



**JOHN J. HELDRICH  
CENTER FOR  
WORKFORCE  
DEVELOPMENT**

# **WORKTRENDS**

**AMERICANS' ATTITUDES ABOUT WORK, EMPLOYERS, AND GOVERNMENT**

## **Unhappy, Worried, and Pessimistic: Americans in the Aftermath of the Great Recession**

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## BACKGROUND

The John J. Heldrich Center for Workforce Development at the Edward J. Bloustein School of Planning and Public Policy at Rutgers University was founded as a research and policy organization devoted to strengthening New Jersey's and the nation's workforce during a time of global economic change. The Heldrich Center researches and puts to work strategies that increase workers' skills and employability, strengthen the ability of companies to compete, create jobs where they are needed, and improve the quality and performance of the workforce development system. Since 1997, the Heldrich Center has experienced rapid growth, working with federal and state government partners, Fortune 100 companies, and major foundations. The Center embodies its slogan "Solutions at Work" by teaming with partners and clients to translate cutting-edge research and analysis into practices and programs that companies, unions, schools, community-based organizations, and government officials can leverage to strengthen the nation's workforce. The Center's projects are grounded in a core set of research priorities:

- > Disability Employment
- > Education and Training
- > U.S. Labor Market and Industry
- > Unemployment and Reemployment
- > Work Trends
- > Workforce Policy and Practice

Since its inception, the Heldrich Center has sought to inform employers, union leaders, policymakers, community members, the media, and academic communities about critical workforce and education issues that relate to the emerging global economy. To better understand the public's attitudes about work, employers, and the government, and improve workplace practices and policy, the Heldrich Center produces the *Work Trends* surveys on a regular basis (the complete set of reports is available at [www.heldrich.rutgers.edu](http://www.heldrich.rutgers.edu)). The surveys poll the general public on critical workforce issues facing Americans and American businesses. The survey findings are promoted widely to the media and national constituencies. The series is co-directed by Carl E. Van Horn, Ph.D., Director of the Heldrich Center and Distinguished Professor at Rutgers University, and Cliff Zukin, Ph.D., Senior Faculty Fellow at the Heldrich Center and Professor of Public Policy and Political Science at Rutgers University.

*Unhappy, Worried, and Pessimistic: Americans in the Aftermath of the Great Recession* continues to advance the goals of the *Work Trends* series to give American workers a voice in the national economic policy debates, and thereby provides policymakers and employers with reliable insights into how workers across the nation are judging and acting upon the realities of work and the workplace.

## THE ECONOMIC RECOVERY: STEADY, SLOW, UNEVEN, AND PAINFUL

Where do the economy and labor market stand more than five years after the official end of the recession in June 2009? Several aspects of the economic recovery from the Great Recession are encouraging. Over the past four years, nearly 10 million private-sector jobs were added back to the economy; more than 2.5 million jobs were added in the past year alone. The United States has experienced 53 straight months of economic growth, which is the longest period of consistent job growth on record.<sup>1</sup> Unemployment rates declined from 8.2 percent in March 2013 to 6.2 percent in July 2014. Thus, the official unemployment rate is 80 percent back to pre-recession levels and for the short-term unemployed — people out of work for less than six months — it has already returned to pre-recession levels.

Unfortunately, other labor market indicators are far less positive.<sup>2</sup> While job growth has been consistent, it has been insufficient to produce enough full-time jobs for everyone who wants one. As of July 2014,<sup>3</sup> nearly 9.7 million workers were unemployed. In addition, many of the jobs lost during the Great Recession were high- and middle-wage jobs, while most of the recovery's employment growth has been in low-wage occupations.<sup>4</sup> Wages have increased modestly for many, but have not increased sufficiently to keep up with inflation. Labor force participation rates are at the lowest levels in three decades.<sup>5</sup> Long-term unemployment rates remain at unprecedented high levels, above pre-recession levels in over 40 states.

While overall unemployment rates are falling, they remain very high for teenagers (20.2 percent), those without a high school diploma (9.6 percent), blacks (11.4 percent), and Hispanics (7.8 percent).<sup>6</sup> There are not nearly enough jobs for the new workers who are joining the labor force, let alone the millions who are either unemployed or working part time, but seeking full-time work. The economy needs at least another seven million jobs to return to the full employment experienced at the beginning of the 21st century. In fact, "...at the current rate it will take until early 2019 for the economy to accommodate new entrants in to the work force and get back to where it was before the recession," according to Brookings Institution scholars.<sup>7</sup>

Declining unemployment is also due in part to the large number of workers who quit looking for jobs and left the labor force altogether: more than one in six men — over 10 million workers — in their prime working years are either unemployed or no longer looking for work.<sup>8</sup>

In 2014, more than 7.5 million individuals are working part time but prefer full-time jobs — a larger percentage than before the recession began.<sup>9</sup>

## AMERICANS ASSESS THE GREAT RECESSION

It is with this backdrop that the John J. Heldrich Center for Workforce Development at Rutgers University conducted a nationally representative survey of Americans with a cross-section of 1,153 respondents between July 24 and August 3, 2014.<sup>10</sup> Previously, the Heldrich Center tracked a nationally representative

sample of unemployed Americans through the recession, starting in August 2009 and finishing with a fourth survey of them in August 2011. The Heldrich Center also surveyed samples of the general public from the time the recession began through 2013. That research showed that the Great Recession deeply affected not just the jobless, but also the vast majority of Americans. Nearly 8 in 10 Americans knew **someone** who lost a job between 2008 and 2012, according to the Heldrich Center's 2013 *Work Trends* survey.<sup>11</sup> Of those, 11 percent said a member of their immediate household was laid off. Another quarter reported that a person in their extended family — a parent, cousin, uncle, or aunt — was laid off, and nearly one in five said close personal friends were jobless at some point during the recession.

This survey provides an accounting of the enduring effects of the Great Recession, five years after both the economy started growing again and the end of the recession was declared by the National Bureau of Economic Research. This report examines: how the public views the recession's impact on the national economy and their own finances, and describes how the public currently views the U.S. economy and their own financial condition in 2014. Other sections present new data on the public's perceptions of **the American worker** and how the public views government responsiveness and competence with regard to employment policy issues.

## THE ALTERED ECONOMY

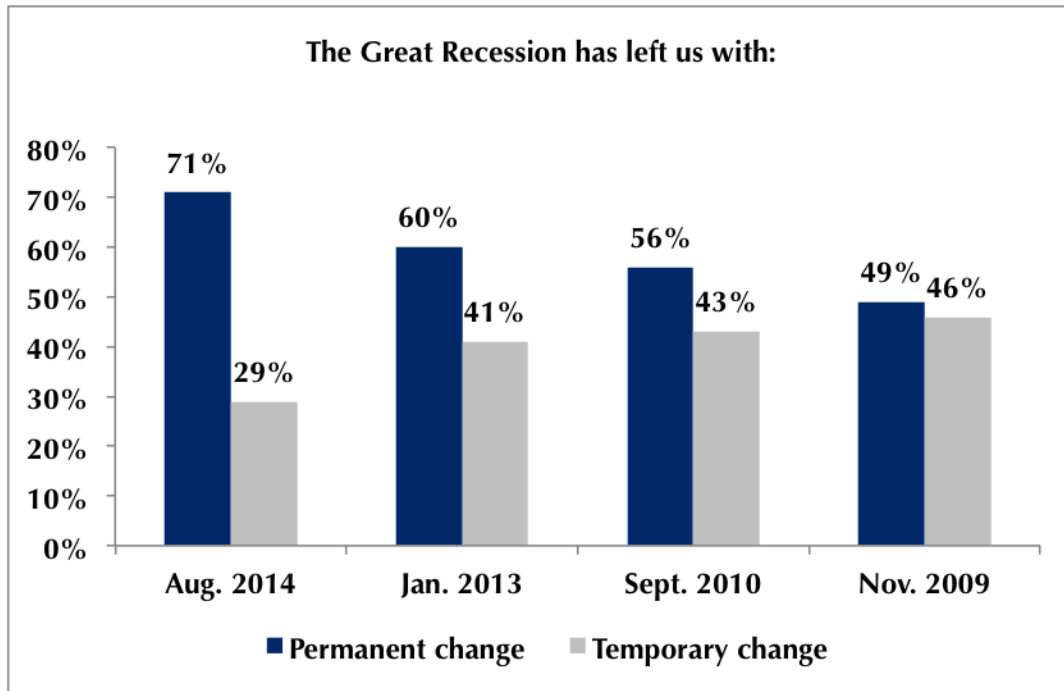
Clearly, the recession has cast a long, dark shadow on the opinions and experiences of Americans. Surveying the wreckage in the aftermath of the Great Recession, most Americans describe a fundamentally altered

landscape. A broad majority say the recession has brought about permanent changes to the economy, and that many aspects of American life will never return to the way they were before the recession.

As shown in Figure 1, the survey finds 71 percent saying the recession left us with “a permanent change in what are normal economic conditions in the country.” Moreover, the belief that the economic downturn created irreversible shifts in the economy grew from 49 percent in November 2009 to 56 percent in September 2010, and to 60 percent in January 2013. Now, 71 percent of Americans think the economy has changed permanently, which represents a broad consensus.<sup>12</sup>

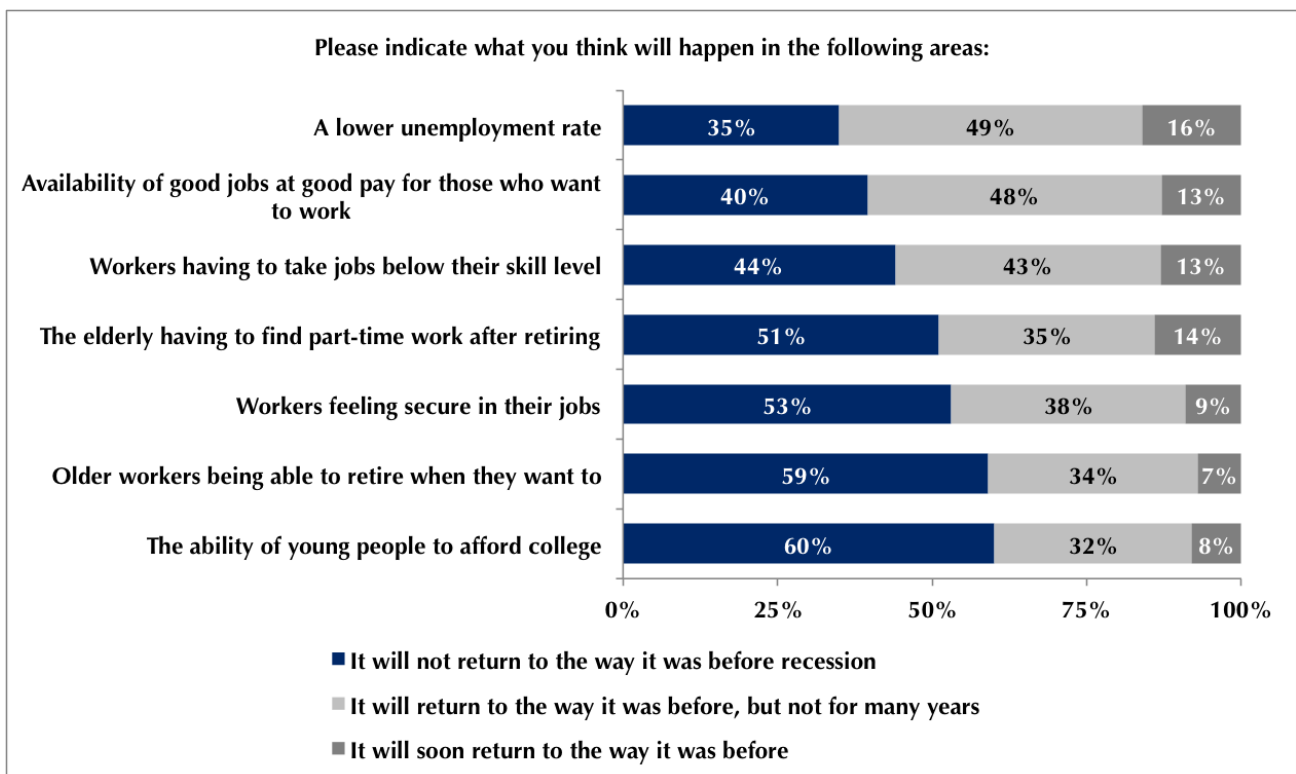
The vast majority of Americans see the recession as having wrought fundamental and lasting changes across a wide number of areas of economic and social life, including the affordability of college (historically important for upward mobility in American society), the age at which people are able to retire, workers' job security, and retirees having to work part time. While majorities say the recession left permanent changes in these areas, there is about another third who say these areas will not return to pre-recession levels for many years to come. A significant number also think that the workplace will become less attractive in future years. As illustrated in Figure 2, half (53 percent) think job security is a thing of the past, coupled with 44 percent who feel there will continue to be a mismatch between jobs and skills where workers will have to take jobs below their skill level. A large segment (40 percent) bemoans the loss of “good jobs at good pay” for those who want to work. Finally, just over one-third think the U.S. unemployment rate will be stuck at a high level forever (35 percent) and half say it will be for a long time to come (49 percent).

**FIGURE 1. Widespread Perceptions of Permanent Economic Change**



Source: Mark Szeltner, Carl Van Horn, and Cliff Zukin, *Diminished Lives and Futures: A Portrait of America in the Great Recession Era*, January 2013. Jessica Godofsky, Carl Van Horn, and Cliff Zukin, *American Workers Assess an Economic Disaster*, September 2010. Carl Van Horn and Cliff Zukin, *The No Confidence Economy*, November 2009 (New Brunswick, NJ: Heldrich Center for Workforce Development, Rutgers University).

**FIGURE 2. Fundamental Changes in the American Economy and Labor Market**



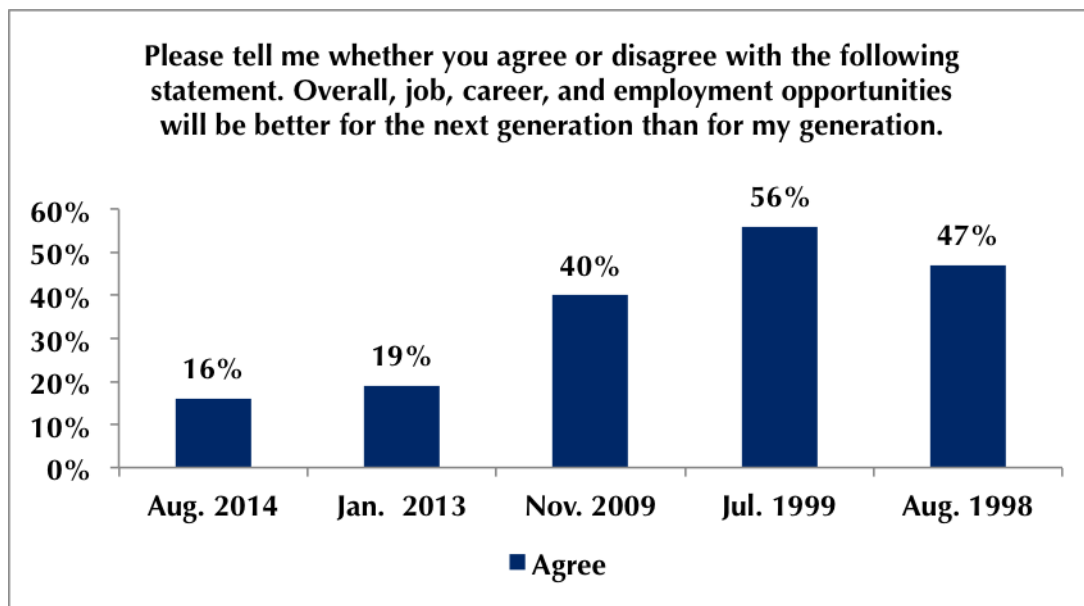
There is also a prevailing pessimism about the future of the workplace. Just 16 percent of Americans now say that job, career, and employment opportunities will be better for the next generation of workers. (See Figure 3.) Forty-five percent say the next generation will not have better opportunities and the remainder is uncertain. Older Americans are more negative about what will befall younger Americans. Half of those over the age of 35 disagree that the next generation's opportunities will be better, compared to 3 in 10 under the age of 35.

A comparison with Heldrich Center surveys conducted in the late 1990s<sup>13</sup> provide a stark comparison of just how much change there has been in this perception over time. Studies conducted in 1998 and 1999 found half of the public who thought the future was brighter for the coming generation, about three times as many who feel that way now. (See Figure 3.)

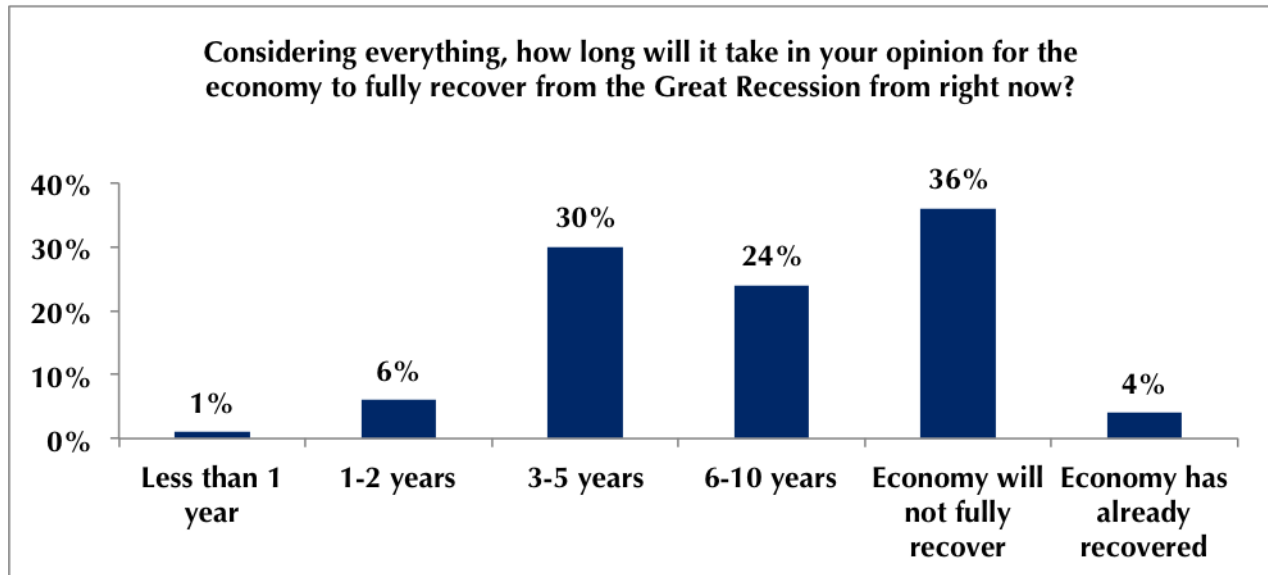
Only 20 percent of currently employed workers feel extremely or very confident they could find another job if they were laid off. After four years of slow, but steady, economic growth and falling unemployment, American workers' attitudes did not change between 2010 and 2014.<sup>14</sup>

When asked to estimate how long it might take the nation to recover from the Great Recession, just 1 in 10 say it will happen within the next two years (or has already happened). In comparison, 60 percent say it will take more than six years if it happens at all. (See Figure 4.) It is worth noting that answers of "six or more years" comprised 54 percent in 2013. This is another indicator that Americans' concern about the future of the economy has not abated even as the economy has continued to grow and add jobs.

**FIGURE 3. Widespread Pessimism About the Prospects for the Next Generation of Americans**



**FIGURE 4. Americans say the Nation has a Long Way to Go Before Recovery from the Great Recession**



## THE PAINFUL EFFECTS OF THE GREAT RECESSION ON INDIVIDUALS AND FAMILIES

The general feeling that the Great Recession has fundamentally changed American life for the worse is not a media-based or externally based perception of reality; rather, it is firmly anchored in personal experience. **Two-thirds of all adults say the recession had an impact on their own standard of living**, a staggering number in American society. Fully one-quarter (26 percent) describe it as a “major” change, with another 41 percent saying it caused a “minor” change. This change may be a piece of good news as perhaps the reality of what happened

was not as bad as the perception of what the near future would bring. Among the two-thirds who experienced a lifestyle change, just over half believe those changes will be permanent and just under half believe it will be temporary.

As seen in Figure 5, as an overall post-recession summary:

- > One-third of Americans (35 percent) say the Great Recession permanently changed their life,
- > One-third (32 percent) say the Great Recession affected them temporarily, and
- > One-third say the Great Recession had no impact on them at all.

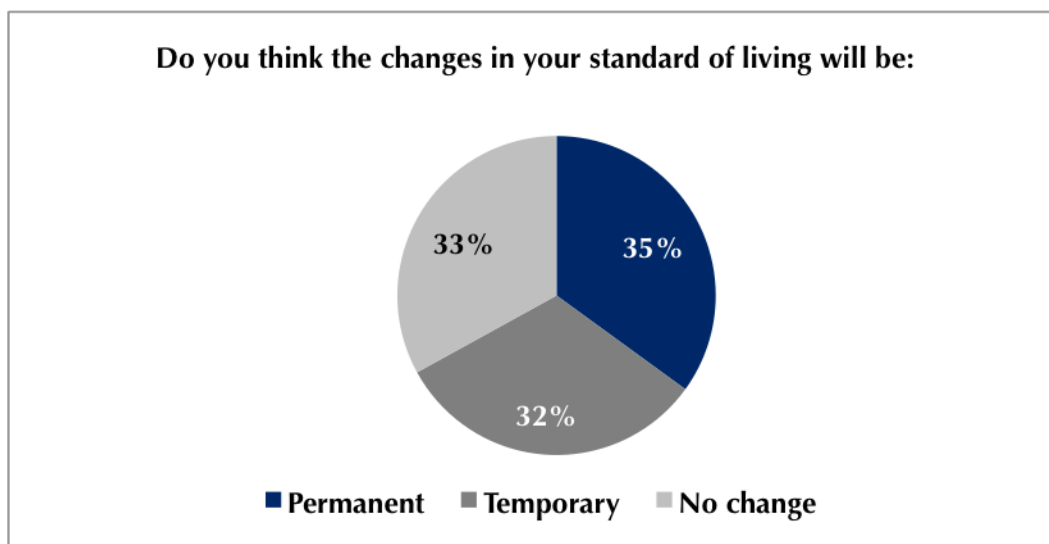


As shown in Table 1, combining the magnitude and permanence of impact yields five distinct categories of Americans.

By this reckoning, one in six Americans can be said to have been devastated by the Great Recession, reporting a major and permanent change in their lifestyle.<sup>15</sup> They are joined by another one in five who report their standard of living has been downsized permanently. These two groups comprise the 35 percent who

report a permanent change. Another 10 percent could be said to have been “set back” by the recession. They experienced a major hit, but it was temporary. Rounding out those who were affected, another 22 percent were troubled by the recession in that they experienced a minor, but temporary retrenchment in their quality of life. Finally, only one-third of the citizenry says they were completely unscathed by the Great Recession.

**FIGURE 5. Permanent Changes in the Standard of Living for More than One in Three Americans**



**TABLE 1. Magnitude and Permanence of the Great Recession on Americans**

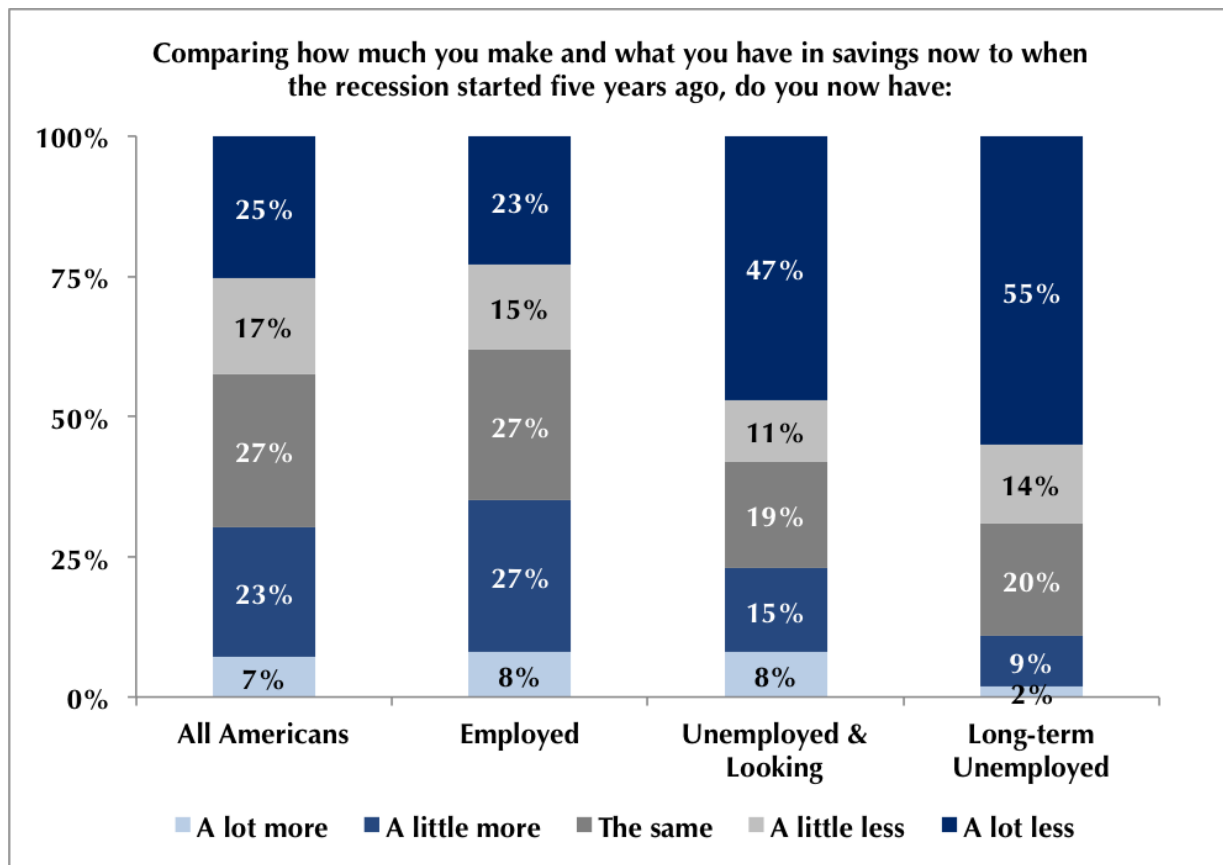
Percent in Population	Millions	Recession Impact	Amount of Impact	Permanence of Change
16%	38 million	Devastated	Major	Permanent
19%	46 million	Downsized	Minor	Permanent
10%	24 million	Set Back	Major	Temporary
22%	53 million	Troubled	Minor	Temporary
33%	79 million	Unscathed	None	—

Asked to compare “how much you make and what you have in savings now to when the recession started five years ago,” a plurality says they have less (42 percent), including 25 percent who say they have **a lot** less. (See Figure 6.) Just over a quarter say they have the same as five years ago, also a real decline in purchasing power given inflation. Just 30 percent say they have more in salary and savings than they did five years ago, including just 7 percent who report having **a lot** more. For those without a job, the financial impact is even worse. Nearly 6 in 10 unemployed say they have less than five years ago (58 percent), and among those who have been seeking employment for more than six months, nearly 7 in 10 say they have less (69 percent).

Despite record gains on Wall Street and the stock market, few Americans say that their own finances are in a good place, and express little

optimism that their situation will improve in the next year. When asked to summarize their current financial state, nearly 6 in 10 Americans rate their financial situation negatively: 40 percent say they are in “only fair” shape, and another 19 percent flatly acknowledge they are in poor shape. Only about a third of Americans say their finances are in good shape (34 percent) and just 7 percent currently describe themselves as being in excellent financial shape. Among those who are employed, 58 percent consider themselves in fair or poor shape, compared to 78 percent of those who are unemployed and looking for a job. Among the long-term unemployed, 83 percent rate themselves as being in poor or fair shape. Not surprisingly, income levels drastically affect these answers, with 81 percent of those making under \$30,000 rating their finances as fair or poor, compared to 46 percent of those making over \$60,000.

**FIGURE 6. Millions of Americans have Less than they Did Five Years Ago**



Nor are Americans expecting to get financially healthier in the near future. Just 4 in 10 say they expect their family's finances to get a little (31 percent) or a lot (9 percent) better over the next year. An equal number (42 percent) expect stagnation, with their financial condition staying the same. And nearly one in five see things getting harder for them over the next 12 months. Asked how long it will take to recover financially from the effects of the recession, 36 percent of Americans predict it will take between 3 and 10 years, and 18 percent say it will take longer than a decade or that they will never recover. Another 14 percent think they will see financial improvement within the next two years, and 32 percent say they and their family have already recovered. One of the reasons for this grim assessment of the recent past and pessimism about the future in the face of a stock market that has soared in recent years is that just one in seven (14 percent) say that what happens on Wall Street affects them a lot. Another 47 percent say the market has a little impact on them.

Americans also doubt their family finances will recover. By a margin of 57 percent to 21 percent, more think their family finances will stay at the new diminished level than will recover to pre-recession levels to join the other 21 percent who feel they had no loss to begin with or have already made it back. Moreover, a fundamental notion of the American Dream has taken a big hit: 42 percent feel that hard work and determination are no guarantee of success in America. Over half (58 percent) believe that people who want to get ahead can work hard and make it.

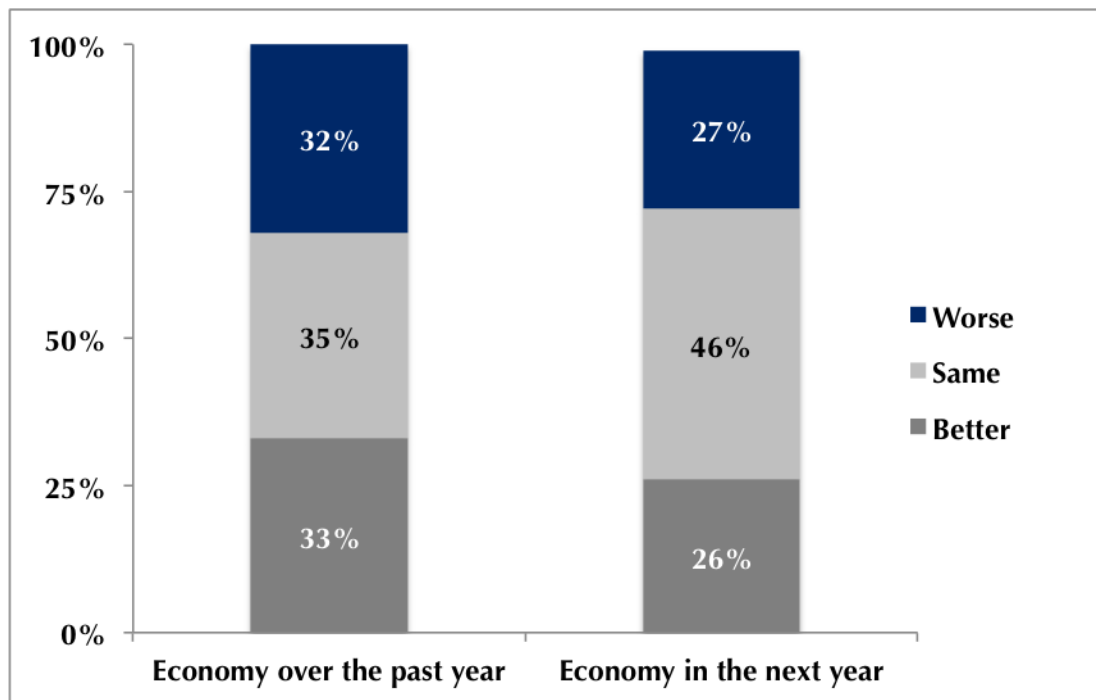
One of the aftereffects of the Great Recession is the disruption of the retirement plans of those currently employed. Almost half of Americans say their retirement plans were altered by the

recession, with 44 percent saying they will retire later than planned, and 4 percent saying they will retire earlier. Among those who have experienced long-term unemployment, 6 in 10 say their plans were affected by the recession: 5 percent will retire earlier and 55 percent will retire later. And those getting closer to retirement also see their working lives extended by the recession. More than half of 45- to 59-year-olds say they will retire later (53 percent), compared to 4 in 10 of those aged 30 to 44 (41 percent) and a third of 18- to 29-year-olds (34 percent).

## VIEWS OF THE U.S. ECONOMY

### **MOST AMERICANS DO NOT BELIEVE THE ECONOMY HAS IMPROVED OR THAT IT WILL IMPROVE NEXT YEAR**

The American public's perception of the nation's economy is gloomy and marked by uncertainty. As illustrated in Figure 7, only a third (33 percent) say the U.S. economy has gotten better compared to a year ago. Equal numbers say it has gotten worse (32 percent) and stayed the same (35 percent). These views are little changed from January 2013. Moreover, few Americans see any sign of the economy changing back in the next year. Nearly half (46 percent) say that a year from now, they expect economic conditions in the nation will be the same, while a quarter of Americans say conditions will get better (26 percent) and a similar number say they will worsen (27 percent). In another assessment of how tough the current economy remains, half of Americans say that now is a bad time to find a quality job, although this is a considerable improvement

**FIGURE 7. Views of the U.S. Economy**

from January 2013 when nearly three quarters (73 percent) said so, perhaps a signal of some cautious optimism about the job market. Still, fewer than one in five Americans say now is a good time to find a job, while nearly a third say they don't know. And for those out of work, fewer are positive about the job market. Only 12 percent of those who are unemployed and looking say it's a good time to find work, compared to nearly twice as many employed Americans (23 percent).

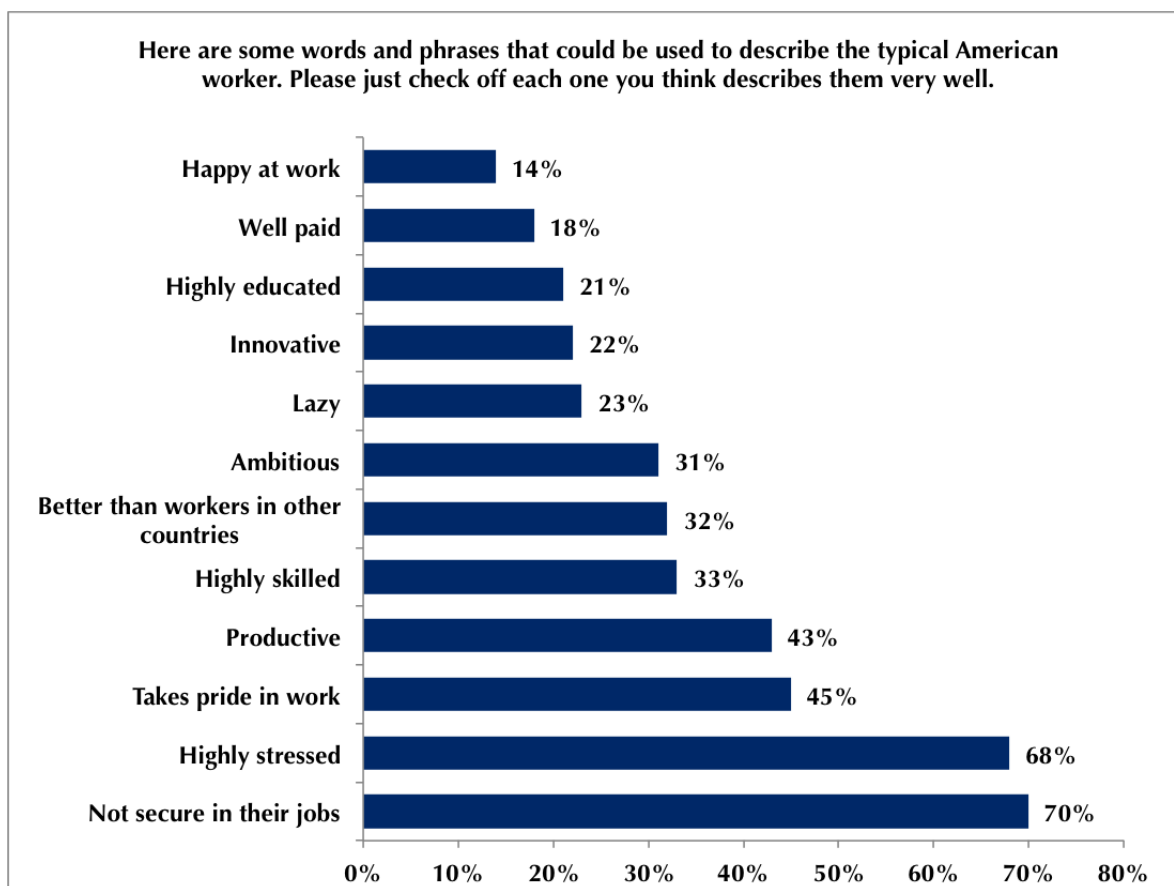
## VIEWS OF THE AMERICAN WORKER

The typical American worker lives a precarious and doleful existence — unhappy, poorly paid, and fearful about losing his or her job according to the opinions of fellow Americans who responded to this survey. Respondents to the

latest *Work Trends* survey were asked to check off a dozen words or phrases that describe the typical American worker very well. The results paint a surprisingly dismal and sobering self-portrait.

Shockingly, **it is but a mere one in seven (14 percent) who believe that the average American worker is happy at work.** (See Figure 8.) Moreover, there is no difference in this perception between the overall population and those currently working; just 12 percent of those employed checked off the American worker as happy in their job. This figure holds regardless of those paid a salary or by the hour. What makes this even more remarkable is that in response to a different question on the survey, 63 percent of workers say they are satisfied with **their jobs**, including 24 percent saying they are “very” satisfied with their job. Sharing the bottom of the list of 12 adjectives is “well paid.” Just 18 percent feel that’s descriptive of the

**FIGURE 8. American Workers are Seen as Unhappy and Insecure at their Jobs**



average American worker. The number is virtually the same (15 percent) for those employed, and there is little difference reported between white- and blue-collar workers — those paid by the hour (13 percent) or paid a salary (17 percent).

On the other end of the scale, more than two-thirds of the public describe American workers as insecure in their jobs, and a similar number as highly stressed. Again, the numbers of those currently working are no better. Among those currently working, 72 percent checked off workers not being secure in their jobs, and 71 percent checked off highly stressed. Taken together, the resulting picture is dismal: underpaid, unhappy workers who are fearful and highly stressed about losing their jobs.

Somewhat startling, given the tug of national pride, **just one in three thinks the American worker is better than workers in other countries.** Twenty-nine percent of those in the workforce feel this way. There are few demographic differences in responses to this item — not by gender, income, or race/ethnicity, although there are modest differences by age: just 26 percent of those under 35 feel the American worker is better, compared to 40 percent of those 55 or over.

Keys to why Americans think workers overseas are better may be found in some of the other adjectives. While only 23 percent describe the average worker as lazy, the American workforce received very tepid marks for being highly skilled (33 percent) and highly educated (21 percent). And relatively few checked off

the descriptors of ambitious (31 percent) and innovative (22 percent). Workers got more credit taking pride in their work (45 percent) and being productive (43 percent). Again, there were no differences in the ratings offered by the population as a whole and those in the workforce.

## ASSESSMENTS OF GOVERNMENT

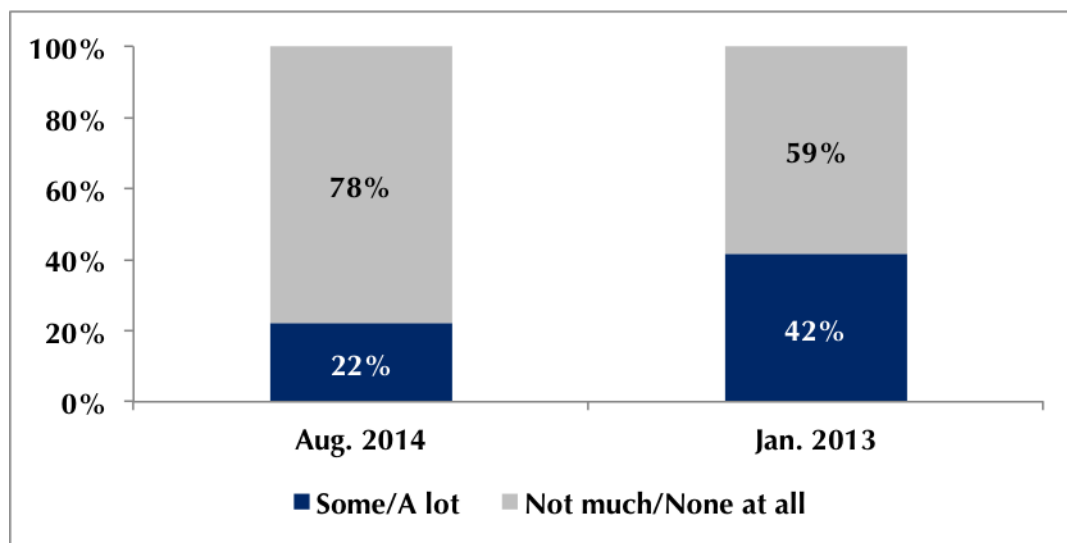
Given the massive, negative impact of the Great Recession, and the persistent gridlock and partisan wrangling in the political system, it is little wonder that the public has almost no confidence that the government in Washington, D.C. can fix the issues plaguing the nation. Just 2 percent say they have “a lot” of confidence that the government in Washington will make progress over the next year on the most important problems facing the nation; another 20 percent say they have “some” confidence. This leaves three quarters (78 percent) of the United States currently with either “not much” or “no

confidence at all.” (See Figure 9.) In only a year-and-a-half, Americans’ confidence in the government’s ability to solve the problems facing the nation fell precipitously by nearly half — from 42 percent in January 2013 to just 22 percent today.

More than half (54 percent) of Americans say they disapprove of the job Barack Obama is doing as president, while 46 percent approve. But Congress’ job approval is even weaker, with just 14 percent of Americans saying they approve of the job being done by the House of Representatives and the Senate.

When Americans were asked who they trust to better handle the economy, President Obama has a slight edge on the Republicans in Congress, 30 percent to 21 percent. But a plurality (43 percent) say they trust neither the president nor the Republicans to do a better job. Opinion divides starkly along party lines, with 61 percent of Democrats trusting Mr. Obama and 52 percent of Republicans trusting their Congressional leaders. But nearly 3 in 10 Democrats (29 percent), more than 4 in 10 Republicans

**FIGURE 9. Limited or No Confidence that Government Can Help**



(45 percent), and nearly three quarters of Independents (74 percent) say they trust neither to handle the economy.

Americans are divided about whether government can and should intervene in helping the unemployed. Some 45 percent think that there is action government can take to reduce unemployment, and 55 percent say that unemployment is going to have to wait until the private sector fuels hiring. However, it is worth noting that the proportion saying there is a role for government increased from 36 percent to 45 percent between 2013 and now. When asked “Who should be mainly responsible for helping” those laid off, 32 percent choose the government, 30 percent say employers, and 38 percent say workers themselves are mainly responsible. This is little different from Heldrich Center surveys conducted in 2010 and 2013.

Few Americans see any real change occurring in the unemployment rate if the Republican Party takes control of Congress after the November 2014 election. Just a quarter (26 percent) say the Republicans gaining control would bring about policies that would lower the unemployment rate, while 3 in 10 say their policies would make unemployment worse. Forty-four percent say Republican control won’t make a difference in the unemployment rate. Not surprisingly, more than half of Republicans say that their party’s control of Congress would lower unemployment (55 percent), while about the same number of Democrats say unemployment would worsen under Republican control (56 percent).

## ENDNOTES

1. Jason Furman, *The Employment Situation in July*, <http://www.whitehouse.gov/blog/2014/08/01/employment-situation-july>.
2. U.S. Congress, Congressional Budget Office, *The Slow Recovery of the Labor Market*, February 2014, Pub. No 4837.
3. U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics, *The Employment Situation, July 2014*, <http://www.bls.gov/news.release/empsit.nr0.htm>.
4. National Employment Law Project, *The Low-Wage Recovery: Industry Employment and Wages Four Years into the Recovery* (Washington, D.C., 2014), <http://www.nelp.org/page/-/Reports/Low-Wage-Recovery-Industry-Employment-Wages-2014-Report.pdf?nocdn=1#page=1&zoom=auto,0,798>.
5. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, after increasing in the 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s, the labor force participation rate reached and maintained an all-time high of 67.1 percent over the 1997-2000 period. Since that time, the labor force participation rate has been falling and is currently 63.7 percent, the lowest the rate has been since the early 1980s. See *Labor Force Projections to 2022: The Labor Force Participation Rate Continues to Fall, December 2013*, <http://www.bls.gov/opub/mlr/2013/article/labor-force-projections-to-2022-the-labor-force-participation-rate-continues-to-fall.htm>.

6. U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics, *The Employment Situation, July 2014*.
7. Nelson D. Schwartz, "Hiring Rises, but Number of Jobless Stays High," *The New York Times*, April 5 2014, B7.
8. David Wessel, *America isn't Working: More than One in Six Men Between 25 and 54 is Without a Job* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution), <http://www.brookings.edu/blogs/up-front/posts/2014/02/06>.
9. U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics, *The Employment Situation, July 2014*.
10. The Heldrich Center also oversampled both those currently unemployed and the long-term unemployed — those who have been out of work for more than 27 weeks. Those findings will be reported the week of September 15, 2014.
11. Mark Szeltner, Carl Van Horn, and Cliff Zukin, *Diminished Lives and Futures: A Portrait of America in the Great-Recession Era* (New Brunswick, NJ: Heldrich Center for Workforce Development, Rutgers University, 2013).
12. Among those who said they were laid off from full-time work, 86 percent perceive long-lasting change.
13. This is a composite average of surveys asked in 1998 (47 percent agree better for next generation, 36 percent disagree) and 1999 (56 percent to 31 percent).
14. See Carol Morell, Peyton M. Craighill, and Scott Clement, "More People Express Uncertainty in Chance to Achieve the American Dream," *The Washington Post*, September 28, 2013, [http://www/washingtonpost.com/local/more-people-express-uncertainty-in-chance-to-achieve-the-american-dream](http://www.washingtonpost.com/local/more-people-express-uncertainty-in-chance-to-achieve-the-american-dream)
15. It certainly is possible that some were affected positively in a major and temporary way. However, an analysis of this group suggests that is not the case. Just 0.3 of the sample fell into this category and also said their current financial position was excellent. There were a few (< 2 percent) with this condition who said the financial condition was good.



## APPENDIX A. METHODOLOGY

The latest Heldrich Center *Work Trends* survey was fielded July 24 to August 3, 2014 online with a national probability sample of 1,153 U.S. residents age 18 or older through GfK (formerly Knowledge Networks). The sample includes 463 respondents who are currently employed, 394 respondents who are unemployed and looking for work, and 297 respondents who are long-term unemployed, currently unemployed, and looking for work for at least seven months.

All surveys are subject to sampling error, which is the expected probable difference between interviewing everyone in a population versus a scientific sampling drawn from that population. The sampling error for 1,100 respondents is +/- 3 percentage points, at a 95 percent confidence interval. Thus, if 60 percent of respondents say the recession has caused permanent changes to the economy, the true figure would be between 63 percent and 57 percent had all U.S. residents been interviewed, rather than just a sample. The sampling error for the 463 employed respondents and for the 394 respondents who are unemployed and looking for work is +/- 5 percentage points, at a 95 percent confidence interval.

Sampling error increases as the sample size decreases, so statements based on various population subgroups, such as separate figures reported for women or men or hourly or salaried workers, are subject to more error than are statements based on the total sample. Sampling error does not take into account other sources of variation inherent in public opinion studies, such as non-response, question wording, or context effects.

The survey was conducted using the web-enabled KnowledgePanel®, a probability-based panel designed to be representative of the U.S. population. Initially, participants are chosen scientifically by a random selection of telephone numbers and residential addresses. Persons in selected households are then invited by telephone or by mail to participate in the web-enabled KnowledgePanel®. For those who agree to participate, but do not already have Internet access, Knowledge Networks provides at no cost a laptop and ISP connection. People who already have computers and Internet service are permitted to participate using their own equipment. Panelists then receive unique login information for accessing surveys online, and then are sent emails throughout each month inviting them to participate in research. When the report talks about the unemployed, it is referring only to those who are unemployed and looking for a job.

## APPENDIX B. TOPLINE SURVEY RESULTS

Knowledge Networks/GFK/online

Employed = August 2014 sample of employed respondents; N = 463

Field dates: July 24 to August 3, 2014

January 2013 = Total January 2013 sample

N=1,153

September 2010 = Total September 2010 sample

Percentage totals may not equal 100% due to rounding

\* = less than 1% reporting

### GENERAL POPULATION SEQUENCE (GENPOP)

**QEMPSTATSUM. Which of the following best describes you?**

N=1,153

	August 2014	January 2013	September 2010
Employed	62%	58%	60%
Unemployed and looking for work	3%	8%	6%
Unemployed and not looking for work	35%	34%	33%
Total	100%	100%	99%

**[IF EMPSTATSUM=1] (Employed)**

**EMPLOYED. Please mark the following that applies to you:**

N=460

	August 2014	January 2013
Full time	71%	73%
Part time	19%	19%
Self-employed full time	7%	5%
Self-employed part time	3%	2%
Military	—	1%
Total	100%	100%

[IF EMPSTATSUM=2] (Unemployed & Looking)

UNEMPLOYED\_LOOKING. Please mark the following that applies to you:

N=391

	August 2014	January 2013
Looking for full-time work	26%	43%
Looking for part-time work (15-20 hours)	43%	23%
Looking for either part time or full time	31%	34%
Total	100%	100%

[IF EMPSTATSUM=2] (Unemployed & Looking)

CE2\_1. How long have you been actively seeking employment?

N=394

	August 2014
2 months or less	29%
3-4 months	18%
5-6 months	5%
7 months to 1 year	11%
1-2 years	12%
More than 2 years	13%
Not sure	14%
Total	102%

[IF EMPSTATSUM=3] (Unemployed & Not Looking)

RETIRED. Please mark the following that applies to you: Are you retired?

N=294

	August 2014	January 2013
Yes	60%	60%
No	40%	40%
Total	100%	100%

[IF RETIRED =1]

**FS5. Because of the recession did your retirement plans change?**

N=197

	August 2014
Yes, retired earlier than planned	21%
Yes, retired later than planned	6%
No change in retirement plans due to recession	73%
Total	100%

[ASK ALL] (GENPOP)

**IN\_SCHOOL. Please mark which of the following applies to you: I am...**

N=1,149

	August 2014
In school part time	4%
In school full time	7%
Not in school	89%
Total	100%

[ASK IF IN\_SCHOOL=1,2] (SCHOOL)

**SCHOOL\_TYPE. Please mark which of the following applies to you: I am enrolled in...**

N=109

	August 2014
An undergraduate degree program	55%
A graduate degree or professional program	33%
Other type of educational program	12%
Total	100%

**QB1. Do you approve or disapprove of the job Barack Obama is doing as president?**

N=1,128

	August 2014
Approve	46%
Disapprove	54%
Total	100%

**QC1. Do you approve or disapprove of the job Congress is doing — the House of Representatives and the Senate?**

N=1,125

	August 2014
Approve	14%
Disapprove	86%
Total	100%

[ASK ALL] (GENPOP)

**QNE1A. How much confidence do you have that the government in Washington, D.C. will make progress over the next year on the most important problems facing the country?**

N=1,140

	August 2014	January 2013
A lot of confidence	2%	5%
Some confidence	20%	37%
Not much confidence	46%	38%
No confidence at all	32%	21%
Total	100%	101%

**QR4. Who do you trust to do a better job handling the economy?**

**N=1,134**

	August 2014	January 2013	September 2010
President Obama	30%	34%	23%
The Republicans in Congress	21%	20%	19%
Neither	43%	39%	45%
Both	6%	8%	12%
Total	100%	101%	99%

**QR6. If the Republican Party takes control of Congress after the 2014 election, do you think this will bring about policies that will:**

**N=1,136**

	August 2014
Help lower the unemployment rate	26%
Make unemployment worse	30%
Will not make a difference in unemployment	44%
Total	100%

**QNEW1. Compared to a year ago, do you think the economy has:**

**N=1,141**

	August 2014	January 2013
Gotten better	33%	29%
Gotten worse	32%	37%
Stayed the same	35%	34%
Total	100%	100%

**QR5. A year from now, do you expect economic conditions in the country as a whole will be:**

N=1,143

	August 2014	January 2013	September 2010
Better	26%	32%	32%
Worse	27%	32%	27%
Same as now	46%	36%	41%
Total	99%	100%	100%

**QR1. Thinking about the job situation in America today, would you say that now is a good time or bad time to find a quality job?**

N=1,146

	August 2014	January 2013	September 2010
Good	18%	27%	7%
Bad	50%	73%	78%
Don't know	32%	Not asked	14%
Total	100%	100%	99%

**QSM1. How much are you and your family's financial situation personally affected by what happens on Wall Street and in the stock market?**

N=1,146

	August 2014
A lot	14%
A little	47%
Not at all	24%
Don't know	15%
Total	100%

**QT2. Please indicate which of the following statements comes closer to your own views, even if neither is exactly right:**

N=1,137

	August 2014
Most people who want to get ahead can make it if they're willing to work hard	58%
Hard work and determination are no guarantee of success for most people	42%
Total	100%

	18-34	35-54	55+
Most people who want to get ahead can make it if they're willing to work hard	65%	56%	54%
Hard work and determination are no guarantee of success for most people	35%	44%	47%
Total	100%	100%	100%

**QR2. Just your best guess, do you think the Great Recession of the last five years has left us with:**

N=1,129

	August 2014	January 2013 <sup>1</sup>	September 2010 <sup>2</sup>	November 2009 <sup>3</sup>
A <b>permanent</b> change in what are normal economic conditions in the country	71%	60%	56%	49%
A <b>temporary</b> change that the economy will recover from	29%	41%	43%	46%
Total	100%	101%	99%	95% <sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Slightly varied wording in 2013: "...of the last four years"

<sup>2</sup> In 2010, the question read: "Just your best guess, do you think the recent problems in the economy indicate the U.S. economy is experiencing a temporary downturn, OR is it experiencing fundamental and lasting changes?"

<sup>3</sup> In 2009, the poll was conducted by telephone and the question read: "Please tell me your best guess: do you think the recent problems in the U.S. economy represent a temporary downturn, or fundamental and lasting changes?"

<sup>4</sup> An additional 5 percent had no opinion.



**QNE5. How long will it take in your opinion for the economy to fully recover from the Great Recession from right now?**

N=1,133

	August 2014	January 2013
Less than 1 year	1%	1%
1-2 years	6%	11%
3-5 years	30%	34%
6-10 years	24%	25%
The economy will not fully recover	36%	29%
The economy has already recovered	4%	NA
Total	101%	100%

**QNE6. Please indicate what you think will happen in each of the following areas:**

N=1,121

	August 2014	January 2013
<b>A lower unemployment rate</b>		
<i>It has returned or will soon return to the way it was before the recession<sup>1</sup></i>	16%	15%
<i>It will return to the way it was before, but not for many years</i>	49%	57%
<i>It will not return to the way it was before the recession<sup>2</sup></i>	35%	29%
<i>Total</i>	100%	101%
<b>Workers feeling secure in their jobs</b>		
<i>It has returned or will soon return to the way it was before the recession</i>	9%	13%
<i>It will return to the way it was before, but not for many years</i>	38%	44%
<i>It will not return to the way it was before the recession</i>	53%	43%
<i>Total</i>	100%	100%
<b>The availability of good jobs at good pay for those who want to work</b>		
<i>It has returned or will soon return to the way it was before the recession</i>	13%	14%
<i>It will return to the way it was before, but not for many years</i>	48%	52%
<i>It will not return to the way it was before the recession</i>	40%	34%
<i>Total</i>	101%	100%

**QNE6. Please indicate what you think will happen in each of the following areas: (continued)**

**N=1,121**

	August 2014	January 2013
<b>The ability of young people to afford college</b>		
<i>It has returned or will soon return to the way it was before the recession</i>	8%	9%
<i>It will return to the way it was before, but not for many years</i>	32%	33%
<i>It will not return to the way it was before the recession</i>	60%	58%
<i>Total</i>	100%	100%
<b>The elderly having to find part-time work after retiring</b>		
<i>It has returned or will soon return to the way it was before the recession</i>	14%	17%
<i>It will return to the way it was before, but not for many years</i>	35%	36%
<i>It will not return to the way it was before the recession</i>	51%	47%
<i>Total</i>	100%	100%
<b>Older workers being able to retire when they want to</b>		
<i>It has returned or will soon return to the way it was before the recession</i>	7%	7%
<i>It will return to the way it was before, but not for many years</i>	34%	30%
<i>It will not return to the way it was before the recession</i>	59%	63%
<i>Total</i>	100%	100%
<b>Workers having to take jobs below their skill level</b>		
<i>It has returned or will soon return to the way it was before the recession</i>	13%	13%
<i>It will return to the way it was before, but not for many years</i>	43%	45%
<i>It will not return to the way it was before the recession</i>	44%	42%
<i>Total</i>	100%	100%

<sup>1</sup> Slightly varied wording in 2013: "It will soon return to the way it was before."

<sup>2</sup> Slightly varied wording in 2013: "It will not return to the way it was before."

**QG1. When people are laid off from work, who should be mainly responsible for helping them?**

N=1,136

	August 2014	January 2013	September 2010
Government	32%	26%	32%
Employers	30%	32%	26%
Workers themselves	38%	42%	42%
Total	100%	100%	100%

**QR10. Do you think the government can reduce unemployment to any real extent, or do we just have to wait until the private-sector economy improves?**

N=1,122

	August 2014	January 2013	September 2010
Government can act	45%	36%	33%
Wait for economic improvement	55%	64%	65%
Total	100%	100%	98%

**QGP5. Here are some words and phrases that could be used to describe the typical American worker. Please just check off each one you think describes them very well.**

N=1,124

	August 2014
Highly skilled	33%
Lazy	23%
Takes pride in work	45%
Not secure in their jobs	70%
Highly educated	21%
Better than workers in other countries	32%
Ambitious	31%
Happy at work	14%
Highly stressed	68%
Innovative	22%
Productive	43%
Well paid	18%

**QTIMESERIES3. Please tell me whether you agree or disagree with the following statement. Overall, job, career, and employment opportunities will be better for the next generation than for my generation.**

**N=1,139**

	<b>August 2014</b>	<b>January 2013</b>	<b>November 2009<sup>1</sup></b>	<b>July 1999<sup>1</sup></b>	<b>August 1998<sup>1</sup></b>
Agree	16%	19%	40%	56%	47%
Disagree	45%	44%	45%	31%	36%
Neither agree nor disagree	39%	38%	11%	9%	9%
Don't know	NA	NA	5%	4%	8%
Total	100%	101%	101%	100%	100%

<sup>1</sup> Surveys administered in 1998, 1999, and 2009 were conducted by telephone.

	<b>August 2014</b>	<b>18-34</b>	<b>35-54</b>	<b>50+</b>	<b>55+</b>
Agree	16%	19%	15%	15%	14%
Disagree	45%	31%	49%	50%	52%
Neither agree nor disagree	39%	50%	36%	35%	34%
Total	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%

**FS1. How would you rate your own personal financial situation?**

**N=1,135**

	<b>August 2014</b>	<b>September 2010</b>
Excellent shape	7%	7%
Good shape	34%	37%
Only fair shape	40%	39%
Poor shape	19%	16%
Total	100%	99%

**QFS7. Comparing how much you make and what you have in savings now to when the recession started five years ago, do you now have:**

**N=1,128**

	August 2014	January 2013 <sup>1</sup>
A lot more	7%	5%
A little more	23%	15%
The same	27%	25%
A little less	17%	18%
A lot less	25%	38%
Total	99%	101%

<sup>1</sup> Varied wording in 2013: “Comparing how much you make and what you have in savings now to when the recession started a couple of years ago, do you now have.”

**QFS10. Overall, did the recession cause:**

**N=1,133**

	August 2014
A major change in your lifestyle	26%
A minor change in your lifestyle	41%
No change in your lifestyle	33%
Total	100%

[IF FS10 = 1 or 2]

**QFS10A. Do you think the impact on your standard of living will be:**

**N=820**

	August 2014
Permanent	35%
Temporary	32%
No change	33%
Total	100%

**QFS8. Thinking about your finances over the next few years, which do you think is more likely?**

N=1,127

	August 2014	January 2013
You will get back to where you were before the recession began	21%	23%
You will stay at the level you are now	57%	61%
You are already back/no loss in the first place	21%	16%
Total	99%	100%

[IF FS8=1 or 2]

**QFS14. Considering everything, how long do you think it will take YOU AND YOUR FAMILY to recover financially from the effects of the recession?**

N=923

	August 2014	January 2013
Less than 1 year	3%	7%
1-2 years	11%	17%
3-5 years	24%	34%
6-10 years	12%	16%
Longer than 10 years/will never recover	18%	12%
Already recovered/no loss from above	32%	15%
Total	100%	101%

**FS3. Over the next year, do you think your family's finances will:**

N=1,134

	August 2014
Get a lot better	9%
Get a little better	31%
Stay the same	42%
Get a little worse	13%
Get a lot worse	4%
Total	99%

**CURRENTLY EMPLOYED**  
**[IF QEMPSTATSUM=1] (EMPLOYED)**

**QCE1. Thinking about your current job, are you:**

N=458

	August 2014	January 2013
Very satisfied	24%	29%
Somewhat satisfied	39%	37%
Neither satisfied not dissatisfied	16%	15%
Somewhat dissatisfied	14%	11%
Very dissatisfied	6%	7%
Don't know	2%	1%
Total	101%	100%

**QRI12. How confident are you that if you lost or wanted to leave your current job, you could find another job as good or better?**

N=455

	August 2014	January 2013	September 2010
Extremely confident	4%	8%	7%
Very confident	16%	10%	12%
Somewhat confident	33%	34%	30%
Not very confident	27%	30%	30%
Not at all confident	21%	18%	20%
Total	101%	100%	99%

**CE12. Because of the recession, do you now think you will retire later or earlier than you had originally planned?**

**N=865**

	August 2014	January 2013 <sup>1</sup>
Yes, will retire earlier than planned	4%	3%
Yes, will retire later than planned	44%	43%
No change in retirement plans because of recession	53%	54%
Total	101%	100%

<sup>1</sup> Varied wording in 2013: “Because of the recession, do you think about retiring later or earlier than you had originally planned?”

**GENERAL POPULATION (CONTINUED)**

**P1. All things considered, do you consider yourself as a Democrat or Republican or Independent?**

**N=1,107**

	August 2014
Democrat	34%
Independent	28%
Republican	26%
Something else	11%
Total	99%

**[IF P1=2 or 4]**

**P1A. Do you lean more toward the:**

**N=469**

	August 2014
Democratic Party	26%
Republican Party	26%
Neither	48%
Total	100%



**P2. Do you think of yourself as a:**

August 2014	
Liberal	18%
Moderate	47%
Conservative	36%
Total	101%



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