

**HB**

**89**

<TARGET><BILL>HB 89</BILL><SUBJECT>HB  
89</SUBJECT><COMM>HEDC29</COMM></TARGET>

# ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE

**Interim:**

600 East Railroad Avenue  
Wasilla, Alaska 99654  
Phone (907) 373-1842  
Fax: (907) 373-4729



**Session:**

State Capitol Building  
Juneau, Alaska 99801-1182  
Phone: (907) 465-2186  
Fax: (907) 465-3818

## REPRESENTATIVE WES KELLER DISTRICT 10

### MEMO

To: Representative Wes Keller

Fm: Jim Pound, Staff 

Date: January 30, 2015

Re: Request to hear HB 89 (29-LS0443\W)

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Please consider this as a request to schedule HB 89 "Secondary School Civics Exam Graduation requirement" for consideration by the House Education Committee. HB 89 is legislation that will assure that our young people understand the basics of our country.

High school students wishing to receive a diploma will have to take the United States Citizenship and Immigration Services exam. This is the test that immigrants are required to know the answers to before becoming citizens.

I have included a complete printed copy of the packet information needed and submitted an electronic version to your staff. If you have any questions please feel free to contact me.

E-Mail: [Representative.Wes.Keller@akleg.gov](mailto:Representative.Wes.Keller@akleg.gov)

Call Juneau Toll free: (800) 468-2186

Website: [www.akrepublicans.org/keller/](http://www.akrepublicans.org/keller/)

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## REPRESENTATIVE WES KELLER DISTRICT 10

### SPONSOR STATEMENT

#### HB 89

**“An Act relating to civics examinations and secondary school graduation requirements; and providing for an effective date.”**

If you sat down and another person asked you questions about American Government and History could you answer 60 percent of them correctly? About 93 percent of immigrants wishing to become citizens can. About 65 percent of Americans can.

House Bill 89 is designed to increase that average in Alaska. Not because it makes you great at Trivial Pursuit but because it make you a better American and Alaskan. House Bill 89 will require high school students to take a 100 question test and answer 60 of them correctly in order to receive a high school diploma. Studying for the test is as easy as going on the internet. The questions, and all of the answers are right there.

Administering the test can be accomplished just as easily with the local district deciding how they want to offer it. Short answers or multiple choice. HB 89 does not dictate how to do it, only that it needs to be done.

Our young people are very active in the political system, unfortunately, often without all of the information they need. HB 89 gives them basics to work from so they will understand the system a little better.

E-Mail: [Representative.Wes.Keller@akleg.gov](mailto:Representative.Wes.Keller@akleg.gov)  
Call Juneau Toll free: (800) 468-2186  
Website: [www.housemajority.org/keller/](http://www.housemajority.org/keller/)

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## REPRESENTATIVE WES KELLER DISTRICT 10

### MEMO

To: Members of the Alaska Legislature

Fm: Rep. Wes Keller

Date: January 30, 2015

Re: Sectional of HB 89 (29-LS0443\W)

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House Bill 89 is broken into five sections:

1. Adds language to the requirements for high school graduation unless waived for certain students that requires passage of the United States Citizenship exam to receive a high school diploma.
2. Establishes that passing requires a score of 60 out of 100.
3. Once a student has passed the test the district will be required to document that passage on the student's transcript.
4. Gives the state board the authority to write regulations for the civics examination including addressing waivers for certain students.
5. Effective date

Please note that a sectional summary of a bill should not be considered an authoritative interpretation of the bill and the bill itself is the best statement of its contents.

E-Mail: [Representative.Wes.Keller@akleg.gov](mailto:Representative.Wes.Keller@akleg.gov)

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Website: [www.akrepublicans.org/keller/](http://www.akrepublicans.org/keller/)

**Thirty Questions**  
**from the new USCIS 100 History and Government Test (Part B)**

- 01. Why did the colonists fight the British? (61)**  
a) because of communism                      b) because of high taxes                      c) because of slavery
- 02. Who wrote the Declaration of Independence? (62)**  
a) (Alexander) Hamilton                      b) (George) Washington                      c) (Thomas) Jefferson
- 03. When was the Declaration of Independence adopted? (63)**  
a) July 4, 1776                      b) September 17, 1787                      c) December 15, 1791
- 04. There were 13 original states. Name three. (64)**  
a) Florida                      c) Ohio                      e) Vermont  
b) Massachusetts                      d) Pennsylvania                      f) Virginia
- 05. What happened at the Constitutional Convention? (65)**  
a) The Bill of Rights was written.                      c) The Federalist Papers were written.  
b) The Constitution was written.                      d) The Star Spangled Banner was written
- 06. What territory did the United States buy from France in 1803? (71)**  
a) the Florida Territory                      b) the Louisiana Territory                      c) the Texas Territory
- 07. Name one war fought by the United States in the 1800s. (72)**  
a) the Civil War                      b) the World War I                      c) the Revolutionary War
- 08. Name the U.S. war between the North and the South. (73)**  
a) the Civil War                      b) the World War I                      c) the Revolutionary War
- 09. Name one problem that led to the Civil War. (74)**  
a) Communism                      b) High Taxes                      c) Slavery
- 10. What was one important thing that Abraham Lincoln did? (75)**  
a) fought against terrorism                      b) freed the slaves                      c) lowered taxes
- 11. Who did the United States fight in World War II? (81)**  
a) Australia, New Zealand, South Africa                      c) England, France, and Russia  
b) China, Japan, Vietnam                      d) Japan, Germany, and Italy
- 12. Before he was President, Eisenhower was a general. What war was he in? (82)**  
a) the Civil War                      b) the World War II                      c) the Revolutionary War
- 13. During the Cold War, what was the main concern of the United States? (83)**  
a) Communism                      b) High Taxes                      c) Slavery
- 14. What movement tried to end racial discrimination? (84)**  
a) civil rights movement                      b) temperance movement                      c) no new taxes movement
- 15. What did Martin Luther King, Jr. do? (85)**  
a) fought for civil rights                      b) fought for separate schools                      c) fought for lower taxes





# CIVICS EDUCATION INITIATIVE

100 Facts Every High School Student Should Know

## Frequently Asked Questions

- Q. What problem is addressed by the Civics Education Initiative?**  
A. *Too few citizens know and understand basic American civics - how our government works and who we are as a nation. By example, according to the Pew Research Center, only about one-third of Americans can name the three branches of government, much less say what each does.*
- Q. What is the impact of this lack of civics knowledge?**  
A. *If you don't know how our government works, you're not likely to be an active and engaged citizen. It's no wonder so few citizens vote, given this lack of basic civics knowledge.*
- Q. Why isn't civics being better taught in our schools today?**  
A. *Education funding is increasingly tied to high-stakes testing on reading, math and science, with a particular focus on STEM subjects - science, technology, engineering, math. While important, this emphasis is leaving civics as a secondary subject or in some cases, not being taught all together.*
- Q. How does the Civics Education Initiative address this problem?**  
A. *The Civics Education Initiative is simple in concept. It requires High School students, as a condition for graduation, to pass a test on 100 basic facts of US history and civics taken from the United States Citizenship Civics Test - the test all immigrants applying for US citizenship must pass.*
- Q. How do immigrants taking the test compare to our own High School students?**  
A. *According to the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Service (USCIS), 92% of immigrants who take the required civics test for citizenship pass. Yet studies by the Annenberg Foundation show that a third of all U.S. citizens can't name even one branch of our federal government.*
- Q. Why use this specific USCIS US Citizenship Civics test?**  
A. *We already require by Federal law that new citizens must learn these 100 facts so they can be prepared to be active and engaged citizens. By using this well-established test, there is no cost to develop a new test, next to no cost involved to administer the test, and a myriad of study materials for this test already exist.*
- Q. What does the Civics Education Initiative legislative language specifically say?**  
A. *All (State) High School students, attending any public or charter school, or a student seeking a general educational development (GED) equivalency, shall, as a condition of High School graduation or its equivalency, take and receive a passing grade on the United States Citizenship Civics Test, produced by the United States Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS). The test shall be the specific 100-questions used by the United States Citizenship and Immigration Service (USCIS) and administered to all applicants for US citizenship. High School students shall be tested on all 100 questions, with a minimum score of 60% being required for passage. High School Students may take the test as many times as necessary for passage, but must pass the test prior to receiving a certificate of High School graduation or a GED equivalency. All (State) schools shall certify that a student has taken the test and received a passing grade on the test, in a way it deems as adequate to ensure the requirements of this Act are followed.*
- Q. Is the Civics Education Initiative a popular idea?**  
A. *Overwhelmingly so! A recent national survey showed 74 percent of likely voters support or strongly support the Civics Education Initiative, including overwhelming support among Men - 78%, Women - 71%, Republicans - 84%, Independents - 75%, Democrats - 68%, Anglos - 76%, Hispanics - 76%, and African American - 60%.*
- Q. Who is promoting the Civics Education Initiative effort?**  
A. *The Civics Initiative [www.CivicsEducationInitiative.com](http://www.CivicsEducationInitiative.com) is project of the Joe Foss Institute [www.JoeFossInstitute.org](http://www.JoeFossInstitute.org) as part of its continuing efforts to promote an appreciation for America's freedoms, public service, patriotism and integrity. The Civics Education Initiative National Board of Advisors includes former US Supreme Court Justice Sandra Day O'Connor, former New York Mayor Rudy Giuliani, Pulitzer winning journalist Carl Bernstein and award winning actor Joe Mantegna.*
- Q. What are the goals and timing of the Civics Education Initiative?**  
A. *The Civics Education Initiative has as its goal the enactment of legislation in all 50 states by September 17<sup>th</sup> 2017 - the 230<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the U.S. Constitution.*

# U.S. NATURALIZATION CIVICS TEST



NATIONAL SURVEY OF NATIVE-BORN U.S. CITIZENS  
MARCH 2012

*As Americans Prepare to Exercise Civic Duty This Fall,  
Too Many Remain Uninformed*



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**AMERICAN DREAM**

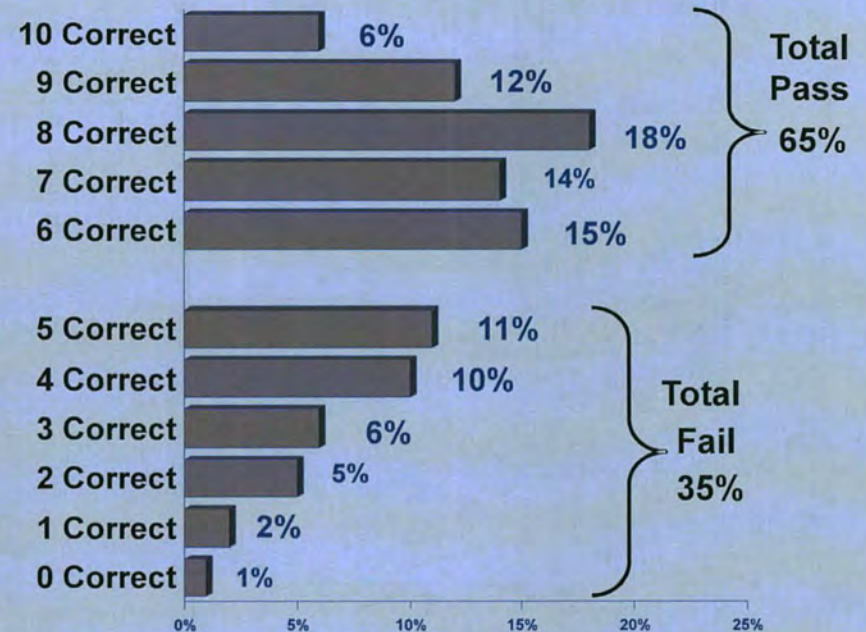
[www.xavier.edu/american dream](http://www.xavier.edu/american dream)

# Key Findings

- **One in three native-born citizens failed** the civics portion of the naturalization test, in stark contrast to the 97.5% pass rate among immigrants applying for citizenship.\* (Based on 6 of 10 questions answered correctly.)
- If the pass rate were 7 out of 10, **one half of all native-born citizens would fail.**

## Native-Born Citizens' Civics Exam Results

Number of Questions Answered Correctly



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\*Pass rate for first-time test takers, [Civics component of the nationalization test](#), see [Table 1](#)

# Key Findings



- While native-born citizens do well on basic questions related to history and geography, the results reveal a **low level of knowledge concerning the principles and features of American government that underlie our civic life.**
- Gaps in familiarity and awareness are in **two primary areas:**
  - The U.S. constitution and the governmental, legal and political structure of American democracy
  - Basic facts related to current political life and identification of key political decision-makers
  - **In fact, in straight rank order, these questions elicited the highest incorrect scores.**



## Questions with the lowest percentage of correct responses: familiarity with the Constitution and basic principles of democracy

Question	% Correct
How many amendments does the Constitution have?	7%
The Federalist Papers supported the passage of the U.S. constitution. Name <u>one</u> of the writers.	8%
When was the Constitution written?	9%
What is the rule of law?	15%
The House of Representatives has how many voting members?	16%
What are <u>two</u> rights in the Declaration of Independence?	18%
Who was President during World War One?	21%
Under the Constitution, some powers belong to the states. What is <u>one</u> power of the states?	23%
What does the judicial branch do?	25%



## Questions with the lowest percentage of correct responses (cont'd): awareness of key political decision-makers and government institutions

Question	% Correct
Who is the Chief Justice of the United States now?	26%
We elect a U.S. Senator for how many years?	29%
What is the supreme law of the land?	29%
How many justices are on the Supreme Court?	32%
How many U.S. Senators are there?	36%
What did Susan B. Anthony do?	37%
Who is <u>one</u> of your state's U.S. Senators now?	37%
Who is the Governor of your state now?	38%
What happened at the Constitutional Convention?	38%
What is the name of the Speaker of the House of Representatives now?	38%



## Questions with the highest percentage of correct responses: knowledge of geography, national symbols and holidays

Question	% Correct
Why does the flag have 50 stars?	100%
What is the name of the President of the United States now?	99%
What major event happened on September 11, 2001?	98%
What is the capital of the United States?	97%
When do we celebrate Independence Day?	97%
What is the capital of your state?	96%
What ocean is on the West Coast of the United States?	96%
Name two national U.S. holidays.	96%
Where is the Statue of Liberty?	96%
Name one state that borders Mexico.	95%
What are the 2 major political parties in the United States?	94%



## Questions with the highest percentage correct responses (cont'd): facts about the Presidency and basic American history

Question	% Correct
If the President can no longer serve, who becomes President?	94%
We elect a President for how many years?	93%
What do we show loyalty to when we say the Pledge of Allegiance?	93%
Who was the first President?	93%
Name <u>one</u> war fought by the United States in the 1900s.	93%
How old do citizens have to be to vote for President?	92%
What is the highest court in the United States?	92%
What is the political party of the President now?	92%
What group of people was taken to America and sold as slaves?	91%
What did Martin Luther King, Jr. do?	91%
In what month do we vote for President?	90%



**Constitution,  
Governance,  
Democracy**

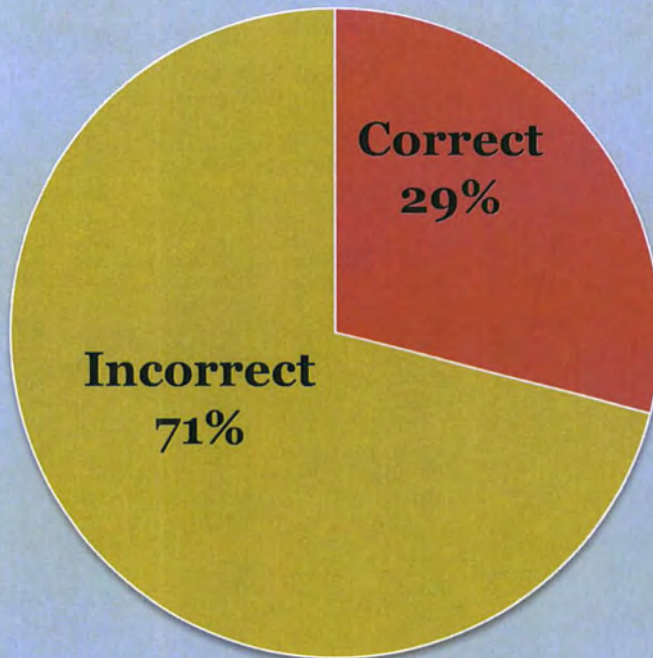
Beyond general familiarity with the Constitution, gaps appear regarding its function and content.

Question	% Correct
The idea of self-government is in the first three words of the Constitution. What are these words?	61%
What do we call the first ten amendments to the Constitution?	58%
What does the Constitution do?	46%
There are four amendments to the Constitution about who can vote. Describe <u>one</u> of them.	46%
What is an amendment?	43%
How many amendments does the Constitution have?	7%

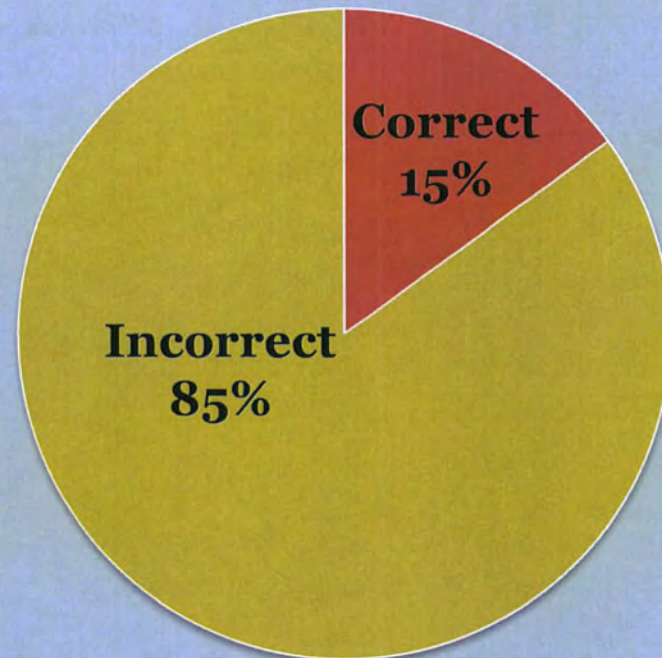


Few can identify the Constitution as the supreme law of the land or define the “rule of law.”

**Q: What is the supreme law of the land?**



**Q: What is the rule of law?**



## Constitution, Governance, Democracy

### Less than half can identify the rights and responsibilities of citizenship

Question	% Correct
When must all men register for the Selective Service?	82%
What are two ways Americans can participate in their democracy?	66%
What is one promise you make when you become a U.S. citizen?	52%
What is one responsibility that is only for U.S. citizens?	50%
What are two rights of everyone living in the United States?	47%
Name one right only for U.S. citizens.	41%

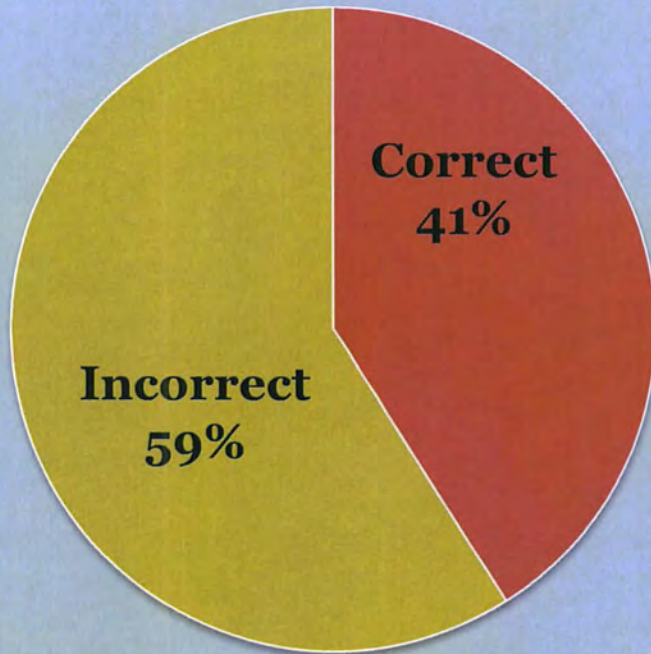
*Many incorrectly believe that the freedoms guaranteed by the Constitution, such as the freedom of expression, assembly and worship, only apply to citizens instead of everyone living in the United States.*



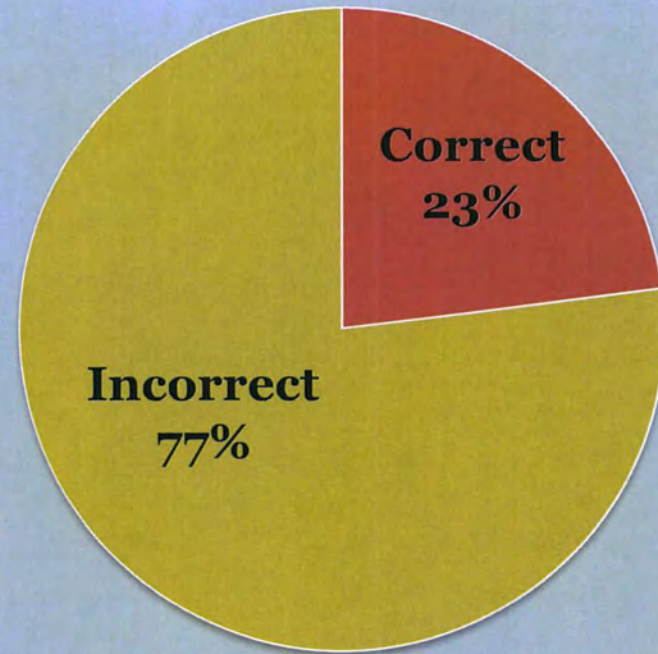
## Government Structure

There is confusion and misunderstanding regarding the powers granted to the federal government and the states.

**Q: What is one power of the federal government?**



**Q: What is one power of the states?**



## Government Structure

# Citizen identification of high profile public decision-makers is alarmingly low

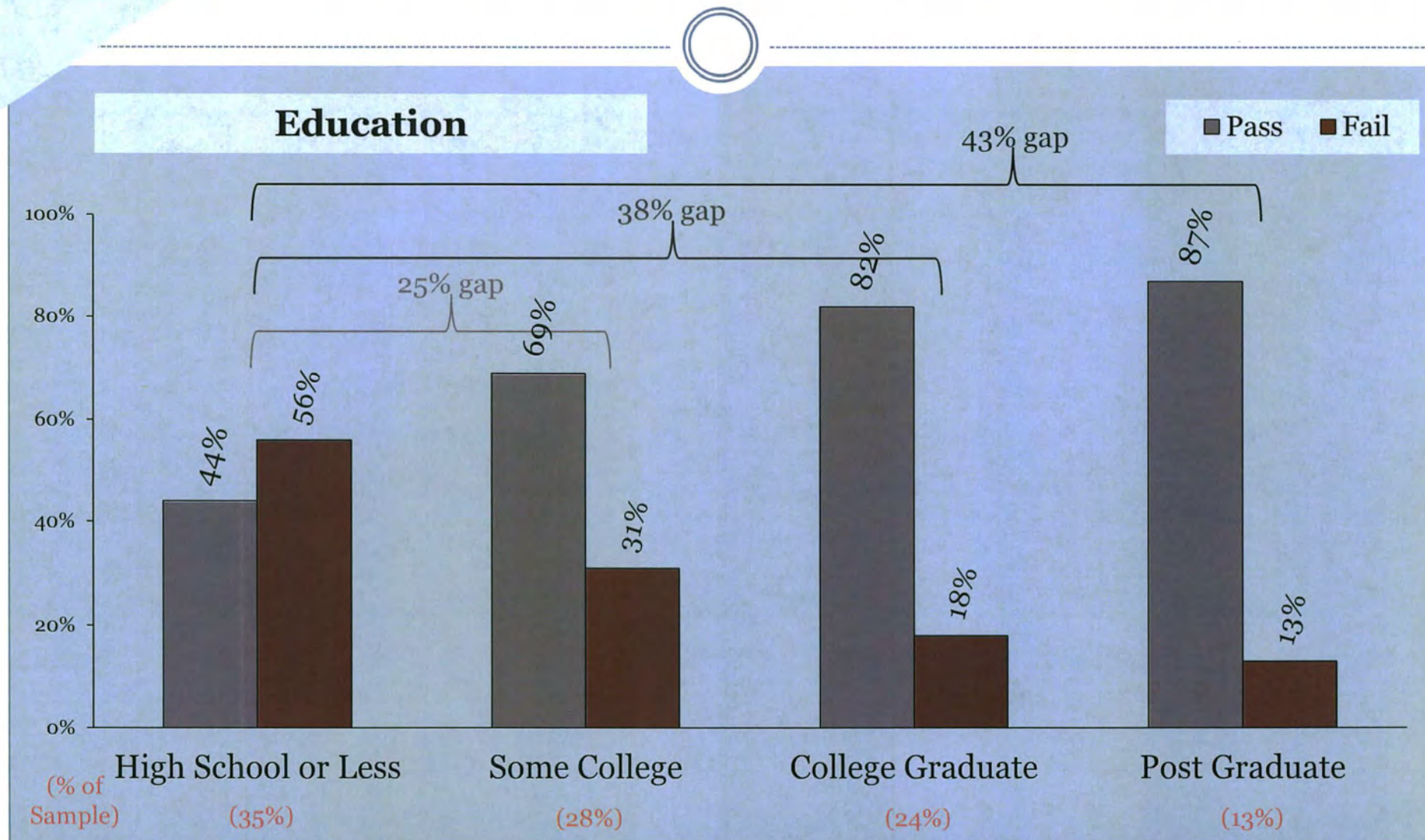
Question	% Correct
What is the name of the President of the United States now?	99%
What is the name of the Vice President of the United States right now?	71%
Who is the Governor of your state now?	38%
What is the name of the Speaker of the House of Representatives now?	38%
Who is one of your state's U.S. Senators now?	37%
Who is the Chief Justice of the United States now?	26%

*As noted on page five, excluding the questions on the President and Vice President, these questions are among the lowest percentage of correct responses.*



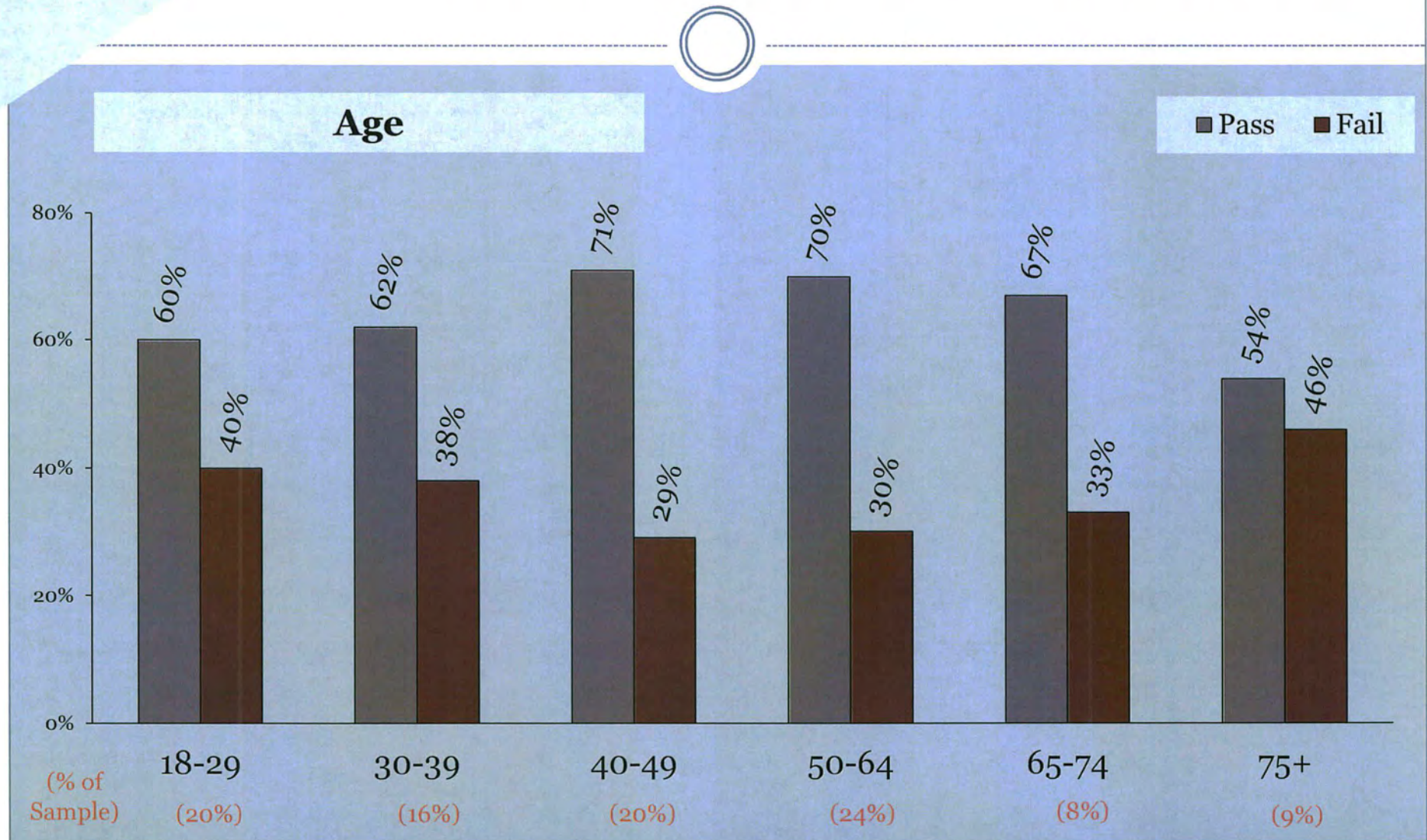
# Demographic Breakdown

Passage is most heavily correlated with education level.



## Demographic Breakdown

Middle-aged citizens have highest pass rates.



# Methodology



- 1,023 telephone interviews with native born U.S. citizens age 18+ nation wide using random digit dial methodology
- Interviews conducted by Fairbank, Maslin, Maullin, Metz & Associates (FM3) on February 29-March 11, 2012 on landlines and mobile phones
- Margin of sampling error is +/- 3.1%
- Research design replicated the Citizenship and Immigration Services (CIS) exam given to immigrants seeking naturalization
- Questions were asked verbatim on the survey as they appear in the [official civics test](#)\*



# Methodology



- Each respondent was asked 10 of 99 potential questions from the CIS naturalization test.\*
- The sample was segmented so that each of the 99 questions was asked of approximately 100 respondents with the exception of 10 questions, which were asked of an additional 10 respondents to compensate for the uneven number of questions.
- Each respondent received questions balanced across topics related to American Government, American History, and what CIS labels as Integrated Civics, as well as type of answer: single or multiple response, fact or concept.
- A passing score is 6 out of 10 questions answered correctly.



For more information, contact:



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CENTER FOR THE STUDY OF THE  
**AMERICAN DREAM**

# Study: One in Three Americans Fails Naturalization Civics Test

**Native-born Americans fare worse on civics exam than immigrants applying for citizenship.**

By [Brian Greene](#) April 30, 2012 | 4:05 p.m. EDT + More

As Americans prepare to pick the next president of the United States in November, [a survey out of the Center for the Study of the American Dream](#) at Xavier University finds that one out of three U.S. citizens fails the civics portion of the immigrant naturalization test. The survey of more than 1,000 voting-age Americans asked respondents 10 random questions from the United States Citizenship and Immigration Services civics exam, which is administered as part of the immigration process, finding that 35 percent answered five or less questions correctly. More than 97 percent of immigrants applying for citizenship pass the test.

Native-born citizens fared best on questions related to history and geography and struggled most with questions about the function of government, specifically on questions about the Constitution and those that asked to identify current policy-makers. Other parts of the study show respondents were overwhelmingly confused about powers granted to the federal government and those granted to individual states.

Here are some questions that gave respondents the most trouble:

- 85 percent could not define "the rule of law."
- 75 percent did not know function of the judicial branch.
- 71 percent were unable to identify the Constitution as the "supreme law of the land."
- 63 percent could not name one of their state's Senators.
- 62 percent did not know the name the Speaker of the U.S. House of Representatives.
- 62 percent could not identify the Governor of their state.
- 57 percent could not define an "amendment."

A [concurrent survey](#) found that almost 77 percent of Americans believe that all native-born citizens should be able to pass the civics portion of the naturalization test and 60 percent think that passing it should be requisite for receiving a high school diploma.