

A Quick Look at the State of the Center



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In our inaugural *State of the Center* survey, we took a deep look at the values of those in the political middle and found that moderates wrestle with, and often reject, what they see as the false either/or ideological choices that define modern politics. They view the world differently than liberals or conservatives, recognizing that both sides have a piece of the truth. They lean towards Democrats, but ultimately, they are open to appeals from Republicans.

1. Who are moderates?

Moderates comprise 37% of registered voters in our poll, compared to 21% who are liberals and 42% who are conservatives.

- Four in ten moderates are self-described Democrats, 39% are Independents, and 21% are Republicans.
- The Democratic Party coalition is split, with 38% identifying as liberal, 37% as moderate, and 25% as conservative. By contrast, 72% of the Republican Party identifies as conservative, with only 26% saying they are moderate.
- Nearly half (48%) of Independents are moderates, with 18% calling themselves liberal and 34% conservative.

2. Moderates on the Role of Government

Unlike liberals and conservatives, moderates don't adopt an ideological view of the government and remain hopeful but also skeptical about its ability to be successful.

- Liberals favor a bigger government over a smaller one by 54% to 12%, while conservatives favor a smaller government over a bigger one by 62% to 13%. A plurality of moderates (39%) says they do not think of government in these terms, with 37% favoring a smaller government and 23% a larger one.
- But 53% of moderates worry that the government isn't doing enough for the economy—only 40% worry the government is too involved in the economy.
- Yet 64% of moderates think the government is often an obstacle to economic growth and opportunity, and by 11 points (54% to 43%) moderates believe if the government is involved in something, it often goes wrong.

3. Moderates on Politics

While liberals and conservatives think their own parties are too moderate, moderates believes both parties are too ideological.

- While 58% of liberals think Congressional Democrats are moderate and 7% say they're conservative, a plurality of moderates (43%) think Democrats in Congress are liberal.
- Most conservatives (58%) think Congressional Republicans are moderate or liberal, but two-thirds of moderates view them as conservative.
- Liberals and conservatives stick with their party, but moderates are persuadable.
- Most liberals vote for Democrats exclusively and most conservatives vote for Republicans exclusively, but 33% of moderates vote equally for both parties.
- Liberals (42%) and conservatives (41%) agree that party labels tell them all they need to know about a candidate, but fewer moderates (31%) agree. Many moderates (40%) strongly disagree that party labels are all they need to know to support a candidate.

4. Moderates on Opportunity

Moderates believe the deck is stacked against some, but they don't think it's stacked against them personally.

- Three-quarters of moderates say America is divided into haves and have-nots, but only 25% of moderates characterize themselves as a have-not.
- A full 85% of moderates think people can get ahead if they work hard, and only 28% say they believe the deck is stacked against them personally.

5. Moderates on the Economy

Moderates agree that we need greater investments in education and infrastructure (72%) and also that it is immoral to leave future generations in debt (77%). When it comes to concerns about the parties, moderates express different worries.

- Democratic Party: Moderates worry that Democrats won't pay down the debt (32%) and will spend money on programs that don't benefit them (28%).
- Republican Party: Moderates worry that Republicans won't adopt economic policies to spur growth and help the middle class (29%) and will cut programs their family relies upon, like Social Security and unemployment insurance (26%).

6. Moderates on Key Issues

Moderates weigh competing values on many politically divisive issues. This tension often translates into support for policies that may seem at odds with each other to the ideological wings.

- **Energy:** Moderates support both expanding the exploration and production of oil, coal, and natural gas in the U.S. (75%) and increasing investments in the development of renewables like solar and wind (90%).

- **Immigration:** Moderates think undocumented immigrants are hardworking people who simply want to care for their families (84%) but are also concerned that granting them citizenship rewards bad behavior (47%).
- **National Security:** Moderates think the government has gone too far in collecting information about phone and internet usage (71%) but some are still concerned we aren't doing enough to reduce terrorist attacks on U.S. soil (45%).
- **Culture Issues:** Moderates support more trust in the individual—not greater government regulation—on a range of issues, including abortion (81%) and recreational use of marijuana (53%). While 84% support expanded background checks, 58% also think current gun laws are sufficient to protect them and their community.

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