

## Most Americans Are Still Upbeat and Optimistic – But Less So than in the Recent Past

**New York, N.Y. — November 5, 2009** — A new Harris Poll finds that the great majority of the public is satisfied with their lives, and that most people believe that their personal situation will improve over the next five years. The numbers who feel this way are lower today than they were in the last few years, but most Americans are still upbeat and optimistic in spite of the economic tough times and the increase in unemployment. Furthermore, a majority of Echo Boomers (aged 18-30), and pluralities of Gen X (aged 31-42) and Baby Boomers feel their present situation today is better than it was five years ago. Only among Matures (aged 62+) is there a plurality who feels that their situation has become worse.

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

Some of the most interesting findings are:

- Fully 88% of all adults are **satisfied with their lives**, and 54% are very satisfied. However, these numbers are lower than in any of the four other Harris Polls that asked these questions since 2003.
- More people (40%) feel that **their situation has improved over the last five years** than feel it has got worse (27%). However, among Matures (aged 62+), more people feel their situation has become worse (30%) than better (20%). The 40% who feel their situation has improved is lower than it was in any of the four previous surveys. In 2005, a 56% majority felt this way.
- Notwithstanding the economic bad times, a 54% majority of adults believe **their personal situation will improve** over the next five years. However, this is lower than it was. In 2005, fully 65% believed their situation would improve.
- On this question about the future, there are very large differences between generations. The older people are, the less likely they are to be optimistic. Fully 82% of Echo Boomers (aged 18-30) and majorities of Gen X (64%) and Baby Boomers (54%) believe their situation will improve. Only 21% of Matures believe this.
- Republicans are more likely than Democrats to be very satisfied with their lives (63% vs. 49%) but are less likely to believe that their personal situation will improve in the next five years (52% vs. 63%).
- People with higher incomes are a little more satisfied with their lives, and are much more likely to feel their personal situation has improved in the last five years (52% among people with household incomes of \$75,000 or more, compared to 32% of people with incomes of less than \$35,000). However, they are not significantly more optimistic about the next five years than are people with incomes below \$50,000 or below \$35,000.

### So what?

Many foreign observers of the United States over the last 200 or more years have remarked that Americans seem to be more optimistic than people living in “the old world,” from which most immigrants came.

This new poll shows that, whatever our current problems are, American optimism is alive and well.

**TABLE 1  
OVERALL LIFE SATISFACTION**

“On the whole, are you very satisfied, fairly satisfied, not very satisfied or not at all satisfied with the life you lead?”

Base: All Adults

	2003	2005	2007	2008	2009
	%	%	%	%	%
<b>SATISFIED (NET)</b>	<b>91</b>	<b>90</b>	<b>94</b>	<b>93</b>	<b>88</b>
Very Satisfied	57	58	56	65	54
Somewhat Satisfied	34	32	38	28	33
<b>NOT SATISFIED (NET)</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>11</b>
Not Very Satisfied	6	6	5	4	7
Not at all Satisfied	2	2	2	2	3
Not sure/Don't Know	1	1	*	*	1

Note: Percentages may not add up exactly to 100% due to rounding

\* Less than 0.5%

**TABLE 2  
PRESENT LIFE SITUATION COMPARED TO FIVE YEARS AGO – TREND**

“If you compare your present situation with five years ago, would you say it has improved, stayed about the same or got worse?”

Base: All Adults

	2003	2005	2007	2008	2009
	%	%	%	%	%
Improved	49	56	54	42	40
Stayed about the same	29	26	28	29	32
Got worse	21	18	17	28	27
Not sure/ Don't know	1	1	*	1	1

Note: Percentages may not add up exactly to 100% due to rounding

\* Less than 0.5%

**TABLE 3  
PRESENT LIFE SITUATION COMPARED TO FIVE YEARS AGO**

“If you compare your present situation with five years ago, would you say it has improved, stayed about the same or got worse?”

Base: All Adults

	Total	Region				Generation			
		East	Midwest	South	West	Echo Boomers (18-30)	Gen X (31-42)	Baby Boomers (43-61)	Matures (62+)
		%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
Improved	40	36	44	37	46	64	45	35	20
Stayed about the same	32	34	30	35	28	19	33	29	48
Got worse	27	30	24	28	25	15	22	35	30
Not sure/ Don't know	1	1	1	*	2	2	-	1	1

Note: Percentages may not add up exactly to 100% due to rounding

\* Less than 0.5% “-” No response

**TABLE 4  
EXPECTED PERSONAL SITUATION IN FIVE YEARS - TREND**

“In the course of the next five years, do you expect your personal situation to improve, to stay about the same or to get worse?”

Base: All Adults

	2003	2005	2007	2008	2009
	%	%	%	%	%
Improve	63	65	62	56	54
Stay about the same	26	22	30	30	27
Get worse	8	10	7	10	15
Not sure/ Don't know	2	3	1	3	3

Note: Percentages may not add up exactly to 100% due to rounding

**TABLE 5  
EXPECTED PERSONAL SITUATION IN FIVE YEARS**

“In the course of the next five years, do you expect your personal situation to improve, to stay about the same or to get worse?”

Base: All Adults

	Total	Generation			
		Echo Boomers (18-30)	Gen X (31-42)	Baby Boomers (43-61)	Matures (62+)
		%	%	%	%
Improve	54	82	64	54	21
Stay about the same	27	14	21	27	48
Get worse	15	4	15	16	26
Not sure/ Don't know	3	-	1	3	5

Note: Percentages may not add up exactly to 100% due to rounding

“-“ No response

**TABLE 6  
SELECTED ATTITUDES AND EXPECTATIONS – BY PARTY**

Base: All adults

	All Adults	Party I.D.		
		Republican	Democrat	Independent
	%	%	%	%
Very satisfied with their lives	54	63	49	57
Personal situation has improved in last 5 years	40	44	36	42
Personal situation will improve in next five years	54	52	63	45

**TABLE 7  
SELECTED ATTITUDES – BY INCOME**

Base: All adults

	All Adults	Income			
		Less than \$35K	\$35K to \$49.9K	\$50K to \$74.9K	\$75K +
		%	%	%	%
Very satisfied with their lives	54	78	53	53	57
Personal situation has improved in last 5 years	40	32	28	32	52
Personal situation will improve in next five years	54	55	59	49	57

## **Methodology**

This Harris Poll was conducted by telephone within the United States October 13 and 18, 2009 among 1,019 adults (aged 18 and over). Figures for age, sex, race/ethnicity, education, region and household income were weighted where necessary to bring them into line with their actual proportions in the population. Propensity score weighting was also used to adjust for respondents' propensity to be online.

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.

Respondents for this survey were selected from among those who have agreed to participate in Harris Interactive surveys. The data have been weighted to reflect the composition of the adult population. Because the sample is based on those who agreed to participate in the Harris Interactive panel, no estimates of theoretical sampling error can be calculated.

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

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***The Harris Poll***® #126, November 5, 2009

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