

Decision 2020: Electing Indiana's Future

Civic Health

SEPTEMBER 2020 • ISSUE 20-EIF08-01



INDIANA UNIVERSITY
PUBLIC POLICY INSTITUTE
Center for Civic Literacy

INTRODUCTION

The civic health of our communities and our state is critically important to our overall economic progress, societal strength and resilience, and our future success. While this term may not be as familiar as other measurements used to gauge community progress, it provides a host of vital information. Civic health reflects the degree to which citizens participate in their communities, from local and state governance to interactions with friends or family. Civic health also relates to the overall well-being of neighborhoods, communities, states, and the nation. There are many indicators of civic health in a community and state, from voting to participating in community life, which builds a culture of civic engagement that enhances our economic, social, and political well-being.

Indiana has conducted four civic health report cards over an eight-year period from 2011 to 2019 that includes two major election cycles to analyze trends over time. The most recent edition of the Indiana Civic Health Index was conducted in 2019 and includes two specific recommendations for future action. The two recommendations outline strategies for expanding and improving civic education programs and opportunities, as well as improving voting rates in Indiana. These two goals are crucial to advancing the state of our civic health. They are also deeply intertwined with one another, hence the need to design an integrated approach to addressing the complex nature of advancing our civic health. There is now sufficient evidence from previous reports and other research to suggest that by focusing on these two areas, civic education and voting, we can significantly improve Indiana's civic health. This will require a concerted effort from all stakeholders interested in supporting citizen participation in its many forms, the result of which will be a more vibrant, successful, and engaged Indiana and nation.

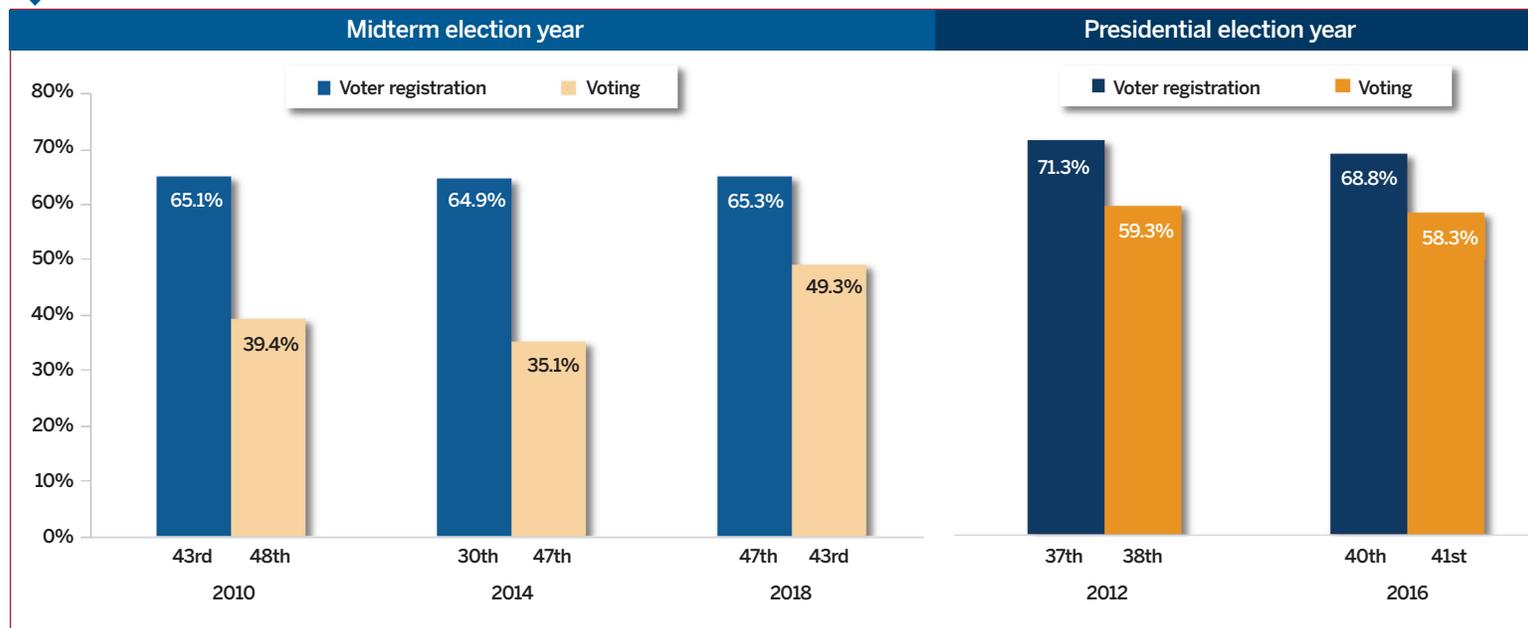
When we recognize the contributions of all Hoosiers to our overall civic health, we broaden and deepen our understanding and connections. The data in the aforementioned reports reveal the patterns of our civic engagement and the commitment of Hoosiers to building a civically engaged Indiana. During the period of analysis, our performance relative to that of other states has improved in key areas, including measures of working with neighbors and attending public meetings. These civic actions speak to our need to connect to our communities and government. In other areas, we identify our opportunities for demonstrating a renewed commitment to improving our civic health, including voting and voter registration.

VOTING

The Current Population Survey Voting and Registration Supplements examine Indiana's performance compared to that of other states. One of the areas in which Indiana has lagged behind the national average is in voting. Indiana's voter turnout ranking has consistently placed the state in the bottom tier, as shown in Table 1. In the 2012 and 2016 presidential election years, Indiana's voter turnout rates resulted in ranks of 38 and 41, respectively. In the 2010, 2014, and 2018 midterm election years, Indiana ranked 48th, 47th, and 43rd, respectively, on voter turnout. Voter registration rates during this period were also low in comparison to other states. Indiana consistently placed in the bottom half of all states. The highest rank achieved on voter registration during this period was the rank of 37th, occurring both in 2012 and 2018. These results make clear that on these measures



Figure 1. Indiana voter registration and voting: comparison of midterm and presidential election years, 2010–2018



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Survey, 2010–2018

of civic participation (i.e., voter turnout and registration), continued dialogue and strategic actions will be critical to building civic engagement and securing the future of Indiana’s civic health.

We must also raise awareness and ask questions related to voting and voter registration. While the national average for voting and voter registration was lower in 2016 than in 2012, the decline in Indiana was more than twice that of the nation in both forms of civic engagement.

Figure 2. Indiana voter turnout during presidential election years, 1972–2016



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Survey, 1972–2016

Looking at some of the voting data in more depth did reveal some encouraging areas. Improvements were seen in voting and voter registration rates among younger voters, even as participation among those 45 years and older generally declined.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Turning to measurements of how Hoosiers are involved with their communities in ways other than voting leads to some positive findings. Hoosiers are active participants in their communities, engaging at high rates in a variety of volunteer, family, group, and nonelectoral activities. It is our sense of community that drives Hoosiers to connect locally, explore their differences, express their views, and contribute to the well-being of their friends, family, and neighbors. In each of these ways, Indiana ranks in the top half of all states. Exploring these strengths is the first step toward

enhancing our civic health. The next step is to identify ways to leverage our skills and talents to connect and contribute to the larger whole, including our state and the nation. We can creatively build on our local identity to further progress at all levels. Given our high levels of engagement in a variety of activities, we also can serve as a model for others to follow. Table 2 summarizes the areas of Hoosier excellence in community and political engagement.

Community involvement is a broad indicator of civic health. There are many ways for Hoosiers to participate in their communities, whether those communities are rural, urban, or suburban. They include joining an organization, volunteering, and developing social connections that come from spending time with family and neighbors. Our engagement in civic life speaks to our sense of community. It also speaks to the ways in which we contribute to and value our communities. It is through community

Table 1. Indiana voting and registration by age group, 2012 and 2016

	Age group						
	18-24	25-34	35-44	45-54	55-64	65-74	75+
Voting (2012)	36.4%	44.5%	52.4%	68.2%	71.6%	76.2%	69.6%
Voting (2016)	43.0%	50.2%	59.7%	60.2%	63.7%	68.4%	66.6%
Registration (2012)	48.2%	57.7%	68.6%	74.7%	78.6%	79.9%	78.7%
Registration (2016)	57.6%	62.5%	69.0%	68.2%	73.3%	77.0%	79.0%

Source: U.S. Census Bureau: Current Population Survey, November Voting and Registration Supplement, 2012 and 2016

Table 2. Indicators of community and political involvement in Indiana, 2013 and 2017

Indicators	2013 ¹		2017	
	Rank	Rate	Rank	Rate
Political involvement				
Posting views on social, political, and local issues on the internet/social media	14	8.8%	2	10.5%
Frequently read, watch, or listen to news or information about social, political, local issues,	N/A	N/A	8	80.0%
Voted in last local election	N/A ²	N/A	20	55.3%
Contacted or visited a public official	30	11.1%	24	13.0%
Community involvement				
Group participation	20	40.2% ³	11	34.3%
Frequently hear from/spend time with friends and family	4	83.9%	12	87.7%
Frequently discuss political, social, or local issues with friends and family	18	30.4%	12	44.1%
Frequently talk/spend time with people of different racial, ethnic, or cultural background	N/A	N/A	17	58.5%
Donations to political organizations (\$25 or more)	N/A	N/A	18	9.5%
Volunteering	22	28.7%	20	34.9%
Frequently do favors for neighbors	25	12.7%	25	10.3%

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Survey Civic Engagement Supplement 2013 and 2015

Notes:

- 1) Volunteering data was obtained from the 2015 Current Population Survey Civic Engagement Supplement. All other data was obtained from the 2013 Supplement.
- 2) In 2017, the question related to voting behaviors was modified. The 2017 question asks respondents to indicate, with a yes or no, if they voted in the last election. Prior to 2017, respondents were asked if they voted in local elections and at what frequency, i.e., always, sometimes, rarely, and never. Data reported for 2016 cannot be compared to that collected in the 2017 CPS.
- 3) Nationally, group participation rates fell. The declining national rate resulted in a higher rank for Indiana despite Indiana's lower rate of group participation.

involvement that we develop new and enrich existing relationships, by sharing ideas and engaging in dialogue. We join groups, volunteer, and connect with one another as a community, as state residents, and as citizens of our country.

The degree to which an individual participates in civic life is a reflection of many different influences and conditions. It is important to note that differences in civic participation can be observed across geographic and educational lines. Recognizing and understanding these differences, as well as similarities, will assist us as we design and implement inclusive strategies for improving civic engagement.

From 2012 to 2016, the data reveals that urban areas experienced positive change in the areas of volunteering, working with neighbors, and attending public meetings. In rural areas, charitable giving rose two percent during the same time period. The gains in suburban areas were minimal. All indicators of volunteering and giving in suburban areas declined with the exception of volunteering which rose by 0.3 percent. While improvements did occur in particular geographic areas, Indiana's overall ranking on these indicators suggests that there is much work to be done. The highest participation rates in these categories occurred in suburban areas, and never exceeded one-third of the population. On a positive note, the findings also show that Hoosier communities strongly value charitable giving and believe in supporting our public well-being, despite our differences and unique socioeconomic and geographic experiences.

LOOKING FORWARD

So where does all of this leave us? As stated previously, the most recent Indiana Civic Health Index issued recommendations focused on two areas which can help drive significant change in Indiana and raise many of the state's underperforming metrics reflected in the Civic Health Index. The first recommendation focuses on improving civic education throughout the state.

Civic Education Task Force

In recent years, many states have formed civic education task forces to examine their state's current policies and investigate methods for improving civic education and promoting informed and active citizens. In 2014, Illinois formed the Civic Education Task Force, which looked at state policies and recommended requiring civic education in high school, revising Illinois Social Science Standards, requiring a service-learning project in middle and high school, and involving students in the election process. The 2014 Illinois task force led to the development of the Democracy Schools Initiative which recognizes and supports high schools that are dedicated to expanding civic learning using five common elements: vision and leadership, curriculum, professional development, community engagement, and a respectful school climate. The California Civic Learning Task Force, formed in 2013, came to similar conclusions and included revising the California History-Social Science Content Standards, including civic learning in state assessments, and working with community stakeholders to connect education to the community.

Table 3. Civic health indicators: community trends, 2012 and 2016

Volunteering and giving	Urban		Suburban		Rural	
	2012	2016	2012	2016	2012	2016
Volunteering	26.4%	27.0%	32.6%	32.9%	27.7%	27.2%
Attending public meeting	9.1%	9.5%	8.1%	8.1%	6.2%	4.8%
Working with neighbors	10.1%	11.8%	8.4%	5.4%	4.6%	5.9%
Charitable giving	53.4%	50.4%	68.6%	63.9%	38.2%	40.0%
Voting	Urban		Suburban		Rural	
	2012	2016	2012	2016	2012	2016
Voting	59.1%	54.7%	65.1%	63.1%	50.3%	57.1%
Registration	69.5%	64.9%	74.3%	72.9%	60.0%	71.5%

Sources: Volunteering and Giving (CPS 2013 September Volunteering Supplement, 16+); Voting and Registrations (CPS 2012 November Voting and Registration Supplement, 18+ Citizens); Interactions with Neighbors (CPS 2013 November Civic Engagement Supplement, 18+); Communication with Family and Friends (CPS 2013 November Civic Engagement Supplement, 18+); Political Involvement (CPS 2013 November Civic Engagement Supplement, 18+); Group Membership (CPS 2013 November Civic Engagement Supplement, 18+); Confidence in Public Institutions, (CPS 2013 November Civic Engagement Supplement, 18+)

As a result of the 2019 Indiana Civic Health Index and the specific recommendation focused on improving civic education, the Indiana Bar Foundation, with significant support from the Lumina Foundation, created a civic education task force to move the issue forward. In February 2020 the newly formed task force, chaired by Lt. Gov. Suzanne Crouch, began its work with the goal of preparing a report with specific, actionable recommendations based on research and ideas from around the country and the state. Those recommendations will be issued in late 2020. The primary objective of the task force's recommendations is to move the needle on Indiana's overall civic health.

Increasing Voter Turnout

The second recommendation focused on improving Indiana's voter turnout and participation rates, and moving Indiana from the bottom 10 of states to the top 10 of states. The Indiana Citizen Education Foundation, known as The Indiana Citizen, was created in order to pursue that goal. This new nonpartisan nonprofit organization was founded by Bill Moreau, one of the contributing authors of the 2019 Indiana Civic Health Index, to address Indiana's persistent low voter turnout and engagement. The goal of the Indiana Citizen is to implement Indiana's first concerted, nonpartisan, statewide campaign to encourage all eligible Hoosiers to register and vote.

A look at the top 10 states shows that Indiana would need to improve turnout by 20 percent to join their ranks. More specifically, the goal is to reach 750,000 of the state's estimated 1.7 million unregistered voters and to provide them with the support they need to register, understand the issues, evaluate candidates, and exercise their right to vote. If the Indiana Citizen can meet its goals, it would catapult Indiana from the bottom 10 of states in voting turnout to the top 10 of states

CONCLUSION

Many Hoosiers who are in fact actively engaged in the civic life of our state have reacted with surprise and disappointment at Indiana's low rankings for voter registration and turnout. Such low rankings fly in the face of our perception—buttressed by some of the more promising data in these reports—that Hoosiers are engaged citizens. Success in this concerted effort to improve voting and civic education in Indiana will benefit all Hoosiers.

Indiana Bar Foundation Civic Education Task Force Members:

Chair: Suzanne Crouch, Indiana Lieutenant Governor

Dr. Lemuel Watson, Dean, Indiana University School of Education

Sen. J.D. Ford, Indiana Senate District 29

Sen. R. Michael Young, Indiana Senate District 35

Rep. Tonya Pfaff, Indiana House District 43

Rep. Tony Cook, Indiana House District 32

Hon. Connie Lawson, Indiana Secretary of State

Hon. Loretta Rush, Chief Justice, Indiana Supreme Court

Amy Dudas, Immediate Past Board Chair, Indiana Bar Foundation

Scott Barnhart, Board Chair, Indiana Bar Foundation

Janet Chandler, Social Studies Teacher, Hamilton Southeastern High School

Dr. Laura Hammack, Superintendent, Brown County School Corporation

Dennis Bland, President, Center for Leadership Development

Dr. Elizabeth Osborn, President, Indiana Council on Social Studies

Kevin Brinegar, President & CEO, Indiana Chamber of Commerce

Dr. Eva Zygmunt, Professor, Ball State University Teachers College

Honorary Members:

Hon. Randall Shepard, Former Chief Justice of Indiana

Hon. Greg Zoeller, Former Indiana Attorney General

Hon. Lee Hamilton, Former Member of the U.S. House of Representatives

Bill Moreau, President, Indiana Citizen Education Foundation

Indiana University Center for Civic Literacy

The Center for Civic Literacy is a multi-disciplinary center. It was first established with support from an IUPUI Signature Center grant. It was created in response to recognition of Americans' troublingly low levels of civic knowledge, and to investigate both the causes and consequences of widespread civic illiteracy—the lack of basic knowledge needed to make informed public judgments. Our mission is to increase public understanding of our civic deficit and its effect on democratic decision-making, and to identify and promote the use of effective tools to help educators and others correct the problem. The Center for Civic Literacy fulfills its mission through scholarly research and publication, public teaching, and community-based partnerships.

Indiana University Public Policy Institute

The Indiana University Public Policy Institute produces unbiased, high-quality research, analyses and policy guidance to promote positive change and improve the quality of life in communities across Indiana and the nation. Our clients use our research to enhance their programs and services, to develop strategies and policies, to evaluate the impact of their decisions—and ultimately to help the people they serve. Established in 1992, PPI is part of the IU O'Neill School of Public and Environmental Affairs.

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Every four years, in conjunction with Indiana's gubernatorial election, the IU Public Policy Institute (PPI) sponsors a Gubernatorial Candidates Forum. This year's event will be broadcast by WFYI and other Indiana Public Broadcasting Stations, as well as available for viewing at go.iu.edu/Decision2020. The event is intended to further the mission of PPI and its Center for Civic Literacy (CCL) to produce unbiased, high-quality research, analyses, and policy guidance to promote positive change and improve the quality of life in communities across Indiana and the nation.

Cities and states today face significant issues and their elected officials have considerable latitude in addressing those issues.

In Indiana, the 2020 gubernatorial and legislative elections will determine how the state pursues policies in education, infrastructure, taxation, health care, environmental policy, and much more. These policies affect us in meaningful and sustained ways on a daily basis. In order to cast an informed vote, citizens must understand what the issues are, the candidates' approaches to those issues, and the legal and political systems within which they must make their preferred policies work.

CCL faculty and staff identified key policy areas facing Indiana in 2020, and enlisted experts in each of those areas. The resulting issue briefs provide policymakers and citizens with important context, background, and identify critical policy issues. Each brief is based upon research and analysis of available data about the state of Indiana, and includes comparisons with other states as well as national trends. Each guide also points readers to local and state level resources offering additional information on the topic.

We thank Lumina Foundation for its support for this project and the forum.



This publication was prepared by the Indiana University Public Policy Institute (PPI) and Center for Civic Literacy and is part of the Decision 2020: Electing Indiana's Future series of publications.



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