

**HEALTH &
DEMOCRACY**

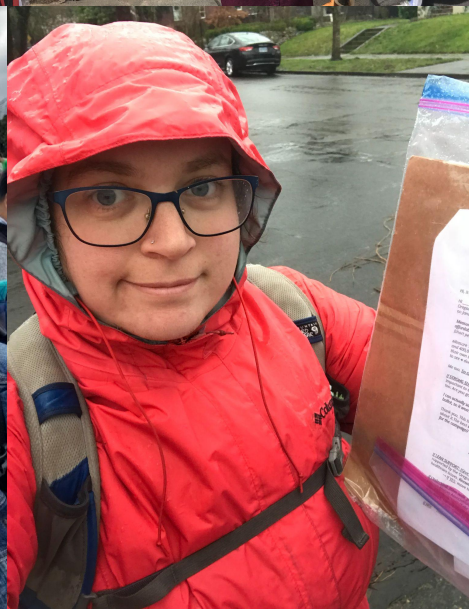
Health & Democracy

Evidence and Action

October, 2026

How is Democracy Related to Health?

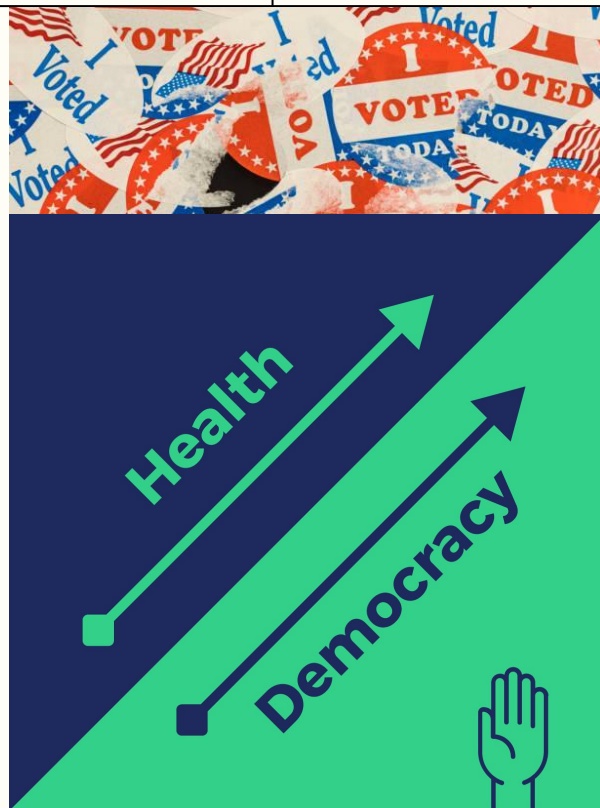
My Story



HEALTH IS ALWAYS ON THE BALLOT

HEALTH &
DEMOCRACY

- Public Safety & Violence prevention
- Health care access
- Early childhood investments
- Climate resiliency
- Pandemic & infectious disease prevention
- Maternal and Infant Health
- Reproductive Health
- Public Health Authority
- Housing, water, food, education, transportation, civil rights



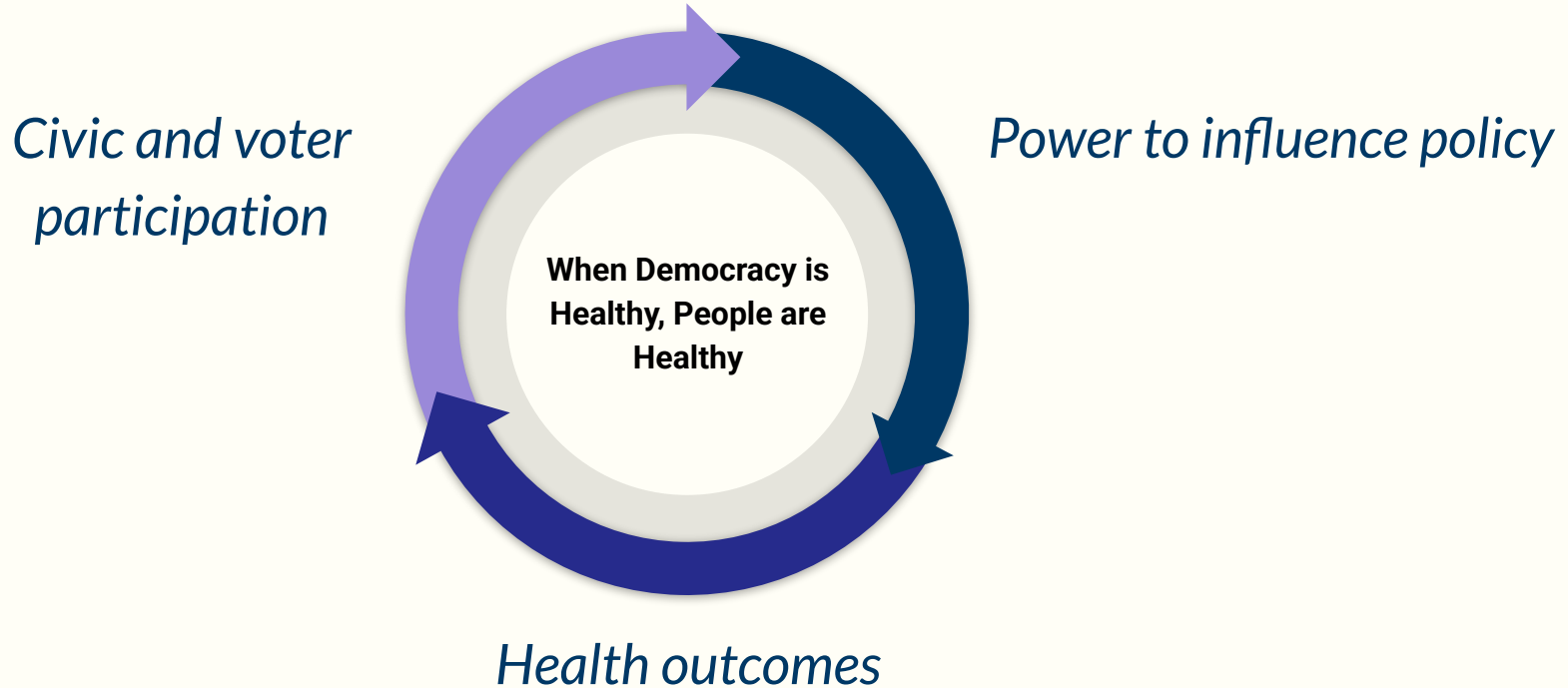
2020 BROUGHT PUBLIC HEALTH & ELECTIONS TOGETHER

HEALTH &
DEMOCRACY



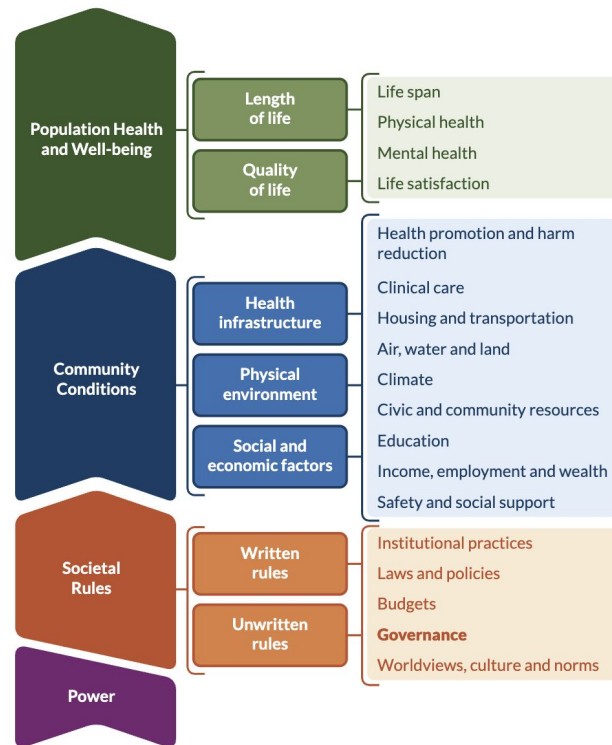
HEALTH & DEMOCRACY ARE INTERDEPENDENT

HEALTH &
DEMOCRACY



HEALTH & DEMOCRACY ARE INTERDEPENDENT

HEALTH & DEMOCRACY



University of Wisconsin Population Health Institute Model of Health © 2025

HISTORY: ELECTORAL EXPANSION IMPROVES HEALTH

HEALTH &
DEMOCRACY

Expansion of Voting Access	Health Improvement
Women’s Suffrage	Child mortality rates declined (Miller, 2008)
Civil Rights Movement	More inclusive policies in education, housing, economic opportunity, and health care including Medicare and Medicaid (Dawes, 2020)
Voting Rights Act of 1965	Reductions in Black infant deaths in Southern counties subject to preclearance (Rushovich et. al, 2024)

All steps forward were contested “continuous struggle for power...”

- Compares 12 public health indicators and voter turnout to the restrictiveness of voting policies in each state.
- States with more voting access and greater civic participation have better health outcomes
- When communities vote they influence policy decisions that have a big effect on their health.

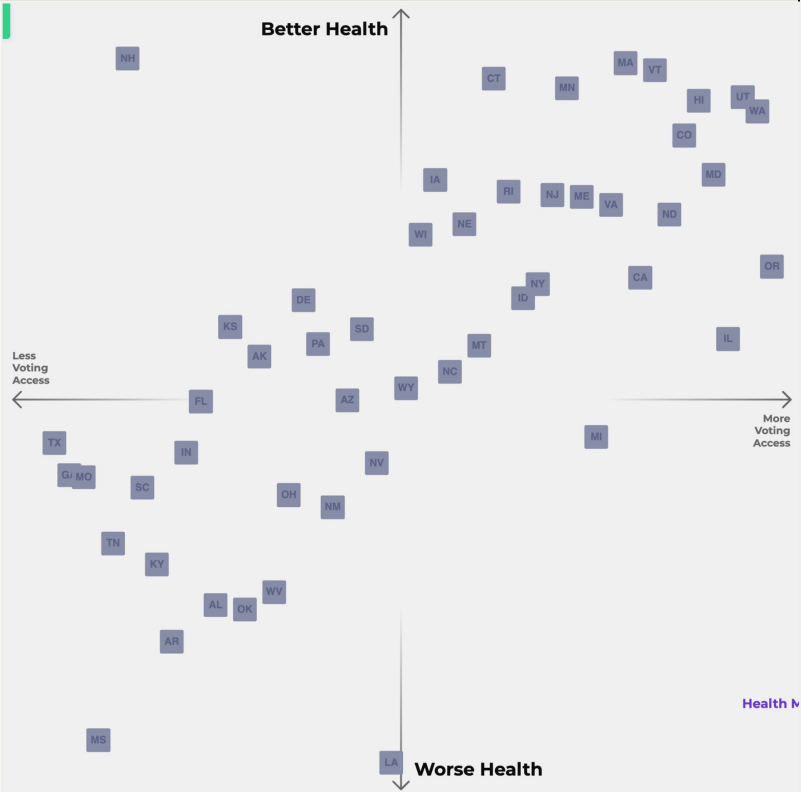


Health & Democracy Index

OVERALL FINDINGS:

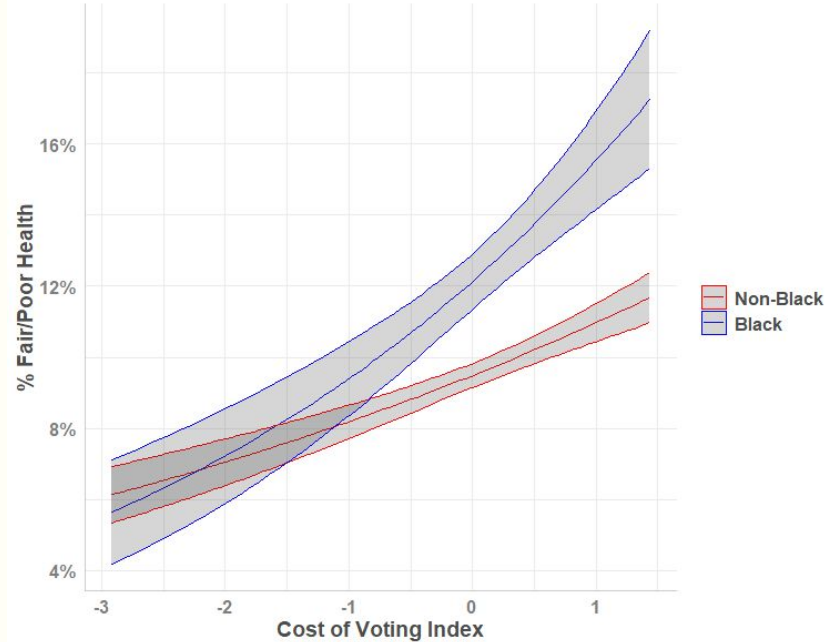
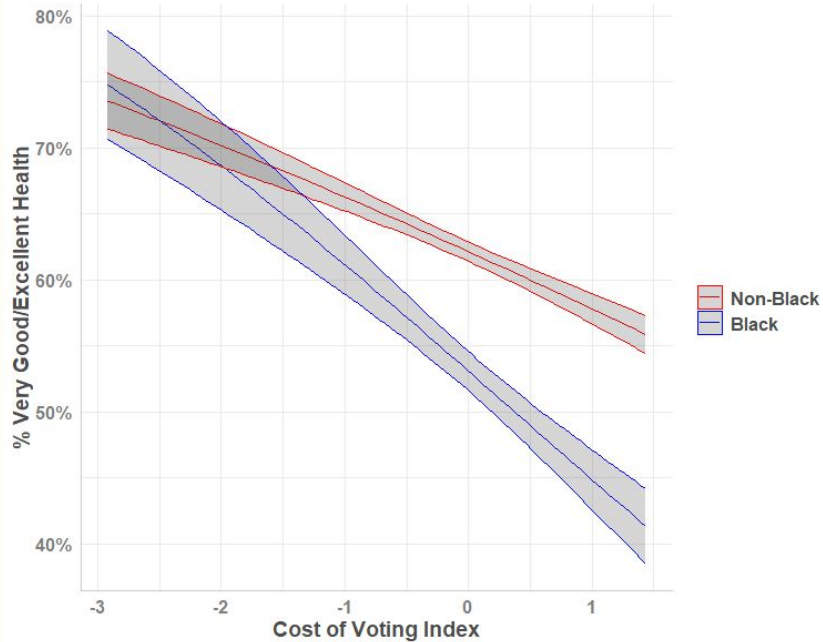
More Voting Access, Better Health Outcomes

States with more inclusive voting
policies and greater levels of civic
participation are healthier.



RESTRICTIVE POLICIES AND THE HEALTH OF BLACK AMERICANS

HEALTH &
DEMOCRACY



Schraufnagel, S., D. Hunter, R. Durbin, and G. Mahs. 2025. "Restrictive State Electoral Environments and the Health of Black Americans." *Social Science Quarterly* 106, no. 5: 106, e70077. <https://doi.org/10.1111/ssqu.70077>

RECENT PEER REVIEWED RESEARCH

HEALTH &
DEMOCRACY

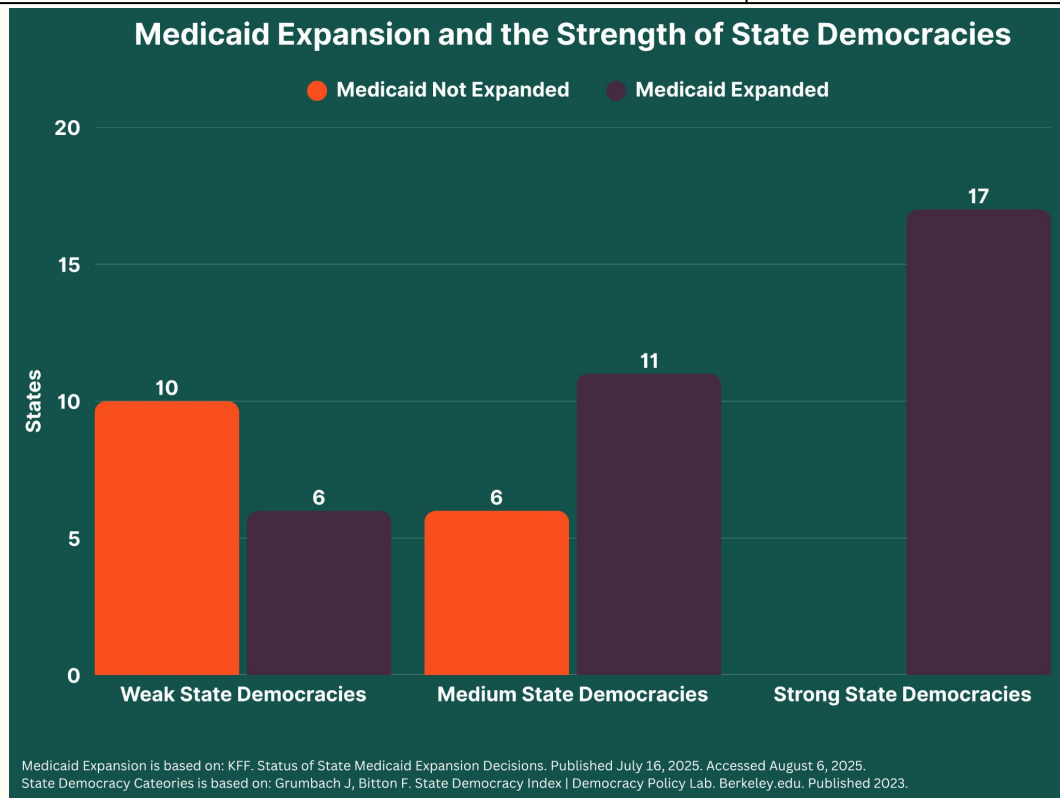
- States where it is **easier to vote** are more likely to have:
 - better rates of **state-level self-reported health** across time (1996-2020); Schraufnagle, 2023
 - **lower uninsured** rates; Pabayo et al., 2021
 - counties had **lower pre-vaccine COVID** case and mortality rates; Pabayo et al., 2022
 - Lower working age **mortality** rates; Montez et.al., 2023
- Civic engagement (voting, volunteering, and activism) among adolescents and young adults is positively associated with **better future income, education levels and mental health** compared to non-voters; Ballard et al., 2019

STRONG DEMOCRACIES SUPPORT KEY HEALTH REFORMS

HEALTH &
DEMOCRACY

States with **stronger democracies** were more likely to have **expanded Medicaid eligibility** by 2020, regardless of partisan-lean, median household income, and educational attainment.

Mahs, Gnora, and Marisa Bremer. *From Ballots to Better Health How Inclusive Democracy Shapes the Public's Health*. 2025.



DEMOCRACY IN THE UNITED STATES

STATE DEMOCRACIES HAVE DECLINED SINCE 2000

In 2013, SCOTUS gutted protections against racial discrimination outlined in the Voting Rights Act

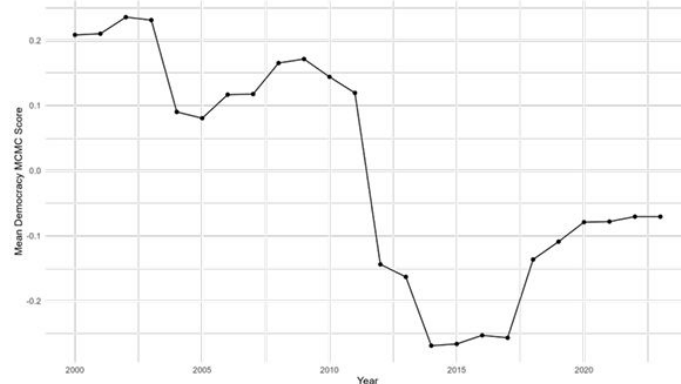
- States have engaged in significant efforts to disenfranchise voters
 - Texas announced implementation of stricter voter ID laws
 - 1,000 polling locations closed
 - Purged voter rolls at higher rates

The State Democracy Index shows:

- Sharp decline in the strength of democracy starting in 2010
- Slight Improvements between 2018-2022

There is work to do to continue supporting a more representative and inclusive democracy

Figure 2: Average Democracy Score by Year



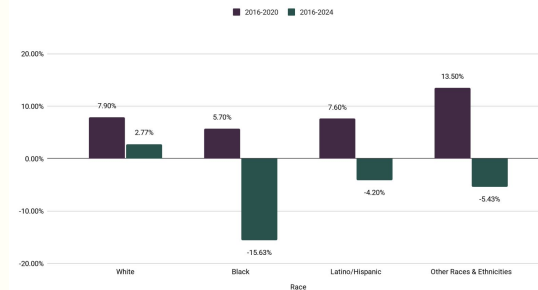
Grumbach J, Bitton F. State Democracy Index | Democracy Policy Lab. Berkeley.edu. Published 2023. <https://democracypolicylab.berkeley.edu/state-democracy-index/>

PROMOTING AN INCLUSIVE DEMOCRACY CONTINUES

HEALTH & DEMOCRACY

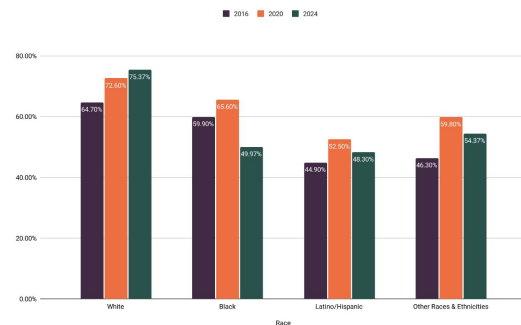
- In 2020, many states enacted changes to expand and promote absentee, drop boxes, early, and drive through voting options
 - Leading to record breaking voter participation
 - And yet, 1 in 3 eligible voters did not cast a ballot.
- Since 2020 states considered over 2,500 and passed 190 new laws making it harder to for eligible voters to cast a ballot

Changes in CVAP Turnout, 2016–2020 and 2016–2024, by Race



Data accessed from TargetSmart on 3-25-25. 2024 Vote History data missing from several jurisdictions including, but not limited to, South Carolina and the District of Columbia.

CVAP Turnout 2016–2024 by Race



Data accessed from TargetSmart on 3-25-25. 2024 Vote History data missing from several jurisdictions including, but not limited to, South Carolina and the District of Columbia.

VOTER SUPPRESSION DISPROPORTIONATELY IMPACTS BLACK, LATINO, AMERICAN INDIAN, PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES, AND LOW-INCOME VOTERS

YOUNG,

HEALTH &
DEMOCRACY

- Black, Latino, and American Indian Voters are more likely to experience
 - Longer polling lines
 - Fewer polling places per capita
- Black, Latino, American Indian, young, and low-income voters are disproportionately burdened by stringent voter ID laws
- Black voters are more likely to be flagged for removal from voter rolls
- One in 5 voters with disabilities needed assistance or had difficulty voting in person (2022) and if voters with disability voted at same rates as voters without there would be 2 million more votes cast (2020)

These same communities are most impacted by health inequities



What Health Professionals DO?

WE HAVE POWER

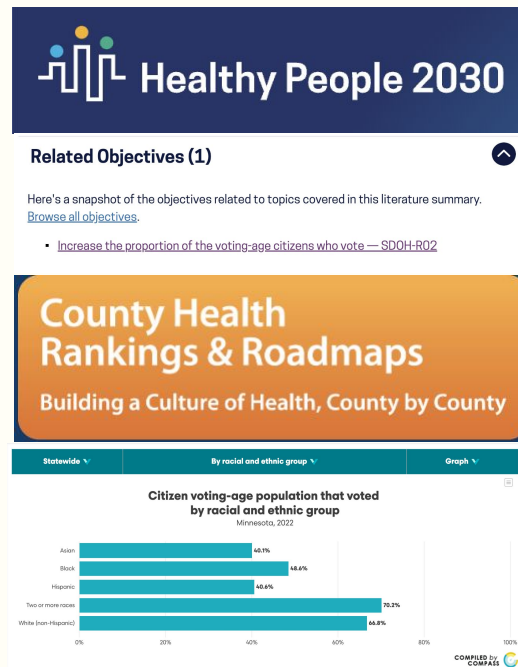
**HEALTH &
DEMOCRACY**

- Largest workforce and accounts for at least 22 million workers which represents about 14% of all workers in the United States.
- Health Professionals are trusted messengers in their communities and with policymakers
- Health organizations represent thousands of members and institutions working to advance health



SYSTEMS CHANGE AT EVERY LEVEL

- **Organization level:** adopt policies to change the narrative and context for advocacy– Ex. SOPHE, AMA, APHA
- **State and local level:** join efforts to promote state and local policies expanding voting access and incorporating measures of civic participation into health goal setting (ex MN, MI)
- **National level:** to promote voter registration and participation using administrative levers– HealthCare.gov, Healthy People 2030, County Health Rankings and Roadmaps.



PROMOTING CIVIC PARTICIPATION AS AN OPPORTUNITY TO SUPPORT THRIVING COMMUNITIES

MINNESOTA STATE HEALTH ASSESSMENT

BELONGING

Civic participation

Participation in civic life takes many forms, including community-building activities, political and electoral participation, influencing policies and systems change, cooperating to improve working conditions, and more. Representation is also important because elected officials make decisions that form the systems and structures of society. Civic participation improves health by building social networks and trust and facilitates community coordination and cooperation.³⁶³ In 2022, the American Medical Association declared voting to be a social determinant of health, and states with lower voter participation are associated with worse health outcomes.³⁶⁴

In 2022, the Healthy Minnesota Partnership identified civic participation as a state strength, citing specific examples like a community providing dental services for low-income community members, organizing for fair wages and good working conditions, and advocating for smoke-free environments.

Statewide data confirms that Minnesota has strong levels of civic participation.

- ▶ In 2021, 36.7% of Minnesotans aged 16 and older had volunteered in the past year.³⁶⁵
- ▶ In 2021, 61.8% of residents donated \$25 or more to nonprofits and other charities.³⁶⁷
- ▶ In 2022, 382,000 people in Minnesota belonged to labor unions (15.2% of the total state workforce³⁶⁹), the 10th highest rate in the country.³⁶⁹ People in Minnesota living in rural areas participate in unions at a higher rate than those living in urban and suburban areas.³⁷⁰
- ▶ In 2020, 75% of Minnesotans participated in the U.S. Census, a rate similar to previous years.³⁷¹

Local and state government, community and statewide organizations, businesses, faith communities, informal networks, and others create civic infrastructure and opportunities to come together to create better health for everyone. Minnesota can continue to build civic infrastructure to provide opportunities for people to take action to stay connected and healthy.

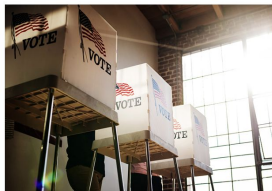
IN 2022...

61% of eligible people in Minnesota voted, the highest rate of voter turnout in the nation.³⁶⁵



Learn more

MN Compass
Civic engagement
(<https://direct.to/kRBZ>)



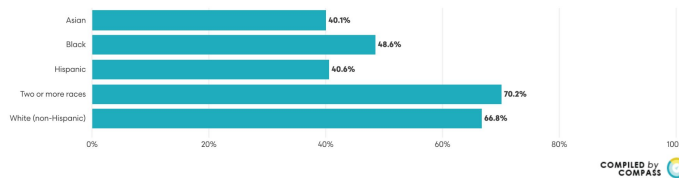
Statewide

By racial and ethnic group

Graph

Citizen voting-age population that voted by racial and ethnic group

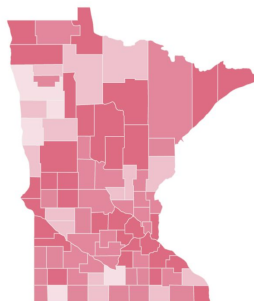
Minnesota, 2022



COMPILED by COMPASS

Citizen voting-age population that voted

By county, 2022



Less than 50.0%
50.0 - 54.9%
55.0 - 59.9%
60.0% or more

COMPILED by COMPASS

ACTIVE PARTNERS FOR POLICY CHANGE

LEVERAGE HEALTH VOICES FOR CHANGE

HEALTH &
DEMOCRACY



Health Professionals are trusted messengers in our communities. We can effectively support positive policy efforts by communicating about the impacts that policy has on the communities we serve, especially with an eye on senior citizens, veterans, and people with disabilities, as well as us: health professionals

Thank You

**HEALTH &
DEMOCRACY**