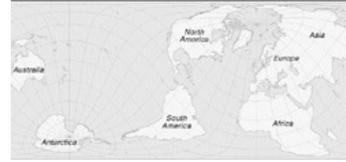


World Beat: International Geography Survey shows lack of skills

By Dheeraj Jagadev
The Flat Hat



In a survey conducted in Canada, France, Germany, Mexico, Great Britain, Italy, Japan, Sweden and the United States, U.S. students came in next to last in geography skills. Of about 3,000 students from ages 18 to 24, only Mexican students did worse than U.S. students, according to the National Geographic website.

Students in every country were better able to identify the population in the United States than Americans. The current population is estimated at about 289 million people, but almost a third of Americans surveyed estimated the population as being between one and two billion. Eleven percent of Americans couldn't locate the United States on a map. About 70 percent of Americans could not find New Jersey on a map and when asked to name at least 10 states, only California and Texas were named correctly by most of the people.

Iraq, a country that President George W. Bush described as being part of an Axis of Evil, could not be found by about 87 percent of Americans. The same was true in the case of Iraq's neighbor Iran.

Only about a third of the surveyed group of Americans could identify Great Britain or France, two of the U.S.' closest allies. According to the National Geographic website, only about 71 percent of the surveyed Americans could identify the Pacific Ocean and 58 percent of the group could not identify Japan. In fact, according to National Geographic, more young U.S. citizens in the study knew that the island featured in last season's TV show "Survivor" was in the South Pacific than could find Israel or New Jersey on the map.

The students surveyed in the other countries are not markedly more literate about geography than the Americans, according to the survey. Of all the young adults in the survey, only about one-third in Germany, Sweden and Japan could name four countries that officially acknowledged having nuclear weapons. In the rest of the countries, that number dropped to less-than a quarter. In France only 24 percent of students knew that their own country was a nuclear nation, according to the survey.

There is a silver lining in the clouds according to Roger Downs, who heads the geography department at Pennsylvania State University. Since the survey was last done in 1988, the percentage of American students taking geography had risen from 30 percent to 55 percent. Those who took geography did markedly better than those who did not. Also, the National Geographic society intends to take steps to fight geographic apathy around the world through coalition building with educational institutions, business and political leaders and the media.

- **PLAYERS:** 3,000 students across the United States, France, Germany, Mexico, Great Britain, Italy, Japan and Sweden.
- **HISTORY:** A similar survey was conducted in 1988. A comparison of the results shows that the number of students taking geography has risen by 25 percent.
- **CURRENT SITUATION:** Only students in Mexico had geography skills worse than those of American students, according to the survey. Among other results, the survey showed that 11 percent of Americans surveyed could not locate the United States on a map.
- **OUTLOOK:** The National Geographic Society, which led the survey, plans to work with educational institutions, business and political leaders and the media to fight geographic apathy around the world.