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

Southern Legislative Conference (SLC) Annual Meeting
2022 (Oklahoma City, Ok)

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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.
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.
EXPANDING THE ELECTORATE

- 1971: Voting Age to 18.
- 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).
VOTER TURNOUT IN 2020:

66%

Local elections are not as popular...
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).
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
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)
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
Appendix
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).
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).
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.