

Key Geography Education Indicators: The U.S. Is Being Left Behind

International and Domestic Surveys Show Americans Lack Geographic Literacy

In 2002, National Geographic commissioned the Roper polling agency to conduct in-person surveys of geographic literacy with a representative sample of over 300 18- to 24-year-olds in each of nine countries: Canada, France, Germany, Great Britain, Italy, Japan, Mexico, Sweden, and the United States (3,250 total surveys). In 2006 National Geographic/Roper conducted a U.S.-only survey to reassess the geographic literacy of young Americans.

- The **United States placed second to last**, above only Mexico, in geographic knowledge, averaging just 23 questions correct out of 56 total questions (41%) (2002).
- Almost nine in ten (88%) Americans **cannot find Afghanistan** on a map of Asia (2006).
- Seven in ten (70%) **cannot find North Korea** on a map, and among just four choices two-thirds (63%) do not know its border with South Korea is the most heavily fortified in the world (2006).
- 50% **cannot find New York State** on a U.S. map, even though it is the third most populous state in the nation, after California and Texas (2006).
- From just four choices, 71% **cannot identify the U.S.** as the world's largest exporter of goods and services (2006).
- Six in ten (63%) **cannot find Iraq or Saudi Arabia** on a map of the Middle East, while three-quarters **cannot find Iran or Israel** (2006).
- Three-quarters think English is the most spoken native language in the world, while only 18% correctly identified Mandarin Chinese (2006).
- When asked, the year after 9/11, to identify the base of Taliban and al Qaeda, Americans scored last among the nine countries with 58% correctly identifying Afghanistan, compared with a 76% average for the eight other countries surveyed (2002).
- Only 19% of young adults in the United States could name four countries that acknowledge having nuclear weapons, compared with the top two performing countries, Germany and Sweden, who averaged 36% (2002).

Geography Is Getting Left Behind Under *No Child Left Behind*

- Due to NCLB's focus on reading and math, **69% of elementary school principals report decreases in time for social studies, including geography** (2005).
- 93% of fourth-grade students are taught geography by teachers who do not have a major, minor, or emphasis on geography or geography education in their undergraduate or graduate studies (2002).
- 72% of eighth-grade students are taught geography by teachers who do not have a major, minor, or emphasis on geography or geography education in their undergraduate or graduate studies (2002).
- National Geographic analysis shows that **42 states fail to require a high school geography course**. Just four states (South Dakota, Texas, Utah, and Virginia) and the District of Columbia require a stand-alone geography course for high school graduation. Three states require a combined history and geography course (California, New Mexico, and Rhode Island) (2005).