

WHERE HAVE ALL THE HEROES GONE?

When Americans consider the past year, fewer than half can identify someone who did anything that rose to the level of heroism. Among those named by respondents, the 2014 Nobel Peace Prize laureate Malala Yousafzai, the Pakistani teenager who was shot by the Taliban, survived and continues education activism for girls is the most frequently cited, according to the most recent national survey from Fairleigh Dickinson University's PublicMind.

Forty percent of respondents identify a hero for 2014, but half (51%) believe they saw little in the way of heroism. Beyond Yousafzai (40%) and members of the military (33%), Americans identified individuals in their own lives as heroes.

“With the exception of Malala Yousafzai, Americans weren't impressed by many public figures in 2014. To them, heroes are often anonymous others putting their lives on the line for the U.S. and those working quietly in their communities to improve the conditions of those around them,” said Krista Jenkins, director of PublicMind and professor of political science.

Thirty-five percent of respondents believe the role of a hero is to inspire others to do something they would not otherwise. Fewer (21%) say heroes help to reflect American values and beliefs and lead efforts to bring about social and political change (16%). Younger Americans tend to value heroes more for their inspirational qualities. Around four-in-ten of those under 45 say heroes are useful for inspiring others, with significantly fewer who believe heroes reflect American values and beliefs and lead efforts to bring about change. Around a fifth of those 30 and younger believe heroes embody this trait compared with only 12 percent of those 60 and older.

“Hero is a term that's used pretty often these days. Apparently this is because Americans aren't united over what makes someone a hero,” said Jenkins.

The same survey asked Americans questions about the role the media plays in helping to identify heroes. Half of the respondents were asked about aid workers traveling to West Africa to fight the Ebola epidemic after indicating that the media called these people heroes. The remaining respondents were asked a similar question without invoking the media's use of the term hero.

When Americans were told the workers were called heroes by the media, and then asked if they agree or disagree with this characterization, aid workers are considered heroes by Americans by about a two-to-one margin. Sixty-three percent say the aid workers are heroes, with 31 percent disagreeing. However, when the question is asked without referencing the media, opinion is more divided. Fifty percent say aid workers are heroes and 43 percent say the workers are just doing their jobs.

“It’s clear the media plays a role in shaping who’s considered a hero and who isn’t. When left to identify a hero themselves, Americans seem to be more likely to apply stricter criteria, but if the media deems someone’s efforts heroic, that can persuade the public to evaluate that person similarly. As with most everything else, it’s hard to think about public attitudes in isolation from the effects of the media,” said Jenkins.

Opinion remains constant across a variety of demographic groups for the question without the media; however, partisan differences appear when Americans were first told CNN called the aid workers heroes. Democrats (73%) were more likely to agree that aid workers are heroes compared with fewer Republicans (62%).

Despite the differences that appear when the media is invoked, Americans are divided over whether the media makes it harder or easier to be considered a hero. Around a third believe the media makes it harder (35%), easier (27%), or makes no difference (31%) as to whether someone is perceived as a hero by Americans today.

The Fairleigh Dickinson University poll of 964 was conducted by telephone with both landline and cell phones from December 8 through December 15, 2014 and has a margin of error of 3.2 +/- percentage points.

Methodology, questions, and tables on the web at: <http://publicmind.fdu.edu>

Radio actualities at 201.692.2846

For more information, please call 201.692.7032

Methodology

The most recent survey by Fairleigh Dickinson University’s PublicMind was conducted by telephone from December 8 through December 15 using a randomly selected sample of 964 adults nationwide. One can be 95 percent confident that the error attributable to sampling has a range of +/- three percentage points. The margin of error for subgroups is larger and varies by the size of that subgroup. Survey results are also subject to non-sampling error. This kind of error, which cannot be measured, arises from a number of factors including, but not limited to, non-response (eligible individuals refusing to be interviewed), question wording, the order in which questions are asked, and variations among interviewers.

PublicMind interviews are conducted by Opinion America of Cedar Knolls, NJ, with professionally trained interviewers using a CATI (Computer Assisted Telephone Interviewing) system. Random selection is achieved by computerized random-digit dialing. This technique gives every person with a landline phone number (including those with unlisted numbers) an equal chance of being selected.

Landline households are supplemented with a separate, randomly selected sample of cell-phone respondents interviewed in the same time frame. The total combined sample is mathematically weighted to match known demographics of age, race and gender.

Tables

As the year comes to a close, is there anyone who did anything in 2014 that makes them a hero in your eyes?

	PID				Gender		Race		Age			
	All	Dem	Ind	Rep	Male	Female	White	Non white	18-29d	30-44	45-59	60+
Yes	40	40	44	37	35	45	41	35	35	36	48	39
No	51	49	53	51	57	45	50	55	53	56	43	50
DK/Ref. (vol)	9	10	3	12	9	10	9	11	13	7	8	11

Individual's name if "yes" to above

Malala	40%
Service men and women	33%
Friends/family	15%
Public figure – non-celebrity (politician, religious figure, etc.)	7%
Public figure – celebrity or sports	3%
Other	2%

CNN and other news outlets recently called those who travel to west African to help fight the Ebola epidemic heroes. Do you agree or disagree [rotate] with this characterization of aid workers as heroes? [Asked of ½ sample; N = ; MoE =]

	PID				Gender		Race		Age			
	All	Dem	Ind	Rep	Male	Female	White	Non white	18-29d	30-44	45-59	60+
Agree	63	73	50	62	61	66	64	60	72	56	59	67
Disagree	31	25	38	34	34	28	32	29	20	40	32	30
DK/Ref. (vol)	6	2	13	4	5	6	4	11	8	4	9	3

In your opinion, are those who travel to west African to help fight the Ebola epidemic heroes, or are they just doing their job [rotate]? [Asked of ½ sample; N = ; MoE =]

	PID				Gender		Race		Age			
	All	Dem	Ind	Rep	Male	Female	White	Non white	18-29d	30-44	45-59	60+
Heroes	50	53	47	51	48	52	51	52	47	49	53	51
Doing job	43	39	45	43	45	40	40	46	47	44	41	40
DK/Ref. (vol)	7	8	8	7	7	7	9	2	6	7	5	9

In your opinion, which of the following best describes how, if at all, heroes are important in a society? Do they inspire others to do something they wouldn't otherwise do, lead efforts to bring about social and political change, or reflect American values and beliefs,

	PID				Gender		Race		Age			
	All	Dem	Ind	Rep	Male	Female	White	Non white	18-29d	30-44	45-59	60+
Inspire others	35	35	37	37	39	32	35	38	42	39	33	30
Lead efforts	16	24	13	10	14	18	15	21	22	17	15	12
Inspire values	21	13	21	29	21	22	24	17	16	14	24	31
Other	4	5	3	4	5	3	4	4	2	3	6	4
Combo (vol)	17	20	16	14	16	19	18	16	15	19	17	16
DK/Ref	5	3	10	6	5	6	5	4	2	8	6	7

In your opinion, does the media make it harder or easier [rotate] for people to be considered a hero, or does it make no difference?

	PID				Gender		Race		Age			
	All	Dem	Ind	Rep	Male	Female	White	Non White	18-29d	30-44	45-59	60+
Harder	35	28	41	42	34	37	38	28	34	34	31	42
Easier	27	35	14	26	24	30	27	32	29	24	33	23
No diff	31	30	38	27	36	26	28	37	34	37	27	25
DK/Ref (vol)	7	8	8	5	6	7	8	3	3	5	9	10

Exact Question Wording and Order

US1 through US3 released December 17, 2014

EDUC1 thru EDUC6 held for future release

H1 As the year comes to a close, is there anyone who did anything in 2014 that makes them a hero in your eyes?

- 1 Yes (ask who and record response)
- 2 No
- 8 DK (vol)
- 9 Refused (vol)

[Note to programmer: ½ sample gets H2A; remainder gets option H2B]

H2A CNN and other news outlets recently called those who travel to West Africa to help fight the Ebola epidemic heroes. Do you agree or disagree [rotate] with his characterization of aid workers as heroes?

- 1 Agree
- 2 Disagree
- 8 DK (vol)
- 9 Refused (vol)

H2B In your opinion, are those who travel to west Africa to help fight the Ebola epidemic heroes, or are they just doing their job? [ROTATE]

- 1 Heroes
- 2 Doing job
- 8 DK (vol)
- 9 Refused (vol)

H3 In your opinion, which of the following best describes how, if at all, heroes are important in a society?

- 1 Inspire others to do something they wouldn't otherwise do
- 2 Lead efforts to bring about social and political change
- 3 Reflect American values and beliefs
- 4 Other
- 5 Combo of above (vol)
- 8 DK (vol)
- 9 Refused (vol)

H4 In your opinion, does the media make it harder or easier [ROTATE] for people to be considered a hero, or does it make no difference?

- 1 Harder
- 2 Easier]
- 3 Makes no difference
- 8 DK (vol)
- 9 Refused (vol)

Sample Characteristics

		Registered voters N = 964; MoE = +/- 3.2
Gender	<i>Male</i>	49%
	<i>Female</i>	51%
Age	<i>18-29</i>	22%
	<i>30-44</i>	26%
	<i>45-59</i>	26%
	<i>60+</i>	24%
	<i>Refused</i>	1%
Race	<i>White</i>	68%
	<i>African American</i>	10%
	<i>Hispanic</i>	13%
	<i>Asian</i>	3%
	<i>Other/Refused</i>	7%
Party (with leaners)	<i>Dem</i>	39%
	<i>Ind/DK/Refused</i>	27%
	<i>Repub</i>	35%