

Americans May be Seeing Slight Improvement in Local Job Markets

Democrats significantly more optimistic than Republicans

NEW YORK, N.Y. – February 2, 2012 – In the current political environment the job market continues to be one of the more important topics. And, for the first time in months, Americans are indicating that the job market in their region of the country may be improving, albeit slightly. This month 14% of U.S. adults say that the job market in their region of the country is good, which is up from 9% who said so in October 2011, 11% who said so in September and 12% who said so two months earlier in July 2011. The number of Americans who call the job market in their region bad has also dropped this month, to 65%, down from 67% who said so in October 2011.

These are some of the results of *The Harris Poll* of 2,016 adults surveyed online between January 16 and 23, 2012 by [Harris Interactive](#).

Although these numbers are still low overall, with almost two thirds calling the job market in their region bad (65%) and one in five saying it's neither good nor bad (21%), a minor increase is important, and may be reflective of real change. Looking across the country it appears that the job markets in the East and South are the best, as 15% and 16% in those regions respectively say that the market there is good, while the Midwest and West may be struggling more—over two thirds in the Midwest (67%) and West (71%) call the job market in their region bad.

Further evidence that the national job market may be improving is the response seen when Americans were asked how they think the job market in their region will change over the next 6 months. For the first time since March 2011 more people say that the job market in their region will be better—27% say so now, compared to 22% in July. While this number shows an increase, it's still lower than the three in ten who expected the job market to improve when asked during the first half of 2011 (30%-32% said so between January and May 2011).

Looking by political party there are stark differences in attitudes regarding the future of the job market—Democrats show significantly more optimism than do either Independents or Republicans. Fully two in five Democrats expect that the job market will improve over the next 6 months (41%) compared to 24% of Independents and only 14% of Republicans who say the same. Republicans and Independents are most likely to say that they think the job market will stay the same (56% and 55%).

This optimism about the job market may be related to perceived blame for the state of the economy. When asked how much each of the following groups are to blame for their financial situation, a large majority of Republicans (84%) and over half of Independents (55%) say they blame the President. This compares to fewer than one third of Democrats who say the same (30%). When asked about other groups' blame for the current financial situation some of the results include:

- Large majorities of Americans say they blame Congress (81%) and Wall Street (70%) for their financial situation;
- Two thirds say they blame large corporations (66%), fewer say they blame state government (62%) or the President (56%) and less than half say they blame local government (48%).

Similarly to how partisan differences may account for how much someone blames the President for their financial situation, Democrats are also significantly less likely than both Republicans and Independents to give

President Obama negative ratings on his handling of the economy. Overall one quarter of Americans say President Obama’s handling of the economy is excellent or very good (25%) while three quarters say it is only fair or poor (75%). These numbers are unchanged since last month despite the other improvements seen in perceptions of the job market.

So What?

The economy and political approval ratings are inexplicably tied. While President Obama continues to struggle with his approval ratings, it seems that Americans’ perceptions of the job market have improved slightly. If these feelings continue, President Obama and his campaign team would do well to link themselves to the improved sentiment. If the feelings do not improve, or do not improve enough, the President’s Republican opposition will surely try to take advantage of the dissatisfaction.

**TABLE 1
RATING OF CURRENT JOB MARKET - TREND**

“How would you rate the current job market of your region of the nation?”

Base: All adults

	2008		2009							
	June	July	Jan	April	June	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
GOOD (NET)	28	30	6	12	9	8	10	10	8	9
Neither good nor bad	18	19	18	20	19	21	22	20	18	19
BAD (NET)	53	51	76	68	72	71	68	70	73	72

	2010									
	Jan	Mar.	April	May	June	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
GOOD (NET)	10	8	10	12	10	12	10	13	11	13
Neither good nor bad	20	18	21	20	25	22	21	21	23	24
BAD (NET)	70	73	70	68	66	66	69	66	66	63

	2011								2012
	Jan	Feb	March	May	July	Sept	Oct	Jan	
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	
GOOD (NET)	13	15	13	16	12	11	9	14	
Neither good nor bad	22	24	22	23	24	22	24	21	
BAD (NET)	65	61	65	61	64	67	67	65	

Note: Percentages may not add to 100% due to rounding

**TABLE 2
RATING OF CURRENT JOB MARKET IN YOUR REGION – BY REGION**

“How would you rate the current job market of your region of the nation?”

Base: All adults

	Total	Region			
		East	Midwest	South	West
	%	%	%	%	%
GOOD (NET)	14	15	11	16	12
Very good	1	1	1	2	1
Somewhat good	12	14	10	15	10
Neither good nor bad	21	22	22	23	18
BAD (NET)	65	63	67	60	71
Somewhat bad	37	34	41	34	41
Very bad	28	30	26	27	30

Note: Percentages may not add to 100% due to rounding; * indicates less than .05%

TABLE 3
EXPECTATIONS FOR JOB MARKET IN SIX MONTHS – TREND

“How do you think that the job market in your region of the nation will change over the next 6 months?”

Base: All adults

	2009				2010					
	Jan	April	June	Aug	June	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
BETTER (NET)	15	23	21	28	26	23	21	23	30	25
Will be much better	1	3	2	2	1	2	2	3	2	2
Will be somewhat better	14	20	19	26	25	21	19	20	28	23
Will remain the same	36	42	47	47	53	49	53	53	50	54
WORSE (NET)	49	36	32	25	21	27	26	24	21	22
Will be somewhat worse	36	29	24	19	15	22	20	18	15	16
Will be much worse	14	7	8	6	6	5	6	6	6	6

	2011					2012
	Jan	Feb	Mar	May	July	Jan
	%	%	%	%	%	%
BETTER (NET)	31	31	32	30	22	27
Will be much better	4	4	2	4	2	2
Will be somewhat better	26	27	30	26	20	25
Will remain the same	51	51	52	49	53	53
WORSE (NET)	18	18	16	21	25	21
Will be somewhat worse	13	13	11	14	17	14
Will be much worse	6	5	6	7	8	7

Note: Percentages may not add to 100% due to rounding

TABLE 4
EXPECTATIONS FOR JOB MARKET IN SIX MONTHS – BY POLITICAL PARTY

“How do you think that the job market in your region of the nation will change over the next 6 months?”

Base: All adults

	Total	Political Party		
		Rep.	Dem.	Ind.
	%	%	%	%
BETTER (NET)	27	14	41	24
Will be much better	2	1	4	*
Will be somewhat better	25	13	37	24
Will remain the same	53	56	47	55
WORSE (NET)	21	30	12	21
Will be somewhat worse	14	22	8	12
Will be much worse	7	8	4	8

Note: Percentages may not add to 100% due to rounding

TABLE 5

BLAME FOR PERSONAL FINANCIAL SITUATION

“How much do you blame each of the following groups or individuals for your financial situation?”

Base: All adults

		BLAME (NET)	A great deal	Somewhat	DO NOT BLAME (NET)	Not very much	Not at all
Congress	%	81	46	36	19	10	9
Wall Street	%	70	43	27	30	16	14
Large corporations	%	66	36	30	34	19	15
State government	%	62	23	39	38	25	13
The President	%	56	29	27	44	24	21
Local government	%	48	15	32	52	33	20

Note: Percentages may not add to 100% due to rounding

TABLE 6

BLAME FOR PERSONAL FINANCIAL SITUATION – BY GENERATION AND POLITICAL PARTY

“How much do you blame each of the following groups or individuals for your financial situation?”

Percent saying “A great deal/somewhat blame”

Base: All adults

	2009	2012	Party		
			Rep.	Dem.	Ind.
	%	%	%	%	%
Congress	72	81	80	84	83
Wall Street	71	70	56	79	73
Large corporations	63	66	49	78	67
State government	60	62	60	66	60
The President	47	56	84	30	55
Local government	47	48	46	49	47

Note: Percentages may not add to 100% due to rounding

TABLE 7

PRESIDENT OBAMA'S JOB RATING ON THE ECONOMY - TREND

"Now, turning to something different, how would you rate the overall job that President Barack Obama is doing on the economy?"

Base: All adults

	2009							
	March	April	May	June	Aug	Sept	Nov	Dec
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
POSITIVE (NET)	47	49	46	43	39	40	34	36
Excellent	13	13	10	3	9	7	6	6
Pretty good	34	36	36	34	31	33	27	30
NEGATIVE (NET)	53	51	54	57	61	60	66	64
Only fair	30	27	30	27	25	27	30	30
Poor	23	24	24	30	36	33	37	34

	2010									
	Jan	Mar	Apr	May	June	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
POSITIVE (NET)	31	32	33	36	32	32	29	27	31	30
Excellent	5	5	6	6	5	6	5	5	5	5
Pretty good	25	27	27	30	27	26	24	22	26	25
NEGATIVE (NET)	69	68	67	64	68	68	71	73	69	70
Only fair	31	30	31	29	32	29	31	33	30	34
Poor	39	37	36	34	37	39	40	39	39	36

	2011										2012
	Jan	Feb*	Mar	May	June	July	Sept.	Oct.	Nov.	Dec.	Jan.
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
POSITIVE (NET)	33	33	33	32	27	26	21	23	22	25	25
Excellent	7	9	5	7	5	3	2	3	3	4	2
Pretty good	26	24	28	26	22	23	18	20	20	22	22
NEGATIVE (NET)	67	62	67	68	73	74	79	77	78	75	75
Only fair	30	22	29	28	30	33	33	36	32	34	34
Poor	37	39	38	40	43	41	46	41	46	41	41

Note: Percentages may not add up exactly to 100% due to rounding; *In February "Not at all sure" was offered as a response choice and 4% responded in that way.

TABLE 8
PRESIDENT OBAMA'S JOB RATING ON THE ECONOMY – BY POLITICAL PARTY

"Now, turning to something different, how would you rate the overall job that President Barack Obama is doing on the economy?"

Base: All adults

	Total	Political Party			Philosophy		
		Rep.	Dem.	Ind.	Cons.	Mod.	Lib.
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
POSITIVE (NET)	25	4	47	22	8	27	45
Excellent	2	-	6	1	1	3	5
Pretty good	22	4	42	21	8	24	40
NEGATIVE (NET)	75	96	53	78	92	73	55
Only fair	34	20	40	37	19	42	40
Poor	41	76	12	41	72	31	15

Note: Percentages may not add up exactly to 100% due to rounding; * indicates less than .05%

Methodology

This **Harris Poll** was conducted online within the United States between January 16 and 23, 2012 among 2,016 adults (aged 18 and over). Figures for age, sex, race/ethnicity, education, region and household income were weighted where necessary to bring them into line with their actual proportions in the population. Propensity score weighting was also used to adjust for respondents' propensity to be online.

All sample surveys and polls, whether or not they use probability sampling, are subject to multiple sources of error which are most often not possible to quantify or estimate, including sampling error, coverage error, error associated with nonresponse, error associated with question wording and response options, and post-survey weighting and adjustments. Therefore, Harris Interactive avoids the words "margin of error" as they are misleading. All that can be calculated are different possible sampling errors with different probabilities for pure, unweighted, random samples with 100% response rates. These are only theoretical because no published polls come close to this ideal.

Respondents for this survey were selected from among those who have agreed to participate in Harris Interactive surveys. The data have been weighted to reflect the composition of the adult population. Because the sample is based on those who agreed to participate in the Harris Interactive panel, no estimates of theoretical sampling error can be calculated.

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