



The American Civic Education Ecosystem: A Landscape Analysis

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Between July 2023 and September 2024, our research team at the Center for Revitalizing American Institutions (RAI) carried out an extensive ecosystem scan, conducted a series of interviews and focus groups, and gathered survey data from over 7,600 educators and students to develop an understanding of the American civic education landscape. The purpose of this report was to assess ways in which RAI could best contribute to *civic education* (see definitions in appendix A) in ways consistent with the Hoover Institution’s mission. In total, more than one hundred experts, leaders, and policymakers in the space took part in interviews and focus groups and 7,666 educators and students responded to our survey questions. This report summarizes our observations, including three broad trends and a set of twelve key findings. Beyond assessing RAI’s opportunities for impact, these insights are shared to foster engagement among the attentive public and those who participated in the study, and to encourage further dialogue and contributions that strengthen the civics ecosystem.

SUMMARY OBSERVATIONS

Broad Trends

- There has been a generational marginalization of civic education.
- Civic education is foundational to our republic and democracy and transcends ideological boundaries.
- Renewed resources are emerging, but challenges of coherence and scaling persist.

Specific Observations

1. Civic education is foundational to key national priorities.
2. Demand and need for improving civic knowledge spans generations and political ideology.

A Hoover Institution Essay

3. Civic tensions are part of healthy democracies; extreme polarization is not.
4. Civic education is inherently interdisciplinary.
5. Curricular content creation is saturated, with a few exceptions: US international relations, military, and national security.
6. Civic education is too siloed across K-12, higher education, and civil society.
7. Educators want more opportunities to develop subject matter expertise and form learning communities.
8. Educators need support navigating difficult topics and conversations.
9. Rural-urban distinctions are underemphasized, even as the civic skill of engaging across differences is emphasized.
10. Momentum for policy reform is primarily at the state and local levels.
11. Better assessment and research are needed.
12. Bridge building leaders and institutions, like Hoover, have an important role to play.

INTRODUCTION

CHARGE

This landscape analysis of civic education was commissioned at the launch of the Center for Revitalizing American Institutions (RAI) at the Hoover Institution. RAI's mission is to study the reasons behind the crisis in trust facing American institutions, analyze how they are operating in practice, and consider policy recommendations to rebuild trust and increase effectiveness.

Our charge was to determine the strengths and deficits of contemporary American civic education and identify opportunities to leverage the assets of the Hoover Institution, particularly through RAI, to contribute in distinctive and meaningful ways. The commission of this analysis reveals a tacit assumption that effective civic education is a prerequisite for rebuilding confidence, trust, and efficacy in American institutions.

The link between education and our ability to effectively self-govern is not a novel notion. It has been with us since the founding of our country. James Madison suggested that "knowledge will forever govern ignorance: And a people who mean to be their own Governors, must arm themselves with the power which knowledge gives." Thomas Jefferson famously implored that we "educate and inform the whole mass of the people, enable them to see that it is their interest to preserve peace and order, and they will preserve it, and it requires no very high degree of education to convince them of this. They are the only sure reliance for the preservation of our liberty."

SCOPE AND TIMING

Our efforts to explore this landscape took place between July 2023 and September 2024. This analysis sought mainly to understand the broader landscape of the civic learning ecosystem—to identify key strengths, weaknesses, trends, and gaps. While certain civic learning outcomes deemed desirable are noted throughout this document (for example, the cultivation of civic knowledge, or the capacity to engage constructively with people we disagree with), no attempt is made to assess specific approaches to achieve those outcomes.

It is also worth noting that the analysis was completed soon after the country emerged from a global pandemic that had an enormous impact on education systems, and during a period of heightened polarization that by many measures was higher than it had been in at least a generation. Notably, our interviews, surveys, and analysis also took place *before* the 2024 presidential election. Therefore, the impact of the second Trump administration’s policies is not a part of this analysis. Finally, it is worth emphasizing several scope conditions that have normative implications.

First, we are unabashedly **pro-democracy**. The term “democracy” has itself come under attack, and we know some young people in Western Europe and North America—but particularly in the United States—believe it is less essential to live in a country governed democratically. We share a commitment to a republic grounded in constitutionalism and the fundamental democratic freedoms. While one can reasonably question whether the United States is living up to its potential, we agree with Ronald Daniels (2021, 9) when he asserts that democracy is the system of government “best equipped to mediate among the different, sometimes competing, and often irreconcilable conceptions of the good and to ensure appropriate care for individual autonomy and dignity.”

Second, it is important to acknowledge that this landscape analysis was commissioned by the Center for Revitalizing American Institutions. As such, we are committed to understanding and advancing civic education that expands the capacity for individuals to be engaged in democracy in the *American* context.

Finally, the analysis intentionally considers pluralistic ideological perspectives in an effort to understand the broader landscape and how initiatives aligned with RAI’s and Hoover’s missions might have the largest impact. This breadth of analysis and ability to bridge ideological boundaries is imperative for civic education initiatives to be broadly successful.

DEFINING CIVIC EDUCATION

With this scope as a backdrop, we also want to be clear about **defining civic education**. Some definitions include the following (with additional examples included in appendix A):

- National Council for the Social Studies: “The study of the rights and duties of citizenship, aimed at preparing citizens to exercise their rights and duties and to participate fully and effectively in civic life.”

- Center for Civic Education: “The study of the structure, function, and principles of government and the rights and responsibilities of citizens in it.”
- Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy views civic education as integral to self- and civic development, tracing back to ancient Greek notions of *paideia* (education) and *arete* (excellence or virtue). It emphasizes the role of political life and participation in the *polis* (city-state) as a means of individual and communal development, highlighting that education’s purpose extends beyond mere knowledge acquisition to include the formation of virtuous citizens.

A more expansive way of defining civic education is by thinking of it as any activity that cultivates a healthy civic identity. Reinforcing our normative commitment to advancing civic education in the American context, we are particularly interested in understanding *American* civic identity.

The concept of civic identity, as L. Lee Knefelkamp (2008) suggests, involves an attempt to *locate one’s self in community* and consists of four essential characteristics. It is:

1. developed through engagement with others;
2. distinct from, but deeply connected to, complex intellectual and ethical development;
3. a holistic practice that requires the integration of critical thinking and the capacity for empathy; and
4. a deliberately chosen and repeatedly enacted aspect of the self.

This framework, which views the formation of civic identity as the outcome of civic education, is particularly useful in our contemporary, deeply polarized context. It serves as a reminder that while civic education involves the transmission of knowledge and skills, it is also about the formation of attitudes and behaviors of effective and ethical citizens. It recognizes the endeavor as being deeply connected to an individual’s moral and ethical development and is an exploration of the question, “What do I care about?” The formation of civic identity involves fostering one’s commitments to liberal democracy, to integrity, and (more generally) to others in a community, all of which require caution against dogmatism and indoctrination.

Balancing the need for a set of shared commitments against concerns of indoctrination is a fundamental challenge in the formation of *any* identity, and no less so when thinking about civic identity. The best civic education creates conditions of inquiry that allow a person to answer the question, “What do I care about?” The worst simply answers the question, “What *should* you care about?”

Additional observations on these tensions will be shared within this report, but as a matter of definition we believe civic education must include both the cultivation of shared knowledge and commitments, and the opportunity to clarify one’s individual values. The best approach in both is to develop a process of inquiry.

We will use political orientation to illustrate this point. Conservatism, progressivism, and other orientations are distinct expressions of civic identity. While the formation of political commitments is part of developing a civic identity, having a healthy civic identity must never be predicated on an assumed “correct” political orientation. A healthy civic identity requires one to have a well-reasoned answer to the question, “What is your individual responsibility to a larger community?” without requiring a specific answer.

Finally, we advocate for the perspective that civic education forms a healthy identity because, just as with the formation of other identities, one’s civic identity is complex, dynamic, deeply personal, and (most importantly) a lifelong journey.

METHODS AND PROCESSES

Our landscape analysis began in summer 2023, with a general review of major civics initiatives, existing reports, surveys, and other landscape assessments (see appendix B for the complete listing). The Working Group on Civics and American Citizenship student team at the Hoover Institution coordinated with the RAI team during this process to integrate and review materials collectively identified.

It was from this initial read of the landscape that subsequent focus group conversations and interviews were designed and conducted, which included more than one hundred civic leaders, educators, and policymakers, as well as a set of surveys that engaged more than 7,600 educators and students between January and August 2024.

SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEWS AND FOCUS GROUP CONVERSATIONS

Between March and August, fifty-eight semi-structured interviews were conducted with civic education leaders from the K-12, postsecondary, and civil society sectors. The interviews, which were held both in person and over Zoom, centered on trends in civic education and strategic opportunities for the Center for Revitalizing American Institutions, and the Hoover Institution more broadly, to effectively contribute to the civic education ecosystem (see interview protocol [here](#)).

As noted in the interview protocol, interviews were conducted under a commitment to anonymity. We have therefore paraphrased interviewees or offered anonymous quotes throughout this report, with a few exceptions where we sought permission to cite select individuals by giving their role or position within the Hoover Institution.

Seven focus group conversations, also held both in person and virtually, were conducted between March and July 2023. Participants represented a wide array of ideological, geographic, demographic, and institutional backgrounds. One focus group was composed specifically of high school students from across the country.

Like individual interviews, focus group conversations centered around observations of trends, bright spots, and challenges in civic education, and suggested comparative strategic opportunities for RAI at the Hoover Institution to contribute their expertise and resources. (See focus group interview protocol [here](#).)

In total, 102 individuals participated in an interview and/or focus group discussion with the following organizations represented:

Alaska Department of Education
American Academy of Arts and Sciences
American Association of State Colleges and Universities
American Enterprise Institute
Arizona State Superintendent Office
Arizona State University
Augsburg University
Bill of Rights Institute
California Charter Schools Association
Campus Compact
Carnegie Corporation of New York
Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement (CIRCLE)
Cerritos College
Citizen University
Civic Learning and Democracy Engagement Coalition
CIVIC/More Perfect
College of DuPage
College of the Canyons
Commission on the Practice of Democratic Citizenship
Council of Chief State School Officers
Cove Canyon Grasslands
Delaware Department of Education
Emory University
George W. Bush Presidential Center

George Washington University
Harvard University
Hiram College
Hoover Institution
iCivics
Institute for Citizens and Scholars
Institute for Public Life and Work
Iowa Department of Education
Jack Miller Center
Johns Hopkins University
Kentucky Department of Education
Marquette University
Miami Dade College
Minnesota Humanities Center
National Constitution Center
National Council for the Social Studies
Nebraska Department of Education
The New American Baccalaureate Project
Pepperdine University
Portland Community College
Providence College
Raritan Valley Community College
Reading Area Community College
Ronald Reagan Presidential Foundation and Institute
San Diego Unified School District
Seattle University
Seguinland Institute
Smithsonian National Museum of American History
Stanford University
Teagle Foundation

Tufts University
Tulane University
Unify America
University of California–Berkeley
University of California–Riverside
University of Hawai‘i
University of Michigan
University of Notre Dame
University of Pennsylvania
University of Pittsburgh
University of Virginia
University of Wisconsin–Madison
Wyoming Department of Education
YMCA of the USA
YMCA of Silicon Valley

The team also participated in several convenings that were attended specifically for the purpose of deepening our analysis:

- Restoring Critical Inclusive Discourse in Higher Education (Stanford University, February 28–March 1, 2024)
- 2024 National Forum of Civic Learning Week (Washington, DC, March 12, 2024)
- Compact24, the annual conference of Campus Compact on Higher Education Civic & Community Engagement (Denver, April 7–10, 2024)
- Citizenship in the 21st Century University, convened by the Stanford Civics Initiative (Hoover Institution, April 13, 2024)
- National Civic Collaboratory at the Reagan Foundation (Simi Valley, April 18–19, 2024)
- Future of the American University at the American Enterprise Institute (Washington, DC, May 14, 2024)
- Private Universities in the Public Interest (Stanford Law School, September 5–6, 2024)

SURVEYS

Building from the insights offered through the landscape analysis, focus group conversations, and interviews, additional questions were administered through two surveys in order to bolster representation of K-12 educators and students in our analysis.

The first survey was conducted with the [Bill of Rights Institute \(BRI\)](#), an organization that teaches civics and equips “students and teachers to live the ideals of a free and just society.” BRI conducts an annual survey of their approximately seventy-five thousand members.¹ In partnership with RAI, the BRI team incorporated new survey questions on bright spots and challenges in K-12 education, as well as specific questions on civic education professional development interests. The survey was administered by BRI between May 16 and June 15, 2024. The 4,666 respondents who participated in the survey were primarily K-12 educators.

This [summary](#) includes the questions, response categories, and summary statistics for close-ended survey questions for which data are referenced in this report. The complete survey instrument can be found [here](#). The RAI team collaborated in the analyses of the open-ended data.

The second survey was conducted in the form of a Deliberative Poll in partnership with the [Deliberative Democracy Lab at Stanford University](#). The poll drew from a nationally representative sample of three thousand eighteen-year-old first-time voters. In partnership with RAI, organizers added an inquiry on high school civic education to the Deliberative Poll: how many civics/government classes were respondents enrolled in, what proportion of educational instruction was classroom as compared to experientially based, what would be the respondent’s ideal balance of the two, and whether a civics test should be required for graduation. From the broader sample, 461 participated in the America in One Room: The Youth Vote in-person deliberation (July 19–22, 2024). During the convening—where participants discussed a range of topics, from nuclear energy to democratic reform—participants explored whether students should be required to pass a general civic literacy test to graduate from high school.

This [summary](#) includes the survey questions, proposal for deliberation, and summary findings on civic education. More information about Stanford’s Deliberative Democracy Lab: America in One Room: The Youth Vote survey and deliberations can be found [here](#).

The feedback from our focus groups, individual interviews, and survey data, combined with our review of existing studies and reports (appendix B), has informed the following observations on the state of American civics education.

SUMMARY OBSERVATIONS

BROAD TRENDS

A common narrative about civic education in the United States is that it has steadily declined over recent decades. The “anemic” state of civic education, as one participant described it,

has in recent years sparked an influx of concern, resources, and ideological debate—amounting, in effect, to a sudden flooding of attention. While this renewed momentum offers opportunity, educators attempting to effectively revive civic education face challenges presented by the abundance of resources and ideological fragmentation within the civics landscape: challenges that are exacerbated by a lack of sufficient funding, commensurate professional development, and explicit attention to bridging and building common ground.

Generational Marginalization of Civic Education

“Policymakers should provide more time, resources, and accountability for students to learn their civic inheritance and shared American history.”

—Fellow at centrist public policy think tank

First, there is broad agreement that civics does not receive the attention it deserves across the educational ecosystem, including K-12, higher education, and civil society. We heard repeatedly that standardized testing requirements prioritized other subject areas, squeezing resources for civic education. This is aptly conveyed in the 2021 *Educating for American Democracy* report, which states that “recent waves of federal education reform from the No Child Left Behind Act of 2002 to the Race to the Top grants of 2009—have largely neglected [civics and history].”

Additionally, an increasing focus on STEM has tended to crowd out other educational priorities, notably civics. And still, while relatively greater attention is now being given to civic education, the funding has yet to follow. Ted McConnell, the executive director of the Campaign for the Civic Mission of Schools, highlights the 2019 US government expenditures at approximately \$54 per student to further STEM learning and a “paltry” five cents per student for civic education—a number low enough for the Orrin G. Hatch Foundation to call for a hundredfold increase in federal funding for civic education in its “Commonsense Solutions to Our Civics Crisis” (2020) policy brief.

The effects of insufficient investment in civic education for our youth are well documented. As shared in a recent Institute for Citizens and Scholars report surveying more than four thousand young adults (ages 18–24), almost half of respondents (40 percent) can correctly answer only one out of four standard civics questions.

This has consequences for civic participation. The same study reports that 35 percent of youth do not feel informed enough to participate politically. As another indication, 80 percent of respondents who score high on civic knowledge plan to engage in at least one civic activity in the upcoming year, whereas only 40 percent of low civic knowledge scorers intend to be civically engaged.

This “generational marginalization of civic education,” as described by Shawn Healy of iCivics in “Momentum Grows for Stronger Civic Education Across States” (2022), is not only affecting our youth but has led to a nation that is in “civic crisis,” as described in a recent Time article. These sentiments of civic crisis were acknowledged by numerous participants

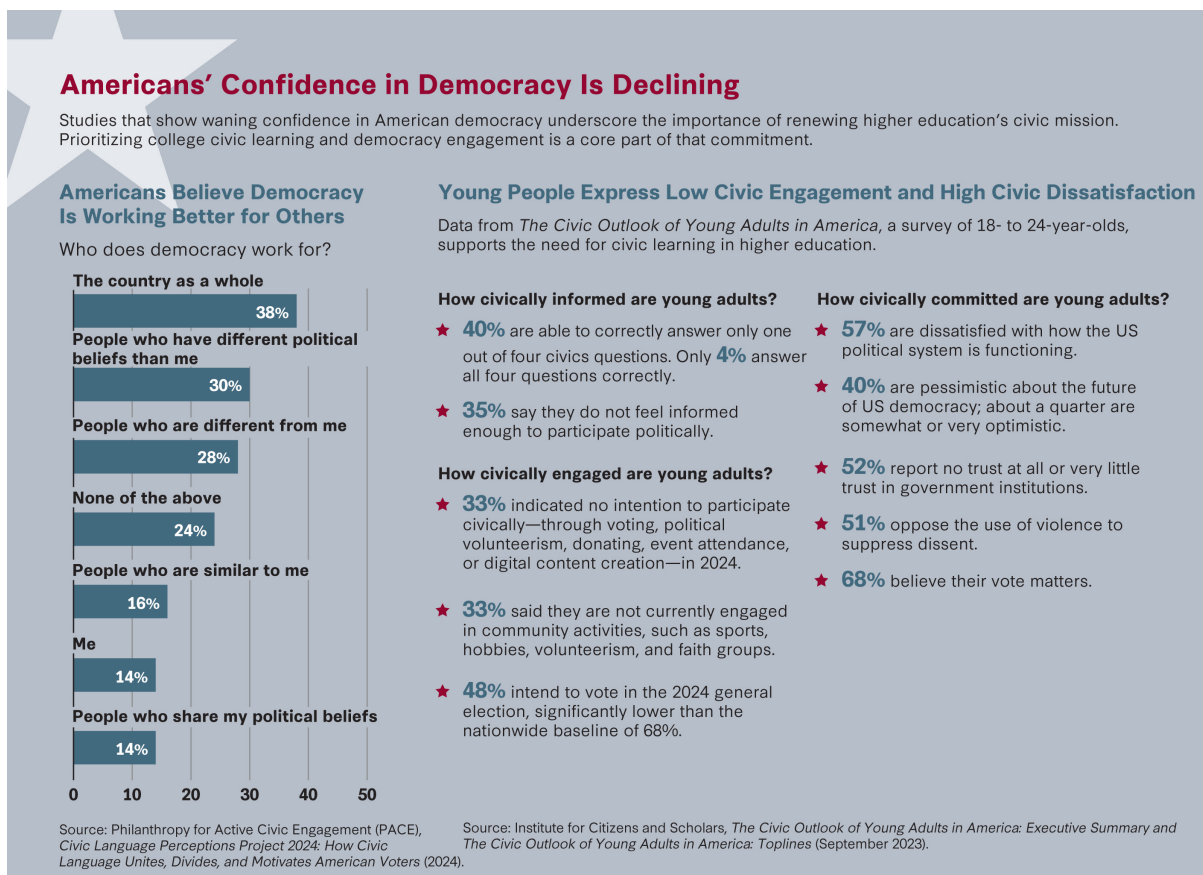
in our landscape assessment and are reflected in the data. Reports from the annual Civics Knowledge Survey at the Annenberg Public Policy Center have varied in recent years (with new methods), but estimates in their [2023 report](#) suggest that somewhere **between a half to a third of all adults are not able to identify all three branches of government**. This and multiple other measures taken into account by the Annenberg Public Policy Center underscore the troubling reality that “one is unlikely to cherish or work to protect freedoms one does not know,” as reflected by Director Kathleen Hall Jamieson.

Moreover, the lack of shared civic knowledge likely contributes to broader ills in our society. In their [2024 *Every Student, Every Degree*](#) report, the Civic Learning and Democracy Engagement (CLDE) Coalition drew from several sources to demonstrate a variety of dimensions in which confidence in democracy itself is declining (see figure 1).

Civic Education Transcends Ideological Boundaries

Second, the overwhelming majority of participants across our focus groups and interviews embraced the idea that civic education is foundational to the American Republic and

FIGURE 1 Americans’ Confidence in Democracy Is Declining



Source: Civic Learning and Democracy Engagement Coalition, [Every Student, Every Degree: College Civic Learning for Today’s Students & Tomorrow’s Democracy](#), accessed September 20, 2025.

democratic governance, and that it must transcend ideology. While we anticipated ideological divisions in civic education, participants blurred the lines of the civics culture wars much more than expected. By this we mean that some progressives shared opinions typically attributed to conservatives, some conservatives shared opinions typically attributed to progressives, and so on. Participants largely embraced pluralistic views and emphasized that high-quality civic education is not a partisan endeavor. They saw it as essential to rebuilding our shared capacity to engage constructively across differences and to uphold democracy. This perspective is perhaps best captured in the 2021 Thomas B. Fordham Institute report *The State of State Standards for Civics and US History in 2021*: “There is no such thing as ‘progressive civics’ or ‘conservative civics,’ because if you have to put an adjective in front of it, it isn’t really civics.”

Unfortunately, this does not shield civic education teachers and faculty, particularly at public institutions, from the impacts of ideological differences in the public and among policymakers, and the impacts of affective polarization.² As one of our interviewees noted, some ideologically motivated and polarized policymakers are eliminating civic education programs and efforts across the country, especially ones that “appear to influence students to think a certain way.” Takeovers of state curricula are one indication where content expertise and educators are being replaced by political ideology and politicians. As one civics expert and former public official shared: “I am aware of a lot of theater.”

Some advocates and pundits, too, have had outsized voices, drumming up views at the margins. Several interviewees described a phenomenon of “conflict entrepreneurs”: those who are exacerbating ideological divides and causing us to over-index on our differences in spite of research that suggests widespread public agreement on the need for civics and many shared elements of core civics content (for example, the [USC Dornsife Center’s “Understanding America Study”](#)). In other words, the culture wars and conflict entrepreneurs have perpetuated an “unnecessary false dichotomy,” as one interviewee at a private university stated.

Perhaps the most well-known manifestation of the culture war is the duel between *The New York Times Magazine’s* 1619 Project and the first Trump administration’s 1776 Report, but there are many others. Chester E. (“Checker”) Finn, Jr., Volker Senior Fellow (adjunct) at the Hoover Institution, sums it up in his piece on the “[civics war ceasefire](#)” saying, “The civics conflict is unnecessary, driven more by cultural combatants and politicians than by vast divides among parents and citizens regarding what schools should teach and children should learn.”

“We really do agree on most principles.”

—Former Republican legislator

Among the numerous national organizations that have recently published about the need to improve or expand civic education, there has been a particularly dramatic increase in the past few years in civic education efforts to bridge ideological divisions. See, for example,

From Civic Education to a Civic Learning Ecosystem: A Landscape Analysis and Case for Collaboration (2019); the American Academy of Arts and Sciences report Our Common Purpose: Reinventing American Democracy for the 21st Century (2020); and the Educating for American Democracy report (2021).

These sentiments are further reflected in the 2023 edited volume, Civic Education in a Time of Democratic Crisis, which includes voices of leading scholars who underscore the opportunity and imperative to find commonality and build bridges. Scholar Peter Levine in “Politics by Other Means” suggests that “the debate about what and how to teach should be more like a public deliberation about the common good than a contest for political advantage.”

“I truly believe there’s still far more that unites than divides us.”

—County assistant superintendent

A concerning empirical study shows that we are punished by our ideological in-group for any sense of fraternizing with our ideological out-group. In other words, there are strong incentives *not* to recognize the validity of others’ experiences and ideas. By contrast, again and again in our conversations we heard messages foregrounding commonality, and a desire to move beyond partisanship and politics to restore both trust in and the efficacy of institutions of education. But we need explicit and persistent efforts to uplift our common ground.

Renewed Resources but Challenges of Coherence and Scaling

Third, there is undoubtedly renewed momentum. Captured in appendix B, there are numerous frameworks, reports, content resources, platforms, scholarly articles, and organizations contributing to, even **flooding** the current landscape.

This renewed momentum is, however, not without its challenges. The landscape is quite noisy and often seen as incoherent. Additionally, some of it is ideologically driven, and the incentive structures, implementation support, professional development, and funding within traditional education systems are not yet sufficient. Throughout our research, educators and civic leaders emphasized the need for greater support and coherence to help them more effectively, and with less confusion, interpret and implement the many resources available to them (see Observation 10 below).

The principal investigators of Educating for American Democracy admirably point to but do not resolve these ranges of challenges and tensions in saying,

Fraught though the terrain is, America urgently needs a shared, national conversation about what is most important to teach in American history and civics, how to teach it and, above all, why. We believe there is a way forward if **we can build a national conversation that is at once ideologically pluralist**, grounded in classroom experience, and accessible both to teachers of all backgrounds and to diverse student learners. (emphasis added)³

Through iCivics and Educating for American Democracy—“the most important, impactful collaborative effort,” as one civics leader at a national nonprofit shared with us—we have a foundational framework and pluralistic model and “we need to build upon it!”

It is worth noting that Educating for American Democracy has drawn criticism from both the right (e.g., Civics Alliance associated with the National Association of Scholars) and the left (e.g., proponents of the 1619 Project), but leaning into such pluralistic collaborations—rather than shying away from them—is perceived as necessary and feasible by the participants in our study for greater consensus building and progress in civic education.

Especially given these factors, we therefore ought to consider the important roles we all can play to nurture that shared national conversation. Indeed, our highest-level observation and corresponding set of proposed opportunities (in the following section) relate to the imperative to leverage the resources and renewed energy to **elevate our common ground in advancing civic education**. We heard, over and over, that our nation’s shared concern about our civic health requires, first and foremost, a civic learning ecosystem that is ideologically pluralistic yet fundamentally rooted in democratic values and principles.

SPECIFIC OBSERVATIONS

Within this broader landscape of the overarching trends depicted above, several specific observations stood out to us based on the conversations we shared, surveys we administered, and information we reviewed.

Observation 1: Civic Education Is Foundational to Key National Priorities

Many framed civic education as key to national priorities, most frequently: (1) democracy; (2) national security; (3) digital and media literacy; and (4) mental health.

Foremost, and broadly recognized, civic education is fundamental to preparing informed, engaged, and ethical citizens, and necessary to sustain and renew *democracy*.

Second, senior former military and national security officers have expressly underscored the connection between civic education and national security. General Jim Mattis, the twenty-sixth secretary of defense and Davies Family Distinguished Fellow at the Hoover Institution, has spoken publicly and frequently on the topic, including with Danielle Allen, lead author of *Educating for American Democracy*: sentiments he underscored in our interview.

Similarly, Lt. Gen. H.R. McMaster, the twenty-fifth national security advisor and Fouad and Michelle Ajami Senior Fellow at the Hoover Institution, shared: “The lack of civic education has contributed to a crisis in confidence in principles, institutions, and processes. An investment in strengthening civic education could help rebuild confidence and secure the nation.”

Still, many others with no professional connection to those areas also emphasized this relationship. Both concepts (democracy and national security) were integrated into recent proposed legislation that sought to strengthen civic education: the [Civics Secures Democracy Act](#).

Third, the topic of digital and media literacy surfaced regularly, often in connection with how deficiencies in these areas likely contribute to affective polarization. The skills of media literacy and engaging across differences were often mentioned in tandem, and numerous experts expressed the need to expand efforts to cultivate information and media literacy as a central civic skill, which in turn may help to counter unhealthy partisanship and polarization.

Finally, the connection to mental health and well-being was referenced less frequently, but nonetheless fervently, by some experts who suggest civic education, particularly when combined with some form of volunteering or community engagement, can boost mental health. The [Points of Light Foundation](#) makes this claim [explicitly](#) based largely on studies cited in the [2023 US Surgeon General's Advisory on the Healing Effects of Social Connection and Community](#) report.

Observation 2: Demand and Need for Improving Civic Knowledge Spans Generations and Political Ideology

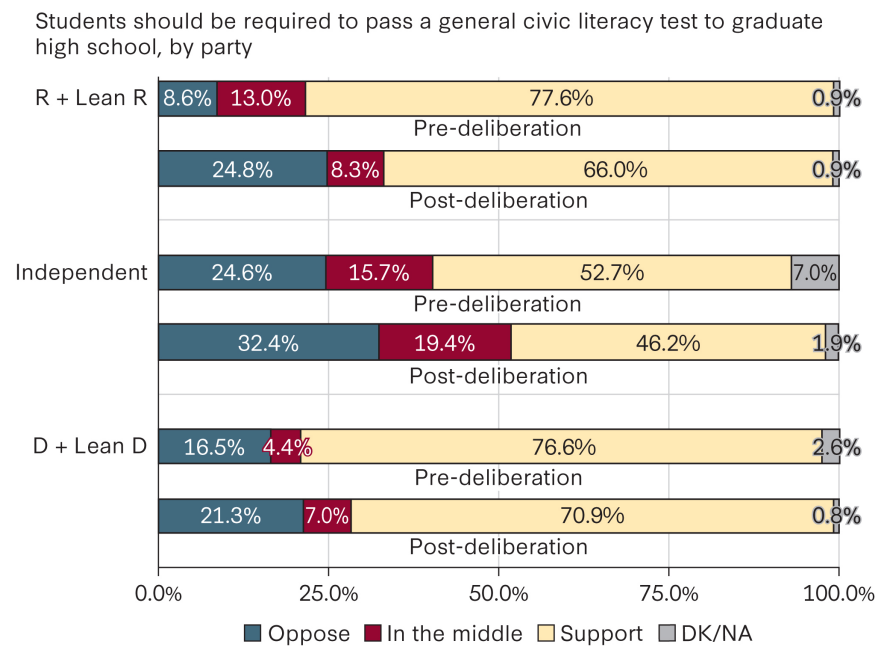
That one-third of US adults are unable to name all three branches of government, as reported by the Annenberg Center, is concerning for all—not just for conservatives, and not just for older adults, as can often be portrayed. Younger adults, and liberal-leaning individuals find it concerning as well.

In the July 2024 *America in One Room: The Youth Vote* survey of a nationally representative sample of eighteen-year-olds, nearly three-fourths (73.5 percent) of participants—both self-identified Republicans (77.6 percent) and Democrats (76.6 percent)—reported support for requiring a civics test for high school graduation.⁴ These percentages decreased modestly post-deliberation (as do most issues that start out with higher-than-average levels of support). Interestingly, Democratic-leaning youth participants ultimately ended up being *more* supportive of requiring a civics test, something that was overwhelmingly perceived as a conservative-leaning idea in our landscape assessment and conversations (see figure 2). And as it turns out, liberals and conservatives alike don't just want better civic education—they *need* it (see figure 3).

Finally, the nationally representative group of young adults who participated in the *America in One Room: The Youth Vote* deliberation also expressed a desire for service learning opportunities: A desire that, across political ideology, increased further after deeper reflection and deliberation on the topic (see figure 4).

Taken together, these data offer a ringing endorsement for more civic education, including both core civic knowledge and civic action through service learning.

FIGURE 2 Support for Requiring a General Civic Literacy Test, Breakdown by Party (n = 430)



Source: Deliberative Democracy Lab, courtesy of Alice Siu.

Observation 3: Civic Tensions Are Part of Healthy Democracies; Extreme Polarization Is Not

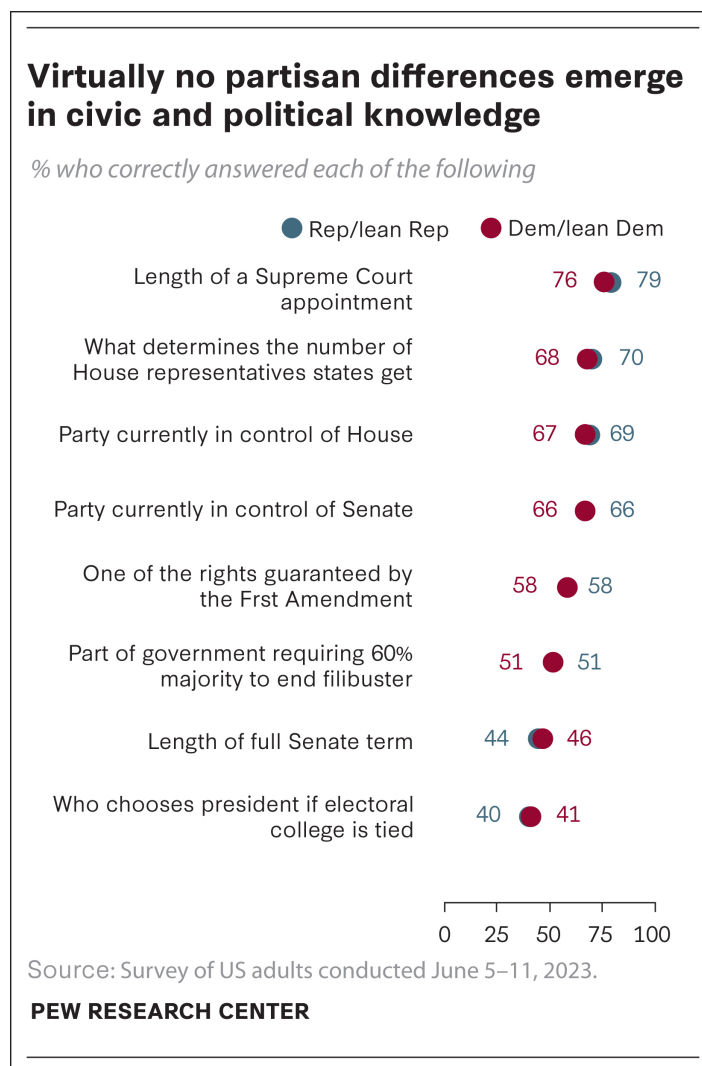
In their statement of principles, the newly formed Alliance for Civics in the Academy emphasizes the need to “intentionally engage with historically significant competing arguments on contested questions of civic life.” Notably, the group does **not** suggest the purpose is to identify the correct argument or find resolutions to those questions.

Similarly, in many of our conversations there was an implied desire to move away from treating civic disagreements as *problems* and instead recognize them as civic *tensions*: complicated, at times competing principles that are the bedrock of healthy democratic self-governance (e.g., rights and responsibilities, free expression, and respect for human dignity).

Civic education experts noted that polarization is sometimes exploited by those with vested political, ideological, or economic interests. These disagreements are framed as zero-sum problems that need to be solved rather than as civic tensions that are unavoidable in a well-functioning democracy. Thus, they become fodder to fuel more polarization.

This exploitation happens with respect to content, pedagogy, and outcomes related to civic education. One example is the pedagogical battle between those who suggest civics must be exclusively about the cultivation of knowledge of a prescribed set of facts and those who believe civic education can only be accomplished by engaging in civic experiences. But civic learning, as we heard expressed many times over, is about being civically well informed *and* productively

FIGURE 3 Partisan Differences in Civic and Political Knowledge



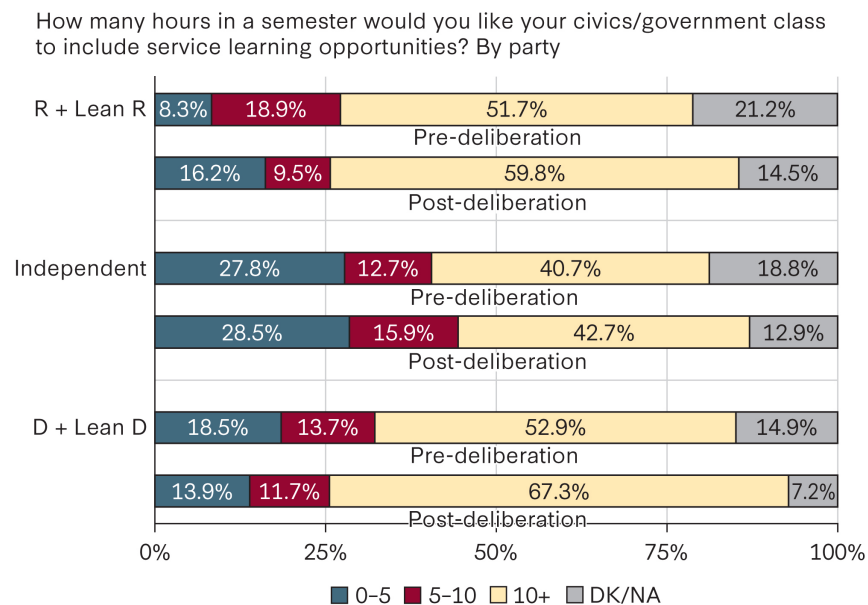
Source: Pew Research Center, Survey of US adults conducted June 5–11, 2023.

engaged in society—a sentiment echoed by young adults engaged in the 2024 America in One Room: The Youth Vote survey and deliberation, who emphasized wanting more of both.

A related culture war often highlighted is the one between history and social studies educators. Notably, one of the “most memorable moments,” as shared by educators in the Bill of Rights Institute (BRI) survey, embraces the tensions between history and social studies as a productive tension:

On the electoral college—Students discovered how and why the EC limited the popular vote. It was good to see them re-read Federalist papers to discover the [founders’] reasoning and apply current understanding about expanding and protecting the vote to question why and how the EC worked, state by state.⁵

FIGURE 4 Number of Hours Preferred for Service Learning Opportunities, by Party



Source: Deliberative Democracy Lab, courtesy of Alice Siu.

Another respondent said:

The last two years we end with a focus question centered on the 14th Amendment. Students are able to discuss and connect the events we learned about during the year to the evolution and importance of the amendment. Their ability to do this is amazing and helps them and me see how it is all interconnected, the past, the present and the future.⁶

This sentiment is also well articulated by John Bridgeland, CEO of More Perfect, who suggests that “K-12 efforts should focus on understanding our history, constitutional system of government, and key moments when leaders and Americans transcended our differences to effect extraordinary change.”

The paired concept of *liberal democracy* is a useful example of a civic tension. On the one hand, democracy is concerned with political equality—the idea that all people have the authority to deliberate and participate in meaningful ways in decision making on public issues, and that those decisions be made by majority rule. On the other hand, classical liberalism is a moral and political philosophy that seeks protection of the rights of the individual and is predicated on consent of the governed and equality before the law. In *What Universities Owe Democracy*, Ronald Daniels (2021, 12) reminds us that the concepts of liberalism and democracy “do not exist in easy alignment with one another” and that “the fusion of these two ideas binds the notion of a government responsive to popular will to the imperative to protect individual rights and preserve rule of law.”

Again, these highlighted issues are neither culture wars to be won nor problems to be overcome; they are interdependent competing principles that are embedded within the fabric of healthy constitutional democracies. Reframing in this way repositions the stakes, avoids an uncivil culture war, and allows us to recognize the ability to manage complexity as an essential, even admirable, civic skill.

Observation 4: Civic Education Is Inherently Interdisciplinary

As mentioned above, one of the culture wars playing out right now is between social studies and history. However, government, social studies, and history all have an important role to play in comprehensive civic education in the United States. In the BRI survey of more than 4,600 civics educators—those who teach social studies, history, and/or government—**only 11 percent reported not using integrated, cross-curricular learning**. Furthermore, content analysis of responses to the open-ended question, “What content or curriculum are you most interested in, or in need of developing?” reveals a tacit understanding among educators that civics is multifaceted, drawing on history, government, and other disciplines (table 1).

An even broader conceptualization, articulated by a scholar in our interviews, is that “civic education should not be narrowly defined; liberal education is education for citizenship, for example, English literature, taught with a civic spirit, is civic education.”

Several conversations hailed the process for developing the *Educating for American Democracy Roadmap* as having mended fences between proponents of civics and history, and the report clearly links and calls for greater integration between those and other disciplines. It advocates that “school students will need to spend more time on history and civics—more, certainly, than the 2.8 hours per week of social studies that is typical in third grade and more than the one year of US history and one semester of US government that is most commonly

TABLE 1 CURRICULUM CONTENT EDUCATORS SEEK MOST

Question: What content or curriculum are you most interested in, or in need of developing?	
Academic Subject	Number of Times Mentioned
Civics	378
US History	377
Government	356
Economics	166
World History/Geography	97
Policy/International Relations	54

Source: [BRI survey](#).

required in high schools. Some of this additional time should be achieved by integrating history and civic learning with ELA courses, or even STEM courses” (p. 22).

In higher education contexts, Benjamin Storey and Jenna Silber Storey at the American Enterprise Institute advocate for the formation of a new discipline of “Civic Thought.” Their proposal stems from widespread concern that American universities are not adequately preparing students for citizenship. They differentiate this new field of study from general education, suggesting that scholars of this new field of study engage “a variety of specialized perspectives but in the manner appropriate to a disciplined generalist.”

The bottom line is that civic education can and must draw upon multiple disciplines.

Observation 5: Curricular Content Creation Is Saturated, with a Few Exceptions: US International Relations, Military, and National Security

Our expert interviews explored whether any civic education topics were under- or over-represented. Almost unanimously, experts noted an abundance of civic education materials and advised against Hoover entering an already saturated market. While many acknowledged varying quality among offerings, few saw a need for Hoover’s involvement.

However, the notable exception was the lack of civics materials addressing US international relations and national security institutions and the fundamental role they play in sustaining a liberal democracy governed by a constitutional republic. This was notably underscored by prominent military and national security interviewees, including Admiral James O. Ellis Jr., Annenberg Distinguished Visiting Fellow at the Hoover Institution; General Jim Mattis, the twenty-sixth secretary of defense and Davies Family Distinguished Fellow at the Hoover Institution; and Lt. Gen. H.R. McMaster, the twenty-fifth national security advisor and Fouad and Michelle Ajami Senior Fellow at the Hoover Institution.

Observation 6: Civic Education Is Too Siloed Across K-12, Higher Education, and Civil Society

Civic education is often discussed in the context of **either** K-12 or postsecondary education, but many experts advocate for a more unified K-16 approach. One key suggestion was for higher education to emphasize the value it places on civic readiness, potentially through admissions criteria and processes that emphasize the importance of civics. Another common observation was that civics was too often not extended or integrated into general education requirements in postsecondary environments, with relatively few colleges and universities requiring civics coursework for graduation. Stanford’s new Civic, Liberal, and Global Education (COLLEGE) requirement for first-year students is a highly regarded example of such an effort. Additionally, colleges and universities play a crucial role in teacher training, textbook creation, and ongoing education. Many suggested professional development and convenings ought to bridge K-12 and higher education.

Several interviewees also highlighted the need to better engage civil society outside traditional educational settings, such as places of worship and museums (essentially extending

K-16 institutions to include civil society organizations). One expert noted, “We expect too much from K-12 education and too little from civil society.” Another called for coalition building among institutions like presidential libraries, foundations, the National Archives, PBS, and the Smithsonian, alongside community organizations and philanthropies with civic missions. Civic learning ought not to end at graduation but instead be expanded for everyone, these interviewees stressed.

Although much of its language tends to focus on K-12, one interviewee described the Educating for American Democracy (EAD) roadmap as a “shining example of bringing different sectors together.” It should be noted that while six of the EAD principal investigators participated in our conversations, the EAD was highly regarded across the experts we engaged who had no affiliation with the report.

Observation 7: Educators Want More Opportunities to Develop Subject Matter Expertise and Form Learning Communities

There is a shared sense of content saturation, as well as sufficient numbers of high-level frameworks and coalitions. However, we frequently heard the need for coherence: that is, help in making sense of what is available and investing in professional development throughout the civic educator professional learning continuum.

A desire for coherence was most commonly described as the organization of convenings that support peer learning and, to the point made above, cross-sector engagement. For example, this might include workshops between scholars, policymakers, and civil society leaders alongside educators. For K-12, an ideal model identified by one participant would be to connect teachers with scholars for content, then have K-12 experts help link the content to their state standards. Another interviewee also emphasized that experience with scholars as subject matter experts would be incredibly valuable, an observation mirrored in the BRI survey with 61.5 percent expressing that it would be “very” or “extremely important” to “have access to scholars/experts.”

For many, these efforts are best done locally; for others, nationally, spanning from the district level to federal level. In any case, we heard that “educators need the opportunity to convene where they aren’t being pitched a particular curriculum,” as one person shared. Another emphasized the value of having an interdisciplinary learning community where educators can “compare notes and support one another.” Fifty-seven percent of the BRI respondents reported that it is “very” or “extremely important” to “have discussion with and be in community with fellow educators.” These same respondents also exhibited a preference for in-person seminars or workshops (over virtual).

Such convenings provide platforms to, as stated by one educator, “amplify the voices of teachers in education reform rather than them being forced to react and adapt.” Furthermore, bringing people together to think about practical solutions was noted as helping educators move away from “destructive” tendencies and more toward “generative opportunities to explore conflict and difference of opinion, *together*; itself a practice of civic-mindedness.”

Observation 8: Educators Need Support Navigating Difficult Topics and Conversations

Unsurprisingly, given the deep polarization in our country, and more directly, the culture wars playing out in civic education, educators overwhelmingly seek support on how to navigate political and parental pressures and talk constructively about sensitive issues in the classroom.

As just a few points of reference, recent articles have highlighted the particularly fraught and challenging environment for educators:

- From a 2023 *Education Week* article, educators report a chilling effect of new laws and confusion about what new laws cover.
- From a 2018 *Education Week* article, superintendents are increasingly concerned about teaching “engaged citizenship.”
- From a 2016 *Fast Company* article, teachers are outright afraid to teach civics.

“The ability to engage constructively across differences—ideological, geographic, race, socioeconomic—is the key problem.”

—Faculty member at a community college

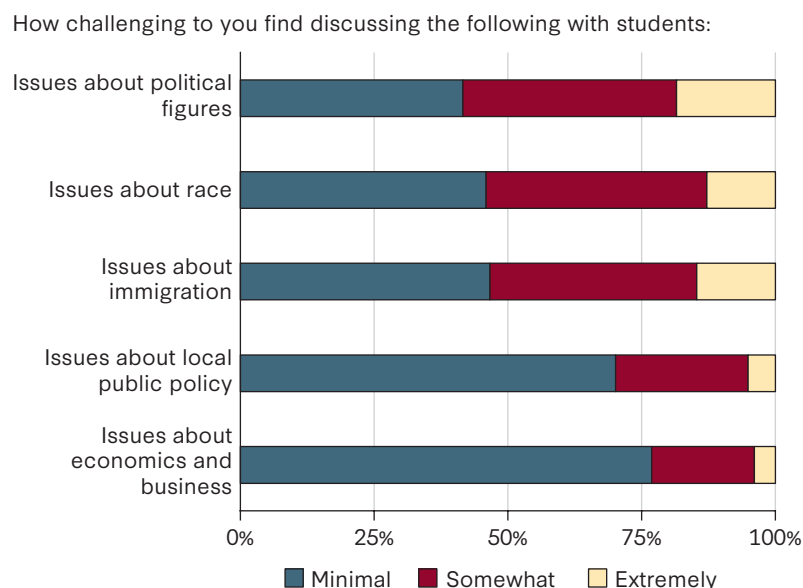
“Educators and administrators are often reluctant to engage in civic education now because of fear of conflict in a polarized environment. However, efforts are needed now more than ever to build capacity to engage effectively across differences as part of civic education, particularly in K-12.”

—Fellow at a conservative think tank

In the BRI survey, issues relating to political figures, race, and immigration were reported as particularly challenging topics (58.1 percent, 53.8 percent, and 53.1 percent of respondents, respectively, said they were between “somewhat” and “extremely” difficult subjects; see figure 5). These are, of course, topics integral to civic education discussions.

Similarly, in response to the broad, open-ended survey question, “What is the most challenging part of your work?,” navigating political climate and controversial topics was one of the three most common themes mentioned, alongside curriculum constraints and student apathy and disengagement. In response to the more specific open-ended question about the “hardest conversation” had in classrooms, social/cultural issues and political issues were, perhaps unsurprisingly, by far the most frequently referenced. As one respondent noted, “Talk[ing] about anything related to race” is the most challenging, “making sure I do not say the wrong thing.” Another shared that “anything political” is the most difficult conversation. “It was a continuous challenge to keep politics out of the civics.”

FIGURE 5 Difficulty in Discussing Civics Issues with Students



Source: BRI data.

Relatedly, 40 to 50 percent of respondents reported feeling pressure from key stakeholders to avoid particular topics altogether, or talk about them in a certain way, with the most pressure coming from parents (52.5 percent), the community (44.0 percent), and the state government (42.3 percent). In the open-ended responses, one shared, “School board policies limit what I’m able to teach, or how I’m able to teach topics that are considered taboo.”

In higher education, pressures from the 2024 campus protests have accelerated efforts to build capacity among educators and students regarding constructive conversations and dialogue across differences. See, for example, University of Wisconsin’s Discussion Project; University of Michigan’s National Intergroup Dialogue Institute; Harvard University’s Dialogue Across Differences; Stanford University’s ePluribus, among many dozens more, including institutions not among the high-profile universities that received the most public pressure. Notably, demand for new content was not the issue we heard as an opportunity for professional development. The July 2024 Campus Compact report *Better Discourse* aptly conveys the challenges for educational institutions to implement and scale training in order to shift norms and practices around difficult conversations.

“We should bring people together to think about practical solutions; doing so is the best way to explore conflict/difference of opinion and develop civic-mindedness.”

—Faculty member at a large public university

“We need more practical opportunities to build this capacity.”

—Program administrator at a large public university

Observation 9: Rural-Urban Distinctions Are Underemphasized, Even as the Civic Skill of Engaging Across Differences Is Emphasized

According to Inside Higher Ed’s 2024 survey of college presidents, nearly two-thirds of presidents expressed concern about waning public confidence in higher education. A cottage industry of “bridging” programs and guides has emerged, with many of the programs focused specifically on postsecondary institutions such as the [Constructive Dialogue Institute](#), [Unify America](#), and Campus Compact’s [Better Discourse](#) guidebook (see appendix B for more examples).

These efforts are admirable. However, these bridging materials also miss a fundamental component: the rural-urban divide. For example, [Bridgebuilding in Higher Education: A Landscape Analysis](#) does not contain a single reference to either “urban” or “rural.”

When we asked participants about gaps in civic education, broadly, several pointed to this divide, stating plainly that “urban-rural polarization is not being addressed.” One interviewee described the urban-rural divisions along the lines of political polarization, characterizing them as some of the *existential problems in American politics and governance*. Others emphasized this problem as particularly germane and pernicious at colleges and universities. As one interviewee intoned, higher education is disconnected from rural concerns and is increasingly not trusted, particularly by conservatives in rural areas. Indeed, the recommendations contained within [Bridgebuilding in Higher Education: A Landscape Analysis](#) ignore the issue of geopolitical homogeneity within postsecondary institutions.

Many interviewees noted that while rurality is highly correlated with conservatism, and conversely, urbanism with progressivism, reflecting on our differences in geographical life experiences with a practical focus on different realities and challenges may give us better purchase on our civic differences.

Stanford University is a useful reference point regarding lack of exposure or connection to domestic rurality, particularly among elite institutions.

Between 4 to 6 percent of Stanford’s domestic undergraduate population has hailed from rural areas over the past decade, and 5 percent of living Stanford alumni live in rural places. By contrast, nearly 20 percent of Americans live in rural areas.

- In 2018, only 19 (roughly 3 percent) of the 582 [Cardinal Quarter](#) placements—Stanford’s public service internship program—took place in a domestic rural context. The vast majority, eighteen of the nineteen students, themselves grew up in a rural area, meaning that just *one* Cardinal Quarter intern that year experienced rural life for the first time.
- Elite institutions often struggle to recruit students from rural areas, which tend to be more conservative, adding to the problem of geopolitical and socioeconomic sorting.

- A 2020 report on rural student experiences at Stanford University conducted by the Haas Center for Public Service and the Bill Lane Center for the American West revealed the obstacles rural students face gaining access to Stanford as well as the challenges they face once enrolled.
- A 2021 report commissioned by the Stanford Associates revealed a relative dearth of Stanford research focused on rural issues, and overwhelming support (94 percent) among alumni residents of the Central Valley for the university to deepen its rural engagement.
- Stanford University is certainly paying significant attention to building the capacity for constructive dialogue, reflected in a new priority initiative, ePluribus Stanford. However, while Stanford has tremendous overall demographic diversity, its student body is not representative of our nation’s diversity in two interconnected dimensions—political ideology and rurality—which may impact these efforts.

The lack of postsecondary rural engagement has downstream impacts. According to a Lumina Foundation report, despite the fact that rural students have higher high school graduation rates and better scores on the National Assessment of Educational Progress, only 19 percent of rural Americans hold a bachelor’s degree or higher, compared with an average of 33 percent nationwide. In recent years, many elite universities have been more intentional about the recruitment of students from rural areas. With funding from the Trott Family Philanthropies, the newly formed STARS College Network works with top colleges to expand access to students from rural areas (Stanford joined in 2024).

The lack of elite university engagement with rural communities creates challenges that extend beyond concerns about enrollment and fostering the capacity for civil discourse as an essential civic skill. In fact, some interviewees suggested that the ramifications may be contributing to the loss of confidence in colleges and universities as bedrock American institutions. Hence, addressing systemic disengagement with rural communities is an important component of addressing contemporary challenges in civic education in the United States.

Observation 10: Momentum for Policy Reform Is Primarily at the State and Local Levels

Another consistent theme in our interviews was the need to focus on state- and local-level policy. It is worth noting that national leaders on both sides of the partisan spectrum advocated for an approach that reflects our nation’s commitment to federalism. This idea was reflected in comments from interviewees, such as:

- “Partnerships with districts are the key to success in civic education” (university faculty member)
- “It is essential to engage local government” (national foundation leader)

- “Groups like the Bill of Rights Institute are successful because they are building things from the ground up” (national association leader)
- “Civics needs to be locally determined” (former K-12 teacher and national association leader)

This observation was effectively expressed by Jeffrey Sikkenga and David Davenport in their 2024 book, *A Republic, If We Can Teach It: Fixing America’s Civic Education Crisis*. They suggest that “federal investment, if one is to be made, would be to go back to funding teacher preparation and leave the how and what of civic education to state and local authorities.” They go further and suggest that leaning into a federalist approach may help mitigate some of the divisiveness that thwarts progress in civic education.

What is most needed from state legislatures is more robust civic education requirements in school curricula: how much should be required, and in what grades must it be taught? Those are the central questions that should be front and center in our state legislatures, not which particular idea or theory should be taught. Notably, these issues may well produce bipartisan agreement and progress, rather than the political controversies and stalemates now dominating state legislatures. (Sikkenga and Davenport 2024, 45–46)

Similarly, national reports such as Fordham Institute’s *The State of State Standards for Civics and US History in 2021* appropriately focus attention on state standards and policies. The diverse approaches taken by states create opportunities for comparative research by scholars, and for states to learn from one another.

Observation 11: Better Assessment and Research Are Needed

There were two themes that stood out with regard to assessment and evaluation. First, in multiple interviews and focus group conversations, particularly those focused on higher education, participants noted challenges in figuring out shared frameworks and outcome measures. One participant pointed to the varying definitions of what “good citizenship” means. Relatedly, the Institute for Citizens and Scholars (ICS) *Mapping Civic Measurement* report illustrates that **civic readiness** is measured more frequently than **civic opportunities**. ICS and many others have noted that voting dominates civic learning measurement, even while it’s just one among many indicators that should be considered. In short, as one participant summed up, we need more extensive measures and better tools to assess civic education and engagement.

In K-12, there are relatively more established standards than found in higher education. See, for example, the 2021 Fordham *State of State Standards* report. A 2024 review of state standards conducted by the Hoover Institution Working Group on Civics and American Citizenship found that twenty-two states had adopted a standard civics test as a graduation requirement. While the number of states with such a requirement has increased in recent years, there were calls for increased K-12 standards and curricula.

Additionally, there is an opportunity to research the impacts of state-level requirements regarding civics, both as a means of understanding what works and as an accountability mechanism. Approaches across states vary widely, and most of what we know about the impact of civic education is based on small case studies or larger scale quantitative studies based primarily on the availability of data (as opposed to what is taking place at the school/district level). The available research is often too small in scale or too detached from context to be either accurate or helpful to educators.

There are a lot of claims about what is effective, especially given ideologically driven forces in this space, and while many are intuitive, they are not necessarily backed up by empirical research. And there are opportunities for rigorous research given the plethora of state and local reforms that have not been systematically evaluated. As one of our interviewees, a former state legislator, pointed out as an example, the state of Arizona implemented statewide civic literacy standards a decade ago, the broad effects of which remain ripe for empirical research.

All of this requires coordination and funding. We did hear concerns that funding is particularly insufficient for assessment, which is necessary to engage and convince philanthropists to make significant investments in civic education, creating something of a Catch-22.

Observation 12: Bridge Building Leaders and Institutions, Like Hoover, Have an Important Role to Play

In nearly all our conversations with leaders and practitioners, there was real excitement about the prospect of the Hoover Institution deepening its engagement and leadership in civic education. The reasons often varied but were connected to perceptions of Hoover's distinctive strengths within the field, especially its convening power, its resources and expertise related to research-driven policy, and its potential contributions to ensuring civic education is more ideologically diverse, including as a valuable and effective bridge builder.

For example, Eric Liu, the CEO of [Citizen University](#), suggested "the civic ecosystem needs a healthy, self-assured, open-minded center right, and the Hoover Institution, perhaps in collaboration with others like Yuval Levin at the American Enterprise Institute, can provide leadership and leverage Condoleezza Rice's interest in engaging across ideological difference."

Similarly, [Paul Carrese](#), a professor in the School of Civic and Economic Thought and Leadership at Arizona State University, suggested "the Hoover Institution can be a key resource and bring more intellectual diversity and is in an excellent position to support professional development beyond Stanford, particularly in partnership with other constitutional or conservative centers/institutes that are engaged in teacher professional development."

Others were simply interested in having access to Hoover's world-class scholars and archives. [David Bobb](#), president of the Bill of Rights Institute, noted that while developing new curricular resources was not a huge need, the Hoover Institution is well positioned to address

underrepresented areas such as global geostrategy, foreign policy, and national security. He also suggested that educator access to Hoover’s library and archives could help transform civic education.

We purposefully had conversations with people from across the ideological spectrum. A nearly universal theme in comments made regarding Hoover’s potential involvement was the desire for it to help build bridges and break down barriers to get people to interact with others who have different political perspectives—and a view that Hoover is well positioned to do this within the realm of civic education. Many interviewees went further, suggesting that similarly situated institutions should also make explicit efforts to strengthen civic education.

CONCLUSION

In 1796, just twenty years after America declared independence, George Washington issued this advice as part of his [farewell address](#):

Promote then, as an object of primary importance, institutions for the general diffusion of knowledge. In proportion as the structure of a government gives force to public opinion, it is essential that public opinion should be enlightened.

These words ring as true today as they did then.

The observations made through this landscape analysis are being shared publicly and with those who contributed their insights, to whom we are deeply grateful. While not exhaustive, the report has served to catalyze conversations within the Hoover Institution and shape our future contributions. We hope it might also catalyze conversations with partners across the civics ecosystem and even the general public to expand knowledge and improve policy, research, and civics outcomes.

No single institution can address the challenge of strengthening civics alone. Advancing civic education at scale will require strategic partnerships and collaboration across sectors. We encourage organizations, educators, and civic leaders to engage with these findings, explore synergies, and consider how best to work collectively toward shared goals. By leveraging complementary strengths and expertise, leaders and stakeholders can drive meaningful progress in fostering informed and engaged citizens.

On July 4, 2026, our nation will commemorate the 250th anniversary of the signing of the Declaration of Independence—a historic milestone that invites reflection on the principles that define American democracy. It also echoes George Washington’s enduring call for civic enlightenment, underscoring the urgent need to expand and strengthen civic education. The Center for Revitalizing American Institutions is uniquely positioned to contribute to this effort and is prepared to play a vital role in preparing citizens to sustain and advance the ideals upon which our republic was founded.

APPENDIX A: DEFINITIONS

There is no one single definition of civic education. Appendix A contains various definitions from a variety of different organizations to help capture what is generally meant by the terms “civic education” and “civics.”

Cambridge Dictionary: The study of the way in which a local government works and of the rights and duties of the people who live in the city. ([Source](#))

CivxNow: In its broadest sense, civics (also known as “civic education” or “civic learning”) is the lifelong process that makes people into informed and engaged members of their communities—which range from schools and towns or neighborhoods to the whole nation and even the world. Civic learning occurs in families, in religious settings and other associations, in political campaigns, and on news websites, among many other venues. . . . As defined in many state standards and other official documents, “civics” usually refers to a K-12 curriculum that is part of the social studies. This curriculum typically draws heavily on political science and law and has close connections to other academic subjects, particularly US history, and to experiences like service learning. In a given grade or school, these disciplines may be integrated in various ways; for instance, one course or sequence of courses may combine civics (as the study of politics) with US history. ([Source](#))

Educating for American Democracy: The word “civic” denotes the virtues, assets, and activities that a free people need to govern themselves well. When civic education succeeds, all people are prepared and motivated to participate effectively in civic life. They acquire and share the knowledge, skills, and dispositions necessary for effective participation. ([Source](#))

Massachusetts Board of Higher Education: The acquisition of the knowledge, the intellectual skills, and the applied competencies or practical skills that citizens need for informed and effective participation in civic and democratic life. It also means acquiring an understanding of the social values that underlie democratic structures and practices. ([Source](#))

Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy: In its broadest definition, “civic education” means all the processes that affect people’s beliefs, commitments, capabilities, and actions as members or prospective members of communities. Civic education need not be intentional or deliberate; institutions and communities transmit values and norms without meaning to. It may not be beneficial: sometimes people are civically educated in ways that disempower them or impart harmful values and goals. It is certainly not limited to schooling and the education of children and youth. Families, governments, religions, and mass media are just some of the institutions involved in civic education, understood as a lifelong process. ([Source](#))

University of California, Riverside: Civic education is a process through which young people develop the knowledge, skills, and commitments to interact effectively with others, improve their communities and the broader society, and participate in democracy. It includes learning

about how federal, state, and local government is structured and functions, as well as learning how to find accurate and trustworthy information about civic and political issues. It also covers how community members can participate in democracy by voting, raising awareness about important issues, communicating with elected and appointed officials, attending public meetings and hearings, and working with community-based organizations. ([Source](#))

Virginia Department of Higher Education: Civics education in Virginia emphasizes the importance of citizen involvement in all levels of government and promotes the study of state and local government among the commonwealth's citizens. Civics and civic education are at the core of Virginia's public school mission. ([Source](#))

APPENDIX B: THE CIVIC EDUCATION ECOSYSTEM

The civic education ecosystem represents a vast landscape of components and resources. This appendix gives a broad overview of the landscape by listing out prominent examples of these components and resources: organizations, efforts, data, books, reports, awards, and so on.

CIVIC EDUCATION EFFORTS AND ORGANIZATIONS BY THEME

Adapted from categories listed by the American Political Science Association (APSA); the original list can be found [here](#).

General/Overarching Efforts

- [Albert Shanker Institute](#)
- [Andrew Goodman Foundation](#)
- [Bill of Rights Institute](#)
- [Center for Civic Education](#)—[We the People curriculum](#)
- [Character Counts!](#)
- [Character Education Partnership](#)
- [Choices for the 21st Century Education Project](#) ([Brown University](#))
- [CIRCLE](#) (Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement at Tufts University; hosts [Teaching for Democracy Alliance](#))
- [Civic Engagement Research Group](#) ([UC Riverside](#))
- [Civic Nation](#)
- [The Civic Trust](#), an initiative of the US Chamber of Commerce Foundation
- [Civics 101: A Podcast](#)
- [The Civics Center](#)
- [Civics Renewal Network](#)
- [Close Up Foundation](#)

- [Democratic Knowledge Project](#)
- [iCivics](#)
- [Institute for Citizens and Scholars](#)
- [James Madison Memorial Fellowship Foundation](#)
- [Kettering Foundation](#)
- [National Association of Secretaries of State](#)
- [National Civic League](#)
- [National Conference on Citizenship](#)
- [National Conference of State Legislatures](#)
- [National Constitution Center](#)
- [National Council for the Social Studies](#)
- [Philanthropy for Active Civic Engagement](#)
- [Society for Experiential Education](#)
- [Teach Democracy](#)
- [Well Versed: Animated Music Videos About Civics for Kids](#)

Focus on US Elections and Voter Education

- [Ballotpedia](#)
- [Campaign Finance Institute](#)
- [Commission on Presidential Debates](#)
- [Common Cause](#)
- [FactCheck.org](#)
- [FairVote](#)
- [Federal Election Commission](#)

- [Guides.Vote](#)
- [Independent Voter Project](#)
- [Kids Voting USA](#)
- [League of Women Voters](#)
- [On the Issues](#)
- [OpenSecrets](#)
- [Rock the Vote](#)
- [Sunlight Foundation](#)
- [Vote Smart](#)

Focus on History and Democratic Institutions and Practices

- [1619 Project](#)
- [1776 Report](#)
- [Civics Alliance from National Association of Scholars—American Birthright](#)
- [Constitution Day](#)
- [Facing History & Ourselves](#)
- [Justice for All: Courts and the Community Initiative](#)
- [The Legislative Semester](#)
- [Resources for Educators and Students](#) (US House of Representatives)
- [Teaching for Democracy Alliance](#)
- [UVA Miller Center](#)

Focus on Leadership, Activism, and Political Involvement/Youth Engagement

- [Center for Youth Political Participation \(Rutgers University\)](#)
- [Civic Influencers](#)

- [Close Up Foundation](#)
- [DoSomething](#)
- [National Youth Leadership Council](#)
- [Rock the Vote](#)
- [Sorensen Institute for Political Leadership](#)
- [Students Learn Students Vote](#)
- [What Kids Can Do](#)
- [Youth Activism Project](#)

Focus on Community Volunteering, National Service, and Civic Participation

- [AmeriCorps / Corporation for National and Community Service](#)
- [Govern for America](#)
- [National Conference on Citizenship](#)
- [Points of Light Foundation](#)
- [Service Year Alliance](#)
- [Youth Service America](#)

Focus on Global Citizenship and International Efforts

- [CIVICUS: World Alliance for Citizen Participation](#)
- [Council on Foreign Relations](#)
- [Foreign Policy Association](#)
- [Freedom House](#)
- [International Foundation for Electoral Systems](#)
- [National Democratic Institute](#)
- [National Endowment for Democracy](#)

- [United Nations Association of the United States of America](#)
- [United States Institute of Peace](#)
- [World Affairs Councils of America](#)

Focus on Pluralism/Civil Discourse/Bridging Divisions

- [AAC&U Institute for Democracy and Higher Education](#)
- [The Better Arguments Project](#)
- [Better Discourse: A Guide for Bridging Campus Divides in Challenging Times](#) (Campus Compact)
- [Beyond Conflict](#)
- [Braver Angels](#)
- [Bridge Alliance](#) (coalition of bridging organizations)
- [Bridging Differences in Higher Education Learning Fellowship](#) (Greater Good Science Center, UC Berkeley)
- [Civity](#)
- [Constructive Dialogue Institute](#)
- [Deliberative Democracy Lab](#) (Stanford)
- [Intercollegiate Civil Disagreement Program Fellowship](#) (Stanford)
- [Living Room Conversations](#)
- [National Coalition for Dialogue and Deliberation](#)
- [National Institute for Civil Discourse](#) (University of Arizona)
- [New Pluralists](#) (a funders group)
- [Unify America](#)
- [US Values Alliance](#)
- [Vanderbilt Project on Unity and American Democracy](#)

Focus on Digital/Information/News Literacy

- [Bites Media](#)
- [Civic Online Reasoning](#) (part of [Digital Inquiry Group](#))
- [Common Sense Education Digital Citizenship Curriculum](#)
- [Cyber Civics](#)
- [Digital Civics Toolkit](#) (Harvard Graduate School of Education)
- [Digital Inquiry Group](#) (previously, Stanford History Education Group)
- [Election Integrity Project](#)
- [FactCheck.org](#)
- [Journal of Online Trust and Safety](#)
- [National Association for Media Literacy Education](#)
- [News Literacy Project](#)
- [PBS News Hour Classroom](#)
- [Stanford Social Media Lab](#)

Focus on Postsecondary Education

- [ALL IN Campus Democracy Challenge](#)
- [Arthur Vining Davis Foundations](#)
- [Campus Compact](#)
- [Citizen University](#)
- [College Civic Learning](#)
- [Generation Citizen](#)

OTHER RESOURCES IN THE ECOSYSTEM

Government Internships

- [Congressional Internship Program](#)
- [Supreme Court Internship Program](#)

Civic Education Awards

- [American Civic Education Teacher Awards](#) (Center for Civic Education, the Center on Representative Government at Indiana University, and the National Education Association)
- [American Civic Education Teacher Awards](#) (Civic Renewal Network)
- [Annual Award for Excellence in Civic Education](#) (Jack Miller Center)
- [Award for Excellence in Civic Learning, Democratic Engagement, and Service Learning](#) (NASPA)
- [California Civic Learning Awards](#) (California Judiciary)
- [National Civics Teacher of the Year Award](#) (Bill of Rights Institute)
- [Sandra Day O'Connor Award for the Advancement of Civics Education](#) (National Center for State Courts)

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NOTES

1. The BRI survey does not draw from a representative sample of Americans. The survey was sent to teachers who engage with BRI to improve their practice of teaching civics. More granular analyses were not conducted for purposes of this report to stratify the sample or weight the analyses. Observations from this survey should therefore be interpreted with some caution with regard to their generalizability.
2. "Affective polarization" refers to animosity toward those with differing views and was first coined by scholar Shanto Iyengar (Iyengar et al. 2019). Notably, the concept distinguishes the characteristic of having differences in policy or ideological preferences from the characteristic of dislike and distrust toward people with differing opinions and from differing political parties.
3. *Educating for American Democracy* involved a cross-ideological collaboration among more than three hundred academics, historians, political scientists, K-12 educators, district and state administrators, civics

providers, students, and others from across the country. The principal investigators included Danielle Allen (Harvard University), Paul Carrese (Arizona State University), Louise Dubé (iCivics), Jane Kamensky (Harvard University), Kei Kawashima-Ginsberg (CIRCLE), Peter Levine (Tufts University), and Tammy Waller (Arizona Department of Education).

4. Independent and unaffiliated respondents expressed less support at 52.7 percent.

5. [Bill of Rights Institute survey](#), entry 117.

6. [Bill of Rights Institute survey](#), entry 51.

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About the Working Group on Civics and American Citizenship

Within the Hoover Institution's Center for Revitalizing American Institutions (RAI), the Working Group on Civics and American Citizenship seeks to craft and communicate policies and practices that nurture good citizenship in the constitutional democracy Americans inhabit—policies and practices that support the principles, convictions, character traits, and associations upon which liberty depends. Consisting of high-quality, nonpartisan research, analysis, and communications, our work is anchored to what Alexis de Tocqueville called “reflective patriotism” and seeks to cultivate in Americans young and old an affirmative attachment to the nation that Lincoln termed “the last best hope of earth.”

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