

# AMERICA'S CIVIC HEALTH INDEX

## *Broken Engagement*



SEPTEMBER 18, 2006

A REPORT BY THE NATIONAL CONFERENCE ON CITIZENSHIP  
IN ASSOCIATION WITH  
CIRCLE AND SAGUARO SEMINAR

*Connecting | Trusting | Volunteering | Participating*



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The National Conference on Citizenship--a non-profit organization chartered by the U.S. Congress--created "America's Civic Health Index" to elevate the discussion of our nation's civic health. Working with leading scholars across America, the National Conference on Citizenship created the Civic Health Index in association with the Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement (CIRCLE), the Saguaro Seminar: Civic Engagement in America, and a network of 250 civic institutions. The goal is to prompt public deliberation about our civic condition, and how best to measure and improve it.

The principal findings of this report are based on 40 indicators of civic health organized into 9 categories. The survey information is nationally representative of the population as a whole and is complete through 2004 (with information from 2005, where available, included).

The creation of America's Civic Health Index and report was a cooperative effort of a working group that was formed more than a year ago. The National Conference on Citizenship would like to give special thanks to the members of that working group:

- **JOHN BRIDGELAND**, CEO, Civic Enterprises; Chair, National Advisory Board, National Conference on Citizenship; and former Assistant to the President of the United States & Director, Domestic Policy Council & USA Freedom Corps;
- **WILLIAM GALSTON**, Senior Fellow at the Brookings Institution; Saul Stern Professor at the School of Public Policy at the University of Maryland; & former Deputy Assistant to the President of the United States for Domestic Policy;
- **STEPHEN GOLDSMITH**, Daniel Paul Professor of Government, Kennedy School of Government at Harvard University; Director, Innovations in American Government; Chairman, Corporation for National & Community Service; and former Mayor of Indianapolis;
- **ROBERT GRIMM, JR.**, Director of Research and Policy Development, Corporation for National and Community Service;
- **LLOYD JOHNSTON**, Research Professor and Distinguished Research Scientist at the University of Michigan's Institute for Social Research; and Principal Investigator of the Monitoring the Future study since its inception in 1975;
- **PETER LEVINE**, Director of the Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement (CIRCLE); Research Scholar at the Institute for Philosophy & Public Policy at the University of Maryland's School of Public Policy; & Steering Committee Chair, Campaign for the Civic Mission of Schools;
- **A.G. NEWMYER, III**, Manager, National Conference on Citizenship;
- **ROBERT PUTNAM**, Peter and Isabel Malkin Professor of Public Policy, Kennedy School of Government at Harvard University; Founder, Saguaro Seminar: Civic Engagement in America; and author of *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community*;
- **DAVID SANDAK**, Program Director, National Conference on Citizenship;
- **THOMAS SANDER**, Executive Director, the Saguaro Seminar, Harvard University; and
- **THEDA SKOCPOL**, Dean of the Graduate School of Arts & Sciences, Harvard University; and author of *Diminished Democracy*.

### A NEW CIVIC HEALTH INDEX

Five years after 9/11 and during the celebration of Citizenship Day and Constitution Week, the National Conference on Citizenship presents “America’s Civic Health Index.” This Index includes a wide variety of civic indicators in an effort to educate Americans about our civic life and to motivate citizens, leaders and policymakers to strengthen it. The Index includes 40 indicators across 9 categories, with each of the 9 categories weighted equally. The 9 categories are:

- Connecting to Civic & Religious Groups;
- Trusting Other People;
- Connecting to Others through Family and Friends;
- Giving and Volunteering;
- Staying Informed;
- Understanding Civics and Politics;
- Participating in Politics;
- Trusting and Feeling Connected to Major Institutions; and
- Expressing Political Views

The Index is based on nationally representative data from 1975 to 2004 so that we can see trends over three decades. Some of the data for 2005 are not yet available. We do report selected trends for 2005 -- some of it is disclosed here for the first time. Because the sample sizes are sufficiently large, we provide breakdowns by age, levels of educational attainment, race and ethnicity, and state. We also explain why these indicators are important, highlight key findings and correlations from existing research, and present questions for further consideration. The complete findings and indicators are presented in Appendix I, the latest data are shown in Appendix II, and the methodology is described in Appendix III.

### OUR KEY FINDINGS

While there are some signs of civic recovery in the last few years, our civic health shows steep declines over the last 30 years. The most hopeful signs are a rebound in volunteering, especially youth volunteering, over the last decade, and increasing political engagement since the late 1990s. But even these trends must be nurtured or they may fizzle out.

Our findings are consistent with a 1998 blue-ribbon National Commission on Civic Renewal, which found that America was turning into a “nation of spectators” rather than the active participants that our democracy requires. And the 2000 *Better Together* report of The Saguaro Seminar warned that “without strong habits of social and political participation, the world’s longest and most successful experiment in democracy is at risk of losing the very norms, networks, and institutions of civic life that have made us the most emulated and respected nation in history.” Some aspects of civic health have modestly improved since 2000. Many more have worsened. And a few have remained stable.

The hopeful news is that the civic health of our young people is improving in some respects compared to their Baby Boomer parents and grandparents, and the period after 9/11 has seen increases in both youth volunteering and voting. After spiraling downwards from 1975 to the late 1990s, political activity and the expression of political views among adults and youth also have been rising since then. However, 9/11 does not appear to have triggered a broader civic transformation.



In fact, a closer look shows a large and growing civic divide between those with a college education and those without one, with a particularly substantial civic gap between college graduates and high school dropouts. And while political activities seem to be rising, there is a growing and troubling contrast between such political engagement on the one hand and growing distrust of strangers and key American institutions on the other. As many Americans suspect, our politics have become both more engaging and more divisive.

Despite some signs of hope, most indicators are on the decline. Trust in one another has steadily declined over the last 30 years; connections to civic and religious groups are consistently down; people are less connected to family and friends and more Americans are living alone; people are less well informed about public affairs; and our trust of and connection to key institutions have been largely on the decline.

We find it alarming that a nation that is economically prosperous, relatively secure, and full of social opportunity and civil liberty evinces serious signs of civic weakness at a time when it most needs civic strength. Here are some of the reasons we need citizens to engage:

- The 21<sup>st</sup> century has opened with acts of terror, natural disasters, deadly regional conflicts, and increased global environmental threat;
- The gap between rich and poor in the United States has widened to the highest levels ever recorded; and
- Our politics exploit our divides for political “points,” making it ever more difficult to find union.

Building on the modest progress in recent years, we can make civic gains. The Greatest Generation, born prior to 1930, ushered in robust American civic health in the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century, with an increased capacity to address common problems together. In this vibrant period of high social capital and civic engagement, our country had a smaller gap between rich and poor and greater cooperation across party lines to address our nation’s challenges. So too today: if we nurture the health of our civic stock, our economic and political stocks also should rise.

## ENGAGING AMERICANS IN A CIVIC HEALTH DIALOGUE

Our nation has learned over generations that we can be much more effective as citizens, government officials, and business leaders with strong feedback measures, in the same way as a pilot flies better with gauges that report the plane’s angle, altitude, fuel level and air speed. To ensure sound economic policy, the United States regularly collects information on its economic health. Every month, we hear about rates of inflation, housing starts, levels of unemployment, and more. Every quarter, we learn about the Gross Domestic Product, a broad quantitative measure of total economic activity in the Nation. All such information is vital to ensuring that our policies and practices can adjust to keep our economy strong. Our regular collection and reporting of such data also tells us something important about our national priorities.

However, our nation lacks regular information about its civic health, even though an active, well-connected, trusting, and engaged citizenry is fundamental to vibrant communities, a strong democracy, and our personal welfare, health and happiness. Since 2001, the U.S. Government has provided annual information on volunteering in the United States. In several scattered years since the 1970s, it has collected and reported information on student knowledge of civics, American government and U.S. history. The government also has collected information through the Internal Revenue Service on charitable contributions. Over time, we hope and expect that the U.S. Government will collect and report more data related to civic health more regularly, building on the work of the Civic Health Index and civic indicators produced here. We also believe that better, more localized data could help policymakers understand which communities are making faster or slower progress and which governmental and non-governmental efforts are working.



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Although we have identified these 40 indicators as important in assessing our country's civic health, we acknowledge that there are many ways to measure it. This project is a first step in an effort to expand our knowledge and reporting of indicators of our civic welfare. We brought together leading experts who have studied these issues for decades with policymakers who have grappled with practical ways to improve our civic life, and we solicited input from the National Conference on Citizenship's network of more than 250 leading civic organizations in the United States.

Now, we want to broaden our scope and invite an active discussion among citizens, educators, foundation and non-profit leaders, business executives, researchers, academics and other citizens about what is important in our civic life and how we measure, report, and improve it. We especially invite discussion on such key questions as these:

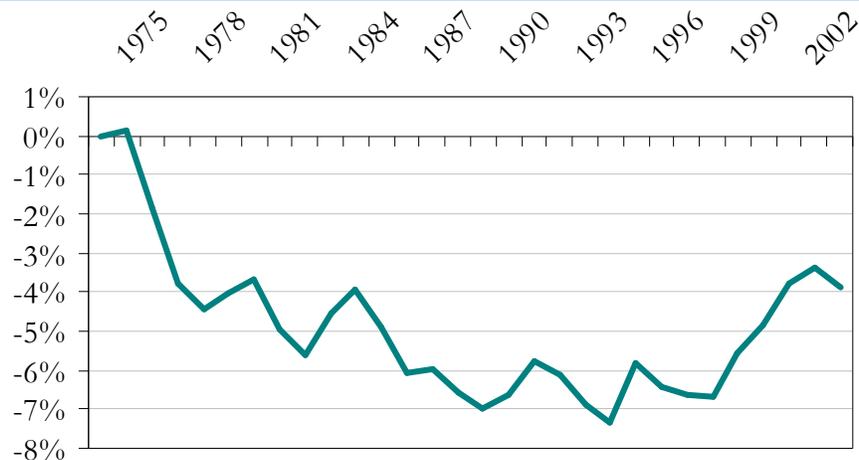
- Are these the right indicators of civic health? What are we missing?
- What are the appropriate weights to such civic measures to reflect their relative importance?
- What key questions should be asked of Americans to sharpen the discussion about the health of our civic ties?
- How have emerging technologies and new modes of communication changed the way we function civically?
- In what new ways are we connecting and engaging with one another?
- Would an increase in each of these indicators of behavior always be a good thing? For example, is it necessarily beneficial if political views are expressed more frequently or if online chat replaces face-to-face communications?
- What concrete steps can citizens, families, leaders in communities, and policymakers take to strengthen our civic stocks?

Thank you for being part of this dialogue and the effort to ensure that our country's civic health receives the attention and focus it merits. 



An analysis of 40 indicators of civic health – including membership in civic groups, trust in other people, connecting to family and friends, staying informed, and trust in key institutions – shows a significant decline over the last 30 years. The 40 indicators have each declined by an average of seven percentage points: a substantial and troubling pattern that is only partly offset by less than a 3-point recovery since 1999. Each percentage point drop is a substantial change. For example, if the proportion of the population that gives a particular answer falls from 28% to 21%, that is a drop of seven percentage points (typical of our index components), but it represents a decline of one quarter.

**Civic Health Index | Our Nation's Civic Health, 1975 - 2005**



“By providing a **precise X-ray of civic health’s key components**, this report identifies the key problems we must address...and the areas of strength on which solutions can be built.”

William A. Galston  
Senior Fellow, Brookings Institution

“**A Civic Health Index is a social capital lens onto America’s soul.** Such lenses, as Lew Feldstein has remarked, enable us to ‘see porches as crime fighting tools, treat picnics as public health efforts, and see choral groups as occasions of democracy.’ While we think we can see, **without such an index, we are blind to the civic patterns happening right before our eyes.**”

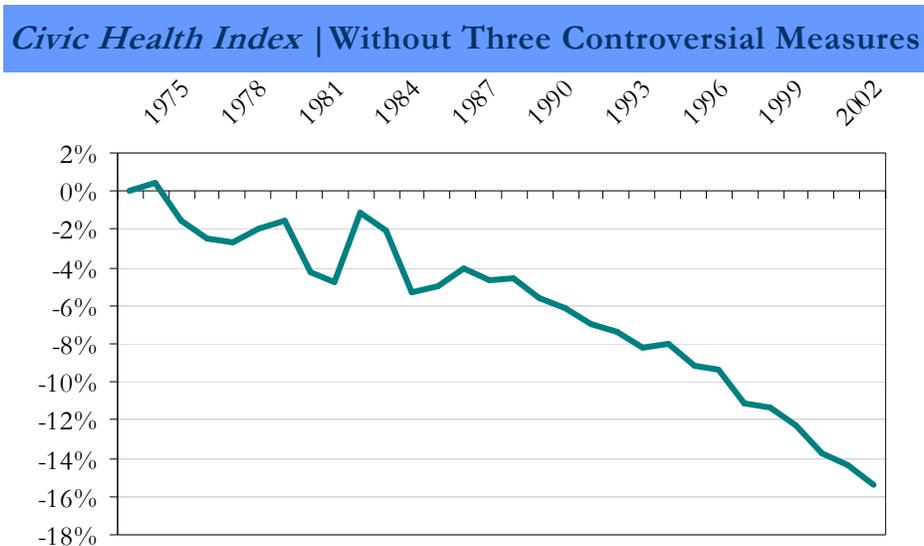
Robert D. Putnam  
Peter and Isabel Malkin Professor of Public Policy, Harvard University



An alternative version of the Index is worth considering. It drops three specific indicators that have improved recently but which might be less reliable than the rest:

- online “chat” (which some see as a shallower form of social and political engagement);
- the ability to place the political parties on an ideological spectrum (which may reflect increased political polarization rather than a rise in civic knowledge more generally); and
- people’s belief that they can understand government (which may reflect increased confidence rather than increased civic understanding).

We have retained those indicators in our analyses, but without these three measures, the Index shows steady worsening over the last three decades, down by almost 9 percentage points, without an improvement over the last five years (as the following chart depicts):





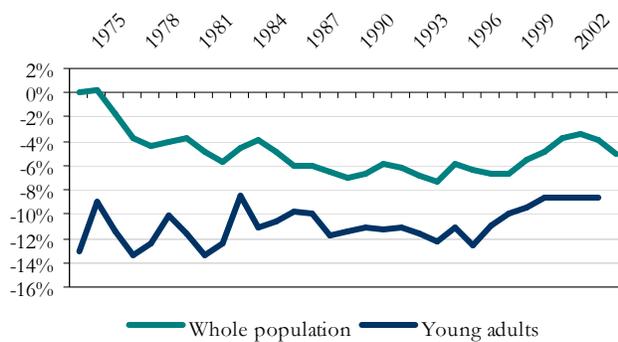
Among all of our indicators of civic health, only a few show signs of civic re-engagement. After presenting improvements in youth civic engagement, we discuss these trends in the context of whether there may have been a 9/11 effect and the existence of a growing civic divide between the well-educated and less-educated. We also highlight positive trends for political activity, expression and knowledge.

**“The signs of hope in our civic life are found in our nation’s young people - an emerging generation of volunteers, voters, and connectors that can lead the way to robust national civic renewal.”**

John M. Bridgeland  
CEO, Civic Enterprises

### IMPROVEMENTS IN YOUTH CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

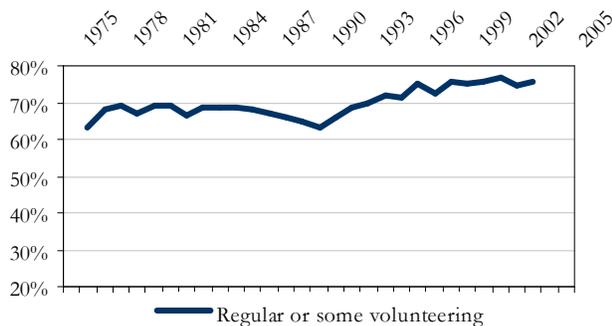
#### Civic Health Index | Young Adults (18 - 25)



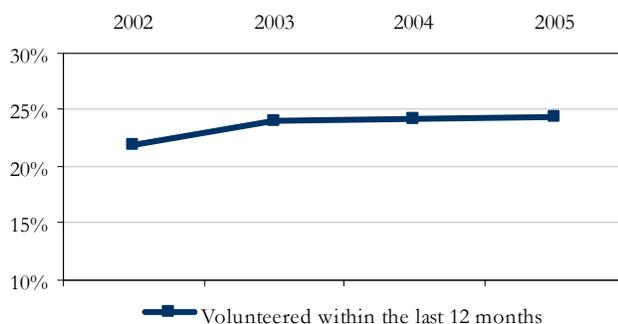
The Index combines data for all adult Americans (age 18 and older). However, if we disaggregate this data (in the chart at left), we see the civic health of young adults (18-25) improving, at least relative to older generations. That is a hopeful sign, because “as the twig is bent, so grows the tree.”

Americans are profoundly shaped by their adolescent civic experiences, as a large body of research confirms. These improvements may portend civic progress in the decades to come relative to predictions 5-10 years ago when young people were less engaged. That said, while the gap has narrowed substantially, each year we are still slipping further civically. Each year, the grim reaper steals away one of the most civic slices of America – the last members of the “Greatest Generation.” This is a cold generational calculus that we cannot reverse until younger Americans become as engaged as their grandparents. While we need to boost the civic health of all Americans, we should pay special attention to whether we can further build upon the important civic gains in this younger cohort.

#### Volunteering at 12th Grade | MTF



#### Youth Volunteering: Ages 16 - 24 | CPS



One way in which young people have closed the gap with older adults is by volunteering at higher rates than their predecessors. The Monitoring the Future (MTF) study annually surveys high school students. We have limited the Civic Health Index to measures that cover American adults (ages 18 and up), but both the MTF data and the Census Bureau’s Current Population Survey (CPS) show an increase in volunteering among younger Americans (high school seniors and 16-24 year-olds, respectively). The CPS, our most reliable measure of youth volunteering, finds a statistically significant increase from September 2001 through September 2005.<sup>1</sup>



## A 9/11 EFFECT?

“9/11 was a litmus test to see whether we could seize the opportunity to restore our civic connections.”

Thomas Sander  
Executive Director, the Saguaro Seminar, Harvard University

In his seminal work on civic life in America, *Bowling Alone*, Robert Putnam wrote that the reinvigoration of civic life in America “would be eased by a palpable national crisis, like war or depression, but for better or worse, America at the dawn of the new century faces no such galvanizing crisis.” Those crises arrived with 9/11 and Hurricane Katrina. Many believed that September 11 would spark the nation into a sense of community that had deteriorated over the last three decades. There was wide speculation and hope that a “9/11 effect” would play a substantial role in shaping the attitudes and behaviors of Americans and youth in particular.

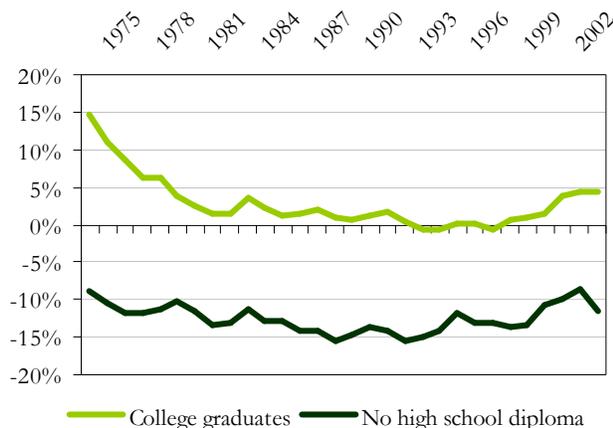
There does seem to have been a 9/11 effect on youth, evidenced by significant increases in political engagement and volunteering in the years after this pivotal event. In areas of national and community life on which our nation has focused -- calls to service, creation of more volunteer and national service opportunities, uses of online technologies to encourage people to find local service opportunities and to make charitable contributions, and voter mobilization and get-out-the-vote drives -- there have been clear signs of civic renewal. However, we have not seen the deeper civic transformation for which many had hoped.

This challenge remains. How can we translate the historic events of 9/11 and Hurricane Katrina and build upon increases in volunteer service and political engagement to foster a deeper, more lasting civic renewal? Why are youth volunteering and political engagement showing promising increases, but other key indicators -- trust in other people and in key institutions, membership in civic groups, religious participation, connecting to others through family and friends, and civic knowledge -- all significantly on the decline? Are volunteering and voting simply the first stages of a budding civic renewal? Are these trends blips on the screen that will return to normal or begin to decline as we move further away from these tragic events? Will it take other galvanizing events to trigger greater or deeper renewal? Are there things that we can do at the community, state and national levels that will reverse these trends and strengthen civic life more broadly?

This is a dialogue that our nation urgently needs to undertake, as too often we lack a structure to translate short-term goodwill from 9-11, Katrina or other defining national events into longer-term civic engagement. Our engagement after such events is too often a fleeting firework, and almost never (except through the Second World War), a sustained fire of civic engagement.

## WIDENING CIVIC DIVIDE: THE WELL-EDUCATED AND LESS EDUCATED

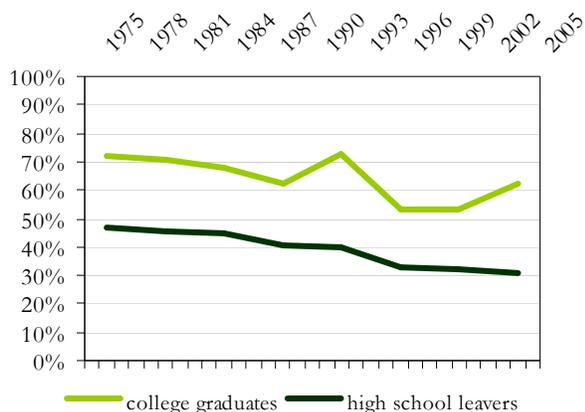
### Civic Health by Educational Background



One of the most dramatic divides in civic health is dependent upon levels of education. Individuals with college degrees are 9-17 points ahead civically of individuals with no college experience. The divide between college graduates and high school dropouts has been as great as 24 percentage points and was 15 points in 2004.



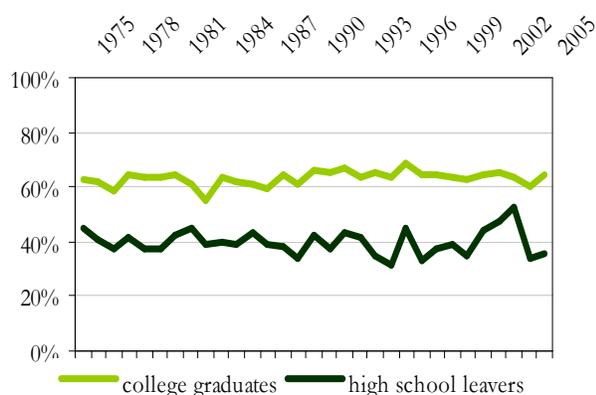
### Voting by Educational Background



While the gaps between college graduates and people without college experience or high school diplomas shrank from 1975 to 1999, these gaps have widened significantly since then. College graduates are much more likely than their less educated peers to vote, volunteer in their communities, read newspapers, trust one another and key institutions, and participate in a civic group.

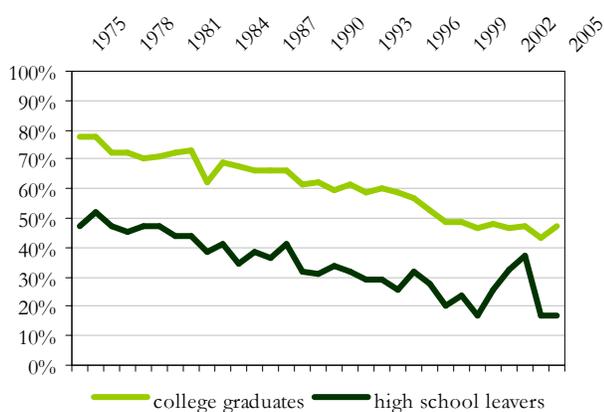
After the 1976 election, almost three quarters of college graduates said they had voted, compared to just under half of high school dropouts. By 2004, turnout among college graduates had slid 10 points, to 62 percent. But turnout for high school dropouts had fallen 16 points, to 31% -- half the rate of their college educated counterparts.

### Volunteering by Educational Background



According to the Current Population Survey's data, from 2001 to 2004, college graduates were more than 4 times as likely to volunteer regularly as high school dropouts (43% to 10%). In 1975, more than three quarters of college graduates attended club meetings at which they could address common issues and develop human ties and networks. Thirty years later, less than half (47%) attended club meetings annually. But the decline was much steeper for people who left high school. In 1975, almost half of adults without high school diplomas attended club meetings. The figure dropped to 15 percent in 2005.

### Club Meetings by Educational Background



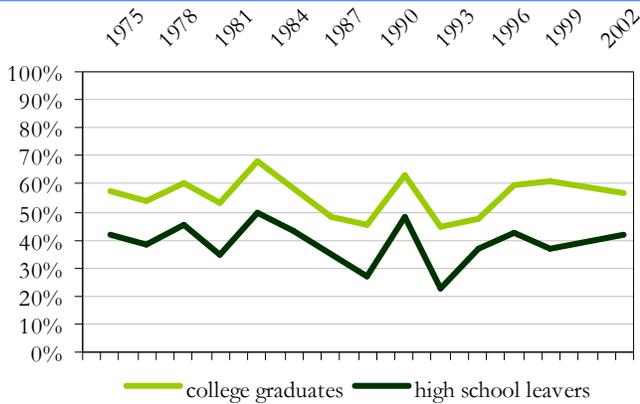
All Americans have withdrawn from regular "public work" in their communities -- tackling issues of common concern -- but the decline has been most pronounced among people with the least education. In 1975, most college graduates (58 %) had worked on a community project within the last year. By 2005, that proportion had been cut to 35% -- a 40% drop. For those without high school degrees, the decline was from 32% to 15%, a drop of almost 55%. Today, few high school dropouts participate in community projects -- an especially serious problem for the hundreds of communities in which the dropout rate is high.

College graduates dominate everyday American community life; high school dropouts are almost completely missing. Half of the Americans who attend club meetings -- and half of those who say they work on community projects -- are college graduates today. Only 3 percent of these active citizens are high-school dropouts. Thirty years ago, the situation was very different. In 1975,

only about one in five active participants was a college graduate, while more than one in ten was a high school dropout.



### Trust in Government by Educational Background



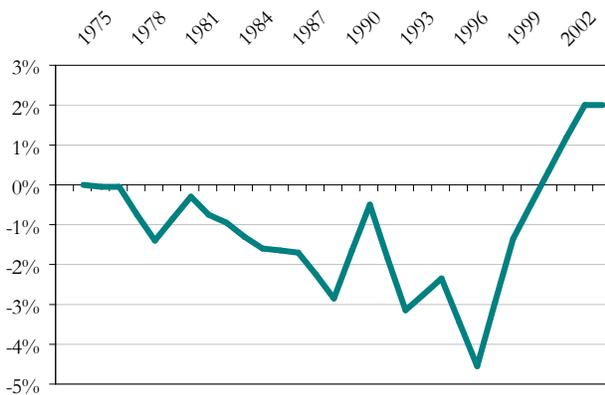
For the most part, the least educated are no longer part of the Tocquevillian civil society in which they had traditionally participated. The composition of civil society has partly changed because college graduates have become more numerous. But unnoticed in these broader demographic changes, and more alarming, is that the rate of civic participation has fallen more steeply among the least educated than among the college educated.

Focusing on increasing high school and college graduation rates would yield a double reward -- providing them with educational skills needed for employment and building their social capital skills that would help individuals find jobs, lead healthy and happy lives, and improve their communities.

## POLITICAL ACTIVITY AND EXPRESSION ARE RISING

Despite high levels of giving and volunteering in the U.S. (compared with other industrialized countries),<sup>2</sup> private volunteerism is dwarfed by public spending in areas that affect critically the character and provision of important needs: social services, education, worker and environmental protection, to name only a few. However, government works better and leaders are held more accountable in communities where citizens are actively engaged as citizen experts -- writing letters to editors, voting based on informed decision-making, attending public meetings, working on campaigns, or using other ways to strengthen our democracy. As Theodore Roosevelt noted, "Nothing worth gaining is ever gained without effort. The people who say that they have not time to attend to politics are simply saying that they are unfit to live in a free community."

### Civic Health Index | Participating in Politics

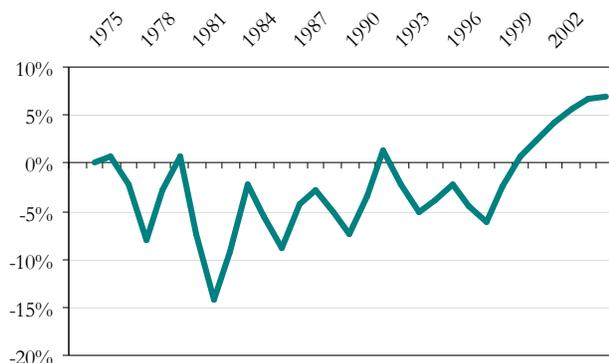


What has happened to our political participation? It spiraled downwards from 1975 until 1998, perhaps fueled by Watergate and distrust of government. Political activities, which include voting in federal elections, attending political meetings, and making political donations, have risen steadily since then.

The divisive nature of American politics may help to explain why trust for others declined while political activities surged. Distrust can motivate people to participate in politics in order to protect their perceived interests or to defeat opponents. Distrust does not, however, help citizens to address common problems together.

During the 2004 presidential election, more than 122 million Americans voted. This was the highest turnout since 1968 and the largest increase since 1952. The rise in political participation is widely attributed to the enormous and widespread efforts of parties, nonprofit groups, foundations, and civic leaders to encourage voter registration and participation in the run-up to the election.<sup>3</sup>

## Civic Health Index | Expressing Political Views



Youth were an interesting component of this up-tick. As scholars noted before 2004, “Despite high hopes with the passage of the Twenty-Sixth Amendment, young people have consistently lagged behind older Americans in terms of registration, voting and most other forms of political involvement. Furthermore, although participation measures have been dropping for all age groups, youth political engagement has been the most precipitous.”<sup>4</sup> But this changed in 2004. Nearly 21 million 18-29 year olds voted in the 2004 presidential election – an increase of 4.6 million from 2000, representing an 11 percentage point gain in voting rates.<sup>5</sup> This upsurge was significant, especially given the steep declines in political engagement that had occurred in prior years.

The additional political participation corresponds with increased mobilization. Participation is always cyclical, rising in years with federal elections and especially when the president is on the ballot. But there are also longer-term trends. In recent years, Americans have been more likely to be contacted by a party or candidate, and been more likely to tell others how to vote. The additional mobilization may be a consequence of high-stakes, very tight national election races.

In these tight races (especially presidential), Americans seem to be trying to express their political views through any channels possible. Writing letters to magazines, giving speeches, persuading other people how to vote, and wearing a political button or displaying a political sticker or sign all became more common after 1996.

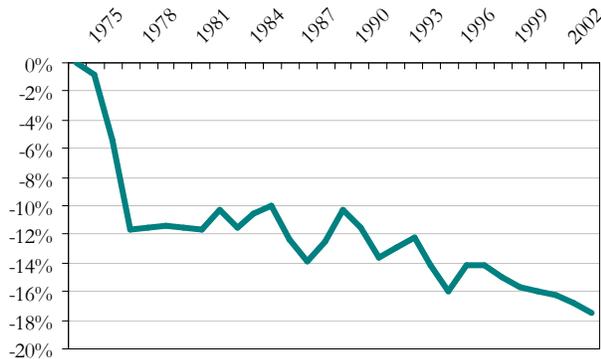
## PEOPLE FOLLOW THE NEWS LESS, ALTHOUGH POLITICAL KNOWLEDGE SEEMS TO HAVE RISEN

Thomas Jefferson wrote: “I know of no safe depository of the ultimate power of the society but the people themselves.” This of course depends on people who know enough to be wise holders of this ultimate power and know enough about our system to be able to participate. So, what are the trends in our political knowledge?

Since the 1970s, Americans have become distinctly less likely to follow public affairs, and specifically to read a newspaper. Newspaper reading is strongly correlated with civic participation. Already in the 1830s, Tocqueville observed “a necessary connection between public associations and newspapers: newspapers make associations and associations make newspapers.”<sup>6</sup> In 2000, according to the National Election Survey, regular newspaper readers were much more likely than other Americans to volunteer, work on issues in their communities, attend local meetings, contact public officials, belong to organizations, and belong to organizations that influence schools.



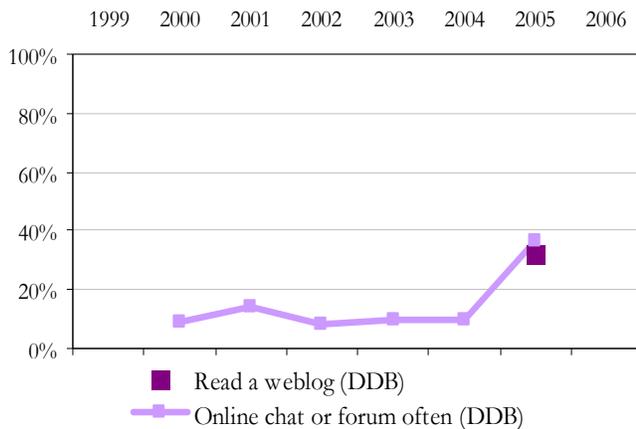
### Civic Health Index | Staying Informed



There is nothing intrinsically superior about a news source that happens to be printed on paper. Newspaper reading, however, has been a better indicator of civic engagement than watching TV news. Although some now get their news through the Internet, this cannot account for the drop in newspaper readership since most of the decline occurred before the Internet had wide reach. And even now, the Internet lags far behind television and newspapers as Americans’ “main source of news.”<sup>7</sup>

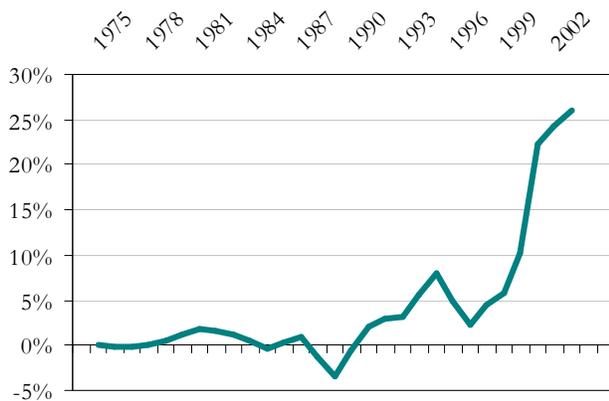
We have included statistics on online participation and expect them to have an increasingly significant impact on the Index. Internet “chat” is included among the measures of “connecting with others”; and reading weblogs or “blogs” is included among the news sources.

### Internet Components of the Index



Despite the decline in news consumption, the measures that have been collected regularly over time show Americans, if anything, apparently better informed about current politics and civic principles than in the recent past. This increase is driven by two variables: awareness of the ideological differences between the major political parties and the belief that the government is comprehensible. Both of those variables typically predict political participation. Many political scientists would argue that the increased ideological polarization of the two major parties actually contributes to citizens’ knowledge by sending clearer signals about what their votes are likely to mean in practice. On the other hand, Americans’ decreasing ability to name their own congressional representatives may be an indicator of disengagement from the news or declining electoral competition at the congressional level.

### Civic Health Index | Understanding Civics and Politics



The most comprehensive look at the trends in Americans’ political knowledge found that there was remarkably little change in the half century after World War II, despite huge increases in schooling and growth of mass communications.<sup>8</sup> It is important to note, however, that there is a paucity of good information about Americans’ political knowledge. The federal government is now planning to conduct regular National Assessments of Educational Progress (NAEP) in civics and American history. (The available Assessments are included in the Civic

Health Index but show little change). We think this is an area of the Civic Health Index that could be significantly improved by more regular measurement.<sup>9</sup>

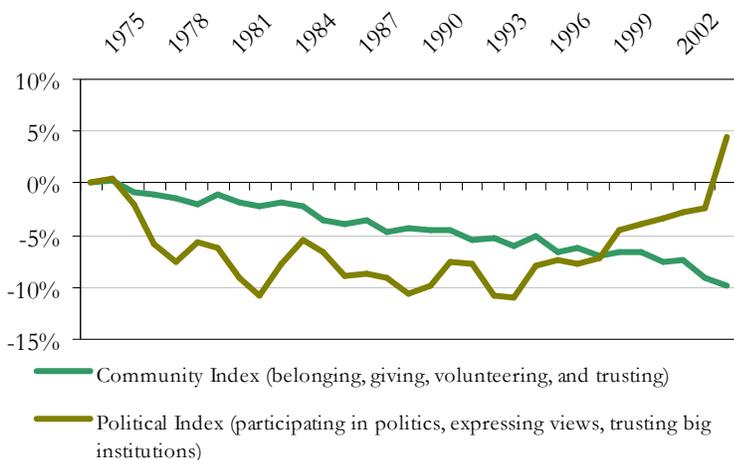


The vast majority of our 40 indicators of civic health show troubling declines over the last 30 years. We present them below.

## WHILE POLITICS IS UP, COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT IS DOWN

Community connectedness -- attending meetings, belonging to groups, trusting other people, and the like -- has declined consistently and almost relentlessly since the 1970s. However, since the late 1990s -- perhaps

### Civic Health Index | Community Falling, Politics Rising



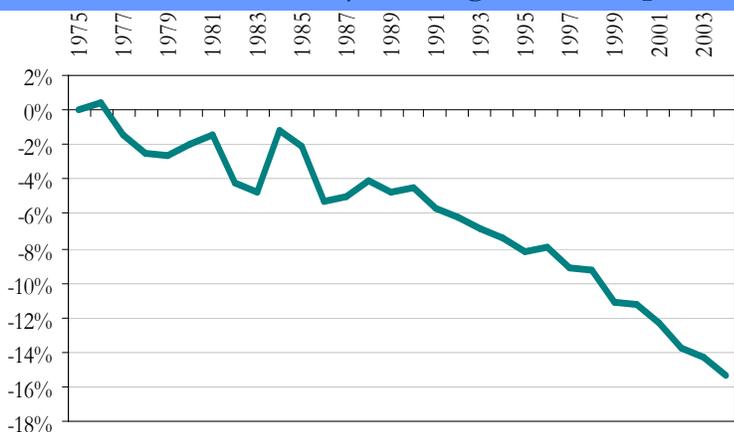
as a result of intense partisan and ideological competition -- participation in political activities and expression of political views have increased. The graph at left shows how trends in community involvement and political engagement cross in the late 1990s.

By giving less weight to the political indicators or dropping them altogether, one could produce an index that showed no recovery since 1999. Conversely, by dropping the community engagement indicators, one could generate an index that showed strong growth since the mid-1990s. We suspect, as the chart demonstrates, that the political forms of engage-

ment are more volatile, and we predict that without community engagement and trust, it will become far harder to build consensus, collaborate or compromise, regardless of our levels of political involvement. But we hope our Civic Health Index will stimulate discussion about what matters most and why these trends have diverged.

## TRUST IN ONE ANOTHER IS DOWN

### Civic Health Index | Trusting Other People



What has happened to our trust of others? In the Index, trust is measured in three ways -- with questions as to whether people are viewed as "honest," as "helpful" and "can be trusted." Over the last 30 years, social trust has steadily declined.

The exact reasons for the loss of trust are not fully understood, but what is clear is that as individuals and as communities, we pay a high personal cost for these declines. Our democracy, economy and society rely on our ability to trust others in order to facilitate basic everyday interactions. Unfortunately, over the past three decades there has been a sharp de-

cline in the levels of trust in others, a key component of "social capital." ("Social capital" means the resources, such as relations and networks, that groups can use to solve common problems.<sup>10</sup>)



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Trust facilitates the ease with which we conduct the daily work of democracy – person-to-person, citizen-to-citizen transactions and collaboration. Without trust it is difficult for members of a community to get together and solve pressing community problems. On an even more basic level, without a strong sentiment of trust, interactions with strangers on a daily basis can be tense and uneasy.

Having less trust also increases “transaction costs” – the costs associated with market interactions – and makes business less efficient and more expensive. It is the reason that more and more businesses now insist on “getting it in writing.” Conversely, working with others to address common problems may increase trust, thereby facilitating further collaboration.

Some have argued that trust is important to our public health. For example, life expectancy is significantly higher in trustful communities.<sup>11</sup> And trust can make high-stakes operations in our democracy (elections and transitions of political power) run more smoothly and peacefully. As political scientists J.L. Sullivan and J.E. Transue note “When people do not trust their fellow citizens, elections and transitions of power appear to be far more dangerous. Citizens may fear that losing an election will mean losing all access to political power... Conversely, when people trust their fellow citizens in general, the stakes do not seem to be so high.”

Expanding on his ideas, Robert Putnam wrote, “People who trust others are all-round good citizens, and those more engaged in community life are both more trusting and more trustworthy. Conversely, the civically disengaged believe themselves to be surrounded by miscreants and feel less constrained to be honest themselves.” Putnam argues that social trust is important because it “lubricates the inevitable frictions of social life.”

While trust in other human beings facilitates cooperation among citizens, one silver lining of distrust is that it can motivate engagement in politics, as people mobilize to defeat other groups or to check major institutions that they distrust. There *have* been times of high average trust and frequent political participation, such as the 1950s. But since the mid-1990s, we seem to have moved to an era of low trust, rising political participation and partisan animosity. 



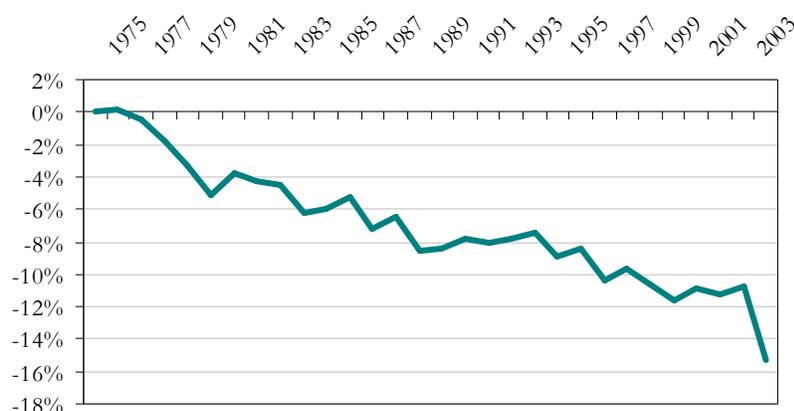
## CONNECTING WITH CIVIC & RELIGIOUS GROUPS IS DOWN

“The heart of democracy is deliberating with fellow citizens about common problems and then acting in groups and associations to address them together.”

Peter Levine

Director, Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement (CIRCLE)

### Civic Health Index | Connecting with Civic and Religious Groups



Since the mid-nineteenth century when French political theorist Alexis de Tocqueville traveled through the U.S., scholars have recognized the significance of voluntary associations as a core component of our thriving democracy. “Americans of all ages, all stations in life, and all types of dispositions are forever forming associations,” Tocqueville wrote in his *Democracy in America*.<sup>12</sup> Tocqueville observed that people who gather in houses of worship, social groups, and political associations frequently deliberate and make decisions about shared concerns. In this way, voluntary associations can

facilitate collective and democratic decision-making.

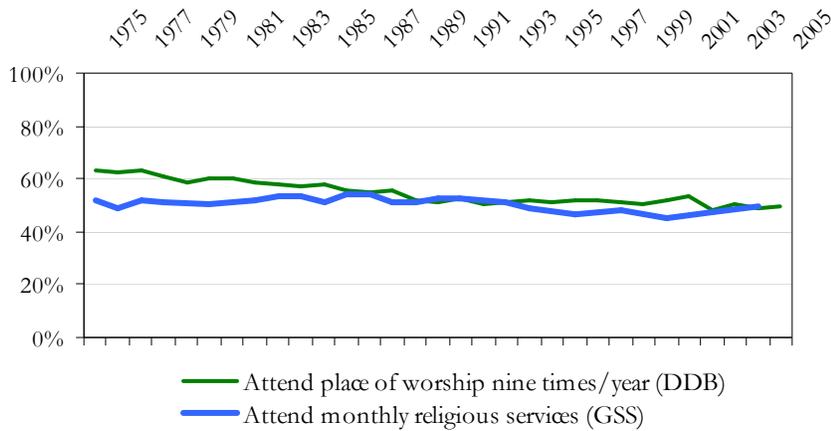
When we meet voluntarily to deliberate and address community challenges together, we do the basic work of democracy. In turn, people who meet in voluntary associations forge meaningful social relations with others, building social capital, and strengthening our democracy.<sup>13</sup> Furthermore, people who participate in voluntary associations tend to have higher levels of social trust and tend to give back to their communities.<sup>14</sup>

But during the past three decades, Americans have gradually retreated from voluntary associations (both community and religious). Attendance at club meetings shows the steepest decline: in 1975, more than 60% of Americans reported that they had attended at least one club meeting within the preceding year. That has dropped by one-third. Today, less than 40% of Americans attend meetings that often. Similarly, in 1975, more than 40% of Americans reported that they had participated in at least one community project a year; today only one quarter do. Finally, Americans attend fewer groups: three decades ago, more than 70% of Americans belonged to at least one voluntary association, while that number has since dropped about 10 percentage points. The decline in club meeting attendance is more pronounced than the decline in group membership, supporting the belief that associations have become less participatory over the last 30 years.

Belonging to religious congregations and attending religious services comprise an important part of the Index. Affiliation with a religious organization is a strong predictor of secular civic habits (volunteering, giving to secular causes, voting, or giving blood) and an important incubator of social capital. Religious affiliation also has likely increased both voter mobilization and political polarization.



## Civic Health Index | Religion Components



Over the last generation, there has been a decline in religious attendance, albeit not as steep as the declines in community and club membership. The declines in religious attendance have come mostly from the people who attend religious services less: there has been an increase over the last three decades both in those going to church *weekly*, and those *never* going to church. Young adults attend houses of worship significantly less and have turned away from organized religion. Other evidence not included in our Index shows they have not turned away from faith.<sup>15</sup>

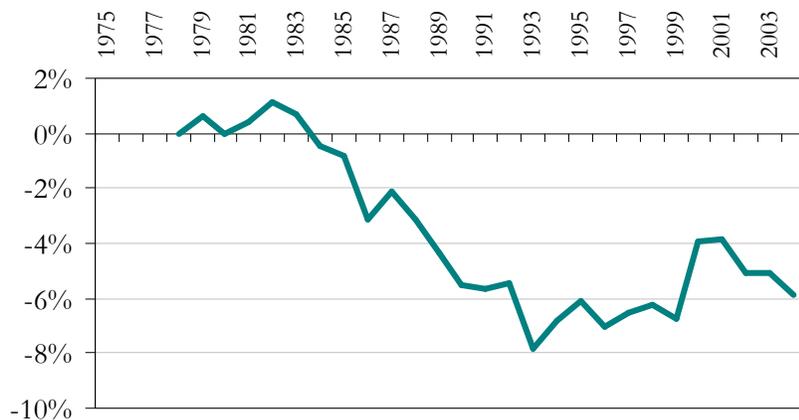
Paradoxically, our retreat from civil society has coincided with an explosion in the number of voluntary associations in the United States. Harvard Dean Theda Skocpol points to dramatic changes in the composition and management of civil society organizations in the U.S. Skocpol argues that professionally-managed, “staffed, mailing-list associations” have replaced the traditional chapter-oriented voluntary association.<sup>16</sup> This new crop of “mailing-list” associations may either be a cause or a consequence of Americans getting less involved with group meetings. Skocpol notes, “If a new cause arises, people think of opening a national office, raising funds through direct mail, and hiring a media consultant. Ordinary citizens, in turn, are likely to feel themselves to be merely the manipulated objects of such efforts. They do not feel like participating citizens or grassroots leaders active in broad efforts. And they are right!”<sup>17</sup>

In short, despite the growing number of voluntary organizations in the United States, Americans attend fewer club meetings, maintain fewer group memberships, and participate in fewer community projects than ever before. Robert Putnam concludes, “the organizational eruption between the 1960s and 1990s represented a proliferation of letterhead, not a boom of grassroots participation.”



## “LONELY NATION”: PEOPLE ARE CONSIDERABLY LESS CONNECTED TO FAMILY AND FRIENDS

### Civic Health Index | Connecting to Others through Friends & Family



While humans are bred to fight, they are also wired by evolution to cooperate with and get support from each other. These close ties also get us through economic and personal crises. We need people to turn to when we learn we have cancer, have lost our job, or our marriage is crumbling. In friends and family, we hone our social capital skills, by tempering our self-interest for the larger, longer-term interests of family or friendship. Moreover, close ties can provide important venues in which we can discuss civic or political topics like religion, happenings in our communities, the country or the world, or political issues.

What has happened to our close ties? More than one-fourth of American households (29.8 million of them) consist of just one person, compared with less than one-fifth of American households (13.9 million) in 1975.<sup>18</sup> A recent Duke University study by Miller McPherson, Lynn Smith-Lovin, and Matthew E. Brashears revealed that Americans have smaller circles of people with whom they can discuss important matters than they did even as recently as 1979. About one in four Americans has *no one* with whom to talk about weighty matters, and nearly half of the population is one close friend or family member away from being socially isolated.<sup>19</sup>

The measures that McPherson and colleagues used were only collected twice. For our Index, we include regular annual survey questions about eating dinner with one’s family and visiting friends. Family dining shows the steepest decline, while the rate at which people visit their friends is more stable. “Online chat” rooms or forums have risen rapidly in recent years, but the large increase in 2005 does not affect the Index, which stops at 2004. The chart above shows some leveling off in the last 10-12 years.

## PEOPLE’S TRUST OF & CONNECTION TO MAJOR INSTITUTIONS ARE DOWN, WITH A STEADY RISE FROM 1994 - 2000

Trust in institutions is as important as the trust people have in one another. Our indicators for trust of institutions include measures of Americans’ confidence in government and the media. Confidence in government is measured by questions relating to how often you can trust government to do what is right, whether government is run by a few big interests or for the benefit of all, whether government wastes taxpayer money, and whether people running government are crooked. Trust in the media relates to the people running press organizations and how often they report the news fairly.

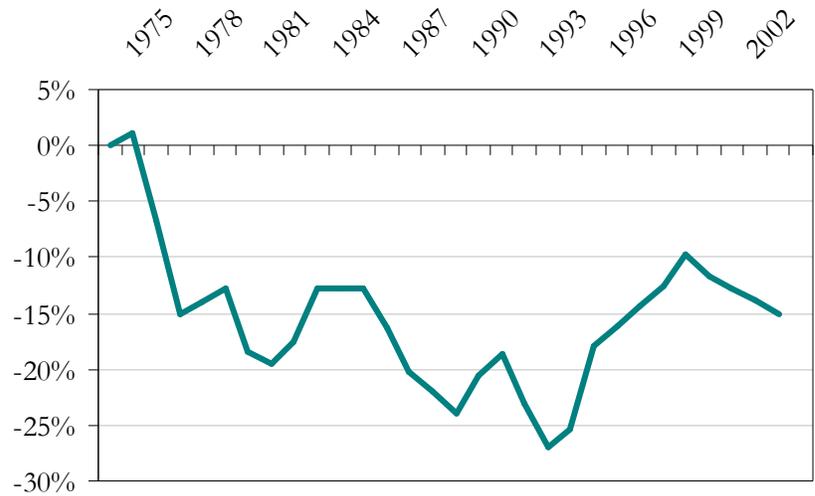


In general, Americans' confidence in major institutions dropped from 1970 to 1993 (continuing a very deep slide that began in the 1960s), followed by a partial recovery through 2000 and then another slide. However, people's trust in the government has rebounded more than their trust in media.

It is an ongoing debate whether the decline in confidence in government reflects a loss of commitment by citizens to government or a failure of the government itself. Alexander Hamilton might argue for the latter theory, for he once proposed, as a "general rule," that people's "confidence in and obedience

to a government will commonly be proportioned to the goodness or badness of its administration."<sup>20</sup> Conversely, some think that governmental institutions and policymakers are under much greater scrutiny now than in the 1960s because of the Freedom of Information Act, a more active media, and congressional committees taking on investigatory functions. This scrutiny often produces more information that can reduce overall confidence in government. Whether feelings about government and institutions are accurate or not, it is harder to get things done in an environment in which significant numbers of Americans are cynical about the competence of major institutions or the interests they represent.

### Civic Health Index | Trusting and Feeling Connected to Major Institutions



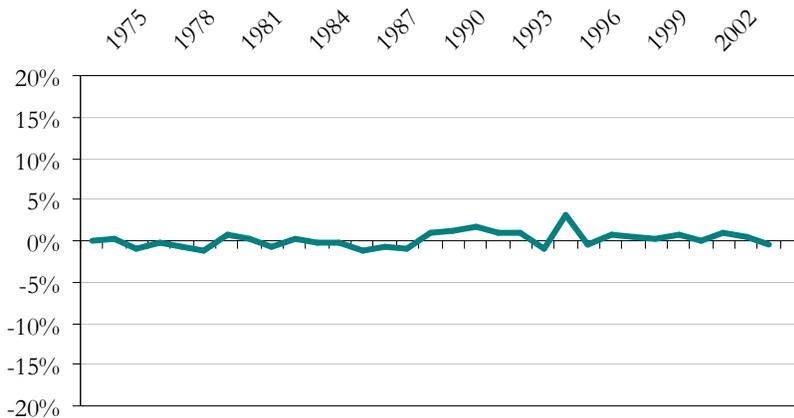


Two anchors of American civic life have remained remarkably constant over the last 30 years, although volunteering has been a brighter spot than charitable giving.

### CHARITABLE GIVING AND VOLUNTEERING HAVE BEEN STEADY

Volunteering and giving are indicators of our larger sense of “we”: a belief that our lives are strengthened by helping those less fortunate, by building up community assets or preserving community public goods.

**Civic Health Index | Charitable Giving and Volunteering**



Our second President John Adams said that, “our obligations to our country never cease but with our lives.” Shirley Chisholm, the first African-American woman to be elected to the U.S. Congress, believed that, “Service is the rent you pay for room on this Earth.”

Service to communities has always been a hallmark of the American Experiment. Accordingly, levels of giving and volunteering are an important proxy of our community’s, and nation’s, civic health.

While most indicators of our civic health show decline, charitable giving has remained steady over the last 30 years. Americans give roughly two percent of their after-tax revenue to philanthropy. Of all charitable giving in 2006, 56% went to the Salvation Army and United Way; 43% went to religious organizations; and as would be expected after national tragedies, 34% went to natural disaster relief.<sup>21</sup> We note that significant donations to each of these categories are likely to have included contributions for natural disaster relief in the aftermath of Hurricanes Katrina and Rita.

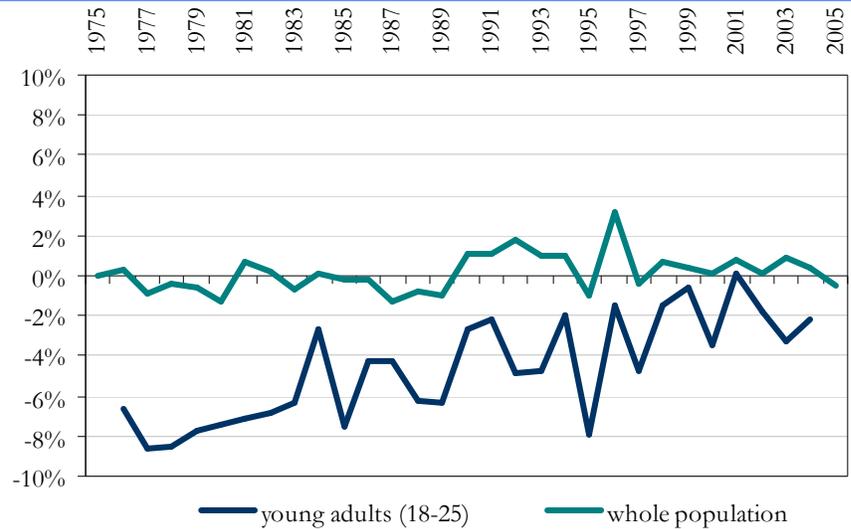
As noted earlier, youth volunteering is a bright spot. This trend has many good implications. By volunteering, young people learn skills, gain confidence, learn about public problems and how they can solve them, and make connections to non-profit and religious organizations. Youth involved in volunteer service also are more successful in school and less likely to abuse drugs.<sup>22</sup>

Over the past decade, young people (ages 18 to 24) have narrowed the gap with adults in volunteering. Levels of volunteering have been so high for youth (compared to their Baby Boomer Generation parents) that some social scientists are starting to talk about the possibility of a “9/11 Generation.” Although we cannot explain why this has happened, we note the growing efforts at all levels to encourage young people to serve through community service in our schools, the growth of national and international service opportunities, service learning (that combines classroom learning and community service) and calls to service from Presidents.



### Giving and Volunteering Index by Age

We also note the significant rise in volunteer service through formal organizations (such as a school, house of worship or non-profit) among *adults* post-9/11, from 59 million Americans (27.4% of the population) during the period September 2001-September 2002, to 63 million Americans (28.8% of the population) during the period September 2002-September 2003. Volunteering among adults has remained steady in the past two years at 28.8% of the population. We suspect that the year following September 2001 created a very high baseline for volunteering and that 59 million figure reflects an increasing number of Americans who volunteered in the aftermath of the 9/11 attacks. So the further increases in the number of volunteers are especially encouraging.



“When citizens volunteer and connect with their neighbors, they ensure that their communities are better places to work and live. **Today, we need a more detailed and localized prognosis of our civic health.** By producing high quality information on what is working and not working in various communities, we can translate that knowledge into a robust civic culture for the new millennium.”

Robert Grimm, Jr.  
Director of Research, Policy Development Corporation for National and Community Service

**“Rapid advancements in technology and communication are changing how we connect with one another civically. We will need to constantly reassess how Americans are adapting their civic habits to modern inventions. New or more robust indicators may have to be designed.”**

Stephen Goldsmith  
Daniel Paul Professor of Government, Harvard University

Human innovation is triggering rapid changes in the way we communicate, work, travel, and interact with one another – from traditional neighborhoods to worldwide communities. If globalization is value-neutral, there are extraordinary opportunities to foster collaboration, connectedness and cooperation on issues affecting our world. There are also daunting challenges in doing so, with the intersection of cultures, religions, and civilizations that never before had such proximity. One obvious example, of course, is the Internet.

Online technologies are being used to bring people together offline, and such “alloy” examples that interweave virtual and real connections may be especially promising. For example, Meetup has connected, in four years, more than 2 million people with Meetup Groups covering more than 4,000 interests – from politics to pets – in 55 countries around the world.

Volumes of information are now available to citizens at the click of a mouse. For example, the Library of Congress has created the “National Digital Library,” which houses online the original record of our Nation’s history – more than 8 million digitized documents, letters, voice recordings and other primary sources relating to American history and culture. The implications for increasing and deepening student knowledge of American history and government are immense, if our nation can train more teachers and librarians in the use of the digital library. Instead of students reading about the Declaration of Independence, they could be reading the original Declaration, with the notes in the margin, and discuss the lively debate that was occurring in Philadelphia.

The Internet also has the great advantage of allowing many people to create their own news, opinions, and cultures. Young people are especially likely to use innovative online methods of civic engagement. According to a November 2005 survey by the Pew Internet and Public Life Project, 57% of teens who use the internet could be considered content creators. They have created a blog or webpage, posted original artwork, photography, stories or videos online or remixed online content into their own new creations, discussion, and collaboration.

These new media can be used in ways that are positive or negative for civil society and democracy. Zephyr Teachout, the Director of Internet Organizing for Howard Dean’s 2004 presidential campaign, says, “While [the Internet] is more radical in every way than the phone, it is like the phone in that it is neutral. Its best capacity...is the capacity for solving civic collective action problems. Its worst capacity is its tendency to make people not want to solve them because they are perfectly happy solving non-civic collective action problems like, ‘I want to play Worlds of Warcraft with 10,000 other people.’”

## Impact of the Internet on Civic Health

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The impact of the Internet on civic health remains unpredictable and controversial. Lee Rainie, director of the Pew Internet and Public Life Project, writes:

Our work suggests that computer-mediated interactions are more likely to be adding to and supplementing voluntary association than replacing such connections. This shows up at several levels of our work:

At the personal level, we consistently hear from internet users that they believe their use of email and instant messaging is increasing their amount of contact with others and helping the quality of their relationships. So, while there is undoubtedly some “replacement effect” as people send and use email and IMs instead of making phone calls or attending gatherings, there is much more multi-modal interaction of the kind where people use emails to set up meetings or phone calls or they send emails to people that represent communications that would not otherwise have taken place except for the ease of using email. Further, we know that people use the internet to expand and maintain association with those larger social networks.

At the community level, the internet seems to have an additive and connecting effect. Online Americans use the Internet to join and participate in groups they had not previously encountered. That is particularly true for younger users. To employ McLuhan’s notion that communication technologies have particular “grammars,” the grammar of the Internet is to afford community creation and maintenance.

At the political level, there is some evidence in our work that internet use to get political news and information brings people to the voting booth. We have not nailed this down definitively because we have only been working on it through three election cycles. Clearly, the role of the Internet in politics is growing. We found that in 2004, 75 million American adults used the Internet to get political news and information, swap emails about the campaign, or use the Internet for direct engagement with the campaign through contributions, attendance at meetings and rallies, or petitioning.

We have also found that Internet users, especially the heaviest ones, are *more* aware of all kinds of political information, including arguments contrary to their own beliefs, than lighter internet users or non-users. Thus, so far, the widespread worry about Internet use contributing to political balkanization is not evident in our studies.

Finally, there is a dimension of online life that is pretty easy to quantify and not easy to understand yet in the context of “voluntary association.” It’s the “content creation” side of online life. Some 57% of wired teenagers and 35% of online adults in America have posted some kind of creative material online - their own writing, movies, audio material, artwork, media “mash-ups.” Their blogs are being read by others. Their articles and editing changes are on wikis. Their vlogs and mashups are on Youtube.com. People are swapping urls of the funniest, raunchiest, weirdest, most unforgettable, and most moving pieces of this content. Is that voluntary association? That’s debatable. Are “communities” being built around this stuff and conversations taking place around it? I’d say yes. And our work suggests that as people participate in these perhaps less-than-profound “communities” they are more inclined to become involved via the Internet with more meaningful associations like community groups.

# State Rankings | Voting and Volunteering

We are able to show reliable measures of volunteering and voting for all states and the District of Columbia. These indicators come from the Bureau of the Census' Current Population Supplement. (Many of the other components of the Civic Health Index do not have sufficient sample sizes to generate reliable estimates at the state level.)

Voting and volunteering are by no means the only ways of being civically engaged. However, they are frequently cited measures of community and political participation. The two measures tend to go together.<sup>23</sup> For example, Minnesota is third in volunteering and first in voting; Nevada is 51st in volunteering and 48th in voting.

	VOLUNTEERING		VOTER TURNOUT		
	RATE: 2002-2005 COMBINED	RANK	RATE: 2002 ELEC- TION	RATE: 2004 ELECTION	RANK*
Alabama	29.0%	30	48.7%	61.6%	17
Alaska	38.0%	7	52.9%	63.4%	12
Arizona	24.6%	46	37.6%	54.3%	46
Arkansas	26.3%	38	45.4%	56.6%	37
California	25.9%	42	35.1%	49.2%	51
Colorado	32.2%	17	46.2%	61.6%	21
Connecticut	30.5%	23	44.2%	58.0%	36
Delaware	26.7%	36	42.9%	61.8%	27
District of Columbia	29.8%	25	48.1%	60.7%	20
Florida	23.8%	48	42.8%	56.3%	39
Georgia	24.9%	43	40.1%	52.4%	45
Hawaii	26.2%	39	41.7%	46.2%	49
Idaho	35.7%	14	44.7%	58.3%	34
Illinois	29.2%	29	43.1%	61.4%	29
Indiana	29.4%	28	39.9%	57.2%	41
Iowa	39.4%	4	48.8%	68.6%	9
Kansas	37.9%	8	46.6%	59.5%	26
Kentucky	29.7%	26	45.2%	63.7%	19
Louisiana	22.7%	49	49.4%	63.2%	15
Maine	32.7%	16	56.8%	70.1%	4
Maryland	30.7%	21	46.8%	59.9%	25
Massachusetts	25.9%	41	47.7%	63.6%	16
Michigan	31.8%	18	48.4%	64.6%	14
Minnesota	40.3%	3	64.3%	76.4%	1
Mississippi	26.0%	40	42.4%	60.8%	33
Missouri	31.7%	19	51.5%	66.3%	8
Montana	37.7%	9	53.3%	70.4%	5
Nebraska	42.1%	2	43.7%	60.9%	28

*Table continues on the next page*



	VOLUNTEERING		VOTER TURNOUT		
	RATE: 2002-2005 COMBINED	RANK	RATE: 2002 ELEC- TION	RATE: 2004 ELECTION	RANK*
Nevada	19.6%	51	37.8%	51.2%	48
New Hampshire	31.6%	20	48.9%	68.5%	10
New Jersey	26.4%	37	38.0%	57.5%	42
New Mexico	28.1%	35	42.1%	60.1%	35
New York	21.5%	50	38.5%	53.2%	47
North Carolina	28.3%	32	42.6%	58.2%	38
North Dakota	35.9%	12	56.5%	71.0%	3
Ohio	30.4%	24	42.4%	64.7%	24
Oklahoma	29.5%	27	47.8%	59.6%	23
Oregon	33.1%	15	52.2%	70.5%	6
Pennsylvania	30.6%	22	41.7%	62.5%	31
Rhode Island	24.6%	47	46.5%	58.0%	30
South Carolina	28.2%	33	45.7%	62.0%	22
South Dakota	38.4%	5	65.2%	63.8%	2
Tennessee	24.7%	45	44.4%	53.1%	40
Texas	28.2%	34	36.0%	50.5%	50
Utah	47.8%	1	41.7%	61.7%	32
Vermont	37.1%	10	51.9%	62.4%	13
Virginia	28.8%	31	34.9%	58.4%	44
Washington	35.8%	13	47.4%	62.0%	18
West Virginia	24.8%	44	36.6%	57.1%	43
Wisconsin	36.7%	11	48.7%	72.7%	7
Wyoming	38.3%	6	53.5%	63.3%	11

\* Voter Turnout Rank based on the average of 2002 and 2004 voter turnout rates



**“This democracy that we have inherited is a precious gift from our forbearers. The report on America’s Civic Health Index tells us something about how vigilant and appreciative we have been in recent years as stewards of that gift.”**

Lloyd D. Johnston

Research Professor and Distinguished Research Scientist, University of Michigan Institute for Social Research

While civic health has been on the decline across most indicators for the last 30 years, there are some important signs of progress in the last few years, especially among young people. We should build on these positive trends.

We invite discussion and input on the Civic Health Index and findings presented in this report and welcome ideas to improve our assessment of the country’s civic health. We believe that our nation can and should do a better job in collecting, reporting, and debating the implications of data that show us trends in our civic life. For we know that when our civic health is vibrant, our communities and country are stronger, and our own lives are enriched.

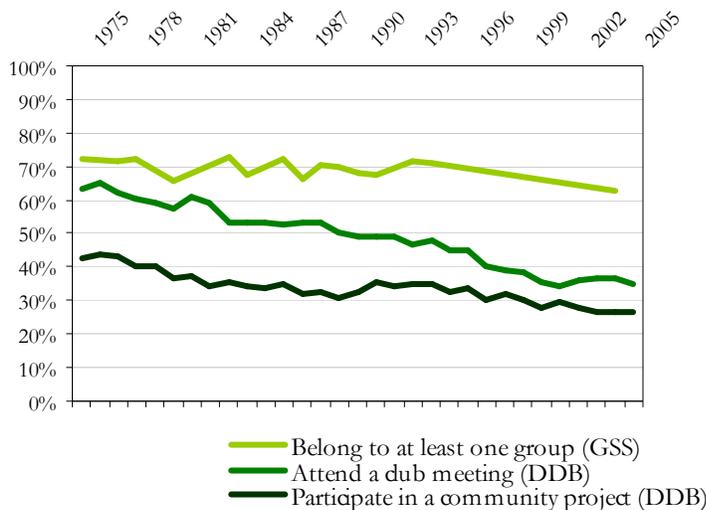
# Appendix I | The Indicators

This Appendix shows all the components of the Civic Health Index, clustered in their 9 categories.

## 1. CONNECTING TO CIVIC AND RELIGIOUS GROUPS

This category comprises five indicators. All the components have declined with the exception of monthly attendance at religious services (shown separately below). The decline in club meeting attendance is steepest -- more pronounced than the decline in group membership. This disparity supports the thesis that associations have become less participatory over the last thirty years: either group membership is becoming “thinner,” with members less pre-disposed to attend meetings, or groups no longer require as much participation through meetings.

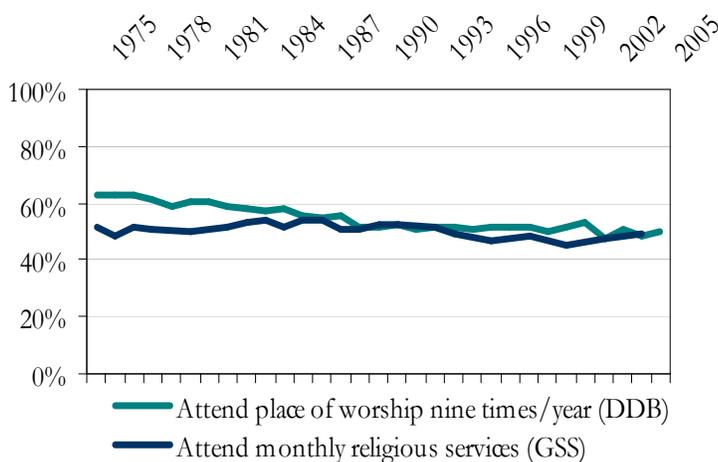
**Civic Health Index | Connecting to Civic and Religious Groups**



associations have become less participatory over the last thirty years: either group membership is becoming “thinner,” with members less pre-disposed to attend meetings, or groups no longer require as much participation through meetings.

Two measures of religious attendance show little change in the American public as a whole. Among youth, however, there has both been stability and change. Young adults attend houses of worship substantially less and have turned away from organized religion, although there is stability in the strength of their religious beliefs. Recent survey research, not included in our Index, suggests some conforming evidence: young adults have turned away dramatically from organized religion, but not from faith.

**Civic Health Index | Religion Components**



### DETAILS

- **“Belong to at least one group”**: The General Social Survey (GSS) asks, “Now we would like to know something about the groups or organizations to which individuals belong. Here is a list of various organizations. Could you tell me whether or not you are a member of each type?” The last choice is “any other groups.” We show the proportion of people who say they belong to at least one.

- **“Attend a club meeting”**: The “DDB Life Style Survey” (DDB) asks whether people have gone to a club meeting within the last 12 months.

- **“Participate in a community project”**: DDB asks people whether they have worked on a community project within the last 12 months.

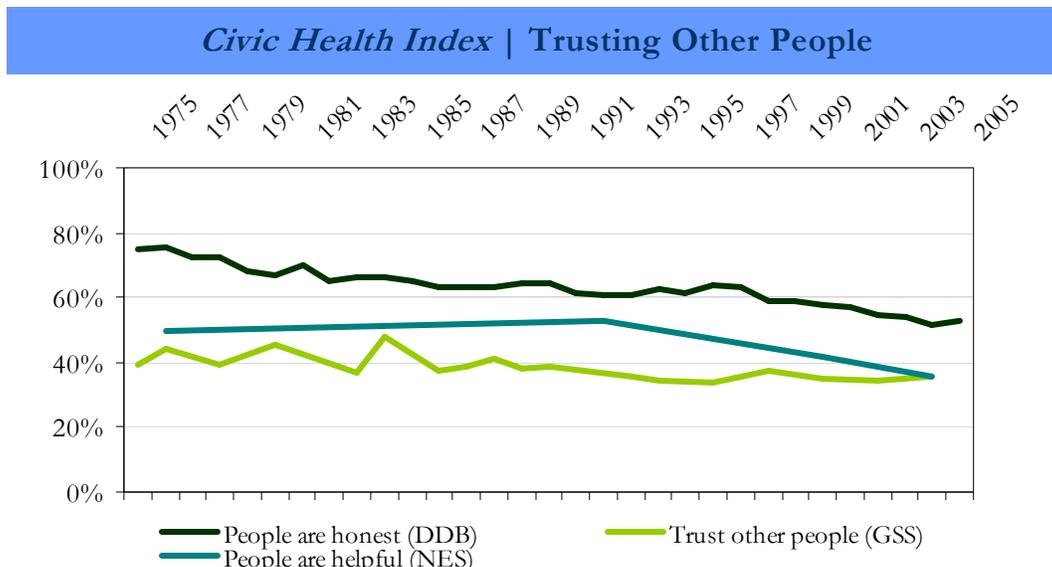
Two measures of religious attendance are combined into one indicator for the purposes of constructing the Index, but are charted separately above:

- **“Attend church or other place of worship nine times a year”**: DDB asks for frequency of attendance; we use nine times per year as the minimum.
- **“Attend monthly religious services”**: GSS asks “How often do you attend religious services?” And we use once a month as the minimum.



## 2. TRUSTING OTHER PEOPLE

Trust is measured with three indicators. These are survey questions about the honesty, trustworthiness, and helpfulness, generically, of other people. They all show declines, especially the measures of honesty and helpfulness.



### DETAILS

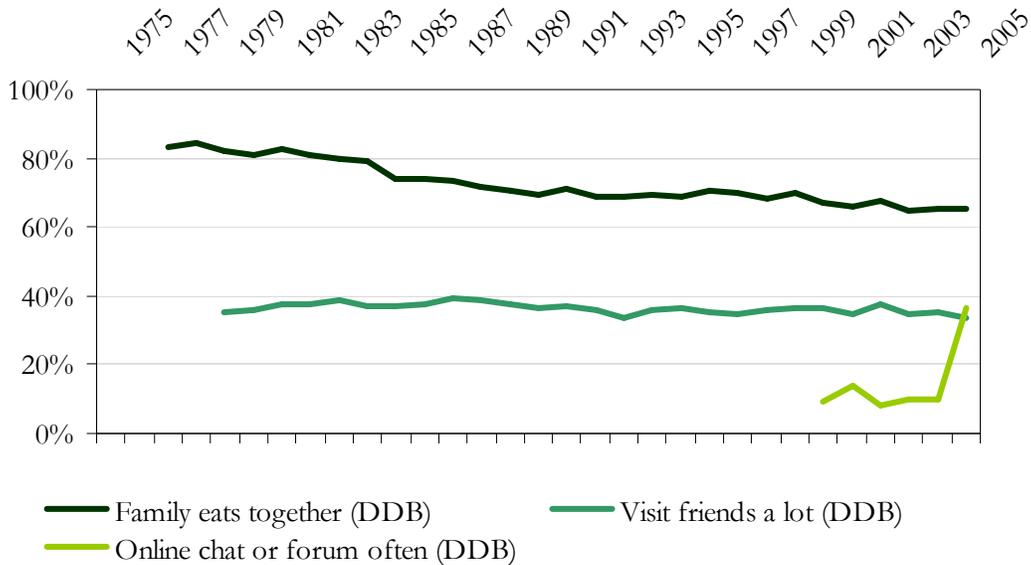
- **“People are honest”**: DDB asks whether people are honest. We combine those who say they “generally agree” or “definitely agree.”
- **“Trust other people”**: GSS asks: “Generally speaking, would you say that most people can be trusted or that you can’t be too careful in life.”
- **“People are helpful”**: the American National Election Studies (NES) asks: “Would you say that most of the time people try to be helpful, or that they are mostly just looking out for themselves?”



### 3. CONNECTING TO OTHERS THROUGH FAMILY AND FRIENDS

The decline in Americans' connections with others is driven by a substantial decrease in the proportion of Americans who say they regularly eat dinner with their families. Visiting friends is more stable. Yet, online "chat" has risen rapidly of late, but the big increase in 2005 does not affect the reported Index, which stops in 2004, the last year data were available across all measures.

#### *Civic Health Index* | Connecting to Others through Family and Friends



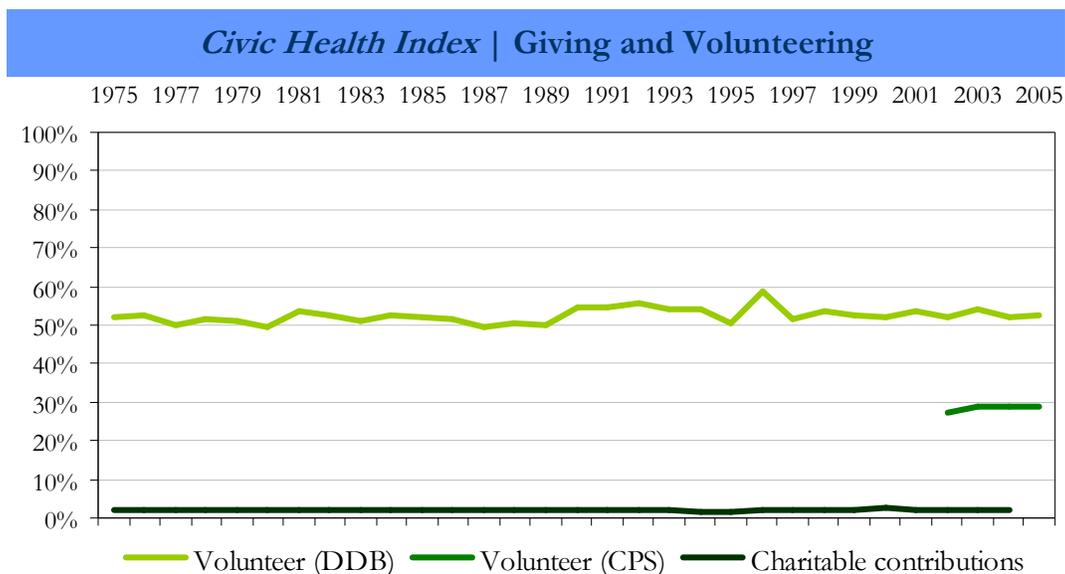
#### DETAILS

- **“Family eats together”**: DDB asks whether the “whole family usually eats dinner together.” We combine “agree” and “definitely agree.”
- **“Visit friends a lot”**: DDB asks whether respondents “spend a lot of time visiting friends.” Again, we combine “agree and “definitely agree.”
- **“Online chat or forum often”**: DDB asks how often people participate in a chat room or online forum per year. We count nine times or more per year as “often.”



## 4. GIVING AND VOLUNTEERING

Over the long term, the rates of giving and volunteering have been remarkably stable. Americans always seem to give roughly two percent of their after-tax income to philanthropy. The DDB’s measure of regular volunteering is also quite flat. The Census Current Population Survey (which has the largest and most representative sample) asks a more stringent question and therefore produces a lower estimate of regular volunteering. The CPS measure shows statistically significant improvement since it was introduced for the period beginning in September 2001.



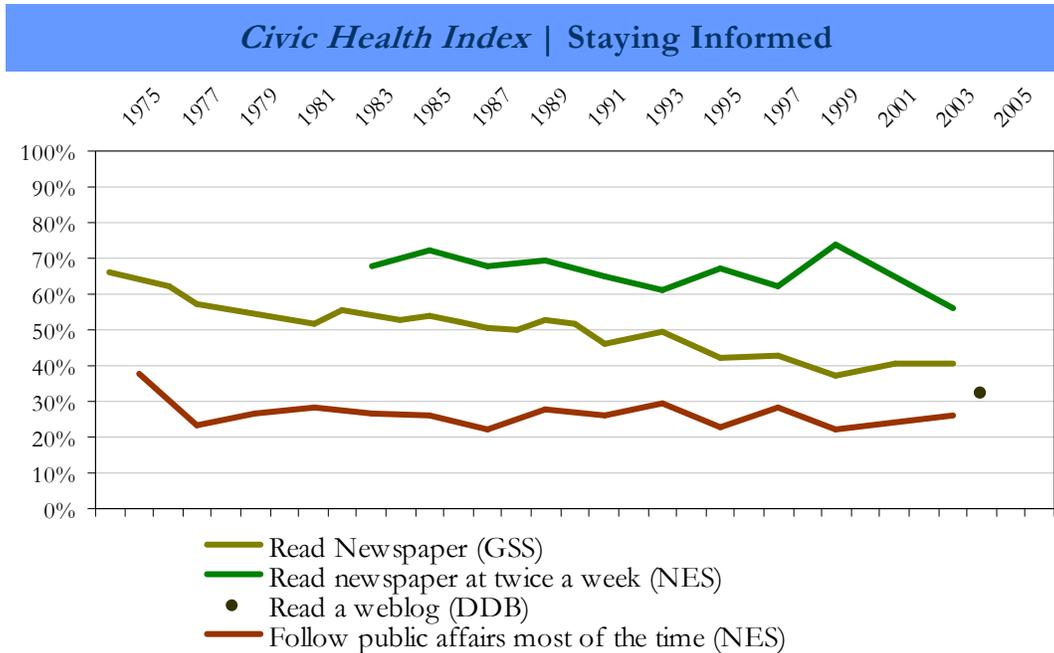
### DETAILS

- **“Charitable contributions”**: We estimate the total itemized federal tax deductions for charity divided by the total disposable household income in the United States, adjusted for inflation. Data come from various editions of the *Statistical Abstract of the United States*.
- Two measures of volunteering are combined into one indicator:
  - DDB asks for the **frequency of doing volunteer work over the preceding 12 months**. We count any answer other than zero.
  - The Census Current Population Survey (CPS) asks two questions and codes people who answer yes to *either* question as volunteers.
    1. **“Since September 1st of last year, have you done any volunteer activities through or for an organization?”**
    2. **“Sometimes people don’t think of activities they do infrequently or activities they do for children’s schools or youth organizations as volunteer activities. Since September 1st of last year, have you done any of these types of volunteer activities?”**



## 5. STAYING INFORMED

One way to measure being informed on public affairs is simply to ask respondents whether they follow the news or public affairs. We also combine two indicators to obtain a reliable estimate of newspaper reading, a powerful correlate of civic engagement that has declined steadily. Reading blogs will enter the Index in 2005. (Reading newspapers online should be captured by the existing survey questions.) We excluded television news because exposure to news programming does not, in general, accompany civic engagement. Although there are excellent news and public affairs programs, watching television news (as a general category) is not a reliable *civic* indicator.



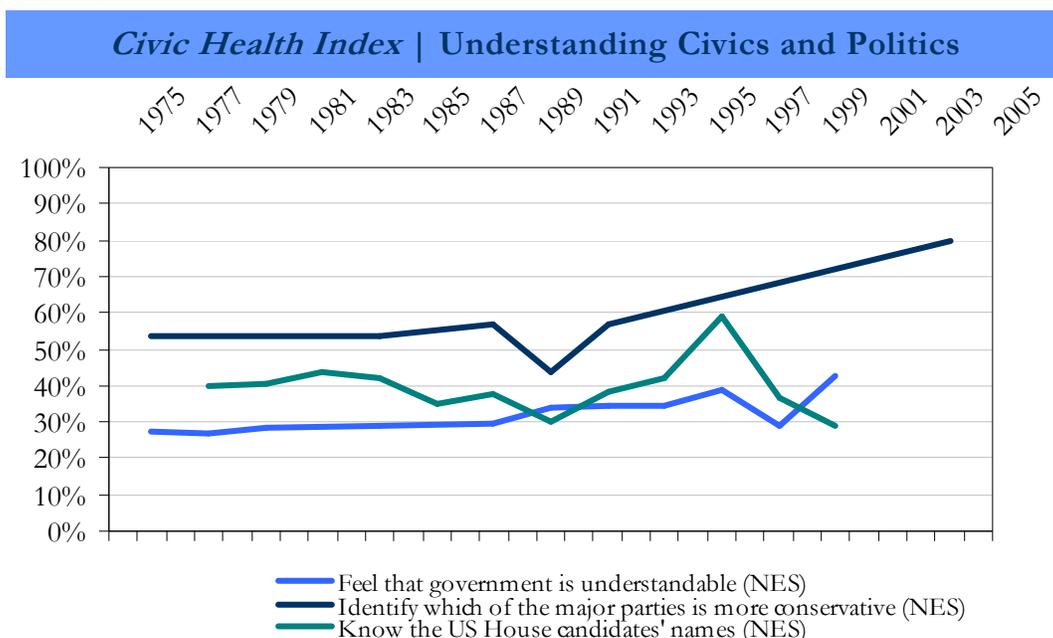
### DETAILS

- **“Follow public affairs”**: NES asks: “Some people seem to follow or think about what’s going on in government and public affairs most of the time, whether there’s an election going on or not. Others aren’t that interested. Would you say you follow what’s going on in government and public affairs most of the time, some of the time, only now and then, or hardly at all?” We count those who say “most of the time.”
- Two measures of **newspaper-reading** are combined into one indicator:
  - GSS asks: **“How often do you read the newspaper?”** We count those who say, “Every day.”
  - NES asks: **“How many days in the past week did you read a daily newspaper?”** We count twice or more.
- **“Read a Weblog”**: DDB asks about reading blogs or weblogs. We count nine or more times in the previous year.

## 6. UNDERSTANDING CIVICS AND POLITICS

Understanding of government has increased according to some measures. But the indicators that show progress may be problematic and misleading. This is a component of America’s Civic Index in need of reliable and regular measures.

The ability to place the parties on an ideological spectrum correlates with voting. That ability has increased, probably because of partisan polarization in Washington, so that casual observers of politics now have a much easier time knowing where the parties stand ideologically. And Americans are somewhat more likely to claim they understand government and politics, although some experts question whether such confidence really measures understanding. Federal assessments of an understanding of U.S. history and civics at the 12<sup>th</sup> grade have been rare but show no significant change. On the other hand, the proportion of people who can name Congressional candidates in their own districts has broadly fallen since 1975, with a brief rise from 1990-1996 and a sharper fall since 1996.



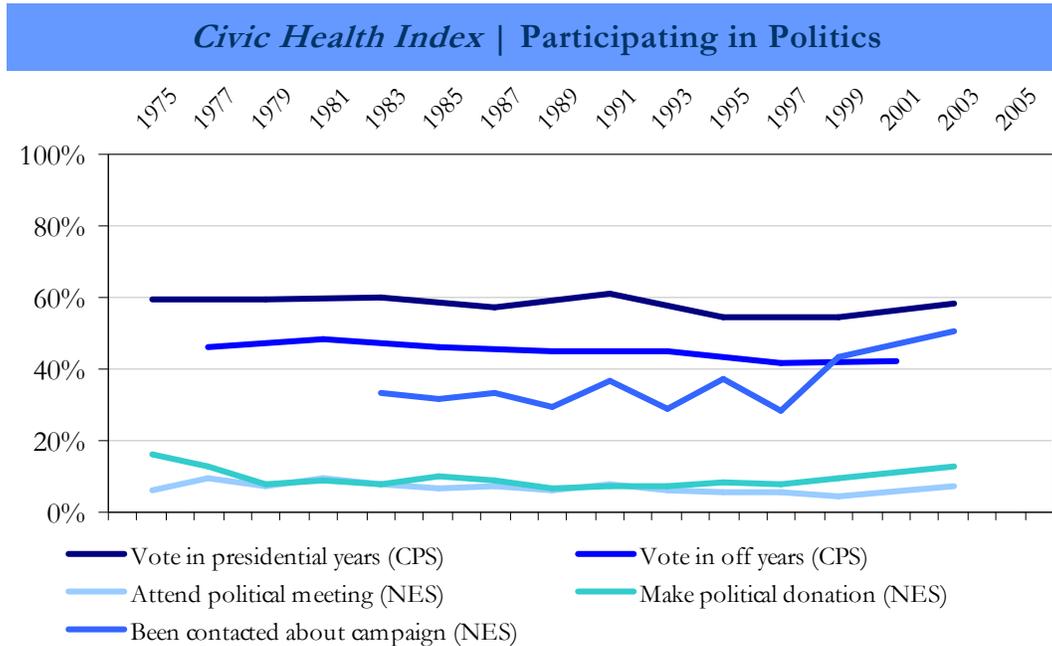
### DETAILS

- **Government understandable:** NES asks people to respond to the statement: “Sometimes politics and government seem so complicated that a person like me can’t really understand what’s going on.” We include those who disagree or neither agree nor disagree.
- **Which major party more conservative:** NES asks: “Would you say that either one of the parties is more conservative than the other at the national level?” If the respondent answers yes, he or she is asked, “Which party is more conservative?” We code those who choose the Republican Party.
- **Know US House candidates’ names:** NES, after the election is over, asks “Do you happen to remember the names of the candidates for Congress—that is, for the House of Representatives in Washington—who ran in the November election from this district?”
- Not shown, but included in the index, are the **National Assessment of Educational Progress 12th grade scores in history (1994, 2001) and civics (1988, 1998)**. Scores are basically unchanged.



## 7. PARTICIPATING IN POLITICS

Since far more Americans vote in presidential elections than in local ones, political participation is cyclical, rising every four years with a presidential election. (We separately chart the off-presidential years so the trend lines are clearer.) Despite the cycle, while presidential voting slid somewhat from 1975 until 1996, there appears to be a clear upward trend since 1999 in voting and mobilization.<sup>24</sup> In contrast, voting in off-presidential years basically has declined slightly over the last 25 years.



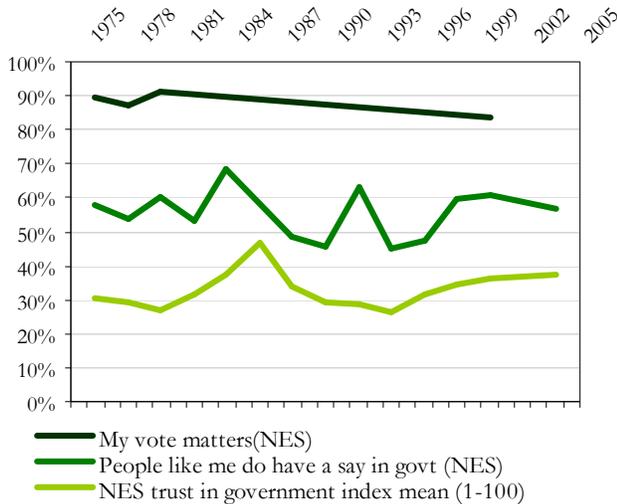
### DETAILS

- Two indicators: “**Vote in presidential years**” and in “**off-years.**” In even years, CPS asks people to recall whether they voted in the most recent election. We include all adult residents in the calculation, including non-citizens and felons.
- “**Attend political meeting**”: NES asks: “Did you go to any political meetings, rallies, speeches, fund raising dinners, or things like that in support of a particular candidate?” (The question has changed slightly several times.)
- “**Make political donation**”: NES has asked several different questions about donations in different years. As an example, in 1986, the question was: “As you know, during an election year people are often asked to make a contribution to support campaigns. During the past year, did you give any money to an individual candidate, or to a political party organization?”
- “**Been contacted about campaign**”: NES asks: “During the campaign this year, did anyone talk to you about registering to vote or getting out to vote?”

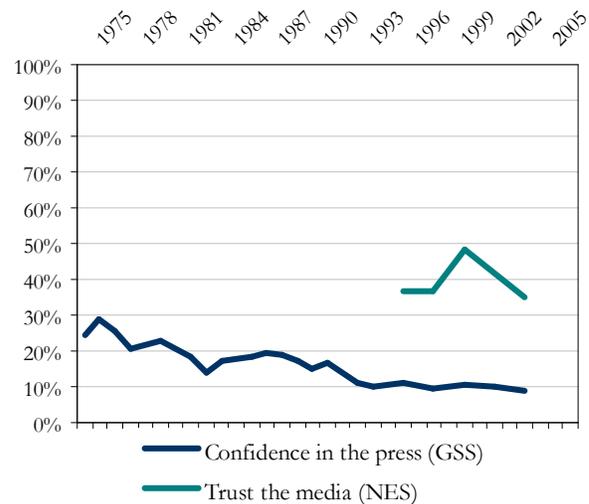
## 8. TRUSTING AND FEELING CONNECTED TO MAJOR INSTITUTIONS

Most people feel that their own vote matters and think that their own Congressional representative is effective. However, the population is more distrustful when asked various questions about the reliability of government as a whole. The overall trend is a decline followed by a recovery, but there is a lot of variation in trend-lines from one measure to the next.

**Civic Health Index | Trusting & Feeling Connected to Government**



**Civic Health Index | Trusting & Feeling Connected to Media**



*Confidence in the press shows steady decline. A measure of “trust in the media” has been introduced recently and moved upward in 2000, but then back down in 2004.*

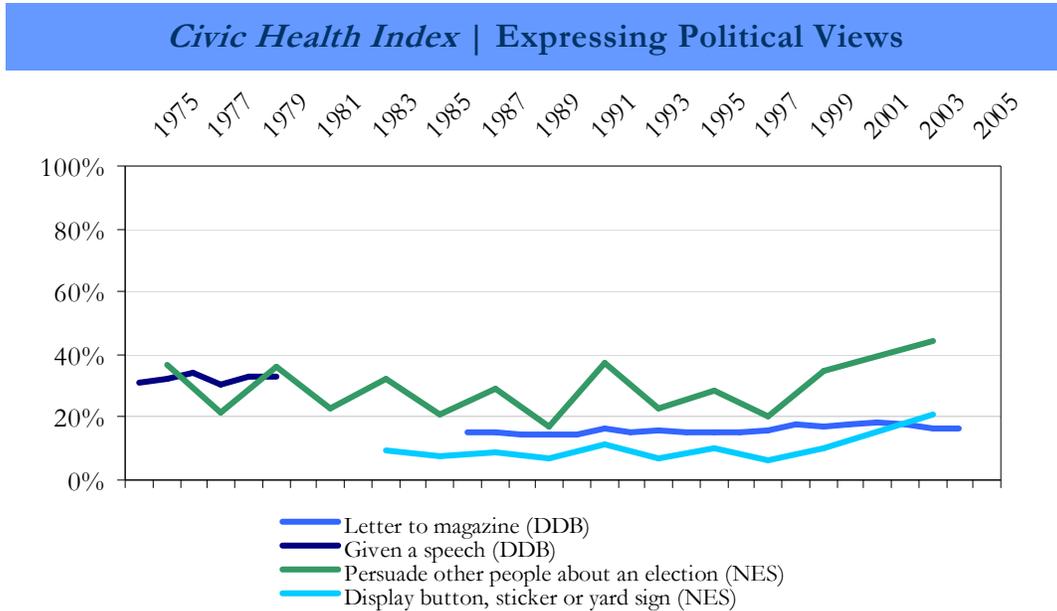
### DETAILS

- **“My vote matters”**: NES asks people to respond to this statement: “So many other people vote in the national elections that it doesn’t matter much to me whether I vote or not.” We include those who do *not* agree.
- **“People like me have a say in government”**: NES asks people whether they agree that: “People like me don’t have any say about what the government does.” We count all those who do not agree.
- **“The NES trust in government index”** is a measure constructed by NES that includes the more trusting responses to these four statements:
  - “How much of the time do you think you can trust the government in Washington to do what is right?”
  - “Would you say the government is pretty much run by a few big interests looking out for themselves or that it is run for the benefit of all the people?”
  - “Do you think that people in the government waste a lot of money we pay in taxes, waste some of it, or don’t waste very much of it?”
  - “Do you think that quite a few of the people running the government are crooked, not very many are, or do you think hardly any of them are crooked?”
- **“Confidence in the press”**: GSS asks: “I am going to name some institutions in this country. As far as the people running these institutions are concerned, would you say you have a great deal of confidence, only some confidence, or hardly any confidence at all in them?” We include questions on “the press” and include those respondents who say they have a great deal of confidence.”
- **“Trust the media”**: NES asks: “How much of the time do you think you can trust the media to report the news fairly?” We count those who say, “Just about always” or “Most of the time.”



## 9. EXPRESSING POLITICAL VIEWS

Like political participation, political expression rises and falls with the election cycle but has moved upward in recent years. Persuading other people about elections is an indicator of political deliberation.



### DETAILS

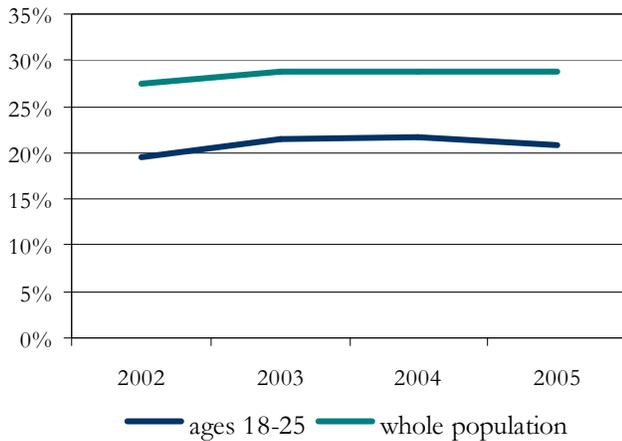
- **“Wrote letter to editor”**: DDB asks whether respondents “Wrote a letter to an editor of a magazine or newspaper” within the last twelve months.
- **“Gave speech”**: DDB asks whether respondents “gave a speech” within the last twelve months.
- **“Persuade others about an election”**: NES asks: “During the campaign, did you talk to any people and try to show them why they should vote for (1984 and later: or against) one of the parties or candidates?”
- **“Display button, sticker, or yard sign”**: NES asks: “Did you wear a campaign button, put a campaign sticker on your car, or place a sign in your window or in front of your house?” (Because of a significant change in the question in 1984, we start this series in that year.)



## ANALYSIS BY AGE

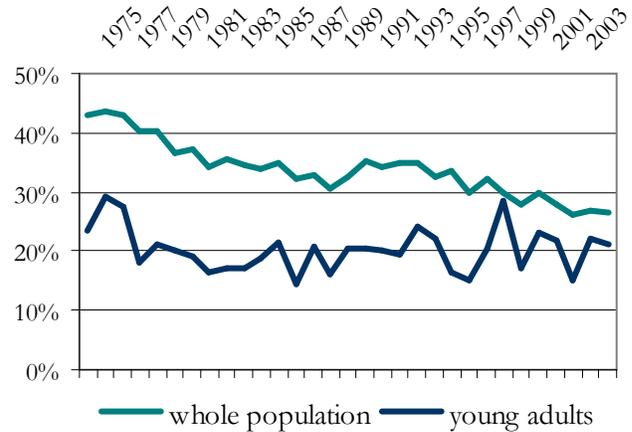
As noted in the main body of the report, youth civic engagement has improved in some respects, although young people remain less engaged than their elders. The improvement in youth engagement is a possible precursor of civic renewal in America if young people reach the level of the Long Civic Generation (those born before 1930) that is gradually exiting the civic stage.

### Volunteering by Age | CPS



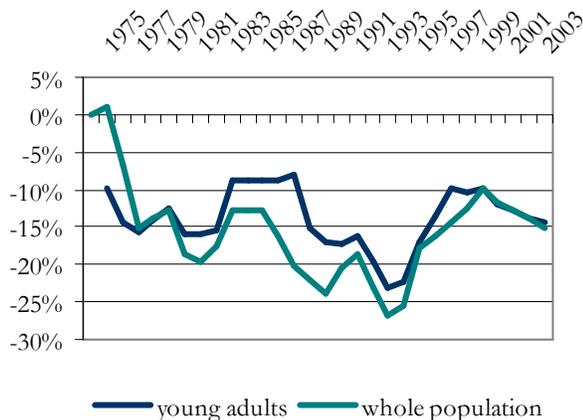
The volunteering rate is up among 18-25 year olds (pictured), and up even more sharply among high school students (not charted here, but charted earlier in the section on “Improvement in Youth Civic Engagement”).

### Work on a Community Project | DDB



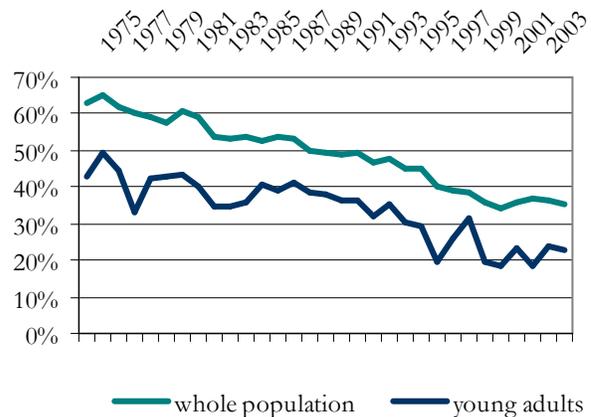
Young adults are no less likely to work together on community projects—a core aspect of democratic participation or “public work.” They were less likely than older people to report such work 30 years ago, but the gap has narrowed.

### Trusting and Connecting to Major Institutions



On some measures, young adults have basically followed the same trend as the whole population. For example, they have similar views of major institutions.

### Club Meetings | DDB



Like older adults, they have become gradually less likely to participate in club meetings, but the gap has remained relatively constant.



## ANALYSIS BY EDUCATIONAL BACKGROUND

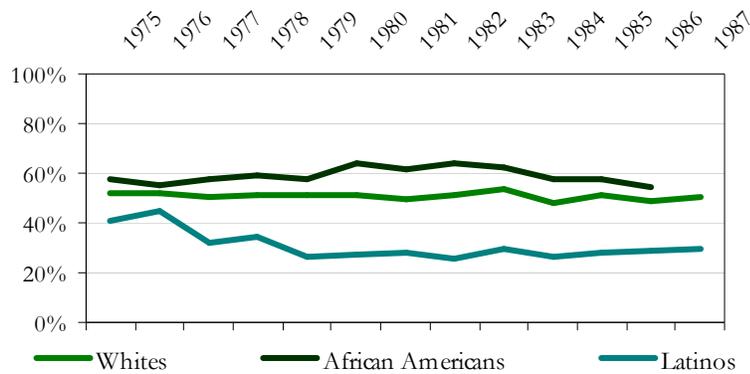
Education provides knowledge and skills that help people participate in civic life. Educational attainment also approximates social class, which correlates strongly with civic health. In this report, we look separately at college graduates (those over the age of 24 who say they hold a bachelors degree or more), non-college adults (those over 24 who say they never attended any college), and high school dropouts (those over the age of 20 who say they do not hold a high school diploma). The gaps in civic health are large, consistent for virtually all the indicators, and often widening. See pp. 9 - 11 for sample graphs on club meetings, volunteering, voting, and trust by educational background.

## ANALYSIS BY RACE AND ETHNICITY

If we calculate the overall Civic Health Index separately for Whites, African Americans, and Latinos, we find that Whites have the highest score and Latinos have the lowest. (Unfortunately, data are not available for Asian Americans, Native Americans, and others, except for voting and volunteering.)

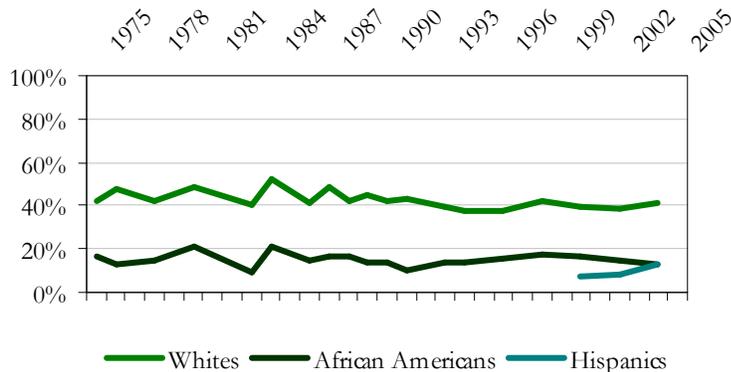
Race and ethnicity, however, are not like educational background, for which all the components show the same patterns. On the contrary, minorities are ahead of Whites on some measures and behind on others. We therefore believe that aggregating all the indicators into indices by race and ethnicity would be misleading; it would obscure a complex picture. Instead, we provide a sample of indicators below.

### Religious Attendance by Race and Ethnicity | DDB



*African Americans attend church or other religious services more frequently than other groups.*

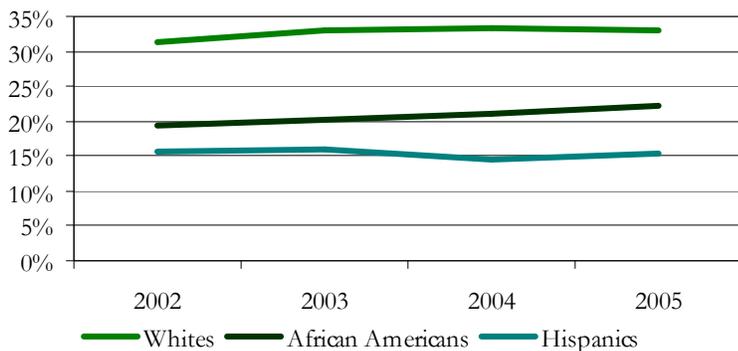
### Trust in Others Index by Race and Ethnicity



*African Americans are less likely to say that most other people can be trusted.*

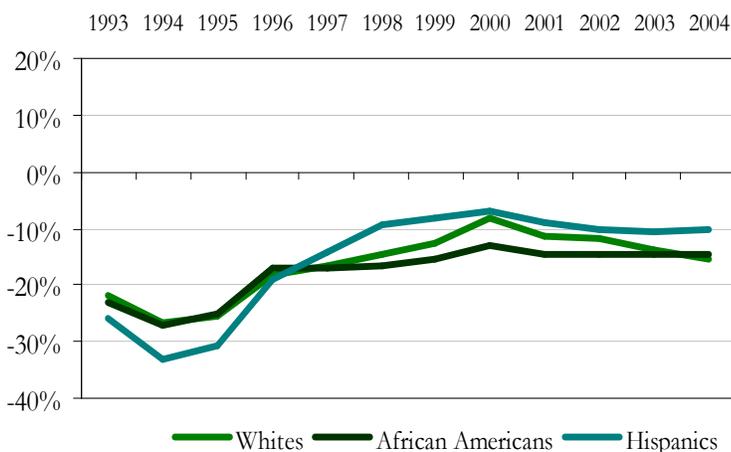


### Volunteering by Race and Ethnicity | CPS



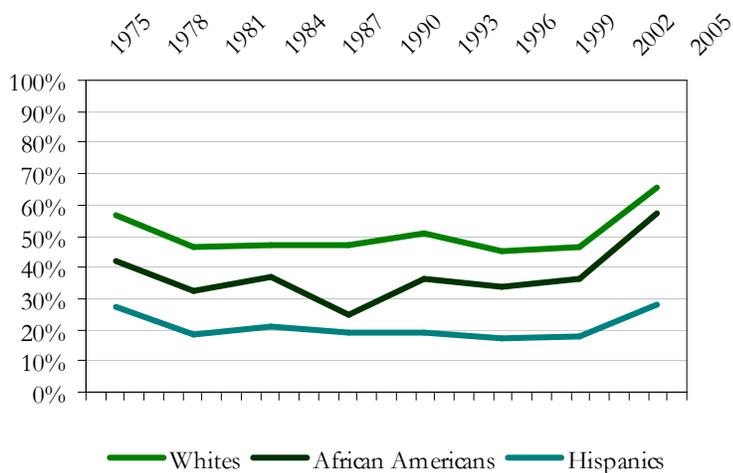
*Volunteering appears to be more common among Whites. These results, however, do not control for the influence of education. Moreover, there may be a cultural bias inherent in the definition of “volunteering,” which often implies unpaid service for organized nonprofit groups, conducted after school or paid employment. Many people do not count translating for a family member, monitoring neighborhood children, or helping at a church as “volunteering.”*

### Trust in Government Index by Race and Ethnicity



*Confidence in government correlates with education, and Whites have a higher level of average educational attainment than African Americans and Hispanics. Nevertheless, minorities have at least as much confidence in government as Whites do.*

### Voting by Race and Ethnicity | CPS



*Overall, Whites vote at higher rates than African Americans, who have higher turnout rates than Hispanics, Asian Americans, and Native Americans. The gap, however, has narrowed between Whites and African Americans. In particular, turnout rates of young African Americans have risen and are now very close to those of young Whites. In fact, African Americans under the age of 30 voted at a higher rate than Whites of that age in 2000.<sup>25</sup> The graph shows turnout per adult citizen population (thus non-citizen immigrants are excluded).*

## Appendix II | Latest Data from 2005

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Thanks to DDB Worldwide Communications Group, Inc., we are able to release some recent survey data that have never been publicly disclosed. For these eight indicators of civic health, we have data from 2005. The following chart shows the latest data and the change in each indicator since the year it was first measured.

INDICATOR	PERCENT WHO SAID YES IN 2005	CHANGE SINCE FIRST MEASURED BY DDB
Attended club meeting within past 12 months	35.2%	-27.9% since 1975
Participated in a community project within the past 12 months	26.6%	-16.3% since 1975
Attend church at least nine times per year	49.8%	-13.3% since 1975
Believe that most people are honest	52.8%	-22.2% since 1975
The whole family usually eats dinner together	65.6%	-17.4% since 1977
Visit friends a lot	33.8%	-1.2% since 1979
Participate in online chat or forum at least nine times per year	36.5%	+27.3% since 2000
Have written a letter to the editor of a magazine within the last 12 months	16.7%	+1.9% since 1987



The Index is composed of 40 indicators in nine categories. These indicators were selected by the working group of advisors acknowledged on p. 2, based on their previous work on civic engagement. The working group reviewed the text of survey questions -- but not the trends in each indicator over time -- when they discussed which ones should be included.

Our data are drawn from the following instruments:

**GSS: The General Social Survey** is produced by the National Opinion Research Center (NORC). Between 1,300 and 3,000 randomly selected individuals are interviewed in person.

**NES: The American National Election Studies**, like the GSS, is an in-person survey of randomly selected residents, about 1,600-2,200 per survey. These studies have been performed in presidential election years from 1948 and also in many mid-term elections since 1956.

**DDB: The DDB Life Style Survey** is a proprietary annual survey of Americans graciously provided to us by DDB. It is not a strictly random survey. Instead, DDB is a “mail panel survey”: DDB purchases lists of names from commercial vendors and constructs a representative national sample, of which a random sub-sample of 5,000 is surveyed by mail. Response rates from those who agree to participate are over 70 percent, but the effective response rate is much lower than CPS, GSS or NES. Nonetheless, careful analysis has found that despite response rate differentials the results are closely comparable to random-digit telephone polls, not just at the surface marginal responses, but also much deeper cross-patterns in the data.

**CPS: The Census Current Population Survey** is a monthly survey of approximately 50,000 households conducted every month by telephone and in-person. Questions about voting are asked in November of federal election years. Questions about volunteering have been asked since September 2001.

We also use **Internal Revenue Service data on philanthropic contributions** and the **National Assessment of Educational Progress**.

The baseline year for the whole index is 1975. We chose that year because a valuable set of indicators from the DDB Lifestyles Survey goes back only that far. The most recent year for which there is complete data is 2004. We have included information that is available for 2005, but note that certain indicators, such as voter turnout, civic knowledge and political activities, will be collected and reported by the end of 2006.

The nine categories are weighted equally. Within each category, each indicator usually counts equally. The only exceptions occur when two or more indicators are seen as measuring essentially the same phenomenon. Those clusters (identified in Appendix I) are averaged together before being included in the Index.

For any year, the score for a given variable is the *percentage-point change* in that variable compared to its baseline year, which was when it was first measured in available surveys. This method allows us to add new variables when data become available. For example, reading blogs was first measured in 2005. We can now include changes in blog-reading compared to the 2005 baseline.

When an indicator is missing in a given year after it has been introduced, we use a straight line between the available data points to calculate the trend. For example, the American National Election Studies are conducted in presidential and mid-term election years, not in odd years. The General Social Survey was conducted annually from 1972 – 1994, except in 1979, 1984 and 1992, and has been conducted biennially thereafter.

## Endnotes

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- 1 Estimates of the percentage of people who volunteer vary widely, depending on how the questions are phrased. (See surveys by the Census Bureau, Higher Education Research Institute, CIRCLE, DDB Life Style, and Monitoring the Future, among others.) Many surveys prompt respondents with a list of volunteer activities, but these lists differ. However, the same *trend* emerges in surveys that repeat a question over time. Chris Toppe, “Measuring Volunteering: A Behavioral Approach,” CIRCLE Working Paper 43, December 2005.
- 2 The United States ranked third out of 41 nations in the proportion of our population (12.9%) who said that they had taken local community action on issues like poverty, employment, housing, or racial equity and fifth out of 60 countries in the proportion (14%) who had done “unpaid voluntary work” to provide “social welfare services for elderly, handicapped or deprived people.” Source: World Values Survey, data collected between 1999 and 2004.
- 3 U.S. Election Assistance Commission *National Voter Turnout in Federal Elections: 1960-1996 Current Population Survey*, U.S. Census Bureau *Voting and Registration: 2000 – 2004*.
- 4 Pasek, Josh; Kate Kensi, Daniel Romer & Kathleen Hall Jamieson. *America’s Youth and Community Engagement: House of Use of Mass Media is Related to Civic Activity & Political Awareness*. Pp. 115-116.
- 5 CIRCLE, *Youth Vote 2004*.
- 6 Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, vol. 2, book 2, Chapter vi [“On the Relation Between Public Associations and Newspapers”]. In the translation by Phillips Bradley New York: Vintage, 1954], vol. 2, p. 120.
- 7 Pew Research Center for the People and the Press, survey conducted June 8-12, 2005.
- 8 Michael X. Delli Carpini and Scott Keeter, *What Americans Know About Politics and Why it Matters* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1989).
- 9 We recommend some of the items in Delli Carpini and Keeter, 1989.
- 10 James Coleman, “Social Capital in the Creation of Human Capital, *American Journal of Sociology*, vol. 94 (1988), pp. 95-120.
- 11 Robert Putnam, *Bowling Alone* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2000).
- 12 Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, (ed. J.P. Mayer) (NY, NY.: Harper & Row, 1969); p. 513.
- 13 Putnam, *Bowling Alone*, p. 135.
- 14 Political scientists Dietlind Stolle and Thomas R. Rochon call these traits “generalized trust” and “community reciprocity.” Dietlind Stolle and Thomas R. Rochon, “Are All Associations Alike? Member Diversity, Associational Type, and the Creation of Social Capital,” *Beyond Tocqueville: Civil Society and the Social Capital Debate in Comparative Perspective*, edited by Bob Edwards, Michael W. Foley, and Mario Diani (Hanover, New Hampshire: University Press of New England, 2001), p. 155.
- 15 Anna Greenberg for Reboot, “OMG!: How Generation Y is redefining Faith in the iPod Era,” April 2005.
- 16 Theda Skocpol. “The Tocqueville Problem: Civic Engagement in American Democracy,” *Social Science History* 21, no. 4 (Winter 1997), 473.
- 17 Skocpol (1997), p. 476.
- 18 US Statistical Abstract, Population Section, No. 51. Series 1 estimate is 19.9% and series 2 estimate is 19.3% single households, depending on assumption of growth in single households since 1970.
- 19 Miller McPherson, Lynn Smith-Lovin, and Matthew E. Brashears, “Social Isolation in America: Changes in Core Discussion Networks over Two Decades,” *American Sociological Review*, vol. 71 (June 2006), pp. 353-375. These trends prompted an AP article on Sunday, August 6, 2006 entitled, “Lonely Nation.”
- 20 The Federalist (27) in Clinton Rossiter, ed., *The Federalist Papers* (New York, 1961), p. 174.
- 21 DDB Life Style Survey. Individuals designated multiple areas of giving, so the percentages do not add up to 100%.
- 22 Richard M Lerner, *Liberty: Thriving and Civic Engagement among America’s Youth* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2004), pp. 85-107.
- 23 The correlation is .62, which is generally considered high.
- 24 Since the NES asks whether “anyone” talked to you about registering to vote or getting out the vote rather than whether you were contacted by “someone you know” (as it is sometimes asked) it is hard to sort out whether some of this increase over the last 12 years is caused merely by increased campaign spending on things like “robocalls” (taped messages of candidates urging one to vote for them) rather than embodying deeper citizen mobilization. However, the NES data on people mobilizing others (shown below under 9. Expressing Political Views”) suggests an actual increase in citizen mobilization.
- 25 Mark Hugo Lopez and Emily Kirby, “Electoral Engagement Among Minority Youth,” CIRCLE Fact Sheet, July 2005.



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