

## **Harris Alienation Index Remains Lower than It Was for Most of the Last 20 Years**

*But 70% of adults believe people in Washington are out of touch with the rest of the country*

**New York, N.Y. — August 10, 2010** — A new Harris Poll finds that the level of alienation among Americans remains, as it was in 2009, somewhat lower than it was for most of the years that George W. Bush was president, and all of the years when Bill Clinton and George H. W. Bush were in the White House.

Almost every year since 1966, the Harris Poll has measured how alienated Americans feel and then calculated the Harris Alienation Index based on the results. The questions measure how much, or how little, people feel their interests are heard and addressed by people with power and influence. This year the Harris Alienation Index stands at 52, compared to 53 last year and 58 in 2008 when George W. Bush was still president. These are some of the results of *The Harris Poll* of 1,066 adults surveyed by telephone between July 13 and 18, 2010 by Harris Interactive.

The Index is based on replies to five questions, which show only modest changes since last year.

- 68% of all adults believe the **rich are getting richer and the poor are getting poorer**, compared to 66% last year;
- 50% believe that **the people running the country don't really care what happens to you**, compared to 53% in 2009;
- 53% believe that **most people in power try to take advantage of people like you** compared to 57% last year;
- 52% believe that **what you think doesn't count very much anymore**, compared to 56% last year;
- 37% believe that **they are left out of things going on around them**, compared to 35% last year.

In addition, 70% feel that the people in Washington are out of touch with the rest of the country, compared to 72% last year. However, this question is not used in the calculation of the Alienation Index, because it was not asked before 1992.

### **Demographically, some people feel more alienated than others**

Hispanics feel more alienated than African-Americans and Whites. (Alienation Index of 55 compared to 49 and 52). People with more education feel less alienated than people with less education. The Index is 56 among people with only a high school education compared to 43 among those with a post graduate education and 44% among those with a college degree.

## **So what?**

It is interesting to speculate on what drives these numbers. Changes in the Index are not, primarily, driven by the economy and the level of unemployment. The Index is lower (i.e. fewer people feel alienated) than it was when the economy was booming in the 1990s.

Nor, it seems, is it directly related to the political mood, measured by the number of people who feel the country is on the right track or who give good and bad marks to the President or Congress. However, Alienation is now much lower among African Americans than it was in the preceding years when a white president was in the White House.

Rather it seems that alienation reflects something more subtle—feelings about the people who are in power, rather than the policies or the consequences of their actions.

**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)

<b>YEAR</b>	<b>PRESIDENT</b>	<b>INDEX</b>
<b>2010</b>	<b>Obama</b>	<b>52</b>
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	2	53 (2009)	52 (2010)	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	1999
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
The rich get richer and the poor get poorer	67	77	79	82	83	78	79	76	78	72	74
What you think doesn't count very much anymore	50	61	62	62	62	66	71	65	63	60	62
Most people with power try to take advantage of people like yourself	43	60	65	64	71	70	72	67	69	58	60
The people running the country don't really care what happens to you	46	60	57	53	60	63	60	59	57	54	68
You're left out of things going on around you	25	35	48	44	48	49	51	43	43	33	46
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	72

	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
The rich get richer and the poor get poorer	69	69	72	69	68	75	72	73	71	66	68
The people running the country don't really care what happens to you	53	36	44	46	44	53	53	59	62	53	50
Most people with power try to take advantage of people like yourself	59	48	61	60	53	60	54	57	59	57	53
What you think doesn't count very much anymore	56	49	55	56	51	53	52	55	57	56	52
You're left out of things going on around you	39	33	30	40	34	35	38	36	41	35	37
The people in Washington are out of touch with the rest of the country*	73	51	60	67	67	74	68	75	83	72	70

\* Not included in the Alienation Index.

Note: Until 2010, these questions were always 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	2010
<b>All Adults</b>	62	56	62	55	47	52	54	50	55	54	56	58	53	52
<b>Gender</b>														
Men	59	55	61	52	46	51	53	45	52	53	54	55	54	51
Women	65	56	63	59	48	54	56	54	58	54	59	60	52	52
<b>Race/Ethnicity</b>														
White	61	54	60	53	43	49	50	45	53	50	54	55	53	52
African American	70	62	72	63	66	68	68	74	67	67	65	71	53	49
Hispanic	70	55	59	54	54	56	64	62	65	63	58	66	60	55
<b>Education</b>														
HS or less	70	63	68	63	52	60	62	56	63	62	65	64	59	56
Some college	60	54	64	54	47	50	53	51	52	53	52	61	56	54
College grad	51	42	47	46	36	40	38	35	46	42	45	45	41	44
Post graduate	42	46	43	32	39	40	47	39	40	36	44	44	44	43
<b>Political Party</b>														
Republican	56	51	59	46	35	41	34	26	35	39	45	42	56	53
Democrat	65	57	63	62	54	62	66	67	70	63	65	69	50	50
Independent	64	56	65	53	49	55	58	55	55	56	58	55	57	49

### Methodology

This Harris Poll<sup>®</sup> was conducted by telephone within the United States between July 13 and 18, 2010 among 1,066 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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***The Harris Poll*® #96, August 10, 2010**

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