Despite changes, Americans know little in news

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WASHINGTON — Americans' knowledge of national and international affairs has changed little in two decades despite the emergence of 24-hour cable news and the Internet as major news sources, a recent poll shows.

People surveyed in February were slightly less able than those polled in 1989 to name the vice president, their state's governor and the president of Russia but slightly more able to answer other questions correctly about national politics, according to a poll released Sunday by the Pew Research Center for the People & the Press.

Of the 1,502 adults surveyed in February, 69 percent correctly answered Dick Cheney when asked who was the vice president, compared with 74 percent who correctly responded Dan Quayle when the same question was asked in 1989. Two-thirds correctly named their state's governor in February compared with three-fourths who got that right in 1989.

However, nearly half — 49 percent — correctly answered that Nancy Pelosi was speaker of the House now, compared with 14 percent who in 1989 correctly named Tom Foley as speaker.

Three-fourths — 76 percent — knew that Democrats control the House compared with 68 percent who answered that correctly in 1989.

The most knowledgeable — the 34 percent of those surveyed who could answer 15 or more of 23 questions correctly — were four times more likely to say they enjoyed keeping up with the news "a lot" than those who answered nine or fewer questions correctly.
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