

Civic Life in America:

KEY FINDINGS ON THE CIVIC HEALTH OF THE NATION

Corporation for
**NATIONAL &
COMMUNITY
SERVICE** 



NATIONAL CONFERENCE
ON
CITIZENSHIP

FACT SHEET

SEPTEMBER 2010

The Edward M. Kennedy Serve America Act, signed by President Obama in April 2009, authorized the Corporation for National and Community Service and the National Conference on Citizenship to produce the Civic Health Assessment (known as Civic Life in America), an annual report detailing the many ways people get involved in communities across the country and work to make a difference. Data for the U.S., regions, state, and city (metropolitan area) level were collected mostly through the Bureau of Labor Statistics and the U.S. Census Bureau. With this rich set of data, leaders and residents are able to identify opportunities to increase and sustain diverse and new types of engagement and build tools and resources to meet community needs. Today our nation faces a number of daunting challenges, including economic recovery, under-performing schools, and unexpected needs arising out of disasters. It is precisely because of the magnitude and multitude of these and other complex challenges that we must reconfigure the way we think and talk about engaging Americans in addressing them. This fact sheet provides an overview of key national findings. Additional statistics and analysis, as well as tools and resources to help communities stimulate greater civic engagement, can be found online at <http://www.serve.gov/civic>.

DEFINING CIVIC LIFE

The term "civic life," which can be used interchangeably with "civic engagement," can describe a diverse set of activities. The concept generally includes activities that build on the collective resources, skills, expertise, and knowledge of citizens to improve the quality of life in communities.¹ While many varieties of civic participation could be classified as civic engagement, this fact sheet focuses on activities that can be classified into five main categories: service, social connectedness, participating in a group, connecting to information and events, and political action.

FINDINGS

See the table on pages 3-4 for a full list of national results.

- Data suggest that Americans are coming together to overcome challenges. They are tilting towards the issues and not running away from them.
- Between 2007 and 2009, about 62 million Americans volunteered through an organization each year.
- Each year on average from 2008-2009, almost 125 million Americans exchanged favors with their neighbors at least once a month.

¹This is a slightly abridged version of the definition used by the IUPUI Task Force on Civic Engagement, available at <http://schoe.coe.uga.edu/benchmarking/bei.html>.

- Although volunteering and voting are two of the most familiar forms of civic engagement, there are many other ways to get involved.
 - Millions of Americans participate in "neighborhood engagement" or informal service activities by working with neighbors to fix a community problem. Informal activities such as neighborhood engagement are important engines for local civic life, since they are often organized by neighborhood residents themselves, without the help of an organization or institution.
- People who participate in one civic activity are more likely to be involved in others.
 - People who serve by volunteering, by working directly with their neighbors to fix community problems, or by attending public meetings where community issues are discussed, are also all more likely to participate in other elements of civic life.
 - People who connect socially by eating dinner with others in their household, keeping in touch online, talking with their neighbors, or trading favors with their neighbors are all more likely to be engaged in service, political action, groups, and following current events in some way.
- Use of the internet is positively related to, and can be a real boon to, our civic engagement.
 - People who have access to the internet in their homes and people who use the internet wherever they have opportunity are more likely to get involved in almost every type of activity studied in the assessment.
- Veterans are generally more involved in their communities than non-veterans.
 - Veterans are more likely to work with their neighbors to fix community problems (10.5% vs. 7.8%), to exchange favors with their neighbors (63.4% vs. 56.9%), and to have voted in the 2008 election (70.9% vs. 56.8%).

METHODOLOGY

Most of the statistics reported in *Civic Life in America: Key Findings on the Civic Health of the Nation* come from the Current Population Survey's (CPS) Civic Engagement Supplement, which has been conducted by the U.S. Census Bureau for the Bureau of Labor Statistics each November since 2008. Others come from the Voting Supplement to the CPS, administered in November in even-numbered years; the Volunteer Supplement to the CPS, administered every September since 2002; and the October 2007 Computer Use Supplement to the CPS. Most supplements have a response rate of about 100,000 respondents. Some voting data (election returns) also come from Dave Leip's Atlas of U.S. Presidential Elections (<http://www.uselectionatlas.org/>). For more information, see civic.serve.gov.

CORPORATION FOR NATIONAL AND COMMUNITY SERVICE

The Corporation for National and Community Service is a federal agency that engages more than five million Americans in service through Senior Corps, AmeriCorps, and Learn and Serve America and leads President Obama's national call to service initiative, United We Serve. For more information, visit NationalService.gov.

NATIONAL CONFERENCE ON CITIZENSHIP

Founded in 1946 and chartered by the U.S. Congress in 1953, the National Conference on Citizenship (NCoC) is a leader in strengthening our nation's civic life. In partnership with over 250 organizations, NCoC tracks, measures, and promotes civic participation. Through this work, NCoC helps define modern citizenship in America. More information can be found at NCoC.net.

NATIONAL FINDINGS TABLE

Category and Indicator	National Results	Rounded # Participating
Service		
Volunteering with an Organization	26.5%	62,000,000
Main Organization - Civic, political, professional, or international	5.4%	3,400,000
Main Organization - Educational or youth service	26.6%	16,500,000
Main Organization - Hospital or other health	8.3%	5,200,000
Main Organization - Religious	35.6%	22,000,000
Main Organization - Social or community service	13.8%	8,500,000
Main Organization - Sport, hobby, cultural, or arts	3.5%	2,100,000
Main Organization - Other	6.9%	4,300,000
Working with Neighbors to Fix Community Problem	7.9%	18,600,000
Attending Public Meeting	9.3%	21,800,000
Top Four Activities - Fundraise or sell items to raise money	26.6%	16,500,000
Top Four Activities - Collect, prepare, distribute, or serve food	23.5%	14,600,000
Top Four Activities - Engage in general labor or transportation	20.5%	12,700,000
Top Four Activities - Tutor or teach	19.0%	11,800,000
Social Connectedness		
Eating Dinner with Household Members - Frequently	89.1%	164,400,000
Eating Dinner with Household Members - Occasionally	7.1%	13,100,000
Eating Dinner with Household Members - Not at all	3.8%	7,100,000
Eating Dinner with Household Members - Frequently*	74.3%	164,400,000
Eating Dinner with Household Members - Occasionally*	5.9%	13,100,000
Eating Dinner with Household Members - Not at all (incl. lives alone)*	19.7%	43,600,000
Talking to Family/Friends via Internet - Frequently	53.6%	113,900,000
Talking to Family/Friends via Internet - Occasionally	14.0%	29,800,000
Talking to Family/Friends via Internet - Not at all	32.4%	69,000,000
Talking with Neighbors - Frequently	45.8%	99,600,000
Talking with Neighbors - Occasionally	35.9%	78,100,000
Talking with Neighbors - Not at all	18.3%	39,900,000
Exchanging Favors with Neighbors - Frequently	16.2%	35,100,000
Exchanging Favors with Neighbors - Occasionally	41.3%	89,500,000
Exchanging Favors with Neighbors - Not at all	42.5%	92,000,000
*For these statistics, people who live alone are classified in the “not at all” category rather than being excluded from the results.		

NATIONAL FINDINGS TABLE continued

Category and Indicator	National Results	Rounded # Participating
Participating in a Group		
School Group	15.4%	34,000,000
Service or Civic Association	6.8%	15,000,000
Sports or Recreation Association	10.3%	22,800,000
Church or Religious Association	18.0%	39,800,000
Other Group	5.6%	12,300,000
Participating in One or More Groups	35.1%	79,500,000
Served as Group Officer or Committee Member	10.1%	22,200,000
Connecting to Information and Current Events		
News from Newspaper - Frequently	67.5%	147,600,000
News from Newspaper - Occasionally	13.7%	29,900,000
News from Newspaper - Not at all	18.9%	41,300,000
News from Magazine - Frequently	16.8%	36,500,000
News from Magazine - Occasionally	21.4%	46,700,000
News from Magazine - Not at All	61.8%	134,800,000
News from Television - Frequently	86.0%	188,500,000
News from Television - Occasionally	6.4%	14,000,000
News from Television - Not at All	7.6%	16,800,000
News from Radio - Frequently	54.5%	118,400,000
News from Radio - Occasionally	11.9%	25,800,000
News from Radio - Not at All	33.7%	73,200,000
News from Internet - Frequently	19.7%	40,900,000
News from Internet - Occasionally	9.2%	19,200,000
News from Internet - Not at All	71.1%	147,800,000
Discuss Politics - Frequently	39.3%	85,600,000
Discuss Politics - Occasionally	34.3%	74,800,000
Discuss Politics - Not at All	26.4%	57,500,000
Political Action		
Voting, 2008 Election	57.1%	131,400,000
Registered to Vote, 2008 Election	64.9%	146,300,000
Showed Support for Party or Candidate	14.8%	32,400,000
Bought or Boycotted Product or Service because of Producers' Political Values	10.7%	23,400,000
Contacted Public Official to Express Opinion	10.4%	22,700,000
Attended Meeting Where Political Issues Were Discussed	10.3%	22,500,000
Taken Part in March, Rally, Protest, or Demonstration	3.1%	6,700,000
Participated in One or More Activities	26.3%	59,300,000