

US Public Opinion About the Animal Protection Movement

Results from the comprehensive public opinion survey conducted by the Summit
for the Animals Association of national animal protection organizations.

(SUMMARY VERSION)

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INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

A NOTE ABOUT CONFIDENTIALITY

This report is intended only for member organizations in good standing with Summit for the Animals and their board members or current employees. The data contained in the report is sensitive and a high degree of confidentiality is required to ensure that the information is not inappropriately used or released to the public or media without sufficient context. Unauthorized sharing of this report or any of the data contained herein with non-members of Summit is a violation of membership and is strictly prohibited. If you have any questions about this policy or use of the data, please contact Ché Green of the Humane Research Council at (206) 852-4848 or by email at cgreen@humanersearch.org.

BACKGROUND AND PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

In 2003, the members of Summit for the Animals, with assistance from the Humane Research Council, agreed to compile all available public opinion data regarding the image, credibility, and effectiveness of the animal protection movement in the US. The result was a comprehensive overview of public opinion research that was presented at the 2004 meeting and is currently available to Summit members via download on the members-only website. However, the secondary research studies included in the report were subject to several limitations, including results spanning more than two decades, different sample sizes and populations, variations in question wording, and other issues. As a result, it was difficult to gain a clear picture of the current state of public opinion regarding animal protection.

Therefore, in 2004 Summit members voted to conduct primary research to gain a solid understanding of the public's perception of the animal protection movement and the organizations and activists that compose it. Such a survey also provides a baseline estimate of public opinion that can be used to compare with future tracking surveys in order to evaluate attitudinal changes over time. More specifically, the current phase of Summit's public opinion research sought to comprehensively understand the geographic, demographic, and psychographic differences among US adults regarding their views of the animal protection movement. The advantage of a large sample size is that it allows for detailed analysis by subgroups, including older vs. younger, more vs. less educated, female vs. male, etc.

METHODOLOGY AND SAMPLE SELECTION

Over 3,000 US adults representative of the US adult population (age 18 and over) completed the survey, resulting in a margin of error of less than +/- 2%. The survey was conducted via the internet in February 2005 with the assistance of Survey Sampling, Inc. (SSI). The method used to collect responses was a controlled online survey with invitations sent to SSI's proprietary research panel of more than 6 million US residents. The invitations were sent using balanced sampling procedures to control survey distribution across age, gender, and ethnicity. Weighting techniques were also employed after data was collected to correct for small variations relative to population numbers. Given the sophisticated data collection, balancing, and weighting, the results included in this report can be considered representative of the US adult population with a high degree of confidence. Overall, the survey's sample size is 3,215, which yields a margin of error of +/- 1.8% at a 95% confidence level. In other words, if we were to repeat this survey again and again, 95 out of every 100 times the results would fall within +/- 2% of those presented here. However, it is important to note that the margin of error increases as sample size decreases, so results are less accurate for subgroups such as females (only) or Catholics.

INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND (CONT'D)

The 2005 Summit survey was divided among three distinct surveys in which the only difference was use of the terms “animal protection” (N=1,066), “animal rights” (N=1,077), or “animal welfare” (N=1,072). The intent of this split-sampling was to determine differences in public opinion of the movement based on variances in the term used. Generally speaking the differences were not significant, however, and therefore responses from the three surveys are combined in most of the following analysis. For the purposes of this report, the general term “animal protection” (AP) will be used to describe the combination of all three. For instance, a “favorable impression of AP” means overall favorable impressions of animal protection, animal rights, and animal welfare, aggregated from the three surveys. Overall, each survey contained a total of 25 questions (refer to Appendix A for question wording and topline results).

RESEARCH LIMITATIONS

Online surveys – and internet research generally – are subject to some potential biases, including under-representation of groups within the population that are older or lower income (generally ethnic minorities). These biases were mitigated using the balanced sampling and weighting procedures mentioned above, but it is likely that some small amount of bias persists. An equally important caveat is that this survey, like most public opinion surveys, almost certainly overstates the degree to which people think about or consider animal protection. This is a result of two factors: 1) Those who respond are most likely to be those who have something to say; and 2) The survey prompts them to think about issues they would normally not have considered. Both issues can result in somewhat overstated responses regarding animal protection in general as well as the AP movement and activists specifically. Finally, please note that the current study is focused on the overall image and credibility of the animal protection movement and not on measuring specific behaviors or feelings about certain animal issues. More research is needed to fully understand these latter concepts beyond the surface-level understanding provided here.

PUBLIC OPINION RESEARCH: NEXT STEPS

HRC’s original research proposal calls for a total of three phases, with this quantitative survey as the first. The second phase will focus on gaining a *qualitative* understanding of how and to what extent the public thinks about animal protection issues. The target audiences for phase two will be based on the profiles described later as well as feedback from Summit members both during and after the 2005 annual meeting in Chicago. HRC recommends conducting an initial set of 2-3 pilot focus groups followed by a core set of 6-10 groups as well as a limited number of interviews for phase two. These methods will provide a better understanding of the public’s consideration of animal issues. Results from phase two will also help prioritize and frame the issues and questions that will be addressed in the tracking study outlined below.

Following the second phase, HRC proposes that the Summit association look ahead and prioritize the issues and data points that will be tracked as ongoing measures of public support of the animal protection movement. Phase three includes developing a metrics “scorecard” to provide a framework for future data collection, including a set of baseline questions to measure attitudes and behaviors of the US population over time. HRC further recommends that the association consider repeating the survey every 2-3 years in order to track changes; more frequently would likely be too costly and not significantly more informative. Summit members may also wish to introduce additional questions (or conduct separate research) covering specific animal protection issues, such as fur, animal testing, or meat consumption.

KEY FINDINGS

UNEXPECTED RESULTS

Several findings in the current study appeared to go against conventional wisdom.

1. The public overall is not very aware or does not have well-formed beliefs about the animal protection movement, suggesting that AP issues are far from “top of mind” for the adult population.
2. Despite low overall awareness, the public’s belief in the importance of treating animals humanely, its favorability toward the AP movement, and its support for AP’s goals (as perceived by respondents) are all very high. This suggests that a lack of knowledge about AP does not prohibit one from having positive favorability toward the cause.
3. However, an equally important finding is that half of the adult population thinks the AP movement is “extreme,” and people are six times likelier to say extreme than “cautious.” Also, one in five adults agrees that animal rights activists are “terrorists willing to use violence.” Even AP’s strongest supporters are just as likely to say AP is extreme as they are to say cautious.
4. Interestingly, while there is some indication that use of the term “animal rights” elicits more negative attitudes than either “animal protection” or “animal welfare,” the differences are small or at the margin of error. It seems that while people are slightly negatively influenced by the term “animal rights,” the *relative* sensitivity to the term is not as great as many might have expected.
5. There is significant evidence that those with higher levels of education have less concern for the humane treatment of animals and less favorable opinions of AP organizations and activists than those with less education. Interestingly, while those with higher education are more supportive of progressive causes in general, they are *less* supportive of AP than those with less education.
6. Overall, African Americans (and to a lesser extent Hispanics and Latinos) are significantly more ambivalent toward AP. Partly attributable to less awareness and knowledge of the issue, these ethnic groups are much more likely to be “neutral or conflicted” toward AP overall.

MORE KEY FINDINGS FROM THE SURVEY

1. **Animal protection seems not to have captured very much public attention, and a significant number of people cannot name an organization or provide a term to describe AP.**
 - ⊙ Only 15% of adults “frequently” heard about or discussed AP in the past year, while a substantial 44% say “rarely” or “never.” Similar questions in other surveys suggest lower overall awareness for AP compared to issues like stem cell research, global warming, and comparable to the issue of genetically modified foods.
 - ⊙ When asked how knowledgeable they are about the efforts of AP groups, about half (48%) say “not at all knowledgeable” or not sure. Half (49%) say “somewhat” knowledgeable and only 3% of adults say “very knowledgeable.”
 - ⊙ When asked to name three national AP organizations, one in four adults (26%) could not provide any name at all. About half (51%) were able to provide a specific group name (mostly PETA).
 - ⊙ When asked to provide up to three terms describing the AP movement, one in 4-5 people (19-27%) could not list any response (slight differences depend on which survey was completed).

KEY FINDINGS (CONT'D)

- 2. Generally speaking, attitudes toward the concept of protecting animals from harm are very positive for the majority of the adult US public.**
 - ⊙ 92% say that humane treatment of animals is “very” or “somewhat” important to them personally.
 - ⊙ 95% agree (51% strongly) that “parents should teach their children respect for all living creatures.”
 - ⊙ 64% agree (34% strongly) that “animals should be protected from all suffering and harm caused by humans.”
 - ⊙ 56% agree (28% strongly) that “humans have an obligation to never harm animals.”

- 3. In addition to positive attitudes toward animals, a majority of the public has a *generally* favorable opinion of animal protection and supports its goals.**
 - ⊙ 72% say they have a “very” or “mostly” favorable opinion of animal protection.
 - ⊙ 53% agree that they support the goals of the animal protection movement (note that the survey did not provide any definition of those goals). By comparison, only 19% of adults disagree and 28% say neither agree/disagree.
 - ⊙ 39% say animal protection issues receive “not enough coverage” from the media, almost three times the number who say “too much coverage” (14%).

- 4. However, despite the public’s high overall favorability of and support for AP, most people believe that AP’s activities are “extreme.” Additionally, respect for AP *organizations and activists* is somewhat lacking, and a majority of people believe the AP movement has had only a small impact on public policy.**
 - ⊙ The public is six times more likely to think that the activities and efforts of the animal protection movement are “extreme” compared to “cautious” (48% vs. 8%). Overall 28% say the activities and efforts are “about right.”
 - ⊙ Although many believe AP is extreme, a much smaller number go so far as to consider “animal rights” activists terrorists. The public is almost three times more likely to agree that *AR* activists are “peaceful advocates” and not “terrorists willing to use violence” (53% vs. 19%).
 - ⊙ One-fourth (25%) of the adult US population has “a great deal of respect” for activists, but the largest group says only “some respect” (49%). 20% of the public has “very little or no respect.”
 - ⊙ Overall, the public thinks AP has had a much weaker impact on public policy than any other of the listed social causes. The public is at least 2-3 times as likely to say AP has had a slight impact or none at all on public policy compared to other causes.

- 5. Based on three key variables – favorability toward the AP movement, support for its goals, and respect for AP activists – we can classify the adult US population into the following key groups or “profiles” and corresponding percentages:**

See the next page for a profile summary table and/or refer to the full descriptions of each profile in the full report.

KEY FINDINGS (CONT'D)

Profile	% of Pop.	Defining Characteristics
Strong Supporters	21%	-- Favorable overall opinion of AP movement -- Agree with supporting goals of AP movement -- Great deal of respect for AP activists
Qualified Supporters	40%	-- Favorable overall opinion of AP movement -- Agree or neither agree/disagree with goals of AP movement -- Mixed feelings on respect for AP activists
Neutral or Conflicted	30%	-- Neutral on overall opinion of AP movement -- Mixed support for AP, skewing to disagree with goals -- Mixed levels of respect for AP activists, skewing negative
Strong Detractors	9%	-- Unfavorable or neutral overall opinion of AP movement -- Do not agree with supporting goals of AP movement -- Very little or no respect for AP activists

- Overall, a majority of adults (70%) fall into the “qualified supporters” or “neutral/conflicted” profile, underscoring the notion that most people are not giving AP enough consideration to take a firm stance on the issue. Although qualified supporters are in fact supportive of AP at a high level, they are significantly more reserved in their support than those in the “strong supporters” profile.
- The group of strong supporters outnumbers the group of “strong detractors” by more than two to one (21% vs. 9%). However, it is also important to note that many of those who fall into the neutral/conflicted group disagree with AP goals and/or disrespect AP activists.
- Strong detractors of the animal protection movement are the smallest group overall, but they are still a very meaningful 1 in 10 adults (9%), and they appear from their responses to be truly devout opponents of the animal protection movement and AP activists.

6. Strong supporters, by definition, are very positive toward animal protection overall, but there remains room for reinforcing favorability and action, even with this group.

- Despite relatively unconditional support on many other issues, nearly one in five (18%) of the strong supporters thinks animal protection’s activities are “extreme.” Interestingly, the same proportion of strong supporters says “cautious” (18%).
- Half (49%) of animal protection’s strongest supporters believe that the movement has impacted US public policy only “a slight amount” or “not at all.”
- About half of strong supporters have avoided fur (60%) or purchased cruelty-free products (50%), but these are relatively passive behaviors. Just over one-fourth of strong supporters have avoided the circus (28%) or chosen to eat less meat/dairy (26%). Smaller numbers of this profile have contacted their legislators (18%), stopped eating meat/dairy (9%), or attended a demonstration (5%).
- Based on the above data, there is evidence of an important and pervasive disconnection between opinion and behavior. Even animal protection’s strongest supporters are not taking as much action for animals as one might expect or hope. This group is only slightly more likely than other profiles to adopt or spay/neuter a companion animal, and less than a third of strong supporters report having taken most of the listed actions.

KEY FINDINGS (CONT'D)

7. Strong supporters are also quite skewed in important ways, such as being dominantly females who have companion animals, and including people who are generally more progressive in nature.

- ⊙ Animal protection's strongest supporters are mostly female (65%). Moreover, women have much more respect for AP activists than men, with 32% saying "a great deal," compared to only 18% of men. Three in ten men (28%) say they have "very little or no" respect for activists.
- ⊙ Strong supporters of AP are more likely to live with companion animals than the rest of the population (77% vs. 66%).
- ⊙ Strong supporters are also slightly less likely than the total population to have earned a college degree (including associate).
- ⊙ Strong supporters of AP are also more likely than other profiles to be supporters of other "progressive" causes including environmentalism, civil liberties, and gay/lesbian rights. This suggests that a favorable opinion of animal protection may be one element of a broader progressive ideology.

8. Animal protection's strongest detractors, on the other hand, skew even more dominantly male and slightly more ethnically white.

- ⊙ Strong detractors of animal protection skew very heavily male (76%). Similarly, men are three times more likely than women to think humane treatment of animals is "not at all important," and twice as likely as women to have an unfavorable opinion of AP.
- ⊙ Strong detractors also skew slightly more white than the general survey population (89% vs. 78%). Additionally, white people are three times more likely to say AP gets too much media coverage compared to African Americans and Hispanics/Latinos. Whites are also most likely to say the AP movement is "extreme," with about half (47-50%) of whites saying extreme compared to only 36% of African Americans and 38% of Hispanics/Latinos.

9. AP's strongest detractors are much more likely to have a higher level of education than those in the other profiles.

- ⊙ The strongest detractors are the most likely to have obtained undergraduate or post-graduate degrees, while those with less education are relatively more favorable toward AP. Significantly more than half (60%) of strong detractors have at least an Associate's degree, compared to just under half (47%) of all other profiles.
- ⊙ Belief in the importance of treating animals humanely is inversely related to education. Of those who have graduate degrees, only a third (34%) say it is "very" important, while 42% of those with undergraduate degrees and 49% of high school graduates say the same.
- ⊙ 72% of high school graduates agree society should protect animals from all suffering, compared to 60% of those with undergraduate degrees and 54% of those with post-graduate degrees. Also, 62% of high school graduates agree humans have an obligation to never harm animals, compared to 53% of those with undergraduate and 47% of those with post-graduate degrees.
- ⊙ Overall opinion and favorability of AP is also inversely related to level of education. 63% of those with graduate degrees have favorable opinions of the movement, compared to 72% of those with undergraduate degrees and 76% of high school graduates. More than twice as many people with graduate degrees have *unfavorable* opinions of AP than high school graduates (16% vs. 7%).

KEY FINDINGS (CONT'D)

10. However, even among animal protection's strongest detractors there is evidence of support for other progressive causes and some animal-friendly behaviors.

- ⊙ A strong majority of AP's strongest detractors (72%) agrees that humane treatment of animals is very or somewhat important, underscoring the pervasiveness of this belief. Similarly, 83% of strong detractors say "parents should teach their children respect for all living creatures."
- ⊙ Somewhat surprisingly, one-fifth of strong detractors say they have donated (20%) and/or volunteered (18%) in the past year to help animals.
- ⊙ Among AP's strongest detractors, 39% say they are "neutral" with respect to favorability toward the AP movement, suggesting that some detractors may not necessarily disagree with the overall concept of animal protection.
- ⊙ Strong detractors of animal protection – none of whom have a "favorable" opinion of AP – exhibit some relatively positive attitudes toward other "progressive" causes. Half of strong detractors have a favorable opinion of civil liberties and 41% have a favorable opinion of environmentalism; however, only 15% have a favorable opinion of gay and lesbian rights.

RECOMMENDATIONS AND NEXT STEPS

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. The public's lack of knowledge about AP and inability to name an organization or provide a descriptive term suggest that AP's "brand" or overall identity is weak. AP groups and activists should align their messages with generally shared values on the humane treatment of animals to take the AP brand more mainstream and strengthen the movement's identity. With this stronger brand, AP advocates will be able to more effectively elevate the status of animal issues in the minds of the US public and make a case for behavior change.
2. An important element of strengthening the AP movement's brand is overcoming certain stereotypes about the extremeness of AP organizations and activists. Half of the public – and a meaningful number of even AP's strong supporters – say that the movement is extreme. The findings are not conclusive, but the prevalence of this opinion may be correlated with the high awareness of PETA, including among those who seem otherwise unfamiliar with AP.
3. With a focus on behavior change as the ultimate goal, animal advocates should seek to bridge the gap for the large segment of the public that is generally favorable toward AP (the "low hanging fruit"). The first priority of AP advocates should be to focus on converting supporters – particularly strong supporters and those who agree with AP's goals – into *actors* engaging in behaviors consistent with animal protection ideals.
4. On the other hand, investing significant resources to convert *detractors* to active supporters will likely have a poor relative payoff. However, AP advocates must inevitably work with detractors as well, and in these cases advocates should try to gain support by aligning with the pervasive feeling about the importance of treating animals humanely. This approach may also be needed to move the neutral and conflicted people toward more supportive positions.

NEXT STEPS (AREAS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH)

In addition to the "surprises" provided earlier, there are several other areas that warrant additional research to fully understand the implications of certain issues and take advantage of opportunities.

1. Clearly, the psychology and particularly the motivations of "strong supporters" are of special interest to animal advocates. Similarly, those who are "qualified" supporters, "neutral" or "conflicted" warrant further research to understand how they can be motivated to become more supportive. These issues are the focus of phases two and three discussed earlier.
2. The surprisingly pervasive opinion that the AP movement is "extreme" suggests a need to better understand which tactics create this perception and how much this view affects people's overall receptiveness to animal issues. Given that some groups may continue to pursue activities viewed negatively by the mainstream public, it would also be valuable to explore how other organizations might more effectively counter this impact.
3. As mentioned earlier, this survey was only designed to gain a surface-level understanding of specific behaviors relating to animal protection or opinion regarding certain animal issues. In order to truly measure the AP movement's impact on the public, behavior metrics should be established and reevaluated every several years.

HOW TO GET MORE INFORMATION

AVAILABILITY OF ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

The information contained in this report is only a subset of the total data that are available from the comprehensive Summit public opinion survey. Given the large overall sample size of this survey, we are able to provide detailed looks at specific segments of the population that may be of special interest to some Summit members. Information not provided in this report but available through additional analysis includes, but is not limited to the following.

- ⊙ Differences by gender or age, or detailed views of specific age groups
- ⊙ Differences by other demographic segments (companion animals, income, religion, etc.)
- ⊙ Details of differences by profile or views of strong supporters, strong detractors, etc.
- ⊙ Demographic characteristics of people who have taken certain actions for animals
- ⊙ Detailed verbatim responses to open questions, organized by survey (AP/AR/AW)

HOW TO REQUEST MORE INFORMATION

This overview report of the public opinion survey is provided free of charged to Summit members in good standing. However, requests for additional data may require a data access fee or a fee for any additional analysis that is required, or both.

For details, please contact Ché Green of the Humane Research Council at 206-852-4848 or by email at cgreen@humanersearch.org. You may also write to HRC at:

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