

Stockton's Hughes Center Research: 55 Percent of New Jerseyans Feel Their Income Is Falling Behind the Cost of Living

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Galloway, NJ - Survey research from Stockton University establishes a baseline on New Jersey residents' attitudes on income inequality, with 55 percent saying they feel their income is "falling behind the cost of living," and nearly 37 percent suggesting their income is "just keeping pace" with the economy.

Key findings from the survey of 802 New Jerseyans statewide include that nearly 70 percent believe the U.S. economy is still in a recession, while only 20 percent believe that economic conditions in New Jersey are good (14 percent) or excellent (6 percent).

"While there has been much analysis regarding New Jersey's economic health, this study allows New Jerseyans to voice how they have been affected by these economic conditions," said Kelly Sloane, Public Policy researcher for Stockton University's William J. Hughes Center for Public Policy. Sloane wrote the report, "Views on Economic Inequality in the State of New Jersey."

The Stockton Polling Institute surveyed respondents statewide to uncover their opinions on income inequality and economic conditions in the state of New Jersey and the United States as a whole.

Nearly 66 percent of those surveyed state that New Jersey is on the wrong track. Poll respondents believe that government has the responsibility and capacity to disrupt economic inequality, and strongly favor or favor reform in a variety of methods.

As New Jersey's economic health becomes more complex, many residents find themselves in a stalemate. Most of the survey's respondents and their family members did not experience economic hardships such as the loss of a job or deep food insecurity. However, the majority of

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those polled also did not enjoy economic achievements, such as the purchase of a new home or job promotion.

New Jersey survey respondents' voiced a general lack of confidence in both the U.S. and New Jersey economy. The majority of those polled (79 percent) rate U.S. economic conditions as poor or fair, while an even higher percentage (84.1 percent) believe that New Jersey's economic conditions are either poor or fair. The majority (60 percent) of residents polled predicted that today's children will be worse off financially than their parents.

Economic inequality has become an important research area because there is clear evidence demonstrating that income, wages, and wealth are highly correlated with "quality of life." With economic inequality emerging as one of the hottest topics of the 2016 presidential election, this research provides an analysis of the views, policy preferences and economic experiences of New Jersey residents. New Jersey residents identified jobs as the most important issue influencing their vote for president in 2016.

"This research gives voice to all New Jerseyans to express their real-life experiences and to express their opinions on how to improve their economic conditions," said Daniel J. Douglas, director of the Hughes Center.

Poll results indicate overwhelming support for economic policy interventions among New Jersey residents, specifically for those designed to address poverty and income inequality. These include "holding down interest rates on student loans," "paid sick leave for full-time employees," "paid leave for the birth or adoption of a child," "state or federally funded pre-K," and "raising the minimum wage to \$15 an hour."

Roughly 88 percent believe that the government should provide "a lot" or "some" action to reduce poverty, with an estimated 77 percent advocating "a lot" or "some" action to answer the wealth gap. Nearly 80 percent of New Jerseyans favor increasing the tax rate for Americans earning more than \$1 million annually.

Of those surveyed, 35 percent believe that the national economy has gotten better. Another 34 percent say it has gotten worse, while 31 percent feel it has stayed the same. Only 10 percent of respondents felt that their personal financial situation was in "excellent" shape, with 40 percent believing their financial situation was in "good shape," and 50 percent viewing their standing as either "fair" or "poor."

This research builds off findings of Sloane's previous report, "Economic Indicators and Quality of Life in Southern New Jersey" (May 2015), which explored county-level and regional economic differences experienced by New Jersey residents.

The report can be downloaded at stockton.edu/hughescenter.

Methodology

The survey was conducted by the Stockton Polling Institute of the William J. Hughes Center for Public Policy (www.stockton.edu/hughescenter). Live interviewers on the Stockton University campus called both landlines and cell phones from Nov. 4-15, 2015. The poll was conducted with 802 adult residents of New Jersey. The poll's margin of error is +/- 3.5 percentage points at a 95 percent confidence level. MOE is higher for subsets. Data are weighted based on United States Census Bureau demographics for New Jersey.

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About the Hughes Center

The William J. Hughes Center for Public Policy (stockton.edu/hughescenter) at Stockton University serves as a catalyst for research, analysis and innovative policy solutions on the economic, social and cultural issues facing New Jersey, and promotes the civic life of New Jersey through engagement, education and research. The Center is named for William J. Hughes, whose distinguished career includes service in the U.S. House of Representatives, Ambassador to Panama and as a Distinguished Visiting Professor at Stockton. The Hughes Center can be found at facebook.com/StocktonHughesCenter and can be followed on [Twitter@hughescenter](https://twitter.com/hughescenter).

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