

## Civics 101 and Then Some

*“Since the founding of this nation, education and democracy have gone hand in hand. The Founders believed a nation that governs itself, like ours, must rely upon an informed and engaged electorate. Their purpose was not only to teach all Americans how to read and write but to instill the self-evident truths that are the anchors of our political system.” — Ronald Reagan*

*Knowledge of our system of governance and our rights and responsibilities as citizens is not passed along through the gene pool. Each generation of Americans must be taught these basics. Families and parents have a key role to play, yet our schools remain the one universal experience we all have to gain civic knowledge and skills. That is the civic mission of schools. — Justice Sandra Day O’Connor, United States Supreme Court (1981–2006)*

Imagine this. Recent (annual) surveys by the Annenberg Public Policy Center have shown that fewer than half and as few as just 26% (2016) of American adults surveyed could name all three branches of the federal government. That means, statistically, you likely cannot either. Do you know them? They are the Executive, Legislative, and Judiciary branches as laid out in the document that our nation was and remains founded upon, the Constitution.

A lot of what this book is about has to do with common knowledge and education. Civics is the study of the rights and obligations of citizens in society. The term derives from the Latin word **civicus**, meaning "**relating to a citizen**". The term relates to behavior affecting other citizens, particularly in the context of urban development. (*Wikipedia*) A citizen is defined as a native or naturalized member of a state or nation who owes allegiance to its government and is entitled to its protection. ([Dictionary.com](http://Dictionary.com))

Civic education is the study of the theoretical, political and practical aspects of citizenship, as well as its rights and duties. It includes the study of civil law and civil codes, and the study of government, with attention to the role of citizens—as opposed to external factors—in the operation and oversight of government. (*Wikipedia*)

So civics refers to citizens, government, laws, rights and obligations. There is a lot to know and learn here that has to do with our lives as citizens in a nation which we all would rather see prosper than fail. At its core essence, a nation is logically comprised of its citizens whose collective behavior determines a nation’s relative success.

There is an emerging consensus across the many scholars and organizations who work on civic learning that imparting knowledge must be paired with developing civic attitudes and behaviors. For example, CivXNow, (<https://civxnow.org>) a bipartisan coalition of over one hundred organizations argues that civic education must include a focus on:

1. Civic knowledge and skills: where youth gain an understanding of the processes of government, prevalent political ideologies, civic and constitutional rights, and the history and heritage of the above.
2. Civic values and dispositions: where youth gain an appreciation for civil discourse, free speech, and engaging with those whose perspectives differ from their own.
3. Civic behaviors: where students develop the civic agency and confidence to vote, volunteer, attend public meetings, and engage with their communities.

As one of the few social institutions present in virtually every community across America, schools can and should play an important role in catalyzing increased civic engagement. They can do this by helping young people develop and practice the knowledge, beliefs, and behaviors needed to participate in civic life.

The fact that children today across the country wake up in the morning and go to school five days a week for most of the year has everything to do with civic education. The idea of a shared school experience where all young people in America receive a standard quality education is inextricably linked to the development of the United States as a national entity and the development of citizens who had and have the skills and knowledge to engage in a democracy.

<https://www.brookings.edu/policy2020/bigideas/the-need-for-civic-education-in-21st-century-schools/>

There is much to be found online regarding civics and education for those interested. Leaders such as Civix Now, the Center for Civics Education, iCivics.org, and many others clearly state the case for the importance of learning civics in schools and in the home. Millions of dedicated educators across the nation are working to promote and teach the importance of a core knowledge of civics for our society now and for our future, but apparently it is an uphill struggle when only roughly one third of adults cannot even name all three branches of the federal government, which for me personally is quite appalling.

So what is the solution?

The [Center for American Progress](#)—an independent progressive policy institute—analyzed civics courses and requirements in U.S. high schools. To evaluate a state’s civics curriculum, the organization looked at course materials and standards in five areas: explanation or comparison of democracy; the U.S. Constitution and Bill of Rights; public participation; information on state and local voting rules; and media literacy and the role and influence of media.

[The report](#) found: Twenty-six states met all five established curriculum requirements. Thirty states require at least a semester of stand-alone civics courses; eight states and Washington, DC, require a full-year course. Hawaii requires 1.5 credits. The 11 states that have no civics requirements are Alaska, Delaware, Kentucky, Maine, Massachusetts, Montana, Nebraska, New Jersey, Oregon, Rhode Island, and Vermont.

Less than half (40 percent) of states require students to take a civics exam as a graduation requirement.

<https://www.slj.com/story/a-look-at-civics-education-state-by-state>

**Outline:**

Why is a national common basis of knowledge regarding civics important?

Civic Participation and Responsibility

Civic Education in Schools

Public Discourse

Essential Basics Review

Federalism / Republic vs. Democracy / Federalist Papers

The Constitution and Bill of Rights

Division of Power / Checks and Balances

State and Local Governments

Two Party system and why so-called third parties struggle to gain hardly any traction in our political system

Regarding Electoral College Reform

Can easily be far more democratic by changing the winner take all electors system to the Nebraska and Maine system

Regarding Election Reform

Why do we need electronic (computer) voting machines? Hacking Democracy, Kill Chain... 2020 election, voter I.D., transparency, holiday (Veteran's Day?),

Regarding Campaign Finance Reform

Issue of 1st Amendment and S.C. decision in Citizens United, which should be overturned, IMHO.

Fiscal responsibility, deficit spending, the national debt, the Federal Reserve, inflation and potential threat of currency collapse / hyperinflation...why it is important for citizens who vote to be aware of this essential aspect of our nation's economy and future.

Significant references:

[https://production-carnegie.s3.amazonaws.com/filer\\_public/ab/dd/abdda62e-6e84-47a4-a043-348d2f2085ae/ccny\\_grantee\\_2011\\_guardian.pdf](https://production-carnegie.s3.amazonaws.com/filer_public/ab/dd/abdda62e-6e84-47a4-a043-348d2f2085ae/ccny_grantee_2011_guardian.pdf)