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5-4-2016

## The Civic Education Crisis and Its Effect on Young Voters

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The Civic Education Crisis and Its Effect on Young Voters

Baker Scholars Thesis

May 4, 2016

Caroline Duer

## Abstract

The civic education crisis is the most underrated crisis in the American education system. The voter turnout rates in America are very low and education policies are heavily focused on STEM. In my report I analyze the link between the quality of state education and youth voter turnout as well as the link between civics exams scores and youth voter turnout. As the civic education crisis grows, and national support for civics ebbs and flows, citizens, especially young people, are going to be the victims. When civic knowledge decreases, it is impossible for our government to function properly. Without the government being held accountable, the freedoms that citizens experience will be given up voluntarily without much awareness. It is our responsibility as citizens to increase our own knowledge and help to promote better education for all. The data available for analyzing education quality and civics exam scores is abysmal and public policy has made proving statistical relevance challenging, but future research addressing diversity, socioeconomic status, and the quality of civics education can fill in the data gaps.

## Acknowledgements

Thank you to Joe Jarret and Dr. Park for advising and supervising my research. Also special thanks to Jian Roachell who helped me run my statistical analysis.

## Introduction

Nelson Mandela once said: "Education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world" ("Education for All"). Education is valuable because it is

the swiftest path to equality, self-sufficiency, and a higher standard of living. The power of knowledge is immeasurable. Eric Cooper; President of the National Urban Alliance for Public Education says “Public education is the bedrock for our democracy and where opportunity is borne from a commitment to social justice” (Cooper).

Civic education is important because to be able to continue to have a “free democratic society students must become active, informed, responsible, and effective citizens” (“All Together Now: Collaboration”). “America’s founders were united in their belief that a successful government only works properly with engaged, well-informed citizens committed to the practice of self-government” (Gnoch and Poliakoff 14). Thomas Jefferson once said, “A Nation that expects to be ignorant and free, in a state of civilization, expects what never was and never will be” (Gnoch and Poliakoff 14). Allowing students to graduate from high school and college with only an elementary understanding of how our government works and their role in their own communities, not only disempowers young citizens but allows corrupt politicians to take advantage of an increasingly more complicated system.

Students need a higher level of knowledge in the subject of civics, and the school systems and state, local, and federal government should be held accountable. The policies that government creates regarding assessments, funding, even redistricting, all affect students’ quality of education. Many citizens do not understand how our government functions. One such demographic is non-college youth. The primary reason youth with no college experience do not vote is because they are “civically alienated” without the civics specific opportunities and connections that college can offer (Godsay et al. 12). In a survey done by Tufts University, 37% of non-college youth were completely disengaged

while only 13% were broadly engaged (Godsay et al. 5). The perception of non-college youth is that “the barriers to civic engagement are concrete, and they lack organized and institutional opportunities to address large-scale social issues” (Godsay et al. 5-6).

The larger problem may be that there are no incentives for the government to increase student knowledge and understanding. George Mason Law Professor Ilya Somin points out: “If the voters effectively monitored education policy and rewarded elected officials for using public schools to increase political knowledge, things might be different. But if the voters were that knowledgeable, we probably wouldn’t have a political ignorance problem to begin with” (Somin 1). If there is no incentive for government to change, it is the responsibility of the electorate to be the final check on government. There is an immediate need for government transparency.

Increasing transparency in government, the quality and quantity of civic education in schools, and emphasizing skills like civility, accountability, problem solving, teamwork, and critical thinking in civics, can create a pathway for more citizens to become active participants in not only their individual communities, but involvement on a national level as well. If active and engaged citizens do not address these issues the opportunity for corruption and inefficiency becomes much larger. When a citizen votes, not only are they exercising a right, but they are exercising power to influence their elected officials. Their choices on the ballot do have influential power, especially in local elections. Professor Somin points to an excellent question in his book “Is Smaller Government Smart Government”: Do citizens have the intrinsic right to make political decisions on the basis of ignorance?” Somin thinks that they do not have that right.

Whatever personal ideology voters have will guide them on major issues, but the ability to even address these questions is the basis of the need for civic education.

Currently, in the American education system, the focus is STEM education (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics). Technical skills are prioritized over the liberal arts. This is unfortunate because with a decreasing focus on liberal arts comes a decrease in value of skills such as effective communication, critical thinking, teamwork, and civility. The lack of civic knowledge and engagement in the United States is alarming. The problem is not necessarily one of awareness; 9 out of 10 American adults say it is important for high school students to study civics and government ("The State of Civic"). The goal is to create effective solutions that increase civic participation by increasing the knowledge base of all citizens. The greatest challenge lies in determining the most effective strategies for increasing voting and civic participation among youth.

In 2014 only 23% of eighth graders scored "proficient" in civics on the National Assessment of Educational Progress exam (U.S. Department of Education 1), and currently only 18% of colleges and universities require students to take at least one American history or government course before graduation (Gnoch and Poliakoff 7). The United States is lagging internationally with voter participation "landing 31st (with a rate of 53.6%) among the 34 countries in the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, most of whose members are highly developed, democratic states" (Desilver 1).

My hypothesis is that high quality education, specifically high quality civic education, will help increase youth voter turnout and civic engagement. By analyzing the

specific elements of the civic education crisis, the large-scale education policies implemented in the last decade and their lasting effects, and how youth voter turnout has been influenced, citizens, lawmakers, and educators can gain a better knowledge of how their collaboration can create innovative ways to increase voter turnout and civic participation. By using current statistics and rankings, I analyzed the correlation and statistical significance of educational quality and youth voter turnout in 2012, and another analysis of regional youth voter turnout and regional average National Assessment for Educational Progress Civics exam scores. The combination of my literature review of previously published research, policy analysis, and statistical analysis creates a solid foundation for future studies of the civic education crisis and helps clarify where more attention is needed to improve civic education, youth voter turnout, and participation.

### Outlining the Crisis

What is civics? According to the Merriam Webster Dictionary, civics is the study of the rights and duties of citizens and of how government works ("Civics"). Civics allows students to learn about government and their role in their communities. Students learn how our government was formed, how it functions, what the roles of citizens are, what a democracy is, and the political relationships between America and other nations (U.S. Department of Education 1). Traditionally, students' mastery of concepts and skills are measured with school assessments, independent surveys, and state civic education requirements. Other measurements are analysis of currently available data from these assessments and surveys, and collating current studies to form the foundation for future research.

## The National Assessment of Educational Progress

The National Assessment of Educational Progress states that there are five knowledge-based standards for a student's civic education:

- I. *What are civic life, politics, and government?*
- II. *What are the foundations of the American political system?*
- III. *How does the government established by the Constitution embody the purposes, values, and principles of American democracy?*
- IV. *What is the relationship of the United States to other nations and to world affairs?*
- V. *What are the roles of citizens in American democracy?*

The standards are in the form of questions that allow students to develop their critical thinking skills and allow for the changing and developing roles of government (Branson 1).

The National Assessment for Educational Progress (NAEP) administers a test-like assessment to a random sample of students from equal parts fourth, eighth, and twelfth grade (Levine 1). The NAEP releases report cards that can compare students data to determine "how students' knowledge has changed over time, which educational practices are related to higher scores, how well students understand various specific topics, and which students perform better or worse for their grade" (Levine 3). The exams are predominately multiple-choice but include a short essay (Levine 1). Students' scores qualify them as one of three levels: "basic", "proficient", or "advanced" (Levine 2). The boundaries of each level can be set differently for each test and each subject area by state governments and school districts, therefore they are not an accurate measure of the



student's proficiency. The qualifications per the National Assessment for Educational Progress for a "sufficient" report card are: "Twelfth-grade students performing at the Proficient level should have a good understanding of how constitutions can limit the power of government and support the rule of law. They should be able to describe similarities and differences among constitutional systems of government, and they should be able to explain fundamental American democratic values, their applications, and their contribution to expanding political participation. They should understand the structure of American government and be able to evaluate activities of political parties, interest groups, and media in public affairs. They should be able to explain the importance of political participation, public service, and political leadership. They should be able to describe major elements of American foreign policy and the performance of major international organizations (Levine 4)." None of the intended outcomes address voting.

The National Assessment of Educational Progress also states: "Ultimately, a free society must rely on the knowledge, skills, and virtue of its citizens and those they elect to public office. Civic education, therefore, is essential to the preservation and improvement of American constitutional democracy" (*National Standards for Civics* 4). Schools fill a different role in students' lives than families, churches, and media outlets. Schools fill the need for a formal and informal education at the same time, connecting all disciplines (*National Standards for Civics* 5).

While the tests could be a useful tool in assessing student knowledge, there is no risk for teachers whose students do not improve or reach these levels on the report cards (Levine 8). The statistics are subjective and the level of true knowledge of the students is more comparative in nature (Levine 9). The National Assessment of Educational

Progress's report cards are useful, but cannot be used alone in the measurement of students' civic understanding. "Federal law specifies that NAEP is voluntary for every student, school, school district, and state. However, federal law also requires all states that receive Title I funds to participate in NAEP reading and mathematics assessments at fourth and eighth grades. Similarly, school districts that receive Title I funds and are selected for the NAEP sample are also required to participate in NAEP reading and mathematics assessments at fourth and eighth grades. All other NAEP assessments are voluntary" ("NAEP Frequently Asked Questions").

Unfortunately, since 2014, funding for these tests is decreasing because of changing budgets. Heartland Institute reports: "The National Assessment of Educational Progress exams in civics, U.S. history, and geography have been indefinitely postponed for fourth and twelfth graders. The Obama administration says this is due to a \$6.8 million sequestration budget cut. The three exams will be replaced by a single, new test: Technology and Engineering Literacy" (Stauss 1). This highlights the shift in focus of our government away from a liberal arts education towards a more math and science focused education. Those in favor of the new replacement test say that it will not affect the classes students take or the education they receive, it will only allow the United States to become more competitive in STEM fields. But does merely changing funding or adding more testing really allow students to become more competitive? The shift in priorities since sequestration shows the shift in priority away from civics, which will now only be tested once during a student's K-12 education. The liberal arts provide the framework for students to gain technical skills. To be able to learn about engineering, one must be able to read and write well, and think critically. For students to be able to get jobs and vote for

representatives whose ideologies align with theirs, no matter their technical career, they need to study civics, history, economics, and geography. The National Assessment for Educational Progress was becoming the backbone of understanding civic knowledge of students until the funding was sequestered.

### No Child Left Behind: Adequate Yearly Progress

In the early 2000's there was a significant amount of national attention on education. No Child Left Behind was signed into law in 2002, with the idealistic goal of having "all of the nation's students perform at grade level on state tests" (Kamenetz). The exact wording of the bill was: "Each State shall establish a timeline for adequate yearly progress. The timeline shall ensure that not later than 12 years after the end of the 2001-2002 school year, all students ... will meet or exceed the State's proficient level of academic achievements on the State assessments..." (Kamenetz) The bill had bipartisan support and was the brainchild of the Bush Administration (Kamenetz). No Child Left Behind was also the 2002 update of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of the Johnson administration (Klein). The primary goal of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act was to provide federal funding for the cost of educating disadvantaged students (Klein).

Adequate Yearly Progress reports were required by each state under No Child Left Behind ("Adequate Yearly Progress"). These reports were intended to set high standards and hold accountable both students and teachers ("Adequate Yearly Progress"). The primary indicator of whether or not students met the standards of the Adequate

Yearly Progress report was through state testing ("Adequate Yearly Progress"). The indicators as laid out exactly by the Department of Education are as follows:

- I. State tests must be the primary factor in the state's measure of AYP, but the use of at least one other academic indicator of school performance is required, and additional indicators are permitted;*
- II. For secondary schools, the other academic indicator must be the high school graduation rate;*
- III. States must set a baseline for measuring students' performance toward the goal of 100 percent proficiency by spring 2014. The baseline is based on data from the 2001-02 school year;*
- IV. States must also create benchmarks for how students will progress each year to meet the goal of 100 percent proficiency by spring 2014;*
- V. A state's AYP must include separate measures for both reading/language arts and math. In addition, the measures must apply not only to students on average, but also to students in subgroups, including economically disadvantaged students, students with disabilities, English-language learners, African-American students, Asian-American students, Caucasian students, Hispanic students, and Native American students.*
- VI. To make AYP, at least 95 percent of students in each of the subgroups, as well as 95 percent of students in a school as a whole, must take the state tests, and each subgroup of students must meet or exceed the measurable annual objectives set by the state for each year ("Adequate Yearly Progress").*

The most admirable aspect of the legislation was that everyone could agree that no child deserves to “be left behind.” President Bush wanted to close the gaps in education levels and test performance of children of different races and socioeconomic stances. The creators of the policy wanted to create an all-inclusive law that held everyone to high standards and included negative consequences to schools for not meeting those standards (Kamenetz). The results of these measures were mixed. “... No Child Left Behind generated statistically significant increases in the average math performance of 4th graders...as well as improvements at the lower and top percentiles. There is also evidence of improvements in 8th grade math achievement, particularly among traditionally low-achieving groups and at the lower percentiles” (Dee and Jacob 2). These score increases were a large part of the original goal: High stakes tests to encourage education efficiency and effectiveness. (Dee and Jacob 3). However, having test scores become the basis of receiving funding, and even the ability of schools to remain open, created a testing culture in schools as they began to test students more to prepare for the state tests (Kamenetz).

No Child Left Behind legislation used punishment and reward accountability system for schools and their Adequate Yearly Progress reports. “In some states, schools considered high-performing by other measures have failed to make AYP, causing considerable public confusion and concern. The numbers of schools not making AYP vary greatly from state to state for a number of reasons, mostly pertaining to differences in states’ tests and accountability systems” (“Adequate Yearly Progress”). Sanctions and even closure threaten schools that do not meet their Adequate Yearly Progress measures. “Under the No Child Left Behind Act, schools that fail to make adequate yearly progress

(meet achievement targets) for two years in a row must allow their students to transfer to a better-performing school in the district” (Klein).

This changed the incentive for schools; they began “focusing more resources on students who were just below passing, to the detriment of both higher and lower achievers. In some cases, schools classified increasing numbers of students as disabled to keep low performing students from negatively affecting the school’s overall performance. In certain cases, they cheated” (Kamenetz). States were allowed to determine what was “proficient,” and determine their own assessment, which forced many schools to keep cutting scores and “dumbing down” the assessments (Kamenetz). This initial intention of creating more government accountability had been lost in the dysfunction of the current bureaucracy. The Heritage Foundation wrote in one of their reports on No Child Left behind that: “One significant problem is that NCLB testing policies have inadvertently weakened state-level testing and academic transparency...Some states have responded to this pressure by changing how their tests are scored to allow more students to pass and to show more progress under NCLB” (Hicock and Ladner 1). Another troubling aspect of No Child Left behind was how “its emphasis on math and reading tests has narrowed the curriculum, forcing schools to spend less time on subjects that aren’t explicitly tested, like social studies, foreign language, and the arts” (Klein). While many critics of No Child Left Behind were upset about over-testing, the over-testing led to an overemphasis on certain subjects, and deemphasized those subjects left untested.

In 2007 No Child Left Behind expired, and was in need of reauthorization. The rewrite of the legislation took until 2015. During those years states could not meet the standards and many states began to write their own legislation changing the priority of

No Child Left Behind (“Adequate Yearly Progress”). In the fall of 2011, the Obama administration also began to allow states to apply for waivers (Klein). They announced that “The Obama administration will waive cornerstone requirements of the No Child Left Behind Act, including the 2014 deadline for all students to be proficient in math and reading/language arts, and will give states the freedom to set their own student-achievement goals and design their own interventions for failing schools. In exchange for that flexibility, the administration will require states to adopt standards for college and career readiness, focus improvement efforts on 15 percent of the most troubled schools, and create guidelines for teacher evaluations based in part on student performance” (McNeil and Klein). Currently 45 States have applied for waivers, and 43 have waivers (Klein, Alyson).

### Every Student Succeeds Act

On December 10, 2015 the Obama administration signed the Every Student Succeeds Act into law. It had taken since 2007 for a bill to pass Congress and become the law. The Every Student Succeeds Act will:

- I. Ensure states set high standards so that children graduate high school ready for college and career.*
- II. Maintain accountability by guaranteeing that when students fall behind, states target resources towards what works to help them and their schools improve, with a particular focus on the lowest-performing 5 percent of schools, high schools with high dropout rates, and schools where subgroups of students are struggling.*

- III. *Empower state and local decision-makers to develop their own strong systems for school improvement based upon evidence, rather than imposing cookie-cutter federal solutions like No Child Left Behind (NCLB) did.*
- IV. *Preserve annual assessments and reduce the often onerous burden of unnecessary and ineffective testing on students and teachers, making sure that standardized tests don't crowd out teaching and learning, without sacrificing clear, annual information parents and educators need to make sure our children are learning.*
- V. *Provide more children access to high quality preschool, giving them the chance to get a strong start to their education.*
- VI. *Establish new resources to test promising practices and replicate proven strategies that will drive opportunity and better outcomes for America's students (Executive Office of The President 2).*

Critics of the new plan say that holding only the bottom 5% of schools accountable is a mistake because we are simply reversing the problem. The goal is to return power and accountability to the state and local governments, but having state and local government be efficient and effective at holding schools to high standards may prove difficult. There is however newly renewed federal funding for civics within the Every Student Succeeds Act. Specifically it will: “authorize an allocation of 1.4% of the amount appropriated for “National Activities” for each fiscal year the Act is in effect” (*President Signs “Every Student 1*).



### Unique State Sponsored Civics Assessments

Prioritizing civics even at the state level is a challenge. A few states have been successful at implementing new strategies to increase civic engagement and knowledge through education assessments. The states that have successfully enacted civics-focused policies have a few similarities.

1. Leadership from a Major Advocate (not a policy maker)
2. Advocates Developing Connections with Policymakers
3. Advocates working with savvy policy makers to navigate the Political System (S.D. Bechtel, Jr. Foundation and CIRCLE Staff 9).

With states now holding more power over their student testing and assessments post-No Child Left Behind, a few states have unique policies. In 2012, Tennessee passed a law that required students to complete “project based” civics assessments that are developed and implemented by individual school districts (Delander 2). The state requires that schools give an assessment once in grades 4-8 and once in grades 9-12 (S.D. Bechtel, Jr. Foundation and CIRCLE Staff 5). The two main goals for creating this mandatory project-based assessment were: 1) civics would be taught in the state, and 2) students would be tested on their active involvement in the community (S.D. Bechtel, Jr. Foundation and CIRCLE Staff 5). There is no published data yet on the success of these measures.

There are a few major challenges though facing the state of Tennessee in implementing this policy: “First, 114 school systems are each charged with developing their own assessment, which reduces uniformity in how civics is being assessed across the state...Second, given the unique nature of the assessment, new measures must be

created” (S.D. Bechtel, Jr. Foundation and CIRCLE Staff 6). Giving state and local governments the freedom to create their own assessments allows them to address the unique needs and circumstances of their local student population and be free from the burden of federal funding consequences. However, creating an assessment is a significant amount of work for each school district and allows varying levels of difficulty and knowledge to be assessed.

In Florida legislators took a different approach. In 2010 Florida passed a law that requires all middle school students to pass a high stakes civics exam that is 30% of their grade in the civics course (Delander 1). “The end-of-course test is to be computer-based and multiple choice, with questions split evenly among these four categories:

1. Origins and purposes of law and government.
2. Roles, rights and responsibilities of citizens.
3. Government policies and political processes
4. Organizations and functions of government (Delander 3).”

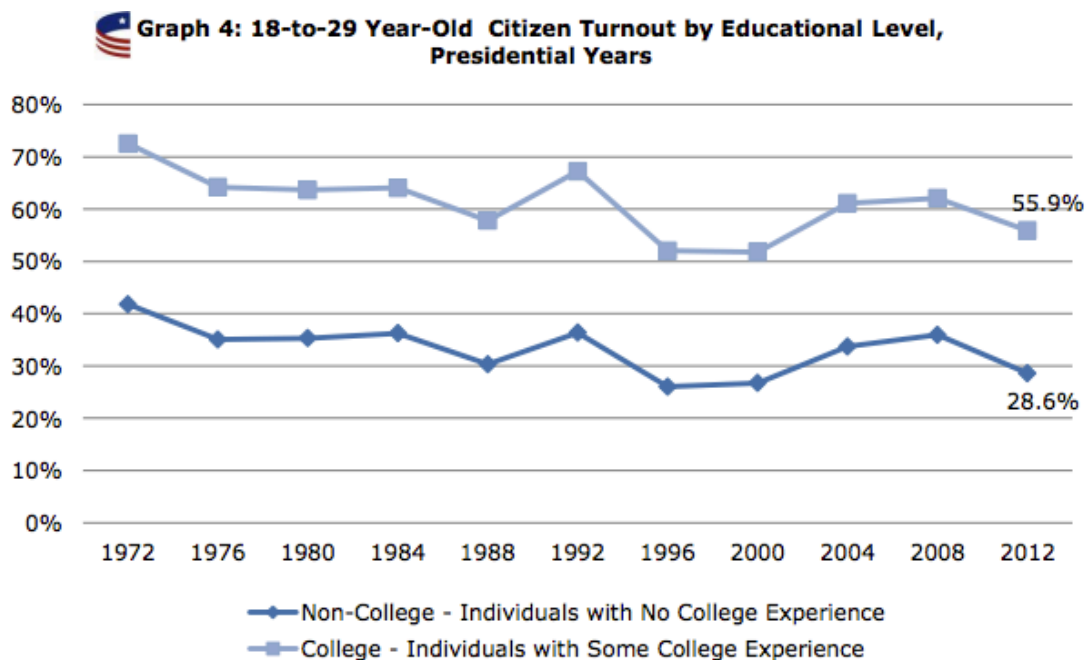
The largest challenge to implementing the new test was informing educators and school districts of the policy change (S.D. Bechtel, Jr. Foundation and CIRCLE Staff 5). Since there are so many different mandates for teachers from the state and local level it can be hard for teachers to be fully informed (S.D. Bechtel, Jr. Foundation and CIRCLE Staff 6). Standardized tests take such a significant amount of time to develop and pilot that it could be several years before the exam is administered and data can be collected on its success (S.D. Bechtel, Jr. Foundation and CIRCLE Staff 7). In addition to Tennessee and Florida passing unique legislation, Arizona has become the first state to require that all students pass a civics exam to graduate from high school (Neuman).

### Background for Statistical Analysis

The future of civics education is uncertain, which means the future of our nation will be uncertain. If civics education dwindles or ceases to exist where then will children gain the base knowledge they need about how our country and government function in order to be able to make informed choices in future elections? To hold government accountable, citizens must be educated in and have a clear understanding of how laws are made, how our electoral college works, which branch of government has which powers, what the effects different policies could have, etc. This foundation of knowledge allows citizens to advocate for policies that affect them personally rather than view themselves as merely the victims of a complicated and corrupt bureaucracy. The government should also be held accountable. Legislation is often carefully crafted to benefit policy makers, and to be challenging for citizens to understand. Citizens should expect a level of clarity in the laws Congress passes, without this clarity, government transparency decreases and it becomes harder for citizen voters to hold their elected officials accountable. There is no reason for bills to be so complicated that no one but legislators (or the staff who wrote the bill) understand it, for Congress to be deadlocked for years, or for politicians to care more about political clout than the citizens they represent. If citizens do not gain a broader civic understanding how can they hold their elected officials accountable on Election Day? Historian, politician, and writer Lord Acton once said, "Power tends to corrupt and absolute power corrupts absolutely. Great men are almost always bad men, even when they exercise influence and not authority; still more when you superadd the tendency of the certainty of corruption by authority" ("Lord Acton Quote Archive"). The problem becomes cyclical, because government is not transparent, citizens cannot hold it

accountable, but schools are not successfully teaching students about their government, so they do not participate, allowing government to become less transparent, less accountable, and therefore less beneficial to both the student and the American society as a whole.

Does the quality of our education effect how many youth decide to participate through voting? There are so many factors that can indicate whether or not someone is likely to vote, but the most obvious one to me was education. However there are many different questions one can pose when looking at education and voter turnout. The first research I saw when I began my project was the correlation between 18-29 year olds with a college education and those without and voter turnout:



Source: CIRACLE's Tabulations from the CPS November Voting and Registration Supplements, 1972-2012.

There is a significant difference in voter turnout rates between youth with any college experience and youth with no college experience. There is also a significant decline in the

past 40 years of youth voter turnout. In the age of social media and instantaneous communication, shouldn't information about voting be dissipated easily and accurately? The problem is the wealth of sources found on the Internet and social media sites can not only be overwhelming, but not accurate. Students depend on their families and schooling for information as well. Does K-12 education quality have the same effect as college attendance on youth voter turnout? I wanted to see if students who had better quality K-12 education were more likely to vote, since those who have gone to college are more likely to vote than those who have not.

### Statistical Analysis

My statistical analysis was two-part: The first was an analysis comparing state "quality of education ranking" to that states youth voter turnout. The second part was analyzing the National Assessment for Educational Progresses civics scores by region compared to the regional youth voter turnout. I used the Annie E. Casey Foundation's study of state education quality to rank the states.

The Foundation created the rankings based on four different factors: the percentage of children not attending preschool, percentage of fourth graders not proficient in reading, percentage of eight graders not proficient in math, and the percentage of high school students not graduating on time (*Kids Count* 45). Their statistics were collected from the National Center for Education Statistics, the National Association for Educational Progress and an internal survey done at the Annie E. Casey Foundation (Mather and Dupuis 12). I have included in my report the percentiles sheet reported by the Annie E. Casey Foundation in their report *Kids Count* on page 33.

The youth voter turnout data was collected by The Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement (CIRCLE). The term “youth voter” describes voters between the ages of 18-29 ("Civic Education Map"). CIRCLE described collecting the data in this quote: “Most recent voter turnout is determined by taking the number of votes cast for each age group present in the Catalist Voter File and dividing by the estimated total citizen population for that age group using the American Community Survey 1 year estimate for that year. The estimated citizen population for each age group is the total population estimate for that age group multiplied by the percentage of citizens in the total population” ("Youth Voter Turnout Election"). The Catalist Voter File is a data set from the company Catalist that collects data and offers subscriptions to academic institutions, policy makers, analytics firms, consultants, and other organizations ("Our Clients"). I did this analysis twice, the first time with youth voter turnout rates from the general presidential election of 2012, and the second with midterm election of 2014 youth voter turnout rates to help reduce any bias an exciting a presidential election have.

My second analysis compared the National Assessment for Educational Progress average regional civics exam scores and regional youth voter turnout averages. Civics exam results were reported by race, gender, region, type of school, family income, parental education, disabilities, and English language learners, but not by specific states (*Civics, Grade 8 1*). The civics test was not designed to provide a state-by-state analysis even though the math and reading tests do have state-by-state results (Levine 8). In my analysis, the youth voter turnout percentages of the states within each region were averaged and compared to the average civics exam score for that region.

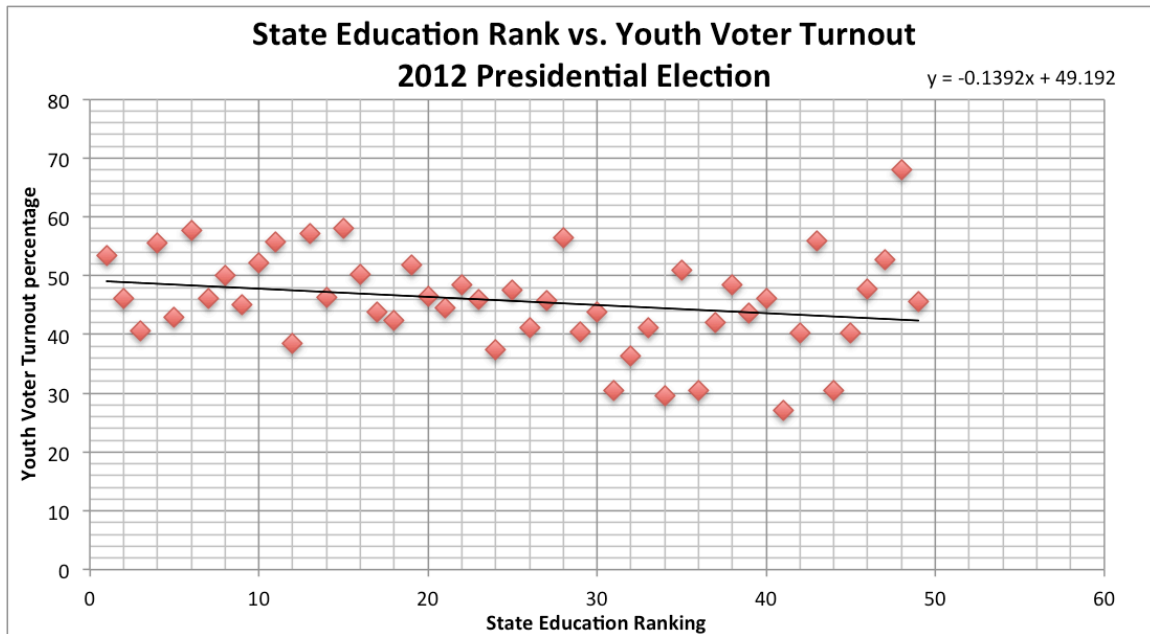
There are 9 different regional groups, determined by the census, that the National Association for Educational Progress uses in reporting their results. The groups were: New England, Middle Atlantic, West North Central, East North Central, South Atlantic, Mountain, Pacific, West South Central, and East South Central. The states in each group were as follows:

- I. New England: Massachusetts, Maine, Rhode Island, Vermont, Connecticut, New Hampshire
- II. Middle Atlantic: New Jersey, New York, Pennsylvania
- III. South Atlantic: Delaware, Maryland, Virginia, West Virginia, North Carolina, South Carolina, Florida, Georgia
- IV. East North Central: Illinois, Indiana, Ohio, Michigan, Wisconsin
- V. West North Central: Iowa, Minnesota, Missouri, North Dakota, South Dakota, Nebraska, Kansas
- VI. East South Central: Alabama, Kentucky, Tennessee, Mississippi
- VII. West South Central: Arkansas, Texas, Louisiana, Oklahoma
- VIII. Mountain: Arizona, Colorado, Montana, New Mexico, Utah, Idaho, Wyoming, Nevada
- IX. Pacific: Alaska, Hawaii, California, Oregon, Washington ("Census Regions and Divisions").

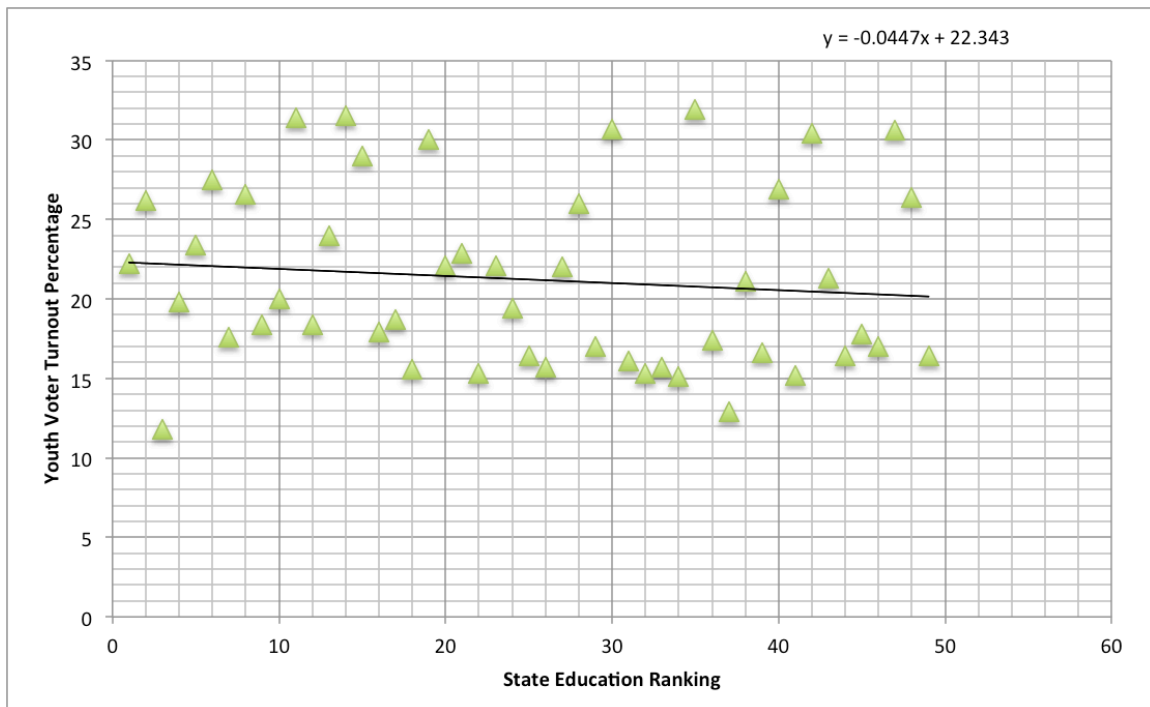
I used the same youth voter turnout data from CIRCLE for this analysis as well.

My hypothesis was that as state ranking of educational quality increased youth voter turnout would be higher, and that the regions with higher average regional civics score would have higher youth voter turnout rates. On pages 34-35 are both of my

spreadsheets for my initial data. I graphed the data and plotted the regression line, which led me to believe that there could be a relationship in both analyses. Below are my graphs from both analyses:

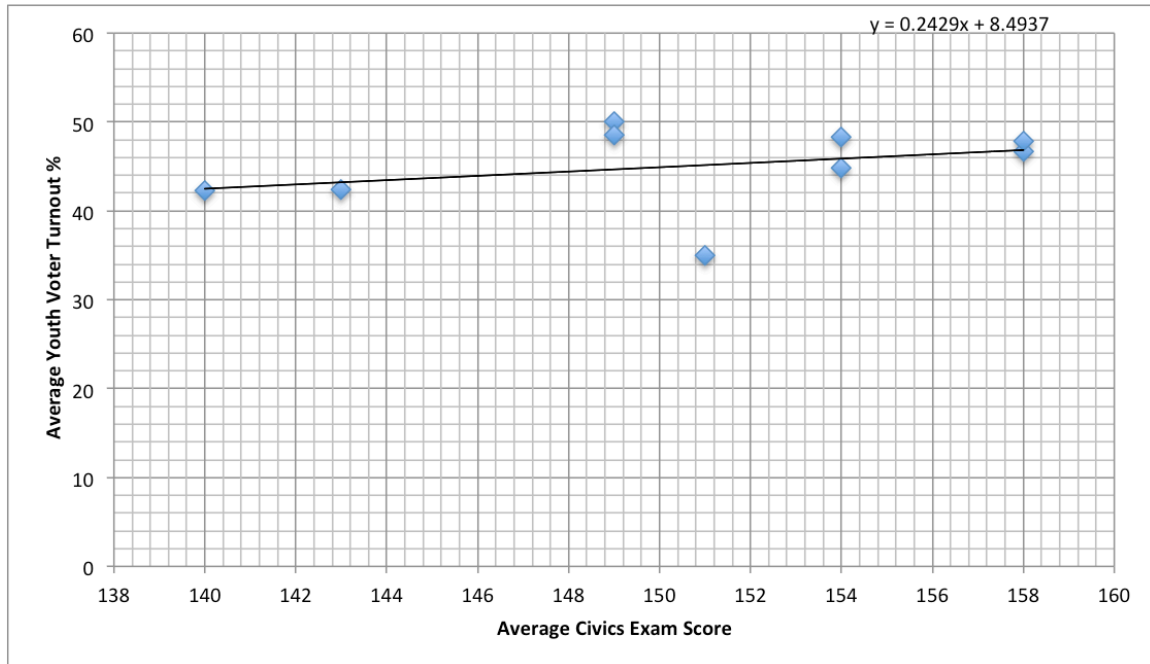


State Education Rank vs. Youth Voter Turnout Midterm Election 2014:





Average Youth Voter Turnout (regional) vs. Average Civics Exam Score (regionally):



For the last graph the youth voter turnout was based on the 2012 election year and the average civics exam scores (since the exam is for 8<sup>th</sup> graders) are from 2006. Those who took the 8<sup>th</sup> grade National Assessment for Educational Progress civics exam in 2006 voted in their first presidential election in 2012.

## Results

After compiling the data, I enlisted the help of my friend Jian to help me run a statistical analysis on my data to see if it was significant, or if there was simply a very small correlation. We set the p value to be 5%. My null hypothesis was that there was no relationship between youth voter turnout (2012, 2014 and average regions) and Educational Ranking or average civics exam scores. We chose an ANOVA analysis since I had more than two groups to compare (50 states). Below are the specific results from our ANOVA analysis.

#RESPONSE VARIABLE: youth voter turnout  
 #INPUT VARIABLES: Quality of civic education

### RESULTS OF LINEAR MODELING AND CORRELATION TESTS:

CORRELATION TESTS: 2012 YOUTH VOTERS & RANKING: p-value: 0.0872  
 (NOT STATISTICALLY Significant, ABOVE 5%)

Residuals:

| Min     | 1Q     | Median | 3Q    | Max    |
|---------|--------|--------|-------|--------|
| -16.400 | -4.093 | -0.036 | 4.552 | 25.569 |

Coefficients:

|             | Estimate | Std. Error | t value | Pr(> t )   |
|-------------|----------|------------|---------|------------|
| (Intercept) | 49.1811  | 2.3249     | 21.15   | <2e-16 *** |
| Ranking     | -0.1386  | 0.0793     | -1.75   | 0.087 .    |

---

Signif. codes: 0 '\*\*\*' 0.001 '\*\*' 0.01 '\*' 0.05 '.' 0.1 ' ' 1

Residual standard error: 8.1 on 48 degrees of freedom

Multiple R-squared: 0.0597, Adjusted R-squared: 0.0401

F-statistic: 3.05 on 1 and 48 DF, p-value: 0.0872 (NOT STATISTICALLY SIGNIFICANT)

CORRELATION TESTS: 2014 YOUTH VOTERS & RANKING= p-value: 0.422  
 (NOT STATISTICALLY Significant, ABOVE 5%)

Residuals:

| Min    | 1Q    | Median | 3Q   | Max   |
|--------|-------|--------|------|-------|
| -10.41 | -4.04 | -1.88  | 4.45 | 11.12 |

Coefficients:

|             | Estimate | Std. Error | t value | Pr(> t )   |
|-------------|----------|------------|---------|------------|
| (Intercept) | 22.3435  | 1.6178     | 13.81   | <2e-16 *** |
| Ranking     | -0.0447  | 0.0552     | -0.81   | 0.42       |

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Signif. codes: 0 '\*\*\*' 0.001 '\*\*' 0.01 '\*' 0.05 '.' 0.1 ' ' 1

Residual standard error: 5.63 on 48 degrees of freedom

Multiple R-squared: 0.0135, Adjusted R-squared: -0.00709

F-statistic: 0.655 on 1 and 48 DF, p-value: 0.422

## REGIONALS VS VOTER TURNOUT

Call: CORRELATION TESTS: 2012 YOUTH VOTERS & AVERAGE RANKING= p-value: 0.304 (NOT STATISTICALLY Significant, ABOVE 5%)

Residuals:

| Min    | 1Q     | Median | 3Q    | Max   |
|--------|--------|--------|-------|-------|
| -8.035 | -1.803 | -0.976 | 2.747 | 5.639 |

Coefficients:

|              | Estimate | Std. Error | t value | Pr(> t )    |
|--------------|----------|------------|---------|-------------|
| (Intercept)  | 48.929   | 3.792      | 12.90   | 3.9e-06 *** |
| Average.Rank | -0.150   | 0.135      | -1.11   | 0.3         |

---

Signif. codes: 0 '\*\*\*' 0.001 '\*\*' 0.01 '\*' 0.05 '.' 0.1 ' ' 1

Residual standard error: 4.6 on 7 degrees of freedom

Multiple R-squared: 0.149, Adjusted R-squared: 0.0279

F-statistic: 1.23 on 1 and 7 DF, p-value: 0.304

Call: CORRELATION TESTS: 2012 YOUTH VOTERS &

Avg.Civics.Score.2006.grade8 = p-value: 0.397 (NOT STATISTICALLY Significant, ABOVE 5%)

Residuals:

| Min     | 1Q     | Median | 3Q    | Max   |
|---------|--------|--------|-------|-------|
| -10.190 | -0.822 | -0.215 | 2.426 | 5.321 |

Coefficients:

|                              | Estimate | Std. Error | t value | Pr(> t ) |
|------------------------------|----------|------------|---------|----------|
| (Intercept)                  | 8.494    | 40.567     | 0.21    | 0.84     |
| Avg.Civics.Score.2006.grade8 | 0.243    | 0.269      | 0.90    | 0.40     |

Residual standard error: 4.72 on 7 degrees of freedom

Multiple R-squared: 0.104, Adjusted R-squared: -0.0237

F-statistic: 0.815 on 1 and 7 DF, p-value: 0.397

I have highlighted my p-values above for ease of understanding.

Unfortunately none of the data sets were statistically significant. However, this does not prove that there is no relationship between education and youth voter turnout. When gathering my data I encountered several problems: finding an objective and comprehensive ranking of states, finding and interpreting the very small amount of data available, not accounting for other factors influencing education, civic engagement, and voter turnout, and not conducting my own independent collection of data.

The state rankings from the Annie E. Casey Foundation were the most comprehensive ones I could find, however they did not address civic education or quality specifically. The standards I listed above (the percentage of children not attending preschool, percentage of fourth graders not proficient in reading, percentage of eighth graders not proficient in math, and the percentage of high school students not graduating on time) do not deal with quality. While quality of teaching and education could influence these factors so could socioeconomic status, whether a student lives in the city, suburbs, or rural area, whether a student has undiagnosed disabilities, the student's race, gender, sexual orientation, parental education and encouragement, family structure, religious beliefs and many others. It would be nearly impossible to be able to be certain that only one factor influences what the Annie E. Casey Foundation used to measure educational quality.

Allowing states to handle their own tests is an excellent way to give power back to individual communities, but a terrible way to allow for collecting easily comparable data across states. The lack of data, and the lack of assessments in civic education is appalling. There are plenty of studies, articles, blogs, and research studies centered on understanding the relationship between education and civic engagement but not a

significant amount of published data. The National Assessment for Educational Progress exams are mandatory for all Title I funded schools but the civics exam is voluntary. This means that there could be a group of students missing from the exam scores. Another problem with the National Assessment for Educational Progress is that their data is reported for public schools only. While many private institutions use the same assessments, the score reporting from the NAEP is only for public schools. Private school students are included in youth voter turnout but are not included in the civics exam scores.

#### The Future of Civics Education Research

Treating youth voters as one equal group is a mistake. Youth voters today are the most diverse group of voters in America (Kawashima-Ginsberg 6). African American and Hispanic youth are less likely to vote, and less likely to be civically engaged (Kawashima-Ginsberg 7). “Attending racially diverse high schools predict lower electoral engagement, and lower levels of informed voting due to the difficulty of discussing controversial issues in such a diverse setting, and feeling discouraged by those who disagree (“All Together Now: Collaboration”). Classrooms that discuss controversial current issues in school and having parental support for controversial discussions diminish the negative relationship between diversity and electoral engagement (“All Together Now: Collaboration”).

The Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement found that sometimes exposure to high quality education can vary by student background: “At 12th grade, Hispanic students were overall less likely to experience current events

discussions, debates, and simulations compared to other racial groups. Parental education and lunch-program eligibility (both indicators of a family's socioeconomic status) were highly predictive of exposure to high quality civic education" (Kawashima-Ginsberg 2). Sadly only 8 states currently include social studies in their school performance assessments, and only 10 states require their government and civics teachers to be certified in government or civics ("All Together Now: Collaboration").

When I began my project I knew collecting original data would be too large of an undertaking for an undergraduate level research project. However, my baker scholars project has created a solid foundation for a future masters or doctoral level study of the civic education crisis. In a more in-depth study I would first clearly define "quality civic education", then rank the school districts in just one state by the quality of their civic education. A comparison of two different states would be interesting as well, but challenging to collect the data. I would collect not only surveys from policy makers, principals, teachers and students, but have in-class exposure, and access to student assessments. This project would need a significant amount of time not only in data collection, but also in getting IRB certified.

### Concluding Thoughts and Remarks

Although my narrow statistical analysis neither clearly proved nor disproved my hypothesis, I found my results interesting and at the same time setting the stage for future research into the relationship between civic engagement and youth voter turnout. In 2015 Philanthropist Frank Islam claimed there were three failures of education system and American civic engagement: a failure of education, a failure of expertise, and a failure of

experience that make up “Citizen Deficit Disorder” (Islam and Crego). In 1930 Eleanor Roosevelt claimed in her essay titled “Good Citizenship: The Purpose of Education”: “In our schools are now given courses in civics, government, economics, current events. Very few children are as ignorant as I once was. But there still remains a vast amount to be done before we accomplish our first objective - informed and intelligent citizens, and secondly, bring about the realization that we are responsible for the trend of thought and action of our times” (Islam and Crego). There is no lack of concern over the years for civic education. The focus on STEM education and the emphasis on testing left behind from the No Child Left Behind policy set civics back significantly (Islam and Crego). When federal government has limited resources, heavily focusing on one area hurts the others, in terms of funding, which later affects their quality. The challenge is identifying the factors that influence young people to vote, and creating effective ways to promote those factors. We already know that receiving higher education makes someone significantly more likely to vote and be more likely to be civically engaged. In the era of social media and celebrity campaigns, the types of student participation can even vary. There are many students who simply post about politics online, yet do not vote, or those who donate to campaigns and do not vote. Simply defining the youth voters as either “involved” or “not involved” is a broad generalization. Is K-12 education the most effective way to promote civic engagement and voting or is there a better route? Statistically larger gains in voter participation are more easily achieved in populations such as Latinos who currently lag behind in this area. Future studies should look at how race and socioeconomic status affects education and civic engagement. Rather than simply stopping at data collection, researchers and policy makers should work together to

get the complete definition of the youth demographic, and be able to make smart, effective policies to change the current problems.

Thankfully there are research organizations like CIRCLE and Tufts University continuing to study these issues in hopes of learning more about the youth voter demographic. My statistically insignificant data does not mean that there is not a relationship between education and youth voter turnout. However, there are many more factors that influence both education and voter turnout (family background, religion, race, socioeconomic status, voter ID laws and registration requirements etc.). It is impossible to separate any one of these factors from education or youth voter turnout when analyzing the data.

As the civic education crisis grows, and national support for civics ebbs and flows, citizens, especially young people, are going to be the victims. When civic knowledge decreases, it is impossible for our government to function properly. Without the government being held accountable, the freedoms that citizens experience will be given up voluntarily without much awareness. It is our responsibility as citizens to increase our own knowledge and help to promote better education for all. Whether the federal or the state government is in control of education with any given piece of legislation, each individual needs to take an interest in the future by increasing his or her civic knowledge and civic engagement.

Social media provides such an incredible platform to raise awareness for issues especially with young voters. Many of them want to be involved but do not believe they have the opportunities, do not actually have the opportunities, and feel civically alienated (Kawashima-Ginsberg 16). If schools took a different approach to reaching the more



diverse, more social generation, there may be more success in the classroom and in civic engagement as a whole. Overhauling our education system sounds daunting, but if each individual recognizes that providing opportunities for others benefits society as a whole, then our government can fully function as it was designed—of the people, by the people, and (most importantly) for the people.







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