

## SUPPORTING THE FREE PRESS THROUGH SCHOOLS

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.

New CIRCLE research uses multivariate analysis of data from the Knight Foundation 2005 Future of the First Amendment Survey and other sources. The authors investigate the effects of courses, state educational policies, school media, and other variables on students' attitudes toward media, attention to media, knowledge of media, and media usage (a full list of variables can be found in Table 1 of the Working Paper). The authors find promise in state policies designed to encourage and support explicit discussion of the news media, especially if students are required to employ news sources in classrooms.

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### SCHOOL COURSES

Discussing the news media in class enhances students' attitudes and habits related to the free press. For instance, of those students who say that they took a class that discusses the role of the media in society, 87 percent believe that people should be able to express unpopular opinions, compared to 79 percent of students who did not take such a class—an eight point difference. Even when controlling for other factors, the authors find a significant difference of three points.

Students are more likely to use the news media regularly when their teachers have required the use of news media in classes. These students are five percentage points more likely to say that student journalists should be allowed to report controversy, and six and a half percentage points more likely to believe that people should be allowed to express unpopular views. Students who have been required to use the news media are also more trusting of journalists and considerably better informed about what is going

on in their own high schools. (All results control for the factors measured in the survey.)

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### SCHOOL MEDIA

Students who are directly involved in scholastic media have generally more favorable attitudes toward the First Amendment. 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. Still, students who are members of the school newspaper staff show positive results in the model, the biggest being their strong opposition to government censorship of newspapers.

### IMPACT ON THE STUDENT BODY

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. (These are average results that do not take into account variations in the quality, function, and history of school newspapers.) Magazines and student television stations show scattered positive results and not many negative ones. For instance, in schools with student magazines, youth are more than five percentage points more likely to support school newspapers' right to report controversy. Having a television station correlates with higher student consumption of media, including newspapers.

### STATE POLICIES

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. The authors suggest two explanations for the general lack of statistical relationships between state policies and the student outcomes measured in this survey. First, the effects may be too indirect to have a significant impact on students. For example, although state policies may influence schools, and schools may influence students, these effects are not large enough for state

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policies regarding civics to have a significant impact on the student outcomes discussed here. Second, many of the state standards require instruction that is virtually ubiquitous. For instance, around 85 percent of all American students take at least one semester of civics, so it is difficult to detect the impact of this experience.

The CIRCLE Working Paper is entitled "Schools, Education Policy, and the Future of the First Amendment" and is authored by Mark Hugo Lopez & Peter Levine of CIRCLE and Kenneth Dautrich & David Yalof of University of Connecticut. It can be downloaded from [www.civicyouth.org](http://www.civicyouth.org).

The screenshot shows the CIRCLE website interface. At the top left is the CIRCLE logo with the tagline "Center for Information & Research on Civic Learning & Engagement". Below the logo is a navigation menu with categories like "About CIRCLE", "Press Releases", "CIRCLE's Mission", "Contact Staff", "Advisory Board", "Expert Guide", "Research Products", "Working Paper Series", "Fact Sheets", "Data Sets and Analysis", "The 2006 Civic and Political Health of the Nation", and "Tools for Practice". A "Research Topics" section lists various areas such as Civic Knowledge (34), Community Participation (46), Concepts of Citizenship (13), Group Membership and Social Networks (29), Higher Education (12), K-12 Civic Education (40), News & Entertainment Media (20), and Youth Voting.

The main content area features a "Quick Facts" section with links to "Youth Voting", "Civic Education", "Trends by Race, Ethnicity and Gender", "Youth Demographics", "Non-College Youth", and "Volunteering/Community Service". Below this is a featured article titled "FEATURED: Quick Facts About Young Voters by State: The Midterm Election Year 2006" by Mark Hugo Lopez, Karlo Barrios Marcelo, and Jared Sagoff, updated in June 2007. The article text states: "Using data from the 2006 Current Population Survey, November (Voting) Supplement, these facts sheets examine voter turnout rates from 1978-2006, turnout rates by subgroup, and partisanship (where available from the Election Pool, Exit Poll surveys) for all 50 states and the District of Columbia." It includes a "Read the rest of this entry" link, research tags, and a "Leave a Comment" option.

On the right side, there is a "Did You Know..." section with a snippet about high school civics education, a "Search for..." bar, and a "Research Highlights" section listing various working papers.



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