

## 2009 CIVIC HEALTH STATE REPORTS REFLECT UNIQUE CHARACTERISTICS AMONG STATES

Through partnerships with local universities and nonprofits, the National Conference on Citizenship (NCoC) expanded *America's Civic Health Index* in 2009 by providing localized data in state-specific indices, including California, Florida, Illinois, Minnesota, New Hampshire, and Ohio. CIRCLE contributed in the analysis of the state-specific data.

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IN MANY STATES, THE ECONOMIC RECESSION SEEMS TO HAVE EXACERBATED THE CIVIC INEQUALITIES THAT ALREADY EXIST AMONG LOW-INCOME, NON-COLLEGE-EDUCATED, AND MINORITY POPULATIONS.

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As seen in the 2009 *America's Civic Health Index*, the economic recession has caused Americans to draw back from civic life. State-specific data show that this is more so the case with certain states in comparison to others. In many states, the economic recession seems to have exacerbated the civic inequalities that already exist among low-income, non-college-educated, and minority populations. Additionally, the findings show a shift in citizen engagement from institutionalized engagement to more personal forms. Individual factors beyond the economic recession – such as trust in government – may also be impacting civic participation. The 2009 index is based on a survey of 1,518 Americans and an additional oversample of 2,371 respondents in six states. For more information see [www.ncoc.net](http://www.ncoc.net).

### MINNESOTA AND NEW HAMPSHIRE REPORT STRONG CIVIC TRADITION

Two of the states – Minnesota and New Hampshire – fared comparatively well in civic health. Both states ranked above the national average on a variety of civic indicators including: volunteering during the past year (NH 43%, MN 60%, National 35%), and working with people in their neighborhood to solve a community problem (NH 19%, MN 16%, National 15%). Moreover, citizens in both states were more likely than citizens in other states to view their state's civic tradition as strong. According to Harry Boyte and Nan Skelton, the authors of the Minnesota report, "When it comes to the combination of voting, volunteering and trying to institute change in their own neighborhoods, no state

in the country has had more engaged citizens over the past few years than Minnesota." Minnesota led the nation by its citizens' overall engagement level. Moreover, New Hampshire showed a strong commitment to volunteering: 43% of New Hampshire residents volunteered within the past year, compared with the national average of 35%.

### IN OHIO AND CALIFORNIA NON-COLLEGE AND IMMIGRANT RESIDENTS HELP IN ALTERNATIVE WAYS

In Ohio, demographic groups responded differently to the economic downturn. Similar to the national trend, Ohioans with college experience were more likely to engage in traditional civic behaviors, such as attending public meetings or volunteering, than those with no college experience. Fifteen percent of adults with college experience said they participated in community projects, compared to the 11% of non-college educated adults. Ohioans without college experience were more likely to give food or money to a relative in need (57%) compared to those with some college experience (44%) or those with a college degree (29%).

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NEW IMMIGRANTS IN CALIFORNIA WERE MORE LIKELY THAN NON-IMMIGRANTS TO HAVE ATTENDED A CLUB OR COMMUNITY MEETING (34% VS. 27%) OR WORKED WITH OTHERS ON PRESSING ISSUES IN THEIR COMMUNITY.

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California – the state with the largest immigrant population<sup>1</sup> – has also seen a shift from traditional forms of service to more personal contributions. New immigrants in California were more likely than non-immigrants to have attended a club or community meeting (34% vs. 27%) or worked with others on pressing issues in their community; minorities also showed higher levels of confidence in the federal government than non-minorities (48% Black, 35% Hispanic, 22% White).

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## CIRCLE IN THE NEWS

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- **“REALITY CHECK: OBAMA’S BASE LIKELY TO DISAPPOINT DEMS,”** BY DAVID PAUL KUHN, *REALCLEARPOLITICS*, 5/17/2010
- **“MILLENNIAL, ISSUES AND POLITICS,”** BY DEMFROMCT, *DAILY KOS*, 5/16/2010
- **“OPPOSITE OF RADICAL: TODAY’S YOUTH TRUST UNCLE SAM,”** BY TOVIA SMITH, *NPR’S MORNING EDITION*, 5/11/2010
- **“INSIDE THE BELTWAY,”** BY JENNIFER HARPER, *WASHINGTON TIMES*, 4/29/2010
- **“LESS POLITICAL ACTIVITY THAN ‘08,”** BY EMILY SCHULTHEIS, *DAILY PENNSYLVANIAN*, 4/29/2010
- **“PONDERING MILLENNIAL POLITICAL VIEWS,”** BY BEN GODDARD, *WIRETAP MAGAZINE*, 4/17/2010
- **“CIVIC EXAMS MIGHT NOT BE A BAD IDEA”** BY JAMES BURNETT, *MIAMI HERALD*, 4/9/2010
- **“SKEPTICISM GROWING AMONG YOUNG AMERICANS”** BY KERRI MILLER, *MINNESOTA PUBLIC RADIO*, 3/24/2010
- **“YOUTH AND POLITICS,”** BY ANONYMOUS, *BOSTON GLOBE BLOG*, 3/7/2010
- **“WILL THE NEXT GENERATION BE AS CIVIC-MINDED,”** BY CHUCK RAASCH, *ARGUS LEADER*, 3/4/2010
- **“PROGNOSIS NEGATIVE,”** BY JESSE SINGAL, *NEWSWEEK*, 2/3/2010

## ILLINOIS AND FLORIDA STRENGTHEN POLICIES TO ENGAGE YOUTH IN CIVIC LIFE

Civic culture in Illinois was hit hard by both the economic recession and several events that caused severe political distrust. Citizens of Illinois did, however, have high levels of trust for their fellow Illinoisans and also showed support for a federal civic agenda: 72% of Illinoisans support policies to implement civic education assessments, compared to 66% nationwide. In addition, 76% of Illinoisans support a service-learning requirement, five percentage points higher than the national average. Within the past year, steps have been taken in Illinois to improve civic education. Specifically, the Illinois Reform Commission asked Governor Pat Quinn to make recommendations for political reform – identifying civic education as a top priority.

Similarly, Florida, a state that is suffering from a civic depression, is looking to strengthen civic life. According to the report, the state has one of the worst civic cultures, ranking 46th in the entire nation. Engagement among youth has been a concern; data show that Floridian Millennials (15–29 years old) are less likely than Seniors (65 and older) to be engaged in their community (7% vs. 21%). In 2010, the Florida State Legislature passed the “Justice Sandra Day O’Connor Civics Education Act.” This act adds social studies, including civics, to the list of subjects tested in the Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test.<sup>2</sup> To download reports for Minnesota, New Hampshire, California, Ohio, Illinois and Florida, please visit the National Conference on Citizenship’s Web site at [www.ncoc.net](http://www.ncoc.net). ★

## ENDNOTES

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1 <http://www.cis.org/articles/2007/back1007.pdf>

2 <http://www.ncoc.net/index.php?tray=content&tid=top41&cid=2kc45>

