

HEARTLAND MONITOR POLL



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New Poll: Parents Remain Gloomy about America's Future while Teens Feel Confident

American Adults Believe Today's Children Have Fewer Prospects and Opportunities, though Teens Remain Optimistic about the Future, according to the Allstate/National Journal Heartland Monitor Poll

Washington, D.C., September 20, 2013— New data from the quarterly **Allstate/National Journal Heartland Monitor Poll** shows an American public that overwhelmingly believes childhood and parenthood were better for earlier generations, with 79 percent of poll respondents saying it was better to have been a child when they were young.

Watch a live briefing on key findings from the latest Heartland Monitor Poll today at 8:30 a.m. ET, at <http://www.nationaljournal.com/events>, featuring Rep. George Miller (D-Calif.), ranking member of the U.S. House of Representatives Education and the Workforce Committee.

The most recent Heartland Monitor shows that Americans are deeply uncertain about the prospects for today's children. A majority (68 percent) of respondents believe that when today's children are adults, they'll have less financial security, with a poorer chance of holding a steady job and owning a home without too much debt. Almost the same percentage (62 percent) believes their children will have less opportunity to achieve a comfortable retirement. Overall, Heartland XVIII delivers a downbeat vision from parents and non-parents alike, who believe that today's children will display less patriotism, work ethic, and civic responsibility than today's adults.

Yet, in the face of this intense pessimism on the part of adults, teenagers are much more optimistic and clearly feel the older generations have it wrong. For the first time, the Allstate/National Journal Heartland Monitor Poll also surveyed high school teenagers ages 13-18, and found an optimistic view of the economy: More than half of the teens surveyed (54 percent) say they believe it's better to be a teenager today than it was when their parents were growing up. A plurality (45 percent) believe that when they are their parents' age, they will have more opportunity to get ahead than the previous generation. Just 24 percent of teens say they will have less opportunity.

"The world looks to America as a beacon of hope to realize one's dreams. While we see pessimism in this poll, the younger generation feels a sense of optimism about the future," said Sanjay Gupta, executive vice president and chief marketing officer of Allstate. "These findings reinforce a challenging backdrop, but the optimism of the younger generation gives us hope in the enduring American dream."

The 18th quarterly Allstate/National Journal Heartland Monitor Poll digs into the increased concerns about the country's political direction and the economy. American adults say that opportunities for a quality education, access to health care, fair treatment, adequate play time, and sufficient love and attention are accessible to some, but are not guaranteed for the average American child.

This negative view of the future parallels a noticeable chilling of the national mood, with a high percentage (64 percent) of Americans believing that the country is on the wrong track. President Obama's approval rating has hit a

low (40 percent), as has that of Congress (13 percent), since this poll's first installment in April 2009. Almost half of Americans (47 percent) say that the Obama administration's actions decrease the opportunity for them to get ahead, the highest percentage since the poll began asking the question in April 2009. Respondents are relatively split on whether the economy will improve (28 percent), become worse (31 percent), or stay the same (36 percent) over the next 12 months.

In the area of education, more teens than adults consider college a worthy investment. While over half of adult respondents (53 percent) still believe the average four-year college education is a ticket to the middle class, and that a degree helps people get good jobs and build successful careers, a full 39 percent view college as an economic burden. Teenagers, meanwhile, feel that college is a good investment for the future (86 percent), rather than an unnecessary expense that is not worth it (14 percent).

In other areas of the poll, a large majority (69 percent) of adults polled believe parents are too busy with work and their own personal lives to spend enough time with their children or to give them the attention they need to learn and grow.

"The operative definition of the American Dream is that each generation will live better than its predecessor," added Ronald Brownstein, editorial director of Atlantic Media. "The latest Heartland Monitor survey shows how much the sustained economic slowdown has frayed that expectation among average Americans. While the poll shows that most Americans believe the country is still providing kids with many of the necessary ingredients for success—particularly a quality education—it captures a widespread fear that the economy simply won't provide as many opportunities to future generations as Americans remember from when they were young."

Key findings from the 18th Allstate/National Journal Heartland Monitor Poll are also available via [PDF](#). Additional information on the entire polling series can be found at: <http://www.theheartlandvoice.com/category/insights>.

Key Findings

1. Americans overwhelmingly believe that today's children and parents are facing more difficulties and challenges than previous generations.

- 79 percent of Americans believe it was better to have been a child when they were young while just 16 percent of American adults believe it is better to be a child in America today.
- 75 percent believe it was better to be a parent when they were growing up, while just 19 percent of Americans think it is better to be a parent in America today.
- This sentiment is remarkably consistent across demographic lines, including age, education, and income.
 - More than half of teens surveyed (54 percent) say it's better to be a teenager today than it was when their parents were growing up (46 percent).
 - Teens are less positive about the state of parenthood today - 40 percent think it is better to be a parent today than it was when their own parents were growing up (60 percent).
 - Overall, Americans overwhelmingly believe that today's children face more challenges (66 percent) than opportunities (25 percent).

2. Looking forward, Americans remain concerned about opportunities and achievement for the next generation.

- Just 20 percent of Americans believe that today's children will have more opportunity to get ahead when they are grown, compared to 45 percent who fear that today's children will have less opportunity, and 30 percent believe they will have about the same level.
 - Today, fewer Americans believe their children will have more opportunities to get ahead than did so a year ago. In September 2012, the Heartland Monitor showed that 32 percent of Americans

believed the next generation will have more opportunities, while 32 percent believed they will have less.

- Young adults ages 18-29 are the most optimistic, but just 31 percent believe that today's children will have more opportunity when they are grown, a 12-point decline since last September.
- Today's teens are more hopeful about their future opportunities, with 45 percent believing they will have more opportunity than their parents had, 24 percent believing they will have less opportunity.
- Thinking about the achievements and activities of their own generation, Americans believe today's children will not quite measure up on a number of factors:
 - 68 percent think that today's children will have less financial security;
 - 65 percent think they will have less patriotism and pride in their country;
 - 63 percent think they will have less work ethic and professional motivation;
 - 62 percent think they will have less financial freedom and the ability to afford luxuries;
 - 53 percent think they will have less financial responsibility;
 - 48 percent think they will have less civic and community responsibility.

3. Americans are conflicted on policy approaches related to the cost of raising children and college education.

- When considering the idea of shared societal responsibility and sacrifice as it relates to assisting parents and children, a slight majority of Americans express hesitation about asking businesses and non-parents to contribute too much.
 - 51 percent believe that "while the country should be supportive of children and young families, raising those children is the responsibility of the parents."
 - 42 percent think that "the entire country has a shared responsibility to invest more in children and young families."
- When told the average cost of raising a child totals more than \$240,000:
 - 60 percent say that the best approach to making parenting more affordable is "lowering taxes."
 - 34 percent prefer "increasing public spending" on programs like pre-K, public education, child care, health care and college tuition.
- More than half of Americans see college as a ticket to the middle class (53 percent) rather than an economic burden (39 percent).
- Teenagers overwhelmingly believe that college is "a good investment for the future" (86 percent) rather than an "unnecessary expense that is not worth it" (14 percent).
- Fewer than half of parents with school-age children think it's realistic that they will be able to pay for college education for themselves or their children.

4. This poll shows a decline in the American political environment and a fading confidence in President Obama and the economy.

- Just a quarter of Americans believe the country is headed in the right direction, a slippage from the 30 percent we measured in May/June. Half of Democrats (50 percent) and only 45 percent of African-Americans now believe things are headed in the right direction.
- President Obama's job approval sits at 40 percent, down from 48 percent in May/June and the lowest we've measured across 18 Heartland Monitor polls.
- Just 13 percent approve of the job Congress is doing, even lower than the 17 percent we measured in May/June.
- 47 percent of Americans now believe that the Obama administration will decrease opportunity for people like them to get ahead. This is the high-water mark for this measure of pessimism, up from 43 percent in April and 40 percent in May/June.

- Just 28 percent believe the economy will improve 12 months from now, the lowest we've measured from 44 percent last November to 34 percent in April and 37 percent in May/June.

5. Americans continue to occupy a "middle ground" between optimism and concern regarding their personal financial situation.

- 44 percent rate their own personal financial situation as excellent or good, compared to 49 percent in May/June 2013.
- 43 percent expect their financial situation to improve by this time next year, a slight decline from 47 percent in May/June but notably higher than the 36 percent measured in April 2013.

Survey Methodology

Since April 2009, the quarterly Allstate/*National Journal* Heartland Monitor Polls have explored American attitudes on the changing economy. The most recent Allstate/*National Journal* Heartland Monitor poll was conducted by FTI Consulting, from September 3-7, 2013 among N=1,000 American adults age 18+ reached via landline and cell phone as well as an online survey of American teenagers age 13-17 and 18 year olds still in high school. The margin of error for the N=1,000 telephone sample is \pm 3.1 percent.

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