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**INSTITUTE FOR
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Why We Study Civics and Hope You Will Too

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As America celebrates the 250th anniversary of our Declaration of Independence, we continue to ask deep foundational questions about what liberty entails, the proper role of government, and how we can best hand over America to future generations.

To examine those questions—and to analyze what we can do to train the next generation of effective citizens and responsible leaders—the Institute for Governance and Civics at FSU has undertaken a [series](#) of surveys and experiments. The results are intriguing and frightening; hopeful and despairing. And they show exactly why the work of civic education is so important.

In October 2025, we asked 1,447 Americans what they thought were some of the most important topics on which to educate students. Fully 84% of Americans said it was “very important” for K-12 schools to prepare students to be more responsible citizens. Another 14% rated that goal as “somewhat important.” Even at the college and university level, 73% of Americans continued to state that it was “very important” to educate more responsible citizens (Figure 1).

As America turns 250, Americans want our institutions to train future generations in American civics.

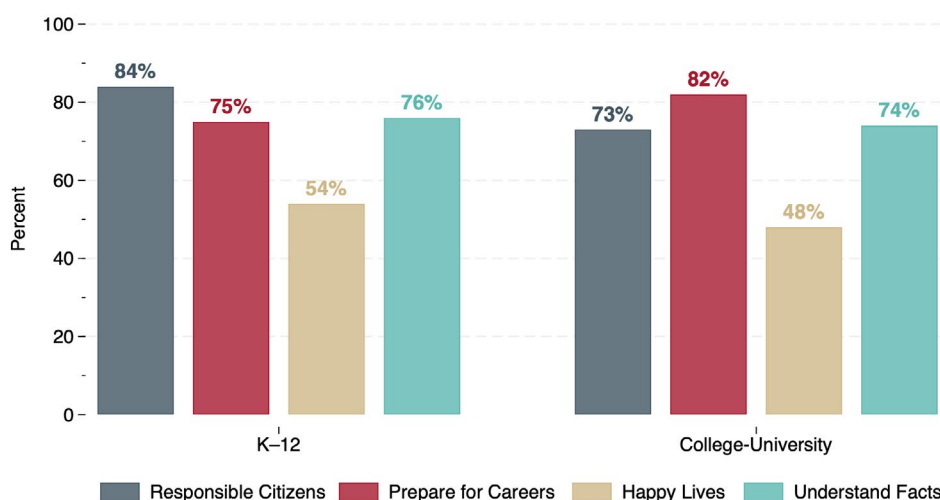


Figure 1: Important Topics for K-12 and College-University Levels

Note: Estimates are weighted to represent the U.S. adult population (n = 1,447). Bars show the percentage of respondents who ranked each topic as “very important.”

The timing could not be more apt.

Civic awareness is at an all-time low. In that October 2025 survey, we asked respondents if their states had their own constitutions or relied on the United States Constitution (Figure 2). Only 49% of respondents knew their states had their own constitutions. Of the remaining respondents, 19% said their states relied on the national constitution; 32% replied that they were not sure.

We asked the same question again in May 2026 and received nearly identical responses—50% of Americans knew their states had their own constitutions. Nearly 10% believed their states had no constitutions at all.

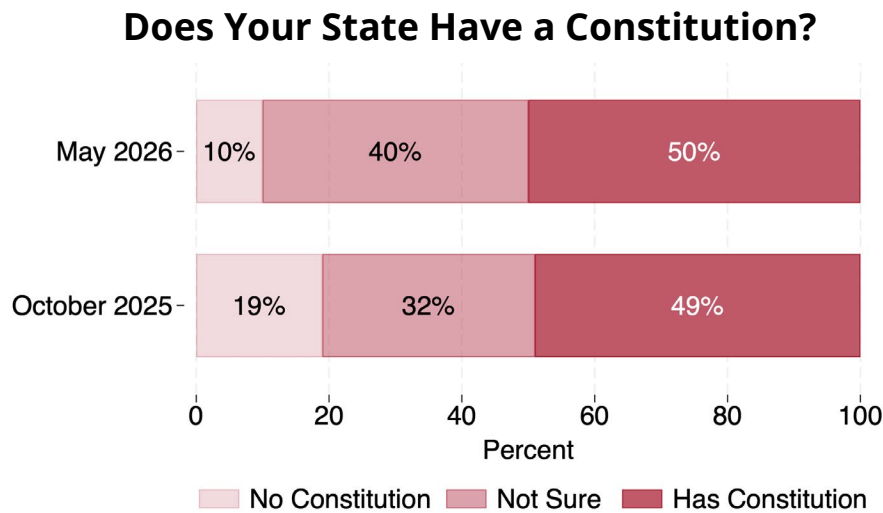


Figure 2: Knowledge of State Constitution

Note: Estimates are weighted to represent the U.S. adult population (2025 n = 1,447, 2026 n = 1,400). Bars show the percentage of respondents in each category.

This lack of awareness regarding state constitutions matters because they play a central role in American self-government. Under the nation's federal system, many rights and public institutions that directly affect citizens' daily lives—including public education systems, hunting and fishing rights, labor provisions, government transparency provisions, and privacy protections—are established or defined in state constitutions. In fact, the topics of education and labor are not mentioned at all in the national constitution. When half of Americans are unaware that their states' constitutions exist, they are less prepared to understand the institutions and rights that shape their lives.

Greater civic education can address these deficiencies.

While understanding rights and responsibilities is reason enough for greater civics knowledge, there are other advantages to America from a more civically aware citizenry. In a September 2025 [report](#), the IGC found a strong relationship between civics knowledge and political tolerance. The report showed individuals with high civic literacy scored 16 points higher on a 0-100 tolerance scale than did individuals with low levels of civic literacy. That was a meaningfully large difference—enough to move someone from “leaning reluctant” to engaging with those who hold different political ideas to being “clearly willing” to engage.

This finding is particularly important amid increasing support for political violence. Another IGC [report](#) found that nearly 20% of adults under age 30 agreed with the statement that violence can be justified to stop harmful speech. Among liberals aged 18-29, that figure rose to 31%.

Using physical violence is sometimes justified to stop a person from engaging in harmful public speech

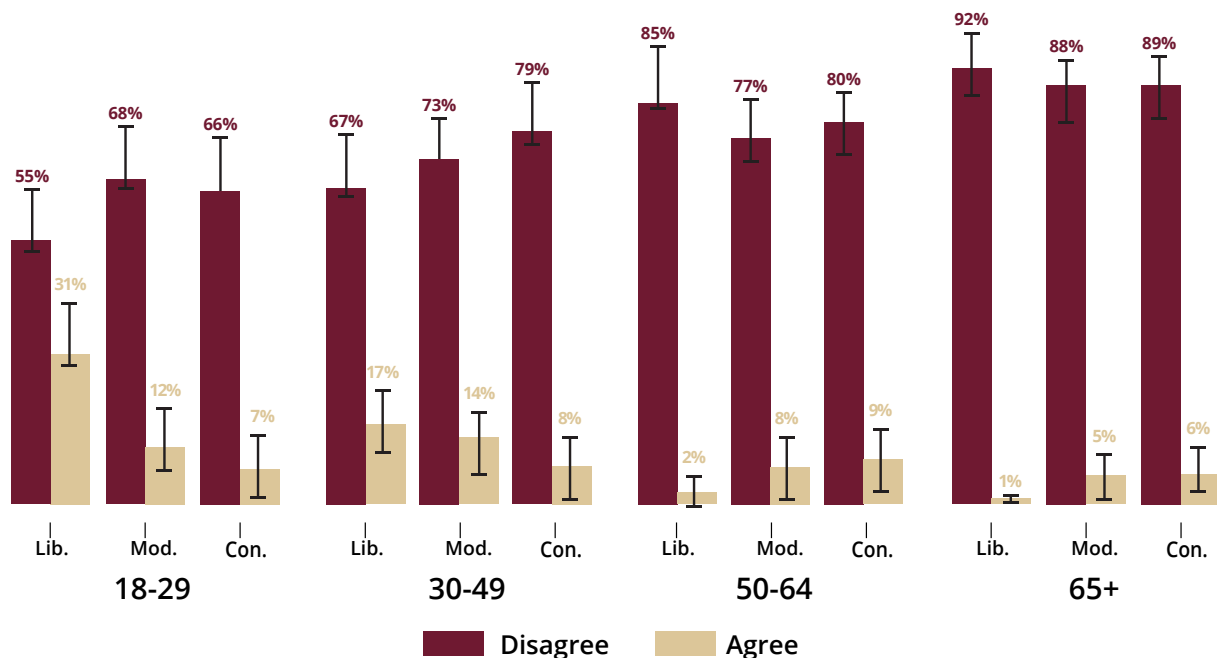


Figure 3. Views on the Use of Violence to Stop Harmful Speech, by Political Ideology

Note. Data (N = 1,445) are weighted to be representative of the national U.S. adult population. Error bars represent 95% confidence intervals, indicating the range within which the true population value is likely to fall. “Neither agree nor disagree” and “Don’t know/Prefer not to say” responses are included in the data but not displayed in the chart. Estimates adjust for differences in gender, race and ethnicity, party affiliation, educational attainment, household income, marital status, employment status, homeownership, parenting status, total household size, number of adults in the household, metropolitan status, and census region.



While civic education alone cannot solve every challenge America faces, the data suggest that greater civic literacy is associated with greater tolerance, a greater willingness to engage with differing viewpoints, and lower support for violent responses to disagreement.

So, why do we do what we do? It's simple.

At a time when political rancor often discourages dialogue, anything that can bring Americans together and make compromise easier is a beneficial thing. Americans overwhelmingly believe that schools should prepare students to become responsible citizens. The evidence shows they are right. Civically minded individuals are more open to ideas and less supportive of violence.

Our country can ill afford to ignore the need for more and stronger civics education. The future of our constitutional republic depends on it.

That's why we do what we do at the IGC.

APPENDIX A

Thinking of K-12 education, how important is it... to prepare students to be more responsible citizens?

Variable:

	Responsible Citizens	Careers	Happy Lives	Factual Truths
Not important	2%	2%	9%	4%
Somewhat important	14%	23%	37%	20%
Very important	84%	75%	54%	76%
Totals	100%	100%	100%	100%
Unweighted N	1447	1447	1447	1447

Percentages weighted; valid denominator unless noted.

Thinking of College-University education, how important is it... to prepare students to be more responsible citizens?

Variable:

	Responsible Citizens	Careers	Happy Lives	Factual Truths
Not important	4%	2%	16%	4%
Somewhat important	23%	16%	36%	22%
Very important	73%	82%	48%	74%
Totals	100%	100%	100%	100%
Unweighted N	1447	1447	1447	1447

As far as you know, does your state have its own Constitution or rely on the national one?

Variable:

Label	Total
Its own	49%
Rely on the national one	19%
Not sure	32%
Web blank	0%
Totals	100%
Unweighted N	1446

To the best of your knowledge, does your state have its own constitution?

Variable:

Label	Total
Yes, it does	50%
No, it does not	10%
Don't know	40%
Totals	100%
Unweighted N	1400

Figure 3. Views on the Use of Violence to Stop Harmful Speech, by Age Group and Political Ideology

Age Group	Ideology	Disagree	Agree
18-29	Liberal	55%	31%
18-29	Moderate	68%	12%
18-29	Conservative	66%	7%
30-49	Liberal	67%	17%
30-49	Moderate	73%	14%
30-49	Conservative	79%	8%
50-64	Liberal	85%	2%
50-64	Moderate	77%	8%
50-64	Conservative	80%	9%
65+	Liberal	92%	1%
65+	Moderate	88%	5%
65+	Conservative	89%	6%