

2020 NEBRASKA CIVIC HEALTH INDEX



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National Conference on Citizenship
Connecting People. Strengthening Our Country.



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Civic Nebraska is a nonpartisan nonprofit organization dedicated to creating a more modern and robust democracy for all Nebraskans. We build community through three program areas: youth civic leadership, civic health, and voting rights.

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The National Conference on Citizenship (NCoC) is a congressionally chartered organization dedicated to strengthening civic life in America. We pursue our mission through a nationwide network of partners involved in a cutting-edge civic health initiative, an innovative national service project, and our cross-sector conferences. At the core of our joint efforts is the belief that every person has the ability to help their community and country thrive.



TABLE OF CONTENTS

| | |
|---|-----------|
| Introduction | 4 |
| Why Does Civic Health Matter?..... | 4 |
| Summary of Data..... | 5 |
| Methods..... | 6 |
| Social Connectedness | 7 |
| Data..... | 7 |
| Discussion..... | 10 |
| Confidence in Institutions | 12 |
| Data..... | 12 |
| Discussion..... | 14 |
| Community Engagement | 15 |
| Data..... | 15 |
| Discussion..... | 18 |
| Political Involvement | 29 |
| Data..... | 19 |
| Discussion..... | 24 |
| Moving Forward for Stronger Civic Health | 25 |
| Appendix | 25 |
| Technical Note | 26 |
| Endnotes | 27 |

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INTRODUCTION

Civic health reflects the degree to which individuals participate and are represented in their communities, from local and state governance to interactions with friends or family, and it refers to the way that communities are organized to define and address public problems.

This report examines how Nebraska fares in four key indicators of civic health:

- **Social Connectedness**
- **Confidence in Institutions**
- **Community Engagement**
- **Political Involvement**

The data and the insights included in this report are a starting point for conversation and collective action towards strengthening civic life and democratic involvement across the state.

For small towns and metropolitan cities alike, the benefits of strong civic health range from achieving success on community priorities to increased wellness to greater economic prosperity for more residents.

WHY DOES CIVIC HEALTH MATTER?

Strong Democracy

Our country's system of governance relies on the civic knowledge and participation of the people to govern effectively.¹ Through cultivating relationships with our neighbors and engaging in discourse and action on shared priorities, we cultivate the habits and mindsets central to sustaining a democratic society.

Health and Wellbeing

Increasing evidence suggests that civic health is at the heart of thriving communities and overall well-being. Time spent with friends, family, and neighbors make a living in a place meaningful, but is also linked to improved mental and physical health.² Even seemingly small actions, such as having dinner as a household, giving a ride to a coworker, or organizing a block party, are civic actions that contribute to health and wellness, especially in times of need.

Economic Prosperity

Civically healthy communities position residents, neighborhoods, and towns for economic prosperity. Job seekers often find opportunities through social connections and entrepreneurs rely on their networks for mentorship and investment. Cities and towns that create a sense of belonging for all residents and come together to make smart investments in the community are better positioned to attract and retain a talented workforce.³ Representative power, inclusive engagement, and connections that bridge different groups within the community help ensure that development provides equitable access to opportunities for all people and all geographies.

Community Development

Civic health is important to completing community projects that increase quality of life and solve local problems.⁴ Whether it be building workforce housing in Stuart or renovating Gene Leahy Mall in downtown Omaha, successful efforts are powered from within by volunteers who rally around a common cause. Democratic involvement in these communities extends beyond managing differing opinions, but rather builds the capacity to work together and sustain action on important issues.⁵

Legacy

Nebraskans are eager to see upcoming generations form good civic habits and a care for the community around them. People across Nebraska work hard to provide opportunities for youth to be involved in community life because they believe it is an important facet of a person's character and ultimately living a good life.

SUMMARY OF DATA

Nebraska is a national leader in spending time with neighbors, family, and friends, in volunteering and working with neighbors to achieve something positive, and in voting in local elections. Nebraska can improve in spending time with people of different backgrounds, participation in voting, engagement among all geographies and demographics, and discussing politics.

Table 1. Nebraska's Civic Health vs. US Averages

| | | 2017 | 2017 US | 2017 | 2013 - 2017 |
|-----------------------|--|-------|---------|---------|---------------------|
| Indicator | | NE | Avg. | NE Rank | Change [^] |
| SOCIAL CONNECTEDNESS | Spend time with family/friends frequently** | 88.2% | 85.4% | 10th | ↑ |
| | Spend time with neighbors frequently** | 40.0% | 33.0% | 5th | |
| | Spend time with people of different backgrounds frequently** | 51.1% | 56.0% | 34th | |
| | Do favors for neighbors frequently** | 8.2% | 9.6% | 38th | |
| | Provide help for family/friends frequently** | 7.3% | 7.7% | 35th | |
| COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT | Volunteering | 40.2% | 30.3% | 6th | ↑ |
| | Working with neighbors towards something positive | 29.5% | 20.9% | 5th | ↑ |
| | Charitable giving (\$25 or more) | 58.8% | 52.2% | 11th | |
| | Attend a public meeting | 13.8% | 10.7% | 13th | |
| | Group membership | 36.5% | 27.1% | 6th | ↓ |
| POLITICAL INVOLVEMENT | Voted in 2012, 2018 | 50.8% | 53.4% | 37th | ↓ |
| | Was registered to vote in 2012,2018 | 66.3% | 66.9% | 34th | |
| | Vote in local elections | 62.0% | 48.3% | 7th | |
| | Discuss politics with friends/family frequently** | 40.0% | 39.0% | 21st | ↑ |
| | Discuss politics with neighbors frequently** | 9.0% | 8.7% | 27th | |
| | Post about political views the Internet or social media frequently | 6.9% | 7.1% | 25th | |
| | Read, watch, or listen to news frequently** | 72.8% | 75.0% | 38th | |
| | Contacted or visited a public official | 16.1% | 11.4% | 13th | ↑ |
| | Bought or boycotted a product | 16.4% | 13.9% | 12th | ↑ |
| | Political donations (\$25 or more) | 6.7% | 8.7% | 42nd | |

Indicates top 10 national ranking

*Rank is among 50 states plus the District of Columbia.

**Frequently indicates “basically every day” or “a few times a week.”

[^]Change determined significant at 90% confidence interval, “-” indicates not available or no change

DEFINITION OF INDICATORS

Social Connectedness includes the quality and frequency of personal connections a person has in their personal life as well as the cohesion and trust within the community.

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

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

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

METHODS

Survey Data

The data included in this index primarily draw from the US Census Bureau's 2017 Current Population Survey (CPS), Volunteering and Civic Life Supplement (n~750). The University of Nebraska Rural Poll (2019: n~1,776, 2017: n~1,972) also provides supplemental information about attitudes and activities of Nebraskans outside the Omaha and Lincoln Metropolitan areas. Lastly, this report draws from the data and conclusions of a 2018 report on Nebraska county-level and Omaha metro area voter turnout compiled by the Center for Public Affairs Research (CPAR) at the University of Nebraska at Omaha. The data from the CPAR report was compiled from the Nebraska Secretary of State and US Census Bureau's American Community Survey.

The CPS survey data slightly underrepresented people of color and respondents had a slightly higher average income than the statewide average. Nebraska Rural Poll respondents skewed white, higher income, and higher educated than the actual state demographic composition. More information on methods of these sources is included at the end of the report.

Civic Health Summit

In May 2020, nearly 80 stakeholders from across the state came together to review the data and provide input on how it relates to their experiences in communities. Insights from these focus group discussions are included throughout the report to supplement the survey data with insight from the lived experience.



SOCIAL CONNECTEDNESS

Social connectedness includes the quality and frequency of personal connections a person has in their personal life as well as the cohesion and trust within the community.

Social connectedness is important because personal relationships are the life-blood of any community, fulfilling a basic human need and bringing value and meaning to the places we live. For individuals, personal relationships are vital to physical and mental wellness, with recent studies indicating a relationship between higher social cohesion and a reduction in mortality.⁶

Across a community, it's the networks of relationships which facilitate collaborations and a sense of social cohesion and mutual support.⁷ Residents who are connected to each other are also connected to support networks, to collective problem solving, and to new job and market opportunities.⁸ Social connectedness among close friends and family as well as among diverse groups in the community is essential to building a culture of participation that supports effective community action.⁹

DATA

Table 2. Nebraska's Social Connectedness in 2013 and 2017

| | 2013 NE | 2013 US | 2013 NE Rank* | 2017 NE* | 2017 US | 2017 NE Rank* |
|--|------------|------------|------------------|-------------|------------|------------------|
| Eat dinner with household members frequently** | 92.7% | 87.8% | 2nd | | | |
| Spend time with family/friends frequently** | 82.3% | 75.7% | 7th | 88.2% | 85.4% | 10th |
| Spend time with family/friends frequently** | | | | 40.0% | 33.0% | 5th |
| Spend time with people of different backgrounds frequently** | | | | 51.1% | 56.0% | 34th |
| Trust in most or all of neighbors | 68.2% | 55.8% | 11th | | | |
| Do favors for neighbors frequently** | 11.2% | 12.1% | 41st | 8.2% | 9.6% | 38th |
| Provide help for friends/family frequently** | | | | 7.3% | 7.7% | 35th |

Indicates top 10 ranking in 2017.

Indicates no data available for time period.

*Rank is among 50 states plus the District of Columbia.

**Frequently indicates "basically every day" or "a few times a week."

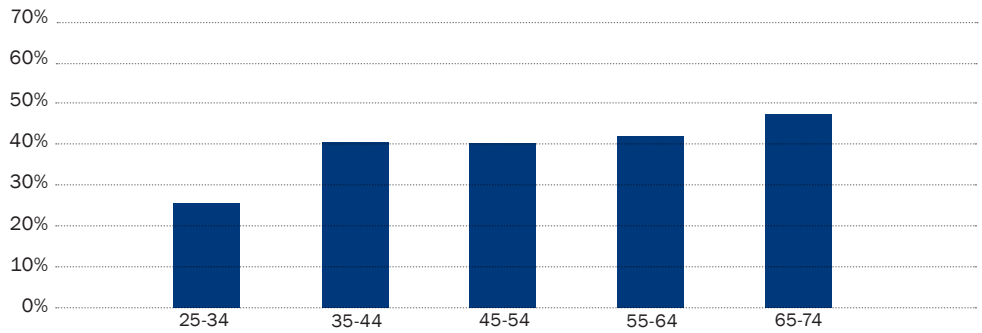
^ Change is statistically significant at 90% confidence interval

Spending time with family, friends, and neighbors

An estimated 88.2% of Nebraskans were estimated to spend time with family and friends at least once a week in 2017, an increase from 2013 which follows the national trend. Spending time with friends and family was fairly consistent among all incomes, levels of educational attainment, and races.

Nebraska also ranked highly among other states for time spent with neighbors, with 40% responding they had a conversation or spent time with neighbors at least once a week. Two notable patterns were that time spent with neighbors was less frequent at younger ages as well as among higher income households

Chart 1. Had a Conversation of Spent Time with Neighbors at Least Once Per Week by Age



Note: Age groups 16-24 and 75+ were omitted due to small sample size.

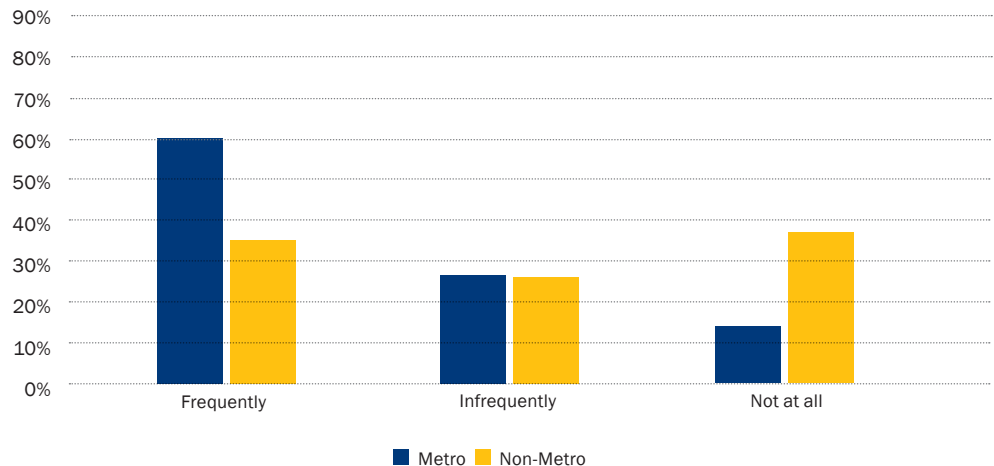
Spending Time with People from Different Backgrounds

Just over 50% of Nebraskans are estimated to spend time with people from a different background at least once a week. Younger people are far more likely to do so, at around 60% of people in each age group 25-54, compared to 34.3% of people age 65-74.

Nebraskans in metro areas are more likely than rural Nebraskans to spend time with people from a different background. Nearly 60% of Nebraskans in metro areas frequently spent time with people from different backgrounds, as compared to 35.7% of non-metro residents. Over 35% of non-metro residents responded “not at all” to this question.



Chart 2. Talk or Spend Time with People From a Different Racial or Cultural Background - Metro Compared to Non-Metro



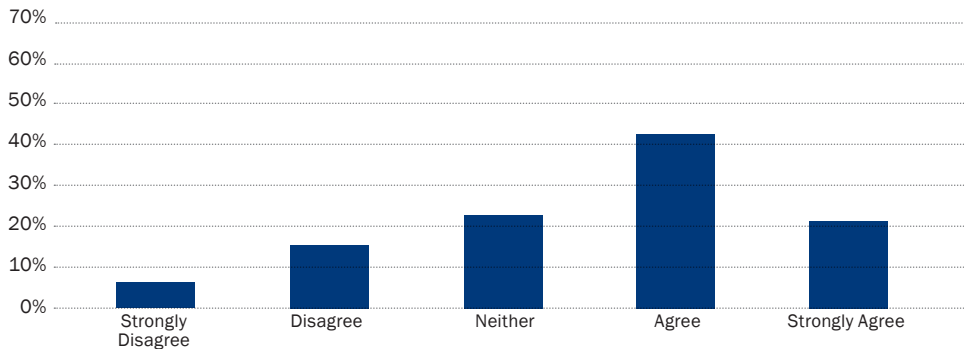
Rural Poll: Belonging in Rural Communities

Frequency of spending time with people of differing backgrounds may be tied to attitudes towards people of different backgrounds. The 2017 Nebraska Rural Poll indicated that 64% of respondents either 'agreed' or 'strongly agreed' that they had a sense of belonging in their community. While this is a majority of people, it still indicates work to be done extending that sense of belonging to the remaining third of respondents who may not feel a sense of belonging in their community.

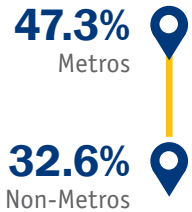
When asked about which groups experienced discrimination in their community, 2017 Rural Poll respondents were most likely to say transgender (32.3% of respondents), gays and lesbians (26.7%), and recent immigrants (23.5%).

Attendees of the civic health summit emphasized that building social connectedness across differing backgrounds is important to building communities where all can thrive and feel at home.

Chart 3. Do Rural Nebraskans Feel They Belong in Their Community



Provide help to friends or extended family at least occasionally



Source: 2017 Current Population Survey, Volunteering and Civic Life Supplement

Provide Help for Family, Friends, or Neighbors

Providing help or favors for neighbors demonstrates strong social connection and trust. Just over 8% of respondents reported doing favors for neighbors at least once a week, and an estimated 55.8% of Nebraskans reported doing favors for neighbors at least occasionally. 41.7% of respondents reported providing food, housing, money, or help for friends or extended family at least occasionally. Those with higher levels of education and people in metropolitan areas are estimated to provide help to friends and neighbors at a slightly higher rate than others.



DISCUSSION

Participants of the 2020 Civic Health Summit emphasized that a connected community is the product of both individual actions and environment. Three themes emerged that will be important to increasing social connectedness across Nebraska: the infrastructure of connection, communities' connectors and includers, and bridging connections across backgrounds.

Infrastructure of Connection

Community events, associations, and places to gather are all part of the basic infrastructure for building and sustaining social connectedness in a community. These community assets provide value to residents, but also fill a vital function in community life by providing opportunities to build trust and strong relationships. Sociologist Eric Klinenborg emphasizes their importance, "People forge ties in places that have healthy social infrastructure—not necessarily because they set out to build community, but because when people engage in sustained, recurrent interaction, particularly while doing things they enjoy, relationships inevitability grow."¹⁰

Communities cannot afford for social connectedness to be an afterthought. Residents who are disconnected from each other are also disconnected from support networks, from collective problem solving, and from new job and market opportunities.¹¹ Understanding where and how people connect and working to expand opportunities for all people to do so is critical work for communities seeking to improve their vitality and wellness.

Based on discussion at the civic health summit, future opportunities for research and collaboration in the state could include:

- Best practices for community groups to adapt to make it easier for outsiders to "break-in" to the inner circle and social groups
- Capitalizing on community events as opportunities to get neighbors connected to each other and to civic and economic opportunities
- Best practices for street and public space design that facilitates social connection
- How policies in land use, transportation, and housing affect opportunities for connection across a city

Connectors and Includers

Summit participants emphasized that a connected community doesn't happen by chance, but through the intention and initiative of residents. As one participant put it, "There are community members and residents who have taken it upon themselves to create connections with each other and make sure that neighbors are finding ways to come together."

These "weavers" of connections bridge divisions, invite outsiders to be involved, and offer their gifts in service to the community.¹² These people may hold formal leadership positions or be seen as informal go-to leaders in their community. Several participants mentioned that people and groups who create diverse linkages are particularly important to helping newcomers "break into" a tight-knit community and feel connected.

Peer to peer networks, many which already exist locally and statewide, are great resources for "connectors" to find support and encouragement. These networks and their members can provide insight for how to lift-up, empower, and emulate these connectors at all levels of civic life in the state.

Bridging Different Backgrounds

Summit participants found bridging different backgrounds to be a particularly important and urgent task for Nebraskan communities. There is an acknowledgement that thriving communities go beyond reinforcing close bonds of a tight-knit “in” group, but also build “cross-cutting” ties that bridge diverse groups. These ties serve as bridges to leadership, information, and opportunity, and also open lines of communication that can prevent controversy from devolving into conflict.¹³

Making groups, places, and events accessible and comfortable for all who live and work in a community helps create the environment for residents to form connections across diverse groups. Summit participants from Nebraska’s big cities and small towns alike grappled with how to engage individuals with backgrounds different than their own, but acknowledged that any efforts should be intentional and thoughtful.

Some specific divides in background mentioned at the summit were:

- Increased connection among long-time residents and newcomers
- Overcoming barriers to cross racial engagement, in particular, engaging white community members in this work
- Reducing relational and environmental challenges to involvement for new Americans
- Bridging the urban-rural divide, both from Omaha/Lincoln to non-metro Nebraska residents, and also between “in-town” residents of small towns and the people in the surrounding rural areas

Summit participants noted that bridging diverse backgrounds is not only a task for individuals, but also for institutions and policy makers. A history of racial segregation in housing has left behind patterns of land use and that reinforce social disconnect among people of different backgrounds.¹³ Disproportionately high levels of incarceration among people of color and underrepresentation in governmental and educational institutions are both symptoms and contributors of inequity. If communities are to build stronger social connections in all neighborhoods and for all families, policy work must closely follow behind the work in the hearts of individuals.

Summit participants saw the work of equity and inclusion as important to community growth as communities diversify. Even from an economic sense, building bridges in social connection is good for business and employment. Inclusion and equitable opportunities for engagement was seen as important for the long-term survival of communities in a more diverse, connected world.

If an individual has trust in their community members, they are much more likely to be willing to volunteer, make a donation, join a group, or participate in a number of other habits of civic health.



CONFIDENCE IN INSTITUTIONS

A person's willingness to engage with an institution is largely predicated on their confidence that that institution is fair, responsive, and effective. Examples of institutions in Nebraska include the state legislature (unicameral), public schools, hospitals, media, and businesses. High confidence in institutions reflects the perception that an institution can be trusted to do the right thing, have the public's best interests in mind, and fulfill its function effectively. As the data will show, confidence varies widely by institution, as well as across different groups, such as race and ethnicity.

DATA

While no data was collected on confidence in institutions from the most recent Current Population Survey, national data from the Gallup confidence in institutions survey from June 2020 is included in this index to provide context and spur discussion.

Highlights from Gallup Confidence in Institutions survey:

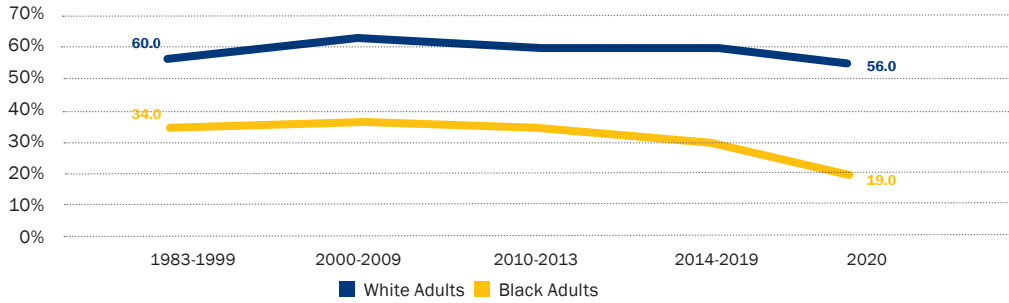
- In the US, small businesses, the military, and the medical system were recorded as having the highest confidence among 15 institutions tracked in this survey.
- Large jumps in confidence in both the medical system and public schools from 2015 to 2020 is likely linked to its response in 2020 to the coronavirus pandemic.
- Significant differences exist among white and black respondents in nationwide confidence in the police as an institution
- At the bottom of the list in public confidence is “big business”, “television news”, and congress, each with less than 20% of respondents nationwide answering that they have “a great deal” or “quite a lot” of confidence in those institutions.

Table 3. Confidence in Institutions, United States, Gallup Poll June 2020

| Institution | Great Deal | Quite A Lot | Some | Very Little | Great deal/ Quite a lot | Great deal/ Quite a lot 5-year change |
|----------------------------------|------------|-------------|------|-------------|----------------------------|--|
| Small Business | 38% | 37% | 19% | 6% | 75% | +8% |
| The Military | 40% | 32% | 20% | 8% | 72% | 0% |
| The Medical System | 22% | 29% | 32% | 16% | 51% | +14% |
| Police | 23% | 25% | 33% | 17% | 48% | -4% |
| The Church of Organized Religion | 25% | 17% | 31% | 23% | 42% | 0% |
| Public Schools | 18% | 23% | 36% | 20% | 41% | +10% |
| Supreme Court | 18% | 22% | 41% | 17% | 40% | +8% |
| The Presidency | 22% | 17% | 23% | 32% | 39% | +6% |
| Banks | 17% | 21% | 43% | 18% | 38% | +10% |
| Organized Labor | 13% | 18% | 45% | 21% | 31% | +7% |
| Criminal Justice System | 10% | 14% | 40% | 33% | 24% | +1% |
| Newspapers | 10% | 14% | 36% | 35% | 24% | 0% |
| Big Business | 7% | 12% | 45% | 33% | 19% | -2% |
| Television News | 9% | 9% | 33% | 43% | 18% | -3% |
| Congress | 6% | 7% | 42% | 41% | 13% | +5% |

A noteworthy example of difference in confidence in institutions by race can be found in the drastically different level of national confidence in the police among white and black survey respondents. 56% of white respondents reported a great deal or quite a lot of confidence versus 19% of black respondents. This gap widened sharply in 2020, when high profile killings of black citizens at the hands of police officers sparked protests and conflict nationwide, including across Nebraska.

Chart 4. Confidence in Police by Racial Group From 1993-2020 in the United States



Source: Gallup

2017 Rural Poll Findings

Nebraska-specific findings in confidence in institutions can be gleaned by drawing on the 2017 Nebraska Rural Poll results, though it should be noted this data excludes households in the Omaha and Lincoln metro areas. Among the 12 institutions included in the survey, public safety, public schools, and local voting and election systems ranked the highest. Over 6 in 10 respondents have “quite a lot” or “a great deal” of confidence in these institutions.

Table 7. Nebraska’s Confidence in Institutions, Nebraska Rural Poll 2017

| Institution | Very Little | Some | Quite a lot | A lot | Great deal/ Quite a lot |
|---|-------------|------|-------------|-------|-------------------------|
| Public safety agencies (police, fire, etc.) in your community | 5% | 19% | 46% | 30% | 76% |
| Public schools (K-12) in your community | 6% | 30% | 42% | 23% | 65% |
| Voting and election systems in your county | 8% | 30% | 43% | 19% | 62% |
| Local municipal government | 11% | 44% | 35% | 10% | 45% |
| Voting and election systems across the nation | 17% | 45% | 31% | 7% | 38% |
| Presidency and executive branch | 28% | 38% | 24% | 11% | 35% |
| State court system | 15% | 50% | 30% | 5% | 35% |
| Governor and state executive branch | 17% | 49% | 29% | 5% | 34% |
| Unicameral | 16% | 53% | 27% | 4% | 31% |
| US Supreme Court and Federal Court | 19% | 53% | 24% | 4% | 28% |
| US House of Representatives | 32% | 52% | 14% | 3% | 17% |
| US Senate | 31% | 53% | 13% | 3% | 16% |

One significant pattern is respondents’ levels of trust increases as institutions converge from national to local. Voting and election systems in respondents’ counties fared 24 points better than voting and election systems across the nation, and Nebraska’s courts and legislature ranked higher in confidence than the US Supreme Court and Congress.

2017 Rural Poll Confidence in News Sources

Among rural Nebraska respondents, local news sources had more public trust than national media outlets, with 81% of respondents reporting either some or a lot of trust in local news sources. Family, friends, and acquaintances also held a position of high trust as sources of information, followed by PBS, state newspapers, and public radio. Respondents showed the most distrust for internet-based platforms with 75% of respondents having ‘not too much’ or ‘no trust’ in social networking sites and internet news blogs

Table 5. Nebraska’s Trust in Information Sources, Nebraska Rural Poll 2017

| Institution | Not at all | Not too much | Some | A lot | Some/A lot |
|--------------------------------|------------|--------------|------|-------|------------|
| Local TV News | 6% | 12% | 54% | 27% | 81% |
| Local newspapers | 6% | 13% | 56% | 25% | 81% |
| Family, friends, acquaintances | 4% | 21% | 61% | 14% | 75% |
| PBS | 14% | 17% | 47% | 22% | 69% |
| State newspapers | 13% | 19% | 52% | 17% | 69% |
| Public radio | 13% | 19% | 48% | 19% | 67% |
| Fox News | 20% | 23% | 42% | 16% | 58% |
| ABC | 17% | 26% | 45% | 12% | 57% |
| CBS | 18% | 25% | 46% | 11% | 57% |
| NBC | 19% | 24% | 46% | 11% | 57% |
| Local radio talk programs | 18% | 25% | 49% | 8% | 57% |
| National newspapers | 28% | 27% | 35% | 10% | 45% |
| CNN | 32% | 25% | 36% | 8% | 44% |
| National radio talk programs | 26% | 32% | 38% | 5% | 43% |
| MSNBC | 33% | 26% | 36% | 5% | 41% |
| Social networking sites | 36% | 39% | 22% | 3% | 25% |
| Internet news blog | 40% | 39% | 20% | 1% | 21% |

DISCUSSION

Public confidence is an important indicator of performance and integrity of the institutions that affect Nebraskans, and is an essential prerequisite for effective governance. Low confidence in institutions across population groups and geography can be a symptom of underlying problems such as underrepresentation, unfair treatment, or lack of communication and engagement. Ultimately, both institutions’ representatives and constituents share responsibility for maintaining public trust and confidence.

Interpreting this data, a few themes can be suggested:

Local institutions already have a high degree of confidence and could be a conduit for progress on urgent public problems. Engagement with local institutions, including running for local office and turn-out in local elections, should remain a priority. Protecting the independence of local institutions from national corporate and political interests can help focus the attention of local institutions on local problem solving.

Low public confidence in institutions among minority racial groups and other geographical and demographic segments of the population should be taken seriously within institutions and underlying problems should be addressed. Summit attendees emphasized the importance of institutional leaders listening to constituents, especially groups which have been historically marginalized.

Because confidence in the press plays an important role in a thriving democracy, media literacy and journalistic integrity should be considered priorities to promote constructive discourse on controversy and accountability and transparency of other institutions. Local news institutions which can openly air controversy and provide accessible, factual information support their community’s ability to drive out rumors and make sound decisions to enhance community well-being.⁵

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Indicators of community engagement include volunteering, charitable giving, working with neighbors, attending public meetings, group membership and group leadership. When these activities are strong it indicates strong ownership within a community, and suggests collective care and problem solving.

Through community engagement, residents get to know their community and its needs, share their own gifts, and connect with others to pursue common interests. Nebraskans tend to do very well relative to the nation in community engagement. Most of these metrics increased from 2013, with the notable exception of group membership, which declined across the nation.

DATA

Table 6. Nebraska's Community Engagement in 2013 and 2017

| | 2013 NE | 2013 US | 2013 NE Rank* | 2017 NE* | 2017 US | 2017 NE Rank* | Change 2013-2017 [^] |
|--|------------|------------|------------------|-------------|------------|------------------|----------------------------------|
| Volunteering | 32.8% | 25.4% | 11th | 40.2% | 30.3% | 6th | ↑ |
| Working with neighbors toward something positive | 10.3% | 7.6% | 12th | 29.5% | 20.9% | 5th | ↑ |
| Charitable giving (\$25 or more) | 54.5% | 50.1% | 17th | 58.8% | 52.2% | 11th | |
| Attend a public meeting | 10.3% | 8.3% | 20th | 13.8% | 10.7% | 13th | ↑ |
| Group membership | 42.5% | 36.3% | 15th | 36.5% | 27.1% | 6th | ↓ |
| Leadership role in an organization | 14.6% | 9.7% | 9th | | | | |

Indicates top 10 ranking in 2017.

Indicates no data available for time period.

*Rank is among 50 states plus the District of Columbia.

**Frequently indicates "basically every day" or "a few times a week."

[^] Change is statistically significant at 90% confidence interval

Overall Civic Engagement Highlights

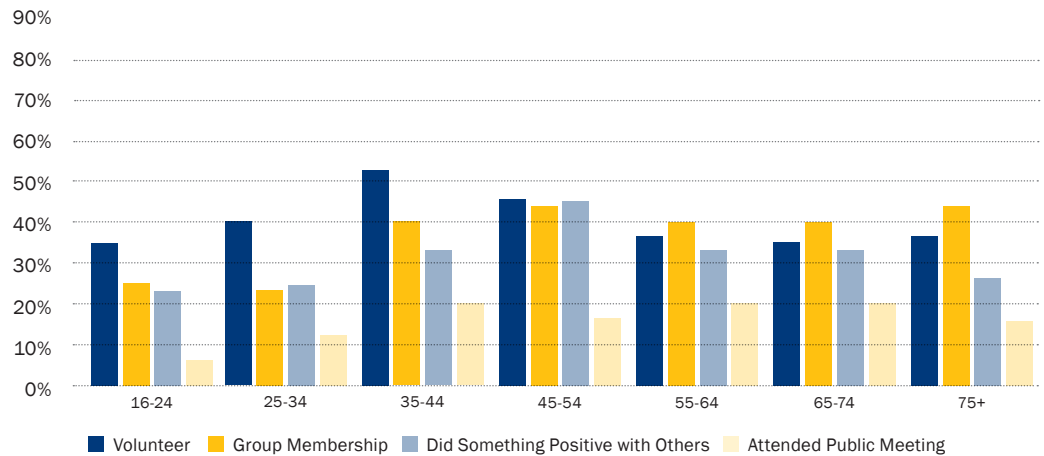
- Increase in volunteering: In 2017, about 40% of Nebraskans were estimated to have volunteered. Of those who volunteered, about 26% said they volunteered at least once a week with the remainder volunteering at least occasionally.
- Increase in working together with neighbors: 29.5% of respondents in Nebraska reported getting together with neighbors to do something positive, the fifth highest percentage in the nation.
- Increase in public meeting attendance: increased slightly from 2013 to 2017, following the trend of the nation, but still only 13.8% of respondents attended a public meeting. Non-metro residents were slightly more likely to attend a public meeting than metro residents.
- Decline in group membership: Despite increases in other activities, group membership decreased markedly both in Nebraska and across the country. Declining group membership is a well-documented, decades long trend that continues to challenge civic groups.⁶

Civic Engagement by Age

35 to 54 year olds reported being the most civically active among the age groups. Young people volunteer at rates similar to other age groups, though group membership is starkly lower among 25-34 year olds than among older generations, with just 22% of 25-34 year olds belonging to any groups, organizations, or associations.



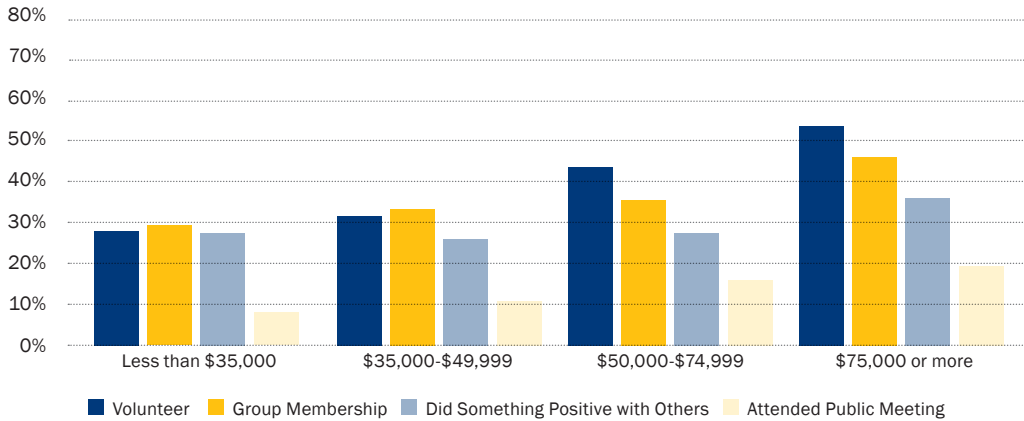
Chart 5. Types of Civic Engagement by Age in Nebraska



Civic Engagement by Household Income

By income, levels of participation in volunteering and group membership differed the most between the highest and lowest income groups. The rates of doing something positive for the community with others and attending a public meeting, were significantly more consistent across income levels.

Chart 6. Types of Civic Engagement By Household Income in Nebraska



Civic Engagement by Educational Attainment

Higher levels educational attainment also seemed to correlate to more activity in civic engagement. It's worth noting, however, that more respondents with a high school diploma (no college) responded that they got together with others to do something positive for the community (26.3%) than responded that they volunteered (22.6%). This differs from the 57.1% of college graduates who responded that they volunteered versus 39.8% who worked with others to do something positive for the community.

Volunteering and group membership among those without a college degree is significantly lower than those with a college degree. College graduates were also more than twice as likely to attend a public meeting than those with a high school diploma or less education.

Belong to any groups, organizations, or associations by education level

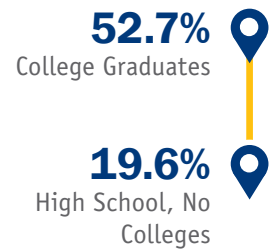
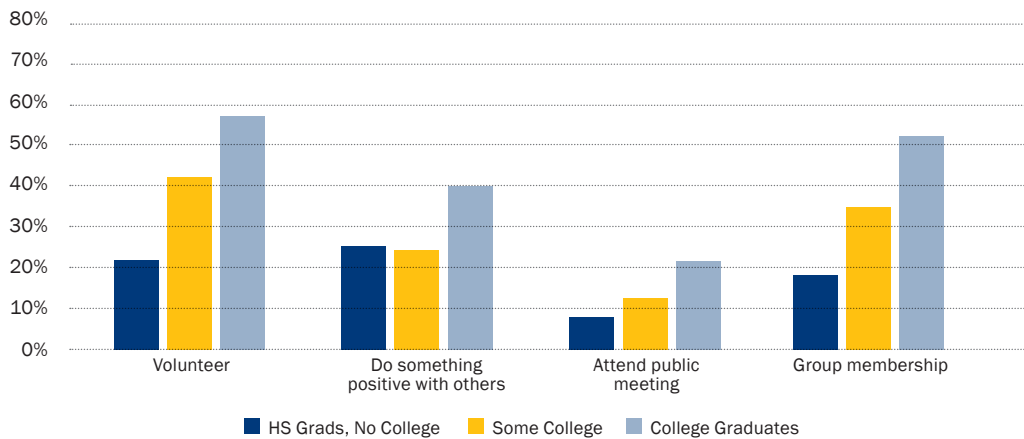


Chart 7. Types of Civic Engagement By Educational Attainment



DISCUSSION

Discussion at the civic health summit centered around two main themes: 1) Engaging everyone, and; 2) Adapting to new forms of engagement.

Engaging Everyone

Nebraska has some of the highest levels of community engagement in the country and rates of volunteering in the state have consistently been above the national average in the past decade. Still, civic leaders have long sought to engage more people.

Formal and Informal Opportunities

The data suggest that engagement generally increases with higher education and income. The largest differences in participation by education and income were in volunteering and group membership. There was less variation, however, in working together with neighbors.

These trends could indicate that community engagement among those without a college degree and with lower incomes is less closely tied to formal volunteering and group membership. Summit participants emphasized that community engagement isn't just formal associations and organized volunteering, but also gifts and help that are shared with neighbors and family, and the informal groups where people get together.

Focus on Assets

The practice of asset-based community development challenges community leaders to acknowledge and value all types of engagement, identifying and naming them as vital assets that contribute to civic life. In this view, increasing community engagement is not as much about enrolling new participants in the initiatives of leaders as it is about connecting the diverse interests, skills, and networks of residents. From a foundation of cultivating relationships, knowledge of assets, and the power of invitation, community leaders can create the conditions for increased engagement.

Communication

Summit attendees also noted that much of the work of expanding engagement to more people falls within the realm of communication. Dispersal of leadership, cultural sensitivity, tolerance for controversy, and conflict management are some of the realms of communication that affect community engagement.

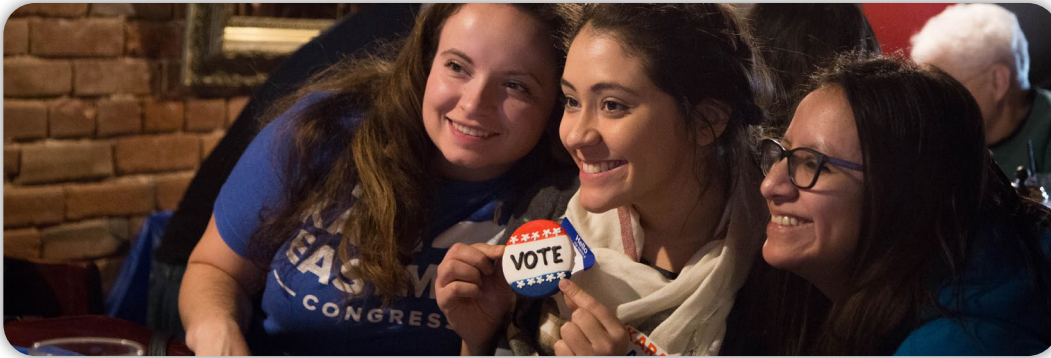
Adapting to new forms of engagement

As technology and lifestyles change, it's appropriate that forms of engagement adapt. Nebraskans will rightly continue to grapple with the tension between in-person commitment and accommodating new technologies and different rhythms of participation. Leaders of engagement initiatives can balance commitment and flexibility by listening and building opportunities around the realities of those they want involved.

Examples of such adaptations include changing the meeting time of a Noon Rotary meeting to accommodate teachers and others without a break for lunch, virtual meeting options for public meetings so those with children can join from home, and making schools and other existing community hubs the locus of engagement in neighborhoods.

POLITICAL INVOLVEMENT

Political involvement includes direct action in the political process such as voting and contacting public officials, and also actions of political discourse like consuming news and discussing politics. Our representative democracy cannot survive without the active and informed participation of its citizens. The data suggest younger people, racial and ethnic minorities, lower levels of income and education tend to be underrepresented in the political process.



DATA

The survey questions selected from the current population survey (CPS) show Nebraska in the middle of the pack, rather than a leader, of state rankings in several indicators of political involvement.

Table 7. Political Involvement in Nebraska, 2013 and 2017

| | 2013 NE | 2013 US | 2013 NE Rank* | 2017 NE* | 2017 US | 2017 NE Rank* | Change 2013-2017 [^] |
|---|------------|------------|------------------|-------------|------------|------------------|----------------------------------|
| Voted in 2012, 2018 | 61.6% | 61.8% | 32nd | 50.8% | 53.4% | 37th | ↓ |
| Was registered to vote in 2012, 2018 | 69.5% | 71.2% | 36th | 66.3% | 66.9% | 34th | |
| Vote in local elections | 65.0% | 58.5% | 16th | 62.0% | 48.3% | 7th | |
| Discuss politics with friends/family frequently** | 30.8% | 27.0% | 15th | 40.0% | 39.0% | 21st | ↑ |
| Discuss politics with neighbors frequently* | | | | 9.0% | 8.7% | 27th | |
| Post about political views on the internet or social media frequently** | | | | 6.5% | 7.1% | 25th | |
| Read, watch, or listen to news frequently** | | | | 72.8% | 75.0% | 38th | |
| Contacted or visited a public official | 12.2% | 10.8% | 27th | 16.1% | 11.4% | 13th | ↑ |
| Bought or boycotted a product | 11.9% | 12.8% | 32nd | 16.4% | 13.9% | 12th | ↑ |
| Political donations (\$25 or more) | | | | 6.7% | 8.7% | 42nd | |

⋮ Indicates top 10 ranking in 2017.

⋮ Indicates no data available for time period.

*Rank is among 50 states plus the District of Columbia.

**Frequently indicates “basically every day” or “a few times a week.”

[^] Change is statistically significant at 90% confidence interval

Overall Political Involvement Highlights

- Nebraskans do well relative to the nation in self-reported voting in local elections
- Several political activities other than voting are estimated to have increased in Nebraska from 2013 to 2017, including:
 - Discussed politics with friends/family frequently, where the increase in Nebraska mirrored a national trend of increased activity.
 - Contacted or visited a public official, the rate of which is estimated to beat the national average.
 - Bought or boycotted a product for political reasons, which also corresponded to an increase across the nation.
- In Nebraska, and across the nation, only a small percentage of people donate to political campaigns.

Among different education levels, the data show that more education generally correlates with more political involvement:

Table 8. Nebraska's Political Engagement by Education

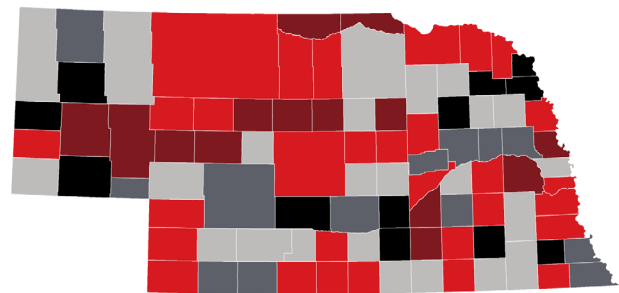
| | High School Graduates | Some College | College Graduates |
|--|-----------------------|--------------|-------------------|
| Contacting Public Officials | 8.5% | 15.9% | 24.4% |
| Discuss Politics with Friends/Family | 25.8% | 42.6% | 48.5% |
| Buy or Boycott Product for Political Reasons | 9.7% | 17.9% | 21.9% |

Voting

It's worth mentioning that while Nebraska's "rank" in voting rate relative to other states improved from 2012 to 2018, the percentage of Nebraskans who voted was estimated to be lower in 2018. This could be attributed to the fact that 2012 was a Presidential election year, which often motivates a larger turnout, and 2018 was a midterm election.

UNO's Center for Public Affairs Research analyzed the Secretary of State's data for 2018 voting and registration. The image above shows the geographical distribution of voter turnout in 2018, black colored counties being less than 45% turnout (12 counties) and deep red being 60% or more (14 counties).

Voting in Nebraska, by County 2018

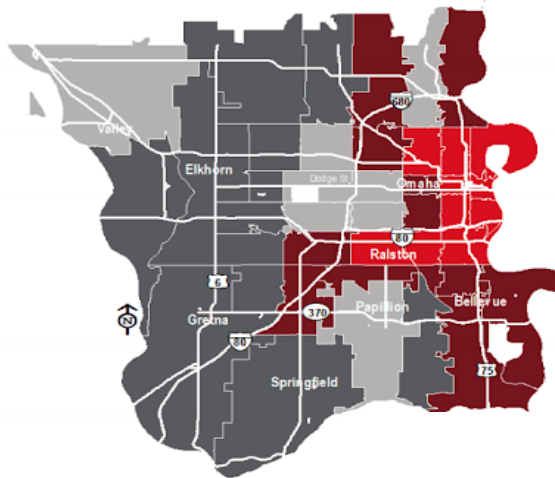


■ Less than 45% ■ 45-49% ■ 50-59% ■ 60-69% ■ 70-79%

Source: 2014 and 2018 Voter Turnout Files 2014, Nebraska's Secretary of State's Office, 2013-2017 American Community Survey, Custom Calculations from 2014 and 2017 ACS Public Use Microdata Samples, U.S. Census Bureau

2016 Voter Turnout as a Percentage of the Eligible Population

The low-turnout counties in 2018 were largely the same counties with lower turnout in 2016. A 2018 report by the Center for Public Affairs Research found that the counties with the highest percentage of Latino population in 2016 had an average voter turnout of 58% compared to 73% voter turnout in the counties with the lowest percentage of Latino population.¹⁷ In the Omaha Metro area, the areas which had the lowest voter turnout correlated with the areas of lower education, lower household income, percent Hispanic, and percent Black population.¹⁸



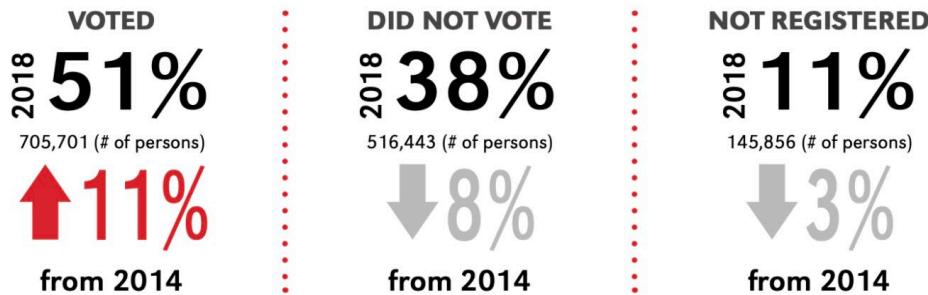
Source: Nebraska Secretary of State Voter Files 2014, 2016, 2018, and 2012-2016 American Community Survey 5-year Estimates Table B05003, as analyzed and prepared by UNO Center for Public Affairs Research, September 2018

□ No data ■ 75% or more ■ 65-74% ■ 55-64% ■ Less than 55%

These trends also align with the data that suggests the people with lower levels of education and income tend to be less likely to be politically involved through contacting public officials or discussing politics with family or friends. Lower levels of political participation among persons of color, persons with lower-income, and in certain geographies means that these groups and areas are underrepresented in the election of officials who make decisions, potentially undermining the accountability of elected officials to all constituencies.

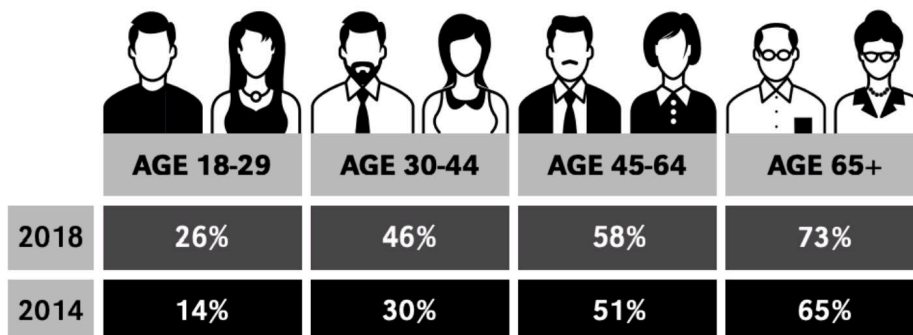
In the CPAR analysis, the 2018 turnout data aligns with the CPS estimation at 51% turnout for the 2018 Midterm election, but registration data was significantly higher than the CPS estimates, with only 11% of eligible voters not registered to vote for the 2018 election.

Registered voters as a percentage of the voting eligible population in midterm elections



In all age groups turnout of eligible voters was up in 2018 from 2014, with the largest gains being made among younger age-groups. Despite increases, younger age groups still vote at a significantly lower rate than older age groups.

In all age groups, turnout of eligible voters was up from 2014.



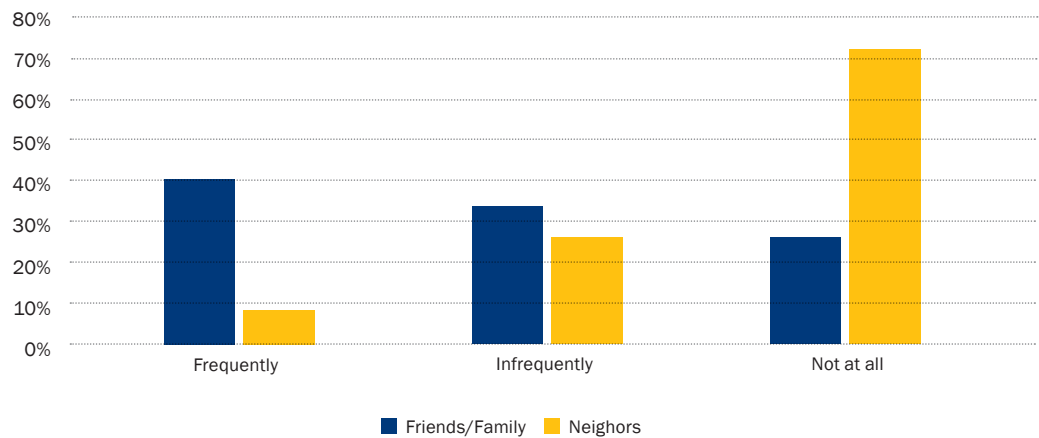
Discussing Politics

Nebraskans are far more likely to discuss politics with friends and family instead of neighbors.

As noted earlier, college graduates are more likely than those with lower levels of educational attainment to discuss politics or societal issues with friends, family, and neighbors. Geographically, 44% of people from Nebraska Metro areas reported discussing politics frequently with friends and family, whereas 33% of people from non-metro areas discuss politics frequently.

Examining civil discourse in the online sphere shows the vast majority of Nebraskans (8 out of 10) claim to not post their political views on social media. Interestingly, there weren't significant differences between age for this variable.

Chart 8. How Often Nebraskans Discuss Political, Societal, or Local Issues with Friends/Family and Neighbors



Competitive Races in Elections

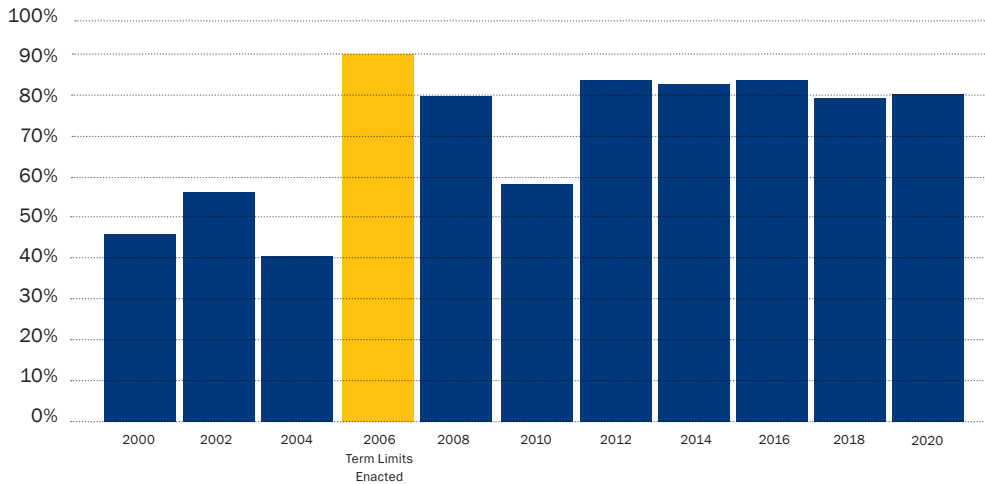
Nationwide polls¹⁹ indicate that just 2% of Americans have ever run for office. Anecdotally, it is said to be difficult to find people to run for public office, particularly for local offices in rural areas of the state. Competitive races for public office (races where candidates don't run unopposed) provide voters a choice of visions and candidates, and can indicate, to some extent, participation in the political process.

Table 9. Nebraska Competitive Elections, All Races 2000-2020

| | NE* |
|---|------|
| US Senate | 100% |
| US House of Representatives | 97% |
| Governor | 100% |
| Secretary of State | 100% |
| Attorney General | 40% |
| State Treasurer | 80% |
| Auditor of Public Accounts | 100% |
| Public Service Commission - All Districts | 61% |
| Nebraska Legislature - All Districts | 73% |
| State Board of Education - All Districts | 64% |
| University of Nebraska Board of Regents - All Districts | 69% |
| Community Colleges - All Colleges, All Districts | 28% |

Within governing bodies, competitive elections vary by geography as well. In the Nebraska Legislature for example, the percent of races that have been competitive from 2000-2020 range from 33% in district 19 (Madison and Stanton Counties) to 100% in several districts in Douglas and Lancaster Counties. The effect of term limits, which were enacted in 2006 after a constitutional amendment passed by Nebraska voters in 2000, can be seen in the percentage of competitive races for Nebraska Legislature seats. In the three years prior to 2006, the average percentage of competitive races was 53%. In 2006 and years since, the average percentage of competitive races was 81%.

Chart 9. Competitive Races, Nebraska Legislature 2000-2020



Source: Nebraska Secretary of State, Previous Election Results

Some controversy has surrounded this change, however, with proponents arguing the higher rate of turn-over is beneficial by getting more people involved and opponents saying it undermines expertise of the body as a whole and ability to address long-term issues.



DISCUSSION

Participation in electoral process

Participation in elections, whether as a voter or candidate, was of major importance to civic health summit attendees. It was noted that participation in voting can be affected by a number of factors, including a few common answers:

- Understanding eligibility to vote and the issues on the ballot
- Accessibility to vote
- Not believing that voting makes any difference because the system is so corrupt

Encouraging voting participation among young adults was of particular importance based on low turn-out compared to other age groups and the desire to instill a habit of engagement at an early age.

The Students Learn Students Vote Coalition is an example of a successful non-partisan campaign to drive voter turnout, especially on college campuses. This coalition addresses knowledge and psychological barriers to voting by providing funding, resources, connections, and direction to get students' questions answered. Because of their work, they added about 2 million new voters for the 2018 election and will have helped add millions more for the 2020 general election.

Along with younger voters, summit attendees also mentioned the need to engage other underrepresented voices, and mentioned several strategies to encourage participation and more equal representation among all age groups, races, ethnicities, and geographies. These themes included:

- **Civic Education**, particularly for school age children, to improve knowledge and awareness about our political systems and how to engage. This includes knowledge about functions of state and local government, courts and legal systems, the U.S. Constitution, other nations' systems and practices, and international institutions. Providing experiential learning opportunities are also important for youth to practice civic virtues and principles and use their strengths and voice to contribute to civic life.
- **Practicing skills of discourse and media literacy.** Fact finding and media literacy are particularly important to being informed about and interpreting current events. Summit participants also noted an urgency to teach skills of constructive discourse which includes being confident to make and defend sound judgments about events, decisions, and ideas.
- **Greater accessibility to participation.** Finding ways to securely and effectively make participation easier for underrepresented and vulnerable populations is important to ensuring a truly representative democracy. A recent example of making a change to accommodate greater participation can be seen in the 2020 primary, when the state of Nebraska responded to the conditions of the coronavirus pandemic and made the decision to send a mail-in ballot application to every voter. By making this change, Nebraska reduced a potential barrier to election day participation among vulnerable populations and in the process, voters shattered primary election turn-out records.
- **Advocacy.** Finding ways to elevate underrepresented voices in the political process to share stories respectfully. For example, in 2019, community organizers with Collective Impact Lincoln (CIL) engaged neighbors in the process of adopting an ordinance to give renters new protections from housing conditions which violate city code. CIL drew from neighborhood gatherings, personal testimony at council meetings, and canvassing conversations with over 9,000 Lincolniters to elevate the stories of community members and finally make the change.

MOVING FORWARD FOR STRONGER CIVIC HEALTH

The data and the insights included in this report are a starting point for conversation and collective action towards strengthening civic life and democratic involvement across the state. The mounting evidence of the importance of civic health to thriving communities increases the urgency of strengthening social connection, confidence in institutions, community engagement, and political involvement across the state. Based on the discussions that contributed to this report, opportunities for strengthening civic health in Nebraska include innovative engagement strategies, bridging diverse backgrounds, supporting educational opportunities for civic participation, and supporting further research.

While the scope of the data is statewide, most activities that build community and strong civic health start at the local level, among friends and neighbors. These activities can be supported statewide through peer learning and the alignment of resources from organizations and institutions. All of these actions will help build communities where Nebraskans all ages and backgrounds take action in civic life in innovative and meaningful ways.

APPENDIX

Detailed Methods

| Demographic | CPS Volunteering | CPS Voting | Rural Poll 2019 | Nebraska (2018 ACS 1-year) |
|--------------------------------------|------------------|------------|-----------------|----------------------------|
| Metro (MSA county) | 62.2% | 64.6% | | 64.5%** |
| Non-Metro | 37.8% | 35.4% | | 35%** |
| White | 90.6% | 88.0% | 98.3% | 89.2% |
| Black or African American | 3.5% | 5.0% | 0.2% | 5.9% |
| Hispanic or Latinx | 10.3% | | 1.7% | 11.1% |
| College Grads (Bachelor's or Higher) | 32.1% | 29.8% | 41.9% | 32.4% |

**2018 5 Year Estimates



TECHNICAL NOTE

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 and all errors are NCoC's own. Volunteering and Civic Engagement estimates are from CPS September Volunteering/Civic Engagement Supplement from 2017 and voting estimates from 2018 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 Nebraska CPS sample size used for this report ranges from 307-768 (volunteering/civic engagement supplement) and to 1,095 (voting supplement) residents from across Nebraska. 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 we examined 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 Nebraska 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 is also important that our 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.

Current Population Survey

US Census Bureau, Current Population Survey (CPS) 2017, Volunteering and Civic Life (n=~750). Phone survey all across Nebraska.

US Census Bureau, Current Population Survey (CPS) 2018, Voting and Registration (n=~750). Phone survey all across Nebraska.

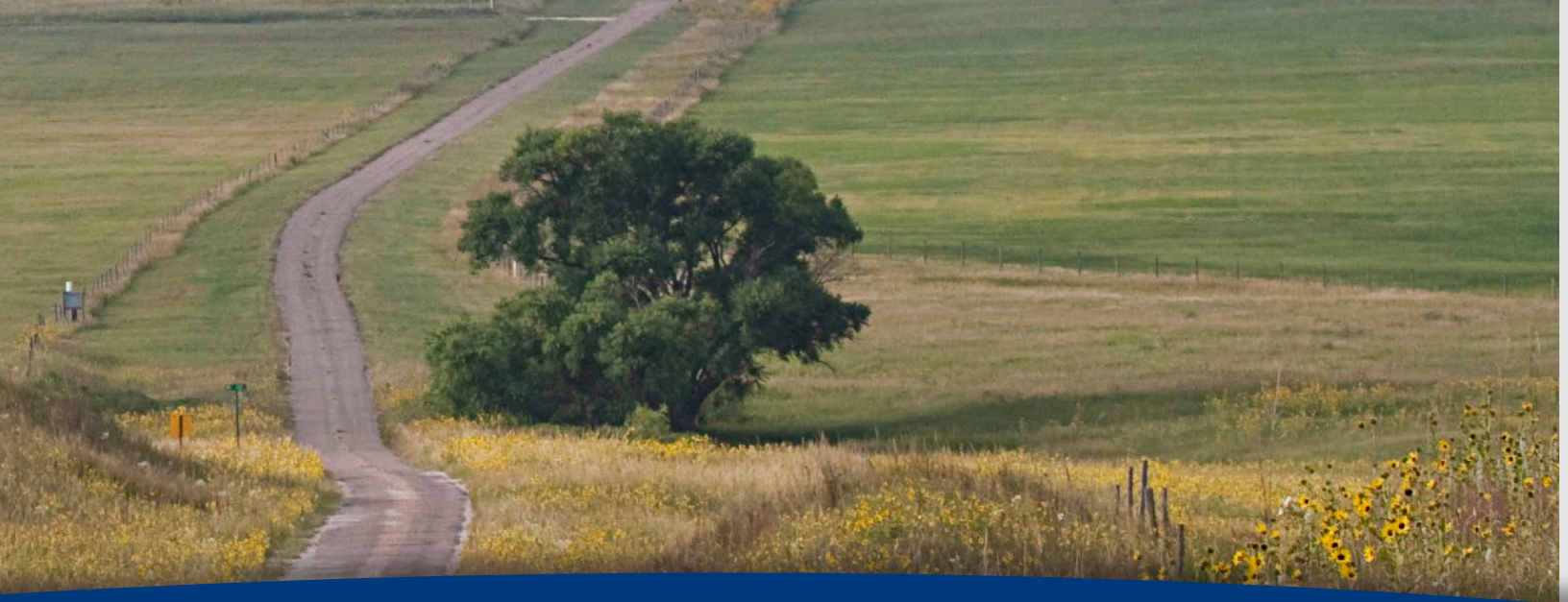
Nebraska Rural Poll

University of Nebraska Rural Poll 2019 (n=1,776); Mail only survey to counties in Nebraska. Omaha and Lincoln metro area counties were excluded from the sample, these counties are: Cass, Douglas, Lancaster, Sarpy, Saunders, Seward and Washington. 14-page questionnaire sent to 6,260 randomly selected households, a 28% response rate was achieved using the total design method (Dillman, 1978).

University of Nebraska Rural Poll 2017 (n=1,972); Mail only survey to counties in Nebraska. Omaha and Lincoln metro area counties were excluded from the sample, these counties are: Cass, Douglas, Lancaster, Sarpy, Saunders, Seward and Washington. 14-page survey sent to 6,260 randomly selected households, a 32% response rate was achieved using the total design method (Dillman, 1978).

2018 Center for Public Affairs Research Voting Report

Nebraska Secretary of State voting data and US Census American Community Survey (ACS) compiled by Center for Public Affairs Research at University of Nebraska-Omaha



ENDNOTES

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- 3 Blueprint Nebraska: Summary Report. July 2019.
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- 9 Flora, C. and Flora, J. Rural Communities: Legacy + Change, Fourth Edition. 2013. P. 128.
- 10 Eric Klinenberg, "Worry Less about Crumbling Roads, More about Crumbling Libraries," Atlantic, September 20, 2018
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- 12 Aspen Institute, "The Relationalist Manifesto." February 13, 2019. <https://www.aspeninstitute.org/blog-posts/the-relationalist-manifesto/>
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- 17 Nebraska Voter Turnout 2014, 2016, 2018 Executive Summary. Center for Public Affairs Research. University of Nebraska at Omaha. 2018.
- 18 Douglas and Sarpy Counties Omaha Area Voter Turnout 2014, 2016, 2018 Executive Summary. Center for Public Affairs Research. University of Nebraska at Omaha. 2018.
- 19 <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2014/09/03/who-runs-for-office-a-profile-of-the-2/>

CIVIC HEALTH INDEX

State and Local Partnerships

NCoC began America's Civic Health Index in 2006 to measure the level of civic engagement and health of our democracy. In 2009, NCoC was incorporated into the Edward M. Kennedy Serve America Act and directed to expand this civic health assessment in partnership with the Corporation for National and Community Service and the US Census Bureau.

NCoC now works with partners in more than 30 communities nationwide 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
Secretary of the State of Connecticut

District of Columbia

ServeDC

Florida

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

Georgia

GeorgiaForward
Carl Vinson Institute of Government,
The University of Georgia
Georgia Family Connection Partnership

Illinois

McCormick Foundation

Indiana

Center on Congress at Indiana University
Indiana Bar Foundation
Indiana Supreme Court
Indiana University Northwest
IU Center for Civic Literacy
IUPUI

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

Massachusetts

Harvard Institute of Politics

Michigan

Michigan Nonprofit Association
Michigan Campus Compact
Michigan Community Service Commission
Volunteer Centers of Michigan
Council of Michigan Foundations

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

Civic Nebraska
Nebraska Community Foundation
University of Nebraska Public Policy Center
UNL Center for Civic Engagement
UNO Service Learning Academy
Nebraska State Bar Foundation

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

Miami University Hamilton Center for Civic Engagement

Oklahoma

University of Central Oklahoma
Oklahoma Campus Compact

Pennsylvania

Center for Democratic Deliberation
National Constitution Center

South Carolina

University of South Carolina Upstate

Texas

The Annette Strauss Institute for Civic Life,
University of Texas at Austin

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
CIRCLE

Economic Health

Knight Foundation
Corporation for National & Community Service (CNCS)
CIRCLE

CITIES

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

Missouri State University
Park University
Washington University

Miami

Florida Joint Center for Citizenship
John S. and James L. Knight Foundation
Miami Foundation

Pittsburgh

University of Pittsburgh
Carnegie Mellon University

Seattle

Seattle City Club

Twin Cities

Center for Democracy and Citizenship
Citizens League
John S. and James L. Knight Foundation

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Former Governor of Florida

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