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Large Majorities See Checks and Balances, Right to Protest as Essential for Democracy

77% say it would be 'too risky' to give presidents more power

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Large Majorities See Checks and Balances, Right to Protest as Essential for Democracy

77% say it would be ‘too risky’ to give presidents more power

Large majorities of the public, Republicans and Democrats alike, say open and fair elections and a system of governmental checks and balances are essential to maintaining a strong democracy in the United States.

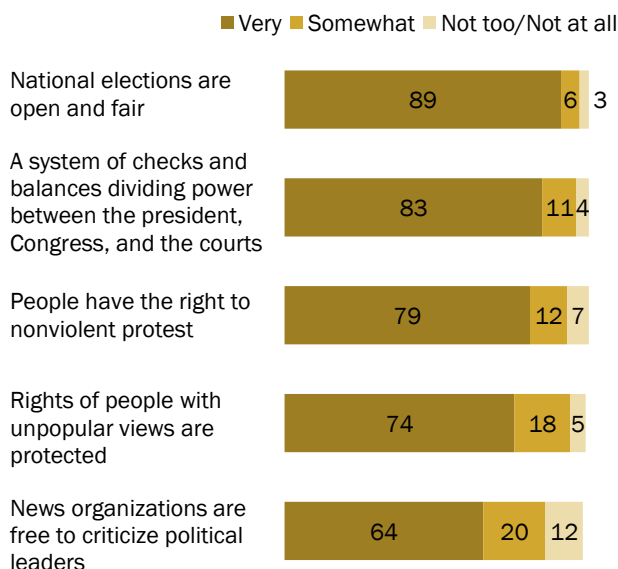
However, there is less consensus about the importance of other aspects of a strong democracy – notably, the freedom of news organizations to criticize political leaders.

The survey by Pew Research Center, conducted Feb. 7-12 among 1,503 adults, finds that 89% say fair and open national elections are very important to maintaining a strong democracy, while 83% say the same about a system of checks and balances dividing power between the president, Congress and the courts.

As in [past surveys](#), most also view the right to nonviolent protest (79%) and protecting the rights of those with unpopular views (74%) as very important components of a strong democracy. A smaller majority (64%) says the freedom of news organizations to criticize political leaders is essential to maintain a strong democracy in the U.S.

Broad public agreement on importance of many aspects of a strong democracy

% who say each is _____ important to maintaining a strong democracy in the United States



Note: Don't know responses not shown.
Source: Survey conducted Feb. 7-12, 2017.

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The survey also finds that there is little appetite among the public for increasing presidential power relative to the other branches of government.

Just 17% of Americans say that “many of the country’s problems could be dealt with more effectively if U.S. presidents didn’t have to worry so much about Congress or the courts,” while 77% take the view that “it would be too risky to give U.S. presidents more power to deal directly with many of the country’s problems” – including sizable majorities of Democrats and Democratic-leaning independents (87%) and Republicans and Republican leaners (65%).

Most Americans say it would be too risky to give presidents more power

% who say

It would be too risky to give U.S. presidents more power to deal directly with many of the country's problems

Problems could be dealt with more effectively if presidents didn't have to worry so much about Congress or the courts

77

17

Note: Don't know responses not shown.
Source: Survey conducted Feb. 7-12, 2017.

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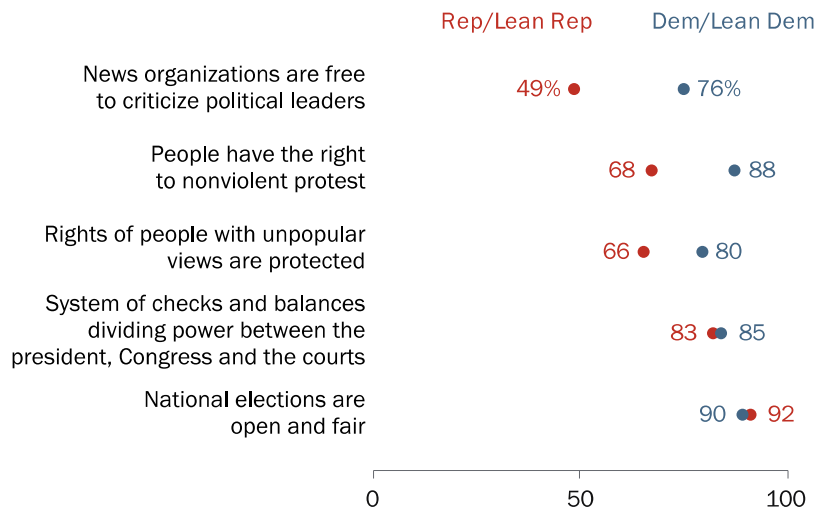
Views about what is important for a strong democracy

For the most part, views of the important components of a strong democracy have changed little since October, late in the presidential campaign. And the partisan differences that were evident then persist today (the item about governmental checks and balances was not included in October).

Nearly all Republicans and Republican-leaning independents (92%) and Democrats and Democratic leaners (90%) view open and fair elections as very important to maintaining a strong democracy. In addition, large majorities in both parties (83% of Republicans, 85% of Democrats) view a system of checks and balances as very important for a strong democracy.

Partisans differ widely on importance of freedom of press to criticize politicians

% who say ___ is very important to maintaining a strong democracy in the United States



Note: Don't know responses not shown.
Source: Survey conducted Feb. 7-12, 2017.

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Republicans (68%) are less likely than Democrats (88%) to view the right to nonviolent protest as very important. Similarly, while majorities in both parties say it is very important that the rights of people with unpopular views are protected, fewer Republicans (66%) than Democrats (80%) say this.

The sharpest partisan disagreement is over the importance of the freedom of news organizations to criticize political leaders. About three-quarters of Democrats (76%) say the freedom of the press to criticize politicians is very important to maintaining a strong democracy; only about half of Republicans (49%) say the same.

Those 65 and older are somewhat less likely (69%) than those younger than 65 (75%) to say that protecting the rights of those with unpopular views is very important for maintaining a strong democracy. And a similar age gap is evident when it comes to protecting the right to nonviolent protest (72% of older adults, compared with 81% of those under 65 say this is very important).

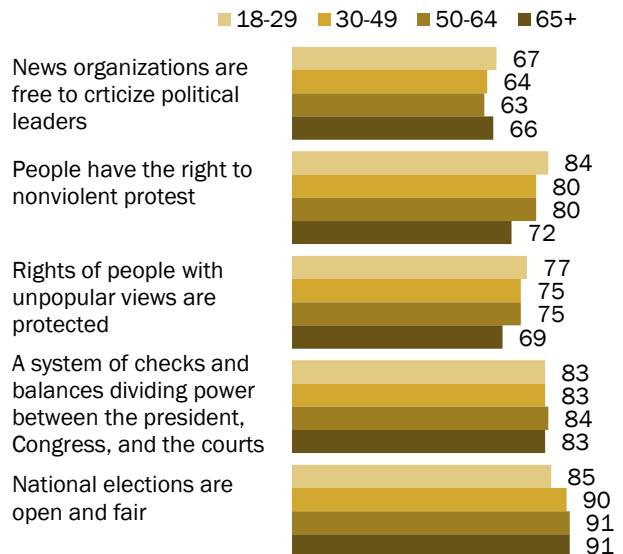
There is little difference across age groups in the importance given to checks and balances, open and fair elections, and press freedom to maintaining a strong American democracy.

Across the board, those with higher levels of education are significantly more likely to consider each of these values very important to maintaining a strong democracy.

And these educational gaps are found within both parties: For instance, while 74% of Republicans with a college degree say it is very important to protect the rights of people with unpopular views, a smaller majority (63%) of those without a college degree say this. Among Democrats, 92% of those with a college degree say this, compared with 74% of those who have not graduated from college.

Few age differences in importance given to several democratic values

% who say _____ is **very important** to maintaining a strong democracy in the United States



Source: Survey conducted Feb. 7-12, 2017.

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Few support increasing presidential power relative to other branches

Americans overwhelmingly think that it would be too risky to give U.S. presidents more power to deal directly with many of the country's problems: 77% say this, while just 17% say that problems could be dealt with more effectively if U.S.

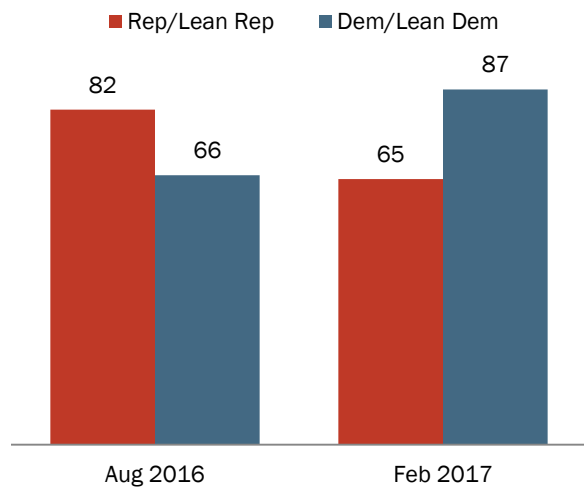
presidents didn't have to worry so much about Congress or the courts.

When a similar question was asked six months ago, a wide majority also expressed skepticism about increasing presidential power (77% now, 72% then).

The sense that increasing presidential power would be "too risky" has grown among Democrats since August, when Barack Obama was still president: While a 66% majority said giving presidents greater powers would be too risky in August, nearly nine-in-ten (87%) now say this. Conversely, while 82% of Republicans expressed concern about increasing presidential powers relative to the other branches of government in August, a smaller majority (65%) say this today.

Post-election partisan shift in views of risks of increased presidential power

% who say it would be too risky to give presidents more power to deal directly with the country's problems



Source: Survey conducted Feb. 7-12, 2017.

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Acknowledgements

This report is a collaborative effort based on the input and analysis of the following individuals:

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Methodology

The analysis in this report is based on telephone interviews conducted February 7-12, 2017 among a national sample of 1,503 adults, 18 years of age or older, living in all 50 U.S. states and the District of Columbia (377 respondents were interviewed on a landline telephone, and 1,126 were interviewed on a cell phone, including 680 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 and Spanish. 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://www.pewresearch.org/methodology/u-s-survey-research/>

The combined landline and cell phone sample are weighted using an iterative technique that matches gender, age, education, race, Hispanic origin and nativity and region to parameters from the 2015 Census Bureau's American Community Survey and population density to parameters from the Decennial Census. The sample also is weighted to match current patterns of telephone status (landline only, cell phone only, or both landline and cell phone), based on extrapolations from the 2016 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 among respondents with a landline phone. The margins of error reported and statistical tests of significance are adjusted to account for the survey's design effect, a measure of how much efficiency is lost from the weighting procedures.

The following table shows the unweighted sample sizes and the error attributable to sampling that would be expected at the 95% level of confidence for different groups in the survey:

Survey conducted Feb. 7-12, 2017

Group	Unweighted sample size	Plus or minus ...
Total sample	1,503	2.9 percentage points
Republican/Lean Rep	581	4.7 percentage points
Democrat/Lean Dem	797	4.0 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.

Pew Research Center undertakes all polling activity, including calls to mobile telephone numbers, in compliance with the Telephone Consumer Protection Act and other applicable laws.

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**PEW RESEARCH CENTER
FEBRUARY 2017 POLITICAL SURVEY
FINAL TOPLINE
FEBRUARY 7-12, 2017
N=1,503**

QUESTIONS 1-2, 5-6, 10, 15-16, 19, 35-37, 39, 43-45, 52-55 PREVIOUSLY RELEASED

NO QUESTIONS 3-4, 7-9, 11-14, 17-18, 20-34, 38, 40-42, 46-51, 56-60

ASK ALL:

Next,

Q.61 How important are each of the following to the United States maintaining a strong democracy. First, **[INSERT ITEM; RANDOMIZE]**. Is this very important, somewhat important, not too important, or not at all important to maintaining a strong democracy? How about **[NEXT ITEM]**? **[IF NECESSARY: How important is [ITEM] to maintaining a strong democracy in the United States? Is this very, somewhat, not too, or not at all important?]**

	<u>Very important</u>	<u>Somewhat important</u>	<u>Not too important</u>	<u>Not at all important</u>	(VOL.) DK/Ref
a. That the rights of people with unpopular views are protected					
Feb 7-12, 2017	74	18	3	2	3
Oct 20-25, 2016 (RVs)	77	18	1	1	2
b. That national elections are open and fair					
Feb 7-12, 2017	89	6	2	1	2
Oct 20-25, 2016 (RVs)	90	6	2	1	1
c. That news organizations are free to criticize political leaders					
Feb 7-12, 2017	64	20	5	6	4
Oct 20-25, 2016 (RVs)	61	22	6	8	3
d. That people have the right to non-violent protest					
Feb 7-12, 2017	79	12	4	3	2
Oct 20-25, 2016 (RVs)	78	17	2	2	1
e. That there is a system of checks and balances dividing power between the President, Congress, and the courts					
Feb 7-12, 2017	83	11	2	2	2

QUESTIONS 55, 62-63, 64-65 PREVIOUSLY RELEASED

Next,

ASK ALL:

Q.66 Which comes closer to your view — even if neither is exactly right. [**READ IN ORDER**].

Feb 7-12 2017		Aug 9-16 2016 ¹
17	Many of the country's problems could be dealt with more effectively if U.S. presidents didn't have to worry so much about Congress or the courts	23
77	It would be too risky to give U.S. presidents more power to deal directly with many of the country's problems	72
6	Don't know/Refused (VOL.)	5

QUESTIONS 68-71, 74-75, 81-82, 84a-f, 92-94 PREVIOUSLY RELEASED

NO QUESTIONS 67, 72-73, 76-80, 83, 85-87, 89

QUESTIONS 84g, 88, 90-91 HELD FOR FUTURE RELEASE

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?

	Republican	Democrat	Independent	(VOL.) No preference	(VOL.) Other party	(VOL.) DK/Ref	Lean Rep	Lean Dem
Feb 7-12, 2017	23	34	37	3	1	2	15	18
Jan 4-9, 2017	25	28	41	4	*	1	18	19
Nov 30-Dec 5, 2016	24	33	35	5	1	3	15	16
Oct 20-25, 2016	26	33	36	3	*	2	15	17
Aug 23-Sep 2, 2016	27	32	33	5	*	3	11	16
Aug 9-16, 2016	27	32	35	2	1	2	13	16
Jun 15-26, 2016	24	33	37	4	1	2	16	16
Apr 12-19, 2016	25	32	37	3	1	2	16	17
Mar 17-26, 2016	25	31	38	3	*	2	15	20
Yearly Totals								
2016	25.4	32.0	36.5	3.4	.5	2.2	14.6	17.0
2015	23.7	30.4	40.1	3.6	.4	1.8	16.4	17.3
2014	23.2	31.5	39.5	3.1	.7	2.0	16.2	16.5
2013	23.9	32.1	38.3	2.9	.5	2.2	16.0	16.0
2012	24.7	32.6	36.4	3.1	.5	2.7	14.4	16.1
2011	24.3	32.3	37.4	3.1	.4	2.5	15.7	15.6
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

¹ In August 2016, the first statement specified the Supreme Court instead of "courts". Question was also asked as part of a list.

PARTY/PARTYLN CONTINUED...

	<u>Republican</u>	<u>Democrat</u>	<u>Independent</u>	(VOL.) No preference	(VOL.) Other party	(VOL.) DK/Ref	Lean <u>Rep</u>	Lean <u>Dem</u>
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
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	--	--	--	--	--