

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

New Hampshire's political history and structure of government, along with its demographic and economic profile, make it a state conducive to insuring high levels of civic engagement. New Hampshire's government is highly decentralized and it has the largest state house of representatives (400) in the country. Citizens live in close proximity to politics and civic life in New Hampshire. The state is also characterized by the in-migration of young families and relatively affluent retirees, the presence of substantial numbers of college graduates, and although the current economic recession is taking a toll, relatively low unemployment and comparatively high household income. These are all characteristics that tend to be positively associated with citizen involvement in community life and public affairs. This is not to say that everything in New Hampshire is rosy. As is true nationwide, economic inequality is growing and is driven largely by the growing gap in wages between college and non-college educated workers. Similarly, there is a geographic divide: many rural communities in New Hampshire are experiencing economic and demographic losses and struggle to maintain the institutions that contribute to a strong community fabric.

Results from the 2009 Civic Health Index (CHI) survey conducted for the National Conference on Citizenship show that, compared to the nation as a whole, New Hampshire residents are more likely to:

Engage in their communities

- Belong or donate money to a local or national group (NH 56% / US 52%)
- Volunteer during the past year (43% / 35%)
- Attend a club or community meeting (36% / 27%)
- Work on a community project (26% / 19%)
- Work with others in their neighborhood to solve a problem (19% / 15%)
- Trust their neighbors – e.g., see other people as honest (77% / 67%) and helpful (66% / 58%)

Experience the negative effects of recession and respond in a positive way

- Personally experience job loss (14% / 9%) within the past year
- Personally experience difficulty affording food or medication (23% / 17%) in the past year
- Personally experience difficulty paying a mortgage (6% / 3%) in the past year

- Help out relatives by giving them a place to stay (22% / 17%)
- Help out non-relatives by giving them a place to stay (17% / 11%)
- Live in communities where people help others during times of economic difficulty (25% / 19%)

Engage in politics and civic life

- See their state's civic tradition as strong (31% / 13%)
- Try to persuade someone to change their mind about a political candidate or an issue (43% / 32%)
- Wear a campaign button or place a campaign sign in their yard (23% / 18%)
- Pay attention to current affairs most of the time (37% / 30%)
- Try to change local policies (16% / 8%)
- Regularly use the Internet to gather information about political, social, and community issues (29% / 18%)

Have less involvement or confidence in organized religion

- Never attend church (48% / 35%)
- Have hardly any confidence in organized religion (37% / 25%)

Value socializing

- Spend a lot of time visiting friends (51% / 40%)
- Regularly use the Internet and electronic devices to communicate with friends (74% / 59%)

Similar to other Americans, New Hampshire residents have:

- Positive views of the impact of citizens in the democratic process
- Substantial gaps in knowledge of how the US political and legal system works
- Low levels of confidence in government decision-making
- Low levels of confidence in economic and social institutions
- Positive views of the effectiveness of economic rewards as incentives for motivating increased community involvement

In New Hampshire, as in the US as a whole:

- College graduates and respondents with even some college education are significantly more likely than those who have a high school education (or less) to be involved in their communities and to have a positive view of the political process
- Weekly churchgoers are more likely than others to have high levels of civic engagement