

Independents and the Presidential Debate System

Douglas E. Schoen, LLC

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Overview

- Douglas E. Schoen, LLC conducted a survey with a random sample of 1,000 likely voters across the country from July 14 – 28, 2014.
- The purpose of this survey was to test voter opinion on reforming presidential debates to include independent candidates.
- The margin of sampling error for this poll is +/-3%.

Overview

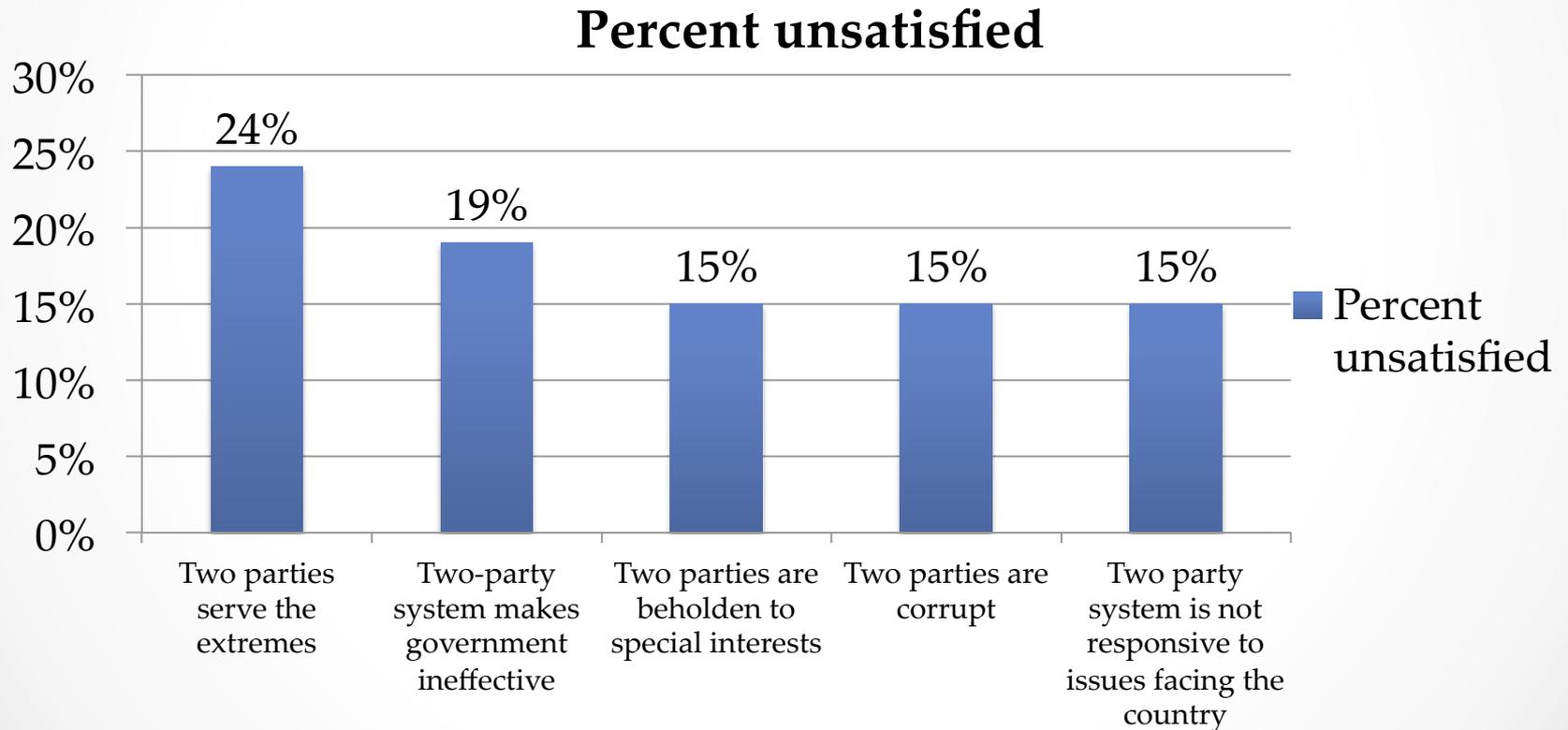
- There is overwhelming support for making changes to the Presidential debate system.
 - **Sixty-six percent of voters think the debates could do a better job informing the public**
 - **A majority of voters want Independent candidates to be included in Presidential debates**
 - **Nearly three quarters of voters agree that the debate system actually “sabotages the electoral process,” as Walter Cronkite put it**

Overview

- Our survey found that there is deep dissatisfaction with the two-party system in America.
 - **Two-thirds of voters feel the political process has gotten worse in the last few years**
 - **Over 80 percent (83%) say that we need substantial political reforms in America**
 - **A majority of voters (53%) report to be unsatisfied with the two-party system**

Overview: Voter Dissatisfaction with the Two-Party System

- A plurality of voters (24%) say they are dissatisfied with the two party system because they feel the two parties only serve the extremes.



Overview

- Voters give negative ratings to both Republicans and Democrats.
 - The Democratic Party's negative ratings have steadily increased over the past two years, going from 40% in Sept. 2012 to 45% in June 2013 to 48% today.
 - The Republican Party's negative ratings have followed a similar pattern, going from 50% in Sept. 2012 to 55% in June 2013 to a record high 64% today.

Overview

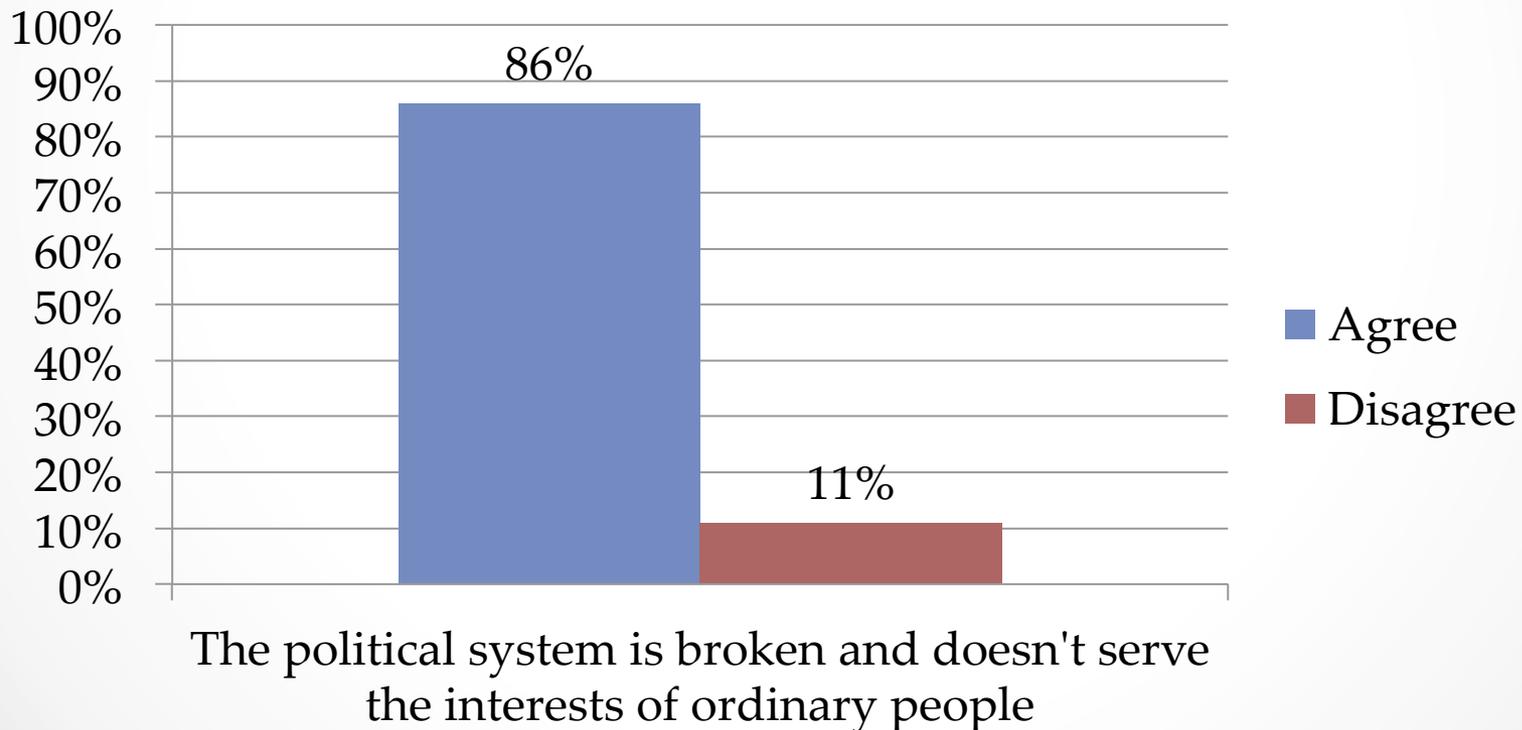
- Disapproval of Congress is at record highs:
 - 83% of Americans disapprove of the job Congress is doing, up from 69% in March 2014.
 - Close to 60% disapprove of the job Congressional Democrats are doing, up from 57% at this time last year.
 - And 68% of Americans disapprove of the job Congressional Republicans are doing, up from 62% in 2012.

Overview

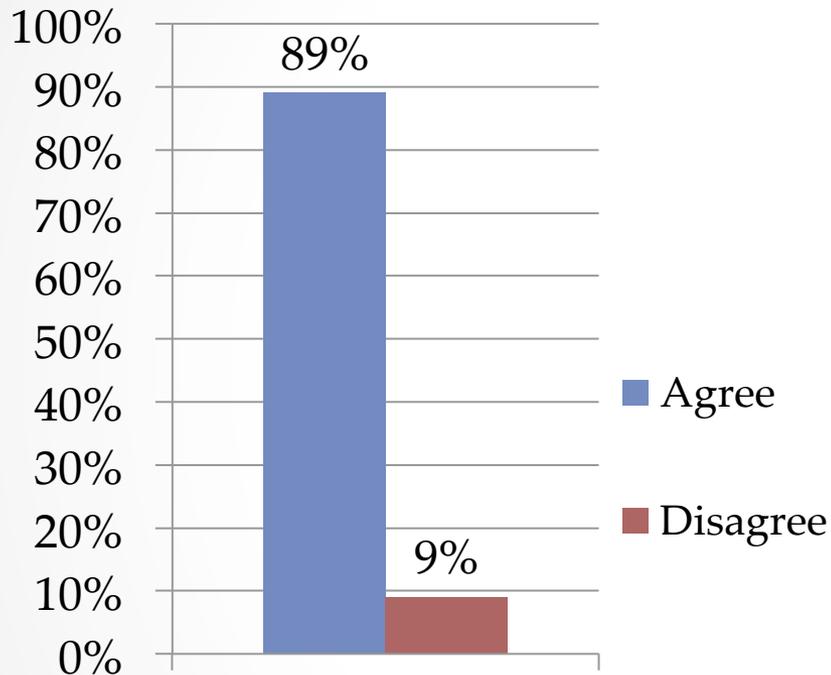
- Dissatisfaction is rooted in out-of-touch political parties that are perceived to only fight and not compromise.
 - Americans feel that the two-party system is broken because it serves the extremes of their parties and not the middle. Ninety-one percent of Americans are frustrated that elected officials fight as opposed to addressing our major problems. And 89% wish that politicians would work together and compromise.

Overview: Our Political System is Broken

- Taken together, an overwhelming majority (86%) see our political system as broken and no longer serving the interests of ordinary people.



Overview: Voters are Frustrated with Elected Officials



Politicians should work together and compromise so we can move forward

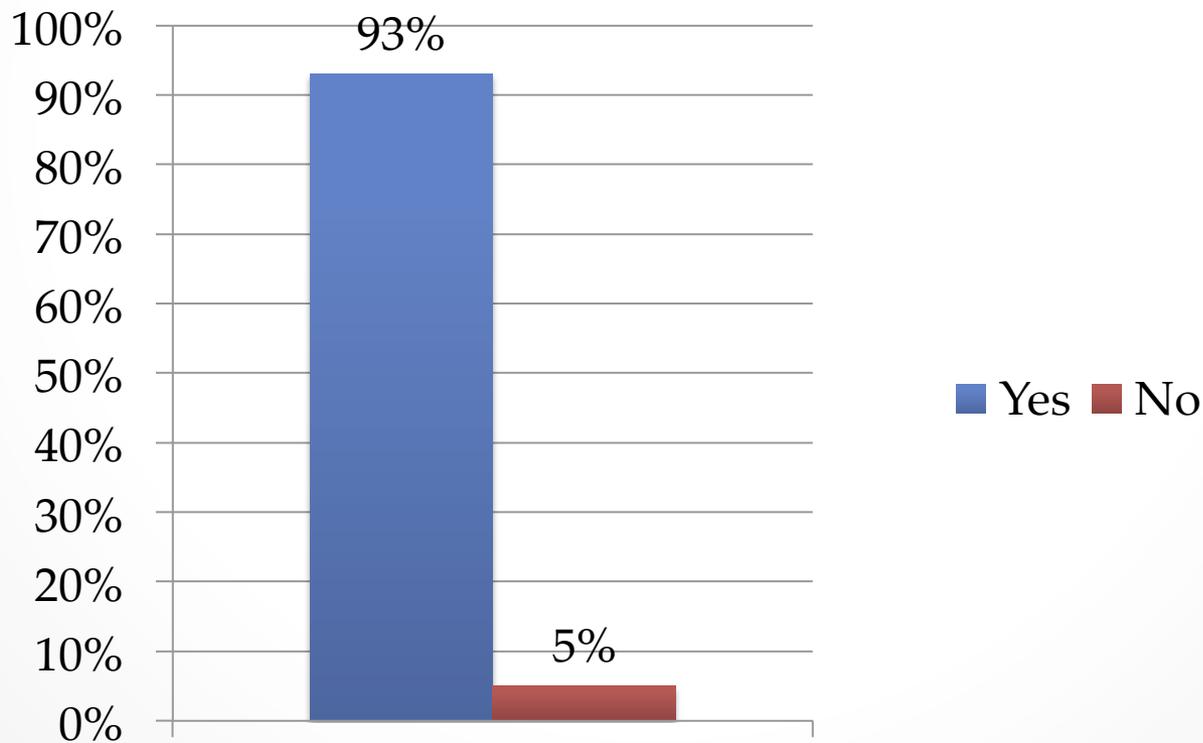
- And 89% wish that politicians would work together and compromise so that we can move forward.

Overview

- Almost all of those surveyed (93%) are familiar with presidential debates.
- However, there is an overwhelming feeling that the debates don't do enough to inform the general public and could be improved.
- 66% of respondents said that the debates could do a better job in informing the electorate while only 27% said they have done as good a job as possible.

Overview: Presidential Debates

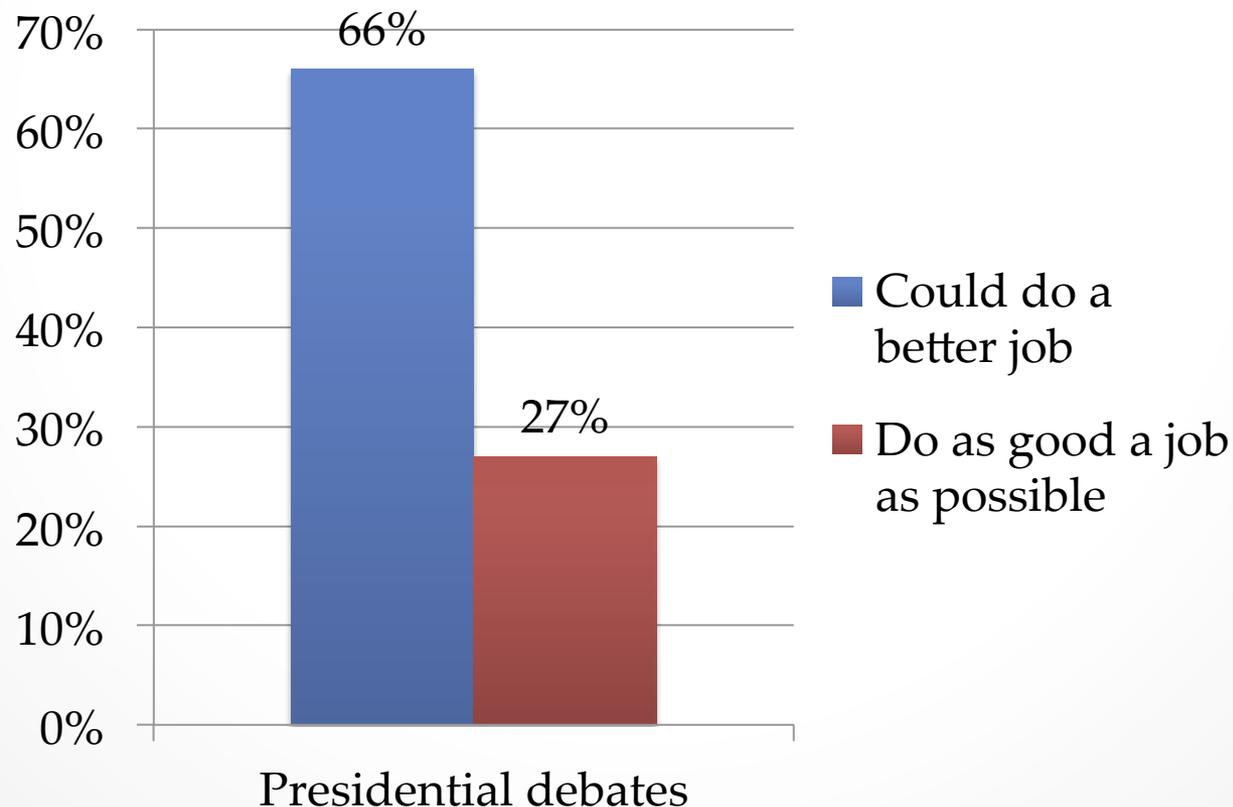
- Virtually all respondents (93%) are familiar with Presidential debates.



• Are you familiar with Presidential debates?

Overview: Presidential Debates

- And while almost all of those surveyed are familiar with presidential debates, close to two-thirds (66%) feel the debates could do a better job informing the public.

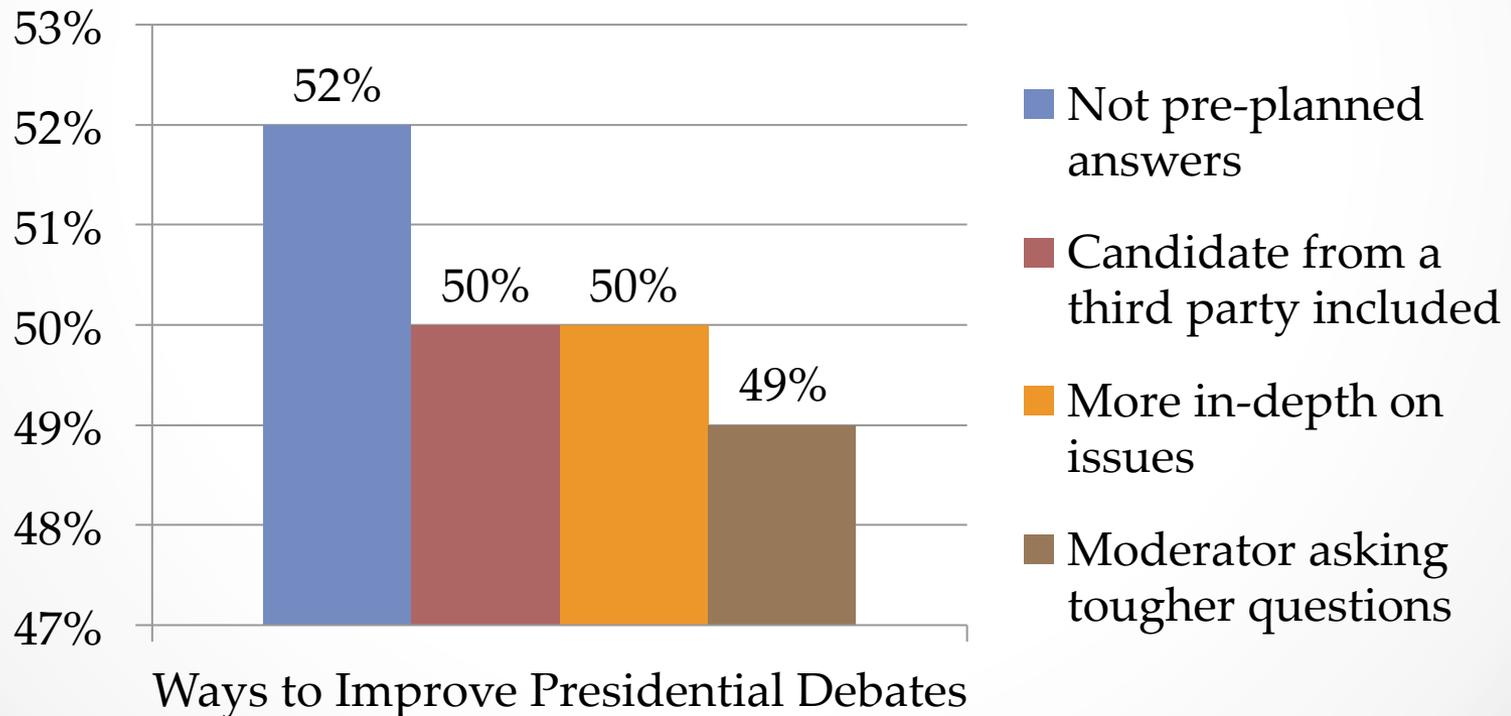


Overview: Improving Presidential Debates

- We asked voters what innovations they thought would improve the debates. The top five innovations were:
 1. If the candidates' responses didn't feel pre-planned (52%)
 2. **If a candidate from outside the two parties was included in the debates (50%)**
 3. If the candidates went into more depth on the issues (50%)
 4. If the moderator asked more hard-hitting questions (49%)
 5. If a wider range of issues were discussed (48%)

Overview: Improving Presidential Debates

- A majority of voters (52%) say they would like it if the candidates' answers weren't pre-planned. And 50% of voters said they'd like to see a candidate from outside the two main parties and if the candidates went more in-depth on the issues.

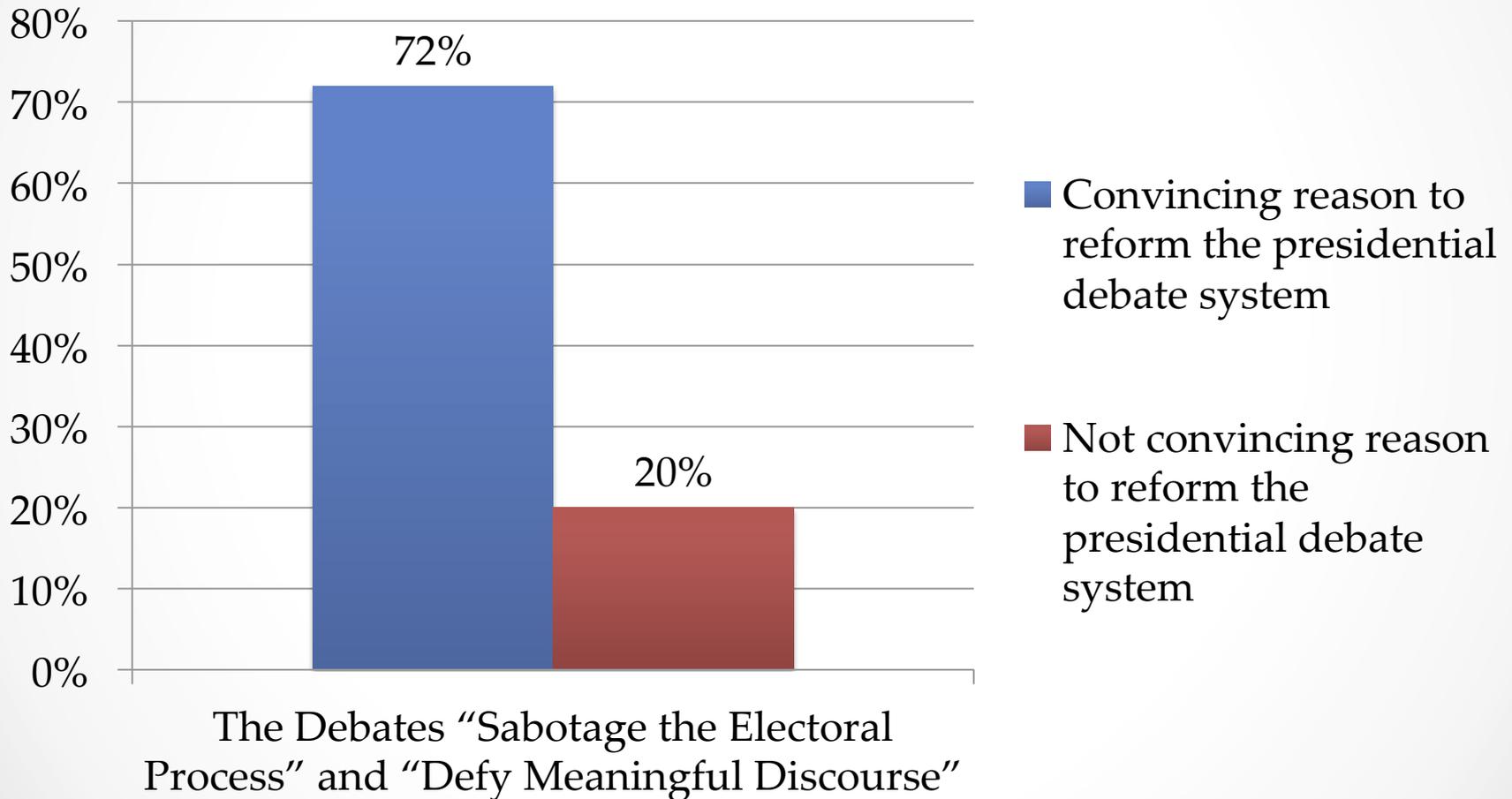


Overview:

- We tested two arguments for reforming the presidential debate system to include candidates from outside the two parties. Both were convincing to a majority of voters.
- **Seventy-two percent** found Walter Cronkite's argument that the **debates actually “sabotage the electoral process”** and “defy meaningful discourse” a convincing reason to reform the presidential debate system.
- **Fifty-five percent** found the fact that the current Co-Chair of the Commission on Presidential Debates has said that the **goal of the debates is to build up the main two parties** to be a convincing reason to reform the presidential debate system.

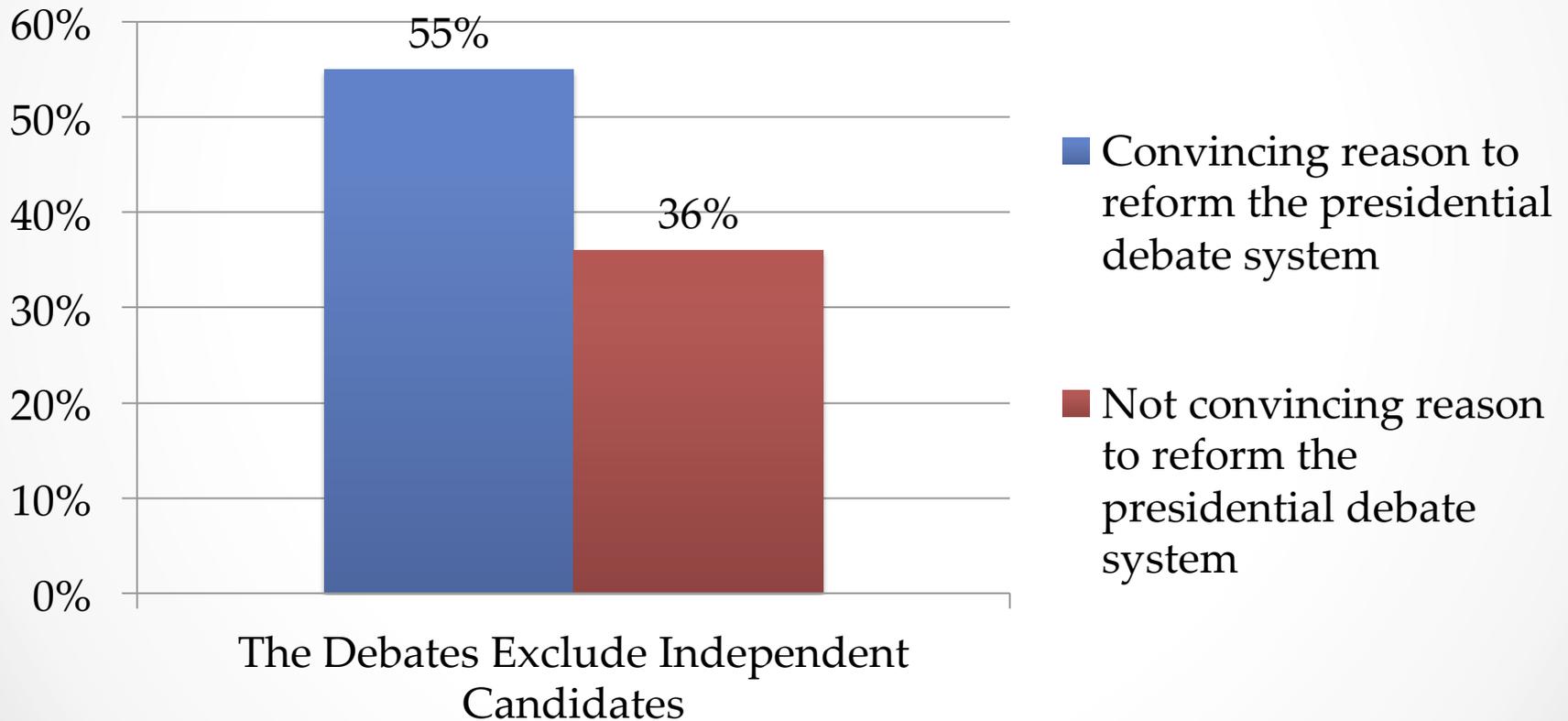
Overview: Reforming Presidential Debates

- Cronkite's argument for reforming the Presidential debate system gets strong support from 72% of voters.



Overview: Reforming Presidential Debates

- And the fact that current Co-Chair of the Commission on Presidential debates has said that the goal in running the Presidential debates is to exclude independent candidates was a convincing argument to reform the Presidential debate system for 55% of voters.



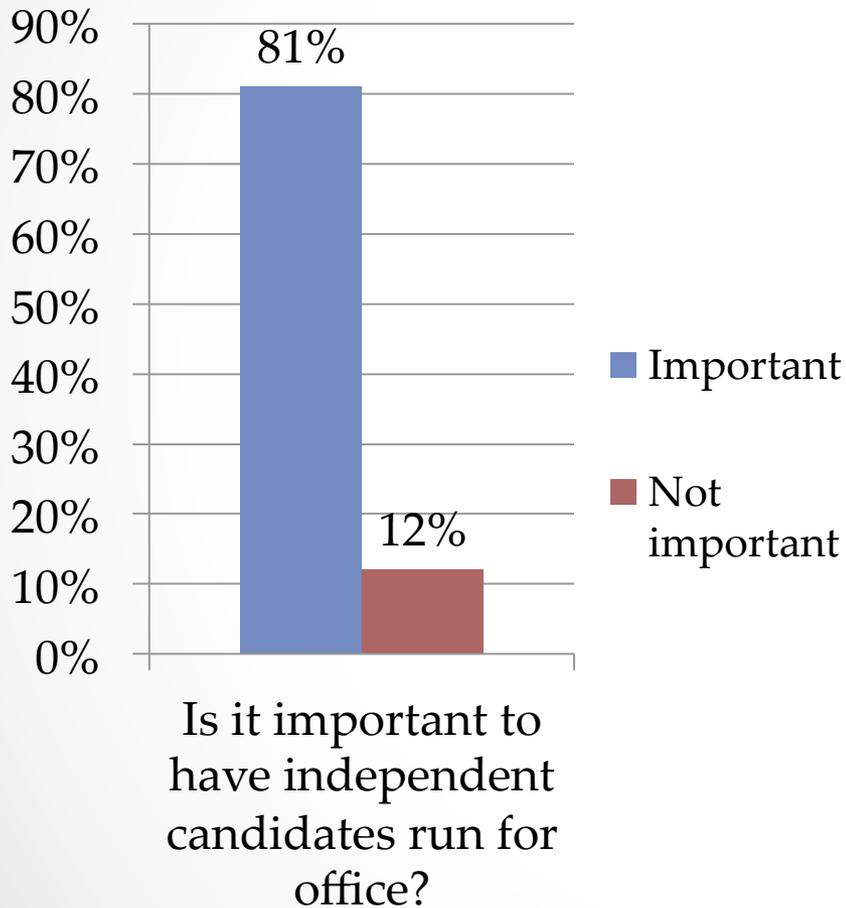
Overview

- To a large degree, voters hold the media responsible for poor coverage of the candidates and issues.
- A solid majority (60%) do not have confidence that the media will provide good coverage of all relevant candidates and issues during the next presidential election.

Overview: Support for Independent candidates

- There is a great deal of support for independent candidates to participate more in the political process.
 - **Eighty-one percent say it's important to have independent candidates run for office.**
 - **Sixty-five percent often feel that the Democrat candidate is too far left and the Republican candidate is too far to the right and would like the option to vote for an independent candidate.**
 - **And over three quarters (76%) say it is important to elect independents to break the partisan gridlock in Washington.**

Overview: Voters Want Independent Candidates to Run for Office



- It is important to a strong majority (81%) of the American people to have independent candidates run for office.

Overview: Independent Candidates

- Moreover, 62% say that they are likely to vote for an independent candidate in the 2016 presidential election.
- But at the same time, 64% of voters worry that if they vote for an independent candidate they will be wasting their vote and end up with the candidate or party they least prefer.

Overview: Arguments for Independents

- There are a number of persuasive arguments as to why voters feel we need to elect Independent candidates:
 - ✓ 91% of Americans believe we need to elect someone who can produce real change and who isn't a career politician.
 - ✓ 86% feel that the parties control who gets elected to office, not the voters.
 - ✓ 86% believe that the main two parties are too beholden to special and corporate interests to create any meaningful change.
 - ✓ 67% think that the Democrats and Republicans have both failed to solve the country's problems

Overview: Independents

- A plurality of voters (42%) feel that having an Independent president would **improve the situation in Washington**.
- And nearly two thirds (63%) think that an independent president could be **more effective** or **just as effective** as a president from the two major parties.

Overview: Key Conclusions

- The messages that will work best in favor of independent candidates are:
 1. That they will produce real change
 2. That they aren't career politicians
 3. That they aren't beholden to special or corporate interests
 4. That the voters are in charge of the electoral process, not the Democrats or Republicans
 5. That Democrats and Republicans haven't solved American's problems

Overview: Key Conclusions

- There is strong interest in reforming the presidential debate process in America so that it better informs the public.
- A majority of Americans support integrating Independent candidates into presidential debates and feel it would improve the debates for a majority of voters, making it a worthwhile endeavor.

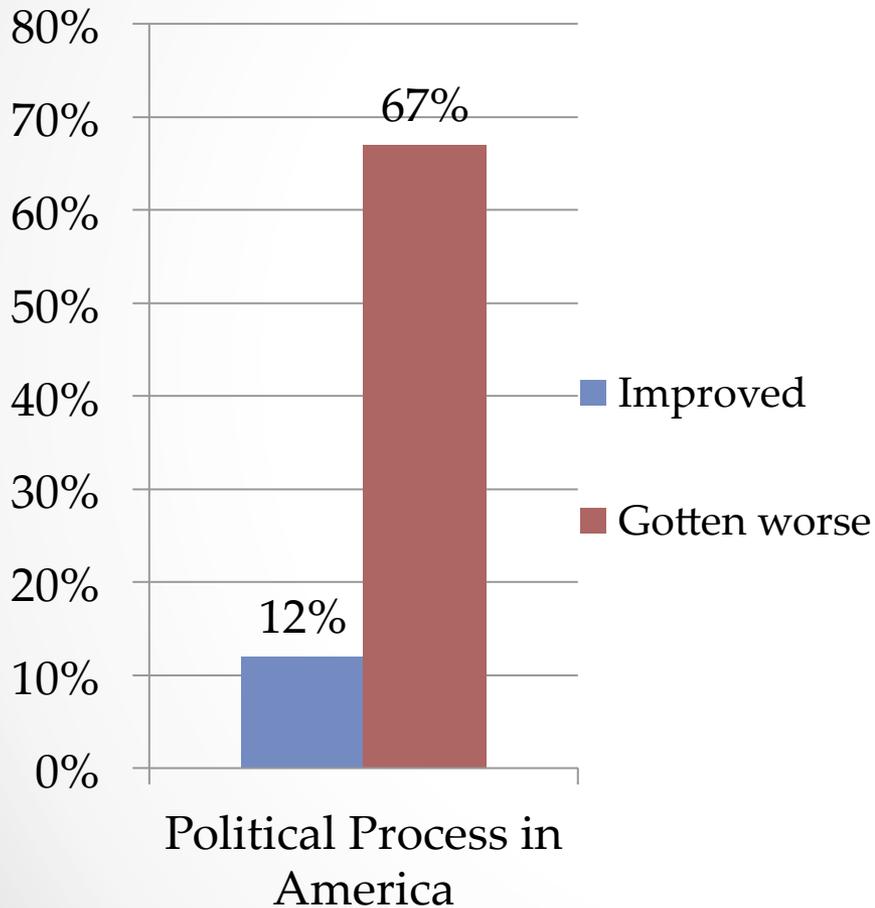
Overview

- The following slides present the main findings from the survey.

Summary of Main Findings

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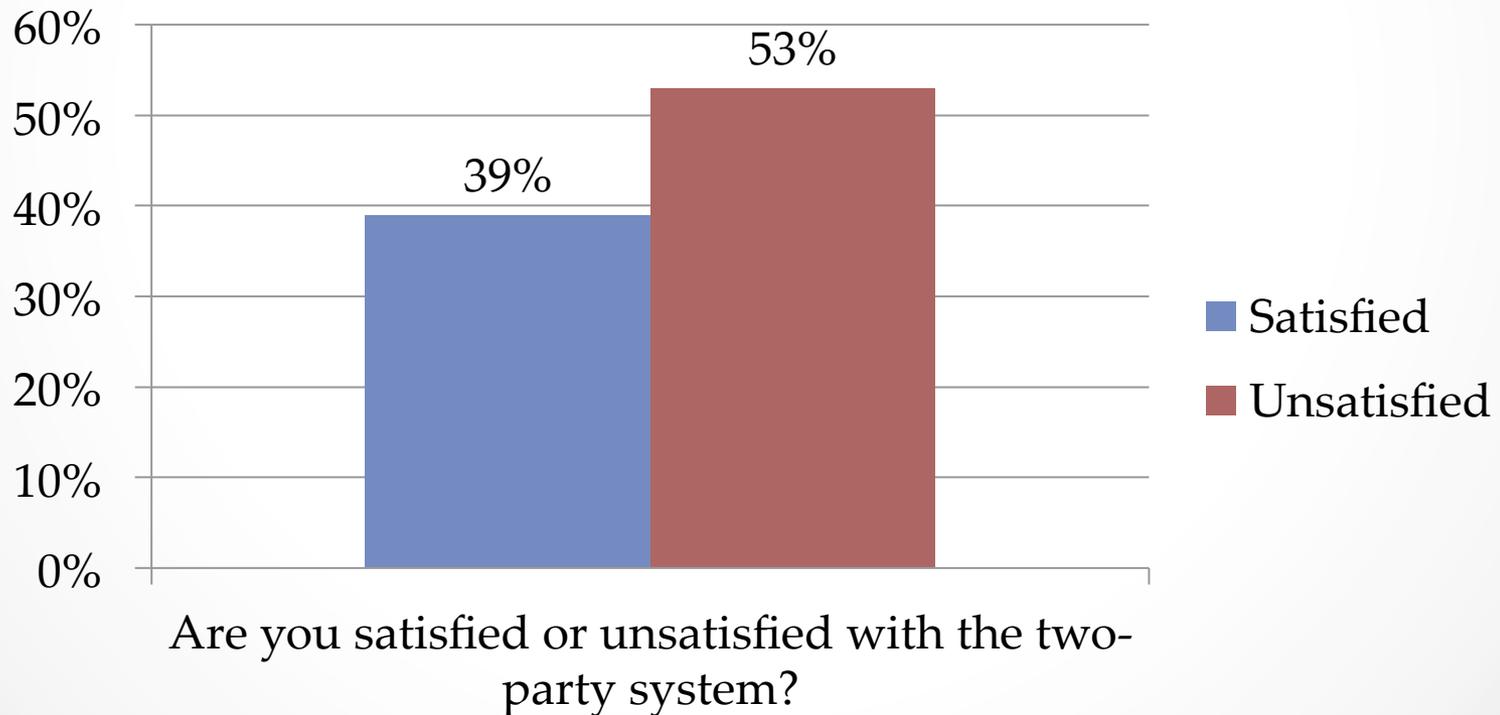
Voters Unsatisfied with the Political System



- Voters feel strongly that the political process in America has gotten worse in the last few years.

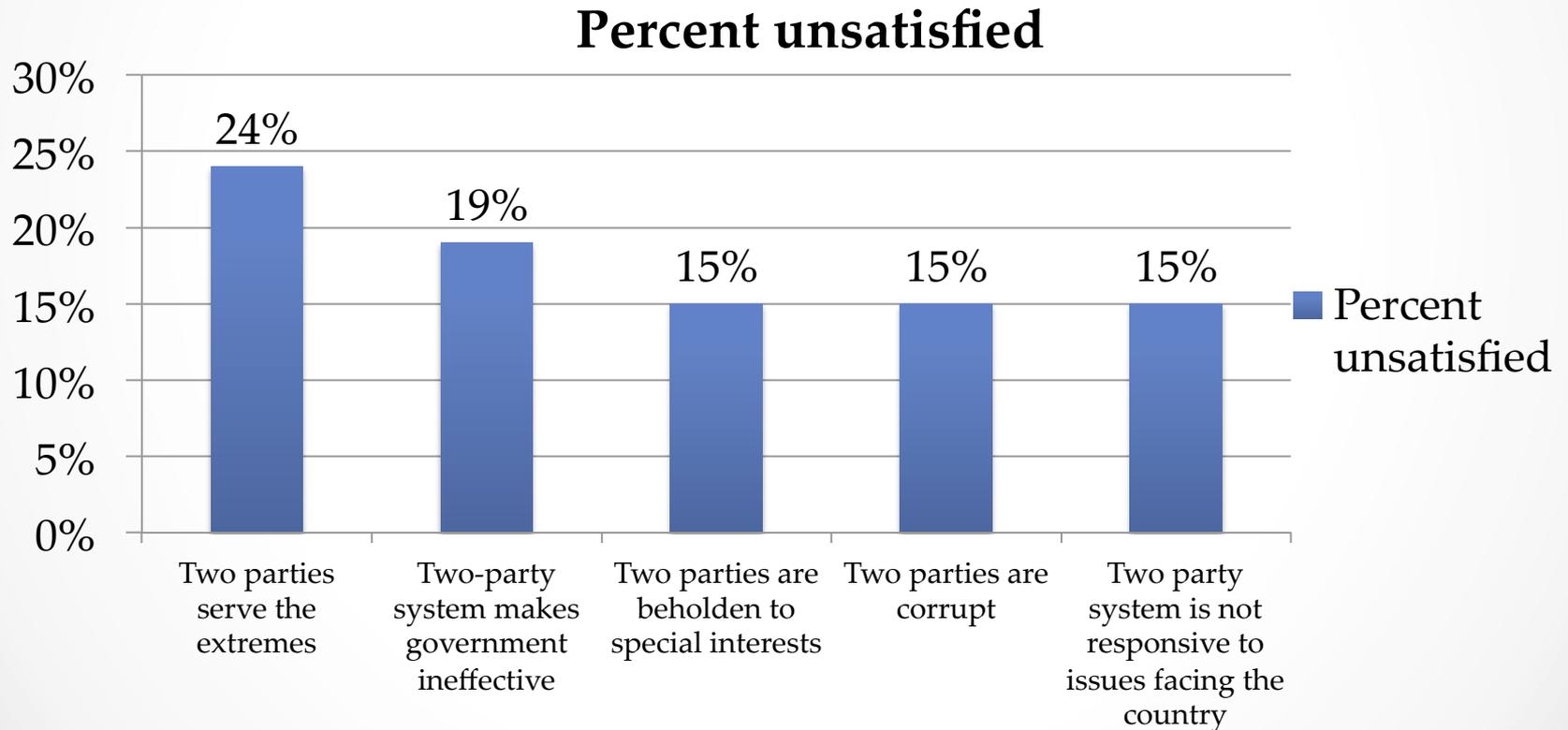
Voters Unsatisfied with the Political System

- A majority (53%) of voters report to be unsatisfied with the political system.



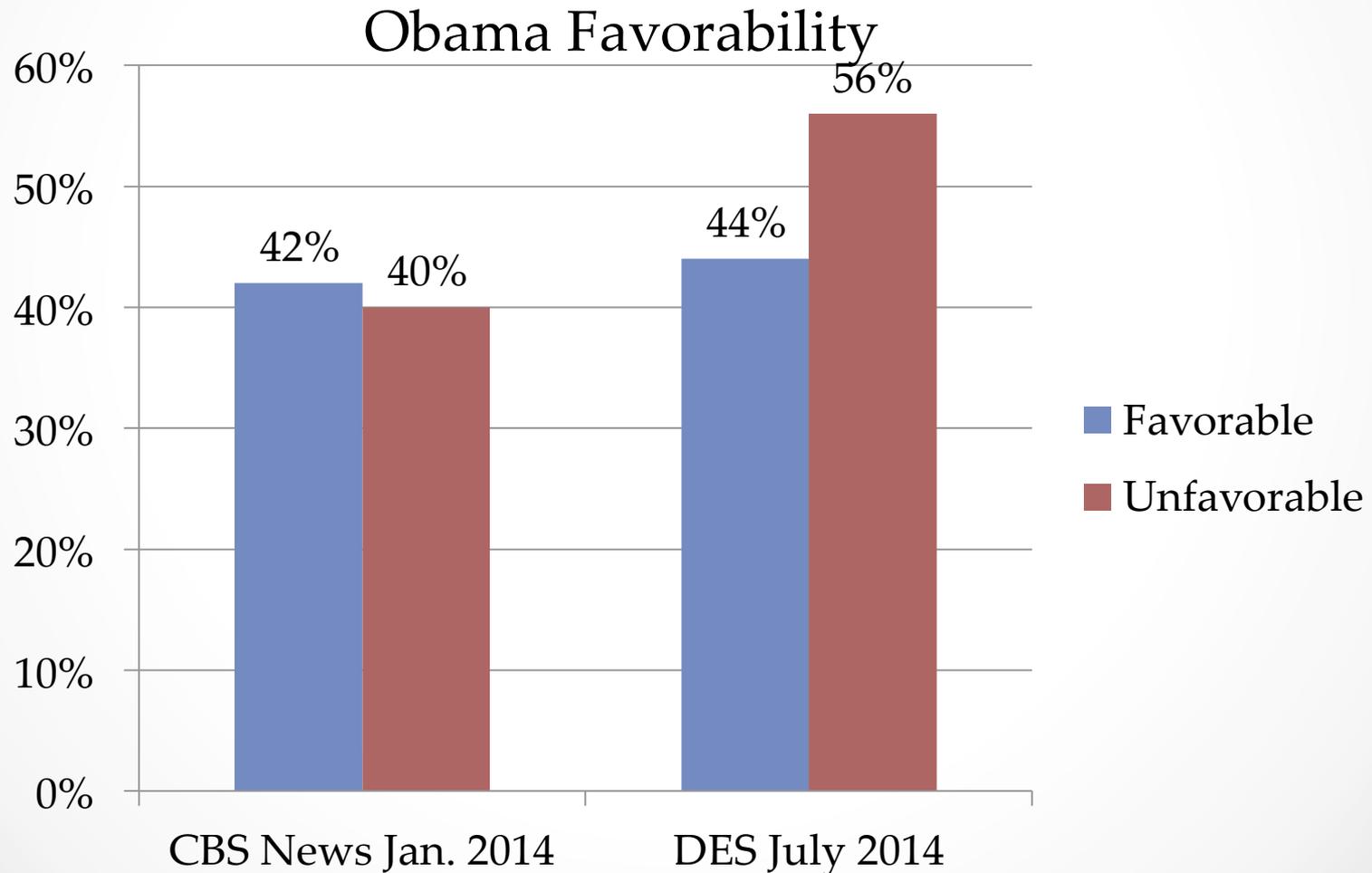
Main Reasons Americans are Unsatisfied with the Two-Party System

- A plurality of voters (24%) say they are unsatisfied with the two party system because they feel the two parties only serve the extremes.



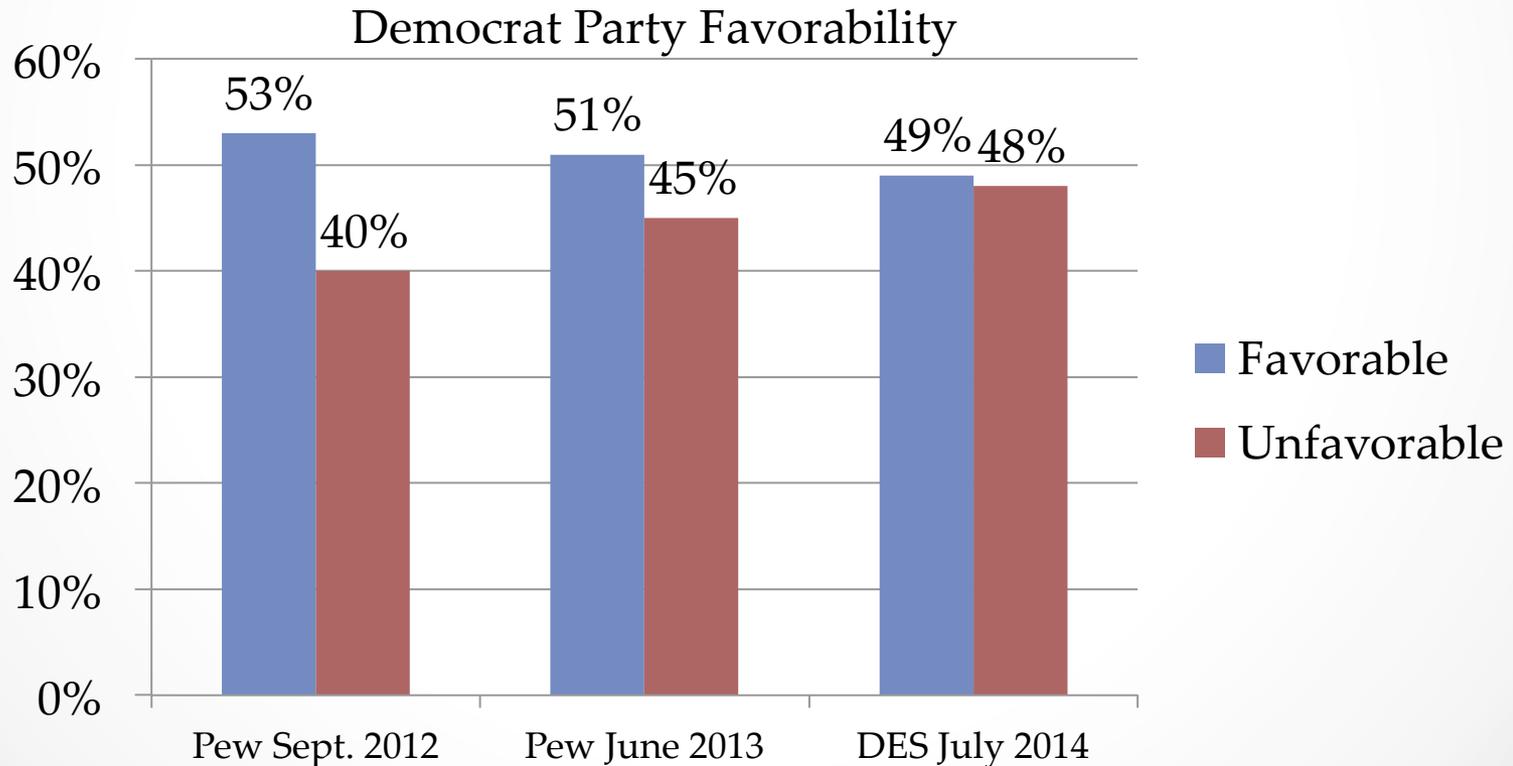
President Obama's Negative Ratings are Increasing

- Between January and July of 2014, President Obama's Unfavorable rating increased from 40% to 56%.



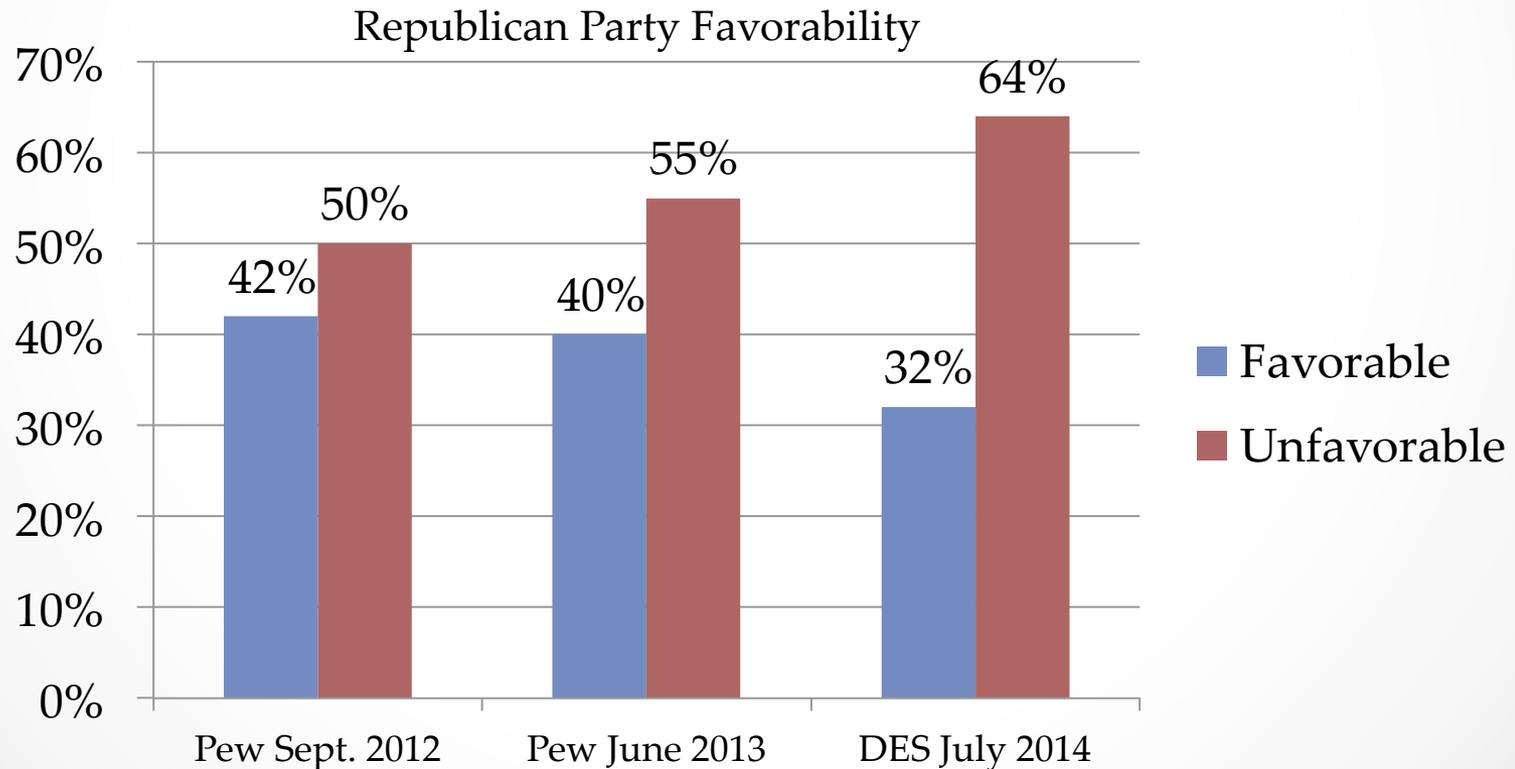
Democrat Party's Negative Ratings are Increasing

- The percentage of voters who rate the Democrat Party unfavorably has grown from 40% in 2012 to 48% today. What used to be a clear favorable rating for the Democrats has disappeared.



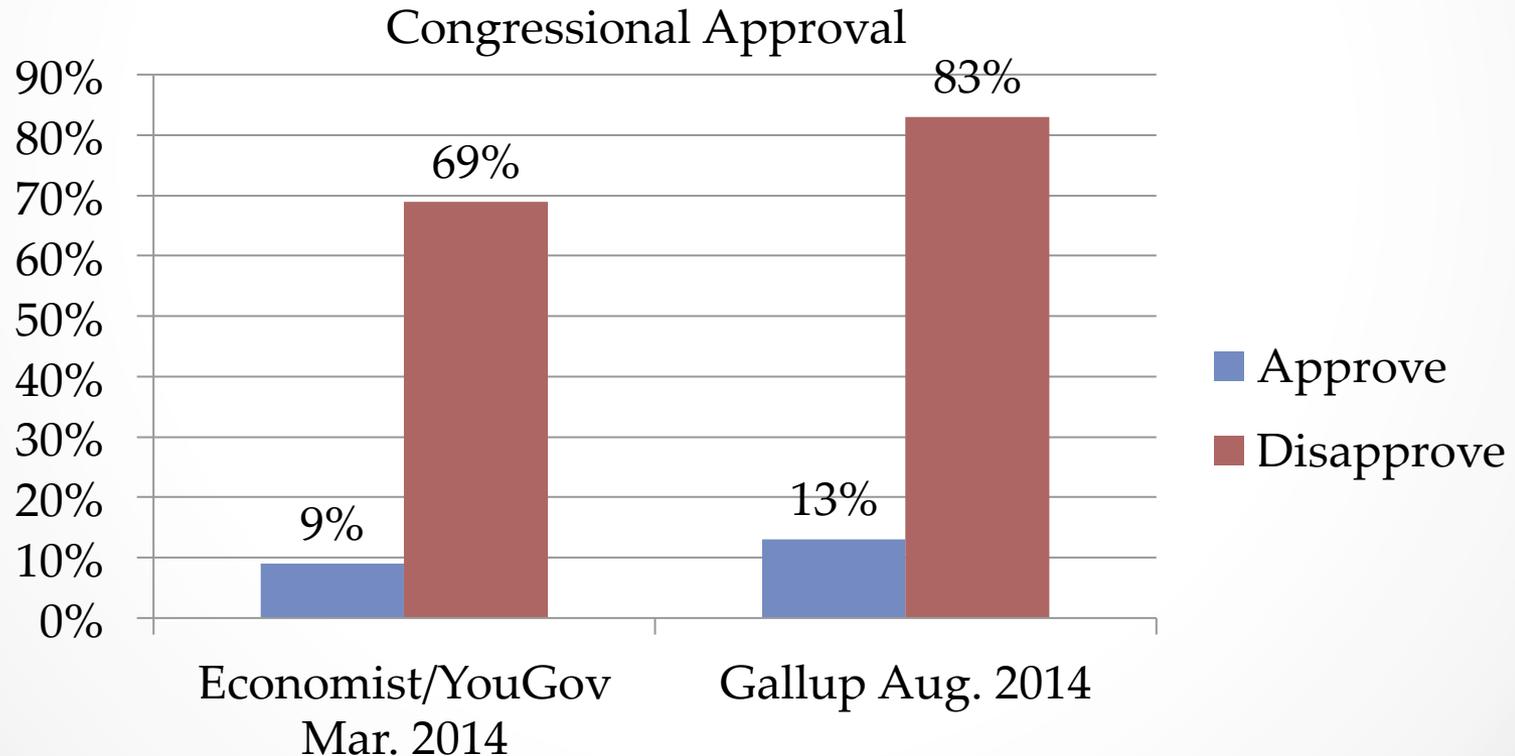
Republican Party's Negative Ratings is at a Record High

- The Republican Party's negative ratings have increased even more than the Democrats', currently at record high 64%.



Disapproval of Congress at All Time High

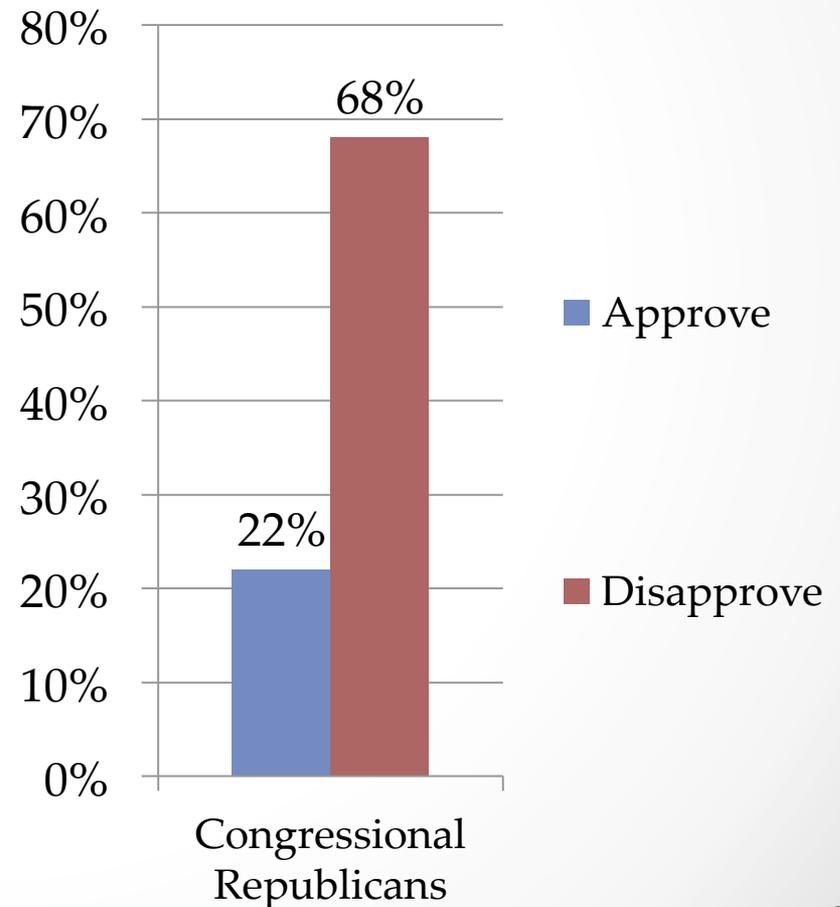
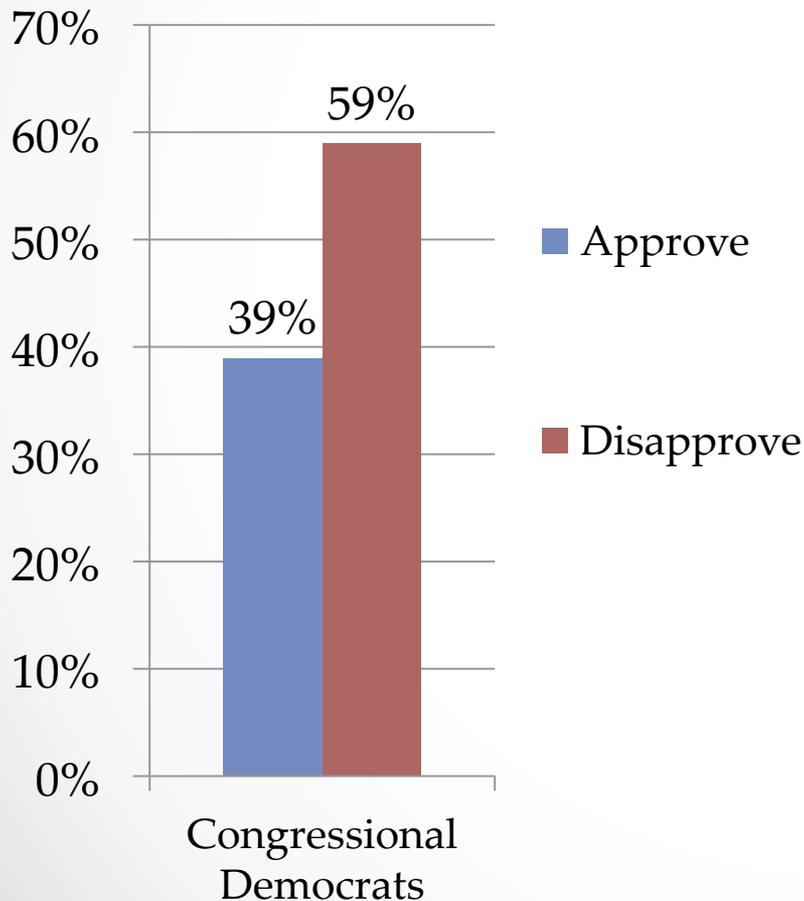
- Today, more than 80% of American disapprove of the job Congress is doing. This is a 14 point increase from earlier this year.



Job Approval Republicans and Democrats

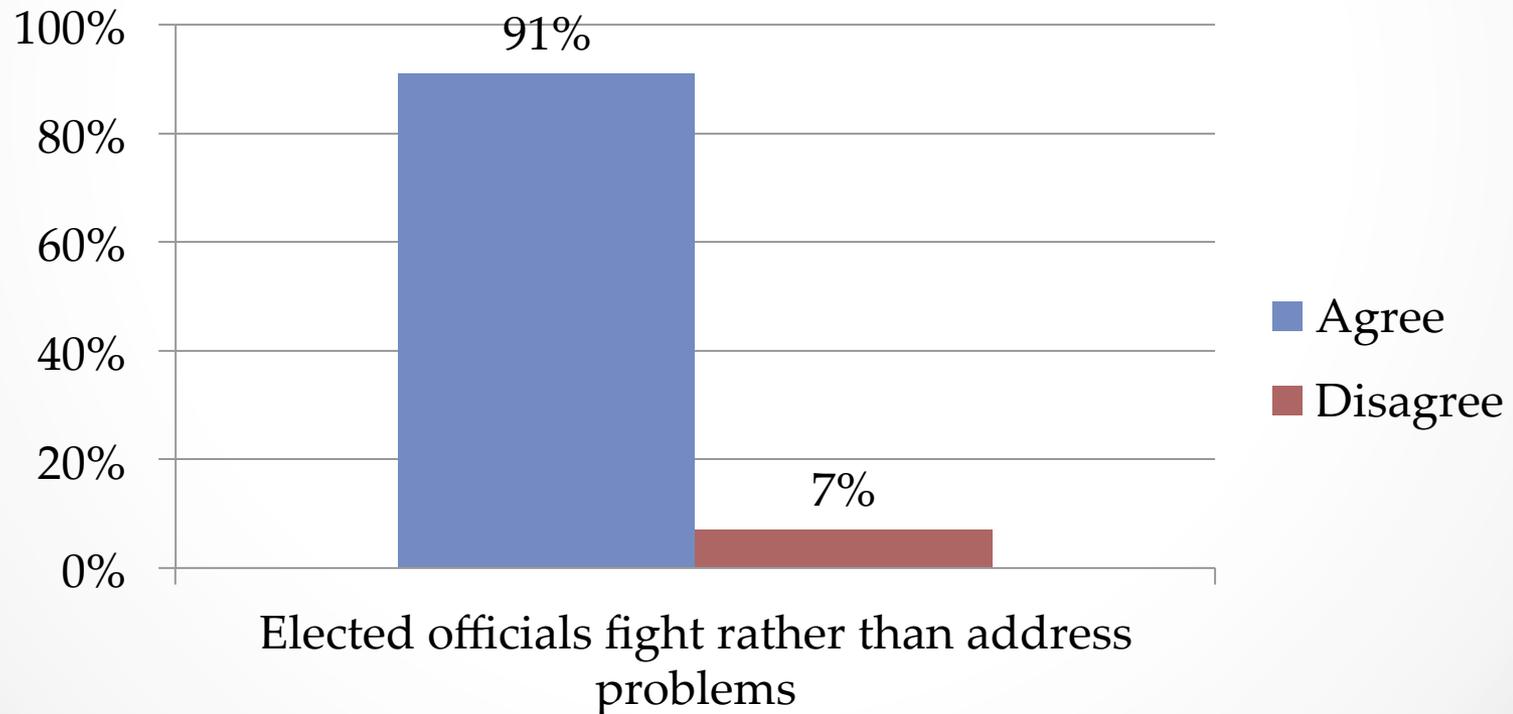
- A majority of Americans disapprove of the job both Congressional Democrats and Republicans are doing.

Congressional Job Approval

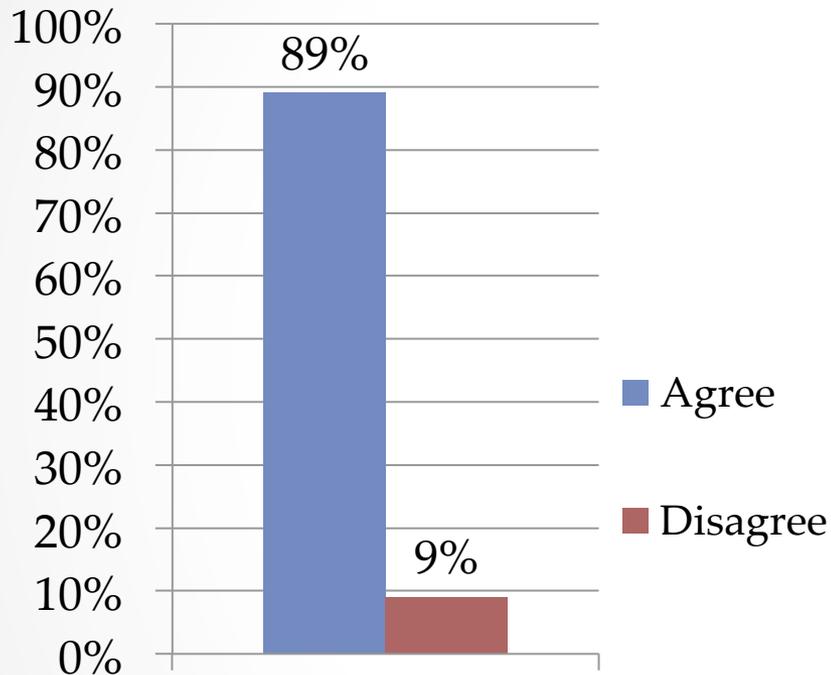


Frustration with Elected Officials

- Ninety-one percent of Americans are frustrated that elected officials only seem to fight instead of addressing major problems.



Frustration with Elected Officials

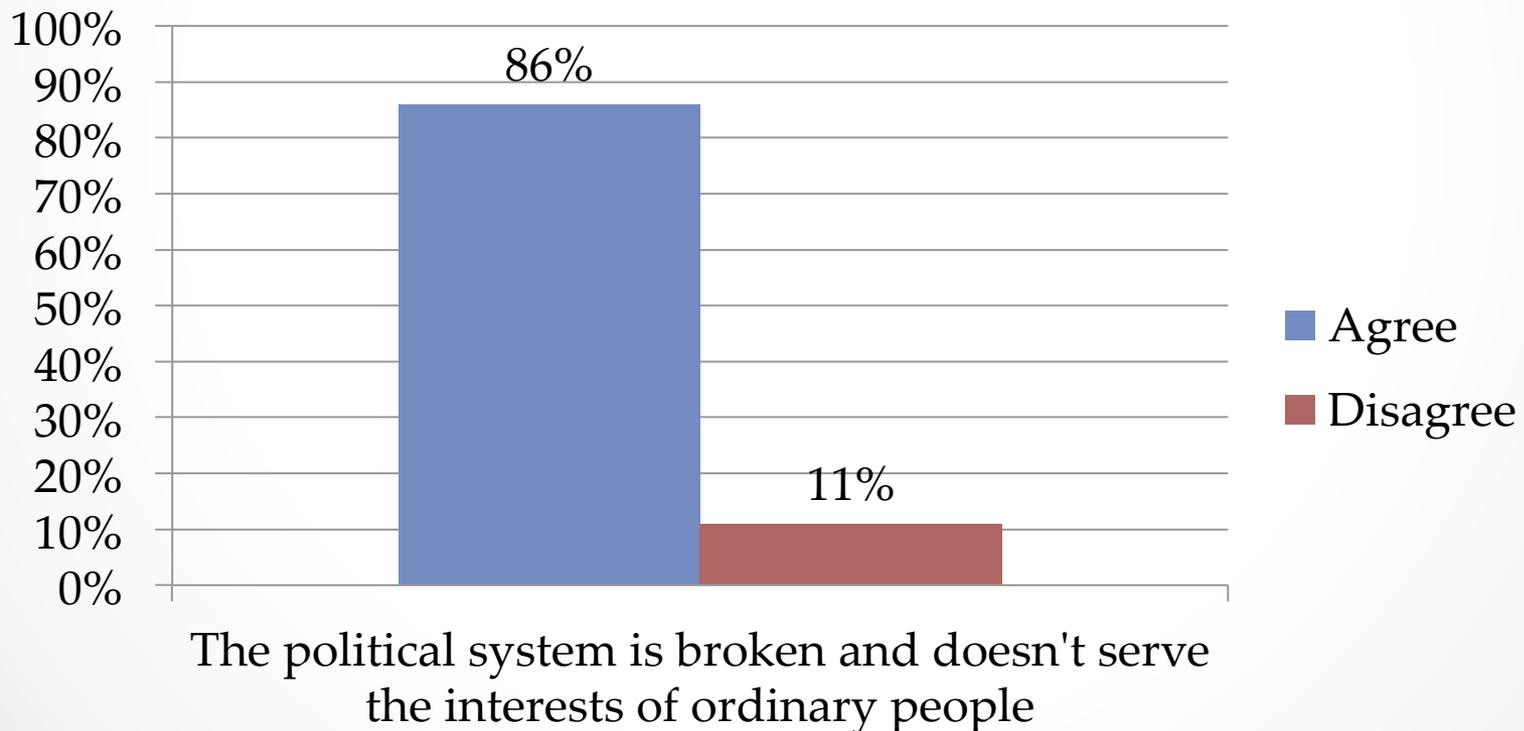


Politicians should work together and compromise so we can move forward

- And 89% wish that politicians would work together and compromise so that we can move forward.

The Broken Political System

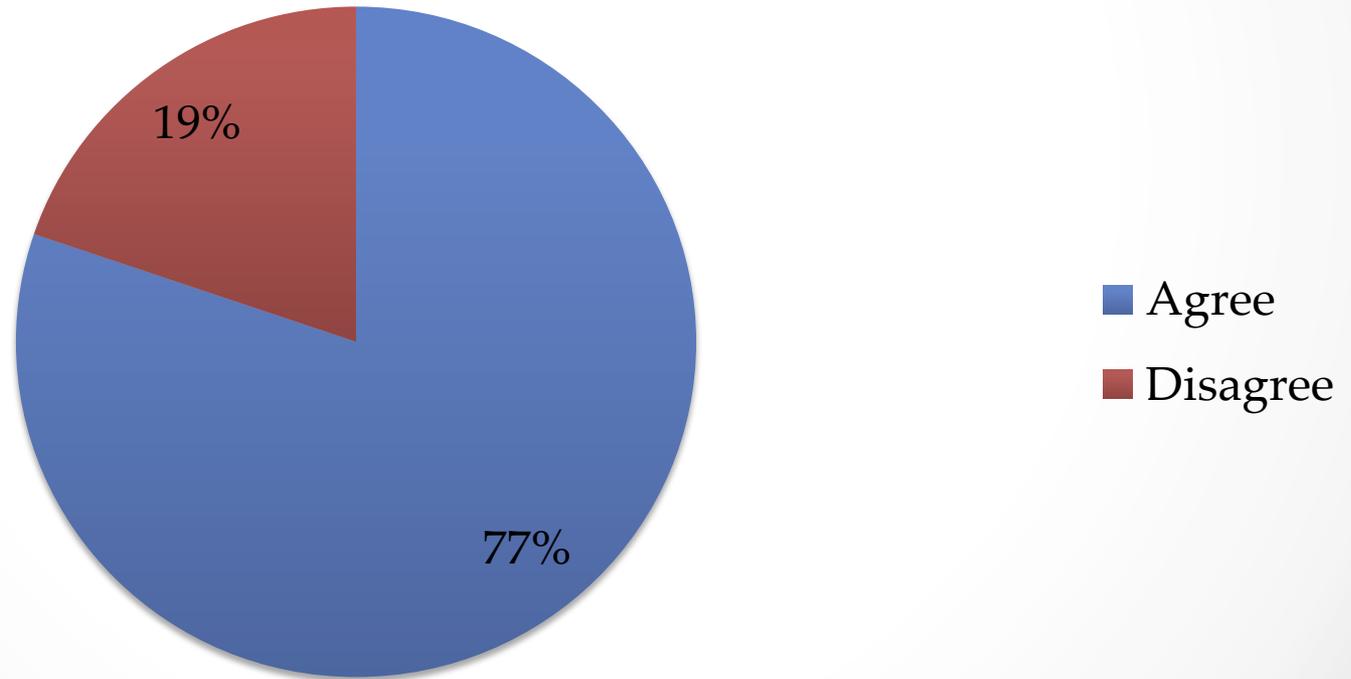
- Taken together, an overwhelming majority (86%) see our political system as broken and no longer serving the interests of ordinary people.



The Broken Political System

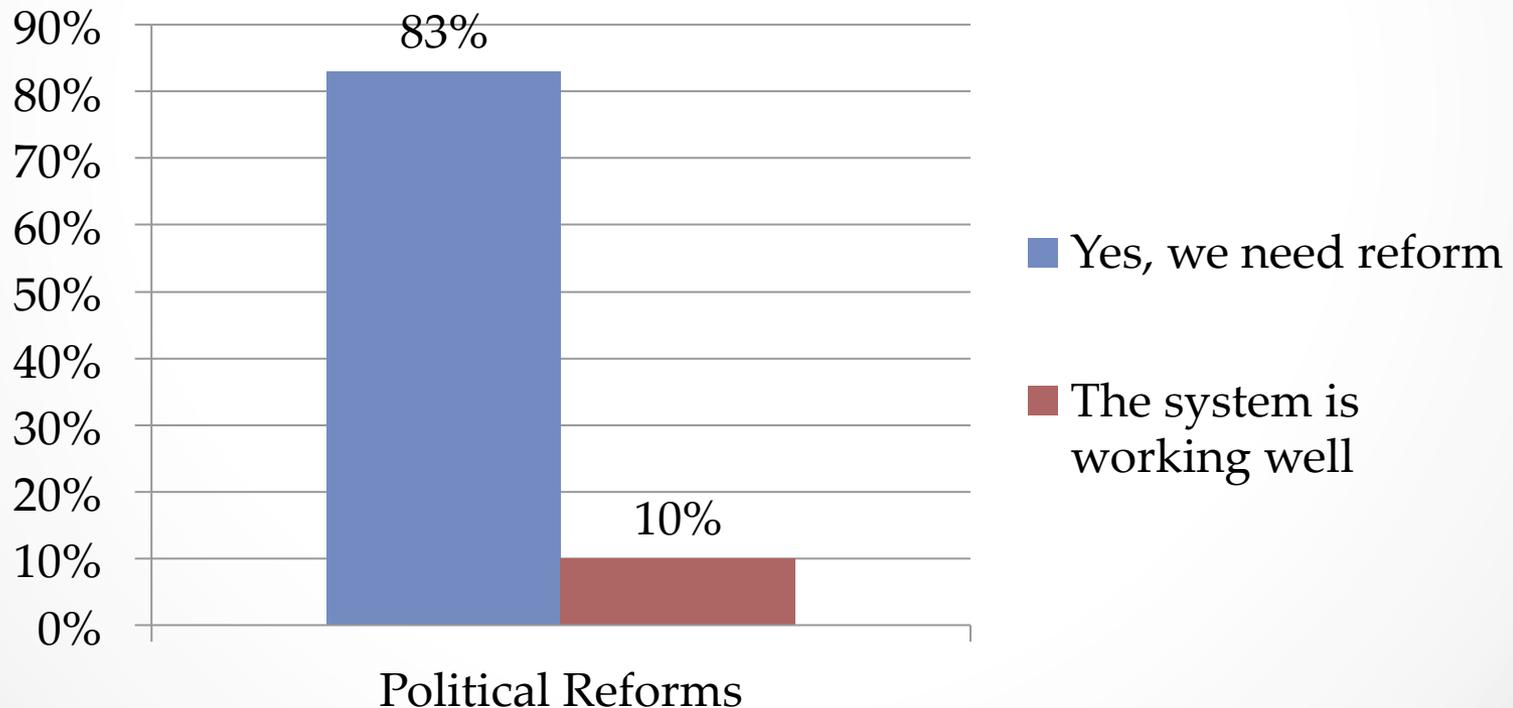
- Over three-quarters of voters (77%) are angry at elected officials and want them out of office.

I am angry and want to throw them all out



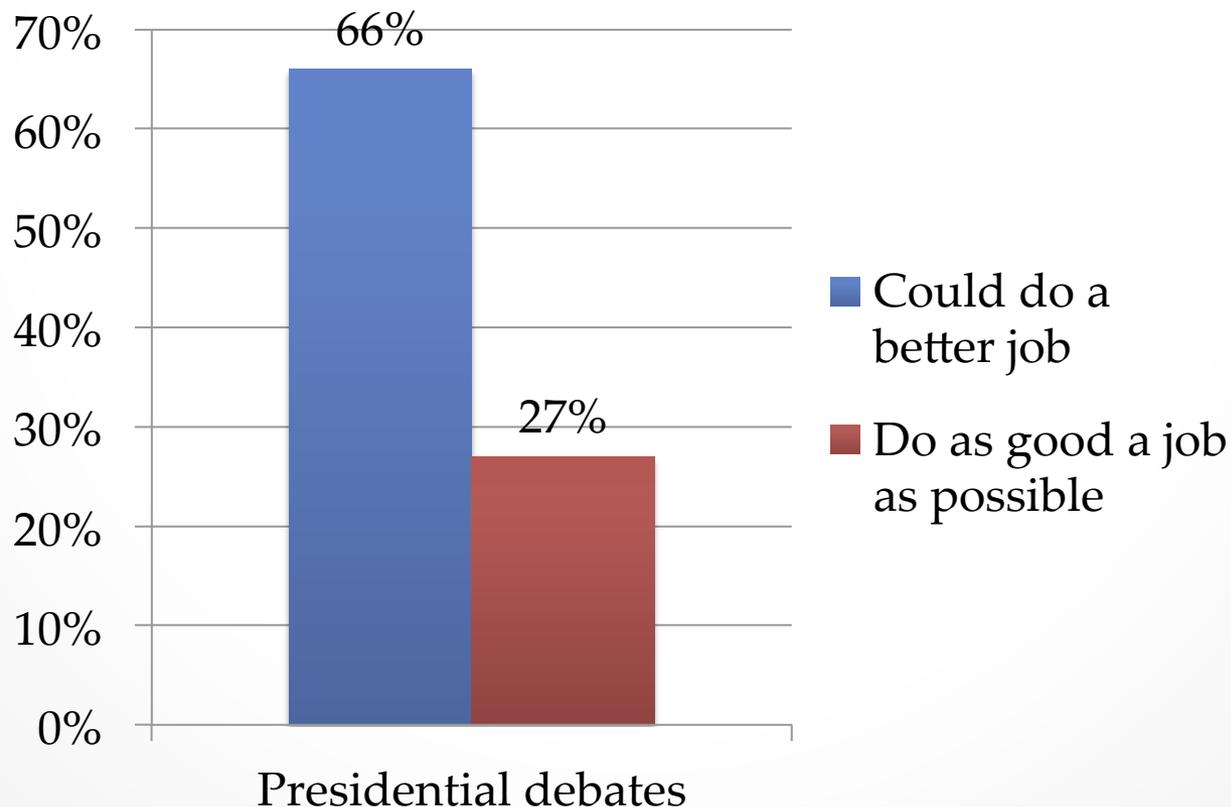
The Broken Political System

- Moreover, 83% believe that we need substantial political reforms as opposed to only 10% who think the system is working well.



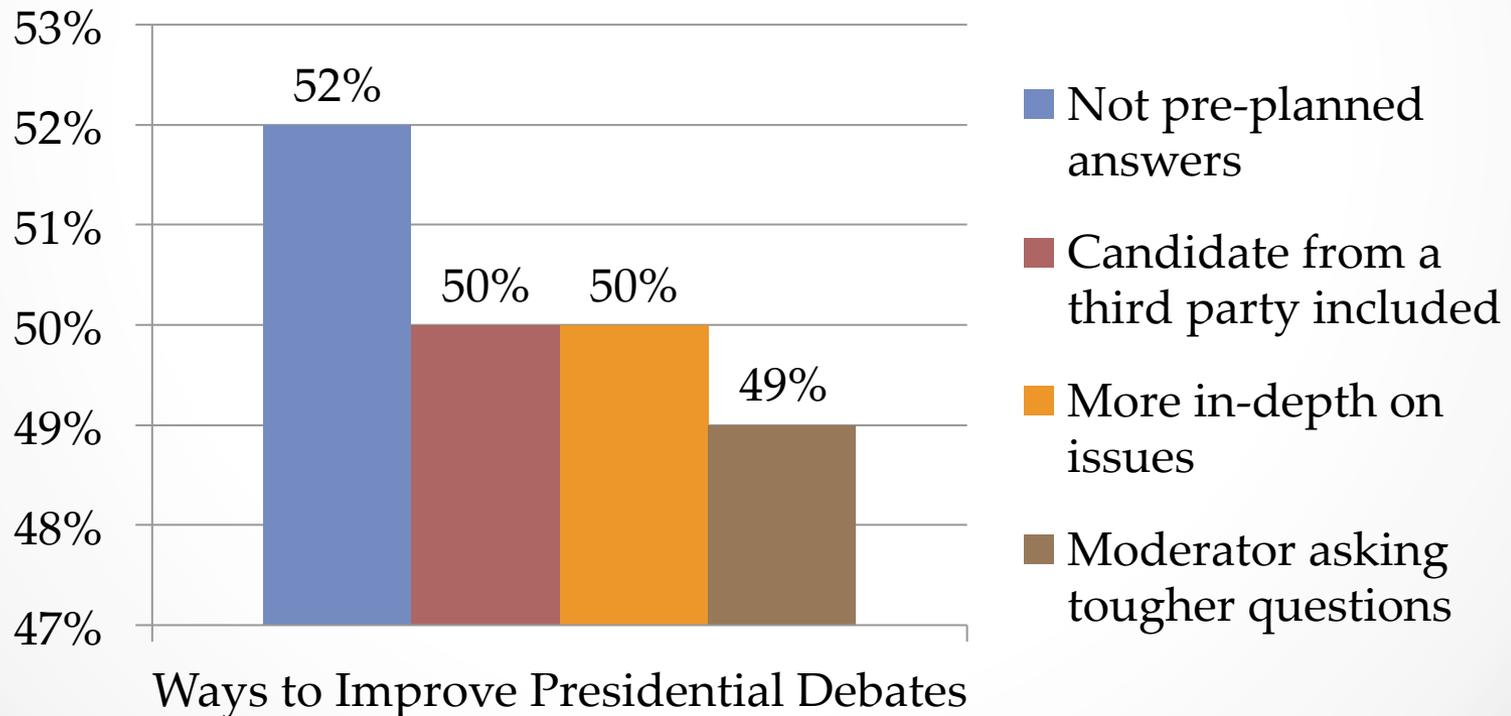
Presidential Debates

- While almost all of those surveyed are familiar with presidential debates, close to two-thirds (66%) feel the debates could do a better job informing the public.



Improving Presidential Debates

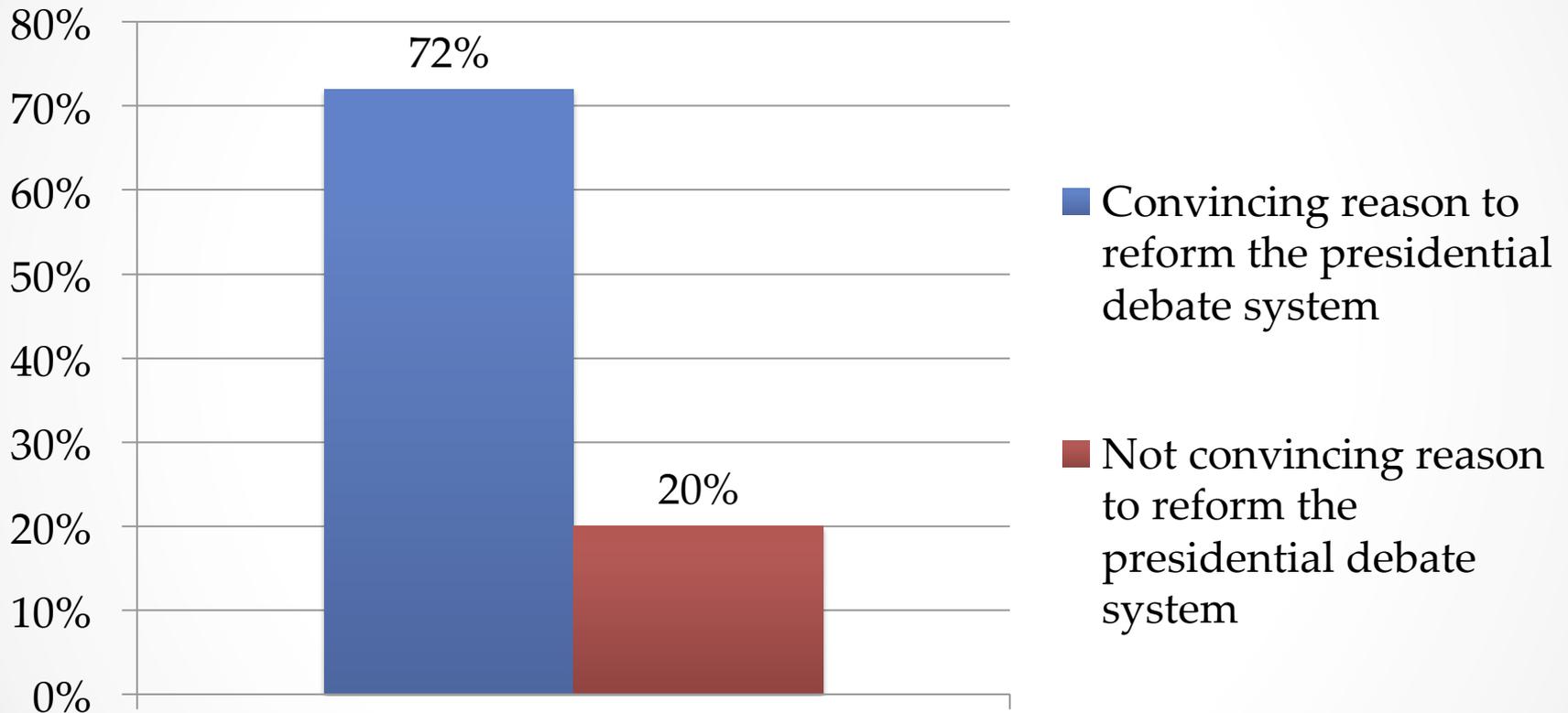
- A majority of voters (52%) say they would like it if the candidates' answers weren't pre-planned. And 50% of voters said they'd like to see a candidate from outside the two main parties and if the candidates went more in-depth on the issues.



Reforming Presidential Debates

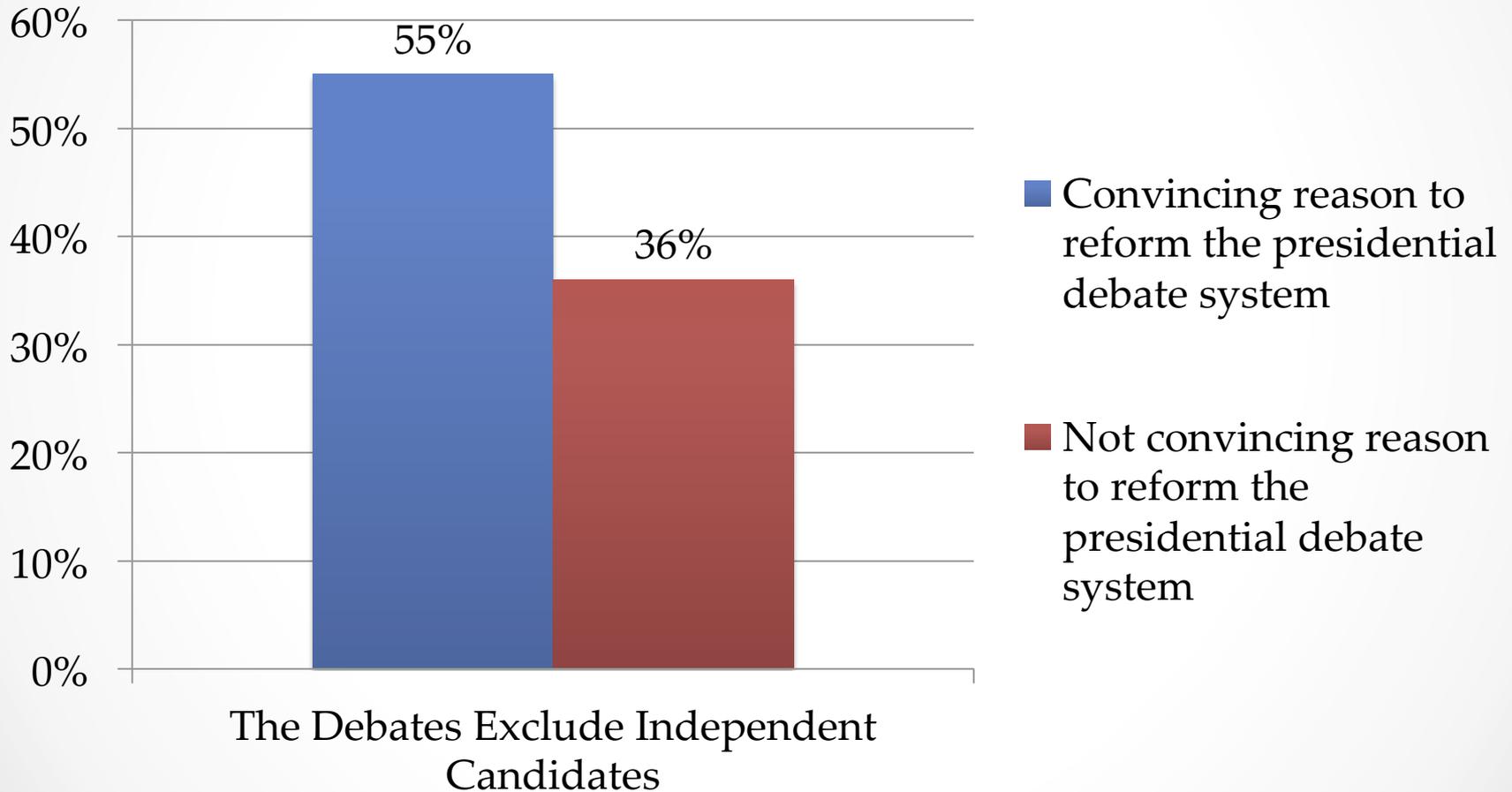
- We tested two arguments for reforming the presidential debate system to include candidates from outside the two parties. Both were convincing to a majority of voters.
- Seventy-two percent found Walter Cronkite's argument that the debates actually "sabotage the electoral process" and "defy meaningful discourse" a convincing reason to reform the presidential debate system.
- Fifty-five percent found the fact that the current Co-Chair of the Commission on Presidential Debates has said that the goal of the debates is to build up the main two parties to be a convincing reason to reform the presidential debate system.

Reforming Presidential Debates



The Debates “Sabotage the Electoral Process” and “Defy Meaningful Discourse”

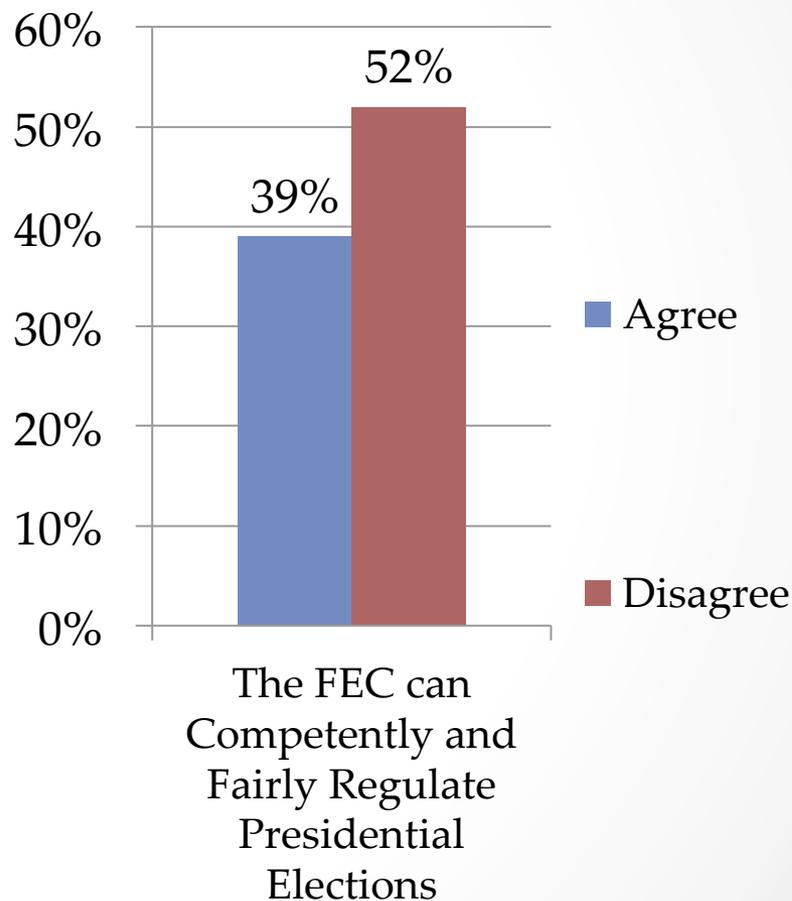
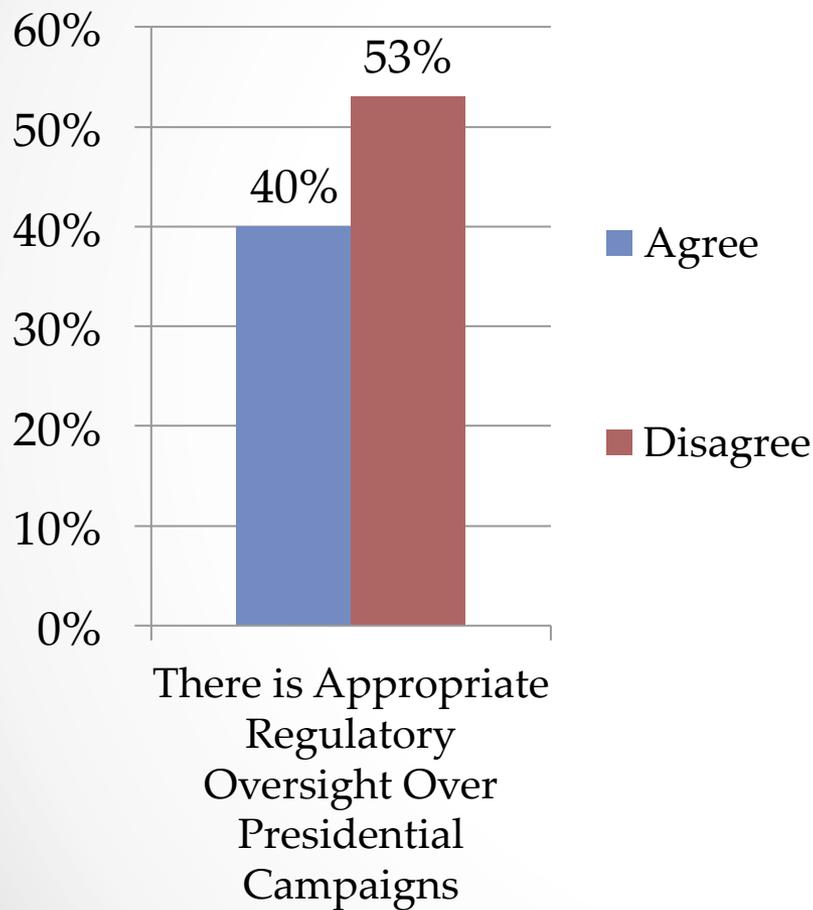
Reforming Presidential Debates



Reforming Presidential Campaigns and Elections

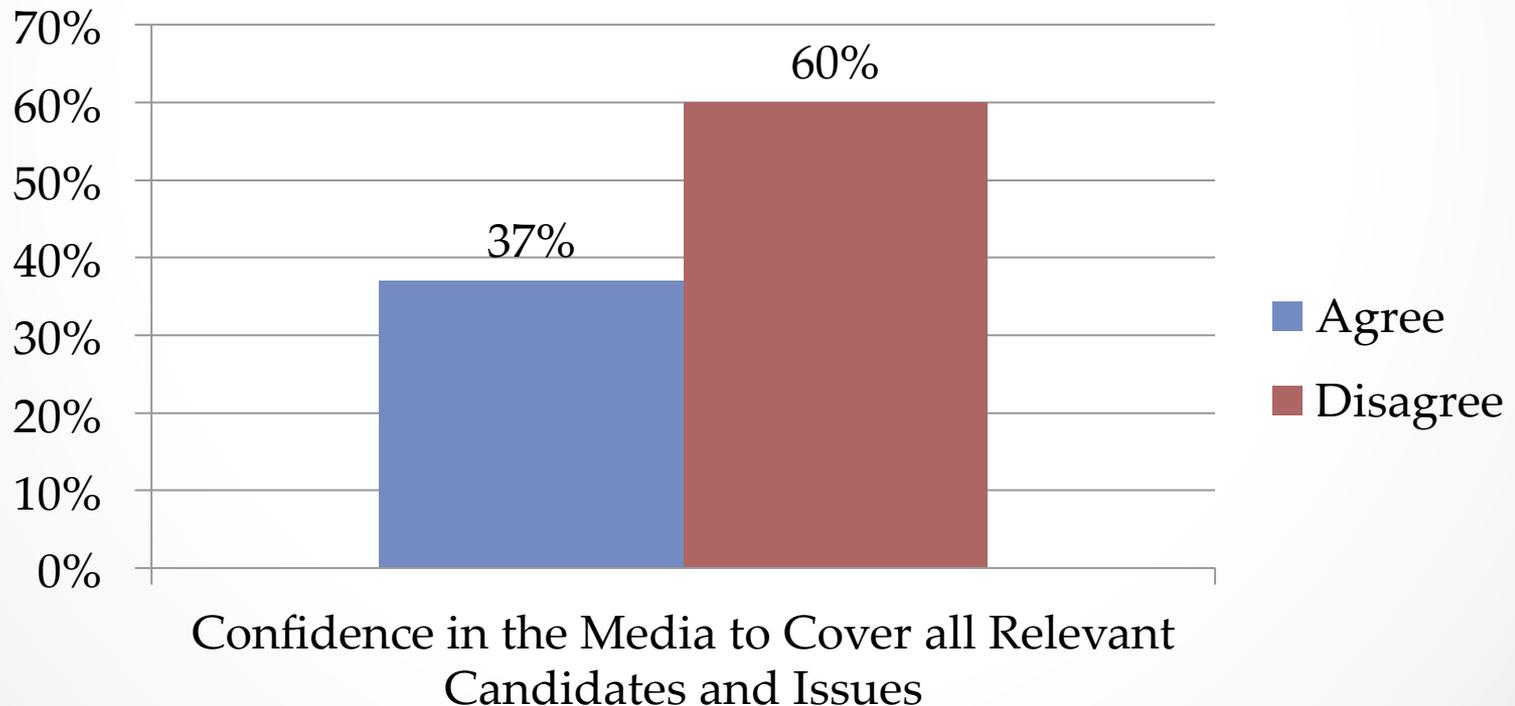
- Debates aren't the only problem: **voters feel that the campaigns and elections themselves need to be reformed.**
- A majority of voters (53%) do not believe that there is appropriate regulatory oversight of presidential campaigns or think that they are conducted with an eye towards fairness.
- And 52% of voters do not have confidence in the FEC to competently and fairly regulate presidential elections.

Reforming Presidential Campaigns and Elections



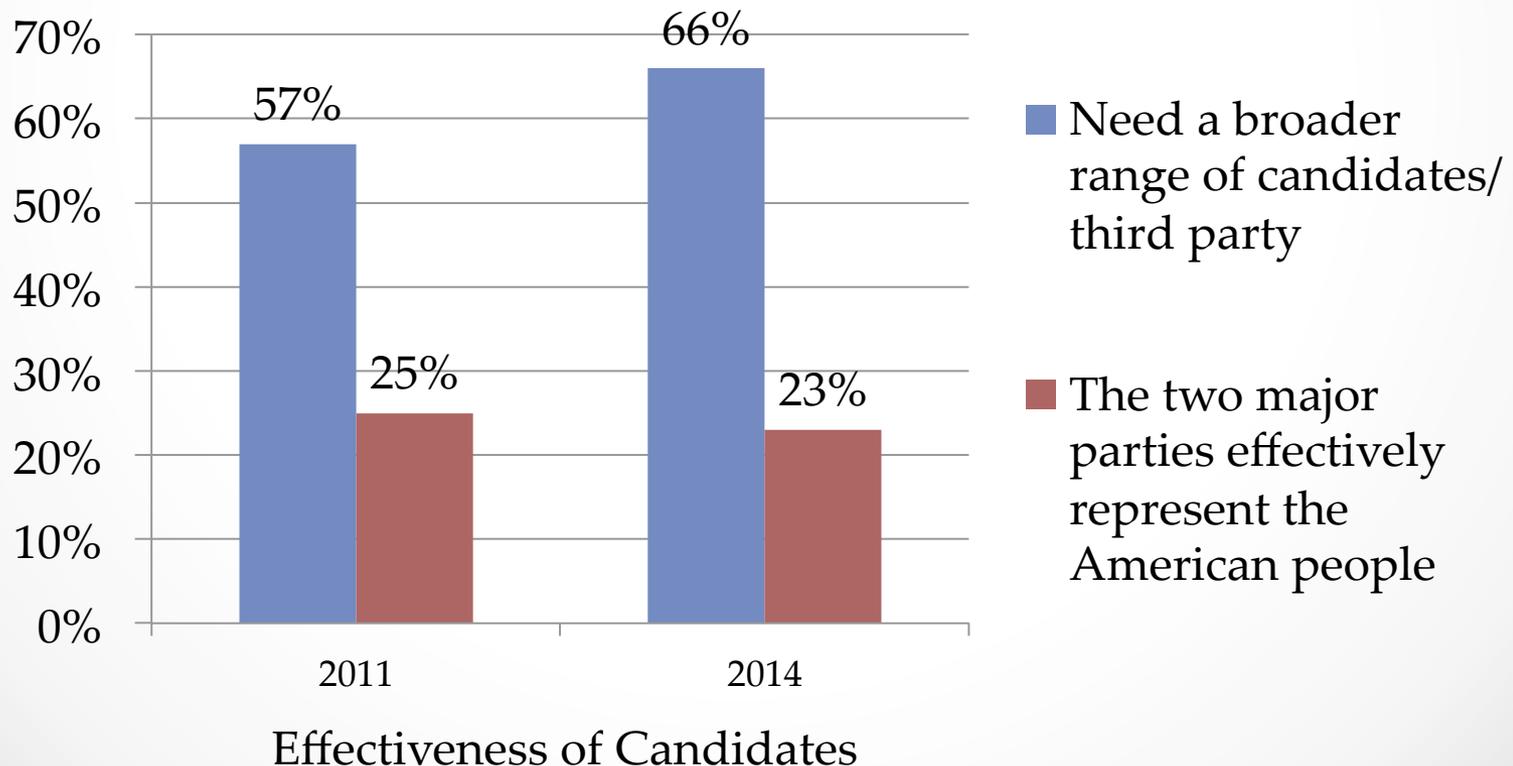
Low Confidence in the Media

- We asked respondents if they have confidence that the media will provide good coverage of all relevant candidates and issues during the next presidential election and found that 60% did not.

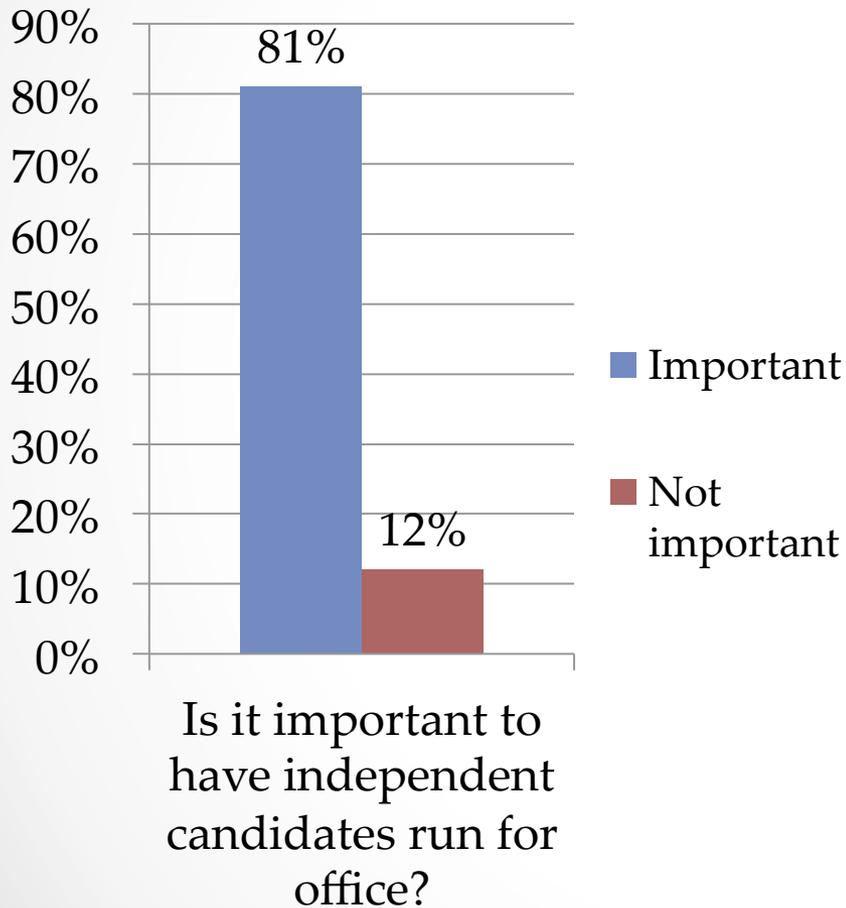


Americans Want Change

- The vast majority of voters do not think candidates from the two major parties effectively represent the American people. Sixty-six percent of voters say we need a broader range of candidates while only 23% believe the main two parties represent the American people, up from 57% in 2011.



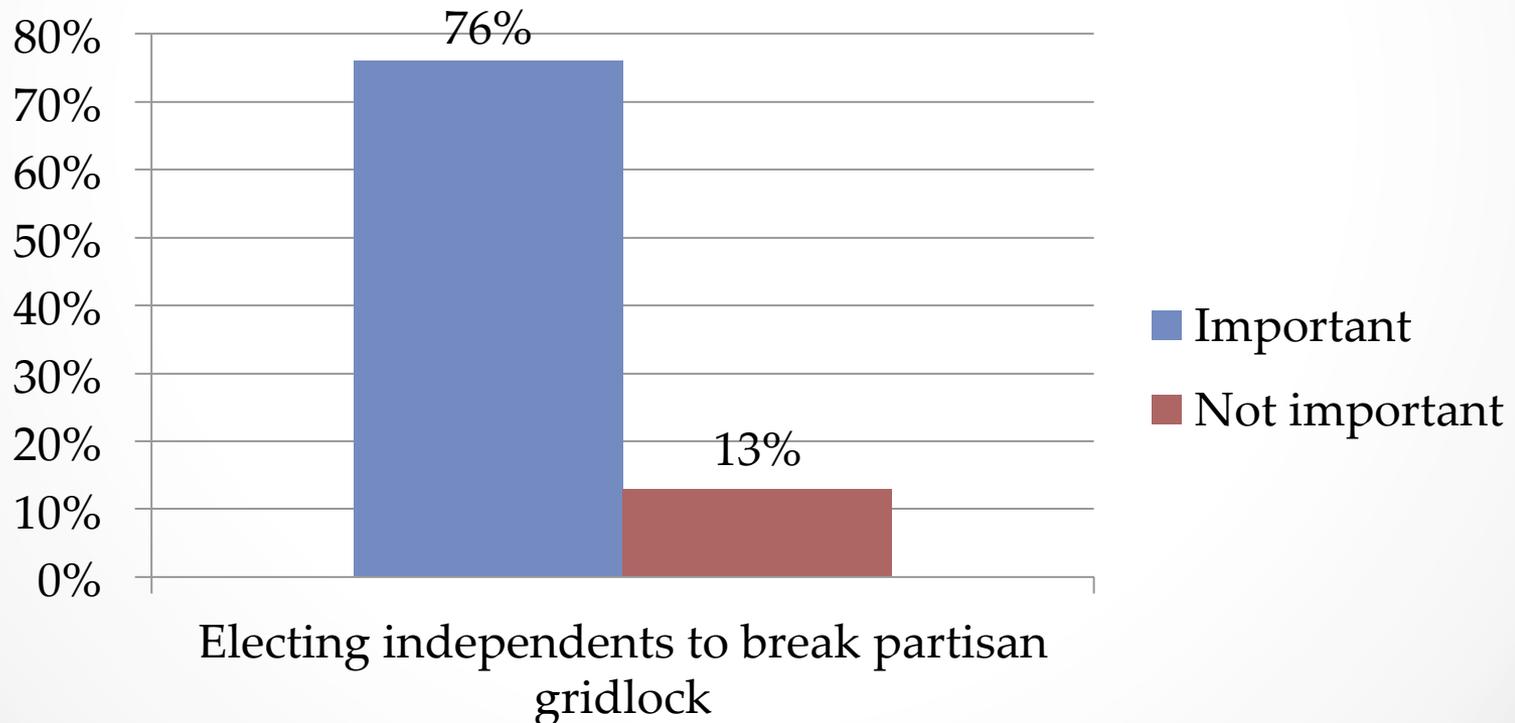
Voters Want Independent Candidates to Run for Office



- It is important to a strong majority (81%) of the American people to have independent candidates run for office.

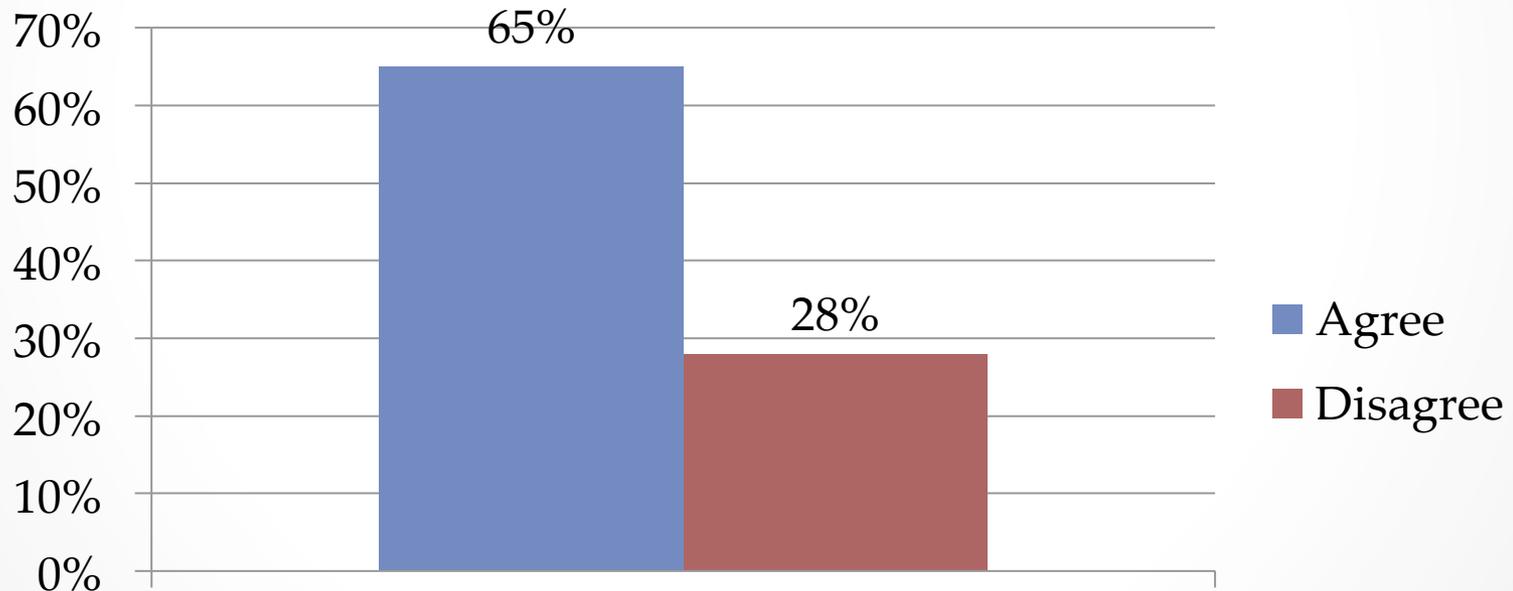
Independents Can Break Partisan Gridlock

- Over three quarters of voters (76%) believe it is important to elect independents to break partisan gridlock in Washington.



Independents Will Cover the Middle

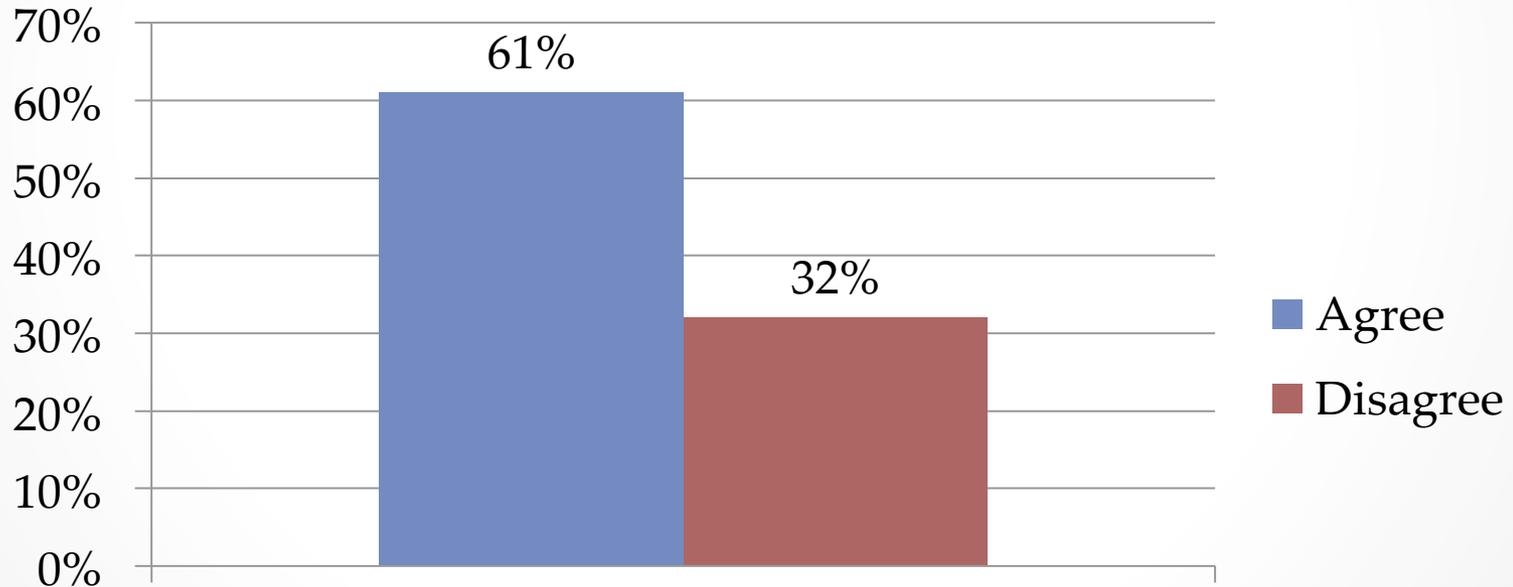
- Americans feel that Democrat candidates are too far left and Republican candidates too far to the right in presidential elections. They want the option to vote for an independent in the middle.



Would like the option to vote for an independent candidate in the middle of the political spectrum

Independents Will Cover the Middle

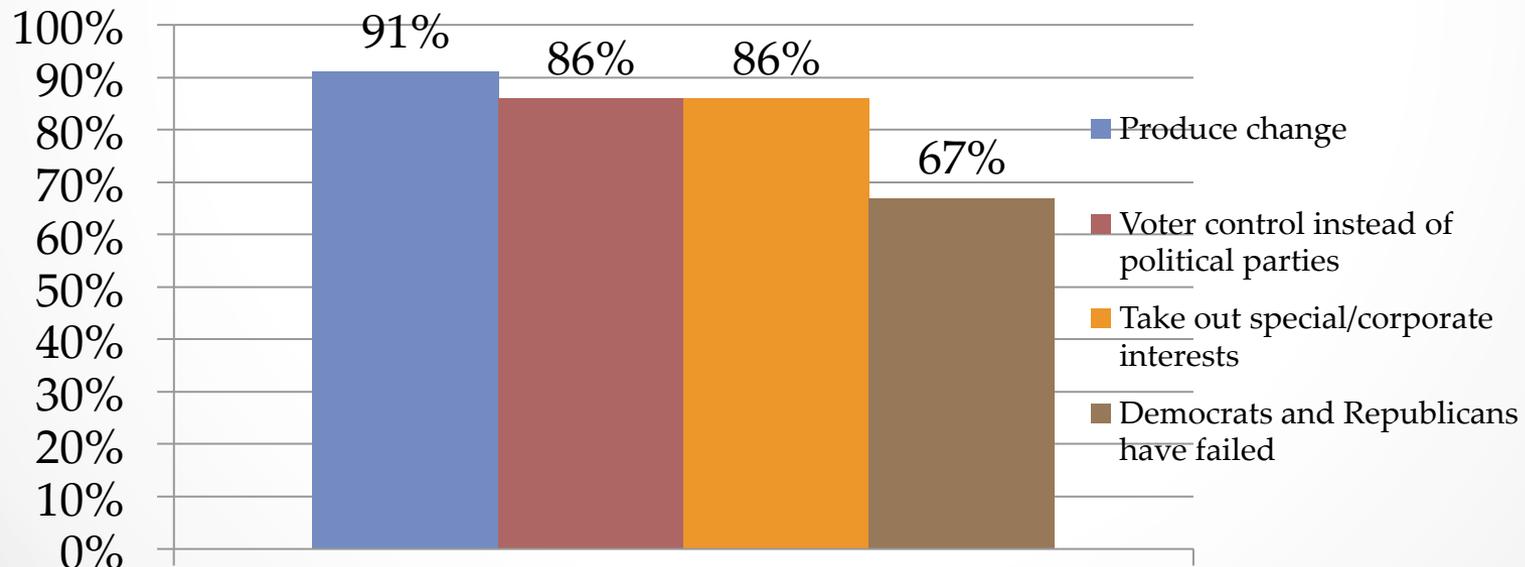
- The same is true in local and statewide office elections.



Would like the option to vote for an independent candidate in the middle of the political spectrum

Why Voters Want Independent Candidates

- Voters want to elect independents to produce change (91%); so that voters will have control over who gets into office instead of the parties (86%); and to get around special and corporate interests (86%).

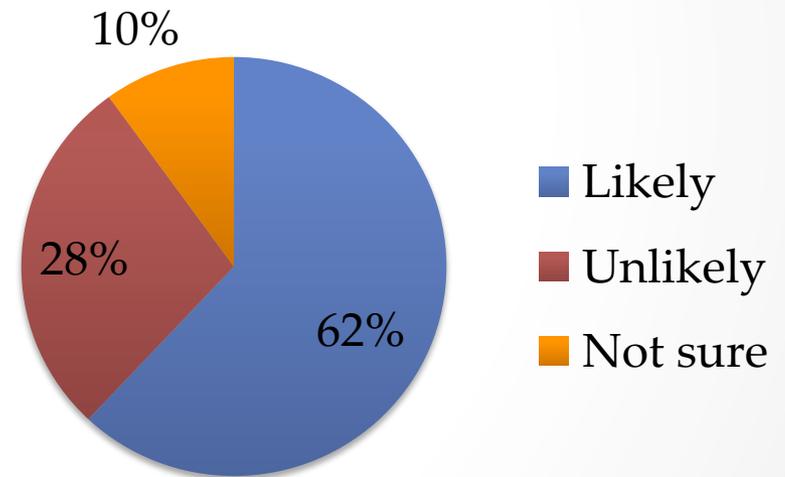


Reasons to vote for an independent

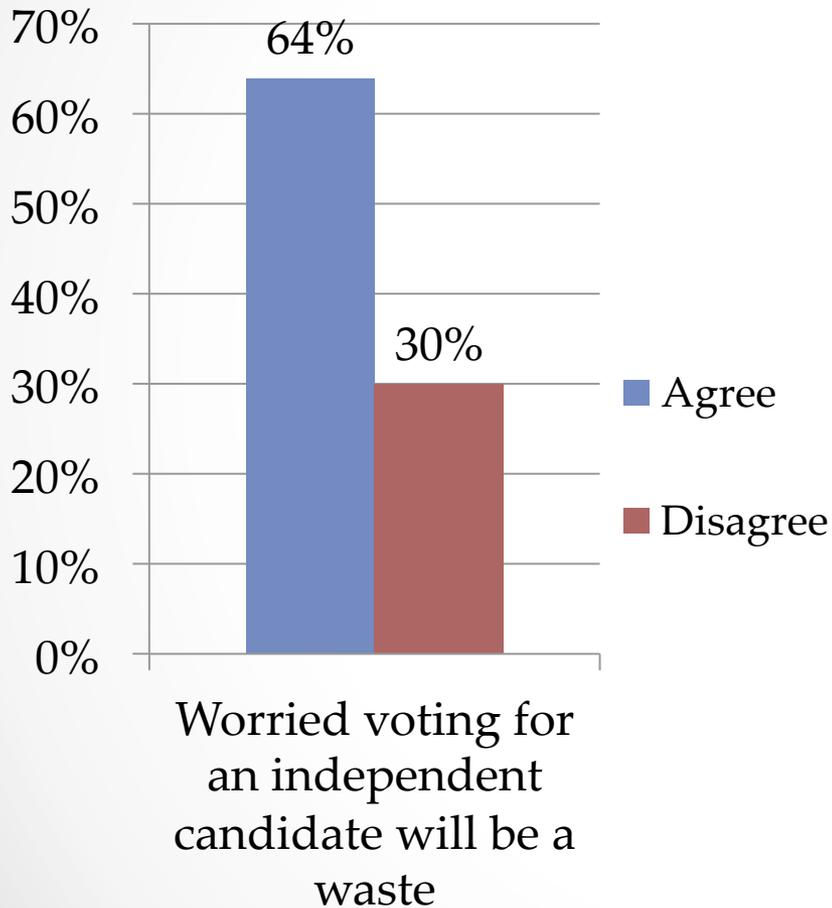
Voting for an Independent Candidate for President

- Sixty-two percent of voters are likely to vote for an independent candidate for president.

Vote for an Independent Candidate for President



But Voters are Worried About Wasting Their Vote on an Independent Candidate



- A majority of voters (64%) reported that they worry that voting for an independent candidate will be wasting their vote and they will get the party they like the least.

Strong Support for an Independent President

- Nevertheless, a plurality of voters (42%) think that having an independent president would improve the situation in Washington.
- Nearly two thirds (63%) think an independent president would be more or just as effective as a Democrat or Republican president.

Strong Support for Independent Candidates

