



THE PEW RESEARCH CENTER
For The People & The Press

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Political Knowledge Update

Well Known: Clinton and Gadhafi Little Known: Who Controls Congress

Take the Latest Quiz Online!

Before you read the report, we invite you to test your own News IQ by taking the latest interactive knowledge quiz now available on the Pew Research Center website. The short quiz includes many of the questions that were included in a national poll. Participants will instantly learn how they did on the quiz in comparison with the general public as well as with people like them. To take the latest quiz, click on this link:

<http://pewresearch.org/politicalquiz/>

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Political Knowledge Update

Well Known: Clinton and Gadhafi; Little Known: Who Controls Congress

The public is generally aware of basic facts about several recent national and international news stories, but is much less knowledgeable about current politics in Washington, according to the Pew Research Center's latest News IQ survey.

About seven-in-ten know that Hillary Clinton currently serves as U.S. secretary of state (73%) and that Moammar Gadhafi is the leader of Libya (71%). An even higher percentage (80%) knows that that the “No Child Left Behind” law deals with education policy.

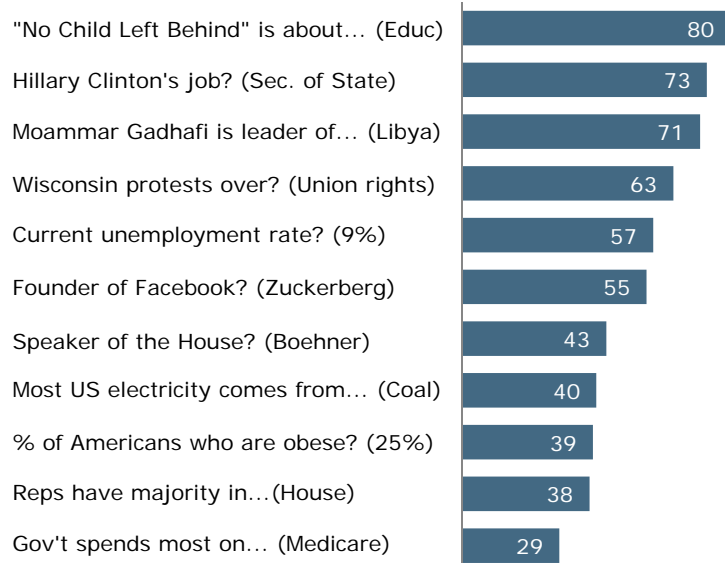
Yet Americans continue to struggle with questions about Congress and its leaders. Just 38% correctly say that Republicans hold a majority of seats in the House – and not in the Senate or the full Congress. Shortly after the

midterm elections in November, slightly more (46%) knew that the Republicans had a majority only in the House.

And only about four-in-ten (43%) are able to correctly identify John Boehner as House speaker; 19% say incorrectly that Nancy Pelosi is still speaker of the House. In November, shortly after the GOP won the House, 38% named Boehner as the presumptive speaker and 13% named Pelosi.

The latest News IQ Quiz, conducted Mar. 17-20 among 1004 adults, also finds that many Americans have a hard time answering detailed questions about U.S. government

What the Public Knows



PEW RESEARCH CENTER. Mar. 17-20, 2011.

spending. Roughly three-in-ten (29%) correctly say that the federal government spends more on Medicare than on scientific research, education or on interest on the national debt. Slightly more (36%) say that interest on the debt is the greater government expenditure.

As in the past, however, most Americans (57%) are able to correctly estimate the unemployment rate (currently about 9%). A majority (63%) also knows that the main focus of the recent protests and political debates in Wisconsin was on union bargaining rights.

Reflecting his growing visibility, 55% identify Mark Zuckerberg as the founder of the social networking site Facebook. This is the only question on the survey that far more of those younger than 30 answered correctly than those 65 and older (63% vs. 25%).

Congress a Mystery to Many

Republicans are more likely than Democrats to be aware of the details of divided power in Washington. Still, only about half of Republicans (49%) know that the GOP controls only the House, compared with 39% of independents and just 33% of Democrats.

This is little changed from November, shortly after the election, when 55% of Republicans knew that the GOP had a majority only in the House. The proportion of Democrats who know that the Republicans have a majority only in the House has fallen since November (from 45% to 33%).

Half of Republicans (50%) can identify Boehner as House speaker; in November, about the same percentage of Republicans (47%) knew that Boehner was the incoming speaker. Just 42% of Democrats and 41% of independents correctly identify Boehner as House speaker, which also is little changed from November.

Boehner Still an Unfamiliar Figure

	Boehner is Speaker	Reps have House Majority	N
<i>% answering correctly...</i>	%	%	
Total	43	38	1004
18-29	21	26	128
30-49	36	36	246
50+	57	44	600
College grad+	62	55	350
Some college	41	42	250
HS or less	32	26	398
Republican	50	49	265
Democrat	42	33	307
Independent	41	39	341

PEW RESEARCH CENTER Mar. 17-20, 2011.

Young people are only dimly aware of the new balance of power in Washington. Just 26% of those younger than 30 think that Republicans have a majority only in the House and 21% correctly name Boehner as speaker. About as many (29%) name Nancy Pelosi as House speaker.

Pew Research Center news interest surveys have found that while the 2010 elections and their aftermath garnered strong public interest and intense media coverage, much of the focus in the first few months of 2011 has been on breaking news – such as the upheaval in the Middle East and Northern Africa and the deadly earthquake and tsunami in Japan. In recent weeks, domestic politics – even the early stages of the 2012 presidential campaign – have gotten little attention. (See [“Public Stays Focused on Japan as Media Turns to Libya” March 30, 2011.](#))

Partisan Differences in Knowledge

On most questions partisan differences are slight. Republicans are more likely than Democrats to correctly answer three of the 11 questions.

Seven-in-ten (70%) Republicans know that public employee union rights were the subject of protests in Wisconsin, compared with 58% of Democrats. Republicans are more likely to know that the GOP controls the House (49% vs. 33%) and that coal is the leading source of U.S. electricity (44% vs. 34%).

Few Partisan Differences in Knowledge

% answering correctly...	Rep	Dem	Ind	R-D
	%	%	%	diff
Reps have a majority in... (House)	49	33	39	+16
Wisconsin protests about? (Union rights)	70	58	66	+12
Most U.S. electricity comes from... (Coal)	44	34	43	+10
Speaker of the House? (Boehner)	50	42	41	+8
Current unemployment rate? (9%)	62	58	56	+4
Founder of Facebook? (Mark Zuckerberg)	56	53	59	+3
US government spends most on... (Medicare)	30	28	33	+2
Moammar Gadhafi is the leader of... (Libya)	74	72	70	+2
Hillary Clinton's job? (Secretary of State)	74	75	74	-1
No Child Left Behind is about... (Education)	78	80	83	-2
Percentage of Americans who are obese? (25%)	39	47	36	-8
N=	265	307	341	

PEW RESEARCH CENTER. Mar. 17-20, 2011.

Persistent Age Gap in Knowledge

As in past installments of the News IQ Quiz, young people struggle with questions about politics and economics, but are better informed on technology questions.

Six-in-ten (63%) of those younger than 30 know that Mark Zuckerberg is the founder of Facebook. That compares with just 45% of those over 50 who know this. Notably, three-quarters of young people (75%) also know that the “No Child Left Behind” law deals with education. Majorities across demographic and political groups correctly answered this question.

Young People Know Founder of Facebook, That “No Child” Law Is About Education

<i>% answering correctly...</i>	18-29	30-49	50-64	65+
	%	%	%	%
No Child Left Behind is about... (Education)	75	83	84	74
Founder of Facebook? (Mark Zuckerberg)	63	64	58	25
Hillary Clinton’s job? (Secretary of State)	57	72	81	81
Moammar Gadhafi is the leader of...(Libya)	54	75	77	74
Wisconsin protests over? (Union rights)	46	59	76	67
Current unemployment rate? (9%)	38	56	65	64
Percentage of Americans who are obese? (25%)	36	36	43	44
Most U.S. electricity comes from... (Coal)	35	37	44	43
US government spends most on... (Medicare)	29	28	27	37
Reps have a majority in...(House)	26	36	46	42
Speaker of the House? (Boehner)	21	36	58	55
N=	128	246	340	260

PEW RESEARCH CENTER. Mar. 17-20, 2011.

But young people are far less likely than older Americans to know that Moammar Gadhafi is the leader of Libya. About half (54%) say correctly that Gadhafi is the leader of Libya, 15% say he leads Egypt and 28% do not know. Large majorities in older age groups associate Gadhafi with Libya. (The survey was conducted March 17-20; the United States and its allies launched airstrikes against Gadhafi’s forces on March 19.)

Similarly, 46% of young people know that the protests in Wisconsin focused on unions rights for public employees. Majorities across older age groups were aware of this. And as in previous surveys, most young people are unable to correctly estimate the unemployment rate; 38% answered this correctly.

About the Survey

The analysis in this report is based on telephone interviews conducted March 17-20, 2011 among a national sample of 1004 adults 18 years of age or older living in the continental United States (673 respondents were interviewed on a landline telephone, and 331 were interviewed on a cell phone, including 144 who had no landline telephone). The survey was conducted by interviewers at Princeton Data Source under the direction of Princeton Survey Research Associates International. A combination of landline and cell phone random digit dial samples were used; both samples were provided by Survey Sampling International. Interviews were conducted in English. Respondents in the landline sample were selected by randomly asking for the youngest adult male or female who is now at home. Interviews in the cell sample were conducted with the person who answered the phone, if that person was an adult 18 years of age or older. For detailed information about our survey methodology, see: <http://people-press.org/methodology/detailed>.

The combined landline and cell phone sample are weighted using an iterative technique that matches gender, age, education, race, Hispanic origin, region, and population density to parameters from the March 2010 Census Bureau's Current Population Survey. The sample also is weighted to match current patterns of telephone status, based on extrapolations from the 2010 National Health Interview Survey. The weighting procedure also accounts for the fact that respondents with both landline and cell phones have a greater probability of being included in the combined sample and adjusts for household size within the landline sample. Sampling errors and statistical tests of significance take into account the effect of weighting. The following table shows the sample sizes and the error attributable to sampling that would be expected at the 95% level of confidence for different groups in the survey:

Group	Sample Size	Plus or minus ...
Total sample	1004	4.0 percentage points
Republicans	265	7.5 percentage points
Democrats	307	7.0 percentage points
Independents	341	6.5 percentage points

Sample sizes and sampling errors for other subgroups are available upon request.

In addition to sampling error, one should bear in mind that question wording and practical difficulties in conducting surveys can introduce error or bias into the findings of opinion polls.

About the Pew Research Center for the People & the Press

The Pew Research Center for the People & the Press is an independent opinion research group that studies attitudes toward the press, politics and public policy issues. We are sponsored by The Pew Charitable Trusts and are one of seven projects that make up the Pew Research Center, a nonpartisan "fact tank" that provides information on the issues, attitudes and trends shaping America and the world.

The Center's purpose is to serve as a forum for ideas on the media and public policy through public opinion research. In this role it serves as an important information resource for political leaders, journalists, scholars, and public interest organizations. All of our current survey results are made available free of charge.

All of the Center's research and reports are collaborative products based on the input and analysis of the entire Center staff consisting of:

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**PEW RESEARCH CENTER NEWS INTEREST INDEX
MARCH 17-20, 2011 OMNIBUS
FINAL TOPLINE
N=1,004**

PEW.1-PEW.5 PREVIOUSLY RELEASED**NO QUESTIONS PEW.6-PEW.10**

Next I'd like to ask about some things that have been in the news. Please answer as best you can. If you don't know the answer just tell me and we'll move to the next question.

RANDOMIZE ORDER OF PEW.11-PEW.23**ASK ALL:**

PEW.11 Do you happen to know if the national unemployment rate as reported by the government is currently closer to **[READ IN ORDER]**?

Mar 17-20 <u>2011</u>		Nov 11-14 <u>2010</u>	Jul 1-5 <u>2010</u>	Jan 14-17 <u>2010</u> ¹	Oct 1-4 <u>2009</u>		Mar 26-29 <u>2009</u>	
3	5%	3	3	2	4	5%	3	4%
57	9% <i>(Correct)</i>	53	54	55	53	10% <i>(Correct)</i>	53	8% <i>(Correct)</i>
14	15%	16	16	15	15	15%	24	12%
11	21%	11	10	15	18	20%	18	16%
14	DK/Ref (VOL.)	17	18	12	10	DK/Ref (VOL.)	2	DK/Ref (VOL.)

ASK ALL:

PEW.12 The Obama administration is proposing revisions to the "No Child Left Behind" Act. That legislation deals with which of the following issues. Is it... **[READ AND RANDOMIZE]**

Mar 17-20 <u>2011</u>	
80	Education <i>(Correct)</i>
2	Adoption
1	Transportation
6	Nutrition
11	Don't know/Refused (VOL.)

ASK ALL:

PEW.13 On which of these activities does the U.S. government currently spend the most money? Is it....**[READ AND RANDOMIZE]**

Mar 17-20 <u>2011</u>		Nov 11-14 <u>2010</u>	
29	Medicare <i>(Correct)</i>	39	National defense <i>(Correct)</i>
7	Education	4	Education
7	Scientific research	15	Medicare
36	Interest on the national debt	23	Interest on the national debt
22	Don't know/Refused (VOL.)	19	Don't know/Refused (VOL.)

NO QUESTION PEW.14

¹ For January 14-17, 2010 and before the question did not include the phrase: "... as reported by the government..."

ASK ALL:

PEW.15 Do you happen to know the name of the current Speaker of the U.S. House of Representatives? Is it
[READ AND RANDOMIZE]

Mar 17-20 <u>2011</u>	Dec 4-7 <u>2008</u>	Aug 16-19 <u>2007</u>
43 John Boehner (<i>Correct</i>)	72 Nancy Pelosi (<i>Correct</i>)	74 Nancy Pelosi (<i>Correct</i>)
19 Nancy Pelosi	3 Dennis Hastert	5 Dennis Hastert
3 Newt Gingrich	3 Barbara Boxer	7 Barbara Boxer
5 Mitch McConnell	3 Eric Holder	5 Scooter Libby
30 DK/Refused (VOL.)	19 DK/Refused (VOL.)	9 DK/Refused (VOL.)

TREND FOR COMPARISON:

Nov 11-14 <u>2010²</u>	
38	John Boehner (<i>Correct</i>)
13	Nancy Pelosi
4	Newt Gingrich
7	Mitch McConnell
38	DK/Refused (VOL.)

ASK ALL:

PEW.16 Which of the following sources of energy provides the most electricity in the U.S. ... Is it **[READ AND RANDOMIZE]**

Mar 17-20 <u>2011</u>	
40	Coal (<i>Correct</i>)
18	Nuclear
21	Hydroelectric
3	Wind
19	Don't know/Refused (VOL.)

ASK ALL:

PEW.17 Thinking about Congress, do Republicans currently have a majority in... **[READ IN ORDER]**

Mar 17-20 <u>2011</u>		Nov 11-14 <u>2010³</u>
38	The House of Representatives (<i>Correct</i>)	46
11	The Senate	8
18	Both the House and Senate	14
6	Neither the House nor the Senate	5
27	Don't know/Refused (VOL.)	27

NO QUESTION PEW.18**ASK ALL:**

PEW.19 According to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control, what percentage of Americans are considered to be obese? Is it closer to... **[READ IN ORDER]**

Mar 17-20 <u>2011</u>	
2	5%
6	10%
39	25% (<i>Correct</i>)
43	50%
11	Don't know/Refused (VOL.)

² For November 11-14, 2010 the question read: "Who is likely to be the next Speaker of the House when the new Congress convenes in January?"

³ For November 11-14, 2010, the question read: "When the new Congress convenes in January, will Republicans have a majority in..."

ASK ALL:PEW.20 What job does Hillary Clinton currently hold? Is she **[READ AND RANDOMIZE]**

Mar 17-20 <u>2011</u>		Mar 26-29 <u>2009</u>		Dec 4-7 <u>2008</u> ⁴	
73	Secretary of State (<i>Correct</i>)	85	Secretary of State (<i>Correct</i>)	87	Secretary of State (<i>Correct</i>)
10	A senator	8	Senator from New York	3	Secretary of the Treasury
3	An ambassador	2	Ambassador to the U.N.	2	Ambassador to the U.N.
3	A governor	2	Secretary of H.H.S.	3	Or something else
10	DK/Refused (VOL.)	3	DK/Refused (VOL.)	5	DK/Refused (VOL.)

ASK ALL:PEW.21 What issue was the main focus of recent protests and political debates in Wisconsin...**[READ AND RANDOMIZE]**

Mar 17-20

2011

63	Union rights for public employees (<i>Correct</i>)
1	The death penalty
2	Agricultural subsidies
7	Same-sex marriage
27	Don't know/Refused (VOL.)

PEW.22 Moammar Gadhafi is the leader of which of the following countries? **[READ AND RANDOMIZE]**

Mar 17-20

2011

71	Libya (<i>Correct</i>)
7	Egypt
5	Saudi Arabia
*	China
16	Don't know/Refused (VOL.)

ASK ALL:PEW.23 Who founded the social networking site called Facebook? Is it... **[READ AND RANDOMIZE]**

Mar 17-20

2011

55	Mark Zuckerberg (<i>Correct</i>)
3	Steve Jobs
4	Bill Gates
3	Jon Stewart
35	Don't know/Refused (VOL.)

NO QUESTIONS PEW.24-PEW.26**PEW.27-PEW.28 PREVIOUSLY RELEASED**

⁴ For December 4-7, 2008 the question asked: "To what cabinet position has Barack Obama recently nominated Hillary Clinton? Is it..." The order of the first three responses was randomized and "something else" was always read last.