

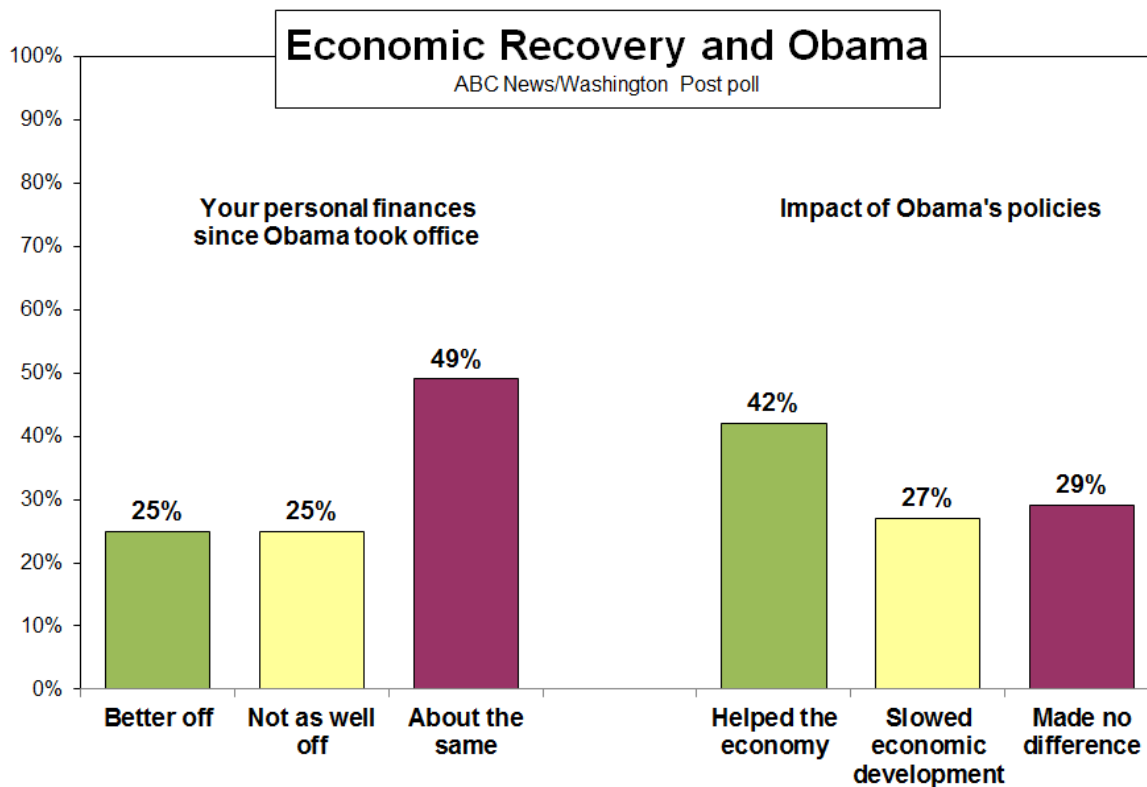
## The State of the Union, 2015: Not Great, but Getting Better

The state of the nation? Not great – but it’s sure been worse.

That summarizes public attitudes as Barack Obama prepares to deliver his penultimate State of the Union address. There are grace notes, largely based on improving views of the economy. But deep concerns about long-term and structural economic challenges remain, alongside sharp divisions across a range of policy issues and approaches.

All told, 42 percent of Americans in the latest ABC News/Washington Post poll rate the state of the nation positively, as excellent or good; a majority, 57 percent, rates it negatively, not so good or poor. The president may well hope for a brighter legacy.

But long-running public discontent at last is being leavened by a growing sense that the economy is getting better. In one example, as many Americans now say their financial situation has improved since Obama took office as say they’ve lost ground – 25 percent each, with the other half reporting no change. That’s a first for his presidency; “worse off” beat “better off” by anywhere from 8 to 22 percentage points in eight previous ABC/Post polls since 2009.



Moreover, a plurality in this poll, produced for ABC by [Langer Research Associates](#), gives Obama credit for the improving economy: Forty-two percent say his policies have helped the economy, easily surpassing the 27 percent who say he's slowed economic improvement. But that leaves three in 10 who say he's made no difference – no harm, but also no good.

Further, among Americans who say the nation is in good shape overall, the economy leads as the chief reason, cited by 41 percent. Among those who say the nation's in bad shape, by contrast, many fewer – 21 percent – blame the economy. The rest scatter among other concerns, including political, social, national security and international issues, or some combination of them.

As noted in a separate analysis yesterday, 41 percent say the economy is in excellent or good shape, up sharply from 27 percent just before the midterm elections. That's fueled a 9-point one-month advance in Obama's job approval rating and a 12-point drop in the number of Americans saying the country's headed seriously off on the wrong track. (That analysis also covers the public's divisions on a variety of policy preferences.)

Yet substantial economic concerns remain. Consider:

- Sixty-two percent are worried about being able to maintain their current standard of living – down from its peak, 68 percent, in mid-2008, but still a sizable majority of the population. It was 51 percent, for comparison, in late 2007, at the beginning of the downturn.
- To the extent the economy has improved, half the public says it's mostly helped wealthy Americans. Substantially fewer, 38 percent, say recovery has helped all income groups.
- A vast 83 percent say the income gap between wealthy Americans and others is a problem for the country; 51 percent call it a major problem. A possible theme in the 2016 presidential election, the Democratic Party leads the GOP in being seen as having better ideas on how to address the issue, by 44 to 33 percent – but neither has majority backing.

**GROUPS** – Views on the economy and on the state of the nation more broadly are closely linked. Among people who rate the economy positively, 77 percent say the country is in good shape overall; so do 66 percent of those who say they've become better off with Obama in office. Positive views of the nation dive to 17 percent among those who say the economy is still hurting, and 14 percent of those who say they're worse off now than when the president took office.

There's also a strong political aspect to views of the country overall. Even as a lame duck, the occupant of the White House influences these attitudes: Ratings of the state of the nation are brightest among Democrats and Democratic-leaning groups such as young adults and nonwhites, and far less so among some others, including older adults, whites and (especially) evangelical white Protestants, a core Republican group. Strikingly, while 65 percent of liberal Democrats say the country's in good shape, a mere 20 percent of conservative Republicans agree, despite the GOP's gains in the 2014 midterms.

There also are differences among groups in economic experiences and attitudes. Young adults by 40-9 percent say they've gotten better off rather than worse off under Obama; this shifts with age until, among seniors, "worse off" sentiment prevails by a 14-point margin. Wealthier people say they're better off by an 11-point margin, while those with incomes less than \$100,000 split about evenly.

Notably, views of the wealth gap as a problem reach across political and income groups alike. However, Democrats and liberals are much more apt to call it a "major" problem, Republicans, and conservatives, much less so.

**METHODOLOGY** – This ABC News/Washington Post poll was conducted by telephone Jan. 12-15, 2015, in English and Spanish, among a random national sample of 1,003 adults, including landline and cell-phone-only respondents. Results have a margin of [sampling error](#) of 3.5 points, including design effect. Partisan divisions are 30-24-37 percent, Democrats-Republicans-independents.

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 Gary Langer.

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

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Full results follow.

\* in data columns = less than 0.5 percent

1-5, 8-21, 28d, 30-31 previously released; 28a-c, 28e, 29 held for release.

6. Thinking about the country overall, how would you describe the state of the nation these days - excellent, good, not so good or poor?

	----- Positive -----			----- Negative -----			No
	NET	Excellent	Good	NET	Not so good	Poor	opinion
1/15/15	42	4	38	57	39	18	1

7. (ASKED IF NOT DK/REF) Why do you say so - is it mainly because of what's happening with (economic), (political), (social), (national security) or (international) issues, or something else?

	Economic	Political	Social	National security	Int'l	Smthng else	Multiple (vol.)	No op.
1/15/15	29	9	9	8	6	13	23	2
Positive	41	6	10	8	6	12	13	3
Negative	21	12	8	9	7	13	29	1

22. Would you say you, yourself, are better off financially than you were when Obama became president, not as well off, or in about the same shape financially?

Better off	Not as well off	About the same	No opinion
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1/15/15	25	25	49	2
10/12/14	22	30	46	2
10/28/12 LV	22	33	45	1
9/9/12 LV	21	32	46	*
5/20/12 RV	17	31	51	1
1/15/12 RV	15	31	53	1
11/3/11 RV	13	35	51	1
9/1/11 RV	14	36	50	1
7/18/09	8	27	64	*

G.W. Bush:

10/5/04 LV	30	30	40	1
10/29/03	22	27	50	1
9/13/03	21	30	49	*
8/11/03	17	25	58	1

Clinton:

6/11/00	34	14	50	2
7/19/98	30	15	52	3
3/1/98	32	9	57	1
6/23/96	29	22	49	0
2/27/94	12	17	71	*

G.H.W. Bush:

1/17/93	27	28	44	1
8/9/92	22	32	45	1
6/7/92	19	32	49	*
3/11/92	20	33	46	1
2/2/92	19	31	49	*
12/15/91	17	33	49	*
10/21/91	20	27	53	1
3/4/91	19	18	63	1

Reagan:

1/16/89	42	18	39	1
1/18/87	37	23	40	1
9/8/86	41	20	39	1

23. Do you think Obama's policies have helped the economy improve, have slowed economic improvement, or have made no difference either way?

	Helped the economy improve	Slowed economic development	Made no difference	No opinion
1/15/15	42	27	29	2

24. Thinking about the income gap between wealthy Americans and those who are less well off - do you think this is a major problem facing this country, a problem but not a major one, or not a problem?

	NET	Major problem	Problem but not a major one	Not a problem	No opinion
1/15/15	83	51	32	15	1

25. Who do you think has better ideas about how to address the income gap, the (Democratic Party) or the (Republican Party)?

	Democrats	Republicans	Both (vol.)	Neither (vol.)	Not a problem (vol.)	No opinion
1/15/15	44	33	3	12	*	7

26. To the extent that the economy has improved, do you think the recovery has (helped Americans at all income levels) or has it (mostly helped wealthy Americans)?

	Helped all Americans	Mostly helped the wealthy	Mostly helped those less than wealthy (vol.)	No recovery (vol.)	No opinion
1/15/15	38	50	1	6	5

27. How concerned are you about being able to maintain your current standard of living - are you very worried, somewhat worried, not so worried or not worried at all?

	---- Worried ----			---- Not worried ----			No
	NET	Very	Smwt	NET	Not so	At all	opinion
1/15/15	62	25	37	38	20	18	*
11/3/11	67	31	36	33	18	15	*
12/13/09	64	24	39	36	19	17	*
12/14/08	66	24	42	34	17	16	*
5/11/08	68	28	40	32	16	15	*
12/9/07	51	17	34	49	22	27	*

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