

Exit Poll Shows Economy Still the Top Concern

Rising prices and **unemployment** were heavy on the minds of voters Tuesday even as a glimmer of optimism peeked through, with four in 10 saying the nation's **economy** is getting better.

The voters were in wide agreement that the economy still has far to go—three-fourths said it was poor or not so good, according to preliminary results of exit polls. Only a fourth thought they were better off financially than four years ago when President **Barack Obama** was elected. Voters were most likely to say their families were doing about the same.

The survey of voters as they left polling places showed six in 10 ranked the economy the top issue, far ahead of health care, the federal budget deficit or foreign policy. The majority who don't yet see economic improvement were roughly divided over whether things were getting even worse or just stuck in place.

Joseph Neat, a stay-at-home father in Hagerstown, Md., said he voted for Republican **Mitt Romney** because Obama has had enough time to deal with the economic troubles affecting families, especially gasoline prices that he called "insane."

"We don't have time for him to make changes. We need the changes now," Neat said of Obama. "And four years is plenty of time."

Voters pointed to years of high unemployment and rising prices as the biggest problems for people like them; those two worries far outstripped concerns about the housing market or taxes in the exit polls conducted for The Associated Press and television networks.

About half of voters said the previous president, George W. Bush, shoulders more of the blame for economic problems than

Obama.

About four in 10 blamed Obama. They don't include William Mullins of Lansing, Mich.

"Obama had a lot to deal with when he came to office," Mullins said. "You can't change everything overnight."

Only a quarter of voters were feeling enthusiastic about Obama's administration; about as many said they're angry about it.

About half said government is doing too many things better left to businesses and individuals, a point hammered by Romney throughout the campaign. Only four in 10 wanted government to do more.

But voters were more likely to say Obama stands for the **middle class** or the poor. The Obama campaign's insistence that the multimillionaire Romney would do more for well-heeled Americans seems to have taken hold in voters' minds.

Half of voters said they think Romney's policies generally favor the rich and barely any thought he favors the poor.

In contrast, only about one in 10 said Obama, who has pushed higher taxes for the wealthy, favors rich Americans. About half of voters said taxes should be raised on income over \$250,000 per year.

For Obama, the biggest group—four in 10—said his policies help the middle class, with the poor coming in a close second.

Nearly two-thirds of voters said they thought illegal immigrants working in the United States should be offered a chance to apply for legal status, instead of being deported.

About one in 10 voters said they'd only settled on their presidential choice within the last few days or even on Election Day.

The survey of 18,237 voters was conducted for the AP and the television networks by Edison Research. This includes preliminary results from interviews conducted as voters left a random sample of 350 precincts nationally Tuesday, as well as 4,389 who voted early or absentee and were interviewed by landline or cellular telephone from Oct. 29 through Nov. 4. Results for the full sample were subject to sampling error of plus or minus 2 percentage points; it is higher for subgroups.

Associated Press writer David Dishneau in Hagerstown, Md., contributed to this report.

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