











2024

Strengthening Maine's Civic Life: Trust, Belonging, and the Future



Table of Contents

Introduction	4
About the Report	5
Who We Are	7
Executive Summary	11
Civic Trust	14
 Maine Takeaways	14
Discussion	16
Belonging and Mattering	17
 Maine Takeaways	17
Discussion	20
Community Climate	21
 Maine Takeaways	21
Discussion	26
The State of Civic Knowledge	27
 Maine Takeaways	27
Discussion	30
Voting	31
 Maine Takeaways	31
Discussion	35
Volunteering, Group Participation, Giving	36
 Maine Takeaways	36
Discussion	38
Civic Participation and Awareness	39
 Maine Takeaways	39
Discussion	45
Hope for the Future	46
 Maine Takeaways	46
Discussion	49
Methodology Statement	51

On the cover: Cadillac Mountain, Acadia National Park. Photo credit: James Griffiths
 Opposite page: Lac Legault, Quebec. Photo credit: Hummingbird Art



Introduction

Do Mainers trust their government? Do they feel they can engage in meaningful ways in our democracy, either at the local, state, or national level? Do they feel they are engaged in their communities? And do Mainers have hope for the future of Maine and of the nation?

These questions highlight the challenge of civic health, a succinct way of capturing a rich, multilayered concept that includes people's sense of belonging in their communities; their trust in government; their willingness to volunteer, vote, and otherwise participate in community life and public affairs; and more. In this report — the first of its kind in our state — Maine joins in this important effort to enhance its quality of civic life and do its part to renew the nation's democratic promise. Through an analysis of the most recent available Census data and an original survey of Maine residents conducted this year, it benchmarks the state's civic health in eight areas: trust in government and each other, feelings of belonging and mattering, perceptions of community climate, the state of civic knowledge, voting, volunteering, civic awareness and participation, and, finally, hope for the future.

Along the way, we explore Maine-specific questions such as perceptions of ranked choice voting and people's feelings about new residents moving to the state. We also summarize some of the demographic correlations in our findings where our research revealed statistically significant patterns or differences.

We hope the findings from this report help inform policy, prioritize funding, influence organizational priorities and collaborations, and spur citizen action across the state.

Through Census data and an original survey, this report benchmarks Maine's civic health in 8 key areas.



Photo credit: Iliia Nesolenyi



About the Report

This first report on the state of civic health in Maine is a joint effort of three partners: the Goldfarb Center for Public Affairs at Colby College, Public Engagement Partners, and Maine Community Foundation.

A civic health advisory committee assisted with the initial framing and subsequent recommendations contained in this report. Members are:

Noël Bonam, AARP

Mufalo Chitam, Maine Immigrants' Rights Coalition

Kate Dufour, Maine Municipal Association

Elizabeth Jabar, Office of Civic Engagement and Partnerships, Colby College

Anna Kellar, League of Women Voters

Stuart Langton, The Highlands Residents Association

Laura Lee, Maine Community Foundation

Robyn Merrill, Maine Equal Justice

Evan Murray, Democracy Maine

Megan Shore, Elmina B. Sewall Foundation

Sterling Speirn, Donor Advisor, Maine Community Foundation

Destie Hohman Sprague, Maine Women's Lobby

Meagan Sway, ACLU of Maine

Ruben Torres, Maine Immigrants' Rights Coalition

Patrick Woodcock, Maine State Chamber of Commerce

This report was co-designed and written by the Goldfarb Center for Public Affairs at Colby College and Public Engagement Partners.

Colby College faculty and staff who worked on the report are Nicholas Jacobs, PhD, Alison Beyea, and Erica Buswell. Colby College students Alma Moskowitz, Sameer Khan, and Cliona Kenny provided additional research assistance.

Public Engagement staff who worked on the report include Quixada Moore-Vissing, PhD, Will Friedman, PhD, Eric Knudsen, and Alyssa Soucy, PhD.

The lead researcher on the report is Quixada Moore-Vissing.



Public Engagement Partners



About the Civic Health Research



ONLINE
TECHNICAL
APPENDIX*

This report on the state of civic health in Maine, the first of its kind for the state, follows a tradition of civic health analyses across the country. A congressionally chartered nonprofit called the National Conference on Citizenship first used Census data to create a “civic health index” in 2006. To date the NCoC has worked with over 35 states and cities to produce civic health indexes. We thank the NCoC for the ground they have broken on measuring civic health and are proud to contribute to this field of work through emulating their analysis of Census data as well as including our own original research through an original statewide survey. Further detail is provided about both data sources in the Methodology Statement at the end of this report.

This report shares information about indicators that assess how healthy civic life and democracy is in Maine. There was a large amount of data gathered for this report. For those who are interested in further detail about any one indicator, an [online](#) detailed civic health summary of all indicators is available. (See QR code at left). Whenever the data permits, we examine how Maine is doing compared with other states and/or with our own past performance. When comparative data is not available, we have created benchmarks for future comparisons that allow us to track our progress over time. The intent is to identify challenges, inform interventions, and enable Mainers to build on our existing strengths and assets into the future.

We collected demographic data where possible to understand how a civic health indicator (such as voting) corresponds with Mainers’ demographic identities (such as their income level). We were able to compare variables such as age, gender, income and educational levels as well as the areas where people live (upstate and downstate, rural or urban). However, we were unfortunately not able to collect data about race and ethnicity. The reason for this is a statistical sampling issue. Because Maine is demographically over 90 percent white¹, the sample size for racial and ethnic subgroups was too small for reliable statistical analysis. Understanding how racial and ethnic identities connect with civic health outcomes is important, and further follow-up research is warranted to learn about the unique civic health experiences of different Mainers.



Photo credit: Katkani

¹ <https://www.census.gov/library/stories/state-by-state/maine-population-change-between-census-decade.html>

* <https://bit.ly/strengthening-maines-civic-health>



Who We Are

Understanding the Uniqueness of the State of Maine

Mainers know our state is unique in many ways. We are the largest state in New England, and one of the most northern states in the United States. Our physical landscape ranges from rugged, rocky coastlines to awe-inspiring mountains to deep, lush woods. We are a place where many people from around the country and world come to enjoy our beaches, hiking, lobster, and salt-of-the-earth culture. Below are some facts about our social, economic, and political landscape that add context to the data and discussion that follow on our state's civic health.

Our residents are older than residents of other states.

In 2023, we ranked as the oldest median age in the nation at nearly 45 years old, and this has been a trend over time.² Indeed, Maine's population is aging more rapidly than the country overall.³

Many of us live around fewer people than in other states.

Maine has a lower population density than the rest of the country, with a population of 44.2 per square mile compared with a national average of 93.8.⁴ Four hundred of 529 towns in Maine have a population density less than the national average. However, our population is highly concentrated in some areas of the state, such as Cumberland and York counties.⁵ Drive times to resources and metropolitan areas can be long, depending on where one lives in the state, and public transportation is limited or even nonexistent for some rural areas.⁶

Along with rural areas nationwide, rural Maine is losing population.

Maine is the second most rural state in the nation, second only to Vermont.⁷ Like many rural areas nationwide, rural Maine is losing population. As a 2022 study by the Carsey School of Public Policy at the University of New Hampshire explains, "Between 2010 and 2020, population loss was widespread across rural America, with more than two-thirds of all nonmetropolitan counties losing population."⁸ Most of Maine's rural areas are facing this challenge. For example, between 2010 and 2020, one of the most populous parts of the state, York County, increased its population by 7.5%, while in one of our sparsest, Piscataquis County, the population decreased by 4.2%.⁹

² U.S. Census Bureau, "America Is Getting Older," June 23, 2023, <https://www.census.gov/newsroom/press-releases/2023/population-estimates-characteristics.html>.

³ United Ways of Maine, "ALICE in Maine: A Study of Financial Hardship," 2023, <https://www.unitedforalice.org/state-reports-mobile>.

⁴ U.S. Census Bureau, "Population Density of the 50 States, the District of Columbia, and Puerto Rico: 1910 to 2020," 2020, <https://www2.census.gov/programs-surveys/decennial/2020/data/apportionment/population-density-data-table.pdf>.

⁵ Angela Hallowell, "Maine's Demographic and Socioeconomic Context," Maine.gov, October 20, 2022, https://www.maine.gov/dafs/economist/sites/maine.gov/dafs/economist/files/inline-files/102022_MaineEconomy_Hallowell.pdf.

⁶ Erin Brown and Jonathan Rubin, "Rural Public Transportation and Maine: Review of State Best Practices" (University of Maine, June 2021), Digital Commons at University of Maine, <https://digitalcommons.library.umaine.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi>.

⁷ World Population Review, "Most Rural States 2021," 2024, <https://worldpopulationreview.com/state-rankings/most-rural-states>

⁸ Kenneth Johnson, "Rural America Lost Population over the Past Decade for the First Time in History," Carsey School of Public Policy (University of New Hampshire, February 18, 2022), <https://carsey.unh.edu/publication/rural-america-lost-population-over-past-decade-first-time-history>.

⁹ U.S. Census Bureau, "QuickFacts: Piscataquis County, Maine; Maine; York County, Maine," 2024, <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/piscataquiscountymaine,ME,yorkcountymaine/POP060210>.



The United Way argues that many more Maine residents are struggling than is indicated by the official poverty level.

We are mostly white.

Ninety-two percent of Maine residents identify as racially and ethnically white. Residents identifying as Black, Hispanic, Asian, Indigenous, or multiracial compose 2% or less of our overall population, and approximately 2% identify as two or more races.¹⁰

Our high school graduation levels are slightly higher than the nation overall while college graduation is on par with the nation.

Maine has nearly the same percentage of high school graduates (87.3%) as the latest national average (87%). We are on par with the rest of the nation in our college graduation rate: 34.1% of our residents have a bachelor's degree or higher, compared with 34.3% nationally.¹¹

Many residents struggle financially.

Maine has the ninth largest gap in the nation between what people earn and the cost of living.¹² Maine's median income of \$68,251 is lower than the national average of \$75,149. Our poverty level (10.8%) is only slightly lower than national averages (11.5%).¹³

Further, the United Way argues that many more Maine residents are struggling than is indicated by the official poverty level. Their report found that 42% of Maine households in 2021 could not afford the basics in the communities where they live, such as housing, childcare, food, transportation, health care, technology, and taxes.¹⁴ Black and Hispanic families in the state were hit harder by this trend than were white families, as were rural residents compared with urban residents. Northern and Western Maine residents in particular have a hard time affording their basic needs.¹⁵ While Maine's average housing costs are lower than national averages, many Mainers still struggle financially.¹⁶



Photo credit: Ms. Tali

¹⁰ <https://www.census.gov/library/stories/state-by-state/maine-population-change-between-census-decade.html>

¹¹ Annie E. Casey Foundation, "High School Graduation Rates by County," 2024, <https://datacenter.aecf.org/data/tables/9881-high-school-graduation-rates-by-county>; National Center for Education Statistics, "Public High School Graduation Rates," nces.ed.gov, May 2024, <https://nces.ed.gov/programs/coe/indicator/coi/high-school-graduation-rates>; Economic Research Service, "Completion Rates, 2018-2022," U.S. Department of Agriculture, 2024, <https://data.ers.usda.gov/reports.aspx>.

¹² WGME, "Report: Maine Has 9th Largest Gap between What People Earn, Cost of Living," July 14, 2021, <https://wgme.com/news/local/report-maine-has-9th-largest-gap-between-what-people-earn-cost-of-living>.

¹³ U.S. Census Bureau, "Maine," 2024, <https://data.census.gov/profile/Maine>.

¹⁴ United for ALICE, "Research Center: Maine," 2024, <http://unitedforalice.org/state-overview/maine>.

¹⁵ United Ways of Maine, "ALICE in Maine: A Study of Financial Hardship," 2023, <https://www.unitedforalice.org/state-reports-mobile>.

¹⁶ U.S. Census Bureau, "Maine," 2024, <https://data.census.gov/profile/Maine>



The seafood industry, forestry, and farming are among the traditional industries that are central to our identity and economy.

As one of the largest commercial fishing states in the country, many people nationally know Maine for our seafood, particularly our lobster. Maine is home to the nation's largest working waterfront, with 20 miles of water frontage¹⁷ dedicated to maritime industries spread out over our vast 3,400 miles of coastline. More than 21,000 people are employed by the state's seafood industry.¹⁸

Agriculture is another longstanding Maine industry, as is forestry. Though there are fewer farms and less farmland than in the past, they are worth more than ever and continue to play a major role in Maine's economy, especially in rural areas.¹⁹ Maine forestry is an \$8 billion industry that is growing, contributing over 31,000 full- and part-time jobs to the state economy in 2019.²⁰

Our residents live with more disabilities than residents of other states.

Perhaps related to being a state with an older population, more of our residents live with disabilities (15.8%) than the national average (13.4%).²¹ Maine also has one of the higher numbers of veterans in the nation,²² some of whom may be accessing disability services.

We struggle with substance use and mental health, particularly among our youth.

Maine ranks within the higher percentile in the nation for illicit drug use, particularly heroin and misuse of pain relievers.²³ Youth ages 12-17 are misusing alcohol at higher rates than national averages.²⁴

Youth ages 18-25 struggle with mental health, including serious depressive episodes and serious thoughts of suicide at higher rates than many other states. However, the percentage of Maine youth in this age group with suicide plans or who attempted suicide in the past year was lower than many other states, signifying that youth are thinking about suicide but not (yet) acting. About 223,000 adults in Maine have a mental health condition, which is less than the national average.

¹⁷ <https://www.islandinstitute.org/priorities/marine-economy/working-waterfront-protection/>

¹⁸ U.S. Economic Development Administration, "With EDA Support, Maine's Marine Industry Reaches New Depths," April 9, 2024, <https://www.eda.gov/impact/success-stories/innovation-and-entrepreneurship/eda-support-maines-marine-industry-reaches>

¹⁹ The University of Maine Cooperative Extension, "U.S. Census of Agriculture Reveals Increase in Value of Maine Farms and Agricultural Products," Extension News, March 22, 2024, <https://extension.umaine.edu/2024/03/22/us-census-of-ag-reveals-increase-in-value-maine-farms-and-ag-products/>.

²⁰ Megan Bailey and Sheldon Green, "The 2019 Statewide Economic Contribution of Maine's Forest Products Sector," Digital Commons at University of Maine, September 2021, https://umaine.edu/foresteconomy/wp-content/uploads/sites/456/2021/09/The-2019-Statewide-Economic-Contribution-of-Maine_s-Forest-Produc.pdf.

²¹ U.S. Census Bureau, "Maine," 2024, <https://data.census.gov/profile/Maine>.

²² Christopher Wolf and Chris Gilligan, "These States Have the Highest Percentages of Veterans," U.S. News and World Report, November 9, 2023, <https://www.usnews.com/news/best-states/slideshows/where-veterans-live>

²³ SAMHSA, "2021 National Survey on Drug Use and Health National Maps of Prevalence Estimates, by State," 2021, <https://www.samhsa.gov/data/sites/default/files/reports/rpt39463/2021NSDUHsaeMaps110122/2021NSDUHsaeMap110122.htm>.

²⁴ Ibid



Access to health care and mental health care is challenging.

Access to health care is a challenge in Maine, due to availability of providers, affordability of care, and the rural nature of the state. In 2021, three in five Mainers had experienced one or more challenges around affording health care, and four in five are worried about affording health care in the future.²⁵ Half of uninsured adults felt that the cost of health care was the primary reason they were not insured.²⁶ Similarly, of the 65,000 adults in Maine who needed but did not receive mental health care, 46% did not access this help due to cost.²⁷

Maine is experiencing shortages in both doctors and nurses,²⁸ and many Maine women of child-bearing age live more than 15 miles from a maternity ward.²⁹ As of 2021, nearly 40% of Mainers reported symptoms of anxiety or depression, but 13% of these individuals were unable to get counseling.³⁰

Broadband access is a continued challenge.

As of September 2020, Maine ranked 43rd in the nation in access to broadband. Of the broadband serviceable locations in Maine, the Maine Connectivity Authority estimates about 120,000 locations have inadequate connectivity speeds that prevent access to the internet.³¹



Photo credit: Sean Pavone/Photo

²⁵ Healthcare Value Hub, “Maine Residents Struggle to Afford High Healthcare Costs,” January 2022, <https://www.healthcarevaluehub.org/advocate-resources/publications/maine-residents-struggle-afford-high-healthcare-costs-covid-fears-add-support-range-government-solutions-across-party-lines>

²⁶ Ibid

²⁷ NAMI Maine, “Mental Health in Maine,” 2023, <https://namimaine.org/mental-health-in-maine/>.

²⁸ Brad Rogers, “Maine in Desperate Need of New Doctors as Nursing Shortage Continues,” WGME, 2023, <https://wgme.com/news/local/maine-in-desperate-need-of-new-doctors-as-nursing-shortage-continues>.

²⁹ Federal Reserve Bank of Boston, “Declining Access to Health Care in Northern New England,” 2019, <https://www.bostonfed.org/publications/new-england-public-policy-center-regional-briefs/2019/declining-access-to-health-care-in-northern-new-england.aspx>.

³⁰ NAMI Maine, “Mental Health in Maine,” 2023, <https://namimaine.org/mental-health-in-maine/>.

³¹ League of Women Voters of Maine, Maine Citizens for Clean Elections, and Maine Students Vote, “State of Maine Democracy,” League of Women Voters, 2023, https://www.lwvme.org/sites/default/files/2023-04/2023_March_State%20of%20Democracy%20in%20Maine_WEB.pdf.



Executive Summary

Summary

Like every state, Maine has a unique pattern of strengths and weaknesses with respect to its civic health. This research report is a way to capture and benchmark that pattern. Here, we present a succinct summary of our findings, along with reflections on their most important implications to help Mainers prioritize their efforts to leverage their strengths and address their weaknesses in the months and years ahead.

Overall, Maine exhibits considerable civic strengths. Based on the most recent Census data, Maine ranks first in the nation in attending public meetings and participating in groups; third in volunteering; fourth in contacting or visiting public officials; sixth in discussing issues with family, friends, or neighbors; and ninth in working with neighbors to improve their neighborhood or community. In addition, Mainers vote at levels significantly above the national average, the vast majority of our citizens feel safe in their communities, and six in ten believe that “while people might not always have the same opinion, we are still able to find common ground.”

The research also pinpoints some of Maine’s civic deficits and challenges. Less educated, lower-income, and younger Mainers were less likely to feel that they belong and matter in their communities. Those with less educational attainment were also less likely to vote or to feel they are able to influence decisions in their community. Most Mainers trust the state government significantly less than their local government. And less than half of Republicans and Independents trust that the 2024 presidential election will be properly tallied.

In what follows, as well as in the [online technical appendix](#) (see QR code at right), more details can be found on such findings. Below is a summary of each of the eight categories of civic health: civic trust, belonging and mattering, community climate, civic knowledge, voting, volunteering and giving, civic participation, and hope for the future.



ONLINE
TECHNICAL
APPENDIX*

Civic Trust. The first part of our report focuses on Mainers’ trust in government and in other people, measured at the local, state, and national levels. Mainers’ trust in government diminishes as attention shifts from the local level (trust in government to “almost always or mostly” to “do what is right” is at 51%) to the state level (trust drops to 37%) to the national level of government (trust nosedives to 17%). Meanwhile, trust in other people is fairly consistent between the local (59%) and state (55%) levels, then drops to 30% for Americans nationwide. In general, regarding both government and other people, older and higher-income Mainers were more trusting than younger and lower-income residents, and Democrats were more trusting than Republicans or Independents.

One implication of these findings is that targeted interventions to strengthen trust should focus on state government, where trust is significantly lower than it is for local government and also to pay special attention to younger and lower-income Mainers as well as Republican and Independent voters.

Belonging and Mattering. The sense that one belongs in one’s community and state and that one’s voice and participation matter to community life are key elements of civic health that support healthy and robust participation in public life. Maine presents a mixed picture on these variables. On the plus side, modest majorities of Mainers feel they belong in their local communities, feel welcomed and included in local activities, do not feel they are treated as “less than” by fellow residents, and are comfortable expressing their opinions. But not very many Mainers feel they matter to their local communities, and many are not sure they can influence local decision-making. In general, high-income, older, and more educated Mainers tend to exhibit significantly higher levels of belonging and mattering than low-income, younger, and less educated Mainers.

In light of these findings, Mainers might consider investing in further research to gain a fuller understanding of why some groups feel like they belong and matter less than others, and what might help address underlying issues.

* <https://bit.ly/strengthening-maines-civic-health>



Based on the most recent Census data, Maine ranks first in the nation in attending public meetings and participating in groups.

Community Climate. In this part of the report, we explore aspects of the social and political climate of Maine's communities that are relevant to civic participation and Maine's capacity to adapt to an increasingly diverse state and nation. We find that almost all Mainers feel safe in their communities. At the same time, a plurality of residents experience barriers to civic participation, including lack of information about civic engagement opportunities and a feeling that their participation will not make a difference to public outcomes, among others. We also found that while Mainers are ambivalent about the influx of new people coming to their state, most feel either positive or neutral about more racially and culturally diverse people coming to their communities. Finally, a majority of Mainers from all demographic backgrounds feel that common ground on solutions to today's problems remains achievable, despite our differences.

It was also the case that low-income Mainers and those without a college degree were particularly likely to experience barriers to community involvement or to worry about the impacts of diverse newcomers to their communities. In response, we suggest that Mainers look for ways to remove the barriers to community involvement and participation we identified through the research, and suggest some strategies for achieving this.

The State of Civic Knowledge. Mainers show a reasonably solid foundation of civic knowledge on both the local and state level. For example, about six in ten residents feel they know whom to reach out to regarding issues and ideas for their community, and almost as many (56%) feel they have that same knowledge in relation to the state as a whole. At the same time, less than half of Mainers know at least one member of their local select/city board. And, in general, residents who are older, better off financially, and more educated tend to show significantly higher levels of civic knowledge.

One implication is Mainers might consider investing more in civic education in high schools and community colleges, especially those that serve majority low-income students. This approach would target two of the lower-scoring demographic groups in this realm of civic health: younger and lower-income Mainers.

Voting. Maine is a national leader in electoral participation, whether we are speaking of national or local elections. Still, about 30% to 40% of Mainers are not participating in most elections. It is also the case that nonvoters are typically less educated and lower-income Mainers. We also found mixed feelings on the benefits of ranked choice voting. Perhaps most concerning, about a third of Mainers lack confidence that the 2024 presidential election will be properly counted – an especially strong belief among Republicans and Independents.

One implication of these findings is that Mainers consider investing in research and civic education to better understand the possible myriad barriers to voting by low-income Mainers and those without a college degree, as well as to explore ways to increase confidence in election results by those with the greatest doubts.

Volunteering, Group Participation, and Giving. As with voting, Maine is a national leader in volunteering, group participation, and charitable giving. Education was the most consistently and powerfully predictive demographic variable associated with these civic activities: the more education, the more Mainers tend to volunteer, join groups, and donate to the causes they care about. One implication of these findings is that Mainers explore what might encourage citizens without a bachelor's degree to participate more fully in these civic commitments, including enriched civic education in kindergarten through grade 12 and in community colleges.

Civic Participation and Awareness. This section measures Mainers' participation in public affairs between elections as well as the degree to which residents pay attention to the news and discuss public affairs with friends and family, neighbors, and those with different beliefs and perspectives from their own. Relative to other states, Mainers exhibit numerous strengths on these themes, ranking first in the nation in public meeting attendance, fourth in interacting with public officials, tenth in paying attention to the news, sixth in discussing important issues with friends and family, and sixth in having such conversations with neighbors.



That said, there is plenty of room for improvement. For example, more Mainers rarely talk to people with different political views than their own than do so regularly. Moreover, less educated, lower-income, and younger residents are generally less likely to be engaged in the activities covered in this section compared to more educated, higher-income and older Mainers. One implication of these findings is to explore “bridging,” a field which involves developing effective ways to foster dialogue and understanding across differences, to see if there are practices that Maine can incorporate — or scale up — to enrich its civic health.

Hope for the Future. A healthy 70% of Mainers are hopeful about the state’s future. However, there are reasons to be concerned that this is a fragile, rather than a stable or growing, working consensus. One such reason is that most Mainers are pessimistic about the future of Maine’s children, with majorities believing that they will have to leave home in order to find economic opportunity and security, and that they are unlikely to have a better life than their parents. Another is that Mainers are pessimistic about the future of the nation and of democracy itself, which makes Maine’s hope for their state more precarious. One implication is that Mainers should be doing all they can to improve the prospects of the young people who, to a significant extent, embody their state’s future.

Recommendations. Each section of the report shares specific recommendations, but a few salient points shone through each aspect of civic health. These include:

- *Investing in civic education*, particularly at the K-12 and community college levels. There are gaps in civic health between those with lower educational levels and incomes compared with higher ones. We recommend experiential civic education that helps people understand how to use their local systems, such as selectboards and how the town manages local elections, as well as civic education that builds people’s voice and agency. Since Mainers are ambivalent about ranked choice voting, this may warrant further civic education as well.
- *Building civic infrastructure in the state* through expanded programming, attention to civic engagement barriers, increased government transparency, and experimenting with new civic innovations. Programs that encourage bridging across differences and build belonging and mattering may increase community connections. Addressing barriers to community involvement may bolster participation. Increased government transparency measures may increase trust in state government. Civic innovations like citizens assemblies may encourage more people from different backgrounds to be involved in community decision-making.
- *Conduct further research and learning about report outcomes.* The survey data in this report helps shine a light on areas needing improvement, but it does not tell us the full story. By talking with Maine communities, especially those from specific populations that struggle with aspects of civic health, we may be able to better understand obstacles and what supports are needed. Some areas for research include learning why certain groups are voting less than others, what could build feelings of mattering and belonging, and how to upgrade prospects for young Mainers so they see a future in the state.



Civic Trust



Maine Takeaways

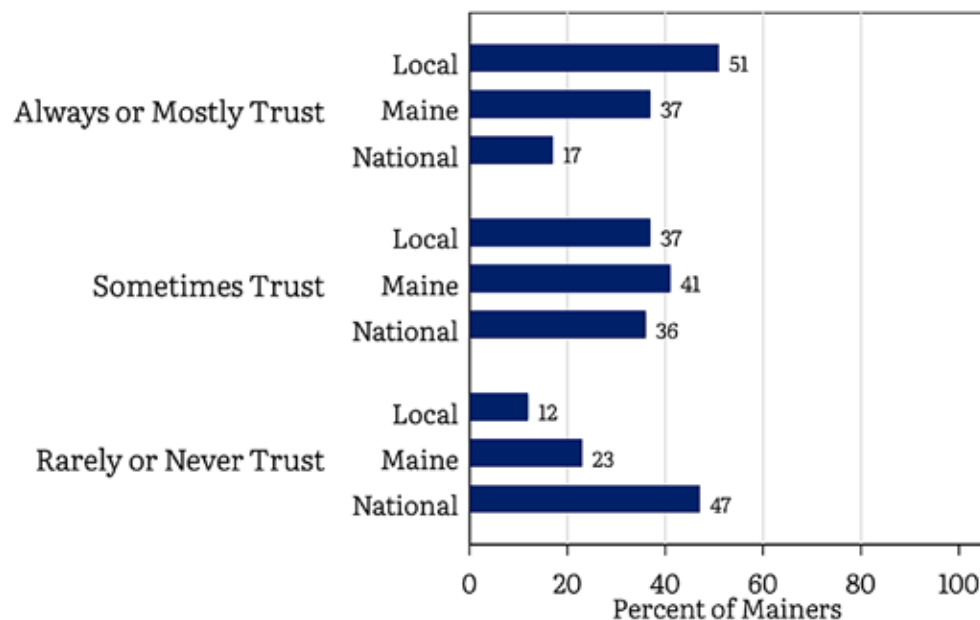
This section examines a theme crucial to the functioning of democracy and the state of civic health: the level of trust people hold toward their government and toward one another. Of course, blind trust brings its own set of issues in a nation with a strong tradition of government accountability, but if most people's default is powerful mistrust of their government and/or their fellow citizens, this creates ripe conditions for misinformation to gain traction and partisan animosity to deepen. This can fundamentally weaken civic health by diminishing citizens' abilities to engage productively in public discourse and collaborate on societal challenges. We will detail our findings as they relate to both Mainers' trust in government as well as their trust in other people.

Trust in Government

Trust in government “to do what is right” declines significantly as the focus shifts from the local to the state levels of government and declines precipitously with respect to the national government as the following findings detail:

- About half of Mainers (51%) “almost always or mostly” trust their local government.
- About a third (37%) trust their state government.
- Only 17% of Mainers trust the national government.

Trust in Local, State, and National Government



In general, Mainers who are *older, higher income, more educated*, or who are *Democrats*, tend to be more trusting of all levels of government compared to those who are *younger, lower income, less educated, and/or who are Republicans or Independents*.

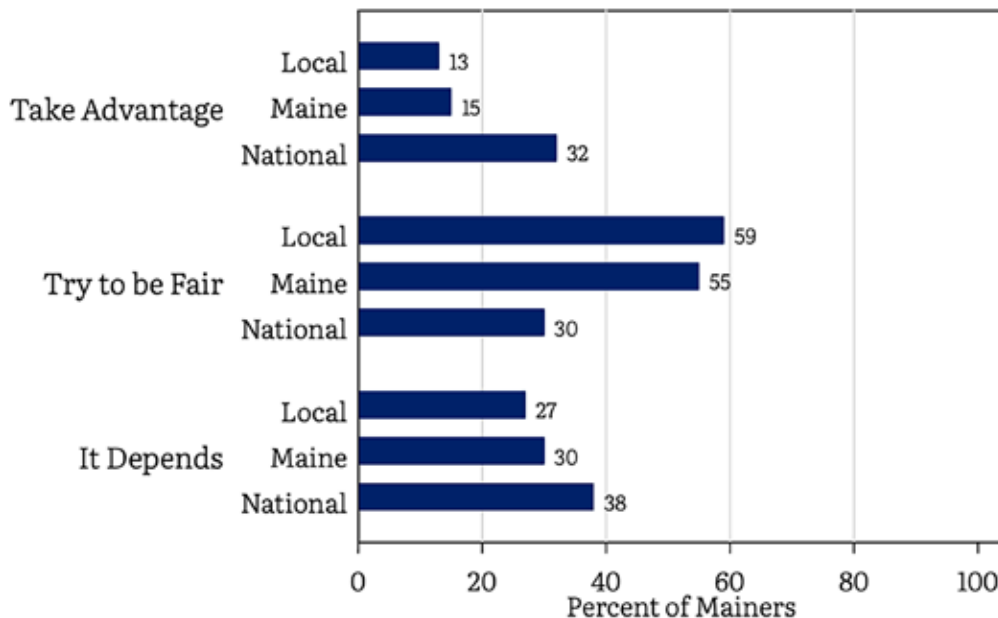
An exception to this pattern is that older Mainers are less likely than younger ones to trust the national government. But when it comes to local and state government, Maine's older adults are much more likely to be trusting. For instance, people 65 years and older trust local government much more than other age groups. They trust local government at 64% compared with 44% of those ages 55-65, a nearly 20 percentage point difference; they trust state government at 43%, compared with 29% of those ages 35-44.

Trust in Other People

When considering Mainers' trust in other people, trust levels decline only slightly as the focus shifts from the local community to the state and then quite a bit more when Mainers think of Americans nationwide.


- Almost six in ten (59%) Mainers say they can trust "most people" to be "fair" in their community rather than "take advantage of them."
- Almost as many (55%) feel that most people across the entire state would treat them fairly.
- Only 30% express this sense of trust toward most of their fellow Americans.

Feel that People Take Advantage or Try to Be Fair



Trust in government 'to do what is right' declines significantly as the focus shifts from the local to the state and national levels of government.





Mainers who are *older, higher income, or more educated* tend to be more trusting of other people compared to those who are *younger, lower-income, and less educated*. For example, older Mainers are much more likely to feel local people would treat them fairly. Seventy-nine percent of those 65 or older said this, compared with 43% of people ages 18-34.

When it comes to measures of trust in other people, the pattern holds for older residents even at the national level, where they remain significantly more likely to be trusting of Americans overall than are younger residents.

Discussion

Mainers trust their state government substantially less than they do their local municipal government. By contrast, when it comes to trusting other *residents*, they trust people from across the state almost as much as they do their neighbors in their community. This suggests that building trust at the state government level is the more urgent task facing those concerned with Maine's civic health.

We also see the general pattern of Maine's low-income, less educated, and younger residents, as well as Republicans and Independents showing lower trust than other groups. This pinpoints the groups that need the most trust-building attention. Cultivating a better understanding of their concerns and trust dynamics could be a useful place to start.

One hypothesis for the significant differences in trust levels is that trust will tend to be lower for those citizens who are out of power politically and disadvantaged economically, which is almost by definition the case for lower-income folks. At the time of this report writing, the Democratic Party controls the state government, the economy has been notably unpredictable, and there are fewer dependable routes to middle-class stability for younger generations. To the extent the above hypothesis holds up, finding ways to ensure that the economic and political concerns of these Mainers are well represented and responded to in public and policy debates might be helpful.

Recommendations

1. Government transparency reforms are specifically intended to build public trust by making information about public decisions available to journalists and the public. *A review of the state of government transparency measures in Maine might suggest some trust-building paths along these lines going forward.*
2. *Conduct additional research to find out what contributes to high levels of trust.* Older Mainers tend to have particularly high levels of trust in local and state government, and in Maine's people generally. This finding suggests these residents are a natural resource for sharing wisdom on this topic. It would be interesting and quite possibly edifying to learn more about why they feel this way.



Belonging and Mattering

Maine Takeaways

In the midst of a national loneliness epidemic, the senses of belonging and mattering to one's community are important dimensions of not only mental and physical health,³² but civic health as well. For instance, residents who feel they do not matter to decision-makers are more likely to develop the kind of resentments that make them vulnerable to demagogic appeals.³³ Recent research has also found that a sense of greater belonging is associated with increased trust in government and in Americans overall, greater levels of civic engagement, and stronger "community efficacy."³⁴

While belonging and mattering are interrelated and sometimes overlapping concepts, they are distinguishable and we will treat them one at a time in this section. By belonging, we mean the sense that one is a welcome, included, and equal member of one's community. There are different ways to evaluate people's sense of belonging and mattering. For purposes of this report, we assess it via the following three indicators³⁵:

- People's perception of whether they belong when interacting with others in their community
- How welcome and included they feel in community activities
- The extent to which people feel they are treated as "less than" by other residents

By mattering, we mean the sense that one's community welcomes and values one's participation in community affairs and makes that participation possible. We measure it via these three indicators:

- Whether people feel they matter to their community
- Whether they feel they can influence decision-making in their community
- Whether they feel comfortable expressing their opinions



Photo credit: Chanelle Malambo/peopleimages.com

³² Loneliness Is Plaguing Americans in 2024: Poll (usnews.com)

³³ E.g., Katherine Cramer, *The Politics of Resentment* (University of Chicago Press: 2016).

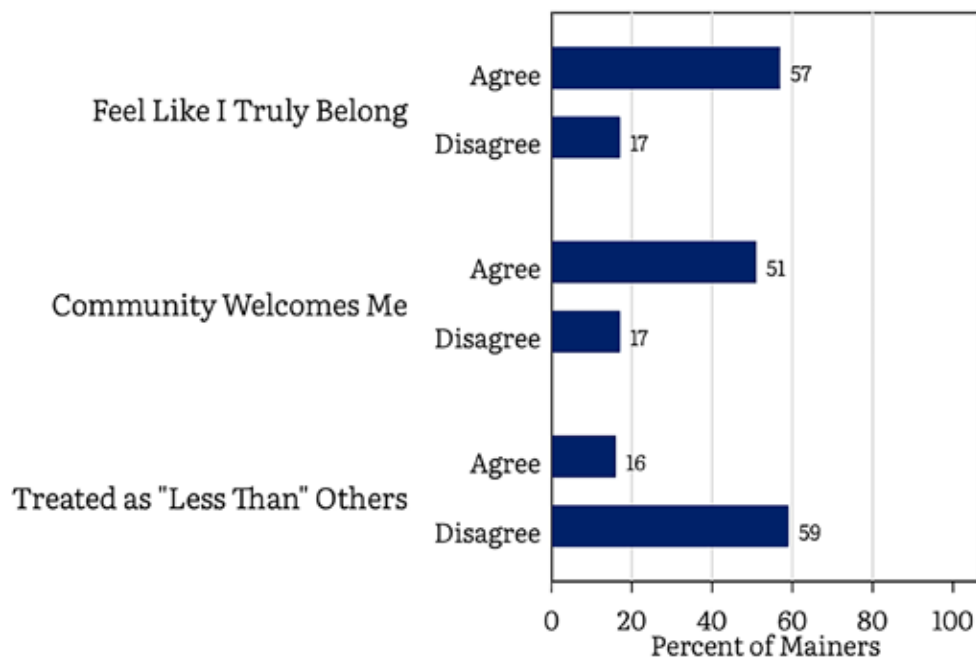
³⁴ thebelongingbarometer_revisededition_june2024_1.pdf (americanimmigrationcouncil.org)

³⁵ https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5f7f1da1ea15cd5bef32169f/t/66636a20ad0a75612e1c25bd/1718654851955/The+Belonging+Barometer_Revised+Edition_June2024



In the midst of a national loneliness epidemic, the senses of belonging and mattering to one's community are important dimensions of not only mental and physical health, but civic health as well.

Measures of Belonging



A 57% majority of Mainers feel like they “truly belong” when they interact with others in their community. Another 27% feel this way “some of the time,” while 17% indicated they feel they do not belong.

Mainers who are especially likely to feel they “truly belong” include *older* and *higher-income* residents. To a lesser extent, *more educated* Mainers are also more likely to feel they belong when interacting with others in their communities. For instance, the percentage of Mainers over the age of 65 who feel like they belong (68%) is 26 points greater than the percentage of Mainers 18 to 34 who feel like they belong (42%).

About half of Mainers (51%) agree that they feel welcome and included in activities in their community. Seventeen percent do not feel this way and another 32% are somewhere in between or unsure.

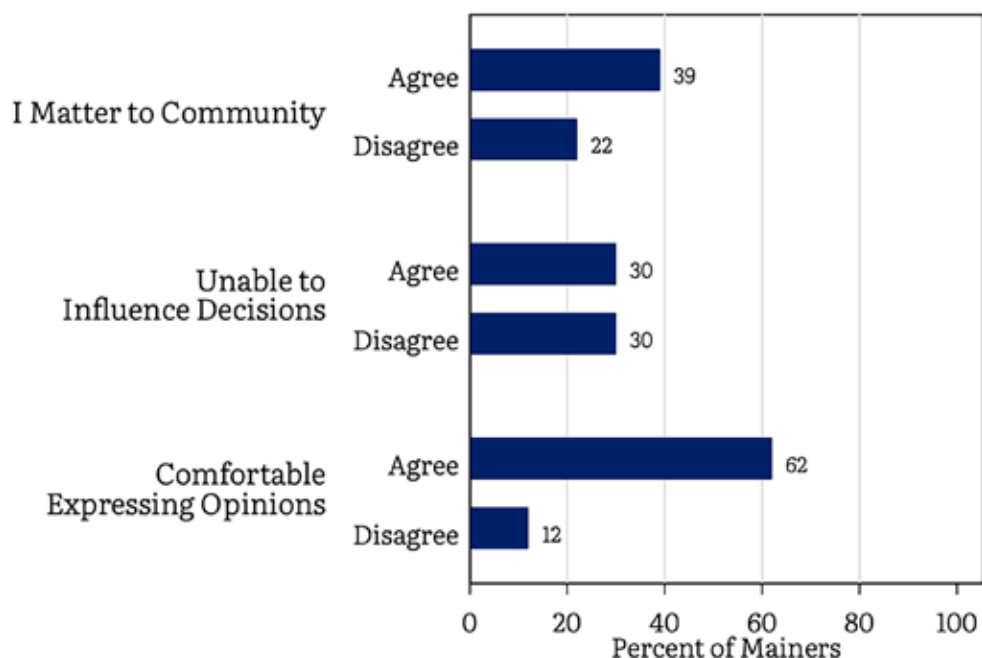
Those who are especially likely to feel welcome and included are *high-income*, *older*, or *highly educated*.

The majority of Mainers (59%) did not agree with the statement “I am treated as ‘less than’ by other residents.” Only 16% agreed they felt treated as “less than,” while another 25% were somewhere in the middle or unsure.

Those who are especially likely to feel they are treated as “less than” by fellow residents include *Mainers age 35-54* or *less educated residents*. The percentage of Mainers with a high school diploma or below who feel this way (19%) contrasts with the 14% of those with a bachelor’s degree or more.



Measures of Mattering



Only 39% feel they matter to their local community. Another 39% were ambivalent, and 22% indicated they did not feel they matter.

Mainers who are especially likely to feel they matter to their community are *high-income, older or more educated*.

Only 30% of Mainers unambiguously feel they can influence decision-making in their community. Another 30% feel clearly that they cannot, while a plurality of Mainers (40%) are somewhere in the middle or unsure.

Those most likely to feel they have no influence on community decisions tend to be *lower-income* and *less educated residents*. Thirty-one percent of Mainers earning less than \$30,000 feel they are unable to influence local decisions. By contrast, only 24% of those who earn \$100,000 or above feel the same.

The majority of Mainers (62%) feel comfortable expressing their opinions in their community. Only 12% indicate they are not comfortable expressing their opinions, and 26% come out somewhere in-between or are unsure.

Those most likely to be comfortable expressing their opinions are *high-income* and *older*. About three in four Mainers (74%) with incomes over \$100,000 feel comfortable expressing their opinions. By contrast, one in two Mainers (50%) earning less than \$30,000 reported feeling the same.





Discussion

Belonging and mattering in Maine is overall a mixed bag. On the plus side, most Mainers feel they belong in their local communities, feel welcomed and included in local activities, do not feel they are treated as “less than” by their fellow residents, and are comfortable expressing their opinions. These, though, are modest — not overwhelming — majorities who feel this way, indicating that there is room to improve in this aspect of civic health.

Moreover, not very many Mainers feel they matter to their local communities, and many are not sure they can influence local decision-making, which can lead some to cynicism, mistrust, frustration, and resentment — and the political ills that can go along with these dispositions.

Moreover, high-income, older, and more educated Mainers tend to exhibit significantly higher levels of belonging and mattering than low-income, younger, and less educated Mainers.

That older Mainers tend to feel they belong and matter is something to celebrate. That younger and lower-income Mainers are significantly and consistently less likely to feel they belong and matter is something to address to strengthen the state’s civic health.

Recommendations:

1. *Consider qualitative research to probe the underlying dynamics of why some groups are especially unlikely to feel they belong and matter and what they themselves think would make a difference.* Such research could also explore if and how local government and other public institutions (schools, libraries, etc.) are creating climates and practices that are welcoming and responsive to all residents.
2. *Consider investing in programs and initiatives that deepen belonging and mattering, such as events that encourage both new and old residents to come together and get to know others who want to build new social connections and have fun.* Additionally, our research findings suggest that paying special attention to include younger and low-income Mainers, as well as Republicans and Independents, in such events would make sense.
3. *Support and foster public participation innovations such as Citizens’ Assemblies where a random sample of residents help with public decision-making and reinforce the sense that everyone belongs and matters in public life because everyone has an equal opportunity to participate.* Moreover, because the assemblies reflect the demographics and diversity of the community, residents can see “people like me” having a voice in local decisions.



Community Climate

Maine Takeaways

We live in a rapidly changing world and a diversifying nation, and managing and adapting to such changes is a mounting challenge for many communities. In this section, we look at dimensions of community climate that make it more or less likely that communities can thrive in the face of these changes. We examine the presence or absence of barriers to public participation, attitudes toward Maine's shifting population, and the capacity of the state's communities to forge common ground amid this ferment.



Barriers to Community Involvement and Participation

A plurality of residents said there are barriers to their involvement and participation in their communities. Forty-four percent say there are “obstacles and barriers that make it difficult for you to be as involved with your community as you would like to be.” Another 20% say “maybe” to that question, while 36% do not perceive such barriers.

Low-income and less educated Mainers are particularly likely to perceive barriers to community involvement. A majority (52%) of those earning under \$30,000 reported obstacles, compared with 31% of those earning \$100,000 or more.

Of those who say there are barriers, the most frequently cited types are:

- Lack of information about civic events and opportunities (53%)
- The feeling their participation won't make a difference (47%)
- The demands of work getting in the way (54%)

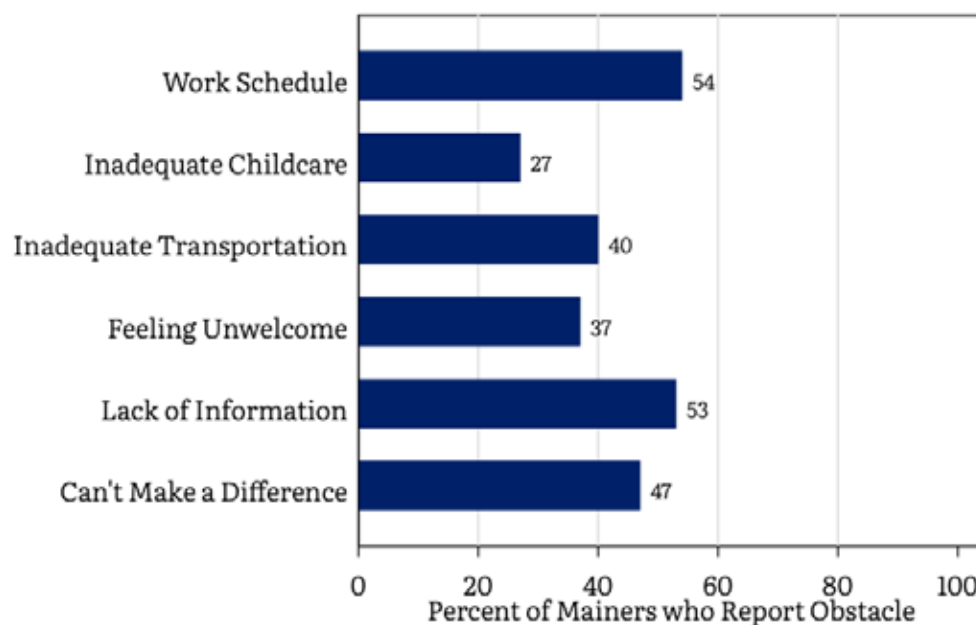
In addition, people cited transportation issues (40%), feeling unwelcome (37%), and childcare (27%, which jumps to 59% for parents of children under 18).



Photo credit: Chee-Onn Leong



Obstacles to Community Involvement



Eighty-two percent agree that they feel safe in the community where they live; only 9% disagree.

While this is largely a positive finding, it does invite us to consider the implications for civic health: If people perceive their communities to be unsafe, they may be less likely to show up to public events, voice their beliefs on important issues, and talk with people who are different from them. Moreover, such fear can create a psychological vulnerability to demagogic appeals, which can lead to scapegoating and the embrace of simplistic answers to complex public problems — and even turn people away from democracy and toward some version of strong-man rule instead.³⁶

Mainers who are *older*, *higher income*, or are *college educated* tend to feel especially safe. But it is also worth noting that significant majorities of all demographic groups feel their community is a safe place to live.

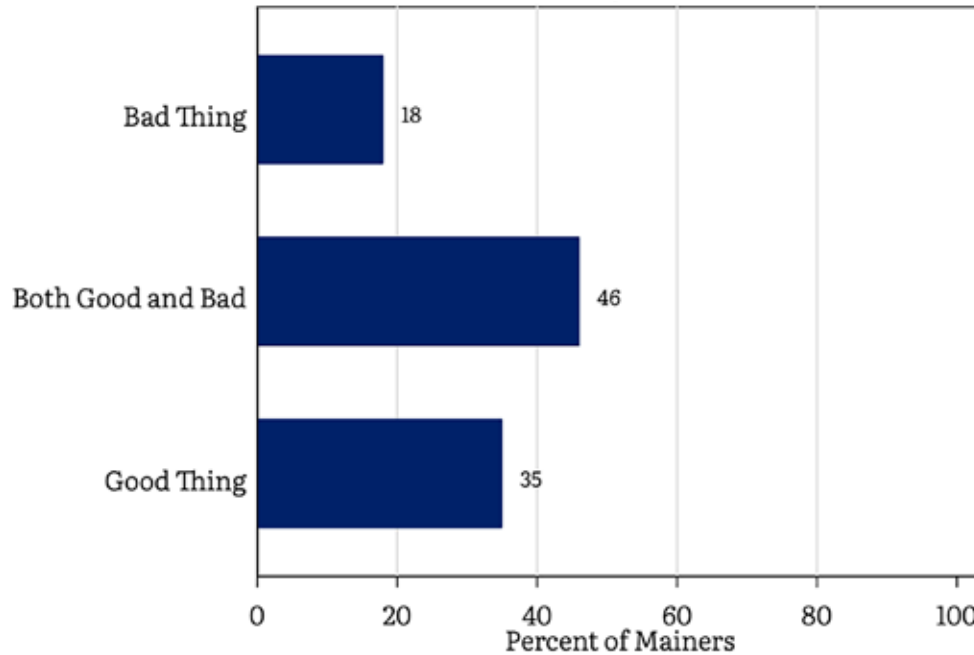
³⁶ Patricia Roberts-Miller (2020) *Demagoguery and Democracy* (New York: The Experiment)



Attitudes Toward Maine's Shifting Population

A 46% plurality of Mainers have mixed feelings about new people moving into the state. Maine has experienced a significant influx of people in recent years, driven primarily by domestic migration but also including new people from other countries. A plurality (46%) said this trend is “both good and bad.” Another 35% felt it was good and 18% said it was bad.

Feelings About New People Moving to the State



A 46% plurality of Mainers have mixed feelings about new people moving into the state.

High-income and more educated Mainers are significantly more likely to be positive about diverse newcomers joining their communities compared with those who are low-income or less educated. Forty-eight percent of people with at least a bachelor's degree agreed this was a positive development, compared with 26% of those with a high school degree or less.



We asked people why they felt the way they do about “new people” coming to the state. About 25% of Mainers who viewed the influx of newcomers as a bad thing felt their impact would raise the cost of living. They said things such as:

People moving in from bigger cities cause the rent prices to increase, as well as the construction of new condo buildings which are ridiculously expensive. As a young person who grew up here, these changes make it difficult for me and others my age to be able to afford housing in our hometown.

When a lot of people moved here during the pandemic, that helped drive up the housing prices. When out-of-state landlords bought places and jacked up the prices, that was a bad thing too.

Another 18% of Mainers who felt negatively about people moving to Maine worried that it would disturb Mainers’ way of life.

The new people are bringing their bigger city mentality and trying to make Maine like their state and it has never been like them.

I enjoy people moving here who appreciate the city as it is, however I am not a fan of people coming in and changing it, trying to make it like every other city in America.

Turning to those who were positive about new people moving to Maine, 25% thought it would improve the state’s diversity.

More people moving to Maine means we have more people who have had more diverse life experiences. Different experiences lead to different perspectives and that is good for everyone. Especially in a place like Maine that at times seems very shut off and unchanged.

About 38% of these more optimistic Mainers also thought it would benefit the economy.

More people can help the economy as they’ll be spending their dollars here, both as consumers and taxpayers.



Photo credit: CBET NAHA



Community Capacity to Forge Common Ground Amid Diversity

Most Mainers are either positive (53%) or neutral (34%) about people of different races or cultures moving into their communities.

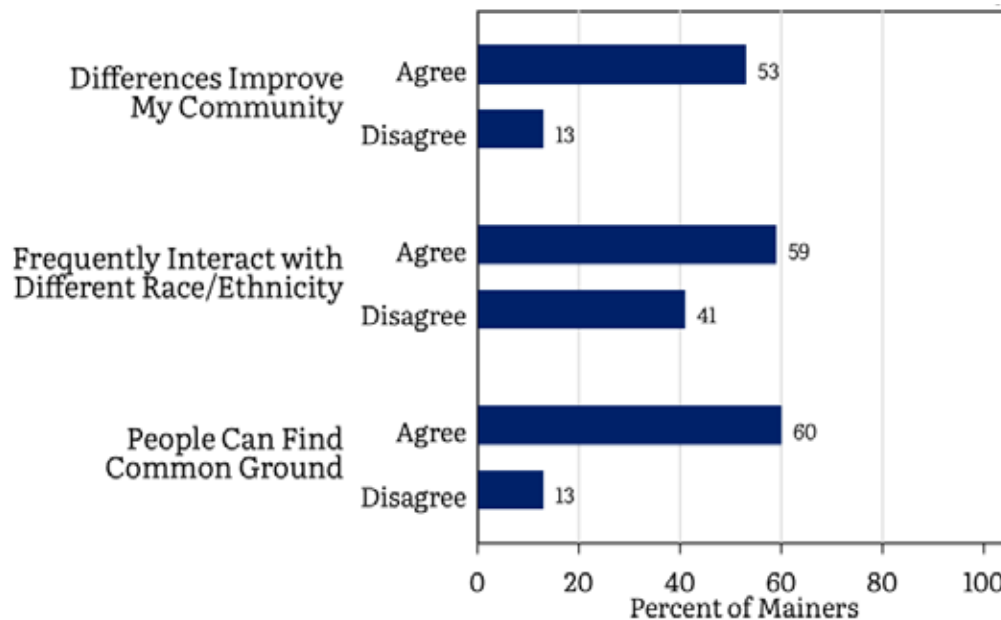
Historically one of the least diverse states in the U.S., Maine has experienced some demographic changes over the past decade, often involving racially or culturally diverse newcomers compared to the state's population overall. Most Mainers are either positive or neutral about such increasing diversity; only 13% outright disagree with the idea that it makes for "a better place to live."

About six in ten Mainers talk regularly with people of racial, ethnic, or cultural groups different from their own. The other 40% have such interactions "a few times a year" or "rarely or never." Younger, higher-income, and more educated Mainers are especially likely to have such interactions with diverse residents.

Most Mainers think their community is capable of finding common ground. Six in ten Mainers say that "while people might not always have the same opinion, we are still able to find common ground." Only 13% disagree with this statement, and another 27% neither agree or disagree.

More educated and higher-income Mainers are somewhat more likely to view common ground as achievable compared to less educated and lower-income Mainers. That said, at least half of all demographic groups express confidence that common ground is achievable despite our differences.

Measures of Common Ground and Diversity





Discussion

We find that almost all Mainers feel safe in their communities, removing one fundamental barrier to robust civic participation from the state's to-do list. At the same time, a plurality of residents feel other barriers exist, including lack of information about civic engagement opportunities and a feeling that their participation will not make a difference to public outcomes, among others.

We also found that while Mainers are ambivalent about the influx of new people coming to the state, most feel either positive or neutral about more racially and culturally diverse people coming to their communities.

Finally, a majority of Mainers from all demographic backgrounds feel that finding common ground on solutions to today's problems remains achievable, despite our differences.

Embedded within most of these findings, it was also the case that low-income Mainers and those without a college degree were particularly likely to have concerns. For instance, they were the most likely to experience barriers to community involvement, or to worry about the impacts of diverse newcomers to their communities.

Recommendations

1. *Address the barriers Mainers identify to community involvement and participation.* Lack of information was the most frequently cited barrier, suggesting that communities should consider how to get the word out about participation opportunities. Other responses to barriers underscored by the research might include providing childcare when possible, holding civic events in places where transportation is convenient, offering virtual participation options, and “going to where people are” to hear about their concerns and ideas for their community. This could include setting up a table at the local factory during lunch breaks, at public schools to hear from youth, or a food bank to hear from lower-income people.

A more challenging barrier to civic participation is the sense a good number of Mainers have that their participation will not make a meaningful difference, a sentiment especially strong among younger residents. Researchers working in the interdisciplinary field of public participation have learned a great deal about how to ensure high quality engagement on issues of common concern, and putting these insights into practice could be an important part of the answer here.³⁷

It is also important to recognize that public trust has been diminishing for decades, and it will take time and effort to rebuild it — a theme we explore in the section on civic trust. Ensuring that the public experiences participation as meaningful and effective is bound to be a longer term project, but a vitally important one for Maine's civic health over time.

2. *Create opportunities for Mainers to air concerns about the state's growing, and increasingly diverse, population to respond to valid issues when possible.* Rapid change is always likely to raise a host of questions and concerns. If communities can address them head on through dialogue, communications, and community engagement, they'll have a better chance of successfully balancing the assets newcomers bring with the challenges they could potentially pose.

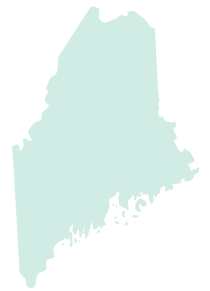
³⁷ Bobbio, L. (2018). Designing effective public participation. *Policy and Society*, 38(1), 41–57. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14494035.2018.1511193>



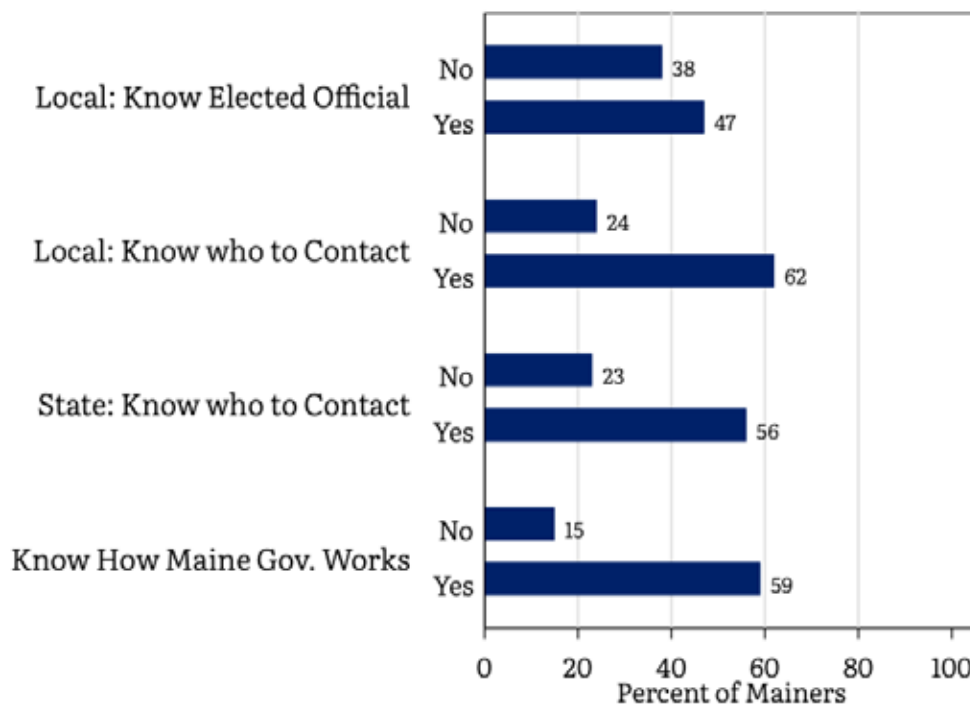
The State of Civic Knowledge

Maine Takeaways

This section explores Mainers' knowledge about both the local and state level of public affairs, including questions about public officials, which party controls government, and who to contact about concerns or ideas to improve things. This is the kind of knowledge that can help Maine citizens engage with the democratic process as they seek to raise awareness of community problems, contribute to their solutions, advocate for state and local policies, and hold public officials accountable or support their initiatives.



Civic Knowledge, Local and State Contexts



Almost half of Mainers know the name of at least one person on their select or city board. Forty-seven percent confirmed that they know the name of at least one person on their select or city board, 38% said they did not have this knowledge, and another 15% were not sure.

Mainers most likely to know the name of a select or city board member are *higher income, more educated, and older*. Also, *Independent voters* are less likely to know this than are *Republicans* or *Democrats*. Fifty-six percent of those with a bachelor's degree or more say they know of a board member compared to 37% of those with a high school degree or less.

Most Mainers feel they know who to contact about concerns or ideas about their community. Sixty-two percent say they possess this knowledge, almost a quarter (24%) do not, and 14% are not sure.

Residents who are especially likely to say they know who to contact about their community tend to be *older, higher income, and more educated*. *Rural Mainers* are also somewhat more likely to know who to contact than are urban and suburban residents.

Fifty-six percent of Mainers feel they know which department or person to contact in state government about their concerns or ideas about the state. Another 23% do not agree, and 21% are somewhere in the middle.

In addition to *higher-income, more educated, and older* Mainers, *Democrats* are more likely to feel they know who to reach out to at the state level than are *Republicans* and *Independents*. About two-thirds (65%) of those with a bachelor's or higher degree say they know who to approach about state issues, while almost half (47%) of those with a high school degree or less say the same.

A 59% majority of Mainers feel they have a general grasp of how their state government works. Another 26% are not sure; and 15% feel they do not have a good understanding of how state government works.



Photo credit: Nii_Anna

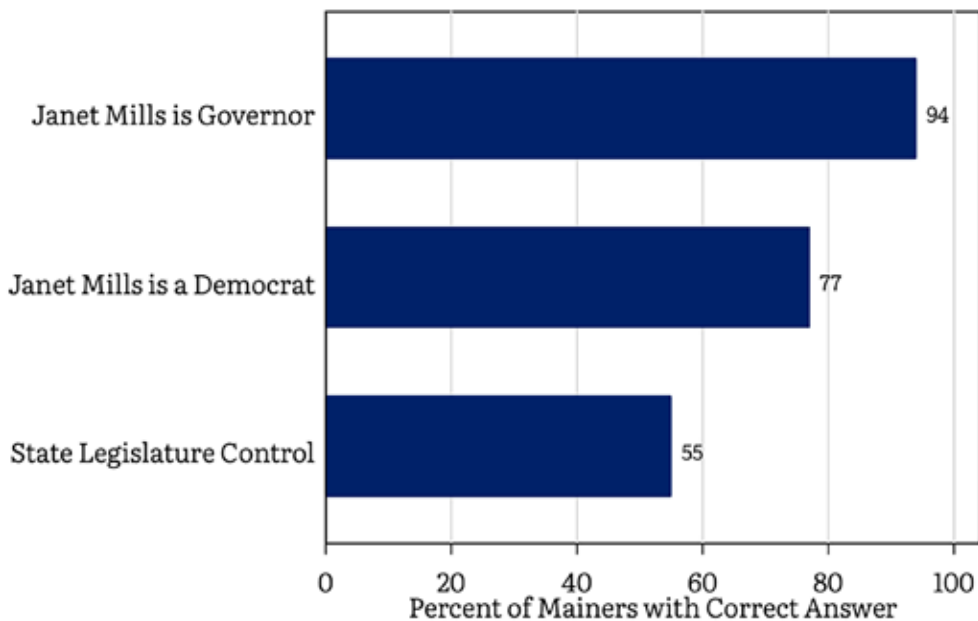


Those most likely to feel this way once again include *upper-income, highly educated, and older* Mainers. As in the last state knowledge question, *Democrats* are also more likely than *Republicans* and *Independents* to say they know how state government works. Additionally, men are a bit more likely to say they know how state government works than women, and downstate residents somewhat more likely than upstate Mainers.

In addition:

- **The vast majority of state residents know the governor's office and party affiliation.** Seventy-seven percent are aware that Governor Mills is a member of the Democratic Party. This includes significant majorities of all demographic groups. That said, Mainers who are older, more educated and higher income are most likely to know this.
- **Strong majorities of Mainers also know which party controls Maine's House of Representatives.** Fifty-five percent know that the Democratic Party controls the Maine House of Representatives. Older Mainers and those with higher incomes are especially likely to be aware of this.

Percent of Mainers Knowing Facts about Maine



Residents who are older and have more income and education tend to show significantly higher levels of civic knowledge.

Discussion

This research displays a reasonably solid foundation of civic knowledge among Mainers on both the local and state level. Majorities of residents, for instance, feel they know who to reach out to about their concerns and aspirations at the community level (62%) and at the state level (56%).

At the same time, there are areas where civic knowledge could be strengthened. For example, less than half of Mainers know at least one member of their local select/city board, knowledge that can be a key to residents effectively advocating for solutions to local issues. We've also seen throughout this section that residents who are older and have more income and education tend to show significantly higher levels of civic knowledge. This suggests targeting efforts to increase civic knowledge toward younger, less educated, and lower-income Mainers especially.

Additionally, a significant partisan gap exists with respect to some areas of knowledge of state government. For example, Democrats are more confident than Republicans and Independents that they know "who to contact" at the state level about concerns and ideas. This may be due to the current Democratic control of the state government, making it more familiar to Democratic residents.

Recommendations

1. *The State might consider investing more in civic education in high schools and community colleges, especially those that primarily serve low-income students.* This would target two of the lower-scoring demographic groups: younger and lower-income Mainers. The idea here, though, is not to fill the specific knowledge gaps identified by this research in a rote way. Rather, it is to help more Mainers gain knowledge that helps them participate effectively in making their communities and state a better place to live.
2. *Consider whether there are ways that older residents could help their communities address civic knowledge gaps.* Mainers age 65 and over show exceptionally high knowledge about decision-making in their communities, and retirees may have the time to help other Mainers learn about and navigate the people and the systems.
3. *Finally, conduct further research to illuminate what's causing some civic knowledge gaps and what might be done in response.* For example, about four in ten Mainers are not very confident they know who to approach in state government about their concerns or ideas. How much of that is a straight-up question of not having the civic knowledge as opposed to feeling a low sense of civic and political efficacy in the face of the kinds of obstacles to participation we explored in the Community Climate section?



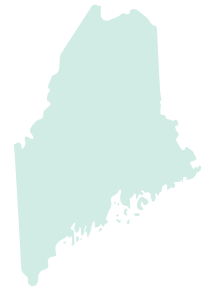
Voting

Maine Takeaways

The peaceful transfer of power through the ballot box is fundamental to democracy. A state in which voting is robust and the results of elections are trusted and accepted is civically healthier than one in which voting is lackluster, substantially and systematically uneven across the citizenry, or whose results are deemed untrustworthy.

We organize our “Maine Takeaways” on voting under the following subheadings:

- Mainers’ voting patterns in national elections
- Maine’s participation in local elections between 2018 and 2021
- Trust in the 2024 national election
- Ranked choice voting



Mainers’ Voting Patterns in National Elections

On average, Maine residents vote at higher rates in both presidential and midterm elections compared to the rest of the country. This is a trend that has held steady since the 1980s.

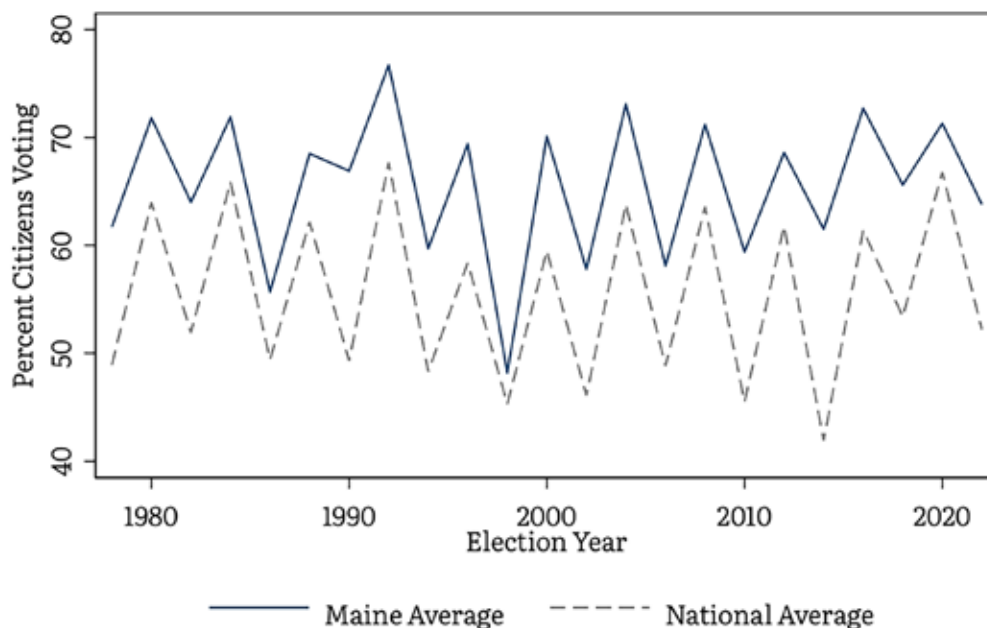
The 2020 National Election

In the most-recent (2020) presidential election, 71% of Maine citizens voted, compared to 66% for the nation.

Education level was the most telling demographic variable distinguishing 2020 voting rates in Maine, with 87% of those with a bachelor’s degree or higher casting a ballot, compared to about 59% with a high school degree or less. Voting was also higher among the highest income Mainers (77%) compared to the lowest (60%).

Maine has long been a national leader in presidential election turnout, as shown in the below figure.

Presidential and Midterm Voting in Maine and USA, 1978-2022



The 2022 Midterm Election

Voting tends to go down during midterm elections. For example, the national voting rate went from 67% in 2020 to 52% in 2022. **Maine, by contrast, dropped from 71% in 2020 to only 64% in 2022, giving us an 18-point edge over the national turnout in the most recent midterm election.**

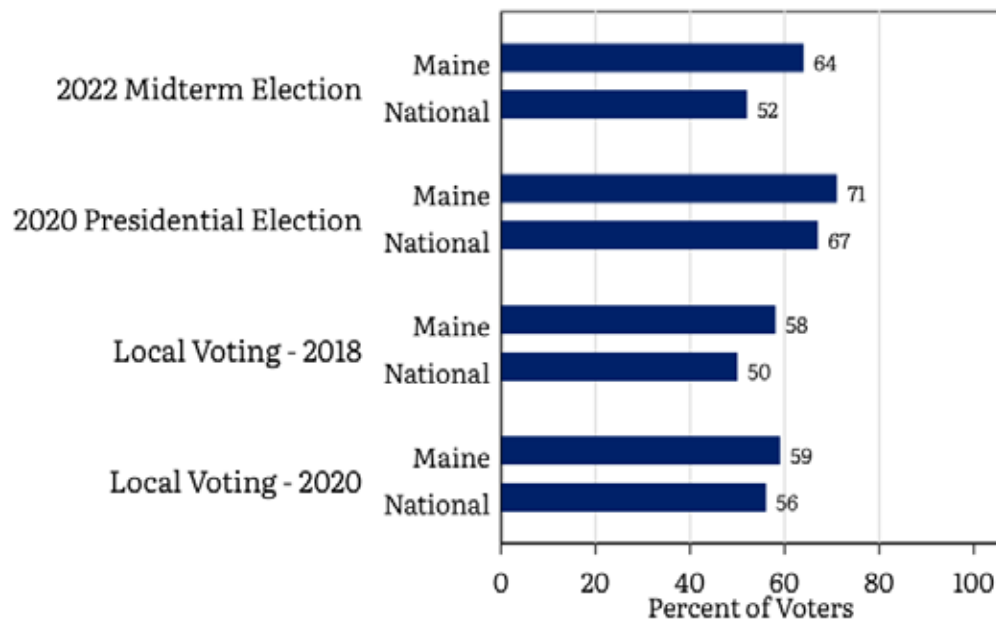
Maine's Participation in Local Elections between 2018 and 2021

Maine demonstrates strength when it comes to voting in local elections. These elections include selecting members to serve on town select boards, approving school budgets, and approving new town policies. Between 2018 and 2019,³⁸ about 58% of Mainers voted in local elections, about 8% higher than the national average of 50%. **In 2020-2021, Maine's turnout ticked up slightly (to 59%) and the national average increased to 56%, still below Maine's level.**

Between 2020- 2021, college-educated Mainers were especially likely to vote in local elections. In addition, high-income Mainers were more likely to vote in local elections than low-income residents, and women were somewhat more likely than men. People with a bachelor's degree or higher voted at 76% compared with 48% of those with only a high school degree, a 28 percentage point difference.

As with the 2020 national vote, the Mainers more likely to vote in 2020-2021 were those with more education or higher income.

National and Local Election Participation, Maine and US



³⁸ We report a range of years since our data come from a question asking people whether they voted in a local election "in the last 12 months."



Trust in the 2024 National Election

While a majority of Mainers expressed confidence that the upcoming presidential election will be counted accurately, more than a third of Mainers did not. The majority of Mainers (60%) expressed confidence that the upcoming presidential vote will be counted accurately, but over a third (35%) disagreed.

Our findings show that, by far, the most powerful predictor of confidence that the 2024 presidential election will be counted properly is party affiliation. Almost nine in ten *Democrats* (88%) are confident about the tally, while only 44% of *Republicans* and 45% of *Independents* feel the same. In addition, *lower-income, less educated, older Mainers, and upstate residents* were all somewhat less likely to feel confident in the integrity of the upcoming presidential election.

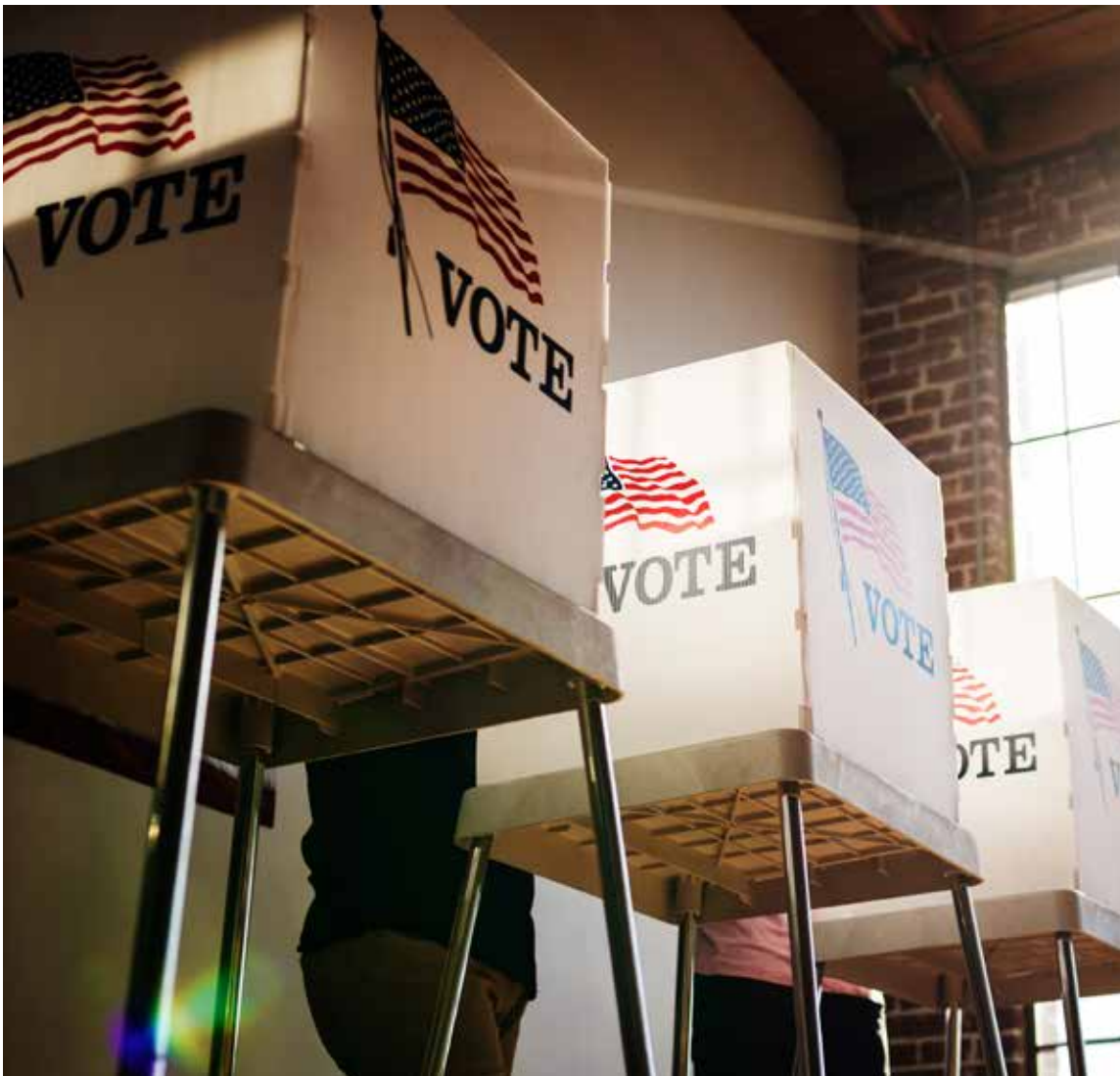


Photo credit: rawpixel.com

The majority of Mainers (60%) expressed confidence that the upcoming presidential vote will be counted accurately, but over a third (35%) disagreed.



Ranked Choice Voting

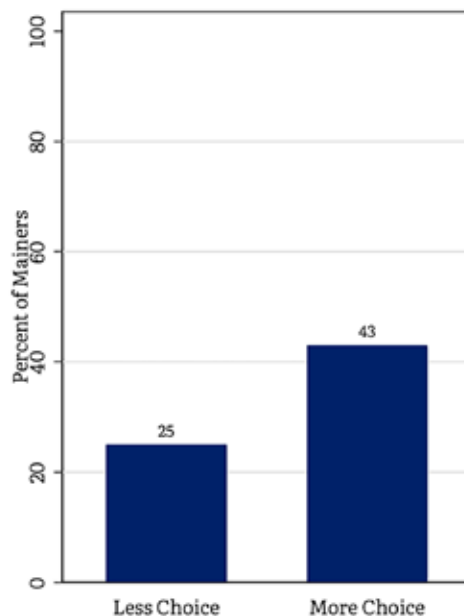
Mainers are divided on whether ranked choice voting is giving them more choices in Maine's elections.

While a growing number of municipalities are experimenting with ranked choice voting (RCV), Maine and Alaska are the only states to have adopted it, and Maine is the first to use it in allocating electors for the U.S. presidential election. (Currently, the Maine Constitution bars the procedure for electing constitutional state officers, such as the governor.) With RCV, "Voters can rank the candidates on their ballot in order of preference. If no candidate breaks 50% of the popular vote, the bottom finisher is eliminated, and voters' second choices come into play. The tabulations continue until a candidate achieves a majority of the total votes."³⁹ Research suggests that RCV can make elections less rancorous and more fully expressive of people's preferences.⁴⁰

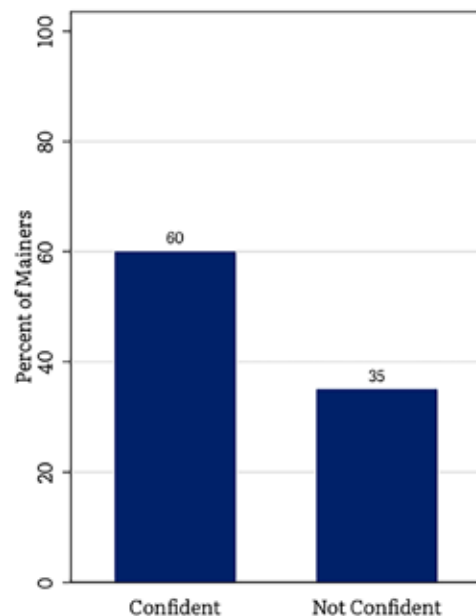
When asked if ranked choice voting gave respondents more or less choice in elections, respondents provided a mix of answers. A plurality of Mainers (43%) felt that ranked choice voting did give them more choice, but almost a third of residents (32%) felt there had been no change in their choice, and about a quarter actually felt it gave them less choice.

Democrats are especially likely to feel that RCV provides voters with more choice, compared to *Independents* and *Republicans*. Additionally, Mainers with more education and higher income were more likely to say that RCV opens up more choice. About 67% of self-identified *Democrats* felt it had given them more choice, compared with 26% of *Republicans* and 34% of *Independents*.

Feelings of More Choice Due to RCV



Confidence in the 2024 Election



³⁹ <https://apnews.com/article/election-2020-senate-elections-voting-maine-united-states>

⁴⁰ Ranked-Choice Voting - Center for Effective Government ([uchicago.edu](https://effectivegov.uchicago.edu/primers/ranked-choice-voting))
<https://effectivegov.uchicago.edu/primers/ranked-choice-voting>



Discussion

In Maine, voting in local, state, and national elections consistently exceeds national averages, a trend that has endured over time. At the same time, the state is not without its challenges in this domain. For example, although Maine voter turnout is higher than national averages, about 30% to 40% are not turning out, depending on the election. These nonvoters tend to be less educated and lower-income Mainers, which could mean that they are less well represented when public policy is being decided. We see there is some room for Maine to grow in this domain of civic health and participation.

The finding that about a third of Mainers lack confidence that the 2024 presidential election will be properly counted is worrisome. It is noteworthy that this is the most partisan result we found in this domain of civic health, with about twice as many Democrats (88%) as Republicans (44%) and Independents (45%) expressing confidence that the 2024 presidential vote count will be correct.

Finally, with respect to local elections, while they often get less attention than national elections, they also often have the most visible and immediate effect on residents' communal well-being. Throughout the United States, voting in local elections has long trailed behind voting in national elections. The fact that Mainers demonstrate higher voting in local elections than national averages is a civic strength.

Recommendations

1. *Conduct further research to determine what is driving mistrust in the forthcoming election results amongst the demographics noted.* Surveys and focus groups could illuminate what is driving the mistrust of election results and suggest measures that could strengthen trust among a significant number of those who lack it now. If Maine is a national leader in voter turnout, findings from additional research about voter distrust also could enable Maine to become a national leader in rebuilding trust in elections.
2. *Research what might be preventing low-participation voters from casting their votes and address any findings related to obstacles to their participation.* Understanding what is standing in the way for different low-participation voters could suggest fixes, including “low-hanging fruit,” such as more effective ways of providing early voting information or adjusting voting locations to make them more accessible to low-income voters. Other obstacles, such as the feeling that “voting doesn’t change anything,” are more difficult to address in the short term, but knowing which Mainers feel this way and why is a place to start.
3. *Consider civic education and engagement strategies to ensure voters understand how ranked choice voting works as well as its potential benefits and challenges.* This could include civic education strategies in high schools and community colleges, as well as working with local journalists to make sure they fully understand the system and what the research says about its impacts so they can help explain it to citizens. It also would make sense to ensure ample opportunities for citizens to ask questions and discuss what they like and what concerns them about RCV. It is a bold experiment in voting, and voters themselves should have the opportunity to help assess and adjust it as needed.



Volunteering, Group Participation, and Giving

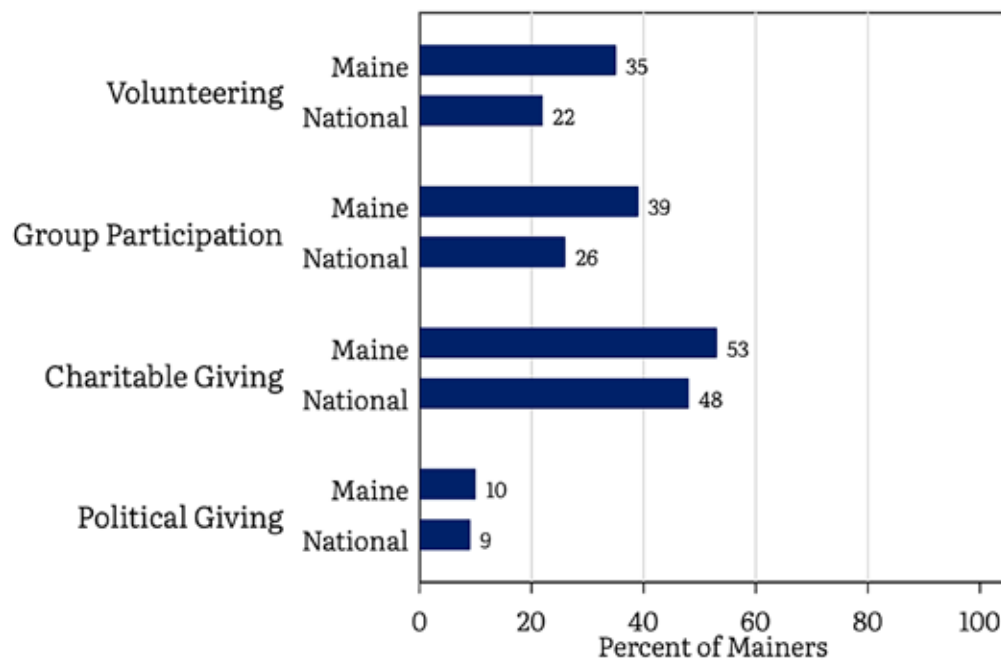


Maine Takeaways

An important marker of civic health is the time, energy, and financial support people give to their communities and the causes they care about. Volunteering, group participation, and giving are among the most common ways that residents express themselves as citizens and participate in the civic life of their communities, state, and nation.

Maine demonstrates considerable strengths in these areas. We are national leaders in volunteerism and participation in civic groups and associations, and slightly above or on par with the national averages in both charitable and political giving. The analysis in this section highlights these strengths as well as areas where Maine can continue to make progress.

Rates of Volunteerism and Giving



Maine is a national leader in the percentage of residents who volunteer. We are third in the nation on this measure, with 35% of Mainers saying they volunteer compared with 22% nationally.

Mainers most likely to volunteer are those with more income, more education, and who are members of the Boomer and Gen X generations. Gen Xers (40%) and Boomers (37%) volunteer more than Millennials (20%) and older-than-Boomer Mainers (12%).

Maine is first in the nation in joining groups and associations. *Thirty-nine percent of Mainers join forces in groups with fellow residents*, compared to 26% nationally.

Mainers with a bachelor's degree or more are especially likely to participate in groups and associations. Other demographic differences were quite modest compared to education level.

Mainers are slightly above average giving to charitable and religious organizations. Fifty-three percent of Mainers participate in such giving, compared to 48% nationally.

Once again, education level was a strong predictor of charitable giving — the more educational attainment, the more likely to give. Higher-income individuals were also more likely to give, but education level appears to be a bigger factor. For instance, 69% of those with a B.A. or more made charitable and religious donations, compared with 29% without a high school degree.

About 10% of Mainers contribute to political groups, just above the 9% national average.

College-educated Mainers were the most likely to make political contributions, just as they were to make charitable ones.



Photo credit: AS Photo Family



Discussion

Overall, Maine demonstrates considerable strengths in volunteering, group participation, and giving. Moreover, growth is evident on some of these items since at least 2019. How might Maine continue on this positive trajectory and see even more growth when these measures are revisited in the future?

Our research found education to be the most consistently and powerfully predictive demographic variable associated with volunteering, group participation and contributing to civic groups and causes. As education increases, these civic activities tend to do the same and often in fairly dramatic fashion. Education, then, seems to hold a key to fostering even greater civic health in volunteering, group participation, and giving. This would seem to add yet another data point to arguments about why post-secondary education is worth encouraging and supporting.

Recommendations

1. While volunteering, group participation, and giving all tend to go up as educational attainment goes up, not all Mainers will pursue a four-year degree, and other strategies ought to be considered as well to continue Maine's progress on these civic strengths. It might, though, be worth *exploring why education correlates with these civic activities*, because understanding more about why education has this effect might suggest creative ways to promote these civic practices among those who do not have the opportunity or inclination to pursue higher education.
2. Another avenue worth exploring is whether *a fuller commitment to civic education in the K-12 and community college settings, including ones that provide actual volunteering experience, might help promote these civic habits and practices among more Mainers.*
3. Regarding volunteering specifically, even though Maine ranks 3rd in the nation in residents who volunteer, *we are in 24th place in terms of how frequently we are actually doing so. Conducting additional research to understand the gap between "I volunteer" and "I volunteer frequently" might reveal actionable insights* to strengthen this civic touchstone even more. For instance, might there be forms of volunteer management and support that could be put in place to enable volunteers to increase their activities?



Photo credit: Iliia



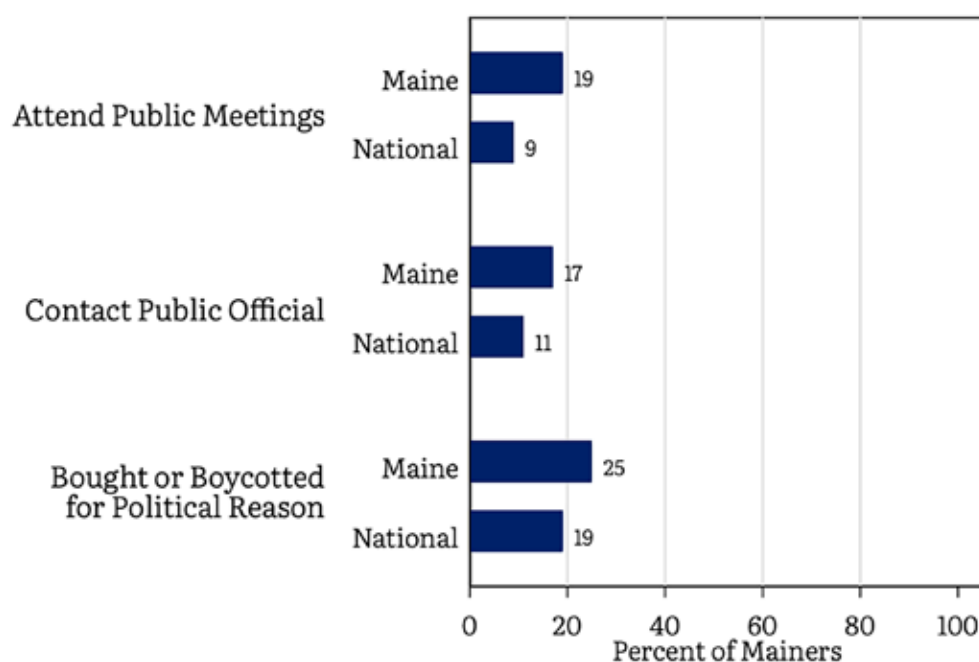
Civic Participation and Awareness

Maine Takeaways

A central dimension of civic health is the extent to which residents care enough about their community, state, and nation to pay attention to public affairs and participate in helping to shape them. This section digs into these themes for Mainers, beginning with the ways in which they participate in public affairs between elections (with voting separately examined in a section of its own), and then exploring the degree to which residents pay attention to the news and discuss public affairs with friends and family, neighbors, and, perhaps most importantly, those with different beliefs and perspectives from their own.



Rates of Civic Participation



Civic Participation

Here, we examine the following indicators of the robustness — or lack of it — of Mainers' participation in public affairs: Attendance at public meetings, interacting with public officials, and two forms of political protest and advocacy: economic advocacy (i.e., buying or boycotting to influence corporate policy) and attending political protests or demonstrations (to influence public policy).

Attending public meetings

The willingness to come together in public assembly to learn about and participate in public affairs has been at the heart of civic life since democracy's inception. Maine has a long tradition of town hall democracy that continues as a civic strength today.

Maine ranks first in the nation for residents attending public meetings. Nineteen percent of Mainers say they have attended a public meeting, compared to 9% of Americans overall.

Those most likely to attend public meetings are *older, more educated, and higher-income* residents. Education level was especially telling: A third of Mainers (33%) with a B.A. or more reported attending public meetings, compared to only 7% of those with only a high school degree.

Contacting and visiting public officials

Robust, productive contact and communication between residents and public officials are an important dimension of good governance and civic health, a counter to the frequent complaint that leaders “are out of touch.” In the section on “Civic Trust,” we looked at the question of trust between residents and public officials; here, we move from attitude to behavior, tracking the level at which citizens are actually reaching out to public officials.

Seventeen percent of Mainers report frequent interactions with public officials, compared with 11% of Americans overall. Maine ranks fourth in the nation for frequently “contacting or visiting” public officials.

More educated and older Mainers are among the groups most likely to interact with public officials.

Protesting and Advocating Between Elections

The Constitution guarantees many ways, beyond the vote, in which Americans can express their views, protest policies, and advocate for economic, social, and political change. We examine two of them here: strategically buying or boycotting corporate products or services and participating in public demonstrations.

Maine residents rank eighth in the nation in buying or boycotting products or services, with a quarter of residents saying they've engaged in such economic advocacy, compared to 19% of Americans nationwide. A high-profile instance of this form of political expression in Maine in recent years took place in response to the Monterey Bay Aquarium's Seafood Watch adding U.S. lobster to a list of seafood to avoid.⁴¹

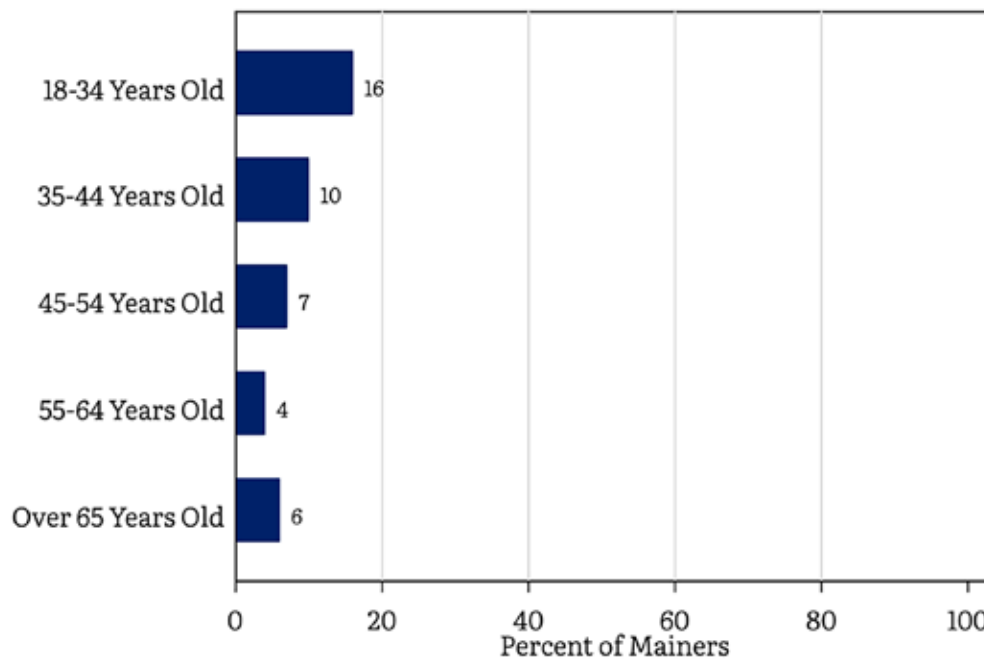
⁴¹ <https://www.pressherald.com/2022/09/12/boycotts-backlash-over-lobster-fisherys-addition-to-red-list/>



Those most likely to express their politics via consumer action tend to be more educated and have *higher incomes*. They are also more likely to be *Millennials* or *Gen Xers* than older or younger residents. For example, about 38% of Mainers with a *bachelor's degree or higher* reported doing so, compared with 15% of those with a *high school education* and 19% of those with *some college*.

Few Mainers attend political protests, marches or demonstrations, but young people are an exception. **Seven percent of Mainers overall said they protested during the past year, but 16% of those ages 18 to 34 said they had done so.** The latter is more than twice the state average of 7% and well above the level at which Mainers ages 55 to 64 (4%) and over 65 (6%) report protesting.

Attend Protest or March in Past Year, by Age



Civic Awareness

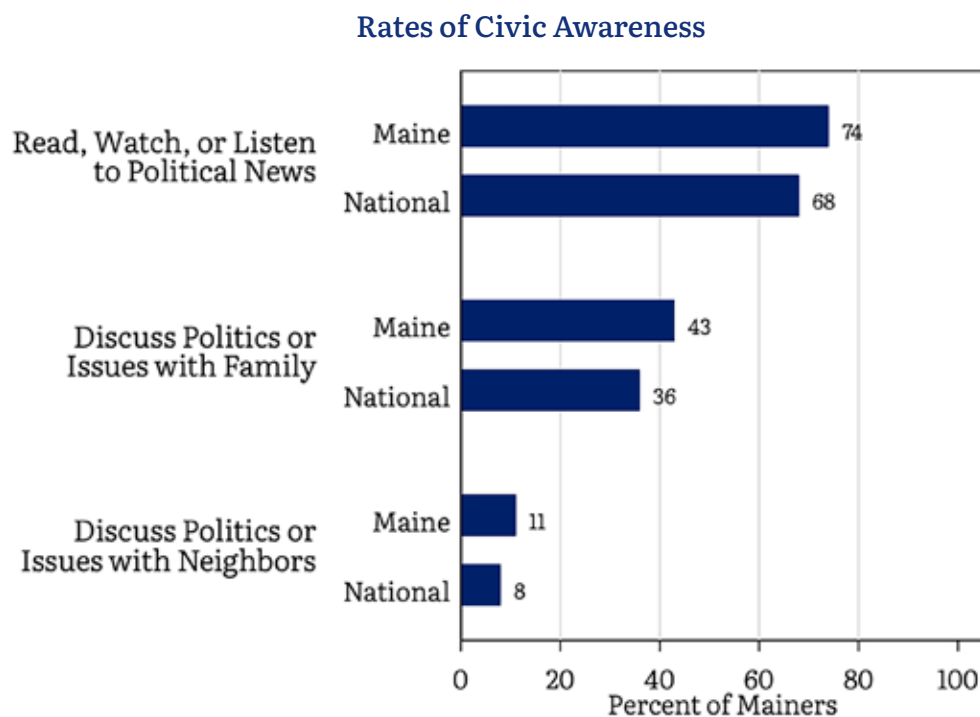
In the first part of this section, we examined patterns of public participation in Maine between elections. But participation without the information and public conversation that helps people deepen their understanding is unlikely to be as meaningful and productive as it could be. As Dan Yankelovich, a pioneer of public opinion research in America, explains, when the public responds to complex issues, their immediate reactions often evolve as they learn more, have conversations with people with different perspectives, and work through conflicts they might have about the tradeoffs involved in pursuing solutions.⁴²

To assess Mainers' civic health on this theme of developing sounder public judgment on complex issues, we examine their attention to the news as well as their propensity to discuss public affairs with family and friends, neighbors, and, perhaps most importantly for a healthy democracy, those with perspectives different from their own.

Paying Attention to News

Seventy-four percent of Mainers engage in “reading, watching, or listening to news about political, societal, or local issues,” compared to a national average of 68%. This places Maine 10th in the nation on this indicator of civic health.

The most significant demographic difference on this question centered on education. Eighty-two percent of Mainers with a BA or higher paid attention to news, compared with 63% who had only a high school diploma.



⁴² Daniel Yankelovich and Will Friedman (eds), *Toward Wiser Public Judgment* (Vanderbilt Press, 2011).



Discussing Important Issues with Family and Friends

Forty-three percent of Mainers report “frequently” discussing important issues with family and friends. This compares with 36% who say this nationally, ranking us 6th in the nation.

Demographic differences tended to be modest on this question, with education again being the most significant example.

Discussing Important Issues with Neighbors

Mainers are much less likely to speak with neighbors about political, societal, or local issues (at 11%) than they are to talk to friends and family about them (at 43%). That said, Maine still ranks 6th in the nation on this civic health measure, with our 11% stacking up pretty well to the national average of 8%.

The demographic differences within the 11% of Mainers who discuss important issues with neighbors are not significant enough to warrant attention.

Talking Across Political Differences with Fellow Mainers

As political debate becomes more polarized and partisan, Americans have increasingly displayed a reluctance to engage with differing viewpoints.⁴³ But without conversations across diverse political perspectives, the search for common ground and reasonable accommodation in an increasingly diverse and often polarized nation is likely to remain difficult.⁴⁴

Photo credit: Ricky



⁴³ <https://www.pewresearch.org/politics/2024/01/09/tuning-out-americans-on-the-edge-of-politics/>

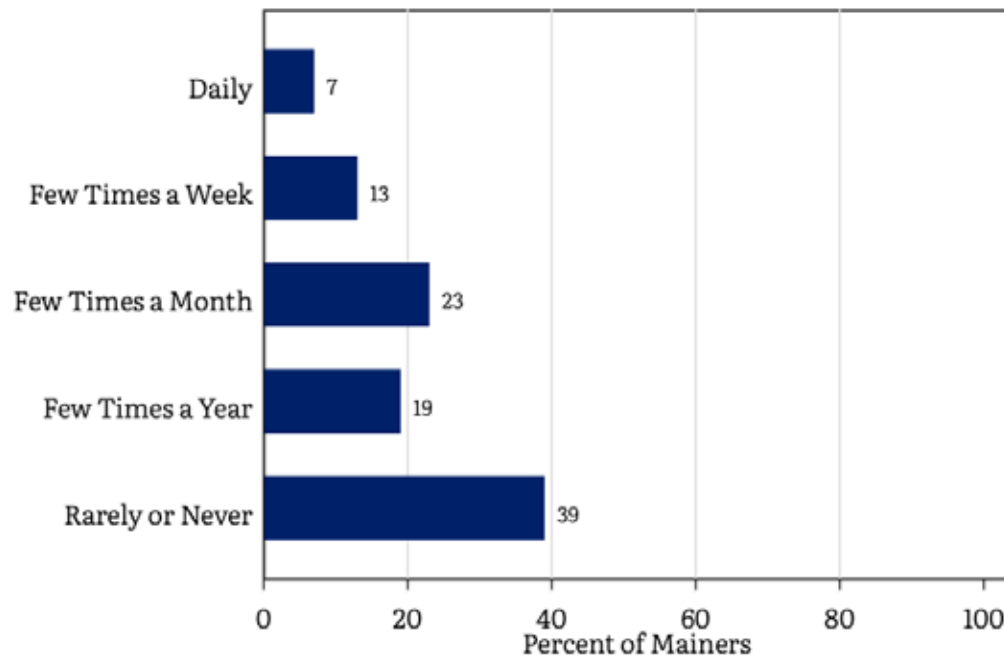
⁴⁴ Why Is It Important for People With Different Political Beliefs to Talk to Each Other? - The New York Times (nytimes.com) <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/10/07/learning/why-is-it-important-for-people-with-different-political-beliefs-to-talk-to-each-other.html>



Reflective of these trends, **Mainers are more likely not to engage people whose views differ from their own than they are of doing so.** About 57% of Mainers talk to others with different views either “never,” “almost never,” or “a few times a year.” Another 43% have such conversations “a few times a month,” “a few times a week,” or “basically every day.”⁴⁵

The Mainers most likely to regularly talk to other residents across lines of political beliefs and values are *higher-income, younger, more educated, and male* Mainers. There are no significant differences by partisanship on this question.

Talk to Others with Different Political Beliefs



⁴⁵ These findings are not directly comparable to the ones about “friends and family” and “neighbors,” because they come from a different survey with somewhat different question wording and significantly different response options. That said, talking to people with diverse views is a critical variable to track in relation to civic health, and establishing this baseline for Maine will enable researchers to track change over time.



Discussion

Mainers exhibit numerous strengths in civic participation and awareness. Where there are national benchmarks, we find we do relatively well, ranking first in the nation in public meeting attendance, fourth in interacting with public officials, tenth in paying attention to the news, sixth in discussing important issues with friends and families, and sixth in having such conversations with neighbors.

To put this in perspective, we might question whether the national figures are themselves much lower than they ought to be in a healthy democracy. True, we rank sixth in discussing important issues with neighbors, but the national average is 8%. If we have reason to be proud of doing relatively well, we should also recognize that the bar set by the national average is awfully low.

In other words, the fact that we do well by national standards does not mean there is no work to do. This is reinforced by another finding in this section: Most Mainers rarely engage with people whose political views are very different from their own. And from another section of the report (Community Climate) we note that a quarter of Mainers are rarely or never interacting in any way with people of different racial, ethnic, or cultural identities than their own.

Finally, it is important to consider the pattern illuminated in this section that less educated, lower-income, and younger residents are generally less likely to be following and discussing the news and participating in public affairs compared to more educated, higher-income and older Mainers.

Recommendations

1. *Further research could explore the obstacles that might be standing in the way of low-participation Mainers becoming more fully engaged in their community and state's public affairs, and the supports that would help them be more engaged.*
2. There is a growing field of “bridging” work, which aims to create a “particular form of social capital which describes connections that link people across a cleavage that typically divides society (such as race, or class, or religion).”⁴⁶ This can involve programs, events, trainings, and the like, that help people with very different perspectives, experiences, and beliefs bridge their differences and recognize their common humanity and shared interests. *Mainers could explore this school of thought and practice to strengthen its civic awareness and participation even more than it is.*
3. As recommended in some other sections, *implementing well-designed civic education in K-12 and community colleges could help all Mainers, including younger and less educated residents, to build the habits, knowledge, and skills of civic awareness and participation.*

Mainers exhibit numerous strengths in civic participation and awareness.

⁴⁶ The Practice of Bridging | Othering & Belonging Institute (berkeley.edu)
<https://www.nytimes.com/2019/10/07/learning/why-is-it-important-for-people-with-different-political-beliefs-to-talk-to-each-other.html>



Hope for the Future

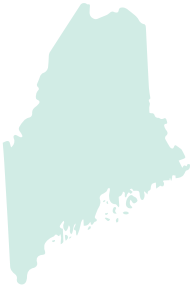
Maine Takeaways

Hope for the future is yet another important ingredient of civic health, reflecting the kind of optimism and energy that can help a state thrive. Maine displays a mixed picture on this theme, with both strengths to build on and weaknesses to address.

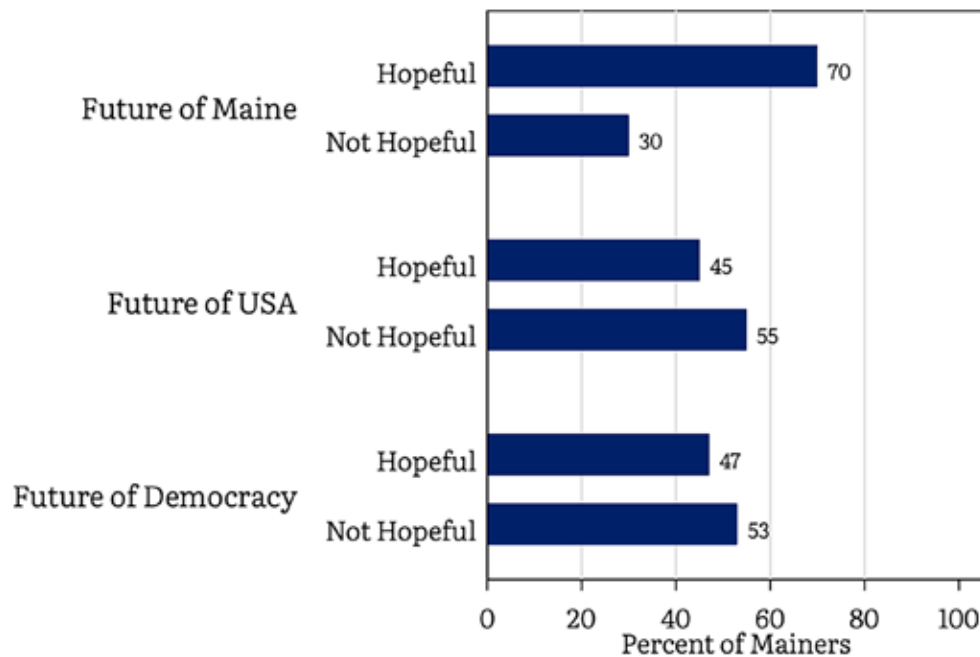
Importantly, a significant majority of Mainers (70%) are hopeful about the future of the state, undoubtedly contributing to Maine's civic health in countless ways. But not all demographic groups are equally hopeful about Maine's future — in general low-income Mainers are less hopeful than high-income residents.

Moreover, Mainers overall are worried about the future of the nation and of democracy itself. Over time, this could affect Maine's optimism about their state.

Finally, Mainers are not confident about the future of young people in the state, which calls into question how long Maine's sense of hopefulness about their state's future can last.



Hope for the Future



Seventy percent of Mainers are hopeful about the future of the state; 30% are not.

This sense of hopefulness is strongest among *Democrats, high-income, more educated, and older residents*. Eighty-three percent of those earning over \$100,000 are hopeful, compared to 64% for people earning under \$30,000.

In contrast to their feelings about the state, only 45% are hopeful about the future of the nation, while 55% are not.

Among Mainers who are hopeful about America's future, *high-income residents* are substantially more hopeful than *low-income residents*.

More Mainers (53%) are not hopeful about the future of democracy than are hopeful (47%).

Democrats and high-income Mainers were once again considerably more hopeful on this dimension compared to *Republicans, Independents, and low-income residents*. In addition, *men* in Maine are somewhat more hopeful about democracy's future than women.

As an indicator of hope for the future of people's **communities**, we asked about the prospects of young people. **Almost six in ten Mainers (59%) believe young people will need to leave their community in search of economic opportunity "almost always or most of the time."** Another 19% think young people will have to move "some of the time," and 22% think they will "hardly ever" or "never" have to move to secure their economic futures.



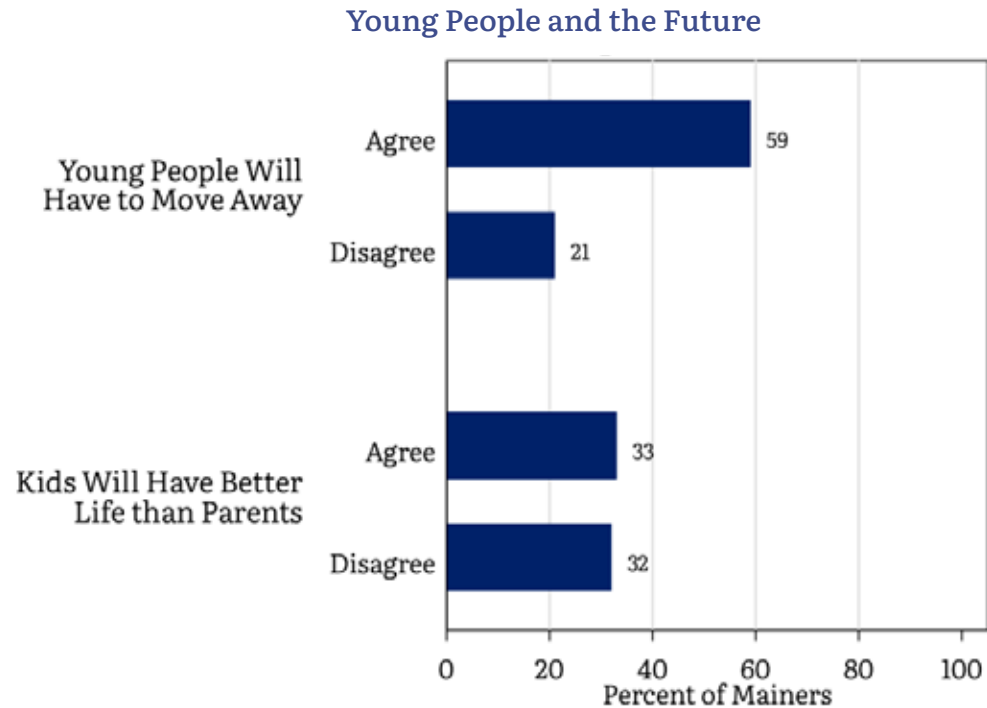
Many Mainers are not hopeful about the future of the nation or democracy.



Mainers are largely in agreement on this question, with few substantial gaps among demographic groups. The most notable one was the 15-point gap between rural (65%) and non-rural Mainers (50%) who believe young people will need to leave their hometown to find decent work “almost always” or “most of the time.” Likewise, *upstate residents* were more likely to believe youth have to move away, at 65% compared with 51% of *those living downstate*.

Related to the last finding, **60% of Mainers said they do not think young kids growing up in Maine will have a better life than their parents.** Thirty-two percent somewhat or strongly disagree with the idea. Thirty-three percent of Mainers think kids will have a better life, while 35% are not sure.”

Once again, *high-income residents* are more hopeful on this score than *low-income residents*. In addition, *men* are more positive than *women*. Notably, *young people* themselves are the least hopeful age group on this question, while the *oldest* Mainers are the most hopeful. Only 28% of 18-34 year olds think young people will do better than their parents. The most optimistic age group is the oldest one, age 65 and over, 36% of whom are hopeful that kids will have a better life than their parents.



Discussion

A strong majority (70%) of Mainers are hopeful about the state's future. That's a sign of some civic strength in the state. But there are other findings in the report that complicate the picture and suggest that this 70% might reflect a fragile rather than a stable or growing majority.

First, of the 70% of Mainers who express hope for the state's future, 49% of them are in the "somewhat hopeful" category, while the lesser portion (21%) are in the "very hopeful" category. So yes, a good deal of hope about the state exists, but the intensity is not as strong as it could be.

Second, hope about the state's future is somewhat unevenly distributed across demographic groups. Generally speaking, the better positioned one is economically and politically, the more likely one is to be hopeful about the state's future. Thus, higher-income and more educated Mainers are more hopeful than lower-income and less educated residents. And Democrats (whose party at this point in time controls the government) are more likely to be hopeful about the state than Republicans and Independents. This factor, though, should be kept in perspective: Even in the lower-hope groups, more people are hopeful about the state than are not.

A bigger challenge are the two final findings in this section on the future of Maine's young people. How stable is the hopeful 70% if significant majorities believe that (a) young people will need to leave their communities to find good jobs, and (b) young people are unlikely to have a better life than their parents?

Finally, a little over half of Mainers are not hopeful about the future of the nation and the future of democracy. This, of course, is a perception not prediction. But still, to the extent so many feel they are in a failing nation with a faltering democracy, how stable can their hope in the state remain?

Recommendations

1. *Upgrade the prospects of young Mainers.* It is hard to imagine anything speaking more directly to a state's future than the fate of young people. But a majority of Mainers are pessimistic that young people can make an economic go of it in their home community or that they'll end up with a better life than their parents. Upgrading those prospects should therefore be a priority. One thing to keep in mind based on our research is that rural communities are significantly more likely to feel that young people will need to leave to find good work; putting a special emphasis on improving the economic prospects of rural youth where they live ought therefore be given special consideration.
2. *Work to increase economic security in general.* In most instances, the lowest-income Mainers were also low on our hope-for-the-future indicators. It follows that raising the income floor and other means of lessening economic insecurity could help promote greater hope in the future. Of course, there are many reasons to ensure that all Mainers have ample economic opportunity and security, the potential impact on hope in Maine's future being just one of them.



Seventy percent of Mainers are hopeful about the state's future, a sign of civic strength. But other findings suggest this 70% might reflect a fragile rather than a stable or growing majority.



Photo credit: Drobot Dean



Methodology Statement

Data for this report on the state of civic health in Maine come from two sources. First, rates of national and statewide volunteering, participation, and voting come from the U.S. Census Bureau's Current Population Survey. Data on civic trust, belonging and mattering, community climate, civic knowledge, obstacles to participation, trust in elections/voting, and civic participation come from a supplemental survey designed by Quixada Moore-Vissing of Public Engagement Partners and Nicholas Jacobs of Colby College. The survey was fielded by Nicholas Jacobs in April 2024.

Census, Current Population Survey: The Current Population Survey (CPS) is the primary source of federal government statistics on employment and unemployment. The CPS has been conducted monthly for over 60 years, interviewing 54,000 households monthly. Every two years, the CPS contains a supplemental survey to assess "Volunteering and Civic Life" as well as rates of voting in midterm and presidential elections. This report draws on data from the 2021 Volunteering and Civic Life supplemental survey, and indicators include U.S. residents aged 16 years and older (N=45,548). Of that, 418 respondents reported living in Maine at the time of the survey. This gives statewide estimates for volunteering and civic engagement a margin of error of ± 4.8 percentage points. Subsequent demographic analysis inflates the margin of error and we only report subgroups where greater than 100 respondents exist. The 2022 (N=589 Mainers) and 2020 (N=626 Mainers) Voting and Registration Supplements produce estimates with a ± 3.6 and ± 3.0 margin of error, respectively. Estimates for rates of voting and registration at the national and state levels are calculated as a percentage of *citizens* older than 18 years. For all supplemental surveys, the Census weighs respondents to representative population demographics at the state and national levels. The comparative variables this report used from the Census data include age, generation, gender, income, and educational levels.

Supplemental Survey of Maine Population: Data specific to Maine is drawn from an online, nonprobability, opt-in survey of adults who report living in Maine, according to a ZIP code (N= 1,036). Quotas are established at the time of fielding for age-sex (interlocked) and region (Androscoggin, York, and Cumberland counties). To account for sample design, post-stratification weights using an iterative-proportional fitting (raking) method are pegged to ACS-2020 estimates of the Maine population, including percent college education, percent White, and age-sex interlocked parameters. The data are trimmed to remove any cases with outlier weights. For geography, respondents confirm what type of community they live in: "rural," "suburban," and "urban." Two attention checks are included in the survey instrument: A captcha, in which respondents with a level of agreement less than 0.7 were excluded (missed 30% of the captcha task); and a question asking respondents to choose a specific answer option. The organically occurring dropout rate was 10% (not including failed attentiveness). Quotas were re-established for each failed attention check/dropped respondent at the time of sampling. On average, respondents took 15 minutes to complete the survey. A research team analyzed open-ended responses to two questions (attitudes on new Mainers, civic fact on Janet Mills' office) with an intercoder reliability score of 0.95. The comparative variables used from the supplemental survey include age, gender, income, educational levels, partisan identity, community type (rural or non-rural) and location in the state (upstate and downstate).

The Census and supplemental survey used slightly different ways of categorizing age, income, and educational levels, so any discrepancies in the report can be explained by differing measurement among the two data sets. For further information about any particular indicator, please see the [online technical appendix](#) (see QR code at right).



ONLINE
TECHNICAL
APPENDIX*

On the back cover: Boulder Beach, Acadia National Park. Photo credit: Rixie

* <https://bit.ly/strengthening-maines-civic-health>





**GOLDFARB CENTER
FOR PUBLIC AFFAIRS**

Colby

Public Engagement Partners

