

We the People: The Citizen and the Constitution
Knowledge of and Support for American Democratic
Institutions and Processes by Participating Students
National Finals 2004

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I. Executive Summary

We the People: The Citizen and the Constitution is an educational program developed by the Center for Civic Education. The program instructs students on the history and principles of American constitutional democracy with the primary goal of promoting civic competence and responsibility among the nation's elementary, middle, and secondary students. Additionally, the instructional program is intended to enhance students' understanding of the institutions of American constitutional democracy and to reinforce the contemporary relevance of the U.S. Constitution and the Bill of Rights. The program utilizes highly acclaimed curricular materials developed by the Center.

At the high school level, classes can choose to enter a formal competition, advancing from congressional district and state competitions to national finals. The competition is structured as a simulated congressional hearing in which students' knowledge of the Constitution and American democratic institutions is tested, allowing students an opportunity to apply the knowledge they have acquired through the curriculum and to strengthen their analytical skills in a practical way.

In the spring of 2004, a survey was given to students participating in the national finals competition of the **We the People: The Citizen and the Constitution (We the People)** Program to assess its impact on student knowledge of and support for democratic institutions and processes. The survey instrument, designed by the Center, incorporated questions previously administered to high school seniors, college freshman, and/or adults in various national surveys. This report compares the scores and responses of **We the People** students to the relevant national sample.

The findings of this study reveal that students participating in the national finals competition of the **We the People** program possess significantly more knowledge of American democratic institutions and processes than the average American. Compared to a representative national sample of high school students surveyed by the 1998 National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) civics assessment, **We the People** national finalists, as a group, are more knowledgeable in *every* category of civic knowledge delineated in the survey, outperforming nonparticipating students on *every* survey question. Several questions were answered correctly by over 90% of **We the People** students. Overall, **We the People** seem to possess a more comprehensive knowledge of American civics and government, and demonstrate a superior ability to reason and make inferences from text than the representative national samples.

In the knowledge section, the mean test performance for **We the People** students was 19 questions correct out of 23, compared to a mean of 12 correct out of 23 for the national sample. Ninety-two percent of **We the People** students outperformed students who took the NAEP test. In a battery of five open-ended-response questions derived from the American Nation Election Studies, 62.7% of **We the People** students answered all five questions correctly, whereas only 16.5% of a corresponding national sample of adults and 8.1% of high school students scored similarly. Nearly four times as many **We the People** students in comparison with a nationally representative sample of adults answered all five questions correctly. **We the People** were also eight times more likely to answer all questions correctly when compared with high school students in the national sample. These results strongly suggest that the **We the People** program has an extremely positive effect on student learning.

Various longitudinal studies have shown that political interest and support is declining among America's youth (Sax, Astin, Korn, and Mahoney 1997). The Center's study found that students who participate in the national finals competition of the **We the People** program show less cynicism toward facets of American politics and government than a corresponding national sample of students possessing similar sociodemographic qualities. In addition, compared with a representative national sample of college freshman, **We the People** students assign much more importance to keeping track of political affairs, influencing the political structure, participating in community leadership, helping others in difficulty, and developing a meaningful philosophy of life. From these findings, it can be inferred that students who participate fully in the **We the People** program are more likely than nonparticipating students to become active, engaged, and compassionate citizens, as well as to develop a greater propensity to support democratic institutions and processes. Ninety-five percent of **We the People** students either *Mostly Agreed* or *Strongly Agreed* that the program increased their knowledge of democratic institutions, and nearly three-fourths of students either *Mostly Agreed* or *Strongly Agreed* that the **We the People** program increased their support for democratic institutions.

II. Introduction and Purpose of Survey

We the People: The Citizen and the Constitution is an educational program developed by the Center for Civic Education on the history and principles of American constitutional democracy with the primary goal of promoting civic competence and responsibility among the nation's elementary, middle, and secondary students.

Additionally, the instructional program is intended to enhance students' understanding of

the institutions of American constitutional democracy and to reinforce the contemporary relevance of the U.S. Constitution and the Bill of Rights. The program utilizes highly acclaimed curricular materials developed by the Center. At the high school level, classes may choose to enter a formal competition, advancing from congressional district and state competitions to national finals. The competition is structured as a simulated congressional hearing in which students' knowledge of the Constitution and American democratic institutions is tested, allowing students an opportunity to apply the knowledge they have acquired through the curriculum and to strengthen their analytical skills in a practical way. During the past 17 years, more than 82,000 teachers have taught the **We the People** curriculum to more than 26,500,000 students. In 2003, two million students participated in the program.

Past studies have shown that students who used the curriculum “significantly outperformed comparison students” on every topic studied (Educational Testing Service 1988, 1990, 1991). For example, a random sample of 900 high school students who studied the **We the People** curriculum outperformed 280 college sophomores and juniors enrolled in political science courses at a major university. The **We the People** students excelled in every topic area on almost every test item (Educational Testing Service 1988, 1990, 1991). Another study found that **We the People** high school students develop a stronger attachment to political beliefs, attitudes, and values essential to a functioning democracy than most other students and adults (Brody 1994).

In 2004, a survey was given to students participating in the national finals competition of the Center's **We the People** program. The survey was designed to assess the impact of the program on student knowledge of and support for democratic

institutions and processes. Students who compete in the national finals have, as a whole, participated in all levels of the program and have shown extraordinary mastery of the **We the People** curriculum. Consequently, the Center's survey is designed to measure the impact of the program on these students.

III. Sampling and Methodology

Each spring, the Center for Civic Education conducts a national finals competition for the fifty-one classes that had won their state competition and earned the right to compete in Washington, D.C. The classes, one from each state and the District of Columbia, studied the Center's *We the People: The Citizen and the Constitution* text to prepare arguments for these simulated congressional hearings. Twenty-four of the 51 classes that competed at the 2004 national finals were randomly selected to participate in the survey. Of those, a total of 17 classes completed the survey (N = 316). Teachers administered the survey in classrooms during May and June, after participating in the annual national competition.

Survey Instrument

The survey instrument utilizes items drawn from several widely used surveys and tests and was designed by the Center to measure political knowledge and support for democratic institutions and processes, as well as to canvass students for feedback on the program itself. The survey consists of 65 open- and close-ended questions (see Attachment A) culled from various national surveys. All questions on the Center survey have been used by at least one national survey and administered to high school seniors,

college freshman, and/or adults. For this study, responses of **We the People** students were compared to respondents' answers on the appropriate national survey from which the question was taken. This report compares the percentage of correct responses by **We the People** students with those of the relevant national sample. The survey also contains two open-ended questions seeking student feedback on their experiences with the program.

It should be noted that the **We the People** students surveyed for this report represent a select, non-representative sample of often high-achieving students. Their results, however, will be compared to various representative national samples. Thus, the analyses of these comparative results are merely suggestive and not generalizable to a larger population.

IV. We the People versus NAEP

Political knowledge is a prerequisite for engaged citizenship and political participation because citizens must possess enough knowledge to effectively and responsibly participate in the political process. Previous studies have shown that young adults are less politically knowledgeable than older adults (Delli Carpini and Keeter 1996:159), while older adults are themselves surprisingly ignorant of many facets of American government (Niemi and Junn 1998:9a). However, our survey results from the **We the People** civic education program indicate that program participants are on their way to becoming informed, engaged, and politically active citizens.

Questions 1 through 23 of the **We the People** survey measure levels of political knowledge. They have been selected from public-release items from the 1998 National

Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) civics assessment that evaluated student knowledge and understanding of U.S. government and politics. NAEP is an ongoing, congressionally mandated project sponsored by the National Center for Education Statistics of the U.S. Department of Education. The project assesses the educational achievements of American students in a variety of fields, including civics. The 1998 NAEP civics assessment surveyed 7,763 twelfth-grade students, a statistically representative sample of the entire nation.

The percentage of correct responses of **We the People** students were compared to the responses of high school seniors in the nationally representative sample from the 1998 NAEP assessment. As noted earlier, the **We the People** sample represents a group of students who have excelled in the program and advanced to the national finals competition, whereas NAEP is a representative sample of all students in the United States (hereafter in this section called the national sample).

The questions were broken down into five categories, each of which address knowledge of a specific area of civic education: the general rights of citizens; state and local government; political systems, parties, and interest groups; basic structure and functioning of the U.S. government; and the ability to reason and make inferences from text. It must be noted that on every question, **We the People** students outscored the national sample; in several questions the difference was over 30 percentage points.

A. Knowledge of the General Rights of Citizens

In each of the five questions that address the general rights of citizens, **We the People** students significantly outperformed the national sample. The question on which

the two groups performed most comparably pertained to the First Amendment and the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and the similarity in performance can likely be attributed largely to the fact that the text of the question hinted at the correct answer (the title of the document, Universal Declaration of Human Rights, identifies the only reasonable answer). Both groups performed quite well on the question.

The percentage differences between the scores of **We the People** students and those of the national sample are quite dramatic for the remaining questions, however. Seventy-six percent of **We the People** students and only 30% of the national sample correctly answered a question requiring students to recognize that the Supreme Court's power to overturn unconstitutional laws is an example of how the U.S. government attempts to limit the power of majorities. **We the People** significantly outperformed the national sample because the program teaches them explicitly about the Supreme Court and the influence of its decisions on everyday life, including the fact that one function of the Supreme Court is to assess the constitutionality of laws that may infringe on the rights of minorities.

A large majority of **We the People** students, 94%, knew that the Framers of the Constitution wished to limit the power of majorities in order to protect the rights of individuals and minorities, compared to just 72% of the national sample. Both groups performed well on this question, though nearly all of the **We the People** students answered this question correctly because of the program's emphasis on the underlying philosophy of the Constitution, including the limits written into it to protect minority rights. On a question concerning foreign policy and Article 22 of the 1948 United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights, **We the People** students outscored the

national sample by 34%. This was a challenging question requiring students to not only be familiar with the document but also with opposing issues pertaining to national sovereignty.

Knowledge of General Rights of Citizens (percentage correct)	WTP	NAEP	Difference
Contrary to the time of the <i>Lochner</i> ruling, it is now generally accepted that the government should take some actions to defend the health and safety of workers.	77%	61%	16%
The Supreme Court's power to overturn unconstitutional laws is an example of the U.S. government's limit on majorities.	76%	30%	46%
The Framers of the Constitution wanted to limit the power of majorities in order to protect the rights of individuals and minorities.	94%	72%	22%
The First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution and Article 22 of the U.N. Universal Declaration of Human Rights, 1948, show a common concern for individual rights.	86%	76%	10%
The Universal Declaration of Human Rights has been opposed by some Americans because of fear that international agreements will force the U.S. to act in ways not consistent with its interest.	82%	48%	34%

B. Knowledge of State and Local Government

Both groups were skilled at inferring from a graph the reason why local governments employ more people than do state or federal governments (93% and 83% respectively). However, the most significant difference in scores resulted from three questions based on a map of the congressional districts of Louisiana. Students were asked to examine the map and deduce the number of districts that should exist and what determines the size of a district.

On one question, students were asked which governmental body decides the congressional district boundaries in Louisiana: while only 53% of the national sample answered this question correctly, 76% of **We the People** students did so because the **We the People** program examines constitutional issues in-depth. As part of the curriculum, students specifically learned that the authority of the state legislatures to draw the district boundaries is a power derived from the Supreme Court decision *Baker v. Carr*.

Another question asked for the best explanation for why there may be more than seven congressional districts in Louisiana in 2002. Eighty-five percent of **We the People** students answered this correctly compared to 59% of students from the national sample. **We the People** students performed dramatically better on this question because a correct answer requires the knowledge that Article I of the U.S. Constitution mandates that the House of Representatives be proportionally represented and a census be completed every ten years to determine the number of districts and representatives in each state.

When asked to choose the best explanation for the size of one of Louisiana’s smallest districts: seventy-seven percent of **We the People** students answered this question correctly as opposed to 47% of the national sample. The answer to the previous question indicates that the population of a congressional district determines its size; therefore, the only reasonable answer to this question is that the congressional district includes an urban area with a concentrated population.

Knowledge of State and Local Government (percentage correct)	WTP	NAEP	Difference
The graph shows that local governments employ more people than do state or federal governments. This is because local governments meet the direct needs of so many people in so many different places.	93%	83%	10%
A state’s legislature determines its congressional	76%	53%	23%

district boundaries.			
A state's increase in population that is proportionally larger than that of other states is likely to increase the number of its congressional districts.	85%	59%	26%
A congressional district occupying a relatively small area may indicate that it includes a large urban area.	77%	47%	30%

C. Knowledge of Political Systems, Parties, and Interest Groups

In this category, **We the People** students showed their superior knowledge, scoring significantly higher than the national sample in each question except for one, which generated the least difference between the two groups in the entire survey. Ninety-seven percent of **We the People** students and 90% of the national sample were able to identify the American Association of Retired Persons (AARP) as an interest group that would be concerned about the Social Security program. Almost everyone in both groups answered this question correctly because the answer is implied in the question: the social security program is a program for retired citizens—a fact that dictates that the only reasonable answer is the AARP.

In a series of three questions regarding two types of electoral systems—the single-member district and proportional representation—**We the People** students did not score nearly as well, though still scoring significantly higher than the national sample. These three questions were the most difficult in the survey. Rather than basing their answers on simple facts, respondents were required to apply their knowledge of abstract political theory, a major component of the **We the People** curriculum. Respectively, 74%, 71%, and 60% of **We the People** students correctly responded to each of the three questions, while only 46%, 39%, and 40%, respectively, of the national sample did so.

Additionally, **We the People** students significantly outscored the national sample on a question involving the Constitutional Convention. While 89% of **We the People** students knew that the Connecticut Compromise declared that Congress would have two houses, one in which state representation was based on population and one in which all states had equal representation, only 55% of the national sample were able to answer this question correctly. **We the People** students significantly outperformed the national sample because they specifically learn the constitutional basis behind proportional and equal representation in the houses of Congress.

Knowledge of Political Systems, Parties, and Interest Groups (percentage correct)	WTP	NAEP	Difference
The American Association of Retired Persons would be most concerned about and opposed to severe cutbacks in the Social Security program.	97%	90%	7%
Countries with proportional representation systems tend to have more political parties than those with single-member districts because they do not have to win a majority of the vote.	74%	46%	28%
In proportional representation systems, the legislature is more representative of the popular vote; therefore, it is better than a single-member district system.	71%	39%	32%
The best argument in favor of single-member district systems is that voters make choices based on individual candidate qualifications rather than party affiliations.	60%	40%	20%
Congress has two houses, one in which state representation is based on population and one in which all states have equal representation. This was outlined in the Connecticut Compromise.	89%	55%	34%

D. Knowledge of the Basic Structure and Functioning of the U.S. Government

Three questions tested knowledge of the basic structure and functioning of the U.S. government. Ninety-five percent of **We the People** students correctly responded that the Bill of Rights was primarily designed to limit the power of the federal government,

compared to just 65% of the national sample. As part of their curriculum, **We the People** students learn extensively about the Constitutional Convention including the main objections of Anti-Federalists to the Constitution—that it did not adequately protect individual rights nor prevent the government from abusing its power.

We the People students did not perform as well on the other two questions, although they still greatly outscored the national sample. Seventy-five percent of **We the People** students correctly answered a question about which part of government has the most authority in U.S. foreign policy, compared to 45% of the national sample. To answer this question, it helps to know that the Constitution stipulates that Congress has authority in foreign policy through the power of the purse and the power to declare war, although the executive branch has gained greater authority over foreign policy over the last fifty years. Additionally, 76% of **We the People** students, versus only 31% of the national sample, knew that most bills introduced in the House of Representatives are never sent by committee to the full House. Many more **We the People** students answered this question correctly because it requires knowledge of the inner workings of the House of Representatives, including the relative difficulty of getting bills to the floor in the absence of bipartisan support.

Knowledge of the Basic Structure and Functioning of the U.S. Government (percentage correct)	WTP	NAEP	Difference
While Congress and the courts have some authority over foreign policy, the president and the state department have the greatest authority.	75%	45%	30%
The primary purpose of the Bill of Rights was to limit the power of the federal government.	95%	65%	30%
Most of the bills introduced in the House of Representatives are never sent by committees to the full House.	76%	31%	45%

E. Ability to Reason and Make Inferences from Text

On each question in this section, **We the People** students significantly outscored the national sample. On two questions testing students' understanding of a quote by Judge Learned Hand, 94% of **We the People** students answered the first question correctly, while 96% did so on the second question. When we compare to the national sample, which answered 69% and 59%, respectively, we find differences of 25% and 37%. **We the People** students understood that the protection of rights is not just a duty of government—that it is also the duty of the people to actively participate in the political process, thus providing a check against the government's possible infringement of individual rights. Only 58% of the national sample demonstrated understanding of a quotation of John Locke, whereas 83% of **We the People** students recognized its meaning, resulting in a difference of 25%. To answer this question, students need to know the basics of Lockean political philosophy: the **We the People** curriculum teaches students about natural rights philosophy and its influence on the founding fathers.

In three questions that referred to the 1905 Supreme Court Case, *Lochner v. New York*, students were asked to interpret the majority opinion and Justice Harlan's dissenting opinion. On all three questions, the national sample failed to score above 35% (30%, 25%, and 35%, respectively), while **We the People** students scored 73%, 68%, and 59%. This resulted in discrepancies of 43%, 43%, and 24%, respectively. These questions required students to analyze the effect of the Supreme Court's decision in *Lochner*, as well as to understand the meaning of the majority and dissenting opinions in the case. The last question required analysis of both Justice Peckham's majority opinion, which emphasizes judicial activism, and Justice Harlan's dissenting opinion emphasizing

judicial restraint, both with implications on the power of the states and the federal government.

Ability to Reason and Make Inferences from Text (percentage correct)	WTP	NAEP	Difference
“Individual liberties depend on citizens committed to the protection of those liberties” best summarizes Judge Learned Hand’s argument about the state of the American democracy.	94%	69%	25%
Judge Learned Hand believed it was most important that citizens protect their freedoms through political participation.	96%	59%	37%
Limited government power is a principle articulated by John Locke’s quote about the “ends of society and government.”	83%	58%	25%
The U.S. Supreme Court ruled in <i>Lochner v. New York</i> that the law limiting the numbers of hours people could work was unconstitutional.	73%	30%	43%
The principle that government should play as small a role as possible in civil society and the economy is directly consistent with the reasoning behind the <i>Lochner</i> ruling.	68%	25%	43%
In <i>Lochner</i> , Peckham argues for judicial activism to limit government power while Harlan argues for judicial restraint but a more active role by government.	59%	35%	24%

F. Overall Summary

We the People students scored higher on every knowledge question than the representative national sample of high school students. Their superior knowledge of American government, as evinced by their higher percentage of correct responses to every question, reflects the detailed curricular content of the program that instructs students in political processes, the nature and history of democratic institutions, and the U.S. Constitution. The average percentage of correct responses for the entire section of knowledge questions for **We the People** students is 81%, compared to 53% of the

national sample. The mean of correct responses for **We the People** students is 19 out of 23 total questions, while the mean of correct responses for the national sample is 12 out of 23. Ninety-two percent of participants outperformed nonparticipants as tested by NAEP. On average, **We the People** students outscored nonparticipants by a total of seven questions. The largest discrepancies occurred on questions dealing with specific provisions of the U.S. Constitution and its effect on political affairs, such as the power of the Supreme Court and the basis for proportional and equal representation in Congress. Both groups scored the lowest on the most difficult questions about proportional or single-member districts: in these, students were asked to apply abstract political theory. Still, the **We the People** students outscored the national sample dramatically on these questions. The results of the survey show that **We the People** students know more than students in the national sample about civics and government in every aspect of civic education tested by the NAEP items.

V. We the People versus Adults: More Knowledge Questions

Five open-ended questions on the **We the People** survey were derived from the American National Election Studies (ANES), a collection of national surveys conducted annually since 1952. Funded by the National Science Foundation, ANES are designed to present data on issues such as Americans' enduring political positions, social and political values, and participation in political life. Each study contains information culled from interviews conducted with 1,000 to 2,000 respondents, aged from 18 to more than 80. The samples are representative of the major regions of the contiguous United States as designed by the U.S. Census Bureau.

The open-ended questions were chosen because Delli Carpini and Keeter (1989:304-6) suggest that this five-item index has strong construct validity and is an excellent measurement to gauge political knowledge. Responses of **We the People** students were compared to the 1991 NES sample. Students in the **We the People** program outscored the national sample of adults on all five questions.

Five Item Knowledge Index (percentage correct)	WTP	1991 NES (age 18-80+)
The job or political office held by Dick Cheney	93%	74%
Judicial review	95%	66%
Veto override percentage	83%	34%
Party control of the house	81%	68%
Party ideological location	90%	57%

These same five questions were asked of 9th-12th grade students and their parents in 55,708 randomly selected households for the 1996 National Household Education Survey (NHES). NHES is a large national study of adults and youth conducted by Westat for the National Center for Education Statistics of the U.S. Department of Education. The results were reported in Niemi and Junn's (1998a) *The Civic Development of 9th through 12th Grade Students in the United States: 1996*.

Comparing the responses of **We the People** students to those of 9th-12th grade students and their parents, **We the People** students easily outperformed both the students and adults of the national sample. In fact, 62.7% of **We the People** students answered all five questions correctly while only 8.1% of the national sample of high school seniors and 16.5% of the national sample of their parents did the same.

Correct answers Range 0 to 5	WTP students (mostly 12 th grade)	9 th -12 th grade students, from the NHES	NHES parents
0 correct	0.6%	24.2%	16.0%
1 correct	1.6%	24.9%	15.7%
2 correct	2.8%	16.5%	16.2%
3 correct	6.0%	14.8%	16.8%
4 correct	25.9%	11.5%	18.8%
5 correct	62.7%	8.1%	16.5%

VI. We the People and Monitoring the Future: Political Attitudes

Questions 24-28 and 31 of the **We the People** survey were designed to measure students' attitudes toward American politics. The questions were taken from Johnston, Bauchman, and O'Malley's (1997) *Monitoring the Future: A Continuing Study of American Youth* (MTF) as part of a survey administered to approximately 16,200 high school seniors. Begun in 1975, the MTF annual surveys explore changes in values, behaviors, and lifestyle orientations of contemporary American youth. MTF is funded by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services and the National Institute on Drug Abuse.

Of the **We the People** students surveyed, 69% identified themselves as being white, and approximately 94% responded that they intended to go to a four-year college or college and graduate school. Because of the vast majority of national finalists are white and college-bound, we compared them to white, college-bound respondents on the MTF survey (N = 917).

The questions in the MTF survey measure cynicism by addressing a number of different ways to participate in the political process. Across all five questions, **We the People** students expressed less cynicism than the white, college-bound national sample of students. For example, when asked whether government officials are crooked or

dishonest, 62.8% of the national sample opined that all or the majority are crooked or dishonest while only 18.4% of **We the People** students responded similarly. **We the People** students also report higher levels of trust that the federal government is “doing what is right” some or a majority of the time. The most striking difference in responses concerned opinions on government spending of tax money: only 20.6% of **We the People** students, versus 62.2% of the national sample, thought that most or all tax money is wasted.

Question	WTP	MTF
All or most people running the government are crooked or dishonest.	18.4%	62.8%
Very or somewhat confident that people running the government know what they are doing.	71.8%	60.2%
All or most tax money is wasted.	20.6%	62.2%
Can trust government in Washington to do what is right all or a majority of the time.	53.5%	33.3%
Government is mostly or always run for the benefit of all people.	26.9%	13.1%

Note: Differences between students is highly significant at Pearson Chi-square $p < .001$

When asked whether government is run for a few big interests or for the benefit of all people, more **We the People** students felt that the government is always or mostly run for the benefit of the people, though this was still the area where **We the People** students displayed the most cynicism. Less than 15% of the national sample and 30.4% of **We the People** students agreed with the statement that “government is pretty much run by a few big interests looking out for themselves.” Students in general are less cynical than adults: seventy percent of adults agreed with the statement in annual surveys from 1990-97.

We the People students and students in the national sample were questioned regarding their intent to participate in certain political activities, such as registering to vote, donating to a political candidate or cause, working in a political campaign,

participating in a lawful demonstration, and boycotting products or stores. **We the People** students were more likely than students in the national sample to declare that they will participate in any given political activity. In virtually all of the measures questioned, **We the People** students were significantly more likely than white college-bound students in the national sample to declare that they will participate or have already participated in all types of political activities measured in the MTF survey.

Question	WTP	MTF
Will or have already registered to vote	96.2%	95.6%
Will or have already written to a public official	62.9%	43.6%
Will or have already donated to a political candidate or cause	44.1%	18.8%
Will or have already worked in a political campaign	44.0%	14.6%
Will or have already participated in a lawful demonstration	52.6%	25.8%
Will or have already boycotted certain products or stores	46.6%	34.1%

While nearly all students in both groups said that they have or will register to vote, differences emerge in other types of political activity. A larger percentage of **We the People** students say they have contacted or will contact public officials. Also, a significantly higher percentage of **We the People** students (39%) say they have worked or are willing to work on a political campaign than the national sample (14.6%). The significant difference between **We the People** students and the national sample is demonstrated in the question regarding willingness to contribute to political campaigns: more than 44% of **We the People** students reported having donated or would be willing to donate to a political campaign, compared to just 18.8% of the national sample. Additionally, more than half of the **We the People** students say they have participated or

will participate in a lawful demonstration compared to a little more than a quarter of the national sample. Seventy-six percent of **We the People** students reported having “a lot” or “a very great interest” in government and current events, and 70% discuss politics frequently. These findings indicate that **We the People** students are more politically engaged in every regard than the representative national survey, and suggest that the **We the People** program motivates students to become politically informed and active in civic life.

VII. We the People versus American College Freshman

The Higher Education Research Institute at University of California, Los Angeles publishes an annual report entitled, *American Freshman: National Norms* (Sax, Astin, Korn, and Mahoney 1997). These reports are based on surveys of freshmen attending colleges and universities. The data shown below are taken from the **We the People** sample and from the thirty-second *American Freshman: National Norms* for the Fall 1997 report, published in December 1997. The survey encompassed 252,082 students at 464 of the nation’s two- and four-year colleges and universities. The data were adjusted by the Higher Education Research Institute to reflect the responses of the 1,610,000 first-time, full-time students entering college in 1997.

In 1996, keeping current with political affairs was considered very important or an essential aspect of life by 57.8% of students nationwide. By 2001, that had dropped to 31.4%. In 2001, only 19% of American college freshmen responded that it was very important or essential to influence the political structure. As shown by the *Freshman* surveys, political interest is on a decline in the American young adult population. It is

encouraging that, according to the Center survey, participants in the **We the People** program conceived of citizenship as active and engaged.

Keeping abreast of political affairs and a knowledge about the political structure are essential in an effective citizen. Without these skills, citizens are neither able to fully understand the political issues affecting their lives, nor to effectively promote change. Eighty-three percent of **We the People** students and 31% of American freshman found it either very important or essential to keep abreast of political affairs, while 65% of **We the People** students and only 19% of American freshman thought it very important or essential to influence the political structure.

Objectives Considered Essential or Very Important	WTP	Freshmen 2001
Keep up to date with political affairs	82.9%	31.4%
Influence the political structure	64.6%	19.0%
Be very well off financially	56.9%	73.6%
Develop a meaningful philosophy of life	85.7%	43.1%
Become a community leader	56.7%	32.0%
Help others who are in difficulty	88.0%	61.4%

Compared to American freshmen nationally, **We the People** students place less value on wealth and place more importance on developing a meaningful philosophy of life, becoming a community leader, and helping others in difficulty. **We the People** students have a positive attitude toward political institutions.

VIII. Student Feedback on the We the People Program

In our survey, we asked students to provide written feedback on the **We the People** program. Specifically, one question asks students to describe whether and how participating in the program increased their knowledge of democratic institutions. Ninety-

four percent of students noted that their knowledge of democratic institutions has increased as a result of their participation. Overwhelmingly, students offered very positive feedback, indicating that the program had not only increased their knowledge of civics and government, but also positively affected their desire to learn more about politics. For instance, one student from Montana remarked, “I have developed a greater understanding of our system of government and an appreciation for the complexity of our constitution. It has also given me a larger perspective of global politics.” A Pennsylvania student commented, “I have learned a great deal of information not only on the structure of our government, but also details on current events that apply to those basic principles.” A student from Hawaii noted, “It has helped me become more patriotic and passionate about my constitutional rights and duties,” An Illinois student commented, “I have a much greater appreciation for the depth of seemingly simple issues. I have gained firsthand experiences that allow me to appreciate the difficulty of making policy, and have learned much more than I ever thought possible in a school setting.”

Another question of the survey asked students whether participating in the program increased their support for democratic institutions and to describe their experience. Seventy-four percent of all respondents agreed that the program helped increase their support of democratic institutions. A student from Nevada remarked: “The program has taught me the benefits and flaws of our system, which inspires me to participate.” A student from Florida wrote, “My support for democratic institutions has increased because I have learned that while, as Locke explained, man is devoted to his own self-interest, the structure of governmental institutions helps protect the will of the people—their health, safety, and welfare—in the best way possible, by assuring that no

one party/person gains too much power.” A Pennsylvania student even remarked, “Now that I am more aware, I feel obligated to take part in American government processes.”

IX. Conclusion

This report was designed to measure political knowledge and support for democratic institutions and processes among students participating in the **We the People: The Citizen and the Constitution** program administered by the Center for Civic Education. Classes that compete in the program’s national finals have received the most in-depth exposure to the materials. Therefore, these students were surveyed to evaluate the effectiveness of the program.

Measures included here show that high school seniors who participate in the **We the People** program are better informed in every aspect of political knowledge measured than national samples of high school seniors, college freshmen, and adults. Knowledge and skills gained through program participation both empower students and strengthen American democracy, which relies on at least a minimally informed public (Delli Carpini and Keeter 1996). Furthermore, **We the People** students are far less cynical about American politics and government than a corresponding national sample of high school seniors, resulting in higher political participation.

These findings, as well as students’ own written feedback, suggest that participants in the **We the People** program have far more positive attitudes toward democratic institutions than do other high school seniors, college students, and adults. Increased knowledge can help young citizens analyze decisions made by government officials and help them to make informed decisions. The survey shows that this

knowledge increases their support for American government and its institutions. Many students noted that the political knowledge amassed from the **We the People** program increased their political engagement and created a more positive attitude toward democracy. Also, meeting and interacting with officials who were willing to make personal sacrifices to serve their government, helped students to acknowledge the value of being engaged in political affairs and supporting the government. As one student from Florida eloquently stated, “Through this program, I have become more aware of the value of America’s democratic institutions and diverse branches of government. I have seen the different institutions interact to balance majority rule with minority rights. I have also become aware of the importance of sowing the seeds of these institutions, for, as stated by James Bryce, ‘No government demands so much of its citizens as democracy...and none gives back so much.’” The survey suggests that participants of the **We the People** program emerge better prepared for citizenship, with knowledge, skills, and attitudes that promote full participation in the political process.

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Attachment A (Survey Instrument)



We the People *The Citizen and the Constitution*

Directed by the Center for Civic Education
Funded by the U.S. Department of Education by act of Congress



Student Questionnaire

This questionnaire is part of an evaluation of the *We the People: The Citizen and the Constitution*.

Your opinions will provide us with important information. Please answer ALL questions as thoughtfully and frankly as possible. Your answers will be kept strictly confidential. Please use a dark pen or pencil to completely fill in the bubbles that correspond with your responses and PRINT in the spaces provided. Thank you!

Question 1 refer to the quotation below.

"Absolute arbitrary power, or governing without settled laws, can neither of them be consistent with the ends of society and government." - John Locke

1. Which of the following statement is most consistent with the Locke quotation above?
 - a. Weak government is worse than no government.
 - b. Government power should be limited.
 - c. Laws should never be changed.
 - d. Only wise people can exercise power.
2. Which statement about the making of United States foreign policy is accurate?
 - a. State governments, through their ability to negotiate independent trade agreements, have preeminent authority in making foreign policy.
 - b. The Senate, because of its power of treaty ratification, has more power in setting foreign policy than does the president.
 - c. The Supreme Court, because it can rule on the constitutionality of executive actions, dominates foreign policy.
 - d. Congress and the courts have some authority over foreign policy, but the president and the state department have the greatest authority.
3. The primary purpose of the Bill of Rights was to
 - a. limit the spread of slavery in the United States
 - b. limit the power of the federal government
 - c. establish judicial review
 - d. allot specific powers to the states
4. Imagine that Congress is considering severe cutbacks in the Social Security program. Which of the following national interest groups would be most concerned about and opposed to such a policy?
 - a. Mothers Against Drunk Drivers
 - b. American Association of Retired Persons
 - c. National Association for the Advancement of Colored People
 - d. American Bar Association

Question 5-6 refer to the quotation below.

I often wondered whether we do not rest our hopes too much upon constitutions, upon laws and upon courts. These are false hopes; believe me, these are false hopes. Liberty lives in the hearts of men and women; when it dies there, no constitution, no law, no court can save it. - Judge Learned Hand, 1941

5. Which of the following best summarizes Judge Hand's argument about constitutional democracy in the United States?
 - a. Constitutions are a serious obstacle to individual liberties.
 - b. Constitutions allow governments to disregard individual liberties.
 - c. Individual liberties depend on citizens committed to the protection of those liberties.
 - d. Individual liberties can only be safeguarded by a written constitution and an independent judiciary.
6. It can be concluded from the quotation that Judge Hand believed it was most important that citizens
 - a. vote for candidates who support their views.
 - b. rely on the courts to safeguard their rights.
 - c. amend the Constitution whenever necessary.
 - d. protect their freedoms through political participation.
7. What happens to most of the bills introduced in the House of Representatives?
 - a. They become laws.
 - b. They are passed but then vetoed by the president.
 - c. They are passed by the House but not by the Senate.
 - d. They are never sent by committees to the full House.

Questions 8-11 refer to the passages below, taken from the Supreme Court's majority opinion and Justice Harlan's dissent in the case of *Lochner v. New York* (1905). In this case, the state of New York had passed a law that limited the number of hours that an employee of a bakery could work to no more than sixty hours a week. *Lochner* was a baker who challenged the constitutionality of the law in the courts.

The statute necessarily interferes with the right of contract between the employer and employees.... The general right to make a contract...is part of the liberty of the individual protected by the Fourteenth Amendment.... Under that provision, no State can deprive any person of life, liberty, or property without due process of law. The right to purchase or sell labor is part of the liberty protected by this amendment...

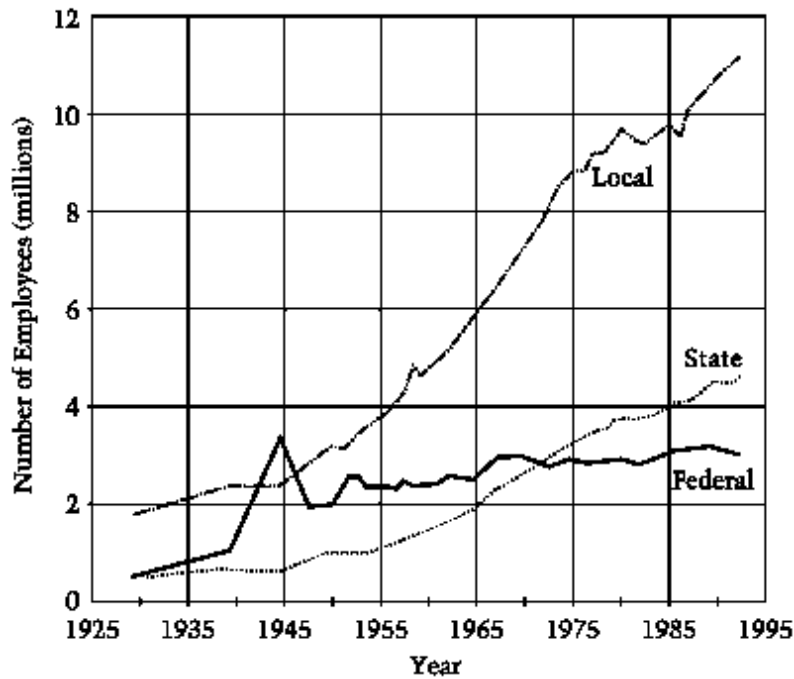
- Justice Peckham, delivering the majority opinion of the Court

It is plain that this statute was enacted in order to protect the physical well-being of those who work in bakeries.... The statute must be taken as expressing the belief of the people of New York that, as a general rule, labor in excess of sixty hours a week...may endanger the health of those who thus labor.... Our duty, I submit, is to sustain the statute as not being in conflict with the Federal Constitution.

- Justice Harlan, in his dissenting opinion

8. What was the effect of the Supreme Court decision in the case of *Lochner v. New York*?
- The power to regulate working hours and conditions was given to the courts.
 - The federal government alone could interfere with the right to make contracts.
 - The law limiting the number of hours people could work was allowed to stand.
 - The law limiting the number of hours people could work was ruled unconstitutional.
9. What is one way that political attitudes toward government regulation have changed since the decision in the *Lochner* case?
- Government today is largely unwilling to regulate private contracts.
 - The federal government no longer applies the Fourteenth Amendment to state laws.
 - It is generally accepted that the government should take some actions to defend the health and safety of workers.
 - It is generally accepted that the government should play a role in enforcing contracts, but not in trying to influence their content.
10. Which of the following arguments supports the majority decision?
- The law should be applied to all people equally, without regard to race, creed, or color.
 - Government should play as small a role as possible in civil society and the economy.
 - The Supreme Court should never overturn state laws, since these tend to reflect the will of the majority.
 - There are times when the government will know what is best for individuals, even though the individuals may not agree.
11. Which of the following is the best way to summarize the difference between the two opinions?
- Peckham argues for judicial activism to limit government power; Harlan argues for judicial restraint, but for a more active role by government.
 - Peckham argues that legislatures have a role to play in civil society; Harlan argues that such a role should be reserved only for the courts.
 - Peckham emphasizes the power of the states; Harlan emphasizes the power of the federal government.
 - Peckham emphasizes the power of the legislatures; Harlan emphasizes the power of the courts.
12. At the Constitutional Convention, there was a major debate between large states and small states about representation in the new Congress. This debate was resolved by the Connecticut Compromise, which said that
- the number of citizens in a state would determine how many seats that state had in Congress, but slaves and other noncitizens would not be counted for this purpose.
 - Congress would have two houses in which the number of seats a state had in each house was based on its population.
 - Congress would have two houses, one in which state representation was based on population and one in which all states had equal representation.
 - Congress would be made up of two houses in which all states had an equal number of representatives in each house.

NUMBER OF FEDERAL, STATE, AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT EMPLOYEES, 1929-1992



13. Which statement helps to explain the data presented in the graph above?
- Federal government has been growing much faster than state or local governments because increasing numbers of people rely on the federal government for different services.
 - Local governments employ more people than do state or federal governments because local governments meet the direct needs of so many people in so many different places.
 - State governments employ fewer people than do local governments because state governments are run much more efficiently than are local governments.
 - Federal, state, and local governments have increased at the same rates over a 70-year period because the system of federalism divides responsibilities among different levels of government.

Questions 14-15 refer to the statement below.

The United States is not a fully democratic country. The framers of the Constitution created a system in which majorities, even large majorities or their representatives in Congress, do not have the right to do anything and everything they want.

14. Which aspect of the American system of government shows one of the limits on the power of majorities discussed above?
- The ability of Congress to override presidential vetoes.
 - The Supreme Court's power to overturn unconstitutional laws.
 - The right of Congress to impeach presidents and federal judges.
 - The ability of people in many states to vote public initiatives into law.
15. The Framers of the Constitution wanted to limit the power of majorities in order to
- encourage the growth of political parties.
 - ensure that state governments would remain weak.
 - enable the government to act quickly in times of crisis.
 - protect the rights of individuals and minorities.

Questions 16-18 refer to the descriptions below of two different electoral systems.

Most democratic countries elect legislatures through one of two types of electoral systems:

- 1.) single-member district
- 2.) proportional representation.

In single-member district systems, citizens in specific areas vote for candidates who represent their districts.

In proportional representation systems, citizens in the country vote for political parties. Parties are then awarded seats in the legislature proportionate to the percentage of the vote they have won. In other words, if a party wins 20 percent of the vote, it receives 20 percent of the seats in the legislature.

16. Why will countries with proportional representation systems tend to have more political parties than those with single-member district systems?

- a. Only large countries tend to use proportional representation systems, and these countries naturally have more parties.
- b. Countries with proportional representation systems tend to be more sharply divided along ethnic and regional lines, and many parties tend to arise as groups struggle to defend their interests.
- c. Parties in proportional representation systems do not have to win a majority of the vote in any district, so it is easier for smaller parties to gain representation in the legislature.
- d. Countries with proportional representation systems tend to have constitutions that mandate the existence of more than three political parties.

17. Which of the following is the best argument that a proportional representation system is better than a single-member district system?

- a. In proportional representation systems, elected representatives will be more likely to actively defend the interests of the regions they were elected to represent.
- b. In proportional representation systems, the balance of power in the legislature is more representative of the popular vote.
- c. Proportional representation systems tend to be less bureaucratic.
- d. Proportional representation systems are more likely to promote strong majorities in legislatures.

18. Which of the following is the best argument that a single-member district system is better than a proportional representation system?

- a. Voters should make choices about individual candidates, as they do in single-member district systems, rather than simply vote for a party.
- b. Single-member district systems lead to stronger political parties, which are good for democracy.
- c. Single-member district systems are better at representing the interests of minorities.
- d. Voters will make wiser choices if they focus on national issues, as they do in single-member district systems, rather than on local issues, as they tend to do in proportional representation systems.

Questions 19-20 refer to the two documents below.

Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the government for a redress of grievances.

- First Amendment to the United States Constitution

Everyone, as a member of society, has the right to social security and is entitled to realization, through national effort and international cooperation and in accordance with the organization and resources of each State, of the economic, social and cultural rights indispensable for his dignity and the free development of his personality.

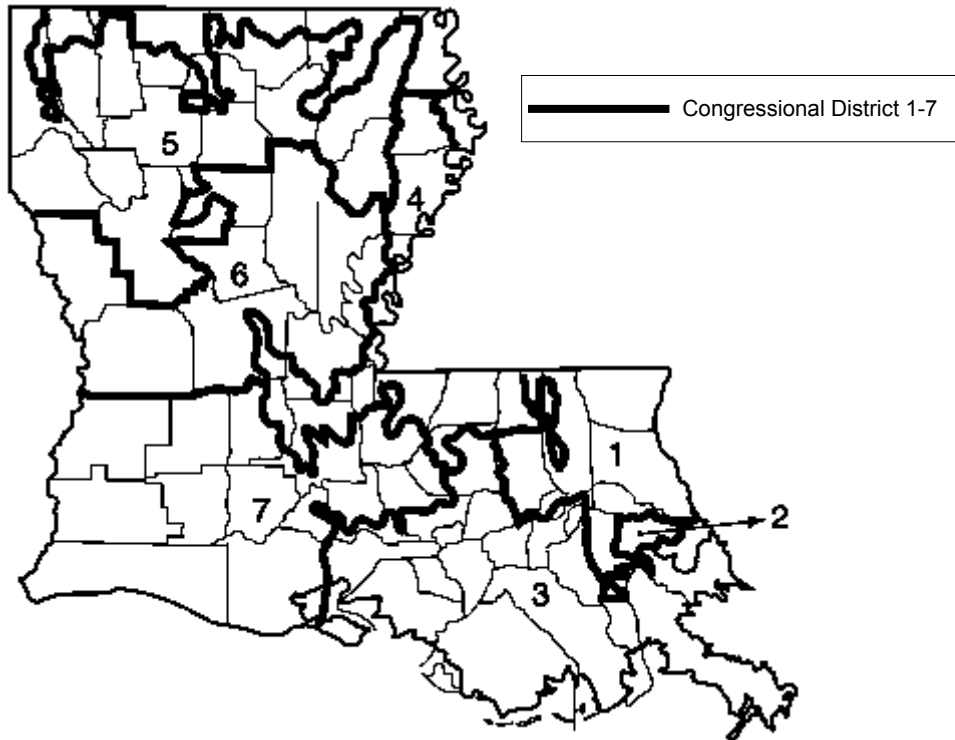
- Article 22 of the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights, 1948

19. The two documents show a common concern for

- a. free speech.
- b. economic rights.
- c. individual rights.
- d. group rights.

20. Why have documents such as the United Nations Universal Declaration been opposed by some citizens in the United States?

- a. Some people fear that international agreements will force the United States to act in ways not consistent with its national interest.
- b. Americans see economic equality as more important than individual liberty.
- c. Some people believe that the government should be free to limit speech and assembly rights where necessary.
- d. Most people do not believe that there are universal human rights.



Questions 21-23 refer to the map above, which shows congressional districts in Louisiana. The numbers on the map refer to congressional districts.

21. The congressional district boundaries shown on the map were probably drawn by the
- state constitutional convention
 - United States Congress
 - Federal Election Commission
 - Louisiana state legislature
22. Which of the following would best explain why there may be more than seven congressional districts in Louisiana in the year 2002?
- The state legislature votes to increase the number of representatives to give the state more decision-making power.
 - The year 2000 census indicates that the population of Louisiana increased proportionately more than that of other states.
 - The Supreme Court decides to increase the number of representatives in all southern states.
 - Citizens of Louisiana vote yes on a referendum to increase the number of representatives in Congress.

23. From the map, you can conclude that congressional district 2 must
- include a large urban area.
 - have fewer people than the other districts.
 - have been drawn to protect an incumbent.
 - be a very old congressional district.

YOUR OPINIONS

24. What do you think about the people running the government?
- All of them are crooked or dishonest.
 - A majority are crooked or dishonest.
 - About half are crooked or dishonest.
 - Very few are crooked or dishonest.
 - None are crooked or dishonest.
25. How much tax money do you think is wasted?
- All of the tax money is wasted.
 - Most of the tax money is wasted.
 - About half of the tax money is wasted.
 - Very little of the tax money is wasted.
 - None of the tax money is wasted.

26. How much of the time do you think you can trust the government in Washington to do what is right?

- a. All the time
- b. A majority of the time
- c. About half the time
- d. Seldom
- e. Never

27. How confident are you that the people running the government know what they are doing?

- a. Very confident
- b. Somewhat confident
- c. Neutral
- d. Seldom confident
- e. Not at all confident

28. Would you say the government is run for a few big interests looking out for themselves, or is it run for the benefit of all people?

- a. Always run for a few big interests
- b. Mostly run for a few big interests
- c. Half for big interests; half for the people
- d. Mostly run for the benefit of the people
- e. Always run for the benefit of the people

29. Now we would like you to rate how good or bad a job the following organizations are doing for the country as a whole. Please mark the circle that best describes how you feel about each organization.

- a. National news media
- b. President and administration
- c. Congress
- d. Supreme Court
- e. Courts and justice system
- f. Police and law enforcement
- g. U.S. military

	r o o p y r e v	r o o p	r i a F	d o o G	d o o g y r e v	n o i p o o N
a.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
b.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
c.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
d.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
e.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
f.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
g.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

31. Some people think about what's going on in government very often, and others are not that interested. How much of an interest do you take in government and current events?

- a. No interest at all
- b. Very little interest
- c. Some interest
- d. A lot of interest
- e. A very great interest

32. How often do you discuss politics:

- a. Frequently
- b. Occasionally
- c. Not at all

30. Below are questions about the government in Washington. Many people don't know the answers. If there are some you don't know please leave them blank and go on to the next question. For the ones you know please print your answer clearly in the spaces provided.

- a. What job or political office is held by Dick Cheney? _____
- b. Whose responsibility is it to determine if a law is constitutional: the president, the Congress, or the Supreme Court? _____
- c. How much of a majority is required for the U.S. Senate and House of Representatives to override a presidential veto? _____
- d. Which party had the most members in the House of Representatives in Washington in 2003? _____
- e. Which of the parties is more conservative than the other at the national level? _____

33. Have you ever done, or do you plan to do, the following things?

- a. Register to vote
- b. Vote in a public election
- c. Write to public officials
- d. Donate to political candidate or cause
- e. Work in a political campaign
- f. Participate in a lawful demonstration
- g. Boycott certain products or stores

o d t' n o W	o d l l i W	y d a e r l A	d e d i c e d n U
f	f	f	f
f	f	f	f
f	f	f	f
f	f	f	f
f	f	f	f
f	f	f	f
f	f	f	f

34. Please indicate the importance to you of each of the following:

- a. Keeping up to date with political affairs
- b. Influencing the political structure
- c. Being well-off financially
- d. Developing a meaningful philosophy of life
- e. Becoming a community leader
- f. Helping others who are in difficulty

l a i t n e s s E	t r o p m l y r e V	t a h w e m o S	t r o p m l t o N
f	f	f	f
f	f	f	f
f	f	f	f
f	f	f	f
f	f	f	f
f	f	f	f

35. Has participating in the **We the People: The Citizen and the Constitution** program increased your knowledge of democratic institutions?
Please describe.

y l g n o r t S	g A y l t s o M	r e h t i e N	i D y l t s o M	y l g n o r t S
f	f	f	f	f

36. Has participating in the program increased your support for democratic institutions?
Please describe.

y l g n o r t S	g A y l t s o M	r e h t i e N	i D y l t s o M	y l g n o r t S
f	f	f	f	f

About You

37. Year you were born: _____
38. What is your sex? Male Female
39. How do you describe yourself?
- Black or African American
 - Mexican American or Chicano
 - Puerto Rican
 - Other Latin American
 - Asian American
 - White (Caucasian)
 - Native American
 - Other
40. Highest level of education of your parents:
- | | Mother | Father |
|------------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| Grade school or less | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Some high school | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| High school | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Some college | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| College degree (BA or BS) | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Graduate/professional degree | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
41. State in which you live: _____
42. Your high school GPA:
- 4.0-3.5
 - 3.49-3.0
 - 2.99-2.5
 - 2.49-2.0
 - 1.99-below
43. Which of the following things might you do after completing high school?
(Mark all that apply)
- Attend a technical or vocational school
 - Serve in the armed forces
 - Graduate from a two-year college program
 - Graduate from a four-year college
 - Attend graduate or professional school after college

Thank you for your participation.

