2024 NORTH CAROLINA CIVIC HEALTH INDEX

Tapping Deep Roots and Nurturing Seeds of Hope to Improve North Carolina's Civic Health

Generation Nation

CAROLINA PUBLIC HUMANITIES

Western Carolina UNIVERSITY

UNC | COLLEGE OF ARTS AND SCIENCES
Program for Public Discourse
Promoting Civic Virtue, Fostering Civil Debate

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National Conference on Citizenship
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NORTH CAROLINA CAMPUS ENGAGEMENT
North Carolina Campus Engagement is a collaborative network of colleges and universities committed to civic and social responsibility, to partnering with communities for positive change, and to strengthening democracy.

GENERATIONNATION
GenerationNation develops a new generation of civic leaders by working with North Carolina K-12 students to help them learn first-hand how their governments and communities work; understand and discuss important civic issues; know how to find and use good sources of news and civic information; and build knowledge, experience, and social capital for civic leadership now and into the future.

THE PROGRAM FOR PUBLIC DISCOURSE AT THE UNIVERSITY OF NORTH CAROLINA AT CHAPEL HILL
The Program for Public Discourse at UNC-Chapel Hill builds the capacity of UNC students for debate and deliberation, enabling them to be better citizens, civic leaders, and stewards of our democracy.

THE PHIL AND CONNIE HAIRE INSTITUTE FOR PUBLIC POLICY AT WESTERN CAROLINA UNIVERSITY
The Phil and Connie Haire Institute for Public Policy at Western Carolina University aims to empower the Western North Carolina region to effectively manage real policy problems by mobilizing students, community leaders, faculty, and citizens to discuss and develop viable policy options to create more effective policies.

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Duke Civic Engagement (DCE) strengthens, connects, and amplifies the various ways students, faculty, and staff work to make a difference in the civic life of our communities. DCE supports Duke University's collaborations with communities on pressing social challenges.

CAROLINA PUBLIC HUMANITIES AT UNC-CHAPEL HILL
Carolina Public Humanities serves North Carolina by connecting UNC-Chapel Hill's faculty and resources with communities throughout the state. It uses the humanities to spark curiosity, facilitate dialogue, and generate ideas in the hopes of building stronger democratic societies and a more humane world.

NATIONAL CONFERENCE ON CITIZENSHIP
The National Conference on Citizenship (NCoC) is 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, our cross-sector conferences and engagement with a broad spectrum of individuals and organizations interested in utilizing civic engagement principles and practices to enhance their work. Connecting people for the purpose of strengthening civic life is our goal. At the core of our joint efforts is the belief that every person has the ability to help their communities and country thrive.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

We are pleased to release the **2024 North Carolina Civic Health Index** (NCCHI). This report was produced by the National Conference on Citizenship in partnership with a group of education-based entities in NC (partners are on page 2). Each partner has invested financial, human, and intellectual resources in a months-long endeavor to examine, document, and advance our state's civic health. We look forward to being part of the growth in civic health that this Index is intended to help NC realize.

The first NCCHI was disseminated in 2003 (with a different focus and data collection method than used since), and two subsequent editions were released in 2010 and 2015. In addition to analysis of the most recent data (gathered by the US Census Bureau in 2021 and 2022), the 2024 Index includes comparisons with data reported in the 2010 and 2015 NCCHIs to make visible the dimensions on which NC's civic health has improved or declined. Although the global COVID pandemic that began in 2020 likely had a negative effect on some of the indicators of civic health, that was not unique to NC; therefore, NC's positions in state rankings and relative to national averages, which are also analyzed here, remain instructive. This 2024 NCCHI also takes a look at youth civic engagement, with an eye to the importance of investing in young people as the future of our state. While there are seeds of hope, particularly in the work of the Bright Spots featured throughout this Index, NC can and must do much, much more to cultivate civic health.

Where NC is Strongest Relative to Other States and the US:

- **Personal relationships with family and friends:** North Carolinians do indeed interact with family and friends. A full 80.9% of respondents reported "frequently" hearing from or spending time with family and friends (compared with the national average of 79.3%), giving the state a ranking of 27th of 51 (50 states plus the District of Columbia).

- **Community relationships:** NC ranks 19th of 51 in terms of percentage of respondents who reported that they "frequently" talk with or spend time with neighbors. This 28.8% of North Carolinians is greater than the national average of 26.9%.

- **Collaboration with neighbors:** When it comes to doing favors for neighbors, NC once again ranks 19th of 51. 10.9% of North Carolinians reported "frequently" doing favors for neighbors, compared to the national average of 10.0%; adding in those who reported "infrequently" (sometimes) doing favors for neighbors brings the total to almost 50%. In addition, NC ranks 25th of 51 for residents working with neighbors to do something positive for their community or neighborhood (19.6% NC compared to 18% US).

- **Participation in groups:** Although ranking 31st of 51 nationally for reported participation in any type of group, more respondents in NC (24.8%) reported doing so than the national average (23.8%).

Where NC has Mixed Results Relative to Other States and the US:

■ **Volunteering:** Just over 1 in 5 respondents (22.8%) reported that, "yes," they volunteered in the last year (compared to 23.2% nationally), generating a 34th of 51 ranking for NC. Among those "yes" respondents, 24.9% indicated that they "frequently" volunteer, compared to the national average of 20.6%, giving NC a ranking of 6th of 51 for "frequent" volunteering (among those who volunteer).

■ **Donations to political or to charitable or religious organizations:** North Carolina is below the national average (6.9% NC compared to 9.4% US) and ranked 42nd of 51 in donations of $25 or more to political organizations. NC is closer to the national average (47.6% NC compared to 48.1% US) but only 35th of 51 in reported donations of $25 or more to charitable or religious organizations.

■ **Voting:** Using data from the US Census Bureau's Current Population Survey (CPS) 2022 November Voting and Registration Supplement, NC comes in at 45th of 51 with 45.7% of respondents reporting having voted in the November 8, 2022 election. When we examine another data set (from the NC State Board of Elections) reporting actual voter turnout, the picture is slightly better than reported by survey respondents, with 51.14% of eligible voters casting ballots in that election. However, this is still lower than the national reported average of 52.2%.

Where NC Can Improve Relative to Other States and the US:

■ **Discussing political, societal, or local issues with others or online:** Only 34.5% of respondents indicated "frequently" discussing political, societal, or local issues with family and friends (compared to the national average of 35.1%, ranking NC 34th of 51). Only 7.6% reported talking with neighbors about political, societal, or local issues (compared to the national average of 7.9%, ranking NC 31st of 51). Fewer than 5% of North Carolinians (6.2% nationally) surveyed reported "frequently" posting their views about political, societal, or local issues on the Internet or social media, with a ranking of 46th of 51. Over 81% of North Carolinians surveyed "never" post on such topics, compared to 79.1% at the national level.

■ **News consumption:** NC is below the national average and is 45th of 51 when it comes to reading, watching, or listening to news or information related to political, societal, or local issues. Fewer NC residents than the national average reported "frequently" consuming such news or information (63.4% NC compared to 67.6% US), and more NC residents than the national average responded that they "never" do so (18.4% NC compared to 16.6% US).

■ **Voter registration:** NC ranks 51st of 51 in voter registration, at 60.8% of respondents (compared with the national average of 69.1%). When we examine data from the NC State Board of Elections reporting actual voter registration for the 2022 election, the picture is again better than reported by survey respondents, with 69.7% of those eligible being registered to vote.

■ **Participation in local politics:** When it comes to attending public meetings or engaging with local public officials, NC ranks 47th and 50th out of 51, respectively.

PRIMARY TAKEAWAY AND RECOMMENDATION: *Deep Roots and Seeds of Hope Despite Cause for Concern*

Even on our strongest indicators, NC still lacks in some aspects. For example, although approximately half of respondents indicated doing favors "at least sometimes" for neighbors (as noted above), that means that over half "never" do so. NC is not highly ranked among states when it comes to civic health. We do not rank in the top 10% of states on any indicator, we rank in the top 30% on only one indicator, and we rank in the bottom 30% on seven. Almost 70% of respondents reported "never" discussing political, societal, or local issues with neighbors; and almost a third reported "never" doing so with family and friends. Over a third of respondents reported "never" consuming news or information about political, societal, or local events. As noted above, less than 10% reported attending public meetings or interacting with public officials. Perhaps most significantly, North Carolinians have rarely been above average on any of the indicators in any of the past Civic Health Indexes.

North Carolina does, however, seem to have potential for growth in our civic health. Our state has deep roots, and there are seeds of hope.

The NC story is tied to the land. The indigenous people who first inhabited this land raised corn, squash, sunflowers, pumpkins, and beans. The colonial settlers adopted many of their agricultural practices and crops (with special emphasis on corn and tobacco). Wealthy antebellum landowners held plantations on which great quantities of cotton and tobacco were grown and harvested. Today many people continue to make a living from the land by growing crops such as sweet potatoes, apples, soybeans, and Christmas trees. While some parts of this history are dark and problematic and include the exploitation of labor, the land has and continues to nourish our people. NC is also teeming with wondrous flora, from the flowering dogwood, the majestic oak, the glorious crape myrtle, and the carnivorous Venus flytrap to the tar, pitch, rosin, and turpentine culled from the pine forests that gave us our "Tar Heel" nickname. From the mountains to the sea, the land is overflowing with beauty, wonder, and the natural resources that underlie our historic and contemporary production of pottery and textiles. This deep connection to land is why, as we explore NC's current civic health, we turn to the analogy of roots and seeds to amplify the message.

It is clear that NC needs to improve our civic health. We believe that our deep-rootedness in the land and our commitment to personal and community connectedness are seeds with the potential to grow into more political and public involvement. However, it will require intentional action and substantial nourishment for such engagement to flourish. For example, if we created opportunities to equip residents with the skills to engage in difficult dialogues on political and social issues, would they be more likely to interact with their friends, family, and neighbors in this way? If we made public meetings or group participation more accessible through the use of technology, would residents engage more often? If we invested more resources into developing tools that make local media more accessible or that create opportunities for more local citizen-journalism, would people participate more deeply?

Like the evergreen longleaf pine – native to and central to the natural and cultural history of NC and with a deep and wide tap root – that serves as our state tree and supports a diversity of plants, animals, and resource uses, it is our hope and intention that this Index will encourage a variety of creative ideas and actions to broaden and deepen civic health in NC. Just as the NC Forest Service (NCFS) prioritizes increasing longleaf pine forest acreage (NCFS, n.d.), so too do the partners who produced this report insist that our state's civic health come to the front and center of our attention and our investment. As the seeds of the longleaf pine require fire to germinate and start on their path to becoming mature trees, perhaps this Index can serve to fire up our motivation, our energy, and our vision as a state such that we continue growing toward fulfillment of our potential to learn, innovate, and move forward together.

INTRODUCTION

North Carolina is one of several states engaged in a unique partnership to investigate, document, and thereby catalyze efforts to enhance civic life in the United States. The National Conference on Citizenship (NCoC; ncoc.org) collaborates with over 35 states and cities to generate locally-based reports that provide recommendations to strengthen civic health.

These Civic Health Indexes (CHIs) can play a key role in focusing the attention of communities on opportunities for and challenges to positive change. According to NCoC, "Civic Health Index partnerships have changed the way governments go about their work, reintroduced civics to our classrooms, redirected investments, influenced national and local conversations to enhance civic life, and bolstered a network of civic leaders across the country." 2023-2024 marks the 20th anniversary of the first CHI in NC; previous NCCHIs were produced in 2003, 2010, and 2015. It is the intention of the partners producing this 2024 NCCHI that the data analysis and recommendations included here will help our state set priorities, leverage best practices, and continue asking the difficult questions we need to face if our state is to fulfill its civic potential and strengthen our communities.

What is Civic Health?

According to NCoC, civic health is "the way that communities are organized to define and address public problems." Closer to home, the Director of the Carolina Public Humanities program at UNC-Chapel Hill explains: "Good civic health means a community in which people engage with each other, where they participate in the shared life of the community and where public institutions are responsive to the needs of the people in that community."[1]

A high level of civic health is generated and maintained through public participation, or civic engagement. RTI Health Solutions, a NC-based consulting firm anchored within RTI International, defines civic engagement as "individual or group action that identifies or addresses the concerns or well-being of a community, social group, or overall society."

High Point University Bonner Leaders (photo credit: Robert Tillman)

Why is Civic Health Important?

At the individual level, civic participation is a social determinant of health (SDH). According to the World Health Organization, an SDH is "a non-medical factor that influences health outcomes. These factors are the conditions in which people are born, grow, work, live, and age; and they include the wider set of forces and systems shaping the conditions of daily life."[3]

According to Healthy People 2030[4] – an initiative of the U.S. Surgeon General to promote, strengthen, and evaluate the nation's efforts to improve the health and well-being of all people – there is a direct connection between social and community context and individual health. Civic participation is linked to youth development and adolescent well-being.[5] Such participation takes a variety of forms. Volunteering, for example, is linked to improved mental health in that it decreases social isolation and loneliness and provides participants with a sense of belonging and purpose.[6] As another example, participation in the electoral process is linked to better self-reported health.[7]

While strong civic health can directly impact individuals, it can also help communities thrive. Communities with strong indicators of civic health have higher employment rates, stronger schools, more responsive government, increased access to opportunity, lower violent crime and youth delinquency rates, reduced mortality, and community vitality.[8]

Where there is strong civic health there is strong social trust because residents are connected with one another. The phrase social capital is "used to describe relationships between individuals that facilitate the kind of social trust that can strengthen communities."[9] Social capital helps communities effectively work together on shared goals.[10]

"Social capital is a vital resource for individuals, groups, and society. Social capital has been described as a lubricant that facilitates getting things done. It allows people to work together and to access benefits from social relationships... Social capital refers to the internal social and cultural coherence of society. As such social capital has been described as a glue... For society, social capital is also important as it allows societal institutions to exist and maintains the coherence of society. It facilitates the cooperation and collaboration of different groups and organizations. It encourages people to be positively social towards one another with a wide range of benefits from reduced crime and corruption, to increased helpfulness and improved cooperation."

- Institute for Social Capital

Civic participation can build social capital, which in turn strengthens the broader community while directly enhancing participating individuals' health and well-being. Individuals are physically, socially, mentally, and emotionally healthier and have strong strong connectedness and relationships. This empowers them to take collective action to improve the quality of life for themselves and their community.

One contextual factor that commands urgency for civic health in 2024 (more than at the time previous NCCHIs were published) is the increase in polarization, specifically affective (or emotional) polarization. Partisan animosity, or dislike (even demonization) of the other party, has increased substantially over the last two decades. Research indicates this is largely driven by mis- (and dis-) information about the policy positions of the other party, fear that the other party's positions threaten democracy, and the sense that the other party "doesn't like us either."[11,12] Bringing politically diverse people together to build relationships, to engage in dialogue, and to work together on shared goals are approaches that demonstrate promise in building trust and reducing polarization. As these are all components of a civically healthy state, it is vital that North Carolinians improve our civic health in order to stem the growing tide of polarization and the potential destructive results of continuing on this path as a state and nation.

How Do We Investigate Civic Health?

The data for this NCCHI are drawn from the 2021 US Census Bureau's Current Population Survey (CPS) Volunteer and Civic Engagement Supplement and the CPS 2022 November Voting and Registration Supplement. These are self-reported responses. When we examine voting behaviors, North Carolina State Board of Elections (NCSBE) data are included.

Nineteen indicators are used in the CPS Supplements to measure civic health. The 2024 NCCHI partners drew on 18 of them, omitting one from the 2021 CPS Supplement on "voting in the last local election" because of uncertainty regarding which election was being referred to by respondents; in the analysis of subset data (see below) and list of recommendations, we incorporate 17, omitting one on frequency of volunteering as the sample size is quite small. Each indicator references a specific civic behavior (e.g., being registered to vote; talking with and spending time with neighbors; discussing political, societal, or local issues with family and friends). These activities are analyzed by the % of respondents who reported participating in them – "frequently," "infrequently," or "never"; "yes" or "no" – and each of these participation levels is compared to the national average and to other states. When rankings by state are noted, the total count is 51 to include all 50 states plus the District of Columbia.

While this approach to analysis is instructive, it simply reports percentages across all survey respondents. A deeper dive into the data reveals distinctions within the sample of respondents; in other words, some subgroups of North Carolinians are more likely to engage in some types of civic engagement activities than others. The 2024 NCCHI, therefore, not only compares respondents who reported that they "frequently" (or, "yes") participated in civic engagement activities with those in other states and with national average but also divides respondents into the following demographic categories, referred to herein as "subsets" (the options from which respondents could choose are identified in parentheses), and compares data within them:

■ Gender (male; female)

■ Age (Generation Z, born 1996 or later; Millennials, born 1982-1995; Generation X, born 1965-1981; Baby Boomers, born 1946-1964; Silent and Long Civic Generation, born 1930-1945 - as well as "16-29 years old" and "30 years or older")

■ Educational attainment, for respondents aged 25 and older (high school diploma; some college; bachelor's degree or higher)*

■ Family income (less than $35,000; $35,000-$49,999; $50,000-$74,999; $75,000 or more)

■ Race/ethnicity (White (only) Non Hispanic; African-American (only) Non Hispanic) **

■ Geography (urban; suburban; rural)

*Note that the educational attainment results do not include less than high school diploma as this sample size was too small.

**Note that in the results from the Census Bureau's CPSs presented in this Index, information for Hispanic, Asian, Pacific Islander, and Native American residents is not included in order to protect survey respondents' confidentiality due to small sample sizes.

The data included in this 2024 NCCHI were collected in 2021 and 2022. This Index also compares data from the three previous NCCHIs, in light of this 20-year anniversary milestone. However, it is important to note that the 2003 NCCHI data were collected differently from subsequent editions and focused exclusively on youth civic engagement. The 2010 and 2015 NCCHIs drew on data from the CPS Supplements, with only partial overlap across all three reports (2010, 2015, 2024) in terms of indicators incorporated.

The data for this NCCHI are drawn from the 2021 US Census Bureau's Current Population Survey (CPS) Volunteer and Civic Engagement Supplement and the CPS 2022 November Voting and Registration Supplement.

The 2024 North Carolina Civic Health Index

This Index is organized into three primary sections:

- Social connectedness – interactions between friends, families, and neighbors, including: talking with or spending time with neighbors; hearing from or spending time with family and friends; doing favors for neighbors; and working with neighbors to do something positive for the neighborhood or community

- Community engagement – interactions beyond friends, families, and neighbors, including: volunteering, participating in groups, and donating to charitable or religious organizations

- Political action and participation – ways people influence local government and public institutions, including: voting, public political participation (attending public meetings, contacting public officials), consuming news, donating to political organizations, discussing political/societal/local issues (posting views on political/societal/local issues on social media, discussing political/societal/local issues with family and friends, discussing political/societal/local issues with neighbors), and choosing services based on social or political values of companies

Each section includes a "Summary of the Findings" and a "Deep Dive" into the subset data. We feature "Bright Spots" or positive examples of related efforts in NC throughout these sections.

This 2024 NCCHI then provides "A Look Back at the 2010 and 2015 NCCHIs," drawing comparisons with the earlier data; "A Look Across the US," comparing NC with other states and with national averages; and "A 20th Anniversary Exploration," which examines the civic health of the respondents in the 2003 NCCHI then and now. Drawing on the analysis throughout, the Index offers "Recommendations" that address a wide range of public and private sectors, encouraging specific actions to advance NC's civic health.

This edition of the NCCHI concludes with a fundamental assessment: There is significant cause for concern – whether we look at participation rates in comparison with other states and with the US as a whole or simply look internally, to what the data tell us about ourselves. But there are also seeds of possibility, which we can, if we choose, nurture into a brighter future. The partners producing this Index intend it to encourage and support such choices and investments – so that, like the longleaf pine that graces our land, NC will continue deepening our roots and generating seeds of hope.

Students from UNC Pembroke at the 2022 NC College Voter Summit (photo credit: Sam Hauser)

SOCIAL CONNECTEDNESS

This section explores findings related to interactions among family, friends, and neighbors, including hearing from or spending time with family/friends, talking with or spending time with neighbors, doing favors for neighbors, and working with neighbors to do something positive for the neighborhood or community.

Summary of the Findings

The NCCHI data paint a relatively positive picture of NC residents' levels of social connectedness in the form of interacting with family, friends, and neighbors and doing favors for neighbors as well as working with neighbors to do something positive for the neighborhood or community. Although a bit higher than national averages, the state rankings and %s are much lower than needed for the state's civic health.

Hearing from or spending time with family and friends
North Carolinians are highly likely to spend time with family and friends, with 80.9% reporting they do so "frequently," which is right in line with the national average of 79.3% and ranks NC 27th of 51 in the nation.

Talking with or spending time with neighbors
NC residents rank in the top half of states (19th of 51) in terms of respondents indicating they "frequently" talk with or spend time with neighbors. This 28.8% exceeds the national average of 26.9%.

Doing favors for neighbors
When it comes to doing favors for neighbors, North Carolinians also ranked 19th and slightly above the national average, with 10.9% reporting "frequently" doing favors for neighbors, compared to 10.0% nationally.

Working with neighbors to do something positive for the neighborhood or community
Moreover, North Carolinians were more likely than the national average (19.6% NC compared to 18.0% US) to report that, "yes," they work with their neighbors to do something positive for their neighborhoods or communities. NC ranks 25th of 51 on this measure.

Social Connectedneess Deep Dive: Data and Takeaways

Gender and Social Connectedness

	Hearing from or spending time with family and friends ("frequently")	Talking with or spending time with neighbors ("frequently")	Doing favors for neighbors ("frequently")	Working with neighbors to do something positive for the neighborhood or community ("yes")
Male	77.0%	29.8%	10.0%	21.8%
Female	84.4%	28.0%	11.6%	17.5%

Males reported working with their neighbors on community-based projects and spending time with their neighbors "frequently" more, while females were more likely to report spending time with family and friends "frequently" and doing favors for neighbors "frequently."

Generation/Age and Social Connectedness

	Hearing from or spending time with family and friends ("frequently")	Talking with or spending time with neighbors ("frequently")	Doing favors for neighbors ("frequently")	Working with neighbors to do something positive for the neighborhood or community ("yes")
Generation Z *(born 1996 or later)*	80.8%	18.6%	9.7%	10.0%
Millennials *(born 1982 to 1995)*	80.2%	17.2%	5.4%	15.4%
Generation X *(born 1965-1981)*	78.0%	32.7%	11.1%	25.3%
Baby Boomers *(born 1946-1964)*	82.4%	36.8%	14.4%	23.8%
Silent and Long Civic Generation *(born before 1930 through 1945)*	84.3%	37.0%	12.2%	14.9%
16-29 Years Old	81.3%	18.9%	8.5%	10.5%
30 Years or Older	80.8%	31.7%	11.5%	22.2%

All ages reported high rates for "frequently" spending time with family and friends (between 78-84%), although older adults (Silent Generation) reported the highest rates. Older adults also reported the highest rates of "frequently" doing favors for neighbors, with Baby Boomers leading, while Millennials were the least likely to report "frequently" doing so. Baby Boomers and Gen X were most likely to respond that, "yes," they work with neighbors to do something positive for their neighborhood or community, while Gen Z and Millennials had the lowest "yes" rates.

Educational Attainment and Social Connectedness

	Hearing from or spending time with family and friends ("frequently")	Talking with or spending time with neighbors ("frequently")	Doing favors for neighbors ("frequently")	Working with neighbors to do something positive for the neighborhood or community ("yes")
High School Diploma	76.8%	28.3%	11.7%	15.5%
Some College	83.6%	30.0%	10.9%	25.5%
Bachelor's Degree or Higher	81.1%	30.2%	9.1%	24.8%

On three of the indicators – hearing from or spending time with family and friends "frequently," talking with or spending time with neighbors "frequently," and working with neighbors to do something positive for the neighborhood or community ("yes") – respondents with some college or a bachelor's degree and above reported higher rates of involvement. However, with regard to doing favors for neighbors, residents with a high school diploma were more likely to report "yes" to doing so than those with post-secondary education.

Household Income and Social Connectedness

	Hearing from or spending time with family and friends ("frequently")	Talking with or spending time with neighbors ("frequently")	Doing favors for neighbors ("frequently")	Working with neighbors to do something positive for the neighborhood or community ("yes")
Less than $35,000	77.8%	31.0%	12.1%	15.5%
$35,000 to $49,999	79.5%	21.9%	10.6%	15.4%
$50,000 to $74,999	81.1%	30.2%	9.1%	24.8%
$75,000 or more	84.6%	29.0%	9.6%	25.0%

With regard to "frequently" spending time with family and friends and working with neighbors to do something positive for the neighborhood or community ("yes"), both increase as annual family income increases. However, "frequently" doing favors for neighbors decreases as annual family income increases, meaning that those with the most financial capital were least likely to report helping their neighbors.

Race/Ethnicity and Social Connectedness

	Hearing from or spending time with family and friends ("frequently")	Talking with or spending time with neighbors ("frequently")	Doing favors for neighbors ("frequently")	Working with neighbors to do something positive for the neighborhood or community ("yes")
White (only) Non Hispanic	82.1%	30.3%	12.5%	21.2%
African-American (only) Non Hispanic	76.4%	21.4%	3.6%	10.8%

The gap between how much White and African-American respondents reported engaging in these activities is fairly wide on these social connectedness indicators, with White respondents consistently reporting higher engagement.

Geography and Social Connectedness

	Hearing from or spending time with family and friends ("frequently")	Talking with or spending time with neighbors ("frequently")	Doing favors for neighbors ("frequently")	Working with neighbors to do something positive for the neighborhood or community ("yes")
Urban	80.0%	26.5%	7.8%	22.5%
Suburban	84.7%	32.5%	13.1%	20.2%
Rural	84.1%	35.0%	12.1%	20.1%

Urban respondents are less likely to "frequently" do favors for neighbors than suburban or rural respondents but are more likely to report working with neighbors to do something positive for the neighborhood or community ("yes"). As far as talking with or spending time with family, friends, and neighbors, the range was fairly close across the board.

BRIGHT SPOTS FOR SOCIAL CONNECTEDNESS

Photo credit: Institute for Emerging Issues

Leading on Opportunity

Social connectedness impacts individuals and the strength of our communities. In 2014, the Chetty Study ranked Charlotte, NC, last among the 50 largest US cities and Mecklenburg County 99 out of 100 NC counties in upward mobility. It was a wake-up call for some and an overdue acknowledgement for others. Charlotte responded with urgency and determination to improve upward mobility for residents who have not benefited from the region's prosperity. The Opportunity Task Force Report offered multiple recommendations and tactics to improve upward mobility, and Leading on Opportunity was created to help focus Charlotte-Mecklenburg's public and private decision-making on strategies to increase opportunity. Through this work, social capital – the strength of our connectedness and communities – is noted for the critical role it plays in outcomes ranging from income to health.

Institute for Emerging Issues

For nearly 40 years, the Institute for Emerging Issues (IEI) has brought individuals together from across sectors, regions, and points of view to take on complex challenges in pursuit of a single goal: to ensure NC's future competitiveness. The first Emerging Issues Forum was held in 1986 to focus attention on critical questions facing NC's leaders; it is now an annual gathering of national and statewide thought leaders and stakeholders who discuss challenges and opportunities for the state. IEI believes when people work together with a shared will and a common vision, progress is smarter, more comprehensive, and enduring.

In addition to the annual Emerging Issues Forum, which has addressed topics related to infrastructure, healthcare, education, environment, economy, and more, IEI has led several initiatives with civic health at the center. Recent examples include working with local-level planning teams across all 100 counties in the state to develop comprehensive plans to ensure digital opportunity can be realized by all who live, learn, or work there; building the capacity of rural faith and other local leaders to better address emerging issues facing their communities; and helping boost interest among young adults in public policy.

North Carolina Community Garden Partners

North Carolina Community Garden Partners (NCCGP) is an unincorporated nonprofit organization started in 2008 from a Children, Youth, and Families At Risk (CYFAR) community projects grant from North Carolina A & T State University. NCCGP cultivates a "a network of gardeners and supporters who share support, information, and experience with new gardens and with each other" to expand community gardening across the state. They provide information and resources on establishing, supporting and maintaining a community garden, and manage a statewide database of existing community gardens.

The Zietlow Civic Engagement Fellowship, Carolina Public Humanities

This competitive, paid opportunity is the chance for a small cohort of UNC-Chapel Hill undergraduates in any college or major to pursue research and community engagement around a contemporary social or political topic of their choosing. Part of the non-partisan Zietlow Initiative, which aims to increase North Carolinians' literacy of humanistic disciplines, democratic processes, and civic life, the Fellowship blends academic training with community engagement best practices. Fellows learn to communicate - through various media and with people who have diverse expertise - in order to build relationships across differences. Because the Fellows' research focuses on the history and contemporary legacy of their topics in UNC-Chapel Hill's local context, the Fellows gain a deep understanding of how to acknowledge our disparate pasts in the service of a shared future.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

This section explores findings related to interactions beyond friends, families, and neighbors, including volunteering, participating in groups, and donating to charitable or religious organizations.

Summary of the Findings

Overall, the civic health indicators related to community engagement suggest that NC is positioned in the bottom half of states when it comes to volunteering, participating in groups, and donating to charitable or religious organizations. NC exceeds the national average for participating in groups but is slightly below it for volunteering and donating.

Volunteering
With 22.8% of respondents indicating that, "yes," they volunteer (compared to 23.2% nationally), NC ranks 34th of 51 on this indicator. 24.9% of these "yes" respondents (compared to the national average of 20.6%) also reported volunteering "frequently," which gives NC its highest ranking across all the indicators of civic health at 6th of 51. Volunteering "frequently" is the only indicator on which NC ranks in the top 20% of states. The CPS surveyors did not precisely define the term "volunteering," and, relatedly, the extent to which that term encompassed, in respondents' minds, informal activities such as participation in a house of worship or sharing caregiving responsibilities for family and friends is unknown.

Participating in groups
The percentage of North Carolinians who reported "yes" to participating in a group is above the national average (24.8% NC versus 23.8% US). On this measure NC ranks 31st in the nation. North Carolinians reported participating in 1.9 groups on average, compared to 2.1 groups nationally.

Donating to charitable or religious organizations
Nearly half of the respondents (47.6%) reported "yes" to donating $25 or more to charitable or religious organizations, compared to the national average of 48.1%. North Carolina ranks 35th of 51 on this measure.

2022 NC College Voter Summit (photo credit: Jenna Weber)

Community Engagement Deep Dive: Data and Takeaways

NOTE: Percentages related to volunteering "frequently" (among those who volunteer) are not included due to small sample sizes when data are parsed into subsets.

Gender and Community Engagement

	Volunteering ("yes")	Participating in groups ("yes")	Donating to charitable or religious organizations ($25 or more)
Male	21.7%	22.2%	45.4%
Female	23.9%	27.1%	49.6%

Female respondents reported volunteering, participating in groups, and donating $25 or more to charitable or religious organizations at higher rates than males.

Generation/Age and Community Engagement

	Volunteering ("yes")	Participating in groups ("yes")	Donating to charitable or religious organizations ($25 or more)
Generation Z *(born 1996 or later)*	14.5%	17.9%	18.8%
Millennials *(born 1982 to 1995)*	19.2%	13.8%	44.6%
Generation X *(born 1965-1981)*	32.8%	24.0%	46.5%
Baby Boomers *(born 1946-1964)*	32.8%	14.4%	23.8%
Silent and Long Civic Generation *(born before 1930 through 1945)*	17.0%	35.2%	60.6%
16-29 Years Old	14.5%	16.7%	23.5%
30 Years or Older	25.2%	27.1%	54.7%

In North Carolina, Gen X and Baby Boomers reported volunteering at the highest rates.

On all indicators in the community engagement category, respondents aged 16-29 as a group reported a lower level of participation than older respondents (aged 30+) as a group. When looking across generations, interestingly, although Gen X and Baby Boomers reported volunteering at the highest rates, the oldest (Silent Generation) reported doing so at higher levels

Educational Attainment and Community Engagement

	Volunteering ("yes")	Participating in groups ("yes")	Donating to charitable or religious organizations ($25 or more)
High School Diploma	11.9%	11.4%	38.3%
Some College	23.9%	27.3%	57.9%
Bachelor's Degree or Higher	39.5%	42.4%	68.3%

On all indicators in this category, the higher the respondent's level of educational attainment, the higher the level of reported participation.

39.5%
of North Carolinians with a Bachelor's degree or higher indicated they volunteered.

Household Income and Community Engagement

	Volunteering ("yes")	Participating in groups ("yes")	Donating to charitable or religious organizations ($25 or more)
Less than $35,000	13.6%	15.7%	35.6%
$35,000 to $49,999	14.4%	16.0%	32.5%
$50,000 to $74,999	21.3%	25.6%	47.8%
$75,000 or more	34.4%	35.0%	62.8%

Overall, reported volunteering, participating in groups, and donating $25 or more to charitable or religious organizations increased as respondents' annual family income increased, meaning that those with the most financial capital were most likely to engage in these ways in their communities. One exception is that individuals with a family income of $35K or less reported donating ($25 or more) to charitable or religious organizations more than did respondents who make between $35K and $50K.

Race/Ethnicity and Social Connectedness

	Volunteering ("yes")	Participating in groups ("yes")	Donating to charitable or religious organizations ($25 or more)
White (only) Non Hispanic	24.8%	26.9%	52.0%
African-American (only) Non Hispanic	16.6%	22.0%	33.9%

On all indicators in the community engagement category, White respondents reported participating more than African-American respondents.

Geography and Social Connectedness

	Volunteering ("yes")	Participating in groups ("yes")	Donating to charitable or religious organizations ($25 or more)
Urban	26.9%	28.4%	49.9%
Suburban	25.1%	26.1%	47.7%
Rural	21.2%	24.8%	48.7%

While reported rates of volunteering and participating in groups were low and fairly similar across geography (all between 20% and 30%), reported rates of donating ($25 or more) to charitable and religious organizations were higher and still fairly similar, with respondents who live in urban areas reporting doing so at a slightly higher rate than their suburban and rural counterparts.

Photo credit: Deliberative Citizenship Initiative, Davidson College

Youth volunteers participating in the SHARE Charlotte event (photo credit: GenerationNation)

Activate Good

Started in 2005, Activate Good is a non-profit Volunteer Center that works to activate volunteers to support charitable causes in the local community. They connect individuals, groups, and companies to volunteer needs with over 600+ nonprofits around the Research Triangle (Raleigh, Durham, Chapel Hill). Volunteer opportunities vary and include short-term, long-term, skills-based, family friendly, group, and other opportunities. They also host several annual days of service as well as volunteer projects, including National Volunteer Week, the 9/11 Day of Service, Family Volunteer Day, and Dignity Week of Service. They also host the Youth Volunteer Corps of the Greater Triangle, which engages youth ages 11-18 in team-based service projects, and Activate Kids, which facilitates volunteer opportunities for families with youth ages 5-10.

In 2023 Activate Good launched Learn and Serve, which aims to transform volunteering into a vehicle for greater civic participation and empowerment by combining service activities with learning and group discussion about the root causes of social issues. The Learn and Serve model deepens engagement and understanding while challenging volunteers to take what they've learned to the next level through repeat participation, outreach, and advocacy.

The High Point University Bonner Leader Program

The High Point University (HPU) Bonner Leader Program empowers students to be actively involved in community service, engage in leadership opportunities, and gain meaningful job preparedness skills while seeking a degree. Through their dedicated efforts, in collaboration with nine community partners, students actively contribute to the betterment of the city of High Point by undertaking an average of 300+ community service hours per student, per year. By utilizing their skills, knowledge, and compassion, HPU students prove themselves to be indispensable resources, actively participating in the enhancement and development of High Point.

Each year the 15 new students admitted into the program through a selection process make the four-year commitment to be a Bonner Leader. All Bonner Leaders must minor in Social Innovation. Collectively, the Bonner Leader Program has nearly 55 servant leaders who work with community partners to change people's lives and help our community thrive.

In addition to HPU, seven other North Carolina colleges and universities also host Bonner Scholars or Bonner Leaders programs, which mobilize students to engage in community service while providing support – financial aid or scholarships plus leadership development. These campuses – Davidson College, Guilford College, Mars Hill University, UNC-Chapel Hill, UNC Charlotte, UNC Wilmington, and Warren Wilson College – are preparing the next generation of civic leaders and volunteers. NC is the state with the largest number of Bonner programs in the country.

RIP Medical Debt

RIP Medical Debt is a national initiative that raises funds to buy the debt of individuals with limited capacity to pay their medical bills. Nearly 1 in 4 families have medical debt they cannot pay for various reasons, including lack of medical insurance or hospital stays that result in medical debt. RIP Medical Debt has eliminated billions of dollars for millions of Americans in its 10-year history. Several faith-based organizations in NC are partnering as part of this initiative to help relieve debt in their local communities and counties. Such place-based charitable giving initiatives, which rely on both small and large donations, might especially motivate those least likely to donate as they are able to see the impact of even small donations immediately (every $1 donation turns into $100 of debt relief).

AmeriCorps in North Carolina

AmeriCorps is a federal agency that manages a network of local, state, and national service programs that connect Americans of all ages and backgrounds to service and volunteerism opportunities. In 2023, 3727 North Carolinians served at 714 locations, including schools, food banks, homeless shelters, health clinics, youth centers, and other nonprofit and faith-based organizations to meet local needs, improve communities, and strengthen civic engagement. While most AmeriCorps grant funding goes to the North Carolina Commission on Volunteerism and Community Service, the Governor-appointed State Service Commission, North Carolinians are also involved in the full-range of AmeriCorps programs, which include AmeriCorps VISTA, NCCC, and the portfolio of AmeriCorps Seniors programs that mobilize North Carolinians 55 and older (Foster Grandparents, Senior Companions, and RSVP).

North Carolinians also participate in the annual MLK Day of Service and 9/11 Day of Service. NC also benefits from the Volunteer Generation Fund. AmeriCorps opportunities range in length from short-term (300 hours) to full-time one-year programs. The newest AmeriCorps opportunity, launched in 2024, is the North Carolina Climate Action Corps, which will place 25 individuals in existing AmeriCorps programs (located in the areas of the state most affected by climate change) to support climate action around resiliency, flood risk, land management practices, healthy food systems, local food production, and more. Special emphasis will be placed on actions that support NC's transition to clean energy.

Photo credit: AmeriCorps

POLITICAL ACTION AND PARTICIPATION

This section explores the ways people influence local government and public institutions, including: voting; public political engagement (contacting public officials, attending public meetings); news consumption; donating to political organizations; discussing politics (posting views online, discussing issues with family and friends, discussing issues with neighbors); and choosing services (buying and boycotting) based on companies' social or political values.

Summary of the Findings

The civic health indicators related to political action and participation suggest that, when compared to other states, the building blocks of political change are not present in NC. North Carolinians are in the bottom tier of states on every indicator related to political action and participation.

Voting

Voting is a nuanced indicator. The CHI includes data from the 2022 Voting and Registration Supplement, which is self-reported. When asked whether they voted in the 2022 November election, 45.7% responded "yes." This places North Carolina near the bottom of states (45th of 51).

However, according to data from the North Carolina State Board of Elections, actual voter turnout for midterm elections has increased in recent decades. The turnout for every midterm election between 1994 and 2014 was in the 30-40% range, and the 2018 and 2022 turnouts were above 50% (although there was a slight dip in 2022, from 52.98% down to 51.14%). The actual turnout is even more promising with regard to the 2020 general election. That year, according to the NC Board of Election results, turnout was 75.35%. This was the highest turnout since 1972 (the oldest data available on the Board of Elections site).
These turnout results for the most recent midterm and general elections appear to be a promising sign that voting is increasing in NC. However, in the March 2024 primaries approximately 24% of North Carolinians registered voters cast a vote – the lowest turnout since 2004. The 2024 turnout will demonstrate whether the higher general election turnout rate will continue.

With regard to voter registration, 60.8% reported being registered to vote in the 2022 Voting and Registration Supplement. This percentage placed NC in last place (51st) on the voter registration indicator. The Board of Elections numbers indicate that actual voter registration was higher than reported on the CHI. Approximately 69.7% of those eligible were actually registered to vote in 2022. Unfortunately, the March 2024 Board of Elections data indicates a slight decline in voter registration rates, down to 67.9%.

Public political engagement

With regard to public political engagement, NC ranks near the bottom nationally for both reported participation in public meetings (6.2% "yes" NC compared to 8.2% "yes" US, with NC ranking 47th of 51) and reported contact with public officials (6.6% NC compared to 9.5% US, with NC ranking 50th of 51).

Photo credit: Braver Angels

Summary of the Findings (cont.)

Consuming news

When it comes to the extent to which North Carolinians read, watch, or listen to news or information about political, societal, or local issues, fewer than the national average reported that they do so "frequently" (63.4% NC compared to 67.6% US); further, more North Carolinians than the national average say they do this "infrequently" (18.2% NC compared to the national 15.8%) or "never" (18.4% NC compared to the national 16.6%). NC ranks 45th of 51 on this indicator.

Donating to political organizations

North Carolinians are not inclined to donate $25 or more to political organizations; only 5.9% reported that, "yes," they do so, compared to the national average of 9.4%. This places NC in the bottom 20% of states (42nd of 51).

Discussing political, societal, or local issues

Fewer than 5% of North Carolinians surveyed reported "frequently" posting their views about political, societal, or local issues on the Internet or social media. While it appears that most Americans in general do not "frequently" post their views (national average for "frequently" posting is only 6.2%), North Carolinians rank near the bottom at 46th of 51. Over 81% of North Carolinians "never" post on such topics, compared to 79.1% at the national level.

Only 34.5% of respondents indicated "frequently" discussing political, societal, or local issues with family and friends (ranking NC 34th of 51). Only 7.6% reported talking "frequently" with neighbors about about political, societal, or local issues (ranking NC 31st of 51). Such statistics are consistent with national averages.

Choosing services (buying and boycotting) based on companies' social or political values

Only 16% of NC respondents (compared to 17.1% US) reported that, "yes," they bought or boycotted a product or service based on a company's social or political views. NC ranks 36th in the nation on this indicator. As noted below in the subset data, this behavior is particularly low among younger people and those with lower levels of educational attainment.

Political Action and Participation Deep Dive: Data and Takeaways

NOTE: Percentages related to volunteering "frequently" (among those who volunteer) are not included due to small sample sizes when data are parsed into subsets.

Gender and Political Action and Participation

	Male	Female
Voter Registration ("yes")(2022)	61.1%	60.6%
Voted in the 2022 Midterm Election ("yes")	45.7%	45.6%
Participating in public meetings ("yes")	5.4%	7.0%
Contacting public officials ("yes")	6.2%	7.0%
Consuming the news ("frequently")	64.0%	62.9%
Donating to political organizations ($25 or more)	6.8%	7.0%
Posting on the Internet or social media ("frequently")	4.3%	5.0%
Discussing political, societal, or local issues with friends and family ("frequently")	34.5%	34.5%
Discussing political, societal, or local issues with neighbors ("frequently")	8.4%	3.5%
Buying and boycotting a product or service ("yes")	14.1%	17.9%

Males and females in NC exhibit political involvement at a difference of less than 2% on all of the indicators except two. There is a larger difference when it comes to "frequently" discussing political, societal, and local issues with neighbors (males are higher) and to buying or boycotting products or services (females are higher).

Photo credit: 4-H NC Kids Voting Program

Generation/Age and Political Action and Participation

	Generation Z (born 1996 or later)	Millennials (born 1982 to 1995)	Generation X (born 1965-1981)	Baby Boomers (born 1946-1964)	Silent and Long Civic Generation (born before 1930 through 1945)	16-29 Years Old	30 Years or Older
Voter Registration (2022)("yes")	42.9%	56.5%	62.5%	67.9%	71.3%	47.1%	64.0%
Voted in the 2022 Midterm Election ("yes")	21.5%	36.6%	47.8%	57.9%	58.7%	24.3%	50.5%
Participating in public meetings ("yes")	1.7%	5.2%	8.8%	7.5%	7.1%	2.1%	7.4%
Contacting public officials ("yes")	0.5%	4.0%	6.8%	9.8%	12.1%	1.2%	8.2%
Consuming the news ("frequently")	35.0%	60.8%	68.0%	72.0%	79.8%	40.5%	70.0%
Donating to political organizations ($25 or more)	1.3%	4.4%	6.4%	9.8%	15.7%	1.0%	8.7%
Posting on the Internet or social media ("frequently")	6.2%	5.6%	3.1%	4.8%	3.7%	5.4%	4.4%
Discussing political, societal, or local issues with friends and family ("frequently")	36.1%	32.5%	29.6%	38.9%	34.7%	34.2%	34.6%
Discussing political, societal, or local issues with neighbors ("frequently")	6.3%	3.1%	5.9%	12.1%	10.8%	6.0%	8.1%
Buying and boycotting a product or service ("yes")	8.0%	15.1%	18.8%	21.1%	13.1%	10.7%	17.7%

As North Carolinians age, they also are more likely to be registered to vote, to vote, and to contact or visit an elected official. News consumption among NC respondents also increases with age; the oldest two generations of respondents (Silent Generation, Baby Boomers) both reported doing so "frequently" at rates more than double the youngest (Gen Z). Perhaps not surprisingly, the youngest respondents (Gen Z) had the highest rates of "frequently" posting on social media, although that rate was quite low; notably, middle aged respondents (Gen X) had the lowest rate of doing so rather than older generations, as might be expected.

Educational Attainment and Political Action and Participation

	High School Diploma	Some College	Bachelor's Degree or Higher
Voter Registration ("yes") (2022)	57.2%	66.6%	70.0%
Voted in the 2022 Midterm Election ("yes")	40.4%	49.7%	58.8%
Participating in public meetings ("yes")	3.6%	5.5%	12.8%
Contacting public officials ("yes")	4.1%	7.8%	13.1%
Consuming the news ("frequently")	62.4%	67.6%	78.5%
Donating to political organizations ($25 or more)	5.0%	7.7%	12.8%
Posting on the Internet or social media ("frequently")	3.5%	5.7%	4.3%
Discussing political, societal, or local issues with friends and family ("frequently")	28.2%	38.9%	39.8%
Discussing political, societal, or local issues with neighbors ("frequently")	8.0%	7.2%	6.8%
Buying and boycotting a product or service ("yes")	11.1%	23.4%	23.8%

Respondents with a bachelor's degree or higher were the most likely to report being registered to vote, voting, attending public meetings, contacting elected officials, consuming news, engaging in civic dialogue with family and friends, and buying or boycotting products or services. They were, however, the least likely to indicate "frequently" having discussions of political, societal, or local issues with neighbors. In comparison, North Carolinians with a high school diploma were the least likely to report "frequently" talking with family and friends about political, societal, or local issues and the most likely to report "frequently" doing so with neighbors.

Household Income and Political Action and Participation

	Less than $35,000	$35,000 to $49,999	$50,000 to $74,999	$75,000 or more
Voter Registration ("yes") (2022)	52.3%	66.4%	60.9%	64.6%
Voted in the 2022 Midterm Election	36.8%	49.9%	43.9%	50.7%
Participating in public meetings ("yes")	2.8%	2.0%	7.1%	10.1%
Contacting public officials ("yes")	3.8%	2.5%	8.9%	9.3%
Consuming the news ("frequently")	56.8%	52.9%	75.9%	66.2%
Donating to political organizations ($25 or more)	2.5%	3.8%	9.5%	10.3%
Posting on the Internet or social media ("frequently")	6.5%	4.3%	4.6%	3.4%
Discussing political, societal, or local issues with friends and family ("frequently")	27.2%	31.6%	40.9%	38.0%
Discussing political, societal, or local issues with neighbors ("frequently")	10.4%	4.8%	8.0%	6.4%
Buying and boycotting a product or service ("yes")	11.4%	8.6%	22.4%	19.5%

The frequency with which North Carolinians of various incomes read, watch, or listen to news or information about political, societal, or local issues does not correlate with income patterns. Respondents with a family income of less than $35k per year reported most "frequently" posting about their political or social beliefs on social media and engaging in civic dialogues with neighbors; they were, however, the least likely to "frequently" participate in such conversations with family and friends.

Political involvement varies widely by income, yet there is a clear divide between the two lowest income brackets and the two highest. Those with the highest family income were most likely to report attending public meetings, contacting or visiting elected officials, and buying or boycotting products or services. When averaging the lowest two income brackets and the highest two, the gulf between these two groups becomes clear.

POLITICAL ACTION	Family Income $0-$50,000	Family income $50k-$75k+
Participating in public meetings ("yes")	2.4%	8.6%
Contacting or visited a public official ("yes")	3.2%	9.1%
Buying and boycotting a product or service ("yes")	10.0%	21.0%

North Carolinians with higher levels of family income engage politically at higher rates.

Race/Ethnicity and Political Action and Participation

	White (only) Non Hispanic	African-American (only) Non Hispanic
Voter Registration ("yes") (2022)	63.4%	58.3%
Voted in the 2022 Midterm Election ("yes")	49.3%	41.2%
Participating in public meetings ("yes")	5.7%	6.8%
Contacting public officials ("yes")	7.8%	2.1%
Consuming the news ("frequently")	66.4%	57.8%
Donating to political organizations ($25 or more)	7.1%	1.7%
Posting on the Internet or social media ("frequently")	4.4%	4.0%
Discussing political, societal, or local issues with friends and family ("frequently")	38.1%	24.4%
Discussing political, societal, or local issues with neighbors ("frequently")	8.4%	3.5%
Buying and boycotting a product or service ("yes")	16.9%	15.8%

Geography and Political Action and Participation

	Urban	Suburban	Rural
Voter Registration ("yes") (2022)	62.8%	63.7%	55.7%
Voted in the 2022 Midterm Election ("yes")	51.2%	46.6%	42.0%
Participating in public meetings ("yes")	7.6%	6.4%	5.9%
Contacting public officials ("yes")	5.9%	8.5%	7.8%
Consuming the news ("frequently")	67.1%	64.5%	58.0%
Donating to political organizations ($25 or more)	9.0%	7.6%	6.0%
Posting on the Internet or social media ("frequently")	3.9%	3.6%	9.0%
Discussing political, societal, or local issues with friends and family ("frequently")	28.8%	38.7%	39.8%
Discussing political, societal, or local issues with neighbors ("frequently")	5.2%	7.8%	11.1%
Buying and boycotting a product or service ("frequently")	17.3%	16.9%	14.3%

Urban voters lead when it comes to attending public meetings, voting, and buying or boycotting products or services. They had the lowest responses of "frequently" engaging in civic discourse with family and friends and with neighbors, however. Suburban North Carolinas are the most likely to have contacted or visited a public official and to be registered to vote. Rural communities reported the highest rates of "frequently" having civic discourse with family and friends and posting on social media and the least "frequent" news consumption.

Photo credit: Institute for Emerging Issues

BRIGHT SPOTS FOR POLITICAL ACTION AND PARTICIPATION

Citizen Academies

Many NC communities offer a Citizens Academy (also known as a city/county 101 program or neighborhood college) in which residents learn how their local governments work, find out how policy and budget decisions are made, and build knowledge and skills for effective citizen participation, including attending and speaking at public meetings, communicating with officials, joining municipal boards and commissions, voting, and more. Citizen Academies are usually 7 to 8 week programs involving 20-25 residents. The Citizens Academy is a helpful project that can be replicated in any town or county. GenerationNation has created a youth version of this initiative for younger community members.

Alumni often become informal ambassadors for the local government, share information with their neighborhoods, and go on to serve on advisory boards. Some run for elected office.

North Carolina Campus Engagement (NCCE)

Founded in 1994, NCCE is the largest and longest-standing organization in NC committed to promoting civic and community engagement in the higher education sector. Through their network of 40 member colleges and universities representing all three sectors – two-year and four-year public and four-year private institutions – NCCE prepares students for civic and social responsibility, deepens community-campus partnerships, and strengthens democracy. Since 2008 NCCE has facilitated efforts to register, inform, and empower college student voters in every election – both local and national; they have hosted trainings, provided information and resources, and disseminated nearly $100,00 in grants to campuses – all to promote voter registration, voter education, and get-out-the-vote initiatives. Through the years they have facilitated fellowship programs that mobilize students, faculty, and staff to organize election engagement activities, form campus Voting Coalitions, and develop and implement three-year election engagement plans for their campuses. Starting in 2013, NCCE began coordinating the NC

Campus Voting Coalition (NC-CVC), a statewide network of democracy organizations committed to mobilizing the student vote. In collaboration with the NC-CVC, NCCE has hosted eight annual NC College Voter Summits and multiple educational webinar series on key topics related to voting and elections. In 2022 NCCE launched the NC Campus Voting Challenge, in partnership with the ALL IN Campus Democracy Challenge and You Can Vote; this program recognizes outstanding campus election engagement.

Since 2013, NCCE has helped members of campus communities gain knowledge and skills to promote civil discourse and dialogue. Through conferences, training, and programs such as Student Dialogue Ambassadors, they have trained over 1000 faculty, students, and administrators. They have also disseminated over $19,000 in grants to 20 campuses that have in turn engaged nearly 5000 students in dialogue activities.

Ravenscroft School

Since 2021, Ravenscroft School, a private school in Raleigh, NC, has been working with Essential Partners (EP), a national organization that helps people build relationships across difference through dialogue. Ravenscroft first reached out to Essential Partners for help having conversations around the 2020 presidential election. They were concerned about the cohesion and resilience of their community in the face of fierce partisan polarization. An initial cohort of 22 faculty members in the Middle School and Upper School took part in The Dialogue Classroom training in August 2021. This training prepares teachers to embed dialogues into their curriculum that open students to varying perspectives and help them better understand their own views and values. In addition, 24 Upper School students were selected to receive training to facilitate Dialogue Across Difference, conversations with their peers about challenging topics that are critical to the Upper School's sense of community. These students led several discussions with fellow students during a Day of Dialogue. Dialogue Topics have included Meaningful Conversations, Giving and Receiving Support, and Building a Stronger Community.

Program for Public Discourse, UNC-Chapel Hill

UNC-Chapel Hill is currently working to foster civil discourse in the classroom, across campus, and with the broader community. The newly established Program for Public Discourse, for example, sponsors the Agora Fellowship, a cohort of undergraduate students dedicated to the study and practice of public discourse across various modalities. After undergoing an intensive training seminar in rhetoric and facilitation, the students deliberate various issues of public controversy throughout the year while also hosting public forums for the student body.

Deliberative Citizenship Initiative, Davidson College

Four years ago, Davidson College launched the Deliberative Citizenship Initiative (DCI), which is dedicated to creating opportunities for Davidson students, faculty, staff, alumni, and members of the wider community to productively engage with one another on difficult and contentious issues facing our community and society. The work of the DCI has four interconnecting emphases: Deliberation Across the Curriculum, Deliberation on Campus, Deliberation in the Community, and Research on Deliberation. Programs include a Deliberative Citizenship Fellows Program, Deliberative Pedagogy (DeeP) Faculty Collaborative, and Deliberative Citizenship Speaker Series as well as Deliberative Forums, Deliberative "D" Teams, Deliberation Facilitator Training Workshops, Commons Conversations, and other events that spark civic dialogue.

In collaboration with community organizations, student groups, and campus offices and with support from The Duke Endowment, Arthur Vining Davis Foundation, and several Davidson alumni, the DCI has welcomed over 1000 people to its Deliberative Forums on topics ranging from artificial intelligence and economic mobility to housing and the future of the Supreme Court. Nearly 1000 more people have participated in its small group discussions called D Teams, which meet several times to discuss topics that have included voting and elections, education policies, climate change, immigration, and more. Over 40 faculty members have participated in the DCI's DeeP Collaborative, and nearly 150 people (both students and non-students) have been trained by the DCI as deliberation facilitators. All of these participants in the DCI's programs are, following the initiative's motto, "building democracy, one conversation at a time."

Participatory Budgeting

Participatory Budgeting (PB) is a democratic process that allows residents to decide how to spend public funds. Residents submit ideas on how to spend a certain amount of money that volunteers vet and turn into project proposals. Residents then vote on which projects to fund. PB Greensboro is organized by the City Department of Budget and Evaluation, with various City departments working to implement voter-approved projects; a Participatory Budget Commission makes recommendations on the program. Mecklenburg County and the cities of Raleigh and Durham also facilitate PB processes.

The NC Leadership Forum at Duke University

The NC Leadership Forum (NCLF) at Duke University aims to transform the state's policy making environment from one of negative polarization and distrust to one of effective collaboration. Founded by a bipartisan group of NC leaders in 2016 in partnership with the Sanford School of Public Policy, NCLF works with state and local policy leaders from the government, business, and nonprofit sectors to provide them with the will, skills, and relationships they need to engage with each other constructively. By June 2024, NCLF will have successfully engaged nearly 400 state and local leaders in NC, The program annually invites cohorts of leaders from the government, business, and non-profit sectors who are diverse across party, ideology, race, ethnicity, gender, professional experience, and regional perspective. These participants engage in four intensive meetings over six months, focusing on a specific public policy topic. Through facilitated discussions, NCLF encourages leaders to explore differing perspectives while also deepening their understanding of their own stance on the issue. During the program, NCLF emphasizes building trust and relationships among between people whom disagreements persist. Duke University students and faculty often support the program by conducting research on questions raised by the participants. Students also have had opportunities to observe policy leaders deliberate during the program and conduct their own dialogues based on NCLF's model. Past evaluations by NCLF and external assessors have shown positive outcomes, with participants often forming enduring relationships across party lines and sectors during the program. Many alumni have collaborated with others they met during an NCLF program, working together on legislation and local initiatives.

Braver Angels

Braver Angels (BA), originally named Better Angels, began in NC with a bus tour by the national leaders of the organization, which formed in 2016. The leaders trained a group of BA members in the Research Triangle Park area to moderate workshops designed to promote communication across the political divide and thereby reduce polarization. Three local BA chapters, which Braver Angels calls "alliances," formed in the Raleigh, Durham/Chapel Hill, and Charlotte areas to provide public workshops, debates, town halls presentations, and other events. Later the two Triangle groups merged, and the Charlotte alliance was discontinued. In the past few years new alliances have formed in Asheville, Wilmington, the Sandhills, and Beaufort County; and new ones are being organized in the Triad, Charlotte, and Washington, NC.

As the number of NC alliances has grown, so has individual membership of NC residents in the national BA organization. As of March 2024, there are 2285 BA members and "subscribers" (non-members who have participated in at least one BA activity) in NC. Since June of 2020 the Triangle alliance, the largest in the state, has provided 47 workshops, 13 debates, 3 town halls, 19 presentations, and 23 other special events. Everyone facilitating these events across the state is an unpaid volunteer whose only compensation is seeing the impact of what they do on individuals, organizations, and institutions. Similarly, all training and events are provided without cost to participants.

A LOOK BACK AT THE 2010 AND 2015 NCCHIS

As indicated in the Introduction, there have been three previous editions of the North Carolina Civic Health Index. While the 2003 Index had a different focus and data collection process, it is instructive to compare the recent data with that reported in 2010 and 2015. The five indicators below have remained consistent across each Index (2010, 2015, 2024). In all but one area (working with neighbors to do something positive for the neighborhood or community, which has increased substantially), NC has declined.

	2010		2015		2024	
	North Carolina	U.S. Average	North Carolina	U.S. Average	North Carolina	U.S. Average
Volunteering ("yes")	23.6%	26.8%	26.0%	25.4%	22.8%	23.2%
Donating to charitable or religious organizations ($25 or more)	50.5%	50.0%	53.3%	50.1%	47.6%	48.1%
Doing favors for neighbors ("frequently")	17.2%	16.2%	13.2%	12.1%	10.9%	10.0%
Working with neighbors to do something positive for neighborhood or community ("yes")	7.9%	10.3%	8.1%	7.6%	19.6%	18.0%
Participating in groups or organizations ("yes")	32.9%	35.1%	38.5%	36.3%	24.8%	23.8%

Note: The data reported in this 2024 NCCHI were collected in 2021 and 2022, one to two years into the global COVID pandemic. It is difficult to determine whether, or to what extent, the pandemic impacted responses. Comparisons with national data on these same five indicators, however, indicate that US averages reported during these same years also (a) more than doubled (relative to the data reported in 2015) on the indicator, "work with neighbors to do something positive for the neighborhood or community," (b) declined on all other indicators, and (c) declined most substantially on participating in groups – suggesting a nationwide pattern that aligned with what could be expected during a pandemic. It must be noted, however, that NC's rates on all but one of the indicators that declined over this period (group participation) decreased by more than did the national averages, suggesting cause for concern.

A LOOK ACROSS THE US: NC COMPARED WITH OTHER STATES AND WITH NATIONAL AVERAGES

What is clear from the data is that North Carolinians are deeply committed to spending time with their families and friends. More so than residents of other states, North Carolinians spend time with their neighbors, do favors for them, and work with them to do something positive for the neighborhood or community. These are areas in which North Carolinians, exceed national averages and, for the most part, rank more highly than half of other states. Among those who volunteer, North Carolinians do so more "frequently" than those in most other states and in comparison with the national average.

	North Carolina	U.S. Average	National Rank
Volunteering (among those who volunteer) ("frequently")	24.9%	20.6%	6th
Talking with or spending time with neighbors ("frequently")	28.8%	26.9%	19th
Hearing from or spending time with family/friends ("frequently")	80.9%	79.3%	27th
Doing favors for neighbors ("frequently")	10.9%	10.0%	19th
Working with neighbors to do something positive for neighborhood or community ("yes")	19.6%	18.0%	25th
Participating in groups or organizations* ("yes")	24.8%	23.8%	31st

* This indicator appears in both tables in this section because NC both has a higher than national average reported participation rate and a low state ranking.

North Carolinians are less inclined to volunteer and to participate in political and public engagement, ranking in the lower half of states and below the national average on the following indicators.

	North Carolina	U.S. Average	State Ranking (out of 51)
Volunteering ("yes")	22.8%	23.2%	34th
Donating to political organizations ($25 or more)	6.9%	9.4%	42nd
Donating to charitable or religious organizations ($25 or more)	47.6%	48.1%	35th
Discussing political, societal, or local issues with family or friends ("frequently")	34.5%	35.1%	34th
Discussing political, societal, or local issues with neighbors ("frequently")	7.6%	7.9%	31st
Posting views about political, societal, or local issues on the Internet or social media ("frequently")	4.7%	6.2%	46th
Reading, watching, or listening to news or information about political, societal, or local issues ("frequently")	63.4%	67.6%	45th
Participating in public meetings ("yes")	6.2%	8.2%	47th
Contacting or visited a public official ("yes")	6.6%	9.5%	50th
Buying or boycotting a product or service ("yes")	16.1%	17.1%	36th
Voted (2022)	45.7%	52.2%	45th
Voter Registration (2022)	60.8%	69.1%	51st
Participating in groups or organizations ("yes")	24.8%	23.8%	31st

Photo Credit: HPU Bonners Leaders

A 20TH ANNIVERSARY EXPLORATION OF YOUTH CIVIC ENGAGEMENT:
Optimism and Urgency for Civic Opportunity and the Future

The first NCCHI was published in 2003 by the North Carolina Civic Education Consortium, a nonpartisan, statewide partnership of more than 190 organizations, including schools, universities, state and local government agencies, businesses, and nonprofit and youth organizations. The Consortium, founded in 1997 in the School of Government at UNC-Chapel Hill, grew out of concern by public leaders that NC was in danger of developing a generation of citizens unprepared to lead their communities. The Consortium's mission was to unite diverse partners to revitalize civic education and engagement among North Carolinians ages 5 to 18. A volunteer work group of the Consortium developed the NCCHI in response to a dearth of comprehensive and meaningful measures of civic engagement.

They gathered data through a statewide telephone survey of 800 non-voting age youth. Respondents, ages 13–17, were asked about their civic skills, behavior, knowledge, attitudes, and opportunities. To establish a benchmark for civic education and engagement, the Consortium also surveyed 800 adults on the same issues. Information gathered from the telephone surveys was coupled with existing measures, such as voter turnout, financial donations, and diversity in public office. The result was to create the first state-level benchmark of youth and adult civic engagement patterns in our nation. In its findings, the report concluded that today's young people have the potential to become a truly great civic generation.

Although less than half of the students surveyed at that time reported having adequate class time for civic education, the first NCCHI documented that NC youth were more involved in community service than previous generations, had confidence in government and in their own civic engagement skills, and engaged in civic life – for example by joining youth councils, discussing current events, or serving in leadership roles – when given the opportunity.

Unfortunately, there is even less investment in civics education than in the past.

Did that level of civic health hold as they aged? Not exactly. High school students in 2003, Millennials in 2021 and 2022 lag behind other generations on many key indicators of civic health as young adults, including:

- Volunteering

- Donating to charitable, religious, or political organizations

- Frequently talking with or spending time with, doing favors for, or discussing political, societal, local issues with family, friends, or neighbors

- Participating in groups

- Contacting a public official or attending a public meeting

- Voting

The 2003 Civic Index challenged NC's political, business, and education leaders and systems to invest more time, money, and energy to prioritize civic education and prepare NC's young people for effective civic participation – with the same urgency and importance as preparing them for work.

Unfortunately, due to education trends, budget cuts, growing political divisiveness, and a focus on STEM education and other areas some deem to be more important for the future, many students now receive less K-12 class time for civic education and are less often encouraged to be civically active; there is even less investment in civics education than in the past. The federal government invests 5 cents per K–12 student in civic education compared to $54 per K–12 student for STEM (Spaulding & Nair, 2020).

BRIGHT SPOTS FOR YOUTH CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

Photo credit: GenerationNation

GenerationNation

In 1992, leaders at the *Charlotte Observer* and other news organizations and businesses launched Kids Voting North Carolina in Charlotte with the hope of boosting voter education and engagement for children and families. Over more than a decade, the program engaged thousands of youth in mock elections in Charlotte, Raleigh, Greensboro, Fayetteville, Durham, Asheville, and other places in the state.

After working as a lead Charlotte partner supporting NC Civic Education Consortium (NCCEC) for the 2003 NCCHI project, the organization was inspired by the call to action to give NC's youth the opportunity to become a great civic generation. Knowing that this work could not be done on Election Day alone, strategies and programs were developed – informed by youth, educators, public officials, NCCEC, and other stakeholders with the 2003 report as a roadmap – to transform what was an annual mock election event into more comprehensive civic literacy and youth civic leadership programming to educate and engage K-12 students throughout the year.

Now called GenerationNation, the organization works with K-12 schools, local governments, organizations, youth, and other partners to develop a new generation of civic leaders. Through a variety of programs that connect classroom education with hands-on learning, GenerationNation students build civic literacy, becoming civic leaders who:

- know how their governments and communities work;
- understand the big issues driving school, community, and state policy and decision-making;
- are able to find and use good sources of news and civic information; and
- build experience, skills, and social capital for civic leadership, increased college access, and career readiness now and into adulthood.

As participants and alumni they graduate high school, attend college, are capable leaders in the workplace, and contribute to NC's civic health by getting involved in local and state government, joining and leading groups, serving on boards, discussing issues, volunteering, voting, running for office, working in public service, donating to nonprofits, and more.

North Carolina Civics Coalition (NC3)

In 2023, GenerationNation convened civic education champions across the state to launch the North Carolina Civics Coalition (NC3). NC3 works to elevate and strengthen civic education statewide, including highlighting and sharing information about NC civic education resources and programs, serving as a resource about effective civic learning policy and practices, and strengthening interest in civic education in NC.

There is evidence of growing opportunity for civic health among NC's youth. Teens volunteer with nonprofits across the state, and over 600 youth serve on their local youth councils and collaborate

through the State Youth Council. Each spring, hundreds of young people learn about the legislative process through the NC Youth Legislative Assembly. School districts, Chambers of Commerce, GenerationNation, and other partners provide youth civic leadership academies in several areas. In Watauga County Schools, students are nominated to serve as school board representatives. NC's 16 and 17 year old students pre-register to vote and at age 17-18 work with their local boards of elections in polling places. NC3 is working to help every NC student become aware of current NC civics programs and to develop new civic participation opportunities to increase access across the state.

Kids Voting North Carolina

Kids Voting programs build civic knowledge and skills among North Carolina K-12 youth through hands-on civic engagement and an authentic election experience.

GenerationNation and KVNC 4-H are NC affiliates for Kids Voting USA. GenerationNation provides educational resources and programming to support teaching about elections and voting and engaging students in election experiences in schools, youth organizations, libraries, scouts, and other programs in the state; enables Charlotte-Mecklenburg high school students to vote to elect their own student representative on the district school board; and engages NC high school students in service-learning as Election Day polling place assistants and in other election experiences.

Kids Voting NC 4-H

Drawing on nearly 20 years of experience successfully building the Kids Voting Durham program, Durham Cooperative Extension developed Kids Voting NC 4-H. Kids Voting NC 4-H programs promote:

- Enhanced youth community engagement: KVNC 4-H equips youth with the skills to actively participate in their communities' civic life now, even before they become of voting age.
- Increased adult voter turnout and knowledge: Upholding the 4-H tradition, youth use their skills and knowledge to educate and inspire adults in their community.
- Future voter turnout: Youth arrive at adulthood confident in their voting and civic skills and participate at higher levels.
- Equitable civic opportunities: Because 4-H has a presence in every county and deep roots in rural communities, KVNC 4-H is ensuring civic experience opportunities can be available to all NC youth.

Existing local 4-H partnerships with schools, youth groups, families, government agencies, and community volunteers extend the reach of this program even further. Many local programs choose to have 4-H youth undertake Kids Voting as a service project for their peers in the community, building leadership skills and volunteerism as well as civic engagement.

NC State Youth Councils, NC Department of Administration

Each year, the NC State Youth Council, a collaboration of youth councils across the state, offers a mini-grant for projects sponsored by youth. Importantly, grant applications and decisions are made by youth themselves. Teens attend a weekend conference in which they learn about the grantmaking process and review proposals. Together, they decide which programs should be funded across NC. In addition, participants become more aware of community needs and build personal philanthropic interests and skills. The program is coordinated by the Council for Women and Youth Involvement at the NC Department of Administration.

North Carolina Civics Diploma Endorsement

In 2023, the North Carolina General Assembly enacted a new high school civics proficiency diploma endorsement, sometimes called a diploma seal. The legislation outlines a two part process in which a student must pass a civics test and fulfill civic participation goals to earn this diploma seal. The policy and requirements are being developed by the State Board of Education and the Department of Public Instruction in 2024 to be put into practice by local school districts. Other states with a civics diploma seal are seeing increased rates of student civic learning and engagement. This could be an important component of increasing NC's civic health.

WHAT CAN YOU DO?

Photo credit: 4H NC Kids Voting Program

North Carolina Youth say *"Lead With Us"*

Progress has been made, but there is still significant work to be done. Recently, NC teens collaborated with peer and adult leaders and GenerationNation to develop Lead With Us, a call to action and framework for increasing and improving civic literacy, leadership, and opportunity.

Young people call on each other to:

- **Build our civic literacy**: understand how our government works, especially at state and local levels; be able to analyze news and civic information; and communicate our ideas and views effectively and civilly

- **Lead, volunteer, and serve now, as youth:** serve in school and civic leadership roles, volunteer and give to nonprofits, and build our peer and adult social capital networks

- **Be a civic leader into the future:** pursue careers connected to public service; lead in our neighborhoods, schools, organizations, workplaces, and government; and register, vote, and run for office

Young people call on adult leaders to:

- **Invest more in civic education:** increase the time all K-12 students spend on civic learning, provide more training and support for teaching civic literacy, and reprioritize civic education in public and private funding

- **Include youth in decision-making:** expand youth roles on nonprofit boards and in government, mentor and share networks with emerging civic leaders, and consider how youth voices can strengthen policy and decisions

- **Expand civic opportunity:** close civic opportunity gaps for under-resourced youth and reinforce the message that civically engaged youth don't only become future voters and civic leaders: they build social capital, increase their own opportunities for economic mobility and college attainment, and develop skills and readiness to join the workforce

RECOMMENDATIONS

When it comes to enhancing civic health, there is certainly a key role for personal responsibility and individual action. Individual residents can advance social connectedness, community engagement, and political action and participation through a wide range of choices and behaviors everyday: volunteering with organizations whose causes we support, hosting small group gatherings to discuss current events, reading history to help us understand the contexts that shape contemporary life, checking in on neighbors we have not seen recently, donating clothing or household items to local thrift stores, spreading the word about opportunities to engage in change initiatives, joining non-violent protests, picking up litter, being thoughtful in the products we choose to buy (or boycott), and raising empathetic children, to name only a few.

In these recommendations, however, we focus attention on efforts organizational and institutional leadership can undertake to invest in capacity building and systems change. We speak directly to the following sectors: municipalities and government; civic, nonprofit, and faith-based organizations; education; business; and media and public information.

Overarching Recommendations

Comprehensive Research
The partners from across the state who produced this 2024 NCCHI call for detailed research related to NC's civic health. There are a myriad of questions, patterns, and trends that need further exploration. For example, what are the factors that have contributed to NC's average and declining civic health for two decades? What interventions have been effective or show the most promise for strengthening our civic health? What contributed to the slight improvement in voting in 2020 and 2022, and what might explain the recent decline in 2024? Why have the demographic patterns identifying which North Carolinians are least likely to be civically engaged (i.e., younger, African-American, lower income) persisted across NCCHIs through the last 20 years? What can we learn from examining the few indicators on which this pattern does not hold? For example, why are African-Americans less engaged than White North Carolinians in all civic activities, with the exception of attending public meetings? Could we attribute this, especially in NC, to our prominence as a key state during the Civil Rights Movement, when African-Americans met regularly to plan and organize public action? Why are older North Carolinians most likely to do favors for neighbors? Maybe it is simply related to the fact that they have lived in their homes and neighborhoods longer and have built closer ties. Could there be something unique to their cohort related to growing up at a time when communities were smaller and perhaps more closely connected?

> Large and consistent investments of capital are needed to move the needle on NC's civic health.

Philanthropic Investment
Large and consistent investments of capital are needed to move the needle on NC's civic health. Funding is needed for comprehensive research, to facilitate convenings of concerned stakeholders and residents, and to implement and sustain effective interventions. One example of such investment is emerging in our regional neighbor, Arkansas, which published its very first CHI in 2023. The lead partner was the Clinton School of Public Service, and the process was supported by several funding partners, including the Arkansas Community Foundation, the Winthrop Rockefeller Foundation, and the Americans for Prosperity Foundation. As a result, and in response to their CHI findings, the Winthrop Rockefeller Institute launched Civic Arkansas, a new initiative to foster a more civically engaged state by leveraging the strengths and addressing the weaknesses documented through the CHI process. To replicate or implement a similar initiative in NC could have a substantial positive impact on our state and would require significant funding.

Social Connectedness

Indicators:

- Hearing from or spending time with family and friends
- Talking with or spending time with neighbors
- Doing favors for neighbors
- Working with neighbors to do something positive for the neighborhood or community

Municipal/Governmental Sector

- **Sponsor and facilitate initiatives to examine and address issues that present barriers to connectedness.** Initiatives such as Leading On Opportunity in Charlotte and the Institute on Emerging Issues (Bright Spots featured in this Index) convene residents and stakeholders to explore local issues such as infrastructure, healthcare, education, environment, digital opportunity, and economic mobility. By participating in and replicating such efforts, leaders across the state can help remove the barriers that hinder residents from engaging while improving the quality of their lives, building social capital, and strengthening civic health.

- **Provide resources and support to develop and strengthen neighborhood associations and local community groups.** Urban residents had the lowest response rate for "frequently" talking with or spending time with neighbors and for "frequently" doing favors for neighbors yet were the most likely to indicate working with neighbors to do something positive for their neighborhood or community. This contrast implies that while urban residents may participate in organized, community-wide improvement projects, they may lack the trust or relationships necessary to interact with individual neighbors. Urban municipalities and local governments could partner with residents to build capacity for the development of neighborhood watch groups to promote safety and trust. They could provide small grant opportunities to support neighborhood groups in hosting communal gatherings such as block parties.

- **Create or support the development or expansion of more green spaces for recreation and invest in the establishment of more urban community gardens**. While the data suggests that North Carolinians do spend time with family and friends, the majority of us do not spend time with, do favors for, or work on projects with neighbors. Green spaces, including parks, beautify communities while creating places for gathering and connecting with neighbors. According to 2019 USDA designations,[14] approximately 16% of NC's 2195 census tracts were food deserts – ranking the state as the 16th worst in the United States on this metric. Food deserts are geographic areas in which residents have limited access to affordable and healthy food options (especially fresh fruits and vegetables). Municipalities could provide funding and support, and neighborhoods could leverage the resources of the NC Community Garden Partners (a Bright Spot in this Index) to establish community gardens, especially in areas where food deserts exist. Such projects would allow neighbors to build relationships and work on projects with positive outcomes for the neighborhood and community.

- **Develop or leverage existing technology to connect neighbors**: Popular social media platforms such as NextDoor and Facebook Marketplace connect neighbors and promote the exchange of information and goods locally. Municipalities could develop place-specific online platforms to further connect residents, promote social interaction, and highlight community events and resources. As one example from NC, Durham Mutual Aid,[15] might model an approach.

Civic, Non-Profit, and Faith-Based Sectors

■ **Create and promote more cross-generational and place-based opportunities for service:** When it comes to social connectedness beyond family and friends, each of the older cohorts demonstrate strengths in this area. Gen X and Baby Boomers are the most likely to work with their neighbors to do something positive for the neighborhood or community, while members of the oldest cohort, the Silent Generation, are more likely to do favors for their neighbors. As Millennials and Gen Z lag behind on all these measures, it would be powerful to create local opportunities for intergenerational connections. Perhaps such efforts could be driven or managed through technology as younger cohorts are especially comfortable with technology and social media platforms in particular. Technology could mobilize young people to find and respond to opportunities to provide assistance to older neighbors or to work together with older neighbors on projects to improve their neighborhoods.

NOTE: Opportunities generated in this category would need to be flexible and take into account work schedules, perhaps being scheduled after work hours or on weekends, as individuals with lower incomes and jobs with less flexibility may face particular challenges to being well-connected with their neighbors.

Community Engagement

Indicators:
■ Volunteering
■ Participating in groups
■ Donating to charitable or religious organizations

Education Sector

■ **Expand college-based volunteer and community engagement programs**: Respondents with some college education or a bachelor's degree or higher had the highest volunteer rates among respondents, although these numbers are below 40%. High quality service-learning and other forms of community engagement in college are positively related to commitment to community involvement post-graduation (for an overview of related research, see Astin et al., 2006; Chan et al., 2014; Hart et al., 2007). Colleges and universities can build and expand programs that instill a community engagement ethos to engage the students beyond residence halls and campus life. Colleges and universities can adopt models such as the Bonner Leaders/Scholars programs or participate in the NC Campus Engagement network (both Bright Spots featured in this Index), gaining knowledge and resources to effectively develop, expand, or strengthen community engagement programming.

Businesses Sector

■ **Promote and incentivize volunteer opportunities for employees:** Volunteer centers and groups such as Activate Good (a Bright Spot in this Index) can help businesses connect their employees to organizations that need volunteers. We recommend employers not only promote these opportunities but also incentivize participation by offering time off for participation and by recognizing engagement. While many white-collar positions offer flexible and sometimes paid time for volunteering, this is not often the case for those at the other end of the income spectrum. Respondents with less than a high school diploma as well as those in the lowest-earning income bracket reported the lowest rates of volunteering. We recommend that NC-based companies, whose workforce is largely blue collar, create employee programs to promote and incentivize volunteering. This is one way North Carolinians at all income levels could have opportunities to meaningfully contribute to their communities (an understanding of justice known as "contributory justice").

Civic, Nonprofit, and Faith-Based Sectors

■ **Recruit and mobilize residents at the neighborhood level for group participation:** Membership organizations and civic groups could empower and encourage their members to invite their neighbors to get involved. Organizations could identify and reach out to specific neighborhoods in their area, especially predominantly African-American, rural neighborhoods (with the individuals least likely to participate) and pursue opportunities to partner together to address local concerns, thus building trust and connections that might lead to greater participation with the organization or group.

■ **Join or support collaborative fund-raising initiatives**: Organizations in these sectors can build on their cultures of collaboration and the generosity and community-mindedness of their individual members, coming together to mobilize their local communities for substantial charitable fundraising. The example of the multiple faith-based organizations that partner with RIP Medical Debt (a Bright Spot highlighted in this Index), through which residents donate funds to relieve the medical debt of individuals in their communities who lack the capacity to pay their medical bills, may serve as a model.

Municipal/Governmental Sector

■ **Invest in AmeriCorps:** As noted in a Bright Spot, AmeriCorps is one pathway to mobilize North Carolinians in meaningful volunteerism and community service. Unfortunately, participation in AmeriCorps has declined in North Carolina. According to the North Carolina 2004-5 annual AmeriCorps Report,[16] over 12,000 North Carolinians were involved in national service that year; but in 2023 only 3724 North Carolinians participated in AmeriCorps programs. We call on the state government, as well as the philanthropic community, to invest additional funding to expand AmeriCorps opportunities in NC. Such investments, by local communities and state government, will be especially necessary to strengthen the program, as there have been significant federal budget cuts – both proposed and enacted – to AmeriCorps in recent years.[17]

■ **Expand volunteer opportunities:** We also encourage all sectors to develop and invest in place-based immersive volunteer opportunities that are targeted to meet the unique needs of NC's local communities. One such model is the Elon Year of Service Fellows Program,[18] which is a partnership between Elon University and six organizations in Alamance County. Recent Elon graduates serve a one-year term focused on health, education, and economic development.

Photo Credit: Institute for Emerging Issues

Political Action and Participation

Indicators:

- Voting and registering to vote

- Public political engagement (contacting public officials, attending public meetings)

- Consuming news (reading, watching, or listening to news or information about political, societal, or local issues)

- Donating to political organizations

- Discussing political, societal, or local issues (posting views online, discussing issues with family and friends, discussing issues with neighbors)

- Choosing services (buying and boycotting) based on companies' social or political values.

Cross-Sector

Civic health demands an appetite for robust public and civic discourse. However, the data reveals that most North Carolinians are not discussing political, societal, or local issues with friends and family, although most do report spending time with them "frequently." When it comes to neighbors, while NC ranks above average among other states with regard to doing favors for neighbors and working with neighbors to do something positive for the neighborhood or community, we are not discussing political, societal, or local issues with them either. Not only are we not talking to people with whom we have relationships about these issues, very few (only 5%) reported "frequently" posting their views about political, societal, or local issues on the Internet or social media. And it is not that North Carolinians are unaware of these issues because, when asked how often they read, watch, or listen to news or information about political, societal, or local issues, over 63% reported that they do so "frequently."

These results demonstrate that NC has potential to enrich its civic discourse. However, they suggest that North Carolinians lack either the motivation or capacity (knowledge, skills, etc.) to transform personal engagement with others and with the news into public discussion.

We call upon all sectors to develop opportunities for North Carolinians to gain and practice skills required for public discourse and dialogue. This would not only improve civic health but would also help bridge divides, strengthen communities, and lead to depolarization while creating relationships and developing a culture in which residents can work effectively together to address public concerns.

We believe these skills must be inculcated with the youth as this would undoubtedly help nurture a culture of communication across divides and bridge differences. This Index features such initiatives as the Ravenscroft School, which partners with a national organization for resources and training in order to develop programming that empowers teachers and students to engage in dialogue. We also highlight several higher education initiatives at UNC-Chapel Hill, Davidson College, and statewide through NC Campus Engagement, that facilitate programming to help faculty, staff, students, and community members learn about and practice dialogue and civic discourse. We encourage others in the education sector (school-based and community-based) to explore these models and implement placed-based initiatives to promote discourse and dialogue.

We also call on the business sector to develop opportunities for employees to learn and practice dialogue and civil discourse skills. We recommend employers engage their employees in gaining these skills, which not only improve civic life but can also promote cooperation, help with managing conflict, and bridge divides in all contexts, including business.

We also invite the civic, non-profit, and faith-based sectors to create community-based opportunities for residents to develop and practice skills for public discourse and dialogue. One potential approach involves group affiliation. Roughly only one-fourth of respondents (24.8%) reported group membership of any type when the data was gathered in 2021.

An increase in group membership would likely facilitate increased discourse around social issues. As Robert Putnam (1999) argued in his seminal study *Bowling Alone*, social affiliations historically served as a vital conduit between the private and public sphere, providing citizens with an informal network within which to discuss common concerns. Organizations in these sectors could partner with Braver Angels and/or the organizations in the Listen First Coalition (Bright Spots in this Index) to help their members gain the confidence and ability to engage in conversations about political and societal issues.

Many municipalities and governments throughout NC facilitate local leadership development initiatives (e.g., Leadership Alamance, Leadership Greensboro) as well as initiatives such as Citizen Academies (one of our Bright Spots) that convene residents to develop leadership skills and learn more about their community and government. These programs could integrate dialogue and civil discourse opportunities based on relevant local issues. Special attention should be given to elevating such opportunities to come together gather and develop these skills for individuals in rural communities, where the rates of residents reporting "frequently" engaging in civic discourse are substantially higher than in urban and suburban communities; in other words, we can leverage the interest of rural residents in discussing issues by providing formal skill building in how to do so most effectively.

We recommend that these efforts to promote dialogue and civil discourse place special emphasis on nurturing intergenerational relationships, as NC's Baby Boomers reported the highest rates of "frequently" engaging in civic dialogue with both neighbors and family and friends and Millennials reported some of the lowest rates.

Municipal/Governmental Sector

- **Invite community members to participate in local politics:** It may be that NC residents are unaware not only of how they can contribute to local decision-making but also of where to begin. As a result of creatively expanded outreach – for example, tabling at local grocery stores or school events – and more opportunities for community participation (such as the example Bright Spots of Participatory Budgeting and Citizen Academies) residents may become more familiar with local governance and better understand how their voices can make a difference. Municipalities can expand the Student Election Assistants program (another Bright Spot) that enables high school students to work at the polls during elections.

- **Make public meetings more accessible:** Local city and town meetings are often held at inconvenient times, including dinner and child bedtimes. To increase participation, local governments can host virtual meetings or provide amenities to boost participation (e.g., meals, childcare).

- **Harness social media as a virtual town square:** North Carolinians are not likely to use social media as platforms to share their views about political, societal, and local issues. This presents a definite growth area – an opportunity to foster discussion of contemporary issues. Sites like Nextdoor and groups on Facebook have begun to do this; training local residents as virtual community moderators or showcasing local happenings in these spaces increase not only civic dialogue but also news consumption.

Media and Public Information Sector

- **Develop the capacity of local communities to report the news:** Rural NC communities have the lowest rate of "frequent" news engagement, and this is likely because local news sources (radios, newspapers, etc.) are increasingly being silenced by larger corporate news sources. The community engagement section (see above) highlights that rural communities are engaging in civic dialogue with their family and neighbors, but they may not have access to adequate local news sources. By working with grassroots organizations and community colleges to report on local happenings, NC communities will have access to highly relevant, specialized news.

- **Make news more relevant and accessible**: Those with the least amount of education also consume news the least frequently. Building and supporting local news would help ensure that content is perceived to be relevant and that language and frameworks are tailored to local populations.

CONCLUSION

When we look at comparisons with national averages and with other states, NC is not in the top percentiles. We exceed national averages on only six indicators and rank in the top half of states on only four. Our civic health, however, is not about comparisons with others. It is about us and the future we want for our state.

So what about when we look at ourselves internally, not in comparison with national averages or other states? There are only four indicators on which more than half of North Carolinians participate ("frequently" or "yes"), and there are 11 on which less than 25% of us participate ("frequently" or "yes").

Over ¾ of respondents indicated "frequently" or "yes"	Between ½ and ¾ of respondents indicated "frequently" or "yes"	Between ¼ and ½ of respondents indicated "frequently" or "yes"	Less than ¼ of respondents indicated "frequently" or "yes"
hear from or spend time with family and friends	are registered to vote (2022 CPS and NC State Board of Elections data) voted in the 2020 general election and the 2022 midterms (Board of Elections data) read, watch, or listen to news or information about political, societal, or local issues	donate $25 or more to charitable or religious organizations discuss political, societal, or local issues with family and friends talk with or spend time with neighbors	do favors for neighbors participate in any type of group volunteer work with neighbors to do something positive for neighborhood or community buy or boycott products and services based on companies' social or political values donate $25 or more to political organizations attend public meetings contact or visit public officials discuss political, societal, or local issues with neighbors post views about political, societal, or local issues on the Internet or social media voted in the 2024 midterm primaries (Board of Elections data)

Looking internally also highlights historic and ongoing disparities.

- Younger North Carolinians reported being less engaged on all measures of political action and participation and of community engagement. In social connectedness, they were 1% more likely to report hearing from or spending time with family and friends ("frequently") and otherwise less likely to participate on the other indicators.

- With a few indicators as exceptions, respondents with some college or a bachelor's degree and above reported higher rates of involvement in all three categories (social connectedness, community engagement, and political action and participation).

- Several indicators increased along with respondents' family income, and there is a clear divide between the two lowest income brackets and the two highest on several others.

- With one exception (attending public meetings), White respondents had higher rates than African-American respondents for reported participation across all indicators in all three categories (social connectedness, community engagement, and political action and participation).

This analysis of the data raises the question as to what structural impediments to civic participation are creating these disparities across age, educational attainment, family income, and race/ethnicity. Efforts to improve civic health in NC must recognize and work to ameliorate these disparities. These subset comparisons also call us to look closely at the areas in which these subsets are more engaged in order to determine how best to leverage these strengths to encourage greater participation amongst all groups.

Photo Credit: Deliberative Dialogue at Davidson College

Overall, too few of us are engaged on the majority of the indicators of civic health. These patterns largely hold across time; therefore, we need to make changes. We cannot do "business as usual" if we want a more civically healthy population.

If we want to live up to our own potential, much less lead as a state, NC has work to do. We must ask ourselves: How might we leverage where we have the deepest roots – connections with family and friends – to strengthen connections with our neighbors and to be more community engaged and more politically active? This 2024 NCCHI has highlighted a wide range of Bright Spots – how can we better support the efforts of these seeds of hope, taking their activities and what they have learned to scale? We have also made a variety of recommendations, speaking to the full range of sectors at work in our state – how might we join together within and across these sectors to take up these recommendations and other ideas generated throughout our state most impactfully in the coming years?

It is our hope – indeed, our intention – that when we look back 20 years from now, NC will have made great strides, with residents increasingly engaged with one another, organizations increasingly investing in civic life, and the state as a whole well-set on a trajectory of ongoing growth in our civic health. We can tap our deep roots, nurture our seeds of hope, and become the civically engaged state we have the potential, and the desire, to be.

TECHNICAL NOTES

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 2021 and voting estimates from 2022 November Voting and Registration Supplement.

Using a probability-selected sample of about 60,000 occupied households, the CPS collects monthly data on employment and demographic characteristics of the nation. Depending on the CPS supplement, the single-year North Carolina CPS sample size used for this report ranges from 271 - 1,116 (volunteering/civic engagement supplement) to 1,825 (voting supplement) residents from across North Carolina. 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, on the assumption that younger people may be completing their education.

Because multiple sources of data with varying sample sizes are used, NCoC's analysis is not able to compute a single margin of error for North Carolina 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, while helpful in benchmarking, national rankings 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 essential 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.

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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, the Edward M. Kennedy Serve America Act directed NCoC 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 35 states and cities 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

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

Georgia
Georgia Family Connection Partnership
Georgia Municipal Association

Illinois
McCormick Foundation

Indiana
Indiana University Center on Representative
Government
Indiana Bar Foundation
Indiana Citizen Education Foundation, Inc.
Indiana Supreme Court
Indiana University Northwest
Indiana University-Purdue University
Indianapolis

Kansas
Kansas Health Foundation

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

Michigan
Michigan Nonprofit Association
Michigan Campus Compact
Michigan Community Service Commission
Volunteer Centers of Michigan
Council of Michigan Foundations
Center for Study of Citizenship at Wayne
State University

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
Nebraskans for Civic Reform

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
North Carolina Campus Engagement
GenerationNation
The Program for Public Discourse at the
University of North Carolina Chapel Hill
Duke Civic Engagement
The Phil and Connie Haire Institute for Public
Policy at Western Carolina University
Carolina Public Humanities at UNC-Chapel
Hill

Ohio
Miami University Hamilton Center for
Civic Engagement

Oklahoma
University of Central Oklahoma
Oklahoma Campus Compact

Pennsylvania
Center for Democratic Deliberation
National Constitution Center

Rhode Island
Rhode Island Council for the Humanities
Rhode Island Department of State

South Carolina
University of South Carolina Upstate

Texas
The University of Texas at Austin
The Annette Strauss Institute for Civic Life
RGK Center for Philanthropy & Community
Service

Virginia
Center for the Constitution at James
Madison's Montpelier
Colonial Williamsburg Foundation

ISSUE SPECIFIC

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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
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NOTES

NOTES

NATIONAL CONFERENCE ON CITIZENSHIP

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Generation Nation

CAROLINA
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UNC | COLLEGE OF ARTS AND SCIENCES
Program for Public Discourse

Promoting Civic Virtue, Fostering Civil Debate

Duke COMMUNITY
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