

The Claim to Change

With the Tea Party driving for inroads in the midterm elections, a new ABC News/Yahoo! News poll indicates that the political movement has effectively seized the mantle of change, 2010-style.

Regardless of whether they support the conservative movement, 55 percent of Americans in the national survey think the Tea Party can “effectively bring about major changes in the way the government operates.” Thirty-seven percent doubt it, with the rest unsure.

That result buttresses the Tea Party’s impressive debut on the national stage. The New York Times reported last week that 138 Tea Party-affiliated candidates are running for congressional office, including three dozen in competitive House races and eight with a chance at Senate seats – enough potentially to give the movement real legislative clout.

There are political and ideological differences in views of the Tea Party’s potential. This poll, done for ABC News and Yahoo! News by Langer Research Associates, finds that 72 percent of Republicans and 61 percent of independents think the movement can forge major changes; just 36 percent of Democrats agree. And 68 percent of conservatives think the movement’s capable of real change, vs. about half of moderates and liberals alike.

Put them together and a sense the Tea Party can effectively bring about major changes in the way the government operates peaks among conservative Republicans, at 82 percent, and craters among liberal Democrats – 50 points lower, at 32 percent.

A separate ABC News/Yahoo! News poll last week found a division on the Tea Party’s future: Three in 10 Americans said they’d like it to form a separate political party of its own, nearly as many wanted it to remain a force within the Republican Party and a quarter said they’d like it to disband entirely. Again there were sharp political and ideological differences.

There are other gaps: Belief that the movement can create major changes is higher in the South and Midwest, combined, than in the Northeast and West; and substantially lower among college-educated Americans (an even split) than it is among those who don’t hold college degrees.

This overall result contrasts with a related question in an ABC News/Washington Post poll earlier this month. In that survey Americans by nearly 2-1, 63-32 percent, thought the Tea Party movement could do little to “change the culture of Washington” – clearly a different metric, with the “culture of Washington” perhaps seen as more resistant to change than “the way the government operates.” Republican and independents are much more apt to think the Tea Party can change the way the government operates than to say it can change Washington’s culture. Most Democrats, by contrast, don’t think it can do either.

On one of these measures the Tea Party does not approach Barack Obama's election-year positioning; shortly before the 2008 election 58 percent thought he could change Washington's culture. But influencing the government's operating style presumably would be good enough for the Tea Party – and on that score it's yanked away the claim to "change" that Obama used so effectively just two years ago.

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.

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

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Full results follow.

3. Whether or not you agree with the Tea Party political movement, do you think it can or cannot effectively bring about major changes in the way the government operates?

	Can	Cannot	No opinion
10/12/10	55	37	8