

Liberty Mutual Responsibility Project

Topline Survey Takeaways¹

The State of Personal Responsibility

Americans give themselves greater credit for personal responsibility than they give to others in their community.

- On a zero to ten scale from not at all responsible to extremely responsible, Americans rate themselves an average of 8.24, while they rate their neighbors an average of 6.79.
- Americans believe their own level of personal responsibility has *increased* in the past five years (70% say more responsible), but say that the personal responsibility of people in this country has *decreased* in the past five years (74% say less responsible).
- 85 percent of Americans think people today are less connected with their neighbors than people 20 years ago (including 57% who say much less).

Looking at generational shifts, Americans believe teenagers, young adults, and parents are all less personally responsible today than those groups 20 years ago.

- 70 percent say teenagers today are less personally responsible than teenagers 20 years ago; 70 percent say young adults (people in their 20s) are less personally responsible than young adults 20 years ago.
- 75 percent say that parents today are less personally responsible than parents 20 years ago.

Defining Personal Responsibility

Americans identify day-to-day personal decisions and tasks as best demonstrating personal responsibility.

- When asked what comes to mind when thinking about personal responsibility, Americans are most likely to think of family, the home, and children (21%) and taking care or control of oneself (20%). Also frequently mentioned are financial matters – paying bills, stability, and managing money (13%).
- On a zero to five scale from not at all important to very important in demonstrating personal responsibility, wearing a seatbelt tops the list (4.63), followed closely by paying your bills on time (4.61).
- On a second tier are: voting in local elections (4.17), prioritizing recycling when possible (3.92), and volunteering time in your local community (3.73), followed by contributing to a charity (3.57) and driving a fuel-efficient car with low emissions (3.50).

¹ Methodology: Ketchum Global Research Network designed and analyzed a phone survey of 1,001 adults nationwide. Braun Research fielded the survey from July 18-29, 2008. The margin of error is +/-3.1%.

Americans associate personal responsibility with family obligations and the effects of one's actions on others.

- Americans say that personal responsibility is about taking care of yourself and your family (mean of 4.83 on 0 to 5 scale from completely disagree to completely agree) and making sure your children behave appropriately (4.66). They also say personal responsibility is about how what you do affects others (4.41) as well as about meeting obligations to others and to your community (4.22) and about being reliable to others even when it requires personal sacrifice (4.22).
- They are less likely to agree that personal responsibility is about knowing your neighbors (3.47) or putting the community before your own self-interests (3.12).
- In line with this close-to-home definition of personal responsibility, Americans are more likely to agree that it's the parent's job to teach personal responsibility (4.87) than to say that it's a teacher's job to teach personal responsibility (3.05).

In the Spotlight

Americans believe reality television shows and the media's attention to celebrity lifestyles have a negative effect on personal responsibility.

- 76 percent say reality television distorts the public's views of personal responsibility (including 59% strongly agree).
- 76 percent say the media's attention to celebrity lifestyles lessens people's own sense of personal responsibility (including 54% strongly agree).

Half of All Americans Cannot Name a Responsible Celebrity or Business Leader

- Nearly half (48 percent) of Americans said they could not name a celebrity that embodies personal responsibility and 56 percent said they couldn't name a business leader who is an example of personal responsibility. At the top of the unaided list of celebrity role models are **Oprah Winfrey** (8%) and **Angelina Jolie** (8%). They are followed by Brad Pitt (3%), Will Smith (3%) and Bono (2%).
- **Bill Gates** is the clear leader among business leaders (15%), followed distantly by Warren Buffet (3%), Donald Trump (2%), Oprah Winfrey (2%), and Lee Iacocca (1%).