Florida Southern College
Center for Polling and Policy Research

Reforming American Political Parties Poll

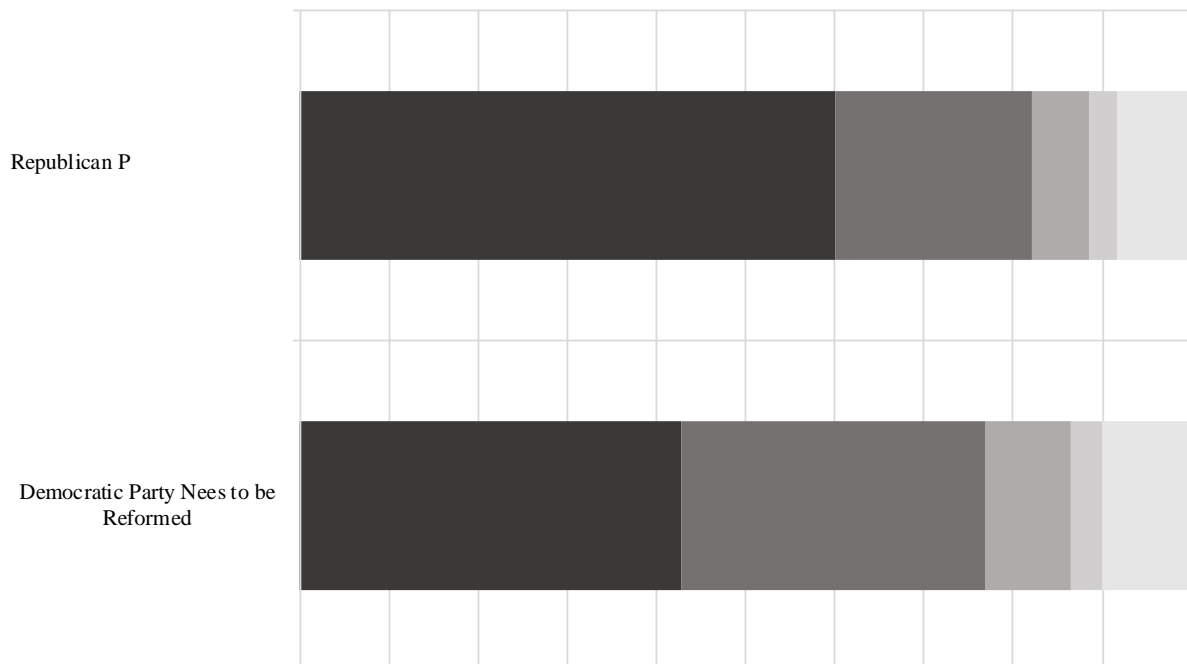# Executive Summary

There is widespread support for reforming the system of political parties in America, but
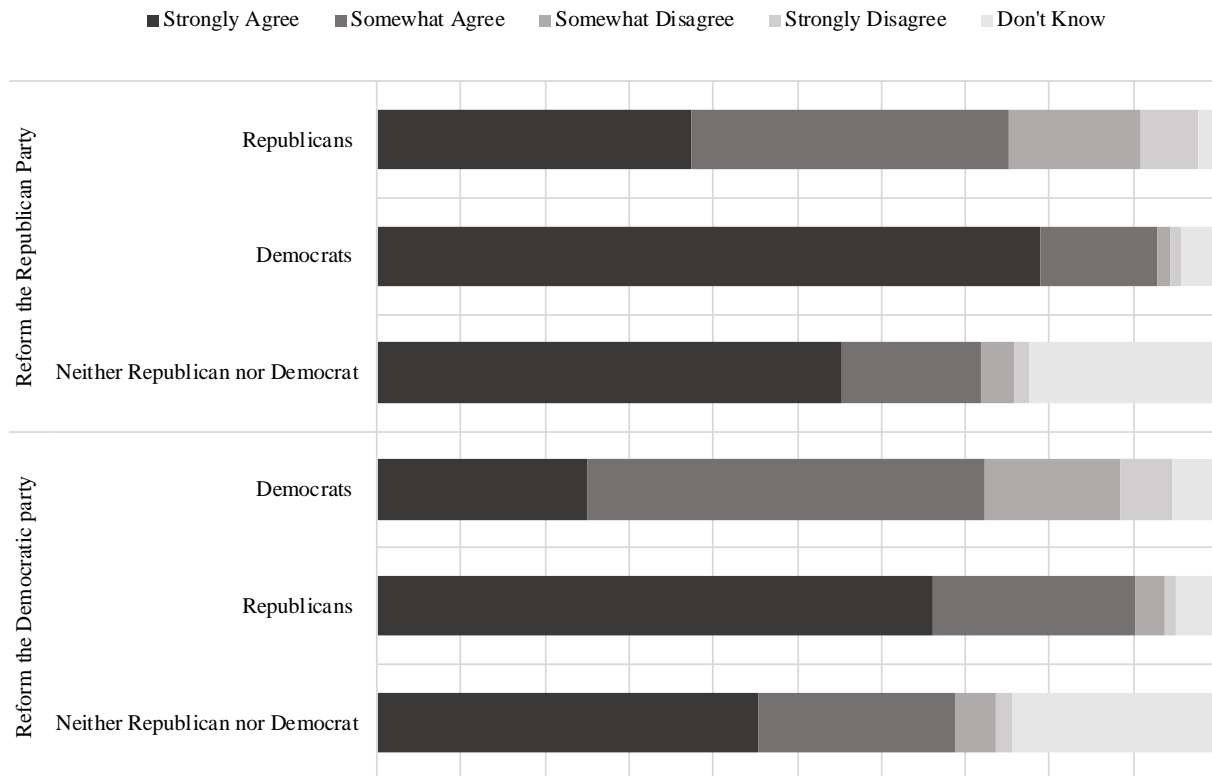
Results

Americans want to see changes in the two major parties. When asked, 76.9 percent of respondents thought the Democratic Party needed to be reformed and 82 thought the same of the Republican Party. The figure below shows that almost 60 percent of respondents *strongly* agreed with the sentiment the Republican Party needs to be reformed and about 43 percent took that same position with regard to the Democratic Party. There appears to be a stronger desire to see reform within the Republican Party, but the lack of intensity found toward the Democratic Party should not be interpreted to mean that reform is not desired in both.

Examining these attitudes based on the partisanship of the respondent reveals strong support for party reform. Party members want to see changes within their own organizations; 72.3 percent of Democrats agreed (strongly or somewhat) that the party needs to be reformed and 75.2 percent of Republicans felt their party also needs reform. Somewhat predictably, members of the opposite party are most likely to *strongly* agree that the party needs to be reformed; 78.9 percent of Democrats strongly support reform in the Republican Party and 66.1 percent of Republicans want the same in the Democratic Party. While the latter finding is hardly surprising in an era of partisan polarization, the former finding lends credibility to statements made in the popular press that Americans are growing increasingly frustrated with parties.

Looking specifically at those respondents who do not identify themselves with either the Republican or Democratic parties, we see the same trend. Sixty-nine percent either strongly or somewhat agree with the sentiment that the Democratic Party needs to be reformed and 71.8 percent believe the same about the Republican Party. Interestingly, there is a relatively high percent of non-party identifiers that   if they would like to see reforms made (24.5 percent with regard to the Democratic Party and 22.4 percent with regard to the Republican). This could indicate a general lack of interest in politics – or parties – among respondents or the lack of ideas about how (or if) these organizations could be reformed.
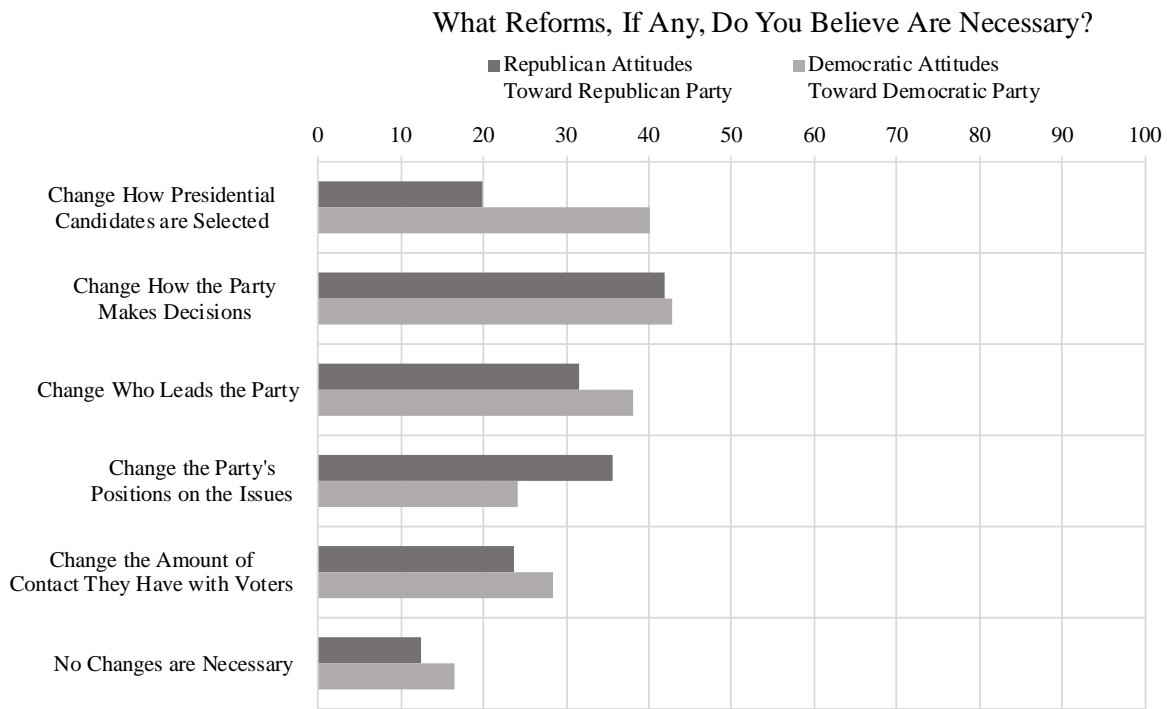
Do You Believe the Party Needs to be Reformed?

■ Strongly Agree   ■ Somewhat Agree   ■ Somewhat Disagree   ■ Strongly Disagree   ■ Don't Know

What Reforms are Needed?

We next asked respondents what changes they would like to see in each party. For Republicans, changing how the party makes decisions received the most support (41.90 percent) followed by the party's positions on the issues (35.5 percent), who leads the party (31.5 percent), how much contact the party has with the voters (23.7 percent), and how its presidential candidates are selected (19.9 percent). For Democrats, changing how their party makes decisions is also at the top of the list (42.8 percent), but how presidential candidates are selected is a close second (40 percent). This is followed by changing who leads the party (38 percent), the amount of contact the party has with voters (28.5 percent), and the party's positions on the issues (24.10 percent).

There are three notable trends in these data. Fist, no suggestion garners majority support among party members. Members of both agree that changes need to be made (only 12.4 percent of Republicans and 16.5 percent of Democrats believe no changes are necessary), but no one item wins the support of a majority of respondents. Second, while changing the way their parties make decisions garners the most support among both parties, the second highest choice is notable. For Republicans, it is changing their party's positions on the issues and for Democrats, it's changing how their party chooses its presidential candidates. Both of these appear to conform to popular media stories about Democrats search for answers to their latest presidential loss and Republicans restructuring in the face of broadening definitions of conservatism. Finally, the gap between Republican and Democratic attitudes may give us insight into the comparative priorities of each organization. We might expect Democrats to be more concerned about modifying their nomination process over the coming years if they wish to be responsive to their members. Likewise, we may see Republicans debating what it means to be conservative even more openly than what currently exists.

What Reforms, If Any, Do You Believe Are Necessary?

Source: Florida Southern College Center for Polling and Policy Research
Reforming American Political Parties Poll, November 2017

Thinking about the positions the parties have taken on the issues, we asked our respondents if they would like to see their party become more conservative, more liberal, or stay the same on a range of policy issues. Specifically, we asked them to provide their feelings toward their party's view on gun control, environmental policy, taxes, healthcare, and immigration. The table below shows responses by Democrats to the policy positions of the Democratic Party and the responses of Republicans to the Republican Party.

Examining the preferences of Republicans first, we find that individuals want their party's positions on gun control, environmental policy, and taxes to stay the same and on healthcare and immigration, to become more conservative. It should be noted the difference between staying the same and becoming more conservative is very narrow on the issue of taxes.

Democrats desired their party's positions to stay the same on all issues. In only the case of healthcare was this margin close. Interestingly, looking at Democrat's position on taxes we find that more would favor a

To assess if the source of the reform message mattered, we also included a brief survey experiment. Using the open primary as our example, we asked half of our respondents if they would approve of using this system of nominating presidential candidates if the party supported the change or if a non-

Methodology

        Students from Florida Southern College, under the supervision of their instructor, designed this poll and fielded results on November 20, 2017. Using Survey Monkey's Audience product, we drew a sample of 1,380 respondents from their online panel, 1,124 of whom completed the questionnaire. Our respondents represented to Survey Monkey they are at least 18 years old, live in the United States, and they all have access to the internet.

Top-Line Results

All cells are percent values

partisan citizen group seeking to clean-

Question 8: [Members of your party] OR [Americans for Reform, a non-partisan citizen group seeking to clean-up government] have been advocating for the use of open primaries nation-wide. Open primaries allow all registered voters, not just registered party members, to have a voice in selecting a party's presidential nominee. How much do you support these efforts?

	Members of Your Party	Americans for Reform
Strongly Support	41.35	38.34
Moderately Support	27.07	29.22
Moderately Oppose	8.27	7.09
Strongly Oppose	11.47	9.29
I don't know	11.87	16.05
Total	100	100