

Inference and simulation

Variability of estimates and confidence intervals



Young, Underemployed and Optimistic

Coming of Age, Slowly, in a Tough Economy

Young adults hit hard by the recession. A plurality of the public (41%) believes young adults, rather than middle-aged or older adults, are having the toughest time in today's economy. An analysis of government economic data suggests that this perception is correct. The recent indicators on the nation's labor market show a decline in the

Tough economic times altering young adults' daily lives, long-term plans. While negative trends in the labor market have been felt most acutely by the youngest workers, many adults in their late 20s and early 30s have also felt the impact of the weak economy.

Among all 18- to 34-year-olds, fully half (49%) say they have taken a job they didn't want just to pay the bills, with 24% saying they have taken an unpaid job to gain work

experience. And more than one-third (35%) say that, as a result of the poor economy, they have gone back to school. Their personal lives have also been affected: 31% have postponed either getting married or having a baby (22% say they have postponed having a baby and 20% have put off getting married). One-in-four (24%) say they have moved back in with their parents after living on their own.

Margin of error

The general public survey is based on telephone interviews conducted Dec. 6-19, 2011, with a nationally representative sample of 2,048 adults ages 18 and older living in the continental United States, including an oversample of 346 adults ages 18 to 34. A total of 769 interviews were completed with respondents contacted by landline telephone and 1,279 with those contacted on their cellular phone. Data are weighted to produce a final sample that is representative of the general population of adults in the continental United States. Survey interviews were conducted under the direction of Princeton Survey Research Associates International, in English and Spanish. Margin of sampling error is plus or minus 2.9 percentage points for results based on the total sample and 4.4 percentage points for adults ages 18-34 at the 95% confidence level.

- 41% ± 2.9%: We are 95% confident that 38.1% to 43.9% of the public believe young adults, rather than middle-aged or older adults, are having the toughest time in today's economy.
- 49% ± 4.4%: We are 95% confident that 44.6% to 53.4% of 18-34 years olds have taken a job they didn't want just to pay the bills.

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Not the same, but only somewhat different.

Confidence intervals

- A plausible range of values for the population parameter is called a **confidence interval**.

Photos by Mark Fischer (<http://www.flickr.com/photos/fischerfotos/7439791462>) and Chris Penny (<http://www.flickr.com/photos/clearlydived/7029109617>) on Flickr.

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- Using only a sample statistic to estimate a parameter is like fishing in a murky lake with a spear, and using a confidence interval is like fishing with a net.

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- By analogy, if we report a point estimate (such as the mean or median), we probably won't hit the exact population parameter.
- If we report a range of plausible values we have a good shot at capturing the parameter.



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Credits

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