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From Brexit to Zika: What Do Americans Know?

Modest partisan differences in knowledge of current affairs

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From Brexit to Zika: What Do Americans Know?

Modest partisan differences in knowledge of current affairs

(Before reading this report, take the quiz yourself by clicking [here](#).)

The latest Pew Research Center News IQ quiz finds that many Americans struggle when it comes to identifying some major political figures, though a majority knows that Paul Ryan is speaker of the House of Representatives.

On the other hand, there is broad awareness of details related to how the Zika virus is spread (86% know it is primarily spread by mosquitoes). In addition, 72% know that tap water in Flint, Michigan, is unsafe because it contains too much lead.

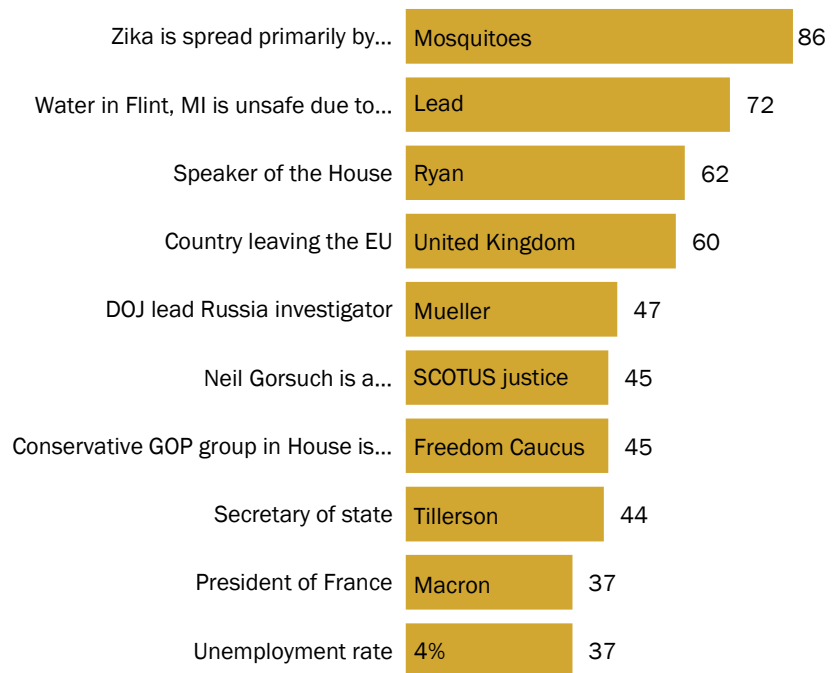
While 62% correctly identify Paul Ryan as speaker of the House, fewer (45%) know that Neil Gorsuch is a Supreme Court justice. (Full question wording available [here](#).)

About half (47%) identify Robert Mueller as the person leading the Justice Department's investigation into Russian involvement in the 2016 election, while 44% know that the current secretary of state is Rex Tillerson.

Public knowledge of international developments varies. Six-in-ten (60%) identify the United Kingdom as the country that has officially begun the process of leaving the European Union.

Public's awareness of developments, political leaders

% answering each correctly



Source: Survey conducted June 22-25, 2017.

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However, just 37% identify Emmanuel Macron as president of France (the survey was conducted before President Donald Trump's visit to France).

The new survey, conducted June 22-25 among 1,002 adults, finds substantial age differences in knowledge about several Washington figures.

For instance, a majority of those 50 and older (56%) know that Tillerson is secretary of state, compared with 32% of those younger than 50.

Older adults also are more likely to know that Gorsuch is a Supreme Court justice, and that Mueller is leading the investigation into Russia's involvement in the presidential campaign. However, majorities across age categories correctly identify Ryan as House speaker.

Wide age gaps in awareness of Tillerson, Gorsuch, Mueller

% answering each correctly

	18-29	30-49	50-64	65+
	%	%	%	%
Zika is spread primarily by... (mosquitoes)	87	88	88	82
Water in Flint, MI is unsafe due to... (lead)	69	70	77	71
Speaker of the House (Paul Ryan)	56	59	69	60
Country leaving the EU (United Kingdom)	62	55	62	60
DOJ lead Russia investigator (Robert Mueller)	37	40	57	56
Neil Gorsuch is a... (Supreme Court justice)	37	43	52	49
Conserv GOP group in House (Freedom Caucus)	42	42	52	43
Secretary of state (Rex Tillerson)	28	35	57	55
President of France (Emmanuel Macron)	41	36	38	34
Unemployment rate (4%)	25	36	46	39
Average number correct overall	4.8	5.0	6.0	5.5

Source: Survey conducted June 22-25, 2017.

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There are no significant age differences in awareness of the United Kingdom as the country taking steps to leave the EU or in the share who correctly identify Macron as president of France.

And large majorities, regardless of age, are able to correctly state that mosquitoes are the primary way the Zika virus is spread to humans and to identify lead as the reason the tap water in Flint, Michigan, is unsafe.

Modest partisan differences in knowledge of events, people

There is little difference in news knowledge across partisan groups, with Republicans and Republican-leaning independents and Democrats and Democratic leaners answering about the same number of questions correctly on average (5.7 questions vs. 5.5 questions, respectively).

Republicans are somewhat more likely than Democrats to correctly identify Paul Ryan as the speaker of the House (69% vs. 61%). There are only modest partisan differences on other questions in the survey.

Republicans and Democrats fare similarly on most questions

% answering each correctly

	Rep/ Lean Rep	Dem/ Lean Dem
	%	%
Zika is spread primarily by... (mosquitoes)	87	88
Water in Flint, MI is unsafe due to... (lead)	74	74
Speaker of the House (Paul Ryan)	69	61
Country leaving the EU (United Kingdom)	61	64
DOJ lead Russia investigator (Robert Mueller)	51	49
Neil Gorsuch is a... (Supreme Court justice)	52	45
Conserv GOP group in House (Freedom Caucus)	52	46
Secretary of state (Rex Tillerson)	50	44
President of France (Emmanuel Macron)	35	41
Unemployment rate (4%)	38	40
Average number correct overall	5.7	5.5

Source: Survey conducted June 22-25, 2017.

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Education gaps in knowledge of current events

As in [past surveys](#), college graduates perform better than those with less education on the News IQ quiz. Those with a bachelor's degree or more education answer an average of 6.9 questions correctly, compared to 5.2 correct answers from those with some college experience and 4.3 from those with no more than a high school diploma.

The educational divide is evident across all of the questions asked, but majorities regardless of educational attainment are able to correctly answer that the Zika virus is spread

primarily by mosquitoes and that the tap water in Flint, Michigan is unsafe due to lead.

Broad awareness of Zika virus and Flint water crisis across educational groups

% answering each correctly

	HS or less	Some college	College grad+
	%	%	%
Zika is spread primarily by... (mosquitoes)	82	88	92
Water in Flint, MI is unsafe due to... (lead)	67	71	80
Speaker of the House (Paul Ryan)	50	64	76
Country leaving the EU (United Kingdom)	48	58	79
DOJ lead Russia investigator (Robert Mueller)	35	43	68
Neil Gorsuch is a... (Supreme Court justice)	35	41	64
Conserv GOP group in House (Freedom Caucus)	34	47	59
Secretary of state (Rex Tillerson)	29	41	67
President of France (Emmanuel Macron)	23	37	58
Unemployment rate (4%)	29	31	53
Average number correct overall	4.3	5.2	6.9

Source: Survey conducted June 22-25, 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 June 22-25, 2017 among a national sample of 1,002 adults, 18 years of age or older, living in the continental United States (500 respondents were interviewed on a landline telephone, and 502 were interviewed on a cell phone, including 329 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 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:

Group	Unweighted sample size	Plus or minus ...
Total sample	1,002	3.8 percentage points
Republican/Lean Republican	411	5.9 percentage points
Democrat/Lean Democrat	472	5.5 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.

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PEW RESEARCH CENTER
June 22-25, 2017 OMNIBUS
FINAL TOPLINE
N=1,002

RANDOMIZE QUESTIONS PEW.1 THROUGH PEW.11**ASK ALL:**PEW.1 Who is the current Secretary of State? **[READ AND RANDOMIZE]**

June 22-25

2017

13	Mitt Romney
15	John Kerry
44	Rex Tillerson (<i>Correct</i>)
7	Scott Pruitt
22	Don't know/Refused (VOL.)

TREND FOR COMPARISON

Oct 6-9

2011

66	Hillary Clinton (<i>Correct</i>)
2	Bill Richardson
4	Joe Biden
3	Condoleezza Rice
25	Don't know/Refused (VOL.)

RANDOMIZE QUESTIONS PEW.1 THROUGH PEW.11**ASK ALL:**PEW.2 Who is the current President of France? **[READ AND RANDOMIZE]**

June 22-25

2017

37	Emmanuel Macron (<i>Correct</i>)
16	Justin Trudeau
8	Malcolm Turnbull
10	Theresa May
29	Don't know/Refused (VOL.)

RANDOMIZE QUESTIONS PEW.1 THROUGH PEW.11**ASK ALL:**PEW.3 Is Neil Gorsuch... **[READ AND RANDOMIZE]**?

June 22-25

2017

45	a Supreme Court justice (<i>Correct</i>)
11	a Senator
5	the Solicitor General
10	the head of the EPA
30	Don't know/Refused (VOL.)

RANDOMIZE QUESTIONS PEW.1 THROUGH PEW.11**ASK ALL:**

PEW.4 Who is leading the Justice Department's investigation into Russian involvement in the 2016 election? **[READ AND RANDOMIZE]**

June 22-25

2017

19	James Comey
10	Sean Spicer
3	Sally Yates
47	Robert Mueller (<i>Correct</i>)
22	Don't know/Refused (VOL.)

RANDOMIZE QUESTIONS PEW.1 THROUGH PEW.11**ASK ALL:**

PEW.5 The tap water in Flint, Michigan is unsafe because it contains too much... **[READ AND RANDOMIZE]**

June 22-25

2017

72	Lead (<i>Correct</i>)
8	Arsenic
3	Asbestos
6	Mold
11	Don't know/Refused (VOL.)

RANDOMIZE QUESTIONS PEW.1 THROUGH PEW.11**ASK ALL:**

PEW.6 Many conservative Republicans in the House of Representatives are members of which of the following groups? **[READ AND RANDOMIZE]**

June 22-25

2017

6	The Tuesday Group
10	The Lincoln Group
45	The Freedom Caucus (<i>Correct</i>)
6	The Blue Dogs
33	Don't know/Refused (VOL.)

PEW.7 HELD FOR FUTURE RELEASE**RANDOMIZE QUESTIONS PEW.1 THROUGH PEW.11****ASK ALL:**

PEW.8 Which of the following countries has officially started the process of leaving the European Union? **[READ AND RANDOMIZE]**

June 22-25

2017

8	Greece
10	Germany
4	Hungary
60	The United Kingdom (<i>Correct</i>)
17	Don't know/Refused (VOL.)

RANDOMIZE QUESTIONS PEW.1 THROUGH PEW.11**ASK ALL:**

PEW.9 According to the CDC, humans are infected with the Zika virus primarily by... **[READ AND RANDOMIZE]**

June 22-25

2017

86	Mosquitoes (<i>Correct</i>)
1	Rodents
1	Spoiled food
7	Contaminated water
5	Don't know/Refused (VOL.)

RANDOMIZE QUESTIONS PEW.1 THROUGH PEW.11**ASK ALL:**

PEW.10 Do you happen to know the name of the current Speaker of the U.S. House of Representatives?
Is it **[READ AND RANDOMIZE]**

June 22-25

2017

62	Paul Ryan (<i>Correct</i>)
9	Nancy Pelosi
1	Jason Chaffetz
9	Mitch McConnell
19	Don't know/Refused (VOL.)

TRENDS FOR COMPARISON: *Who is the current Speaker of the U.S. House of Representatives?*
[RANDOMIZE]?

Jul 7-Aug 4 <u>2014</u>		Mar 17-20 <u>2011</u>	Nov 11-14 <u>2010</u> ¹
60	John Boehner (<i>Correct</i>)	43	38
18	Nancy Pelosi	19	13
7	Newt Gingrich	3	4
14	Mitch McConnell	5	7
1	Don't know/Refused (VOL.)	30	38

¹ For November 11-14, 2010 the question read: "Who is likely to be the next Speaker of the House when the new Congress convenes in January?"

PEW.10 TRENDS FOR COMPARISON CONTINUED...

Dec 4-7

2008

72	Nancy Pelosi (<i>Correct</i>)
3	Dennis Hastert
3	Barbara Boxer
3	Eric Holder
19	Don't know/Refused (VOL.)

Aug 16-19

2007

74	Nancy Pelosi (<i>Correct</i>)
5	Dennis Hastert
7	Barbara Boxer
5	Scooter Libby
9	Don't know/Refused (VOL.)

RANDOMIZE QUESTIONS PEW.1 THROUGH PEW.11**ASK ALL:**

PEW.11 Is the national unemployment rate as reported by the government currently closer to...? **[LIST IN ORDER]**

	<i>(Correct)</i>				(VOL.)
June 22-25, 2017	<u>4%</u> 37	<u>7%</u> 20	<u>12%</u> 20	<u>17%</u> 12	DK/Ref 12
		<i>(Correct)</i>			(VOL.)
September 25-28, 2014	<u>3%</u> 4	<u>6%</u> 33	<u>9%</u> 27	<u>12%</u> 18	DK/Ref 18
		<i>(Correct)</i>			(VOL.)
May 9-June 3, 2012	<u>5%</u> 5	<u>8%</u> 52	<u>15%</u> 14	<u>21%</u> 8	DK/Ref 21
		<i>(Correct)</i>			(VOL.)
March 17-20, 2011	<u>5%</u> 3	<u>9%</u> 57	<u>15%</u> 14	<u>21%</u> 11	DK/Ref 14
		<i>(Correct)</i>			(VOL.)
November 11-14, 2010	<u>5%</u> 3	<u>10%</u> 53	<u>15%</u> 16	<u>20%</u> 11	DK/Ref 17
July 1-5, 2010	3	54	16	10	18
January 14-17, 2010	2	55	15	15	12
October 1-4, 2009	4	53	15	18	10
		<i>(Correct)</i>			(VOL.)
March 26-29, 2009	<u>4%</u> 3	<u>8%</u> 53	<u>12%</u> 24	<u>16%</u> 18	DK/Ref 2