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The Associated Press-NORC
Center for Public Affairs Research

OBAMA'S LEGACY AS PRESIDENT: DEPENDS ON WHO YOU ASK

As President Barack Obama prepares to leave the White House after nearly eight years, most Americans have positive views of him and his administration, albeit with lukewarm opinions about some aspects. But, according to the latest Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research poll, there are deep divisions among the public.

Concerning the Obama administration, Democrats are exceptionally positive and Republicans are extremely negative. While less than half of whites have a favorable impression of the president, non-whites are overwhelmingly enthusiastic. Most college graduates give Obama a good grade for his stewardship, but less educated Americans are more critical. The racial and education differences hold even when controlling for party identification.

Only 32 percent of the public say Obama has kept his campaign promises, although 44 percent say he tried to keep the promises but was unsuccessful. Twenty-two percent of Americans (and 49 percent of Republicans) say he did not keep his promises.

And while various economic indicators suggest an improved economy, most Americans do not regard either their own circumstances or the country's as having improved during the Obama administration.

The nationwide poll of 1,017 adults was part of the AmeriSpeak® Omnibus, a monthly multi-client survey using NORC at the University of Chicago's probability-based panel. Interviews were conducted between December 14 and 19, 2016, online and using landlines and cell phones.



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Three Things You Should Know

About the AP-NORC Poll

Among all American adults...

- 1) Fifty-seven percent have a favorable impression of Obama, and 52 percent say he has been a great or good president.
- 2) Only 27 percent say Obama has been able to keep his promise to unite the country. While 32 percent say the president has kept his campaign promises in general, 44 percent say he has tried but failed.
- 3) Forty-one percent say they personally are better off now compared to when Obama first entered the White House; 46 percent think the country as a whole is better off. But, regardless of economic indicators suggesting a healthy economy, most people do not perceive an improvement.

Some of the poll's key findings are:

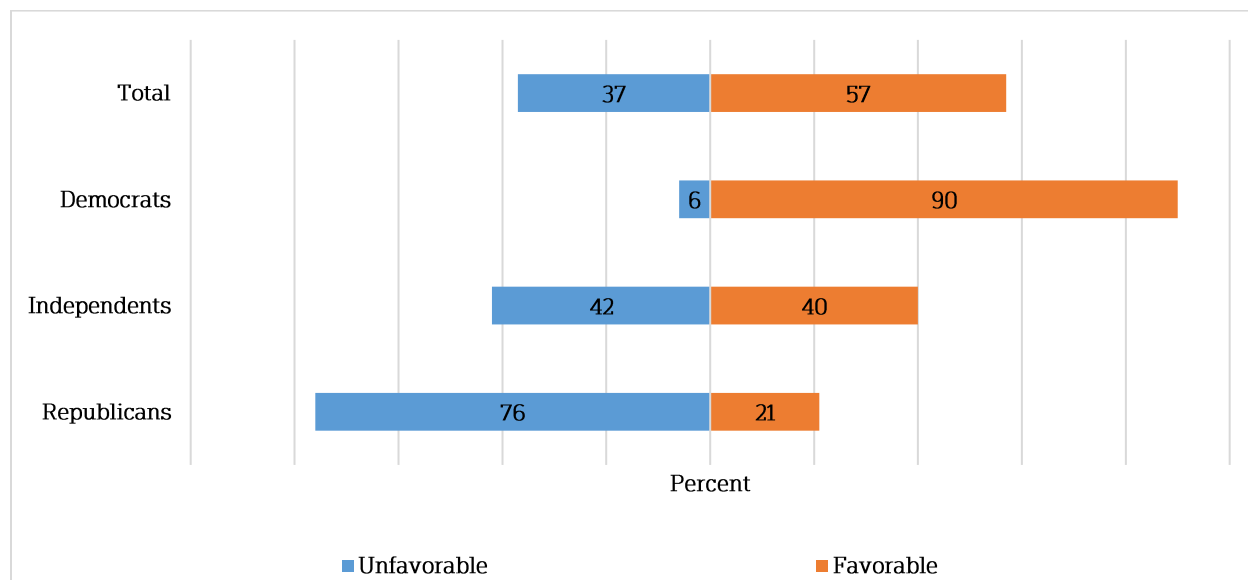
- Overall, 57 percent of Americans have a favorable opinion of the president, and 37 percent have an unfavorable view. Ninety percent of Democrats, 79 percent of blacks, and 63 percent of college graduates all have a positive impression of Obama. Only 49 percent of whites and 21 percent of Republicans have a favorable opinion of the president.
- Fifty-two percent of the public regard Obama as a great or good president. Among Democrats, 84 percent say the president has been great or good; 45 percent of independents and only 12 percent of Republicans agree.
- Only 32 percent of Americans say Obama has kept his campaign promises, although 44 percent say he tried but was unable. Twenty-two percent of the public, including 49 percent of Republicans and 23 percent of independents, say Obama did not keep his promises. Only 2 percent of Democrats agree.
- One of those promises was to bring the country together.¹ Only 27 percent of Americans think Obama has been successful in uniting the country, while 44 percent say the United States has become more divided and another 28 percent say there has been no change.
- While many measures indicate a stronger economy than Obama inherited, most people do not regard their personal situation as having improved. Forty-one percent say they and their family are better off in the wake of eight years of the Obama administration, but 32 percent feel there has been no change and 26 percent say their circumstances have deteriorated.
- While 46 percent say the country has become better off under Obama's watch, most don't see a positive change -- 33 percent say the country is worse off and 20 percent do not see any difference.
- Forty-three percent of black Americans say Obama's actions in office have made most blacks better off, while 49 percent say his administration has had no effect—neither good nor bad. Only 5 percent of blacks say Obama has had a detrimental effect on most blacks.

AMERICANS ARE DIVIDED ALONG PARTISAN AND RACIAL LINES IN EVALUATIONS OF OBAMA.

Most Americans overall have a favorable view of the president. Fifty-seven percent have either a very or somewhat favorable impression of him, while 37 percent have a very or somewhat unfavorable impression. Fifty-two percent say he has been a good or great president, but 20 percent say he has been average and 28 percent say he has been poor or terrible.

Democrats view him overwhelmingly positively, but Republicans see him negatively, and independents fall in between. Nine in 10 Democrats have a favorable view of Obama, and about 8 in 10 say he has been a good or great president. On the other hand, just 2 in 10 Republicans view him favorably, and nearly 7 in 10 say he has been a poor or terrible president.

¹ <https://www.scribd.com/document/4107302/Barack-Obama-s-Blueprint-For-Change#download>

Deep partisan divisions emerge in evaluations of Obama and his presidency.

Question: Do you have a favorable or unfavorable impression of Barack Obama? If you don't know enough about Barack Obama to have an opinion, you can say that, too.

Source: AP-NORC Center poll conducted Dec. 14-19, 2016, with 1,017 adults nationwide.

Looking at racial differences, most blacks and Hispanics have a positive view of the president while whites are just about equally positive and negative. Seventy-nine percent of blacks and 72 percent of Hispanics have a favorable impression of him. Whites are split fairly evenly between favorable impressions (49 percent) and unfavorable (45 percent). Additionally, large majorities of blacks (89 percent) and Hispanics (68 percent) say he has been a good or great president. Whites are in less agreement; only 41 percent say he has been a good or great president, 22 percent say he has been average, and 37 percent say he has been poor or terrible. Differences also emerge among whites based on education. Forty-nine percent of whites with at least a four-year degree say he has been a good or great president versus 35 percent without a degree.

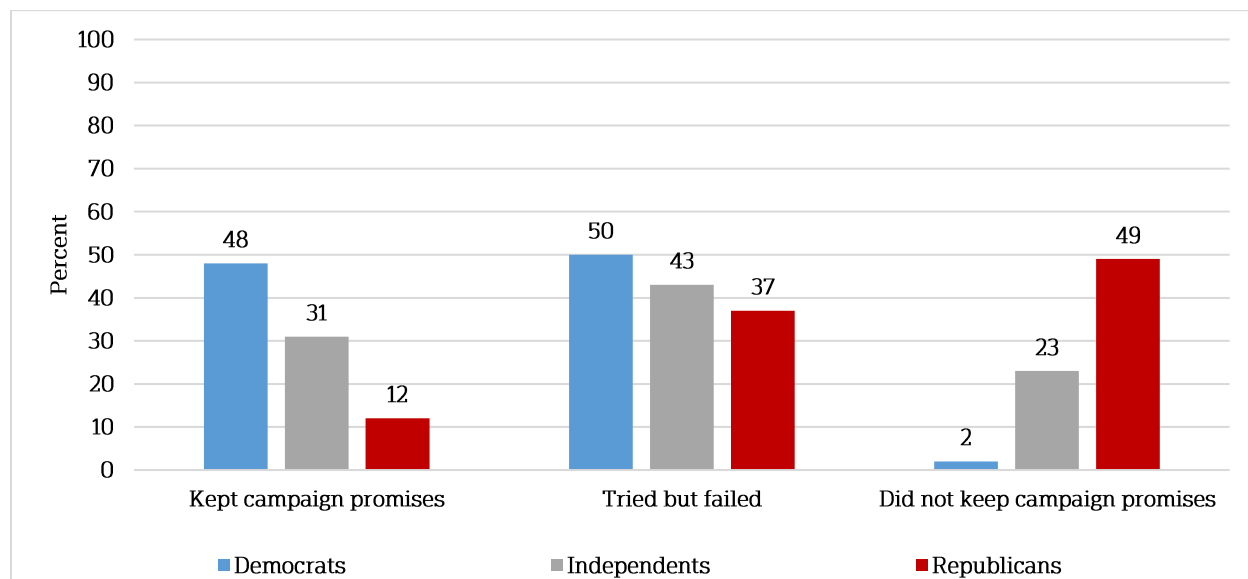
Obama's favorability rating is similar to what President Bill Clinton's was as he prepared to leave office, Clinton also enjoyed a 57 percent favorability in December 2000. On the other hand, President George W. Bush was seen favorably by just 40 percent of the public prior to leaving office in January 2009.² President George H.W. Bush enjoyed even higher favorable numbers (62 percent) than Obama as he prepared to leave office after losing reelection to Clinton in 1992.

SPECIFIC EVALUATIONS OF OBAMA AND HIS IMPACT ARE EVEN MORE MIXED AND AGAIN DIFFER BY PARTY.

While many Americans have an overall favorable impression of Obama, they are less enthusiastic about some specific aspects of his presidency. Only about a third of Americans say he has kept the promises he made while running for president, although another 44 percent say he tried to keep those promises but was unsuccessful. Twenty-two percent of all Americans (but almost half of Republicans) say he has not kept his campaign promises at all.

² <http://www.gallup.com/poll/1618/favorability-people-news.aspx>

Democrats overwhelmingly think Obama kept, or at least tried to keep, his campaign promises. Republicans mostly think he either tried and failed or did not keep them.



Question: Do you think Barack Obama has...kept the promises he made while running for president, tried but failed to keep his promises, or not kept his promises?

Source: AP-NORC Center poll conducted Dec. 14-19, 2016, with 1,017 adults nationwide.

Candidate Obama often spoke of bringing the country together. Seven years later, before his final State of the Union address last January, Obama expressed regret over the political divisions that have grown during his presidency.³

Most Americans agree with his assessment. Fewer than 3 in 10 say Obama's presidency has made the country more united. More than 4 in 10 say it is more divided. About 3 in 10 say it is neither more united nor more divided.

Views are mixed about how the actions of Obama, the first black president of the United States, have impacted the lives of black people. Forty-six percent say he has made black Americans neither better nor worse off. Twenty-eight percent of Americans say he has made blacks better off, and 24 percent say worse off. Racial differences emerge in attitudes here. While blacks are more likely to say Obama's actions were inconsequential compared to the other options, they are more likely than whites (43 percent vs. 23 percent) to say he has made things better for them, even when controlling for party identification. Whites are more likely than blacks to say he made things worse (30 percent vs. 5 percent).

Since Obama was inaugurated in January 2009, the nation's economy has added more than 10.7 million jobs and the unemployment rate has dropped below the historical norm. At the same time, while the number of long-term unemployed has dropped by 725,000, it is still 650,000 higher than at the start of the Great Recession in December 2007.⁴

³ <https://www.bloomberg.com/politics/articles/2016-01-12/obama-regrets-divided-u-s-before-final-state-of-the-union>

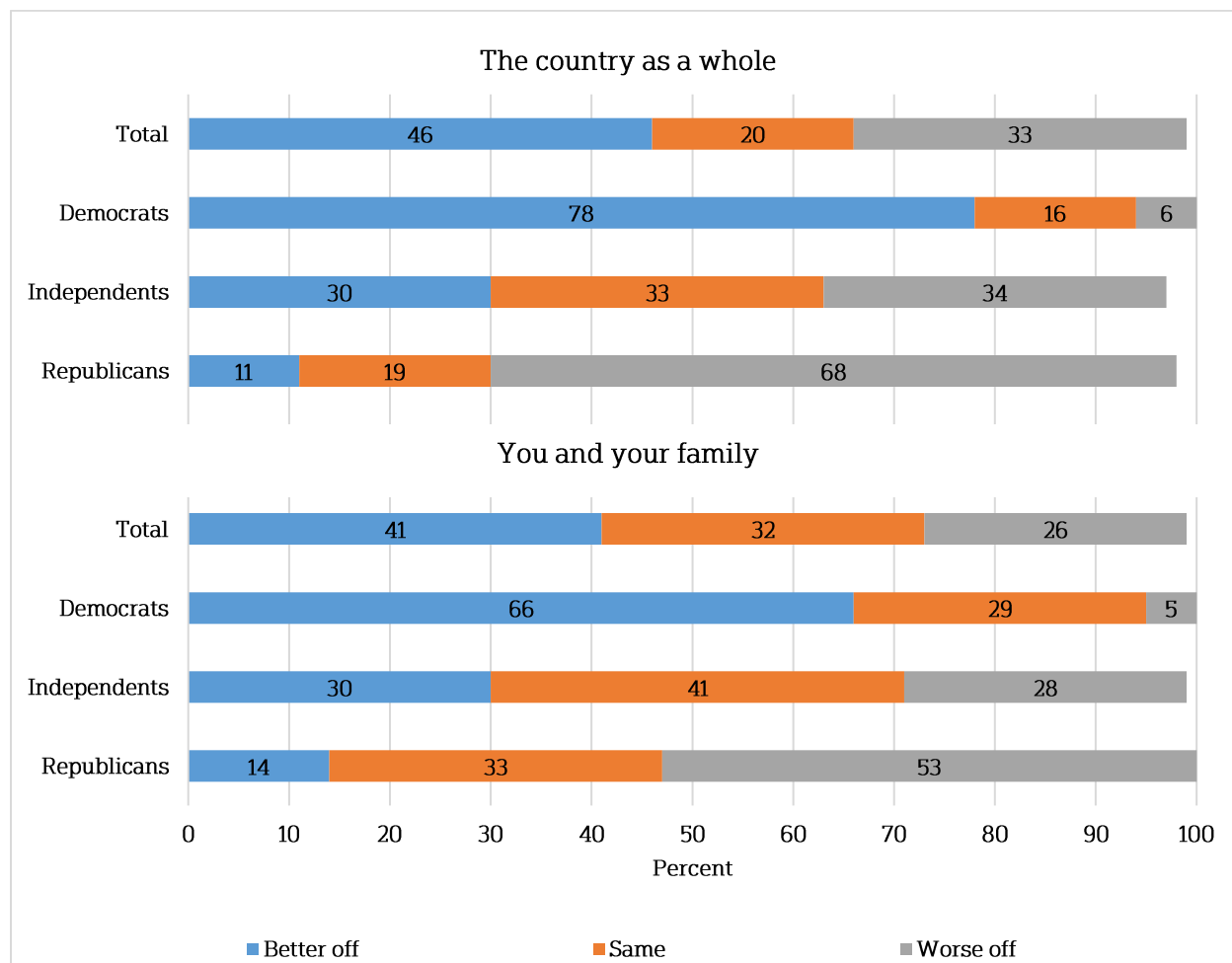
⁴ <http://www.factcheck.org/2016/10/obamas-numbers-october-2016-update/>

Even as Obama leaves the country in better economic circumstances than when he arrived in the White House, most Americans do not perceive an improved economy—either for themselves or the country.

While there is more to these evaluations than the economy, when asked if they and their family are better or worse off since Obama became president, 4 in 10 Americans say they are somewhat or much better off. Less than 3 in 10 say they are somewhat or much worse off, while 3 in 10 say there is not much difference. When discussing the country as a whole, 46 percent say it is better off, but 20 percent say there has been no improvement and 33 percent say it has deteriorated.

Like general evaluations of the president, deep partisan differences emerge. Democrats express more positivity after eight years of an Obama administration than Republicans or independents, both for themselves and the country overall.

Most Democrats say the country as a whole and they and their families personally are better off compared to when Obama took office, while majorities of Republicans say both are worse off.



Questions: Overall, would you say that the country as a whole is better off or worse off than it was when Barack Obama became president in 2009, or has there not been much difference?

Overall, would you say that you and your family are better off or worse off than you were when Barack Obama became president in 2009, or has there not been much difference?

Source: AP-NORC Center poll conducted Dec. 14-19, 2016, with 1,017 adults nationwide.

ABOUT THE STUDY

Survey Methodology

This survey was conducted by The Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research and with funding from NORC at the University of Chicago. Data were collected using AmeriSpeak Omnibus®, a monthly multi-client survey using NORC's probability-based panel designed to be representative of the U.S. household population. The survey was part of a larger study that included questions about other topics not included in this report. During the initial recruitment phase of the panel, randomly selected U.S. households were sampled with a known, non-zero probability of selection from the NORC National Sample Frame and then contacted by U.S. mail, email, telephone, and field interviewers (face-to-face). The panel provides sample coverage of approximately 97 percent of the U.S. household population. Those excluded from the sample include people with P.O. Box only addresses, some addresses not listed in the USPS Delivery Sequence File, and some newly constructed dwellings.

Interviews for this survey were conducted between December 14 and 19, 2016, with adults age 18 and over representing the 50 states and the District of Columbia. Panel members were randomly drawn from AmeriSpeak, and 1,017 completed the survey—846 via the web and 171 via telephone. The final stage completion rate is 30.5 percent, the weighted household panel response rate is 34.3 percent, and the weighted household panel retention rate is 95 percent, for a cumulative response rate of 9.9 percent. The overall margin of sampling error is +/- 3.7 percentage points at the 95 percent confidence level, including the design effect. The margin of sampling error may be higher for subgroups.

Once the sample has been selected and fielded, and all the study data have been collected and made final, a poststratification process is used to adjust for any survey nonresponse as well as any non-coverage or under- and oversampling resulting from the study specific sample design. Poststratification variables included age, gender, census division, race/ethnicity, and household phone status. Weighting variables were obtained from the 2016 Current Population Survey. The weighted data, which reflect the U.S. population of adults age 18 and over, were used for all analyses.

All differences reported between subgroups of the U.S. population are at the 95 percent level of statistical significance, meaning that there is only a 5 percent (or lower) probability that the observed differences could be attributed to chance variation in sampling.

A comprehensive listing of the questions, complete with tabulations of top-level results for each question, is available on The AP-NORC Center website: www.apnorc.org.

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ABOUT THE ASSOCIATED PRESS–NORC CENTER FOR PUBLIC AFFAIRS RESEARCH

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