



THE COMMONWEALTH POLL

The VCU Center for Public Policy

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Consumer Sentiment in Virginia: More Negative than Positive but Little Change Since December

Richmond, VA—More Virginians see the national business conditions as facing bad times in the coming year (49 percent) than see good times ahead (just 27 percent). Similarly, more than half of Virginians (52 percent) expect periods of unemployment in the nation as a whole over the next five years. Virginians’ outlook on national business conditions is largely unchanged since last December. Despite these assessments, two thirds of Virginians consider this a good time to make purchases for major household items. ‘The best piece of news for retailers in these difficult economic times comes from public sentiment that now is still a good time to make major purchases.’ said economist, Michael D. Pratt, Ph.D., director of the Virginia Center for Urban Development at VCU. The Commonwealth Poll was conducted October 3 to 11 with 800 adults in Virginia. The margin of error is +/- 4 percentage points.

Expectations are more positive for one’s personal finances than they are for either the state or national economy. Nearly half of Virginians (49 percent) expect their personal finances to remain the same in the coming year and another 38 percent expect to better off; twenty nine percent expect to be worse off next year. A quarter of Virginians are worried a great deal or quite a bit about job loss for themselves or their family compared to 53 percent who are not worried about this. For 32 percent of Virginians, the ups and downs in the stock market have a great deal or quite at bit of personal impact. Twenty nine percent feel somewhat affected while 38 percent do not feel affected by stock market changes.

National Conditions	GOOD TIMES	BAD TIMES	SAME (VOL.)
National business conditions next year	27%	49%	13%
National economy in 5 years	28%	52%	11%
Buying big items now	66%	21%	11%
State Conditions			
Virginia economy next year	37%	42%	12%
Finding a job in Virginia next year	31%	54%	7%
Personal Finances			
Personal finances over last year	49%	29%	21%
Personal finances next year	38%	11%	49%

The Commonwealth Poll
 October 3-11, 2002
 Number of respondents: 800

Q1. First, we are interested in how people are getting along financially these days. Would you say that you (and your family living there) are better off or worse off financially than you were a year ago?

	Oct. 2002	Dec. 2001	Feb. 2001
Better off	49%	44%	49%
Worse off	29%	28%	22%
Same (vol)	21%	27%	28%
No answer	2%	-	-

Q2. Now looking ahead, do you think that a year from now, you (and your family living there) will be better off financially, or worse off, or just about the same as now?

	Oct. 2002	Dec. 2001	Feb. 2001
Better off	38%	43%	41%
Worse off	11%	10%	8%
Same (vol)	49%	45%	51%
No answer	2%	2%	1%

Q3. Now turning to business conditions in the country as a whole, do you think that during the next twelve months we'll have good times financially, or bad times, or what?

	Oct. 2002	Dec. 2001	Feb. 2001
Good times	27%	33%	32%
Bad times	49%	47%	35%
Same (vol)	13%	12%	21%
Other (vol)	8%	8%	10%
No answer	2%	1%	1%

Q4. Looking ahead, which would you say is more likely-that in the country as a whole we'll have continuous good times during the next five years or so, or that we will have periods of widespread unemployment or depression, or what?

	Oct. 2002	Dec. 2001	Feb. 2001
Continuous good times	28%	33%	38%
Periods of unemployment	52%	48%	37%
Same (vol)	11%	9%	11%
Other (vol)	8%	8%	13%
No answer	2%	2%	1%

Q5. About the big things people buy for their homes, such as furniture, a refrigerator, stove, television, and things like that. Generally speaking, do you think now is a good or bad time for people to buy major household items?

	Oct. 2002	Dec. 2001	Feb. 2001
Good time to buy	66%	64%	61%
Bad time to buy	21%	23%	21%
Same (vol)	11%	9%	15%
No answer	3%	4%	3%

Q6. What about just in Virginia? Do you think that during the next twelve months we'll have good times financially, or bad times, or what?

	Oct. 2002	Dec. 2001	Feb. 2001
Good times	37%	37%	50%
Bad times	42%	38%	22%
Same (vol)	12%	14%	18%

Other (vol)	9%	9%	10%
No answer	1%	2%	-

Q7. Thinking about jobs in Virginia, do you think the next twelve months will be a good time or bad time for finding a job in Virginia?

	Oct. 2002	Dec. 2001	Feb. 2001
Good time	31%	31%	52%
Bad time	54%	53%	30%
Same (vol)	7%	9%	10%
Other (vol)	5%	5%	8%
No answer	1%	1%	-

Q8. How much do you worry about yourself or someone in your family being laid off or losing their job-a great deal, quite a bit, some, not much, or not at all?

A great deal	16%
Quite a bit	9%
Somewhat	21%
Not much	24%
Not at all	29%
Don't know	0%
No answer	0%

Q9. How much do the rises and falls in the stock market affect you personally- a great deal, quite a bit, somewhat, not much, or not at all?

A great deal	16%
Quite a bit	16%
Somewhat	29%
Not much	16%
Not at all	22%
Don't know	1%
No answer	0%

METHOD OF THE COMMONWEALTH POLL

The Commonwealth Poll is an omnibus public opinion survey of Virginia residents. Each survey covers a variety of topics. The survey is conducted by telephone with a randomly-selected sample of adult Virginians.

Interviewing for The Commonwealth Poll was conducted by telephone from the facilities of the Survey and Evaluation Research Laboratory at Virginia Commonwealth University in Richmond. The interviewing is conducted by a staff of professionally trained, paid interviewers using computer-assisted telephone interviewing software.

The sample of telephone numbers was prepared by Genesys Sampling Systems of Ft. Washington, Pennsylvania, and was designed so that all residential telephones, including new and unlisted numbers, had a known chance of inclusion. The cooperation rate for the survey was 42%. Using the Council of American Survey Research Organization (CASRO) response rate calculations, interviews were obtained with respondents in 36% of the known or assumed residential households in the sample.

The data were weighted to adjust for unequal probabilities of selection due to multiple telephone lines and multiple adults living in the household. In addition, the data were weighted on sex, race, age, and region of residence to reflect the demographic composition of the Virginia adult population. Percentages reported in the text and tables are weighted, while the number of cases shown in the tables for various subgroups is the actual number of respondents.

Questions answered by the full sample of adults are subject to a sampling error of plus or minus approximately 4 percentage points at the 95 percent level of confidence. This means that in 95 out of 100 samples

like the one used here, the results obtained should be no more than 4 percentage points above or below the figure that would be obtained by interviewing all adult Virginians with telephones. Where the answers of subgroups are reported, the sampling error would be higher. Because of nonresponse (refusals to participate, etc.), standard calculations of sampling error are apt to understate the actual extent to which survey results are at variance with the true population values. Surveys are also subject to errors from sources other than sampling. While every effort is made to identify such errors, they are often difficult or impossible to measure. Readers making use of the results are urged to be mindful of the limitations inherent in survey research.

Further information is available on request from the director of the Commonwealth Poll, Dr. Cary Funk, at 804 827 1430 or cfunk@vcu.edu. More information on the Commonwealth Poll can be found at <http://www.vcu.edu/commonwealthpoll/>.

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