

FOR RELEASE DECEMBER 14, 2015

Debates Help Fuel Strong Interest in 2016 Campaign

But most say campaign has not focused on important issues

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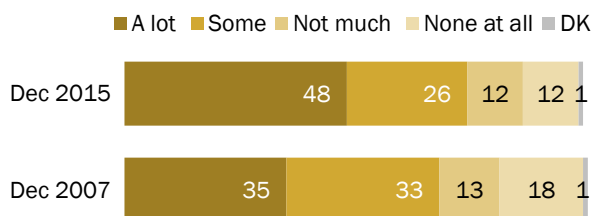
As candidates in both parties prepare for the next round of presidential debates, a new national survey finds that the public is highly engaged by the 2016 campaign. Fully 74% of Americans say they have given a lot or some thought to the candidates, higher than the shares saying this at comparable points in the past two presidential campaigns.

The presidential debates clearly have been a hit with the public. Nearly seven-in-ten (69%) say they have watched at least some of the televised debates between the candidates. In December 2007 – the most recent election in which there were contested nominations in both parties – just 43% reported watching any of the debates.

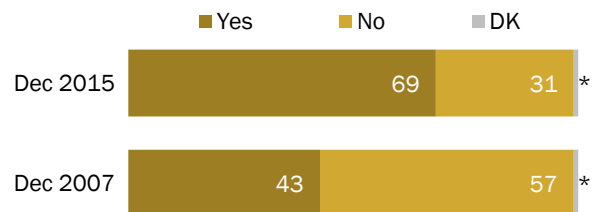
The latest national survey by Pew Research Center, conducted Dec. 8-13 among 1,500 adults, finds that nearly two-thirds (65%) of those who watched the debates say they have been helpful in learning about the candidates. And about half of debate watchers (51%) say they have found the debates “fun to watch.”

Strong interest in 2016 campaign, most say they have watched debates

% saying they have given ___ thought to candidates ...



Watched any of the presidential debates? (%)



Source: Survey conducted December 8-13, 2015.
Figures may not add to 100% because of rounding.

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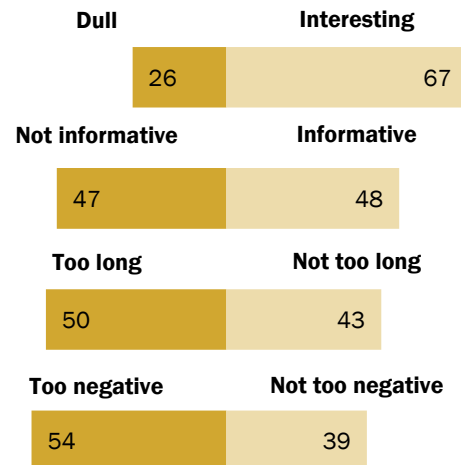
Yet the public has mixed impressions of the campaign so far. Two-thirds (67%) describe the presidential campaign as interesting – far more than did so before the first primary contests in the 2012 and 2008 campaigns (36% and 37%, respectively). About half (48%) say the campaign is informative, which is identical to the share that described the campaign as informative in January 2012.

As during prior campaigns, many Americans view the current contest as “too negative” (54% describe the campaign this way) and “too long” (50%).

Moreover, only about a third (34%) say the campaign has “focused on important policy debates,” while 58% say it has not. Democrats and independents are more likely than Republicans to say the campaign has not focused on key policy debates. By roughly two-to-one, Democrats (63% to 29%) and independents (62% to 32%) say the campaign has not focused on important policy debates. Republicans are divided – 46% say the campaign has concentrated on important policy debates while 44% say it has not.

Public impressions of 2016 campaign

% describing the presidential campaign as ...

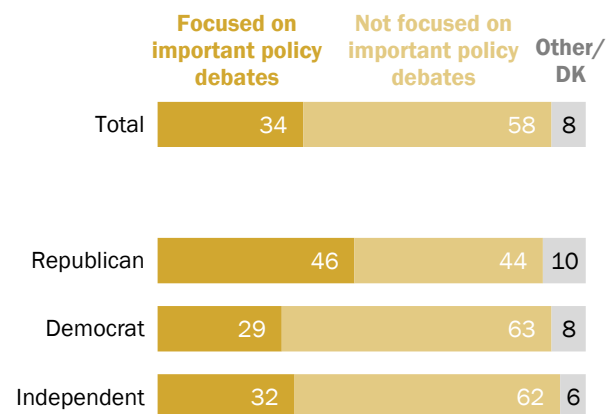


Source: Survey conducted December 8-13, 2015.
Don't know responses not shown.

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Most say 2016 campaign has 'not focused on important policy debates'

% saying the presidential campaign so far has been ...



Source: Survey conducted December 8-13, 2015.
Figures may not add to 100% because of rounding.

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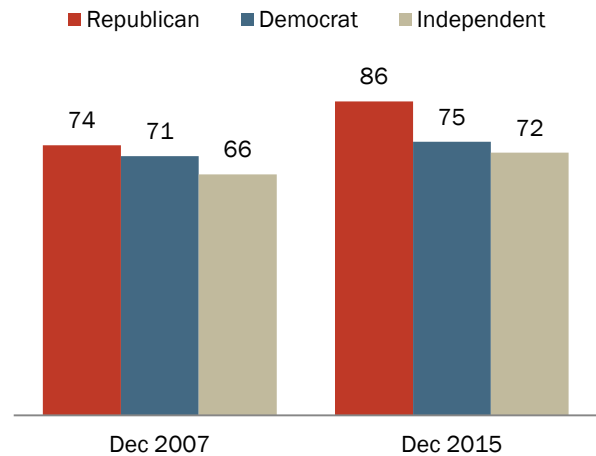
With the election still close to a year away, Republicans are more likely than Democrats to say they have given at least some thought to the candidates. Currently, 86% of Republicans say they have given a lot or some thought to the presidential candidates, compared with 75% of Democrats and 72% of independents.

And Republicans are substantially more engaged in the current campaign than they were at this point in the 2008 campaign; in December 2007, 74% of Republicans had given a lot or some thought to the candidates running for president.

While large majorities in both parties – and across nearly all demographic categories – say they have watched the debates, 77% of Republicans report watching at least some of the debates, compared with 69% of Democrats and 67% of independents.

Higher campaign interest among Republicans than at same point in '08

% giving a lot/some thought to the candidates ...



Source: Survey conducted December 8-13, 2015.

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Impressions of the presidential campaign

Across a range of measures, Republicans generally have more positive impressions of the campaign so far than do Democrats or independents.

Republicans are 14 percentage points more likely than Democrats and independents to describe the campaign as interesting (79% of Republicans vs. 65% of Democrats and independents). And while a majority of Republicans (63%) view the campaign as informative, fewer than half of Democrats (46%) and independents (42%) say the same.

Overall, 54% describe the presidential contest as too negative, which is similar to views of the last presidential campaign in January 2012 (50%). In February 2008, at a much later stage in that campaign – [more than half the country had held primaries or caucuses](#) – just 28% described the presidential campaign as too negative.

Republicans have more positive impressions of presidential campaign than Democrats, independents

% describing the presidential election campaign so far as ...

	2008		2012	2016	'08-'15 Change
	Oct 2007 %	Feb 2008 %	Jan 2012 %	Dec 2015 %	
Interesting					
Total	37	70	36	67	-3
Republican	36	69	48	79	+10
Democrat	49	80	35	65	-15
Independent	29	64	34	65	+1
Informative					
Total	--	65	48	48	-17
Republican	--	64	59	63	-1
Democrat	--	74	46	46	-28
Independent	--	61	48	42	-19
Too negative					
Total	--	28	50	54	+26
Republican	--	34	48	41	+7
Democrat	--	18	53	65	+47
Independent	--	33	48	54	+21
Too long					
Total	66	57	57	50	-7
Republican	74	63	49	42	-21
Democrat	61	49	60	55	+6
Independent	68	60	59	53	-7

Source: Survey conducted December 8-13, 2015.

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Today, 65% of Democrats and 54% of independents say the presidential campaign is too negative, compared with 41% of Republicans. In January 2012, there were only modest partisan differences in views of that campaign, when about half of Democrats (53%), Republicans (48%) and independents (48%) said it was too negative.

And in February 2008, just 18% of Democrats, and about a third of Republicans (34%) and independents (33%) viewed the campaign as too negative.

In addition, higher percentages of Democrats (55%) and independents (53%) than Republicans (42%) view the campaign as too long. That was also the case in 2012, when just the GOP had a contested nomination. But in February 2008, Democrats (49%) were less likely than either Republicans (63%) or independents (60%) to say the campaign was too long.

Views of the debates

Among the 69% of the public that says they have watched any of the presidential debates, most say they have found them helpful but views are more mixed on whether they have been fun to watch.

About two-thirds of debate watchers (65%) say the televised debates have been helpful in learning about the candidates, while far fewer (34%) say they have not been helpful.

Majorities across partisan and ideological groups say the debates have been helpful in learning about the candidates.

About half (51%) say the debates have been fun to watch, while nearly as many (46%) say they have not been fun to watch. Republicans (56%-39%) are slightly more likely to view the debates as fun to watch than Democrats (50%-48%) and independents (48%-49%). However, about as many liberal Democrats (57%) as

Majorities across political groups say debates have been helpful

Among those who have watched any of the presidential debates, percent who found them ...

	Yes	No	DK
Helpful in learning about the candidates	%	%	%
Total	65	34	2=100
Republican	69	29	1=100
Conservative Rep	69	29	2=100
Independent	62	37	1=100
Democrat	65	32	2=100
Liberal Dem	64	34	2=100

Fun to watch

Total	51	46	3=100
Republican	56	39	4=100
Conservative Rep	59	35	6=100
Independent	48	49	2=100
Democrat	50	48	2=100
Liberal Dem	57	41	2=100

Source: Survey conducted December 8-13, 2015. Figures may not add to 100% because of rounding. Based on those who say they've watched any presidential debate (N=1,088).

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conservative Republicans (59%) say the debates have been fun to watch.

As in past election cycles, young adults under 30 are less likely than older adults to say they have watched a presidential debate.

Overall, 58% of those under 30 say they have watched a presidential debate, compared with 72% of those ages 30 and older. All age groups are more likely to say they have watched a debate so far this cycle than in December 2007 – the last cycle with contested nominations in both parties.

But while a smaller share of those under 30 have tuned into a debate, those who have watched are more likely than older adults to say they have found the debates fun to watch. Nearly six-in-ten (59%) of debate watchers under 30 say they have found them fun to watch, compared to about half of debate watchers 30 and older.

When it comes to whether the debates have helped watchers learn about the candidates, there are virtually no differences by age. For example, 70% of those under the age of 30 and 68% of those 65 and older say the debates have been helpful.

Young people less likely to say they have watched a debate

Percentage who have watched any of the presidential debates ...

	Dec 2007	Dec 2015	Change
	%	%	
Total	43	69	+26
18-29	33	58	+25
30-49	42	72	+30
50-64	47	72	+25
65+	55	72	+17

Source: Survey conducted December 8-13, 2015.

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More young people describe the debates as ‘fun to watch’

Among those who have watched any of the presidential debates, percent who found them ...

	Yes	No	DK
	%	%	%
Fun to watch			
Total	51	46	3=100
18-29	59	40	1=100
30-49	51	46	3=100
50-64	49	48	3=100
65+	47	49	4=100

Source: Survey conducted December 8-13, 2015. Figures may not add to 100% because of rounding. Based on those who say they've watched any presidential debate (N=1,088).

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Methodology

The analysis in this report is based on telephone interviews conducted December 8-13, 2015 among a national sample of 1,500 adults, 18 years of age or older, living in all 50 U.S. states and the District of Columbia (525 respondents were interviewed on a landline telephone, and 975 were interviewed on a cell phone, including 582 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 2013 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 2014 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	1,500	2.9 percentage points
Republican	416	5.5 percentage points
Democrat	446	5.3 percentage points
Independent	557	4.8 percentage points
Watched the debate	1,088	3.4 percentage points
Republican	328	6.2 percentage points
Democrat	323	6.3 percentage points
Independent	394	5.7 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 is a nonprofit, tax-exempt 501(c)(3) organization and a subsidiary of The Pew Charitable Trusts, its primary funder.

**PEW RESEARCH CENTER
DECEMBER 2015 POLITICAL SURVEY
FINAL TOPLINE
DECEMBER 8-13, 2015
N=1,500**

QUESTIONS 1-2, 7, 11, 15-16 HELD FOR FUTURE RELEASE**NO QUESTIONS 3-6, 8-10, 12-14, 17-19****ASK ALL:**

Thinking about the 2016 presidential election...

Q.20 How much thought, if any, have you given to candidates running for president in 2016? **[READ]**

	<u>A lot</u>	<u>Some</u>	<u>Not much</u>	<u>None at all</u>	(VOL.) DK/Ref
Dec 8-13, 2015	48	26	12	12	1
Sep 22-27, 2015	39	26	17	17	1
May 12-18, 2015	25	33	21	20	1
Mar 25-29, 2015	22	28	26	23	1

TRENDS FOR COMPARISON:**2012 Presidential Election**

Feb 8-12, 2012 ¹	44	25	16	13	1
Jan 11-16, 2012	38	27	19	16	1
Jan 4-8, 2012	31	30	18	19	1
Nov 9-14, 2011	36	26	21	15	1
Sep 22-Oct 4, 2011	29	29	22	19	2
Aug 17-21, 2011	27	30	23	18	1
Jul 20-24, 2011	20	29	27	23	1
May 25-30, 2011	23	30	27	19	1

2008 Presidential Election

February, 2008	48	29	10	11	2
January, 2008	44	32	11	11	2
December, 2007	35	33	13	18	1
November, 2007	34	35	16	14	1
October, 2007	30	37	17	14	2
September, 2007	27	33	21	17	2
July, 2007	30	38	16	15	1
June, 2007	29	34	20	16	1
April, 2007	26	34	21	17	2
March, 2007	24	36	20	18	2
February, 2007	24	34	22	18	2
December, 2006	23	36	20	20	1

NO QUESTION 21

¹ In 2011 and 2012, question read: "How much thought, if any, have you given to candidates running for president in 2012?" In 2006, 2007 and 2008, question read "How much thought, if any, have you given to candidates running for president in 2008?"

ASK ALL:

Q.22 Overall, how would you describe the presidential election campaign so far – is it **[READ ITEM a. FIRST, THEN RANDOMIZE ITEMS b. THRU e.]**

	<u>Interesting</u>	<u>Dull</u>	(VOL.) <u>Neither</u>	(VOL.) <u>DK/Ref</u>
a. Dec 8-13, 2015	67	26	4	3
TRENDS FOR COMPARISON:				
2012 Presidential Election				
Oct 18-21, 2012	63	28	5	4
Sep 7-9, 2012	53	37	5	6
Jun 21-24, 2012	34	56	4	5
Mar 22-25, 2012	38	52	4	7
Jan 12-15, 2012	36	55	3	5
Oct 20-23, 2011	35	51	4	10
2008 Presidential Election				
Oct 10-13, 2008	71	25	3	1
Sep 12-15, 2008	68	26	5	1
Apr 18-21, 2008	59	35	5	1
Feb 15-18, 2008	70	25	4	1
October, 2007	37	55	5	3
April, 2007	34	52	6	8
2004 Presidential Election				
Mid-October, 2004 (RV)	66	28	5	1
Early September, 2004 (RV)	50	42	6	2
June, 2004	33	57	4	6
2000 Presidential Election				
June, 2000	28	65	4	3
1996 Presidential Election				
July, 1996	21	73	3	3
	<u>Too negative</u>	<u>Not too negative</u>	(VOL.) <u>Neither</u>	(VOL.) <u>DK/Ref</u>
b. Dec 8-13, 2015	54	39	2	4
TRENDS FOR COMPARISON:				
2012 Presidential Election				
Oct 18-21, 2012	55	37	3	5
Sep 7-9, 2012	51	39	3	6
Jun 21-24, 2012	53	37	3	8
Mar 22-25, 2012	52	34	3	11
Jan 12-15, 2012	50	41	1	7
Oct 20-23, 2011	44	41	4	11
2008 Presidential Election				
Oct 10-13, 2008	55	41	3	1
Sep 12-15, 2008	43	51	4	2
Apr 18-21, 2008	50	44	4	2
Feb 15-18, 2008	28	66	3	3
2004 Presidential Election				
Mid-October, 2004 (RV)	57	38	3	2
Early September, 2004 (RV)	62	32	1	5
June, 2004	45	46	2	7
Mid-March, 2004	47	47	2	4

Q.22 CONTINUED...

	<u>Informative</u>	Not <u>informative</u>	(VOL.) <u>Neither</u>	(VOL.) <u>DK/Ref</u>
c. Dec 8-13, 2015	48	47	2	3
TRENDS FOR COMPARISON:				
2012 Presidential Election				
Oct 18-21, 2012	59	34	2	4
Sep 7-9, 2012	53	39	2	6
Jun 21-24, 2012	40	52	1	6
Mar 22-25, 2012	40	50	1	8
Jan 12-15, 2012	48	45	2	6
Oct 20-23, 2011	40	49	2	9
2008 Presidential Election				
Oct 10-13, 2008	63	34	2	1
Sep 12-15, 2008	54	41	3	2
Feb 15-18, 2008	65	31	2	2
2004 Presidential Election				
Mid-October, 2004 (RV)	73	22	3	2
Early September, 2004 (RV)	63	33	1	3
June, 2004	48	46	2	4
Mid-March, 2004	53	42	2	3
	<u>Too long</u>	Not <u>too long</u>	(VOL.) <u>Neither</u>	(VOL.) <u>DK/Ref</u>
d. Dec 8-13, 2015	50	43	2	5
TRENDS FOR COMPARISON:				
2012 Presidential Election				
Oct 18-21, 2012	49	43	4	3
Sep 7-9, 2012	50	41	3	6
Jun 21-24, 2012	56	35	2	7
Mar 22-25, 2012	58	31	3	8
Jan 12-15, 2012	57	35	2	6
Oct 20-23, 2011	50	39	2	9
2008 Presidential Election				
Oct 10-13, 2008	57	39	3	1
Apr 18-21, 2008	65	29	5	1
Feb 15-18, 2008	57	40	*	3
October, 2007	66	28	3	3
April, 2007	59	32	3	6
2004 Presidential Election				
Mid-October, 2004 (RV)	51	43	3	2
Early September, 2004 (RV)	53	42	2	3
June, 2004	52	42	2	4
Mid-March, 2004	52	44	1	3
	Focused on important policy <u>debates</u>	Not focused on important policy <u>debates</u>	(VOL.) <u>Neither</u>	(VOL.) <u>DK/Ref</u>
e. Dec 8-13, 2015	34	58	2	6

ASK ALL:

Q.23 So far, have you watched any of the televised debates between presidential candidates or haven't you had a chance to watch any of them?

Dec 8-13 <u>2015</u>		Dec <u>2007</u>	Jul <u>2007</u>
69	Yes	43	40
31	No	57	59
*	Don't know/Refused (VOL.)	*	1

TRENDS FOR COMPARISON:**Republican debates**

Jan 4-8 <u>2012</u> ²		Oct 13-16 <u>2011</u>
40	Yes	27
60	No	73
*	Don't know/Refused (VOL.)	*

Democratic debates

Jan <u>2004</u>		Feb <u>1992</u>
20	Yes	16
80	No	84
*	Don't know/Refused (VOL.)	*

RANDOMIZE Q.24 AND Q.25**ASK IF WATCHED DEBATES (Q.23=1) [N=1,088]:**

Q.24 Have you found the debates to be helpful in learning about the candidates, or not?

BASED ON TOTAL: WATCHERS:

Dec 8-13 <u>2015</u>	Dec 8-13 <u>2015</u>	
44	65	Yes
23	34	No
1	2	Don't know/Refused (VOL.)
31	--	<i>Haven't watched any debates</i>

BASED ON WATCHERS:

Oct 13-16 <u>2011</u>	Jul <u>2007</u> ³
61	66
38	33
1	1
--	--

N 1,500 1,088 306 647

RANDOMIZE Q.24 AND Q.25**ASK IF WATCHED DEBATES (Q.23=1) [N=1,088]:**

Q.25 Have you found the debates to be fun to watch, or not?

BASED ON TOTAL: WATCHERS:

Dec 8-13 <u>2015</u>	Dec 8-13 <u>2015</u>	
35	51	Yes
32	46	No
2	3	Don't know/Refused (VOL.)

BASED ON WATCHERS:

Jul <u>2007</u> ⁴
47
51
2

N 1,500 1,088 647

² In January, 2012 and October, 2011 the question referred only to Republican debates. In December, 2007 this question asked about watching any of presidential debates and then followed up with whether those were Democratic debates, Republican debates or both. In July, 2007 the question referred to "any of the televised debates between presidential candidates". In 1992 and 2004, the question referred only to Democratic debates.

³ In July, 2007 this question referred to "any of the televised debates between presidential candidates."

⁴ In July, 2007 this question referred to "any of the televised debates between presidential candidates."

QUESTIONS 26-28, 30-31, 40-48, 51, 59-63, 69-71, 81-85, 90-92 HELD FOR FUTURE RELEASE**NO QUESTIONS 29, 32-39, 49-50, 52-58, 64-68, 72-80, 86-89****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?

				(VOL.)	(VOL.)	(VOL.)	Lean	Lean
	<u>Republican</u>	<u>Democrat</u>	<u>Independent</u>	No preference	Other party	DK/Ref	Rep	Dem
Dec 8-13, 2015	26	31	37	4	*	2	16	15
Aug 27-Oct 4, 2015	24	29	41	4	*	2	17	17
Sep 22-27, 2015	26	30	40	2	*	2	15	16
Jul 14-20, 2015	22	32	41	4	*	1	15	19
May 12-18, 2015	24	32	38	3	1	2	15	18
Mar 25-29, 2015	25	30	39	4	*	2	15	17
Feb 18-22, 2015	24	31	38	4	1	1	18	17
Jan 7-11, 2015	21	30	44	3	1	1	19	18
Dec 3-7, 2014	24	31	39	3	1	2	17	17
Yearly Totals								
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
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	--	--	--	--	--