

What We Love and Hate about America

Science and technology and the Constitution get highest marks; the political and economic systems get the lowest

New York, N.Y. – June 8, 2010 – A new *Harris Poll* measures what Americans think about the United States or, more specifically, how they rate 16 elements of American life.

Large majorities of the public give high marks to science and technology, the Constitution, the quality of life and colleges and universities. Large majorities give poor marks to our political system, the economic system, public schools, the health care system and the legal system.

These are some of the findings of a **Harris Poll**[®] survey of 2,503 U.S. adults surveyed online between May 10 and 17, 2010 by **Harris Interactive**.

Aspects of American life which get the most positive ratings, defined as those who rate them excellent or pretty good, are:

Science and technology	75%
The Constitution	70%
The quality of life	66%
Colleges and universities	65%
TV, movies and entertainment	62%

Other items that also receive positive ratings but from smaller majorities are:

Civil rights	58%
The standard of living	56%
Public safety	56%
Equal opportunity	52%

The elements that receive the lowest positive ratings (where large majorities give either only fair or poor ratings) are:

The health care system	33%
Public schools	32%
The economic system	28%
The political system	23%

Other elements that receive low ratings, but better than those above, are:

The environment	44%
The system of government	43%
The legal system	37%

Words matter

The contrast between the 70% of adults who give the *Constitution* positive marks, the 23% who give the *political system* a positive rating and the 43% who give the *system of government* good marks is very striking. Presumably, the system of government and the political system are based on the Constitution. However, for many people, politics and government have strong negative connotations.

Differences by political party

For many of the 16 elements on the list, the differences between Republicans, Democrats and Independents are small. For example, science and technology gets positive ratings of 78%, 76% and 76% respectively. However, on a few items, the differences are quite large. For example:

- Civil rights get better marks from Republicans (70%) than from Democrats (53%);
- Equality of opportunity also gets more positive marks from Republicans (65%) than from Democrats (47%);
- The environment gets much better marks from Republicans (61%) than from Democrats (37%); and,
- On the other hand, the political system is viewed less favorably by Republicans (19%) than by Democrats (33%).

Differences by education

On almost all of the 16 items, the level of satisfaction is correlated with the level of education. For example, those giving the system of government positive ratings increases from 31% of those with no more than a high school education to 45% of those with some college, 56% of those with a college degree, and 61% of those with post-graduate education. This same gradient, or correlation with education, is true of the Constitution, quality of life, colleges and universities and standard of living, the legal systems, the economic system and the political system.

So what?

These results highlight the importance of granularity and the need to avoid sweeping generalizations about what people think about the United States – and other countries. People see many elements that they like about the United States – and other things they dislike. At one end of the spectrum, 75% of adults think well of American science and technology. At the other, 77% have negative opinions about the political system.

**TABLE 1
NATIONAL RATINGS**

“On a different topic, how would you rate each of the following in the United States?”

Base: All adults

	Excellent/ Pretty good (NET)	Excellent	Pretty good	Only fair/ Poor (NET)	Only fair	Poor
	%	%	%	%	%	%
Science and technology	75	21	55	25	21	4
Constitution	70	33	37	30	22	8
Quality of life	66	14	52	34	27	6
Colleges and universities	65	14	51	35	27	8
TV, movies and entertainment	62	18	43	38	28	11
Civil rights	58	11	47	42	31	11
Standard of living	56	11	46	44	32	11
Public safety	56	7	49	44	35	9
Equality of opportunity	52	10	41	48	33	15
Environment	44	5	39	56	42	13
System of government	43	10	33	57	33	24
Legal system	37	5	32	63	40	22
Health care system	33	6	27	67	39	29
Public schools	32	3	29	68	44	24
Economic system	28	5	23	72	44	29
Political system	23	3	20	77	36	40

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

TABLE 2
POSITIVE NATIONAL RATINGS – BY POLITICAL PARTY & EDUCATION
 “On a different topic, how would you rate each of the following in the United States?”
Percent saying “Excellent/Pretty good”

Base: All adults

	Total	Political Party			Education			
		Rep.	Dem.	Ind.	H.S. or less	Some college	College grad.	Post grad.
		%	%	%	%	%	%	%
Science and technology	75	78	76	76	73	78	75	77
Constitution	70	75	72	70	61	72	78	87
Quality of life	66	70	69	66	59	68	75	76
Colleges and universities	65	66	72	63	59	65	74	79
TV, movies and entertainment	62	58	69	58	61	60	64	62
Civil rights	58	70	53	59	50	62	66	65
Standard of living	56	62	58	56	45	60	69	73
Public safety	56	64	57	54	50	59	61	62
Equality of opportunity	52	65	47	52	48	53	60	51
Environment	44	61	37	43	44	43	46	50
System of government	43	43	50	40	31	45	56	61
Legal system	37	38	44	34	31	37	45	52
Health care system	33	43	30	31	30	34	37	35
Public schools	32	31	37	29	32	31	32	36
Economic system	28	26	35	25	19	29	39	39
Political system	23	19	33	18	15	25	33	39

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

TABLE 3
NEGATIVE NATIONAL RATINGS – BY POLITICAL PARTY & EDUCATION
 “On a different topic, how would you rate each of the following in the United States?”
 Percent saying “Only fair/Poor”

Base: All adults

	Total	Political Party			Education			
		Rep.	Dem.	Ind.	H.S. or less	Some college	College grad.	Post grad.
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
Political system	77	81	67	82	85	75	67	61
Economic system	72	74	65	75	81	71	61	61
Public schools	68	69	63	71	68	69	68	64
Health care system	67	57	70	69	70	66	63	65
Legal system	63	62	56	66	69	63	55	48
System of government	57	57	50	60	69	55	44	39
Environment	56	39	63	57	56	57	54	50
Equality of opportunity	48	35	53	48	52	47	40	49
Public safety	44	36	43	46	50	41	39	38
Standard of living	44	38	42	44	55	40	31	27
Civil rights	42	30	47	41	50	38	34	35
TV, movies and entertainment	38	42	31	42	39	40	36	38
Colleges and universities	35	34	28	37	41	35	26	21
Quality of life	34	30	31	34	41	32	25	24
Constitution	30	25	28	30	39	28	22	13
Science and technology	25	22	24	24	27	22	25	23

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

Methodology

This **Harris Poll** was conducted online within the United States between May 10 and 17, 2010 among 2,503 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. Where appropriate, these data were also weighted to reflect the composition of the adult online 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.

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By Humphrey Taylor, Chairman, The Harris Poll, Harris Interactive

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