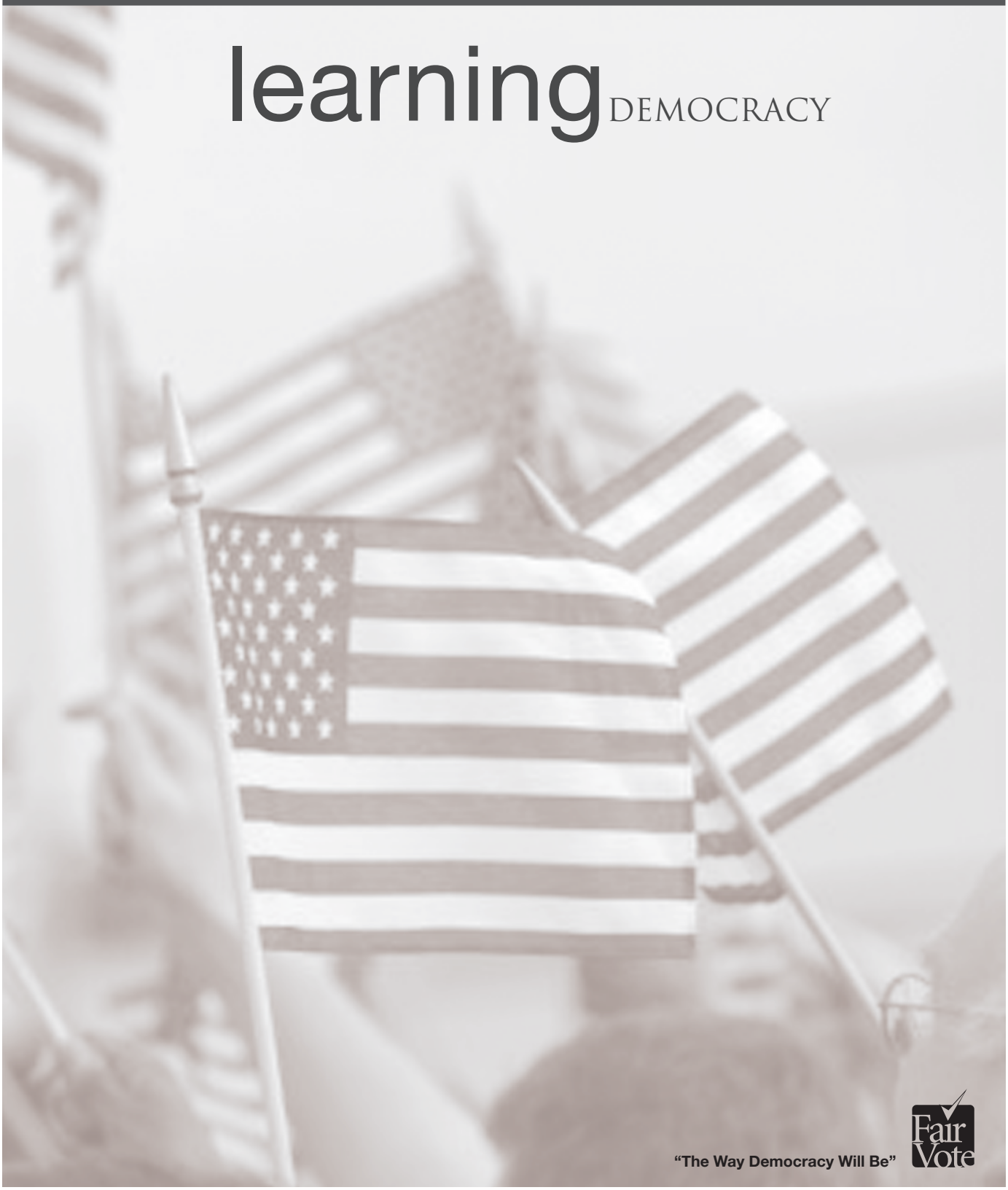
A STUDENT'S GUIDE TO VOTING TEACHER'S EDITION

learning DEMOCRACY



"The Way Democracy Will Be"

Fair Vote

Based in Takoma Park, Maryland, FairVote is a national non-partisan, non-profit pro-democracy organization. We pursue an innovative, solution-oriented election reform agenda that focuses on systemic change and increasing political participation.

Founded in 1992 operating for many years as the Center for Voting and Democracy, FairVote is the leading national organization transforming our elections to achieve unfettered, fraud-free access to participation, a full spectrum of meaningful choices and majority rule with fair representation and a voice for all.

Achieving our goals rests upon bold, but achievable reforms: a constitutionally protected right to vote, direct election of the president, instant runoff voting for executive elections and proportional voting for legislative elections. As a reform catalyst, we develop and promote practical strategies to improve elections for local, state and national leaders.

FairVote designed *Learning Democracy* to supplement traditional high school civics programs by teaching students the mechanics of participation and a student's role in the democratic process. Through innovative lessons, *Learning Democracy* gives students concrete examples of how and why they should increase their level of political engagement.

This curriculum is part of FairVote's Right to Vote Initiative, which focuses on the goal of establishing a universal Right to Vote in the U.S. Constitution, and national, state and local reforms in the spirit of that goal.

Learning Democracy was written by Right to Vote Director Adam Fogel and American University undergraduate Marc Tomik with guidance from a distinguished Advisory Committee consisting of leaders in education, voting rights and election reform. Thank you to the Center for Media Literacy, the Center for Information & Research on Civic Learning & Engagement (CIRCLE) and the Harvard Institute of Politics for allowing us to use their materials with permission.

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teacher's edition OVERVIEW

LESSON OVERVIEW

Learning Democracy teaches the foundational elements of participating in democracy, while encouraging students to discuss systematic reform. Voting rates among young people have declined since 18-year-olds gained the right to vote in 1971. A recent poll of 18 to 24-year-olds by Harvard University's Institute of Politics found that less than a third trusts the President (31%), Congress (29%) or the federal government (28%) to do the right thing all or most of the time[1]. This lesson explores both **why** *young people distrust the government and* **how** *we might combat this trend. Through intriguing discussion questions and hands-on group activities,* **Learning Democracy** *gives students a chance to play policy-maker and focus on developing real solutions that would increase youth political participation.*

LESSON OBJECTIVES

At the conclusion of *Learning Democracy,* students should be able to:

1. Identify reasons young people (and the public in general) distrust the government
2. Explain the pros and cons of certain reform proposals
3. Understand the "mechanics" of participation (including deadlines, rules and procedures)
4. Know where to find non-partisan election information
5. Explain how and why suffrage expanded over the course of American history
6. Register to vote if eligible

PREPARATION/TEACHING MATERIALS

- *Learning Democracy* handout-includes voting deadlines/tips and websites for non-partisan election information
- League of Women Voters "Voter Guide"
- Voter Registration Forms
- *Learning Democracy* Power Point Presentation (optional)

TEACHING PROCEDURES

[A] Introduction

Before beginning the lesson, it is important for students to understand why such a lesson is necessary in the first place. Many students may not be aware of the low voter turnout and registration rate of their age group and others may not see how these trends make a real difference in their lives. Beginning with Harvard's 2006 *Youth Survey on Politics and Public Service* provides students with a broad context of young peoples' views on government and public service. In addition, students can refute or accept the survey's conclusions by using examples from their own life experience.

Why are young people more than two-times more likely to participate in community service (51%) than in government, political or issues-related (19%) work?

Do you agree with the "trust" rankings of these institutions? Why? (refer to **Figure 1** (p. 2)

How can this graph be misleading? (Hint: Is less transparency trustworthier? Are benchmarks of success less obvious with some institutions?)

[1]Harvard University Institute of Politics. The 11th Biannual Youth Survey on Politics and Public Service by Harvard University's Institute of Politics. 1 November 2006.

[B] Will You Vote?

For years, political pundits and political scientists have insisted that the reason young people don't vote is because of the vicious cycle of political neglect and apathy. They say young people don't vote because candidates ignore them and politicians ignore young people because they don't vote. This circular argument may have some truth to it, but other reasons for not voting certainly exist as well. First, see how students react to this argument.

Do they agree that candidates ignore issues that matter to young people?

What issues do students care about?

What issues do candidates seem to focus on during a campaign? Why?

Students also may not vote because they don't see how they fit into the bigger picture. A single vote in isolation rarely makes a difference, but collective votes are powerful. When we vote, we should feel connected to something larger: a political party, a movement, an organization, etc.

As young people grow less connected to parties, will other things replace them?

What connection do students feel to other young voters? Why is this important?

Do your parents vote regularly? Does that impact your own decision about whether to vote?

Some political commentators argue that young people today are "too smart" to care about politics because young people realize that the system itself is broken; therefore, voting will not *really* make a difference.

Is there any truth to this argument?

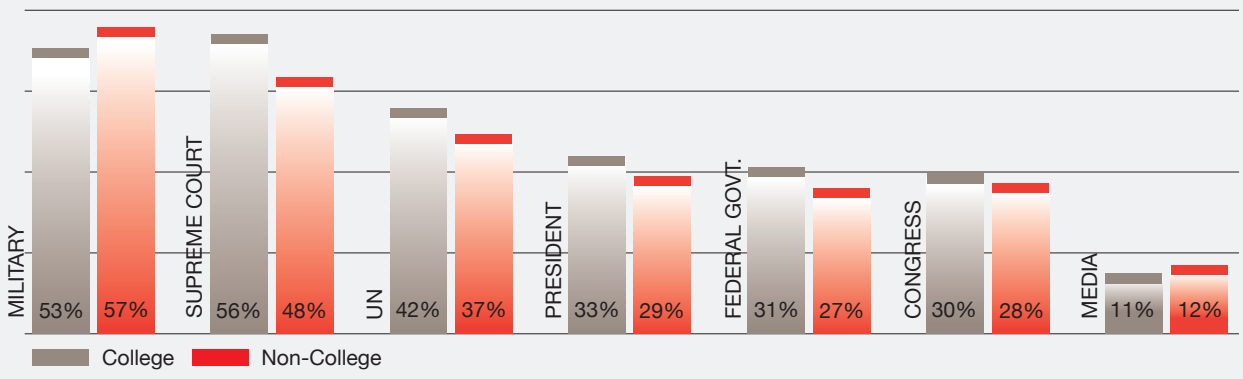
What do we mean by the system being "broken?"

What types of systemic reform would encourage young people to participate? (this question is explored further in section C)

[C] History of Suffrage

In order for students to understand *why* people vote, they need to know *how* our current state of suffrage came to be in the United States. Teaching

Figure 1: % Who Trust Institutions "All" or "Most" of the Time by College Status



the history of suffrage prepares students to think about how reforms have come about in the past and what steps are necessary to change the election system in the future. Teaching about the expansion of the franchise throughout American history gives students a frame of reference to discuss current issues with historical parallels. Since the Bill of Rights, far more Constitutional amendments have focused on expanding suffrage than any other topic, with amendments guaranteeing popular election of U.S. Senators, providing an equal right to vote for African Americans, women and 18-year-olds, banning poll taxes and providing presidential voting rights for the citizens of the District of Columbia. Learning about such changes and the 1965 Voting Rights Act is essential for understanding our democracy.

This section also explains the history of reforms that have shaped voters' access to elections and the meaning of their vote.

How were different pro-suffrage amendments won?

Why did the Supreme Court act to require legislative districts to be of equal population?

What has been done to regulate the financing of campaigns?

[D] Democracy Around the World

Democracy and representation mean different things in different parts of the world. The United States is the oldest constitutional democracy, yet we are among the lowest in voter participation. We have hundreds of thousands of elected officials on the local, state and national level with powers that often overlap or are in tension. Elections take place at least twice a year where voters elect everyone from President of the United States to city dogcatcher. Most nations have far fewer elected offices and elections, but much greater clarity over who is accountable for government policies and responsibilities.

The United States generally has winner-take-all elections with local district representation, while most other well-established democracies use proportional voting methods that directly represent more voters and provide more competitive choices, but give no particular weight to geographic representation. This section gives students a snapshot of democracy around the world and exposes them to variations of representative government.

Students have a chance to conduct independent research about other countries' electoral structure and discuss what we can learn from different approaches. Most importantly, they will have a better idea of what a citizen's role is in a representative democracy and how that role changes depending on the country's model.

[E] Media Literacy

When students go home and watch television, do they turn on MTV or CSPAN? When they see a political commercial do they flip the channel or watch it, believing everything it says at face value? This section explores the best ways for students to stay informed about the political process through nonpartisan sources so they can make knowledgeable decisions in the voting booth.

Understanding political TV commercials is an important way for students to learn the basics of campaigns. Since most political commercials are "negative" ads, students should first think about ***why*** campaigns decide to attack their opponent. Being able to detect deceptive or inaccurate information will give students an advantage and make them more perceptive voters. Here are some questions students can think about when watching political TV ads.

Who is the target audience for the ad?

What is the message of the ad? How does this fit into the overall theme of the campaign?

What do we learn about either candidate from the ad?

How do we know if it's true? Is the ad misrepresenting or exaggerating key information?

Students should know that television is probably the least efficient way of finding objective information about candidates and issues. Since students are more technologically savvy than ever before, websites are probably the best method of finding nonpartisan, accurate information. Project VoteSmart (www.vote-smart.org) is an example of a valuable resource for candidates' positions on issues and learning about ballot questions in your state. This website also has positions on various issues from elected officials on both the state and federal level.

[F] Reform Proposals

Discussing a broad array of electoral reform proposals will give students a chance to see the political process in a new light. Students may believe there are obstacles to voting that could be removed. They may be discouraged because they think they have to accept the system as it is, but don't necessarily realize how many ideas exist about how to change it. When introducing these proposals, it is important to remind students that there are no "right" or "wrong" answers, but many reforms could have unintended consequences that they should consider.

Students tend to be most interested in ideas that they perceive as impacting them directly, such as lowering the voting age, voter registration as a graduation requirement and allowing younger people to run for federal offices. If there is consensus on a specific topic, assign a group of students to argue against the proposal as an academic exercise. Highlighting and debating the pros and cons of all of these reforms will reinforce the importance of thoughtful and deliberative policymaking.

We divided reform proposals into ones affecting accessibility to voting and ones potentially affecting the meaning and power of one's vote.

ACCESSIBILITY:

Voter Registration

16-year-old advance registration

Should 16-year olds be allowed to register when they receive their driver's license? Will this increase the likelihood of them voting when they turn 18?

Universal Registration

Should citizens have to register to vote? Should the government do it for us?

Registration as a graduation requirement

Should registering to vote be a graduation requirement?

Mandatory voting

Should the government fine people for not voting?

Lower the voting age

Do you think people under 18 should be allowed to vote?

If so, how young?

Vote-by-mail

Should you need an excuse to vote absentee?

Should you be allowed to vote before Election Day?

Expanding suffrage

Should legal immigrants vote in local elections such as those for school board?

Should citizens living in the territories have Congressional representation? Should they vote for president?

Should citizens incarcerated for a felony vote?

MEANING AND POWER:

Money in politics

Should campaigns continue to be funded by private donations or through public financing, or a mix?

Voter guides and access to the airwaves

Should the government be responsible for informing potential voters?

Should candidates receive guaranteed airtime?

Term limits

Are career politicians a good thing? What would the Framers say?

Electoral College

Should we elect the president by a national popular vote where every vote is equally meaningful?

Instant Runoff Voting

Should we require winners to have a majority vote while giving voters more choices? Would it result in less negative campaigns?

Changing the two-party system

Are there enough choices? Are there real differences between candidates?

Should we make it easier for third parties and independents to get on the ballot?

Should we adopt proportional voting methods that might allow more parties to win seats in legislatures?

[G] Ideas for Action

While most people think of voting, attending political rallies or volunteering for a campaign as "political participation," today's students have a whole new definition. Large majorities of students view activities like wearing a wristband in support of a cause or wearing a t-shirt expressing a political or social opinion as "political" action. While these passive forms of expression are important, we have to be sure to explain why more active forms of political participation are still necessary in a participatory democracy.

This section of the curriculum explores the relationship between community involvement and political action. The lesson helps students identify problems in their community and prepares students to think about how government can have a role in addressing those problems. Students will learn the importance of lobbying at the local, state and national level to make systemic changes that will improve their community.

[H] Mechanics

Tips for first-time voters:

- Bring a photo ID—even if it may not be required
- Wait in line (don't leave)—if you're in line before the polls close, you can still vote
- Bring notes/practice ballot—it's not a test
- Ask questions—that's why poll workers are there
- If your name is not on the rolls and you know you are in your right polling place, request to vote by provisional ballot—call in a week to find out if your vote was counted
- If you need a ballot in a language other than English or you have a disability, ask for assistance

Tips for absentee voters:

- Submit your absentee ballot request form to your county board of elections at least a month before Election Day
- Mail in your absentee ballot at least a week before Election Day
- If you don't receive your absentee ballot at least a week before Election Day, call your county board of elections

REGISTER TO VOTE:

- In most states, you can register if you will be 18-years-old on or before the next election;
- In some states, you can vote in primaries when you are 17 if you will be 18 by the general election
- Read all directions carefully
- Use your driver's license or state ID number unless you don't have one
- Check or write "unaffiliated" if you're not sure which political party you want to join—you can always change it, but you might need to choose a party if you want to vote in a party primary.
- Remember to sign your name

TEACHER RESOURCES

FairVote's Learning Democracy Curriculum Homepage

http://www.fairvote.org/learningdemocracy

Harvard University Institute of Politics Youth Survey in Politics and Public Service

http://www.iop.harvard.edu/research_polling html

League of Women Voters-Vote 411

http://www.vote411.org

Project Vote-Smart

http://www.vote-smart.org

Rock the Vote

http://www.rockthevote.com

Federal Election Commission

http://www.fec.gov

American Bar Association

http://www.abanet.org/vote

Kids Voting USA

http://www.kidsvotingusa.org

will you vote? UNDERSTANDING YOUR GENERATION

LESSON OVERVIEW

Before students can have a meaningful discussion about the political behavior of their peers, it is important that they have a basic understanding of voting and community service trends. This activity gives students an opportunity to evaluate charts and graphs about youth civic and political participation. Students will work together or individually to analyze a set of data and offer suggestions for the trends and patterns they discover.

LESSON OBJECTIVES

At the conclusion of this activity, students should be able to:

1. Read and analyze charts and graphs
2. Offer explanations for voting and civic engagement trends
3. Offer solutions for combating negative trends and suggestions for continuing positive trends

TEACHING PROCEDURES

1. Distribute the voter turnout graphs.
2. Either in groups or individually, have students answer the following questions:

   a. What percentage of eligible 18-29 year-olds voted in the 1982 mid-term election? (32%)

   b. What percentage of eligible 18-29 year-olds voted in the 2000 presidential election? (40%).

   c. What is the difference between youth voter turnout in 2004 and 1972? (55%-49%=6%) Why is this significant? What historical factors could contribute to this decrease in participation?

   d. What years go against the downward trend of participation? (midterm election: 1982, presidential election: 1992, 2004) Why do you think this is the case? What makes these elections unique?

3. Distribute the volunteering graphs.
4. Either in groups or individually, have students answer the following questions:

   a. During what decade was the most significant increase in volunteering among all grade-levels? (the 1990's) Why do you suppose this was the case? (possible reasons: introduction of AmeriCorps, relative peace & prosperity)

   b. Did the 9/11 attacks have a lasting impact on volunteerism among young people? How do you know? Does this surprise you?

   c. What is the most common reason for volunteering? (To help other people) Why do you volunteer?

   d. What are examples of "social or political problems?" How do these problems directly relate to other types of community problems?

   e. What groups of people do you feel connected with who might have a stake in an election? Are those groups of people organized? Will they see their votes as collectively giving themselves power?

VOTER TURNOUT GRAPHS

Figure 2:
Voter Turnout Midterm Years Among Citizens, by Age

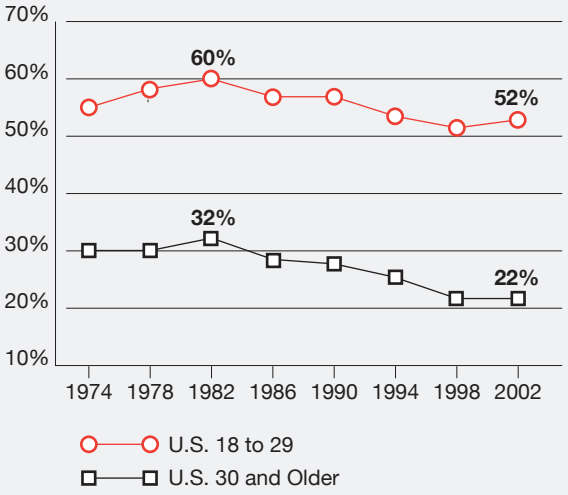
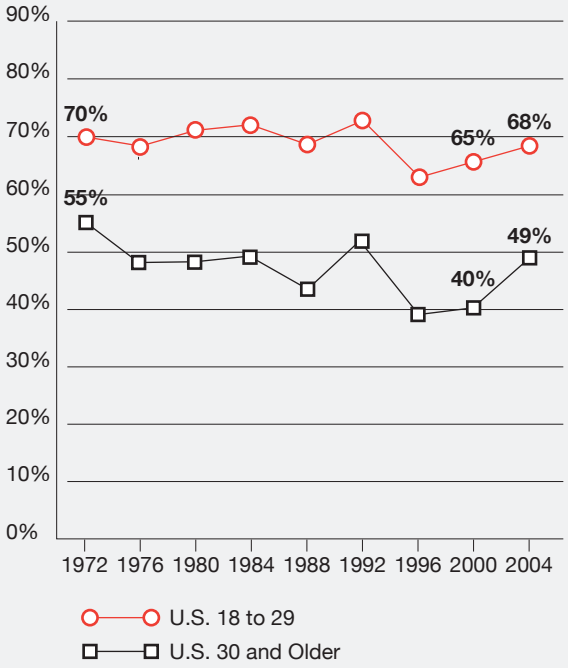


Figure 3:
Ages 18-29 and 30+, Voter Turnout in Presidential Years Census Citizen Turnout Method



Source: Center for Information & Research on Civic Learning & Engagement©
(Note: This turnout based on surveys may be higher than actual turnout. It also measures turnout of eligible voters, not registered voters—note that about a third of eligible voters are not registered to vote.)

VOLUNTEERING GRAPHS

Figure 4:
Volunteering Among 8th, 10th, and 12th Graders

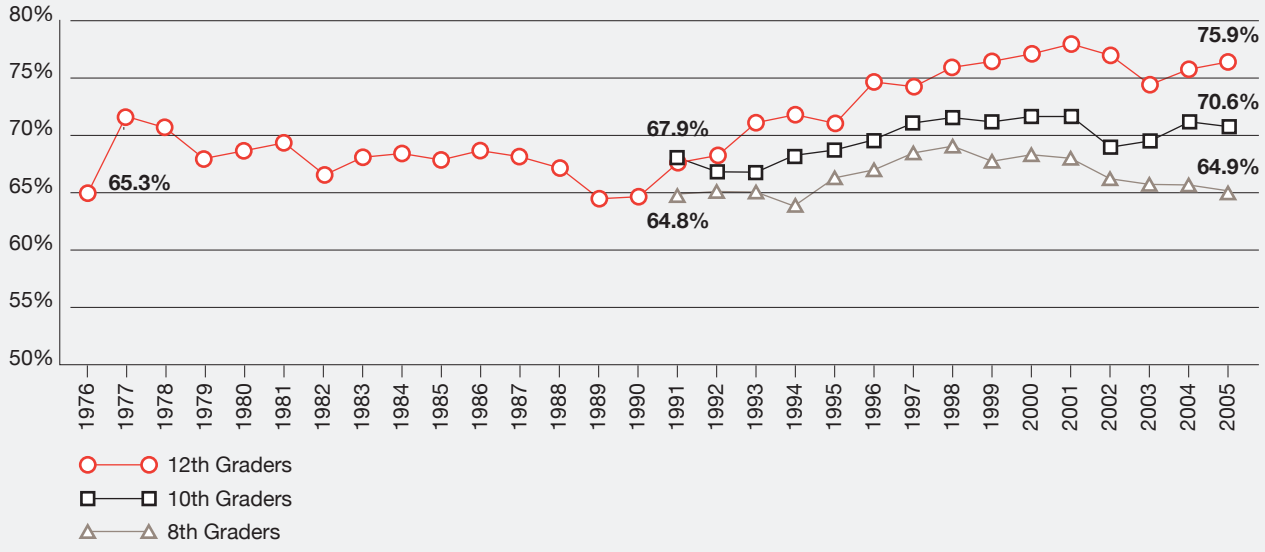
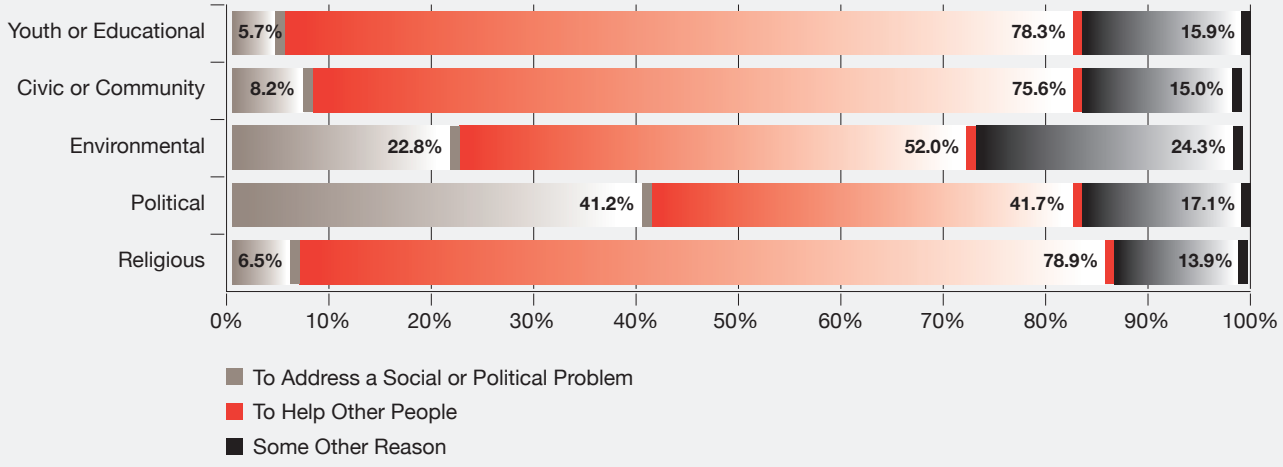


Figure 5:
Reasons for Volunteering Among 15-25 year old Volunteers by Type of Volunteer Organization



Source: Center for Information & Research on Civic Learning & Engagement©

will you vote? COMMUNITY SERVICE AND POLITICAL INVOLVEMENT

LESSON OVERVIEW

This lesson traces the connections between community involvement and political issues. In the course of the discussion, the overarching question should concern how community involvement can be transformed into political involvement. Students will participate in a class discussion as well as work in groups or independently to identify issues of local importance.

LESSON OBJECTIVES

At the conclusion of this activity, students should be able to:

1. Identify local political issues of importance to them
2. Offer reasons why politicians don't focus on issues important to youth
3. Offer potential causes and solutions to low voter turnout among youth
4. Complete the Brief Constructed Response (BCR) item on political involvement

TEACHING PROCEDURE

1. Start the discussion by asking students about their experience with community service. If it is a requirement at the school, ask whether it is a good idea or not, and what is the value of the service.

   a. How many people are involved in community service?

   b. What sort of service do students complete?

   c. Is there an obligation for all citizens to be involved in their community?

2. Expand from community service into other ways for individuals to be involved in communities. Those who work during the week can become part of local councils that meet at night, volunteer on weekends, etc.

   a. What other ways can people be involved in their community? (Running for local office, local clubs)

   b. What about bowling leagues, local business owners, health clubs? —Does that count?

3. Using local office as a springboard, direct discussion into the topic of local government and issues. Explain that national government may have the most publicity, but local government is also important and can affect those in the class. Distribute the Political Issues handout and have students look over each issue and decide in small groups which issue is most important to their local community. Then, ask students to pick out which issue they feel that politicians think is most important.

   a. Which level of government responds to each issue?

   b. What level of government is most important?

   c. What level of government is most responsive to each issue listed?

   d. What kind of involvement can be done to affect each issue?

4. Contrast what the class has said is the most important issue to them with what they feel is most important to politicians. Ask students how they decided what politicians felt were most important. Use discussion questions to steer conversation to how politicians choose certain issues.

   a. How do elected officials determine what issues are important?

   b. Does voter turnout matter for decision-making?

   c. How do constituents influence decision-makers?

5. Ask why politicians don't spend more time on youth issues—offer this reasoning: "For years, political pundits and political scientists have insisted that the reason young people don't vote is because of the vicious cycle of political neglect and apathy. They say young people don't vote because candidates ignore them and politicians ignore young people because they don't vote." This circular argument may have some truth to it, but other reasons for not voting certainly exist as well. See how students react to this argument. Do they agree that candidates ignore issues that matter to young people? Would any electoral reforms they've discussed potentially result in more candidates talking about youth issues?

6. For years, party affiliation determined voter loyalty. As an increasing number of young people register as independents, is there a declining sense of being part of a "team" or movement larger than the individual voter? Put another way, do students feel a sense of community in the voting process?

   a. Why is party loyalty declining?

   b. Does the decrease in party loyalty force voters to vote "against" candidates as opposed to "for" them? How does negative campaigning influence this decision?

   c. Is an independent voter's motivation different from a partisan? How so?

   d. What institution or organization can take the place of political parties? Do we need anything?

7. Other political commentators argue that young people today are "too smart" to care about politics because young people realize that the system itself is broken; therefore, voting will not *really* make a difference.

   a. Is there any truth to this argument?

   b. What do we mean by the system being "broken?"

HAVE STUDENTS ANSWER THIS BRIEF CONSTRUCTED RESPONSE ITEM:

1. How do government officials decide which policies to implement? Why do some constituent groups have a larger voice?

2. What can citizens do to have an affect on government policy?

3. Include examples and details to support your answer.

POLITICAL ISSUES HANDOUT

Of the issues on this list, which level of government would be responsible for the issue? What can be done to change the current policy for each issue? What is the most important issue? What issues are not on this list that could be added?

- Graduated licenses for young drivers.
- Public parks and recreation centers (teen center/skate park).
- Military (recruiters calling, funding for military, draft).
- Environmental issues (local river clean up, congested roads, dependence on oil, global warming).
- Transportation (bike routes in town, public transit).
- Skateboarding/rollerblading laws.
- Taxes on sales, income and property
- Cost of housing
- Funding for college grants/scholarships
- Student debt
- Healthcare
- Education (Standardized testing, length of school day, compulsory attendance age)
- Alcohol/Drug laws and enforcement.
- Social Security reforms.
- Crime

LESSON OVERVIEW

This lesson focuses on the development of the right to vote from a historical perspective, but also forces students to ask basic questions about government. Students will start with an examination of what type of government system the United States is under, and then explore the topic of voting rights through constitutional amendments.

LESSON OBJECTIVES

At the conclusion of this lesson, students should be able to:

1. Identify the type of government that exists in the United States
2. Discuss historical background for our republican form of government
3. Identify the various amendments that have expanded the right to vote to different groups in the United States and the 1965 Voting Rights Act

TEACHING PROCEDURES

1. Begin by asking fundamental questions about our government.

   a. What kind of government are we?

   Republic: We elect representatives to serve our interests as citizens

   Democracy: Government of the people, but is it direct? Is democracy served when we are a republican form of government? Are the voices of those who vote for losing candidates still heard?

   How do republican and democratic forms of government interact? What is a good balance between trustee and delegate representation?

   b. Why is this debate so important?

   United States was founded because of the abuses of King George III; therefore, democratic and republican ideals were paramount. But why not a direct democracy then? Did the founders want true "rule by the people? What does "consent of the governed" mean?"

   Constitution provided for a mix of representation: indirect election of Senators and President, but popular vote for members of the House of Representatives

   c. But who made up the new Constitution?

   Which groups were not represented in the founding of the country?

   Why weren't they?

   How did the lack of diversity affect the finished document?

   d. How has the Constitution changed as it relates to voting?

   15th Amendment: Prohibited voting discrimination based on race. What caused this amendment to pass? What are the consequences of the action? Why was this amendment "incomplete?" Connect to the civil rights movements of the 1960's and the Voting Rights Act.

   17th Amendment: Direct election of Senators. What was the previous system? Why would the founders want the state legislators to select

Senators? What are the advantages/disadvantages of each system?

19th Amendment: Prohibited voting discrimination based on a person's sex. How did this amendment change elections? What caused this amendment to pass? Who is still left out?

23rd Amendment: District of Columbia receives 3 Electoral Votes for President. Is this statehood? Why not? How is the District being represented/not represented? What other groups are left out (Puerto Rico, territories with citizens who serve at high rates in the U.S. military)

24th Amendment: Prohibition on Poll taxes – How does this enfranchise people? Should there be a property requirement to vote? An income requirement? On votes that affect tax rates, should the person have to pay taxes to vote? What about 18 year olds who don't pay school/property taxes but get to vote?

26th Amendment: Gives 18-year-olds the right to vote. Should 18-year-olds be allowed to vote? Why did the 26th Amendment pass so quickly? Is 18 too old?

e. Federal Voting Legislation

Voting Rights Act of 1965: Prohibits discrimination based on literacy, institutes policy of "preclearance" for states with a history of voter disenfranchisement, and mandates language-minority assistance at the polls in certain jurisdictions. The Voting Rights Act has resulted in an increase in civic participation by Latinos, Asian Americans, American Indians and Alaska Natives and has significantly increased voter registration rates among African Americans in the south.

National Voter Registration Act of 1993: ("Motor Voter"): Requires departments of motor vehicles and other government offices to provide an opportunity for citizens to register to vote.

Help America Vote Act of 2002 (HAVA): First time in history the federal government appropriates money to states for elections. Introduces some federal requirements like the right to a provisional ballot and notification of over-votes. Many states used the money to update their voting equipment and voter registration systems after the 2000 Presidential Election debacle.

2. Even with all the voting changes, problems still arise. Ask students what they remember about the 2000 Presidential Election. The entire country waited for weeks for the result of the Florida election. Why was the country waiting for Florida? Why did 537 votes draw the attention of the country when one candidate won the national popular vote by half a million votes?

Answer: the Electoral College

3. Homework: research Electoral College for debate. Half of the class wants to keep it, half wants to change it.

Make sure to include these issues:

Why did the Founders create it? Why did they have to change it in 1804? When did all states first hold popular election for president? Who benefits from the Electoral College? Who loses? What reforms are there?

TEACHER RESOURCES

U.S. National Archives and Records Administration

http://www.archives.gov/federal-register/electoral-college/

FairVote's Electoral College Information Page

http://www.fairvote.org/?page=964

http://www.nationalpopularvote.com

http://www.everyvoteequal.com

LESSON OVERVIEW

This lesson focuses on students thinking about different voting systems, culminating in an activity where students get to test out different systems. The lesson starts with a debate about the Electoral College, which students should have researched before class. It continues with a discussion about voting reforms and ends with a test of two different voting systems to determine what is most effective at making the most people happy.

LESSON OBJECTIVES

1. Debate the Electoral College and how it has changed based on prior research
2. Identify possible reforms to the Electoral College
3. Explain "National Popular Vote"
4. Identify two possible reforms to the electoral system

TEACHING PROCEDURES

1. Start with a debate on the Electoral College.

   Give each side 3-5 minutes to present their case for or against the Electoral College. At the conclusion of the presentations, ask what they learned from their research and whether they agree with the side for which they argued.

2. Discussion on the Electoral College

   a. Does it seem fair that the winner of our most important national office doesn't need to win a majority of the votes?

   b. What about a National Popular Vote? Pros, cons?

   c. How would that affect campaigns? "Swing states" vs. "spectator states?"

   d. Would a national popular vote change how candidates campaign?

   e. Should it matter what state you live in when voting for President?

   f. Why are 18-29-year-olds 35% more likely to vote in "swing states" than "spectator states?"

   g. Is the National Popular Vote plan a sensible substitute for amending the Constitution?

TEACHER RESOURCES

FairVote's Electoral College Information Page

http://www.nationalpopularvote.com

http://www.fairvote.org/?page=964

3. Introduce the National Popular Vote plan that relies on a state compact.

   a. If each state pledges its electoral votes to the national popular vote winner, would the Electoral College matter?

   b. Maryland was the first state to pass the National Popular Vote compact into law. What does this mean for the state of Maryland? What else needs to happen now before the compact becomes active?

4. That's one suggestion for Presidential elections, but what about other elections? What other elections are there?

a. Compulsory Voting: Most people lament the low voter turn out rate in the United States, especially among young voters. Should voting become more than a "responsibility" and become a legal obligation? Is not voting as big of a statement as voting for a specific candidate?

b. Universal registration: Right now, we have to "opt-in" to be able to vote by filling out a registration form. What if you didn't have to and everyone was automatically on the voter rolls? What pros/cons are there to this system?

c. Election Accessibility: Not everyone can make it to the polls on Election Day. What can the government do to make sure everyone has a chance to vote? Vote early by mail? Vote early in person? Make Election Day a Federal Holiday? Weekend voting?

5. Instant Runoff Voting

a. What if instead of choosing just one option, you were able to rank your choices 1, 2 and 3? Is voting about choosing only one person, or is it about the voters entire preference? Should candidates have to win a majority of the vote or be able to win by plurality because the majority splits its vote?

b. Activity – Voting Systems (refer to **Figure 6)**

TEACHER RESOURCES: INSTANT RUNOFF VOTING

Compulsory Voting

http://www.idea.int/vt/compulsory_voting.cfm

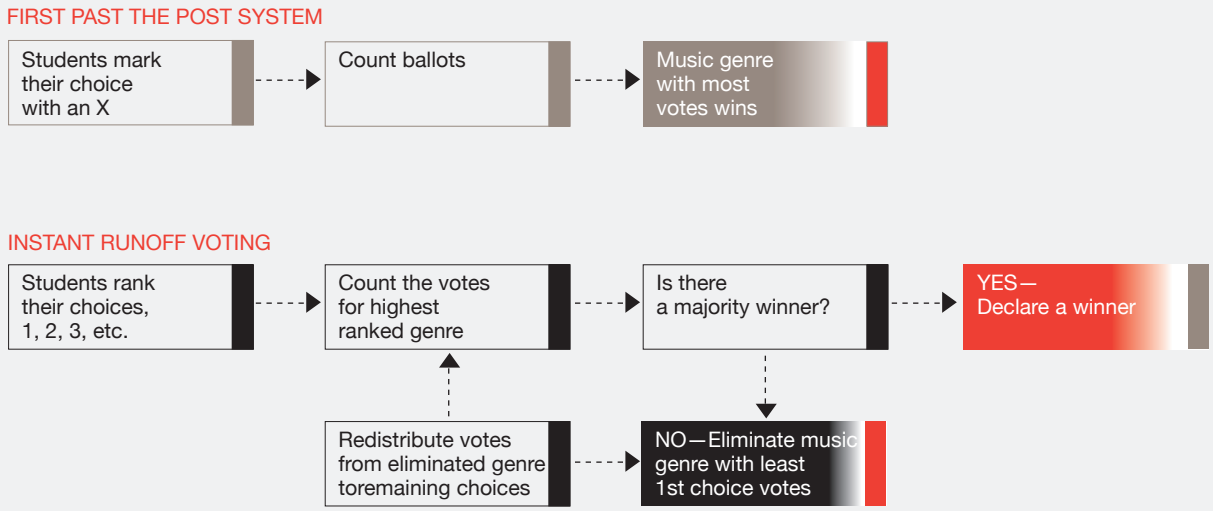
Universal Registration

http://www.fairvote.org/?page=65

Instant Run-Off Voting

http://www.instantrunoff.com/

Figure 6: Tabulating Results:



VOTING SYSTEMS

Today you will be voting on which music will be played during your study hall. There will be only one ballot cast, and the winning choice will be played for the rest of the year with no option of recall.

FIRST PAST THE POST SYSTEM:

CHOOSE ONE

☐ **JAZZ** ☐ **ROCK** ☐ **RAP**

☐ **R & B** ☐ **POP**

INSTANT RUNOFF VOTING

RANK ORDER

Directions: Mark your first choice by writing the number “1” in the line next to the candidate’s name. You may also indicate which candidates are your second choice, third choice, and so on by writing the numeral “2”, “3”, and so on in the line next to the name.

___ **JAZZ** ___ **ROCK** ___ **RAP**

___ **R & B** ___ **POP**

VOTING SYSTEMS

In this second ballot, mark off your reaction to the outcome of the election:

FIRST PAST THE POST SYSTEM:

I FOUND THE RESULTS TO BE:

☐ GREAT!

☐ **TERRIBLE!**

☐ **OK , I CAN LIVE WITH IT**

INSTANT RUNOFF VOTING

I FOUND THE RESULTS TO BE:

☐ GREAT!

☐ **TERRIBLE!**

☐ **OK , I CAN LIVE WITH IT**

LESSON OVERVIEW

This lesson explores the state of representative democracy in the United States and around the world. Through comparative examples of various types of democratic systems, students will learn that all democracies function differently. This lesson gives students a chance to independently research systems of government around the world and discuss the benefits and drawbacks of each system. Students will also explore what it means to be "represented" by an elected official and what a citizen's role is in a representative democracy.

LESSON OBJECTIVES

At the conclusion of this lesson, students should be able to:

1. Identify various types of democratic systems
2. Discuss pros and cons of various democratic systems (refer to **Figure 7**)
3. Explain what "representation" means and how that meaning changes depending on the system
4. Understand a citizen's role in a representative democracy

TEACHING PROCEDURES

1. Hyper-federalism

   The U.S. has more elected offices and more frequent elections than any other country. The U.S. also has one of the lowest rates of voter participation. Is there a connection between these two facts? Do our citizens suffer from "election fatigue?"

   a. Consider our election system and government structure compared to the U.K.—how could these differences influence voter engagement and participation?

Figure 7: Comparing the U.S. and U.K.

UNITED STATES	UNITED KINGDOM
Presidential System	Parliamentary System
Strong Upper-House	Weak Upper-House
Federal system— frequent local, state, & federal elections	Power concentrated in central government— infrequent elections
Huge number of elected offices— about 2 million—with limited party involvement	Few elected offices—only city councils—elected at the same time, with parties playing a large role

2. What does representation mean?

What does it mean to have "representation" in a legislature? Is it enough that someone represents your geographic location (district), or should representatives also reflect the demographic composition of the population? Should your representative reflect your gender, race, or economic status? Ask students if they believe in quotas (setting seats aside for specific demographic segments of the population). Then ask them to identify the quota we use to draw districts (geography-where each area gets a representative no matter how many or how few people vote). What problems are there with this system? Who benefits, who loses?

3. Representative Democracy in the United States

a. The colonies broke away from England because they opposed taxation without representation and wanted more control over their local affairs. The Framers decided against a direct democracy because they feared giving too much power to the uneducated masses. Representative democracy allowed political leaders to take a deliberative approach to policymaking, without the influence of fickle public opinion. At the same time, the Framers established direct elections to the House of Representatives every two years, which gives the public a chance to change course if they are unsatisfied with their representation.

b. Although historically many Members were elected in at-large elections, the House of Representatives today is an example of a winner-take-all, single-member district system. This means that the person receiving the most votes in each congressional district represents everyone in that district, regardless of their share of the vote. This system is "candidate-centric," which means the individual running (not the political party) is the focus of the race, although partisan patterns dominate most voting behavior.

c. "Candidate-centric" systems tend to emphasize a strong constituent link. Representatives must factor in their constituents' local interests, by battling for local projects in their district like funding for schools, roads and military bases.

d. In the U.S., we have a two-party system because of our "winner-take-all" rules. As you'll see later, some countries allow like-minded groupings of voters to elect candidates in proportion to their share of the vote.

4. Representative Democracies Around the World

a. Ukraine is an example of many nations that give representation in the legislature to any political party that receives more than a certain share of the vote – in this case 4%. Citizens vote for an entire slate of candidates based on political party, as opposed to individual candidates. Advocates of this system argue that the legislature more accurately reflects the political affiliation of the general population. A critique of this system is that too many parties are represented, which can lead to a fractured, weak government. Another problem is that citizens do not have an individual representative, so the constituent link is weak.

b. In Finland, citizens use proportional representation like in Ukraine, but instead of electing slates of candidates based on party affiliation, they vote for individual representatives in regional districts. The same issue of forming coalition government occurs, but the constituent link in this system is stronger.

c. Australia has a House of Representatives with single-member districts that is similar to the United States. One key difference is that Australia uses Instant Runoff Voting, where citizens rank their choices. IRV avoids "spoiler" candidates (3rd parties that draw votes from major-party candidates) and guarantees the winner receives a majority of the vote. Single-member districts ensure a strong constituent link.

d. Germany seeks to balance proportionality with local representation by electing half of its representatives from single-member districts and half from Ukraine-type party lists. Any party winning at least 5% wins a fair share of seats, with its seats first going to its winners in the single-member districts.

e. Ireland also balances the accuracy of representation (proportionality) against the importance of having a strong constituent link. Ireland's legislature has districts with between three and five members, and uses an instant runoff-type choice voting method where candidates need about a fifth of the vote to win a seat. This system encourages larger third parties that would be over-represented in Finland or Ukraine but non-existent in the United States.

5. Compare and contrast—Have students research international systems of government. Looking at factors like representation of women, multiple parties and competitive elections, have them evaluate the pros and cons of:

   - Proportionality
   - Constituent Link
   - Candidate-centric vs. Party-centric systems

6. How do representatives make decisions?

   a. A number of factors go into the policymaking process of representatives. Alan Rosenthal of the Eagleton Institute at Rutgers University lists these factors:

   1. Merits of the case
   2. The views of constituents
   3. Role of interest groups
   4. Position of political party
   5. Conviction and record of the individual legislator

   b. Which of these factors is most important? Which one is least important?

   c. Why do interest groups matter? Why does the position of the political party matter?

   d. Discuss how ethics and decision-making are related.

   i. When your views on an issue conflict with your constituents' views, how do you reconcile the two?

   ii. When an interest group donates money to a candidate, does that candidate have an obligation to support that group's positions on issues?

   iii. When you disagree with your party's leadership on an issue, how should you vote? Could there be consequences to voting your conscience?

7. Citizen's role

   a. Expand on views of constituents/interest groups

   b. What groups have the biggest impact on government?

8. Policymaking activity-competing interests

   Have students debate the following issues, taking both constituent concerns and personal beliefs into account:

   a. Lower voting age to 16

   b. Lower drinking age to 18

   c. Death penalty

   d. Road construction

   e. Graduated driver's licenses

   f. Recreation facilities

media literacy QUESTIONS FOR THE PRESS

LESSON OVERVIEW

This lesson provides the basis for further study into media literacy. The class will examine different forms of media and explore Five Key Questions and Five Core Concepts that control the messages sent by the media. To strengthen the understanding of the Concepts and Questions, the class will examine different messages from the media and answer each of the Five Questions.*

LESSON OBJECTIVES

At the conclusion of this activity, students should be able to:

1. Identify the different concepts built into media messages
2. Analyze why media messages are constructed to target audiences
3. Adjust different aspects of media messages and suggest how the overall message would change

TEACHING PROCEDURES

1. Before teaching this lesson, have each student find an advertisement to bring in the next day for homework. Encourage the students to be creative in their methods, and search through newspapers, magazines, online advertisements, etc.
2. Ask the students to explain their ads. After the basics of what the product is for, and what is in the advertisement, ask the Five Key Questions of media literacy:
   - **i.** Who Created This Message? – All messages are "constructed."
   - **ii.** What techniques are used to attract attention? – Media messages are constructed using a creative language with its own rules.
   - **iii.** How might different people understand this message differently from me? – Different people experience the same media message differently.
   - **iv.** What lifestyles, values and other points of view are represented in, or omitted from, this message? – Media have embedded values and points of view.
   - **v.** Why was this message sent? – Most media messages are organized to gain profit and/or power.
3. After introducing the questions to the class through the first volunteers, ask the rest of the class to answer the questions about their own advertisements. Allow students to work in groups and discuss their answers with each other.
4. Once the students finish evaluating their own advertisements, ask to what else the questions could apply. What is a media message? Can you judge movies by this standard? Newspapers? Political advertisements? Can you judge ALL messages this way?
5. Split the students into small groups again and ask them to discuss television advertisements and the different aspects of media literacy. If possible, bring in a television and have a taped commercial ready to show to the class. If there is a commercial to show, deconstruct the commercial using the Five Key Questions and Five Core Concepts.

6. Working off of the previous exercise, ask the students in groups to either adjust the commercial they have just seen on video based on the Five Key Questions, or create their own advertisement, working up from the Five Questions. For example, an altered advertisement could shift based on the third question of audience, and try to shift to a different demographic or regional audience.

7. Have the class share their work.

***CONTENT PROVIDED BY THE CENTER FOR MEDIA LITERACY**

http://www.medialit.org

LESSON OVERVIEW

This lesson gives students a chance to observe advertisements by political figures and evaluate their messages. In small groups, students will analyze the messages and discuss what information is included and what the ad leaves out. In addition, students will identify the target audience for each advertisement. To conclude, the class will watch the advertisements again and identify the tactics campaigns use to promote their message.

LESSON OBJECTIVES

At the conclusion of this activity, students should be able to:

1. Identify messages within political advertising
2. Evaluate how political advertisements can be misleading
3. Identify the target of political advertisements

TEACHING PROCEDURES

1. For this lesson, you will need access to the Internet or a taped political advertisement. To begin, find advertisements from local candidates, preferably from recent elections, or an election that is currently taking place. YouTube and candidate's websites are great sources for election advertisements.
2. Start by queuing an advertisement to run. Before any discussion begins, split the class into different groups.

   a. One group should represent the campaign creating the advertisement and defend the techniques used in the advertisement

   b. One group should represent the opposing campaign, and pick apart the advertisement as being false/misleading.

   c. One group should represent young voters and find what issues or parts of the advertisement appeal to young people.

   d. The last group should represent a media watchdog group aiming for accuracy above all else.
3. In the groups, let students discuss the advertisement for about 10 minutes. Each group should present their points to the class and try to persuade the others of their perspective.
4. After each group presents, go over which tactics in the advertisement seemed to work best at persuading those in the audience and which did not. Did the ad seem overtly biased? Does biased advertising turn voters off?
5. Ask the students who the intended audience of the advertisement is. Is it based on age, political party, location, socio-economic status, etc?
6. Finally, review the advertisement one more time to go over the methods that were discussed and identify them as they appear.

reform proposals WHY 18?

LESSON OVERVIEW

Students know the voting age is 18-years-old, but why 18? This lesson briefly explores the reasons why the 26th Amendment to the Constitution, lowering the voting age to 18, was the fastest ratification in history and what other reform proposals are in the public realm that would increase youth participation in elections. Through a 20-30 minute discussion and a policymaking activity, students will consider the pros and cons of several election reform proposals. Students will play the role of members of Congress and state legislators in 1971, while also thinking about solutions that would benefit democracy today.

LESSON OBJECTIVES

At the conclusion of this lesson, students should be able to:

1. Identify reasons for lowering the voting age to 18-years-old in 1971
2. Explain the process of amending the Constitution
3. Consider policy solutions for increasing youth participation in elections
4. Develop innovative solutions to complex election problems

TEACHING PROCEDURES

1. Begin by discussing the 1960s in general. It was a time of great political discontent and civil unrest. Examples: Assassinations of John F. Kennedy, Robert Kennedy, Martin Luther King Jr., Malcolm X, riots, Vietnam War growing unpopular, etc.
2. The 1960s were also a time of political change. Congress passed many important pieces of legislation and two constitutional amendments that expanded the right to vote:

   a. 1961-23rd Amendment gives Washington, DC residents the right to vote in presidential elections

   b. 1964-24th Amendment bans poll taxes

   c. 1964-The Civil Rights Act bans election discrimination on account of race

   d. 1965-The Voting Rights Act protects voting rights of minorities and eliminates literacy tests

3. A Brief History of the 26th Amendment to the Constitution

   a. Voting age is determined by the states

   b. As early as the 1950s, President Dwight Eisenhower endorsed lowering the voting age to 18-years-old.

   c. In 1970, Congress passed a law similar to the 26th Amendment—Oregon challenged the law, saying it infringed on the state's right to set the voting age *(Oregon v. Mitchell)*. The Supreme Court agreed and declared the law unconstitutional.

   d. In 1971, Senator Jennings Randolph (D-West Virginia) introduced the 26th Amendment. It easily passed both chambers by the necessary two-thirds and three-quarters of the states ratified it in a matter of months. Senator Randolph proposed lowering the voting age 11 times, starting in 1942.

4. Why lower the voting age in 1971?

a. Vietnam War-The government conscripted young men into the service, but these young men could not vote. Politicians faced increasing pressure to lower the voting age to 18. A common slogan among soldiers was: "Old enough to fight, old enough to vote!"

b. Popular support-A Gallup Poll showed that 64% of Americans supported granting 18-year-olds the right to vote in 1969, compared with 17% support in 1939.

c. 18-year-olds are adults-Many states set 18-years-old as the age of adulthood in many other areas of law, including signing contracts, getting married and owning property.

The following questions can be useful to facilitate an in-class discussion or used as a homework assignment.

5. Flashback 1971: You're the policymaker

a. Imagine you're in Congress in 1971 and the 26th Amendment is proposed. What are some arguments for and against the Amendment?

b. What are possible unintended consequences of giving 18-year-olds the right to vote?

c. Should voting age determine other age restrictions (i.e. legal drinking age, driver's license, etc.)? Why or why not?

d. Now imagine you're in a state legislature in 1971—does being on the state-level change your decision-making? How so?

e. Should the federal government decide the voting age? Why or why not?

f. What are some issues in 1972 (the first year 18-year-olds could vote for president) that would motivate young Americans to go to the polls? List the most important issues of the day and what affect those issues had on the outcome of the 1972 Presidential Election.

6. Fast forward 2008: You're the policymaker

a. Imagine you're in Congress today. Are there any constitutional amendments you would propose to expand voting rights? Rep. Jesse Jackson, Jr. (D-Illinois) proposed the Right to Vote Amendment, which would grant citizens an explicit right to vote in the Constitution (something that does not currently exist). Passage of this amendment could lead to voting rights for as many as nine million American citizens—people living in the District of Columbia, the territories and people convicted of felonies—who don't have the right to vote for president and Congress. Would you support this amendment? Why or why not? (see Appendix A)

b. Is 18 the right age to vote? Maybe Congress made a mistake in 1971 and it should be even younger? Is 17 better? 16? Explain your reasoning.

c. Should younger adults be able to run for office? Should 18 to 24-year-olds be eligible to run for U.S. Congress? Should a 34-year-old be eligible to run for President?

d. Some countries make voting mandatory. Do you think this is a good idea? Why or why not?

e. In California, one state legislator wants to make sure every student graduating from high school registers to vote. He is proposing a law that would require students to register as a graduation requirement. Should students have to register to vote (or opt-out in writing) in order to receive a diploma? Would this law help voter turnout? Would it encourage more students to learn about political issues?

APPENDIX A

TEXT OF HOUSE JOINT RESOLUTION RES. 28, THE RIGHT TO VOTE AMENDMENT

JOINT RESOLUTION

Proposing an amendment to the Constitution of the United States regarding the right to vote.

Resolved by the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America in Congress assembled, (two-thirds of each House concurring therein), That the following article is proposed as an amendment to the Constitution of the United States, which shall be valid to all intents and purposes as part of the Constitution when ratified by the legislatures of three-fourths of the several States:

Article --

`SECTION 1. All citizens of the United States, who are eighteen years of age or older, shall have the right to vote in any public election held in the jurisdiction in which the citizen resides. The right to vote shall not be denied or abridged by the United States, any State, or any other public or private person or entity, except that the United States or any State may establish regulations narrowly tailored to produce efficient and honest elections.

`SECTION 2. Each State shall administer public elections in the State in accordance with election performance standards established by the Congress. The Congress shall reconsider such election performance standards at least once every four years to determine if higher standards should be established to reflect improvements in methods and practices regarding the administration of elections.

`SECTION 3. Each State shall provide any eligible voter the opportunity to register and vote on the day of any public election.

`SECTION 4. The Congress shall have power to enforce this article by appropriate legislation.**'.**

ideas for action CONNECTING CIVIC ENGAGEMENT TO POLITICAL PARTICIPATION

LESSON OVERVIEW

This lesson explores the relationship between community involvement and political action. No matter how a student is involved in his or her community—from cleaning up a park to volunteering at a soup kitchen—the activities in which students participate have important political implications. Identifying problems in a community and creating short-term solutions for those problems (through community service) is only one element to being a responsible, involved citizen. Another aspect of active citizenry is being able to lobby local, state and national officials to make systemic changes that will improve the community.

LESSON OBJECTIVES

At the conclusion of the lesson, students should be able to:

1. Identify problems in their community or school
2. Identify the level of government or specific officials responsible for solving the problem
3. Develop a strategy to lobby for action

TEACHING PROCEDURES

1. Students should discuss why people participate in community service. Why do many schools have community service requirements? How does community service fit into the general goals of high school?
2. In what types of community service activities do students participate? Why do they choose these activities? Discuss each of these activities and how they can improve the community (refer to **Figure 5** (p. 9)

   a. Youth or Education—mentoring programs, volunteering after school, tutoring

   b. Civic or Community—volunteering at a soup kitchen or community center, working with the elderly or disabled

   c. Environmental—cleaning up a park, starting a recycling program

   d. Political—volunteering for a campaign, working for a grassroots organization

   e. Religious—working for a church/synagogue/mosque group, raising money for a religious charity

3. How do Americans participate in politics? (refer to **Figures 8, 9, & 10** (p.30 & 31)

   Traditional activities:

   - Writing a letter to a newspaper editor
   - Contacting an elected official
   - Participating in a march or demonstration

Is civic engagement the same as political participation? How are they different? Why do so many young people participate in "civic engagement" activities and so few participate in traditional "political" activities? Is there a negative connotation associated with political activity? Why is this the case?

4. After students have thought a little bit about the differences between civic engagement and political participation, now they will have a chance to connect the two through an activity.

   a. First, have students split up into groups of 3 or 4 and identify a problem facing their school or community.

   b. Have them write a paragraph or two about how they could temporarily solve the problem through a community service activity.

   c. Next, through research, students should identify who is responsible for fixing the problem. It may be the school board, the city council, the mayor or the state government. Have them write a longer paper (a page or two) about why (or why not) solving the problem through the political process would be a better (or worse) way to go. What can the government do that an ordinary citizen cannot? What are downsides to government involvement?

   d. Finally, have students take action—write a letter, meet with an elected official or circulate a petition to draw attention to the issue. How did the officials respond? Is this what you expected?

TITLE? GRAPHS

Figure 8:
Contacted or visited a public official

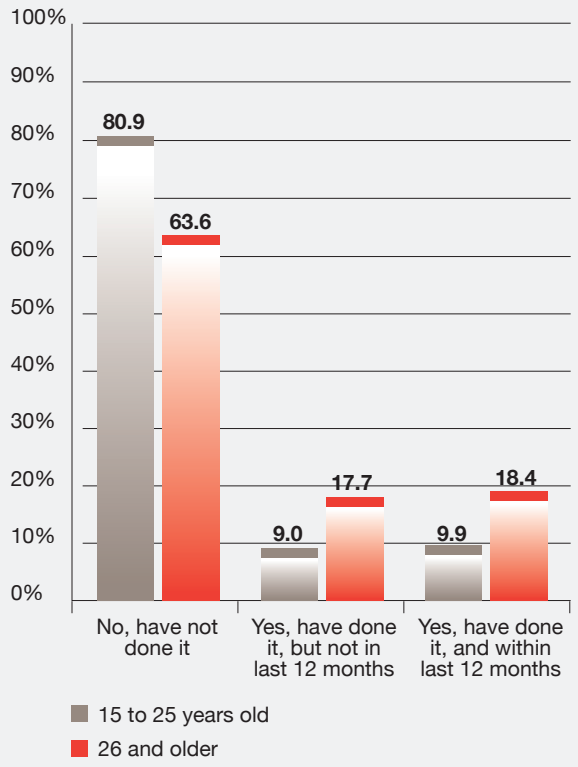
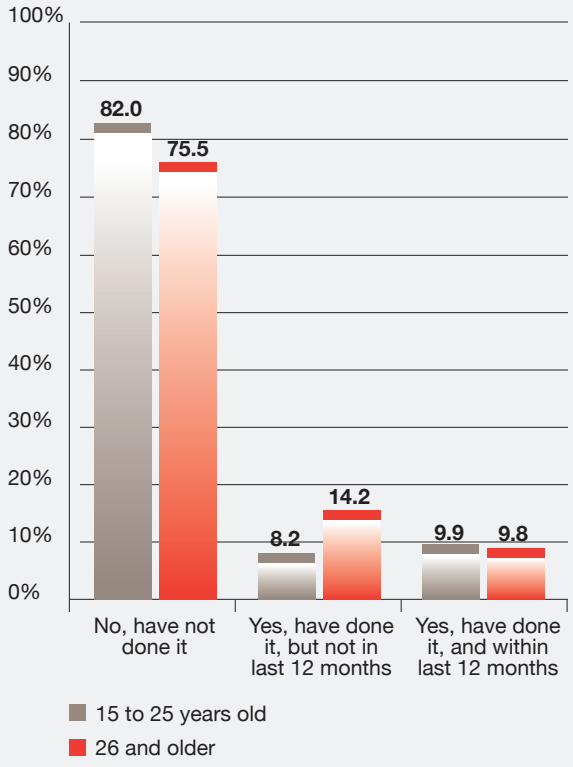
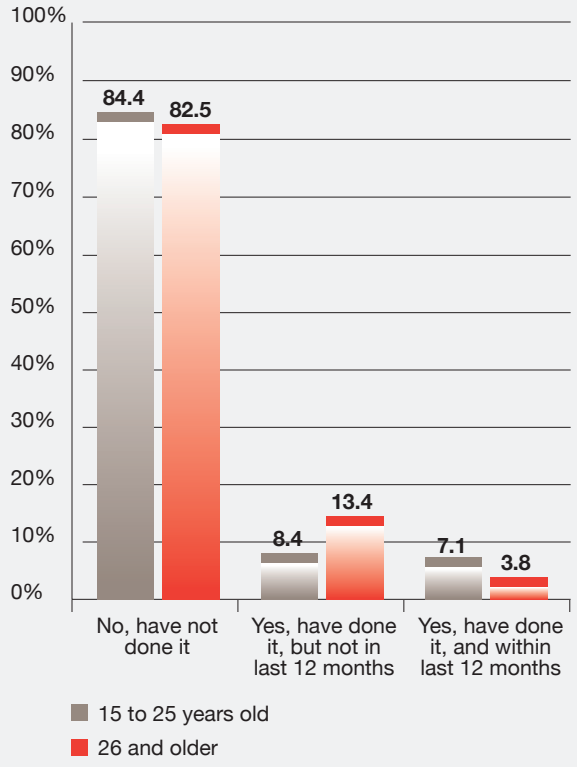


Figure 9:
Contacted newspaper or magazine



Source: Center for Information & Research on Civic Learning & Engagement©

Figure 10:
Taken part in a protest, march, or demonstration



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Based in Takoma Park, MD, FairVote is a leading national non-partisan, non-profit pro-democracy organization. We pursue an innovative, solution-oriented agenda that focuses on systemic change and increasing political participation.

learning DEMOCRACY

www.fairvote.org

"The Way Democracy Will Be"

Fair Vote