

Post-election partisanship among millennials deepens, poll finds

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A [new national poll](#) of America's 18- to 29- year-olds by Harvard's Institute of Politics (IOP), located at the John F. Kennedy School of Government, finds a slight majority (52%) of Millennials overall continuing to approve of the job Barack Obama is doing as President. The poll also finds at no time have young Democrats and Republicans been more divided on President Obama's job performance: 85 percent of Democrats approve of the job the President is doing while only 11 percent of Republicans say the same.

The IOP's newest [poll results](#) – its 23rd major release since 2000 – also show Millennials have a mixed opinion of the National Rifle Association (NRA), with thirty-eight percent (38%) expressing either somewhat (25%) or very (13%) favorable attitudes toward the organization – and equal numbers expressing unfavorable attitudes (20% somewhat, 18% very). A [detailed report](#) on the poll's findings is available on the [Institute's website](#).

"With the hard choices that all of us need to make, it is more important than ever that young Americans are able to connect with and trust elected officials and [public institutions](#)," said Harvard Institute of Politics Director Trey Grayson. "To ensure progress, our leaders in government need to set a positive tone and work together to show young people that Washington can again deliver results."

"On issues ranging from their views of the President to immigration to gun control to the role government should play in improving our

economy, both [Democrats and Republicans](#) are hardening their positions, while Independent-minded voters are tuning out," said Harvard Institute of Politics Polling Director John Della Volpe. "Nearly half of all Americans under 30 believe that the politics of today are not able to meet the challenges our country is facing. We have been warned."

The KnowledgePanel survey of 3,103 18- to 29- year-old U.S. citizens with a margin of error of +/- 1.7 percentage points (95% confidence level) conducted with the Government and Academic Research team of GfK for the IOP between March 20 to April 8, 2013 finds –

Obama Job Approval Steady, as Partisanship Among Millennials

Deepens. Several months after a successful re-election campaign and during the initial phase of his second term, a slight majority (52%) of 18- to 29- year-olds in America say they approve of the job [Barack Obama](#) is doing as President (46%: disapprove) – the same approval percentage noted six months and also one year ago in IOP polling. While the top-line indicators of approval have not changed, a look below the surface reveals that 18- to 29- year-olds are now the most divided when it comes to the opinion of this President. Since November 2009, IOP polling has tracked how members of each party rate President Obama's job performance eight times, and the difference between the way that Democrats and Republicans view the President has never been more dramatic than in the last six months. For example, 85 percent of Democrats approve of his job performance, while only 11 percent of Republicans feel the same, resulting in a net difference of 74 percentage points. When the same question was asked one year ago, the difference between Democrats and Republicans was 63 percentage points; in November 2009 during the health care debate, the divide was 65 percentage points.

Nearly One-Half Favor Stricter Gun Control Laws, Approximately One-third Believe Laws Should Be Kept As They Are. Recent

tragedies in Newtown, CT and Aurora, CO have brought gun control to the forefront of public discourse. Although the IOP's April poll showed a plurality of 18- to 29- year-olds support greater restrictions on guns, the proportion is lower than that seen throughout the entire adult population. Nearly a majority, 49 percent, support making gun laws more strict, while 35 percent believe gun laws should be kept as they are with 15 percent of 18- to 29- year-olds saying they prefer less strict gun laws. For comparison, a January, 2013 CBS/*New York Times* poll showed overall adult support for stricter gun laws at 54 percent, five percentage points higher than found in the in the IOP's April poll. In addition, recent gun-related tragedies and resulting public discussion also do not appear to have strongly increased youth support for stricter gun laws. CBS/*New York Times* polling found a greater increase (8%) in support for stricter gun control laws over the past two years (54%: Jan. 2013; 46%: Jan. 2011) than IOP polling found (3%) over the same time period (49%: Apr. 2013; 46%: Feb. 2011).

Majority of Young Millennials Disapprove of the Way President Obama is Handling "Gun Violence." Although a majority of Millennials approve of President Obama's job performance overall (52%), less than half (42%) of America's 18- to 29- year-olds say they approve of the way he is handling "gun violence" with a majority (56%) saying they disapprove. The only issue with a higher disapproval rating among the five tested in the IOP's April poll was the President's handling of the federal budget deficit (62%). The IOP's latest poll was conducted before the recent failure of gun control legislation in the U.S. Senate, reflecting disapproval with President Obama's proposals more than with legislative results in Congress.

Millennials Split on View of the NRA; Nearly One-in-Five Own a Firearm. The IOP's April poll shows America's 18- to 29- year-olds have a mixed opinion of the National Rifle Association, a strong opponent of President Obama's gun control proposals. Thirty eight

percent (38%) expressed either somewhat or very favorable (13% very favorable, 25% somewhat favorable) attitudes towards the NRA, with equal numbers expressing unfavorable attitudes (20% somewhat unfavorable, 18% very unfavorable). Slightly less than one-in-five (18%) Millennials tell us that they own a gun; slightly more than twice that number, 39 percent, say they have an immediate family member who owns a gun.

Plurality of Young Americans Support a Pathway to Citizenship for Illegal Immigrants; Not Quite Half of Under-30 Crowd Support Legalization of Marijuana. A plurality of Democrats (56%), Republicans (32%) and Independents (41%) believe that those currently in the country illegally should be afforded a path to citizenship as long as they do not have criminal records, have paid taxes, learn English and pay a fine. Overall, 44 percent of all 18- to 29- year-olds subscribe to this policy (pathway to citizenship), whereas 22 percent support "a path to legal status now, but not citizenship, for those who don't have criminal records, have paid taxes, learn English and pay a fine," 11 percent support "a path to citizenship or legal status but only after measurable improvements have been made in border security," and 20 percent believe in "no path to citizenship or legal status; they should be required to go home and reapply for entry into the country." When the 44 percent of those in favor of a pathway to citizenship are analyzed, we find that a plurality, but not a majority, of Whites (40%), African Americans (41%) and Asian Americans (40%) are in support, while nearly two-thirds of Hispanics (59%) are supportive of this new, potential policy. In addition, for the first time since our project was conceived in 2000, we asked young Americans their opinions related to legalization of marijuana. Overall, not quite half (44%) of young people under 30 support legalization, one-third oppose (33%) – and when provided the option, 23 percent report that they are unsure or refused to answer the question.

Republicans in Congress see Slight Job Performance Improvement,

Democrats Locked in Place. Among Millennials, the job performance ratings of Democrats in Congress over the past six months decreased within the margin of error from 41% (Oct. 2012) to 40% (Apr. 2013), while approval of Republicans in Congress increased four percentage points from 23% (Oct. 2012) to 27% (Apr. 2013) over the same time period. Disapproval ratings for Congress also remain largely unchanged from October 2012 polling: fifty-eight percent (58%) of America's 18- to 29- year-olds still say that they disapprove of the way that Democrats in Congress are doing their job (58%: Oct. 2012) and 71 percent say the same today about Republicans in Congress (72%: Oct. 2012).

Only One-in-Four Millennials say U.S. Headed in Right Direction.

Virtually unchanged since our last poll was taken in the weeks leading up to the 2012 general election, 25 percent of young Americans in our April survey indicated that things in the country were "generally headed in the right direction" (25%: Oct. 2012), 42 percent reported that things were "off on the wrong track" (41%: Oct. 2012) – and 34 percent were unsure at this time (31%: Oct. 2102).

By multiple measurements, the economy remains the top issue of concern for this generation.

As was the case in March 2012 IOP polling, more Millennials cited "jobs and the economy" (55%: Apr. 2013; 58%: Mar. 2012) in an open-ended question on which national issue concerns them most – again far outpacing any other answer.

Additionally, the Institute tested the relative importance of sixteen issues facing the United States; respondents were shown two issues and asked to choose which was a more important concern for America. For the second year in a row, IOP polling found domestic and financial-related concerns were most important to young Americans under 30. The top issue was "creating jobs and lowering the unemployment rate" which won against every other issue it was paired with (i.e., "the field") 75 percent of the time. Other top issues were "reducing the federal deficit" which won its matchup 62 percent of the time, "creating a world-class

education system" which beat every other issue 61 percent of the time, and "lowering the tax burden for all Americans" which won 58 percent of the time. Current hot button issues such as "reducing gun violence" and "developing a comprehensive immigration policy" were in the middle of the pack winning their matchups against the field 44 percent and 43 percent of the time respectively. A more robust breakdown of the sixteen issues tested and match-up results is available in the IOP's April 2013 poll executive summary on the [Institute's website](#).

Provided by Harvard University

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