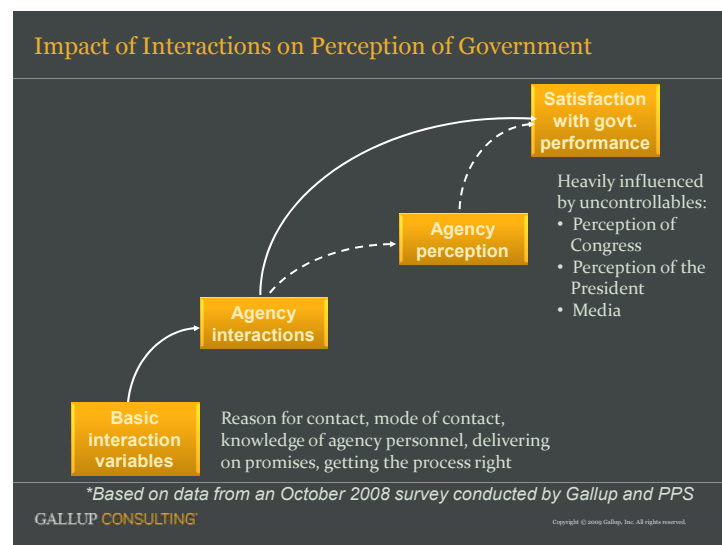


Gallup Study Provides Valuable Insights on the Individual Experience With Federal Agencies

INTRODUCTION

In the summer of 2009, in response to President Obama's call for "a high-performance government," Gallup conducted an unprecedented study that examined public attitudes about the "overall customer experience" across all federal agencies. To provide deeper insights than existing government satisfaction indexes, this study asked more than 40,000 American citizens to answer a series of questions about the level and quality of service they received from federal agencies to paint a clearer picture of the overall experience of individuals' interactions with the agencies.

This study follows research Gallup conducted in coordination with the Partnership for Public Service (PPS) in 2008. Gallup and PPS conducted qualitative and quantitative research to study how the public formulated opinions about federal government performance. In addition to uncontrollable factors such as presidential and congressional approval, one key objective was to discover the role individual interactions with federal agencies played in the formation of overall perceptions of government performance. Since personal interactions are so important to how people feel the government is doing overall, Gallup sought to conduct additional research to gather a deeper understanding of how agencies are perceived and what creates a successful agency interaction. This was the main goal of the 2009 study that is presented in this paper.



The best in private sector businesses frequently assess how their customers think and feel about their products and service offerings. Great CEOs and leaders must subsequently act on this information or risk losing their customers to competition. Federal agencies, however, do not have the competition to worry about; instead their main concern should be if citizens' needs are adequately being met on a consistent, yet case-by-case, basis. While Americans often have no choice but to interact with the government, a quality experience is no less critical as it can affect citizen engagement, patriotism, and an overall sense of pride in one's government and the public goods and services it provides.

The data from this study provides a snapshot of *how* Americans feel about their interactions with the federal government, *why* they interact with the federal government, and with *which* agencies they most frequently interact. One major finding after the initial phase of the study is that individual experience varies the most when it is dependent on the specific context and reason for the interaction with a given agency.

With insights driven by data, managers can implement strategic actions in their organization to better address the wide range of individual needs on a case-by-case basis in a "high-performance" manner. These actions can be driven by data from the organizational level down to the individual workgroup level — the point of citizen contact. Without detailed workgroup-level data, managers are left with an overall picture of agency satisfaction and have limited means to make targeted interventions that will effectively address an array of individual need.

Methodology

Data were collected via mail and Web using the Gallup Panel, a nationally representative multi-mode panel of American households. A total of 61,145 surveys were distributed, and 41,876 responses to the survey were received (60% Web, 40% mail), for a participation rate of 68%. The field period was May 14 – June 24, 2009, and the data were weighted to match specific demographic targets and U.S. population estimates. The margin of sampling error is +/-0.2 percentage points, and is larger for agency-level results. For agencies with approximately 1,000 responses, the margin of error is +/- 3.1 percentage points.

Survey respondents were asked a variety of questions pertaining to their views of and interactions with U.S. government agencies. Respondents were asked to identify a federal agency they had most recently had an interaction with, and to answer an in-depth series of questions about that experience. All respondents were also asked to complete a series of questions about their general attitudes and opinions toward the federal government.

Based on the specific interaction, respondents assessed their level of overall satisfaction with the agency. Additionally, a number of questions were asked specifically about their interaction.

Agency-level questions were asked to assess criteria that were most important in this context, such as professionalism, trust, accuracy, and quality.

Agency representatives were assessed with a series of questions designed to measure everything from individual knowledge to the ability to please the citizen. Finally, if the citizen had an interaction via the agency Web site, a series of Web-specific questions were asked. These questions assessed a number of areas from the ease of navigating the site to the ease of finding information.

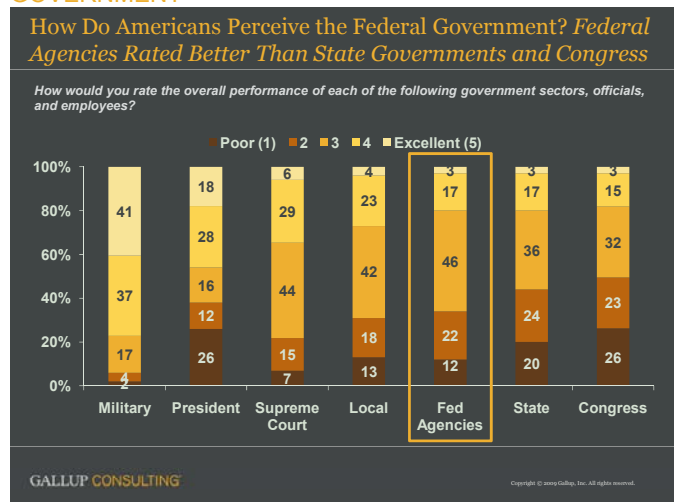
Each aspect of the citizen-agency interaction was analyzed for its predictive impact on overall satisfaction.

FINDINGS

Performance by Level of Government

Americans expressed a wide variety of opinions when asked to rate the overall performance of different sectors of government. Seventy-eight percent (78%) of Americans expressed positive views about the performance of the U.S. military, making it the highest-rated sector of government by far. In contrast, federal agencies, while faring slightly better than Congress, are not viewed very positively or negatively by Americans. Nearly half of Americans tend to view federal agencies neutrally (46%), with significantly more negative views (34%) than positive ones (20%).

Figure 1: OVERALL PERFORMANCE BY BRANCH OF GOVERNMENT



An Important Brand-Building Opportunity

This neutral-to-negative opinion regarding federal agencies could be a reflection of Americans' ambivalence or an indicator that Americans haven't had enough experience with a specific federal agency to rate its overall performance. Regardless of the reason, this signifies an opportunity for federal agencies to build a positive brand image in the eyes of Americans.

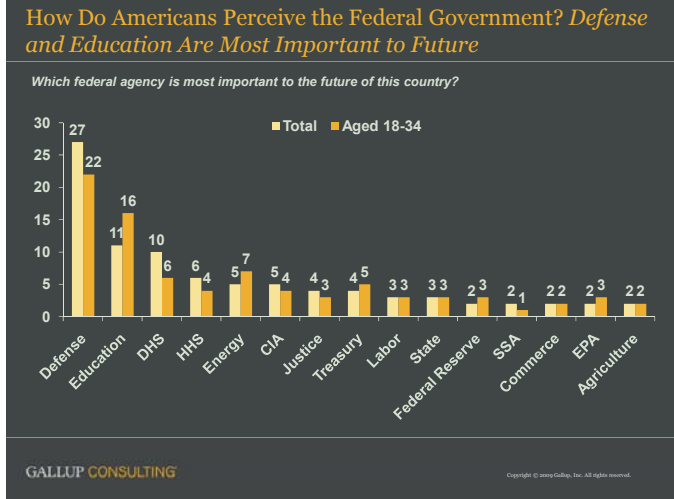
In 2006, Gallup and the Council for Excellence in Government studied the brand image of federal agencies, finding that while awareness of most agencies was high, it did not equate to a positive brand. In this current study, Gallup further gauged impressions of federal agencies' brands and the specific differentiators between each. This was done through providing respondents with a list of 94 federal agencies that have some form of interaction with the public, and asking respondents to identify which agency on the list best fit a series of positive brand image statements.

Given the importance of public perceptions and their impact on brand image, Gallup examined what it believes are the most vital measures of an agency's brand: importance to the future, impact, prestige, and most desirable employer.

Importance to America's Future

When asked to identify the one agency that is most important to the future of the country, the public is most likely to cite the Department of Defense. The Department of Education is deemed second most important, with young adults aged 18 to 34 particularly likely to rate it the most as the important. These data can answer important question for agency leaders about whether the public view of their agency is aligned with what the agency intended.

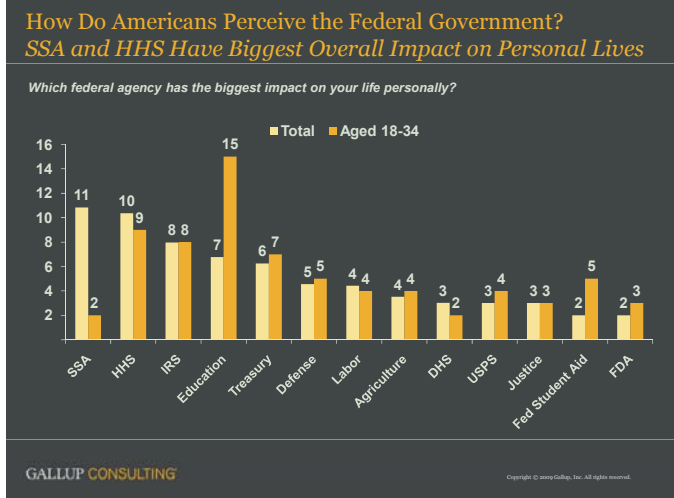
FIGURE 2: IMPORTANCE TO THE COUNTRY'S FUTURE



Impact on Personal Lives

The Social Security Administration is chosen by more Americans than any other as having the biggest impact on Americans lives personally. The Department of Health and Human Services, guardians of the country's good health, is a close second. Not surprisingly, young Americans aged 18 to 34 (those likely to have received Federal student aid), cited the Department of Education as having the greatest impact on their lives.

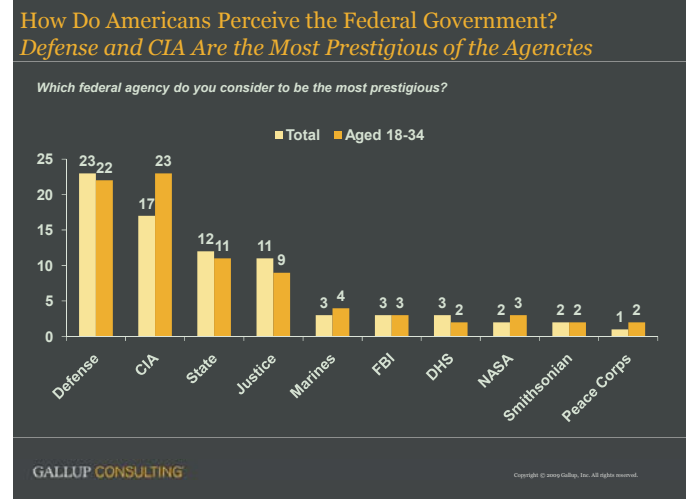
FIGURE 3: AGENCIES WITH GREATEST IMPACT



Agency Prestige

The Department of Defense is considered the most prestigious agency by Americans. Young adults are equally likely to respond that they consider the CIA the most prestigious federal agency.

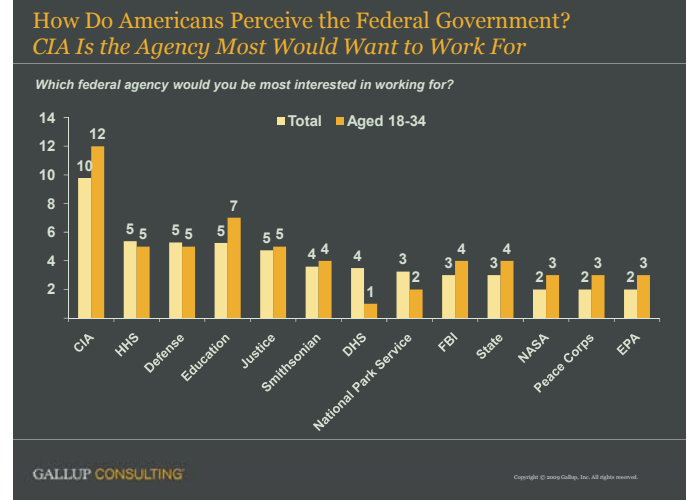
FIGURE 4: PRESTIGE BY AGENCY



Federal Workplaces of Choice

Consistent with Gallup's 2006 findings, among young adults and Americans overall, the CIA is viewed as being the federal employer of choice. Most Americans cite the CIA as the federal agency they would most want to work for. No other federal agencies elicit such a strong response from Americans, with the slight exception of the Department of Education among young adults.

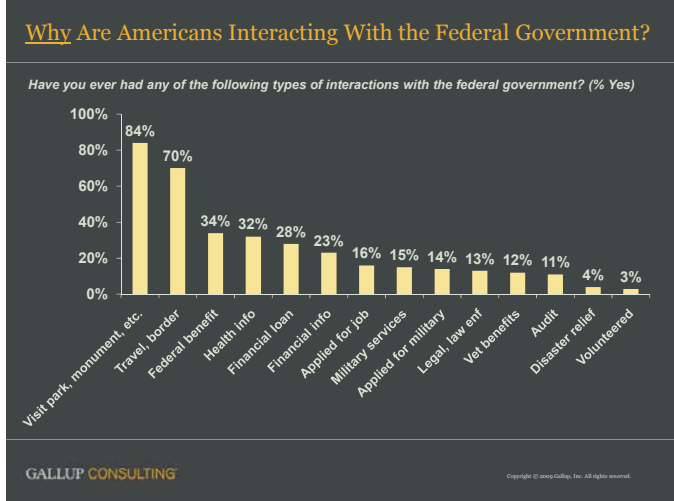
FIGURE 5: TOP AGENCIES TO WORK FOR



Why Americans Interact

Most interactions with federal government are either to visit a national park, monument, or historic landmark, or to pass through a border checkpoint, customs control, or airport security. However, significant portions of the public also cite a variety of other reasons for interacting with the federal government.

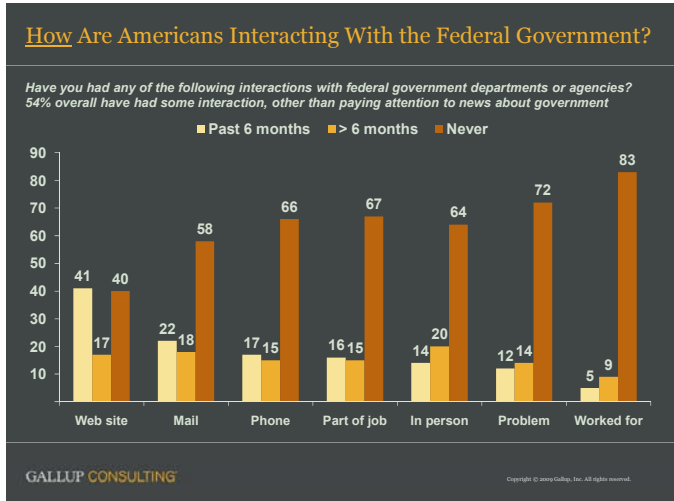
FIGURE 6: WHY AMERICANS INTERACT WITH THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT



How Americans Interact

When contacting agencies during the past six months, Web sites are the most common method of interaction (41%). The next most common type of contact is via mail (22%). Fifteen percent (15%) of Americans surveyed report working or having worked for the federal government.

FIGURE 7: HOW AMERICANS INTERACT WITH THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT



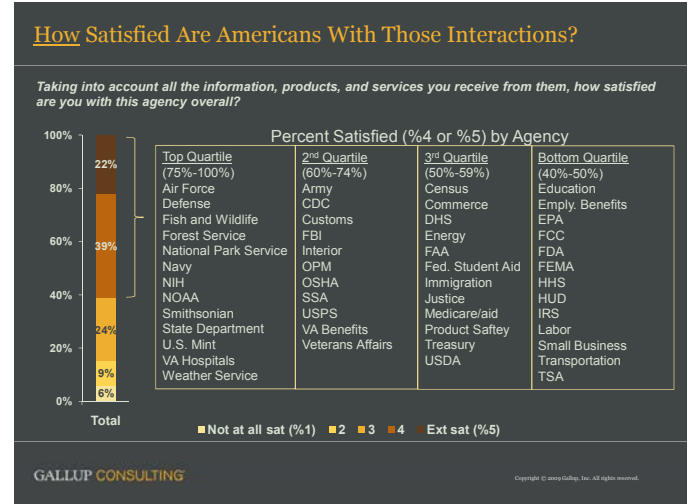
Satisfaction

Knowing how and why Americans interact with agencies is important, but having detailed measurements of specific agency interactions is critical. To capture data about that specific interaction, Gallup asked respondents to rate overall satisfaction with the agency they most recently interacted with. In addition to overall satisfaction, respondent were asked to rate individual aspects of that encounter.

Americans are generally satisfied with the performance of government agencies. When asked to think about the

agency they most recently interacted with, 61% indicated they were satisfied with the agency. For the highest-rated agency, the National Park Service, 90% of respondents report being satisfied.

FIGURE 8: SATISFACTION



Drivers of Satisfaction

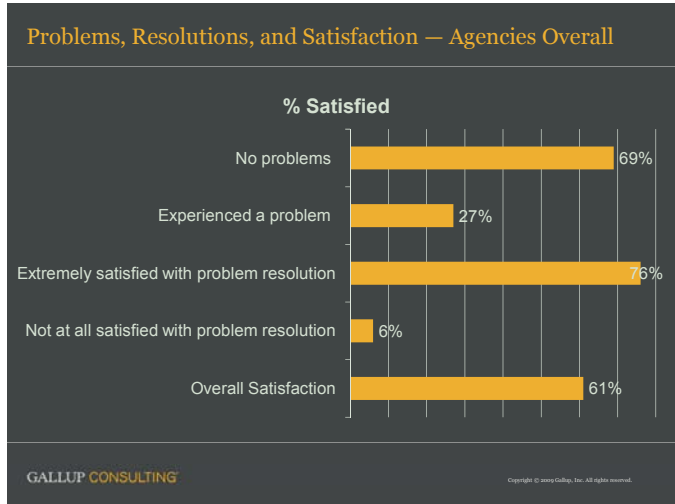
In order to understand what drives overall satisfaction, Gallup asked respondents to rate 31 specific aspects of their experience interacting with federal agencies, ranging from overall assessments of the agency (such as delivering on promises, treating people with respect, and providing accurate information), to transactional assessments (such as the time it takes to get a response, the ability to connect with a live person, and problem resolution), to evaluations of agency representatives (such as being available, courteous, and following through), to evaluations of the agency's Web site (such as ease of navigation, ease of finding needed information, and ease of completing online forms).

The findings suggest that the most important driver of satisfaction is an agency's ability to resolve problems in a satisfactory manner. Figure 10 illustrates satisfaction levels and how the problems handled. Those who experienced a problem had lower levels of satisfaction (27%). However, when those problems were resolved and citizens were extremely satisfied with the problem resolution, overall satisfaction jumped to 76%.

The large sample size in this study allows the ability to analyze the drivers of satisfaction at an agency level. A total of 49 agencies had sample sizes large enough to analyze (with at least 100 reports). Individual agency results are available by request, but Figure 11 identifies the seven key agencies that received the largest number of responses. These agencies represent a variety of interactions the public has with the federal government, including agencies that disburse benefits (SSA, FSA), agencies that are visited by the public in person (National Park Service), agencies that provide safety (TSA) and security (Department of Defense), agencies that set policies that directly impact the public (Centers

for Medicare & Medicaid — CMS), and agencies that collect funds from the public (IRS). Figure 11 outlines the key elements that matter to these agencies' customers. The better the agency can perform on these individual metrics, the more satisfied their customers will be.

FIGURE 9: PROBLEM RESOLUTION AND SATISFACTION



By targeting these drivers, agencies can influence the aspects of individual interactions that have the most impact on overall satisfaction and make the best use of limited resources.

The Problem of Local Variation

Just as these data show the wide range of variance in satisfaction across agencies on a case-by-case basis, there will be similar patterns of variation within an agency. In most organizations, these variations remain unmeasured and undetected. Without workgroup-level data, managers are left without effective tools to manage performance of teams that deliver services to citizens. Agency executives are similarly left without tools to manage performance, and the result is inconsistent service delivery across the organization. The existence of performance variation within an agency implies that the only way to manage variation is to provide feedback at the level where it originates. Thus, any satisfaction research is incomplete without local measurement and management of service delivery. Does your agency's current satisfaction measure provide local managers with the information they need to manage effectively? It is only with adequate customer satisfaction measures that strategic actions can be implemented to better address the wide range of individual need on a case-by-case basis in a "high-performance" manner. Without detailed workgroup-level data, managers are left with an overall picture of agency satisfaction and have limited means to make targeted interventions that will address a wide variety of individual needs.

FIGURE 10: DRIVERS OF SATISFACTION

Top 5 Drivers of Satisfaction by Sample Agencies								
	Total	TSA	NPS	SSA	DOD	IRS	CMS	FSA
	25,290	1,098	1,262	4,976	1,574	1,829	1,091	1,035
1	Problem resolution	Willing to work with me	Quality of info you get	Problem resolution	Problem resolution	Name I can trust	Name I can trust	Willing to work with me
2	Willing to work with me	Problem resolution	Delivers on promises	Goes out of way to please	Quality of info you get	Goes out of way to please	Problem resolution	Listens carefully to me
3	Goes out of way to please	Goes out of way to please	Name I can trust	Delivers on promises	Delivers on promises	Willing to work with me	Willing to work with me	Follows through on actions
4	Name I can trust	Does it right 1 st time	Follows through on actions	Treats people fairly	Accurate info	Follows through on actions	Delivers on promises	Goes out of way to please
5	Delivers on promises	Name I can trust	Listens carefully to me	Willing to work with me	Listens carefully to me	Does it right 1 st time	Time it takes to get answer	Problem resolution