



For Immediate Release: September 25, 2008
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Economy seems better to the educated, whites and Republicans, the National Annenberg Election Survey shows

As widely reported, polls have shown that the percentage of the American public reporting that the economy is faltering has increased over the past year. Some groups see the situation as more dire than others do. Results from the University of Pennsylvania's National Annenberg Election Survey show that college-educated adults, whites, and Republicans are less likely than their demographic counterparts to believe that economic conditions in the country today are worse than they were one year ago, even when controlling for gender, age, education, income, race, ethnicity, and party identification.

One-quarter (25 percent) of adults overall said that the economic conditions in the United States are worse today than they were one year ago.

Many Americans are not satisfied with the direction in which the country is headed, according to survey results. Over 72 percent of Americans contend that the country is not headed on the right track (see Table 3). The percentage of adults reporting that the country is headed down the wrong track has increased in recent weeks (see Graph 1).

"People's mood about the direction of the country is somber," said Kate Kenski, a senior analyst for the National Annenberg Election Survey and an assistant professor of communication at the University of Arizona. "Negative feelings about the country's direction have increased in recent weeks."

Democrats (87 percent) were significantly more likely than Republicans (50 percent) and independents (74 percent) to contend that the country is on the wrong track. Democrats (28 percent) and independents (25 percent) were more likely to contend that the country's economic conditions are worse than they were a year ago in comparison to Republicans (19 percent).

"Although Republicans are less likely than Democrats and independents to feel negatively about the direction that the country is headed, nearly half of Republicans believe that things are not going well," said Kenski.

Although their perceptions of the economic situation facing the country and their personal economic situations were comparable, women (75 percent) were significantly more likely than men (69 percent) to say that the country was headed down the wrong track.

Adults who lived in households with incomes of \$75,000 or more were less likely than their counterparts to state that the country was seriously on the wrong track. Decreased education was associated with seeing the country on the wrong track. As educational level drops, perception that the country is on the wrong track increases (see Table 3).

Blacks (86 percent) were significantly more likely than whites (70 percent) to report that the country is headed down the wrong track. Blacks (37 percent) were also more likely than whites (23 percent) to state that the country's economic situation was worse than it was a year ago.

Hispanics (66 percent) were less likely than non-Hispanics (73 percent) to report that the country was on the wrong track. They were statistically comparable on perceptions of the country's economic situation and their own personal economic situations in comparison to a year ago.

Data for this study were collected between September 5, 2008 and September 22, 2008 from 4,683 adults in the United States. The margin of sampling error was plus or minus 1.4 percentage points for the sample overall. For subsamples within the study, the margins of sample error are larger, depending on the sample sizes of the groups being analyzed.

Appendix

Table 1. Perceptions of economic conditions of country by demographic characteristics

Now, thinking about one year ago, in your opinion, were the economic conditions in this country much better than they are right now, somewhat better, the same, somewhat worse, or much worse?						
	Better	Same	Worse	DK	Ref	N
Total	57.2%	17.4%	24.5%	1.0%		4,683
Men	55.3%	18.2%	25.6%	0.9%		1,998
Women	58.9%	16.6%	23.4%	1.1%		2,685
High school or less	54.6%	14.4%	29.8%	1.1%	0.1%	1,356
Some college	57.8%	19.2%	22.1%	0.8%		1,259
College degree or more	60.3%	19.7%	19.2%	0.9%		1,970
18-29 years old	54.6%	16.9%	27.5%	1.0%		301
30-44 years old	58.6%	17.8%	23.1%	0.5%		1,055
45-64 years old	57.6%	17.5%	23.9%	0.9%	0.1%	2,062
65 and older	56.3%	16.6%	25.4%	1.7%		1,163
Household income below \$35,000	52.1%	16.2%	30.3%	1.3%	0.1%	1,067
\$35,000 to less than \$75,000	58.7%	17.4%	23.5%	0.4%	0.1%	1,381
\$75,000 and over	61.7%	18.6%	18.8%	0.9%		1,635
Whites	58.4%	17.9%	22.8%	0.9%		3,895
Blacks	47.3%	13.8%	37.4%	1.5%		375
Hispanics/Latinos	52.4%	18.0%	28.9%	0.8%		283
Northeast	58.9%	17.8%	22.5%	0.8%		1,011
Midwest	52.9%	19.5%	26.9%	0.6%	0.1%	1,206
South	56.0%	16.3%	26.3%	1.3%	0.1%	1,519
West	62.0%	16.2%	20.9%	0.9%		947
Urban	57.6%	15.2%	26.0%	1.2%	0.1%	1,315
Suburban	58.3%	18.2%	22.6%	0.9%		2,437
Rural	53.4%	18.2%	27.2%	1.0%	0.1%	931
Republican	59.0%	20.9%	19.2%	0.9%		1,313
Democrat	56.2%	15.3%	28.0%	0.5%		1,642
Independent	57.4%	16.5%	25.0%	0.9%	0.1%	1,319

NOTE: The reported sample sizes are from the unweighted data. The reported percentages, however, are based on weighted data.

Table 2. Perceptions of personal economic situation by demographic characteristics

Still thinking about one year ago, was your personal economic situation much better than it is right now, somewhat better, the same, somewhat worse, or much worse?						
	Better	Same	Worse	DK	Ref	N
Total	39.3%	39.3%	20.7%	0.5%	0.1%	4,683
Men	37.3%	40.9%	21.3%	0.5%		1,998
Women	41.2%	37.9%	20.2%	0.5%	0.1%	2,685
High school or less	43.2%	33.5%	22.6%	0.6%	0.1%	1,356
Some college	39.3%	38.8%	21.5%	0.4%	0.1%	1,259
College degree or more	34.0%	48.3%	17.2%	0.4%	0.1%	1,970
18-29 years old	41.9%	33.9%	23.0%	1.1%		301
30-44 years old	37.7%	38.5%	23.7%	0.1%		1,055
45-64 years old	42.1%	38.0%	19.5%	0.3%	0.1%	2,062
65 and older	34.0%	47.4%	17.3%	1.1%	0.2%	1,163
Household income below \$35,000	42.3%	31.2%	26.0%	0.4%	0.1%	1,067
\$35,000 to less than \$75,000	41.7%	38.4%	19.5%	0.4%		1,381
\$75,000 and over	37.1%	44.8%	17.7%	0.4%	0.1%	1,635
Whites	38.5%	41.4%	19.5%	0.5%	0.1%	3,895
Blacks	42.5%	28.9%	28.2%	0.4%		375
Hispanics/Latinos	42.8%	31.0%	25.4%	0.8%		283
Northeast	38.8%	41.2%	19.5%	0.4%	0.1%	1,011
Midwest	36.5%	41.3%	21.7%	0.5%		1,206
South	42.3%	36.1%	20.7%	0.8%	0.1%	1,519
West	38.2%	40.6%	21.1%	0.2%		947
Urban	40.5%	37.3%	21.8%	0.4%	0.1%	1,315
Suburban	38.2%	40.7%	20.4%	0.6%	0.1%	2,437
Rural	40.8%	38.6%	20.2%	0.5%		931
Republican	34.3%	47.0%	17.8%	0.8%		1,313
Democrat	42.0%	35.6%	22.1%	0.3%	0.1%	1,642
Independent	41.7%	37.9%	19.8%	0.5%	0.2%	1,319

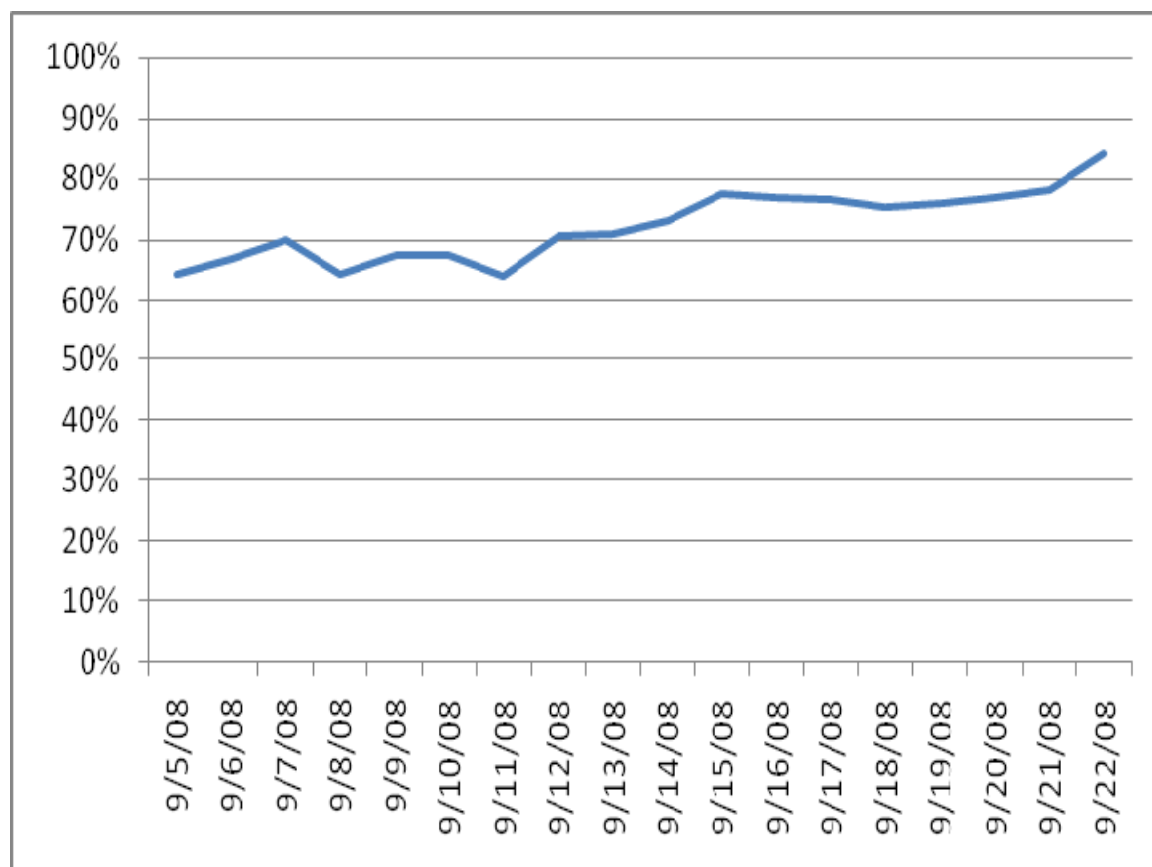
NOTE: The reported sample sizes are from the unweighted data. The reported percentages, however, are based on weighted data.

Table 3. Right direction/wrong track by demographic characteristics

Do you feel things in this country are generally going in the right direction, or do you think things are seriously off on the wrong track?					
	Right direction	Wrong track	DK	Ref	N
Total	17.6%	72.2%	8.9%	1.3%	4,683
Men	20.5%	69.1%	9.4%	1.0%	1,998
Women	15.1%	75.1%	8.4%	1.5%	2,685
High school or less	14.6%	75.5%	8.7%	1.1%	1,356
Some college	17.9%	71.0%	9.6%	1.4%	1,259
College degree or more	21.5%	68.8%	8.3%	1.3%	1,970
18-29 years old	17.4%	70.9%	11.2%	0.4%	301
30-44 years old	19.7%	70.0%	8.6%	1.8%	1,055
45-64 years old	16.6%	74.5%	7.9%	1.0%	2,062
65 and older	16.7%	72.3%	9.4%	1.5%	1,163
Household income below \$35,000	13.7%	76.6%	8.7%	1.0%	1,067
\$35,000 to less than \$75,000	14.3%	76.3%	8.2%	1.3%	1,381
\$75,000 and over	24.3%	66.3%	8.4%	1.0%	1,635
Whites	19.3%	70.0%	9.3%	1.4%	3,895
Blacks	8.1%	85.6%	5.7%	0.6%	375
Hispanics/Latinos	19.5%	66.1%	13.4%	1.0%	283
Northeast	14.9%	75.6%	8.8%	0.7%	1,011
Midwest	16.7%	74.8%	7.4%	1.1%	1,206
South	17.7%	72.0%	9.1%	1.2%	1,519
West	21.1%	66.7%	10.2%	2.1%	947
Urban	15.9%	75.5%	7.6%	1.1%	1,315
Suburban	18.7%	70.5%	9.4%	1.3%	2,437
Rural	17.4%	72.0%	9.3%	1.3%	931
Republican	36.1%	49.6%	12.5%	1.8%	1,313
Democrat	6.9%	87.4%	4.6%	1.1%	1,642
Independent	16.1%	74.0%	8.9%	1.0%	1,319

NOTE: The reported sample sizes are from the unweighted data. The reported percentages, however, are based on weighted data.

Graph 1. Percentage of adults who reported that the country is seriously off on the wrong track



The analysis for this release was conducted by Kate Kenski, Ph.D., a senior analyst for the National Annenberg Election Survey and an assistant professor in the Department of Communication at the University of Arizona.

About the Survey

The National Annenberg Election Survey (NAES) is a survey conducted each presidential election by the Annenberg Public Policy Center of the University of Pennsylvania. It is the largest academic election survey being conducted during the 2008 campaign. It ultimately will include approximately 57,000 rolling cross-section telephone interviews (one interview per respondent) and almost 100,000 web interviews (including up to five interviews with the same person) as the campaign evolves. The first web wave began in October 2007; the final interviews will be completed following the general election, November 4, 2008.

National Annenberg Election Surveys also were conducted in 2000 and 2004.

The 2008 survey, as with past NAES polls, will examine a wide range of political attitudes about candidates, issues and the traits Americans want in a president. It will also place a particular emphasis on the effects of media exposure through campaign commercials and news from radio, television, newspapers and the internet. Additionally, the survey measures the effects of other kinds of political communication, from conversations at home and on the job to various efforts by campaigns to influence potential voters.

Methodology

Data for this analysis comes from the NAES rolling cross-sectional telephone survey. The field period ran from September 5 and September 22, 2008. The total number of respondents interviewed during this period was 4,683.

The results have been weighted to take account of household size and number of telephone lines into the residence and to adjust for variation in the sample relating to geographic region, sex, race, age and education. The sample sizes reported in the tables, however, are the unweighted number of cases.

In addition to sampling error, the practical difficulties of conducting any survey of public opinion may introduce other sources of error into the poll. Variations in the wording and order of questions, for example, may lead to somewhat different results.

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