



IS POLITICS A GOOD THING?



Increasing Political Appreciation among High School Students

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BACKGROUND

Introducing . . .

POLITICAL APPRECIATION:

Appreciating the political process and the functions served by politicians, parties, and competitive political institutions in a democracy.

The Problem:

Current programs of civic education in high school fail to address politics in a positive way. They may mandate volunteering and encourage civic engagement, but do not attract students into political participation as adults.



The Youth Leadership Initiative:

- Innovative, technology-based products that bring the American democratic process to life in the classroom
- Over 500,000 high school and middle school participants to date
- *YLI mock election*: nation's largest on-line mock election
- *e-Congress*: on-line simulation of how bills become law; students research, draft, debate and pass original legislation
- *A More Perfect Union*: simulation game in which students run a fictional U.S. Senate campaign
- Other programs and teaching resources

A FREE PROGRAM OF
THE UVA CENTER FOR POLITICS

THE DESIGN

Evaluation Design:

- Solomon 4-group panel design
- 2 groups of high school civics classes completed pre-test in Fall 2002
- 4 groups completed post-test in Spring 2003
- 2028 students in 107 high schools
- About 1/2 of high schools were located in Virginia
- Margin of error: +/- 2.6%

Solomon's Four-Group Experimental Design:

| GROUP | PRE-TEST | | POST-TEST |
|-------|----------|--|-----------|
| A | YES | | YES |
| B | YES | | YES |
| C | NO | | YES |
| D | NO | | YES |

MEASURES

Measuring Political Appreciation:

- An index of 7 agree/disagree items
- Chronbach's alpha=.71
- Factor analyzed in relation to other predictors
- A 3-item reduced form of the index is based on the factor analysis

The Items:

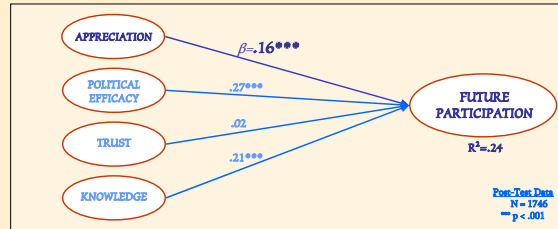
- "Most politicians act unethically and are just out for themselves."
- "If the American people made their own decisions instead of relying on politicians, the country would be better off."
- "There is a lot about our form of government that I am proud of."
- "Americans disagree so much about the right things to do in politics that we need politicians to resolve these disputes."
- "Our government would run better if decisions were left up to independent experts and not the elected politicians."
- "'Compromise' in politics is really just selling out one's principles."
- "Politics is a good thing."

3-item scale

FINDINGS

Political Appreciation Affects Intention for Future Political Participation:

- Tested in a simple model that controls for:
 - political efficacy
 - political trust
 - political knowledge
- Effect is seen in pre-test and post-test results



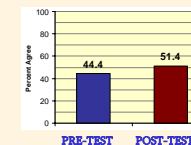
| Appreciation's Effect | Examples: |
|-------------------------------|--|
| Voting | β=.23 registering to vote, participation in local and national elections |
| Communal Participation | β=.07 joining groups solving local and national problems, protests against government, contacting government officials and agencies, petitions, volunteer work, writing letters |
| Spectator Participation | β=.26 displaying American flag, wearing a button, political bumper sticker, discussing political issues, encouraging voter participation, donating money to political cause |
| Active Partisan Participation | β=.14 attending political meetings or rallies, working for political party or candidate, running for office |

YLI Positively Effects Participation:

- Participation in mock election decreased cynicism towards politicians and government
- Students participating in mock election were less likely to believe:
 - Most politicians act unethically
 - Government would be better off run by independent experts
 - Compromise in politics is just selling out
- Participation in mock elections had a positive effect on the belief that politics is a good thing
- E-Congress students were more likely to believe
 - Our government needs politicians to resolve disputes
 - Politics is a good thing

Before & After YLI Mock Election:

"... we need politicians to resolve disputes."



DISCUSSION

Limitations:

- Not a randomized experiment
- Non-YLI schools imperfectly matched to YLI schools
- Some effects are partly attributable to sensitization from the pre-test
- Not all of the items were changed in a favorable direction by YLI

Conclusions:

- Political appreciation is an important political orientation, distinct from measures of efficacy and trust.
- Increasing the political appreciation of high school youth increases their intention to participate in the future.
 - The effect is strongest for partisan, campaign-related forms of participation.
- The programs of the Youth Leadership Initiative are successful in increasing political appreciation of participating students.



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