



MARKET RESEARCH

The Harris Poll® PEOPLE

Civics Education

Prepared for:

The American Bar Association



July 2005



Table of Contents

	Page
Background and Methodology	3
Executive Summary	4
Detailed Findings	7
Respondent Profile	16



Background and Methodology

Harris Interactive conducted an omnibus study on behalf of the American Bar Association. A nationally representative sample of 1,002 adult Americans ages 18 or older were interviewed by telephone using an unrestricted Random Digit Dialing (RDD) technique that significantly reduces serial bias and ensures that respondents with both listed and unlisted numbers are reached. Only one interview was conducted per household.

Interviews were conducted from July 22 through July 27, 2005.

To ensure a reliable and accurate representation of the total national adult population, completed interviews were weighted to known proportions for race, education and gender. The margin of error for the total sample is plus or minus 3.1%.

Please note that questions may not add up to 100% due to rounding or the acceptance of multiple responses.



Executive Summary



Executive Summary

- **The majority of Americans could use a civics refresher course.**
- **Just over half (55%) of Americans can correctly identify the three branches of government.**
 - More than one in five (22%) believe the three branches of government are the Republican, Democrat, and Independent branches.
 - A full 16% of respondents believe the three branches of government to be local, state, and federal.
- **Less than half (48%) of Americans can correctly identify the meaning of the concept of separation of powers.**
 - However, almost two-thirds (63%) report being very or somewhat familiar with the separation of powers principle.
 - 82% feel that the separation of powers is important, while only 5% report that it is not important or they do not know what it means.
- **Nearly two-thirds of Americans (64%) can correctly identify the principle of checks and balances.**
 - Just about that same percent (68%) report being somewhat or very familiar with the concept of checks and balances.
 - About four in five (82%) believe checks and balances are important, while only 3% believe they are not important or are not sure what they are.
- **Almost half (48%) of respondents correctly identified the role of the judiciary in the federal government.**
 - Nearly three in ten (29%) reported they believe the judiciary advises the President and Congress about the legality of an action they intend to take in the future.

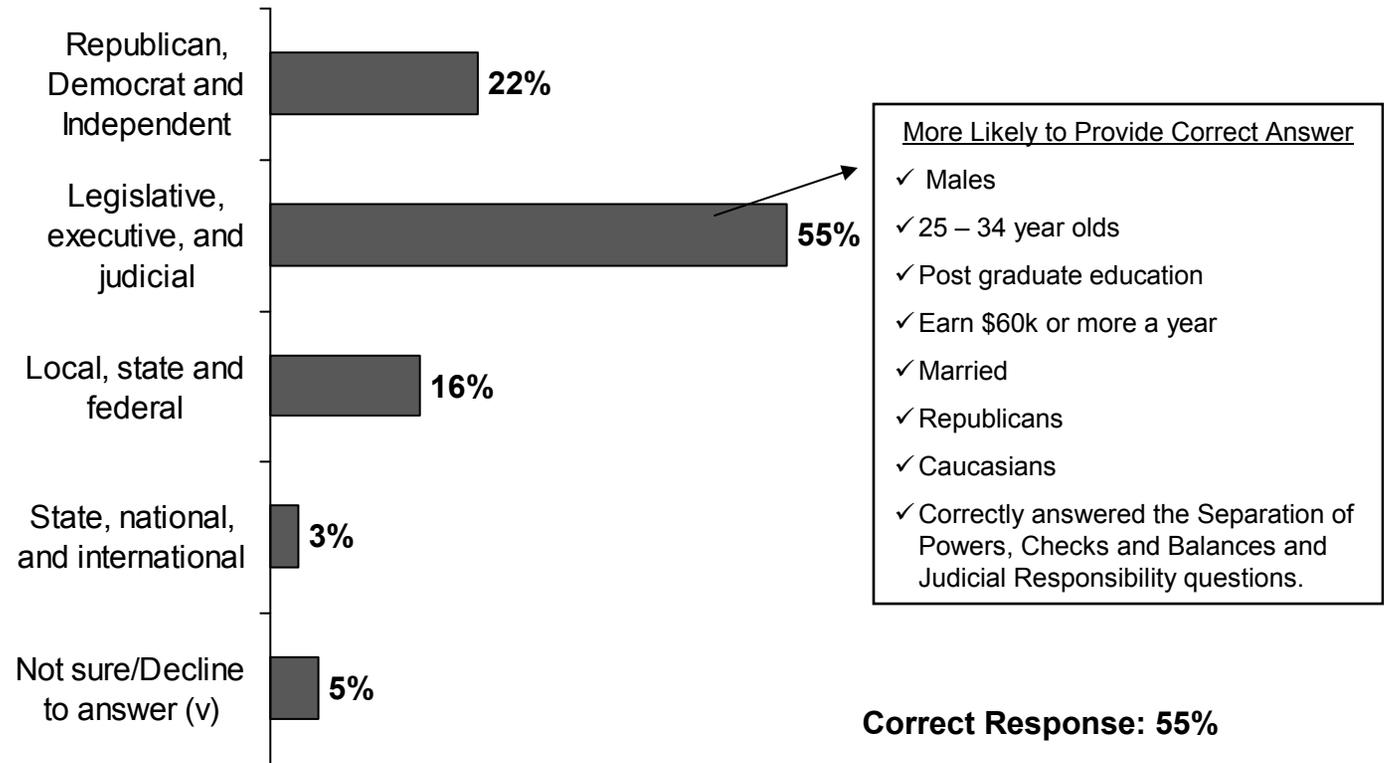


Detailed Findings



Slightly more than half (55%) can correctly identify the three branches of government.

Branches of Government



More Likely to Provide Correct Answer

- ✓ Males
- ✓ 25 – 34 year olds
- ✓ Post graduate education
- ✓ Earn \$60k or more a year
- ✓ Married
- ✓ Republicans
- ✓ Caucasians
- ✓ Correctly answered the Separation of Powers, Checks and Balances and Judicial Responsibility questions.

Correct Response: 55%

Incorrect Response: 40%

What are the three branches of government?

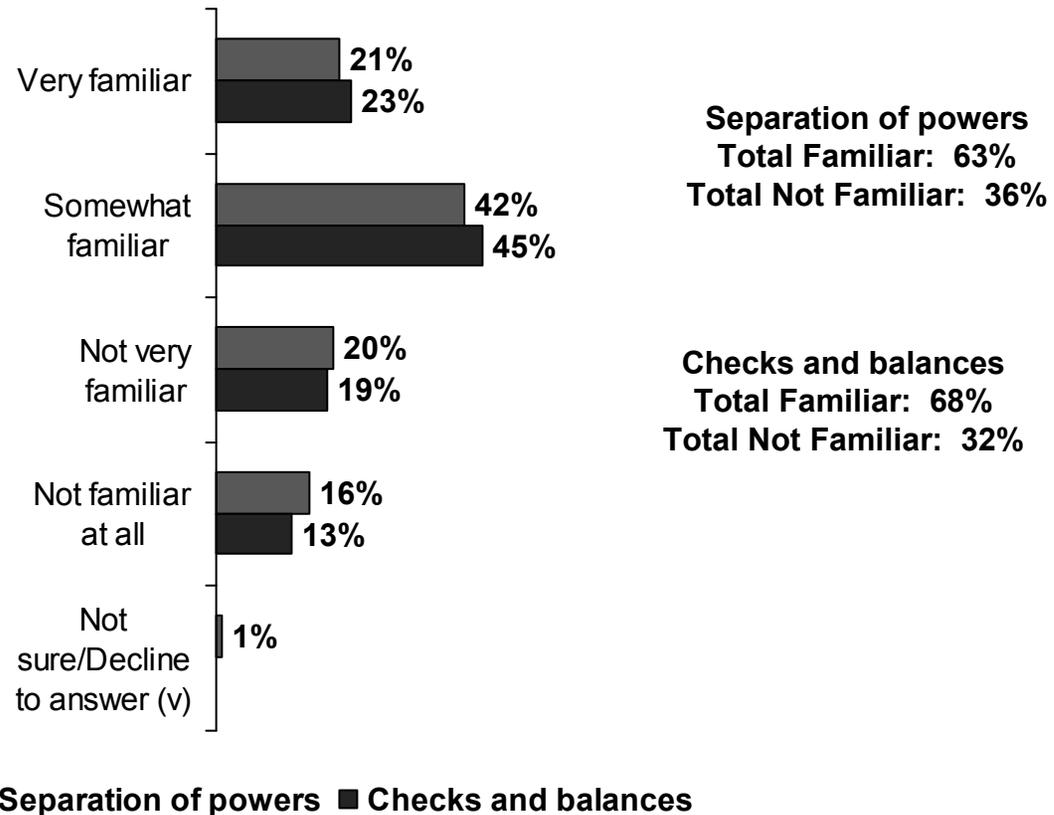
Base: All respondents (n=1002)





Similar numbers of respondents indicate familiarity with the concept of separation of powers (63%) and checks and balances (68%).

Familiarity with U.S. Constitution



How familiar would you say you are with these concepts on which the U.S. constitution is structured- very familiar, somewhat familiar, not very familiar, or not at all familiar?

Base: All respondents (n=1002)



However, nearly half (48%) incorrectly identified the meaning of separation of powers.

Meaning of Separation of Powers

	<u>Total</u>
	%
Republicans can do some things, but Democrats can do others.	6
Different federal departments have different powers. For example, the Department of Defense runs the military while the Department of Justice prosecutes crimes.	27
The federal government does some things, like set postage rates, while state governments have other powers, like setting speed limits on state highways.	15
Congress, the President and the Federal Courts each have different responsibilities.	45
Not sure/Decline to answer (v)	8

- More Likely to Provide Correct Answer
- ✓ Post graduate education
 - ✓ Earn \$60k or more a year
 - ✓ Married with children
 - ✓ Republicans
 - ✓ Registered to vote
 - ✓ Caucasians
 - ✓ Correctly answered the 3 Branches of Gov't, Checks and Balances and Judicial Responsibility questions.

Correct Response: 45%

Incorrect Response: 48%

Which of the following best describes what "separation of powers" means?

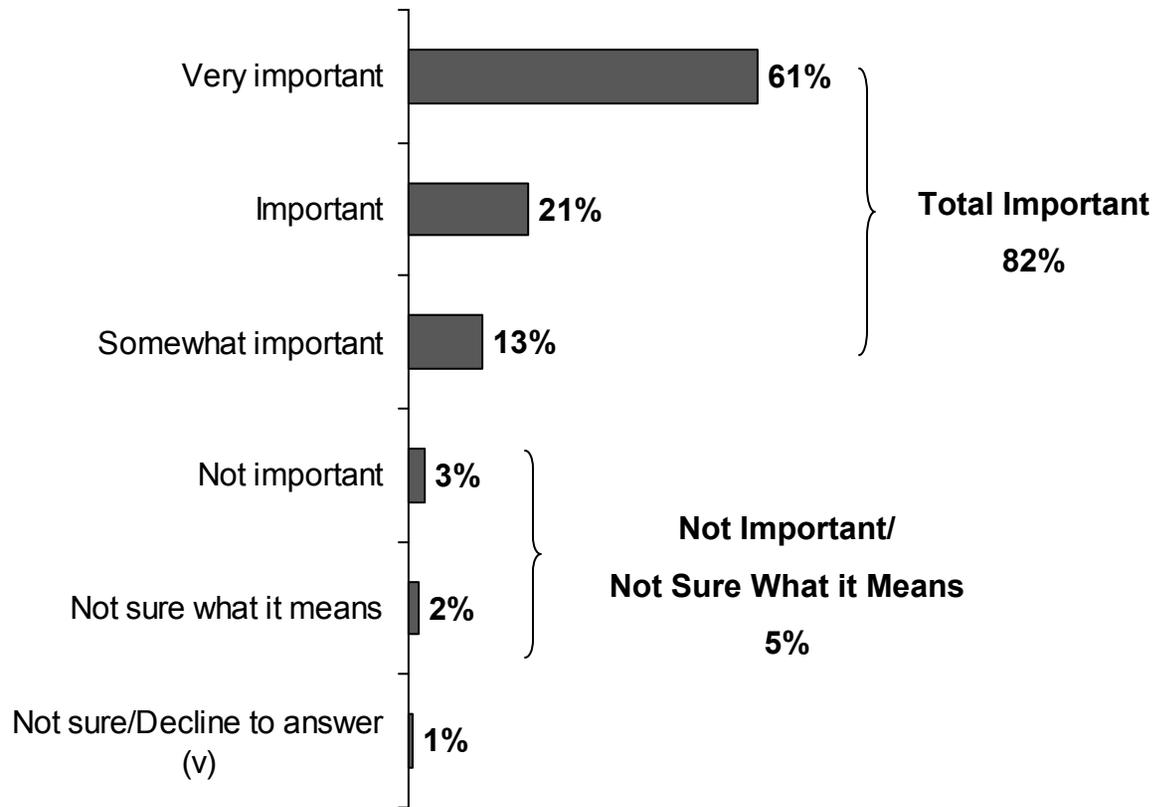
Base: All respondents (n=1002)





A large majority (82%) of respondents feel the concept of separation of powers is important.

Importance of Separation of Powers

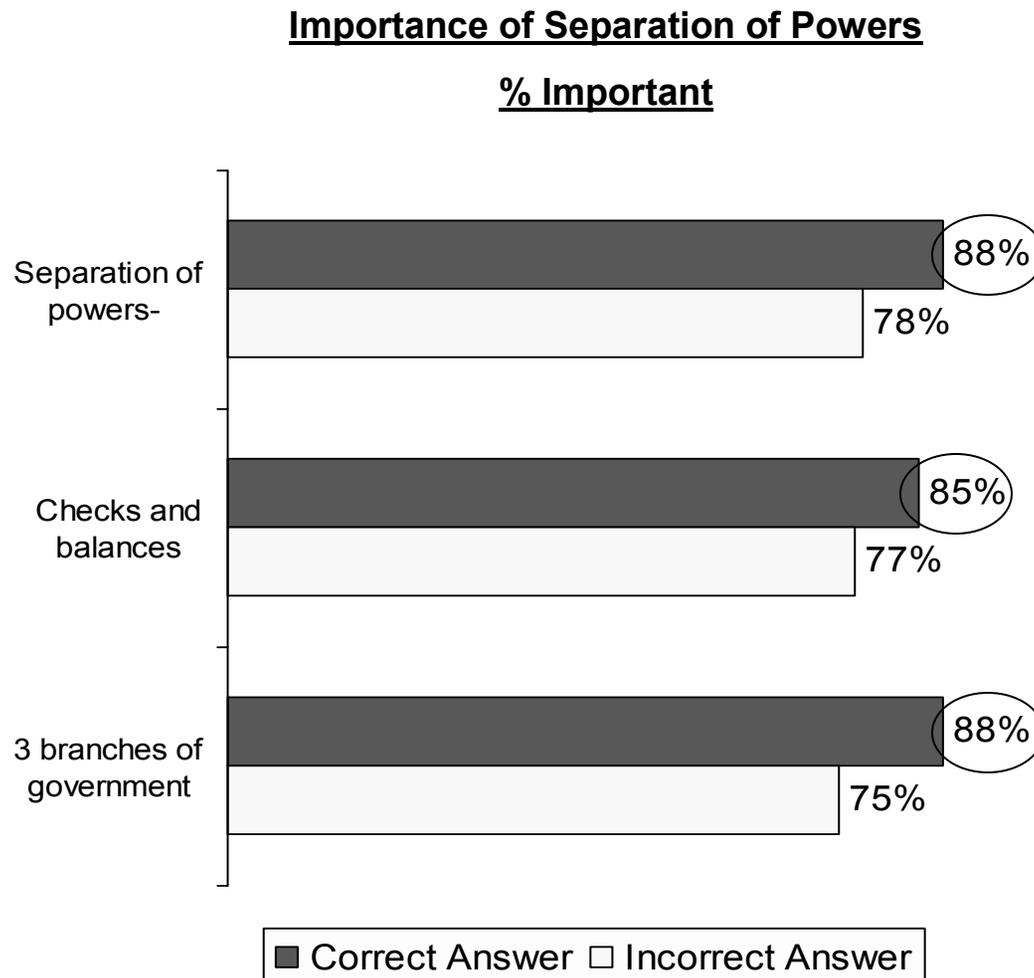


How important is the principle of “separation of powers” in the federal government?
Base: All respondents (n=1002)





Those who answered any of the questions correct about the meaning of the three concepts were more likely to think that Separation of powers is important.



How important is the principle of “separation of powers” in the federal government?
Base: All respondents (n=1002)





When it comes to checks and balances, nearly two-thirds (64%) can correctly identify the meaning, compared to less than half (45%) who correctly identified the meaning of separation of powers.

Meaning of Checks and Balances

	Total
	%
Negotiations between Congress and the President over a balanced federal budget.	15
A division of power among the branches of federal government that prevents any one of them from going beyond their constitutional authority.	64
The decisions by the Federal Reserve Board about interest rates and banking.	8
Regulation of auditors and the financial services industry by the Securities and Exchange Commission.	6
Not sure/Decline to answer (v)	6

- More Likely to Provide Correct Answer
- ✓ Males
 - ✓ 35 – 54 year olds
 - ✓ Post graduate education
 - ✓ Earn \$60k or more a year
 - ✓ Married
 - ✓ Republicans
 - ✓ Caucasians
 - ✓ Correctly answered the 3 Branches of Gov't, Separation of Powers, and Judicial Responsibility questions.

Correct Response: 64%

Incorrect Response: 29%

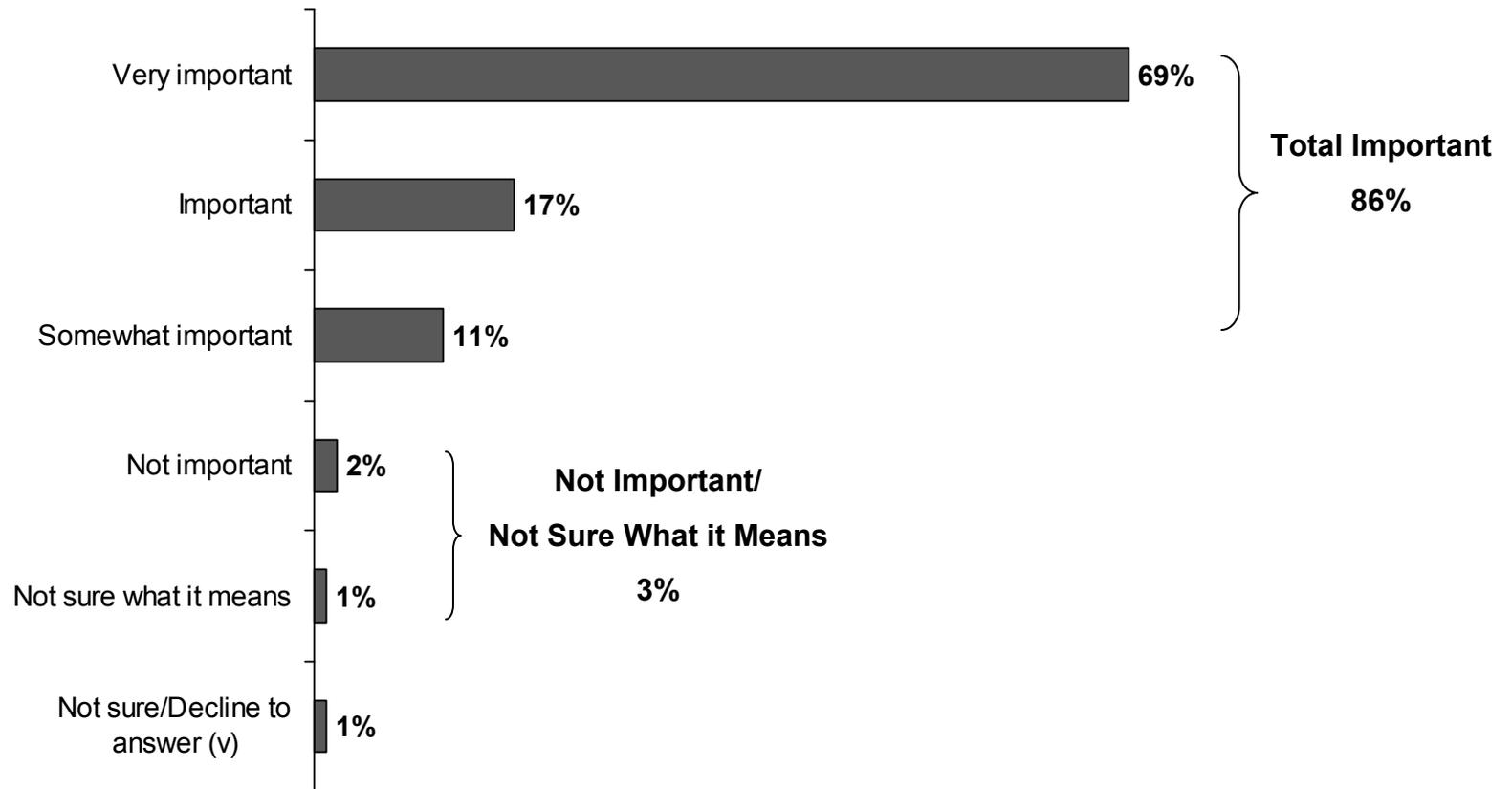
Which of the following best describes what “checks and balances” refers to?
Base: All respondents (n=1002)





Nearly all (86%) Americans feel the concept of checks and balances is important, with almost 7 in 10 (69%) citing checks and balances as very important.

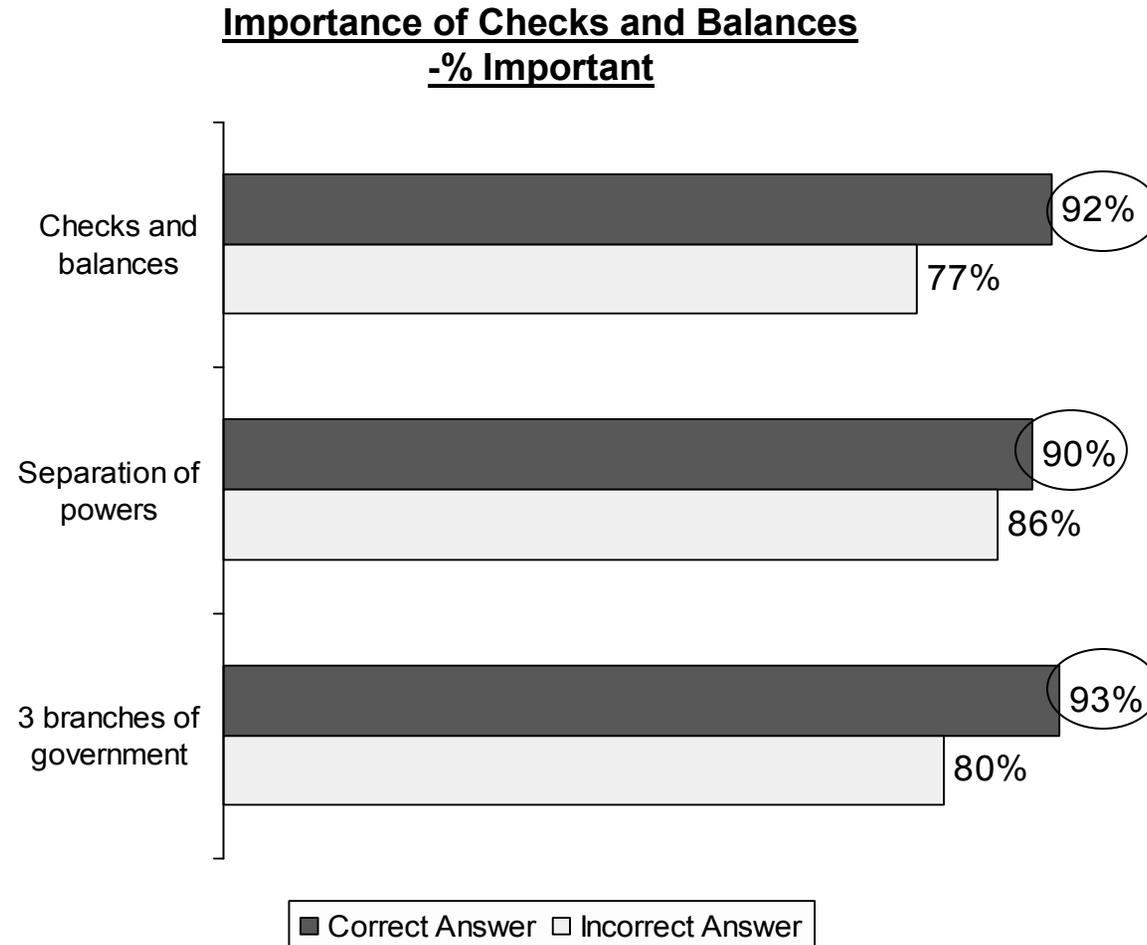
Importance of Checks and Balances



How important is the principle of “checks and balances” in the federal government?
Base: All respondents (n=1002)



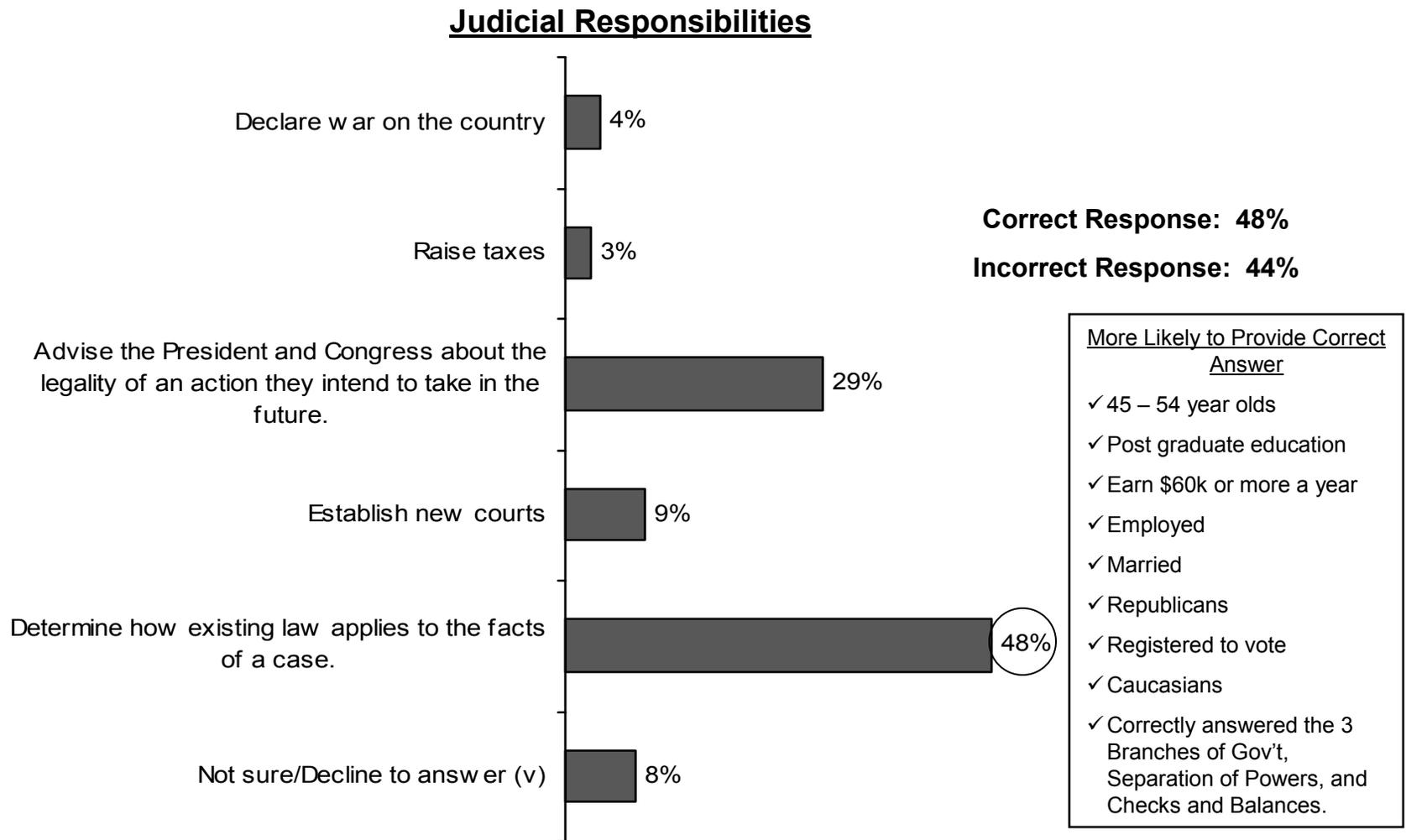
As with separation of powers, those who correctly identified the meaning of these three concepts tend to think Checks and balances are more important than those who did not.



How important is the principle of “checks and balances” in the federal government?
Base: All respondents (n=1002)



Concerning judicial responsibilities, only slightly more respondents (48%) can correctly identify judicial responsibilities than those who cannot (44%).

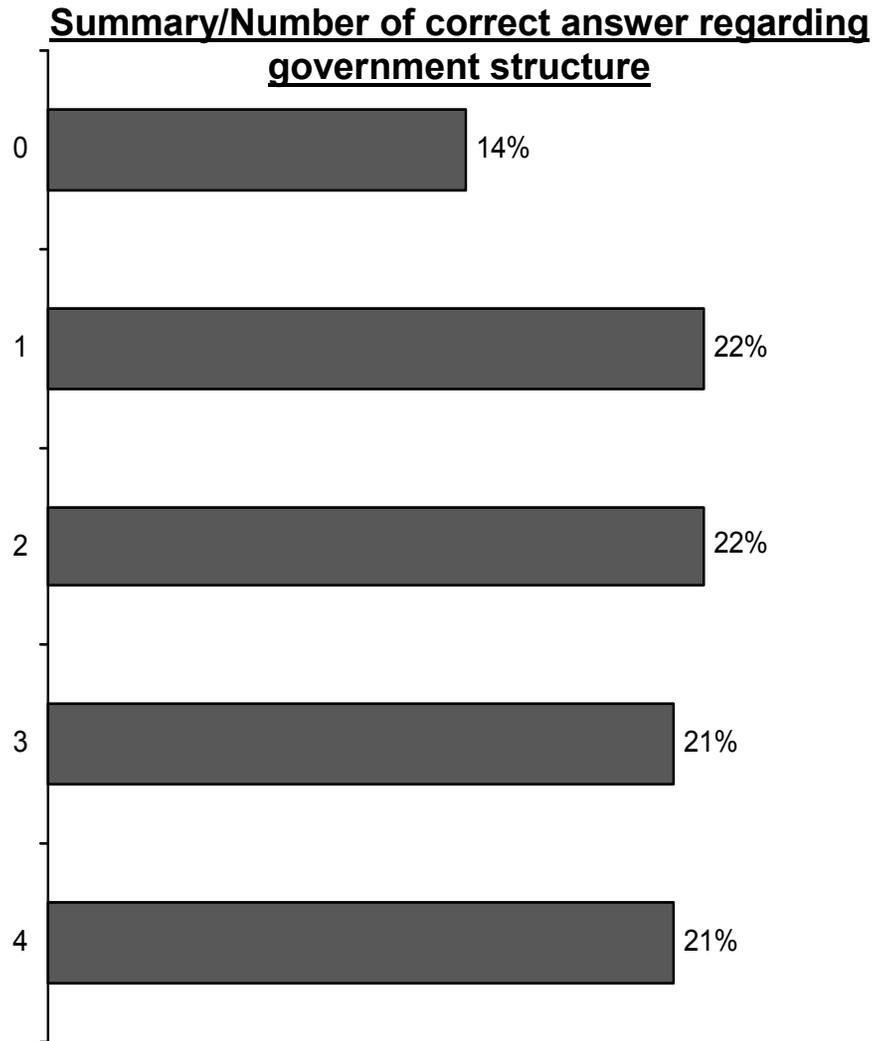


In addition to determining whether a law violates the U.S. Constitution, which ONE of the following is a responsibility of the judicial branch of government?

Base: All Respondents (n=1002)



About 1 in 5 correctly answered all four questions concerning the division of powers within the federal government.



- More Likely to Answer all Four Correctly
- ✓ Post-graduate education
 - ✓ Moderates
 - ✓ Republicans
 - ✓ Registered voters



Summary of correct responses.
Base: All Respondents (n=1002)



Respondent Profile



Respondent Profile

<u>Gender</u>	<u>Total</u> %
Male	48
Female	52

<u>Age</u>	<u>Total</u> %
18 – 34	22
35 – 44	16
45 – 54	21
55+	41

<u>Race</u>	<u>Total</u> %
White	73
Black/African American	12
Asian/Asian American	1
Other	6
Decline to answer	2

<u>Ethnicity</u>	
Yes, of Hispanic origin	10
No, not of Hispanic origin	90

<u>Marital Status</u>	<u>Total</u> %
Married	55
Single, never married	19
Divorced	13
Separated	2
Widowed	10
Living with partner	*

<u>Children <18 in Household</u>	<u>Total</u> %
Yes	38
No	25



Respondent Profile (continued)

<u>Education</u>	<u>Total</u> %
High school graduate or less	43
Completed some college, but no degree	27
Associate's degree	7
College graduate or more	24

<u>Employment Status</u>	<u>Total</u> %
Employed full-time	41
Employed part-time	10
Not employed	48

<u>Household Income</u>	<u>Total</u> %
Less than \$25,000	33
\$25,000 - \$49,999	27
\$50,000 - \$79,999	17
\$80,000 or more	12
Decline to answer	12