

Many Europeans, Especially in Britain, Have Lost Confidence in Their Elected Representatives

Americans are somewhat less critical of their members of Congress

ROCHESTER, N.Y. – June 17, 2009 – A new **Financial Times/Harris Poll** finds that many Europeans say they have less confidence in their own elected representatives (their members of parliament, deputies, etc.) than they did a year ago. Only tiny minorities of people under 64 (those over 65 were not surveyed) in the five largest countries in Europe believe that their elected legislators provide “good value for money.” Americans are very critical of their members of Congress, but on some questions they are much less hostile than people in Europe.

These are some of the findings of a Financial Times/Harris Poll conducted online by Harris Interactive among a total of 6,284 adults aged 16-64 within France, Germany, Great Britain, Spain, and the United States and adults aged 18-64 in Italy between May 27 and June 1, 2009.

Trust in People’s Own Legislators Have Declined in last 12 Months

Hardly anyone under 65 in the six countries – the highest number is 5% in Italy – says they have more trust in their own elected representatives now than they did 12 months ago. Substantial minorities in all six countries, from 37% in Britain to 13% in France, say they trust them less now.

Value for Money

Majorities of people under 65 in Spain (71%) and Britain (57%) say their elected legislators do *not* represent “value for money in terms of the tax money paid for his or her salary and expenses.” The numbers who feel this way are lower but still substantial in Germany (50%), Italy (44%), and France (41%) and much lower in the United States (28%).

Many people are not sure, and few people believe they *do* represent value for money – from only 7% in France to 15% in the United States.

Respect

Given the poor opinions that many people have of their legislators, it may be surprising that most people under 65 in the United States and Europe respect their elected legislators “about the same as most other people in their community.” However, in Britain, where there has been a huge scandal about their expenses, with several members of the government resigning, fully 49% respect MPs less than most other people. In the other countries surveyed less than 30% feel this way

Legislators' Honesty – Compared to other Countries

In five of the six countries, at least two-thirds of adults under 65 believe their elected legislators are neither more nor less honest than those in other countries. In Italy, however, a 52% majority believe their legislators are “less honest than those elsewhere in the world.” Even in Britain, only 22% think they are less honest than in other countries.

A Special Focus on British Attitudes

Following the massive media coverage of the scandals in Britain about MPs over-claiming expenses for their second homes, the Financial Times/Harris Poll found that:

- Virtually everyone under 65 in Britain (96%) is aware of the scandal;
- About one-third (31%) of these adults say would be less likely to vote for their sitting MP;
- Fully 59% say they would be at least somewhat likely “to consider supporting an independent candidate” in the next general election; and,
- Most people accept the idea that MPs who do not live in or near to London should be able to claim expenses for a second home (but 27% do not). They are divided between 36% who favor a flat “per day” allowance for the time they are in Westminster and 31% would allow claims up to a set limit, with no claims beyond that.

So What?

Several conclusions can be based on these findings:

1. The often stated belief that many people “hate the Congress but like my member of Congress” or “hate MPs but like my MP” is not true now for most people in these six countries.
2. The high levels of distrust and criticism in Europe help to explain why minority parties (including several extremist right wing anti-immigrant parties) did well in the recent elections for the European Parliament, while many of the leading parties lost ground.
3. American commentators have sometimes written that “anti-politician” sentiment is higher here than in many other countries. Currently that is clearly not the case.
4. Depending on which question is being asked, the public in Britain, Italy and Spain tend to be angrier with their elected legislators than people in France and Germany.
5. Many people in Europe seem to be telling us that they are “mad as hell and don’t want to take it anymore.”
6. This is particularly true in Britain where many voters now want to punish the two largest parties for their sins by voting against them in next year’s elections.

TABLE 1
FEELINGS TOWARDS OWN MP/LEGISLATOR

“Thinking about your own MP/legislator, which statement best sums up how you feel about him or her now as compared to 12 months ago?”

Base: All EU adults in five countries and U.S. adults

	Great Britain	France	Italy	Spain	Germany	United States
	%	%	%	%	%	%
I trust him/her more than I did a year ago	2	2	5	4	2	3
My opinion has not changed about him/her in the last year	37	43	35	44	44	46
I trust him/her less than I did a year ago	37	13	20	29	22	18
I don't know who my MP/Legislator is	25	41	40	24	32	33

Note: Percentages may not add up to 100% due to rounding

TABLE 2
MP/LEGISLATOR'S SALARY AND EXPENSES

“How much do you agree or disagree with the following statement? My MP/legislator represents value for money in terms of tax money paid for his or her salary and expenses.”

Base: All EU adults in five countries and U.S. adults

	Great Britain	France	Italy	Spain	Germany	United States
	%	%	%	%	%	%
AGREE (NET)	10	7	10	13	10	15
Agree strongly	3	3	1	2	3	6
Agree somewhat	7	4	8	11	7	9
Neither agree nor disagree	18	33	23	11	27	25
DISAGREE (NET)	57	41	44	71	50	28
Disagree somewhat	22	18	16	20	24	12
Disagree strongly	35	24	28	51	26	15
Not sure	15	19	23	5	14	32

Note: Percentages may not add up to 100% due to rounding

TABLE 3
RESPECT FOR OWN MP/LEGISLATOR

“Compared to other groups of people in your community (for example – business people, religious leaders, civil servants etc.) overall, how much more or less do you respect your MP/legislator than other groups?”

Base: All EU adults in five countries and U.S. adults

	Great Britain	France	Italy	Spain	Germany	United States
	%	%	%	%	%	%
Respect MP/legislator more than most other people in community	5	5	9	5	1	5
Respect MP/legislator about the same as most other people in community	46	71	63	66	76	66
Respect MP/legislator less than most other people in community	49	24	28	29	22	28

Note: Percentages may not add up to 100% due to rounding

TABLE 4
MPs/LEGISLATORS’ POWER OVER MINISTERS

“How much do you agree or disagree with the following statement? MPs/legislators should have more power to hold ministers accountable for their actions.”

Base: All EU adults in five countries and U.S. adults

	Great Britain	France	Italy	Spain	Germany	United States
	%	%	%	%	%	%
AGREE (NET)	62	56	38	50	37	30
Agree strongly	34	15	10	21	7	9
Agree somewhat	28	41	29	29	30	21
Neither agree nor disagree	18	27	26	28	35	29
DISAGREE (NET)	6	10	24	13	19	20
Disagree somewhat	4	5	14	7	12	9
Disagree strongly	2	5	10	7	7	11
Not sure	13	7	11	8	10	21

Note: Percentages may not add up to 100% due to rounding

**TABLE 5
HONESTY OF MPs/LEGISLATORS**

“Thinking about the MPs/legislators in [INSERT COUNTRY], in general, do you think they are...?”

Base: All EU adults in five countries and U.S. adults

	Great Britain	France	Italy	Spain	Germany	United States
	%	%	%	%	%	%
More honest than those elsewhere in the world	9	6	*	2	11	9
About the same as those elsewhere in the world	70	84	47	66	79	74
Less honest than those elsewhere in the world	22	10	52	32	10	17

Note: Percentages may not add up to 100% due to rounding; * indicates less than 0.5%

**TABLE 6
EFFECT OF RECENT MPs EXPENSE CLAIMS REVELATIONS ON LIKELIHOOD TO VOTE (BRITAIN)**

“Have the recent revelations regarding MP’s expense claims in Great Britain made you any more or less likely to now vote for your sitting MP?”

Base: All GB adults who are aware of the recent revelations regarding MPs’ expense claims (96% of all adults)

	Great Britain
	%
More likely	4
Has not made any difference	40
Less likely	31
Not likely to vote	17
Not sure	8

Note: Percentages may not add up to 100% due to rounding

**TABLE 7
LIKELIHOOD TO CONSIDER INDEPENDENT CANDIDATE AT NEXT NATIONAL ELECTION (BRITAIN)**

“At the next national election how likely would you be to consider supporting an independent candidate unconnected with any of the existing political parties?”

Base: All GB adults who are likely to vote

	Great Britain
	%
AT LEAST SOMEWHAT LIKELY (NET)	59
Extremely likely	14
Very likely	9
Likely	16
Somewhat likely	20
Not at all likely	24
Not sure	17

Note: Percentages may not add up to 100% due to rounding

TABLE 8
MPs' REQUIREMENT FOR SECOND HOME (BRITAIN)

“Some MPs say they need a second home if they represent a constituency a long way from London, how do you think this requirement should be managed?”

Base: All GB adults

	Great Britain
	%
Give them a flat "per day" allowance for every day they spend in Westminster	36
Allow them to claim up to a set limit for rent and council tax, allowing no claims for items beyond that	31
Allow them nothing	27
Allow them to claim for mortgage interest, furnishings and repairs provided they produce receipts	6

Note: Percentages may not add up to 100% due to rounding

Methodology

This **FT/Harris Poll** was conducted online by Harris Interactive among a total of 6,284 adults aged 16-64 within France (1,058), Germany (1,037), Great Britain (1,125), Spain (1,013) and the United States (1,060), and adults aged 18-64 in Italy (1,011) between 27 May and 1 June 2009. Figures for age, sex, education, region and Internet usage were weighted where necessary to bring them into line with their actual proportions in the population. Propensity score weighting was used to adjust for respondents' propensity to be online.

All sample surveys and polls, whether or not they use probability sampling, are subject to multiple sources of error which are most often not possible to quantify or estimate, including sampling error, coverage error, error associated with nonresponse, error associated with question wording and response options, and post-survey weighting and adjustments. Therefore, Harris Interactive avoids the words “margin of error” as they are misleading. All that can be calculated are different possible sampling errors with different probabilities for pure, unweighted, random samples with 100% response rates. These are only theoretical because no published polls come close to this ideal.

Respondents for this survey were selected from among those who have agreed to participate in Harris Interactive surveys. The data have been weighted to reflect the composition of the adult populations of the respective countries. Because the sample is based on those who agreed to participate in the Harris Interactive panel, no estimates of theoretical sampling error can be calculated.

These statements conform to the principles of disclosure of the National Council on Public Polls and of the British Polling Council.

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By Humphrey Taylor, Chairman, The Harris Poll, Harris Interactive

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Press Contact:

Harris Interactive
Corporate Communications
585-272-8400
press@harrisinteractive.net

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