

Economic Anxiety and the American Dream:

*Is the Dream at Risk in the 21st
Century?*

*Presented by Celinda Lake,
Lake Research Partners*

Summary Description of Methods

- *This is a unique approach to the study of the American Dream, not a traditional survey. Starting with focus groups and then 2 phone surveys (with the use of open ended questions)—we measured how people think about the American Dream and what their values are.*
- Interview Dates: March 11 to 19, 2007.
- 800 interviews of a random sample of non-supervisory workers nationwide.
- Sampling error is +/- 3.5% for the full sample, higher among split sampled questions.
- 'Non-supervisory workers' are comprised of workers who are not: full-time students, retired persons, business owners or CEOs, company executives, managers/supervisors, or professionals such as doctors or lawyers, but who are: either employed or actively looking for work, work at least 20 hours per week if employed, and earn less than \$100,000 per year.
- Survey of identical size and methodology was conducted August 14-20, 2006
- Focus groups conducted between September 11 and 21, 2006 in Los Angeles, Chicago, Miami, and Houston among workers in housekeeping & janitorial services, food processing & manufacturing, construction, and port, warehouse, or transportation.

Key Summary: The Dream

- ✓ The American Dream is a core framework that integrates issues together and gives them meaning and power.
- ✓ The American Dream is rooted in the workplace, and it is tied to the job. Work is seen as a value, not just a means to an end. The American Dream is a powerful expression of values, not just an outcome of work.
- ✓ Work is a core value. People believe that hard work should be rewarded and respected.
- ✓ The cornerstones of the American Dream include:
 - ✓ wages that support a family,
 - ✓ affordable quality health care,
 - ✓ opportunities for your children,
 - ✓ respect for the work you do, and
 - ✓ and retirement security.

Key Summary: The Dream

- ✓ **Economic security is the priority of the American workers—not as a safety net, but in terms of workers and their families achieving the economic security they deserve in return for working hard.**
- ✓ **In their own words, workers stress good jobs, opportunity for their children, hard work, and basic economic security over the achievement of wealth.**
- ✓ **Workers are increasingly pessimistic about achieving the American Dream, especially when compared to previous generations and the prospects for achieving this for the next generation.**
- ✓ **Access to training and learning opportunities are important avenues to achieve the American Dream.**

Key Summary: Anger & Anxiety

- ✓ **Workers are anxious about the state of the economy. They believe strongly that, despite the news accounts of economic growth, working families are falling behind.**
- ✓ **Their anger and anxiety is rooted in concern over the basics (health care, retirement, personal debt, paying the bill).**
- ✓ **Workers believe corporations and wealthy interests have too much power and that this is a barrier to working people achieving the American Dream.**

Key Summary: An Active Agenda

- ✓ **Workers support a strong platform of economic security to restore the American Dream, including guaranteeing affordable health care, protecting Social Security, and raising the minimum wage as the cost of living rises.**
- ✓ **Workers want Government to hold corporations accountable. They also believe that, as workers and consumers, they have a powerful role in holding corporations accountable.**
- ✓ **Workers believe that by joining together, they can produce change.**

Views on Self Identification:

*Workers have an ambivalent
reaction to the term “middle
class” as a description*

Fewer and fewer people see themselves as middle class.

"Well for me personally it would be. I think I'm more... I'm not middle class. I think I'm probably under middle class." *IL female food processing or manufacturing worker*

"Because they like, where I'm living it's like considered middle class but I don't mind. There's some people with a lot more than I've got. I consider them maybe middle class, you know with a fancier house." *IL male food processing or manufacturing worker:*

"To me it's those of us who are in a middle class. That is there are people who are rich, who have they are owners of factories. Middle class workers we have enough to have our house, car, food and to live somewhat comfortably." And others are a little poorer." *CA male Hispanic building services or hospitality worker*

Many have trouble with class designations.

"[If you heard someone say lower middle class.] I'd probably swear at them. " -IL male food processing or manufacturing worker

"It's America not England you know. We don't have that class system. We shouldn't have a class system like that." -FL male port, warehouse or transportation worker

"I don't see myself as, I don't, I'm not referring to high class, middle class, or low class. It's just us, it relates to work." -CA female Hispanic building services or hospitality worker

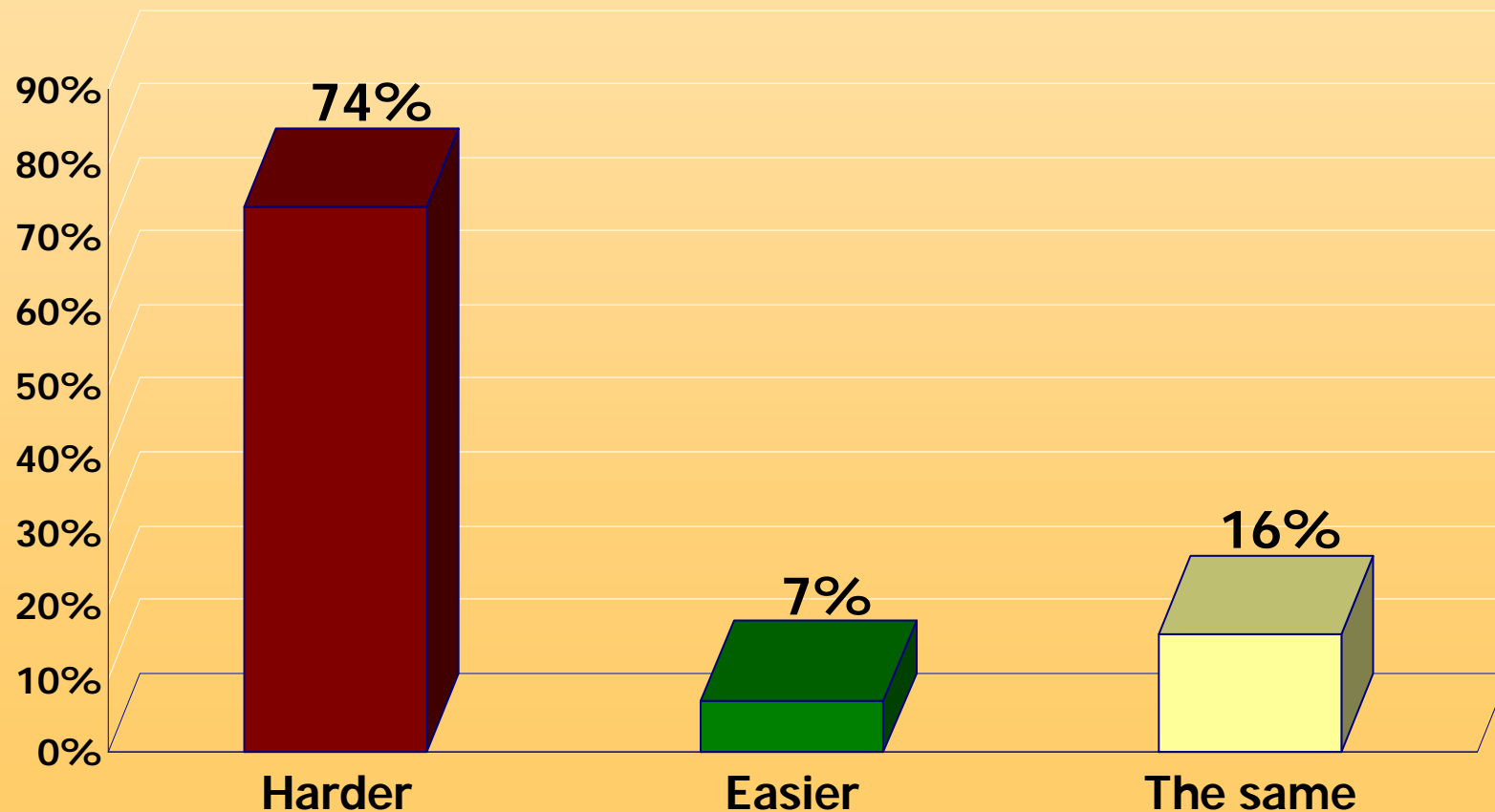
"See I find I hate that term middle. It's like you know singling people are you upper, lower, middle. You know you're a worker. We're all workers you know. We all work together. You shouldn't think below anything else you know." -IL male food processing or manufacturing worker

Views on the American Dream:

*A Dream of security and
peace of mind that's getting
harder to reach*

Nearly three out of four believe the American Dream is becoming harder to reach.

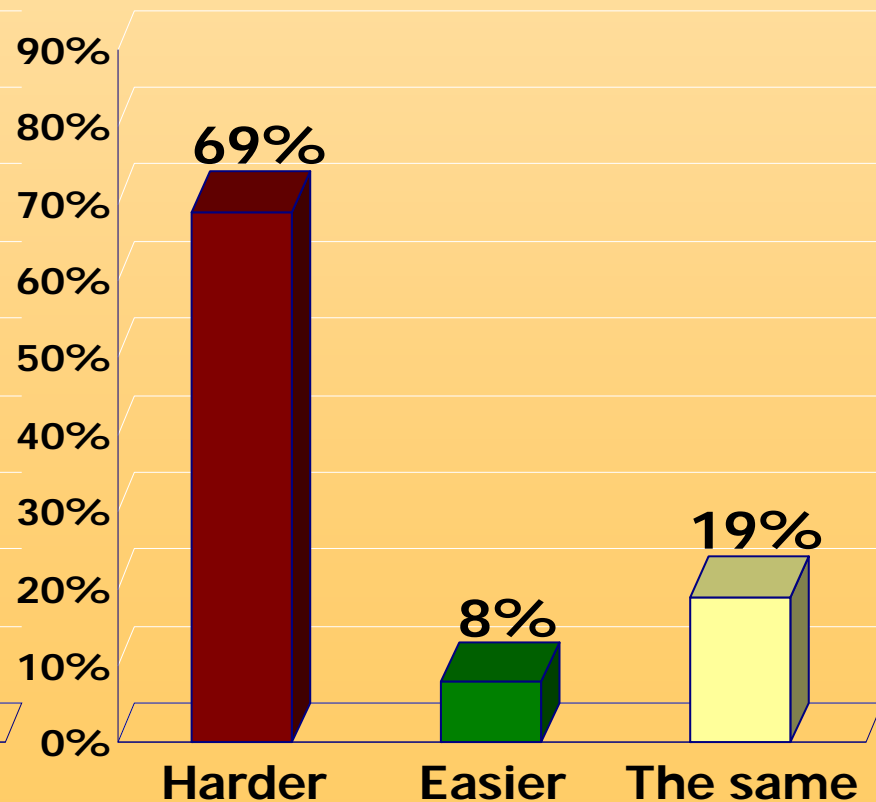
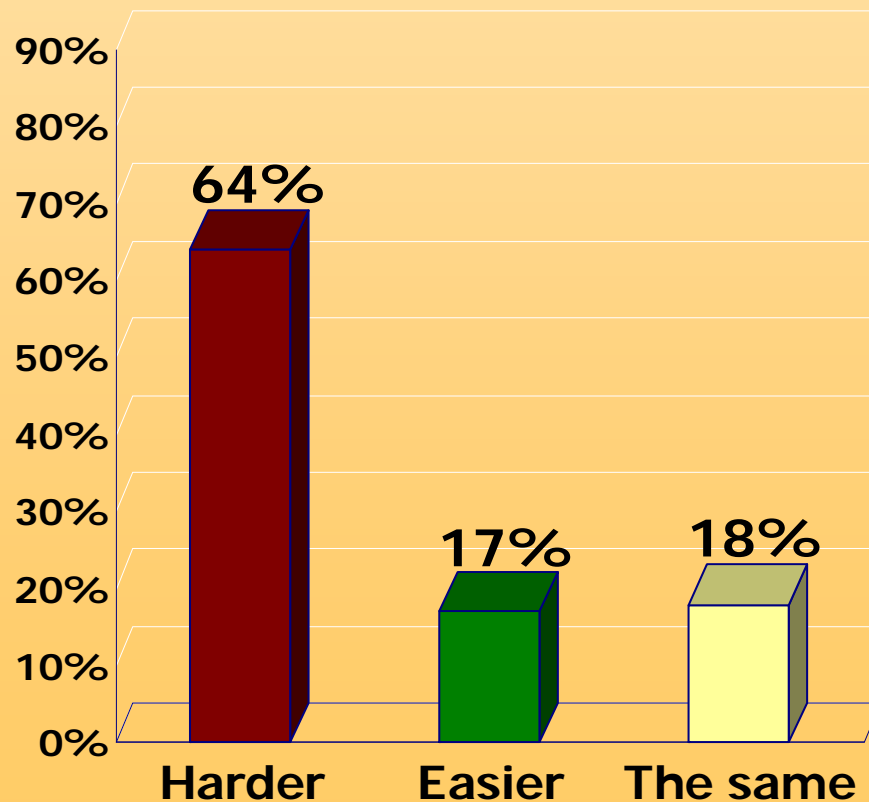
*Do you think it is becoming harder or easier these days to achieve the American Dream, or is it about the same?**



Two thirds also believe it is harder to achieve the American Dream than it was for their parents, and it will be harder for the next generation.

Compared to your parents' generation, do you think it is becoming harder or easier to achieve the American Dream, or is it about the same?

Looking to the next generation, the way things are going now, do you feel the American Dream will be easier to reach than today, harder to reach, or will it be the same?



* Asked of half of respondents

In their own words, the American Dream is:

What does the American Dream mean to you? (Example verbatim quotes)

"Keeping your head above water, not worry about going into debt and trying to survive."

"To have a stable home, career, wages that match the cost of living, be able to afford gas for the automobile, and being able to provide for your family's welfare and well-being."

"Equal opportunity for public education, higher education, employment and economic growth, enabling one to become a home owner."

"Freedom - right to an education, right to excel; the sky is the limit, opportunity to better yourself."

"Taking care our children and our children's children."

"Being able to watch my children do better than me."

"Work hard, get a decent job, have secure health care and benefits."

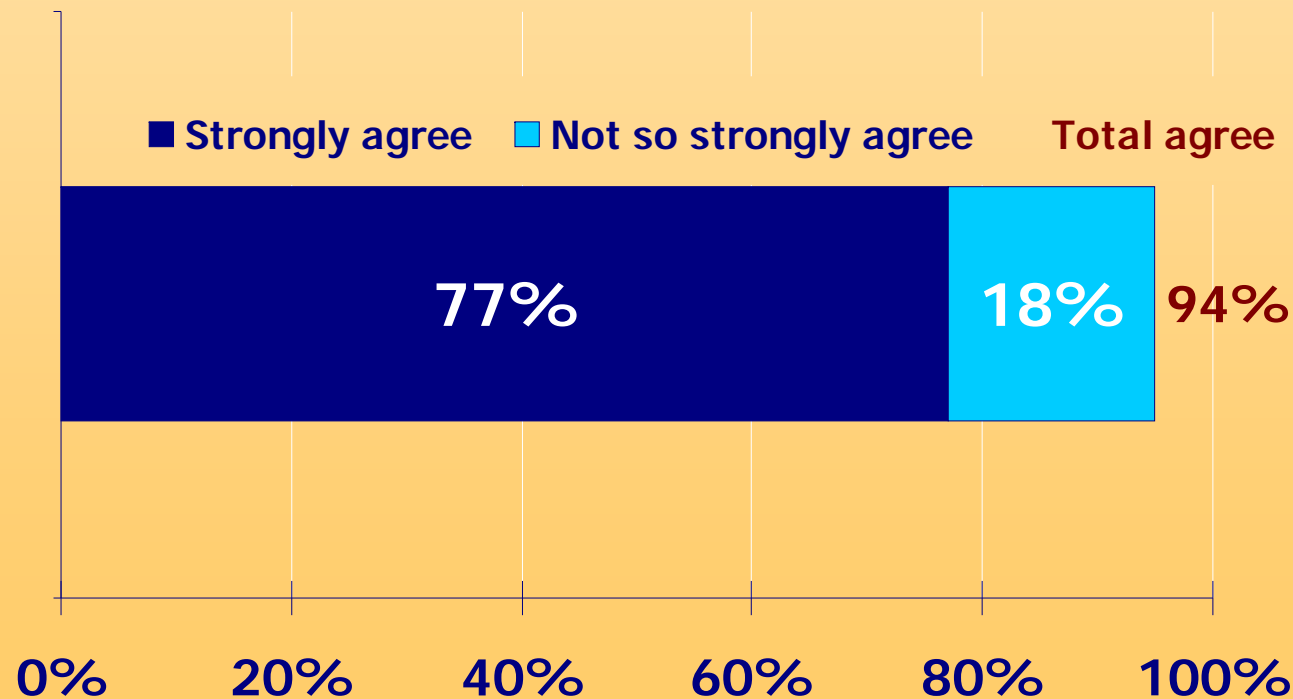
"It means for every person to have a home, health care, & food."

"To be able to survive after retirement, to be able to hold on to what I have after I retire."

"Nothing to worry about, like bills never late or payments."

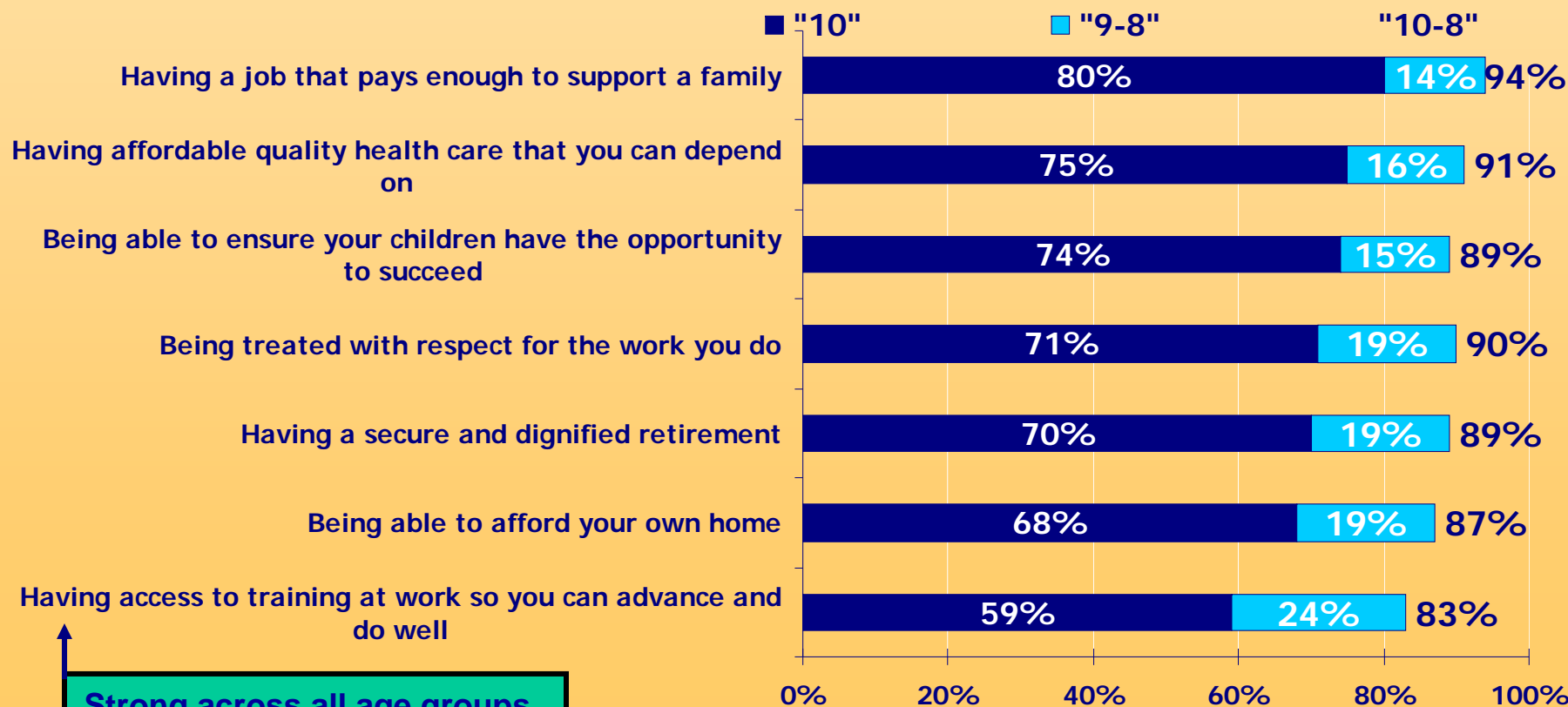
Hard work is a core value and key part of the American Dream.

In America, hard work should lead to economic security for your family.



The core of the American Dream lies in the basics of economic security AND work that is respected.

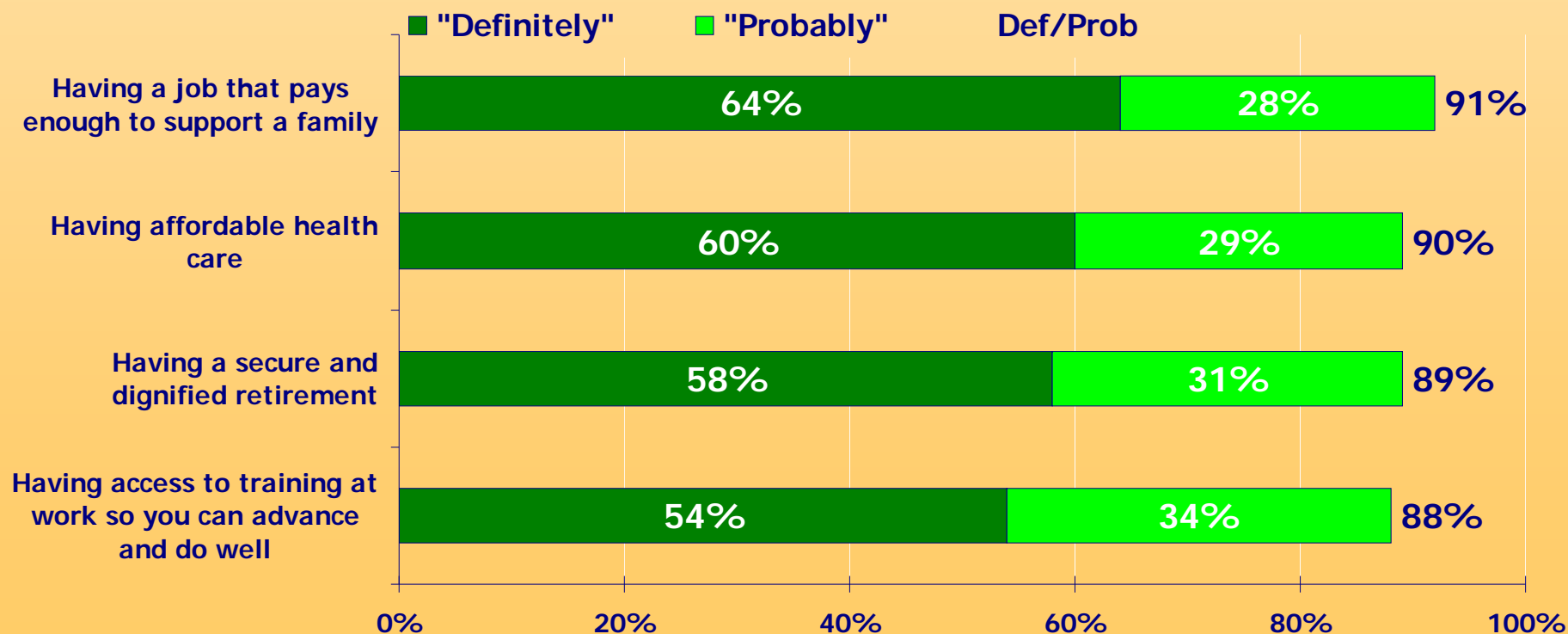
I'm going to read some goals that some people say are important for reaching the American Dream. For each one, please rate how important it is for you personally as part of the American Dream. Again use a scale from 0 to 10, where 10 means it is an extremely important part of the American Dream for you, and 0 means it is not important at all, and 5 is neutral.



Strong across all age groups

Workers believe joining a union will help them get quality health care and job training.

I'm going to read some goals that people say are important for reaching the American Dream. For each one, please tell me whether working people joining together in unions or worker associations would help achieve that goal or not.



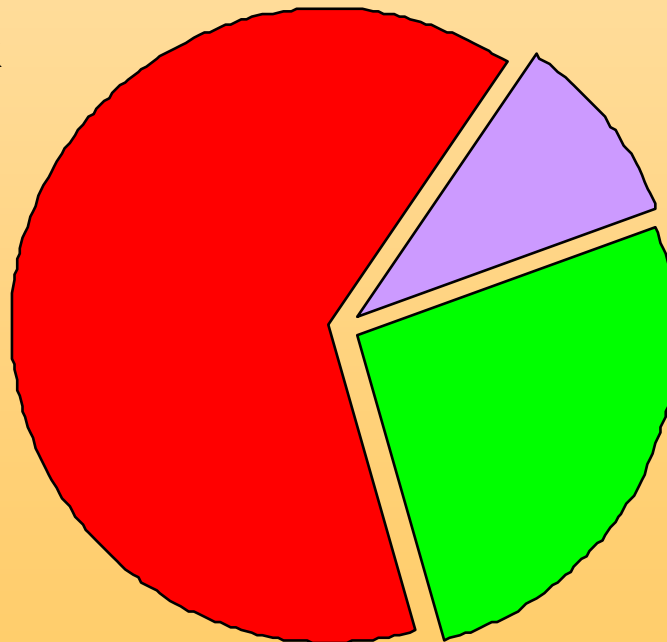
Anger and Anxiety:

*Day to day economic concerns
underscore anxiety and
increased corporate power
underscores the anger*

Workers are deeply pessimistic about the state of the country's economy.

Generally speaking, do you think that the economy in this country is going in the RIGHT DIRECTION, or do you feel things have gotten pretty seriously off on the WRONG TRACK?

Wrong Track
64%



Don't know
10%

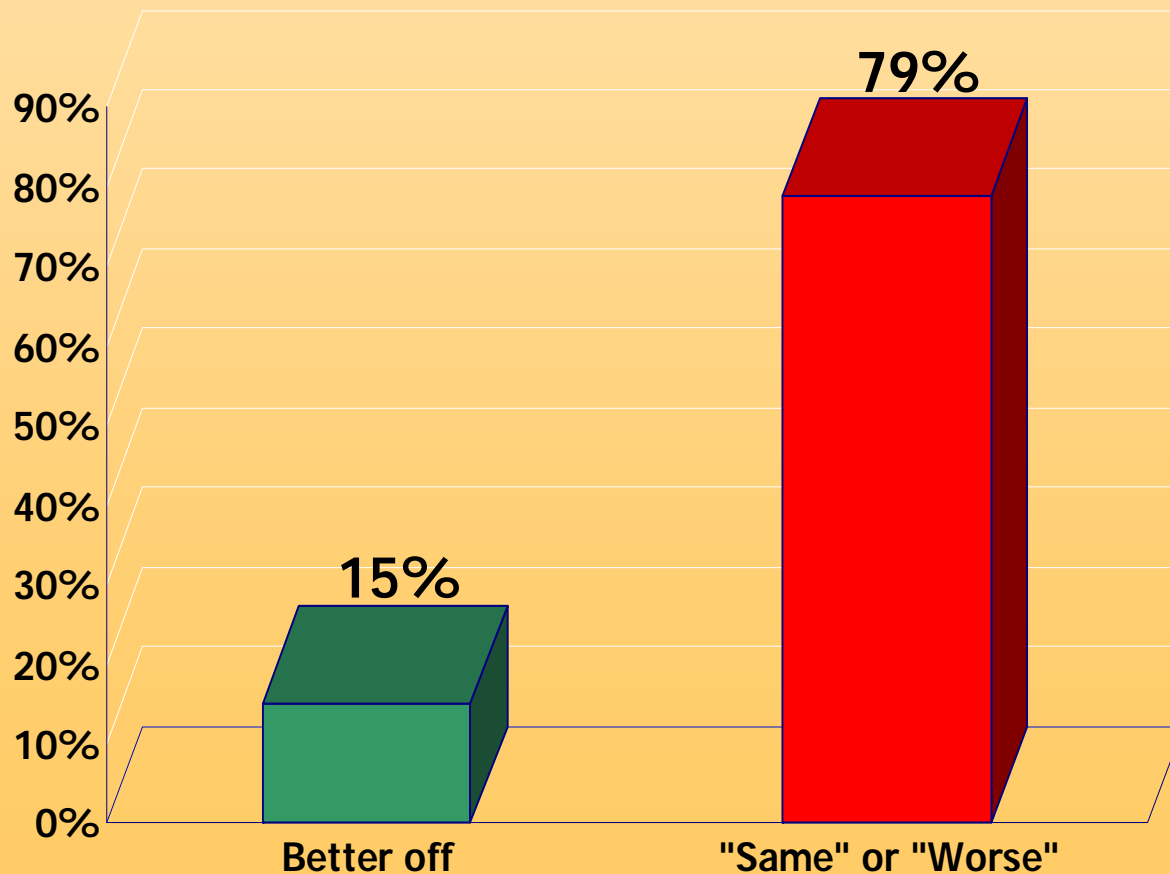
Right
Direction
26%

-From August 2006 survey:
63% Wrong track
28% Right Direction

As in August, every demographic group is net negative now on the direction of the economy.

Only 15% of workers believe the next generation will be better off.

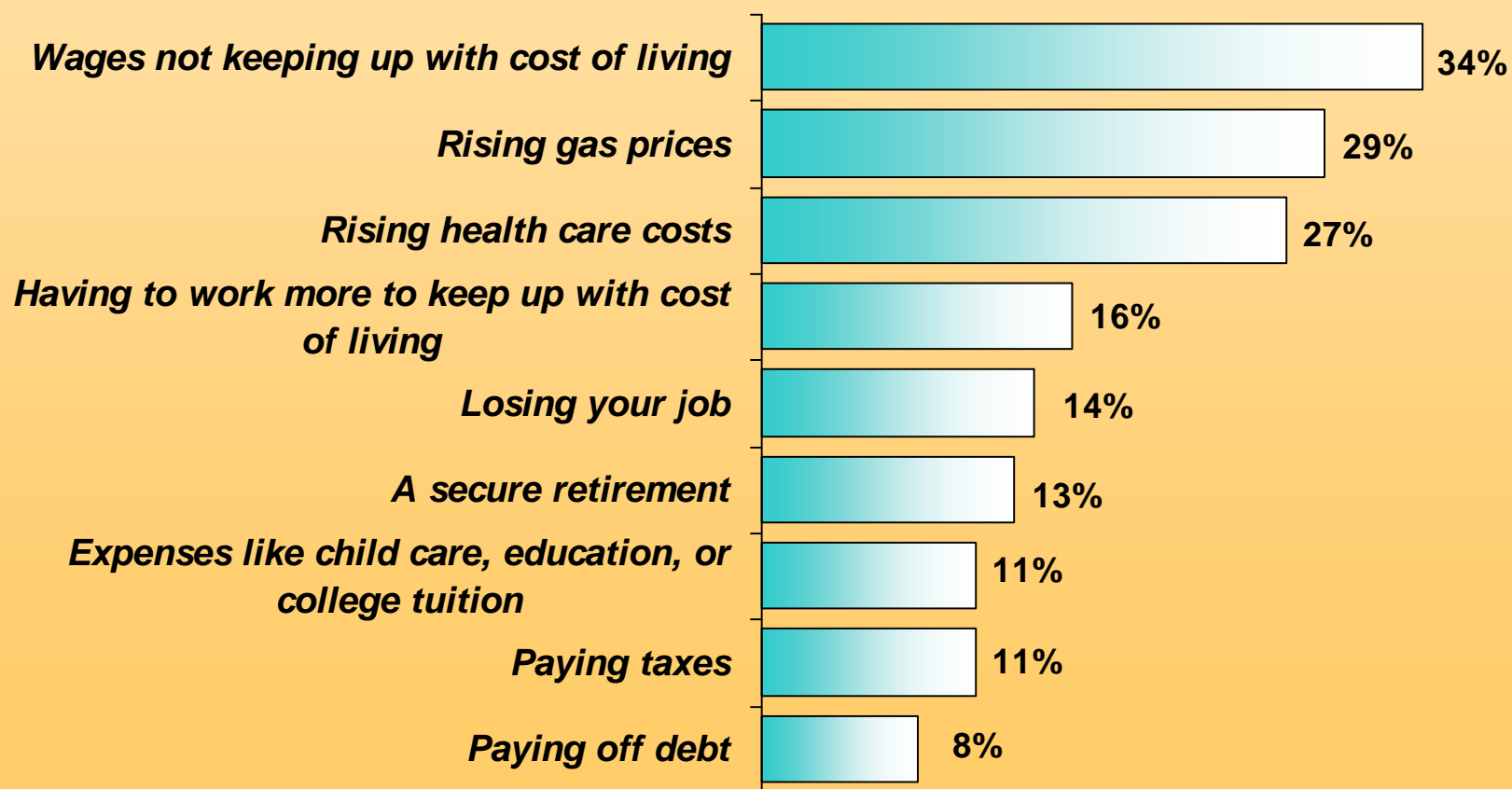
Thinking about the next generation of Americans who are children today, the way things are going, do you think economically they will be better off, worse off, or about the same as the generation of adults who are working today?



From August 2006 survey:
18% Better off
78% "Same" or "Worse"

Wages not keeping up with cost of living is the top economic concern, followed by rising gas prices and health care costs.

Thinking specifically about the economy, what two things are you personally worried about the most? Are they...



Their negative view of the economy is driven by stagnant wages and higher costs of living.

"There's no progress. There's no option. No more salary. That's it. We're static there. We all fear of being dismissed. It's and if you leave there's like ten people in line waiting to get your job." - CA male Hispanic building services or hospitality worker

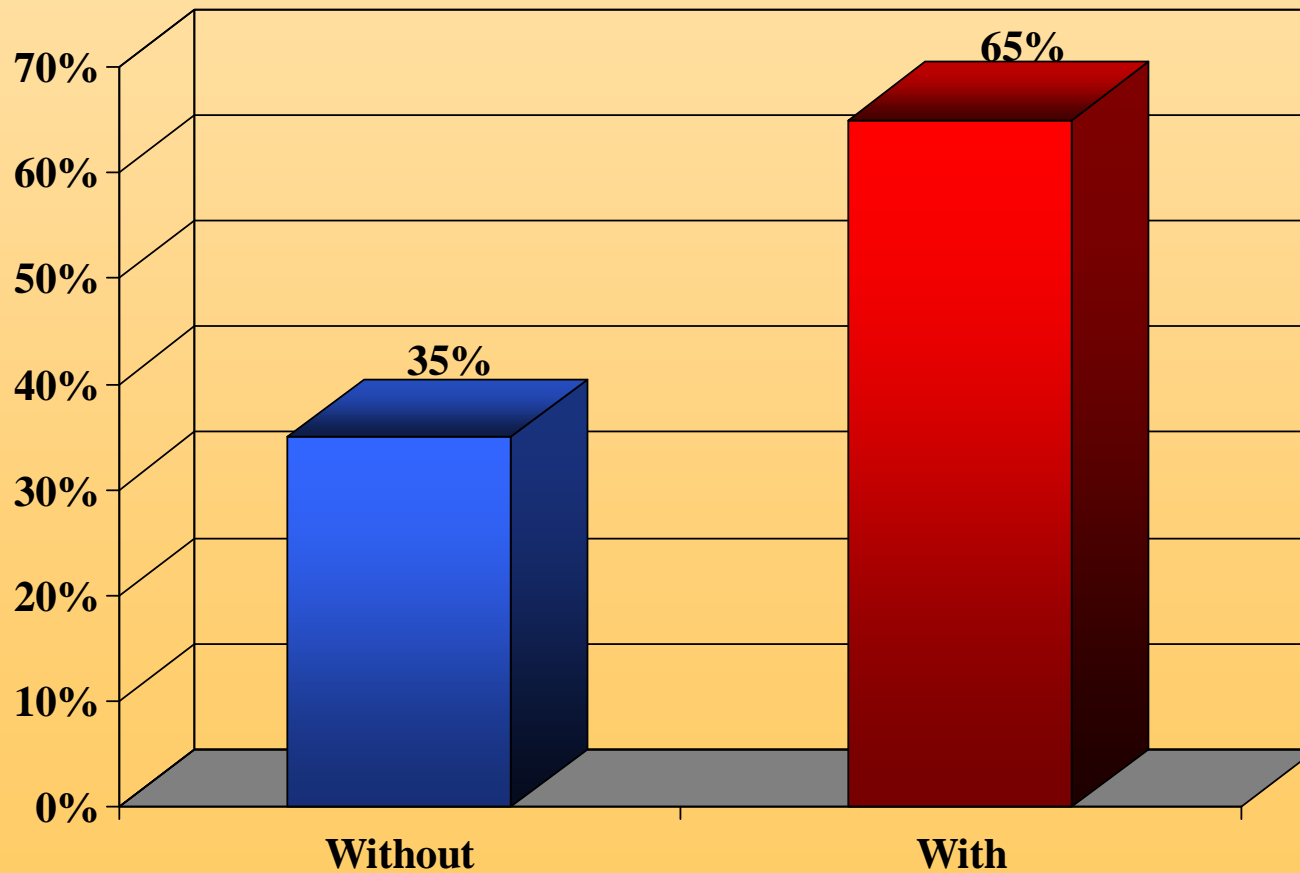
"I think it's getting tougher and tougher. Well, when I first started working, we used to get like 5% ... in raises. Okay. And now you're talking 1% to 1-1/2% and it's only going to get worse. I see it coming down to where, no, we're not getting a raise... And it used to be 2-year contract, now it's 5 years. And it's just getting worse." - IL male food processing or manufacturing worker

"The financial situation so the cost of living, it just keeps going up; food, gasoline, housing, rent." - CA female Hispanic building services or hospitality worker

"There are small companies that don't provide medical care or benefits and so if sometimes if you cut yourself or do this to yourself you have to pay. " - CA female Hispanic building services or hospitality worker

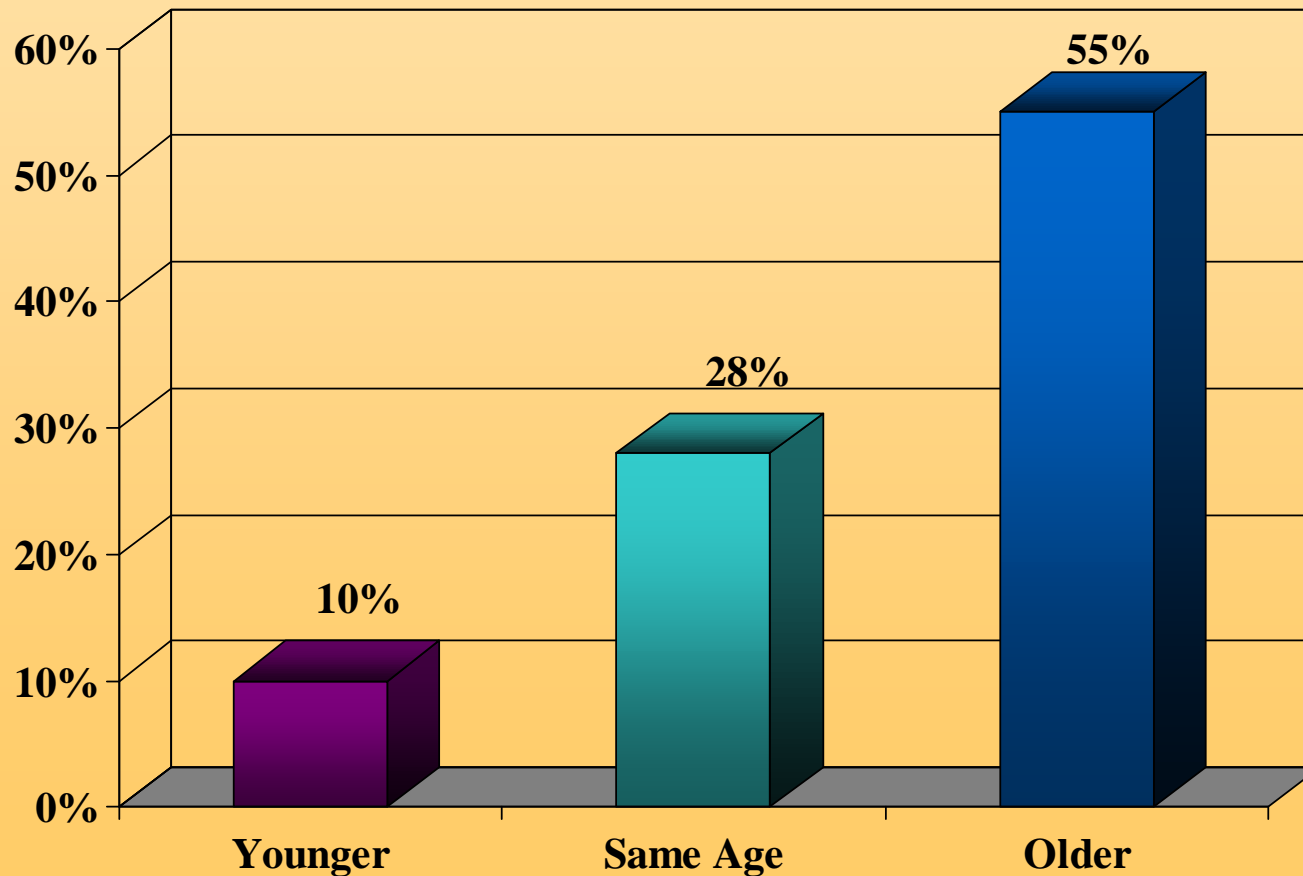
Over a third of workers have either recently or currently been without health care coverage.

Recently or Currently Without Health Care Coverage



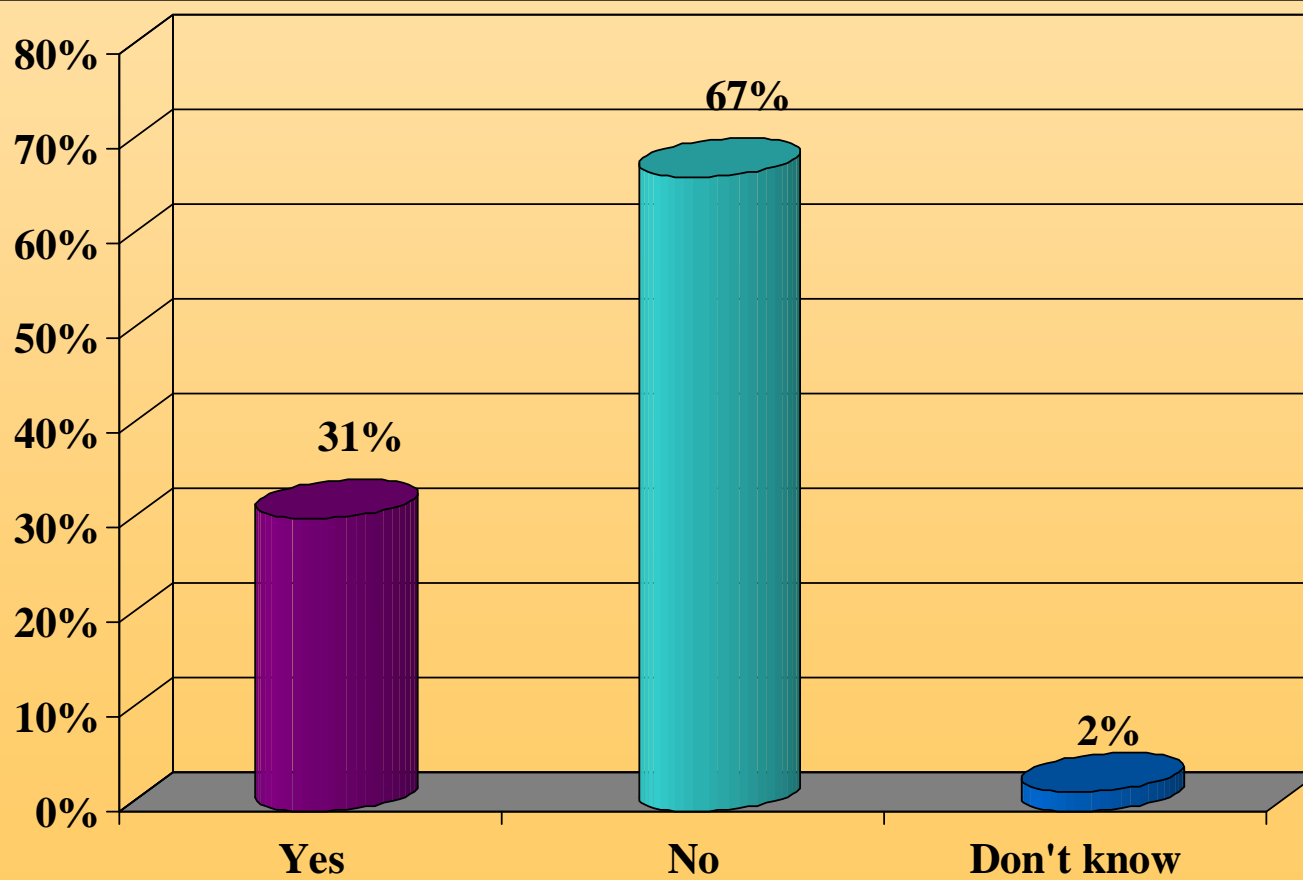
A majority of workers now believe they will retire at an older age than they expected.

Do you think that you will retire younger, the same age or older than you estimated 5 years ago?



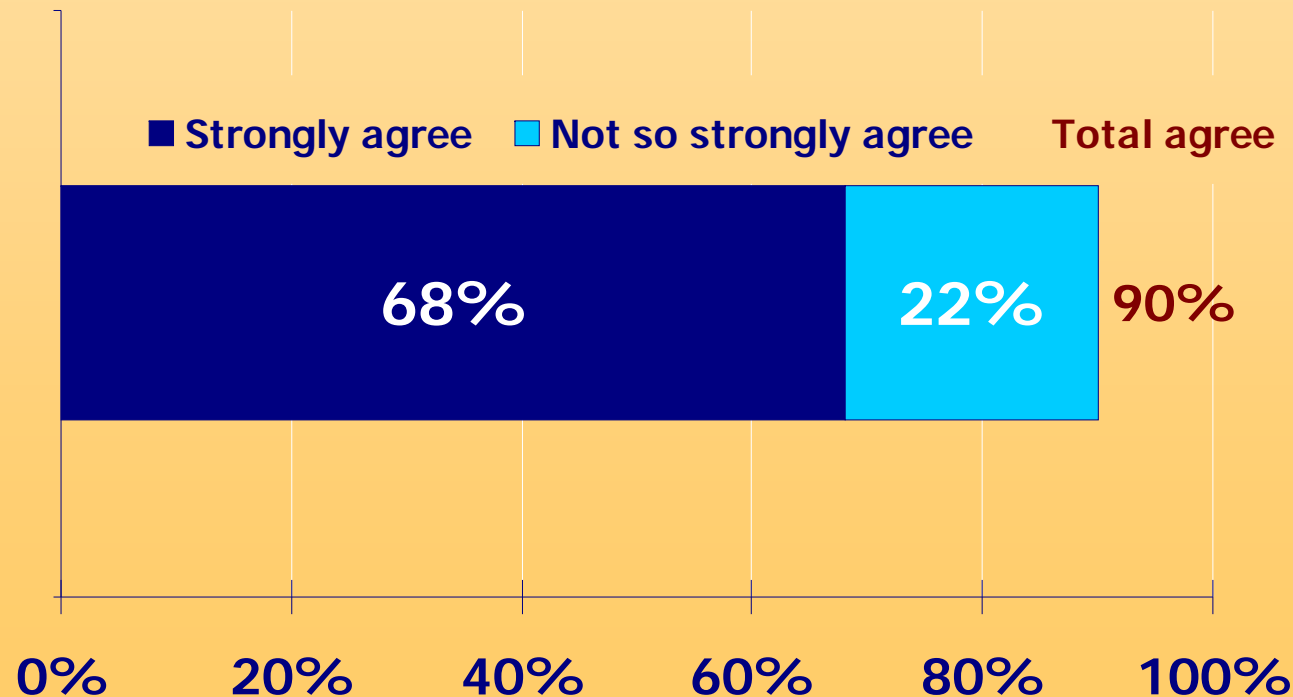
Over three out of ten workers
have had to incur debt to pay
for basic expenses.

In the last year, have you had to incur debt to pay for basic necessities like food, utilities and gasoline?



Workers are angry about profits only going to the top and want corporations held accountable.

Corporations in America have a responsibility to see to it that their workers get ahead when they are profitable, not just the CEOs.



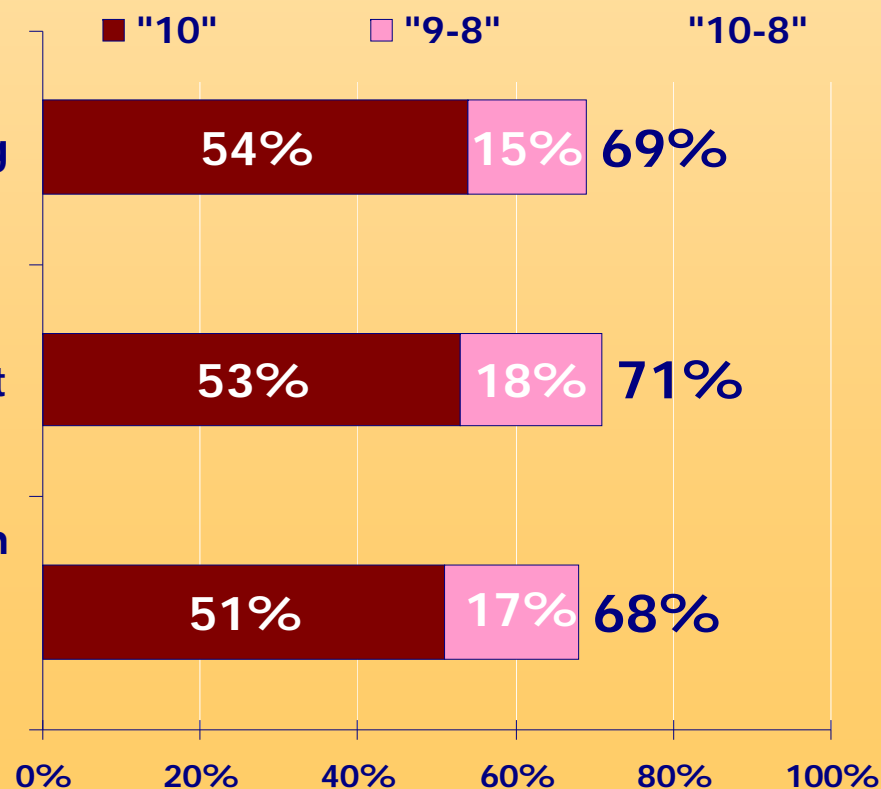
Workers see an increase in the power of the wealthy and corporations as obstacles to the American Dream.

I'm going to read you a list of things that some people say are reasons the American Dream is becoming more difficult to reach. For each one, please rate how convincing it is as a reason for why the American Dream may be more difficult to reach. Use a scale from 0 to 10, where 10 means it is an extremely convincing reason, and 0 means it is not convincing at all as a reason.

The government gives tax breaks and special favors to the rich while neglecting working and middle class families.*

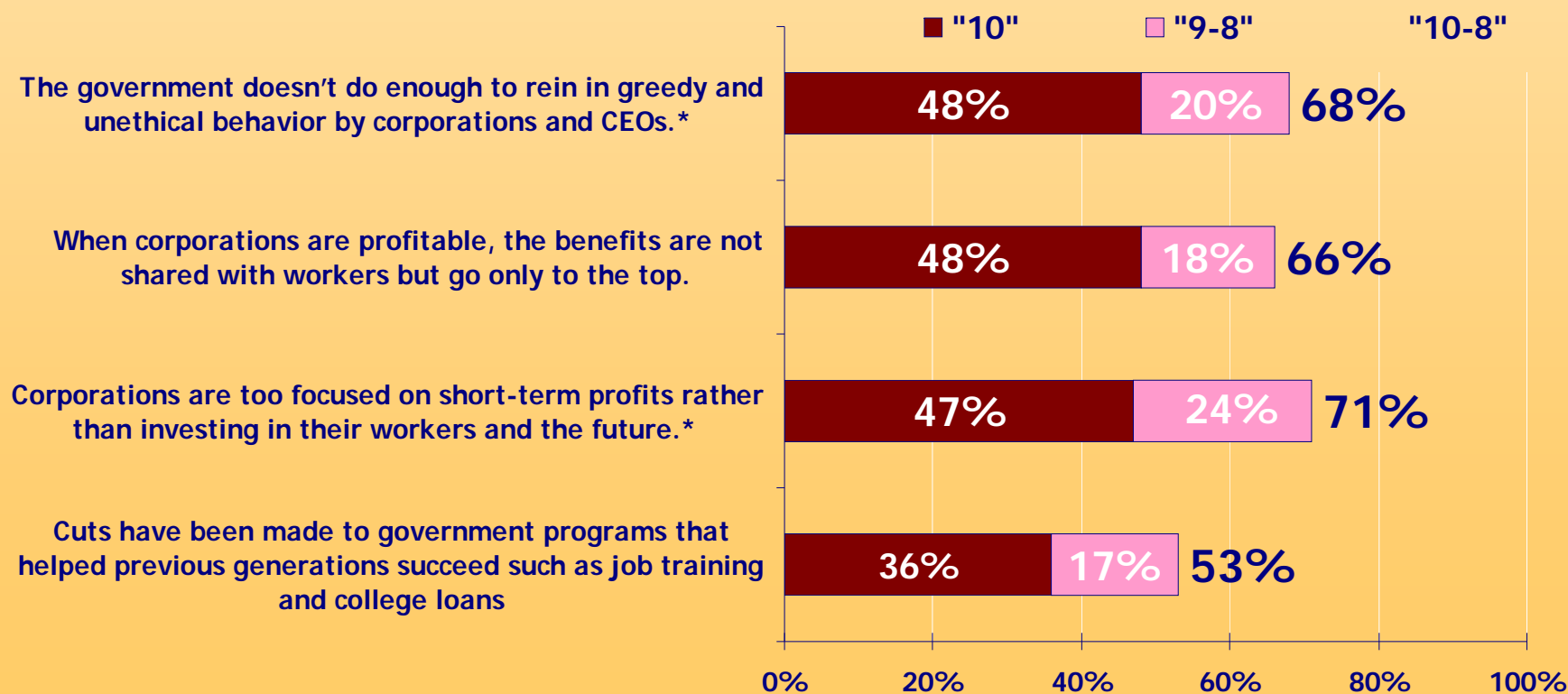
Corporations have gained too much power in the political system and that has hurt working people.

Multinational corporations have so much power they can drive down wages, eliminate health benefits and pensions, and disregard labor laws.



Workers see greedy CEOs and a focus on short-term profits as hurting the American Dream.

I'm going to read you a list of things that some people say are reasons the American Dream is becoming more difficult to reach. For each one, please rate how convincing it is as a reason for why the American Dream may be more difficult to reach. Use a scale from 0 to 10, where 10 means it is an extremely convincing reason, and 0 means it is not convincing at all as a reason.

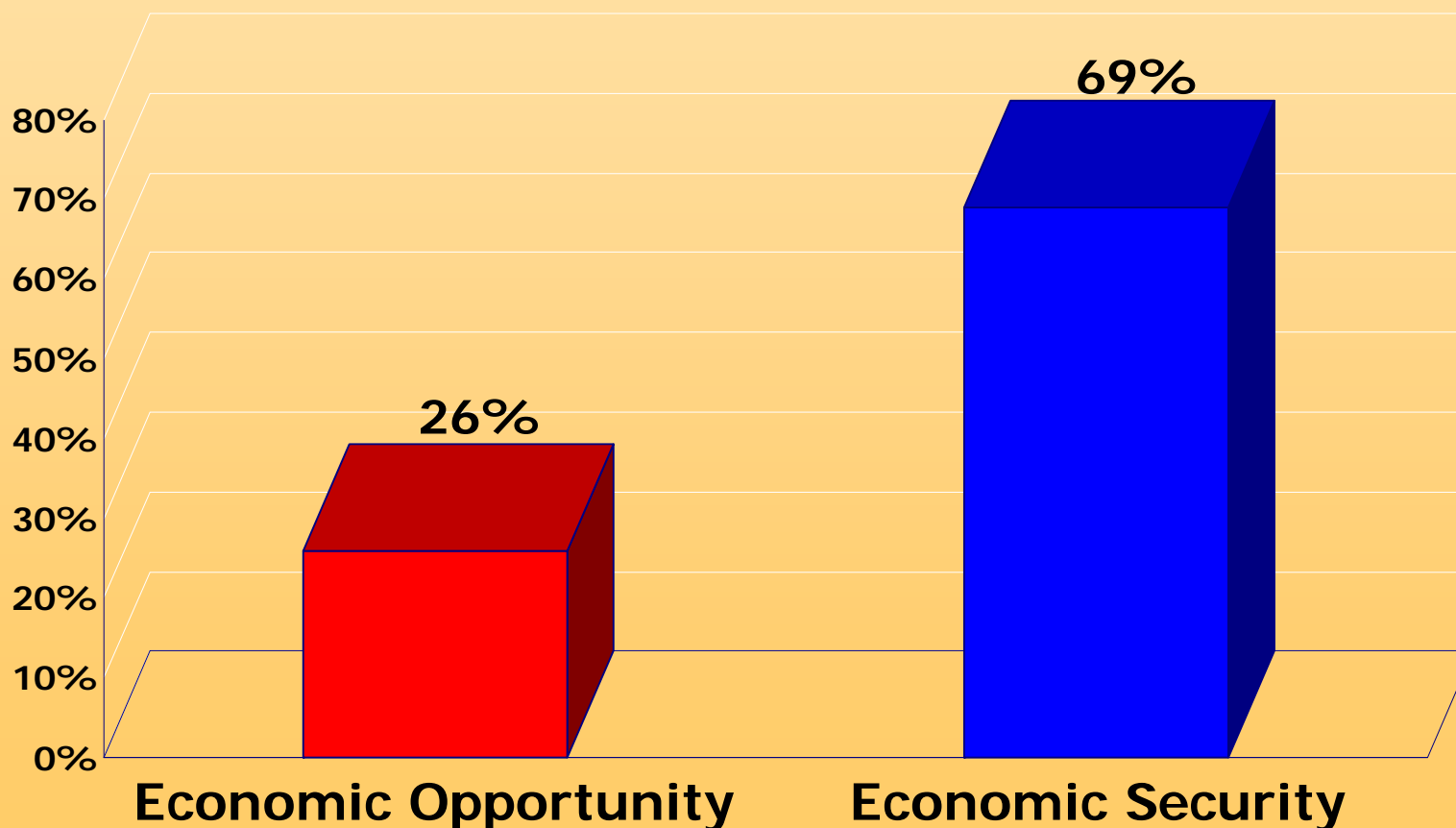


The Working American Dream Agenda:

*Workers are calling for a more active role for
workers, consumers, and the government to
help protect the basics of economic security*

Working people highly value economic security over opportunity.

*Thinking about the global economy, which is more important to you personally – economic opportunity or economic security?**

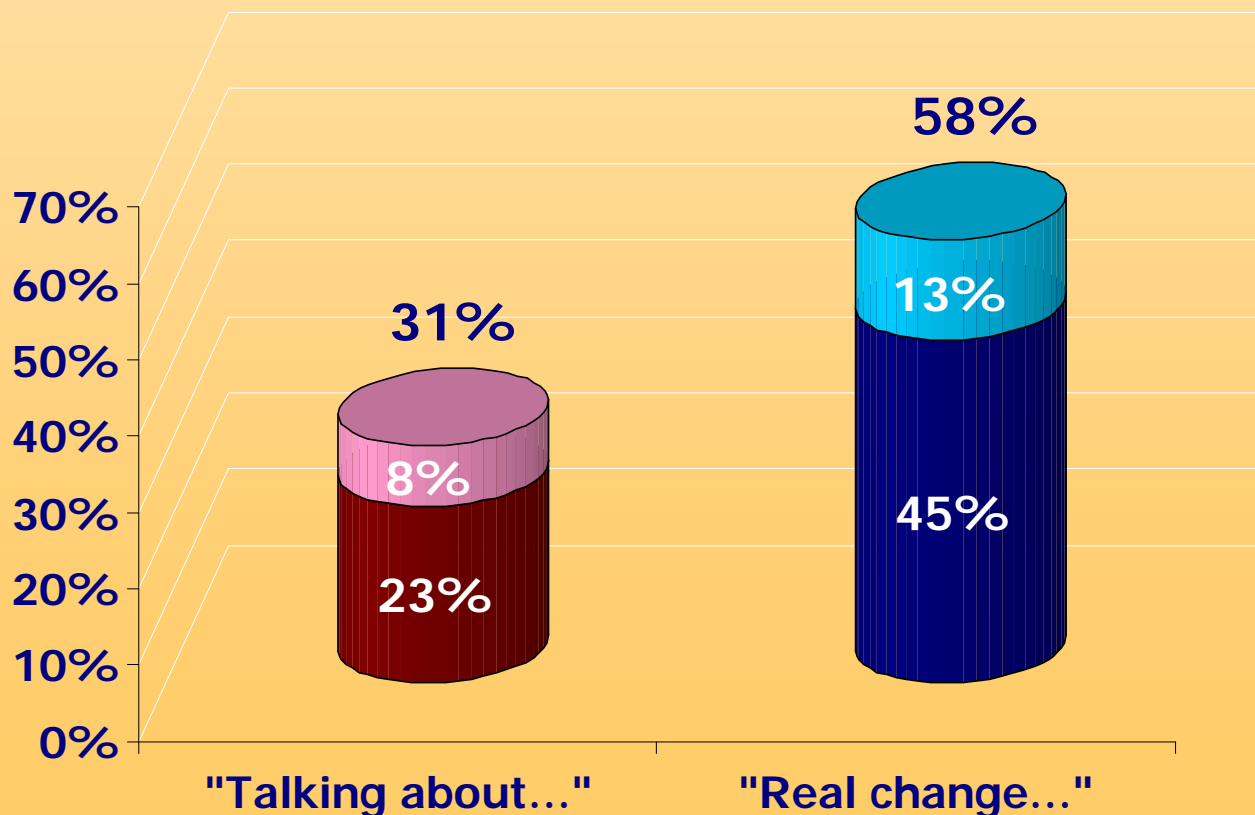


Workers believe real change is possible, working together.

Now I'm going to read you a pair of statements. Please tell me whether the *FIRST* statement or the *SECOND* statement comes closer to your own views, even if neither is exactly right

Talking about restoring the American Dream sounds good but nothing will change. The wealthy and powerful make the rules in this country, and there's not much working people can do about it

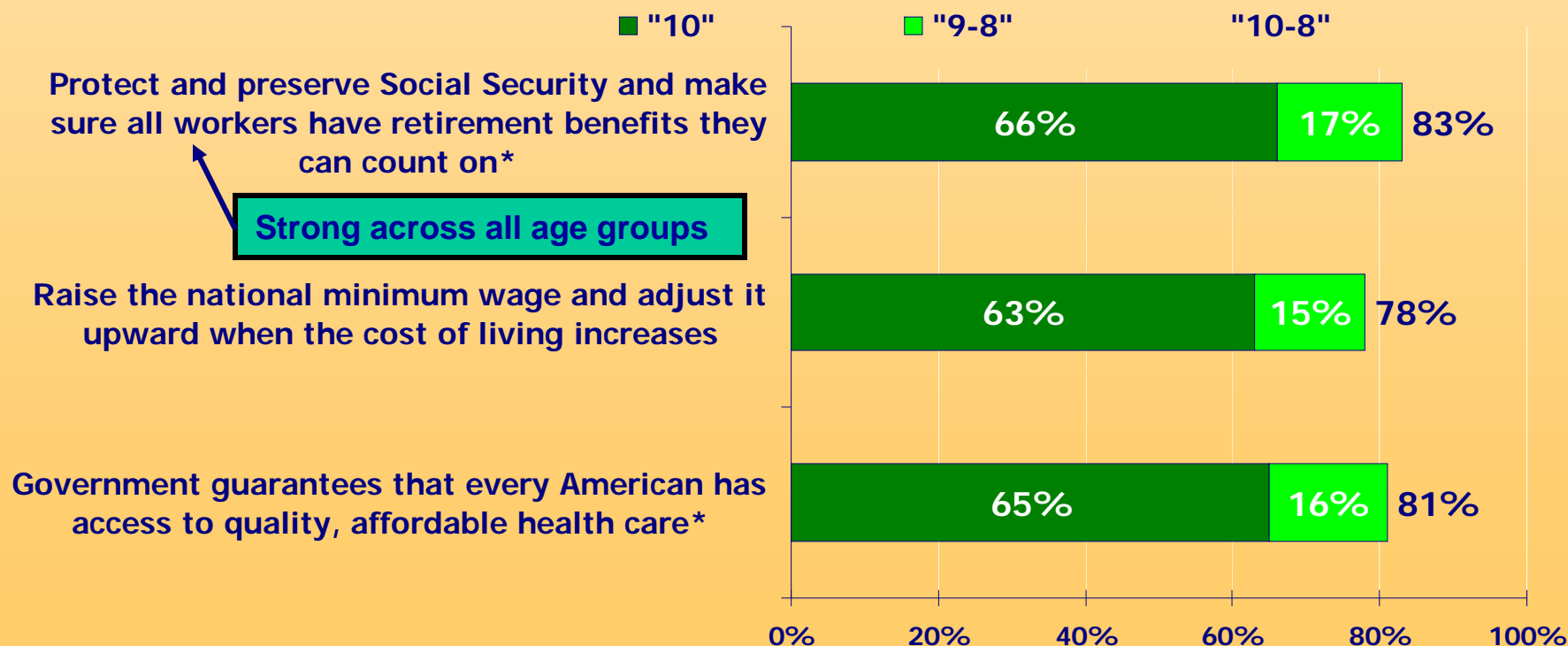
Real change is possible if we join together businesses, families, working people, and community groups. We have done it before and we can restore the American Dream together



**Dark colors indicate intensity*

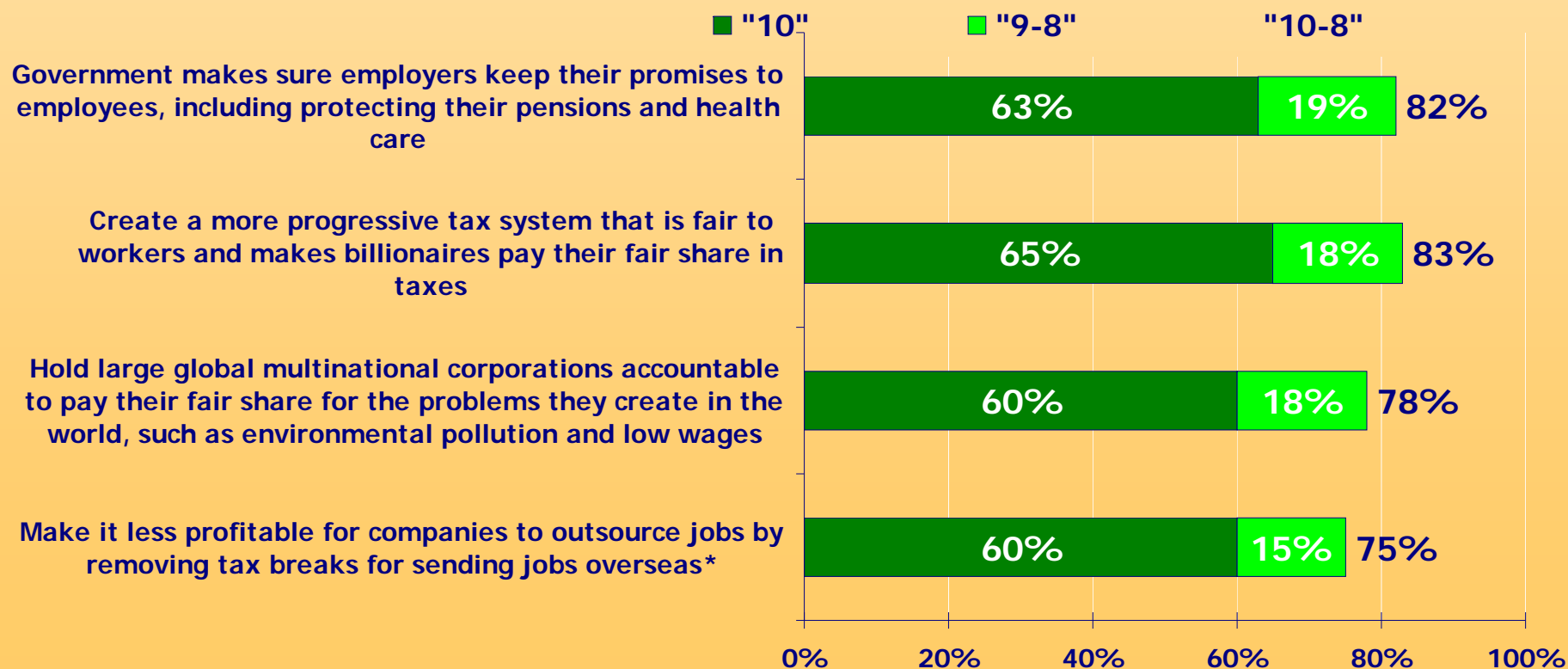
Protecting retirement security, raising the minimum wage, and health care reform are key pieces of the agenda.

Now thinking overall about the goal of making the American Dream more attainable. I am going to read some steps that could be taken to help make the American Dream more attainable. For each one, please rate how effective that step would be in making the American Dream more attainable. Use a scale from 0 to 10, where 10 means this step would be very effective, and 0 means the step is would not be effective at all, and 5 is neutral.



Workers want corporations held accountable.

Now thinking overall about the goal of making the American Dream more attainable. I am going to read some steps that could be taken to help make the American Dream more attainable. For each one, please rate how effective that step would be in making the American Dream more attainable. Use a scale from 0 to 10, where 10 means this step would be very effective, and 0 means the step is would not be effective at all.



Additionally, workers want consumers and working people to take a role in holding corporations accountable.

Now thinking overall about the goal of making the American Dream more attainable. I am going to read some steps that could be taken to help make the American Dream more attainable. For each one, please rate how effective that step would be in making the American Dream more attainable. Use a scale from 0 to 10, where 10 means this step would be very effective, and 0 means the step is would not be effective at all.

