

TO: National Employment Law Project
FROM: Hart Research Associates
DATE: December 26, 2013
RE: Survey on Federal Unemployment Benefits

On behalf of NELP, Hart Research interviewed a national representative sample of 811 registered voters from December 18-22. The margin of error for results is +/- 3.5%. This memo reviews the main findings from the survey.

Only one-third of American voters believe Congress should allow federal unemployment benefits to end this week. By a strong 21-point margin, voters say Congress should act to maintain (55%) rather than cut off (34%) these benefits. Support for maintaining benefits is very broad, encompassing a majority of voters in every region of the country and every age cohort. Women overwhelmingly favor an extension (61% to 28%), and men favor it by a 10-point margin (50% to 40%).

There is also more intensity of feeling on the side favoring an extension. More than twice as many voters strongly favor maintaining benefits (43%) as strongly feel benefits should end (21%). Among women who feel strongly about the issue, the ratio is nearly three-to-one for an extension (49% to 17%).

Americans support federal benefits because they reject the claim that unemployed workers are not trying to find work. Just 33% of voters agree that most of those receiving unemployment benefits "are not trying to find a job, and prefer to collect benefits without working." Instead, 57% say that the unemployed "would rather work, but cannot find a job in today's economy."

There is a substantial political risk for Republicans if they block an extension. Voters with a history of voting in off-year elections embrace an extension by a 20-point margin (55% to 35%), suggesting that the 2014 elections will be contested within a strongly pro-benefit electorate. Moreover, some of the demographic groups that built the GOP's 2010 majority oppose the party's policy of ending unemployment benefits:

- Seniors (age 65 and over) favor an extension (61% to 31%) more than any other age group, including 52% strongly in favor.
- White non-college voters favor an extension by 15 points (52% to 37%).
- White women favor maintaining benefits by 20 points (53% to 33%).

A member of Congress who opposes federal unemployment benefits faces an 18-point net loss of support from voters. Just 21% say that this position makes them more likely to vote for a member of Congress, while 39% are less likely to support the member's re-election (35% say it will not affect their vote). Candidates who oppose an extension of benefits can expect to face a particularly strong backlash from women (-27 points), seniors (-26), Latinos (-30), and moderates (-31).