

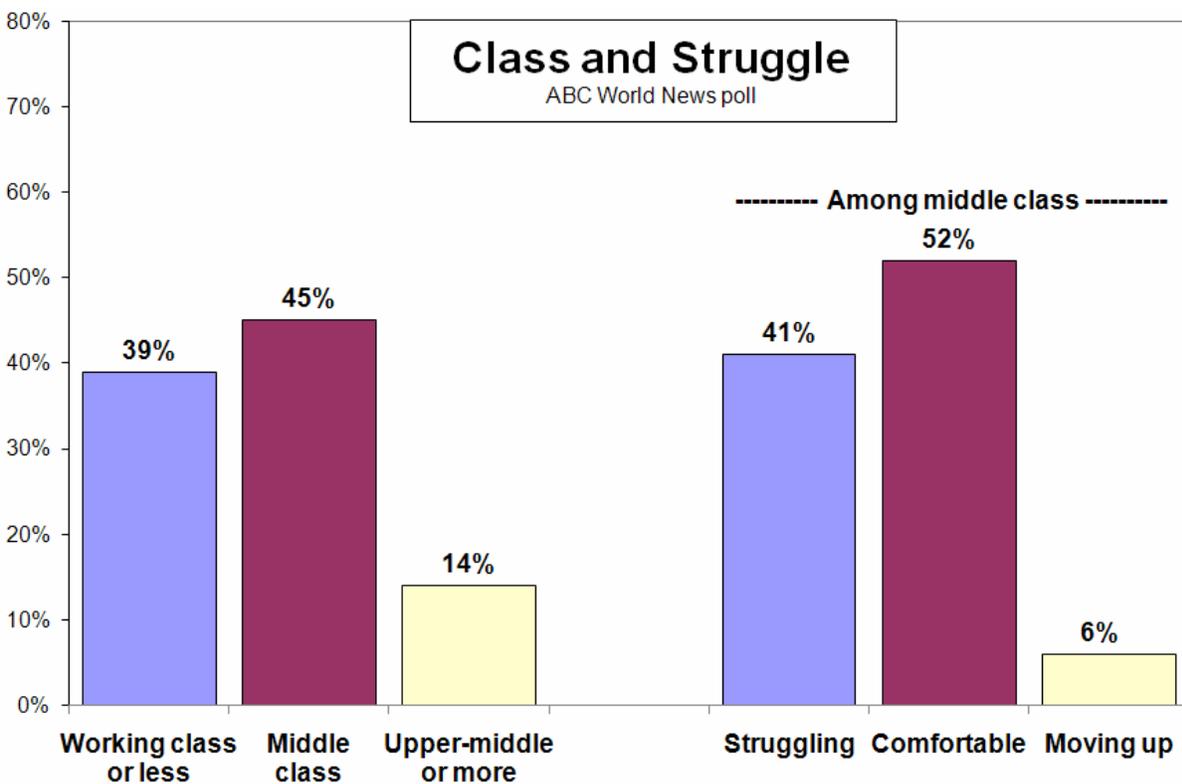
ABC WORLD NEWS POLL: THE MIDDLE CLASS

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Within the Middle Class, Four in 10 are Struggling

A bit fewer than half of Americans count themselves as middle class – but many of them aren’t sure how long it’ll last: Among people who say they’re in the middle class now, four in 10 also say they’re struggling to remain there in this difficult economy.

A big factor: educational attainment. Among middle-class Americans with college degrees, 75 percent say they’re “comfortably” middle class or even moving up; 25 percent are struggling. But among those without a college degree, this poll for ABC World News with Diane Sawyer finds that about twice as many, 49 percent, are fighting to hold their place. (Education relates to income, and it’s less well-off people in the middle class who are more likely to be struggling to stay there.)



All told, 45 percent of Americans define themselves as middle class (about what it’s been on average in polls since the 1960s), compared with 39 percent who see themselves as working class or less well-off than that, and 14 percent as upper-middle class or better off. Women are slightly more likely than men to consider themselves middle class, 48 percent vs. 42 percent, and

more seniors put themselves there – 51 percent, vs. 43 percent of middle-aged adults. (Seniors have had more time to save, and have smaller households and Medicare coverage, among other factors.) Nearly half of whites call themselves middle class, compared with 38 percent of racial minorities.

While 52 percent in the middle class say they're there comfortably, it's perhaps a sign of the times that very few of those in the middle class – 6 percent – see themselves as moving up beyond their current status.

INCOME and MORE – Average incomes for people who call themselves middle class are about \$55,000 a year, vs. about \$35,000 for those who call themselves working class or lower and about \$95,000 for those who say they're upper-middle class or better off. But income is far from the sole determinant of self-defined middle class status, likely because family size, expenses, local costs of living and other circumstances also come into it. Even among people with incomes under \$25,000 a year, 41 percent describe themselves as middle class. So do 38 percent of those with household incomes over \$100,000.

Education again matters. People with college degrees are more apt than others to consider themselves middle class, upper-middle class or better off than that. Just 20 percent of college graduates call themselves working class or lower, compared with 46 percent of Americans who haven't completed college.

While a range of people consider themselves middle class, there is broad agreement on what it means: Anywhere from 67 to 80 percent say “a necessary part” of being middle class means being able to afford things like an occasional new car and vacation travel (these two are at the lower end, cited by 67 and 71 percent, respectively), and to be able to save money, buy little luxuries and own a home, seen by 77 to 80 percent as necessary elements of a middle-class life.

	“Necessary elements” of a middle-class life
Being able to...	
Own your own home	80%
Save for the future	78
Afford things you'd like to have	77
Afford vacation travel	71
Buy a new car	67

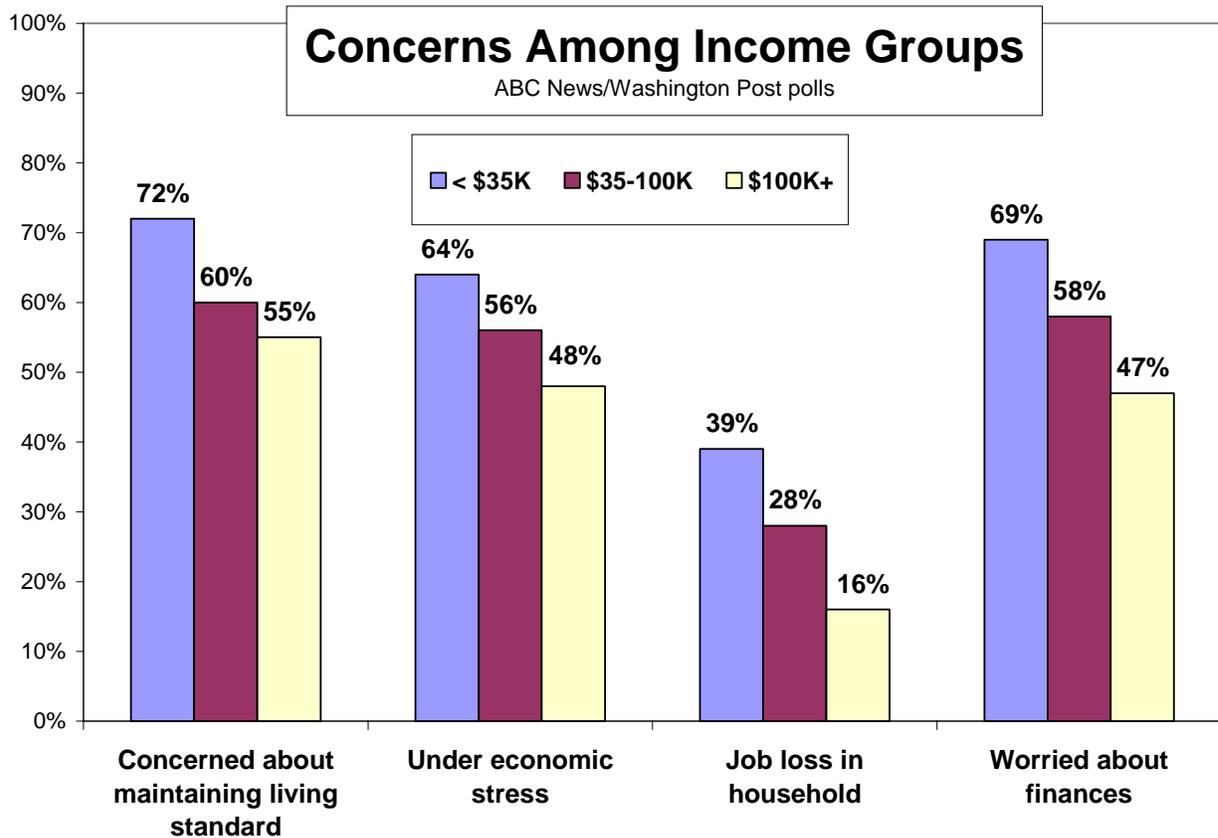
There's of course another way to look at the middle-class, not by self-definition but by income groups. For purposes of the analysis that follows we've defined middle class as the 41 percent of Americans with household incomes from \$35,000 to \$100,000 a year.

In ABC News and ABC News/Washington Post polls conducted in recent months, a majority in this middle income range, 58 percent, are worried about their family's financial situation, and about as many, 56 percent, report personal stress as a result of the current economy. Both those are roughly in between the levels of worry and stress reported by those less-well off (more worried and stressed) and those in the upper-income group (less so).

In another measure, 60 percent in the middle-income group express worry about maintaining their standard of living; it's similar among better-off Americans, 55 percent, but spikes to 72 percent among those with lower incomes.

Underscoring the depths of the economic crisis, 28 percent of middle-income Americans say someone in their household has been laid off or lost a job in the last year. That jumps even higher, to 39 percent, among lower-income Americans, and drops considerably to 16 percent of those with \$100,000-plus incomes. There's a difference in impact at the low end: Less well-off people are much more apt than those who are better off to say the layoff caused them serious financial hardship.

Also in recent ABC/Post polling, 57 percent of middle-income Americans said the U.S. economy is in "long-term decline"; it was about the same among those better-off, compared with 68 percent in the lower-income category. And in the ABC News Consumer Comfort Index, 57 percent of middle-income adults rate their own finances positively; that jumps to 84 percent in the higher-income category, and dives to 27 percent among people with lower incomes.



Other results have been similar across these groups. Eighty-four percent of middle-income Americans say jobs are hard to find in their area, as do 79 percent of the better-off and 89 percent of those less well off. And regardless of income, more than seven in 10 adults have told us they're worried about the direction of the economy over the next year.

METHODOLOGY – This ABC World News poll was conducted by telephone Feb. 26-March 2, 2010, among a random national sample of 1,005 adults reached by landline and cell-phone alike. Results for the full sample have a 4-point error margin; click [here](#) for a detailed description of sampling error. Sampling, data collection and tabulation by Social Science Research Solutions at ICR-International Communications Research of Media, Pa.

Analysis by Gary Langer.

ABC News polls can be found at ABCNEWS.com at <http://abcnews.com/pollingunit>

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Full results follow (*= less than 0.5 percent).

1-8 held for release.

9. Would you describe yourself as working class, middle class, upper middle class, or better off than that?

	Worse off than work. class (vol.)	Working class	Mid. class	Upper mid. class	Better off than that	No opin.
3/2/10	2	36	45	11	3	2

10. (IF MIDDLE CLASS) Would you say you are struggling to remain in the middle class, comfortable in the middle class, or moving up beyond the middle class?

	Struggling to remain in mid. class	Comfortable in mid. class	Moving up beyond middle class	No opinion
3/2/10	41	52	6	*

11. Being in the middle class may mean different things to different people. For each item I name, do you think it is or is not a necessary part of being a member of the middle class?

3/2/10 - Summary Table

	Is middle class	Is not middle class	No opinion
a. Being able to save money for the future	78	18	4
b. Being able to buy a new car from time to time	67	30	3
c. Being able to own your own home	80	18	2
d. Having enough money for vacation travel	71	25	4
e. Having enough money to sometimes buy things you'd like to have, even if you don't absolutely need them	77	21	1

END