

Cooperation vs. Confrontation: Do Nice Guys Finish First?

If nice guys finished first, Barack Obama might be riding high.

So suggests the latest ABC News/Yahoo! News poll, in which Obama far outpoints other players on the political scene in being seen as cooperative rather than confrontational. Others are much more apt to be viewed as focused on political division – from the mainstream news media to conservative radio hosts, from Sarah Palin and the Tea Party to both parties in Congress.

Life, though, is not that simple. Obama’s rating as cooperative rests on his towering support from Democrats, and narrower but still majority backing among independents; it plummets among Republicans. And cooperation isn’t necessarily all it’s cracked up to be: While most Americans still prefer it, their numbers have eased in the heat of the 2010 election campaign.

Overall, the public by a 20-point margin, 57 percent to 37 percent, says it’s preferable for leaders to “try to cooperate across party lines, even if it means compromising on important issues” than to stick with their positions, if that means a lack of cooperation. But this has subsided from a broader, 35-point margin, 66-31 percent, in an ABC News/Washington Post poll in February 2009. Preference for cooperation is down by 9 points; for sticking to your guns, up by 6.

A boost in election-related partisanship will do that. And interestingly, the decline in preference for cooperation has been steepest (12 points) among Democrats and independents. It’s flatter among Republicans, who were less enamored of the kumbaya thing in the first place. All three groups now come out about evenly on the question.

GETTING ALONG – Who’s seen as more interested in political cooperation rather than division? Obama’s the only one to score positively for cooperation, by 59-36 percent, among eight groups or individuals tested in this survey, produced for ABC News and Yahoo! News by [Langer Research Associates](#). The Democrats in Congress follow, but very distantly: Forty-four percent see them as more interested in encouraging cooperation, vs. 50 percent as more divisive.

	More interested in encourgaing...	
	Cooperation	Division
Barack Obama	59%	36
Democrats in Congress	44	50
Sarah Palin	34	56
Tea Party	31	56
Republicans in Congress	31	61
Mainstream media	30	63
Conservative radio hosts	30	61
Cable news programs	29	59

Views change sharply from there: Palin’s seen as more interested in political division than in cooperation by 56-34 percent; the Tea Party political movement, by a very similar 56-31 percent. And the Republicans in Congress, the mainstream media, conservative radio talk show hosts and cable news programs all are seen as more interested in division by 2-1 margins.

Which is preferable depends on your point of view. Moderates and liberals alike by wide margins say it’s more important to them that leaders cooperate than that they stick to their positions. Conservatives, by contrast, divide evenly on the question. Also, if it means compromise, cooperation is less popular with younger adults than it is with their elders.

PARTISANS – Ideology is a bigger factor than partisanship; Democrats, Republicans and independents all prefer cooperation by similar margins. But both partisanship and ideology are huge factors in who is viewed as more cooperative than divisive.

Among Democrats, for instance, 87 percent think Obama’s more interested in cooperation than in division. That falls to 53 percent among independents and just 28 percent among Republicans. And 71 percent of Democrats see their party’s Congress members as on the side of cooperation; just 36 percent of independents and two in 10 Republicans agree.

Notably, among liberal or moderate independents, 62 percent think Obama’s focused more on cooperation. Among conservative independents that plummets to 38 percent.

	% saying each is more interested in cooperation		
	Democrats	Independents	Republicans
Barack Obama	87%	53%	28%
Democrats in Congress	71	36	20
Sarah Palin	23	35	52
Tea Party	17	36	45
Republicans in Congress	13	34	52
Mainstream media	36	28	22
Conservative radio hosts	23	32	35
Cable news programs	31	33	21

Across the aisle the tables turn, though the differences are less sharp. A bare majority of Republicans, 52 percent, think their own party’s leaders are more interested in cooperation than in division; 34 percent of independents and just 13 percent of Democrats agree. Similarly, 52 percent of Republicans see Palin as more cooperative than divisive; that drops to 35 percent of independents and 23 percent of Democrats. And 45 percent of Republicans see the Tea Party mainly as encouraging cooperation, vs. 36 percent of independents and 17 percent of Democrats.

Majorities of Democrats, independents and Republicans alike – 69, 58 and 58 percent – think conservative talk show hosts are more interested in encouraging political division than cooperation. Only among Americans who describe their own political views as “very conservative” is there a close division – 48-43 percent – on whether conservative talk radio hosts are working toward cooperation or division.

Virtually across the board, majorities also say both the mainstream media and cable news programs are more interested in division than in fostering political cooperation, with these sentiments peaking among Republicans and conservatives.

METHODOLOGY – This ABC News/Yahoo News! poll was conducted Oct. 6-12, 2010, among a random national sample of 1,025 adults. Respondents were selected using an address-based sample design. Households for which a phone number could be ascertained were contacted by phone; others were contacted by mail and asked to complete the survey via a toll-free inbound phone number or the internet. See details [here](#). Results for the full sample have a 4-point error margin. Click [here](#) for a detailed description of sampling error.

This survey was produced by [Langer Research Associates](#) of New York, N.Y, with sampling, data collection and tabulation by SSRS of Media, Pa.

Analysis by Gary Langer.

ABC News polls can be found at ABCNEWS.com at <http://abcnews.com/pollingunit>

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Full results follow.

1. What’s more important to you - that political leaders (stick with their positions on important issues, even if it means a lack of cooperation between Democrats and Republicans); or that political leaders (try to cooperate across party lines, even if it means compromising on important issues)?

	Stick with their positions	Try to cooperate across party lines	No opinion
10/12/10	37	57	6
2/22/09*	31	66	3
*2/09 ABC News/Washington Post			

2. For each of the following groups or individuals, please tell me whether you think they’re more interested in encouraging political (cooperation), or in encouraging political (division).

10/12/10 - Summary Table

	Cooperation	Division	No opinion
a. The Democrats in Congress	44	50	7
b. The Republicans in Congress	31	61	8
c. Barack Obama	59	36	5
d. The mainstream media	30	63	8
e. Conservative radio talk show hosts	30	61	9
f. Cable news programs	29	59	12
g. Sarah Palin	34	56	10
h. The political movement known as the Tea Party	31	56	13

3 Released separately.

4. Would you say that your views on most political matters are...

	-----Liberal-----				----Conservative----			No
	NET	Very	Somewhat	Moderate	NET	Somewhat	Very	opinion
10/12/10	24	8	16	36	38	25	13	2

END