
Exclusive: Angry with Washington, 1 in 4 Americans open to secession

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Some 23.9 percent of Americans polled from Aug. 23 through Sept. 16 said they strongly supported or tended to support the idea of their state breaking away, while 53.3 percent of the 8,952 respondents strongly opposed or tended to oppose the notion.

The urge to sever ties with Washington cuts across party lines and regions, though Republicans and residents of rural Western states are generally warmer to the idea than Democrats and Northeasterners, according to the poll.

Anger with President [Barack Obama's](#) handling of issues ranging from [healthcare reform](#) to the rise of Islamic State militants drives some of the feeling, with Republican respondents citing dissatisfaction with his administration as coloring their thinking.

But others said long-running Washington gridlock had prompted them to wonder if their states would be better off striking out on their own, a move no U.S. state has tried in the 150 years since the bloody Civil War that led to the end of slavery in the South.

"I don't think it makes a whole lot of difference anymore which political party is running things. Nothing gets done," said Roy Gustafson, 61, of Camden, South Carolina, who lives on disability payments. "The state would be better off handling things on its own."

Scottish unionists won by a wider-than-expected 10-percentage-point margin.

Falling public approval of the Obama administration, attention to the Scottish vote and the success of activists who accuse the U.S. government of overstepping its authority - such as the self-proclaimed militia members who flocked to Nevada's Bundy ranch earlier this year during a standoff over grazing rights - is driving up interest in secession, experts said.

"It seems to have heated up, especially since the election of [President Obama](#)," said Mordecai Lee, a professor of governmental affairs at the University of Wisconsin at Milwaukee, who has studied secessionist movements.

'OBAMACARE' A FACTOR

Republicans were more inclined to support the idea, with 29.7 percent favoring it compared with 21 percent of Democrats.

Brittany Royal, a 31-year-old nurse from Wilkesboro, North Carolina, said anger over the "Obamacare" [healthcare reform](#) law made her wonder if her state would be better off on its own.

"That has really hurt a lot of people here, myself included. My insurance went from \$40 a week for a family of four up to over \$600 a month for a family of four," said Royal, a Republican. "The North Carolina government itself is sustainable. Governor (Pat) McCrory, I think he has a better healthcare plan than [President Obama](#)."

By region, the idea was least popular in New England, the cradle of the Revolutionary War, with just 17.4 percent of respondents open to pulling their state out.

It was most popular in the Southwest, where 34.1 percent of respondents back the idea.

That region includes Texas, where an activist group is calling the state's legislature to put the secession question on a statewide ballot. One Texan respondent said he was confident his state could get by without the rest of the country.

"Texas has everything we need. We have the manufacturing, we have the oil, and we don't need them," said Mark Denny, a 59-year-old retiree living outside Dallas on disability payments.

Denny, a Republican, had cheered on the Scottish independence movement.

"I have totally, completely lost faith in the federal government, the people running it, whether Republican, Democrat, independent, whatever," he said.

Even in Texas, some respondents said talk about breaking away was more of a sign of their anger with Washington than evidence of a real desire to go it alone. Democrat Lila Guzman, of Round Rock, said the threat could persuade Washington lawmakers and the White House to listen more closely to average people's concerns.

"When I say secede, I'm not like (former National Rifle Association president) Charlton Heston with my gun up in the air, 'my cold dead hands.' It's more like - we could do it if we had to," said Guzman, 62. "But the first option is, golly, get it back on the right track. Not all is lost. But there might come a point that we say, 'Hey, y'all, we're dusting our hands and we're moving on.'"

(Reporting by Scott Malone; Additional reporting by Mimi Dwyer in New York; Editing by Douglas Royalty)

