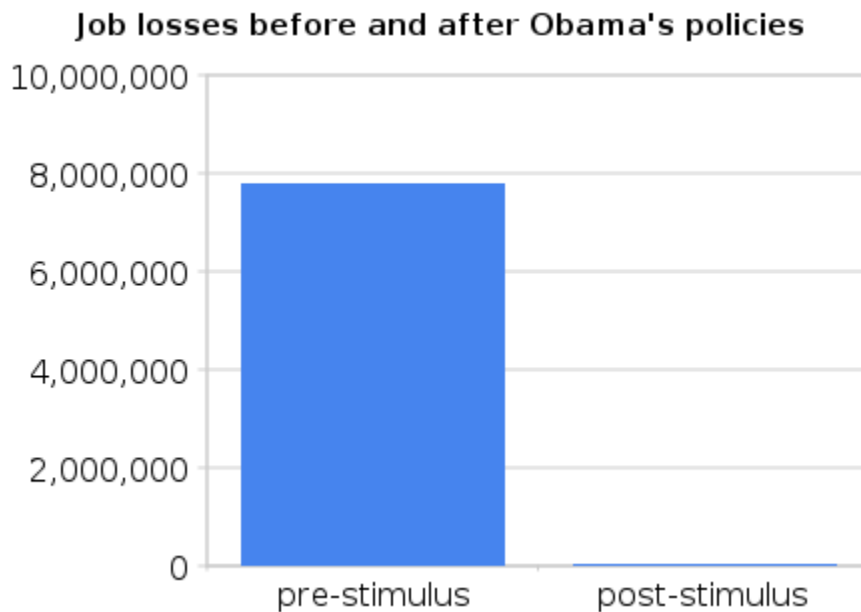


Who can we blame for job losses?

By Ezra Klein, Washington Post, August 12, 2010



"Obama's America," [tweets](#) Republican political consultant Patrick Ruffini, linking to [this map](#) of economic devastation.

Fairly or not, Ruffini raises an interesting question: How much unemployment can we blame on the Obama administration? Economist Rob Shapiro [dug into](#) some Bureau of Labor Statistics data and came back with the best numbers I've seen on the subject. He separated job losses into two buckets: Those that happened before the stimulus, which was Obama's major effort to deal with joblessness, and those that happened after the stimulus. Here's what he found:

From December 2007 to July 2009 – the last year of the Bush second term and the first six months of the Obama presidency, before his policies could affect the economy – private sector employment crashed from 115,574,000 jobs to 107,778,000 jobs. Employment continued to fall, however, for the next six months, reaching a low of 107,107,000 jobs in December of 2009. So, out of 8,467,000 private sector jobs lost in this dismal cycle, 7,796,000 of those jobs or 92 percent were lost on the Republicans' watch or under the sway of their policies. Some 671,000 additional jobs were lost as the stimulus and other moves by the administration kicked in, but 630,000 jobs then came back in the following six months. The tally, to date: Mr. Obama can be held accountable for the net loss of 41,000 jobs (671,000 – 630,000), while the Republicans should be held responsible for the net losses of 7,796,000 jobs.

We can argue about how much of the job losses should really be pinned on Republicans or Republican policies, of course. Financial deregulation happened under Bill Clinton, for instance. And it's hard to hold George W. Bush solely responsible for a global financial crisis. But insofar

as the job losses go, it's hard to credibly blame this White House for the vast, vast majority of them.

That said, though this wasn't Obama's economic crisis, it is his economic recovery. There's a fair question as to whether another set of policies could've led to faster job growth over the last year or so. And the recent shakiness in the recovery is cause for concern on that front. So it's worth looking at Shapiro's proposal to strengthen the recovery, too:

First, create jobs by expanding an Administration initiative already in place: Deep cuts in the payroll tax for employers who expand their workforce. Second, shore-up the weak housing market and stabilize falling home prices with a long-overdue, new initiative: A loan program for homeowners with mortgages in trouble, modeled on federal student loans, to bring down foreclosure rates. Third, prepare tens of millions of Americans for the jobs the economy will begin to create once it's back on track: Provide grants to community colleges to fund free computer training for any American adult who walks in and asks for it. And fourth, put in place some long-term deficit reduction to head off higher interest rates when the economy does begin to expand again.

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