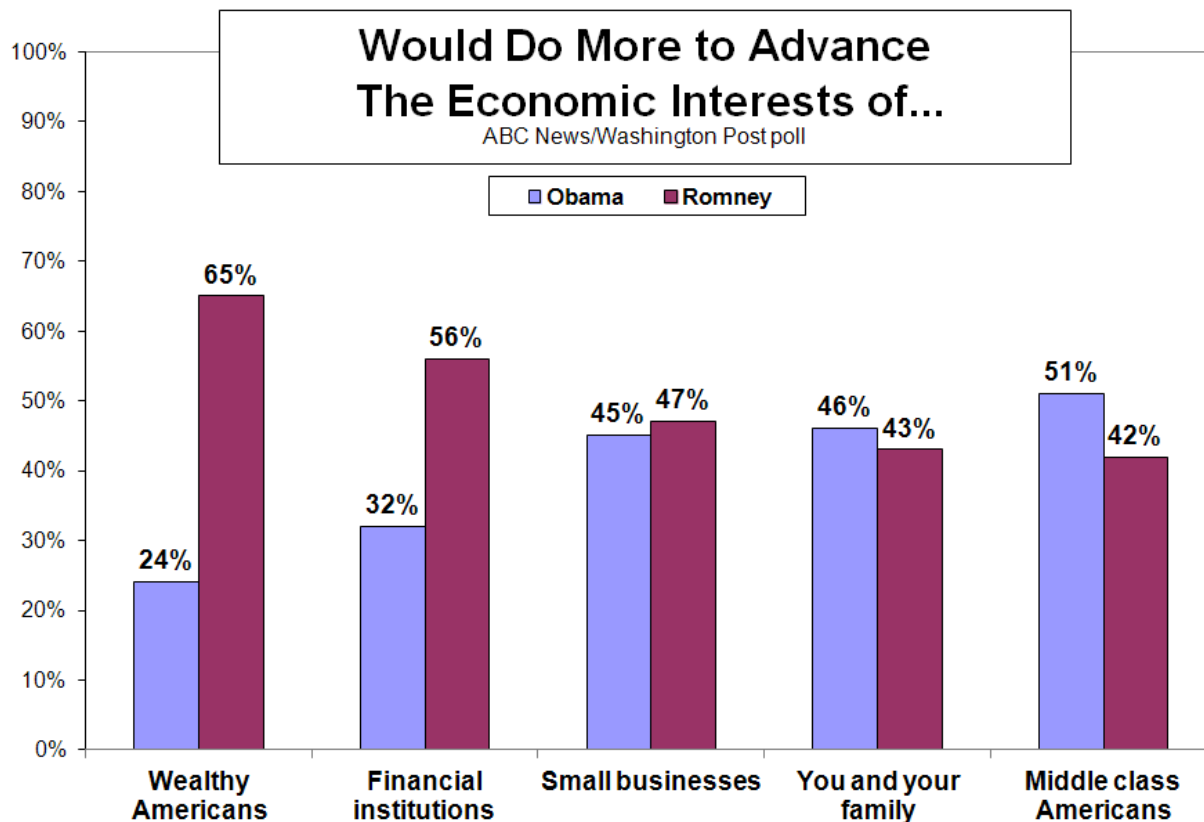


In Ratings on Economic Interests The 2012 Battle Lines are Drawn

Americans overwhelmingly say Mitt Romney as president would do more than Barack Obama to advance the interests of financial institutions and the wealthy, and by a narrower margin see Obama as better for the middle class. But when it comes to the best champion for “you and your family” or small businesses, the two run evenly – marking the closeness of their contest overall.

These sentiments in the latest ABC News/Washington Post poll stake out the field of play in the 2012 election, dominated as it is by the public’s economic concerns. On one hand, it’s an achievement that Romney, even while tagged as the protector of the wealthy, runs competitively with Obama on who’d best advance Americans’ personal economic interests. Yet it’s notable as well that Obama runs competitively, given his poor marks for handling the economy overall.



Other elements also will inform the economic debate in the months ahead. More people think new regulations on financial institutions are too weak rather than too strong, by a 15-point

margin, 38 to 23 percent. More also feel that unfairness in the economic system that favors the wealthy is a bigger problem than overregulation that stifles free enterprise.

Both those may help Obama, but broader economic discontent works against him. And the public divides on whether or not they feel they have a fair chance to get ahead, a weak report on the American dream that reflects the still-sour public mood after four-plus years of downturn.

STRATEGY – In terms of strategy, the results suggest that Obama stands little to gain from attacking Romney as the darling of the rich; partly because it's so broadly agreed upon, views that Romney is the better proponent of the wealthy do not independently predict vote preferences. Belief that Romney would better advance the interests of financial institutions does predict his support, but comparatively mildly so.

Instead, this poll, produced for ABC by [Langer Research Associates](#), suggests that the true contest is about who's seen as better advancing the interests of the middle class, small businesses and "you and your family." Each of these (and they are highly correlated) strongly relates to vote preferences, even controlling for factors such as partisanship, ideology and ratings of the economy.

Overall, the survey finds that Americans by a broad 65-24 percent think Romney would do more to advance the interests of the wealthy and by 56-32 percent think he'd do more for financial institutions. On advancing the economic interests of "you and your family" it's 46-43 percent, Obama-Romney; on small businesses, 45-47 percent. Obama, as noted, leads by 51-42 percent in views he'd do more to advance the economic interests of the middle class.

THE PAIN – All this matters because of the economic pain the public has withstood in recent years. More than a third of Americans, 35 percent, say they or someone in their household has lost a job in the past few years. And 71 percent say it's happened to a close friend or relative.

Such experiences are Obama's greatest challenge in convincing voters he deserves another term. As reported earlier this week, twice as many say they've gotten economically worse off than better off under Obama, 55 percent disapprove of his handling of the economy overall and his lead over Romney in understanding the economic problems of average Americans has shrunk by half since February. Fifty-two percent in an open-ended question call the economy the top issue in their vote, dwarfing other mentions.

Romney's task is to prove he can do better. His success so far is mixed; despite Obama's deficits on the issue, the two run essentially evenly in trust to handle the economy. And most people don't think they'd have done any better had Romney been in charge for the past three years.

STRUGGLES – Other measures indicate the level of economic difficulties across groups, and how they play out in vote choices. Regardless of what economic class they place themselves in, 42 percent of Americans say they're "struggling" to stay there, a broad level of economic uncertainty. And that rises among "working class" Americans to 52 percent.

Overall, about a third (32 percent) of Americans consider themselves to be working class, half say they're "middle class" and 15 percent say they're "upper middle class" or doing better than that.

The middle class, in particular, is divided by those who are struggling (39 percent of this group) or either holding steady or moving up (60 percent). Obama leads Romney by 14 percentage points, 55-41 percent, among middle-class registered voters who are stable or improving financially. Among those who are struggling, it flips to 51-43 percent, Romney-Obama.

Working class registered voters, by contrast, divide fairly closely between Obama and Romney whether they're struggling or not, underscoring the role of the middle class as the political battleground.

Characteristics of struggling Americans are expected: They're more likely than their counterparts to have been hit by a job loss, more strongly negative about the condition of the economy and more pessimistic about their personal finances. Who best addresses those concerns, and the economic dislocation behind them, is the candidate most likely to win in November.

PARTY – Of course, partisanship and ideology, as well as economic experiences, color assessments of the candidates on these issues. Democrats and Republicans divide sharply on whether Obama or Romney will do more to advance the economic interests of the middle class, "you and your family" and small businesses alike.

Swing-voting independents are the key; they split evenly in terms of who'd do better advancing the interests of "you and your family" and small businesses. Obama's lead in looking out for the middle class comes from independents, who pick him over Romney by 15 points, 53-38 percent.

	Obama-Romney will advance the interests of...				
	Middle class	You/ family	Small biz	Financial institutions	Wealthy
Overall	51-42%	46-43	45-47	32-56	24-65
Democrats	81-15	81-12	74-18	46-46	28-67
Republicans	9-85	4-86	6-86	15-75	12-71
Independents	53-38	45-42	44-48	31-56	28-62
Liberals	80-15	72-20	67-26	30-62	27-69
Moderates	58-33	52-34	49-42	35-53	20-70
Conservatives	26-68	24-67	25-67	29-60	24-61

METHODOLOGY – This ABC News/Washington Post poll was conducted by telephone May 17-20, 2012, among a random national sample of 1,004 adults, including landline and cell-phone-only respondents. Results have a margin of [sampling error](#) of 3.5 points for the full sample. The survey was produced for ABC News by [Langer Research Associates](#) of New York, N.Y., with sampling, data collection and tabulation by Abt-SRBI of New York, N.Y.

Analysis by Gregory Holyk.

ABC News polls can be found at ABCNEWS.com at <http://abcnews.com/pollingunit>.

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Full results follow.

*= less than 0.5 percent

1-12, 17-18, 20-21, 23-31 previously released.

13. In the past few years, have you or has anyone living in your household been laid off or lost their job?

	Yes	No	No opinion
5/20/12	35	65	*
7/17/11*	29	71	*
12/12/10	34	65	*
11/15/09	30	70	*
9/12/09	27	73	*
4/24/09**	23	77	0
2/22/09	18	82	*
12/14/08	18	82	*

*7/17/11 and previous: "last year..."

**4/24/09 and previous: "In the last few months..."

14. Thinking beyond your own household, do you have any close friends or immediate family members who have been laid off or lost their job in the last few years?

	Yes	No	No opinion
5/20/12*	71	29	*
7/17/11	71	29	*
12/12/10	72	28	0
4/24/09	63	36	*
2/22/09	60	40	1

*5/20/12 added "in the last few years"

15. Would you describe yourself as working class, middle class, upper middle class, or better off than that?

	Worse off than work. class (vol.)	Working class	Mid. class	Upper mid. class	Better off than that	No opin.
5/20/12	2	32	50	13	2	1
4/8/12	2	33	44	15	3	2
3/2/10*	2	36	45	11	3	2

*ABC News

16. (IF WORKING CLASS, MIDDLE CLASS OR UPPER MIDDLE CLASS) Would you say you are struggling to remain in the (working/middle/upper middle) class, comfortable in the (working/middle/upper middle) class, or moving up beyond the (working/middle/upper middle) class?

Struggling Comfortable Moving up No

	to remain	in current class	beyond current class	opinion
5/20/12	42	47	9	1

Working class:

5/20/12	52	32	13	3
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Middle class:

5/20/12	39	53	7	1
4/8/12	36	58	5	1
3/2/10*	41	52	6	*

*ABC News

Upper middle class:

5/20/12	33	62	5	1
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15/16 NET:

	5/20/12
Worse off than working class (vol.)	2
NET Working class	32
Struggling to remain	17
Comfortable	10
Moving up	4
No opinion	1
NET Middle class	50
Struggling to remain	19
Comfortable	26
Moving up	4
No opinion	*
NET Upper middle class	13
Struggling to remain	4
Comfortable	8
Moving up	1
No opinion	*
Better off than that	2
No opinion	1

19. Who do you think would do more to advance the economic interests of [ITEM] - (Obama) or (Romney)?

5/20/12 - Summary Table

	Obama	Romney	Both (vol.)	Neither (vol.)	No opinion
a. Middle class Americans	51	42	1	4	2
b. Wealthy Americans	24	65	2	3	6
c. You and your family	46	43	*	6	5
d. Financial institutions	32	56	2	4	6
e. Small businesses	45	47	1	3	4

Compare to: Who do you think cares more about protecting the economic interests of [ITEM] - (Obama) or (the Republicans in Congress)?

a. Middle class Americans

Both	Neither	No
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	Obama	Reps	(vol.)	(vol.)	opinion
10/2/11	52	32	1	12	3
7/17/11	53	35	1	9	2

b. Wealthy Americans

	Obama	Reps	Both (vol.)	Neither (vol.)	No opinion
10/2/11	17	70	5	6	2

c-e No trend.

22. Do you think the new federal regulations on banks and other financial institutions go too far in regulating these businesses, don't go far enough, or are about right?

	Too far	Not far enough	About right	No opinion
5/20/12	23	38	28	10

Compare to: On another subject, given what you've heard about them, do you think the new financial regulations being developed by Congress and the Obama administration go too far in regulating banks and other financial institutions, don't go far enough, or are about right?

	Too far	Not far enough	About right	No opinion
6/6/10	20	35	39	6

*** END ***