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## ABSTRACT

This brochure presents highlights from "What Democracy Means to Ninth-Graders: U.S. Results from the International IEA Civic Education Study," a report that analyzes the U.S. results of the 1999 International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement (IEA) Civic Education Study, Phase 2. The study was designed to assess the civic knowledge of 14-year-old students across 28 countries. This brochure contains briefs of the results on the following topics: "The Civic Achievement of U.S. Students in International Perspective"; "The School and Classroom Context of Civic Knowledge"; "The Demographic, Socioeconomic, and Out-of-School Context of Civic Knowledge"; "Concepts of Democracy, Citizenship, and Government"; "Attitudes of U.S. Students toward National and International Civic Issues"; and "Current and Expected Activities Related to Politics." (Contains seven figures.) (BT)

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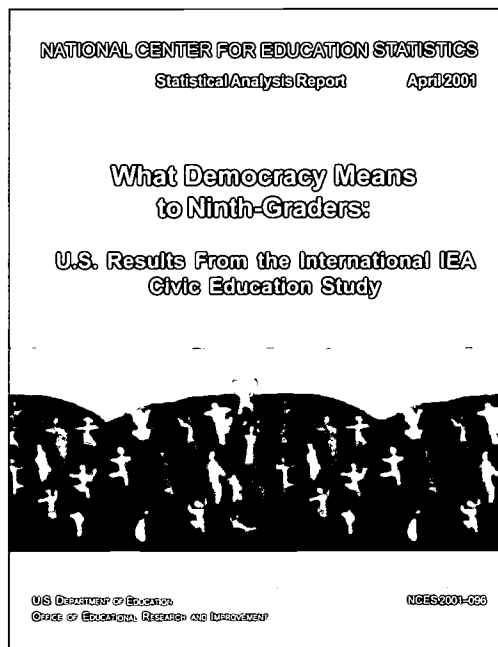
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## ighlights of U.S. Results From the International IEA Civic Education Study (CivEd)

In 1999, the United States participated with 27 other countries in the IEA Civic Education Study (CivEd), an international assessment designed to tap the civic knowledge and skills of 14-year-olds and their attitudes toward democracy and citizenship. The assessment followed a series of case studies conducted in several countries; both were conducted under the auspices of the International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement (IEA).

The National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), the sponsor for the study in the United States, presents the results from the national analyses in the report *What Democracy Means to Ninth-Graders: U.S. Results From the International IEA Civic Education Study* (Baldi et al., 2001). The report is intended to inform education practitioners, policymakers, parents, and concerned citizens of the status of civic education in the United States today. This brochure is based on the results from this report.

In the United States, the assessment was administered to 2,811 students across 124 public and private schools nationwide at the beginning of ninth grade, the grade in which most 14-year-olds were enrolled at the time of the assessment (October 1999). The assessment was not designed to measure knowledge of a particular country's government but instead was developed through expert consensus to measure knowledge and understanding of key civic principles that are universal across democracies. Figure 1 provides the list of countries participating in the CivEd assessment.



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**Figure 1.—Countries participating in the CivEd Assessment**

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Australia	Finland	Portugal
Belgium (French)	Germany	Romania
Bulgaria	Greece	Russian Federation
Chile	Hong Kong (SAR)	Slovak Republic
Colombia	Hungary	Slovenia
Cyprus	Italy	Sweden
Czech Republic	Latvia	Switzerland
Denmark	Lithuania	United States
England	Norway	
Estonia	Poland	

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SOURCE: Torney-Purta, J., Lehmann, R., Oswald, H., and Schulz, W., 2001. *Citizenship and Education in Twenty-Eight Countries: Civic Knowledge and Engagement at Age Fourteen*. Amsterdam: The International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement (IEA).

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CivEd consisted of three instruments: a student questionnaire, a school questionnaire, and a teacher questionnaire. Five types of items were developed for the student questionnaire:

- Civic content items (Type 1) assessed knowledge of key civic principles and pivotal ideas (e.g., key features of democracies) measured by multiple-choice items.
- Civic skills items (Type 2) assessed skills in using civic-related knowledge through multiple-choice items (e.g., understanding a brief political article or a political cartoon).
- Survey items measured students' concepts of democracy, citizenship, and government (Type 3); attitudes toward civic issues (Type 4); and expected political participation (Type 5).

Additional survey questions assessed students' perceptions of the climate of the classroom and other background variables.

The school questionnaire, completed by the principal, contained questions designed to gather information on the school's general environment, such as size, length of school year, and characteristics of the student body. The school questionnaire also asked questions designed to provide a picture of the way civic education is delivered through the curriculum and school-sponsored activities, as well as the number of staff involved in teaching civic-related subjects. Additionally, a teacher questionnaire was administered. However, because the organization of civic education and the role of civic education teachers in U.S. schools differ from those of many other countries in the study, results from the teacher questionnaire were not analyzed in the U.S. report.

### The civic achievement of U.S. students in international perspective

The civic achievement of students in all 28 countries was measured by a total civic knowledge scale composed of two subscales: a civic content subscale and a civic skills subscale. Civic content refers to knowledge of content, such as characteristics of democracies, and civic skills refer to the interpretative skills needed to understand civic-related information (e.g., the skills needed to make sense of a newspaper article or a political cartoon).

- U.S. ninth-graders scored significantly above the international average on the total civic knowledge scale. Furthermore, in no other country did students significantly outperform U.S. students (figure 2).

**Figure 2.—Average civic achievement of ninth-grade students, by scale and nation: 1999**

Total Civic Knowledge		Civic content	
<i>Nation</i>	<i>Average</i>	<i>Nation</i>	<i>Average</i>
(none)		Poland	112
Poland	111	Greece	109
Finland	109	Finland	108
Cyprus	108	Cyprus	108
Greece	108	Hong Kong (SAR)	108
Hong Kong (SAR)	107	Slovak Republic	107
<b>United States</b>	<b>106</b>	Italy	105
Italy	105	Norway	103
Slovak Republic	105	Czech Republic	103
Norway	103	<b>United States</b>	<b>102</b>
Czech Republic	103	Hungary	102
Hungary	102	Slovenia	102
Australia	102	Russian Federation	102
Slovenia	101	Denmark	100
Denmark	100	Australia	99
Germany	100	Germany	99
Russian Federation	100	Bulgaria	99
England	99	Sweden	97
Sweden	99	Portugal	97
Switzerland	98	England	96
Bulgaria	98	Switzerland	96
Portugal	96	Belgium (French)	94
Belgium (French)	95	Estonia	94
Estonia	94	Lithuania	94
Lithuania	94	Romania	93
Romania	92	Latvia	92
Latvia	92	Chile	89
Chile	88	Colombia	89
Colombia	86		
International Average	100	International Average	100
		Civic skills	
		<i>Nation</i>	<i>Average</i>
		(none)	
		<b>United States</b>	<b>114</b>
		Finland	110
		Cyprus	108
		Australia	107
		Poland	106
		Greece	105
		Italy	105
		England	105
		Hong Kong (SAR)	104
		Slovak Republic	103
		Norway	103
		Czech Republic	102
		Sweden	102
		Switzerland	102
		Hungary	101
		Germany	101
		Denmark	100
		Slovenia	99
		Russian Federation	96
		Belgium (French)	96
		Bulgaria	95
		Portugal	95
		Estonia	95
		Lithuania	93
		Latvia	92
		Romania	90
		Chile	88
		Colombia	84
		International Average	100

Average is significantly higher than the U.S. average.  
 Average does not differ significantly from the U.S. average.  
 Average is significantly lower than the U.S. average.

SOURCE: IEA Civic Education Study, Standard Population of 14-Year-Olds Tested in 1999.

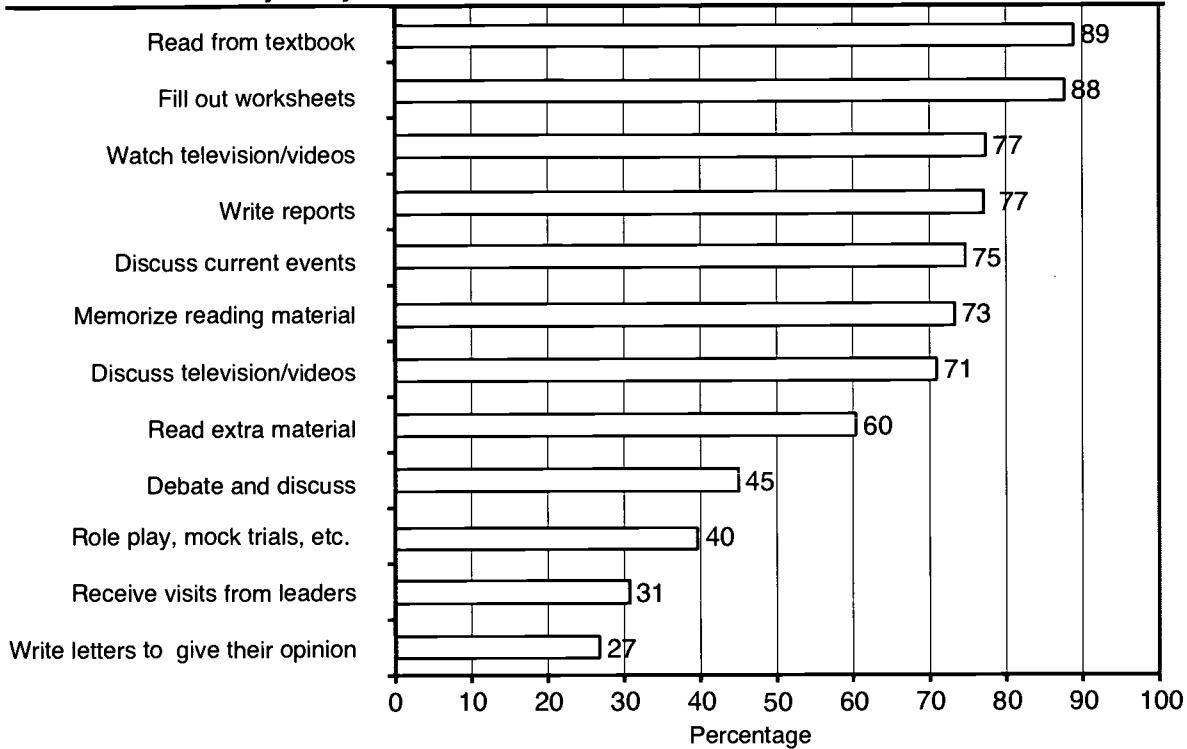
- U.S. students' average scores on the civic content subscale did not differ significantly from the international mean. Students in six countries performed better than U.S. students on this subscale (figure 2).
- U.S. students performed significantly higher than the international mean on the civic skills subscale and also performed significantly higher than students in every other country participating in CivEd (figure 2).
- Overall, the results indicate that ninth-grade U.S. students performed well when compared with students in the other 27 participating countries.

### The school and classroom context of civic knowledge

- In 1999, 70 percent of U.S. schools with a ninth grade reported having a ninth-grade civic-related subject requirement.
- In 55 percent of U.S. schools, principals reported that ninth-grade students are required to take 5 to 6 periods a week in civic-related subjects such as social studies, history, or civics.
- Sixty-five percent of students reported studying social studies in school almost every day. However, 12 percent of students reported never or hardly ever studying social studies in school.
- The majority of U.S. ninth-graders typically spent less than 1 hour a week on social studies homework.
- Students who studied social studies in school almost every day had higher scores on all three civic achievement scales than students who studied social studies once or twice a week or even less frequently.
- Students in low-poverty schools (with a low percentage of children eligible for the free or reduced-price lunch program) outperformed students in high-poverty schools.
- Students in U.S. schools were more likely to study domestic civic issues than international civic issues.
- U.S. students were more likely to report reading a textbook or filling out worksheets when studying social studies than engaging in activities such as receiving visits from leaders or writing letters to give their opinion (figure 3).
- Eighty-five percent of students reported being encouraged by teachers to make up their own minds about issues, and about two-thirds reported being encouraged by teachers to discuss political or social issues about which people have different opinions.



**Figure 3.—Percentage of ninth-grade U.S. students reporting doing various activities when they study social studies: 1999**



SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Civic Education Study (CivEd), 1999.

### The demographic, socioeconomic, and out-of-school context of civic knowledge

- White and multiracial students scored higher, on average, than black and Hispanic students on the content and skills subscales and on the total civic knowledge scale. In addition, Asian students scored higher than black students on all three civic achievement scales, and higher than Hispanic students on the content subscale (figure 4).
- Female students scored higher, on average, than male students on the skills subscale, but there were no differences between males' and females' average scores on the content subscale or on the total civic knowledge scale (figure 4).
- Performance on the CivEd assessment was positively related to the number of books that students reported having in their home, as well as to the receipt of a daily newspaper (figure 4).
- Students' civic achievement was also positively related to their parents' educational attainment (figure 4).

**Figure 4.—Ninth-grade U.S. students' average civic achievement scores, by selected demographics and home characteristics: 1999**

	Percentage	Total civic knowledge	Civic content	Civic skills
<b>Sex</b>				
Male	49.0	105.6	101.7	111.1
Female	51.0	107.5	102.3	116.3
<b>Race/ethnicity</b>				
White	63.4	111.6	106.5	118.4
Black	12.8	92.7	89.8	100.2
Hispanic	13.7	97.1	92.9	106.0
Asian	3.9	109.4	104.5	116.2
Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander	***	***	***	***
American Indian/Alaska Native	***	***	***	***
Multiracial	3.5	109.1	104.4	115.5
<b>Number of books in the home</b>				
0–10	8.6	90.7	88.0	97.4
11–50	21.6	99.0	94.6	108.3
51–100	22.2	104.9	100.2	113.2
101–200	19.6	111.5	106.3	118.6
More than 200	28.0	115.3	110.5	120.1
<b>Receives a daily newspaper</b>				
Yes	58.0	109.7	104.8	116.3
No	42.0	102.5	98.3	110.3
<b>Parents' highest level of education</b>				
Elementary or less	4.7	91.0	88.2	98.1
Some high school	6.1	94.5	90.2	105.1
Finished high school	19.6	101.4	97.0	109.9
Some vocational/technical education	7.8	107.4	102.2	116.1
Some college	27.0	108.9	104.0	116.3
Completed a bachelor's degree	34.9	118.7	113.4	123.1

\*\*\* Sample size is insufficient to permit a reliable estimate.

NOTE: Percentages may not add to 100 because of rounding.

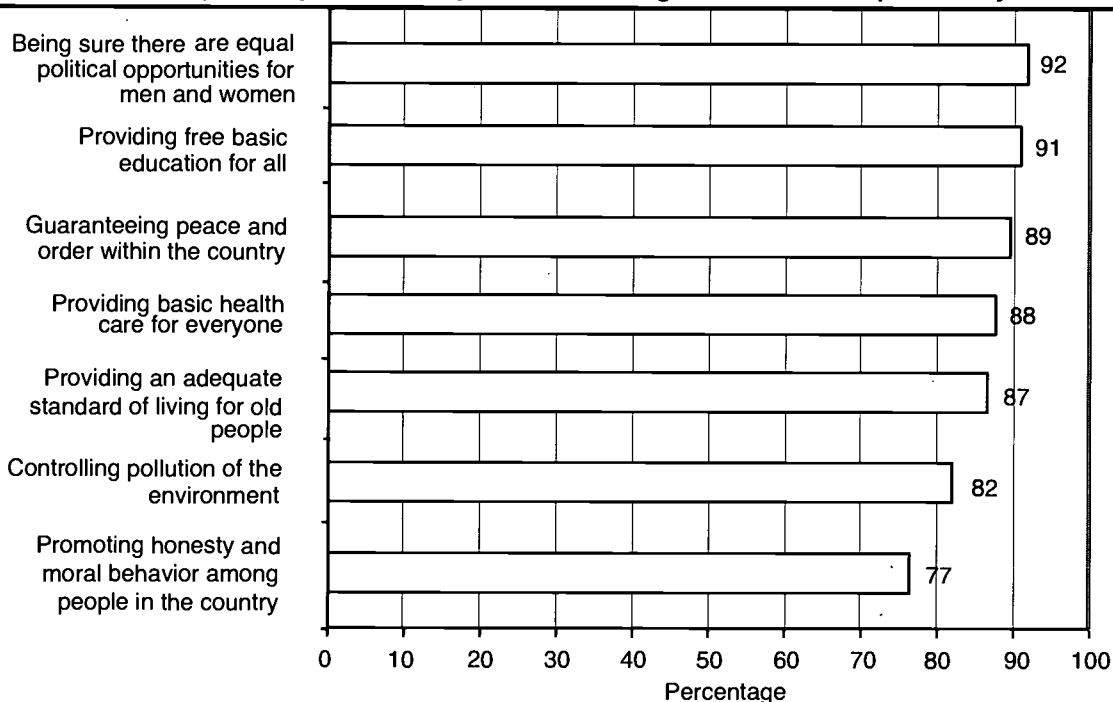
SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Civic Education Study (CivEd), 1999.

- Students born in the United States demonstrated a higher civic knowledge, on average, than foreign-born students.
- Students who had higher expectations for their own continued education also did better on the CivEd assessment.
- Students who reported that they were not absent from school at all during the month prior to the CivEd assessment scored higher, on average, on the civic assessment than students who reported being absent 3 or more days during the month prior to the assessment.
- Students who participated in meetings or activities sponsored by any type of organization, even if they participated only a few times a month, had higher civic knowledge than students who did not participate at all.
- Although participation in extracurricular activities sponsored by a school or community organization was positively related to civic achievement, the frequency of participation was not.
- On average, students who engaged in nonschool activities directly related to academics did better on the CivEd assessment than their peers who did not.

## Concepts of democracy, citizenship, and government

- About 90 percent of ninth-grade U.S. students reported that it is good for democracy when everyone has the right to express opinions freely.
- Approximately 80 percent of U.S. students reported that voting in every election and showing respect for government leaders were important factors in being good citizens.
- Eighty-nine percent of ninth-grade U.S. students thought that it was important for a good citizen to participate in activities to help people in the community.
- Ninth-grade U.S. female students were more likely than their male peers to report social movement-related activities, such as promoting human rights and protecting the environment, as important.
- U.S. students reported average scores higher than the international mean on the importance of conventional citizenship scale and the importance of social movement-related scale but lower than the international mean on the economy-related government responsibilities scale.
- Eighty-four percent of ninth-graders said that the government should be responsible for keeping prices under control.
- Fifty-nine percent of U.S. ninth-graders said that it was the responsibility of the government to provide an adequate standard of living for the unemployed.
- Asian and black U.S. ninth-graders were significantly more likely than their white peers to report that the government should be responsible for economy-related issues.
- Between 87 and 92 percent of U.S. ninth-graders said that the government should be responsible for ensuring equal political opportunities for men and women, providing free basic education and health care for all, guaranteeing peace and order within the country, and providing an adequate standard of living for old people (figure 5).

**Figure 5.—Percentage of ninth-grade U.S. students reporting that various society-related actions probably or definitely should be the government’s responsibility: 1999**



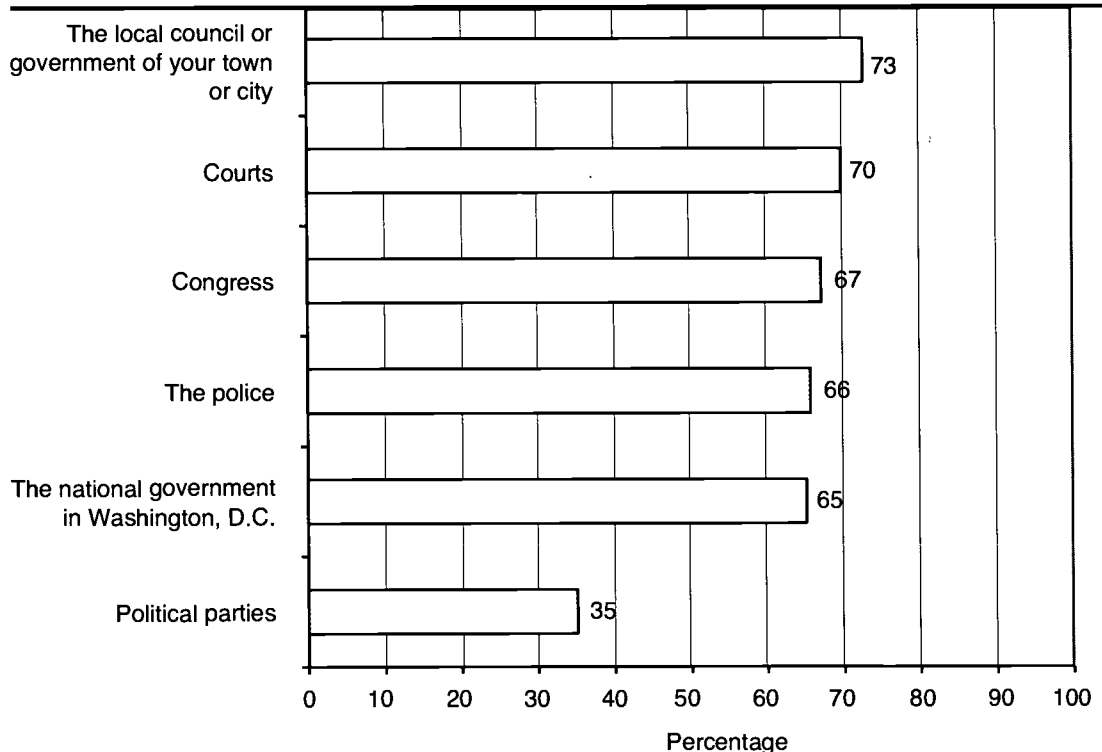
SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Civic Education Study (CivEd), 1999.



## Attitudes of U.S. students toward national and international civic issues

- A majority of ninth-grade students reported that they trust local and national government institutions in the United States. In contrast, only 35 percent of students reported trusting political parties (figure 6).
- Female ninth-graders were more likely to report that they trust government-related institutions than were their male counterparts.
- Ninety-two percent of U.S. ninth-graders reported that we should always be alert and stop threats from other countries to the political independence of the United States.
- Fifty-three percent of male U.S. ninth-graders agreed that we should stop outsiders from influencing the traditions and cultures of the United States, compared with about 35 percent of females.
- Nine out of 10 students supported women's political rights and agreed that women should run for public office and have the same rights as men. A greater proportion of female ninth-graders supported women's rights than did males.
- Hispanic, Asian, and multiracial ninth-graders reported having more positive attitudes toward rights for immigrants than did their white peers.
- U.S. students reported average scores higher than the international mean on both the support for women's rights scale and the positive attitude toward immigrants' rights scale.

**Figure 6.—Percentage of ninth-grade U.S. students reporting that they trust various institutions most of the time or always: 1999**



SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Civic Education Study (CivEd), 1999.

## Current and expected activities related to politics

- Ninth-grade U.S. students reported discussing political issues with teachers and parents, but discussions of U.S. politics were more likely to occur than discussions of international politics.
- Male ninth-grade students were more likely to report discussing international political issues with people their own age than were their female counterparts.
- Students who reported using newspapers as a source of political information were more likely to read about domestic politics than to read about international politics.
- Television was the primary source that ninth-grade U.S. students relied on to obtain information about politics.
- Female and male students as well as U.S.-born and foreign-born students all reported television as their primary source of political news and radio as their least likely source, and with similar levels of frequency.
- U.S. students' average score on the expected participation in political activities scale was higher than the international average.
- Female ninth-grade students were more likely than their male counterparts to expect to be politically active as adults (figure 7).
- Results indicated no differences in expected political participation by race or country of birth (figure 7).
- Students in households containing 100 or fewer books were less likely to report expecting to participate in political life as adults than students in households containing more than 200 books (figure 7).

**Figure 7.—Ninth-grade U.S. students' average score on the expected participation in political activities scale,\* by selected background characteristics: 1999**

	Average score		10	11
<b>Total</b>	10.5	(0.05)		
<b>Sex</b>				
Male	10.3	(0.07)		
Female	10.6	(0.06)		
<b>Race/ethnicity</b>				
White	10.5	(0.07)		
Black	10.5	(0.10)		
Hispanic	10.3	(0.10)		
Asian	10.5	(0.14)		
Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander	***	***		
American Indian/Alaska Native	***	***		
Multiracial	10.5	(0.20)		
<b>Country of birth</b>				
U.S.-born	10.5	(0.05)		
Foreign-born	10.5	(0.16)		
<b>Number of books in the home</b>				
0-10	9.9	(0.20)		
11-50	10.2	(0.08)		
51-100	10.5	(0.07)		
101-200	10.5	(0.09)		
More than 200	10.8	(0.08)		

\*Expected participation in political activities was measured by a scale based on student responses to three items. These items asked whether students expected to participate in the following three activities as adults:

Join a political party; write letters to a newspaper about social or political concerns; and be a candidate for a local or city office.

( ) Standard errors appear in parentheses.

—●— Mean ( ± 2 standard errors).

\*\*\* Sample size is insufficient to permit a reliable estimate.

NOTE: The international mean for this scale is 10.0. The U.S. mean is significantly higher than the international mean.

Percentages may not add to 100 because of rounding.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Civic Education Study (CivEd), 1999.

# *Notes*

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SOURCE: Baldi, S., Perie, M., Skidmore, D., Greenberg, E., and Hahn, C. (2001). *What Democracy Means to Ninth-Graders: U.S. Results From the International IEA Civic Education Study* (NCES 2001-096). U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics. Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office.

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