

Big Drop in Confidence in Leaders of Major Institutions

Contributed by Harris Interactive
Friday, 29 February 2008

Â The Harris PollÂ® #22, February 28, 2008 Leaders of the Military Only One of 16 Categories to Improve Since Last Year

Over the past four decades, the Harris Poll has measured the confidence, or lack of confidence, in the leaders of major institutions. This year's survey finds that confidence has declined substantially since last year. Fifteen of the sixteen items listed show a fall in confidence and the overall Harris Interactive Confidence Index has fallen nine points this year.

The largest declines in those who have a "great deal of confidence" are for medicine (down from 37% to 28%), leadership in the White House (down from 22% last year to 15%) and for the relatively highly rated small business leaders (down from 54% to 47%).

Only one institution shows an improvement. Those who have a great deal of confidence in leaders of the military have increased from 46 percent to 51 percent. This almost certainly reflects a sense that the situation in Iraq is improving and the so-called "surge" has been somewhat successful. It may also reflect public confidence in General David Petraeus, the commander in Iraq.

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

As a result of the fall in confidence levels, the Harris Interactive Confidence Index had dropped very sharply from 53 in 2007 to 44 this year. This is the lowest it has been in eleven years.

This poll also shows significant declines in the number of people who have a great deal of confidence in:

- Wall Street, down six points from 17 percent to only 11 percent (reflecting, presumably, the decline of the stock market);
- Major Educational Institutions, down five points from 37 percent to 32 percent;
- The Courts and the Justice Systems, also down five points from 21 percent to 16 percent.

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Institutions at the Top of the List

In this year's survey the leaders of six institutions enjoy the most confidence:

- The military (51% have a great deal of confidence);
- Small business (47%);
- Major educational institutions (32%);
- Medicine (28%);
- Organized religion (25%);
- The Supreme Court (25%).

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Institutions at the Bottom of the List

Leaders of the following institution engender the lowest levels of confidence:

- The Congress (only 8% have a great deal of confidence);
- The press (10%);
- Organized labor (11%);
- Wall Street (11%);
- Major companies (14%).

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Republicans Have More Confidence in the Leaders of Some Institutions and Democrats Have More Confidence in Others

Republicans tend to have more confidence than Democrats in the leaders of:

- The military (76% vs. 37%);
- Small business (58% vs. 40%);
- Medicine (38% vs. 24%);
- The Supreme Court (37% vs. 20%);
- Organized religion (35% vs. 21%);
- The White House (30% vs. 7%);
- Major companies (21% vs. 12%);
- Wall Street (15% vs. 9%).

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Democrats, on the other hand, tend to have more confidence in the leaders of:

- Major educational institutions (39% vs. 25%);
- Television news (22% vs. 13%);
- Organized labor (17% vs. 6%);
- The press (17% vs. 5%);
- Congress (11% vs. 6%).

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Why Confidence Levels Rise and Fall and Why Have They Fallen this Year?

The Harris Poll measures the changing levels of confidence from year to year but it does not explain why they change. We can provide plausible explanations for some, but not all of the changes.

We believe that at least two forces change these numbers. One is specific events (or public perception of events). These would explain the higher level of confidence in the military and the lower level of confidence in the White House (parallel to the recent decline in President Bush's ratings).

Another explanation is the halo effect from general mood of the country that appears to raise or lower the levels of confidence in leaders generally when things seem to be going well, confidence rise " and vice versa.

However, sometimes confidence in specific institutions rises or falls for reasons we do not understand. In this year's survey we do not offer an explanation for the sharp decline in confidence in the leaders of small business or medicine. It should be noted however that both of these still do much better than most of the institutions listed.

So What?

Public perceptions of different institutions and their leaders matter. They influence behavior. Legislators and regulators are probably more likely to take a tougher line with unpopular institutions than with popular ones. The influence of Corporate America is probably hurt by the low standing of major companies but helped by the high standing of small business. As confidence in Wall Street declines, legislators may be inclined to investigate or regulate financial markets. The unpopularity of organized labor may make it harder for unions to recruit new members. This year's increased respect for our military leaders probably increases their influence on Capitol Hill. In a democracy, popularity and unpopularity often make a difference. TABLE 1 CURRENT CONFIDENCE IN LEADERS OF INSTITUTIONS (2008) "As far as people in charge of running (READ EACH ITEM) are concerned, would you say you have a great deal of confidence, only some confidence, or hardly any confidence at all in them?"

Base: All Adults
 A Great Deal of Confidence Only some Confidence Hardly Any Confidence At All Not Sure Decline To Answer

The military 51 34 15 1*

Small business 47 45 53 1

Major educational institutions, such as colleges and universities 32 49 15 4*

Medicine 28 46 23 1*

The U.S. Supreme Court 25 55 16 3-

Organized religion 25 46 24 31

Public schools 20 54 25 1*

The courts and the justice system 16 55 27 1*

Television news 16 55 29 1*

The White House 15 41 41 21

Major companies 14 53 29 21

Organized labor 11 53 29 61

Wall Street 11 52 27 91

The press 10 48 41 1*

Law firms 10 52 33 41

Congress 8 50 39 21

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

* Less Than 0.5%
 TABLE 2A
 CONFIDENCE IN LEADERS OF INSTITUTIONS (2001-2008)
 "As far as people in charge of running (READ EACH ITEM) are concerned, would you say you have a great deal of confidence, only some confidence, or hardly any confidence at all in them?"
 Those saying "a great deal of confidence"

Base: All Adults

Â 2001 2002 2003 2004 2005 2006 2007 2008 Change 2007-2008

The military 44 71 62 62 47 47 46 51 +5

Small business XXXX 47 45 54 47 -7

Major educational institutions such as colleges and universities 35 33 33 13 73 93 83 73 2-5

Medicine 32 29 31 32 29 31 37 28 -9

Organized religion 25 23 19 27 27 30 27 25 -2

The U.S. Supreme Court 35 41 34 29 29 33 27 25 -2

Public schools XXXX 26 22 22 22 0-2

The courts and the justice system XXXX 22 21 21 16 -5

Television news 24 24 21 17 16 19 20 16 -4

The White House 21 50 40 31 31 25 22 15 -7

Major companies2016131217131614-2

Wall Street2319121715151711-6

Organized labor1511141517121511-4

Law firms1013121011101310-3

The press1316151512141210-2

Congress182220131610108-2

The executive branch of the federal government20332623XXXXX

HARRIS INTERACTIVE CONFIDENCE INDEX5565575553525344-9

X = Not askedTABLE 2BCONFIDENCE IN LEADERS OF INSTITUTIONS (1991-2000)"As far as people in charge of running (READ EACH ITEM) are concerned, would you say you have a great deal of confidence, only some confidence, or hardly any confidence at all in them?"Those saying "a great deal of confidence"

Base: All AdultsÂ 1991199219931994199519961997199819992000%%%%%%%%%

The militaryX505739434737445448

Small business47XXXXXXXXXX

Major educational institutions such as colleges and universitiesX2923252730273736

The U.S. Supreme Court15302631323128374234

Medicine23222223262929383944

Organized religion2111XX24X20252726

The White HouseX252318131515202221

Public schoolsXXXXXXXXXX

The courts and the justice systemXXXXXXXXXX

Television news9122320162118262320

Wall Street14131315131717183030

The pressXX1513111411141513

Major companies20101619212118212328

Organized labor2111XX8X9131515

Congress916128101011121215

Law firmsX131189117111012

The executive branch of the federal governmentXX151291212171718

HARRIS INTERACTIVE CONFIDENCE INDEX45454743434742546059

X = Not askedTABLE 2CCONFIDENCE IN LEADERS OF INSTITUTIONS (1981-1990)"As far as people in charge of running (READ EACH ITEM) are concerned, would you say you have a great deal of confidence, only some confidence, or hardly any confidence at all in them?"Those saying "a great deal of confidence"

Base: All AdultsÂ 1981198219831984198519861987198819891990%%%%%%%%%

Small businessXXXXXXXXXX

The military28313545323635333243

Major educational institutions such as colleges & universities34303640353436343235

The White House28202342301923172014

The U.S. Supreme Court29253335283230322832

Medicine37323543393336403035

Organized religion22202224212216171620

Public SchoolsXXXXXXXXXX

The courts and justice systemXXXXXXXXXX

Major companies1618181917162119169

Organized labor1281012131111131018

Congress16132028162120151614

Television news24242428232729282527

Wall StreetXXXXXXXXX821

The press16141918161919181812

Law firmsXX121712141513XX

The executive branch of the federal government24XXX191819161714

HARRIS INTERACTIVE CONFIDENCE INDEX51465363515153504650

X = Not askedTABLE 2DCONFIDENCE IN LEADERS OF INSTITUTIONS (1966-1980)"As far as people in charge of running (READ EACH ITEM) are concerned, would you say you have a great deal of confidence, only some confidence, or hardly any confidence at all in them?"Those saying "a great deal of confidence"

Base: All AdultsÂ 19661971197219731974197519761977197819791980%%%%%%%%%

The military6127354033242327292928

Small businessXXXXXXXXXXXX

Major educational institutions such as colleges & universities6137334440363137413336

The U.S. Supreme Court5023283340282229292827

Medicine7361485750434243423034

Organized religion4127303632322429242022

The White HouseXXX1828X1131141518

Public schoolsXXXXXXXXXXXX

The courts and justice systemXXXXXXXXXXXX

Television newsXXX4131352828353729

Wall StreetXXXXXXXXXX12

The press2918183025262018232819

Major companies5527272921191620221816

Organized labor2214152018141014151014

Congress421921X1813917101818

Law firmsXXX2418161214181613

The executive branch of the federal government4123271928131123141717

HARRIS INTERACTIVE

CONFIDENCE INDEX10058596964554455555049

X = Not askedTABLE 3CONFIDENCE IN INSTITUTIONS; AVERAGE FOR INDEX IN EACH
DECADEÂ 1960s1970s1980s1990s2000sÂ Â Â 198049199050200059Â Â 197158198151199145200155Â Â 1972591982461
5200265Â Â 1973691983531993472003*57Â Â 197464198463199443200455Â Â 197555198551199543200553196610019764
198651199647200652Â Â 197755198753199742200753Â Â 197855198850199854200844Â Â 197950198946199960Â Â

AVERAGE FOR DECADE10057514855

*Completed in December 2002TABLE 4CONFIDENCE LEVELS â€œ BY PARTY"As far as people in charge of running â€œ are
concerned, would you say you have a great deal of confidence, only some confidence, or hardly any confidence at all in
them?"Those saying "a great deal of confidence"

Base: All AdultsÂ TotalParty IDRepublicanDemocratIndependent%%%%%%%%

The military51763745

Small business47584043

Major educational institutions, such as colleges and universities32253933

Medicine28382423

The U.S. Supreme Court25372024

Organized religion25352119

Public schools20201922

The courts and the justice system16171812

Television news16132210

The White House153079

Major companies14211211

Organized labor116179

Wall Street1115910

The press105177

Law firms107119

Congress86116

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

Methodology

The Harris PollÂ® 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.

The Harris Interactive Confidence in Leadership Index measures changes in the public's confidence in various institutions. It is derived in the following manner:

- The index is based on the mean value of the items asked.
- All items have equal weight.
- The year 1966, the first year the items were asked, was set as a reference year for the index and assigned a score of 100.
- In order to yield a score of 100 in 1966, the mean value of the original 10 items was multiplied by a factor of 2.11. This same factor was then applied to the mean score in subsequent years, as long as the same items were asked.
- Whenever a new item is added, the multiplication factor is changed so that the new item has no effect on that year's score. The new factor is derived by calculating the index with and without the new item(s), taking the ratio of the two scores, and multiplying this ratio by the old factor. (The current factor is 2.14).
- In years when an item included in a previous year is not asked, it is assumed for calculation purposes that no change has occurred in that item since the last time it was asked.

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.