



**GOVERNMENT REFORM:
INDEPENDENTS AND THIRD-PARTY CANDIDATES
APRIL 2018**

Fielded by: Nielsen Scarborough **Fielding Dates:** Sept. 22 – Oct. 17, 2017
Sample size: 2,569 registered voters **Margin of Error:** +/- 1.9%

In this survey, you will be asked to evaluate a number of proposals for making changes to the way the U.S. federal government works.

Q1-16. Questions released previously

[Independent and third-party candidates]

There is currently a debate about whether the government should take steps to make it more possible for independent and third-party candidates to compete in Congressional elections.

Here is an argument **in favor of** making it more possible for independent and third-party candidates to compete in Congressional elections.

Q17. If there were more independent and third-party members of Congress, the two big parties would not be so powerful. They would be less able to drive Congress into gridlock. The big parties would have to be more flexible and less ideological so as to form coalitions on specific issues with the non-aligned members. Sometimes, the non-aligned members would be a swing vote that could break through an impasse or introduce a new idea. Also, voters who are not enthusiastic about either of the big parties, would finally have a real voice in Congress.

	Very convincing	Somewhat convincing	Total convincing	Somewhat unconvincing	Very unconvincing	Total unconvincing	Refused / Don't know
National	37.1%	44.7%	81.8%	11.4%	6.1%	17.5%	0.8%
GOP	29.0%	49.5%	78.5%	13.3%	7.1%	20.4%	1.1%
Dem.	41.3%	42.9%	84.2%	10.2%	4.9%	15.1%	0.7%
Indep.	45.7%	37.6%	83.3%	9.7%	6.6%	16.3%	0.5%

Cook's PVI (D-R)

Very red	38.7%	43.6%	82.3%	12.4%	4.1%	16.5%	1.3%
Red	33.3%	50.9%	84.2%	10.2%	4.8%	15.0%	0.8%
Lean red	36.7%	43.1%	79.8%	12.7%	6.2%	18.9%	1.3%
Lean blue	38.8%	42.1%	80.9%	12.1%	6.3%	18.4%	0.6%
Blue	35.4%	46.7%	82.1%	8.7%	8.4%	17.1%	0.7%
Very blue	40.1%	40.2%	80.3%	12.6%	6.8%	19.4%	0.2%

Here is an argument **against** making it more possible for independent and third-party candidates to compete in Congressional elections:

	Very convincing	Somewhat convincing	Total convincing	Somewhat unconvincing	Very unconvincing	Total unconvincing	Refused / Don't know
National	9.6%	31.5%	41.1%	31.5%	26.5%	58.0%	1.0%
GOP	12.6%	32.9%	45.5%	32.0%	21.7%	53.7%	0.8%
Dem.	8.2%	31.7%	39.9%	30.9%	28.0%	58.9%	1.2%
Indep.	5.7%	27.7%	33.4%	31.7%	34.1%	65.8%	0.8%

Cook's PVI (D-R)

Very red	8.7%	32.2%	40.9%	34.3%	24.2%	58.5%	0.6%
Red	7.5%	37.6%	45.1%	29.2%	25.1%	54.3%	0.6%
Lean red	10.6%	26.5%	37.1%	33.4%	28.8%	62.2%	0.7%
Lean blue	10.7%	30.8%	41.5%	30.7%	26.3%	57.0%	1.5%
Blue	8.6%	33.3%	41.9%	28.9%	27.6%	56.5%	1.7%
Very blue	10.8%	28.8%	39.6%	31.9%	27.7%	59.6%	0.8%

Q18. There is no need to make efforts to help out independent and third-party candidates. We already have some independent members of Congress, and we have had more than two parties for a long time. Nothing forces someone to pick one of the two major parties if they don't want to. Third parties should build themselves up by grassroots organizing and fielding good candidates for local offices instead of focusing on tweaking the rules in their favor. It is also not clear that having independent or third-party members of Congress will necessarily lead to consensus. Some of them could be more extreme than the big parties, and with more players in the field, it might be even harder to find common ground.

Q 19: So, how acceptable would it be to you for the government to take steps to make it more possible for independent and third-party candidates to compete in Congressional elections?

	Mean	Unacceptable (0-4)	Just Tolerable (5)	Acceptable (6-10)	Refused / Don't know
National	6.8	18.5%	16.0%	65.2%	0.4%
GOP	6.5	22.8%	15.6%	61.3%	0.3%
Dem.	7.0	16.3%	15.6%	67.7%	0.4%
Indep.	7.2	13.7%	17.8%	67.9%	0.7%

Cook's PVI (D-R)

Very red	6.8	17.1%	16.4%	65.7%	0.8%
Red	6.7	22.2%	14.6%	62.9%	0.3%
Lean red	7.0	16.3%	15.5%	68.0%	0.1%
Lean blue	6.8	18.7%	14.1%	66.4%	0.8%
Blue	6.7	20.6%	15.2%	63.7%	0.5%
Very blue	6.7	16.4%	20.7%	62.9%	0.0%

Q20. In conclusion, do you favor or oppose efforts to make it more possible for independent and third-party candidates to compete in Congressional elections?

	Favor	Oppose	Refused / Don't Know
National	74.0%	24.7%	1.3%
GOP	71.3%	27.8%	1.0%
Dem.	75.0%	23.5%	1.5%
Indep.	78.2%	20.4%	1.4%
Cook's PVI (D-R)			
Very red	75.2%	23.7%	1.1%
Red	74.1%	24.4%	1.5%
Lean red	73.8%	25.3%	0.9%
Lean blue	75.4%	23.4%	1.2%
Blue	71.3%	27.0%	1.7%
Very blue	73.9%	25.0%	1.2%

[IF "favor" Q20=1, PRESENT Q21]

Q21. How important do you think it is to make it more possible for independent and third party candidates to compete in Congressional elections? (Note: results are percent of total)

	Very	Somewhat	Slightly	Not at all	Ref./Don't know
National	40.2%	26.8%	6.5%	0.2%	0.3%
GOP	33.5%	28.4%	8.6%	0.2%	0.5%
Dem.	42.6%	26.2%	5.8%	0.3%	0.1%
Indep.	50.5%	24.3%	3.5%	0.0%	0.0%
Cook's PVI (D-R)					
Very red	39.4%	29.4%	5.5%	0.4%	0.4%
Red	42.4%	25.2%	6.0%	0.2%	0.3%
Lean red	40.3%	26.9%	5.8%	0.4%	0.4%
Lean blue	41.3%	27.8%	6.1%	0.0%	0.1%
Blue	35.8%	28.1%	6.8%	0.5%	0.0%
Very blue	43.0%	21.3%	9.2%	0.0%	0.4%

Access to Presidential Debates

A related topic is whether the government should make it more possible for independent and third-party candidates to run for US President. One proposal is to make it more possible for independent or third-party candidates to participate in presidential debates.

The Commission on Presidential Debates controls these debates. Currently, the Commission requires that candidates must receive an average of 15% support in five major national polls just prior to the debate. An

independent or third-party candidate has only met this requirement once since the Commission was established in 1987.

Here is an alternative requirement that has been proposed to the Commission on Presidential Debates to make it more possible for an independent or third-party candidate to be part of the presidential debates:

- A candidate must fulfill the state requirements to be on the ballot (primarily getting signatures) in enough states that the candidate could conceivably win an election. If more than one candidate meets this condition, then the candidate who has gathered the most signatures across states would be the participant in the debates.

Here is an argument **in favor of** this proposal:

Q22. It is important for our Presidential debates to not simply be dominated by the standard parties. Independent and third-party candidates bring important new perspectives. But the current standard--that candidates must have 15% support in polls to be in the debates--is really a catch-22, because the candidate would need name recognition to get support, and the best way to do that would be to participate in the debates. They don't have the institutional support that Republican and Democratic candidates get, they receive far less free media coverage, and it is too costly for them to pay for enough advertising to gain name recognition. Getting the many thousands of signatures needed to get on the ballot in many states is enough of a requirement.

	Very convincing	Somewhat convincing	Total convincing	Somewhat unconvincing	Very unconvincing	Total unconvincing	Ref./ Don't know
National	36.4%	44.2%	80.6%	12.9%	5.8%	18.7%	0.6%
GOP	32.9%	46.7%	79.6%	12.6%	6.7%	19.3%	1.2%
Dem.	38.0%	43.2%	81.2%	14.2%	4.2%	18.4%	0.3%
Indep.	40.8%	41.0%	81.8%	10.3%	7.6%	17.9%	0.3%

Cook's PVI (D-R)

Very red	34.4%	48.0%	82.4%	9.2%	6.6%	15.8%	1.8%
Red	39.1%	45.8%	84.9%	10.3%	4.6%	14.9%	0.2%
Lean red	36.9%	42.7%	79.6%	14.1%	6.3%	20.4%	0.1%
Lean blue	38.3%	38.8%	77.1%	15.9%	6.4%	22.3%	0.6%
Blue	35.2%	43.9%	79.1%	14.3%	5.9%	20.2%	0.7%
Very blue	34.1%	45.7%	79.8%	14.0%	5.3%	19.3%	0.8%

Here is an argument **against** this proposal:

	Very convincing	Somewhat convincing	Total convincing	Somewhat unconvincing	Very unconvincing	Total unconvincing	Ref./Don't know
National	11.2%	30.0%	41.2%	32.6%	25.1%	57.7%	1.2%
GOP	12.4%	32.6%	45.0%	32.8%	21.1%	53.9%	1.2%
Dem.	10.6%	29.6%	40.2%	33.0%	25.8%	58.8%	1.1%
Indep.	9.9%	24.5%	34.4%	30.9%	33.0%	63.9%	1.7%

Cook's PVI (D-R)

Very red	10.7%	28.3%	39.0%	33.5%	25.7%	59.2%	1.8%
Red	11.8%	30.0%	41.8%	32.8%	25.0%	57.8%	0.4%
Lean red	10.3%	33.3%	43.6%	31.4%	23.8%	55.2%	1.2%
Lean blue	12.1%	29.6%	41.7%	33.0%	23.4%	56.4%	2.0%
Blue	10.3%	31.8%	42.1%	30.8%	25.9%	56.7%	1.2%
Very blue	11.7%	26.8%	38.5%	33.0%	27.7%	60.7%	0.9%

Q23. The debates are a key moment during which voters see and hear the candidates who have a realistic chance of winning the election and becoming President. Having up on the stage another candidate who is not really a serious contender is a big distraction, driven by an excess of inclusiveness. The 15% polling requirement works to make sure only viable candidates participate and no one is prevented from meeting this standard. Just getting a lot of signatures, which can be done if you hire enough canvassers, is too low a bar.

So, again, the proposal is to make it more possible for an independent and third-party candidate to be part of the presidential debates by replacing the current requirement with a requirement to that he or she succeeds in getting on the ballot in enough states to potentially win.

Q24. Please select how acceptable this proposal would be to you.

	Mean	Unacceptable (0-4)	Just Tolerable (5)	Acceptable (6-10)	Refused / Don't know
National	6.8	16.3%	15.7%	67.7%	0.4%
GOP	6.6	19.3%	14.6%	65.7%	0.4%
Dem.	6.9	15.7%	14.4%	69.6%	0.3%
Indep.	7.1	10.7%	21.6%	67.1%	0.5%

Cook's PVI (D-R)

Very red	6.8	15.2%	16.7%	67.6%	0.5%
Red	7.0	14.8%	12.8%	72.1%	0.3%
Lean red	6.8	14.9%	16.6%	68.1%	0.4%
Lean blue	6.8	18.3%	16.1%	65.2%	0.4%
Blue	6.8	17.6%	16.7%	65.5%	0.1%
Very blue	6.8	17.1%	15.6%	67.0%	0.4%

Q25. Would you favor or oppose having the Commission on Presidential Debates adopt this proposal for making it more possible for an independent or third-party candidate to participate in the presidential debates?

	Favor	Oppose	Refused / Don't Know
National	77.1%	22.1%	0.8%
GOP	74.5%	24.7%	0.8%
Dem.	77.4%	21.6%	1.1%
Indep.	82.7%	16.8%	0.5%

Cook's PVI (D-R)

Very red	79.1%	20.3%	0.7%
Red	82.0%	17.2%	0.9%
Lean red	75.3%	24.1%	0.7%
Lean blue	76.1%	23.0%	0.9%
Blue	75.1%	24.0%	0.9%
Very blue	75.5%	23.3%	1.2%

[IF "favor" Q25=1, PRESENT Q26]

Q26. How important do you think it is to make it more possible for an independent or third-party candidate to participate in the presidential debates? **(Note: results are percent of total)**

	Very	Somewhat	Slightly	Not at all	Ref./Don't know
National	44.9%	27.3%	4.3%	0.4%	0.3%
GOP	37.9%	31.5%	4.8%	0.1%	0.2%
Dem.	46.9%	25.3%	4.3%	0.5%	0.3%
Indep.	56.5%	21.9%	2.8%	0.9%	0.6%

Cook's PVI (D-R)

Very red	43.3%	31.4%	3.8%	0.1%	0.4%
Red	46.7%	28.8%	5.2%	1.0%	0.2%
Lean red	43.0%	28.0%	3.7%	0.1%	0.5%
Lean blue	46.2%	24.9%	3.7%	0.9%	0.3%
Blue	43.4%	26.7%	4.8%	0.1%	0.1%
Very blue	47.6%	23.7%	3.6%	0.3%	0.3%