

NEW REPORTS AVAILABLE ON THE CIVIC HEALTH OF PA, MD, NY, OK, IL, AND CHICAGO, SHOW AGE GAPS IN CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

The last issue of *Around the CIRCLE* summarized reports on the civic health of Missouri, Arizona, North Carolina, Virginia, Ohio, California and the Greater Seattle metropolitan area. Since then, reports on the civic health of Pennsylvania, Maryland, New York, Oklahoma, Illinois, and the Chicagoland region have been released.¹

These reports, produced by the National Conference on Citizenship (NCoC), seek to highlight the strengths and weaknesses of states' civic health. CIRCLE contributed to the analysis for the state-specific data. This article summarizes the major findings of the latest state reports.

YOUNG PEOPLE STAY CONNECTED TO NEWS AND FAMILY VIA TECHNOLOGY

Research shows a relationship between access to the news and civic engagement: those who follow the news are more likely to engage in a variety of civic activities. According to many of the state reports, young people follow the news at lower rates than their adult counterparts.² Despite lower levels of attentiveness to the news, young people in many states are using technology to obtain the news. In Maryland, for instance, Millennials are the most likely to access current events through the Internet (30.8% versus 22.8% for Generation X, 22.0% for Boomers, and 15.0% for the Silent Generation). Providing more opportunities or incentives for Millennials to follow the news via the Internet is a potential pathway to getting young people engaged in civic life.

HAVING CLOSE TIES WITH FAMILY, FRIENDS, AND NEIGHBORS IS BELIEVED TO BE A FOUNDATION OF GOOD CIVIC HEALTH, AND IN FACT, RESEARCH FINDS A STRONG RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN CONNECTING WITH OTHERS AND SEVERAL FORMS OF CIVIC PARTICIPATION.

Having close ties with family, friends, and neighbors is believed to be a foundation of good civic health, and in fact, research finds a strong relationship between connecting with others and several forms of civic participation. Nationally, young Americans are less likely to have face-to-face contact with family and neighbors than older adults but instead are more likely to keep in close touch with family and friends using the Internet. Similarly, in New York, Millennials

were the age group most likely to report using an electronic tool to communicate with family and friends (62% versus 46% for adults aged 35-54, and 32% for over 55).

YOUTH IN NEW YORK AND PENNSYLVANIA VOLUNTEER AT LOWER RATES THAN THEIR ADULT COUNTERPARTS

Nationally, young people are volunteering at lower levels than their adults counterparts. Many states also found this pattern. In New York, age was found to be a predictor of volunteering. Fourteen percent of 16-to 24-year-olds in New York were volunteers, compared to almost a quarter of 44-to 55-year-olds. Similarly, Millennial Pennsylvanians were the least likely along with those born in 1930 or before, to get involved in their neighborhoods. (The Millennials' rate was 4.6%.) Even so, Millennials show promise; volunteering rates are slightly higher for Millennials now than they were for Boomers when they were the same age.³ The Internet and technology could provide venues for young people to hear about opportunities and get involved.⁴

CIVIC EDUCATION PROGRAMS SEEK TO PROVIDE OPPORTUNITIES TO PARTICIPATE

Several state reports highlighted the need for stronger civics education programs in schools. *The Illinois Civic Health Index*, for example, recommended a holistic civic education approach, which included community-based learning, a family structure with models of civic participation, and a government institution that nurtures civic engagement. Maryland has broken new ground, as the first and only state to require service-learning as a condition for high school graduation. On the other hand, the Oklahoma report showed that slightly less than a third (29%) of students in the state were involved in community service, service-learning, and civic engagement activities.

YOUTH VOTER TURNOUT UP IN 2008, BUT GENERATIONAL GAPS STILL PERSIST

Nationally, youth voter turnout increased between 2000 and 2008. However, young people still vote at lower rates than their adult counterparts, and this gap is growing in some states. Pennsylvania, for instance, saw a decrease in youth voter turnout. Maryland, which ranks in the top third for voter turnout, found that

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Baby Boomers (born 1946-1964) were the most likely to have voted (74.4%), while Millennials (born after 1980) were the least likely to have voted (55.5%). In Chicagoland, Baby Boomers were the most likely to vote (68.3%), and Millennials were least likely to vote (49.9%). Both reports found rates comparable to, or higher than, the national averages. However, both reports identified the need to close the gap in voter turnout and many states noted that initiatives are being considered to increase youth voter turnout. The "Campus Vote" initiative, discussed in Oklahoma's report, has been responsible for registering more than 18,000 voters on college campuses in the past seven years.

For more information, or to read full reports go to <http://ncoc.net/states>. ★

ENDNOTES

- 1 The Texas Civic Health Report has not yet been released. Florida state partners have opted to do a series of civic health fact sheets, which will be released at different times.
- 2 *2010 Civic Health Assessment: Executive Summary*. Retrieved from the National Corporation on Citizenship website: <http://www.ncoc.net/CHAExecutiveSummary2010>
- 3 <http://ncoc.net/index.php?tray=content&tid=top18&cid=225>. This finding is not calculated via the Census Current Population Survey (CPS).
4. Ibid

