



NEW HART RESEARCH POLL

Tracking the Recovery: Voters' Views on the Recession, Jobs, and the Deficit

IN RECESSION THAT HIT CLOSE TO HOME FOR MOST, VOTERS ARE DOWNBEAT ABOUT PROSPECTS FOR QUICK RECOVERY, WANT MORE GOVERNMENT ACTION ON JOBS

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In a recession often described as deep and severe, we now have one more adjective to add: personal.

A new survey of public views of the economy, released today, reveals that 57 percent of Americans are close to someone who has been laid off, 61 percent report that someone close to them has had their hours or pay cut, and 44 percent of all households have experienced one or the other during the past year. Because the pain of this recession is striking so close to home, Americans strongly support continuing government action to address unemployment.

The Tracking the Recovery survey, conducted among 802 registered voters nationwide from September 21-23 by Hart Research Associates for the Economic Policy Institute, takes an in-depth look at Americans' experiences in this recession, their expectations for the year ahead, their views of the government's role and degree of success so far, and their priorities for further government action.

"Unemployment and the lack of jobs remains the dominant problem on the economic agenda for voters across party lines," said Hart Research's president, Geoffrey Garin, who presented the results today at an EPI forum in Washington, D.C. "The portrait that emerges from this survey is of a majority with deep concern about the jobs situation who are looking to the Obama administration for continued action to save and create jobs."

More than eight out of 10 voters (85%) believe the country is still in an economic recession. And with unemployment rates near double digits nationally and above that in many states, it's no surprise that the vast majority of Americans (83%) see unemployment as a big problem today, and one not likely to end soon. When asked what they foresee for 12 months from now, 61 percent said unemployment will still be a big problem.

Another issue rated as a big problem by participants in the survey is the failure of wages and salaries to keep up with the cost of living. Today, 63 percent of Americans rate this as a very big or fairly big problem; 57 percent expect it to be a very or fairly big problem a year from now.

While voters have some concern about the growth of the federal deficit, job creation is far and away their top priority. In fact, by a margin of 53 to 42 percent, voters are more concerned about rising unemployment rates than the rising federal deficit.

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The survey results show that the voters are not persuaded by conservatives' efforts either to blame the Obama administration for the federal deficit or to convince them that efforts to stimulate the economy should be abandoned in favor of spending cuts to reduce the deficit. By a margin of 73 to 24 percent, poll respondents agreed that: "The federal budget deficit is an important problem, but we need to deal with it in a way that allows us to invest in job creation, education, and energy independence, because we cannot solve the deficit problem without getting people back to work and getting our economy growing again."

"Voters understand that investing in job creation must necessarily come before the challenge of addressing the federal deficit. These findings will help policy makers understand that they can do what they need to do to create a sound, jobs-based recovery without losing public support over the federal deficit," said Lawrence Mishel, the president of EPI, which commissioned the poll. "And for those who have assumed that the deficit will trump all other concerns, it's a wake-up call."

When asked who has been helped most so far by the government's stimulus efforts, the majority say "large banks" (62%) or "Wall Street investment companies" (54%) have benefited either a lot or a fair amount. Asked how much "the average working person" or "you and your family" have benefited, approximately one out of 10 (13% and 10%, respectively) say a lot or a fair amount.

The vast majority of voters (81%) agree that the Obama administration still needs to do more to deal with unemployment and the loss of jobs. The survey also shows that voters trust the president more than congressional Republicans, by a margin of 43 to 32 percent, to have the right economic policies.

When asked what additional actions they think the government should take, a majority of voters support five initiatives:

- 87 percent say they support passing a major new job creation tax credit for businesses that create jobs in the United States in the next two years (56% support strongly, 31% somewhat).
- 81 percent support extending unemployment insurance benefits for those who have lost their jobs during the recession and are unable to find new jobs (48% and 33%).
- 71 percent support putting unemployed people back to work at government-funded public service jobs that help meet important community needs (41% and 30%).
- 63 percent favor giving a new round of tax rebates to lower- and middle-income Americans (35% and 28%).
- 52 percent support providing increased federal assistance to state and local governments to prevent additional layoffs of government employees because government layoffs add to unemployment and harm vital services (23% and 29%).

The Economic Policy Institute is an independent, nonprofit, nonpartisan research institute – or “think tank” – that researches the impact of economic trends and policies on working people in the United States and around the world.