



THE PEW RESEARCH CENTER
For The People & The Press

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Civil War at 150: Still Relevant, Still Divisive

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT:

Andrew Kohut

President, Pew Research Center

Carroll Doherty and Michael Dimock

Associate Directors

Scott Keeter

Director of Survey Research

1615 L St, N.W., Suite 700

Washington, D.C. 20036

Tel (202) 419-4350

Fax (202) 419-4399

www.peoplepress.org

Civil War at 150: Still Relevant, Still Divisive

As the 150th anniversary of the start of the Civil War approaches, most Americans say the war between the North and South is still relevant to American politics and public life today.

More than half of Americans (56%) say the Civil War is still relevant, according to the latest national survey by the Pew Research Center for the People & the Press, conducted March 30-April 3 among 1,507 adults. Nearly four-in-ten (39%) say the Civil War is important historically but has little current relevance.

In a nation that has long endured deep racial divisions, the history of that era still elicits some strong reactions. Nearly half of the public (46%) says it is inappropriate for today's public officials to praise the leaders of the Confederate states during the war; 36% say such statements are appropriate.

Nonetheless, a majority (58%) say they have no particular reaction to the Confederate flag, the symbol of the South. Among those who have a reaction to the flag, more than three times as many say they have a negative reaction as a positive reaction (30% to 9%).

There is no consensus among the public about the primary cause of the Civil War, but more (48%) say that the war was mainly about states' rights than say it was mainly about slavery (38%). Another 9% volunteer that it was about both equally.

Young people are more likely than older Americans to say that the war's main cause was states' rights – 60% of those younger than 30 express this view, the highest percentage of

Mixed Views of Civil War's Legacy

	Mar 30- Apr 3
<i>Do you think Civil War is...</i>	%
Still relevant to American politics and political life	56
Important historically, but has little relevance today	39
Don't know.)	5
	100
<i>Is it appropriate for public officials today to praise Confederate leaders?</i>	
Appropriate	36
Inappropriate	46
Don't know	15
	100
<i>Your reaction when you see the Confederate flag displayed?</i>	
Positive reaction	9
Negative reaction	30
Neither	58
Don't know	2
	100
<i>Your impression of the main cause of the Civil War?</i>	
Mainly about states' rights	48
Mainly about slavery	38
Both equally (Vol.)	9
Neither/Don't know	6
	100

PEW RESEARCH CENTER Mar. 30-Apr. 3, 2011.
 Figures may not add to 100% because of rounding.

any age group. Those 65 and older are the only age group in which more say that slavery, rather than states' rights, was the main cause of the Civil War (by 50% to 34%). While 48% of whites view states' rights was the war's main cause, so too do 39% of African Americans.

Sense of Southern Identity

On some, but not all, issues relating to the Civil War, the views of whites who identify as Southerners differ significantly from those who do not.

About a quarter of all whites (24%) consider themselves Southerners; 75% do not.

Nearly half of self-described Southern whites (49%) see states' rights as the war's main cause; among whites who do not consider themselves Southerners, a comparable percentage (48%) also says states' rights was the war's main cause. However, self-described Southern whites are more likely than other whites to view praise by politicians for Confederate leaders as appropriate and to have a positive reaction to displays of the Confederate flag.

Consider Yourself a Southerner?

	Yes	No	DK
	%	%	%
Total	25	73	2=100
White	24	75	1=100
Black	43	54	2=100
<i>Among whites:</i>			
Living in confederate states	64	35	1=100
Living in non-confederate	9	90	1=100

PEW RESEARCH CENTER Mar. 30-Apr. 3, 2011. Q73.
 Figures may not add to 100% because of rounding.

Less Positive View of Politicians Praising Confederates

The public expresses a less positive view of politicians praising Confederate leaders than it did a decade ago. In a January 2001 Gallup survey, 50% said they thought it was appropriate for public officials to praise the leaders of the Confederate states in the Civil War; 40% said such praise was inappropriate.

In the new survey, more think that politicians' statements praising Confederate leaders are inappropriate rather than appropriate (by 49% to 36%).

Whites who consider themselves Southerners are the only group in which substantially more view public officials' praise for Confederate leaders as appropriate rather than inappropriate (52% to 32%). A plurality of all whites (49%) – and a clear majority of African Americans (60%) – say it is inappropriate for public officials to praise Confederate leaders.

About six-in-ten (59%) among those with at least a college degree also say praising leaders of the former Confederate states is inappropriate, while 30% say they do not have a problem with that. Those with a high school diploma or less are divided (42% appropriate, 41% inappropriate).

Appropriate for Politicians Today to Praise Confederate Leaders?

	Yes	No	DK
	%	%	%
Total	36	49	15=100
White	36	49	14=100
Black	33	60	7=100
<i>Among whites:</i>			
See self as Southerner	52	32	16=100
Not a Southerner	32	55	14=100
<i>Among public:</i>			
College grad+	30	59	11=100
Some college	33	53	14=100
H.S. or less	42	41	17=100
Republican	41	42	17=100
Democrat	30	61	9=100
Independent	41	47	13=100

PEW RESEARCH CENTER Mar. 30-Apr. 3, 2011. Q68.
 Figures may not add to 100% because of rounding. Whites and blacks include only non-Hispanics.

Racial Differences in Reactions to Confederate Flag

Only a small number of Americans say they display the Confederate flag, but that symbol of the Southern cause elicits more negative reactions from some groups – especially African Americans, Democrats and the highly educated. Nevertheless, most Americans say they do not react positively or negatively when they see the Confederate flag.

Fewer than one-in-ten (8%) say they display the Confederate flag in places such as their home or office, on their car or on their clothing; 91% say they do not. The number that displays the Confederate flag is just a small fraction of the 75% who say they display the American flag in their homes or offices, on their cars or their clothing.

Far more African Americans than whites have a negative reaction to the Confederate flag (41% to 29%). Still, about as many blacks have no reaction (45%) as a negative reaction to the Confederate flag. Among whites, 61% have no reaction.

Whites who consider themselves Southerners have a more positive reaction to the Confederate flag than do other whites: 22% say they react positively when they see the Confederate flag displayed, compared with 8% of all whites and just 4% of whites who do not consider themselves Southerners.

Nearly half of those with at least a college degree (46%) say they have a negative reaction to the display of the Confederate flag, compared with a third (33%) of those with some college experience and just 18% of those with a high school diploma or less.

There also are partisan differences in reactions to the flag: about twice as many Democrats (44%) as Republicans (21%) react negatively to displays of the Confederate flag. And Republicans are more likely than Democrats to have a positive reaction to the flag (15% vs. 7%).

Reactions to The Confederate Flag

<i>Reaction when you see the Confederate flag displayed?</i>	Posi- tive %	Nega- tive %	Nei- ther %	DK %
Total	9	30	58	2=100
White	8	29	61	2=100
Black	10	41	45	3=100
<i>Among whites:</i>				
See self as Southerner	22	13	64	1=100
Not a Southerner	4	35	59	2=100
<i>Among public:</i>				
College grad+	5	46	47	2=100
Some college	5	33	61	1=100
H.S. or less	14	18	65	3=100
Republican	15	21	62	2=100
Democrat	7	44	46	3=100
Independent	8	27	63	2=100

PEW RESEARCH CENTER Mar. 31-Apr. 3, 2011. Q72.
Figures may not add to 100% because of rounding. Whites and blacks include only non-Hispanics.

About the Survey

The analysis in this report is based on telephone interviews conducted March 30-April 3, 2011 among a national sample of 1,507 adults 18 years of age or older living in the continental United States (1,001 respondents were interviewed on a landline telephone, and 506 were interviewed on a cell phone, including 215 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/>

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 and relative usage of landline and cell phones (for those with both), 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	1,507	3.5 percentage points
White non-Hispanic	1124	4.0 percentage points
Black non-Hispanic	174	9.0 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:

Andrew Kohut, Director
Scott Keeter, Director of Survey Research
Carroll Doherty and Michael Dimock, Associate Directors
Michael Remez, Senior Writer
Leah Christian and Jocelyn Kiley, Senior Researchers
Robert Suls, Shawn Neidorf, and Alec Tyson, Research Associates
Jacob Poushter, Research Analyst
Danielle Gewurz, Research Assistant

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PEW RESEARCH CENTER FOR THE PEOPLE & THE PRESS
APRIL 2011 POLITICAL SURVEY
FINAL TOPLINE
March 30-April 3, 2011
N=1507

QUESTIONS 1-9 PREVIOUSLY RELEASED**NO QUESTIONS 10-12****QUESTIONS 13-59 PREVIOUSLY RELEASED****NO QUESTIONS 60-65****ASK ALL:**

Q.66 As you may know, this April will be the 150th anniversary of the start of the American Civil War. Do you think **[READ AND RANDOMIZE]**

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39	The Civil War was important historically, but has little relevance to American politics and public life today
56	The Civil War is still relevant to American politics and public life today
5	Don't know/Refused (VOL.)

ASK ALL:

Q.67 What's your impression of the main cause of the Civil War? Was the Civil War **[READ AND RANDOMIZE]**?

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38	Mainly about slavery
48	Mainly about states' rights
9	Both equally (VOL.)
2	Neither/Other (VOL.)
4	Don't know/Refused (VOL.)

ASK ALL:

Q.68 Do you generally think it is appropriate or inappropriate for public officials today to praise the leaders of the Confederate States during the Civil War?

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		<i>Gallup/CNN/USA Today</i>	
		<u>Jan 2001</u>	
36	Appropriate	50	
49	Inappropriate	40	
15	Don't know/Refused (VOL.)	10	

ASK ALL:

Q.69 Do you display the American flag, in places such as at your home or office, or on your car or clothing, or not?

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75	Yes
25	No
*	Don't know/Refused (VOL.)

NO QUESTION 70

ASK ALL:

Q.71 Do you display the Confederate flag, in places such as at your home or office, or on your car or clothing, or not?

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8	Yes
91	No
1	Don't know/Refused (VOL.)

ASK ALL:

Q.72 When you see the Confederate flag displayed, do you have [RANDOMIZE: a positive reaction, a negative reaction] or neither?

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9	Positive reaction
30	Negative reaction
58	Neither
2	Don't know/Refused (VOL.)

ASK ALL:

PARTY In politics TODAY, do you consider yourself a Republican, Democrat, or independent?

ASK IF INDEP/NO PREF/OTHER/DK/REF (PARTY=3,4,5,9):

PARTYLN As of today do you lean more to the Republican Party or more to the Democratic Party?

				(VOL.)	(VOL.)	(VOL.)	Lean	Lean
	Republican	Democrat	Independent	No preference	Other party	DK/Ref	Rep	Dem
Mar 30-Apr 3, 2011	25	32	37	3	*	3	17	16
Mar 8-14, 2011	24	33	38	3	*	2	17	15
Feb 22-Mar 1, 2011	24	33	37	3	*	3	15	16
Feb 2-7, 2011	24	31	39	3	*	2	16	16
Jan 5-9, 2011	27	32	35	4	*	2	15	14
Dec 1-5, 2010	25	33	34	5	1	2	13	14
Nov 4-7, 2010	26	30	37	4	*	2	17	13
Oct 27-30, 2010	25	34	31	6	1	4	13	11
Oct 13-18, 2010	25	31	36	4	*	3	16	13
Aug 25-Sep 6, 2010	24	32	39	2	*	2	15	17
Jul 21-Aug 5, 2010	26	33	34	4	*	3	14	14
Jun 16-20, 2010	27	34	34	3	1	2	15	15
Apr 21-26, 2010	26	33	36	3	1	3	16	13
Mar 11-21, 2010	28	34	32	3	*	3	13	12
Mar 10-14, 2010	22	33	37	6	*	3	14	13

Yearly Totals

2010	25.2	32.7	35.2	3.6	.4	2.8	14.5	14.1
2009	23.9	34.4	35.1	3.4	.4	2.8	13.1	15.7
2008	25.7	36.0	31.5	3.6	.3	3.0	10.6	15.2
2007	25.3	32.9	34.1	4.3	.4	2.9	10.9	17.0
2006	27.8	33.1	30.9	4.4	.3	3.4	10.5	15.1
2005	29.3	32.8	30.2	4.5	.3	2.8	10.3	14.9
2004	30.0	33.5	29.5	3.8	.4	3.0	11.7	13.4
2003	30.3	31.5	30.5	4.8	.5	2.5	12.0	12.6
2002	30.4	31.4	29.8	5.0	.7	2.7	12.4	11.6
2001	29.0	33.2	29.5	5.2	.6	2.6	11.9	11.6
2001 Post-Sept 11	30.9	31.8	27.9	5.2	.6	3.6	11.7	9.4
2001 Pre-Sept 11	27.3	34.4	30.9	5.1	.6	1.7	12.1	13.5
2000	28.0	33.4	29.1	5.5	.5	3.6	11.6	11.7
1999	26.6	33.5	33.7	3.9	.5	1.9	13.0	14.5
1998	27.9	33.7	31.1	4.6	.4	2.3	11.6	13.1
1997	28.0	33.4	32.0	4.0	.4	2.3	12.2	14.1

PARTY/PARTYLN CONTINUED...

				(VOL.)	(VOL.)	(VOL.)	Lean	Lean
	<u>Republican</u>	<u>Democrat</u>	<u>Independent</u>	No preference	Other party	DK/Ref	<u>Rep</u>	<u>Dem</u>
1996	28.9	33.9	31.8	3.0	.4	2.0	12.1	14.9
1995	31.6	30.0	33.7	2.4	.6	1.3	15.1	13.5
1994	30.1	31.5	33.5	1.3	--	3.6	13.7	12.2
1993	27.4	33.6	34.2	4.4	1.5	2.9	11.5	14.9
1992	27.6	33.7	34.7	1.5	0	2.5	12.6	16.5
1991	30.9	31.4	33.2	0	1.4	3.0	14.7	10.8
1990	30.9	33.2	29.3	1.2	1.9	3.4	12.4	11.3
1989	33	33	34	--	--	--	--	--
1987	26	35	39	--	--	--	--	--

ASK ALL:

Q.73 Do you consider yourself a Southerner, or not?

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25	Yes
73	No
2	Don't know/Refused (VOL.)