

Party ties, not religious ones, drive down Obama's approval rating

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(RNS) Most Christians don't approve of President Obama right now, but he gets high ratings from Muslims and other minority religious groups.

It's not because of their religion, though.

Obama's level of popular approval matches Americans' political party ties, not their religious identity, age, or almost any other demographic characteristic, said Jeffrey Jones, managing editor of the Gallup poll.

The newest Gallup tracking poll shows the president's approval rating in June averaged 43 percent for Americans overall. However, his ratings sank with Catholics to 44 percent, down from 54 percent in June 2013.

In that time frame, most Protestants' already low approval for the president slid to 37 percent from 43 percent. And Mormons, never big fans of Obama, gave him the same 18 percent approval rating as last summer.

Even groups historically inclined to approve of Obama registered a dimmer view of him since June 2013:

- Muslims, down to 72 percent from 78 percent.
- Jews, down to 55 percent from 64 percent.
- No religious identity, down to 54 percent from 61 percent.

"It's interesting to see that there are differences among the religious groups although they are not affected differently by what he does," Jones said.

Indeed, the overall order of religious groups' relative approval rating for Obama has not changed since his first inauguration in 2009, according to Gallup surveys.

“By and large, at this point in his presidency, people know if they like him or not although there can be movement around the margins,” Jones said.

The good feelings from Obama’s re-election year have dissipated in the face of recent serious challenges, the pollster said.

“The perception is that a lot is not getting done on the major problems the country is facing,” said Jones.

Jones said the real driver in approval ratings is not religion; it’s political affiliation. A religious group’s political tilt will shape its views more than Obama’s policies and actions. Mormons, for example, are largely Republican, hence their low approval rate of the president.

The results are drawn from aggregating 88,000 Gallup Daily tracking interviews. The margin of error varies by subgroup.