



Mercyhurst Center
for Applied Politics

The Mercyhurst Poll
Economy and Poverty Unit

The Current Economic Situation
and its Impact on Pennsylvanians

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College

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Table of Contents

Methodology.....	1
Response Rate.....	2
Questions.....	2
Data.....	3
Table 1: Pennsylvania Population Characteristics v. Sample.....	4
Findings.....	5
State of the Economy in the Nation and at Home.....	5
Efforts to Address the Economic Situation.....	6
Frequency Report.....	7

Methodology

This report summarizes the results of a survey of adult residents of Pennsylvania that was conducted between September 19 and October 7, 2011. During the 19 day field period interviewers called weekday evenings between the hours of 6:00 and 9:00 PM, and between 11:00 AM and 5:00 PM on selected weekdays. For each working phone number, interviewers made no less than six attempts to contact the residents of households for which numbers had been generated. Respondents categorized as refusals were frequently called back to further insulate against bias in our sample. To minimize selection bias, interviewers were instructed to not administer the questionnaire to the first person in the household to whom they spoke, but to “the adult in the household who has had the most recent birthday.”

Calls were generated by CATI software and relied on a list of randomly generated landline telephone numbers (cell-only households were not included in the population from which the sample was drawn). In this study, 426 adults were interviewed. For a sample size of 426, there is a 95 percent probability that the results are within plus or minus 4.75 percentage points (the margin of error) of the actual population distribution for any given question. For subsamples, the margin of error is higher (depending on the size of the subsample). Aside from the margin of sampling error, there are several factors that prevent the results obtained through a probability sample from being a perfect representation of those that would be obtained if the entire population was interviewed. This non-sampling error is the result of a variety of factors including, but not limited to, response rates and question order. In this survey, a variety of techniques were employed to reduce common sources of non-sampling error.

Response Rate

Calculating a response rate for a particular study involves considering a number of variables. Simply stated, it refers to the percentage of individuals in a sample that, when contacted, elect to participate in a study by responding an interviewer's questions. In recent years, researchers have documented a sharp decline in response rates. Today, a typical study that relies on telephone interviews can expect a response rate of between 20 and 30%. Although it is unclear if, or to what extent, response rate is a source of non-sampling error, most polls strive to maximize response rate by making multiple attempts to contact individuals and taking steps to secure their cooperation once they have been reached. In this way, our study of adult residents of Pennsylvania is no different than most polls: Up to eight attempts were made to contact hard-to-reach individuals. These attempts occurred during weekday mornings, afternoons and evenings. To ensure a high rate of cooperation, interviewers received training on conversion techniques that are consistent with research ethics as defined by the Mercyhurst College Institutional Review Board. As a result of these efforts, our study obtained a response rate of 24%, which is consistent with studies of similar populations.

Questions

In order to compare Pennsylvanians' opinions on the state of the economy and its impact on residents' lives to the nation as a whole, some questions for the Economics and Poverty Unit of the *Mercyhurst Poll* were derived from an ABC News/Washington Post poll conducted in July, 2011. For these results, see <http://www.langerresearch.com/uploads/1125a4Economy.pdf>.

This report contains the questions as worded on the questionnaire and in the order in which they were asked. Some of the questions include bracketed information, which is, in every case, an instruction to the programmer or interviewer.

Whenever possible, question order was randomized to ensure that respondents did not receive a set order of response options, which allowed response set bias to be minimized. For structured (close-ended) questions, interviewers were trained to probe for clarity when respondents' answers were not identical to the predefined response options. For unstructured (open-ended) questions, interviewers were trained to record verbatim responses whenever possible.

Data

Data collected during this study was prepared for analysis by director and associate director of Mercyhurst Center for Applied Politics. Data preparation included, but was not limited to, removing partial interviews (respondent-terminated interviews) from the dataset. To maximize the accuracy of our results, sometimes data is weighted. Simply stated, weighting is when data collected from survey respondents are adjusted to represent the population from which the sample was drawn. In this study, the variables "age" and "gender" were weighted in order to adjust for differences between the sample and Pennsylvania population (see Table 1).

Table 1. Pennsylvania Population Characteristics v. Sample

	Pennsylvania	Sample
Adult Population	9,910,224	428
Sex		
Female	52%	61%
Male	48%	39%
Age		
18-29 years	21%	4%
30-59 years	52%	47%
60 and older	27%	49%
Race		
White	82%	89%
Black	11%	6%
Latino	6%	2%
Other	2%	3%
Region		
Northeast	9%	9%
Southeast	43%	42%
Central	22%	22%
Southwest	21%	23%
Northwest	5%	6%

The survey was conducted by the Mercyhurst Center for Applied Politics (polisci.mercyhurst.edu/mcap) under the direction of Dr. Joseph M. Morris (Director), Dr. Rolfe D. Peterson (Methodologist) and Sean Fedorko (Project Manager). It may be used in whole or in part, provided the survey is attributed to the Mercyhurst Center for Applied Politics at Mercyhurst College. Data will be available for free download at the center's website thirty days after the release of this report. Direct questions to Dr. Joseph M. Morris, Director, Mercyhurst Center for Applied Politics, Mercyhurst College, 501 E. 38th Street, Erie, PA, 16546.

Findings

Summary of Findings

The Economics and Poverty Unit of the *Mercyhurst Poll* finds that adult residents of Pennsylvania believe that the state of nation's economy is poor, and have had to make changes to their personal lifestyles that make them upset or concerned. The survey also finds that Pennsylvanians are critical of the Obama Administration, Republicans in Congress and Democrats in Congress' efforts to address the economic situation, but are most critical of the Bush Administration's efforts to fix the ailing economy. These results are based on interviews with 426 adult residents of Pennsylvania (margin of error of +/- 4.75) that were conducted between September 19 and October 7, 2011.

State of the Economy in the Nation and at Home

A majority of Pennsylvanians (57%) describe the state of nation's economy as "poor" and nearly 90% say jobs are "somewhat" or "very difficult" to find in their community. Although most Pennsylvanians (57%) reported that they "are making just enough money to get by," 22% say that they "are falling behind." Only 17% indicate that they are "getting ahead financially."

The state of the economy is directly impacting Pennsylvanians and their extended families. Roughly one out of every four Pennsylvanians (24%) have had someone living in their household lose their jobs during the past twelve months, and two out of every three Pennsylvanians (67%) have close friends or family members who have found themselves unemployed during the past year. The nation's economic situation has caused a majority of Pennsylvania residents (53%) to make significant changes to their lifestyle, and most of these individuals describe

themselves as “upset” (38%) or “concerned” (45%) about the changes they’ve had to make.

Today, more than three out of every four Pennsylvanians (77%) know individuals or families that struggle each month to get their basic needs met, such as rent, utilities, healthcare, proper clothes, or food; and only 9% say that poverty is the result solely of the persons or family’s “lack of effort.”

Efforts to Address Economic Situation

Pennsylvanians are largely critical of efforts made by the Bush Administration, Obama Administration, Democrats in Congress, and Republicans in Congress to address the economic challenges facing the United States. A slight majority say that the actions taken by the Obama Administration and the Republicans in Congress (53%) have made things “somewhat” or “much worse,” and nearly a majority feel the same about actions taken by Democrats in Congress (47%). A clear majority of Pennsylvanians (58%) say that the actions taken by the Bush Administration made the economic situation “somewhat” or “much worse.”

Frequency Report

Results may not total 100% due to rounding.

Q.1 – Q. 13 report frequencies after weighting on respondent age and gender.

Q.1 To begin, would you describe the state of the nation's economy these days as excellent, good, not so good, or poor?

Excellent	0%
Good	5%
Not So Good	39%
Poor	57%
DK	0%
RF	0%

Q.2 Thinking about job opportunities where you live, would you say there are plenty of jobs available in your community, jobs are somewhat difficult to find in your community, or that jobs are very difficult to find in your community?

Plenty of Jobs	7%
Somewhat Difficult to Find	47%
Very Difficult to Find	43%
DK	4%
RF	0%

Q.3 Which best describes your family's financial situation?

Do you feel as if you are getting ahead financially, have just enough money to maintain your standard of living, or are you falling behind financially?

Getting Ahead	17%
Just Enough Money	57%
Falling Behind	22%
DK	1%
RF	2%

Q.4 Has the economic situation caused you to change your personal lifestyle in a significant way, or not?

Yes, it has	53%
No, it has not	47%
DK	0%
RF	0%

[IF THE ANSWER IS 2, THEN SKIP TO QUESTION 6]

[IF THE ANSWER IS 8, THEN SKIP TO QUESTION 6]

[IF THE ANSWER IS 9, THEN SKIP TO QUESTION 6]

Q.5 How would you describe your feelings about the changes you've had to make - are you angry about it, not angry but upset, not upset but concerned, or is it not a cause for concern?

Angry	12%
Upset	38%
Concerned	45%
Not Concerned	14%
DK	1%
RF	0%

Q.6 In the last year, have you or has anyone living in your household been laid off or lost their job?

Yes	24%
No	76%
DK	0%
RF	0%

Q.7 Thinking beyond your own household, in the last year, have any close friends or immediate family members been laid off or lost their job?

Yes	67%
No	33%
DK	0%
RF	0%

[ASK QUESTIONS 8 TO 11 IN RANDOM ORDER]

Q.8 Thinking about the economic challenges facing the country would you say the actions taken by the Obama Administration made things much better, somewhat better, somewhat worse, much worse, or had no effect?

Much Better	3%
Somewhat Better	23%
Somewhat Worse	24%
Much Worse	27%
No Effect	19%
DK	3%
RF	1%

Q.9 Thinking about the economic challenges facing the country would you say the actions taken by the Bush Administration made things much better, somewhat better, somewhat worse, much worse, or had no effect?

Much Better	2%
Somewhat Better	18%
Somewhat Worse	27%
Much Worse	31%
No Effect	15%
DK	6%
RF	1%

Q.10 Thinking about the economic challenges facing the country would you say the actions taken by the Democrats in Congress made things much better, somewhat better, somewhat worse, much worse, or had no effect?

Much Better	3%
Somewhat Better	19%
Somewhat Worse	22%
Much Worse	25%
No Effect	21%
DK	9%
RF	1%

Q.11 Thinking about the economic challenges facing the country would you say the actions taken by the Republicans in Congress made things much better, somewhat better, somewhat worse, much worse, or had no effect?

Much Better	2%
Somewhat Better	15%
Somewhat Worse	27%
Much Worse	26%
No Effect	24%
DK	7%
RF	1%

Q.12 Do you personally know individuals or families who really struggle each month to get their basic needs met, such as rent, utilities, health care, proper clothes, or food?

Yes	77%
No	23%
DK	0%
RF	0%

Q.13 People have very different opinions about why a person or family is in poverty. Some people believe that poverty is the result of a person's lack of effort, while others believe it is the result of circumstances beyond their control. How about you? Would you say that most poverty is caused by people's lack of effort, circumstances beyond people's control, or a combination of lack of effort and circumstances beyond their control?

Lack of Effort	9%
Circumstances	21%
Combination	69%
DK	1%
RF	1%

Demographic questions (Q.49 – Q. 63) are reported before sample population weighting .

Our last few questions are used to ensure that our sample for this survey reflects the population as a whole. Again, all information will be kept confidential.

Q.49 Generally speaking, do you usually think of yourself as a Republican, a Democrat, or an Independent?

Republican	29%
Democrat	30%
Independent	39%
Other	1%
DK	0%
RF	1%

[IF THE ANSWER IS 2, THEN SKIP TO QUESTION 51]

[IF THE ANSWER IS 3, THEN SKIP TO QUESTION 52]

[IF THE ANSWER IS 8, THEN SKIP TO QUESTION 52]

[IF THE ANSWER IS 9, THEN SKIP TO QUESTION 52]

[IF THE ANSWER IS 4, THEN SKIP TO QUESTION 52]

Q.50 Would you call yourself a strong Republican or a not very strong Republican?

Strong Republican	52%
Not Very Strong	44%
DK	2%
RF	1%

[IF THE ANSWER IS 1, THEN SKIP TO QUESTION 53]

[IF THE ANSWER IS 2, THEN SKIP TO QUESTION 53]

[IF THE ANSWER IS 8, THEN SKIP TO QUESTION 53]

[IF THE ANSWER IS 9, THEN SKIP TO QUESTION 53]

Q.51 Would you call yourself a strong Democrat or a not very strong Democrat?

Strong	58%
Not Very Strong	41%
DK	1%
RF	0%

[IF THE ANSWER IS 1, THEN SKIP TO QUESTION 53]

[IF THE ANSWER IS 2, THEN SKIP TO QUESTION 53]

[IF THE ANSWER IS 8, THEN SKIP TO QUESTION 53]

[IF THE ANSWER IS 9, THEN SKIP TO QUESTION 53]

Q.52 Do you think of yourself as closer to the Republican Party or to the Democratic Party?

Closer to Republican	37%
Closer to Democratic	34%
Neither	12%
DK	13%
RF	4%

Q.53 Generally speaking, would you consider yourself to be a liberal, a conservative, a moderate, or have you not thought much about this?

Liberal	14%
Conservative	32%
Moderate	25%
Have not thought much about this	23%
DK	4%
RF	2%

Q.54 In what year were you born?

[Record Year]

Q.55 What is the highest level of education you have completed?

Less than High School	3%
High School/GED	29%
Some College	15%
2-Year College (Associates) or Professional	13%
4-Year College Degree (BS or BA)	23%
Masters Degree	14%
Doctoral Degree	3%
DK	0%
RF	1%

Q.56 What is your religious affiliation?

Protestant	29%
Catholic	37%
Jewish	3%
Muslim	0%
Other	17%
Not affiliated with a religion	11%
DK	1%
RF	1%

Q.57 What is your race?

White or Caucasian	89%
Black or African American	6%
Asian or Pacific Islander	0%
Hispanic or Latino	2%
Arabic	0%
DK	0%
RF	2%

Q.58 What is your marital status?

Single, never married	15%
Married	62%
Separated	2%
Divorced	10%
Widowed	9%
Other	0%
Partnership	0%
DK	0%
RF	1%

Q.59 If you add together the yearly incomes, before taxes, of all the members of your household for the past year, would the total be...

[Read all Categories]

Less than \$30,000	22%
\$30,000 to \$60,000	25%
\$60,000 to \$90,000	17%
\$90,000 to \$120,000	10%
Greater than \$120,000	11%
DK	2%
RF	12%

Q.60 What is your current employment status?

Employed	49%
Unemployed	10%
Laid off / Furloughed	0%
Retired	36%
Disabled	3%
DK	0%
RF	1%

[IF THE ANSWER IS 1, THEN SKIP TO QUESTION 62]

[IF THE ANSWER IS 4, THEN SKIP TO QUESTION 62]

Q.61 Are you currently seeking employment?

Yes	39%
No	58%
DK	0%
RF	3%

Q.63 Gender.

Male39%
Female	...61%

[DEBRIEF]

We are at the end of the survey. I want to thank you for your participation and let you know that: Research at Mercyhurst College which involves human participants is overseen by the Institutional Review Board. Questions or problems regarding your rights as a participant should be addressed to Mr. Timothy Harvey: Institutional Review Board Chair, Mercyhurst College, 501 East 38th Street, Erie, Pennsylvania 16546. Telephone (814) 824-3372