

Civic Education Attitudinal Trends of High School Students Post 9-11

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Introduction

From the days of our founding fathers, the mission of our schools has continued to be significantly infused with the responsibility of civic competency of students. Since the signing of the United States Constitution, the idea that a democracy cannot exist without a well-educated population has prevailed. Noteworthy is the fact that for 32 years the public has consistently stated that the primary mission of schools was to educate people to become responsible citizens according to the 2002 Phi Delta Kappa 32nd Annual Gallup Poll. Respondents were asked what was the most important purpose of our schools, and the response was “preparing people to become responsible citizens.” Moreover, the National Council for the Social Studies has stated that “the primary purpose of social studies is to help young people develop the ability to make informed and reasoned decisions for the public good as citizens of a culturally diverse, democratic society in an interdependent world” (p. 1).

The 2007 Civic Education Attitudinal Trends of High School Students Post 9-11 survey (CEATHS) by the researchers herein was designed to probe into how well high school students understand not only the content knowledge of civics but also their attitudes towards the rights, responsibilities, duties and values of being a good democratic world citizen, including their attitudes towards the environment in a post 9-11 world. Daves (2008) stated that after the September 11, 2001, attack “instantly social studies became the most important component in our schools curricula. Within a matter of a few minutes our nation and its history was changed forever and the importance of understanding that history was paramount” (p. 16).

Additionally, economic questions were inserted into the questionnaire to delve into students’ content knowledge and attitudes towards capitalism. Various survey questions were written to coincide with the 1998 National Association of Secretaries of State (NASS) New Millennium Project’s (NASSNMP) nationwide survey in order to identify attitudinal trends in civic education by high school students.

Trends can help answer questions such as:

1. How well prepared our students to carry on our culture?
2. Have student attitudes changed after September 11, 2001?
3. How strongly do students believe in certain political and economic values?
4. Should political and economic values be incorporated to a greater degree in the elementary curriculum?
5. Do students feel a responsibility towards the environment?

The main focus of the CEATHS 2007 survey was to enable the researchers to take the results from both surveys, make comparisons, and identify trends. Specifically, the CEATHS 2007 survey’s focus was on identifying critical areas in the social studies’ civic, economic and environmental curriculums and bring trend awareness to educators in these fields.

Purpose

The purpose of this survey was to investigate the attitudes of high school students on nine factors: (a) democratic ideals; (b) personal ideals; (c) diversity; (d) patriotism; (e) political involvement; (f) civic duty; (g) cultural values; (h) world trust; and (i) 9-11 effects. This survey is part of on-going longitudinal

research to track trends in high school students' attitudes toward civic education. The next CEATHS survey will be conducted after the Presidential election in spring 2010.

Review of Civic Education Surveys and Reports

Numerous civic education surveys and statistical reports were perused prior to constructing the CEATHS questionnaire. Among them were (a) the 2005 Citizenship, Involvement, Democracy (CID) Survey Project conducted for the Center for Democracy and the Third Sector (CDATS) at Georgetown University; (b) the Civic Education Survey Report for Summer 2004 by The Florida Law Related Education Association, Inc. which emphasized content knowledge; (c) the 2001 Civic Knowledge and Engagement at Age 14 in 28 Countries by Torney-Purta, Amadeo and Lehmann; (d) The 2005 California Survey of Civic Education, (e) the 1999 Civic Education Study by the International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement; (f) the NAEP 1998 Civics Report Card for the Nation; and (g) What Democracy Means to Ninth-Graders: U.S. Results from the 2001 International IEA Civic Education Study. All these surveys and report have embedded in them the themes of content knowledge, trust, and volunteerism, with a few having questions on environmental attitudes.

NASS New Millennium Project

The researchers herein used the 1998 NASSNMP nationwide survey as a comparison to the 2007 CEATHS survey to delimit attitudinal trends in high school students from a pre- and post 9-11 perspective. The NASSNMP nationwide public opinion survey was commissioned by the NASS and conducted by The Tarrance Group/Lake Snell Perry & Associates between November 14-19, 1998. The Tarrance Group is a national survey research firm. There were 1,005 participants 15-24 years of age. The following NASS questions were modified to fit the 2007 CEATHS survey and their respective results were compared:

1. Do you feel more optimistic that America's best years as a country are still ahead of us, or do you feel more worried that America's best years might already be behind us? (p. 2)
2. Overall, do you think most people can be trusted, or do you approach most people with caution? (p. 4)
3. Do you think becoming successful in a career is important? (p. 5)
4. Do you think having a close-knit family life is important? (p. 5)
5. Do you think doing well financially, making a lot of money is important? (p. 5)
6. Do you think being a good American who cares about the good of the country is important? (p. 5)
7. Do you think gaining knowledge, education and skills is important? (p. 6)
8. Do you talk often about politics, government or current events with your friends? (p. 7)
9. How likely is it that you will volunteer to help in a political campaign? (p. 12)
10. How likely is it that you will volunteer to help someone in need? (p. 12)
11. You can't trust politicians because most are dishonest. (p. 15)
12. The most important thing I can do as a citizen is to help others.(p. 15)

Participants

The participants in the 2007 CEATHS survey were from two high schools (9th through 12th grade), rural and urban respectively, in different geographic locations in the southeastern United States. There were 467 participants from the rural high school and 480 participants from the urban high school, n=947. Gender breakdown was 498 males and 449 females. Ethnic breakdown was 728 (77%) white, 120 (13%) African American, 54 (6%) Hispanic, 4 (.5%) Native American, 41 (4.5%) Asian/Pacific Islander. The 1997 NASSNMP survey had a similar ethnic breakdown: 67% white, 14% Black, 14% Hispanic/Latino, 3% Asian/Pacific American, and 1% Native American.

Instrument-Questionnaire

The questionnaire contained 49 questions, and these questions were categorized into nine factors. Analyses were performed on each question and on each of the nine factors. The instrument was designed by both researchers herein and Dr. Paul Nicodemus, Department of Psychology, Austin Peay State

University. The survey consisted of four demographic questions: 1) grade level; 2) gender; 3) ethnicity; and 4) frequency of church attendance. The survey also had one open-ended question at the end. The CEATHS 2007 survey used a likert scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree).

A pilot survey was performed using 48 participants, and after a four-week time period, results of each of the administrations of the 49 questions were compared, resulting in $r=.846$.

Procedures

Procedures were approved by the Austin Peay State University Institutional Review Board to insure anonymity, confidentiality, and voluntary participation of participants in the CEATHS 2007 survey.

Analyses

Microsoft Excel was used to analyze the individual questions and SPSS.14 was used to analyze the nine factors. Questions 6 ($\alpha=.2.87$), 7 ($\alpha=.3.26$), 41 ($\alpha=.2.96$), and 44 ($\alpha=.4.06$) are not included in the nine categories because of ambiguities.

Research Findings

Democratic Ideals

One of the most astonishing statistics to come out of this survey was the decline in trust of politicians from 1997 (32%) to 2007 (1%). Only 5% trusted in the American government. Did trust decline partly because of the "Attack on America" on September 11, 2001, or the Iraq war?

Only 22% believe that democracy is worth defending and going to war if needed, and only 22% believe that each generation of Americans has had to defend democracy, some by going to war and making the ultimate sacrifice.

Fifteen percent believe that democracy allows individuals to follow their dreams, and 23% believe that democracy cannot exist without a well-educated population. Only 7% believe that the primary goal of schools is to educate students about the American democratic culture, in direct contrast to the civic mission stated by Kappa Delta Pi Gallup Poll, National Council for Social Studies (NCSS), and National Association of Secretaries of State (NASS). Lack of content knowledge is evident when a mere 30% believe Americans should have a variety of places to purchase an item as opposed to just one place, and 23% believe competition is necessary in America's economic system. However, fortunately 63% believe they have the right to buy/own land. The overall mean for the 14 questions in the factor of Democratic Ideals was $M = 3.49$, $Mdn = 3.49$, and $SD = .548$.

Personal Ideals

Twenty percent of respondents believed it was important to analyze policies, and only 21% believed it was important to make objective decisions. Thirty percent believed they had respect for authority and the law, while 32% believed it was important to research problems. Clearly, these percentages are low need to be emphasized more with students, preferably at the elementary level. The one exception was that 45% of the respondents believed that one person could make a difference. The five questions in the factor of Personal Ideals had a mean of $M = 3.81$, $Mdn = 3.79$, and $SD = .225$.

Diversity

Only 25% of the respondents believed they had tolerance for the ideas of others, while 34% believed that the more understanding they have about peoples' culture and customs, the easier it would be to understand and accept them. Thirty percent believed that it was important to discuss controversial issues with people of different perspectives, and 30% believed that understanding other peoples' points of view can reduce violence within a school. Only 26% respondents believed that all people should be included in the social and political process. The five questions on the factor of Diversity has a mean $M = 3.78$, $Mdn = 3.81$, and $SD = .081$.

Patriotism

About 43% of the respondents believed that being a good American who cared about the good of the country was important, and 41% believe that the flag was the unifying symbol of America. On the downside, only 17% believe that it is important to voluntarily enlist in the military to defend America, and a mere 10% believed that there were certain times when it could become necessary for the government to seize a piece of land for the public good. Again, the lack of knowledge regarding eminent

domain is evident. The four questions on the factor of Patriotism had a mean of $\underline{M} = 3.58$, $\underline{Mdn} = 3.61$, and $\underline{SD} = .560$.

Political Involvement

On the lower end of this factor, only 4% of the respondents discussed American politics with their friends, and only 6% said that they were interested in American politics and/or Politicians. Only 7% said that they would volunteer to help in a political campaign. On the high end, 40% believed they had a responsibility to vote. The four questions on the factor of political involvement had a mean of $\underline{M} = 2.99$; $\underline{Mdn} = 2.82$; and $\underline{SD} = .560$.

Civic Duty

Respondents scored on the high end on the factor of civic duty. Specifically, 47% said it was likely that they would volunteer to help someone in need. Forty-three percent believed in the importance of helping to make their community a better place, and 41% believed that the most important thing they could do as a citizen was to help others. Regarding respondents' views on the environment, only 31% believed that they had a responsibility to protect the environment.

Young Americans liked to volunteer for social situations like hospitals and schools rather than for political campaigns. Not only did the 1997 NASSNMP survey support this finding but also the International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement (IEA) in its second survey on civic education in 1999.

The four questions on the factor of Civic Duty had a mean of $\underline{M} = 4.10$, $\underline{Mdn} = 4.15$, and $\underline{SD} = .127$.

Cultural Values

The findings in this study coincided with the 1998 study in that the respondents in both surveys scored high in this factor. Fifty-one percent believed that having a close-knit family was important. A huge 66% believed that gaining knowledge and skills training for a career was important, and 68% believed that having a successful career was important. The three questions on the factor of Cultural Values had a mean of $\underline{M} = 4.46$, $\underline{Mdn} = 4.56$, and $\underline{SD} = .176$.

World Trust

Respondents scored on the low end for this factor. Specifically, 17%-20% believed that it was important to discuss or negotiate issues with America's enemies. Twenty percent believed that it was dangerous to compromise with America's enemies. The three questions on World Trust had a mean of $\underline{M} = 3.46$, $\underline{Mdn} = 3.48$, and $\underline{SD} = .096$.

9-11 Effects

Fortunately, only 8% of the respondents believed that capitalism leads to economic and moral destruction. However, after the "Attack on America" on September 11, 2001, only 11% said they were more likely to participate in politics, and 23% said they were now more likely to vote as a result of the war on terrorism. The three questions of 9-11 Effects had a mean of $\underline{M} = 3.22$, $\underline{Mdn} = 3.08$, and $\underline{SD} = .277$.

Limitations

This study was limited to respondents from urban and rural school districts, convenience sampling, and sample size. Moreover, respondents had no time limits on taking the survey; however, some respondents could have used "Christmas treeing" to select their answers. However, the researchers herein feel confident in the results due to a large, diverse, sample size.

Conclusion

The conclusions of this survey coincide with other national and international surveys in many respects. There is a trend worldwide for students to be more apt to volunteer in soup kitchens rather than in political campaigns. Moreover, there is a lack of content knowledge about the rights, responsibilities, duties, and values encompassing civic education and capitalism. However, 31% of students said they are concerned and interested in environmental issues. Since 9-11, the lack of trust in politicians and the government has gone from approximately 32% to 1%.

The impact of these results is profound on educators. The trends have continued over the last decade and will continue until the challenges of content knowledge deficiencies are addressed. The definition of democracy has expanded to include not only the rights, duties, and responsibilities but also the values of

being a good democratic citizen and world citizen. Value language such as justice and fairness, equality of opportunity, diversity (religion, culture, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, language and dialect, giftedness/disability), tolerance, freedom, life, liberty, pursuit of happiness, the public or common good, courage, being lawful (respecting the rights of others), environmental responsibilities, being a critical thinker, and being patriotic must be incorporated into an expanded definition of democracy.

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Table 1:
Questions 1 to 49 Percentage Responses

Question #	1	2	3	4	5
1	22	14	31	26	6
2	39	17	17	23	4
3	21	16	35	22	5
4	6	4	19	36	35
5	5	4	21	30	40
6	17	16	40	17	10
7	10	11	42	19	18
8	28	27	37	8	1
9	1	3	14	31	51
10	1	1	6	26	66
11	1	1	7	22	68
12	2	3	17	35	43
13	5	5	29	35	26
14	1	3	14	39	43
15	2	3	17	37	41
16	4	4	13	33	45
17	5	8	41	30	15
18	4	6	32	34	23
19	4	4	21	29	42
20	5	5	21	35	34
21	13	17	41	22	7
22	4	5	22	45	25
23	3	6	25	36	30
24	5	6	38	35	16
25	3	4	19	42	32
26	6	12	41	20	20
27	15	14	39	22	10
28	6	12	41	20	20
29	2	3	30	44	21
30	8	7	22	33	30
31	5	7	30	33	26
32	7	8	21	34	30
33	12	9	34	22	22
34	7	7	33	31	22
35	6	8	32	34	20
36	11	11	37	24	17
37	3	5	22	29	41
38	13	12	41	24	11
39	8	8	34	27	23
40	10	8	57	17	8
41	11	18	41	24	6
42	2	4	30	35	30
43	3	5	25	36	31
44	3	4	20	30	42
45	7	5	38	33	17
46	2	2	11	21	63
47	16	16	44	17	7
48	2	3	16	32	47

49 4 6 37 30 23

Table 2:

Democratic Ideals Factor

<u>Question #</u>	<u>N</u>	<u>Mean</u>	<u>Standard Deviation</u>
3	947	2.74	1.170
4	947	3.92	1.093
8	947	2.28	.984
13	947	3.71	1.054
17	947	3.43	1.079
18	947	3.66	1.035
19	947	4.02	1.053
21	947	2.94	1.082
24	947	3.51	.984
33	946	3.34	1.255
34	947	3.54	1.118
42	947	3.87	.939
46	947	4.41	.937
49	947	3.62	1.028

Table 3:

Personal Ideals Factor

<u>Question #</u>	<u>N</u>	<u>Mean</u>	<u>Standard Deviation</u>
16	947	4.11	1.054
25	947	3.96	.969
28	947	3.53	.990
29	947	3.79	.884
30	947	3.70	1.191

Table 4:

Diversity Factor

<u>Question #</u>	<u>N</u>	<u>Mean</u>	<u>Standard Deviation</u>
20	947	3.88	1.091
22	947	3.81	.995
23	947	3.83	1.032
31	947	3.69	1.068
32	947	3.71	1.188

Table 5:

Patriotism Factor

<u>Question #</u>	<u>N</u>	<u>Mean</u>	<u>Standard Deviation</u>
12	947	4.14	.936
27	947	2.98	1.168
36	947	3.25	1.186
37	947	3.98	1.068

Table 6:

Political Involvement Factor

<u>Question #</u>	<u>N</u>	<u>Mean</u>	<u>Standard Deviation</u>
1	947	2.80	1.280
2	947	2.35	1.306
5	947	3.96	1.099
47	947	2.85	1.117

Table 7:

Civic Duty Factor

<u>Question #</u>	<u>N</u>	<u>Mean</u>	<u>Standard Deviation</u>
14	947	4.20	.858
15	947	4.10	.954
43	947	3.93	1.722
48	947	4.20	.939

Table 8:

Cultural Values Factor

<u>Question #</u>	<u>N</u>	<u>Mean</u>	<u>Standard Deviation</u>
9	947	4.26	.911
10	947	4.56	.733
11	947	4.57	.727

Table 9:

World Trust Factor

<u>Question #</u>	<u>N</u>	<u>Mean</u>	<u>Standard Deviation</u>
26	947	3.36	1.122
35	947	3.55	1.069
45	947	3.48	1.065

Table 10:

9-11 Effects Factor

<u>Question #</u>	<u>N</u>	<u>Mean</u>	<u>Standard Deviation</u>
38	947	3.08	1.140
39	947	3.54	2.116
40	947	3.04	.977

Table 11:

<u>Factor</u>	<u>Mean</u>	<u>Median</u>	<u>Standard Deviation</u>
Democratic Ideals	3.499	3.580	.548
Personal Ideals	3.818	3.790	.225
Diversity	3.784	3.810	.081
Patriotism	3.587	3.615	.560
Political Involvement	2.990	2.825	.684
Civic Duty	4.107	4.150	.127
Cultural Values	4.463	4.560	.176
World Trust	3.463	3.480	.096
9-11 Effects	3.220	3.080	.277

Table 12:

Survey Questions

1. I am interested in American politics and/or politicians.
2. I discuss American politics with my friends.
3. I trust the American government.
4. I believe in the importance of one person's vote.
5. I believe that I have a responsibility to vote.
6. I believe America's best years are ahead.
7. I believe America's best years are already past.
8. I believe that politicians can be trusted.
9. I believe having a close-knit family is important.
10. Gaining knowledge and skills training for a career is important.
11. Becoming successful in a career is important.
12. Being a good American who cares about the good of the country is important.
13. Being involved in democracy and voting is important.
14. Being involved and helping your community be a better place is important.
15. I believe that the most important thing I can do as a citizen is to help others.
16. I believe that one person can make a difference.
17. I believe that democracy allows individuals to follow their dreams.
18. I believe that democracy cannot exist without a well-educated population.
19. I believe that equality is a fundamental right of all citizens.
20. I believe that the more understanding I have about peoples' culture and customs, the easier it is to understand and accept them.
21. I believe that the primary goal of schools is to educate students about the American democratic culture.
22. I believe I have tolerance for the ideas of others.
23. I believe its important to discuss controversial issues with people of different perspectives.
24. I believe that conflicts are an important part of the democratic process.
25. I believe its important to research problems.
26. I believe that it is dangerous to compromise with America's enemies.
27. I believe that there are certain times when it becomes necessary for the government to seize a piece of land for the public good.
28. I believe it's important to analyze policies.
29. I believe it's important to make objective decisions.
30. I believe I have respect for authority and the law.
31. I believe that all people should be included in the social and political process.
32. I believe that understanding other peoples' points of view can reduce violence within the school.
33. I believe that democracy is worth defending and going to war if needed.
34. I believe that each generation of Americans has had to defend democracy, some by going to war and making the ultimate sacrifice.
35. I believe that it is important to negotiate problems with America's enemies.
36. I believe that it is important to voluntarily enlist in the military to defend America.
37. I believe that the flag is the unifying symbol of America.
38. Since the Attack on America" on September 11, 2001, I believe I am now more likely to participate in politics.
39. Since the "Attack on America" on September 11, 2001, I believe I am now more likely to vote as a result of the war on terrorism.
40. Foreign leaders have criticized the American economic system by implying that capitalism leads to economic and moral destruction. I believe this statement is true.
41. I believe that America's current economic condition is working.

42. I believe that America should have a variety of places to purchase an item as opposed to just one place.
43. I believe that I have a responsibility to protect the environment.
44. I believe that the government has a responsibility to provide me with good health care.
45. I believe that it is important to discuss issues with America's enemies.
46. I believe that I have the right to buy/own land.
47. It is likely that I will volunteer to help in a political campaign.
48. It is likely that I will volunteer to help someone in need.
49. I believe competition is necessary in America's economic system.