

## Executive Summary

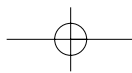
Organization of American States  
Unit for Social Development and Education

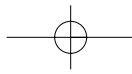


# **Strengthening Democracy in the Americas through Civic Education:** An Empirical Analysis Highlighting the Views of Students and Teachers\*

Washington, D.C. January 2004

\* Judith Torney-Purta and Jo-Ann Amadeo, University of Maryland, College Park. With an Introductory Chapter by Francisco Pilotti, Unit for Social Development and Education of the OAS (Civic Education Project Coordinator). A grant from the Permanent Mission of the United States to the OAS is gratefully acknowledged.





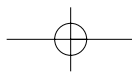
## INTRODUCTORY NOTE

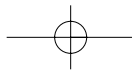
The Organization of American States considers education for democracy to be of the utmost importance. At the III Summit of the Americas, the Heads of State and Government emphasized that education is the key for the strengthening of democratic institutions. This view is incorporated into the Inter-American Democratic Charter. Similarly, the II Meeting of Education Ministers of 2001, held in Punta del Este, underscores the importance of an education for peace and against violence and calls for the creation of an Inter-American Program for the Formation of Values. At the III Meeting of Education Ministers, held in Mexico in 2003, the Ministers reiterate their responsibility to consolidate an educational system committed to democracy as a way of life, and acknowledge the "importance of generating democratic awareness, culture and values among present and future generations." Likewise, they commit themselves to the implementation of the principles contained in the Inter-American Democratic Charter, especially those that state that "education is key to strengthening democratic institutions, promoting the development of human potential, alleviating poverty and fostering greater understanding among our peoples", and call for the incorporation of these principles in educational programs.

In response to these mandates, the Unit for Social Development and Education, in its role as Technical Secretariat of the Ministerial Meetings, coordinated a research project that revisits the data gathered by the International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement's (IEA) Civic Education Study. The knowledge, attitudes and civic activities of 14 and 17 year-old students are examined, and the analysis concentrates on three countries of this hemisphere: Chile, Colombia and the United States. For comparative purposes, and considering its similar cultural heritage, Portugal's data is also analyzed.

A key element of the challenge of responding with equity, quality and pertinence to the demands of an education for liberty and democracy, consists in listening and considering the voices of young people, including their positions, worries, doubts, skepticism and hopes. In order to reframe civic and ethics education, it is essential to analyze the role of teachers in the process of citizen formation, who should have the capacity to analyze facts critically and propose concrete actions for strengthening peace, human rights and democracy. These are the objectives of the research we submit for your consideration in a summarized version, in the hope that it will provide input to the consideration of this topic in the Extraordinary Meeting of the Permanent Council, which will include the presence of the President of the Ministerial Meeting and the authorities of the Inter-American Commission on Education.

Sofialeticia Morales Garza  
Director, Unit for Social Development and Education





**What do young people think about democracy?  
Do they understand how democratic institutions work?  
Do they expect to vote and to take part in other civic activities as adults?  
Do they believe in and practice tolerance?**



Responses to questions such as these, and some of their policy implications, are analyzed by the OAS—sponsored study summarized in this Executive Summary. The study is based on a secondary analysis of the data collected by the International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement's (IEA) cross-national Civic Education Study. Of particular interest to the OAS project is the mining of the data for the three American countries that participated in the IEA study: *Chile, Colombia, and the United States*. The Inter-American Democratic Charter provides the guiding framework for this study.

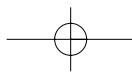
I N T E R - A M E R I C A N D E M O C R A T I C C H A R T E R

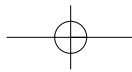
The peoples of the Americas have a right to democracy and their governments have an obligation to promote and defend it. —Article 1

Special attention shall be given to the development of programs and activities for the education of children and youth as a means of ensuring the continuance of democratic values, including liberty and social justice. —Article 27

- The Inter-American Democratic Charter underlines the importance of education as an indispensable tool for the strengthening of democracy in the Americas, and points to the strategic significance of young people.
- The Americas present a youthful profile: Close to 40% of the total Latin American and Caribbean population is under 18 years of age, and in Canada and the United States over one fourth of the population belongs to this age group.
- Young people's views and opinions must be considered when designing educational programs for the advancement of democracy. This approach respects the right to participation of children and youth, enhances the quality and impact of citizenship formation, and fosters improved inter-generational dialogue.

**No single or uniform approach in citizenship education will be recommended in this report. However OAS member states can benefit from a regional outlook that fosters a dialogue based on empirical data concerning the views of young people and their teachers and promising practices in the field.**





## Strengthening Democracy through Civic Education

In response to a mandate from the Organization of American States' General Assembly, the Unit for Social Development and Education of the OAS General Secretariat (UDSE)<sup>1</sup> designed and coordinated a project on the role of civic education in the process of strengthening democracy and democratic institutions in the Americas.

The empirical analyses highlighted in this Executive Summary examine the civic knowledge, attitudes, and activities of 14- and 17-year-old students in Chile, Colombia, Portugal, and the United States. As stated above, the data were previously collected as part of the IEA Civic Education Study, a cross-national study initiated in the mid-1990s to examine the ways in which young people are prepared for their rights and responsibilities as citizens in democratic societies.<sup>2</sup> During the IEA study, tests of civic knowledge and surveys of civic attitudes and activities were administered to 90,000 14-year-old students in 28 countries (during 1999) and 50,000 16- to 19-year-old students in 16 countries (during 2000). Two researchers who were part of coordinating the IEA study were asked to focus on mining the data collected from the three OAS member states who participated. A fourth country that shared the Iberian cultural heritage was added to the analysis for comparison purposes.

### A Focus on Younger and Older Adolescents

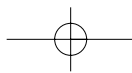
Research teams in Chile, Colombia, and Portugal collected data from both 14-year-olds and 17-year-olds, while the United States collected data only from the younger students. The internationally defined population for 14-year-olds was all students enrolled on a full-time basis in that grade in which most students aged 14 are found at the time of testing.

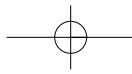
Testing of 14-year-olds (8th or 9th graders, according to whether the testing was late or early in the school year) took place during 1999.

- ◆ In Chile 180 schools and 5,688 8th-grade students participated. The mean age of students was 14.3 years.
- ◆ In Colombia 144 schools and 4,926 8th-grade students participated. The mean age of students was 14.6 years.
- ◆ In Portugal 149 schools and 3,261 8th-grade students participated. The mean age of students was 14.5 years.
- ◆ In the United States 124 schools and 2,811 9th-grade students participated. The mean age of students was 14.7 years.

<sup>1</sup> Acronym from the Spanish: Unidad de Desarrollo Social y Educación

<sup>2</sup> Amadeo, J., Torney-Purta, J., Lehmann, R., Husfeldt, V., & Nikolova, R. (2002). *Civic knowledge and engagement: An IEA study of upper secondary students*. Amsterdam: IEA (<http://www.wam.umd.edu/~iea>); Torney-Purta, J., Lehmann, R., Oswald, H., & Schulz, W. (2001). *Citizenship and education in twenty-eight countries: Civic knowledge and engagement at age 14*. Amsterdam: IEA (<http://www.wam.umd.edu/~iea>).





Because of country differences in the organization of schooling, the internationally defined population for the upper-secondary students was specified independently in each participating country and was not expected to cover any particular age level.

- ◆ In Chile, 180 schools and 5,777 12th-grade students participated. The mean age was 17.9 years.
- ◆ In Colombia 149 school and 5,347 11th-grade students participated. The mean age was 17.7 years.
- ◆ In Portugal 149 schools and 2,795 11th-grade students participated. The mean age was 17.6 years.

### **The Test of Civic Knowledge**

The content of all test questions was decided upon by a collaborative process and designed to be appropriate across participating countries. The test items were designed to assess students' knowledge of democratic institutions and processes as well as their skills in interpreting information. See Figures 1 and 2 for examples of content knowledge questions. Figure 3 is an example of a question designed to test students' skills in interpreting political information.

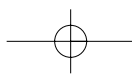
### **Survey of Civic Attitudes and Activities**

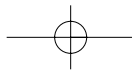
Many educators advocate participation in school and community organizations as a means of teaching civic knowledge and promoting citizenship. This kind of active and experiential education provides adolescents with opportunities to learn citizenship skills. It also acknowledges that it is not merely that adults are teaching students to become citizens, but that young people are already citizens with rights and responsibilities. Further, research suggests that youth who are active in school and community organizations are more likely to become active citizens as adults.

Support for a democratic system of government and human rights were among the issues covered in the survey. A major focus of the study was the school. This was not limited to the formal curriculum in any particular school course, but included several subject areas. Opportunities for discussion in the classroom and the school culture were important, along with textbooks and curriculum. A primary purpose was to obtain a picture of how young people are initiated into the political communities of which they are members, including in- and out-of-school experience. The concept of the political was not limited to formal governmental organizations or legislative structures.

### **Survey of Teachers**

In addition to assessing the civic-related views and knowledge of students, the perspectives of teachers were also examined. The survey questions administered to the teachers examined who is teaching civic-related subjects, what training they receive, what sources they draw on to teach civic education, and what improvements they think are needed. Moreover, the teachers were also asked




**Figure 1 Content Knowledge Item Example**

*In a democratic political system, which of the following ought to govern the country?*

- A.  Moral or religious leaders.
- B.  A small group of well-educated people.
- C.  Popularly elected representatives.
- D.  Experts on government and political affairs .  
[most frequently chosen incorrect answer]


**Figure 2 Content Knowledge Item Example**

*Which of the following is most likely to cause a government to be called non-democratic?*

- A.  People are prevented from criticizing [not allowed to criticize] the government.
- B.  The political parties criticize each other often.
- C.  People must pay very high taxes.  
[most frequently chosen incorrect answer]
- D.  Every citizen has the right to a job.

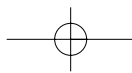
**Figure 3 Skills Item Example**

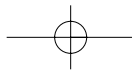
*WE CITIZENS HAVE HAD ENOUGH!*

A vote for the Silver Party means a vote for higher taxes.  
It means an end to economic growth and a waste of our nation's resources.  
Vote instead for economic growth and free enterprise.  
Vote for more money left in everyone's wallet!  
Let's not waste another 4 years! VOTE FOR THE GOLD PARTY

*The party or group that has issued this leaflet is likely also to be in favor of ...*

- A.  reducing state [government] control of the economy.
- B.  lowering of the voting age.
- C.  capital punishment.
- D.  more frequent elections.  
[most frequently chosen incorrect answer]





about what they perceived was emphasized in their schools. In short, the data provide a series of snapshots of teachers' views of civic education in their countries.

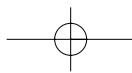
As policymakers and civic leaders endeavor to strengthen democracy through civic education, much can be learned from the views of students and teachers themselves. What misconceptions do students have, and what strengths and challenges do teachers see in the area? What directions and policy options should be considered in moving forward if priority is to be placed on this area?

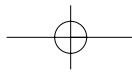
## SUMMARY OF MAJOR FINDINGS FROM THE OAS-COMMISSIONED STUDY

### *Voices of Students*

#### **Knowledge and Awareness of Civic Issues**

- ◆ **In the area of civic knowledge, there were relatively few differences between countries in the extent to which students understood the basic ideas about democracy and citizenship—the uncontested core of democratic understanding.** Students in Colombia were especially strong in supporting participatory activities by citizens for strengthening democracy. However, a number of students in Chile and Colombia failed to grasp some threats to democracy, such as corruption, nepotism, and control of the media. In many cases these could be traced to the inclusion or absence of related issues about political institutions and the ideals of democracy in the curriculum. The everyday experience of students with “real politics” in the community also appeared to be influential.
- ◆ **With more years of formal schooling, and more life experience, the 17-year-old students performed better than the 14-year-old students on the test of civic knowledge.** The rate of growth between the two ages was similar in Chile and Colombia; and similar to the growth rate in countries such as Norway and Sweden. This suggests that civic education needs to be improved in the years of school before students are 14 years old, since relative deficits of understanding among Latin American students already exist at that age.
- ◆ **There does not seem to be a basic core of information about economics that students in all four countries have acquired.** This contrasts with the situation for definitions of democracy and political institutions, where most students by age 14 and almost all students by age 17 appeared to have acquired certain basic knowledge. This suggests that economics is not a central theme of civic-related education in these countries. If acquisition of economic concepts is thought to be important, considerable effort at curriculum reform is needed.



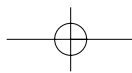


## Engagement

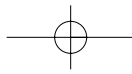
- ◆ **Most students belong to at least one organization in their school or community.** Many students, in all four countries, reported that they belong to groups that are distinctly school related such as student councils or school newspapers, whereas few students reported membership in organizations affiliated with political parties or human rights groups. This school involvement is a positive sign given the fact that research suggests that youth organizations provide places for students to develop democratic skills. Policies that encourage schools and communities to work together to provide opportunities for young people could foster the development of civic skills, knowledge, and identity.
- ◆ **In all countries and with both age groups, school factors such as an open classroom climate for discussion, confidence in school participation, and learning in school to solve community problems were related to students' expectations that they would participate in political and social-movement activities as adults.** This suggests that schools and teachers have an important role to play in the development of civic engagement and this may have implications for teacher training.
- ◆ **One of the most significant predictors of both the 14-year-old and 17-year-old students' expectations of participating in civic activities as adults was the frequency with which they read the newspaper.** Therefore, school-based programs which introduce students to newspapers and foster skills in interpreting political information seem to be of value.

## Trust

- ◆ **National trust and pride decline over the period from early to late adolescence and students who possess more knowledge of civics and politics are less trusting than students with less knowledge.**
- ◆ **Pride in membership in one's community, trust in national political institutions and trust in institutions whose representatives are contacted on a daily basis are conceptually distinct and show distinct national patterns.** Students in Chile, Colombia, and Portugal were less likely than those in the United States to trust national and institutionalized groups and more likely to trust the institutions in which they participate regularly, such as the Church and the school, as well as the people in the country. Schools may have a special niche as trusted locale in which preparation for citizenship can take place.







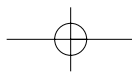
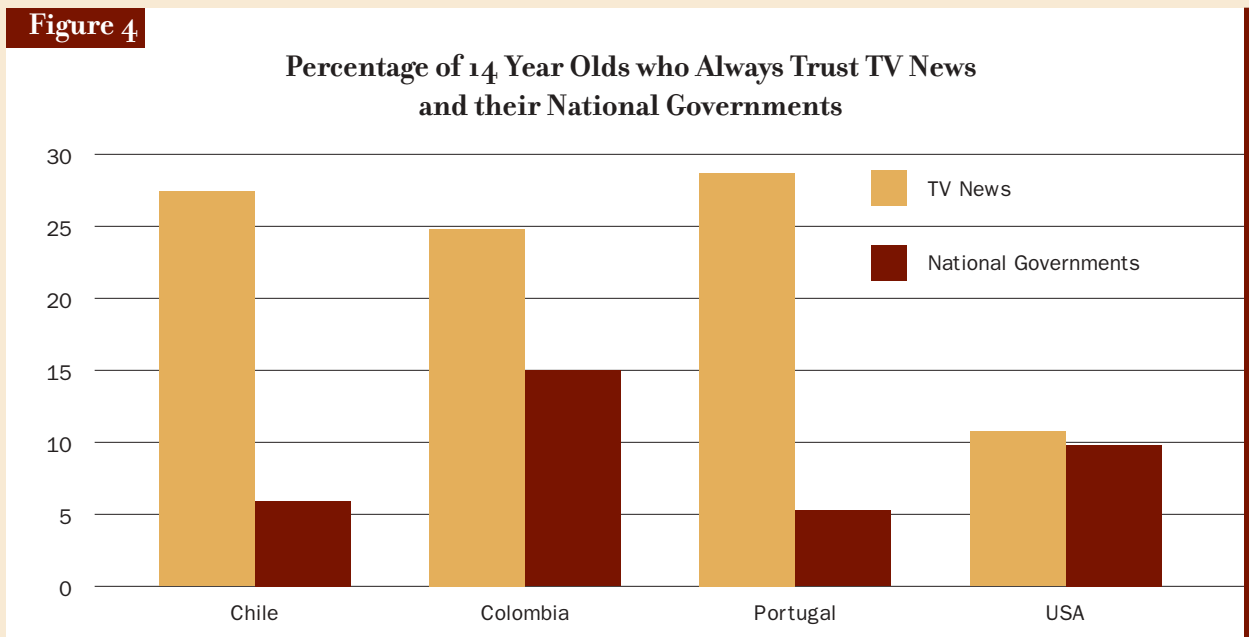
## Media Use

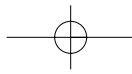
- ◆ **In general, young people use and trust the mass media and in fact, trust the media more than they do their national governments (see Figure 4).** These findings imply that teacher training should include use of the media and that students should receive media education. That is, students should be given the opportunity to learn to interpret information, critically analyze the images they see and hear, and separate fact from opinion.
- ◆ **Media news consumption, especially reading newspapers, is positively associated with civic knowledge (somewhat weakly) and students' expressed willingness to vote (more strongly).** These associations hold even when controlling for the socioeconomic status of the students. One suggestion arising from this finding is to provide newspapers in schools and to incorporate newspapers in formal instruction.

## Attitudes and Values

- ◆ **By age 14, young people respond to women's rights issues in a way consistent with their gender identities.** In other words, female students are more supportive of women's rights than are males. Females also are more supportive of rights for ethnic and racial groups.
- ◆ **There were high levels of support for women's rights, higher among 17-year-olds than 14-year-olds.** The least likely type of political participation to be endorsed by the students was women serving in elected political office.

**Figure 4**



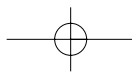


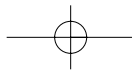
## **Voices of Teachers**

- ◆ **In Chile, Portugal, and the United States, teachers responded that they thought civic education should be integrated into all subjects in the curriculum—especially in social sciences and humanities subjects.** Data were available only from the teachers of 14-year-olds in Chile, Portugal, and the United States.
- ◆ **When teachers prepare for civic-education-related activities, they often draw from original sources such as constitutions or human rights declarations.** High percentages of teachers in Chile and Portugal also reported that they thought it very important to use media sources in civic education. Given adolescents' interest in the media, the study of media sources may be one way to capture students' interest and provide exposure to newspapers.

## **Looking to the Future Contribution of Civic Education to the Promotion of a Democratic Culture in the Americas**

The data analyzed for this report were collected from students and teachers in Chile, Colombia, Portugal, and the United States and reflect their views and voices relating to civic education in their countries. The picture that emerges from the analysis of these data provides direction to policymakers and educators in several areas, such as teacher training and instructional materials, classroom and school environment, curriculum reform, and media education. The role of parents and out-of-school activities as well as the broad cultural norms and values of a society in the development of civic knowledge and attitudes are also apparent.





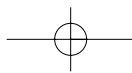
## **Table of Contents (Full Report)**

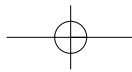
# **Strengthening Democracy in the Americas through Civic Education: An Empirical Analysis Highlighting the Views of Students and Teachers**

- Chapter 1** The Promotion of Democracy through Civic Education: An Introduction to a Project sponsored by the Organization of American States
- Chapter 2** The Framing and Methodology of the IEA Civic Education Study and the Choice of Countries for the OAS-Commissioned Analysis
- Chapter 3** Civic Knowledge Performance and the Understanding of Democracy and Citizenship
- Chapter 4** Economic Knowledge and Attitudes
- Chapter 5** Civic and Political Participation
- Chapter 6** Generalized Trust and Trust in Institutions
- Chapter 7** Attention to Media and Trust in Media Sources
- Chapter 8** Support for Women's Rights and Attitudes toward Ethnic Groups
- Chapter 9** Teachers, Schools, and Students' Perceptions of Civic Education
- Chapter 10** Strengthening Democracy in the Americas: Summary of Findings and Directions for the Future

## **Reference List**

## **Appendix**





Organization of American States  
Unit for Social Development and Education



**Organization of American States**

Dr. César Gaviria, Secretary General  
Ambassador Luigi Einaudi, Assistant Secretary General

**Unit for Social Development and Education**

Dr. Sofialeticia Morales G., Director  
Francisco Pilotti, Principal Specialist

This Executive Summary and the full Report, are available online (PDF) at:  
<http://www.oas.org/udse> .

Copies of the Report in English or Spanish (or of its Executive Summary) may be obtained by sending a full mailing address to Francisco Pilotti, UDSE, Organization of American States, 1889 F St. NW, Washington, D.C. 20006 or [fpilotti@oas.org](mailto:fpilotti@oas.org).

