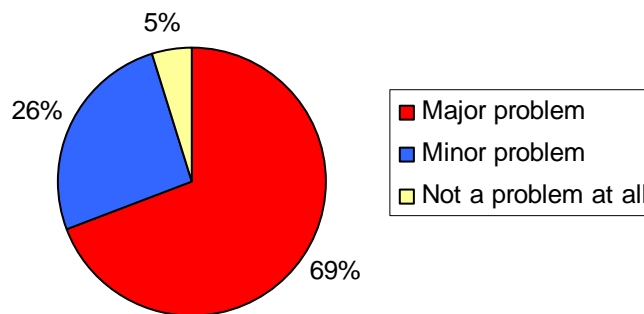




Georgians See Poverty as a Major Problem but Differ on Causes¹

In the three years since the Carl Vinson Institute of Government last surveyed Georgians about their perception of poverty as a problem in Georgia (“The Public Contemplates the Problem of Persistent Poverty,” April 2004), more people have become convinced that poverty is a major problem challenging the state. In the most recent Peach State Poll, conducted in May 2007, 69 percent of Georgians stated that poverty is a major problem (see Figure 1), as opposed to 53 percent. Blacks more often than whites and Hispanics identified poverty as a major problem; however, with 82 percent of blacks, 63 percent of whites, and 57 percent of Hispanics identifying poverty as a major problem, the issue clearly cuts across racial lines. Women (78 percent), more so than men (60 percent), believe that poverty is a major problem in Georgia today. Fifty-nine percent of Republicans, 75 percent of Democrats, and 71 percent of Independents see poverty as a major problem today.

Figure 1. In your opinion, how big a problem is poverty in Georgia today?

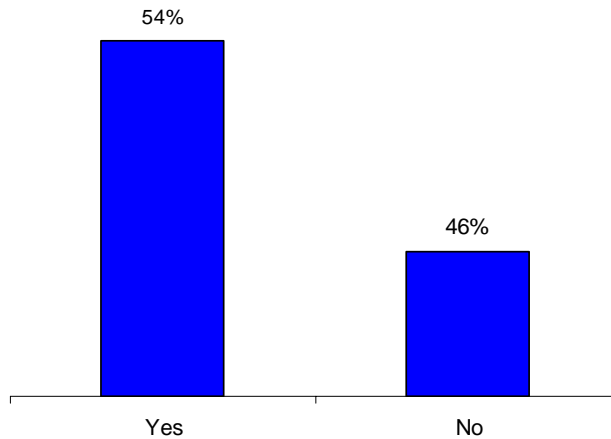


More than half of respondents—54 percent—appear to be optimistic that poverty could be eliminated if the government were willing to spend whatever necessary would be necessary to do so (see Figure 2). Sixty-one percent of all people who said that poverty is a major problem facing Georgia today also said that if the government were willing to spend whatever was necessary to eliminate poverty, this would be an attainable goal. Blacks strongly agreed—79 percent—that if the government were willing to spend whatever was necessary to eliminate

¹ This report was written and prepared by Jennifer Holland, a graduate research assistant at the Carl Vinson Institute of Government.

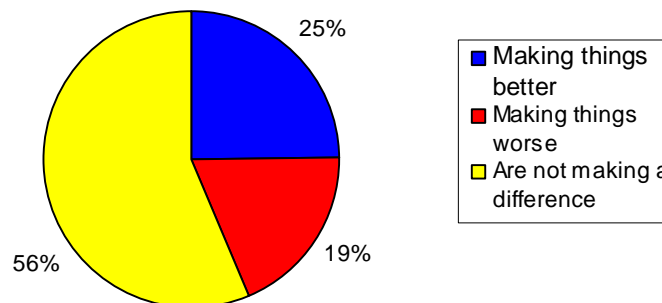
poverty, it could be accomplished. Whites (41 percent) and Hispanics (48 percent) had a less favorable view of government’s ability to eliminate poverty through spending.

Figure 2. If the government were willing to spend whatever it thought was necessary to eliminate poverty, do you think this is something that could be accomplished?



When asked about current government programs to improve the condition of poor people in this country, 56 percent of Georgians said that these programs are not making any difference at all (see Figure 3). Seventy-one percent of Hispanics, 60 percent of blacks, and 53 percent of whites share the opinion that government programs are not making any difference at all. Although a majority of people across all political affiliations think that government programs are ineffective at improving the condition of poor people, 63 percent of Democrats versus 51 percent of Republicans reported that government programs are not making a difference. Seventy percent of all Georgians with a household income below \$30,000 believe that government programs are making no difference at all to improve the condition of poor people, as compared with 56 percent of Georgians with a household income of \$30,000 or more who hold this view.

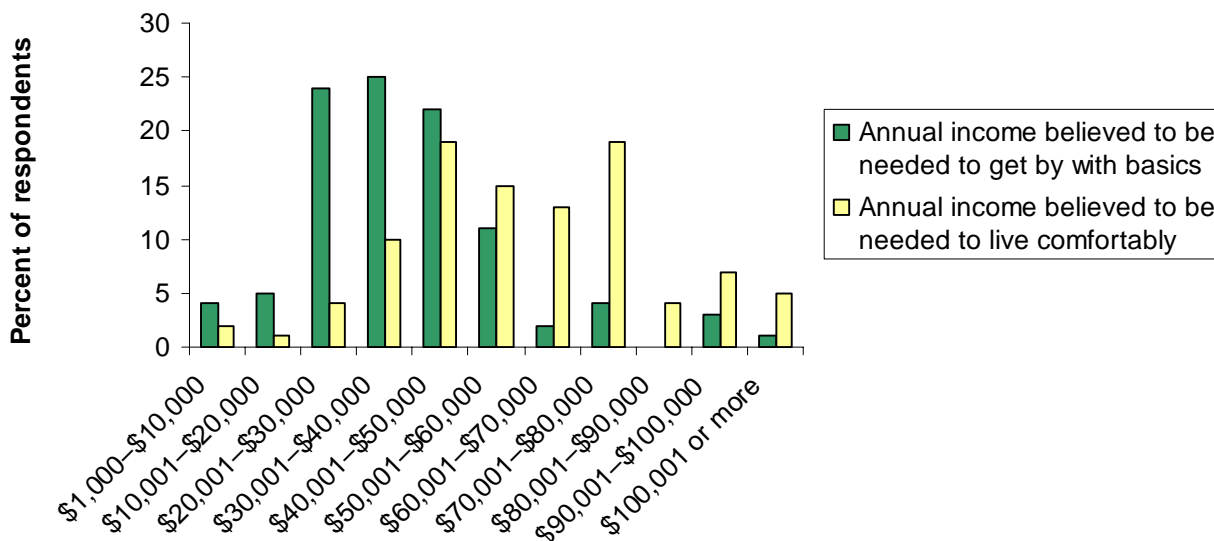
Figure 3. What effect do government programs that try to improve the condition of poor people in this country have?



The majority of Georgians (63 percent) perceive poor people as people who work but cannot earn enough money rather than people who do not work. Although a majority of both men and women feel that poor people are people who work, women (69 percent) are more likely than men (56 percent) to support this view. A majority of Democrats and Independents think that poor people are people who work (77 percent and 65 percent, respectively); however, a slight majority of Republicans (51 percent) believe that poor people are people who do not work. More Hispanics (95 percent) and blacks (71 percent) than whites (56 percent) view poor people as those who work but cannot earn enough money.

On average Georgians believe that a family of four needs an annual household income of \$44,351 to afford the basics of food, clothing, and shelter. The poverty threshold for a family of four in 2007, as defined by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, is \$20,650, which is less than half amount that Georgians identified as minimally necessary. Twenty-five percent of Georgians believe that a family of four needs between \$30,001 and \$40,000 to have the basics, and 24 percent reported that between \$20,001 and \$30,000 is needed to get by with the basics (see Figure 4). On average, Georgians believe that a family of four needs an annual household income of \$68,599 to live comfortably. Twenty percent of Georgians believe that a family of four needs an annual household income between \$40,001 and \$50,000 to live comfortably, and 19 percent believe that an income between \$70,001 and \$80,000 is needed to live comfortably (see Figure 4).

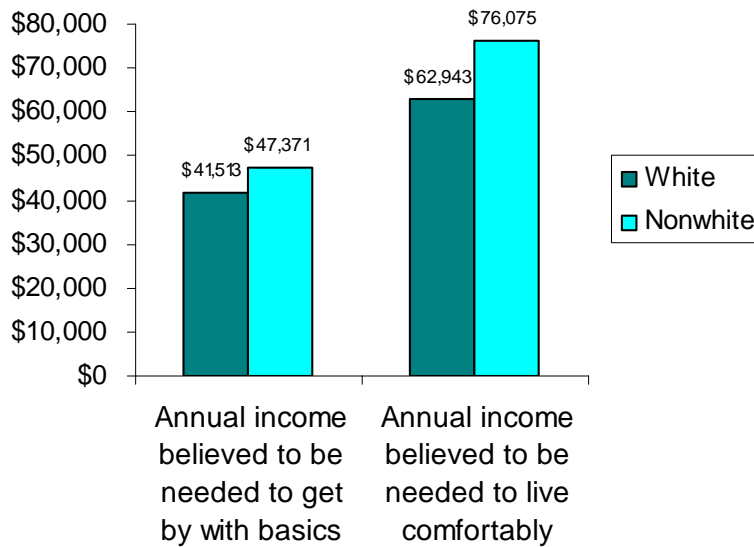
Figure 4. In your opinion, how much money does a Georgia family of four need to make annually to get by with the basics and to live comfortably?



Women believe that a family of four needs more money to get by with the basics (\$47,408) and to live comfortably (\$69,388) than men do, who reported it takes \$41,139 to get by with the basics and \$67,828 to live comfortably. Younger Georgians between 18 and 35 years old believe

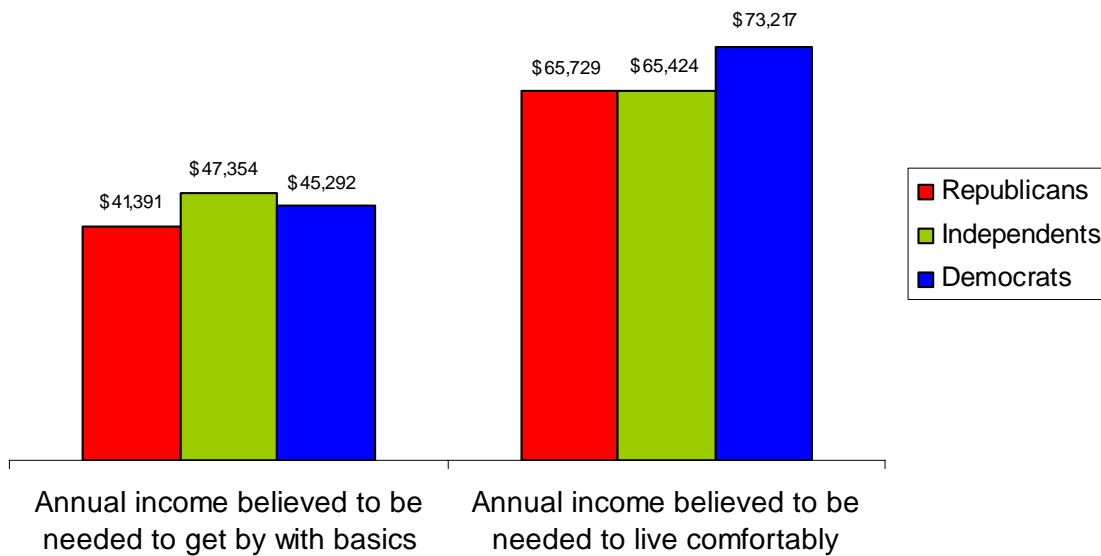
it takes more money to live comfortably than Georgians 35 years old and older (\$71,679 and \$66,307, respectively). Nonwhite Georgians believe that it requires about \$6,000 more to get by with the basics and about \$13,000 more to live comfortably than white Georgians believe is necessary (see Figure 5).

Figure 5. In your opinion, how much money does a Georgia family of four need to make annually to get by with the basics and to live comfortably?



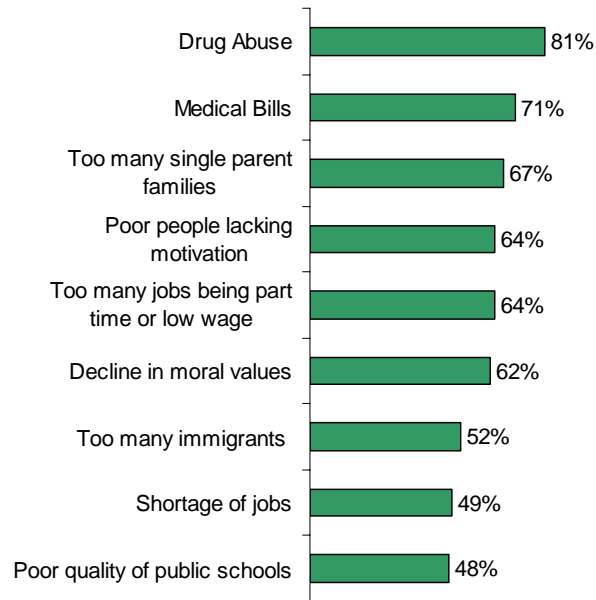
Of three political affiliations, Independents cited the greatest amount of money needed by a family of four needs to get by with the basics and the smallest amount of money to live comfortably (see Figure 6). Republicans identified the smallest annual income that a family of four needs to get by with the basics, and Democrats identified the largest income that a family of four needs to live comfortably.

Figure 6. In your opinion, how much money does a Georgia family of four need to make annually to get by with the basics and to live comfortably?



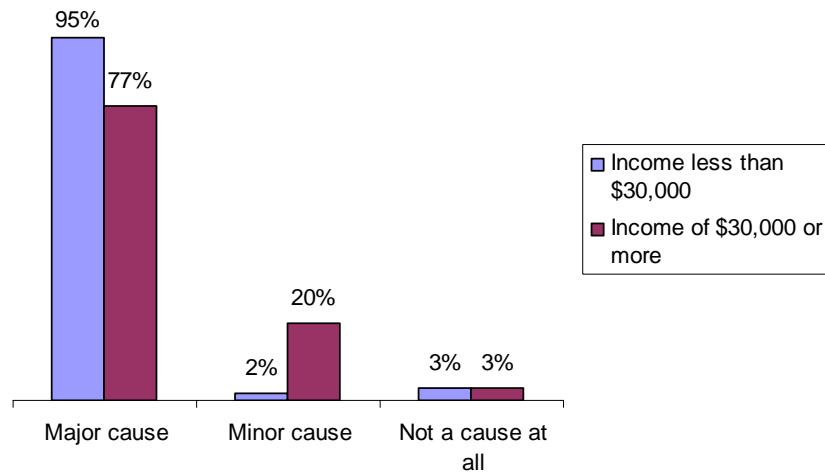
When Georgians were asked to rate nine potential causes of poverty as either a major, minor, or noncontributing factors, 81 percent of Georgians cited drug abuse as a major cause of poverty (see Figure 7). Interestingly, 63 percent of the people who identified drug abuse as a major cause of poverty also believe that poor people work. Together, these findings indicate that Georgians perceive poor people as working but also making poor decisions that contribute to and perpetuate their impoverished state. The second and third most frequently cited major causes of poverty are medical bills (71 percent) and too many single-parent families (67 percent), respectively. Less than half of Georgians identified a job shortage and the poor quality of public schools as major causes of poverty.

Figure 7. Percent reporting each of the following as a major cause of poverty



Although a majority of all races identified drug abuse as a major cause of poverty, a greater percentage of Hispanics (94 percent) than whites or blacks (77 percent and 83 percent, respectively) reported it as a major problem. Of Georgians with a household income below \$30,000, 95 percent indicate drug abuse as a major cause of poverty, compared with 77 percent of Georgians with an income of \$30,000 or greater (see Figure 8).

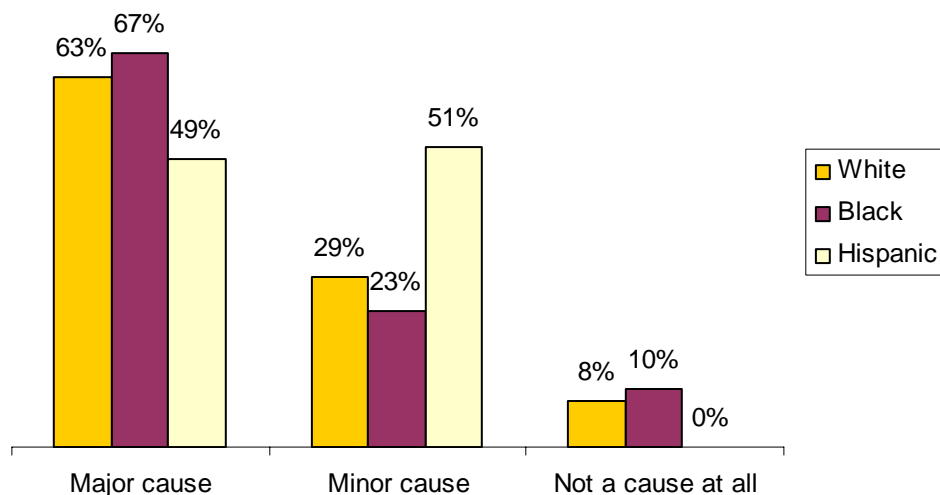
Figure 8. Do you consider drug abuse to be a major cause, minor cause, or not a cause at all of poverty?



Seventy-five percent of women identify medical bills as a major cause of poverty, compared with 66 percent of men. A majority of Georgians both with college degrees (66 percent) and without college degrees (75 percent) believe that medical bills are a major cause of poverty.

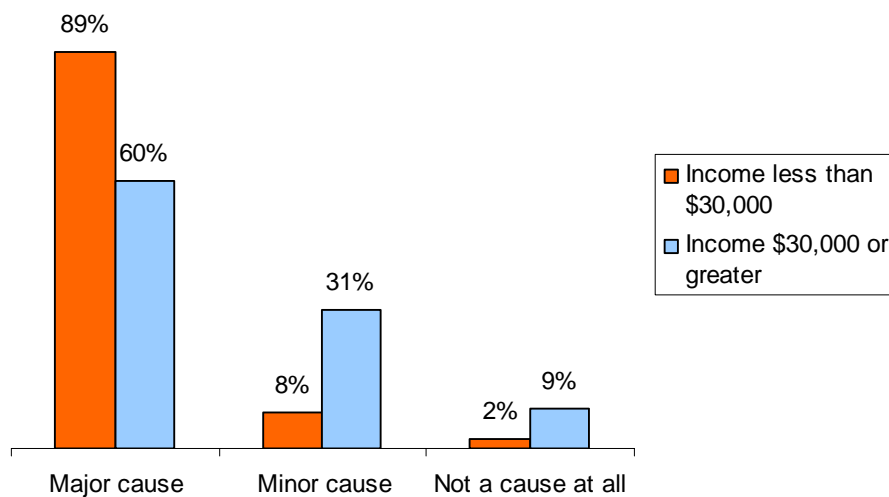
A majority of blacks (67 percent) and whites (63 percent) believe that poor people lacking motivation is a major cause of poverty, while only 49 percent of Hispanics share this view (see Figure 9). Georgians with a household income below \$30,000 (72 percent), more so than Georgians with a household income of \$30,000 or more (60 percent), attribute poverty to poor people lacking motivation.

Figure 9. Do you consider poor people lacking motivation to be a major cause, minor cause, or not a cause at all of poverty?



Women, more than men, believe that too many jobs being part-time or low-wage is a major cause of poverty (71 percent and 56 percent, respectively). Eighty-one percent of blacks, 78 percent of Hispanics, and 52 percent of whites agree that too many jobs being part-time or low-wage is a major cause of poverty. A majority of Democrats and Independents feel that too many jobs being part-time or low-wage is a major cause of poverty (77 percent and 62 percent, respectively); however, 54 percent of Republicans believe this to be a minor cause or not at all a cause of poverty. Eighty-nine percent of people with a household income below \$30,000 believe this issue to be a major cause of poverty, compared with 60 percent of people with a household income of \$30,000 or more who hold this belief (see Figure 10). Seventy percent of Georgians without a college degree believe that too many jobs being part-time or low-wage is a major cause of poverty, and 55 percent of Georgians with a college degree believe this to be a major cause of poverty.

Figure 10: Do you consider too many jobs being part-time or low-wage to be a major cause, minor cause, or not a cause at all of poverty?

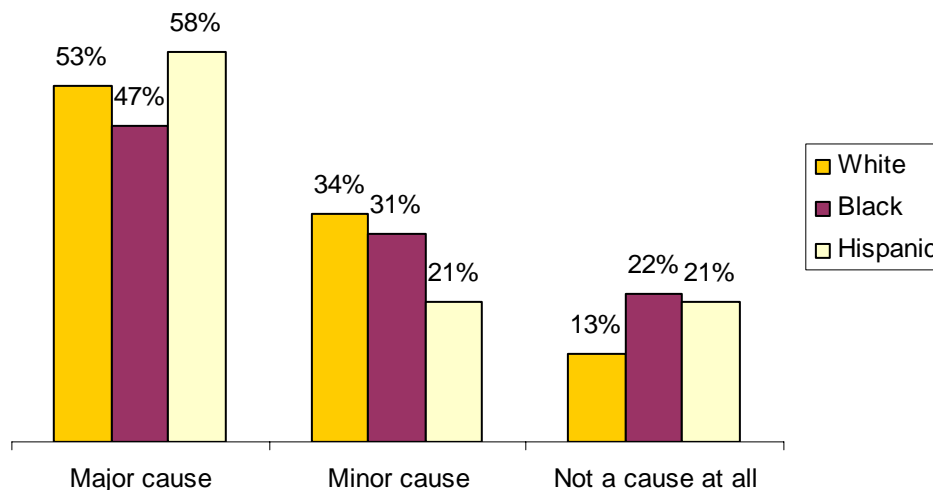


Georgians 36 years old or older, more so than Georgians between 18 and 35, believe a decline in moral values to be a major cause of poverty (68 percent and 51 percent, respectively). A clear majority of Republicans and Independents (76 percent and 58 percent, respectively) believe that a decline in moral values is a major cause of poverty, while 49 percent of Democrats hold this view.

A greater percentage of women, as compared to men, cite too many immigrants as a major cause of poverty (56 percent and 46 percent, respectively). Hispanics (58 percent), more so than blacks (47 percent) and whites (53 percent), identify too many immigrants as a major cause of poverty (see Figure 12). Fifty-six percent of people 36 years old or older attribute poverty to too many immigrants, and only 42 percent of people between 18 and 35 cited too many immigrants as a major cause of poverty. Sixty percent of Republicans, 50 percent of Democrats, and 45 percent of Independents consider too many immigrants a major cause of poverty. Of respondents with a household income below \$30,000, a majority (61 percent) cited too many immigrants as a major

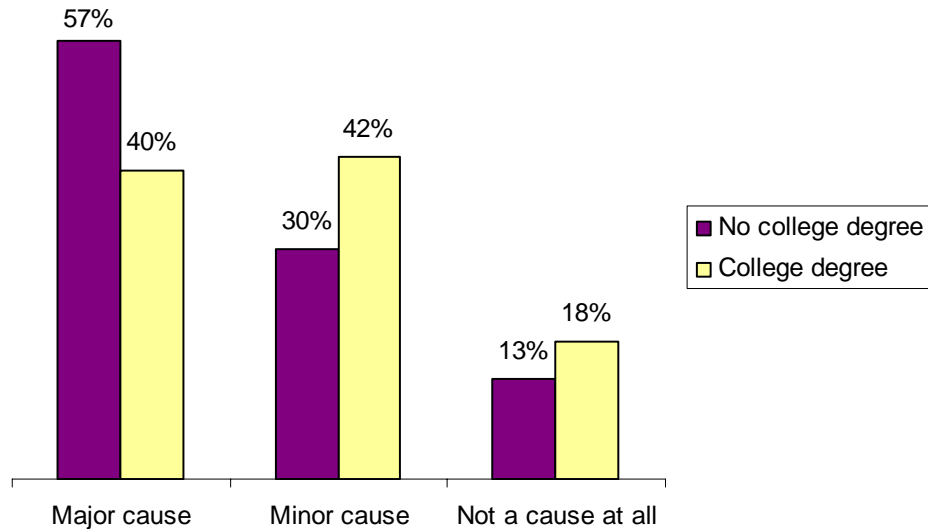
cause of poverty, compared with 49 percent of people with a household income of \$30,000 or more. Of those people without a college degree, a majority (57 percent) cited too many immigrants as a major cause of poverty, while only 44 percent of people with a college degree cited too many immigrants as a major cause of poverty.

Figure 12. Do you consider too many immigrants to be a major cause, minor cause, or not a cause at all of poverty?



A majority of women (55 percent) attribute poverty to a shortage of jobs, while a majority of men consider job shortage to be a minor cause or not at all a cause of poverty. A majority of blacks think that a shortage of jobs is a major cause of poverty, while 62 percent of whites and 52 percent of Hispanics believe that a shortage of jobs is either a minor cause or not at all a cause of poverty. A majority of Georgians ages 18 to 35 cite a shortage of jobs as a major cause of poverty, while a majority of Georgians 36 years old or older cite this job shortage as a minor cause or not at all a cause of poverty. Most Democrats (60 percent) cite a shortage of jobs as a major cause of poverty, while only 47 percent of Independents and 36 percent of Republicans cite this factor as a major cause of poverty. Of Georgians with an income of less than \$30,000, a majority (68 percent) cite a shortage of jobs as a major cause of poverty, while a majority of Georgians with an income of \$30,000 or more (53 percent) cite this as a minor or not at all a cause of poverty. A majority of people without a college degree identify a shortage of jobs as a major cause of poverty (see Figure 13).

Figure 13. Do you consider a shortage of jobs to be a major cause, minor cause, or not a cause at all of poverty?



These data were taken from the Peach State Poll conducted May 4 – 17, 2007. The poll included 802 telephone interviews of randomly selected adults in Georgia. For a sample of this size, the margin of error at the 95 percent confidence level is +/-3.5 percent.

The Carl Vinson Institute of Government, a public service and outreach unit of the University of Georgia, has as part of its mission to provide policymakers with systematic, objective research to inform policy decisions. In accordance with that mission, the Peach State Poll aims to give voice to the public on important policy matters and issues pertaining to political, social, and economic life in Georgia.

For more information on this survey or other Peach State Poll results, see www.vinsoninstitute.org/peachpoll.