

The Influence of Civic Education on Electoral Engagement and Voting

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*Paper presented at APSA's Teaching and Learning Conference,
Albuquerque, N.M., February 11-13, 2011.*

It has become commonplace for scholars and political practitioners to lament young people's low levels of engagement in American election campaigns. Studies have documented declining voter turnout among young adults since the 1970s. In recent years, however, there have been some encouraging developments on the electoral front. Participation in presidential elections among young voters has been on the rise since the 2000 campaign. Fifty-one percent of 18-29 year old voters cast a ballot in 2008 compared to 49% in 2004 and 43% in 2000 (Kirby and Kawashima-Ginsberg, 2009).¹ Coinciding with the rise in turnout, youth engagement in campaign activities has increased, especially in the 2008 presidential contest. Young people were energetic volunteers who provided candidates with corps of grassroots operatives. They were peerless innovators who developed novel campaign strategies employing new technologies, including social networking and video-sharing websites (Owen, 2008, 2009). Despite these developments, the youth vote lags considerably behind turnout for citizens over age 40. Further, young people are more inclined to vote in presidential contests than in primary, midterm, or lower level elections. Young voters were not enthusiastic participants in the 2010 midterm elections (Thee-Brenan, 2010). Approximately 23% of eligible 18-29 year olds voted in the midterm contests (CIRCLE Staff, 2010) compared to 41% of the general population (McDonald, 2010).

There are a number of explanations for the increased electoral activation in 2008, including the presence of a candidate who appealed to youth, young people's belief that they could influence the outcome of the campaign, enhanced outreach to youth by candidates, parties, and independent political organizations, and technological developments that contributed to a more open communications environment. This study is concerned with another plausible explanation for the increase in young people's electoral engagement--the preparation provided by civic education. A critical mass of younger citizens has gone through civic education programs prior to reaching voting age. Civic education can provide people with knowledge of how the system works which forms the basis for the development of a sense of political efficacy and civic duty that facilitates participation (Delli Carpini and Keeter, 1996). Civic skills conducive to electoral engagement can be developed through the civics curriculum.

This study addresses the following research questions in relation to both traditional forms of campaign activity, such as working on a political campaign or attending a candidate's rally, as well as newer forms of campaign engagement associated with social media, including using social networking sites and video sharing platforms to interact with the election. Does civic education at the precollege level influence electoral engagement and voting later in life? What kinds of classroom instructional approaches are most conducive to creating citizens who are inclined to participate actively in elections?

CIVIC EDUCATION AND PARTICIPATORY ORIENTATIONS

Civics instruction across the nation varies widely in its structure, content, and quality. Many schools incorporate civic education into social studies or American history courses rather than offering dedicated civics classes. Such courses may gloss over or are

uneven in their coverage of voting and other forms of active political engagement. At the same time, school-based programs that aim to improve civics instruction by going beyond standard lecture and textbook teaching methods alone have been implemented. Students not only learn about the Constitutional and historical foundations of American government, the requirements of citizenship, and structure and functions of the political system, they also become familiar with the skills needed for meaningful political and civic participation, such as public speaking, participating in public hearings, contacting officials, meeting with community leaders about issues, and using media to engage the polity.

There has been a long-running debate over the priority that should be given to voting and campaign-related participation in classroom civic education. Some scholars believe that the civic education curriculum should have an overt focus on voting with the goal of increasing turnout in elections (Neimi, 2001). Others believe that by encouraging intermediate civic traits, such as political knowledge, efficacy, and citizen duty, civic education is inherently promoting voting (Campbell, 2006). The differing assessments of instructional goals as well as the wide variation in the amount and quality of civic education in schools may be responsible in part for the contradictions that are inherent in the research findings.

The Effectiveness of Civic Education

Scholars and practitioners long have contemplated whether civic education plays an important role in the development of civic attitudes, norms, values, and behaviors. A seminal study by Langton and Jennings (1968) traced the rise and implementation of civics courses in the United States dating back to 1915. The study employed a national probability sample to evaluate the impact American government and civics courses had on youth political orientations. Their findings suggested that such coursework led to little,

if any, increase in youth civic engagement or political participation. This work, in conjunction with other studies that provided mixed support at best for the notion that schools influence the development of civic orientations (Jennings and Niemi, 1974; Connell, 1972; Tedin, 1974; Beck, 1977, Jennings and Niemi, 1981), contributed to the subsequent de-emphasis of civics in the nation's public schools.

Other scholars, while noting some limitations of the extant curriculum, challenged this notion. Some have gone so far as to characterize the school as “the most important and effective instrument of political socialization in the United States” (Hess and Torney, 1967: 101). Studies support the contention that civic education contributes to the development of knowledge and norms that encourage political engagement. Robust civics instruction can lead to increased levels of political knowledge. Formal civic education imparts an understanding of the government and how it works that aids people in developing a sense of agency that encourages participation (Torney, Oppenheim, and Farnen, 1975; Delli Carpini and Keeter, 1996; Niemi and Junn, 1998; Tolo, 1999).

Political engagement also requires that people believe in their own ability to influence actual political happenings. A sense of political efficacy does not come only from political knowledge, but also derives from other skills that are enforced through successful civic education programs. These skills include public speaking, debate, and an ability to work with people with differing points of view. They have been defined as, “. . . the communications and organizational abilities that allow citizens to use time and money effectively in political life” (Verba et al, 1995). Increased political efficacy can lead to higher level of political participation. Efficacy is an important determinant of political behavior because without feelings of competency and a belief that one's actions are consequential, one has little incentive to participate in politics (Easton and Dennis, 1967; Abramson and Aldrich, 1982).

Civic duty, while distinct from political efficacy, is closely related in that both concepts deal with

the way individuals orient themselves within the broader political establishment. Studies consistently demonstrate that civic duty is an important predictor of political participation (Campbell, 2006).

Research has shown that students who receive quality civic education are more inclined to develop a strong sense of civic duty (Owen and Soule, 2010).

Research has documented the direct link between higher levels of civic education and increased voter turnout rates. Students with more education were much more likely to have voted in the 2000 presidential election than those with lower levels of education (Dee, 2003). A more recent study found that students who complete a year of coursework in American government/civics are 3-6 percentage points more likely to vote in an election following high school than those without exposure to civic education. (Bachner, 2011).

Classroom Environment and Instructional Methods

Particular types of civic education and classroom instructional methods are more conducive to making participatory citizens. Factors, such as integrating current events into classroom curricula, work to increase students' future political participation (Niemi and Junn, 1998). Current events, particularly when tailored to a student's interest or discussed in conjunction with an active classroom or community-based project (Youniss and Yates, 1997), are a key component of a civics course that can bolster civic knowledge and engagement by providing "nonduplicative civic knowledge" (Galston, 2001). The 2005 California Survey of Civic Education reported 61% of students in classes that continuously discussed current events said that they were interested in politics in contrast to 32% in classes that did not include current events discussions in their curricula (California Campaign for the Civic Mission of Schools, 2005).

Kahne and Middaugh's (2008) model for high quality civic education is rooted in curricular support that goes beyond textbooks. They find that making classroom civics more personal and engaging (e.g. meeting civic role models, discussing local issues of relevance to the students) positively influenced high school students' commitment to civic participation. In addition, they argue that an increase in these

types of activities could help to offset the civic opportunity gap created by differences in personal backgrounds and home environments (2008: 36-37).

By participating in classroom level political exercises students develop more positive views of government and the political system in general. A study of We the People . . . The Citizen and the Constitution found that program participants develop stronger attachments to democratic attitudes and principles as well as an enhanced sense of political interest and effectiveness (Leming, 1996). Scholars also have found positive indications that students who take part in Project Citizen, which integrates problem solving, collaborative thinking, and cross-disciplinary approaches into the curriculum, leave with a greater sense of their own agency as a civic actor (Atherton, 2000; Tolo, 1998).

HYPOTHESES

There are indications based on data from the two surveys employed in this study that innovative approaches to civic education are related to higher levels of politicization. People whose civic education experience includes innovative curriculum elements are more likely to develop participatory norms and a sense of civic duty that remains over the life course (Owen and Soule, 2010). Similarly, civic education experience is linked to the use of social media for political engagement (Owen, et al., 2010). This paper examines another aspect of the relationship of civic education to politicization by testing the following hypotheses related to voting and campaign involvement:

H₁: The greater the amount and quality of precollege civic education, the more likely people are to vote in presidential elections.

H₂: The greater the amount and quality of precollege civic education, the more likely people are to participate in campaign-related activities.

We test the proposition that people who have no civic education will be the least likely to vote or engage in election campaigns. Taking a civics course of any kind in

junior high and high school will increase the likelihood that a person will participate in campaigns later in life. We expect to find that civic education programs that incorporate active instructional elements are the most effective in promoting campaign engagement.

DATA

This study employs data from two original surveys.² The Civic Education and Political Engagement Study (CEPES) is a survey designed to examine the influence of civic training on the development of political orientations and citizenship skills. This study is unique in the extent to which it explores respondents' civic education experience in detail through an extensive battery of questions which takes into account classroom civic education, service learning programs, and participation in extracurricular activities. Respondents evaluated their own civic education experience and reported their attitudes toward civics instruction in general. The survey includes standard and new items related to political knowledge, political norms, attitudes, values, political participation, campaign activity, voting behavior, traditional media use, and new/social media use. The online survey was conducted by Knowledge Networks (KN) between May 14 and 28, 2010, and employs a national probability sample (n=1,228) drawn from KN's nationwide online panel.

The same questionnaire with several additional items was administered to a sample of alumni of We the People . . . The Citizen and the Constitution (WTP), a civic education program developed the by Center for Civic Education. More than 28 million students have participated in We the People since 1987. The program's curriculum incorporates innovative instructional techniques, including a simulated congressional

hearing in which students demonstrate their knowledge and understanding of constitutional principles in front of a panel of judges. The survey was administered online by the researchers to a convenience sample of WTP alumni (n=1,002).³

MEASURES

Electoral Participation Variables

This study focuses on three aspects of electoral participation during the 2008 presidential election: 1) voting; 2) campaign participation; 3) engagement via social media. Identical indicators were developed for the CEPES and the WTP Alumni data sets. The voting measure is based on respondents' self-report about whether they turned out in the election or not. Respondents who were ineligible to vote in 2008 either because they were not of voting age or were not American citizens were removed from the analysis. Self-reported turnout can be inflated, as people give the socially responsible answer to the question. However, Berent, Krosnick, and Lupia, in addressing the registration and turnout measures in the American National Election Studies, find that "survey respondent's reports of their own registration and turnout behavior are more accurate than previously believed" (2011: 5). The voter eligible turnout for 2008 was 62%, and 73% of the CEPES respondents indicated that they had voted. A similar measure of voter turnout was devised for voting in presidential elections prior to 2008.

The surveys included seven items that assessed respondents' participation in the campaign. The indicators of campaign participation include: 1) volunteering for a candidate or political party; 2) working for an organization that informed or mobilized voters; 3) contributing money to a campaign or political party; 4) wearing a campaign

button, displaying a bumper sticker or yard sign; 5) attending a campaign rally or meeting; 6) calling in to a radio or television talk show; 7) doing something on your own to support or oppose a candidate. These items were combined to form an index of campaign participation ranging from zero to seven (Cronbach's $\alpha=.688$). This index was collapsed to form a dichotomous measure indicating whether a respondent had participated in any or none of these ways during the 2008 campaign.

Using social media to participate in the presidential contest gained in prominence in 2008. Seven indicators of using social media to engage with the campaign were included in the study: 1) used a social networking site, like Facebook, to engage with others during the campaign; 2) watched online campaign videos, such as those on YouTube; 3) followed the campaign via a blog; 4) posted something related to the campaign on a blog, website, or videosharing site; 5) visited a candidate's website; 6) used email to send information about the campaign to others, and 7) used Twitter to send or receive campaign information. These items were combined to form an eight-point index of social media engagement (Cronbach's $\alpha=.880$). A dichotomous measure was created indicating whether a respondent had engaged with social media in any of these ways during the 2008 election or not.

Three indicators that tap participation through both traditional activities and social media were employed in the analysis. The first is an additive index combining the traditional participation and the social media measures that ranges from zero to sixteen. For the second indicator, the dichotomous measures of campaign participation and social media engagement were combined to form a categorical indicator of participation via traditional campaign activities and social media. This variable takes into account people

who took part in the campaign through both traditional activities and social media, those who participated only in traditional ways, those who engaged solely through social media, and those who did not participate at all. In the general population, 15% participated in both types of activities, 14% took part in traditional activities only, 16% engaged only through social media, and 54% did not participate. Finally, a dichotomous measure tapping whether a respondent participated through either traditional activities or social media was constructed.

Civic Education Variables

A civic education index was constructed for the CEPES data as a basic indicator of the amount of civics instruction people received. The survey asked respondents if they had taken a government, social studies, or civics class in junior high or high school.⁴ Participants also indicated whether or not they had taken part in civic education program that went beyond the basic government, social studies, or civics curriculum to incorporate active and innovative learning features, such as field trips, interviews with civic leaders, debates, mock trials, hearings, and simulated elections. Survey respondents affirmed participation in approximately 35 different civic education programs. These programs differ in specific goals and instructional methods, but all involve some type of curriculum innovation. More than twice as many respondents to the CEPES conducted by KN participated in We the People (75 cases or 6% of the sample) than in any other program. Additional programs include Kids Voting USA, Model Congress/Model United Nations, Street Law, Close Up, and Project Citizen. Students who participate in some of these programs can be predisposed to high achievement and strong civic attitudes. Some may self-select into the program or are encouraged to take part by teachers and parents. However, others may be exposed to the program as part of the curriculum. The civic education index

consists of three categories: 1) people who had no civic education at all (24% of the sample); 2) those who took a civics course only (64% of the sample); and 3) individuals who took a civics course and participated in a civic education program (12% of the sample).⁵

The CEPES and WTP Alumni surveys include items that tap into the type of classroom civics instruction the respondent had received. These variables measure the extent to which the class experience included lecture, textbook-based learning, current events-based learning, classroom activities, and community-based activities. Each item is measured using a five point indicator ranging from never to always. A fifteen point classroom instruction scale was constructed using the current events-based learning, classroom activities, and community-based learning items (Cronbach's $\alpha = .799$). A higher score on the civics classroom instruction scale indicates the student experienced a more interactive and engaging classroom setting.

Respondents were asked if they had ever taken part in a variety of activities in conjunction with their civics training. The fourteen instructional activities include 1) debates, 2) a competition to test civic knowledge, 3) mock trials, 4) hearings, 5) mock election, 6) delivering a speech, 7) discussing current events, 8) writing a letter to a government official, 9) circulating a petition, 10) attending a community meeting, 11) meeting with government or community leaders, 12) taking a field trip to a local, state, or federal government institution or historic site, 13) community service, and 14) creating civics-related informational material, newsletters, videos, or websites. These dichotomous items were combined to form a civics curricular activities scale that ranges from 0 to 14.

The survey asked respondents if they had participated in eighteen different types of extracurricular activities each represented by a dichotomous variable. Prior research indicates that the relationship of extracurriculars to politicization differs across types of activities.

Therefore, we created four scales representing specific categories of extracurricular activities—political, media-related, service, and sports/ hobbies. The political activities scale (range 0 to 4) includes participation in student government, debate team or mock trial, a political campaign, or political internship. The media-related extracurricular activities scale (range 0 to 4) consists of participation in student newspaper, yearbook, radio or television station, and literary journal. A scale representing service extracurricular activities (range 0 to 4) takes into account participation in a community service organization, boy or girl scouts, 4 H Club or other agricultural organization, and church or religious groups. The final scale (range 0 to 5) includes participation in sports, hobby organizations, and other non-political organizations, including cheerleading, band, choir, glee club, drama, and language clubs.

Civic Duty

A general civic duty scale was constructed from four items indicating that the respondent feels that she has a responsibility to keep informed about public affairs, take part in government affairs, volunteer in the community, and serve on a jury. The sixteen point indicator is scored so that a high value equates with a strong sense of civic duty (Cronbach's alpha= .766).

FINDINGS

This study provides evidence to support the hypothesis that civic education is positively related to voting. As Table 1 depicts, the greater the amount and quality of civic education, the more likely people were to turn out to vote. Respondents who had no civic education were substantially less likely to vote in 2008 and in prior presidential contests than those who had taken a civics course or participated in a civics program. There is a difference of over 20 percentage points between those who have no civic education and those who have taken at least a civics or social studies course. Those who

have gone through a civic education program are the most likely to cast a ballot. 88% of alumni of the We the People program reported turning out in the 2008 presidential election and 78% turned out in previous electoral contests.

Table 1
Voting and Civic Education Experience

	No Civic Ed	Civics/Social Studies Only	Civics/Social Studies and Program	Total Sample	We the People Alumni
Voted in 2008 Election	55%	78%	83%	73%	88%
Voted in Previous Elections	48%	73%	78%	67%	78%

χ^2 p \leq .05 for Civic Education Index

The analysis indicates a similar pattern supportive of civic education’s positive influence on campaign participation. In keeping with the second hypothesis, the higher the level of civic education, the more likely people were to participate in the 2008 election. 62% of those whose civics instruction included an innovative program engaged in the campaign either through traditional activities or social media compared to 48% of those who took a civics or social studies course only and 30% of those who had no classroom civics instruction. 81% of We the People alumni participated in the campaign in some way. Further, the level of engagement in the campaign increased with the quality of the civic education experience. As Table 2 depicts, 24% of people exposed to a civics program took part in the campaign through both traditional activities and social media, as opposed to 17% of those who had a civics or social studies class only and 7% of those with no civic education. 53% of alumni of the We the People program took part in the campaign through both traditional activities and social media, while another 21% engaged through social media alone and 7% participated in traditional ways.

Table 2
Campaign Participation and Civic Education Experience

	No Civic Ed	Civics/Social Studies Only	Civics/Social Studies and Program	Total Sample	We the People Alumni
Traditional and Social Media Participation	7%	17%	24%	15%	53%
Traditional Participation Only	11%	14%	20%	14%	7%
Social Media Participation Only	12%	17%	19%	16%	21%
No Campaign Participation	70%	52%	38%	54%	19%

χ^2 p \leq .05 for Civic Education Index

The percentage of national survey respondents whose civic education experience included active instructional elements is strikingly low. Participating in debates, discussing current events, and taking field trips to government and historical sites are mentioned most frequently by the CEPES survey participants (between 21% and 24%). Less than 20% of subjects reported participating in the majority of instructional activities. Fewer than 10% of respondents had participated in a competition to test their civic knowledge, taken part in a hearing, written a letter to a public official, circulated or signed a petition, attended a community meeting, met a political leader, or prepared civic-related materials. (See Table 3.)

Our findings strongly support the contention that civics curricula incorporating activities conducive to the development of civics skills will be more likely to produce citizens who will vote and take part actively in election campaigns. Table 3 depicts the

percentage of respondents to the CEPES who took part in fourteen types of civics curricular activities who voted and participated in the campaign. The combined campaign involvement measure that includes both traditional and social media engagement is used in the analysis.⁶ Across the board, people whose classroom civics experience incorporated active forms of instruction were more likely to vote than those who did not have these kinds of experiences. For all but one item, 85% or more of those whose civic education included an instructional activity reported voting in the 2008 election. The findings are similar for campaign engagement. 84% or more of respondents in each category of civics curricular activities participated in the campaign through traditional means and/or social media. 90% or more of those who took part in a simulated hearing, wrote a letter to a public official, or created civics materials engaged in the campaign.

One of the civics curricular measures--creating civics-related informational material, newsletters, videos, or websites—is particularly relevant for the use of social media in the campaign. Fewer people (1% of the CEPES sample) reported experience with this type of instructional activity than any other form. Although the number of cases in the category is small, the data suggest that this type of classroom activity may prepare people to engage with social media during campaigns. 67% of respondents who had created informational material engaged with the 2008 campaign through social media, and 50% took part in traditional campaign activities.

Findings for the WTP Alumni sample appear in Table 4. Civics curricular activities are a regular component of the WTP curriculum. In contrast to the national sample, high percentages of respondents had engaged in almost all of the curricular activities. The smallest percentage is associated with creating civics-related media

material and websites; 41% of respondents reported this being a part of their civic educational experience. Over 90% of WTP alumni who created media materials and websites voted and engaged in the campaign.

Table 3
 Voting, Campaign Engagement and Civics Curricular Activities
 Civic Education and Political Engagement Study (KN)

	Debate	Compete	Mock Trial	Hearing	Mock Election	Speech	Current Events	Letter	Petition	Attend Meeting	Meet Leaders	Field Trip	Comm Service	Civic Material	Total Percent/n
Voted	87%	88	85	68	89	85	88	89	87	90	88	88	91	93%	73% (905)
Engaged	85%	86	84	90	85	85	86	93	83	84	87	83	88	93%	46% (524)
Total	21%	5	12	2	12	18	24	9	5	8	5	24	7	1%	
χ^2 sign. voted engaged	.00 .00	n.s. n.s.	n.s. n.s.	n.s. n.s.	.00 .00	.03 .02	.00 .00	.01 .00	n.s. n.s.	.00 .00	n.s. .01	.00 .00	.00 .00	.01 n.s.	

Table 4
 Voting, Campaign Engagement and Civics Curricular Activities
 We the People Alumni Survey

	Debate	Compete	Mock Trial	Hearing	Mock Election	Speech	Current Events	Letter	Petition	Attend Meeting	Meet Leaders	Field Trip	Comm Service	Civic Material	n
Voted	92%	88	90	86	89	90	90	91	93	90	90	92	88	93%	88% (463)
Engaged	85%	86	91	89	87	86	85	86	93	89	87	83	88	94%	81% (539)
Total	88%	83	77	68	67	78	94	76	48	74	81	88	79	41%	
χ^2 sign. Voted Engaged	.00 .00	.00 .00	.00 .00	.00 .00	.00 .00	.00 .00	.00 .00	.00 .00	.00 .00	.00 .00	.00 .00	.00 .00	.00 .00	.00 .00	

An ordinary least squares regression analysis was run to investigate further the effects of classroom environment and curricular activities on campaign participation. The three dependent variables are the traditional campaign activity, social media engagement, and combined campaign engagement scales. Classroom factors represented by the class environment variable—the combined measure of the extent to which the respondents' civics instruction consisted of current events-based learning, classroom activities, and community-based activities—and the curricular activities index were included in the model. The four measures of extracurricular activities, the civic duty index, and demographic controls for age, sex, and race were incorporated in the analysis.⁷ The classroom factors, extracurricular activities, civic duty measure, and demographic variables were treated as blocks of variables, and the R^2 for each block was assessed.⁸

As Table 5 demonstrates, the classroom factors are significant predictors of traditional campaign activity, social media engagement, and combined campaign engagement. People whose civic education experience included active and innovative curricular experiences are more likely to take part in election campaigns. These factors explain more of the variance in each of the models than any of the other sets of variables, including extracurricular activities. The curricular activities measure is a strong and significant predictor of traditional campaign activity, while class environment is not.⁹ However, classroom environment is a stronger predictor of social media engagement than curricular activities. Both variables are statistically significant. The two classroom factors are significant predictors of combined campaign engagement, and the coefficients are of a similar magnitude.

Extracurricular activities explain less of the variance in campaign participation than classroom factors. In fact, the R^2 for this block of variables is not significant for social media engagement and is very weak for combined campaign engagement. Taking part in political forms of extracurricular activities, such as student government, debate team, and working on a campaign while in junior high or high school, is statistically significant in all three models, and is the strongest individual predictor of traditional campaign activity. Participating in service-related extracurricular activities is positively related to traditional campaign activity, but is not significant in the other two models. The relationship between sports and hobby extracurricular activities and all three measures of campaign activity is negative, and it is statistically significant for traditional and combined campaign engagement.

Civic duty, as expected, is a statistically significant predictor in all three models. The relationship is strongest for the combined campaign engagement measure and weakest for traditional campaign activity. Age is the strongest predictor among the demographic controls, and it is statistically significant in all of the models. The direction of the relationship differs based on the type of campaign engagement. Age is the strongest predictor of social media engagement, as younger people were more likely than older cohorts to take part in the 2008 presidential election in this way. However, older people were more inclined to participate in traditional ways. Sex is a weak predictor of engagement, with men being slightly more inclined to participate than women. The control for black/African American was not significant, and the coefficient for white was significant and negative.

Table 5
 OLS Regression Analysis of Traditional Campaign Activity, Social Media Engagement, and
 Combined Campaign Engagement on Classroom Factors and Extracurricular Activities

	Traditional Campaign Activity	Social Media Engagement	Combined Campaign Engagement
Classroom Factors			
Class Environment	-.003	.119*	.108*
Curricular Activities	.243 *	.066*	.113*
R ²	.157*	.071*	.101*
Extracurricular Activities			
Political	.270*	.084**	.138*
Service	.050***	.015	.028
Sports and Hobby	-.118*	-.037	-.061***
Media	.041	.013	.020
R ²	.076*	.006	.018*
Civic Duty	.175*	.202*	.224*
R ²	.031*	.018*	.027*
Demographics			
Age	.113*	-.215*	-.163*
Sex	-.045***	-.052***	-.059**
Black/African American	.023	-.056	.047
White	-.085*	-.110*	-.117*
R ²	.021*	.058*	.041*
Model R²	.284*	.153*	.187*

*p≤.01 **p≤.05 ***p≤.10

CONCLUSION

This study finds that civic education matters for voting and participation in election campaigns. Taking a course in social studies or civics in junior high or high school significantly increases the probability that a citizen will vote and engage in campaign-related activities. People whose civic education experience goes beyond a standard course and includes an innovative program, such as We the People, Kids Voting, or Close Up, are the most likely to participate in elections. Students whose civic education incorporates active and innovative forms of civics

instruction that facilitate the development of relevant skills are inclined to participate in politics as adults.

Classroom civics instruction is more important than extracurricular activities in promoting voting and electoral engagement. The possible exception is the relationship of participation in politically-related extracurricular activities and traditional campaign participation. However, students who engage in these kinds of extracurricular activities may be predisposed to politics.

Engagement in campaigns through social media is a new and evolving phenomenon that warrants consideration by civic educators. The majority of curriculum innovations reported by the CEPES and WTP Alumni survey respondents are especially relevant for traditional forms of participation. The civics experience of few of the CEPES respondents, in particular, included the creation of the media-related materials, newsletters, videos, and websites. However, people whose civics instruction included these elements were highly inclined to participate in the campaign, especially through social media. If the 2011 midterm elections are any indication, campaign engagement through social media will increase and become more sophisticated over time. Teaching young people how to use social media for political activation may be a productive next step for civic educators.

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NOTES

¹ 62% of eligible voters turned out in 2008, while 60% cast a ballot in 2004 (Michael McDonald, *United States Election Project*, http://elections.gmu.edu/voter_turnout.htm).

² The study is funded by the Center for Civic Education, and is being conducted by Diana Owen and a team of graduate student researchers at Georgetown University.

³ Participants for the WTP Alumni Survey were recruited through the WTP alumni network, WTP teachers, and WTP program coordinators. Respondents from 50 states and one American territory are represented in the sample. The respondents are self-selected; the sample is neither random nor representative.

⁴ The fact that respondents relied on recall of their civic education experience is a potential limitation of this study. We sought to mitigate this pitfall by subjecting the instrument to rigorous pretesting of the items. The Georgetown University research team conducted an extensive survey and interview pretest on 288 subjects. A subsample of the survey respondents was interviewed to determine if they had difficulty answering any of the questions. The interview subjects ranged from young people to octogenarians, and included members of a senior citizens community in Florida. The subjects generally had little difficulty recalling their civics experience in some detail. A small number of items where recall was sketchy, such as whether their high school civics course had been required or was an elective class, were eliminated from the study. The survey instrument was pretested further by Knowledge Networks on 50 subjects before the final version went into the field.

⁵ Six respondents participated in a civics program, but did not take a civics course. These respondents were eliminated from the analysis because there were too few of them to analyze.

⁶ An analysis using the four part campaign engagement measure (traditional and social media engagement, traditional participation only, social media engagement only, and no engagement) revealed similar findings, and indicated that exposure to civics curricular activities was positively related to all forms of campaign engagement. A slightly higher percentage of people who engaged in both forms of campaign engagement is apparent across all categories of civics curricular activities.

⁷ A number of additional variables were included in the model, but were not statistically significant. These include an item which ascertained whether the respondent had an outstanding civics teacher and demographic controls for education and income. The education variable alone did not strongly predict campaign participation.

⁸ The correlation between the curricular activities and classroom environment measures is .367.

⁹ The bivariate correlation between traditional campaign participation and the civic activities scale is .367 compared to .160 for the classroom environment variable.