

**Democratic Lead in Party Identification at Highest Point in 25 Years**

*Also Independents increase and now outnumber Republicans*

**ROCHESTER, N.Y. – March 3, 2009 –** [The Harris Poll®](#) has been tracking party identification for 40 years. We do this by combining all the relevant national polls to produce large samples and eliminate small survey-by-survey fluctuations. Our latest numbers are based on 15,210 interviews conducted by telephone between January and December 2008.

The results are bad news for the Republicans. The Democratic lead in party identification has widened to ten percentage points, compared to five points in President Bush's first term in 2001, and three points in 2002.

This is the first time since 1984 that the Democrats have held a double digit lead (and our latest data from two telephone surveys that are not included in these calculations because they were conducted in 2009 show an 11 and 12-point lead).

More bad news for the Republicans is that, for the first time since 1983, there are more Independents (31%) than Republicans (26%). This is the first time in 30 years (since 1979) that we have found so many Independents.

Other interesting findings from these surveys (since 1969) include:

- In the short term party identification has always been quite stable. It rarely changes by more than a few percentage points from year to year.
- But over the longer term, changes have been substantial. Between 1973 and 1978 the Democratic lead in party identification was more than 20 points. In 1977, it reached 27 points.
- From 1977 onwards, the Democratic lead party identification fell to 11 points in the 1980s, seven points in the 1990s and to three points in both 2002 and 2004.
- These Republican advances began to be reversed, with a six-point Democratic lead in 2005 and a nine-point lead in 2006 and 2007. The latest data (for 2008 and 2009) show that this Democratic lead has widened a little more.

**Political Philosophy**

While party identification has moved up and down over the years, political philosophy – whether people think of themselves as conservatives, liberals or moderates – has been remarkably stable.

- Over the last 40 years conservatives have always had a substantial lead over liberals, although this fell to 11 points and 12 points in 1972 and 1975.
- Since 1978, the conservative lead over liberals has varied only between 15 points (1979) and 24 points (1995).

- Since 1972 moderates have always outnumbered conservatives and since 1974 their “share of the market” has varied only between 36% and 42%.

### **So What?**

These data suggest three conclusions:

1. Party identification moves remarkably slowly but it sometimes changes in reaction to popular or unpopular presidents. Republicans made striking gains during the Carter and Reagan presidencies. Republicans made modest gains in the first term of President George W. Bush while Democrats gained during his second term.
2. Political philosophy is more stable than party identification and has not been moved by popular or unpopular presidents.
3. We need to remember that many people (31% in 2008) are Independents rather than Democrats or Republicans and that more people (41% in 2008) are moderates than conservatives or liberals.

**TABLE 1  
PARTY AFFILIATION**

“Regardless of how you may vote, what do you usually consider yourself – a Republican, a Democrat, an Independent, or some other party?”

Base: All adults

Year*	President	Republican	Democrat	Independent	Democratic Lead
		%	%	%	% pts.
2008	Bush, G.W.	26	36	31	10
2007	Bush, G.W.	26	35	23	9
2006	Bush, G.W.	27	36	24	9
2005	Bush, G.W.	30	36	22	6
2004	Bush, G.W.	31	34	24	3
2003	Bush, G.W.	28	33	24	5
2002	Bush, G.W.	31	34	24	3
2001	Bush, G.W.	31	36	22	5
2000	Clinton	29	37	23	8
1999	Clinton	29	36	26	7
1998	Clinton	28	37	27	9
1997	Clinton	29	37	26	8
1996	Clinton	30	38	26	8
1995	Clinton	31	36	28	5
1994	Clinton	32	37	26	5
1993	Clinton	29	38	27	9
1992	Bush, G.H.W.	30	36	29	6
1991	Bush, G.H.W.	32	37	26	5
1990	Bush, G.H.W.	33	38	25	5
1989	Bush, G.H.W.	33	40	23	7
1988	Reagan	31	39	25	8
1987	Reagan	29	38	28	9
1986	Reagan	30	39	25	9
1985	Reagan	30	39	26	9
1984	Reagan	27	40	24	13
1983	Reagan	26	41	27	15
1982	Reagan	26	40	28	14
1981	Reagan	28	39	28	11
1980	Carter	24	41	29	17
1979	Carter	22	41	31	19
1978	Carter	22	43	30	21
1977	Carter	21	48	25	27
1976	Ford	24	47	24	23
1975	Nixon/Ford	21	46	27	25
1974	Nixon	23	45	32	22
1973	Nixon	26	48	26	22
1972	Nixon	30	47	23	17
1971	Nixon	31	49	20	18
1970	Nixon	31	49	20	18
1969	Nixon	32	49	19	17

**NOTE:** “Other” and “Not sure” responses excluded.

\*Data are not available for 1968.

**TABLE 2  
DECADE MEANS OF DEMOCRATIC LEAD**

“Regardless of how you may vote, what do you usually consider yourself – a Republican, a Democrat, an Independent, or some other party?”

Base: All adults

	Democratic Lead
	% pts.
1970s	21
1980s	11
1990s	7
2000's (so far)	6*

\*Between 2000 and 2004 the Democratic lead averaged 5 points. Between 2005 and 2008 it averaged 9 points.

**TABLE 3  
POLITICAL PHILOSOPHY**

“How would you describe your own political philosophy – conservative, moderate, or liberal?”

Base: All adults

Year*	President	Conservative	Moderate	Liberal	Conservative Lead (over Liberals)
		%	%	%	%
2008	Bush, G.W.	37	41	18	19
2007	Bush, G.W.	35	37	19	16
2006	Bush, G.W.	37	37	19	18
2005	Bush, G.W.	34	42	20	14
2004	Bush, G.W.	36	41	18	18
2003	Bush, G.W.	33	40	18	15
2002	Bush, G.W.	35	40	17	18
2001	Bush, G.W.	36	40	19	17
2000	Clinton	35	40	18	17
1999	Clinton	37	39	18	19
1998	Clinton	37	40	19	18
1997	Clinton	37	40	19	18
1996	Clinton	38	41	19	19
1995	Clinton	40	40	16	24
1992	Bush, G.H.W.	36	42	18	18
1991	Bush, G.H.W.	37	41	18	19
1990	Bush, G.H.W.	38	41	18	20
1989	Bush, G.H.W.	37	42	17	20
1988	Reagan	38	39	18	20
1987	Reagan	37	39	19	18
1986	Reagan	37	39	18	19
1985	Reagan	37	40	17	20
1984	Reagan	35	39	18	19
1983	Reagan	36	40	18	18
1982	Reagan	36	40	18	18
1981	Reagan	38	40	17	21
1980	Carter	35	41	18	17
1979	Carter	35	39	20	15
1978	Carter	34	39	17	17
1977	Carter	30	42	17	13
1976	Ford	31	40	18	13
1975	Nixon/Ford	30	38	18	12
1974	Nixon	30	43	15	15
1972	Nixon	31	36	20	11
1968	Nixon	37	31	17	20

\* Data are not available for the following years: 1969, 1970, 1971, 1973, 1993, and 1994.

**NOTE:** “Other” and “Not sure” responses excluded.

**TABLE 4  
DECADE MEANS OF POLITICAL PHILOSOPHY**

"How would you describe your own political philosophy – conservative, moderate, or liberal?"

Base: All adults

	Conservative	Moderate	Liberal	Conservative Lead (Over Liberals)
	%	%	%	%
1970s	32	40	18	14
1980s	36	40	18	18
1990s	38	41	18	20
2000's (so far)	35	40	19	16

**NOTE:** "Other" and "Not sure" responses excluded.

**Methodology**

*The Harris Poll*<sup>®</sup> was conducted by telephone within the United States between January and December 2008, excluding September, among a nationwide cross section of 15,210 adults (aged 18 and over). Figures for age, sex, race/ethnicity, education, region, number of adults in the household, size of place (urbanicity) and number of phone lines in the household were weighted where necessary to bring them into line with their actual proportions in the population.

All sample surveys and polls, whether or not they use probability sampling, are subject to multiple sources of error which are most often not possible to quantify or estimate, including sampling error, coverage error, error associated with nonresponse, error associated with question wording and response options, and post-survey weighting and adjustments. Therefore, Harris Interactive avoids the words "margin of error" as they are misleading. All that can be calculated are different possible sampling errors with different probabilities for pure, unweighted, random samples with 100% response rates. These are only theoretical because no published polls come close to this ideal.

***These statements conform to the principles of disclosure of the National Council on Public Polls.***

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