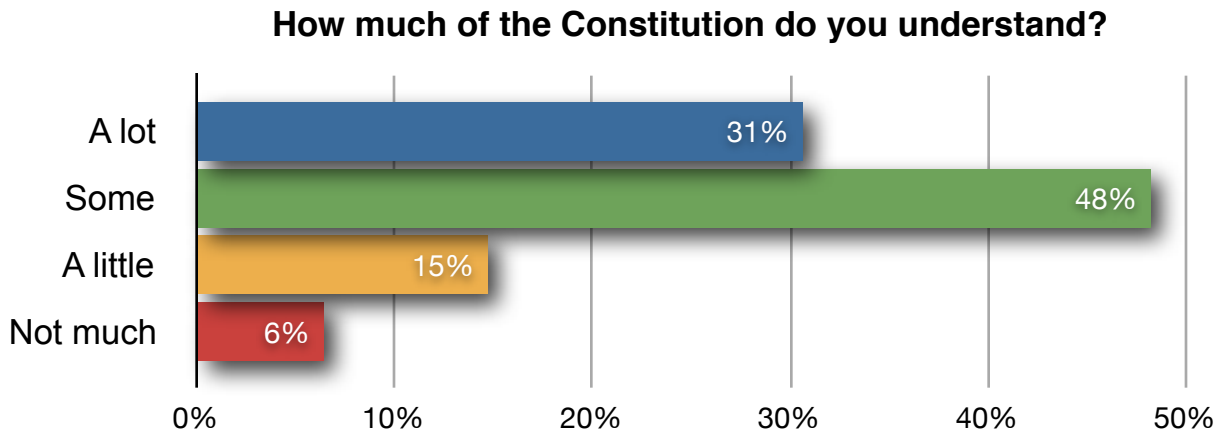


EXECUTIVE SUMMARY  
The State of the Constitution: What Americans Know

In 2010 the Center for the Constitution at James Madison’s Montpelier conducted a nationwide telephone survey of people across the United States to gauge Americans’ understanding of constitutional principles. Sponsored by the Claude Moore Charitable Foundation, the survey was informed by input from a dozen scholars of the Constitution and constructed by the staff of the Center for the Constitution with assistance from Dr. Quentin Kidd of the Wason Center for Public Policy at Christopher Newport University. The telephone survey of a random sample of adults age 18 and older who reside in the United States was conducted between July 20 and July 28, 2010. Live interviewing and sampling were conducted by the Muhlenberg College Institute of Public Opinion. The final number of completed surveys in the national sample was 988 with a margin of error of +/- 3.1% at the 95% level of confidence. The margin of error for sub groups is larger due to smaller sample sizes.



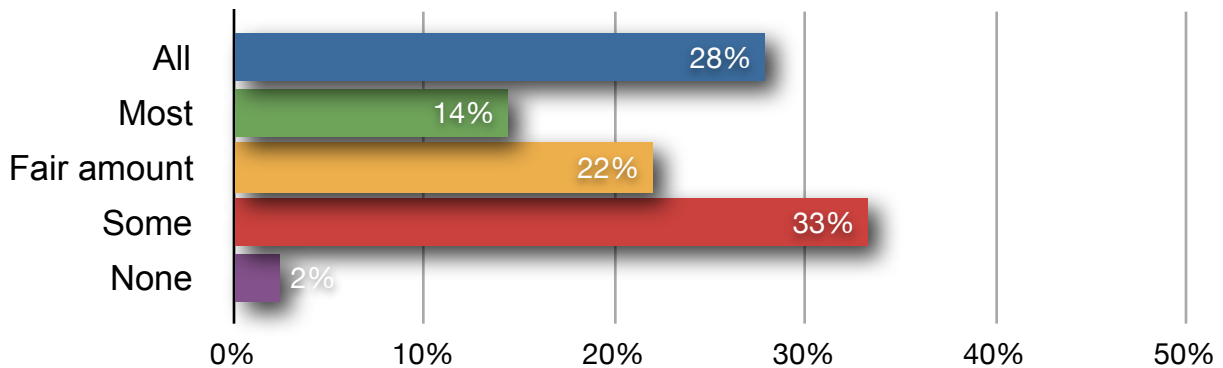
In the survey we asked several general questions designed to find out how much people believe they know and understand about the Constitution. Nearly one-third of all Americans report understanding “a lot” about the Constitution; an additional almost 50% report understanding “some” of the Constitution. Given the fundamental importance of the Constitution to America, it is distressing that 21% report “little” or “not much” understanding of the Constitution.

When analyzed by age, the youngest respondents (ages 18-24) report much less understanding of the Constitution than older people. This is discouraging given that the younger groups should have most recently studied American history and government in high school and/or college.

Age Group	A Lot	Some	Little	Not Much
18 - 24	15.9%	43.7%	22.2%	18.3%
25 - 34	32.6%	47.1%	13.4%	7.0%
35 - 44	28.2%	54.0%	16.1%	1.7%
45 - 54	29.3%	56.0%	10.5%	4.2%
55 or older	37.2%	43.2%	14.2%	5.4%

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**How much of the Constitution have you read?**



It is interesting to contrast understanding with the actual reading of the Constitution. It is curious to note that the percentage of respondents who report understanding “a lot” about the Constitution (30.6%) is slightly higher than the percentage who report having read the whole Constitution (27.9%), however, the difference is within the margin of error of the survey ( $\pm 3.1\%$ ). At the same time 79% report understanding “some” or “a lot,” but only 42% report having read “all” or “most” of the Constitution.

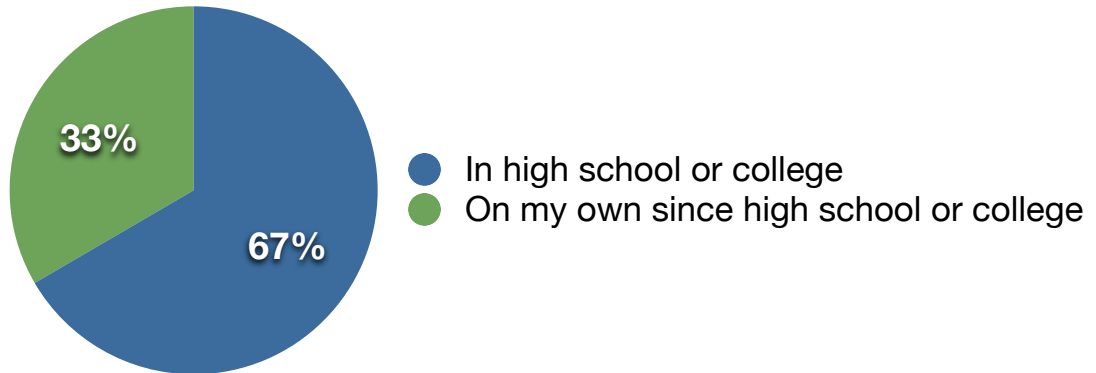
The results are even less encouraging when analyzed by age, many fewer young people (ages 18-24) report having read “all” or even “most” of the Constitution. Surprisingly, 8.5% of young people report having read “none” of the Constitution, despite very likely having been assigned reading all or part of the Constitution in school.

Age Group	None	Some	Fair Amount	Most	All
18 - 24	8.5%	30.8%	33.1%	13.1%	14.6%
25 - 34	1.8%	33.1%	20.7%	17.2%	27.2%
35 - 44	2.9%	37.7%	20.0%	10.9%	28.6%
45 - 54	.5%	34.7%	23.2%	16.8%	24.7%
55 or older	1.6%	30.8%	18.9%	14.2%	34.6%

In general, in this survey there were very few differences between men and women, however, 32.2% of men compared to 23.7% of women report having read all of the Constitution.

We specifically studied reports of Constitutional understanding of those reporting having read the Constitution.

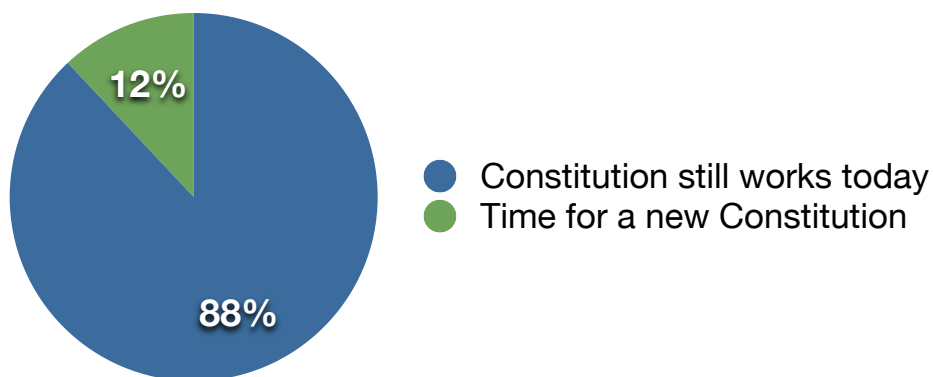
### How recently have you read the Constitution?



Of those who have read at least some of the Constitution, two-thirds report having last read it in school and only one-third report having read the Constitution on their own. It is perhaps not surprising that people 45-54 or 55 and older report having read the Constitution on their own more than average (38.5% and 41.7% compared to 33% for the general population). In terms of education level, those who have attended graduate school or attended vocational or technical school are also more likely to have read the Constitution on their own (52.8% and 40.0% respectively).

Political affiliation tells an interesting story--50.9% of people identifying themselves as “other” for political party have read the Constitution since high school, compare this to 35.9% of Independents, 35.4% of Republicans and only 25.4% of Democrats.

### Does the Constitution still work, or is it time for a new Constitution?



When asked if the Constitution still works today, or if it is time for a new constitution, an overwhelming 88% reported that the Constitution still works. However, the story of survey respondents’ overwhelming support for the current Constitution hides some important findings. Young people (ages 18-24) and African Americans report a desire for a new constitution at three times the rate of the full population (12%).

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<b>Age Group</b>	<b>Constitution still works today</b>	<b>Time for a new Constitution</b>
18 - 24	61.8%	38.2%
25 - 34	85.2%	14.8%
35 - 44	93.8%	6.2%
45 - 54	91.7%	8.3%
55 or older	93.8%	6.2%

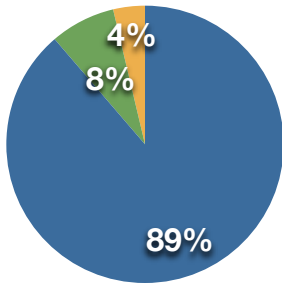
<b>Race/Ethnicity</b>	<b>Constitution still works today</b>	<b>Time for a new Constitution</b>
White	90.4%	9.6%
Black/African American	63.8%	36.2%
Other Race/Ethnicity	80.2%	19.8%

With respect to political affiliation, people who do not identify with one of the two major parties, or even as “Independent,” but as belonging to “Other” for political party also feel the need for a new constitution at a higher rate than the general population. On the other hand, Republicans are more confident in the Constitution than Democrats or Independents.

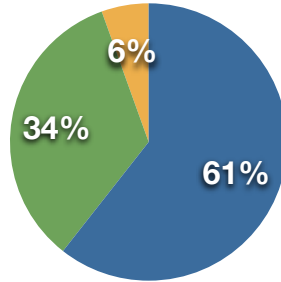
<b>Party Affiliation</b>	<b>Constitution still works today</b>	<b>Time for a new Constitution</b>
Republican	95.1%	4.9%
Democrat	84.0%	16.0%
Independent	86.4%	13.6%
Other	79.6%	20.4%

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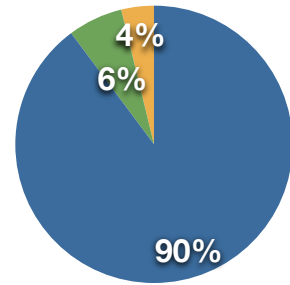
**Make and regulate money**



**Regulate interstate commerce**



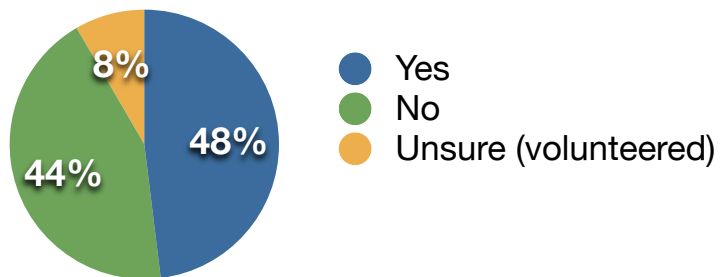
**Make treaties**



- Federal government
- State governments
- Not Sure

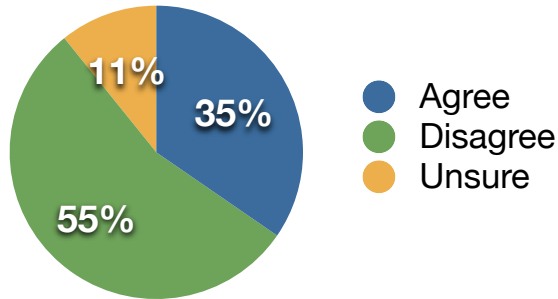
We asked several basic knowledge questions about government power that come directly from the Constitution. In the case of making and regulating money and making treaties, people knew that these were powers of the federal government at the same rate they reported understanding “some” or “a lot” of the Constitution. However, on the question of regulating interstate commerce, only 61% of the general public knows that this is a power reserved to the federal government.

**Is there a clear division of power between federal and state governments?**



Some of the confusion could come from our unique form of government. Federalism does require a sharing of certain powers, but Americans are mixed on whether or not there is a clear division of power between the state and federal governments. When asked which level of government has more power, 70% of the people think the division of power favors the federal government over the states. Only about 8% think the states have more power and 22% think the balance is about right.

**American Constitutionalism is a system in which the government's powers are limited.**

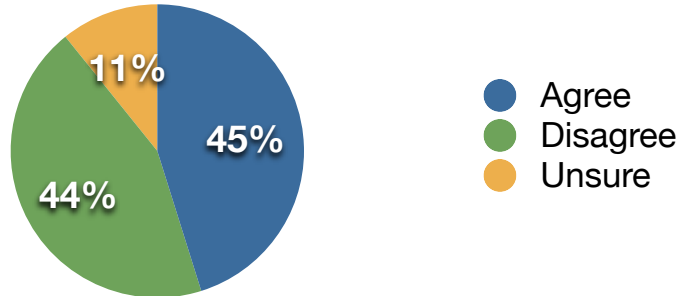


Given the Founders' great concern that the national government not become too powerful, it is a bit discouraging that only 35% of Americans believe that the Constitution limits government power. The differences between Democrats and Republicans regarding views of government power are illustrative perhaps of their philosophies. Democrats are much more likely to believe (45.5%) that governmental power is limited than are Republicans (29.5%), Independents (29.1%) or others (31.7%). Interesting differences are found between people in different age groups and levels of educational attainment.

Age Group	Agree	Disagree	Unsure
18 - 24	21.3%	63.0%	15.7%
25 - 34	45.3%	48.3%	6.4%
35 - 44	34.7%	56.6%	8.7%
45 - 54	33.7%	53.5%	12.8%
55 or older	34.5%	54.3%	11.2%

Education Level	Agree	Disagree	Unsure
High school or less	25.0%	59.4%	15.6%
Some college	33.0%	56.7%	10.3%
Vocational or technical	33.3%	55.6%	11.1%
College graduate	41.0%	49.8%	9.2%
Graduate study or more	44.3%	49.4%	6.3%

**American Constitutionalism is a system in which the government is empowered to act for the common good.**

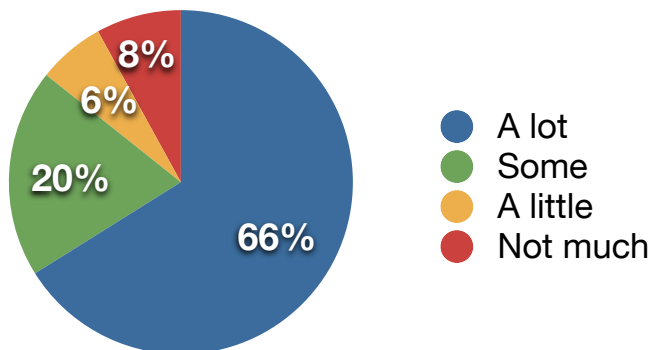


All age groups closely agree with the national average in believing that the government is empowered to act for the common good. Sadly, almost half the population does not feel that the government was designed with this goal. Whites and African Americans also agree at about the same level as the general population while only 37.8% of other race/ethnicity believes this.

In contrast, 62.2% of Democrats believe that government is empowered to act for the common good, compared to only 37.2% of Republicans, 37.0% of Independents and only 26.6% of others. This contrast is striking when considered with views on whether or not government power is limited (previous question).

Party ID	Agree	Disagree	Unsure
Republican	37.2%	54.4%	8.4%
Democrat	62.2%	28.4%	9.5%
Independent	37.0%	49.5%	13.5%
Other	26.6%	56.3%	17.2%

**On a day-to-day basis, how much would you say the Constitution affects you?**



With respect to the relevance of the Constitution to a person's day-to-day life, most respondents believe the Constitution has an impact on their daily life (66%). However, Republicans believe

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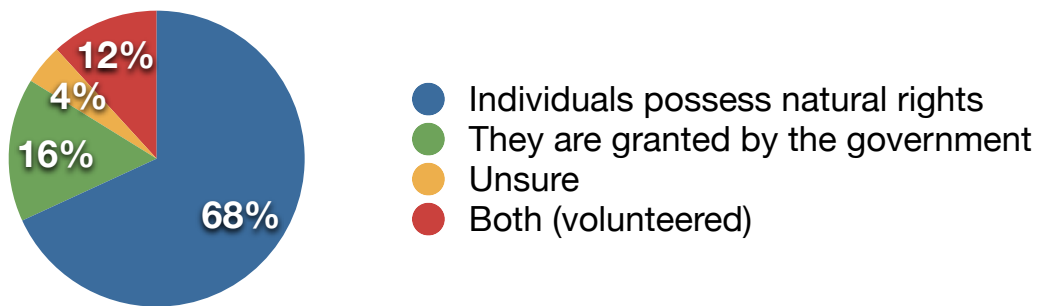
this much more (73.9% report “a lot”) than Democrats, Independents and others (60.5%, 65.3%, and 63.5%, respectively). Whites also believe the Constitution affects them “a lot” more (68.2%) than African Americans or those of other races or ethnicities (54.1% and 49%, respectively). This is not surprising given (as discussed above) that African Americans and others also believe at much higher levels that the United States needs a new Constitution.

Young people are both less knowledgeable about the Constitution and more less likely to think the Constitution affects them and therefore more likely to think it is time for a new Constitution. Republicans, as a group, are more inclined to feel that the Constitution has an impact on their daily life.

Age Group	A lot	Some	Little	Not much
18 - 24	33.9%	39.5%	9.7%	16.9%
25 - 34	63.5%	16.5%	10.0%	10.0%
35 - 44	76.3%	14.5%	4.0%	5.2%
45 - 54	75.1%	14.3%	6.3%	4.2%
55 or older	69.4%	19.4%	4.1%	7.0%

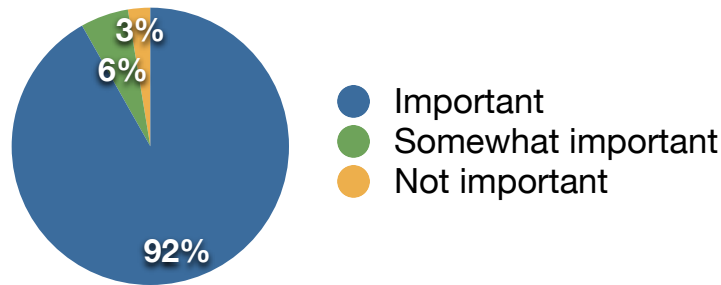
Party ID	A lot	Some	Little	Not much
Republican	73.9%	16.9%	5.9%	3.3%
Democrat	60.5%	23.1%	8.5%	7.8%
Independent	65.3%	19.3%	4.0%	11.3%
Other	63.5%	7.9%	14.3%	14.3%

**Where do rights come from?**



One of the most important philosophical beliefs of the founders was in the “natural rights” of humans. It is disappointing that only 68% of the population believes that their rights to free speech and freedom of religion among others, are natural rights. Interestingly, 18-24-year-olds understand the source of basic rights better than the older age groups (82.2% versus 63.7% to 69.7%). No other demographic grouping had such stark differences.

**Rule of law**



We studied people’s attitudes related to several key constitutional principles, such as rule of law, limited government, separation of powers, and separation of church and state. Rule of law is believed by most people to be an important constitutional principle. That the United States would be a nation of laws, not beholden to a “leader” was important to the founders, and continues to be important to Americans today. Curiously, young people are somewhat less inclined than other age groups to believe that rule of law is an important principle of American government.

Age Group	Important	Somewhat Important	Not Important
18 - 24	80.3%	11.0%	8.7%
25 - 34	88.8%	11.2%	0.0%
35 - 44	96.5%	2.9%	0.6%
45 - 54	94.7%	2.6%	2.6%
55 or older	94.0%	3.5%	2.5%

**Separation of church and state**



Related to rule of law is the concept of separation of church and state. This American constitutional principle works in two ways: government does not rely on religion or religious leaders for its authority and the people have the freedom to practice any religion they choose--or to not practice. While most Americans believe this is an important principle of American government, people not identifying with a major political party are somewhat less inclined to believe this is important.

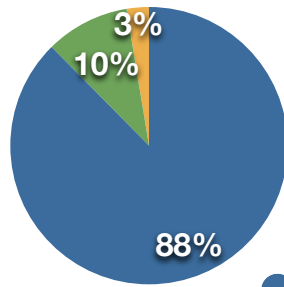
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Party ID	Important	Somewhat Important	Not Important
Republican	91.6%	7.7%	0.7%
Democrat	90.0%	7.4%	2.7%
Independent	88.1%	6.3%	5.6%
Other	79.7%	10.2%	10.2%

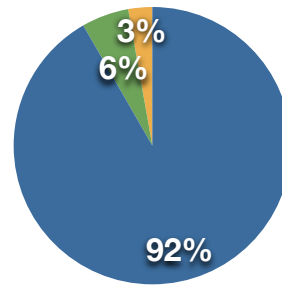
Perhaps more surprising is the finding that 18-24-year-olds believe that separation of church and state is important at far lower levels than any other age group.

Age Group	Important	Somewhat Important	Not Important
18 - 24	66.4%	21.1%	12.5%
25 - 34	89.3%	8.3%	2.4%
35 - 44	95.3%	2.9%	1.8%
45 - 54	92.6%	5.8%	1.6%
55 or older	94.0%	4.1%	1.9%

**Limited government**



**Separation of powers**



- Important
- Somewhat important
- Not Important

With respect to limited government and separation of powers, again, the general public believes strongly in these principles. Again, young people are less inclined to believe in these principles than are older Americans.

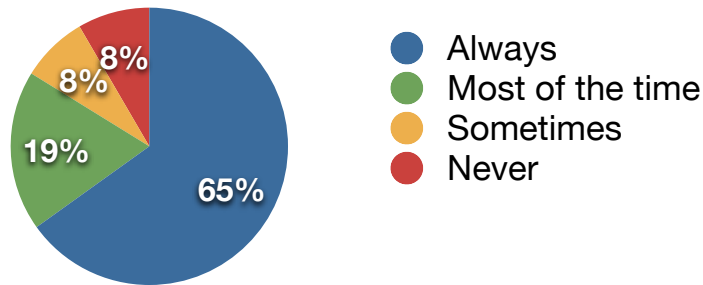
**What is the source of governmental authority?**



The Constitution begins with the words, “We the people” because the Founders believed that the only legitimate source of power for the government was the people. It is distressing that today only half of Americans believe the source of government power comes from the will of the people. This was the one question that showed large differences between men and women.

Gender	People	Elected Officials	A higher power (vol.)
Male	58.0%	39.7%	2.4%
Female	38.8%	59.3%	1.8%

**How often do you vote?**



The percentage of Americans reporting that they always vote (65%) is about 8% higher than the actual voter turnout in the 2008 presidential election (56.8%). What is most disturbing, but not surprising given findings by other studies, is the low level of interest in voting by young people.

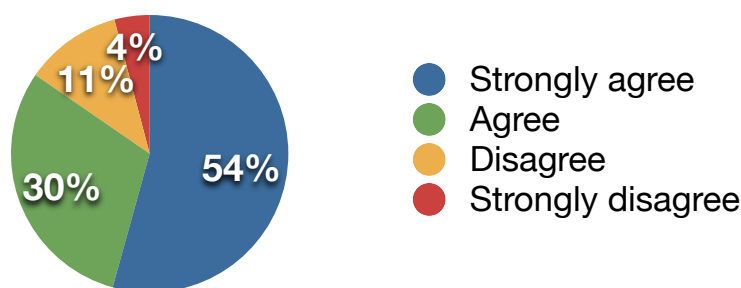
Age Group	Always	Most of the time	Sometimes	Never
18 - 24	37.8%	13.4%	14.2%	34.6%
25 - 34	56.8%	24.3%	12.4%	6.5%
35 - 44	65.1%	22.1%	8.7%	4.1%
45 - 54	73.4%	17.6%	4.8%	4.3%
55 or older	75.5%	16.6%	3.8%	4.1%

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Voting is also related to education level.

Education Level	Always	Most of the time	Sometimes	Never
High school or less	53.5%	20.4%	14.3%	11.8%
Some college	61.3%	17.2%	8.8%	12.6%
Vocational or technical	53.5%	23.3%	11.6%	11.6%
College graduate	73.4%	19.8%	4.8%	2.0%
Graduate study or more	80.5%	17.0%	0.0%	2.5%

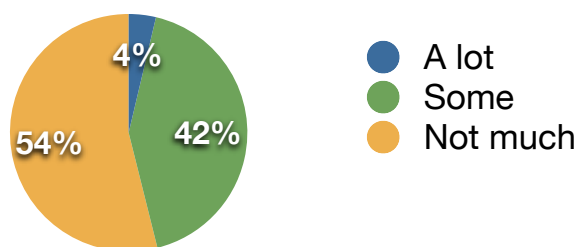
### Are elected officials in Washington accountable to the voters?



On the other hand, 84% of Americans “agree” or “strongly agree” that our elected officials are accountable to the voters. Again, the largest differences within any demographic breakdown was between the age categories.

Age Group	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
18 - 24	43.5%	37.9%	18.5%	0.0%
25 - 34	46.7%	33.3%	12.1%	7.9%
35 - 44	52.4%	30.4%	14.3%	3.0%
45 - 54	55.9%	33.5%	8.0%	2.7%
55 or older	62.6%	24.0%	8.3%	5.1%

### How much do you know about Madison?



Finally, we asked what Americans know about James Madison, “Father of the Constitution,” “Architect of the Bill of Rights,” Congressman, Secretary of State, and President of the United States. From the perspective of the Center for the Constitution at James Madison’s Montpelier, to learn that only 4% of the

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population reports knowing “a lot” about James Madison is very distressing. However, younger people are the most knowledgeable about Madison. An encouraging sign for the future.

Age Group	A lot	Some	Not much
18 - 24	10.9%	42.2%	46.9%
25 - 34	1.2%	45.4%	53.4%
35 - 44	.6%	42.2%	57.2%
45 - 54	1.6%	41.5%	56.9%
55 or older	5.1%	41.5%	53.4%

Young people, however, did not distinguish themselves on specific knowledge questions.

**James Madison was...**



Age Group	A Revolutionary War Hero	President of the United States	A U.S. Supreme Court Justice
18 - 24	19.4%	75.7%	4.9%
25 - 34	17.2%	77.9%	4.8%
35 - 44	9.0%	89.1%	1.9%
45 - 54	5.2%	90.1%	4.7%
55 or older	5.4%	92.0%	2.5%

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**Methodology Statement:**

This report is based upon the findings from a telephone survey of a random sample of adults age 18 and older who reside in the United States between July 20 and July 28, 2010. Live interviewing and sampling were conducted by the Muhlenberg College Institute of Public Opinion. The final number of completed surveys in the national sample was 988 with a resulting margin of error of +/- 3.1% at the 95% level of confidence. However, the margin of error for sub groups (i.e. Democrats, women, etc.) is larger due to smaller sample sizes. In addition to sampling error, the other potential sources of error include non-response, question wording, and interviewer error. The response rate (AAPOR RRI Standard Definition) for the survey was 31%. Ten callbacks were employed in the fielding process. The data reported here are weighted on sex, age, race and region of residence to reflect as closely as possible the demographic composition of adults 18 and older. Percentages may not equal 100 due to rounding. The poll was designed by Dr. Sean O'Brien of the Center for the Constitution at James Madison's Montpelier and Dr. Quentin Kidd of the Wason Center for Public Policy at Christopher Newport University.