

TRUST, TOLERANCE, AND TEACHING: A NATIONAL SURVEY

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Institute for Governance and Civics at Florida State University conducted a national survey in February 2025 to assess public views on politics, education, civic knowledge, and political tolerance. The survey included 2,002 U.S. voters and an oversample of 412 Floridians (N=2,414). Below, we highlight some of the key findings from this poll.

- A majority of Americans (53.1%) believed the country is on the wrong track. Pessimism tended to be higher among women, younger adults, and Black voters. In contrast, Trump voters were significantly more optimistic, with nearly 69% saying the country is headed in the right direction.
- Voter's civic knowledge appeared mixed. Most respondents correctly answered basic questions—like identifying George Washington and the meaning of the flag's stars. At the same time, nearly 30% misunderstood the Supreme Court's primary function.
- Political tolerance was lower among younger voters. Just 14.5% of 18–24-year-olds showed high willingness to engage across political differences, compared to 39.3% of those over 65. Trump voters were slightly more politically tolerant than Harris voters.
- On education, voters supported civics instruction rooted in constitutional principles. Roughly 85% favored teaching about freedoms in the Constitution and requiring civics programs that include learning about the Constitution. More than 80% supported curriculum transparency.
- Trust in public schools remained highly partisan: roughly 75% of Democrats expressed trust in K–12 schools to be free of bias, compared to just 45% of Republicans.

Overall, the poll shows Americans value civics, remain divided ideologically, and desire a renewed commitment to national unity through education.

A MAJORITY OF VOTERS THINK THE U.S. IS ON THE WRONG TRACK

We asked respondents whether they believed things in the United States are “going in the right direction” or if they “have gotten off on the wrong track.” Overall, 53.1 percent said the country was on the wrong track, while 38.2 percent said it was headed in the right direction. Nearly every subgroup shared this sentiment. Men were slightly less pessimistic than women, with 49.7 percent of men saying

the country was on the wrong track, compared to 56.4 percent of women. Similarly, older respondents were less pessimistic than younger ones, though a majority in every age group believed the country was off course.

With the exception of Asian voters—which were a relatively small sample size—the majority of each racial and ethnic group said the U.S. was on the wrong track. Black voters

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were the most pessimistic, with 59.6 percent expressing this view. Interestingly, middle-income voters—those with household incomes between \$60,000 and \$100,000—were the most optimistic, with 45.7 percent saying the country was heading in the right direction and 47.6 percent saying it was on the wrong track. By comparison, 57 percent of those earning less than \$60,000 and 54.5 percent of those earning more than \$100,000 said the country was on the wrong track.

The outlook among middle-income voters may reflect President Trump’s stronger appeal within this demographic. In fact, Trump voters were the only subgroup with a clear majority expressing confidence in the country’s direction. Nearly 69 percent of those who voted for Donald Trump in the 2024 presidential election said the country was headed in the right direction, while only 21.9 percent said it was on the wrong track. By contrast, 83.3 percent of Kamala Harris voters said the country was on the wrong track.

Table 1: Would you say that things in the United States of America are going in the right direction or have they gotten off on the wrong track?

	Number of Respondents	Wrong Track (Percent)	Right Direction (Percent)
Total	2,414	53.1	38.2
Sex			
Male	1,227	49.7	42.3
Female	1,185	56.4	34.3
Age			
65 or Older	579	52.0	41.2
55 to 64	459	50.4	38.3
45 to 54	435	50.0	40.4
35 to 44	362	57.8	35.6
25 to 34	338	56.3	33.5
18 to 24	241	55.3	37.5
Race/Ethnicity			
White	1,690	51.8	39.2
Black	290	59.6	34.9
Hispanic	266	50.7	42.6
Asian	97	49.5	33.2
Education Level			
High School or Less	676	48.9	43.4
Some College	724	55.1	36.7
Four Year College	603	51.6	37.5
Post Grad	410	58.9	33.3
Household Income			
<\$60,000	675	57.0	33.8
\$60,000 to \$100,000	725	47.6	45.7
>\$100,000	1,014	54.5	35.8
2024 Presidential Vote			
Kamala Harris	1,104	83.3	9.8
Donald Trump	1,138	21.9	68.7

At the time this poll was conducted, President Trump and his administration were moving at a frenetic pace to eliminate programs that did not align with his agenda. The data suggest that Trump voters strongly supported the president's actions. Overall, 49.8 percent of respondents approved of the job President Trump was doing, while 46.8 percent disapproved. Among Trump voters, approval was overwhelming—94 percent expressed support for his performance.

Table 2: Do you disapprove or approve of the job Donald Trump is doing as president?

	Disapprove (Percent)	Approve (Percent)
Total	46.8	49.8
Sex		
Male	43.6	53.0
Female	49.9	46.7
Race/Ethnicity		
White	42.7	55.1
Black	62.2	30.2
Hispanic	50.8	45.7
Asian	55.5	39.4
2024 Presidential Vote		
Kamala Harris	90.7	6.6
Donald Trump	4.0	94.0

RESPONDENT'S CIVIC KNOWLEDGE RAISES CONCERN

Our poll included seven civic knowledge questions, each with four multiple-choice options. Respondents performed well on the more basic items. Over 95 percent correctly identified George Washington as the Father of our country and knew that the stars on the U.S. flag represent the states. Similarly, large majorities knew that Abraham Lincoln wrote the Emancipation Proclamation (89.3%) and that states have different numbers of Representatives in Congress based on population (87.1%). Additionally, 81.8 percent correctly recognized that the separation of powers helps prevent any one branch of government from becoming too powerful.

Correct responses declined when questions addressed more complex topics, such as the

judiciary and civic responsibilities. Only 70.2 percent correctly identified the primary role of the U.S. Supreme Court as “to declare what the law is.” Alarming, 19.2 percent believed the Court’s role is “to decide based on policy preferences,” while 8.2 percent said it should “change society for the better.”

Table 3: Civic Knowledge Questions

Question	Percent Correct
Who wrote the Emancipation Proclamation?	89.3%
Why do some states have more Representatives than other states?	87.1%
In the U.S. Constitution, what is the most important factor that stops one branch of the federal government from becoming too powerful?	81.8%
What is the primary role of the U.S. Supreme Court?	70.2%

YOUNGER GENERATIONS TEND TO BE LESS POLITICALLY TOLERANT

A key measure of political tolerance is a person’s willingness to interact with individuals with whom they disagree. To assess this, we asked participants to respond to six scenarios, each beginning with the prompt: “When it comes to people who are of the opposite political party or political disposition from you, would you be willing to...”. The responses revealed several noteworthy patterns.

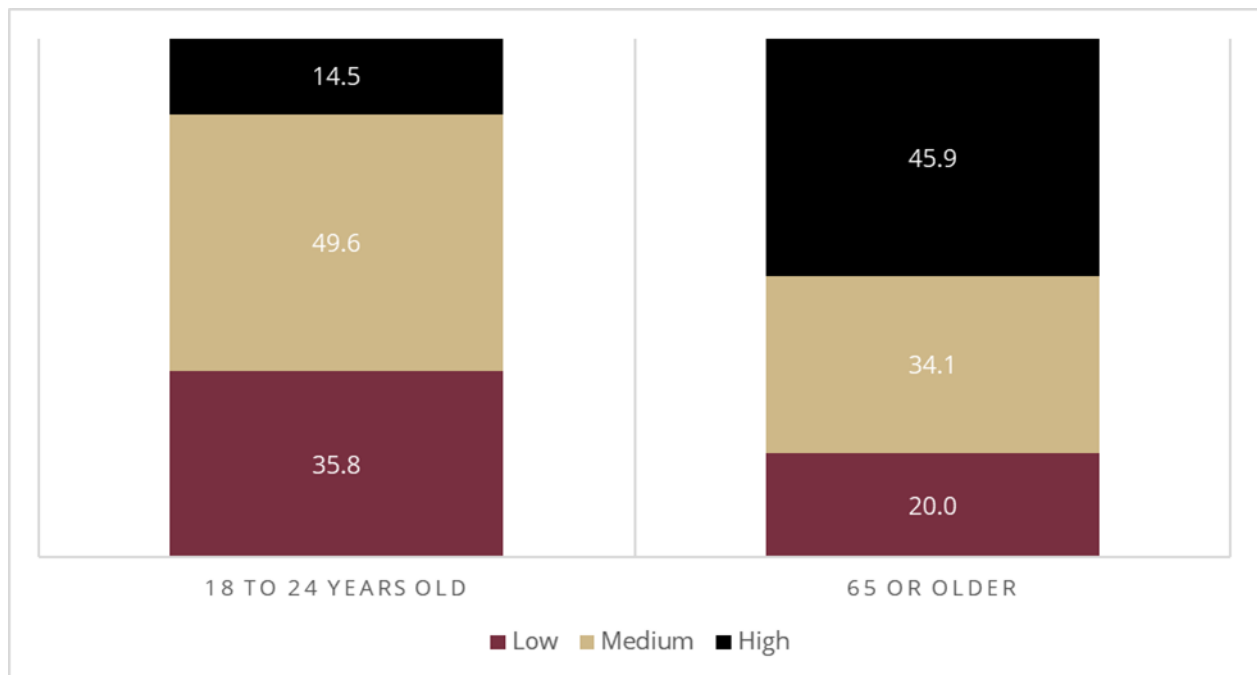
Most voters expressed a willingness to engage with those with whom they disagree in social settings and commercial interactions. However, support declined when it came to more personal matters. Just over half—50.8 percent—said they would be willing to allow someone with opposing political views to marry a member of their family, and 52.3 percent said they would be willing to allow such a person to teach their children. Notably, about one in five respondents said they would not permit someone they disagreed with politically to marry into their family or educate their children.

Table 4: Political Tolerance

When it comes to people who are of the opposite political party or political disposition from you, would you be willing to...?	No	Yes, but I would prefer not to	Yes
Have them marry a member of your family.	20.9%	28.3%	50.8%
Sell them something.	14.2%	11.8%	74.0%
Buy something from them.	16.9%	16.6%	66.5%
Send members of your family to school with them.	14.2%	18.3%	67.5%
Have them teach members of your family at school.	21.8%	25.9%	52.3%
Engage in a social or recreational activity with them.	13.3%	16.0%	70.0%

Based on participants' responses, we categorized individuals as having low, medium, or high levels of cross-partisan engagement. A response of "Yes" was assigned a value of 1, while "Yes, but I would prefer not to" was assigned 0.5. Each participant received a total score ranging from 0 to 6. Those scoring 3 or below were classified as having low engagement, scores between 3.5 and 5.5 as medium, and a perfect score of 6 as high engagement.

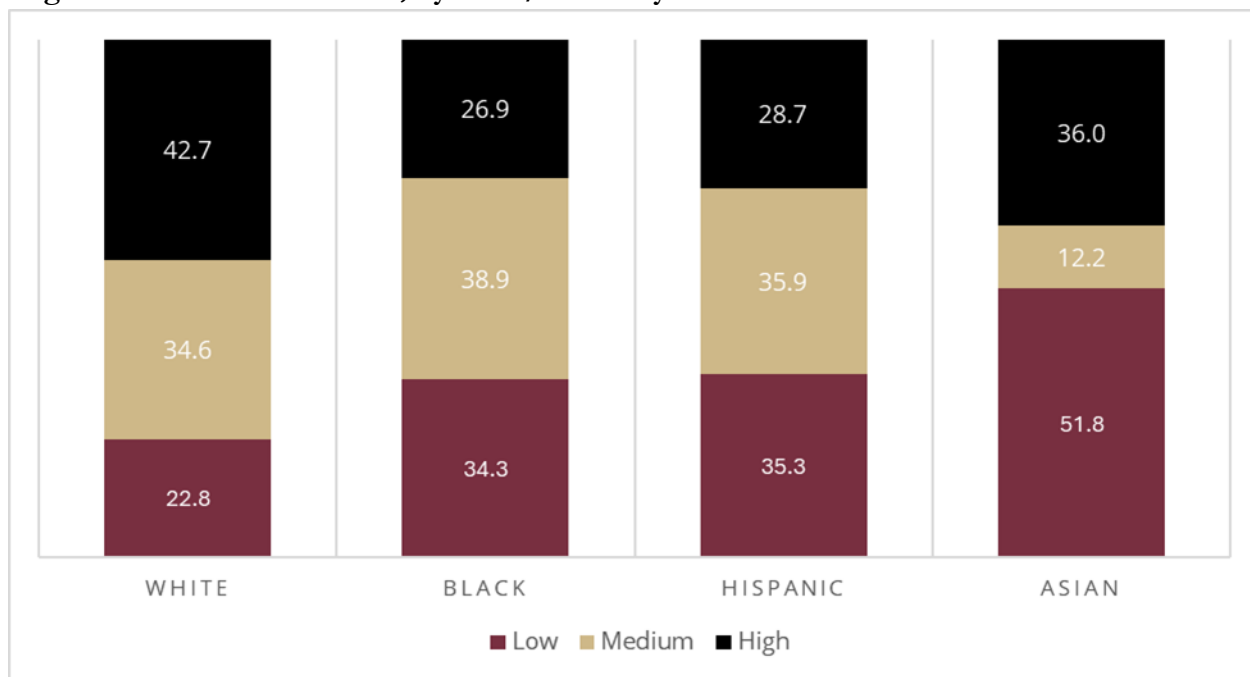
Significant differences emerged across demographic groups. Young adults aged 18 to 24 showed the lowest levels of political tolerance, while those 65 and older displayed the highest. Only 14.5 percent of 18–24-year-olds demonstrated high political tolerance, meaning they answered "yes" to all six scenarios. In contrast, 39.3 percent of those 65 and older gave uniformly tolerant responses. Notably, more than one-third of the youngest age group fell into the low tolerance category.

Figure 1: Political Tolerance, Age Group Comparison

Similar patterns emerged across racial and ethnic groups (Figure2). White voters in our sample had the highest levels of political tolerance, with 42.7 percent receiving a high score, 34.6 percent a medium score, and 22.8

percent a low score. In contrast, more than one in three Black and Hispanic voters fell into the low tolerance category, as did half of Asian voters.

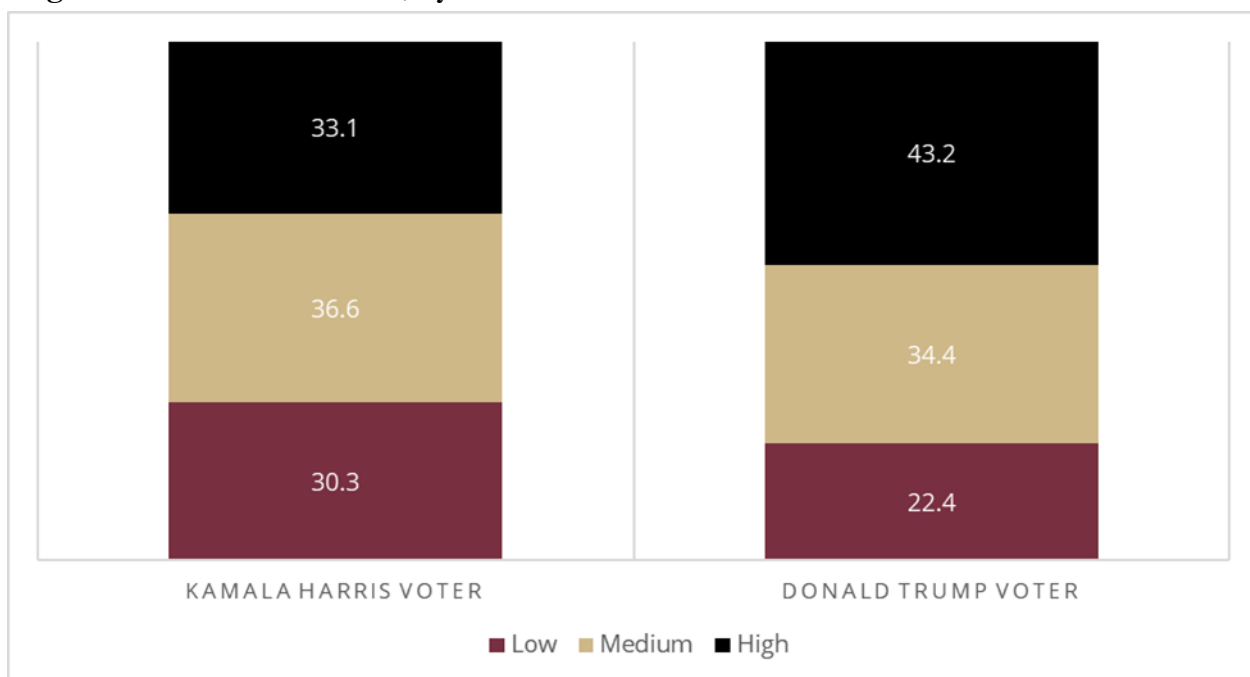
Figure 2: Political Tolerance, by Race/Ethnicity



Trump voters exhibited higher levels of political tolerance than Harris voters (Figure 3). Forty-three percent of Trump voters achieved a high political tolerance score—10 percentage points higher than Harris voters.

Similar proportions of Trump (34.4%) and Harris (36.6%) voters fell into the medium category. Overall, these findings suggest that Trump voters were marginally more politically tolerant than Harris voters.

Figure 3: Political Tolerance, by 2024 Presidential Candidate Vote



THE PURPOSES OF EDUCATION: CITIZENSHIP AND CAREERS

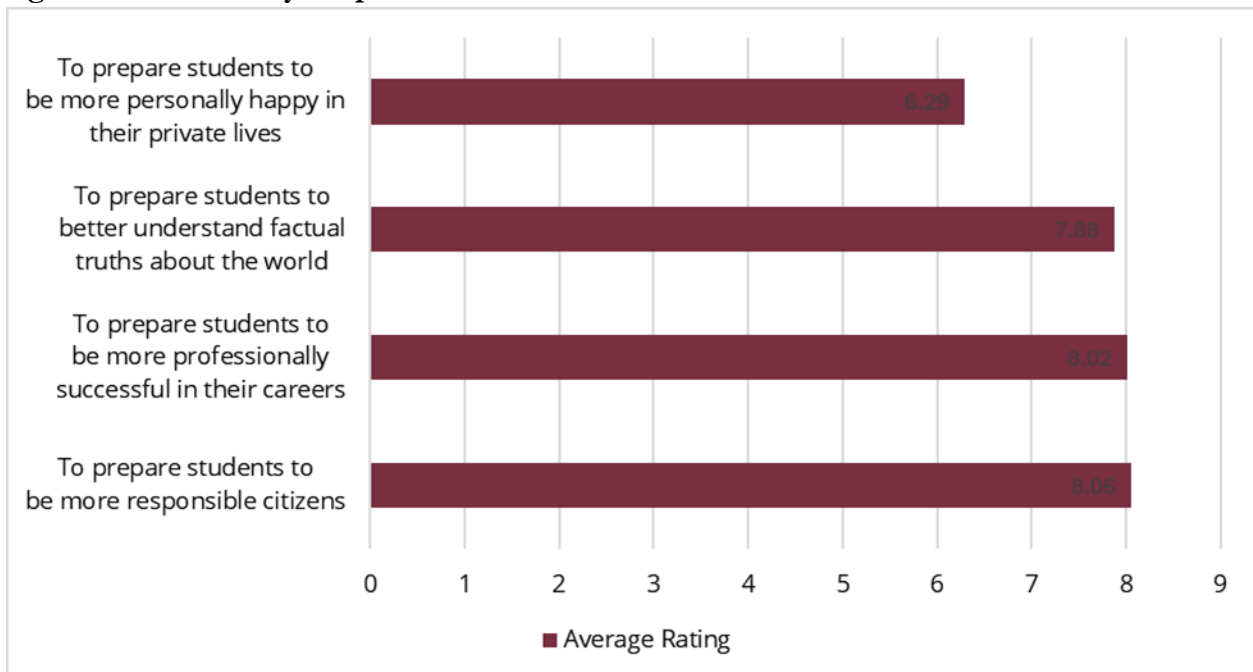
To understand how voters view the purpose of education, we asked participants, “What is the goal of K–12 education?” Respondents were asked to rate four goals on a scale from 1 to 10, where 1 indicated the goal was not important at all and 10 indicated it was the single most important goal. The four goals included: helping students live meaningful and happy lives, teaching factual truths about the world, preparing students for careers, and preparing students for citizenship.

Overall, the results suggest that voters view education as serving a dual purpose: preparing students for both citizenship and careers

Overall, the results suggest that voters view education as serving a dual purpose: preparing students for both citizenship and careers. Close behind these priorities was helping students understand factual truths about the world.

As shown in Figure 4, “preparing students to be more responsible citizens” received the highest average rating at 8.06, followed closely by “preparing students to be more professionally successful in their careers” at 8.02. “Helping students better understand factual truths about the world” followed with an average score of 7.88. While “helping students lead more personally happy and meaningful lives” received the lowest average rating at 6.29, this does not suggest voters devalue happiness—rather, it indicates that they see the purpose of K–12 education as more focused on preparing students for civic and professional life than on fostering personal fulfillment alone.

Figure 4: The Primary Purpose of Education



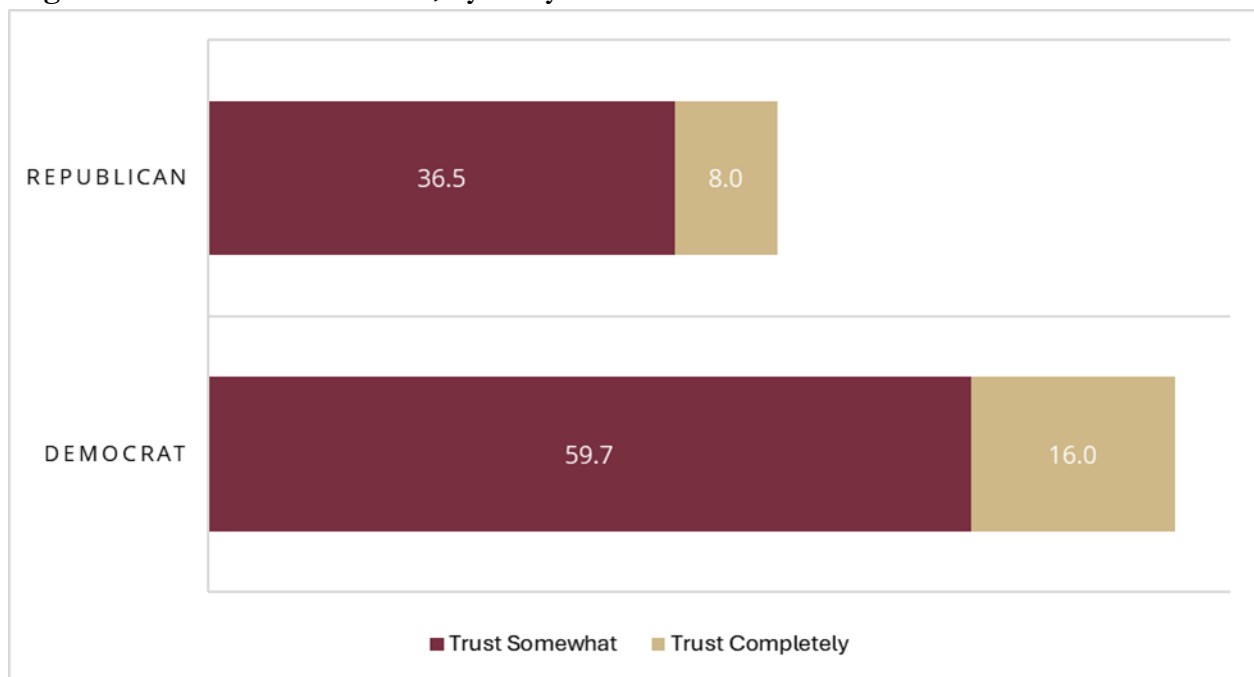
REPUBLICANS HAVE LOWER TRUST IN K-12 SCHOOLS

We asked voters how much they trust K–12 schools to provide students with an education free of political bias. Republicans expressed significantly less trust than Democrats. Only 8 percent of Republicans said they trust K–12 schools completely, and 36.5 percent said they trust them somewhat. In contrast, twice as many Democrats reported complete trust, and nearly 60 percent said they trust them somewhat. Altogether,

more than three in four Democrats expressed some level of trust in K–12 education, compared to just 44.5 percent of Republicans—a gap of 31.2 percentage points.

Trust also varied by race and ethnicity. Black voters reported the highest levels of trust, with 65.1 percent indicating at least some confidence in schools. Hispanic voters followed closely at 62.6 percent. Asian and white voters expressed lower levels of trust, with both groups averaging around 58 percent.

Figure 5: Trust in K-12 Schools, by Party



AMERICANS SUPPORT CIVICS INSTRUCTION, SPURN DIVISIVE PRACTICES

Given the trust disparities in K–12 education noted above, it is clear that many Americans believe there is room for improvement. To explore potential reforms, we asked voters whether a range of proposals would make education better or worse. The results are unambiguous: Americans overwhelmingly support greater civics instruction.

The strongest support came for teaching students about the freedoms guaranteed by the Constitution and the Bill of Rights, with 85.3 percent saying this would improve

education. Similar levels of support were found for requiring civics programs that include learning about the U.S. Constitution (84.6%) and teaching students that, regardless of their racial or ethnic background, they are all part of one nation (84.2%). Transparency also received broad approval, with 81.2 percent favoring the idea of providing parents with more detailed information about their child’s curriculum.

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Conversely, most voters rejected divisive teachings on race. Roughly two-thirds said that emphasizing economic and racial background over individual talent or hard work—and teaching that America is a fundamentally racist country—would make education worse (Appendix 1). However, subgroup differences were notable. Nearly 64 percent of white voters said teaching that America is fundamentally racist would worsen education, while 24.1 percent said it would improve it. Among Black voters, 34.5 percent said it would improve education, compared to 48.5 percent who said it would worsen it. Similar patterns appeared in responses to teaching that background matters more than effort: 50.4 percent of Black voters said this would improve education, while 33.3 percent said worse; among white voters, just 24.8 percent said better and 64.2 percent said worse.

Partisan differences were stark. While Democrats were divided on whether teaching that America is fundamentally racist would improve education (45.1 percent better, 39.7 percent worse), Republicans overwhelmingly opposed it (14.4 percent better, 75.9 percent worse). Democrats were also more supportive of teaching political activism (60.1 percent better vs. 32.2 percent of Republicans).

In contrast, teaching that America is a fundamentally good country received strong support from white voters and Republicans. Among white voters, 72.4 percent said it would improve education; among Black voters, 53.2 percent agreed. Support was highest among Trump voters (84.1 percent), compared to 53.6 percent of Harris voters. One of the widest gaps emerged on patriotism: while 63.4 percent of voters overall said encouraging students to be patriotic would improve education, only 47.1 percent of Harris voters agreed, compared to 82.6 percent of Trump voters.

Support for expanding parental control over school choice was also strong, particularly among Black voters. Overall, 68 percent of respondents said giving parents

more control would improve education, including 73.8 percent of Black voters and 67.4 percent of white voters. Support was highest among Trump voters (82.2 percent), compared to 54.5 percent of Harris voters.

POLL INFORMATION

This poll was conducted between February 7 and February 12, 2025 by Hunt Research. The poll consisted of 2,002 U.S. voters and an oversample of 412 Florida voters (N = 2,414). The poll was conducted online with a panel survey matched to a registered voter file. The demographic characteristics of the survey group are presented in Table 5.

Table 5: Descriptive Characteristics of Poll Participants

Category	Percent
Sex	
Male	49.1
Female	50.8
Age	
18 to 24	10.0
25 to 34	14.0
35 to 44	15.0
45 to 54	18.0
55 to 64	19.0
65 or older	24.0
Race/Ethnicity	
White	70.0
Black	12.0
Hispanic	11.0
Asian	4.0
Income	
Less than \$40,000	17.8
\$40,001-\$60,000	12.3
\$60,001-\$80,000	23.6
\$80,001-\$100,000	20.3
\$100,001-\$250,000	21.7
More than \$250,000	4.2
Presidential vote	
Kamala Harris	45.7
Donald Trump	47.2
Did not vote	5.0
Stated Party	
Democrat	35.7
Republican	38.1
Independent	26.3

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

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Appendix 1: Would the following education reforms make education better or worse?

