

PRRI: Public Religion Research Institute, September 23, 2014

2014 American Values Survey

WASHINGTON — Despite the overall improvement in the U.S. economy, a majority of Americans have a decidedly gloomy outlook on their personal financial situation and the economic future of the country heading into the midterm elections, finds the **2014 American Values Survey**. Nearly 6-in-10 Americans report being in only fair (37 percent) or poor financial shape (20 percent), while roughly 4-in-10 Americans say they are in excellent (7 percent) or good (34 percent) financial shape. This assessment represents a notable drop from 2010, when half of Americans indicated they were in excellent (9 percent) or good (41 percent) financial shape.

The fifth annual look at religion, values and public policy in America from the nonpartisan **Public Religion Research Institute** finds that over the last year many Americans have experienced significant economic hardships, such as cutting back on meals to save money or having trouble paying a monthly bill. An Economic Insecurity Index (EII), developed by PRRI from six specific indicators of economic hardship, finds that approximately 4-in-10 Americans live in households with high (15 percent) or moderate (26 percent) levels of economic insecurity, while 6-in-10 Americans live in households with low (20 percent) or no (39 percent) reported economic insecurity.

“Despite the fact that there has been improvement in the economy since the Great Recession, approximately 4-in-10 Americans live in households experiencing high or moderate levels of economic insecurity,” noted **Robert P. Jones, CEO of PRRI**. “Economic insecurity remains highly stratified by race, with nearly 6-in-10 black Americans living in households with high or moderate levels of economic insecurity.

These economic struggles have taken their toll on the public’s faith in the idea of the American dream. Roughly 4-in-10 (42 percent) Americans say that the American dream—that if you work hard, you’ll get ahead—still holds true today. Nearly half (48 percent) of Americans believe that the American dream once held true but does not anymore, and 7 percent say the American dream never held true. Black Americans are more pessimistic about the idea of the American dream than other racial groups. Less than one-third (31 percent) of black Americans say the American dream still holds true today, while half (50 percent) say it once held true but does not anymore, and 14 percent say it never held true.

The new survey also finds that over the last year, Americans’ confidence in the criminal justice system’s equal treatment of racial and ethnic minorities has dropped significantly. Today, fewer than 4-in-10 (38 percent) Americans believe that black Americans and other minorities receive the same treatment as white Americans in the criminal justice system, while a majority (56 percent) of Americans disagree. Just one year ago, the public was evenly divided. In 2013, 47 percent agreeing that all Americans receive equal treatment regardless of race, while 47 percent disagreed. More than 8-in-10 (84 percent) black Americans say that black Americans and other minorities do not receive equal the same treatment as whites in the criminal justice system, compared to 6-in-10 (60 percent) Hispanics and a slim majority (51 percent) of white Americans.

“Americans are increasingly doubtful that the criminal justice system is colorblind,” said **Daniel Cox, PRRI Research Director**. “The sharp decline in confidence is especially pronounced among younger Americans. Compared to one year ago, young adults are much less likely to agree that the criminal justice system treats everyone the same, regardless of race.”

When it comes to specific economic and workplace policies, Americans are largely in agreement. By a margin of two to one, Americans agree that the government should do more to reduce the gap between the rich and poor (66 percent agree, 32 percent disagree). Approximately 8-in-10 (78 percent) Americans favor requiring companies to provide all full-time employees with paid leave for the birth or adoption of a child. Approximately 8-in-10 (81 percent) Americans favor requiring companies to provide all full-time employees with paid sick days if they or an immediate family member gets sick.

Additional findings from the survey include a decline in the size of the Tea Party since 2010; a public evenly divided over concerns about government interference in religion versus religious groups forcing their beliefs on others; and a plurality of support among likely midterm voters for Republican candidates. These findings, as well as demographic breaks by religion, political affiliation, race and more are available below and online at the following link: <http://publicreligion.org/research/2014/09/survey-economic-insecurity-rising-inequality-and-doubts-about-the-future-findings-from-the-2014-american-values-survey/>

The 2014 American Values Survey was designed and conducted by Public Religion Research Institute and funded by the Ford Foundation and the Nathan Cummings Foundation. Results of the survey were based on 4,507 bilingual (Spanish and English) telephone interviews (2,253 respondents were interviewed on a cell phone) conducted by professional interviewers among a random sample of American adults between July 21, 2014 and August 15, 2014. The margin of error for the total sample is +/- 1.8 percentage points at the 95% level of confidence.

Among the Findings:

Today, only 30 percent of Americans believe the economy has gotten better over the last two years, while 35 percent say it has gotten worse, and 33 percent say it has stayed about the same. The survey finds evidence that partisans’ views of the economy are strongly influenced by their political affiliation, despite the fact that Republicans are significantly more likely than Democrats to report being in good or excellent financial shape.

- Only 15 percent of Republicans (and 14 percent of Tea Party members) say the economy has gotten better over the last two years. Majorities of Republicans (54 percent) and Americans who identify with the Tea Party movement (62 percent) say the economy has gotten worse over the last couple years.
- Nearly half of Democrats (48 percent) say the economy has gotten better over the last two years, while about 1-in-5 (17 percent) say it has gotten worse. One-third of Democrats (33 percent) say the economy has stayed about the same.

Only about 1-in-5 (21 percent) Americans believe the economic recession is over, while 72 percent believe the economy is still in a recession today.

Many Americans continue to experience significant economic hardships in their daily lives. The most commonly reported economic hardship is food insecurity; more than one-third (36 percent) of Americans report that they or someone in their household had to reduce meals or cut back on food to save money over the course of the past year.

An Economic Insecurity Index (EII) was developed by PRRI from six specific measures of economic hardship. The EII finds that approximately 4-in-10 Americans live in high (15 percent) or moderate (26 percent) economic insecurity households, while 6-in-10 Americans live in households with low (20 percent) or no (39 percent) reported economic insecurity.

- Nearly 6-in-10 black Americans live in households with moderate (33 percent) or high (25 percent) levels of economic insecurity.
- Nearly half of Hispanics live in households with moderate (29 percent) or high (18 percent) levels of economic insecurity.
- By contrast, fewer than 4-in-10 white Americans reside in households with moderate (24 percent) or high levels (12 percent) of economic insecurity.

Overall, Americans express significant concerns about the economic future for themselves and their children.

- White Americans (45 percent) and Hispanics (42 percent) are more likely than black Americans (31 percent) to believe that the American Dream still holds true today, although pluralities of each group say it was true in the past, but not anymore. Notably, black Americans are more likely than any other racial or ethnic group to say that the American Dream never held true (14 percent).
- Nearly half (49 percent) of Americans believe that their own generation is better off financially than their children's generation will be. About 1-in-5 (18 percent) say the two generations will be equally well off financially. Only 3-in-10 (29 percent) say their own generation is worse off financially than their children's generation will be.

When the survey was fielded in mid-August, registered voters were roughly split in their voting preferences for the 2014 congressional midterm elections.

- Forty-five percent of registered voters say that if the election were held today, they would vote for or lean toward voting for the Democratic candidate in their electoral district, while roughly as many (43 percent) say they would vote for, or are leaning toward, the Republican candidate.
- Among likely voters, however, Republican candidates hold a substantial advantage over Democratic candidates (49 percent vs. 41 percent).

- The voting preferences of religious communities largely mirror the 2012 presidential election patterns. Nearly 7-in-10 (69 percent) white evangelical Protestant registered voters and a majority (53 percent) of white mainline Protestant registered voters favor the Republican candidate in their district. Half (50 percent) of white Catholic registered voters also say they prefer the Republican candidate, while 40 percent say they would support the Democratic candidate.
- By contrast, nearly two-thirds (65 percent) of Hispanic Catholic registered voters prefer the Democratic candidate in their district. Nearly 9-in-10 (88 percent) black Protestant registered voters say they would support the Democratic candidate in their district. Majorities of Jewish (57 percent) and religiously unaffiliated (55 percent) registered voters also say they would support a Democratic candidate.

Although the Tea Party remains a potent force in American politics, there are signs that the movement may be shedding members. Currently, 7 percent of Americans identify as part of the Tea Party movement, down from 11 percent in 2010. The demographic attributes of those who identify with the movement remain largely unchanged since 2010.

- Currently, 35 percent of Americans say they have a favorable view of the Tea Party, while close to half (46 percent) say they have an unfavorable view. Roughly 1-in-5 Americans report having never heard of the Tea Party (5 percent) or have no opinion of the group (14 percent).
- Despite initial suggestions that the Tea Party represented a new and independent political movement, the survey finds that the Tea Party draws heavily from existing social movements, particularly the Christian Right and the Republican Party. Nearly half (47 percent) of Americans who identify with the Tea Party also say they are part of the Religious Right or the Christian conservative movement. Nearly 8-in-10 (77 percent) identify as Republican or lean toward the Republican Party. These findings have remained consistent since 2010.

Most Americans (55 percent) believe that one of the biggest problems in the country is that not everyone is given an equal chance to succeed in life. Roughly 4-in-10 (38 percent) Americans disagree with this statement, saying that it is not really that big a problem if some people have more of a chance in life than others.

- More than three-quarters (76 percent) of black Americans, and roughly 6-in-10 Hispanics (62 percent) and Asian Americans (58 percent), say that one of the big problems facing the country is that not everyone is given an equal chance in life.
- Only half (50 percent) of white Americans agree. More than 4-in-10 (42 percent) white Americans believe that it is not really that big of a problem if some people have more of a chance in life than others.

Americans are largely in agreement on a range of economic policies:

- Approximately two-thirds (66 percent) of Americans agree that the government should do more to reduce the gap between the rich and poor, while roughly one-third (32 percent) disagree.
- Roughly 6-in-10 (57 percent) Americans favor increasing the tax rate on Americans earning more than \$250,000 per year, while 37 percent are opposed.
- About 7-in-10 (69 percent) Americans favor increasing the minimum wage from \$7.25 per hour to \$10.10 per hour.
- Approximately 8-in-10 (78 percent) Americans favor requiring companies to provide all full-time employees with paid leave for the birth or adoption of a child.
- Approximately 8-in-10 (81 percent) Americans favor requiring companies to provide all full-time employees with paid sick days if they or an immediate family member gets sick.

However, most Americans say they do not believe that major institutions—such as the overall economic system, business corporations, and government—are working for their benefit.

- Nearly two-thirds (64 percent) of Americans believe the economic system in the country unfairly favors the wealthy, compared to 34 percent who disagree.
- Most Americans (53 percent) *do not* believe that business corporations generally strike a fair balance between making profits and serving the public interest, while 41 percent believe that they do strike this balance.
- Only one-third (33 percent) of Americans agree that the government is run for the benefit of all the people, while nearly two-thirds (64 percent) of Americans disagree.

More than 6-in-10 (62 percent) white college-educated Americans do not believe that black Americans and other minorities receive the same treatment as white Americans in the criminal justice system, compared to 45 percent of white working-class Americans.

- More than 8-in-10 (84 percent) black Protestants, roughly two-thirds (66 percent) of religiously unaffiliated Americans, and a slim majority (53 percent) of Catholics disagree that all Americans in the criminal justice system receive equal treatment regardless of race. White mainline Protestants are divided (48 percent agree, 46 percent disagree) on the issue of equal treatment. Only 43 percent of white evangelical Protestants disagree that all Americans in the criminal justice system receive equal treatment regardless of race; 52 percent agree.

Nearly half (46 percent) of Americans say they are more concerned about the government interfering with the ability of people to freely practice their religion, while an equal number (46 percent) say they are more concerned about religious groups trying to pass laws that force their beliefs on others.

- White evangelical Protestants (66 percent) and Hispanic Protestants (57 percent) are more concerned about the government interfering with the ability of people to freely practice their religion.
- By contrast, religiously unaffiliated Americans (63 percent) and Jewish Americans (64 percent) report more concern about religious groups trying to pass laws that force their beliefs on others.
- There is less of a consensus among other religious groups. A slim majority (51 percent) of Catholics say they are more concerned about religious groups trying to force their beliefs on others, although 42 percent say they are more concerned about the government interfering with people's ability to freely practice their religion. Black Protestants are also divided, but they are more concerned about religious groups trying to force their beliefs on others (48 percent) than they are about the government interfering with people's ability to freely practice their religion (40 percent). White mainline Protestants are nearly evenly divided: 46 percent report more concern about the government interfering with people's ability to freely practice their religion, while 45 percent say they are more concerned about religious groups trying to pass laws that force their beliefs on others.