

# MARISTPOLL

## Marist College Institute for Public Opinion

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NPR/PBS NewsHour/Marist Poll\*

### **Americans Dread Political Discussions This Thanksgiving... Underscores Bitter Tone in Washington**

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#### **This NPR/PBS NewsHour/Marist Poll Reports:**

A majority of Americans who celebrate the Thanksgiving holiday, 58%, dread the thought of having to talk politics around the Thanksgiving table. 31% are eager to talk about the subject with their family and friends, and 11% are unsure.

Regardless of political party identification, Americans do not look forward to political debates during the holiday. Democrats, 65%, independents, 56%, and Republicans, 49%, have this view. Among those who supported President Donald Trump in the 2016 presidential election, a slim majority, 51%, dread discussing politics with their loved ones while 38% say they are eager to engage in the conversation.

"Most people would be thankful if politics were not part of their Thursday dinner menu," says Dr. Lee M. Miringoff, Director of The Marist College Institute for Public Opinion.

"Unfortunately, that dish may leave many Americans with a bitter taste in their mouths."

Thanksgiving celebrants divide about whether or not politics will come up at their Thanksgiving dinner. 50% think it is either very likely (28%) or somewhat likely (22%) that the topic will be brought up. However, 49% think it is either not too likely (15%) or not at all likely (34%) that the subject will be discussed.

Americans also divide about how they feel when they discuss politics with people who have a different opinion than they do about President Donald Trump. 47% of adults nationally find it stressful and frustrating while 43% consider the conversation interesting and informative. Four percent do not talk politics with those who differ with them in their opinion of the president. Six percent are unsure.

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A political divide exists. While 63% of Democrats say such political exchanges are stressful and frustrating, a majority of Republicans, 52%, describe it as interesting and informative. Independents divide. 47% say they find value in the conversation, and 44% do not.

The dread and frustration many Americans feel about political discussions during the holiday reflect the perceived rancor in the country. Few Americans, 11%, think positive political discourse is the norm, including only 2% who say the tone is very positive. Half of adults nationally, 50%, describe the tone of political discourse as negative including 36% who say the tone is somewhat negative and 14% who describe it as very negative but not angry. An additional 36% of Americans think “angry” is the appropriate term to describe political dialogue. Three percent are unsure.

Regardless of political party, most Americans consider the discourse in the country to be lacking. However, majorities of Republicans, 51%, and independents, 52%, consider the discourse to be negative but do not go so far as to call it “angry.” Democrats are less likely to agree. 45% of Democrats say the conversation is negative while 44% say the tenor is angry. A notable 21% of Republicans believe the political back-and-forth is positive. This is more than two times the proportion of Democrats, 9%, and more than three times the proportion of independents, 6%, with this impression.

Who’s to blame for the tone in Washington? Americans consider both political parties and President Trump to contribute to the rancorous tone in the nation. 66% of U.S. residents believe the Democrats have crossed the line in how they talk about politics. 67% say the same about Republicans, and 70% think President Trump has gone too far in his approach. On each of these questions, fewer than three in ten Americans use “acceptable” to describe how the Democrats, 29%, the Republicans, 27%, and President Trump, 26%, talk about politics.

Democrats and Republicans are not overly eager to come to the defense of those in their own party. While a majority of Democrats, 52%, say the way the Democrats discuss politics is acceptable, a notable 42% believe they have crossed the line. The same is true for Republicans. 51% of the GOP say their party’s tone is acceptable while 45% consider their approach to be out of bounds.

When it comes to President Trump, a majority of Republicans, 55%, consider his tone to be acceptable, but a notable 38% say he has crossed the line. Not surprisingly, most Democrats, 89%, and three in four independents, 75%, say the president’s approach is out of line. Although a majority of Trump supporters, 54%, think the president’s tone is acceptable, 40% think it is not.

About two in three Americans, 67%, think the overall tone and level of civility in Washington, D.C. has gotten worse since President Trump was elected. 23% believe it has stayed about the same as it was, and only 6% think it has improved. This is little changed from July when 70% thought the tone had deteriorated, 20% believed it had stayed about the same, and 6%

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said it had improved.

Americans, though, do not think the tone and civility in their own community has gotten worse since President Trump was elected. Only slightly more than three in ten residents, 32%, say the tenor has become more discordant. 53% believe it has remained about the same as it had been, and 12% think it has improved.

Looking at President Trump's overall job approval rating, his score has remained consistent. 39% of Americans, identical to the 39% reported by Marist last week, approve of how the president is doing his job. 55%, comparable to 53% previously, disapprove. Six percent are unsure.

"Americans picked sides early about President Trump, and his standing has been locked in since," says Dr. Lee M. Miringoff, Director of The Marist College Institute for Public Opinion. "Of the eleven polls conducted since President Trump has taken office, his job approval rating has been between 35% and 39%."

A partisan divide as well as President Trump's base remain intact. 86% of Republicans, up slightly from 80% last time, approve of how the president is doing his job. 88% of Democrats, comparable to 89% previously, disapprove. Among independents, 39% approve of how the president is performing while 56% disapprove. 41% and 54%, respectively, had this view when Trump's approval rating was reported last week. Americans who supported President Trump in 2016 still think highly of his job performance. 87% of these residents, similar to 89% previously, have this opinion.

The proportion of Americans who strongly disapprove of how the president is performing in office, 38%, is nearly twice that of those who strongly approve, 20%. These proportions are nearly identical to those reported last time.

President Trump's favorable score is also upside down. 37% of Americans have a positive opinion of Trump while 57% have a negative one. Six percent are unsure. These findings are comparable to those previously reported.

Many Americans, 58%, lack confidence in President Trump to lead the country in an international crisis. This includes 18% who do not have very much confidence in him to navigate an international emergency and 40% who have no confidence at all in him to do so. Four in ten Americans, 40%, have either a great deal of confidence (21%) or a good amount of trust (19%) in the president to deal with such a situation. There has also been little movement on this question since it was last reported in September.

Turning to Congress and the 2018 midterm elections, 43% of registered voters nationally say they support the Democrat in their district while 40% say they are for the Republican candidate. Six percent do not support either candidate, and 10% are undecided. The advantage the Democrats had in the Marist Poll reported earlier this month has narrowed.

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In that survey conducted during the week of the 2017 elections, 51% of voters said they supported the Democrat while 36% reported they backed the Republican.

“Independents account for the narrowing of the gap,” says Dr. Lee M. Miringoff, Director of The Marist College Institute for Public Opinion. “Many independents have moved from a preference for a Democratic candidate for Congress to either undecided or neither. The preference for Republicans is largely unchanged.”

When asked to reflect upon what the potential implications of the 2017 elections are for 2018, a plurality of Americans, 44%, think things will stay about the same, and the Republicans will likely keep control of the Congress. 36% believe things will change, and the Democrats will gain control of Congress next November. Two percent say the 2017 elections do not tell us anything about what will happen in the midterm elections, and nearly one in five Americans, 18%, are unsure.

On the issues, a majority of adults nationally, 57%, disapprove of how the Republicans in Congress are handling tax reform. 31% approve, and 12% are unsure. By party, 81% of Democrats and 60% of independents disapprove of the GOP’s approach. More than six in ten Republicans, 62%, approve of how the Republicans are handling tax reform, but a notable 29% disapprove.

Regardless of political party, Americans do not want to increase the national deficit even if it means they will receive a tax cut. 66% of residents nationally oppose a tax cut if it means the nation’s deficit will grow. 26% are in favor of such action. Eight percent are unsure. Tea Party supporters are the demographic group most in favor of increasing the deficit if it means tax cuts will be the result. Yet, even among them, only 40% support a tax cut at the expense of the deficit.

Nearly three in four Americans, 74%, disapprove of how the Republicans in Congress are handling the issue of health care. 17% approve, and 9% are unsure. In October, 11% of Americans thought well of how the GOP was addressing the issue, and 78% disapproved. 10%, then, were unsure.

Views on what Congress should do with the Affordable Care Act are little changed from October as well. 67% of Americans either want Obamacare adjusted or to let it stand. This includes a plurality, 41%, who want it changed so that it does more, 7% who want the law changed so that it does less, and 19% who want it to remain in its current form. 28% want the ACA completely repealed. These findings are similar to a poll conducted last month which found 66% either wanted changes made to Obamacare or wanted it to remain unaltered. 28%, at that time, favored repeal.

By party, more than six in ten Democrats, 62%, want the ACA expanded. A similar 64% of Republicans want it completely repealed, but a notable 17% of the GOP want Obamacare changed so that it does more.

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In general, 59% of Americans, down from 66% earlier this month, think the nation is moving in the wrong direction. 33%, up slightly from 29%, say it is moving in the right one. Eight percent are unsure.