

Alienation Declines to Lowest Level Since 2004

The Harris Alienation Index is lower now than in all but four of last 37 years

New York, N.Y. — November 3, 2009 — The Harris Poll has been measuring the level of alienation in the United States since 1966. Alienation, as we define and measure it, reflects, in large measure, public feelings about the rich and powerful, including their feelings about elections and the president.

Based on the public's answers to five questions, we compute the Harris Alienation Index. The higher the number, the more people are alienated, by which we mean that they feel unable to influence people with political and economic power and feel left out of things around them.

The relatively lower level of alienation this year is probably a result of the 2008 elections and, for Democrats and African Americans, the replacement of President Bush by President Obama. While Republicans are more alienated now (Alienation Index 56) than they were in 2008, they are much less alienated than Democrats were then (69).

These are some of the results from *The Harris Poll*, a new study of 1,019 U.S. adults surveyed by telephone between October 13 and 18, 2009 by Harris Interactive.

This time last year, the Harris Alienation Index stood at 58, the highest level of George W. Bush's presidency. This year it has dropped to 53, its lowest level since 2004. In the 37 years since 1972, there have only been four years (1978, 2001, 2002 and 2003) when the Alienation Index was lower than it is now.

The main reason that fewer people are alienated today is that there has been a drop in the number of adults who feel that:

- **"The people running the country don't really care what happens to you,"** down nine points from 62% to 53%.
- **"You're left out of things going on around you,"** down six points from 41% to 35%.

In addition, there was an 11-point drop, from 83% to 72%, in those who feel that **"the people in Washington are out of touch with the rest of the country,"** but this question is not used to calculate the Alienation Index.

Alienation by demographics

Last year the highest levels of alienation were among African Americans (Alienation Index 71) and Democrats (69). This year no demographic group analyzed has an Alienation Index higher than 60 (Hispanics) and 59 (those with an education level of High School or less).

TABLE 1
ALIENATION INDEX – TREND SINCE 1966

The Harris Interactive Alienation Index is calculated by taking an average (mean) of those who agree with the first five statements (see Table 3)

YEAR	PRESIDENT	INDEX
2009	Obama	53
2008	G.W. Bush	58
2007	G.W. Bush	56
2006	G. W. Bush	54
2005	G. W. Bush	55
2004	G. W. Bush	50
2003	G. W. Bush	54
2002	G. W. Bush	52
2001	G. W. Bush	47
2000	Clinton	55
1999	Clinton	62
1998	Clinton	56
1997	Clinton	62
1996	Clinton	62
1995	Clinton	67
1994	Clinton	65
1993	Clinton	65
1992	G. H. W. Bush	65
1991	G. H. W. Bush	66
1990	G. H. W. Bush	61
1989	G. H. W. Bush	58
1988	Reagan	54
1987	Reagan	55
1986	Reagan	60
1985	Reagan	56
1984	Reagan	55
1983	Reagan	62
1982	Reagan	56
1978	Carter	51
1977	Carter	59
1976	Ford	57
1974	Nixon	59
1973	Nixon	55
1972	Nixon	44
1971	Nixon	40
1969	Nixon	36
1968	Johnson	36
1966	Johnson	29

The Alienation questions were not asked in 1967, 1970, 1975, 1979, 1980 and 1981.

**TABLE 2
ALIENATION INDEX UNDER EIGHT PRESIDENTS**

President	Years With Data	High	Low	Average
Barack Obama	1	53 (2009)	53 (2009)	53
George W. Bush	8	58 (2008)	47 (2001)	53
Bill Clinton	8	67 (1995)	55 (2000)	62
George H. W. Bush	4	66 (1991)	58 (1989)	62
Ronald Reagan	7	62 (1983)	54 (1988)	57
Jimmy Carter	2	59 (1977)	51 (1978)	55
Gerald Ford	1	57 (1976)	57 (1976)	57
Richard Nixon	5	59 (1974)	36 (1969)	47
Lyndon Johnson	2	36 (1968)	29 (1966)	32

**TABLE 3
ALIENATION INDEX: DECADE AVERAGES (MEAN)**

The 1960s	34
The 1970s	52
The 1980s	57
The 1990s	63
The 2000s (so far)	53

**TABLE 4
ALIENATION – INDIVIDUAL QUESTION TREND**

"Now I want to read you some things some people have told us they have felt from time to time. Do you tend to feel or not feel (READ LIST)?"

Those saying "Yes, feel this way"

	1972	1977	1985	1990	1992	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
The rich get richer and the poor get poorer	67	77	79	82	83	78	79	76	78	72
What you think doesn't count very much anymore	50	61	62	62	62	66	71	65	63	60
Most people with power try to take advantage of people like yourself	43	60	65	64	71	70	72	67	69	58
The people running the country don't really care what happens to you	46	60	57	53	60	63	60	59	57	54
You're left out of things going on around you	25	35	48	44	48	49	51	43	43	33
The people in Washington are out of touch with the rest of the country*	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	83	83	81	75	76	76

	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
The rich get richer and the poor get poorer	74	69	69	72	69	68	75	72	73	71	66
The people running the country don't really care what happens to you	62	53	36	44	46	44	53	53	59	62	53
Most people with power try to take advantage of people like yourself	60	59	48	61	60	53	60	54	57	59	57
What you think doesn't count very much anymore	68	56	49	55	56	51	53	52	55	57	56
You're left out of things going on around you	46	39	33	30	40	34	35	38	36	41	35
The people in Washington are out of touch with the rest of the country*	72	73	51	60	67	67	74	68	75	83	72

* Not included in the Alienation Index.

Note: These questions have always been asked at the end of the year, usually in November or December.

TABLE 5
ALIENATION INDEX BY DEMOGRAPHICS

	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009
All Adults	62	56	62	55	47	52	54	50	55	54	56	58	53
Gender													
Men	59	55	61	52	46	51	53	45	52	53	54	55	54
Women	65	56	63	59	48	54	56	54	58	54	59	60	52
Race/Ethnicity													
White	61	54	60	53	43	49	50	45	53	50	54	55	53
African American	70	62	72	63	66	68	68	74	67	67	65	71	53
Hispanic	70	55	59	54	54	56	64	62	65	63	58	66	60
Education													
HS or less	70	63	68	63	52	60	62	56	63	62	65	64	59
Some college	60	54	64	54	47	50	53	51	52	53	52	61	56
College grad	51	42	47	46	36	40	38	35	46	42	45	45	41
Post graduate	42	46	43	32	39	40	47	39	40	36	44	44	44
Political Party													
Republican	56	51	59	46	35	41	34	26	35	39	45	42	56
Democrat	65	57	63	62	54	62	66	67	70	63	65	69	50
Independent	64	56	65	53	49	55	58	55	55	56	58	55	57

Methodology

This Harris Poll[®] was conducted by telephone within the United States between October 13 and 18, 2009 among 1,019 adults (aged 18 and over). Figures for age, sex, race/ethnicity, education, region, number of adults in the household, number of phone lines in the household were weighted where necessary to bring them into line with their actual proportions in the population.

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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