

# 2023 GEORGIA CIVIC HEALTH INDEX™



GEORGIA  
**family connection**  
PARTNERSHIP



National Conference on Citizenship

# ABOUT THE PARTNERS

## GEORGIA CITY SOLUTIONS

The Georgia Municipal Association created Georgia City Solutions, Inc. to help cities address the challenges of intergenerational poverty. Its mission is to establish and support innovative programs, solutions, and research aimed at building vibrant, economically prosperous, and well-managed cities and improving municipal residents' quality of life. [gacities.com/about/georgia-city-solutions](https://gacities.com/about/georgia-city-solutions)

## GEORGIA FAMILY CONNECTION PARTNERSHIP

Georgia Family Connection Partnership (GaFCP) believes all people have the ability to become productive citizens. GaFCP works toward measurably better outcomes for a Georgia where all children are healthy, primed for school, and succeed when they get there; where families are stable, self-sufficient, and productive; and where communities are vibrant, robust, and thriving. A nonprofit, public-private intermediary, GaFCP convenes public and private organizations and key community members committed to improving conditions and prospects of children and families. By connecting creative solutions, GaFCP expands, improves, and cultivates efforts that work to eliminate barriers and inefficiencies, while making effective use of existing resources and services. GaFCP helps to strengthen communities so that they, and our state, can prosper. Along with GaFCP's statewide network—the only one of its kind in the nation—Georgia Family Connection is committed to using the *Civic Health Index* to continue conversations and spark action around Georgia's civic engagement. [gafcp.org](https://gafcp.org)

## GEORGIA MUNICIPAL ASSOCIATION

Based in Atlanta, the Georgia Municipal Association (GMA) is a voluntary, nonprofit organization that provides legislative advocacy, education, and employee benefit and consulting services to its 537 member cities. GMA's mission is to anticipate and influence the forces shaping Georgia's cities. [gacities.com](https://gacities.com)

## NATIONAL CONFERENCE ON CITIZENSHIP

The National Conference on Citizenship (NCoC) pursues its mission through a nationwide network of partners involved in a cutting-edge civic health initiative and innovative national service project, and cross-sector conferences. At the core of NCoC's joint efforts is the belief that every person has the ability to help his or her community and country thrive. [ncoc.org](https://ncoc.org)



Photo: GaFCP

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# INTRODUCTION

In 2013, Georgia Family Connection Partnership (GaFCP)—along with the Carl Vinson Institute of Government, GeorgiaForward, and the National Conference on Citizenship (NCoC)—published the first *Georgia Civic Health Index*. A second edition was published in 2019 in partnership with GaFCP, NCoC, and the Georgia Municipal Association (GMA), launching conversations and action across our state.

This third edition of the *Georgia Civic Health Index* examines the way Georgians interact with each other, with their communities, and in political life. It allows us to see the ways Georgia's civic health has changed since 2013 and explores the ways civic participation varies across demographic variables, including income, educational attainment, age, race and ethnicity, and geography. This report also compares Georgia's rates of civic participation to other states and to national averages, so that—together—we can support and broaden existing conversations, initiate new dialogues, explore and implement evidence-based practices, and implement strategies at all levels to strengthen civic health and communities.

## What is Civic Health?

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Civic health includes a wide range of civic engagement indicators, from shared interactions among friends and family to the ways people participate in their communities. Civic health also reflects the ways people express themselves politically, in traditional measures like voter registration and turnout, and more social measures like discussing politics and sharing information and resources.

This report examines four main areas of civic health:

- » **Social Connectedness**
- » **Community Involvement**
- » **Political Action**
- » **Confidence in Institutions**

## Why Does Civic Health Matter?

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Civic participation is a cornerstone of democracy, and strong civic health is vital to healthy, functioning systems and thriving communities. Engaging with those elected and appointed to represent you helps ensure the best interests of your community are promoted and protected.

Strong civic health also is associated with positive population and community outcomes—from good public health to a stable workforce and resilient economy. For example, research conducted by AmeriCorps found strong links between volunteering and employment.<sup>1</sup> And strong social cohesion—talking to neighbors, doing favors for neighbors, trusting neighbors, and seeing and hearing from friends and family—correlates with better health outcomes, such as improved child development and adolescent well-being, better mental health, lower violent crime rates and youth delinquency, and reduced mortality.<sup>2</sup>

Working together to strengthen civic health is one way we can help improve outcomes for Georgia's children, families, and communities—results that GaFCP, GMA, Georgia City Solutions, and other organizations and leaders across the state are already diligently working to achieve each day.



## DEFINITIONS OF KEY TERMS AND CONCEPTS

**Civic health** reflects the degree to which citizens participate in their communities, from local and state governance to interactions with friends or family. Civic health also relates to the overall well-being of neighborhoods, communities, states, and the nation.

**Civic engagement** is the act of working with local institutions and fellow residents to promote meaningful actions, movements, and relationships within a community or population. This can take many forms, from registering to vote to talking politics with friends or family to participating in community groups. Some measures of civic engagement are political, some are social, and some are individual, but each reflects essential data about a community's overall civic health.

**Social connectedness** is defined as a series of interactions between friends, families, and neighbors, such as eating dinner with friends or family and trusting neighbors.

**Community involvement** refers to the ways people interact with fellow residents beyond their friends, family, and immediate neighbors. These actions include group membership, charitable giving, volunteering, and attending public meetings.

**Political action and participation** refer to the ways people influence local government and public institutions, including voting in state and local elections, contacting public officials, discussing politics, and buying or boycotting goods to reflect political opinions.

**Confidence in institutions** refers to the degree to which residents believe that various local institutions, including public schools, media, and corporations, will do what is right.

### GENERATIONAL CONCEPTS

#### **Long Civic Generation (born before 1931)**

This is the last generation raised before World War II. When disaggregated by generation, this report combines data from the Long Civic and Silent generations, because the sample sizes for these populations were too small to analyze independently.

#### **Silent Generation (1931 – 1945)**

This generation refers to people born in the middle of the Great Depression and preceding World War II. When disaggregated by generation, this report combines data from the Long Civic and Silent generations, because the sample sizes for these populations were too small to analyze independently.

#### **Baby Boomers (1946 – 1964)**

This generation was born in the years after World War II, when the United States experienced a large increase in birth rates.

#### **Generation X (1965 – 1980)**

This generation follows the Baby Boomers and is sometimes referred to as the “baby bust,” because it was the beginning of a decline in birth rates in the United States.

#### **Millennials (1981 – 1995)**

This generation refers to those born in the 1980s through the mid 1990s, when there was a brief spike in birth rates attributed to the maturation of the Baby Boomers generation.

#### **Generation Z (1996 and later)**

This generation represents those born in the late 1990s and 2000s.

# CIVIC HEALTH IN GEORGIA

Georgia generally lags national averages in measures of civic health, though some compelling differences exist among a few indicators between the 2019 report and the current data. This increasingly diverse state is the primary economic hub of the Southeast and includes large rural areas that rely on agriculture production. Strengthening Georgia's civic health is key to ensuring that all Georgia residents enjoy the benefits of the state's growth and increased economic well-being. Compared with all 50 states and the District of Columbia, Georgia does not display strong civic health across most measures.

<b>GEORGIA CIVIC HEALTH RANKINGS AT A GLANCE</b>	National Rank
<b>At or Above National Averages</b>	
<b>Donated to political organization (\$25 or more)</b>	21
<b>Voter turnout</b>	29
<b>Attended a public meeting</b>	32
<b>Voted in last local election</b>	32
<b>Voter registration (2020)</b>	33
<b>Contacted or visited public official</b>	35
<b>Frequently post views about political, societal, or local issues on the internet or social media</b>	35
<b>Group participation</b>	38
<b>Below National Averages</b>	
<b>Donated to charitable or religious organization (\$25 or more)</b>	41
<b>Bought or boycotted a product or service</b>	42
<b>Frequently discuss political, societal, or local issues with family or friends</b>	44
<b>Frequently discuss political, societal, or local issues with neighbors</b>	45
<b>Volunteering</b>	45
<b>Work with neighbors to do something positive for neighborhood or community</b>	46
<b>Frequently hear from or spend time with family or friends</b>	46
<b>Frequently do favors for neighbors</b>	47
<b>Frequently read, watch, or listen to news or information about political, societal, or local issues</b>	51
<b>Frequently talk with or spend time with neighbors</b>	51



Photo: GaFCP

## SOCIAL CONNECTEDNESS

Social connectedness is a measure of how individuals interact with each other and involves both the quality and number of connections individuals have with those in their social circle. It fulfills the basic human need for relationships and extends from interactions with family and close friends to broader groups in communities. Social connectedness is an essential component of a healthy community and promotes individual health and well-being. Interactions with family, friends, and neighbors are foundational for building trust and community cohesion, and measuring individuals' interactions with these groups demonstrates social connectedness.

### *Spending Time with Family and Friends*

In the most recent survey, Georgians reported that—across the board—they value spending time with family and friends, with 77.9% of Georgians reporting they frequently hear from or spend time with those groups. While the difference between most demographic groups was not significant, there are some differences in frequency by gender, geographic location, and family income. Georgia's state mean for this indicator (77.9%) is close to the national average (79.3%).

Slightly more Georgia females (79.8%) reported frequently spending time with family and friends than males (75.8%). And more urban-dwelling Georgians reported frequently hearing from or spending time with family and friends (82.9%) than those living in suburban (78.4%) and rural (68.7%) communities. This may reflect the fact that individuals residing in urban communities often have greater geographic mobility and live in closer proximity to family and friends.

Nearly three-quarters (72.8%) of individuals with family incomes below \$35,000 reported frequently spending time and communicating with family and friends, compared to 82.1% of individuals having incomes greater than \$75,000.



Georgians value time with family and friends—with **77.9%** reporting they frequently spend time or hear from those groups.

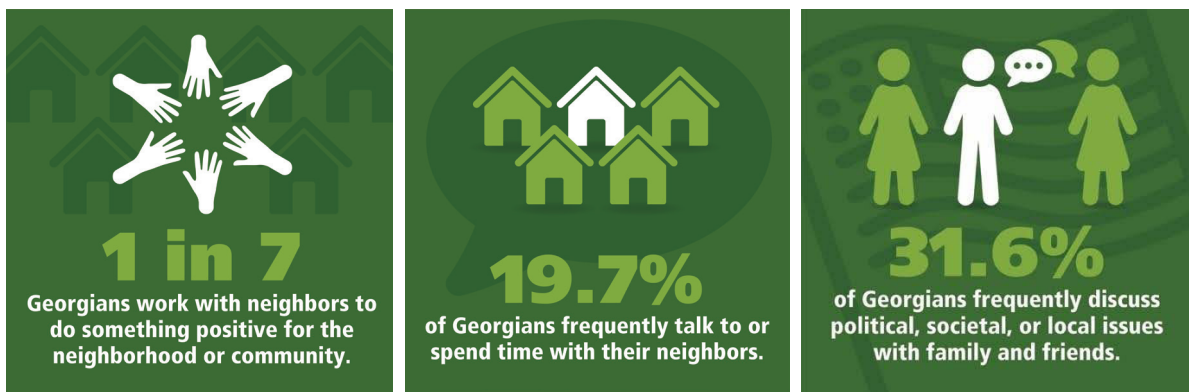


## Discussing Political, Societal, or Local Issues with Family or Friends

Another measure of social connectedness is the extent to which individuals discuss political, societal, or local issues with family or friends. Overall, Georgians spend less time frequently engaged in discussions about these issues with family or friends (31.6%) than the national average (35.1%). More individuals with a bachelor's degree or higher (44.4%) reported frequently discussing political, societal, or local issues than those with less education, as only 34.3% of Georgians with some college and 24.5% of those with a high school diploma reported frequently engaging in this way.

## Talking to or Spending Time with Neighbors

Though Georgians value spending time with family and friends, fewer (19.7%) reported they frequently talk to or spend time with their neighbors than the national average (26.9%). However, 29.6% of older Georgians born before 1931 through 1945, the Long Civic and Silent generations, reported talking to or spending time with neighbors, a more frequent rate than Baby Boomers (28.1%), Generation X (15.5%), Millennials (18.8%), and Generation Z (7.4%). When considering geography, there are only slight differences as 20.2% of rural Georgians frequently spent time with or talked to neighbors, compared to 16.4% living in urban and 18.1% in suburban communities. Individuals with incomes less than \$35,000 also reported frequently talking and spending time with neighbors at slightly higher rates than those with higher incomes.



## Discussing Political, Societal, or Local Issues with Neighbors

Georgians are less likely to discuss political, societal, or local issues with neighbors than they are with family and friends. Only 6.2% of individuals reported frequently engaging with neighbors in this way, compared to the 31.6% who frequently discuss these issues with family and friends. However, those with a bachelor's degree or higher (11.1%) and the Long Civic and Silent generations (11.9%) are more likely to frequently discuss these issues with neighbors.



Photo: GaFCP

## Doing Favors for Neighbors

Georgians also do not frequently exchange favors with neighbors. In the most recent data, only 7.7% of Georgians reported they frequently do favors for neighbors compared to 10% nationally. More rural Georgians and those born before 1930 through 1945 reported doing favors than their counterparts in other geographical areas and age groups. Nearly one in seven (13.8%) of the Long Civic and Silent generations frequently did favors for neighbors, compared to 12% of Baby Boomers, 6.8% of Generation X, 4.3% of Millennials, and 4.6% of Generation Z. About one in eight (12.7%) rural Georgians exchanged favors with neighbors, compared to 8% of urban and 5.5% of suburban residents. Notably, Georgians who live in rural areas and who are a part of the Long Civic and Silent generations frequently exchange favors more than the rest of the state and nation.

## Working with Neighbors to Do Something Positive for Neighborhood or Community

About one in seven (14.5%) Georgians work with neighbors to do something positive for the neighborhood or community, compared to the national rate of 18%. There are appreciable differences among Georgians when comparisons are made based on household income and educational attainment. More than one in six (17.3%) Georgians with family incomes greater than \$75,000, and 17.8% of those with incomes between \$35,000 and \$49,999, work with neighbors to do something positive for the neighborhood or community, while only 12.3% of those with incomes less than \$35,000, and 9.7% of those with incomes between \$50,000 and \$74,999 report working with neighbors. Nearly one-quarter (24.3%) of Georgians with a bachelor's degree or higher work with neighbors to do something positive in the neighborhood, substantially higher than individuals with some college (15.9%) and a high school diploma (8.9%).



Top Left Photo: GaFCP

Top Right Photo: GaFCP

Bottom Photo: Polk Family Connection



# WE CHOOSE PIERCE

Civic-Minded Students Choose to Make Pierce County a Better Place



Photo: Pierce County Family Connection

Georgia's civic health declined in most of the 21 civic engagement measures between 2013 and 2019, according to the Georgia Civic Health Index (CHI). This alarming data translated into action in Pierce County, where youth were stunned when they learned that Georgia ranked 50th in the nation in spending time with neighbors and family and 40th in voting in the last election—yet ranked 13th in talking about political views online.

"It's a struggle to maintain civic health in rural communities like Pierce," said Sarah Gove, director of marketing for Memorial Satilla Health and former director of the Pierce County Chamber of Commerce. "We typically have low voter turnout, and when it comes to volunteering, it seems like the same few folks work tirelessly to better the community. A culture shift sparked by the pandemic has magnified this problem."

Pierce County Family Connection, Chamber of Commerce, Industrial Development Authority, school system, and community representatives recognized the magnitude of this issue. The initial concept for a new Student Leadership Academy progressed into simultaneously creating a Youth Civic Health Board as the Collaborative's partners examined the CHI and Georgia KIDS COUNT data.

"We saw a connection between states with better overall KIDS COUNT data and higher levels of civic health," said Pierce County Family Connection Executive Director Stephanie Bell. "If we want healthy kids and families, we need to show our youth the vital role civic health plays in helping individuals and communities thrive."

Bell would like to look at other states, asking questions like, "Why do they have more two-parent successful families? Why are they so civic minded? Why is their social capital so high?" And then figure out ways to replicate it. "If I could travel across the state talking about civic health, I would," she said. "It's that essential to changing the dynamics and future of Georgia's families."

Matt Carter, executive director of the Pierce County Industrial Development Authority, agreed. "The CHI showed us specific areas where we need to improve," he said. "We want students to learn about their responsibilities as citizens—voting, paying taxes, getting involved in community activities. And hopefully students will want to be more involved and help improve our county."

According to Bell, the Collaborative's annual plan addresses this need. "Our primary goal and strategy are to help our youth," she said. "We want our youth to understand why civic health matters and is tied to other indicators of well-being. We'll keep collecting civic health data and comparing it to the KIDS COUNT data to try to accumulate evidence that points to a direct correlation between the two. Our hope is that this helps to build future sustainable families living healthy lifestyles with children who are healthy and succeeding in school."



The City of Blackshear and residual proceeds from the Chamber’s annual gala provided \$4,700 to fund the Academy and Board. Partners spread the word throughout the county’s schools, churches, and other local spots. The motto is simple: “We Choose Pierce.”

“Our community believes in the future of our youth and we’re strong supporters of the education system in Pierce County,” said Cassie Davis, Pierce County Chamber of Commerce executive director. “My hope for these students is to not only utilize their leadership skills and advocate for civic health in Pierce County, but wherever they go.”

The first 12 high school juniors who complete the application are selected for the Academy and Board each year on a first-come, first-served basis. Eight sessions are focused on:

- community awareness,
- leadership,
- economic development,
- local career and education opportunities,
- civic health, and
- volunteerism.

Bell initially thought creating a community of volunteerism and neighborhood unity might seem “corny” to high schoolers—until she presented them with Georgia’s CHI standings.

“I was surprised by how low we were on the charts,” said senior Austin Sikes. “That moment made me want to improve our civic health and spread respect and

compassion. Our civic health affects everyone who lives here.”

Aaron Bell, registrar and elections assistant for the Pierce County, Georgia Board of Elections and Registration, said student leaders have stepped up to help facilitate the democratic process. “It strengthens that process to have young people take part in their community and helps prepare them for their futures.”

Participants attend civic and government meetings, volunteer in the community, and tour local businesses. Students also complete monthly challenges based on CHI findings—like thanking their mail carrier, reaching out to old friends, and being friendly neighbors.

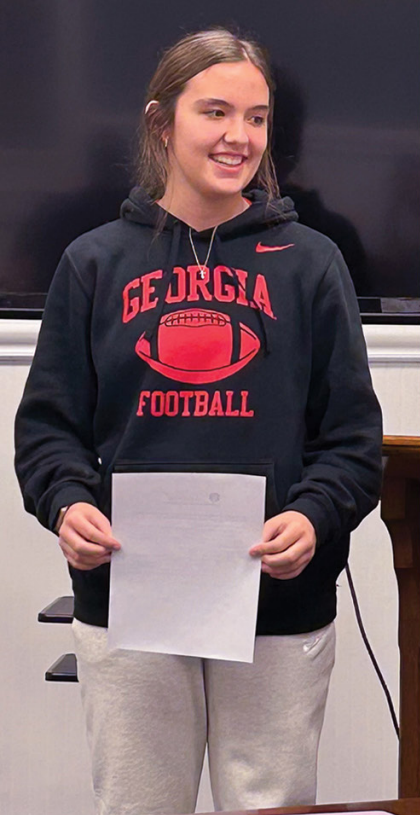
“This made us think more about how small gestures can make big change in a community,” said senior Maura Kate Waters. “I learned about what leadership looks like, had the opportunity to demonstrate leadership skills through our monthly challenges and service projects, and I learned how civic health impacts my community.”

The group visited Okefenokee Swamp Park to learn about the impact of tourism on the county, and they toured farms and the 4-H Extension office to observe the role of agriculture in their community. Students also donated essential items to the Magnolia House Shelter for the Abused.

“I never knew small businesses and even tourism play such a huge part in our county,” said senior Regan



Photo: Pierce County Family Connection



“Small gestures  
can make  
big change in  
a community.”

—Maura Kate Waters  
High School Senior

Photo: Pierce County Family Connection

Clements. “During one session, we got to plan out a small business we thought our town needed. The ideas—an arcade, an ice cream shop, a skating rink—blew my mind. They may not sound like necessities, but they’re places where our community could come together more often, which further helps our civic health.”

Sikes, who watched fellow students professionally pitch their ideas, said, “These are the future adults who will run this town. They had great ideas to expand our little city to become a better hometown and create a better society for future residents of Blackshear.”

The program’s graduates continued honing leadership skills this summer. Waters explored government on a local and national level as a teen-delegate on the 2023 Washington Youth Tour, while Clements attended the Rotary Youth Leadership Awards Conference.

All the students reported that this program helped change their mindset on how civic health affects a community. Volunteering, voting, and helping friends and neighbors topped their lists of things they will continue to do. Promoting events, volunteering,

and serving on youth civic clubs, banks, and Electric Membership Corporation (EMC) boards also helped them see there’s still a lot of work to do.

Phone calls, emails, and social media messages help Bell informally track students’ progress. “Students feel like they can talk to us on a different level now, and share even more about their hopes and dreams,” said Bell. “They’re still doing everything they can to make a difference—and that’s all we were looking for to begin with.”

Bell said the findings from the 2023 CHI will continue to guide the Collaborative’s efforts.

“We hope this program will ignite a passion for community engagement and civic responsibility at the polls,” said Gove. “We want our youth to gain a greater appreciation for their community, empathy for their neighbors, and pride in their hometown. I envision this board as the launching point for movers and shakers in our community—young people with high moral values and a desire to make our community a better place to live, work, and play together.”





Photo: Sumter County Family Connection

## COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT

Community involvement refers to individuals' active participation and engagement in the well-being and development of their community. It's a collaborative process that fosters a sense of belonging and shared responsibility among community members. Community involvement takes the form of volunteering, charitable giving, and participating in groups, among other indicators. By getting involved, Georgia residents can make a positive impact on their community, address common issues, and promote social cohesion. But Georgia ranks lower than average for indicators of community involvement. This poses a challenge for communities, but also a clear need for innovative solutions to empower residents to take ownership of their surroundings and create thriving and vibrant communities.

### Volunteering

As of 2021, Georgia ranks 45th in the nation for volunteerism, a drop from 2017 when Georgia ranked 44th. Only 19.9% of Georgia residents reported volunteering in 2021, a nearly 7% decrease from 2017 when 26.5% reported volunteering. This change is potentially attributed to the COVID-19 pandemic when residents were less likely to be out in the community.

More than six in seven (86.4%) Georgia residents reported volunteering infrequently in 2021. However, just 0.4% of individuals reported never volunteering, close to the national rate of 0.8%.

Volunteerism in Georgia differs among various groups:

- » Generation X (27.1%) volunteers more than Millennials and Generation Z, who volunteer at similar rates—19.7% and 18.3%, respectively.
- » Females (22.3%) volunteer at a slightly higher rate than males (17.2%).
- » White residents volunteer at a slightly higher rate than black residents—21.9% and 17%, respectively.
- » Suburban residents have higher rates of volunteering at 22.1% compared to urban (11.3%) and rural (16.1%) residents. This is a drastic decrease from 2017, when urban residents had a higher rate of volunteering at 30.5% compared to suburban (26.4%) and rural (26.9%) residents.



As of 2021, Georgia ranks **45th** in the nation for volunteerism.

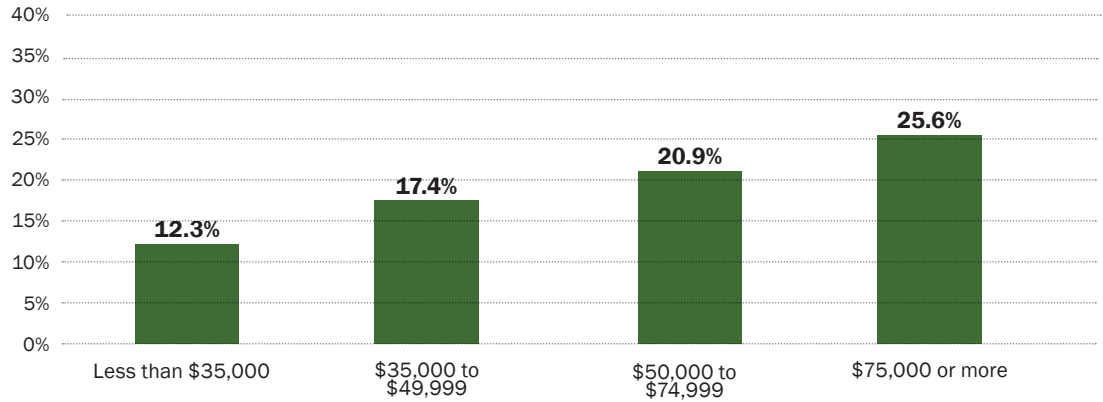


Volunteering shows a positive correlation with both income and education levels. Individuals who engage in volunteer activities often develop valuable skills, expand their networks, and gain experiences that can enhance their employability and career prospects. Data show that Georgia residents who earn more and have a higher level of education volunteer more than those who earn less and have a lower level of education. Raising awareness and educating the community about the benefits of volunteering is an effective way to increase involvement.

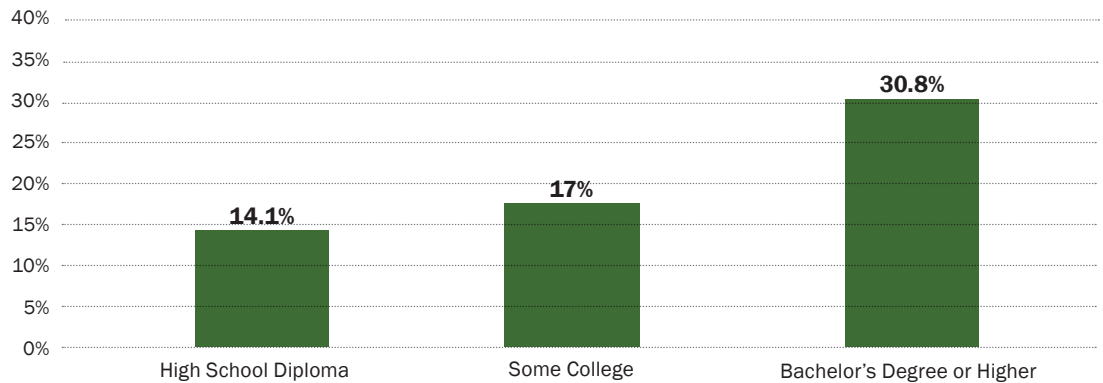


Data show that Georgia residents who earn more and have a higher level of education volunteer more than those who earn less and have a lower level of education.

**Figure 1. Volunteering by Household Income in Georgia**



**Figure 2. Volunteering by Education Level in Georgia**



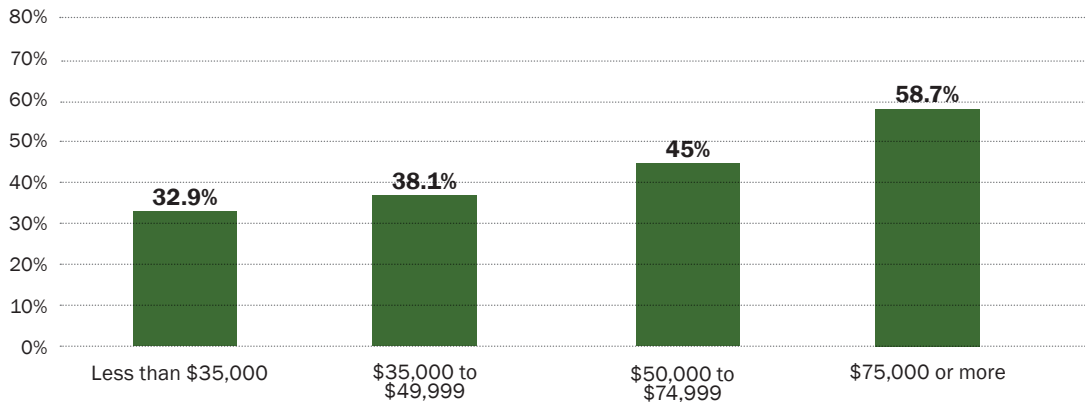
## Charitable Giving

Charitable giving is a significant form of volunteerism that goes beyond donating time and skills. It involves providing financial resources to support organizations and causes that address societal needs and improve the well-being of communities. While volunteering through direct involvement is essential, charitable giving plays a crucial role in enabling nonprofits and charitable organizations to carry out their missions effectively. There is a slight increase in the percentage of Georgia residents reporting donations to charitable or religious organizations from 2017 to 2021—45% to 46%, respectively—but Georgia still ranks near the bottom of the nation at 41st. However, Georgia ranks slightly higher than the national rate of 9.4%, with a rate of 9.8% for donations to political organizations.

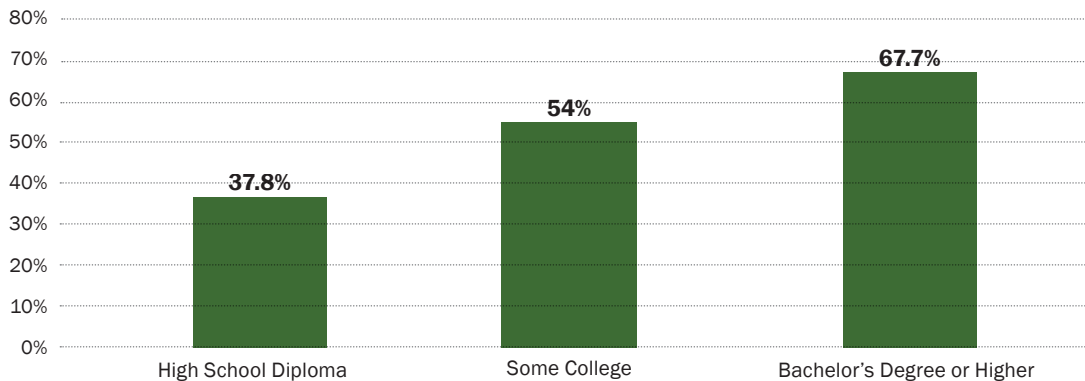
Charitable donations tend to increase with higher income and higher education level, and vary among other demographic variables:

- » The Long Civic and Silent generations donate to charitable or religious organizations more often (58.2%) than younger generations, such as Generation Z (18.2%).
- » Females (48.7%) donate at a slightly higher rate than males (43%).
- » White residents report donating at a higher rate than black residents—49.9% and 36.7%, respectively.

**Figure 3. Charitable Giving by Household Income in Georgia**



**Figure 4. Charitable Giving by Household Education Level in Georgia**



## Participating in Groups

Group participation is a dynamic and impactful form of volunteering that harnesses the collective power of individuals working together toward a common goal. This collaborative approach allows groups to pool their resources, skills, and efforts to address community needs and bring about meaningful change. With 22.4% of Georgia residents belonging to a group of any type, Georgia ranks 38th in group participation—a significant jump from 2017, when Georgia ranked 49th in the nation. As with other indicators of volunteerism, group participation increases with age, income, and education, as well as other demographic differences.

- » Females (23%) tend to belong to a group slightly more than males (21.6%), and 10% more white, non-Hispanic residents report belonging to a group than black, non-Hispanic residents—at 25.9% and 15.2%, respectively.
- » Significantly more suburban residents (22.3%) participate in groups than rural (15.6%) and urban (13%) residents.

## Listening to Our Youth and Meeting Their Needs

If we are to properly prepare our next generation of leaders and citizens, we must first listen to our young people about what they need from their communities. After that, we must help them inform decision-makers on how they can change local systems to better support younger constituents. Adults must ensure that youth have the desire and information they need to become active, contributing members of their communities—now.

The Georgia Municipal Association (GMA), Georgia Family Connection Partnership (GaFCP), and local community partners worked together in 2021 and 2022 to survey youth about their needs and engagement in Lumpkin, Washington, Bibb, Ben Hill, Towns, and Mitchell counties. The objective was to allow teen voices to help shape the way local elected officials and other community leaders operate—from day-to-day service delivery to system-level policies.

The survey, distributed through schools and after-school programs, yielded 450 responses. Most respondents were between the ages of 15 and 18, female, white, and lived with their parents.

Overall, youth in those communities reported they:

- » need help finding jobs, graduating from school, accessing transportation, and participating in out-of-school activities;
- » had more positive than negative experiences with civic institutions;
- » enjoyed positive experiences in their communities when visiting a local park and attending local community events;
- » had little to no contact with local government officials, including mayor, city council, and county commissioners; and
- » would be more engaged in civic life if there were more activities in which they could participate.

Community leaders, including city officials and Family Connection Collaboratives, used the data to discuss with their local partners how to better engage and support youth in their communities.

GMA and GaFCP continue to work together to make young people's needs better known—and met—so that Georgia's youngest residents ultimately feel more empowered to become active and productive participants in their communities.





## POLITICAL ACTION

Political action refers to voter registration and turnout, contacting elected officials, and expressing political opinions. Georgia has scored lower than the national average on voter registration and turnout in previous years; however, this year Georgia was consistent with the national average in voting and was close to average in voter registration. Georgia has some of the lowest rates in the nation for watching or listening to news about political, societal, or local issues and in buying or boycotting products or services for political or societal reasons. Even with the increase in voting rates, Georgians still have room to improve in political action.

Consistently across all measures of political action, Georgians' political engagement increases with education and income. There is also some variability in political action by generation and urbanization. Some areas in the latest data show that younger generations and older generations were the least likely to engage, while mid-life generations were the most likely.

### Voting

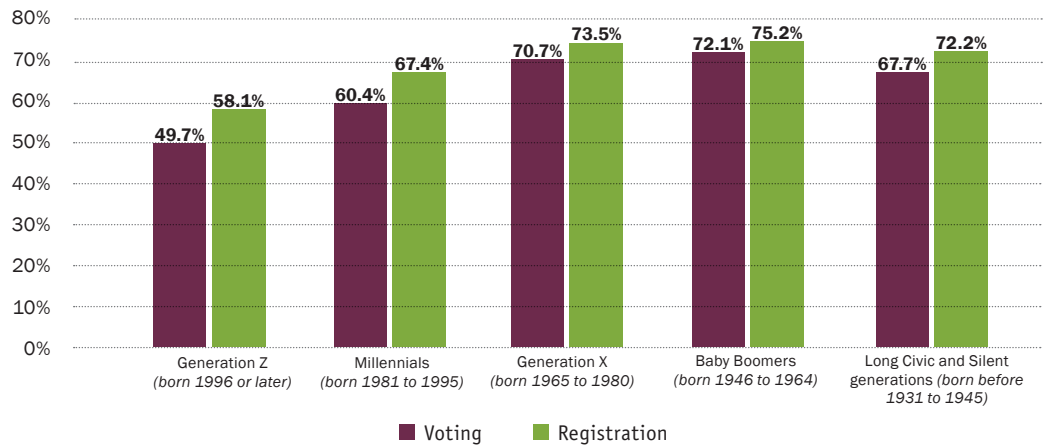
In the most recent survey, 2020 data showed that 70.7% of Georgia residents were registered to vote, up from 62% in 2010—and of those registered, 66.1% voted in 2020. These rates were comparable to the national averages of 72.7% registered and 66.8%, who voted and represent a continuing improvement in Georgia's ranking for both indicators.

The rates of registered voters and voting individuals were higher than data reported in the two previous editions of the *Georgia Civic Health Index*. While Georgia ranked 37th in the nation for voter registration and voting in the 2019 edition, the state ranked 33rd in voter registration and 29th in voting in 2021.

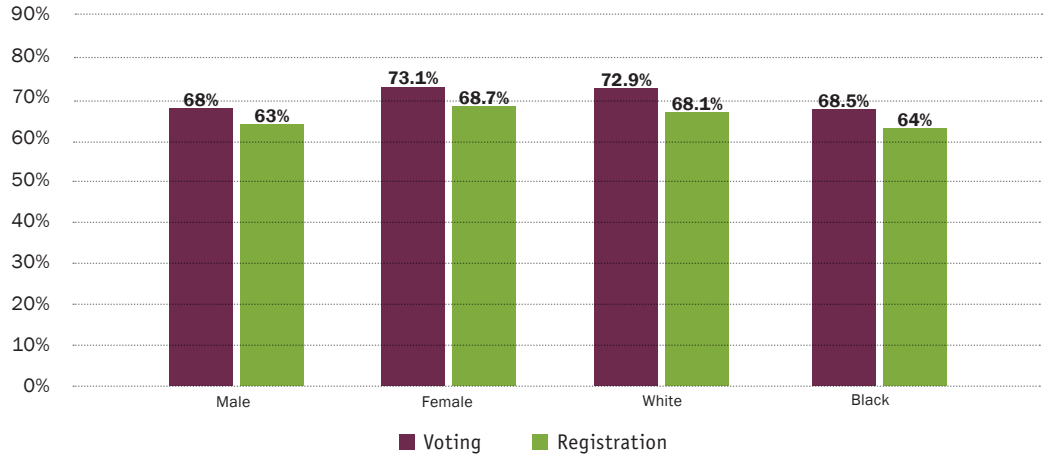
When looking at characteristics that correspond with high levels of voter registration and turnout, higher income and higher levels of education were strongly associated with both forms of political engagement. Here are some other key findings across demographics:

- » Compared to younger generations, voter turnout in 2020 increased significantly with age for Boomers (72.1%) and Generation X (70.7%) but declined again among the Long Civic and Silent generations (67.7%). Millennials (60.4%) and Generation Z (49.7%) had the lowest turnout.
- » Generation Z showed a large difference between voter registration (58.1%) and voting (49.7%), with the second largest disparity in the Long Civic and Silent generations, which had 72.2% registered and 67.7% voting.
- » Individuals older than age 30 were more likely to be registered to vote (73.4%) and to vote (69.9%) than those 18 to 29 years old (61.4% and 52.8%, respectively).
- » Females reported slightly higher levels of registration and voting (73.1% and 68.7%) than men (68% and 63%, respectively).
- » A larger percentage of white Georgians registered (72.9%) and voted (68.1%), compared to black Georgians (68.5% registered and 64% voted).
- » Individuals residing in suburban areas were more likely to be registered (74.5%) and to vote (70.6%) than individuals in urban (62.9% and 60.5%, respectively) or rural areas (66.9% and 58.9%, respectively).

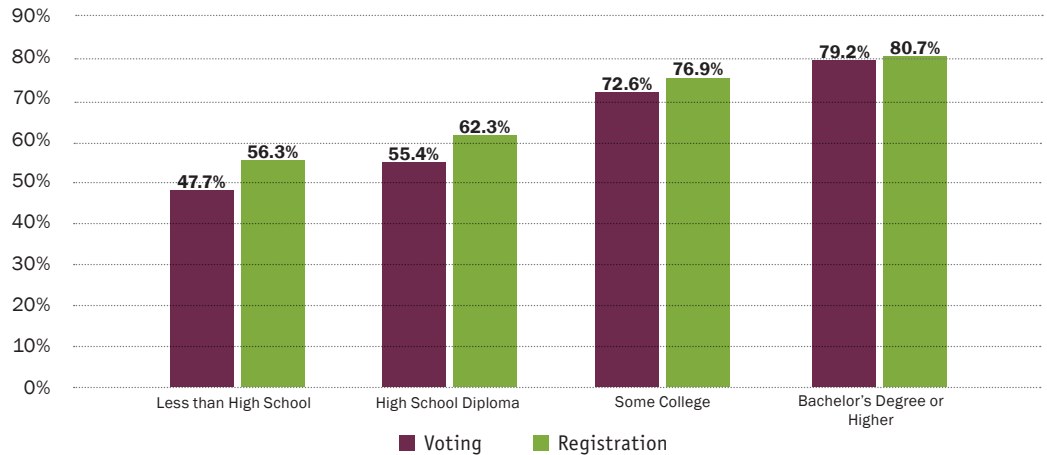
**Figure 5. Voting and Registration by Generation in Georgia**



**Figure 6. Voting and Registration by Gender and Race in Georgia**



**Figure 7. Voting and Registration by Education Level in Georgia**





## Attending a Public Meeting and Contacting a Public Official

Attending public meetings is an avenue for engaging with fellow residents, as well as relaying ideas and feedback to various public entities. At the state level, 8.2% of Georgia's residents report attending a public meeting, which is the same as the national average. Overall, attending public meetings tends to increase with age and income.

Communication with public officials is another critical step in ensuring that a community's interests are represented in decision-making. Georgia saw a drastic improvement in the most recent data, ranking 35th in the nation in contacting public officials—up from 49th in the 2019 *Georgia Civic Health Index*. While only 8.3% of Georgia residents reported contacting a public official in 2017, 9.6% did so in 2021. This puts Georgia on par with the national rate, which declined from 11.4% in 2017 to 9.5% in 2021.

Even with the improvement, Georgia's current rate for this indicator is still lower than its 2011 rate of 12%. With less than 10% of Georgians contacting or visiting their public officials, there is a need for education and training regarding the importance and process for working with public officials, especially among populations with the lowest rates of engagement.

The *Georgia Broadband Annual Report 2022* found that 454,950 Georgia addresses are not served by broadband, so there is also work to be done to ensure equitable access to communication tools.<sup>3</sup>

Additional trends across demographics:

- » Those with some college reported the highest percentage attending public meetings at 14.4%, compared to 4.6% of those with a high school diploma and 10.7% of those with a bachelor's degree or higher.
- » The percentage of individuals who attend public meetings declines slightly with the Long Civic and Silent, and Baby Boomer generations, but otherwise follows the same trend as contacting a public official. This may be due in part to a growing limitation for physical mobility to attend events.
- » Women (8.8%) are slightly more likely to attend a public meeting than men (7.4%). However, men (12.5%) are more likely to contact public officials than women (7%).
- » White residents (9.3%) are more likely to attend a public meeting, compared to 6% of black residents, and contact public officials (11.2%, compared to 7.1% of black Georgians).
- » Suburban residents (10.5%) are more likely to contact their public officials than rural (7.9%) or urban (8.4%) residents.
- » The likelihood of contacting a public official generally increases with age, more education, and higher income levels.
- » Georgians 30 years and older are much more likely to contact a public official (11.8%) than those 16 to 29 (2.5%). Baby Boomers are more than twice as likely (15.4%) to contact elected officials than Millennials (6.8%) or Generation Z (1.3%).
- » Those with a bachelor's degree or higher (17.1%) are more than twice as likely to contact public officials than those with a high school diploma (6.2%).
- » Individuals earning \$75,000 or more are significantly more likely to contact public officials than those earning less than \$35,000 (13.1% and 4.5%, respectively). Individuals earning \$75,000 or higher are also nearly twice as likely to attend a public meeting than those earning less.

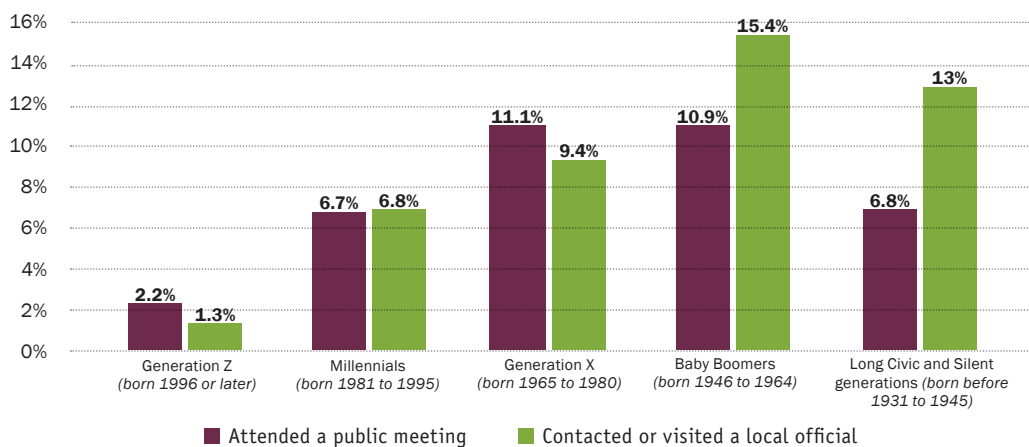


Georgia ranks 35th in the nation in contacting public officials, up from 49th in 2019.



Photo: Virginia Reese

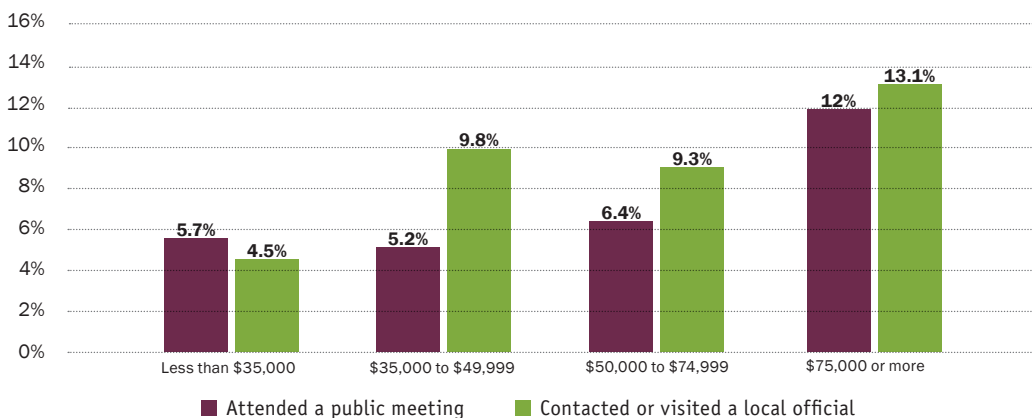
**Figure 8. Attending a Public Meeting and Contacting a Public Official by Generation in Georgia**



**Figure 9. Attending a Public Meeting and Contacting a Public Official by Education Level**

Attending Public Meetings		Contacting Public Officials	
High School Diploma	4.6%	High School Diploma	6.2%
Some College	14.4%	Some College	11.4%
Bachelor's Degree or Higher	10.7%	Bachelor's Degree or Higher	17.1%

**Figure 10. Attending a Public Meeting and Contacting a Public Official by Income Level in Georgia**

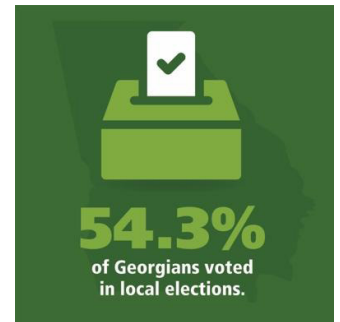
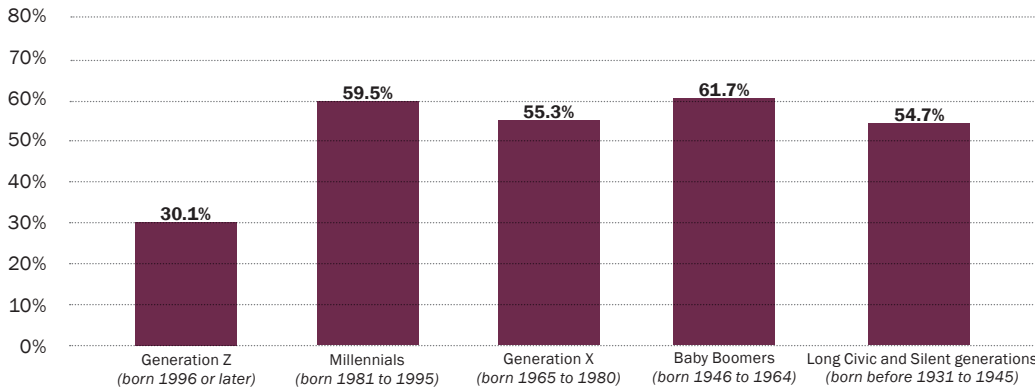


## Voting in Local Elections

When asked about voting in local elections, trends from national and state elections often continued, with 54.3% of Georgians voting in local elections, comparable to the national rate of 55.3%.

- » Voting in local elections increased with age with Baby Boomers (61.7%) much more likely to vote in local elections than Generation Z (30.1%). Overall, older individuals were more likely to vote in local elections than younger (58.9% of those older than 30 and 37.8% of 18- to 29-year-olds).
- » Voting in local elections also increased with education and income. Georgians with a bachelor's degree or higher (74%) are more likely to vote locally than those with a high school diploma (42.9%). Those earning \$75,000 or more (64.8%) were more likely to vote in local elections than those earning less than \$35,000 (40.9%).
- » Rural residents (51%) were the least likely to vote in local elections compared to urban (69.5%) and suburban (57.4%) residents.

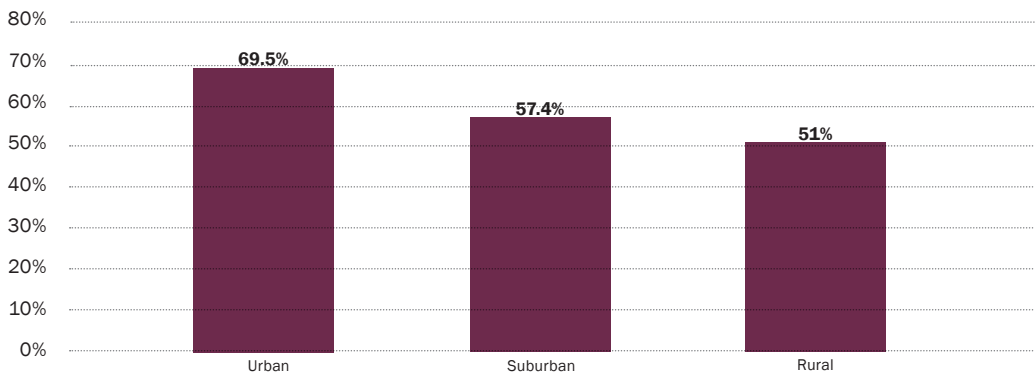
**Figure 11. Voted in Last Election by Generation in Georgia**



**Figure 12. Voted in Last Election by Income and Education Level in Georgia**

Less than \$35,000	40.9%	High School Diploma	42.9%
\$35,000 to \$49,999	44.9%	Some College	62%
\$50,000 to \$74,999	58.1%	Bachelor's Degree or Higher	74%
\$75,000 or more	64.8%		

**Figure 13. Voted in Last Election by Urbanicity in Georgia**





## Sharing Views, Expressing Political Opinions Online, and Reading, Watching, or Listening to News

Unlike previous years when Georgia outperformed most of the nation, Georgians share their views on political, societal, or local issues on the internet or social media at about the same level or less frequently than the national average. In the most recent data, 5.4% of Georgians engage in this way frequently compared to 6.2% nationally, ranking Georgia 35th.

Compared with the national average of 67.6%, Georgia also lags the rest of the country in frequently reading, watching, or listening to news or information about political, societal, or local issues, at 60%. This ranks Georgia 51st in the nation for this indicator. As with other indicators of civic health, the percentages of frequently reading, watching, or listening to news or information about political, societal, or local issues increases with age, income, and education. Across all groups, Georgians were generally more likely to read or listen to news than to share it on social media.

Young people from Generation Z (7.8%) are more likely to post and share political information frequently than Millennials (4.1%) or Generation X (3.9%). However, the most recent data show Baby Boomers (6.4%) and the Long Civic and Silent generations (5%) are more likely than some younger generations to post online frequently.

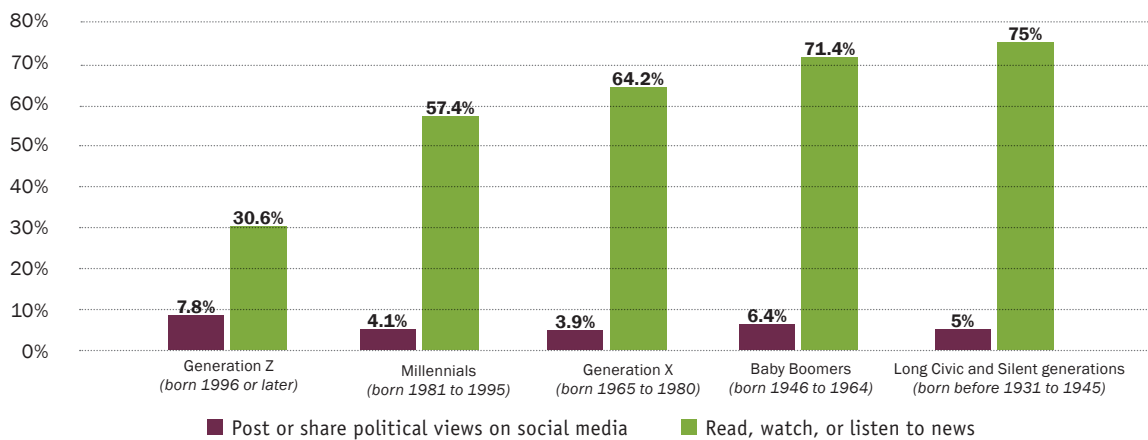
The number of Georgians who post online varies by education level. Those with a high school diploma reported posting frequently at a rate of 3.2% compared to 6.8% of those with some college and 5.7% with a bachelor's degree. Unlike previous years, black residents (4.7%) are less likely to post frequently than white residents (6.2%). Urban residents (6%) are more likely to post frequently than suburban (4.8%) or rural residents (4.6%).

Suburban residents are also more likely than urban or rural residents to frequently read, watch, or listen to news; and white residents (65.5%) are more likely than black residents (51.1%) to engage in this way.

**60%** of Georgians frequently read, watch, or listen to news or information about political, societal, or local issues.

Georgia ranks **51st** in this indicator.

**Figure 14. Social Media Use and Engagement with News by Generation in Georgia**



## Buying or Boycotting a Product or Service

Georgians report slightly lower rates of buying or boycotting a product or service as a political action, at 14.4%, compared with the national average of 17.1%, which ranks Georgia 42nd nationally. The rate of buying or boycotting a product or service generally increased with income and education. Just 8.2% of residents with a high school education report buying or boycotting, compared with 24.5% of residents with a bachelor's degree or higher.

White Georgians (16.4%) are more likely to buy or boycott than black Georgians (10.4%). Geographically, urban residents are most likely to buy or boycott, and rural Georgians are least likely, at 15.8% and 8.5%, respectively. These correlations may be partially explained by age and education. Additionally, rural Georgians and those with lower incomes may have fewer choices of goods and services to buy or boycott, or less financial freedom to express themselves with their wallets.



Photo: City of Covington

## CONFIDENCE IN INSTITUTIONS

The U.S. Census Current Population Survey does not inquire about confidence in institutions, so the data are not available to compare and rank Georgia with other states regarding these indicators. However, measurements of the American public's trust in government and private institutions can be examined and better understood through research and national polling data, like those available from the Pew Research Center and Gallup.

### *Trust in Government*

Citizens are more trusting when they perceive their government will keep its promises and officials are competent to do the job for which they were elected or appointed. The National Conference on Citizenship (NCoC) has defined “confidence in institutions” as “the degree to which residents believe that various institutions will do what is right.”

Pew Research Center and Gallup poll data collected yearly for decades reveal that public trust in institutions has been declining over the past 20 years and hit an average all-time low in 2023.<sup>4,5,6</sup> In particular, the federal government has seen a dramatic dip in recent years, and confidence in all three federal branches hit record lows in Gallup's 2022 report.

While confidence in the presidency, Congress, and the U.S. Supreme Court saw modest improvements in Gallup's 2023 data, none of these institutions—nor any of the other 13 surveyed about—made significant shifts from 2022 to 2023.<sup>7</sup> Confidence in four institutions—big business, large technology, police, and public schools—tied or dipped below their previous record lows in 2023.

According to the latest Gallup data:

- » Americans' confidence in 11 of 16 public and private U.S. institutions significantly declined and trust did not improve in any institution over the previous year in 2022.<sup>8</sup> None of the institutions saw substantial gains or losses from 2022 to 2023, prolonging the trend of historically low confidence.<sup>9</sup>
- » The share of Americans who expressed “a great deal” or “quite a lot” of confidence in Congress dropped five percentage points from 12% in 2021 to 7% in 2022, then improved only one percentage point to 8% in 2023.<sup>10,11</sup>
- » The U.S. Supreme Court and the presidency saw the biggest dips in the public's confidence from 2021 to 2022—dropping 11 percentage points (36% to 25%) and 15 points (38% to 23%), respectively.<sup>12</sup> Confidence in those institutions rebounded only slightly in 2023, with the Supreme Court inching up two percentage points to 27% and the presidency improving three percentage points to 26%.<sup>13</sup>

Public trust in institutions  
hit an average  
**all-time low**  
in 2023.

Polling from the Pew Research Center indicates that public dissatisfaction stems from perceptions that the U.S. government is not careful with taxpayer money, not responsive to the needs of ordinary Americans, and not addressing the concerns of certain groups.<sup>14</sup>

Majorities of Americans feel the U.S. government does “too little” for middle- (69%) and lower-income (66%) people, children (54%), retired people (65%), people with disabilities (54%), and people who live in rural areas (54%). Conversely, most people (61%) think the federal government does “too much” for higher-income people.<sup>15</sup>

One trend that has held steady for decades is Americans’ relatively higher levels of trust in state and local governments. Gallup data show in a different annual survey on governance in 2022 that “Americans are much more trusting in their state (57%) and local (67%) governments than in any branch of the federal government.” And, “while state and local trust levels are currently below their historical averages of 63% and 70%, respectively, they are only slightly so.”<sup>16</sup>

Higher levels of trust in state and local government seemingly correlate with peoples’ perception and levels of satisfaction with “how things are going.” For example, one 2022 Pew Research Center survey found that 75% of Americans are “dissatisfied with the way things are going in this country today,” while only 34% are dissatisfied with how things are going in their local communities. Conversely, only 24% are satisfied with the state of the country, while 65% are satisfied with the state of their community.<sup>17</sup>

According to Pew data, an overwhelming majority of Americans are skeptical about candidates’ motivations for running for elected office at all levels—local, state, and federal. A 2022 Pew survey of U.S. adults found that “65% say that at least some candidates run for office out of a desire to serve the community, but a much larger share (92%) say at least some political candidates seek office as a means of serving their own interests.”<sup>18</sup>



In 2023, only 17% of Americans expressed confidence in the criminal justice system, a slight rebound from 14% in 2022.

## *Trust in the Judicial System*

Gallup reported a six-point drop (20% to 14%) in Americans’ confidence in the criminal justice system from 2021 to 2022, with a slight rebound in 2023 to 17%. The police also saw an eight-point drop from 2021 to 2023—from 51% in 2021, to 45% in 2022, to 43% in 2023—flipping the number of adults who have “a great deal” or “quite a lot” of confidence in this institution into the minority. The 2023 number also represents an all-time low for confidence in the police since Gallup has been measuring it.<sup>19,20</sup>

Gallup’s data show only 25% of Americans reported “a great deal” or “quite a lot” of confidence in the U.S. Supreme Court in 2022, the lowest percentage on record—improving only slightly to 27% in 2023.<sup>21</sup> That’s down from 36% in 2021 and 56% in 1988, which was the high-water mark for confidence in the nation’s highest court.<sup>22</sup> In 2022, close to half of Americans (45%) said the Supreme Court had too much power, compared to only 25% in 2020.<sup>23</sup>

When disaggregated, the data reveal stark differences in opinion about the U.S. Supreme Court across political, racial, and age groups.

Pew reports that “the partisan gap in favorable views of the Supreme Court—45 percentage points—is wider by far than at any point in 35 years of polling on the court.”<sup>24</sup>

Only 38% of black Americans have a favorable view of the court, compared with 52% of Hispanics, 49% of whites, and 46% of Asians. Additionally, older adults are more likely than younger adults to have favorable views of the Supreme Court. About six in 10 Americans ages 50 and older (57%) view the court favorably, compared with 44% of those ages 30 to 49 and 32% of adults under 30.<sup>25</sup>



## Confidence in Other Public and Private Institutions

Gallup polls, some dating back to 1972, have asked the public how much trust and confidence it has in various institutions, such as businesses, schools, health care, and the media.

In early 2020, when people's daily lives were upended as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, they leaned on institutions like the medical and public school systems to help alleviate some of their fears and restore a sense of normalcy. Americans broadly approved at that time of how U.S. hospitals (88%) and their children's schools (83%) were handling the virus.<sup>26</sup> However, the notable rise in confidence in these institutions during the pandemic was nearly completely offset by a sharp decline two years later. The credibility of medical and public school leaders diminished as the pandemic wore on, and politics—amplified by the media—divided opinions.

### Public Schools

After seeing a double-digit increase during the COVID-19 pandemic, confidence in public schools dipped back near its lowest level to 28% in 2022, then tied an all-time low of 26% in 2023.<sup>27</sup> That's down 15 percentage points from 2020 (41%) and six percentage points from 2021 (32%).<sup>28</sup> Historically, the high-water mark for confidence in public schools was recorded in 1975 at 62%, while the tie for lowest confidence was recorded in 2014.<sup>29</sup>

A glaring partisan divide also exists for confidence in this institution, with only 9% of Republicans expressing “a great deal” or “quite a lot” of confidence in public schools in 2023, compared with 43% of Democrats.<sup>30</sup>



### Health Care System

Public confidence in the medical system follows a similar trend as public schools. A double-digit surge at the onset of the COVID-19 crisis reverted to pre-pandemic, historically low levels by 2022. Specifically, a 43-year high of 51% of Americans had “a great deal” or “quite a lot” of confidence in the medical system in 2020, while only 38% said the same two years later.<sup>31,32</sup>

For context, the highest percentage of confidence on record was 80% in 1975, while the lowest was 31% in 2007.<sup>33</sup>

### Big and Small Business

Out of the 16 institutions on which Gallup surveyed, the greatest number of Americans expressed high confidence in small business in 2023, with 65% expressing “a great deal” or “quite a lot” of confidence.<sup>34</sup> However, that's down slightly from the 68% of Americans who expressed confidence in 2022. High levels of confidence in this institution have remained steady over time, but notably peaked in 2020 at 75%.<sup>35,36</sup>

In contrast, public confidence in big business lags far behind. In 2022 and 2023, only 14% of Americans reported “a great deal” or “quite a lot” of confidence in big business, and the highest level of confidence reported was nearly 50 years ago in 1975 at only 34%.<sup>37,38</sup>



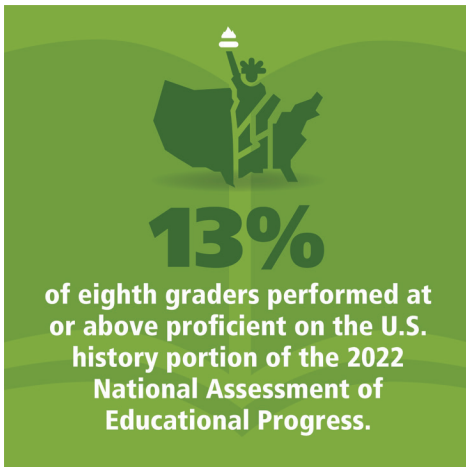
According to Gallup, 65% of Americans express confidence in small business, compared to 14% of Americans expressing confidence in big business.

## Mass Media

Just 34% of Americans expressed “a great deal” or “a fair amount” of confidence in mass media—newspapers, television, and radio—for full, fair, and accurate reporting of the news in 2022. More than one-third of Americans (38%) reported having no confidence in the media that year.<sup>39</sup>

Like confidence in public schools, the partisan gap is wide for this institution. While 70% of Democrats reported having high levels of confidence in mass media in 2022, a mere 14% of Republicans said the same. And “for the third straight year, the majority of Republicans indicate[d] that they have no trust at all in the media,” according to Gallup.<sup>40</sup>

When broken down by medium, only 16% of Americans had “a great deal” or “quite a lot” of confidence in newspapers in 2022, down five percentage points from 21% in 2021.<sup>41</sup> That improved only slightly to 18% in 2023.<sup>42</sup> Americans’ confidence in TV news rebounded more—from 11% in 2022 to 14% in 2023—but it’s still under the 16% who reported confidence in 2021.<sup>43</sup> While confidence in these media has never been high, the 2022 percentages represent all-time lows for both institutions. The highest confidence recorded was 51% in 1979 for newspapers and 46% in 1993 for TV news.<sup>44</sup>



## Improving Trust and Confidence

The decline of trust in government and other institutions raises complex questions and challenges for our nation’s democracy. The concept of declining confidence versus active mistrust is also something to be considered and monitored.<sup>45</sup>

However, opportunities exist across the country and in Georgia to build on strengths to help grow confidence. For example, higher levels of trust in state and local government—as well as the majority sentiment that individual communities are on the right track—provide elected leaders at those levels with leverage to gain meaningful feedback, improve perceptions and outcomes for residents locally, and inform and connect decision-makers at the federal level with communities’ needs.

Civic trust also correlates with civic knowledge and engagement. However, the trends for civic learning and knowledge are troubling, as the 2022 National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) scores for history and civics were down from previous years’ assessments. Only 13% of eighth graders performed at or above proficient on the U.S. history portion of the examination, a low point in what has been a decade-long downward trend.<sup>46</sup> And while eighth graders’ average score on the civics portion of the 2022 NAEP dipped only slightly by two points since the last time it was assessed in 2018, only 22% of students scored proficiently. More concerning, though, is the number of students who scored at or below basic jumped from 27% in 2018 to 31% in 2022.<sup>47</sup>

The decline in civic knowledge presents leaders with a tremendous opportunity to strategically close gaps in—and improve—engagement and trust levels. Public and private organizations must continue to seek opportunities to better inform residents about the systems and institutions that affect their lives and encourage input and participation from all groups—especially those who have been historically excluded and those who the data tell us are engaging at lower rates. Online community engagement and face-to-face interactions can be powerful tools for civic participation, but decision-makers must ensure equitable access to resources and opportunities to fully realize the benefits.

## Civic Engagement and Education Efforts in Georgia

**Association County Commissioners of Georgia (ACCG) Civic Affairs Foundation** is a nonprofit organization that strengthens counties by undertaking programs and projects that encourage civic engagement and promote participation in government. The Foundation's Georgia County Internship Program (GCIP) provides internship opportunities in county government to high school and college students and recent graduates. Funding is provided to counties through grants provided by the ACCG Civic Affairs Foundation, and GCIP has provided more than 500 internship opportunities in more than 90 counties.

**Georgia City Solutions (GCS)**, a **Georgia Municipal Association (GMA)** nonprofit, launched the **Certified City of Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Belonging (DEI&B)** program in 2023, which recognizes cities fostering DEI&B practices within their municipal government and community. Certified cities must hold at least two community stakeholder meetings each year to identify engagement barriers. The **Mayor's Reading Club** encourages mayors to engage with children to improve literacy skills and overall early learning success. Through the **ENGAGE: Connecting With Georgia's Children & Youth** initiative, GMA and GCS hold two events each year for city-sponsored youth councils, engaging youth council members in leadership and teambuilding exercises. The GMA/GCS **EMBRACE Civility** initiative recognizes cities that have passed resolutions acknowledging that civil behavior and speech are critically important to a healthy, functional, and respectful society.

**Georgia Center for Civic Engagement (GCCE)** is a nonpartisan nonprofit that educates and equips students to become informed and active citizens. GCCE provides professional development opportunities for educators and experiential learning programs for students in grades K-12. More than 165,000 students participated in their programs in the 2022-23 school year. GCCE provides opportunities for students to directly engage in experiences that will help develop deeper civic knowledge, stronger civic identity, and commitment to a life of civic engagement by implementing programs such as mock elections, model United Nations, and a youth leadership institute.

The Georgia General Assembly passed Senate Bill 220 in 2022, creating the bipartisan **Georgia Commission on Civic Education**. The Commission is charged with promoting and enhancing education on the importance of civic involvement in a constitutional republic; promoting the study of state and local government; promoting the importance of civic engagement and public service; and facilitating communication and collaboration among organizations in the state that conduct civics education. The Commission also is tasked with periodically reviewing the conditions, needs, issues, and problems related to civics education in Georgia's schools, as well as other oversight and reporting responsibilities.

**Georgia Economic Placemaking Collaborative**, an effort spearheaded by the **Georgia Cities Foundation**, a GMA nonprofit, is a two-year, place-based economic development program that emphasizes the importance of equitable and inclusive community engagement in the development project process. Assembling a diverse community team is required for cities to participate. Each community team consists of elected officials, city staff, members of downtown development organizations, chambers of commerce, faith-based organizations, local associations, business owners and operators, and residents. The Collaborative helps teams identify projects that reflect the unique cultural and historic character of the community. Fourteen cities have participated in the Collaborative since its inception in 2018.



**Georgia Family Connection Partnership (GaFCP)** launched a **Civic Health Initiative** in 2013 when it co-authored the inaugural *Georgia Civic Health Index*. Since then, GaFCP has partnered with Metis Associates, GMA, and others to collect data from Georgia residents—including youth—to better understand and address civic health trends at the community level. In addition, several local Family Connection Collaboratives have integrated civic health strategies into their annual plans. GaFCP works with GMA, the Georgia Center for Civic Engagement, and Judicial Council of Georgia/Administrative Offices of the Courts to promote civic engagement and education as a strategy for improving civic health across the state.

**GaFCP** supports 10 county Collaboratives in the **Community Partnership for Supporting Youth Cohort**, taking a whole-community approach to supporting youth development and high school completion. Incorporating elements of the National Dropout Prevention Center's Effective Strategies, the Youth Thrive model, and an equity lens, participating Collaboratives implement best and promising practices tailored to their individual needs to improve students' educational experience while building resiliency in young people, supporting them in transitioning to college and careers, and developing skills to lead full, productive lives. Activities include implementing mentorship programs; meaningfully engaging young people and their parents in their school and community; supporting mental and physical health and other basic needs; supporting alternative and enhanced school models; linking students to Career, Technical, and Agricultural Education; and supporting two-generation work and youth entrepreneurship.

**GeorgiaForward**, a GMA nonprofit, launched its **Young Gamechangers** program in 2012. This unique and proven leadership action program gathers 45 of Georgia's brightest young minds to develop creative and viable recommendations for one community. Host communities present the class with several of their most significant challenges and receive detailed, well-researched "big idea" proposals with timelines, potential funding sources, and prospective partners. Class participants tackle real community and economic development issues with colleagues from across the state, building up civic engagement tools like collaboration, compromise, and negotiation. Ten communities have participated as a host site since 2012.

**Georgia Initiative for Community Housing** is a partnership of GMA, Georgia Power, the Georgia Department of Community Affairs, and the College of Family and Consumer Sciences at the University of Georgia. Launched in 2004, the initiative grew out of Georgia's experience with the National League of Cities' Affordable Housing Program and the Magnolia Awards for Excellence in Affordable Housing. It offers communities a three-year program of collaboration and technical assistance related to housing and community development. The initiative's objective is to help communities create and launch a locally based plan to meet their housing needs. Teams of government staff and elected officials, local nonprofits, the faith community, other housing stakeholders, and community members from each city work over three years to develop creative solutions to complex local challenges through collaboration with local, regional, and state leaders. Since 2004, 94 communities have taken part in the initiative.



Photo: City of Marietta

## NEXT STEPS AND BEST PRACTICES FOR GEORGIA

Georgia's success depends on citizens being connected to each other and involved in their communities and the political process. Research has shown that civic engagement is related to improved public health outcomes, including mental health, as well as economic resilience, low unemployment, and lower violent crime rates.<sup>48</sup> These positive outcomes have been found in both adults and adolescents.

Volunteering is associated with decreased depression and increased life satisfaction, well-being<sup>49</sup>, and self-reported health.<sup>50</sup> These effects also have been shown to increase over time with regular volunteering.<sup>51</sup> For seniors, volunteering is associated with increased social, cognitive, and physical activity and functioning<sup>52</sup> and decreased risk of mortality.<sup>53</sup>

Youth who engage in community service are more likely to avoid teen pregnancy<sup>54</sup> and have more positive attitudes toward themselves and others, social competence<sup>55</sup>, and academic competence. Civic engagement is associated with improved self-reported health in adults<sup>56</sup>, as well as higher academic achievement and social and emotional adjustment in adolescents.<sup>57</sup>

This research supports Georgia's efforts to build social cohesion, political engagement, and stronger civic health. The literature specifies a growing number of evidence-based and evidence-informed practices that can be developed and implemented in communities.

The National Center for Learning and Civic Engagement<sup>58</sup>, Brown Center Report on American Education<sup>59</sup>, Maryland Civic Education Coalition<sup>60</sup>, and National Telecommunications and Information Administration have identified examples.<sup>61</sup>



**Volunteering**  
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**Civic engagement**  
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health outcomes—including  
mental health, economic  
resilience, low unemployment,  
and lower violent crime rates.

# EVIDENCE-BASED AND EVIDENCE-INFORMED PRACTICES

- » Provide instruction in government, history, law, and democracy using evidence-based curricula like iCivics
- » Incorporate discussion of current local, national, and international issues into classrooms
- » Design and implement programs that provide students with opportunities to apply what they learn through performing community service
- » Offer extracurricular activities that provide opportunities for young people to get involved in their schools or communities
- » Encourage students to participate in school governance
- » Promote and encourage student-led voluntary associations
- » Encourage students to participate in simulations of democratic processes and procedures
- » Increase news media literacy education
- » Increase attention to social-emotional learning and school climate
- » Increase opportunities for volunteerism
- » Modify built environments to increase opportunities for face-to-face interactions across generations and among various community populations
- » Develop and promote urban spaces that bring people together
- » Encourage and support educational achievement
- » Develop methods to invite community members to participate in nonpartisan community activities
- » Support and promote voting
- » Support and encourage national service opportunities (AmeriCorps, Military, Teach for America, etc.)
- » Promote digital literacy and equity, a condition in which all individuals and communities have the information technology capacity needed for full participation in our society, democracy<sup>62</sup>, and economy

These practices include classroom as well as community activities. Several occur through schools but outside of formal classroom instruction, such as extracurricular activities and participation in school governance. Both social-emotional learning and school climate are focused on promoting a healthy, safe school environment that fosters learning and respectful engagement with peers.

The message is clear: building a knowledge base is necessary but insufficient to equip citizens to participate fully in a democratic society. Interactive and participatory practices that bring community members together are required core components of high-quality civics education designed to foster social connectedness, community involvement, and political action—and advance improvements in civic health across our state.





Photo: GaFCP

## TECHNICAL NOTES

Unless otherwise noted, findings presented in this report are based on the National Conference on Citizenship's (NCoC) analysis of the U.S. Census Current Population Survey (CPS) data. Any errors are NCoC's own. Volunteering and Civic Engagement estimates are from CPS September Volunteering/Civic Engagement Supplement from 2021, and voting estimates are from 2020 November Voting and Registration Supplement.

Using a probability-selected sample of about 150,000 occupied households, the CPS collects monthly data on employment and demographic characteristics of the nation. Depending on the CPS supplement, the single-year Georgia CPS sample size used for this report ranges from 215 to 1,045 (volunteering/civic engagement supplement) and to 1,819 (voting supplement) residents from across Georgia. This sample is then weighted to representative population demographics for the district. Estimates for the volunteering and civic engagement indicators (e.g., volunteering, working with neighbors, making donations) are based on U.S. residents ages 16 and older. Voting and registration statistics are based on U.S. citizens who are 18 and older (eligible voters). When examining the relationship between educational attainment and engagement, estimates are based on adults ages 25 and older, based on the assumption younger people may be completing their education.

Because multiple sources of data with varying sample sizes are used, the report is not able to compute one margin of error for Georgia across all indicators. Any analysis that breaks down the sample into smaller groups (e.g., gender, education) will have smaller samples and therefore the margin of error will increase. Furthermore, national rankings, while useful in benchmarking, may be small in range, with one to two percentage points separating the state/district ranked first from the state/district ranked last. It also is important that margin of error estimates are approximate, as CPS sampling is highly complex and accurate estimation of error rates involves many parameters that are not publicly available.

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Photo: GaFCP



# CIVIC HEALTH INDEX

## State and Local Partnerships

The National Conference on Citizenship (NCoC) began America's *Civic Health Index* in 2006 to measure the level of civic engagement and health of our democracy. In 2009, the Edward M. Kennedy Serve America Act directed NCoC to expand this civic health assessment in partnership with the Corporation for National and Community Service and the U.S. Census Bureau. NCoC now works with partners in more than 35 states and cities to use civic data to lead and inspire a public dialogue about the future of citizenship in America and to drive sustainable civic strategies.

### STATES

#### Alabama

University of Alabama  
David Mathews Center for Civic Life  
Auburn University

#### Arizona

Center for the Future of Arizona

#### California

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

#### Colorado

Metropolitan State University of Denver  
The Civic Canopy  
Denver Metro Chamber Leadership  
Campus Compact of Mountain West  
History Colorado  
Institute on Common Good

#### Connecticut

Everyday Democracy

#### District of Columbia

ServeDC

#### Florida

Florida Joint Center for Citizenship  
Bob Graham Center for Public Service  
Lou Frey Institute of Politics  
and Government

#### Georgia

Georgia Family Connection Partnership  
Georgia Municipal Association

#### Illinois

McCormick Foundation

#### Indiana

Indiana University Center on Representative  
Government  
Indiana Bar Foundation  
Indiana Citizen Education Foundation, Inc.  
Indiana Supreme Court

Indiana University Northwest

Indiana University-Purdue University  
Indianapolis  
O'Neill School of Public and Environmental  
Affairs

#### Kansas

Kansas Health Foundation

#### 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

#### Michigan

Michigan Nonprofit Association  
Michigan Campus Compact  
Michigan Community Service Commission  
Volunteer Centers of Michigan  
Council of Michigan Foundations  
Center for Study of Citizenship at Wayne  
State University

#### Minnesota

Center for Democracy and Citizenship

#### Missouri

Missouri State University  
Park University  
Saint Louis University  
University of Missouri Kansas City  
University of Missouri Saint Louis  
Washington University

#### Nebraska

Nebraskans for Civic Reform

#### New Hampshire

Carsey Institute  
Campus Compact of New Hampshire  
University System of New Hampshire  
New Hampshire College & University Council

#### New York

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

#### North Carolina

Institute for Emerging Issues

#### Ohio

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Civic Engagement

#### Oklahoma

University of Central Oklahoma  
Oklahoma Campus Compact

#### Pennsylvania

Center for Democratic Deliberation  
National Constitution Center

#### Rhode Island

Rhode Island Council for the Humanities  
Rhode Island Department of State

#### South Carolina

University of South Carolina Upstate

#### Texas

The University of Texas at Austin  
Annette Strauss Institute for Civic Life  
RGK Center for Philanthropy & Community  
Service

#### Virginia

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

### ISSUE SPECIFIC

#### Latinos Civic Health Index

Carnegie Corporation

#### Veterans Civic Health Index

Got Your 6

#### Millennials Civic Health Index

Mobilize.org  
Harvard Institute of Politics  
Center for Information and Research on  
Civic Learning and Engagement (CIRCLE)

#### Economic Health

Knight Foundation  
Corporation for National & Community  
Service (CNCS)  
Center for Information and Research on  
Civic Learning and Engagement (CIRCLE)

## CITIES

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### **Atlanta**

Community Foundation of Greater Atlanta

### **Greater Austin**

The University of Texas at Austin  
RGK Center for Philanthropy and  
Community Service

Annette Strauss Institute for Civic Life  
Leadership Austin

Austin Community Foundation  
KLRU-TV, Austin PBS  
KUT News

### **Chicago**

McCormick Foundation

### **Kansas City & Saint Louis**

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Park University  
Washington University

### **Miami**

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John S. and James L. Knight Foundation  
Miami Foundation

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### **Seattle**

Seattle City Club

### **Twin Cities**

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