



CHICAGO CIVIC HEALTH INDEX

2010



M McCormick
Foundation



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The 2010 *Chicago Civic Health Index* demonstrates the failure of the region to prepare its youngest citizens for their adult civic responsibilities, along with the effects of endemic political corruption and the widespread cynicism and disengagement it spawns. **While Chicagoland residents trail their national peers by small margins on most measures of civic health, including civic engagement and social capital, the overall numbers are unacceptably low.** The challenge of turning the tide rests upon the region's commitment to civic education and engagement opportunities for tomorrow's active, informed citizens and political leaders.

For the purposes of this report, civic engagement is defined as a composite of five frequently measured and discussed forms of civic participation: voting, volunteering, working with neighbors to fix a problem in the community, expression of political voice, and financial contributions to voluntary organizations. In voter turnout for the 2004 Presidential election, Chicagoland citizens (65.5%) were just as likely to vote as their state (65.6%) and more likely than their national peers (63.8%). However, despite the historic implications of the 2008 election and the favorite-son candidacy of then-Senator Barack Obama, **turnout actually declined among Chicagoland citizens** (62.1%), who were outvoted by both their state (62.6%) and national peers (63.6%).

In volunteering rates, Chicago ranks 38th among the 51 largest cities in the United States. Chicago volunteers averaged 27.9 hours per resident over the course of a year, ranking 45th among the 51 largest cities studied. On a more positive note, Chicagoland citizens are slightly more apt to engage in selected political activities than the nation as a whole (26.7% compared with 26.3%). This includes contacting of or visits with public officials; attending meetings where political issues are discussed; purchasing or boycotting products or services for political reasons; taking part in a march, protest, rally, or demonstration; and contributing financially to political candidates or their parties. Chicagoland residents are also more likely to engage in political conversations with friends and family a few times a week or more (43.0% versus 39.3% nationally).

Social capital allows individuals to form connections that benefit the collective interests of the community. This encompasses networks of mutual obligations through interactions with a diverse group of people. For the purposes of this report, social capital is measured by group membership; "private sociability," centering on people's personal connections to family members, friends, and peers; and discussion of current events and access to information.



Group membership in Chicagoland (36.7%) mirrors state (37.2%) and national averages (35.1%). **On measures of connectedness, Chicagoland residents trail the rest of the country on every measure but one**, but these differences are relatively small. While they are slightly less likely to eat dinner with their families at least a few times a week (86.4% to 89.1%), to talk with their neighbors (45.3% to 45.8%), and do favors for their neighbors (15.1% to 16.0%), Chicagoland citizens are more likely to converse with friends and family via the Internet (60.1% to 53.6%). **Across all forms of media, Chicagoland residents outpace their national peers in terms of news attentiveness.** They are more avid consumers of newspapers and news magazines, television news, radio news, and Internet news (32% to 29%).

While the cures for Chicagoland's ailing civic health are elusive, **the restoration of the civic missions of the region's schools is vital to the future of local democratic participation and governance.** The McCormick Foundation, in partnership with the Illinois Civic Mission Coalition, published the *Illinois Civic Blueprint* in 2009. The blueprint outlines six promising approaches to citizen development and provides models of their execution in local schools and through community organizations. It sets up a process where Illinois high schools document their commitment to these approaches, and those deemed proficient are conferred Democracy School status. To date, nine local high schools have been recognized as Democracy Schools. The restoration of Chicagoland's civic health over the next generation is incumbent upon all regional schools living their civic mission and becoming Democracy Schools.

INTRODUCTION

Chicagoland's civic health is on life support. This report identifies the symptoms of the region's failure to prepare its youngest citizens for their civic responsibilities as adults, and the effects of endemic political corruption that breeds widespread cynicism and disengagement. It is published by the National Conference on Citizenship and supported by the McCormick Foundation.

Chicagoland,¹ encompassing both the City of Chicago and surrounding suburban counties, boasts a rich community of organizations and institutions committed to civic education and engagement. However, their work is made exponentially more difficult by the abandonment of its schools' civic missions and apathy that extends throughout citizens' lives. Across the nation, high-stakes testing focuses solely on reading and math skills, which are critical for career- and college-readiness, but crowd out schools' historic role in the political socialization of young people for their adult roles as citizens in a representative democracy. Local school funding shortfalls have further narrowed the curriculum, casting off veteran teachers and precluding students from formative civic engagement opportunities both inside and outside the classroom.

The current recession has exacted its own toll on Chicagoland's civic health, as the region's higher-than-average unemployment rate precludes citizens from volunteering in their communities and engaging in political activities. Widespread gun violence continues to cripple the city, fraying the fabric of the city's social networks and breeding collective fear. Political corruption permeates state and local politics, making the term "Chicago politics" synonymous nationally with patronage hiring, insider deals, and an utter lack of transparency.

It's no wonder then that Chicagoland residents shun civic and political engagement. The report that follows will highlight how Chicago compares with Illinois and the nation on measures of voting, volunteerism, expression of political voice, and voluntary financial contributions to civic causes. It will also speak to the prevalence of social capital in the region, exploring the tendencies of local citizens to join groups, connect with one another more informally, and remain attentive to the news and engage with others in discussions of current events. Each measurement is broken down by generational cohort, providing evidence of the state of civic emergency that cripples the region as its youngest residents are the least civically engaged. When relevant, socioeconomic disparities centering on race, income, and education are also highlighted.



While the Chicago region trails the state and nation on many of these measures, there remains reason for optimism. The Illinois Civic Mission Coalition and its member organizations have made significant progress in reviving the civic mission of schools throughout the state. It is the hope of the Coalition that the next cohort of regional and state residents will be known not for their political apathy but instead as a generation deeply committed to advancing the civic health of communities statewide. This report concludes with detailed policy suggestions and documentation of the progress of the Coalition to date.

CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

Active involvement in the political life of one's community is vital to its civic health. This report uses the ubiquitous term "civic engagement" to measure these elusive yet critical habits. For the purposes of this report, civic engagement is defined as a composite of five frequently measured and discussed forms of civic participation: voting, volunteering, working with neighbors to fix a problem in the community, expression of political voice, and financial contributions to voluntary organizations. What follows is a breakdown of civic engagement in Chicagoland along these lines.

VOTING

The voting decision is dependent upon two actions: registering to vote and then following through with the action. Voting is viewed by many as the most minimal form of civic engagement, yet it is the tool by which most Americans interact with the political process and hold elected officials responsible for their actions.

In the 2004 Presidential election, Chicagoland citizens (65.5%) were almost as likely to show up at the polls than other Illinoisans (65.6%) and were more likely than their national peers (63.8%). Fast forward to 2008, where turnout actually declined among Chicagoland citizens (62.1%), and were outpaced by both their state (62.6%) and national peers (63.6%). Recall that the 2008 election had a favorite-son candidate, then-Senator Barack Obama, running for president. While this arguably lured many regional and state residents to the polls on Election Day, many others may have abstained with the expectation that Obama would win easily, diminishing the importance of individual votes.

Parsing the region, City of Chicago residents voted more frequently than their metropolitan peers, registering a 65.4% turnout in 2008 as opposed to 60.1% for those who live in the outlying suburban areas.

Breaking down the Chicagoland 2008 vote along generational lines, Baby Boomers (born 1946-1964) were the most likely to vote (68.3%), followed by Gen-Xers (born 1965-1980, 64.4%), and members of the Silent Generation (born 1945 or earlier, 58.1%). Millennials, born after 1980, were the least likely (49.9%) to report voting in 2008. While these numbers mirror national trends, they should temper celebrations of unprecedented youth involvement in the 2008 campaign. True, civic engagement is subject to a lifecycle effect, where participation grows throughout one's life into middle age, and tails off as one becomes a senior citizen. However, political



involvement among young people (Millennials, and especially Gen-Xers) still lags behind other generations when accounting for their current position in life.²

Of all the participatory political acts, voting is the least likely to break down along class lines.³ While Chicagoland residents who make more than \$75,000 annually were the most likely to vote in 2008 (76% turnout rate), those making less than \$35,000 ranked second (66.8%), besting the \$35,000-\$50,000 (59.8%) and \$50,000-\$75,000 (66.2%) income brackets.

Similar trends held true for voter registration in 2004 and 2008. Chicagoland citizens were more likely than their national counterparts to be registered to vote in 2004 (73.5% of Chicagoland citizens registered to vote versus 71.0%). Chicagoland citizens, however, were less likely to have been registered compared with the statewide registration rate (74.5%). Moreover, Chicagoland did lagged behind both in 2008 (69.0%, 70.9%, and 71.0% respectively), falling in absolute and relative terms.

Voter registration in Chicagoland also mirrors voter turnout along generational lines. Once more, Baby Boomers (75.0%) were the most likely to be registered, followed by Gen-Xers (70.3%), the Silent Generation (65.6%), and finally, Millennials (59.1%). The same is true for the city-suburban split, as Chicago residents were registered at a higher rate (71.5%) than suburban residents (67.7%).

In 2008, turnout among registered voters was quite high, reaching 90% among Chicagoland citizens, slightly outpacing state (88.4%) and national citizens (89.6%). Illinois residents face greater challenges in attempting to register in comparison to northern neighbors Minnesota and Wisconsin. Both states allow voters to register at the polls on Election Day and typically rank at or near the top in national measures of voter turnout. While Illinois voters are still required

to register one month prior to primary and general elections, the state legislature did lower the bar for no-excuse absentee balloting in August 2009, permitting "...a new person to request and vote an absentee ballot without specifying a reason for being absent at the polling place on Election Day."⁴

Methods of voter registration vary, but registering at the Department of Motor Vehicles is the most common option for Chicagoans, followed closely by a city or county registration office. Chicagoans are more than twice as likely as their national counterparts to register as a result of a registration drive (15.6% compared with 7.6%), are on par for registering at either a school, hospital, or campus (8.1% versus 8.0%), and lag significantly behind the national average of voters who register by mail (7.6% versus 16.7%).

Among those who failed to register, Chicagoans (34.4%) were less likely than other state citizens (38.5%) and the rest of the nation (40.8%) to express their disinterest in the election or lack of involvement with politics as the reason for their nonparticipation. However, they were much more likely to cite their failure to meet registration deadlines (23.5% versus 17.9% statewide and 14.7% nationally), and also their ineligibility to vote altogether even though they were U.S. citizens (9.7% compared with 8.7% in Illinois and 8.0% in the U.S.). Chicagoans mirrored other state and national citizens in the percentage who claimed they didn't know how or where to register to vote (4.0%, 4.4%, and 3.8%, respectively).

For those registered voters who failed to make it to the polls on Election Day, a plurality of Chicagoland citizens (27.2%) claimed that they were too busy, tied down by either work or school obligations, exceeding both state (23.3%) and national reports (18.9%) on this count. Individual or familial illness or disability ranked second (21.9%), followed by those who cited a lack of interest or felt that their vote wouldn't make a difference (18.0%). Other factors, in order of frequency include a dislike of the candidates or campaign

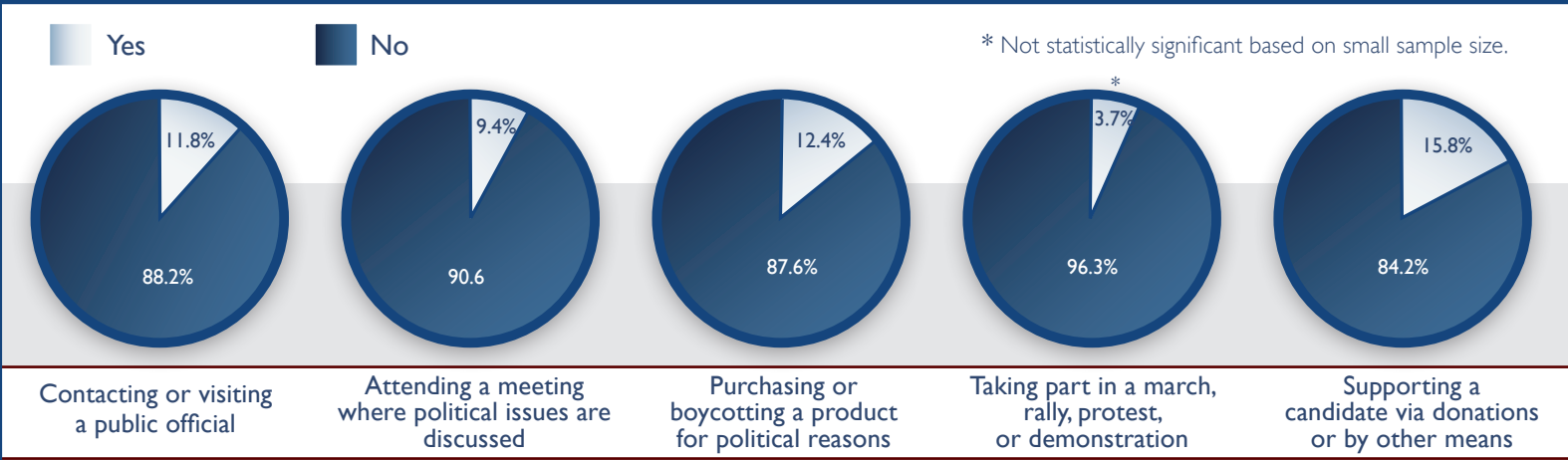


issues (8.0%), those who were out of town on Election Day (7.0%), inconvenient polling place locations, hours, or excessively long lines (3.3%), registration problems (did not receive an absentee ballot, not registered at their current residence, 2.6%), and those who simply forgot (0.9%).

While voting by mail is increasingly common in states and cities across the nation (Oregon, for example), accounting for 16% of American voters, it remains rare among Chicagoans (4.0%) and Illinois residents (3.8%). The same is true for those who take advantage of early voting opportunities. While Chicagoans are more likely to vote early than other Illinois citizens (25.7% compared with 21.2%), both trail its national incidence (29.8%).

Chicagoland residents also engaged in various forms of non-electoral participation (see Figure 1), including contacting or visiting a public official; attending a meeting where political issues are discussed; purchasing or boycotting a product for political reasons; taking part in a march, rally, protest, or demonstration; or supporting a political candidate or party via financial donations or by other means. Unfortunately, each of these non-electoral activities is the exception rather than the norm.

FIGURE 1: FORMS OF NON-ELECTORAL POLITICAL PARTICIPATION



Of additional concern are the racial disparities related to political acts beyond voting. While Whites and African-Americans are almost equally likely to participate in one or more political acts beyond voting, Latinos trail on this count by significant margins. Participatory inequalities may translate into distorted forms of representation when public voices fail to mirror the populace, as political interests vary by income, educational attainment, race, and ethnicity.

VOLUNTEERING

Chicago ranks 38th among the 51 largest cities in the United States for volunteering among residents 16 and older. Volunteering in America⁵ estimates that Chicago's volunteer rate grew by 3% since 2008, and that 1.7 million residents volunteered from 2007 through 2009. Chicago volunteers averaged 27.9 hours per resident over the course of a year, ranking 45th among the 51 largest cities studied. This constitutes an estimated \$4.1 billion of service contributed to the region.

By comparison, Chicago's 2009 volunteer rate of 26.9% exceeds that of both New York (16.4%) and Los Angeles (21.9%). However, it trails smaller neighbors Indianapolis (29.2%) and Milwaukee (33.4%).⁶ There exists an ongoing debate in the participation literature between the mobilizing effects of urban residence and the political stimulants associated with city living ("mobilization model"), and the hypothesis that participation declines as one moves from a small town to a larger city ("decline of community model").⁷ The large city comparisons lend evidence in favor of the decline of community model. However, when comparing Chicago to the volunteer rates of select Illinois cities, the findings are more inconclusive. For example, while Champaign (32.4% volunteer rate) and Peoria (29.7%) residents each outpace Chicago residents' volunteer rate (26.9%), Rockford residents hold only a slight lead (27.6%), and Kankakee residents trail by a significant margin (21.4%).⁸

Chicagoland citizens' volunteer rates mirror the national average (26.8%), but trail the rest of the state slightly (28.3%). Chicagoland and Illinois citizens attended meetings where political issues were discussed consistent with the national average (10.0% versus 9.9%), and were about as likely to report "fixing something" with their neighbors (8.8% nationally), although state citizens (9.0%) outpaced Chicagoland (8.1%) citizens. Both Chicagoland (53.4%) and Illinois citizens (52.4%) were more likely to make donations than the rest of the nation (52.0%).

Volunteer rates in Chicagoland again split along generational lines. While Baby Boomers (29.4%), Gen-Xers (28.1%), and the Silent Generation (27.9%) are coupled closely together, Millennials (23.6%) trail these cohorts by a significant margin. The same is true for donations greater than \$25, although the order among the top three is shifted, with Baby Boomers continuing to lead the way

(68.0%), followed by the Silent Generation (63.5%), and Gen-Xers (57.0%). Millennials pull up the rear once more (27.8%).

While one might expect Millennials to trail older Chicagoans in financial donations, their volunteering lag is more troublesome. The region boasts strong school-based service-learning programs, a pedagogical practice that links volunteerism with the formal classroom curriculum, enabling student selection of service projects, and more importantly, classroom reflection upon service experiences. Chicago Public Schools, for example, require 40 hours of community service for graduation, and more recently have moved to project-based service requirements.⁹ Many universities located within the Chicagoland region also house service-learning centers and programs that work with community partners to identify and address city issues. Examples of these university-based programs include the Center for Civic Engagement at Northwestern University and the Civic Leadership Certificate Program at the University of Illinois-Chicago.

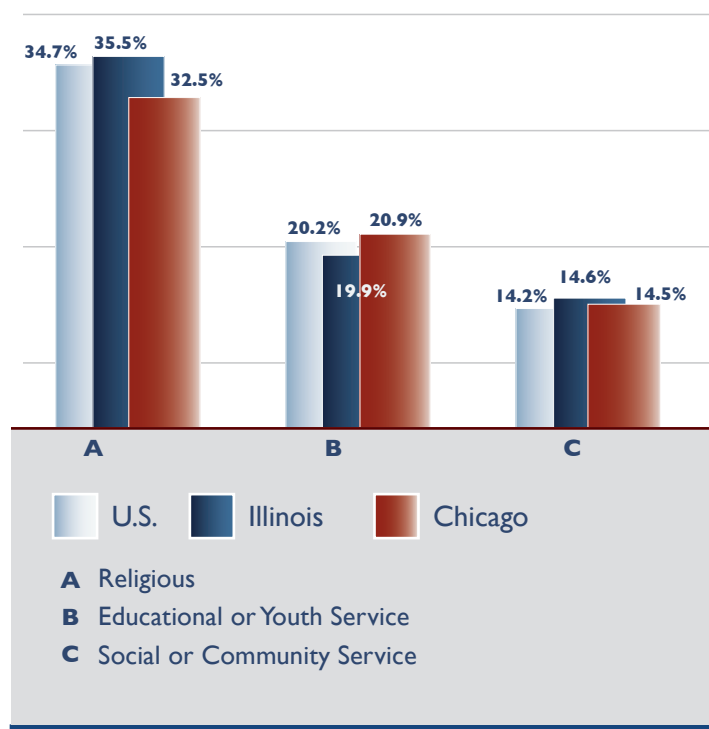
Finally, Chicagoland volunteer rates stratify along class lines. Only 20.5% of those who make less than \$35,000 annually reported volunteering in 2009, compared with 42.4% of those with incomes in excess of \$75,000. According to Verba et al. (1995), civic engagement correlates closely with income. However, once active, poor Americans are as generous with their time as the affluent.¹⁰

Like volunteering, individual donations of more than \$25 to a civic cause split definitely along income lines. Whereas 72.8% of Chicagoland residents who make more than \$75,000 annually donate at least \$25, only 40.5% of those making less than \$35,000 annually contribute at similar levels. There is often a strong correlation with income and education, and there is evidence to suggest that Chicagoland donations also break down along educational attainment lines.¹¹ For instance, while 47.0% of high school graduates make donations of at least \$25 annually, 77.0% of college graduates attain this distinction.

Turning to the city-suburban split, Chicagoland residents in the outlying areas are more likely to volunteer than their urban counterparts (29.0% versus 23.2%). Although Chicago does not currently have a central resource for volunteerism, the City is working to improve resources for volunteerism and service efforts. In January 2010, Chicago was chosen as a "City of Service," receiving a \$200,000 Cities of Service Leadership Grant from the Rockefeller Foundation to hire a Chief Service Officer "dedicated to developing and implementing a citywide plan to increase volunteerism and target volunteers to address (the) city's greatest needs." Chicago will use the grant money over the next two years to strengthen avenues to volunteerism within the city, targeting after-school programs and economic development opportunities.¹²

Turning to the facilitators of volunteerism, the types of organizations that Chicagoland, Illinois, and American citizens affiliated with mirrored one another both categorically and proportionately. Religious institutions outpaced educational or youth service organizations, and social or community organizations in the top three rankings for each geographic category. According to Robert Putnam in *Bowling Alone* (2000), “faith communities in which people worship together are arguably the single most important repository of social capital in America.”¹³

FIGURE 2: RATES OF VOLUNTEERING BY TYPE OF ORGANIZATION



Chicagoland citizens are more likely (24.1%) than state (20.3%) and national citizens (18.7%) to engage in episodic volunteering opportunities of less than two weeks in a given year. Occasional volunteerism (three-to-ten weeks) is on par with the state and national average (23.9% for both Chicagoland and U.S. versus 24.5% for Illinois), and regular volunteering of more than twelve weeks lags slightly behind (47.2% versus 50.6% for the state and 51.4% nationally).

For those who did volunteer, citizens at all levels said that they were asked by a member of the organization or via school-based channels. This was followed closely by approaching the organization under their own auspices. Research shows that professional, school-based, and religious affiliations stand as the primary basis by which individuals encounter volunteering opportunities.¹⁴ More than anything, simply asking someone to serve clears an important threshold.

Volunteerism is habit-forming. Nearly two-thirds of individuals who reported volunteering in 2008 did so again in 2009, but Chicagoland citizens trail slightly on this count (61.5% of Chicagoland citizens versus 65.9% statewide and 65.5% nationally).

EXPRESSION OF POLITICAL VOICE/FINANCIAL CONTRIBUTIONS

Chicagoland citizens are less apt to engage in selected (non-electoral) political activities than the nation as a whole (22.1% compared with 26.3%). This encompasses contacting of or visits with public officials; meeting attendance where political issues are discussed; the purchase or boycott of products or services for political reasons; taking part in a march, protest, rally, or demonstration; and financial contributions to political candidates or their parties. Consistent with their greater proclivity to participate in political activities, Chicagoland residents are also more likely to engage in political conversations with friends and family a few times a week or more often (43.0% versus 39.3% nationally).

SOCIAL CAPITAL

Robert Putnam suggests that social capital includes both individual and collective components.¹⁵ Its presence enables individuals to form connections that benefit the collective interests of the community. Individuals form networks of mutual obligations or “generalized reciprocity” via interactions with a diverse group of people.

The survey data reported below doesn't measure social capital directly, but instead feature indicators often treated by the literature as components of social capital known to correlate with its ancillary features, including trust. The first measurement is group membership, which gauges active, voluntary leadership in various types of associations. These groups have long been viewed as the building blocks of American civil society.

Group members are classified as those who belong to at least one group or attend a meeting at least once a month. Group leaders are participants who hold offices or committee memberships.

GROUP MEMBERSHIP

Chicagoland citizens are slightly more likely to claim group membership than their national peers (see Figure 3), narrowly trailing their state counterparts on this measure. This includes school groups, neighborhood or community associations, sports and recreational



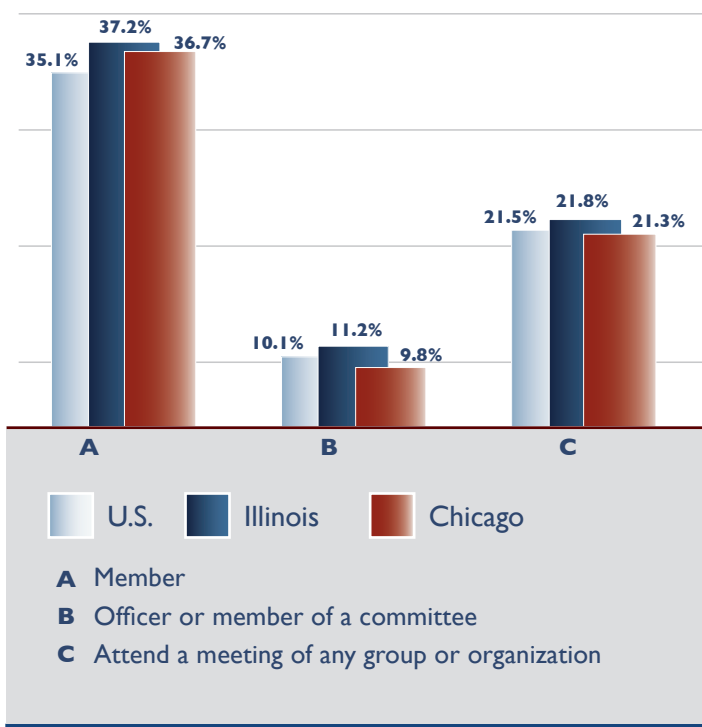
associations, church membership, and service or civic associations. They are only slightly less likely to assume leadership roles (Illinois residents as a whole are more likely), and the same relationship holds for meeting attendance. Group leadership is less common in urban areas (7.1% of urban residents serve as leaders nationwide) compared with rural residents (10.3%). Leaders are more likely to work with neighbors to improve the community, express political voice, volunteer, and vote.

Group membership in Chicagoland can also be parsed along generational lines. Involvement is highest among Baby Boomers (42.6%), followed closely by the Silent Generation (41.0%), and then yielding to significant gaps with Generation X (35.6%) and Millennials (28.8%). One would expect group membership to grow with age as occupational, church-based, and community ties strengthen over the course of the lifecycle.

Slight differences in group membership also exist throughout the Chicagoland region. Group membership, leadership, and meeting attendance are all more common among suburban residents than City of Chicago residents. The largest disparity centers on meeting attendance, which is reported by 24.3% of suburban residents as opposed to 16.7% of Chicagoans.

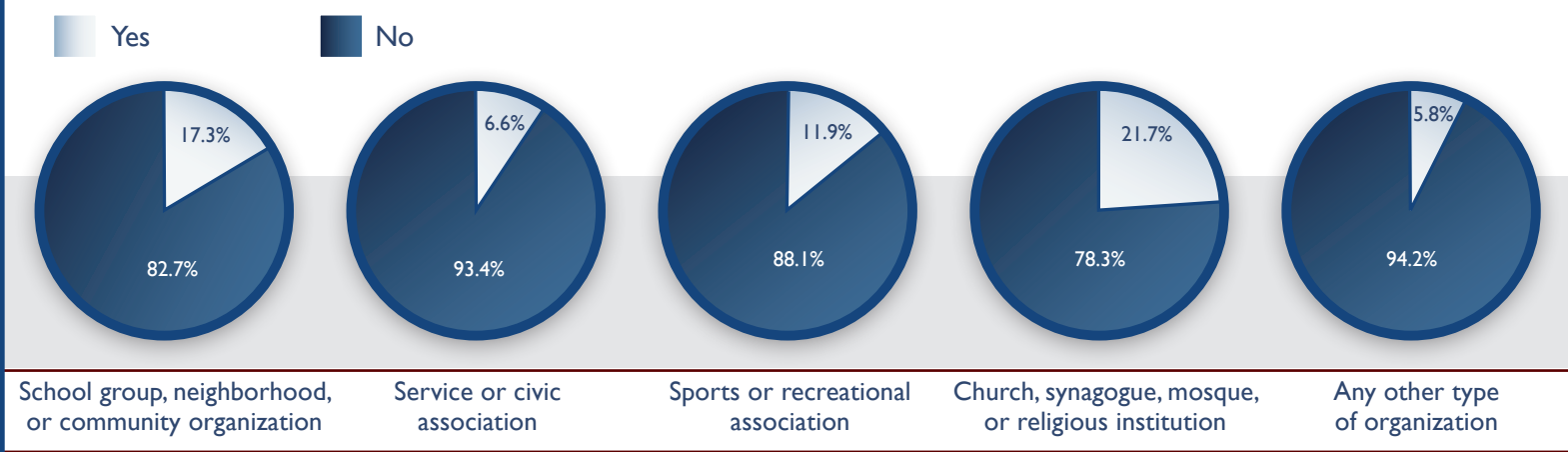
Finally, there are significant race-based disparities in group membership among Chicagoland residents. Whereas 41.8% of Whites claim membership in one or more groups, African-Americans trail slightly on this front (35.2%), and Latinos lag behind both groups (17.6%) by a significant margin. These numbers track national trends in recent decades, as African-Americans were mobilized by the Civil Rights Movement, and Latinos are plagued by language barriers and in some cases problems with their citizenship status.¹⁶

FIGURE 3: GROUP MEMBERSHIP



The most common group that Chicagoland residents participate in is religious institutions (see Figure 4), followed by school groups and community and neighborhood organizations, sports or recreational associations, and service or civic associations. Once more, each of these group forms attracts only a small minority of the population of potential participants. While most of these groups are not overtly political in orientation, they do develop member skills and establish relationships transferable to the political world.

FIGURE 4: FORMS OF GROUP PARTICIPATION



PRIVATE SOCIABILITY

The second measurement of social capital is termed “private sociability,” centering on people’s personal connections to family members, friends, and peers. These connections are known to have positive effects on personal health and well-being, but also may present pathways to civic and political participation.

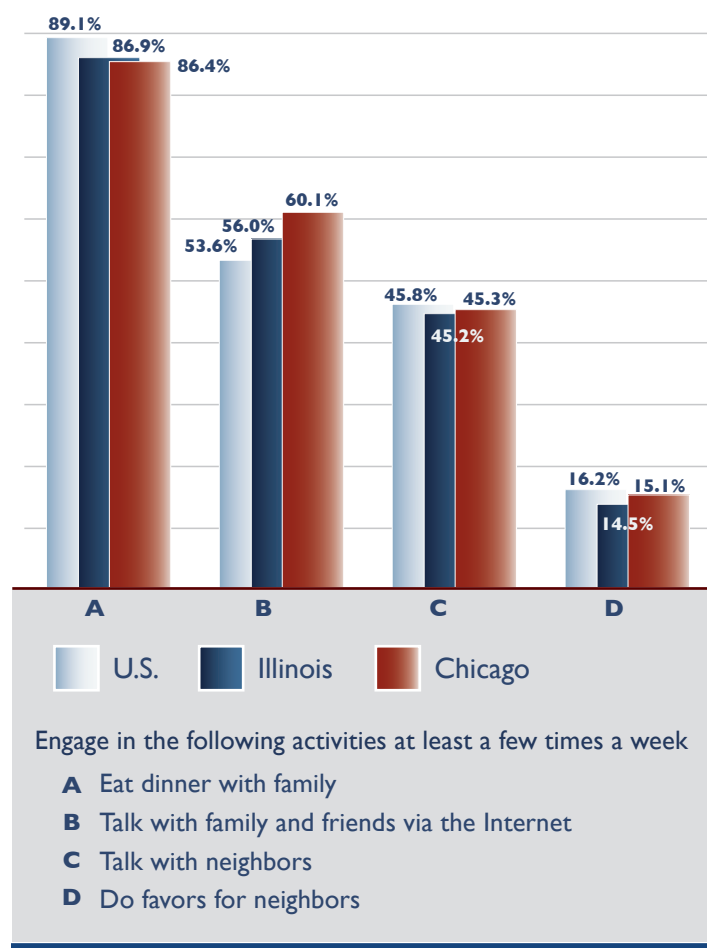
Connectedness is defined as communicating with family and friends by email, eating dinner with family members “basically every day,” and talking with neighbors at least a few times weekly. It also focuses on exchanges of favors with neighbors, including watching one another’s children, house sitting, or other small acts of kindness.

Like group leadership, urban residents are less likely to connect with others and exchange favors with neighbors (14.4% versus 19.5%). Once more, connectedness translates into expressions of political voice and higher rates of volunteerism and voter turnout.

On measures of connectedness, Chicagoland and statewide residents trail the rest of the country on every measure but one, but these differences are relatively small (see Figure 5). While they are slightly less likely to eat dinner with their families at least a few times a week and to talk with and do favors for their neighbors with the same frequency, Chicagoland citizens are most likely to converse with friends and family via the Internet.

However, online discourse with family and friends is much more common among Whites (67.3%) than African Americans (43.8%) and Latinos (43.0%). Here lies evidence of a race-based digital divide.

FIGURE 5: CONNECTEDNESS



Chicagoland residents who report strong personal ties exhibit a higher rate of political engagement. They are also more likely to vote. Nationally, rural and suburban residents are more likely to report stronger personal ties and more frequent exchanges of favors with neighbors, but there are not significant differences on this front in the Chicago metropolitan area. In fact, City of Chicago neighbors are more likely to interact weekly than their suburban counterparts (50.1% versus 42.7%), with suburban residents leading the way on monthly conversations with neighbors (39.5% versus 29.1%). City residents also perform more frequent favors for their neighbors (15.7% versus 14.8%), eclipsing suburbanites on weekly favors, but trailing slightly on the monthly frequency (45.1% versus 42.0%).

DISCUSSION OF CURRENT EVENTS AND ACCESS TO INFORMATION

Democratic governance and the health of a community are premised upon informed participation. This includes an understanding of current issues, the means of affecting change, and a gauge of others' views and interests. Three measures have been selected to assess the prominence of discussion and access to information among Chicagoland residents: newspaper reading, consumption of news from multiple media sources, and discussions of political issues with family and friends in person and via the Internet or email.

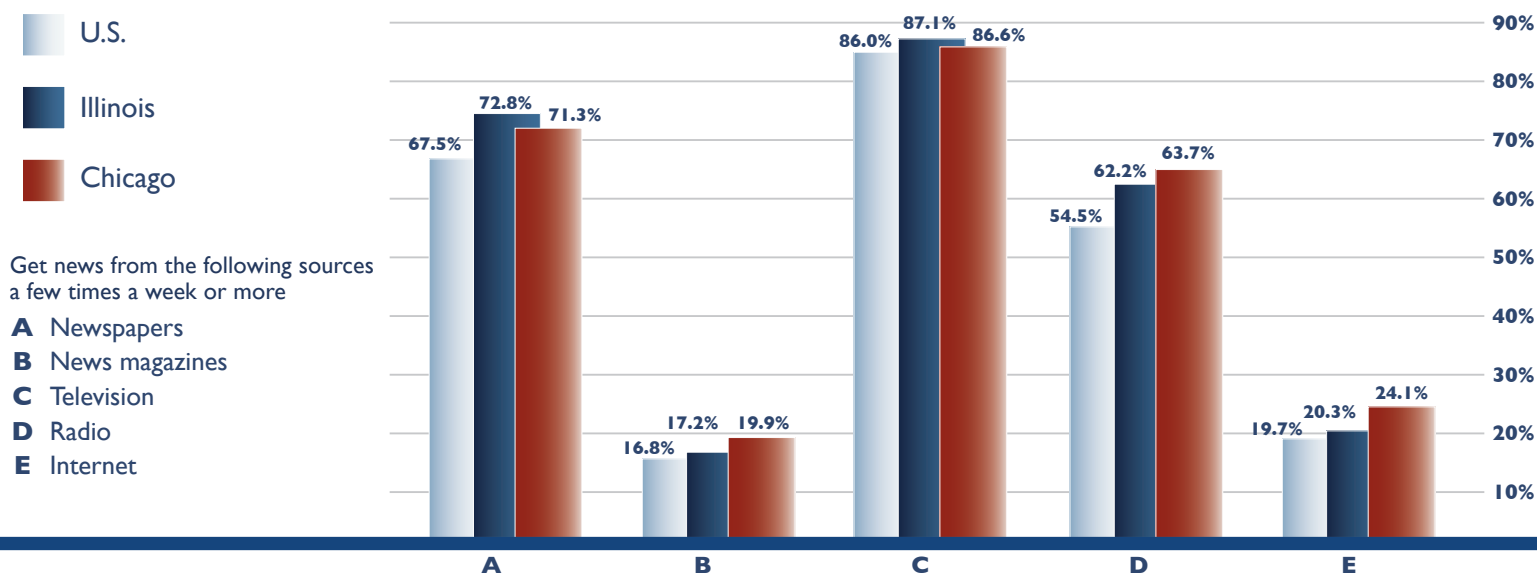
Frequent and broad access to news and information and engaging in political conversations with others is related to higher civic engagement, and the combination of the two exerts even more powerful effects.



By every measure (see Figure 6), Chicagoland residents outpace their national peers in terms of news attentiveness. The most pronounced gaps lie with those who get their news from the radio and the Internet at least a few times a week. The differences are smaller for newspaper and news magazine readership, and virtually on par in terms of television news watching. When compared with the rest of Illinois, Chicagoland residents are less likely to regularly read newspapers, but more likely to read news magazines and watch television news, and they are more avid consumers of news on the radio and via the Internet.

Millennials in Chicagoland are much less attentive to the news than their older peers. A little more than one-third (35.6%) of 18-29 year-olds read a daily newspaper compared with more than half (52.9%) of those over 30. Similar disparities surface for television (55.4% of Millennials versus 77.2% of those 30 and older) and radio news (33.7% versus 51.9%). However, Millennials are more likely to use the Internet as a daily news source, although a small sample size negates the statistical significance of this finding.

FIGURE 6: NEWS ATTENTIVENESS



The findings of a 2007 report prepared by Thomas Paterson of the Shorenstein Center on the Press, titled *Young People and the News*,¹⁷ are even more startling. He found that only 9% of teenagers read a newspaper daily, and nearly half (46%) hardly ever or never read the paper. Less than one-third (31%) watch national television news daily, and a quarter of teens listen to radio news daily. Only 20% of teens access the Internet daily for news consumption, and nearly a third (32%) never use the web as a news source.

Once more, news consumption tends to increase over the course of a lifecycle as adult responsibilities, including careers, home ownership, and childrearing, combine to make the embedded information more relevant. However, those Americans currently under 40 exhibit lower levels of news attentiveness at this stage of the life cycle in comparison to previous generations. It is cause for concern and further evidence that two generations of Americans are, in the words of David Mindich, “tuned out.”¹⁸

Thankfully, there is an innovative new model to develop constructive news consumption among middle and high school students across the country by using seasoned journalists to help young people sort fact from fiction in the Information Age. The Washington, DC-based News Literacy Project set root in Chicago in 2009, with the aim of teaching “¹⁹...students the critical thinking skills they need to be smarter and more frequent consumers and creators of credible information across all media and platforms.”

The consequences of news attentiveness translate into political dialogue among friends, neighbors, and fellow citizens. Such conversations carry their own positive civic consequences. In Chicagoland, those who engage in political discussions report higher rates of volunteerism and are also more likely to make monetary donations to political causes. News attentiveness and political discussions each correlate with fixing something in the community with neighbors.

Moreover, political discussions with family members and friends, although fairly widespread, show generational trends. Chicagoland Gen-Xers lead the way on this count, with 80.8% reporting political conversations at least a few times a month. Baby Boomers rank a



close second (80.4%), and are actually more likely than Gen-Xers to talk politics a few times a week (47.0% versus 44.5%). The Silent Generation and Millennials are also paired closely together on this front, with the former (72.4%) narrowly surpassing the latter in monthly discussions (70.9%).

Returning to the city-suburb comparison, Chicago residents are more likely to report weekly political conversations with family members and friends (45.9% versus 41.3%), yet monthly political conversations of this nature are more common in the suburbs (36.6% versus 28.2%), where the smallest number report the complete absence of political conversations (22.1% versus 25.9%).

THE ROAD AHEAD

With the indices of Chicago's civic health digested, one can certainly conclude that the patient needs urgent attention. While Chicagoland compared commensurably with Illinois and national residents on most measures of civic engagement and social capital, these numbers are excessively low on most counts. Other than voting in presidential elections, most Chicagoland residents sit on the proverbial sideline of civil society. While there is no panacea for curing poor civic health, schools are central to political socialization and the development of lifelong civic habits.

The restoration of the Chicagoland schools' civic missions is vital to the future of local democratic participation and governance. The McCormick Foundation, in partnership with the Illinois Civic Mission Coalition,²⁰ published the *Illinois Civic Blueprint*²¹ in 2009. The Blueprint is designed to give educators, policymakers, parents, and all Illinois residents explanations of promising approaches to high school level civic education; examples of Illinois high schools, educators, and students using these approaches; recommendations for implementing these approaches statewide; and resources that support schools and communities in promoting civic engagement among Illinois high school students.

The original purpose of public schools in the United States was to prepare young people for their role as citizens in a representative democracy. During the intervening years, schools have been tasked with ensuring that their students are career- and college-ready, and unfortunately, in too many locales, their original civic mission has been all but abandoned. Accountability through standardized testing has narrowed the curriculum toward an excessive emphasis on math, reading, and science to the exclusion of social studies and the humanities. It is no wonder that students demonstrate low levels of civic knowledge and lack proclivities toward political participation. Schools must continue to ensure the career- and college-readiness of their students, but also prepare them for the vital rigors of democratic citizenship.

In 2003, the National Campaign for the Civic Mission of Schools, in a report²² co-produced with The Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement (CIRCLE) and funded by the Carnegie Foundation, articulated six promising approaches for citizenship development in schools. They include formal instruction in U.S. government, history, law, and democracy; structured engagement with current and controversial issues; service



learning linked to the formal curriculum; extracurricular activities that encourage greater involvement and connection to school and the community; authentic student voice in school governance; and finally, participation in simulations of democratic structures and processes. The Illinois Civic Blueprint details the application of these promising approaches in high schools statewide and connects schools with community resources that assist with achievement of these ends.

High school students deserve enhanced opportunities to learn and practice civic engagement behaviors. The Illinois Civic Blueprint sets forth a process by which Illinois high schools complete an audit of their civic education offerings in pursuit of "Democracy School"²³ status. Through the formal curriculum and extracurricular opportunities, schools assess the degree to which students are exposed to the six promising approaches articulated in the blueprint. Applicants also develop a school improvement plan in order to demonstrate their schools' continued commitment to the civic development of their students, and are subsequently eligible for supplementary Foundation funding.

The accredited Democracy Schools are secondary schools that provide students with authentic experiences in the rights, responsibilities, and tensions inherent in living in a constitutional democracy. These schools consciously promote civic engagement by all students, have an intentional focus on fostering participatory citizenship, and place an emphasis on helping students understand how the fundamental ideals and principles of our democratic society relate to important current problems, opportunities, and controversies.

Illinois Democracy Schools collaborate with parents, students, and their communities in developing a civic mission and in providing curricular and extracurricular civic learning experiences for all students. They engage students in a continual process of improving and increasing civic learning. Evidence of these characteristics can be found in students' classrooms and formal learning opportunities, interactions with school governance structures, and in the opportunities for civic growth provided through service-learning and extracurricular activities.

Since 2006, nine Illinois high schools have successfully completed a civic audit and have been subsequently recognized as Democracy Schools.²⁴ In September 2009, the Illinois State Board of Education endorsed the Civic Blueprint. These early successes lay the groundwork for statewide success and represent a model for replication nationally.

The Blueprint details six policy recommendations to promote and improve the civic mission of every high school in the state.

I. PROVIDE FORMAL INSTRUCTION IN AMERICAN GOVERNMENT, HISTORY, LAW, AND DEMOCRACY IN ILLINOIS HIGH SCHOOLS:

- Require formal instruction in American government, law, and democracy along with formal instruction in U.S. history as integral to a comprehensive social studies program
- Recommend civic knowledge instruction that is interesting, relevant, realistic, and interactive, and that favors discussion and critical thinking rather than memorization
- Encourage local school boards to develop clear statements concerning the importance of learning about American government, history, law, and democracy and its inclusion in the social studies program
- Conduct a meaningful statewide survey of subject-matter that supports civic learning at the secondary level, in order to provide critical information for policymaking²⁵
- Include civic education experts and advocates on the committee revising the Illinois Learning Standards for Social Studies

2. PROMOTE STRUCTURED ENGAGEMENT WITH CURRENT AND CONTROVERSIAL ISSUES IN ILLINOIS HIGH SCHOOLS:

- Endorse the discussion of controversial issues in the classroom
- Encourage local school boards and schools to formulate clear guidelines for discussing controversial issues and to develop transparent procedures for addressing concerns expressed by all stakeholders
- Provide professional development to help teachers better handle controversial issues discussions

3. PROVIDE ILLINOIS HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS WITH OPPORTUNITIES TO LEARN THROUGH SERVICE:

- Revise teaching standards to include service learning as part of the certification requirement
- Endorse the inclusion of service learning as an effective teaching tool
- Encourage project-based service-learning experiences over a specific number of student service hours
- Encourage both group-based and individual student service-learning experiences where students have a legitimate voice in the project
- Promote service experiences that are connected to a formal classroom curriculum
- Encourage the allocation of sufficient time for individual reflection on service experiences

4. OFFER EXTRACURRICULAR ACTIVITIES FOR ILLINOIS HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS THAT ENCOURAGE GREATER INVOLVEMENT AND CONNECTION TO THEIR SCHOOLS AND COMMUNITIES:

- Encourage schools to conduct a baseline assessment of their current extracurricular activities—using the Illinois Civic Audit or a similar instrument—to determine how these activities advance larger civic outcomes
- Endorse the creation of extracurricular civics or civic engagement clubs at high schools to give students an opportunity to take a look at local issues
- Encourage schools to conduct an annual audit of resources and activities in their local communities

5. ENCOURAGE ILLINOIS STUDENT PARTICIPATION IN HIGH SCHOOL GOVERNANCE:

- Endorse the creation of a student seat on local school boards or local school councils
- Endorse the creation of student advisory councils, representing all elements of the student body and with access to the principal and/or school governance structures
- Encourage administrators to support student creation of High School Bills of Rights and Responsibilities subject to annual student amendment and administrative review

6. ENCOURAGE ILLINOIS HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS TO PARTICIPATE IN SIMULATIONS OF DEMOCRATIC PROCESSES AND PROCEDURES:

- Endorse the incorporation of simulation and/or real-world application of democratic processes as part of the curriculum
- Integrate democratic simulations in the classroom with real-life experiences
- Encourage teacher and student involvement with independent programs and organizations, such as those offered by members of the Illinois Civic Mission Coalition, that provide models and opportunities to practice democratic structures and processes
- Support the invitation and involvement of elected and appointed public officials in school classrooms and activities

Our nation's public schools are tasked with resolving too many societal ills, and the civic education community is certainly not the only group advocating for greater inclusion of content across the curriculum. However, the civic education community does not seek to diminish the importance of other core subject areas like reading, math, and science, or the value of the arts, humanities, and physical education. Instead, it merely asks to return to its original seat at the proverbial table of public education. Moreover, civic education is particularly apt for inclusion across the curriculum, enhancing learning in other core and elective subject areas.²⁶ Students must emerge from secondary schools career- and college-ready, but also prepared for their imminent role as citizens in a representative democracy.

Picture a region where every young person learns the basic principles of democracy. He or she is exposed to controversial matters of public concern and equipped with strong deliberative skills. Community and political service lie at their very core, and they project an inclusive voice for positive change. Young people



are familiar with the structures and processes of both elections and governing, and they participate with a sense of obligation, but also with a belief that they can affect democratic outcomes. In sum, Democracy Schools facilitate the development of such efficacious and engaged citizens who are so desperately needed to resuscitate Chicagoland's civic health.

May the findings of the first *Chicago Civic Health Index* serve as the clarion call for regional civic renewal. In order to repair the region's political fabric and prevent persistent corruption, Chicagoland voters must register and come to the polls on Election Day. They must reach out to elected officials and hold them accountable at the same time.

Regional residents must ramp up volunteer efforts, especially during difficult economic times like these, and build deep and lasting social capital. They must join groups, attend meetings, and assume leadership positions. Family members and neighbors must connect with one another over dinner or online. Finally, participation must be informed, and each of us must pay attention to the news and discuss the pressing issues of the day with fellow community members.

Chicago's civic health may be on life support, but the prescription for a clean bill of health lies in the content of this report. It is incumbent upon the patients, Chicagoland residents, to reclaim their local democracy.

TECHNICAL NOTES

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

For the Chicago Report, the sample size for citizen engagement was 3,929 and the sample size for volunteering 2,071.

Because we draw from multiple sources of data with varying sample sizes, we are not able to compute one margin of error for the state across all indicators. For Chicago, the sample size for major indicators varied from +/- 1.3% - 2.5%, depending on the sample size and other parameters associated with a specific indicator. Any analysis that breaks down the sample into smaller groups (gender, education) will have smaller samples and therefore the margin of error will increase. It is also important to emphasize that our margin of error estimates are approximate, as CPS sampling is highly complex and accurate estimation of error rates involves many parameters that are not publicly available.

The 2010 national report, *America's Civic Health Assessment* issue brief and executive summary can be found online at www.ncoc.net/CivicHealth2010. Rankings and data for all 50 states and 51 largest metropolitan areas are available at <http://civic.serve.gov>. The 2010 city report, *Chicago Civic Health Index* can be found online at www.ncoc.net/Chicago

ENDNOTES

¹ The Chicagoland region encapsulates the Chicago-Naperville-Joliet area, extending into portions of Northwest Indiana and Southeast Wisconsin, including five Illinois counties (Cook, DuPage, Lake, McHenry, and Will), and one each in Indiana (Lake) and Wisconsin (Kenosha).

² Zurkin, Cliff, Keeter, Scott, Andolina, Molly, Jenkins, Krista, and Delli Carpini, Michael (2006). *A New Engagement? Political Participation, Civic Life, and the Changing American Citizen*. NY: Oxford U. Press.

³ Verba, Sidney, Schlozman, Kay Lehman, and Brady, Henry E. (1995). *Voice and Equality: Civic Volunteerism in American Politics*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard U. Press. Page 189.

⁴ "Illinois Public Act 96-0533." Illinois General Assembly. Available online: <http://www.ilga.gov/legislation/publicacts/fulltext.asp?Name=096-0533>.

⁵ "Volunteering in Chicago." Volunteering in America. Available online: <http://www.volunteeringinamerica.gov/IL/Chicago>. Accessed August 27, 2010.

⁶ "Comparison Tool." Volunteering in America. Available online: <http://www.volunteeringinamerica.gov/IL/Chicago/Compare>. Accessed September 21, 2010..

⁷ Verba, Sidney, and Nie, Norman H. (1972). *Participation in America: Political Democracy and Social Equality*. Chicago: U. of Chicago Press. Page 231.

⁸ "Comparison Tool." Volunteering in America. Available online: <http://www.volunteeringinamerica.gov/cities.cfm>. Accessed September 21, 2010.

- ⁹ Chicago Service Requirement, <http://www.servicelearning.cps.k12.il.us/News.html>
- ¹⁰ Verba et al. (1995), pages 189-192.
- ¹¹ Educational attainment is calculated for survey participants 25 and older.
- ¹² Cities of Service Grants, <http://www.citiesofservice.org/leadership-cities>
- ¹³ Putnam, Robert D. (2000). *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community*. NY: Simon and Schuster. Page 66.
- ¹⁴ Burns, Nancy, Schlozman, Kay Lehman, and Verba, Sidney. (2001). *The Private Roots of Public Action: Gender, Equality, and Political Participation*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard U. Press.
- ¹⁵ Putnam, pages 20-21.
- ¹⁶ Verba et al. (1995), pages 230-231.
- ¹⁷ Paterson, Thomas. (2007). *Young People and the News*. Boston: Joan Shorenstein Center On the Press, Politics, and Public Policy, John F. Kennedy School of Government, Harvard University. Available online: http://www.hks.harvard.edu/presspol/research/carnegie-knight/young_people_and_news_2007.pdf (July)
- ¹⁸ Mindich, David T.Z. (2004). *Tuned Out: Why Americans Under 40 Don't Follow the News*. NY: Oxford University Press.
- ¹⁹ The News Literacy Project. Available online: <http://www.thenewsliteracyproject.org/>. Accessed: August 30, 2010.
- ²⁰ The Illinois Civic Mission Coalition is a broad, non-partisan consortium including educators, administrators, students, universities, funders, elected officials, policymakers, and representatives from the private and non-profit sectors. Formed in 2004, the Illinois Coalition is part of the Campaign for the Civic Mission of Schools, a national initiative to restore a core purpose of education to prepare America's youngest citizens to be informed and active participants in our democracy. The McCormick Foundation serves as convener for the Coalition.
- ²¹ McCormick Foundation. (2009). *Educating for Democracy: A Civic Blueprint for Illinois High Schools*. Available online <http://www.mccormickfoundation.org/publications/McCormickFoundationEducatingforDemocracy.pdf>
- ²² Carnegie Foundation. (2003). *The Civic Mission of Schools*. Available online: http://www.civicmissionofschools.org/site/campaign/cms_report.html. Accessed August 27, 2010.
- ²³ McCormick Foundation. "What Is a Democracy School?" Educating for Democracy. Available online: <http://www.mccormickfoundation.org/civics/programs/democracyschools/WhatIs.aspx>
- ²⁴ The current roster of Illinois Democracy Schools includes Bartlett High School, Carl Sandburg High School (Orland Park), Community High School (West Chicago), Geneva High School, Glenbard North High School (Carol Stream), Glenbard South High School (Glen Ellyn), Lake Park High School (Roselle), Maine West High School (Des Plaines), and Wheaton North High School.
- ²⁵ The McCormick Foundation is currently in the process of data collection and analysis. The anticipated release of the Illinois Civic Audit is March 2011.
- ²⁶ "Principles for Learning." National Council for the Social Studies. Available online: <http://www.socialstudies.org/principlesforlearning>. Accessed: September 22, 2010.



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

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