

2012 NORC Presidential Election Study: Americans' Views on Entitlement Reform and Health Care



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INTRODUCTION

The 2012 NORC Presidential Election Survey was designed to measure public opinion about important issues the country faces—entitlement reform, partisanship, the deficit, economic recovery, and health care costs. This survey sought to determine, among other things, what the priorities of the American people are in regards to the budget deficit, what expectations they have for their elected representatives, and what the most pressing issues are that they, and not necessarily government officials, see facing the United States today.

The following report, “Americans’ Views on Entitlement Reform and Health Care,” focuses on the opinions of the American people on the role of the government in entitlement reform and health care. This is the third and final report from the 2012 NORC Presidential Election Survey, reporting on data collected in the post-election period.

The report’s results suggest that substantial majorities of the American public prefer to maintain Social Security and Medicare in their current forms and reject proposals to change them, while at the same time, Democrats and Republicans are sharply divided over such entitlement reforms. We find that Americans give strong support to many provisions of the Affordable Care Act (ACA), including the prohibition against insurance companies from denying health insurance coverage based on a pre-existing condition, yet only one-third support the government buying health insurance for all Americans. Majorities supported two controversial aspects of the ACA: the requirement that states expand Medicaid to cover more people, which was struck down by the Supreme Court in June 2012 before this survey was administered, and the requirement that insurance companies pay for contraceptives. We also find that most Americans, including large majorities of Democrats and Republicans alike, prefer that their own representatives work with others and make compromises, even compromises that include policies that the respondents dislike.

BACKGROUND AND METHODOLOGY

Part I of the 2012 NORC Presidential Election Survey was conducted in the weeks prior to the 2012 presidential election and was a nationally representative household survey with 2,136 adults. Part II was conducted in the weeks just after the 2012 presidential election with 1,125 respondents re-contacted from Part I. The survey was conducted by NORC at the University of Chicago in partnership with the following experts: Mark Hansen, Ph.D., University of Chicago; Andrea Campbell, Ph.D., Massachusetts Institute of Technology; Stephen Ansolabehere, Ph.D., Harvard University; and Benjamin Page, Ph.D., Northwestern University.

Respondents were asked if they considered themselves to be a Democrat, a Republican, an Independent, or other affiliation. Self-identified Republicans and Democrats were then asked if they considered themselves to be a strong or not so strong Republican/Democrat. These questions determined the “strong” and “weak” party variables used in many tables. All self-identified Independents were asked if they thought of themselves as closer to the Republican or Democratic party, which produced the “leaning” Independent variables.

ENTITLEMENT REFORM

KEY FINDINGS

- Substantial majorities of the American public prefer to maintain Social Security and Medicare in their current forms and reject proposals to change them. Approximately 60 percent favor traditional Social Security over a program that would allow workers to invest the taxes themselves. More than 65 percent favor traditional Medicare over a program that would give workers a specific amount of money to spend on either private or government health insurance.
- Younger Americans are much more supportive of changes in Social Security and Medicare than older Americans. Young adults are about twice as likely as retirees to favor changes, but Republican proposals for reforms do not receive majority support even from young adults.
- Despite the generational differences in attitudes toward Social Security and Medicare reforms, the two programs occasion little generational conflict.
- Democrats and Republicans are sharply divided over entitlement reforms. Overwhelming majorities of Democrats support Social Security and Medicare in their current forms. A majority of Republicans support a GOP proposal for Social Security reform, and a large number of Republicans, but less than a majority, favors a GOP proposal for Medicare reform.

SOCIAL SECURITY AND MEDICARE REFORM

In this time of fiscal challenge, many leaders have pushed to reform entitlements, particularly the largest programs, Social Security and Medicare. The nation, they argue, is fast approaching—or has passed—the point at which society will not be able to afford these benefits for seniors without either raising taxes to unconscionable levels or leaving unsustainable levels of debt for future generations to pay.

Our survey addressed specific proposals to change both Social Security and Medicare. We asked respondents whether they favor or oppose, for Americans 55 and under, replacing the government guarantees of Social Security with government grants that recipients could invest as they see fit. President George W. Bush and other Republicans have sponsored such a proposal. We also asked respondents to choose between Medicare in its current form for all seniors, and a system for citizens currently under age 55 in which the government would provide a fixed sum of money to help them after becoming seniors to purchase either traditional Medicare or private health care coverage. The alternative is the program proposed by Representative Paul Ryan, the 2012 Republican vice presidential nominee. In both cases, we worded our questions carefully to avoid prejudicial descriptors like “privatization” and “vouchers.”

Even so, the proposals to change Social Security and Medicare elicited only minority support. Around a third of respondents (32 percent) liked the idea of replacing Medicare as currently constituted with a program of grants to individuals to purchase government or private health insurance. The proposal to turn Social Security from a “defined benefit” plan to a “defined contribution” plan fared slightly better. A larger proportion of our respondents, but still well less than a majority, 38 percent, expressed support for the change.¹ Social Security and Medicare in their current form remain very popular.

Table 1: Public Opinion on Entitlement Reforms

	Social Security	Medicare
Change the Program	38.0%	32.4%
Keep Program As Is	62.0%	67.6%

GENERATIONAL DIVIDE AND OPINIONS

Support for changes in Social Security and Medicare was greatest among younger Americans, ages 18 to 29, and least among Americans currently at or beyond the retirement age of 65. Not quite a majority of young adults (50 percent) supported allowing workers to invest a portion of the amount they pay into Social Security. Fewer younger adults, but still a substantial number, 40 percent, endorsed requiring seniors to purchase health care coverage with government assistance. Seniors, on the other hand, were much more skeptical of both reforms, opposing the Social Security proposal by a margin of 48 percentage points (26 percent for and 74 percent against) and the Medicare proposal by a margin of 56 percentage points (22 percent for and 78 percent against).

Table 2: Opinion on Entitlement Reform by Age

Percent Supporting Change	29 and Under	30 to 54	55 to 64	65 and Over
Social Security	49.6%	39.0%	35.1%	26.4%
Medicare	39.6%	33.1%	34.0%	21.8%

Despite the generational divide, however, there is little evidence that entitlement reform occasions generational conflict. We asked respondents whether they thought that the elderly or the young get more than their fair share, less than their fair share, or about their fair share of the benefits of federal spending. Only 8 percent believed that the elderly receive more than they deserved, many (37 percent) said the elderly receive too little, and most (55 percent) said the elderly receive their appropriate share. In contrast, 21 percent thought the young take more than their fair share, even though many (34 percent) thought the young get too little and a plurality (44 percent) thought the young receive about the right amount. Republicans were more likely to think that the elderly and the young alike receive too much, while the Democrats think that they both—but especially the young—receive too little.

¹ The Social Security question was asked in the first wave of the survey, before the election, the Medicare question in the second wave, after the election. For comparability, only respondents who participated in both waves of the survey are included in these tallies.

Table 3: Assessments of Generational Conflict

Elderly Receive	Young Receive		
	More than Fair Share	About Fair Share	Less than Fair Share
More than Fair Share	2.3%	2.4%	3.2%
About Fair Share	10.1%	28.0%	16.7%
Less than Fair Share	8.8%	14.0%	14.6%

To assess the possibility of generational conflict, we combined the responses to the two “fair share” questions mentioned above to identify respondents whose views favor the elderly—they think the elderly get too little and the young too much or about the right amount (in the lower left of the table); respondents whose opinions favor the young—they think the young receive too little and the elderly either too much or about the correct amount (in the upper right); and respondents who favor neither over the other. The major differences of opinion about entitlement reform were not between respondents who favor the elderly and respondents who favor the young but between respondents who favor either the elderly or the young and respondents who have no preference between them. For both programs, respondents with “neutral” attitudes were more likely to support changes than respondents with attitudes in favor of either the elderly or the young.² However much the rhetoric of entitlement reform has pitted the elderly against the young, the message does not seem to have taken hold in the electorate.

Table 4: Opinion on Entitlement Reform, by Attitudes toward the Elderly and the Young

Percent Supporting Change	Favor Elderly	Neutral	Favor Young
Social Security	31.6%	42.4%	35.3%
Medicare	24.5%	40.7%	20.1%

PARTY AFFILIATION AND ENTITLEMENT REFORM

Opinions on entitlement reform are very strongly influenced, however, by party affiliation. Democrats strongly support Social Security (76 percent) and Medicare (77 percent) in their traditional forms. On the other hand, a majority of Republicans, 60 percent, favor replacing Social Security with a defined contribution plan, and a sizable proportion, 44 percent, favor changing Medicare to a system supporting the purchase of private or government health insurance. Democrats favor preserving Social Security and Medicare in their traditional forms more than Republicans favor changing them—hence the overall public preference for the policy status quo.

Table 5: Opinions on Entitlement Reform by Partisan Identification

Percent Supporting Change	Democrat		Independent			Republican	
	Strong	Not So Strong	Leans Democratic	Pure (Volunteered Answer)	Leans Republican	Not So Strong	Strong
Social Security	17.2%	28.1%	32.5%	29.1%	69.9%	47.9%	59.7%
Medicare	17.1%	30.9%	26.4%	52.2%	37.3%	39.1%	52.5%

² This counterintuitive pattern has an explanation in partisanship: Democrats are more likely than Republicans to believe that both the elderly and the young receive less than their fair share of government benefits, and Democrats are also more likely than Republicans to oppose these two proposals for entitlements change.

HEALTH CARE PREFERENCES

KEY FINDINGS

- We find that existing government health insurance programs are popular, even when described without their program labels, although support for Medicare is perhaps lower and support for Medicaid possibly higher when those programs are described rather than labeled, as in other surveys.
- Although large majorities of Americans support the government paying for health care for Americans over 65 and for Americans in poverty, only one-third support the government doing so for all Americans.
- A majority support the government requiring states to expand Medicaid, a provision of the ACA that the Supreme Court struck down.
- Senior citizens come across as “health care conservatives:” less supportive than younger respondents of a government role in various aspects of health care, including their own public health insurance.
- The uninsured are more supportive than the insured of a government role in health care in every regard except the requirement that everyone buy health insurance. Republicans are less supportive of a government role than Democrats in every aspect of health care asked about, even the conversion of Medicare from fee-for-service to managed care, a long-time desire of many Republican policymakers.

OVERALL OPINION ON ROLE OF GOVERNMENT IN HEALTH CARE

We asked respondents their preferences about the role of government in health care (“In the area of health care, what do you think the government should do?”), including both benefits and programs that the government currently provides, provisions that will be implemented as part of the ACA, and reforms that could take place. What is significant about our approach is that we did not use any program labels (did not mention “Medicare,” “Medicaid,” “Affordable Care Act”), but simply described what government does in each instance in an effort to tap underlying preferences for government’s role without the cues that come from such labels.

We find that support is very high for roles that the government already plays (Table 6): “pay for health care for all Americans over 65” (which is Medicare); “cover drug bills for senior citizens” (the 2003 Medicare Modernization Act); and “pay for health care for all Americans who are in poverty” (Medicaid).ⁱⁱ In terms of government’s future role, all of the provisions of the ACA about which we asked garnered majority support except the requirement “that all people buy health insurance;” even without the “individual mandate” label, only 39 percent of respondents supported that provision. The two ACA insurance regulations—covering children on their parents’ plans through age 25 and a ban on pre-existing condition denials—were the most popular, but even the employer mandate (“require that all businesses provide insurance for their employees”) was supported by 61 percent of respondents.

Majorities supported two controversial aspects of the ACA: the requirement that states expand Medicaid to cover more people, which was struck down by the Supreme Court in June 2012 before this survey was administered, and the requirement that insurance companies pay for contraceptives.

Finally, there is more lukewarm support for two other reforms. When asked whether Medicare should be changed from fee-for-service to managed care, 50% said yes to 43 percent no. And when asked whether the government should pay for health care for all Americans, just 37 percent said yes and 62 percent said no, the lowest level of support among any of the health care items we asked.

Table 6: Government Role in Health Care

	Percent Supporting a Government Role to ...	Yes	No	Don't Know
Current Programs	Pay for health care for all Americans over 65	72.1%	26.1%	1.9%
	Cover drug bills for senior citizens	68.2%	30.2%	1.7%
	Pay for health care for all Americans who are in poverty	65.5%	33.0%	1.6%
ACA Provisions	Require insurance companies to cover children on their parents' health insurance plans through age 25	69.4%	30.1%	0.5%
	Prohibit insurance companies from denying health insurance coverage because of a person's pre-existing condition	62.1%	36.2%	1.7%
	Require that all businesses provide insurance for their employees	61.2%	38.2%	0.7%
	Require that states expand Medicaid to cover more people	56.0%	42.0%	2.0%
	Require insurance companies to pay for contraceptives	53.5%	45.7%	0.8%
	Require that all people buy health insurance	39.1%	59.2%	1.6%
Other Reforms	Change Medicare from fee-for-service (doctor is paid for each visit and service) to managed care (doctor is paid a set amount for treating a health problem, regardless of number of visits)	50.1%	43.6%	6.2%
	Pay for health care for all Americans	37.0%	62.0%	1.0%

SELF-INTEREST IN GOVERNMENT HEALTH CARE OPINION

We examined whether those with a stake in health care—because of their age, insurance status, or employment in the health care industry—have distinctive opinions about the role of government in health care.

Age. What is most striking about examining the health care questions by age is that senior citizens stand out as “health care conservatives”—even when it comes to their own programs (Table 7). That is, seniors are less enthusiastic than respondents under 65 about various provisions in the ACA: they are less supportive of continued coverage for young people on their parents' insurance, the ban on pre-existing coverage prohibitions, the employer mandate, and the Medicaid expansion. They are even less enthusiastic about the government's role in their own existing government-provided health insurance programs. Only 60 percent of seniors say the government should pay for health care for all Americans over 65, compared to three-quarters of those under 65, and only 53 percent of seniors said the government should cover drug bills for senior citizens, compared to two-thirds to three-quarters among younger respondents.

It is possible that the difference is due to seniors' interpretation of the survey questions. When we ask about the government paying for health care for all Americans over 65, perhaps senior respondents do not think of Medicare but think the question refers to extending coverage to seniors who do not currently have Medicare (and who must therefore surely be undeserving in some way). The asymmetry of support by age is also notable: while non-seniors are more supportive than seniors of government paying for health care for seniors, seniors are less supportive than non-seniors of government paying for health care for all Americans.

Table 7: Government Role in Health Care by Age

	Percent Supporting a Government Role to...	18-29	30-54	55-64	65+
Current Programs	Pay for health care for all Americans over 65	74.6%	74.9%	74.1%	59.6%
	Cover drug bills for senior citizens	74.6%	74.6%	66.0%	52.6%
	Pay for health care for all Americans who are in poverty	68.8%	62.0%	66.3%	64.3%
ACA Provisions	Require insurance companies to cover children on their parents' health insurance plans through age 25	70.1%	71.9%	68.9%	65.9%
	Prohibit insurance companies from denying health insurance coverage because of a person's pre-existing condition	63.1%	65.1%	65.6%	49.8%
	Require that all businesses provide insurance for their employees	79.1%	61.9%	51.4%	53.6%
	Require that states expand Medicaid to cover more people	61.1%	58.0%	54.0%	49.6%
	Require insurance companies to pay for contraceptives	54.7%	56.7%	57.8%	40.4%
Other Reforms	Require that all people buy health insurance	49.0%	32.2%	39.9%	36.9%
	Change Medicare from fee-for-service (doctor is paid for each visit and service) to managed care (doctor is paid a set amount for treating a health problem, regardless of number of visits)	56.3%	53.1%	47.8%	40.5%
	Pay for health care for all Americans	44.9%	34.3%	41.0%	26.0%

Insurance Status. It is generally the case that those without health insurance, those who have been unable to see a doctor because of the cost, and those who have been denied health insurance for a pre-existing condition are more supportive of the various government interventions mentioned than those respondents who are not in these situations, with one notable exception: those without health insurance are less supportive of the individual mandate—a government requirement that all people buy health insurance—than those with insurance (Table 8). Similarly, those who have failed to see a doctor because of cost or who have been denied insurance because of a pre-existing condition are also less supportive of a requirement to buy health insurance than other respondents.

Table 8: Government Role in Health Care by Insurance Status, Cost Status, and Denial of Health Insurance because of a Pre-Existing Condition

	Percent Supporting a Government Role to ...	Insured		No Doctor because of Cost		Denied because of Pre-Existing Condition	
		Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No
Current Programs	Pay for health care for all Americans over 65	71.1%	76.3%	82.8%	69.0%	88.8%	68.8%
	Cover drug bills for senior citizens	66.6%	75.7%	79.6%	64.9%	84.2%	65.2%
	Pay for health care for all Americans who are in poverty	65.8%	61.4%	74.2%	63.0%	77.8%	64.5%
ACA Provisions	Require insurance companies to cover children on their parents' health insurance plans through age 25	68.2%	76.9%	80.0%	66.7%	78.9%	67.1%
	Prohibit insurance companies from denying health insurance coverage because of a person's pre-existing condition	62.4%	61.3%	65.4%	61.3%	80.7%	63.3%
	Require that all businesses provide insurance for their employees	59.5%	70.9%	77.8%	56.8%	73.5%	55.4%
	Require that states expand Medicaid to cover more people	54.7%	63.2%	65.5%	53.5%	64.1%	54.8%
	Require insurance companies to pay for contraceptives	53.7%	52.2%	62.4%	51.1%	75.4%	54.1%
	Require that all people buy health insurance	41.3%	24.0%	31.5%	40.8%	32.4%	39.1%
Other Reforms	Change Medicare from fee-for-service (doctor is paid for each visit and service) to managed care (doctor is paid a set amount for treating a health problem, regardless of number of visits)	47.6%	62.0%	61.5%	46.6%	70.0%	46.7%
	Pay for health care for all Americans	36.4%	38.0%	44.5%	34.7%	56.7%	34.1%

Health Industry Employment. We might imagine that opinion toward the government role for health care might differ among those who work in the health care industry. When it comes to existing government programs, we received more pro-government responses from members of the public who live in a household in which someone works for a hospital, a health care provider, a health insurance company, or for some other kind of health care company (Table 9). Those employed in the health industry are more supportive of the government paying for health care for those over 65, covering seniors' drug bills, and paying for health care for the poor. Those in health care industry households give more pro-government responses to elements of the ACA and to government provision of health care to all Americans, but most of these differences are not statistically significant (except for greater support for coverage of children under 26, the employer mandate, and the individual mandate). Thus it appears that those in health care households are more supportive of existing government roles, and are also more supportive of ACA provisions than other members of the public, but by much smaller margins.

Table 9: Government Role in Health Care by Health Care Industry Employment

	Percent Supporting a Government Role to ...	Health Care Employment	
		Yes	No
Current Programs	Pay for health care for all Americans over 65	81.8%	69.5%
	Cover drug bills for senior citizens	80.5%	64.9%
	Pay for health care for all Americans who are in poverty	71.4%	63.8%
ACA Provisions	Require insurance companies to cover children on their parents' health insurance plans through age 25	77.3%	67.6%
	Prohibit insurance companies from denying health insurance coverage because of a person's pre-existing condition	66.9%	61.0%
	Require that all businesses provide insurance for their employees	65.5%	60.0%
	Require that states expand Medicaid to cover more people	58.4%	55.3%
	Require insurance companies to pay for contraceptives	56.4%	52.7%
Other Reforms	Require that all people buy health insurance	44.4%	37.7%
	Change Medicare from fee-for-service (doctor is paid for each visit and service) to managed care (doctor is paid a set amount for treating a health problem, regardless of number of visits)	53.4%	48.8%
	Pay for health care for all Americans	41.5%	35.6%

Note: Respondents were asked if anyone in their household works for a hospital, as for a health care provider, for a health insurance company, or for some other kind of health care company.

PARTY AFFILIATION AND ROLE OF GOVERNMENT IN HEALTH CARE

Finally, we examine opinion about the role of government in health care by party identification. Unsurprisingly, there are large differences between partisan groups, even for existing programs. Just 45 to 50 percent of Republican identifiers support the government paying for health care for all Americans over 65, and less than half support the government paying seniors' drug bills. Only about one-third support government provision of health care for those in poverty (Medicaid), compared to over 80 percent support among Democrats.

Several of the provisions of the ACA—allowing children to stay on their parents' insurance and the ban on pre-existing condition prohibitions—are supported by 40 percent or more of Republican identifiers. Even the employer mandate enjoys support among 46 percent of weak Republican identifiers (but just 28 percent of strong Republicans). However, other aspects of the ACA are supported by very few Republicans: Medicaid expansion, contraceptive coverage, and the individual mandate (nor is the individual mandate so popular among Democrats, just over half of whom support it).

The one area in which Republican opinion runs against expectations is in the structure of Medicare. A number of Republican lawmakers have championed replacing Medicare's fee-for-service structure with managed care, but among the public only 34 percent of weak Republicans and 26 percent of strong Republicans support such a change. Perhaps the survey subjects were responding more to the "government requirement" aspect of the question than to the actual policy content.

Table 10: Government Role in Health Care by Party Identification

	Percent Supporting a Government Role to ...	Democrat		Independent			Republican	
		Strong	Not So Strong	Leans Democratic	Pure (Volunteered Answer)	Leans Republican	Not So Strong	Strong
Current Programs	Pay for health care for all Americans over 65	90.3%	87.8%	80.0%	63.7%	51.4%	45.2%	50.3%
	Cover drug bills for senior citizens	84.5%	74.0%	78.3%	67.3%	55.1%	41.7%	45.7%
	Pay for health care for all Americans who are in poverty	87.2%	82.9	75.2%	68.4%	47.3%	27.5%	36.2%
ACA Provisions	Require insurance companies to cover children on their parents' health insurance plans through age 25	88.7%	81.9%	83.1%	62.8%	39.8%	64.9%	39.0%
	Prohibit insurance companies from denying health insurance coverage because of a person's pre-existing condition	72.6%	75.7%	73.3%	61.1%	52.5%	46.0%	39.8%
	Require that all businesses provide insurance for their employees	81.1%	73.0%	70.3%	61.9%	45.6%	46.2%	27.6%
	Require that states expand Medicaid to cover more people	77.6%	77.6%	72.6%	46.9%	27.2%	29.2%	24.9%
	Require insurance companies to pay for contraceptives	75.0%	67.4%	72.2%	46.5%	21.7%	32.7%	21.4%
	Require that all people buy health insurance	60.8%	53.0%	55.5%	15.9%	20.0%	17.0%	6.5%
	Change Medicare from fee-for-service (doctor is paid for each visit and service) to managed care (doctor is paid a set amount for treating a health problem, regardless of number of visits)	58.2%	59.5%	54.4%	56.6%	46.6%	34.1%	26.1%
Other Reforms	Pay for health care for all Americans	59.2%	48.7%	43.4%	41.2%	10.2%	18.5%	11.3%

BIPARTISANSHIP AND THE AMERICAN PEOPLE

KEY FINDINGS

- Most Americans, including large majorities of Democrats and Republicans alike, prefer that their own representatives work with others and make compromises, even compromises that include policies that they dislike.
- Americans perceive that President Obama (by a margin of more than 60 percent to less than 40 percent) and congressional Democrats to a lesser extent (about half and half) have tried sincerely to find policy solutions acceptable to both parties. Fewer than a fourth credit congressional Republicans with a sincere orientation toward bipartisan cooperation.
- Perceptions of the readiness of Democrats and Republicans in Washington to find common ground depend upon party affiliation. Partisans are more likely to see their own side as virtuous and the other side as insincere. A majority of even Republican identifiers, however, believes that congressional Republicans did not try to find policies acceptable to both parties.

AMERICANS' OPINIONS ON BIPARTISANSHIP

Whether connecting across the aisle in the Congress or negotiating the distance between the Capitol and the White House, the differences between Democrats and Republicans on the great (and small) issues of the day have never seemed larger than they were in the 112th Congress. Politicians claimed to act on principles and principles alone, and compromise, if it happened at all, occurred only very late in the day. Cooperation between the two political parties seems to be more difficult than ever before.

The agonistic politics of recent years is not what Americans say that they want. We asked respondents to say whether they think their own representatives in Washington should stand by their principles, even if little gets done, or instead work with others to get things done, even if the result is a compromise including provisions they dislike. The vast majority, 79 percent, said that their representatives should work with others and get things done. Twenty percent said that they should stand by their principles.ⁱⁱⁱ The two parties' supporters differ in their taste for cooperation and compromise. Democrats (including Independents who lean Democratic) are 21 percentage points more likely than Republicans (including Independents who lean Republican) to say that their representatives should work with others to get things done.

Although partisans of both sides profess a willingness to accept compromise, nearly three times as many Republicans as Democrats expect their representatives to stand by their principles, which they presumably share, even if nothing gets done. Accordingly, for policy choices on which Republicans part company with Democrats—on domestic spending, defense spending, and top-bracket tax rates—the advocates of the “conservative” position are more likely to insist that their representatives hold to principles. Even so, a large majority of Republicans, like a large majority of Democrats, prefers compromise and progress to principle and gridlock.

Table 11: Principles and Compromise by Party Identification

Percent Who Believe Their Representative Should	Democrat		Independent			Republican	
	Strong	Not So Strong	Leans Democratic	Pure (Volunteered Answer)	Leans Republican	Not So Strong	Strong
Stand by Their Principles	5.7%	17.1%	16.9%	30.5%	26.7%	38.3%	27.8%
Work with Others to Get Things Done	94.3%	81.5%	83.1%	69.5%	71.8%	56.8%	70.0%
Neither (Volunteered Answer)		1.3%			1.5%	5.0%	2.2%

AMERICANS' PERCEPTION OF BIPARTISANSHIP EFFORTS

The public does not perceive parity in the readiness of Democrats and Republicans to find consensus solutions. We asked respondents whether President Obama, the Republicans in Congress, and the Democrats in Congress had or had not made sincere efforts to work with members of the opposing party to find solutions that are acceptable to both sides. Nearly two-thirds (66 percent) said that the President had attempted to reach bipartisan solutions. Just short of half (50 percent), moreover, gave the same assessment of congressional Democrats. Only a quarter (23 percent), however, perceived that congressional Republicans had sincerely tried to find consensus policies.^{iv}

Table 12: Made Sincere Efforts to Find Mutually Acceptable Solutions

	Percent Yes
President Obama	65.8%
Republicans in Congress	23.2%
Democrats in Congress	49.6%

To be sure, the perceptions of the parties' actions were influenced by respondents' own allegiances to the Democratic or the Republican side. Almost all of the self-identified Democrats (96 percent of all types of Democrats) credited President Obama with bipartisanship, while only a quarter of the Republican identifiers (24 percent of all types) did. Three-fourths (74 percent) of Democrats, likewise, said that Democrats in Congress had made sincere efforts to work with Republicans in Congress, a view that was shared by only a sixth (16 percent) of Republicans. Democrats and Republicans both, however, expressed considerable skepticism about the willingness of congressional Republicans to work cooperatively with President Obama and congressional Democrats. Only 14 percent of Democrats, unsurprisingly, thought Republicans in Congress had invested in bipartisanship. But only 40 percent of Republicans thought that their co-partisans in the Senate and the House had made efforts to find common ground.

Table 13: Evaluations of Attempts at Bipartisanship by Party Identification

Percent Who Thought Bipartisan Efforts Were Made by	Democrat		Independent			Republican	
	Strong	Not So Strong	Leans Democratic	Pure (Volunteered Answer)	Leans Republican	Not So Strong	Strong
President Obama	97.5%	95.1%	92.4%	55.5%	36.2%	28.8%	9.6%
Republicans in Congress	8.9%	20.3%	18.1%	18.6%	41.5%	22.1%	49.7%
Democrats in Congress	79.5%	69.3%	66.5%	37.5%	23.5%	14.8%	10.1%

Of course, some Americans find bipartisanship commendable, some lamentable. Many Republicans are glad that Republicans in Congress stuck to their principles in their struggles with President Obama and the Democrats. Many Democrats wish that President Obama and congressional Democrats had been less interested in compromise. Respondents who demanded that their representatives stand by principles were more likely to say that President Obama and congressional Democrats had not made a sincere effort to work with Republicans, and more likely to say that congressional Republicans had made such an effort than respondents who wanted their representatives to compromise to get things done. This is not surprising given that three times as many Republicans as Democrats expect fealty to principles. The few Democrats who wished their side would stick to principles, however, thought exactly the same as the Republicans who wanted their side to stick to principles. The stick-to-principles Democrats were less likely to see bipartisanship in the actions of President Obama and congressional Democrats and more likely to see it in the actions of congressional Republicans, than Democrats who wished their side to work across the aisle.

ENDNOTES

- i. For whatever reason, our respondents are more Democratic in their partisanship than other surveys would suggest. The Pew polls gauged partisan identification in five samples of adults between September and November of 2012. In comparison to our sample, Pew's distribution of partisan identification is:

	Democratic	Independent	Republican	Other/DK
Pew	33%	36%	25%	6%
NORC	41%	32%	23%	4%

Reweighting the NORC sample to the Pew proportions, however, makes little difference to our results. Here and in subsequent endnotes, we cite some of the larger differences. In what follows, the label "Original Weighted" corresponds to the statistics set forth in the main body of the report. For the question concerning public support for entitlement reforms, the breakdown of opinion is:

	NORC Data			
	Social Security		Medicare	
	Original Weighted	Rewighted	Original Weighted	Rewighted
Change the Program	38.0%	40.3%	32.4%	34.1%
Keep Program As Is	62.0%	59.7%	67.6%	65.9%

- ii. For the question of the government's role in healthcare, the breakdown of opinion is:

	Percent Supporting a Government Role to ...	NORC Data	
		Original Weighted	Rewighted
		Yes	Yes
Current Programs	Pay for health care for all Americans over 65	72.1%	69.9%
	Cover drug bills for senior citizens	68.2%	66.5%
	Pay for health care for all Americans who are in poverty	65.5%	63.0%
ACA Provisions	Require insurance companies to cover children on their parents' health insurance plans through age 25	69.4%	67.2%
	Prohibit insurance companies from denying health insurance coverage because of a person's pre-existing condition	62.1%	60.5%
	Require that all businesses provide insurance for their employees	61.2%	58.7%
	Require that states expand Medicaid to cover more people	56.0%	53.2%
	Require insurance companies to pay for contraceptives	53.5%	51.2%
Other Reforms	Require that all people buy health insurance	39.1%	36.8%
	Change Medicare from fee-for-service (doctor is paid for each visit and service) to managed care (doctor is paid a set amount for treating a health problem, regardless of number of visits)	50.1%	49.2%
	Pay for health care for all Americans	37.0%	34.5%

iii. For the question of whether representatives should work with others and get things done, or representatives should stand by their principles, the breakdown of opinion is:

	NORC Data	
	Original Weighted	Reweighted
Representatives Should Work With Others and Get Things Done	79.0%	77.3%
Representatives Should Stand by Their Principles	19.8%	21.4%
Neither (Volunteered Answer)	1.2%	1.4%

iv. For the question of whether key political leaders made sincere efforts to find mutually acceptable solutions, the breakdown of opinion is:

	NORC Data	
	Original Weighted	Reweighted
President Obama	65.8%	61.9%
Republicans in Congress	23.2%	24.3%
Democrats in Congress	49.6%	46.1%

For more information, visit www.norc.org or email info@norc.org