

## **“Can Democracy Be Taught?”**

Steven E. Finkel

*Journal of Democracy* 14 (October 2003): 137–151.

*The following is information on the technical aspects of the study on which Steven Finkel’s article is based.*

### **Survey Questions**

In each country, we asked respondents questions relating to six democratic orientations and behavior. The indices for each of these dependent variables were created as follows.

*Local-Level Participation.* Respondents were asked if they had taken part in an organized activity to solve a community problem; attended a meeting of the local town council or government officials; worked for a party or candidate in an election campaign; or contacted a local elected official in the last year. A scale for participation was created from the number of activities in which respondents reported taking part.

*Political Knowledge.* The survey asked questions about knowledge of political leaders, incumbent politicians, and the structure of the South African/Dominican/Polish government, such as whether respondents knew the name of the President or Deputy President, the Premier of the respondent’s province, how long the term of office for President is, and the branch of government that elects the President. We summed respondents’ correct answers to these questions to create a general knowledge scale, ranging from 0 to 8.

*Efficacy:* The questionnaire contained three-four questions on efficacy, all asking the respondent to agree or disagree on a four-point scale to a series of questions concerning their views of their influence on the political system. The three questions were: (1) Sometimes politics and government are so complicated that people like me can’t understand what is going on; (2) People like me have no say in what the government does; and (3) I feel well prepared for participating in political life; and (4) If I wanted to discuss my political views, I would know where and how to contact elected officials. The responses were averaged to create the overall 1-4 efficacy scale.

*Tolerance:* The questionnaire asks standard questions to test the respondent’s willingness to extend freedoms of association, participation and speech to three unpopular groups: atheists in all three countries, racists (“persons who believe blacks to be genetically inferior”) and sexists (“persons who believe women to be genetically inferior”) in South Africa, and communists and militarists (“persons who want to suspend elections and have the military rule the country”) in the Dominican Republic and Poland.. For each group, it was asked whether such a person should be allowed to speak publicly in your locality; should be allowed to vote, and should be allowed to organize peaceful demonstrations to express his/her point of view. The number of tolerant responses were added to form the overall 0-9 scale.

*Institutional Trust:* Respondents were asked how much they trusted a series of political institutions, including: the legal system, the President, the Constitutional Court (where appropriate), the legislature, local councils, etc. We created a 0-7 scale of trust by adding the number of institutions in which the respondent had “a good deal” of trust.

*Support for Democratic Elections.* We asked individuals in South Africa “if a non-elected government or leader could impose law and order and deliver houses and jobs, how willing would you be to give up regular elections and live under such a government?” The coding of responses range from “1” for “very willing” to “4” for “very unwilling.” In the Dominican Republic and Poland, the question was a 1-4

strongly agree to strongly disagree response to: “Regular elections in the Dominican Republic (Poland) are not necessary.”

### **Statistical Methods**

The statistical method used to assess the effects of civic education is what is known as “propensity score matching,” a procedure that is widely used to assess the effects of experimental or quasi-experimental interventions. Essentially, the procedure compares the dependent variables (i.e. the score on participation, knowledge, efficacy, etc.) for each individual in the treatment group with the score for individuals in the control group who are most like the treatment individual on all other potentially confounding variables. That is, respondents from the treatment group – those who received civic education – are matched with respondents from the control group --- those who did not receive civic education --- on all of the following characteristics: education; income; age; gender; community size; time lived in the community; household size; number of children; employment status; student status; church attendance; involvement in church activities; number of voluntary organizations to which the individual belongs; political interest; attention to the mass media. The matching procedure makes the groups as statistically equal as possible by controlling for all the factors that are known to distinguish individuals who received civic education training from those who do not. Then, the dependent variables are compared between the treatment and matched control group to determine the “treatment effect,” i.e., the net difference between the civic education group and the control group on the variable in question, over and above the effects of the control variables. The treatment effect is then evaluated to determine whether it is “statistically significant,” which means that the results were unlikely to have come about by chance. We report statistically significant relationships at the .05 level, indicating that the chances of observing the differences between the civic education and control groups if there were no true differences in the overall population were less than 5%.

TABLE 1

THE IMPACT OF CIVIC EDUCATION ON DEMOCRATIC ORIENTATIONS AND BEHAVIOR

	SOUTH AFRICA	DOMINICAN REPUBLIC	POLAND
<b>LOCAL PARTICIPATION</b>	<b>0.30</b>	<b>0.44</b>	<b>1.05</b>
(0-4 scale)	<i>0.23</i>	<i>0.35</i>	<i>0.73</i>
<b>POLITICAL KNOWLEDGE</b>	-0.03	<b>0.22</b>	<b>0.25</b>
(0-8 scale)	-0.02	<i>0.17</i>	<i>0.2</i>
<b>POLITICAL EFFICACY</b>	<b>0.11</b>	<b>0.14</b>	<b>0.32</b>
(1-4 scale)	<i>0.15</i>	<i>0.19</i>	<i>0.36</i>
<b>POLITICAL TOLERANCE</b>	<b>0.28</b>	<b>0.53</b>	<b>0.57</b>
(0-9 scale)	<i>0.16</i>	<i>0.21</i>	<i>0.22</i>
<b>INSTITUTIONAL TRUST</b>	<b>0.31</b>	<b>-0.66</b>	0.05
(0-7 scale)	<i>0.18</i>	<i>-0.34</i>	0.03
<b>SUPPORT FOR ELECTIONS</b>	0.11	0.13	<b>0.23</b>
(1-4 Scale)	0.09	0.13	<i>0.32</i>
Number of Cases	939	1924	1375

Note: Coefficients represent the difference on each variable between individuals in the treatment (civic education) and control groups, controlling for demographic and other pre-existing group differences. For example, individuals receiving civic education training participated on average in .44 more local level political activities in the Dominican Republic than individuals who did not receive civics training.

Coefficients in italics represent the difference between the treatment and control group expressed in standard deviation form to facilitate comparisons across variables measured on different scales.

Coefficients in bold are statistically significant at the .05 level (two-tailed).

**TABLE 2**

**THE IMPACT OF CIVIC EDUCATION ON LOCAL PARTICIPATION  
FOR DIFFERENT KINDS OF INDIVIDUALS**

	<b>SOUTH AFRICA</b>	<b>DOMINICAN REPUBLIC</b>	<b>POLAND</b>
<b>GROUP MEMBERSHIPS</b>			
None	-0.03	0.18	<b>0.68</b>
One	<b>0.18</b>	<b>0.26</b>	<b>0.87</b>
Two or More	<b>0.30</b>	<b>0.36</b>	<b>0.83</b>
<b>AGE</b>			
18-34	<b>0.21</b>	<b>0.26</b>	<b>0.62</b>
35+	<b>0.24</b>	<b>0.50</b>	<b>0.85</b>
<b>EDUCATION</b>			
Less Than High School	<b>0.23</b>	<b>0.37</b>	<b>0.61</b>
High School or More	<b>0.30</b>	<b>0.27</b>	<b>1.00</b>
<b>POLITICAL INTEREST</b>			
Low	0.10	<b>0.22</b>	<b>0.72</b>
High	<b>0.38</b>	<b>0.31</b>	<b>0.86</b>

Note: Coefficients represent the standardized (or standard deviation) change in each variable from exposure to civic education. For example, civic education in the Dominican Republic among those who belong to no secondary groups produces a .18 standard deviation change in local participation, while civic education among those who belong to three or more groups produces a .36 standard deviation change in local participation.

Coefficients in **bold**, statistically significant at the .05 level (two-tailed)