

CIVIC CONCEPTIONS AND ATTITUDES

Key Findings: England, Germany, Italy, Russian Federation, United States

Compared to students in most other G8 countries, U.S. 14-year-olds placed more trust in national government and more importance on adult citizenship activities, though they were less affirming of government responsibilities pertaining to society and economy.

In 1999, as part of the International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement (IEA) Civic Education Study, 14-year-olds were asked about the importance of two kinds of adult citizenship activities: conventional (e.g., importance of voting in every election or knowing about the country's history) and social movement-related (e.g., importance of taking part in activities promoting human rights or benefiting people in the community). Both of these citizenship activities were rated as more important among 14-year-olds in the United States (average scale score = 10.3 for both activities) than among 14-year-olds in all of the other G8 countries presented except for Italy (figure 16a). Among the countries shown, both citizenship activities were rated as lowest in importance in England (average scale score = 9.2 for both activities).

Fourteen-year-olds were further asked whether the government should be responsible for various society-related issues (e.g., to provide basic education and basic health care for all people) and various economy-related issues (e.g., to guarantee a job for everyone who wants one and to keep prices under control). Fourteen-year-olds in the United States were less affirming of the concept that government should have society-related responsibilities (average scale score = 10.0) than their counterparts in all of the other G8 countries presented except for Germany, which was least af-

firming of this concept (average scale score = 9.4). In addition, 14-year-olds in the United States were least affirming among their peers of the concept that government should have economy-related responsibilities (average scale score = 9.2). Among the countries presented, English 14-year-olds rated society-related government responsibilities the highest and Russian Federation 14-year-olds rated economy-related government responsibilities the highest (average scale scores = 10.8 and 10.6, respectively).

Fourteen-year-olds in the United States, followed by their counterparts in the Russian Federation, were the most confident in their expectations to participate in conventional political activities as an adult compared to 14-year-olds in other G8 countries (e.g., join a political party or write letters to a newspaper about social or political concerns) (average scale scores = 10.5 and 10.0, respectively). Fourteen-year-olds in the United States were also the most likely among the countries shown to express trust in the national government, with about two-thirds (65 percent) reporting that they always or most of the time trust the national government (figure 16b). Fourteen-year-olds in the Russian Federation were the least likely among the countries to express trust in the national government, with 29 percent reporting that they always or most of the time trust in the national government. However, 14-year-olds in the Russian Federation were the most likely to express interest in politics. More than half of 14-year-olds in the Russian Federation (54 percent) reported being interested in politics. In the United States, 39 percent of 14-year-olds reported being interested in politics. One-quarter of the 14-year-olds in England (25 percent) expressed interest in politics, which was the lowest level of reported interest among the countries presented.

Definitions and Methodology

For the two scales on the importance of adult citizenship activities—conventional and social movement-related—students were asked to indicate the importance of several activities. Each activity was prefaced with, “An adult who is a good citizen . . .” For each activity (e.g., “votes in every election,” “takes part in activities promoting human rights”), response choices ranged from 1 (not important) to 4 (very important).

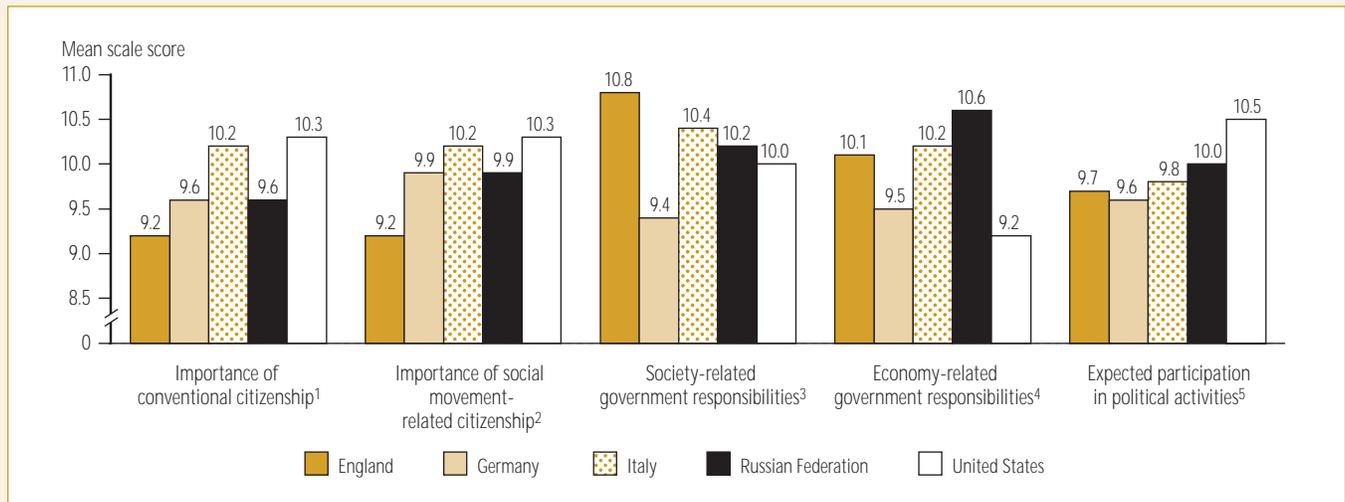
For the two scales on the concepts of government responsibilities—society-related and economy-related—students were asked to indicate their level of agreement over whether the government should be responsible for various issues. The 14-year-olds were asked, “What responsibilities should the government have?” For each issue (e.g., “to provide free basic education for all,” “to keep prices under control”), response choices ranged from 1 (should

not be the government's responsibility) to 4 (definitely should be the government's responsibility).

For the scale on expected participation in political activities, students were asked, “When you are an adult, what do you expect that you will do?” For the three activities (e.g., “join a political party”), response choices ranged from 1 (I will certainly not do this) to 4 (I will certainly do this). See figure 16a for the complete list of items making up each scale.

Items were scaled using the Item Response Theory ‘Partial Credit Model.’ The resulting person parameters (logits) for the latent dimensions were converted to international scales with a mean of 10 and standard deviation of 2 (countries equally weighted). The scale scores are relative to the international mean, and do not reveal any substantial meaning regarding the item response categories.

Figure 16a. Average scores on selected scales assessing 14-year-olds' conceptions of citizenship and government responsibilities and their expected participation in political activities, by country: 1999



¹The six activities (alpha = .67) included: "votes in every election," "joins a political party," "knows about the country's history," "follows political issues in the newspaper, radio or TV," "shows respect for government representatives," and "engages in political discussions."

²The four activities (alpha = .63) included: "would participate in a peaceful protest against a law believed to be unjust," "participates in activities to benefit people in the community," "takes part in activities promoting human rights," and "takes part in activities to protect the environment."

³The seven issues (alpha = .70) included: "to provide basic health care for everyone," "to provide an adequate standard of living for old people," "to provide free basic education for all," "to ensure equal political opportunities for men and women," "to control pollution of the environment," "to guarantee peace and order within the country," and "to promote honesty and moral behavior among people in the country."

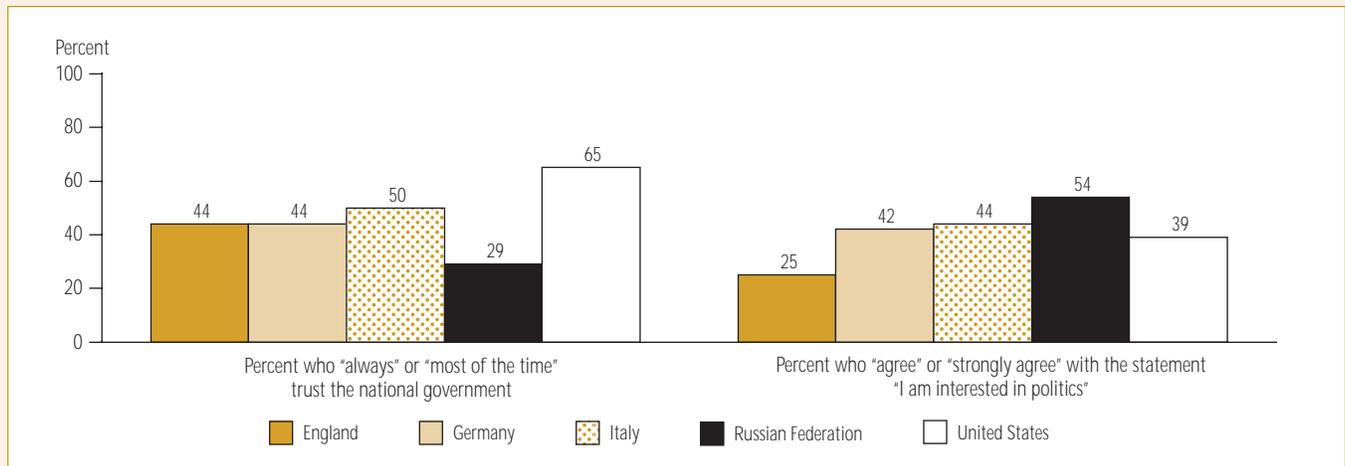
⁴The five issues (alpha = .55) included: "to guarantee a job for everyone who wants one," "to keep prices under control," "to provide industries with the support they need to grow," "to provide an adequate standard of living for the unemployed," and "to reduce differences in income and wealth among people."

⁵The three activities (alpha = .73) included: "join a political party," "write letters to a newspaper about social or political concerns," and "be a candidate for a local or city office."

NOTE: Countries were instructed to select the grade in which most 14-year-olds were enrolled at the time of the study. In the United States, this was 9th grade.

SOURCE: International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement, Civic Education Study. (2001). *Citizenship and Education in Twenty-Eight Countries: Civic Knowledge and Engagement at Age Fourteen, 2001*, Figures 4.1, 4.2, 4.3, 4.4, and 6.1. Amsterdam: Author.

Figure 16b. Percentage of 14-year-olds who report trust in the national government and percent who report interest in politics, by country: 1999



NOTE: Countries were instructed to select the grade in which most 14-year-olds were enrolled at the time of the study. In the United States, this was 9th grade.

SOURCE: International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement, Civic Education Study. (2001). *Citizenship and Education in Twenty-Eight Countries: Civic Knowledge and Engagement at Age Fourteen, 2001*, Tables 5.1 and 6.1. Amsterdam: Author.