

us to locate contemporary American social and political values in a comparative context.

The 1992 module of the ongoing ISSP project shows how strong and distinctive America's individualistic commitments still are. Asked, for example, to assess the relative importance for getting ahead in life of various conditions and characteristics, Americans gave clear primacy to three: one's own ambition, one's own hard work, and one's own education (see below). It's what I do—not my family background, race, religion, gender, or other factor extraneous to personal effort and commitment. Thus, the US public, across group lines, continues to affirm its belief in the ideal of a meritocratic society, and its judgment that for all its shortcomings

this country approaches the meritocratic ideal.

Similarly, Americans remain far more inclined than their counterparts in many other advanced industrial democracies to emphasize individual responsibility over governmental action in diverse areas, from social welfare programs to income distribution. Commenting on earlier ISSP research, University of Chicago social scientist Tom W. Smith aptly described the US as "the reluctant bride of the welfare state, instituting national programs later than most countries...and spending a lower share of its national income on social welfare than most...." [Tom W. Smith, "The Polls: The Welfare State in Cross-National Perspective," *Public Opinion Quarterly*, Fall 1987, p. 406.]

Data also show that the US public believes that the opportunity to advance remains present in this society, and in part as a result that it supports a version of the ideal of equality which stresses opportunity over result. American individualism has deep roots in religious belief—the equal worth of each person before God—and surveys show the US continuing to stand out among post-industrial societies in the strength of religious commitments. Data presented on pp. 24-25 indicate, further, that Americans still see their country in exceptionalist terms, back strongly the ideal of "one people" united by shared ideals, and are extraordinarily conservative or preservative about the symbols and rituals which express their nationality.

## Defining American Values: It's the Individual

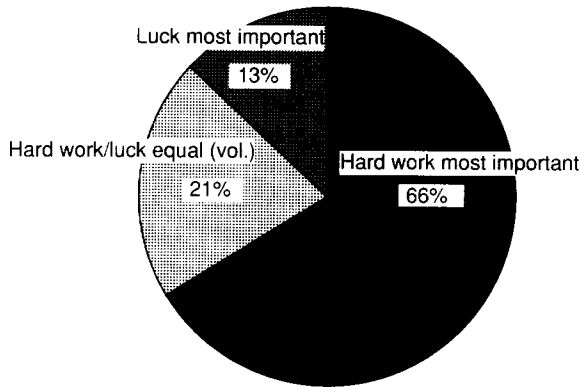
**Question:** Please show for each of these how important you think it is for getting ahead in life...

Essential/very important		Not very/not at all important	
	Percent		Percent
Ambition	90	The part of the country a person comes from	76
Hard work	88	A person's religion	70
Having a good education yourself	87	A person's political beliefs	62
Natural ability	52	A person's race	58
Knowing the right people	43	Being born a man or a woman	56
Having well-educated parents	41	Having political connections	50
Coming from a wealthy family	18	Coming from a wealthy family	49
Having political connections	18	Having well-educated parents	17
Being born a man or a woman	17	Knowing the right people	14
A person's race	15	Natural ability	5
A person's religion	15	Having a good education yourself	1
A person's political beliefs	11	Ambition	1
The part of the country a person comes from	6	Hard work	1

**Source:** International Social Survey Program (ISSP) survey by the National Opinion Research Center (NORC), February-April 1992.

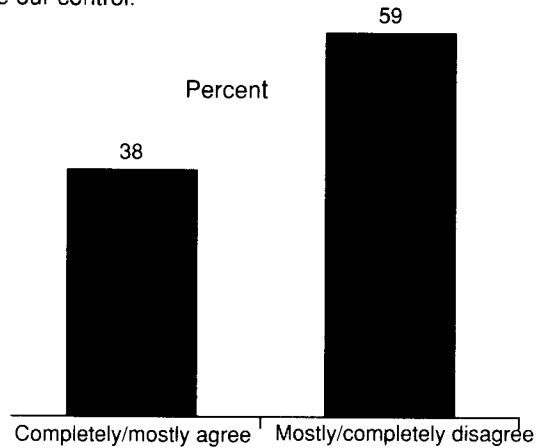
# Defining Values: Individual Responsibility

**Question:** Some people say that people get ahead by their own hard work, others say that lucky breaks or help from other people are more important. Which do you think is most important?



**Source:** Survey by National Opinion Research Center, University of Chicago, General Social Survey (NORC-GSS), February-April 1991.

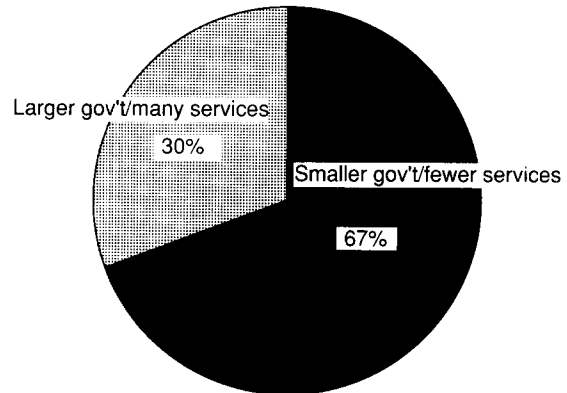
**Question:** ...Please tell me whether you completely agree with it, mostly agree with it, mostly disagree with it, or completely disagree with it...Success in life is pretty much determined by forces outside our control.



**Source:** Survey by Princeton Survey Research Associates (PSRA) for Times Mirror, May 28-June 10, 1992.

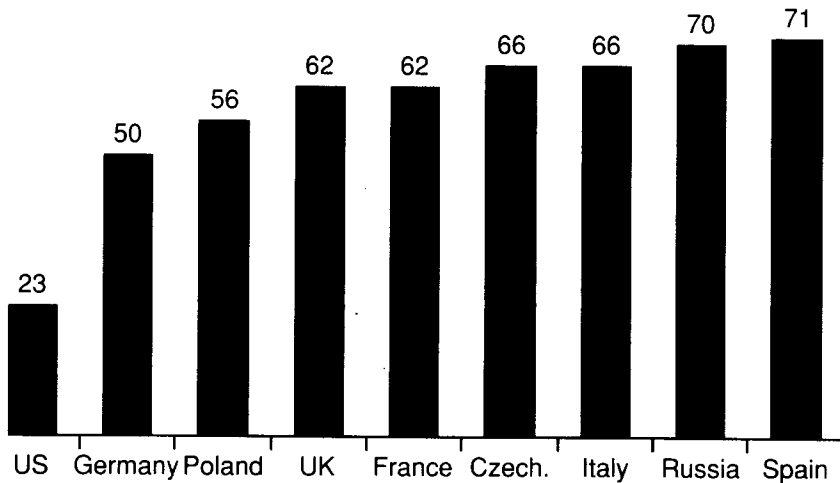
**Question:** Would you say you favor smaller government with fewer services, or larger government with many services?

**Source:** Survey by ABC News/Washington Post, February 25-28, 1993.



## Government Should Care for Those Who Cannot Care for Themselves

Percent responding "completely agree"



**Question:** For each statement, please tell me whether you completely agree with it, mostly agree with it, mostly disagree with it, or completely disagree with it...It is the responsibility of the state [in the US, asked "the government"] to take care of very poor people who can't take care of themselves.

**Note:** These data are taken from a study of nine European countries, two Soviet Republics, and one former Soviet Republic done by the Times Mirror Center for The People and the Press.

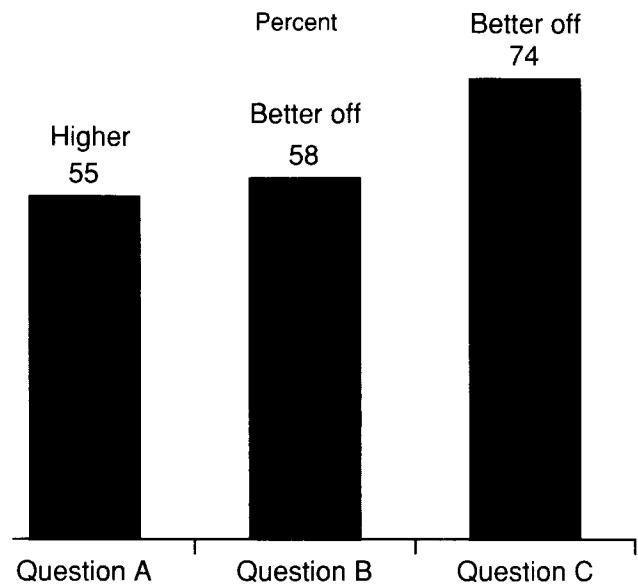
**Source:** Surveys by PSRA for Times Mirror conducted throughout 1990 and 1991.

# Social Mobility: Opportunity is Present

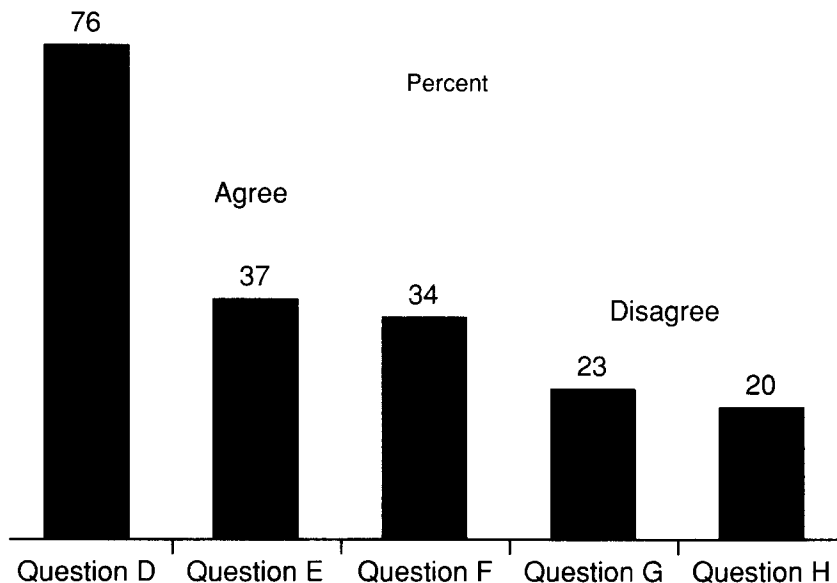
**Question A:** Please think of your present job (or your last one if you don't have one now). If you compare this job with the job your father had when you were 16, would you say that the level or status of your job is (or was): Much higher than your father's, higher, about equal, lower, much lower than your father's?

**Question B:** Compared with your father when he was about your age, are you better or worse off in your income and standard of living generally?

**Question C:** Compared with your father when he was about your age, are you better or worse off in your schooling and training?



## Equality: Opportunity, Not Result



**Question D:** Do you agree or disagree...differences in income in America are too large?

**Question E:** Do you agree or disagree...it is the responsibility of the government to reduce the differences in income between people with high incomes and those with low incomes?

**Question F:** Do you agree or disagree...the government should provide everyone with a guaranteed basic income?

**Question G:** Do you agree or disagree...people would not want to take extra responsibility at work unless they were paid extra for it?

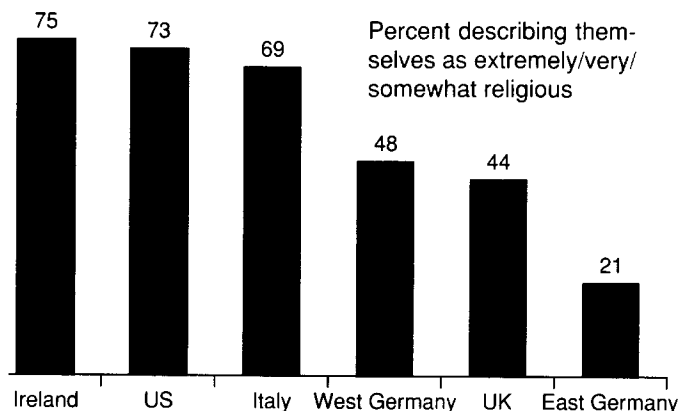
**Question H:** Do you agree or disagree...no one would study for years to become a lawyer or doctor unless they expected to earn a lot more than ordinary workers?

**Note:** Similar response categories have been collapsed.

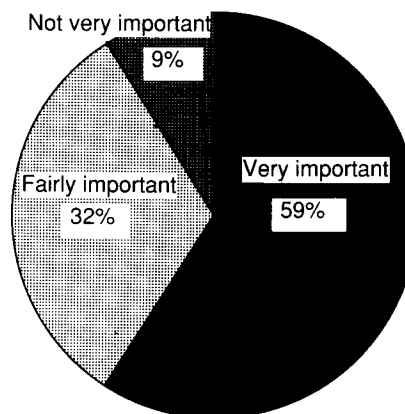
**Source:** ISSP survey by NORC, February-April 1992.

# Defining Values: Religious Beliefs

## Strength of Religious Ties



## Importance of Religion



**Question:** Would you describe yourself as extremely religious, very religious, somewhat religious, neither religious nor non-religious, somewhat non-religious, very non-religious, extremely non-religious?

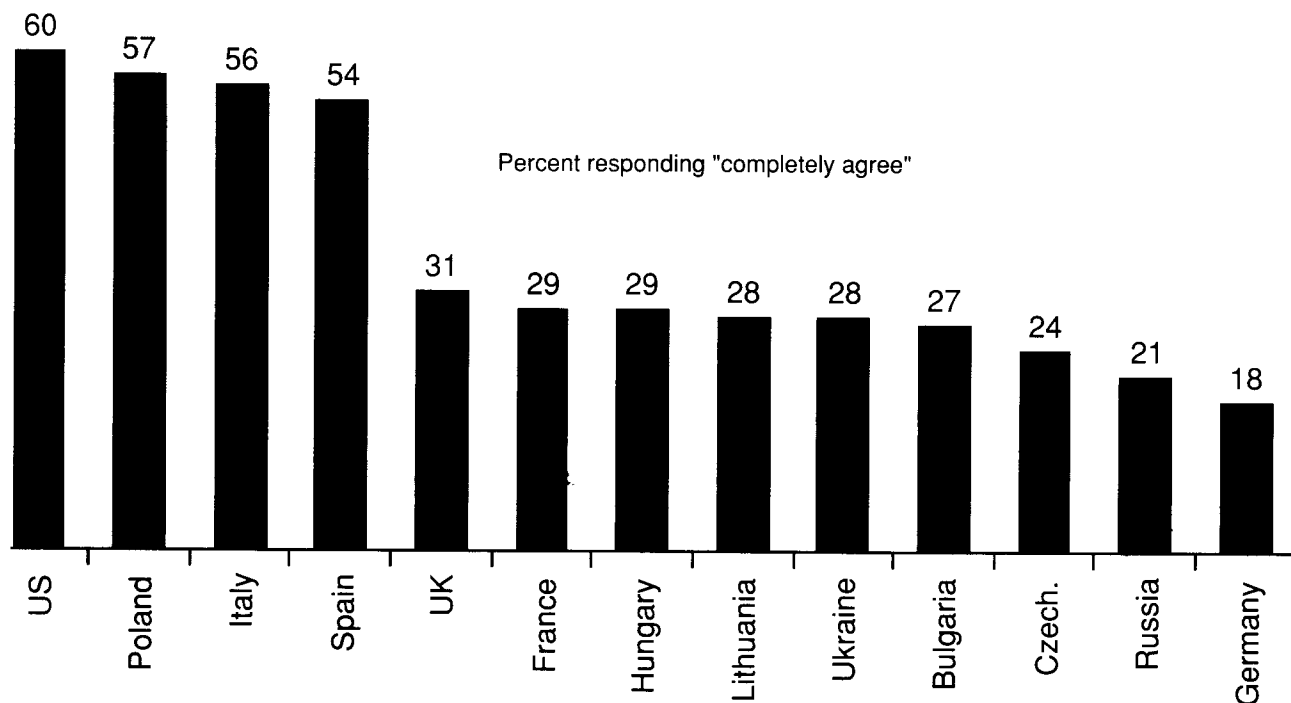
**Source:** ISSP surveys by Economic and Social Research (Ireland); NORC (US); Eurisko (Italy); Social and Community Planning Research (UK); and Zentrum fuer Umfragen, Methoden, und Analysen (Germany), 1991.

**Question:** How important would you say religion is in your own life—very important, fairly important, or not very important?

**Source:** Survey by the Gallup Organization for CNN/USA Today, March 12-14, 1993.

## Belief in God

**Question:** Please tell me how much you agree or disagree with each of these statements...I never doubt the existence of God.



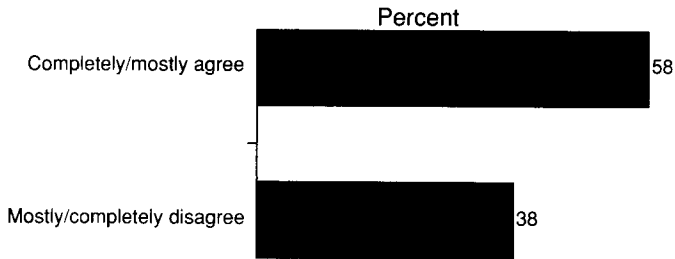
**Note:** The results for East and West Germany are in contrast to each other, therefore the individual results are reported, 11% and 20% respectively.

**Source:** Surveys by PSRA for Times Mirror, conducted throughout 1990 and 1991.

# National Confidence

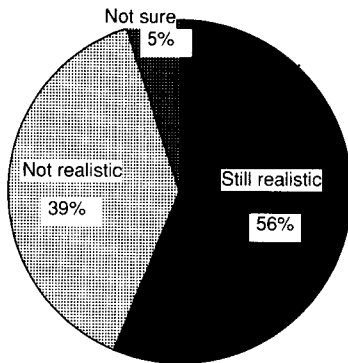
**Americans remain confident about many of the fundamentals of their society, but as the data on this page indicate, anxieties seem to be increasing.**

**Question:** ...For each statement, please tell me whether you completely agree with it, mostly agree with it, mostly disagree with it, or completely disagree with it...I don't believe that there are any real limits to growth in this country today.



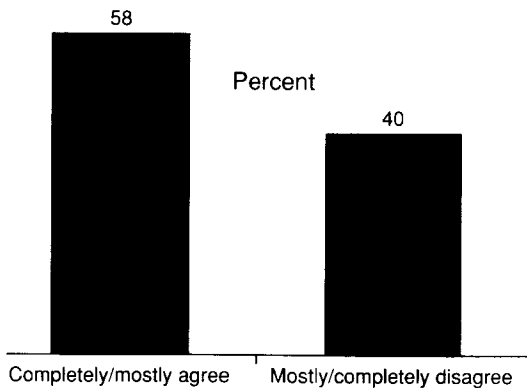
**Source:** Survey by PSRA for Times Mirror, May 28-June 10, 1992.

**Question:** Is the American dream of middle class prosperity still a realistic goal for new immigrants or not?



**Source:** Survey by Louis Harris and Associates for *Business Week*, June 10-14, 1992.

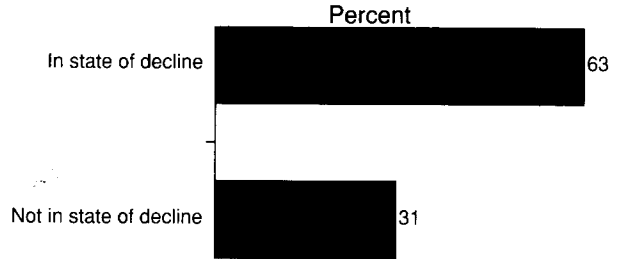
**Question:** ...For each statement, please tell me whether you completely agree with it, mostly agree with it, mostly disagree with it, or completely disagree with it...As Americans we can always find a way to solve our problems and get what we want.



**Source:** Survey by PSRA for Times Mirror, September 10-13, 1992.

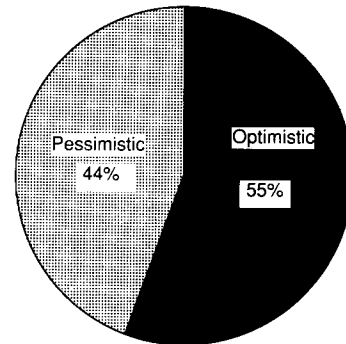
# ...And Worries

**Question:** Do you think America is in a state of decline, or do you feel that this is not the case?



**Source:** Survey by Peter Hart and Breglio Research Companies for NBC News/*Wall Street Journal*, January 17-21, 1992.

**Question:** Thinking about America's children, what is your outlook for their future? Would you say it is...very optimistic, optimistic, pessimistic, or very pessimistic?



**Note:** Similar response categories have been collapsed.

**Source:** Survey by the Gallup Organization for *Life Magazine*, March 30-April 5, 1992.

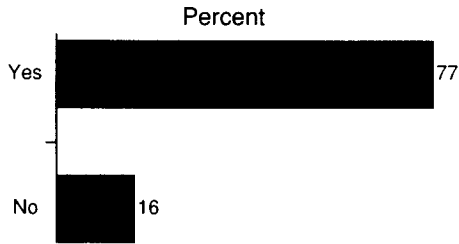
**Question:** Suppose you were talking to a person, in a general way, about the United States and other countries. Which one of these statements best expresses your own point of view?...The US is the greatest country in the world, better than all other countries in every possible way; The US is a great country, but so are certain other countries; In many respects, certain other countries are better than the US.

	Percent	
	1955	1991
The US is the greatest.	66	37
The US is great, but....	31	54
Others are better.	1	9

**Source:** Surveys by the Gallup Organization, latest that of May 23-26, 1991.

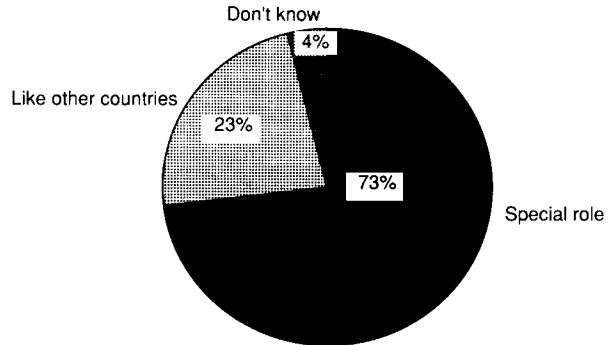
# American Exceptionalism:

**Question:** Do you think there are unique American characteristics that distinguish us from citizens of all other countries?

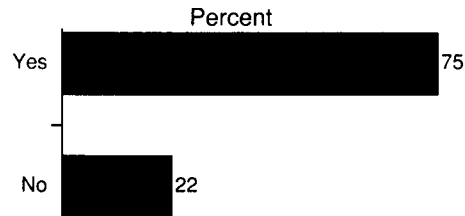


**Note:** The 77% who responded "yes" were then asked: "What is it that makes Americans different?" Twenty-two percent answered "freedom," 10% gave misc. positive items, 9% "opportunity," 10% gave misc. negative items, and 9% said "materialism."

**Question:** Do you think the US has a special role to play in the world today, or is it pretty much like other countries?

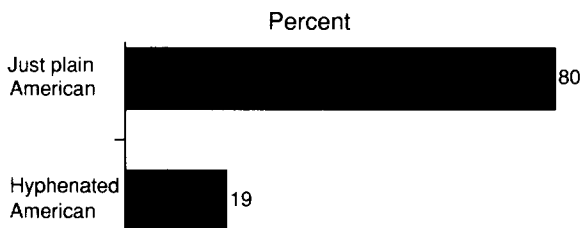


**Question:** Earlier on in American history, many people around the world thought the US was the very best place in the world to live. Do you think it still is, or not?

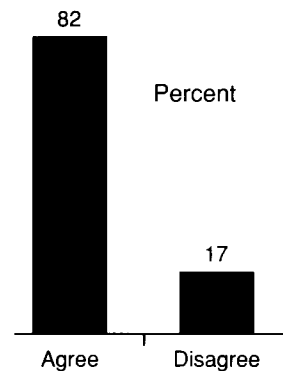


## Handling Ethnicity

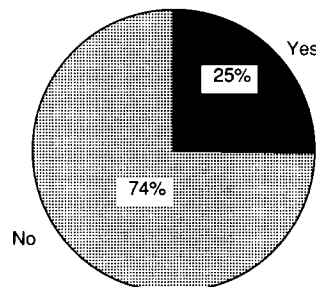
**Question:** Some people think of themselves in terms of where their ancestors came from, such as Irish-American, Afro-American, or Polish-American. Do you think of yourself like this, or just plain as an American?



**Question:** Would you agree or disagree...Anyone who wants to stay in this country should have to learn English?



**Question:** Do you speak any language other than English well enough to get by day-by-day in a country where it was spoken?

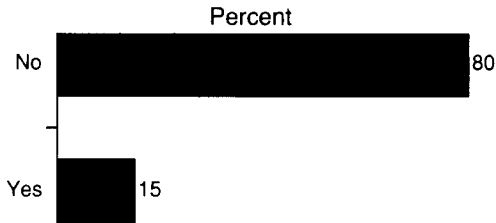


**Source:** The survey data herein are from the *Hartford Courant*/Institute for Social Inquiry CONNECTICUT POLL, June 1993.

# A View From Connecticut

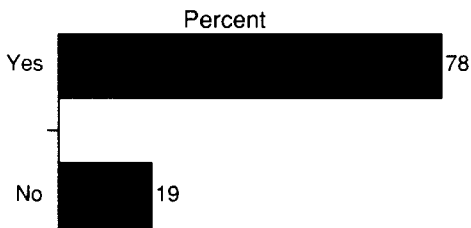
## Symbols: Don't Change Anything

**Question:** As you know, various prominent Americans are shown on our paper money...If it were up to you, is there anyone you would pick to be honored this way instead of one of these men?



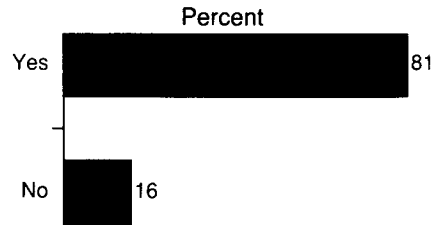
**Note:** Two-fifths of those who wanted to see someone honored, 6% overall, chose John Kennedy. A similar question posed to a national sample by ICR Survey Research Group for Plus System, Inc. in July 1992, found responses of 69% "no" and 25% "yes."

**Question:** Do you think US school children should be required to pledge allegiance to the flag in all US schools, or not?

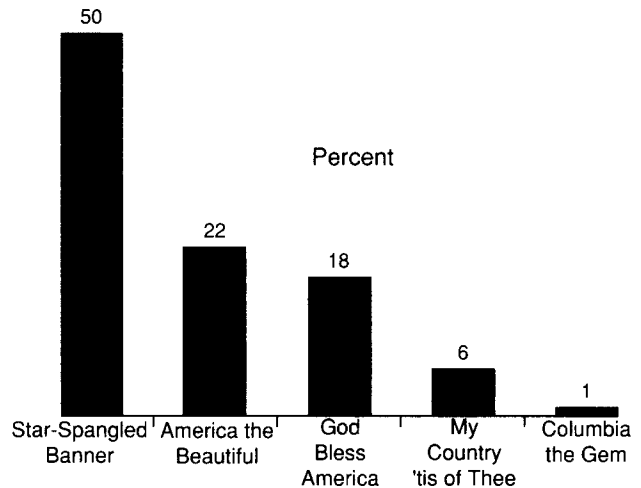


**Note:** A similar question posed to a national sample by Wirthlin Group for *Reader's Digest* in March 1992 found responses of 78% "agree" and 18% "disagree."

**Question:**...the official motto of the United States...is "In God We Trust." Do you think this is appropriate for our country's official motto, or not?



**Question:**...If it were up to you, which of the following would you choose to be our national anthem? "The Star-Spangled Banner," "America the Beautiful," "Columbia the Gem of the Ocean," "My Country 'tis of Thee," or "God Bless America?"



**Note:** A similar question posed to a national sample by the Gallup Organization in May 1991 found responses of 40% "Star-Spangled Banner," 17% "America the Beautiful," 35% "God Bless America," and 4% "My Country 'tis of Thee."

## Most Admired Politicians

**Questions:** Thinking of the time from after World War II up to today, what American political figures, living or dead, do you most admire? And how about from earlier in American history, what American political figures from that period, if any, do you most admire?

**Note:** Leaders mentioned by fewer than 5% of the respondents are not included here.

	Now	Then
John Kennedy	38%	
Harry Truman	14	
Dwight Eisenhower	12	
Franklin Roosevelt	10	
Robert Kennedy	9	
Martin Luther King	9	
Richard Nixon	7	
Ronald Reagan	7	
George Bush	5	
Abraham Lincoln		41%
Thomas Jefferson		20
George Washington		15
Franklin Roosevelt		9
Theodore Roosevelt		6

**Source:** The survey data herein are from the *Hartford Courant*/Institute for Social Inquiry CONNECTICUT POLL, June 1993.