

"It is a racist thing. It just shows the weak, dark underside of America."
— FREEMAN, on Tea Party opposition to Obama



POLITICS at the BOX OFFICE

An exclusive *THR*/Penn Schoen Berland poll reveals a harsh partisan divide in moviegoing habits, why Dems and Republicans like different films — and which actors each side absolutely refuses to pay to see **BY PAUL BOND**

ON SEPT. 23, MORGAN FREEMAN WENT ON CNN'S *PIERS MORGAN Tonight* to proclaim that Tea Party opposition to President Obama "is a racist thing." The timing wasn't ideal, considering *Dolphin Tale* had opened that day and the film was tracking particularly well among conservatives, many of whom the star had suddenly maligned.

While only 627,000 people saw Freeman on CNN that night, millions soon viewed the clip as Drudge Report, Twitter, Facebook and other digital outlets turned it into a viral sensation — not difficult given how partisan and personal politics have become in this run-up to the 2012 presidential election. "He belongs on my 'no pay, no watch' list after his latest, nearly hallucinatory raving," wrote one commenter on a conservative media site.

With *Dolphin Tale* opening with a strong \$19.2 million that first weekend and finishing No. 1 with \$13.9 million in its second, the financial impact of Freeman's comments is hard to quantify. But they did have an effect. In a far-ranging poll Penn Schoen Berland conducted for *The Hollywood Reporter* of 1,000 registered voters to gauge moviegoing tendencies of Democrats vs. Republicans, it's clear political allegiances have shifted entertainment viewing habits. Jon Penn, the firm's president of media and entertainment research, says that before Freeman's words, interest in *Dolphin Tale* was considerably higher among conservatives and religious moviegoers than among liberals. After the remarks, 34 percent of the conservatives who were aware of them, and 37 percent of Tea Partiers, said they were less likely to see the film — but 42 percent of liberals said they were more likely. (Five days after Freeman's remarks, 24 percent of all moviegoers were aware of them.)

In fact, overall, 35 percent of Republicans and 45 percent of Tea Partiers consider a celebrity's political position before paying to see their films, compared with 20 percent of Democrats.

Many exhibitors say privately that they cringe when a star waxes politically just before one of their movies opens — like when, seven weeks before *Contagion*, Matt Damon attended a Save Our Schools march where some attendees compared Republicans to "terrorists." Videos of Damon mocking conservatives for their fiscal policies spread like wildfire on the Internet.

"Of course it impacts box office," says Landmark Theatres owner Mark Cuban. "You just hope that for every member of one party that no-shows because of comments, another buys a ticket for the same reason."

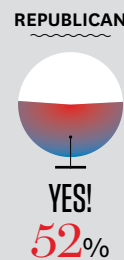
Among the poll's findings:

► **Democrats are bigger moviegoers** This is likely fueled by Hollywood's reputation — among both parties — for churning out movies that promote liberalism (*Avatar* was named by the most moviegoers as having a liberal agenda). During the past six months, Democrats have seen on average 5.7 movies in a theater, while Republicans have seen fewer than four.

► **Republicans are more likely to wait for home video** Democrats are likelier to see movies on opening weekend, while GOP members prefer waiting it out. Republicans assume their values will be assaulted onscreen — so why pay the big bucks? — while Democrats embrace pop culture more and want to be "in the know," says Penn.

► **Republicans prefer family films; Democrats like edge** From hundreds of Oscar winners and classics, Republicans were far more likely to name as favorites *The Sound of Music* and *It's a Wonderful Life*; Democrats favored *Bonnie and Clyde* and *The Silence of the Lambs*. Among recent films, Republicans were likelier to choose *Soul Surfer* and *Secretariat*. Democrats?

HAVE YOU EVER AVOIDED A MOVIE BECAUSE OF THE POLITICAL VIEWS OF AN ACTOR?



POLITICAL STAR POWER

Almost predictably, some stars are more polarizing than others because of their willingness to express (sometimes controversial) offscreen opinions

Republicans

Stars they are likely to AVOID because of politics



Michael Moore
60%
of all GOPers reject him



Jane Fonda
48%



Whoopi Goldberg
47%



Oprah Winfrey
46%



Sean Penn
40%

Democrats

Stars they are likely to AVOID because of politics



Mel Gibson
36%
of all DEMs reject him



Arnold Schwarzenegger
30%



Tom Cruise
27%



Kelsey Grammer
14%



Jon Voight
13%

MODERN TIMES

While the parties love comedies equally, Democrats named titles in that genre as among their favorites more often than did Republicans



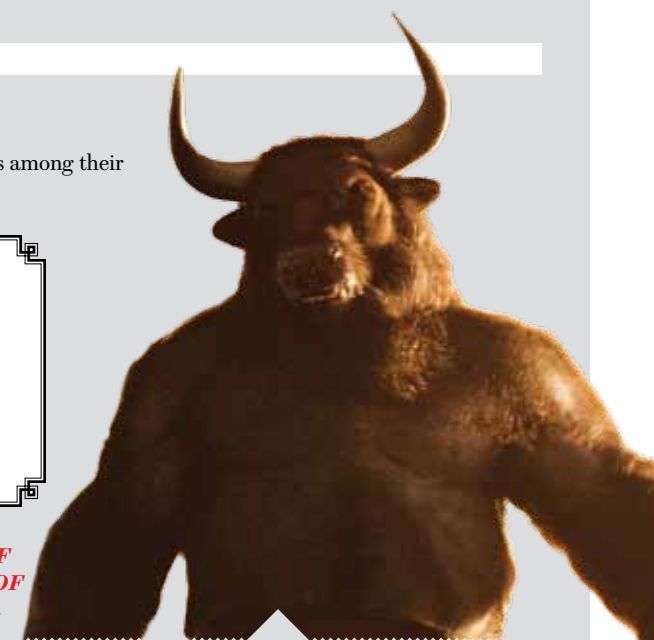
— TOP 5 —
Recent movies that DEMOCRATS like more than REPUBLICANS

1. TYLER PERRY'S MADEA'S BIG HAPPY FAMILY
2. BAD TEACHER
3. EASY A
4. THE SOCIAL NETWORK
5. RISE OF THE PLANET OF THE APES

267% more DEMOCRATS named *Big Happy Family* among their favorites

— TOP 5 —
Recent movies that REPUBLICANS like more than DEMOCRATS

1. THE CHRONICLES OF NARNIA: THE VOYAGE OF THE DAWN TREADER
2. THOR
3. SOUL SURFER
4. PIRATES OF THE CARIBBEAN: ON STRANGER TIDES
5. SECRETARIAT



280% more REPUBLICANS named *Narnia* among their favorites

RECENT MOVIES THAT APPEAL TO BOTH PARTIES



MIDNIGHT IN PARIS
\$54.7M (DOMESTIC)



THE LINCOLN LAWYER
\$58M



RIO
\$143.6M



LIMITLESS
\$79.2M



WALL STREET: MONEY NEVER SLEEPS
\$52.5M

APPEAL OF BEST PICTURE OSCAR WINNERS

The left gravitates to edgier films, while the right prefers inspirational fare



200% more DEMOCRATS named *The Departed* among their favorites

— TOP 5 —
Best picture Oscar winners that DEMOCRATS like more than REPUBLICANS

1. THE DEPARTED
2. KRAMER VS. KRAMER
3. AMERICAN BEAUTY
4. CRASH
5. SLUMDOG MILLIONAIRE

— TOP 5 —
Best picture Oscar winners that REPUBLICANS like more than DEMOCRATS

1. CHARIOTS OF FIRE
2. MY FAIR LADY
3. THE STING
4. THE SOUND OF MUSIC
5. BRAVEHEART



250% more REPUBLICANS named *Chariots of Fire* among their favorites

BEST PIC OSCAR WINNERS THAT APPEAL TO BOTH PARTIES



FORREST GUMP
1994



THE KING'S SPEECH
2010



THE GODFATHER PART II
1974



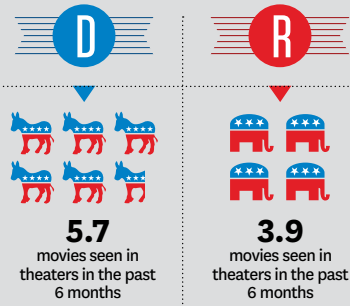
AMADEUS
1984



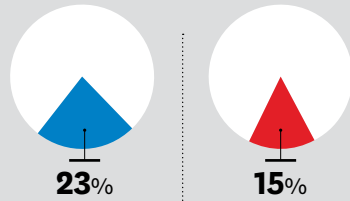
THE DEER HUNTER
1978

MOVIEGOING HABITS

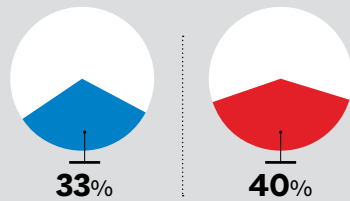
Pop culture plays a bigger role in Democrats' lives than Republicans', and that plays out in film consumption



Percentage of those who attend on the opening weekend of a film



Percentage of those who rent from video stores or vending machines



- | | |
|-------------|------------|
| 1. Comedy | 1. Comedy |
| 2. Action | 2. Action |
| 3. Drama | 3. Romance |
| 4. Romance | 4. Drama |
| 5. Thriller | 5. Family |

Republicans and Democrats further agree that **ROMANTIC COMEDIES** are their favorite type of comedy over R-rated, action and family comedies.

BUT Twice as many **Republicans** consider **"GOOD FOR THE WHOLE FAMILY!"** an important reason for seeing a film in the theater.



Favorite COMEDY ACTORS

DEMOCRATS PREFER **Chris Rock** **THREE TIMES AS MUCH** AS JEFF FOXWORTHY

REPUBLICANS PREFER **Jeff Foxworthy** **TWICE AS MUCH** AS CHRIS ROCK

SUPERHERO DISCREPANCY

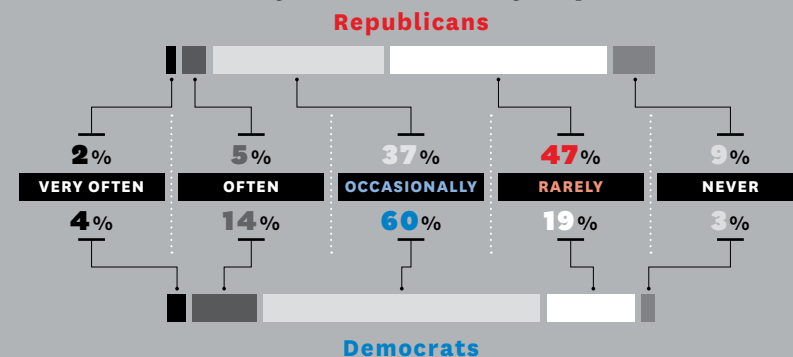
BATMAN and SUPERMAN are both sides' favorites, but they disagree on ...



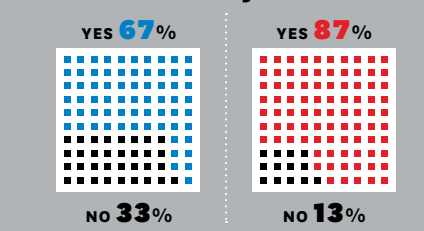
HOLLYWOOD AND POLITICAL BELIEFS

Both parties agree that the industry has a liberal agenda, but they disagree on how it manifests onscreen

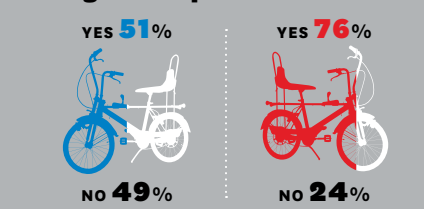
How often do Hollywood films reflect your political beliefs?



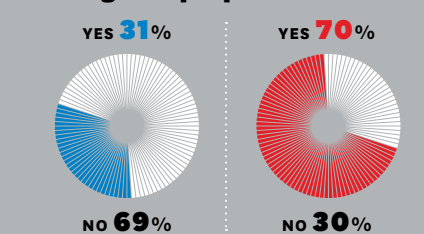
Does Hollywood promote a liberal objective?



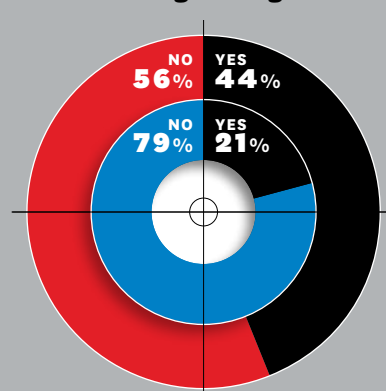
Do Hollywood films have a negative impact on children?



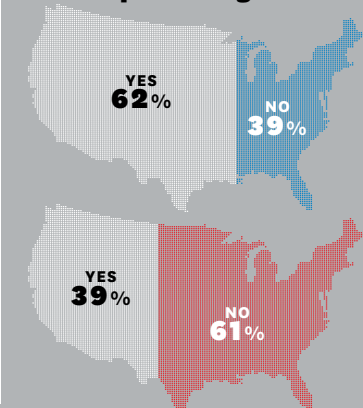
Is Hollywood biased against people of faith?



Does Hollywood portray the U.S. military in a negative light?



Do Hollywood films represent America in a positive light?



POLITICAL CONCESSIONS

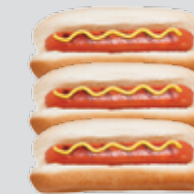
Popcorn

IS BY FAR THE SNACK OF CHOICE FOR BOTH DEMOCRATS AND REPUBLICANS



DEMOCRATS PREFER HOT DOGS NEARLY

3 to 1 MORE THAN REPUBLICANS



GIVEN THE CHOICE, WOULD YOU PURCHASE MORE **healthy options** AT THE MOVIE THEATER INSTEAD OF WHAT YOU USUALLY BUY?



41% OF REPUBLICANS SAID YES!
51% OF DEMOCRATS SAID YES!

Democrats, Republicans and Tea Partiers can agree on one thing!
HARRISON FORD in *Air Force One* is their favorite fictional U.S. president.



The Social Network, Bad Teacher and Easy A.

► **Republicans tsk-tsk sex, violence and cursing** While majorities of both parties think movies contain too much of all those, the numbers are greater for Republicans. A majority of Democrats think Hollywood films are generally inspiring and morally uplifting; a majority of Republicans don't.

► **Democrats think America is portrayed well** While 62 percent of Dems say Hollywood shows America in a positive light, only 39 percent of Republicans concur. And 44 percent of Republicans think Hollywood portrays the U.S. military negatively, but only 21 percent of Democrats agree. "Typically, when you see a movie, it will reflect a Democrat's values," says Penn. "Republicans aren't getting the films they want."

► **Not everything about movies is partisan** Dems and Republicans say comedy is their favorite genre, popcorn is their favorite theater snack, *Forrest Gump* is their preferred blockbuster and Indiana Jones is their favorite action hero.

Probably nothing in the poll, though, is more sobering for Hollywood than the large numbers of moviegoers who hold the political views of actors against them. For Republicans, 52 percent say they have avoided a movie because of the political views of its star. Among Democrats, it's 36 percent.

Many Democrats, for example, don't want to see movies that star Charlton Heston because he was president of the National Rifle Association. On the flip side, Sean Penn repels about 40 percent of Republicans. In March 2009, Fox News host Bill O'Reilly made news worldwide when he told *THR* that Penn is the only actor he refuses to buy a ticket to see because he "gives aid and comfort" to dictators. O'Reilly's impassioned audience is 3 million a night — his feelings, one might surmise, would reverberate. (Penn's biggest domestic box-office movie is 2003's *Mystic River*, with \$90.1 million; his 2010 film *Fair Game*, about Valerie Plame, grossed \$9.5 million.)

"What causes a liberal actor to lose conservative fans has nothing to do with politics and everything to do with class," says John Nolte, editor-in-chief of the conservative entertainment site Big Hollywood. "An actor who simply goes on about the business of acting and supporting left-wing causes usually generates nothing more than indifference from right-of-center fans and can generate respect because of how they handle themselves, especially when compared to their obnoxious counterparts."

Until recently, Freeman wasn't known for political activism. There are, however, other celebrities who are so partisan that their off-screen politics influence box-office potential, as is the case with Whoopi Goldberg, Oprah Winfrey and Jane Fonda. Those three, along with Penn, are identified by the poll as celebrities whose movies large numbers of Republicans avoid.

While less likely to take stars' politics into consideration when buying tickets, there are a few actors Democrats also shy from, such as Mel Gibson and Arnold Schwarzenegger. Even Michael Moore is shunned by 21 percent of moviegoing Democrats — balanced out by the 25 percent who say they seek out his movies. "Many Democrats and liberals see Michael Moore in the same way that many Republicans and conservatives see Pat Robertson: as an embarrassing blowhard who makes their own side look bad," says John Pitney Jr., a professor of American politics at Claremont McKenna College. Perhaps that's one reason Moore broke records with his \$119 million domestic haul from *Fahrenheit 9/11* while follow-ups *Sicko* and *Capitalism: A Love Story* took in \$25 million and \$14 million, respectively.

There are a few stars so admired by one party for their activism that they will seek out their films — though that love might not translate to the box office because there are usually enough on the other side who say they'll avoid those same actors. Conservative Jon Voight is in that category, as are liberals Damon and George Clooney, who opens the politically charged *The Ides of March* on Oct. 7. Some are simply universally admired for their activism, like Clint Eastwood, John Wayne and Bob Hope.

Meanwhile, back to *Dolphin Tale*. Alcon co-president Andrew Kosove won't entertain the notion that Freeman hurt box-office performance "by even one dollar!" In a written statement, he says he doesn't share Freeman's view and adds: "As a person who has some libertarian viewpoints myself, I STRONGLY believe Morgan's right to express whatever beliefs he has on any topic. We are a free country. Thank God!"

Thank God is right. www.thr.com

OPENING SPREAD: FREEMAN: JASON KEMPIN/GETTY IMAGES; STAR POWER, CLOCKWISE FROM MOORE: STEPHEN LOVING/GETTY IMAGES; FRAZER HARRISON/GETTY IMAGES; MAURY PHILLIPS/GETTY IMAGES; FRAZER HARRISON/GETTY IMAGES; FREDERICK M. BROWN/GETTY IMAGES; VALERY HACHE/APP/GETTY IMAGES; FRAZER HARRISON/GETTY IMAGES; JAMIE MCCARTHY/GETTY IMAGES; JEMAL COURTESY/GETTY IMAGES; MODERN TIMES, CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: TYLER FERRY/STUDIOS; 20TH CENTURY FOX/EVERETT COLLECTION; BARRY WETCHER/TWENTIETH CENTURY FOX; JOHN BAER/RELATIVITY MEDIA; BLUE SKY STUDIOS/TWENTIETH CENTURY FOX; SAEED ADANI/SONY PICTURES CLASSICS; BEST PICTURE, CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: WARNER BROS. ENTERTAINMENT INC.; 20TH CENTURY FOX/EVERETT COLLECTION; UNIVERSAL/COURTESY EVERETT COLLECTION; WARNER BROS. COURTESY EVERETT COLLECTION; COURTESY EVERETT COLLECTION; THE WEINSTEIN COMPANY; EVERETT COLLECTION; THIS SPREAD, CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: STEPHEN LOVING/GETTY IMAGES; CHARLIE GALLAGHER/GETTY IMAGES FOR AFI; WARNER BROS./COURTESY EVERETT COLLECTION; UNIVERSAL/COURTESY EVERETT COLLECTION; PASCAL LE SEGRETAIR/GETTY IMAGES; ISTOCK; COLUMBIA PICTURES/EVERETT COLLECTION; AMY SUSSMAN/GETTY IMAGES.