

Firefighters, Scientists and Doctors Seen as Most Prestigious Occupations

Real estate brokers, Accountants and Stockbrokers are at the bottom of the list

ROCHESTER, N.Y. – August 4, 2009 – Every year at this time, The Harris Poll asks whether an occupation can be considered to have very great prestige or hardly any prestige at all. This year there are some changes as well as some stability in what occupations are considered prestigious and what ones are not.

These are some of the results of a nationwide telephone survey conducted by Harris Interactive among 1,010 U.S. adults between July 8 and 13, 2008.

Most Prestigious Occupations

The occupations at the top of the list are:

- Firefighter (62% say “very great prestige”),
- Scientist (57%),
- Doctor (56%),
- Nurse (54%),
- Teacher (51%), and
- Military officer (51%).

Least Prestigious Occupations

Looking at the other side of the list, only 15% or fewer adults regard the following occupations as having very great prestige:

- Real estate agent/broker (5%),
- Accountant (11%),
- Stock broker (13%),
- Actor (15%).

Substantial majorities of adults (from 65% to 80%) believe that these occupations have “hardly any” or only “some” prestige.

Additionally, several occupations are regarded as “very prestigious” by more people this year than they were last year:

- Business executive, up six points to 23%,
- Military office, up five points to 51%, and
- Firefighter, up five points to 62%.

However, even with this improvement, business executives are still near the bottom of the list with 62% of Americans saying they have only some prestige or hardly any prestige at all.

Two occupations lost four or more points since last year:

- Farmers, down five points to 36%,
- Accountant, down four points to 11%.

Biggest Changes over Last 30 Years

The Harris Poll first asked this question, but with a shorter list of occupations, in 1977. *The biggest change since then has been a 22 point increase from 29% to 51% in those who believe teachers have very great prestige.*

Two occupations have lost substantial ground since 1977: scientists, down 9 points to 57% and lawyers, down 10 points to 26%. In addition, two have remained unchanged – priests/ministers/clergy at 41% and journalists at 17%. Also, two have remained very stable – entertainers, down 1 point to 17%; and bankers, down 1 point to 16%.

So What?

While some of the numbers may fluctuate from year to year, one thing remains constant, especially in the past two decades. The professions that are at the top of the list and considered to have very great prestige are ones that are not considered to be high-paying jobs – firefighters, nurses and teachers. The ones at the bottom are ones that may have a lot of fame attached to them – athletes, actors, entertainers – or are ones that have the potential to earn large salaries – business executives, stockbrokers, real estate agents. People do not equate money and fame with prestige. These are two completely separate concepts to the American public.

**TABLE 1
PRESTIGE OF 23 PROFESSIONS AND OCCUPATIONS**

“I am going to read off a number of different occupations. For each, would you tell me if you feel it is an occupation of very great prestige, considerable prestige, some prestige or hardly any prestige at all?”

Base: All Adults

	Very Great Prestige	Considerable Prestige	Some Prestige	Hardly Any Prestige At All	Not Sure/Refused
	%	%	%	%	%
Firefighter	62	21	13	5	*
Scientist	57	22	14	7	*
Doctor	56	28	13	3	*
Nurse	54	24	18	4	*
Military officer	51	24	17	7	*
Teacher	51	22	17	10	*
Police officer	44	24	24	7	*
Priest/Minister/Clergy	41	21	28	10	1
Engineer	39	27	28	5	1
Farmer	36	22	28	14	*
Architect	29	30	31	10	*
Member of Congress	28	21	27	22	2
Lawyer	26	22	33	19	*
Business executive	23	15	46	16	1
Athlete	21	18	42	19	*
Journalist	17	20	40	22	1
Union Leader	17	17	34	30	1
Entertainer	17	17	40	25	1
Banker	16	21	43	18	1
Actor	15	19	33	33	*
Stockbroker	13	11	43	31	3
Accountant	11	23	46	19	1
Real estate agent/broker	5	14	50	30	*

*Less Than 0.5%

TABLE 2
32-YEAR TREND FOR “VERY GREAT” PRESTIGE

“I am going to read off a number of different occupations. For each, would you tell me if you feel it is an occupation of very great prestige, considerable prestige, some prestige or hardly any prestige at all?”

Base: All Adults

	'77	'82	'92	'97	'98	'00	'01	'02	'03	'04	'05	'06	'07	'08	2009
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
Firefighter***	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	55	48	56	63	61	57	62
Scientist	66	59	57	51	55	56	53	51	57	52	56	54	54	56	57
Doctor	61	55	50	52	61	61	61	50	52	52	54	58	52	53	56
Nurse	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	47	44	50	55	50	52	54
Military officer	NA	22	32	29	34	42	40	47	46	47	49	51	52	46	51
Teacher	29	28	41	49	53	53	54	47	49	48	47	52	54	52	51
Police Officer **	NA	NA	34	36	41	38	37	40	42	40	40	43	46	46	44
Priest/Minister/ Clergy****	41	42	38	45	46	45	43	36	38	32	36	40	42	40	41
Engineer	34	30	37	32	34	32	36	34	28	29	34	34	30	40	39
Farmer	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	36	41	41	36
Architect	NA	NA	NA	NA	26	26	28	27	24	20	27	27	23	28	29
Member of Congress	NA	NA	24	23	25	33	24	27	30	31	26	28	26	28	28
Lawyer	36	30	25	19	23	21	18	15	17	17	18	21	22	24	26
Business executive**	18	16	19	16	18	15	12	18	18	19	15	11	14	17	23
Athlete	26	20	18	21	20	21	22	21	17	21	23	23	16	20	21
Journalist	17	16	15	15	15	16	18	19	15	14	14	16	13	18	17
Union leader	NA	NA	12	14	16	16	17	14	15	16	15	12	13	18	17
Entertainer	18	16	17	18	19	21	20	19	17	16	18	18	12	15	17
Banker	17	17	17	15	18	15	16	15	14	15	15	17	10	15	16
Actor	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	13	16	16	12	9	16	15
Stockbroker	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	8	10	8	11	12	10	13
Accountant	NA	13	14	18	17	14	15	13	15	10	13	17	11	15	11
Real estate broker/agent	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	6	5	9	6	5	6	5

* No trend; NA not asked

** In surveys prior to 2001 we used the words “policeman” (now changed to “police officer”) and businessman (now changed to “business executive”) which may account for the changes from 2001 to 2002.

***In surveys prior to 2006, we used the word “fireman” (now changed to firefighter) which may account for some of the changes from 2005 to 2006.

****In surveys prior to 2007, we used the word “clergyman” now changed to clergy which many account for some of the changes from 2006 to 2007.

TABLE 3
CHANGES FOR “VERY GREAT” PRESTIGE

“I am going to read off a number of different occupations. For each, would you tell me if you feel it is an occupation of very great prestige, considerable prestige, some prestige or hardly any prestige at all?”

Base: All Adults

	2009 Total for Very Great Prestige	Changes since 1977	Changes since last year
	%	%	%
Firefighter	62	NA	+5
Scientist	57	-9	+1
Doctor	56	-5	+3
Nurse	54	NA	+2
Military officer	51	NA	+5
Teacher	51	+22	-1
Police Officer	44	NA	-2
Priest/Minister/Clergy	41	0	+1
Engineer	39	+5	-1
Farmer	36	NA	-5
Architect	29	NA	+1
Member of Congress	28	NA	0
Lawyer	26	-10	+2
Business executive	23	+5	+6
Athlete	21	-5	+1
Journalist	17	0	-1
Union leader	17	NA	-1
Entertainer	17	-1	+2
Banker	16	-1	+1
Actor	15	NA	-1
Stockbroker	13	NA	+3
Accountant	11	NA	-4
Real estate broker/agent	5	NA	-1

Note: N/A indicates occupation wasn't asked about in 1977

Methodology

The Harris Poll® was conducted by telephone within the United States between July 7 and 14, 2009 among a nationwide cross section of 1,010 adults (aged 18 and over). Figures for age, sex, race, education, number of adults, number of voice/telephone lines in the household, region and size of place were weighted where necessary to align them with their actual proportions in the population. However, only approximately 500 people were asked about each occupation.

All sample surveys and polls, whether or not they use probability sampling, are subject to multiple sources of error which are most often not possible to quantify or estimate, including sampling error, coverage error, error associated with nonresponse, error associated with question wording and response options, and post-survey weighting and adjustments. Therefore, Harris Interactive avoids the words “margin of error” as they are misleading. All that can be calculated are different possible sampling errors with different probabilities for pure, unweighted, random samples with 100% response rates. These are only theoretical because no published polls come close to this ideal.

These statements conform to the principles of disclosure of the National Council on Public Polls.

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By Regina A. Corso, Director, The Harris Poll, Harris Interactive

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Press Contact:

Carol Fricke
Harris Interactive
585-272-8400
press@harrisinteractive.net