

Most Americans Can't Answer These Four Civics Questions... Here's One Reason Why

Pew Research recently ran [a report](#) on political engagement in America. What caught my eye was the short, [seven-question civics test](#) embedded below.

As Pew explains, four of the questions in particular, including those about the Electoral College, presidential term limits, and Senate procedures, reveal a lot about American knowledge of government. Perhaps it's no surprise that such knowledge is limited.

As the chart below shows, very few Americans rank in the level of high civic knowledge. Only a third of those 65 and older do so.

But that low number gets even worse when younger generations are tested. About a quarter of those age 30-64 rank in this high knowledge category. Only 14 percent of those age 18-29 do the same.



Initially, I reasoned that such numbers are due to experience, or lack thereof. Older Americans have had many years to grow, learn, and accumulate information. Younger generations have not.

But this explanation is called into question when one considers that the younger demographic runs from age 18 to 29. That's a wide timeframe in which students are exposed to a high volume of education. They are adults, old enough to learn, retain, and apply the information they receive. The fact that only 14 percent of them are doing so calls into question whether they are actually learning the knowledge in

the first place.

Other statistics suggest this is the true problem. According to [The Nation's Report Card](#), only four percent of high school seniors register as advanced in their understanding of civics. In the related area of history, only one percent of seniors rank at the same level. About the only positive thing one can glean out of those numbers in comparison to those reported by Pew is the fact that some young people are eventually able to pull themselves out of this pit of ignorance in their years of higher education.

This matters, of course, because those who fail to understand the principles upon which our government is founded risk losing their freedoms, a fact which John Adams made clear in his [writings](#):

“Children should be educated and instructed in the principles of freedom. Aristotle speaks plainly to this purpose, saying, ‘that the institution of youth should be accommodated to that form of government under which they live; forasmuch as it makes exceedingly for the preservation of the present government, whatsoever it be.’”

Many Americans are dissatisfied with the direction of today's government, not the least of which is the ever-increasing loss of freedoms. Unless we place greater emphasis on growing the pool of civics-knowledgeable students, can we only expect this state to grow worse?

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