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September 16, 2015

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**Is there a constitutional right to own a home or a pet?  
Many Americans don't know**

PHILADELPHIA – One American in three says that the Bill of Rights guarantees the right to own your own home, while one in four thinks that it guarantees “equal pay for equal work,” a national survey by the [Annenberg Public Policy Center](#) of the University of Pennsylvania has found.

Those protections are not in the Bill of Rights, the first 10 Amendments to the Constitution.

The survey, released for Constitution Day (Thursday, Sept. 17), shows that many Americans are unfamiliar with basic facts about their government:

- Only one in three Americans (31 percent) could name all three branches of the U.S. government, while just as many (32 percent) could not identify even one.
- More than one in four Americans (28 percent) incorrectly thinks a 5-4 Supreme Court ruling is sent back either to Congress for reconsideration or to the lower courts for a decision.
- About one in 10 Americans (12 percent) says the Bill of Rights includes the right to own a pet. It does not.

The survey was conducted Aug. 27-31 among 1,012 adults ages 18 and up. It has a margin of error of plus or minus 3.7 percent, and is one in a series of national surveys by the Annenberg Public Policy Center (APPC) that asked Americans about their civic knowledge.

“Past Annenberg research has shown that basic civics knowledge is valuable,” said Ken Winneg, managing director of survey research at the Annenberg Public Policy Center. “The current survey shows that, in the presence of statistical controls, the odds are two times greater that you know the three branches of government if you’ve taken a high school or college civics class than if you haven’t taken any civics courses.”

Kathleen Hall Jamieson, director of the Annenberg Public Policy Center, added: “Those who can identify the three branches and key provisions in the Bill of Rights are more likely to support the system embodied in the Constitution. Civic knowledge predicts a willingness, for instance, to retain the Supreme Court whether it issues a desired or unpopular ruling.”

## **Abolishing or reducing the Supreme Court's power**

Asked about the Supreme Court, a quarter of the respondents (25 percent) agreed that “it might be better to do away with the court altogether” if it started making a lot of rulings most Americans disagreed with. About the same proportion (26 percent) said that when Congress disagrees with the Supreme Court’s decisions, it should pass legislation saying the court can no longer rule on that issue.

If given the chance to write a new Constitution, a number of Americans would abolish or change existing rights:

- One-quarter of people (26 percent) favored requiring a person to testify against himself in court.
- Nearly half (46 percent) opposed a prohibition on “double jeopardy,” or retrying a person for the same crime twice if new evidence emerged after a not-guilty verdict.

The survey found that people would, by a slight margin, retain some existing rights. A little more than half of those surveyed (54 percent) agreed that the government should not be able to prohibit a peaceful march down a main street, even if the marchers’ views were offensive. Just half (50 percent) thought the government should not be able to prohibit practice of a religion if a majority of voters thought that it held un-American views. By contrast, three-quarters (76 percent) of the respondents opposed giving the government “prior restraint,” the right to stop the press from publishing articles critical of the government.

## **The Civics Renewal Network offers a solution**

To address the need for better civics education, the Annenberg Public Policy Center has joined with 25 other nonpartisan organizations in the [Civics Renewal Network](http://civicsrenewalnetwork.org/), which makes free, high-quality educational materials available online at <http://civicsrenewalnetwork.org/>. Among the partners in the Civics Renewal Network are the [Library of Congress](#), the [National Archives](#), the [National Constitution Center](#), the [U.S. Courts](#), the NEH’s [EDSITEment](#) Project and [iCivics](#). For the full list visit: <http://civicsrenewalnetwork.org/partners>.

For Constitution Day, the U.S. Courts are conducting 31 naturalization ceremonies at prominent sites, including the National Archives in Washington, D.C., the National Constitution Center in Philadelphia, and the Battleship USS Missouri in Honolulu. In addition, teachers and classes nationwide are taking part in the [“Preamble Challenge”](#) led by the National Constitution Center, and undertaking creative ways to recite or celebrate the Preamble to the Constitution.

The [Annenberg Public Policy Center](#) was established in 1994 to educate the public and policy makers about the media’s role in advancing public understanding of political, health and science issues at the local, state and federal levels.

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