



THE PEW RESEARCH CENTER
For The People & The Press

NEWS Release
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Speech Not Seen as More Important than Past Addresses Most Intend to Watch Obama's State of the Union

Most Americans say they plan to watch President Obama's State of the Union address Tuesday night. Still, a sizable majority sees the speech to Congress as no more important than in previous years.

In the latest survey by the Pew Research Center for the People & the Press, conducted Jan. 20-23 among 1,001 adults, 61% say they plan to watch the State of the Union address, either on television (54%) or the internet (7%). About a third (35%) say they don't think they will watch the State of the Union, Obama's first since Republicans took control of the House in the 2010 elections.

In January 2007, shortly after Democrats took control of Congress, 59% said they planned to watch George W. Bush's State of the Union speech, while 37% said they did not.

Nearly three-in-ten (28%) say this year's speech is more important than addresses in past years, while 53% say it is about as important and 11% say it is less important. The number saying this speech is more important is down from just before Obama's 2010 speech (39% more important).

Fewer Republicans Plan to Watch State of the Union

	Total	Rep	Dem	Ind
<i>Plan to watch and how?</i>	%	%	%	%
Yes, plan to watch	61	54	74	58
on television	54	52	65	48
on internet	7	2	9	10
Don't think will watch	35	42	20	38
Don't know	4	4	6	4
	100	100	100	100
<i>Importance of speech compared to past years</i>				
More important	28	20	39	28
Less important	11	20	3	13
Same	53	55	54	53
Don't know	8	5	4	6
	100	100	100	100
<i>Heard about proposal to get Dems, Reps to sit together at speech...</i>				
A lot	15	17	21	10
A little	34	31	32	39
Nothing at all	50	51	46	50
Don't know	1	1	1	1
	100	100	100	100

PEW RESEARCH CENTER Jan. 20-23, 2011.
Figures may not add to 100% because of rounding.

The address also comes just weeks after the Jan. 8 shooting rampage in Tucson, Ariz., that nearly killed one House member, Democrat Gabrielle Giffords. Views about the importance of this year's State of the Union are roughly similar today to what they were in a survey conducted largely before the shootings.

Democrats are far more likely than independents or Republicans to say they will watch the president's speech. Fully 74% of Democrats intend to watch it either on television (65%) or online (9%). That compares with 58% of independents and 54% of Republicans who say they will watch the speech either on TV or on the web.

Democrats also are more likely to view this year's speech as more important than past State of the Union addresses: 39% of Democrats say this, compared with 28% of independents and 20% of Republicans.

By contrast, there is little partisan difference in awareness of proposals to have Republican and Democratic lawmakers sit together during the speech as a show of unity. Roughly half of Democrats (53%) say they have heard a lot (21%) or a little (32%) about this; comparable percentages of independents (49%) and Republicans (48%) say they heard at least a little about these proposals.

Bush's Early Speeches Seen as More Important

The public's perceived importance of the speech is not much different than during most years of George W. Bush's presidency. Still, Americans saw the two Bush speeches following the Sept. 11, 2001 terror attacks as more important than usual; 54% said this in January 2002, while a similar number (52%) said this in January 2003 amid the buildup to the Iraq war and growing concerns about the economy.

Importance of State of the Union

	More important	Less important	Same	DK
Obama	%	%	%	%
Jan 20-23	28	11	53	8=100
Jan 5-9	34	11	49	6=100
Jan 2010	39	9	45	7=100
Bush				
Jan 2008	19	27	46	8=100
Jan 2007	32	16	43	9=100
Jan 2006	30	14	47	9=100
Jan 2005	34	9	47	10=100
Jan 2004	34	9	49	8=100
Jan 2003	52	6	35	7=100
Jan 2002	54	4	36	6=100
Clinton				
Jan 2000	16	22	53	9=100
Jan 1999	27	16	51	6=100

PEW RESEARCH CENTER Jan. 20-23, 2011.
 Figures may not add to 100% because of rounding.

From 2004 to 2007, roughly a third viewed Bush's State of the Union as more important than previous years' addresses. That percentage dropped to 19% in January 2008, shortly before Bush's final State of the Union.

About the Survey

The analysis in this report is based on telephone interviews conducted January 20-23, 2011 among a national sample of 1,001 adults 18 years of age or older living in the continental United States (671 respondents were interviewed on a landline telephone, and 330 were interviewed on a cell phone, including 135 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 and relative usage of landline and cell phones (for those with both), 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	1001	4.0 percentage points
Republicans	283	7.0 percentage points
Democrats	307	7.0 percentage points
Independents	311	7.0 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.

About the Pew Research Center for the People & the Press

The Pew Research Center for the People & the Press is an independent opinion research group that studies attitudes toward the press, politics and public policy issues. We are sponsored by The Pew Charitable Trusts and are one of seven projects that make up the Pew Research Center, a nonpartisan "fact tank" that provides information on the issues, attitudes and trends shaping America and the world.

The Center's purpose is to serve as a forum for ideas on the media and public policy through public opinion research. In this role it serves as an important information resource for political leaders, journalists, scholars, and public interest organizations. All of our current survey results are made available free of charge.

All of the Center's research and reports are collaborative products based on the input and analysis of the entire Center staff consisting of:

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**PEW RESEARCH CENTER NEWS INTEREST INDEX
JANUARY 20-23, 2011 OMNIBUS
FINAL TOPLINE
N=1001**

PEW.1 AND PEW.2 HELD FOR FUTURE RELEASE

PEW.3a AND PEW.3b HELD FOR FUTURE RELEASE

ASK ALL:

PEW.3 How much, if anything, have you heard about each of the following **[INSERT; RANDOMIZE]**

	<u>A lot</u>	<u>A little</u>	<u>Nothing at all</u>	(VOL.) DK/Ref
c. A proposal that Republicans and Democrats sit together at this year's State of the Union address, rather than on separate sides of the room				
January 20-23, 2011	15	34	50	1

ASK ALL:

PEW.4 Now thinking about Barack Obama's upcoming State of the Union address... Do you consider this year's State of the Union address to be MORE important than past years', LESS important, or about as important as past years'?

	<u>More important</u>	<u>Less important</u>	<u>Same</u>	(VOL.) DK/Ref
Obama				
January 20-23, 2011	28	11	53	8
January 5-9, 2011	34	11	49	6
January 6-10, 2010	39	9	45	7
Bush				
January, 2008 ¹	19	27	46	8
January, 2007	32	16	43	9
January, 2006	30	14	47	9
January, 2005	34	9	47	10
Mid-January, 2004	34	9	49	8
January, 2003	52	6	35	7
January, 2002	54	4	36	6
Clinton				
January, 2000	16	22	53	9
January, 1999	27	16	51	6

ASK ALL:

PEW.5 Do you plan to watch this year's State of the Union Address on television, watch it on the internet, or don't you think you'll watch it?

TREND FOR COMPARISON

Jan 20-23 <u>2011</u>		Jan <u>2007²</u>	
54	Watch on television	59	Yes, watch
7	Watch on the internet	37	No, not watch
35	Don't think will watch	4	Don't know/Refused (VOL.)
4	Don't know/Refused (VOL.)		

¹ In 2008, question began "As you may know, George W. Bush will give his annual State of the Union address in a few weeks..."

² In January 2007, this item asked about George W. Bush's State of the Union address and did not ask where respondents plan to watch.