

## 13 Things That Define the New American Center

It is bigger than you think...

**ARE YOU IN THE NEW AMERICAN CENTER? TAKE OUR POLL AND FIND OUT >>  
PLUS: AN EXPLAINER AND WHERE YOUR POLITICIANS STAND**

By The Editors

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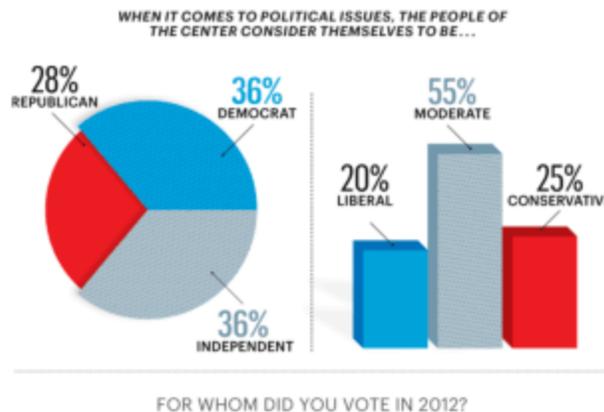


An **exclusive** Esquire-NBC News survey shows us that everything we are told about politics in America today—that there is no middle ground between left and right, blue and red, us and them—is wrong. The data, compiled by the Benenson Strategy Group (pollster for Obama for America '08 and '12) and Neil Newhouse of Public Opinion Strategies (lead pollster for Romney for President), show us there is a large group of American voters—even a majority—who make up a New American Center that is passionate, persuadable, and very real. They are merely waiting

for Washington to find them.

### **1. THE CENTER IS FILLED WITH PEOPLE WHO DO NOT CONSIDER THEMSELVES THE CENTER.**

When we talk about the Center, we are not talking about some shapeless, shifting mass of voters who just can't make up their minds about where they stand. They know what they stand for—nearly half the voters we identified in the Center even say they're liberals or conservatives. (Hell, 15 percent of those in the Center say they are supporters of the Tea Party.) However, their views don't neatly correspond to traditional definitions of liberal or conservative, creating a disjunction between where they think they are on the ideological spectrum and where they actually are.

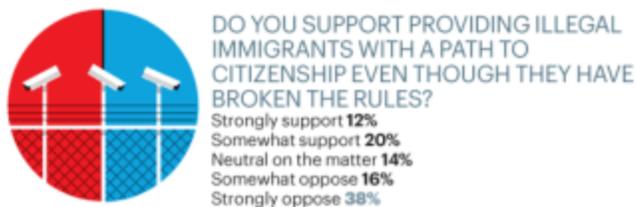
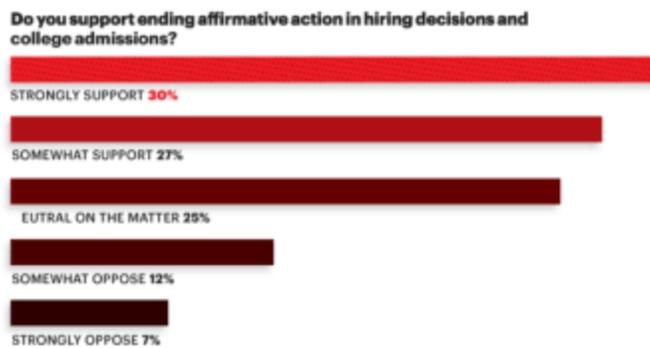
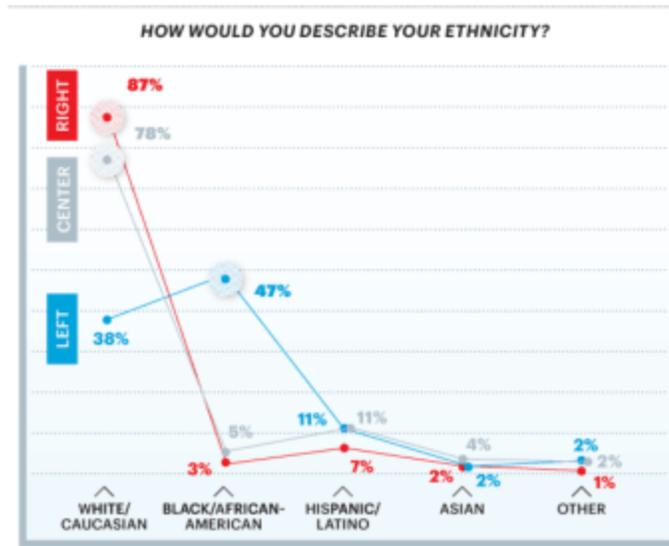


## MEANWHILE, ON THE LEFT AND RIGHT:

Among those on the Right, there is a much higher tendency to self-identify as very conservative on social issues (65%) compared with those on the Left who identify as very liberal on social issues (54%). The same numbers more or less apply on fiscal issues, with the Right more likely to describe themselves in extreme terms.

## 2. THE CENTER IS PRETTY WHITE. NOT AS WHITE AS THE FOLKS ALL THE WAY TO THE RIGHT, BUT STILL: PRETTY WHITE. AND THEY DON'T WANT TO HEAR ANY TALK OF "DIVERSITY."

Compared with voters who make up segments further to the left on the spectrum, the Center is much less ethnically diverse. Though it's impossible to attribute any direct causation, there also happens to be a clear lack of support in the Center for issues typically related to diversity.

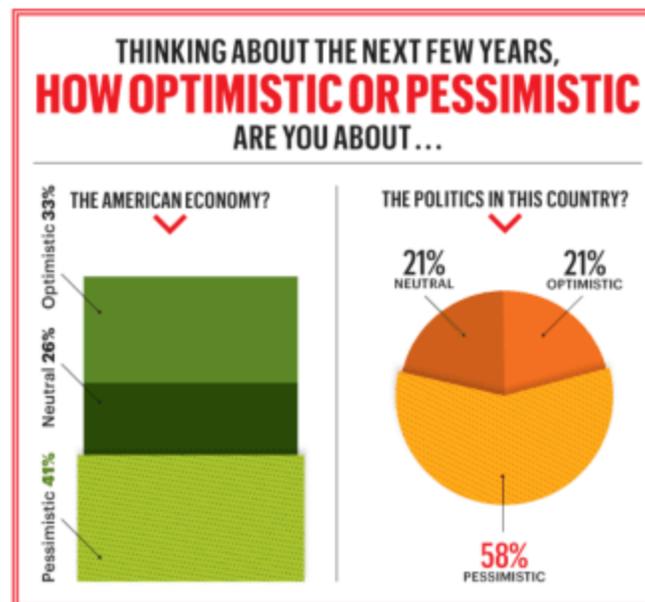
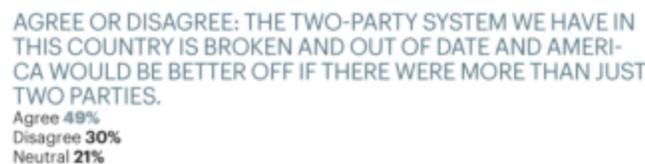
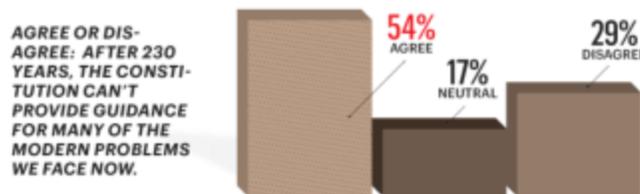


## MEANWHILE, ON THE LEFT AND RIGHT:

The Right is about 90 percent white across the board, while on the Left you've got two camps side by side: the secular segment (very white) and the religious (very nonwhite), meaning it's not quite right to think of the Left as an ideological Benetton ad. There are stark racial divisions, and only when the group is unified does it become diverse. The support for affirmative action and immigration reform on the Left is soft—a bare majority supports both causes—while the opposition from the Right is very strong.

### 3. THE CENTER DOESN'T MUCH LIKE HOW THINGS ARE GOING.

They're not sure how well the Constitution is aging. They don't much like the two-party system. And they don't care for politicians. What else you got, Washington?



## 4. THE CENTER TRUSTS DEMOCRATS (AND OPRAH) MORE THAN REPUBLICANS.

Eighteen percent of those in the Center name a Democratic figure as the person they trust most, including 9 percent who pick the president. By comparison, 13 percent name a Republican leader, and there are no active GOP politicians who receive more than 1 percent, save one: Chris Christie. This could reflect the absence of a unifying national leader in the Republican Party. Or, you know, could be something else.



### DEMOCRATIC FIGURES

**18%**  
*Including:*  
 Barack Obama 9%  
 Hillary Clinton 4%  
 Bill Clinton 3%  
 Other Democratic political figures 2%

### REPUBLICAN POLITICAL FIGURES

13%  
*Including:*  
 George W. Bush 2%  
 Chris Christie 2%  
 Mitt Romney 1%  
 Sarah Palin 1%  
 Rand Paul 1%  
 Ron Paul 1%  
 Other GOP 5%

### OPRAH WINFREY

6%

### ACTORS/ACTRESSES

7%  
*Including:*  
 Tom Hanks 1%

### CONSERVATIVE PUNDITS

3%  
*Including:*  
 Bill O'Reilly 1%  
 Rush Limbaugh 0%

### LIBERAL PUNDITS

3%  
*Including:*  
 Jon Stewart 1%  
 Stephen Colbert 1%

### ELLEN DEGENERES

2%

### BUSINESS LEADERS

3%

### RELIGIOUS FIGURES

5%  
*Including:*  
 The pope 3%  
 Billy Graham 1%

### NEWS PERSONALITIES

6%  
*Including:*  
 Anderson Cooper 1%  
 Brian Williams 1%

### MILITARY LEADERS

4%  
*Including:*  
 Colin Powell 1%

### NO ONE

13%

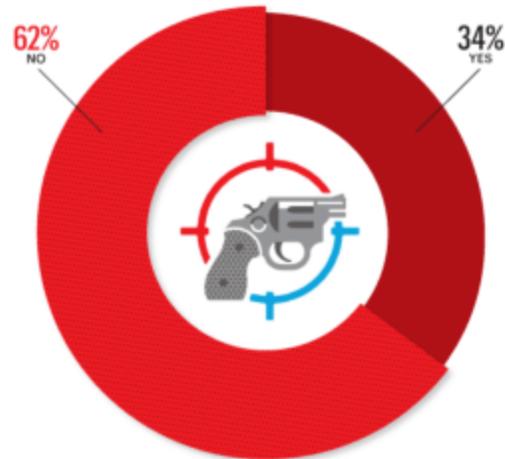
## **MEANWHILE, ON THE LEFT AND RIGHT:**

On the Left, it's Obama by a mile—not even the Clintons come close. But among the Right, Billy Graham (at 7 percent) outpolls everyone on the list, with the next three highest tied at 4 percent: the pope, Bill O'Reilly, and George W. Bush. (Among active politicians, the Right likes Rand Paul best.)

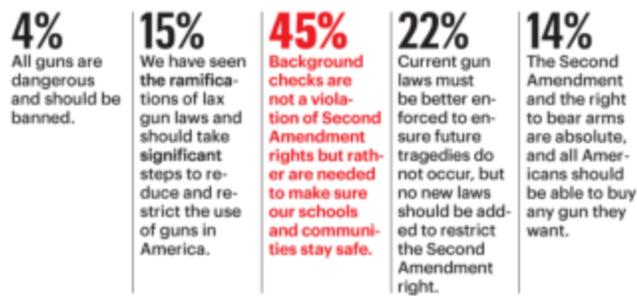
## **5. PLEASE DON'T TALK TO THE CENTER ABOUT GOD AND GUNS.**

Religion is not a major part of the Center's life, and it firmly believes that religion has no place in the public sphere. Meanwhile: Even though about a third of those in the Center own guns, an overwhelming plurality have no problem with background checks.

DO YOU OWN A GUN OR DOES SOMEONE IN YOUR HOUSEHOLD OWN A GUN?



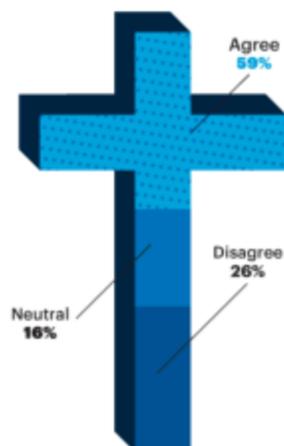
WHICH STATEMENT BEST DESCRIBES YOUR VIEW ON THE ISSUE OF GUN CONTROL?



Agree or disagree: Religion is important to me and I regularly make time to attend services and pray.

Agree 29%  
Disagree 55%  
Neutral 16%

AGREE OR DISAGREE: CHURCHES AND RELIGIOUS ORGANIZATIONS SHOULD HAVE NO ROLE IN POLITICS.



## MEANWHILE, ON THE LEFT AND RIGHT:

The Center is less religious than the Right, and—surprise!—it's less religious than the Left, too, and here's why: Members of the Gospel Left (the ones who broke 99 to 1 for Obama in 2012) are second only to the Righteous Right for how important religion is to them. Unlike their fellow believers on the Right, though, more than half of the Gospel Left feels that religion should not play a role in public life.

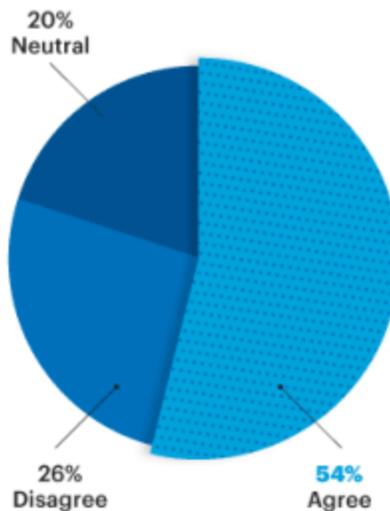
## 6. THE CENTER BELIEVES THE GOVERNMENT SHOULD HELP ONLY THOSE WHO REALLY NEED HELP.

The Center strongly favors government intervention that ensures everyone has their basic needs met (such as food and health care) and has a fair shot at earning a decent living.

**Agree or disagree: Government should guarantee that people get equal pay for equal work, regardless of their gender or race.**  
Agree 73%  
Disagree 15%  
Neutral 12%



**AGREE OR DISAGREE: WE NEED THE GOVERNMENT TO MAINTAIN PROGRAMS LIKE FOOD STAMPS, WELFARE, AND MEDICAID SO THAT PEOPLE WHO HIT HARD TIMES DON'T FALL THROUGH THE CRACKS.**



## **MEANWHILE, ON THE LEFT AND RIGHT:**

On the Left, there is intense and broad support for these issues, but there are huge divisions on the Right. The religious segment overwhelmingly supports all of these issues, while the Talk Radio Heads oppose all but equal pay, and between the two, the Right nets out to soft opposition to raising the minimum wage (with 49 percent against, 39 percent for) and safety-net programs (43 percent against, 40 percent for).

## **7. ...BUT THE CENTER WOULD REALLY PREFER THAT THE GOVERNMENT LEAVE THE REST OF US ALONE.**

Especially when it comes to our personal lives, though that live-and-let-live mind-set has limits. Though a clear majority of the Center is strongly in favor of marriage equality, half also registers concerns about changing the definition of marriage. There is also support for abortion—but mostly during the first three months.



## ABORTION?

- Should be prohibited in all circumstances. **3%**
- Should be legal only to save the life of the mother. **4%**
- Should be legal only in cases of rape or incest, or to save the life of the mother. **29%**
- Should be legal for any reason, but not after the first three months of pregnancy. **36%**
- Should be legal for any reason, but not after the first six months of pregnancy. **15%**
- Should be allowed at any time during the woman's pregnancy for any reason. **12%**



## LEGALIZE MARIJUANA?

- STRONGLY SUPPORT 34%**
- SOMEWHAT SUPPORT 18%**
- NEUTRAL ON THE MATTER 15%**
- SOMEWHAT OPPOSE 13%**
- STRONGLY OPPOSE 20%**

### AGREE OR DISAGREE: GOVERNMENT SHOULD NOT LEGISLATE HOW AMERICANS CAN BEHAVE IN THEIR PERSONAL LIVES, SUCH AS OWNING GUNS, ABORTION, MARRIAGE, AND MARIJUANA.

**54%**  
AGREE

**18%**  
NEUTRAL

**28%**  
DISAGREE



### WHICH STATEMENT BEST DESCRIBES YOUR VIEW ON THE ISSUE OF GAY MARRIAGE?

Marriage is between two people who love each other and are committed to each other, regardless of whether they are men or women.

**44%**

Gay marriage is a civil-rights issue. Preventing gay people from getting married is discrimination.

**11%**

Marriage is an issue for each state to decide, and if some states want to recognize gay marriage or other states

want to prohibit it, then that is their right.

**9%**

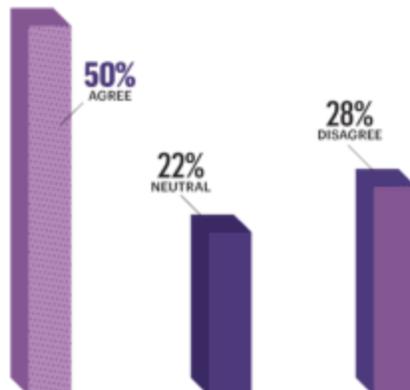
Marriage is between a man and a woman, but there is no reason same-sex partners cannot have civil unions that give them the same legal rights as married couples.

**23%**

Marriage has always been between a man and a woman, and that definition should not be changed.

**13%**

### AGREE OR DISAGREE: MARRIAGE AND FAMILY ARE IMPORTANT INSTITUTIONS THAT SHAPE OUR CULTURE AND OUR COUNTRY AND WE NEED TO BE CAREFUL BEFORE WE CHANGE THE DEFINITION.

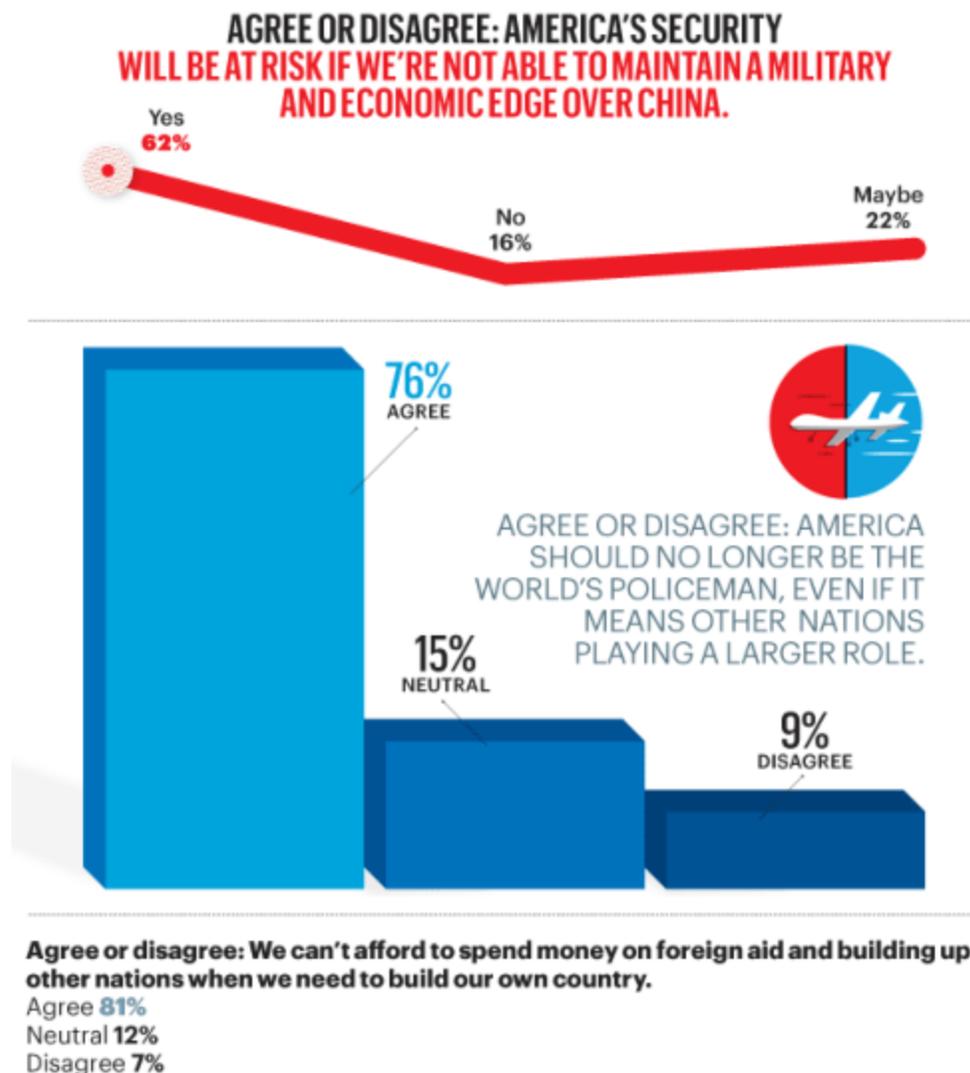


## MEANWHILE, ON THE LEFT AND RIGHT:

There are moderating forces within both camps: The relatively conservative social views of the Gospel Left balance out the Bleeding Hearts' strong progressive views, while the Talk Radio Heads, most of whom don't want the government involved in our personal lives, balance out the intense pro-life, anti-gay-marriage positions of the Righteous Right.

## 8. THE CENTER HAS HAD IT WITH THE REST OF THE WORLD.

... And doesn't much want to use American resources to fix things overseas when we have problems at home. However: ix-nay on bringing up ina-Chay.

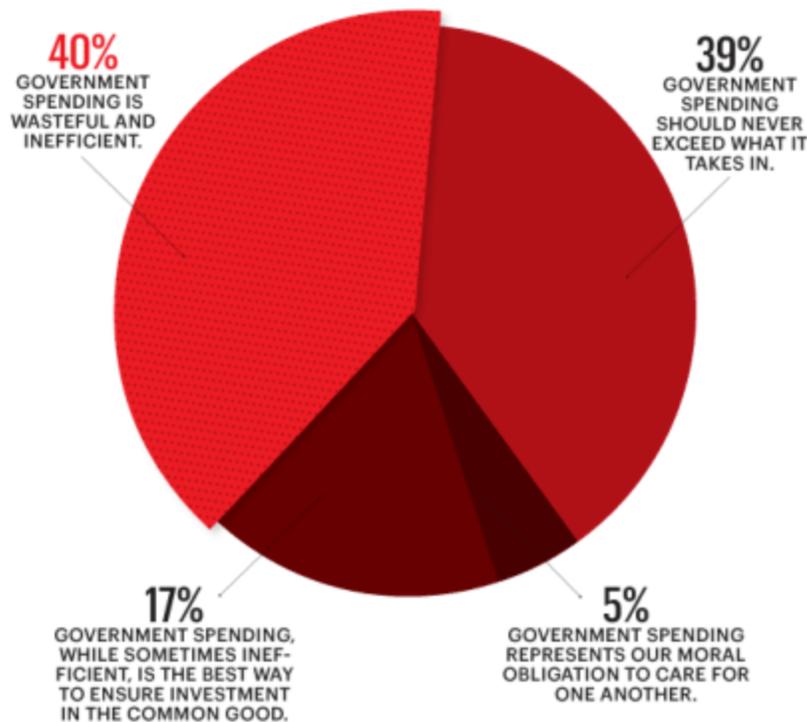


## MEANWHILE, ON THE LEFT AND RIGHT:

This is the one thing that the Left, the Right, and the Center agree on, with one exception: The Center is even less likely than either the Left or the Right to believe that America has a responsibility to maintain peace in the world.

## 9. THE CENTER WANTS THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT TO SPEND LESS, GO EASY ON REGULATION.

WHICH STATEMENT BEST DESCRIBES YOUR VIEW ON THE ISSUE OF GOVERNMENT SPENDING?



SHOULD AMERICANS AMEND THE CONSTITUTION TO REQUIRE THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT TO BALANCE ITS BUDGET EACH YEAR?

Strongly support **50%**  
Somewhat support **27%**  
Neutral on the matter **11%**  
Somewhat oppose **7%**  
Strongly oppose **4%**

Which statement best describes your view on the issue of Wall Street reform?

Financial markets left unregulated will wreck the American economy. **35%**  
Financial reform should be used only to curb abuses, and shouldn't restrict banks' and investors' ability to make profits. **42%**  
Financial reform undermines free-market capitalism and prevents growth and prosperity. **12%**  
Financial reform is another indicator of government overreach into activity it has no right to regulate. **11%**

## MEANWHILE, ON THE LEFT AND RIGHT:

There is significant tension on the Left regarding a balanced-budget amendment, with the secular Left split on an amendment while the religious strongly support it. Similarly, there is tension on the Right when it comes to financial regulation, with the religious Right taking a slightly dimmer view of financial markets than the secular.

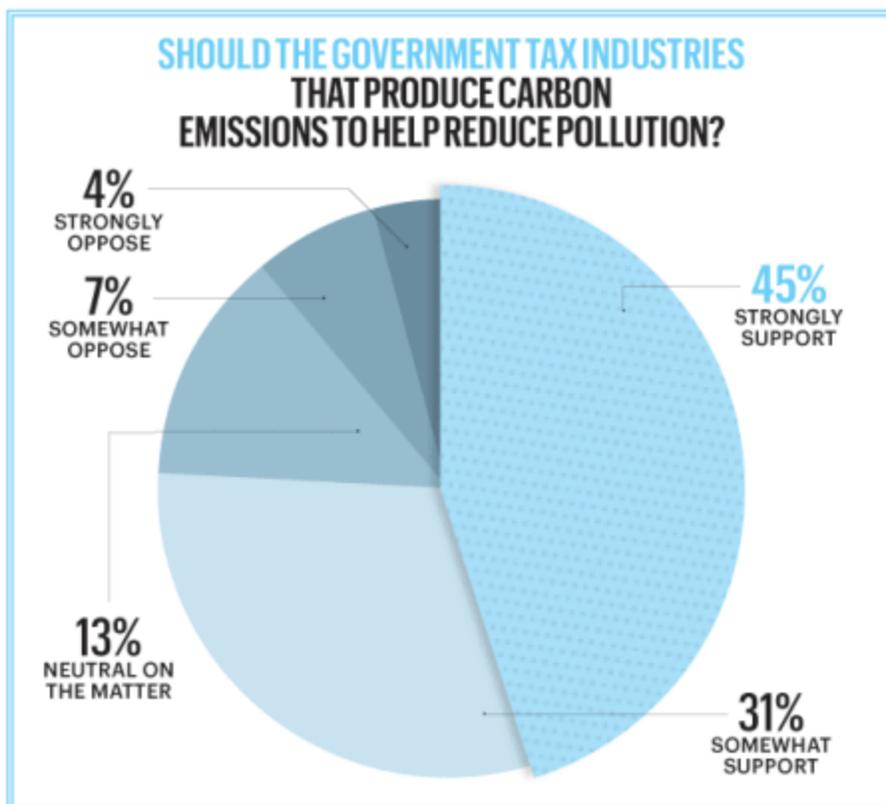
## 10. THE CENTER IS PRETTY OKAY WITH RAISING TAXES ON THE RICH AND ON POLLUTERS.

The Center wants a tax system and an economy that ensures the wealthy pay their fair share and polluters pay for their mess, and they want the revenue that generates to be spent fairly and wisely—not just handed out to people who aren't accountable or funneled to wasteful projects.



### DO YOU SUPPORT RAISING TAXES ON AMERICANS WHO MAKE MORE THAN \$1 MILLION A YEAR?

Strongly support **59%**  
Somewhat support **19%**  
Neutral on the matter **7%**  
Somewhat oppose **7%**  
Strongly oppose **8%**



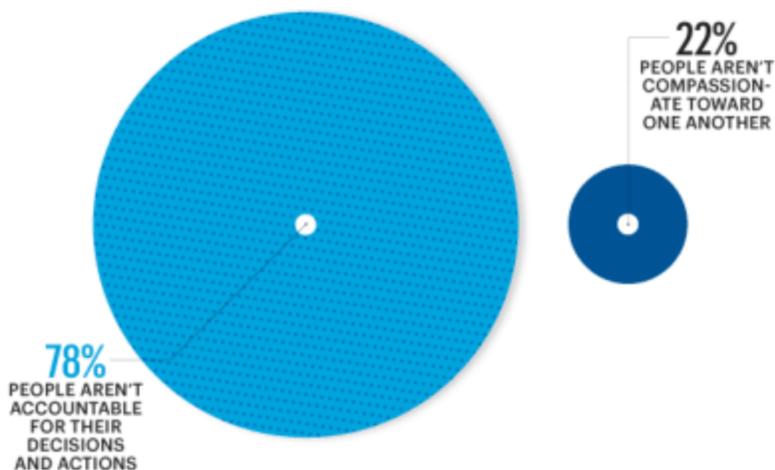
## MEANWHILE, ON THE LEFT AND RIGHT:

Contrary to what you might have heard, the Right as a whole supports raising taxes on millionaires and taxing polluters, but just barely, and owing to the split between the Righteous Right (who overwhelmingly support the measures) and the Talk Radio Heads (who oppose). The Left is very intense in its support of both.

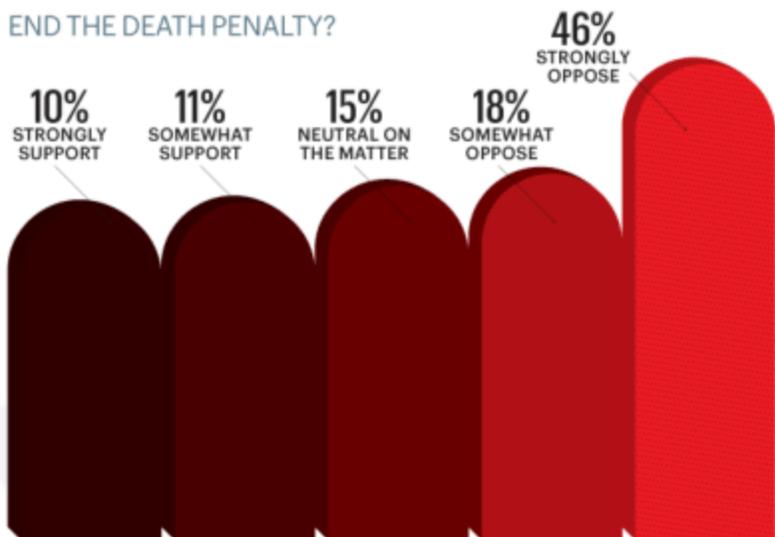
## 11. DRILL, KILL, AND STOP COMPLAINING: THE CENTER IS NOT SOFT.

**Should the government expand exploration of U.S.-based oil and gas reserves to lessen dependence on foreign oil?**

Strongly support **54%**  
Somewhat support **26%**  
Neutral on the matter **10%**  
Somewhat oppose **7%**  
Strongly oppose **3%**



**END THE DEATH PENALTY?**



## 12. THE CENTER NEEDS A DRINK—PROBABLY A BEER. AND THEY RECYCLE!

**Which of the following alcoholic drinks are you most likely to drink when you go out?**

Wine **21%**  
 Beer **31%**  
 Clear spirits such as vodka or gin **15%**  
 Dark spirits such as bourbon or whiskey **7%**  
 I do not drink alcohol. **26%**

**Which of the following sports do you most enjoy watching on television?**

Major league baseball **26%**  
 Pro football **46%**  
 College football **19%**  
 Pro basketball **10%**  
 College basketball **8%**  
 Hockey **9%**  
 Nascar **9%**  
 Golf **6%**  
 Tennis **3%**  
 MLS soccer **1%**  
 International soccer **3%**  
 I do not watch sports on television. **21%**



### HEY, CENTER: WHAT'D YOU DO LAST WEEKEND?

Watched TV shows or movies live on TV. **86%**

Used social media such as Facebook, Twitter, or Instagram. **67%**

Read a magazine or newspaper. **65%**

Watched TV or a movie using TiVo, DVR, Netflix, et al. **56%**

Played a game online or on a phone or tablet. **55%**

Dined at a restaurant. **54%**

Read blogs or Web sites. **54%**

Read a book. **47%**

Shopped at Walmart or Costco. **44%**

Played sports, exercised. **35%**

Went shopping for fun. **34%**

Had sex. **34%**

Played video games. **31%**

Traveled out of town. **25%**

Went to church. **17%**

Had a fight with a spouse or family member. **12%**



**WHICH OF THE FOLLOWING BEST DESCRIBES THE RECYCLING YOU DO AT HOME?**

I RECYCLE AT HOME BECAUSE IT IS REQUIRED. **5%**

I RECYCLE AT HOME OUT OF HABIT. **11%**

I RECYCLE AT HOME BECAUSE I DON'T LIKE TO WASTE. **22%**

I RECYCLE AT HOME BECAUSE I FEEL LIKE I AM DOING SOMETHING GOOD FOR THE ENVIRONMENT. **47%**

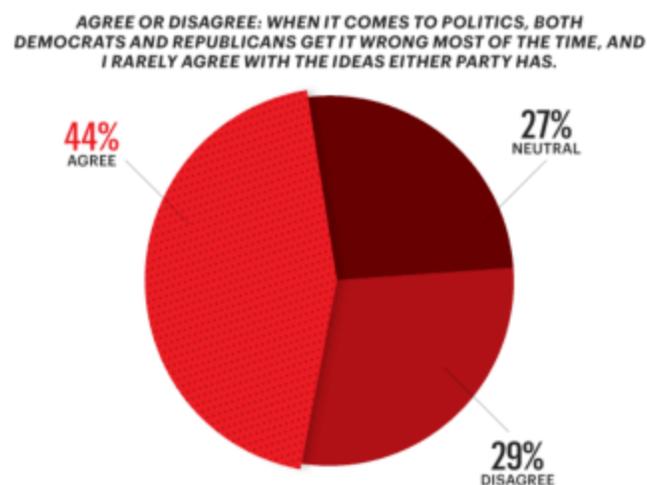
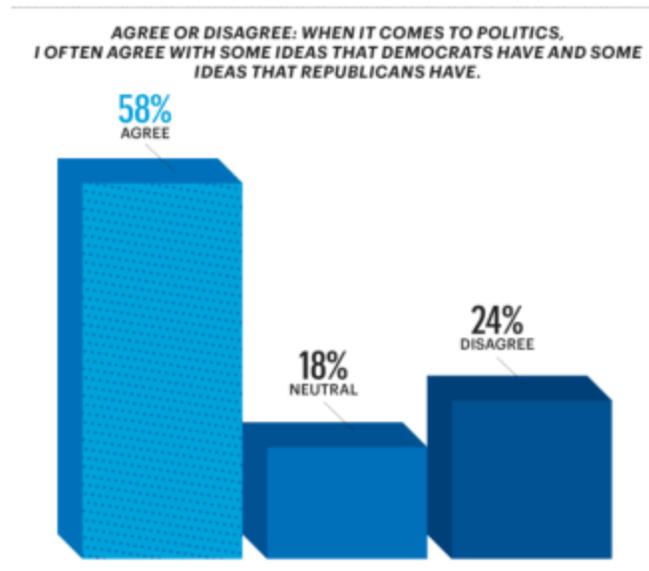
I DO NOT RECYCLE AT HOME. **15%**

## MEANWHILE, ON THE LEFT AND RIGHT:

If you are on the Left, you are less likely to have had sex, or read a book, than if you are on the Right.

### 13. THE CENTER IS UP FOR GRABS.

Nearly two thirds of the Center agree that when it comes to politics, they often agree with some ideas that Democrats have and some ideas that Republicans have. There is not a strong consensus as to whether the Republicans or Democrats "get it wrong most of the time" or that their ideas rarely represent the Center's view, with 44 percent agreeing (just 24 percent strongly agree) and 29 percent disagreeing. What's more, more than one in three in the Center don't feel like there is anybody in Washington expressing for them. They are waiting to be found.



## **MEANWHILE, ON THE LEFT AND RIGHT:**

Those on the Left are the most confident that someone in Washington is expressing their viewpoints, while among the Right (the Righteous Right in particular), more than half feel no one is speaking up for them. The Right, too, seems up for grabs.

## **14. Are You In the New American Center?**

### **METHODOLOGY**

The Benenson Strategy Group and Public Opinion Strategies conducted a nationwide survey from August 5 through 11, 2013, with 2,410 registered voters. They applied a k-means clustering technique to group respondents into "segments" based on attitudinal and demographic commonalities and like-mindedness. They conducted eight iterations of the clustering to optimize the differentiating variables that feed into the segmentation methodology. The segments were formed based on commonalities across their demographics; psychographics; political, social, and economic values; and lifestyles. The pollsters selected the segmentation solution that yielded the most unique and differentiated clusters.

***EDITOR'S NOTE:** Based on respondents' answers to our survey, the statisticians and analysts identified eight distinct ideological segments within the U. S. population, each with its own defining values, beliefs, and lifestyles. Among those eight segments, there are four that occupy what the survey has determined is the center of the ideological spectrum. Unless otherwise indicated, each of the answers to the survey questions reflects the general consensus position of the center. For clarity, some questions have been adjusted and some answers aggregated from the original survey.*