

CRS Report for Congress

Drug Abuse and Control: National Public Opinion Polls

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DRUG ABUSE AND CONTROL: NATIONAL PUBLIC OPINION POLLS

SUMMARY

This report is another in a series of public opinion poll compilations by CRS on selected major policy issues. This report presents recent national polls on drug abuse and control.

During this period drug abuse was mentioned as by far the most important problem facing the Nation. The seriousness with which Americans view the issue is underscored in sentiments favoring increased government spending on the anti-drug campaign, although the public is somewhat doubtful about whether governments can do that much to control drug abuse. Cuts in defense spending were mentioned as the preferred means of paying for this effort, but a substantial majority of respondents also expressed willingness to pay more in Federal taxes to help support it.

Law enforcement, drug abuse education and rehabilitation, and cooperation with foreign governments, though not necessarily in that order, were mentioned as measures deserving the most government spending and effort. Drug use, perceived by many as a function of personal weakness rather than a disease, is considered a more serious problem than alcohol abuse. Occasional crack and cocaine users are viewed more as criminals than occasional marijuana smokers. The importance of drug abuse education for children was supported by an overwhelming majority of respondents. Rehabilitation was endorsed for first-time drug offenders but not for repeat offenders.

The idea of citizens' organized involvement in anti-drug efforts is viewed favorably, as is drug testing for workers in general and for high school students. More than 80 percent of respondents to one poll expressed a willingness to be tested for drug use if their employer requested it. Americans are closely divided on use of military forces to fight drug use in the United States. Illegal drug use as a contributing factor to crime and violence is widely perceived. Drug legalization (decriminalization) is supported by less than 15 percent of the public and most see it as likely to increase, not decrease, drug use; most do not see it as likely to substantially reduce drug-related crime. The courts are seen as the weakest link in the institutional forces arrayed in the drug war. Law enforcement agencies, the schools, and drug treatment centers are seen as marginally more effective.

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DRUG ABUSE AND CONTROL: NATIONAL PUBLIC OPINION POLLS

INTRODUCTION

This report presents a series of national poll results on the attitudes of the American public concerning drug abuse and control. The national polls were reported by various public opinion polling organizations during 1989 and through January 1990. This is another in a series of reports containing public opinion data on various major policy issues.

The national results are presented under selective topical headings. Each entry includes the actual question wording [when the exact question wording is not provided by the source, the question appears in italics], the survey results for the question, the name of the survey organization, a brief description of the sample and when the survey was actually conducted, and a description of the sampling error as indicated in the original study (the margin of error in the national polls is plus or minus three percentage points, unless otherwise noted).

Interpretations of public opinion polls often merit caution. Poll results may be misleading or interpreted poorly or inaccurately. It is important to bear in mind that a definitive quantified statement on how the public feels on most public policy issues is virtually impossible because of fluctuations in public opinion. Most public issues do not embody a singular concept; each issue brings with it multiple concerns—legal, moral, ethical, social, political, economic, and technical.¹ On the other hand, polls may provide valuable information on what the public thinks; as such, they can be helpful in the political process. For a discussion of the possible limitations of poll results and guidelines for interpreting public opinion polls, consult the appendix.

¹ Childs, Harwood L. Introduction. In: Lowell, Lawrence A. *Public Opinion and Popular Government*. New York, Johnson Reprint Corporation, 1969. p. xi.

CRS'S POLL DATABASE FILE

Many of the poll results (particularly the national surveys) contained in this report have been drawn from the Congressional Research Service's online POLL (Public Opinion Legislative Locator) database file located on the Library of Congress' SCORPIO system. The POLL file contains the results of public opinion surveys, as reported in news releases or printed studies, conducted by some of the major public opinion polling organizations. The POLL file was originally developed for CRS by the Roper Center in Storrs, Connecticut.²

The POLL file contains the reported results of: the Harris Survey, the Gallup Poll, the CBS News/New York Times Poll, and the NBC News Poll (NBC News/Wall Street Journal, since October 1985), all since January 1, 1978. The POLL file also contains the results of the Los Angeles Times Poll since January 1982 and the ABC News/Washington Post Poll since January 1985. Information from these sources is added to the file continually. The POLL file also contains the results of selected special surveys conducted for government agencies and private organizations. As new studies of likely interest to Members of Congress are released, they are added to the database.

The CRS Government Division also maintains an extensive hardcopy file of public opinion polls covering a wide array of subjects. Materials from these files are used to supplement data from the POLL file.

Limitations of the POLL File

The accuracy of the information contained in the POLL file is dependent on the accuracy of the published source from which the information is taken. While CRS makes every effort to check the database information against the original published version, it is not routinely possible to verify the original published version against the actual data collected or to verify the description of the actual field procedures used by the various organizations.

The POLL database file, as indicated above, is limited in its coverage. While providing results from some of the major polling organizations, the file does not include all the public opinion results on any topic. Furthermore, the results shown in the POLL database file are limited by what the polling organizations send to CRS.

² The POLL database is copyrighted by the Roper Center for Public Opinion Research.

For More Information On Using The POLL Database File

If you require a more detailed search on a particular topic beyond what is contained in this publication, you can request further research from CRS or, through SCORPIO, directly access the POLL file in your congressional office. For information and training on using the POLL file directly from the terminals in your office, contact Ted Moore at 707-6447. For information about specific polls call 707-8646. This service is limited to congressional users only.

NATIONAL POLLS ON DRUG ABUSE

I. DRUG ABUSE AS THE "MOST IMPORTANT PROBLEM"

Most Important Problem Facing the Nation

September 1989

"What do you think is the most important problem facing this country today?"

	Percent*
Economy (general)	4
High cost of living/inflation	1
High cost of borrowing/interest rates	*
Federal budget deficit/failure to balance budget	5
Trade deficit/trade relations/balance of trade	1
Unemployment	2
Recession/depression	-
Other specific economic problems	3
Drugs/drug abuse	63
Crime	3
Poverty/hunger/homeless	5
Environment/pollution	1
Quality of education	1
Ethics in society/moral decline	1
Fear of war/nuclear war	2
International problems/foreign affairs	3
Abortion	1
Dissatisfaction with government	*
Other non-economic problems	8
None/Don't know	4

* Less than 1%.

NOTE: Total adds up to more than 100% due to multiple responses.

The Gallup Poll. The results of the survey are based on telephone interviews with a national sample of 1,238 adults, aged 18 and over, contacted during the period September 7-10, 1989. Margin of error: plus or minus 4%

September 1989

"What do you think is the most important problem facing this country today?"

	Percent
Drugs	64
Economy	5
Poor	3
Jobs	2
Budget deficit	2
Crime	2
Homelessness	2
Morality	2
Government	2
Other	11
No opinion	5

The CBS News/New York Times Poll. The results of the survey are based on telephone interviews with a national sample of 824 adults, 18 and older, contacted during the period September 6-8, 1989.

July 1989

"What do you think is the most important problem facing the nation today? Is it . . . curing AIDS, or cutting the federal budget deficit, or reducing crime, or fighting drug abuse, or strengthening the economy, or improving health care, or stopping pollution of the environment, or eliminating sex and violence from TV and movies, or what? I could repeat those if you wish. (WAIT FOR REPLY) Is there another problem that you consider almost as important? (ACCEPT UP TO 2 REPLIES)"

	Percent
AIDS	24
Deficit	24
Crime	20
Drugs	43
Economy	20
Health	11
Pollution	14
Sex	9
Other	12
Not sure	2

The Los Angeles Times Poll. The results are based on a telephone survey across the nation, including the states of Alaska and Hawaii, with a sample of 3,583 adults, 18 years of age and older, contacted during the period July 8-13, 1989.

April 1989

"What do you think is the most important problem facing this country today: Is it arms control, or the federal budget deficit, or drugs, or the economy, or education, or the environment, or the homeless, or the possibility of war and peace, or what? (WAIT FOR REPLY) Is there another one of those problems you consider almost as important? (RECORD UP TO TWO ANSWERS)"

	Percent
Arms control	10
Deficit	29
Drugs	63
Economy	23
Education	17
Environment	9
Homeless	20
War	5
Other	5
Not sure	2
Refused	1

The Los Angeles Times Poll. The results are based on a telephone survey across the nation, including the states of Alaska and Hawaii, with a sample of 2,160 adults, 18 years of age or older, contacted during the period April 22-25, 1989.

Most Important Problem Facing Local Community

September 1989

"What do you think is the most important problem facing the community you live in?"

	Percent
Drugs	35
Crime	6
Jobs	6
Taxes	4
Economy	4
Environment	3
Education	3
Morality	2
Too many people	2
Other	12
No problems	2
No opinion	21

The CBS News/New York Times Poll. The results of the survey are based on telephone interviews with a national sample of 824 adults, 18 and older, contacted during the period September 6-8, 1989.

II. BUSH ADMINISTRATION AND ANTI-DRUG WAR

Expectations For Bush Presidency

February 1989

"Here are some questions about the tasks facing President Bush. Do you think the Bush Administration will or will not be able to: Reduce the federal budget deficit? Get the drug crisis under control? Improve the quality of the environment? Keep America prosperous? Keep the nation out of war? Reduce the crime rate in the U.S.? Improve educational standards? Increase respect for the U.S. abroad? Improve the lot of minorities and the poor? Avoid raising taxes?

	Will	Will not	No opinion
Keep nation at peace	77 %	11 %	12 %
Keep nation prosperous	74	16	10
Increase respect abroad	74	15	11
Improve education standards	74	18	8
Raise environment quality	62	26	12
Help poor minorities	53	36	11
Lower crime rate	39	49	12
Reduce budget deficit	39	46	15
Manage drug crisis	36	51	13
Avoid tax increase	29	64	7

The Gallup Poll. The results of the survey are based on telephone interviews with a national sample of 1,001 adults, contacted during the period January 24-26, 1989. Margin of error: plus or minus 4%

Presidential Influence In Fighting Drug Abuse

January 1989

"How much effect do you think a president can have in fighting drug use in the United States? Do you think he can have a great deal of effect, some, or not very much?"

	Percent
Great deal	39
Some	33
Not very much	26
Not sure	2

The NBC News/Wall Street Journal Poll. The results of the survey are based on telephone interviews with a national sample of 2,025 adults, 18 and older, contacted during the period January 14-17, 1989.

Can An Effective President Control Illegal Drug Problem?

April 1989

"Do you think an effective president would be able to reduce significantly the nation's illegal drug problem, or do you think reducing the nation's drug use is a problem beyond any president's control?"

	Percent
President could help	38
Problem beyond president's control	53
Not sure	9

The NBC News/Wall Street Journal Poll. The results of the survey are based on telephone interviews with a national sample of 1,017 adults, 18 and older, contacted during the period March 29-30, 1989. Margin of error: plus or minus 4%

Can William Bennett Reduce Illegal Drug Use?

April 1989

"George Bush created a new job, National Drug Policy Director, and named William Bennett to that position. Do you think Bennett will be able to reduce the country's illegal drug use, or don't you think so?"

	Percent
Yes	26
No	38
Not sure	36

The NBC News/Wall Street Journal Poll. The results of the survey are based on telephone interviews with a national sample of 1,017 adults, 18 and older, contacted during the period March 29-30, 1989. Margin of error: plus or minus 4%

George Bush Plan For Combatting Drug Problem

September 1989

"In general, do you approve or disapprove of George Bush's proposals for fighting the drug problem?"

	Percent
Approve	69
Disapprove	11
Don't know/No answer	20

The CBS News/New York Times Poll. The results of the survey are based on telephone interviews with a national sample of 824 adults, 18 and older, contacted during the period September 6-8, 1989.

Federal Government's Anti-Drug Campaign

January 1989

"Do you approve or disapprove of the job the federal government has been doing to combat illegal drugs in the United States?"

	Percent
Approve	41
Disapprove	53
Not sure	6

The NBC News/Wall Street Journal Poll. The results of the survey are based on telephone interviews with a national survey of 2,025 adults, 18 and older, contacted during the period January 14-17, 1989.

Bush Plan For Anti-Drug Campaign Cost Too Much?

September 1989

"Is it your impression that President Bush's calls for spending too much money to combat drug use, too little money or the right amount of money?"

	Percent
Too much	16
Too little	39
Right amount	33
Don't know	12

The Gallup Poll. The results of the survey are based on telephone interviews with a national sample of 1,238 adults, aged 18 and over, contacted during the period September 7-10, 1989. Margin of error: 4%

III. DRUG WAR AND GOVERNMENT SPENDING

Priority In Government Spending

July 1989

"Considering the number of important problems facing the nation today, in which one of the following areas do you think the government should be spending more money: AIDS, or cancer, or crime, or drugs, or the environment, or health care, or the homeless, or unemployment, or is there some other area where you think the government should be spending more money? (WAIT FOR REPLY) Is there another problem that you consider almost as necessary to spend money on? (ACCEPT UP TO 2 REPLIES)"

	Percent
Nothing	2
AIDS	24
Cancer	14
Crime	16
Drugs	33
Environment	15
Health	20
Homeless	30
Unemployment	12
Other	7
Not sure	3

The Los Angeles Times Poll. The results are based on a telephone survey across the nation, including the states of Alaska and Hawaii, with a sample of 3,583 adults, 18 years of age or older, contacted during the period July 8-13, 1989.

April 1989

"If you had a say in making up the federal budget this year, for which of the following programs should spending be increased, for which should spending be decreased, and for which should spending be kept the same?"

	Increased	Same	Decreased	No opinion
Combatting drug problem	65 %	28 %	4 %	3 %
Research on AIDS	52	38	6	4
Programs for elderly	50	45	3	2
Social Security	46	47	3	4
Environmental protection	39	49	7	5
Scientific research	32	55	9	4
Military arms, defense	11	49	37	3

The Gallup Poll. The results of the survey are based on personal interviews with a national sample of 2,048 adults, aged 18 and over, contacted during the period January 27-February 5, 1989. Margin of error: plus or minus 2%

Federal Spending On Anti-Drug Campaign

September 1989

"Should federal spending on fighting the drug problem be increased, decreased, or kept about the same?"

	Percent
Increased	56
Decreased	6
Kept the same	29
Don't know/No answer	9

The CBS News/New York Times Poll. The results of the survey are based on telephone interviews with a national sample of 824 adults, 18 and older, contacted during the period September 6-8, 1989.

More Spending On Specific Programs?

March 1989

If you had to choose, would you favor more government spending on (READ EACH ITEM) even if it means raising taxes, or would you favor no more federal spending on (READ EACH ITEM) and not raising taxes?"

	Favor federal spending with more taxes	No more federal spending, no tax raise	Not sure
Helping the homeless	71 %	27 %	2 %
Stricter control of acid rain and toxic waste dumping	68	30	2
Controlling drug abuse	67	31	2
A child care tax deduction for the poor	66	32	2
AIDS research	63	34	3
A merit school program	46	42	12
Basic scientific research	46	49	5
Creating enterprise zones in black ghetto areas	42	50	8
The SDI (Star Wars) nuclear defense program	23	73	4
A \$90 billion plan to bail out failing Savings and Loans	18	76	6

The Harris Poll. The results of the survey are based on telephone interviews with a national sample of 1,250 adults, aged 18 and over, contacted during the period February 10-14, 1989.

Drug Control Approach Deserving Most Money and Effort

January 1990

"There are many things that our government is doing to fight drug use. Which one of the following activities in the government's fight against drugs do you think deserves the most money and effort?"

Teaching young people about the dangers of drugs	40 %
Helping drug users overcome their addiction to drugs	5
Working with foreign governments to stop the export of drugs to this country	28
Arresting people in this country who sell drugs	19
Arresting the people who use drugs	4
Don't know	4

The Gallup Poll. The results of the survey are based on telephone interviews with a national sample of 1,226 adults, aged 18 and over, contacted during the period January 4-7, 1990.

**Next Most Important Approach
Deserving Money and Effort**

January 1990

"Which one of these government activities is next most important?"

Teaching young people about the dangers of drugs	24 %
Helping drug users overcome their addiction to drugs	15
Working with foreign governments to stop the export of drugs to this country	24
Arresting people in this country who sell drugs	26
Arresting the people who use drugs	8
Don't know	3

The Gallup Poll. The results of the survey are based on telephone interviews with a national sample of 1,226 adults, aged 18 and over, contacted during the period January 4-7, 1990.

**Spend More Money and Raise Taxes
For Specific Solutions**

August 1989

"Would you favor or oppose spending more money on, and raising your own taxes to pay for (READ EACH ITEM)?"

	Favor	Oppose	Not sure
An education campaign to convince young people and others not to use drugs	79 %	19 %	2%
A sharp increase in the prisons available for locking up convicted drug pushers	71	26	3
The expansion of drug rehabilitation centers so that any addict can be immediately admitted for treatment	67	28	5
An increase in aid to Bolivia, Peru, and Colombia to combat cocaine traffic from those countries to the U.S.	50	45	5

The Harris Poll. The results of the survey are based on telephone interviews with a national sample of 1,250 adults, aged 18 and over, contacted during the period August 18-22, 1989.

Federal Program Cuts To Pay For Anti-Drug Campaign

August 1989

"If you had to choose, would you prefer to see sharp cuts in (READ EACH ITEM) in order to pay for the federal government's anti-drug programs, or not?"

	Prefer cuts	Don't prefer	Not sure
Defense spending	61 %	34 %	5%
Federal health and nutrition programs	19	78	3
Federal aid to education	13	84	3
Federal aid to the homeless	13	84	3
Medicaid benefits	10	89	1
Veterans' health benefits	10	87	3
Medicare benefits	7	91	2
Social Security benefits	7	93	*

* less than 0.5%.

The Harris Poll. The results of the survey are based on telephone interviews with a national sample of 1,250 adults, aged 18 and over, contacted during the period August 18-22, 1989.

Spending On Poverty and Unemployment In Anti-Drug War

September 1989

"In the fight against drugs, do you think we are spending too much on law enforcement and not enough on problems like poverty and unemployment?"

	Percent
Yes	43
No	42
Don't know/No answer	15

The CBS News/New York Times Poll. The results of the survey are based on telephone interviews with a national sample of 824 adults, 18 and older, contacted during the period September 6-8, 1989.

\$8 Billion Too Much Or Too Little For Anti-Drug War?

September 1989

"Bush has proposed nearly eight billion dollars to fight the drug problem this year. Do you think that's too much, too little, or the right amount?"

	Percent
Too much	16
Too little	22
Right amount	38
Don't know/No answer	24

The CBS News/New York Times Poll. The results of the survey are based on telephone interviews with a national sample of 824 adults, 18 and older, contacted during the period September 6-8, 1989.

Increase Federal Income Taxes To Help Fight Drug Abuse?
April 1989

"Do you think George Bush should propose an increase in federal income taxes to help pay for the fight against drug abuse, or not?"

	Percent
Yes	32
No	60
Not sure	8

The NBC News/Wall Street Journal Poll. The results of the survey are based on telephone interviews with a national sample of 1,017 adults, 18 and older, contacted during the period March 29-30, 1989. Margin of error: plus or minus 4%

**Willing To Pay Higher Income Taxes
To Help Combat Drug Use?**

September 1989

"Would you, yourself, be willing to pay higher federal income taxes to help combat drug use?"

	Percent
Yes	62
No	35
Don't know	3

The Gallup Poll. The results of the survey are based on telephone interviews with a national sample of 1,238 adults, aged 18 and over, contacted during the period September 7-10, 1989. Margin of error: plus or minus 4%

Willing To Pay \$100 More In Taxes To Fight Drug Problem?

September 1989

"Would you be willing to pay \$100 a year more in federal taxes in order to increase spending on fighting the drug problem, or not?" (Asked only of those who say federal spending on fighting the drug problem should be increased--56% of the total sample)

	Percent
Willing	70
Not willing	25
Don't know/No answer	5

The CBS News/New York Times Poll. The results of the survey are based on telephone interviews with a national sample of 824 adults, 18 and older, contacted during the period September 6-8, 1989.

Pay More Federal Income Taxes To Help Fight Drug Abuse?

April 1989

"Would you be willing to pay more in federal income taxes to help fight drug abuse, or not?"

	Percent
Yes	53
No	42
Not sure	5

The NBC News/Wall Street Journal Poll. The results of the survey are based on telephone interviews with a national sample of 1,017 adults, 18 and older, contacted during the period March 29-30, 1989. Margin of error: plus or minus 4%

IV. DIMENSIONS OF DRUG PROBLEM

Worst Part of the "Drug Problem"

April 1989

"When you think about the 'drug problem,' what part of it seems worst to you?"

	Percent
Addicted mothers	-
Babies born addicted	-
Kids	23
Drugs in school	3
Kids selling	2
Pushers targeting kids	3
Peer pressure	-
Organized crime	-
Crime--murder	6
Crimes to get drug money	2
Drugs killing	1
Gang violence	1
Inner city	-
Drug users	-
Supply--easy access	5
Traffic from other countries	7
Drug dealers	6
Established people involved	2
Government involved	1
Demand	-
Politicians not doing anything	1
Ruins lives	5
Not helping users	1
Problems spreading	3
Laws not strict enough	2
Laws not enforced	2
Legalize some drugs	1

Worst Part of the "Drug Problem" -- continued

April 1989

	Percent
Not enough money for enforcement	-
Crack	2
Cocaine	1
Recreational drugs	-
Education	-
People don't know better	-
Parents	-
Too little education	-
Drugs in media	-
Everything	7
Other	2
Don't know/No answer	10

The New York Times/CBS-TV News Poll. The results of the survey are based on telephone interviews with a national sample of 1,412 adults, aged 18 and older, contacted during the period April 13-26, 1989.

Seriousness of Drug Problem

September 1989

"How serious do you feel the drug problem is here in the United States --very serious, somewhat serious, not very serious, or not serious at all?"

	Percent
Very serious	87
Somewhat serious	10
Not very serious	1
Not serious at all	1
Not sure	1

The Harris Poll. The results of the survey are based on telephone interviews with a national sample of 1,250 adults, aged 18 and over, contacted during the period August 18-22, 1989.

Possible To Reduce Drug Problem In the U.S.?

September 1989

"Do you think it is possible to significantly reduce the drug problem in this country, or do you think the problem is beyond control?"

	Percent
Possible	73
Beyond control	19
Depends (volunteered)	5
Don't know/No answer	3

The CBS News/New York Times Poll. The results of the survey are based on telephone interviews with a national sample of 824 adults, 18 and older, contacted during the period September 6-8, 1989.

Drug Problem In American Inner Cities Solvable?

September 1989

"Do you think the drug problem in America's inner cities is so severe that it can never be solved?"

	Percent
Yes	39
No	52
Don't know/No answer	9

The CBS News/New York Times Poll. The results of the survey are based on telephone interviews with a national sample of 824 adults, 18 and older, contacted during the period September 6-8, 1989.

More Serious Problem--Drug Abuse or Alcoholism?

September 1989

"Which is a more serious problem in this country today--illegal drug use or alcohol abuse?"

	Percent
Drugs	58
Alcohol	20
Both equal (volunteered)	20
Depends on drug (volunteered)	-
Don't know/No answer	2

The CBS News/New York Times Poll. The results of the survey are based on telephone interviews with a national sample of 824 adults, 18 and older, contacted during the period September 6-8, 1989

Drugs, Alcoholism, Unemployment, and Crime

September 1989

"Now I would like you to consider some concerns that people may have. For each one please tell me how concerned you are, if at all, that it will happen—very concerned, somewhat concerned, not too concerned, or not at all concerned?"

	Very concerned	Somewhat concerned	Not too concerned	Not at all concerned	Don't know
Having family member develop an alcohol problem	49 %	16 %	15 %	20 %	*
Losing your job	31	10	16	40	3
Having family member on drugs	60	10	12	18	—
Becoming a victim of a crime as a consequence of the drug problem in this country	59	20	12	8	1

* less than 1%.

Drug Abuse A Disease Or A Personal Weakness?

April 1989

"What about drug abuse? Do you think drug abuse is a disease and that it should be treated medically like any other physical ailment, or do you think drug abuse is more of a personal weakness?"

	Percent
Disease	38
Personal weakness	53
Not sure	9

The NBC News/Wall Street Journal Poll. The results of the survey are based on telephone interviews with a national sample of 1,017 adults, 18 and older, contacted during the period March 29-30, 1989. Margin of error: plus or minus 4%

Demand and Supply Problem In Anti-Drug War

September 1989

"In your opinion what's the more effective way to combat the drug problem, by reducing demand for drugs in the U.S. or by reducing the supply of drugs coming out of Colombia?"

	Percent
Reduce demand in the U.S.	48
Reduce supply in Colombia	44
Don't know	8

The Gallup Poll. The results of the survey are based on telephone interviews with a national sample of 1,238 adults, aged 18 and over, contacted during the period September 7-10, 1989. Margin of error: plus or minus 4%

Responsibility For Drug Problem--Seller or User?

September 1989

"Who do you think is MORE responsible for the drug problem in our country today—the person who SELLS illegal drugs or the person who USES illegal drugs?"

	Percent
Seller	47
User	31
Both (volunteered)	20
Don't know/No answer	2

The CBS News/New York Times Poll. The results of the survey are based on telephone interviews with a national sample of 824 adults, 18 and older, contacted during the period September 6-8, 1989.

V. DRUG EDUCATION, TREATMENT, AND ENFORCEMENT**When To Teach Children About Drugs**

September 1989

"At what age do you think children today need to be taught about drugs?"

	Percent
Under 5	10
5-6	42
7-9	20
10-12	4
13+	4
Other	7
Don't know/No answer	5

The CBS News/New York Times Poll. The results of the survey are based on telephone interviews with a national sample of 824 adults, 18 and older, contacted during the period September 6-8, 1989.

Drug Education Programs For All Public School Students

April 1989

"Do you think public schools should be required to conduct drug education programs for all students, or don't you think so?"

Percent

Yes	91
No	7
Not sure	2

The NBC News/Wall Street Journal Poll. The results of the survey are based on telephone interviews with a national sample of 1,017 adults, 18 and older, contacted during the period March 29-30, 1989. Margin of error: plus or minus 4%

Do Drug Education Programs Help Deter Drug Use?

April 1989

"Do you think drug education programs are helpful in teaching school children not to use drugs, or don't you think so?"

Percent

Yes	88
No	9
Not sure	3

The NBC News/Wall Street Journal Poll. The results of the survey are based on telephone interviews with a national sample of 1,017 adults, 18 and older, contacted during the period March 29-30, 1989. Margin of error: plus or minus 4%

More Money For Drug Education or For Tougher Enforcement?

April 1989

"In thinking about the money the U.S. government will spend on fighting illegal drugs, would you rather that more money be spent on education or more money on tougher law enforcement?"

	Percent
Education	51
Law enforcement	43
Not sure	6

The NBC News/Wall Street Journal Poll. The results of the survey are based on telephone interviews with a national sample of 1,017 adults, 18 and older, contacted during the period March 29-30, 1989. Margin of error: plus or minus 4%

Enforcement Against Drug Users or Against Drug Dealers?

September 1989

"Do you think the police should put more of their efforts into arresting casual users--people who use illegal drugs occasionally--OR should the police put more of their efforts into pursuing drug dealers?"

	Percent
Casual users	6
Drug dealers	79
Both equal (volunteered)	12
Don't know/No answer	3

The CBS News/New York Times Poll. The results of the survey are based on telephone interviews with a national sample of 824 adults, 18 and older, contacted during the period September 6-8, 1989.

Jail or Treatment For First-Time Drug Offender?

September 1989

"When a person is convicted for using drugs, there can be a choice between sending them to jail or having them go to a drug treatment program instead. What do you think is the best way to deal with a drug user convicted for the first time--jail or treatment?"

	Percent
Jail	8
Treatment	84
Depends (volunteered)	5
Don't know/No answer	3

The CBS News/New York Times Poll. The results of the survey are based on telephone interviews with a national sample of 824 adults, 18 and older, contacted during the period September 6-8, 1989.

Jail or Treatment For Repeat Drug Offender?

September 1989

"What do you think is the best way to deal with a drug user convicted several times--jail or treatment?"

	Percent
Jail	70
Treatment	16
Depends (volunteered)	10
Don't know/No answer	4

The CBS News/New York Times Poll. The results of the survey are based on telephone interviews with a national sample of 824 adults, 18 and older, contacted during the period September 6-8, 1989.

Jail or Treatment For Pregnant Drug Offender?

September 1989

"What do you think is the best way to deal with a pregnant woman convicted for using drugs that might affect her baby—jail or treatment?"

	Percent
Jail	15
Treatment	71
Depends (volunteered)	7
Don't know/No answer	7

The CBS News/New York Times Poll. The results of the survey are based on telephone interviews with a national sample of 824 adults, 18 and older, contacted during the period September 6-8, 1989.

Occasional Marijuana Smoker Punished As A Criminal?

September 1989

"Do you think someone who smokes MARIJUANA OCCASIONALLY should be prosecuted and punished as a criminal, or not?"

	Percent
Yes, as a criminal	43
No	50
Don't know/No answer	7

The CBS News/New York Times Poll. The results of the survey are based on telephone interviews with a national sample of 824 adults, 18 and older, contacted during the period September 6-8, 1989.

Occasional Crack User Punished As A Criminal?

September 1989

"Do you think someone who smokes CRACK OCCASIONALLY should be prosecuted and punished as a criminal, or not?"

	Percent
Yes, as a criminal	70
No	23
Don't know/No answer	7

The CBS News/New York Times Poll. The results of the survey are based on telephone interviews with a national sample of 824 adults, 18 and older, contacted during the period September 6-8, 1989.

Can Organized Groups of Citizens Reduce Drug Problems?

September 1989

"Do you think organized groups of citizens in big cities can work together to significantly reduce the drug problems there?"

	Percent
Yes	86
No	9
Don't know/No answer	5

The CBS News/New York Times Poll. The results of the survey are based on telephone interviews with a national sample of 824 adults, 18 and older, contacted during the period September 6-8, 1989.

Use Military Forces To Fight Drug Abuse In the U.S.?

April 1989

"Do you favor or oppose using our military forces to fight drug use here in the United States?"

	Percent
Favor	50
Oppose	41
Not sure	9

The NBC News/Wall Street Journal Poll. The results of the survey are based on telephone interviews with a national sample of 1,017 adults, 18 and older, contacted during the period March 29-30, 1989. Margin of error: plus or minus 4%

VI. DRUG TESTING

Willing To Be Tested For Illegal Drug Use?

September 1989

"If your employer wanted to test all employees to determine if they had used illegal drugs recently, would you be willing to be tested, OR would that be an unfair invasion of YOUR privacy?" (Asked only of those who are employed--data on employment status not shown in the printed release)

	Percent
Yes, willing	82
No, invasion	15
Depends, (volunteered)	2
Don't know/No answer	1

The CBS News/New York Times Poll. The results of the survey are based on telephone interviews with a national sample of 824 adults, 18 and older, contacted during the period September 6-8, 1989.

Favor Drug Testing Policy For Workers?

September 1989

"Would you favor a policy that would require workers in general to be tested to determine whether they have used illegal drugs recently, OR would that be an unfair invasion of privacy?"

	Percent
Yes, favor	61
No, unfair invasion	24
Depends (volunteered)	12
Don't know/No answer	3

The CBS News/New York Times Poll. The results of the survey are based on telephone interviews with a national sample of 824 adults, 18 and older, contacted during the period September 6-8, 1989.

Favor Drug Testing Policy For High School Students?

September 1989

"What about high schools? Would you favor a policy requiring high school students to be tested to determine whether they have used illegal drugs recently, OR would that be an invasion of the students' privacy?"

	Percent
Yes, favor	62
No, invasion	27
Depends (volunteered)	8
Don't know/No answer	3

The CBS News/New York Times Poll. The results of the survey are based on telephone interviews with a national sample of 824 adults, 18 and older, contacted during the period September 6-8, 1989.

VII. DRUG ABUSE: CRIME AND VIOLENCE

Factors Responsible For Crime

June 1989

What factors in your opinion are most responsible for crime in the country?

	1989	1981
Drugs	58 %	13 %
Unemployment	14	37
Breakdown of family, society, values	13	19
Courts too lenient	4	20
Punishment too lax	4	13
TV violence	2	3
Other	19	17
Don't know	6	8

The Gallup Poll. The results of the survey are based on telephone interviews with a national sample of 1,235 adults, aged 18 and over, contacted during the period June 8-11, 1989. Margin of error: plus or minus 4%

Concerned About Violent Crime Due To Illegal Drugs?

April 1989

"How concerned are you about the increase in violent crime due to illegal drugs in the United States . . . very concerned, somewhat concerned, or not very concerned?" (Asked only of those who said they think crime has risen -94% of the total sample)

	Percent
Very concerned	78
Somewhat concerned	20
Not very concerned	2
Not sure	0

The NBC News/Wall Street Journal Poll. The results of the survey are based on telephone interviews with a national sample of 1,017 adults, 18 and older, contacted during the period March 29-30, 1989. Margin of error: 4%

Increased Crime Rate Because of Illegal Drug Use?

April 1989

"Do you think the nation's crime rate has risen because of illegal drug use in the United States, or don't you think so?"

	Percent
Yes	94
No	4
Not sure	2

The NBC News/Wall Street Journal Poll. The results of the survey are based on telephone interviews with a national sample of 1,017 adults, 18 and older, contacted during the period March 29-30, 1989. Margin of error: plus or minus 4%

Blame U.S. Policy on Drugs For Increase In Violent Crime?

April 1989

"Do you place any of the blame for the increase in violent crime on the U.S. government's policy on drugs, or not?" (Asked only of those who said they think crime has risen--94% of the total sample)

	Percent
Yes	41
No	46
Not sure	13

The NBC News/Wall Street Journal Poll. The results of the survey are based on telephone interviews with a national sample of 1,017 adults, 18 and older, contacted during the period March 29-30, 1989. Margin of error: plus or minus 4%

Limiting Assault Weapons on Drug-Related Violence

March 1989

"Do you think that limits on importing and owning assault weapons will or will not decrease the amount of drug-related violence in this country?"

	Percent
Will decrease	46
Will not decrease	44
Don't know/No answer	10

The CBS News/New York Times Poll. The results of the survey are based on telephone interviews with a national sample of 663 adults, 18 and older, contacted during the period March 15, 1989. Margin of error: plus or minus 4%

VIII. DRUG LEGALIZATION

Legalization of Drugs

January 1990

"Some people feel that current drug laws haven't worked, and that drugs like marijuana, cocaine, and heroin should be legalized and subject to government taxation and regulation like alcohol and tobacco. Do you think drug legalization is a good idea, or a bad idea?"

Good idea	14 %
Bad idea	80
Some drugs should be legalized and others should not	2
Don't know	4

The Gallup Poll. The results of the survey are based on telephone interviews with a national sample of 1,226 adults, aged 18 and over, contacted during the period January 4-7, 1990.

Strength of Feeling About Drug Legalization

January 1990

"How strongly do you feel about this issue? Do you feel very strongly, fairly strongly, or not at all strongly about drug legalization?"

Very strongly	72 %
Fairly strongly	21
Not at all strongly	6
Don't know	1

The Gallup Poll. The results of the survey are based on telephone interviews with a national sample of 1,226 adults, aged 18 and over, contacted during the period January 4-7, 1990.

Attention To Drug Legalization Issue

January 1990

"How closely have you followed the news coverage about the idea of drug legalization? Have you followed it very closely, fairly closely, not too closely, or not at all closely?"

Very closely	19 %
Fairly closely	53
Not too closely	21
Not at all closely	6
Don't know	1

The Gallup Poll. The results of the survey are based on telephone interviews with a national sample of 1,226 adults, aged 18 and over, contacted during the period January 4-7, 1990.

Possible Results If Drugs Were Legalized

January 1990

"Now I'd like you to think about what might happen if drugs were legalized. First, do you think drug use would increase, decrease or stay about the same?"

	Increase	Decrease	Stay Same	Don't know
Drug use in public schools would	65 %	12 %	20 %	3 %
Number of addicts would	67	7	23	3
Drug overdoses would	63	10	23	4
Amount of drug-related crime would	52	25	20	3

The Gallup Poll. The results of the survey are based on telephone interviews with a national sample of 1,226 adults, aged 18 and over, contacted during the period January 4-7, 1990.

Effect of Drug Legalization On Drug Education Programs

January 1990

"How do you think legalization might affect government's efforts to educate people about the dangers of drugs? Would it mostly improve things by generating tax revenue from drug sales that could be directed to drug education programs, or would it mostly make things worse by sending a message that it is okay to use drugs?"

Legalization would improve things	20 %
Legalization would make things worse	74
Don't know	6

The Gallup Poll. The results of the survey are based on telephone interviews with a national sample of 1,226 adults, aged 18 and over, contacted during the period January 4-7, 1990.

IX. ANTI-DRUG WAR: CONFIDENCE IN INSTITUTIONS

Confidence In Institutions Involved In Anti-Drug Fight

January 1990

"Many institutions in society are involved in the fight against drugs. For each of the following, please tell me how much confidence you have that it has the resources and the ability to be effective in the fight against drugs. First, how much confidence do you have in the resources and ability--a great deal of confidence, some confidence, not too much confidence, or no confidence at all?"

	Great confi- dence	Some confi- dence	Not too much confidence	No confi- dence	Don't Know
Courts	11 %	39 %	32 %	15 %	3 %
Police	19	54	20	6	1
Public school	19	47	23	7	4
Drug treatment centers	19	49	19	7	6
Border patrol	15	44	24	9	8
Federal drug agents	22	52	15	5	6

The Gallup Poll. The results of the survey are based on telephone interviews with a national sample of 1,226 adults, contacted during the period January 4-7, 1990.

APPENDIX

GUIDELINES FOR INTERPRETING PUBLIC OPINION POLLS

Poll results are always subject to error. Some error can be attributed to sampling design and some are a result of nonsampling error—such as error in interpretation by either the pollsters or commentators, question wording, etc.

There are several reasons for exercising care in interpreting the results of any public opinion poll. The results of a single survey may be biased because of the timing of the study. Comparisons among the results of various polls may lead to faulty conclusions due to differences in question—wording, question order, the groups surveyed and the methods used by the various research firms. In addition, all polls and surveys based on samples of respondents are subject to error.

Sampling Errors

The results of sample surveys of the public are all subject to sampling error. Sampling error (best thought of as "uncertainty" rather than "mistake"—is the potential for inaccuracy introduced because the survey only includes a fraction of the population studied. In general, larger samples mean smaller errors. However, the benefits derived from reducing the margin of error by one or two percentage points is usually not cost-effective. Keep in mind that the conventionally stated margin of error is applicable only for results based on the total sample; therefore, it will be difficult to make judgments on subgroups (such as blacks, union members, etc.) as the margin of error will be greater.

Who Was Polled?

One should always look at the population that was surveyed. Did the polling organization seek opinions from registered voters, likely voters, all adults, certain religious groups, certain age groups, etc.? Differences in the results from similar questions may occur because different populations are surveyed. For example, asking the same question of a sample of "registered voters" and of a sample of "likely voters" may produce widely different results because each sample is representative of a different population grouping. Some polling organizations may not call back hard-to-reach people or may not attempt to persuade respondents who initially refuse to be interviewed to change their minds. These poll results can be expected to show findings that differ from the results of polls conducted with more stringent methods. The

reason is that some kinds of people are harder to reach, and they may behave differently from others. A New York Times/CBS News Poll conducted in September 1988, found that of registered voters reached on the first call, only 37 percent were men; with follow ups added, that proportion rose sharply.³

The Method of Contact

Using different methods of data collection (e.g. telephone interviewing and in-person interviewing) with exactly the same questions may produce different results as well. Frequently, surveys are taken by telephone interviews because they are more cost-effective. Even though polling organizations may make adjustments, this may still mean an underrepresentation of citizens from the lowest economic levels.⁴

Nonsampling Errors

Question Wording and Placement

A slight variation in the wording of a question may have a major impact on the results. This makes comparisons of the results of different surveys over a period of time more of a problem. Therefore, any variations might give the appearance that attitudes had "changed" when no such change had occurred. Any change in wording may mean that the survey is actually measuring something different from a previous survey on the same subject. According to William Schneider, a political analyst with the American Enterprise Institute for Public Policy Research, "every word, every modifier, every stipulation and every condition can make a difference."⁵ For example, asking people about "aid to the needy" prompts a very different response than if you ask them about "welfare".

Question wording can have a profound effect on the responses given to policy questions, in which people do not have crystallized opinions. Questions on topics that arouse complex emotions, like abortion, or questions on more remote topics of foreign policy are especially sensitive to the wording in questions.⁶ Sometimes people react to the qualitative symbols and images

³ Kagay, Michael R. In *Judging Polls, What Counts Is When and How Who is Asked What*. *The New York Times*, Sept. 12, 1988. p. A6.

⁴ Germond, *To Understand Polls*.

⁵ Jaroslovsky, Rich. What's On Your Mind, America? *Psychology Today*, July/August 1988. p. 56, 58.

⁶ Kagay, *In Judging Polls*, p. A6.

presented in the questions (such as images of needy children, taxes, etc.) rather than on the basis of deeply held conviction.⁷

Question order can also alter results markedly. For example, suppose a polling agency develops a survey to measure a particular political leader's popularity. Then imagine that the pollster interviews a respondent who is generally unhappy with his/her personal financial status and the country's economic situation. In such a case, if the question about the political leader's popularity is asked after a series of questions about the economy and the respondent's financial situation, the leader's popularity rating would generally be lower if the popularity question had been asked for. From this example, we can see that question order can alter the context within which the question is answered.⁸ All of these factors introduce what public-opinion experts refer to as "response bias" in polls.⁹

Effects of Timing

The results of any single survey are based on interviews conducted during a short period of time, and events may cause public attitudes to change quite quickly and dramatically. Poll results are often skewed by recent news coverage. An empirical study by Shanto Iyengar and Donald R. Kinder showed that "television news . . . is a most powerful force determining what springs to the citizen's mind and what does not. By priming certain aspects of national life while ignoring others, television news sets the terms by which political judgments are rendered and political choices made."¹⁰

While a single survey may record attitudes at a moment in time, it cannot measure change. A review of the results of many surveys conducted over a period of time may provide a clearer picture of the stability or instability of public attitudes.

⁷ Erikson, et al., *American Public Opinion*, p. 51-53.

⁸ Asher, Herbert. *Polling and the Public: What Every Citizen Should Know*. Washington, Congressional Quarterly Inc., 1988. p. 56.

⁹ Jaroslovsky, *What's On Your Mind, America*, p. 56.

¹⁰ Iyengar, Shanto and Donald R. Kinder. *News That Matters: Television and American Opinion*. Chicago, The University of Chicago Press, 1987. p. 4.

Non-Attitudes and Interviewer Effects in Public Opinion Polling

Whenever possible, analysis of public opinion surveys should examine the extent of civic inattentiveness and the problems this creates for the proper interpretation of findings from opinion surveys.¹¹ Philip Converse, one of the early experts in the area of public opinion, estimated that less than 20 percent of the adult population holds meaningful opinions on more abstract or remote issues.¹² Numerous panel studies¹³ have shown that people's attitudes on various issues over time are inconsistent.¹⁴ Inconsistency is sometimes a result of true opinion conversion by individuals on a particular subject over time. However, often people's responses in panel studies are inconsistent because they lacked strong conviction or they responded to the question even though they did not have well formed attitudes on the topic.¹⁵ The latter is often referred to as "nonattitudes." One way to minimize the extent of nonattitudes in survey responses is for polling organizations to include filter questions in the survey in order to find out whether or not individuals truly have formed an opinion on a particular issue. For example, a polling agency might ask the respondent if he knows enough about X to offer an opinion. If the respondent says yes, then the pollster could proceed with the question about X. Another way to reduce nonattitude responses is for the polling agency to ask more open-ended questions. Open-ended questions are ones in which a set response is not provided. They are used less frequently because they are difficult to code and they greatly increase the costs of a survey.

¹¹ Erikson, et al, *American Public Opinion*. p. 40.

¹² Converse, Philip E. *The Nature of Belief Systems in Mass Publics*, In: Apter, David (ed.). *Ideology and Discontent*. New York, Free Press of Glencoe, 1964. p. 238-245; and Erison, *American Public Opinion*. p. 49.

¹³ Panel studies are those in which the same individuals are interviewed on the same subject more than once. They are useful in determining the volatility of public opinion of particular issues and/or candidates.

¹⁴ Converse, Philip E. *Attitudes and Nonattitudes: Continuation of a Dialogue*. In: Tufte, Edward (ed.), *The Quantitative Analysis of Social Problems*. Reading, Mass., Addison-Wesley, 1970; Taylor, Marylee C. The Black-and-White Model of Attitude Stability: A Latent Class Examination of Opinion and Nonopinion in the American Public. *American Journal of Sociology*, v. 89, Sept. 1983. p. 373-401; and Norpoth, Helmut, and Milton Lodge. The Difference Between Attitudes and Nonattitudes in the Mass Public: Just Measurement? *American Journal of Political Science*, v. 29, May 1985. p. 291-307.

¹⁵ Asher, *Polling and the Public*, p. 11.

Since most survey questions are not accompanied by a filter and are not open-ended, analysts should be aware that many sociological factors can impair a poll's accuracy. Since people generally do not want to appear uninformed when they are approached by a pollster, many individuals will respond to a question even when they have not given the issue prior thought. Such responses are referred to as the "doorstep variety."¹⁶ An example of the magnitude of this problem is exemplified in a 1980 study of the greater Cincinnati area which included a fictitious item in a survey:

Respondents were presented with the following item about the nonexistent Public Affairs Act: "Some people say that the 1976 Public Affairs Act should be repealed. Do you agree or disagree with this idea?" Fully a third of the respondents offered an opinion on this version of the question.¹⁷

In short, the more remote the issue, the greater the probable share of responses of the "doorstep variety." If the question included a filter such as, "do you agree, disagree or have no opinion," then the results would be different that if a "no opinion" response has to be volunteered. The percentage of people claiming "no opinion" will be lower if the "no opinion" option is not given within the question.¹⁸

There is also what researchers call the "courtesy bias," i.e., people interviewed want to be liked and to give agreeable answers. They want to appear intelligent and often want their responses to be socially desirable.¹⁹

Further, when people do not have a definite opinion on a subject, there is a tendency to agree. This is referred to as "response acquiescence."²⁰ An interviewer may unwittingly—or intentionally—obtain certain answers merely by smiling selectively.

¹⁶ Ibid., p. 44.

¹⁷ Asher, *Polling and the Public*. p. 22.

¹⁸ Erikson, et al., *American Public Opinion*, p. 45.

¹⁹ Yost, Barbara. Pollsters Struggle to Keep Up. *The Phoenix Gazette*, May 1, 1984.

²⁰ Erikson, et. al., *American Public Opinion*, p. 54.

HOW INFORMED IS THE AMERICAN PUBLIC?

Many Americans are not very attentive observers of the political world.²¹ A recent survey of 18-44-year-olds for *Rolling Stone* magazine conducted by Peter D. Hart Research Associates showed that only one in three said they followed the news regularly; 45 percent of those surveyed said that politics was either "not very important" or "not at all important" in their lives.²² Many Americans do not follow current events closely enough to develop concrete opinions on topical political issues. Although political events can attract near-universal attention if they contain the necessary elements of human interest and drama, complicated political events or issues often get ignored by much of the general public.²³ This probably means that many Americans are not able to offer informed opinions on specific Government proposals.

However, simply because many individuals are not able to offer informed opinions on specific measures, this does not mean that they have no opinion on the subject, that they do not care about the broader issues, or that they may not oppose or support with vigor a specific policy. It may be that if an individual were provided with more information, he or she would then offer an informed opinion. In the final analysis, public opinion polls offer a picture of what is on the public's mind at a given point in time. Since this picture often appears muddled, users of public opinion must exercise care in drawing conclusions from poll results.

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²¹ Ibid., p. 40.

²² Greider, William. Portrait of a Generation: The Rolling Stone Survey. *Rolling Stone*, Apr. 7, 1988. p. 53.

²³ Erikson, et al., *American Public Opinion*, p. 41.