



Summary of Public Opinion Research on Nutrition and Hunger and Issues that Voters Want Candidates to Address

*Conducted by Peter D. Hart Research Associates, Inc. and McLaughlin & Associates
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Hunger is an increasing concern for a substantial proportion of American families. Economic factors are making it harder for people to adequately feed themselves and their families, forcing growing numbers to rely on public and private assistance programs. Voters both support these programs and want candidates and office holders to address these issues.

These findings are the result of a review of polling data and research conducted during the past eight years exploring public opinion on nutrition, food insecurity, hunger and federal spending on domestic programs to combat these problems. The review by Peter D. Hart Research Associates and McLaughlin & Associates found that a majority of Americans believe eliminating hunger should be a priority of the federal government and the next presidential administration. For the full review, visit the Food Research and Action Center's Web site at www.frac.org/Press_Release/hungerpoll08.htm.

Food and Hunger in America

Food insecurity is a harsh reality for a substantial number of American families, and the number of families experiencing this hardship is on the rise.

- The percentage of adults who say they are at least slightly worried about being able to put food on the table increased from 27 percent in 2007 to 57 percent in 2008. Those who are very worried about affording adequate food increased from 7 percent to 20 percent during that same period, according to a study conducted by the Rockefeller Foundation.
- Polls by the Pew Research Center for the People and the Press found the percentage of adults saying they were finding it difficult to afford the food they need rose 11 percent between January (27 percent) and July (38 percent) of 2008.
- Low-wage workers and people of color are having the hardest time affording the food they need. A 2008 survey by the Kaiser Foundation/Washington Post/Harvard Low-Wage Worker poll found that almost half of workers who make less than \$27,000 a year are having a hard time buying food. The Campaign for American Workers Survey by the Rockefeller Foundation and Time, found that 16 percent of Hispanics and 17 percent of African Americans have gone hungry because they could not afford food.

American Attitudes about Food and Hunger

Most Americans believe hunger is a serious problem that is getting worse, and that providing relief to those who need it is crucial to solving the problem.

- Large majorities of Americans say hunger is a very important social issue and this perspective appears to be on the rise, with 64 percent expressing this view in 2006 and 73 percent doing so in 2007, according to surveys by Hormel Foods. A recent study by the Food Research and Action Center (FRAC) and the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities (CBPP) found that 78 percent of voters think the problem of poor families who are unable to afford enough food to eat is a serious problem; 56 percent characterized it as a very serious problem. This concern was evident across party and ideological lines.
- In another study for FRAC and CBPP, focus group participants nearly unanimously agreed that "people who work hard in low-wage jobs should not have to see their families go hungry or lack proper nutrition," and "in America, no child should go hungry."

- Nearly nine in ten Americans agree that there are many people in the U.S. who try to lift themselves out of poverty but cannot do so without help, according to a 2007 Hormel survey. Four in five believe that a developed country should ensure that people have enough to eat, and that “a society that does not ensure that every child has enough to eat cannot be called civilized.”
- An Alliance to End Hunger study in 2007 asked voters to identify the most important moral issue facing our nation: fighting hunger and poverty was the top issue (42 percent), with more voters identifying this as the biggest moral issue than protecting the environment (23 percent), abortion (17 percent), and gay marriage (13 percent).

Food, Hunger and Political Will

Hunger is an important political issue that voters want government and political leaders to address. Most are favorable toward aid and food programs, often even if it means increasing spending in those areas.

- In a 2008 poll conducted by the Alliance to End Hunger, more than three in five voters said they are more likely to support a presidential candidate who makes fighting hunger a top priority, and nearly nine out of 10 voters said that support for hunger issues is important when voting for a member of Congress – a 14 percent increase from when the same question was asked in 2003. When voters are told a candidate for office wants to fight hunger, they become more likely to vote for the candidate, regardless of the candidates’ party affiliation; 65 percent are more likely to vote for a Democratic candidate described in this way and 62% are more likely to support the Republican candidate described in the same way.
- Nearly two-thirds of Americans say they believe the U.S. government must make solving the hunger issue a higher priority (Hormel Foods Hunger Survey, 2006 and 2007), and three-quarters of voters believe we could “dramatically reduce the hunger problem if we really made it a national priority” (Alliance to End Hunger, 2007).
- In a 2007 survey, nearly two-thirds of adults said it is the government’s responsibility to make sure everyone in the United States has enough to eat, with 45 percent who strongly agree (The Opportunity Agenda, 2007).
- Americans strongly support funding for public nutrition assistance programs. In 2007, FRAC and CBPP reported there is a broad national consensus that the government is spending too little to ensure low-income people get the food they need, with a majority of voters across the political, income, and regional spectrums expressing this view. In a 2008 study, seven in 10 (69 percent) voters say the federal government is spending too little in this area, which is a 24-point increase from 2002 (Alliance to End Hunger).
- Ninety-four percent believe that it’s important for government to fund anti-hunger programs including school lunch and the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC). By nearly three to one, voters think it is more important to increase food stamp benefits for low-income people who need help (66 percent) than it is to hold down the cost of the program (24 percent).
- When recently asked about temporarily increasing monthly food stamp benefits as part of an economic stimulus package, 64 percent of Americans were in support, according to a poll by FRAC and CBPP. In a separate 2006 study, 92 percent of voters expressed support for creating a program to ensure every hungry child in America is fed, with 75 percent saying they strongly support this initiative (Democratic Leadership Council).