

NATION | WORLD

Optimism on economy rising

Two-thirds say they'll be better off next year

By Susan Page
USA TODAY

WASHINGTON — Americans may be downbeat about today's economy, a USA TODAY/Gallup Poll finds, but they are increasingly optimistic that things are about to get better for the nation and themselves.

Though an overwhelming 71% rate economic conditions as poor, a 58% majority predict they will be good a year from now. Although those surveyed are inclined to say they are financially worse off than a year ago, nearly two-thirds say they think they'll be better off this time next year.

That assessment of personal finances already is on the upswing. More than one-third report they are better off than they were a year ago — the highest number since before the economic meltdown in 2008. (Four in 10 say they're worse off.)

The sense that the recession's impact finally is lifting should be good news for President Obama, since an improving economy typical-

ly boosts the prospects for a White House incumbent running for re-election.

Regardless of which candidate they support, those surveyed predict by 56%-36% that the president will win in November over Republican Mitt Romney. That's better than the advantage Obama had at this point four years ago; then, by 52%-41%, Americans predicted he would defeat Republican John McCain.

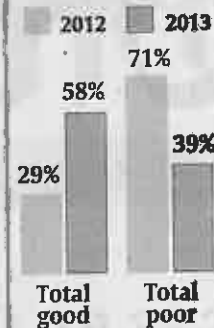
There's also encouraging news for Romney in the poll.

Since becoming the presumptive Republican nominee, Romney's favorable-unfavorable rating has jumped to 50%-41%, his best ever and in the same neighborhood as Obama's 52%-46% standing. The former Massachusetts governor gets stronger ratings than the president when it comes to handling the economy, the issue likely to drive the campaign.

In the poll, 55% say the economy would get better over the next four years if Romney was elected, compared with 46% who say it would

USA TODAY Gallup Poll

How would you rate the economic condition today, and how do you think it will be a year from now?



Source: USA TODAY/Gallup poll of 1,012 adults Thursday through Sunday. Margin of error: ±4 percentage points.

By Julie Snider, USA TODAY

improve if Obama was re-elected. Twenty-seven percent said the economy would get worse in a Romney first term, compared with 37% who say that of an Obama second term.

"We're right back where we've been all along: The economy is a major issue, and it's one which neither candidate has a serious advantage on," says Gary Jacobson, a political scientist at the University of California-San Diego. "I think Romney gets better ratings because of his reputation as a CEO, and Obama is going to benefit from the fact that optimism is increasing, and people are future-oriented. ... It looks like it's extremely close."

For the first time during this campaign cycle, the GOP has an advantage in congressional elections. By 50%-44%, those surveyed say they're likely to vote for the Republican congressional candidate. The two parties were tied in the USA TODAY poll in February, and Democrats had a 7-point advantage last August.