

Minimum Wage Basics: Public Opinion on Raising the Minimum Wage

NELP's Minimum Wage Basics series sheds light on key issues related to the minimum wage, drawing on the latest research and campaign developments.

Introduction

Americans across all political and demographic distinctions strongly favor raising the minimum wage as a tool to improve workers' lives, address income disparity, and stimulate our consumer-driven economy. As the [November 2014 minimum wage ballot initiatives](#) and the results of various polls make clear, the American people support strong wage floors that help businesses thrive and enable workers to provide for themselves and their families. The public's appetite for strong minimum wages sends a clear message to lawmakers: vote to raise the minimum wage and voters will support you.

Americans Believe the Minimum Wage Is Too Low and Are Concerned About Rising Inequality

The federal minimum wage of \$7.25 per hour, which has not been increased since 2009, is not a living wage. A 2014 [Public Policy Polling](#) poll shows that 80 percent of respondents do not believe they can support themselves or their families on the minimum wage.

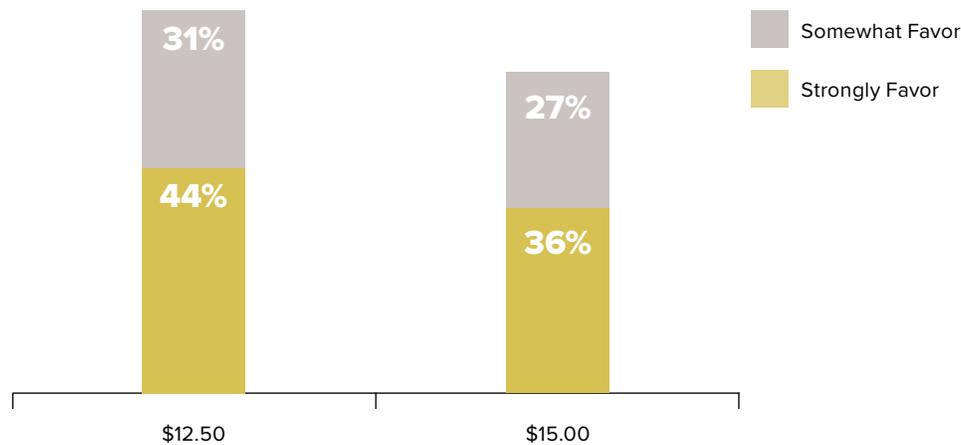
Other polls show that 7 in 10 Americans worry that income inequality is getting worse (2014 [CBS News poll](#)), and nearly as many believe the government has a role to play in reducing the gap between rich and poor (2014 [Pew/USA Today](#) poll). A 2013 [Washington Post/ABC News](#) poll found that 57 percent of Americans want lawmakers to address income inequality. One of the policies favored by 66 percent of poll respondents is increasing the minimum wage.

Polls Show Overwhelming Public Support for a Significant Increase in the Minimum Wage

A January 2015 poll shows that Americans across all regions, socioeconomic levels, and demographic groups support an increase in the minimum wage to at least \$12.50. According to the poll, conducted by [Hart Research Associates](#) on behalf of the National Employment Law Project (NELP), 75 percent of Americans support raising the federal minimum wage to \$12.50 by 2020, including:

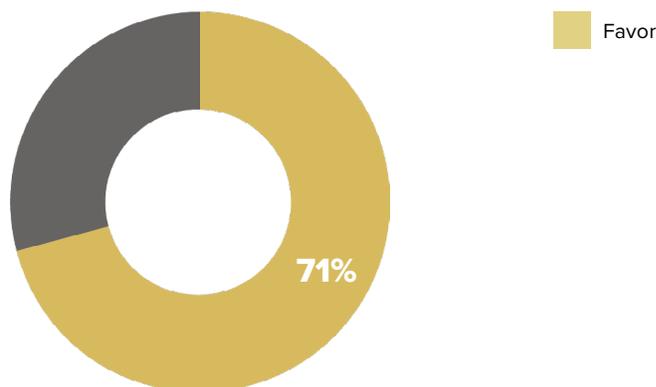
- 92 percent of Democrats
- 73 percent of Independents
- 53 percent of Republicans
- 80 percent of women
- 72 percent of whites without a college degree

Americans Overwhelmingly Support Increasing the Minimum Wage to \$12.50 or More



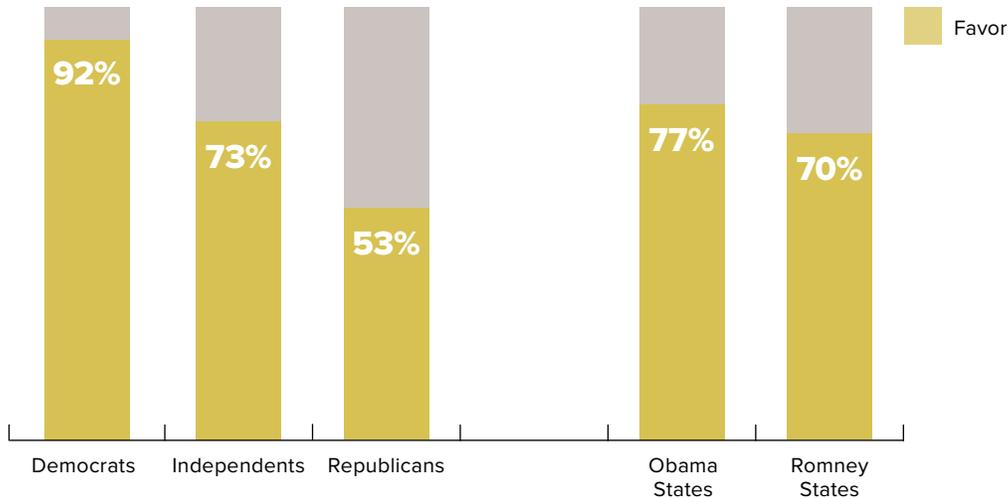
Public support is higher for a minimum wage increase to \$12.50 than for a more modest increase to \$11.00 (75 percent to 71 percent, respectively). A \$12.50 minimum wage also enjoys deeper support than an \$11.00 minimum wage: 44 percent of those polled strongly favor a \$12.50 minimum wage, as opposed to only 29 percent who strongly favor an \$11.00 minimum wage. Even at the \$15.00 level, public support is clear: 63 percent support an increase to \$15.00 by 2020, including 36 percent who strongly favor this increase. In addition, nearly three in four Americans (71 percent) favor eliminating the subminimum tipped wage to ensure tipped employees earn the same minimum wage as other workers, and 82 percent support automatic annual increases to the minimum wage to ensure it keeps up with the rising cost of living.

Americans Support Eliminating the Subminimum Tipped Wage



Public support for a robust minimum wage transcends political leanings. Although support for this measure is strongest (77 percent) in “blue” (Democratic-leaning) states that voted for Barack Obama in the 2012 general elections, support in “red” (Republican-leaning) states that voted for Mitt Romney is nearly as high (70 percent). Registered voters indicated they are almost twice as likely (45 percent) than less likely (25 percent) to favor candidates who vote to raise the minimum wage—an almost two-to-one ratio that holds true with Independents and respondents in states that voted for Mitt Romney in 2012.

Support for \$12.50 by Party Affiliation & 2012 General Election Results



Other polls show similarly strong support for raising the minimum wage:

- A 2015 [AP-GfK](#) poll shows 6 in 10 Americans favor raising the minimum wage, including nearly half (48 percent) who strongly favor this measure.
- The 2014 CBS News poll cited above found that more than 7 in 10 Americans (72 percent) favor raising the minimum wage to \$10.10, including 88 percent of Democrats, 75 percent of Independents, and 48 percent of Republicans.
- The 2014 Pew/USA Today poll cited above found that 73 percent of Americans favor increasing the minimum wage, including 90 percent of Democrats, 71 percent of Independents, and 53 percent of Republicans.
- A 2014 [Quinnipiac University](#) poll found 71 percent of voters support raising the minimum wage to \$10.10, including 18 percent who favor a rate higher than \$10.10. This poll also found that voters are “more likely” (41 percent) than “less likely” (18 percent) to support candidates who favor raising the minimum wage.

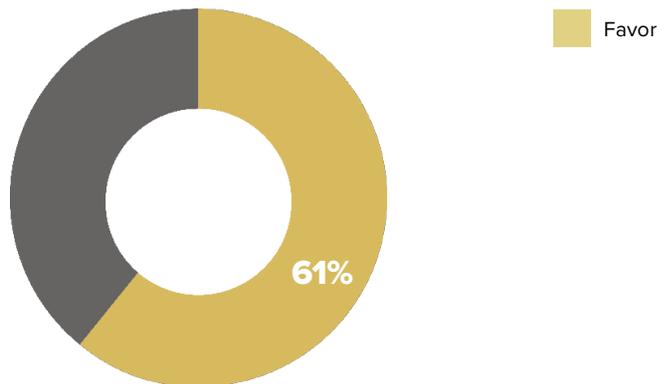
Small Businesses Support Raising the Minimum Wage, See It as Boon for Economy, Their Bottom Lines

Support for a higher minimum wage is also strong among small business owners, who see it not only as beneficial to workers but to their own bottom lines.

According to a July 2014 poll by [Business for a Fair Minimum Wage and the American Sustainable Business Council](#), more than three in five (61 percent) of small business owners support raising the federal minimum wage to \$10.10, with annual increases to keep pace

with the cost of living. Of those polled, strong majorities believe raising the minimum wage will increase consumer purchasing power (58 percent), boost the economy (56 percent), and benefit their business bottom lines (53 percent) by lowering employee turnover and increasing productivity and customer satisfaction.

The Majority of Small Business Owners Support Raising the Minimum Wage



The poll found strong levels of support across the country, with substantial majorities of employers in favor of raising the minimum wage in the Northeast (67 percent), the Midwest (61 percent), the West (60 percent), and even the South (58 percent). A plurality of respondents in the poll identified as Republican or Republican-leaning (43 percent), while smaller shares identified as Democratic or Democratic-leaning (28 percent) or Independent (19 percent).

In a March 2014 poll, [Small Business Majority](#) found majority support (57 percent) among small business owners for raising the minimum wage to \$10.10 and adjusting it annually to the cost of living. A higher level of support (61 percent) comes from small businesses in the retail and restaurant industries—two industries that pay some of the lowest wages in the nation.¹ A plurality (47 percent) of respondents in this poll identified as Republican, while smaller shares identified as Democratic (35 percent) or Independent (18 percent).

Americans Agree Raising the Minimum Wage Is Good for the Economy

Like most small business owners, the general public also understands the value of a higher minimum wage to the economy. In the 2015 NELP poll, respondents were significantly more likely to agree with the argument that a higher minimum wage will increase spending and stimulate the local economy (57 percent) than they were to agree with the idea that increasing the minimum wage will hurt low-wage workers (43 percent).

Similarly, in the 2014 CBS poll, the majority (54 percent) of respondents indicated they do not believe that raising the minimum wage would result in job losses. And in a 2013 [NBC/Wall Street Journal](#) poll, 58 percent agreed that raising the minimum wage would boost the economy and bring people out of poverty, while only 36 percent thought that a higher minimum wage would hurt business or employment.

Notes

1. National Employment Law Project, [The Low-Wage Recovery: Industry Employment and Wages Four Years into the Recovery](#), April 2014.