

civic engagement

HOW RESIDENTS PARTICIPATE IN THEIR COMMUNITY TO BUILD A VIBRANT HOUSTON REGION WITH OPPORTUNITY FOR ALL

When Houstonians stay connected and engaged, we cultivate trust and achieve more as a region. Places with high levels of civic engagement have lower levels of unemployment, better schools, stronger health and more responsive governments.¹ Civic engagement includes a variety of different activities an individual can take to shape the future of their community and to improve the condition of the community members.² A civically-engaged resident is invested in their community's overall well-being, that of its most marginalized groups, and actively works toward its betterment by engaging in the political process, participating in civic institutions and giving back.³ Combined, these indicators provide a way to measure the state of civic life across Houston and our community's capacity to meet the needs of all residents.

However, widespread civic participation is ultimately dependent on the levels of the perceived extent to which that community, society or government has held up its end of the social contract and developed trust among members.⁴ In 2020, less than half of Harris County residents believe that most people can be trusted, and in 2018, levels

of trust in Harris County were nearly nine percentage points lower than the national average. Trust levels have been shown to increase when community members belong to civic and social organizations and work to improve their community.⁵ However, residents throughout our region have lower access to opportunities to connect. Compared to the state and nation, Houston's three-county region is behind in the number of civic and social organizations available to residents.

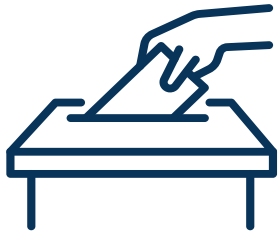
Of the various ways in which citizens can work to shape and improve their community, the act of selecting our representation at the local, state and federal levels of government is one of the most obvious and basic.⁶ And while the 2020 election inspired the biggest increase in voter registration and turnout in our region's recent history, we still lag national rates in the percentage of registered voters who ultimately cast a ballot, suggesting certain barriers still keep some residents away from the polls.

Nonprofit organizations in Houston's three-county region play an essential role in advancing civic engagement not only by improving the condition of our residents and their communities but also through the strengthening of social ties among those who actively participate by volunteering or donating to important causes.⁷ Studies have shown that volunteering one's time or money can increase general life satisfaction, happiness, self-esteem and overall psychological well-being.⁸ About half of Houstonians report donating at least \$25 to a nonprofit organization in 2019 and prior to widespread disruptions caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, about half of Houstonians also volunteered their time.

The more we can build trust and connection among our neighbors to ensure that the needs of all our residents are being met, levels of civic engagement in the Houston region will rise.



3 Subtopics of Civic Engagement



VOTER & NON-ELECTORAL PARTICIPATION

82%

of Black citizens in Greater Houston are registered to vote.



PHILANTHROPY & VOLUNTEERING

49%

of residents in Greater Houston donated at least \$25 to charitable organizations in 2019.



SOCIAL CONNECTEDNESS

46%

Only 46% of Harris County residents say "most people can be trusted" in 2020. Though low, levels of trust have increased 15 percentage points since 2014.

EXPLORE ALL SUBTOPICS FURTHER ON OUR WEBSITE WWW.UNDERSTANDINGHOUSTON.ORG

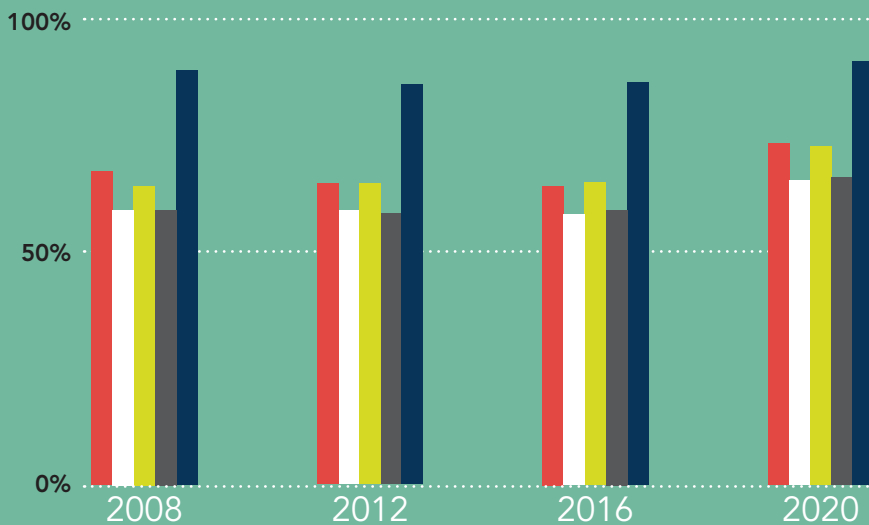
VOTER TURNOUT

Between 66% and 74% of registered voters in Houston's three-county region cast a ballot in the 2020 Presidential Election.

Trend over time: FB H M
 Compared to nation: FB H M

Percent of Registered Voters who Voted in Presidential Elections

■ Fort Bend ■ Harris ■ Montgomery ■ Texas ■ U.S.



Source: For counties and Texas: Texas Secretary of State; For U.S.: Census Bureau, Voting and Registration, Retrieved on April 29, 2021

LONELINESS



53%

About 53% of Houstonians sometimes or always felt lonely in 2019 — about five percentage points higher than in 2018.

Trend over time:
 Compared to nation:

PHILANTHROPY

Public Charities Per 10,000 Residents

FORT BEND = 21.7

HARRIS = 26.4

MONTGOMERY = 22.0

Trend over time:
 Compared to nation:

LEGENDS

LOCATIONS: FB Fort Bend H Harris M Montgomery

COMPARISONS: Better Worse Same No Info

See next page for references and data sources.

references

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2. Adler, R. P., & Goggin, J. (2005). What do we mean by “civic engagement”? *Journal of transformative education*, 3(3), 236-253.
3. Handy, F., Shier, M., & McDougale, L. M. (2014). Nonprofits and the Promotion of Civic Engagement: A Conceptual Framework for Understanding the “Civic Footprint” of Nonprofits within Local Communities. *Canadian Journal of Nonprofit and Social Economy Research*, 5 (1), 57-75. Retrieved from https://repository.upenn.edu/spp_papers/176.
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5. Wang, L., & Graddy, E. (2008). Social capital, volunteering, and charitable giving. *Voluntas: International Journal of Voluntary and Nonprofit Organizations*, 19 (1), 23.
6. Adler, R. P., & Goggin, J. (2005).
7. Schneider, J. A. (2007). Connections and disconnections between civic engagement and social capital in community-based nonprofits. *Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly*, 36(4), 572-597.
8. Konrath, S. (2014). The power of philanthropy and volunteering. *Wellbeing: A complete reference guide*, 1-40.

DATA SOURCES

SUBTOPICS

Social Connectedness: Kinder Houston Area Survey

Voter & Non-Electoral Participation: U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Survey - Voting and Registration Supplement

Philanthropy & Volunteering: U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Survey - Volunteering and Civic Life Supplement

INDICATOR HIGHLIGHTS

Loneliness: Cigna Loneliness Index

Voter Turnout: Texas Secretary of State

Public Charities per 10,000 Residents: Urban Institute, National Center for Charitable Statistics; U.S. Census Bureau, 2020 Decennial Census