

2023

## Perception vs. Reality: The Influence of Civic Experiences in High School on Adult Civic Engagement

Kaya Bottmeyer  
*Dominican University of California*

<https://doi.org/10.33015/dominican.edu/2023.POL.ST.02>

**Survey: Let us know how this paper benefits you.**

---

### Recommended Citation

Bottmeyer, Kaya, "Perception vs. Reality: The Influence of Civic Experiences in High School on Adult Civic Engagement" (2023). *Political Science & International Studies | Senior Theses*. 11.  
<https://doi.org/10.33015/dominican.edu/2023.POL.ST.02>

This Senior Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by the Liberal Arts and Education | Undergraduate Student Scholarship at Dominican Scholar. It has been accepted for inclusion in Political Science & International Studies | Senior Theses by an authorized administrator of Dominican Scholar. For more information, please contact [michael.pujals@dominican.edu](mailto:michael.pujals@dominican.edu).

**Perception vs. Reality:  
The Influence of Civic Experiences in High School  
on Adult Civic Engagement**

By

Kaya Bottmeyer

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the  
Requirements for the Degree of

Bachelor of Arts  
In  
Political Science

Bachelor of Arts  
In  
History

Department of Political Science & International Studies  
Department of History  
Dominican University of California  
San Rafael, CA  
May 2023

**IRB Approval # 11091****Abstract**

Research on political socialization has shown that individuals' families and education play a significant role in their later political actions and attitudes, but more needs to be understood on how large the role of education is and, specifically, what impact secondary education has on people's political socialization. Literature suggests that educational standards that require more civics or social science courses are more effective in creating civically engaged individuals, and curriculums that employ service learning and experiential learning techniques are even more effective at increasing civic engagement, but to what extent does a person's perception of their educational experience factor into their adult civic engagement? This thesis examines how young adults perceive the impact of their high school social science and civics curriculum on their adult civic engagement. Specifically, this thesis asks to what extent do young adults view their secondary education as being the primary impact on their civic engagement? This study uses a survey of young adults between the ages of 18 and 30 that asks questions about their civic education and civic experiences in high school and post-high school to understand what they perceive to have had the largest impact on their engagement now that they are adults. There are two hypotheses for this thesis: H1: People who had a civically involved high school experience will participate in more civic activities after high school and H2: People who had civically involved high school experiences will identify education as being the main influence on their later civic engagement. This study supported both hypotheses. It found that people who had a civically involved high school experience, either through extra classes or civic activities, were more likely to participate in a higher number of civic activities as young adults than people who did not have a civically involved high school experience. It also found that those who had more civically involved high school experiences named education as the main influence. The role secondary education plays in political socialization is crucial to understand as states continue to adapt standards and curriculums to promote civic engagement to further energize our democracy in America.

**Table of Contents**

*Abstract*..... 2

*Table of Contents*..... 3

*List of Tables*..... 4

*Introduction*..... 4

*Background*..... 7

*Literature Review*..... 16

*Theoretical Framework*..... 24

*Data Collection and Methodology*..... 26

*Findings and Analysis*..... 28

    A. Service Learning’s Impact on Civic Engagement..... 29

    B. Civic-Oriented Activities’ (Experiential Learning) Impact on Civic Engagement..... 29

        Table 1: The Impact of Clubs and Activities on Civic Engagement..... 30

    C. Academic Classes, Political Efficacy, and Civic Engagement..... 31

        Table 2: How Amount of Information Remembered From High School Impacts Civic Engagement..... 31

        Table 3: The Number of Courses Taken in High Schools Impact on Political Efficacy..... 32

        Table 4: The Impact of Political Efficacy on Civic Engagement..... 33

    D. Addressing the Hypothesis..... 33

*Conclusion*..... 35

*Bibliography*..... 37

*Appendix A*..... 42

**List of Tables**

**Table 1:** The Impact of Clubs and Activities on Civic Engagement.....30

**Table 2:** How Amount of Information Remembered From High School Impacts Civic  
Engagement.....31

**Table 3:** The Number of Courses Taken in High Schools Impact on Political Efficacy.....32

**Table 4:** The Impact of Political Efficacy on Civic Engagement.....33

## Introduction

Why do we care about high school social science curriculums? Most people can recognize the importance of learning about history, government, and economics, but what bigger purpose might it serve? Research suggests that those who have a stronger understanding of the American political system, and its functions, are far more likely to engage with the American democratic system than those who have a weaker understanding.<sup>1</sup> This type of understanding can come from many different sources, including one's family, friends, and religious group, but a significant contributor to how much people know about our political system is one's schooling.

So why do we care if people are educated enough to be confident engaging in our political system? A republic, such as the one we have in the United States, requires its people to be involved in its democratic processes. This is because it relies on representation, and you cannot have representation without people choosing who represents them. The people of America must not only be compelled to participate in their system but must also understand what their role is and how the system works in order to be effective participants. Scholar after scholar repeats the need for an educated citizenry, and in America, our K-12 schools are the most widespread place to educate. The role of compulsory education in America is not just to prepare students for college or a job, but also to prepare them to be an active member of our political system.<sup>2</sup> Justice Sandra Day O'Connor pointed this out in the mid-2000s, stating, "The better educated our citizens are, the better equipped they will be to preserve the system of government we have. And we have to start with the education of our nation's young people. Knowledge about our government is not handed down through the gene pool. Every generation has to learn

---

<sup>1</sup> Lester W. Milbrath and Madan Lal Goel, *Political Participation: How and Why Do People Get Involved in Politics?* (Lanham: University Press of America, 1982).

<sup>2</sup> Barbara A. Bardes and Robert W. Oldendick, *Public Opinion: Measuring the American Mind* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2017), 91.

it, and we have some work to do.”<sup>3</sup> There has been a decline in political participation in recent decades; since 1968, voter turnout declined to well below 60% of the voting age population until the year 2020, and other kinds of political participation like attending political party meetings, participating in a candidate’s campaign, or donating to a campaign are only reported by around 10% of the American population.<sup>4</sup> With this in mind, it is crucial to know more about how we can make an impact on students in secondary school, as they are about to become full participants in our political system, and prepare and encourage them to be full-fledged members of our democratic process. The first step in this process is understanding how young adults who have completed secondary school view what influenced their political socialization and civic engagement the most. There are studies on specific variables within schooling, such as service learning or rigorous content standards, and lots of research on undergraduates, but not on a mixed sample of college and non-college graduates, and specifically on people’s own perceptions as to what played the largest role in their political competence and engagement. This thesis examines how young adults perceive the impact of their high school social science and civics curriculum on their adult civic engagement. Specifically, this thesis asks to what extent do young adults view their secondary education as being the primary impact on their civic engagement? The hypotheses were as follows: H1: People who had a civically involved high school experience will participate in more civic activities after high school. H2: People who had civically involved high school experiences will identify education as being the main influence on their later engagement.

---

<sup>3</sup> Seth Schiesel, “Former Justice Promotes Web-Based Civics Lessons,” *The New York Times*, 2008, <https://www.nytimes.com/2008/06/09/arts/09sand.html>.

<sup>4</sup> Stephan Medvic et al, “The Electorates Responsibility,” in *Shades of Gray: Perspectives on Campaign Ethics* (Brookings Institution Press, 2002), 225-238.

This thesis used a survey to acquire data from young adults between the ages of 18 and 30, to attempt to ascertain what their perspectives are on their political socialization. The survey included questions about their educational background, the content of their education in secondary school, whether or not they had experiential or service learning, and what their civic engagement looks like as an adult. From there, the data was analyzed to understand if there was a relationship between secondary school experiences and adult civic engagement. A literature review provides background and scholarship to explain the nature of the relationship between education and civic engagement, as well as other factors such as service learning. The theoretical framework for this work is based on studies of education as an influence on political socialization, as well as the use of service learning as a tool to enhance adult civic engagement. The methodology lays out the details of the study conducted and will provide the data which will be used in the data analysis portion, which will look to see if the data supports either of the hypotheses presented. Finally, the study will be reviewed, and the limitations of this project will be addressed, including proper next steps in continuing this research to better address the larger question of how to get more Americans to engage with their own political processes.

## Background

This thesis is based on how the education system in the United States creates curriculums and teaches students, and knowledge of the way it functions is crucial for understanding whether or not the system is sufficiently developing young adults' civic engagement. The United States has a decentralized education system, which means that the way school is taught and its content is in the hands of the states and localities. In current times, states develop standards that outline what public schools are required to teach at each grade level. The US has not always had a standards-based education system; initially, there wasn't even a formal education system. Many children did not receive a formal education; those who did were primarily white and came from more successful families. Before the 1830s schools were run by churches, groups of local parents, or certain charities.<sup>5</sup> Free and accessible school was not the norm until the Founding Fathers made it a priority. It was their belief that American democracy would not survive without competent participants, and educating the citizenry was necessary for creating said participants.<sup>6</sup>

Public schooling in America has gone through major shifts and changes in content, pedagogy, and structure. The U.S. now follows a standards-based model, which has nationally recognized standards (it is still up to states to choose to adopt these standards), and then state standards which tend to focus on content and pedagogy. The national standards used by most states currently are the Common Core Standards, which provide learning outcomes for different subjects at each schooling level. States standards vary heavily but generally expand on these learning outcomes and include specific topics, such as state history, that schools are required to teach. These standards dictate what (and sometimes how) civics is taught across the nation and

---

<sup>5</sup> Gerald L. Gutek, *An Historical Introduction to American Education: Third Edition* (Long Grove, IL: Waveland Press, 1970), 21.

<sup>6</sup> Gutek, *An Historical Introduction to American Education*, 49.

within individual states, so understanding their background and content is important when analyzing the role of education on civic outcomes.

Looking back to early American educational history, the Founders recognized that having an educated citizenry would not be possible without a more unified system, and after the American Revolution, political leaders, including Thomas Jefferson and John Adams, pushed for a public education system. A few years after the war, Jefferson wrote to George Wythe, "I think by far the most important bill in our whole code is that for the diffusion of knowledge among the people. No other sure foundation can be devised for the preservation of freedom, and happiness."<sup>7</sup> This weight placed on education spurred into action bills that allowed for land grants for states to build public schools and eventually led to the creation of "common schools." Horace Mann, an abolitionist and educational reformer was a driving force behind the creation of common schools. He envisioned a school that would "unite all citizens—of varied religions, ethnic backgrounds, socioeconomic levels, and professions—into one community, educated in the values of a basically white Protestant society."<sup>8</sup> Common schools focused on reading, writing, and arithmetic, as well as history, geography, grammar, and rhetoric. Proponents of the common schools felt that this more universal form of education would work to equal out the social classes and better prepare those in the lower and middle classes for good jobs. In 1848, Mann wrote in a Massachusetts School Board report, "Education, then, beyond all other devices of human origin, is the great equalizer of the conditions of men--the balance-wheel of the social machinery."<sup>9</sup> The concept of common schools was not accepted by all, as it mixed the social classes together and required wealthy families to enroll their children in common schools rather

---

<sup>7</sup> Correspondence between Thomas Jefferson and George Wyth, August 13, 1786. National Archives: <https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Jefferson/01-10-02-0162>.

<sup>8</sup> James S Berkman, "Mann's Democratic Vision and School Choice," *Schools* 6, no. 2 (2009): pp. 251-256, doi:10.1086/605957.

<sup>9</sup> Horace Mann. Report No. 12 of the Massachusetts School Board (1848).

than private schools. Some Americans also did not like the idea of having to pay to educate other people's children. In the same report, Mann noted, "[The] establishment of a republican government, without well-appointed and efficient means for the universal education of the people, is the most rash and foolhardy experiment ever tried by man."<sup>10</sup>

Public schools spread at a disappointing rate during the early to mid-1800s, with some areas experiencing significantly more growth than others. Public education increased in more rural areas, specifically in the Northeastern states, but tended to flounder in larger cities where many of the wealthy still chose to send their children to public schools. The Southern states did not have these same public school systems until the Reconstruction Era following the Civil War. By the 1870s, attendance of 5 to 14-year-old children was up to 78%; this was after most states took responsibility for providing this public education.<sup>11</sup> These numbers were not inclusive of children of color, as access to education was really only for children of European descent at this time. The next shifts in education were high school and equity for children of different genders and racial backgrounds. Schools were often separated by gender, or at least female students were taught a different curriculum; young women also were not necessarily prepared for or expected to attend secondary schools. For non-white children, access to education was even more limited. Students of color not only were provided with fewer opportunities, but the schools set up for them were of notably lower quality and did not provide close to the same education as white schools. In 1896, the *Plessy v. Ferguson* decision held that "separate but equal" practices were constitutional, and this was applied to schooling for many years until 1954 when *Brown v Board of Education* overturned *Plessy* and established that "separate" was always inherently unequal<sup>12</sup>.

---

<sup>10</sup> Mann. Report No. 12 of the Massachusetts School Board.

<sup>11</sup> Johann N. Neem, *Democracy's Schools: The Rise of Public Education in America* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2017), 177.

<sup>12</sup> *Plessy v. Ferguson*, 163 U.S. 537 (1896).  
*Brown v. Board of Education*, 347 U.S. 483 (1954).

This decision slowly ended up leading to integrated schools. This was a contentious change and took a long time to actually be enforced, but it eventually led to a school system with more equitable opportunities.

Focusing on contemporary educational history, the Standards-based Educational Reform Movement (SBER) began in the late 1980s and 1990s, after a trend of lower SAT scores, lower graduation rates, and overall lower education standing for the U.S. compared to other countries.<sup>13</sup> Discussions about the SBER focus on the six following elements: “1) transference of responsibility, 2) academic expectations, 3) alignment, 4) support and technical assistance, 5) assessment, and 6) accountability.”<sup>14</sup> Standards are laid out by agencies that work to create content and curriculum standards that can be widely applied and result in well-rounded and educated students. Based on these standards, educational content, such as textbooks, are created that allow for streamlined teaching and learning within these standards. Teachers are expected to follow said standards and are often supported through official training so that they can apply the standards within the classroom. Students are then assessed, usually on a statewide test, to understand how schools are succeeding or failing at getting their students to meet the benchmarks laid out in the standards. Accountability is seen in the punishment or rewarding of schools/districts depending on how their students do in these assessments.<sup>15</sup> The idea of standards-based reform had a long journey before being implemented but was generally spurred by an interest in raising the national averages by providing students with similarly well-rounded curricular experiences.

---

<sup>13</sup> Kenneth K Wong, James W Guthrie, and Douglas N Harris, “Preface,” *Peabody Journal of Education* 79, no. 1 (2004): pp. 1-6.

<sup>14</sup> Laura Hamilton, Brian Stecher, and Kun Yuan, *Standards-Based Reform in the United States: History, Research, and Future Directions* Center on Education Policy, 2009. Laura Hamilton, Brian Stecher, and Kun Yuan, *Standards-Based Reform in the United States: History, Research, and Future Directions* Center on Education Policy, 2009.

<sup>15</sup> Joshua L Kenna and William B. Russell III, “The Culture and History of Standards-Based Educational Reform and Social Studies in America,” *Journal of Culture and Values in Education* 1, no. 1 (2018): pp. 26-49, doi:10.46303/jcve.01.01.3.

The 2002 No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB), passed while George H.W. Bush was in office, was one of the first modern steps towards raising the bar in American public school education, as it required every state to enact a system of standards-based accountability that includes standards, assessments, and annual targets for performance.<sup>16</sup> The NCLB Act required states to create these standards and subsequent tests and to implement them for 12 years, proving by the end that their students could reach 100% proficiency in whatever standards the state decided to require. Schools that did not meet yearly improvement goals were subject to certain state initiatives. When the NCLB Act was up for reauthorization in 2007, it did not end up being reauthorized, but the requirements for schools still stood until the 2014 deadline. When President Obama became president, he signed the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009, which led to what is called the Race to the Top (RTTT) initiative, which allotted over 4 billion dollars to be set aside for school funding, but the funds had to be won through a competitive grant program. Obama also ended up offering states waivers to get out of NCLB's 2014 requirement deadline if they agreed to follow other educational changes such as adopting college and career readiness standards, creating an accountability system that reports the lowest performing five percent of schools and the ten percent with the largest achievement gaps, and develop teacher and principal evaluations that include student performance.<sup>17</sup> Before this, a movement began in 2009, led by the National Governors Association and the Council of Chief State School Officers, to develop college and career standards on a broader scale. These standards were developed by teams of education professionals, including teachers, administrators, and educational scholars. The concept was to be able to apply these standards across the whole nation, providing every student with the tools to be successful in college or a

---

<sup>16</sup> No Child Left Behind Act of 2002, Public Law 107–110, 107th Congress (January 8, 2002): <https://www.congress.gov/bill/107th-congress/house-bill/1/text>

<sup>17</sup> Barack Obama, Press Release, "Remarks by the President on No Child Left Behind Flexibility," *National Archives* (September 23, 2011): <https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/2011/09/23/remarks-president-no-child-left-behind-flexibility>

career following graduation.<sup>18</sup> These standards are called the Common Core State Standards (CCSS), and they focus on performance outcomes rather than content. The CCSS went through many rounds of review and editing before being published in 2010, with mathematics and English language arts (ELA) standards. The CCSS were voluntarily adopted by 45 states within a year, and this allowed them to apply for the RTTT waivers Obama offered regarding NCLB. Some critics felt that the adoption of these standards would allow for too much federal power over what has historically been a state right, that decentralization was important and would be lost with nationwide standards like CCSS.<sup>19</sup>

In the decades since NCLB, most states have stuck with the Common Core standards, California being one of them. With the majority of participants in this study attending high school in the state of California, it is necessary to understand the specifics of California's standards and education system. California was one of the leaders in the SBER movement, creating its own standards within the state as early as the 1980s. California created and launched a mathematics framework in 1985 and an English language arts framework in 1987 and passed bills to test these subjects in the 1990s.<sup>20</sup> These frameworks paved the way for later versions and were some of the first SBER frameworks created by a state. The states also created a newer and more rigorous assessment program called the California Learning Assessment Program. They were one of the first rounds of states to adopt CCSS, and the majority of recent high school graduates in this study were students of schools subject to the CCSS standards. This means their curriculums were built around a few specific learning outcomes and then more rigidly through

---

<sup>18</sup> Common Core Initiative, "Common Core State Standards for English Language Arts & Literacy in History/Social Studies, Science, and Technical Subjects," Wayback Machine, Last modified 2023, [https://web.archive.org/web/20220914175925/http://www.corestandards.org/wp-content/uploads/ELA\\_Standards1.pdf](https://web.archive.org/web/20220914175925/http://www.corestandards.org/wp-content/uploads/ELA_Standards1.pdf).

<sup>19</sup> Joshua L. Kenna and William B. Russell III, "The Culture and History of Standards-Based Educational Reform and Social Studies in America," *Journal of Culture and Values in Education* 1, no. 1 (2018): pp. 26-49, doi:10.46303/jcve.01.01.3.

<sup>20</sup> "Timeline of California Standards-Based Reform," *Timeline of California Standards-Based Reform - Historical Documents* (CA Dept of Education), accessed March 18, 2023, <https://www.cde.ca.gov/nr/re/hd/yr96-10tl.asp>.

CA state standards. Looking at social studies in particular, there aren't as many strong assessments for social studies, so even with standards in social studies, outcomes are a bit less researched.<sup>21</sup> The CCSS standards for ELA at the high school level include benchmarks for reading, writing, speaking, and listening. These standards are quite in-depth and include things such as expectations for comprehension abilities, ability to engage in collaborative discussion, ability to analyze and understand arguments in literature, and much more.<sup>22</sup> Beyond these standards, the state of California also has its state standards, which focus on 3 main sections in social studies: World History, Culture, and Geography: The Modern World, United States History and Geography: Continuity and Change in the Twentieth Century, and Principles of American Democracy and Economics.<sup>23</sup> As a whole, the state social standards for grades 9-12 outline expectations for “intellectual reasoning, reflection, and research skills” that accompany the content standards.<sup>24</sup> The content standards are very specific, laying out exact information, events, and people that students are expected to know upon completion of that grade level. Overall, CA standards combined with CCSS provide an in-depth outline of what students are to be taught at each grade level.

The details of how these concepts and information are to be taught are what is not laid out by the standards. This is something that is left up to the teacher to use whatever pedagogy they deem most appropriate to help their student meet the standards. This is not a simple task, and many rely on the aid of the frameworks that the CA State Board of Education has produced.

---

<sup>21</sup> William B. Russell, “Teaching Social Studies in the 21st Century: A Research Study of Secondary Social Studies Teachers’ Instructional Methods and Practices,” *Action in Teacher Education* 32, no. 1 (2010) 65-72, doi:10.1080/01626620.2010.10463543.

<sup>22</sup> Common Core Initiative, “Common Core State Standards for English Language Arts & Literacy in History/Social Studies, Science, and Technical Subjects,” Wayback Machine, Last modified 2023, [https://web.archive.org/web/20220914175925/http://www.corestandards.org/wp-content/uploads/ELA\\_Standards1.pdf](https://web.archive.org/web/20220914175925/http://www.corestandards.org/wp-content/uploads/ELA_Standards1.pdf).

<sup>23</sup> California State Board of Education, *History–Social Science Content Standards for California Public Schools California Kindergarten Through Grade Twelve* (2000).

<sup>24</sup> California State Board of Education, *History–Social Science Content Standards for California Public Schools California Kindergarten Through Grade Twelve* (2000).

The frameworks are intended to “guide educators as they design, implement, and maintain a coherent course of study to teach content, develop inquiry-based critical thinking skills, improve reading comprehension and expository writing ability, and promote an engaged and knowledgeable citizenry in history and the related social sciences.”<sup>25</sup> The frameworks lay out things like guiding questions for a course, examples of how to teach to these questions, and suggestions for activities to create high engagement.

It is necessary to understand that all of this only applies to public schools; private schools are their own domain, and they are not required to follow state standards. Because many of the participants in this study attended private high schools, it is helpful to know a bit more about them as well. Private schools are mostly unregulated, as they are not required to meet any specific standards or be accredited. They are required to file an affidavit every year with information on student enrollment, staffing, and more, but generally, private schools have free reign over their curriculums and decide what to teach to their students and how. State assessments are not a part of private schooling, though students often participate in testing like APs and SATs or ACTs when preparing to go to college. There is not much data on accreditation, but it appears most established private schools seek accreditation through accrediting organizations such as the Western Association of Schools and Colleges or similar institutions. In the 2023 school year, there were around 300 WASC-accredited private high schools in the state of California.<sup>26</sup>

The current state of public education in the U.S., and in California specifically, follows the standards-based approach, which allows for an easier overarching idea of what students are

---

<sup>25</sup> California Department of Education. *History Social Science Framework For California Public Schools Kindergarten Through Grade Twelve*, (2017). <https://www.cde.ca.gov/ci/hs/cf/documents/hssfchapter15.pdf>.

<sup>26</sup> “WASC Directory,” Western Association of Schools and Colleges, Last modified 2023, [https://www.acswasc.org/wp-content/themes/acswasc/pdf/ACS-WASC\\_Directory.pdf](https://www.acswasc.org/wp-content/themes/acswasc/pdf/ACS-WASC_Directory.pdf).

taught and even how they are taught. Understanding this allows for a better analysis of the data collected in this study and the role formal high school education has on young adults' civic outcomes. While there isn't as varied data about civic activities throughout time, voter turnout is one of the few civic activities measured in every presidential election. Taking a look at this information, it is clear that there was a drop in youth (18-29) voter turnout from 1972 that has only recovered now in 2020. While there have been spikes and dips throughout, the drop-off originally occurred around the same time as declining test scores through the 70s and 80s. In recent times, the current climb back up began with the 2016 election, which was the first presidential election after the implementation of common core. While there is likely not a direct correlation, the overall youth turnout declining and now rising again may be impacted by the quality of widespread public education, creating young adults who are better equipped to participate in this democratic system. More time will tell if this pattern holds and if current Standards-Based Educational Reforms have brought the average American youth's civic engagement to a new level.

## Literature Review

The relationship between democratic function and education is not a new one and was stressed by the Founding Fathers, who recognized that civic education was critical for the success of their new republic. In the book *Public Opinion: Measuring the American Mind* by Barbara A. Bardes and Robert W. Oldendick, the authors write that “there can be no doubt that public education in the United States was driven first by the need to produce citizens who could support this radical democratic system.”<sup>27</sup> The relationship between education and democracy has been a constant throughout American history, but the way we as a society understand it and the way scholars view and understand it has changed over time. In the 1800s, Alexis de Tocqueville, a French political theorist, noted that American democracy relied on the concept of civic engagement and was concerned with equality and individualism, but also a forming of groups to work towards a better future together and engage in civic life.<sup>28</sup> De Tocqueville’s concern with involvement in civic and social engagement is relevant to this day and has held fast throughout American History. This idea can be boiled down to the need to have an engaged citizenry, citizens who actively participate in the necessary democratic processes. Good citizenship has meant different things throughout history. Political scientist Russel J. Dalton writes about how people view and understand citizenship and the changes that have occurred across different generations. Historically, the idea of good citizenship has been viewed through the lens of duty-based citizenship, but now Dalton has explained that the idea of engaged citizenship has become more common among younger generations. Dalton differentiates the two in several ways; “Citizen Duty” is primarily reliant on people's conformation to social norms,

---

<sup>27</sup> Barbara A. Bardes, and Robert W. Oldendick, *Public Opinion: Measuring the American Mind*. (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2017), 93.

<sup>28</sup> Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America* (New York, NY: New American Library, 1963).

whereas “Engaged Citizenship” is more participatory and autonomous.<sup>29</sup> For example, duty-based citizenship would see someone who reports crimes, votes in most elections, and feels compelled to do things that support the state, such as paying all taxes, joining the military, and obeying the law. In contrast, “Engaged Citizenship” would see someone who participates in protests, volunteers, is charitable, supports what they see as ethical businesses, and has their own political opinions.

In the early 1900s, educational philosopher and psychologist John Dewey wrote the book *Democracy and Education: An Introduction to the Philosophy of Education*, which is still a central work discussing the relationship between education and democracy in America. Dewey wrote about the role of active and informed participation in democracy and viewed education as a major piece in creating such citizens.<sup>30</sup> It is essential to understand the context from which Dewey constructs his educational philosophies and pedagogies, as he did so from a perspective of anti-industry.<sup>31</sup> Some reflect on this being a bit of a socialist viewpoint, and either way provides understanding as to why Dewey stressed an educational system that encouraged individual thinkers and went beyond just educating the youth on how to become members of our capitalistic society. He stressed creating curious and deep-thinking people through our education system and required that teachers be creative, knowledgeable, and passionate about what they were teaching. Dewey also believed that having an educated public who engaged with our democracy promoted moral good. This is the beginning of the concept of political socialization, which is crucial in this area of study.

---

<sup>29</sup> Russell J. Dalton, “Citizenship Norms and the Expansion of Political Participation,” *Political Studies* 56, no. 1 (2008) 76-98, doi:10.1111/j.1467-9248.2007.00718.x.

<sup>30</sup> John Dewey, *Democracy and Education* (Middlesex: Echo Library, 2007).

<sup>31</sup> Robert B. Westbrook, “Schools for Industrial Democrats: The Social Origins of John Dewey’s Philosophy of Education,” *American Journal of Education* 100, no. 4 (1992): pp. 401-419, doi:10.1086/444023.

Political socialization, in broad terms, is simply learning about the political system. This means the process by which we inform people on how to participate properly in our political system. The direct study of political socialization began in the 1950s and was led by Hyman, who wrote *Political Socialization: A Study in the Psychology of Political Behavior*, which gathered the then scattered literature on the concept and formalized a term for the theory.<sup>32</sup> It was later written about in greater detail by Greenstein in “Personality and Political Socialization,” and this perspective centers on the individual and their development of political attitudes, values, and behaviors.<sup>33</sup> In the 1960s, two works continued this area of study but focused on how elementary-aged children attained their political views, one by Hess and Torney and one by Easton and Dennis.<sup>34</sup> The idea of political socialization starts with children but can develop through adulthood as one's influences change. In the 1970s, Jennings and Niemi did a study that found the family was a major source of political socialization for children, something that scholarship still recognizes to this day.<sup>35</sup> Primary influences on the political socialization of children are their family, peers, religious groups, school, and now social media.<sup>36</sup> Central to this paper is the understanding of the role school plays in political socialization, and while a large amount of literature prioritizes the family's role, there are more and more connections to the school as a notable piece in socialization. There are several ways to view the role schools can have on the political socialization of their students, but understanding that practices and rituals

---

<sup>32</sup> Herbert H. Hyman, *Political Socialization: A Study in the Psychology of Political Behavior* (Free Press, 1959).

<sup>33</sup> Fred I. Greenstein, “Personality and Political Socialization: The Theories of Authoritarian and Democratic Character,” *The ANNALS of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 361, no. 1 (1965): pp. 81-95, doi:10.1177/000271626536100108.

<sup>34</sup> Robert D. Hess and Judith Torney-Purta, *The Development of Basic Attitudes and Values toward Government and Citizenship during the Elementary School Years* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1965).  
David Easton and Jack Dennis, *Children in the Political System: Origins of Political Legitimacy* (Chicago, Illinois: University of Chicago Press, 1980).

<sup>35</sup> Kent M Jennings and Richard G. Niemi, *The Political Character of Adolescence: The Influence of Families and Schools* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1974).

<sup>36</sup> Derek Anderson, “U.S. High School Student's Social Media Use and Their Political Socialization,” *Communication Today* 11, no. 2 (2020) 166-174.

sometimes have more of an impact than content is important and somewhat modern.<sup>37</sup> For example, a student whose schooling encourages open debate and provides them with civic experiences like voter pre-registration and volunteering in their community might be socialized to have higher political efficacy and, therefore, higher civic engagement than a student whose schooling focuses on teaching them about the American governmental system without engaged experiences. The late 1960s focus on the role of the school in political socialization is also supported by the study “The Civic Culture: Political Attitudes and Democracy in Five Nations” by Gabriel Almond and Sidney Verba, which notes the large role formal secondary education plays in political socialization through creating political competence.<sup>38</sup>

Political scientist Robert Putnam writes about the role of formal education in future civic and social engagement, noting that “Education is one of the most important predictors – usually, in fact, the most important predictor – of many forms of social participation – from voting to associational membership, to chairing a local committee to hosting a dinner party to giving blood.”<sup>39</sup> In the early 2000s, Putnam wrote about declining civic and social engagement in the U.S. in his well-known book *Bowling Alone* which noted this downward trend in many forms of engagement. The relationship between education and civic or social engagement is not parallel; therefore, even if education levels increase, that does not mean civic engagement will also increase at the same rate. Research has shown that it is specific aspects of education that promote high civic engagement. The idea is that schools can encourage the “development of bureaucratic competence, civic skills, cognitive capacity, curriculum (including the opportunity to discuss social and political issues in the classroom, or what is labeled classroom climate), student

---

<sup>37</sup> Barbara A. Bardes and Robert W. Oldendick, *Public Opinion: Measuring the American Mind* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2017).

<sup>38</sup> Gabriel A. Almond and Sidney Verba, *The Civic Culture: Political Attitudes and Democracy in Five Nations* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2016).

<sup>39</sup> Robert D. Putnam, *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community* (New York, NY: Simon & Schuster Paperbacks, 2020), 186.

government, habits of associational involvement, and volunteering in the community (service learning).<sup>40</sup> This is crucial to understanding the role different pedagogies, standards, and frameworks play in the role of social politicization through schools and a continuing of increasing civic engagement through secondary education.

An aspect of encouraging and increasing civic involvement and an active citizenry is increasing political efficacy. Political efficacy is the idea that one's actions and participation truly have an impact on the outcome of political processes. A functional democracy requires engaged citizenship, and in order to facilitate this engagement, the public must have a sense of political efficacy. A sense of political efficacy is crucial to facilitating civic engagement and is something that can be found through understanding democratic functions better and what one's role is within American democracy.<sup>41</sup> To better understand the concept, it is helpful to understand the explanation of external and internal efficacy developed by George I. Balch, who did a multiple-item analysis of the concept of a sense of political efficacy. Balch explained internal efficacy as one's belief that they have the means to participate in the political system and external efficacy as the belief that one's political actions actually impact the governmental function.<sup>42</sup> Studies conducted in the 1950s and 2000s have found that people who have greater internal efficacy are about 2.9% more likely to vote, about 1.7% more likely to volunteer in campaigns, and about 2.5% more likely to contribute money than citizens with the least sense of their own competence.<sup>43</sup> The same studies have also found that people who have the greatest

---

<sup>40</sup> David E. Campbell, "What Is Education's Impact on Civic and Social Engagement?," *Measuring the Effects of Education on Health and Civic Engagement* (Copenhagen: Symposium on Social Outcomes of Learning, Danish University of Education 2006)

<sup>41</sup> Lester W. Milbrath and Madan Lal Goel, *Political Participation: How and Why Do People Get Involved in Politics?* (Lanham: University Press of America, 1982).

<sup>42</sup> George I Balch, "Multiple Indicators in Survey Research: The Concept 'Sense of Political Efficacy,'" *Political Methodology* 1, no. 2 (1974) 1-43.

<sup>43</sup> Steven J. Rosenstone and John Mark Hansen, *Mobilization, Participation, and Democracy in America* (Longman, 2009).

sense of external efficacy are 10.6% more likely to turn out, 4.8% more likely to try to influence, 1.4% more likely to work for a party, and 2.8% more likely to give money.

Studies such as these have come out of a newer type of understanding of American democratic participation, as scholars and the public became curious as to why civic participation seemed to drop in the 1950s and later. Literature shows that from 1950-2000, peoples' attitudes regarding their internal and external efficacy dropped quite a bit.<sup>44</sup> External efficacy seems to have had a more significant decrease, as polls found that people's confidence in the government listening to the people significantly dropped since the 50s. In regard to political efficacy relating to education, it can be seen as a two-way street; the more educated people are on the functions and structures of government, the higher their internal and external efficacy. Political socialization plays a role in efficacy as well; efficacy can be fostered by those teaching individuals about the political world; parents, teachers, and peers may pass on their level of efficacy to an individual. People with more experience in civic activities are also more likely to have higher external efficacy, activities such as participation in a political campaign or voter registration drive. These sorts of external efficacy require higher internal efficacy, which truly can be found through thorough and productive education. Experiential and service-learning are two ways to help individuals gain experience interacting with civic or societal functions, as well as encouraging people to participate in civic activities such as voting and writing to public officials, which have the potential to increase one's political efficacy as well.

The idea of experiential learning comes again from Dewey, who believed that combined with pedagogy, experiences provided a necessary part of the education experience. Part of the pieces needed to create a meaningful education experience was reflection and relationship, two

---

<sup>44</sup> Barbara A. Bardes and Robert W. Oldendick, *Public Opinion: Measuring the American Mind* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2017).

pieces used in modern-day service learning as well.<sup>45</sup> This work was carried on by David Kolb in the 1980s, who used Dewey's idea to create his experiential learning cycle, which used four key concepts; concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualization, and active experimentation.<sup>46</sup> This theory is what guides a majority of service learning and experiential learning today. In the 1990s, the adoption of these ideas became more popular, and there was a push to fund and set up service learning and experiential learning programs in schools. Although few states have service-learning requirements in high school, the programs are becoming more popular and have been incorporated into more public and private high schools. Colleges are much more likely to have service-learning programs, though some private secondary schools do as well. Service-learning has been found to promote more meaningful learning, higher engagement as well as retention of students.<sup>47</sup> Any type of system that encourages further education will facilitate more educated students, and a system that students view as promoting interpersonal and community engagement is likely to increase civic engagement. Studies have shown that service-learning is an effective pedagogical tool for increasing students' civic responsibility and engagement.<sup>48</sup> With the knowledge that this form of an educational program is effective at increasing civic responsibility, it can be gathered that experiential and service learning, when properly executed, would result in a form of political socialization that increases students' political efficacy, therefore increasing civic engagement. With this in mind, the argument for the use of service-learning in high schools is still being debated, and part of my

---

<sup>45</sup> John Dewey, *Experience and Education*, (New York: Free Press, 2015).

<sup>46</sup> Patti H. Clayton, Julie A. Hatcher, and Robert G. Bringle, *Research on Service Learning: Conceptual Frameworks and Assessment* (Sterling, Virginia: Stylus Publishing, 2013).

<sup>47</sup> Sara M Gallini and Barbara E Moely, "Service-Learning and Engagement, Academic Challenge, and Retention," *Michigan Journal of Community Service Learning* Fall (2003): pp. 5-14.

<sup>48</sup> Scott J. Myers-Lipton, "Effect of a Comprehensive Service-Learning Program on College Students' Civic Responsibility," *Teaching Sociology* 26, no. 4 (1998): p. 243, doi:10.2307/1318766.

work will try to understand if those who experienced service-learning in high school self-report it as having a notable effect on their adult civic engagement.

This study seeks to better understand how high school experiences have influenced young adults' civic engagement. With the understanding of the role schools play in political socialization and so much existing work on the civic engagement of undergraduate students, it seems there is a gap in understanding what impact high schools themselves have. One of the reasons this is so crucial is that high school is the highest level of education that is compulsory across the entire nation. While a wide number of individuals now go to colleges or universities, high school is the last place of formal education for a number of young adults in America. There is specifically a gap in looking at how young adults view the level of civic education and experiences they had in high school against their civic engagement now, along with their sense of political efficacy. This study aims to fill that gap and provide further insight into where the school system is succeeding or falling behind so as to know what steps may be taken to continue building up the civic engagement of the youth of America.

## Theoretical Framework

Research has found that education plays a major role in individuals' political socialization and that thorough political socialization positively impacts political efficacy, which in turn increases one's civic engagement.<sup>49</sup> It is known that civic participation is crucial to the democratic function of our republic, and increasing this participation is vital to maintaining the health of our governmental systems. When looking at the link between education and civic engagement, the state of U.S. education must be taken into consideration; specifically, the education young adults receive directly before entering the age where they are full-fledged participants in our governmental system. High school education is the place where this thesis focuses, specifically working to understand if adults under 30 identify education as one of the primary influences on their efficacy and engagement.

Robert Putnam's work on declining social and civic participation outlines the importance of increasing widespread participation, and he also argues that education is one of the biggest predictors of participation.<sup>50</sup> Some assert that family is a larger influence, but education is one area where the public and government can work to increase political competence, something that cannot necessarily be done to family structures directly. Putnam found that there was a generational dip in participation, especially in traditional forms of civic engagement such as voting, joining a political group, volunteering, and the like.<sup>51</sup>

Looking at this phenomenon, the work of Russel J. Dalton explains that part of this dip is a change in what civic participation means for newer generations. His concepts of “Citizen

---

<sup>49</sup> David E Campbell, “What Is Education’s Impact on Civic and Social Engagement?,” *Measuring the Effects of Education on Health and Civic Engagement*, 2006.

<sup>50</sup> Robert D. Putnam, *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community* (New York, NY: Simon & Schuster Paperbacks, 2020).

<sup>51</sup> Robert D. Putnam, *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community* (New York, NY: Simon & Schuster Paperbacks, 2020).

Duty” vs. “Engaged Citizenship” highlight that young adults now are transitioning towards actions like protesting, supporting ethical business practices, and having more individual and autonomous participation.<sup>52</sup> With this in mind, this study not only included varied forms of civic participation but also aimed to determine if young adults felt that their education increased both traditional “Citizen Duty” and the contemporary “Engaged Citizenship” that Dalton writes about.

One of the final pieces of the puzzle is what high school education entails, and studies, such as those done by Scott J. Myers-Lipton, show that pedagogical approaches of experiential learning and service learning are highly effective in facilitating higher participation and engagement.<sup>53</sup> This study works to find whether or not young adults feel that their service/experiential learning or lack thereof in high school impacted their engagement and further examines if there is a connection between these pedagogical approaches and outcomes of specific forms of participation, categorized by Russel J. Dalton.

The overarching argument of this work is that people who had a civically involved high school experience will participate in more civic activities after high school, and people who had civically involved high school experiences will identify education as being the main influence on their later engagement. The term “civically involved” includes both classroom and extracurricular activities and could be service learning, experiential learning, or something pedagogically similar.

---

<sup>52</sup> Russell J. Dalton, “Citizenship Norms and the Expansion of Political Participation,” *Political Studies* 56, no. 1 (2008): pp. 76-98, doi:10.1111/j.1467-9248.2007.00718.x.

<sup>53</sup> Scott J. Myers-Lipton, “Effect of a Comprehensive Service-Learning Program on College Students’ Civic Responsibility,” *Teaching Sociology* 26, no. 4 (1998): p. 243, doi:10.2307/1318766.

## **Data Collection and Methodology**

A survey was used to collect the data used in this study (see Appendix A). Survey research as a methodology was chosen because this research aimed to understand individuals' perceptions of their own experiences and the survey method allowed for a simplified method of collecting this perspective-based data on a larger scale with less opportunity for questions to be leading or for ambivalent answers. The standardization of survey research is one of its greatest strengths but also reflects one of the notable weaknesses of survey research, which is an inability to ask further questions where it may be helpful. With this in mind, several opportunities for participants to expand on their answers and provide more information or context following more complex questions were provided. Another weakness of survey research is the validity of the data collected, as surveys can be skewed in favor of certain responses, with questions sometimes worded in ways that lead one to answer in specific ways. With this in mind, I worked to stay away from leading questions, although, from the questions, it is apparent that my work is looking at civic engagement, which could influence certain participants to answer in what would seem like a “satisfactory” way according to the topic: for example, saying they participate more or feel more educated than is actually true. I tried to mitigate this by making the survey anonymous, so participants would not have to be concerned about what I may think of them following the survey, thus encouraging them to be more honest. I received IRB approval of my questions and overall study from the Dominican University of California before sharing my survey with participants in order to verify that my questions and method were ethical. Another limitation of the sample was the age range required of participants; since this study only looked at those between the ages of 18 and 30, the convenience sample was smaller due to a lack of a high number of adults of that age being within circles that I was able to access. I recognize that a

larger study done on a more randomized group would be valuable. The sample was demographically limited, as it contained primarily white individuals, college/post-college students, and women. A randomized sample could also tackle this limitation by allowing for a wider range of individuals of different ages, educational backgrounds, and geographical locations.

The method of delivery and data collection was online, using the site Qualtrics. To access the survey, participants needed an internet-capable device and an internet connection. This did allow for a more widespread range of participants since the survey could be accessed from anywhere with internet access. I shared the survey with professors at my university, who went on to share it with their students via email, as well as friends and acquaintances via social media postings on my pages as well as those of friends and family. The final method of distributing the survey was face-to-face interactions, as I asked as many young adults I came into contact with as possible to fill out the survey.

## Findings and Analysis

This study began by asking the following question: to what extent do young adults view their secondary education as being the primary impact on their civic engagement? The reason for asking this question is that literature has shown that there are certain things that are significant contributors to people's civic engagement, one major category being their education and education experiences. To answer this question, I thought it would be best to ask people how they remember their high school civic experiences, and if they think there was any link between those experiences and their engagement now. Based on the survey that was given, there were multiple findings that help to answer this question and address the accompanying hypothesis, which was: people who had a civically involved high school experience will participate in more civic activities after high school, and people who had civically involved high school experiences will identify education as being the main influence on their later civic engagement. Defining "civically involved high school experience" is not simple, so in this study, several questions were used to determine high levels of civic involvement in high school. The data used in the analysis is fourfold, the first factor being participating in service learning, the second being involved in a civics-oriented club or activity, the third being the number of civics courses they report taking in high school, and the final factor being how much they report remembering from their high school civic education. By looking at all of these factors together, a larger conclusion can be mapped out regarding the level of civic involvement participants had as high school students and, therefore, the impact it had on their civic engagement as adults.

### **A. Service Learning's Impact on Civic Engagement**

The results of this study found that participating in service learning in high school did not necessarily lead to higher levels of civic engagement later. There are many reasons the data may have been less than compelling, beginning with how the questions pertaining to service learning in high school were worded. The question used was, "Did any of your academic classes take you into the community to volunteer (not school-required volunteer hours)?" The question did not use the vocabulary "service learning," as many individuals would not have known that's what this sort of activity was called. Another factor to consider is the lower prevalence of service learning in public schools. Because service learning is not mandated as a graduation requirement in 48 states (including California), most public school curriculums do not use service learning as an educational tool. It is included in the frameworks of 33 states, but only 11 provide funding to implement it in schools. The data collected here was not enough to really look at the widespread impact of high school-level service learning on adult civic engagement, and reliance on individuals' memory of their high school experience may not be the most effective way to gather this specific type of data. Further studies should focus on students who took courses that did use service learning as a part of the curriculum.

### **B. Civic-Oriented Activities' (Experiential Learning) Impact on Civic Engagement**

Participants who were involved in civic-oriented activities such as debate clubs, mock trials, or student government had notably higher civic engagement as adults. Students who participated in 1 or more civic-minded activities or clubs in high school were more likely to participate in a higher number of civic activities as young adults. On average, those who named

one club/activity now participate in over 5 civic activities, and those who were involved in at least two now participate in over 9 civic activities (see Table 1). Individuals who did not name a civic-oriented club or activity averaged 4 civic activities now. In sections where participants were asked, "Are there any activities/programs/classes, etc., that you were involved with that you think impacted how much you engage in politics and your community?" Participants' answers were varied, but at least two noted how involved experiences impacted them, one named "IGNITE Club," which is a political club with the mission of "build[ing] the largest, most diverse movement of young women who are ready and eager to own their political power."<sup>54</sup> The other participant simply said, "hands-on activities made the biggest impact." This shows that participants themselves do reflect on experiential learning as having a notable impact on their political efficacy and engagement as young adults, even if service learning was not specified. This finding supports the previous work done by scholars such as Myers-Lipton, which found that pedagogical approaches such as experiential learning were very effective in facilitating higher participation and civic engagement.

**Table 1: The Impact of Clubs and Activities on Civic Engagement**

Clubs/Activities	Average Number of Civic Activities Now
None	4
1	5
2+	9

<sup>54</sup> "Who We Are," IGNITE, accessed March 17, 2023, <https://ignitenational.org/who-we-are>.

### C. Academic Classes, Political Efficacy, and Civic Engagement

The number of classes a participant remembers taking in high school did not appear to have a strong correlation with how many civic activities they participated in as young adults, but there was an increase in participation from one class taken (resulting in an average of 3 activities now) to 2 or 3 classes taken (resulting in an average of 5 activities now), and then a much larger increase with individuals who took 5+ classes, these people averaged 8 civic activities now. However, looking at how much participants self-report remembering from their high school civics education and experiences correlates with their level of civic engagement as young adults. Those who report remembering nothing participate in an average of 3 civic activities now, those who report remembering some things participate in an average of 5 civic activities now, and finally, those who report remembering most things from their high schools' civics education now participate in an average of 6 civic activities (see Table 2). The more individuals remember about their civics education at any level, is likely to impact their political efficacy and therefore result in higher engagement.

**Table 2: How Amount of Information Remembered From High School Impacts Civic Engagement**

Amount Remembered	Average Number of Civic Activities Now
"I remember nothing"	3
"I remember some things"	5
"I remember most things"	6

Looking at the importance of education in political efficacy, the number of civics courses taken by participants correlates with how confident they are in their understanding of the American political system. Participants who reported they were only a little confident in their understanding of how the American political system functions took an average of 2.5 civic

classes in high school, participants who reported they were "somewhat confident" took an average of 3.4 civics classes in high school, and participants who reported that they were "very confident" took an average of 3.6 civics courses in high school (see Table 3). Only one participant reported being "not confident at all," so this category did not have enough data to find an appropriate average. In this same vein, looking at involvement with civic-oriented clubs/activities rather than classes, participants who were involved in one or more of these clubs/activities were 17% more likely to report being "somewhat confident" or "very confident" in their understanding of how the American political system functions than those who were not involved in one of these activities.

**Table 3: The Number of Courses Taken in High Schools Impact on Political Efficacy**

Number of Civics Courses Taken in High School	Level of Confidence (Political Efficacy)
2.5	"Only a little confident"
3.4	"Somewhat confident"
3.6	"Very confident"

When looking at how political efficacy impacts civic engagement, participants' level of confidence in their knowledge of how the American political system functions correlates with the number of civic activities they participate in as adults. Participants who reported being "only a little confident" participate in an average of 3.2 civic activities as young adults, whereas those who reported being "somewhat confident" participate in an average of 6 civic activities, and those who reported being "very confident" participate in an average of 6.3 civic activities (see Table 4). This correlation aligns with much of the previous research noted in the literature

review, notably the work of Rosenstone and Hansen, which showed that higher levels of political efficacy led to a higher likelihood of engaging with the political system.

**Table 4: The Impact of Political Efficacy on Civic Engagement**

Level of Confidence (Political Efficacy)	Average Number of Civic Activities Now
“Only a little confident”	3.2
“Somewhat confident”	6
“Very confident”	6.3

#### **D. Addressing the Hypothesis**

The data showed that students who took 3 or more civics courses in high school were most likely to name school as their top influence, with 42% of the group choosing school, with family at a close second with 35% of the group. For students who participated in one or more civic activities while in high school, the most common influence was again school, with 54% of the group naming school as their largest influence, and again family in second with 36% of the total. Overall, those who had a civically involved high school experience were more likely to name their schooling as the biggest impact on their current civic engagement, therefore supporting the second hypothesis.

In addressing the first hypothesis presented in this study, the data illustrates that overall, individuals who had a more highly civically engaged high school experience, through either experiential learning, taking more civics courses, or participating in a civics-oriented club or activity were more likely to engage in a higher number of civic activities as adults. The data used to define highly civically engaged experiences was quite varied to not simplify involvement to

just the number of classes taken, or activities participated in, which allows for stronger support of the first hypothesis, finding that there is a correlation between higher civics involvement in secondary school and higher civic engagement as a young adult.

## Conclusion

The results of this study support previous scholarship that shows the positive relationship between stronger education and higher political efficacy, as well as participating in experiential learning and higher civic engagement. Understanding a stronger education as a combination of things, such as a high number of classes taken, as well as participation in civic activities and clubs, allowed for a more comprehensive understanding of how education helps increase political efficacy and civic engagement. The additional feedback provided by participants aligned with this as well, noting in their own reflections that some of the most impactful things on their civic engagement were either academic courses or clubs and activities that centered on civics. This study should be an inspiration to reinvigorate our secondary school curriculums as much as possible and to really embrace the methods of learning that have been found to be so helpful, such as experiential learning. While this study was less conclusive on the impact of service learning, further studies could be done to understand the true impact of properly executed service learning in the high school curriculum.

While this study begins to fill the gap regarding the impacts of how young adults reflect on the impact of their high school education and experiences on their current civic engagement, a lot more research should be done to focus on specific pedagogical choices that seem to have the greatest widespread impact. Additionally, the sample for this study was small and quite limited. The majority of individuals who participated in the study were college educated and from California. Looking at a larger sample with a more diverse sample that includes different educational, geographical, socioeconomic, and ethnic backgrounds would provide a deeper and more well-rounded understanding of this topic.

The goal of this work is to reflect on what the American education system could be doing better to help facilitate higher political efficacy and, therefore, higher civic engagement to revitalize our participatory democracy. The impacts of SBER will be better researched in the coming years as more and more young adults complete Common Core-based educations; yet, even before then, it is up to the American public to recognize the need for ever-increasing civic education and engagement. It is with great disappointment that we sit in front of our varying media and watch videos showing our fellow citizens failing to understand basic aspects of political function. Things as simple as the three branches of government, the meaning of women's suffrage, and much more seem to slip further and further from the grasp of the average American, and yet we are utterly dependent on each other's participation to maintain our democratic system of government. An often repeated story notes that after exiting the Constitutional Convention, Benjamin Franklin answered a woman's question regarding the type of government that was created with the phrase, "A republic, if you can keep it."<sup>55</sup> The weight of the simple sentence says it all, our democratic republic relies on an informed and engaged citizenry, and it is our duty to work toward maintaining this through education.

---

<sup>55</sup> A quote by Benjamin Franklin, as recollected in the journal of James McHenry, 1787.

## Bibliography

- Almond, Gabriel A., and Sidney Verba. *The Civic Culture: Political Attitudes and Democracy in Five Nations*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2016.
- Anderson, Derek. "U.S. High School Student's Social Media Use and Their Political Socialization." *Communication Today* 11, no. 2 (2020): 166–74.
- Balch, George I. "Multiple Indicators in Survey Research: The Concept 'Sense of Political Efficacy.'" *Political Methodology* 1, no. 2 (1974): 1–43.
- Bardes, Barbara A., and Robert W. Oldendick. *Public Opinion: Measuring the American Mind*. Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2017.
- Berkman, James S. "Mann's Democratic Vision and School Choice." *Schools* 6, no. 2 (2009): 251–56. doi:10.1086/605957.
- California Department of Education. *History Social Science Framework For California Public Schools Kindergarten Through Grade Twelve* (2017).  
<https://www.cde.ca.gov/ci/hs/cf/documents/hssfwchapter15.pdf>.
- California State Board of Education. *History–Social Science Content Standards for California Public Schools California Kindergarten Through Grade Twelve*, (2000).
- Campbell, David E. "What Is Education's Impact on Civic and Social Engagement?" *Measuring the Effects of Education on Health and Civic Engagement*. Copenhagen: OECD, 2006.
- Clayton, Patti H., Julie A. Hatcher, and Robert G. Bringle. *Research on Service Learning: Conceptual Frameworks and Assessment*. Sterling, VA: Stylus Publishing, 2013.

Common Core Initiative. “Common Core State Standards for English Language Arts & Literacy in History/Social Studies, Science, and Technical Subjects.” Wayback Machine, Last modified 2023.

[https://web.archive.org/web/20220914175925/http://www.corestandards.org/wp-content/uploads/ELA\\_Standards1.pdf](https://web.archive.org/web/20220914175925/http://www.corestandards.org/wp-content/uploads/ELA_Standards1.pdf).

Dalton, Russell J. “Citizenship Norms and the Expansion of Political Participation.” *Political Studies* 56, no. 1 (2008): 76–98. doi:10.1111/j.1467-9248.2007.00718.x.

Dewey, John. *Democracy and Education*. Middlesex: Echo Library, 2007.

Dewey, John. *Experience and Education*. New York: Free Press, 2015.

Easton, David, and Jack Dennis. *Children in the Political System: Origins of Political Legitimacy*. Chicago, Illinois: University of Chicago Press, 1980.

Gallini, Sara M, and Barbara E Moely. “Service-Learning and Engagement, Academic Challenge, and Retention.” *Michigan Journal of Community Service Learning* Fall (2003): 5–14.

Greenstein, Fred I. “Personality and Political Socialization: The Theories of Authoritarian and Democratic Character.” *The ANNALS of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 361, no. 1 (1965): 81–95. doi:10.1177/000271626536100108.

Guttek, Gerald L. *An Historical Introduction to American Education: Third Edition*. Long Grove, IL: Waveland Press, 1970.

- Hamilton, Laura, Brian Stecher, and Kun Yuan. *Standards-Based Reform in the United States: History, Research, and Future Directions*. Center on Education Policy, 2009.
- Hess, Robert D., and Judith Torney-Purta. *The Development of Basic Attitudes and Values toward Government and Citizenship during the Elementary School Years*. Chicago: University of Chicago, 1965.
- Hyman, Herbert H. *Political Socialization: A Study in the Psychology of Political Behavior*. Free Press, 1959.
- Jefferson, Thomas. Letter to George Wyth. Paris: France, August 13, 1786.
- Jennings, Kent M, and Richard G. Niemi. *The Political Character of Adolescence: The Influence of Families and Schools*. Princeton University Press, 1974.
- Kenna, Joshua L, and William B. Russell III. “The Culture and History of Standards-Based Educational Reform and Social Studies in America.” *Journal of Culture and Values in Education* 1, no. 1 (2018): 26–49. doi:10.46303/jcve.01.01.3.
- Massachusetts School Board, and Horace Mann. *Report No 12*, Report No 12 § (1848).
- Milbrath, Lester W., and Madan Lal Goel. *Political Participation: How and Why Do People Get Involved in Politics?* Lanham etc.: University Press of America, 1982.
- Myers-Lipton, Scott J. “Effect of a Comprehensive Service-Learning Program on College Students' Civic Responsibility.” *Teaching Sociology* 26, no. 4 (1998): 243. doi:10.2307/1318766.

Neem, Johann N. *Democracy's Schools: The Rise of Public Education in America*. Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2017.

Putnam, Robert D. *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community*. New York, NY: Simon & Schuster Paperbacks, 2020.

Richard, Dan, Cheryl Keen, Julie A Hatcher, and Heather A Pease. "Pathways to Adult Civic Engagement: Benefits of Reflection and Dialogue across Difference in Higher Education Service-Learning Programs." *Michigan Journal of Community Service Learning* 23, no. 1 (2017). doi:10.3998/mjcsloa.3239521.0023.105.

Rosenstone, Steven J., and John Mark Hansen. *Mobilization, Participation, and Democracy in America*. Longman, 2009.

Russell, William B. "Teaching Social Studies in the 21st Century: A Research Study of Secondary Social Studies Teachers' Instructional Methods and Practices." *Action in Teacher Education* 32, no. 1 (2010): 65–72. doi:10.1080/01626620.2010.10463543.

Schiesel, Seth. "Former Justice Promotes Web-Based Civics Lessons." *The New York Times*, 2008. <https://www.nytimes.com/2008/06/09/arts/09sand.html>.

Sigel, Roberta s. *Learning about Politics: A Reader in Political Socialization*. New York: Random House, 1970.

Simeone, James, and Greg M. Shaw. "Do Project Pedagogies Make a Difference?" *Journal of Political Science Education* 13, no. 1 (2016): 75–90. doi:10.1080/15512169.2016.1194210.

“Timeline of California Standards-Based Reform.” Timeline of California Standards-Based Reform - Historical Documents (CA Dept of Education). Accessed March 18, 2023.

<https://www.cde.ca.gov/nr/re/hd/yr96-10tl.asp>.

Tocqueville, Alexis de. *Democracy in America*. New York, NY: New American Library, 1963.

Traugott, Michael, Stephan Medvic, David Dulio, and Candice Nelson. “The Electorates Responsibility.” Essay. In *Shades of Gray: Perspectives on Campaign Ethics*, 225–238. Brookings Institution Press, 2002.

U.S President. Press Release. “Remarks by the President on No Child Left Behind Flexibility.”

*National Archives* (September 23, 2011):

<https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/2011/09/23/remarks-president-no-child-left-behind-flexibility>

“WASC Directory.” Western Association of Schools and Colleges, Last modified 2023.

[https://www.acswasc.org/wp-content/themes/acswasc/pdf/ACS-WASC\\_Directory.pdf](https://www.acswasc.org/wp-content/themes/acswasc/pdf/ACS-WASC_Directory.pdf).

Westbrook, Robert B. “Schools for Industrial Democrats: The Social Origins of John Dewey's Philosophy of Education.” *American Journal of Education* 100, no. 4 (1992): 401–19.

doi:10.1086/444023.

“Who We Are.” IGNITE. Accessed March 17, 2023. <https://ignitenational.org/who-we-are>.

Wong, Kenneth K, James W Guthrie, and Douglas N Harris. “Preface.” *Peabody Journal of Education* 79, no. 1 (2004): 1–6.

## Appendix A

### Qualtrics Survey Questions

1. What type of institution did you attend for high school?
  - a. Public
  - b. Charter school
  - c. Private
  - d. Homeschool
  - e. Other
    - i. Please describe
2. What state did you attend high school in?
  - a. (short answer)
3. What courses do you remember taking in high school? (check all that apply)
  - a. United States History & Geography
  - b. World History, Culture & Geography
  - c. American Government & Civics
  - d. Economics
  - e. AP Comparative Government
  - f. AP US Government
  - g. AP US History
  - h. AP World History
  - i. Other (include any other history/gov/social science course you can remember)
    - i. (short answer)
4. Did your high school require volunteer hours in order to graduate?
  - a. Yes
  - b. No
5. If yes, were you required to volunteer in your immediate community or just anywhere?
  - a. (Short answer)
6. Did any of your academic classes take you into the community to volunteer (not school-required volunteer hours)?

- a. Yes
  - b. No
7. Did you participate in any of the following clubs/activities?
- a. Debate Club/Team
  - b. Model UN/Model Congress
  - c. Mock Trial
  - d. Politics Club/Political Action Club
  - e. Young Republicans/Young Democrats
  - f. Youth and Government
  - g. We the People Club
  - h. Any sort of student leadership (i.e. class president, class representative, etc)
  - i. None
  - j. Other (any sort of civics-related activity you can think of!)
    - i. (short answer)
8. Which of these civic activities do you do/have you done?
- a. Registered to vote
  - b. Vote in presidential elections
  - c. Vote in midterm elections
  - d. Vote in local elections
  - e. Read about news/politics regularly
  - f. Watch television news regularly
  - g. Participate in protests
  - h. Share news/political info online
  - i. Take part in community leadership/programs (word better)
  - j. Been/are a member of the military
  - k. Been/are a member of a political group
  - l. Held office/served on a local board or commission
  - m. Worked/volunteered for a political campaign/voter registration drive
  - n. Volunteered for a national service organization (i.e Teach for America, Americorps, Peace Corps)
9. How much do you remember what you learned in your high school civics courses?

- a. I don't remember anything
  - b. I remember some things
  - c. I remember most things
  - d. I remember everything
10. Are there any things you wish had been taught in your high school civics curriculum?
- a. No
  - b. Yes
    - i. Explain
11. If you attended college, did your college have service-learning courses (the course required you to go out into the community and volunteer with some sort of group)?
- a. Yes
  - b. No
  - c. I did not attend college
12. If you attended college, did you take any civics courses?
- a. Yes
  - b. No
  - c. I did not attend college
13. If you took college civics courses, do you remember what you learned?
- a. I remember nothing
  - b. I remember a few things
  - c. I remember some things
  - d. I remember everything
14. How confident are you in your understanding of how the American political system functions?
- a. Not confident at all
  - b. Only a little confident
  - c. Somewhat confident
  - d. Very confident
15. Are there any activities/programs/classes.etc, that you were involved with that you think impacted how much you engage in politics and your community?
- a. Yes

- i. Explain
  - b. No
- 16. Which of the following has most influenced what you have learned about how politics and world affairs function?
  - a. Family
  - b. Friends
  - c. School
  - d. The media
  - e. Religious organizations
  - f. Other
    - i. Please explain further
- 17. What is your age?
  - a. (short answer)
- 18. Highest level of education (multiple choice)
  - a. High School
  - b. Some college
  - c. Associates Degree
  - d. Bachelors Degree
  - e. Masters Degree
- 19. What is your gender?
  - a. Male
  - b. Female
  - c. Non-binary/non-conforming
  - d. Transgender
  - e. Prefer not to respond
  - f. Other
- 20. What is your ethnicity?
  - a. (short answer)