

2010 REPORTS PRESENT STRENGTHS AND WEAKNESS OF STATES' CIVIC HEALTH

In September 2010, the National Conference on Citizenship and the Corporation for National and Community Service produced the first *Civic Health Assessment*; this was the first federally funded research on civic engagement authorized under the landmark and bi-partisan Edward M. Kennedy Serve America Act. Thirteen states and four cities signed on to complete individualized civic health reports in 2010.¹ CIRCLE contributed to the analysis of the state-specific data. Below is a summary of the completed reports, including Missouri, Arizona, North Carolina, Virginia, Ohio, California and the first city-level report of its kind, the *Greater Seattle Civic Health Index*.²

STATES SHOW EDUCATIONAL DIVIDE: CITIZENS WITH MORE EDUCATION TEND TO BE MORE CIVICALLY ENGAGED

This year, state-specific data allowed the state partners to break down participation levels among several different demographics, including age, gender, race, marital status, income level, urbanicity and more. There were similarities in each state, but there were also unique differences.

Mimicking national trends, several state indices found an education divide in engagement. Having education beyond high school has shown to be a key predictor of voter turnout and other indicators of citizen engagement. Slightly more than 80% of all Arizonans with a college degree voted in 2008, 32 percentage points higher than those with only a high school diploma. However, the *Missouri Civic Health Index* revealed a strong “blue-collar” base for civic engagement in Missouri compared to the nation as a whole. In Missouri, higher levels of education were associated with more participation, but people without college experience were participants and leaders at higher rates than residents of other states.

Virginians with no college experience turned out in much lower percentages in the 2008 Presidential Election compared to their counterparts with college experience (53.3% vs 80.5%, respectively). Moreover, Ohioans who attend college were more likely to volunteer, participate in groups, fix problems in the community and lead organizations, though Ohio ranks 44th in the nation in the number of people 25 and above with college degrees. This educational divide was particularly important in the California

report, as approximately 20% of Californians in 2008 did not graduate from high school. At the city-level, Seattle saw dramatic gaps in engagement between those with and those without college experience.

SOME STATES SHOW TRADITIONALLY DISENGAGED RESIDENTS CONNECTING IN OTHER WAYS

The 2009 *National Civic Health Index* found that in the midst of an economic crisis, Americans were engaging less in institutionalized forms of service, but they were still helping in other ways. State data in 2010 found this to be true in some of the states. North Carolinians without college experience, for instance, were less likely to be engaged in formal volunteering than their counterparts with college experience. However, they were more likely to have strong personal connections to family and friends and to help their neighbors than those who have some college education. North Carolina also found that rural residents had a higher level of “connectedness” than those living in metropolitan areas. Similarly, Missourians without high school diplomas did favors for their neighbors at a rate that was 10 percentage points higher than the rate for those with college degrees. Moreover, in the greater Seattle region, the only civic indicator that didn't directly rise with college experience was neighborliness.

STATES DIFFER IN LEVELS OF POLITICAL ENGAGEMENT AND NEWS CONSUMPTION

Voter turnout rates, one indicator of political engagement, varied greatly across the states studied. In North Carolina, voter turnout increased among citizens of all ages, races, and classes between 2004 and 2008. NC's voter turnout rate ranked 15th among all states studied. On the other hand, Arizona ranked 43rd for voter turnout in the 2008 presidential election (59.8%, a four percentage point decline in voter turnout from the 2004 election). Virginia ranked 9th in voter turnout among citizens age 18 and older. In Virginia, the 2008 voting rate for 18-to 29-year-olds was higher than the national average (58.7% for VA and 51.1% for US); however, young Virginians still lag behind their elders. Ohio ranked 25th in voter turnout among eighteen and older citizens in 2008. The Ohio report showed that voting was the most common form of political participation, though more than a quarter (29.5%) of Ohioans were active in 2008 by performing

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CIRCLE IN THE NEWS

A SAMPLE OF RECENT COVERAGE:

- **“BUILDING THE YOUTH VOTE IS ABOUT BUILDING INFRASTRUCTURE,”** BY ABBY KIESA, *THE NATION*, 11/5/2010
- **“DID JOHN STEWART HURT THE DEMOCRATS IN ELECTION 2010?,”** BY GLORIA GOODALE, *CHRISTIAN SCIENCE MONITOR*, 11/4/2010
- **“NEXT TIME, WOO YOUNG OBAMA SUPPORTERS,”** BY ERICA WILLIAMS, *CNN OPINION*, 11/4/2010
- **“ONE IN FIVE US UNDER-30’S VOTED IN MIDTERMS: STUDY,”** BY AFP WIRE, *YAHOO NEWS*, 11/3/2010
- **“VOTERS SAY THEY FEEL ABANDONED,”** BY DAMIEN CAVE, *THE NEW YORK TIMES*, 10/31/2010
- **“TEA PARTY MOVEMENT ALIENATING YOUNG VOTERS,”** BY KEVIN BRENNAN AND JOSH LEDERMAN, *THE WASHINGTON POST*, 10/30/2010
- **“ARE YOUNG DISILLUSIONED?,”** BY KEVIN DRUM, *MOTHER JONES*, 10/25/2010
- **“ENTHUSIASM GAP AMONG YOUNG VOTERS,”** *CBS TV NEWS*, 10/16/2010
- **“THE KIDS AREN’T ALRIGHT,”** BY CARRIE DANN, *MSNBC FIRST READ*, 10/14/2010
- **“OBAMA TELLS STUDENTS THEIR FUTURE HINGES ON ELECTION,”** BY DAVID JACKSON, *USA TODAY*, 10/8/2010

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one or more non-electoral political acts such as participating in events for political parties, raising money and advocating for policy changes.

California ranked 33rd in voter turnout for the November 2008 election, with the rate of 63.4% for citizens age 18 and over. Though the ranking is low, California’s voting rate is about the same as the national average of 63.6%. While residents of the greater Seattle area were more likely to participate in non-electoral politics, such as contacting a public official or participate in a march, rally or protest, Seattle’s voting rate was slightly higher than the national average.

Research shows that those who read and discuss the news regularly are more likely to vote, volunteer and give money to charities. In Arizona, approximately 37% of respondents did not follow or discuss the news regularly. However, Arizona Millennials were more likely to discuss politics and current issues compared to their peers nationally. Additionally, the Missouri report found that there was a positive association between the frequency with which Missourians watch the news on television, read the newspaper in print or online and listen to the news on the radio, and their levels of social capital and voting. In North Carolina, those with some college education were more than twice as likely to access the news frequently and engage in political discussions with others as those with no college experience. ★

ENDNOTES

- 1 Arizona, California, Florida, Illinois, Maryland, Missouri, New York, North Carolina, Ohio, Oklahoma, Pennsylvania, Texas, Virginia, along with the metropolitan communities of Chicago, Miami, Minneapolis/St. Paul, and Seattle.
- 2 A summary article of the remaining reports will be in the spring issue of the CIRCLE newsletter, v8.i2.

NEW ON CIVICYOUTH.ORG

Check out the interactive map on www.civicyouth.org, and click on a state to find state-by-state details on the youth vote in Midterm Elections, such as voter share, voter turnout and voter turnout among 18-to 29-year-olds by gender, race, and marital status.

