



# What Americans Know about Politics and Why It Matters

*By Michael X. Delli Carpini, Scott Keeter*



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This book is the most comprehensive analysis ever written about the American public's factual knowledge of politics. Drawing on extensive survey data, including much that is original, two experts in public opinion and political behavior find that many citizens are remarkably informed about the details of politics, while equally large numbers are nearly ignorant of political facts. And despite dramatic changes in American society and politics, citizens appear no more or less informed today than half a century ago.

Michael X. Delli Carpini and Scott Keeter demonstrate that informed persons are more likely to participate, better able to discern their own interests, and more likely to advocate those interests through political actions. Who, then, is politically informed? The authors provide compelling evidence that whites, men, and older, financially secure citizens have substantially more knowledge about national politics than do blacks, women, young adults, and financially less- well-off citizens. Thus citizens who are most disadvantaged socially and economically are least able to redress their grievances politically. Yet the authors believe that a broader and more equitably informed populace is possible. The challenge to America, they conclude, lies in providing an environment in which the benefits of being informed are clearer, the tools for gaining information more accessible, and the opportunities to learn about politics more frequent, timely, and equitable.



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### **Editorial Review**

From Library Journal

The American public's cynical attitude toward politics is much discussed, but what do Americans really know about politics? Two political scientists provide a detailed examination of who knows what, how much, and why it matters in American politics. Employing survey data of Americans for a nearly 50-year period and utilizing sophisticated statistical techniques, Delli Carpini (Barnard Coll.) and Keeter (Virginia Commonwealth Univ.) find that, while Americans are not as knowledgeable as they should be, they are not completely ignorant of politics and that the level of political knowledge has remained virtually unchanged over 40 years. Among the authors' other major findings: women, African Americans, the poor, and the young tend to be less politically knowledgeable than the rest of the population; and people with higher levels of motivation and skills tend to be better educated about politics. This excellent study places its quantitative research in the context of thoughtful and significant discussions of democratic theory. Recommended for political science students at all levels. —Thomas J. Baldino, Wilkes Univ., Wilkes-Barre, Pa.  
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### **About the Author**

Michael X. Delli Carpini

is dean of the Annenberg School for Communication at the University of Pennsylvania. Scott Keeter is director of survey research at the Pew Research Center in Washington, DC.

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