



## **Schools, Education Policy, and the Future of the First Amendment**

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**ABSTRACT**

First Amendment principles are fragile unless they have widespread public support. People form lasting views about civil liberties and other political issues in adolescence. They are influenced by many factors, including what they learn and experience in schools. Therefore, schools' treatment of the Constitution and the press is important for the future of the First Amendment. In turn, schools can be influenced by state educational policy.

A multivariate analysis of data from the Knight Foundation 2005 Future of the First Amendment survey, combined with data on state education policies, reveals that discussing the news media in class enhances students' attitudes and habits related to the free press. Also, when their teachers have required the use of news media in classes, students are more likely to use the news media regularly. Students who are directly involved in scholastic media have generally more favorable attitudes toward the First Amendment. For the most part, existing state policies that might be expected to enhance students' knowledge, attitudes, or habits related to the First Amendment do not seem to have significant impact.

I often wonder whether we do not rest our hopes too much upon constitutions, upon laws, and upon courts. These are false hopes; believe me, these are false hopes. Liberty lies in the hearts of men and women; when it dies there, no constitution, no law, no court can even do much to help it.

—Judge Learned Hand, speech in Central Park, New York City, on “I Am an American Day,” May 21, 1944

Constitutional principles, such as the five rights enumerated in the First Amendment, are unstable unless large numbers of people support them. It is unlikely that people will commit strongly to abstract principles unless these concepts are connected to their personal experience. Therefore, if we want Americans to favor freedom of the press, we must hope that they use a free press on a regular basis and derive benefit from it.

Furthermore, if we want to influence habits and values related to the press (or to any public matter or institution), we should focus on young people. What individuals experience between the ages of 14 and 25 can have lasting effects on their political attitudes and behaviors, whereas few experiences after age 25 seem to matter. Several longitudinal studies find that adolescent experiences affect the civic behavior of individuals in adulthood.<sup>1</sup> For example, Jennings and Stoker find that a person’s participation in high school extracurricular groups during the 1960s still correlates with his or her participation in neighborhood associations forty years later, controlling for other factors.<sup>2</sup> Furthermore, whole generations often have enduring civic characteristics, presumably because their members shared common formative experiences. Therefore, it is frequently the arrival of a new generation, rather than a change in existing individuals’ opinions, that explains shifts in public attitudes.

For example, the percentage of Americans who favor a ban on interracial marriage has fallen steadily since the 1970s. If we look separately at the trend for each generation, we find that most cohorts have not significantly changed their attitudes as they have moved through life. (The exception is people born before 1906, some of whom did change their minds about miscegenation laws during the 1970s.) However, each new generation has entered adulthood with more positive attitudes toward interracial marriage than its predecessors, causing public opinion to change gradually but substantially as the population has changed.<sup>3</sup> Likewise, attitudes toward free speech for “admitted homosexuals,” anti-Black racists, and atheists are fairly consistent over each person’s lifecourse but are different for each generation, according to data from the US General Social Survey. (In general, the Baby Boomers—born between 1945 and 1964—show the most support for free speech in these controversial cases, with Generation X—born 1965-1984—slightly behind.)

A theoretical explanation for the lifelong impact of adolescent experiences was first proposed by Karl Mannheim during the 1920s.<sup>4</sup> Young children usually have no need to form opinions about public issues and institutions, because they are insulated by family, school, and neighborhood. However, in modern Western societies, the outside world makes its presence evident sometime after age 11. When adolescents first became aware of the government, law, news media, and political issues, they must form opinions about the public realm. The attitudes that they form depend upon their individual experiences (e.g., their courses in school, interactions with the government, and parents’ opinions), and upon large historical events that may influence their whole generation. Their opinions are relevant to their habits. For example, someone who dislikes public affairs is unlikely to form a habit of reading the daily newspaper, but someone who cares about social justice may become a habitual volunteer or activist.

Once adolescents have formed opinions and habits, it would take attention, time, and emotional energy for them to change their minds. Public events of great significance can force them to reevaluate. For example, the rise of Hitler sooner or later compelled German Jews to reassess their attitudes toward

politics in general and the German state in particular. However, politics and public issues have low salience in countries like the United States, where political transitions are regular and non-violent. For the most part, therefore, Americans do not feel the need to reassess the core political opinions that they form between ages 14 and 25. Their civic and political identities (i.e., their durable attitudes and habits) are formed during that period.

Many factors influence the identities that form before age 25. For anyone primarily concerned with the First Amendment and consumption of high-quality daily news, the relevant factors probably include the behavior and attitudes of parents and other influential adults (e.g., whether they discuss politics and participate in community affairs<sup>5</sup>); the nature of available news media (e.g., whether newspaper and television stations cover issues of interest to adolescents in an attractive way<sup>6</sup>); the community's attitudes toward the news and public affairs; and the teaching of relevant skills, habits, and concepts in schools.

Schools are the focus in the remainder of this paper. Compared to parents, news media, and communities, public schools are the easiest to change through law and public policy. They can have direct impact on students' civic attitudes, knowledge, and habits.<sup>7</sup> There is also evidence that social studies instruction can have indirect effects, enhancing family discussions of current events, which then increase both parents' and students' interest and knowledge.<sup>8</sup> Therefore, any friend of the First Amendment should ask what policies may influence schools to teach students to value and use the free press.

The civic development of young people is of special concern today. While members of the youngest generation are relatively tolerant of gays, racial minorities, and immigrants,<sup>9</sup> they are quite disconnected from the news media. For example, Higher Education Research Institute surveys of incoming college freshmen find that the percentage who follow public affairs most of the time fell from 26 percent in 1974 to 5.1 percent in 2000, although it has rebounded a bit in the current decade. Likewise, in the National Election Studies, the percentage of Americans between the ages of 18 and 25 who consistently follow the news has fallen from 24 percent in 1960 to 5.1 percent in 2000. Declines of roughly four fifths in regular attention to the news do not bode well for the future of the news media or the First Amendment. These declines cannot be attributed to the rise of rival news sources such as the Internet. The questions are phrased to include all forms of news media consumption. Besides, the dramatic decline occurred during the 1980s, before the Internet reached large scale.

The Knight First Amendment Survey data

In 2005, the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation conducted a major survey of 112,203 high school students, 7,889 teachers, and 308 principals. The survey was focused on habits and attitudes relevant to the First Amendment and especially freedom of the press. Students were asked factual questions about the First Amendment, such as whether it is legal to burn the American flag as a protest. They were asked opinion questions, such as whether the press has too much freedom and whether newspapers should be allowed to publish freely without government approval. They were also asked questions about their use of various news media.

<b>Table 1. List of Dependent and Independent Variables</b>		
<b>Dependent Variables</b>	<b>Policy Independent Variables</b>	<b>Other Independent Variables</b>
<p><i>Attitudes</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Disagree that the First Amendment goes too far</li> <li>Disagree that the press has too much freedom</li> <li>People should be allowed to express unpopular opinions</li> <li>People should be allowed to burn US flag as political statement</li> <li>Musicians should be allowed to sing offensive lyrics</li> <li>Newspapers should be allowed to publish without prior government approval</li> <li>School newspapers should be free to publish controversial articles</li> <li>Americans don't appreciate First Amendment freedoms as they ought</li> <li>Trust journalists to tell the truth</li> </ul> <p><i>Attention</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Do people think about the First Amendment?</li> <li>Do you personally think about First Amendment?</li> </ul> <p><i>Knowledge</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>There is a legal right to burn flag.</li> <li>Courts can jail reporters for not naming sources?</li> <li>Government cannot restrict indecent material on the Internet.</li> <li>There is no legal right to shout "fire" in a crowded theater as a prank</li> </ul> <p><i>Media use</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Do you get news from newspaper every day?</li> <li>Do you get news from the radio every day?</li> <li>Do you get news from TV every day?</li> <li>Do you get news from the Internet every day?</li> <li>Do you read a news weekly?</li> <li>Do you know a lot about what's going on in your high school?</li> </ul>	<p><i>Courses</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Taken Class that Deals with 1st Amendment</li> <li>Taken Class that Discusses Role of Media</li> <li>Taken class that dealt with Journalism</li> <li>Media use is Required by Teacher</li> </ul> <p><i>State Policies</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Course Requirement in civics</li> <li>At least 3 credits of social studies/history</li> <li>Course Requirement specifically mentions Constitution</li> <li>Course Requirement for Social Studies includes Civics or American Government</li> <li>State Assessment Includes Civics</li> <li>State Evaluations of Schools Measure Civic Outcomes</li> <li>Media literacy Requirements Pre-High School</li> <li>Media literacy Requirements in High School</li> </ul> <p><i>School Media</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>School has: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Newspaper</li> <li>Magazine</li> <li>Radio Station</li> <li>Television Station</li> <li>Web Publication</li> <li>Other Publication</li> </ul> </li> <li>Eliminated within the last 5 years: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Newspaper</li> <li>Magazine</li> <li>Radio Station</li> <li>TV Station</li> <li>Web Pub.</li> <li>Other publication</li> </ul> </li> <li>Number of Teachers Assigned to Journalism Programs</li> <li>Percentage of students enrolled in courses teaching journalism skills</li> <li>Media Use is a High Priority (according to principal)</li> </ul> <p><i>Respondent's participation</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Student is member of: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>School Newspaper</li> <li>School Magazine</li> <li>School Radio Station</li> <li>School Television Station</li> <li>School Web Publication</li> <li>Other School Publication</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<p><i>Personal/Demographic</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Gender</li> <li>Race/ethnicity</li> <li>Citizenship status</li> <li>Income class</li> <li>Grade level at time of survey</li> <li>College Aspirations</li> <li>GPA</li> <li>Census Region</li> <li>Where Parents get their news</li> <li>Discuss Current Affairs with Parents</li> </ul> <p><i>School Level Controls</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Public School Indicator</li> <li>School Size</li> <li>School Urbanicity</li> <li>Percent of Students on Free Lunch</li> <li>High School Graduation Rate</li> <li>High School 4 year College Attendance Rate</li> <li>High School 2 year College Attendance Rate</li> <li>High School Technical School Attendance Rate</li> <li>Percent Minority in School</li> <li>Indicator for School type (Regular versus Technical or Special Education)</li> </ul>

These are the main outcome variables of interest in this article. The survey also provides data about students' experiences in school (as they recall them), including participation in student newspapers and several other kinds of student media, performance arts, sports, debate clubs, student councils, religious groups, and community service opportunities; plus total hours in extracurricular activities and membership in groups. There are measures of experiences outside of schools, such as whether the student discusses news at home or with friends, and whether his or her parents read the newspaper everyday, listen to the radio news everyday, watch the tv news everyday, obtain news from the internet everyday, and read a weekly news magazine.

The survey collects demographic information, especially students' current grade, confidence that they will attend college, current grade-point average, gender, race, citizenship status, self-identified financial class of family, and region. There are also data on the attitudes of teachers and administrators and facts about schools and curricula as reported by these adults, especially school size, urban location, and percent of students receiving free lunch—the last, a proxy for school income levels.

We were able to combine these data with a database of state civic education policies compiled by the Education Commission of the States (ECS) with funding from CIRCLE (The Center for Information & Research on Civic Learning & Engagement) and Carnegie Corporation of New York. The ECS database includes numerous variables, from which we selected the following as likely to be relevant: whether all students are required to take at least three credits of Social Studies/History; whether state standards specifically require some study of the Constitution; whether state standards for the social studies include civics or American government; whether the state assessment of students includes civics; and whether state evaluations of schools measure civic outcomes. Finally, we included in the model a list of state standards for media literacy, derived from work by Robert Kubey and Frank Baker.<sup>10</sup> That list was developed in 1999, and some state standards could have changed by the time the Knight Foundation survey data were collected. However, Kuber and Baker's data allowed us to test the effects of media-literacy standards for grades k-8 on the high school students in the Knight sample.

The analytical method used in this paper is a multivariate approach that estimates the effects of various "inputs" on the "outputs" of interest: in this case, students' attitudes and habits related to the First Amendment. Specifically, we es

$$FA_i = f(course, SP, SM, other)_i,$$

where  $FA_i$  represents a student's attitude toward, knowledge of, or level of attention paid to the First Amendment, *course* represents Media use course characteristics students may have taken, *SP* represents state policies towards the First Amendment, and *SM* represents the status of school media at the student's high school. Last, *other* represents a full set of controls containing demographic, school, and other characteristics of the student. We estimate this as a probit model. The coefficients that result from the model can be expressed as the impact of any input, holding other factors constant. This is a powerful method, especially given a sample of 112,203 students. However, it requires three caveats.

First, all these results are correlational. When two factors correlate after all the other factors measured in the survey have been controlled, we suspect that one factor causes the other, but this may not be the case. Instead, some third factor, unmeasured in the survey, may be the underlying cause. For instance, students who begin with an interest in the news media may tend to take courses about journalism, and that initial interest (rather than the courses that they elect to take) may explain why they consume more than an average amount of news. Because the model includes controls for numerous variables, it allows reasonable inferences about causation, but it does not prove causation.

Second, most of these variables are measured by asking students or adults to report their own experiences and values. Self-reports introduce a source of bias. For example, the students who report having taken classes on the First Amendment or the media may not always be the students who actually took those classes. Some may have forgotten what they studied because they did not find it interesting

or did not understand it, while others may say they took the course because they think that is the “right thing to do.” [Note: some of us feel that this second caveat is unnecessary, because it’s a standard form of measurement error, well accepted by those reviewing academic papers using survey research.]

Third, when a survey sample is large, one must take care to distinguish between statistical significance and what one might call “policy significance.” In this paper, we only report results that are statistically significant. It is highly likely that the same results would arise if we could survey all high school students in America, instead of randomly sampling 100,000. Nevertheless, some of these results are small. If statistical relationships are reliable but small, they should not necessarily influence schools or states. For example, if a hypothetical yearlong course were to increase by one percent the likelihood that students read a newspaper, that is not a strong reason to require—or even to offer—the course. The benefit is simply not worth such a large investment of time and money.

## **MAIN RESULTS**

### **1. CLASSROOM INTERVENTIONS**

Even once we control for numerous variables that are intended to measure students’ social background and experiences, we find that some courses and course topics are related to the outcomes of interest in this paper.

**Table 2. Curriculum Effects**

Statistically Significant Results from the Full Probit Model with a complete set of controls. Marginal Effects are shown. \* significant at 5%; \*\* significant at 1%

<i>Outcome Measure</i>	<i>Curriculum Policies</i>			
	Taken Class that Deals with 1st Amendment	Taken Class that Discusses Role of Media	Taken class that dealt with Journalism	Media use is Required by Teacher
Disagree that the First Amendment goes too far	-1.2%**		-4.7%**	-2.2%**
Disagree that the press has too much freedom	1.9%**	1.7%**	-2.3%**	-3.4%**
People should be allowed to express unpopular opinions	3.6%**	4.1%**	-1.8%**	6.5%**
People should be allowed to burn US flag as political statement	1.3%**	1.2%**		
Musicians should be allowed to sing offensive lyrics	3.9%**	3.7%**	-1.6%**	6.5%**
Newspapers should be allowed to publish without prior government approval	1.9%**	2%**	-1.3%**	3.9%**
School newspapers should be free to publish controversial articles	2.1%**	3.1%**	-1.1%**	5.1%**
Americans don't appreciate First Amendment freedoms as they ought	4.1%**	3.1%**		3.6%**
Trust journalists to tell the truth	2.3%**	3.7%**		5.7%**
Do you personally think about First Amendment?	0.5%**	0.4%*	1.6%**	0.5%*
There is a legal right to burn flag.	4.5%**	2.8%**	1.5%**	2.2%**
Courts <i>can</i> jail reporters for not naming sources?	3.5%**	1.4%**	-1.2%**	0.7%*
Government <i>cannot</i> restrict indecent material on the Internet.	1.2%**	1.7%**	1.1%**	0.8%*
There is <i>no</i> legal right to shout "fire" in a crowded theater as a prank	-1.9%**	-1.7%**	-1.4%**	-3.9%**
Do you get news from newspaper every day?	0.6%**	0.5%**	1.4%**	
Do you get news from the radio every day?	1.2%**	2.5%**	2.2%**	2.7%**
Do you get news from TV every day?	2.0%**	2.5%**	1.6%**	3.6%**
Do you get news from the Internet every day?	0.6%*	1.6%**	1.5%**	2.0%**
Do you read a news weekly?	2.2%**	1.3%**	1.6%**	2.5%**
Do you know a lot about what's going on in your high school?	3.7%**	5.1%**	2.4%**	7.1%**



According to the probit model, if a student reports taking a class that discusses the role of the media in society, then we should expect him or her to have moderately more favorable attitudes toward the First Amendment, to be more likely to report thinking about the First Amendment often, to have slightly better factual knowledge, and to consume more news. When we simply compare the mean results for students who do and do not report taking such a class, the differences are quite large. For example, of those students who say that they took a class that discusses the role of the media in society, 87% believe that people should be able to express unpopular opinions, compared to 79.3% of students who did not take such a class. That eight-point difference narrows to 3.6 points once we employ the full probit model with its many controls; but it remains a significant result. The full model also finds a 3.1 point difference in the percentage of students who believe that Americans are not sufficiently appreciative of the First Amendment.

Taking a class that “discusses” the role of media is not a very demanding intervention. It seems likely (although we cannot tell from the survey data) that spending significant instructional time on studying the role of the media would have bigger effects than we see in our model’s results. After all, some of the students who recall having discussed the role of the mass media in class may have spent no more than five minutes on the topic.

If students report that a teacher has required the use of news media in class, then we should expect mainly positive effects on attitudes. In the probit model, these students are 5.1 percentage points more likely to say that student journalists should be allowed to report controversy, and 6.5 percentage points more likely to believe that people should be allowed to express unpopular views. (However, students who have been required to use the news media are 3.4 percentage points more likely to say that the press has too much freedom.) The effects on knowledge are mixed,<sup>11</sup> but significantly more regular news consumption seems to result from using the media in class. While there is no impact on regular newspaper reading, there are positive relationships with the use of other media: radio news (2.7 percentage points), television news (3.6 points), Internet news sources (two percentage points), and weekly news magazines (two percentage points). Students who have been required to use the news media are also more trusting of journalists and considerably better informed about what’s going on in their own high schools.

It appears, thus, that using and discussing the news media in class make a substantial difference to students’ attitudes and habits related to the news. One of us has experience teaching news to high school students and believes that it is very difficult for them to understand a news story in any medium until they understand some background facts that journalists presume. They do not merely need generic literacy in the relevant language; they must also understand factual references, terms, and conventions that are common in daily news reporting. Therefore, it is not surprising that a class on the news raises actual news consumption. Again, spending more than a token amount of time would presumably increase the impact. According to research by David E. Campbell, time spent discussing current issues correlates with 14-year-olds’ civic knowledge and their predictions of how civically involved they will be as adults. However, a more powerful correlate than time is students’ sense that political and social issues are discussed openly and respectfully in their classes.<sup>12</sup>

Other approaches at the classroom level are somewhat less promising. For example, if a student reports taking a class that dealt with the First Amendment, our results show that he or she will use somewhat more news media and have somewhat better factual knowledge (e.g., such students will be 4.5 percentage points more likely to understand that there is a right to burn the flag). However, effects on attitudes appear mixed. If a student reports taking a high school class that dealt with journalism skills, then the model shows that he or she will have somewhat worse attitudes toward free speech across the board, even though such students think more about the First Amendment. For example, these students are 4.7 points more likely to say that the First Amendment “goes too far.” However, they student consume

slightly more news. It would take qualitative research to determine the reason for these findings, but we hypothesize that high school journalism classes often accentuate scandals and other problems with the contemporary news media, thereby lowering support for the First Amendment. Nevertheless, students consume more news if they are taught journalism skills.

## **2. PARTICIPATING IN SCHOOL MEDIA**

Education about the free press can occur through scholastic journalism, not just in social studies or media courses. Overall, students who directly participate, for example by serving on the staff of the school newspaper, have more favorable attitudes toward the First Amendment, know more about it, and consume more news. These results hold after one controls for all factors measured in the survey, but it is still not certain that participation boosts attitudes and knowledge. The reverse could be true: those favorable to free speech might choose to participate in scholastic media.

**Table 3. Media Participation Effects**

Statistically Significant Results from the Full Probit Model with a complete set of controls. Marginal Effects are shown. \* significant at 5%; \*\* significant at 1%

<i>Outcome Variables</i>	Student member of School Newspaper	Student member of School Magazine	Student member of School Radio Station	Student member of School Television Station	Student member of School Web Publication	Student member of Other School Publication
Disagree that the First Amendment goes too far	2.2%**	6.1%**	5.1%**	2%*	-3.9%**	
Disagree that the press has too much freedom	4%**					
People should be allowed to express unpopular opinions	2.7%**	-4.1%**	-4.9%**	-2.3%**		
People should be allowed to burn US flag as political statement	5.8%**	4.1%**	4.6%**	2.5%**	2.2%**	
Musicians should be allowed to sing offensive lyrics	3.2%**	-5.2%**	-2.9%**			
Newspapers should be allowed to publish without prior government approval	8.1%**			2.5%**	1.8%*	
School newspapers should be free to publish controversial articles	6.5%**	-4%**	-2.8%*			2%*
Americans don't appreciate First Amendment freedoms as they ought	3.3%**			2%*		
Trust journalists to tell the truth	7.3%**		-2.8%*		-2.2%*	-1.9%*
Do people think about the First Amendment?		3.9%**	3.4%**		3.3%**	1.1**
Do you personally think about First Amendment?	3%**				1.8%*	2.5%**
There is a legal right to burn flag.	6%**	1.8%*	2.2%**	1.6%*	2.8%**	1.7%*
Courts <i>can</i> jail reporters for not naming sources?		4.9%**	4.7%**		2.5%**	3.1%**
Government <i>cannot</i> restrict indecent material on the Internet.	-1.7%*	-5.3%**				
There is <i>no</i> legal right to shout "fire" in a crowded theater as a prank		-4.3%**	-4.5%**	-2%**	-2.5%**	-3.1%**
Do you get news from newspaper every day?	2.2%**	2.3%**	1.7%**		1.4%**	0.9%*
Do you get news from the radio every day?		2.3%**	1.8%*			
Do you get news from TV every day?				1.9%*	2.2%**	
Do you get news from the Internet every day?	2.0%**				6.7%**	1.5%*
Do you read a news weekly?	2.2%**	1.3%*			1.4%*	
Do you know a lot about what's going on in your high school?	2.2%**		-3.8%**			

School newspaper staff show positive results in the model, the biggest being their strong opposition to government censorship of newspapers. Participation in scholastic radio appears somewhat more ambiguous. For instance, radio staff are somewhat less likely than other people to believe that musicians should be allowed to sing offensive lyrics. (They are seven points less supportive, but that difference shrinks to 2.9 percentage points in the full probit model.) Students who work on magazines also have mixed attitudes toward the First Amendment, compared to other students with similar characteristics. As might be expected, students who work on school-based web publications are considerably more likely to use the Internet for daily news. Radio staff feel less aware of what is going on in their school than are other students, perhaps because they are focused on music.

### **3. EFFECTS OF SCHOLASTIC MEDIA ON A SCHOOL POPULATION**

We have seen that directly participating in scholastic journalism correlates with various positive outcomes. However, most students do not serve on the staffs of newspapers and other news organs. When we examine the effects of scholastic media on the whole student body, we find less encouraging results.

**Table 4. School Media Effects**  
 Statistically Significant Results from the Full Probit Model with a complete set of controls. Marginal Effects are shown.  
 \* significant at 5%; \*\* significant at 1%

	School has ...				Eliminated within the last 5 years ...							School Policies				
	Newspaper	Magazine	Radio Station	TV Station	Web Publication	Other Publication	Newspaper	Magazine	Radio Station	TV Station	Web Pub.	Other pub.	No. of Teachers	%age of students enrolled in courses	%age of students enrolled in courses	Media Use is a School High Priority
Disagree that the First Amendment goes too far							2.2%*	4.2%**			-3.2%*					
Disagree that the press has too much freedom					2.2*					2.6%**				1.7%**	2.1%**	
People should be allowed to express unpopular opinions				2.1%*		-1.2%*	2.8%**								2.1%**	
People should be allowed to burn US flag as political statement		2.8%**					1.5%*		7.6%**	-1.6%*				0.9%**		1.6%**
Musicians should be allowed to sing offensive lyrics				2.6%*			3.8%**							1.2%*		
Newspapers should be allowed to publish without prior government approval	-1.8%*			3.8%**			2.9%**							1.9%**		
School newspapers should be free to publish controversial articles		5.6%**	-4.4%*	2.6%*			3.6%**		5.7%*					2.2%**		

The apparent effects of newspapers are particularly disappointing. In schools with student newspapers, the student body is somewhat more favorable toward government censorship of newspapers and somewhat less concerned that other Americans take the First Amendment for granted, compared to students in otherwise similar schools. When there is a school newspaper, students are more likely to get news from television but no more likely to use printed sources or to feel well informed about their schools. Except for the correlation with television viewership, the model finds no positive effects from having a scholastic newspaper.

Magazines and student television stations show scattered positive results and not many negative ones. For instance, in schools with student magazines, youth are 5.6 percentage points more likely to support school newspapers' right to report controversy. (This result contrasts with the null result from having a scholastic newspaper.) Having a television station correlates with student consumption of media, including newspapers.

The Knight survey asked whether various forms of student media had been eliminated within the last five years. There were many positive results from the elimination of various forms of media. It is possible that closing a newspaper or other news organ increases students' appreciation for the free press and causes them to consume other forms of media. However, eliminating student media is not an ethical way to enhance students' attitudes to the First Amendment, nor could that intervention be repeated.

The percentage of students who are enrolled in classes that teach journalism skills is a positive predictor of some attitudes and knowledge related to the First Amendment. That is true even though students who reported taking such classes themselves showed notably mixed results. These two variables come, respectively, from the principals' survey and the students' survey. The difference in perspectives may explain the discrepancy in results. When principals say that media use is a high priority in their buildings, there are a few positive results—notably, an increased level of students' trust in journalists and a greater chance that students will feel informed about their school.

The survey asked for how long each form of student media had been established in each school. There were no statistically significant results from these variables for any outcome. In several cases, a coefficient of zero was statistically significant at the 1% level. Thus, according to the survey data and our probit model, the longevity of student media has no impact at all.

#### **4. STATE POLICY EFFECTS**

Finally, the Knight survey allows us to estimate the impact of government policies on student outcomes. Even today, after the passage of No Child Left Behind (NCLB) in 2001, the federal government has virtually no influence on civics or social studies instruction or scholastic newspapers and other media at the high school level. The accountability measures imposed by NCLB extend no further than eighth grade and emphasize reading, language arts and mathematics. There are federal funding opportunities for civic education and service-learning, but they amount to less than \$100 million in total, compared to a national education budget of xxx billion.<sup>13</sup> Important policies are set not by the federal government but by schools (for which we use the survey's measures of courses and principals' opinions as proxies), by school districts (unmeasured in this study), and by states. For state-level policies, the Education Commission of the States database gives us detailed information, current for 2003. We have added state media literacy policies, using data collected in 1999.

**Table 5. State Policy Effects**

Statistically Significant Results from the Full Probit Model with a complete set of controls. Marginal Effects are shown.

\* significant at 5%; \*\* significant at 1%

<i>Outcome Variables</i>	Course Requirement in civics at least 3 credits of social	Course Requirement specifically mentions	Course Requirement for Social Studies includes Civics or	State Assessment Includes Civics	State Evaluations of Schools Measure Civic Outcomes	Media Requirements Pre-High School	Media Requirements in High School
Disagree that the First Amendment goes too far			2.3%**				
Disagree that the press has too much freedom	-1.1%*		-2.7%**	-1.7%*			
People should be allowed to express unpopular opinions					-1.4%*	1.2%**	
People should be allowed to burn US flag as political statement			2%**		1.2%*		
Musicians should be allowed to sing offensive lyrics	-1.8%**					1.3%*	
Newspapers should be allowed to publish without prior government approval	-1.5%*					1.2%*	-2.7%**
School newspapers should be free to publish controversial articles			-2.7%**		2%**		-1.3%*
Americans don't appreciate First Amendment freedoms as they ought						1.3%*	
Trust journalists to tell the truth				3.2%**	-3.4%**		
Do people think about the First Amendment?						0.6%*	
Do you personally think about First Amendment?			-2%**			1.4%**	1.1%*
There is a legal right to burn flag.	-1%*		3.1%**			0.9%*	
Courts <i>can</i> jail reporters for not naming sources?							
Government <i>cannot</i> restrict indecent material on the Internet.	1.2%*	2.7%**					
There is <i>no</i> legal right to shout "fire" in a crowded theater as a prank	1.5%**	-2.2%**		1.7%**			1.5%**
Do you get news from newspaper every day?			-2.5%**	-1.7%**			-0.8%*
Do you get news from the radio every day?						2.0%**	2.6%**
Do you get news from TV every day?			-3.5%**	-2.5%**	2.2%**	1.2%*	
Do you get news from the Internet every day?			-2.0%**			0.8%*	
Do you read a news weekly?		-2.0%**	1.2%*	3.8%**	-2.0%**		1.3%**
Do you know a lot about what's going on in your high school?	-4.2%**	2.9%**	2.2%*	4.5%**	-2.2%**	-1.9%**	-3.7%**

In general, the state policies that deal explicitly with civics and social studies do not correlate significantly with the student outcomes measured in the Future of the First Amendment survey, either in the full probit model or when we simply compare the means in states with various policies versus the means in states without those policies. We suggest two explanations for the general lack of statistical relationships between state policies and the student outcomes measured in this survey. First, although state policies may influence schools, and schools may influence students, these effects are not large enough for state policies regarding civics to have significant impact on the student outcomes discussed here.

Second, many of the state standards require instruction that is virtually ubiquitous. For instance, 85% (check) of all American students take at least one semester of civics, so it is not the case that students only take civics courses in the 41 states and District of Columbia that have civics standards. Perhaps the frequency of course-taking would fall if civics standards were dropped, but that supposition is not testable using these data. The current standards probably influence the content of courses to a degree, but not with consequences picked up in this survey.

Notwithstanding the general finding that current state policies do not correlate with students' knowledge, values, opinions, or habits relevant to the First Amendment, a few statistically significant relationships are found in the probit model. If a state's evaluation of schools measures civic outcomes (as in 15 states), then the probit model predicts a mix of positive and negative effects. There appears to be a 3.2 percentage-point boost in trust for journalists and an increase in the proportion of students who feel they know what is going on inside their own schools; but they read the newspaper somewhat less and are somewhat more likely to feel that the press has excessive freedom.

If civics or American government is part of the state social studies requirements (as in 41 states), we would expect mixed effects on attitudes and knowledge—including a few significant negative results—and somewhat less news consumption. For example, in those states, controlling for other factors, students are 2.7 percentage points less likely to believe that scholastic newspapers should be free to publish controversial material, and 2.7 percentage points more likely to feel that the press has excessive freedom.

If a state requires at least three credits of social studies or history (as 26 states do), then the probit model finds a mix of small effects on attitudes and knowledge (none as big as 2 percentage points), and a 4.2 point reduction in students' feeling that they know what is going on in their own schools.

If state education standards specifically mention study of the Constitution (as just eight do), then we see no effects on attitudes, a few mixed effects on knowledge, and less reading of news weeklies. It is possible that a specific mention of the Constitution is a misleading indicator. Perhaps some state standards are "laundry lists" that mention many things and compel attention to none. Then an explicit mention of the Constitution may simply indicate that a state's standards are excessively detailed and lengthy. Paul Gagnon argues that the truly "vital topics" for civic education (including the Constitution and the Bill of Rights) "appear in state standards, but are often buried in unprioritized lists of topics, subtopics, and skills. ... The resulting state standards are rarely 'coverable,' much less teachable in ways that the standard documents themselves declare as ideal: that is, in both breadth and depth, with much writing, inquiry and 'active learning,' group projects, simulations, debates, seminars, and exhibits."<sup>14</sup>

Finally, we were able to investigate the effects of state-level requirements for media literacy as of 1999. We looked separately at requirements for grades k-8 and requirements at the high school level. In general, the k-8 mandates showed more positive effects on high school students than the mandates imposed in high schools. For instance, our model predicts that instituting a k-8 requirement for media literacy would lower students' support for government censorship of the press by 1.2 points; a high-school requirement would raise their support for censorship by 2.7 points.



## RECOMMENDATIONS

Two important positive relationships found in the full probit model are between students' news consumption (on one hand) and taking courses that discuss the role of the media in society or that require use of the news media. It is certainly possible that these relationships are not causal—perhaps students who have a prior interest in the news elect to take relevant courses. However, our own experience suggests that explicit instruction in current events and required practice in using news media probably do increase news consumption.

Otherwise, the lack of substantial effects from extant state policies indicates two possible conclusions. Perhaps state policies do not have much potential to change student outcomes regarding news consumption and attitudes toward the press or the First Amendment. State policies tend to be blunt instruments that affect the number of courses taken or the amount of time spent on various topics. It may be the case that subtler factors, such as teachers' attitudes toward the press, are more important. Alternatively, it could be that state policies have the potential to enhance students' attitudes, knowledge, and habits relevant to the First Amendment; but no states currently have effective policies in place. While the data from the Knight Survey do not provide powerful evidence for any extant policy intervention at the state level, we believe there is promise in state policies that encourage and support explicit discussion of the news media, especially if students are required to employ news sources in classrooms. Given the mixed results from high school courses, it may be especially important for states to support teacher education, both before and during service in the classroom.

## ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup>Review of 14 studies in James Youniss and Daniel Hart, "Motivation, Values, and Civic Participation," paper presented at the Democracy Collaborative, Knight Civic Engagement Project Consultation Meeting, Washington, DC, October 24, 2002. Portions of this paper appear in James Youniss, Jeffrey A. McLellan, and Miranda Yates, "What We Know About Engendering Civic Identity," *American Behavioral Scientist*, vol. 40, no. 5 (March/April 1997), pp. 620-631. See also M. Kent Jennings and Laura Stoker, "Social Trust and Civic Engagement across Time and Generations," *Acta Politica*, 2004, vol. 39, 342-379 and Jonathan D. Zaff, J.D "Socializing Youth for Citizenship," CIRCLE Working Paper 03 (2003), "Identity Development and Feelings of Fulfillment: Mediators of Future Civic Engagement" (CIRCLE Working Paper 04, 2003), "Promoting Positive Citizenship: Priming Youth For Action," CIRCLE Working Paper 05 (2003). Certain intense experiences have lifelong effects on fundamental civic identities: see Doug, McAdam, *Freedom Summer* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990); A.J. Stewart, I.H.. Settles, and J.G., Winter, "Women and the Social Movements of the 1960s: Activists, Engaged Others, and Non-Participants. *Political Psychology* (1998), vol. 19, 63-94. SF. Finkel, "Can democracy be taught?" *Journal of Democracy*, 2003, vol. 14, no. 4, 137-151 finds positive effects from adult civic education programs in South Africa, Poland, and the Dominican Republic. However, these are countries in rapid political transition, and their adult citizens may have especially fluid ideas about politics.

2 Jennings and Stoker

3 Michael Olander, Emily Hoban Kirby, and Krista Schmitt, "Attitudes of Young People Toward Diversity," CIRCLE Fact Sheet, February 2005, p. 5. The source is the General Social Survey. Since this is a cross-sectional survey, it assesses different people each year. However, it is a reasonable assumption that a trend observed in random samples of a population over time would also be observed if a panel of individuals were surveyed repeatedly.

4 Karl Mannheim, "The Problem of Generations" (1928), in *Essays on the Sociology of Knowledge*, edited by Paul Kecskemeti (London, 1952), pp. 276-322

5 Parents' discussion of politics and parents' volunteering strongly correlate with their children's volunteering, voting, participating in groups, boycotting products or companies, and signing petitions. See Scott Keeter, Cliff Zukin, Molly Andolina, and Krista Jenkins, *The Civic and Political Health of the Nation: A Generational Portrait*, Sept. 2002, pp. 30-31, available from CIRCLE at [www.civicyouth.org/research/products/data.htm](http://www.civicyouth.org/research/products/data.htm).

6 Susan Sherr, "News for a New Generation, Report 1: Content Analysis, Interviews, and Focus Groups," CIRCLE Working Paper 16 (July 2004);

7 Carnegie Corporation of New York and CIRCLE, *The Civic Mission of Schools* (Washington, 2003), [www.civicmissionofschools.org](http://www.civicmissionofschools.org).

8 Michael McDevitt, Spiro Kioussis, Xu Wu, Mary Losch, and Travis Ripley, "The Civic Bonding of School and Family: How Kids Voting Students Enliven the Public Sphere," CIRCLE Working Paper 7, July 2003.

9 Olander et al.

- 10 Their list of media standards by state is available from the Media Literacy Clearinghouse at <http://medialit.med.sc.edu/statelit.htm>.
- 11 All of the curricular interventions have negative impact on students' ability to answer correctly a question about the right to shout fire in a crowded theater. Possibly the famous quotation from Justice Holmes is being taught in a confusing way.
- 12 David E. Campbell, "Voice in the Classroom: How an Open Classroom Environment Facilitates Adolescents' Civic Development," CIRCLE Working Paper 28, February 2005.
- 13 See Emily Hoban Kirby, Peter Levine, and Brent Elrod, "Federal Policies on Civic Education and Service," CIRCLE Fact Sheet, February 2006.
- 14 Paul Gagnon, *Educating Democracy: State Standards to Ensure a Civic Core* (Washington, DC: Albert Shanker Institute, 2003), p. 18.

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