

**Humphrey Taylor**  
Chairman of *The Harris Poll*®

**Robert Leitman**  
Group President, Health Care,  
Education & Public Policy



## Attitudes to Government Regulation Vary Greatly for Different Industries

*Majorities nationwide believe managed care, health insurance, pharmaceutical and oil companies should be more regulated*

When politicians debate the need to increase, decrease or change government regulation, they often do so in a generic way without reference to any particular industries. They talk of the need to “cut red tape and burdensome regulation,” to have “stricter oversight of accounting practices” or call for “stronger enforcement of environmental standards.” The public, on the other hand, tends to see the industries very differently and to distinguish between the regulation of one industry and another. Majorities favor more regulation of some industries, but not of others. For example, the public is seven times more likely to want to regulate managed care companies than to regulate computer manufacturers.

In this *Harris Poll*®, Harris Interactive showed a national sample of 2,271 adults a list of 15 industries and asked them which ones should be *more regulated*, and which should be *less regulated*. They were also asked which ones are generally *honest and trustworthy* (normally believing a statement by a company in that industry).

### Which industries should be more regulated by government?

Four industries were mentioned by more than fifty percent of those surveyed as needing more regulation, and the top three are all in the health care industry – **managed care** (60%), **health insurance** (59%) and **pharmaceuticals** (57%). The only other industry to be mentioned by more than fifty percent is the oil industry (52%).

Other industries where relatively large numbers favor more regulation are **tobacco** (44%), **life insurance** (35%), **hospitals** (35%), **airlines** (31%) and **telephone companies** (30%).

### Which industries should be regulated less?

A majority (57%) does not believe that any of the fifteen industries should be regulated less than they are now, and few people mentioned any one industry. The industries mentioned most often as requiring less regulation are **computer software companies** (18%), **computer hardware companies** (17%) and **supermarkets** (17%).

### Which industries are more or less honest and trustworthy?

While no industries were mentioned by majorities as being generally honest and trustworthy (so that you would normally believe a statement by a company in that industry), results varied widely among the different industries. At the top end, relatively large numbers trust **supermarkets** (40%), **banks** (35%), **hospitals** (34%), **computer hardware companies** (27%), **packaged food companies** (23%), and **computer software companies** (22%).

On the other hand, only very few people believe that **tobacco companies** (3%), **managed care companies** (4%), **oil companies** (4%), and **health insurance companies** (7%) are generally honest and trustworthy.

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There is, clearly, a strong correlation between trust and the need for regulation. While there are some exceptions, the survey finds that the lower the level of trust, the greater the perceived need for regulation. Industries that want to avoid onerous regulation need to work hard at earning the public's trust.

## So what?

These questions were suggested to Harris Interactive by Dr. Robert Blendon of Harvard, the leading academic authority on public opinion and health care. In reviewing these findings Dr. Blendon comments, "Prior research suggests that Congress and state legislatures pay a lot of attention to high levels of public concern about the behavior of specific industries. When the nation's focus on the Iraq war and terrorism becomes less riveting, we are likely to see legislatures respond to these poll findings with more oversight and regulatory proposals aimed at the health plan and pharmaceutical industries. Also, if gasoline prices do not fall soon, oil companies will find themselves in the same spotlight."

## A Note On Methodology

In order to fully understand poll data, it is always necessary to look very closely at the actual questions asked. It is important, in this poll, to note that our questions referred to **regulation** "for example for health, safety or environmental reasons," because these are the main reasons given by the public for supporting more regulation.

This may have increased the number favoring more regulation. If we had used different words, the numbers would have been different. However, we believe we still would have found the same kinds of big differences among different industries and a very similar rank order of industries.

These results are based on a nationwide survey of 2,271 adults surveyed online between February 19 and 25, 2003 using the same methods Harris Interactive used to forecast the 2000 presidential election with great accuracy.

**TABLE 1**

**Industries Which Should Be More/Less Regulated And Are Trusted**

Q: “Which of these industries do you think should be **more regulated** by government – for example for health, safety or environmental reasons – than they are now?”

Q: “Which of these industries do you think should be **less regulated** by the government?”

Q: “Which of the following do you think are **generally honest and trustworthy** – so that you would normally believe a statement by a company in that industry?”

Base: All adults

	Regulated More	Regulated Less	Generally Honest and Trustworthy
	%	%	%
Managed care companies such as HMOs	60	8	4
Health insurance companies	59	7	7
Pharmaceutical and drug companies	57	7	13
Oil companies	52	7	4
Tobacco companies	44	11	3
Life insurance companies	35	7	11
Hospitals	35	11	34
Airlines	31	11	20
Telephone companies	30	14	12
Packaged food companies	26	9	23
Car manufacturers	24	11	14
Banks	21	10	35
Computer software companies	11	18	22
Supermarkets	10	17	40
Computer hardware companies	8	17	27
None of these	20	57	37

Note: Percentages add up to more than 100% because multiple responses were accepted for each question.

**Methodology**

*The Harris Poll®* was conducted online within the United States between February 19 and 25, 2003 among a nationwide cross section of 2,271 adults (ages 18 and above). Figures for age, sex, race, education and number of adults in the household 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.

In theory, with probability samples of this size, one could say with 95 percent certainty that the results in each country have a statistical precision of plus or minus three percentage points of what they would be if the entire adult population had been polled with complete accuracy. Unfortunately, there are several other possible sources of error in all polls or surveys that are probably more serious than theoretical calculations of sampling error. They include refusals to be interviewed (non-response), question wording and question order, and weighting. It is impossible to quantify the errors that may result from these factors. This online survey is not a probability sample.

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

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To become a member of the Harris Poll Online<sup>SM</sup> and be invited to participate in future online surveys, visit [www.harrispollonline.com](http://www.harrispollonline.com).

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**Media inquiries, contact:**

Nancy Wong 585.214.7316

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