

TO
Jobs for the Future

FROM
Morning Consult

FIELD DATES
September 26–29, 2026

SAMPLE
2,014 U.S. registered voters

Voters enter the midterms financially strained and want elected officials to prioritize jobs and skills

On behalf of Jobs for the Future (JFF), Morning Consult surveyed 2,014 U.S. registered voters to understand how they feel about the economy and their own financial footing heading into the November midterm elections, and how much priority they want elected officials to give to job quality, workforce skills, and affordable education and training. Voters are pessimistic about the economy, and the kitchen table issues central to advancing economically are a top-tier priority that voters feel candidates are not fully addressing.

57%

of voters say the economy is on the wrong track

81%

say improving the quality of jobs in America should be a top or important priority for elected officials

69%

are more likely to support a candidate who is openly in favor of improving job quality; 6% are less likely

Voters agree that the quality of jobs should be a top-tier issue for the midterms

Asked to rate 12 issues facing the country, voters emphasized kitchen table concerns like bringing down the prices of goods and services and improving the quality of jobs, above other foreign and domestic matters where their views diverged along party lines.

Nearly two-thirds of voters named as a top priority bringing down the prices of goods and services (64%), including 68% of Independents, 65% of Democrats, and 59% of Republicans. At least 50% of voters also said making health care more affordable, reducing the federal budget deficit, and improving the quality of jobs should be a top priority. Improving the quality of jobs was named a top priority by 53% of Democrats, 49% of Republicans, and 48% of Independents.

Other key issues—improving the affordability and career-relevance of education and helping people navigate the economy and get a quality job—also garnered strong support of voters, especially when accounting for respondents who identified these as an important but

lower priority.

How much of a priority each issue should be for elected officials

% of registered voters. Bars show all voters: solid is a top priority, lighter is an important but lower priority, with each share labeled. Columns show top plus important priority combined.

		All	Dem	Ind	Rep
Bringing down the prices of goods and services		84%	84%	81%	86%
Making health care more affordable for Americans		83%	84%	81%	83%
Improving the quality of jobs in America		81%	81%	78%	83%
Reducing the federal budget deficit		80%	76%	78%	86%
Ensuring education and training is affordable and connected to quality career paths		80%	83%	79%	79%
Countering the influence of foreign adversaries like China and Russia		75%	70%	71%	83%
Regulating tech companies		75%	79%	69%	75%
Helping people navigate a changing labor market and get a quality job		75%	79%	72%	72%
Protecting the environment		74%	78%	71%	72%
Reducing the amount of U.S. aid to foreign countries		69%	64%	60%	78%
Halting the construction of AI data centers		67%	73%	62%	63%
Deporting undocumented immigrants		62%	46%	57%	81%

Source: Morning Consult survey of 2,014 U.S. registered voters, September 26–29, 2026.

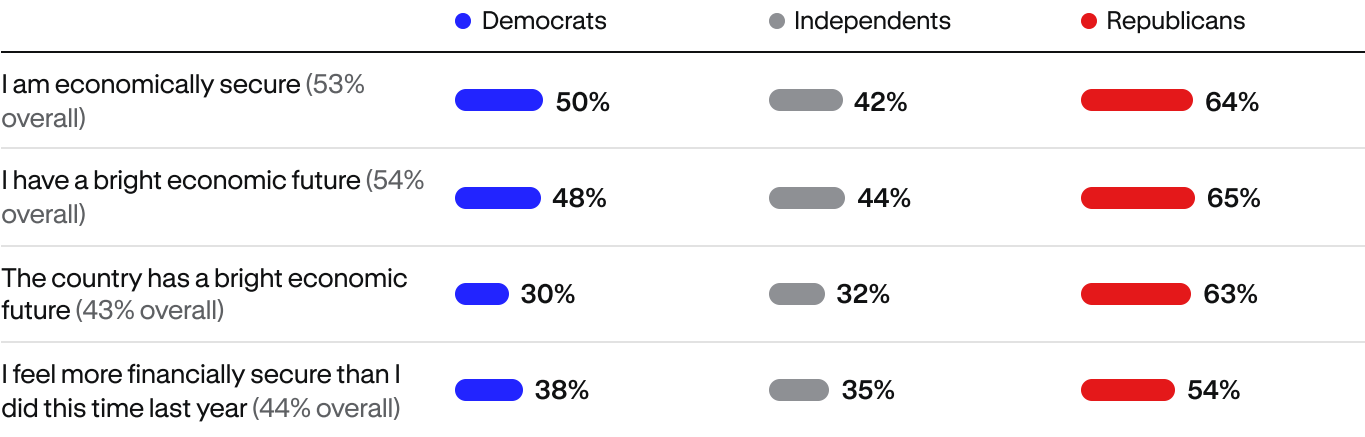
Voters see the economy on the wrong track and want elected officials to improve access to quality jobs

57 percent of voters say the economy is on the wrong track, compared with 34% who say it is headed in the right direction. More voters disagree (52%) than agree (44%) that they feel more financially secure than they did a year ago, and 48% disagree that the country has a bright economic future, compared with 43% who agree.

Confidence in finding work is limited. Only 63% of employed voters agree that if they lost their job they could find a new one that pays the same or a higher wage. Only 52% of voters are optimistic about their own prospects of getting or keeping a quality job, while 37% are pessimistic. Views divide sharply by party: 18% of Democrats and 20% of Independents say the economy is headed in the right direction, compared with 58% of Republicans.

Economic sentiment by party

% who strongly or somewhat agree



Source: Morning Consult survey of 2,014 U.S. registered voters, September 26–29, 2026.

Voters look to both employers and government to improve job quality: 83% say employers have a great deal or fair amount of responsibility, 74% say the same of state or local government, and 74% say the same of the federal government. Fewer than half are satisfied with the attention elected officials are giving to improving the quality of jobs (47%) and helping people gain access to them (45%). Around two-thirds say they would be more likely to support a candidate focused on issues of job quality (69%), employment assistance (63%), and affordable career-relevant education and training (66%), while single digits of voters would be less likely to support a candidate focused on these issues (6%, 7%, and 8%, respectively).

Key voter blocs

INDEPENDENT VOTERS

Only 42% feel economically secure (compared to 50% of Democrats and 64% of Republicans), and only 20% say the economy is headed in the right direction.

RURAL VOTERS

44 percent feel economically secure, compared with 62% of urban voters. Only 30% of rural voters say the economy is headed in the right direction, compared to 40% of urban voters.

Voters are worried about AI's impact on jobs, and some are unsure they have the skills to succeed in an AI-driven economy

47 percent of voters are pessimistic about AI's impact on jobs in America and 39% are optimistic; only 15% are strongly optimistic. Asked about their own careers, employed and unemployed voters (excluding retirees, students, and homemakers) are more positive: 47% optimistic and 39% pessimistic, with 18% strongly optimistic. While 63% of employed voters agree they have the knowledge and skills to use AI in their job and 62% that they could adapt or switch careers as AI changes their industry, a sizable share of voters disagree -- 28% and 29%, respectively.

74 percent of voters see it as the responsibility of employers to help workers gain AI skills, followed closely by schools (73%), AI companies (71%), and individuals (71%), with state or local government (59%) and the federal government (58%) trailing. 60 percent of employed voters want their employer to provide more AI training, though views diverge: 28% strongly agree and 17% strongly disagree. In the event of job loss, voters support government action: 73% support helping workers who lose jobs due to AI with living expenses, job search assistance, and education and training (Democrats 81%, independents 68%, Republicans 70%).

GEN Z

54 percent of employed or unemployed Gen Z voters (excluding retirees, students, and homemakers) expressed optimism about the impact of AI on their career -- a rosier view than older voters, including Millennials (48%), Gen X (43%), and Baby Boomers (42%). Higher percentages of employed Gen Z voters report that using AI has improved the quality of their current job -- 71%, compared to 58% of Millennials, 46% of Gen X, and 31% of Baby Boomers. Employed Gen Z voters report they are much more likely to change their career path as a result of AI (64%), compared to Millennials (52%), Gen X (31%), and Baby Boomers (23%). Gen Z voters say they have a bright economic future, compared to older generations (56% Millennials, 49% Gen X, and 52% Baby Boomers).

WOMEN

Among employed and unemployed voters (excluding retirees, students, and homemakers), 35% of women are optimistic about AI's impact on their own career, compared with 59% of men. Women identified as independent voters are the least optimistic: 21% are optimistic about AI's impact on their career, compared with 45% of independent men. Among employed women, 53% say they have the skills to use AI in their job, compared with 74% of men.

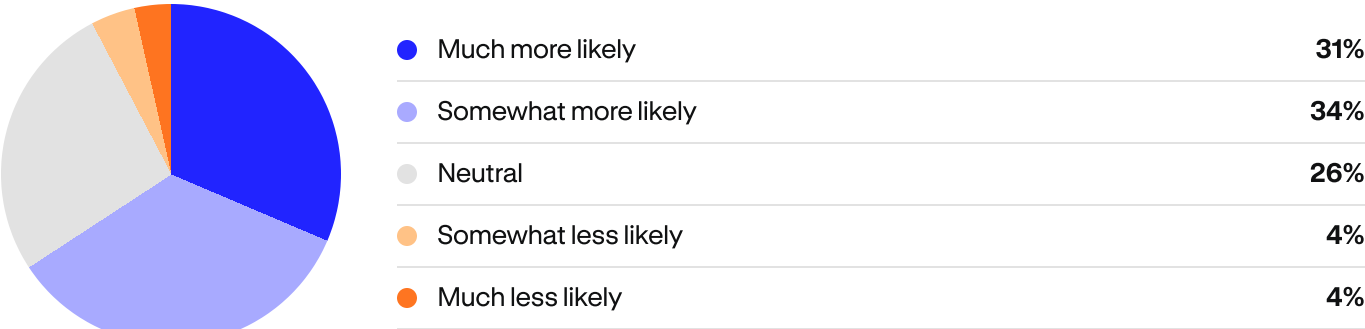
In worrying economic times, voters value access to education and training, but cost is a critical barrier

80 percent of voters say it should be a top or important priority for elected officials to ensure education and training is affordable and connected to quality career paths. Support holds across party lines: 83% of Democrats, 79% of independents, and 79% of Republicans.

Just 45% are satisfied with the attention candidates are paying to affordability of education and training, and 66% would be more likely to support a candidate focused on it; 8% would be less likely.

Likelihood to support a candidate focused on affordable education and training connected to quality career paths

% of registered voters



Source: Morning Consult survey of 2,014 U.S. registered voters, September 26–29, 2026.

48 percent disagree that they have enough money for themselves or a household member to enroll in a college degree program, compared with 43% who agree. Voters are slightly more positive about nondegree programs, with 48% agreeing and 42% disagreeing.

UNEMPLOYED

Only 29% of unemployed individuals report having enough money to pay for college, while 33% can pay for a nondegree program.

LESS THAN A BACHELOR'S DEGREE

Only 36% of voters without a four-year degree can afford to pay for college, while 41% say they could pay for a nondegree program.

Strong majorities recognize students and parents bear a great deal or fair amount of responsibility for costs, yet they also see schools, the federal government, and employers as responsible. The pattern differs somewhat by type of program: employers are seen as responsible more often for nondegree programs (66%) than for college degrees (53%).

Despite broad recognition of personal responsibility, voters support government actions to address affordability: preserving need-based financial aid (75%), allowing financial aid to be used for nondegree training programs (77%), making dual enrollment low or no cost (76%), and increasing employer tax credits or grants for tuition assistance (71%). Each draws at least 68% support among Democrats, independents, and Republicans.

Voters want education and training aligned to employer needs and support actions that align education with work

83 percent agree that curriculum taught in the classroom should match the skill requirements employers are asking for, while only 10% disagree. Voters see career-connected learning as a shared responsibility: 84% say schools have a great deal or fair amount of responsibility for making education relevant to quality jobs and in-demand careers, followed by students (74%), state or local government (73%), employers (70%), and the federal government (67%).

Voters support a range of government actions to improve the value of education and training: requiring education and job training providers to disclose graduate outcomes (76%), directing funding to credentials of value -- those that are portable, stackable, and tied to real economic opportunity (75%), evaluating programs on the quality of the jobs they lead to (75%), expanding school and business partnerships for work-based learning (78%), funding apprenticeships (77%), investing in career and technical education (77%), and increasing career counselors to guide learners and workers through their options (73%). Each draws at least 67% support among Democrats, independents, and Republicans (**see Appendix**).

The bottom line

Voters enter the midterms with weak views of the economy and of their own financial footing, and independents and rural voters are among the least confident. Quality jobs and affordable, career-connected education and training rank alongside prices and health care as priorities, hold at similar levels across party lines, and are issues on which fewer than half of voters are satisfied with the attention candidates give. Specific proposals on apprenticeships, work-based learning, career and technical education, and financial aid for short-term programs draw support from about three in four voters, including majorities of Democrats, independents, and Republicans.

This memo presents findings from a Morning Consult survey conducted September 26–29, 2026 among a national sample of 2,014 U.S. registered voters. The interviews were conducted online, and the data were weighted to approximate a target sample of registered voters based on gender by age, gender by children in household, race by educational attainment, marital status, home ownership, region, and 2024 presidential vote. Results from the full sample have a margin of error of +/-2 percentage points; margins of error are larger for subgroups.

Appendix: Support for policy actions

Share of registered voters who strongly or somewhat support each action by elected officials, ordered from highest to lowest support within each topic; n = 2,014 registered voters.

	All	Dem	Ind	Rep
QUALITY JOBS				
Target employment and training programs to young people who are not in school or working and struggling to get by.	77%	80%	72%	76%
Assist workers who have lost their jobs due to AI by helping them with living expenses, job search assistance, and education and training.	73%	81%	68%	70%
Promote skills-based hiring decisions by removing unnecessary college degree requirements from government positions and encouraging private-sector businesses to do the same.	72%	73%	70%	73%
COLLEGE AFFORDABILITY				
Make it low or no cost for high school students to dually enroll in college-level courses and earn credits toward their high school diploma and a college degree or credential.	76%	82%	74%	73%
Preserve financial aid funding for college students and families with financial need.	75%	83%	70%	70%
Increase tax credits or grants for employers who pay for education and training for workers who are in need of upskilling or reskilling due to technological advances in labor market.	71%	74%	68%	70%
Take into consideration how much a person earns after graduation when determining how much they should be responsible for paying back. A lower earning graduate should pay less for their education and training than a higher earning graduate.	63%	71%	55%	60%
ACCESS TO EDUCATION AND TRAINING				
Allow people to use their government-funded financial aid to enroll in short-term, nondegree programs that teach job-related skills.	77%	81%	71%	75%
Award students with academic credits based on their prior learning and work experiences, in order to reduce the time to completion of their degree or credential.	76%	80%	70%	76%
Provide education and training assistance to people receiving public benefits, like welfare, food stamps, or Medicaid in order to prepare them for quality jobs.	76%	83%	69%	73%
Increase funding for adult education and literacy programs.	75%	81%	72%	72%
Incentivize people in prison to prepare for quality, in-demand jobs by increasing the amount of time they can earn off their sentence for obtaining a college degree, graduate degree, or nondegree workforce credential.	66%	77%	56%	61%
VALUE OF EDUCATION AND TRAINING				
Require education and job training providers to disclose the employment outcomes for their graduates in the aggregate, including how much they typically earn.	76%	80%	68%	76%
Direct funding to education and training programs that lead to or result in a credential of value—those that are portable, stackable, and tied to real economic opportunity.	75%	77%	68%	76%

Evaluate government-funded workforce development and job training programs based not only on whether people get jobs, but also on the quality of those jobs.	75%	78%	67%	77%
Increase the number of career counselors in school and community settings to provide people with better guidance about education, training, and career fields that lead to quality jobs.	73%	79%	68%	71%

CAREER RELEVANCE

Expand partnerships between schools and businesses that provide work-based learning experiences to students.	78%	80%	74%	77%
Provide robust funding for apprenticeship programs, so more people learn a skill while earning a living.	77%	82%	70%	75%
Increase investments in career and technical education to provide more students with job-related skills and prepare them for careers in high-demand fields like health care, manufacturing, technology, and skilled trades.	77%	81%	70%	76%
Incorporate AI literacy and digital skills in education curriculum and training programs.	66%	65%	59%	70%