



**THE PEW RESEARCH CENTER**  
For The People & The Press

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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:**  
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## Most See Debates as Helpful A Third in GOP Have Seen a Presidential Debate

About a quarter of the public (27%) says they have watched one or more of the Republican presidential debates so far this year. Most debate watchers say the televised sessions have been helpful in learning about the candidates (61%) and a third (34%) say the debates have led them to change their minds about which candidate they might support.

Four years ago, in July 2007, 40% said they had watched any presidential debate – whether Democratic or Republican – at that early point in the campaign. In that cycle both parties had wide open races and a number of debates took place early on. Looking back to 2004, when only the Democrats had a primary contest, only 20% said they had watched any of the Democratic debates as of January 2004.

According to the latest survey by the Pew Research Center for the People & the Press, conducted Oct. 13-16 among 1,007 adults, about a third (36%) of Republicans say they have watched a debate this year, which is comparable to the number that said this in July 2007 (38%). Interest among Democrats and independents is understandably much lower, with only a quarter of Democrats (25%) and independents (24%) reporting that they have watched any of the debates.

### 2011 Debates Draw Attention of Tea Party Supporters

	Jan 2004	Jul 2007	Oct 2011
<i>% who have watched candidate debates</i>	%	%	%
Total	20	40	27
Republican	18	38	36
Democrat	24	45	25
Independent	18	38	24
All Republican/lean Rep	18	39	34
Agree with Tea Party	--	--	53
Disagree/ No opinion	--	--	21

PEW RESEARCH CENTER Oct. 13-16, 2011. 2004 asked about Democratic candidate debates, 2011 about Republican debates and 2007 about debates involving either party's candidates.

This compares to significantly broader viewership in 2007 (45% of Democrats and 38% of independents) in July 2007, when there were contested primaries in both parties.

And, in a sign of their engagement this election cycle, about half of Republicans and Republican-leaning independents who say they agree with the Tea Party say they have watched any of the GOP debates (53%). This compares with only 21% among Republicans and Republican-leaning independents who do not identify with the Tea Party movement.

### Debates Helpful, Somewhat Influential

About six-in-ten debate watchers (61%) say the televised events have been helpful in learning about the candidates, not much different from the 66% of debate watchers who said this four years ago.

Three quarters of Republicans and Republican-leaning viewers say they have found the debates to be helpful in learning about the candidates (75%). Among those who say they agree with the Tea Party, 83% say the debates have been helpful.

While helpful to most, only about a third (34%) of debate watchers say what they've seen in the debates has led them to reassess their choices among the GOP candidates; most (64%) say the debates have not made them rethink initial choices. The influence of the debates is broader among Republicans and GOP-leaning independents; about four-in-ten (43%) who watched say the events have led them to change their minds about which of the candidates they might support. Fully half (51%) of Tea Party Republicans and Republican-leaning independents say the debates have led them to reassess which candidate they might support.

### Debates More Helpful, Influential, to Tea Party Republicans

	All debate watchers	Rep/lean R	
		All	Tea Party
<i>Helpful in learning about candidates?</i>	%	%	%
Yes	61	75	83
No	38	24	16
Don't know	1	*	1
	100	100	100
<i>Led you to change mind about who to support?</i>			
Yes	34	43	51
No	64	56	48
Don't know	2	2	1
	100	100	100
N	306	162	109

PEW RESEARCH CENTER Oct. 13-16, 2011. Figures may not add to 100% because of rounding.

## About the Survey

The analysis in this report is based on telephone interviews conducted October 13-16, 2011, among a national sample of 1,007 adults 18 years of age or older living in the continental United States (604 respondents were interviewed on a landline telephone, and 403 were interviewed on a cell phone, including 182 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. 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://people-press.org/methodology/detailed>.

The combined landline and cell phone sample are weighted using an iterative technique that matches gender, age, education, race, Hispanic origin, region, and population density to parameters from the March 2010 Census Bureau's Current Population Survey. The sample also is weighted to match current patterns of telephone status, based on extrapolations from the 2010 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 within the landline sample. Sampling errors and statistical tests of significance take into account the effect of weighting. The following table shows the 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	Sample Size	Plus or minus ...
Total sample	1,007	4.0 percentage points
Republicans	282	7.0 percentage points
Democrats	293	7.0 percentage points
Independents	355	6.5 percentage points
Rep/Rep leaners	429	6.0 percentage points
Agree with Tea Party	196	8.5 percentage points
Disagree/No opinion	231	8.0 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.

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**PEW RESEARCH CENTER  
OCTOBER 13-16, 2011 OMNIBUS  
FINAL TOPLINE  
N=1,007**

**PEW.1-PEW.3, PEWWP.4 HELD FOR FUTURE RELEASE**

**ASK ALL:**

PEW.5 So far, have you watched any the presidential debates between Republican candidates or haven't you had the chance to watch any of them?

Oct 13-16		Dec	Jul	<i>Democratic debates</i>	
<u>2011</u>		<u>2007</u> <sup>1</sup>	<u>2007</u>	<u>2004</u>	<u>1992</u>
27	Yes	43	40	20	16
73	No	57	59	80	84
*	Don't know/Refused (VOL.)	*	1	*	*

**IF YES WATCHED DEBATES (PEW.5=1), ASK:**

PEW.6 Have you found the debates to be helpful in learning about the candidates, or not?

**BASED ON TOTAL: WATCHERS:**

Oct 13-16	Oct 13-16
<u>2011</u>	<u>2011</u>
16	61
10	38
*	1
(73)	--

**BASED ON WATCHERS:**

Jul
<u>2007</u> <sup>2</sup>
66
33
1
<i>Haven't watched any debates/ Don't know if watched</i>

N 1,007

306

647

**IF YES WATCHED DEBATES (PEW.5=1), ASK:**

PEW.7 Have the debates led you to change your mind about which of the candidates you might support, or not?

**BASED ON TOTAL: WATCHERS:**

Oct 13-16	Oct 13-16
<u>2011</u>	<u>2011</u>
9	34
17	64
1	2
(73)	--

Yes  
No  
Don't know/Refused (VOL.)  
*Haven't watched any debates*

N 1,007

306

<sup>1</sup> 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.

<sup>2</sup> In July, 2007 this question referred to "any of the televised debates between presidential candidates."