



National Survey Finds Just 1 in 3 Americans Would Pass Citizenship Test

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STATE-BY-STATE RESULTS

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Survey Findings

Results of 50-state survey find only four in 10 can demonstrate basic history understanding.

PRINCETON, N.J. (Oct. 3, 2018) – Only one in three Americans (36 percent) can actually pass a multiple-choice test consisting of items taken from the U.S. Citizenship Test, which has a passing score of 60, according to a national survey released today by the Institute for Citizens & Scholars (formerly the Woodrow Wilson National Fellowship Foundation).

Only 13 percent of those surveyed knew when the U.S. Constitution was ratified, even on a multiple-choice exam similar to the citizenship exam, with most incorrectly thinking it occurred in 1776. More than half of respondents (60 percent) didn't know which countries the United States fought in World War II. And despite the recent media spotlight on the U.S. Supreme Court, 57 percent of those surveyed did not know how many Justices actually serve on the nation's highest court.

Most Americans Don't Know the Facts About Country's Founding

The poll, conducted by [Lincoln Park Strategies](#), a nationally recognized full-service analytic research firm that partners with corporate and non-

profit clients around the globe to meet all of their research and data needs, has a margin of error of ± 3 percent with a random sample of 1,000 American citizens. The survey also found that:

- Seventy-two percent of respondents either incorrectly identified or were unsure of which states were part of the 13 original states;
- Only 24 percent could correctly identify one thing Benjamin Franklin was famous for, with 37 percent believing he invented the lightbulb;
- Only 24 percent knew the correct answer as to why the colonists fought the British;
- Twelve percent incorrectly thought WWII General Dwight Eisenhower led troops in the Civil War; 6 percent thought he was a Vietnam War general; and
- While most knew the cause of the Cold War, 2 percent said climate change.

Despite the enormous struggles to demonstrate a basic understanding of American history, most respondents said U.S. history was an appealing subject during their time in school, with 40 percent noting it was their favorite and another 39 percent saying it was somewhere in the middle of favored courses of study.

Age Gaps Exist

Surprisingly, the poll found stark gaps in knowledge depending on age. Those 65 years and older scored the best, with 74 percent answering at least six in 10 questions correctly. For those under the age of 45, only 19 percent passed with the exam, with 81 percent scoring a 59 percent or lower.

State-by-State Results

On Feb. 15, 2019, Citizens & Scholars released a new survey of 41,000 Americans. The results showed that in the highest-performing state, only 53 percent of the people were able to earn a passing grade for U.S. history. **People in every other state failed; in the lowest-performing state, only 27 percent were able to pass.**

Among all 50 states and the District of Columbia, Vermonters were the sole group able to pass the multiple-choice test. Even more disturbing, only 27 percent of those under the age of 45 nationally were able to demonstrate a basic understanding of American history. Nationally, only four in 10 Americans passed the exam.

The survey found only 15 percent of American adults could correctly note the year the U.S. Constitution was written and only 25 percent knew how many amendments there are to the U.S. Constitution. Further, 25 percent did not know that freedom of speech was guaranteed under the First Amendment, and 57 percent did not know that Woodrow Wilson was the commander in chief during World War I.

C&S is developing a critical mass of Americans as effective citizens

How the States Fared

The top four states following Vermont are Wyoming, South Dakota, Montana and Virginia. The five lowest-performing states are Mississippi, Alabama, Arkansas, Kentucky and Louisiana.

State	A (90-100)	B (80-89)	C (70-79)	D (60-69)	F (59 or less)
Vermont	4%	13%	23%	13%	47%
Wyoming	7%	13%	15%	15%	51%
South Dakota	1%	15%	17%	15%	52%
Montana	3%	13%	15%	16%	53%
Virginia	5%	11%	14%	16%	54%
Nebraska	5%	10%	11%	20%	55%
Delaware	6%	9%	17%	14%	55%
Minnesota	2%	8%	17%	18%	55%
North Dakota	1%	8%	15%	21%	55%
Utah	5%	10%	17%	13%	55%
Maine	2%	10%	18%	14%	56%
Kansas	2%	11%	12%	18%	56%
Iowa	4%	12%	13%	14%	57%
New Hampshire	5%	8%	13%	17%	57%
Illinois	3%	9%	16%	15%	57%
Arizona	2%	8%	17%	16%	58%
Connecticut	3%	11%	14%	15%	58%

D.C.	7%	12%	15%	9%	58%
Massachusetts	3%	10%	14%	14%	58%
Rhode Island	4%	10%	13%	16%	58%
Wisconsin	3%	10%	14%	15%	58%
New Jersey	3%	11%	14%	14%	58%
Maryland	4%	10%	13%	14%	59%
Ohio	4%	9%	14%	15%	59%
Idaho	2%	9%	17%	14%	59%
Nevada	2%	11%	12%	16%	59%
Colorado	2%	10%	14%	15%	59%
Oregon	3%	11%	13%	14%	60%
Pennsylvania	4%	9%	12%	15%	60%
Washington	3%	9%	15%	13%	60%
California	4%	8%	13%	15%	60%
New York	4%	11%	11%	13%	60%
Hawaii	3%	7%	14%	16%	60%
Missouri	3%	8%	14%	15%	61%
North Carolina	4%	8%	13%	14%	61%
Florida	2%	7%	14%	15%	62%
Tennessee	3%	10%	12%	13%	62%
New Mexico	1%	12%	11%	14%	63%
Oklahoma	4%	7%	13%	14%	63%
Texas	3%	7%	12%	15%	63%
Indiana	3%	8%	12%	14%	64%
Michigan	2%	7%	14%	13%	64%
Alaska	3%	7%	10%	15%	65%
South Carolina	3%	7%	10%	14%	66%
West Virginia	5%	5%	5%	19%	66%
Georgia	3%	8%	11%	12%	67%
Mississippi	2%	7%	10%	13%	69%
Alabama	2%	7%	10%	12%	69%
Arkansas	3%	5%	10%	12%	70%
Kentucky	1%	6%	11%	11%	71%
Louisiana	4%	6%	9%	9%	73%

Lincoln Park Strategies conducted the poll for Citizens & Scholars (formerly the Woodrow Wilson National Fellowship Foundation). It

involved 41,000 interviews among adults nationwide. The margin of error is approximately ± 1.0 percent.

Snapshot Civic Education Policy Snapshot

Updated March 25, 2025 | Lauren Gendill

Related Topic:

5 Things to Know About Civic Education

- Civics, also called civic education or civic learning, can broadly be defined as “the lifelong process that makes people into informed and engaged members of their communities—which range from schools and towns or neighborhoods to the whole nation and even the world,” according to [iCivics](#).
- Civic education in elementary and secondary schools can build students’ [knowledge, skills and dispositions to communicate ideas with others and contribute to their communities](#). [Research suggests](#) that individuals who learn about civics are more likely to vote and participate in civic activities.
- A [recent survey](#) found that 1 in 6 American adults cannot name any branch of government. Data from the [National Assessment of Educational Progress](#) indicates that student performance in civics education decreased between 2018 and 2022, with average scores showing no significant difference from when the assessment was first administered in 1998.
- State legislative activity on K-12 civic education has [increased in recent years](#). Since 2023, at least 23 states and the District of Columbia have enacted legislation related to the topic.
- Enacted legislation features various approaches to enhance K-12 civic education including but not limited to revising social studies standards, requiring civics courses and digital and media literacy instruction, creating conditions for assessments, establishing high school graduation requirements and recognition programs, providing for professional development for educators, allocating funding and forming commissions and task forces.

5 States That Enacted Civic Education Policies Within the Last 5 Years

- **Kentucky**

[HB 535 \(2024\)](#) requires high school students to successfully complete a one-half credit civic literacy course or a civics test to graduate. Relatedly, the bill prescribes civic literacy course components and establishes reporting measures.

- **Connecticut**

[HB 6762 \(2023\)](#) requires public schools to provide instruction on civics and media literacy. The bill also establishes the Civics Education, Civics Engagement and Media Literacy Task Force to study and develop strategies for civic engagement and instruction on civics, citizenship, media literacy and American government, including those for high school and college students.

[SB 154 \(2024\)](#) amends membership of the Civics Education, Civics Engagement and Media Literacy Task Force to include a high school student and a college student.

- **Indiana**

[HB 1384 \(2021\)](#) establishes the Civic Education Commission and requires the State Board of Education, in coordination with the Department of Education, to establish standards for civics education. The bill additionally requires students to successfully complete a one-semester civics education course in grade six, seven or eight.

[SB 211 \(2024\)](#) requires the Department of Education, in coordination with the Commission for Higher Education and subject to the approval of the State Board, to establish criteria for an excellence in civic engagement designation for high school students. The department is also required to develop recommendations for an excellence in civics education designation for schools.

- **New Hampshire**

[SB 216 \(2023\)](#) requires class time for civics in elementary school, a half-year civics course in middle school, and a half-year civics course and a one-year history and government course in high school. The legislation additionally clarifies existing civic assessment graduation requirements to apply to public, chartered public, non-public schools and privately incorporated schools serving as public schools.

- **Rhode Island**

HB 5028 (2021) requires middle and high school students to demonstrate proficiency in civics education as defined by their local school district. The bill also directs school districts to provide at least one student-led civics project during either middle or high school.