

Fall 2016 Community Attitude Survey



January 2017

The Butler Center for Business and Economic Research is pleased to announce the results of the Fall 2016 Community Attitude Survey. The results of the survey are used to calculate consumer sentiment which measures the relative amounts of positive to negative attitudes by consumers in our local area with regard to current economic conditions and future expectations. Specifically, we ask five questions similar to those used by national surveys of consumer attitudes such as the University of Michigan's Index of Consumer Sentiment and the Conference Board's Consumer Confidence Index. Below we present the results from this year's survey, which was conducted *after the election*, and we compare them to the results from previous years.

We measure consumer sentiment for each question on a scale from 0 to 200. A value of 100 indicates an equal amount of positive and negative attitudes, a value below 100 indicates relatively more pessimism, and a value above 100 indicates relative optimism. Overall consumer sentiment is then calculated as the average of all five questions. Each of the questions and the corresponding measure of consumer sentiment are presented below.

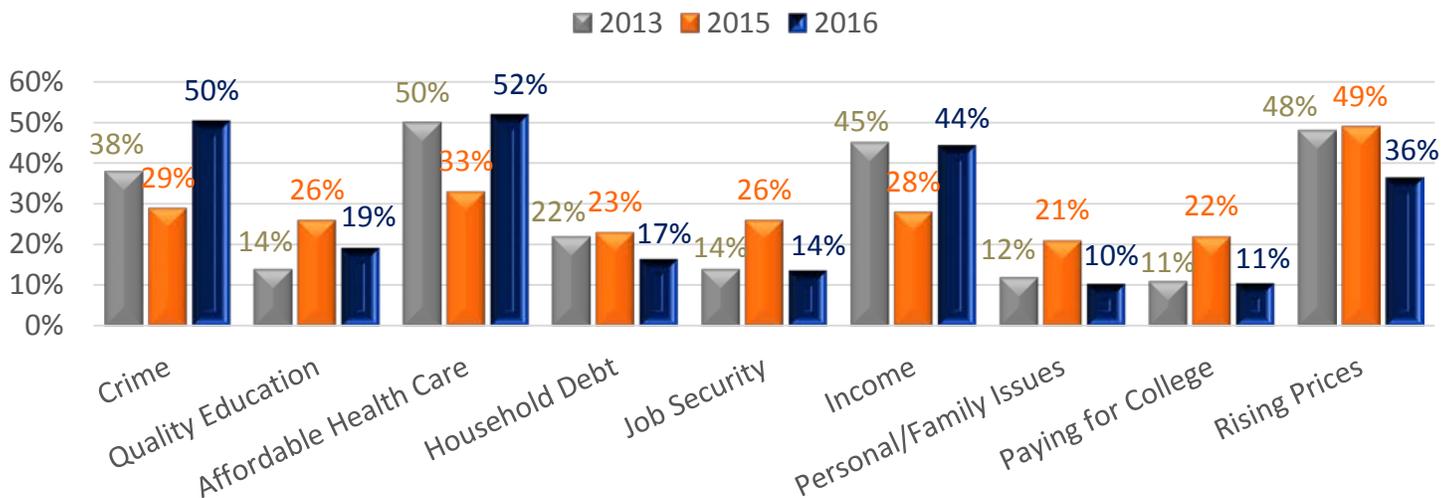
Survey Question	Consumer Sentiment, View from Fall of ...			
	2013	2014	2015	2016
Would you say that you and your household are better off or worse off financially than you were a year ago?	89.0	102.1	94.7	91.2
Do you think that a year from now you and your household will be better off financially, worse off, or just about the same?	106.3	132.1	104.0	124.5
In the country as a whole, do you think that during the next <i>12 months</i> we'll have good times financially or bad times?	78.3	91.1	99.7	121.1
In the country as a whole, do you think that during the next <i>five years</i> we'll have good times financially or bad times?	86.7	83.0	97.4	121.3
Do you think now is a good or a bad time for people to buy major household items?	105.2	166.0	100.6	126.5
Overall	93.1	114.9	99.3	116.9

Across the board, this year's survey reflected the most optimism about the future than any of the previous years. This may be the result of continued slow growth and reduced political uncertainty. The only factor weighing down the overall measure of consumer sentiment is the continued decline in perceived current financial conditions. For the first time in our survey, overall sentiment is optimistic about the country's financial outlook in both the short-term and long-term.

Unlike last year's survey, there were significant differences across racial boundaries. Households who identified themselves as black or African-American were more likely to indicate that they were doing better off financially this year than last year and were relatively more pessimistic than other racial groups regarding the country's financial outlook.

We also asked respondents to indicate items that were of greatest concern to their family. Each respondent could choose up to three. The table below describes the percentage of respondents choosing each item and how the concerns of the community have changed since 2013 when we last asked the same question.

Issues of Top Concern to Local Families



Consistent with previous surveys, the top four issues concerning families remain the same -- rising prices, affordable health care, income, and crime. Affordable health care was mentioned by over 50% of the households, up from 33% last year. This is probably due to the uncertainty regarding whether or not the Affordable Care Act will be repealed and exactly what form the replacement policy would take. Crime is now second on the list with 50% of the households listing it as a

The four issues of most concern to local families are rising prices, affordable health care, crime, and income.

top concern, a 72% increase from last year. 44% of households listed income as one of their top 3 concerns, up from 28% of households last year. While still one of the top four, the percentage of households listing concern over inflation (rising prices) has fallen from nearly 50% in each of the past two surveys to 36% in the most current one. Similar to 2013 and unlike last year, concern is focused in the top 4 areas; the most listed concern of the remaining five areas was concern over quality education (19%). Unlike the responses regarding consumer sentiment, the concerns listed by households were consistent across all racial groups.

For more information contact:

Benjamin F. Blair, the Sarah T. Butler Distinguished University Chair in Business and Finance, director of the Butler Center for Business and Economic Research and Associate Professor of Economics at Columbus State University. (706) 507-8173; blair_benjamin@columbusstate.edu