



Textbooks of Today

Civics Education in the Early Twenty-First Century

Jed Ngalande

The great privilege of the Americans does not simply consist in their being more enlightened than other nations, but in their being able to repair the faults they may commit.

—Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*

American civics textbooks have tended to reflect the era in which they are written, as I showed in my previous report.¹ In this essay, I examine texts from the early twenty-first century to determine whether they continue in that pattern.

A brief recap of the earlier review: During the late 1800s, as the nation healed from the bloodshed of the Civil War, its civics textbooks tended to focus on the founding principles and governing institutions of the United States. As progressivism spread throughout America in the 1910s and 1920s, civics education shifted toward what one could achieve through “personal citizenship” in one’s local community. During the Great Depression and World War II, civics texts were more apt to emphasize nationally oriented civic duty. As the Cold War advanced, they began to teach students to view America as a global power advancing democracy on the world stage.

Civil Rights-era social and education reforms saw civics folded into “social studies” along with history and other fields. Within the textbooks of that era, the promotion of shared civics values faded as the 1970s introduced “values clarification,” which encouraged students to identify and articulate their own values rather than embrace shared or traditional values. Though this style of education fell out of popularity—it was said to foster moral relativism and the rejection of parental guidance—late twentieth-century civics education did not return to the active promotion of common values and patriotism. Rather, the 1990s saw the civics portion of social studies teach more about “individual rights and autonomy.”²

A Hoover Institution Essay

What might we expect to find in civics textbooks of the new millennium, a period marked by terrorism, polarization, and declining American pride?³ Bear in mind that today's teachers can draw instructional materials from many sources and hence are less dependent on traditional textbooks. Yet such books remain a window into the themes and topics that authors in this field find most important and continue to influence what is taught and learned in many classrooms.

I was somewhat surprised to find that the books most frequently adopted into state, district, and school curricula in recent years—such as *We the People: The Citizen and the Constitution* (Center for Civic Education 2016), *Magruder's American Government* (McClenaghan 2010), and *Civics: Government and Economics in Action* (Davis et al. 2005)—emphasize the Constitution, governmental structures, and institutions much as did texts from the late nineteenth century. Yet these modern books also discuss citizen rights, liberties, and responsibilities far more than did the textbooks of old.

Perhaps the largest tonal difference between earlier and more contemporary civics textbooks is how they deal with patriotism and good citizenship. Nineteenth-century texts centered on government structure over—and sometimes to the exclusion of—the actions of individual citizens. When they did address personal behavior, yesterday's textbook authors focused almost exclusively on promoting actions that would help families, close-knit communities, and the larger society run smoothly. In the latter twentieth century, civics textbooks facilitated broad discussions of citizen behavior while also instructing America's young to display patriotism in everything from their own daily actions in the community to supporting peace and security on the world stage.

Insofar as twenty-first-century textbooks advocate patriotism at all, their approach is more abstract, less connected to individual action. Books such as *We the People: The Citizen and the Constitution* and *Civics: Government and Economics in Action* argue that patriotism and good citizenship are beneficial for the nation, and they walk students through examples of what civic participation looks like in the modern age. Yet their words seem more distant from the lives of actual students, and the authors certainly do not exhort or admonish—particularly when compared with civics texts from the progressive era or even the 1990s.

Modern civics textbooks match or surpass earlier eras in their coverage of America's founding principles, institutions, and individual agency, yet they present citizenship in a more impersonal way—tending more to abstract arguments for civic virtue rather than direct calls to action or admonitions about behavior. They seem to avoid directing young

Americans to pursue good citizenship with the bluntness and vigor that we more often found in their predecessors.

METHODOLOGY

The twelve works examined in this study (see Textbooks Reviewed at the end of this essay) were selected because they have been among the most widely circulated civics texts in the United States during this past quarter-century. Together, they encompass every major commercial and nonprofit publisher operating in this instructional space, including Cengage, the Center for Civic Education, Glencoe/McGraw-Hill School, Holt McDougal, Pearson, and W. W. Norton.⁴ As shown in table 1, there's ample evidence of their penetration into US high schools.⁵ Web searches show that each textbook appears in multiple high school syllabi or AP listings and possesses an International Standard Book Number (ISBN). Additionally, the majority of this study's books appear in state adoption and school district textbook lists, indicating the selection enjoys wide availability and likely substantial use in classrooms across the nation.⁶

They're also relatively current. As shown in table 1, all were revised or renewed over the past twenty-five years. This shows that their publishers continued to update and continue circulating these works throughout the first quarter of the twenty-first century. That it was worth the publishers' while to do this further attests to the popularity—and likely profitability—of these particular publications.

The reader should, however, bear in mind that relatively few textbooks have been distinctly labeled “civics” since the 1960s, when “social studies” began to encompass a number of disciplines. And while civics education has seen a modest rebound in recent years—with thirty-eight states and DC requiring high school students to take at least one civics course of some duration to receive a diploma—enough online resources and requirement flexibility exist that today's civics teachers can draw upon many sources besides textbooks.⁷ Because the United States has neither a national curriculum nor any central authority governing civics education, instruction is determined by the fifty states and the many districts within each state, each with its own adoption cycles and procurement rules. This decentralization renders it difficult to trace definitive textbook usage patterns.

Mindful of those limits, I examined what appear to be the most prominent high school civics textbooks from the most prominent education publishers, my goal being to get a better sense of how American democracy is currently being placed before students in the present era.

TABLE 1 TEXTBOOK VISIBILITY (2001–26)

Textbooks	State adoption lists	School district records	ISBN circulation	Revised editions issued	High school syllabi presence
<i>The American Democracy</i> (Patterson 2013)	—	—	✓	2010, 2012	AP Government and dual-enrollment
<i>American Democracy Now</i> (Harrison et al. 2019)	—	—	✓	2019, 2022, 2025	AP Government and dual-enrollment
<i>American Government: Institutions and Policies</i> (Wilson et al. 2017)	—	—	✓	2011, 2013, 2024	AP Government and dual-enrollment
<i>American Politics Today</i> (Bianco and Canon 2019)	—	—	✓	2009, 2017, 2023	AP Government and dual-enrollment
<i>Civics: Government and Economics in Action</i> (Davis et al. 2005)	✓	✓	✓	2005, 2007, 2009	High School Civics
<i>Civics in Practice</i> (Massing 2009)	✓	✓	✓	2007, 2009	High School Civics
<i>Civics Today</i> (Remy et al. 2008)	✓	✓	✓	2003, 2004, 2005, 2008, 2009	High School Civics
<i>Government in America</i> (Edwards et al. 2021)	—	—	✓	2004, 2012, 2020, 2025	AP Government and dual-enrollment
<i>Magruder’s American Government</i> (McClenaghan 2010)	✓	✓	✓	2016	High School Government
<i>United States Government: Democracy in Action</i> (Remy 2006)	✓	✓	✓	2003	High School Government
<i>United States Government: Principles in Practice</i> (Fraga 2010)	✓	✓	✓	2009, 2012	High School Government
<i>We the People</i> (Center for Civic Education 2016)	✓	✓	✓	2001, 2016, 2023	High School Government, AP Government supplement

Note: Each title used in this study appears in at least two of the following independent indicators of instructional use: official state textbook adoption lists for high school civics / social studies / government classes, district- and school-system-level textbook adoption lists of the aforementioned nature, ISBN catalogs, revised editions issued, high school syllabi, or recommended textbook lists for AP Government.

INSTITUTIONS: PARITY WITH THE PAST

Across these dozen texts, the most consistent feature is their emphasis on institutions—the founding documents, guiding principles, and machinery of American government. They continue to anchor their content to the same pillars that structured civics education more than a century ago. In this respect, modern textbooks resemble their nineteenth-century predecessors far more than they resemble the civics texts of the progressive era, the Cold War, or the values-clarification period of the late twentieth century.

This institutional scaffolding is clearest in *We the People: The Citizen and the Constitution*, which devotes 242 of its 305 pages to the Constitution’s philosophical foundations, drafting, structure, and amendments. Its six-unit structure—ranging from the historical foundations of the American political system to the challenges facing constitutional democracy in the twenty-first century—places the Constitution at the center of civic understanding. Although the book includes a substantial section on the individual citizen, its overwhelming focus remains the creation, content, and evolution of the nation’s governing framework (Center for Civic Education 2016, vii–xii).

A similar pattern appears in *American Government: Institutions and Policies*, which is organized in five major parts: The American System; Opinions, Interests, and Organizations; Institutions of Government; The Politics of Public Policy; and The Nature of American Democracy. While the book includes chapters on public opinion and political behavior, its core again remains institutional. Congress, the presidency, the judiciary, and the federal bureaucracy receive extensive treatment, and the authors devote far less attention to the individual citizen than did the civics textbooks of the progressive era or the values-clarification period. Nor do we find any focus on state and local governments (Wilson et al. 2017, iii).

United States Government: Democracy in Action follows a similar trajectory. Its nine units begin with the Constitution and the divisions of federal power, proceed through rights and liberties, and conclude—unlike other textbooks—with public policy and state and local government (Remy 2006, iv–vii). The sequencing varies slightly across textbooks, but the pattern is unmistakable: foundations first, institutions second, political behavior third. This is the core around which all other content is arranged.

Other major textbooks are similar. *The American Democracy* divides its chapters into four units—Foundations, Mass Politics, Governing Institutions, and State and Local Governments (Patterson 2013, ix–xvii)—while *American Politics Today* is organized into Foundations, Politics, Institutions, and Policy (Bianco and Canon 2019, ix–xvi).

Magruder's American Government follows a similar three-part structure: Foundations of American Government, Political Behavior, and The Legislative Branch (McClenaghan 2010, v–vii). *American Democracy Now* is organized into Foundations, Fundamental Principles, Linkages Between the People and the Government, and Institutions of Government (Harrison et al. 2019, viii–xvi). Across these books, the Constitution and the structures of government remain the backbone of civics.

Even textbooks that integrate economics do so primarily through institutional channels. *Civics: Government and Economics in Action* and *Government in America: People, Politics, and Policy* embed their economic instruction within discussions of federal power, regulatory authority, and national stability (respectively, Davis et al. 2005, 6–13; Edwards et al. 2021, iv). These books reinforce the idea that economic life is inseparable from institutional design.

WHAT'S DIFFERENT

Although textbooks of the early twenty-first century have similar institutional frameworks, they differ in how they present and apply this material to students' lives. *Civics in Practice: Principles of Government and Economics* (Massing 2009) stands out for its chapter-by-chapter pairing of institutional content with personal application. Each chapter includes a "Reading Skills" activity, a "Civics Skills" activity, and an assigned entry from the "Active Citizenship Video Program." These tools connect institutional knowledge to students' lived experiences, showing how government structures intersect with everyday life.

Civics Today: Citizenship, Economics, and You (Remy et al. 2008) employs a similarly distinctive approach. Each chapter section begins with a "Real World Civics" (Units 1–5, 8) or "Real World Economics" (Units 6–7) vignette, followed by "Civics & You" (Units 1–5, 8) or "Economics & You" (Units 6–7) questions that ask students to consider how the topic affects their own lives. This approach integrates institutional content with contemporary examples and personal reflection, encouraging students to see the relevance of government structures to their daily experiences.

United States Government: Principles in Practice offers yet another version. In addition to chapters on the foundations of American government, the branches of federal government, and citizens' rights and liberties, the book includes a second section—"Interactive United States Government"—that features simulations of elections, Supreme Court cases, foreign policy decisions, and comparative political systems (Fraga 2010, iv–viii). State-specific editions add chapters on state and local government tailored to the student's location, reinforcing the institutional framework while uniquely grounding it in local context.⁸

CITIZENSHIP

Twenty-first-century civics textbooks match or surpass those of earlier eras in their coverage of America's founding principles, institutions, and individual agency. When it comes to citizenship, however, they present it in a more impersonal way. They shed the moral exhortation of the progressive era, the patriotic imperatives of the Cold War, and the values-clarification ethos of the 1970s. The result is a curriculum that is institutionally robust but normatively restrained—rich in information, but cautious in tone.

Modern civics textbooks also diverge from their predecessors in how they present public affairs—the realms of political behavior, public opinion, interest groups, media, and civic engagement. Today's dominant tone is analytical rather than hortatory, reflecting a broader shift in civics education away from moral instruction and toward political science. Today's textbooks explain how American politics works, not how students should participate in it. This marks a significant departure from earlier eras, when public affairs were framed through national unity, Cold War purpose, or values-clarification exercises.

Among the clearest examples of this shift can be seen in *American Politics Today*. In their preface, authors Bianco and Canon (2019, xxi) explicitly reject the “grand normative concepts such as civic responsibility” that characterized earlier textbooks. They argue that such texts left students with little understanding of “how American politics really works” or how to synthesize political facts into coherent explanations. This orientation shapes the book's treatment of public affairs: political parties, interest groups, elections, and public opinion are presented as empirical phenomena to be understood rather than arenas for civic duty.

A similar approach appears in *American Democracy Now*, which devotes an entire section—“Linkages Between the People and the Government”—to explaining how citizens interact with political institutions through parties, media, and interest groups. The authors frame civic engagement broadly, quoting Michael Delli Carpini's definition of it as “individual and collective actions designed to identify and address issues of public concern.” Yet even here, the tone is empowering rather than directive: The book “hopes” to inspire engagement but does not prescribe it (Harrison et al. 2019, 8).

In *American Government: Institutions and Policies*, the authors devote substantial attention to how opinions form, how they are measured, and how they influence political outcomes. Their discussion of civic duty—framed partly as participation in political affairs and partly as community involvement—appears within this broader analysis of political behavior rather than as a civic obligation (Wilson et al. 2017, 78, 82, 90).

Two textbooks attempt to bridge public affairs with students' own experiences. *Civics Today* (Remy et al. 2008) uses "Real World Civics" vignettes and "Civics & You" questions to connect political processes to everyday life, while *Civics in Practice* (Massing 2009) incorporates experiential learning through its "Active Citizenship Video Program," "Reading Skills," and "Civics Skills" activities. These features do not alter the underlying analytical tone, but they do attempt to make public affairs more accessible and personally relevant.

Democracy in Action is more cautious. Its treatment of political participation emphasizes rights and liberties but avoids urging students toward specific behaviors. Even its discussions of authoritarian states and the collapse of Soviet Communism—topics that earlier textbooks used to contrast American democracy with foreign threats—are presented descriptively rather than as some kind of summons to civic commitment, much less to national unity (Remy 2006, 289, 305; 249, 304).

Government in America (Edwards et al. 2021) places heavier emphasis on political behavior and public opinion, as well as how economics affect these dynamics. *The American Democracy* (Patterson 2013) devotes an entire unit to Mass Politics, highlighting how large-scale political behavior shapes governance. *Magruder's American Government* offers one of the most expansive treatments of political socialization, detailing how age, race, income, occupation, family, peer groups, and media shape political attitudes over a lifetime. Yet even *Magruder's*, with its rich discussion of influences on political behavior, refrains from explicitly telling the students what to pursue (McClenaghan 2010, 216).

WHITHER CIVIC DUTY AND PATRIOTISM?

Among all the shifts that distinguish twenty-first-century civics textbooks from their predecessors, none is more pronounced than the transformation in how they define—and decline to define—civic duty and patriotism. Earlier eras treated these as central pillars of civic formation; modern textbooks treat them as topics to be analyzed, contextualized, or described but rarely as norms to be embraced. *We the People*, for instance, grounds its discussion in Tocqueville's observation that Americans contribute to the common good because doing so ultimately benefits their private ambitions (Center for Civic Education 2016, 247).

The narrowest definition of civic duty appears in *Government in America*, which reduces it almost entirely to voting—"the belief that in order to support a democratic government, a citizen should vote" (Edwards et al. 2021, 294). *The American Democracy* likewise

treats civic duty as a matter of political behavior, embedding it within discussions of public opinion, participation, and electoral dynamics rather than civic obligation (Patterson 2013, 206).

Other textbooks edge somewhat closer to a sense of duty or obligation. *Democracy in Action* explains how citizens may participate in government but avoids urging them toward any particular form of engagement (Remy 2006, 23). As noted above, *American Democracy Now* offers a broader conception, defining civic engagement as “individual and collective actions designed to identify and address issues of public concern” (Harrison et al. 2019, 8).

Civics in Practice offers perhaps the most explicit definition of a “good citizen,” emphasizing voting wisely (Massing 2009, 261), helping one’s community (126), and cultivating constructive family relationships (315). *Civics Today* similarly roots civic responsibility in shared values and core institutions (Remy et al. 2008, 11–12)—especially the family (13)—arguing that unity and social cohesion arise from common beliefs and habits (7).

Principles in Practice is even more didactic. It admonishes students that citizens have duties to obey the law, accept personal responsibility, respect others’ rights, pay taxes, serve on juries, and be ready to defend the country if drafted (Fraga 2010, 343). This book maintains something close to the mid-twentieth-century vocabulary of obligation. *American Government: Institutions and Policies* blends political and community-oriented expectations, defining civic duty both as participation in political affairs and as taking community life seriously (Wilson et al. 2017, 78).

Civics textbooks of the past quarter-century equal or exceed earlier eras in their coverage of America’s governmental and social foundations, but they present citizenship in a more impersonal way. They inherit elements from each phase of twentieth-century textbooks—calls for national unity from the Cold War period, student-centered reflection from the values-clarification era, and respect for autonomy from the 1990s—while combining these elements into a fundamentally different whole. Public affairs are presented as systems to be understood, not incubators of moral development or patriotic duty.

BUT ARE STUDENTS LEARNING?

In sum, we find, for the most part, a civics curriculum that is descriptively rich, politically scientific, and pedagogically cautious—one that equips students with knowledge of political processes but rarely urges them to act within them.

Yet it's information that few Americans appear to absorb and retain. Consider, for example, results on the annual *Annenberg Civics Knowledge Survey*, the quadrennial National Assessment of Educational Progress, the 2023 youth assessment commissioned by the Institute for Citizens & Scholars, and many other measures.⁹ Indeed, even as the overwhelming majority of states require high schoolers to take a civics course—with many also requiring students to pass some sort of assessment—little textbook-type information appears to be internalized.¹⁰ Although that's not the books' fault, it does represent a very large ongoing challenge for civics education and educators.

The “good citizenship” challenge is separate. Judging from this review of widely used textbooks, today's civics curricula—compared to those of previous eras—appear to have few direct messages regarding how young Americans should conduct themselves and what they should aspire toward. As the systematic exercise of good citizenship seems to decline among Americans, few of today's civics textbook authors strive to instill it in their readers.

Going forward, those seeking a renaissance of civic education will do well to recognize the twin challenges of civic-knowledge retention and good-citizenship inspiration. There's no reason to suppose that just increasing the length of a civics textbook or the rigor of an end-term assessment would significantly increase long-term civics knowledge—and there's even less reason to expect it to rectify plummeting affection for the nation or sense of one's obligations as a citizen.

The latter is almost certainly linked to the decline in American confidence in key institutions, as well as our leaders, our fellow citizens, and our own futures. At a time when barely a third of Americans are satisfied with how democracy works in today's United States, no K-12 civics course (or teacher) can assume that constructive civic engagement is a behavior that young Americans admire or want to participate in. To make the affirmative case for this kind of citizenship insofar as textbooks can help—and it's unclear how much they can help—they might include illustrative actions and statements from respected political and social leaders in our past—both recent and distant—to exemplify good citizenship in a digestible way and perhaps also to illustrate bad citizenship. They might select examples that relate to the themes or topics of particular chapters: Founding Fathers for chapters on the Constitution; presidents, senators, Supreme Court justices, and governors for the appropriate chapters detailing the divisions of government; social leaders throughout the centuries for chapters on the evolution of civil rights and liberties; and community leaders for chapters on public affairs, politics, and civic engagement. Students could be asked to reflect on each example, both individually and in class discussions.

Nobody expects textbooks alone to solve the problem, but I sense that they could help more than most of them now do. Exceptions demonstrate what's possible. Among the volumes that I reviewed, *Civics in Practice* (Massing 2009) shows a promising approach. Not only does it clearly define what good citizenship is and demonstrate by example how a young American can work toward it, even as a high school student, but we also find embedded in each chapter supplementary features relating the topic to everyday life ("Civics in Practice" and "Civics, the Economy, and You"). Also frequently recurring are "Analysis Skill" sections asking students to examine excerpts from topical historic documents, media investigations, political cartoons, and primary sources as well as community-service and legal features.

As for civics knowledge and its retention, the textbooks I reviewed are chock-full of information regarding the nation's founding principles, government, institutions, politics, public affairs, and the individual citizen's role in all of them. A course based on this material, and equipped with appropriately rigorous assignments and assessments, will do about as much as a singular course can for its students. Yet internalizing and retaining such information almost surely requires more than one pass, which is to say states, districts, and schools that want to boost retention need to tackle civics more often and in greater depth. Start young. Get serious in middle school. Double down in high school. Repetition is likely the only solution to retention in this realm.

It also has to count—not just passing the course but also demonstrating knowledge and understanding on external assessments of various kinds, perhaps including the federal government's citizenship exam.¹¹ Make sure it counts for teachers and schools, too, as part of a state's accountability system—which may be helped by the National Assessment Governing Board's recent decision to begin making available state-specific scores in the eighth- and, subsequently, also the twelfth-grade NAEP civics assessment.¹²

Although knowledge retention and citizenship development need different strategies, educators and policy leaders should keep both in mind. Repeated attention to civics would give more chances for student civic engagement, which, if nurtured properly, could keep and even expand the interest of students through multiple years of civics courses.

Good textbooks can help, but they're ultimately just an ingredient in school-centered learning, which in turn is just an ingredient in the formation of citizens. America also needs a culture—political, social, and educational—dedicated to promoting civic behavior as a cornerstone of the American Dream. Today's civics textbooks are certainly not the source of our citizenship challenges. But they are a part—perhaps a small part—of the solution. But others must step up to the plate. Our political and societal leaders should inspire

schools to restructure civics education into a long-term commitment that transcends courses and assessments. A system that connects the subject through all corners of learning and prioritizes multiyear instruction in civics with emphasis on personal relevance and individual application while not holding patriotism at arm's length. This way, students might aspire to more than fulfilling a graduation requirement or passing a mandatory test. They might even pursue good citizenship for a lifetime.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This work could not have been completed without the input and guidance of Hoover Institution Volker Senior Fellow Chester E. Finn, Jr., and the Working Group on Civics and American Citizenship (chaired by Finn), for whom it was my honor to work the past four years.

NOTES

1. Jed Ngalande, "A Century-Plus of Civic Education: What the Textbooks Show," Hoover Institution, September 10, 2024, <https://www.hoover.org/research/century-plus-civic-education-what-textbooks-show>.
2. Ngalande, "A Century-Plus of Civic Education."
3. Jeffrey M. Jones, "American Pride Slips to New Low," Gallup, June 30, 2025, <https://news.gallup.com/poll/692150/american-pride-slips-new-low.aspx>.
4. Laura S. Hickey and Kristy M. Jones, *A Research Study on Textbook Recycling in America: Recommendations for Proper Disposal and Repurposing at the End of a Textbook's Useful Life*, National Wildlife Federation, November 2012, <https://dl.icdst.org/pdfs/files4/2b801852e00070c9c133b89e09af8b24.pdf>, 17. Though *A Research Study on Textbook Recycling in America* may seem an odd choice of source at first, not only is there an extensive section on "Educational Publishing" within, but it stands to reason that a paper from the National Wildlife Federation—with research funded by McGraw-Hill Companies—on the recycling of educational textbooks would have some insight on which publishers provide the most-used textbooks across the nation.
5. Unlike in Ngalande, "A Century-Plus of Civic Education," I was not able to find sufficient representation of elementary or middle school civics textbooks for this review—hence the focus solely on the high school curriculum for this piece.
6. Publishers keep book sales data well hidden, and it's impossible to know what materials teachers employ when the classroom door is closed. But there's enough evidence available to support my claim that these dozen books are in widespread use and reasonably representative.
7. Sophia Craiutu and Jed Ngalande, "State Civics Requirements in 2024," Hoover Institution, December 17, 2024, <https://www.hoover.org/research/state-civics-requirements-2024>. Thirty states plus Washington, DC, require a half-year civics course, seven states require a full-year course, and Connecticut requires a course of unspecified duration.
8. Luis Ricardo Fraga, *United States Government: Principles in Practice, Florida* (2012); *United States Government: Principles in Practice, Georgia* (2010); *United States Government: Principles in Practice, Ohio* (2010); *United States Government: Principles in Practice, Pennsylvania* (2010); *United States Government: Principles in Practice, Virginia* (2009).

9. "Annenberg Civics Knowledge Survey," Annenberg Public Policy Center, University of Pennsylvania, <https://www.annenbergpublicpolicycenter.org/political-communication/civics-knowledge-survey/>; "Lower Average Civics Score for Eighth-Graders than in 2018" (NAEP Civics), <https://www.nationsreportcard.gov/civics/results/scores>; Citizen Data and the Institute for Citizens & Scholars, *The Civic Outlook of Young Adults in America: Toplines*, Institute for Citizens & Scholars, <https://cands.org/research-civic-outlook-of-young-adults/>.
10. Only ten states mandated neither a civics course nor an assessment for high schoolers as of 2024, according to Craiutu and Ngalande, "State Civics Requirements in 2024."
11. US Citizenship and Immigration Services, *The Naturalization Interview and Test*, last reviewed/updated October 31, 2025, <https://www.uscis.gov/citizenship/learn-about-citizenship/the-naturalization-interview-and-test>.
12. Linda Jacobson, "A Year Ago, Experts Worried About NAEP's Future. Now, the Test Is Expanding," *Chalkbeat*, May 15, 2026, <https://www.chalkbeat.org/2026/05/15/experts-were-worried-about-naep-future-but-now-its-expanding/>.

TEXTBOOKS REVIEWED

These dozen books are far from an exhaustive list of all textbooks reviewed in preparation for this paper. Rather, they are the ones that proved most representative of twenty-first-century civics education and thus directly referenced by this review.

Bianco, William T., and David T. Canon. 2019. *American Politics Today*. 6th ed. W. W. Norton.

Center for Civic Education. 2016. *We the People: The Citizen and the Constitution*. 4th ed.

Davis, James E., Phyllis Maxley Fernlund, and Peter Woll. 2005. *Civics: Government and Economics in Action*. Pearson Prentice Hall.

Edwards, George C., Martin P. Wattenberg, and William G. Howell. 2021. *Government in America: People, Politics, and Policy, 2020 Presidential Election Edition*. 18th ed. Pearson Education.

Fraga, Luis Ricardo. 2010. *United States Government: Principles in Practice*. Holt McDougal.

Harrison, Brigid C., Jean Wahl Harris, and Michelle D. Deardorff. 2019. *American Democracy Now*. 6th ed. McGraw-Hill Education.

Massing, Gregory. 2009. *Civics in Practice: Principles of Government and Economics*. Holt McDougal.

McClenaghan, William A. 2010. *Magruder's American Government*. Pearson Prentice Hall.

Patterson, Thomas E. 2013. *The American Democracy*. 11th ed. McGraw-Hill Education.

Remy, Richard C. 2006. *United States Government: Democracy in Action*. 2nd ed. Glencoe/McGraw-Hill.

Remy, Richard C., John J. Patrick, and David C. Saffell. 2008. *Civics Today: Citizenship, Economics, and You*. Glencoe/McGraw-Hill.

Wilson, James Q., John J. Dilulio Jr., Meena Bose, and Matthew S. Levendusky. 2017. *American Government: Institutions and Policies*. 16th ed. Cengage Learning.



The publisher has made this work available under a Creative Commons Attribution-NoDerivs license 4.0. To view a copy of this license, visit <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nd/4.0>.

Copyright © 2026 by the Board of Trustees of the Leland Stanford Junior University

The views expressed in this essay are entirely those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the views of the staff, officers, or Board of Overseers of the Hoover Institution.

32 31 30 29 28 27 26 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

Preferred citation: Jed Ngalande, “Textbooks of Today: Civics Education in the Early Twenty-First Century,” Working Group on Civics and American Citizenship, Hoover Institution, October 2026.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



JED NGALANDE

Jed Ngalande is a graduate of Stanford University and former research assistant for the Hoover Institution Working Group on Civics and American Citizenship. While studying biology and economics at Stanford, he also expressed a passion for civics and government through participation in the *Stanford Daily* as a beat reporter and in the Intercollegiate Civil Disagreement Partnership Fellowship.



Working Group on Civics and American Citizenship

As part of the Center for Revitalizing American Institutions (RAI), the Working Group on Civics and American Citizenship focuses on citizenship and civic education—and the improvement of both—within a constitutional democracy. It provides guidance for RAI’s research and programmatic initiatives. Its members engage in innovative research projects, grant review, fellow selection processes, and other efforts that advance civic education and strengthen American citizenship. With today’s heightened attention to civics as well as important recognition of key anniversaries in the nation’s history, members also serve an ambassadorial role by creating and communicating policies and practices that foster the habits, values, knowledge, and skills that form the basis of citizenship in a liberal democracy.

For more information about this Hoover Institution working group, visit us online at hoover.org/research-teams/working-group-on-civics-and-american-citizenship.

**Hoover Institution
Stanford University**
434 Galvez Mall
Stanford, CA 94305-6003
650-723-1754

**Hoover Institution
in Washington**
1399 New York Ave. NW, Ste. 500
Washington, DC 20005
202-760-3200

**Hoover Institution
in Texas**
3889 Maple Ave., Ste. 600
Dallas, TX 75219
hoovertexas@stanford.edu

