

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 Educational Differences

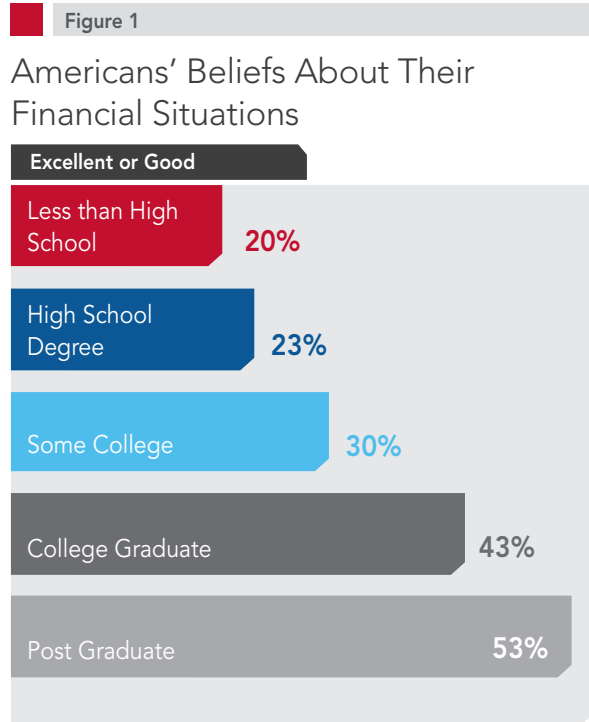
Americans with the least education were the most concerned about their current economic situation and future prospects. This reinforces the 2009 and 2011 polls' finding that most Americans understand the value of a college degree for achieving the American Dream, a belief supported by past Economic Mobility Project research showing a strong link between postsecondary education and economic mobility.

### Education Groups

- Less than a high school degree
- High school graduate
- Some college
- College graduate (two- or four-year degree)
- Post graduate (more than a college degree)

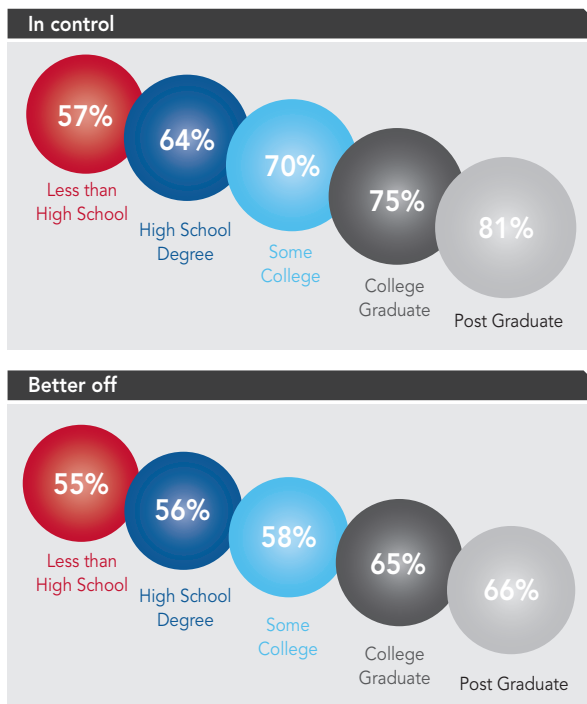
A strong majority of all respondents said the recession had hurt their economic situation, ranging from 74 percent of postgraduates to 83 percent of those without a college degree. However, those with the least education were the most negative in assessing their current financial situations.

More than half (53 percent) of postgraduates and 43 percent of college graduates rated their current financial situation as excellent or good compared to only 23 percent of high school graduates and 20 percent of those with less than a high school degree (see Figure 1).



**Figure 2**

### Do Americans Feel In Control of Their Economic Situation and Better Off Than Their Parents at the Same Age?



Americans with the least education were less likely to believe they had control over their financial situations and to say they were better off than their parents at the same age.

Eighty-one percent of postgraduates and 75 percent of college graduates felt in control of their current economic situation compared with 64 percent of high school graduates and 57 percent with less than a high school degree (see Figure 2).

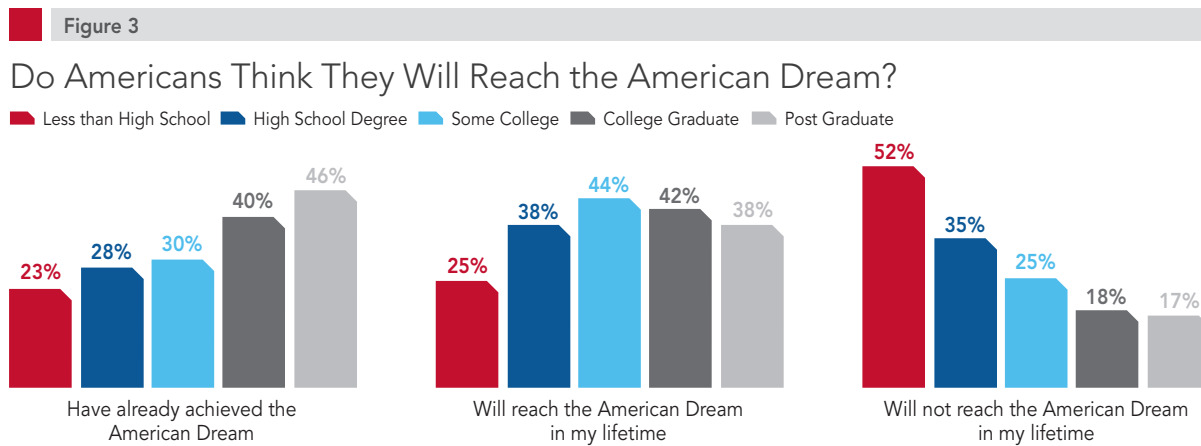
Sixty-six percent of postgraduates and 65 percent of college graduates believed they were better off than their parents at the same age compared with 56 percent of high school graduates and 55 percent of those with less than a high school degree (see Figure 2).

**Of those without a high school diploma, fewer than half said they would achieve the American Dream at some point in their lives, and they were the least likely to say the American Dream is alive and well.**

More than half (52 percent) with less than a high school degree did not believe they would ever achieve the American Dream in their lifetime followed by more than one-third (35 percent) of high school

graduates. On the other hand, nearly half of postgraduates (46 percent) and 4 in 10 of those with a college degree believed they had already achieved the American Dream (see Figure 3).

Six in 10 with less than a high school degree and two-thirds (66 percent) of those with a high school degree believed the American Dream is alive and well compared with 79 percent of college graduates and 76 percent of postgraduates.



**Almost half of those with less than a high school degree believed their economic circumstances would be worse in 10 years, and more than 6 in 10 said they would not earn enough money to lead the lives they want in the future.**

Almost half (46 percent) of those with less than a high school degree and 3 in 10 (31 percent) of those with a high school degree believed their economic circumstances would be worse in 10 years compared with only 23 percent of both college graduates and postgraduates (see Figure 4).



An even larger proportion of those with less than a high school degree (62 percent) and those with a high school degree (41 percent) did not believe they would earn enough money to live the lives they want to lead in the future, compared with only 27 percent of college graduates and 20 percent of postgraduates.

FULL POLL RESULTS ARE AVAILABLE AT: [WWW.ECONOMICMOBILITY.ORG/POLL2011](http://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.