

2011 ALABAMA CIVIC HEALTH INDEX



THE UNIVERSITY OF
ALABAMA



**DAVID MATHEWS
CENTER FOR CIVIC LIFE**



AUBURN
UNIVERSITY
COLLEGE OF
LIBERAL ARTS



National Conference on Citizenship
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At the National Conference on Citizenship (NCoC), we believe everyone has the power to make a difference in how their community and country thrive.

We are a dynamic, nonpartisan nonprofit working at the forefront of our nation's civic life. We continuously explore what shapes today's citizenry, define the evolving role of the individual in our democracy, and uncover ways to motivate greater participation. Through our events, research and reports, NCoC expands our nation's contemporary understanding of what it means to be a citizen. We seek new ideas and approaches for creating greater civic health and vitality throughout the United States.

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THE DAVID MATHEWS CENTER FOR CIVIC LIFE

The David Mathews Center for Civic Life is a 501 (c) 3 non-profit organization that works with citizens who want to make positive, innovative decisions that lead to action in their communities on issues that concern them. The primary work of the Center is to encourage sustainable community practices that are aimed at building and preserving a healthy democracy. The Center takes a non-advocacy, non-partisan approach to facilitating the important work that citizens must do to maintain a civic environment that promotes engagement. The David Mathews Center honors the life and work of David Mathews, a native of Grove Hill, Alabama and President and CEO of the Kettering Foundation in Dayton, Ohio.

AUBURN UNIVERSITY – COLLEGE OF LIBERAL ARTS

The College of Liberal Arts at Auburn University, comprised of thirteen academic departments and the Caroline Marshall Draughon Center for the Arts & Humanities, is home to nearly 4,500 undergraduate and graduate students. The College fosters a community in which students, faculty, and administration have an understanding of the human condition, a respect for individual and cultural differences, and a desire for the free exchange of ideas.



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This document represents the first in-depth report of the state of Alabama's civic health. The Alabama Civic Health Index (ACHI) looks at key indicators of civic life in Alabama: how conscientious Alabama citizens are of their family, friends, and neighbors; how engaged they are politically; and how they engage in civic organizations and group activities. Through these measures, we can assess, evaluate, and reflect on a fuller picture of Alabama's civic health—not just in terms of voting in elections, but how individuals are connecting with family and friends, working together to solve problems, and contributing their time and talents to their communities.

This report is linked to a national initiative of NCoC (the National Conference on Citizenship), an organization chartered by Congress that began publishing *America's Civic Health Index* in 2006. In 2009, NCoC was incorporated into the Edward M. Kennedy Serve America Act and directed to expand the civic health assessment in partnership with the Corporation for National and Community Service and the U.S. Census Bureau. Unless otherwise noted, findings presented in this report are based on analysis of the U.S. Census Current Population Survey (CPS) data provided by the Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement (CIRCLE) at Tufts University.

The findings in this report show that Alabamians are indeed engaged in important ways. They often engage in discussions on politics and current events with their friends and family. They are invested in working together to solve community problems and often exchange favors with neighbors. We are encouraged that Alabama ranks higher than the national average in the following categories: doing favors for neighbors, frequently talking about politics with friends and family, donating to charities, and working with neighbors to fix something or improve their community.



4th

Alabama ranks 4th nationally for the percentage of residents who exchange favors frequently with neighbors.

Photo courtesy of David Mathews Center for Civic Life.

Alabama Civic Health At a Glance

	Latest Estimates (2010)	Latest Ranking (2010)	Moving Average (2008-2010 pooled)
Volunteering	26.6%	30th	25.6%
Voting (2010 Midterms)	44.1%	34th	NA
Registration (2010 Midterms)	65.0%	31st	NA
Working with neighbors to fix something or improve something in the community	10.1%	18th	8.1%
Doing favors for neighbors frequently	21.1%	4th	17.6%
Group membership	29.1%	43rd	31.5%
Eating dinner with a member of household frequently	86.9%	38th	89.7%
Talking about politics with friends and family frequently	30.0%	10th	40.7%
Talking with family and friends on the Internet or via Email frequently	43.9%	49th	42.4%

However, Alabama falls below the national averages in these categories: volunteering, voter registration and turnout, group membership, eating dinner with family, and Internet connectivity. Furthermore, the data demonstrates wide gaps in Alabamians' civic participation. With a high unemployment rate and large rural population, many individuals find few opportunities to engage and often feel isolated.

Some interesting findings captured throughout this report include:

- While 33.9% of urban residents and 32.5% of rural residents discuss politics at least a few times a week, only 16.7% of suburban residents report doing so.
- Overall, only 43.9% of Alabamians connect over the Internet a few times a week or more; this is less than the national rate of 54.3%.
- Women tend to be more socially connected than men: 29.9% of women connected in three or more ways, compared with only 22.7% of men.
- Married Alabamians are almost twice as likely to engage in public work (7.7%) than unmarried individuals (4.1%). Public work also generally increases with age, peaking for those between the ages of 65 and 80 (9.9%). Gender and race do not predict this behavior.

Definitions of Composite Measures

Political action means conventional political engagement: mainly efforts to influence the government and other large institutions. Political action, as defined by this report, is composed of these four items: voting, discussing politics with family and friends a few times a week or more, contacting public officials, and buying or boycotting products. An individual receives one point for each activity that he or she reports. The state's mean is the average score for all residents age 18+.

Social connectedness, as defined by this report, is composed of eating dinner with other members of your household a few times a week or more, communicating with friends or family online a few times a week or more, talking with neighbors a few times a week or more, and doing favors for neighbors a few times a week or more.

Participation in **public work** as defined by this report, both attending meetings and working with neighbors to solve problems, is relatively uncommon in the United States. Among all Americans age 16 or older, 4.7% met the definition and 95.3% did not in 2010. Although 4.7% is a small percentage of the national population, this still roughly represents 11.2 million people who are attending meetings and working at the local level on public problems.

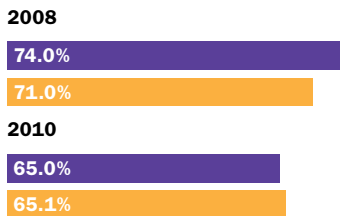
“A strong public is essential to a community that works democratically.”¹

- David Mathews

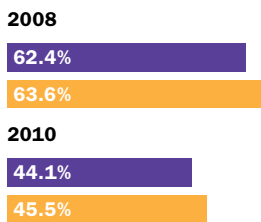
Civic engagement is a vital component of a healthy democracy. While the types of engagement, formal and informal, in our democratic process may vary, the driving force behind those actions is consistent – if we want stronger communities, we have to be engaged. As renowned French political philosopher Alexis de Tocqueville once stated after visiting the United States in the early nineteenth century, “The health of a democratic society may be measured by the quality of functions performed by private citizens.”²

The first step to strengthening civic life across the state of Alabama is to understand the ways in which Alabamians are currently engaged in their communities. This data provides a critical window into the strong civic foundation across the state that can be built upon to address gaps in participation. We hope Alabamians will read this report, and use the findings to generate more dialogue and inform strategies to improve civic health across the state. We offer examples of promising initiatives that should be built upon, and recommendations of areas where we might focus more attention, but this is only a starting point. Please join us in ongoing dialogue about the report's findings online at www.mathewscenter.org and post a comment in response to the Alabama Civic Health Index.

Voter Registration



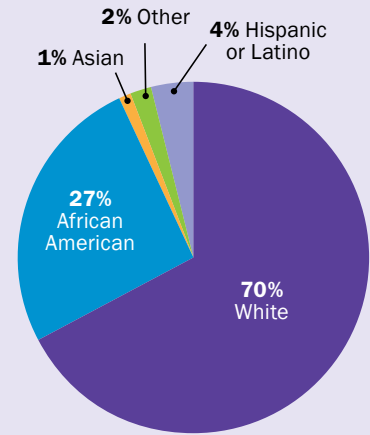
Voter Turnout



■ Alabama
■ US

Who is Alabama?

According to 2010 Census American Community Survey, Alabama's population — growing from past years — reached 4,779,736. Approximately 70% of Alabamians are White, whereas 27% are African American, 1.0% Asian, and 2% identify as other. Furthermore, approximately 4% identify as Hispanic or Latino. A little more than a third (34%) of Alabamians are under the age of 25, whereas a little over a quarter are age 25-44 (26%) and 45-64 (27%). Approximately 14% of Alabamians are age 65 and older.³ Furthermore, January 2012 data from the Bureau of Labor Statistics shows a 7.8% unemployment rate for Alabama.⁴



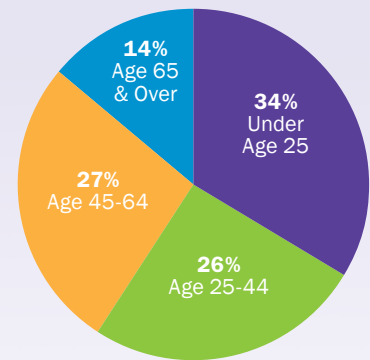
Alabama by Race

4,779,736

2010 Alabama Population

7.8%

Alabama Unemployment Rate



Alabama by Age

FINDINGS

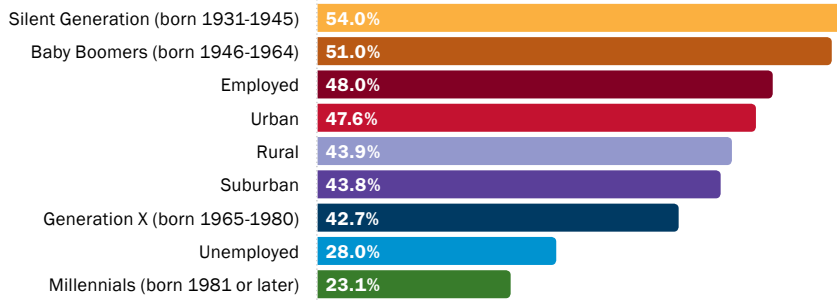
Political Action

Political action means conventional political engagement: mainly efforts to influence the government and other large institutions. Political action, as defined by this report, is composed of these four items: voting, discussing politics with family and friends a few times a week or more, contacting public officials, and buying or boycotting products. An individual receives one point for each activity that he or she reports. The state's mean is the average score for all residents age 18+.

When looking at the composite measures of political action across the state, it is clear that Alabama residents exhibit different levels of engagement depending on variables such as education, age, and race and ethnicity. African Americans are slightly more likely to be involved in at least one political action (67.6%) than Whites (64.0%). However, Whites in Alabama were more likely to participate in two or more political actions (28.6%) than African Americans (15.7%).

College education predicted political engagement: Alabamians 25 and older who had some college education were almost twice as likely to be politically engaged than younger Alabamians. Following the national trend, married Alabamians were far more likely to take political action than unmarried people. The likelihood of taking political action generally increases with age, peaking at ages 55–64, and declining slightly for those who are 65 and older. Put another way, Alabamians age 55+ reported twice as many political acts, on average, than people between 20 and 24.

Alabama Voter Turnout, 2010



VOTING

In addition to examining trends along the composite measure of political action, it is also important to analyze engagement along individual indicators. One important measure of political action is the degree to which individuals turn out to the polls. In the 2008 presidential election, voter registration in Alabama was 74.0% (above the national average) and voter turnout was 62.4% (on par with the national average). In the 2010 midterm elections, voter registration was 65.0% (on par with national average) and voter turnout was 44.1% (slightly below the national average).

When examining voting patterns across the state more closely, there are interesting divides along lines of employment, age, and geographic location. One particularly striking gap in voter turnout exists between the employed and unemployed (48.0% vs. 28.0%) citizens. This gap is troubling as it indicates that those who are unemployed are not participating in the most basic form of political action and, as such, their voices are not being heard. Another interesting finding is the difference in voter turnout by age. Baby boomers and senior citizens are twice as likely to vote as Millennials. According to a recent study conducted by CIRCLE (the Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement), in the 2008 Democratic and Republican primaries, an estimated 135,000 youth voted, producing a turnout of about 19%.⁵ And, while less dramatic, there is still a notable difference in voter turnout by geographic region: 47.6% of urban residents voted compared with 43.8% of suburban and 43.9% of rural residents.

OTHER ACTS OF POLITICAL ENGAGEMENT

Political engagement involves more than the act of voting. The political process encompasses other activities such as contacting public officials, attending meetings on public issues, and talking with family and friends about politics.

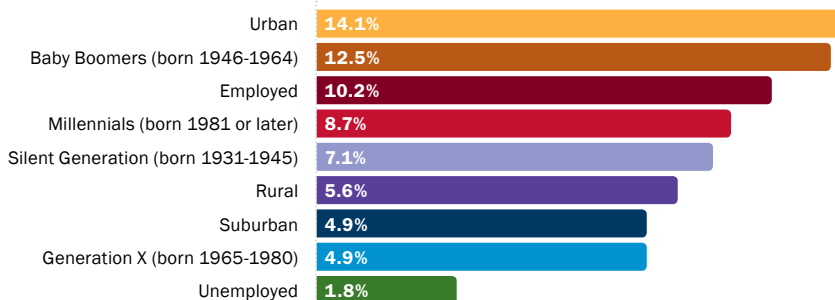
In 2010, Alabama ranked 51st in contacting or visiting a public official. This is a significant finding, as it raises questions of whether or not the voices and input of constituents are being effectively heard and represented by elected officials. Only 6.4% of Alabama's citizens reported having contacted or visited an official while the national average was 9.9%.

51st

National rank of Alabama in contacting or visiting a public official in 2010.



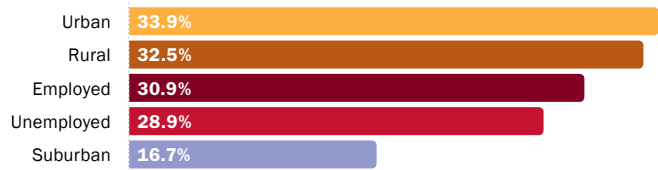
Alabama Rates of Contacting or Visiting a Public Official, 2010



The same trends based on age, employment status, and geographic region exist with this indicator as did with voting. The Baby Boomer generation reported contacting public officials at a high rate of 12.5%, with those between the ages of 55 and 64 reporting the highest rate of 16.9%. Those defined as Generation X, however, reported contacting public officials at the low rate of 4.9%.

Furthermore, those individuals who were employed reported contacting public officials at a rate of 10.2% while the unemployed were drastically lower at only 1.8%. There is also a correlation between where one lives and the rate at which they report contacting or visiting public officials. For those living in a principal city, the rate reported was 14.1%, while for individuals living in suburban and rural areas, the rates were only 4.9% and 5.6%, respectively.

Alabama Rates of Discussing Politics Frequently, 2010



16.7%

of suburban Alabamians discuss politics frequently, compared to 32.5% of rural residents and 33.9% of urban residents.

In contrast to this low engagement in contacting elected officials, Alabama has the distinction of being one of the most active states with regards to talking about politics with friends and family. Alabama ranks 10th in this area and boasts a rate of 30% of its residents who actively discuss politics with friends and family. This is higher than the national average of only 26%. It is interesting to consider why Alabamians would be so highly engaged in discussing politics while taking relatively little action to contact their elected officials. Why do Alabamians not take their concerns to public officials? Does this reflect a deep-seated lack of trust in the political system? Or, is this a reflection of a general sense of apathy toward institutional politics?

When looking at this high engagement in discussing politics among residents statewide, there are still some interesting findings by region, as well. For example, while 33.9% of urban residents and 32.5% of rural residents discuss politics at least a few times a week, only 16.7% of suburban residents report doing so. Another interesting finding was the relative lack of impact of employment status on this indicator: those who are employed (30.9%) and unemployed (28.9%) were nearly equally likely to discuss politics frequently.

WHAT CAN BE DONE?

While there are promising findings in the degree to which Alabamians take an interest in and discuss politics, there is clearly still much work to be done across the state to promote political engagement. Civic education is a vital tool for encouraging and building active citizens in the state of Alabama. The Alabama State Department of Education recently revised the Alabama Course of Study for Social Studies after a thorough examination of national standards and input from interested Alabamians. In order to graduate from Alabama public schools, every student must complete a half-year course in civics/government.

But civic education is not only the responsibility of school teachers, and Alabama is fortunate to have a number of organizations promoting civic learning. The American Village, located in Montevallo, AL is a nationally pioneering classroom and American history and civics education center that engages and inspires 40,000 students annually from Alabama and other Southeastern states in experience-based academic programs related to American history, civics, and government.

The David Mathews Center for Civic Life holds frequent Teachers' Institutes to help instructors develop their skills using National Issues Forums materials in the classroom. This non-partisan and non-advocacy approach encourages teachers and students to practice the skills of public deliberation and issues analysis in a constructive format.

The Alabama Center for Law & Civic Education organizes several programs for students to learn about civic matters. The "We the People" program is a curriculum for upper elementary, middle,

and high school students on the U.S. Constitution and Bill of Rights and conducts both competitive and non-competitive mock congressional hearings annually. The Play by the Rules program is a comprehensive juvenile law text and curriculum that works hand in hand with the seventh grade civics objectives for the state of Alabama. The Teen Court of Jefferson County program is a peer sentencing court for juvenile offenders where defendants are represented and prosecuted by teens in front of a jury of their peers to receive a constructive sentence. The Street Law program trains law student volunteers to present law-related topics to students in the greater Birmingham area.

The Alabama Bar Association coordinates the Lawyer in Every Classroom project, which provides attorney visits to classrooms to discuss civic issues with students. The Montgomery Election Center received national attention for its Art of Democracy Project, which used local artists to develop works representing the diversity of our democracy.

These programs all provide excellent models for cultivating the civic knowledge, skills, and competencies necessary to prepare young people to participate fully in democracy. The state should build upon a foundation of such promising initiatives to encourage more advances in civic education and learning.

Social Connectedness

Social connectedness is composed of eating dinner with other members of your household a few times a week or more, communicating with friends or family online a few times a week or more, talking with neighbors a few times a week or more, and doing favors for neighbors a few times a week or more.

Social connectedness focuses on the frequency with which individuals connect and communicate with one another. When people are more connected personally, they are likely to come together for civic or political reasons.

When considering a composite measure of social connectedness, the demographic differences are less prominent for indicators of social connectedness than those associated with political action. That said, however, 20.2% of African Americans were reported to be socially isolated, which was twice as likely as Whites at 10.4%. Interestingly, Alabama's elderly population appears to be relatively sheltered from isolation compared with their peers across the country. Another interesting finding was that living in the city center predicted social isolation while rural living was associated with a very social lifestyle.

Gender and marital status seem to play a larger role in social connectedness in Alabama. More women in Alabama reported being connected to others compared with their male counterparts. Being married also plays a role in the connections for Alabamians, 68.9% of married couples are connected in two or more ways versus only 49.9% of unmarried individuals.

ENGAGING WITH NEIGHBORS

Two important indicators of social connectedness are the degree to which individuals talk and exchange favors with neighbors. These were both areas in which Alabama citizens were very engaged, relative to national averages. In fact, Alabama citizens ranked 4th in the nation for doing favors for neighbors and 7th in the nation for talking with neighbors. These high rates of engagement with neighbors reflect an investment in community and a strong social fabric that is promising for the state. They also reflect a strong foundation from which further civic engagement potentially can be built.

Of particular interest when examining neighbor engagement are the geographic differences. Rural residents across the state are far more likely to exchange favors with neighbors at least a few times a week, at 29.6%, as opposed to 15.3% of urban residents and 15.8% of suburban residents. Similarly, rural residents were more likely to talk frequently with neighbors at 55.3% versus 48.2% of urban residents and 44.2% of suburban residents. Interestingly, individuals in rural Alabama are more likely to engage with their neighbors but less likely to vote or volunteer than their urban and suburban counterparts. This finding is worth noting as it indicates a significant asset in rural communities across the state that could be built upon for other forms of engagement.

29.6%

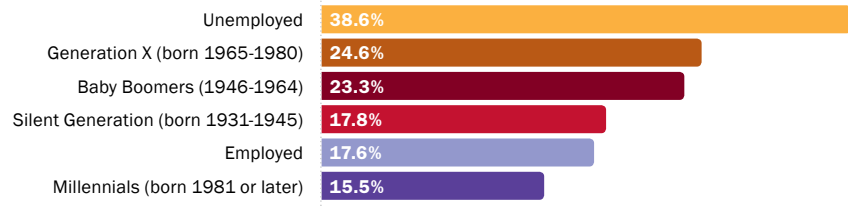
of rural Alabamians exchange favors with their neighbors at least a few times a week.

Photo courtesy of the Crimson White Newspaper at the University of Alabama.



There are other differences in engaging with neighbors along lines of age and employment status:

Alabama Rates of Exchanging Favors with Neighbors a Few Times a Week or More, 2010



INTERNET CONNECTIVITY

Another indicator of social connectedness is how residents connect on the Internet with their family and friends. Overall, 43.9% of Alabamians connect over the Internet a few times a week or more—this is less than the national rate of 54.3%. When looking at the data for talking with family and friends via the Internet, it is important to note that individuals between the ages of 20 and 24 hold the highest percentage of connectivity at 70.4%. The lowest age group is that of citizens 65 and older at only 24.1%.



70.4%

of Alabamians ages 20-24 connect with family and friends online.

The reverse is true when looking at talking with neighbors. Residents 65 and older have a significantly higher rate of connectivity (55.7%) than those between the ages of 20 and 24 (38.4%). This finding demonstrates an interesting generational gap in the ways that residents are engaging online versus face-to-face. It also might shed light on ways in which the younger generation's high online engagement could be leveraged to promote participation in other forms.

WHAT CAN BE DONE?

Several studies have demonstrated links between social connectedness and the performance of the economy and positive outcomes for individual health and welfare.⁶ Social connectedness is correlated with staying in school longer, increased involvement in activities, and a greater sense of community.⁷ Alabama's scores in social connectedness show that we have many strengths but several challenges as well. By making social connectedness a priority, Alabamians should be able to increase individual and collective well-being.

Projects that promote civic engagement often promote social connectedness as well, since the two are complementary. The small Town of Oak Grove, for example, decided to develop and maintain a community garden not only to help provide fresh vegetables for people in need, but also to create a common space for volunteers to interact, work together for a common purpose, and bond as a community.

Although Alabamians rank high for doing favors and talking with neighbors, it is important for citizens to move beyond their own neighborhoods to connect with people from diverse backgrounds. Bridge Builders Alabama, a two-year leadership program for high school juniors and seniors, brings together students from various backgrounds to develop connections that foster positive relationships, oftentimes lasting beyond high school years.

Programs and initiatives that continue to foster bonding and bridging social capital, both among neighbors and diverse groups, are critical to building a strong civic foundation for the state.

Volunteerism and Group Membership

While measures of volunteerism and group participation are not explicitly factored into the composite measures, they are critical indicators of civic health to be examined more closely. Volunteerism reflects an important way of giving of one's time to make a contribution to society. Group affiliation reflects membership in organizations and societies of like-minded individuals for recreational or social purposes. It is worth noting that NCoC produced research in 2011, entitled "Civic Health and Unemployment: Can Engagement Strengthen the Economy?", that found a strong

positive correlation between engagement, in the form of volunteering among other indicators, and resilience against unemployment in a time of economic hardship.⁸ These kinds of findings should draw attention to the substantive value of engagement as more than just a “feel good” exercise.

VOLUNTEERISM

Volunteers have a significant impact on community needs. They deliver critical services, keep public spaces clean and safe, mentor and tutor children, coach sports teams, provide professional services, build capacity, and maintain infrastructure. In 2010, 26.6% of Alabamians reported volunteering; this was higher than the national rate of 26.3%. Yet it is important to note that Alabama ranked 30th nationally in this indicator. Roughly 970,000 residents volunteered in 2010, and of that number, 59.9% were female, leaving men to hold only 40.1% of the volunteering positions.

Alabama Volunteerism by Race, 2010



The typical volunteer puts in about 52 hours each year, which averages out to about one hour of volunteer service per week. Interestingly, marital status has a high impact on the rate at which individuals volunteer — 63.6% of all volunteers are married.

Among those Alabamians who volunteer, the most common activity was serving, collecting, preparing, or distributing food. This activity was shared by 25.7% of the volunteers. Other predominant areas of volunteerism were teaching or tutoring, representing 25.1% of volunteer activities, and fundraising, representing 23.1% of activities.

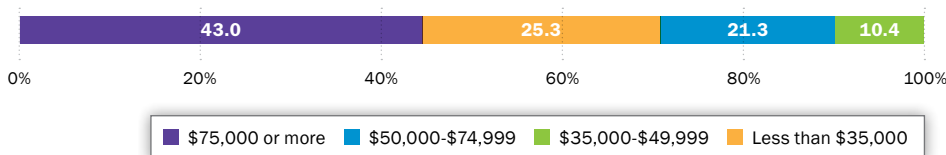
Volunteering was relatively strong across all age groups. Those between the ages of 30 and 45 were the most likely to volunteer their time with 32.1% reporting that they volunteer. While those 65 and older were the least likely to volunteer, at only 17.5%.

In terms of racial differences, Whites were more likely to volunteer than African Americans, with a volunteering rate of 29.2% for Whites, compared with 21.7% of African Americans. Given relative proportions of the population, the White population of Alabama represented 70.5% of volunteers, while African Americans were 20.3%, Asians 0.4% and Latinos 1.7% of volunteers.

Interestingly, there is no significant difference between those volunteers who were unemployed and those who were employed. There is, however, a difference based on region: 26.5% of urban residents in the state reported volunteering, compared with 28.3% of suburban residents and only 17.2% of rural residents. As noted above, however, rural residents were far more likely to exchange favors with neighbors. These findings represent interesting geographic differences in how individuals contribute to their community.

Of the volunteers who are employed, income was an interesting predictor. Those who reported living in the top income bracket of \$75,000 and above made up 43.0% of all Alabama volunteers. However, the second largest group at 25.3% was made up of individuals making less than \$35,000 per year. The next two groups follow a steady downward trend, from those making \$50,000 to \$74,999 at 21.3% of volunteers and those making between \$35,000 and \$49,999 at only 10.4%.

Alabama Volunteerism by Income, 2010



25.3%

Percentage of all volunteers in Alabama who fall in the lowest income range — the second highest rate among all income levels

Photo courtesy of University of Alabama.



Volunteers can work through many different organizations. In Alabama, those working with religious organizations made up 48.8% of all volunteers. Those volunteering with children's organizations were the second highest group at 19% of all volunteers. Such a high rate of volunteerism with religious organizations might be explained by both the large number of religious organizations across the state and by the existence of the Governor's Office of Faith-Based and Community Initiatives, a state initiative that seeks to promote volunteerism and service. This also provides insight into another important asset—the role that faith-based institutions can play in advancing engagement.

Though the level of participation in volunteerism in Alabama looks encouraging, the state ranked 43rd in the nation in terms of group membership. Only 29.1% of all Alabamians reported belonging to religious, neighborhood, school, sports, or other types of groups in the community, while the national average for group participation was 33.3%. Not only was Alabama below the national average, but 2010 represented a decline from previous years. Across 2008-2012, 31.5% of Alabamians volunteered on average.

Alabama was, however, nearly identical to the nation in terms of those who take a leadership role within an organization. While the national average was 9.1%, in Alabama 9.2% of citizens held a leadership role in an organization.

With such a large percentage of Alabamians engaging with neighbors, why are group affiliations so low? Group membership is important as it can strengthen and build a sense of community. Members share information, needs, and resources while working together and building social connections.

WHAT CAN BE DONE?

Community service in Alabama tends to be predominantly performed by those involved with faith-based service. Therefore, the Alabama Governor created the Office of Faith-Based and Community Initiatives to coordinate and assist with a host of service projects throughout the state. The Alabama Code Section 41-24 created the Alabama Community Service Grant Program to award assistance to organizations in the state that seek to assist local communities.

Civic education and service learning are two important factors that can lead to stronger social connectedness and community engagement. In terms of service learning, Alabama currently partners non-governmental organizations with several institutions of higher learning.

Impact Alabama is a nonprofit organization dedicated to developing and implementing substantive service learning projects in coordination with more than 20 universities and colleges throughout the state. Through its program Focus First, 2100 college students have coordinated vision screenings for more than 140,000 children across the state. Students also assist low-income families with income tax preparation, saving them more than \$1.3 million in fees.

During the 2010-2011 school year, Learn and Serve America provided service learning projects and engaged more than 15,000 students in Alabama. It is important to note that service learning does not have to be performed only at the college level. Projects also can be initiated by individuals, elementary, middle, and high schools, churches, and civic organizations. Creating and expanding these efforts will make an impact across the state of Alabama and prepare young people to continue to contribute to their communities in meaningful ways.



9.2%

of Alabamians hold a leadership role within an organization.

Photo courtesy of David Mathews Center for Civic Life.

Public Work

One of the most important indicators of the civic health of a state or nation is individual participation in public work.⁹ Public work is working with others to solve a problem or improve something through the process of deliberation and action. The measurements for public work are attendance at community meetings and working with neighbors to solve problems and improve something in the community.

Participation in **public work** as defined by this report, both attending meetings and working with neighbors to solve problems, is relatively uncommon in the United States. Among all Americans age 16 or older, 4.7% met the definition and 95.3% did not in 2010. Although 4.7% is a small percentage of the national population, this still roughly represents 11.2 million people who are attending meetings and working at the local level on public problems.

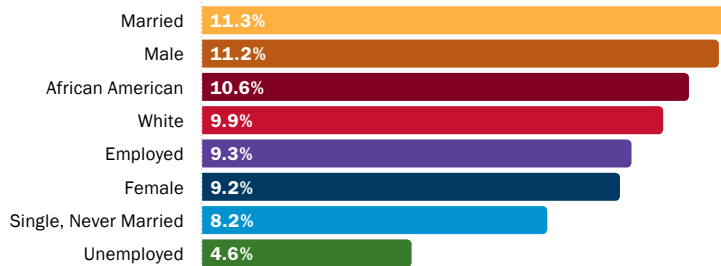
In Alabama, 6.3% of residents met this criteria. Furthermore, married Alabamians were almost twice as likely to meet the criteria for public work (7.7%) than single people (4.1%). Like other forms of civic engagement, public work is correlated with education. Just 1.2% of adults without high school diplomas met our criteria, rising to 9.4% of college graduates. In Alabama, going to college at all, even without graduating, was associated with a large increase in the likelihood of public work (3.2% without any college education and 10.3% with at least some college education.)

Public work also generally increases with age, peaking for those who are between 65 and 80 (9.9%).

WORKING WITH NEIGHBORS

When looking at each individual indicator of the composite measure of public work, Alabama performs well. In 2010, Alabama ranked 18th in the nation for percentage of citizens working with neighbors to solve community problems. This seems in line with the previously stated findings around the frequency with which Alabamians also talk and exchange favors with neighbors. Alabama's percentage for this indicator also rose from 7.1% in 2009 to 10.1% in 2010, which illustrates a proportional increase of nearly 45%. While inversely, the national average dipped slightly from 2009 to 2010. This significant increase in working with neighbors in contrast to the national decline demonstrates yet another asset of the state's civic health.

Alabama Rates of Working with Neighbors, 2010



Participation in the category of working with neighbors to solve community problems correlates directly with age, since individuals tend to participate in this activity as they age. Alabamians ages 16-29 were the least likely to solve such problems at 5.6%, while 14.0% of those ages 65-79 actively worked with their neighbors.

1.2%

of Alabamians without high school diplomas both attend public meetings and work with neighbors to solve problems—compared to 9.4% of college graduates.

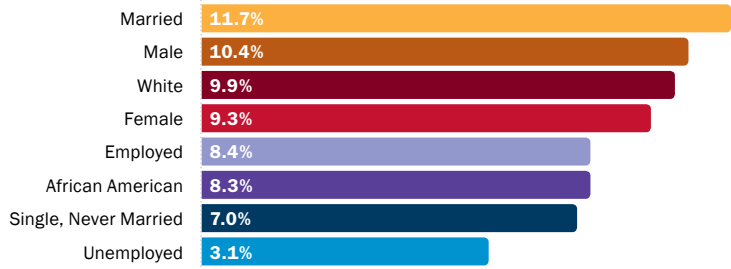
Photo courtesy of David Mathews Center for Civic Life.



ATTENDING COMMUNITY MEETINGS

Alabama had similar positive results regarding citizens over the age of 16 attending community meetings. In 2010, 9.8% of Alabamians attended community meetings, which is slightly higher than the national average of 9.2%. The results for this indicator are similar to that of working with neighbors. While the most active age group to attend meetings was Alabamians ages 65-79 at a rate of 17.9%, the least likely to attend meetings were those ages 16-29 at only 5.2%. As seen previously in the trend of working with neighbors, Alabama's rates increased while the nation's numbers as a whole decreased.

Alabama Rates of Attending Public Meetings, 2010



17.9%

of Alabamians ages 65-79 attended public meetings, compared to 5.2% of 16-29 year olds.

Photo courtesy of David Mathews Center for Civic Life.

WHAT CAN BE DONE?

Given the fast pace of today's society, it is important to note that Alabama's citizens have taken the time to work together to make their communities a better place.

These two important indicators of attending meetings and working with neighbors to solve problems show that Alabamians take significant pride in their communities and responsibility for their immediate surroundings.

However, citizens can continue to work together to solve problems in their communities. Several groups, both nonprofit and faith based, across the state work with citizens to address particular issues they face daily. One such group is the David Mathews Center for Civic Life. During the last year, the Mathews Center has worked with citizens across the state of Alabama discussing what citizens can do to address the drop-out situation in their communities.

Another such organization is the Alabama Poverty Project. This organization mobilizes Alabamians to eliminate poverty by not only providing informative presentations and educational seminars, but also by working with communities to develop strategic plans to end poverty in their communities.

By working together citizens in the state of Alabama can make a difference in the lives of their neighbors, children, and communities.

CONCLUSION

The elements of a strong foundation for civic health are alive and well in Alabama, but there is still work left to do. Alabamians are actively engaged in their communities through building relationships with neighbors, exchanging favors, and working together on community issues. While Alabamians engage in certain forms of political action such as discussing politics frequently, they rank last in the nation for percentage of residents who contact public officials. On these and other measures of social connectedness and community engagement, there is clearly room for improvement to ensure that Alabamians are able to contribute their time, talents, and voices to strengthening their communities.

Many organizations in the state of Alabama are working to engage students in meaningful projects that promote community involvement and service learning. These types of civic education and community initiatives build the skills, knowledge, and awareness necessary to strengthen citizen engagement. We should build upon this strong foundation to continue expanding the depth and reach of these programs. Furthermore, the following areas of civic life demand further attention and emphasis:

- Voting is an essential practice and a right for all Americans. With citizens in Alabama already taking steps to discuss politics with family and friends, the next step would be to encourage younger residents to go to the polls and vote.
- Community Engagement already plays a large role in the lives of many of Alabama's citizens. Yet more can be done. By actively participating in community discussions, taking part in service projects, and becoming more involved in the daily lives of our neighbors, Alabamians will promote positive change in their communities. These types of involvement are not just for the youth in the community. Opportunities abound for older generations and can greatly enhance the quality of life for those who participate. There are many organizations open to the public that promote such positive change. However, it is important to consider that, "fundamental change focuses on the community as a whole rather than a particular part of it and on the interrelationship of problems rather than just the one that seems most manageable. Therefore, while community-changing efforts may begin with specific projects, these have to be integrated so that they will be mutually supportive, and, consequently, more effective."¹⁰
- Education is of vital importance to so many factors of civic health. By supporting students as they complete high school and continue on to institutions of higher learning, we are laying the foundation for these individuals to become active members of society. Each indicator of civic health shows that education is a powerful predictor of community involvement and engagement. We need to ensure all Alabamians have access to the educational opportunities that will enrich not only their own lives but their communities as well.

By strengthening civic education, supporting students, encouraging voting, and continuing to place emphasis on problem solving in our local communities, Alabama has already taken important steps to becoming an active and civically engaged state. We hope this report catalyzes further dialogue and action to continue down that path.





TECHNICAL NOTES

Findings presented above are based on CIRCLE's analysis of the Census Current Population Survey (CPS) data. Any and all errors are our own. Volunteering estimates are from CPS September Volunteering Supplement, 2002 - 2010, Voting and registration data come from the CPS November Voting/Registration Supplement, 1972-2010, and all other civic engagement indicators, such as discussion of political information and connection to neighbors, come from the 2010 CPS Civic Engagement Supplement.

Estimates for the volunteering indicators (e.g., volunteering, working with neighbors, making donations) are based on U.S. residents ages 16 and older. Estimates for civic engagement and social connection indicators (e.g., exchanging favor with neighbor, discussing politics) are based on U.S. residents ages 18 and older. Voting and registration statistics are based on U.S. citizens who are 18 and older (eligible voters). Any time we examined the relationship between educational attainment

and engagement, estimates are only based on adults ages 25 and older, based on the assumption that younger people may still be completing their education.

Because we draw from multiple sources of data with varying sample sizes, we are not able to compute one margin of error for the state across all indicators. In Alabama, the margins of error for major indicators varied from +/- 1.7% to 3.5%, depending on the sample size and other parameters associated with a specific indicator. Any analysis that breaks down the sample into smaller groups (e.g., gender, education) will have smaller samples and therefore the margin of error will increase. It is also important to emphasize that our margin of error estimates are approximate, as CPS sampling is highly complex and accurate estimation of error rates involves many parameters that are not publicly available.



ENDNOTES

- ¹ David Mathews, *For Communities to Work* (Kettering Foundation Press, 2002).
- ² Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*. Edited by Richard D. Heffner. (New York: New American Library, 1956)
- ³ U.S. Census Bureau, 2010 Census. Profile of General Population and Housing Characteristics
- ⁴ U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, Alabama Economy at a Glance
- ⁵ CIRCLE analysis of Census Current Population Survey (CPS), <http://www.civicyouth.org/background-young-voters-in-alabama-and-mississippi/>
- ⁶ Robert D. Putnam, *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2000).
- ⁷ Jaana Juvonen, "Reforming middle schools: Focus on continuity, social connectedness, and engagement," *Educational Psychologist* 42 (2007): 197-208.
- ⁸ National Conference on Citizenship, "Civic Health and Unemployment: Can Engagement Strengthen the Economy?" <http://www.ncoc.net/unemployment>
- ⁹ Harry Boyte and Nancy Kari, *Building America: The Democratic Promise of Public Work* (Temple University Press, 1996).
- ¹⁰ David Mathews, *For Communities to Work* (Kettering Foundation Press, 2002).

CIVIC HEALTH INDEX

State and Local Partnerships

America's Civic Health Index has been produced nationally since 2006 to measure the level of civic engagement and health of our democracy. As the *Civic Health Index* is increasingly a part of the dialogue around which policymakers, communities, and the media talk about civic life, the index is increasing in its scope and specificity.

Together with its local partners, NCoC continues to lead and inspire a public dialogue about the future of citizenship in America. NCoC has worked in partnerships in communities across the country.

STATES

Alabama

University of Alabama*
David Mathews Center*
Auburn University*

Arizona

Center for the Future of Arizona

California

California Forward
Center for Civic Education
Center for Individual and
Institutional Renewal*
Davenport Institute

Connecticut

Everyday Democracy*
Secretary of the State of Connecticut*

Florida

Florida Joint Center for Citizenship
Bob Graham Center for Public Service
Lou Frey Institute of Politics
and Government
John S. and James L. Knight Foundation

Illinois

Citizen Advocacy Center
McCormick Foundation

Indiana

Center on Congress at Indiana University*
Hoosier State Press Association
Foundation*
Indiana Bar Foundation*
Indiana Supreme Court*
Indiana University Northwest*

Kentucky

Commonwealth of Kentucky,
Secretary of State's Office*
Institute for Citizenship & Social Responsibility,
Western Kentucky University*
Kentucky Advocates for Civic Education*
McConnell Center, University of Louisville*

Maryland

Mannakee Circle Group
Center for Civic Education
Common Cause-Maryland
Maryland Civic Literacy Commission

Massachusetts

Harvard Institute of Politics*

Minnesota

Center for Democracy and Citizenship

Missouri

Missouri State University

New Hampshire

Carsey Institute

New York

Siena College Research Institute
New York State Commission on
National and Community Service*

North Carolina

North Carolina Civic Education Consortium
Center for Civic Education
NC Center for Voter Education
Democracy NC
NC Campus Compact
Western Carolina University Department
of Public Policy

Ohio

Miami University Hamilton Center for
Civic Engagement

Oklahoma

University of Central Oklahoma
Oklahoma Campus Compact

Pennsylvania

Center for Democratic Deliberation*
National Constitution Center

Texas

University of Texas at San Antonio

Virginia

Center for the Constitution at James
Madison's Montpelier
Colonial Williamsburg Foundation

CITIES

Chicago

McCormick Foundation

Miami

Florida Joint Center for Citizenship
John S. and James L. Knight Foundation
Miami Foundation*

Seattle

Seattle City Club
Boeing Company
Seattle Foundation

Twin Cities

Center for Democracy and Citizenship
Citizens League*
John S. and James L. Knight Foundation

Justin Bibb

Special Assistant for Education and Economic Development for the County Executive, Cuyahoga County, Ohio

Harry Boyte

Director, Center for Democracy and Citizenship

John Bridgeland

CEO, Civic Enterprises
Chairman, Board of Advisors, National Conference on Citizenship
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 Cambell

Chief Program Officer, National Conference on Citizenship

Doug Dobson

Executive Director, Florida Joint Center for Citizenship

David Eisner

President and CEO, National Constitution Center

Maya Enista Smith

CEO, Mobilize.org

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Former Deputy Mayor of New York City
Daniel Paul Professor of Government, Kennedy School of Government at Harvard University
Director, Innovations in American Government
Former Mayor of Indianapolis

Robert Grimm, Jr.

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Founding President of Facebook

Kenneth Prewitt

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

Robert Putnam

Peter and Isabel Malkin Professor of Public Policy, Kennedy School of Government at Harvard University
Founder, Saguro Seminar
Author of *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community*

Thomas Sander

Executive Director, the Saguro Seminar, Harvard University

David B. Smith

Executive Director, National Conference on Citizenship
Founder, Mobilize.org

Heather Smith

Executive Director, Rock the Vote

Max Stier

Executive Director, Partnership for Public Service

Michael Weiser

Chairman, National Conference on Citizenship

Jonathan Zaff

Vice President for Research, America's Promise Alliance



THE UNIVERSITY OF
ALABAMA



AUBURN

UNIVERSITY

COLLEGE OF

LIBERAL ARTS



National Conference on Citizenship
Chartered by Congress



**DAVID MATHEWS
CENTER FOR CIVIC LIFE**