

## **Gas Prices Slam Mobility – And Obama’s Prospects, Too**

The price of gasoline is damaging not just Americans’ finances and mobility – but the public’s broader economic sentiment, and with it, Barack Obama’s re-election prospects.

With gas up 26 percent this year to an average \$3.88 a gallon, seven in 10 Americans in this ABC News/Washington Post poll report financial hardship as a result, six in 10 say they’ve cut back on driving – and, among those hardest hit, Obama’s ratings are suffering.

This poll, produced for ABC News by [Langer Research Associates](#), finds the president’s job approval rating 13 points lower among people who say the price of gas is causing them hardship; 43 percent approve of the president, vs. 56 percent of those who report no hardship. And among the four in 10 feeling “serious” hardship, just 39 percent approve of Obama’s work in office.

In re-election terms, 53 percent of those who are feeling serious hardship as a result of gas prices say they definitely will not vote for Obama in 2012 – 14 points more than say so among those who are feeling either less-than-serious hardship, or none at all.

Political support usually rests heavily on economic performance, and there the sharply rising price of gas is taking its expected toll. Economic pessimism – the number of Americans who say the economy is getting worse – has doubled this year to 44 percent, and it rises to 54 percent, among those who report serious financial hardship from gas prices.

	Financial hardship because of gas prices		
	Serious	Not serious	None
Obama: Approve	39%	50%	56%
Obama: Will not support	53	40	39
Economy: Getting worse	54	38	34

It’s not unusual for the president to take the heat when gas prices rise: George W. Bush’s job approval rating correlated with the price of gasoline across his two terms at  $-.84$ , a very strong relationship. Obama’s approval rating has correlated with the price of gas at  $-.71$ .

Given these results, political positioning is in full swing. Obama has initiated an examination of possible gas-price manipulation; he also conceded at a fundraiser last Thursday that the rise in gas prices has hurt his popularity. House Republicans plan hearings and legislation alike to highlight the run-up in fuel costs.

Approval of the Democrats in Congress shows an effect similar to Obama’s, though less stark – it’s 9 points lower among those who report serious financial hardship as a result of gas prices

compared with those who report no hardship. But, notably, Republican leaders' approval ratings do not show such an effect: Approval of the Republicans in Congress overall is an identical 34 percent among people who report hardship as a result of gas prices and among those who report no hardship. House Speaker John Boehner, R-Ohio, has 42 and 45 percent approval, respectively, in these groups. That leaves more of the damage for the president, and perhaps by extension, his party.

**HARDSHIP and DRIVING** – At 71 percent, the number of Americans who report hardship as a result of gas prices rivals its peak in ABC / Post polls, 77 percent in the summer of 2008, when gas topped out at more than \$4 a gallon after a sharp 16-month run-up. Then as now, many Americans said they were driving less – and did so. In August 2008 the government reported 15 billion fewer miles driven vs. a year previously, down 6 percent.

In this survey, 58 percent say they're driving less now as a result of has prices. People who aren't driving less give a median price of \$5 as the point at which they, too, will cut back on the amount of driving they do. (Some high-spenders boost the average, rather than the median, to \$5.47.)

Gas prices, naturally, are hitting hardest among lower-income Americans. Sixty percent of those with household incomes below \$35,000 report serious hardship, compared with only 22 percent among those with incomes over \$100,000.

**METHODOLOGY** – This ABC News/Washington Post poll was conducted by telephone April 14-17, 2011, among a random national sample of 1,001 adults, including landline and cell-phone-only respondents. Results have a margin of [sampling error](#) of 3.5 points. The survey was produced for ABC News by [Langer Research Associates](#) of New York, N.Y., with sampling, data collection and tabulation by TNS of Horsham, Pa.

Analysis by Gary Langer and 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

1-21, 25-36 previously released.

22. Have recent price increases in gasoline caused any financial hardship for you or others in your household, or not? (IF YES) Has that been a serious hardship, or not serious?

	----- Yes -----				
	NET	Serious	Not serious	No	No opinion
4/17/11	71	43	29	28	*
3/13/11	71	44	26	29	1
7/28/08	72	45	27	28	*
6/15/08	77	51	25	23	0

5/11/08	63	34	29	37	*
4/13/08	67	38	29	32	1
5/21/07	58	27	30	42	*
4/15/07	67	36	31	33	*
7/19/06	60	29	30	39	1
5/15/06	57	31	26	43	*
4/9/06	70	44	26	30	*
9/11/05	64	34	30	36	*
8/28/05	66	36	30	34	*
8/21/05	53	26	27	47	*
4/24/05	64	34	30	36	*
3/20/05	57	29	28	43	*
5/23/04	64	37	27	36	0
4/18/04	54	31	23	46	0
4/28/02	53	20	33	47	*
4/29/01	48	17	30	52	*
6/25/00*	44	NA	NA	56	*
5/24/00	36			64	*
4/2/00	39			61	*
3/12/00	41			59	*
2/15/00	40	"	"	60	*

\*6/25/00 and previous by Gallup; slightly different wordings.

23. (IF GAS IS A HARDSHIP) What steps, if any, have you taken to deal with the higher price of gasoline? (ACCEPT UP TO 3 RESPONSES)

	----- Base: Hardship -----			----- Base: All -----		
	4/17/11	6/15/08	5/11/08	4/17/11	6/15/08	5/11/08
Driving Less NET	72	72	66	51	55	42
Driving less	61	61	54	44	46	34
Carpooling/ride sharing	8	8	7	5	6	4
Taking mass transit	2	3	3	2	2	2
Telecommuting/working from home	*	1	*	*	*	*
Changing vacation plans	3	3	1	2	3	1
Cut back on other types of travel	7	5	2	5	4	1
Walking/riding bike	2	NA	NA	1	NA	NA
Bought smaller/more fuel efficient car	6	8	8	4	6	5
Cut back on other expenses	12	11	7	9	8	4
Running up debt/credit card bills, etc.	0	*	*	0	*	*
Shopping around for cheaper gas	3	3	2	2	2	1
Other	7	11	10	5	8	6
None	10	5	9	7	4	6
No opinion	1	3	2	1	3	1

24. (NOT DRIVING LESS) What price per gallon would gasoline have to reach for you to significantly cut back on the amount of driving you do?

	Mean	Median	Already have/it's already there (vol.)	Don't drive (vol.)	No opinion
4/17/11	\$5.47	\$5.00	19	8	6
5/11/08	\$5.65	\$5.00	31	7	9

Q23/24 NET:

	----Base: All----
	4/17/11 5/11/08
Driving Less NET	58 58

\*\*\*END\*\*\*