

In March 2011, the Economic Mobility Project updated its 2009 national poll to reassess public perceptions of economic mobility and the American Dream in the wake of the Great Recession.

Large majorities of Americans felt that the recession had hurt their economic status and rated their current financial situation as only fair or poor. However, even in the face of personal economic hardship, Americans maintained a strong belief in their ability to achieve the American Dream and control their own economic situations.

New analyses on the 2011 poll data examine demographic differences by age cohort, education, income, employment, and race/ethnicity.



Economic Mobility and the American Dream: Examining Income Differences

Lower-income Americans expressed the least favorable perceptions of their current economic circumstances, ability to achieve the American Dream, and opportunities for a better financial future. Compared to other income groups, they were the most supportive of the government's role in helping people out of poverty and preventing the middle class from falling behind.

- Income Groups**
- **Less than \$25K**
 - **\$25K to under \$50K**
 - **\$50K to under \$75K**
 - **\$75K to under \$100K**
 - **\$100K or more¹**

¹ Income tends to be underreported on surveys and polls because of its perceived sensitivity by respondents. Income was intentionally asked as the last question on our survey. Overall, 16 percent of respondents refused to report income on our poll. This is much lower than typical item nonresponse rates on other surveys, which can range from 20 to 40 percent (see Yan, T., R. Curtin, and M. Jans. (2010). "Trends in Income Nonresponse over Two Decades," *Journal of Official Statistics*, 26 (1): 145-164). The distribution of respondents across income categories in the Economic Mobility Project's poll aligned well with other data sources.

Lower-income Americans were the most negative about their current financial standing.

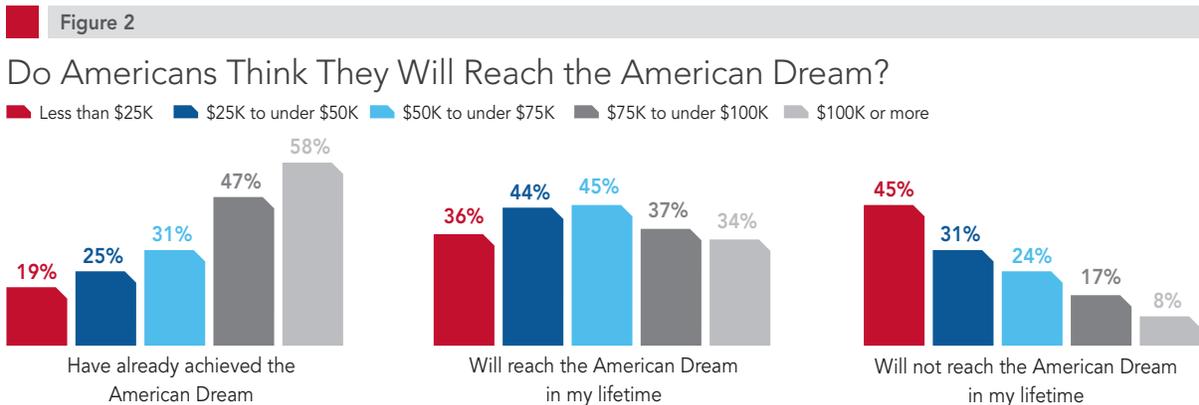
An overwhelming 81 percent of those making less than \$50,000 per year rated their financial situation negatively. In contrast, majorities of those making at least \$75,000 a year rated their financial situations positively, including 69 percent of those making \$100,000 or more per year (see Figure 1).



While many Americans making less than \$25,000 a year believed their financial situation would improve over time, they expressed less optimism about their ability to achieve the American Dream than other income groups.

Nearly 6 in 10 (58 percent) of those making less than \$25,000 per year

thought they would be better off financially in 10 years; only one-third believed they would be worse off. However, 45 percent of this income group said they would never achieve the American Dream, and more than half (53 percent) believed they would never earn enough money to lead the kind of life they want (see Figure 2).



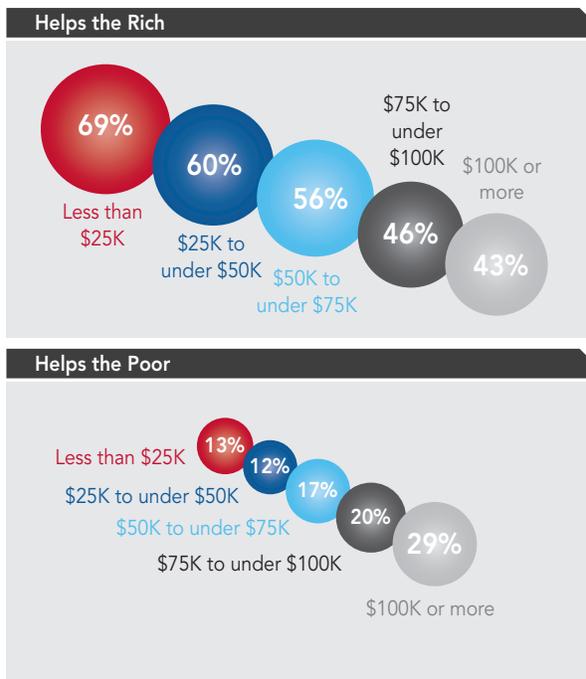
Those making less than \$25,000 per year were the most likely to think that the government is helping the rich and not the poor.

Almost 7 in 10 (69 percent) low-income Americans believed government helps the rich a great deal. In contrast, fewer than half of those making \$75,000 or more per year thought the government helps the rich, and only about a quarter of the higher income groups believed the government helps the poor to the same degree. A larger proportion of the lowest income group, 60 percent, believed the government does not help the poor “much” or “at all” compared to about 3 in 10 making at least \$75,000 a year (see Figure 4).

Those making less than \$50,000 per year were the most supportive of government playing a role in helping people out of poverty, preventing the middle class from falling behind, and ensuring that every job pays a good wage with benefits.

Figure 3

Percent of Americans Who Think the Government is Helping Certain Groups “a Great Deal”



A majority of all income groups were supportive of government’s activity in these areas. However, the higher one’s family income, the less likely was the belief that these should be “one of the most important” or “a very important” role for the government.

FULL POLL RESULTS ARE AVAILABLE AT: WWW.ECONOMICMOBILITY.ORG/POLL2011

METHODOLOGY

On behalf of The Pew Charitable Trusts’ Economic Mobility Project, a national survey, focus groups, and individual interviews were conducted by the Mellman Group and Public Opinion Strategies. For the survey, 2,000 adults nationwide were interviewed by telephone March 24-29, 2011. The margin of error is +/-2.2% at the 95% level of confidence for the sample as a whole, but larger for subgroups. Very few respondents reported “Don’t Know” or refused to answer select questions. Such missing cases were excluded from final analyses on a question-by-question basis.