

Typical-American

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A Statistical Portrait of the 'Typical' American; This Is Your Life, Generally Speaking

By ANNE CRONIN

In an election year, politicians dance to the "Fanfare for the Common Man." President Bush has been trying to separate the "advocates of the liberal agenda" from "you and I and those values of family that we share." Bill Clinton invoked the average Americans "who do the work, pay the taxes, raise the kids and play by the rules." in his acceptance speech at the Democratic National Convention.

But who is all this aimed at? **Who is the typical American?**

What follows is a statistical portrait of the typical American in the early 1990's. It begins with Census Bureau data from April 1990 that have been compiled from the longer census questionnaires mailed to one in six, or 17.7 million American households. The Census Bureau is still analyzing the raw data, but a general portrait has begun to appear.

Marketing surveys and opinion polls add to the portrait by providing frequent snapshots of current thinking and buying.

When you take all of the data and divide by 249 million Americans, you come up with the Average Jane. People who exactly match Jane's description will be rare indeed, but most Americans should find a little of themselves in the "Typical."

THE BASICS

* **The typical American is a white woman who is 32.7 years old.**

In 1990, whites were 80.3% of the population, blacks were 12.1%, others were 7.7%. Hispanic people, who can be of any race, were 9.0%. Females were 51.2%. Age figure was a median. All figures in this section are the Census Bureau's for 1990, unless otherwise noted.

*** She is married and is a mother.**

Calculating from Census Bureau data, the Statistical Abstract of the United States reports that in 1989 62% of people 18 and older were married. In 1990, the average family size was 3.17 people.

*** She has some German blood.**

More Americans reported German ancestry, 19.6%, than any other. Irish, at 13.1%, and English, at 11%, were the runners-up.

*** She graduated from high school.**

75.2% were at least high school graduates. 20.3% had at least a bachelor's degree.

*** Her family income was \$35,225 in 1989.**

Median figure was for 1989. Per capita income was \$14,420.

*** The typical American family owns a home.**

In 1990, 56% of occupied year-round homes were owner-occupied. All figures in this section are the Census Bureau's for 1990.

*** It is in the suburbs.**

43.9% of the population lived in the suburbs, 31.3% in central cities and 24.8% in rural areas.

*** The house is mortgaged. The total monthly ownership cost is \$737.**

65.4% of people who owned their homes had a mortgage, with no mortgage the median monthly cost was \$209.

*** The house has three bedrooms.**

38.1% of all housing units had three bedrooms, 30.8% had two bedrooms, 13.8% had one bedroom; 12.3% had four bedrooms, 2.8% had five or more bedrooms. 2.3% had no bedroom.

*** The house is 11 to 20 years old. The family has been living in it for 2 to 5 years.**

21.8% of all housing units were built in the 1970's. 20% were built in the 1980's and the first three months of 1990; 18.4% were built before 1940; 16.1% were built in the 1960's. 14.5% were built in the 1950's; 8.5% were built in the 1940's.

28.2% of people in 1990 had moved into their home between 1985 and 1988. 20.9% had moved in since 1989.

*** The house is heated with natural gas.**

51% of homes were heated with natural gas; electricity was the next most popular at 25.8%, fuel oil was number three at 12.2%.

WORK

*** The typical American drives to work alone.**

73.2% of workers 16 years and older drove to work alone. 13.4% drove in carpools. Only 5.3% used public transportation. All figures in this section are the Census Bureau's for 1990.

* She works for a private company or corporation. She is a clerical worker. The company is in manufacturing.

77.4% of workers were employed by a business; 15.2% worked for the government. 7% worked for themselves.

16.3% of workers were in administrative support, which includes clerical workers. The runner-up was professional specialty workers (nurses, engineers, etc.) 14.1%.

Manufacturing fields employed 17.7% of workers, retail trade was the next most common employer, at 16.8%.

POSSESSIONS

*** The house has two telephones. There is no answering machine. The phone carries 3,516 local and long-distance calls a year.**

The Electronic Industries Association reported that 93% of households had a telephone in January 1992, and about 70% had two or more telephones. 46% had answering machines.

A Commerce Department report in October 1991 tallied the number of calls.

*** The house has two or more television sets. There is a VCR. Cable television is available.**

In January 1992, 98% of households had a television set (65% had two or more). 77% had a VCR and 61% received cable television service, according to the Electronic Industries Association.

*** The typical American does not own a gun.**

In a Gallup Poll in May 1991, 53% of respondents said they did not have a gun in the house.

*** She expected to spend about \$375 on Christmas gifts last year.**

A Conference Board survey conducted before Christmas 1991 asked people how much they expected to spend.

*** She owed \$2,317 on her credit cards at the end of 1991.**

Average debt per card holder, calculated by the Nilson Report, Santa Monica, Calif. About 60% of adults have at least one credit card.

*** She does not have a will.**

In a Gallup Poll in January 1991, 45% said they did not have a will.

*** She generates about 3 pounds of garbage every day.**

Estimate is from the Garbage Project.

CHARACTERISTICS

*** The average American male is 5 feet 9.1 inches tall and weighs 172 pounds. The average female is 5 feet 3.7 inches tall and weighs 144 pounds.**

From results of adult physical exams reported to the National Center for Health Statistics from 1976 to 1980, the most recent figures available.

*** They think this current weight is just about right.**

A Gallup Poll in November 1991 reported that 57% of respondents said their weight is about right. 35% said they were overweight, and 8% said they did not weigh enough. * The typical American is Protestant. She belongs to a church, but did not attend services last week.

In an April 1992 poll, Gallup found that 64% of respondents said they preferred a Protestant denomination. 71% of the respondents said they were members of a church or synagogue, but only 41% attended in the last week.

*** The typical American is a Democrat, and considers herself a moderate.**

34% of respondents in a New York Times/CBS News Poll conducted in July 1992 identified themselves as Democratic, 29% as Republican, and 32% as independent. But younger people were more likely to identify themselves as independent, in the 18 to 29 age group. Independents were the largest party identification, with 34% and in the 30 to 44 group, independent were 33%.

The poll also found that 42% said they were moderate in their political philosophy.

*** She considers herself an environmentalist.**

In April 1991, Gallup found that 75% of people called themselves an environmentalists.

HEALTH

*** The typical American lost 5.1 days of work or school in the last year because of illness.**

Data are from a 1990 survey by the National Center for Health Statistics.

*** She was in contact with a doctor 5.5 days in the last year.**

From a 1990 survey by the National Center for Health Statistics. Contact could have been through an office, clinic or hospital visit, house call or by telephone.

*** Medical bills account for 14% of the average family's spending.**

Data are from the World Health Organization, statistical yearbook for 1992.

*** The typical American doesn't smoke.**

Only 28% of respondents in a December 1991 Gallup Poll said they smoked. 47% said they never smoked. 25% said they had kicked the habit.

*** She does not know anyone who has contracted AIDS.**

Only 18% of respondents in an October 1991 Gallup Poll said they knew someone who had contracted AIDS.

ACTIVITIES

*** The typical American spent one or two hours driving yesterday.**

Of respondents to a May 1991 Gallup Poll, 25% spent 1 or 2 hours in their cars on the previous day, 16% spent 2 or 3 hours and 13% spend one-half to 1 hour.

* She read a newspaper today.

A Gallup Poll in February 1991 found that on any given day 71% of Americans read a newspaper, 38% read a book for work or school and 36% read a magazine and 33% read a book for pleasure.

*** She watched 28 hours and 13 minutes of television last week, about one-quarter of her waking hours.**

The average amount of television watched by Americans 2 years old or older in the 1990-91 season was reported by Nielsen Media Services. The average young adult sleeps 7 to 8 hours a night, according to university studies.

BELIEFS

*** The typical American believes in the Devil, but does not believe in ghosts or witches.**

In 1991, Gallup found that 55% of people polled said they did not believe in ghosts and 71% did not believe in witches. 52% did believe in the devil.

*** She basically believes the Bible version of how humanity was created, rather than the evolutionary view.**

In a November 1991 Gallup Poll, 47% of the respondents agreed that "God created man pretty much in his present form at one time within the last 10,000 years." 40% agreed that "man has developed over millions of years from less advanced forms of life but God guided this process, including man's creation. 9% agreed that God had no part in it.

EATING HABITS

*** The typical American's ideal meal consists of:**

Shrimp cocktail or other seafood appetizer

Green salad Vegetable soup Steak Potatoes and broccoli Bread Cheesecake or ice cream Tea, hot or iced

Unless otherwise noted, all information in this section comes from a Gallup Poll taken in November 1991.

*** Her most frequently purchased fruit was bananas, and the vegetable was lettuce.**

72% of respondents reported buying bananas in the last month, 63% said they bought lettuce.

*** She drinks regular soda, not diet, but drinks low-fat milk.**

52% of respondents said they drank regular soda, 34% drank diet soda, and 13% said they don't drink soda.

Only 24% of respondents said they bought whole milk most often.

*** She drinks alcohol, usually beer.**

In a February 1992 Gallup Poll, 64% of respondents said they drink alcohol. Beer was preferred by 47% of the total respondents, and by 71% of those under age 30.

*** She hates liver.**

More respondents said that they hated liver (14%) than any other food. Tied for runner-up were spinach, fish and seafood, each with 6%.

5% of respondents agreed with President Bush - they hated broccoli. But 10% said there wasn't any food they hated. [END]