Business Divides:

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Big Companies Have Too Much Power and Influence in DC, Small Business Has Too Little

Over three quarters of Americans also say PACs, lobbyists and banks have too much power

Many factors influence government policy and, more specifically, politicians.

Yet year after year, certain groups are seen as having too much power over these politicians and others as having too little.Â

Four groups in particular are seen by strong majorities as having too much power and influence in Washington and there is a clear theme for these groups.

Two are in business â€“ big companies (87%) and banks and financial institutions (83%) while the two others are "Inside the Beltway" groups â€“ PACs, or political action committees which give money to political candidates (83%) and political lobbyists (83%).

These are some of the results of The Harris Poll of 1,010 adults surveyed by telephone between February 16 and 21, 2010 by Harris Interactive.

There are six other groups who majorities of Americans say have too much power and influence in Washington: the news media (66%), entertainment and sports celebrities (61%), trial lawyers (60%), trade associations (57%), labor unions (57%) and TV and radio talk shows (55%).

At the other end of the spectrum, there are groups that are seen as having too little power and influence over policy and politicians. Over nine in ten Americans (93%) say small business has too little power while 82% say the same about public opinion.

Two-thirds of U.S. adults (67%) say nonprofit organizations have too little power and influence and over half say the same about opinion polls (55%), churches and religious groups (54%) and racial minorities (52%).

Trends over time
In the sixteen years since this question was first asked there have been some shifts in opinion and some things have held steady. Some of the largest changes are:

* A 13 point drop in those saying news media have too much power (79% in 1994 to 66% today). Conversely there is a 10 point increase in those saying the news media have too little power (13% to 23%);

* An 11 point increase in those saying labor unions have too much power (46% to 57%) and a 9 point drop in those saying they have too little power (43% to 34%);

* A six point decrease in those saying opinion polls (37% to 31%) and racial minorities (38% to 32%) have too much power.

The difference over time for the two ends of the list â€“ big business and small business - is almost unchanged since 1994. Then 86% of Americans said big business has too much power; now it is 87%. For small business, 92% said they had too little power in 1994, today 93% of Americans say this.

Partisan differences
Probably not surprisingly, Republicans and Democrats have some different opinions on how much power some of these groups have. Republicans are much more likely to believe that labor unions (75% vs. 36%), racial minorities (53% vs. 17%), and entertainment and sports celebrities (74% vs. 48%) have too much power.

On the other hand, Democrats are much more likely to believe churches and religious groups (44% vs. 13%) and TV and radio talk shows (62% vs. 45%) have too much power.

Most Republicans and Democrats agree on the power of banks and financial institutions. Over four in five Democrats (83%) and 79% of Republicans say they have too much power and influence in Washington.

So what?
Year after year, public opinion on business in this country is split, perceived as having either too much or too little power and influence, depending on their size. One reason for such a distrust of Washington and such pessimism towards the politicians in the city is their focus on only doing what is right for big companies.

This year, banks and financial institutions are added to the list and immediately rise to the top â€“ for having too much power in Washington. No doubt this has been influenced by the bailouts many of them received and adds to the common perception that elected officials are not in touch with most of those who actually helped put them into office.

Methodology
The Harris PollÂ® was conducted by telephone within the United States between February 10 and 15, 2009 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% 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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