

Public Policy Research Lab
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2014 Louisiana Election Report

Partisan Enthusiasm, Congressional Approval, and Issue Priorities in the Midterm Election

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Partisan Enthusiasm, Congressional Approval, and Issue Priorities in the Midterm Election

The Republican Party currently has an advantage in how likely its voters are to show up in the upcoming midterm elections in Louisiana. The latest statewide survey by Louisiana State University's Public Policy Research Lab, conducted August 14-September 7 among 1,021 adult Louisiana residents (including 944 registered voters), finds that heading into the final weeks of the 2014 campaign Republican voters are following the election more closely and are more committed to casting ballots than Democratic voters.¹

Key findings from the survey include:

1. On likelihood of voting:
 - Among registered voters in Louisiana, Republicans are 10 percentage points more likely than Democrats to say they are “absolutely certain” to vote this fall and 19 points more likely to say they are following the campaign “very closely” or “fairly closely”.
 - Black registered voters, who tend to support Democratic candidates, appear just as likely to cast a ballot in this election as white registered voters. However, they remain less likely to vote than white Republicans.
2. On opinions of Congress and the President:
 - Party control of Congress is an important motivating factor for both Democrats and Republicans in this election, but opinions about President Obama are less important for Democrats than for Republicans.
 - A majority of Republican voters not only disapprove of the president, but also disapprove of their own party's leaders in Congress.
 - Barely more than a third of registered voters in Louisiana can correctly identify the party of their current representative in the U.S. House.
3. On issue priorities:
 - The economy and foreign affairs top the list of voters' concerns.

Voter Engagement in the 2014 Election in Louisiana

Louisiana voters are more enthusiastic about this year's midterm elections than are Americans across the country. With a battleground race for the U.S. Senate, an open House seat in the sixth district, and a potentially competitive House race in the fifth district to peak public interest, about half of registered voters in Louisiana (51%) say they are more enthusiastic about voting this year than in previous midterm elections. Only 34% say they are less enthusiastic. When the Pew Research Center recently posed the same question to a national audience, 40% of registered voters in the U.S. said they are more enthusiastic and 41% said they are less enthusiastic than in years past (see [Wide Partisan Differences over the Issues that Matter in 2014, September 12, 2014](#)).

When it comes to keeping up with news about the candidates and campaigns, about half of the state's registered voters say they are following the elections "very closely" or "fairly closely." Nearly three fourths (73%) say they are "absolutely certain" to cast a ballot in the midterm election.

Of course, survey respondents tend to overstate how likely they are to vote. Turnout in recent midterm elections in Louisiana when a U.S. Senate race was on the ballot average only 44.5% of registered voters. Even in presidential elections when more people show up to vote, turnout averages 67.4% of registered voters in Louisiana over the past three cycles. Therefore, the survey answers should not be taken as predictions of the exact level of turnout that will occur in November. Nevertheless, these responses are quite valuable for comparing groups of voters to see which are more engaged with the election. The differences between groups in responses to these questions is predictive of differences in turnout on Election Day.

With just six weeks until Election Day, the Republican Party has a clear lead on two of three measures of engagement. Sixty percent of Republican voters say they follow news of the candidates and campaigns in the state "very closely" or "fairly closely." Only 41% of Democrat voters say the same.

Eighty five percent of Republicans say they are "absolutely certain" to vote, compared to 75% of Democrats. However, registered voters from both parties are about equally likely to say they are more enthusiastic about voting this year compared to previous midterm elections – 54% of Republicans and 51% of Democrats.

Much of the punditry surrounding the Senate race in Louisiana has focused on whether black Democrats will turnout in high numbers. Democratic candidates tend to do better in Louisiana when black turnout is high. For example, when Democrat Senator Mary Landrieu won reelection in 2008, black turnout was very close to white turnout. Two years later, Republican Senator David Vitter easily secured reelection in a contest that saw black turnout lag nearly ten percentage points behind white turnout.

There is no clear evidence that black voters are less engaged than white voters in the 2014 election. While it is true that only 40% of black registered voters say they are following news of the campaign closely compared to half of whites, blacks are just as likely as whites to say they

are “absolutely certain” to vote. Furthermore, blacks are more enthusiastic about 2014 compared to previous midterm elections (55%) than whites (47%).

The engagement gap is not between blacks and whites. It is between *white Republicans* and everyone else. White Republicans are especially engaged in this election; for example, 84% of white Republicans say they are “absolutely certain” to vote. All other combinations of race and party have smaller shares saying they are “absolutely certain” of voting – for example, 78% of black Democrats, 79% of white Democrats, and 48% of white independents.

Although this gap generally does not bode well for the Democrats’ fortunes in the U.S. Senate race, there may be some positive news for them. Black Democrats in the Baton Rouge area – where there is an open seat contest in the sixth district – appear especially likely to vote. While this degree of enthusiasm is unlikely to change the outcome of the sixth district race where the district lines and demographics favor a Republican victory, the excitement of the contest may boost black turnout enough in the city to influence the Senate race. No less than 87% of black Democrats in the Baton Rouge area who are registered to vote report they are “absolutely certain” to cast a ballot. This level of enthusiasm puts them in league with white Republicans statewide.

The largest demographic difference consistent across all three measures of engagement is age. Engagement is lowest among younger voters, who tend to participate less in politics anyway. Half say they are certain to vote, and barely more than a quarter of 18 to 29 year olds are following campaign news. In contrast, all other age groups express greater engagement. The age difference may harm Democrats who tend to do better among younger voters than they do among older voters.

Republicans Lead on Engagement Measures

	More enthusiastic about voting than in past midterms %	Following news about election very/fairly closely %	Certain to vote %
All	51	49	73
Republicans	54	60	85
Democrats	51	41	75
Independents	36	43	53
White	47	51	74
Black	55	40	76
Other	38	45	60
White Republicans	54	62	84
White Democrats	49	50	79
White Independents	33	40	48
Black Democrats	55	39	78
Men	55	52	69
Women	44	47	77
18-29	43	27	50
30-44	41	43	68
45-64	53	56	82
65+	59	64	87
Less than high school	53	41	64
High school only	51	42	75
Some college	42	46	68
College degree or higher	50	67	84
Southwest Louisiana	45	49	76
New Orleans Area	46	48	73
Baton Rouge Area	50	56	71
North Shore Area	53	47	69
North Louisiana	51	48	76
White Republicans Baton Rouge Area	54	67	86
Black Democrats Baton Rouge Area	56	59	87

Based on registered voters. Survey conducted August 14 to September 7, 2014.

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Attitudes toward the Government and the Midterm Vote

About three out of every five registered voters in Louisiana (59%) say that party control of Congress will play a role in their decision this fall. Both Republicans (71%) and Democrats (66%) are motivated by the prospect of determining which party leads Congress. Independents are far less concerned with party control. Only about one quarter (26%) say it will be a factor in their decision.

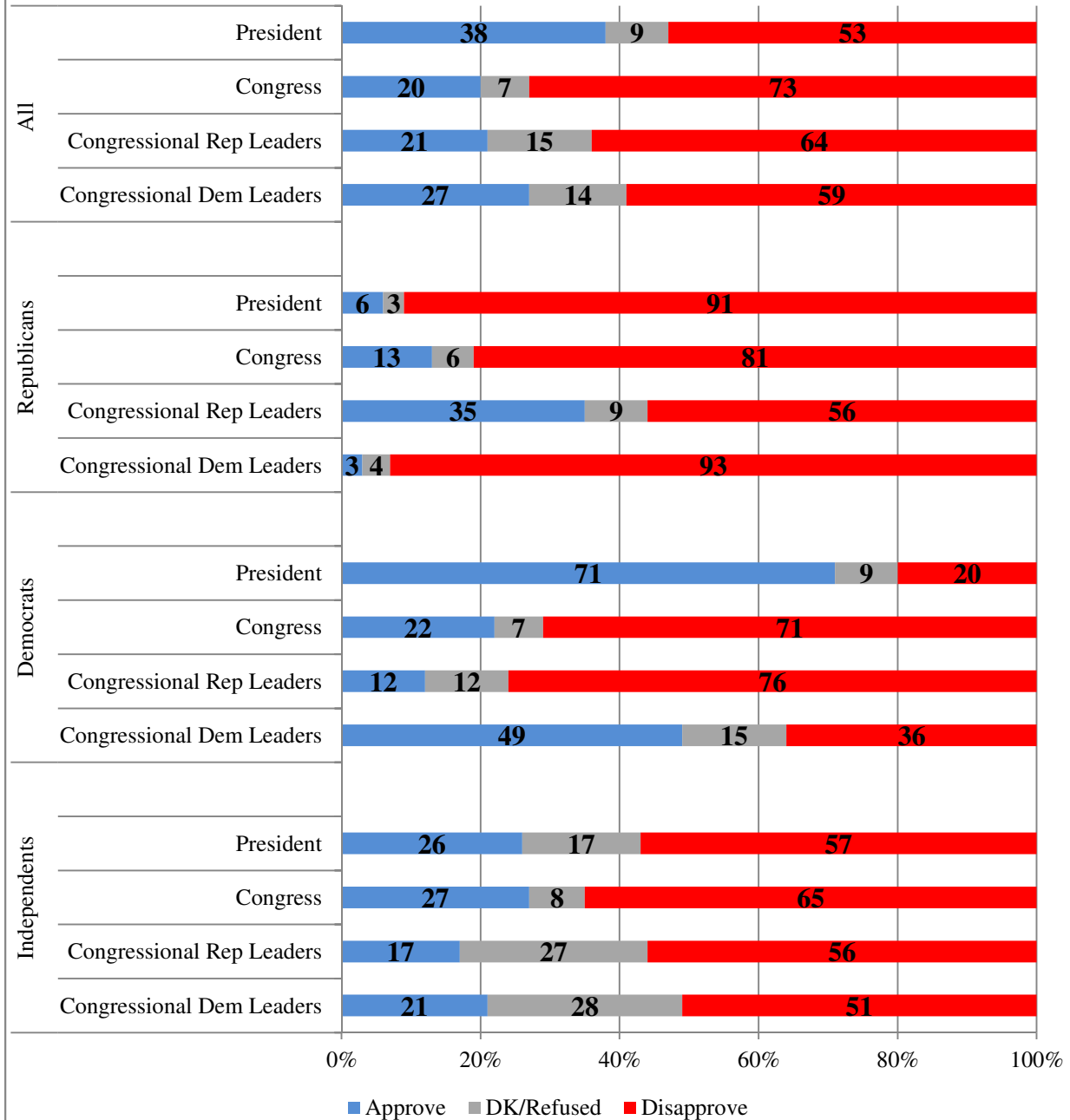
The parties stand further apart on whether President Obama will be a factor in their votes. Overall, 53% of registered voters say their opinion of the President will play a role when deciding how to vote. Republicans are far more likely to say the President will matter for their votes. Two-thirds of Republican voters (67%), point to the President as a factor – nearly the same share as say party control will be factor. Just over half of Democrats (51%) say their opinion of the President will shape their vote. Independents are hardly any more motivated by their opinion of the President (31%) than they are about party control of Congress.

If voters base their choice in November in part on their opinions of the President, the news is not good for Democrats. A majority of Louisiana voters (53%) disapprove of how President Obama is handling his job; only 38% approve. Disapproval is even higher among Republicans – 91% disapprove and only 6% approve. Independents also have a negative, though slightly better, view of the president's job performance – 57% disapprove and 26% approve. Democrats are much more positive toward the president – 71% approve and 20% disapprove. However, the fact that fewer Democrats than Republicans will rely on these opinions when deciding how to vote mitigates any boost the president might bring to voters of his own party.

Registered voters in Louisiana are even less happy with Congress than with the president. Overall, just one in five voters (20%) approve of the job Congress is doing while 73% disapprove. A majority of Louisiana voters (59%) disapprove of the job Democratic congressional leaders are doing and just 27% approve. Republican leaders fare slightly worse – 64% disapprove and 21% approve.

Large majorities of voters in both parties disapprove of the job Congress is doing (81% among Republicans and 71% among Democrats), but there is an interesting partisan difference. Democrats disapprove of the job Republican leaders in Congress are doing (76% disapprove to 12% approve) but a plurality approve of the job Democratic leaders are doing (49% approve to 36% disapprove). In contrast, Republican voters in Louisiana disapprove of congressional leaders from both parties. An overwhelming majority of Republican voters disapprove of the Democratic congressional leaders (93%). What is more surprising is that a majority of Republicans also disapprove of their own party's leaders in Congress (56% disapprove to 35% approve). In short, Republican voters in Louisiana appear to be unhappy with Congress as a whole and its leaders from both parties.

Most Disapprove of President, Congress, and Both Parties' Leaders



Based on registered voters. Survey conducted August 14 to September 7, 2014.
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Few Voters Know Which Party Their Member of Congress Belongs To

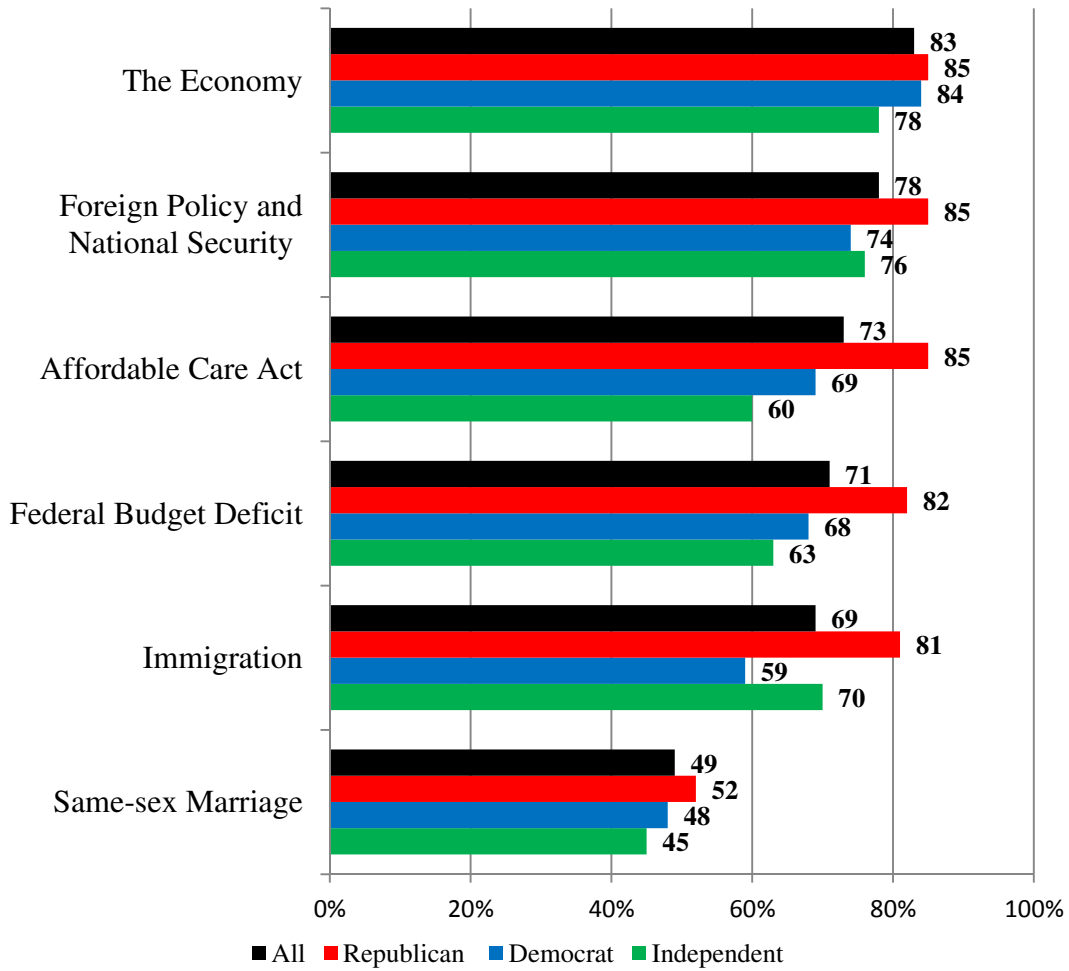
Despite the fact they will soon be called upon to pass judgment on their elected representatives in the U.S. Congress, many registered voters in Louisiana are not familiar with the political landscape of the fall elections. When asked which party their member of the U.S. House of Representatives belongs to, only 38% correctly identify their congressional representative's party. This is significantly lower than the national average (53%) recently reported for registered voters nationally by the Pew Research Center (see [GOP has Midterm Engagement Advantage, July 24, 2014](#)). Forty-one percent of Louisiana's registered voters say they do not know the party to which their representative belongs. About one in five voters (21%) answer incorrectly by saying their representative belongs to the opposite party from that which he is actually a member. The share of incorrect responses in Louisiana is about the same as that nationally (22%).

Issue Priorities

The economy tops the agenda as the most important issue for most of Louisiana's registered voters with 83% calling it an "extremely important" or "very important" issue for their vote in this election. The economy is closely followed by foreign policy and national security, which 78% describe as extremely or very important. Majorities also consider the Affordable Care Act (73%), the federal budget deficit (71%), and immigration (69%) important issues for their votes this fall. In contrast, less than half of voters (49%) consider same-sex marriage, the only social issue on the survey, to be an important priority this election.

Republicans and Democrat voters not only differ in where they stand on the issues, they also disagree over how important the issues are. Similar shares in both parties think the economy is an important priority. Neither party places great priority on same-sex marriage compared to other issues. However, Democrats and Republicans differ on the remaining four issues that appear on the survey. More Republicans than Democrats think immigration (+22 points), the Affordable Care Act (+16 points), the federal budget deficit (+14 points), and foreign policy (+11 points) are important issues for how they will vote.

Partisan Differences in Issue Priorities



Based on registered voters. Survey conducted August 14 to September 7, 2014.
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About the Survey

The results in this report are based on interviews conducted via telephone between August 14 and September 7, 2014 among a sample of 1,021 adults living in Louisiana, including 944 self-identified registered voters. Among the total sample, 514 respondents were interviewed on a landline telephone, and 507 were interviewed on a cell phone. Landline phone numbers were selected via random digit dialing. Cell phone numbers were randomly selected from available cell phone blocks. The interviews were handled by callers at the Public Policy Research Lab at Louisiana State University.

The sample is weighted to correct for unequal selection probability and nonresponse. It is also weighted to match demographics of gender, age, race, education, income, and parish of residence. Demographic weighting targets are based on the most recent American Community Survey of the U.S. Census Bureau. Parish weights are based on the 2010 Decennial Census.

The overall margin of error for the weighted sample of registered voters is +/- 4.3 percentage points. However, the margin of error is larger for comparisons of subgroups and for estimates from questions asked to only a subset of the total sample.

In addition to sampling error, question wording and practical difficulties in conducting surveys can introduce error or bias into the findings of public opinion polls.

The Public Policy Research Lab is a joint effort between the LSU Manship School's Reilly Center for Media & Public Affairs and the LSU College of Humanities and Social Sciences. The Public Policy Research Lab is a non-partisan center for survey research and data analysis. The lab does not take candidates or political parties as clients. Except for purposes of academic research, the lab does not ask "horserace" or "trial heat" questions about elections in Louisiana – i.e., the candidate for whom prospective voters intend to cast their ballots.

**LSU Public Policy Research Lab 2014 Election Survey
Final Topline for Registered Voters (944)**

Frequencies may not total 100 due to rounding

Q1. Do you approve or disapprove of the way Barack Obama is handling his job as President? **[IF DK ENTER AS DK. IF "DEPENDS" PROBE ONCE WITH: Overall do you approve or disapprove of the way Barack Obama is handling his job as President? IF STILL DEPENDS ENTER AS DK]**

Approve	38%
Disapprove	53%
(Vol.) Don't Know	7%
(Vol.) Refused	2%

[RANDOMIZED ASSIGNMENT EITHER TO Q2 OR TO Q3A AND Q3B]

Q2. Do you approve or disapprove of the job Congress is doing? **[IF DK ENTER AS DK. IF DEPENDS PROBE ONCE WITH: Overall do you approve or disapprove of the job Congress is doing? IF STILL DEPENDS ENTER AS DK]**

Approve	20%
Disapprove	73%
(Vol.) Don't Know	7%
(Vol.) Refused	1%

Q3a. Do you approve or disapprove of the job the Republican leaders in Congress are doing? **[IF DK ENTER AS DK. IF DEPENDS PROBE ONCE WITH: Overall do you approve or disapprove of the job the Republican leaders in Congress are doing? IF STILL DEPENDS ENTER AS DK]**

Approve	21%
Disapprove	64%
(Vol.) Don't Know	14%
(Vol.) Refused	1%

Q3b. Do you approve or disapprove of the job the Democrat leaders in Congress are doing? **[IF DK ENTER AS DK. IF DEPENDS PROBE ONCE WITH: Overall do you approve or disapprove of the job the Democrat leaders in Congress are doing? IF STILL DEPENDS ENTER AS DK]**

Approve	27%
Disapprove	59%
(Vol.) Don't Know	13%
(Vol.) Refused	1%

Q4. The congressional elections for the U.S. Senate and the U.S. House of Representatives will be coming up later this year. How closely have you followed news about the candidates and campaigns in Louisiana for this year's congressional elections?

Very closely	21%
Fairly closely	28%
Not too closely	29%
Not at all closely	22%
(Vol.) Don't Know	1%
(Vol.) Refused	0%

Q5. Do you yourself plan to vote in the election this November?

Yes	92%
No	6%
(Vol.) Don't Know	2%
(Vol.) Refused	0%

Q6. **[ASK ONLY IF ANSWERED "YES" TO Q5]** How certain are you that you will vote? Are you absolutely certain, fairly certain, or not certain?

Absolutely certain	80%
Fairly certain	18%
Not certain	2%
(Vol.) Don't Know	0%
(Vol.) Refused	0%

Q7. [ASK ONLY IF ANSWERED “YES” TO Q5] Compared to previous congressional elections, are you more enthusiastic about voting than usual, or less enthusiastic?

More	53%
Less	37%
(Vol.) Don't Know	10%
(Vol.) Refused	0%

Q8. [ASK ONLY IF ANSWERED “YES” TO Q5] Will the issue of which party controls Congress, the Republicans or the Democrats, be a factor in your vote for Congress this year, or not?

Yes, will be a factor	59%
No, will not	37%
(Vol.) Don't Know	3%
(Vol.) Refused	1%

Q9. [ASK ONLY IF ANSWERED “YES” TO Q5] Will how you feel about Barack Obama be a factor in your vote for Congress this year, or not?

Yes, will be a factor	53%
No, will not	43%
(Vol.) Don't Know	4%
(Vol.) Refused	0%

[RANDOMIZED ORDER IN WHICH Q10-Q15 APPEARED]

Q10. [ASK ONLY IF ANSWERED “YES” TO Q5] How important will the issue of the Affordable Care Act, also known as Obama-care, be to your vote for Congress this year?

Extremely important	37%
Very important	36%
Somewhat important	12%
Slightly important	5%
Not at all important	9%
(Vol.) Don't Know	1%
(Vol.) Refused	0%

Q11. [ASK ONLY IF ANSWERED “YES” TO Q5] How important will the issue of the economy be to your vote for Congress this year?

Extremely important	41%
Very important	43%
Somewhat important	12%
Slightly important	2%
Not at all important	2%
(Vol.) Don't Know	1%
(Vol.) Refused	0%

Q12. [ASK ONLY IF ANSWERED “YES” TO Q5] How important will the issue of the federal budget deficit be to your vote for Congress this year?

Extremely important	35%
Very important	36%
Somewhat important	18%
Slightly important	4%
Not at all important	4%
(Vol.) Don't Know	3%
(Vol.) Refused	0%

Q13. [ASK ONLY IF ANSWERED “YES” TO Q5] How important will the issue of immigration be to your vote for Congress this year?

Extremely important	33%
Very important	36%
Somewhat important	18%
Slightly important	5%
Not at all important	5%
(Vol.) Don't Know	1%
(Vol.) Refused	0%

Q14. [ASK ONLY IF ANSWERED “YES” TO Q5] How important will the issue of foreign policy and national security be to your vote for Congress this year?

Extremely important	37%
Very important	41%
Somewhat important	14%
Slightly important	5%
Not at all important	2%
(Vol.) Don't Know	1%
(Vol.) Refused	0%

Q15. [ASK ONLY IF ANSWERED “YES” TO Q5] How important will the issue of same-sex marriage be to your vote for Congress this year?

Extremely important	25%
Very important	24%
Somewhat important	18%
Slightly important	9%
Not at all important	23%
(Vol.) Don't Know	1%
(Vol.) Refused	1%

Q16. Do you happen to know whether your current representative in the U.S. House of Representatives is a [INSERT ITEM; RANDOMIZE] or a [ITEM]?

BASED ON RESPONDENTS MATCHED TO CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICTS

Correctly identified party of representative	38%
Democrat representative	6%
Republican representative	32%
Incorrectly identified party of representative	21%
Guessed Democrat, but Republican representative	19%
Guessed Republican, but Democrat representative	2%
(Vol.) Don't Know	41%
(Vol.) Refused	0%

Notes

ⁱ Voter party affiliation is based on a measure asking respondents whether they consider themselves a Democrat, a Republican, an independent or something else. Voters who did not initially identify themselves as a Democrat or Republican were then asked which, if any, of the two major parties they felt closer to. These indicators reflect a voter's personal identification with a party. These labels are not synonymous with registration in a party.