

Hunger Message Project

2008 Election Day Poll



An Electorate Ready for Action: 10 Key Findings on Hunger

Results and Analysis of 2008 Exit Polling

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A new year and a new administration have begun. And with them come new opportunities to create a better world for hungry people. President Barak Obama has pledged to end child hunger in the U.S. by 2015. During his inaugural address, President Obama promised people in poor nations that the U.S. would “work alongside you to make your farms flourish and let clean waters flow; to nourish starved bodies and feed hungry minds.” These pledges are a great start, but there is much work to be done to build the political will to achieve these ambitious goals.

Since 2002, the Alliance to End Hunger has regularly conducted the Hunger Message Project – a national, non-partisan poll of voters’ attitudes on domestic and global hunger. The result is an extraordinary body of evidence demonstrating that voters know hunger is a serious problem and they are paying attention to what their elected leaders are doing to alleviate it.

But policymakers and politicians continue to underestimate voters’ willingness to prioritize hunger programs. They believe that with the economy in a tailspin, voters are so concerned about their personal circumstances that they won’t want their tax dollars spent overseas or on government programs.

They couldn’t be more wrong.

Our polling shows that in good times and in bad, Americans want their government to be generous to hungry people and to act boldly to break the cycle of extreme poverty that ensnares one billion people globally. In fact, the voters who are at the greatest risk for hunger themselves are also the most adamant that the U.S. should be doing everything it can to help hungry people around the world.

Those who work on behalf of hungry people know that we are at a crossroads. The need is overwhelming, but the opportunity has never been greater. I hope the information contained in the latest Hunger Message Project will be useful in your efforts to end hunger at home and abroad.

Sincerely,

Max Finberg
Director

BUILDING THE WILL TO END HUNGER
www.alliancetoendhunger.org

Introduction

Voters care about reducing hunger and poverty—here and abroad. That is the clear conclusion of a review of 2008 exit polling sponsored by The Alliance to End Hunger. The results show that not only do Americans believe that the problem is growing worse, they also think that neither political candidates nor the media talk about issues of hunger and poverty enough, and they are ready for action.

On Election Day, McLaughlin & Associates, working with Freedman Consulting, LLC, polled 1,000 voters on hunger and poverty both in the United States and around the world. Voters were asked about topics ranging from the scope of the hunger and poverty problem to specific solutions elected officials and candidates have proposed to address these challenges.

The results of the survey show that hunger and poverty were important issues to voters. Large numbers of voters want to hear more about hunger and poverty from politicians and the media, and their concerns include hunger and poverty at home and around the world.

The hunger problem has also become more personal. More than half of those polled worry about rising food prices, and one in every five worries about either him or herself or someone he or she knows going hungry.

Americans are ready to act. They strongly approve government solutions to hunger and are willing to spend the tax dollars needed to dramatically reduce food insecurity at home and abroad. While those polled prefer solutions that expand opportunity and general economic growth to direct assistance, they also believe specific programs that increase and streamline federal assistance are important parts of the solution.

The study is divided into “10 Key Findings” about public attitudes on hunger and poverty:

1. Voters support President Obama’s plan to end child hunger by 2015
2. Voters support increasing federal funds to fight hunger, even when they are told the price tag
3. Voters want action by the president on poverty and hunger
4. Despite support for ambitious policies, voters see obstacles to success
5. For one in five Americans, worries about hunger are immediate and personal
6. Voters believe the problem of hunger is big and growing
7. Voters favor broad economic growth and see both government and private actors as vital
8. Hunger and poverty mattered to voters in the recent election
9. Voters do not blame the hungry for their plight
10. Voters want to hear more about hunger from candidates and the media

These lessons suggest that the moment is ripe for action by a new Congress and Administration. Americans care about domestic and global hunger and poverty. Americans believe that working to reduce hunger and poverty is the right thing to do. Despite hard economic times, they will support policies that target hunger, even if such programs require new spending.

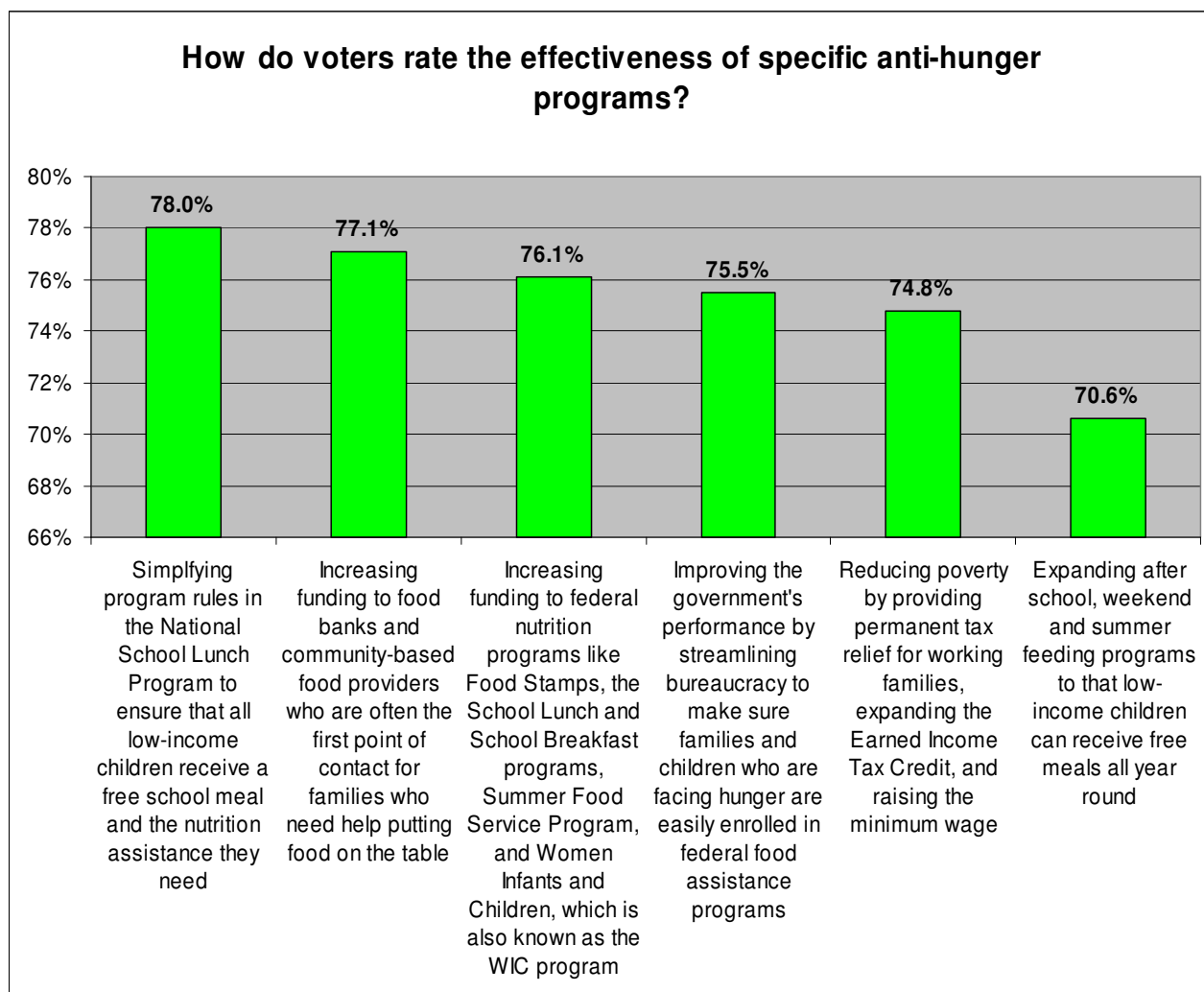
1. Voters Support President Obama’s Plan to End Child Hunger by 2015

Voters support specific plans to achieve ambitious hunger goals. When asked whether they would favor spending additional tax dollars to end child hunger by 2015 – a plan proposed by the Obama-Biden campaign – 73 percent of voters said yes.

The poll also found that a higher level of specificity can combat voter doubt over the ability of hunger reduction programs to achieve targets.

For example, after asking whether respondents believed spending additional tax dollars on federal hunger programs can end child hunger in the United States by 2015 (to which 40.4 percent said no and 39.9 percent said yes), the poll then proceeded to test the elements of a plan designed to do just that.

Specifically, respondents were asked to rate the six components the Obama-Biden plan to end domestic child hunger by 2015. At least 70 percent of those polled rated each plank of the plan as effective. On average, respondents considered the elements of the plan effective at a rate of 75 percent.

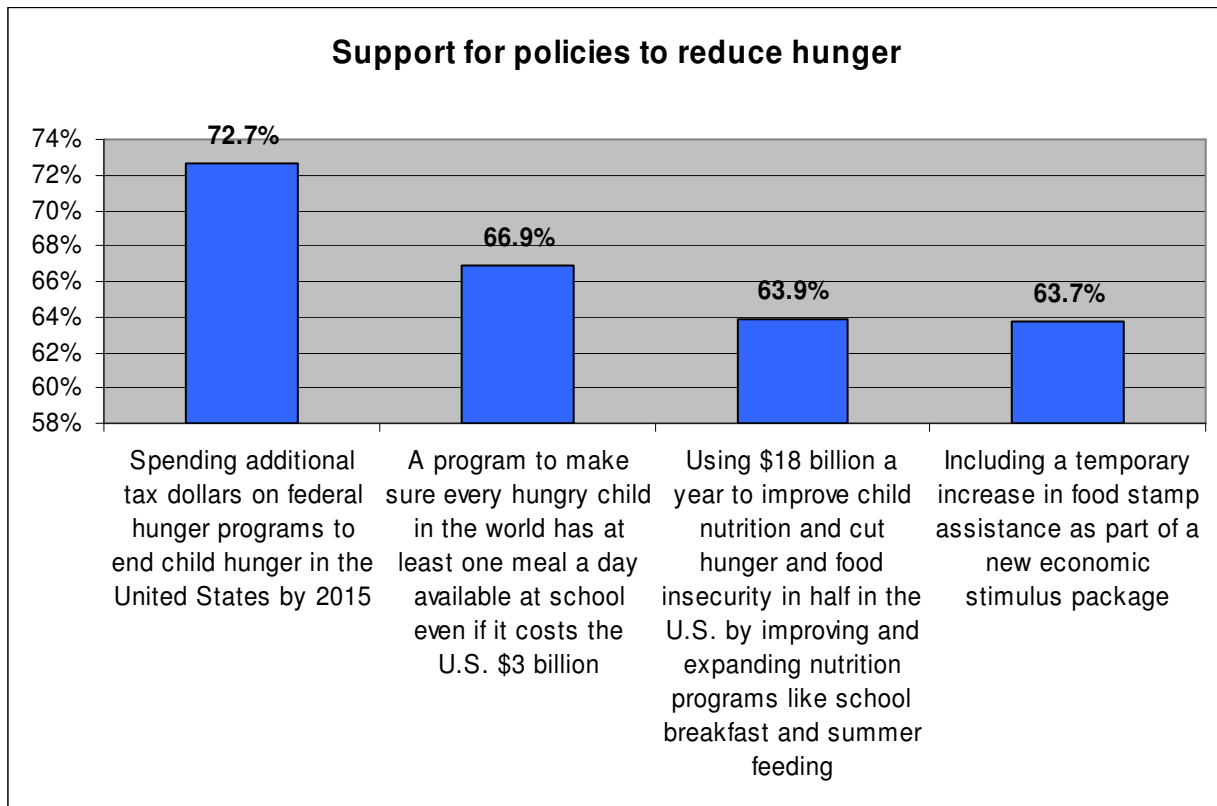


2. Voters Support Increasing Federal Funds to Fight Hunger, Even When They Are Told the Price Tag

When presented with an array of programs to reduce hunger, voters strongly support spending money and taking strong action against hunger in the United States and around the world, even when they know the cost is billions of dollars.

A strong majority (63.9 percent) of those polled favor a program to cut hunger in half, even if it cost \$18 billion per year. Two thirds even favor a program to ensure that each hungry child in the world receives one meal per day in school, despite a cost of \$3 billion. A total of 63.7 percent favor including a temporary increase in food stamp assistance in a congressional stimulus package. Spending additional federal tax dollars on programs to end child hunger in the United States by the year 2015 won the most support (72.7 percent).

Americans remain remarkably supportive of potentially costly programs to reduce hunger. Those that are focused on helping children, in the United States and around the world, have the most support.

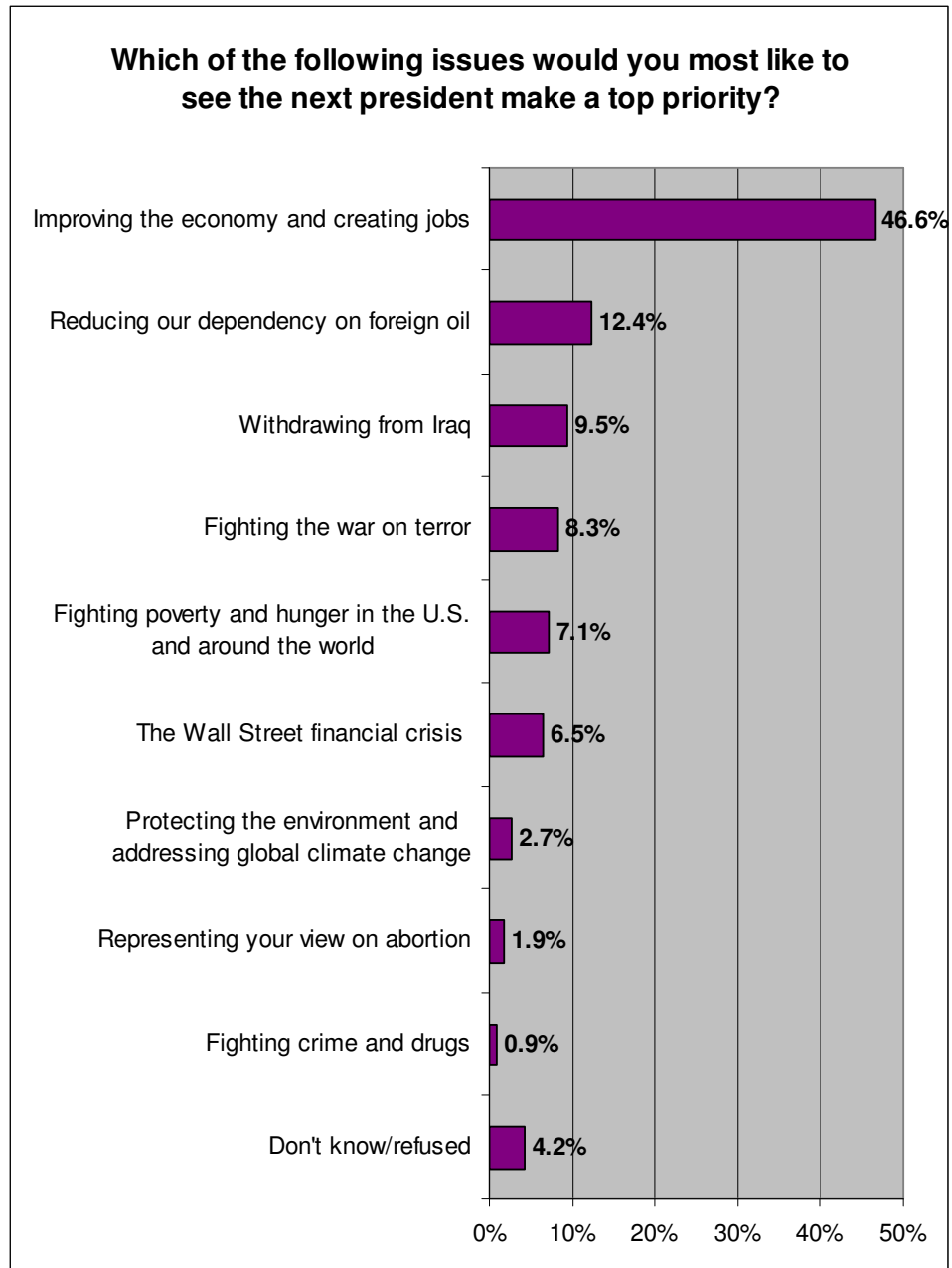


3. Voters Want Action by the President on Poverty and Hunger

Americans do want the incoming president to do something about hunger and poverty.

When respondents were asked to say which issue they would most like to see the next president make a top priority, 7.1 percent of those polled chose hunger- or poverty-related issues. Specifically, 1.9 percent said fighting hunger in the United States, 1.2 percent said fighting hunger around the world, 2.7 percent said fighting poverty in the United States, and 1.3 percent said fighting poverty around the world.

While hunger and poverty did not surmount the broad campaign issues of the economy (53.1 percent), Iraq and the war on terror (17.8 percent), or reducing dependence on foreign oil (12.4 percent), they exceeded protecting the environment and addressing global climate change (1.5 percent), representing the respondent's view on abortion (1.9 percent), and fighting crime and drugs (.9 percent).



4. Despite Support for Ambitious Policies, Voters See Obstacles to Success

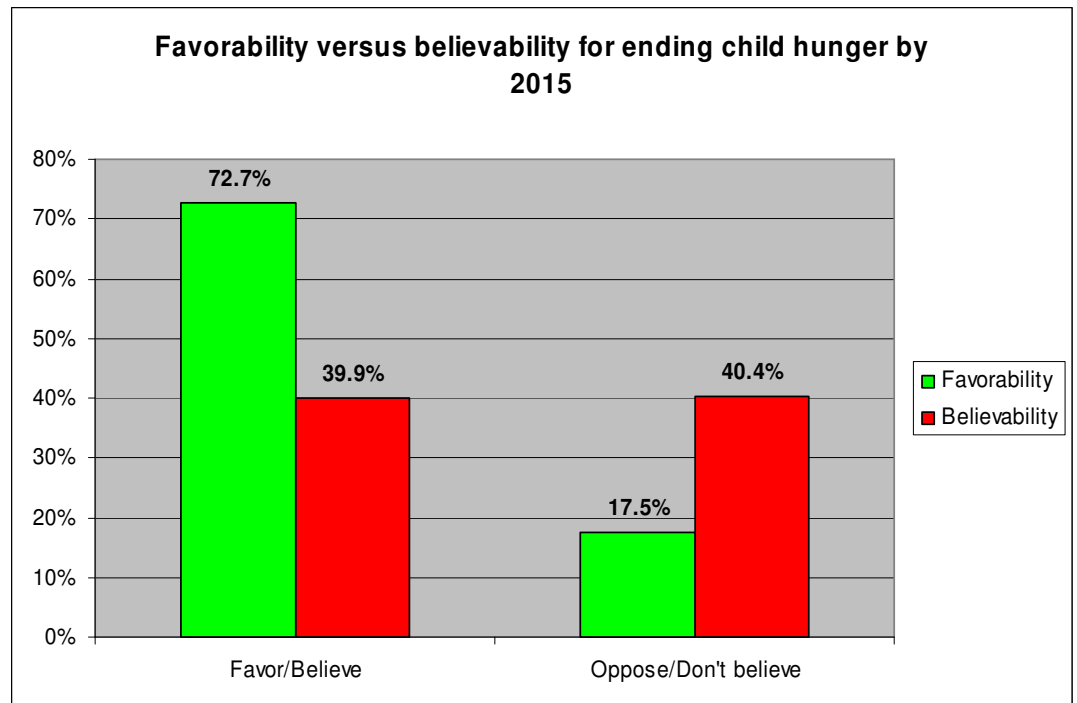
Americans strongly favor programs to dramatically reduce hunger, but need to hear evidence and new ideas to be convinced we can solve the problem.

For example, the poll asked a number of questions about a plan to end child hunger by 2015, as proposed by President Obama during the 2008 presidential campaign.

As this report shows, voters strongly support such a program and will support spending for it. But they need to hear more than just that spending will actually end child hunger in the United States by the year 2015.

While 72.7 percent favored the program, far fewer (39.4 percent) believed it would work without hearing more. Over 40 percent initially did not believe such programs could end domestic child hunger by 2015.

Only when voters heard specific descriptions of each element of the plan did they begin to believe that it would be successful in attaining its goal of halving domestic child hunger by 2015.

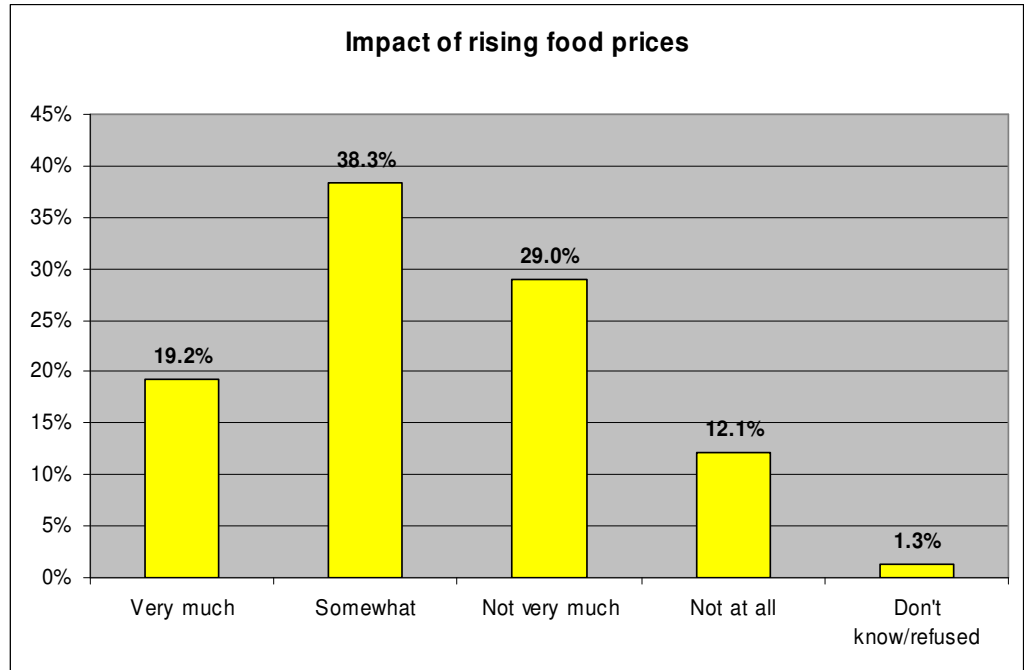


This suggests an important gap between goals voters identify as noble and worthy of pursuing and their first-blush confidence that we can actually achieve them. Advocates for new programs to reduce hunger need to seize the opportunity offered—that voters will support the programs. But they need to couple their appeals for new programs with evidence and arguments for how the programs will actually work.

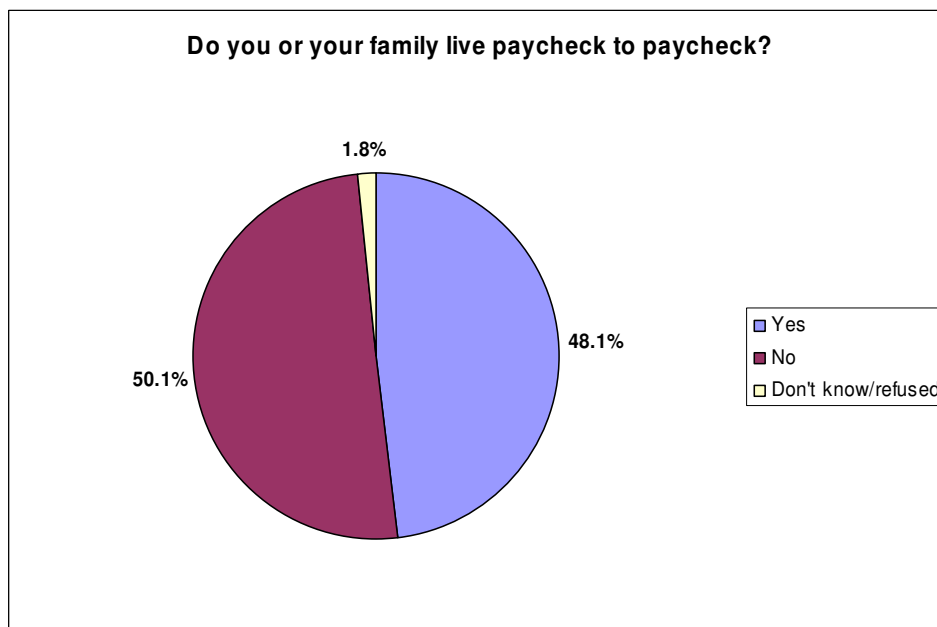
5. For One in Five Americans, Worries about Hunger Are Immediate and Personal

The continued economic downturn and rising food prices mean that more individuals and families worry that they or someone they know may go hungry because of rising food prices.

When asked about the impact of rising food prices, a staggering 57.6 percent express personal concern. A significant 19.2 percent said they have been impacted “very much . . . I worry about me or someone I know going hungry” (because of rising food prices). More than a third said they worry “somewhat . . . I can buy less but do not worry about me or someone I know going hungry or skipping meals.”



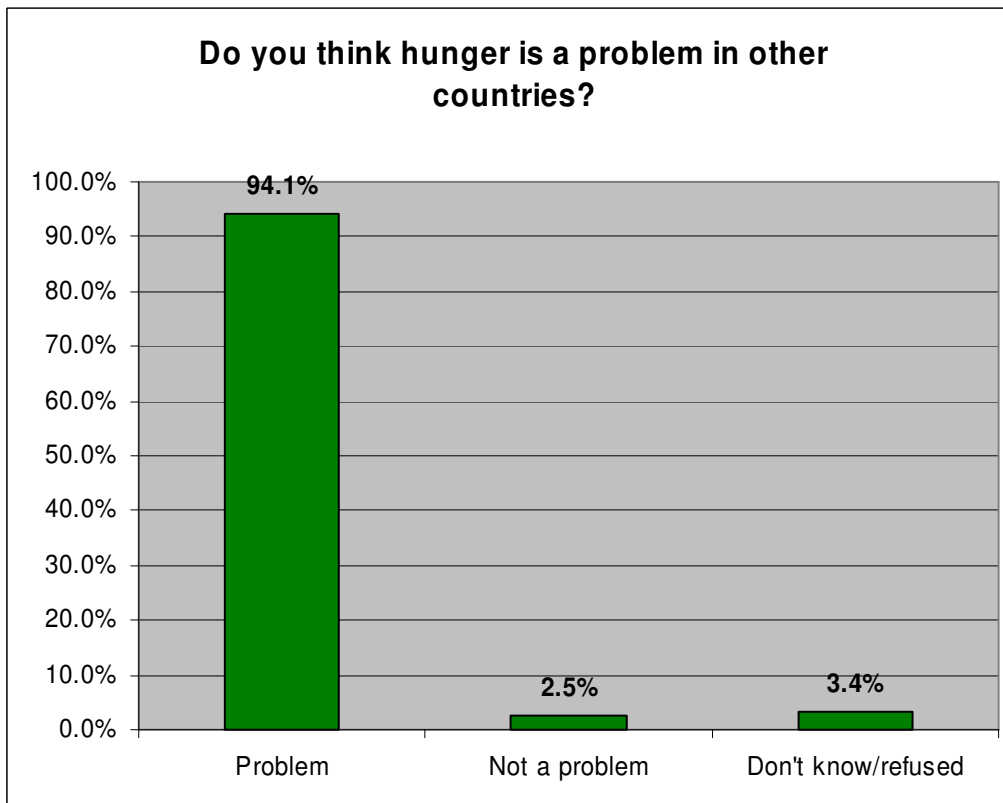
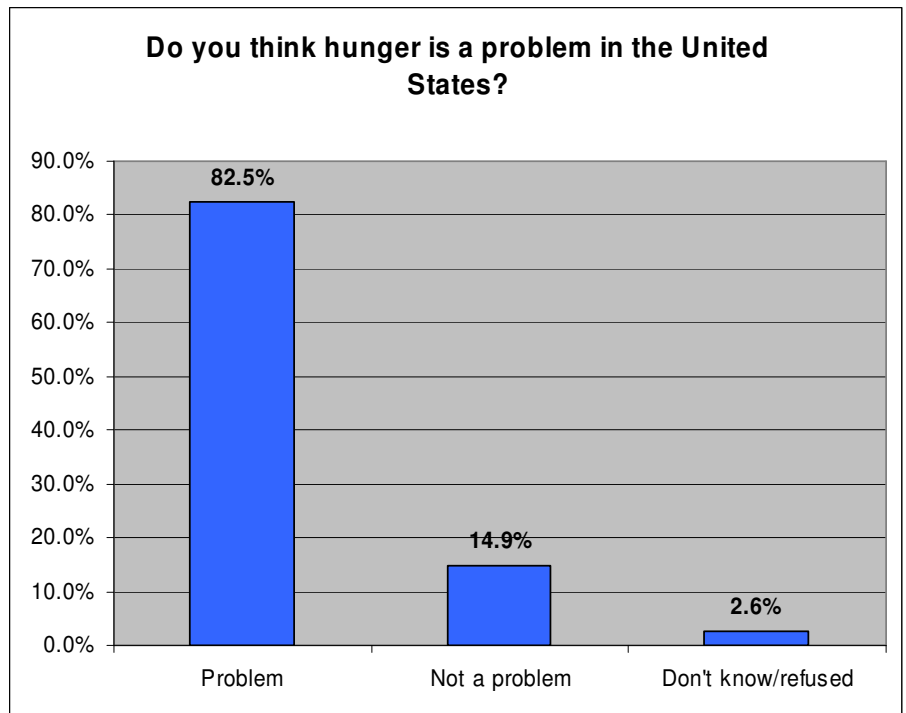
Nearly half (48.1 percent) of those polled said that they or their families live from paycheck to paycheck.



6. Voters Believe the Problem of Hunger Is Big and Growing

American voters are in widespread agreement that hunger in the United States and around the world is a growing problem.

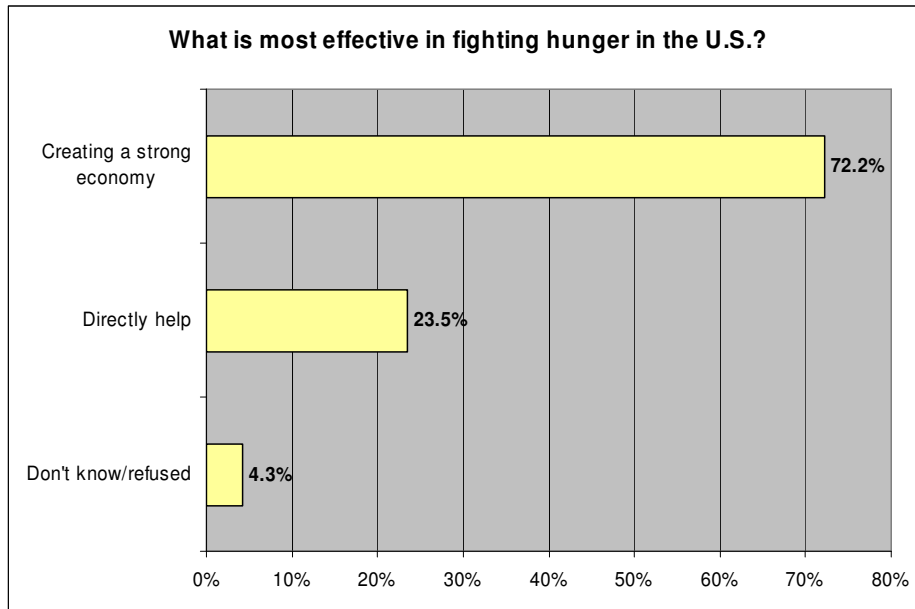
An overwhelming number (82.5 percent) said that hunger is either a big problem or somewhat of a problem in the United States, while only 11.5 percent responded that hunger was not really a problem and only 3.4 percent said hunger was not a problem at all. Nearly half (49.0 percent) said that the hunger problem in the United States was worsening.



Even more people worry about the problem of hunger around the world. Of those polled, 94.1 percent said that hunger is a problem in other countries, and 74.4 percent felt hunger in other countries was a “big problem.” Only 2.5 percent said hunger in other countries was not a problem. Similarly, 58.8 percent of those polled said the hunger problem in other countries was getting worse.

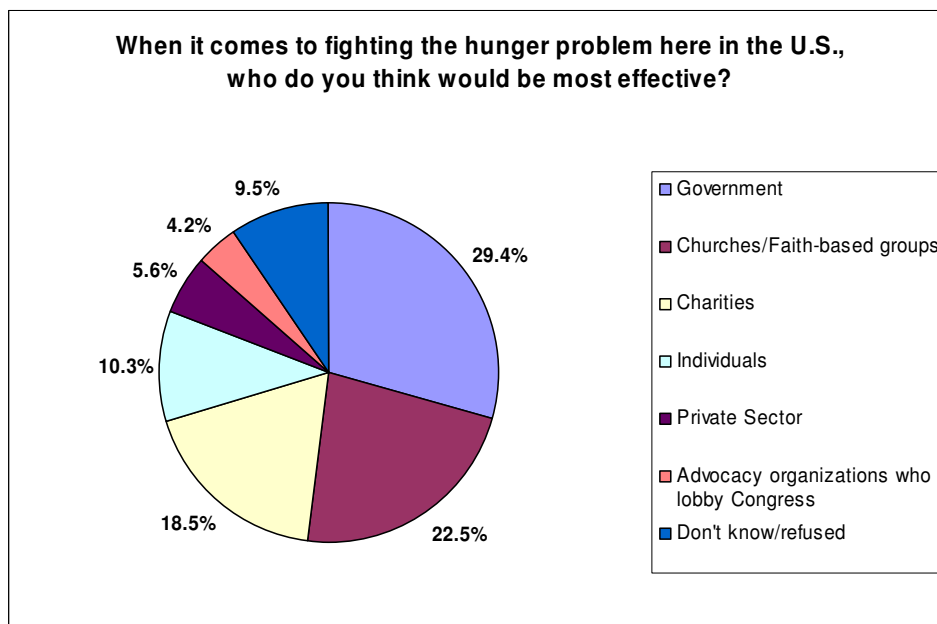
7. Voters Favor Broad Economic Growth and See Both Government and Private Actors as Vital

Although individuals will favor new government spending to cut hunger, they still believe that direct assistance should be coupled with improving economic opportunity and the overall economy. Simply put, the evidence of the poll shows voters want both—a broad economic program to create jobs and new direct assistance efforts.



When presented with two ways to fight hunger, “Creating a strong economy so that poor people can get better jobs” and “Supporting programs that directly help poor and hungry people,” 72.2 percent said that creating a strong economy would be most effective and 23.5 percent said that supporting programs that directly help poor people would be most effective.

Presented with a list of actors in the fight against hunger, a plurality (29.4 percent) said the government would be most effective. At the same time, a majority voted for one private actor or another. Almost one quarter, 22.5 percent, said churches and faith-based groups, 18.5 percent said charities, 10.3 percent said individuals, 5.6 percent said the private sector, and 4.2 percent said advocacy organizations who lobby Congress. Non-governmental actors therefore accounted for 61.1 percent of total responses.



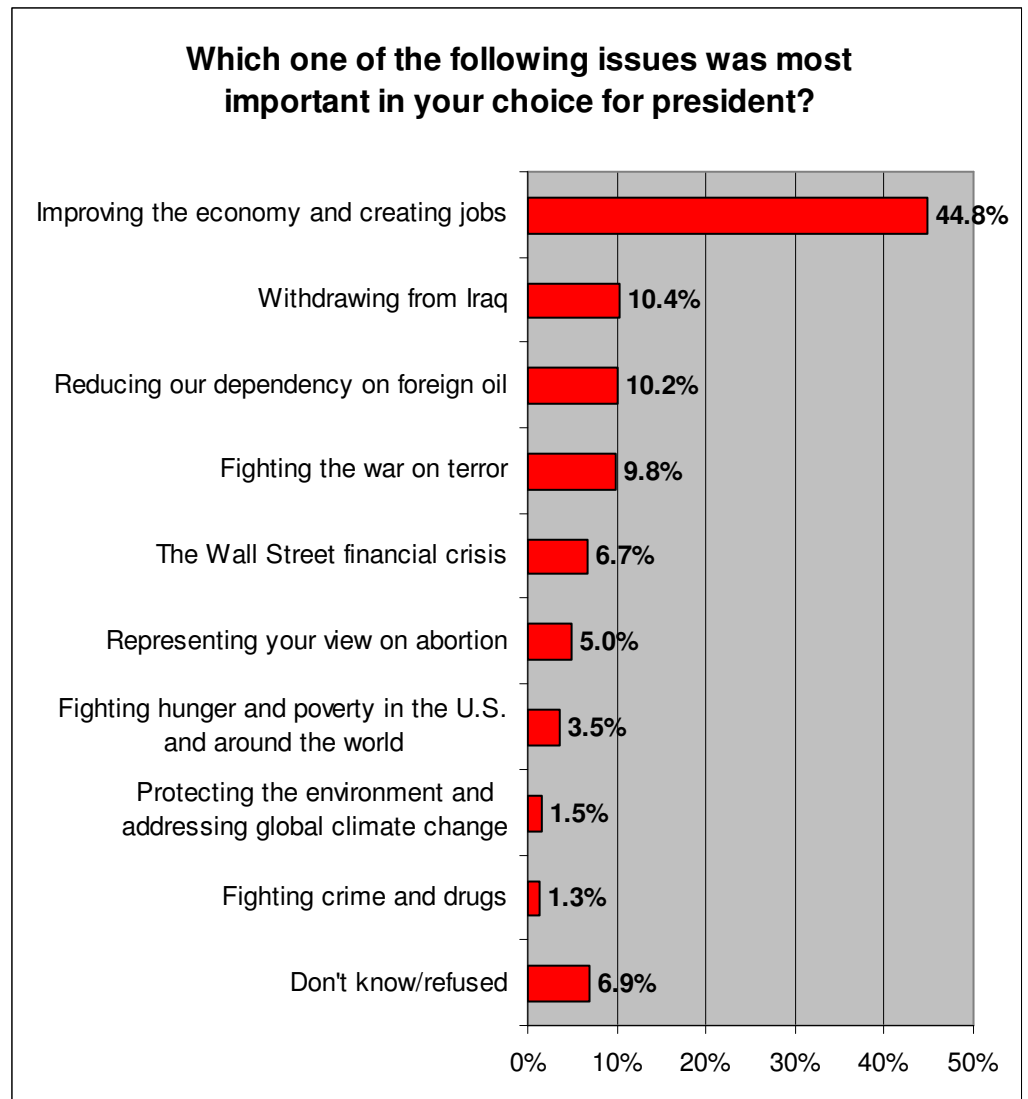
8. Hunger and Poverty Mattered to Voters in the Recent Election

Overall, hunger and poverty were surprisingly important issues when Americans entered the voting booth in 2008.

While hunger and poverty were overwhelmed by support for economic issues (51.5 percent), Iraq and the war on terror (20.2), and reducing foreign oil dependence (10.2 percent), they more than doubled in importance issues such as protecting the environment and addressing global climate change (1.5 percent) and fighting crime and drugs (1.3 percent). When asked what issue was *most important* in their choice for president, 3.6 percent of voters said hunger and poverty (2.4 percent said “fighting hunger and poverty in the U.S.” and 1.1 percent said “fighting hunger and poverty around the world”).

These results show that hunger and poverty are significant second-tier issues. They may not enjoy the status of the overall economy and national defense in the minds of voters, but they command real importance, especially in relation to other social concerns.

One interesting finding is the degree to which voters say that issues of poverty and hunger mattered to them in deciding their vote. Over half (55.6 percent) said a candidate’s position on hunger was important when deciding a vote for president. When deciding on congressional candidates, 50.6 percent of those polled said a candidate’s position on hunger was important.

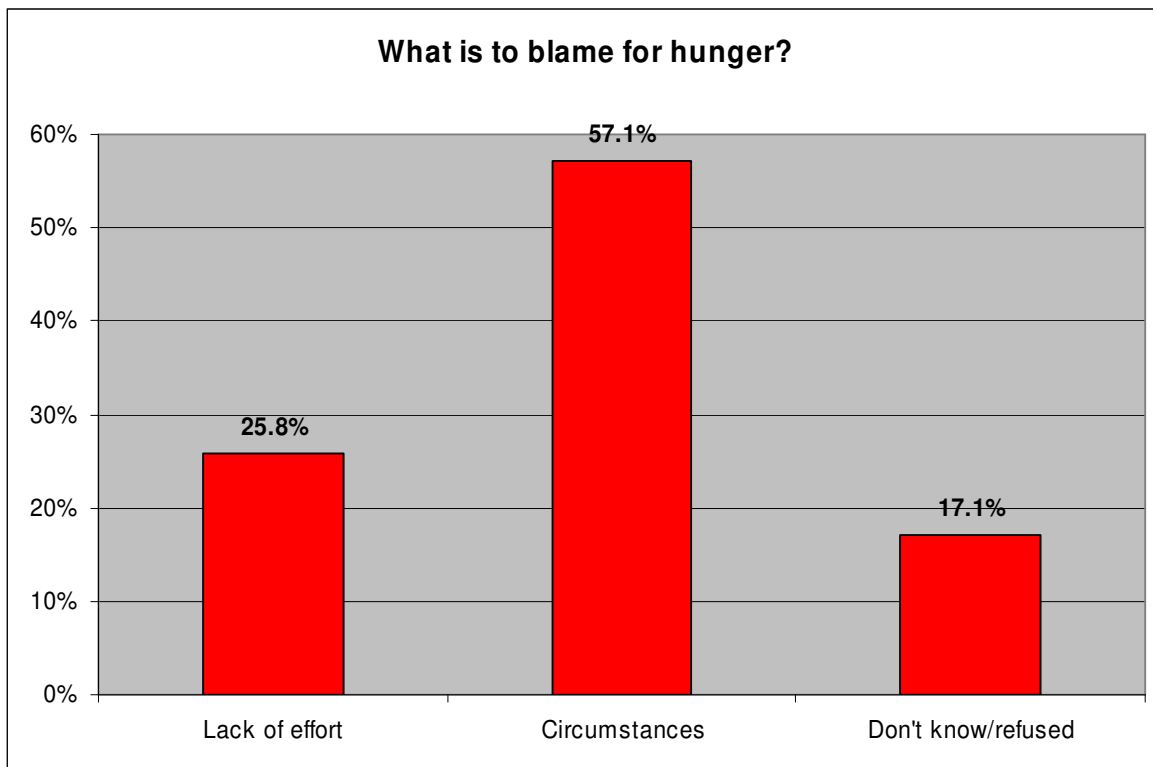


9. Voters Do Not Blame the Hungry for Their Plight

Americans do not blame the hungry for their plight and believe the best reason to reduce hunger is our moral obligation to do so, not the practical benefits some voters associated with a reduction in hunger.

When asked which is more often to blame if a person is hungry and doesn't have enough to eat, 57.1 percent identified circumstances beyond his or her own control and only 25.8 percent blamed a lack of effort on his or her own part.

When asked the best reason for working to reduce hunger, 37.5 percent said it is the moral and right thing to do. Fewer (21.2 percent) pointed to the instrumental benefit of helping people to escape poverty and get better jobs. About one tenth of voters – 11.5 percent – said the best reason to reduce hunger is that it can have long-term impacts on children's learning and development. Fewer chose "It is what God wants us to do" (7.3 percent), it will "reduce crime and violence" (6.1 percent), "elderly who are hungry can have more health problems" (4.9 percent), it will "promote national security by reducing terrorism and violence in the world" (2.2 percent), and "it will improve the reputation of the United States around the world" (1.9 percent).



Clearly, the moral mandate to alleviate hunger is a powerful cause for action. Voters see that the existence of hunger is morally wrong, but also see practical reasons to work on the problem, and they recognize that hungry people are not themselves responsible for the problem.

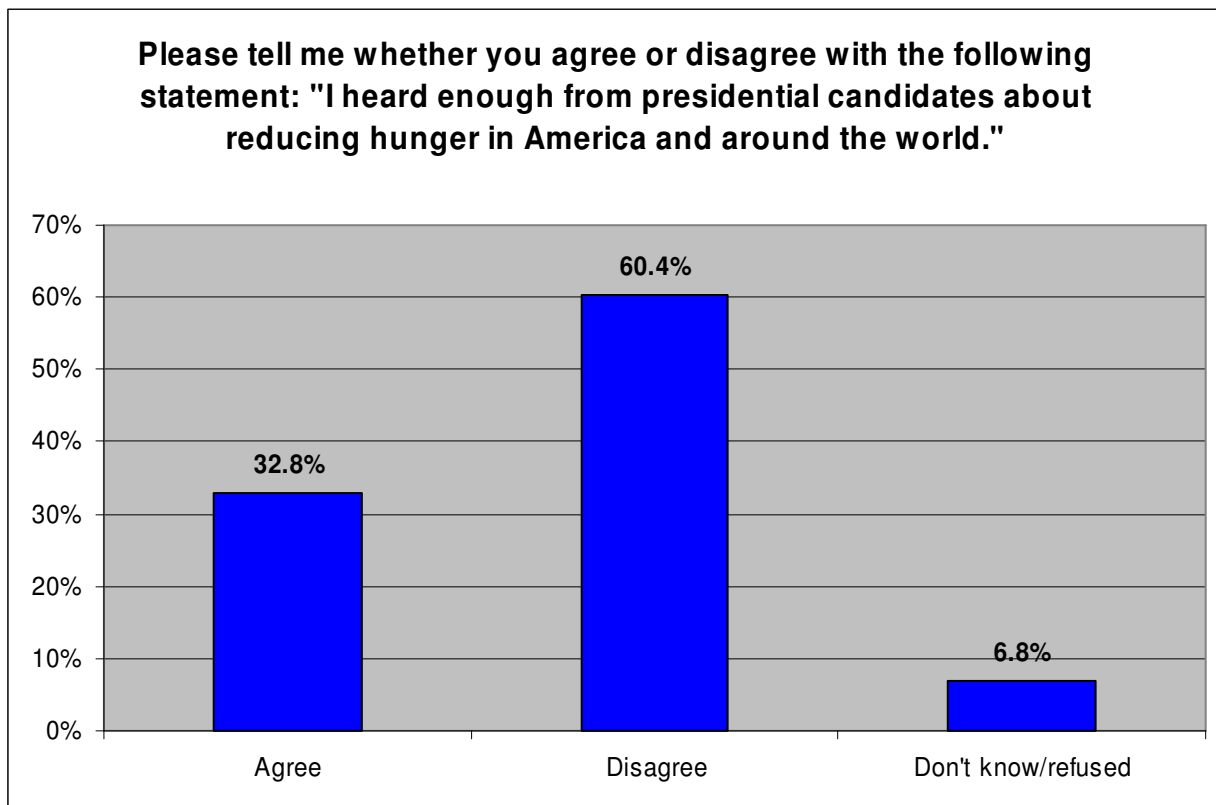
10. Voters Want to Hear More about Hunger from Candidates and the Media

American voters say they did not hear enough about hunger in this election cycle. They want to hear more from candidates and the media about domestic and global hunger.

Only 32.8 percent of voters polled agreed with the statement “I heard enough from the presidential candidates about reducing hunger in America and around the world.” A majority (60.4 percent) disagreed with this statement and 31.9 percent strongly disagreed.

When asked whether they agreed or disagreed with the statement “During this election the media covered the issue of reducing hunger in America enough,” only 29.1 percent agreed, while 65.1 percent disagreed (37.6 percent strongly disagreed).

Similarly, 65.4 percent disagreed with the statement “During this election the media covered the issue of reducing hunger around the world enough,” while only 27.8 percent agreed. A total of 39.3 percent strongly disagreed.



Conclusion

These 10 findings from the 2008 exit polling are intended to help journalists, advocates, and policymakers understand how American voters view the hunger and poverty problem, both at home and abroad.

The data shows that voters care about the problem deeply and believe the situation is worsening. Americans want to hear more about fighting poverty and hunger from political candidates and the media. Ultimately, voters are willing to devote the resources necessary to reduce hunger.

Voters also want to hear more than just goals and commitments of new resources. While they approve of goal-setting, they also express skepticism that we can actually achieve our aspirations when it comes to fighting hunger. This pessimism can be overcome by leaders who offer specific and pragmatic proposals.

This study suggests that the public believes that specific policies designed to achieve ambitious targets – such as ending child hunger by 2015 – can be effective. The report indicates that voters want leaders to advocate for new antipoverty and hunger programs and resources, but they also want these efforts to call on both public and private actors, to reform programs to make them more effective, and to keep a clear eye on how we can really solve the problems of hunger and poverty in the United States.

The American voter is ready for leaders to step up our fight against poverty and hunger. But he or she is also ready to hear more than just generic calls to action and simple statements of goals. The American voter wants to hear how we will grow the whole economy, spend more on direct assistance, engage both the public and the private sector, and keep making government programs more effective.

Overall, this report is good news for those who want a more vigorous fight against hunger and poverty. American voters are ready to support a broad new initiative, but they want to know the details, too.

Methodology

McLaughlin & Associates conducted a national survey among 1,000 voters on November 4th, 2008. All interviews were conducted by professional interviewers via telephone. Interview selection was done at random within predetermined election units. These units were structured to statistically correlate with actual voter distributions in a national general election.

The accuracy of the sample is within +/- 3.1 percent at a 95 percent confidence interval.

This report and the poll preparation were undertaken by a bipartisan team that included Tom Freedman, Sam Gill, and Sam Feder of Freedman Consulting, LLC, and Jim McLaughlin and Stuart Polk of McLaughlin & Associates.

Tom Freedman is President of Freedman Consulting, LLC, and is an advisor to leading political figures, corporations, philanthropies, and non-profits developing policy ideas that become part of an effective strategic message. Mr. Freedman served in the Clinton Administration as Senior Advisor to the President, and prior to that as Special Assistant to the President for Policy Planning. Mr. Freedman was Chief of Staff for Strategy for the Clinton/Gore '96 campaign.

Jim McLaughlin is President and Partner of McLaughlin and Associates and is a nationally recognized public opinion expert and Republican strategic consultant. He has worked for over 50 members of Congress, eight U.S. Senators, and seven Governors. He also serves as a consultant and research strategist to Fortune 500 companies and small businesses.

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BUILDING THE WILL TO END HUNGER **www.alliancetoendhunger.org**

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The Alliance to End Hunger engages diverse institutions in building the public and political will to end hunger at home and abroad. The Alliance has more than 65 members -- corporations, non-profit groups, universities, individuals, and Christian, Jewish and Muslim religious bodies.

The Alliance to End Hunger:

- Brokers unique partnerships between our members that leverage their efforts to benefit the hungry people they serve.
- Elevates hunger on the national agenda by studying how voters think about hunger, sharing our findings with political leaders, and encouraging champions for hungry people among our elected officials.
- Represents the United States as a member of the International Alliance Against Hunger and partners with national alliances in Ghana, Guatemala, and Jordan to help them build food security for their citizens.

The Alliance and its members believe that a country and a world without hunger is a goal within our reach and that it is the responsibility of individuals, communities, and governments to make it happen. The Alliance fosters strategic partnerships to overcome hunger around the world; builds political commitment from our leaders to do what it takes to end hunger; and creates global connections with the International Alliance Against Hunger, where it joins similar efforts underway in 25 countries to cut in half the number of hungry people by 2015.

HUNGER MESSAGE PROJECT

The Alliance regularly conducts non-partisan opinion polls through the *Hunger Message Project* to better understand voters' attitudes about hunger and how best to communicate with them on this issue.

Republican pollster Jim McLaughlin and Democratic consultant Tom Freedman has been surveying voter attitudes on hunger and poverty for the Alliance since 2002. Over the last six years, the number of voters who believe that domestic hunger is getting worse has increased by 25 percent and the number of voters who believe that global hunger is getting worse has increased by 33 percent.

Complete *Hunger Message Project* polls and analysis are available in the *Building Political Will* section of the Alliance's website, www.alliancetoendhunger.org.