

Voters' Views of the Economy: What's Health Care Got to Do With It?

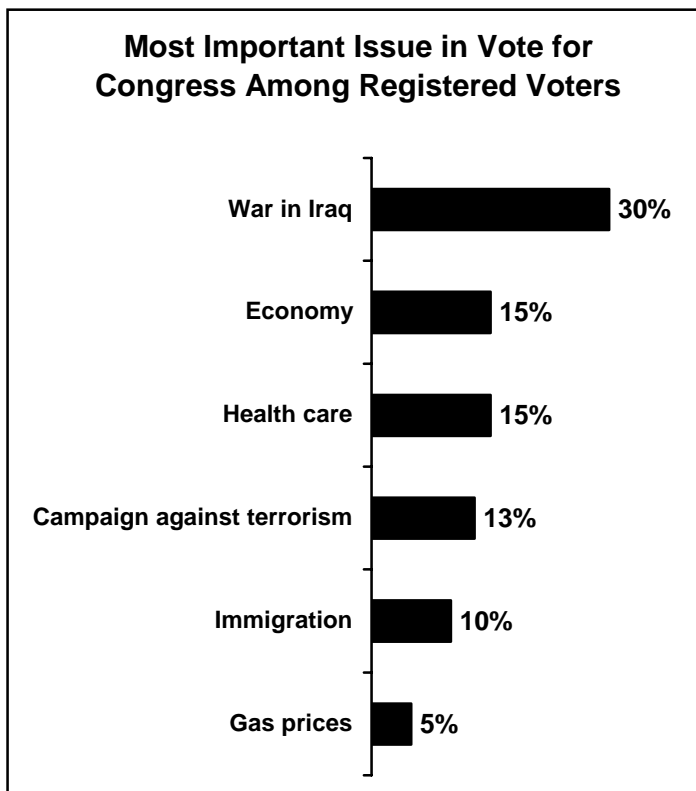
Previous surveys have shown that it is health care costs – an economic issue -- that top the public's list of health care concerns. This has spurred some observers with an interest in health policy to wonder whether voters who talk about the economy as their top concern may in some way also be talking about health care. This Data Note suggests that views of rising health care costs do play a minor role in influencing voters' negative evaluations of the national economy. At the same time, it is worries about the availability of good jobs and wages that are driving this year's economy voters more than concerns about health care and health insurance.

Economy voters: Jobs and wages dominate concerns

Fifteen percent of voters this year say that the national economy will be the most important issue to their vote. And even more so than other voters, their view of that national economy is gloomy.

But what do people mean when they say they're going to vote on the economy? A new poll suggests this group's main concern in 2006 is jobs.

The 15 percent of voters who named the economy as their top issue were asked: "When you say the economy is an important issue, can you tell me more specifically what you mean?"



In response, about half of the economy voters in the survey mentioned jobs. About one in five (19 percent) mentioned the need for jobs that pay better wages and benefits. A similar number (16 percent) cited a need for more jobs in general, and 6 percent expressed concerns about jobs leaving the country.

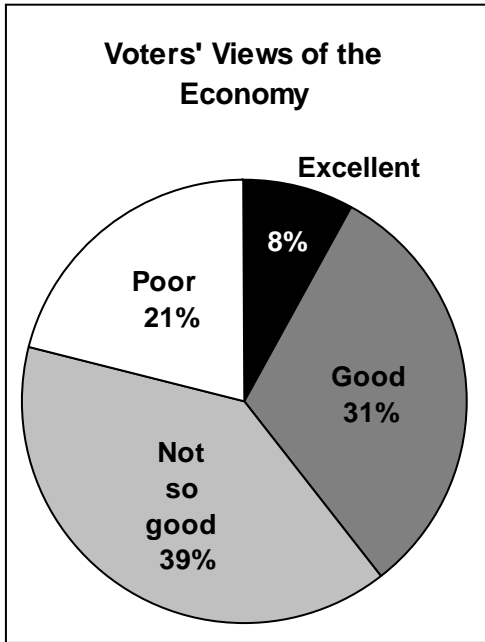
After jobs, the most frequently mentioned issue was gas prices --20 percent of economy voters said this was one thing they planned to take to the ballot box-- and then cost of living concerns (15 percent).

In the next tier were issues related to housing and health care (9 percent and 8 percent, respectively).

Q: When you say the economy is an important issue, can you tell me more specifically what you mean?

Total Mentions: Among registered voters	
Jobs (NET)	48%
<i>Need better jobs/better wages</i>	19
<i>Need more jobs</i>	16
<i>Jobs leaving the country</i>	6
<i>Jobs Generic</i>	7
Gas prices	20
Inflation/Rising cost of living	15
Economy, Generic (NET)	15
<i>Economy</i>	9
<i>'Fix bad economy'</i>	4
<i>'Keep good economy'</i>	2
Housing	9
Health care/health insurance/costs	8
Interest rates	5
Taxes	4
Class inequality	4
Education	2
National debt	2
Cost of Iraq	2
Social Security/retirement	1
Stock market	1
Balance of trade	1
Other	10

NOTE: Numbers add up to more than 100% because multiple mentions were accepted.



Close-to-home concerns, including health care, drive negative views of economy

Looking more broadly than the economy voters, the survey found that most Americans continue to be sour on the state of the national economy. Overall, six in ten voters rated the economy “not so good” (39 percent) or “poor” (21 percent).

These ratings are highly partisan: 77 percent of Democrats and 61 percent of political independents give the economy bad ratings, compared to only 33 percent of Republicans. There is also a gender gap: men are 17 percentage points more likely to say the economy is doing well (48 percent do, compared to 31 percent of women). Not surprisingly, those with higher incomes are more satisfied with the national economy than those getting by on less.

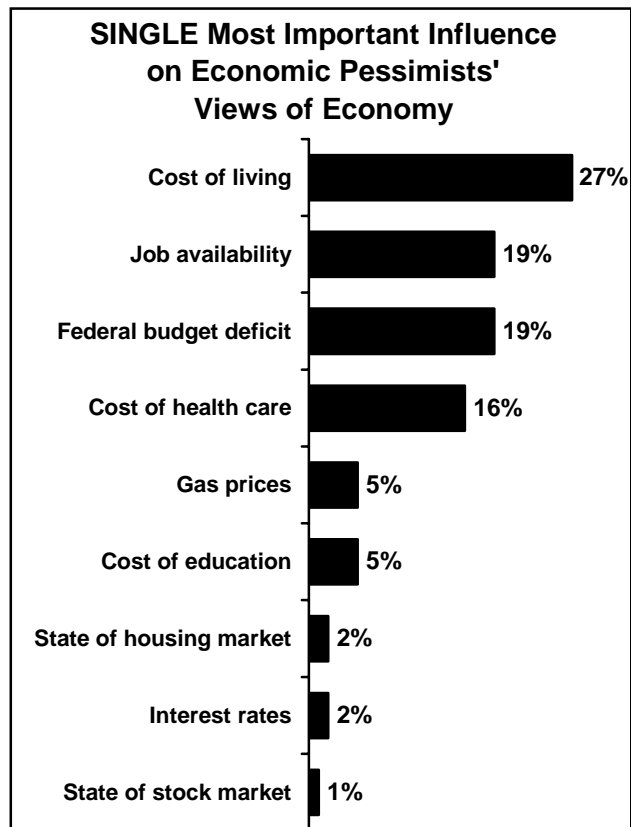
The new poll suggests that three issues with potentially direct personal impact, including health care, are driving these widespread assessments, along with concerns about the budget deficit.

The sixty percent of voters who expressed negative views of the economy – hereafter called the economic pessimists – were given a list of nine possible reasons for their poor rating, asked to rate each one individually and then asked to choose which was *most important* to their judgment.

The most popular response among the economic pessimists was the cost of living in general, picked by 27 percent.

Following that were concerns about the availability of good jobs (named by 19 percent), the federal budget deficit (19 percent) and worries about the cost of health care (16 percent).

Issues that didn’t break double digits as reasons for people’s negative views: gas prices (5 percent); the cost of education (5 percent); the state of the housing market (2 percent); interest rates (2 percent); and the state of the stock market (1 percent).



TOPLINES

1. Here's my first question... What will be the single most important issue in your vote for Congress this year...? (**READ AND RANDOMIZE 1-6, READ 'SOMETHING ELSE' LAST**)

<u>ALL</u>	<u>RV</u>	
28	30	The war in Iraq
14	15	Health care
14	15	The economy
13	13	The U.S. campaign against terrorism
11	10	Immigration
6	5	Gas prices
1	1	All of the above (VOL.)
5	6	Something else
2	1	Not planning to vote (VOL.)
5	5	(DO NOT READ) Don't know/Refused

2. When you say the economy is an important issue, can you tell me more specifically what you mean? (**OPEN-END QUESTION. RECORD VERBATIM RESPONSE.**)

Based on those who say the economy is the most important issue in their vote for Congress

	<u>ALL</u>	<u>RV</u>
Jobs (NET)	49	48
<i>Need better jobs/better wages</i>	20	19
<i>Need more jobs</i>	17	16
<i>Jobs leaving the country</i>	6	6
<i>Jobs Generic</i>	6	7
Gas prices	19	20
Inflation/Rising cost of living	15	15
Economy, Generic (NET)	14	15
<i>Economy</i>	8	9
' <i>Fix bad economy</i> '	4	4
' <i>Keep good economy</i> '	2	2
Housing	10	9
Health care/health insurance/costs	8	8
Interest rates	5	5
Taxes	4	4
Class inequality	3	4
Education	2	2
National debt	2	2
Cost of Iraq	1	2
Social Security/retirement	1	1
Stock market	1	1
Balance of trade	1	1
Other	13	10
	n = 158	n = 141

Note: numbers add to more than 100% because multiple mentions were accepted

7. Would you describe the state of the nation's economy these days as... **(READ)**

<u>ALL</u>	<u>RV</u>	
8	8	Excellent
32	31	Good
39	39	Not so good OR
22	21	Poor
1	1	(DO NOT READ) Don't know/Refused

8. For each of the following, please tell me whether it is a major reason, a minor reason or not a reason why you rate the economy as (not so good/poor). (First/Next)... **(READ AND RANDOMIZE)**? (Is this a major reason, a minor reason, or not a reason you rate the economy as (not so good/poor)?)

Based on those who describe the economy as "Not so good" or "Poor" (ALL: n=673, RV: n=578)

		<u>Major Reason</u>	<u>Minor Reason</u>	<u>Not a Reason</u>	<u>Don't know/Refused</u>
a. The cost of health care	ALL	83	11	4	2
	RV	85	11	3	1
b. The cost of education	ALL	65	24	9	2
	RV	63	25	9	3
c. Gas prices	ALL	73	19	6	2
	RV	71	21	6	2
d. The state of the housing market	ALL	39	38	19	4
	RV	39	38	19	4
e. The federal budget deficit	ALL	69	17	9	4
	RV	71	18	8	3
f. The cost of living in general	ALL	77	17	5	1
	RV	77	17	5	1
g. The availability of good jobs	ALL	72	16	8	3
	RV	73	17	8	3
h. Interest rates	ALL	45	36	17	3
	RV	44	36	17	3
i. The state of the stock market	ALL	20	41	25	14
	RV	20	42	26	12

9. You named several things as major reasons why you think the economy is not doing well. If you had to choose, which of these would you say is the MAIN influence on your judgment of the economy. Is it... **(READ ITEMS RATED MAJOR REASONS IN Q8)?**

Based on those who describe the economy as “Not so good” or “Poor” (ALL: n=673, RV: n=578)

<u>ALL</u>	<u>RV</u>	
28	27	The cost of living in general
19	19	The availability of good jobs
17	19	The federal budget deficit
16	16	The cost of health care
6	5	Gas prices
5	5	The cost of education
2	2	The state of the housing market
2	1	Interest rates
1	1	The state of the stock market
1	2	None of these/Other (VOL.)
1	1	None rated major reasons
3	3	(DO NOT READ) Don’t know/Refused

Methodology

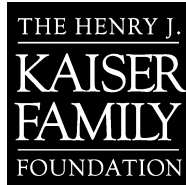
The Kaiser Family Foundation *Data Note – Voters’ Views of the Economy: What’s Health Care Got to Do With It?* – is based on a survey conducted and analyzed by researchers at the Kaiser Family Foundation. A nationally representative sample of 1,200 adults ages 18 and older – including 1,052 self-reported registered voters – was contacted by telephone by Princeton Survey Research Associates International between October 5 and October 10, 2006. Interviews were conducted in English and Spanish. Topical results are shown based both on the general population (noted as “ALL”) and on self-reported registered voters (“RV”).

The margin of sampling error for the survey is plus or minus 3 percentage points for results based on all registered voters or all respondents. For results based on economy voters only (Q2), the margin of sampling error is plus or minus 9 percentage points, and plus or minus 5 percentage points for results based on economic pessimists (Q8, Q9). Note that sampling error is only one of many potential sources of error in this or any other public opinion poll.

Values less than 0.5% are indicated by an asterisk (*). “Vol.” indicates that a response was volunteered by respondent, not an explicitly offered choice. Percentages may not always add up to 100% due to rounding.

To see previously released questions asked on this survey and the demographics, visit this page:

<http://www.kff.org/kaiserpolls/7578.cfm>



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