

Massachusetts Residents Cite Difficulties Keeping Up With Rising Costs

By Steve Koczela and Caroline Koch

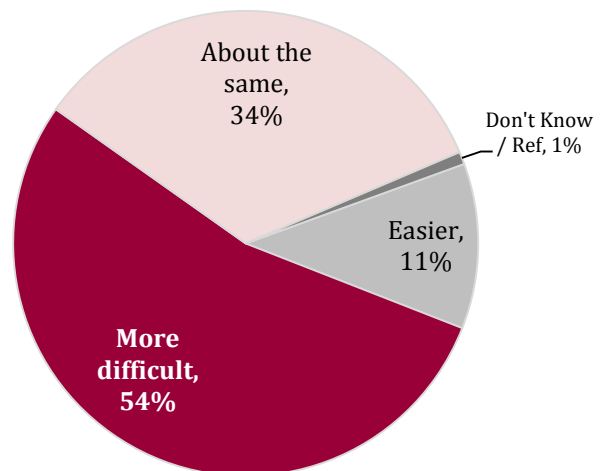
Bay State residents are feeling the pinch from rising costs of living and the lack of access to good paying jobs, according to recent surveys conducted by the MassINC Polling Group (MPG). About half (54%) believe that it has become more difficult to afford the kind of life they want to live, while just 11 percent said it has become easier (Figure 1). Among residents who identify themselves as middle class, about one in three (32%) now say they are in danger of falling out of the middle class. These anxieties are in line with a recent MassINC study showing declining financial security for Massachusetts residents over the last decade across a range of indicators.¹

Costs, lack of jobs weigh on residents

To assess the changes in the level of concern, we compared surveys conducted by MassINC in 2003 and 2011. Six in ten now say the availability of good paying jobs requires “major improvement”, a 22 point increase since 2003, and the largest shift of any of the dynamics included in the survey (Figure 2, next page). There is particularly pronounced concern about jobs among those calling themselves “lower” or “lower middle class”. Three quarters among these groups say job availability needs major improvement, compared to about half of other residents. Expectations for the medium term job market are similarly dim, with 62 percent of residents saying they expect bad times for business over the next five years.

Other economic issues having to do with the cost of living in Massachusetts also raised concern for residents. As college tuition prices and overall student debt continue to rise, Massachusetts residents are more worried about affordability of a college education. A majority (57%) still sees college as essential to success, though only 39 percent believe the majority of those who are qualified have the opportunity to attend. About two thirds (65%) called for major improvement in college affordability, an increase from 48 percent who said the same in 2003.

Figure 1: % who say it has gotten easier / more difficult to afford lifestyle in last 10 yrs



“Over the last 10 years, has it become easier or more difficult for you and your family to afford to live the kind of life you want—or is it just about the same?”

This report includes the results of five surveys of probability samples of Massachusetts adults.

- February, 2003, survey by MassINC
- March, 2008, survey by MassINC
- Three quarterly surveys from 2011 by The MassINC Polling Group

See Appendix B for methodological details and notes.

¹ Ben Forman and Caroline Koch, “97.4,” *CommonWealth Magazine*, Vol. 16, No.4, (November, 2011), 13-17.

Health care costs are also of great concern to residents, with 64 percent saying the cost of health care needs major improvement. Health care costs were not included in the 2003 survey. The availability of affordable housing was the one economic issue that saw decreased concern between 2003 and 2011, though this may reflect weakness in the overall housing market.

Traffic still a concern

Financial pressures are not the only thing causing anxiety for Massachusetts residents. The road and traffic situation are a continual concern with 54 percent surveyed saying it needs major improvement, little changed since 2003 (50%). This general sentiment can be attributed to the well-documented congestion woes throughout the state, which cost a total of \$2.4 billion in lost economic activity in Boston alone during 2010 according to one estimate.²

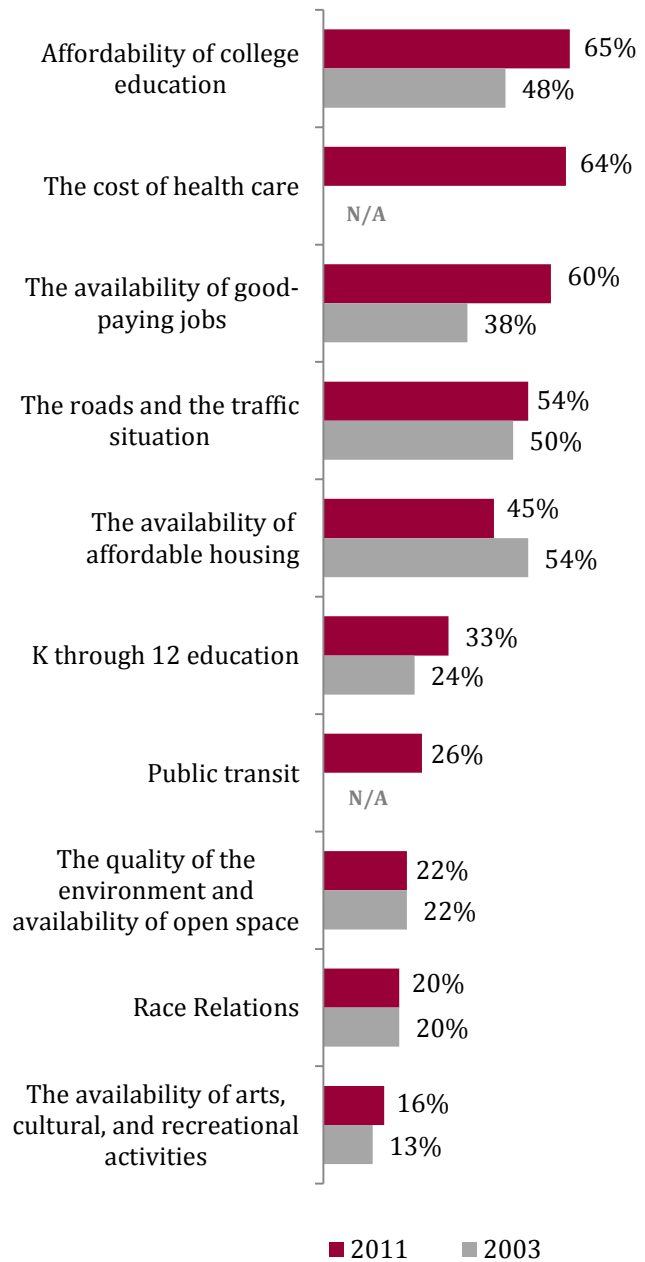
Non-economic issues bring less anxiety

Residents express less concern over other issues, most of which showed little change since 2003. A quarter or less see the need for major improvement in public transit (26%), the quality of the environment (22%), race relations (20%), and the availability of arts and recreation (16%). One in three now say K-12 education needs major improvement, compared to 24% who said so in 2003.

Young residents share similar concerns

Young Massachusetts residents (ages 25-39) feel similarly elevated levels of concern over the cost of college education and the cost of health care. The availability of good-paying jobs is less concerning to this group than it is to all residents, with 46 percent of 25-39 year olds citing the need for major improvement compared to 60 percent overall. For a complete breakdown of opinions among this age group, see Appendix A.

Figure 2: % of residents who think each issue needs major improvement



² “2011 Annual Urban Mobility Report” (College Station, TX: Texas Transportation Institute, 2011).

Appendix A – Tables and Charts

Table 1. Overall ratings of quality of life issues in Massachusetts

“Now we’d like your opinion of some different aspects of life in Massachusetts today. Please try to answer as best you can, even if I ask about an area where you and your family are not directly affected. Here’s the first one. READ FIRST ITEM Do you think Massachusetts needs major improvement in this area, needs some improvement, is satisfactory as is, or is more than satisfactory as is?”

	Overall		Age 25-39		
	2011	2003	2011	2008	2003
<u>The quality of the environment and availability of open space</u>					
More than satisfactory as is	6%	4%	4%	na	na
Satisfactory as is	35%	32%	35%	na	na
Needs minor improvement	30%	40%	36%	na	na
Needs major improvement	22%	22%	18%	na	na
DK/Refusal	6%	3%	6%	na	na
Total	500	1001	129	na	na
<u>The roads and the traffic situation</u>					
More than satisfactory as is	2%	1%	1%	1%	1%
Satisfactory as is	12%	16%	14%	15%	13%
Needs minor improvement	28%	32%	36%	33%	30%
Needs major improvement	54%	50%	43%	50%	55%
DK/Refusal	4%	1%	5%	1%	1%
Total	500	1001	129	801	283
<u>The availability of good-paying jobs</u>					
More than satisfactory as is	1%	2%	1%	3%	1%
Satisfactory as is	12%	18%	19%	26%	19%
Needs minor improvement	21%	39%	26%	33%	40%
Needs major improvement	60%	38%	46%	36%	40%
DK/Refusal	6%	4%	8%	3%	1%
Total	500	1001	129	801	283
<u>K through 12 education</u>					
More than satisfactory as is	3%	4%	3%	5%	4%
Satisfactory as is	24%	25%	27%	22%	21%
Needs minor improvement	31%	38%	29%	36%	43%
Needs major improvement	33%	24%	31%	27%	24%
DK/Refusal	9%	9%	9%	9%	8%
Total	500	1001	129	801	283

Table 1 cont. Overall ratings of quality of life issues in Massachusetts

	Overall			Age 25-39	
	2011	2003	2011	2008	2003
<u>Affordability of college education</u>					
More than satisfactory as is	3%	1%	4%	1%	1%
Satisfactory as is	9%	14%	9%	13%	13%
Needs minor improvement	18%	31%	20%	32%	30%
Needs major improvement	65%	48%	59%	44%	53%
DK/Refusal	6%	5%	8%	10%	3%
Total	500	1001	129	801	283
<u>The cost of health care</u>					
More than satisfactory as is	3%	na	5%	3%	na
Satisfactory as is	13%	na	12%	19%	na
Needs minor improvement	17%	na	13%	28%	na
Needs major improvement	64%	na	64%	45%	na
DK/Refusal	3%	na	6%	5%	na
Total	500	na	129	801	na
<u>The availability of affordable housing</u>					
More than satisfactory as is	3%	1%	2%	3%	1%
Satisfactory as is	18%	14%	19%	11%	14%
Needs minor improvement	26%	29%	27%	26%	27%
Needs major improvement	45%	54%	43%	55%	57%
DK/Refusal	8%	3%	9%	5%	1%
Total	500	1001	129	801	283
<u>The availability of arts, cultural, and recreational activities</u>					
More than satisfactory as is	14%	14%	11%	16%	15%
Satisfactory as is	41%	41%	37%	42%	37%
Needs minor improvement	25%	29%	31%	24%	33%
Needs major improvement	16%	13%	16%	15%	14%
DK/Refusal	5%	3%	6%	3%	1%
Total	500	1001	129	801	283

Table 1 cont. Overall ratings of quality of life issues in Massachusetts

	Overall			Age 25-39	
	2011	2003	2011	2008	2003
<u>Race Relations</u>					
More than satisfactory as is	4%	3%	7%	na	na
Satisfactory as is	35%	32%	34%	na	na
Needs minor improvement	32%	41%	30%	na	na
Needs major improvement	20%	20%	17%	na	na
DK/Refusal	9%	4%	13%	na	na
Total	500	1001	129	na	na
<u>Public transit</u>					
More than satisfactory as is	4%	na	4%	na	na
Satisfactory as is	29%	na	28%	na	na
Needs minor improvement	29%	na	31%	na	na
Needs major improvement	26%	na	24%	na	na
DK/Refusal	12%	na	14%	na	na
Total	500	na	129	na	na

Appendix B – Data Collection

About the MassINC Poll (2003): The Massachusetts Quality of Life Survey, sponsored by MassINC, obtained telephone interviews with a representative sample of 1001 adults living in Massachusetts telephone households. The interviews were conducted in English by Princeton Data Source, LLC from January 20 to February 2, 2003. Statistical results are weighted to correct known demographic discrepancies. The margin of sampling error for the complete set of weighted data is 3%. See the full report [here](#).

About the MassINC Poll (2008): The Young Adults Survey, sponsored by MassINC, obtained telephone interviews with a representative sample of 801 adults ages 25 to 39 living in Massachusetts telephone households. The survey was conducted by Princeton Survey Research International. Interviews were completed in English and Spanish by Princeton Data Source, LLC from February 6 to March 2, 2008. Statistical results are weighted to correct known demographic discrepancies. The margin of sampling error for the complete set of weighted data is 5.4%. See the full report [here](#).

About the MPG polls (2011): These results are based on questions from The MassINC Polling Group quarterly polls of Massachusetts residents conducted in April, July and October of 2011. Live telephone interviews were conducted via both landline and cell phone using conventional random digit dialing (RDD) sampling methods. Interviews were conducted in both English and Spanish by Eastern Research Services. The margin of sampling error is 4.4% for each study. Questions in these polls related to the quality of life and college affordability were sponsored by the MassINC Associate Board.