

# Citizenship

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## *A Challenge for All Generations*

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September 2003



*Representative*  
**DEMOCRACY**  
*in America*  

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*Voices of the People*

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This publication is a joint product of the Trust for Representative Democracy of the National Conference of State Legislatures, the Center for Civic Education and the Center on Congress at Indiana University. Funding was provided by the U.S. Department of Education by act of Congress.



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NATIONAL CONFERENCE *of* STATE LEGISLATURES



**CENTER FOR CIVIC EDUCATION**



**THE CENTER ON CONGRESS AT INDIANA UNIVERSITY**

Printed on recycled paper



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ISBN 1-58024-302-9

# Executive Summary

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This public opinion survey shows that young people do not understand the ideals of citizenship, they are disengaged from the political process, they lack the knowledge necessary for effective self-government, and their appreciation and support of American democracy is limited. The older generations have failed to teach the ideals of citizenship to the next generation. But there is hope. The report provides new evidence that civic education makes a big difference in the attitudes toward citizenship, knowledge and civic engagement of young people.

The report is based on a national public opinion survey designed to tap how the civic attitudes, knowledge and participation of young people—the DotNet generation between 15 and 26 years of age—compare to those of older generations. The poll was conducted by Knowledge Networks, a research firm that conducts scientifically based Internet surveys. The sampling error for the two age groups—15 to 26 and over 26—is approximately  $\pm 4$  percentage points each.

The survey results reveal a breakdown in how older generations pass on the values of democracy to younger Americans, especially in the area of what it means to be a good citizen.

Here are some key findings regarding the qualities of good citizens:

- Seventy-eight percent of those in the older generations say we need to pay attention to government and politics compared with 54 percent of the younger generation.
- Less than half of the DotNets think that communicating with elected officials or volunteering or donating money to help others are qualities of a good citizen.
- Only 66 percent of the DotNets say that voting is a necessary quality for being a good citizen, compared with 83 percent of those over age 26.
- Among the DotNet generation, 64 percent report that they have taken a high school course on civics or American government. Those who have done so are much more likely to believe they are personally responsible for making things better for society and have a more expansive concept of the qualities of a good citizen. On the importance of voting, for example, there is a 24-point spread between those who have taken a government class and those who haven't.

In the area of civic engagement—the act of governing ourselves:

- Only half of the DotNets reported that they voted in the most recent elections or that they follow politics, compared to three-quarters of those over age 26.
- In many areas of civic participation, two or three times more DotNets who have taken a civics class report that they have engaged in civic activities than those who have not.

On civic knowledge—the tool that enables us to govern ourselves:

- Three-quarters of the older generations correctly identified the party of their state's governor and three out of five knew the Republicans control Congress. But only one-third could correctly identify the party in control of their state's legislature.
- Among DotNets, eight out of 10 know that the cartoon Simpsons live in Springfield, and the great majority know that Ruben Studdard is the reigning American Idol. But less than half know the party of their state's governor, and only 40 percent can say which party controls Congress.

On attitudes toward representative democracy—our appreciation and understanding of the complexities of the legislative process:

- The majority of Americans grasp the fact that people disagree on the issues and the system has to work to resolve such disagreements.
- The public is cynical about the people and processes of government. They are about equally divided on whether legislators care what people in their districts think or don't care about the opinions of ordinary people. Two in five believe that those elected to public office are out to serve their own personal interests, while only one in three thinks they are trying to serve the public interest. A majority believes that the system is run by a few big interests rather than for the benefit of all.
- Americans believe the country would be better off if the people decided issues directly by voting on them. Support for representative democracy is limited.

The gap between the civic attitudes, knowledge and participation of the new generation of DotNets and the older ones is substantially greater than the gaps between previous generations. It suggests that the DotNets will never be as engaged in democracy as their elders, even as they age.

Civic education makes a big difference in the attitudes, knowledge and engagement of young people. Thirty-nine states have civics or government class requirements for high school graduation. All states will want to review their civic education requirements, standards, assessments, teacher training and course content to determine if they are delivering effective civic education that produces informed citizens.

# Introduction

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In his inauguration as the 43<sup>rd</sup> president of the United States, George W. Bush said, “We are bound by ideals that teach us what it means to be citizens. Every child must be taught these ideals. Every citizen must uphold them. ... I ask you to be citizens.” The findings of this survey of public attitudes toward citizenship and representative democracy suggest that fulfilling President Bush’s challenge that we be citizens in more than name only is a large task, for young and old alike.



This public opinion survey shows that young people do not understand the ideals of citizenship, they are disengaged from the political process, they lack the knowledge necessary for effective self-government, and their appreciation and support of American democracy is limited, at best. The older generations have failed to teach the ideals of citizenship to the next generation.

But there is hope. This report provides new evidence that civic education makes a big difference in the attitudes toward citizenship, knowledge and political participation of young people.

The survey was conducted as part of the Representative Democracy in America project, a joint effort of the Trust for Representative Democracy of the National Conference of State Legislatures, the Center for Civic Education and the Center on Congress at Indiana University. The project is designed to reinvigorate and educate Americans on the critical relationship between government and the people it serves.

Our reason for undertaking the survey was to improve our understanding of public views about Congress, state legislatures and the concept of representative democracy. We need better information about public attitudes toward democratic institutions so we can design civic education programs that improve public understanding of Congress and state legislatures and, ultimately, nurture better citizens.

For our system of representative democracy to be healthy, we need citizens who:

- Understand what it means to participate in governing themselves.
- Actually engage in that self-governance.
- Have the knowledge to do it well.
- Appreciate the complexities of the process and understand how it works.

Our attempt in this survey is to assess how well Americans match up to these goals.

Because the primary focus of the Representative Democracy in America project is on young people, we particularly want to know more about those who have recently come of age or are about to do

so. We want to know how the civic attitudes, knowledge and participation of young people compare with those of older generations. For this reason we have focused on the age group that Scott Keeter, Cliff Zukin, Molly Andolina and Krista Jenkins, in their related 2002 public opinion survey, *The Civic and Political Health of the Nation: A Generational Portrait*, have dubbed the DotNets. DotNets are the approximately 40 million young Americans between 15 and 26 years of age, born after 1976.

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*“We call them the DotNets because we think one of their defining characteristics will be having come of age along with the Internet. Information has always been virtually costless and universally available to them; technology cheap and easily mastered; community as much a digital place of common interest as a shared physical space. They came of age in the Clinton era of scandal amid a booming economy—now in retreat—and a refocus on the family.”*

—Keeter et al.<sup>1</sup>

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Our primary goal in conducting the survey—and the way in which it differs from other recent surveys of public opinion on American democracy—is to compare younger and older Americans’ attitudes toward representative democracy and their roles as citizens. We also designed the survey to touch on the different generations’ knowledge of our political system. In the course of our analysis, we discovered some rather surprising—and, to us, gratifying—things about how civic education affects civic attitudes, knowledge and participation.

## The Survey

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**K**nowledge Networks, a research firm that conducts Internet-based surveys, conducted the poll under the direction of the National Conference of State Legislatures. Knowledge Networks has developed a method to conduct true probability sampling on the Web, ensuring that findings from the sample are representative of the larger population.

The survey was conducted August 1 - 25, 2003. The sample was stratified to over-sample the DotNets—those who are 15 through 26 years of age. Our goal was to interview representative samples of DotNets and their older cohorts in the American public. We interviewed 632 respondents in the 15 to 26 age group and a companion sample of 654 in the over-26 age group.

The sampling error for each of these groups is  $\pm 4$  percentage points. In other words, if we were to find in our *sample* of 600+ that 50 percent had a particular attitude, we would be 95 percent confident that the true value in the underlying *population* of all U.S. residents from which the sample was drawn would be between 46 percent and 54 percent. The questionnaire and a complete set of tabulations of the responses to the survey can be found at: [www.representativedemocracy.org](http://www.representativedemocracy.org).

# Qualities of a Good Citizen



There has been a breakdown in how older generations pass on the values of democracy to younger Americans. People of all generations believe that obeying the law is a quality of being a good citizen—a whopping 95 percent of those over age 26 say that obeying the law is important, followed closely by 87 percent of the DotNet generation (ages 15 to 26). But beyond that consensus on the value of obeying the law, significant differences exist between the DotNets and their elders on what constitutes good citizenship.

There is a 24-point spread between the older generations and the younger one on the need to pay

| What Makes a Good Citizen?                             | DotNets | Over 26 |
|--|---------|---------|
| Obeying the law  | 87%     | 95%     |
| Voting   | 66      | 83      |
| Paying attention to government and politics            | 54      | 78      |
| Contacting elected officials about issues and problems | 48      | 67      |
| Volunteering to help others                            | 49      | 59      |
| Donating money to help others                          | 35      | 46      |

attention to government decisions and political happenings in order to be a good citizen. Similarly, the older generations are 19 points more likely to say that a good citizen should contact a state legislator or member of Congress when he or she cares about a public policy issue or needs help with a government problem. Sadly, less than half of the DotNets think that communicating with

elected officials or volunteering or donating money to help others are qualities of a good citizen.

When it comes to the most fundamental democratic act, only 66 percent of the DotNets say that it is necessary to vote in order to be a good citizen, compared with 83 percent of those over age 26.

On a question about who is responsible for making society better—individuals or government—there is not much consensus among young people or their elders. When asked to choose whether they agree more with the statement, “I am personally responsible for getting involved and making things better for society” and “Making things better for society is a job for other people and government,” Americans choose the personal responsibility statement by a margin of 51 - 11. On the surface, this is impressive. But 37 percent have no opinion or can’t decide about this choice. The “No Opinion” and “It’s a job for government” responses combined are about equal to those in favor of individual responsibility for the community—an ideal that lies at the heart of our democracy.

But there is hope in this otherwise bleak picture of the younger generation’s understanding of the ideals of citizenship. Among the DotNet generation, 64 percent report that they have taken a high school course on civics or American government. And it makes a big difference in young people’s notions of citizenship. Those who have taken a civics or American government class are much more likely to believe they are personally responsible for making things better for society and have a more expansive concept of the qualities of a good citizen. On whether voting is important, for example, there is a 24-point spread between those who have taken a government class and those who haven’t.

We should note that the DotNets who say they have taken civics or government courses tend to be the ones who have more education in general. Controlling for education somewhat dampens the effects of civics classes on the various measures related throughout this report among the college-educated. But most of the measures remain statistically significant, especially among those with less than a college education.

The public certainly supports the idea that civic education is important. Nine out of 10 Americans say that it is important for high schools to teach civics and government. DotNets

are somewhat less enthusiastic about civic education, but even among this group 79 percent say that it’s important. DotNets who have actually taken a civics class score nearly the same as the older generations on this question.

Two out of five Americans say that they think high schools spend too little time teaching about civics and government, while only 3 percent say that too much time is spent on such classes. But the largest number say they aren’t sure about this question. DotNets’ opinions on this subject do not differ significantly from those of the rest of the population.

| <b>Civic Education Changes Views<br/>on What Makes a Good Citizen</b><br>(DotNets Only) |             |                        |
|---|-------------|------------------------|
|   | Took Civics | Did Not<br>Take Civics |
| Taking personal responsibility for making things better                                 | 55%         | 32%                    |
| Voting  | 71          | 57                     |
| Obeying the laws  | 90          | 80                     |
| Paying attention to government  | 59          | 42                     |
| Contacting elected officials on issues  | 54          | 39                     |

*Note: Includes only those questions about being a good citizen on which there was a statistically significant difference. Sampling error for those who have taken a civics class is plus or minus 5 percent; for those who have not, it is plus or minus 7 percent.*

# Civic Engagement



Turning from what the public thinks good citizens should do to what they actually have done, approximately three-quarters of the respondents say that they are registered to vote and have voted in all or most recent elections. Since only about half the adult population is actually registered and only half of those vote, clearly our respondents' memories are bad or they don't want to admit that they are not registered or don't vote. Perhaps this is because they do believe it is important to vote (as already reported), so they feel guilty about admitting they haven't.

| Civic Participation                     | DotNets | Over 26 |
|---|---------|---------|
| Registered to vote                      | 61%     | 83%     |
| Voted in most or all elections          | 47      | 77      |
| Follow what's happening in government   | 49      | 78      |
| Participated in volunteer activity*     | 55      | 55      |
| Contacted public official*              | 16      | 36      |
| Worked in or contributed to a campaign* | 9       | 29      |

*\*Combines "Yes, have done it in last 12 months" with "Yes, but have not done it in last 12 months."*

Even if we accept this over-reporting of voting, major differences exist between young people and older people in this area. There is a 22-point gap between those over age 26 and the 18- to 26-year-old DotNets (15- to 17-year-olds were not asked about registering or voting because they are not eligible).

Only half of the DotNets reported that they have voted in all or most recent elections, compared with three-quarters of those over 26.

Among those who are not registered to vote, the two most frequent reasons (they could choose more than one response) given by youngsters and oldsters alike are, "I am turned off by the process/negative political advertising" (38 percent of all) and "I'm not interested in politics" (35 percent). The third most important reason young people do not register is, "I'm not informed enough to make a decision" (31 percent), while for the older non-voters it is, "There's often no difference between the candidates" (30 percent).

The primary reasons why people regularly vote are: "It's a responsibility or duty" (86 percent); "It's a way to influence the direction of government" (83 percent); and "It's a way to affect how specific issues are decided" (81 percent). The differences between generations on this question are not significant.

In other measures of participation, DotNets are much less likely to follow what is happening in government and politics than those who are over age 26. Only half the DotNets say that they regularly or sometimes follow government news, compared with three-quarters of those who are

older. More than half the DotNets, like their elders, say that they participate in volunteer activities. But when it comes to political activities—such as contacting a public official or working on or contributing to a political campaign—very few of the young people say they have done it. Many other studies confirm these findings. The problem is not that young people are unwilling to perform service, rather their service does not extend to government and public policy.

| Civic Education Means More People Involved<br>(DotNets Only) | Took Civics |  | Did Not Take Civics |  |
|--|-------------|--|---------------------|--|
|  |             |  |                     |  |
| Registered to vote   | 72%         |  | 43%                 |  |
| Voted in all or most elections                               | 59          |  | 28                  |  |
| Follow what's happening in government                        | 63          |  | 30                  |  |
| Participated in volunteer activity                           | 64          |  | 40                  |  |
| Contacted public official                                    | 21          |  | 11                  |  |
| Worked on a campaign   | 14          |  | 3                   |  |
| Have friends that are interested in government               | 38          |  | 17                  |  |

*Note: Includes only those questions about participation on which there was a statistically significant difference. Sampling error for those who have taken a civics class is plus or minus 5 percent; for those who have not, it is plus or minus 7 percent.*

Further evidence of the generational gap in our civic culture comes from questions about talking with family and friends about government and politics. Twice as many older Americans report that their friends are interested in government and politics compared with their younger counterparts, and substantially more say that they talked politics with family when they were growing up.

| What Do You Want to Be?<br>(DotNets Only) |                  |
|---|------------------|
|   | Those Interested |
| Business                                  | 53%              |
| Artist: music/theater                     | 44               |
| School teacher                            | 34               |
| Medicine: doctor/nurse                    | 34               |
| Sales/marketing                           | 30               |
| Law enforcement                           | 29               |
| Lawyer                                    | 26               |
| Mechanic                                  | 24               |
| Plumber/electrician/carpenter             | 20               |
| State lawmaker                            | 17               |
| President of the U.S.                     | 16               |
| Member of Congress                        | 14               |
| Politician                                | 14               |
| Farmer                                    | 12               |

*Note: DotNet respondents could choose multiple occupations.*

Taking a civics or American government class also makes a difference in levels of civic participation. DotNets who have taken a civics class are often two or three times more likely to say that they have engaged in political activities than those who have not.

Two out of five DotNets who have taken a civic education course say that their interest in government and politics increased as a result. Less than one in 10 report that their interest decreased. Half the respondents say that their interest in government and politics stayed about the same.

Related to the subject of civic engagement is whether a career in public service is attractive to them. When DotNets are asked about occupations of interest to them, being a farmer is the only one that scores lower than elected official (president, member of Congress, state lawmaker). Only about 15 percent of the DotNet respondents say that political offices might interest them, compared with approximately half who are attracted to careers in either business or the arts (music and theater). About one-third say that they would like to be school teachers or doctors and nurses.

# Civic Knowledge



The good news is that nearly 100 percent of the American public, regardless of age, know the correct answer to a very basic question about American government: Where is the nation's capital? But the results are less encouraging when the questions are tougher.

It is important for Americans to know which political party controls the government if they are to hold parties accountable for the performance of government. "If you don't like what they're doing, throw them out" is not only an old adage but also a principle upon which our democracy is based. The older age groups did reasonably well on two questions about party control. Three-quarters of them correctly identified the party of their state's governor and three out of five knew the Republicans control Congress.

|                                    | DotNets | Over 26 |
|------------------------------------|---------|---------|
| Nation's capital                   | 95%     | 97%     |
| TV Simpson's hometown              | 82      | 46      |
| Winner of American Idol            | 64      | 54      |
| Party of the governor              | 48      | 72      |
| Party control of Congress          | 40      | 61      |
| Party control of state legislature | 22      | 33      |
| Speaker of the U.S. House          | 10      | 22      |

The over-26 age group didn't fare so well in identifying the party in control of their state's legislature. Only one-third gave the correct answer. Since respondents had three choices on this question (Democrat, Republican or split party control between the two chambers), their correct answers scored the same as if they had guessed. Forty-three percent said they didn't know. The work of our state legislatures appears to be below the horizon for most Americans.

The political knowledge of the DotNet generation is dismayingly poor. Eight out of 10 of them can tell you that the television Simpsons live in Springfield, and 64 percent know that Ruben Studdard is the most recent American Idol. But less than half know the party of their state's governor, and only 40 percent can say which party controls Congress. Forty-eight percent acknowledge they don't know which party controls the Congress, and 19 percent got it wrong.

Dennis Hastert is no American Idol. Only one in five Americans (only one in 10 DotNets) can pick his name out of a list as speaker of the U.S. House of Representatives. "Don't Know" and Representative Tom DeLay, the majority leader, finished ahead of Speaker Hastert, and Newt Gingrich, who is five years removed from the speakership, was in a dead heat with him. To be sure, speaker of the House is not one of the more visible positions in American politics, and Speaker Hastert has never been one to seek a high profile. But it is one of the most important leadership positions in the country. It is not unreasonable to expect that the public would do a better job of knowing who presides over the House of Representatives, leads its majority party and sets its agenda.

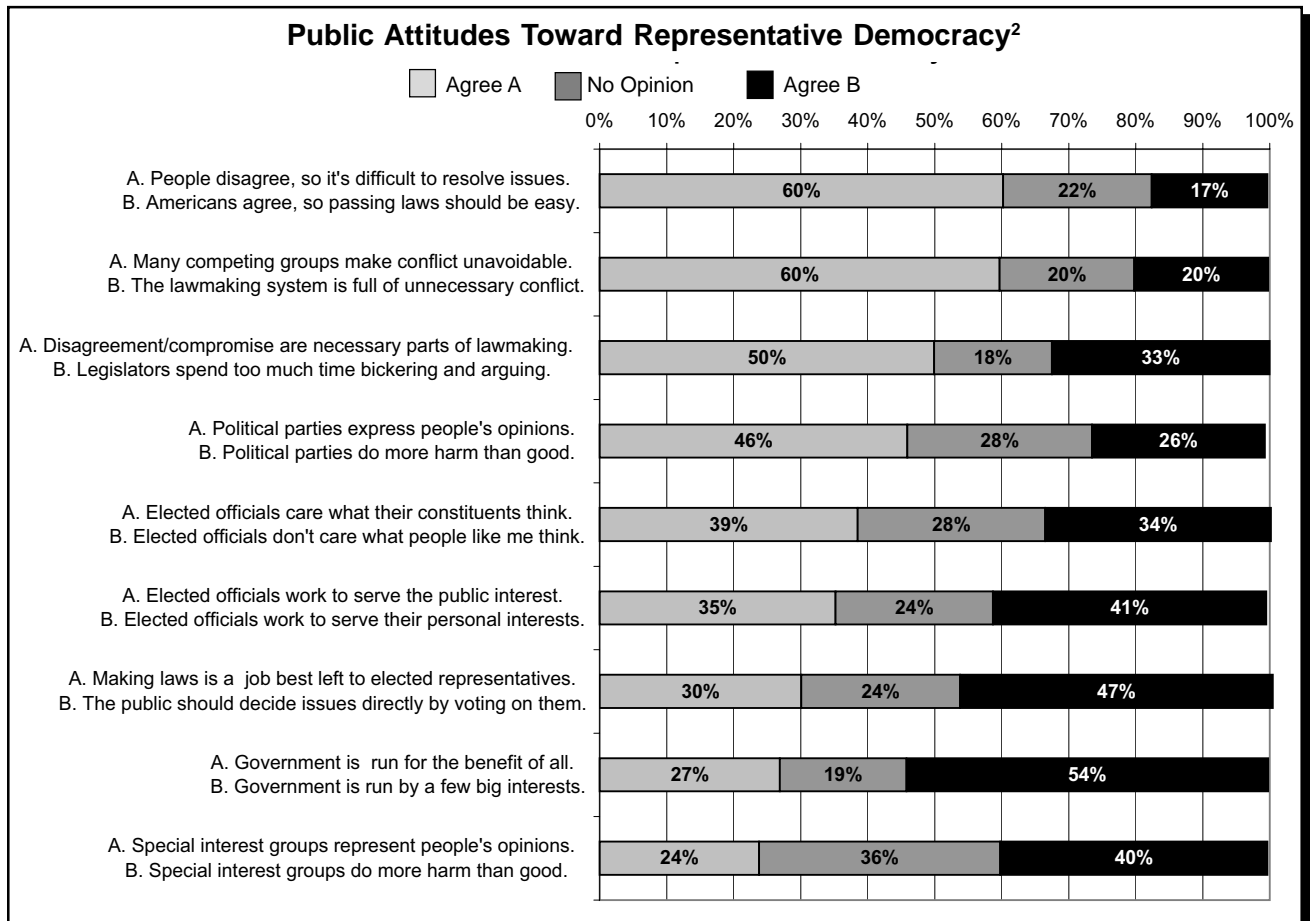


# Attitudes Toward Representative Democracy

Respondents to the survey were given a series of paired statements about our system of representative democracy and asked which they agreed with more. One statement shows an appreciation of the complexities of representative democracy and how it works. It generally represents how most political scientists view our system of government. The other statement in the pair is a more negative or critical view and one that is often conveyed in the news media or is widely held by the public, according to other opinion polls.



The older and younger generations do not differ much or very consistently on these measures of public attitudes toward representative democracy, so we have not displayed generational differences. Most of the differences involve substantially higher “Don’t Know” or “No Opinion” responses from the DotNet generation. This suggests that younger people have so little understanding of the system that they have a difficult time expressing an opinion about it.



The responses reveal that many Americans have a reasonably good understanding of the role that disagreement and conflict play in our system of representative democracy. The majority of Americans grasp the fact that people disagree on the issues and the system has to work to resolve such disagreements. They realize that conflict is unavoidable because of all the competing groups and interests. The public also sees how disagreement and compromise are part of lawmaking, but one-third think legislators spend too much time bickering and arguing.<sup>3</sup>

The public is cynical about the people and processes of government. They realize the benefit of political parties, but not of interest groups. Although one-third think that legislators care what people in their districts think, almost as many think that legislators don't care about ordinary people. Two in five believe that those elected to public office are out to serve their own personal interests, while only one in three thinks they are trying to serve the public interest. The system, a majority believes, is run by a few big interests looking out for themselves, not for the benefit of all.

Most Americans who take a position on the question believe people should vote directly on issues rather than leaving decisions to elected representatives. This has major implications for our political system. Support for representative democracy, in short, is limited.

Finally, when viewing the power of different groups in society, Americans see themselves—whether they are ordinary people, young people or senior citizens—as having too little power. They think organized groups—such as business and corporations, political parties, special interest groups and labor unions—have too much power. Among governmental institutions, state legislatures, governors and the president are seen as having about the right amount of power, while Congress has too much.

|                         | Too Much | About Right | Too Little |
|-------------------------|----------|-------------|------------|
| Business/corporations   | 62%      | 15%         | 7%         |
| Political parties       | 59       | 19          | 3          |
| Special Interest groups | 48       | 14          | 12         |
| Congress                | 45       | 36          | 5          |
| Labor unions            | 39       | 22          | 20         |

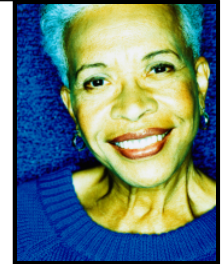
|                       | Too Much | About Right | Too Little |
|-----------------------|----------|-------------|------------|
| The president         | 31%      | 46%         | 9%         |
| The governor          | 27       | 43          | 12         |
| The state legislature | 22       | 40          | 16         |

|                 | Too Much | About Right | Too Little |
|-----------------|----------|-------------|------------|
| Young people    | 5%       | 24%         | 43%        |
| Senior citizens | 5        | 16          | 68         |
| Ordinary people | 0        | 12          | 77         |

# A Challenge for all Generations

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The findings of this public opinion survey leave little doubt that Baby Boomers and the World War II generation have failed to successfully pass on the ideals of citizenship to the DotNet generation that is now coming of age. They have botched President Bush’s challenge “to teach what it means to be citizens.”



Are the DotNets a lost cause? Only time will tell. Most of them have already completed their education or are in the process of doing so. Improved classroom-based civic education cannot be the solution for them. Perhaps as they grow older the DotNets, through maturity and the burdens of responsibility, will gain a greater appreciation of what it means to be a citizen, show more knowledge of the political process and start to participate more actively in our democracy. After all, at any point in recent history, the younger generation has always been more disaffected from the civic culture than its elders. But the gap between this new generation of DotNets and the older ones differs both quantitatively and qualitatively from previous generational gaps. The differences reported here are great enough to suggest that the DotNets will never be as engaged in democracy as the “Greatest Generation” or the Baby Boomers unless new strategies are developed to reach them in their adult years.

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*Civic education makes a difference in the attitudes, knowledge and engagement of young people.*

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There is ample evidence in this report, though, that there is hope for those who are younger than the DotNets—the elementary- and middle-schoolers of today. Civic education makes a difference in the attitudes, knowledge and engagement of young people. If civics and government classes as they are delivered today make a difference, would better civic education make a greater difference? We suspect it would. The older generations, particularly the public policymakers and educators responsible for teaching American government or civics in the schools, have the opportunity not only to increase the amount of civic education but also to improve its quality. They have the chance to reinvigorate civic education in America and to instill in future generations the values of citizenship that drive them. By strengthening civic education in our public schools, they can support the development of a healthy system of representative democracy.

The Education Commission of the States reports that 39 states have some sort of civics or government class or credit requirement for high school graduation. All states will want to review their civic education requirements, standards, assessments, teacher training and course content to determine if they are delivering effective civic education that produces informed citizens with high ideals. It’s the least we can do to meet President Bush’s challenge.



# Appendix

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The following supplements the information about the survey methodology in the body of the report. The authors designed the questionnaire with the advice and support of John Hibbing, University of Nebraska.

Knowledge Networks collected the data via an Internet-based survey fielded between August 1 - 25, 2003. Knowledge Networks is a research organization that successfully recruited the first on-line panel that is representative of the entire U.S. population. Unlike most Internet-based surveys, Knowledge Networks conducts a true probability sampling, ensuring that findings from the sample are representative of the larger population. Knowledge Networks selects households using the survey research best practice of a random digit dialing (RDD) sampling technique and then provides selected households with free hardware and Internet access. This overcomes the “digital divide” problem of most other Web-based surveys by ensuring that even those households without prior Internet access are included in the sample.

After the study was initially fielded, an e-mail reminder was sent to non-responders three days later; two other customized e-mail reminders were sent on August 14 and August 22. In the end, 1,286 Knowledge Networks panel members responded to the survey, resulting in an overall completion rate of 63 percent. The following table displays the response rate by the two sampling subgroups.

**Completion Rates**

| <b>Age Group</b> | <b>Number Fielded</b> | <b>Number Completed</b> | <b>Completion Rate</b> |
|------------------|-----------------------|-------------------------|------------------------|
| 15-26            | 1,208                 | 632                     | 52.3%                  |
| 27+              | 851                   | 654                     | 76.9%                  |
| Total            | 2,059                 | 1,286                   | 62.5%                  |

# Notes

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1. Scott Keeter, Cliff Zukin, Molly Andolina and Krista Jenkins, “The Civic and Political Health of the Nation: A Generational Portrait,” CIRACLE, [http://www.civicyouth.org/research/products/youth\\_index.htm](http://www.civicyouth.org/research/products/youth_index.htm).

2. Although the more appreciative of each pair of statements is always listed first in the figure, the order of the statements was random for the respondents. The statements have been truncated for display purposes. The actual statements as given in the survey, from top to bottom in the figure, are as follows:

A. People disagree on specific issues, so the political system must struggle to resolve various values and interests.

B. Americans agree on what is right and necessary, so it should be easy to pass the laws that the people want.

A. Conflict is unavoidable in the process of making laws because there are so many competing groups and interests.

B. The process of making laws is full of unnecessary conflict.

A. Political parties are an important way for people with similar views to make their opinions known.

B. Political parties do more harm than good in politics.

A. Debate, disagreement and compromise are natural and necessary parts of lawmaking.

B. Legislators spend too much time bickering and arguing.

A. I am personally responsible for getting involved to make things better for society.

B. Making things better for society is a job for other people and government.

A. One of the important ways by which Americans are represented is through the special interest groups they belong to.

B. Special interest groups do more harm than good in politics.

A. Most people elected to public office work to serve the public interest.

B. Most people elected to public office work to serve their own personal interest.

A. Making laws is a complicated job best left to elected representatives.

B. The country would be better off if the public decided issues directly by voting on them.

A. Government is generally run for the benefit of all.

B. Government is run by a few big interests looking out for themselves.

A. Elected officials care about what people in their districts think and take those opinions into account in their policy decisions.

B. Elected officials don't care what people like me think.

3. The responses to these paired statements differ substantially from those of other surveys that have asked some of the same questions by themselves, without an opposing paired statement. For example, in a 2002 survey, *Exercising Citizenship in a Democracy*, Edward Carmines found that 68 percent of the public agrees that members of Congress “spend all their time bickering instead of cooperating,” twice the number who agree with that statement in this survey. Similarly, Carmines reported that the public scored 24 points higher on agreement with the statement that elected officials don't care what people think than they did when this question was paired with a more positive statement here. The method of offering choices between two contrasting views, each reasonable by itself, appears to dampen the responses to the more cynical statements.