

# Executive Summary

Majorities of Americans see the federal government as wasteful and inefficient, and continue to hold unfavorable views of national government. Fewer than four in ten have some or a lot of trust and confidence in the federal government to solve the most important problems facing the country.

In contrast, three in five Americans (60%) have a very favorable or somewhat favorable view of major companies. Less than one in five say major companies are wasteful and inefficient, and the public thinks private businesses should take on more responsibility for solving national problems.



**2 IN 5**

have a very favorable or somewhat favorable view of the **federal government**.



**3 IN 5**

have a very favorable or somewhat favorable view of **major companies**.

These are some of the major findings of the third annual Public Affairs Pulse, a survey commissioned by the Public Affairs Council, a nonpartisan, nonpolitical association of corporate and nonprofit public affairs executives.

The survey, designed and executed by Princeton Survey Research Associates International (PSRAI), is based on telephone interviews in English and Spanish with 1,604 adults age 18 or older living in the continental United States. Interviews were conducted on both landline telephones and cellphones May 8-23, 2013.

For results based on all respondents, the results are subject to a sampling error margin of plus or minus 3 percentage points.

## Efficiency versus waste

A majority of the public (51%) says the federal government is often wasteful and inefficient. Only 9 percent say the government is well-run and efficient, with 39 percent saying it is somewhere between those two poles. In contrast, only 17 percent say big companies are wasteful, and 28 percent believe major firms are well-run. Fifty-two percent place the firms somewhere between these extremes.

Public views toward state governments are less critical than views toward the federal government. Thirty-one percent call them wasteful, 16 percent say they are well-run, and 51 percent rank them in between.

In addition, a majority say it's more important to keep taxes at current levels (53%) than to maintain current levels of government services (39%). And 58 percent say it is more important to keep taxes level, while 33 percent are more concerned about preserving government jobs. These views may help explain why the public has not been more outraged by the budget sequestration, which implements federal spending cuts mandated by the Budget Control Act of 2011.

## Regulation and trust

Americans are divided on the question of whether government regulation of business helps more than it hurts. This latest survey finds 44 percent believe government regulation of business is necessary to protect the public interest, while 52 percent conclude that government regulation of business usually does more harm than good. This represents an uptick in negative views about government regulation. The 2012 survey found the public evenly divided: 48 percent to 49 percent.

For the first time, the Pulse survey explored how levels of trust in various industry sectors might relate to perceptions of the need for more regulation of those sectors. In general, the less trustworthy the public perceives an industry to be, the more likely the public is to say there is too little regulation of that industry. For example, health insurance companies, pharmaceutical companies and banks/financial institutions are ranked as less trustworthy than others. These are also the top three on the list of industries that are considered under-regulated.

## **Who should pay for political campaigns?**

The public is overwhelmingly opposed to using federal tax dollars to fund political campaigns, a frequently expressed goal of campaign finance reform groups. A majority are also opposed to so-called Super PACs pouring money into elections. Americans favor candidates spending their own money, individuals making personal contributions and regulated political action committees (PACs) providing funding.

In particular, it's worth noting that nearly two out of three Americans (65%) are fine with a candidate's personal wealth being a major source of a campaign's war chest.

## **Young people are more upbeat**

Millennials are the often-discussed youngest generation of adults, ranging from 18 to 32 years old. Though they've taken a hard hit from the Great Recession, Millennials are more satisfied with the way things are going in this country today and more supportive of government than are older Americans. Forty-two percent say they are satisfied with the way things are going, compared with 31 percent of Gen X-ers and only 20 percent of Baby Boomers.

Fifty-one percent of young people give the federal government favorable scores, compared with only 44 percent of Gen X-ers, 35 percent of Baby Boomers and 34 percent of Matures.

Young people are about as likely to hold favorable views of major companies as others, with 62 percent giving favorable marks and 36 percent unfavorable ones. On the other hand, Millennials are somewhat less likely to trust major companies, with 48 percent trusting corporations while 52 percent do not.