



Achieving
the American
Dream:

A Meta-Analysis of
Public Opinion
Concerning Poverty,
Upward Mobility, and
Related Issues

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for the Ford Foundation Project
Making Work Pay for Families Today

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Method:

The attached report is an analysis of existing public opinion data regarding issues related to poverty and upward mobility including views of the poor, perceived causes of poverty, support for policies, and satisfaction with life and work. The public opinion statistics mentioned in this report were gathered from publicly available sources and complete citations are included. This is not intended to be a policy brief of the realities of poverty, nor is it a comprehensive listing of every public opinion question relevant to the topic at hand. Rather it is meant as a strategic overview of the underpinnings of public perception on this issue to inform strategic communications efforts.

Introduction

September 27, 2001

Since this report was completed prior to the terrorist attack on September 11th, it is reasonable to question whether or not the analysis continues to be valid. Of course the attack will have implications for the issue and how the project moves forward. However, the main objective of the attached analysis was to outline how people think and feel about this issue, i.e., the assumptions they hold and the values they bring to the conversation. These perspectives are based on enduring cognitive models or belief systems that are largely unaffected by current events. For example, people value work and believe that with enough hard work anyone can grow up to be President or Bill Gates. This is an enduring belief that provides a lens through which people see poverty or the issues facing low-wage workers. Recent events are not likely to change these enduring perspectives.

What has changed is the level of priority the public is likely to give the issue in the short-term. The public agenda is very reactive to current events. Prior to the terrorist attack, education and the economy topped the nation's concerns. It is not surprising that fighting terrorism is now top-of-mind (64% top priority), followed by the economy (20%), education (7%), and health care (6%) (*NBC/Wall Street Journal*, September 15-16, 2001). Nearly 80% support increasing funding for defense and intelligence, even if that means less funding for social programs (*Fox News*, September 19-20, 2001). This does not mean issues facing low-wage workers are any less important to the public. In fact, in the coming months we may see more ability to highlight these issues as people think about ways to address the effects of recession.

Recession is no longer a future possibility according to the public; it is here. Shaky consumer confidence and inconsistent ratings of the economy have turned downward in the past two weeks. A majority (55%) thinks the attack makes a recession more likely (*Fox News*, September 19-20, 2001). However, most (58%) believe the attack will cause a brief recession while 26% point to a long recession (*Newsweek*, September 20-21). Economic conditions could provide a context for bringing the issues of low-wage workers to the forefront of the national conversation.

I do not mean to imply that public opinion concerning low-wage workers is unaffected by our national tragedy or only affected in shallow ways. The country is experiencing severe personal trauma. Three-quarters (71%) have felt depressed, 49% have had difficulty concentrating, and 33% have had difficulty sleeping. An astounding percentage (20%) say they or a friend or family member know someone among the dead, missing, or injured (Pew Research Center, September 13-17). Economically, 17% say their company has already been hurt by the attack, and 29% feel their company will be hurt in the future (Gallup).

However, it is unclear what the effect will be for the long-term. Through this adversity may come strength, a tearing down of divisions, and a commitment to help others. More than three-quarters (79%) say the terrorist attacks will do more to change the country for the better by making it stronger and more unified. Spirited action and generosity is widespread: 79% have displayed an American flag; 64% have donated money, food or other supplies to the relief efforts; 60% have lit a candle and 50% have attended a special religious or ecumenical service (*Newsweek*, September 20-21).

The element of this project that may be most dramatically affected by the terrorist attack is our hypotheses for future communications to move the issue forward. We may be entering a new era of community engagement and patriotism, which may position economic competitiveness, strengthening America, or responsibility to others as stronger frames in the current context than they would have been previously. Fortunately, this exploration is the primary task for the next round of research.

Meg Bostrom

Strategic Snapshot

At some level every American believes in “The American Dream.” A man from Hope who would be President...a college boy building computers in a garage becomes the world’s leading businessman...American society is filled with rags to riches stories. These stories color our view of success and failure, and provide a lens through which we see the rich and the poor.

Fundamentally we believe that anyone can grow up to be Bill Gates with enough initiative and hard work, because we see opportunity as unlimited in the U.S. Hard work is the litmus test for how we feel about the poor and those on welfare. The working poor are generally respected—they are working hard and we as a society want to do everything we can to help them succeed. However, for many the first images of the poor that come to mind are welfare recipients, who are viewed as rejecting the American values of independence and hard work.

Understanding the underpinnings of opinion concerning the welfare reform debate is instructive in developing communications efforts on behalf of the working poor. The welfare reform debate was framed as being about welfare to work, a very effective framing for the reformers. “Welfare to work” defines the problem as not working, which people find inexcusable for healthy adults. Reform was about valuing work, not cutting welfare rolls, punishing the poor, or saving tax dollars. This suggested that there was, and is, an opportunity to shift the conversation toward training people for the jobs that will help them climb out of poverty permanently. People believe the poor work hard, and many of the jobs they have will not support a family. To address this problem, the public strongly favors a variety of measures to support work such as increasing the minimum wage, subsidies for childcare or health care, etc. Work and individual responsibility

need to be front and center in the conversation to gain public approval for these policies.

Some of the hostility toward welfare recipients may be due to public identification with the working poor, and resentment for those who are perceived as getting a free ride. The public worries more about finances than most other concerns and a majority is dissatisfied with their current income level. Few are saving enough for retirement, and few are satisfied with their retirement plans. Half have a family member or close friend who is poor and a third have received public assistance at some point in their lives. There is an opportunity to use this identification with the poor and belief in the American Dream to develop an upward mobility message. The desire to advance in life and achieve income security is shared across income levels and may be a way to mobilize support across classes.

Next to hard work, the public most believes in the ability of a good education to help one succeed in life. Americans are currently very critical of the public education system, but they have great faith in the ability of education—from pre-school through vocational training and college—to help people achieve in life. Education needs to be a part of any national dialogue concerning poverty or upward mobility. In fact, there may be an opportunity to develop a message around lifelong learning and advancement and connect education to a competitive workforce. Public opinion findings demonstrate that job satisfaction correlates not only with salary, but also with ability to learn and grow, so job training and education are needs that cross the workforce and are overwhelmingly supported.

One of the biggest barriers to policy change is people’s skepticism of government’s ability to address poverty. In large part this is due to the public’s assumption that the government is inefficient and welfare is ineffective. At the same time, some of the most strongly supported solutions are ones that require government action. This indicates that messages grounded in specific solutions will be much more persuasive than a vague call for government to take more responsibility.

To be successful, communications need to be cognizant of the relevant American values outlined in this report:

- Each individual is responsible for his or her own success or failure.
- With hard work comes reward.
- Anyone can achieve the American Dream.
- The goal is equal opportunity, not equal outcome.

This is not meant to suggest that communications need to necessarily repeat these values. Rather, subsequent research efforts need to determine how proposed communications interact with these core values and other relevant values, to determine which communications approaches will lead to policy support.



The National Context

Mood of the Nation

The mood of the nation in 2001 is markedly different from the prior year. The bright optimism of the past few years has been replaced by uncertainty. While most Americans continue to feel positively toward the state of affairs in the nation, positive indicators have been dropping steadily for much of the year, and dissatisfaction has increased. Some of these indicators are now beginning to return to a positive direction, but response remains unstable.

In May of this year, more Americans were dissatisfied (50%) than satisfied (46%), with “the way things are going in the United States,” the first time this measure had turned negative since mid-1997. By June, majority response shifted toward the positive where it remains. However, the public is still basically divided on this measure, with 51% saying they are satisfied and 46% dissatisfied.¹

As of mid-July, 70% of the public believed “things in the country these days are going” “very” or “fairly well,” a slight increase from the 65% response to this question over the past few months. However, this also represents a decline from a high of 80% in February 2000, and from consistent ratings in the upper 70s throughout most of last year.²

The Harris “Feel Good Index,” which is an average of the proportion of Americans who respond that they “feel good” about 16 measures which range from family relationships and quality of life, to the morals of the country and the economy, has dropped one point each year from its inception in 1998, and now stands at 72.³

Harris Feel Good Index ¹ (% “Feel Good”)		
	2001	1998
Your relations with your family	96	97
The quality of your life overall	94	95
Your home	93	93
Your standard of living	90	90
Your health	89	89
Your social life	85	87
The city, town, or county in which you live	82	82
The quality of the air, water & environment where you live and work	69	68
The morals and values of people in your community	67	70
Your financial security for the future	67	67
Your job, if you have one	64	67
Your children’s future	62	65
Your marriage, if you are married	61	60
The state of the nation	54	59
The nation’s economy	47	64
The morals and values of Americans in general	40	42

Worries about the economy are driving the uncertain national mood. While most continue to believe economic conditions are good, fewer feel positively than a few months ago. However, there are signs that the public is beginning to feel more optimistic about future economic conditions.

A closer examination of each of the measures comprising the Harris Feel Good Index demonstrates that worry

about the nation’s economy is driving the decline in general optimism. Comparing current responses to the responses people gave in 1998 demonstrates that most measures have remained consistent, including people’s sense of financial security. There have been slight declines in people’s ratings of their job and their children’s future, but the most dramatic decline has been in ratings of the nation’s economy, falling from 64% “feel good” to 47%.

Nervousness about the economy is not grounded in concerns about jobs, but there are some indications that personal finances have suffered

In April of this year, 67% rated economic conditions in the country as “very” (10%) or “somewhat good” (57%). This represents a dramatic downturn since February when 80% rated economic conditions as good, and from the consistent 80% or higher ratings this measure has achieved since the end of 1997.⁵ Only 41% believe economic conditions are “excellent” or “good,” down from 67% in January of this year.⁶ However, the public is becoming more optimistic. The proportion believing the economy is getting worse has been 60% or higher for most of the year, but has now dropped to 53%.⁷

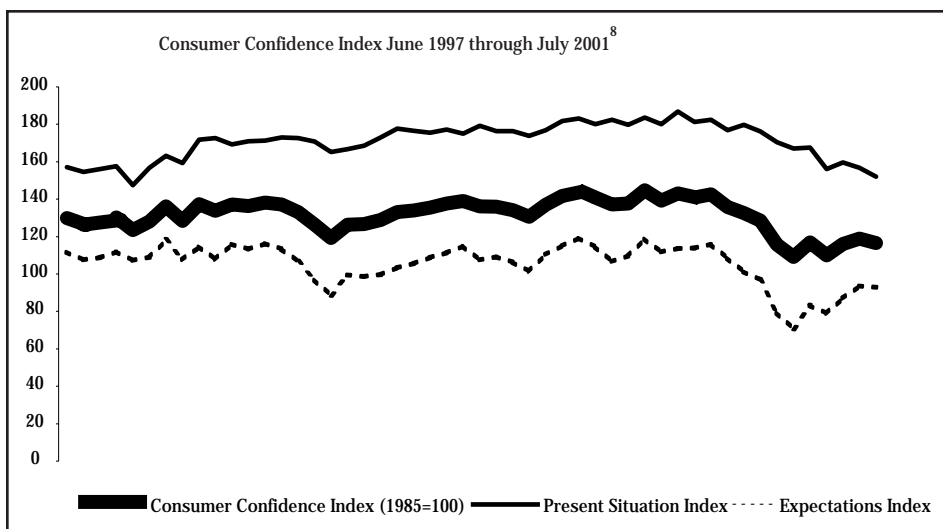
Additionally, consumer confidence has been declining over the past year. In July 2000, the Consumer Confidence Index stood at 143. By July 2001, it had dropped to 116.5. The same patterns were repeated in the Present Situation Index (July 2000 = 186.8; July 2001 = 152) and the Expectations Index (July 2000 = 113.7; July 2001 = 92.9).

As noted in the Harris Feel Good Index outlined above, people have rated their job satisfaction and their financial security fairly consistently over the past few years. Furthermore, unlike the recession in the early 1990s when people worried about jobs (79% felt that jobs were difficult to find in January

	Top/High Priority %	Top Priority %
Improving education	94	50
Keeping America prosperous	91	43
Ensuring the long-term strength of the Social Security system	89	46
Helping senior citizens pay for prescription drugs.	88	42
Keeping the federal budget balanced	88	40
Ensuring the long-term strength of the Medicare system.	88	40
Improving the healthcare system	87	43
Providing military security for the country	85	39
Improving conditions for minorities and the poor	80	30
Reducing the use of illegal drugs in America	78	36
Improving the quality of the environment.	78	30
Improving race relations	75	28
Cutting federal income taxes.	65	26
Improving the way political campaigns are financed	60	25

1992), today only 44% believe jobs are difficult to find, while 42% believe there are plenty of available jobs.⁹

However, there are indications that Americans have become less confident of their financial situation. As of June 2001, 44% of Americans rated their own personal financial situation as being in “excellent” or “good shape.” This is down substantially from one year earlier when 52% rated their financial situation positively. However, they are optimistic about the future, with 63% saying they expect their financial situation to improve over the course of the next year, up from 57% in January 2001.¹⁰



People want to help the poor and address poverty, but it is not the highest of priorities

Priorities for the Country

Education, prosperity, and taking care of senior citizens are at the top of the public's goals for the Bush Administration. Addressing poverty is a lower priority, however it is one of the areas with which the public most frequently cites dissatisfaction. Few believe President Bush will work for the poor.

Education has been a top concern for the public for several years. With the long economic expansion and dropping crime rates, education moved to the top of the public's agenda, where it remains.

There is near unanimous agreement (94%) that improving education is a high priority, with 50% saying it is a top priority for the Bush Administration. After education, the public sees "keeping America prosperous" as a priority with 91% saying it is a high priority and 43% the top priority. Seniors issues and health issues round out the rest of the top tier of concerns: ensuring the strength of Social Security (89% high priority, 46% top priority), helping seniors pay for prescription drugs (88%, 42%), ensuring the strength of Medicare (88%, 40%), and improving the health care system (87%, 43%). A balanced federal budget is also near the top of people's priorities (88%, 40%). In comparison, "improving conditions for minorities and the poor" is, at best, a second tier issue, with 80% saying it is a high priority, but only 30% saying it is a top priority.

Additionally, Americans state it is extremely important for the president and Congress to deal with education (93% important, 61% "extremely important"). Most also think it is important to raise the minimum wage (63%), but fewer think that issue is "extremely important" (31%).¹² People want to

help the poor and address poverty, but it is not the highest of priorities. Three quarters (73%) favor "providing more generous government assistance to the poor," but only 28% strongly favor that action.¹³

While addressing poverty has not been a top public priority for government action, Americans are dissatisfied with the nation's efforts to deal with poverty. Public dissatisfaction with poverty runs higher than many issues that have

received more press attention such as education or the economy. There are several reasons why public dissatisfaction may not have turned into political priority. For example, it may be that people do not yet have a defined policy answer to this problem, or cynicism over welfare may cause people to doubt government's abilities in this area.

% Dissatisfied with Aspect ¹⁴	
The amount Americans pay in federal taxes	71
The availability of affordable health care	68
The nation's efforts to deal with poverty and homelessness	66
The quality of public education in the nation	57
The nation's laws or policies on guns	57
The Social Security and Medicare systems	57
The acceptance of homosexuality in the nation	57
The nation's campaign finance laws	56
The level of immigration into the country today	55
The nation's policies to reduce or control crime	52
The nation's energy policies	49
The quality of medical care in the nation	49
The state of race relations	48
The nation's policies regarding the abortion issue	47
The quality of the environment in the nation	40
The position of blacks and other racial minorities in the nation	40
The role America plays in world affairs	34
The nation's military strength and preparedness	32
The position of women in the nation	31
The state of the nation's economy	27

Believe President Bush Will Work “For” Group¹⁵ (In Percent)

The military	92
Large corporations	86
White men	85
Wealthy people	85
Religious conservatives.	74
Hispanic	67
Other racial and ethnic minorities	65
The middle class	65
Blacks/African-Americans	64
Women’s rights groups	56
Poor people	52
Environmental groups.	50
Labor unions	45

Furthermore, the American public does not believe the current administration will prioritize the poor. At the time of George Bush’s inauguration, the public felt he would work for the military (92%), corporations (86%), white men (85%) and wealthy people (85%). Only a slim majority felt he would work for the poor (52%), narrowly edging out environmental groups (50%) and labor unions (45%) in priority.

A plurality (43%) believes that the Bush Administration is most helping the “haves” in society, while only 4% think it is most helping the “have-nots” and 40% think the Bush Administration is treating them both the same.¹⁶

Satisfaction with Aspects of Life

Satisfaction With Aspect¹⁷
Percent “Very Satisfied”

Family life	69
Current housing	63
Community as a place to live in	58
Safety from physical harm/violence	55
Personal health	54
Job/work	50
Opportunities to succeed in life	48
Education	45
Financial situation.	26

Satisfaction with family and community runs high, but Americans are less satisfied with their finances, their work, and their opportunity to succeed in life. A majority worries about finances and is not earning enough to live the kind of life they would like. Retirement is a particular worry, with very few saving enough for retirement, and a fifth not saving anything at all. There may be an opportunity for a national dialogue around a cluster of concerns relating to ability to advance in work and achieve financial security.

Most Americans are satisfied with their family life, housing, and community. What they are dissatisfied with are the areas that have to do with work and upward mobility. They are least satisfied with their financial situation (26%) and are also dissatisfied with work life, chances for success, and education.

People worry about finances: that they “Will not have enough money to live comfortably” (69% worry, 30% worry “a lot”);¹⁸ and that they “Will not have enough health insurance to pay for large medical bills” (60% worry, 29% worry “a lot”).¹⁹ These financial worries are more prevalent fears than illness or other crises such as:

- That your spouse or someone very close to you will not live long (59% worry, 22% worry “a lot”)
- What will happen to you if you become old and sick (57%, 18%)
- That your health will get much worse (60%, 18%)
- That you or someone in your household will lose your/their job (46%, 17%)
- That you will be a victim of a crime (61%, 13%)
- That you will not live long (41%, 10%)
- That you will go to hell (28%, 10%)²⁰

Most are not earning enough to lead the kind of life they want (60%), but those who are not earning enough now feel they will be able to earn enough in the future to lead the life they want (63%).²¹ Not only are they not leading the life they want now, they are not saving substantially for the future either. A majority (58%) is saving, but only 10% are “saving a lot.” Twenty-nine percent are just managing to make ends meet, while the remainder are either drawing on savings (5%) or going into debt (6%). Only 15% feel that they are saving enough for retirement, while 48% are saving, but feel they need to save more. Nineteen percent are not saving at all and among the self-identified “have-nots,” 41% are not saving at all for retirement.²²

American Values

Satisfaction with Work

Americans are more satisfied with other aspects of their lives, but even so, a substantial number are very satisfied with their work. Furthermore, a greater proportion is satisfied today than ten years ago. Stress level, recognition, and salary correlate with an employee's satisfaction, while relations with co-workers and supervisors, job security and opportunity for advancement correlate with worker dissatisfaction. Lower income employees are far less satisfied with their work than those with higher incomes.



Ratings of Current Job²³ % Completely Satisfied

Your relations with co-workers . . .	67
Physical safety conditions of your workplace	63
Flexibility of your hours	56
Amount of vacation time you receive	50
Your job security	48
Your boss or immediate supervisor	47
Amount of work required of you	46
Opportunity you have to learn and grow	43
Recognition you receive at work for your accomplishments . .	38
Family and medical leave benefits your employer provides	38
Health insurance benefits your employer offers	33
Your chances for promotion	32
Retirement plan your employer offers	31
Amount of money you earn	23
Amount of on-the-job stress you have	21

Nearly all workers (86%) say they are satisfied with their jobs, and 39% report that they are completely satisfied. This is a marked improvement from ten years earlier, in 1989, when 89% were satisfied, but only 28% were completely satisfied.²⁴

Workers are most satisfied with their relationships with coworkers (67% completely satisfied), and with the physical safety of their work environment (63%). Most are also satisfied with the flexibility of their hours (56%) and their vacation time (50%).

Workers are dissatisfied with their stress level (21%), the amount of money they earn (23%) and their retirement plan (31%). Interestingly, opportunity to

learn and grow is rated highly by several (43%) while fewer give good ratings to chances for promotion (32%).

According to Gallup's analysis of job satisfaction, there are three factors that drive employee satisfaction: stress, recognition, and salary. Workers who are satisfied with these areas tend to be satisfied with the job overall. The items most associated with dissatisfaction are relations with co-workers and one's boss, job security and opportunities to learn and grow. Workers who are dissatisfied with these areas are generally dissatisfied with the job in general.

Those at the lowest income levels are the least satisfied with their job. Workers in households earning \$75,000 per year or more are more likely to be "completely satisfied" with their job (47%) than those making \$30,000-74,999 (42%), or those earning less than \$30,000 (24%).²⁵

American Values

An individual's responses to questions in a survey are driven by an underlying perspective of how the world works. By looking across a variety of questions it is possible to determine some of the underlying belief systems dictating a person's reactions to problems such as poverty. In this section, a series of American values or belief systems relevant to poverty are outlined, to illuminate why the public will be more receptive to certain solutions and certain messages over others.

Americans are charitable and generous toward those they view as truly needy.

Fundamentally, nearly all Americans agree (86% agree, 34% completely) that "People should do much more than they do now to help others who are in need, even if it costs them their own time and money."²⁶ Furthermore, 75% agree, "This is a rich country which could afford to do more to help the

...what people most want from government is a level playing field... [and] a safety net to catch the vulnerable

poor than we do now.”²⁷ American generosity results in a desire to protect those least able to care for themselves. Fully 81% agree with the statement “You would be willing to pay a little more in taxes to take care of children, the elderly, and persons with disabilities who are unable to support themselves.”²⁸

Far fewer are willing to extend this level of generosity to those who seem less in need. Only 46% agree “You would be willing to pay a little more in taxes to help adults who are employable, but who are unable to support themselves.”²⁹ Though described as being unable to support themselves, the word “employable” indicates to survey respondents that this is a group of people who should not need assistance from others.

The goal is equal opportunity, not equal outcome. There is near unanimous agreement (90% agree, 52% completely) that “Our society should do what is necessary to make sure that everyone has an equal opportunity to succeed.”³⁰ While 63% feel “The money and wealth in this country should be more evenly distributed among more people,” they don’t fault the basic economic system for inequality.³¹ Two-thirds (68%) see the economic system in the U.S. as “Basically fair, since all Americans have an equal opportunity to succeed,” while less than three in ten (29%) view the system as “Basically unfair, since all Americans do not have an equal opportunity to succeed.”³²

So what people most want from government is a level playing field. However, most also want a safety net to catch the vulnerable. Nearly two-thirds (62%) agree with the statement “The government should guarantee every citizen enough to eat and a place to sleep” (29% completely agree).³³ A similar percentage (61%) agrees, “It is the responsibility of the government to take care of people who can’t take care

of themselves” (23% completely agree).³⁴ However, people do not support an expansion of services at all costs. Only 44% agree (14% completely) with the statement “The government should help more needy people even if it means going deeper in debt.”³⁵

Each individual is responsible for his or her own success or failure. Seventy-eight percent agree (78%, 47% strongly), “People should take responsibility for their own lives and economic well-being and not expect other people to help.” They reject a systemic cause for poverty, agreeing that “Most people who don’t get ahead should not blame the system, they have only themselves to blame” (71% agree, 36% strongly).³⁶

Most people credit or blame their own abilities for their fortune or lack of fortune. Of those who feel their financial situation is excellent or good (50% of the public), nearly all (86%) credit their good fortune to their own efforts and abilities. Even among those who rate their financial situation as only fair or poor (49% of the public), 43% credit it to something they failed to do, 22% bad luck, 20% due to something others had done to them.³⁷ The public believes they have to rely on themselves if they fall on bad times (65%) rather than rely on the government to help (29%). Those who are better off are more likely to point to self-reliance (67%), but even a majority of those in poverty agree (59%).³⁸

With hard work comes reward. Americans believe in hard work and responsibility, rejecting the complaint that “Hard work offers little guarantee of success” (60% disagree, 38% strongly).³⁹ Two-thirds (65%) reject the notion that “Success in life is pretty much determined by forces outside our control” (28% completely disagree).⁴⁰

The public does not begrudge the success of those who worked to achieve it. Nearly all Americans agree (89% agree, 52% completely), “I admire people who get rich by working hard.”⁴¹ Instead, those who don’t work hard and are dependent on others frustrate the public. Two-thirds agree (62% agree, 25% completely), “Many people today think they can get ahead without working hard and making sacrifices.”⁴² Three quarters agree (79% agree, 35% completely) with the statement “Poor people have become too dependent on government assistance programs.”⁴³

Anyone can achieve the American Dream. The idea of “the American Dream,” i.e., that anyone can achieve financial and social success with enough hard work, is a part of our national identity. Three-quarters (76%) are satisfied with the “Opportunity for a person in this nation to get ahead by working hard” (36% very satisfied).⁴⁴ Eighty-one percent agree that there is “Plenty of opportunity and anyone who works hard can go as far as they want.”⁴⁵

Additionally, a plurality (43%) side with the statement “There is more opportunity to get ahead than there used to be,” while another 36% say “The amount of opportunity is about the same.” Only 20% think, “There is less opportunity than there used to be.”⁴⁶

A majority (51%) of voters believe it is still possible for most Americans to live the American Dream, while 34% think it not possible for most Americans today. There are strong racial and partisan divides on this question, with 54% of white Americans believing it is still possible to live the American Dream, but only 27% of black voters agreeing. Fully 71% of Republican voters believe it is still possible for most Americans to live the Dream, but only 37% of Democrats agree. Independents are

Poverty and the Poor

mixed with 48% believing the Dream is alive while 34% disagree.⁴⁷

Significant percentages of Americans believe they will become rich. Forty-one percent believe it is very (12%) or somewhat likely (29%) that they will become rich; while 57% think it is not too likely (31%) or not at all likely (26%). Interestingly, a majority (55%) of those under 30 think it is likely they will be rich, while only 36% of those over 50 think they will.⁴⁸ Most, however, do not see their job as their path to fortune; 71% of those who are employed believe there is no chance they will get rich in their current job.⁴⁹ Finally, 38% say it is harder to get rich in America than it used to be, while 26% think it is easier, and 31% see no difference.⁵⁰

Poverty and the Poor Scope of the Problem

Poverty is seen as a significant problem to be addressed, but Americans are not sure it is possible to eliminate poverty. Americans are increasingly likely to see society as divided into the “haves” and “have-nots,” and a majority characterize themselves as “haves.” They believe the gap between the rich and the poor will grow, but also believe more people are getting rich.

A majority (55%) thinks poverty is a “big problem” in American society today.⁵¹ Those in poverty (defined as less than 100% of the federal poverty level) are more likely to see poverty as a big problem (67%), but even a majority (52%) of those with higher incomes (defined as those with an income above 200% of the poverty level) see it as a big problem.⁵²

But Americans are divided in how much they believe poverty can be addressed. If government spending were no object, 47% believe poverty

could be eliminated while 49% think that objective could not be accomplished. Democrats are more optimistic that poverty can be eliminated (56%), while few Republicans agree (34%). The poor believe poverty could be eliminated if the government put enough resources into it (65%), while a majority of those with higher incomes think that is a task that cannot be accomplished (54%).⁵³ Very few (18%) currently believe too much is being spent on assistance to the poor, but the remainder are divided between believing the country spends too little (38%) and that the amount is about right (36%).⁵⁴

Forty-four percent (44%) see American society divided into the “haves” and “have-nots” while 53% reject this characterization. The proportion believing the country is divided into those two groups is the highest it has been, and substantially higher than it was in 1988 (26%). Most Americans would characterize their own situation as among the “haves” (52%), while 32% identify themselves as “have-nots.” But the proportion self-identifying as “haves” is far lower than in 1999 when 67% saw themselves as “haves” or in 1988 when 59% placed themselves as “haves.”⁵⁵

Not only are people more likely to see American society divided into “haves” and “have-nots,” they also believe the gap between the rich and the poor will grow (69%).⁵⁶ Three-quarters (74%) believe that “The percentage of Americans who are rich is increasing from year to year;” 9 points higher than the 65% who felt this way in 1990. Two-thirds (69%) agree, “Today it’s really true that the rich just get richer while the poor get poorer” which represents a decline from the 1980s. Sixty-two percent think poverty is increasing, while 32% believe poverty is decreasing. Since Gallup started asking this ques-

tion 15 years ago, this is the greatest shift they have noted toward believing that poverty is decreasing.⁵⁷

The Picture of the Poor

The public is conflicted in their views of the poor, and the conflict revolves around work. The public holds the working poor in high regard, because their hard work is a reflection of the American work ethic. Those who receive public assistance, however, are held in much lower esteem since the public sees them as not valuing work and getting paid for doing nothing. Democrats and Republicans disagree on how much a person is to blame for his or her own misfortune, with Democrats much more willing to point to circumstances and seeing the poor as wanting to work, but being in true need. Republicans blame individuals’ lack of effort and see welfare recipients as not wanting to work and taking advantage of others.

Most see poverty for a family of four being somewhere between \$20–25,000 a year. There is near unanimous agreement (88%) that a family of four earning \$15,000 is poor. Two-thirds (64%) still see \$20,000 as being poor, while only 42% see \$25,000 as constituting poverty.⁵⁸



...61% think the poor “are people who work but can’t earn enough money”...only 34% think they do not work

% Rating Individuals and Groups as Sharing “Your Moral and Ethical Values”⁵⁹

	Share Most Values	Most / Some Values
Older Americans.	55	92
Whites	27	88
Blacks or African Americans	21	83
Poor people	27	82
Baby Boomers.	25	74
The Democratic Party	21	68
Young people under the age of 30	16	68
The Republican Party.	20	67
Immigrants.	17	66
Hillary Clinton.	26	65
Al Gore.	21	65
Rich people.	11	61
Members of politically conservative religious groups like the Christian Coalition	25	60
Bill Clinton	19	59
People on welfare	7	56
Newt Gingrich.	12	50
Homosexuals	6	35

Americans tend to see the poor as being of good character. In fact, the public is more likely to say they share the same values as poor people (27% say poor people generally share most of their values), rather than rich people (11%). This is different from how they feel about people on welfare, with whom few believe they share values (7%).⁶⁰

Furthermore, 67% believe the poor have the same moral values as other Americans, while 21% think they have lower moral values and 8% think they have higher moral values. This opinion

is shared by those who are better off (68%) as well as by those who are near poverty (57%, with 19% saying they have higher moral values).⁶¹

People are slightly less likely to believe welfare recipients have the same moral values as other Americans, but 63% believe welfare recipients have about the same moral values, with 29% saying their values are lower. Those near poverty are the harshest critics of welfare recipients, with 34% saying they have lower moral values and 56% saying they have the same values.⁶²

Attitudes toward work are at the core of people’s perceptions of the poor. Most have a picture of the poor as working—61% think the poor “are people who work but can’t earn enough money” while only 34% think they do not work.⁶³ Perceptions of government benefits color views of the poor and of welfare recipients specifically. When considering benefits, slightly more of the public believes that “Poor people today have it easy because they can get government benefits without doing anything in return” (46%), while nearly as many (43%) believe “Poor people have hard lives because government benefits don’t go far enough.” Democrats and Republicans disagree on this point. Democrats believe the poor have hard lives (55%) while Republicans think they have it easy (60%).⁶⁴ The poor believe “Poor people have hard lives because government benefits don’t go far enough” (59%), while those with higher incomes are more likely to believe “Poor people today have it easy because they can get government benefits without doing anything in return” (50%).⁶⁵ (Note that both choices in the question assume government benefits in relation to poor people; another indication that views of the poor and views of those who receive government assistance are frequently intertwined).

The public is divided between believing that welfare recipients really need welfare (47%) or they could get along without it if they tried (44%). Those nearest the poverty level believe welfare recipients are in genuine need (60%), while those with more than 200% above the poverty line are divided between believing they are in genuine need (45%) and they could get along without it if they tried (46%).⁶⁶

Understanding that most Americans believe each individual is responsible for his or her own success or failure, and with hard work comes reward, helps explain why views of the poor are not wholly sympathetic. A plurality (45%) believe the “poor are mainly to blame for their poverty” while 36% believe people are “poor through no fault of their own.” Conservatives and liberals approach this distinction very differently. Self-identified conservatives are more likely to believe that the poor are to blame for their situation (56% to blame, 29% no fault) while liberals think the poor are not at fault (37% to blame, 49% no fault). This suggests a reason for why conservatives and liberals see different solutions to poverty.⁶⁷

Additionally, 48% believe people are not doing enough to help themselves out of poverty, while 45% think they are poor due to circumstances beyond their control. Again, there are strong distinctions by party identification. A majority of Democrats (57%) point to circumstances as the problem; while nearly two-thirds (63%) of Republicans say people are not doing enough to help themselves.⁶⁸

Americans are convinced there are jobs available for welfare recipients who really want to work (78%), but they are divided in whether or not welfare recipients really do want to work (47% yes) or not (44% no). A majority of Democrats view welfare recipients as wanting to work (55%), while just as

... [(59%)] who believe jobs are available think the jobs welfare recipients can get do not pay enough to support a family

many Republicans think they do not want to (55%).⁶⁹ There is widespread agreement that people could find work if they wanted to badly enough. Whether people are thinking about the unemployed or welfare recipients, they believe:

- “Most people who are unemployed could find paid work without much difficulty if they really worked at it” (77% agree)⁷⁰
- “Most people who are on welfare and do not work, would find paid work if they were not on welfare” (75% agree)⁷¹

Importantly, even those who believe jobs are available think the jobs welfare recipients can get do not pay enough to support a family (59%).⁷²

There are strong racial divides in perceptions of the poor, the scope of poverty and the causes of poverty. Blacks are more likely than whites to see poverty as a big problem (72% compared to 52%); to say circumstances cause poverty (57% compared to 44%); to say that poor people have hard lives (59% compared to 39%); to say that the government could eliminate poverty if it wanted (67% compared to 40%); and to say that most welfare recipients want to work (54% compared to 45%). Whites are more likely than blacks to hold the opposite opinion on all these measures.⁷³

Reflections of the Poor

Many Americans have personal experience with poverty. Roughly one-quarter see themselves as lower income or poor, but half worry about becoming poor, and half have a close friend or family member who is poor. One-third say they or an immediate family member have received welfare or public assistance at some point.

Twelve percent see themselves as rich or upper income, 61% middle income, 21% lower income, and 6% identify as poor. Since 1990, the percentage identifying as rich or upper income has grown by 5 percentage points, while the proportion seeing themselves as lower income or poor has declined by 6 percentage points.⁷⁴

Though a quarter see themselves as lower income or poor, many more identify with the poor, either through worrying about becoming poor, or through personal relationships with the poor. A majority (53%) worries about becoming poor, with 18% saying they “worry a great deal.” This worry is pronounced among those at less than 100% of the poverty level, with 68% saying they worry, 35% worry “a great deal.”⁷⁵

More than one-third (36%) of respondents note that someone in their family is poor and 48% have a close friend who is poor.⁷⁶ One-third has at some time received welfare or public assistance benefits: 64% of those in poverty have received welfare, 47% of those at 100–200% of the federal poverty level, and even 33% of those at more than 200% of the federal poverty level have received assistance at some point.⁷⁷ Of the 64% in poverty who have received public assistance, over half (59%) were receiving assistance at the time of the study.⁷⁸ Those receiving assistance are optimistic that it is a short-term situation. Only 37% of those currently receiving assistance expect to still be receiving assistance in one year.⁷⁹ Few of those receiving assistance say they are receiving a lot of pressure from the government to find a job (14%).⁸⁰

Those earning less than 100% of the federal poverty level think of themselves as poor, and rate their financial situation negatively. They tend to blame themselves for their financial troubles, but also cite a higher

incidence of health problems than those with higher incomes. Majorities of the poor, and significant percentages of the near poor have had trouble paying bills in the past year.

A majority of the poor (57%) is satisfied with the way the economy is going, but that compares with 74% of those who are more well off.⁸¹ The poor rate their own financial situation as only fair (44%) or poor (40%). Those in poverty tend to think of themselves as poor (65%), while only 33% of those at 100–200% of the federal poverty level think of themselves as poor.⁸² A plurality of the poor self identify as “lower class” (40%) followed by “working class” (32%), while those at 100–200% of the poverty level think of themselves as working class (51%) or middle class (30%).⁸³



**Ratings of Current Situation
% Only Fair or Poor⁸⁴**

	% of Federal Poverty Level		
	<100%	100-200%	200%+
Your health care coverage	45	44	23
The safety of your neighborhood	44	25	13
The housing you currently live in	37	28	13

Those in poverty are mixed in their reasons for their financial troubles, with 34% saying it is due to something they failed to do, 29% bad luck, and 21% due to things others have done to them.⁸⁵ However, the poor cite a higher incidence of health problems than those who are better off. Overall, 20% rate their health as “only fair” or “poor.” Those at the lowest income levels, however, are more likely to report poor health (47%) than those at 100-200% of the poverty level (33%) or those at more than 200% of the poverty level (14%). They also rate their neighborhood safety and their housing worse.

As outlined in the following table, majorities of those earning less than 100% of the poverty level had problems paying their utility bills, buying food, and getting the medical care they needed over the past year. Significant percentages of those at 100-200% of the federal poverty level also struggled to pay bills.

The poor think it is increasingly difficult to climb out of poverty and think the government is partially to blame. Like the general public, they have a lot of faith in the ability of education and job training to improve their situation.

Had Serious Problem in Past Year % Yes for Self or Family⁸⁶

	% of Federal Poverty Level		
	<100%	100-200%	200%+
Falling behind in your gas,electric, or phone bills	53	41	29
Being unable to get medical care because of the cost	51	40	27
Having too little money to buy enough food	52	35	17
Falling behind in your rent or mortgage payments	42	31	26
Being unable to pay for adequate transportation to get to work or school.	40	22	14
Having trouble paying a credit card balance	38	39	40
Having a problem with alcohol or drug abuse	22	17	21
Being a victim of a crime	22	16	16
Being unable to find child care or being forced to take your child out of childcare because you can't pay	21	21	13
Getting divorced or separated, in part because of financial problems	18	14	13

The poor believe it is harder than it was ten years ago for poor people to get out of poverty by working hard (62%) and they blame the federal government for making it harder (46% blame the government for making it harder).⁸⁷ If they could change one thing about the current welfare system, welfare recipients say it would be helping more people go to school (11%) or get job training (6%), followed by help with day care (6%).⁸⁸ The low level of educational attainment among the poor explains their desire for educational assistance; three-quarters (74%) have no more than a high school degree, and 41% do not have a high school degree.⁸⁹



Causes of Poverty

As noted earlier in this analysis, the public points to hard work as the main ingredient for riches and success, and lack of hard work as the major cause of poverty. They also recognize there may be circumstances outside one’s control that can cause poverty, but tend to look first to the individual. Next to hard work, education is a core determinant of future success or failure.

There are three key ingredients for success according to the public: hard work (92% rate “4 or 5” on a 5 point scale), education (92%), and parents (87%). Other helpful factors include willingness to take risks (69%), connections (68%) and natural ability (60%). Fewer think physical appearance (50%), luck (43%) or inheritance (41%) matter. The public does not think dis-

Responsibility and Solutions

honesty is necessary (24%) and few think race (30%) or gender (33%) matter.

A majority thinks people are rich due to strong efforts (53%) rather than to circumstances they do not control (32%). In comparison, they are less likely to think a poor person's situation is due to lack of effort (43%) and more likely to point to circumstances (41%).⁹¹ Majorities of the poor point to circumstances (57%), while those at higher incomes are more likely to point to the individual (50%) over circumstances (44%).⁹²

Reasons for Success or Not Rate "4 or 5" on a 5 Point Scale⁹⁰

Hard work and initiative	92%
Getting the right education or training.	92%
Parents and family	87%
Willingness to take risks	69%
Connections, knowing the right people	68%
Ability or talent one is born with . .	60%
Physical appearance, good looks . .	50%
Good luck, in the right place at the right time	43%
Money inherited from family	41%
Gender.	33%
Member of particular race/ethnic group	30%
Dishonesty and willingness to take whatever one can get	24%

Majorities point to several causes for poverty, some of which are individual in nature, some systemic, and others due to chance. At the top of the list of causes of poverty is drug abuse, with 70% saying it is a major cause of poverty. Other failings of individuals that are perceived to be major causes of poverty include a decline in moral values

(57%), single parent families (54%) and lack of motivation (52%). At the same time, majorities see several circumstances that could force a person into poverty including medical bills (58%), low wage jobs (54%) and poor quality public schools (47%).⁹³

% Major Cause of Poverty⁹⁴

Drug abuse	70
Medical bills	58
Decline in moral values	57
Too many jobs being part time or low wage	54
Too many single-parent families	54
Poor people lacking motivation . .	52
Poor quality of public schools	47
The welfare system	46
A shortage of jobs	34
Too many immigrants	30

Americans across income strata rate several causes of poverty at the same level; poor people's lack of motivation, a decline in moral values, the welfare system, and poor quality public schools. But there are several causes the poor are more likely to see as major causes of poverty than those not near poverty: drug abuse, medical bills, low wage jobs, single parent families, a shortage of jobs, and too many immigrants.⁹⁵

Responsibility and Solutions Responsibility for Poverty

As noted, much of the responsibility for addressing poverty rests on the shoulders of the poor since many believe poverty results from lack of individual effort. However, people also

point to government's responsibility to address this problem. They are skeptical of government's ability to affect poverty, in large part because they believe government is incapable of doing anything well. Most believe current government programs for the poor are ineffective, and few point to government as the actor they would most like to address this problem. However, when given specific solutions, some of the most strongly supported are solutions that require a government role.

Forced to choose between two alternatives, 65% think "The government in Washington, DC should make every possible effort to improve the social and economic position of the poor" while only 29% think "The government should not make any special effort to help the poor, because they should help themselves." However, when choosing among various actors, Americans make it clear that the poor need to take responsibility. One-third (32%) believe government should have the greatest responsibility for helping the poor, while 28% believe the poor themselves bear the greatest responsibility. Other actors are pointed to less frequently: churches (14%), families of the poor (12%), and other private charities (6%).⁹⁶

People hold conflicting views about government's role in eliminating poverty. They are divided between believing "The government in Washington should do everything possible to improve the standard of living of all Americans" (51% side with this statement) and believing "This is not the government's responsibility, each person should take care of themselves" (46%).⁹⁷ On the one hand, 70% agree "The federal government has a responsibility to try to do away with poverty in this country." At

Best Provider of Indicated Service (In Percent, Ranked by % Government Role)¹⁰³

	Religious Organization	Non-religious Community Group	Federal/State Government
Job training	5	28	61
Health care	9	28	56
Literacy training	12	31	49
Counseling and educating prisoners	40	18	35
Treatment for drug and alcohol addiction	27	36	31
Child care	29	32	29
Feeding the homeless	40	25	28
Mentoring programs for young people	40	39	15
Counseling teens about pregnancy	39	42	12

the same time, they reject the socialistic implication of income shifting in the statement “It is the responsibility of government to reduce the differences in income between people with high incomes and people with low incomes” (67% disagree, 40% strongly).⁹⁸

Part of the skepticism of a role for the government is the public’s perception of government waste. Nearly two-thirds agree (64% agree, 27% completely), “When something is run by the government, it is usually inefficient and wasteful.”⁹⁹ On average, people believe that 46 cents out of tax every dollar is wasted. While a very high figure, this is lower than in 1998 (56 cents) or 1995 (51 cents).¹⁰⁰ A majority (61%) thinks government programs to improve the condition of poor people are not having any impact (48%) or are making things worse (13%). Only one-third (34%) views government programs as making things better, however those who are poor are more likely to see the benefit of government programs (43%).¹⁰¹

The public also looks to non-government actors to address this problem. When given a large variety of choices, only 28% say federal and state government agencies can do the best job of providing services to people in need. A

plurality (37%) chooses religious organizations, followed by non-religious, community-based organizations (27%).¹⁰²

While the overall inclination is toward non-government actors, there are certain services for which the public looks to government to provide. As the table above outlines, people tend to prefer federal or state government for providing job training, health care or literacy training. Programs for young people, such as pregnancy counseling, mentoring programs, and childcare, are the realm of non-governmental organizations, as are charitable activities such as feeding the homeless.

Solutions

To address poverty, the public wants to help people get good jobs, and assist them in their jobs so they can be successful. There is overwhelming support for more education and training, increasing the minimum wage, subsidizing day care and giving tax credits to low income workers. The public is much less enthusiastic about cash assistance and “guaranteeing” income.

**“In what ways should government help the poor?”¹⁰⁴
Volunteered Response, In Percent**

Education Training	
Better Education	38
More job and skills training	29
Income Transfer	
Financial aid, give money	12
Tax breaks, lower taxes	5
Raise minimum wage	2
More Opportunity	
More jobs and job opportunities	16
Better jobs	3
More opportunities	3
Other	
More housing	11
Better health care coverage	10
Better child care	7
More social programs and services	6

When asked what the government should do to help the poor, the public most frequently suggests education and job training (67%). They are less likely to cite tax breaks or raising the minimum wage (19% mention some kind of income transfer), though they support these efforts at high levels. One-fifth (22%) wants the government to focus on providing more opportunity.

The most popular policies, such as increasing the minimum wage and subsidized day care, are supported equally across income levels. The policies with less support are driven down through the weak support of those with more income. The poor are much more supportive than those not close to poverty of food stamps (78% of the poor compared to 57% of those more than 200% of poverty), cash assistance (75% of the poor, 51% of those 200%+), and guaranteeing a minimum income (71% of the poor, 54% of 200%+).

The public overwhelmingly supports policies for working people. A majority strongly supports “helping low income Americans develop the skills they need to compete in the global economy” (90% support, 56% strongly support).¹⁰⁶ Just as many are willing to help “Pay for education and job training for people leaving welfare” (90% support, 53% strongly).¹⁰⁷ Tax credits are popular, particularly when provided directly to the poor: “Tax credits to people who work but do not earn enough to keep their families out of poverty” (86% support, 55% strongly).¹⁰⁸ People also support a business credit through offering “Tax cuts to businesses that hire people leaving welfare” (77% support, 34% strongly).¹⁰⁹

Government Actions to Directly Help the Poor% Support¹⁰⁵

Increasing the minimum wage	85
Expanding subsidized day care . . .	85
Spending more for medical care for poor people	83
Increasing tax credits for low-income workers	80
Spending more for housing for poor people	75
Making food stamps more available to poor people	61
Guaranteeing everyone a minimum income	57
Increasing cash assistance for families	54

Education receives near unanimous support as an action to address poverty for the long-term. The public wants to improve public schools and expand job-training programs. They also want schools to teach about morals and the work ethic, and want to expand public employment programs. There is more modest support for increasing police in low-income areas and little support for toughening divorce law.



Government Actions to Reduce Poverty% Support¹¹⁰

Improving public schools in low-income areas	94
Expanding job-training programs . . .	94
Requiring public schools to teach about moral values and the work ethic	83
Expanding public employment programs	82
Putting more police in low-income areas	72
Making it harder to get divorced. . .	38

Areas for Policy Consideration

The rest of this section highlights several specific policy areas for addressing poverty: work, the minimum wage, welfare reform, education, health care, childcare, and teen pregnancy. The intent of these sections is to outline key trends in public opinion in each area as related to poverty or upward mobility. It is not intended to be a comprehensive assessment of each topic.

Work: Work is at the center of how people think about poverty and upward mobility. The public wants to assist and reward those who are working hard, but worry that too many are relying on others to take care of them. They believe there are jobs for anyone who wants one, but also realize many jobs will not lift a family out of poverty. The public’s emphasis on work indicates that policies rewarding work, or assisting work, such as

increasing the minimum wage, childcare subsidies, etc., will be popular if correctly framed.

As of early 2001, the public did not view a shortage of jobs as a cause of poverty. Two-thirds (69%) think there are jobs available for anyone who is willing to work.¹¹¹ When it comes to welfare recipients, the public is even more forceful. Three quarters (78%) note there are jobs available for most welfare recipients who really want to work.¹¹²

At the same time, the public recognizes the available jobs may not be good ones. Of those who believe jobs are available for welfare recipients, a majority (59%) also believes most of the jobs welfare recipients can get will not support a family.¹¹³ Low wages and poor jobs are problems the public is sympathetic toward. Everyone agrees that “As a country, we should make sure that people who work full-time should be able to earn enough to keep their families out of poverty” (94% agree, 80% strongly).¹¹⁴

The answer to this problem, according to the public, is to give working people the help they need to lift themselves out of poverty: 94% agree “People who have been on public assistance but would like to work should be given help to make it possible for them to find jobs.”¹¹⁵ This perspective results in very high levels of support for policies such as expanding job-training programs (94%) and expanding public employment programs (82%).¹¹⁶

People are willing to continue assistance to guarantee job stability. Two-thirds (69%) agree “The government should continue to help low-income people even after they find jobs by offering things like additional training or help with childcare, so they can succeed in their jobs.” Only 27% choose the alternative, “Once a low income

person finds a job, the government should no longer be helping them at all. At that point, success is up to the individual, not the government.”¹¹⁷ This perspective even extends to welfare recipients. Three-quarters (77%) agree, “When parents on welfare find jobs, government should provide help if their jobs do not pay enough to financially support their children.”¹¹⁸

Messages about “workforce issues” allow the conversation to shift responsibility beyond the individual to include societal institutions. When the public thinks about whom or what shares responsibility for the competitiveness of the American workforce, they point first to the public education system (92% bears responsibility, 60% bears a lot of responsibility). While individual job seekers are still seen as responsible (88%, 58%), the public includes state government (83%, 39%) and federal government (79%, 38%), as well as employers (83%, 36%) in the mix of responsible parties.¹¹⁹

Minimum wage: The public wants to support workers and direct assistance to those who work. Therefore, increasing the minimum wage is a popular policy. It directly benefits workers, and addresses the needs of the poor.

Most are aware of the current minimum wage, and those who are incorrect guess too high rather than too low. A majority (51%) understands the minimum wage is currently about \$5 an hour. Few (4%) think it is less than that, while 28% think it is \$6 an hour, and 11% think it is \$7 or more.¹²⁰

The \$10–11,000 annually that a full-time worker can earn with the minimum wage is ridiculously low compared to what the average person thinks a family needs to live. When asked what annual income a family of four needs to make ends meet, 69% report their earnings need to be at least \$35,000/year.¹²¹

Polls consistently report very high levels of public support for increasing the minimum wage. Most recently, the Pew Research Center reported 87% favor (49% strongly) “An increase in the minimum wage, from \$5.15 an hour to \$6.45 an hour.”¹²² If anything, support is higher now than in recent years. In October 1999, 83% supported increasing the minimum wage, and in 1998 76% supported increasing it.¹²³

There are two caveats concerning public support for increasing the minimum wage. First, it has broad support, but not deep, passionate support. Increasing the minimum wage is seen as “extremely important” for the President and Congress to deal with by only 31% of the public. This compares with the top response of education at 61%.¹²⁴ Secondly, it is seen as the appropriate domain for state, not federal, legislation. When given the choice, nearly two-thirds (62%) see this as a responsibility for state legislatures, while only 27% believe Congress should set the minimum wage.¹²⁵



Welfare reform was about the American work ethic, not cutting the cost of welfare

Welfare Reform: The most recent welfare reform debate provides lessons for communicating on poverty and issues concerning the working poor. Reforming welfare was a widely popular action because it reinforced the American work ethic. People were not concerned with the costs of welfare; they wanted to reinforce the value of work. Even though they recognized that families and children might face hardship, in the long run the public felt children would be better served by learning the value of work. They support transitional help, but want to see welfare recipients at work.

Half (50%) of the public is aware welfare has been substantially changed over the last five years, while 18% say “no” and 32% aren’t sure.¹²⁹ Of those who are aware of the changes, 61% believe the reforms are working well. The remainder tend to believe reform is not working well because it denied too many people the help they need (64%) over not having cut enough people from the welfare rolls (31%). While awareness of the law is similar among those in poverty and those who are more well-off, those who are well-off are more likely to believe the reforms are working well (61%), though even a majority of those in poverty also believe the reforms are working well (53%).¹³⁰

tion in welfare rolls to changes in welfare laws that forced more people to work (62% of those who know there have been changes in welfare), rather than to the strong economy (23%). Those in poverty place even more credit on welfare changes (73%) rather than the economy (16%).¹³³

Among the lowest priorities for welfare reform was saving tax dollars (an average of 8.6 on a 10 point scale). The public was far more interested in eliminating abuse (9.5), helping people stay off welfare (9.3), helping people get jobs (9.2), lowering poverty (9.1) and reducing the number of people on welfare (9.1). They did not want welfare reform to be a punitive action; rather some of their top priorities were “making sure poor children get the help they need” (9.4), reducing teen pregnancy (9.2) and strengthening families and family values (9).¹³⁴

The welfare reform debate focused on getting people off welfare and into any kind of job. This approach was, and is, effective because it triggers people’s work ethic: 63% agree “People who are making the transition from public assistance to work should take whatever jobs they can get, even if these jobs don’t provide health insurance or allow them to fully support their families.”¹³⁵ However, opponents to welfare reform missed an opportunity to recast the issue as being about getting people permanently off welfare and out of poverty through advancing job skills. Three-quarters (77%) agree “The government should help people develop skills and get jobs where they have opportunities for advancement, so that they can be successful in the workforce and not need government assistance in the future.” Only 19% agree with the alternative choice, “The government should move people off welfare and into jobs as quickly as possible, even if the jobs offer little opportunity for advancement, because the most

Reasons Welfare Reform Is Working Well% Major Reason¹³¹ (Among the 31% Who Know of Change in Welfare Laws and Say It Is Working Well)	
Requires people to go to work	87
Has substantially cut the welfare rolls	64
Welfare departments are now doing more to help poor people	52
There is now less stigma attached to receiving welfare	28

Welfare reform was a popular action, with 80% favoring efforts to reform.¹²⁶ Reform garnered this strong level of support, even though 46% thought penalties and time limits would harm children.¹²⁷ What bothered people about welfare was the idea that “Too many people take advantage of the welfare system and don’t try to get ahead on their own” (45% worry a great deal). Those at the lowest income levels worry more about taking advantage (50% of those who earn less than \$30,000 worry a great deal) than those at the highest income levels (26% of those who earn more than \$75,000 worry a great deal).¹²⁸

Welfare reform was about the American work ethic, not cutting the cost of welfare. People most often point to “requiring people to go to work” as the major reason welfare reform is working well (87%). Of four choices, 64% choose requiring work as the most important reason it is working well over cutting the welfare rolls, welfare helping more people, or fewer stigmas attached to welfare. Notably, those who know of the changes in the welfare law, even though a majority thinks the law is working well, also believe those who have left the welfare rolls remain poor (73%).¹³² They do not believe welfare reform addressed poverty. But they also credit the reduc-

Percent Saying Each is a “Major Problem” in Public Schools in Their Community and in the Nation as a Whole¹⁴²

	Community's Schools	Nation's Schools
Lack of parental involvement	55	78
Student use of alcohol or illegal drugs	51	69
Students who are undisciplined and disruptive	50	73
Overcrowded classrooms	47	61
Violence and lack of school safety	35	64
Inequality in funding among school districts	34	51
Lack of adequate academic standards	32	50
Poor school administration	27	42
Poor quality teachers	26	34
Lack of computers and technology	24	30
Public school facilities that are unsafe or unhealthy	21	37
Discrimination against children because of race or gender	18	33

important thing is getting people off welfare.”¹³⁶

Education: The public places great faith in the ability of education to solve many of the ills that face the country. Education is one of the most important institutions in American society. People see education as the primary solution for poverty for the short-term (in improving job skills) and the long-term (in educating the next generation). The public thinks of all levels of education, from pre-school through college and vocational training, as having a role in addressing poverty.

People place the future of the country in schools. When asked how big a role various institutions will play in making life better in the future, schools and universities are near the top (79% major role) after science and technolo-

gy (89%) and medical advances (85%). Schools are perceived as having a more major role than government, business, the military, the media, or religion.¹³⁷ This is a competitiveness issue. Compared to schools in other advanced industrialized countries, Americans think our public schools rank as average (37%), or worse (38%), while only 19% believe we perform better than average.¹³⁸

Nearly half the public (47%) sees poor quality public schools as a major cause of poverty.¹³⁹ The scope of public education in addressing poverty includes pre-school and grade school education, in part because the public thinks a child's core personality is determined in elementary school. A majority believes that grade school has more influence than high school on the kind of person a child will be when grown (57% point to grade school, 27% high school).¹⁴⁰

But the public does not want to limit educational solutions for poverty to elementary and high school. There is near unanimous agreement (93%) that “People who are making the transition from welfare to work should be allowed the time and training to prepare for jobs that make it possible for them to stay off of welfare permanently.”¹⁴¹

Public faith in education is due to the public's view of the importance of education, not their faith in the quality of the existing system, of which they are very critical.

As the table outlines, the public deems the nation's schools in worse shape than schools in their own community. They are critical of parents, and are concerned about drugs, violence and overcrowded classrooms. The nation's schools fare particularly poorly on discipline (ranked third for community schools, second for national schools) and violence (ranked fifth for community schools, fourth for national schools).

The public is energized to fix their own schools, but also motivated to fix inner city schools. There is near unanimous support for improving public schools in low-income areas (94% support)¹⁴³ and for requiring public schools to teach about moral values and the work ethic (83% support).¹⁴⁴ Addressing decaying school buildings has become a high priority among adults. “Fixing run-down schools” is a popular priority for funds (80% strongly favor), even over reducing class size (69%), more computers (61%), teacher pay (60%), and increased security (53%). A majority of both parents (59%) and non-parents (53%) are willing to pay as much as \$500 per year in increased taxes to pay for these changes. Others are willing to increase taxes by lower amounts: \$100 (9% favor giving \$100 but not \$200),

and \$200 (20% favor paying \$200, but not \$500).¹⁴⁵

Employers and college professors do not see a high school diploma as evidence a student has learned the basics, and few rate recent job applicants as having good basic skills. In fact, 64% of them believe graduates from public schools lack the skills needed to succeed in the work world.¹⁴⁶

Most parents and teachers see a high school diploma as evidence of having learned the basics, while professors and employers disagree.

Value of a High School Diploma¹⁴⁷

A high school diploma is no guarantee that a student learned the basics

Parents	31%
Teachers	23%
College Professors	73%
Employers	59%

A high school diploma means a student has at least learned the basics

Parents	63%
Teachers	76%
College Professors	27%
Employers	39%

Note: "Teachers" are k-12.

Additionally, few professors or employers rate their recent students or job applicants as having good basic skills.

Rate Skills of Recent Job Applicants/Students¹⁴⁸
(% Excellent/Good)

	College Professors	Employers
Rate basic math skills	16%	31%
Rate ability to write clearly	16%	20%
Rate grammar and spelling	22%	18%

The public wants schools to adapt to a changing job market. Changing technology and communication are influences that young people need to master to succeed in today's world.

Two-thirds (69%) see a "great deal of change" in what today's young people need to learn before they graduate from high school, with computers topping the list (36%).¹⁴⁹ The basics, including good work habits, are unanimously perceived as important skills. The ability to communicate well and use technology have been added to the "basic" skills needed to succeed.

%Very Important Skills for Young People to Get Ahead¹⁵⁰

Having good basic reading, writing, and math skills	99%
Having good work habits, such as being responsible, on time, and disciplined	98%
Having good communications skills	89%
Knowing how to use computers and up-to-date technology	80%
Knowing how to speak a foreign language	28%

Most see changes in technology and communications as having more of an influence on the future job force than trends toward job insecurity or globalization.

% Great Deal of Influence on the Future of Young People¹⁵¹

The growing importance of computers and up-to-date technology	77%
More sources of information and more ways to communicate information	60%
Less job security and more downsizing	50%
The growth of the global economy	49%
Diversity in the workforce	39%
The declining number of manufacturing jobs	38%

One caveat concerning the power of education: American belief in a person's ability to be successful through adversity and hard work is so central to our view of the world that a majority (55%) believes "Success in the workplace depends mainly on what you learn and your ability to adapt to your job after you leave school, so you can still succeed with a high-school diploma or two-year college degree" over "It's almost impossible to get ahead these days without a four-year or postgraduate degree, so you have to go to college in order to gain the credentials and knowledge necessary to get ahead" (42%).¹⁵² Educational messages for adults should focus on providing needed job skills, and messages for children should focus on giving the best possible opportunity for a bright future. Education for the sake of education or as a cure-all will overstate the value the public sees in education's ability to address poverty.

At the same time, the public is uncomfortable with day care...the public reacts differently when it concerns poor women

Health care: The public at large feels insecure about their own health care, and recognizes that health care may be a particularly difficult problem for the poor. They see medical costs as a cause of poverty and want government to provide help for those without health coverage.

The cost of health care is a worry that many Americans share. It is one of the top worries cited by the public, with 60% saying they worry they “Will not have enough health insurance to pay for large medical bills” (29% worry “a lot”).¹⁵³ Few are satisfied with the health insurance benefits they currently receive from their employer (33% completely satisfied).¹⁵⁴ They are dissatisfied with the availability of affordable health care in this country (68% dissatisfied, second highest issue tested),¹⁵⁵ and want the president and Congress to make improving the healthcare system a priority (87%, 43% top priority).¹⁵⁶

The public recognizes that health care is a problem for the poor. Sixty one percent (61%) see poor people as being worse off than other Americans when it comes to health care. Furthermore, a majority (58%) considers medical bills as a major cause of poverty, and the poor are particularly likely to feel this way (71% among those at less than 100% of poverty line).¹⁵⁷



Americans support increased attention to and funding for health care for the poor. Eighty one percent agree, “When parents on welfare find jobs, government should provide help if their jobs do not provide affordable health insurance.”¹⁵⁸ Furthermore, 83% support spending more for medical care for poor people.¹⁵⁹

Child Care: Americans are conflicted about women in the workforce. They support women’s ability to work, and recognize dual incomes are needed for most families, but they worry that children will suffer. When it comes to poor women, however, the public’s work ethic overrides their concern for motherly nurturing. They want the poor to work, even those who are mothers of young children.

Fully 83% believe that women’s entering the workforce has been a change for the better,¹⁶⁰ and 71% disagree (48% completely) with the statement “Women should return to their traditional roles in society.”¹⁶¹

At the same time, the public is uncomfortable with day care, and would rather find a way for mothers to stay with their young children. Only a slim majority (51%) of both men and women believe “It’s fine for a mother with young children to take a job if she feels she can handle both responsibilities,” over “A mother who is able to financially, should stay at home with young children” (43% of women, 41% of men agree).¹⁶² “At-home” is the preferred state. Eighty percent (80%) agree, and a majority (52%) strongly agrees, “It may be necessary for mothers to be working because the family needs money, but it would be better if she could stay home and take care of the house and children.”¹⁶³ Changes in gender relationships in recent years have

made it harder: “For parents to raise children” (80%); “For families to earn enough money to live comfortably” (65%); “For marriages to be successful” (71%); “For women to lead satisfying lives” (47%, with women 6 points more likely than men to say harder); and “For men to lead satisfying lives” (48% with men 9 points more likely than women to say harder).¹⁶⁴

But the public reacts differently when it concerns poor women. When thinking about public assistance programs for the poor, 69% agree with the statement “Single mothers who are capable of working should work even if they have young children or other family members to care for.”¹⁶⁵

Even parents of very young children believe the benefit of learning the value of work overrides the undesirability of childcare.¹⁶⁶ Among parents of young children, 86% agree, 53% strongly, that “It’s important for kids whose families are on welfare to see their parent working or going to school, even if it means the kids must be in child care.” Even when those same young parents believe it is important for a parent to stay home during the child’s youngest years, they still think it is better for parents on welfare to use child care so they can go to work or school (73%), while only 21% believe it is better for them to stay home.¹⁶⁷

In addition to wanting children to learn the value of work from their parents, the public sees quality child care as a way to help climb out of poverty. Eighty-three percent (83%) agree, 54% strongly, that “The nation’s poorest children need low-cost, high quality day care centers to have a fair chance of succeeding in school and climbing out of poverty.”¹⁶⁸

This conflict between what is best for all children and what is best for poor children helps to explain why parents

of young children can support giving parents a much bigger tax break to parents who stay at home to care for their children (64% say it would be very helpful),¹⁶⁹ and also support increasing funding for the Head Start program for low-income families (60% very helpful). It also helps explain why fully 86% support childcare assistance for all low-income families so they can work.¹⁷⁰

Government is not normally seen as a desirable participant in childcare. When asked who “should be primarily responsible for ensuring that families have access to child care,” 60% believe it should be up to families, followed by employers (23%) and then government (15%).¹⁷¹ However, they support government giving working families some help with this responsibility. A majority would favor increasing “Federal spending to provide childcare assistance to working parents” (53% favor), or “Giving tax credits to families that earn less than \$60,000 to help pay for childcare costs” (71%).¹⁷²

Reducing Teen Pregnancy: While single mothers may constitute the bulk of adults in poverty, concerns about teen pregnancy are on the decline. Poverty is seen as contributing to teen pregnancy, but the most frequently cited cause is lack of moral values.

Two-thirds (68%) of adults view teen pregnancy as a major problem facing the country.¹⁷³ While high, this response is down significantly from the mid-1980s when it stood at 84%.¹⁷⁴ Teens verify that teen pregnancy is a reality. Three-quarters (76%) of teenagers know someone their age who has gotten pregnant.¹⁷⁵

Like so many issues facing teens, the public places blame on a general decline in morality (65% say it contributes “a lot”), and point to the media for promoting casual sex.¹⁷⁶

Contributes “A Lot” to Unplanned Pregnancy and Sexually Transmitted Disease

A decline in moral values	65%
Too much casual sex in the movies and on TV	55%
Poverty and poor education	46%
A lack of openness about sex and sexual issues	35%
Inadequate sex education in the schools	32%

Mobilizing for Change

The public is willing to devote more of the government budget to addressing the needs of the poor, however, the public also assumes there is significant government waste that could be cut in other areas to provide the funding. Large percentages have engaged in charitable activities on behalf of the poor while very few have taken political action for this issue.

In the most recent budget battle, Americans demonstrated that they are more interested in safeguarding programs that support people, over tax cuts. People choose preserving Medicare and Social Security (47%) over cutting income taxes (21%) or paying down the debt (14%). There are strong partisan differences in response, with Republicans choosing a tax cut over Social Security (40% to 30%) and Democrats overwhelmingly choosing Social Security (65% Social Security, 7% tax cut).¹⁷⁷

In considering a series of policies to address poverty, such as increasing the minimum wage, expanding childcare subsidies, and improving access to health care, a majority (56%) felt so strongly about these solutions that they stated they would be willing to pay more in taxes to have them happen, with 44% willing to pay \$200 more in taxes.¹⁷⁸ At the same time, however, 86% agree, “If spent more wisely, there should be enough money in the existing federal budget to take care of the poor.”¹⁷⁹

The public sees state and local government as best suited to set the minimum standards for the care of poor people: state government (31%), local government (26%), federal government (15%), churches and charities (11%), the poor themselves (6%). However, they want federal government to ultimately be responsible for paying for the care of the poor: federal government (31%), state government (28%), local government (15%), churches and charities (8%), and the poor themselves (8%).¹⁸⁰

Two-thirds have acted charitably for the poor, either donating money to organizations to help the poor (68%) or helping an individual or family directly (67%). Forty-two percent say they have volunteered for an organization that helps the poor. People are less likely to have taken political action, such as contacting a public official (10%).



Next Steps

Done Activity in Past 12 Months¹⁸¹ % Yes

Donated money to an organization that helps the poor 68

Directly tried to help a poor individual or family 67

Contributed your time to an organization that helps the poor 42

Contacted a public official about problems faced by poor people 10

Mobilizing the poor politically could start with voter registration. Overall, 78% say they are registered to vote at their current address, but only 67% of those in poverty and 68% of those at 100–200% of the federal poverty level are registered to vote.¹⁸²

Next Steps

The next phase of research will explore several themes and hypotheses suggested by the analysis of existing public opinion data. In a series of focus groups, we will investigate questions that are relevant to developing the communications strategy for this issue, such as:

- To which broad issues should we attach low-wage workers? Which broader issue areas resonate, set up societal action on behalf of this issue, and lead to support for the appropriate policy solutions? Should issues facing low-wage workers be framed as: education, economic competitiveness, upward mobility, poverty, making work pay, etc.? What does each issue achieve for low-wage workers, and what are the pitfalls?
- Similarly, what “themes” are powerful for communications? How does each of the following

themes influence policy support among the public: development (human, worker, economic), security, new economy, opportunity, etc. How does each theme intersect with the central values outlined in this report?

- How does the context of “poverty” affect policy support for the working poor? Does associating the working poor with poverty help or hurt? People are more likely than they used to be to believe that society is divided into haves and have-nots. Does that characterization help or hurt? Should communications make more people aware of the gap between the rich and the poor, or is this fruitless?
- Is sympathy for the poor a prerequisite to public support for policies? Does public support for policies increase if people see the poor as working hard, or as more likely to have health problems, etc? Or, does this knowledge just reinforce the bootstrap mentality that they need to try harder? Is it better to frame these issues as being about a strong society rather than helping the poor? Is it better to frame these issues as ones that affect all workers at all income levels rather than just low-wage workers?
- Who, beyond the poor, should be held as responsible? Which solutions lead to different responsibility? Who does the public most trust to make a real difference (federal, state, local government, business, schools, NGOs, etc.)?

• In addition to investigating answers to the key strategic questions outlined above, there are several specific language elements that need exploration, such as:

- How should we refer to the group: low-wage workers, working poor, etc.
- What are the language nuances in individual issues that affect support, i.e., should minimum wage be discussed as an hourly or annual figure?
- Which messengers will be compelling spokespeople?

These are just some of the many questions that will be explored with the public, first in focus groups, and then refined in a survey.

- ¹ Gallup/*CNN/USA Today* Poll.
- ² *CNN/Time* Poll, conducted by Yankelevich Partners.
- ³ “Harris Feel Good Index” by The Harris Poll, latest response May 22–27, 2001, 1014 adults nationwide.
- ⁴ “Harris Feel Good Index” by The Harris Poll, latest response May 22–27, 2001, 1014 adults nationwide.
- ⁵ Gallup/*CNN/USA Today* Poll, 1015 adults nationally, April 20–22, 2001.
- ⁶ The Gallup Poll, most recent, July 19–22, 2001, 1038 adults nationwide.
- ⁷ The Gallup Poll, most recent, July 19–22, 2001, 1038 adults nationwide.
- ⁸ Conference Board Consumer Confidence Survey conducted by NFO Research.
- ⁹ “News Interest Index,” conducted by Pew Research Center for the People and the Press, 1200 adults nationally, June 13–17, 2001. January 1992 figure is from *US News and World Report*.
- ¹⁰ Sponsored by the Pew Research Center for the People and the Press, 1200 adults nationally, June 13–17, 2001.
- ¹¹ Gallup Polls-Gallup News Service, Jan. 24, 01
- ¹² Conducted by Gallup, June 8–10, 2001.
- ¹³ Pew Research Center for the People and the Press, conducted by Princeton Survey Research Associates, 2041 adults nationally, March 5–18, 2001.
- ¹⁴ Conducted by the Gallup Organization, 1003 adults nationally, January 10–14, 2001.
- ¹⁵ “The Bush Transition,” *Washington Post-ABC News* Poll, 1513 Adults nationally, January 11–15, 2001.
- ¹⁶ Conducted by the Pew Research Center for the People and the Press, June 13–17, 2001, 1200 adults nationally.
- ¹⁷ Gallup Poll, 1004 adults nationally, June 11–17, 2001.
- ¹⁸ The Harris Poll. 1,011 adults nationally, Oct. 27–Nov. 2, 1999.
- ¹⁹ The Harris Poll. 1011 adults nationally, Oct. 27–Nov. 2, 1999.
- ²⁰ The Harris Poll. 1011 adults nationally, Oct. 27–Nov. 2, 1999.
- ²¹ Sponsored by the Pew Research Center for the People and the Press, conducted by Princeton Survey Research Associates, 985 adults nationally who are employed full or part-time, September 28–October 10, 1999.
- ²² Conducted by the Gallup Organization, 5001 adults nationwide, April 23–May 31, 1998.
- ²³ Conducted by the Gallup Organization, 641 adults nationwide who are employed full or part-time, August 24–26, 1999.
- ²⁴ Gallup Poll, 641 adults nationally who are employed full or part-time, Aug. 24–26, 1999.
- ²⁵ Conducted by the Gallup Organization, 641 adults nationwide who are employed full or part-time, August 24–26, 1999.
- ²⁶ Pew Research Center for the People and the Press, conducted by Princeton Survey Research Associates, 2041 adults nationally, March 5–18, 2001.
- ²⁷ Harris Poll. 1024 adults nationally, April 7–10, 2000.
- ²⁸ “Devolution Survey on Healthcare and Welfare Reform Issues” sponsored by the Kellogg Foundation, conducted by Bonney and Company, 2221 adults, November 4–27, 1998.
- ²⁹ “Devolution Survey on Healthcare and Welfare Reform Issues” sponsored by the Kellogg Foundation, conducted by Bonney and Company, 2221 adults, November 4–27, 1998.
- ³⁰ “Values Update Survey,” Pew Research Center for the People and the Press, 1165 adults nationally, November 5–9, 1997/November 13–17, 1997.
- ³¹ Sponsored by the *Washington Post/Kaiser Family Foundation/Harvard University*, conducted by ICR, 1224 registered voters, October 12–19, 2000.
- ³² Conducted by the Gallup Organization, 5001 adults nationwide, April 23–May 31, 1998.
- ³³ “Values Update Survey,” Pew Research Center for the People and the Press, 1165 adults nationally, November 5–9, 1997/November 13–17, 1997.
- ³⁴ “Values Update Survey,” Pew Research Center for the People and the Press, 1165 adults nationally, November 5–9, 1997/November 13–17, 1997.
- ³⁵ “Values Update Survey,” Pew Research Center for the People and the Press, 1165 adults nationally, November 5–9, 1997/November 13–17, 1997.
- ³⁶ *Washington Post/Harvard University/Kaiser Family Foundation* Poll, 1200 adults nationally, August 1998.
- ³⁷ “Poverty in America,” *NPR/Kaiser/Kennedy School* Poll, 1952 adults, January 4–February 27, 2001.

- ³⁸ “Poverty in America,” *NPR/Kaiser/Kennedy School Poll*, 1952 adults, January 4–February 27, 2001.
- ³⁹ *Washington Post*/Harvard University/Kaiser Family Foundation Poll, 1200 adults nationally, August 1998.
- ⁴⁰ “Values Update Survey,” Pew Research Center for the People and the Press, 1165 adults nationally, November 5–9, 1997/November 13–17, 1997.
- ⁴¹ “Values Update Survey,” Pew Research Center for the People and the Press, 1165 adults nationally, November 5–9, 1997/November 13–17, 1997.
- ⁴² “Values Update Survey,” Pew Research Center for the People and the Press, 1165 adults nationally, November 5–9, 1997/November 13–17, 1997.
- ⁴³ “Values Update Survey,” Pew Research Center for the People and the Press, 1165 adults nationally, November 5–9, 1997/November 13–17, 1997.
- ⁴⁴ Conducted by the Gallup Organization, 1003 adults nationally, January 10–14, 2001.
- ⁴⁵ Conducted by the Gallup Organization, 5001 adults nationwide, April 23–May 31, 1998.
- ⁴⁶ Conducted by the Gallup Organization, 5001 adults nationwide, April 23–May 31, 1998.
- ⁴⁷ Rasmussen Research conducted this national Portrait of America telephone survey of 750 likely voters on January 3, 10, and 17, 2001.
- ⁴⁸ *Newsweek* Poll conducted by Princeton Survey Research Associates. 750 adults nationwide, June 24–25, 1999.
- ⁴⁹ *Newsweek* Poll conducted by Princeton Survey Research Associates. 750 adults nationwide, June 24–25, 1999.
- ⁵⁰ *Newsweek* Poll conducted by Princeton Survey Research Associates. 750 adults nationwide, June 24–25, 1999.
- ⁵¹ “Poverty in America,” *NPR/Kaiser/Kennedy School Poll*, 1952 adults, January 4–February 27, 2001.
- ⁵² “Poverty in America,” *NPR/Kaiser/Kennedy School Poll*, 1952 adults, January 4–February 27, 2001.
- ⁵³ “Poverty in America,” *NPR/Kaiser/Kennedy School Poll*, 1952 adults, January 4–February 27, 2001.
- ⁵⁴ “Poverty in America,” *NPR/Kaiser/Kennedy School Poll*, 1952 adults nationally, January 4–February 27, 2001.
- ⁵⁵ Conducted by the Pew Research Center for the People and the Press, June 13–17, 2001, 1200 adults nationally.
- ⁵⁶ “1999 Millennium Survey,” Pew Research Center For the People & the Press, conducted by Princeton Survey Research Associates, April 6–May 6, 1999 1546 Adults nationally.
- ⁵⁷ Conducted by the Gallup Organization, 5001 adults nationwide, April 23–May 31, 1998.
- ⁵⁸ “Poverty in America,” *NPR/Kaiser/Kennedy School Poll*, 1952 adults, January 4–February 27, 2001.
- ⁵⁹ “The 1998 National Survey of Americans on Values,” sponsored by the *Washington Post*/Kaiser Family Foundation/Harvard University, conducted by Chilton Research, 2025 adults nationally, July 29–August 18, 1998.
- ⁶⁰ *Washington Post*/Harvard University/Kaiser Family Foundation Poll, 1200 adults nationally, August 1998.
- ⁶¹ “Poverty in America,” *NPR/Kaiser/Kennedy School Poll*, 1952 adults, January 4–February 27, 2001.
- ⁶² “Poverty in America,” *NPR/Kaiser/Kennedy School Poll*, 1952 adults, January 4–February 27, 2001.
- ⁶³ “Poverty in America,” *NPR/Kaiser/Kennedy School Poll*, 1952 adults, January 4–February 27, 2001.
- ⁶⁴ “Poverty in America,” *NPR/Kaiser/Kennedy School Poll*, 1952 adults, January 4–February 27, 2001.
- ⁶⁵ “Poverty in America,” *NPR/Kaiser/Kennedy School Poll*, 1952 adults, January 4–February 27, 2001.
- ⁶⁶ “Poverty in America,” *NPR/Kaiser/Kennedy School Poll*, 1952 adults, January 4–February 27, 2001.
- ⁶⁷ Harris Poll. 1024 adults nationally, April 7–10, 2000.
- ⁶⁸ “Poverty in America,” *NPR/Kaiser/Kennedy School Poll*, 1952 adults, January 4–February 27, 2001.
- ⁶⁹ “Poverty in America,” *NPR/Kaiser/Kennedy School Poll*, 1952 adults, January 4–February 27, 2001.
- ⁷⁰ Harris Poll, 1024 adults nationally, April 7–10, 2000.

- ⁷¹ Harris Poll, 1024 adults nationally, April 7–10, 2000.
- ⁷² “Poverty in America,” *NPR/Kaiser/Kennedy School Poll*, 1952 adults, January 4–February 27, 2001.
- ⁷³ “Poverty in America,” *NPR/Kaiser/Kennedy School Poll*, 1952 adults, January 4–February 27, 2001.
- ⁷⁴ Conducted by the Gallup Organization, 5001 adults nationwide, April 23–May 31, 1998.
- ⁷⁵ “Poverty in America,” *NPR/Kaiser/Kennedy School Poll*, 1952 adults, January 4–February 27, 2001.
- ⁷⁶ “Poverty in America,” *NPR/Kaiser/Kennedy School Poll*, 1952 adults, January 4–February 27, 2001.
- ⁷⁷ “Poverty in America,” *NPR/Kaiser/Kennedy School Poll*, 1952 adults, January 4–February 27, 2001.
- ⁷⁸ “Poverty in America,” *NPR/Kaiser/Kennedy School Poll*, 1952 adults, January 4–February 27, 2001.
- ⁷⁹ “Poverty in America,” *NPR/Kaiser/Kennedy School Poll*, 1952 adults, January 4–February 27, 2001.
- ⁸⁰ “Poverty in America,” *NPR/Kaiser/Kennedy School Poll*, 1952 adults, January 4–February 27, 2001.
- ⁸¹ “Poverty in America,” *NPR/Kaiser/Kennedy School Poll*, 1952 adults, January 4–February 27, 2001.
- ⁸² “Poverty in America,” *NPR/Kaiser/Kennedy School Poll*, 1952 adults, January 4–February 27, 2001.
- ⁸³ “Poverty in America,” *NPR/Kaiser/Kennedy School Poll*, 1952 adults, January 4–February 27, 2001.
- ⁸⁴ “Poverty in America,” *NPR/Kaiser/Kennedy School Poll*, 1952 adults, January 4–February 27, 2001.
- ⁸⁵ “Poverty in America,” *NPR/Kaiser/Kennedy School Poll*, 1952 adults, January 4–February 27, 2001.
- ⁸⁶ “Poverty in America,” *NPR/Kaiser/Kennedy School Poll*, 1952 adults, January 4–February 27, 2001.
- ⁸⁷ “Poverty in America,” *NPR/Kaiser/Kennedy School Poll*, 1952 adults, January 4–February 27, 2001.
- ⁸⁸ “Poverty in America,” *NPR/Kaiser/Kennedy School Poll*, 1952 adults, January 4–February 27, 2001.
- ⁸⁹ “Poverty in America,” *NPR/Kaiser/Kennedy School Poll*, 1952 adults, January 4–February 27, 2001.
- ⁹⁰ Conducted by the Gallup Organization, 5001 adults nationwide, April 23–May 31, 1998.
- ⁹¹ Conducted by the Gallup Organization, 5001 adults nationwide, April 23–May 31, 1998.
- ⁹² “Poverty in America,” *NPR/Kaiser/Kennedy School Poll*, 1952 adults, January 4–February 27, 2001.
- ⁹³ “Poverty in America,” *NPR/Kaiser/Kennedy School Poll*, 1952 adults, January 4–February 27, 2001.
- ⁹⁴ “Poverty in America,” *NPR/Kaiser/Kennedy School Poll*, 1952 adults, January 4–February 27, 2001.
- ⁹⁵ “Poverty in America,” *NPR/Kaiser/Kennedy School Poll*, 1952 adults, January 4–February 27, 2001.
- ⁹⁶ Conducted by the Gallup Organization, 5001 adults nationwide, April 23–May 31, 1998.
- ⁹⁷ *Washington Post*/Harvard University/Kaiser Family Foundation Poll, 1200 adults nationally, August 1998.
- ⁹⁸ *Washington Post*/Harvard University/Kaiser Family Foundation Poll, 1200 adults nationally, August 1998.
- ⁹⁹ “Values Update Survey,” Pew Research Center for the People and the Press, 1165 adults nationally, November 5–9, 1997/November 13–17, 1997.
- ¹⁰⁰ *ABC News.com* Poll, conducted by IRC, 1021 adults nationally, April 12–16, 2000.
- ¹⁰¹ “Poverty in America,” *NPR/Kaiser/Kennedy School Poll*, 1952 adults, January 4–February 27, 2001.
- ¹⁰² Pew Research Center for the People and the Press, conducted by Princeton Survey Research Associates, 2041 adults nationally, March 5–18, 2001.
- ¹⁰³ Pew Research Center for the People and the Press, conducted by Princeton Survey Research Associates, 2041 adults nationally, March 5–18, 2001.
- ¹⁰⁴ Conducted by the Gallup Organization, 5001 adults nationwide, April 23–May 31, 1998.
- ¹⁰⁵ “Poverty in America,” *NPR/Kaiser/Kennedy School Poll*, 1952 adults, January 4–February 27, 2001.

- ¹⁰⁶ Sponsored by Jobs for the Future, conducted by Lake Snell Perry and Associates, 1001 adults nationally, April 27–30, 2000.
- ¹⁰⁷ Sponsored by Jobs for the Future, conducted by Lake Snell Perry and Associates, 1001 adults nationally, April 27–30, 2000.
- ¹⁰⁸ Sponsored by Jobs for the Future, conducted by Lake Snell Perry and Associates, 1001 adults nationally, April 27–30, 2000.
- ¹⁰⁹ Sponsored by Jobs for the Future, conducted by Lake Snell Perry and Associates, 1001 adults nationally, April 27–30, 2000.
- ¹¹⁰ “Poverty in America,” *NPR/Kaiser/Kennedy School Poll*, 1952 adults, January 4–February 27, 2001.
- ¹¹¹ “Poverty in America,” *NPR/Kaiser/Kennedy School Poll*, 1952 adults, January 4–February 27, 2001.
- ¹¹² “Poverty in America,” *NPR/Kaiser/Kennedy School Poll*, 1952 adults, January 4–February 27, 2001.
- ¹¹³ “Poverty in America,” *NPR/Kaiser/Kennedy School Poll*, 1952 adults, January 4–February 27, 2001.
- ¹¹⁴ Sponsored by Jobs for the Future, conducted by Lake Snell Perry and Associates, 1001 adults nationally, April 27–30, 2000.
- ¹¹⁵ “Devolution Survey on Healthcare and Welfare Reform Issues” sponsored by the Kellogg Foundation, conducted by Bonney and Company, 2221 adults, November 4–27, 1998.
- ¹¹⁶ “Poverty in America,” *NPR/Kaiser/Kennedy School Poll*, 1952 adults nationally, January 4–February 27, 2001.
- ¹¹⁷ Sponsored by Jobs for the Future, conducted by Lake Snell Perry and Associates, 1001 adults nationally, April 27–30, 2000.
- ¹¹⁸ “Devolution Survey on Healthcare and Welfare Reform Issues” sponsored by the Kellogg Foundation, conducted by Bonney and Company, 2221 adults, November 4–27, 1998.
- ¹¹⁹ Sponsored by Jobs for the Future, conducted by Lake Snell Perry and Associates, 1001 adults nationally, April 27–30, 2000.
- ¹²⁰ “News Interest Index” Pew Research Center for the People and the Press, 1200 adults nationally, June 13–17, 2001.
- ¹²¹ Sponsored by Jobs for the Future, conducted by Lake Snell Perry and Associates, 1001 adults nationally, April 27–30, 2000.
- ¹²² “News Interest Index,” conducted by Pew Research Center for the People and the Press, 1200 adults nationally, June 13–17, 2001.
- ¹²³ *ABC News.com* Poll. Sept. 29–Oct. 3, 1999. N=1020 adults nationwide.
- ¹²⁴ Gallup Poll, 1004 adults nationally, June 8–10, 2001.
- ¹²⁵ Yankelovich Partners Omnibus, sponsored by The Employment Policies Institute, 1004 adults nationally, February 1–4, 2001.
- ¹²⁶ “Devolution Survey on Healthcare and Welfare Reform Issues” sponsored by the Kellogg Foundation, conducted by Bonney and Company, 2221 adults, November 4–27, 1998.
- ¹²⁷ “Devolution Survey on Healthcare and Welfare Reform Issues” sponsored by the Kellogg Foundation, conducted by Bonney and Company, 2221 adults, November 4–27, 1998.
- ¹²⁸ Sponsored by the Washington Post, conducted by ICR, 1010 adults nationally, October 27–31, 1999.
- ¹²⁹ “Poverty in America,” *NPR/Kaiser/Kennedy School Poll*, 1952 adults, January 4–February 27, 2001.
- ¹³⁰ “Poverty in America,” *NPR/Kaiser/Kennedy School Poll*, 1952 adults, January 4–February 27, 2001.
- ¹³¹ “Poverty in America,” *NPR/Kaiser/Kennedy School Poll*, 1952 adults, January 4–February 27, 2001.
- ¹³² “Poverty in America,” *NPR/Kaiser/Kennedy School Poll*, 1952 adults, January 4–February 27, 2001.
- ¹³³ “Poverty in America,” *NPR/Kaiser/Kennedy School Poll*, 1952 adults, January 4–February 27, 2001.
- ¹³⁴ “Devolution Survey on Healthcare and Welfare Reform Issues” sponsored by the Kellogg Foundation, conducted by Bonney and Company, 2221 adults, November 4–27, 1998.
- ¹³⁵ “Devolution Survey on Healthcare and Welfare Reform Issues” sponsored by the Kellogg Foundation, conducted by Bonney and Company, 2221 adults, November 4–27, 1998.
- ¹³⁶ Sponsored by Jobs for the Future, conducted by Lake Snell Perry and Associates, 1001 adults nationally, April 27–30, 2000.
- ¹³⁷ 1999 Millennium Survey, sponsored by the Pew Research Center, conducted by Princeton Survey Research Associates, 1546 adults nationally, April 6–May 6, 1999.

- ¹³⁸ Shell Oil Company Shell Poll conducted by Peter D. Hart Research Associates. July 17–20, 1998. N=1123 adults nationally.
- ¹³⁹ “Poverty in America,” *NPR/Kaiser/Kennedy School Poll*, 1952 adults, January 4–February 27, 2001.
- ¹⁴⁰ Sponsored by *Time/CNN*, conducted by Yankelovich Partners, 1031 adults nationally, June 9–10, 1999.
- ¹⁴¹ “Devolution Survey on Healthcare and Welfare Reform Issues” sponsored by the Kellogg Foundation, conducted by Bonney and Company, 2221 adults, November 4–27, 1998.
- ¹⁴² *NPR/Kaiser/Kennedy School Education Survey*, conducted by ICR, 1422 adults nationally, June 25–July 19, 1999.
- ¹⁴³ “Poverty in America,” *NPR/Kaiser/Kennedy School Poll*, 1952 adults, January 4–February 27, 2001.
- ¹⁴⁴ “Poverty in America,” *NPR/Kaiser/Kennedy School Poll*, 1952 adults, January 4–February 27, 2001.
- ¹⁴⁵ *NPR/Kaiser/Kennedy School Education Survey*, conducted by ICR, 1422 adults nationally, June 25–July 19, 1999.
- ¹⁴⁶ Conducted by Public Agenda, 708 parents of children in public school, 700 public school teachers, 252 employers of recently graduated students, 257 college professors who teach freshmen and sophomores, October–November, 1998.
- ¹⁴⁷ Conducted by Public Agenda, 708 parents of children in public school, 700 public school teachers, 252 employers of recently graduated students, 257 college professors who teach freshmen and sophomores, October–November, 1998.
- ¹⁴⁸ Conducted by Public Agenda, 708 parents of children in public school, 700 public school teachers, 252 employers of recently graduated students, 257 college professors who teach freshmen and sophomores, October–November, 1998.
- ¹⁴⁹ “Education Technology Survey” sponsored by the Milken Family Foundation, conducted by Hart Research Associates, 1012 registered voters nationally, May 29–31, 1997.
- ¹⁵⁰ “Education Technology Survey” sponsored by the Milken Family Foundation, conducted by Hart Research Associates, 1012 registered voters nationally, May 29–31, 1997.
- ¹⁵¹ “Education Technology Survey” sponsored by the Milken Family Foundation, conducted by Hart Research Associates, 1012 registered voters nationally, May 29–31, 1997.
- ¹⁵² The Shell Poll, conducted by Peter Hart Research, 1123 adults nationally, July 17–20, 1998.
- ¹⁵³ The Harris Poll. 1,011 adults nationally, Oct. 27–Nov. 2, 1999.
- ¹⁵⁴ Conducted by the Gallup Organization, 641 adults nationwide who are employed full or part-time, August 24–26, 1999.
- ¹⁵⁵ Conducted by the Gallup Organization, 1003 adults nationally, January 10–14, 2001.
- ¹⁵⁶ Gallup Polls-Gallup News Service, Jan. 24, 01
- ¹⁵⁷ “Poverty in America,” *NPR/Kaiser/Kennedy School Poll*, 1952 adults, January 4–February 27, 2001.
- ¹⁵⁸ “Devolution Survey on Healthcare and Welfare Reform Issues” sponsored by the Kellogg Foundation, conducted by Bonney and Company, 2221 adults, November 4–27, 1998.
- ¹⁵⁹ “Poverty in America,” *NPR/Kaiser/Kennedy School Poll*, 1952 adults, January 4–February 27, 2001.
- ¹⁶⁰ 1999 Millennium Survey, sponsored by the Pew Research Center, conducted by Princeton Survey Research Associates, 1546 adults nationally, April 6–May 6, 1999.
- ¹⁶¹ Sponsored by the Pew Research Center, conducted by Princeton Survey Research Associates, 1411 adults, October 7–11, 1999.
- ¹⁶² The Shell Survey, conducted by Peter Hart Research, 1040 women and 413 men, January 7–13, 2000.
- ¹⁶³ *Washington Post* poll. 1,477 registered voters on September 7–17, 2000.
- ¹⁶⁴ Survey of Americans on Gender in the Workplace, sponsored by the Washington Post, Kaiser Family Foundation, Harvard University Survey Project, conducted by Chilton Research Services, 804 adults nationally, November 17–23, 1997.
- ¹⁶⁵ “Devolution Survey on Healthcare and Welfare Reform Issues” sponsored by the Kellogg Foundation, conducted by Bonney and Company, 2221 adults, November 4–27, 1998.
- ¹⁶⁶ Conducted by Public Agenda, 815 parents with children age 5 and younger, June 1–15, 2000.

- ¹⁶⁷ Conducted by Public Agenda, 754 parents with children age 5 and younger, who believe it is important for a parent to stay home during a child's youngest years, June 1–15, 2000.
- ¹⁶⁸ Conducted by Public Agenda, 815 parents with children age 5 and younger, June 1–15, 2000.
- ¹⁶⁹ Conducted by Public Agenda, 815 parents with children age 5 and younger, June 1–15, 2000.
- ¹⁷⁰ “Devolution Survey on Healthcare and Welfare Reform Issues” sponsored by the WK Kellogg Foundation, conducted by Bonney and Company, 2221 adults, November 4–27, 1998.
- ¹⁷¹ Harris Poll, by Louis Harris and Associates, 1000 adults nationally, January 1998.
- ¹⁷² “News Interest Index Poll,” funded by the Pew Research Center, conducted by Princeton Survey Research Associates, 1218 adults nationally, January 1998.
- ¹⁷³ Sponsored by the Kaiser Family Foundation, conducted by Princeton Survey Research Associates, 3884 adults nationally, July 7–September 19, 1999.
- ¹⁷⁴ Conducted by the Roper Organization, 1993 adults nationally, personal interviews, February 8–22, 1986.
- ¹⁷⁵ Conducted by *CBS News*, 1047 10th graders, September 2–10, 1997.
- ¹⁷⁶ “Americans on Sex and Sexual Health Survey” sponsored by the Kaiser Family Foundation and *ABC Television*, conducted by Princeton Survey Research Associates, 1204 adults nationally, April 24–May 10, 1998.
- ¹⁷⁷ *CBS News* Poll, 660 adults nationwide, April 4–5, 2001.
- ¹⁷⁸ “Poverty in America,” *NPR/Kaiser/Kennedy School* Poll, 1952 adults, January 4–February 27, 2001.
- ¹⁷⁹ “Devolution Survey on Healthcare and Welfare Reform Issues” sponsored by the Kellogg Foundation, conducted by Bonney and Company, 2221 adults, November 4–27, 1998.
- ¹⁸⁰ “Devolution Survey on Healthcare and Welfare Reform Issues” sponsored by the Kellogg Foundation, conducted by Bonney and Company, 2221 adults, November 4–27, 1998.
- ¹⁸¹ “Poverty in America,” *NPR/Kaiser/Kennedy School* Poll, 1952 adults, January 4–February 27, 2001.
- ¹⁸² “Poverty in America,” *NPR/Kaiser/Kennedy School* Poll, 1952 adults, January 4–February 27, 2001.

