Agreement Across the Aisle:

Schools Should Prepare Students for the Rights and Responsibilities of Citizenship

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Executive Summary

Our education-focused University of Southern California (USC) research team viewed a need to probe deeply into the public's attitudes and opinions on issues related to educating students about the rights and responsibilities of citizenship in the United States democracy. This is our third annual look at adults' views on the most pressing educational topics in the U.S.

From October through December 2024, we fielded a survey to the [Understanding America Study's](#) (UAS) nationally representative, longitudinal panel of households in the United States. Questions addressed civics education, managing disagreement about education within communities, free speech, and Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) initiatives. With a response rate of 81%, our sample included 4,200 adults, almost half (44%) of whom had a school-aged child in the home. A bit more than one-third of the sample, 37%, identified as Democrat or lean Democrat (D) while nearly the same number (36%) identified as Republican or lean Republican (R). Meanwhile, 26% identified as independent or belonging to another political party, such as Green or Libertarian. (For purposes of this document, we label the third group as "Other.")[1]

Here, we highlight six key takeaways from our analyses. In the full body of the report, we expand upon these and provide more results.

Cross-partisan agreement: Less than a third of all adults think U.S. public schools do a good job of preparing students for citizenship.

Adults think U.S. public schools are doing a poor job at achieving what could reasonably be argued as schools' primary aims, and this opinion does not vary substantially by partisan affiliation. For each of four purposes of our nation's education system, approximately a third or fewer adults think schools deserve a grade of an A or B (Figure ES1). The greatest proportion of adults (40%) thinks schools deserve As or Bs in the goal of preparing students for college, followed by citizenship (29%), being good workers (28%), and preparing students for life (16%). Equal (or greater) numbers think schools are failing in three of the four areas.

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[1] Sums to 99% due to rounding.

FIGURE ES1: PERCENTAGE OF RESPONDENTS ASSIGNING SCHOOLS LETTER GRADES A THROUGH F FOR PREPARING STUDENTS FOR FOUR PURPOSES OF PUBLIC EDUCATION.
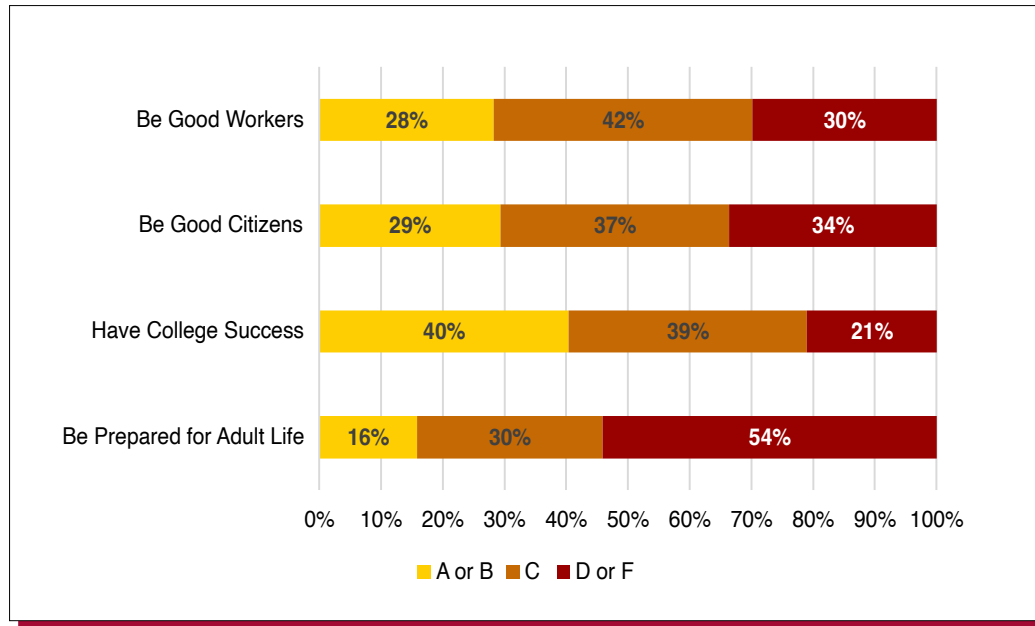
Contrary to political rhetoric, there is high overall support — and a recent narrowing of the partisan divide — for students learning civics topics in school.

We observed significant overall increases since 2021 in the proportions of adults rating civics education topics as important or very important. Driving these increases are Republicans (up 4 percentage points on average) and those with other political affiliations (up 7 points), as among Democrats the increase was smaller (less than one percentage point). Helping explain this disparity is that in 2021, an already-high proportion of Democrats endorsed these items as important — thus in 2024, Republicans narrowed the gap on many items. This trend includes the item stating students should be learning about racism in school, where 54% of Republicans in 2021 endorsing this item grew to 58% in 2024 (Table ES1).

TABLE ES1: CHANGES OVER TIME IN PERCENTAGES OF ADULTS BELIEVING STUDENTS LEARNING TOPICS RELATED TO CIVICS EDUCATION IN SCHOOL ARE IMPORTANT, REPUBLICANS COMPARED TO DEMOCRATS.

	REPUBLICAN			DEMOCRAT		
	2021	2024	CHANGE *	2021	2024	CHANGE *
Political issues like immigration or gun control	57%	64%	+7% ↑	82%	80%	-2%
How the US government system works	91%	95%	+4% ↑	91%	94%	+3%
Racism in the United States	54%	58%	+4% ↑	92%	93%	+1%
Requirements for voting	84%	88%	+4% ↑	90%	90%	0%
Income inequality in the United States	46%	51%	+5% ↑	87%	87%	0%
The United States' leadership role in the world	76%	82%	+6% ↑	84%	84%	0%
The federal government's influence over state and local affairs	73%	82%	+9% ↑	84%	86%	+2%
Benefits and challenges of social programs like Medicare and Social security	62%	69%	+7% ↑	82%	82%	0%
How students can get involved in local government or politics	69%	75%	+6% ↑	85%	84%	-1%
The contributions of historical figures who are racial/ethnic minorities	61%	60%	-1%	86%	88%	+2%
The contributions of historical figures who are women	64%	61%	-3%	87%	88%	+1%

* **0-3 percentage point change:** no shading; **4-5 percentage point change:** light shading; **6+ percentage point change:** dark shading.

There is high overall and cross-partisan support for students learning about civic education topics through a wide range of instructional activities.

Shown in Figure ES2, majorities of both Republicans and Democrats think all 16 civics education-related activities we presented are important or very important, except: 1) joining a local protest during school (21% overall, 24% Democrats, 12% Republicans), and 2) reciting the Pledge of Allegiance (63% overall, 44% Democrats 84% Republicans). The latter has the largest partisan gap among all activities, at 40 percentage points.

We also observed strong cross-partisan agreement about learning multiple perspectives, with 79% overall believing it is important for students to debate topics from opposite points of view (84% Democrats, 78% Republicans), and 84% believing it is important to evaluate different arguments about a topic (89% Democrats, 84% Republicans).

FIGURE ES2: ADULTS' BELIEFS ABOUT THE IMPORTANCE OF STUDENTS PARTICIPATING IN CIVICS-RELATED LEARNING ACTIVITIES.

Legend: Overall • Republican ▲ Other ■ Democrat ◆

Activity	Other	Overall	Republican	Democrat
Learn about the U.S. Constitution	87	92	95	93
Learn to detect false information online	84		88	89 / 94
Learn reasons to vote in local, state, or federal elections	79	87	89	92
Learn importance of registering to vote	74	85	86	92
Evaluate different arguments on a topic		77	84	84 / 89
Register to vote when students turn 18	74	84	84	90
Honor veterans and military service	78	83 / 80	92	
Research solutions to community problems		79 / 80	83	89
Debate a topic from the opposite view of their own	73	79	78	84
Do community service as part of classwork	71 / 73	75		80
Vote in school elections (e.g., student council)	71	73	74	64
Recite the pledge of allegiance	63	63	84	44
Participate in a mock trial	54 / 57		58	58
Join school voting campaigns (e.g., for class president)	54	56	59	57
Write letters to a newspaper about issues they care about	53 / 54		51	58
Join a local protest during school time	27	21	12	24

Percentage of respondents in support of each (weighted)

Every possible university response to students' expressions of free speech has more adult support than even the most supported student protest action.

Adults generally oppose disruptive forms of student protest, and support universities shutting them down. Specifically, as shown in Figure ES3, majorities think it is never appropriate for students to disrupt graduation ceremonies to protest (79%), write or draw protest messages on college property (76%), shout down speakers (67%), or occupy school buildings (56%). In contrast, a majority of respondents believe it is always appropriate for universities to support police arresting students who break laws during protests (53%).

Even the more common and modest kinds of student protest have only tepid and conditional support. Though not a majority, still large proportions of respondents believe it's never appropriate that students skip class (46%), walk out (44%), or build an encampment (40%) — and very small proportions believe these activities are always appropriate (3-8%).

Across political affiliations, we found strong opposition to disruption of campus activities, vandalism, law/rule breaking, or things that make campus unsafe (less than a third support, with opposition a plurality or majority), and support for universities to curtail behaviors that cross those lines. However, greater proportions of Republicans support more authoritarian responses to student protests (e.g., shutting down protests, calling the police), and take the side of the institution.

The least-popular institutional action we asked about, with substantively similar perspectives among Republicans and Democrats, was for institutions to take an official position on a current political issue (e.g., via sending an email documenting the institution's stance).

FIGURE ES3: ADULTS' SUPPORT, OVERALL AND BY PARTISAN AFFILIATION, FOR STUDENT FREE SPEECH ACTIONS AND COLLEGE/UNIVERSITY RESPONSES.

Universities

Action	Never Appropriate	Sometimes Appropriate	Always Appropriate	I Don't Know
Shut down protests for safety	5%	49%	38%	8%
Police arrest students	6%	33%	53%	8%
Shut down protests for learning	9%	41%	41%	9%
Free speech zones for protests	10%	43%	32%	15%
Police break up protests	12%	62%	17%	9%
Cancel speakers over protests	15%	50%	23%	12%
Move online to avoid protests	28%	47%	11%	15%
Take an official position	28%	38%	15%	19%

Students

Action	Never Appropriate	Sometimes Appropriate	Always Appropriate	I Don't Know
Demand divestment	29%	42%	10%	20%
Criticize on social media	38%	38%	13%	11%
Protest camps	40%	41%	7%	12%
Walk out in protest	44%	36%	8%	12%
Skip class in protest	46%	34%	8%	12%
Occupy buildings in protest	56%	23%	7%	14%
Shout down speakers	67%	18%	4%	11%
Protest messages on property	76%	12%	4%	8%
Disrupt graduation	79%	10%	3%	8%

Legend: ■ Never Appropriate ■ Sometimes Appropriate ■ Always Appropriate ■ I Don't Know

Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion on college campuses receives substantially more support from Democrats than Republicans

Support for DEI initiatives showed some of the largest partisan gaps on our survey, with Democrats substantially more supportive than Republicans. While 58% of Republicans say it is never appropriate for job applicants to be required to write about their commitment to DEI, 23% of Democrats feel the same — a difference of 35 percentage points (Figure ES4). While 47% of Republicans say it is never appropriate for college students to be required to take classes about DEI, 10% of Democrats believe the same (37 percentage point difference). Similar partisan gaps were observed for creating college/university positions responsible for supporting DEI (44% of Republicans responding never appropriate versus 7% of Democrats) and requiring faculty/staff to be trained in DEI (35% R to 5% D responding never appropriate).

FIGURE ES4: PERCENTAGES OF ADULTS, OVERALL AND BY PARTISAN AFFILIATION, SUPPORTING DIVERSITY, EQUITY, AND INCLUSION SCENARIOS.
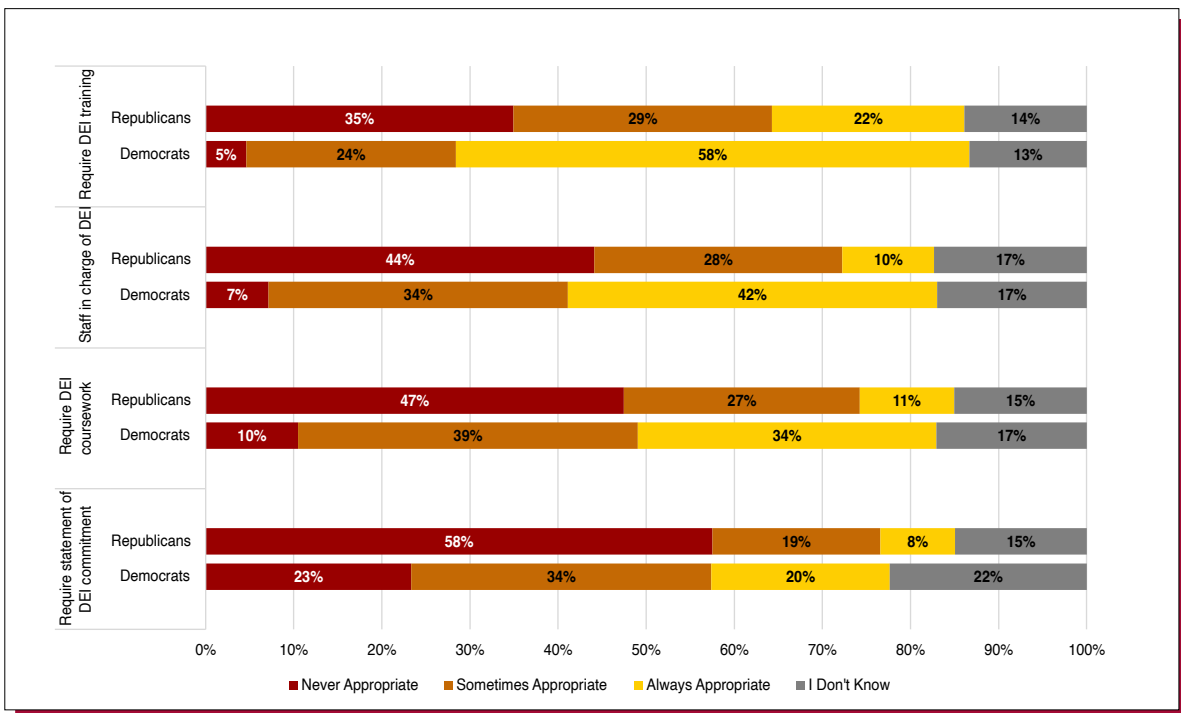
Adults think the best way to navigate disagreements about education issues within communities is through shared decision-making involving multiple parties.

We shared seven choices for managing disagreements over education initiatives or policies within communities—with alternatives ranging from special-interest groups to town voting to superintendents. Adults voiced clear cross-partisan agreement (Figure ES5) that the best way is through shared decision-making including community members, either through committees or public discussion (both organized by school boards).

FIGURE ES5: PERCENTAGE OF ADULTS, OVERALL AND BY PARTISAN AFFILIATION, SUPPORTING VARIOUS APPROACHES TO MANAGING DISAGREEMENTS ABOUT EDUCATION ISSUES WITHIN COMMUNITIES.
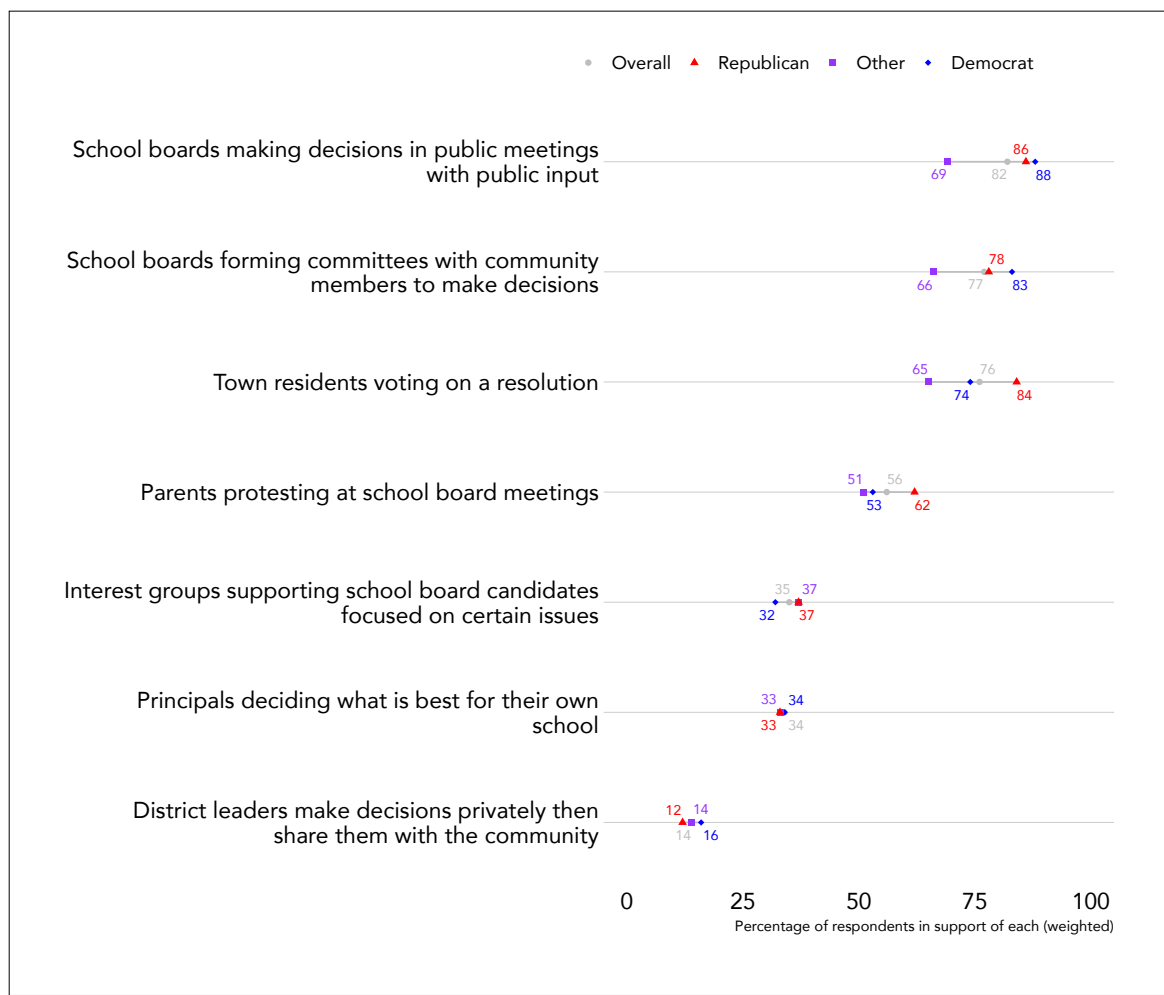
Introduction

Schools have a fundamental role in United States democracy: to prepare the next generation for the responsibilities and rights of citizenship through developing their related knowledge and skills.

Yet U.S. K-12 education has been showing signs of crisis in various related areas. Debates about teaching the history and consequences of slavery in the U.S. reveal a lack of shared understanding about our national narrative. There are enormous partisan differences in attitudes toward what schools should be teaching, especially related to LGBTQ issues and racial inequality. Current and pending legislation has made some teachers fearful to discuss potentially controversial or contested topics in their classrooms (though others have not voiced evidence of indoctrination, politicization, or classroom malpractice). Exacerbating these challenges, teachers lack resources that could help them productively facilitate deliberation over differing perspectives.

Though also related to COVID school closures, students' scores on the 2022 National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) civics and U.S. history examinations have declined from 2018, as have other measures of academic performance. Among eighth-grade students, less than a quarter (22%) demonstrated proficiency in civics—the first decline since the NAEP civics assessment began in 1998—with 13% proficient in U.S. History, continuing a decline that started in 2014.

Only a small fraction of K-12 students are capable of differentiating credible from fake news. This lack of ability to discern the difference leads students (and adults) to be susceptible to propaganda, spreading false information, and further deepening extremist positions on contested topics, challenging a healthy democracy.

Post-secondary education as well is demonstrating signs of crisis. During the last few school years, college campuses across the country have been experiencing considerable unrest. Most recently, waves of campus protests about the Israel-Hamas war have included students building encampments, walking out of class, and occupying campus buildings. Initially, many institutional leaders did not respond, grappling with balancing free speech rights against the threats of hate speech and danger to student safety. Ultimately, many shut down protests—some calling in police, others arresting students—resulting in high-profile controversy about the boundaries that should or should not exist around students' rights to free speech via protest. Other postsecondary campus conflicts have revolved around "cancel culture" and "woke" political ideologies, as well as Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) departments, offices, and administrative positions.

Some of these challenges are to be expected. Education's role in preparing citizens is a source of contention in a pluralist democracy like the U.S., where definitions of "good citizens" abound. Some people believe good citizenship is defined by being an educated voter and exercising one's rights. Others believe good citizenship requires paying taxes, caring for the environment, and/or leading a morally/ethically sound life. For others, good citizens must act in support of social justice. These are just a few examples among many in which the definition of a good citizen can differ in a pluralist democracy.

Likewise, freedom of speech means different things to different people. To some, it means the absolute right to say whatever the speaker wants to say, including speech that makes others uncomfortable, fearful, or even threatens violence. Others' interpretation of freedom of speech has limitations designed to protect the safety of individuals, groups, and society.

> **Likewise, freedom of speech means different things to different people.**

Related to and compounding these challenges, partisan pressures on our educational systems have grown substantially in recent years, though the loudest voices are not always speaking for the majority. Effectively managing varying perspectives within communities — including the meaning of citizenship, the topics students should be learning, the resources teachers use, free speech, and/or about DEI initiatives — is an additional challenge.

In this context, policymakers and educators must recognize where the public stands on issues related to educating students for democracy. This report sheds light on public opinion about four topics related to educating students for the rights and responsibilities of citizenship: 1) civics education in K-12 schools, 2) free speech in postsecondary education, 3) initiatives to support Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) in postsecondary education, and 4) managing disagreement about K-12 education within communities. Below we provide more context and background in each of the areas that led to the development of our specific survey questions.

Civics Education

Rancorous partisan divides dominate politics daily, with examples specific to civics education addressing "action civics" and the bipartisan "Educating for American Democracy" initiative among others.

These disagreements have high-stakes consequences. In March 2021, a group of Republican and Democratic lawmakers in Congress introduced "The Civics Secures Democracy Act." If enacted, the bill would have authorized $1 billion annually for six years towards federal civics education programs. By September 2021, the act was stuck in congressional gridlock. In its place, another bipartisan group introduced a $400 million replacement, the "Teaching Engaged Citizenship Act of 2021," which similarly has not passed.

To inform determinations about public investment in civics education, it is essential to learn more about adults' beliefs about the role of civic education as part of educating students for the rights and responsibilities of democratic citizenship. We thus re-administered a set of items, first administered in spring 2021, asking about the related topics adults think are important for students to learn in school, then developed a new set of items asking about the activities through which adults think students should learn those topics in school.

Free Speech in Postsecondary Education

Students have exercised their right to freedom of speech on college campuses throughout the decades. In 2023-24, the salience of the issue — and conversation about appropriate institutional responses — was particularly heightened due to a wave of protests and other activities related to Hamas' attack on Israelis on Oct. 7, 2023, and the subsequent Israel-Hamas war. A congressional hearing in December 2023 addressing campus responses to student actions led to the resignation of prominent university presidents at Harvard and Columbia. The University of Southern California — our own institution — captured media attention with a series of large public protests, the arrest of student protestors, and canceling a planned valedictorian speech (among other major changes to graduation activities) for safety concerns. Many campuses opened for the 2024-25 school year with substantial added security measures and other policy changes due to the possibility of more student-led protests (e.g., creation of "free speech zones").

Seeking to understand what adults think about the boundaries of free speech on campuses, such as what are appropriate behaviors and actions by both students and institutions, we included questions about these topics.

Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion in Postsecondary Education

In the education sector, modern efforts to address racial injustices have recently been described with the umbrella term "Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI)." DEI proponents argue we need sustained and intentional efforts to disrupt inequalities of opportunity inherent to structures and processes that systematically disadvantage students from historically underserved racial groups. Opponents argue that DEI efforts are discriminatory toward non-minorities, and breed censorship and ideological conformity.

To date, Democratic leaders have been more supportive of DEI efforts than Republicans, who have voiced opposition. Republican leaders in some states have enacted laws defunding or abolishing DEI programs on college campuses. With Republicans now in control of the White House, both houses of Congress, and the federal courts, recent executive actions make clear that there will be continued efforts to undo DEI structures and policies.

Here we focus on asking adults their opinions about DEI efforts at the postsecondary level, the context in which some of the most contentious issues related to DEI have played out.

Managing Disagreement Within Communities

In fall 2023, we found meaningful differences by partisan affiliation regarding the content adults think K-12 children should be learning in school. We also found lack of consensus around how to resolve such disagreements about curriculum content.

For several reasons, this is another challenge related to educating students for the rights and responsibilities of citizenship. First, disagreement over curriculum and instruction topics requires a decision-making process that community members can agree upon, be it based on voting, deliberation, committees, etc. There are a variety of actors in our education systems — school boards, school and district leaders, teachers, parents, and policy-makers — and some individual or group must decide what is taught in the context of disagreement. Second, how schools and their communities model their own decision-making will shape children's readiness to handle contested issues in the future as adults.

Thus, we investigated adults' beliefs about this topic by asking questions about the means through which communities could resolve disagreements concerning education.

Methodology

From October through December 2024, we administered a set of questions addressing the four topics described above to a sample of nationally representative [Understanding America Study](#) (UAS) households, those with and without K-12 children living in the home.

From the overall UAS panel of nearly 15,000 households, we included all households with K-12 children; these have been responding to our other education-related surveys during the last several years. We also selected an additional random subsample of households without school-aged children at home. For the current survey, we re-administered a set of questions about civic education topics we first asked in spring 2021, and developed new questions informed by current high-profile issues and events.

We administered our survey between Oct. 16 and Dec. 8, 2024, inviting 5,200 panel members: 2,600 of whom had at least one K-12 child, and 2,600 who did not. We offered the option to respond in English or Spanish. Our final responding sample included 1,857 households with at least one K-12 child living in the home (response rate=71%), and 2,343 households without children currently in the home (response rate=90%)—an overall response rate of 81% (n=4,200).

To examine differences by partisanship, we primarily referred to respondent party identification collected in August 2024[2], at least two months prior to the current survey. Of the sample, 37% identified as Democrat or lean Democrat (D), 36% identified as Republican or lean Republican (R), and 26% identified as independent or belonging to a minor political party, such as Green or Libertarian. For purposes of this report, the third group is labeled as "Other."

2024 Presidential Election

With the survey administration window spanning October-December 2024, during this time was the Harris-Trump Presidential election on Nov. 5. Because our survey addressed politically salient topics, we were concerned that election-related content, coverage, and salience of civics- and education-related topics might affect participant responses (consciously or subconsciously).

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[2] For those missing this variable from August 2024, we used a value from the most recent party affiliation data-collection timepoint available, as the UAS poses this question to panelists repeatedly every few months.

Whether or not the election affected respondents' attitudes towards our content was not a primary research question; rather, we were concerned about a potential threat to the reliability of our results.

To allow our team to field the survey as planned in fall 2024, while addressing this potential election-related validity threat, we randomly split our 5,200-strong sample into pre-election and post-election administration halves. Both halves (n=2,600 each) were equally representative of households with and without a K-12 child. We also ensured both halves had comparable proportions of respondents who had responded to our spring 2021 survey asking about which topics students should be learning about in their civics classes (n=~70%). [3]

This design allowed us to examine whether the election affected a participants' likelihood of endorsing survey items in a particular way. If pre- and post- election average responses did not differ, we planned to average across sample halves. However, if pre- and post-election averages did differ systematically across the two halves, we planned to examine how the election affected responses prior to making analytic decisions. Options included reporting results separately by sample (before the election versus after) or making statistical adjustments for the influence of the election when reporting overall averages.

Comparing pre- to post-election means, across the total of 87 survey items, six overall mean differences were statistically significant. Three were higher averages pre-election, three were higher post-election. One was in the area of school performance, two were about civics topics that should or should not be covered in schools, one was about managing disagreements within communities, and two were about postsecondary education initiatives and policies. The differences did not cluster in one domain of measurement, nor did they favor one direction over another (e.g., consistently higher or lower at one time point than another). Further, none of the differences were more than five percentage points in magnitude. For no items did limiting our sample to include only the pre- or only the post-election sample half substantively change our interpretation of the results.

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[3] Among households with a K-12 child in 2024, 51% of the 2024 sample also completed the survey in 2021. Among those without children in the home in 2024, 90% of the 2024 sample also completed the 2021 survey. Each year's sample is representative of the U.S. national adult population. Sample demographics can be found in Appendix A.

Given the lack of a systematic pattern in these six differences, and the fact that we might expect four to be significantly different by chance (i.e., 5% of all significance tests), six reaching statistical significance, and the lack of patterns noted above, did not suggest the presence of a meaningful election bias. We therefore averaged across pre- and post-election responses and used all available survey data, without adjustment for survey timing. In Appendix D, a table shows item means and significance test results of differences.

Reporting magnitude of differences between subgroups

Throughout this report, we highlight differences between partisan groups… focusing on differences of 10 percentage points and greater.

Throughout this report, we highlight differences between partisan subgroups. Due to our large sample sizes, differences of three percentage points reach statistical significance. However, statistical significance does not necessarily equate to meaningful practical differences. For this reason, we refer to descriptive differences of less than 10 percentage points as demonstrating relative similarity in beliefs between Democrats and Republicans (i.e., these are "small" differences) while focusing on differences when the difference is 10 percentage points and greater. We acknowledge that differences of this magnitude have different meanings in different contexts — that is, smaller differences may be meaningful in some areas while not in others — so this is an imperfect approach. However, applying a systematic threshold helps to ensure more objectivity in commenting on the presence or absence of partisan beliefs or attitudes.

More technical details

In the following sections, we present the main takeaways of our data, highlighting results overall and by partisan affiliation. We invite interested readers to read our interpretations as well as examine for themselves the topline and crosstab data, full explanation of our methodology, results, and questionnaires (available here).
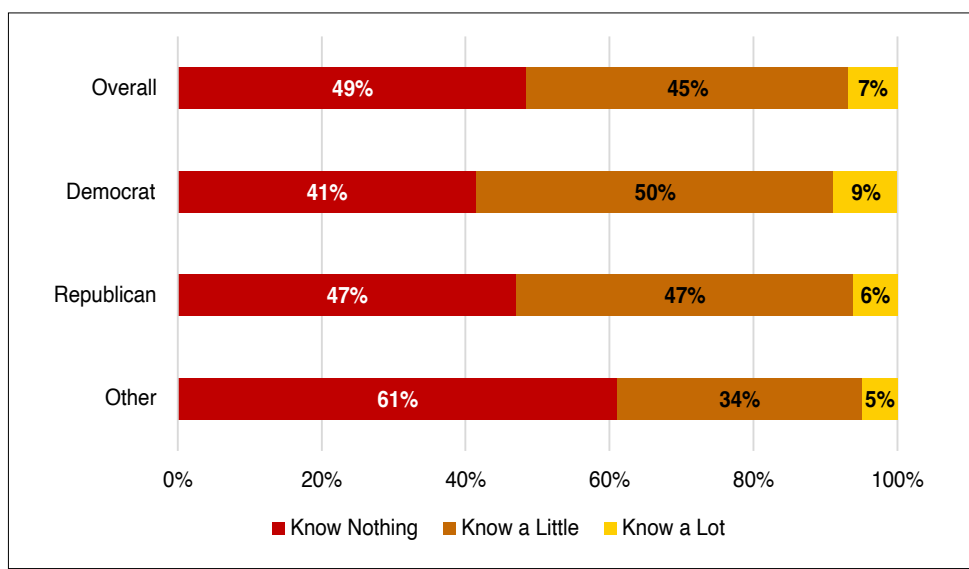
Results: K-12 Civics Education

Recent partisan disagreements about many realms of U.S. policy and culture tend to emphasize extreme 'left' and extreme 'right' beliefs. But do extreme viewpoints accurately represent the US public's views about civics education? We re-administered the same set of items asking about civics education topics adults think children should learn in school that we first administered in 2021. We analyzed results longitudinally while adding new items to obtain greater detail. Learning about changes over time, with additional contextual details, will inform policy.

Half of U.S. adults admit they do not know what "civics education" means.

Prior to diving into survey content about attitudes towards and beliefs about the importance of civics education, we wondered how comfortable adults are with the language often used to talk about "civics education" topics. We first asked how much they know about civics education, offering the response options "nothing at all," "I know a little," and "I know a lot." As we show in Figure 1, roughly half of the sample (49%) reported not knowing anything about what civics education is. This proportion was similar regardless of whether a K-12 child lives in the household: 53% with and 45% without. Across partisan groups, 41% of Democrats and 47% of Republicans knew nothing at all, while a greater proportion of "Other," 61%, reported the same.

FIGURE 1: FAMILIARITY WITH "CIVICS EDUCATION."

	Know Nothing	Know a Little	Know a Lot
Overall	49%	45%	7%
Democrat	41%	50%	9%
Republican	47%	47%	6%
Other	61%	34%	5%

Notably, though not the focus of this report, we saw larger subgroup differences by age, with 65% of those aged 34 and younger reporting knowing nothing at all compared to 35% of those aged 65+ knowing nothing at all. This may suggest the term "civics education" is outdated. We also observed similarly large differences by educational attainment, with 65% of those without a college degree knowing nothing at all compared to 29% among those with at least a bachelor's degree.

Despite the large proportion reporting they do not know anything about the term "civics education," answers to subsequent questions shared throughout this report were similar (i.e., mostly five percentage points or less for each item), between those reporting not knowing anything compared to those knowing a little or a lot. Results are available in Appendix E.

Whether respondents reported knowing anything about civics education or not, we asked next, "In a sentence or less, what is 'civics education'?" Many left this question blank or answered in some way that they don't know.

We examined responses by analyzing the frequency of word use in respondents' definitions. We excluded "stop" words (such as "and," "the," and "of"), and words that reflected "the study of" rather than the content of the study (such as "education," "study," "teaching," and "learning"). We also dropped "civics" from the word cloud, as many respondents wrote "Civics education is…" or otherwise defined civics education as "civics" or "the study of civics." Figure 2 shows a word cloud depicting the 30 most frequent words—after the exclusions above—with the size of the word illustrating its frequency. Approximately 2,000 respondents provided an answer.

FIGURE 2. WHAT IS CIVICS EDUCATION?

More than half the responses used the term "government" in their answer — by far the descriptor most used for what comes to mind when one hears "civics education." These answers sometimes included just the word "government" but also frequently included elements such as "the Constitution," "how the government works," or "functions of" or "branches of" government. "Citizenship" also was frequently referenced. Combining instances of "citizens" (285), "citizen" (188), and "citizenship" (104), more than 500 participants' responses referenced something in this area — clearly the second-most frequent concept. These answers included sentiments like being "active and engaged citizens," "responsible citizenship," and "how to be a good citizen." Other common descriptors were, "rights," including "human rights," "basic rights," "rights and duties," and "rights and responsibilities" — as well as "history," "responsibilities," "politics," "laws," and "justice."

Overall, the open-ended data indicate responding adults understand the main objectives of civics education, broadly defined to have the goal of preparing students for the rights and responsibilities of U.S. citizenship.

Less than a third of adults think U.S. public schools do a good job of preparing students for citizenship.

We wanted to know how well adults think U.S. public schools are preparing students for citizenship, and the importance of that objective relative to other high-level purposes of schools. Regarding the purposes of preparing students to: 1) be good citizens, 2) be good workers, 3) succeed in college, and 4) be prepared for adult life, we asked adults to:

- Grade U.S. public schools using a traditional letter scale (A, B, C, D, F, I don't know)

- Indicate importance of each of these areas of preparation (not at all important, slightly important, important, very important)

Overall, adults think U.S. public schools are doing a poor job at achieving what could reasonably be argued as schools' primary aims. The results were similar between partisan groups and between those saying they do or don't know anything about what is "civics education." For each of the four (reasonable) purposes of our nation's education system, approximately a third or fewer of adults think schools deserve an A or B on a traditional grading scale for any of the four given aims (Figure 3). The greatest proportion of adults (40%) thinks schools deserve As or Bs in the goal of preparing students for college, followed by preparing students for citizenship (29%), to be good workers (28%), and preparing students for life (16%). Conversely, more than half of adults (54%) think public schools are failing (that is, assigned Ds or Fs) at preparing students for life. These results mirror those shown in other high-quality nationally representative surveys.

FIGURE 3: PERCENTAGE OF RESPONDENTS ASSIGNING SCHOOLS LETTER GRADES A THROUGH F FOR PREPARING STUDENTS FOR FOUR PURPOSES OF PUBLIC EDUCATION.
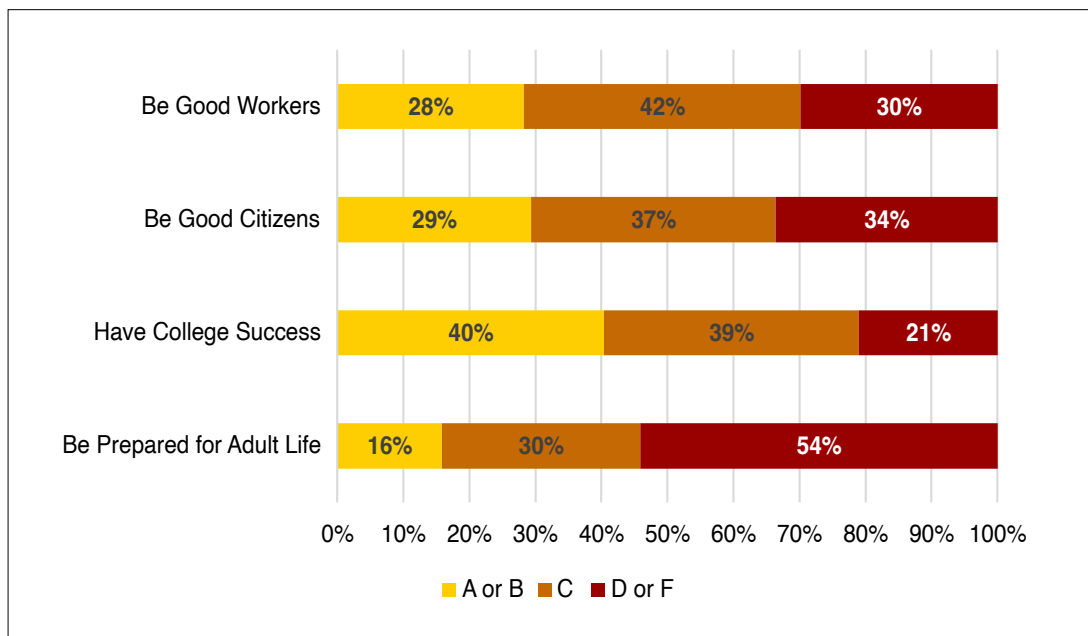
Republicans, more so than Democrats, assigned failing grades (Figure 4) in all four dimensions, though both parties were more in agreement than not.

FIGURE 4: PERCENTAGE OF ADULTS, BY POLITICAL AFFILIATION, ASSIGNING SCHOOLS LETTER GRADES D OR F FOR FOUR PURPOSES OF PUBLIC EDUCATION.

% Assigning D or F Grade

- Democrats
- Republicans
- Other
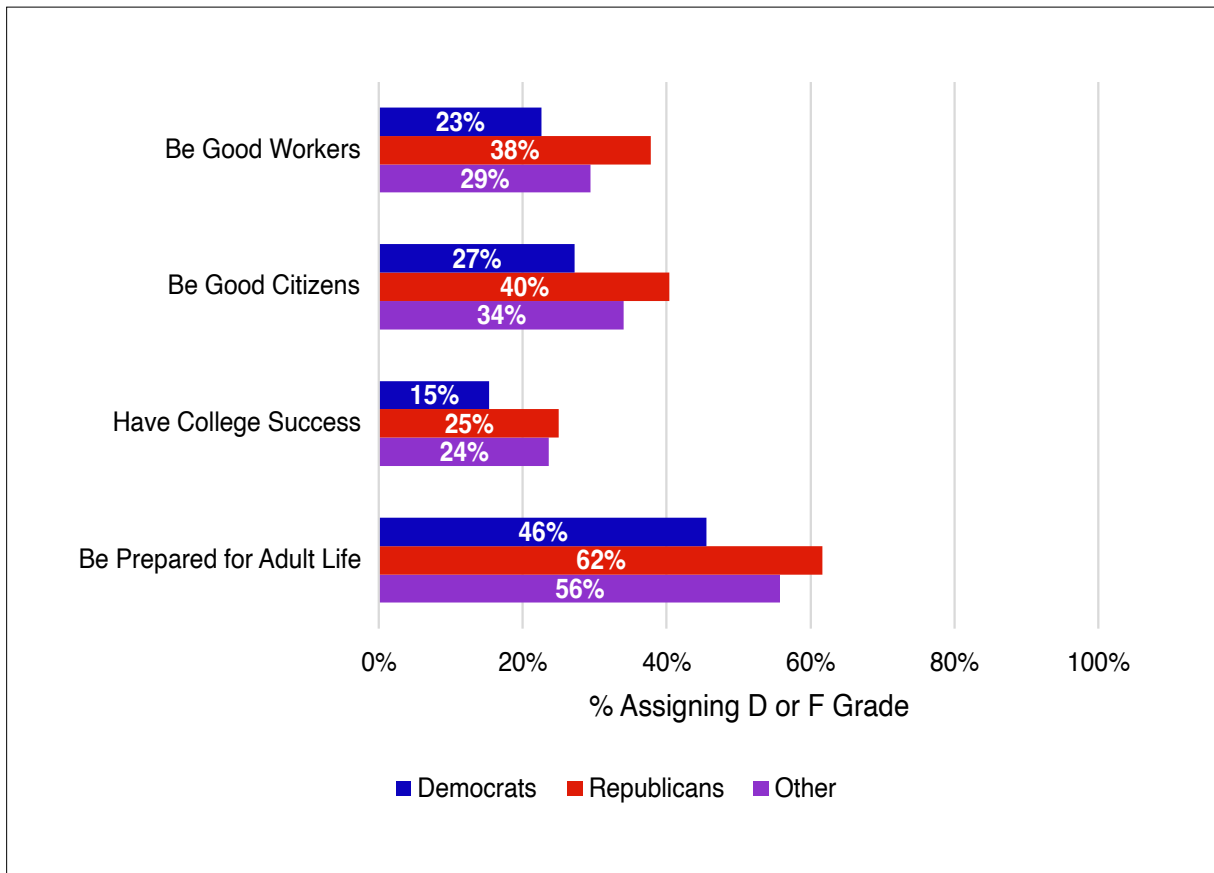
There is universal agreement in the importance of preparing students to be good citizens.

Despite believing schools are not doing a good job preparing students in these ways, adults across the aisle agree that these priorities are important. While adults gave schools poor grades at preparing students for life, 95% rated this an important or very important education priority — tied with preparing students for citizenship as the most important aim (Figure 5).

Also, key priorities were preparing students for work (89%) and college (81%)—with the latter not as much of a universal truth for U.S. adults, though still very high levels of cross-partisan agreement about what schools' primary aims should be. Differences between Democrats and Republicans are not meaningful in magnitude.

FIGURE 5: PERCENTAGE OF ADULTS, BY POLITICAL AFFILIATION, BELIEVING PREPARING STUDENTS FOR FOUR EDUCATIONAL PRIORITIES ARE IMPORTANT.
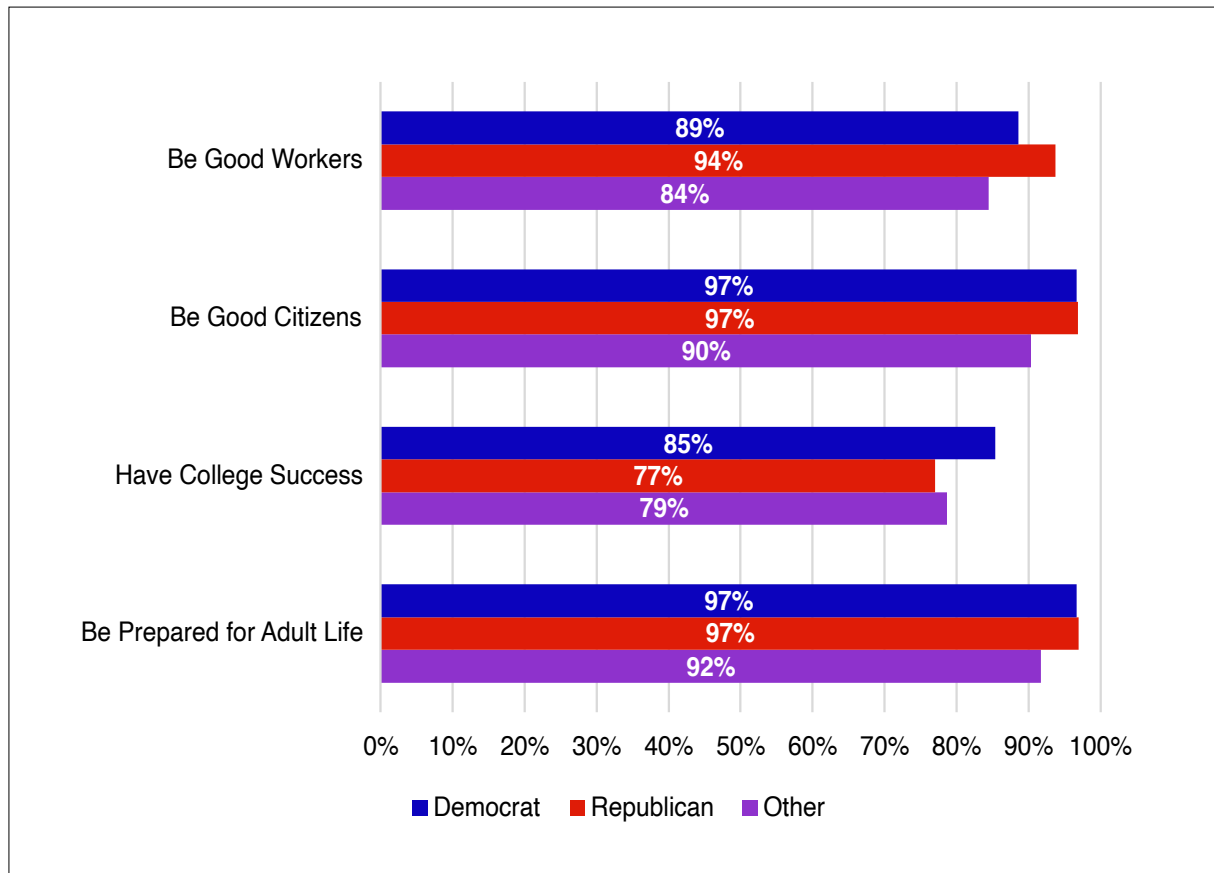
Adults voice high overall support for students learning civics education topics in school, including increased cross-partisan agreement since 2021.

For specifics of civics education, we asked panelists about 11 topics designed to cover a range of issues important to adults across the political spectrum. Responses were on a scale from not at all important to very important. We had first asked the question "How important do you think it is for students to learn about these topics in school?" in early 2021, followed again in fall 2024."

For every topic, at least 70% of adults overall think it is important or very important for students to learn in school each of the topics we presented. Between the two surveys, proportions of respondents endorsing each item as important significantly increased for 5 of 11 items in this set, and another five showed nonsignificant increases.

Driving up the overall averages were more Republicans and respondents with "Other" political identifications indicating importance. Across items, the average increase among Republicans was four percentage points and among "Other" respondents was seven percentage points, compared to a less than one-point increase among Democrats.[4] In 2021, average item-level support had been higher among Democrats than Republicans. Thus by 2024, partisan differences diminished. This result counters political rhetoric indicating civics education is an area of increasing partisan divide.

The item with the greatest support among Republicans (95%), Democrats (94%), and those with other political affiliations (84%) is teaching students how the U.S. government system works (e.g., the three branches of the federal government). Except for this item, higher proportions of Democrats than Republicans or "Other" supported each of the other 10 items by rating them as important. Other items with similarly high levels of support between partisan groups (i.e., differences of less than 10 percentage points) include the importance of learning about the federal government's influence over state and local affairs, and the U.S.'s leadership role in the world. We observed meaningful differences for some items, such as more than 30 percentage points between Republicans and Democrats regarding the importance of learning about racism and income inequality. Yet for all 11 items, at least a majority (i.e., greater than 50%) within each partisan group thinks the topic is important. Table 1 shows results for all items for partisan subgroups.

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[4] We see a similar pattern when restricting our sample to respondents who answered these questions in both 2021 and 2024 and did not change political affiliation between those time points, suggesting that the pattern is driven by changes in Republicans' beliefs, not changes to the composition of respondents who identify as Republicans (or Democrats) between 2021 and 2024. See Appendix F for results like those in Table 1 but restricted to respondents who answered these questions in both 2021 and 2024 and did not change political affiliation between those time points.

TABLE 1: CHANGES OVER TIME IN PERCENTAGES OF ADULTS BELIEVING STUDENTS LEARNING TOPICS RELATED TO CIVICS EDUCATION IN SCHOOL ARE IMPORTANT, REPUBLICANS COMPARED TO DEMOCRATS.

	REPUBLICAN			DEMOCRAT		
	2021	2024	CHANGE *	2021	2024	CHANGE *
Political issues like immigration or gun control	57%	64%	+7% ↑	82%	80%	-2%
How the US government system works	91%	95%	+4% ↑	91%	94%	+3%
Racism in the United States	54%	58%	+4% ↑	92%	93%	+1%
Requirements for voting	84%	88%	+4% ↑	90%	90%	0%
Income inequality in the United States	46%	51%	+5% ↑	87%	87%	0%
The United States' leadership role in the world	76%	82%	+6% ↑	84%	84%	0%
The federal government's influence over state and local affairs	73%	82%	+9% ↑	84%	86%	+2%
Benefits and challenges of social programs like Medicare and Social security	62%	69%	+7% ↑	82%	82%	0%
How students can get involved in local government or politics	69%	75%	+6% ↑	85%	84%	-1%
The contributions of historical figures who are racial/ethnic minorities	61%	60%	-1%	86%	88%	+2%
The contributions of historical figures who are women	64%	61%	-3%	87%	88%	+1%

* 0-3 percentage point change: no shading; **4-5 percentage point change:** light shading; **6+ percentage point change:** dark shading.

Two results counter the narrative of well-documented culture wars. Most Republicans demonstrated support for teaching about income inequality, higher than three years ago. In 2021, 46% of Republicans felt students learning about U.S. income inequality was important; in 2024, that level of support crosses the majority threshold, at 51%. As well, in 2021, 54% of Republicans supported students learning about racism in the U.S, now higher at 58%.

Given the possibility that adults might rate all these topics as important, we also asked them to identify which three topics they believed were most important for students to be learning. When forced to pick three, most adults agree upon one: "how the U.S. government works," selected as a top priority by 70% of the sample (71% Democrats, 81% Republicans, 56% "Other").

However, disagreement followed, with no other item of the 11 reaching one-third support as a top three most important. Even when split by party affiliation, there was quite a lot of variation, such that no single items dominates the selections other than "how the government works" (Figure 6). There is partisanship, with Republicans more likely to select federalism, America's global leadership role, and voting requirements, while Democrats are more likely to select racism and income inequality.

FIGURE 6: PERCENTAGES OF ADULTS, OVERALL AND BY PARTISAN AFFILIATION, CHOOSING EACH OF 11 CIVICS EDUCATION TOPICS AS "TOP THREE" MOST IMPORTANT.
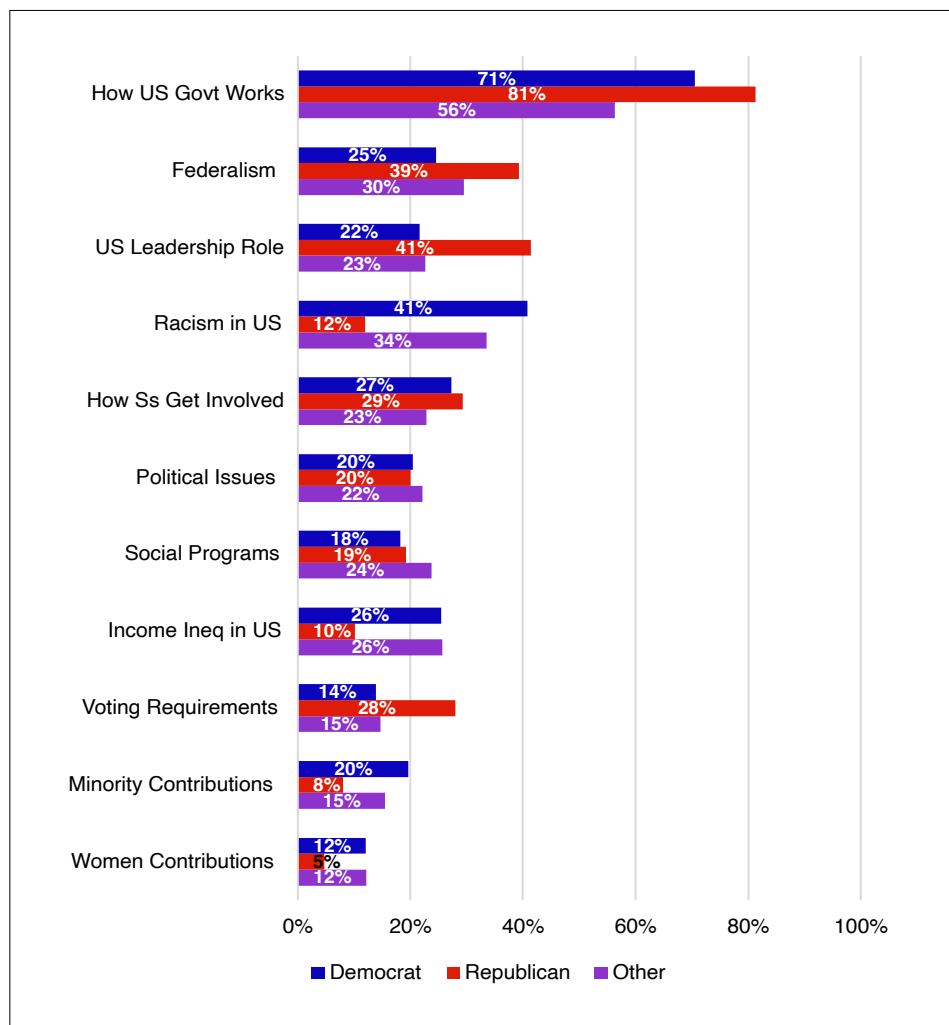
There is strong cross-partisan agreement in perceived importance of various civic-related learning activities, including learning multiple perspectives.

We asked adults about the importance of various activities that fall under the umbrella of civic learning in schools, ranging from learning about voting, to detecting false information online, to doing community service (Figure 7). Respondents answered how important they think it is for students to engage in 16 different activities, skills, or experiences. A majority believes 15 of the 16 activities were important or very important; the only exception was joining a local protest during school (21% overall; 12% Republican, 24% Democrat, 27% Other).

For most items, Republicans and Democrats support them at near the same levels. The only item showing meaningfully partisan disagreement is the importance of reciting the Pledge of Allegiance, as less than half of Democrats (44%) believe this is important or very important compared to more than 8 in 10 Republicans (84%). For all the others, excepting two, the percentage difference in agreement between Democrats and Republicans is less than 10 points. Greater proportions of Republicans (92%) than Democrats (78%) think it is important to honor veterans and military service.

Notably, we observed strong cross-partisan agreement about learning multiple perspectives. In response to the item about evaluating different arguments about a topic, 84% of adults overall believe this is important, including 89% of Democrats and 84% of Republicans. Similarly, regarding debating topics from opposite point of view, 79% overall view it as important (84% of Democrats and 78% of Republicans).

Notably, we observed strong cross-partisan agreement about learning multiple perspectives.

FIGURE 7: ADULTS' BELIEFS, OVERALL AND BY PARTISAN AFFILIATION, ABOUT THE IMPORTANCE OF STUDENTS PARTICIPATING IN CIVICS-RELATED LEARNING ACTIVITIES.
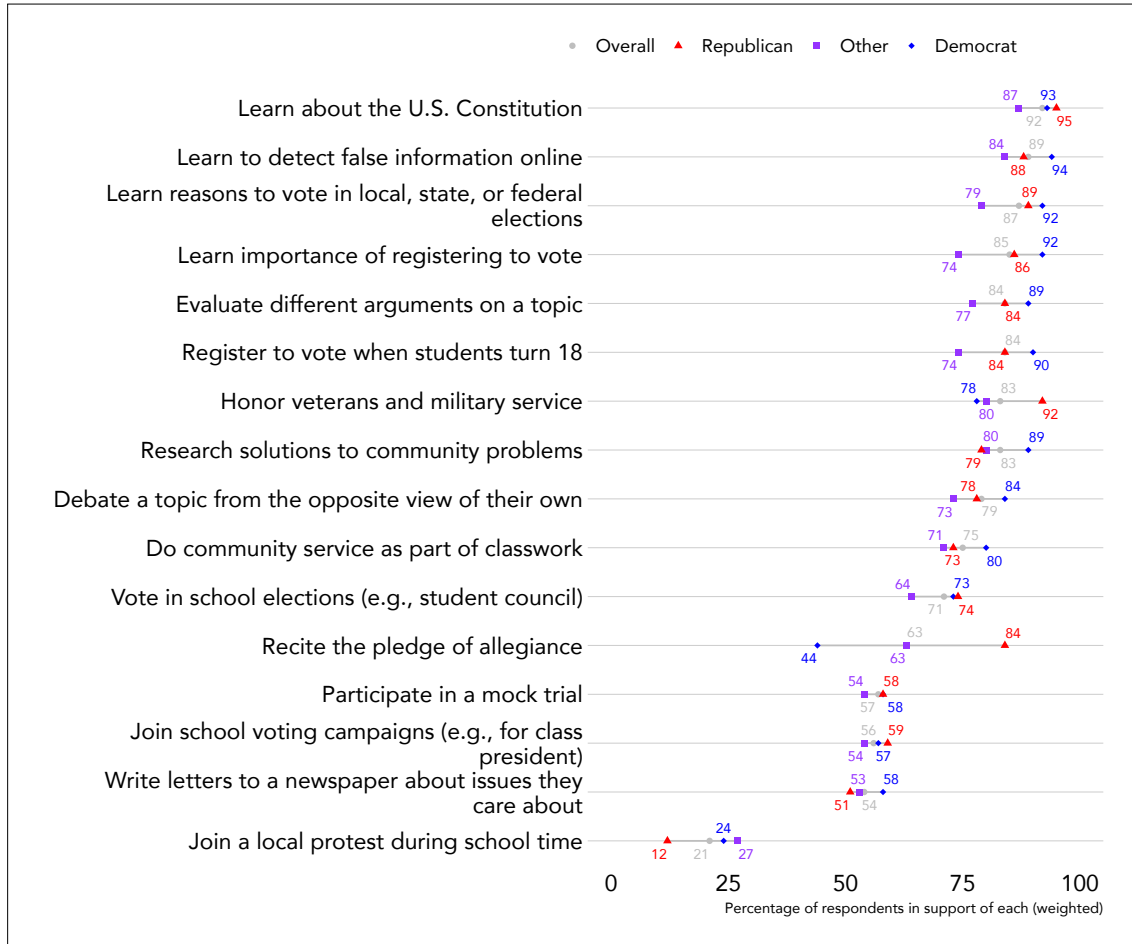
Again, wanting to see if consensus (or lack thereof) would emerge when forced to select the most important topics, we asked adults to select their top three. There was somewhat more convergence here than in the knowledge area, with about 50% selecting learning about the Constitution, and over 40% saying students should learn how to detect misinformation online (Figure 8). However, no other item was selected by more than 30% of adults. Republicans are more likely to include honoring veteran/military services and the Pledge of Allegiance in their top three, while Democrats choose detecting misinformation at a higher rate than Republicans.

FIGURE 8: PERCENTAGES OF ADULTS, OVERALL AND BY PARTISAN AFFILIATION, CHOOSING EACH OF 16 CIVICS LEARNING ACTIVITIES AS "TOP THREE" MOST IMPORTANT.
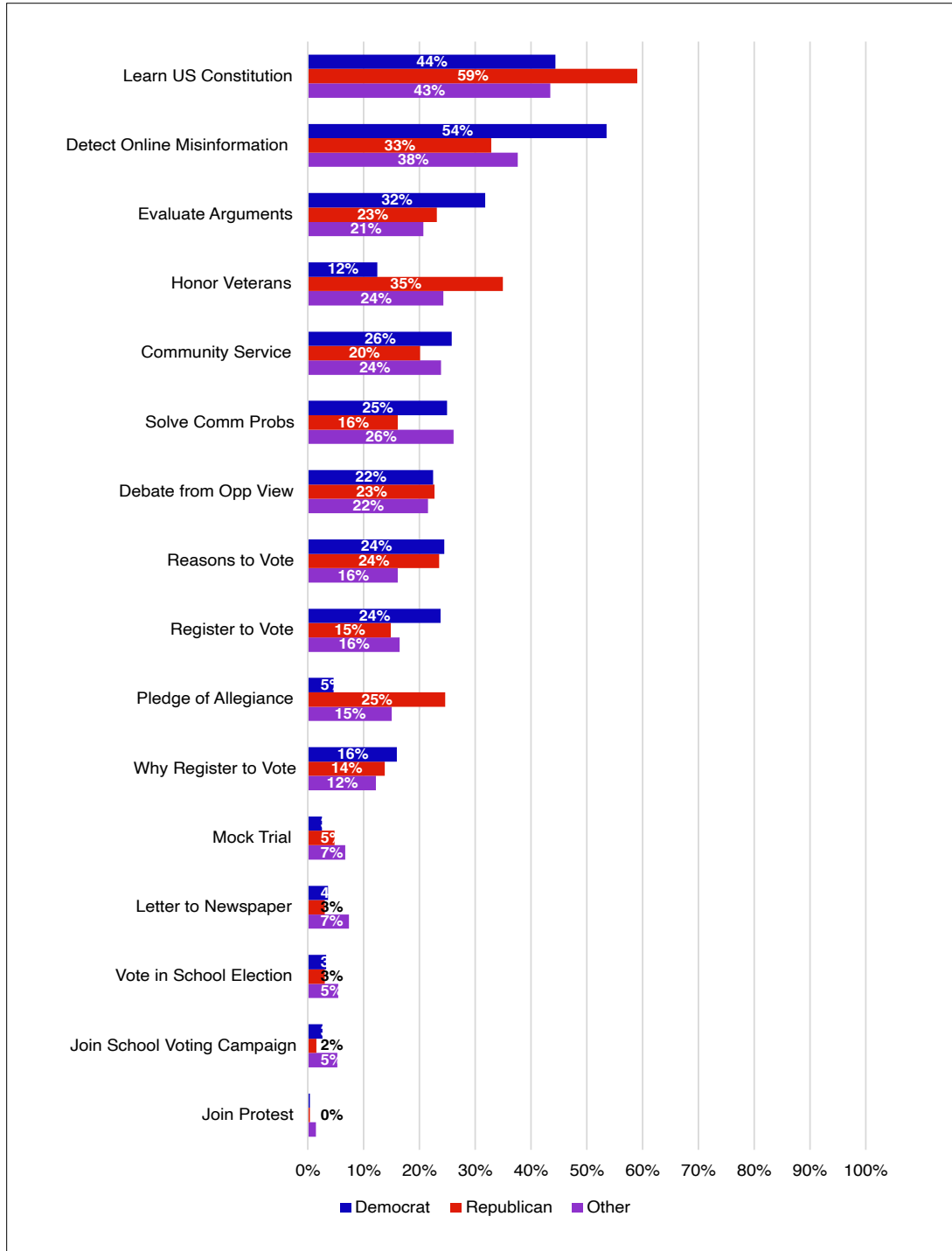
Results: Free Speech in Post-secondary Education

We wondered what U.S. adults think about complex free speech issues, particularly as media coverage often amplifies opinions that are not widely held or focuses on only a small proportion of a given population (e.g., elite private colleges in the Northeast). With a nationally representative sample, we had the opportunity to examine what the average U.S. adult knows and believes about issues related to free speech on college campuses. We asked adults if they believed it was appropriate for students or universities to engage in various actions—specifically actions that trigger free speech concerns on campus. For each scenario, we asked whether it was never appropriate, sometimes appropriate, or always appropriate, also offered respondents a "don't know" option. These are complex issues, and while we worked to carefully craft items, we acknowledge that asking the questions differently would have resulted in different results.

There is a great deal of opposition to students disrupting campus activities, and a great deal support for universities to act to curtail such behaviors.

The most high-profile incidents from the 2023-24 academic year were cases where student-led protests were particularly disruptive to school operations (e.g., graduation ceremonies), included violence or vandalization of school property, involved local police, or resulted in student arrests or injuries. Though we anticipated that respondents would heavily rely on the "sometimes" option we offered, there was somewhat surprising consensus that disruptive student actions in the name of free speech are never appropriate.

We found that adults generally oppose these forms of student protest, and support universities shutting them down. Specifically, shown in Figure 9, majorities think it is never appropriate for students to disrupt graduation ceremonies to protest (80%), write or draw protest messages on college property (76%), shout down invited speakers (67%), or occupy school buildings (56%). At the other end, only very small proportions believe these activities are always appropriate (3-7%).

As for counterprotest activities by institutions, most respondents believe it is always appropriate for universities to support police arresting students who break laws during protests (53%). Respondents are also broadly supportive of other university actions to shut down student protest, especially when those actions are framed as protecting safety (38% always appropriate, 49% sometimes) or when protests interfere with learning (41% always appropriate, 41% sometimes).

FIGURE 9: ADULTS' SUPPORT, OVERALL AND BY PARTISAN AFFILIATION, FOR STUDENT FREE SPEECH ACTIONS AND COLLEGE/UNIVERSITY RESPONSES.
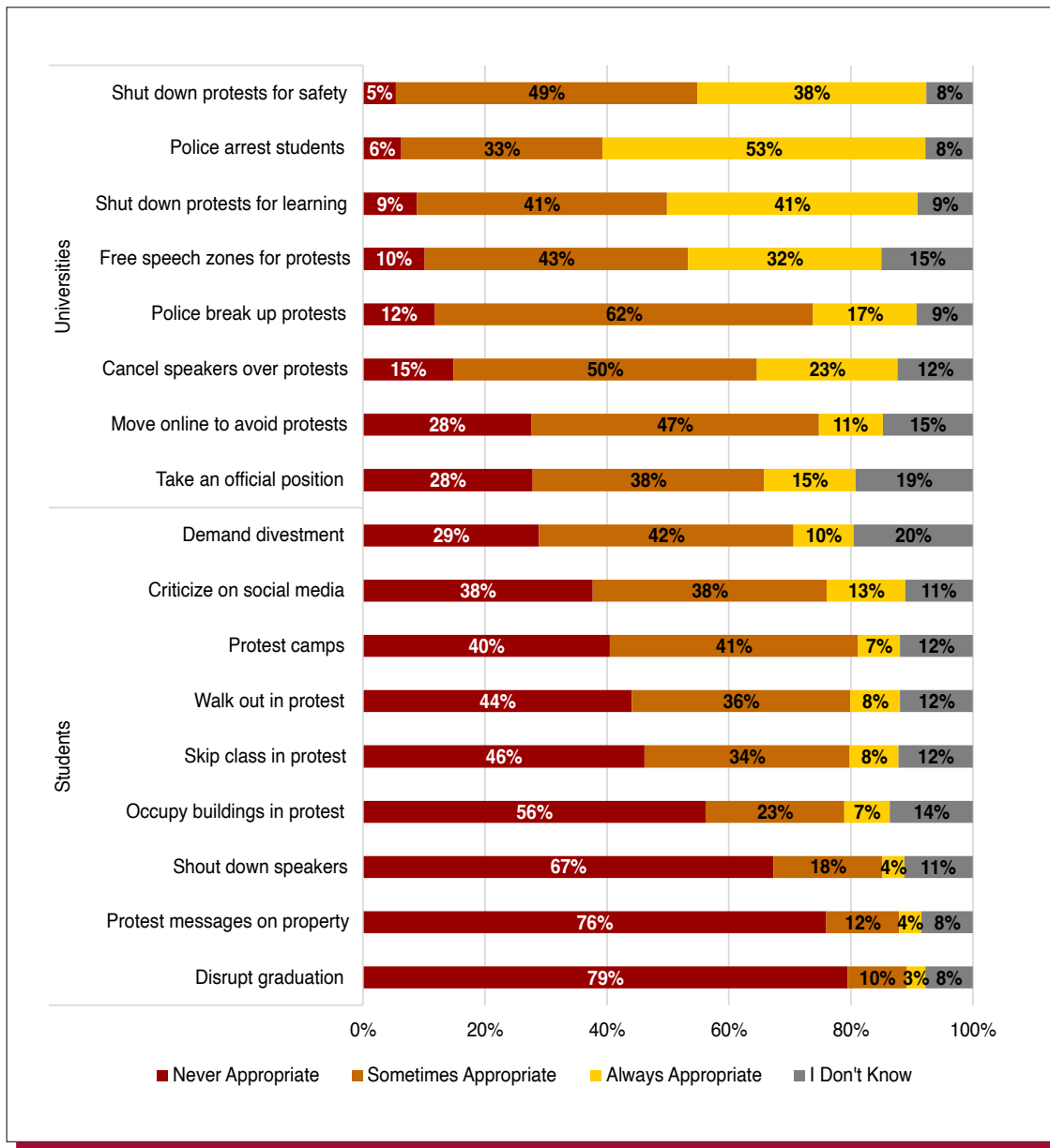
Much of the free speech debate lives in gray areas, with support in some circumstances but not others; free-speech absolutism is far from a majority.

> ... free-speech absolutism is far from a majority.

Once you move beyond these most disruptive student behaviors, the debate about campus free speech lives in much grayer areas. Only one other scenario had a majority of respondents in either the "never" or "always" category, with two-thirds (67%) saying it is never appropriate for students to shout down invited speakers with whom they disagree. Still, there were some forms of student protest that were more and less supported, and the same for types of institutional response.

Pluralities say it is never appropriate for students to stop going to classes as a form of protest (46% never appropriate, 42% sometimes or always appropriate) or protest world events by walking out of class (44% never appropriate, 44% sometimes or always appropriate). For the other three student protest scenarios, the plurality opinion was that it is sometimes appropriate for students to set up camps or sleep out on campus to protest (41% sometimes appropriate), criticize college or university leaders on social media (38%), and demand university leadership not make certain financial investments (42%). Still, around 30% to 40% of respondents say these student actions are never appropriate, and only about 10% of respondents say they always are.

Some university responses to student protest also are a gray area for those surveyed — but they still see more support than do student protests. Every university action is more popular than even the most tolerated student protest action. For universities to create free speech zones and limit protests to those areas, about a third of respondents believe it is always appropriate (32%), with 43% saying that is sometimes appropriate. There is even more uncertainty about the appropriateness of calling the police to break up student protests (62% sometimes, 17% always, 12% never), canceling speakers for safety reasons related to student protests (50% sometimes, 23% always, 15% never), moving classes online to avoid protests (47% sometimes, 11% always, 28% never), and taking an official position on current political issues (38% sometimes, 15% always, 28% never).

Republicans express more unconditional beliefs and generally support institutional actions over student speech rights.

We found large partisan splits based on most of the campus free speech items, with Figure 10 showing the five items with the largest gaps. Republicans are consistently more likely than Democrats to indicate it is never appropriate for students to engage in most student protest actions. For instance, they are 20-30 percentage points more likely to say it is never appropriate for students to protest by walking out of class (60% for Republicans, 33% for Democrats), set up camps/sleep out on campus (55% R, 30% D), shout down invited speakers (81% R, 60% D), criticize college leaders on social media (48% R, 28% D), and demand leaders not make certain financial investments (41% R, 19% D).

Relatedly, Republicans are more supportive of universities cracking down on student protests in a variety of ways. For instance, Republicans are more likely to say it is always appropriate to shut down protests for safety reasons (48% R, 30% D), shut down protests if they interfere with learning (59% R, 30% D), call the police to break up student protests (27% R, 9% D), and have police arrest students who break laws during protests (72% R, 42% D).

Combining these two sets of data points, it is clear that Republicans are less likely than Democrats to express conditional views about student or institutional protest behaviors. On every item, fewer Republicans than Democrats indicate "sometimes appropriate," with gaps ranging from under 5 percentage points (e.g., calling the police to break up student protests, creating free speech zones) to nearly 20 percentage points or more (e.g., set up camps or sleep out on campus, have police arrest students who break the law).

FIGURE 10: FIVE ITEMS RELATED TO FREE SPEECH WITH THE LARGEST PARTISAN DIFFERENCES.
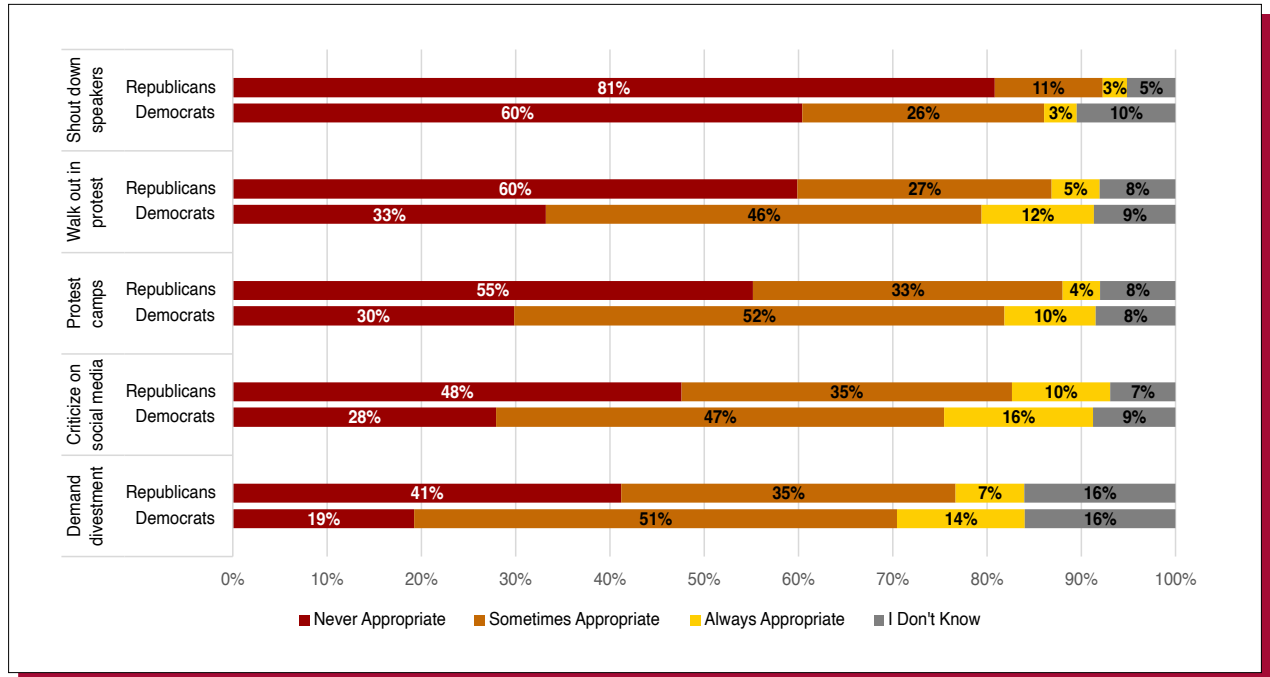
Results: Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion in Postsecondary Education

The DEI debate on college campuses may be more esoteric or detached from the daily lives of survey respondents, but we thought it important to explore the public's opinions. Even the DEI label itself is jargony and may not resonate with individuals who have not followed the issue closely.

In the weeks since President Trump's inauguration, there has been renewed attention to the DEI label across the federal government. However, at the time we fielded this survey, in late 2024, DEI issues were not in the news media as much as college protests had been over the prior year.

We asked about four possible DEI scenarios:

- Requiring job applicants to write about their commitment to DEI

- Requiring students to take courses about DEI

- Creating positions on campus for supporting DEI

- Requiring faculty and staff to be trained on DEI

There is more uncertainty and ambivalence about DEI issues than about free speech issues on college campuses.

Overall, we find that respondents have less strong opinions about DEI than about free speech issues, and more respondents said they don't know what is appropriate or not. When looking across the four topics, approximately one-quarter to one-third of respondents use each of the available response categories, including "don't know." In fact, use of "don't know" is higher in general for these items compared to the free speech items. On the four DEI scenarios, 18-23% of respondents don't know whether they are appropriate or not (Figure 11).

FIGURE 11: PERCENTAGES OF ADULTS, OVERALL AND BY PARTISAN AFFILIATION, SUPPORTING DIVERSITY, EQUITY, AND INCLUSION SCENARIOS.
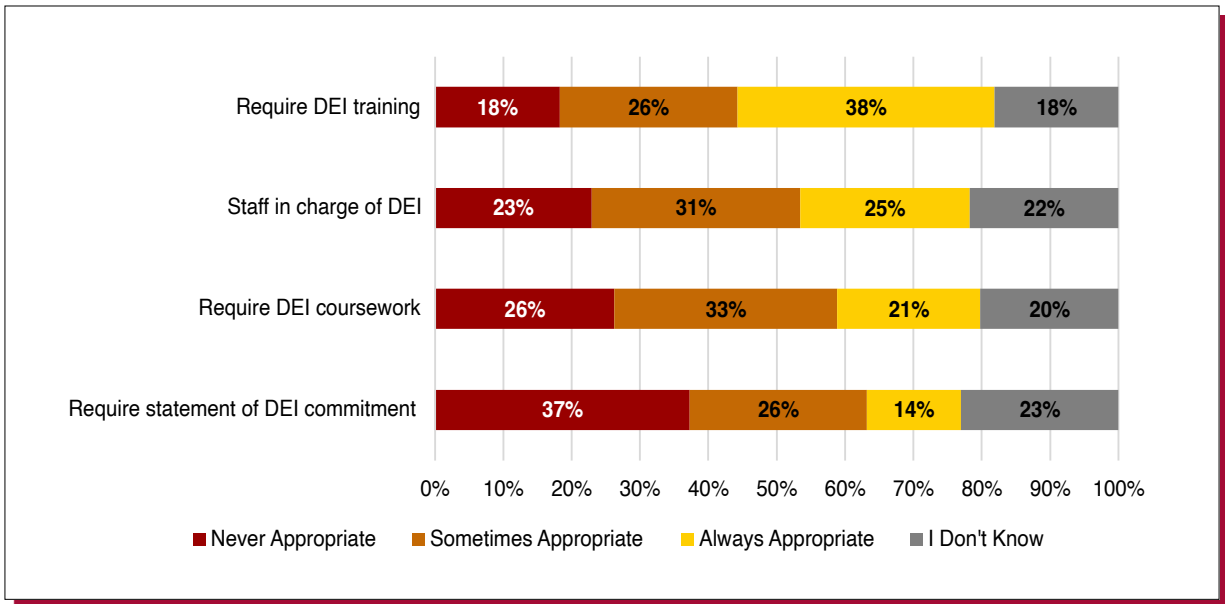
Democrats are substantially more supportive than Republicans of DEI on campus, though even a majority of Republicans support DEI training for faculty and staff.

Among the largest partisan gaps in our survey were found regarding DEI initiatives, with Democrats far more supportive than Republicans. While 58% of Republicans say it is never appropriate for job applicants to be required to write about their commitment to DEI, less than a quarter of Democrats (23%) feel the same—a difference of 35 percentage points (Figure 12). While 47% of Republicans say it is never appropriate for college students to be required to take classes about DEI, only 10% of Democrats believe the same Similar gaps were observed for those saying it's never appropriate to create college/university positions responsible for supporting DEI (44% of Republicans versus 7% of Democrats) or require faculty/staff to be trained in DEI (35% R, 5% D).
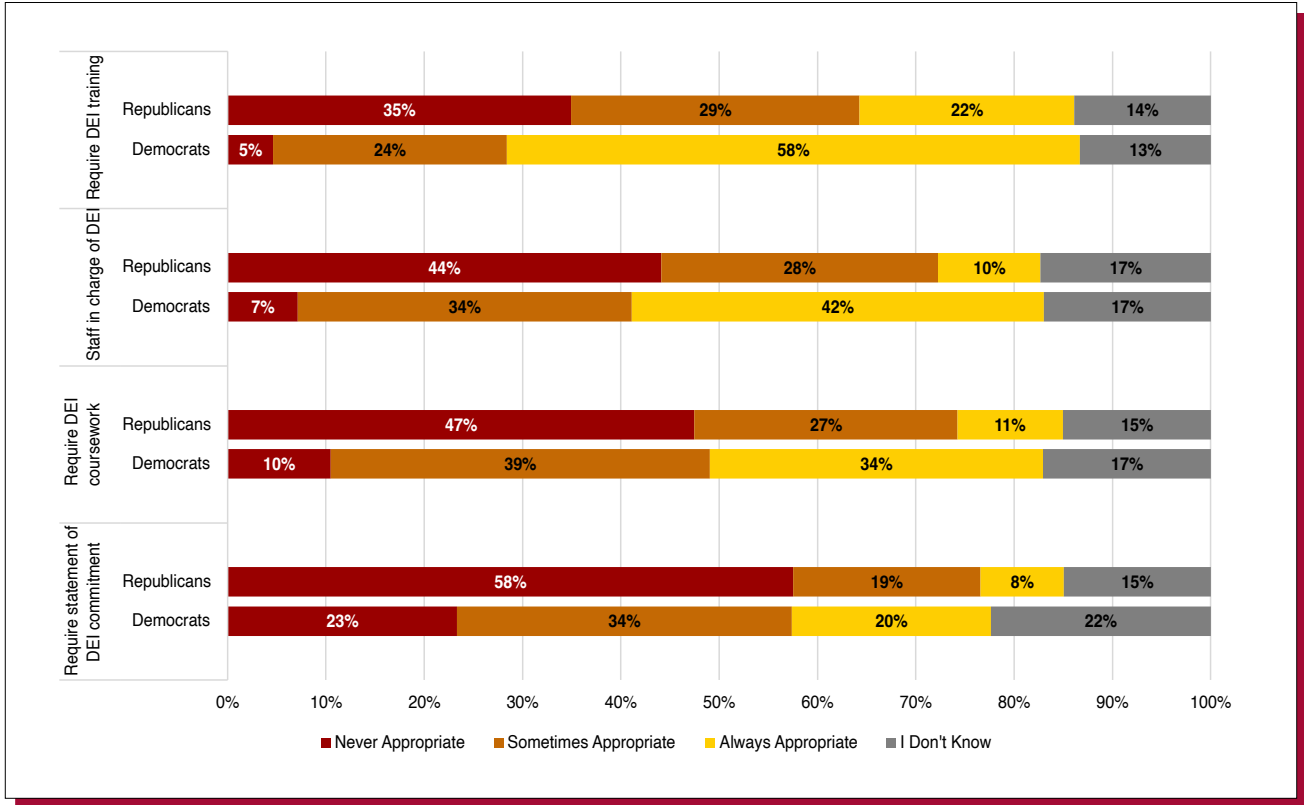
FIGURE 12: PERCENTAGES OF ADULTS, OVERALL AND BY PARTISAN AFFILIATION, SUPPORTING DIVERSITY, EQUITY, AND INCLUSION SCENARIOS.

Results: Managing Disagreement Within Communities

To learn how adults think communities should best resolve disagreements, we first stated:

> *Community members often disagree about education issues, for example, about what children should be learning about in school, how tax money should be used in education, and other issues. When there is disagreement, community members address it in different ways.*

We presented seven potential ways to resolve disagreements, then asked whether adults support or oppose these approaches. We offered the response options "support," "oppose," and "I don't know" for each of the seven, as well as the option to write-in an approach we had not listed. We then asked adults to select which of the seven approaches has the greatest potential to improve schools. We also provided an "other" option and the opportunity to type other ideas as the eighth option.

To manage disagreement about education issues, adults want shared decision-making including community involvement

Perhaps surprisingly given evidence demonstrating U.S. adults prefer government by strong leaders over debate, we found the most support for options that featured shared decision-making including community members. As shown in Figure 13, the most preferred approaches include school boards making decisions in public meetings with public input (82% support), committees made up of community members and the school board (77%), and town residents contributing input through a formal voting process (76%). The least support is for unilateral decision-making, such as district leaders making decisions (14%), principals making decisions alone (34%), or non-elected interest groups (35%). Mostly, Republicans and Democrats agree — partisan differences are small.

FIGURE 13: ADULTS' BELIEFS, OVERALL AND BY PARTISAN AFFILIATION, ABOUT THE BEST WAYS TO MANAGE DISAGREEMENTS ABOUT EDUCATION ISSUES WITHIN COMMUNITIES.
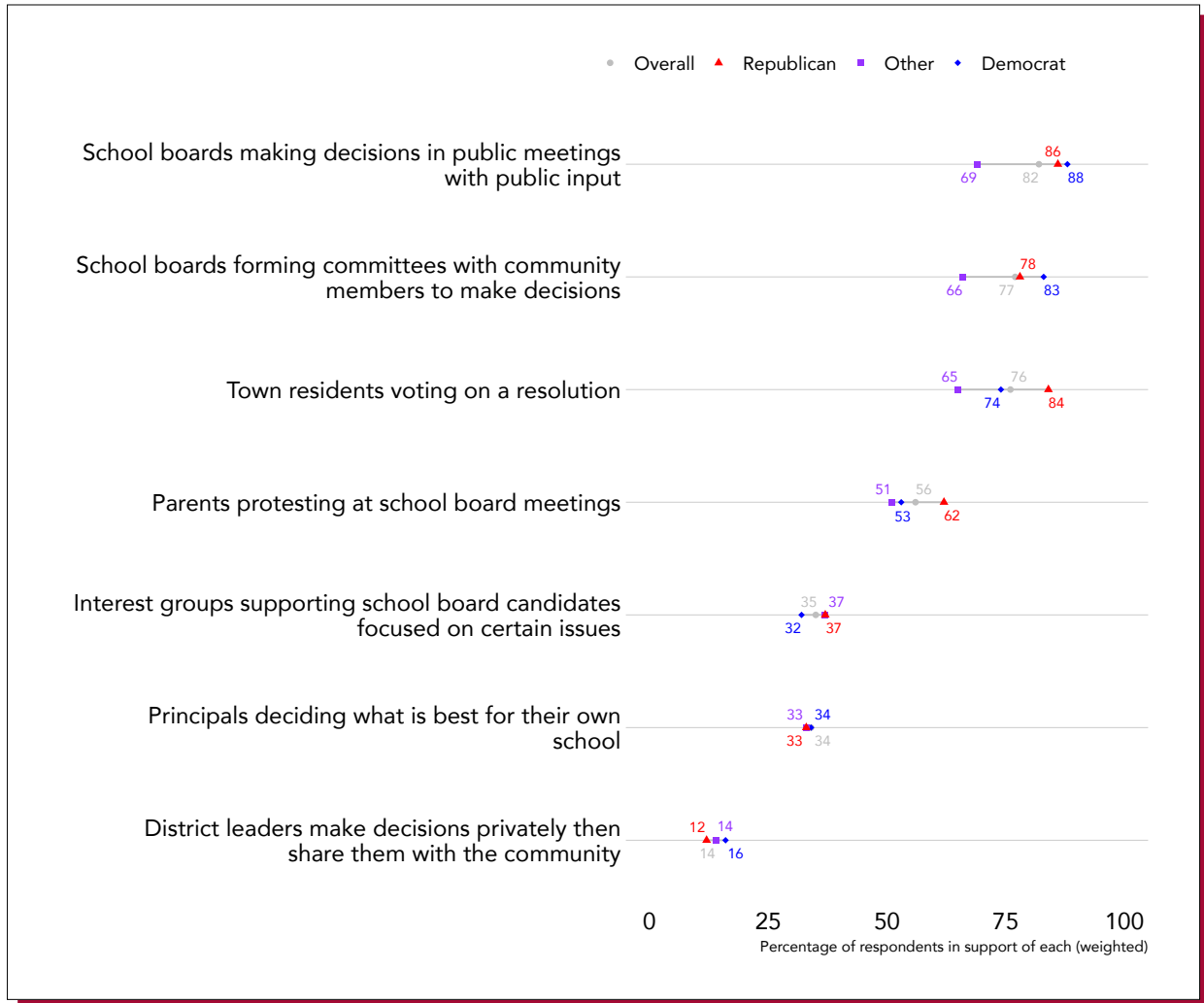
Of the full sample, 118 (3%) of respondents wrote in a substantive "other" approach to managing disagreements. The alternate approach to resolving disagreements suggested most frequently is parent input (n=42); e.g., "parents having the right to discuss and vote on certain topics within the school." Other suggested ideas include educator input (n=31), student input (n=17), and input from the broader community (n=16). While not a way to resolve disagreements per se, transparency (n=10) is noted as a principle that should be present in whatever path to resolution a community takes.

Discussion

Educating the next generation for the rights and responsibilities of U.S. citizenship means different things to different people—which means it can be contentious.

There is public will to invest in civics education.

Overall, the results on civics education topics are hopeful. While lack of familiarity with the technical term "civics education" is quite common across the political spectrum, adults highly value the importance of developing citizens in schools—on par with preparing students for life. Adults also demonstrate cross-partisan support for learning about a wide variety of topics related to civics through a wide range of activities. The low level of support for students learning to join local protests may quell concerns that some communities want to use civics education to teach students to protest.

That said, we acknowledge the strong likelihood of partisan disagreement within each content area regarding the specific details and perspectives adults hope children will learn. In a pluralist democracy like the U.S., different people have different conceptions of what citizenship—and thus civic education—should entail. For example, the values Republicans may want children to learn about social programs likely differ from the values Democrats would espouse. Differing perspectives put the onus on the education system, including curriculum and instructional materials, and educators, to develop students' awareness of multiple perspectives. We still view it as a positive sign there is high cross-partisan agreement that students should be learning these topics in school—especially that students should be learning multiple perspectives.

These results indicate the U.S. population may be far more supportive of initiatives designed to invest in civics education than challenges to bills to date indicate. Bipartisan approaches to developing the workforce and to strengthening democracy are underway. Our results indicate investment in combining the two would be fruitful.

Student protests are broadly unpopular, especially among Republicans and when the protest tactics are disruptive.

Protests on a small number of mostly elite college campuses received substantial media attention in 2024, but views about those protests were intimately tied to views about the underlying issue motivating them: the Israel-Hamas conflict. We attempted to generalize respondents' views beyond the bounds of that issue, and in so doing we learned that student protests are broadly unpopular with the general public. While the most disruptive activities—disrupting graduation, breaking laws, and vandalism—are exceptionally unpopular, there is limited support for even the more innocuous and common forms of student protest. Indeed, every single university response we asked about has more public support than even the most supported student protest action.

Still, this is not to say respondents oppose free speech—only that there are clearly mixed views about what kinds of speech are appropriate, and where/when. For instance, we found considerable opposition to students shouting down speakers they disagree with, implying that adults believe college campuses should be places where such views are heard and debated. Additionally, the least popular institutional action was for administrators to take an official position on a current political issue (e.g., via sending an email stating a position on a social issue), implying that adults believe institutions should be politically neutral.

Adults express uncertainty about DEI issues, though greater proportions of Republicans are opposed.

Out of all topics on our survey, the partisan gaps were among the largest in views on DEI initiatives. Majority proportions of Republicans express opposition to most forms of DEI, though fewer are against training on DEI issues. In contrast, the majority of Democrats support most uses of DEI on college campuses.

Seen another way, however, the results suggest most U.S. adults do not have strongly held views on DEI issues on college campuses. We did not see majority support or opposition to any of the issues we asked about, while almost one-quarter of respondents did not know how they felt about DEI issues. It may be that these issues are simply too far removed from the real-world interests of most U.S. adults to resonate.

Adults believe democratic processes with shared input are the best way to resolve disagreements within communities. They do need to participate, though.

Clear preference for school board-facilitated shared decision-making about education topics demonstrates belief that the democratic process — rather than authoritarianism or delegating to the experts — is the best way for local communities to make their decisions. This result was not a given. For example, more Republicans (30%) than Democrats (17%) think school boards have too much influence.

Yet while it's easy for people to say they want democratic engagement, their actions reveal otherwise. Just 9% of adults (22% of parents, 5% of non-K12 parents) say they attended a school board meeting during the 2023-24 school year. As long as attendance remains low, school boards will be unable to make decisions reflecting the majority of their community's preferences. If parents want to voice their perspectives and assume the rights they seek, they must participate in school board meetings and related committees. Further, communities will need to develop mechanisms for ensuring that all perspectives receive careful consideration, not just the "loudest voices" or the ones who hold attention-getting fringe viewpoints.

> **Communities will need to develop mechanisms for ensuring that all perspectives receive careful consideration, not just the "loudest voices" or the ones who hold attention-getting fringe viewpoints.**

Appendix A.

TABLE A1. STATISTICS DESCRIBING SAMPLE FEATURES (WEIGHTED).

	UNWEIGHTED %
Democrat	37
Republican	36
Neither	26
K-12 child in the household	44
No K-12 child in the household	56

TABLE A2: SAMPLE DEMOGRAPHICS (UNWEIGHTED AND WEIGHTED) COMPARED TO U.S. DEMOGRAPHICS.

	UNWEIGHTED %	WEIGHTED %	NATIONAL %[5]
Female	61	51	50
Male	39	49	50
Age 18-34	11	18	29
Age 35-54	47	43	32
Age 55-64	18	16	16
Age 65+	24	23	22
Education (HS degree or less)	20	38	38
Education (some college)	34	26	29
Education (BA or more)	46	36	33
HH income ($24,999 or less)	17	20	16
HH income ($25,000-$49,999)	18	20	18
HH income ($50,000-$74,999)	16	17	16
HH income ($75,000-$149,999)	31	29	30
HH income ($150,000 or more)	18	14	20
Non-Hispanic White	63	61	58

[5] National demographics from 2022 American Community Survey one-year estimates.

Appendix B: Organizational Background and Author Biographies

About the Center for Applied Research in Education

The CESR Center for Applied Research in Education (CARE), established in 2022 by Marshall Garland, Amie Rapaport, and Anna Saavedra, is housed in the Dornsife Center for Economic and Social Research (CESR) at the University of Southern California. CARE researchers conduct research and evaluations designed to increase understanding of how educational policies affect students, teachers, and schools, and whether interventions are effective, for whom, and under what conditions. We also oversee the education module of the Understanding America Study (UAS), a nationally representative survey panel of more than 13,000 households. Our partners include educators, school districts, state education agencies, foundations, and collaborating research organizations. Our work receives funding support from many public and private organizations, including but not limited to the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, Hewlett Foundation, Lucas Education Research, the National Science Foundation, the One8 Foundation, and the United States Department of Education.

About the USC EdPolicy Hub

The USC EdPolicy Hub is collaborating with Southern California schools, education systems, and community colleges to co-design and conduct relevant research that will help partners navigate challenges and improve outcomes and equity for students across the region. Research is built upon input from schools, families, education systems, community-based organizations, and civic leaders, with the intent of delivering practical, actionable solutions to these same stakeholders. While we hope the results of our work will be widely relevant outside of Southern California, our local partners will determine our focus. The Hub is based at the USC Rossier School of Education as part of Dean Pedro Noguera's Educational Equity Initiative. Serving as Executive Director is Dr. Jon Fullerton, USC Rossier School of Education Research Professor. Hub leadership also includes USC Rossier faculty advisors Dr. Morgan Polikoff, Associate Professor of Education; Dr. Patricia Burch, Professor; and Dr. Anna Saavedra as the Director of Research.

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Dr. Anna Saavedra is a Research Scientist at CESR, where she co-directs CARE and is the USC EdPolicy Hub's Director of Research. In addition to studying public opinions about education-related topics through the UAS, she leads studies of student-centered learning and civics education interventions and policies.

Dr. Morgan Polikoff is a Professor of Education at the USC Rossier School of Education, a CESR Fellow, and a faculty director of the USC EdPolicy Hub. In addition to studying public opinion on education policy, he investigates the design, implementation, and effects of standards-based curriculum, assessment, and accountability policies. His book Beyond Standards was published in 2021 by Harvard Education Press.

Dr. Daniel Silver is a Research Scientist at CARE. In addition to studying public opinions about education-related topics through the UAS, his expertise includes curriculum use and policy, and quantitative methods.

Dr. Amie Rapaport is a Research Scientist at CESR, where she co-directs CARE. In addition to studying public opinions about education-related topics through the UAS, she helps school districts and state agencies study the implementation and impact of education interventions and school policies.

Marshall Garland is a Research Scientist at CESR, where he co-directs CARE. In addition to studying public opinions about education-related topics through the UAS, his primary interest lies in the design and execution of evaluations of educational policies and interventions.

Jacob Scollan-Rowley is a PhD student at the USC Rossier School of Education. In addition to studying public opinions about education-related topics through the UAS, his primary interests are curriculum policy, use, and impact.

Appendix C: Full Survey Questionnaire

Main intro: This survey asks questions about your experiences and opinions related to K-12 education. Your input makes a difference! The perspective of UAS adults (those with and without K-12 children in the household) has contributed to shaping public policy in school districts nationwide. We appreciate your contributions to this important research.

K-12 Civics Education

1. How much, if anything, do you know about what civics education is?

    a. Nothing at all

    b. I know a little

    c. I know a lot

2. *[If R answered b or c]:* In a sentence or less, what is "civics education"?

	Using a traditional grading scale (A, B, C, D, F), how well do you think America's public schools are preparing students to...	How important is it for American schools to prepare students to... *[Not at all important, slightly important, important, very important]*
Be good workers		
Be good citizens		
Succeed in college		
Be prepared for adult life		

3. How important do you think it is for students to learn about these topics in school?
(not at all important, slightly important, important, very important)

    a.   Political issues like immigration or gun control

    b.   How the U.S. government system works (e.g. the three branches of the federal government, the U.S. Constitution)

    c.   Racism in the United States

    d.   Requirements for voting

    e.   Income inequality in the United States

    f.   The United States' leadership role in the world

    g.   The federal government's influence over state and local affairs

    h.   Benefits and challenges of social programs like Medicare and Social Security

    i.   How students can get involved in local government or politics

    j.   The contributions of historical figures who are racial and/or ethnic minorities

    k.   The contributions of historical figures who are women

4. Which three topics from the list you just answered about are the most important to learn about in school?

5. How important is it for students to do these activities in school?
(not at all important, slightly important, important, very important)

    a.   Do community service as part of classwork.

    b.   Research solutions to community problems.

    c.   Debate a topic from the opposite view of their own.

    d.   Learn about the U.S. Constitution.

e. Honor veterans and military service.

f. Learn to detect false information online.

g. Participate in a mock trial.

h. Evaluate different arguments on a topic.

i. Write letters to a newspaper about issues they care about.

j. Join school voting campaigns (e.g., for class president).

k. Learn reasons to vote in local, state, or federal elections.

l. Join a local protest during school time.

m. Recite the pledge of allegiance.

n. Vote in school elections (e.g., student council).

o. Learn importance of registering to vote

p. Register to vote when students turn 18

6. Which three activities from the list you just answered about are the most important for students to do in school?

Managing Disagreements in Communities

Community members often disagree about education issues, for example, about what children should be learning about in school, how tax money should be used in education, and other issues. When there is disagreement, community members address it in different ways.

	Do you support or oppose these ways of handling disagreements about education? [Support, oppose, don't know}	Which of the following has the greatest potential to improve schools? [Choose one only]
Interest groups supporting school board candidates focused on certain issues		
Parents protesting at school board meetings		
School boards making decisions in public meetings with public input		
District leaders (e.g., superintendent) making decisions privately and then sharing them		
School boards forming committees with community members to make decisions		
Principals deciding what is best for their own school		
Town residents voting on a resolution		
Other (please describe)		

Free Speech in Postsecondary Education

When students in colleges/universities decide to express their right to free speech, they have chosen to do so in numerous ways, for various causes over the decades. We would like to learn what you think are appropriate actions from colleges/universities, students, and professors.

7. For each of the following, do you think it is appropriate for colleges/universities to: **(never appropriate, sometimes appropriate, always appropriate, don't know)**

   a. Shut down student protests for safety reasons.

   b. Shut down student protests if they interfere with learning.

   c. Call the police to break up student protests.

   d. Take an official position on current political issues (e.g., by email).

   e. Have police arrest students who break laws during protests.

   f. Move classes online to avoid protests.

   g. Cancel speakers for safety reasons related to student protests.

   h. Create "free speech zones" and limit protests to those areas.

8. For each of the following, do you think it is appropriate for college/university students to: **(never appropriate, sometimes appropriate, always appropriate, don't know)**

   a. Protest world events by walking out of class.

   b. Set up camps or sleep out on campus to protest.

   c. Occupy school buildings.

   d. Shout down invited speakers they disagree with.

   e. Disrupt graduation ceremonies to protest.

    f.   Criticize college/university leaders on social media.

    g.   Write or draw protest messages on college/university property.

    h.   Stop going to classes as a form of protest.

    i.   Demand college/university leadership not make certain financial investments.

Supporting Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion in Colleges

9.   Some colleges/universities have been taking action(s) intended to support Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI). For each of the following actions, please indicate if you think it is appropriate for colleges/universities to:
(never appropriate, sometimes appropriate, always appropriate, don't know)

    a.   Require adults applying for college/university jobs to write about their commitment to DEI in their job applications.

    b.   Require college/university students to take courses about DEI.

    c.   Create college/university positions with responsibility for supporting campus DEI.

    d.   Require college/university staff and faculty to be trained about DEI.

10.   How difficult were the questions in this survey to answer overall?
(Very easy, easy, not easy or difficult, difficult, very difficult)

11.   Could you tell us how interesting or uninteresting you found the questions in this survey?
(Very interesting, interesting, neither interesting nor uninteresting, uninteresting, very uninteresting)

12.   Do you have any other comments on the survey? Please type these in the box below.
[If you have no comments, please click next to complete this survey.]

Appendix D: Pre vs Post Election Analysis

	NOTHING %	A LITTLE %	A LOT %	SIG DIFF?
Civics Grade A or B: Good Workers	25	27	35	Yes
Civics Grade A or B: Good Citizens	29	27	28	No
Civics Grade A or B: College Success	35	41	43	Yes
Civics Grade A or B: Adulthood Preparation	15	14	19	No
Civics Importance: Good Workers	89	90	89	No
Civics Importance: Good Citizens	94	95	98	No
Civics Importance: College Success	83	79	75	Yes
Civics Importance: Adulthood Preparation	95	96	97	No
Topic is Important: Political Issues	68	72	78	Yes
Topic is Important: How U.S. Govt Works	88	95	98	Yes
Topic is Important: Racism in U.S.	76	75	76	No
Topic is Important: Voter Requirements	82	88	91	Yes
Topic is Important: Income Inequality in U.S.	73	67	70	Yes
Topic is Important: U.S. Global Leadership	80	82	88	Yes
Topic is Important: U.S. Federal Govt Influence on State/Local	79	85	88	Yes
Topic is Important: Benefits and Challenges of Social Programs	74	77	80	No
Topic is Important: How Students Can Get Involved in Politics	74	79	87	Yes
Topic is Important: Historical Contribution of Minorities	72	74	77	No
Topic is Important: Historical Contribution of Women	73	75	80	No

	NOTHING %	A LITTLE %	A LOT %	SIG DIFF?
Activity is Important: Community Service	72	77	78	Yes
Activity is Important: Community Problem Solution Seeking	80	84	90	Yes
Activity is Important: Debate from Opposing View	74	83	90	Yes
Activity is Important: Learn About U.S. Constitution	89	95	97	Yes
Activity is Important: Honor Veterans	84	84	82	No
Activity is Important: False Info Detection	86	92	93	Yes
Activity is Important: Mock Trial	52	60	69	Yes
Activity is Important: Evaluate Arguments	79	89	89	Yes
Activity is Important: Write to Newspaper	54	54	55	No
Activity is Important: Join School Campaigns	58	55	58	No
Activity is Important: Reason to Vote	83	91	94	Yes
Activity is Important: Join a Protest	23	18	19	Yes
Activity is Important: Pledge of Allegiance	64	62	62	No
Activity is Important: Vote in School Elections	68	73	78	Yes
Activity is Important: Importance of Voting	81	88	93	Yes
Activity is Important: Register to Vote	80	86	92	Yes
Support: Interest Groups Backing School Board Candidates	36	34	38	No
Support: Parent Protest	54	57	58	No
Support: School Boards Deciding with Public Input	76	88	92	Yes
Support: District Leaders Deciding without Input	15	14	15	No
Support: Committee Formation Involving Community	73	80	87	Yes
Support: Principal Decides for School	33	33	42	No
Support: Town Residents Vote	72	79	80	Yes

	NOTHING %	A LITTLE %	A LOT %	SIG DIFF?
Support: Other [Opportunity to write-in]	9	17	18	Yes
Never Approp. Uni: Shut Down Student Protests for Safety	5	5	9	No
Never Approp. Uni: Shut Down Student Protests for Learning	8	9	12	No
Never Approp. Uni: Call Police on Student Protests	12	11	19	No
Never Approp. Uni: Take Official Position	24	31	35	Yes
Never Approp. Uni: Have Police Arrest Student Lawbreakers	8	5	6	No
Never Approp. Uni: Move Classes Online	24	29	43	Yes
Never Approp. Uni: Cancel Speakers	12	17	24	Yes
Never Approp. Uni: Create "Free Speech Zones"	9	10	19	Yes
Never Approp. Stu: Class Walkout	44	45	40	No
Never Approp. Stu: Protest Camps	39	42	41	No
Never Approp. Stu: Occupy School Buildings	49	62	67	Yes
Never Approp. Stu: Shout Down Speakers	63	71	75	Yes
Never Approp. Stu: Disrupt Graduation	77	81	85	Yes
Never Approp. Stu: Criticize University Leaders on Social	44	34	19	Yes
Never Approp. Stu: Write Protest Message on Uni Property	73	80	74	Yes
Never Approp. Stu: Skip Class in Protest	46	46	49	No
Never Approp. Stu: Demand Uni Divestment	30	28	29	No
Never Approp. Uni: Require DEI Commitment w/ Job App	32	42	47	Yes
Never Approp. Uni: Require Students to take DEI Courses	21	30	40	Yes
Never Approp. Uni: Create Position to Support DEI	18	27	31	Yes
Never Approp. Uni: Require DEI Staff Training	15	21	27	Yes

	NOTHING %	A LITTLE %	A LOT %	SIG DIFF?
Always Approp. Uni: Shut Down Student Protests for Safety	39	37	30	Yes
Always Approp. Uni: Shut Down Student Protests for Learning	41	42	38	No
Always Approp. Uni: Call Police on Student Protests	19	15	13	Yes
Always Approp. Uni: Take Official Position	15	15	14	No
Always Approp. Uni: Have Police Arrest Student Lawbreakers	50	56	55	Yes
Always Approp. Uni: Move Classes Online	12	9	10	No
Always Approp. Uni: Cancel Speakers	26	21	17	Yes
Always Approp. Uni: Create "Free Speech Zones"	32	32	31	No
Always Approp. Stu: Class Walkout	8	8	13	No
Always Approp. Stu: Protest Camps	7	7	8	No
Always Approp. Stu: Occupy School Buildings	10	5	5	Yes
Always Approp. Stu: Shout Down Speakers	4	3	3	No
Always Approp. Stu: Disrupt Graduation	4	3	3	No
Always Approp. Stu: Criticize University Leaders on Social	9	15	26	Yes
Always Approp. Stu: Write Protest Message on Uni Property	4	3	6	No
Always Approp. Stu: Skip Class in Protest	7	9	10	No
Always Approp. Stu: Demand Uni Divestment	8	11	17	Yes
Always Approp. Uni: Require DEI Commitment w/ Job App	13	14	19	No
Always Approp. Uni: Require Students to take DEI Courses	17	23	33	Yes
Always Approp. Uni: Create Position to Support DEI	21	28	36	Yes
Always Approp. Uni: Require DEI Staff Training	33	41	48	Yes

Appendix E: Analysis by Level of Civics Knowledge

	NOTHING %	A LITTLE %	A LOT %	SIG DIFF?
Civics Grade A or B: Good Workers	25	27	35	Yes
Civics Grade A or B: Good Citizens	29	27	28	No
Civics Grade A or B: College Success	35	41	43	Yes
Civics Grade A or B: Adulthood Preparation	15	14	19	No
Civics Importance: Good Workers	89	90	89	No
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Topic is Important: Racism in U.S.	76	75	76	No
Topic is Important: Voter Requirements	82	88	91	Yes
Topic is Important: Income Inequality in U.S.	73	67	70	Yes
Topic is Important: U.S. Global Leadership	80	82	88	Yes
Topic is Important: U.S. Federal Govt Influence on State/Local	79	85	88	Yes
Topic is Important: Benefits and Challenges of Social Programs	74	77	80	No
Topic is Important: How Students Can Get Involved in Politics	74	79	87	Yes
Topic is Important: Historical Contribution of Minorities	72	74	77	No
Topic is Important: Historical Contribution of Women	73	75	80	No

	NOTHING %	A LITTLE %	A LOT %	SIG DIFF?
Activity is Important: Community Service	72	77	78	Yes
Activity is Important: Community Problem Solution Seeking	80	84	90	Yes
Activity is Important: Debate from Opposing View	74	83	90	Yes
Activity is Important: Learn About U.S. Constitution	89	95	97	Yes
Activity is Important: Honor Veterans	84	84	82	No
Activity is Important: False Info Detection	86	92	93	Yes
Activity is Important: Mock Trial	52	60	69	Yes
Activity is Important: Evaluate Arguments	79	89	89	Yes
Activity is Important: Write to Newspaper	54	54	55	No
Activity is Important: Join School Campaigns	58	55	58	No
Activity is Important: Reason to Vote	83	91	94	Yes
Activity is Important: Join a Protest	23	18	19	Yes
Activity is Important: Pledge of Allegiance	64	62	62	No
Activity is Important: Vote in School Elections	68	73	78	Yes
Activity is Important: Importance of Voting	81	88	93	Yes
Activity is Important: Register to Vote	80	86	92	Yes
Support: Interest Groups Backing School Board Candidates	36	34	38	No
Support: Parent Protest	54	57	58	No
Support: School Boards Deciding with Public Input	76	88	92	Yes
Support: District Leaders Deciding without Input	15	14	15	No
Support: Committee Formation Involving Community	73	80	87	Yes
Support: Principal Decides for School	33	33	42	No

	NOTHING %	A LITTLE %	A LOT %	SIG DIFF?
Support: Town Residents Vote	72	79	80	Yes
Support: Other [Opportunity to write-in]	9	17	18	Yes
Never Approp. Uni: Shut Down Student Protests for Safety	5	5	9	No
Never Approp. Uni: Shut Down Student Protests for Learning	8	9	12	No
Never Approp. Uni: Call Police on Student Protests	12	11	19	No
Never Approp. Uni: Take Official Position	24	31	35	Yes
Never Approp. Uni: Have Police Arrest Student Lawbreakers	8	5	6	No
Never Approp. Uni: Move Classes Online	24	29	43	Yes
Never Approp. Uni: Cancel Speakers	12	17	24	Yes
Never Approp. Uni: Create "Free Speech Zones"	9	10	19	Yes
Never Approp. Stu: Class Walkout	44	45	40	No
Never Approp. Stu: Protest Camps	39	42	41	No
Never Approp. Stu: Occupy School Buildings	49	62	67	Yes
Never Approp. Stu: Shout Down Speakers	63	71	75	Yes
Never Approp. Stu: Disrupt Graduation	77	81	85	Yes
Never Approp. Stu: Criticize University Leaders on Social	44	34	19	Yes
Never Approp. Stu: Write Protest Message on Uni Property	73	80	74	Yes
Never Approp. Stu: Skip Class in Protest	46	46	49	No
Never Approp. Stu: Demand Uni Divestment	30	28	29	No
Never Approp. Uni: Require DEI Commitment w/ Job App	32	42	47	Yes
Never Approp. Uni: Require Students to take DEI Courses	21	30	40	Yes
Never Approp. Uni: Create Position to Support DEI	18	27	31	Yes

	NOTHING %	A LITTLE %	A LOT %	SIG DIFF?
Never Approp. Uni: Require DEI Staff Training	15	21	27	Yes
Always Approp. Uni: Shut Down Student Protests for Safety	39	37	30	Yes
Always Approp. Uni: Shut Down Student Protests for Learning	41	42	38	No
Always Approp. Uni: Call Police on Student Protests	19	15	13	Yes
Always Approp. Uni: Take Official Position	15	15	14	No
Always Approp. Uni: Have Police Arrest Student Lawbreakers	50	56	55	Yes
Always Approp. Uni: Move Classes Online	12	9	10	No
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Always Approp. Uni: Require DEI Commitment w/ Job App	13	14	19	No
Always Approp. Uni: Require Students to take DEI Courses	17	23	33	Yes
Always Approp. Uni: Create Position to Support DEI	21	28	36	Yes
Always Approp. Uni: Require DEI Staff Training	33	41	48	Yes

Appendix F: Percentages of Adults Who Believe Learning Topics Related to Civics Education in School is Important (restricted sample)

	REPUBLICAN			DEMOCRAT		
	2021	2024	CHANGE *	2021	2024	CHANGE *
Political issues like immigration or gun control	57%	65%	+8% ↑	86%	81%	-5% ↓
How the US government system works	92%	97%	+5% ↑	93%	94%	+1%
Racism in the United States	51%	55%	+4% ↑	94%	94%	0%
Requirements for voting	84%	88%	+4% ↑	92%	92%	0%
Income inequality in the United States	44%	46%	+2% ↑	88%	88%	0%
The United States' leadership role in the world	79%	84%	+5% ↑	84%	87%	+3%
The federal government's influence over state and local affairs	72%	82%	+10% ↑	86%	87%	+1%
Benefits and challenges of social programs like Medicare and Social security	60%	68%	+8% ↑	84%	84%	0%
How students can get involved in local government or politics	67%	76%	+9% ↑	87%	84%	-3%
The contributions of historical figures who are racial/ethnic minorities	60%	58%	-2%	88%	88%	0%
The contributions of historical figures who are women	63%	61%	-2%	90%	89%	-1%

* **0-3 percentage point change:** no shading; **4-5 percentage point change:** light shading; **6+ percentage point change:** dark shading.

* Restricted to respondents who answered these questions in both 2021 and 2024 and did not change political affiliation between those time points.