America in Peril – How We've Dealt With Civic Crises In The Past

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WHAT IS CIVIC HEALTH?

➔ Civic health is the way communities are organized to define and address public problems.
➔ Civic health includes a wide range of civic engagement indicators, from social interactions among friends and family to the ways people participate in groups and communities.
➔ Civic health also reflects the ways people express themselves politically—in traditional measures like voter registration and turnout—as well as in social measures like discussing politics and sharing information.

—https://gafcp.org/georgia-civic-health-index/

WHAT IS CIVIC HEALTH?

➔ **Voting*****

➔ But it is also:

- ◆ Giving money.

- ◆ Protesting.

- ◆ Writing your representative.

- ◆ Being a member of an organization.

- ◆ Solving problems in your community.

Profiling America's Civic Health – "Civic Health Index 2021: Citizenship in Crisis"

➜ Protests for racial equity in the summer of 2020 engaged an estimated 15 to 26 million people; the largest in the country's history.

➜ The 2020 election had the highest voter turnout of the 21st century: over 66%.

➜ Nontraditional voting (i.e. by mail or before the election) was more common than casting a ballot in person.

➜ Membership of large-scale civic institutions, including unions, churches and other religious organizations, and daily newspapers, continued to decline.

CIVICS EDUCATION

→ Some people do not learn Civics Education in K-12.
  - 9 states and the District of Columbia require one year of U.S. government or civics.
  - 30 states require a half year.
  - 11 states have no civics requirement.
→ Many people do not understand how our government works (Federalism).
  - Which level of government is responsible for what?
  - National, State, Local (Counties and Cities).

CIVICS EDUCATION

➔ States need to make Civics Education a priority if we want to see improvement in this area.
  ◆ K-12.
  ◆ Real world applications.
  ◆ Opportunities to practice civics.
➔ Service learning.
  ◆ Classroom experience.
➔ We need an educated electorate if we want a healthy democracy.

AMERICA WAS FOUNDED AMIDST A CIVIC CRISIS

➜ Virginia Plan (Madison)
➜ New Jersey Plan (Patterson)
   ◆ Representation?
      ● How will we count people?
   ◆ Who can participate?
   ◆ How do they participate?
➜ **Connecticut Compromise!**
➜ When faced with challenges we return to those two questions:
   ◆ **Who can participate?**
   ◆ **How do they participate?**

EXPANDING THE ELECTORATE

➜ 1700s: Voting White (male) property holders.
➜ 1800s: Official barriers to voting recede.
➜ Reconstruction.
➜ 1920s: Women gain the right to vote.
➜ 1960s: The South increases restrictions to Black voting.
➜ 1965: Voting Rights Act.

EXPANDING THE ELECTORATE

➜ 1971: Voting Age to 18.
➜ 1975: Voting Rights Act expanded: protects language minorities.
➜ 1982: Congress requires new voting protections for people with disabilities.
➜ Motor Voter, Etc.
➜ 2013: The Supreme Court strikes a blow to the Voting Rights Act.
➜ 2021-present: Federal and State laws to expand/limit .

ENGAGEMENT AND TURNOUT

➔ How to measure?
  ◆ National, State, Local?
➔ Which Elections? Primary vs. General.
➔ 2022 Voting Laws:
  ◆ Alabama, Arizona, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, and Oklahoma passed election laws making it harder to vote.
  ◆ Arizona, Connecticut, New York, and Oregon enacted laws that made it easier to vote.

ELECTION INTEGRITY

People are worried that their votes do not or will not count.

➔ Some say voter fraud is rare: https://www.brennancenter.org/issues/ensure-every-american-can-vote/vote-suppression/myth-voter-fraud
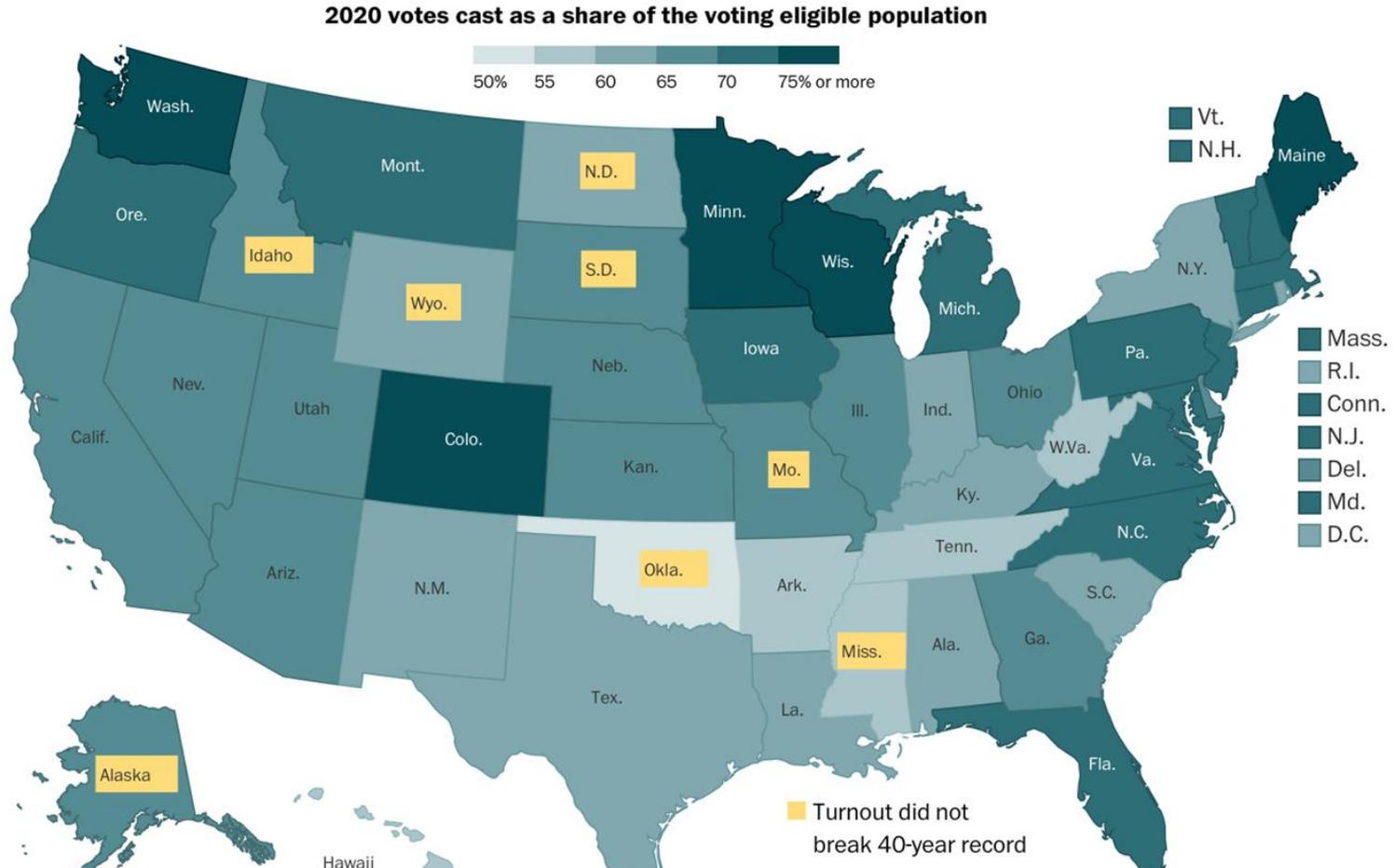➔ Some say it's happening often enough to be concerned: https://www.heritage.org/election-integrity/heritage-explains/voter-fraud

TAKING A STEP BACK: VOTER TURNOUT

VOTER TURNOUT IN 2020:

66%

Records from 1980 were surpassed in 42 states and D.C. (State-level data from earlier than 1980 was not available).

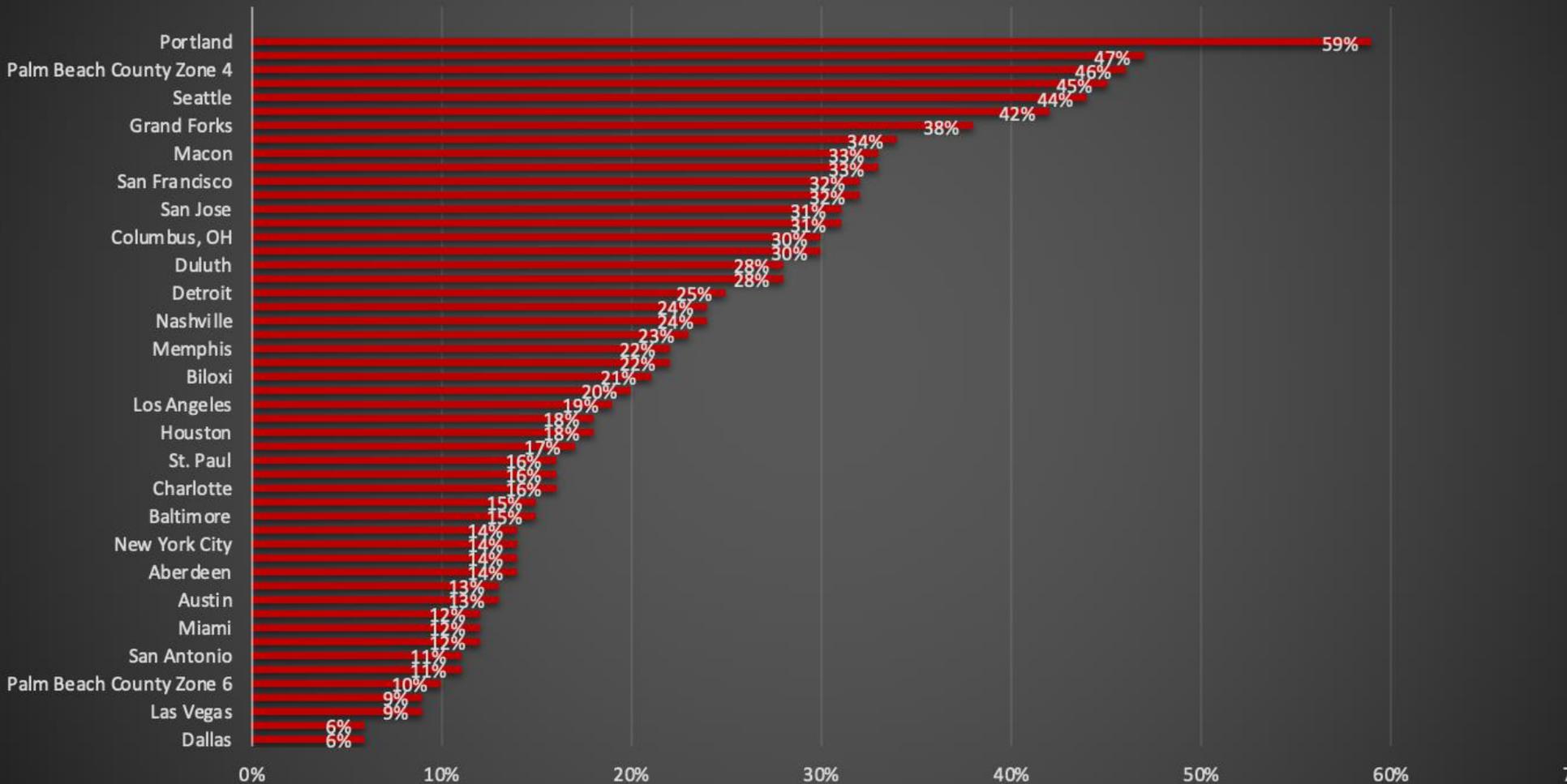**2020 votes cast as a share of the voting eligible population**

50% 55 60 65 70 75% or more

Vt.
N.H.

Mass.
R.I.
Conn.
N.J.
Del.
Md.
D.C.

Turnout did not break 40-year record

VOTER TURNOUT IN 2020:

66%

Local elections are not as popular...

Eligible voter turnout in most recent mayoral election

City	Turnout
Portland	59%
	47%
Palm Beach County Zone 4	46%
Seattle	45%
	44%
	42%
Grand Forks	38%
	34%
Macon	33%
	33%
San Francisco	32%
	32%
San Jose	31%
	31%
Columbus, OH	30%
	30%
Duluth	28%
	28%
Detroit	25%
	24%
Nashville	24%
	23%
Memphis	22%
	22%
Biloxi	21%
	20%
Los Angeles	19%
	18%
Houston	18%
	17%
St. Paul	16%
	16%
Charlotte	16%
	15%
Baltimore	15%
	14%
New York City	14%
	14%
Aberdeen	14%
	13%
Austin	13%
	12%
Miami	12%
	12%
San Antonio	11%
	11%
Palm Beach County Zone 6	10%
	9%
Las Vegas	9%
	6%
Dallas	6%

PAST RESPONSES:
ELECTORAL REFORM

LOCAL POLITICS

➔ Problem: Political machines (Tammany Hall).

➔ Reform Era: Two-Thirds of Municipal Elections are non-partisan.
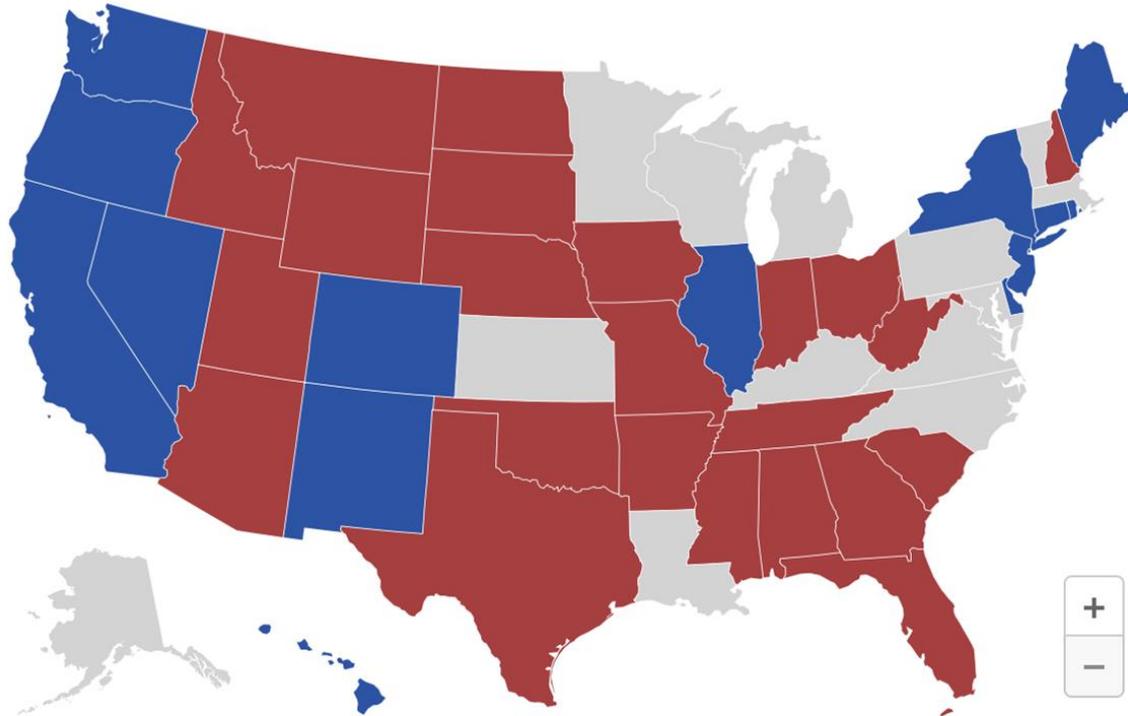
➔ Off year Elections (Pros and Cons).

STATE POLITICS

➜ Problem: Competitive Elections

➜ Many State House and Senate Elections are not competitive.

➜ Turnout is typically much lower than turnout in Presidential Elections.

➜ **Trifecta:** One political party holds the governorship, a majority in the state senate, and a majority in the state house in a state's government.

Overview of state government trifectas by state

Current state government trifectas

Republican trifecta   Divided government   Democratic trifecta

Source: Ballotpedia

BALLOTPEDIA

STATE POLITICS

➔ Reforms:
- ◆ Top-Two Primary Elections (California and Washington)
  - ● California Assembly and Senate before and after electoral reforms and finds that after the electoral reforms, both chambers were less ideologically polarized and more willing to build consensus with other lawmakers across the aisle (Grose 2014).
- ◆ Majority Vote System (Louisiana)

STATE POLITICS

➔ Proposed Reforms:

➔ Final Five Voting:

 ◆ A catch-all, nonpartisan primary election from which the top five candidates of any party advance.

 ◆ A general election that uses ranked choice voting (RCV) to select a winner.

➔ Final Four in Alaska.

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

➔ Informed and engaged electorate:
  ◆ How much do they know?
  ◆ How easy/hard is it to participate?
  ◆ How do they combat mis/dis-information?
➔ Electoral Rules:
  ◆ **Who gets to participate?**
  ◆ **How do they participate?**
➔ Integrity:
  ◆ Do we trust the results?
➔ Representation:
  ◆ What are the people we elect doing once in office?

THANK YOU!
QUESTIONS/DISCUSSION

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Appendix

NATIONAL POLITICS

➔ Problem: Gridlock and Polarization
➔ Reform: Primary Rules
   ◆ Members of Congress from states with closed primaries took policy positions furthest from the estimated median voter's ideal positions within their districts.
   ◆ Representatives from states with semi-closed primaries were the most ideologically moderate (Gerber and Morton 1998).
➔ Type of primary has no meaningful influence on the extremity of legislators' positions (McGhee et al. 2014; Nielson and Visalvanich 2017).

NATIONAL POLITICS

➜ Top-two primary system provides some insights.
   ◆ California, one study finds that there is more ideological moderation in congressional voting under the new top-two primary system (Grose 2020).
   ◆ Newly elected members of Congress when compared to incumbents.
   ◆ The effect is also bigger in comparison to closed primaries than in open primaries
➜ Why? Two candidates of the same party advance to the general election, the more moderate of them is most likely to win (Munger 2019).

NATIONAL POLITICS

→ U.S. House members from 2003 to 2018 asked how ideological extremity is affected by winning via the top-two primary versus a more traditional party primary (Grose 2020)?
  ◆ Districts using the top-two primary elect more ideologically moderate U.S. House members than districts using partisan primary systems.
  ◆ Effect was larger compared to closed primaries and open primaries.
  ◆ The moderating effect of the top-two nomination system holds for both new office holders and ongoing incumbents, but the degree is larger for new candidates.