



Written by [Bob Adelman](#) on September 30, 2013

## More Americans Say Country Headed in Wrong Direction

Last week's [poll from Bloomberg](#) showed that 68 percent of Americans — two out of every three — say that the country is heading in the wrong direction. This is the most in two years and a substantial increase just since the first of the year. In addition, it appears that more Americans are blaming President Obama as the cause, as those holding an unfavorable view of the president now outnumber those with a favorable view for the first time since his election in 2008.



Since the first of the year, the number of Americans who think the country is headed in the right direction has fallen from 38 to 25 percent, while the number of those who think it's headed in the wrong direction has jumped from 55 to 68 percent.

Bloomberg isn't alone. [PollingReport.com published the results of more than a dozen other polls](#) taken around the same time with similar outcomes. For instance, the CBS News/*New York Times* Poll conducted September 19-23 showed that 66 percent think the country is headed in the wrong direction — a jump from 57 percent — while just 29 percent think it's headed in the right direction — a decline from 38 percent — since the first of the year. Similar results showed up in the polls of NBC News/*Wall Street Journal*; Gallup; ABC News/*Washington Post*; and Pew Research Center. Gallup showed three out of four (75 percent) “dissatisfied with the way things are going in the United States at this time,” while just 22 percent are “satisfied.”

In a related question in the Bloomberg poll, more than twice as many Americans think that America's “economic standing in the world” will be worse in the next 12 months than those who think it will be better: 41 percent to 19 percent. This lines up almost exactly with the results just published by two of Washington's largest conservative think tanks: the Heritage Foundation and the Cato Institute.

Heritage has published its Index of Economic Freedom every year since 1995, based on four key indices: the Rule of Law, Limited Government, Regulatory Efficiency, and Open Markets. The foundation noted that, [as of last September](#),

The United States, with an economic freedom score of 76, has lost ground again in the 2013 Index ... with declines in monetary freedom, labor freedom and fiscal freedom....

Registering a loss of economic freedom for the fifth consecutive year, the U.S. has recorded its lowest Index score since 2000.

Dynamic entrepreneurial growth is stifled by ever-more-bloated government and a trend toward cronyism that erodes the rule of law....

Under Democratic President Barack Obama, the federal system of government, designed to reserve significant powers to the state and local levels, has been strained by the national government's rapid expansion.

Cato uses five broad categories in its [Economic Freedom of the World index](#), instead of Heritage's four: the Size of Government, the Legal System and Property Rights, Sound Money, Freedom to Trade



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Internationally, and Regulation. The authors of the Cato study noted:

The cornerstones of economic freedom are personal choice, voluntary exchange, freedom to compete, and security of privately-owned property...

Virtually without exception, [our] studies have found that countries with institutions and policies more consistent with economic freedom have higher investments rates, more rapid economic growth, higher income levels, and a more rapid reduction in poverty rates.

Since the year 2000, the United States has been in free fall, according to Cato:

Throughout most of the period from 1980 to 2000, the United States ranked as the world's third-freest economy, behind Hong Kong and Singapore....

By 2005, the US ranking had slipped to 8th. The slide has continued. The United States placed 16th in 2010 and 19th in 2011.

Although the United States lost ground in all five categories, the decline in the Legal System and Property Rights was precipitous:

In 2000, the 9.23 rating of the United States was the ninth highest in the world. But by 2011, [it] had slid to 6.93, placing the United States 38th worldwide ... tied with Venezuela as the largest reduction among the [185] countries rated....

The increased use of eminent domain to transfer [private] property to powerful political interests, the ramifications of the wars on terrorism and drugs, and the violation of property rights of bondholders in the auto-bailout case have all weakened the tradition of strong adherence to the rule of law in the United States....

To a large degree, the United States has experienced a significant move away from [the] rule of law and toward a highly regulated, politicized state.

For the first time, Cato considered non-economic findings to help with its analysis. "Life satisfaction" is more than just gross domestic product or net after-tax (spendable) per capita income. Using the results from the World Values Survey, Cato was able to obtain a measure of "collective well-being" among the countries surveyed, using "happiness" and "life satisfaction" to inform its results. The study's authors noted:

The quality of economic and political institutions matters for life satisfaction basically for two reasons. First, free markets and ... democracy ... are important determinants of growth, thereby contributing to life satisfaction via higher income levels and lower unemployment rates.

Second ... freedom of choice as [a] value in itself may explain why positive effects on life satisfaction remain....

This non-monetary impact seems to be quite important for the individual....

Economic freedom, therefore, not only makes people richer, but it also makes them happier.

It didn't take a study by scholars at Heritage and Cato to find out the level of "life satisfaction" being currently enjoyed by Americans. All they had to do was ask them. They would have found out that overweening government, crony capitalism, ignoring the Constitution, and overriding the rule of law are leading Americans to conclude that the country is heading in the wrong direction and that its international economic influence as a so-called free country is likely to continue to wane in coming



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years.

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