



2020 NEW HAMPSHIRE CIVIC HEALTH INDEX™ Executive Summary



University of
New Hampshire

Carsey School of Public Policy



National Conference on Citizenship



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ABOUT THE PARTNERS

UNIVERSITY OF NEW HAMPSHIRE - CARSEY SCHOOL OF PUBLIC POLICY

The Carsey School of Public Policy at the University of New Hampshire is nationally recognized for its research, policy education, and civic engagement. The school takes on pressing public issues with unbiased, accessible, and rigorous research; builds the policy and political problem-solving skills of its students; and brings people together for thoughtful dialogue and practical problem-solving.

NATIONAL CONFERENCE ON CITIZENSHIP

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



OVERVIEW

The 2020 New Hampshire Civic Health Index (2020 Index) builds on previous Indices published in 2006, 2009, and 2013.¹ Taking stock of our civic well-being makes sense in light of the changes the state has experienced in recent years. Understanding our civic habits and who participates and who does not is critical to the physical, economic, and political health of our state. This is especially important in order to understand the experiences of people who have historically participated less in public life, due to systemic barriers and discrimination or due to choice, and whose voices are less likely to be heard when public decisions are being made. This past year, we also have seen how a global pandemic as well as a resurgence of activism focused on racial and social justice can affect the ways that people interact, look out for each other, and work to make communities more inclusive and equitable.

The purpose of the 2020 Index is to provide a comprehensive view of the ways in which New Hampshire residents show up and participate in public life. The 2020 Index is especially focused on the ways in which different groups engage in civic activities as a function of demographic characteristics such as age, educational achievement, gender, social class, and race. We know that different population groups experience varying individual health outcomes; we want to know if that is true when it comes to civic health as well. The central questions that have guided the 2020 Index focus on:

- How we trust and engage with each other
- How we participate in community and politics
- How different demographic groups participate in civic life

The data examined in the 2020 Index were all collected prior to the onset of the coronavirus pandemic. The data reflect people's behavior and attitudes during more "normal" times. We expect that a similar snapshot focused on civic health taken during the height of stay-at-home orders, school closures, spiking unemployment rates, and barricaded public spaces would produce different results. Eventually, there will be a "new normal" as the pandemic subsides. One way to think about the data reported here is to see it as a reminder and baseline for what civic health can look like. And the ways in which the pandemic has heightened attention to social and economic disparities can help us attend to disparities in civic health, too. In that sense, the timing of the 2020 Index matters even more than we anticipated when we began the work.

The 2020 New Hampshire Civic Health Index draws on data available from the most recent U.S. Census Bureau Current Population Survey supplements on voting and civic life.² We drew additional data from the UNH Granite State Poll (October, 2019) and the recent publication by the Carsey School of Public Policy, *What is New Hampshire?*³, as well as the November, 2019 Carsey School Brief, *New Hampshire Demographic Trends in an Era of Economic Turbulence*.⁴

A significant addition to the 2020 Index is the replication the Social Capital Community Benchmark Survey commissioned in 2000 by the Saguaro Seminar, which included a sample of New Hampshire residents.⁵ We pulled select questions from this Community Benchmarks Survey for the October 2019 Granite State Poll, as well as some of our own original questions. Thus, we are able to report on changes in trust and social capital in New Hampshire between 2001 and 2019. The Social Capital Community Benchmark Survey measures trust and social capital, as well as barriers to engagement. Measuring trust is one way of taking our civic pulse, along with other indicators that can give us a holistic view of the Granite State.

KEY FINDINGS

When we look at New Hampshire relative to the rest of the country, we have many things to celebrate. In the most recent data, the Granite State ranked:

- **Second in the nation in charitable giving of \$25 or more in the past year**
- **Fifth in the nation in voting in the 2016 election**
- **Fifth in the nation in connecting regularly with friends and family**
- **Sixth in attending public meetings**
- **Seventh in talking about important political, societal, or local issues with friends and family**

Some other trends include:

- **The majority of New Hampshire residents feel they matter to their community and can make an impact.**
- **In midterm elections in 2018, the state achieved the highest voter turnout since 1978.**

However, there are aspects of our civic health that need attention. Although Granite Staters demonstrated relatively strong civic health in categories such as Volunteering and Giving and Civic Awareness and Engagement, residents were more variable with respect to Connecting in Community. Although voter turnout surged in the 2020 election, prior to that, turnout had declined in the last two presidential elections, 2012 and 2016. Since 2001, trust in the national government has fallen dramatically, and trust in local government and local news media is also declining. Granite Staters reported that they feel more barriers to engagement than they did in 2001.

There was a large disparity between what Granite Staters did civically with friends and family compared with what they did with their neighbors. For example,

- **Granite Staters ranked in the top ten in the nation for connecting with friends and family regularly (5th) and talking about political, societal, or local issues with friends and family (7th).**
- **Granite Staters ranked toward the bottom in the nation when it comes to connecting with neighbors regularly (38th), talking with neighbors about political, societal, or local issues (33rd), and doing favors for neighbors (40th). Part of this disparity may relate to trust—since 2001, Granite Staters' trust in their neighbors has also declined.**

New Hampshire residents ranked very low compared with national averages in terms of

- **Posting their views about political, societal, or local issues online (38th)**
- **Helping out friends or extended family with food, housing, or money (45th)**
- **New Hampshire ranked in the bottom five states in the nation in terms of connecting with people of different racial, ethnic, or cultural backgrounds (46th).**

As a note, there were several areas where our data were a helpful start but not sufficient to paint the full picture of civic life in New Hampshire—for instance, we need more data about New Hampshire’s civic health in relation to race, ethnicity, and culture, as well as further data about our charitable giving.

Considering our research questions and the data we reviewed, we can point to six themes that result from our analysis.

Theme 1: Demographics affect civic health. We found that different demographic designations had effects on civic health including education, age, income, and geographic locations where individuals lived in the state.

Theme 2: Although New Hampshire demonstrates strong voter turnout overall, this varies by demographics, particularly education and income. Those with a college degree were more likely to vote, and less educated and lower income people were less likely to vote and more likely to experience obstacles that made it difficult for them to participate in civic life.

Theme 3: Overall Granite Staters’ trust is declining, both in public institutions and in each other. One of the most significant changes we found in the 2020 Index was the noticeable decline in trust in neighbors, government, and local media, compared to prior years. Trust in the national government has declined by half since 2001, from 30 percent to 14 percent; trust in local government has declined as well, from 52 percent to 44 percent in the same time period. Our trust is connected to other variables such as our sense of mattering in our communities, whether we vote, and other key indicators of civic health.

Theme 4: Education is the most consistent, stable predictor of civic behavior of all types. We examined educational achievement (type of educational degree attained), and we specifically asked to what extent residents have received civics education in school. We found relationships among education levels and/or receiving civics education, and virtually all other civic health variables including voting, knowing how to become engaged in one’s community, and whether one believes they matter to their community.

Theme 5: Income impacts civic health in some differing ways, and working class people in particular demonstrate an interesting mix of engagement behaviors. One’s income is highly related to whether and how one participates in civic life. Higher income people tended to vote more, connect more with family and friends, and connect more with people of a different racial or ethnic group. Those in the lowest income group were the most likely to do a favor for a neighbor or help others out. Low-income individuals were also most likely to connect with neighbors. We also found that those in the lower middle-income group were more likely to engage with the news and contact a public official than other income groups. At the same time, lower middle-income individuals were least likely to vote compared to others.

Theme 6: Age matters, and Millennials overall struggle in achieving strong civic health. People of different ages participate in public life to different degrees and in different ways. Those who are considered “millennials” (born between 1981 and 1996) are less likely in general to be civically engaged and vote than other age cohorts. There is evidence from a recent survey of 20- to 40-year old NH residents that one-fifth to one-quarter have no family or friends living nearby. In a survey conducted by Stay Work Play New Hampshire, almost one-third of those responding indicated that they would probably or definitely move out of state within two years.⁶ Since this age cohort is critical to New Hampshire’s long term civic and economic health, this is an important finding.



REFLECTIONS

Taking these findings into account, we have identified several reflections about how to preserve those areas of civic health where New Hampshire is excelling and to address those areas where we are performing poorly. Briefly, these steps include:

1. At the individual as well as institutional and systemic levels, we must find ways to bring people together across racial, ethnic, cultural, political, and social identities, and to start to forge a new image of New Hampshire as a state that acknowledges its diversity and changing demographics.
2. Targeted efforts to increase voter participation among those with less education and those in the 18-34 age range can help to enfranchise these groups. It will be important to mine new 2020 voter turnout data to determine if these populations changed or continued historic habits of low voter participation.
3. It is important that all New Hampshire students complete a civics education curriculum that provides them with the skills and knowledge needed to function as informed citizens.
4. Municipalities in partnership with public institutions and nonprofit organizations should create opportunities for people to spend time together, hear each other's views, and participate in shared actions to address community challenges. The planned design and creation of civic infrastructures can offer places and spaces for connection, conversation, and collaboration.
5. Municipal governments in partnership with schools and nonprofit organizations can do a better job of informing residents about how to get involved, how to make their voices heard, and how decisions get made in city councils, schools, conservation commissions, and so on.
6. Regular assessment of civic health at the state as well as the regional and town levels is necessary in order to track trends over time and identify necessary policies and practices that can increase participation and engagement. It is integral that such assessments examine racial and ethnic data, and seeing how that data has historically not been available from the sources that we drew this report from, we may need to conduct additional studies with oversampling to attain sufficient race and ethnicity data, or create new data collection methods that surface how race and ethnicity affect civic health.

Although the authors of this report provide the above reflections as prospective next steps, a cross-sector conversation throughout the state about these findings is needed in order to digest the data and identify actions to strengthen New Hampshire's civic health.

Please see the full report for more detail about the ideas summarized in this Executive Summary.



ENDNOTES

¹ The NCoC has worked with various partners in New Hampshire over the years to publish the New Hampshire Civic Health Indices. The 2006 Civic Health Index was published by the New Hampshire Institute for Politics at St. Anselm College. The more recent Indices were published by the Carsey School of Public Policy.

- Mallory, B. & Moore-Vissing, Q. (2013). *2012 New Hampshire Civic Health Index*. Carsey School of Public Policy at the University of New Hampshire and the NCoC. <https://scholars.unh.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1192&context=carsey>
- Dillon, M. & Rogers, S. (2009). *2009 New Hampshire Civic Health Index*. NCoC. <https://www.ncoc.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/04/2009NewHampshireCHI.pdf>

² U.S. Census Bureau, Volunteering and Civic Life in New Hampshire, Current Population Survey (2017) and Voting in New Hampshire, Current Population Survey (2018 and 2016).

³ *What is New Hampshire?* (2018). Carsey School of Public Policy at the University of New Hampshire. <https://carsey.unh.edu/what-is-new-hampshire>

⁴ Johnson, K.M., “New Hampshire Demographic Trends in an Era of Economic Turbulence” (2019). The Carsey School of Public Policy at the Scholars’ Repository. 380. <https://scholars.unh.edu/carsey/380>

⁵ We obtained our permission to use this survey through the UNH Survey Center and New Hampshire Charitable Foundation. 2000 Social Capital Community Benchmark Survey (2000). Retrieved October 02, 2020, from <https://ropercenter.cornell.edu/featured-collections/2000-social-capital-community-benchmark-survey>

⁶ Stay Work Play New Hampshire Quality of Life Survey (2018, June 19). Retrieved October 02, 2020, from <https://stayworkplay.org/survey/>



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