



## What Americans know about the U.S. Supreme Court and want changed about the Court

**September 24, 2009, Washington, D.C.,** - A new C-SPAN poll of awareness and knowledge of the U.S. Supreme Court shows that nearly nine in ten American voters (88%) say the Court has an impact on their everyday lives -- but only half (49%) of respondents could name a specific case heard by the Court.

The survey of 801 voters conducted for C-SPAN on September 17<sup>th</sup> by Penn, Schoen and Berland Associates, LLC, also indicates the public supports major changes to the Court, most notably revisiting the concept of constitutionally-guaranteed lifetime appointments.

Nearly eight in ten respondents (79%) know there is no mandatory retirement age for Supreme Court justices; 56% of those surveyed said would prefer that justices do not receive lifetime appointments. In fact, fully three-in-four (78%) of survey participants would prefer 18-year terms to the high court, a proposal published in the Harvard Journal of Law and Public Policy and reported on by the *New York Times*, among others. (In fact, the average tenure of the eight Justices appointed before this summer is 17 years. Newly-appointed Justice Sotomayor replaced Justice Souter, who served 18.6 years.)

Another major change to the Court favored by survey respondents is televised oral arguments; nearly two in three (65%) want cameras in the Supreme Court (tracking closely with a 61% finding in a July 2009 C-SPAN poll conducted directly before the Sotomayor hearings).

"Americans are telling us that the work of the Supreme Court is important to their lives. So much so, that they want greater transparency around its work -- that's what's behind the support for televising the High Court's oral Arguments," said Robert Green, principal, Penn, Schoen and Berland Associates.

(Every state currently allows at least some level of television coverage of appellate court proceedings. Cameras also have been officially permitted in the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> Federal appeals courts on a case-by-case basis since 1996. In addition, the Supreme Court of Canada first allowed a camera in its courtroom in 1981 and next month, Britain's Supreme Court will admit television cameras.)

### **AWARENESS OF COURT PROCEEDINGS**

Of the 49% of those surveyed who could name any case heard by the Court, one case predominates: *Roe vs. Wade* (named by 84%). A few respondents were able to cite other cases: *Brown vs. Board of Education* (9%); *Plessy vs. Ferguson* (3%); *Bush vs. Gore* (1%); *District of Columbia vs. Heller* (1%); *Marbury v. Madison* (1%).

When specifically asked about *Bush vs. Gore* (the case that decided the 2000 presidential election), 71 percent said the ruling did not affect their view of the high court.

The poll was conducted to coincide with C-SPAN's upcoming "Supreme Court Week," which begins on October 4 at 9 PM (ET) with a 90-minute original feature documentary on the Supreme Court, described mostly through the commentary of the Justices who serve there. Over the following week, C-SPAN will air its exclusive one-on-one interviews with every current and retired Justice in their entirety -- the first time so many Justices have granted interviews for a television production.

"During Supreme Court Week, C-SPAN viewers will have a rare opportunity to hear the Justices talking about the role of the Court, its traditions, and its history," C-SPAN president Susan Swain said. "We hope that our programs will help expand Americans' knowledge of the Supreme Court."

**Survey Methodology:** Penn, Schoen & Berland Associates conducted online interviews on September 17, 2009 among 801 2008 general election voters in the United States. The margin of error for the entire sample is +/- 3.46 at the 95% confidence level

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#### **About Penn, Schoen & Berland Associates**

Penn, Schoen & Berland Associates, a unit of the WPP group (NASDAQ = WPPGY) is a global research-based consultancy that specializes in messaging and communications strategy for blue-chip political, corporate and entertainment clients. We have over 30 years of experience in leveraging unique insights about consumer opinion to provide clients with a competitive advantage - what we call Winning Knowledge™. PSB executes polling and message testing services for Fortune 100 corporations and has helped elect more than 30 presidents and prime ministers around the world. More information is available at [www.psbresearch.com](http://www.psbresearch.com).

#### **About C-SPAN**

C-SPAN was created by America's cable companies in 1979 as a public service and programs three public affairs television networks, C-SPAN Radio, a Washington, D.C. radio station distributed by XM Satellite Radio; and a video-rich website. Visit [www.c-span.org](http://www.c-span.org).