

Minnesota Public Radio News and Humphrey Institute Poll

The Backlash in Minnesota: Economic Distress and Political Distrust

Report prepared by the Center for the Study of Politics and Governance
Humphrey Institute of Public Affairs
University of Minnesota

Lawrence R. Jacobs
Director, Center for the Study of Politics and Governance

Joanne M. Miller
Research Associate, Center for Study of Politics and Governance
Associate Professor, Department of Political Science

Reeling from the economic downturn and the sense that the country and state are lurching off in the wrong direction, Minnesotans express significant distrust of government and Wall Street according to the Minnesota Public Radio News and Humphrey Institute poll.

- Nearly the entire state agrees that the nation's economy is dismal and more than half indicate that they are facing economic distress in their own households. About 6 out of 10 describe the country and Minnesota as off on the wrong track.
- Wall Street and the financial industry are also targets of the popular backlash. They are singled out more than the Bush and Obama administration for the economy's sharp downturn.
- There is an intense backlash against government, signaling that Democrats face peril if they are seen as its defenders heading into the November elections. Majorities distrust the government, see Washington as too powerful and welcome fewer services, and worry that President Barack Obama is steering the country toward socialism. More also disapprove than approve of the recently enacted health reform. Presumptive Republican gubernatorial nominee Tom Emmer is benefiting from this backlash.

There are, however, striking nuances that moderate the popular backlash.

- The Tea Party protesters are supported by 1 out of 5 Minnesotans but more people oppose them and do so more intensely than support them.
- Minnesotans continue to support government for concrete proven purposes – large majorities report that Social Security is worth the costs and a solid plurality credits the federal government's stimulus for boosting the economy.
- Cracking down on undocumented immigrants, which has fueled intense anger in some states, lacks majority support in Minnesota and splits the state.

- Despite some fears about the backlash, the vast majority of Minnesotans consider the use of violence to be unjustifiable.

The survey was conducted of 701 Minnesota adults between May 13 to May 16, 2010, which follows the endorsing conventions by the three major parties in Minnesota. The margin of error is +/-5.8 percentage points. For smaller subgroups the margin of sampling error is larger.

The Dismal Economy

The sharp economic downturn has unsettled Minnesotans. **Nine out of ten report that the national economy is only fair or poor.** The dreary rating of the national economy moderates when it comes to one’s own household: **45% indicate that their situation is excellent or good. And far fewer offer negative reports of their household’s economic condition compared to the nation’s,** although more than half (55%) indicate household economic distress.

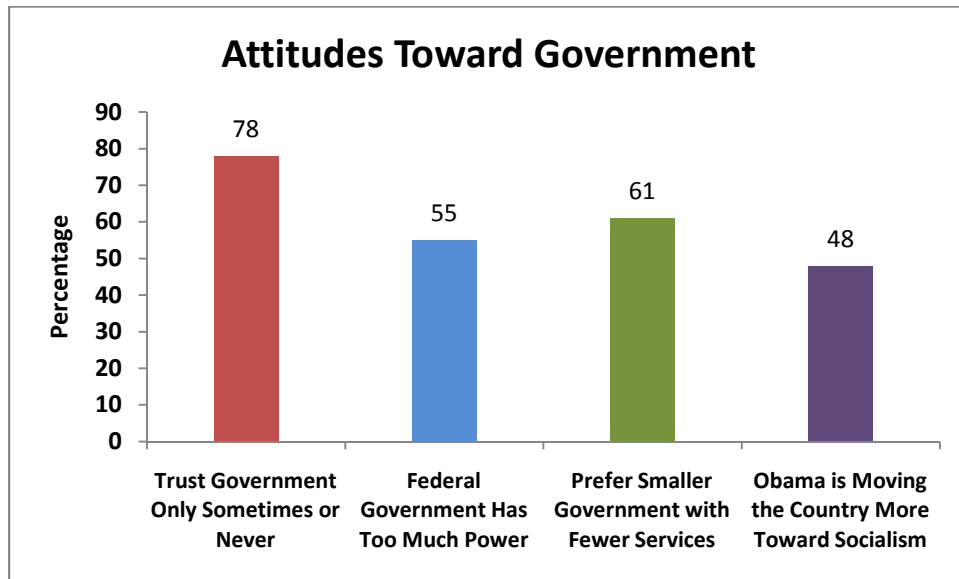
Minnesotans More Negative about National Compared to Personal Economic Conditions

	Rating of National Economic Conditions	Rating of Economic Conditions at Home
Excellent/Good	10%	45%
Fair/Poor	89%	55%
No Opinion	1%	0%

The economic malaise combined with the political upheaval is fuelling a sense that our society has lost its way. **About 55% report that both Minnesota and the country are off on the wrong track rather than moving in the right direction.** Although these findings point to dissatisfaction, it is not as high as it was in October 2008 when an MPR-Humphrey Institute poll reported that it topped 80%.

The Political Volcano

The general reaction of Minnesotans toward government is hostility and suspicion. Eight out of ten trust government never or only some of the time. Solid majorities believe that the federal government has too much power (55%) and would prefer to shrink its role and have fewer services (61%). **A narrow plurality (48%) believes that Obama is moving the country toward socialism.**



Emmer is drawing support from the government backlash. Among his supporters, 89% believe that the federal government is too powerful. This triples the support among Dayton's backers. In a promising sign for Emmer, 69% of independents also recoil at the federal government's power.

Although health reform has slid from the front page, it reflects this reaction against government. A plurality (48%) disapprove rather than approve (37%) of the recent federal health reform, with 37% strongly disapproving.

Health Reform as Lightning Rod

Reaction to Federal Health Care Reform	
Approve	37%
Disapprove	48%
No Opinion	15%

The backlash against government may favor Republicans in upcoming elections and pose a significant hurdle for Democrats attempting to make the case for government responsibility for medical care and other services.

The backlash against government extends to Wall Street and financial institutions. More Minnesotans blame Wall Street and financial institutions (26%) for the economic tumble than Bush Administration (20%), Congress (9%), or the Obama Administration (7%).

Wall Street Also Blamed

	Blame for Economic Downturn
Wall Street and financial institutions	26%
Bush Administration	20%
Congress	9%
Obama Administration	7%
Other/combination	34%
No opinion	4%

The singling out of Wall Street transcends party lines. Of the four institutions we assessed, Wall Street is the top culprit in the eyes of Republicans and independents; Democrats rank them a bit below the Bush administration in culpability for the economy. A similar pattern is evident across gubernatorial candidates, with supporters of Tom Emmer also singling out Wall Street as do the supporters of his closest rival – Democratic hopeful Mark Dayton – though more Dayton supporters blame Bush rather than Wall Street.

Minnesota Nice Moderates Backlash

The popular backlash against economic turmoil, government, and Wall Street has been moderated in Minnesota.

Even as they vent, **three-quarters conclude that Social Security is worth the costs** while only 17% say it is not. Even more striking, **more Minnesotans report that the federal government’s steps to stimulate the economy have made it better** (40%) than made it worse (18%) or made no difference (36%).

Support Social Security and Stimulus

	Social Security	Government Stimulus
Worth the costs	76%	
Not worth the costs	17%	
No Opinion	7%	
Made economy better		40%
Made economy worse		18%
No impact on economy		36%
No Opinion		6%

The Tea Party protesters are supported by 20% of Minnesotans. Nearly half (47%) of the Tea Party supporters back Emmer.

But the Tea Party has triggered a counteraction. More oppose the Tea Party movement (26%) than support it and do so a bit more intensely. Far more believe that Tea Partiers do not reflect the view of most Americans (50%) than do (29%), and a greater share indicate that they

are less likely to vote for a candidate supported by the movement (24%) than to be swayed by it (11%). **Independent voters who often swing elections report that they are less likely rather than more likely to cast a ballot for a Tea Party candidate by a 23% to 3% margin.**

Although the Tea Party symbolizes the backlash against government and Wall Street, it has also precipitated resistance that appears to be more widespread if less vivid.

Tea Party Counteraction

	Tea Party Movement
Support	20%
Oppose	26%
No Opinion	54%
Reflects Views of Most Americans	29%
Not Reflect Views of Most Americans	50%
No Opinion	21%
Endorsement make more likely to vote for	11%
Endorsement makes less likely to vote for	24%
Won't make a difference	54%
No Opinion	11%
A lot or some differences with Republican Party	55%
Not much or no differences with Republican Party	24%
No Opinion	20%

Moreover, **the Tea Party does not appear to monopolize the political energy in Minnesota.**

Among Minnesotans enthusiastic about the gubernatorial election, 22% are supporters of the Tea Party movement but 28% oppose it and 50% have not formed an opinion of it.

In addition, the Tea Party's support does not directly benefit a political party – particularly the Republican Party. Most Minnesotans (55%) report that they see some or a lot of differences between the Tea Party and Republican Party. Only 24% think that there are few or no differences.

Finally, fears that the popular backlash would fuel broad support for violence are not evident in Minnesota. **Eighty-four percent say that violence against the government is never justified;** only 10% believe it is justified.

Muted Backlash Against Immigrants

Immigration has fed the popular backlash against government and has become a target for anger and resentment in certain parts of the country. Although there is support for tougher immigration

enforcement in Minnesota, it is muted. **Only a plurality favors rather than oppose the tough Arizona immigration law (48% vs. 31%). In addition, Minnesotans are split over whether the government’s main focus in dealing with illegal immigration should be developing a plan to halt the flow of illegal immigrants or developing a plan to deal with those already living in the U.S. illegally.**

Mixed Support for Immigrant Reform

	Support Arizona Immigration Law	Main focus of Government Policy toward Illegal Immigrants
Favor	48%	
Oppose	31%	
No Opinion	21%	
Halting Flow		44%
Deal with Immigrants currently living in U.S.		45%
No Opinion		11%

About the Survey

This survey is a collaboration between Minnesota Public Radio News and the Center for the Study of Politics and Governance at the University of Minnesota's Humphrey Institute of Public Affairs. The survey was analyzed by the Center. The research team was Lawrence R. Jacobs (Center Director) and Joanne M. Miller (Associate Professor, Department of Political Science). Geoff Sheagley provided research assistance.

The survey was fielded by the Information Specialists Group (ISG) and is based on a landline random digit dial survey in Minnesota. ISG called a sample of telephone exchanges that was randomly selected by a computer from a list of active residential exchanges within Minnesota. Within each exchange, random digits were added to form a complete telephone number, thus permitting access to both listed and unlisted numbers. Within each household, one adult was selected to be the respondent for the survey.

As is common with public opinion surveys, the data were weighted. In the first stage, the data were weighted based on the number of potential survey respondents and the number of landline telephone numbers in the household. In the second stage, data were weighted according to cell phone usage, as well as gender, age, race, and Hispanic ethnicity to approximate the demographic characteristics of the population according to the Census.

The distribution of party identification among Minnesotan adults in the full sample is as follows:

	Minnesota Adults
Republican	42%
Independent	15%
Democrat	42%

701 adults living in Minnesota were interviewed by telephone between May 13 and May 16, 2010; the margin of sampling error is +/-5.8 percentage points. In theory, in 19 cases out of 20 the results among Minneapolis voters will differ by no more than +/-5.8 percentage points in either direction from what would have been obtained by interviewing all voters in the election. The response rate is 26 percent (based AAPOR response rate calculation 4).

Our calculation of sampling error uses a more cautious approach than is common in order to take account of design effects. The common approach calculates the margin of sampling error based primarily on the number of respondents, which would produce a margin of error of +/-3.7 percent for a sample size of 701. This approach implicitly assumes a 100% response rate, which of course never happens. Our calculation of the margin of sampling error takes into account the response rate and the effects of weighting, in particular, which produces a margin of error of +/-5.8 percent. This is reflected in our analysis of Dayton's 4 point lead over Emmer outside the margin of error and as a statistical "toss-up" even though we also suggest a "slight edge" for the Democrat. In our view, taking account of design effects errs on the side of caution and should enhance confidence in the reported results.

In addition to sampling error, the practical difficulties of conducting any survey of public opinion may introduce sources of error into the poll. Variations in the wording and order of questions, for example, may lead to somewhat different results.

Questions

Generally speaking, would you say things in Minnesota are heading in the right direction, or are they off on the wrong track?

Generally speaking, would you say things in this country are heading in the right direction, or are they off on the wrong track?

Overall, do you think the benefits from government programs such as Social Security and Medicare are worth the costs of those programs for taxpayers, or are they not worth the costs to taxpayers?

How much of the time do you think you can trust the government in Washington to do what is right - just about always, most of the time, or only some of the time?

Do you think it is ever justified for citizens to take violent action against the government, or is it never justified?

Which one of the following statements comes closest to your views about governmental power today? The federal government has too much power, the federal government has just about the right amount of power, the federal government has too little power?

Generally speaking, would you say things in this country are heading in the right direction, or are they off on the wrong track?

If you had to choose, would you rather have a smaller government providing fewer services, or a bigger government providing more services?

Some people think that President Obama's policies are moving the country more toward socialism. Others don't think that this is the case. How about you? Do you think President Obama's policies are moving the country more toward socialism, or are his policies not moving the country in that direction?

Do you approve or disapprove of the federal health care reform bill that was recently signed into law?

As you may know, Arizona recently passed an immigration law. How much would you say you know about the new law? Would you say you know a lot, some, only a little or not much at all about the new Arizona immigration law?

Based on what you know or have read about the new Arizona immigration law, do you favor or oppose it?

If you had to choose, what should be the main focus of the U.S. government in dealing with the issue of illegal immigration? Halting the flow of illegal immigrants or Developing a plan to deal with the ones who are currently in the U.S. illegally

How would you rate the economic conditions in this country today? Excellent, good, fair or poor?

How would you rate the financial situation in your household? Excellent, good, fair or poor?

Who do you think is mostly to blame for the current state of the nation's economy? Bush Administration, Obama Administration, Wall Street and financial institutions, Congress, or Someone else.

So far, do you think the things the federal government has done to try stimulate the economy have made the economy better, made the economy worse, or do you think they have had no impact on the economy so far?

Regardless of your overall opinion, do you think the views of the people involved in the Tea Party movement generally reflect the views of most Americans, or not?

Do you support the Tea Party movement, do you oppose it, are you undecided, or haven't you heard enough about it yet to form an opinion?

If a candidate running for office in Minnesota was endorsed by the Tea Party Movement, would this make you more likely to vote for the candidate, less likely to vote for the candidate, or wouldn't it make a difference?

How much difference do you think there is between the Republican Party and the Tea Party Movement? A lot of difference, some difference, not much difference, or no difference?