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KEY U.S. POPULATION AND HOUSEHOLD CHALLENGES: THE FIRST FOUR MONTHS OF TRUMP 2.0

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

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Abstract

Census Bureau Household Trends and Outlook Pulse Survey data covering the first four months of Trump 2.0 reveal a sharp decline in confidence in The Presidency as an institution; and a significant increase in the levels of U.S. household distress over job loss, escalating prices, caregiver constraints, transportation barriers, food insecurity, and threats of foreclosure and eviction. Policies, programs, and practices to address these issues are outlined.

Introduction

The year 2025 was enormously disruptive in American society. Among other challenges, a never-ending barrage of 225 White House Executive Orders dramatically transformed the U.S. population and the households in which they reside.

Data from the February and June 2025 waves of the Census Bureau's Household Trends and Outlook Pulse Survey (HTOPS), which monitors on a monthly basis a panel of U.S. households randomly selected from more than 75,000 addresses across the nation, allow us to highlight both the nature and frequency of "emergent social and economic matters" in U.S. households during the first four months of Donald J. Trump's second term as President of the United States (Trump 2.0).

Key Insights

HTOPS data highlighting shifts in the frequency of expressions of "very little confidence" in nine U.S. institutions between February and June best captures the pulse of the nation in early 2025. Shown in Table 1, the findings are especially noteworthy regarding one specific institution: The Presidency.

Over this four-month period, lack of confidence responses to The Presidency increased by 5.6 percent or 7.4 million. According to the HTOPS data, more than half of the U.S. working age population—53.9 percent or close to 140 million--expressed "very little confidence" in The Presidency in June 2025. As Table 1 shows, none of the other eight U.S. institutions, including Congress and the U.S. Supreme Court, had absolute and relative shifts in the lack of confidence this high.

Table 1: Absolute and Percent Change in Expressions of Very Little Confidence in Selected U.S. Institutions Between February & June 2025

Absolute Number of Working Age Population (June 2025)	Percent of Working Age Population (June 2025)	Institution	Percent Change in Working Age Population (February-June 2025)	Absolute Change in Working Age Population (February-June 2025)
9,790,948	3.8	U.S. CENSUS BUREAU	-4.1	-420,752
107,934,509	41.7	CONGRESS	-4.0	-4,459,720
56,248,237	21.7	CRIMINAL JUSTICE SYSTEM	-13.0	-8,405,252
23,266,461	9.0	THE MILITARY	0.9	203,642
39,841,507	15.3	THE POLICE	5.2	2,082,041
139,987,062	53.9	THE PRESIDENCY	5.6	7,439,575
40,299,064	15.5	PUBLIC SCHOOLS	5.4	2,059,657
20,073,446	7.7	U.S. STATISTICAL AGEN-CIES	9.0	1,657,316
70,007,306	26.9	U.S. SUPREME COURT	-15.8	-13,153,473

Source: HTOPS, February & June Waves, 2025

The declining confidence in The Presidency is related--at least in part--to the deteriorating employment prospects of the nation's working age population (defined as ages 15 to 64) over this four-month period. Between February and June 2025, as the HTOPS data in Table 2 show, the number of U.S. households in which at least one person lost a job recently increased by 3.5 percent (365,156). By June 2025, 8.3 percent of U.S. households (10.8 million) experienced recent job loss.

Table 2: Absolute and Percent Change U.S. Households & Recent Household Job Loss Between February & June 2025

Absolute Number or U.S. Households (June 2025)	Percent of U.S. Households	Recent Household Job Loss	Percent Change in U.S. Households	Absolute Change In U.S. Households (Feb-June 2025)
10,863,718	8.3	YES	3.5	365,156
120,154,406	91.7	NO	0.8	991,726

Source: HTOPS, February & June Waves, 2025

In absolute numbers, shown in Table 3, the U.S. employed population declined by 8.7 percent or nearly fourteen million between February and June 2025. Only 57 percent of the working age population was employed in June (147.4 million), down from 62 percent in February (160 million). Without question, the decline reflects the Trump Administration's massive staff reductions in federal agencies and programs, including grant and aid programs, as well as the White House mandated dismantling of DEI initiatives in all societal institutions, including federal contractors. By following the Trump Playbook, some states also contributed to the decline.

Table 3: Absolute and Percent Change in U.S. Working Age Population and Their Employment Status Between February & June 2025

Absolute Number (June 2025)	Percent of Working Age Population	Employed for Last 7 Days	Percent Change	Absolute Change (Feb-June 2025)
147,449,048	56.6	YES	-8.7	-13,981,266
112,856,729	43.4	NO	13.7	13,602,300

Source: HTOPS, February & June Waves, 2025

The job losses were evident in nearly every sector of the U.S. economy, including the private sector (-10.4%), government (-9.8%), self-employment (-17%), and family business (-7.3%). The nonprofit sector was the exception; it experienced a modest three percent increase in employment during this period (577,370), as shown in Table 4.

Table 4: Absolute and Percent Change in Employment by Economic Sector Between February & June 2025

Absolute Number (June 2025)	Percent of Working Age Population (June 2025)	Sector of Employment	Percent Change (Feb-June 2025)	Absolute Change (Feb-June 2025)
23,231,045	16.0	GOVERNMENT	-9.8	-2,537,040
87,840,919	60.0	PRIVATE SECTOR	-10.4	-10,207,178
18,222,442	12.6	NON-PROFIT	3.3	577,370
13,185,158	9.1	SELF-EMPLOYED	-17.0	-2,697,494
2,416,883	1.7	FAMILY BUSINESS	-7.3	-190,642

Source: HTOPS, February & June Waves, 2025

In June 2025, according to HTOPS, close to half of the U.S. working age population was not engaged in gainful employment (43 percent or 112 million), a 13.7 percent increase in the number (thirteen million) since February 2025. The following were among the main reasons given for not working in June 2025.

- Five percent (5.6 million) did not want to work and therefore might be classified as discouraged workers.
- Nearly half were retired (54.6 million).
- Fourteen percent were sick or disabled (15.7 million).
- And layoffs accounted for only a small fraction (1.4 percent or 4.0 million).

However, as shown in Table 5, transportation barriers, and caregiving constraints (both childcare and eldercare) were the major causes of the increase in the number of working age individuals who were not engaged in work for pay between February and June 2025.

Table 5: Absolute and Percent Change in Main Reasons for Not Working Between February & June 2025

Absolute Number (June 2025)	Percent of Working Age Population	Main Reason for Not Working	Percent Change	Absolute Change (Feb-June 2025)
5,625,166	5.0	DID NOT WANT TO WORK	8.7	450,090
8,004,521	7.1	CARING FOR CHILDREN	102.9	4,060,377
2,377,598	2.1	CARING FOR ELDERLY	51.5	808,623
15,751,381	14.0	SICK OR DISABLED	-11.5	-2,040,122
54,632,794	48.2	RETIRED	8.7	4,312,769
4,019.137	3.6	LAID OFF	40.0	1,148,057
1,543,242	1.4	EMPLOYER SHUTDOWN	-35.1	-835,514
4,427,8565	3.9	NO TRANSPORTATION	151.7	2,668,687
16,360,779	14.6	OTHER REASON	21.8	2,923,677

Source: HTOPS, February & June Waves, 2025

Over this four-month period, and precisely when employers were instituting mandatory return to office policies, the number of working age individuals who did not have accessible, safe, dependable, and affordable transportation increased by 152 percent (2.7 million) and totaled 4.4 million by June 2025.

Similarly, the number of working age individuals caring for children increased by 103 percent (4.0 million) while those with elder care responsibilities increased by fifty percent (808,623) between February and June 2025. An estimated 8.0 million people, seven percent of the working age population, had childcare responsibilities; and 2.4 million, two percent of the working-age population, were caring for an older adult in June 2025.

Concerns about the escalating cost of goods and services also probably contributed to the declining confidence in The Presidency between February and June 2025. Partly due to White House Executive Orders mandating accelerated deportation of unauthorized immigrants and a clampdown on international migration, the U.S. working age population declined by -1.3 million (-0.5 percent) during this period. Simultaneously, according to the HTOPS data, the frequency of concerns about prices increased by seven percent among the nation's working age population. In June 2025, as shown in Table 6, 134 million working age individuals expressed concerns about the escalating cost of goods and services, up from 125 million in February 2025.

Table 6: Absolute & Percent Change in U.S. Working Age Population & Expressed Concerns About Rising Prices Between February and June 2025

Indicator	June 2025	February 2025	Absolute Change	Percent Change
POPULATION CHANGE	259,619,510	260,961,578	-1,342,068	-0.5
EXPRESSED CONCERNS ABOUT PRICES	134,472,079	125,678,066	8,794,013	7.0

Source: HTOPS, February & June Waves, 2025

Due to the combined effects of job losses and growing concerns about inflation, one half of U.S. households (sixty-seven million) were having trouble covering expenses by the fourth month of Trump 2.0, according to the HTOPS data. The number of households in this situation increased by five percent or 3.2 million between February and June 2025.

One example of the rising expense challenge, 4.4 percent of U.S. households were behind on mortgage payments (2.4 million) in June 2025, a significant increase in the number of such households since February 2025 (12.3 percent or 245,735). And the HTOPS data revealed that number of homeowner households facing foreclosure risk increased by 171 percent during this period (81,936).

Similarly, 9.1 percent of renter-occupied households were behind on rent payments in June 2025 (4.0 million). And while this was fewer by -550,315 (-12.2 percent) than four months earlier, the absolute number of renters facing eviction risk increased by 12.2 percent (168,975) over the four-month period, bringing the total to 1.5 million in June 2025.

Covering the cost of housing accommodations was not the only financial challenge U.S. households faced during the first four months of Trump 2.0. Food insecurity was also a problem for 38.8 million U.S. households in June 2025. Sixty five percent of these households (twenty-five million) cited "could not afford to buy more food" as the reason for their food insecurity. The number of households in this situation increased by two percent (515,015) between February and June 2025.

Even more revealing regarding food insufficiency, 29 percent of U.S. households (4.9 million), in response to a HTOPS probe, reported in June 2025 that children in their household were not eating enough because "we could not afford enough food." Households this situation increased by 30 percent between February and June 2025 (1.1 million).

Emblematic of the food insecurity problem, 9 million U.S. households got free groceries from a food bank or some other charitable organization in June 2025. HTOPS data indicate that this was a slight increase in the number of households receiving such assistance four months earlier (19,038).

Yet another indicator of household financial challenges: the number of working age individuals who said that "transportation options cost more than I can afford" increased by 1.3 million or 24%. An estimated 6.7 million U.S. households, according to the HTOPS data, were transportation-constrained in June 2025.

Concluding Insights

In the U.S., as we have demonstrated elsewhere, the size of the under-utilized talent pool has increased significantly in the recent past. Some of the increases were due to the substitution effects of the adoption of AI tools in workplaces. But the February and June waves of HTOPS suggest that the recent increase also coincided with massive cuts in government employment and the dismantling of DEI programs in all sectors of the economy during the first four months of Trump 2.0. In addition, employer-instituted mandatory return to office policies also probably played a key role.

Our analyses of the HTOPS data indicate further that the frequency of transportation and caregiving constraints increased significantly as major barriers to employment among the U.S. working age population between February and June 2025. And layoffs combined with the escalating cost of goods and services exacerbated affordability issues and challenges for both working and not working U.S. households.

To effectively address current and future labor needs, employers should institute HR policies and practices that address caregiving issues (childcare and eldercare). Childcare and especially eldercare—absent the support of others--can impose severe constraints on searching, securing, and/or maintaining a job. In the case of caring for an older adult, there are potential adverse impacts on the caregiver's personal health and wellbeing, which in turn can adversely impact both job search and performance.

Employers also should invest in housing assistance and transportation supports to reduce/minimize commuting challenges. And it is advisable for employers to re-evaluate the value-add of mandatory return-to-office policies for all employees, given recent research demonstrating the positive impact of remote work on productivity.

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