

**BASELINE PUBLIC OPINION RESEARCH**  
**NOVEMBER 2008**



**gerstein | agne**  
strategic communications

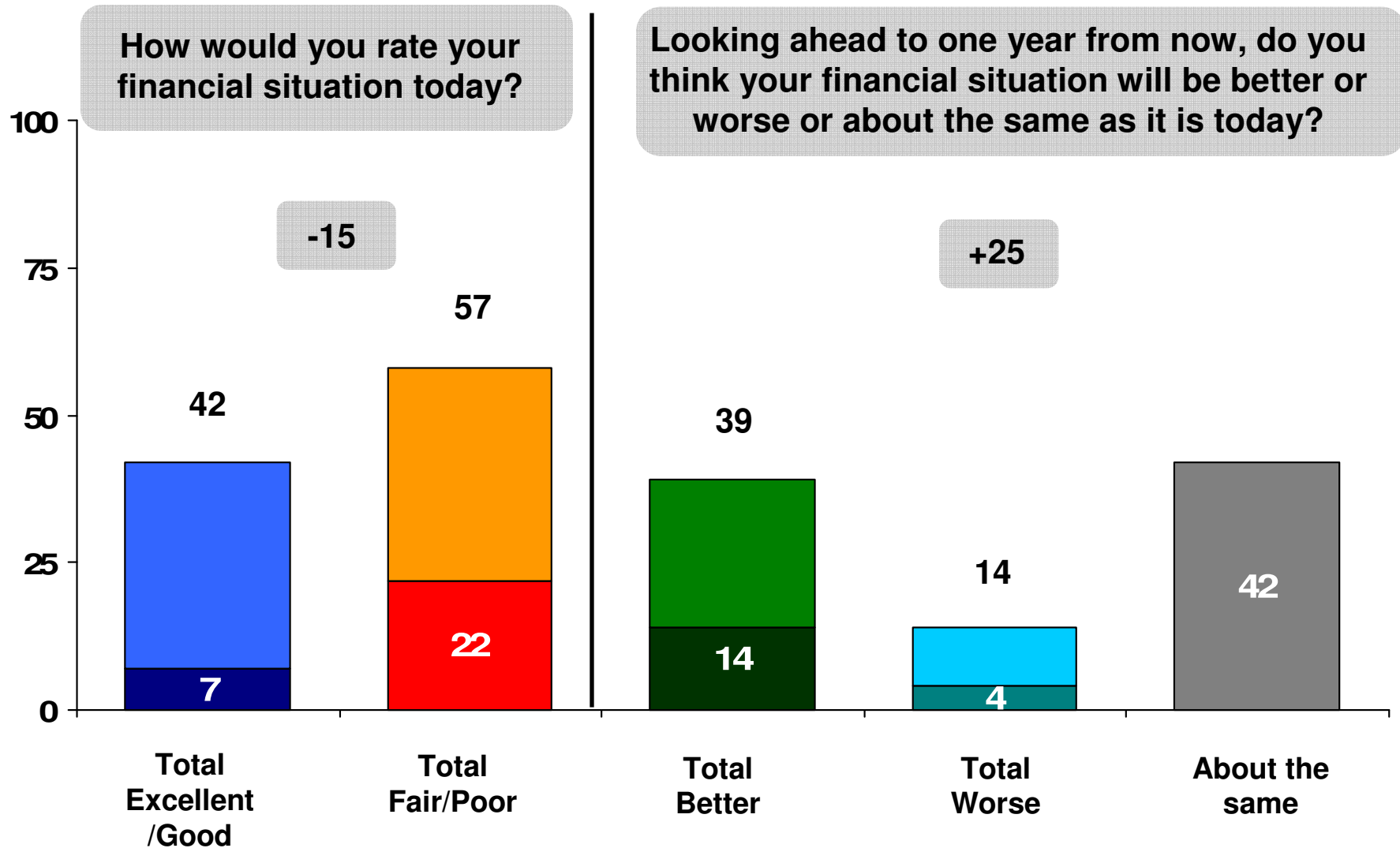


## Key Findings / Strategic Recommendations

- **Majority demonstrates strong support for national goal of cutting poverty in half within 10 yrs – even after questions about wage & benefit costs to businesses, higher spending & taxes on wealthy**
- **Divisions emerge based on ideology, partisanship, age, and race**
- **Deep financial anxiety, growing personal connection to poverty coincide with strong support for poverty reduction goal**
- **Broad agreement that poverty has direct impact on middle class; current financial crisis does not lessen need for urgent action**
- **Ideological and economic frames more effective than moral one against conservative frame on causes of poverty and best solutions**
- **Poverty must be situated within a larger message about rebuilding the economy from the bottom up and shifting our governmental priorities to help middle/lower income families; poverty should not be seen as a separate effort**
- **Three pillars of policy messaging on achieving poverty reduction goals:**
  1. **Jobs, Jobs, Jobs (and Wages)**
  2. **Health Care and Education**
  3. **Personal Responsibility and Values**

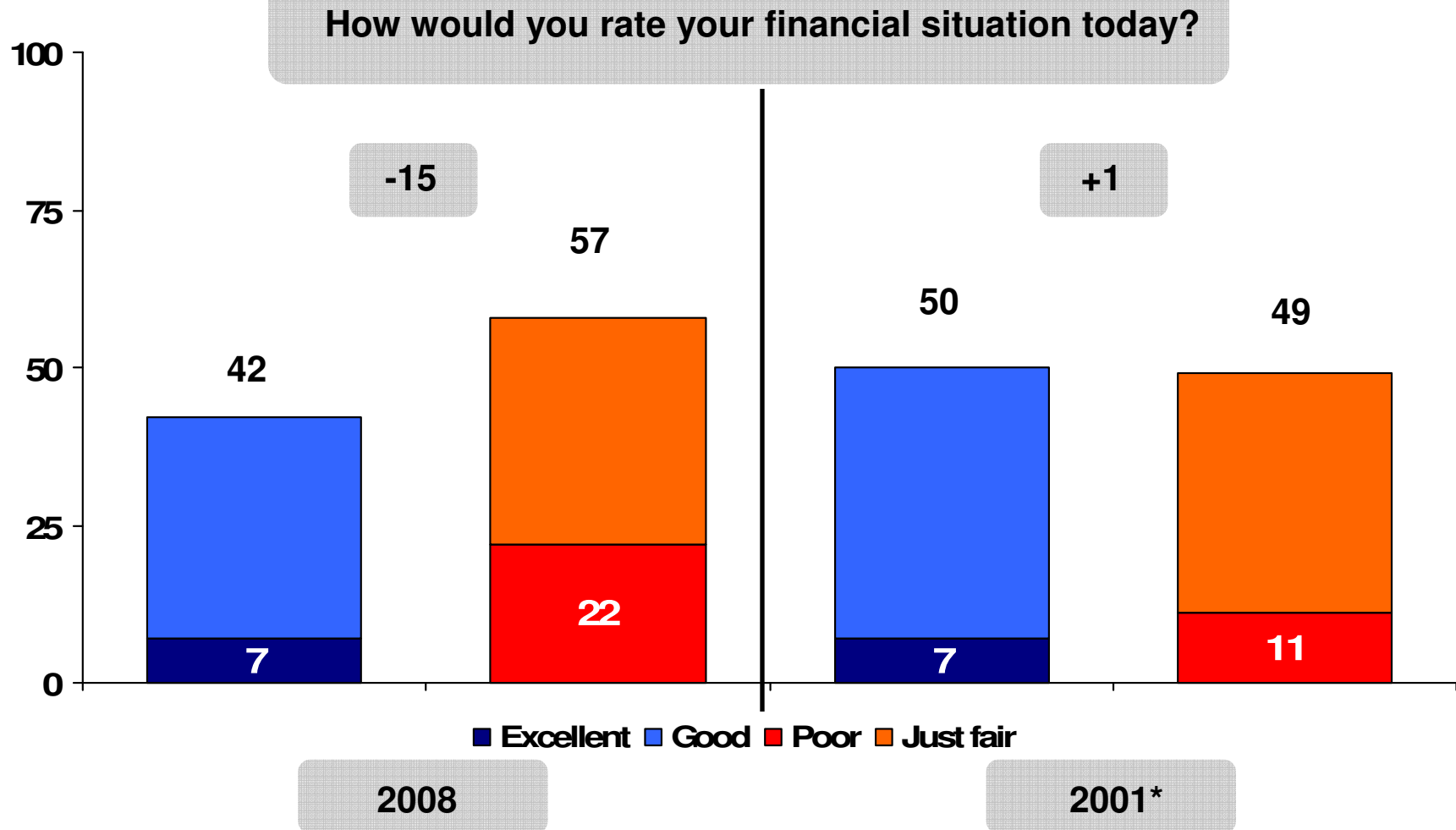


# Deep Financial Anxiety





# Declining Ratings of Personal Finances\*

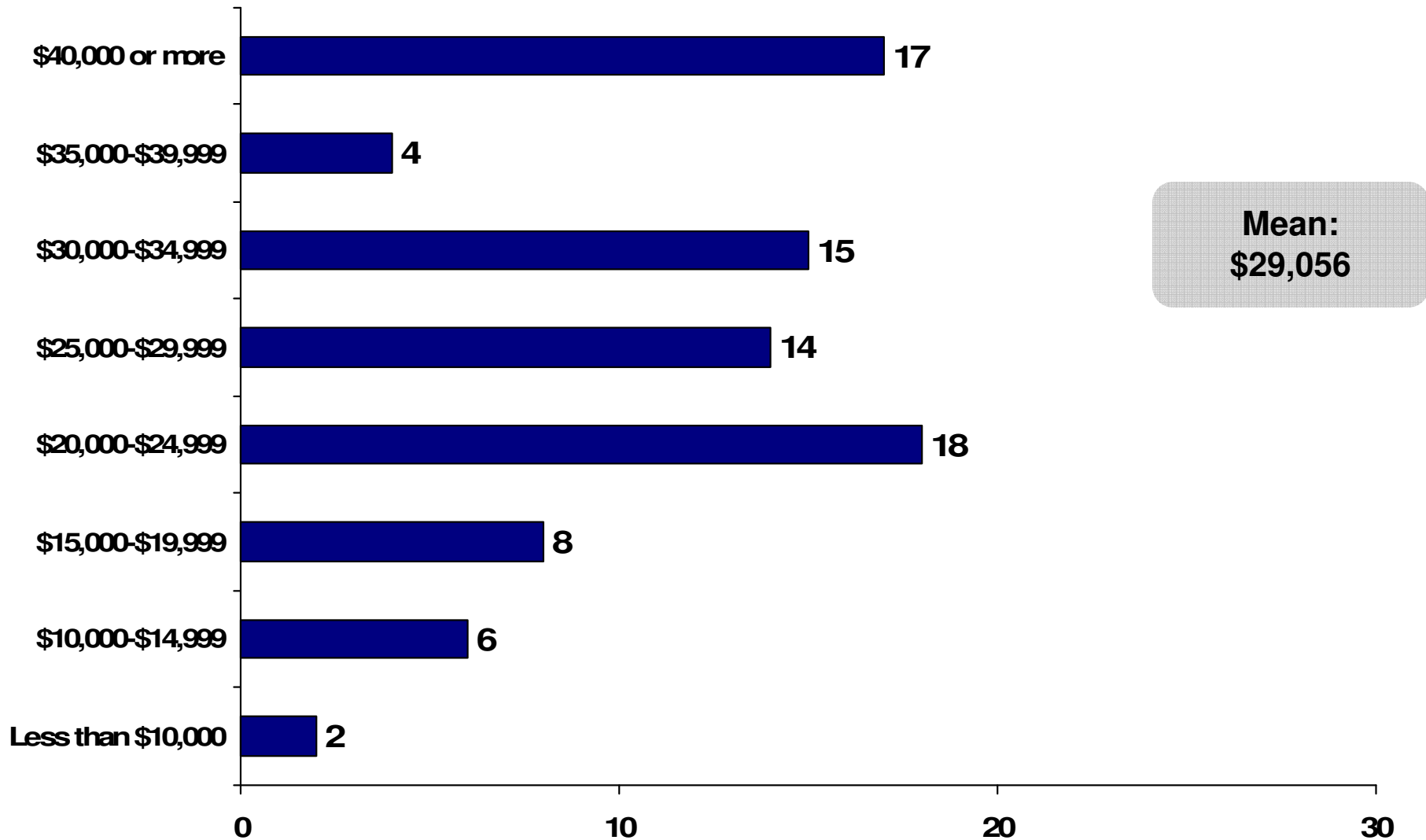


*\*Findings from 2001 NPR/Kaiser/Kennedy School Poll, conducted January 4-February 27, 2001 of 1,952 randomly selected respondents*



# Defining the Poverty Line

*Public Overestimates Poverty Line for Family of Four (\$21,200)*





# Poverty Line by Income

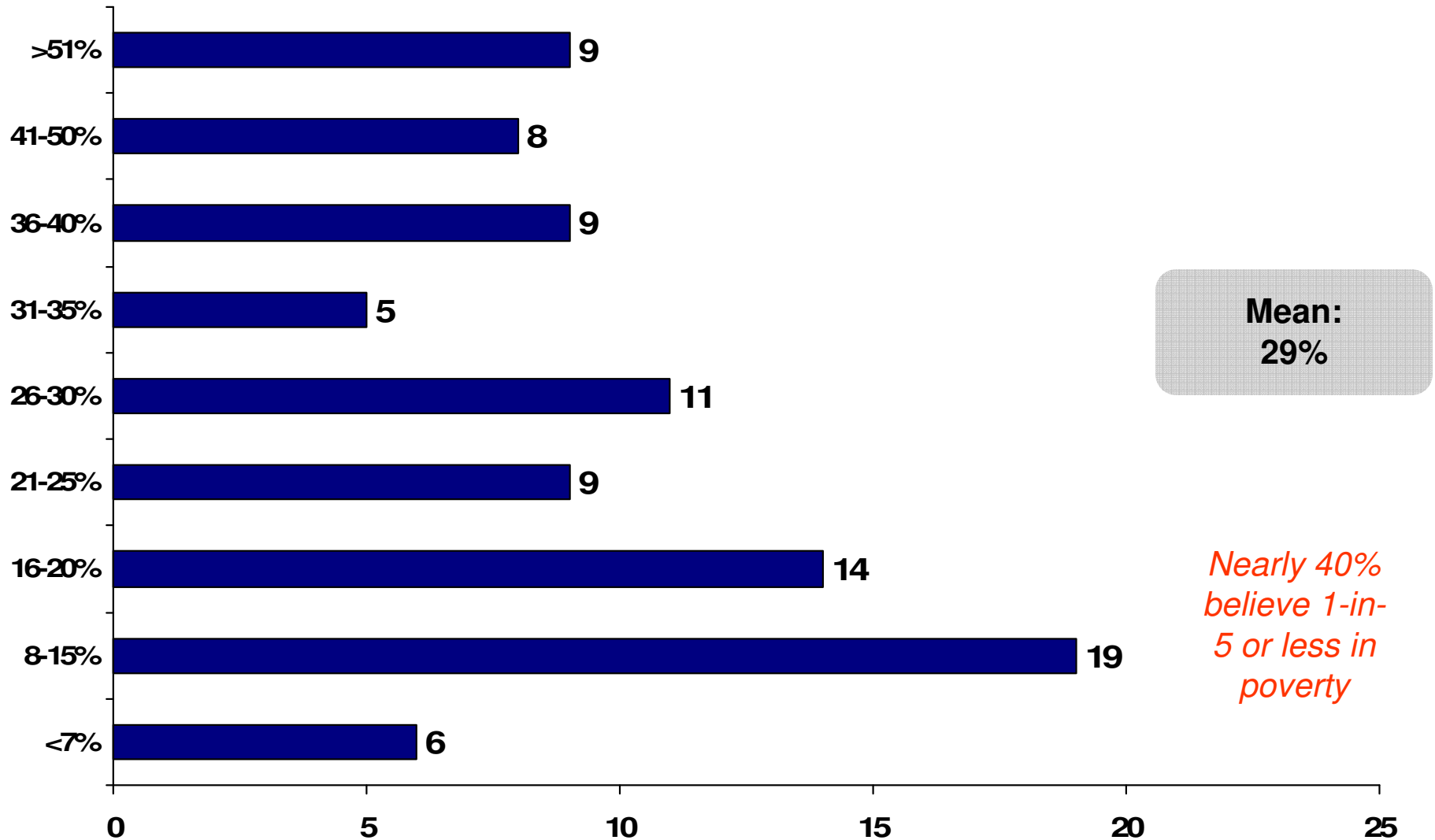
*No Real Differences By Income Level*

| <b>Income</b>             | <b>Mean</b>                 |
|---------------------------|-----------------------------|
| <b>&lt;\$10,000</b>       | <b>\$28,975</b>             |
| <b>\$10,000-\$20,000</b>  | <b>\$25,877</b>             |
| <b>\$20,000-\$30,000</b>  | <b>\$26,358</b>             |
| <b>\$30,000-\$50,000</b>  | <b>\$27,188</b>             |
| <b>\$50,000-\$75,000</b>  | <b>\$33,052</b>             |
| <b>\$75,000-\$100,000</b> | <b>\$28,646</b>             |
| <b>&gt;\$100,000</b>      | <b>\$32,527</b>             |
|                           |                             |
|                           | <b>Total Mean: \$29,056</b> |



# Percentage Poor in America

Public Believes Poverty Rate Much Higher Than Official Count (12.5% in 2007)





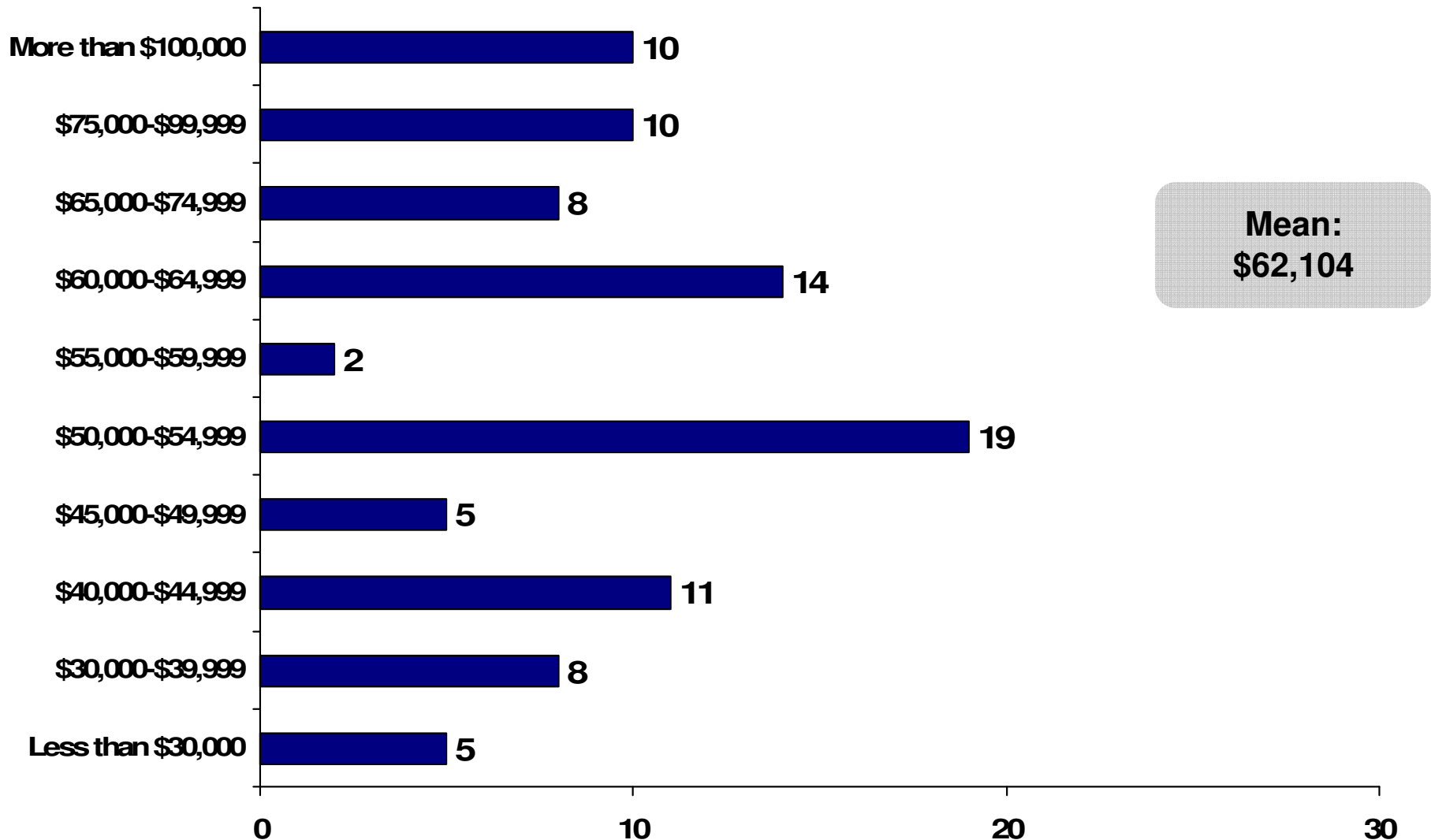
# Percentage Poor by Income

*\*Inverse Relationship between Income and Perception of Poverty*

| <b>Income</b>             | <b>Mean</b>            |
|---------------------------|------------------------|
| <b>&lt;\$10,000</b>       | <b>43%</b>             |
| <b>\$10,000-\$20,000</b>  | <b>36%</b>             |
| <b>\$20,000-\$30,000</b>  | <b>36%</b>             |
| <b>\$30,000-\$50,000</b>  | <b>29%</b>             |
| <b>\$50,000-\$75,000</b>  | <b>26%</b>             |
| <b>\$75,000-\$100,000</b> | <b>24%</b>             |
| <b>&gt;\$100,000</b>      | <b>24%</b>             |
|                           |                        |
|                           | <b>Total Mean: 29%</b> |



# Defining Middle Class





## Middle Class by Income

*Definition of Middle Class Increases With Income (Except for Lowest Income Bracket)*

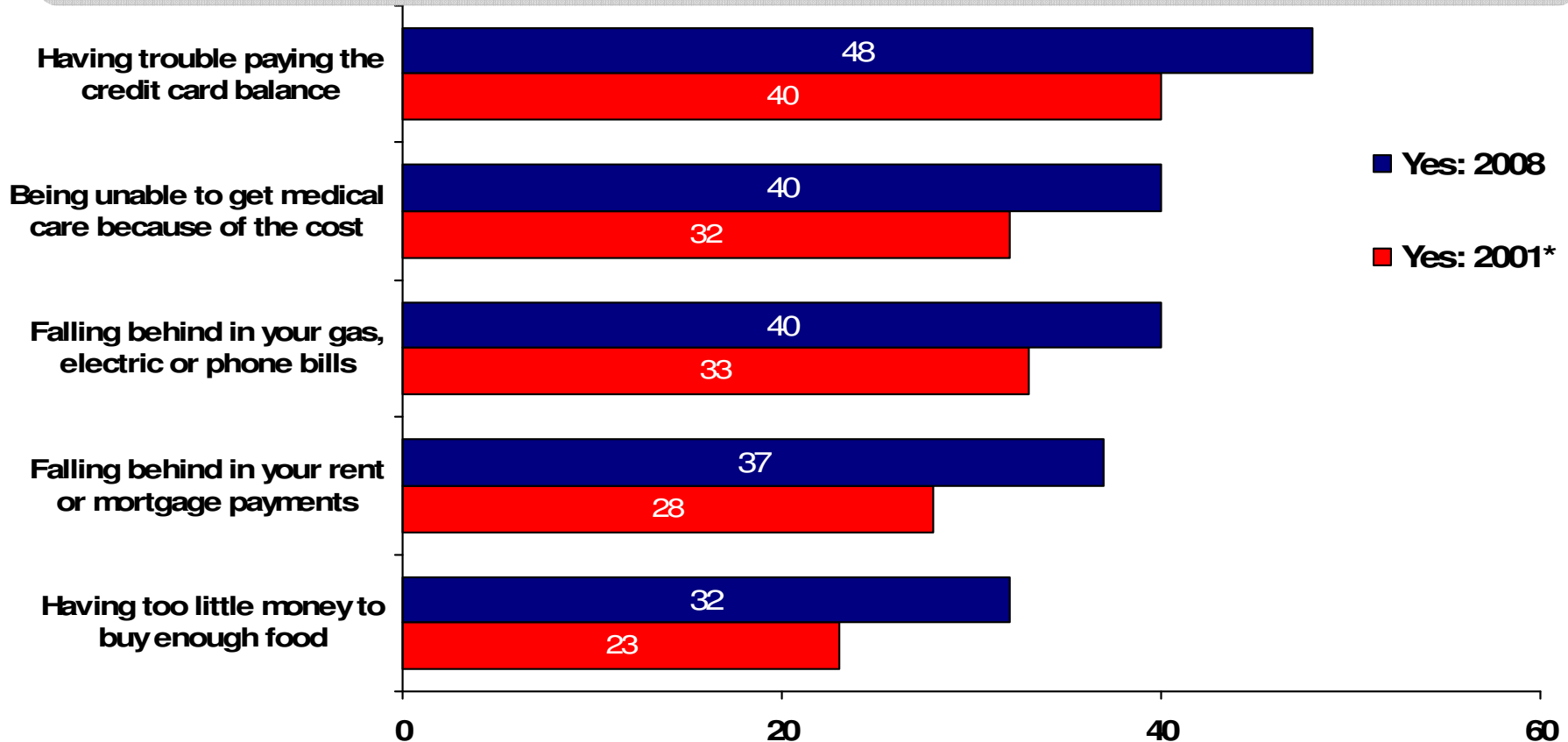
| <b>Income</b>             | <b>Mean</b>                 |
|---------------------------|-----------------------------|
| <b>&lt;\$10,000</b>       | <b>\$63,296</b>             |
| <b>\$10,000-\$20,000</b>  | <b>\$52,113</b>             |
| <b>\$20,000-\$30,000</b>  | <b>\$54,088</b>             |
| <b>\$30,000-\$50,000</b>  | <b>\$58,100</b>             |
| <b>\$50,000-\$75,000</b>  | <b>\$66,912</b>             |
| <b>\$75,000-\$100,000</b> | <b>\$62,328</b>             |
| <b>&gt;\$100,000</b>      | <b>\$71,761</b>             |
|                           |                             |
|                           | <b>Total Mean: \$62,104</b> |



# Financial Difficulties Growing

Significant Increase in Every Measure Tested

In the past year, have you or someone in your family had a **SERIOUS** problem with any of the following?

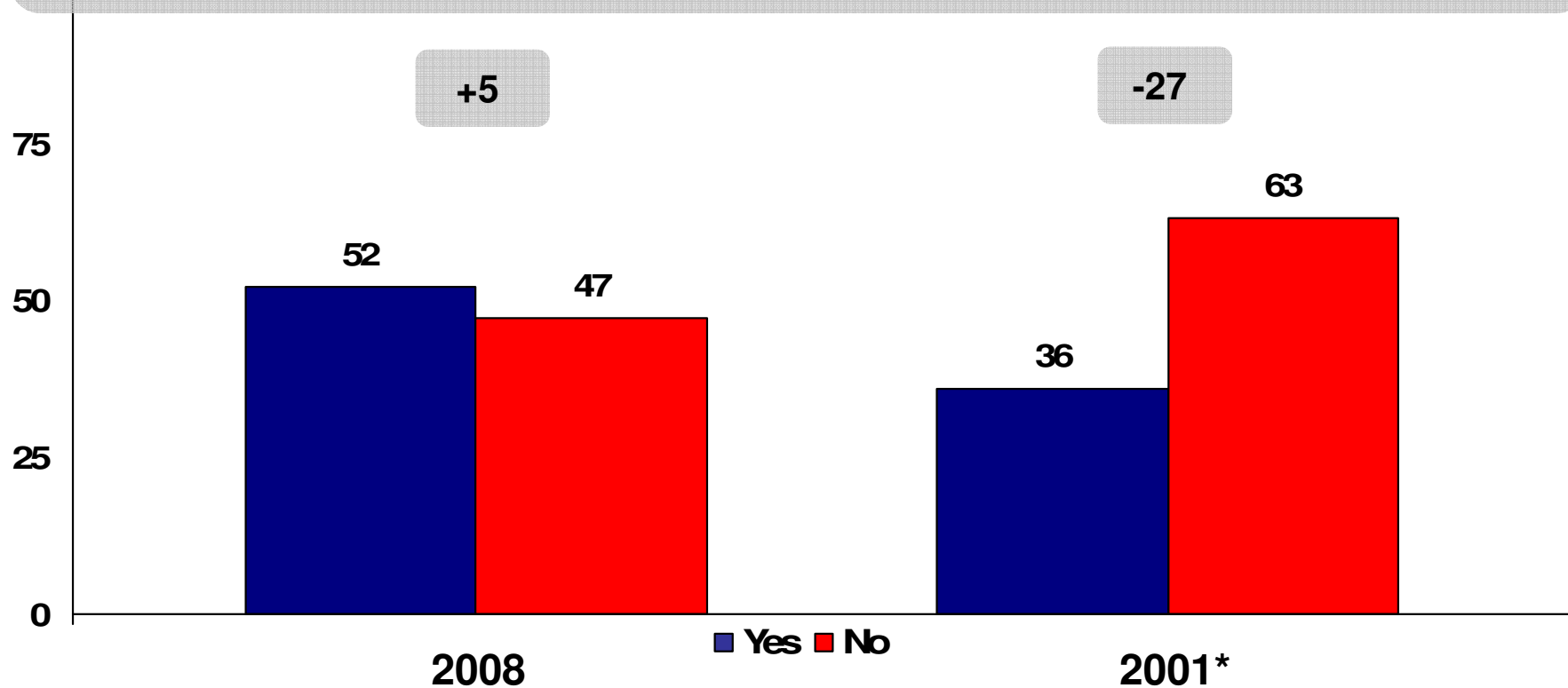


\*Findings from 2001 NPR/Kaiser/Kennedy School Poll, conducted January 4-February 27, 2001 of 1,952 randomly selected respondents



# Growing Personal Connection to Poverty

Thinking about your own family – both your immediate family living here and your other close relatives like aunts, uncles, cousins, and so on – as far as you know, is anyone in your family poor?



*\*Findings from 2001 NPR/Kaiser/Kennedy School Poll, conducted January 4-February 27, 2001 of 1,952 randomly selected respondents*



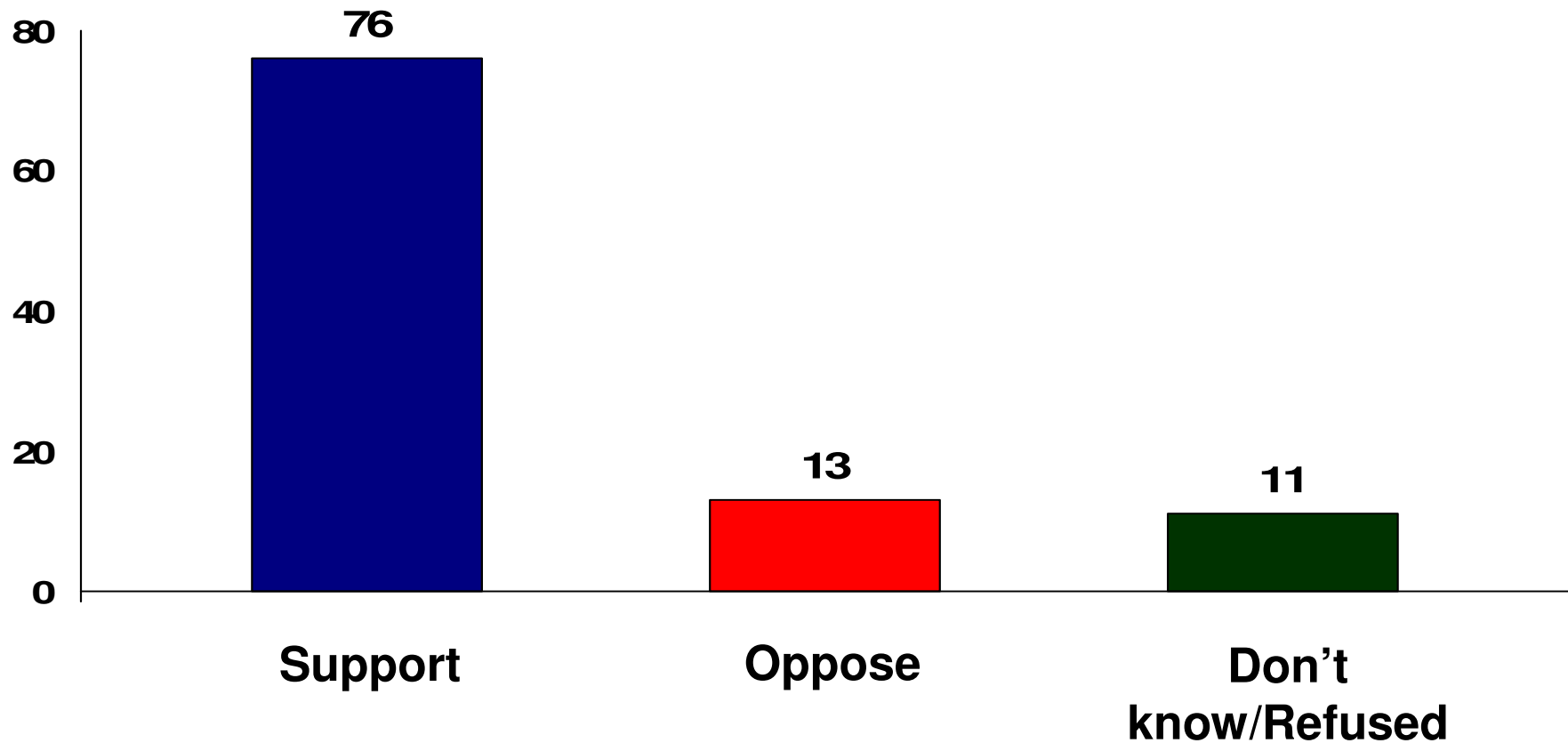
# Poverty Reduction Goal



# Overwhelming Support for Poverty Reduction Goal

*No Significant Difference Between Split Samples*

Would you support or oppose the next President and Congress setting a national goal to cut poverty in the United States in half within ten years (and strengthen the middle class)?

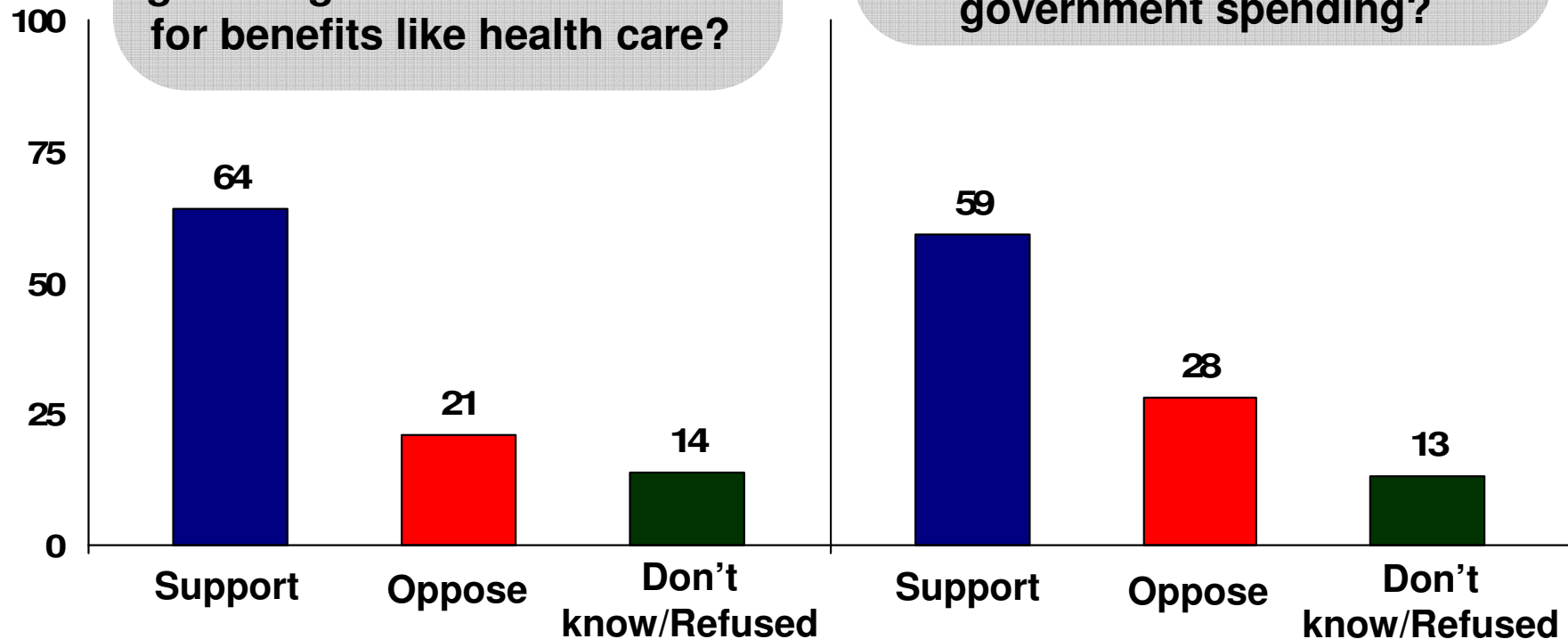




## Majority Remain Supportive Despite Challenges on Cost to Businesses, Tax & Spend

Would you still support a national goal to cut poverty in the United States in half within ten years (and strengthen the middle class) if it required businesses to pay their workers higher wages or contribute more for benefits like health care?

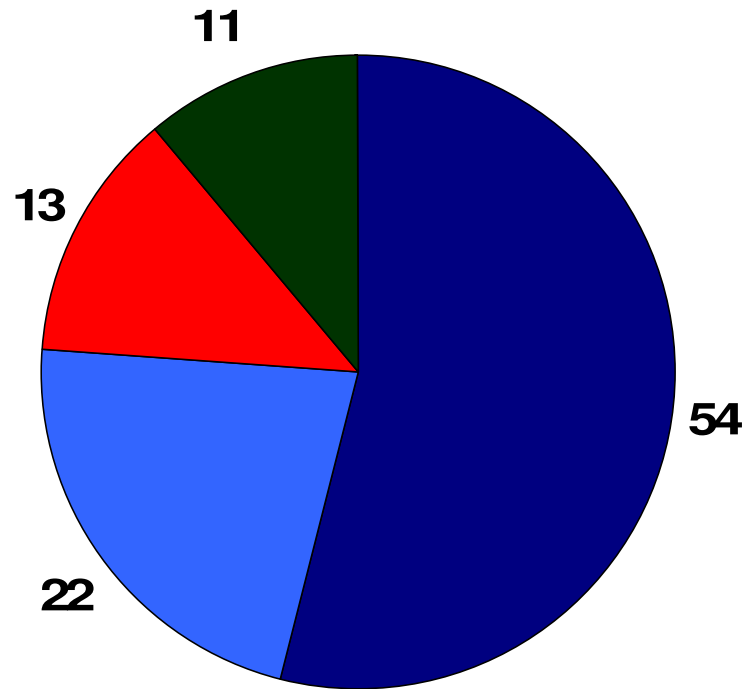
Would you still support a national goal to cut poverty in the United States in half within ten years and (strengthen the middle class) if it required higher taxes for the wealthy and new government spending?





# Broad Support for Poverty Reduction Goal

Would you support or oppose the next President and Congress setting a national goal to cut poverty in the United States in half within ten years (and strengthen the middle class)?



■ Solid support      ■ Conditional support  
■ Solid oppose      ■ Don't know/Refused

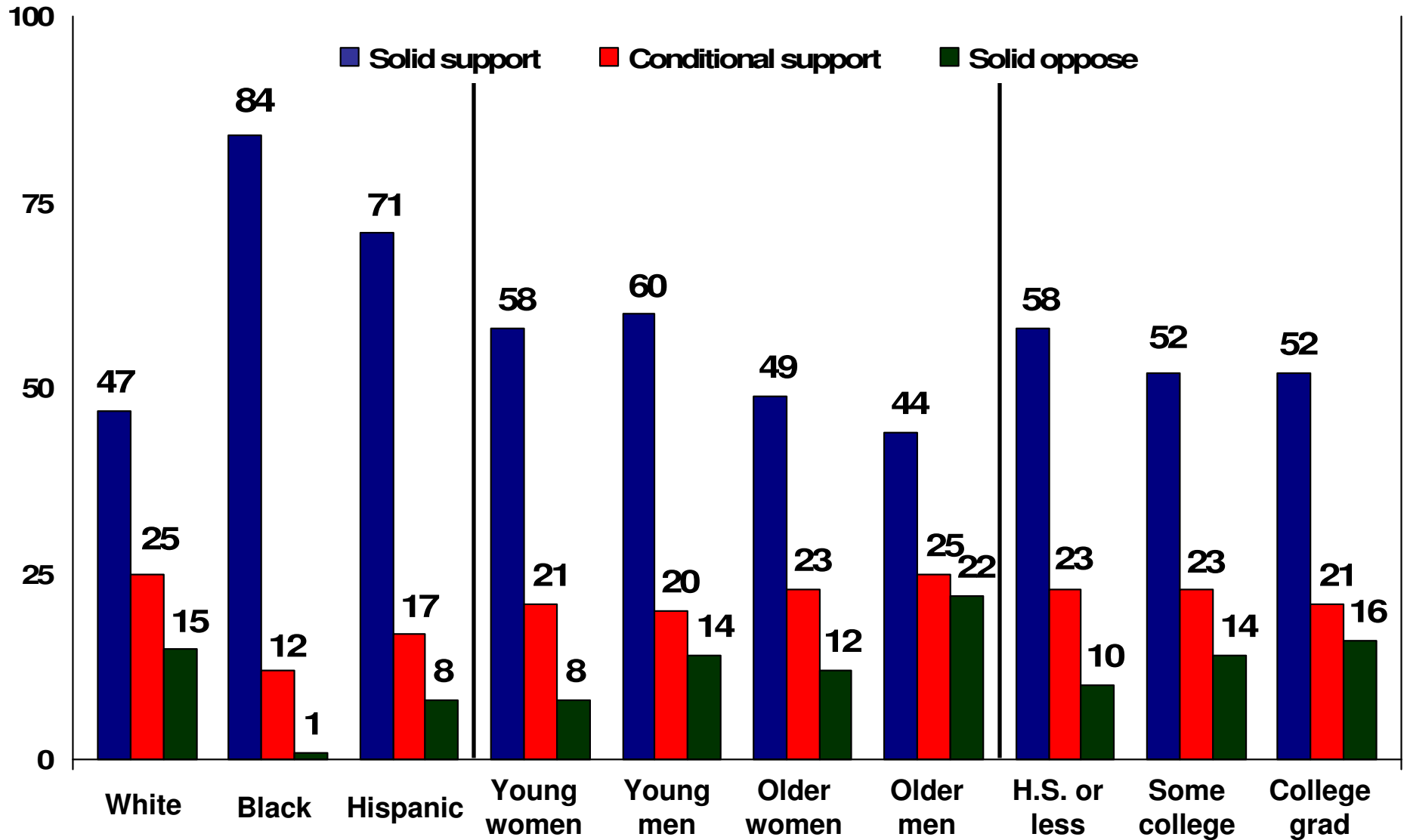
• 36% of Conditional Supporters shift away on businesses paying higher wages and benefits

• 64% of Conditional Supporters shift away on higher taxes for wealthy and increased govt. spending



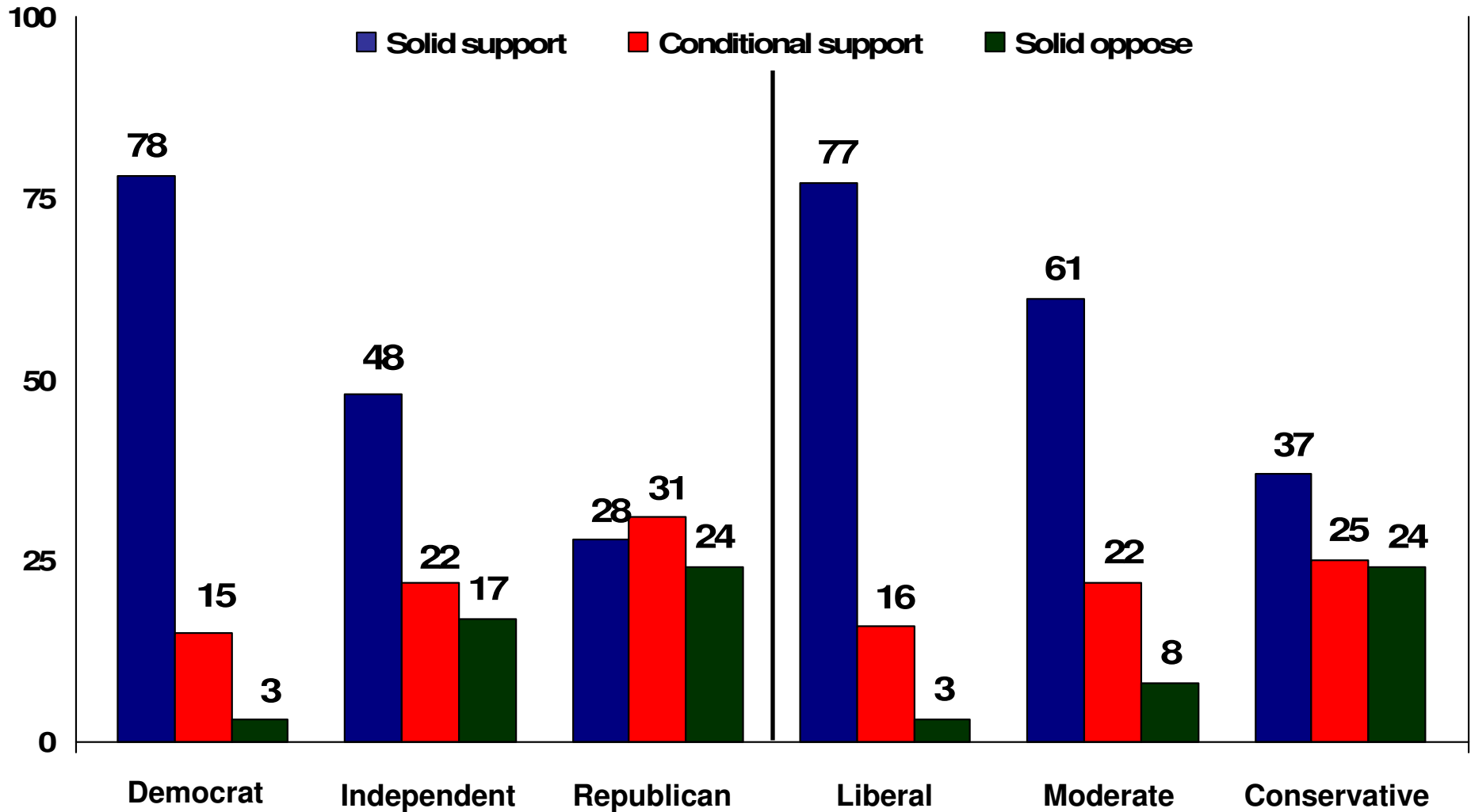
# Poverty Reduction - Key Demographics

*Age, Race are critical factors*





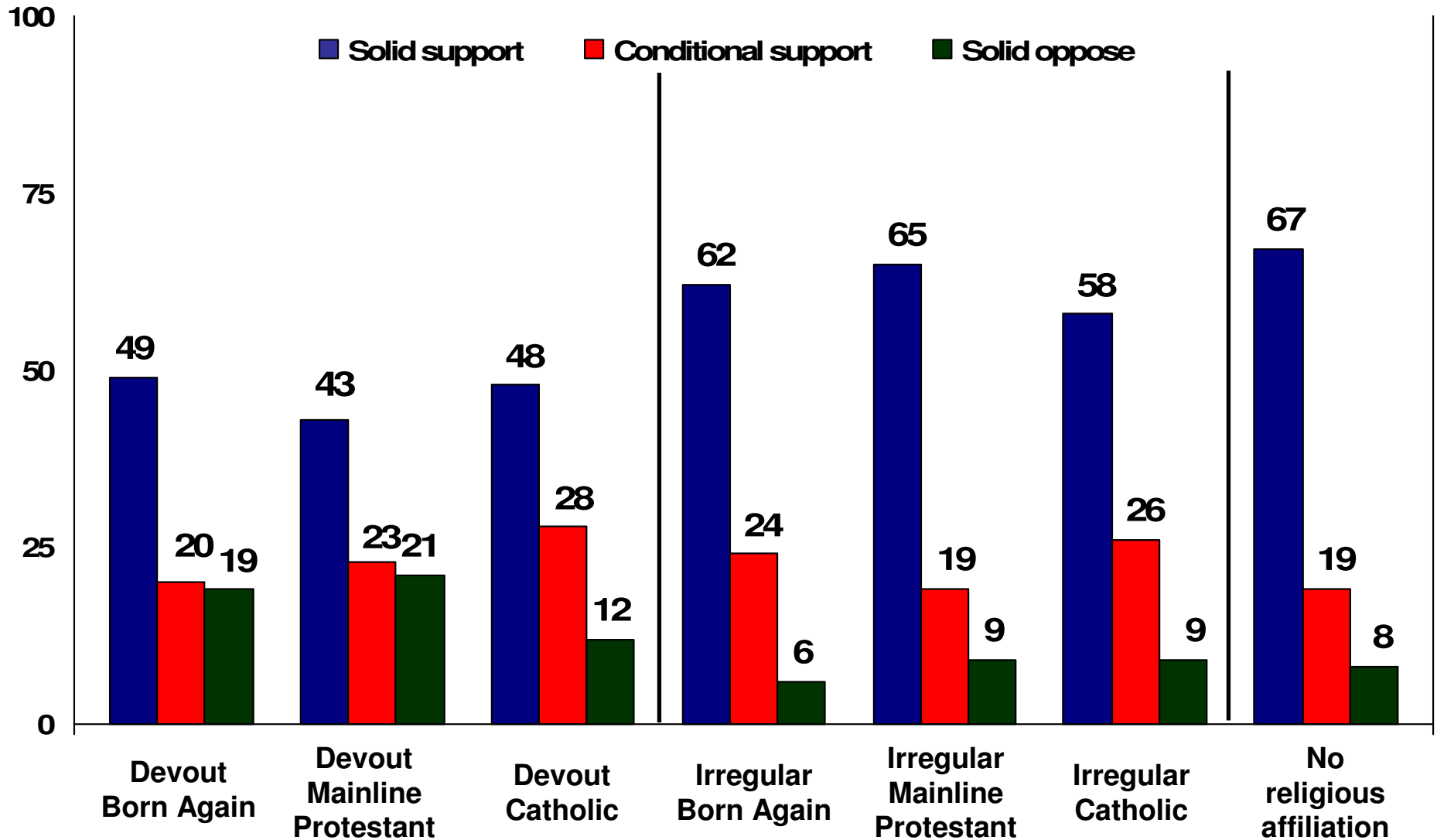
# Poverty Reduction - Partisan/Ideology





# Poverty Reduction – Religion

*Regular Church Attendance Correlates with Decreased Support*





# Attitudes about Poverty



## External Social and Economic Factors Are Root Causes of Poverty

*Now I'm going to read you some pairs of statements about poverty and the economy. After I read each pair, please tell me whether you agree more with the first statement or agree more with the second statement.*

**Much  
more**      **Total**

**Most people who live in poverty are poor because their jobs don't pay enough, they lack good health care and education, and things cost too much for them to save and move ahead.**

**39**

**57**

**OR**

**Most people who live in poverty are poor because they make bad decisions or act irresponsibly in their own lives**

**12**

**25**

**Most people who live in poverty are poor because economic conditions outside of their control cause them to be poor.**

**26**

**47**

**OR**

**Most people who live in poverty are poor because they are not doing enough to help themselves out of poverty.**

**22**

**38**



## Poverty Seen as Intractable but Hardships are Real

|  | Much more | Total |
|--|-----------|-------|
| Despite our best intentions, there will always be a sizeable group of poor people living in America.<br>OR<br>Our nation has made great strides in reducing poverty among the elderly and working class, and with new efforts we can move closer to eradicating poverty among all Americans. | 30        | 62    |
| Despite some material gains, poor people today face real economic hardships.<br>OR<br>Poor people today are actually doing pretty well compared to those in earlier generations.   | 30        | 56    |
|  | 19        | 37    |



## Current Financial Crisis Not Reason to Delay Action on Poverty

|   | Much more | Total |
|---|-----------|-------|
| Even with the costs of fixing the financial crisis, the government cannot ignore the economic needs of poor families.                                     | 41        | 72    |
| OR  |           |       |
| Given all the money we are spending to fix the financial crisis, the government should not plan any new spending to help the poor.                        | 10        | 21    |
| <hr/>   |           |       |
| The recent financial crisis was primarily a result of government deregulation and reckless behavior by Wall Street banks and CEOs.                        | 40        | 53    |
| OR  |           |       |
| The recent financial crisis was primarily a result of low-income and minority homebuyers getting in over their head with mortgages they could not afford. | 14        | 22    |



# Poverty Touches the Middle Class

|  | Much more | Total |
|--|-----------|-------|
| The negative consequences of poverty affect all of us.                                 | 51        | 77    |
| OR   |           |       |
| The negative consequences of poverty affect mostly those living in poor neighborhoods. | 10        | 19    |
| <hr/>  |           |       |
| Poor families share a lot of economic needs and priorities with middle class families. | 24        | 59    |
| OR   |           |       |
| Poor families have different economic needs and priorities than middle class families. | 19        | 36    |
| <hr/>  |           |       |
| Policies that help poor families also help to make middle class families more secure.  | 23        | 49    |
| OR   |           |       |
| Policies that help poor families don't do much to help middle class families.          | 21        | 42    |

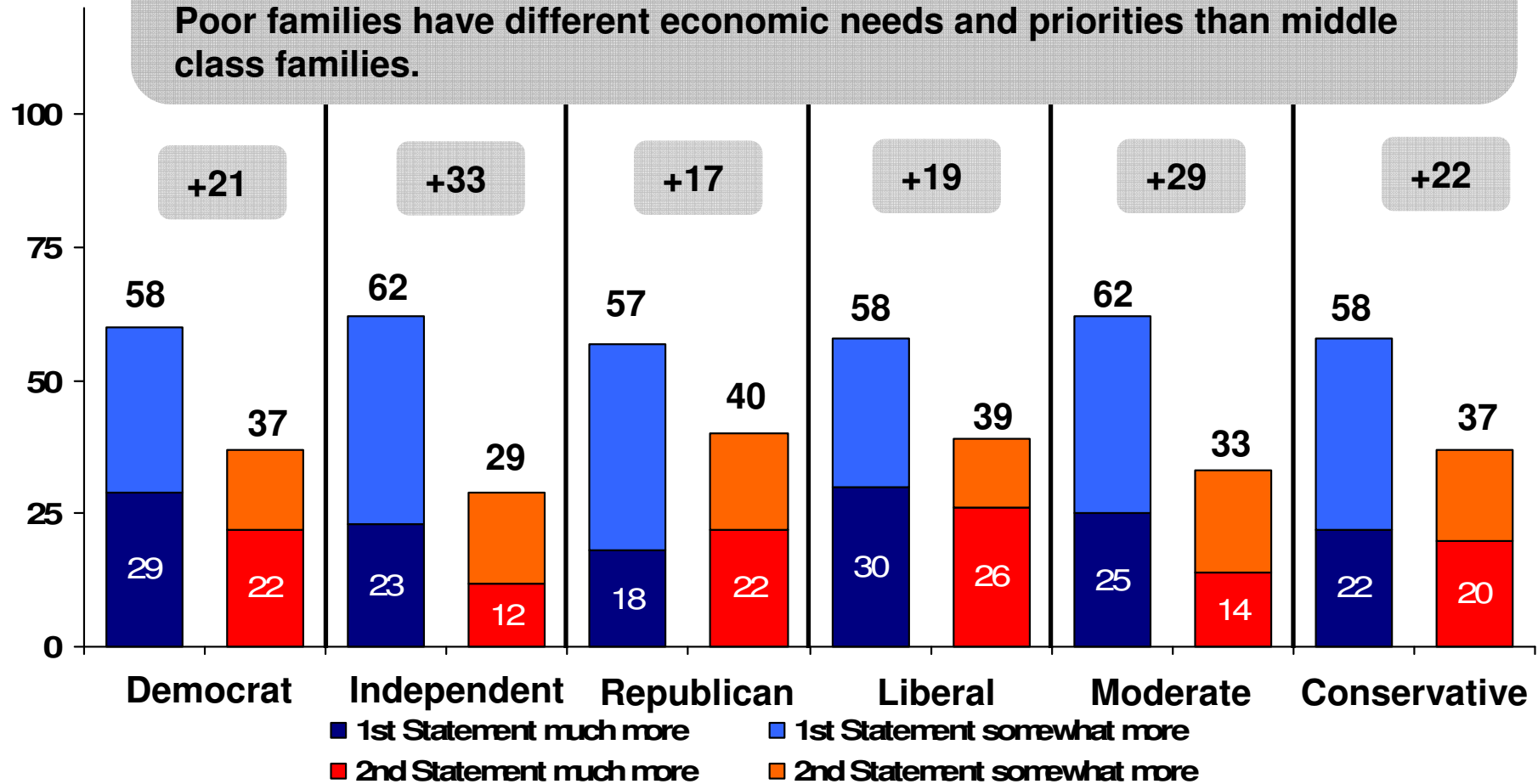


# Broad Partisan / Ideological Agreement on Shared Economic Needs

Poor families share a lot of economic needs and priorities with middle class families.

OR

Poor families have different economic needs and priorities than middle class families.



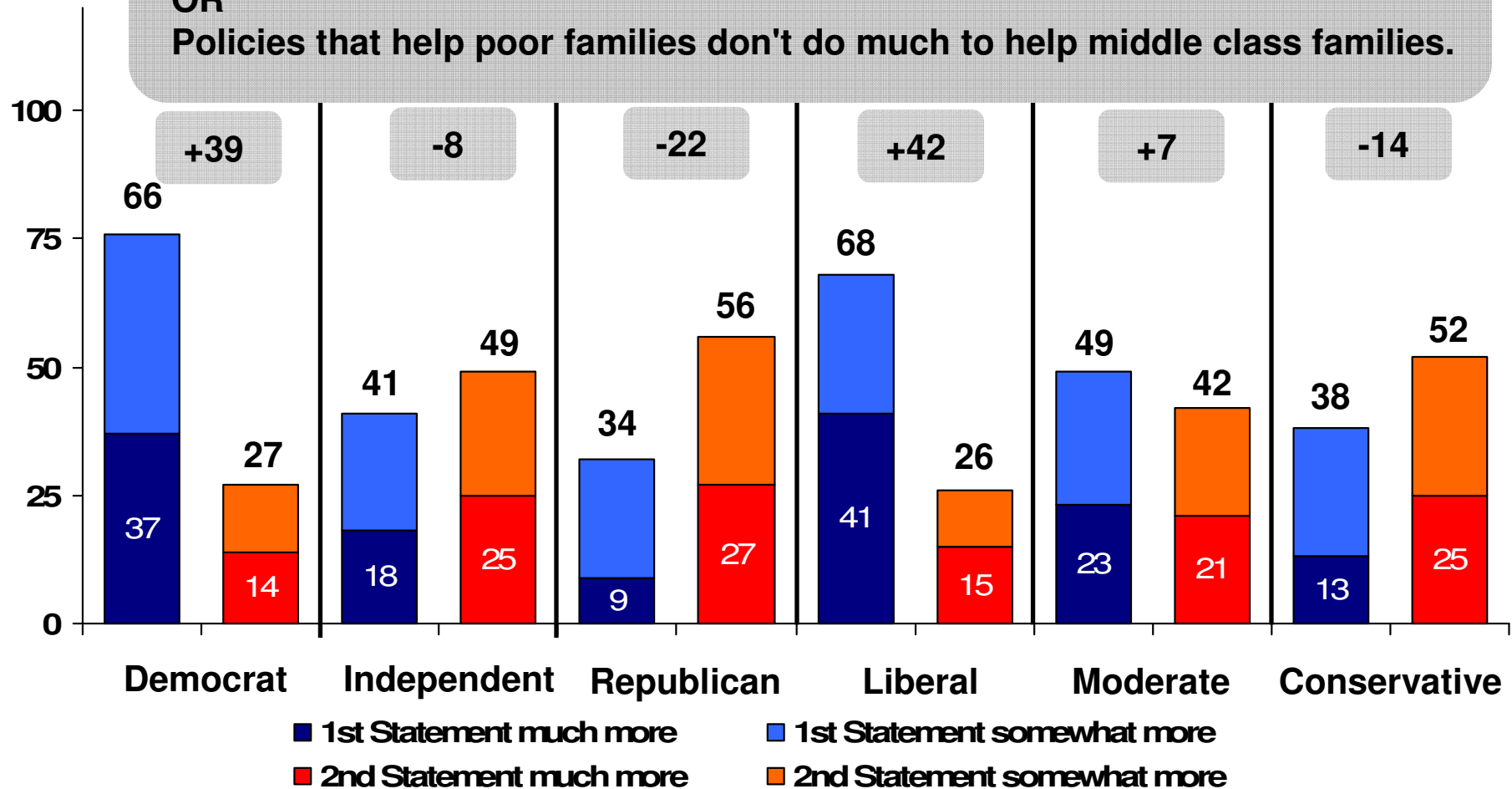


# Sharp Partisan and Ideological Divides When Focus Shifts to Policies

Policies that help poor families also help to make middle class families more secure.

OR

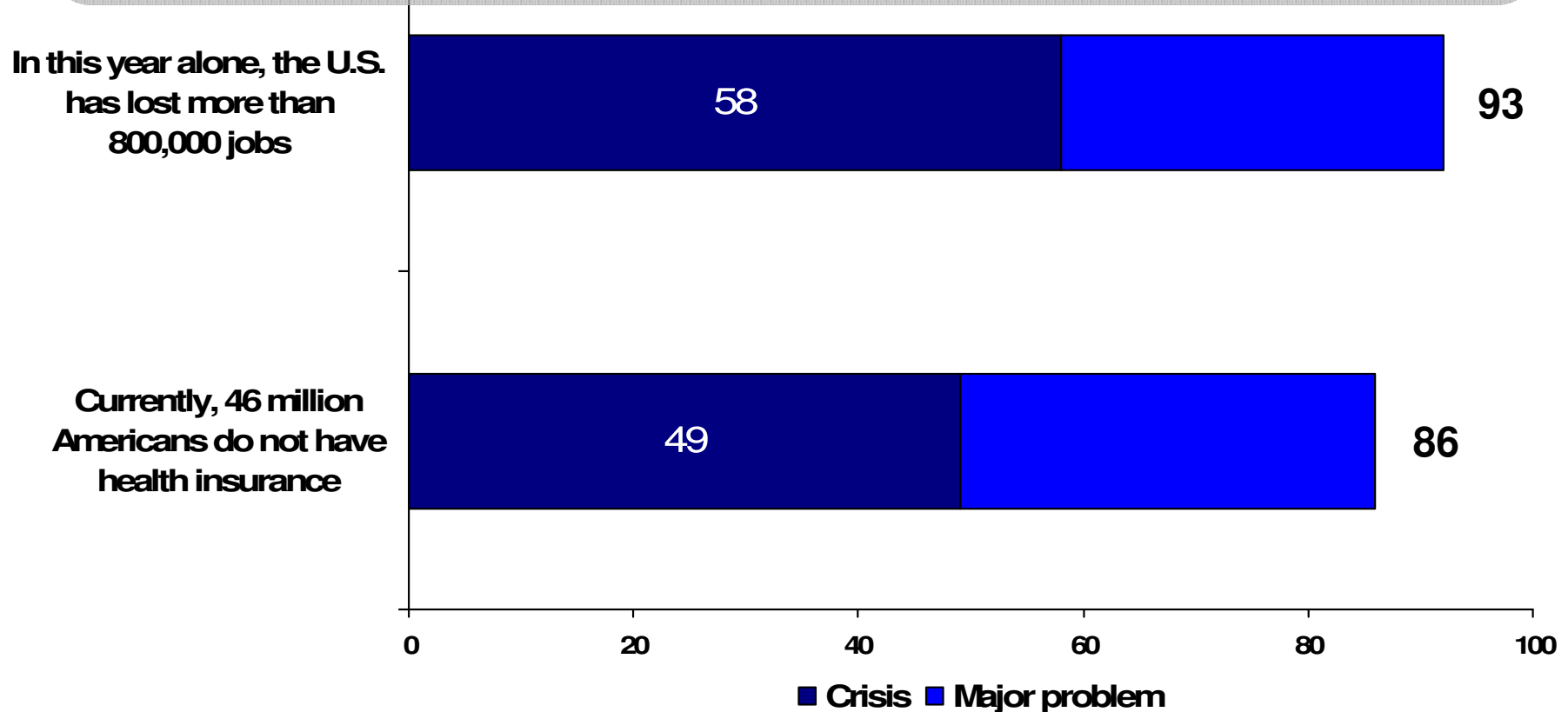
Policies that help poor families don't do much to help middle class families.





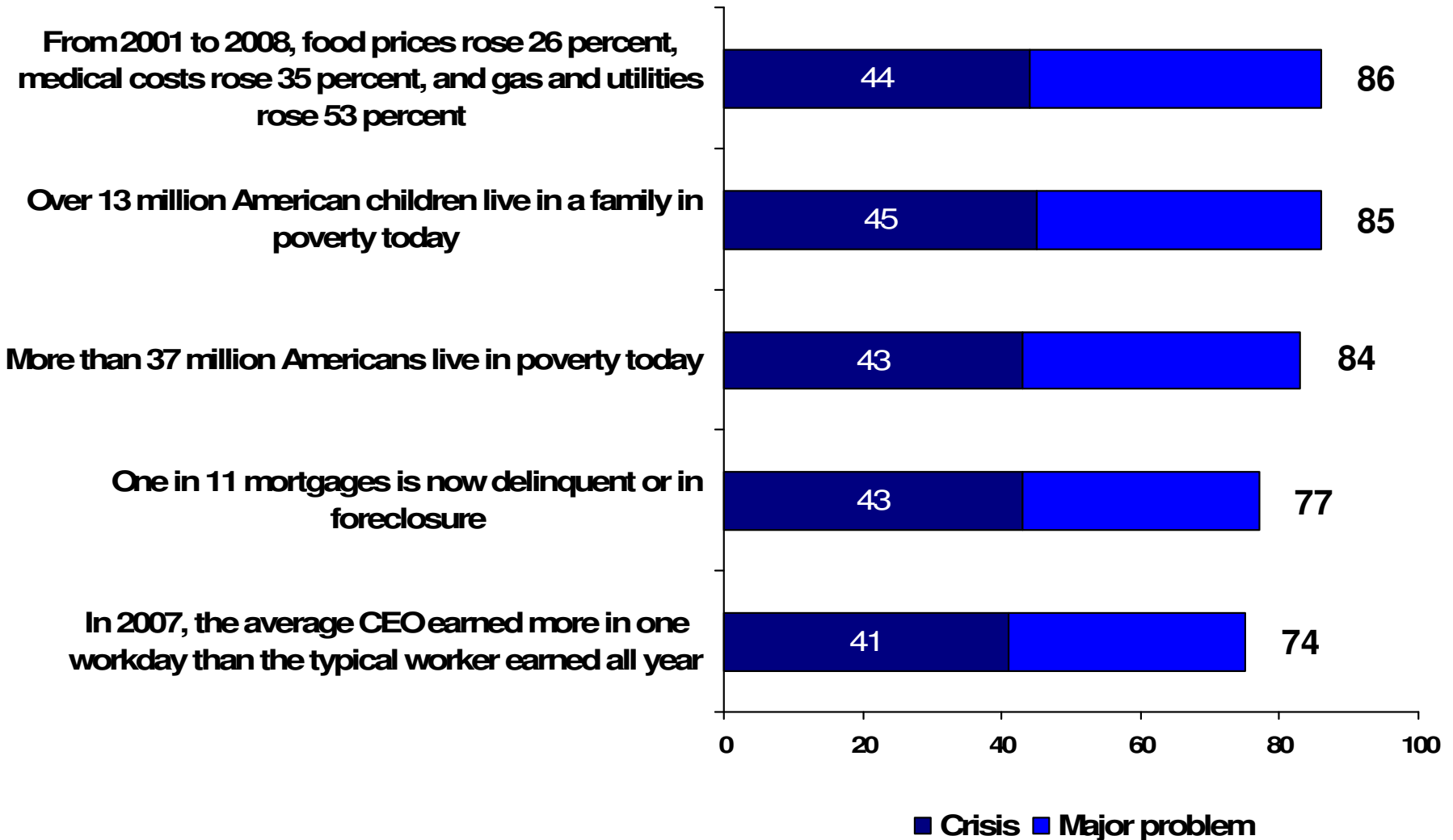
# Jobs and Health Care Emerge as Most Urgent Priorities

I am going to read you a list of facts about the American economy today. For each one, I want you to tell me whether you personally think this fact represents a crisis that our country must address immediately, a major problem that must be addressed soon, a minor problem that should be addressed eventually, or is this not a significant problem for the country?



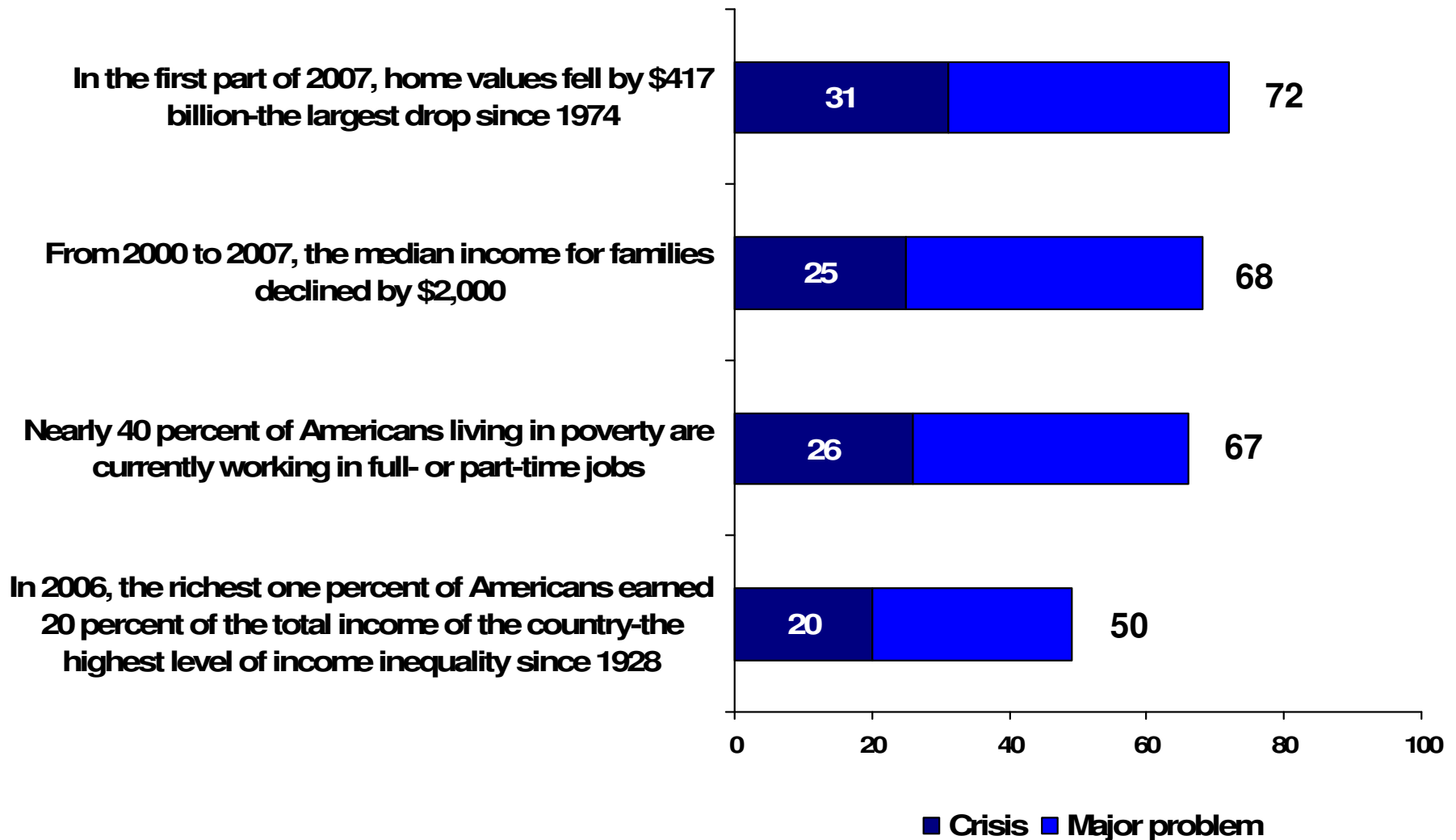


# Second Tier of Priorities Reflects Concern About a Range of Hardships





# Third Tier of Priorities





# Framing and Policies



# Ideological Frame Most Effective Against Conservatives

*I'd like you to please rate the argument on a scale of 0 to 10, with 0 meaning that argument is not at all convincing to you as a way to reduce poverty and 10 meaning the argument is very convincing to you as a way to reduce poverty.*

**Poverty is primarily a failure of government policy-something is wrong with our political system when the wealthy get huge tax breaks while millions of workers can't earn enough to stay out of poverty. To cut poverty, we must end the "trickle-down" and "on your own" mentality of the last eight years by paying workers a living wage; making corporations and the rich contribute their fair share; investing in infrastructure and jobs; providing affordable health care; and creating better schools and job opportunities for young people.**

**Poverty is primarily a failure of personal responsibility-any one in this country can make it into the middle class if they work hard enough and make the right decisions in life. To cut poverty, we need to ensure that poor people take responsibility for their own choices, reduce their dependency on welfare and government handouts, and pursue policies that promote work and strong two-parent families**

8-10      10      **Mean**

55      32      **7.1**

35      18      **5.8**



## Economic Frame Very Strong Against Conservative Frame

*I'd like you to please rate the argument on a scale of 0 to 10, with 0 meaning that argument is not at all convincing to you as a way to reduce poverty and 10 meaning the argument is very convincing to you as a way to reduce poverty.*

8-  
10      10      **Mean**

**Poverty is primarily a failure of our economy-something is wrong with our economy when a person working full time can't earn enough to stay out of poverty. To cut poverty, we must ensure that our economy works for everyone by paying workers a living wage; making corporations and the rich contribute their fair share; investing in infrastructure and jobs; providing affordable health care; and creating better schools and job opportunities for young people.**

54      35      **7.0**

**Poverty is primarily a failure of personal responsibility-any one in this country can make it into the middle class if they work hard enough and make the right decisions in life. To cut poverty, we need to ensure that poor people take responsibility for their own choices, reduce their dependency on welfare and government handouts, and pursue policies that promote work and strong two-parent families**

38      19      **6.1**



## Moral Frame Strong, but Clearly Less Effective

*I'd like you to please rate the argument on a scale of 0 to 10, with 0 meaning that argument is not at all convincing to you as a way to reduce poverty and 10 meaning the argument is very convincing to you as a way to reduce poverty.*

8-  
10      10      **Mean**

**Poverty is primarily a failure of our nation's moral values-something is wrong with our society when we produce nearly \$13 trillion in goods and services each year yet 37 million Americans remain in poverty. To cut poverty, we must do more to promote the common good and ensure that all Americans-not just the privileged and well-to-do-have the right to adequate food and housing, health care, education, and employment that pays a living wage.**

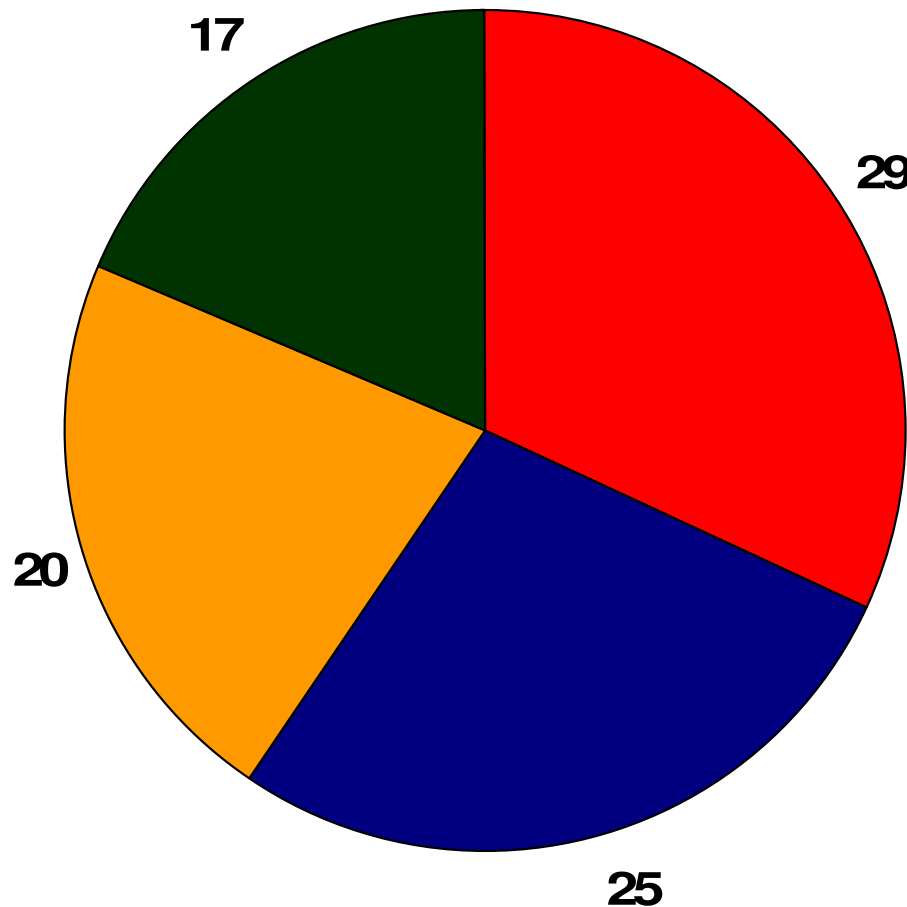
46      23      **6.8**

**Poverty is primarily a failure of personal responsibility-any one in this country can make it into the middle class if they work hard enough and make the right decisions in life. To cut poverty, we need to ensure that poor people take responsibility for their own choices, reduce their dependency on welfare and government handouts, and pursue policies that promote work and strong two-parent families**

42      22      **6.1**



# Jobs and Responsibility Themes Stand Out in Open-Ended Recall



## ■ Work/Jobs/Wages

- People need work
- Need to create jobs
- Need fair wages
- Raise minimum wage

## ■ Personal Responsibility/Less Government

- Poor people need to take responsibility
- Shouldn't rely on government
- Two parent family

## ■ Other Policy

- Education
- Health care for all
- Improve infrastructure

## ■ Progressive Values

- Rich should pay more
- Government should help people more
- We need to help others
- Produce trillions; people in poverty



# Jobs, Better Wages Critical for Reducing Poverty

*Now, I'm going to read you some specific policy solutions that have been proposed to help reduce poverty in this country. For each one, please tell me whether you would support or oppose that particular policy solution.*

**Strongly Support**    **Total Support**

**Invest in green jobs to help build alternative energy needs and make our buildings and homes more energy efficient**

**71**

**91**

**Increase the minimum wage and make sure it rises with inflation**

**65**

**84**

**Help low wage workers afford quality child care**

**64**

**91**



## Health Care and Education Very Important

*Now, I'm going to read you some specific policy solutions that have been proposed to help reduce poverty in this country. For each one, please tell me whether you would support or oppose that particular policy solution.*

|   | <b>Strongly Support</b> | <b>Total Support</b> |
|---|-------------------------|----------------------|
| <b>Expand publicly funded scholarships to help more families afford college</b>                 | 64                      | 86                   |
| <b>Provide quality, affordable health care coverage for every American</b>                      | 64                      | 82                   |
| <b>Expand nutrition assistance to provide more families with healthy food and enough to eat</b> | 58                      | 87                   |



## Responsibility and Values Essential Part of Solution

*Now, I'm going to read you some specific policy solutions that have been proposed to help reduce poverty in this country. For each one, please tell me whether you would support or oppose that particular policy solution.*

|   | <b>Strongly Support</b> | <b>Total Support</b> |
|---|-------------------------|----------------------|
| <b>Encourage reductions in teen pregnancy</b> | <b>80</b>               | <b>91</b>            |
| <b>Encourage marriage</b>                     | <b>50</b>               | <b>70</b>            |



## Righting Wrongs of Current Financial Climate Attracts Support

*Now, I'm going to read you some specific policy solutions that have been proposed to help reduce poverty in this country. For each one, please tell me whether you would support or oppose that particular policy solution.*

|  | <b>Strongly Support</b> | <b>Total Support</b> |
|--|-------------------------|----------------------|
| <b>Stop predatory lending practices that target low income families with high cost loans</b> | 70                      | 83                   |
| <b>Help struggling homeowners refinance mortgages on affordable terms</b>                    | 50                      | 82                   |



## Expanded Tax Credits, UI Supported, But With Less Strength

*Now, I'm going to read you some specific policy solutions that have been proposed to help reduce poverty in this country. For each one, please tell me whether you would support or oppose that particular policy solution.*

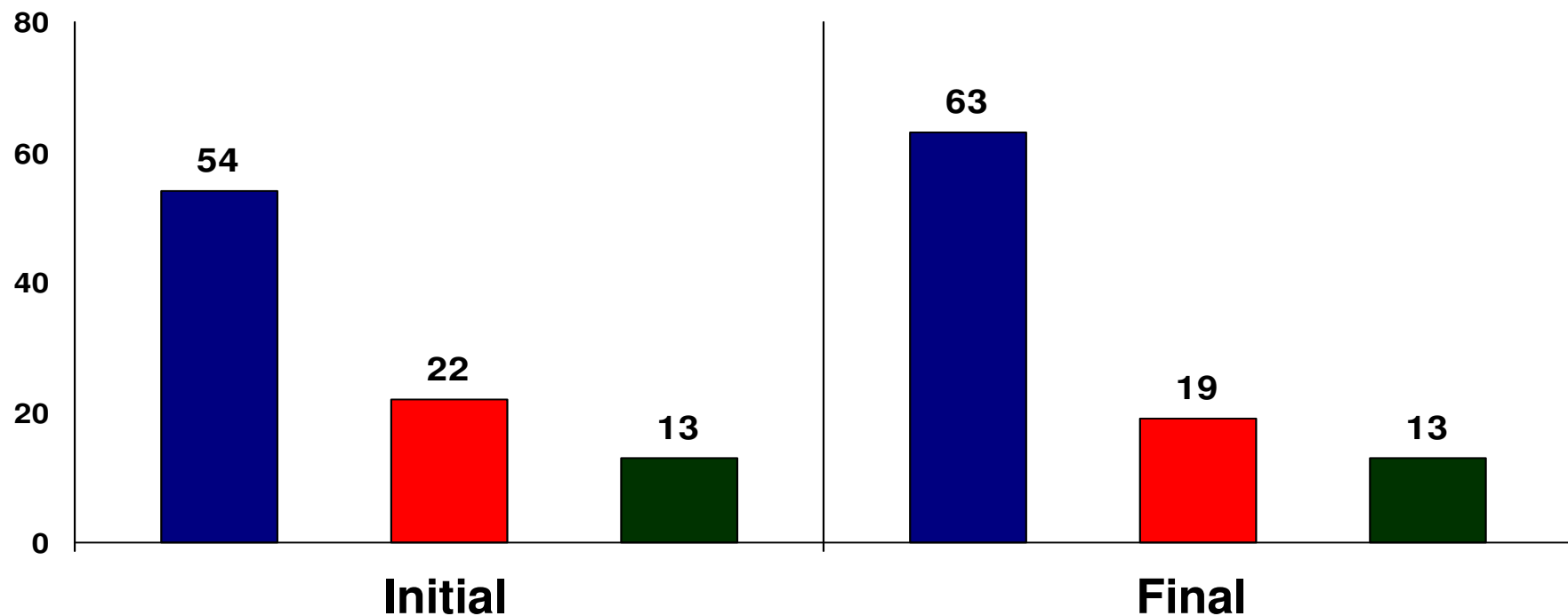
|   | <b>Strongly Support</b> | <b>Total Support</b> |
|---|-------------------------|----------------------|
| <b>Expand tax credits targeted to families with low wage jobs</b>                         | <b>49</b>               | <b>81</b>            |
| <b>Expand tax credits for more low income families with children</b>                      | <b>48</b>               | <b>80</b>            |
| <b>Extend the eligibility period for unemployment insurance during economic downturns</b> | <b>47</b>               | <b>83</b>            |
| <b>Expand unemployment insurance to cover more low income workers</b>                     | <b>36</b>               | <b>72</b>            |



# Movement Among Undecideds Produces Increased Final Support

Would you support or oppose the next President and Congress setting a national goal to cut poverty in the United States in half within ten years (and strengthen the middle class )?

■ Solid support      ■ Conditional support      ■ Solid oppose





## Shift on Poverty Reduction Goal\*

- **Liberal/Progressive/Moderate Republicans: +16 shift**
  - ◆ 36 to 52 percent
- **\$30K - \$50K: +14 shift**
  - ◆ 54 to 68 percent
- **Large Households (5+ in household): +14 shift**
  - ◆ 53 to 67 percent
- **Married with kids: +13 shift**
  - ◆ 51 to 64 percent
- **\$10K - \$30K: +12 shift**
  - ◆ 61 to 73 percent

*\*Increase in % 'Solid Support'*