

The Story of Civics among American Adults

March 2024



More in
Common



About

More in Common

The report was conducted by More in Common US, a nonpartisan research nonprofit that works to understand the forces driving us apart, find common ground, and bring people together to address shared challenges.

We work in partnership with a wide range of civil society groups, as well as philanthropy, business, faith, education, media and government to connect people across lines of division.

For more information please visit
www.moreincommon.com
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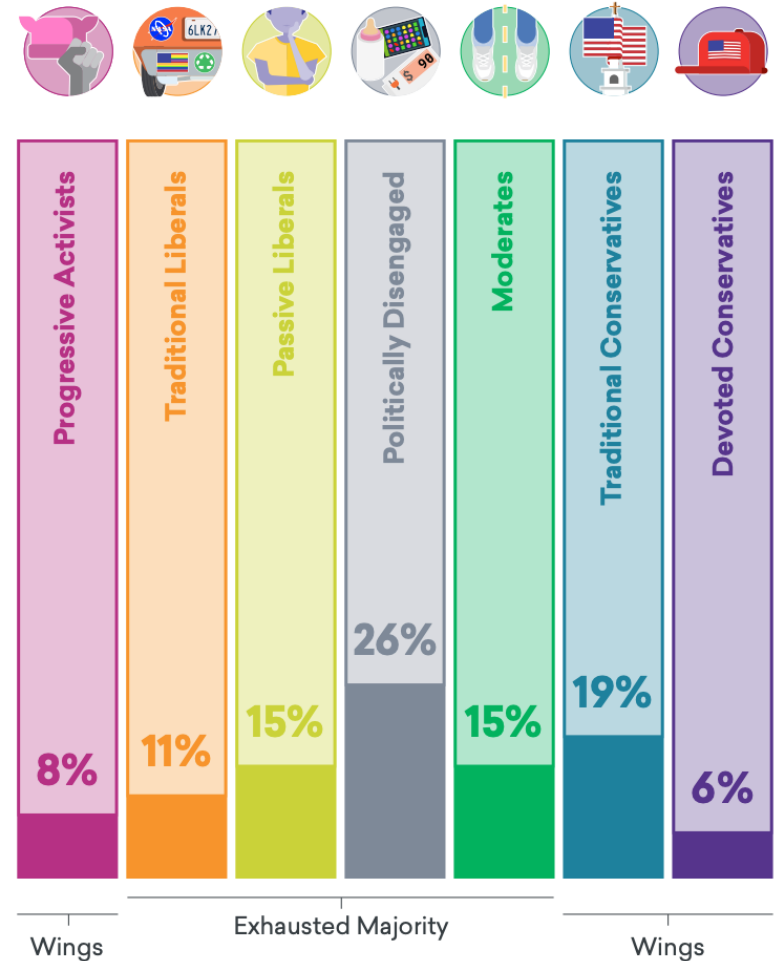
About Americans in Conversation

- **Americans in Conversation (AIC) is a cutting-edge, mixed media, mixed methods research platform that enables testing of a wide range of content. At its core, it is a tool that helps us understand how to help increase social cohesion through quantitative and qualitative study. It consists of a politically and demographically diverse and representative online community of about 150 Americans with whom we can engage continuously. We draw insights from the platform through analysis of participants' video journaling, surveys, discussion groups and in-depth interviews.**
- **Continuous engagement with participants allows us to ask questions, test ideas, and refine messaging guidance in response to real-time events. We've found that qualitative data is a powerful and underused way to both understand and present the views of Americans. The rich quotes and long-form thoughts of Americans on various issues is vital for gaining a deeper understanding of people's underlying beliefs.**



About More in Common's Hidden Tribes

- **Progressive Activists:** younger, highly engaged, secular, cosmopolitan, angry.
- **Traditional Liberals:** older, retired, open to compromise, rational, cautious.
- **Passive Liberals:** unhappy, insecure, distrustful, disillusioned.
- **Politically Disengaged:** young, low income, distrustful, detached, patriotic, conspiratorial.
- **Moderates:** engaged, civic-minded, middle-of-the-road, pessimistic, Protestant.
- **Traditional Conservatives:** religious, middle class, patriotic, moralistic.
- **Devoted Conservatives:** white, retired, highly engaged, uncompromising, patriotic.





Summary

When asked about civics, many American adults feel they have reasonable knowledge, but relatively little social engagement. The most common response when asked about whether they have a civic role model, for example, is some version of "no". Similarly, when asked how they continue to learn about civics, American adults are three times as likely to say "read the news" as they are to say they participate in a community group. And close to three quarters of participants in our focus group said they do not belong to a group that regularly discusses civics.

This presents a challenge: civics is inherently social. It requires engaging with other people and groups to identify, negotiate, and solve problems or to otherwise shape and participate in civic life. Yet, for many if not most Americans, civics is an abstract and individual enterprise—it is not a feature of their experience with other people, and they often lack someone to provide an example of how to engage as a citizen.

When they do identify role models, it is most common for people to identify a family member. This underscores that when people do engage with civics, they do so via relationships, especially with family.



Civics Activity

- **From January 9-12, 2024, we conducted a focus-group type of activity with online respondents, asking them a mix of close- and open-ended questions about civics. A total of n=121 respondents completed these activities.**
- **In this activity, we defined ‘civics’ as “the study of the rights and duties of citizenship.”**
- **Quotations from those conversations with respondents are included in this report. Where provided, names have been changed to protect their privacy. Grammar and punctuation may have been lightly edited for clarity.**

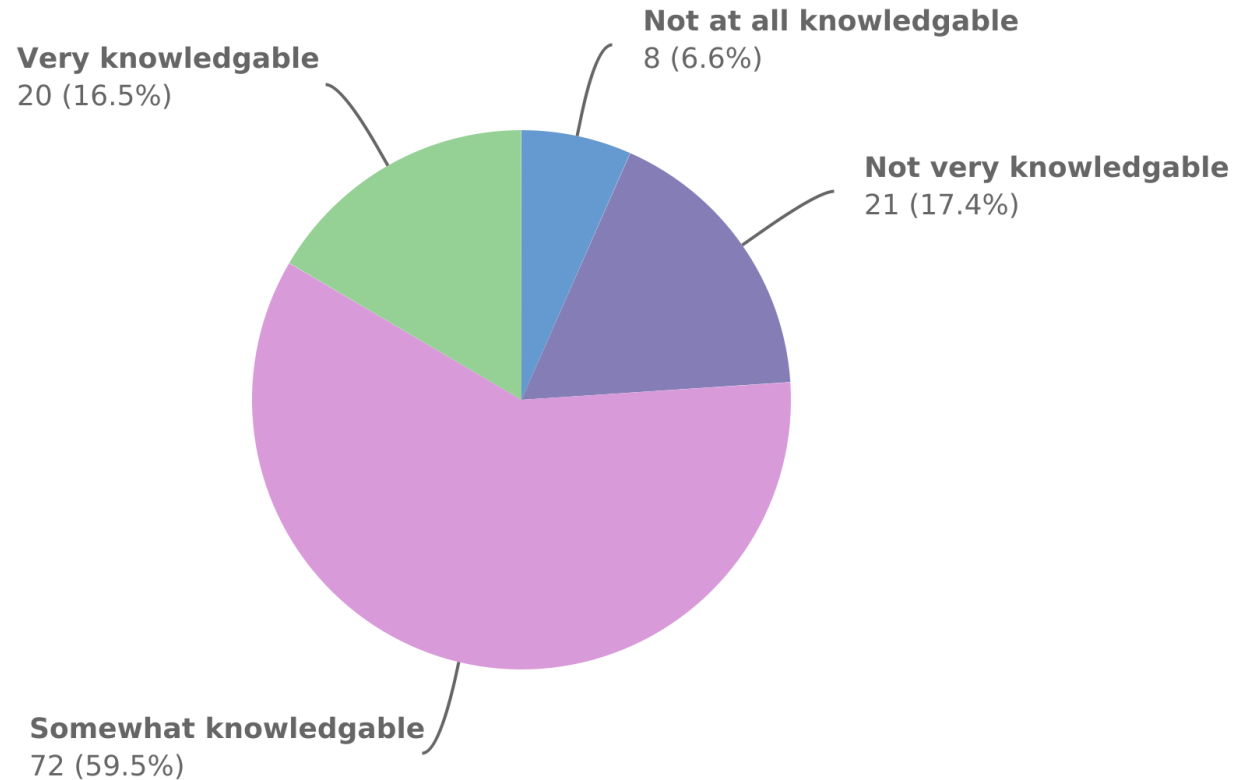


Awareness, Interest, and How American Adults Learn about Civics

Most Americans (76% of this group) feel they are somewhat or very knowledgeable about civics.



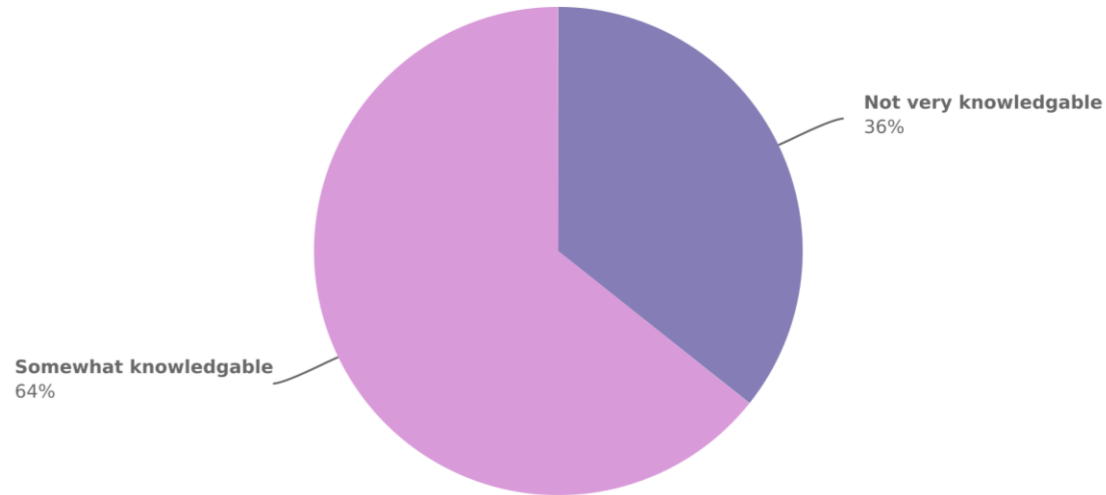
Question: In general, how knowledgeable do you consider yourself to be about civics?



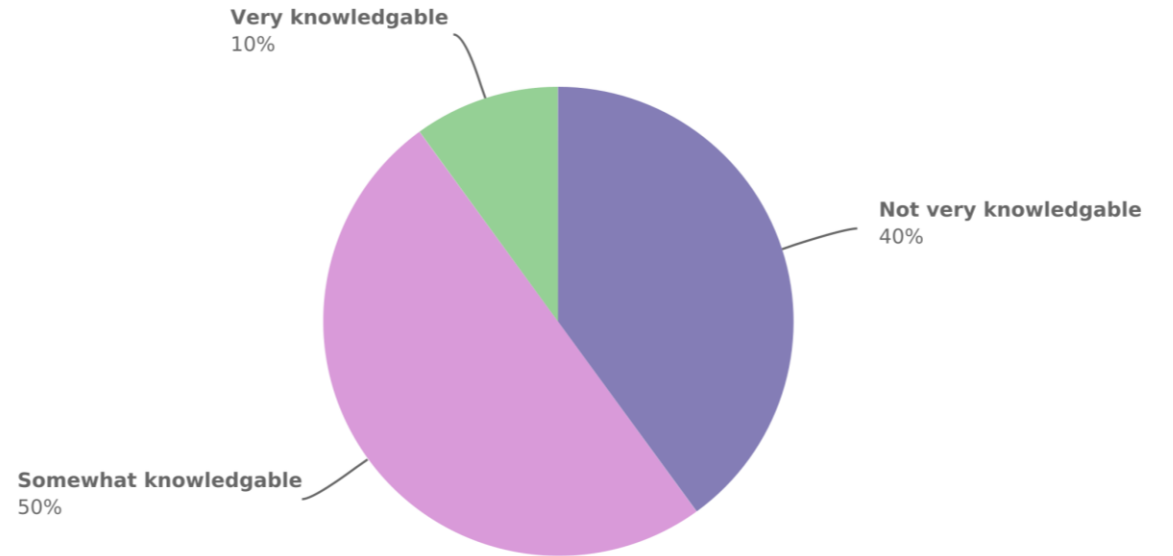
Younger Americans rate themselves as less knowledgeable about civics. Among ages 18-24, 64% rate themselves as somewhat knowledgeable. Among ages 25-34, 60% rate themselves as somewhat or very knowledgeable.



Question: In general, how knowledgeable do you consider yourself to be about civics?



Age: 18-24

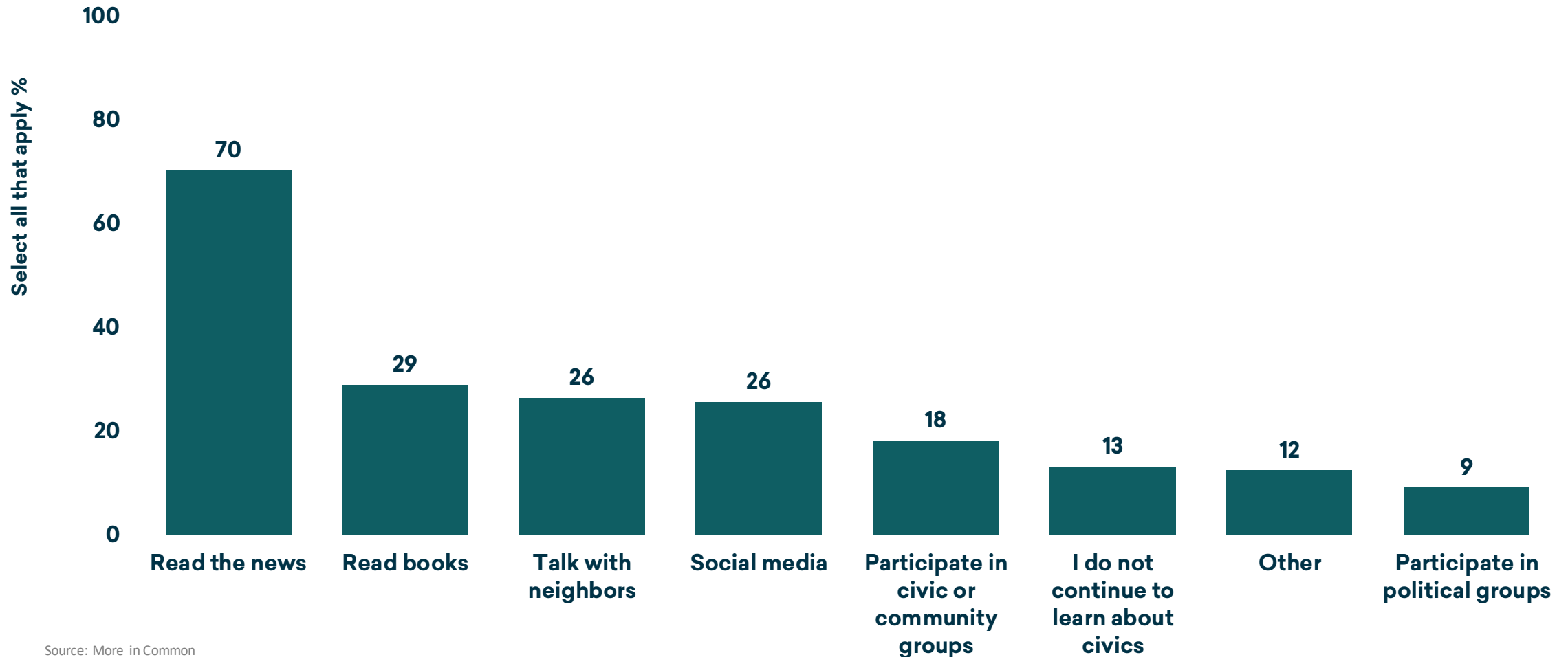


Age: 25-34

For most Americans, to the extent they engage in civic learning, it is an individual experience; few report participating in social or community efforts.



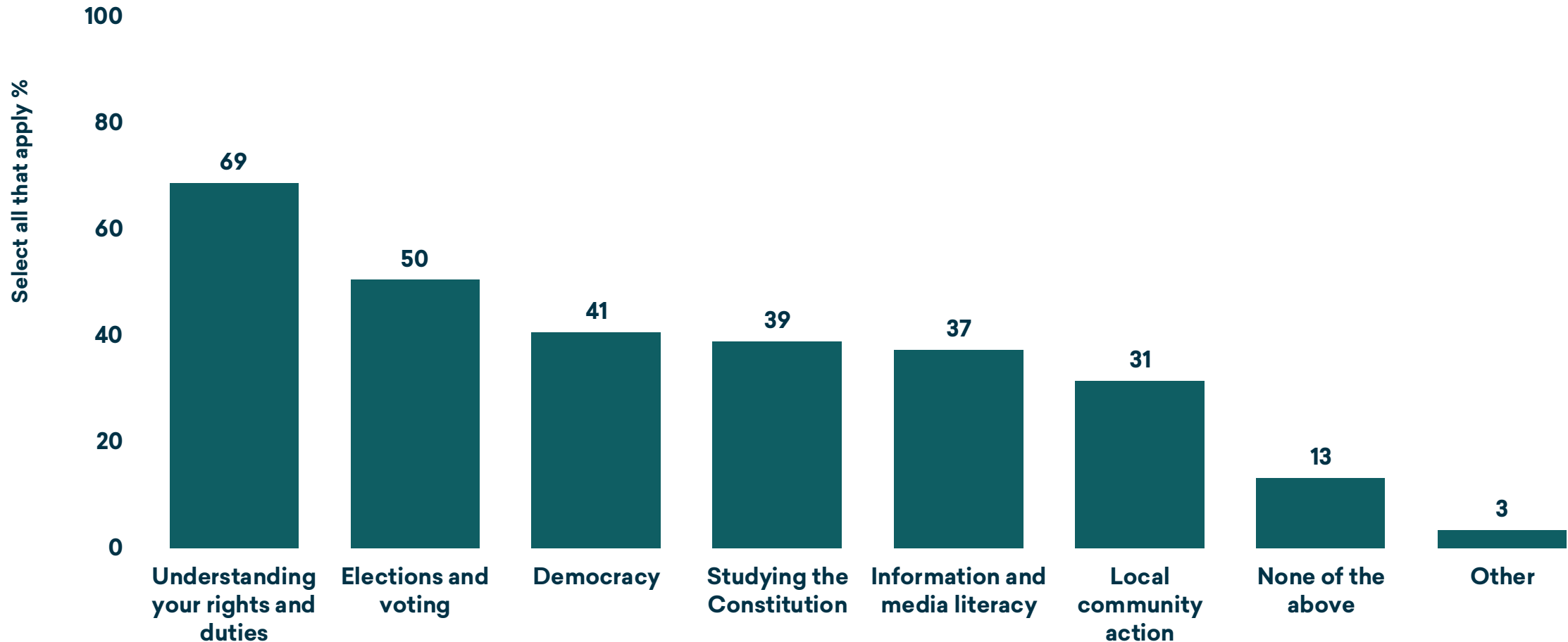
Question: How do you continue to learn about civics yourself, if at all?



When asked which civic courses would be of interest, Americans primarily choose courses related to rights and duties, elections and voting, and democracy.



Question: Which of the following civic courses would you be interested in taking part in? Select all that apply.



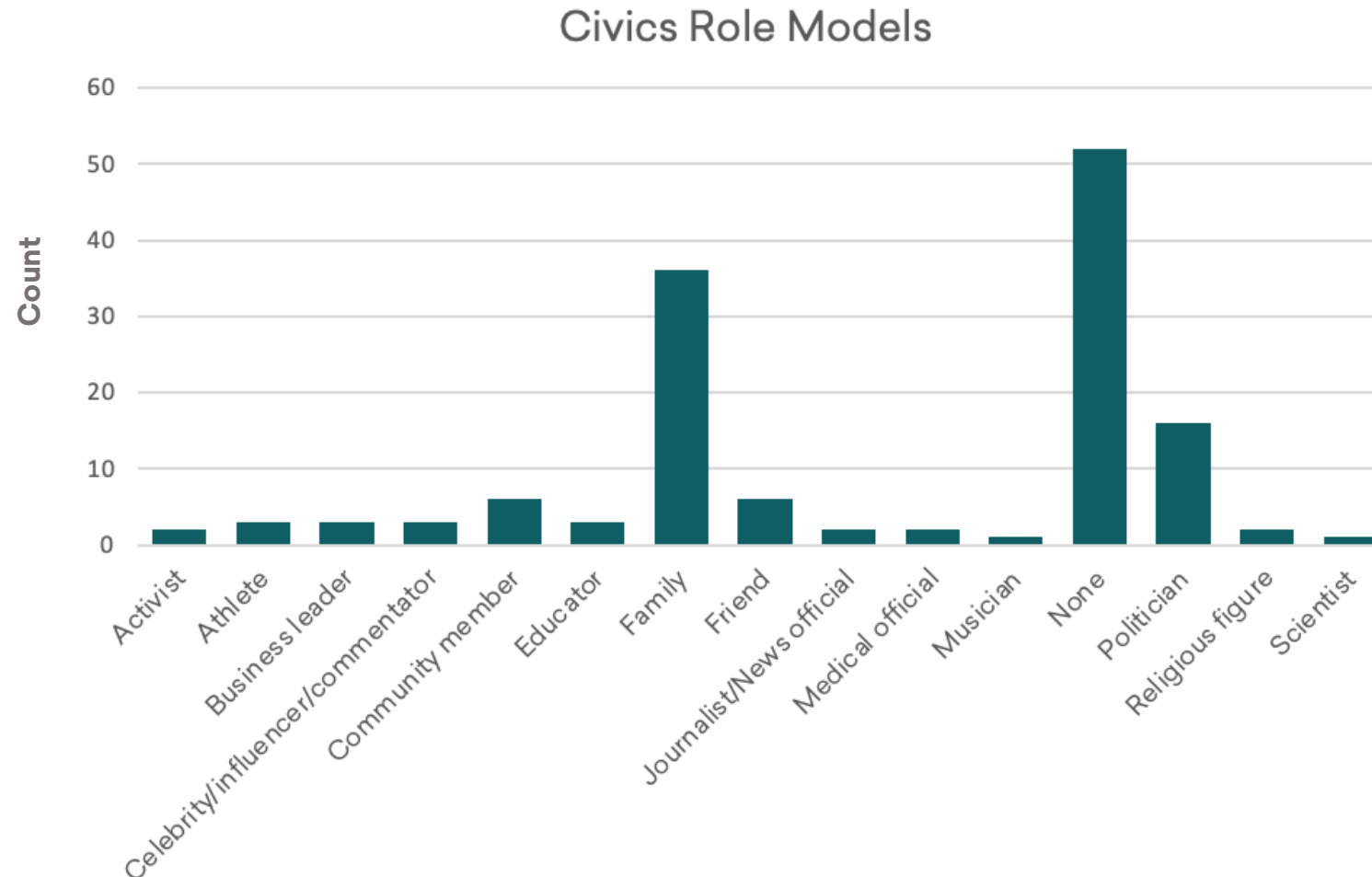
Civics Role Models





When asked about their civics role models, the most common response is none; close to half the respondents said they did not have one. The next most common was family, with politicians coming in as a distant third.

Question: Do you have a role model, or someone you look up to, as someone who demonstrates good civic behavior? What is your relationship to that person?



Many Americans (43% of this group) say they do not have a role model when it comes to good civic behavior.



Question: Do you have a role model, or someone you look up to, as someone who demonstrates good civic behavior? What is your relationship to that person?



I do not have a role model in civics.

–Alyssa, aged 45-54 white woman, Democrat, Moderate

Sadly, I do not have a role model in this area.

–Tyler, aged 55-64 white man, Republican, Moderate



No one to look up to in that area.

–Paul, aged 45-54 Black man, Independent, Passive Liberal

I do not have a role model now or then that I looked up to.

–Sally, aged 55-64 white woman, Democrat, Politically Disengaged



Those who do mention a role model often speak about a family member (30% of this group).



Question: Do you have a role model, or someone you look up to, as someone who demonstrates good civic behavior? What is your relationship to that person?



I would say my role model is first my mother and then my pastor. I learn a lot about civil rights, society, and what is going on in the world from my mother.

–Evelyn, aged 45-54 Black woman, Democrat, Traditional Conservative

My dad exercised good civic behavior. He was a veteran of the U.S. Army and had integrity on how to respect the USA.

–Randy, aged 65+ white man, Republican, Traditional Conservative



I have had a few in my past like my maternal grandfather who I would count as positive role models for good civic behavior but there is nobody that I can presently count on as such a role model.

–Mick, aged 45-54 white man, Independent, Progressive Activist

My mom is always my inspiration, and demonstrating good civic behavior is one of her role model traits.

–Yasenia, aged 18-24 Hispanic woman, Democrat, Progressive Activist



Some Americans (21% of this group) cite politicians, athletes, business leaders, celebrities, and influencers who exhibit good civic behavior.



Question: Do you have a role model, or someone you look up to, as someone who demonstrates good civic behavior? What is your relationship to that person?



I think that the governor of our state, Mike Dewine, demonstrates good behavior and leadership skills. He is a moderate Republican and I think he actually believes in what he is doing.

–Dorian, aged 55-64 white man, Republican, Traditional Conservative



When I think of a role model who demonstrates good civic behavior, I think of my 10th grade US History teacher who emphasized consistent good-faith civic engagement. Today, there are some internet personalities who I admire for their advocacy for voting in EVERY election and participation in civic. David Pakman and Sam Seder come to mind.

–Wyatt, aged 35-44 white man, Democrat, Progressive Activist

Mattress Mack in Houston Texas is a great supporter of the community.

–Andrea, aged 55-64 Hispanic woman, Republican, Traditional Liberal



The person I look up to the most is Probably Jimmy Carter. He is a role model every person in this world should look up to. He has helped millions in this world.

–Tracey, aged 45-54 white woman, Democrat, Traditional Liberal



Talking about Civics in Communities



Most Americans (72% of this group) do not have a group where they talk regularly about civics. Many cite they do not have time for such activities.



Question: Is there a community or group that you are a part of where you regularly talk about or engage in civics? If yes, what is the group? If no, what are the reasons why you are not a part of such a group?



There is no group that I am a part of that regularly talks about or engages in anything that is solely focused on civics. I'm sure I've stumbled across posts or videos related to this though.

–Lily, aged 35-44 white woman, Independent, Politically Disengaged

I am not part of any organized civics group. I have never been much a "joiner."

–Brian, aged 65+ Black man, Independent, Progressive Activist



There is not a community or group that I am a part of where I regularly talk about or engage in civics. I'm not part of a group because I'm unaware of how to find those groups.

–Wyatt, aged 35-44 white man, Democrat, Progressive Activist

No. I barely have time for hobbies outside of work and house chores, but I used to volunteer with an animal shelter group where we would bag food for homeless, food banks, seniors, etc.

We had all sorts of discussions - politics, traveling, sports, etc. This group disbanded with Covid. We do have monthly dinners with our neighbors and he was a police officer, so we do have good talks about current events, past events, etc.



–Jeanne, aged 45-54 white woman, Republican, Moderate

Some Americans cite specific community groups (6%), online groups (5%), and religious groups (2% of this group) as places where they discuss civics.



Question: Is there a community or group that you are a part of where you regularly talk about or engage in civics? If yes, what is the group? If no, what are the reasons why you are not a part of such a group?



We talk a lot at church.

–Kate, aged 35-44 white woman,
Republican, Politically Disengaged

I belong to several local Democrat groups on Facebook. They help keep me informed on local political happenings.

–Tracey, aged 45-54 white woman,
Democrat, Traditional Liberal



Yes, many community activities are centered around civic engagement and I attend when I can.

–Brandon, aged 35-44 white man,
Independent, Devoted Conservative

Other than like a online community on YouTube or Reddit form, there's not much involvement when it comes to me being involved in civics because there's not much engagement or people I know from these communities

–Bryan, aged 18-24 Asian American man,
Democrat, Politically Disengaged



Some mention conversations they have about civics with their family (6% of this group), friends (6%), and local community or neighbors (4%).



Question: Is there a community or group that you are a part of where you regularly talk about or engage in civics? If yes, what is the group? If no, what are the reasons why you are not a part of such a group?



I participate in a number of professional organizations and have met with political leaders in Washington to advocate for healthcare issues.

–Jason, aged 65+ white man, Independent, Traditional Liberal

I'd say the queer community, in having to fight for our rights, is pretty constantly engaged in civics and civic discussions.

–Lydia, aged 25-34 white woman, Democrat, Progressive Activist



No not really. I have friends and relatives that I talk to regularly on this subject and I watch tv news everyday so I feel I am pretty well up to speed on civics and related matters.

–Steve, aged 65+ white man, Democrat, Traditional Conservative

I typically engage in topics about civics with my family, mostly because we all agree a lot on certain issues.

–Peter, aged 18-24 white man, Independent, Progressive Activist





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