

The Harris Survey

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NUMBER OPPOSED TO BUSING FOR RACIAL PURPOSES DROPS 25 POINTS OVER A 10 YEAR PERIOD

By Louis Harris

In one of the most dramatic turnarounds in recent history, the number of Americans opposed to busing school children for racial purposes has declined from an overwhelming 78-14 percent in 1976 to a current 53-41 percent, a decline of 25 points over the past decade. From 1971 to 1976, well over 7 in every 10 people across the country were opposed to busing for racial purposes.

One of the chief reasons for this startling change of thinking in the country is the fact that the satisfaction levels with the experience of busing children has taken a sharp upward turn, according to this latest Harris Survey, taken by telephone between November 26th and December 2nd, among a national cross section of 1,250 adults. Back at the beginning of this decade, in 1981, only 54 percent of all parents whose children were being bused said they felt the experience was "very satisfactory." Another 33 percent said it was "partly satisfactory", with only a relatively small 11 percent who said it was "not satisfactory." Among whites, less than a majority, 48 percent, found the busing experience for their children highly satisfactory.

Now, a much higher 71 percent of all families whose children have been bused for racial purposes say they are very satisfied, up a full 17 points in only 5 years. But the biggest change upward has occurred among whites. The number of whites highly pleased with the busing of their children has jumped a full 25 points just since 1981. By contrast, among black parents, high satisfaction has actually declined from 74 to 64 percent, although a sizable majority obviously still are pleased by it.

Significantly, whites are now more satisfied with busing their children to school for racial purposes than is the case among blacks. This is one of the most dramatic shifts in public opinion, but is particularly significant since it has taken place in the area of busing.

This shift in attitudes has been accompanied not by a decline in the number of children who are bused for racial purposes, but instead by a sharp increase. Just five years ago, the Harris Survey indicated that no more than 19 percent of the households of the country reported that they had a child in their family who had been picked up by bus to go to school with children of other races. Now, a much higher 32 percent of the households have had that experience. The number of black families who have had such a busing experience has risen from 40 to 48 percent and the number of white households has gone up from 17 to 31 percent.

These results indicate that busing now has been much more widely accepted by public school systems than has previously been either reported or realized. Significantly, as more white families have had their children go through the busing process, they have found that their worst fears simply did not materialize. Instead the entire process was one of high satisfaction.

In turn, the actual experience of busing then appears to have changed public attitudes about busing generally. For a generation, the Harris Survey had found that while the number who found busing unsatisfactory had never gone above 16 percent, nonetheless the vast majority of people, by margins of 5 to 1 or better steadfastly, in almost a by rote reaction, firmly stated their opposition to busing.

But now, as the numbers have risen on those who know how it works, opposition to busing for racial purposes appears to be on the decline. For the first time, a whole host of key segments of the American public now actually favor busing:

-- Most dramatic is the pattern by age, clearly reflecting as sharp generational differences as any since the Vietnam War days. The older people are, the more they oppose busing. Put another way, the new and emerging generation is
(over)

overwhelmingly pro-busing. Young people 18-24 favor busing by 60-34 percent, as do those 25-29 by 51-43 percent. Among those 30-49 years of age, opposition rises to 58-37 percent, while those 50-64 stand in opposition by 59-35 percent. Most opposed to busing are the elderly who don't like it by a margin of 63-26 percent.

-- Not unexpectedly, there are sharp and real differences on busing by race. Whites oppose it by 57-36 percent, while blacks favor it by 66-33 percent and hispanics by 58-39 percent.

-- Politically, Republicans oppose busing most of all by a margin of 60-36 percent. Democrats oppose it but by a much closer 49-43 percent. The surprise are independents who oppose busing but by no more than 52-41 percent.

-- By religion, white Protestants are overwhelmingly opposed to busing by 61-32 percent, as are those whites who follow evangelical preachers by 60-30 percent. White Catholics, however, oppose it by a much closer 51-43 percent.

T A B L E S

Between November 26th and December 2nd, the Harris Survey asked a nationwide cross section of 1,250 adults by telephone:

"Have any of the children in your family been picked up by bus to go to school with children of other races, or hasn't that happened?"

CHILDREN IN YOUR FAMILY BUSED TO SCHOOL?

	<u>Been</u> <u>picked up</u> %	<u>Not</u> <u>happened</u> %	<u>No children</u> <u>(vol.)</u> %	<u>Go to</u> <u>private schools</u> %	<u>Not</u> <u>sure</u> %
TOTAL					
Dec. 1986	32	58	9	*	1
June 1983	23	70	6	1	1
Feb. 1981	19	70	10	*	1
WHITE					
Dec. 1986	31	58	10	*	1
June 1983	21	70	7	1	1
Feb. 1981	17	72	10	1	*
BLACK					
Dec. 1986	48	48	3	-	1
June 1983	36	63	1	-	-
Feb. 1981	40	53	6	1	-

"How did the busing of children in your family to go to school with children of other races work out -- very satisfactory, partly satisfactory, or not satisfactory?" (Base: 32 percent who have children who have been bused to school.)

SATISFACTION WITH SCHOOL BUSING

	<u>Very satisfactory</u> %	<u>Partly satisfactory</u> %	<u>Not satisfactory</u> %	<u>Not sure</u> %
TOTAL				
Dec. 1986	71	24	3	2
June 1983	65	25	10	*
Feb. 1981	54	33	11	2
WHITE				
Dec. 1986	73	22	3	2
June 1983	64	24	11	*
Feb. 1981	48	37	13	2
BLACK				
Dec. 1986	64	35	1	-
June 1983	66	28	6	-
Feb. 1981	74	21	5	-

(continued)

"Do you favor or oppose busing of school children to achieve racial balance?"

FAVOR OR OPPOSE SCHOOL BUSING

	<u>Favor</u> %	<u>Oppose</u> %	<u>Not sure</u> %
Dec. 1986	41	53	6
March 1976	14	78	8
Sept. 1975	20	74	6
Aug. 1972	18	76	6
May 1972	14	81	5
March 1972	20	73	7
Sept. 1971	17	77	6

1986 DEMOGRAPHICS ON SCHOOL BUSING

	<u>Favor</u> %	<u>Oppose</u> %	<u>Not sure</u> %
TOTAL	41	53	6
Age 18-24	60	34	6
25-29	51	43	6
30-49	37	58	5
50-64	35	59	6
65 and over	26	63	11
White	36	57	7
Black	66	33	1
Hispanic	58	39	3
White Protestant	32	61	7
White Catholic	43	51	6
White Moral Majority	30	60	10
Republican	36	60	4
Democrat	43	49	8
Independent	41	52	7

*=less than 0.5 percent

--no response

M E T H O D O L O G Y

This Harris Survey was conducted by telephone within the United States between November 26th and December 2nd, among a cross section of 1,250 adults nationwide. Figures for age, sex, race and education were weighted where necessary to bring them into line with their actual proportions in the population.

In a sample of this size, one can say with 95 percent certainty that the results have a statistical precision of plus or minus three percentage points of what they would be if the entire adult population had been polled.

This statement conforms to the principles of disclosure of the National Council on Public Polls.

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