



## Americans Perceive Big Deficit of Kindness in Their Society

by Jesus Rios, Founder & CEO – Quanttitudes LLC

- Only 1 in 4 respondents (25%) rated the kindness of their fellow Americans favorably, and many believe kindness has either declined or stalled in recent years.
- In contrast, 75% consider themselves kind.
- Hispanics and African Americans more likely to perceive kindness around them.
- Just 5% view political or corporate leaders as “great examples of kindness.”

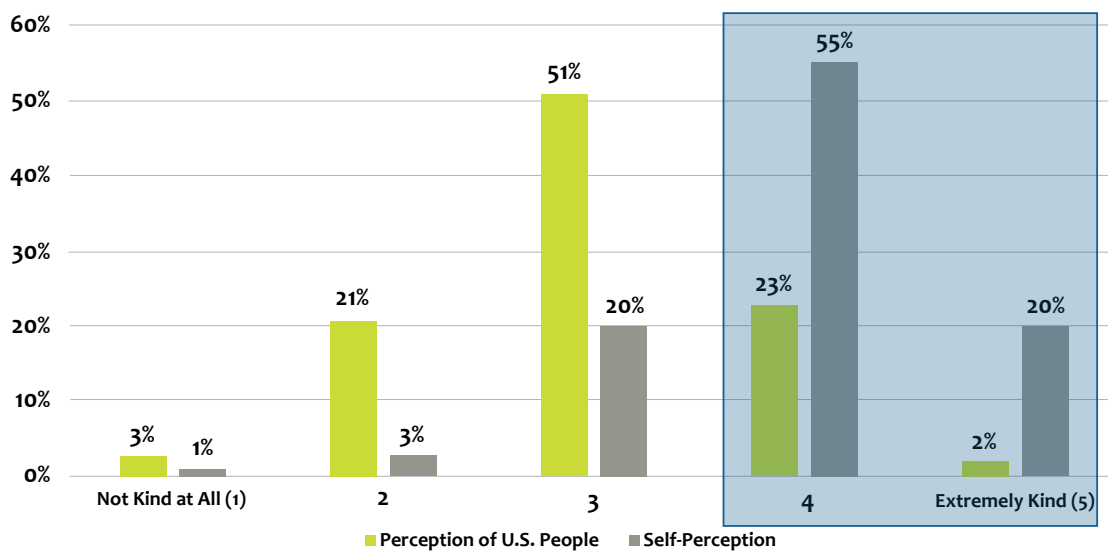
New York, NY – With the arrival of the holidays, Americans have traditionally reflected on their relationship with their fellow citizens as random manifestations of care and generosity start to pop up everywhere. In fact, it has now become a sign of the season for throngs of inspired Good Samaritans — some under the guise of “Secret Santa” — to go around paying off layaway merchandise at discount stores, handing out cash to the needy, or visiting orphanages to deliver presents to disadvantaged kids. It’s definitely a time when Americans seem to pause for a while to think of those around them. However, as heartwarming as these spontaneous good deeds may sound, for most U.S. adults day-to-day random acts of kindness don’t seem to be a good enough measure of the true level of kindness in their society.

In a recent survey of U.S. adults conducted by Quanttitudes on behalf of MacLean|Schechter (an advisory firm focused on designing financial innovations for

social impact/common good), only 1 in 4 respondents (25%) rated the kindness of their fellow Americans favorably (4s or 5s on a 5-point scale), with the remaining 75% providing ratings of 3 and lower. Furthermore, most respondents believe kindness has either deteriorated or remained stagnant in recent years. When asked how the current level of kindness compares to 10 years ago, 51% said Americans are now less kind or much less kind, while 33% believe they're equally kind.

Interestingly, respondents tend to exclude themselves from these evaluations, as many rated their own kindness much higher than that of their fellow citizens. In fact, a whopping 75% rated their own kindness with 4s or 5s in stark contrast with the 25% that answered in the same way about U.S. people in general.

How kind would you say people in the U.S. are in general / How kind do you consider yourself? On the scale below, please select any number from 1 to 5 keeping mind that 1 means "Not Kind at All" and 5 means "Extremely Kind"



Quanttitudes also asked respondents if they had been involved in random acts of kindness in the 7 days prior to the survey, either in the role of doer, witness, or receiver of such acts. As part of the question, a random act of kindness was defined as "any good deed done by a stranger for no apparent reason other than caring for other human beings." As such — respondents were also told — "It could be a small action, like holding the door for someone, or bigger actions such as saving someone from being run over by a car."

Interestingly, 96% of U.S. adults answered that they had been involved in such acts in at least one of the three roles in the previous 7 days, with 75% saying they had

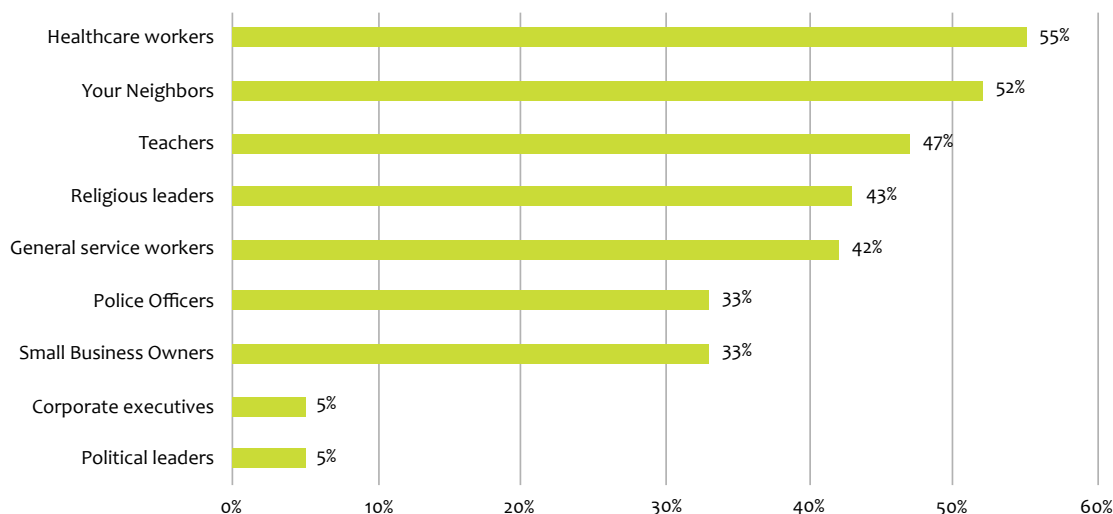
been involved as a doer, 45% as a witness, and 41% as a receiver. So, random acts of kindness don't appear to be rare occurrences but rather common traits of day-to-day life in U.S. society. However, the fact that only 1 in 4 respondents rated the kindness of their fellow citizens favorably reveals an intriguing disconnect between the reported incidence of kind behaviors and the overall perception of kindness in U.S. society.

### Minorities Slightly More Likely to Perceive Kindness

African Americans (28%) and Hispanics (27%) are slightly more favorable than Whites (23%) when evaluating the kindness of fellow Americans. Also, respondents aged 65+ (36%) are more positive than any other age group and particularly higher than 25–34 year olds (12%). Likewise, residents of the South (26%) are the most positive in their current perceptions of kindness, while those living in the Northeast are the most negative (16%).

Also, when asked their perceptions of kindness as related to specific social groups, no groups were mentioned as “great examples of kindness” by strong majorities. In fact, the only groups singled out by more than 50% of respondents were “Healthcare Workers” (55%) and “Neighbors” (52%). On the other hand, the groups least associated with “great examples of kindness” were “Corporate Executives” and “Political Leaders,” each mentioned by only 5% of respondents. Police Officers — a group that has recently been subject to intense public criticism — were considered “great examples of kindness” by one third (33%) of the respondents, with Whites expressing more favorable views (37%) than Hispanics (25%) or African Americans (23%).

Which of the following would you say of Great Examples of Kindness in the city or area where you live?  
(% Yes)

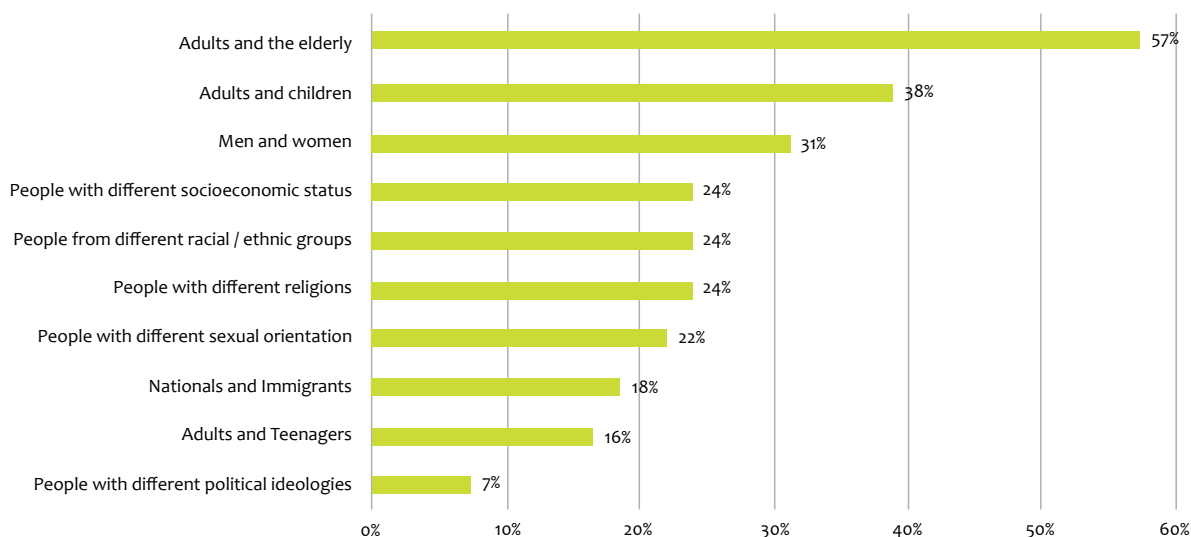


## Not So Kind Coexistence

In order to explore the perception of kindness as related to the interaction of certain diverse groups in the U.S. society, respondents were asked whether they believe such groups “stand out for treating each other with kindness” or not. Here again, no groups gathered favorable responses by overwhelming majorities. However, the groups perceived as coexisting more kindly were “Adults and the Elderly” (57%), “Adults and Children” (38%) and “Men and Women” (31%), while the ones viewed as interacting with the least kindness were “Nationals and Immigrants” (18%), “Adults and Teenagers” (16%) and “People with Different Political Ideologies” (7%).

As can be noticed, political leaders and politically motivated lack of kindness appear to be major factors driving the negative overall perception of kindness in the U.S.

Which of the following groups would you say STAND OUT FOR TREATING EACH OTHER WITH KINDNESS?



## Implications and Opportunities

Despite the fact that U.S. adults report experiencing random acts of kindness as a relatively common aspect of their day-to-day lives, a majority of them perceive a deficit of kindness in the U.S. society, and many believe kindness has deteriorated over the past few years. Furthermore, when evaluating their communities, only a few believe they are surrounded by “great examples of kindness,” with particularly low marks being given to leaders and to groups historically divided by political or cultural tension.

Research evidence in social psychology suggests that perceived kindness has intrinsic value for society. When the residents of a country feel certain that they can rely on their fellow citizens whenever in need, it not only benefits their personal

well-being but also that of the collective as well. It helps build the mutual trust and social capital that both individuals and societies need in order to coexist peacefully, collaborate and thrive. Therefore, the fact that most U.S. adults do not view kindness as a ubiquitous trait in their society carries an urgent call to action for leadership. Political leaders, in particular, are singled out to serve as better role models for society; but all leaders in positions to educate the masses, or to exert influence on which attitudes and behaviors get more visibility and social recognition, should be equally compelled by these findings.

As the holiday spirit springs forth, it is fitting to know that a legion of “good doers” are already out there giving testimony to America’s character. But Americans need to believe kindness is indeed a core trait of their society’s character, as opposed to a seasonal phenomenon. Only through such belief can a virtuous circle of behavior–perception–behavior be set in motion to reinforce kind behaviors and bring about significant social change.

### **Survey Methodology**

*The above cited findings are based on a Quanttitudes – MacLean|Schechter poll conducted among n=1,000 male and female adults 18 years of age and older who live in the 50 U.S. states and the District of Columbia, and are pre-recruited panelists of the KnowledgePanel™. The KnowledgePanel is a commercially available online probabilistic panel owned by GfK. Because of its probabilistic nature, this panel allows for sampling that is projectable to the U.S. adult population.*

*The sample was post-stratified by means of weighting in order to correct for randomly occurring disproportions in key demographic and/or geographic variables. Panelists who don’t have Internet service or a personal computer in their household are provided a laptop and a paid Internet service plan by the panel owner.*

*The margin of error for this sample is +/- 3% at the 95% confidence level. This is the maximum error for the total sample of n=1,000. Demographic or geographic sample breakouts carry a greater margin of error.*

*One thousand respondents is the typical sample size used in electoral or social polling where researchers are interested in gauging the prevalence of a social phenomenon at the overall country level.*

