

Stockton Poll: N.J. Residents Weathered Pandemic Well, But Concerned About Future

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Galloway, N.J. - Most New Jersey adults have maintained or improved their financial status as COVID-19 surged and waned in recent months. But as inflation rises, a majority are pessimistic about economic conditions, according to a Stockton University Poll released today.

Daily COVID-19 cases, hospitalizations and death numbers started rising in December. The surge peaked in January with 35,000 new cases and 6,000 hospitalizations a day. Lower numbers earlier in the pandemic had spurred massive job losses and economic decline.

But most of those surveyed remained employed, did not experience lower incomes, or did not curtail their spending during the recent surge, according to the statewide poll of 655 adults. Even so, a majority feel negatively about the New Jersey economy as they see inflation spiral, store shelves go empty and businesses run short on staffing, the poll sponsored by the William J. Hughes Center for Public Policy at Stockton University found.

“These results reflect the delicate balance our political leaders must employ in addressing the economy,” said John Froomjian, director of the Hughes Center. “On the one hand, jobs are plentiful, and wages are going up. But people aren’t comfortable as inflation spikes gas and food prices.

“Overall, the perception is that the economy isn’t doing that well,” Froomjian said.

On an individual level, most of those polled have at least held their ground financially over the past six months. Household income stayed level for 57% and increased for 23%.

A slim majority of 51% said their overall fiscal status stayed the same, and it got better for 16%. A majority kept spending at the same level (51%) or spent more (14%) than they did before the pandemic surged. Nearly half said they did fine despite rising inflation.

Close to 60% were employed and 20% were retired, with 10% unemployed and looking for work at some point during the past six months.

A significant minority have been hurt financially. A third (32%) said they are in worse financial straits. One in five (19%) saw household income go down, and 33% cut back on spending the past six months.

A majority of 51% said rising food, housing and fuel costs are making it more difficult to make ends meet.

“Most people, but not everyone, did okay during the pandemic’s latest assault on public health. But many don’t feel comfortable about the way things are going,” Froomjian said.

Of those who were looking for work at some point in the past six months, most said at least some jobs are available where they live but they are not satisfied with the quality of the jobs offered.

Only 23% gave positive marks to the state economy. Forty-one percent rated it as average, and 34% said it is in bad shape. Exactly half said the state is headed in the wrong direction, with 34% thinking it’s on the right track and 8% neutral.

Respondents were split about future economic conditions, with 48% somewhat or very optimistic and 47% somewhat or very pessimistic. Even 27% of those whose status improved and 31% of those whose income increased were pessimistic about the future.

Alyssa Maurice, polling researcher for the Hughes Center, said the poll reflected a number of trends or developments that could signal problems with the economy.

- Among the minority looking to buy, 67% said it’s hard to buy a car and 77% said it’s difficult to afford a new house
- 75% have seen local businesses close
- Only 24% have not regularly experienced empty shelves at local stores
- 64% have experienced at least some shipping delays when ordering products
- And nearly 60% said their places of employment have been short-staffed, and 34% have had to adjust operating hours because of it.

The poll was conducted Feb. 16 through Feb. 26, just prior to the conflict in Ukraine.

Full poll results are on the [Hughes Center Polling Institute website](#).

Methodology

The poll of New Jersey adults was conducted by the Stockton Polling Institute of the William J. Hughes Center for Public Policy February 16-26, 2022. Live interviewers who are mostly Stockton University students called cell phones and landlines from the Stockton University campus. Opinion Services supplemented a portion of the fieldwork. Overall, 86 percent of interviews were conducted on cell phones and 14 percent on landline phones. A total of 655 New Jersey adults were interviewed. Both cell and landline samples consisted of random digit dialing (RDD) sample. Data are weighted based on U.S. Census Bureau American Community Survey data for New Jersey on variables of age, race, ethnicity, education level, sex, and region. The poll’s margin of error is +/- 3.8 percentage points at a 95 percent confidence level. MOE is higher for subsets.

About the Hughes Center

The William J. Hughes Center for Public Policy (www.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 the late 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 on [YouTube](#), and can be

followed on Facebook [@StocktonHughesCenter](#), Twitter [@hughescenter](#) and Instagram [@stockton_hughes_center](#)

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Stockton University

Stockton University, which is celebrating its 50th year of teaching in 2021-22, is [ranked](#) among the top public universities in the Northeast. Our almost 10,000 students can choose to live and learn on the 1600-acre wooded main campus in the Pinelands National Reserve in South Jersey and at our coastal residential campus just steps from the beach and Boardwalk in Atlantic City. The university offers more than 160 undergraduate and graduate programs. Learn more at Stockton.edu.