

**Very Large Majorities Of Americans Believe Big Companies, PACs, Political Lobbyists and the News Media Have Too Much Power and Influence in D.C.**

*Nine in Ten Americans, However, Believe Small Business has Too Little Power and Influence in D.C.*

**ROCHESTER, N.Y. – March 11, 2008** – When one thinks of Washington D.C. and the power corridors, smoke filled rooms and shady deals with lobbyists may come to mind. There are certain groups in particular which are singled out by large majorities of the American public as having too much power in those corridors. Leading the list are big companies, as 86 percent of Americans say they have too much power and influence in Washington. These are followed by Political Action Committees (PACs), which give money to political candidates; 83 percent of Americans cite them as having too much power and influence.

Four in five Americans (80%) say political lobbyists have too much power, while almost three-quarters (74%) say the same about the news media. Rounding out the top five are entertainment and sports celebrities, as over two-thirds (69%) of Americans believe they have too much power and influence in D.C. This is actually the first time celebrities have been included on this list and they start off right in the top five to being too powerful in Washington.

Looking at this from the other side of the spectrum, 90 percent of Americans believe that small business has too little power and influence in Washington. Large majorities also believe public opinion (74%) and nonprofit organizations (65%) have too little power and influence.

These are some of the results of a Harris Poll of 1,010 adults surveyed by telephone between February 5 and 11, 2008 by Harris Interactive®.

**Who Else Has Power and Influence?**

In addition to PACs and big companies, there are three other institutions which majorities of the public believe have too much power – TV and radio talk shows (57%), trade associations (57%) and labor unions (51%). Looking at the reverse side of the issue, just over half of the public believes racial minorities (51%) and churches and religious groups (52%) all have too little power and influence in Washington. Interestingly, the public seems to be split on one policy influencer: opinion polls. Maybe people are just overwhelmed with the number of opinion polls in this election year, but 46 percent say they have too little power and influence while 44 percent say they have too much.

**Changes over Time**

There some interesting things to note when comparing this year to 1994, the first year *The Harris Poll* asked this question. First, PACs have seen a five point decrease in the number of people saying they have too much power. Perhaps this is a sign Americans perceive the legislative ethics and campaign finance changes as doing

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some good. Opinion polls have seen a seven point increase since 1994 in those saying they have too much power and a six point increase since just last year.

When looking at some of the other long-term changes between 1994 and 2007, the biggest changes are:

- A eight-point decline from 82 to 74 percent in those who think that public opinion has too little power and influence;
- A six-point increase from 51 to 57 percent in those who think that TV and radio talk shows have too much power and influence and a five-point decrease from 37 to 32 percent in those who say TV and radio talk shows have too little power and influence;
- A five point decrease from 79 to 74 percent in those who think that the news media has too much power and influence;
- A six point increase from 14 to 20 percent in those who think public opinion has too much power and influence;
- A five-point decline from 38 to 33 percent in those who think that racial minorities have too much influence.

#### **Differences between the Views of Republicans, Democrats and Independents**

Republicans, Democrats and Independents tend to agree on certain issues related to power and influence in Washington. Over 80 percent of all three groups believe that PACs have too much power and influence (83%, 84% and 89%, respectively). Furthermore, similar numbers of Republicans and Democrats believe TV and radio talk shows (55% and 59% respectively) and Trade associations (57% and 55% respectively) have too much power and influence. Only four percent of all three party groups think small business has too much power and influence in D.C.

However, there are also some large differences. Republicans are much more likely than Democrats to believe that labor unions have too much power (65% vs. 39%). They are also more likely to think that racial minorities (43% vs. 23%), opinion polls (51% vs. 37%), and the news media (80% vs. 69%) have too much power.

Democrats, on the other hand, are more likely than Republicans to only think two groups have too much power and influence -- churches and religious organization (48% vs. 28%) and big companies (91% vs. 80%).

**TABLE 1****GROUPS SEEN AS HAVING TOO MUCH OR TOO LITTLE POWER AND INFLUENCE IN WASHINGTON**

"And now a question about the power of different groups in influencing government policy, politicians, and policy makers in Washington. Do you think (READ EACH ITEM) have/has too much or too little power and influence in Washington?"

Base: All Adults

	<b>Too Much</b>	<b>Too Little</b>	<b>About Right</b>	<b>Not Sure/Refused</b>
	%	%	%	%
Big companies	86	8	2	3
Political action committees which give money to political candidates	83	9	2	5
Political lobbyists	80	13	1	6
The news media	74	17	4	6
Entertainment and Sports celebrities	69	20	4	7
TV and radio talk shows	57	32	5	7
Trade Associations	57	24	4	15
Labor unions	51	39	4	6
Opinion polls	44	46	4	7
Churches & religious groups	40	52	4	5
Racial minorities	33	51	5	11
Nonprofit organizations	23	65	4	8
Public opinion	20	74	3	4
Small business	4	90	3	3

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

**TABLE 2**  
**GROUPS SEEN AS HAVING TOO MUCH POWER - TRENDS 1994-2008**

"And now a question about the power of different groups in influencing government policy, politicians, and policy makers in Washington. Do you think (READ EACH ITEM) have/has too much or too little power and influence in Washington?"  
*Percent saying "too much"*

Base: All Adults

	1994	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2007	2008	Change Since 1994
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
Big companies	86	82	84	86	87	80	83	90	84	86	-
Political action committees which give money to political candidates	88	83	83	83	83	78	81	85	85	83	-5
Political lobbyists	79	75	74	71	70	69	72	74	79	80	+1
The news media	79	81	77	77	72	72	71	68	71	74	-5
Entertainment and sports celebrities	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	69	n/a
TV and radio talk shows	51	54	54	57	47	54	54	51	54	57	+6
Trade Associations	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	61	52	57	n/a
Labor unions	46	42	39	44	46	45	48	43	47	51	+5
Opinion polls	37	36	35	38	33	33	36	33	38	44	+7
Churches & religious groups	n/a	n/a	27	28	31	27	32	35	38	40	n/a
Racial minorities	38	31	32	30	27	20	31	28	32	33	-5
Nonprofit organizations	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	23	18	23	n/a
Public opinion	14	21	15	14	15	19	18	16	17	20	+6
Small business	4	3	5	5	5	4	5	4	6	4	-

- no change

**TABLE 3**  
**GROUPS SEEN AS HAVING TOO LITTLE POWER - TRENDS 1994-2008**

"And now a question about the power of different groups in influencing government policy, politicians, and policy makers in Washington. Do you think (READ EACH ITEM) have/has too much or too little power and influence in Washington?"

*Percent saying "too little"*

Base: All Adults

	1994	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2007	2008	Change Since 1994
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
Big companies	9	8	6	6	5	10	9	5	11	8	-1
Political action committees which give money to political candidates	8	8	7	6	7	12	11	10	11	9	+1
Political lobbyists	13	12	12	13	11	15	16	17	14	13	-
The news media	13	9	8	10	14	17	18	23	20	17	+4
Entertainment and sports celebrities	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	20	n/a
TV and radio talk shows	37	29	24	23	29	29	28	34	31	32	-5
Trade Associations	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	22	28	24	n/a
Labor unions	43	41	40	37	35	37	37	46	42	39	-4
Opinion polls	52	49	44	41	49	48	47	53	49	46	-6
Churches & religious groups	n/a	n/a	52	56	51	53	53	55	51	52	n/a
Racial minorities	51	52	50	51	51	59	54	58	54	51	-
Nonprofit organizations	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	67	68	65	n/a
Public opinion	82	74	74	73	75	69	72	78	74	74	-8
Small business	92	85	85	88	87	88	88	92	90	90	-2

- no change

**TABLE 4**  
**GROUPS SEEN AS HAVING TOO MUCH POWER – BY PARTY ID**

“And now a question about the power of different groups in influencing government policy, politicians, and policy makers in Washington. Do you think . . . have/has too much or too little power and influence in Washington?”  
*Percent saying “too much”*

Base: All Adults

	All Adults	Party ID			Difference between Republicans and Democrats
		Republican	Democrat	Independent	
	%	%	%	%	%
Big companies	86	80	91	91	-11
Political action committees which give money to political candidates	83	83	84	89	-1
Political lobbyists	80	81	77	86	+4
The news media	74	80	69	75	+11
Entertainment and Sports celebrities	69	71	66	74	+5
TV and radio talk shows	57	55	59	60	-4
Trade Associations	57	57	55	57	+2
Labor unions	51	65	39	56	+26
Opinion polls	44	51	37	46	+14
Churches & religious groups	40	28	48	43	-20
Racial minorities	33	43	23	33	+20
Nonprofit organizations	23	27	21	21	+6
Public opinion	20	23	18	20	+5
Small business	4	4	4	4	0

**Methodology**

[\*The Harris Poll\*](#)<sup>®</sup> was conducted by telephone within the United States between February 5 and 11, 2008 among a nationwide cross section of 1,010 adults (aged 18 and over). Figures for age, sex, race/ethnicity, education, region, number of adults in the household, size of place (urbanicity), and number of phone lines voice/telephone 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 percent 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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**About Harris Interactive**

[\*Harris Interactive\*](#) is a global leader in custom market research. With a long and rich history in multimodal research, powered by our science and technology, we assist clients in achieving business results. Harris Interactive serves clients globally through our North American, European and Asian offices and a network of independent market research firms.

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