



OKLAHOMA CIVIC HEALTH INDEX

2010



*Strategies for Strengthening
Oklahoma's Civic Energy*



Oklahoma | Campus Compact

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INTRODUCTION

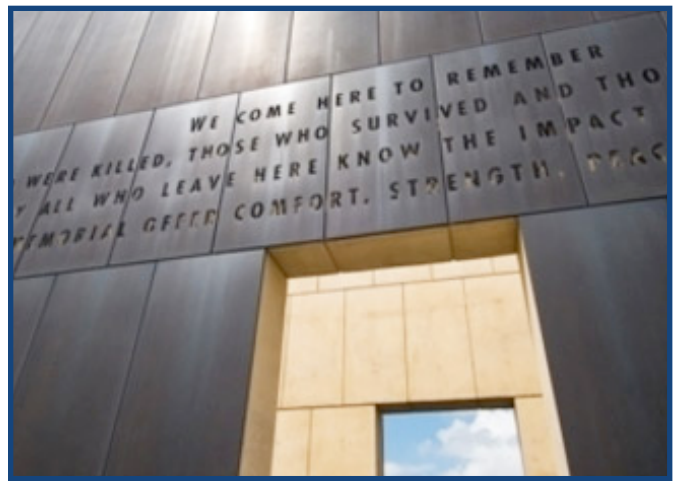
OUR STORY

The story of Oklahoma is a fascinating testament to the importance of civic engagement in shaping a state. It is the story of land runs and the Trail of Tears, of quaint rural towns and vibrant urban centers, of short-term economic booms and long-term economic busts, of 20th Century oil and 21st Century clean energy. It is the story of the populism of Woody Guthrie and the pop culture influence of Garth Brooks. It is the story of the horrors from tornados, dust storms, and terrorism, and also of the rejuvenating powers of faith, hope, and perseverance. It is the story of old and new, of how Oklahoma is perceived outside the state versus our reality as Oklahoma citizens.

To many outsiders, “Oklahoma” suggests images of the Old West, but we know the name from the Choctaw language meaning Red People. Yet, at just 103 years old, Oklahoma is one of the youngest and most dynamic states in the union. While many might perceive Oklahoma to be the land of the southern plains, Oklahoma has more than 1400 square miles of surface water in its lakes and ponds (larger than the state of Rhode Island). While some still think that surreys with a fringe on top remain the ideal way to move from place to place, in Oklahoma today people ride horses for fun, not transportation; and the only covered wagon most people see runs on Owen Field to celebrate Sooner touchdowns.

While in Oklahoma you can still watch a hawk making lazy circles in the sky, Oklahoma is also a state where three-fifths of its population (total population exceeds 3.6 million people) lives in one of its two vibrant, urban areas, Tulsa and Oklahoma City. While Oklahomans still possess the strong individualistic spirit that characterized its founding, it is also the seventh most religious state in the nation. And while Oklahoma still lies in the heart of “tornado alley,” the Thunder most Oklahomans talk about these days is rolling through the NBA.

This new Oklahoma did not arise magically one day on the southern plains. Instead, it took a decades-long, concerted effort on the part of civic leaders and citizens to reshape our land, our economy, and our future. It took the efforts of government to dam up the rivers flowing through this land to create the numerous man-made lakes. It took the efforts of business leaders to diversify our economy beyond agriculture and oil. It took the efforts of civic leaders to enhance the quality of life and to attract a major league sports franchise.



It is clear that Oklahomans have worked together in the past to build a better state. This report—the *Oklahoma Civic Health Index*—provides important details on the current state of Oklahoma’s civic health and shows the willingness of Oklahomans to work together and solve today’s most pressing problems.

The pages that follow will highlight some areas where Oklahoma’s civic health falls short—areas where Oklahoma needs to improve if we are going to continue moving forward. But this report also will detail some incredible successes, examples of how each day Oklahomans are working together to improve their communities, to boost their economy, and to enhance their quality of life. In other words, the century-old sooner spirit of civic engagement, civic pride, and civic energy continues to lift Oklahoma higher.

This is Oklahoma ... and this is our story.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Civic engagement is a broad term and includes a spectrum of examples ranging from volunteerism and community service on one side to public policy and politics on the other. Democracy requires us to work collaboratively to solve problems. In a democracy, we have a responsibility to register to vote, to stay informed on civic issues and current events, and volunteer. The civic skills we develop and nurture in K-12 such as citizenship awards, recycling, and mock elections, should continue and be reinforced in higher education. Examples include practicing good stewardship, voting, and working together to solve community challenges. Civic responsibility should be practiced and strengthened in our daily lives as we renew our commitment to community and in our journey of lifelong learning.

CATEGORIES OF CIVIC HEALTH

The *Oklahoma Civic Health Index* measures the civic habits of our citizens across a wide range of indicators in an effort to strengthen citizen participation in our communities, state, and nation. Below is the executive summary of the leading findings from the 2010 *Oklahoma Civic Health Index*, based on research conducted by the U.S. Census Bureau and the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics from 2008 and 2009. We present the civic health of Oklahoma by looking at five key indicators in national context: volunteering and service, political action, social connection, belonging to a group, and working with neighbors. While each indicator represents an important aspect of civic health in Oklahoma, no one indicator should be treated as the sole representation of the state's civic health.

FIVE KEY FINDINGS

1. Oklahomans invest in family connections and private sociability.

In connecting with members of their household, **92.3% of Oklahomans report that they eat dinner with their family at least a few times per week.** It is very clear that Oklahomans value family mealtime and have a desire for sociability and maintaining family connections. Volunteers and non-volunteers alike eat dinner with family at least once a week.

2. In Oklahoma, social actions such as working with neighbors to solve community issues help strengthen communities.

In these challenging economic times, Oklahomans value the relationship with their neighbors. These kinds of social actions help strengthen communities across the state. **Oklahoma ranks 20th nationwide in the number of people age 18 and older who exchange favors with neighbors a few times a week.**



3. Civic responsibility is an important tool in a democracy

Although voting is an important democratic tool, successful civic engagement requires more than just voting. Citizens need to be active in their communities, discussing politics, accessing civic information, and engaging in multiple forms of political activity. Oklahoma seems to be “in the middle of the pack” compared to most states. For example, **Oklahoma ranks 31st in the rate of people 18 and older who talk about politics with friends and family at least a few times a week.** In Oklahoma, those who have low access to information and do not discuss politics or current events with others are far less likely to vote than their peers who are more well-connected to information. Those with access to information in Oklahoma were also far more likely to volunteer than others. Moreover, Oklahomans who engaged in political discussions with others are also more likely to fix something in the community with neighbors.

4. Oklahomans with more education tend to be more civically engaged.

Education makes a big difference in how Oklahomans participate in politics: **53.4% of college graduates 25 and older were likely to have performed any non-electoral acts, but only 18.9% of those with a high school degree did so.** Those who assume leadership roles in community groups are highly involved in all other forms of civic engagement, but make up just 8.5% of our total population. In Oklahoma, keeping up with news and engaging in political discussions are related to higher rates of voting.

Membership in religious, neighborhood, school, or sports groups is an important indicator of civic health. Oklahoma ranks 32nd in the nation. In addition, Oklahoma surpasses the national average in the number of people who take a leadership role in an

organization by serving as an officer or serving on a committee. Religious-and faith-based organizations have long been a catalyst for civic participation in Oklahoma, with Oklahoma ranking 7th in the importance of religion and participation in worship, according to The Pew Forum (2009).

5. Oklahomans continue to increase their commitment to volunteering and service.

Oklahoma ranks 19th in the nation for volunteering among residents ages 16 and older in 2009. An estimated average of 824,000 Oklahoma residents volunteered between 2007 and 2009. Nationally, Oklahoma has a strong spirit of service as it ranks 5th in the nation for volunteering. Volunteers in Oklahoma are also more likely to use social media to communicate with family and friends.

THE CHALLENGE

The *Oklahoma Civic Health Index* invites each Oklahoman to think creatively and work together to propose ways we can renew the civic health of our communities and our state. As a state, we tend to connect on the family level, so how can we strengthen state and community ties?

DEFINING CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

What is civic engagement? Civic engagement, according to Thomas Ehrlich in *Civic Responsibility and Higher Education*, “means working to make a difference in the civic life of our communities and developing the combination of knowledge, skills, values and motivation to make that difference. It means promoting the quality of life in a community, through both political and non-political processes.”¹ This definition thus includes several components. First, it recognizes that civic engagement is about communities and their civic life. This definition ties directly into Robert Putnam’s idea of social capital, or the benefit that accrues from people being with other people. Putnam recognized that social capital, just like physical capital (buildings and equipment) can influence the productivity of groups and individuals. Second, this definition also recognizes that civically engaged individuals have many attributes: They have “knowledge, skills, values, and motivation” they can use to help their communities. Civic engagement not only includes a wide range of activities, but it also is expected that citizens will move back and forth between these activities, emphasizing some over others and some not at all.²

These civic engagement activities bring many benefits to society. For individuals, civic engagement can lead to personal enrichment and promote a strong sense of social trust. It can also encourage personal happiness and provide a strong sense of personal, political, and social empowerment, thus improving the quality of life. For the community, civic engagement can create higher social capital levels which can foster a sense of community. Higher social capital levels also can lead to better health, higher education levels, and lower crime levels. Moreover, with such high community involvement, there can often be less conflict, and thus a greater consensus on policy priorities because of more involvement in the discourse. At a macro-level, higher civic engagement levels have been shown to promote economic stability, to discourage famine and societal destruction, and to strengthen state capacities.

It is important to recognize that there are some barriers to full civic engagement. For example, other responsibilities of citizens, such as job, work, and family, can take time away from civic involvement. People who work full-time and/or have long commutes may have less time to volunteer and participate than those who are working part-time or working closer to home. Thus, successful civic engagement has a strong economic component; it may be hard for citizens to be civically engaged when they are worried about shelter and getting food on the table. Second, civic attitudes are also important to the success of civic engagement. Citizens may believe their contribution may not make a difference, and therefore, they may be less willing to participate in the community. They may not have the confidence to participate or may feel that they are disconnected from society. Third, civic engagement can be weakened when there are large numbers of transitory citizens, as it takes longer for citizens to get connected when they are moving more often. Fourth, the type of population can have an effect on the level of civic engagement. Lower educational attainment and religious attendance levels typically lead to lower civic engagement. Civic engagement is also more difficult when there are strong social stratification and community cleavages along income, religious, and racial lines. Similarly, civic engagement can be easier when the citizens are healthy and have fewer medical issues. Finally, structural elements in a society and/or government can impact civic engagement. If a society imposes barriers to political participation, such as making it harder to get registered to vote, then civic engagement levels will be lower.

Civic engagement might not always lead to a positive outcome. For example, while civic engagement encourages extensive participation in citizens by community groups, not all community groups may be helpful to society. Civic engagement also requires a substantial investment upon the part of the individual, the community, and even society as a whole.

One can see civic engagement in Oklahoma by looking at the civic energy of this spirited state. A diverse population makes the state differ in landscape and in activity as onlookers pass through. In the state's capitol, Oklahoma City, urban development has been greatly increasing in recent years. Bricktown has been a work in progress over the last decade and is now a "must see" tourist destination and a local hangout for those who live nearby. With the gain of an official (NBA) basketball team, the *Oklahoma City Thunder*, Bricktown has quickly become the place to be on the weekends. It has a wide selection of restaurants, a 16-screen movie theatre, and a new bowling lounge. In Bricktown, you can also find the stadium for the *OKC Redhawks*, the city's minor league baseball team. Oklahoma City is also gaining a (AHL) hockey team, the *OKC Barons*, who have replaced the longstanding *Blazers*. Tulsa now has a (WNBA) women's basketball team, the *Tulsa Shock*, enabling the city to make recent headlines as well. Tulsa is a growing city that provides many jobs and opportunities for citizens, as well as a vibrant downtown area with attractions that interest tourists and locals alike. In other notable cities, military bases keep the communities up and running. Lawton, Enid, and Midwest City all serve as grounds for large military bases that bring many soldiers into the state. Oklahoma is



also known for having numerous small towns. There are many rural communities which continue to thrive off of high school sports, church activities, and morning gatherings at the local cafes. Oklahoma has a large Native American population and the Indian Fair is held every year in the "Indian Capitol of the Nation" in Anadarko. Every August, Native Americans from across the country gather for parades, powwows, and a week-long festival to proudly showcase their culture to visitors. No longer is Oklahoma a bland state with few attractions. It is quickly becoming a hot spot for travelers across the Midwest.

SUMMARY: OKLAHOMA RANKINGS

INDICATOR

2008/2009 OKLAHOMA

RANKING

Voter registration	70.1%	36th
Voter turnout	58.8%	45th
Discuss politics frequently with family and friends	39.1%	31st
Participate in non-voting political activities	28.6%	23rd
Eat dinner with family or household at least a few times a week	92.3%	5th
Exchange favors with neighbors	16.9%	20th
Belong to group or organization that meets regularly	35.8%	32nd
Work with neighbors to fix a community problem	7.5%	40th
Volunteered in 2009	31.4%	19th
Made contribution of \$25 or more (2009 18 and older)	54.9%	23rd

HOW OKLAHOMA COMPARES TO THE NATION: 2010 CIVIC HEALTH INDICATORS

ACTIONS THAT INFLUENCE GOVERNMENT

VOTER REGISTRATION, TURNOUT AND FULFILLMENT RATES (2008)

	NATIONAL	OKLAHOMA
Voter registration	71.0%	70.1%
Voter turnout	63.6%	58.8%
Voter turnout for 18-to-29 year olds	51.1%	47.6%
Voter fulfillment rate	89.6%	83.8%

EXPRESS POLITICAL VOICE IN OTHER WAYS

Discuss politics frequently with family/friends	39.3%	39.1%
Participate in non-voting political activities	26.3%	26.8%
<i>Political activities include:</i>		
Contacted or visited a public official	10.9%	14.3%
Attended a meeting where political issues were discussed	10.1%	11.6%
Bought or boycotted a product or service	10.1%	10.9%
Took part in a political march, rally, protest, or demonstration	3.1%	2.3%
Gave time or money to a candidate or party	14.6%	15.6%

FOLLOW THE NEWS AND STAY INFORMED

Follow news several times a week or more:

Read newspaper (print, Internet)	67.5%	70.2%
Read newsmagazine (print, Internet)	16.8%	13.8%
Watch news (TV, Internet)	86.0%	87.4%
Listen to news (radio, Internet radio)	54.5%	52.1%
Get news from blogs, chat rooms or independent news	19.7%	21.1%

ACTIONS THAT BUILD COMMUNITY

MAINTAIN CLOSE TIES TO FAMILY, FRIENDS, AND NEIGHBORS

Eat dinner with family or household almost every day	89.1%	92.3%
Talk with family and friends via email or on the Internet	53.6%	50.3%
Talk with neighbors several times a week or more	45.8%	41.7%
Exchange favors with neighbors	16.0%	16.9%

PARTICIPATE IN AND PROVIDE LEADERSHIP TO ORGANIZATIONS

Attended meeting of any group or organization	21.5%	22.1%
Belong to group or organization that meets regularly	35.1%	35.8%
Served as officer or committee member in last 12 months	10.1%	11.2%
Worked with neighbors to fix a community problem	8.8%	7.5%

GIVE TIME AND MONEY TO CAUSES AND HELPING OTHERS

Volunteered in 2009	26.8%	31.4%
Made contributions of \$25 or more	50.0%	54.9%

OKLAHOMA'S CIVIC ENERGY

RANKINGS AND PERCENTAGE ESTIMATES FOR MAJOR CIVIC INDICATORS

In this section, we present the civic health of Oklahoma by looking at five key indicators in national context: service, participating in a group, connecting to information and current events, social connectedness, and political action. While each indicator represents an important aspect of civic health in Oklahoma, no one indicator should be treated as the sole representation of the state's civic health.

VOLUNTEERING AND SERVICE

In examining the national results, we maintain that people engaged in volunteering and service tend to be more socially connected citizens. Volunteers in Oklahoma are more likely to use email or the Internet to communicate with family and friends (65.9% for volunteers and 46.7% for non-volunteers). Volunteers are more likely to talk to neighbors at least once a week (55.4% for volunteers and 45.3% for non-volunteers). Volunteers and non-volunteers alike eat dinner with family at least once a week (93.6% for volunteers and 89.8% for non-volunteers).

Oklahoma ranks 19th in the nation for volunteering among residents ages 16 and older in 2009, with a volunteering rate of 31.4%. Nationally, 26.8% of Americans report volunteering at least



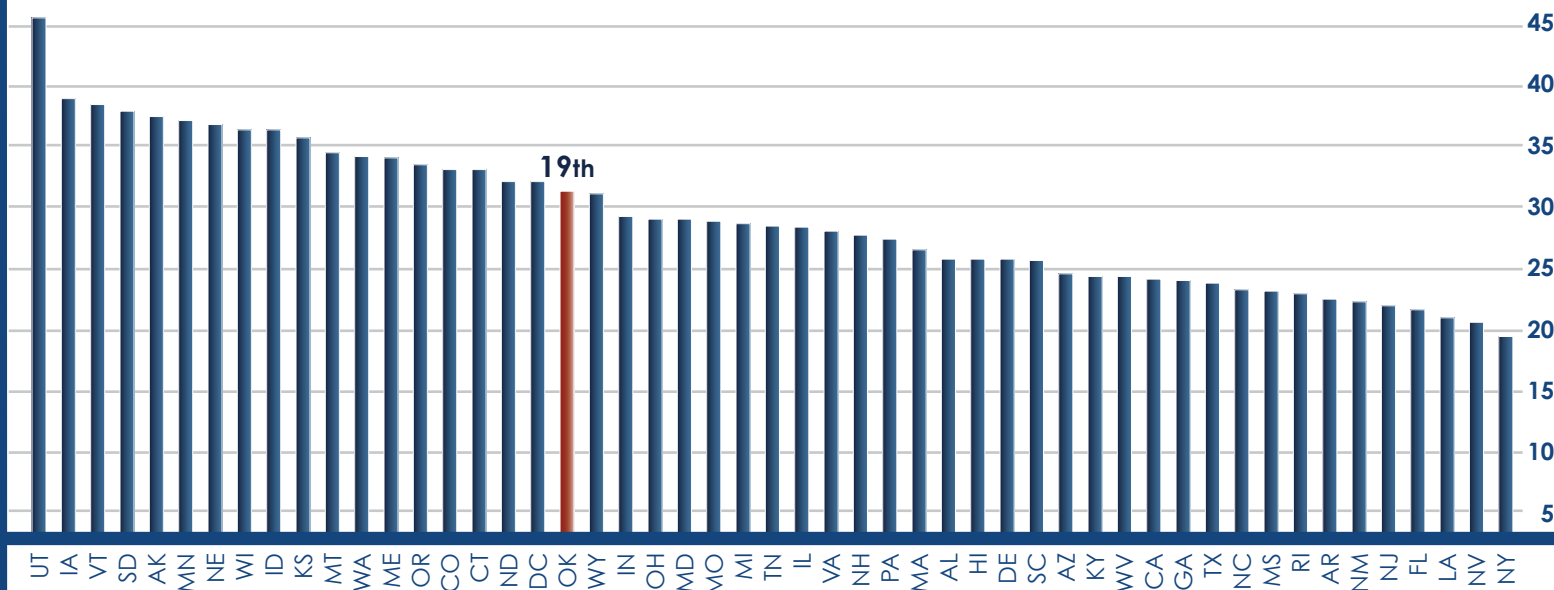
once in the past 12 months. According to VolunteeringinAmerica.gov, an estimated average of 824,000 residents volunteered in Oklahoma between 2007 and 2009. Oklahoma's volunteering rate has increased by three percentage points since 2008. In Oklahoma City, 356,000 adults volunteered with an organization (33.9%), ranking the city 5th among the 51 largest metropolitan areas.

Oklahoma ranks 40th in working with neighbors to solve community problems in 2009, with the rate of 7.5%. Nationwide, 9% of Americans ages 16 and older report working with neighbors to improve the community in the past 12 months. Nationally, there has been an increase in the rate of people working with neighbors.³ The data from Oklahoma suggest that the rates of people who work with their neighbors have been generally stable.

VOLUNTEERING

2009 NATIONAL AVERAGE - 26.8%

OKLAHOMA - 31.4%



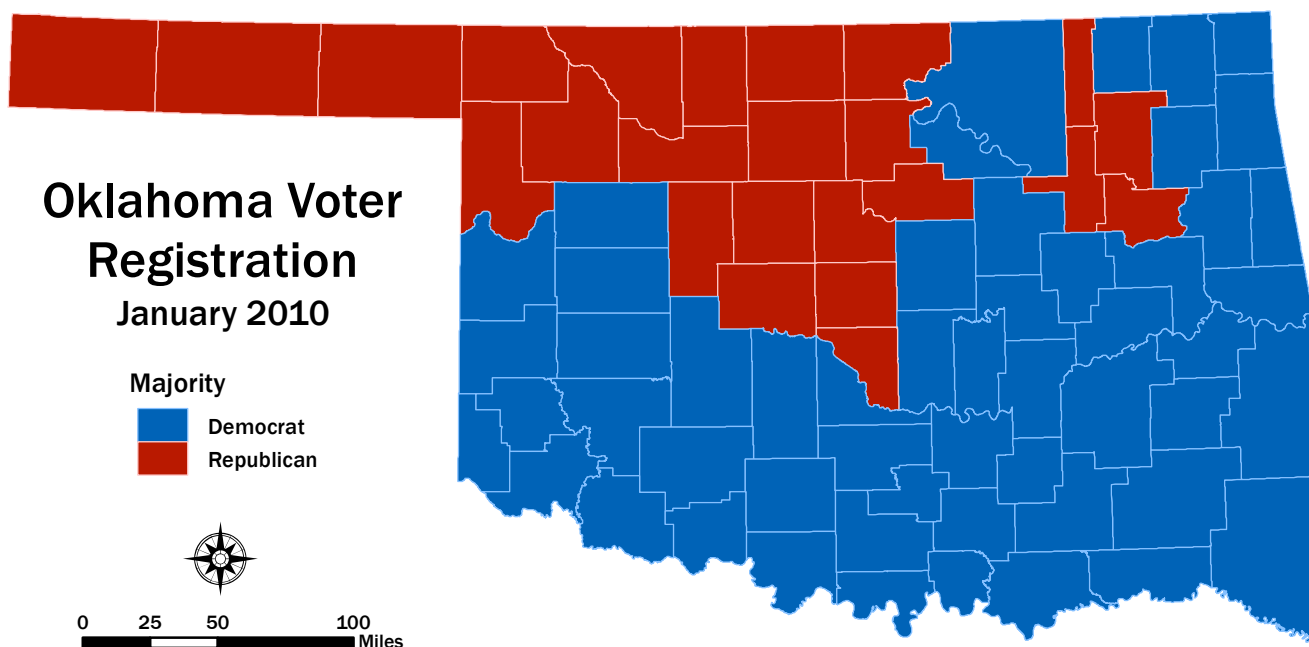
POLITICS: VOTING AND REGISTRATION, POLITICAL INVOLVEMENT, AND CIVIC TRUST

GEOGRAPHIC PATTERNS OF REGISTRATION

In order to vote in Oklahoma, one must register with a political party, as an independent, or list "no party." According to registration figures available from the Oklahoma Election Board, the percentage of Democratic registrants has decreased, while the percentages of Republican and independent registrants have increased. As of January 15, 2010, 999,855 (49.0%) voters were registered as Democrats, compared with 1,045,490 (50.4%) in 2007. The

Republicans, meanwhile, increased from 805,607 (39.9%) voters in 2007 to 813,158 (39.8%) in 2010 (Oklahoma Election Board, 2007 and 2010). There has been a slight increase in the number of independents with 225,067 voters declaring themselves to be independents in 2010 (or 11.1%) compared with 224,464 (10.8%) independents in 2007.

In looking at voter registration annually since 1960, more Oklahomans have registered as Democrats than as Republicans.⁴ Thus, it is not surprising that a large percentage of counties are majority Democrat as well. But here there has been a major change since January 2004. In January 2004, all but eight of Oklahoma's 77 counties



Prepared by Brad Watkins, Ph.D.
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were majority Democrat. These eight Republican counties were mostly in the northwestern part of the state, with the exception of Tulsa and Washington counties in the northeast. Counties in the southeast were particularly Democratic, with Choctaw, McCurtain, and Pushmataha having less than 6% Republican registered voters. In 2007 and 2010, however, registered Republicans increased significantly in the number of majority Republican counties—21 in 2007 and 24 in 2010.⁵ The Republicans now have an electoral majority in the Panhandle counties, the other northwestern counties, the highly populated center of the state (Oklahoma, Cleveland, Canadian, Logan, and Noble), and several counties near and including Tulsa. Democrats, on the other hand, hold an electoral majority in the northeastern counties, all the southern counties, and all the southeastern counties.

VOTER REGISTRATION IN RECENT ELECTIONS

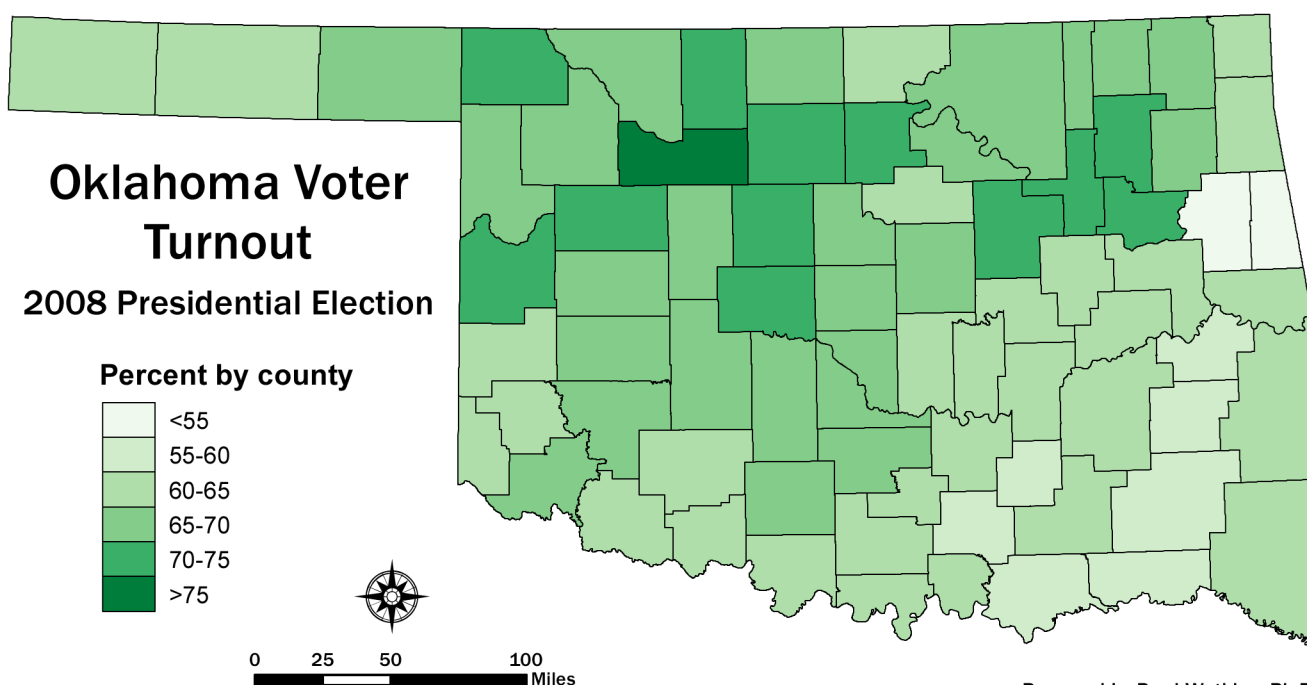
Voter registration can be done at tag agencies or in local government offices. Oklahoma also allows registration by mail for all voters. The closing date for registration before an election is 24 days. One must be a resident of the county where one is registered to vote for at least 30 days. According to the Unofficial DMV Guide website, Oklahoma has what is known as a “closed primary system,” which means that only Democrats can vote in Democratic primaries and only Republicans can vote in Republican primaries. Voters registered as independent must have authorization from the party before voting in primary elections. Of course, all voters may vote on nonpartisan issues including judicial nominations and all county and state questions.

In the November 2008 elections, Oklahoma ranked 36th nationally in voter registration rates, with 70.1% of voters registered, compared to 71.0% nationally. This was a decrease of 2% compared to the 2004 Presidential Elections.⁶

VOTER TURNOUT IN RECENT ELECTIONS

One of the measures of political participation is voting turnout. It is measured by the percentage of eligible voters that actually turnout at the polls. Voting turnout in Oklahoma has been slightly higher than the national average with 57.5% for the ten presidential elections between 1960 and 1996. The national average for that same time period was 55.3%. In recent presidential elections, Oklahoma's turnout has been both higher and lower than the national average. In 2000, for example, Oklahoma's turnout rate of 55.3%, which was higher than the national turnout rate of 51.2%. In 2004, Oklahomans set a voting record when 1,463,875 voters cast ballots, the most voters ever.⁷ In November 2008, when Oklahomans ranked #1 in terms of the percentage of voters voting for John McCain, Oklahoma ranked 45th in turnout at 58.8%, compared to the national average of 63.6%. Overall for the 2004-2008 elections, Oklahoma ranked 42nd, with a voter turnout rate of 60.5%.⁸

As reported by Nathan Elliot on *News 9*, a record number of Republican voters turned out for Oklahoma's primary elections in 2010, according to data compiled by American University's Center for the Study of the American Electorate.⁹ On the other hand, a record low number of Oklahoma Democrats came to the polls in the July and August 2010 races. In the November 2010 elections, Oklahomans had a turnout rate of 49.7%.



VOTER TURNOUT VARIES BY GEOGRAPHY

Voting turnout varies substantially by geographic region in Oklahoma. As the chart shows, typically the northern sections of the state tend to have the highest voter turnout, while southern Oklahoma tends to have the lowest voter turnout.¹⁰ This is particularly true in the southeastern section of Oklahoma known as “Little Dixie.” This geographic area closely resembles the South in terms of its voting patterns, with less voter participation and more support for Democratic candidates. Education and income usually are strongly correlated, and as a result, the southeastern part of the state has the lowest voter turnout. The county with lowest percentage turnout of registered voters in the 2008 presidential elections was Adair, which was the only county below 55% voter turnout of registered voters.¹¹ Other counties with lower turnout include Haskell, Latimer, Pushmataha, Choctaw, Bryan, Johnston, and Coal – all counties which are south of I-40 and east of I-35. The counties with the highest percentages of turnout were generally in the northern and southwestern sections of the state, with Major County at over 76% turnout of registered voters in the presidential election. On the other hand, the northeastern part of the state has some of the highest levels of education, with wealthier voters and more Republicans. All of these factors encourage the higher voter turnout found in that region.

POLITICAL DISCUSSION AND ENGAGEMENT IN OKLAHOMA

Although voting is truly important for civic engagement, successful civic engagement requires more than just showing up at the voting booth several times every few years. Citizens need to be active in their community, they need to be discussing politics, they need to have access to civic information, and they need to be engaging in multiple forms of political activity. On several indicators, Oklahomans seem to be “in the middle of the pack” compared to most other states. Oklahoma ranks 31st in the rate of people 18 and older who talk about politics with friends and family at least a few times a week at 39.1%. Nationally, this figure is 39.3%.

ENGAGING IN POLITICAL ACTS AND ATTENDING PUBLIC MEETINGS

Oklahoma ranks 23rd in the percentage of people 18 and older who engage in at least one type of political act (28.6%), which is higher than the national average of 26.3%. Oklahoma ranks 31st among the states in attending public meetings about community affairs in 2009.¹²



Photographer: Daniel Smith

ACCESS TO INFORMATION

Access to information appears to be less important to Oklahomans. Overall, Oklahomans are more likely to engage in political discussions without frequent and broad access to information. This was particularly true for Generation Xers in Oklahoma, with 22.5% in this category, compared with 16.2% nationwide.¹³ Access to information is a significant predictor of two other forms of political activity: voting and volunteering. In Oklahoma, those who had low access to information and do not discuss politics or current events with others are far less likely to vote than their peers who are more well-connected to information. The gap between these groups was one of the largest among the states that CIRCLE examined.¹⁴ Those with access to information in Oklahoma were also far more likely to volunteer than others. Moreover, Oklahomans who engaged in political discussions with others are also more likely to fix something in the community with neighbors.¹⁵

One way to remedy the problem with access to information is education. Education makes a big difference in how Oklahomans participate in politics: 53.4% of college graduates 25 years of age and older were likely to have performed any nonelectoral acts, but only 18.9% of those with a high school graduation over the age of 25 did so. Similarly in the same survey, a smaller percentage of college graduates aged 25 and older (59.3%) said that they did not get news from other Internet sources, while a whopping 89.0% of less than high school graduates said that they did not get news from other Internet sources. Finally, education also made a difference in terms of donating money: 79.9% of college graduates aged 25 and older donated \$25 or more, while only 49.1% with a high school graduation did.¹⁶

PARTY COMPETITION IN OKLAHOMA

Oklahoma is a hard state to categorize when it comes to politics. At first glance, Oklahoma looks like a Democratic state. The state legislature has been majority Democrat since 1921, most state offices have been held by Democrats, and Democrats have held the edge in voter registration. Oklahoma also has had only three Republican governors throughout its history, along with 22 Democrats. This led political scientists to classify Oklahoma as majority Democrat. Yet, since 1960 Oklahoma has voted only once at the presidential level for a Democratic candidate—Lyndon Baines Johnson in 1964. Moreover, many of its congressional seats have been held by Republicans, and in 2010 five out of six seats were held by Republicans, with only Representative Dan Boren in the Second District in eastern Oklahoma being the lone Democrat. And, if asked, most Oklahomans, except in the southeast corner of the state, would probably maintain that there are more Republicans than Democrats in Oklahoma, even though they would be wrong. The Republican Party, though, has been making gains, taking control of the Oklahoma House of Representatives in 2004 and the Oklahoma Senate in 2008. After the 2006 elections, the Oklahoma Senate was the most competitive in the country, with a 24D-24R ratio in that body. Oklahomans also gave the most lopsided victory of any state to Republican John McCain in the 2008 Presidential Election.¹⁷ In the 2010 elections, the Republicans won all statewide offices including Governor and Lieutenant Governor, with stronger majorities in both the Oklahoma House and the Oklahoma Senate.

COMPETITION FOR ELECTED SEATS

Party competition must be measured by another factor—competition for elected seats—and this is clearly an aspect where Oklahoma needs some improvement. Making sure that there is a choice of candidates on a ballot is crucial for civic engagement. After all, if one candidate is elected year after year, there is not much democracy, and that will discourage voter turnout and civic engagement. Oklahoma has taken care of one aspect. In 1990, Oklahoma became the first state in the nation to adopt term limits for its state legislators. These term limits require that state legislators can only serve twelve years in either the Oklahoma House and/or Senate. As adopted, term limits apply only to state legislators, but did not completely take effect on Oklahoma's state legislators until 2004. By the Oklahoma constitution, the governor and lieutenant governor are also limited to two terms, and several other state-level positions have term limits as well.



Oklahoma does have a problem with making sure its legislative elections are contested. As an example, at the U.S. Congress level, only 30 of the 435 seats in the 2010 elections were uncontested, seven for the Republicans (1.6% of all seats), and 23 for the Democrats (5.3% of all seats). And in Oklahoma, of the 101 races for the 2010 Oklahoma House, 47 were uncontested or 47.5% of all seats. The Republicans with the greater number of seats in the House to defend (62 to 39) had a greater percentage of their seats uncontested (53.2%) compared with the Democrats (35.9%). This is a significant challenge for Oklahoma to address because the lack of competition can have a serious impact on voter turnout and thus civic engagement. Despite candidate recruitment training sessions held by both parties in Oklahoma, there are still too many uncontested seats. When the six uncontested Oklahoma Senate seats in 2010 were added in, there were 125 races for the state legislature in the 2010 elections, and 53 of these had only one name on the ballot.¹⁸

BALLOT ACCESS

Another civic engagement challenge that Oklahoma may need to address is ballot access. Despite being a very populist state, Oklahoma has some of the toughest ballot-access laws in the country. Not only is Oklahoma a closed primary state, but Oklahoma also makes it very difficult for third-party or independent presidential candidates to get on the ballot. While independent candidates statewide only need to file to run for state office, independent candidates for president must gather signatures equal to 5% of those voting for governor or president in the last general election. To remain on the ballot, a new party's candidate for governor or president must draw at least 10% of the vote in the next election. Thus, it took a petitioning requirement of 51,781 signatures for a third party to secure full party

ballot access, and 37,027 signatures to place a presidential candidate in the 2004 elections. For the 2012 Presidential Elections, this will mean 43,880 signatures just to get on the ballot.¹⁹

Thus, in the 2004 U.S. Presidential Elections, Oklahoma was the only state in the nation whose voters were limited to just two choices, Democrat and Republican. Half of the states had at least six names on the ballot, and Colorado had 12 names.²⁰ Voters in 49 states had the opportunity to vote for Libertarian nominee Michael Badnarik, and voters in 36 states had the opportunity to vote for independent/Reform candidate Ralph Nader. Oklahoma voters, however, were not given these choices, despite attempts by Libertarians in Oklahoma to get on the ballot in 2004. The Libertarian Party of Oklahoma found that of the 2,098,750 registered voters in Oklahoma only 1,234,229 (59%) voted for a presidential candidate.²¹ In the last nine years, no Oklahoma voter has been permitted to vote for anyone for president except for the nominees of the two major parties.

MONEY AND OKLAHOMA POLITICS

Another way that Oklahomans can engage civically is by donating money, either to political candidates or political causes. Monetary donations are monitored by two organizations, the Federal Elections Commission for candidates to federal office (presidents and their vice presidents, U.S. House, and U.S. Senate candidates) and the Oklahoma Ethics Commission for state and local candidates. In terms of giving, there has been some remarkable consistency at both the federal and state levels, but there is much greater volatility when donations to the political parties are examined.

For example, at the federal level, Oklahoma has consistently ranked between 29th and 31st among states for total itemized contributions to federal candidates from 2000 to 2010. Oklahomans in 2009-2010, for example, gave \$8,346,104 to federal candidates, ranking the state 31st among states. Oklahoma has had similar rankings for individual donations over \$200 (currently ranking 31st with \$9,805,926 in 2009-2010), with overall rankings ranging from 28th to 31st between 2000 and 2010. Moreover, with PAC donations, Oklahomans also have remained remarkably consistent, with rankings ranging between 27th and 33rd from 2000 to 2010, and currently at 27th with \$1,181,800 in donations.²²

At the state level there also has been some consistency. Oklahoma Senate candidates usually raise more money than their House colleagues, raising \$138,637.24 on average for the 2008 Senate

races compared with \$46,402.22 for the 2008 House contests.²³ In several statewide races, such as governor and treasurer, the candidates spent more than \$1 million total to win those seats in 2006, while in other statewide races that year, such as attorney general, state auditor and inspector, and corporation commissioner, the candidates spent between \$300,000 and \$500,000. Not surprisingly, winners usually raise more money than their losing opponents, with Oklahoma House winners raising three times more than the losers, and the Senate winners raising twice as much as their opponents.²⁴

Moreover, there also has been some consistency in terms of PAC money, or the donation of money to candidates by various interests in Oklahoma. Oklahomans take a much higher percentage of in-state as opposed to out-of-state PAC money. The percentage of in-state PAC money given to state legislative candidates has stayed consistently between 80-90% for the last six elections. The list of active PACs has also remained fairly similar. In the 2006 and 2008 elections, the "big" PACs, in terms of the total money given, were Energy for Oklahomans, Chesapeake Energy, OK Ag Fund, Oklahoma Independent Energy PAC, and the Realtors PAC. Thus, it is not a surprise that the Oil and Gas PACs gave the second largest amount of donations in 2006 and 2008 (Health PACs were #1). There was also remarkable consistency in the number of PACs giving one to two donations (107 in 2006, 108 in 2008), and those giving more than 100 donations (under ten for both 2006 and 2008).²⁵ However, if candidates really wanted to do well, they needed to attract party/ideology money. This is because these types of PACs were the most likely to give the largest average donation by category in the 2006 and 2008 elections. Candidates like PACs that give large average donations because then they have to chase after fewer donors.

Yet the biggest changes in Oklahoma money have taken place with the parties. This was true at both federal and state/local levels. At the federal level, Oklahoma has ranged from the highest rank of 6th to a rank of 29th in terms of percentage giving to Republicans. In the 2009-2010 election cycle, Oklahoma currently ranks 7th, giving 71.4% of its donations to federal Republican candidates. The low point for Republican candidates came in 2004 when Oklahoma ranked only 29th. Oklahoma has traditionally ranked between 40-45th in percentage giving to Democrats, currently ranking 43rd or giving 28.4% to Democrats. But back in 2004, Oklahomans ranked 22nd in its giving to Democrats, giving 40.6% that year.²⁶

At the state level, one could almost ask, "Where did the political party money go?" as both parties have experienced a noticeable drop in their donations to candidates. Unfortunately for the Democrats, they have been hit the worst. Republican-donating PACs were among the top 10 PACs in both the average amount and the total amount donated in the 2006 elections with five to six PACs on each list. But, the Republican-leaning PACs were not found at all on the 2008 top 10 lists. The Democrats fared even worse. The Democrats had only one PAC that gave mostly to Democrats in 2006, LEGAL, which is a lawyers' PAC. However, by 2008, the Democrats also did not make either list. Even more troubling for the Democrats, they experienced a remarkable decline in the overall amount of giving. Combining both the ideology and party PAC money, the Democrats actually gave almost \$13,000 more to Democratic candidates in 2008 than they did in 2006 (\$116,590.64 in 2006 and \$129,249.98 in 2008). However, compared with the Republicans, these amounts were bad news for the Democrats. While the Republican ideology/ party PACs gave \$721,908 in 2006 and only \$514,345 in 2008, thus experiencing a significant decline, the Republicans still gave \$385,000+ more than the Democrats did in the 2008 elections. As a result, the Republican party/ideology PACs were able to give to 234 candidates in 2008, while the Democratic party/ideology PACs were able to give to only 96 candidates. This obviously put the Democrats at a severe disadvantage and could be one of the reasons they lost both Oklahoma House and Senate seats in the 2008 elections.²⁷

The other remarkable change in election money is the sheer increase in the amount of spending. In 1998, a state House candidate in Oklahoma spent \$25,970 on average. Today, that is \$46,402, with some candidates spending more than \$400,000 for an Oklahoma House seat in the 2008 elections. On the Senate side, the gap is even greater with the average Senate candidate spending \$57,082 in 1998 but \$138,637 in 2008, and some candidates spending more than \$500,000 in 2008.²⁸



Photographer: Michael Ives

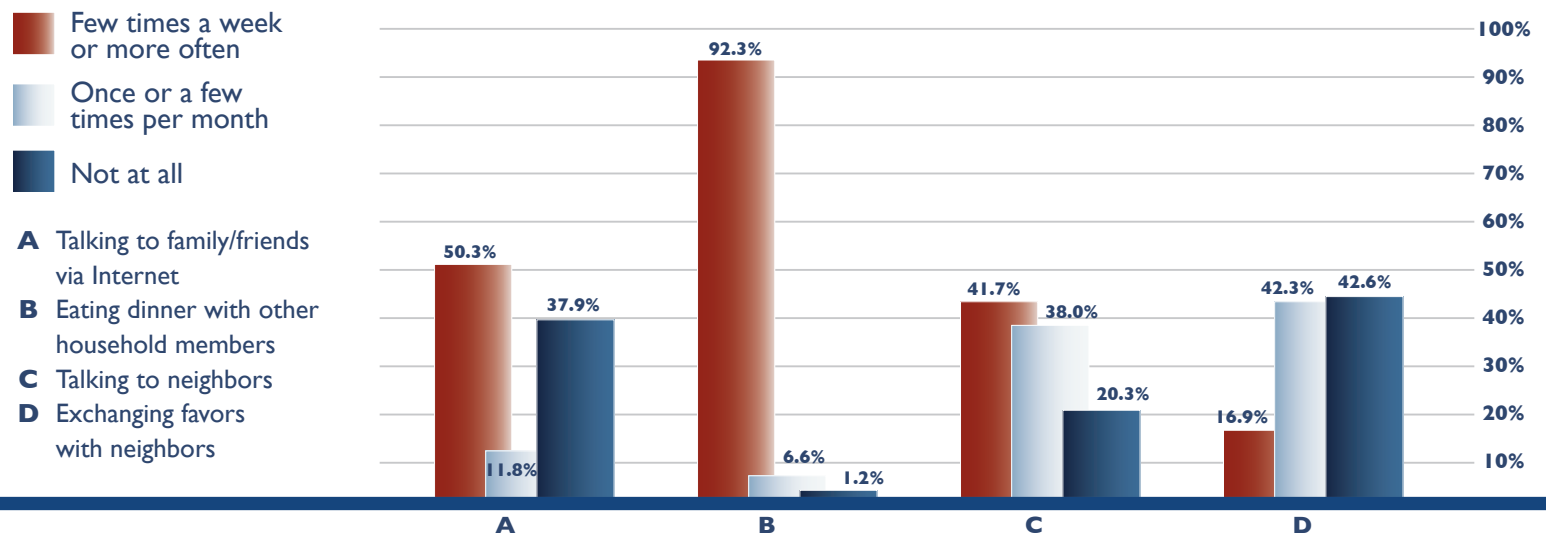
CONNECTING WITH OTHERS

Oklahoma is known as the Heartland, not only because of our geographic location, but because of Oklahoman's strong reliance on meaningful relationships for social, political, and personal connectedness. Connecting with others is a major civic indicator identified by the national *Civic Health Index*. Also, connecting with others is a key way Oklahomans maintain ties, share information, and solve problems. Following national trends, Oklahomans who are more “connected” are more likely to perform other services such as volunteering or fixing something in the neighborhood.



Photographer: Daniel Smith

CONNECTEDNESS



NATIONAL TRENDS IN OKLAHOMA

Nationally, unemployed Americans are slightly more likely to be connected with family and neighbors (18.7%) than unemployed Americans (14.2%). Despite Oklahoma's relatively lower unemployment rate, we continue to value and seek out opportunities to connect to others. National trends also indicate that those high in private sociability (35%) are more likely to express political voice in one or more ways than those low on this dimension (11.1%). In Oklahoma, despite our relatively high private sociability, we are less likely to express political voice in direct ways. For example, while Americans who are less connected are far less likely to vote, Oklahoma residents are slightly more connected but relatively less likely to vote.

EATING DINNER WITH FAMILY MEMBERS

In terms of connecting with others, 92.3% of Oklahomans report that they eat dinner with their family at least a few times per week. It is very clear that Oklahomans value family mealtime and have a desire for sociability and maintaining family connections. Therefore, we can conclude that while Oklahomans tend to spend more time than most states eating meals with family, this practice does not result in our talking more about politics than other states.

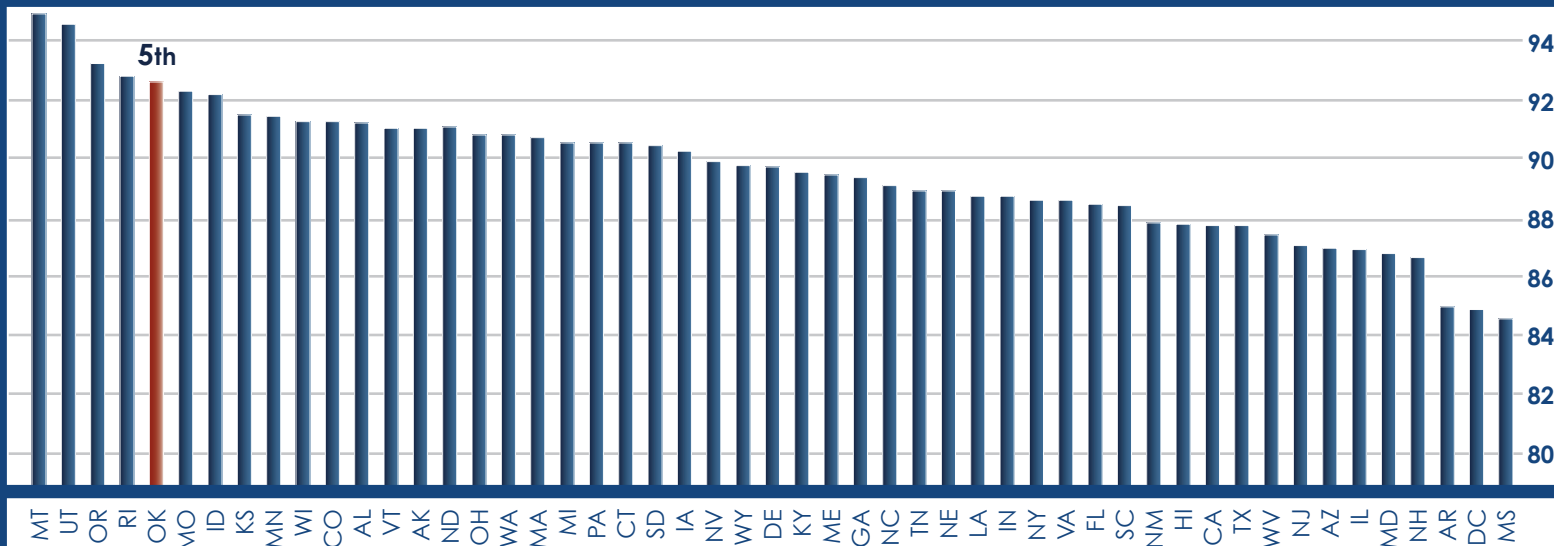


Photographer: Patti Loughlin

EAT DINNER WITH FAMILY AND HOUSEHOLD MEMBERS

2009 NATIONAL AVERAGE - 89.1%

OKLAHOMA - 92.3%



EXCHANGING FAVORS WITH NEIGHBORS AND TALKING WITH FRIENDS

Another notable indicator of civic health in Oklahoma is the relationships citizens foster with their neighbors. These kinds of social actions help strengthen communities across the state. Oklahoma ranks 20th nationwide in the number of people 18 years and older who exchange favors with neighbors a few times a week or more. This rate of 16.9% compares with the national average of 16%. Oklahomans also report talking with neighbors several times a week or more at a rate of 41.7%, whereas the national rate is 45.8%.

COMMUNICATING WITH FAMILY AND FRIENDS BY EMAIL OR THE INTERNET

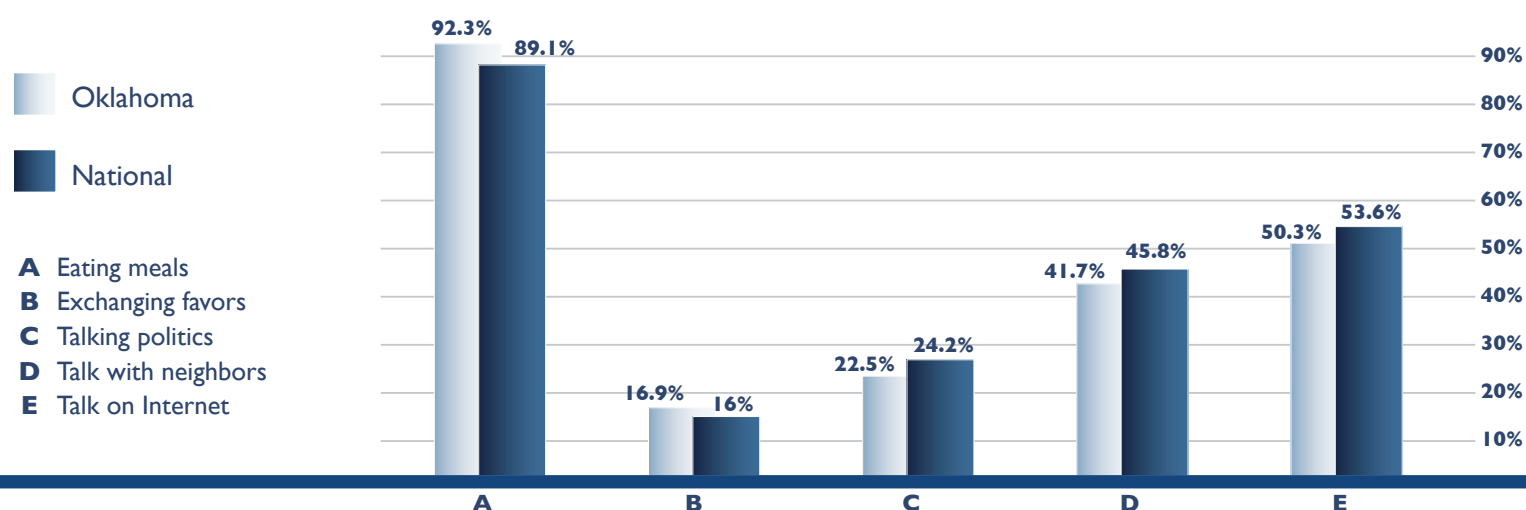
Oklahomans communicate with friends and family by email or the Internet at a rate of 50.3%. This compares with a national rate of 53.6%. Therefore, Oklahomans are less likely than other states to communicate electronically with family and friends.

In summary, Oklahomans eat dinner with family and exchange favors with neighbors more than the national average, but use email or the Internet to talk to family and friends and talk with neighbors less often than the national average. They talk politics at about the same rate as the national average. When activities are grouped into a category called private sociability, only 16.6% of residents are connected and exchange favors and 9% have weak ties with others in Oklahoma. These numbers seem remarkably low despite being consistent with the national trends.

GROUP ASSOCIATION AND LEADERSHIP

Civic health requires an active interest in the life of the community, city, state, and country through organization participation and leadership. In *Bowling Alone*, author Robert Putnam chronicles a pattern of declining civic participation in America since the mid-1960s. Despite this pattern, over the past two centuries scholars have written about the importance of civic participation. Writing in the 1830s, Alexis de Tocqueville, author of *Democracy in America*, was astonished by the number and diversity of associations in America, and attributed much of the success of American democracy to this fact. He believed that active participation and leadership in citizen organizations are the building blocks of a civil society and essential to democracy's success in America. According to John Dewey, the preeminent American philosopher of the 20th Century, "in our democratic society citizens should interact with each other, learn from each other, grow with each other, and together make their communities more than the sum of their parts."

EXCHANGING FAVORS WITH NEIGHBORS AND TALKING WITH FRIENDS



BELONGING TO AND LEADERSHIP IN GROUPS

Currently, only 35.1% of all Americans 18 and older belong to at least one religious, neighborhood, school, or sports group, which is an important indicator for civic participation. Membership is defined as participation in a group that meets at least once a month. Oklahoma ranks 32nd in the nation in this measure, with a rate of 35.8%. Other indicators of civic participation can be seen in the table. Oklahoma (11.2%) also surpasses the national average (10.1%) in the number of people who take a leadership role in an organization by serving as an officer or serving on a committee of an organization.

NATIVE AMERICANS IN OKLAHOMA

Oklahoma has the second-largest Native American population of any state, with California ranking first. Many of the more than 273,230 Native Americans living in Oklahoma today are descendants of the original 67 tribes inhabiting Indian Territory.²⁹ As evidence of this, 15% of Oklahoma's state legislators were Native American in 2009 compared with 1% nationwide.³⁰

RELIGION IN OKLAHOMA

Another cultural factor for Oklahoma related to civic participation is the role of religion in the state. According to The Pew Forum (2009), Oklahoma ranks 7th in participation (69%) in the importance of religion and participation in worship compared with the national average (56%). Religious and faith-based organizations have long been the catalyst for Oklahomans' civic participation and leadership.

ROLE OF EDUCATION

Education serves an integral role in civic responsibility. Distinct information on civic engagement programming at Oklahoma's colleges and universities is available through the national Campus Compact Annual Membership Survey.

2009 SERVICE STATISTICS FOR OKLAHOMA

Students: An average of 29%, or 1,699 students, were involved in community service, service-learning, and civic engagement activities, slightly less than the Campus Compact states' average of 33%. This involvement averaged 1.9 hours per week per campus, also below the Campus Compact states' average, for a total of 4,630,113 hours served in 2008-2009.

Faculty and Administration: An average of 26 service-learning courses were offered on each Oklahoma campus of higher education, with an average of 7%, or 20 faculty teaching a service-learning course. Such faculty involvement is slightly more than the Campus Compact states' average of 6%. Presidents of Oklahoma institutions of higher education report significant support of service-learning and civic engagement on their campuses, with 79% stating that they participate in campus service and civic engagement activities, and 83% publicly promoting service and civic engagement.³¹

Community Partners: Oklahoma campuses average 42 community partnerships, with nonprofit/community-based organizations and K-12 schools representing the most frequent partners.³²

HIGHER EDUCATION VALUES ENGAGEMENT AND SERVICE

The higher education accreditation standards set forth by the Higher Learning Commission place an emphasis on engagement and service. Criterion Five provides that: "As called for by its mission, the organization identifies its constituencies and serves them in ways both value." The components for compliance include learning from the constituencies the institution serves, analyzing its capacity to serve their needs and expectations, maintaining the capacity and the commitment to engage with its identified constituencies and communities, showing its responsiveness to those constituencies that depend on it for service, and demonstrating these constituencies value the services the organization provides.



Photographer: Daniel Smith

EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT AS INDICATOR

We know educational attainment is an important indicator of group involvement in Oklahoma. Group participation jumps from 38% for those with some college experience to 61% for those with a college degree.³³

The dramatic increases in engagement following the lines of educational attainment are also visible in the category of political participation. Only 28% of those with some college experience report engaging in at least one non-electoral political act while 53% of college graduates do so. Similar patterns appear in both volunteerism rates and charitable donations. This is not necessarily bad news for Oklahoma as educational attainment continues to rise steadily.³⁴

Progress in rates of educational attainment, stimulated by the Oklahoma State Regents for Higher Education Brain Gain 2010 initiative, should result in increased levels of volunteerism and engagement. Since 2001, the proportion of Oklahoma residents with college degrees has grown from 20.4% to 22.2%.³⁵

Another state higher-education initiative, "Making Place Matter," serves to enhance civic engagement in Oklahoma. A project of the American Association of State Colleges and Universities, "Making Place Matter" provides tools and practical insights for community and campus leaders as they seek to build partnerships and to create a more vital and sustainable economy in their local and regional communities. Oklahoma institutions of higher education promote regional stewardship and mobilize the assets of a higher education system toward economic development, community service, and outreach goals.

“CAMPUS VOTE INITIATIVE”

Other initiatives, such as the biannual “Campus Vote Initiative” sponsored by Oklahoma Campus Compact, enhance civic education and engagement. In 2008, the program set a new record through the voter registration of 5,300 students. Over its seven-year history, the Oklahoma Campus Vote Initiative Contest has been responsible for registering more than 18,000 new voters on college campuses.

K-12

Oklahoma’s public school principals report that on average, parents and community members volunteer 3.1 hours of service per student annually. Unlike other areas of civic engagement, volunteer rates in K-12 schools do not appear predominantly in areas with high educational attainment. Of the 20 public school districts with the highest rate of volunteer hours, 80% are located in counties well below the state average for percent of population with a college degree. The K-12 schools could be a great place to encourage volunteerism among those parents and community members who are otherwise less engaged.³⁶



Photographer: Patti Loughlin

PUBLIC POLICY AND CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

In the context of civic engagement, public policy serves as both incentive and guide for policymakers, businesses, and ordinary individuals to come together and work closely to build more advanced communities. Public policy also creates and sustains a healthy environment in which interdependent civic habits (social connection, voting, volunteering, group leadership, etc.) are encouraged and reinforced. Though there is still a long way to go to continue to improve public policy and raise its civic engagement level, several past and current public policies in Oklahoma, either carried out in big cities such as Oklahoma City and Tulsa or in small towns of different sizes, have proved to be successful in closely connecting the different sectors of communities and attaining inspiring achievements at a large scale. They have set good examples for future public policy making and practice.

OKLAHOMA CITY

"Rarely has a community invested in itself as we have done, and never has a community been more united and inclusive in determining its direction."³⁷

-Mick Cornett, the Mayor of Oklahoma City

On December 14, 1993, a temporary one-cent sales tax over five years (a six-month extension added in 1998) was approved by 54% of 60,129 Oklahoma City voters to support **Metropolitan Area Projects (MAPS)**, a capital-improvement program including nine major projects for new and upgraded sports, recreation, entertainment, cultural, and convention facilities.³⁸ During the 66 months the tax was in effect, \$363 million was raised. Appointed by the Mayor, a mandated 21-member citizen oversight board reviewed project components and made recommendations to the City Council. The MAPS office, whose staff members were all city employees, handled day-to-day operations. The MAPS projects such as the constructions of the Ford Center and the Ronald J. Norick Downtown Library and the development of a trolley transit system have not only revitalized Bricktown and the city's national image, but greatly improved the quality of city life.³⁹

"In every neighborhood of Oklahoma City, schools are not only renovated or rebuilt, they are full of hope and eager young minds preparing to be the future leaders of Oklahoma City and the State of Oklahoma."⁴⁰

-Carl Edwards, the Chairman of OCMAPS Trust



Photographer: Daniel Smith

On November 13, 2001, 61% of 60,855 Oklahoma City voters and 61% of 34,318 residents within the OKC Public School District approved a temporary one-cent sales tax for seven years and a school bond issue to support the **MAPS for Kids** program, which includes hundreds of construction, transportation, and technology projects to radically improve schools within Oklahoma City limits and benefit the city's public school students.⁴¹ The program has already raised \$714 million. By the end of 2009, 18 schools have been completed, and roofing and fire alarm projects have started in 45 completed schools. In addition, 17 schools are in progress, with 160 new school buses, computers, telephones, network, and library technology. More than 70 new and renovated schools totaling \$470 million in construction will be completed when the program draws to a close in 2012.⁴² MAPS has proved to be a success in improving student achievement, creating efficient operations, providing safe and secure campuses, and overall building a bright future for the city's children and community.

"The last 10 years of this city's history were incredible, but they will not equal the next 10 years."⁴³

-Mick Cornett, the Mayor of Oklahoma City

On September 17, 2009, 54% of 75,421 Oklahoma City voters with an estimated total voter turnout of 31%, significantly higher than most local elections, approved a one-cent sales tax for seven years and nine months to support the \$777 million MAPS 3 program.⁴⁴ The program includes eight projects that directly address public concerns such as a new rail-based streetcar system of five-to-six miles downtown, 57 miles of new public bicycling and walking trails throughout the city, and state-of-the-art health and wellness aquatic centers designed for senior citizens. A citizen oversight board will be created to sustain continuous civic engagement.⁴⁵

TULSA

*"I believe Tulsa County has and should continue to unite cities, towns, and cooperate with the state and the federal government and the Indian Nations to work together. There is no better example of this cooperation than Vision 2025."*⁴⁶

-Wilbert E. Collins, Sr., Tulsa County Commissioner

On September 9, 2003, approximately 60% of 128,676 Tulsa County voters approved a one penny 13-year increase (January 1, 2004-January 1, 2017) in Tulsa County sales tax to support Vision 2025, a \$885 million comprehensive diverse growth package of 32 projects ranging from business, education, health care, and events facilities to community enrichment proposed by the governments of the City of Tulsa and Tulsa County.⁴⁷ By the end of August 2010, total sales tax has exceeded \$343 million. It is estimated that the total sales tax will result in revenue of \$707 million by 2017. Tulsa County's Board of County Commissioners is empowered by citizens and actively executes the projects. Many citizen committees are being formed to overview the Vision 2025 process and provide oversight for individual projects. A specialized website, online surveys, periodical newsletters, and other forms of media and communication also provide citizens with necessary accesses to up-to-date project information and seek their continued active involvement. Among the projects, the \$188 million BOK Center, a 19,199 seat, 565,000 square-foot multipurpose, state-of-the-art sports and entertainment venue, has created hundreds of new jobs for Tulsans and is expected to generate an estimated economic impact of \$92 million annually.⁴⁸

*"People forgot how pretty our buildings are when they were allowed to run down. We still have some eyesores, but now people are proud of our community."*⁴⁹

-Karen Dye, the Director of the Newkirk Main Street Authority

In 42 towns of many sizes, the **Oklahoma Main Street Program**, starting in 1986 under the collaboration of the Oklahoma Department of Commerce and the National Main Street Center, is enthusiastically driven by communities to preserve historic buildings and revitalize older, traditional business districts. Although direction, ideas, and training are provided by the Center, the long-term successes of the program rest on the partnership between public and private sectors and depend on the desires of local leaders and the involvement and commitment of the community. By August 2010,

private and public reinvestment has totaled \$755,205,14. The results are significant: 3,753 business buildings have been rehabilitated; new businesses have expanded to 4,169; 13,070 new jobs have been created; and volunteer hours have reached 852,026.⁵⁰ The success of the program has helped nourish community pride, especially among local volunteers.

Since its founding in 1967, the **Oklahoma Academy** has been bringing Oklahomans together to enact effective solutions to solve the state's problems.⁵¹ The only statewide organization of its kind in the nation, the Academy is a nonprofit, nonpartisan, membership organization that discusses problems, develops ideas, proposes solutions, and works to move those ideas into action. Membership in the Academy is open to anyone and currently includes more than 600 Oklahomans representing all parts of the state and all ideological viewpoints. The centerpiece of the Academy's efforts is its annual Town Hall conference. Each year, the Academy brings together a diverse group of 125 citizens for three days of intense deliberations to discuss a current issue and develop specific public policy recommendations. Then, at the start of each legislative session, the Academy presents these recommendations to the Governor and Legislature for action. Through the years, the efforts of the Academy and its members have shaped state and local public policy on the economy, education, workforce development, innovation, healthcare, the environment, criminal justice, tribal relations, substance abuse, water, and energy.



Photographer: Daniel Smith

CONCLUSION: A CALL TO ACTION

The complex picture of *Oklahoma's Civic Health Index* reflects a snapshot of both the strengths and weaknesses of our state. So where do we go from here? This report provides every Oklahoman with both a greater understanding of what we value and an opportunity to evaluate what each of us can do to increase the health and well-being of our communities. It encourages us to celebrate the strength of our unique heritage and collective nature. It also invites us to energize our efforts to enact unique solutions for weaknesses we deem important to our future health.

THE UNIQUE HERITAGE OF OKLAHOMA

Our strengths can be characterized as a unique mixture of fierce independence and care for others. Our history as a state reflects a distinct blend of tribal governments, farm families, and the entrepreneurial spirit of Oklahoma industry. These strengths can be mobilized to address the issues that we find the collective will to change. Our tendency to be connected on a family level provides an excellent model of membership and leadership in local and state groups which endeavor to solve the problems of the everyday lives of each member of its family, our community.

EDUCATIONAL ASPIRATIONS

At the local and community level, Oklahoma serves as a model for other states in our efforts to improve educational outcomes including those directed at early childhood development, such as state-funded pre-K, and those directed at college accessibility and completion, such as the Oklahoma State Regents for Higher Education's Brain Gain 2010 and Oklahoma Promise. We can also adopt programs that reflect positive changes we see in our neighboring states and across the nation. We can borrow models of successful investment in education to ensure we no longer struggle to pay and retain the teachers and other professionals we so skillfully train. We can decrease class size and increase student competencies so college or trade school dreams can be realized. We can increase college retention and graduation rates. We can empower our educational system to provide the environment for each child and each adult to be a fully engaged citizen of our state and nation.

HEALTH CARE ASPIRATIONS

Oklahoma is a leader in developmental and health screenings of infants. We can also be proud of and use as a model the comprehensive system of care that provides equal access to all members of the



Native American population. Despite these strengths, we have serious problems with the uninsured and underinsured as they lack access to medical care, mental health services, and prevention and wellness promotion. Children, the elderly, and the poor are the most vulnerable parts of our community family but have been silently left out of the health care system. We now recognize that they deserve to be part of a comprehensive system that cares for everyone. In addition, we recognize that the cost of health care for all of us is negatively impacted by the inefficient and costly use of emergency rooms for routine health concerns. We cannot afford to let funding for new and well-established programs that increase the health and well-being of most Oklahomans be cut when we work so hard to promote the financial fitness of our business industry. We can strive to find a balance between the needs of industry and of all individuals if we have the desire for all our community family members to benefit from living in Oklahoma.

POLITICAL AND SOCIAL ASPIRATIONS

We can maximize those interpersonal ties to include a broader range of interest and knowledge in social and political issues. People of our state gather to be connected at the dinner table, at coffee shops, co-ops, and sporting events. They share information and opinions. Why not use these venues to infuse the conversations with information from various news sources so opinions and decisions are based on data rather than the most impressive or powerful member of the group? This may also result in empowering the people of Oklahoma to increase participation in local groups, voter registration rates, knowledge of issues, and voter turnout for concerns that range from the backyard to the boardroom.

BUSINESS AND INDUSTRY ASPIRATIONS

Our state has demonstrated the ability to transform our major metropolitan areas into places where industry prospers and Oklahomans can explore and enjoy large-scale events and beautiful cityscapes as in Oklahoma City and Tulsa. Why not also transform these successes into efforts to build the communities of rural Oklahomans so that they, too, may prosper and feel they are a part of both the heart and soul of our state? Efforts such as these will benefit our society by greatly reducing the need to address poverty, drug use, teen pregnancy, homelessness, gang violence, health care inequality, failing schools, and a disenfranchised populace. There is no single solution to these necessary changes and there is not one single group who can make these changes. Rather, it will be the will and effort of all people on multiple levels deciding as a state that we are determined to be heard, be engaged, be inclusive, and be energized to make a difference in our state and in our own backyard.

LEADERSHIP ASPIRATIONS

Elected leadership in Oklahoma does a great job of talking about and promoting issues during elections. Unfortunately, very little of that information or follow-through trickles down to the average citizen once elections are over. This leads to low levels of engagement and loss of potential talent that could come from our community family. Greater involvement at all levels could reverse the trend in Oklahoma for elected seats to go unchallenged. Oklahoma has incorporated civic engagement efforts at the college and leadership levels, such as the Oklahoma Academy for State Goals, Campus Compact, and the American Democracy Project. Why not expand those efforts by providing easy access to local and state government, by promoting and rewarding educators who infuse the educational experiences of our children with the knowledge and skills needed to be an informed and engaged citizen? This provides an avenue for translating K-12 reading, writing, and arithmetic into a useful application for an energized, financially secure, and socially responsible life as an adult.

Does an engaged and educated populace pose a threat? Certainly this is true. As the population becomes more informed and empowered, the rhetoric of the extremists is subdued and diffused. Radicalism and hate cannot thrive in an environment where people have learned to think for themselves and act in ways that benefit

the greater good, not just the individual or the interest group. Do some people fear an engaged and informed citizenry? Absolutely, because people are less likely to follow blindly when they are informed and engaged. We must each decide to dedicate at least a small effort to promoting the engagement of ourselves and others in this remarkable process. Let's use this report as the impetus for positive change, for increased engagement and understanding, and for the wisdom and leadership potential that each person has to enact a better life for all Oklahomans.

Civic engagement has the potential to empower each citizen to take on the personal responsibility to assist, inform, engage, and energize our friends, neighbors, family, community, educational system, government agencies, and political system to do the will of the fiercely independent, yet uncommonly compassionate Oklahoma spirit.



TECHNICAL NOTES

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 CPS September Volunteering Supplement, 2007, 2008 and 2009, and data available from Volunteering in America. Voting and registration data come from the CPS November Voting/Registration Supplement, 2004 and 2008, and 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 and to minimize error.

For the Oklahoma Report, the sample size for citizen engagement was 2,492 and the sample size for volunteering was 1,313.

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 Oklahoma sample. However, according to the Census Bureau, published margin of error for CPS voting and registration supplement from 2008 is +/-0.3% for the national estimate and +/- 2.6% for Oklahoma. For specific population subgroups, the margin of error is greater.

The 2010 national report, *America's Civic Health Index* issue brief and executive summary can be found online at www.ncoc.net/CivicHealth2010. Rankings and data for all 50 states and 51 largest metropolitan areas are available at <http://civic.serve.gov>. The 2010 state report, *Oklahoma's Civic Health index* can be found online at www.ncoc.net/OK

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ENDNOTES

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