

# New poll shows strong support for increased minimum wage and assault weapons ban

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The results of a new national UMass Poll released today show strong public support for an assault weapons ban and a broad consensus in favor of a higher federal minimum wage. Additionally, President Barack Obama enjoys high personal favorability, while Speaker John Boehner is viewed as equally unfavorable.

Respondents were asked about a variety of topics, including which issues they viewed as most important, about how favorably they view various [government officials](#), and their personal views on a number of hot-topic issues such as [minimum wage](#), [gun control](#), the Voting Rights Act, and immigration. The poll also took a somewhat unique visual approach to a handful of issues questions, showing a random set of respondents images relating to the issue at hand.

When asked whether they support or oppose a proposed ban on assault weapons, overall support for an assault weapons ban is strong, with 53 percent of Americans expressing support for the ban and 31 percent opposed. Those shown a photo of an AR-15 rifle along with the question responded at a higher rate in support of a ban (57 percent) than those not shown the photo (51 percent).

- The photo appeared to have the greatest effect depending on [political ideology](#).
- The AR-15 image galvanized support for an assault weapons ban among liberals, and stronger opposition to the ban among

ideological conservatives.

- When asked the question without the photo, 24 percent of conservatives responded that they "opposed" the ban and 26 percent "strongly opposed" the ban. When shown the photo with the question, however, opposition solidified to 47 percent "strongly" opposing the ban, with just 12 percent simply opposing.
- Likewise, without the photo 52 percent of liberals responded that they "strongly support" and 34 percent "support" the ban, but that number shifted to 67 percent strongly support versus 19 percent support when shown the AR-15 image.
- Among moderates, the image appeared to have greatly influenced their feelings – overall support/oppose/neither numbers without the photo were 48/33/19, but when shown the image the results were 67/24/10.

"It isn't always clear what Americans have in mind when they are asked to evaluate a ban on assault weapons," said Brian Schaffner, chair of the political science department at the University of Massachusetts Amherst and director of the UMass Poll. "Showing an image of an assault weapon did increase support for the ban."

**Regarding the federal minimum wage**, a bipartisan consensus believes that the floor for hourly pay should be higher, nearly matching the \$9/hour recommended by President Obama.

- On average, those surveyed thought that the current minimum wage is nearly 50 cents higher than its actual rate of \$7.25/hour,
- On average, respondents' preferred minimum wage rate was \$8.87/hour.
- Even Republican respondents indicated that the wage should be higher, with their answers averaging out to \$8.13/hr. This is

lower than the Democrat respondents' preferred \$9.48/hour, but still nearly a full dollar higher than the current rate.

Jesse Rhodes, assistant professor of political science at UMass Amherst, said "There seems to be across the board support for a minimum wage that is higher than what we have today, though how much higher is a matter of some debate as Republicans would like to see a much more modest increase than Democrats."

Another question with a visual element polled concerns about voting lines on election day. Respondents were asked to rank the importance of the issue, and were either shown an image of black voters standing in a long line, a photo of white voters standing in a long line, or no image at all. Overall, and in most subsets of respondents, significantly less people found the issue "very important" when shown the image of black voters, although the numbers for "somewhat important" generally increased when shown the same image.

**On immigration,** Americans seem to vastly over-estimate how many illegal immigrants come to the U.S. in a given year.

- When asked how many illegal immigrants they think entered the U.S. in 2012, the average guess was 2.32 million. Yet, estimates suggest fewer than 500,000 entered the U.S. in 2012.
- The results suggest that Americans also over-estimate the number of legal immigrants who enter the country each year. While approximately 1 million entered legally in 2012, the average guess was 1.72 million.
- The UMass Poll asked respondents how many immigrants they think should be legally allowed to enter the country each year. Few Americans—only 3 percent—want to admit no legal immigrants.

- However, almost one-in-four chose a number of legal immigration of less than 500,000 per year, and only one-in-five chose a level of legal immigration greater than 3 million per year.

"These results suggest that rhetoric concerning the 'invasion' of illegal immigrants may have influenced the manner in which Americans think about the scale of both illegal and legal immigration to the U.S," stated Tatishe Nteta, assistant professor of political science and associate director of the UMass Poll. "Regardless, while most Americans view the United States as a 'nation of immigrants,' our results indicate that a substantial portion of the public desires an ebb to the flow of new legal immigrants coming to our shores."

When surveyed about their opinions of government officials ("What is your opinion of the following individuals?") with the options of Very Favorable, Favorable, Unfavorable, Very Unfavorable, and Not Sure:

- President [Barack Obama](#) has a topline favorability of 51 percent, versus 43 percent unfavorable.
- Examined by [respondents'](#) ideology, 81 percent of liberals and 57 percent of moderates give the President a favorable rating, while 80 percent of conservatives and 38 percent of moderates view him unfavorably.
- Seventeen percent of conservatives view the President favorably, while only 8 percent of [liberals](#) view him unfavorably. His favorability is split more distinctly among party identification, with 88 percent of Democrats viewing him favorably, while 87 percent of Republicans hold a negative opinion of him.
- Speaker of the House John Boehner polled the lowest among those surveyed, tallying a 51 percent overall unfavorable rating to only a 25 percent overall favorability.
- 39 percent of Republicans and 41 percent of ideological

conservatives view Speaker Boehner negatively, while 51 percent of independents and 56 of overall moderates hold unfavorable views of the Speaker.

- Early in his tenure, Secretary of State John Kerry touts a 41 percent favorable and 35 percent unfavorable rating. Nearly one-in-four Americans do not offer an opinion of Kerry, though, a number that remains high across party ID and ideology.

The poll of 800 adults was conducted March 11-14 by YouGov America under the direction of UMass Poll at the University of Massachusetts Amherst ([www.umass.edu/poll](http://www.umass.edu/poll)). YouGov was rated as one of the most accurate pollsters of the 2012 election by Nate Silver of FiveThirtyEight.com. The margin of error for the poll is 5 percent. The margin of error would be larger for subpopulations.

**More information:** Toplines for the poll can be found at:

[www.umass.edu/poll/pdfs/20130318\\_Data.pdf](http://www.umass.edu/poll/pdfs/20130318_Data.pdf)

Crosstabs for the poll can be found at:

[www.umass.edu/poll/pdfs/20130318\\_Crosstabs.pdf](http://www.umass.edu/poll/pdfs/20130318_Crosstabs.pdf)

Provided by University of Massachusetts Amherst

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