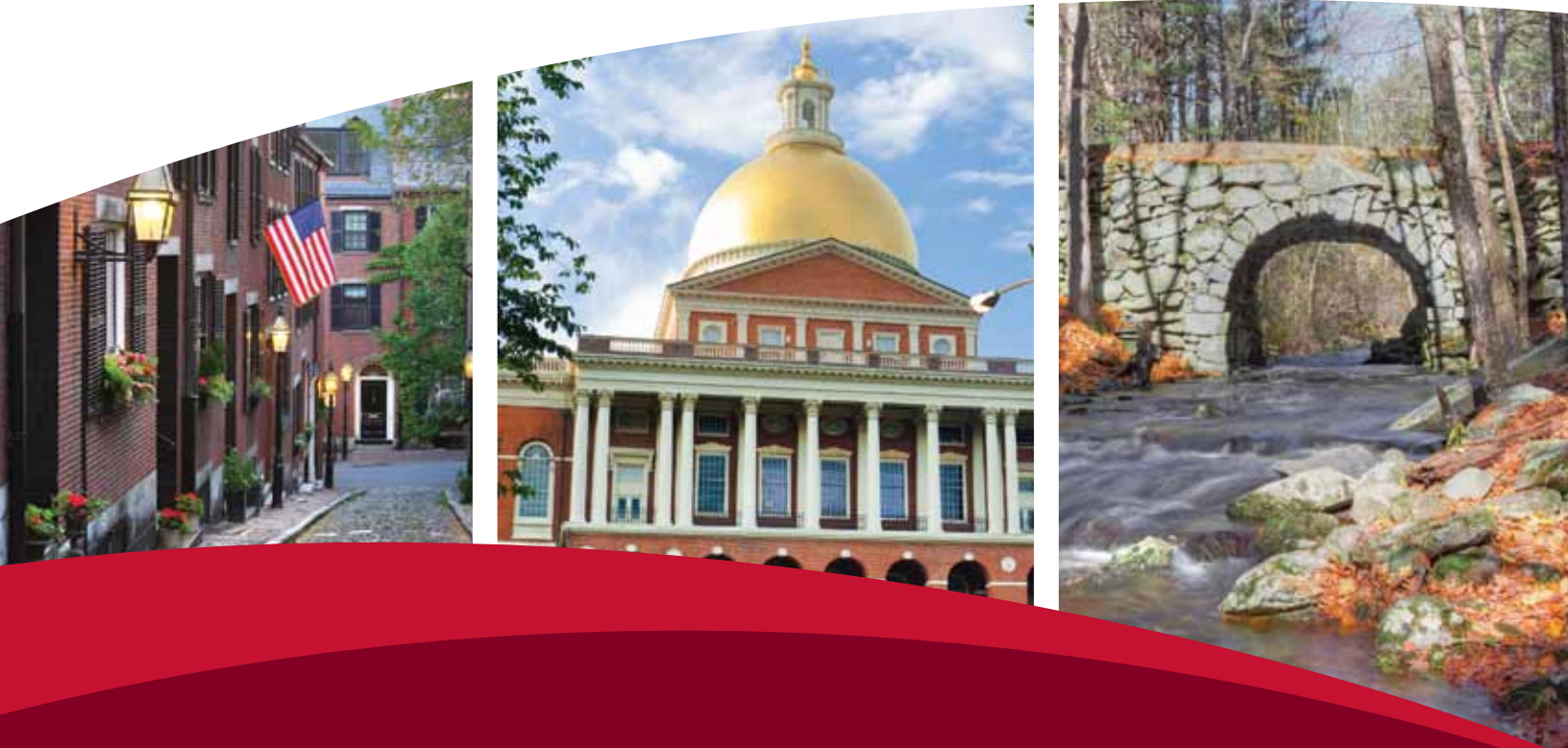


2011 MASSACHUSETTS CIVIC HEALTH INDEX



National Conference on Citizenship
Chartered by Congress



ABOUT THE PARTNERS

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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, non-partisan 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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INTRODUCTION

The United States was founded on the principles of a new kind of democracy, in which citizens were afforded essential rights and liberties and given the opportunity to participate freely in the government and politics. Massachusetts, in particular, is seen as a figurative place of origin for the leaders and revolutionary movement that led to our country's success in establishing a modern democratic republic.

As the legacy and potential of our country relies upon an engaged citizenry, individuals have the privilege and responsibility to become informed and involved in their society. This engagement is important not only on a national level, through avenues such as voting in presidential elections, but also on statewide and local levels. It takes shape in many forms—through strengthening social capital by connecting with one's neighbors, family and friends; through engaging in the political system by contacting elected officials or casting a vote; or through participating in community groups such as service programs, religious organizations or a local sports team. Each of these forms of engagement plays a critical role in shaping how our communities, economies and democracy function. Research has shown that we are individually and collectively better off when we work together. In fact, recent research from the National Conference on Citizenship (NCoC) has found “that five measures of civic engagement – attending meetings, helping neighbors, registering to vote, volunteering and voting – appear to help protect against unemployment and contribute to overall economic resilience.”¹



12%

of 18- to 29-year olds believe the country is headed in the right direction.

Given the critical importance of civic health to our communities and our democracy, it is a topic that merits further exploration, understanding, and recognition. Civic engagement not only promotes a more interconnected society, but it also empowers citizens to engage directly with the institutions that govern their lives. Especially in light of today's nationally contested issues and the high disapproval rates for public officials, civic engagement is more important than ever. As reflected in recent polls, citizens are frustrated with the direction in which the country is headed and want change. A new national poll by Harvard's Institute of Politics (IOP) reports that only 12% of young Americans (18- to 29-year olds) believe the country is 'headed in the right direction,' while more than half (52%) consider things are on the 'wrong track.' In addition, approval of President Obama's handling of the economy among 18- to 29-year olds dropped by ten percentage points to 32% since February polling.² Given this sense of frustration and disillusionment, it is even more important to restore a sense of self-efficacy paired with opportunities for engagement, through avenues such as working with neighbors, influencing political systems, volunteerism, and building stronger networks among communities.

Once a historic hub of this kind of citizen action, Massachusetts has not seen considerable increase in participation in recent years and has even experienced downward trends in many cases, which will be explored throughout this report. This decline could be attributed to a variety of factors worth exploring further, among them lack of civic education or lack of awareness of opportunities to become involved. Regardless of the causes, this stagnation is troubling.

Massachusetts needs to engage the input, voice, and contributions of all of its citizens in order to be stronger. With its diverse set of demographics, geographically, economically, and ethnically, Massachusetts has great potential to become a model of an inclusive government that engages all residents in meaningful ways. While the path to increased inclusion and engagement is challenging, public, private, and nonprofit leaders, as well as residents, must do more to encourage greater engagement. The results of this effort will strengthen the civic fabric of our communities and state for years to come.

REPORT OVERVIEW

The purpose of this report is to take a critical look at the current state of civic health in Massachusetts and understand current trends and rates of participation relative to the nation. To help track and measure civic health in Massachusetts, the IOP turned to NCoC, an organization chartered by Congress, that began publishing *America's Civic Health Index* in 2006. In 2008, NCoC began partnering with local institutions to produce state-level reports. After passage of the Edward M. Kennedy Serve America Act in 2009, NCoC partnered with the Corporation for National and Community Service and the U.S. Census Bureau to expand the civic health assessment through the Census Current Population Survey (CPS).

The Index has become the leading gauge of how Americans are connecting to each other and engaging in their communities. Throughout this report, civic health is examined by measuring a broad set of indicators such as the rates at which people are voting and volunteering, as well as how individuals are connected to family and friends, neighbors, and institutions. This 2011 Civic Health Index is based on analysis of CPS data performed by the Center for Information & Research on Civic Learning and Engagement (CIRCLE).

Through seeking to better understand where Massachusetts and its residents are most and least engaged, we begin to put forward a series of recommendations for how the state, its citizens, and key stakeholders – institutions of higher learning in particular – can contribute to increased and sustained civic engagement and participation.

MASSACHUSETTS AND NATIONWIDE DATA ON POLITICAL ACTION, SOCIAL CONNECTEDNESS, AND ENGAGEMENT IN PUBLIC WORK

When assessing civic health in Massachusetts, in addition to indicator-by-indicator analysis, CIRCLE developed three composite measures to help explain the U.S. Census data: political action, social connectedness, and public work. These indicators help to provide an overall snapshot of the civic health of the state. Political action is defined by efforts to influence the government or other institutions and takes the form of voting, discussing politics with others, reaching out to public officials about certain issues, and using purchasing power to take a stance on a certain issue. Social connectedness refers to eating dinner with loved ones a few times a week, talking with family or friends online, and connecting with neighbors. Public work consists of engaging in community meetings and working with neighbors to fix or improve something.³

While civic health trends in Massachusetts reflect some national trends, the state's rating on social connectedness, political action, and public work are somewhat above the national averages. This could be due to the state's rich history dating back to the founding of the United States, legendary politicians, or its highly visible Senate races among other possibilities. In the following section, we present the state's performance on these composite measures and compare these rates to the national averages. Additionally, to paint a more detailed story about the state's levels of civic engagement, we provide data on specific civic indicators such as voting, volunteering, and contacting public officials.

Political Action

Political action is a critical aspect of broader civic health as it reflects the ways in which individuals engage with and seek to influence the institutions that govern their lives. **Political action** refers to conventional political engagement: mainly efforts to influence the government and other large institutions through voting, discussing politics with others, reaching out to public officials about certain issues, and using purchasing power to take a stance on a certain issue. Overall, residents

Political Action

refers to conventional political engagement: mainly efforts to influence the government and other large institutions through voting, discussing politics with others, reaching out to public officials about certain issues, and using purchasing power to take a stance on a certain issue.



of Massachusetts participated in political action at a slightly higher rate than the national average. However, in Massachusetts there were some disparities along demographic lines worth noting.

While political action among African Americans and Whites came close nationally, in Massachusetts, the average number of political acts by Whites in 2010 far exceeded the number for African Americans: 71.5% of Whites took part in at least one act, versus 38.5% of African Americans. Latinos lagged even further behind with only 30.9% taking part in a political act. The age disparity in civic engagement was notable nationally but more pronounced in Massachusetts. More than three quarters of Massachusetts residents ages 55 and over participate in at least one political action as opposed to less than half of those residents ages 16-34. Also worth noting are the geographic disparities. The central cities of the Commonwealth have much lower political participation than in the suburbs—in fact, 46% of urban residents were not engaged at all. Educational attainment also proves to be a sharp dividing line in Massachusetts. College graduates reported an average of 1.47 political acts, and more than 80% of them did something political. High school drop-outs, on the other hand, reported an average of 0.5 acts and 60.5% did nothing.



11th

Massachusetts ranked 11th nationally for voter turnout in 2010.

VOTER TURNOUT IN MASSACHUSETTS

Voter Turnout (Age 18+)

2010 (State Rank)



■ MA
■ US

The degree to which people vote is an important indicator of the composite political action scores described above. With a voter turnout rate of 52.2% for citizens ages 18 and over, Massachusetts ranked 11th nationally for turnout in 2010. This is compared to a national turnout rate of 45.5% for citizens ages 18 and over. The state has maintained its 11th place ranking despite experiencing a drop in voter turnout from 55.4%, as measured in 2006. The 2010 drop-off in voter turnout might be due to “the lack of a governor’s contest, long-standing apathy about preliminary elections, and a growing number of independent voters.”⁴ National turnout has also fallen since 2006 when turnout rate for all eligible citizens nationwide was 47.8%. While Massachusetts is still in the 25th percentile, voter turnout across the state needs to increase as it is a tool by which citizens can interact with government and hold elected officials accountable.⁵

From the graphs that follow, it is evident that Massachusetts typically sees greater voter turnout than the United States nationally. However, we see that Massachusetts and the nation tend to follow a similar rise and fall trend with a few notable exceptions. For example, in the 1990 midterm election, the country’s average voter turnout was roughly the same as the previous midterm election (~50%), while Massachusetts turnout jumped to 64.7%. This may be explained by the state’s contentious gubernatorial race, which resulted in the election of William Weld—the first Republican Governor of Massachusetts since 1975.

Voter Turnout (Age 18+)

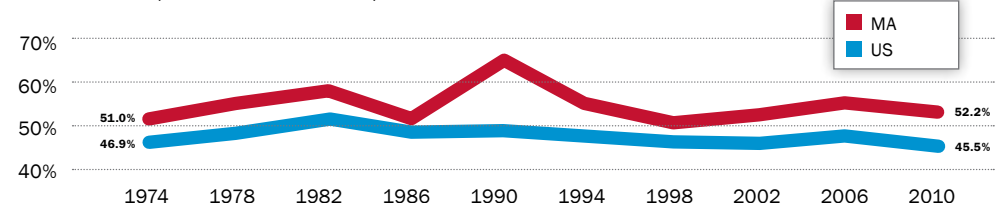
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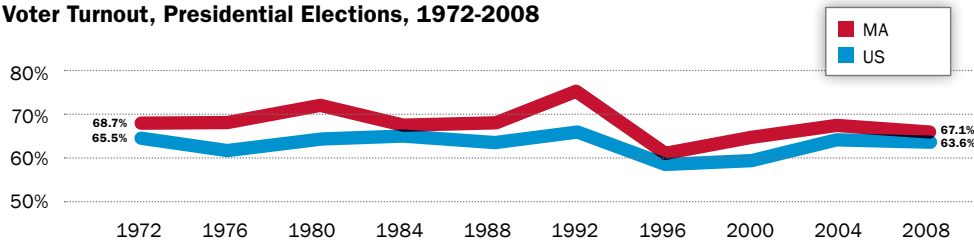
■ MA
■ US

Below are the historical trends on voter turnout in midterm and presidential elections (1972-2008) in Massachusetts and the United States.

Voter Turnout, Midterm Elections, 1974-2010



Voter Turnout, Presidential Elections, 1972-2008



Furthermore, while overall voter turnout in the state is higher than national trends, it is important to look at divides in participation demographically. For example, echoing the dramatic divide in political action between White and African American residents, we see a greater disparity between White and African American voters in Massachusetts than national trends. In Massachusetts, 57.0% of Whites voted in 2010, while only 41.2% of African Americans did. This presents a much starker disparity than national trends in which 48.6% of Whites voted and 44% of African Americans voted. Furthermore, 14.0% of Latinos in Massachusetts voted in 2010, relative to 31.2% nationally.

Massachusetts demonstrates similar trends to the nation in voting disparities along the lines of age and educational attainment. However, these gaps are worth noting. Only 29.9% of Massachusetts residents with less than a high school diploma voted in 2010, while 66.4% of college graduates did. Furthermore, only 22.4% of 18-24 year olds voted in 2010, while 68.5% of 55-64 year olds did. These demographic trends shed valuable light on where the state is capitalizing upon citizen input and engaging citizen voice, and where there are serious gaps that must be addressed.

66.4%

was the voter turnout rate in 2010 among college graduates in Massachusetts.



Voter Turnout by Race/Ethnicity	MA 2010	National 2010
White	57.0%	48.6%
African American	41.2%	44.0%
Latino	14.0%	31.2%

Voter Turnout by Education	MA 2010	National 2010
Less Than High School Diploma	29.9%	25.1%
High School Graduate, No College	41.1%	37.9%
Some College, No BA/BS	49.6%	46.3%
College Graduates	66.4%	60.9%

Voter Turnout by Age	MA 2010	National 2010
18-24 Years Old	22.4%	21.3%
25-34 Years Old	32.7%	31.2%
35-44 Years Old	52.1%	43.1%
45-54 Years Old	61.2%	50.5%
55-64 Years Old	68.5%	59.0%
65-74 Years Old	68.0%	62.1%
75+ Years Old	60.4%	59.2%

VOTER REGISTRATION IN MASSACHUSETTS

While voter registration is not explicitly factored into the composite score for political action, it is still an important indicator of civic health to be considered.

In 2006, the Massachusetts voter registration rate was 72.4% compared with a national rate of 67.6%. In 2010, however, the Massachusetts voter registration rate had decreased to 68.6% compared with a national rate of 65.1%. In 2010, Massachusetts ranked 14th among all states in the rate of citizens who are registered to vote.

While these high rates of voter registration are promising, research shows that voter registration doesn't always correlate with voter turnout.⁶ This bears out in comparing statewide registration to turnout rates, as well. Too often, voter turnout efforts morph into purely voter registration efforts without addressing other significant barriers to casting a vote such as having to take time off work, facing long lines, or having limited time. These barriers need to be considered and addressed if voter turnout is to be increased.



28.7%

of Massachusetts residents, in 2010, reported that they talk about politics at least a few times a week. This number dropped from 42.3% in 2008-2009.

TALKING POLITICS WITH FRIENDS AND FAMILY

In addition to voting, another important indicator of political action is the frequency with which individuals discuss politics with family and friends. Interestingly, this category marks a significant difference between the 2008-2009 and 2010 results across the state of Massachusetts. In 2010, 28.7% of Massachusetts residents reported that they talked about politics at least a few times a week, while 26.0% was reported nationally. By contrast, in 2008-2009, both the state and nation had much higher rates with 42.3% of Massachusetts residents reporting positively and 39.3% of national residents doing the same. Perhaps the notably high number of political discussions in 2008-2009 is due in part to the monumental Presidential election in late 2008. Whether or not this is the case, it's crucial to stress the importance of discussing politics with family and friends at all times—not just during election years. After the 2008 election, only 14% of Americans “were confident they would try to change local policies regarding schools, work or neighborhoods.”⁷ This is just one reflection of the challenge in sustaining input and engagement from citizens outside of high-profile election cycles. Building avenues and interest for individuals to discuss politics creates a cycle of information, self-efficacy, and motivation that might translate into other forms of political and community engagement.

Social Connectedness

For the purposes of this report, **social connectedness** is a composite measure defined by four items: 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.

The Saguaro Seminar at the Harvard Kennedy School, under the direction of Professor Robert Putnam, has done extensive research on social connectedness, also referred to as “social capital.” Of the benefits of these connections and social ties, they write, “These connections may increase individual well-being and opportunity by linking people more strongly to their local community and to larger societal resources. Or they may build community by strengthening bonds that link community members or by bridging divisions between them. The new ties may be formal, like a club, association, or civic institution, or informal, like a group of friends talking or colleagues collaborating.”⁸ In essence, social connectedness, or social capital, provides a critical foundation from which further participation and engagement can build. As such, it's an important element of civic health to further understand and promote.

The state of Massachusetts has some reason for optimism when examining the social connectedness of its residents. When examining social connectedness nationally, people tend to become more isolated with advanced age, but the isolation rate of older individuals in Massachusetts was slightly lower than the national average. The state's Latinos were also at low risk of social disconnection, with just 4.6% scoring zero on the social scale. However, there are still significant gaps along lines of educational attainment. For example, 23% of the state's high school drop-outs reported no connections at all. This connection between lower educational attainment and higher risk of social isolation is troubling.

FAVORS FOR NEIGHBORS

When we examine this composite measure of social connectedness on a closer level, we see some areas for improvement. For example, Massachusetts is below the national rate of Americans who self-report that they frequently, meaning a few times a week or more, exchange favors with their neighbors. The national rate in 2010 was 15.2% while the Massachusetts rate was 12.8%. This disparity results in the state ranking 46th nationally with levels down from 2008-2009 estimates, both nationally and in-state. However, while the national rate is only down by one percentage point since 2008-2009, the Massachusetts rate is down by as much as 4.5 percentage points. This significant decrease is worth noting and examining further. Exchanging favors with neighbors is an important element of social capital, and the more that individuals are engaged in social networks on neighborhood and community levels, the more they are typically engaged in other forms.

EATING DINNER WITH FAMILY

On a promising note, this decreased engagement with neighbors does not extend into the home, as 88.7% of Massachusetts residents report that they eat dinner with their family a few times a week or more. Eating dinner with family is a great way to foster discussions of current events and politics. Compared with the national rate of 88.1% in 2010, Massachusetts is ranked 27th in this category. However, the states ranked above Massachusetts differ by merely percentage points, or in some cases, tenths of a percentage point. While the percentage of Massachusetts residents that eat dinner with family frequently is high, rates have actually shown a marginal decrease since 2009 reports which place the national rate at 89.1% and the Massachusetts rate at 90.7%.

Public Work

Another important aspect of civic health is the degree to which citizens work collaboratively on local issues. The **public work** composite measure identifies individuals who *both* attend meetings *and* work with neighbors to fix or improve something. This measure reflects lower participation than social connectedness with 4.7% of Americans nationally meeting the definition. Though 4.7% is still a small percentage of the total population, it is important to keep in mind that this represents 11.2 million people who are attending meetings and working at the local and grassroots level to solve public problems. In Massachusetts, there is a promising higher rate of 5.7% of residents who are both attending meetings and working with neighbors to address community issues.

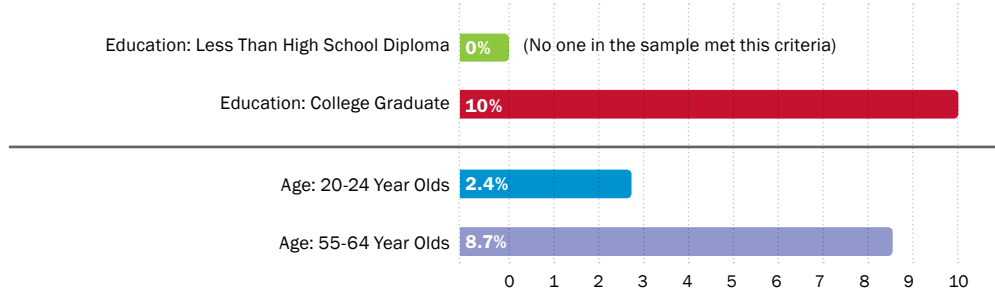
At the national level, we see that public work is also strongly correlated with education level. Only 1.2% of adults without high school diplomas met the criteria, rising to 9.4% of college graduates. This means that America's venues of public work are dominated by the middle-class. When examining trends along lines of race and ethnicity, Native Americans are most likely to meet the definition of public work at 6.2%. It is also found that married people are three times more likely to participate in this way as single people. There is also a steep age curve, with just 1.3% of teenagers meeting the definition, rising to a peak of 6.8% for ages 55-64. To sum up, middle-aged, educated, married couples seemed especially active in this arena.

46th

Massachusetts ranks 46th nationally for the rate of people who exchange favors with neighbors at least a few times a week.



Massachusetts Citizens Engaged in Public Work



Public work was strong in Massachusetts, but again, there are interesting gaps along demographic lines. Just 2.4% of 20-24 year olds met the criteria for public work, whereas 8.7% of those ages 55-64 were engaged in public work. Education again was a strong predictor, with 10% of college graduates meeting the criteria, as opposed to no one in the sample with less than a high school diploma. As opposed to other forms of participation with regional divides, cities and suburbs in Massachusetts showed the same rate of public work.

ATTENDING COMMUNITY MEETINGS

When we break down the public work criteria, and look separately at each indicator, we also see interesting trends. From 2006 to 2010, Massachusetts ranked considerably higher than the nation on percentages of residents who attended community meetings.

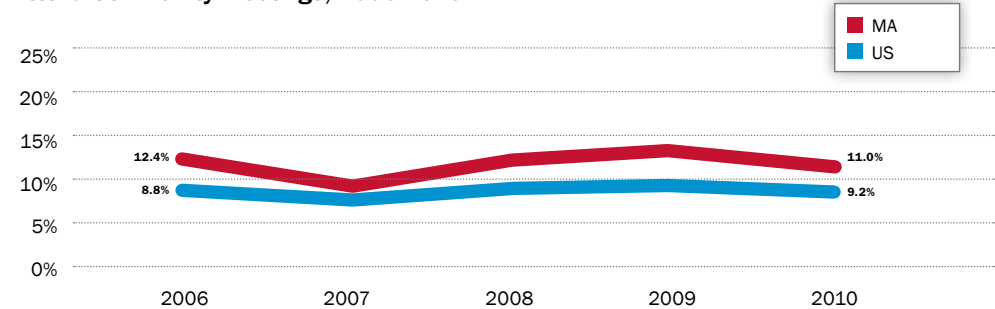
Below is the historical trend demonstrating how Massachusetts compares to the United States on attending community meetings from 2006 to 2010.



2.4%

of 20-24 year olds in Massachusetts engaged in public work in 2010.

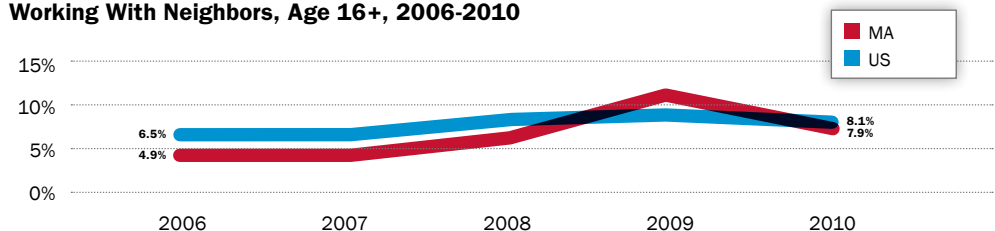
Attend Community Meetings, 2006-2010



WORKING WITH NEIGHBORS IN MASSACHUSETTS

The rate of neighbors working together to solve community problems reflects a desire to work toward a solution and is a critical mark of vibrant civic health. Something as simple as how residents work together can have significant implications for community vitality. Research produced by NCoC, exploring the link between civic engagement and economic resilience,

Working With Neighbors, Age 16+, 2006-2010



demonstrated that, “an increase in one point in the state’s rate of working with neighbors was associated with a decrease of 0.256 percentage points in the unemployment rate when the economic factors were controlled.”⁹

This is important to bear in mind as both the national and state’s rates of neighbors working together to solve community problems were down from 2009 levels. Nationally, 8.8% of neighbors were engaging with local problems in 2009 while 8.1% did so in 2010. In Massachusetts, 10.8% of people were working with their neighbors to solve their problems in 2009, but that rate fell to 7.9% in 2010, ranking the state in 31st place nationally.

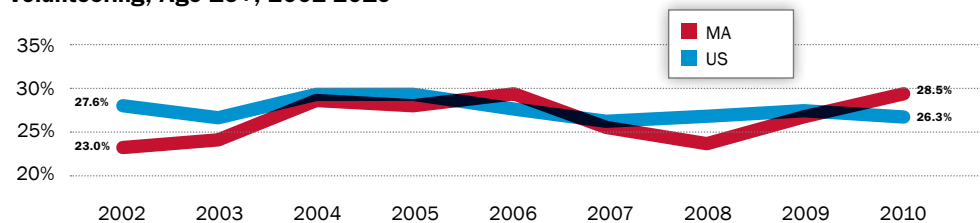
Other Forms of Community Engagement

In addition to the three composite measures of civic health discussed previously – political action, social connectedness and public work – there are other important indicators of how individuals are participating in their communities. Two of these indicators also worth noting are volunteerism and group participation.

VOLUNTEERING IN MASSACHUSETTS

Volunteering is an important avenue for individuals to contribute their time and talents to address pressing social issues. In 2010, 1,510,000 Massachusetts residents volunteered, making 28.5% the state’s volunteering rate for 2010. This statistic places Massachusetts 21st out of 50 states and the District of Columbia, with the national volunteering rate at 26.3%. This statistic is promising, as well, because it marks an increase of about two percentage points from 2009 levels.

Volunteering, Age 16+, 2002-2010



Between 2002 and 2010, volunteering in the United States and Massachusetts has fluctuated very little from its lowest level to its highest. Unlike voter turnout, the national volunteering rate is generally higher than Massachusetts with the exception of 2006 and 2010.

GROUP MEMBERSHIP

Another important indicator of engagement in civil society is the rate at which people belong to one or more community groups such as religious, neighborhood, schools, sports, and other community groups. CPS data reflects that 34.5% of Massachusetts residents were engaged in such groups in 2010. This is above the national rate of 33.3% for the same year. This places the state in 29th place for the rate of people belonging to civil society groups. Beyond basic engagement, 10.7% of Massachusetts citizens assume a position of leadership in such organizations in the form of officer or committee positions, compared with a rate of 9.1% nationally. Group membership provides an important foundation of connectedness and access points to further engagement that should be encouraged and promoted.

As we have seen, Massachusetts has many strengths and performs well on a number of indicators of civic health. There are also, however, many areas with room for improvement. Troubling gaps in participation along lines of race and ethnicity, age and educational attainment must be examined carefully in order to shape data-driven strategies and solutions moving forward. Given the current state of civic health in Massachusetts, what follows is a series of recommendations for programs, approaches, and policies that can serve to strengthen engagement in all forms and advance the civic vitality of our communities.

21st

Massachusetts ranks 21st nationally in the rate of volunteering.



ECONOMIC CLIMATE AND DEMOGRAPHIC CONTEXT

As we saw in many of the civic health indicators, nationally and in the state of Massachusetts, there are troubling divides along demographic lines that must be examined more closely. Furthermore, for proposals which aim to increase civic engagement and promote civic health to be successful, they must be understood in light of the state's socioeconomic, political, and demographic context.

With an unemployment rate of 7.3%, Massachusetts must consider the implications of engaging those citizens who are in the midst of struggling with the demands of daily life.¹⁰ Perhaps even more troubling than the state's unemployment rate, is the fact that the economic crisis has forced, nationally, 170,000 homeless families into shelters in 2009—up nearly 30% from 2007.¹¹ When finding a job or securing housing takes precedence, finding time for community service, voting, or other forms of participation can prove challenging.

In addition to the economic climate, another important piece of context to consider is how minority communities are being incorporated into civic life in the state of Massachusetts. According to U.S. Census data, the total population in Massachusetts in 2010 was 6,547,629. The breakdown of the state's population by race and ethnicity was as follows: 80.4% White, 6.6% Black/African American, 0.3% Native American, 5.3% Asian/Pacific Islander, 4.7% identifying as some other race, 2.7% identifying as two or more races, and 9.6% Hispanic.¹² As mentioned previously, while African Americans came close to Whites in political action nationally, in Massachusetts, there is a huge disparity along racial lines. The average number of political acts initiated by Whites was more than double those of African Americans and Latinos, the two most prominent minority racial groups in Massachusetts. Adding to this complexity is the large immigrant population—14.1% of the state's residents are foreign-born, as reported by the U.S. Census Bureau in 2010. These immigrant populations, especially, face both a linguistic and cultural barrier, which present added complexities to inclusive engagement.



Another important consideration is how geographic divides play a role in shaping community connectedness and civic engagement. Typically, urban areas across the state see lower rates of participation than their suburban counterparts. More research is needed to understand how the racial, economic, and social make-up of cities relates to levels of participation.

The Saguaro Seminar continues to produce interesting research on the connections between social inequality and social capital, particularly looking at “the impact of economic hard times on social capital and civic engagement, as well as some worrying new evidence of a growing ‘class gap’ among American young people, as kids from upper-middle class backgrounds are increasingly well-nested in family, religious, and community networks, whereas kids from the other side of the tracks are increasingly isolated from such connections.”¹³ This kind of research is critical to understanding how these divides in participation in the state of Massachusetts can be reversed.

CIVIC HEALTH FOR THE YOUNGER GENERATION

In order to ensure that all citizens use their voice, time, and talents to contribute to their communities, we must ensure that civic education plays a central role in preparing young people to participate fully in democracy. Emerging research has concluded that levels of political knowledge positively correlate with political participation. Civic education plays a central role in shaping the political knowledge, competencies and self-efficacy for individuals to engage in our democracy. One study, conducted by political analyst William Galston at the University of Maryland in 2001, suggested that “traditional classroom-based civic education can significantly raise political knowledge.”¹⁴ Recognizing the important role that civic education plays, the Massachusetts legislature has been exploring several pieces of legislation dealing with increased civic education. Such bills include both proposals from the Senate and House (HB00136,¹⁵ HB00174,¹⁶ S00183¹⁷

are the bill numbers for the current session of legislature) all of which directly deal with including a civics education requirement in classrooms. These pieces of legislation are currently pending debate and approval.

Another approach to promoting civic education has been to attempt to engage individuals more through incentives. As such, the Massachusetts government has considered legislation which would award young people a seal of excellence for engaging in civic practices.¹⁸

The Campaign for the Civic Mission of Schools—a coalition of 40 organizations committed to improving the quality and quantity of civic learning in American schools—is a valuable resource to consult when looking to implement civic education in Massachusetts classrooms. They explain that the purpose of civic education is to “help young people acquire and learn to use the skills, knowledge, and attitudes that will prepare them to be competent and responsible citizens throughout their lives.”¹⁹ Their research cites six ways to develop competent and responsible citizens: “providing instruction in government, history, law, and democracy; incorporating discussion of current local, national, and international issues and events into the classroom, particularly those that young people view as important to their lives; designing and implementing programs that provide students with the opportunity to apply what they learn through performing community service linked to the formal curriculum and classroom instruction; offering extracurricular activities that provide opportunities for young people to get involved in their schools or communities; encouraging student participation in school governance; and encouraging students’ participation in simulations of democratic processes and procedures.”²⁰ These recommendations and resources, among many others in the field, ought to be examined carefully as Massachusetts charts its own course in ensuring every child has access to high-quality civic education.

Out-of-school programs also play a critical role in shaping the civic skills and attitudes of young people. In an interview with Ms. Anny Jean-Jacques Domercant, Assistant Director to the Governor’s Office of Community Affairs, she described the creation of Governor Deval Patrick’s Governor’s Statewide Youth Council, which was aimed at getting young people from diverse backgrounds to become more involved in their community and to give them a forum to voice their concerns or observations. This initiative, a result of Governor Patrick’s visit to Dorchester during a time of considerable violence and youth-inflicted crime, was an attempt to “give youth a voice in shaping the policies that affected them.” Consisting of 28 young adults (two from each Massachusetts county), the Youth Council is a positive step toward civic engagement of the next generation. Such programs should be strongly encouraged as they give youth a sense of empowerment and allow them to understand the importance of civic engagement for both their local and state communities.



ENCOURAGING CIVIC PARTICIPATION IN THE ADULT POPULATION

The importance of civic education, teaching citizens about the theory, principles, and motivations behind civic engagement and the principles that closely tie civics and politics, is an invaluable point that must not be overlooked. Several proposed pieces of legislation attempting to incorporate civic education more fully into K-12 education are steps in the right direction. However, we must also be cognizant of educating, informing, and equipping the rest of the population—the adults who work, have the capacity to vote, and make up a considerable portion of the population. Adult education is equally critical to the advancement of communities and the state.

Just as civic education for school-age children promotes the development of knowledge and skills through experiential learning, so should approaches to adult education. Community service and volunteerism provide such pathways for developing these skills and should be encouraged. Investments into volunteer capacity in the nonprofit sector, promotion of volunteer opportunities through diverse outreach avenues, and building a culture of service are productive ways to build these pathways.

One example of this kind of effort has launched in New York City. In April 2009, Mayor Bloomberg started the NYC Service branch of the New York City government, appointing the city's chief service officer and forming a service branch of the city government.²¹ The purpose of NYC Service is to connect New York City citizens with volunteer or service projects so they can give back. NYC Service runs an aggressive advertising campaign, "Use Your _____ For Good," and it can be seen on billboards, taxis, buses, and subways throughout the city. NYC Service also has an interactive website where one can do a specific 'service search' to find a service opportunity that is compatible with one's interests and schedule. This NYC Service branch is part of the national Cities of Service coalition, in which the Massachusetts cities of Springfield, Holyoke, Somerville and Boston are currently members.

Oftentimes, encouraging engagement is built first upon a foundation of community members who understand and value their own role, efficacy, and importance. Educating and informing individuals about the underlying reasons as to *why* their civic engagement is crucial is a vital step toward shifting behaviors. By better understanding how they can effect change, as well as the processes entailed in governance (for example, the arduous process required for a bill to become legislation), citizens will be more motivated and empowered to take action to impact these systems.

In order to carry out such a goal, much consideration must be given to the time constraints and daily demands of individual citizens. As media and other sources of entertainment are widely used avenues for engagement, they might prove effective tools to increase engagement. In an increasingly social media-oriented society, this kind of public education effort could be accomplished through short public service announcement-type ads, five-minute television programs, and informational mailings. These programs should be multilingual and regionally targeted in order to ensure the most efficient and largest-reaching programs can be implemented.

Another avenue for promoting education and information are community libraries, which serve as important community hubs. Moreover, libraries can host public forums as a means of bringing communities together to seek solutions and common ground on issues that affect their everyday life.²² Robert Putnam's *Better Together* provides a series of case studies which demonstrates ways that communities are strengthened by bringing people together. The book highlights one particular story of a public library that served as a unique bridge between a racially and socio-economically divided community: "No longer a passive repository of books, the new Chicago library is an active and responsive part of the community. It is also an agent of change that can bring together very different types of communities, from the wealthy Gold Coast to the impoverished, mostly African American, Cabrini Green."²³

In addition to informing and empowering citizens, another critical effort is to increase opportunities for citizens to use their voices through greater voter engagement. A variety of proposed bills (S00310,²⁴ S00298,²⁵ S00301,²⁶ HB00205²⁷ are the bill numbers for the current session of legislature) seek to make voter registration easier to access by providing avenues online and in public high schools, same-day registration on absentee voting. One example of similar national legislation which aimed to increase voter turnout was in 1993 when President Clinton passed the National Voter Registration Act allowing voter registration when qualifying voters applied for or renewed their driver's license or applied for social services. In an increasingly technological society, reforms that allow for easily accessible, secure online voter registration should be considered carefully. While concerns regarding how to publicize and train citizens to use these services are valid, in the long run, the ease of access could prove critical to increased voter registration and turnout.



THE COLLEGIATE-CENTRIC ADVANTAGE

Massachusetts is home to 121 institutions of higher education, a number of which consistently rank as some of the best colleges/universities in the United States. Especially prominent is its University of Massachusetts program which features five campuses around the state. Many of these top schools are centered in and around Boston and the Eastern seaboard area. Massachusetts should view the presence of so many higher education institutions in the state as a valuable resource to advance civic health. Many universities, such as Harvard University located in Cambridge, promote civic engagement among the student body and/or among the community at large. For example, Harvard College hosts its own student-run CIVICS program, dedicated to promoting civic education in the community.²⁸ Such programs advance civic health in area schools and have met with relative success. Many of these programs also focus on disparities in engagement along racial and economic lines by targeting financially depressed areas such as the Dorchester and Roxbury areas.

Another example of an initiative which addresses the critical role that higher education plays in advancing civic health is the American Democracy Project, which began in 2003 as an initiative within the American Association of State Colleges and Universities. The purpose of the project is to “produce graduates who are committed to being active, involved citizens in their communities.”²⁹ This program includes a series of national initiatives supported by groups of campuses and national partners. For example, one initiative, Civic Agency, is devoted to encouraging citizens to work collaboratively across differences like partisan ideology, faith traditions, income, geography, and ethnicity to address common challenges, solve problems, and create common ground. National initiatives such as the American Democracy Project, Campus Compact, and others can serve as critical resources for the state of Massachusetts as it leverages its many institutions of higher education to promote civic health.

CONCLUSION

As individuals and communities struggle to get back on their feet during difficult economic times, and widespread frustration with the economy and politics continues to grow, sustainable strategies must be developed to reengage citizens in everyday problem solving and shaping the communities in which they want to live. Massachusetts has a rich tradition of citizen engagement and continues to be a leader in measures such as voter turnout and registration, citizens who talk with each other about politics, and those who engage over the Internet with family and friends. The state also has tremendous assets that should be built upon such as its many institutions of higher education that bring invaluable resources to bear on pressing community issues and help shape the next generation of civic leaders. However, Massachusetts must also grapple with some troubling trends and gaps in participation along lines of age, race and ethnicity, and socioeconomic status. Understanding where we are, and what resources we can leverage to strengthen civic engagement is the first step toward advancing civic health across the state. Exploring promising practices and initiatives being developed and implemented throughout the country is also critical to identifying and replicating sustainable civic strategies throughout Massachusetts. With a pivotal election cycle just around the corner and ongoing legislation passing through Congress, Massachusetts citizens can't afford to miss out on the action. By equipping our young people to understand their role, rights, and responsibilities in a democratic system and empowering residents of all backgrounds to contribute their time, talents, and voice to their communities, we can create a stronger and more vibrant state together.



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 United States residents ages 16 and older. Estimates for civic engagement and social connection indicators (e.g., exchanging favor with neighbor, discussing politics) are based on United States residents ages 18 and older. Voting and registration statistics are based on United States 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 Massachusetts, the margins of error for major indicators varied from +/- 1.3% to 2.8%, 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.

Notes About the Composite Civic Indicators:

CIRCLE provided three composite measures of civic engagement offered in this report as a way to offer a summative metric to glean a bigger picture of the level of engagement among residents of the state. *It is important to note, however, that these composite measures represent just one way of bundling together individual indicators into larger categories to tell one type of story about civic engagement.*

The three composite measures are one of the many ways of summarizing multiple indicators:

- *“Political action” metric is a count of activities in the conventional political engagement domain. These are mainly efforts to influence the government and other large institutions. It is composed of 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 to make up a scale of 0 to 4.*
- *“Social connectedness” is a count of activities that are considered to maintain or strengthen social connection. It is composed of four items: 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. Individuals get one point for each act they report to make up a scale of 0 to 4.*
- *“Public work” composite identifies individuals who both attend meetings and work with neighbors to fix or improve something. Drawing on the terminology of Harry Boyte in *Building America: The Democratic Promise of Public Work* (and antecedents such as Alexis de Tocqueville), public work refers to the combination of talking about issues and directly acting on them. A person is scored as participating in public work if he or she both attends meetings and works with neighbors (if a person does one of the other, they are not counted in this measure).*

ENDNOTES

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- 3 CIRCLE provided three composite measures of civic engagement offered in this report as a way to offer a summative metric to glean a bigger picture of the level of engagement among residents of the state.
 1. "Political action" metric is a count of activities in the conventional political engagement domain. These are mainly efforts to influence the government and other large institutions. It is composed of 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 to make up a scale of 0 to 4.
 2. "Social connectedness" is a count of activities that are considered to maintain or strengthen social connection. It is composed of four items: 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. Individuals get one point for each act they report to make up a scale of 0 to 4.
 3. "Public work" composite identifies individuals who both attend meetings and work with neighbors to fix or improve something. Drawing on the terminology of Harry Boyte in *Building America: The Democratic Promise of Public Work* (and antecedents such as Alexis de Tocqueville), public work refers to the combination of talking about issues and directly acting on them. A person is scored as participating in public work if he or she both attends meetings and works with neighbors (if a person does one or the other, they are not counted in this measure).
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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 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

Oklahoma

University of Central Oklahoma
Oklahoma Campus Compact

Pennsylvania

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
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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



National Conference on Citizenship
Chartered by Congress

