

Opportunity Trumps Fairness with Swing Independents: A Quick Look at the Numbers



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Third Way's new poll of 1,000 Independents in 12 battleground states identifies a bloc of voters who are truly up-for-grabs in 2012: the 38% of Independents we dubbed the "Swing Independents," who don't have strong views for or against either President Obama or Governor Romney. *For Swing Independents, the fairness argument increasingly touted by many on the left falls short; instead they want to hear an optimistic message of opportunity.*

#1: Swing Independents are up for grabs.

- President Obama has an advantage with Swing Independents, who went for him 35% to 29% over Romney, with 36% undecided. When pressed, 9% of the undecided said they leaned towards the President and 9% towards Romney. The Congressional ballot is virtually tied, with nearly 6 in 10 undecided.
- Obama's favorability rating is staggeringly high, with 57% holding a favorable view and only 35% an unfavorable one. Romney did not conjure such warm feelings: towards him, Swing Independents were split, 41% favorable to 40% unfavorable.
- Swing Independents viewed Romney as fairly close to themselves ideologically. They put Obama center-left on the ideological scale and Romney center-right, but they put themselves right-of-center. However, they saw the Republican Party as significantly further right than themselves or Romney

#2: Fairness falls short with Swing Independents.

- The supermajority of Swing Independents think the system is already basically fair, and by 3 to 1 they call themselves “haves,” not “have nots.”
- Income inequality is at best a secondary concern. Swing Independents say 57% to 38% that the deficit is a bigger priority.
- Fully 90% say they are confident they can pay their bills, but only 8% are strongly confident the next generation will be able to find good jobs.

#3: Opportunity resonates with Swing Independents.

- 80% of Swing Independents say they’d prefer a candidate to focus on increasing opportunity, rather than reducing income inequality (15%).
- When asked directly what was the most important thing we could do to make our economy stronger, a significant majority (55%) said we should “provide more economic opportunity for Americans to succeed through hard work.”

Swing Independents picked a candidate who said “more opportunity means a stronger economy” over one who said “a fairer economy means a stronger economy,” 51% to 43%.

But 63% believed the fairness message was something President Obama would say, while less than one-quarter credited him with the opportunity message.

All data from poll by Global Strategy Group for Third Way of 1,000 self-identified Independent likely voters who voted in the 2008 Presidential election in 12 swing states: CO, FL, IA, MI, NC, NH, NM, NV, OH, PA, VA, and WI. Fielded March 8–18th, 2012. Margin of Error +/- 3.1% for Independents, +/- 5.1 for Swing Independents.

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