

# CHALLENGES OF REPRESENTATIVE DEMOCRACY

At best, politics in America is a spectator sport, not a participatory sport, according to a national public opinion poll conducted by The Representative Democracy in America, Voices of the People project. The 2009 survey looked at generational differences in knowledge, attitudes and engagement in American politics.

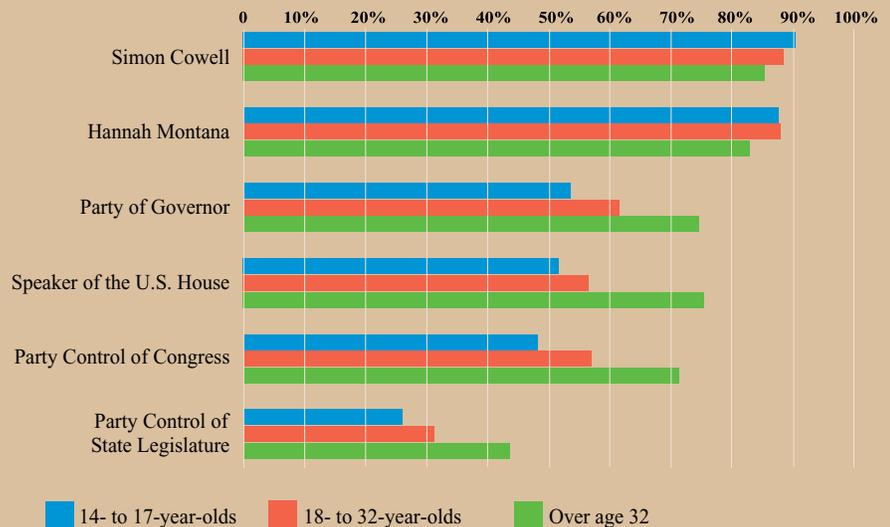
The results showed that most Americans, whatever their age, haven't communicated with a member of Congress or a state legislator on a public policy issue or a governmental problem in the last year. Nearly two-thirds of the American public think that "government is run by a few big interests." And about half think that elected officials serve their private, not the public, interest and that "elected officials don't care what people like me think." Only four in 10 understand that interest groups are one way that they are represented in the policy process.

And the public lacks knowledge of our government. More high school students knew that there are three Jonas Brothers in the band by that name than that there are three branches of government. Only half of those between the ages of 14 and 31 correctly chose "the people elect their representatives" as the definition of "representative democracy."

The good news? Education can help! High schoolers who had taken a civics class followed government more closely and were more knowledgeable about our system of representative democracy.



## WHAT AND WHO WE KNOW



## WHAT AMERICANS THINK ABOUT GOVERNMENT



## CIVICS CLASSES MAKE A DIFFERENCE

