

Article: "Political Knowledge after September 11"
Author: Markus Prior
Issue: Sep. 2002
Journal: *PS: Political Science & Politics*



This journal is published by the American Political Science Association. All rights reserved.

APSA is posting this article for public view on its website. APSA journals are fully accessible to APSA members and institutional subscribers. To view the table of contents or abstracts from this or any of APSA's journals, please go to the website of our publisher Cambridge University Press (<http://journals.cambridge.org>).

This article may only be used for personal, non-commercial, or limited classroom use. For permissions for all other uses of this article should be directed to Cambridge University Press at permissions@cup.org.

Political Knowledge after September 11*

Since the beginnings of survey research more than half a century ago, political scientists have repeatedly found that most people know very little about politics. Study after study has shown that the structure of government, details of policy, as well as most politicians and public figures are unknown to many Americans.¹ Philip Converse's (1975, 79) comment is still valid: "The most familiar fact to arise from sample surveys is that popular levels of information about public affairs are, from the point of view of the informed observer, astonishingly low." The year 2001 prior to 9/11 was no exception. Surveys showed, for instance, that less than one-third of Americans knew in June that the Republican Party had a majority in the House of Representatives, and that less than 20% correctly said that the federal government was spending less money than it was taking in that year. In stark contrast, by November, 90% of the American public knew that inhaled anthrax was more difficult to treat than cutaneous anthrax, and more than 80% were aware in early 2002 that the Northern Alliance had been fighting on

the side of the United States and Britain in the Afghanistan war.²

In this article, I examine how 9/11 and the subsequent efforts to combat terrorism have affected what people know about politics. My analysis suggests three main

differences between knowledge before and after 9/11. First, knowledge of 9/11 and the "war on terrorism" shot up to uncommonly high levels, just as common sense and our theories would predict. The second point is less intuitive: Heightened interest spread to issues not directly related to the terrorist attacks and appears to have increased knowledge of politics more broadly. Finally, a comparison between knowledge related to 9/11 and general political knowledge reveals that some of the usual obstacles to learning did not matter in the aftermath of 9/11. A low sense of civic duty, lack of faith in government responsiveness, and a full-time job all kept people from getting informed about politics in general, but not from learning about the terrorist attacks and the war on terrorism.

Knowledge of the Events of September 11 and the "War on Terrorism"

Some scholars are not terribly surprised about people's low levels of political

knowledge. People have lives to live and many more important things to think about. It is surely a better use of your memory to remember when to pick up your kids after school than what office is held by Tom Daschle. Most people do not bother to become informed about politics because there are few downsides from not doing so (Downs 1957). Incentives to learn about politics are low, as the direct personal benefits that arise from political knowledge are minimal. The chances are less than minuscule that your vote is going to be the tiebreaker in an election and that it actually matters whether you made an informed choice between the candidates. Therefore, the "rational" behavior arising from this calculation would be that people not waste *any* time on politics: "Voters are irrational—not because they have so little information, but because they have so much!" (Fiorina 1990, 335).

If one focuses only on elections, one ignores that political knowledge offers more benefits outside the electoral context. Knowing how your local government works or the politicians who represent you, for example, allows you to ask for favors or claim benefits more effectively. Moreover, people selectively seek information that is personally relevant to them (e.g., Iyengar 1990; Sears and Freedman 1967). For instance, senior citizens who follow news about social security reform may be in a better position to organize their retirement savings efficiently, thus obtaining material advantages from knowledge about the issue. In short, some information seeking and learning is instrumental and reflects people's self-interest.

September 11 gave the terms "self-interest" and "instrumental news seeking" a dramatically different meaning. In an election context, it is highly unlikely that one's political knowledge will change anything about the outcome. On and after 9/11, it appeared crucially important to find out what had happened and whether it might happen again. In the long run, the impact of many policy decisions, such as social security and health care, may be much bigger than the impact of decisions on how to react to 9/11. But in the immediate aftermath of 9/11, learning about anthrax or the likelihood of new attacks promised potentially much higher and more direct payoffs than learning about politics in 'normal' times.

This argument can easily be carried too far. The image of a rational actor trying to figure out the relative payoffs from learning more about anthrax compared to checking his stocks is misleading. In the face of threat, gathering facts about the situation is an

by
Markus Prior,
Stanford University and
Princeton University

immediate, hard-wired reaction. In a study of emotional reactions to presidential candidates, Marcus and MacKuen (1993, 672) show that “threat powerfully motivates citizens to learn about politics.” The part of the brain’s limbic system that monitors the environment inhibits ongoing behavior and directs attention to the threat. If relatively modest threats such as presidential candidates automatically stimulate the brain to learn, it is easy to imagine a powerful, immediate impulse to gather information as a result of 9/11. Regardless of whether this impulse was caused by a hard-wired reaction or rational calculations, we would expect very high levels of knowledge of matters that could have an immediate impact on people’s lives. For example, both rational behavior and the imminent threat should lead people to know that inhaled anthrax is more dangerous than cutaneous infections, as 90% did by November 2001.

Most of what people know about politics, however, is unlikely ever to benefit them directly and materially. A more important reason why some people learn about politics is that they are curious and enjoy knowing what is going on in the political world (e.g., Delli Carpini and Keeter 1996). Knowledge of 9/11 and the war on terrorism is high even for aspects that are less likely to provide material benefits. This sort of knowledge may be more readily attributed to high interest, rather than instrumental news seeking. As Figure 1 shows, almost everyone followed the news about the terrorist attacks of 9/11 and the defense against possible future acts of terrorism. Interest in the U.S. military efforts in Afghanistan did not quite reach

A low sense of civic duty, lack of faith in government responsiveness, and a full-time job all kept people from getting informed about politics in general, but not from learning about the terrorist attacks and the war on terrorism.

those levels, but was still clearly higher than interest in the economy.

These extraordinarily high levels of news interest were satisfied by an unprecedented amount of media coverage in the days after the terrorist attacks. The four big broadcast television networks provided coverage uninterrupted even by commercials for four days. The WB network and many cable channels, including MTV, TNT, and ESPN, carried news feeds instead of their usual entertainment and sports programming. Many music radio stations switched to around-the-clock news.³ News magazines produced special editions covering the attacks and the rescue efforts.⁴ While television was people’s primary news source, traffic on news web sites increased dramatically. The number of unique visitors to cnn.com on September 11 and 12 increased by 680% to 11.7 million visitors. The 9.5 million unique visitors to msnbc.com represented a 236% increase (Rainie and Kalsnes 2001).

The immediate threat and the uncommonly high levels of interest, combined with a ready supply of information, created a situation in which learning was bound to occur. The poll results summarized in Table 1 illustrate this. Almost two-thirds of the population knew in November 2001 that some Muslim countries were cooperating in the war on terrorism. In early 2002, roughly 85% of all U.S. residents were aware that the Northern Alliance was fighting with the United States and Britain in the Afghanistan war, and that Pakistan and

Afghanistan had a common border. Still more than three-quarters knew that the Office of Homeland Security was founded after 9/11, and almost 60% understood that Pakistan and Russia, but not Turkey, possess nuclear weapons.

These numbers contrast markedly with knowledge of foreign affairs before 9/11. While more than 60% of the population knew in early September 2001 that a U.S. spy plane collided with a fighter jet from China, only 14% were aware of the issue addressed by the Kyoto agreement. Less than a quarter could name the Russian prime minister, and only 2% knew that the Canadian prime minister was Jean Chretien. I must note that all post-9/11 knowledge questions about foreign affairs which I located for this article are multiple-choice format, which is generally easier than open-ended questions (such as those pre-9/11 questions mentioned here). We should not read too much into the absolute percentages since they are affected by question topics, question wording, and the particular set of response options. But it is still telling that in April 2001, only 2% could give the Canadian prime minister’s name, while 85% knew in February 2002 that Pakistan, but not Russia, Iraq, or Kazakhstan, shared a border with Afghanistan.

We can, moreover, compare post-9/11 knowledge of the war on terrorism with knowledge of domestic issues as assessed by multiple-choice questions. Less than half of the population is aware that the projected budget surplus for 2001 was smaller than expected. Only around 20% know that the government spent less in 2001 than it took in, that taxes are lower in the United States than in Western

Figure 1
News Interest

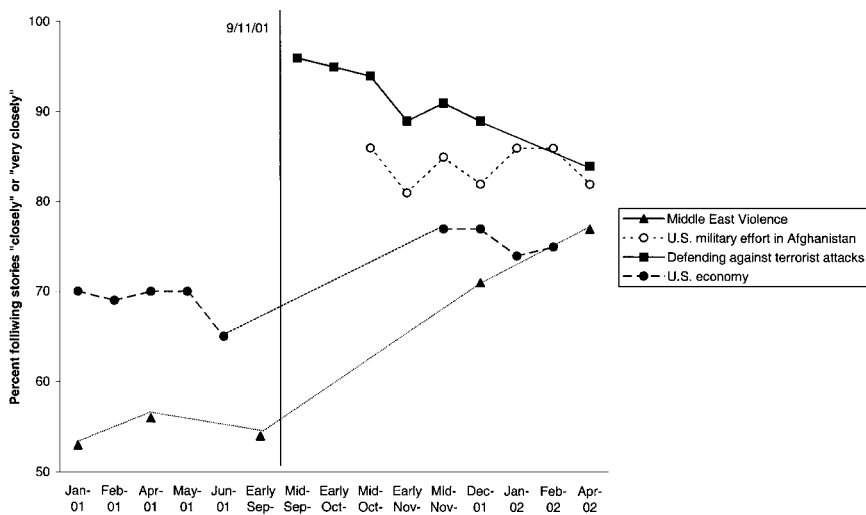


Table 1
Knowledge of the “War on Terrorism” and Current Political Issues

	After 9/11	Before 9/11
Knowledge of 9/11 and the “War on Terrorism”		
As far as you know, are there governments of largely Muslim nations that are cooperating with the United States in its war against terrorism, or are they all either neutral or siding with the Taliban? (There are Muslim nations that are cooperating /They are all either neutral or siding with the Taliban)	62.9 (11/01) ^f	
Which, if any, of the following nations DO NOT have nuclear weapons? (Pakistan/Russia/ Turkey)	57.4 (11/01) ^f	
Which kind of anthrax is MORE difficult to treat, the kind that is inhaled into the lungs, or the kind that appears on the skin? (The kind that is inhaled into the lungs /The kind that appears on the skin)	89.7 (11/01) ^f	
Which of the following countries shares a border with Afghanistan? (Russia/ Pakistan /Iraq/Kazakhstan)	85.4 (2–3/02) ^a	
In the war in Afghanistan, which of the following groups fought on the side of the coalition led by the United States and Britain? (The Islamic Jihad/The Taliban/ The Northern Alliance /Al-Qaeda)	83.5 (2–3/02) ^a	
Which of the following agencies was founded in the wake of September 11? (Office for Homeland Security /Delta Force/National Security Agency/Department of Civilian Defense)	77.3 (2–3/02) ^a	
Who is the current secretary of state? (Colin Powell /Donald Rumsfeld/Condoleezza Rice/Harrison Ford)	67 (2/02) ^c	
Can you tell me the name of the current vice president of the United States? (open-ended; correct answer: Dick Cheney)	66.7 (11/01) ^f	
Can you tell me the name of the current Secretary of Defense? (open-ended; correct answer: Donald Rumsfeld)	34 (2/02) ^d	
Current Political Knowledge		
—Foreign Policy—		
Earlier this year, a U.S. spy plane collided with a fighter jet from another country. The American air crew was held for several days. Do you know in what country this took place? (open-ended; correct answer: China)		61.8 (8–9/01) ^g
Recently, President Bush withdrew U.S. support for an international treaty known as the Kyoto Protocol. What issue does this agreement address? (open-ended; correct answers: environment, global warming, greenhouse gas emissions, climate change, pollution, clean air, air quality, ozone)		14.4 (8–9/01) ^g
What is the name of the president of Russia? (open-ended; correct answer: Vladimir Putin)		22.9 (8–9/01) ^g
Recognized photo of Vladimir Putin	69.5 (2–3/02) ^a	
Do you happen to know the name of the Prime Minister of Canada? (open-ended; correct answer: Jean Chretien)	2 (4/01) ⁱ	
Do you happen to know the name of the country in Latin America that recently has been in a political and economic crisis? (open-ended; correct answer: Argentina)	28 (1/02) ^e	
—Domestic Policy/Politics—		
Recently, President Bush made a nationally televised, prime-time address to the nation about an important issue. Do you happen to know what this address was about? (open-ended; correct answers: stem cell research, medical research [funding of], cloning, anything to do with embryos or fetuses or cells)		23.2 (8–9/01) ^g

(Continued on next page)

Table 1—continued
Knowledge of the “War on Terrorism” and Current Political Issues

	After 9/11	Before 9/11
Do you happen to know if the federal government is spending more money than it is taking in this year, or spending less money than it is taking in ?		18.5 (6/01) ^h
Do you happen to know whether the projected U.S. government budget surplus for this year is larger than expected, smaller than expected , or about what was expected?		41.8 (8–9/01) ^g
Compared to the citizens of Western Europe, do you think Americans pay a higher percentage of their income in taxes, a smaller percentage of their income in taxes , or don't you think there's much difference in the percentage of their income that they pay in taxes?		22 (6/01) ^h
Recognized photo of John McCain	81.5 (2–3/02) ^a	
Do you happen to know which party currently has the most members in the House of Representatives in Washington? (Republicans /Democrats)	55.8 (2–3/02) ^a	
Do you happen to know which political party has a majority in the U.S. House of Representatives? (Republicans /Democrats)		31.4 (6/01) ^h
Do you happen to know which political party has a majority in the U.S. Senate? (Republicans /Democrats)		56 (6/01) ^h
Please give me your best guess for this next question. For every dollar spent by the federal government in Washington, how much of each dollar do you think goes for foreign aid to help other countries? (open-ended; correct answer: ^j 5% or less)	20.1 (2–3/02) ^a	17.2 (1998–99) ^b
Would you say there is more, less, or about the same amount of crime in the United States today as compared to 10 years ago? (less /same/more)	21.2 (2–3/02) ^a	12.2 (1998–99) ^b

Note: Cell entries are percentage of respondents answering correctly and date of the survey. Multiple-choice items list all options and correct answer in bold type.

^aNationally representative survey of U.S. residents designed by the author and conducted by Knowledge Networks; February/March 2002; web-based survey, N = 2358.

^b1998 Multi-Investigator Study, see Gilens 2001; N = 586 (foreign aid)/208 (crime).

^cPower of Reading Survey, February 21–24, 2002; phone survey, N = 1,000.

^d*Washington Post* Poll, February 19–21, 2002; phone survey, N = 756.

^ePew Research Center for the People & the Press, January 2002 News Interest Index, January 9–13, 2002; phone survey, N = 1,201.

^fPew Research Center for the People & the Press, November 13–19, 2001; phone survey, N = 1,500.

^gPew Research Center for the People & the Press, America's Place in the World III Survey, August 21–September 5, 2001; phone survey, N = 1,000; when identical question was used in Form A and B, average percentage correct is used.

^hPew Research Center for the People & the Press, June 2001 News Interest Index, June 13–17, 2001; phone survey, N = 1,200.

ⁱCBS News Poll, April 4–5, 2001; phone survey, N = 660.

^jFollowing Gilens (2001), I count answers of 5% or less as correct.

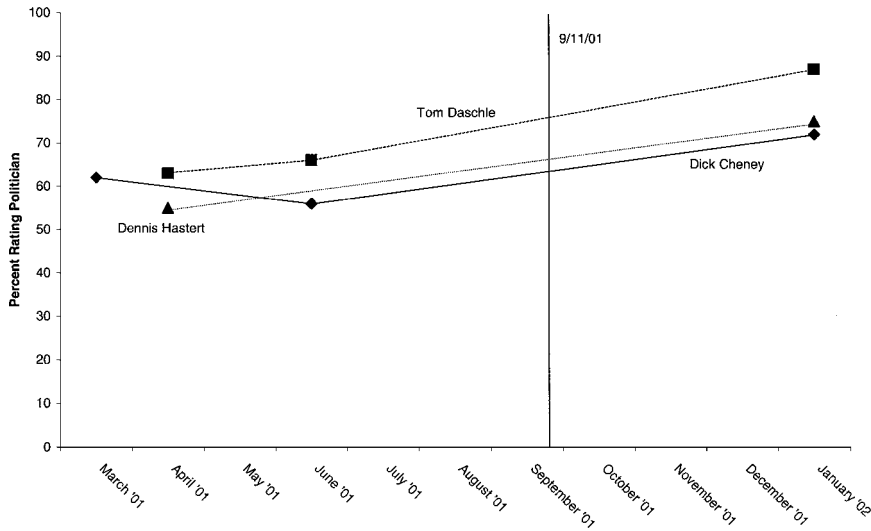
Europe, or that the crime rate in the United States is lower than it was 10 years ago. These comparisons, while obviously not systematic or representative of the universe of foreign and domestic issues, make the level of knowledge about 9/11-related issues and the war on terrorism look remarkably high. Extraordinary circumstances generated extraordinary levels of knowledge.

Knowledge of Government Pre- and Post-9/11

Was the surge in interest and learning confined exclusively to the war on terrorism? Figure 1 reveals an interesting trend

for two issues not directly related to terrorism and the U.S. military effort in Afghanistan—the political situation in the Middle East and the state of the U.S. economy. Interest in these issues increased compared to pre-9/11 levels. In the months leading to 9/11, around 55% professed interest in the Middle East conflict.⁵ By December 2001, this number was up to 70%; a Pew survey conducted in April 2002 shows a continued rise in interest. While the escalation of events in the first months of 2002 may be partly responsible for high interest, a rise in interest had already occurred in December 2001. A similar, if less pronounced pattern, emerges for people's interest in the U.S. economy. These data suggest that 9/11 not only generated extremely high interest in the defense against

Figure 2
Recognition of Politicians



terrorism and the war in Afghanistan, but increased interest in politics more generally. It would not have been inconceivable for people to focus all their attention on the extraordinary events of 9/11, at the expense of other issues. Yet, we find a spillover of high interest to issues that are not directly related to the new threat.

This finding is supported by people's own assessments of their information-seeking behavior. In a Pew survey conducted in November 2001,⁶ less than 20% reported that they found it "hard to get interested in news stories that don't deal with terrorism in some way," and 66% of the respondents said they were "more generally interested in the news" after the terrorist attacks than before. A *Washington Post* poll conducted in February 2002 still finds 44% of the respondents reporting that 9/11 had made them "more interested in politics and political news."⁷ Of those, almost 3 in 5 said that this heightened interest generalized to "all kinds of political issues." If interest increased for political news in general, did political knowledge get a boost across the board?

This is difficult to answer since we are limited by the availability of survey questions that were asked before and after 9/11. Figure 2 graphs the percentage of people rating the performance of several political leaders as a measure of recognition. Recognition of Tom Daschle and Dick Cheney changed little between March/April and June 2001, but had increased perceptibly when measured again in January 2002. Recognition of Dennis Hastert was also clearly higher in January '02 than in April '01. Furthermore, the percentage of people who know the majority in the U.S. House also increased during this period: from 31% in June '01 to 56% in February '02.⁸ In sum, we observe several instances where political knowledge increased between mid-2001 and early 2002 in areas not directly related to 9/11. Our data do not permit us to determine the extent to which heightened political interest after 9/11 contributed to this learning effect. It is not implausible that people simply became more familiar with the new government. But the large increase in recognition between June '01 and January '02, but not in the earlier period between March '01 and June '01, suggests that 9/11 provides at least a partial explanation for the observed knowledge gains.

If interest and learning indeed spread to politics more generally as a result of 9/11, we can just as clearly see the

limits of this spreading effect. In 1999 and 2002, random samples of U.S. residents were asked whether crime had decreased in the past 10 years and what percentage of the budget was spent on foreign aid (see Table 1). The percentage of people answering the foreign aid question correctly is virtually unchanged. On the crime question, we see a small increase, but this is more likely a result of crime rates' having been lower than in the 1990s for several years by now. Increased general political interest does not appear to have spread to the issues of foreign aid and crime. And the remarkable performance on several knowledge questions about the war on terrorism does not generalize to foreign affairs issues per se. Even after 9/11 increased interest in the situation in Afghanistan and the Middle East, only 28% of the population could name Argentina as the Latin American country that recently experienced a political and economic crisis.

The Causes of General and 9/11-Specific Knowledge

So far, we have seen that some of the common assumptions about the acquisition of political knowledge do not seem to apply to the period following 9/11. Political knowledge of 9/11-related issues is quite high, and heightened political interest appears to have spread to some other political issues too. One reason is the immediate threat presented by the terrorist attacks. However, some people still know more than others even about the war on terrorism. How can we explain these differences in political knowledge? Do the same factors that we have found to influence political knowledge in the past influence 9/11-specific knowledge as well? To address these questions, I compared the predictors of general political knowledge and 9/11-specific knowledge, drawing on a representative survey of U.S. residents conducted in February and March 2002 (see notes to Table 1 for details). I created a measure of 9/11-specific knowledge by summing correct responses to three of the questions listed in Table 1:

- "Which of the following countries shares a border with Afghanistan?" (Russia/Pakistan/Iraq/Kazakhstan)
- "In the war in Afghanistan, which of the following groups fought on the side of the coalition led by the United States and Britain?" (The Islamic Jihad/The Taliban/The Northern Alliance/Al-Qaeda)
- "Which of the following agencies was founded in the wake of September 11?" (Office for Homeland Security/Delta Force/National Security Agency/Department of Civilian Defense)

My measure of general political knowledge is the sum of correct answers to the following five questions⁹:

- "For every dollar spent by the federal government in Washington, how much of each dollar do you think goes for foreign aid to help other countries?"
- "Would you say there is more, less, or about the same amount of crime in the United States today as compared to 10 years ago?"

Table 2
Explaining Political Knowledge

	9/11-Specific Knowledge	General Political Knowledge
Political interest	.11*** (.021)	.11*** (.017)
Education, 5-point scale	.035*** (.0050)	.038*** (.0041)
Civic duty	.016 (.025)	.063** (.021)
External efficacy	-.0066 (.021)	.037* (.018)
Trust in government	.031 (.021)	.0044 (.017)
R is female	-.054*** (.011)	-.050*** (.0091)
Age	.0005 (.00039)	.00007 (.00032)
R works at least part-time	-.016 (.013)	-.041*** (.011)
HH income	.0077*** (.0015)	.0079*** (.0013)
Primary language is English	.078* (.033)	-.0052 (.028)
R lives in New England or Mid-Atlantic state	.035* (.014)	.015 (.011)
Constant	.51*** (.042)	.25*** (.035)
Adjusted R ²	.135	.085
N	2239	2239

Note: Cell entries are OLS coefficients and standard errors in parentheses.

*p < .05.

**p < .01.

***p < .001.

“Which party currently has the most members in the House of Representatives in Washington?”

Visual recognition of Vladimir Putin

Visual recognition of John McCain

Both types of knowledge have in common several of the well-known predictors of political knowledge. The regression analysis in Table 2 shows that political interest, education, gender, and income are all related to both types of knowledge at statistically significant levels. People who are more politically interested, people who are better educated, men, and people with higher income are more knowledgeable about the war on terrorism and politics in general. These results mirror previous analyses of political knowledge (e.g., Delli Carpini and Keeter 1996).

Several differences emerge, however, between explanations of general and 9/11-specific knowledge. First, we know that some people keep up with the news, even if they are not particularly interested in politics, because they believe that it is their duty as citizens to do so (Delli Carpini and Keeter 1996). The results for the general political knowledge index corroborate this conclusion: General knowledge is higher

among people with a sense of duty.¹⁰ The same is not true for 9/11-specific knowledge. People know about the war on terrorism independent of their sense of duty. Those who do not think that it is their responsibility as a citizen to be informed are just as knowledgeable about the war than those who do.

The second difference is somewhat similar. People’s sense of government responsiveness—their “external efficacy”—normally affects learning. Those who believe that government officials pay attention to “ordinary citizens” are more likely to learn about politics. In the present analysis, external efficacy is significantly related to general political knowledge, but not to 9/11-specific knowledge.¹¹ People who think that they don’t have any say in what government does or that officials don’t care about ordinary citizens are not discouraged to learn about the war on terrorism—they know just as much as those who believe government to be more responsive.

The third difference is just as intuitive. People who work full-time are less likely to be well informed about current political events, presumably because they are too busy to follow politics closely. Yet, work status is not related to 9/11-specific knowledge. People with a full-time job learned just as much about the war on terrorism as those with presumably more free time. Given that coverage of 9/11 was available virtually 24 hours a day, it is not surprising that being at work for eight hours a day does not lower knowledge of the events.

Finally, we return to the theme of self-interest and threat. Even controlling for all other factors, we still find evidence that people living in the Northeast are particularly knowledgeable about the events of 9/11. The threat of terrorism is most clearly perceived close to the sites of the attacks, and thus residents there have learned more about the war on terrorism than have people in other parts of the country. General political knowledge, on the other hand, is not higher in the Northeast. The perception of threat has not stimulated people to learn about such things as the crime rate or the House majority party.

To some it may seem reassuring that a crisis of 9/11’s proportions can command the interest of most Americans. It is, however, a perversity of our political system and the nature of human attention that this sort of universal interest occurs only in moments of disaster, such as the Kennedy assassination, the Challenger explosion, or 9/11. The conclusion to draw from this analysis, then, is unfortunately not that the public’s attention is there when we need it the most. When information can make a difference, on election day, many people stay home or cast uninformed votes. By failing to gather more information before they cast their vote, uninformed voters betray their own best interest. Recent research shows that a more informed electorate would frequently reach different electoral decisions and develop different collective policy preferences—decisions and preferences that would often benefit currently less-informed citizens (Althaus 1998; Bartels 1996; Gilens 2001). In the case of 9/11, the context—the presence of an unspecified threat—triggered an increase in interest and knowledge. Normally, however, a democracy cannot and should not use threat to reach the knowledge levels it requires to function. It has to rely on context-independent, intrinsic interest, which is in shorter supply than threat-induced interest after 9/11. Politics gets undivided attention when things go horribly and perceptibly wrong. Little things that go wrong and accumulate over time do not trigger the same threat perception, but may well be equally damaging. If our threat monitors and self-interest detectors routinely fail to notice the small disasters, saying that they worked when the big crisis came does not prove that our democracy is in good health.

Notes

*I would like to thank Scott Althaus, Mo Fiorina, Shanto Iyengar, and Paul Sniderman for helpful comments.

1. The most comprehensive analysis of Americans' political knowledge is Delli Carpini and Keeter (1996). For a recent review of the literature, see Kinder (1998).

2. For sources for these and all other poll questions cited, see Table 1.

3. I have argued elsewhere that this lack of alternatives is a powerful factor in increasing political knowledge, especially among people who would usually prefer media content other than news. One reason for decreasing political knowledge in some segments of the population is the unlimited availability of entertainment that makes it much easier to avoid politics. The week after 9/11 resembled the old days of broadcast television when all channels offered news at the same time (for a summary of this argument, see Prior 2002).

4. Paul Farhi and Christopher Stern, "Big Story Costly to Media Firms. Newspaper, TV Companies Warn Wall Street of Impact on Earnings," *Washington Post*, 20 September 2001, sec. E. David D. Kirkpatrick and Stuart Elliott, "Media Trying, with Dignity, to Stem Huge Losses in Advertising," *New York Times*, 17 September 2001, sec. C.

5. The January 2001 Pew News Interest Index asked about "renewed efforts to reach peace agreement in the Middle East," not about violence in the Middle East.

6. Pew Research Center for the People & the Press, November 13–19, 2001; phone survey, N = 1,500.

7. *Washington Post* poll, February, 19–21, 2002; phone survey, N = 756.

8. As indicated in Table 1, the wording was not identical for the both questions. Moreover, the June '01 poll was conducted over the phone, whereas the February–March '02 poll used web-based interviewing.

9. Both knowledge indices are divided by the number of items to the range from 0 to 1.

10. The index of civic duty is created by averaging agreement with the following four items: "It is my duty as a citizen to follow the news," "If my friends do not care to get information about politics, that's fine with me" (reversed), "Not following the news even if I have the time to do so makes me feel guilty," and "Everyone should know about the important political issues of the day." The resulting measure of news preference has a reliability of $\alpha = .64$.

11. The external efficacy scale is built by averaging agreement with two statements: "Public officials don't care much what people like me think," and "People like me don't have any say about what the government does." They correlate at $\alpha = .58$.

References

- Althaus, Scott L. 1998. "Information Effects in Collective Preferences." *American Political Science Review* 92:545–58.
- Bartels, Larry M. 1996. "Uninformed Votes: Information Effects in Presidential Elections." *American Journal of Political Science* 40:177–207.
- Converse, Philip E. 1975. "Public Opinion and Voting Behavior." In *Handbook of Political Science*, ed. Fred I. Greenstein and Nelson W. Polsby. Reading, MA: Addison–Wesley.
- Delli Carpini, Michael X., and Scott Keeter. 1996. *What Americans Know About Politics and Why It Matters*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.
- Downs, Anthony. 1957. *An Economic Theory of Democracy*. New York: Harper.
- Fiorina, Morris P. 1990. "Information and Rationality in Elections." In *Information and Democratic Processes*, ed. John A. Ferejohn and James H. Kuklinski. Urbana: University of Illinois Press.
- Gilens, Martin. 2001. "Political Ignorance and Collective Policy Preferences." *American Political Science Review* 95:379–96.
- Iyengar, Shanto. 1990. "Shortcuts to Political Knowledge: Selective Attention and Accessibility Bias." In *Information and Democratic Processes*, ed. John A. Ferejohn and James H. Kuklinski. Urbana: University of Illinois Press.
- Kinder, Donald R. 1998. "Opinion and Action in the Realm of Politics." In *The Handbook of Social Psychology*, ed. Daniel T. Gilbert, Susan T. Fiske, and Gardner Lindzey. Boston: McGraw-Hill.
- Marcus, George E., and Michael B. MacKuen. 1993. "Anxiety, Enthusiasm, and the Vote: The Emotional Underpinnings of Learning and Involvement During Presidential Campaigns." *American Political Science Review* 87:672–85.
- Prior, Markus. 2002. "Liberated Viewers, Polarized Voters: The Implications of Increased Media Choice for Democratic Politics." *The Good Society* 11(3).
- Rainie, Lee, and Bente Kalsnes. 2001. *The Commons on the Tragedy*. Washington, DC: Pew Internet and American Life Project, October 10.
- Sears, David O., and Jonathan L. Freedman. 1967. "Selective Exposure to Information: A Critical Review." *Public Opinion Quarterly* 31:194–213.



Rally Leader: Support for President Bush surged in the wake of September 11 reaching a Gallup Poll 90% approval on September 21 and 22. Here Bush speaks to reporters in the Oval Office on Thursday, Sept. 13, 2001. (AP Photo/Doug Mills)