



# CALIFORNIA CIVIC HEALTH INDEX

# 2010



*Financial Crisis, Civic Engagement  
and the "New Normal"*



**CA**forward Center for Civic Education



PEPPERDINE  
UNIVERSITY  
School of Public Policy

DAVENPORT INSTITUTE  
for Public Engagement and Civic Leadership

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

- I EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**
- 2 INTRODUCTION**
- 4 POLITICAL CIVIC ENGAGEMENT**
- 8 SOCIAL CIVIC ENGAGEMENT**
- 12 RECOMMENDATIONS**
- 13 ENDNOTES**

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

### **Pete Peterson**

Executive Director, Davenport Institute for Public Engagement and Civic Leadership, Pepperdine University, School of Public Policy

### **Zabrae Valentine**

Deputy Director, California Forward

### **Richard Raya**

Policy Director, California Forward

### **Maria Gallo**

National Director, School of Violence Prevention Program  
Center for Civic Education

### **Suzanne Soule**

Director of Research, Center for Civic Education

### **Jessie Oettinger**

Student (MPP '11), Goldman School of Public Policy, University of California, Berkeley

### **Surbhi Godsay**

Researcher, The Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement (CIRCLE) of The Jonathan M. Tisch College of Citizenship and Public Service at Tufts University

## **STATE PARTNERS**

**Zabrae Valentine**, California Forward

**Pete Peterson**, Davenport Institute for Public Engagement and Civic Leadership

**Maria Gallo**, Center for Civic Education

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The term “civic engagement” has become one of the more vague in public policy discussions. More than any other national organization, the Congressionally chartered National Conference on Citizenship (NCoC) has sought to bring clarity to this very important subject through survey research and promoting civic participation. Their annual “Civic Health Index” studies American civic engagement on activities ranging from voting to volunteering to many in between. For the last three years, NCoC has also focused on California for one of its state-level reports. To help define the term, this year’s report is divided into “political civic engagement” (voting and registering to vote, discussing politics with friends/neighbors) and “social civic engagement” (volunteering, having dinner with family, working on community problems).

As with so many things related to California, the 2010 *California Civic Health Index* illustrates both the challenges to and promises of building a healthy civic culture in the state. **In both its political and social findings, the results outlined in this report demonstrate that although Californians confront many hurdles to participation, they are responding positively with several engagement trend lines moving upward.**

The data discussed in this survey demonstrate that California has great room for improvement when it comes to the civic engagement of its residents. But the data also suggest that there has been and will continue to be progress in this area. At a time when the prognosis for traditional political processes in California looks particularly bleak, residents and community leaders have an opportunity to work together in new ways to find new processes to replace those that are failing.

## VOTING

Californians seem to be mirroring the national average in many areas of civic engagement. They turned out to vote at nearly the same percentage seen nationally (63.4% and 63.6%, respectively), and at the midterm elections (47.8% in California and nationally). Although Californians are keeping up with the national average on most areas of civic engagement under review, the percentages remain well below ideal. California ranked 42nd among all states in voter-registration rate. While California saw a turnout of 68.2% of eligible voters, the national voter-registration rate for all eligible citizens in 2008 was 71.0%.

## SOLVING PROBLEMS AND TALKING POLITICS

Community collaboration and discussion of politics are also important areas to consider in the assessment of civic engagement.



**In 2009, 8.3% of Californians worked with neighbors to fix a problem, up from 5.7% in 2006 and just below the national average of 8.8%.** Attention to and discussion of politics are also areas that should be reviewed. Rates of news consumption and discussion in California are somewhat below the national average. Thirty-three percent of Californians discussed politics with friends and family at least a few times a week, ranking 46th in the nation.

## SERVICE AND VOLUNTEERING

Volunteers provide essential human capital needed to run many nonprofit and government service organizations. Between 2007 and 2009 an estimated 6.8 million Californians contributed their time to helping such organizations provide service to the larger community. In 2009, 24.6% of Californians reported volunteering at least once in the last 12 months, slightly lower than the national average of 26.8%; California ranks 39th among the states in percentage of residents who volunteer.

## COMMUNITY CONNECTIONS

In 2009, 8.3% of Californians say they work with neighbors to improve the community, slightly below the national average of 8.8%. In this measure of engagement, California ranks 33rd in the nation. On a less formal level, 13.8% of Californians exchange favors with neighbors a few times a week while the average for the entire country is 15.9%. Another informal method of social engagement is family connectivity. Nationally, 89.1% of Americans eat dinner with their family a few times a week. California ranks 41st in the nation with 87.8% of residents reporting that they eat with their family a few times a week. Leadership and group membership are both strong predictors of other forms of civic engagement. In California, the percentage of group members who volunteer is 43.2% while 83.1% of group leaders volunteer. More than a quarter of leaders have also worked with neighbors to improve the community.

# INTRODUCTION: CIVIC ENGAGEMENT IN CALIFORNIA: FROM BELL TO THE “NEW NORMAL”

There is some excuse for those who question the importance of civic engagement. For one thing, the term has become amorphous—covering any action from voting to volunteering. For another, most coverage of the subject is painted with the veneer of “good government,” giving it an air of saccharine sweetness.

**This leaves us with the question: Is our participation in the “public square” and our involvement in our communities really consequential?**

Like few stories in recent memory, the infamous government scandals uncovered in the City of Bell’s government demonstrated the dramatic importance of civic engagement.<sup>1</sup> The debacle in southern Los Angeles County powerfully reveals the importance of civic engagement—in both its political (voting, staying informed) and social (volunteering, working with others) manifestations. For while there are some aspects of the Bell story that are unique, there are others that point to what Harvard professor and New York City Deputy Mayor Stephen Goldsmith has dubbed the “new normal” in local and state governments.

State and federal investigations into the malfeasance committed in the small Los Angeles city continue. What is known at this point, however, is that the process, which resulted in unconscionable salary packages for several city staffers and elected officials, began at the ballot box in 2005.

Then, in an election in which less than 1% of Bell’s population of 37,000 residents participated, the decision was made to detach the city from state restrictions on municipal compensation. This allowed the city council to set their own and staff’s salaries far above the statewide average. Of course, the unethical decisions made by Bell’s political leaders are inexcusable, but increasing blame has also been heaped on the city’s residents.

A problem that began in an under-utilized voting booth was allowed to fester as Bell’s residents either did not, or could not, track their government’s spending over a five-year period. As the *Sacramento Bee* editorialized, “To ferret out malfeasance, reporters and prosecutors depend on attentive citizens who are helping to watchdog how their money is being spent. As the city of Bell demonstrates, the cost of disengaging is high indeed.”<sup>2</sup>

Because decades-long pensions are involved in this fiasco, if the 2005 election decision is allowed to stand, not only Bell’s taxpayers,



but taxpayers statewide will be held responsible for millions of dollars in benefits payments. What started as a local civic decision has become a real concern to all Californians.

The policies proposed in response to what has occurred have generally tended towards centralization and consolidation. Various calls have come for greater oversight by the State government, but as political commentator Joe Mathews opined, with more than 400 cities and thousands of governing agencies, “The state is in no position to keep an eye on all of California’s local governments. It needs citizens, engaged citizens, to be minding the store.”<sup>3</sup>

Respected local government thinker and current Ventura City Manager Rick Cole recently proposed a more localized approach, consolidating a number of Los Angeles-area cities (including Bell) into a larger municipality.<sup>4</sup> But while this may, in fact, be a “sensible step” as Cole describes, it illustrates the profound cost of civic disengagement: essentially the death penalty for a locally governed community.

The Bell story is anomalous in many respects, but it does highlight several important issues related to “civic engagement.” The first is one of definition. Although as noted earlier, the phrase *civic engagement* is used to describe a variety of activities, civic engagement is better understood as including two separate but related categories of involvement. Activities such as voting, staying informed by reading local news sources, or discussing community concerns with your neighbors, constitute the *political* side of engagement, all of which appeared to be entirely lacking (for a variety of reasons) in Bell. At the same time, there is also a *social* element to civic engagement.

Eating meals with the family, volunteering, and working with neighbors to fix local problems—all of these play an important role in building a healthy community.

The face of local government in California is changing as it confronts fiscal crises related to the statewide economic crisis. The aforementioned deputy mayor of New York City, Stephen Goldsmith, has popularly titled this era as the “new normal.” A combination of declining revenues and increased expenditures on pensions and retirement benefits has resulted in what he describes as an “enduring reality that must be confronted. Crisis is now the norm.”<sup>5</sup> As municipalities—both cities and states—cut back services, the importance of social civic engagement grows tremendously, Goldsmith explains, “Public officials who wish to be on the right side of the right sizing movement must create structures that facilitate participation.”<sup>6</sup>

The second issue raised by Bell’s predicament is contextual. As in California more broadly, Bell’s deteriorating economy is particularly reflected in high unemployment rates. Since the global economy began to falter in 2007, California has continued to experience unemployment rates much higher than the national average (12%+), with the Los Angeles-area rating even worse.<sup>7</sup>

Along with the rest of California, Bell has a high level of ethnic diversity. Demographics and diversity also help define the contextual test to civic engagement. In his interesting 2007 study of the relationship between ethnic heterogeneity and civic participation, *E Pluribus Unum*, sociologist Robert Putnam found that diversity generally relates inversely to engagement.<sup>8</sup> In a study of 41 American cities, Putnam and his team of researchers discovered that, while diversity offers great opportunities for creative civic problem-solving in the long-run, it also presents challenges to collaboration related to language and culture (at least in the short-term).

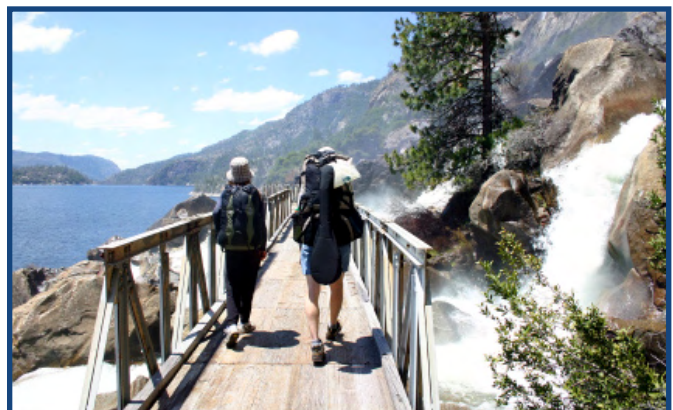
As with so many things related to California, the *2010 California Civic Health Index* illustrates both the challenges to and promises of building a healthy civic culture in the state. In both its political and social findings, the results outlined in this report demonstrate that although Californians confront many hurdles to participation, they are responding positively with several engagement trend lines moving upward.

Civic engagement, both political and social, increases government responsibility and stewardship, helps create effective solutions

to political and economic problems, and strengthens the trust of residents for their local governments and of local governments for their residents. Today, in the era of Goldsmith’s “new normal,” civic engagement is more vital than ever, especially in a state as diverse as California.

The data discussed in this survey demonstrate that California has great room for improvement when it comes to the civic engagement of its residents. But they also suggest that there has been and will continue to be progress in this area. At a time when the prognosis for traditional political processes in the State of California looks particularly bleak, residents and community leaders have an opportunity to work together in new ways to find new processes to replace those that are failing. This year, the Bell Scandal sparked renewed concern in the condition of local government for many Californians, and may prove a valuable catalyst for motivating civic engagement.

Civic engagement is a process that must be learned by both governments and private citizens. But it is a process that can be learned and expanded throughout the State of California. As we head into the second decade of the new millennium facing unique social and economic challenges, there is no better time to learn these lessons.



# POLITICAL CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

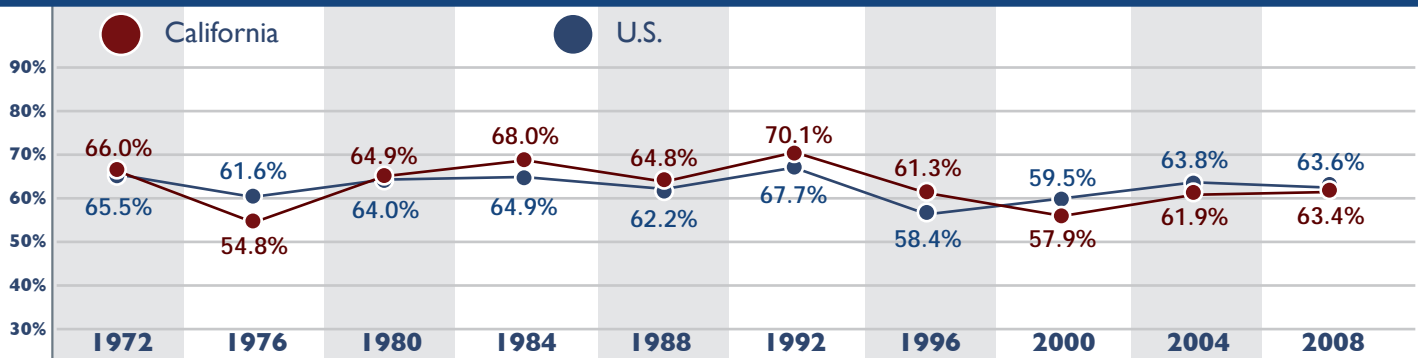
Civic engagement broadly encompasses many forms of political and civic activities. These include registering to vote, voting, attending community meetings, working with others to improve one's community, discussing politics and paying attention to public affairs. All of these activities build both political and social capital for individuals, their communities, and the states they live in. The composite measure of these is an indication of the state's civic health.



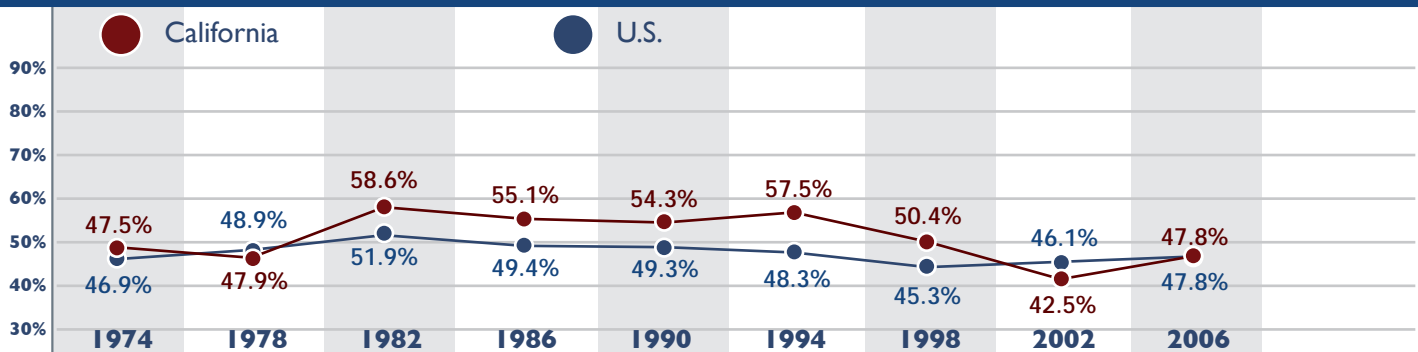
## THE GOOD NEWS

Californians seem to be mirroring the national average in many areas of civic engagement. We turned out in 2008 to vote at nearly the same percentage seen nationally (63.4% and 63.6%, respectively), and at the midterm elections (47.8% in California and nationally). Californians also volunteer close to the national percentage (24.6% and 26.8%, respectively) and work with their neighbors to solve

**FIGURE 1: VOTER TURNOUT AMONG CITIZENS 18+ FOR PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS IN CALIFORNIA AND THE UNITED STATES (1972-2008)**



**FIGURE 2: VOTER TURNOUT AMONG CITIZENS 18+ FOR MIDTERM ELECTIONS IN CALIFORNIA AND THE UNITED STATES (1974 TO 2006)**



community problems (8.3% in California and 8.8% nationally). In examining how Californians compare to the nation, it is important to also look at other states with similar size and similar demographics. Compared with Texas and New York, Californians exceeded their averages on every area of civic engagement measured.

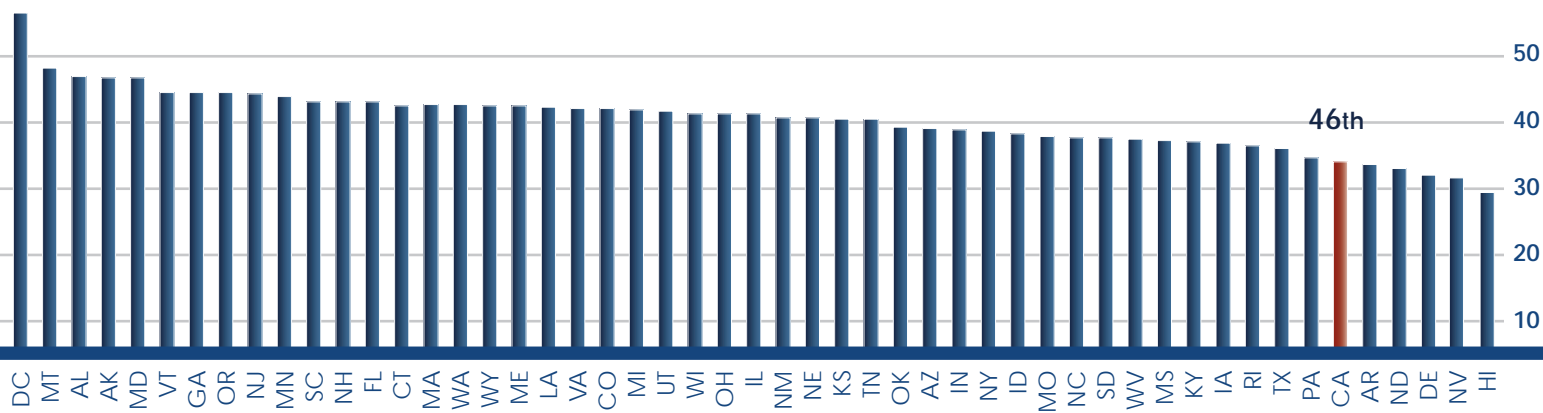
California ranked 33rd in voter turnout for the November 2008 election, with the rate of 63.4% for citizens age 18 and over. Although the ranking is low, the 2008 turnout nearly matched the national average of 63.6%. Since 2000, voter turnout in California has increased from 57.9% in 2000, to 61.9% in 2004 and to 63.4% in 2008. Midterm voter turnout similarly shows an upward trend after 2002, with 47.8% of California voters going to the polls in 2006.

Community collaboration and discussion of politics are also important areas to consider in the assessment of civic engagement. Access to news and political discussion builds social capital; those who report high news consumption and high political discussion are far more

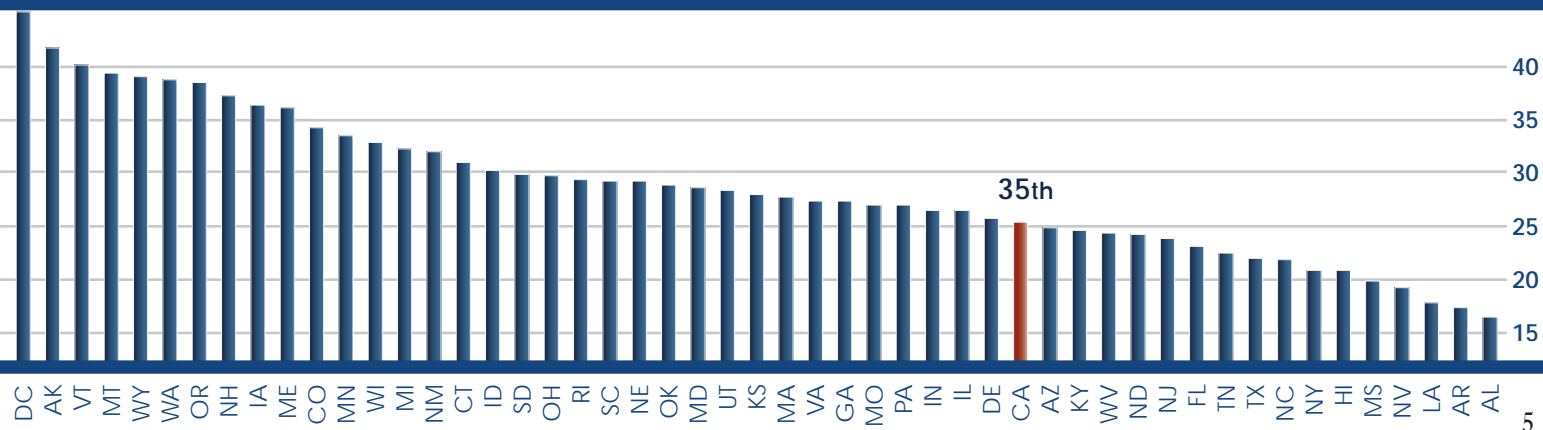
likely to volunteer than those who report low news consumption and low political discussions. Similarly, access to information also predicts whether people fix something in the community with neighbors. Those who keep up with news and discuss politics are more likely to donate money than those who do not.

In 2009, 8.3% of Californians worked with neighbors to fix a problem, up from 5.7% in 2006 and just below the national average of 8.8%. Attention to and discussion of politics are also areas that should be reviewed. Rates of news consumption and discussion in California are somewhat below the national average. Thirty-three percent of Californians discussed politics with friends and family at least a few times a week, ranking 46th in the nation. Younger Californians are more disengaged from news, with 48.1% neither consuming nor discussing the news (about six percentage points difference from the national average), whereas older Californians are somewhat more connected to news than their contemporaries nationally.

**FIGURE 3: DISCUSS POLITICS WITH FAMILY AND FRIENDS**  
 2008 - 2009 NATIONAL AVERAGE - 39.3% CALIFORNIA - 33.4%



**FIGURE 4: PARTICIPATE IN ONE OR MORE NON-ELECTORAL POLITICAL ACTIVITIES**  
 2008 - 2009 NATIONAL AVERAGE - 26.3% CALIFORNIA - 25.1%

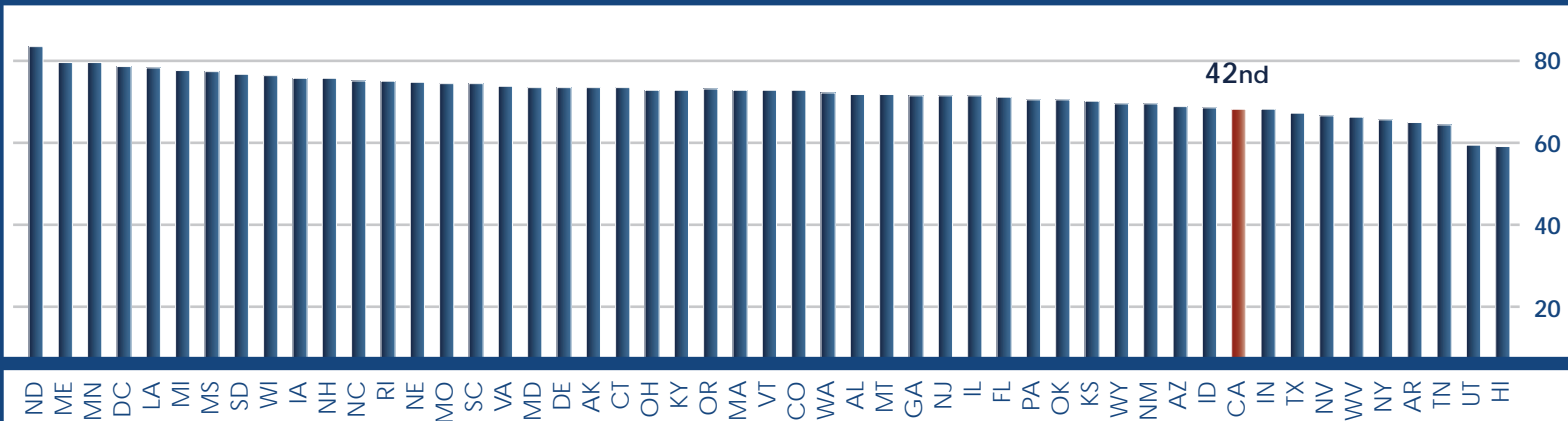


## THE BAD NEWS

Although Californians are keeping up with the national average on most of the areas of civic engagement under review, the percentages remain well below ideal. California ranked 42nd among all states in voter-registration rate. While California saw a turnout of 68.2% of eligible voters, the national voter registration rate for all eligible citizens in 2008 was 71.0%. Voting trends are on the rise in California, again mirroring the national average.

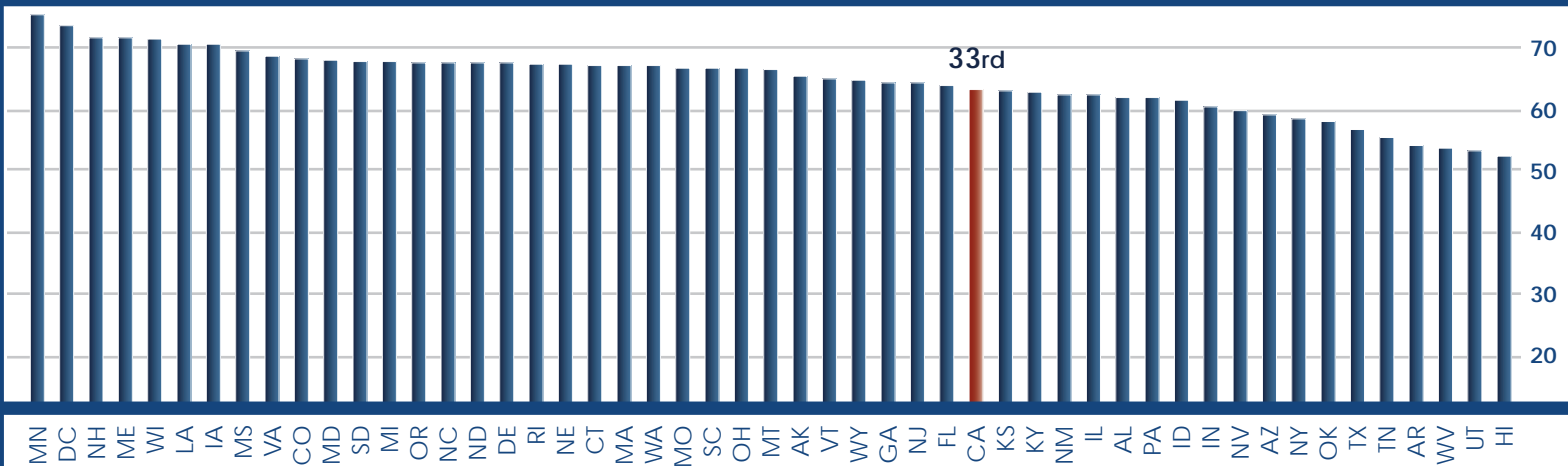
### FIGURE 5: VOTER REGISTRATION

2008 NATIONAL AVERAGE - 71% CALIFORNIA - 68.2%



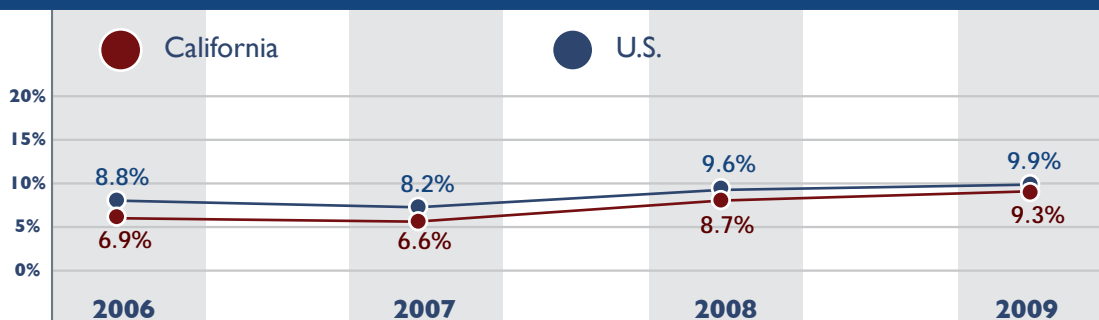
### FIGURE 6: VOTER TURNOUT

2008 NATIONAL AVERAGE - 63.6% CALIFORNIA - 63.4%



However, all Californians need to be encouraged to engage with the news and to discuss politics, particularly younger Californians. Better-informed citizens participate more, including working to improve community problems, taking on a leadership role in one's community, and donating money to campaigns.

### FIGURE 7: ATTENDING PUBLIC MEETINGS





Recent studies have demonstrated that those with less money and less education, and are a minority, are less likely to participate in the political process. In a 2004 report, the American Political Science Association Task Force on Inequality and American Democracy concluded that:

The privileged participate more than others and are increasingly well organized to press their demands on government. Public officials, in turn, are much more responsive to the privileged than to average citizens and the least affluent. Citizens with low or moderate incomes speak with a whisper that is lost on the ears of inattentive government, while the advantaged roar with the clarity and consistency that policymakers readily heed (p. 1).

Americans 25 years of age and older who have no college experience are far less likely (21.5%) to access information and engage in political conversation than those who have college experience (37.0%). This translates into political action; those who discuss politics with others are more likely to engage civically in a wide array of behaviors, including voicing political opinions, voting, volunteering, and working to improve the community with neighbors.<sup>9</sup>

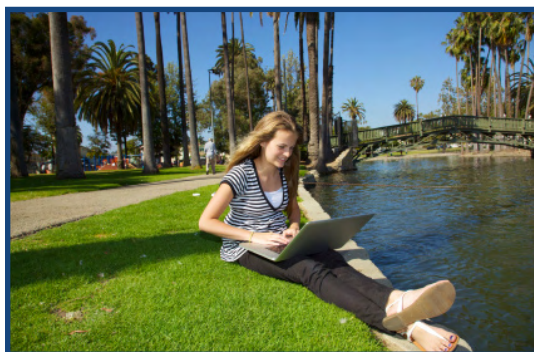
Approximately 20% of Californians in 2008 did not graduate from high school. Large urban areas in California are of special concern. Using data obtained from the 2003-04 academic year, The Editorial Projects in Education Research Center demonstrated that urban students graduate at a rate of 15 percentage points lower than their suburban peers.<sup>10</sup> On the national level, nearly one-quarter of all students who fail to graduate high school with a diploma live in one of the 50 largest cities.<sup>11</sup> Repeated studies have shown that level of education is strongly related to political participation. While 57% of U.S. citizens aged 18-29 attended college, they represented 70% of young voters.<sup>12</sup> Meanwhile, only 6% of youth with less than a high school diploma voted. This group comprises 14% of the young population. Further, of the 29% of the population with only a high school diploma, 24% voted.<sup>13</sup>

Although California's population of more than 36 million residents is increasing in diversity, those participating in the political process are not representing that diversity. Growing diversity increases the importance of providing interactive civic education to all students. Civic education is essential to providing Californians with needed opportunities to engage in discussion of current events and to garner the knowledge and skills to effectively participate in the political process. The current requirement of one semester-long government course at grade 12 may be too little and too late, both for those who drop out of school or who arrive as adults.

## CIVIC EDUCATION FOUND TO PROMOTE CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

Several studies over the last two decades have affirmed that civic education can have a significant effect on a student's political knowledge and engagement.<sup>14</sup> More recent research has specified certain interactive and high-quality classroom techniques that are essential to creating an enlightened and engaged citizenry.<sup>15</sup> In a 2010 study, Dr. Diana Owen of Georgetown University found that Americans who reported having participated in a civic-education class that included an interactive component were more politically knowledgeable and more civically engaged.<sup>16</sup>

In a 2009 Department of Education publication on the achievement gap in California, the State Superintendent of Public Instruction stated that "The state can no longer ignore the fact that major segments of the next generation continue to fall short of their potential. Quite simply, the achievement gap among student subgroups is a threat to their future and to the future economic health and security of California and of this nation."<sup>17</sup> Increasing interactive civic-education programs may narrow the gap in the educational divide. A recent study by Joseph Kahne at Mills College found that classroom civic learning opportunities can offset impact of neighborhood and home contexts. In other words, participating in a high-quality, interactive civic-education program can compensate and narrow the gap.<sup>18</sup> Similarly, in Campbell's paper "Voice in the Classroom: How an Open Classroom Climate Fosters Political Engagement Among Adolescents,"<sup>19</sup> he finds that quality civic-education practices had the largest impact on California low-income/high-needs students. Additionally, findings from a new longitudinal study on interactive civic education programs in California support that high-quality and engaging civic-learning opportunities promote civic and political engagement outside the classroom. Dr. Kahne demonstrated content-learning promoted interest in politics, interest in diverse opinions, a commitment to participatory citizenship and voting. Experience-centered learning promoted volunteerism, political action and expression, a commitment to participatory citizenship, and confidence in one's civic skills.<sup>20</sup> These studies provide strong evidence of the impact that civic education (or the lack thereof) can have on our children.



# SOCIAL CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

Civic engagement encompasses a wide range of activities undertaken to address issues of public concern. These actions can be overtly political, like voting and volunteering, or they can be subtler, like exchanging favors with a neighbor. In this section, we examine the components of civic engagement having to do with Californians' social interactions with each other and with their community.

The social capital produced by acts of social civic engagement helps create "networks, norms, and social trust that facilitate coordination and cooperation for mutual benefit."<sup>21</sup> These societal attributes are highly correlated with community ability to constructively and effectively tackle public problems. The idea of social capital includes both participation in public groups (like churches) and private sociability and connectedness with immediate family. These activities build trust among citizens and function as a training ground for collaborative problem solving.

In this period of financial hardship for both governments and individuals, it is perhaps more important than ever for communities to develop the skills needed to work together to solve problems.

## MEASURING CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

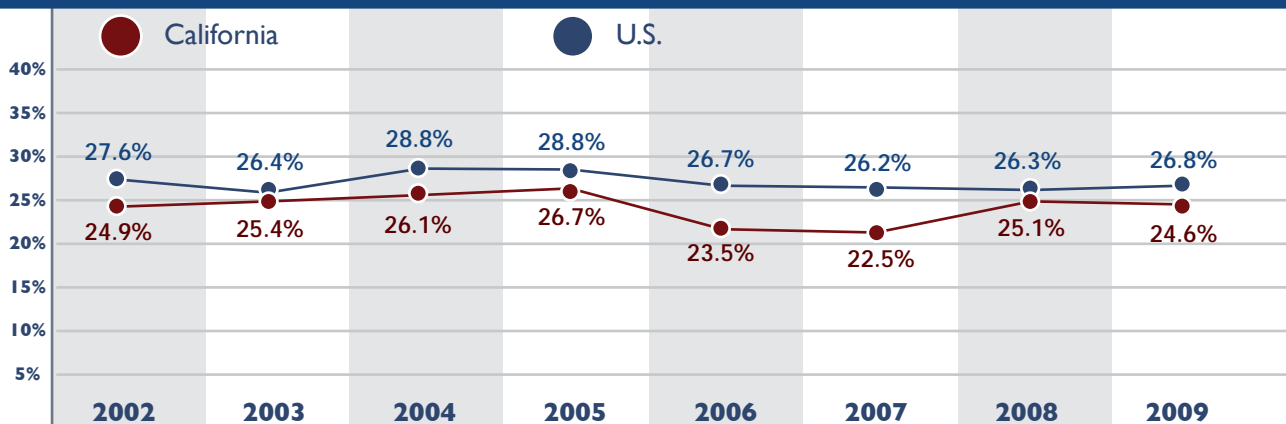
Because quantitative measures of "social capital" can be elusive, this study uses data on a combination of civic-engagement activities that correlate with creating trust. For the purposes of this report, Californians were asked to report how often they volunteer, their participation in groups and as leaders of groups, and the frequency and means by which they connect with others.



## SERVICE AND VOLUNTEERING

Volunteers provide essential human capital needed to run many non-profit and government service organizations. Between 2007 and 2009, an estimated 6.8 million Californians contributed their time to helping such organizations provide service to the larger community. In 2009, 24.6% of Californians reported volunteering at least once in the last 12 months, slightly lower than the national average of 26.8%. California ranks 39th among the states in percentage of residents who volunteer.

FIGURE 8: VOLUNTEERING (2002-2009)



Although it does not boast the highest volunteer rate, California is investing in an educational infrastructure to institutionalize and expand its service-learning programs throughout the state. Currently more than 160,000 students are providing more than 1.8 million volunteer service hours. Additionally, federal programs like Senior Corps, AmeriCorps, and Learn and Serve America engaged more than 230,000 Californian volunteers of all ages and brought in more than \$73 million in federal grants to improve the state.

### COMMUNITY CONNECTIONS

In the early 19th Century, Alexis deToqueville commented on the value of formal and informal associations in America. He recognized that the power of group associations to generate ideas and motivate actions was the building block of this new society and a necessary balance to the individualizing tendency of democracy. Tocqueville saw the two aspects of civic engagement closely linked. He explained that, on the one hand, social associations “facilitate political associations,” while “on the other hand, political association singularly develops and perfects civil association.”<sup>22</sup>

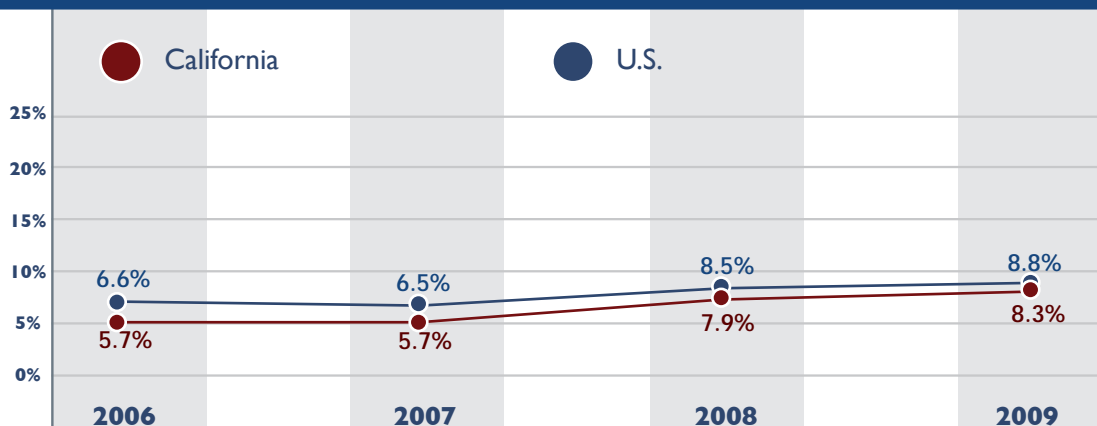
As technology rapidly changes the landscape of social networks and norms, this report looks at the kinds of connectivity Californians have to their families, neighbors, and communities. In a recent essay that questioned the impact of internet-based social networks on social movements, Malcolm Gladwell speculates that although online connectivity makes it easy to proliferate *ideas*, the kind of



collectivist *action* that was a hallmark of our Civil Rights Movement and other important social revolutions depends more on strong leadership and close, in-person relationships between movement participants.<sup>23</sup> Whether or not Gladwell is correct, it is certainly true that our community relationships, news consumption, and methods of conceptualizing solutions are rapidly changing with the advent of new forms of communication. As Californians work to effect change in their communities, proliferation of information and forms of social interactions both will play a large role.

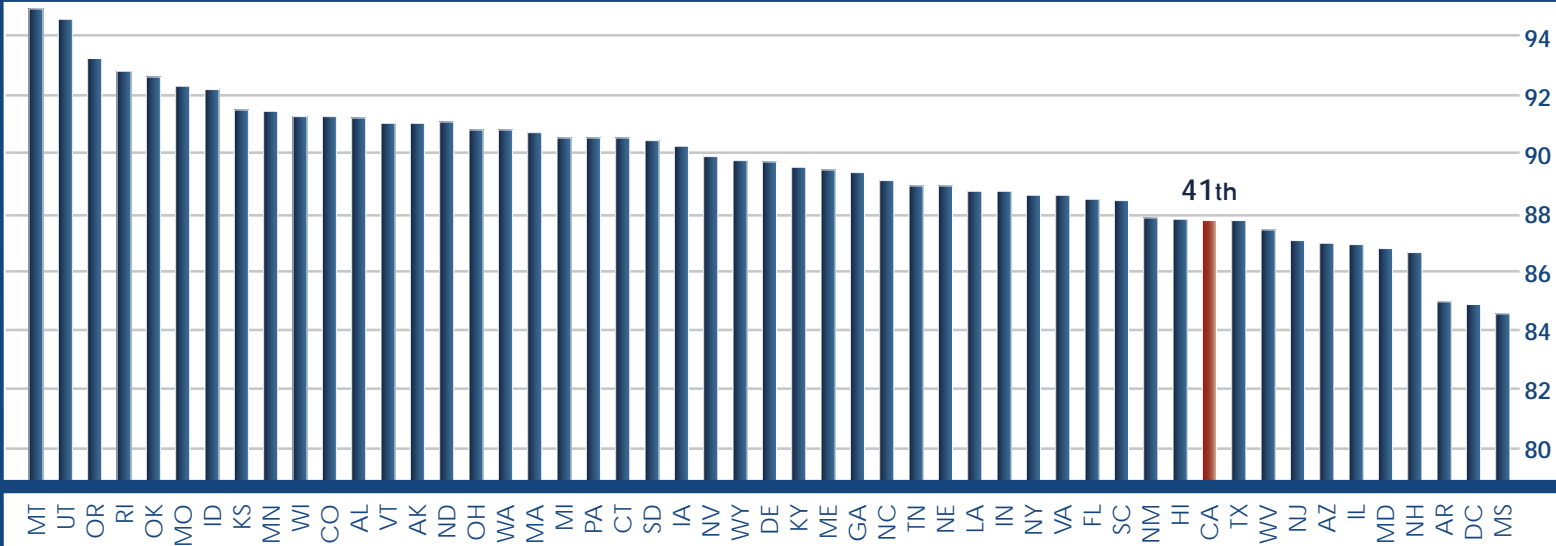
Over the last few years, the rate at which Americans report working with neighbors to improve the community has increased: 8.3% of Californians say they work with neighbors to improve the community, slightly below a national average of 8.8%.

**FIGURE 9: WORKED WITH NEIGHBORS**



In this measure of engagement, California ranks 33rd in the nation. On a less formal level, 13.8% of Californians exchange favors with neighbors a few times a week, while the average for the entire country is 15.9%. These informal actions are greatly affected by geography: Californians who live in rural communities are far more likely to regularly exchange favors (21.9%) than those in urban areas (11.9%). Another informal method of social engagement is family connectivity. Nationally, 89.1% of Americans eat dinner with their families a few times a week. California ranks 41st in the nation, with 87.8% of residents reporting that they eat with their families a few times a week.

**FIGURE 10: EAT DINNER WITH FAMILY AND HOUSEHOLD MEMBERS**  
 2009 NATIONAL AVERAGE - 89.1%      CALIFORNIA - 87.8%



Membership in community groups ranging from sports leagues to community service clubs to Bible studies has fallen steadily over the last 40 years, but 31.5% of Californians still report belonging to some kind of group. Of these, about 7% report serving in some kind of leadership role. California ranks 44th in the nation on this measure of civic engagement. Nationally, 35.1% of Americans are members of groups and 10.1% say they have served in a leadership capacity.

Leadership and group membership are both strong predictors of other forms of civic engagement. Those who report group affiliation and leadership have higher rates volunteering and working with neighbors to improve the community. In California, the percentage of group members who volunteer is 43.2%, while 83.1% of group leaders volunteer. More than a quarter of leaders have worked with neighbors to improve the community.

**FIGURE 11: TYPES OF ORGANIZATIONS WHERE CALIFORNIANS VOLUNTEER**

	Yes	No
Church group or religious association	14.1%	85.9%
Sports or recreation association	9.7%	90.3%
Service or civic association	5.1%	94.9%
School group	13.1%	86.9%

## CALIFORNIA, NEW YORK, AND TEXAS

For the 2010 *Civic Health Index*, thirteen states and four cities elected to do location-specific reporting. These reports allow us to examine specific differences between states. For example, while California outranks New York and Texas in volunteering rate, the difference in most measures is fairly minor. Where we find the greatest variety between these states is in centralized policy stances on the issues of mandatory service-learning for K-12 students and how the states teach “civic engagement.”

In the last three years, the California legislature has passed a handful of bills aimed at improving civic engagement among young people. The Governor has vetoed at least three of these initiatives (related to young voter registration, credit for service learning, and excusing school absence due to civic engagement reasons). Despite these vetoes, California high school seniors are required to take a half year civics class designed to help them “pursue a deeper understanding of the intuitions of American government.”

Like California, Texas and New York have passed bills that call for improved and mandatory civic education curriculums. However, neither state has required or developed centralized service-learning programming like California’s “CalServe Initiative” run by the state Department of Education. In Texas, where individual school districts decide on service-learning requirements, only 5% of districts have elected to mandate service learning. The cities of Austin and Houston in Texas have been awarded grants from the Rockefeller Foundation to help set up networks that connect residents with volunteer opportunities. New York may be following in California’s footsteps, however, the legislature is soon to vote on a bill that would make service learning a graduation requirement for high school seniors.

## NATIONAL TRENDS

In general, California is representative of the national trends in civic engagement we examine here with some notable exceptions. California data confirm that certain civic-engagement activities are more likely to predict whether a person will participate in other forms of engagement. One of the strongest predictors is whether a person reports serving in a leadership role. Leaders are more likely to volunteer (nationally, 75% of leaders volunteer compared with the 26.8% national volunteering average) and more likely to have worked with neighbors to improve their communities. Factors that appear to influence leadership are college experience and employment. People who are employed and have college experience are much more likely to serve as leaders. In particular, college experience has a very strong relationship with leadership—83% of leaders have been to college.



In his most recent research on social capital and civic engagement, Robert Putman highlights that while civic participation and interest in public policy have increased in the Millennial Generation since the 9/11 attacks, the spike in participation appears to be limited to young people from more privileged backgrounds. Lower class youth report less engagement in their communities and politics.<sup>24</sup> This apparent relationship between leadership, civic engagement, and social class may be echoed in these statistics as well.

Although these political forms of engagement are stronger among a privileged population, leadership, employment, and college experience do not appear to favorably affect connectivity with family and friends. The unemployed are more likely to trade favors with neighbors than those who are employed, and college experience seems to have no bearing on whether a person is connected with friends and family. Those who do report high levels of connectedness are some of the least likely to volunteer.

Nationally from 2007 to 2010, civic engagement numbers have increased. The percentage of Americans volunteering has grown by two percentage points and in California the rate has increased by nine percentage points. Since its nadir in 2007, the country has shown impressive growth in the percentage of Americans who report “working with neighbors.” Mirroring national results since 2007, the percentage of Californians who are assisting neighbors has improved by more than 40%. In part, this appears to be a positive civic response to the economic crisis. It is worth noting that these California trends, while similar to the national results, are significantly greater than Texas and New York. Californian’s steady increase in civic engagement and willingness to reach out is a positive sign. With unemployment at 12.4%, an increasingly bi-partisan legislature, and plenty of difficult decisions to make regarding our fiscal and natural resources, the 2010 *Civic Health Index* for California shows that there is still room for optimism in these difficult times.

# RECOMMENDATIONS

## POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

What can be done to strengthen the gains California has made, while encouraging growth in those areas where civic engagement is faltering? There are no easy answers or a silver bullet to bring an instant solution. However, policy recommendations can be offered as pathways of improvement.

Civic engagement requires lifelong learning and participation. Civic engagement embraces community involvement and improvement, continued education on political processes, and active participation in government—including the all-important watchdog role.

The recommendations listed below consider the many facets of civic engagement, and recognize individual citizens, governmental entities, and the public, private, and nonprofit sectors need to work together to improve the state's civic health index.

Four years ago the Education Commission of the States made four policy recommendations that are still relevant today, in the larger context of civic education. They are in its place included here with some additional ideas in parenthesis.

1. Extending citizenship education into the elementary and middle grades (with introductions in the primary grades where children are so eager to learn)
2. Making citizenship education experience grounded in knowledge and explicitly designed to engage students (taking them from passive learner to active participant)
3. Allowing more time for preparation and professional development to teach citizenship education
4. Recognizing testing and assessment as important elements of any citizenship education program, and encouraging legislators to support the development of tests that go beyond civic knowledge

## ADDITIONAL RECOMMENDATIONS

5. Creating a robust educational out-reach to all adults, in particular to the immigrant population, on the practical structure and function of government and on the development of the civic engagement skills needed as a citizen of this democratic society.
6. Incorporating civic educational strategies across the curriculum in all teacher-preparation programs.



7. Training in public engagement for municipal officials: This “new normal” era is creating new relationships between citizens and their public leaders. From engaging the public in vital budget decisions to including them in new public-private partnerships for service delivery, participatory governance is becoming the new civic-leadership skill. In other states, the Secretary of State coordinates some of these collaborative projects at the local level.
8. Better alignment of service delivery and revenue responsibilities in California: One of the reasons Californians explain their disengagement is the perception that many major policy decisions are “made in Sacramento.” Recent election results demonstrate that residents are much more willing to support public services where the decision-making is kept as local as possible.
9. Broaden the Brown Act: Typically regarded as a “check box” by many local officials, and organized through the standard “three minutes at the microphone,” public engagement projects that include facilitated, deliberative processes should be considered conforming to regulated public meeting structures. Online public engagement on local policy issues should also be supported as being part of a legal and legitimate public process.

Innovative civic education programs are already available in California. We need not reinvent the wheel. What is needed is a vehicle to make them widespread across the population.

# ENDNOTES

- <sup>1</sup> Gottleib, Jeff and Vives, Ruben. (2010, July 15). Is a city manager worth \$800,000? *Los Angeles Times*. P. 1.
- <sup>2</sup> "Distracted public puts purse at risk." *Sacramento Bee*. July 23, 2010. P. 12A.
- <sup>3</sup> Mathews, Joe. (2010, August 24). The Problems With the Bell Reforms. *Prop Zero (NBC-Los Angeles Online)*.
- <sup>4</sup> Cole, Rick. (2010, July 30). Fixing the broken Bell. *Los Angeles Times*.
- <sup>5</sup> Goldsmith, Stephen. The New Political Reality. e21 [blog]. (2010, February 3). Retrieved from <http://www.economics21.org/commentary/new-political-reality>
- <sup>6</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>7</sup> Semuels, Alana. (2010, September 18). Job losses cut wide swath in California. *Los Angeles Times*.
- <sup>8</sup> Putnam, Robert. (2007). E Pluribus Unum: Diversity and Community in the 21st Century. *Scandinavian Political Studies*. 2( 30).
- <sup>9</sup> Langton and Jennings 1968, Delli Carpini and Keeter 1996
- <sup>10</sup> Swanson, 2008
- <sup>11</sup> Swanson, 2008
- <sup>12</sup> CIRCLE, 2008
- <sup>13</sup> CIRCLE, 2008
- <sup>14</sup> Niemi and Junn 1998, Torney-Purta 2002, Campbell 2008, Galston 2001
- <sup>15</sup> Owen, et al 2010; Torney-Purta 2010; Kahne 2008 and 2009
- <sup>16</sup> Owen, et al. 2010
- <sup>17</sup> Closing the Achievement Gap, 2008
- <sup>18</sup> Kahne and Sporte 2008; Kahne and Middaugh 2008
- <sup>19</sup> Campbell, 2008
- <sup>20</sup> Kahne, et al. 2010
- <sup>21</sup> Putnam, Robert D. (1995) Bowling Alone: America's Declining Social Capital Source. *Journal of Democracy* [1045-5736] 6 (1), 67
- <sup>22</sup> deTocqueville, Alexis. *Democracy in America*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press 2000. 496.
- <sup>23</sup> Gladwell, Malcolm. (2010, Oct. 4). "Small Change." *The New Yorker*. 42-49.
- <sup>24</sup> Sander, Thomas H. and Putnam, Robert D. (2010, January). Still Bowling Alone? The Post-9/11 Split. *Journal of Democracy*. 21(1), , 9-16

# WORKS CITED

- Campbell, David E. (2008). Voice in the Classroom: How an Open Classroom Climate Fosters Political Engagement Among Adolescents. *Political Behavior* 30 (4): 437-454.
- CIRCLE. (2008). *Young Voters in the 2008 Presidential Election*, updated 12/01/08. Available online: [http://www.civicyouth.org/PopUps/FactSheets/FS\\_08\\_exit\\_polls.pdf](http://www.civicyouth.org/PopUps/FactSheets/FS_08_exit_polls.pdf)
- Galston, W. (2001). Political Knowledge, Political Engagement, and Civic Education. *Annual Review Political Science*. 4: 217-234.
- Kahne, Joseph, Crow, David and Lee, Nam-Jin. (2010). *Pedagogy Can Promote Politics: High School Learning Opportunities and Youth Political Engagement*. Paper presented at APSA 2010, Washington D.C.
- Kahne, J. and Middaugh, E. (2009). Democracy for Some: The Civic Opportunity Gap in High School. *Engaging Young People in Civic Life* (Levine, P. and Youniss, J., eds). Nashville, TN: Vanderbilt University Press.
- Kahne, Joseph E. and Sporte, Susan E. (2008). Developing Citizens: The Impact of Civic Learning Opportunities on Students' Commitment to Civic Participation. *American Educational Research Journal*, 45 (3), 738-766
- Kahne, J. and Middaugh, E. (2008). High Quality Civic Education: What is It and Who Gets It? *Social Education*. 72(1), 34-39.
- Kahne, J., Middaugh E., and Croddy, M. (2005). *The California Survey of Civic Education. Report to Educating for Democracy: California Campaign of Civic Education*. Published by the Constitutional Rights Foundation
- Kristof, Nicholas. (2009, August 19). Priority Test: Health Care or Prisons? *New York Times*, New York edition. P.A27.
- Langton, K. and Jennings, MK. (1968). Political Socialization and the High School Civics Curriculum in the United States. *American Political Science Review*. 62: 862-867.
- Levine, P. (2006). The Civic Mission of Schools: Chief Findings and Next Steps. *Knowledge Quest*, 34(4), 18-21.
- Niemi, RG. and Junn, J. (1998). *Civic Education: What Makes Students Learn*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.
- Swanson, Christopher B. (2008) Cities in Crisis: A Special Analytic Report on High School Graduation. Available online: [www.americaspromise.org](http://www.americaspromise.org)
- Torney-Purta, J. and Richardson, W. (2002). The School's Role in Developing Civic Engagement: A Study of Adolescents in Twenty-Eight Countries. *Applied Developmental Science*, 6(4), 203-212.
- Torney-Purta, Judith and Wilkenfeld, Britt S. (2009). Paths to 21st Century Competencies Through Civic Education Classrooms: An Analysis of Survey Results from Ninth-Graders. Washington, DC: Campaign for the Civic Mission of Schools and American Bar Association Division for Public Education. Available online from CIRCLE: <http://www.civicyouth.org/?p=360>
- The White House. (2010). Remarks by the President at University of Michigan Spring Commencement. [Office of the Press Secretary, Official Web Site of the White House and President Barack Obama]. Retrieved May 4, 2010 from <http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/remarks-president-university-michigan-spring-commencement>
- U.S. Census Bureau. (2010). *Public Education Finances 2008*. Educational Finance and Special Statistics Branch, June. Available online: <http://www2.census.gov/govs/school/08f33pub.pdf>



# TECHNICAL NOTES

The *2010 Civic Health Index* is based on The Center for Information & Research on Civic Learning and Engagement's (CIRCLE) analysis of Census Current Population Survey (CPS) data. Volunteering estimates are from CPS September Volunteering Supplement, 2007, 2008 and 2009, and data available from Volunteering in America. Voting and registration data come from the CPS November Voting/Registration Supplement, 2004 and 2008. All other civic-engagement indicators, such as access to information and connection to others, come from the 2008 and 2009 CPS Civic Engagement Supplement. For these indicators, the 2008 and 2009 data were combined, whenever possible, to achieve the largest possible sample size and to minimize error.

For the California Report, the sample size for citizen engagement was 16,964 and the sample size for volunteering was 8,883.

Because the report draws from multiple data sources with varying error parameters, there is no exact estimate of margin of error for the national or California sample. However, according to the Census Bureau, published margin of error for CPS voting and registration supplement from 2008 is +/-0.3% for the national estimate and +/-0.9% for California. For specific population subgroups, the margin of error is greater.

The 2010 national report, *America's Civic Health Assessment* issue brief and executive summary, can be found online at [www.ncoc.net/CivicHealth2010](http://www.ncoc.net/CivicHealth2010). Rankings and data for all 50 states and the 51 largest metropolitan areas are available at <http://civic.serve.gov>. The 2010 state report, *California's Civic Health Index*, can be found online at [www.commonsense.org](http://www.commonsense.org) and [www.civiced.org](http://www.civiced.org). For a chronicle of California Civic Health Index work since 2008, visit [www.NCoC.net/CA](http://www.NCoC.net/CA).



# NATIONAL CONFERENCE ON CITIZENSHIP

## Board of Directors

Norma Barfield  
Barry Byrd  
Philip Duncan  
Eric Federing  
Thomas Gottschalk  
Gail Leftwich Kitch  
Martin Krall  
Dennis McGinn  
A.G. Newmyer  
John Reeder  
Thomas Susman  
Craig Turk  
Michael Weiser (Chair)  
Jocelyn White

## Board of Advisors

Diana Aviv  
James Basker  
John Bridgeland (Chair)  
Jean Case  
Frank Damrell  
John J. Dilulio, Jr.  
Jane Eisner  
Chester Finn, Jr.  
William Galston  
Stephen Goldsmith  
Scott Heiferman  
Walter Isaacson  
Amy Kass  
Michelle Nunn  
Michael Pack  
Robert Putnam  
Charles Quigley  
Ian Rowe  
Tobi Walker

Founded in 1946 and federally chartered by the U.S. Congress in 1953, the National Conference on Citizenship (NCoC) is a leader in advancing our nation's civic life. We track, measure and promote civic participation and engagement in partnership with other organizations on a bipartisan, collaborative basis. We focus on ways to enhance history and civics education, encourage national and community service, and promote greater participation in the political process.

Many distinguished Americans have been involved with the growth and development of NCoC over the years including Presidents Harry S. Truman and Dwight D. Eisenhower and Chief Justices Earl Warren and Warren Burger. The roster of board members, advisors and guest speakers at NCoC events represent a diverse spectrum of leaders from across government, industry, academia, community and nonprofit organizations and the media, including Senators Robert Byrd and Lamar Alexander, Justices Sandra Day O'Connor, Stephen Breyer, Anthony Kennedy, Ruth Bader Ginsburg, and Antonin Scalia, philanthropists Ray Chambers and Eugene Lang, authors David McCullough and Walter Isaacson, scholars Robert Putnam and Stephen Goldsmith, TIME Magazine's Richard Stengel, MTV's Ian Rowe, ABC's Cokie Roberts, actor Stephen Lang, AOL's Jean Case, Facebook's Sean Parker, former Clinton Administration advisor William Galston and former Bush Administration advisor John Bridgeland.

NCoC's accomplishments are many, ranging from fueling the civic energy of the Greatest Generation freshly home from WWII to helping lead the celebration of our nation's Bicentennial in 1976. NCoC helped establish the observance of Constitution Day, each September 17, and our charter mandates we hold our annual conference close to this date with a focus on building a more active and engaged citizenry.

Since 2006, NCoC has produced *America's Civic Health Index*, the nation's leading measure of citizen actions and attitudes. In April 2009, NCoC was included in the Edward M. Kennedy Serve America Act. To help our communities harness the power of their citizens, the Corporation for National and Community Service and the U.S. Census Bureau were directed to work with NCoC to expand the reach and impact of these metrics through an annual Civic Health Assessment.

To advance our mission, better understand the broad dimensions of modern citizenship, and to encourage greater civic participation, NCoC has developed and sustained a network of over 250 like-minded institutions that seek a more collaborative approach to strengthening our system of self-government.

For more information, please visit [www.ncoc.net](http://www.ncoc.net)

## 2010 America's Civic Health Assessment

**Civic Life in America: Key Findings on the Civic Health of the Nation**

To download to iPhone or Android, scan these barcodes with the free [stickybites](#) app

Executive Summary



Issue Brief



More information:

[NCoC.net/CivicHealth2010](http://NCoC.net/CivicHealth2010)

**State and City rankings:**

<http://Civic.Serve.gov>

# CIVIC INDICATORS WORKING GROUP

**JOHN BRIDGELAND**, CEO, Civic Enterprises; Chairman, Board of Advisors, National Conference on Citizenship; and former Assistant to the President of the United States & Director, Domestic Policy Council & USA Freedom Corps

**NELDA BROWN**, Executive Director, National Service-Learning Partnership at the Academy for Educational Development

**KRISTEN CAMBELL**, Director of Programs and New Media, National Conference on Citizenship

**DAVID EISNER**, President and CEO, National Constitution Center

**MAYA ENISTA**, CEO, Mobilize.org

**WILLIAM GALSTON**, Senior Fellow, Brookings Institution; former Deputy Assistant to the President of the United States for Domestic Policy

**STEPHEN GOLDSMITH**, Deputy Mayor of New York City, Daniel Paul Professor of Government, Kennedy School of Government at Harvard University; Director, Innovations in American Government; and former Mayor of Indianapolis

**ROBERT GRIMM, JR.**, Professor of the Practice of Philanthropy and Nonprofit Management, University of Maryland

**LLOYD JOHNSTON**, Research Professor and Distinguished Research Scientist at the University of Michigan's Institute for Social Research; and Principal Investigator of the Monitoring the Future Study

**KEI KAWASHIMA-GINSBERG**, Lead Researcher, Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement (CIRCLE) at the Jonathan M. Tisch College of Citizenship and Public Service at Tufts University

**PETER LEVINE**, Director, Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement (CIRCLE) at the Jonathan M. Tisch College of Citizenship and Public Service at Tufts University

**MARK HUGO LOPEZ**, Associate Director of the Pew Hispanic Center; Research Professor, University of Maryland's School of Public Affairs

**SEAN PARKER**, Co-Founder and Chairman of Causes on Facebook/MySpace; Founding President of Facebook

**KENNETH PREWITT**, Director of the United States Census Bureau; Carnegie Professor of Public Affairs and the Vice-President for Global Centers at Columbia University,

**ROBERT PUTNAM**, Peter and Isabel Malkin Professor of Public Policy, Kennedy School of Government at Harvard University; Founder, Saguaro Seminar; author of Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community

**THOMAS SANDER**, Executive Director, the Saguaro Seminar, Harvard University

**DAVID B. SMITH**, Executive Director, National Conference on Citizenship; Founder, Mobilize.org

**HEATHER SMITH**, Executive Director, Rock the Vote

**MAX STIER**, Executive Director, Partnership for Public Service

**MICHAEL WEISER**, Chairman, National Conference on Citizenship

**JONATHAN ZAFF**, Vice President for Research, America's Promise Alliance

# CIVIC HEALTH PARTNERS

## STATES:

**ARIZONA** - Center for the Future of Arizona

**CALIFORNIA** - California Forward, Common Sense California, Center for Civic Education

**FLORIDA** - Florida Joint Center for Citizenship

**ILLINOIS** - Citizen Advocacy Center, McCormick Foundation

**MARYLAND** - Mannakee Circle Group, Center for Civic Education, Common Cause Maryland, Maryland Civic Literacy Commission, University of Maryland

**MISSOURI** - Missouri State University

**NEW YORK** - Siena Research Institute

**NORTH CAROLINA** - North Carolina Civic Education Consortium, Center for Civic Education, NC Center for Voter Education, Democracy NC, NC Campus Compact, Western Carolina University Department of Public Policy

**OHIO** - Miami University Hamilton

**OKLAHOMA** - University of Central Oklahoma, Oklahoma Campus Compact

**PENNSYLVANIA** - National Constitution Center

**TEXAS** - University of Texas at San Antonio

**VIRGINIA** - Center for the Constitution at James Madison's Montpelier, Colonial Williamsburg Foundation

## CITIES:

**CHICAGO** - McCormick Foundation

**MIAMI** - Florida Joint Center for Citizenship and the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation

**MINNEAPOLIS / ST. PAUL** - Center for Democracy and Citizenship, Augsburg College and the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation

**SEATTLE** - Seattle City Club, Boeing Company, Seattle Foundation

www.NCoC.net



CAforward



Center for Civic Education

PEPPERDINE  
UNIVERSITY  
School of Public Policy

DAVENPORT INSTITUTE  
for Public Engagement and Civic Leadership