

THE PUBLIC MATTERS

How Americans View Education, Health & Psychology

TEACHERS COLLEGE COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY

THE PUBLIC MATTERS: TECHNICAL NOTE

Version 2.0

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Note: The Public Matters was formerly named The Public Mind.

THE PUBLIC MATTERS:

HOW AMERICANS VIEW EDUCATION, PSYCHOLOGY AND HEALTH

1. Background

Citizen preferences play a key role in a democracy, and there is a substantial body of work that tries to understand the role that public preferences play in the policy process. Despite the important role public opinion plays, there are only limited efforts to document public opinion about education, psychology, and health. The Public Matters project seeks to address this gap by providing reliable, valid public opinion data to inform public debate. The Project includes a series of public opinion surveys on a variety of issues related to governance, policies, and practice that have the potential to affect human development.

2. Methodology

Results are based on online survey conducted August 28 – September 6, 2017 among a national sample of 3,117 adults 18 year of age or older using the Qualtrics Panel. Qualtrics, a marketing research firm, partners with a variety of online panel providers to supply a nationally representative sample. The sample is compiled using overall demographic quotas based on census percentages for representation (i.e., age, gender, race/ethnicity, household income, and census region). To allow greater power for analysis, we over-sampled people who identify as Black, Asian and Pacific Islander, and/or Latinx. The sample is weighted to represent the U.S. adult population living in households or group quarters (see Table 2.1).

The survey included several quality assurance measures, including attention checks and a speed check. Attention checks asked respondents to mark a specific answer. Respondents who failed one or more of these checks were removed from the final sample. Further, respondents who completed the survey in less than 10 minutes were also removed from the final sample.

Most of the survey items were developed by the research team and colleagues at Teachers College. Other survey items were adapted from the National Opinion Research Center (NORC) General Social Survey (GSS), Gallup, and Pew Research Center. The survey also included a detailed battery of survey items on sociodemographic characteristics. In addition to close-ended items, the survey asked several open-ended questions, allowing respondents to contextualized and explain their responses in greater detail.

To test for framing/wording effects, the survey contained several experiments. For example, we vary the term used for describing educators as stakeholders in education. We used the term “teacher unions” to situate educators as an organized and political entity. And we used the term “teachers” as a more neutral reference. The survey included similar experiments in questions about LGBT families (“same sex families” vs. “gay and lesbian families”) and

environmentalism (“climate change” vs. “global warming”). Each of these experiments included a total of two conditions. Respondents were randomly assigned to each condition.

The survey included four parts:

Part	Content	Number of closed items	Number of open-ended items
1	Education		
	General	15	
	Views of stakeholders	12	1
	Social justice and diversity	18	1
	New organizational forms	17	2
	Higher education	18	1
2	Health	15	-
3	Psychology	11	-
4	Socio-demographics	25	-
	Total	131	5

All surveys are subject to various forms of error. One form is sampling error: the variation in results that is attributable to chance in which members of a population are randomly selected to participate in the survey. For percentages based on the entire sample, the approximate margin of error is +/- 1.8%. For subgroups, the margin of error is larger. For example, the margin of error for Black respondents is approximately +/- 4.5%.

Table 2.1: Sociodemographic composition of the final sample

	Total No weights	Total With weights
Gender		
Man	50.0	47.4
Woman	50.0	52.6
Age		
18-24	12.7	13.0
25-44	34.5	35.1
45-64	35.2	36.0
65 plus	17.6	16.0
Race/ethnicity		
American Indian/Alaska Native	1.0	1.4
Asian	7.3	5.7
Black/African American	13.0	14.3
Hispanic, Latino, or Spanish origin	16.4	17.5
Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander	<.2	<.2
White/Caucasian *	69.0	68.2
Other	<.4	<.4
Sexual orientation		
Heterosexual	90.2	89.4
LGBT	8.6	9.4
Refused	1.2	1.2
Marital status *		
Married / living with a partner	58.3	57.2
Widowed	3.3	3.4
Divorced or separated	10.4	11.1
Never married	28.0	28.5
Parent (yes)	29.0	31.7
Education		
High school and less	19.2	37.4
Associate degree / some college	39.4	33.5
Bachelor's degree and more	41.5	29.0
Community		
Urban	20.2	20.4
Suburban	69.6	69.0
Rural	10.2	10.6

	Total No weights	Total With weights
Income		
Below \$30,000	24.7	30.9
Between \$30,000 and \$49,999	21.5	22.8
Between \$50,000 and \$99,999	36.5	32.4
More than \$100,000	17.3	13.8
Political ideology		
Liberal	31.5	29.9
Middle of the road	34.1	36.9
Conservative	34.4	33.2
Political party		
Democrat	38.2	38.5
Republican	26.8	26.0
Independent	31.4	31.3
Other parties	3.6	4.2
Region		
Northeast	16.4	16.3
Midwest	21.1	21.3
South	39.6	40.6
West	23.0	21.8