

2012 OKLAHOMA CIVIC HEALTH INDEX



CIVIC SKILLS AND VOTER EDUCATION

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National Conference on Citizenship
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NATIONAL CONFERENCE ON CITIZENSHIP

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.

AMERICAN DEMOCRACY PROJECT, CENTER FOR CIVIC ENGAGEMENT, UNIVERSITY OF CENTRAL OKLAHOMA

The American Democracy Project in the Center for Civic Engagement at the University of Central Oklahoma is committed to increasing student civic engagement, an essential component of transformative learning, at the University of Central Oklahoma. Established in 2003 in partnership with The New York Times and the American Association of State Colleges and Universities, with UCO as a charter member, the American Democracy Project involves 250 colleges and universities in a special initiative that focuses on higher education's role in preparing the next generation of informed, engaged citizens for our democracy. As institutions and as individuals we make a difference by example, by living lives of engagement, and by inviting our students to prepare for lives of civic responsibility.

OKLAHOMA CAMPUS COMPACT

Oklahoma Campus Compact (OkCC) supports the civic purpose of higher education that includes developing students as citizens. OkCC assists member institutions in their efforts to develop citizenship skills by promoting and advancing methodologies including service-learning, volunteerism, community service, and political engagement. Established in October 2000, OkCC represents 36 Oklahoma higher education institutions as part of the 1,200 college and university Campus Compact membership nationwide. OkCC is housed at the Oklahoma State Regents for Higher Education Academic Affairs Division. An Executive Committee guides the work of the OkCC in providing faculty development, student civic engagement, and resource development and subgrants to help students develop the knowledge and skills of civic participation through involvement in public service.



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Civic Health Index

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Cover, center: President Abraham Lincoln discusses his policies with students as part of a living history program at the Oklahoma History Center in Oklahoma City. Jason Harris, photographer; Cover, right/left: Daniel Smith, Director of Photographic Services, University of Central Oklahoma; This page, left inset: Dodie O'Bryan on behalf of Pawnee County Historical Society, found on Facebook; This page, center inset: Daniel Smith, Director of Photographic Services, University of Central Oklahoma; this page, right inset: Judges at the Naturalization Ceremony held at the University of Central Oklahoma on September 28, 2012. Daniel Smith, Director of Photographic Services, University of Central Oklahoma; skyline photo: Daniel Smith, Director of Photographic Services, University of Central Oklahoma.



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INTRODUCTION

A research team from the University of Central Oklahoma's American Democracy Project, Oklahoma Campus Compact, and NCoC (the National Conference on Citizenship) produced the first *Oklahoma Civic Health Index* in 2010. We examined the civic health of Oklahoma by looking at five key measures of civic health from the U.S. Census Current Population Survey (CPS) Supplements in a national context: volunteering and service, political action, social connection, belonging to a group, and working with neighbors.

Building on the first report's findings, and examining a more comprehensive set of indicators, the 2012 *Oklahoma Civic Health Index* concentrates on civic skills and voter education, with special focus on Oklahoma politics and citizen engagement. The report includes new measures such as trust of neighbors, confidence in institutions, online engagement, and local voting. As the movement for civic learning grows within Oklahoma and the United States, now is the critical time to explore these issues in more detail.

“Civic Learning for Democracy’s Future”

In January 2010, U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan and national education leaders joined together for a White House-sponsored event to invite a national conversation on the significance of educating students for informed, engaged, and productive citizenship.

As U.S. Under Secretary of Education Martha J. Kanter points out in “Civic Learning for Democracy’s Future,” the Obama administration has been working to transform public education with a call to action to the states. Forty-five states and the District of Columbia have adopted a set of common core standards designed to increase student proficiency in English and mathematics, demonstrating a desire for high school graduates to be prepared for college-level work. “Civic learning, and education’s vital purpose to cultivate engaged and effective citizens,” Kanter explains, “is a national imperative. And by civic learning we certainly mean civic knowledge and skills as instructional content, but we also mean opportunities for increased social engagement as applied learning – as a strategy to deliver more effective instruction, across a broad range of disciplines.”¹

Civic Learning in Oklahoma: College, Career and Citizen Ready

How can we engage our young people in the democratic process, teach them habits of civic and social responsibility, and instill in them a commitment to civic virtue and lifelong learning? These themes have been part of an ongoing national education discussion, as well as a movement at the state level. In 2012, the state of Oklahoma revised the Pre-K-12 social studies curriculum standards with an intentional commitment to civic skills.

State Superintendent of Public Instruction Janet C. Barresi and the Oklahoma State Department of Education have developed a more vibrant and rigorous social studies framework focused on citizenship literacy. This new C3 plan, or “college, career and citizen ready,” represents the first time in Oklahoma that the social studies curriculum offers a seamless citizenship education framework from Pre-K-12. “By the year 2020,” Barresi has maintained in the new C3 Plan, “each student graduating from an Oklahoma high school must be college, career and citizen ready.”²

Citizen Engagement and the Economy

What are the connections between education, civics, and the economy? We see a link between civic engagement and economic resilience. We know that the unemployment rate for Americans with a baccalaureate degree is about half the national average. A recent study by NCoC finds that cities, counties, and states with strong civic engagement, particularly expressed through social cohesion and a community’s nonprofit organization infrastructure, experienced lower increases in unemployment during the economic recession.³ Oklahoma’s unemployment rate remains around 5% while the national unemployment rate is approximately 7.8%. In September 2011, Governor Mary Fallin and Chancellor Glen Johnson of the Oklahoma State Regents for Higher Education announced Oklahoma’s participation in Complete College America with the goal of increasing the number of degrees and certificates in Oklahoma by 1,700 per year for 12 years, or a 67% increase in degree completion by 2023. This research demonstrates that preparing young people to participate more fully in our communities, democracy, and economy are of the utmost importance.

We see value in exploring the civic health of Oklahoma through the lens of civic skills and voter education, and hope this report catalyzes new dialogue and action across the state. We invite you to invest in the civic health of Oklahoma’s citizens and communities as we prepare the next generation of informed, educated, and engaged citizens and leaders of our democracy.

67%

The Oklahoma State Regents for Higher Education aim for a 67% increase in degree completion by 2023.



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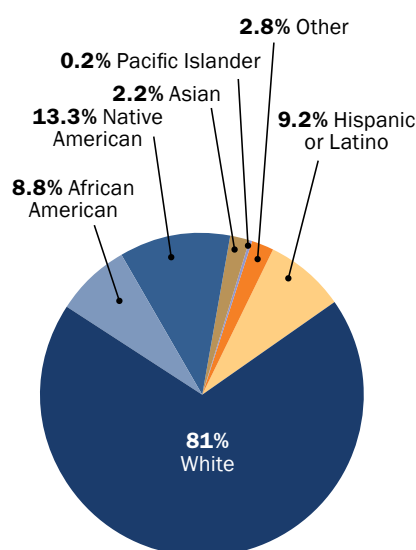
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The 2012 *Oklahoma Civic Health Index* focuses on civic skills and voter education. It explores a broad set of indicators of civic participation across the state, and relative to national trends. This report allows us to take a look at areas in which we are excelling and those in which there is room for improvement. It is intended to be read, considered, and used by all Oklahomans to collectively and intentionally move our fine state forward to strengthen our civic health.

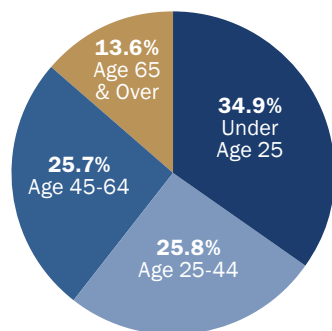
Who is Oklahoma?

3,791,508

2010 Oklahoma Population



Oklahoma by Race



Oklahoma by Age

Source: 2011 American Community Survey

Please note that individuals may identify as more than one race in the categories above, such that the total sum is greater than 100%

Categories of Civic Health

The *Oklahoma Civic Health Index* provides a snapshot of the civic behavior of our citizens across a wide range of civic indicators, drawing largely upon measures developed by NCoC for the national Civic Life in America project. The categories include Social Connectedness, Volunteering, Political Involvement, Confidence in Public Institutions, and Citizenship Education. The information in each section draws largely upon research conducted by the U.S. Census Bureau and the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics in 2011 through the Current Population Survey Supplements on Volunteering and Civic Engagement, referred to throughout the report as CPS data. Analysis of this data was provided by The Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement (CIRCLE). Additional sources were used by the authors to provide a richer and more complex picture of how Oklahoma functions and thrives and where we struggle and find challenges. Each section represents a unique aspect of Oklahoma's civic health, but all the pieces together provide the most accurate picture. Therefore, no single indicator or statistic should be used to reflect the overall civic health of our state. In reviewing the results of this research, five key findings have emerged.

Key Findings

1. The road to engagement could start at the dinner table, but it doesn't yet.

While Oklahomans rank 8th in the nation for eating dinner with family, we rank 30th in discussing politics—around the dinner table or elsewhere. Oklahomans talk to family and friends, reflecting high sociability, but the majority of us don't talk politics. We eat dinner together, but the dinner conversation does not function as a frequent mechanism to share information about candidates or political issues. We have high levels of trust and exchange favors with neighbors frequently (defined as "a few times a week or more"), but we don't talk frequently to neighbors about political issues, nor do we work frequently with neighbors to solve problems.

2. Oklahomans' hearts beat strong for volunteering.

Volunteers make valuable contributions to their communities, state, and country. In 2011, Oklahoma's efforts ranked above the national average, placing Oklahoma 20th in the nation for volunteering. From 2008 - 2010, Oklahoma's efforts generated an average of 814,700 volunteers, or 29.2% of the state's residents. Volunteering efforts are evident in our ordinary citizens, in corporate culture, in university life, and in civic groups. It has become part of our culture to work hard and to volunteer to help others.

3. We don't talk about politics nor do we frequently engage in political acts.

In addition to the previous finding that we don't talk frequently about politics with family, friends, or neighbors, we also don't engage in political acts like registering and voting. In the 2010 elections, Oklahoma ranked 44th among all states in the rate of citizens who are registered to vote, with 61.0%. Even worse, Oklahoma ranked 47th in voter turnout during the 2010 elections, with a turnout rate of 40.4% for citizens age 18 and over. This is true despite the state's leading role in some areas of voter engagement, such as accessible voting machines.

4. Confidence in public institutions is moderate in Oklahoma and across the nation.

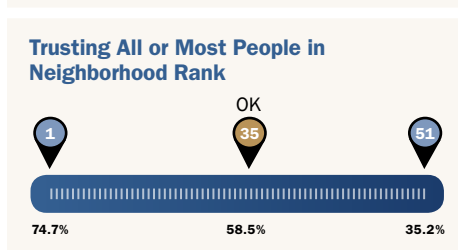
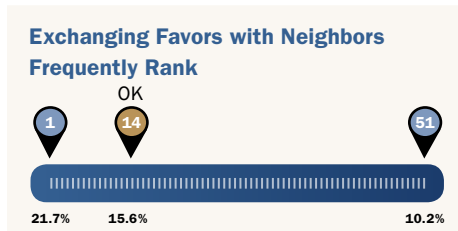
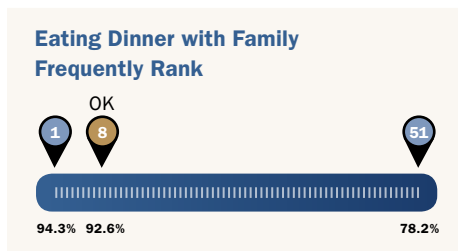
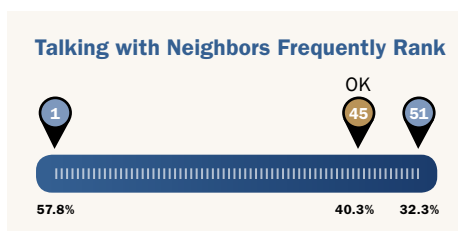
Nationally, there is relatively low confidence in public schools, the media, corporations, and the government. Oklahoma shares these views, with a few exceptions. Oklahomans tend to maintain a good degree of confidence in public schools compared with the rest of the nation. In addition, according to CPS data, 68.6% of Oklahomans reported they were very or somewhat confident in corporations, ranking the state 5th nationally.⁴

5. Oklahoma civic skills are on track to improve.

The Oklahoma State Department of Education has developed a more vibrant and rigorous social studies framework focused on citizenship literacy. “By the year 2020,” State Superintendent of Public Instruction Janet C. Barresi has maintained in the new C3 plan, “each student graduating from an Oklahoma high school must be college, career and citizen ready.”⁵

SOCIAL CONNECTEDNESS

Interactions with Neighbors



Social connectedness and trust create an important foundation for participating in deeper kinds of civic engagement. As mentioned previously, NCoC's recent research on the connections between civic engagement and economic resilience emphasize the critical importance of this social cohesion at the community level. As one might expect, Oklahoma fares well in engagement with neighbors.

Many Oklahomans will have heard visitors comment on the friendly nature of “folks” in Oklahoma. Oklahomans ranked 14th in the nation for frequently exchanging favors with neighbors (15.6% versus 14% nationally). In what appears to be a contradiction, however, the state ranks 45th in terms of talking with neighbors frequently (40.3% versus 43.7% nationally). Another view shows us that almost 60% of Oklahomans trust all or most of the people in their neighborhood. Yet only 7.7% of Oklahomans indicated they had worked with neighbors to address local issues frequently compared with 8.7% nationally, ranking us again 39th in the nation.

It is somewhat puzzling that while the level of trust and exchanging favors is strong, the reported levels of talking with one another and working together is low. And while Oklahomans rank 8th in the nation for eating dinner with family (92.6% versus 89.5% nationally), we rank 30th in discussing politics—around the dinner table or elsewhere. This may suggest that, on the surface,

Oklahomans have strong social connections and networks, but these connections are not used for deeper engagement. Could this be a tendency to avoid potential conflict of opinion? Or is it a reflection of an assumed agreement on such issues?

15.6%
of Oklahoma's residents
frequently exchange favors
with their neighbors



Photo credit: Oklahoma Tourism and Recreation Department

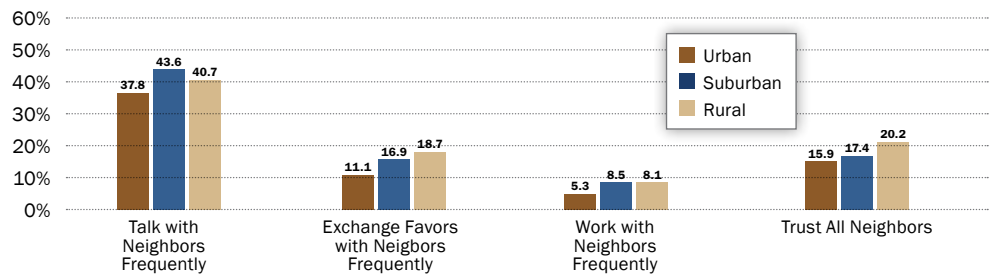


81%

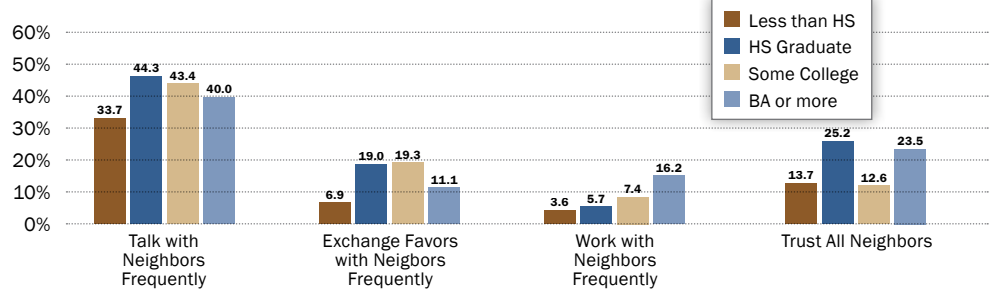
of Oklahomans report communicating frequently (at least a few times a week) with friends and family.

Photo credit: Daniel Smith, Director of Photographic Services, University of Central Oklahoma

OK Social Connectedness by Region



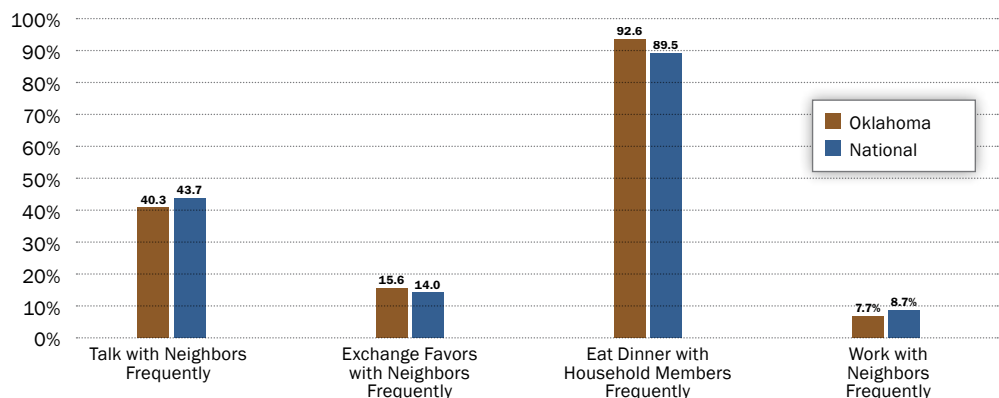
OK Social Connectedness by Education



Please note that the sample size for those with 'Less than HS' education is small.

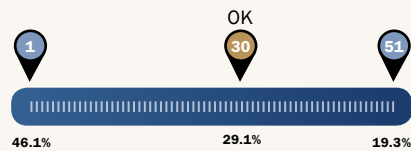
Oklahoma is often credited with a strong, pioneering spirit, which manifests itself in a great sense of individual independence. The ability to set out on one's own and make things happen is often perceived as strength of character. But there is a contrary perspective: that this sense of individuality inhibits in some ways the ability to come together. Perhaps, as the above data suggests, Oklahomans demonstrate both sides of this story. Oklahomans exhibit a strong emphasis on independence, but also possess a faith in one another that allows people to come together in time of need and to accomplish what can only be done interdependently. One important question to consider when analyzing this data is whether or not the state has achieved the best balance of the two.

OK Social Connectedness: Oklahoma vs National



Communications with Friends or Family

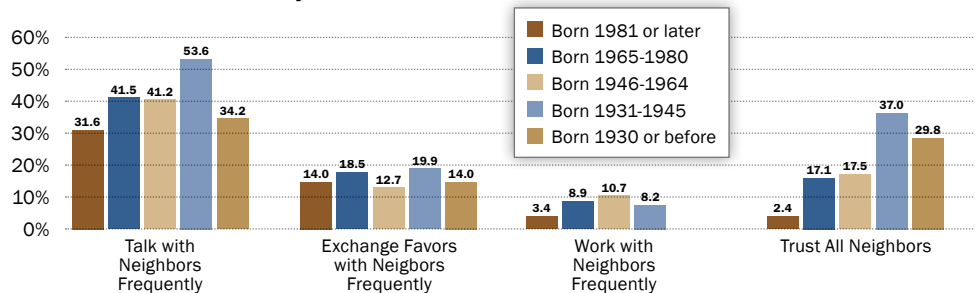
Discussing Politics Frequently Rank



Families and friends provide important networks for Oklahomans to become civically engaged. 81% of Oklahomans report communicating frequently (at least a few times a week) with friends and family. This is only slightly higher than the national average of 79%, and ranks Oklahoma 24th in this area. Urban and suburban Oklahomans connect with their family or friends slightly more frequently

(81.1% and 83.2%, respectively) than Oklahomans in rural areas (79.7%). Individuals over 30 years of age reportedly connect with their family or friends at a lower rate (80.2%) compared with younger Oklahomans (83.8%). Oklahomans report less communication when the social connection extends beyond friends and family. An interesting question for further exploration would be the topics discussed by Oklahomans and whether these networks can translate to more active civic engagement. Nearly a third of Oklahomans said they talk about politics one or a few times a month, and a little over a third said they don't talk about politics at all.

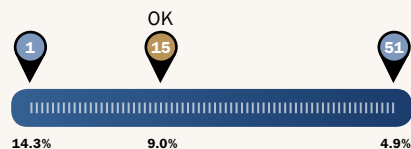
OK Social Connectedness by Generation



Please note that the 'Born 1930 or Before' age group has a small sample size.

Social Media as a Mechanism of Civic Engagement

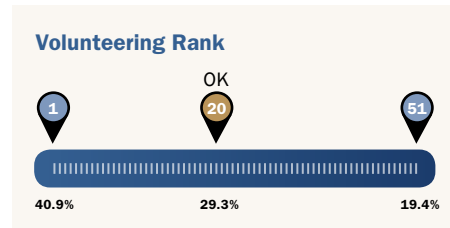
Expressing Political Views Online Rank



The rise of social media has caused an evolution in the ways we connect with other people. Social networks provide support and affirmation. The availability of social media has not only increased our connections with our friends and family, but created and strengthened social connections with people in our communities, our state, across the country, and even around the world. Facebook is a

prevalent social media vehicle that is used by over 166 million people in the United States.⁶ In Oklahoma, the number of Facebook users is nearing 2 million. The greatest percentage of Oklahoma Facebook users are under 30 years of age (1.1 million). Oklahomans under 30 also report that they connect with family and friends at a higher rate than do Oklahomans over 30, which may be attributed to this easy access to others through various forms of social media. However, according to CPS findings, more 30+ residents frequently discuss politics online versus 18-29 year olds. Regardless, this is an area of promise for the state as Oklahoma ranks 15th nationally for the number of residents who frequently express their views on community or political issues online.

VOLUNTEERING



While Oklahoma has areas for improvement in political engagement, the state fares well in how residents give back to their communities through volunteerism. Volunteers make valuable contributions to their communities, state, and country. From 2008 through 2010, Oklahomans offered their assistance at a greater rate than volunteers averaged nationally, 29.3% compared with 26.8%

nationally, placing Oklahoma 20th in the volunteer rate among the 50 states and the District of Columbia. A total of 814,700 Oklahomans volunteered their time and talents. This work translated into 103.9 million hours of service valued at \$2.2 billion.⁷ Offering service to one's community or to a cause helps to solve problems and improve lives.

Many people have been willing to serve in the state, although not every person volunteers at the same rate. The level of an individual's education, the individual's age, gender, race and ethnicity, location, marital status, and employment situation all significantly impact the rate of service, as indicated in the 2011 CPS data.

Gender	2011 Rate
Male	24.2%
Female	34.1%

Education	2011 Rate
Less than High School	11.7%
High School Graduate	23.3%
Some College	27.7%
BA or more	51.7%

Race & Ethnicity	2011 Rate
White, Non-Hispanic	30.9%
Black, Non-Hispanic	18.7%

Generation	2011 Rate
Millennial (born 1981 or later)	20.8%
Generation X (born 1965-1980)	33.8%
Baby Boomers (born 1946-1964)	35.5%
Silent Generation (born 1931-1945)	24.2%
Long Civic Generation (born 1930 or before)	17.7%

Region	2011 Rate
Urban	19.2%
Suburban	33.9%
Rural	31.6%

All data in the above chart was provided by CIRCLE analysis of 2011 CPS data. The pooled 2008-2010 data cited in the narrative of this section are based on CPS data reported by the Corporation for National and Community Service. The data sample was too small to report the percentages for Native American, Hispanic, and Asian citizens.

The impact of volunteer efforts from 2008-2010 across the state was significant and multi-faceted. One important avenue for engagement of Oklahomans appears to be faith-based organizations. Over this three-year period, Oklahomans volunteered the most frequently for religious organizations, and outpaced the national average by a rate of 42.8% to 35%. According to a study by the Corporation for National and Community Service, volunteers who serve through faith-based organizations are the most likely to continue serving, and youth who attend religious services regularly are almost twice as likely to volunteer regularly.⁸

From 2008-2010, Oklahomans' major preferences for volunteering as ranked by frequency were:

- | | |
|-------------------------------------|----------------------------|
| 1. Religious Organizations | 5. Hospitals |
| 2. Educational Organizations | 6. Civic Activities |
| 3. Social Services | 7. Sports/Arts |
| 4. Other | |

The impact that education has on imparting the knowledge, skills and opportunities for students to contribute to their communities cannot be overemphasized. In Oklahoma, residents with a bachelor's degree or higher are more than twice as likely to volunteer as high school graduates. The state's current endeavor to increase its high school and college completion rates will likely increase the rate of voluntary contributions of its citizens. The importance of contributing to society is fostered on college and university campuses. Eighty-three percent of higher education

37.3

Average hours of volunteer service per year by Oklahomans from 2008 to 2010.

Oklahomans' major volunteer activities in order of frequency, 2008-2010

1. Fundraising
2. Food Collection and Distribution
3. General Labor
4. Tutoring/Teaching

institutions' mission statements include policies for community service, academic service-learning, and/or civic engagement. In 2011, college and university students in Oklahoma volunteered an average of 3.4 hours per week. An average of 27% of the students on Oklahoma's higher education campuses were involved in community service, service-learning, and civic engagement activities, with their service valued at \$136,274,195. The most common areas in Oklahoma addressed by higher education students through service were health care, K-12 education, and tutoring.⁹

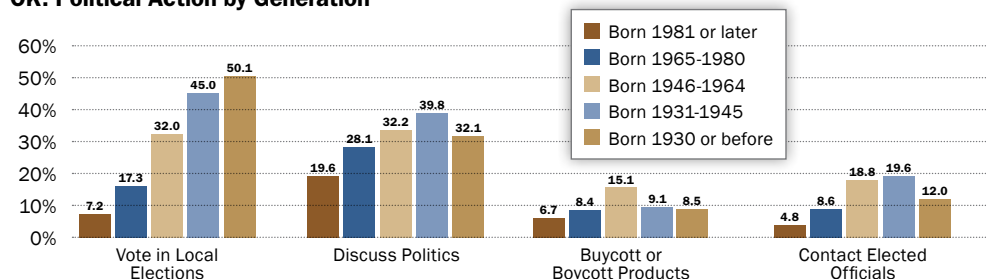
The fact that Oklahomans give back regularly through volunteerism is a promising area for the state, and programs which cultivate the skills, opportunities, and desire to serve, whether through faith-based organizations or higher education, are important pillars of civic health.

POLITICAL INVOLVEMENT

Oklahoma Politics

Political participation is important for Oklahomans' civic engagement and it provides an important pathway for political socialization. Political socialization provides a number of benefits for Oklahomans: (1) they are more likely to learn about Oklahoma and its politics – its symbols, political institutions, leaders, and political parties; (2) they are more likely to feel connected to their communities; (3) they are more likely to believe the political system is legitimate; and therefore, (4) they are more likely to live in stronger communities.

OK: Political Action by Generation



Please note that the 'Born 1930 or Before' age group has a small sample size.

Unfortunately, Oklahoma still has some work to do when it comes to political participation. While Oklahoma fares well in certain measures of political involvement, Oklahoma ranks significantly below other states in terms of political participation, typically with ranks in the 30s and 40s among the 50 states. This includes low voter registration, voter turnout, and a lack of election competitiveness.

Oklahoma Voter Registration

In order to vote in Oklahoma, one must first be registered. Oklahoma voter registration, along with that of many other states, has been simplified in recent years with the introduction of the Motor Voter law passed by the U.S. Congress in 1993, which made voter registration forms available at driver's license facilities. Now they can be found almost everywhere including schools, libraries, and online. Although the Motor Voter law has made voter registration forms widely available, Oklahoma does not have high voter registration rates.

In the 2010 general elections, according to CIRCLE analysis of CPS data which calculates voter registration based on eligible citizens, Oklahoma ranked 44th among all states in the rate of citizens who are registered to vote, with 61.0%. In the 2006 general elections, Oklahoma's voter registration rate was 55.2%. Both of these rates show Oklahoma considerably below the national voter registration rate, which was 65.1% in 2010 and 67.6% in 2006. The U.S. Census Bureau shows slightly different numbers for Oklahoma's voter registration rate with 59.5% of Oklahomans registered in the 2010 elections, which ranked Oklahoma 36th among the states.¹⁰

Oklahoma Voter Registration

2006

55.2%

67.6%

2010 (ranking in parentheses)

61.0% (44th)

65.1%

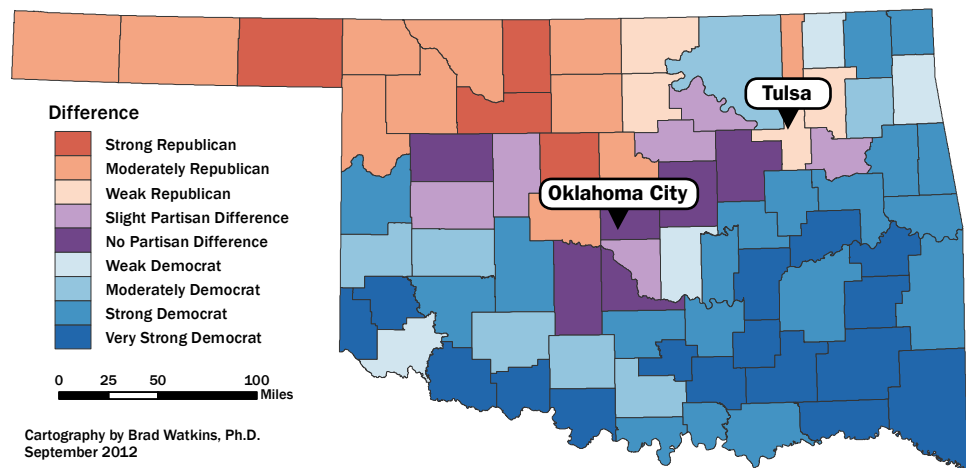
■ Oklahoma
■ U.S. Average

In 2010, Oklahoma had more polling places per capita than the national average, but they were not being used to their full advantage as Oklahoma had fewer registrants (953 as compared with 1,680 nationally) and fewer Election Day voters (433 as compared with 515 nationally) per polling place.¹¹

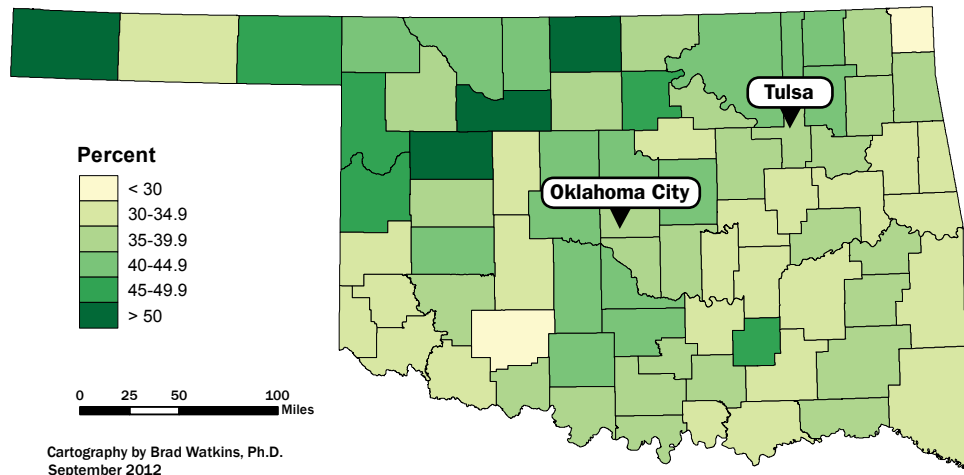
One potential challenge is that Oklahoma has not adopted a number of election rules enacted by other states which could make voter registration more accessible, such as same-day voter registration and paperless online voter registration. The National Conference of State Legislatures suggests acceptance of these policies is a growing trend. Colorado, Kansas, and Arizona – states near Oklahoma – have adopted online voter registration and all three states have higher voter registration rates than Oklahoma (59.5%), ranging from 61.0% for Colorado to 65.5% for Kansas.¹²

Mapping Voter Registration in Oklahoma

Map of Oklahoma Voter Registration by Party Affiliation as of August 2012



Map of Voter Turnout by County, 2010 Elections for Governor



Registering and voting become virtually synonymous when talking about the reasons for differences among citizens with these two political activities. That is because people must be registered in order to vote, and so, many of the reasons are similar.

50.1%

of Oklahomans born in 1930 or before typically vote in local elections vs. just 7.2% of those born in 1981 or later.



University of Central Oklahoma students participated in the Oklahoma Campus Compact Voter Registration Contest as part of Constitution Day programming in September 2012. Photo credit: Patti Loughlin

First, voting can be explained by many demographic factors. The most important of these is education, with those who indicate they have some college education much more likely to vote than those without some college. In addition, those who are wealthier, older, married, and have higher incomes are more likely to vote. Scholars though have found that ethnicity, race, and gender do not explain voter turnout that well, especially when education and income are taken into account. Occupation is a minimal factor in voter turnout, although government employees are slightly more likely to vote.¹³

Second, citizens are more likely to vote if they voted in the previous election. Voting becomes a habit that can become either learned or unlearned, and those who are surrounded by family and friends who also vote thus are more likely to vote themselves.¹⁴ This can manifest into a regional difference in voter turnout, as some regions have a stronger culture and tradition of voting. This can be seen in the second map opposite, which shows the voter turnout by county in Oklahoma. As of August 2012, the counties with the lowest turnout were in the two opposite corners of the state, Ottawa in Northeast Oklahoma and Comanche in Southwest Oklahoma. Historically, though, the counties with the lowest voter turnout have been found in the Southeast corner of the state, known as the “Little Dixie.” These counties also have higher percentages of voters registered as Democrats. This combined with the 11.7% of Oklahomans registered as Independents could explain why Oklahoma, which has more registered Democrats (46.3%) than Republicans (41.9%), has voted Republican for every presidential race since 1964 and has a Republican-majority legislature as of November 2012, according to the Oklahoma State Election Board.

Another factor to consider is party identification which can influence voter turnout in multiple ways. Party identification is related to many of the demographic factors above. Moreover, Oklahoma has closed primaries, meaning that each party has its own separate primary. Thus, if there are few races for a particular party on the ballot due to the lack of party competition, voter turnout is likely to be lower. For general elections, greater competition and therefore greater voter turnout may occur depending on whether there are two strong contenders, a candidate of the majority party and a weak challenger, or just a single candidate. The first map opposite indicates the amount of party competition in Oklahoma by looking at the percentage difference in registrants between the Republican and Democratic parties. The purple or light purple portions of the map indicate very little difference in voter registration between the two parties. Those counties labeled as strong Democrat or Republican have a 35-50% advantage in voter registration for that party, while those labeled as weak Democrat or Republican have only a 10-15% advantage for that party. Oklahoma’s panhandle counties along the northwest corner of the state are decidedly Republican. The strongest Democratic area is southeast Oklahoma.

Oklahoma Voter Turnout – General Elections

Oklahoma’s voter turnout rate has been consistently under the national average from 2000-2010. In looking at these election years, it is important to distinguish between two types of elections – the presidential election years of 2000 and 2004, and the midterm election years of 2006, 2008, and 2010. In midterm election years, where there is no presidential race at the top of the ticket, voter turnout tends to be 13-16% lower than in presidential election years across the nation. According to the Nonprofit Voter Engagement Network, in 2010, Oklahoma was no exception with a turnout of 39.7%, which ranked Oklahoma 39th. This can be explained though by the lack of other races on the ballot in 2010 as compared with 2006 when there were numerous statewide races, including a very competitive race for governor, which resulted in a voter turnout rate of 36.4%, ranking Oklahoma 40th. Yet the national average in these election years was 41.6% in 2010 and 41.4% in 2006.¹⁵ Similarly, Oklahoma was also under the national averages for presidential voter turnout. While the national turnout rates were 50.3% in 2000, 55.7% in 2004, and 57.1% in 2008, Oklahoma had 48.2% in 2000, 55.6% in 2004, and 53.4% in 2008. This ranked Oklahoma 45th among the 50 states for the 2008 elections. The difference in these turnout numbers relative to previous CPS data analyzed by CIRCLE can be explained by the fact that CIRCLE calculates voter registration based on eligible citizens as the denominator (anyone over the age of 18 who is a citizen) while other statistics rely on eligible *residents* as the denominator.



35-50%

Counties with strong party affiliation have a 35-50% voter registration advantage for that party, while those with weak affiliation have only 10-15% advantage.

Photo credit: Daniel Smith, Director of Photographic Services, University of Central Oklahoma

Oklahoma Voter Turnout – Primary Elections

At the congressional-level primaries held in July 2012, Oklahoma experienced the low voter turnout that many observers had feared. Voter turnout only averaged 17.1% to 29.7% for the state legislative races.¹⁶ For Oklahoma, the July 2012 elections were almost the “perfect storm” for low voter participation. Not only had Oklahoma moved its primary date up a month to comply with the federal Help America Vote Act (HAVA), but there was also only one statewide race and only on the Republican side for Corporation Commissioner. There were a few competitive contests, but many election ballots across the state featured only one or two races. The only race with high voter turnout was for the open second congressional district seat. It is likely that the “new” date combined with the limited ballots produced low voter turnout throughout the state.^{17, 18}

Voter Turnout Percentage by Demographic Characteristics in Oklahoma

Registration and Voting Demographics, 2004-2010 General Elections from Census Data

	REGISTERED				VOTED			
	2010	2008	2006	2004	2010	2008	2006	2004
Male	58.3	67.7	66.5	67.7	37.8	58.4	44.7	58.0
Female	60.5	67.1	69.2	69.2	40.9	56.6	45.0	60.3
White	61.2	69.1	72.4	71.4	41.3	58.2	48.2	62.6
Black	57.0	73.1	63.5	61.8	36.1	61.6	38.1	54.7
Hispanic	27.6	27.6	31.5	21.7	11.9	19.5	14.3	18.9
Total	59.5	67.4	67.9	68.4	39.4	58.5	44.9	59.2

Native Americans were not noted in these voter turnout statistics because in many states they were too small of a percentage to be distinguished. However, that is not the case in Oklahoma which has the second-largest Native American population at 12.9% according to the 2010 U.S. Census Briefs. Oklahoma also has 29% of the most concentrated counties in the nation.¹⁹ Unfortunately, Native Americans have not always been mobilized to vote. In the 2008 elections, more than one million eligible Native Americans and Alaska Natives were not registered to vote—34% of the total Native population over 18. Native Americans have the lowest participation rate in voting of any ethnic group. The National Congress of American Indians (NCAI) has created the Native Vote Project, which seeks to increase political participation among Native Americans and document such participation to draw awareness to American Indian and Alaskan Native issues. In September 2012, Native Vote hosted Native Vote Week events throughout the state of Oklahoma to encourage Native Americans not only to register to vote, but also to remind them to vote in the 2012 elections. One study undertaken by Native Vote, for example, showed that if Native Americans voted fully they could affect the outcome in nine of the swing states in the 2012 presidential election because of the concentration of Native Americans in those states.²⁰

Other Forms of Political Participation

Sometimes or Always Voting in Local Elections Rank



Although voting in primary and presidential elections is an important part of civic engagement, it is not the only way to engage in the community. Citizens can engage in their community by discussing politics with family and friends, contacting or visiting public officials, boycotting products, or voting in local elections. Politically engaged citizens need to discuss politics in their everyday

lives. As mentioned previously, while this is an area for improvement in Oklahoma, there has been recent growth. In 2010, 23.9% of Oklahomans talked politics with family and friends at least a few times a week. That rate increased to 29.1% in 2012.

Citizens that contacted or visited public officials

2009

10.5%

9.9%

2011

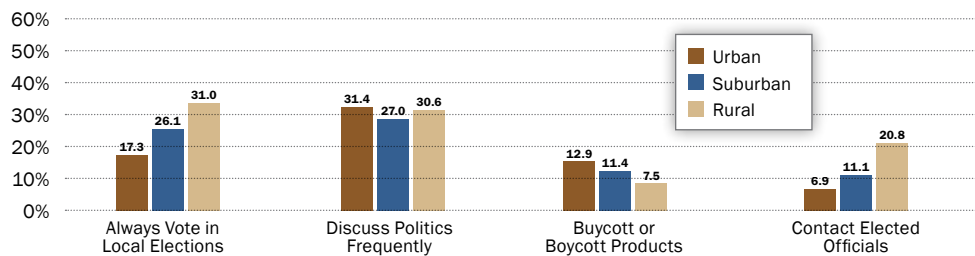
12.6%

12.3%

■ Oklahoma

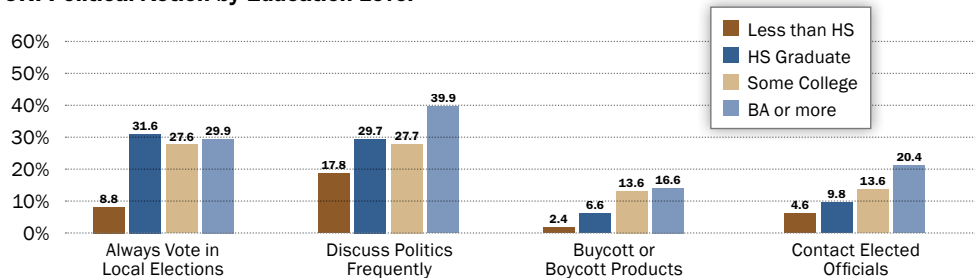
■ U.S. Average

OK: Political Action by Region



While Oklahomans participate in other political activities at lower rates when compared to other states, there has been a slight improvement in Oklahoma since the last report was produced in 2010 in other areas such as contacting a public official, and boycotting a product or service. The 2011 CPS data reflects that 12.6% of Oklahomans contacted or visited public officials compared with 12.3% nationally. This is an increase from the 2009 CPS data which showed Oklahoma's rate was only 10.5% compared with 9.9% nationally. There are several possible reasons for this increase, including the fact that the survey was conducted in a year when healthcare reform was a critical issue for civically engaged Oklahomans. In terms of boycotting a product or service, Oklahomans improved from 7.0% in the 2009 CPS findings to 10.2% in the 2011 CPS findings, though both years were below the national average.

OK: Political Action by Education Level



One significant weakness for Oklahoma, however, was voting in local elections, where Oklahoma ranked 49th of 50 states. According to CPS data, only 49.4% of Oklahoma residents said they sometimes or always voted in local elections, such as for mayor or school board, compared with 57.8% of residents nationally. The reality, however, is much more disappointing. In Oklahoma, when only local elections are on the ballot, the typical voter turnout averages less than 8%. The low turnout in local elections could be explained by the fact that local elections are not as advertised as national and state elections. Voters who are not politically engaged may not be aware of local elections due to lack of information. Likewise, voters who are politically engaged are typically informed voters who are more likely to cast votes that represent their views.

Oklahoma has some of the best voting machines in the country and has more polling places per capita than the national average.



Improvements Made/ Improvements to be Made

VOTING MACHINES AND ELECTRONIC VOTER REGISTRATION

There are a few opportunities, despite the challenges noted above, to improve Oklahomans' political engagement. Oklahoma, for example, leads the way as the first state in the nation to adopt a unified voting machine among all of its precincts in 1992. These election ballots were easy to use, simply read by machines, and could be totaled quickly. The 2000 presidential election helped to get the HAVA passed in 2002 by the U.S. Congress which provided federal money for states seeking to improve their voting machines and required that all states do so by a certain date. In 2012, the state made voting machine adaptations in order to comply with new accessibility requirements which allow physically challenged voters to vote without any assistance. Although its voting machines are top-notch, Oklahoma is one of 24 states that does not use electronic polling books at the polling place to verify voters. Rather, Oklahoma poll workers still use paper books that are provided by each county. This might explain why Oklahoma had more of its provisional ballots (70.2%) rejected than the national average (45.2%).²¹

ACCESS TO INFORMATION AND VOTER REGISTRATION DRIVES

There have been efforts to increase voter registration in Oklahoma. The Oklahoma State Election Board maintains a detailed website that provides access to the voter registration form for Oklahoma and up-to-date voter information and election results.²² Oklahoma Campus Compact coordinates a statewide voter registration contest on college campuses as part of Constitution Day activities. The colleges are categorized by enrollment size and given a color (red, white, or blue) so that schools are competing against others similar in size.²³ Oklahoma's Prosperity Project provides a voter registration toolkit for employers and other groups in Oklahoma to encourage people to vote.²⁴ For the 2012 elections, groups as diverse as the League of Women Voters, Change Oklahoma Hispanic Voter Registration Drive, the Tulsa Zoo, the Oklahoma Indian Bar Association, Empower Oklahoma, and the NAACP, all conducted voter registration drives.

VOTER EDUCATION

Another opportunity to increase voter engagement could be the publication of voter education guides. Finding nonpartisan information about the candidates can be difficult in Oklahoma. For those with Internet access, the easiest way to find nonpartisan information is through websites such as fairvote.org, vote411.org, and smartvoter.org. But for those without Internet access, the availability of nonpartisan information is scarce. Voter information guides could solve this problem. Unlike Oklahoma, 17 states, including Arizona and California, have some form of voter information guide distributed throughout the state. The guide can be created by the state bar association, the judicial branch, a nonprofit organization, or an interested body, and can provide information to voters about the candidates and the issues in the upcoming election. Such guides are typically distributed about 4-6 weeks before the election and often include sample ballots.²⁵

Hypotheses for Low Political Participation

In addition to finding solutions to improve voter engagement, it is important to understand why Oklahomans might not be politically engaged.

POLITICAL COMPETITION

Political competition is a significant aspect of civic engagement because citizens are more likely to participate when they know their votes make a difference. When there is only a single candidate, there is obviously not a choice, which leads to lower engagement. Oklahoma often does not score highly when it is ranked against other states in terms of its political competition. In fact, as the following table shows, Oklahoma ranked among the bottom ten states on five of the six indicators in a report entitled "Dubious Democracy" by the Center for Voting and Democracy, and was actually ranked 50th overall among the 50 states.²⁶

62.8%

of Oklahoma State House seats did not have a chance to be competitive because of the lack of an opponent (2012)



Photo credit: Oklahoma Tourism and Recreation Department

Dubious Democracy, 2006-2010, U.S. House Elections

	Definition	Oklahoma's 2010 Score	Oklahoma's 2010 Rank	2010 National Average	Oklahoma's 2006 Score
Margin of Victory	The point difference between the winner and the loser	59.6	50 th	33.0	33.0
Voter Turnout	The percentage of people who come out to vote	29.9%	50 th	48.8%	35.3%
Representation Index	The percentage of eligible voters who voted for the winning candidate	20.5%	49 th	25.7%	23.2%
Incumbent Win Streak	The length of time since an OK U.S. House candidate was defeated	18 elections (88 races in a row)	48 th	3.6 elections (11.4 races in a row)	16 elections
Landslide Index	The percentage of all OK U.S. House races won by a margin of victory of at least 20%	80%	41 st	64.4%	100%
Seat-to-votes Index	The average by which one party wins a greater percentage of the seats than votes	11.2%	17 th	2.3%	N/A
Overall	Democracy Index	41.2	50 th	25.8	36.4

These figures might not be so alarming if Oklahoma only experiences a lack of political competition at the congressional level. But that is not the case. At the state legislative level, Oklahoma seems to have a hard time fielding enough candidates. As noted in the *2010 Oklahoma Civic Health Index*, of the 101 races for the 2010 Oklahoma House, 47 were uncontested or 47.5% of all seats. Unfortunately, Oklahoma's competitiveness only declined for the 2012 elections. In the Oklahoma House, 52 of the 86 members seeking re-election in 2012 won another term because they didn't have an opponent. Two candidates who filed for a seat in the House won their bids when no one else filed.²⁷ Thus, where it was only 47.5% of the seats in 2010, in 2012 a whopping 62.8% of Oklahoma House seats did not have a chance to be competitive because of the lack of an opponent.²⁸

BALLOT ACCESS

Another issue that may account for the low political participation is ballot access. While Oklahoma leads many states in some measures of voting accessibility noted previously, Oklahoma's election procedures are simply not designed to allow for the greatest turnout. It has already been noted that Oklahoma does not have same-day voter registration or paperless online voter registration like some states. Early voting is restricted in Oklahoma by a short early-voting period and limited access to polls during the early-voting period – only one poll per county. But Oklahoma also has other election procedures that seem to discourage turnout. For example, while Oklahoma has in-person absentee balloting and no-excuse absentee balloting, Oklahoma requires that all absentee ballots be notarized and that the ballots be returned by mail with a service that requires delivery documentation. These requirements discourage voter turnout, as Oklahomans not only use the absentee procedure less than the rest of the country (9.1% of all ballots for Oklahoma, 15.1% for US), but Oklahoma also had more of its ballots rejected for not having a signature (50.0% versus 1.3% for US).²⁹ This procedure became even more difficult in April 2012 when Oklahoma passed a law limiting a notary public to notarizing a maximum of 20 absentee ballots.

VOTER ID LAW

Another potential factor, the effect of which has yet to be determined, is Oklahoma's voter ID law. In 2010, Oklahoma enacted the proof-of-voter-identity law, or what it is more commonly referred to as the voter ID law, requiring voters to present photo identification at the time a vote is placed in person. Without this identification, an individual has to vote using a provisional ballot, which will be counted when verified after the election.

9.1%

of Oklahomans use the absentee voting procedure compared to 15.1% nationally.



Oklahoma voters have not yet seen the full effects of the voter ID law, as it just took effect for the first statewide election on November 6, 2012. Nevertheless, during the 2012 primary runoff elections, about 90% of the voters who failed to present proper identification ended up having their ballots counted. There were 91 provisional ballots filed due to lack of identification, and all but nine were determined to be properly registered voters.³⁰ The voter ID law is a new trend in elections, with 34 states considering voter ID legislation in 2011 and eight states enacting new laws.³¹ Voter ID laws are of interest because those opposed to these laws believe they may restrict the right to vote and can contribute to low voter turnout, while supporters believe they may help secure the election process and reduce voter fraud.

CHALLENGES WITH MILITARY/OVERSEAS VOTERS

The civic engagement of military and overseas voters is an important issue in Oklahoma because Oklahoma has five military installations within the state, including the Fort Sill Army Post, which is located in Comanche County, one of the least-voting counties in the state. Military and overseas voters present special challenges because they heavily rely on absentee ballots. In the 2008 elections, the military voter turnout was only 54% nationwide, compared with the general voter turnout of 63%. As a result, Congress passed the Military and Overseas Voter Empowerment Act in 2009 which required states to move their election dates to accommodate these voters. It also required states to standardize their absentee military ballots and each military base to have a voter assistance office. In 2012, Oklahoma moved up the date of its congressional primary elections by almost a month, from August to July, to meet the new federal requirement.³² Moving this date up should have the result of increasing military voter participation in the future, but in the 2012 primary election, it seemed to confuse voters as there was much lower voter turnout.

TERM LIMITS IN OKLAHOMA

A term limit is a length of time placed on an elected official to hold elected office. Normally, term limits are enacted to foster competitive elections, represent a diverse population accurately, weaken interest groups, and prevent lifetime public servants from turning into career politicians.³³ States that have adopted term limits have experienced greater turnover rates in U.S. legislatures.³⁴ Those who are opposed to term limits believe limits discourage democracy because the will of the people's vote is not represented, experience is removed from office, turnover does not provide long-term solutions, and the spending to win an election may be increased greatly.³⁵ Term limits in Oklahoma were enacted in 1990 and the laws took effect in 2004. In 2009, an eight-year term limit was placed upon the office of governor while the legislative term limit consists of 12 years of combined service in both chambers.³⁶ Oklahoma also has term limits for other statewide elected offices, including lieutenant governor, state auditor and inspector, attorney general, state treasurer, labor commissioner, state schools superintendent, and insurance commissioner.³⁷ Despite the change to term limits, Oklahoma's political participation rates are still below the national average. Recent academic studies have shown that states with state legislative term limits have actually experienced decreases in voter turnout.³⁸ Many reasons for the lower turnout have been hypothesized, including the fact that term limits typically lead to public officials just rotating to new offices, rather than creating a new diverse group of officials as expected.

BALLOT FATIGUE

Ballot fatigue can also contribute to lower civic engagement. Ballot fatigue can happen when the ballot is so long that it actually discourages voter turnout. In 2010, Oklahoma voters faced one of their longest ballots in history, including most statewide seats such as governor and lieutenant governor, U.S. representative seats, along with associate judges, district judges, district attorneys, state legislators, and seats on the civil courts of appeals. There were also 11 state questions which added nearly 2000 words to the ballot.³⁹

THE OVERALL STATUS OF OKLAHOMA'S POLITICAL ENGAGEMENT

As shown above, Oklahoma has both strengths and weaknesses when it comes to political participation. The state is strong when it comes to its election processes. It has some of the best voting machines in the country and has more polling places than the national average. Although behind national averages, Oklahomans in recent years have also engaged in more political behavior—whether that is boycotting products, discussing politics with family and friends, or contacting public officials. All of these behaviors increased from 2010 to 2011, according to CPS data.



Since 2010, Oklahomans have engaged more in political behaviors including boycotting products, discussing politics with family and friends, or contacting public officials.

Photo credit: Daniel Smith, Director of Photographic Services, University of Central Oklahoma

However, there is still significant room for improvement. Issues such as political competition, electoral access, voter information, and others require careful consideration. Oklahoma needs to make a change in order to improve its civic health. Effective political engagement means that all of Oklahoma's residents are engaged in the electoral process and become more invested in and attached to their communities, which therefore can lead to an increase in the overall civic health of the state.

CONFIDENCE IN PUBLIC INSTITUTIONS

A significant component to the state's civic health is citizens' confidence in their public institutions, as this might connect strongly with their willingness to engage. While there are many possible explanations for current rates of confidence in major institutions, one theory is that the state of the economy might play a central role. Regardless, it seems to be true that Americans have had decreasing confidence in major institutions in recent years.

By a wide margin, most Americans have lost confidence that the federal government or large corporations can solve the country's current economic crisis. As affirmed in a nationwide poll conducted last year, Americans generally believe that it is small businesses (79%) and local business leaders (74%), not Congress (43.5%) or large corporations (45%), that can be trusted to come up with ideas for creating jobs.⁴⁰

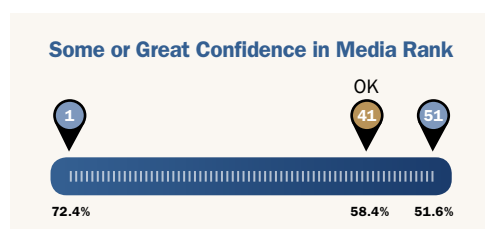
The lack of confidence in many of the country's largest public institutions, whether it is the federal government or large corporations, has gradually declined over the past four decades.⁴¹ However, this downward trend may never have been so apparent than after the 2008 financial crisis and our country's labored attempts to climb out of the economic recession that followed.

Accountability and transparency are important traits of any successful public institution and its leaders. But when the public loses confidence in an institution's leadership, it can undermine the public's confidence in the entire institution. Such a deterioration of confidence, especially when the public institution is the federal government itself, can have dangerous ramifications to society in general:

"An erosion of confidence in major institutions of society, especially those of representative democracy, is a far more serious threat to democracy than a loss of trust in other citizens or politicians.... [L]oss of confidence in institutions may well be a better indicator of public disaffection with the modern world because they are the basic pillars of society. If they begin to crumble, then there is, indeed, cause for concern."⁴²

Recent data suggests that American citizens are losing confidence in many public institutions and the leaders of these institutions. This erosion of public confidence can also be seen in 2011 CPS data examined below, along with other national research results.

Confidence in the Media



"Americans have grown more negative about the media in recent years, as they have about many other U.S. institutions and the direction of the country in general," according to a recent Gallup Poll, which found that only 21% of adults nationwide expressed a great deal of confidence in television media.⁴³ The Gallup poll was taken shortly after major television outlets

21%

of those polled nationally had a positive view of large corporations, while 71% had a positive view of small businesses. (Gallup, 2012)



Photo credit: Patti Loughlin

erroneously reported that the U.S. Supreme Court had struck down the Affordable Care Act on June 28, 2012.⁴⁴ This reflected a 27% decrease in confidence from the previous year and a 46% drop from 1993 when Gallup began measuring this data.⁴⁵

Oklahomans similarly lack confidence in the media, according to 2011 CPS data. Although they were not asked to differentiate between the different media formats, only 58.4% of Oklahoman respondents reported they were very or somewhat confident in the media to do the right thing. While neither the recent Gallup poll nor the U.S. Census Current Population Survey distinguishes between local and cable television news outlets, a survey conducted by the Pew Research Center suggests that negative public sentiment toward television news may be influenced more by cable news outlets than network or local news outlets.⁴⁶

In that same poll, cable news outlets were most frequently cited by participants when asked “what comes to mind when you think about a news organization?”⁴⁷ Overall, 63% of all respondents named a cable news network rather than a network news outlet, a local television news outlet, national newspaper, local newspaper, or Internet outlet.⁴⁸ Those same respondents confirmed their belief that news organizations are often influenced by powerful people and organizations (80%), tend to favor one side (77%), and present stories that are often inaccurate (66%).⁴⁹ When Pew Research Center started asking these questions in 1985, only 53% of respondents believed news organizations were biased or influenced by powerful people. Since 1985, the public’s belief in the inaccuracy of the news media’s report has nearly doubled from 34% to 66%.⁵⁰

In fairness to the media, there is considerable research that suggests that viewers’ own ideological or partisan positions frequently influence their perceptions of media bias.⁵¹ These media studies propose that the more ideological or partisan the viewers, the more likely the viewers are to believe that the media favors their opponents.⁵²



58.4%

Only 58.4% of Oklahoman respondents reported they were very or somewhat confident in the media to do the right thing.

Photo credit: Daniel Smith, Director of
Photographic Services, University of
Central Oklahoma

Confidence in the Government

Despite this lack of confidence in the media, most Americans still have more confidence in the media than the government, especially the federal government.⁵³ According to the Pew Research Center, “By almost every conceivable measure Americans are less positive and more critical of government these days.”⁵⁴ While a September 2012 survey suggested that Americans’ confidence in the federal government ticked up slightly over the past year, dissatisfaction with all three branches had increasingly declined since 2010.⁵⁵

Nowhere is the public’s lack of confidence in federal government greater than the legislative branch. In a six-year period, Congress’ favorability rating dropped in the survey from 56% to 25%, leading Pew Research Center to conclude that discontent toward Congress has seemingly “poisoned the well for trust in the federal government” in general.⁵⁶ Public discontent toward federal government is not limited to the legislative branch. Trust in the executive branch has remained slightly higher than the legislative branch on a fairly consistent basis. Since falling to 40% during Watergate, confidence in the executive branch actually climbed steadily over the next 30 years in Gallup polling, to a modern high of 67% in 2002. The public’s confidence level dropped significantly, though, following President George W. Bush’s declaration of war against Iraq in 2003, nearly matching Watergate-level lows toward the end of 2008.⁵⁷ Since that time, executive branch confidence has rebounded. This past year, Gallup reported that 56% of those surveyed had much trust and confidence in the executive branch.⁵⁸

Amongst all the data collected on confidence in the three branches of government, perhaps the most noteworthy trend involves the eroding lack of confidence in the judicial branch. The United States Supreme Court has historically been considered the least partisan. Some legal commentators, however, assert that the U.S. Supreme Court justices no longer remove their political ideologies from their legal opinions. As noted by one commentator: “When it comes to the core of the Court’s work, determining the contemporary meaning of the Constitution, it is ideology, not craft or skill, that controls the outcome of cases.”⁵⁹

Whether real or perceived, public confidence in the Judicial Branch has been diminished as its courts, especially the U.S. Supreme Court, have come to be seen by some as another pawn in the ongoing battle of competing ideologies. While it is still the most trusted branch in government, at least one recent poll has indicated that Americans' trust in the Judicial Branch fell from a 40-year high of 80% in the late 1990s to 63% in 2011.⁶⁰ Another recent poll revealed that most respondents (95%) believed that the workings of the U.S. Supreme Court should be more transparent.⁶¹

Whatever the latest polls suggest about Americans' overwhelming disapproval of their federal government, these same polls frequently highlight one of the greatest contradictions of our democracy: As Americans, we typically hate Congress while loving our particular Congressmen.⁶² Commonly referred to as the Fenno Paradox, this phenomenon is alive and well in Oklahoma, where in 2010 both U.S. Senators Tom Coburn and Jim Inhofe garnered some of their highest approval ratings, 69.6% and 64%, respectively,⁶³ while Congress suffered some of its lowest approval ratings in its history as an institution.

Similarly, state and local governments generally seem to fare much better than their federal government counterparts in many public opinion surveys. For example, Gallup reports that Americans expressed a great deal or fair amount of trust in their state (65%) and local (74%) governments in 2012,⁶⁴ once again suggesting that citizens are more apt to distrust government institutions the farther they get from those institutions and their leaders. The survey notes slight variances of trust in state and local governments based on region and political affiliation:

"Americans are in a better mood about conditions in the U.S. now than at any time during the last three years. And while their level of satisfaction and confidence in the economy remains below historical norms, their trust in state and local governments is as high as it has been in the last decade."⁶⁵

Confidence in Corporations



Shortly after the 2008 financial crisis, Marist College released a survey finding that 76% of respondents believed the moral compass of Corporate America was pointing in the wrong direction.⁶⁶ Fifty-two percent of those same respondents assigned a letter grade of either "D" (24%) or "F" (28%) when asked how each would rank Corporate America for its honesty and ethical conduct.⁶⁷

Described as the "worst market disruption in postwar American history,"⁶⁸ there is little doubt that most polls taken immediately after the crisis reflected a similar lack of confidence in U.S. corporations. But lack of confidence in corporations is not necessarily new.

Americans' confidence in financial institutions has consistently ebbed and flowed over the past four decades, reaching confidence levels as high as 60% in the late 1970s to lows of 18% in 2010.⁶⁹ This lack of confidence is not restricted to financial institutions, but more broadly extends to corporations in general.

On a brighter note, however, polls suggest that Americans do not view all corporations with equal distrust. Most respondents seem to distinguish between large businesses and small businesses when expressing their lack of confidence. A survey conducted by the Pew Research Center showed that only 25% of those polled nationally had a positive view of large corporations, while 71% had a positive view of small businesses.⁷⁰

This negative view of large corporations was confirmed by another poll conducted by Gallup on June 20, 2012. The Gallup survey found that only 21% of respondents had a great deal or quite a lot of confidence in big business, but 63% had a great deal or quite a lot of confidence in small businesses.⁷¹

5th

Oklahoma ranked 5th in the nation for residents who have great confidence in corporations to do the right thing.

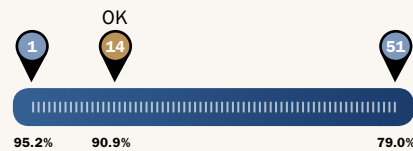


Photo credit: Daniel Smith, Director of Photographic Services, University of Central Oklahoma

At first glance, CIRCLE analysis of CPS data suggested an anomaly between Americans' and Oklahomans' confidence in corporations. According to the Current Population Survey, 68.6% of Oklahomans reported they were very or somewhat confident in corporations, the fifth-highest ranking among states that participated in the survey. After reviewing the findings, however, it is entirely possible that many Oklahomans' confidence in corporations are shaped by their interactions with Oklahoma small businesses rather than large multinational corporations, since 97.2% of all Oklahoma employers are considered small businesses (i.e. less than 500 employees), according to data published by the U.S. Small Business Administration.⁷² This conclusion would be consistent with similar findings throughout this section that Americans and Oklahomans generally trust those institutions, whether public or private sector, in which they are more likely to have a closer, more personal relationship.

Confidence in Public Schools

Some or Great Confidence in Public Schools Rank



Americans generally have less confidence in public schools than they had 40 years ago, according to a national poll conducted this past summer. Gallup reported that only 29% of Americans had a great deal or quite a lot of confidence in public schools nationwide, exactly half the confidence level reported (58%) when Gallup first asked the question about public schools in 1973 and a 5% decrease from 2011.⁷³

Meanwhile, confidence levels for public schools in Oklahoma appear to buck this nationwide trend. Nearly 91% of all Oklahoma respondents in the U.S. Census Bureau Current Population Survey were either very confident or somewhat confident in the public school system. Oklahoma's confidence in its public schools ranks it 14th among all states that participated in the survey. While a number of factors may contribute to Oklahomans' higher than average confidence level in their public schools, the number of school districts in the state may be a contributing factor. Oklahoma has the 8th-highest number of school districts per capita with 521 school districts, according to a recent report in the *The Oklahoman*.⁷⁴

Similar to other institutions we have examined, Oklahomans seem to express more confidence in their local public schools because they tend to have closer, more personal connections to the instructors and administrators of those institutions. As exemplified in a recent statement made by retired School Board President Dewayne Streater, whose entire school district of New Lima consists of 266 students: "Most of the kids that graduate at a school like New Lima have lived there all their life... The rural schools are really needed... They are mainly the hub of the community."⁷⁵

Shared Responsibility

It may not be possible to accurately identify where this distrust or lack of confidence in many of our nation's largest public institutions originates. But to a great extent, most of these public institutions are led by men and women who were either elected or chosen by the very citizenry who express concern about their trustworthiness or effectiveness. To the extent that the federal government is largely composed of local citizens elected to represent us in Washington DC, and to the extent that corporate executives are hired by boards of directors chosen by shareholders like us, then perhaps we share some responsibility for the failures of these public institutions. Which leads us to ask: Have our public institutions let us down, or have we let down our public institutions?

We all have a responsibility, as individuals, family members, educators, and active members of society, to address these critical issues involving our trust or mistrust of these public institutions. There is nothing wrong with expecting more accountability and transparency from these public institutions, but it starts with our own willingness to become more engaged citizens in our living rooms, our classrooms, and our boardrooms.

91%

of Oklahomans have some or great confidence in public schools, according to CPS data.



Photo credit: Daniel Smith, Director of Photographic Services, University of Central Oklahoma

In 2011, the Financial Crisis Inquiry Commission released its findings and conclusions as to the cause of the 2008 financial crisis and recommendations on what steps could be taken to prevent a future financial crisis. Ultimately, the Commission concluded that the crisis was avoidable, noting that, “The crisis was the result of human action and inaction, not of Mother Nature or computer models gone haywire... To paraphrase Shakespeare, the fault lies not in the stars, but in us.”⁷⁶ Indeed, the failure of our public institutions may not lie exclusively in the institution or even the leaders of those public institutions but rather in those voters and shareholders who select and choose to retain those leaders.

CITIZENSHIP EDUCATION

The C3 Plan: College, Career, and Citizen-Ready

The civic health data for the state of Oklahoma has revealed some important strengths and opportunities for growth. We know that the future of the state’s civic health resides in the next generation. How can we engage our young people in the democratic process, teach them habits of civic and social responsibility, and instill in them a commitment to civic virtue and lifelong learning? These themes have been part of an ongoing national education discussion. In 2012, the state of Oklahoma has revised the Pre-K-12 social studies curriculum with an intentional commitment to civic skills.

State Superintendent of Public Instruction Janet C. Barresi and the Oklahoma State Department of Education have developed a more vibrant and rigorous social studies framework focused on citizenship literacy. “By the year 2020,” Barresi has maintained in the new C3 Plan, “each student graduating from an Oklahoma high school must be college, career and citizen ready.”⁷⁷ C3 represents the first time in Oklahoma that the social studies curriculum offers a seamless framework from Pre-K-12.

Civic knowledge is an important part of the Oklahoma State social studies and history curriculum standards. Incoming ninth graders are required to complete three units of history and citizenship skills in order to graduate from high school. Students complete one unit of U.S. history, half unit of Oklahoma history, half to one unit of U.S. government, and half to one unit of other social studies.

The Oklahoma State Board of Education adopted the Common Core State Standards in June 2010. On June 2, 2010, the National Governors Association Center for Best Practices and the Council of Chief State School Officers released the final version of the Pre-K-12 standards in mathematics and English language arts, including literacy in history/social studies, science, and the technical subjects, as part of the Common Core State Standards Initiative. The initiative seeks to “provide a consistent, clear understanding of what students are expected to learn. The standards are designed to be robust and relevant to the real world, reflecting the knowledge and skills that our young people need for success in college and careers.”⁷⁸ These standards were developed with teachers, school administrators, curriculum content experts, and others. The goal is to provide a clear and consistent framework to prepare Oklahoma students for college, the workforce, and responsible citizenship. Full implementation will occur by the 2014-15 school year.⁷⁹

In 2012, Oklahoma revised its state standards for history and social studies. The new content standards encourage teachers to spend more time focusing on more recent periods of history leading to the present, including seminal events such as the Oklahoma City bombing and the terrorist attacks of 9/11. Additionally, standards were introduced for psychology and sociology. The state also introduced new standards and objectives related to state and local government and revised the geography standards to focus on human and cultural geography. Oklahoma also integrated the Common Core reading and writing standards for history/social studies into content standards for history/social studies.

C3 offers the coherency storyline, “The Foundation, Formation, and Transformation of the American System – Politically and Economically,” to integrate citizenship education in the four content

The standards are designed to be robust and relevant to the real world, reflecting the knowledge and skills that our young people need for success in college and careers.



Photo credit: Daniel Smith, Director of Photographic Services, University of Central Oklahoma

areas of social studies: history, geography, civics and government, and economics. With the goal of educating the next generation of informed and engaged citizens, students will learn the principles of American constitutional democracy and civic responsibility.

With respect to civics education, the grade school years of Pre-K through second grade focus on the study of American democratic symbols and holidays, basic responsibilities of citizenship, notable Americans, and American landmarks. In third grade, students focus on Oklahoma studies through the contributions of such notable Oklahomans as Sequoyah, Will Rogers, Clara Luper, and Wilma Mankiller; a commemoration of Statehood Day on November 16; and investigating the historical significance of state and local landmarks, such as Route 66 and the Oklahoma City National Memorial. Fourth graders discuss regional geography and history, such as cultures of major Native American groups, European explorers and their interactions with the tribes they encountered, and the identification of historically significant sites, such as the White House and Pearl Harbor National Park. Fifth grade focuses on the foundation of the United States, including the Jamestown settlement, the development of northern and southern colonies, and the Revolutionary War.

The middle school years of grades six and seven focus on the geography and cultures of the western and eastern hemispheres, respectively. Grade eight concentrates on the causes, events, and ideologies of the American Revolution through the Civil War and Reconstruction eras, including the geographical transformation of the nation throughout that time period. During the high school years, the study of economics focuses on applying decision-making models to real-life economic situations, a discussion of nonprofits, interest rates, and investments, the examination of the American free-market system, and the roles of money, entrepreneurs, the U.S. government, and the Federal Reserve.



High school U.S. government focuses on the foundation of the U.S. republican system of government, the U.S. Constitution, and the principles of the U.S. system of government, including the relationships and the responsibilities between national, state, tribal, and local governments. Students will discuss the civic duties of voting, serving on juries, paying taxes, and respecting the law. Students will also analyze how the governmental structure provides citizens the opportunity to monitor and influence the actions of the government and hold elected officials accountable. Students will analyze the rights protected in the Bill of Rights and the 14th Amendment.

High school also focuses on Oklahoma history and government, such as the formation of the state constitution, the state's geography, the major political and economic events, such as the Five Tribes' and Plains tribes' removal to Oklahoma, the establishment of military forts, the Tulsa Race Riot, and oil booms and busts.⁸⁰ In addition to these changes to the curriculum, outside groups are working to integrate their programming with these standards. Institutions in Oklahoma, including the Oklahoma Council for History Education, the Oklahoma Historical Society, the Oklahoma Academy for State Goals, the Oklahoma Bar Association, and the Institute for Constitutional Heritage at the University of Oklahoma, lead the effort in preserving the history of Oklahoma with an emphasis on civic skills and inspiring a new generation of Oklahomans to learn and connect to state history and citizenship.

The Oklahoma Historical Society, dedicated to collecting, preserving, and sharing the history and culture of the state of Oklahoma and its people, resides in the Oklahoma History Center, a 215,000-square-foot learning center featuring five state-of-the-art galleries and the Research Center. OHS Education Director Jason Harris and his staff work with the C3 Standards for the Social Studies in a number of ways. The standards help to guide education programming, living history presentations, educational tool kits, field trips and museum tours. For the majority of student programs, C3 is used as a tool to determine a program's usefulness to teachers in meeting academic objectives.⁸¹ The Oklahoma Historical Society coordinates Oklahoma History Day. History Day is a national competition that gives students a chance to conduct research, interpret information, and prepare their own conclusions in unique ways that meet the C3 objectives. The goal is to enhance students' critical thinking, evaluation and comparison, and presentation skills. State winners have the opportunity to present their projects at National History Day in Washington, DC.⁸²

History Day is a national competition that gives students a chance to conduct research, interpret information, and prepare their own conclusions in unique ways that meet the C3 objectives.

Photo credit: Jason Harris

SUMMARY

While strong and proud in many ways, Oklahoma's civic health is in need of some rehabilitation.

Oklahoma has strengths of which we can and should be proud. However, we have discussed several areas where Oklahoma falls short relative to national trends. It is important for each of us to consider the role we can play in strengthening our communities' civic health, and why this is such a critical endeavor.

1. Civic health has been shown to be related to other important measures of a state's health, such as resilience to recession and unemployment. NCoC's research indicates that "participation in civil society can develop skills, confidence, and habits that make individuals employable and strengthen the networks that help them to find jobs."⁸³ This research also concludes that social networks facilitate the process of job seeking, that information is more available when members of a society participate in civil activities, that greater civil participation is strongly correlated with trust in other people, that good governments are associated with stronger civil societies, and that civic engagement facilitates the feeling that people are attached to their communities.

2. Oklahoma's civic health may be a reflection of other public health areas of concern. We may consider how our civic health relates to social problems and health. While Oklahoma has improved from 49th to 46th in the nation in our overall health ranking, there is a lot of work to be done. According to the 2011 State of Oklahoma Health Report Card, the percent of Oklahomans who are obese is 32% compared with 26.9% nationally. Infant mortality is at 8.6 (per 1000), compared to 6.8 nationally. Total mortality is at 933.0 (per 100,000) compared with 760.2 nationally, which earns us an "F" on the 2011 State of Oklahoma Health Report Card and identifies Oklahoma as having one of the highest death rates in the nation (2011 report).⁸⁴

In Oklahoma, the death rates for whites, blacks, and American Indians all received a grade of "F," though the Hispanic population in Oklahoma received a grade of "A." Suicide is at 14.7 (per 100,000) compared with 11.3 nationally. Teen fertility is at 30.4 (per 1000) compared with 22.1 nationally. Lack of health insurance coverage is at 19.8% compared with 14.4% nationally, and the poverty rate is 15.7% compared with 13.2% nationally.

The 2012 Child Welfare League of America (CWLA) report on Oklahoma's children found the overall state poverty rate was 16.9%, with children under 18 years having a rate of 24.7% (ages 5-17: 23.1% and under 5: 17.9%). In 2010, nearly 40,000 Oklahoma grandparents had primary responsibility in caring for their grandchildren. Approximately 16,000 Oklahoma teens (ages 16-19) were not enrolled in school and were not working, and 64,000 young adults (ages 18-24) were not enrolled in school, were not working, and had no degree beyond high school.⁸⁵

According to the Oklahoma Commission on the Status of Women report, Oklahoma continues to be ranked the highest of the 50 states for female incarceration rates.⁸⁶

3. Our level of civic health cannot be attributed to a single factor, cause, or person. There may be a basic lack of intention when it comes to the civic life of our state. From the need for civic education, to making voting accessible, to informing our citizens, and to engaging one another in community life, we need to strengthen the institutions and opportunities that nurture and enhance the civic life of our citizens.

40,000

Approximate number of Oklahoma grandparents who had primary responsibility in caring for their grandchildren in 2010.



Photo credit: Daniel Smith, Director of Photographic Services, University of Central Oklahoma

CALL TO ACTION

Now, let's come up with some ways to accomplish the positive change we all want.

This report does not claim to have the solutions to these problems. It is instead a call to action directed at a diverse audience, from the highest-ranking administrator to the ordinary citizen. Along and beyond this continuum are youth and elders, teachers and students, workers and bosses, parents and children, leaders of corporations and nonprofits, employees of big-box stores and entrepreneurs, people of every race and ethnic background, civic club leaders and mayors, and governors, congressional leaders, and pages.

1. It is the responsibility of each of us to interact more purposefully with others. This may mean being involved in the laws that regulate our profession or guarding our profession from ethical and legal incompetency. It may mean giving a ride to a neighbor to the polling station or teaching neighborhood kids to peacefully resolve a conflict. It may mean being a better example when coaching little league or being a better role model when organizing a bake sale. It may mean being a better loser, but even more importantly, to be a better winner – one who is modest and a good sport. It means demanding civil discourse in the media and embracing diversity of thought. This may mean listening to the person whose ideas you don't favor with as much intent as you would to those whose ideas you do favor.

2. It is the responsibility of each of us to model, teach, or enable a richer civic life for others. It is the responsibility of each of us to design civic engagement opportunities across the educational lifespan of the citizens of our state.

Parents and grandparents can talk to their children and grandchildren about all sides of a political debate. They can let their children understand the importance of political issues, help them stay informed, and model good voting behavior. Oklahoma is 4th in the nation for the number of grandparents in the role of rearing their own grandchildren. The Oklahoma State Aging Services, reports about one in 10 children nationally is raised by a grandparent, but that number is about one in six in Oklahoma.⁸⁷

Teachers can address issues of policy in a nonpartisan way in the classroom so our youth can start thinking about their choices, using critical thinking to consider issues, and incorporate problem solving to make a better tomorrow. Teaching styles should abandon the traditional method of lecturing and instead provide opportunities, such as those provided through *The Youth Empowerment Fund*, which helps build the capacity of young people to participate as decision makers and feel empowered as change agents in their communities.⁸⁸ Curriculum should emphasize voting rights and create students who are “citizen-ready” by the age of 18 when they become eligible to vote. Students should have experiences that make them feel just as excited about voting as they do when anticipating the receipt of their driver's licenses at the age of 16. Pre K-12 Education will play a crucial role in this endeavor. In the early years, students can use these skills to consider the rules of the school and the classroom and later on they can address the issues of their school board, local elections, and larger elections. They can learn at an early age the benefits of being informed about the policies that govern them so they can take those skills into adulthood.

College campuses can offer opportunities for college students to be involved in the governance of their campus as well as being informed of and making changes to the issues related to registering, voting, voter suppression, absentee ballots, and provisional voting. They can get involved by identifying voting stations and by ensuring that students who use absentee ballots have them completed efficiently. Students can also engage in volunteerism and service-learning projects to tie their coursework with the real-world demands of their future employers and social service organizations.



College campuses can offer opportunities for college students to be involved in the governance of their campus as well as being informed of and making changes to the issues related to registering, voting, voter suppression, absentee ballots, and provisional voting.

Photo credit: Daniel Smith, Director of Photographic Services, University of Central Oklahoma

Legislators can use this report to guide decisions about funding and programs to improve civic education. They can consider laws that continue to allow all eligible voters to cast a ballot. They can also consider extending early voting and make early voting more accessible.

Businesses can place a greater emphasis on civic engagement by encouraging and rewarding volunteerism, as some businesses in the state have done, such as OKC Thunder, Chesapeake, and Devon Energy. They can also work to provide voter education programs and time off for employees to vote.

3. Voter education is an important piece of the engagement movement. With the institution of the new voter ID law, it is critical for voters to understand the new rules and the forms of acceptable identification in order to legally vote. A public service announcement would be helpful. Various ways to vote should be identified so those who cannot vote in person know what their alternatives are and how to use them (early voting, absentee voting, provisional voting, etc.). Work should be continued to empower members of the military to be able to vote. Greater utilization of organizations who are continuously working to increase levels of civic engagement, such as the OK Native Vote 2012 or the League of Women Voters, could result in voter education guides. This may increase voters' knowledge of candidates and other ballot issues, and may help with the low levels of candidate competition in Oklahoma. Oklahoma can also consider extended early voting, same-day voter registration and paperless online voter registration as alternatives to our current system. These options have been adopted by other states and have led to an increase in voting numbers.

4. Social media can be used to increase voter education, voter participation in debates and voting, and otherwise civically engaging people. It has been reported that both registered and non-registered citizens have connected over the Internet at similar rates (58.5% and 46.8%, respectively).⁸⁹ Consequently, it may be argued that the Internet has been and may continue to be used as a tool to connect people who are otherwise disengaged. As indicated previously in this report, social networks, such as Facebook and Twitter, provide avenues of increased communications between friends and family but also create the potential for strengthened social connections with people in our communities, our state, and across the nation. As the prevalence of social network sites continues to spread, it will become necessary to utilize this technology to go beyond the traditional methods of offline engagement, such as town hall meetings. While it is true that not all Oklahoma citizens have access to the Internet or are active on social media, this is simply an additional avenue through which civic engagement may be sought.

Has this report distressed you? Surprised you? Inspired you? As proud Oklahomans, let's do what we can in our own communities, schools, businesses, and government to move these rankings. What can you do? To share your experiences and get involved, please visit www.uco.edu/adp.



Photo credit: Oklahoma Tourism and Recreation Department

TECHNICAL NOTES

Unless otherwise noted, the findings of the 2012 Oklahoma Civic Health Index are based upon analysis of Census Current Population Survey (CPS) data provided by The Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement (CIRCLE) at Tufts University. Volunteering estimates are from CPS September Volunteering Supplements (2009, 2010 and 2011), and data available from Volunteering in America. Voting and registration data are from the CPS November Voting & Registration Supplement (2008 and 2010). All other civic engagement indicators, such as access to information and connection to others, come from CPS Civic Engagement Supplement (2009, 2010 and 2011). For these indicators, 2009, 2010 and 2011 were combined whenever possible to achieve the largest-possible sample size to minimize error.

The sample size for volunteering included 1,266 respondents (16 and over). The civic engagement supplement included 1,117 in the sample.

Because the report draws from multiple data sources with varying error parameters, there is no exact margin of error for the Oklahoma sample. The margin of error ranges from $\pm 1.6\%$ and $\pm 4.3\%$. For specific population subgroups, the margin of error is larger.

ENDNOTES

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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

Georgia

Georgia Forward
University of Georgia
Georgia Family Connection Partnership

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

Michigan

Michigan Nonprofit Association
Michigan Campus Compact

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

Millennials Civic Health Index

Mobilize.org
Harvard Institute of Politics
CIRCLE

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