



NORTH CAROLINA CIVIC HEALTH INDEX

2010



Democracy in Action: Strengthening Civic Life in North Carolina



TABLE OF CONTENTS

- 1 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY: KEY FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS
- 2 INTRODUCTION
 - The North Carolina Civic Health Index
 - Context of North Carolina
- 5 WHERE DOES NORTH CAROLINA STAND? A COMPARISON WITH NATIONAL TRENDS
- 8 LOW CIVIC ENGAGEMENT AMONG NORTH CAROLINA'S YOUTH: A SERIOUS CAUSE FOR CONCERN
- 9 VOTING IS NORTH CAROLINA'S CIVIC STRENGTH. IS IT SUSTAINABLE?
- 11 NORTH CAROLINA'S CIVIL SOCIETY: AN EXCLUSIVE CLUB
- 12 RURAL, NON-COLLEGE EDUCATED AMONG THE STATE'S MOST "CONNECTED"
- 13 NORTH CAROLINIANS WITH SOME COLLEGE MORE LIKELY TO KEEP UP WITH CURRENT EVENTS
- 14 RECOMMENDATIONS

NORTH CAROLINA CIVIC HEALTH INDEX PARTNERS

Democracy North Carolina, represented by Bob Hall

North Carolina Campus Compact, represented by Dr. Lisa Keyne

North Carolina Center for Voter Education, represented by Damon Circosta

North Carolina Civic Education Consortium, represented by Kelley O'Brien

Department of Public Policy at Western Carolina University, represented by Dr. Christopher Cooper

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Just as American democracy cannot succeed without informed and engaged citizens, North Carolina's future depends on residents who care about their communities and participate in civic life. Using data from the U.S. Census Bureau's Current Population Survey, the *North Carolina Civic Health Index* assesses the strengths and weaknesses of civic life in North Carolina. Findings from the *North Carolina Civic Health Index* indicate that North Carolina has the potential to flex its civic might, but there are serious gaps in civic participation that are cause for concern.

KEY FINDINGS

- **Voting in the 2008 Presidential election** is the single measure of civic engagement on which North Carolina performs above the national average. It is **the state's civic strength**: Increases in voter turnout among North Carolinians of all ages, races, and classes illustrate that, when inspired to, our residents can step up and participate in the political process.
- North Carolina's **young people** — the future leaders of our state and our communities — are the **least civically engaged of any age group in North Carolina**. The state's Millennial generation, those born after 1981, reported the lowest rates of participation in all five indicators of civic engagement: They are the least likely to have volunteered in the past year; worked with their neighbors to fix a problem in their community; participated in a non-electoral political act; contributed \$25 or more; and, among eligible voters, to have voted in the 2008 election.
- North Carolina's **civil society** — the voluntary and social organizations that make our communities work — is **led by a small group of older, college-educated, mostly white residents who are involved in religious organizations**. Moreover, there is a significant gap in the demographics of residents who are participating in North Carolina's civil society: Few young people, Hispanics, and African-Americans are participating in groups or organizations.
- **North Carolinians without college experience** are notably more likely to **have strong personal connections to family and friends** and to **help their neighbors** than those who have some college education. Rural residents have a higher level of "connectedness" than those living in metropolitan areas.
- **North Carolinians with some college education** are more than **twice as likely to access the news frequently** and **engage in political discussions** with others than those with no college experience. Moreover, North Carolinians with no college experience are relatively unconnected to current events — they are unlikely either to access the news frequently or discuss politics with others.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Individually, we can contribute to our state's civic health by keeping up with current events and discussing them with friends and family;

casting informed votes in all elections; volunteering time, whether it be minutes, hours, or days; forming and maintaining connections with families, friends, and neighbors; and taking on leadership roles in our communities.

Key individuals and institutions have additional responsibilities to ensure that North Carolina's residents are equipped with the necessary knowledge, skills, and resources to participate in and contribute to civic life.

Policymakers can:

- Continue to explore creative means of supporting informed participation in all of North Carolina's elections.
- Ensure that our state's young people are learning about government (federal, state, and local) and civics in the classroom and that teachers have resources to teach these subjects effectively.
- Recruit and mentor a diverse group of leaders who represent the varying interests of our state's residents.

K-12 educators can:

- Engage students in simulations of democratic process, such as town council meetings or General Assembly sessions.
- Incorporate discussion of local, state, and national current events into the classroom.
- Provide opportunities for meaningful student leadership.
- Implement service-learning that links students' work outside the classroom to what they are learning from their textbooks.

Institutes of higher education can:

- Promote service-learning that connects students to the communities in which they live.
- Offer leadership development programs that prepare students for leadership at the local, state, and national levels.
- Encourage students to register to vote and cast informed votes in all elections through candidate forums and "Get Out the Vote" efforts.

Community organizations can:

- Actively recruit diverse groups of volunteers.
- Offer leadership programs such as those often offered by local chambers of commerce and local governments.
- Recruit others than the "usual suspects" for advisory boards and commissions.

INTRODUCTION

In the past decade, North Carolina's civic health has been tested. Residents read headlines about local, state, and national leaders investigated for misconduct and are expected to place their confidence in a system of government that they may not trust. Conversely, in 2008, North Carolinians of all ages demonstrated their civic strength by turning out in record numbers to vote in the Presidential election.

Just as American democracy cannot succeed without informed and engaged citizens, North Carolina's future depends on residents who care about their communities and participate in civic life. Turnout for the 2008 election and the stories of countless leaders working to make our communities better; tell us that North Carolina has the potential to flex its civic might. But how can we harness this civic potential? How can we ensure that all North Carolinians are engaged in their communities? Measuring the state of North Carolina's civic health is an important step in developing policies and programs that strengthen the state's civic infrastructure.

THE NORTH CAROLINA CIVIC HEALTH INDEX

The National Conference on Citizenship (NCoC), in partnership with the Civic Indicators Working Group, has published America's Civic Health Index annually since 2006. Through the passage of the Edward M. Kennedy Serve America Act in 2009, NCoC formalized a partnership with the U.S. Census Bureau and the Corporation for National and Community Service. The act charges these three partner organizations with developing, refining, and implementing annual measures of America's civic health. Having good measures of our country's civic aptitudes will enable policymakers, private and public institutions, and citizens to strengthen the range of activities, attitudes, and behaviors that make up our nation's civic life.

This year, NCoC has partnered with 13 states and 4 cities to assess civic health at the state and local levels. North Carolina's Civic Health Index is overseen by a team of organizations committed to advancing civic engagement in North Carolina. Democracy North Carolina, North Carolina Campus Compact, the North Carolina Center for Voter Education, the North Carolina Civic Education Consortium, and the Department of Public Policy at Western Carolina University have joined to assess North Carolina's civic health with a united purpose to document, and ultimately improve, civic engagement in North Carolina. The Center for Civic Education also provided crucial funding to support this project.

CONTEXT OF NORTH CAROLINA

Because the civic health of North Carolina is shaped by many factors, it is important to understand the context in which civic participation occurs in our state. Changes in North Carolina's population and demographics, as well as our existing civic infrastructure (i.e., policies related to voting, opportunities to volunteer, and civic education), influence how much residents are involved in their communities and shape the civic health of our state.

POPULATION AND DEMOGRAPHICS

North Carolina's population has grown significantly over the past decade. Between 2000 and 2009, the state's population grew by 16% from 8,078,824 to 9,380,884 residents; this is double the U.S. growth rate of 8%. North Carolina's population will probably continue its rapid growth: The U.S. Census Bureau projects that North Carolina will be among the eight most populous states by 2030.¹

The state's rapid population growth has been mirrored by a shift in demographics. Between 2000 and 2008, the state's Hispanic population increased by 68%; Hispanics made up 7% of North Carolina's population in 2008. During this same period, the number of African-Americans living in North Carolina increased by 10.3%; African-Americans make up 21% of the state's population. The population of white residents grew by 9.4%, making up 70% of North Carolina's population.^{2,3}

North Carolina's population increase can also be attributed to an influx of people moving from other parts of the United States, primarily the Northeast. In 2007, North Carolina ranked 6th in the number of net movers as a percent of the state's population.⁴

More than 80% of North Carolinians have graduated from high school, and more than 25% have a 4-year college degree. Both of these figures are slightly below the national average. The state's median household income, \$46,107, is also below the national average. Poverty in North Carolina is a particular concern. Nearly 15% of North Carolinians live in poverty, 14.6% compared with 13.2% nationally.⁵

North Carolina has been hit particularly hard by the recent recession. The unemployment rate increased by nearly 7 percentage points between 2000 and 2010. In May 2010, 10.3% of North Carolinians were unemployed, compared with the national rate of 9.7%.⁶

VOTING

The changes in demographics summarized above have undoubtedly shaped voting trends in our state. For instance, the number of unaffiliated voters has increased dramatically over the past decade: Since 2000, the number of North Carolinians registered as “unaffiliated” (neither as Democrat nor Republican) has increased by 83%.⁷ The influx of new residents from politically moderate states has been offered as one explanation for this trend toward unaffiliated registration. As urban areas grow, North Carolina’s population hubs have an increasingly strong voice in the electoral process. In the 2008 election, North Carolina’s seven most populous counties (Mecklenburg, Wake, Guilford, Forsyth, Cumberland, Durham, and Buncombe) had 37% of the state’s registered voters.⁸

North Carolina policymakers have worked hard to make it easier for eligible voters to cast ballots. In the late 1990s and early 2000s, the North Carolina General Assembly authorized a number of policies that ultimately allowed all eligible voters in North Carolina to “vote early.” Through “one-stop” voting, voters can now cast absentee ballots at designated sites in each county in the period from 19 to three days before the election; county boards of elections have the option of offering one-stop voting on evenings and weekends in this period. In 2007, the General Assembly enacted legislation allowing eligible citizens to come to a one-stop site and, while there, fill out an application to register and cast an absentee ballot. This is often referred to as “same-day registration.”

State policymakers have taken important steps to increase youth voter turnout. In January 2010, North Carolina became the third state to allow 16- and 17-year-olds to “pre-register” to vote. Signed into law in August of 2009, HB908 changed North Carolina’s pre-registration policy to allow a citizen to register to vote after turning 16. These pre-registered voters are automatically added to the voter roll when they reach the age to vote.⁹

VOLUNTEERING

According to Volunteering in America, North Carolina averaged 1.7 million volunteers who contributed \$4.5 billion of service annually from 2007-2009. During this same two-year period, 24.6% of North Carolinians reported volunteering.¹⁰

North Carolina’s 53 designated Volunteer Centers are key resources for volunteer opportunities in local communities. Volunteering and community service are also promoted by the governor’s office through its Commission on Volunteerism and Community Service.

Appointed by the governor, commissioners and commission staff work to foster an ethic of volunteerism and community service in North Carolinians of all ages and backgrounds. The commission oversees the state’s Americorps and Citizen Corps programs, promotes participation in Days of Service, and suggests ways to serve that will address North Carolina’s most critical challenges.¹¹

In 2009, the Commission surveyed community organizations, government agencies, educational institutions, and national service programs to gauge various aspects of North Carolina’s volunteerism. The results showed that 85% of surveyed organizations offered service in their local communities, 80% engaged volunteers older than 55, and 61% provided youth with volunteer opportunities.¹²

CIVIC EDUCATION IN K-12 PUBLIC SCHOOLS

North Carolina’s schools are key elements of the state’s, and the country’s, civic infrastructure. Our nation’s founders often referred to the link between schools and civic preparation. In a 1787 letter to James Madison, Thomas Jefferson shared his belief that the education of the “common people” was necessary to ensure the preservation of liberty. In his farewell address, George Washington outlined his vision for public education and argued that enlightening the citizenry was essential to the success of government.

Students in North Carolina’s public schools begin studying citizenship as early as the 3rd grade, when young North Carolinians learn about the concepts of leaders in relationship to their communities.¹³ The theme of citizenship is continued in middle school, where students learn about North Carolina history and explore opportunities for citizenship at the local and state levels. When students reach high school, they are required to take three social studies courses, including Civics and Economics, which is typically taught in the 10th grade. The current standards for the tested Civics and Economics course state that students will “acquire the skills and knowledge necessary to become responsible and effective citizens in an interdependent world” and to operate as informed decision-makers. In this course, students “explore active roles as a citizen at the local, state, and national levels of government” and “develop, defend, and evaluate positions on issues regarding the personal responsibility of citizens in the American constitutional democracy.”¹⁴

Public schools in North Carolina do not have a statewide service-learning requirement. However, service-learning exists in the curriculum of some school districts and individual schools, mostly

as a result of grants from Learn and Serve America.¹⁵ These schools receiving Learn and Serve funding aim to connect service-learning goals with outcomes in the areas of academic engagement, partnership development, and health and safety needs.¹⁶

CIVIC ENGAGEMENT ON COLLEGE CAMPUSES

North Carolina's public and private higher education institutions have recognized community engagement as a priority, and in 2009, 40 of North Carolina's colleges and universities were named to the President's Higher Education Community Service Honor Roll. Established in 2006, the national honor roll recognizes colleges and universities that support innovative and effective community service. The selection process is managed by the Corporation for National and Community Service, the federal agency that engages more than a million Americans in service through its Senior Corps, AmeriCorps, and Learn and Serve America programs, and leads President Obama's national call-to-service initiative, United We Serve. North Carolina has had an institution identified as "Presidential Awardee" each year since the designation was created: Elon University in 2006, Johnson C. Smith University in 2007, Duke University in 2008, and UNC Chapel Hill in 2009.

Thirteen of North Carolina's institutions of higher learning have been granted the Carnegie Foundation Community Engagement Classification. This elective classification was established in 2006 to recognize higher education institutions collaborating with their communities in an exchange of knowledge and resources, and involves analysis of national data, data collection and documentation,



photo by: Donn Young

with substantial effort invested by campuses. By December 2008, 120 institutions nationwide had received the Community Engagement Classification. Of the 13 North Carolina institutions deemed "community engaged," 10 are public universities. North Carolina's state system exceeds peer systems across the country.

Community engagement is well integrated into the North Carolina college experience. In addition to the University of North Carolina, the North Carolina Community College System, and North Carolina Independent Colleges and Universities, North Carolina Campus Compact is a resource and convener for campuses committed to graduating civically engaged citizens and to building their communities. The Compact state office works closely with the national Campus Compact of nearly 1,200 presidential members and 35 state offices.

Methodology

The 2010 Civic Health Index is based on The Center for Information & Research on Civic Learning and Engagement's (CIRCLE) analysis of Census Current Population Survey (CPS) data. Volunteering estimates are from the 2007, 2008, and 2009 CPS September Volunteering Supplements and data available from Volunteering in America website at www.volunteeringinamerica.gov. Voting and registration data are from the CPS November Voting/Registration Supplement (2004 and 2008). All other civic engagement indicators, such as access to information and connection to others, come from the 2008 and 2009 CPS Civic Engagement Supplement. For these indicators, the 2008 and 2009 data were combined whenever possible to achieve the largest possible sample size to minimize error.

For the North Carolina report, the sample size for citizen engagement was 1913 residents (18 and older); the sample size for volunteering was 2085 residents (16 and older). All voting estimates are of citizens ages 18 and older. Because the report draws from multiple data sources with varying error parameters, there is no exact estimate of margin of error for the national or North Carolina sample. However, according to the Census Bureau, published margin of error for CPS voting and registration supplement from 2008 is $\pm 0.3\%$ for the national estimate and $\pm 1.7\%$ for North Carolina. For specific population subgroups, the margin of error is greater.

WHERE DOES NORTH CAROLINA STAND? A COMPARISON WITH NATIONAL TRENDS

North Carolina's civic health lags that of other states. Generally speaking, North Carolina ranks in the bottom 50% of major civic health indicators except for those related to voting in 2008, where the state ranks in the top 30% in voter turnout.

VOLUNTEERING

North Carolina ranks 42nd in the nation for volunteering among residents ages 16 and older. In 2009, 23.6% of residents 16 and older reported volunteering in the past 12 months. This low ranking should be a source of concern. However it is important to note that North Carolina's volunteer rate has remained relatively stable since 2006, while some states have experienced sharp declines in volunteerism during these tough economic times. This is particularly impressive given North Carolina's higher-than-average poverty rate (14.6% compared with 13.2% nationally) and higher-than-average unemployment rate (10% compared with 8.5% nationally) in 2009.¹⁷



FIGURE 1: VOLUNTEERING 16+ 2002-2009



Another possible explanation for North Carolina's below-average volunteer rate is that there are fewer opportunities for volunteering in our state than in others. Communities with a higher number of nonprofits per capita are more likely to have higher volunteer rates. As the number of nonprofits per 1,000 city residents increases, the volunteering rate also increases. The national average is 4.45 nonprofit organizations per 1,000 city residents. North Carolina has, on average, 4.01 nonprofits per 1,000 city residents.¹⁸

Both in North Carolina and nationally, volunteers are most likely to spend their time volunteering for religious organizations, followed by children's educational organizations. However, the rate at which North Carolinians volunteer for religious organizations is 7 percentage points higher than that of the nation; 41.7% of North Carolinians who volunteer do so at religious organizations, compared with 34.7% nationally.

When asked how they became a volunteer, nearly half of Americans and North Carolinians responded, "I was asked," which indicates that people are willing to give their time if asked to do so.

GROUP ASSOCIATION AND LEADERSHIP

Community organizations such as religious, neighborhood, school, and sports groups are an important part of North Carolinian's civic infrastructure. These groups provide residents with opportunities to make their communities better places to live, connect with one another, and develop leadership skills that may translate to other aspects of civic participation. Unfortunately, North Carolinians are not participating in community groups at very high rates, ranking 39th nationally with 32.9% of people 18 and older belonging to a community group. Furthermore, 7% of North Carolinians take a leadership role by serving as an officer or on a committee for the groups to which they belong. Nationally, 35.1% of Americans are members of at least one group or organization, and 8.5% are civil society leaders.¹⁹

CONNECTING WITH OTHERS

North Carolina ranks 12th in the rate of people 18 and older who exchange favors with their neighbors, a measure of connecting with others. Seventeen percent of adult residents report exchanging favors a few times a week, compared with the national rate of 16%. Another measure of connecting with others is how often one eats dinner with family. North Carolinians 18 and older are equally as likely as their national counterparts to eat dinner with family; 89% eat dinner with family at least a few times a week.

VOTING

Between 2004 and 2008, North Carolina leapt from ranking 42nd to 15th in the nation in voter turnout. In 2008, 67.5% of citizens 18 and older reported that they voted. This is nearly 4 percentage

points higher than the national average and 6 percentage points higher than North Carolina's 2004 voter turnout. Like other Southern states, turnout in North Carolina has lagged well behind the national averages since the beginning of the Jim Crow era of disenfranchisement and segregation following Reconstruction. In fact, the state's turnout in 2008 was its highest in more than 100 years.²⁰

More than three-quarters of eligible North Carolinians are registered to vote, ranking the state 12th in the nation for voter registration, a substantial increase from the state's ranking of 30th in 2004. In 2008, 75.7% of eligible North Carolinians reported that they were registered to vote, compared with 71% of all Americans. This is a 3 percentage point increase from North Carolina's 2004 registration rate.

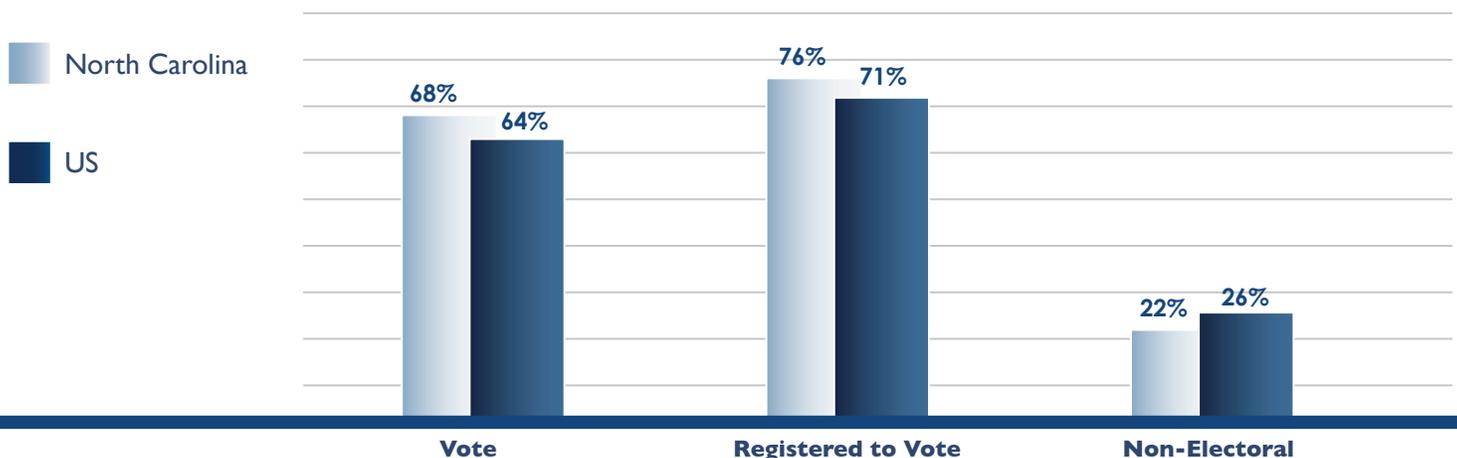
POLITICAL ENGAGEMENT

Although North Carolina ranks high in voting, participation in other political activities, such as attending a public meeting, taking part in a rally, or donating to a candidate, is quite low. Among North Carolinians 18 and older, 22% engage in at least one type of non-electoral political act, ranking North Carolina 44th in the nation. Nationally, 26.3% of Americans 18 and older engage in at least one type of non-electoral political act.

North Carolinians are a less likely than other Americans to talk about politics with friends and family. Among residents 18 and older, 38% report talking about politics with friends and family at least a few times a week. Nationally, 39.3% of Americans 18 and older discuss politics with friends and family a few times a week or more.

POLITICAL PARTICIPATION: ELECTORAL AND NON-ELECTORAL

FIGURE 2: CIRCLE ANALYSIS OF U.S. CENSUS, NOVEMBER VOTING/REGISTRATION SUPPLEMENT 1972-2008 AND U.S. CENSUS CPS SUPPLEMENT



CIVIC ENGAGEMENT INDICATORS: FINDINGS AND COMPARISONS

Civic engagement is more than just voting. It is a broad spectrum of activities that make our communities better places to live. When residents vote in local elections, volunteer to assist those in need, sit on school boards, or even voice their concerns through letters to the editor, they are making our communities better places to live.

The civic engagement of North Carolina, and the United States, can be measured through a broad composite that includes several of the most frequently measured and discussed forms of civic participation. The composite measure, which captures participation in government, public work, and service, serves as a single indicator of a state's civic health.

The chart below provides comparisons between North Carolina and the nation on the five core measures of civic health (marked with asterisk), as well as five other indicators of civic participation:

	LATEST 2008/2009 ESTIMATES FOR THE U.S.	LATEST 2008/2009 ESTIMATES FOR NORTH CAROLINA	NORTH CAROLINA RANKING
Volunteering *	26.8%	23.6%	42nd
Working with neighbors *	10.3%	7.9%	36th
Voting *	63.6%	67.5%	15th
Talk about politics with friends and family *	39.3%	37.9%	37th
Make a contribution over \$25*	50%	50.5%	**
Exchange favor with neighbors	16.2%	17.2%	12th
Voter registration	71%	75.7%	12th
Eat dinner with a member of household almost every day	89.1%	89.1%	30th
Engaged in one or more non-electoral political acts ²¹	26.3%	22.4%	44th
Group membership ²²	35.1%	32.9%	39th

* One of the five core measures of civic health

** A ranking is not available for this indicator

Based on this composite measure of five indicators, North Carolina's civic health is slightly below average. Residents voted in the 2008 election at a rate that exceeded the national average, and North Carolinians contribute money at the same rate as the national average. These civic behaviors are characterized by completing one specific and traditional, task, i.e., going to the polls to vote or writing a check to support a cause. However, North Carolinians lag behind the national average on measures of engagement that might require a more substantial time commitment, i.e., volunteering, working with neighbors to solve a community problem, and expressing political voice.

LOW CIVIC ENGAGEMENT AMONG NORTH CAROLINA'S YOUTH: A SERIOUS CAUSE FOR CONCERN

North Carolina's young people — the future leaders of our state and our communities — are, unfortunately, the least civically engaged of any age group in North Carolina. This is similar to the national trend. The state's Millennial generation, those born after 1981, reported the lowest rates of participation in all five indicators of civic engagement: They are the least likely to have volunteered in the past year; worked with their neighbors to fix a problem in their community; participated in a non-electoral political act, contributed \$25 or more, and, among eligible voters, to have voted in the 2008 election.

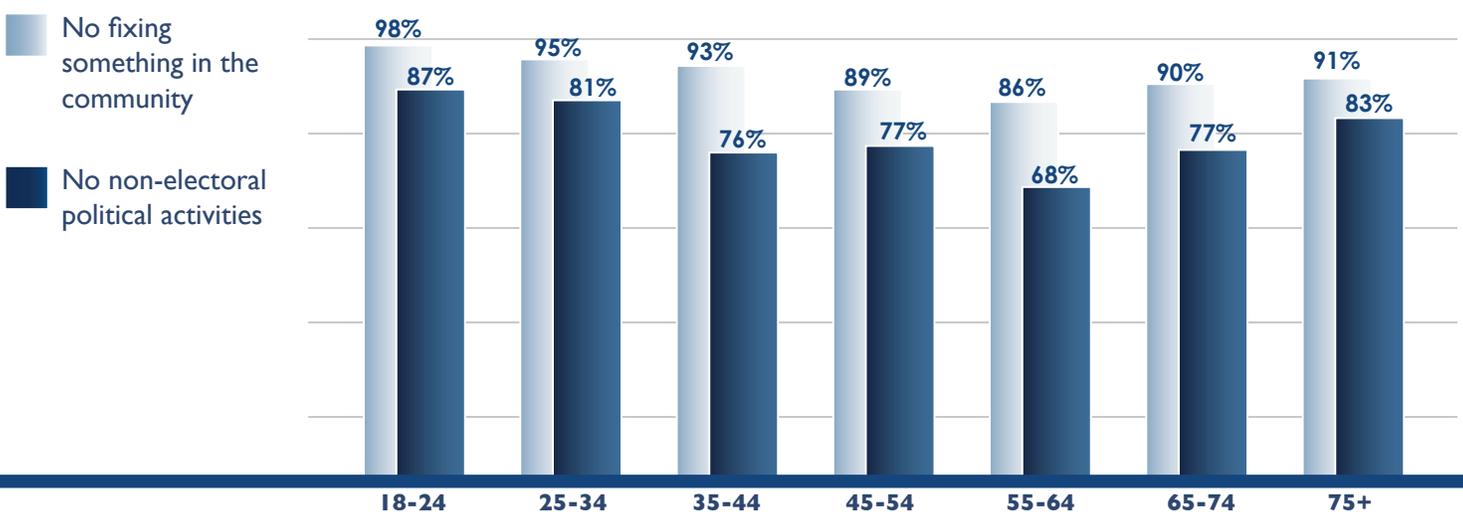


Just 2% of North Carolinians ages 18 to 24 have worked with neighbors to fix a problem in the community; this is 6 percentage points below the state rate. Moreover, in 2008, nearly 90% of young people ages 18 to 24 report that they did not participate in non-electoral political activities during the past year. Such activities include attending a meeting where political issues were discussed, buying or boycotting a product or service, taking part in a march, rally, protest or demonstration, or showing support for a candidate or party by donating.

The civic health of North Carolina lies in the balance. Without improved civic engagement among our state's young people, we risk losing a generation of leaders.

COMMUNITY DISENGAGEMENT

FIGURE 3: CIRCLE ANALYSIS OF U.S. CENSUS CPS DATA



VOTING IS NORTH CAROLINA'S CIVIC STRENGTH. IS IT SUSTAINABLE?

Voting in the 2008 election is the single measure of civic engagement on which North Carolina performs above the national average. It is our state's civic strength: Increases in voter turnout among North Carolinians of all ages, races, and classes illustrate that, when inspired to, our residents can step up and participate in the political process. The question is, will they do it again?

The 2008 Presidential election led to unprecedented voter turnout in North Carolina. For the first time in more than 30 years, North Carolina was considered a "battleground" state, and residents cast their votes in record numbers. There were undoubtedly several factors that lead to the 6 percentage point increase in voter turnout between the 2004 and 2008 elections. Among these factors were contentious elections for president, U.S. Senator and governor, increased opportunities for eligible voters to vote, and presidential candidates who invested substantial resources in the state.

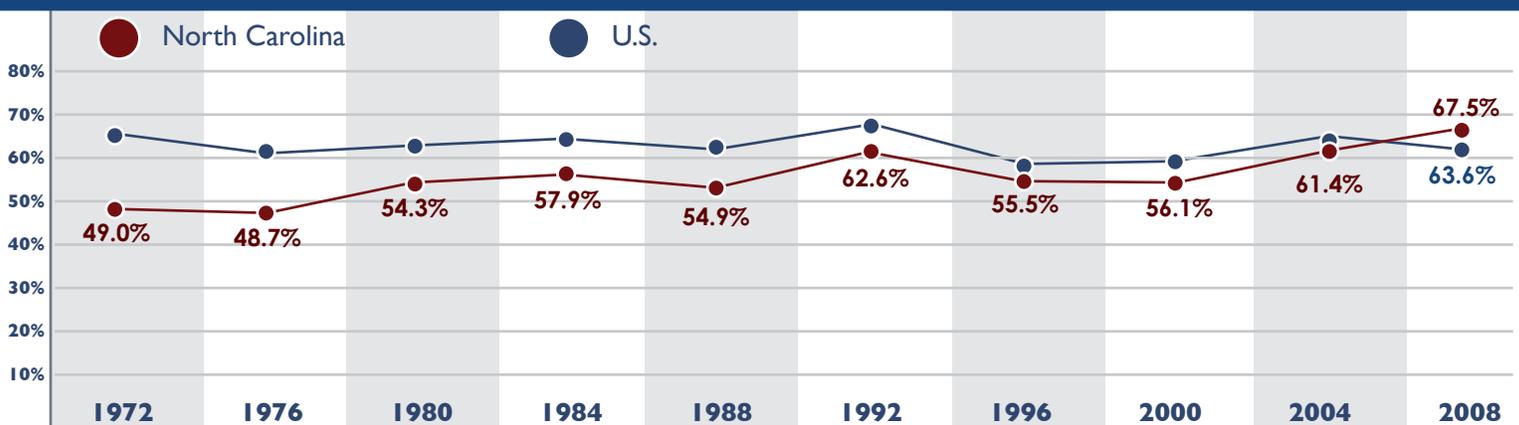


photo by: Gina Childress, Forsyth County

In the past decade, it has become easier for North Carolinians to vote. North Carolina's "one stop early voting" requires all North Carolina counties to open at least one voting location from 19 to three days before Election Day. Early voting and absentee ballots provide residents with more options to cast votes in any election, and residents have seized this opportunity. In 2008, more than half (54.3%) of eligible North Carolinians voted before Election Day, nearly double the national rate of 29.8%. More than 250,000 voters used same-day registration to update or initiate registration.²³

VOTER TURNOUT 1972-2008

FIGURE 4: CIRCLE ANALYSIS OF U.S. CENSUS, NOVEMBER VOTING/REGISTRATION SUPPLEMENT 1972-2008



There are significant differences among the 67.5% of North Carolinians who did report voting in the 2008 election. Residents who have served on active military duty, a large segment of North Carolina's population, were much more likely to vote than their civilian counterparts (79.3% compared with 66%). Our state's wealthiest residents (those living in households with annual incomes at or above \$75,000) were substantially more likely to vote than those living in households with incomes below \$35,000 (82.4% versus 60.4%).

VOTING IN 2008 PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION BY INCOME
FIGURE 5: CIRCLE ANALYSIS OF U.S. CENSUS, NOVEMBER VOTING/REGISTRATION SUPPLEMENT 2008



Mirroring the national trend, North Carolina's youth voter turnout surged in 2008. The state's ranking for youth voter turnout moved from 40th in 2004 to 16th in 2008. Fifty-five percent of eligible North Carolinians ages 18-29 reported voting in the 2008 election. Although this is a 10 percentage point increase between the 2004 and 2008 elections, it still means that 45% of our state's Millennial generation chose not to engage in the 2008 election.

The rise in voter participation seen in the 2008 election may be unsustainable. Voter turnout in the 2009 municipal elections fell back to the low levels of pre-2008 municipal races.²⁴ However, the 2008 election did engage thousands of North Carolinians who may not have otherwise participated in the democratic process. It remains to be seen what will happen in future elections, but the low performance of North Carolina on other measures of civic involvement suggests the state will return to the bottom third of states for voter turnout. North Carolina needs to develop a richer culture of civic engagement that nurtures, and is nurtured by, multiple community-building activities and a deeper sense of social responsibility. A review of indicators of social capital and group membership shows the state has a long way to go.

NORTH CAROLINA'S CIVIL SOCIETY: AN EXCLUSIVE CLUB

Social capital, or the connections that we have with one another, is an essential measure of North Carolina's civic health. We need to feel connected to our communities and the people who live in them to be driven to participate in democracy. A successful democracy hinges on active, engaged citizens participating in civil society.

The strength of North Carolina's civil society can be measured by the number of residents who attend group meetings, formally belong to groups and, to a larger degree, by the number of group participants who also hold offices or committee memberships. By this definition, 33% of North Carolinians have participated in civil society within the past year, compared with 35% of Americans.²⁵ Just 7% of North Carolinians are civil leaders, compared with the national average of 8.5%.

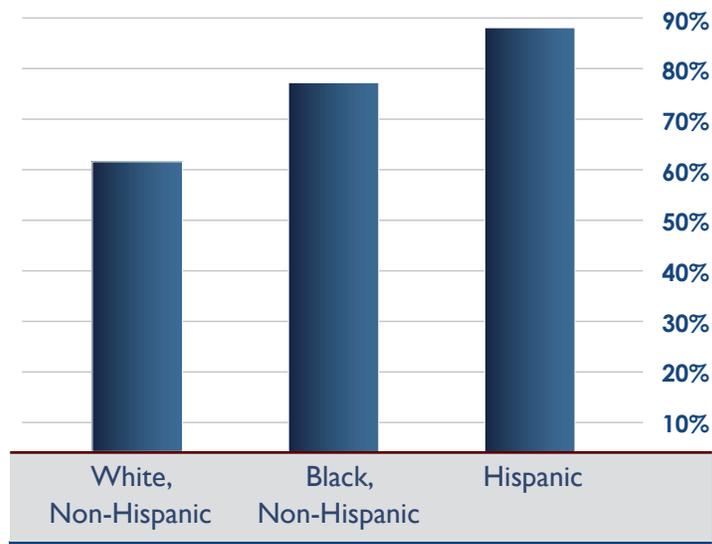
Nationally, greater participation in civil society is highly predictive of other civic behaviors. This makes sense, as formal group memberships and taking leadership roles generally provide people with ample opportunities to serve the community and work with others.



WHO'S PARTICIPATING?

Not only are North Carolinians lagging in group participation, but there is a significant gap in the demographics of residents who are participating in North Carolina's civil society. In keeping with the trend of low youth civic engagement, North Carolina's young people are the least likely to belong to a group or organization (84% are non-participants compared with the state average of 67%). The vast majority of the state's Hispanic residents, a rapidly growing segment of North Carolina's population, is not participating in civil society (88% are non-participants compared with 65.4% of non-Hispanics). African-Americans in North Carolina are less likely than white residents to participate in civil society (76.8% non-participants compared with 61% of whites).

**RESIDENTS NOT PARTICIPATING IN CIVIL SOCIETY
BY RACE/ETHNICITY**
FIGURE 6: CIRCLE ANALYSIS OF U.S. CENSUS CPS DATA



North Carolina's wealthiest individuals, those with annual incomes at or above \$75,000, are the most likely to participate in groups; 59% report group membership. North Carolinians with some college experience are more than twice as likely as those with no college experience to participate in a group (45% compared with 18%).

WHO'S LEADING?

Those who lead our community groups, churches, or governments are also highly engaged in all forms of civic engagement, far above the levels among those who simply participate in civil society. These group leaders are an essential component of North Carolina's social capital not only for the leadership they provide, but also for their broad involvement in civic life. Unfortunately, North Carolina possesses a relatively small leadership base.

The state's small leadership base is characterized by disproportionate representation of certain demographics: College-going and white North Carolinians are more likely to be civil leaders, as are residents

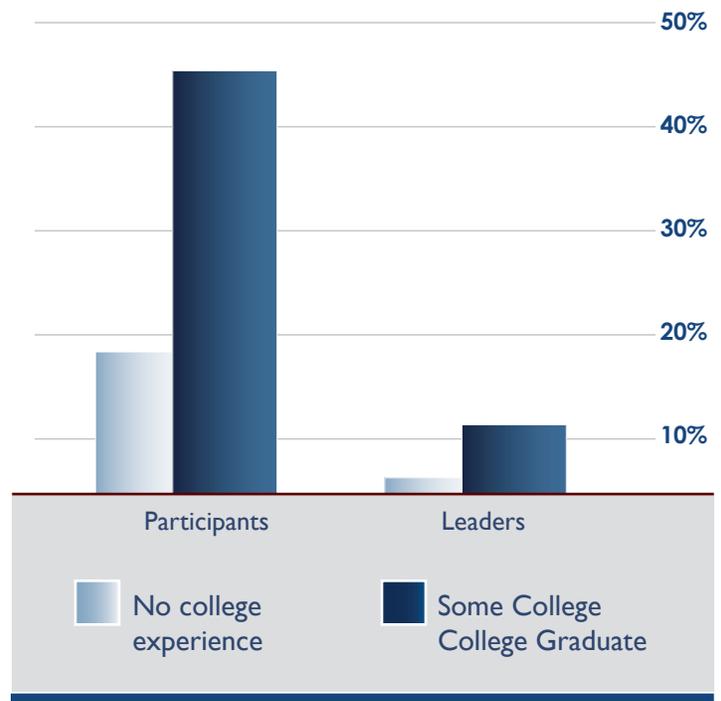
who are involved in religious institutions. In North Carolina, there is an especially strong connection between education and formal group leadership. Residents with college experience are more than five times more likely to be civil leaders than their fellow North Carolinians who never went to college. Only 2.2% of North Carolinians without college experience are civil leaders.

White non-Hispanics are the most likely to be civil leaders in North Carolina; 9.5% serve in leadership positions, compared with the state average of 7%. Metropolitan residents are more likely to be civil leaders than those living in rural areas of the state (8% compared with 4.6%).

North Carolinians who participate religious groups, beyond simply attending religious services, are significantly more likely to be civil society leaders. Among those who belong to a religious group or organization, 33% are leaders; only 4% of those not belonging to a religious group are leaders.

All in all, North Carolina's civil society appears to be supported by a small and homogeneous group of people with college educations. About two-thirds of residents lack any formal group affiliation. North Carolina's civil society must be strengthened and we must cultivate a new generation of diverse leaders who represent the interests of all North Carolinians.

**PARTICIPATION IN CIVIL SOCIETY
COLLEGE VS. NON-COLLEGE
FIGURE 7: CIRCLE ANALYSIS OF U.S. CENSUS CPS DATA**



RURAL, NON-COLLEGE EDUCATED AMONG THE STATE'S MOST "CONNECTED"

Participation in civil society measures North Carolinians' connections to groups and organizations; however, our personal connections are another important measure of social capital. Connections to peers, family, and friends have positive effects on health and well-being and may be pathways to civic and political participation.

Private connections can be measured through activities such as communicating with friends and family, eating dinner with members of one's household, talking to neighbors, and favors exchanged with neighbors. By this measure, 91.2% of Americans and 90.2% of North Carolinians are connected in some way.

Residents who have strong interpersonal connections and exchange favors with neighbors often are North Carolina's most "connected" residents. By that measure, 17% of North Carolinians are "connected" — that is, they have strong interpersonal connections and frequently exchange favors with neighbors. This rate is just slightly higher than the national average of 16%.



photo by: Jeritta Roark

Measuring the "connectedness" of North Carolinians is particularly important because Americans who are less connected are far less likely to vote. Nationally, Americans who are interpersonally connected are also more likely to volunteer. However, in North Carolina, personal connection is unrelated to volunteering.

Unlike the gaps in civil society participation, gaps in connectedness do not fall along traditional socio-economic lines. For instance, nationally, unemployed Americans are slightly more likely to be connected with family and neighbors and to also exchange favors with neighbors (18.7%) than employed Americans (14.2%); this trend is mirrored in North Carolina.

North Carolinians without college experience are notably more likely to have strong personal connections to family and friends and to help their neighbors: 23% do both in North Carolina, compared

with 16.2% nationwide. Rural residents have a higher level of “connectedness” than those living in metropolitan areas. More than 20% of rural residents have strong connections with family and friends and help their neighbors, compared with 15% of those living in metropolitan areas.

The various measures suggest that the informal, personal connections associated with family-based, rural traditions remain strong in the state, but they do not engender a sense of community ownership and responsibility, or “civic power,” that is evident among more urban, educated, and higher-income North Carolinians.

NORTH CAROLINIANS WITH SOME COLLEGE MORE LIKELY TO KEEP UP WITH CURRENT EVENTS

Democratic institutions and healthy communities require informed citizens: People who understand current issues, opportunities for change, and other people’s views and interests. Newspaper reading has a traditionally strong correlation with civic and political participation, and other emerging news sources represent potential assets to democracy and civil society. Discussing politics with friends and family is an opportunity to share and process the information provided by news sources and to exchange knowledge drawn directly from experience. Access to such information and discussion of it are therefore important indicators of North Carolina’s civic health.

North Carolinians who keep up with the news are more likely to volunteer. Those who engage in political discussions with others are more likely to fix something in the community with neighbors, an important measure of civic engagement. Residents who keep up with news, discuss politics with friends and family, or both are more likely to donate money than those who do neither.

North Carolinians are similar to their national counterparts in the way they access news and discuss current and political issues with others. Among North Carolinians, 28% access news frequently and discuss politics with others; 32% do neither. Unfortunately, it is the state’s youngest residents who are most likely to do neither; 44.5% of North Carolina’s Millennials neither access news frequently nor discuss politics with others.

The state’s African-American, white, and Hispanic residents report similar rates of news consumption and discussion of current events. However, there are significant gaps between the state’s low- and high-income residents. Nearly forty percent (37.2%) of North Carolinians living in lower-income households (with an annual income of less than \$35,000) neither access news frequently nor engage in political discussions with others. Conversely, 40% of



photo by: Kewanna Cigales

North Carolina’s wealthiest residents (those living in households with an annual income of \$75,000 or more) do access the news frequently and engage in political discussion with others. Residents living in metropolitan areas are slightly more likely to access the news frequently and engage in political discussion with others (30%) than rural North Carolinians (24%).

There is a very notable gap in access to information between North Carolinians with some college experience and those without. Residents with some college experience are twice as likely to access the news frequently and engage in political discussions with others than those with no college experience (35% versus 18%). Moreover, 41% of North Carolinians with no college experience are relatively unconnected to current events — they neither access the news frequently nor discuss politics with others.

It is through informed participation in North Carolina’s political and community activities that all residents have the opportunity to shape the future of the state. These gaps along economic, geographic, and educational lines are cause for serious concern; if not addressed, they have the potential to perpetuate a cycle of civic apathy.

RECOMMENDATIONS

North Carolina's Civic Health Index provides an opportunity to affirm the state's strengths while also helping identify goals for the future. Every North Carolinian has a responsibility, and the potential, to ensure that our state remains a vibrant and thriving democracy. Individually, we can contribute to our state's civic health by keeping up with **current events** and discussing them with friends and family; casting **informed votes** in all elections; **volunteering time**, whether it be minutes, hours, or days; forming and maintaining **connections with families, friends, and neighbors**; and taking on **leadership roles** in our communities.

In addition to the personal responsibility we each have to contribute to the civic health of North Carolina, key individuals and institutions — policymakers, educators, and community organizations — have additional responsibilities to ensure that North Carolina's residents are equipped with the necessary knowledge, skills, and resources to participate in civic life.

POLICYMAKERS

North Carolina has taken important steps to improve voter participation while ensuring secure elections. Policymakers should **continue to explore creative means of supporting informed participation in all of North Carolina's elections.**

The future leaders of our state are North Carolina's least civically engaged residents. Policymakers can combat this trend by **ensuring that our state's young people are learning about government (federal, state, and local) and civics in the classroom.** Additionally, our state's **teachers deserve the professional development and resources** to teach these subjects effectively.

North Carolina's leadership base is small and does not reflect the diversity of our state. Policymakers can change this trend by **recruiting and mentoring a diverse group of leaders** who represent the varying interests of our state's residents.

K-16 EDUCATORS

Our state's K-12 schools are uniquely poised to prepare North Carolina's next generation of leaders for participation in civic life. Schools can prepare students to be active, responsible citizens by implementing promising approaches outlined in the 2003 Civic Mission of Schools report. These strategies include **teaching**

students how local, state, and national governments work through civics, government, law, and history courses; **simulations of town council meetings or General Assembly sessions; discussions about how current events affect residents** at the local, state, and national levels; providing **opportunities for meaningful student leadership**, and **service-learning** that links students' work outside the classroom to what they are learning from their textbooks.

North Carolina's institutes of higher education can build upon this foundation of civic learning by promoting **service-learning that connects students to the communities** in which they live; offering **leadership development programs that prepare students for leadership at the local, state, and national levels**; and encouraging students to **register to vote and cast informed votes in all elections** through candidate forums and "Get Out the Vote" efforts.

COMMUNITY ORGANIZATIONS

Our state's community organizations are vital to North Carolina's civic health. They provide opportunities for us to volunteer our time, connect with one another, and develop important leadership skills.

Results of the Civic Health Index indicate that volunteerism in North Carolina may increase if residents are simply asked to volunteer. Community organizations can seize this opportunity by **actively recruiting diverse groups of volunteers.** Through meaningful opportunities for service, residents realize their ability to make a difference and become more involved in all areas of the democratic society.

Working individually or in collaboration, these organizations also provide important opportunities for residents to develop and hone their leadership skills. Through **leadership programs such as those often offered by local chambers of commerce and local governments**, youth and adults can become equipped with knowledge and skills to make them better local leaders. Community organizations can help diversify our state's leadership base by **recruiting others than the "usual suspects" for advisory boards and commissions.**

ENDNOTES

- ¹ U.S. Census Bureau
- ² American Community Survey, 2006-2008 estimate
- ³ The State of the South 2010, Chapter 1: Beyond the 'Gilded Age.' MDC Inc.
- ⁴ "Who Moves? Who Stays Put? Where's Home?" Pew Research Center: December 17, 2008.
- ⁵ American Community Survey, 2006-2008 estimate
- ⁶ American Community Survey, 2006-2008; Census 2000; and Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2010
- ⁷ Democracy North Carolina "Study Shows Voters in North Carolina are More Independent, Urban and Non-White. Revised for Release Monday, January 25, 2010
(<http://www.democracy-nc.org/downloads/ChangingVotersPopCensusMissing2010.pdf>)
- ⁸ Democracy North Carolina "Study Shows Voters in North Carolina are More Independent, Urban and Non-White. Revised for Release Monday, January 25, 2010
(<http://www.democracy-nc.org/downloads/ChangingVotersPopCensusMissing2010.pdf>)
- ⁹ <http://www.ncleg.net/gascripts/BillLookUp/BillLookUp.pl?Session=2009&BillID=h+908>
- ¹⁰ 2007-2009 average, <http://www.volunteeringinamerica.gov/>
- ¹¹ <http://www.volunteernc.org/aboutUs/infoAboutComm.aspx>
- ¹² North Carolina State Service Plan 2010-2013: <http://www.volunteernc.org/library/pdfs/Publications/SSP%202010.pdf>
- ¹³ <http://www.ncpublicschools.org/curriculum/socialstudies/scos/2003-04/027thirdgrade>
- ¹⁴ <http://www.ncpublicschools.org/curriculum/socialstudies/scos/2003-04/062tenthgrade>
- ¹⁵ <http://www.ncpublicschools.org/servicelearning/>
- ¹⁶ www.ncpublicschools.org/servicelearningamerica
- ¹⁷ <http://www.volunteeringinamerica.gov/factors.cfm?state=NC>
- ¹⁸ [VolunteeringinAmerica.gov http://www.volunteeringinamerica.gov/factors.cfm?state=NC](http://www.volunteeringinamerica.gov/factors.cfm?state=NC)
- ¹⁹ For the purposes of this report, a 'civil society leader' is defined as someone who reported that they belong to at least one organization/group and/or attended a meeting of any group organization AND has been an officer or served on a committee of any group or organization in the last twelve months.
- ²⁰ Democracy North Carolina, 2008 Recap: Same-Day Registration & Other Successes, December 26, 2008, updated March 19, 2009
(<http://www.democracy-nc.org/downloads/WrapUpYearofVoterPR2008.pdf>)
- ²¹ Possible options include: attending a meeting where political issues were discussed, buying or boycotting a product or service, taking part in a march, rally, protest or demonstration, or showing support for candidate or party by donating.
- ²² The percentage point estimate refers to the portion of people who said they belong to any groups presented (religious, school, neighborhood, or sports/recreation)
- ²³ Democracy North Carolina, 2008 Recap: Same-Day Registration & Other Successes, December 26, 2008, updated March 19, 2009
(<http://www.democracy-nc.org/downloads/WrapUpYearofVoterPR2008.pdf>)
- ²⁴ North Carolina State Board of Elections statistics analyzed by Democracy North Carolina, February 2010.
- ²⁵ We define group participants as those who belong to at least one group or attend a meeting at least once per month. The calculation of group participants includes both those who have participated in a group and those who classify themselves as civil leaders. Group participation includes belonging to a school group: neighborhood or community association; sports or recreation association; church, synagogue, mosque, or religious institution; any other type of organization; or a service or civic association.



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Founded in 1946 and federally chartered by the U.S. Congress in 1953, the National Conference on Citizenship (NCoC) is a leader in advancing our nation's civic life. We track, measure and promote civic participation and engagement in partnership with other organizations on a bipartisan, collaborative basis. We focus on ways to enhance history and civics education, encourage national and community service, and promote greater participation in the political process.

Many distinguished Americans have been involved with the growth and development of NCoC over the years including Presidents Harry S. Truman and Dwight D. Eisenhower and Chief Justices Earl Warren and Warren Burger. The roster of board members, advisors and guest speakers at NCoC events represent a diverse spectrum of leaders from across government, industry, academia, community and nonprofit organizations and the media, including Senators Robert Byrd and Lamar Alexander, Justices Sandra Day O'Connor, Stephen Breyer, Anthony Kennedy, Ruth Bader Ginsburg, and Antonin Scalia, philanthropists Ray Chambers and Eugene Lang, authors David McCullough and Walter Isaacson, scholars Robert Putnam and Stephen Goldsmith, TIME Magazine's Richard Stengel, MTV's Ian Rowe, ABC's Cokie Roberts, actor Stephen Lang, AOL's Jean Case, Facebook's Sean Parker, former Clinton Administration advisor William Galston and former Bush Administration advisor John Bridgeland.

NCoC's accomplishments are many, ranging from fueling the civic energy of the Greatest Generation freshly home from WWII to helping lead the celebration of our nation's Bicentennial in 1976. NCoC helped establish the observance of Constitution Day, each September 17, and our charter mandates we hold our annual conference close to this date with a focus on building a more active and engaged citizenry.

Since 2006, NCoC has produced America's Civic Health Index, the nation's leading measure of citizen actions and attitudes. In April 2009, NCoC was included in the Edward M. Kennedy Serve America Act. To help our communities harness the power of their citizens, the Corporation for National and Community Service and the U.S. Census Bureau were directed to work with NCoC to expand the reach and impact of these metrics through an annual Civic Health Assessment.

To advance our mission, better understand the broad dimensions of modern citizenship, and to encourage greater civic participation, NCoC has developed and sustained a network of over 250 like-minded institutions that seek a more collaborative approach to strengthening our system of self-government.

For more information, please visit www.ncoc.net

2010 America's Civic Health Assessment

Civic Life in America: Key Findings on the Civic Health of the Nation

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CIVIC INDICATORS WORKING GROUP

JOHN BRIDGELAND, CEO, Civic Enterprises; Chairman, Board of Advisors, National Conference on Citizenship; and former Assistant to the President of the United States & Director, Domestic Policy Council & USA Freedom Corps

NELDA BROWN, Executive Director, National Service-Learning Partnership at the Academy for Educational Development

KRISTEN CABELL, Director of Programs and New Media, National Conference on Citizenship

DAVID EISNER, President and CEO, National Constitution Center

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WILLIAM GALSTON, Senior Fellow, Brookings Institution; former Deputy Assistant to the President of the United States for Domestic Policy

STEPHEN GOLDSMITH, Deputy Mayor of New York City, Daniel Paul Professor of Government, Kennedy School of Government at Harvard University; Director, Innovations in American Government; and former Mayor of Indianapolis

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LLOYD JOHNSTON, Research Professor and Distinguished Research Scientist at the University of Michigan's Institute for Social Research; and Principal Investigator of the Monitoring the Future Study

KEI KAWASHIMA-GINSBERG, Lead Researcher, Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement (CIRCLE) at the Jonathan M. Tisch College of Citizenship and Public Service at Tufts University

PETER LEVINE, Director, Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement (CIRCLE) at the Jonathan M. Tisch College of Citizenship and Public Service at Tufts University

MARK HUGO LOPEZ, Associate Director of the Pew Hispanic Center; Research Professor, University of Maryland's School of Public Affairs

SEAN PARKER, Co-Founder and Chairman of Causes on Facebook/MySpace; Founding President of Facebook

KENNETH PREWITT, Director of the United States Census Bureau; Carnegie Professor of Public Affairs and the Vice-President for Global Centers at Columbia University,

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THOMAS SANDER, Executive Director, the Saguaro Seminar, Harvard University

DAVID B. SMITH, Executive Director, National Conference on Citizenship; Founder, Mobilize.org

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MAX STIER, Executive Director, Partnership for Public Service

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JONATHAN ZAFF, Vice President for Research, America's Promise Alliance

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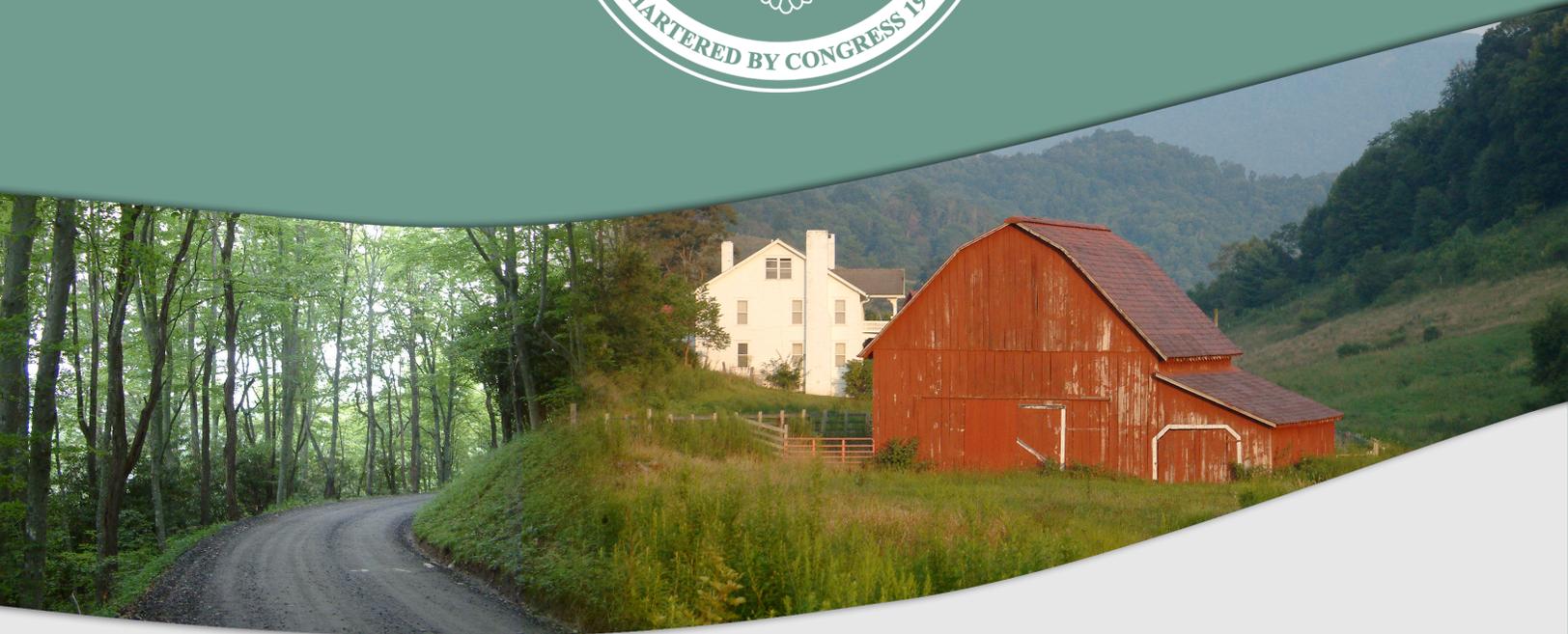
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