

Independent Voter Project

Wave 14 Findings



Altria

Altria Client Services

Background

Research Objective

- Independents are a critical voting bloc in American politics. About one-third of registered voters identify as independents, so swings among this group towards one party or another often determine election outcomes. Significant attitudinal differences exist, however, within the independent bloc. Grouping them together misses important patterns and potential opportunities for both political parties.
- To better understand the political landscape of the country, this effort builds on previous waves of research to track the political attitudes and views of registered voters, particularly independent and unaffiliated voters.
- The following presentation is commissioned and prepared by Altria Client Services and contains data from 14 waves of public opinion surveys conducted on the political landscape and the attitudes of self-identified independent voters.

Methodology

- Trained interviewers at Voter / Consumer Research's (V/CR) phone center in Houston, Texas conducted this survey of n=1,367 registered voters nationwide between October 16-27, 2013. The total sample consists of a base sample of n=800 registered voters plus an oversample of self-identified independent voters to reach a total of n=800. The margin of error for the base and independent sample is +/- 3.5% at the 95% confidence interval. This increases to +/- 4.9% for split samples (n~400), and to +/- 4.6% for pure independents (n=447).
- V/CR selected respondents randomly from a registered voter sample including both cell phone (30%) and landline (70%) telephone numbers. All respondents confirmed that they are registered to vote. Quotas were set for gender, age, race and census region to ensure consistency with national demographic trends. Party identification for the base sample of registered voters is 36% Democrat, 31% independent, and 30% Republican.

Executive Summary

Political Environment

- The political environment reflects an electorate highly frustrated with national leadership over the government shutdown that ended just as wave 14 fielding began. Pessimism about the direction of the country nears its four-year tracking high, while job approval of Republicans and Democrats in Congress nears its tracking low.
- As a stark summary, more voters say they would prefer to replace their member of Congress than re-elect them, and this is especially true among independent voters.
- Compared with data leading up to the last “like” midterm election four years ago (October 2009), the electorate has become even more polarized. Partisans are growing even more partisan, especially Democrat identifiers, in their support of their party’s candidate on the Congressional ballot.
 - Eighty-seven percent (87%) of Democratic identifiers support the Democrat on the generic Congressional ballot (up 12 points from four years ago). Eighty-nine percent (89%) of Republican identifiers support the generic Republican, (up seven points from four years ago).
- As some partisans become more extreme, data suggests that weaker Republican identifiers are shedding their party labels and identifying instead as independents. Over the last four years, the percentage of former Republicans identifying as independents averaged 30% and never deviated more than two points. Since the last wave in October 2012, the percentage of former Republicans increased four points to 34%.

Direction of the Country

3. Would you say things in this country are [Rotate] heading in the right direction /or/ off on the wrong track? [If right direction or wrong track:] And do you feel strongly about that or just somewhat?

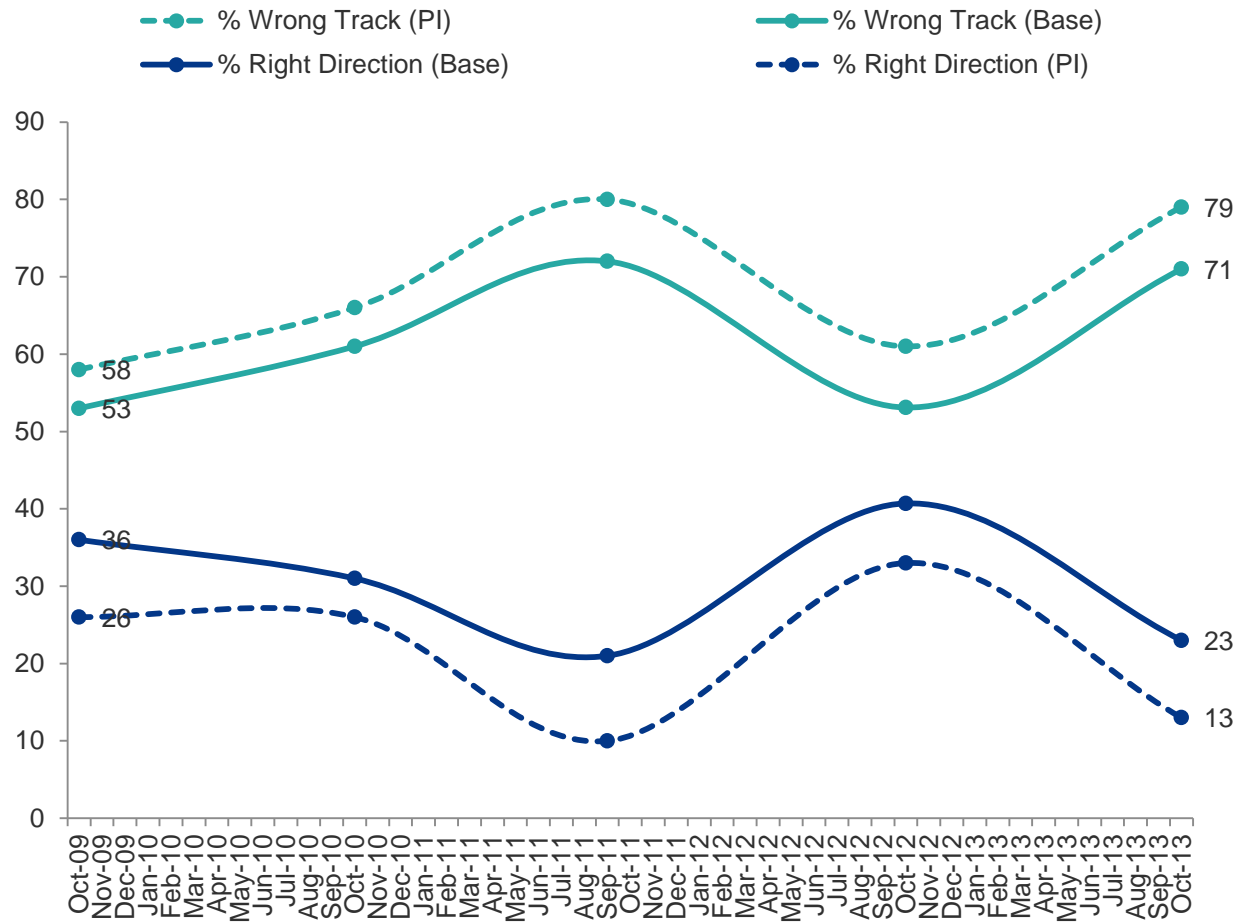
Analysis

The national mood is grim, likely a result of frustration and disappointment over the recent government shut down.

Negative intensity is high. A 58% majority of the electorate and almost two-in-three (65%) pure independents (PI) say they feel strongly that the country is on the wrong track.

Self-identified Republicans and pure independents remain significantly more likely to say the country is off on the wrong track than self-identified Democrats (Republicans 94%, pure independents 79%, Democrats 43% wrong track).

However, Democrat identifiers are more pessimistic about the direction of the country than they were four years ago when only one-quarter (25%) of these voters said the country was off on the wrong track.



Most Important Problem

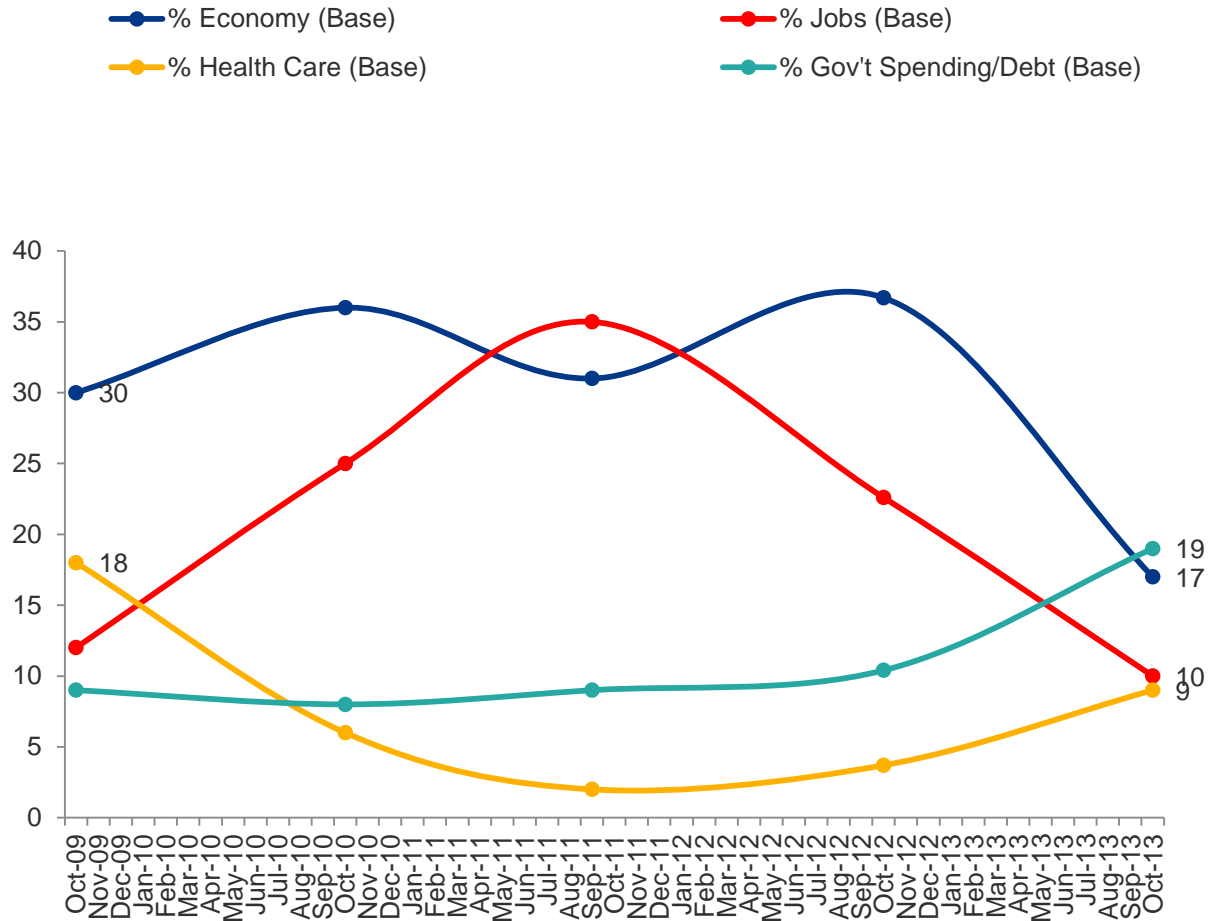
12. Turning to national issues, what would you say is the single most important problem facing the nation?

Analysis

Voter concern over the economy and jobs subsides slightly this wave, while concern over government spending/debt and health care trend upward.

These results, coupled with emerging concerns over the debt ceiling (6% overall, 11% among Republican identifiers), and partisan fighting (4% overall, 8% among Democrat women), reflect voter frustration about the recent government shutdown and funding disagreements.

These data may also indicate voter perceptions of economic improvement, and/or that voters now identify government spending/debt as a root cause of the down economy.



Most Important Problem - Subgroups

Analysis

Different groups of voters ascribe varying levels of importance to the top problems facing the nation.

Women are more concerned about health care than men, while men are more concerned about government spending/debt than women.

Democratic identifiers and seniors aged 65+ are more likely to cite jobs than Republican identifiers and voters under age 30 who primarily focus on government spending/debt.

As with previous waves, black voters continue to focus on jobs.

More than one-in-five voters who say the country is off on the wrong track also say government spending/debt is the most important problem facing the nation.

	Economy	Jobs	Gov't Spending/ Debt	Health Care
Total	17	10	19	9
Democrat Identifiers	16	16	11	8
Pure Independents	16	10	20	8
Republican Identifiers	20	3	23	11
Men	17	11	21	7
Women	17	9	17	11
<30 yrs.	10	7	28	9
65+ yrs.	14	17	11	10
White	17	9	20	11
Black	10	25	10	7
Right Direction	18	16	14	9
Wrong Track	17	8	21	10



Job Approval: President Obama

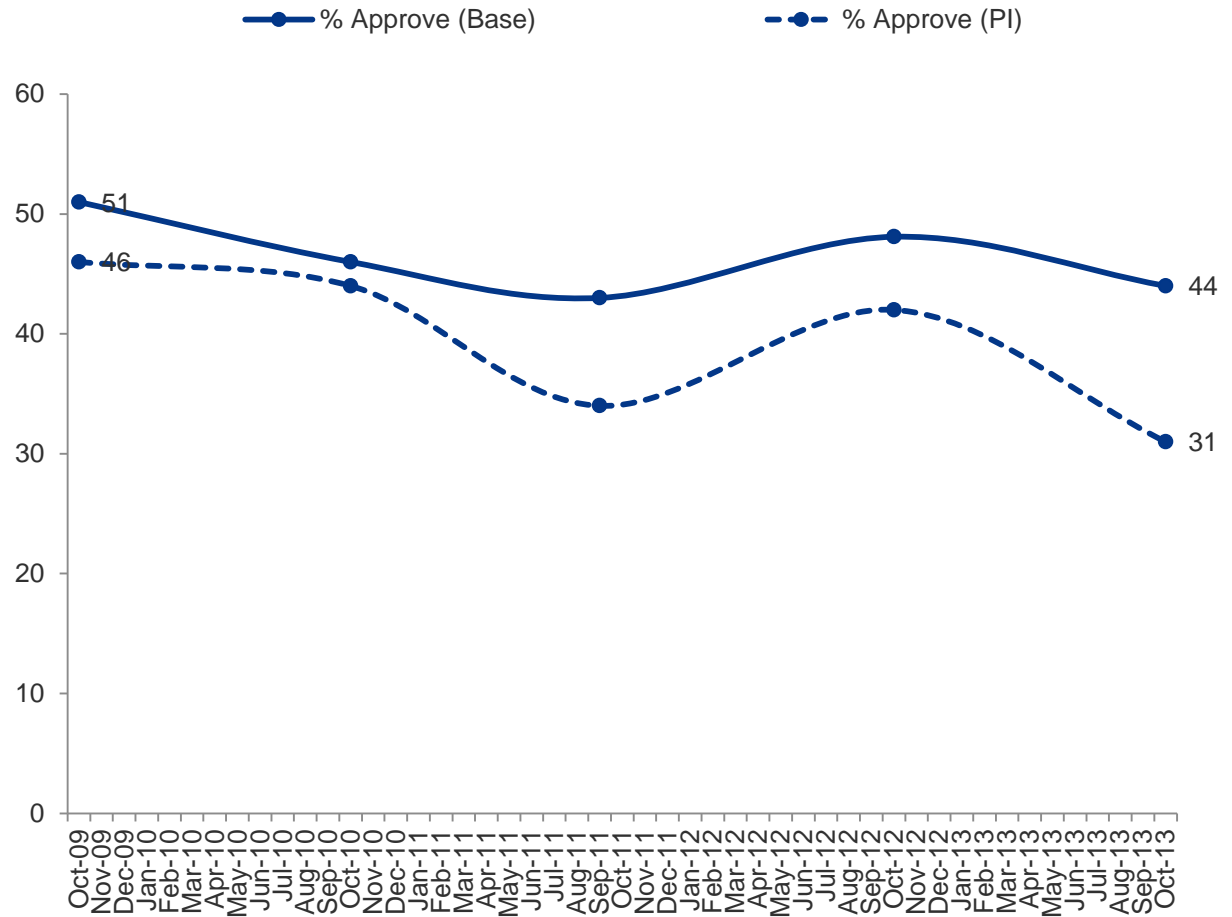
4. Do you approve or disapprove of the way Barack Obama is handling his job as president? [If approve or disapprove:] And do you strongly [approve/disapprove] or just somewhat [approve/disapprove]?

Analysis

The president's job approval rating is net negative. More than half (53%) of voters nationwide express disapproval with Barack Obama's performance in office, while only 44% say they approve.

Partisanship and partisan leanings influence the results of this measure. Disapproval among self-identified Republicans (93%) and Republican-leaning independents (91%) outweighs the approval of Democrats (85%) and Democrat-leaning independents (77%).

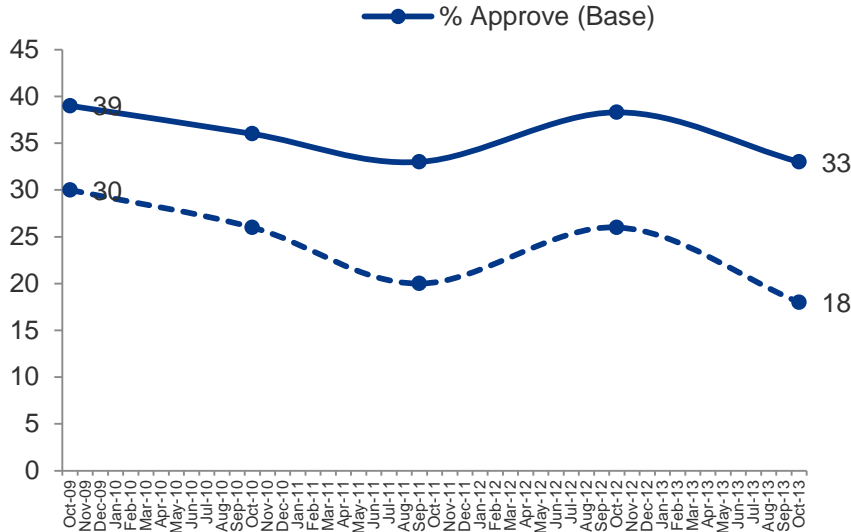
But, since the electorate contains more Democrat identifiers than Republican identifiers (DEM +6), the views of pure independents ultimately determine the net negative outcome of this measure. These non-partisan voters are almost twice as likely to disapprove than approve of the job the president is doing (59% disapprove to 31% approve).



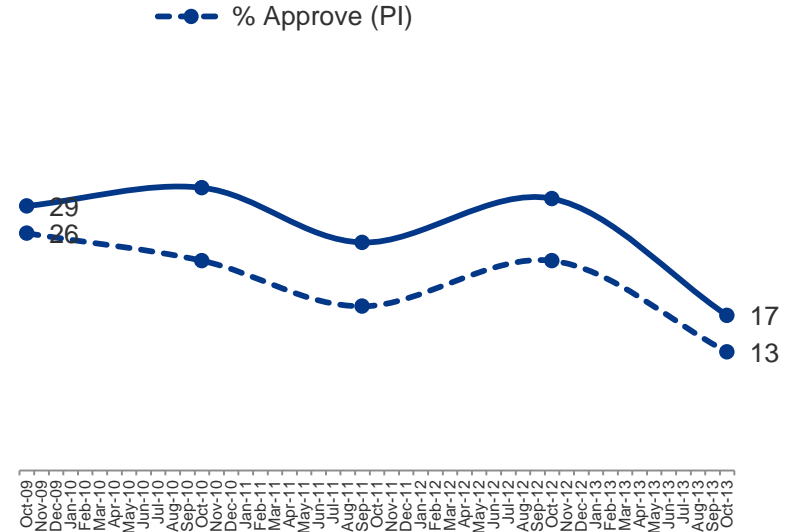
Job Approval: Congress

8 & 9. Do you approve or disapprove of the way Republicans/Democrats in the U.S. Congress are handling their job? [If approve or disapprove:] And do you strongly [approve/disapprove] or just somewhat [approve/disapprove]?

Democrats in Congress



Republicans in Congress



Analysis

Approval ratings of Republicans and Democrats in Congress remain as they have over the last four years, significantly more negative than positive. This wave, however, shows disapproval rising to a tracking high of 79% for Republicans and to 64% for Democrats. Republicans fare worse than Democrats among important subgroups, as well. Pure independents are six points more disapproving of Republicans in Congress than of Democrats (82% disapprove to 76% disapprove), and women are 20 points more disapproving of Republicans than Democrats (80% disapprove to 60% disapprove).

Even Republican-identifiers are almost twice as likely to disapprove of members of their own party than approve (63% disapprove to 33% approve), Self-identified Democrats take the opposite view; they *approve* of Democrats in Congress by more than two-to-one (68% approve, 30% disapprove).

Independent Previous Party Affiliation

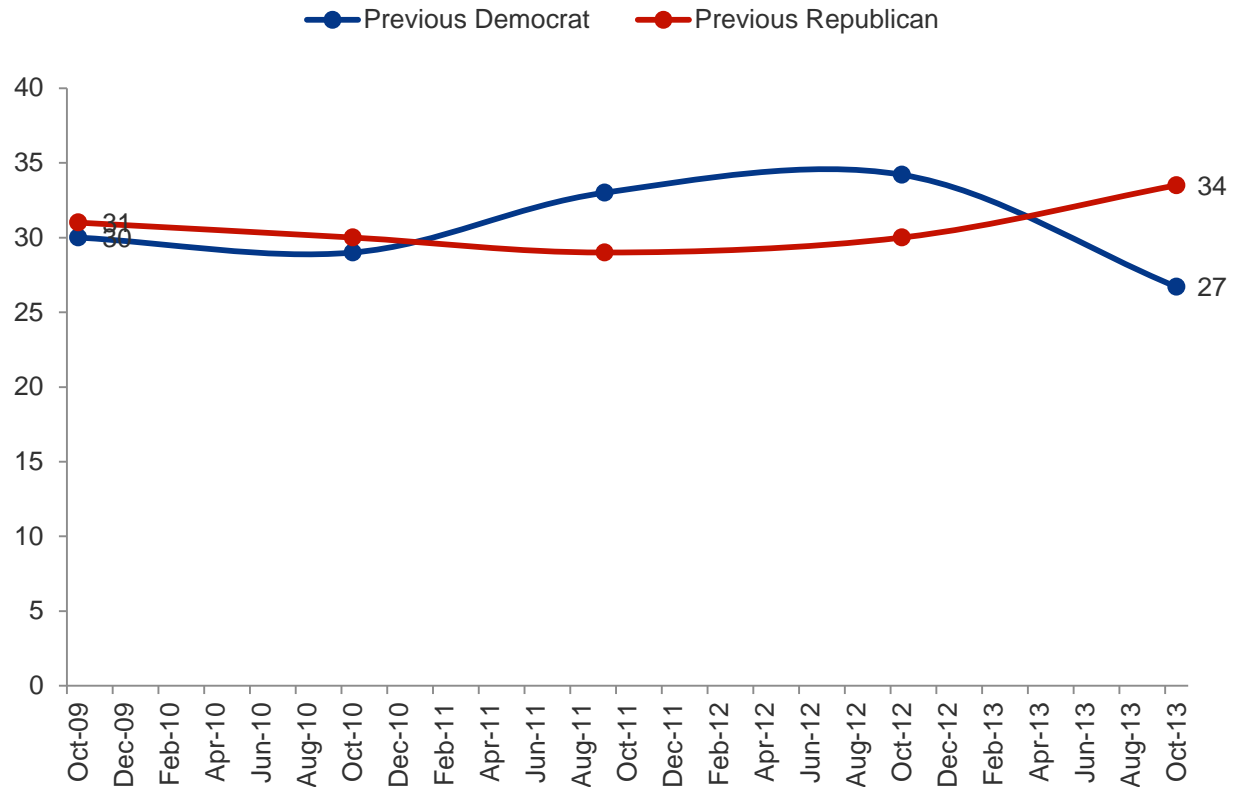
29. [Ask if Independent, Q2=3, 4, or 5] Was there any time when you considered yourself [Rotate:] a Democrat /or/ a Republican? [If yes, ask if necessary:] And did you consider yourself [Rotate:] a Democrat /or/ a Republican?

Analysis

Tracking data show defection in the Republican partisan ranks, potentially as a result of independents' intense disapproval of Republicans in Congress.

Over the last four years, the percentage of former Republicans identifying as independents averaged 30% and never deviated more than two points.

Since the last wave in October 2012, the percentage of former Republicans increased four points to 34%.



Tea Party Support

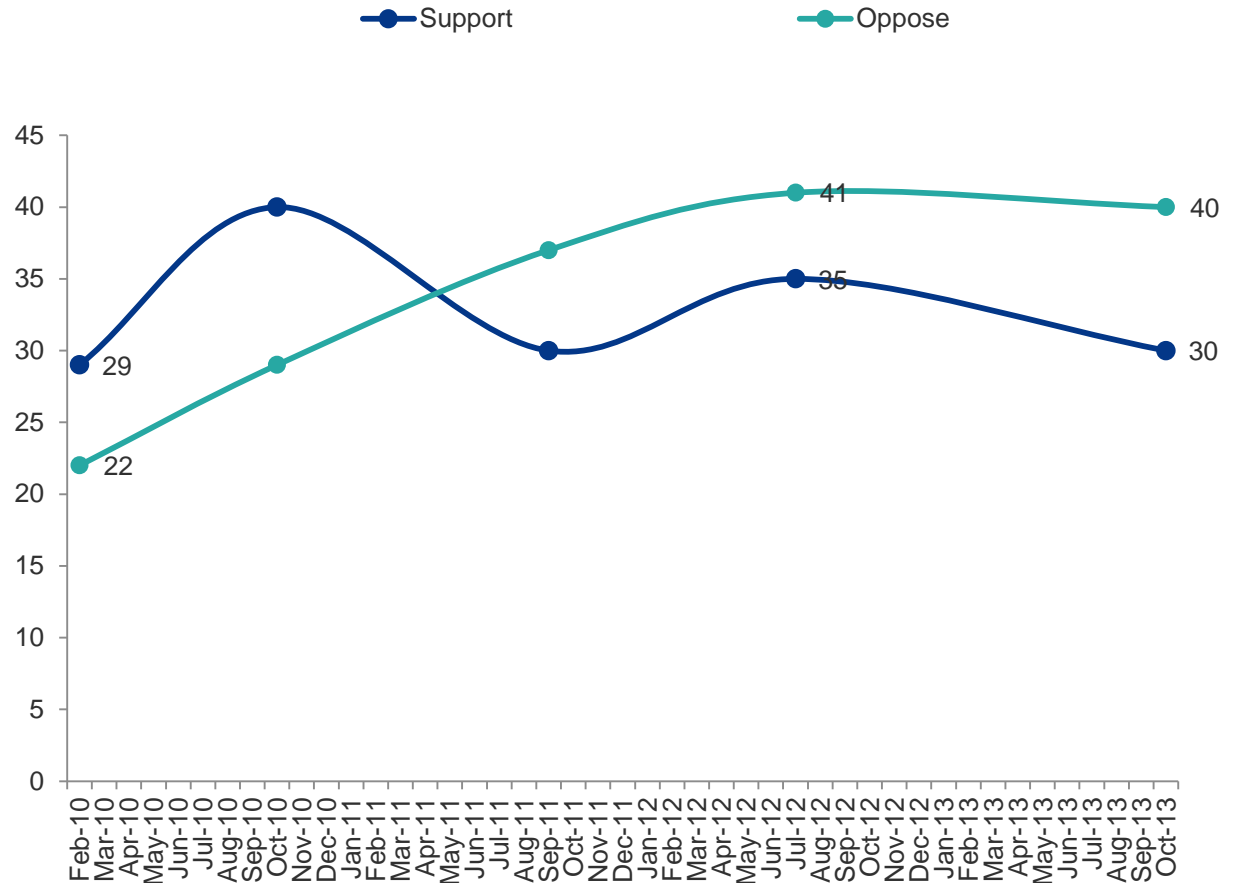
28. And finally...you may have heard discussion of the Tea Party movement. Based on what you've seen, read, or heard, do you [Rotate] support /or/ oppose the Tea Party movement? If you are not familiar with the Tea Party movement, just say so. [If support or oppose:] And do you strongly [support/oppose] or just somewhat [support/oppose]?

Analysis

Data show diminishing support for the Tea Party movement as well, down five points to 30% since July 2012, and on par with our first measurement four years ago.

In fact, more voters strongly oppose the Tea Party (35%) than support it (30%), perhaps due to frustration over the Tea Party's role in the government shut down.

Notably, Republican support of the Tea Party has fallen nine points since our last measurement, from 67% to 58%.



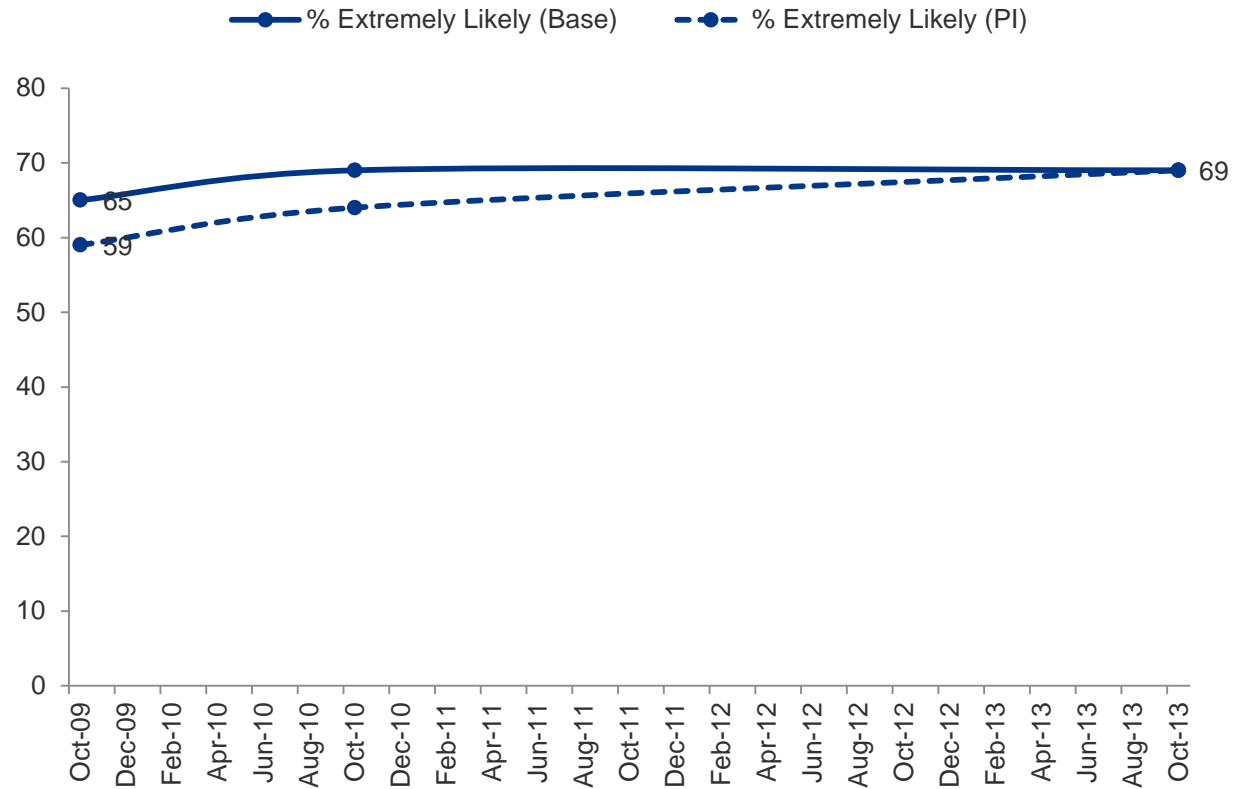
Vote Intensity

5. And thinking ahead to the elections for U.S. Congress in November 2014. I know it's still a ways off, but would you say you are extremely likely to vote, very likely to vote but not extremely likely, somewhat likely to vote, or not too likely to vote in the next election for Congress in 2014?

Analysis

Widespread disapproval of national leaders may have focused voters on the 2014 midterms earlier than usual. Compared to the same point in time four years ago, data show an increase in likelihood to vote, especially among pure independents.

The increase in Republican defectors in the independent sample may account for the spike in independent voting intensity, since Republicans have shown a vote intensity advantage over Democrats in most of our tracking waves. This pattern holds true in the most recent wave; 73% of Republicans now say they are extremely likely to vote, compared to only 68% of Democrats.



Generic Congressional Ballot

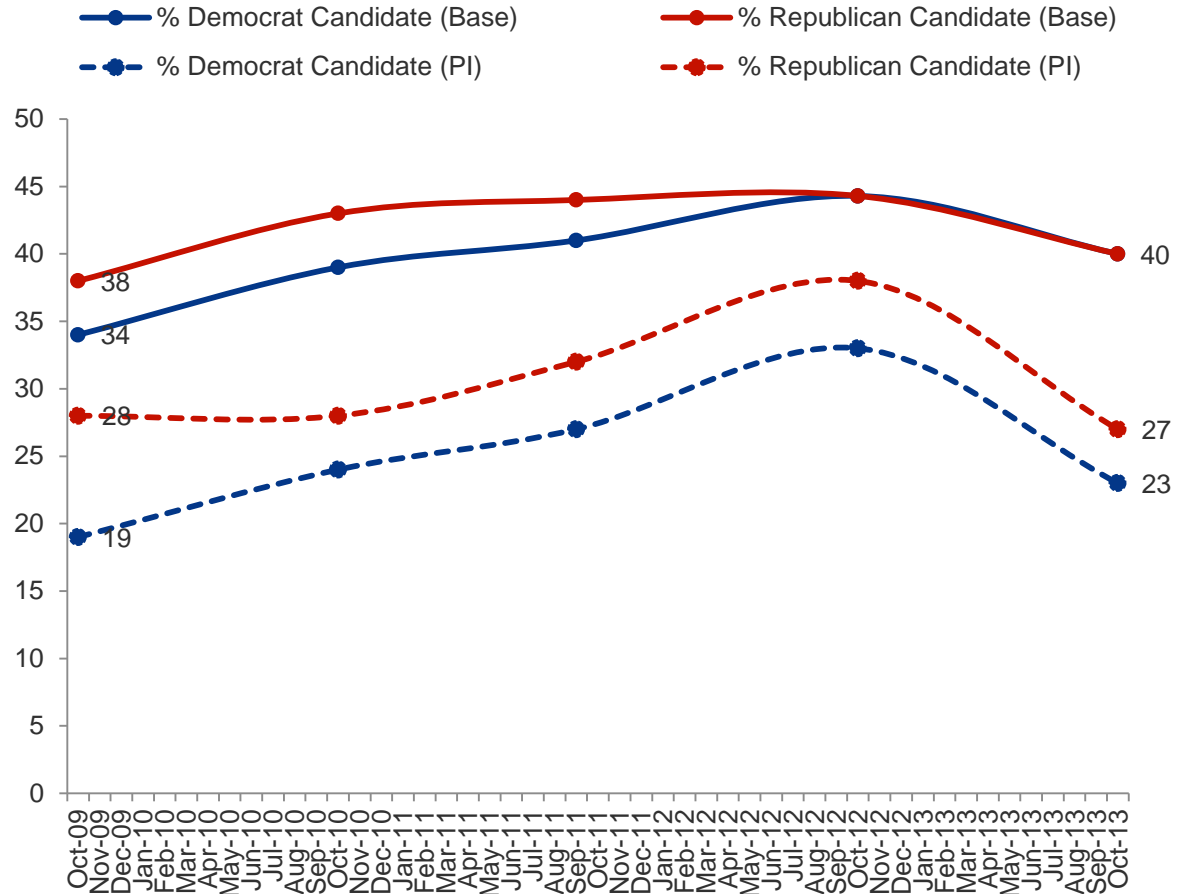
6. If the elections for U.S. Congress were held today and you had to make a choice, would you vote for [Rotate] the Republican candidate /or/ the Democrat candidate in your Congressional district? [If Republican or Democrat, ask:] Would that be definitely the [Republican/Democrat] or probably the [Republican/Democrat]?

Analysis

Compared to four years ago, the generic Congressional ballot shows a more decisive and divided electorate. Both candidates currently get 40% of the vote, with only 15% undecided (5% say neither or refuse). In October 2009, the ballot was 38% Republican, 34% Democrat, and 22% undecided. Even pure independents are more decisive. Since the last "like" election cycle, the percentage of undecideds dropped five points to 37%.

The generic Democrat starts off with a better ballot position than in 2009, especially among self-identified Democrats who grew 12 points more supportive of their party's generic candidate (75% supported in October 2009, 87% support now).

The generic Republican also maintains a high level of support from it's base (89%), but shows a more conservative seven point gain since October 2009.



Congressional Ballot Comparison

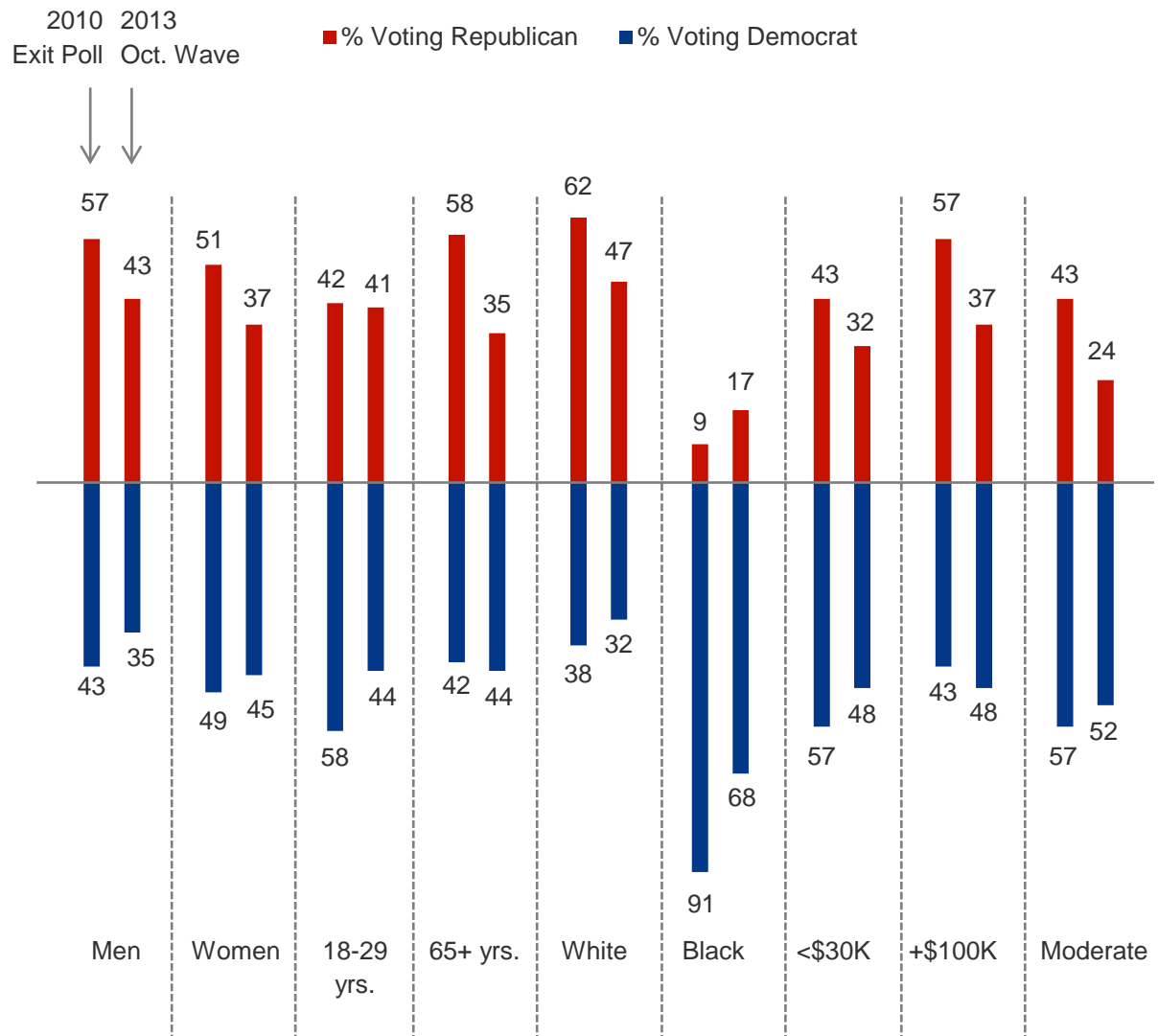
Additional Analysis

The generic Republican candidate underperforms among its 2010 coalition more so than the generic Democrat candidate; 77% of voters who supported a Republican congressional candidate in 2010 still vote for the generic Republican today. In contrast, the generic Democrat retains 85% of its 2010 Democrat voters.

The Democrat candidate leads by eight points among women (45% to 37%), while the Republican candidate leads by the same margin among men (43% to 35%). This gender gap has grown more pronounced since the 2010 election when women gave a slight, two point edge to the Republican candidate.

Race continues to play a decisive role on this measure, with black voters supporting the Democrat by 51 points, and white voters supporting the Republican by 15 points.

The generic Republican appears to have lost ground among voters with family incomes over \$100K. In 2010, these higher income voters supported the Republican by 14 points, but current data shows them supporting the generic Democrat candidate by 11 points (48% to 37%).



Hard Re-elect

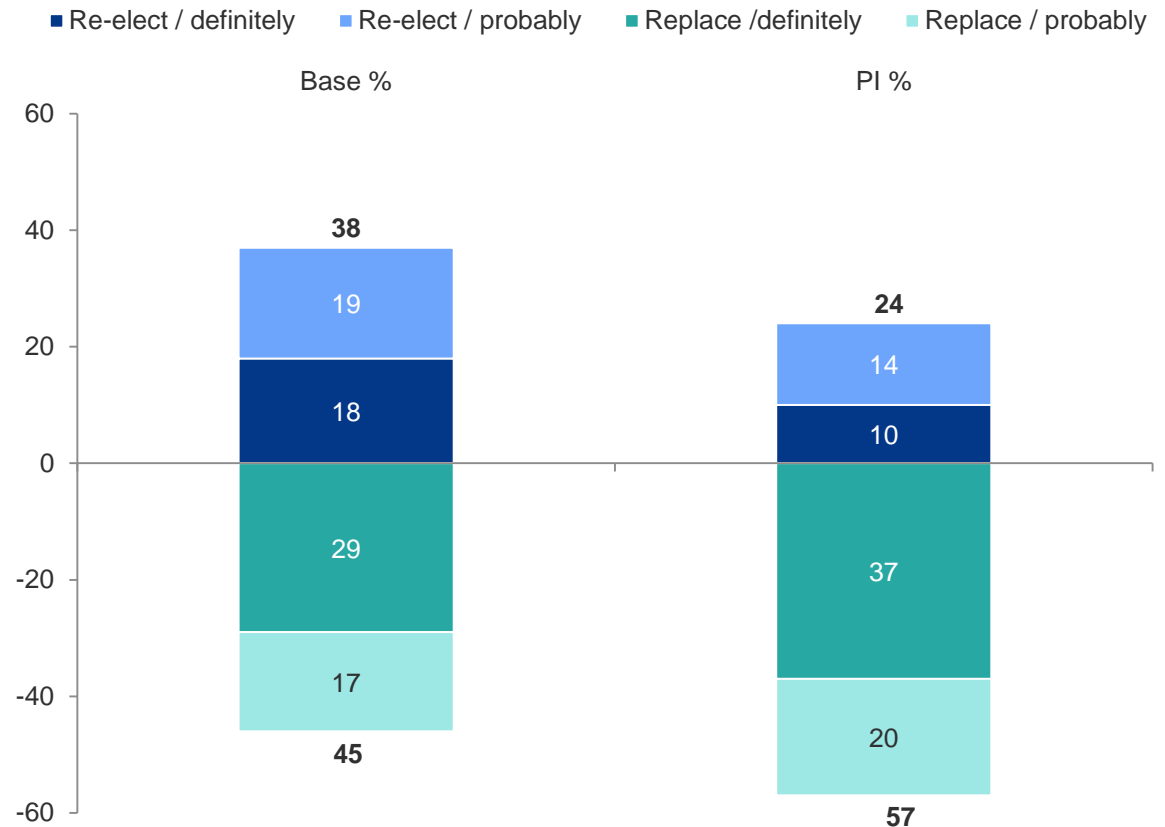
7. Thinking about this another way...if the election was held today, would you vote to [Rotate] re-elect your current member of Congress /or/ replace your current member of Congress? [If choice made, ask:] And would you definitely vote to [re-elect/replace] your current member of Congress or probably vote to [re-elect/replace] your current member of Congress?

Analysis

Overall, the electorate is eight points more likely to vote to replace their current member of Congress than re-elect them. However, 16% are undecided which could more than make up for the margin.

While partisan identifiers are slightly more likely than the overall sample to stick with their current member of Congress, more than half of pure independents call for a replacement. This is especially true of Republican-leaning independent women.

		Re-elect %	Replace %
Republican		41	43
Democrat		42	42
Republican leaning independent	W	26	59
	M	39	48



Government Size

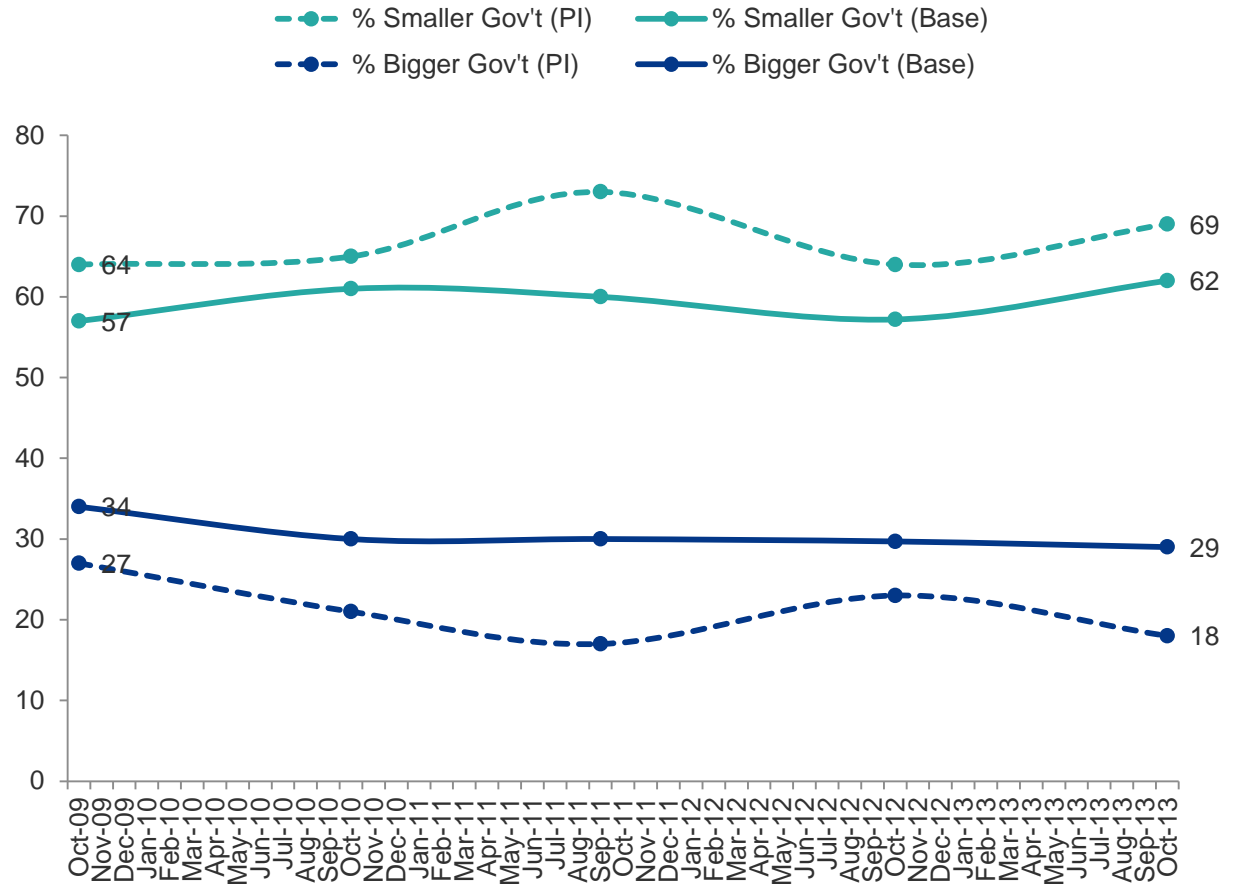
10. In general, do you prefer [ROTATE]: Bigger government with more services; OR Smaller government with fewer services?

Analysis

Voters continue to prefer smaller government with fewer services to bigger government with more services by approximately two-to-one. This increases to almost four-to-one among pure independents.

Although attitudes on this measure tend to be more stable than others, our tracking data over the last four years shows a gradual increase in the preference for smaller government over larger government.

Most of this movement can be attributed to Republican identifiers increasingly preferring smaller government (83% in October 2009 to 91% now). In contrast, there is no statistically significant change in the preference of Democrat identifiers over the same time period.



Government Role

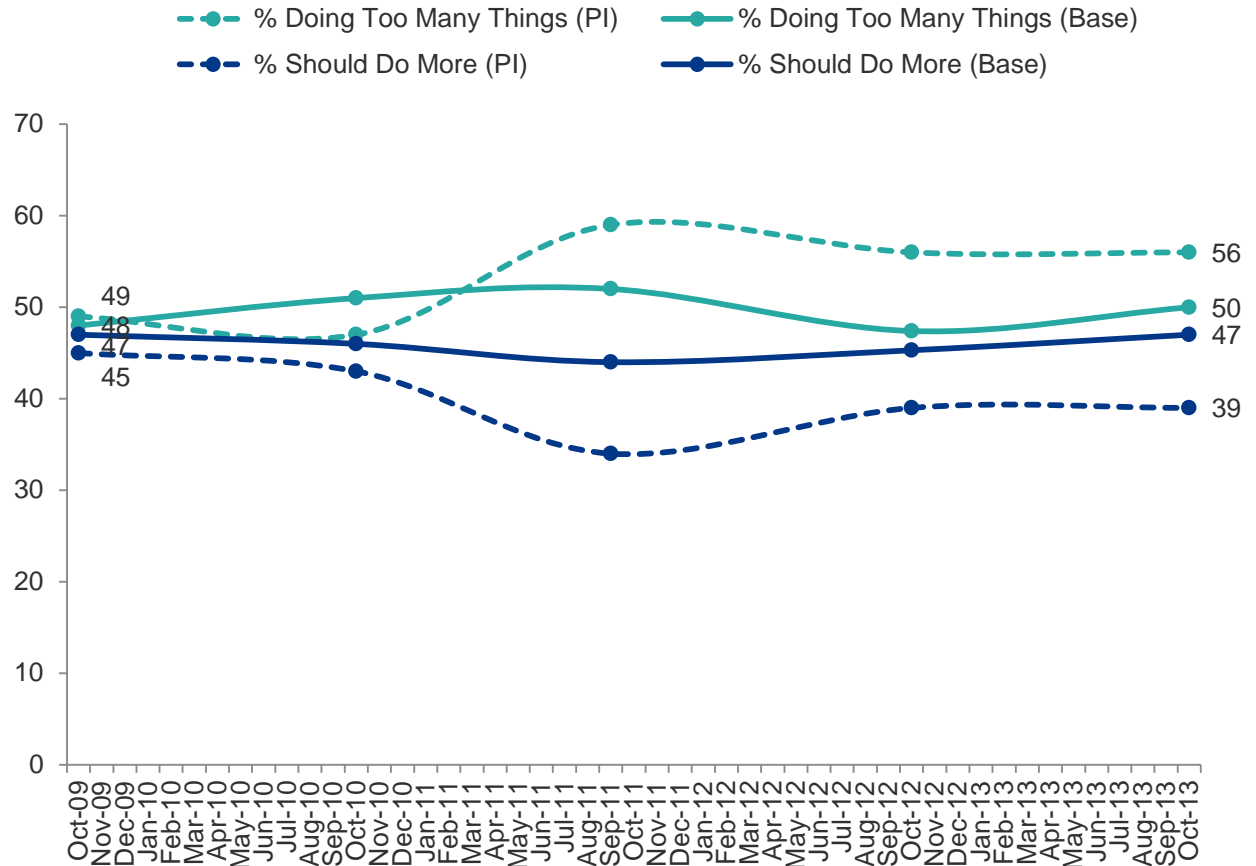
11. Now I'm going to read two statements about the role of government. Please listen and then tell me which one comes closer to your point of view: [Rotate] Government should do more to solve problems and help meet the needs of people /or/ Government is doing too many things better left to businesses and individuals?

Analysis

Voter attitudes split within the margin of error on the question of whether the government should do more or less.

Partisan affiliation accounts for attitudinal differences on this measure, as 80% of Democratic identifiers say the government should be doing more to solve problems and 79% of Republican identifiers say the government is doing too many things.

The gap in pure independents' attitudes grew significantly after the 2010 midterm elections, but has tapered off slightly since then.



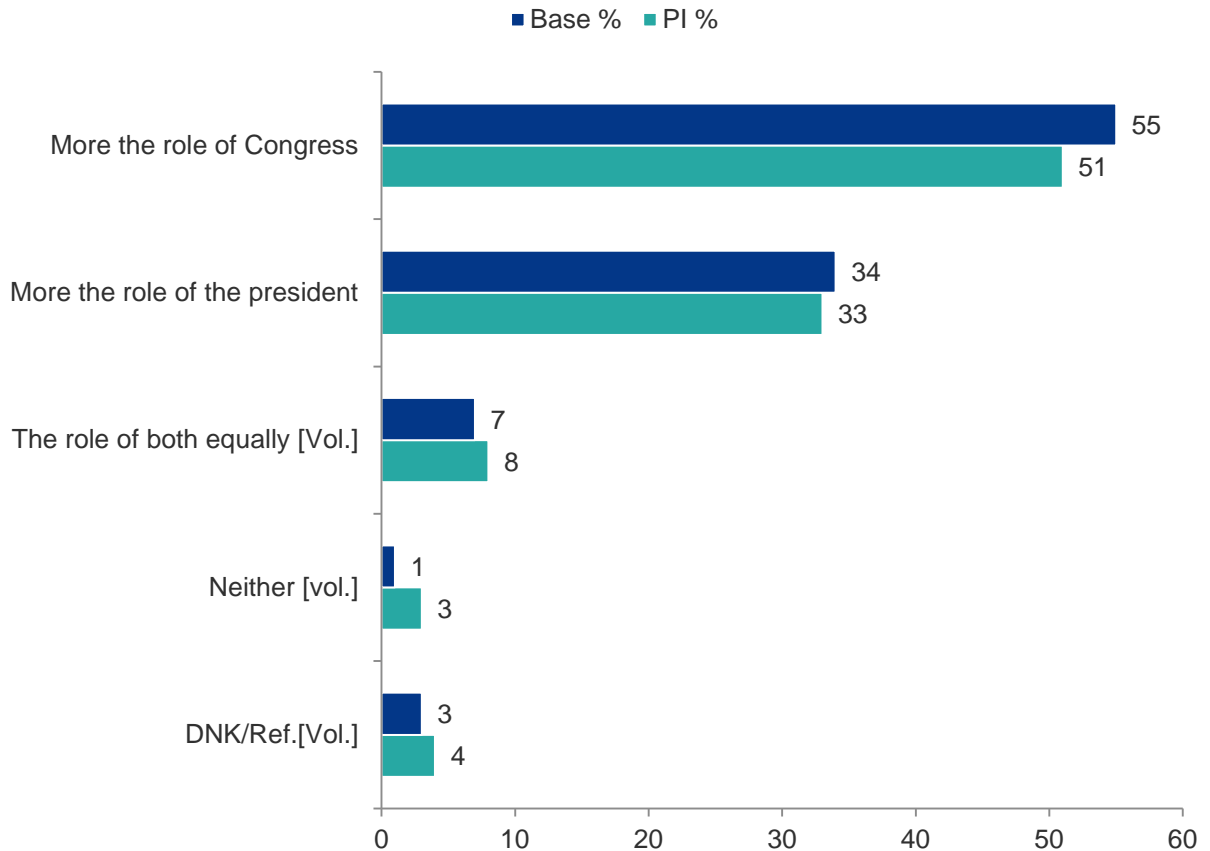
Leadership on Gov't Funding

13. Thinking specifically about recent negotiations between President Obama and Congress on the issue of funding the government...whose role is it to take the lead on this issue? Would you say it is more the role of [Rotate:] the President /or/ Congress?

Analysis

Most voters think that Congress should take the lead on the issue of funding the government, while roughly one-third say the president should play the leading role. This holds true for pure independents, and across all subgroups.

However, an interesting attitudinal distinction emerges on this measure when looking at results by age. The percentage of voters saying Congress should play the leading role decreases as age increases, from 68% among millennials to only 44% among seniors aged 65 years and up. This may have to do with higher levels of disapproval of Congress among older voters, especially pertaining to Republican members of Congress.





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