

THE PUBLIC AGENDA

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THE INSIDE SOURCE FOR PUBLIC OPINION AND POLICY ANALYSIS

Rudeness Survey Stirs Up Public Debate about the Decline of Civility in the U.S

The Pew Charitable Trusts Support Major New Study



AP/WideWorld Photos

Aggravating Circumstances: Public Agenda's survey finds Americans annoyed by fellow citizens' public misbehavior, including rude use of cell phones. Fully six in ten believe a law banning cell phone use in movies, restaurants, museums and other public settings would help silence abusive blabber.

Litterbugs, reckless drivers, cell phone addicts: just a typical week in the U.S., say most Americans. Rudeness is on the rise in our society, they say, and not just the rudeness of strangers: 41 percent are willing to accept some of the blame, according to Public Agenda's survey *Aggravating Circumstances: A Status Report on Rudeness in America*. The report, released in April, was written by Steve Farkas and Jean Johnson, with Ann Duffett and Kathleen Collins.

Funded by The Pew Charitable Trusts, the study generated a level of print, broadcast and online media coverage unprecedented for Public Agenda (including commentary from prominent editorial boards and broadcasters) and drove record traffic to Public Agenda Online (see "Rude Awakening" sidebar).

Nearly 60 percent of Americans in the survey say they often encounter reckless and aggressive drivers on the road, almost half report they often are

subjected to loud and annoying cell phone conversations, and a similar number say bad service has driven them out of a store in the past year.

"Participants in our focus groups were clearly incensed by what they perceived as a widespread lack of civility and decline in respect among their fellow citizens," says Public Agenda Senior Vice President Steve Farkas. "What we did not anticipate was the level of unhappiness expressed by those interviewed for this study."

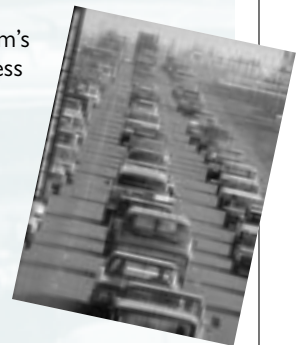
Rudeness: A "Serious National Problem"

Seventy-nine percent of 2,013 U.S. adults interviewed for the survey feel that lack of respect and courtesy should be regarded as a serious national problem.

The comprehensive study probes how typical Americans feel about courtesy, respect and rudeness based on their daily experiences. Concern about discourteous behavior ran high

Rude Awakening: Survey Jump-Starts Sizeable Media, Online Buzz

The level of unhappiness with rude behavior reported in *Aggravating Circumstances* struck a chord with both U.S. and international media, which gave the study prominent and widespread coverage. The study's authors sat for interviews on NBC's *Today* show, BBC Radio and several CNN programs, with commentators Sam Donaldson, Charles Osgood, Bruce Morton and numerous radio talk shows, and for print interviews with The Associated Press, *USA Today* and scores of other outlets. Subsequent coverage appeared in *The Wall Street Journal*, *The New York Times*, *The Washington Post* and *Time* magazine. Industry "bible" *Talkers* magazine named it the week's fourth most popular talk-radio story in the U.S. The survey was featured on America Online's opening page, attracted 150,000 visitors to CNN.com's on-the-spot rudeness poll and was one of the top stories Yahoo! visitors emailed to their friends—all of which drove record traffic to Public Agenda Online.



Students Say They Take Standardized Tests in Stride

Although debate over standardized testing continues to attract media coverage, students themselves say they take the tests in stride. Ninety-five percent of 600 middle and high schools students surveyed nationwide say they either can deal with the stress or don't worry at all about taking the tests, according to Public Agenda's fifth annual *Reality Check* report.

A joint endeavor of Public Agenda and *Education Week*, *Reality Check 2002* tracks the nation's progress in raising

Standardized Tests...

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academic standards in public schools and was funded by The Pew Charitable Trusts and the GE Fund.

The report also found that most teachers and students say preparing for standardized tests does not come at the expense of neglecting other class work so far.

Widespread Support

“Despite some headlines trumpeting a ‘backlash to testing,’ *Reality Check* shows strong agreement on the useful role standardized tests can play, and a broad consensus on how they should be used,” says Public Agenda Senior Vice President Jean Johnson, who co-authored the report with Vice President Ann Duffett. “Virtually all students say they take the tests seriously, and most also seem to be taking the tests in stride.”

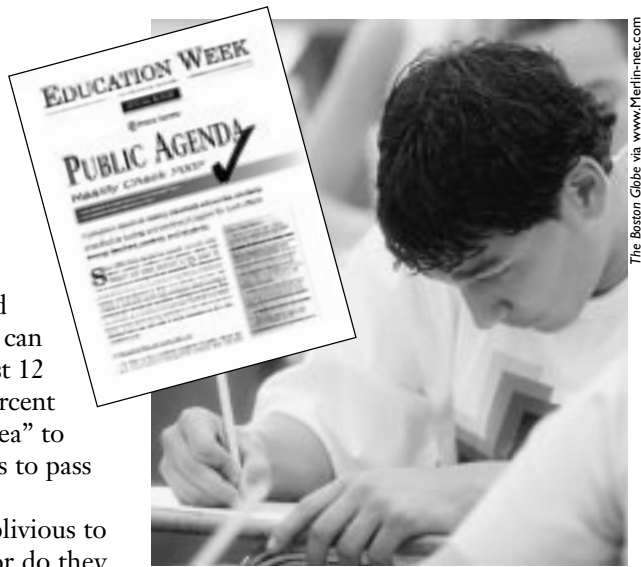
Reality Check suggests that support for turning back the clock on the standards movement in their local school district is virtually nonexistent among parents (2 percent), teachers (1 percent), employers (2 percent) and college professors (1 percent).

Recognizing the Benefits and Risks of Tests

Majorities say that testing can be useful in a variety of circumstances. For example, most parents (78 percent) and teachers (59 percent) say testing students at a young age is good because struggling students can be identified and helped. Just 12 percent of parents and 20 percent of teachers say it’s “a bad idea” to require high school students to pass a test to get a diploma.

None of the groups is oblivious to the downsides of testing, nor do they fully reject arguments made by the critics of high-stakes testing. Large majorities of parents (66 percent) and teachers (79 percent) say “teachers will end up teaching to the test instead of making sure real learning takes place” (see “Mindful” chart below). Strong majorities also reject the idea of using just one test to decide whether a student gets promoted or graduates.

Copies of Reality Check 2002 are available for free from Public Agenda.



The Boston Globe via www.Merlin-net.com

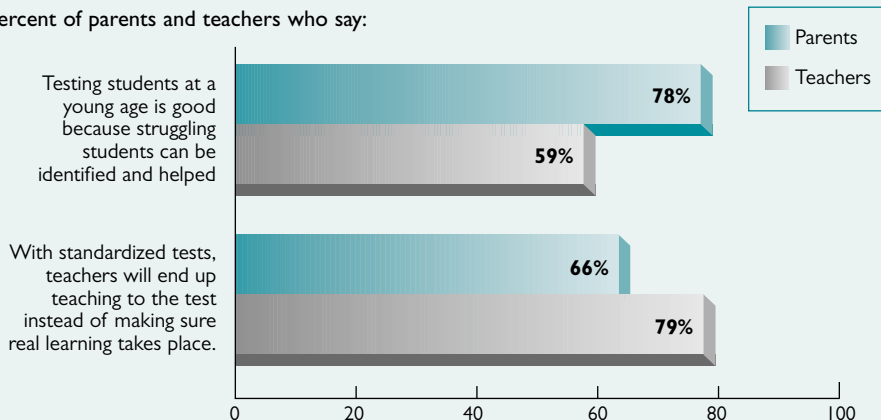
Reality Check: According to Public Agenda’s survey, 79 percent of students say they think standardized-test questions are generally fair.

Reality Check Prompts Chorus of Comment on Testing

Survey respondents’ strong agreement on the useful role standardized tests can play as well as their recognition of the downsides of testing, prompted a chorus of comment in key media and policy forums. In a *New York Times* op-ed, IBM Corporation Chairman Louis V. Gerstner notes that the survey finds “huge margins [of parents and teachers] said students work harder if they have to pass a test for promotion or graduation.” The findings also prompted articles in the *Milwaukee Journal-Sentinel*, the *Richmond Times-Dispatch* and other newspapers published in communities where standards and testing are front-burner issues. U.S. Secretary of Education Roderick R. Paige incorporated numerous findings in his 25-city tour to promote the *No Child Left Behind* education reform law.

Mindful of Testing’s Pros and Cons

Percent of parents and teachers who say:



SOURCE: Public Agenda, *Reality Check* 2002

What’s Happening on



Click!: Site Seen As Unbiased ‘Net-source on Gay Rights Issues

Public Agenda’s online gay rights issues guide, supported by the Gill Foundation, has netted significant media attention and Web links since its launch. In a *People* magazine cover story, our Senior Vice President Jean Johnson explains the wrinkles in opinion found in the guide. Growing numbers of Americans say they think homosexuality should be an acceptable alternative lifestyle, she says, but some portion of the population also say they are “a little uncomfortable with the idea.”

Our issues guide is a resource link in ABCNews.com’s story about entertainer Rosie O’Donnell’s experience as a gay parent. *Philadelphia Gay News* quotes Anthony Tapia, Gill director of grantmaking, who says the guide’s presentation of both sides of gay rights concerns will “help create a dialogue around the issues. That was what was important to us so people could then form their own opinions.”



Prisoner Reentry into Society

Small-Scale Pilot Project Explores the Views of Three Philadelphia-area Focus Groups

Every day, some 1,600 prison inmates (mostly men) are released back into American society. In many instances, they are left to find their way with little planning, counsel or support. This spring the Urban Institute convened the Reentry Roundtable—a nationwide group of academic experts in criminal justice, corrections officials, former prisoners, prisoner and victim advocacy groups and community leaders—to discuss the issue.

The Reentry Roundtable asked Public Agenda to develop a small-scale pilot project to gain a better perspective

on public attitudes about prisoner reentry. Public Agenda conducted three Philadelphia-area focus groups on the subject. In addition to support from the Urban Institute and Public Agenda itself, funding for the pilot project was provided by the Open Society Institute, the George Gund Foundation and Arthur White.

Jeremy Travis is co-director of the Urban Institute's Reentry Roundtable.



John Burgess © The Press Democrat, Santa Rosa, CA



Inmate at a California prison.

Public Agenda Newsmakers

IN MEMORIAM

John W. Gardner, member, Policy Review Board



John W. Gardner was a valued member of Public Agenda's Policy Review Board and his insights and experience have guided our work over the past quarter century. Founder of the citizen advocacy group Common Cause, Dr. Gardner was also secretary of health, education and welfare during the Johnson administration, where he helped launch Medicare and many other Great Society programs. One of America's foremost writers and thinkers on education, his pioneering work earned him the Presidential Medal of Freedom, America's highest civilian honor. He was also president

of the Carnegie Corporation and, after retiring from Common Cause, became a professor at his alma mater, Stanford University. A *New York Times* editorial after his death reads, "In a rich and active career that spanned more than half a century, [he] will best be remembered as an eloquent voice for citizen participation in public life, and as a man whose own career was powerful testimony to what a caring individual can accomplish."

Although preliminary, the focus groups suggest that few typical citizens are aware of the prisoner reentry issue. But once the issue is introduced, most recognize that the lack of support, jobs, education and drug treatment could be a recipe for a "revolving door [process] with people going back into prison almost as fast as they leave it." Public Agenda hopes to pursue further research.

The Philadelphia focus group findings are reported by Public Agenda Senior Vice President Jean Johnson and Senior Research Fellow John Immerwahr on the Urban Institute Web site (www.urban.org), and are scheduled to be included in a forthcoming book to be published by the Urban Institute.

In the Pipeline: Survey Topics

■ How do parents rate their own performance in **raising kids today**? What are parents doing to raise responsible children? What strategies work (or don't work)? Are schools reinforcing the right values? The new survey will build on the groundbreaking research *Kids These Days 1999*, which found that most Americans describe teens and children with such words as "lazy" and "irresponsible."

Sponsored by State Farm Insurance Companies and, on behalf of the Association of National Advertisers, Inc., the Family Friendly Programming Forum

■ How well do Americans understand underlying values of **the Constitution**, responsibilities of citizenship and specific constitutional guarantees? As the 215th anniversary of the signing of the Constitution is celebrated this fall, Public Agenda and the National Constitution Center will document the public's beliefs and misperceptions, possible obstacles to civic participation and the role this democratic cornerstone plays in their lives today.

Sponsored by the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation as part of an ongoing partnership between Public Agenda and the National Constitution Center

■ How do **people who immigrate to the United States** view our political system? What are their views on our government? Do they feel accepted and protected once they are here or do they have concerns about their treatment? The survey will examine the concerns and perspectives of those who have come from other countries to live in the United States.

Sponsored by the Carnegie Corporation of New York



The Boston Globe via www.Merlin-net.com

Graduation day for special-needs student.

Special Education

As Congress prepares to reauthorize the landmark Individuals with Disabilities Education Act to improve the nation's special education system, Public Agenda will release a study that is believed to be the first to probe the views of parents of special-needs children.

What Parents, Teachers and Students Think about Large and Small High Schools

Public Agenda's recent national survey *Sizing Things Up* finds that few people outside the circle of education reformers have yet to be fully exposed to the idea of reducing high school size to around 500 pupils—a move some reformers say may help improve public education. Almost a third (32 percent) of parents and about half (45 percent) of teachers have given “a lot of thought” to the idea. At the current time, parents and teachers typically see reforms such as reducing class size and instilling better discipline as more immediate concerns.

The survey, funded by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, is believed to be the first opinion study comparing the views and firsthand experiences of teachers, parents and students in large and small high schools.



Study Spotlights Public Views for Communities Eyeing Small School Reforms

The study's insights on public views attracted significant attention in *Education Week*, *The Education Gadfly* and other media outlets for professionals, as a growing number of school districts grapple with the issue of whether to create small high schools. In addition, it was the topic of a major article in *Educational Leadership*, and Senior Vice President Jean Johnson's *Phi Delta Kappan* piece was subsequently reprinted by the Washington Association of School Administrators and an education professor at Southern Illinois University. The study gained coverage in the *Cincinnati Enquirer* and the *St. Petersburg Times*, on New York 1 News, and in other communities where small school reforms are under discussion. *Dallas Morning News* columnist Lee Cullum told us the study “truly breaks new ground as far as most people are concerned.”

Copies of *Sizing Things Up* can be ordered from Public Agenda for \$10, plus \$2 shipping and handling. Bulk-order discounts are available.

New Faces at Public Agenda

Rick Remington Director of Communications



Mr. Remington will lead all media relations and communications efforts and comes to Public Agenda from Amtrak's national high-speed rail program, where he handled communications for the development and launch of Acela Express. Prior to that, he was a statehouse correspondent with *The Star-Ledger* (Newark, New Jersey), covering the Legislature and issues in housing, transportation and corrections. Mr. Remington earned a B.A. in journalism and history from Ohio Wesleyan University and studied at the University of Wales, Cardiff. He lives with his wife Judy and children Jessica, Christopher and Miranda in Bordentown, New Jersey.

Jerome Uher Senior Outreach Coordinator



Mr. Uher will steer ongoing efforts to penetrate key legislative, policy and business communities with Public Agenda's non-partisan opinion research and policy analysis. A former aide to U.S. Senator Jeff Bingaman (D-N.M.), he brings more than 10 years of experience in the fields of communications and government relations. At the Washington, D.C., public relations firm Widmeyer Communications, Jerome led a consulting team for the U.S. Department of Agriculture to promote the USDA's environmental programs. Mr. Uher has also served as communications director for the National Parks Conservation Association, a watchdog group dedicated to preserving America's natural and historical treasures.

Talking about Standards-Based Education Reforms

Public Agenda Provides Assistance to McREL in Conducting Multi-State Community Dialogues

Public Agenda has been asked by Mid-continent Regional Educational Laboratory (McREL) to apply our 25 years of national experience in guiding local town meetings to a McREL

initiative. Public Agenda will develop frameworks for community conversations and train local staff to organize and moderate town meetings on standards-based education reforms. Community forums currently are planned throughout 2002 in Wyoming and Colorado, and McREL plans to support conversations in many more states over the next two years.



Rudeness... continued from page 1

throughout all regions of the country, in urban, suburban and rural areas alike.

Manners: Not about the 'Right' Fork

"Lack of manners for Americans is not whether you confuse the salad fork for the dinner fork," says Deborah Wadsworth, Public Agenda's president. "It's about the daily assault of selfish, inconsiderate behavior that gets under their skin on the highways, in the office, on TV, in stores and the myriad other settings where they encounter fellow Americans." The *San Francisco Chronicle* editorialized, "Such incivility is insidious, painful and dangerous, inciting violence and weakening communities."

R-E-S-P-E-C-T: What Customers and Salespeople Want

Americans say the business world's quest for greater efficiency too often leaves customer service behind. Very large majorities believe too many stores force customers to wait for service by cutting corners on hiring and that it's common for salespeople to act like "the customer is not even there."

Acknowledging that disrespect goes both ways, 74 percent say they often see customers treating salespeople rudely. Nearly half (46 percent) of all Americans say bad service drove them out of a store in the past year.

Support for Practical Solutions

Based on the survey, Americans believe some practical solutions could be effective:

- Over 90 percent say it would be effective to notify management of employees who are rude so that action can be taken, but also to identify helpful employees so that they can be financially rewarded.
- Seventy-eight percent say it would be effective to encourage motorists to report aggressive drivers to the police.

Find a special summary, charts, press release and video on the survey and visit 21 in-depth issue guides on topics from terrorism to medical research, education, gay rights and campaign finance reform at www.publicagenda.org. Copies of Aggravating Circumstances can be ordered from Public Agenda for \$10, plus \$2 shipping and handling. Bulk-order discounts are available.

Our Leadership

Founding Fathers Daniel Yankelovich

"Your understanding and respect for the American people stands as a benchmark for those of us in public life," former President Jimmy Carter wrote to Daniel Yankelovich, on the occasion of Public Agenda's 25th anniversary.

For nearly half a century, Mr. Yankelovich has observed American public opinion and authored groundbreaking books, articles and reports on the views of Americans on a variety of topics. He has pioneered seminal ideas: "the seven stages of public opinion"; a focus on tracking deep-seated thinking on policy issues instead of top-of-the-head opinion snapshots; and 15 strategies for successful dialogue.

His acute understanding of how and why we think the way we do has influenced policymakers, academics, community and business leaders and experts of all persuasions. He started Yankelovich, Skelly and White in 1958 and later formed DYG, Inc. He is the founder of *The New York Times*/Yankelovich Poll, which subsequently merged with the CBS Poll.

The Public Agenda

In 1975, Daniel Yankelovich and former Secretary of State Cyrus Vance

co-founded Public Agenda to open communication channels between the public and leadership around important policy issues. One of Public Agenda's goals is to help leaders understand what the public is thinking, and also

to provide educational material to citizens so they may be able to make informed decisions about issues that affect them. Mr. Yankelovich's thinking and experience undergird Public Agenda's unbiased, innovative, and in-depth research.

His contributions are not only considerable but also distinguished by

their range. He is a founding president of the Society for the Advancement of Socio-Economics, chairman emeritus of the Educational Testing Service, a director of the Institute for Global Ethics, the Japan Society and Loral Space & Communications Ltd.

Mr. Yankelovich is the author of nine books, including *Coming to Public Judgment: Making Democracy Work in a Complex World* and

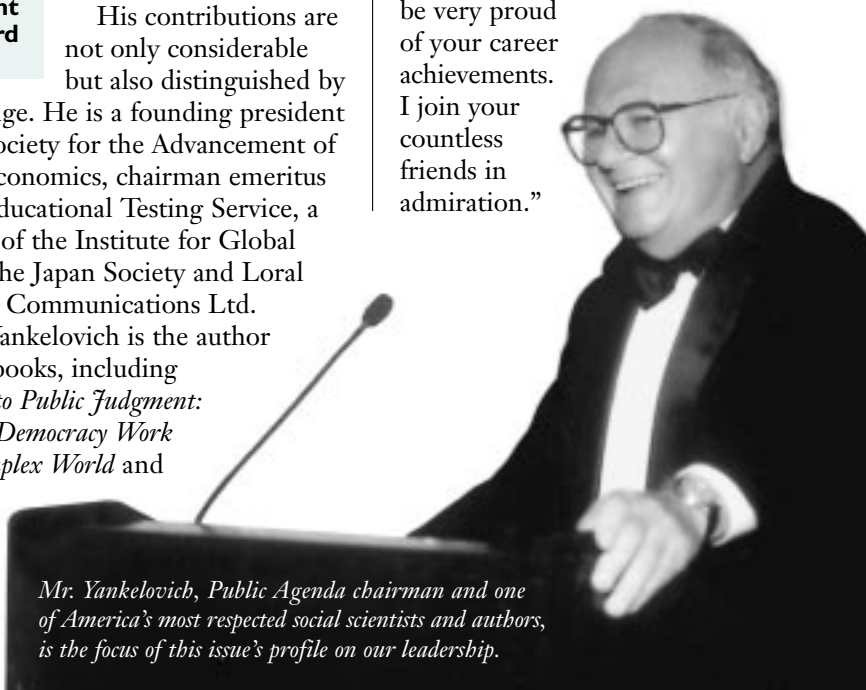
"You should be very proud of your career achievements. I join your countless friends in admiration."

Former President Gerald Ford

The Magic of Dialogue, as well as dozens of articles and papers. In 1995, he was awarded the prestigious Helen Dinerman Award by the World Association for Public Opinion Research.

He was the Rantoul Fellow in Clinical Psychology at his alma mater, Harvard University. He is currently chairman of Viewpoint Learning, Inc. in La Jolla, California. He has received honorary doctorates from a number of universities and was elected to the American Academy of Arts and Sciences in 1999.

Former President Gerald Ford has called Daniel Yankelovich's dedication to public service "outstanding." He added, "You should be very proud of your career achievements. I join your countless friends in admiration."



Mr. Yankelovich, Public Agenda chairman and one of America's most respected social scientists and authors, is the focus of this issue's profile on our leadership.

Reflections from the President by Deborah Wadsworth

Aggravating Circumstances: A Status Report on Rudeness in America garnered more ink in press coverage, more air time on radio and television, and more hits on the Web than any other report in Public Agenda's history. It is curious why this study, which was sponsored by The Pew Charitable Trusts, has evoked such a spontaneous and visceral response.



Bill Lulow

We ourselves have concluded that the research appears to have tapped into a deep sense of frustration over the widespread incivility and lack of respect that people say permeates almost every sector of American life.

Oftentimes, polls yield findings that turn out to be no more than skin deep—a mere snapshot of a top-of-the-head response, with results that are volatile, unstable and rife with contradictions. Occasionally, a carefully constructed survey will probe more deeply, exploring inconsistent responses yielding results that are dependable, with a ring of truth to them.

We have struck such a vein with this study. Where people generally hesitate in a poll to answer in ways they think are not socially acceptable, and frequently point to others as responsible for what ails them, in this research, Americans depict a rudeness that appears to know no bounds, and, large numbers of them acknowledge their own responsibility for the growing incivility.

The question this research begs is very clear. Given the strong consensus we have unearthed about this problem, what are Americans going to be willing to do? *Aggravating Circumstances* may have the potential to launch a national discussion of possible remedies to the situation.

Public Agenda hopes to explore whether people are willing to persuade themselves that changes in their individual behavior could make a difference—whether they believe that the sum of small, personal acts could, at some point, tip the balance toward greater respect and civility for society overall.

Public Agenda intends to discuss our findings with panels of key decision

makers in various sectors that came in for particularly tough criticism in this study. Our goal is to challenge those whose businesses depend on satisfied customers, those engaged in telemarketing, those promoting the sale of cell phones, and those focusing on child-rearing to consider possible actions that might reinforce our better instincts.

Though Public Agenda is not an agency for social reform, nor an advocacy group devoted to behavioral change, we do believe that this research leads irrefutably to the need to answer the question of what, individually and collectively, we are willing to do to diminish these “aggravating circumstances.”

THE PUBLIC AGENDA

Public Agenda is a nonpartisan, nonprofit organization that seeks to raise the level of public discussion about critical policy choices facing the nation.

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