

# 2023 CIVIC HEALTH ASSESSMENT

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Dear Kentuckian,

It is a great privilege to serve as the 86<sup>th</sup> Kentucky Secretary of State. In this role I have many duties, including managing elections, receiving business filings, holding land records, appointing notaries public, protecting the identity of domestic abuse victims, and filing and affirming numerous documents issued by the Governor and laws passed by the General Assembly.

These jobs are all critical components of democracy and help us in Kentucky to continue as a model of self-government both in the United States and abroad. Perhaps one of the most critical roles I have is to assess and promote civic health. Civic health can mean many things to many people. To me it is the bedrock of our society. It is not just going through the proper motions but understanding how they work for the common good.

To that end, I took on this Kentucky Civic Health Assessment to help understand how well we are doing as a government by the people – as a people, self-governing. To be frank, we need to do better. It is no secret that America is more divided than we can remember. But we are not just polarized; most signs suggest we are less engaged, less social, and more dogmatic in our differences.

Unfortunately, Kentucky is no exception. But Kentucky was founded by pioneers like Daniel Boone, who said they could do it better. They could tame a rugged wilderness, they could prosper where others could not, and they could maintain order better than those from eastern capitols.

We have had our ups and downs over the past 230 plus years, but in my mind, we have always been a leader. Even when we are down, we pick ourselves up better than most, dust ourselves off, and get down to work.

In this assessment, we have found some great strengths we hope to build on. We have also found some weaknesses, and like our forefathers and mothers, we can rise to the challenge and charge forward.

Many people today say that America is more divided than at any time since just before the Civil War. But it was Kentucky that produced Abraham Lincoln, who faced a divided nation and held that great nation together.

My hope is that in our own self-reflections on our current state of civic health, that our pioneering spirit and can-do attitude will be a model to bring this nation together once again. It is said a rising tide lifts all boats. I say a rising Kentucky lifts a nation.

I hope this report brings you pride but also some self-reflection. I hope it taps into that uniquely Kentucky spirit that beats in all our hearts.

Sincerely,

Michael G. Adams  
Secretary of State of the Commonwealth of Kentucky

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## Glossary

**Social Interactor** -a person which reports getting most of his or her political knowledge/leanings from interactions with friends and co-workers.

*Broadly Social Interactors* – These are persons who report getting most of their political knowledge/beliefs from social interactions within a more narrow group such as family or their religious community.

**Media Consumer** - a person who reports getting most of his or her political knowledge/leanings from media sources, including local and national broadcast media and social media.

**Reader** - someone who reports getting most of their political leanings from reading, which may include books, articles, print media, scholarly papers, etc.

**Fixed Mindset** - a person who believes he or she is has innate knowledge or skills, and is innately good, with policy preferences based on being a “good person.” Such are resistant to opinions and information that challenges their beliefs.

**Growth Mindset** - a person that believes he or she constantly growing and learning. In this context, such a person sees opposing views as an opportunity to learn facets of an issue not considered, which may either enhance one’s already held position or cause one to change such opinions.



***“Liberty cannot be preserved without a general knowledge among the people, who have a right...and a desire to know.” John Adams (1765)***

***“Freedom is never more than one generation away from extinction. We didn't pass it to our children in the bloodstream. It must be fought for, protected, and handed on for them to do the same.” - Ronald Reagan (1964)***

## Introduction

It is right and appropriate that from time to time we, as a self-governing people take stock of our civic health. As the two quotes above make clear, self-government, which is an expression of freedom and liberty, is dependent on a knowledgeable population. Such institutions of self-government are always at risk from a kind of atrophy that can permeate the body politic.

Most measures of civic health focus primarily on voter registration and voter turnout. To be sure, these are important measures, but they are only but a few pieces in a larger puzzle.

If a doctor measured a patient's physical health in the same way civic health is often measured, the doctor would check to see if the patient had a gym membership and how frequently such membership is used – but not necessarily HOW it is used. That would largely be the extent of an annual check-up, and as a nation or state we would measure overall health improvements and declines based on these aggregate figures.

That simply does not tell the whole story. In fact, according to Statista<sup>i</sup>, nearly 65 million Americans have gym memberships, while at the same time the Center for Disease Control (CDC) reports 73% of Americans over age 20 are overweight or obese<sup>ii</sup>.

Just as we cannot measure physical health primarily through the prism of gym memberships, we cannot measure civic health exclusively by voter registration. We must consider other factors in what constitutes a civically healthy nation and state. In addition to voter turnout we must look deeper. How are we voting? Do we know the candidates we are voting for, the offices they seek, and how those offices function in government?

Like other measures of civic health, this report will consider raw data on voter registration and turnout. However, it will also delve deeper to understand how civically healthy we appear to be as a nation and Commonwealth.

To that end, we must not ignore the linkage between civic health and social health.

In the groundbreaking *Bowling Alone*, Robert Putnam documents both the linkage between social/community engagement and civic health, and socialization's precipitous decline since the middle part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. As Putnam argues, when we form bonds with others outside of politics, we become better informed and engaged civically.<sup>iii</sup>

You share a connection with the person you bowl with or the fellow parent at the PTA meeting. Such activities force us to form a diverse network of relationships, but also to form diverse bonds tying us together in each relationship. You come to know persons

as your bowling partner, maybe randomly selected to play on a team together. You meet people at church potlucks, whom you first know through faith and food.

You learn about them, about other common experiences and interests, forming more and more bonds. Thus, when politics do arise, both actors are willing to listen and understand their mutual differences. This is because we know each other as more than being members of the same or different political tribes. Political differences may break a single bond; multiple and stronger bonds are harder to break, but we are more easily divided if there is no bond to begin with.

While Putnam shows declining participation in groups that foster diverse social networks; Bill Bishop documents in *The Big Sort*, that to the extent we do still gather, we cluster with likeminded people. Not only do we not join bowling leagues anymore, but the groups, and even the locations we live, are more homogeneous than ever.

This matriculates out into what sources of information we consume and trust. It is no secret that today, people rely on news sources that align with their political ideology and distrust others completely. Yet as numerous studies have shown, the more homogeneous we become with our associations and sources of information, the more extreme and dogmatic we become of our positions.

All this adds up to a recipe for civic polarization and tribalization, which can become unhealthy. It is not that such things are innately bad at some levels. UK and Louisville fans are polarized and tribal,

and no one is particularly aggrieved by this. Perhaps we can become very passionate about sports, but most people's lives are not directly impacted by them.

Consider this sports dynamic taken to an extreme. If two respective fan bases have such animosity toward each other that they cannot watch a game together or even talk to each other, it becomes a larger problem.<sup>1</sup> Moreover, it is a problem when loyalties infringe on our ability to see the game uniformly and consistently. Most of us have seen this dynamic at play, "the refs cost us the game." "That rule was not applied correctly."

These sports divisions manifest in other ways too. We gravitate towards news and commentary that support our tribal loyalties. We tend to like news that affirms our team is the best (or at least better than others believe) and reject news that suggests something else. We like to cite statistics that reenforce our points of view and discount those that do not. More often, we believe folklore about our teams and stereotypes about our opponents. These folklores and stereotypes are fostered by self-segregating by team loyalties.

Again, this is just sports, but we can see that many of these same dynamics exist in our civic dealings.

The three dynamics we have laid out here can be a toxic mix for civic health. If we minimally participate, socially withdraw, and are passionately tribal, then we are not a civilly healthy society; even if we all are registered to vote and do so. Conversely, if we are more directly engaged, diversely interactive, and less

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<sup>1</sup> It may be an even bigger problem with two rival institutions refuse to collaborate on research and

thus the benefits of academic collaboration are lost to tribal loyalties.

tribal, it would seem we would be more civically healthy.

## Methodology

This report relies on government statistics such as voter registration and turnout, undervote, etc. for both Kentucky, other states, and the nation.

Generally, to get an understanding of national trends we relied on publicly available private surveys like those conducted by the Pew Foundation and Gallup.

We also commissioned our own survey, conducted by Eighteen92, of 800 likely Kentucky voters in September 2023, to specifically assess civic understanding and engagement in the Commonwealth. As we said in the introduction, truly assessing civic health goes beyond rote voter registration and turnout data. This survey helped to fill in data regarding where someone gets information or how knowledgeable they are about the structure of government.

## Format of the Report

This report is broken into three sections: Direct Participation, Social Civics, and Polarization. In all categories this report seeks to establish some national trends and an analysis of how the Commonwealth of Kentucky compares.

Only in the Direct Participation section do we talk about Kentucky-specific statistics as they relate to national and state data within each subsection.

In the two subsequent sections, we first discuss national trends and observations, and then we discuss and compare our analysis of the Commonwealth in a discrete subsection.

The use of these different formats is justified in that static data such as national voter turnout and Kentucky turnout can easily be compared side-by-side with little explanation. In the latter two sections, it is more practical to introduce the concepts of social civics and polarization at a national level and give the reader an understanding of them before turning to the application of those concepts to Kentucky-specific data.

## Acknowledgments

This report would not have been possible without the generous financial support of the **Center for Secure and Modern Elections** and **The McConnell Center at the University of Louisville**.





## Direct Participation

### Voter Registration and Turnout

Any question of civic health must start with voter registration and voter turnout. However, these are imperfect measures. Voter registration has a controversial past; it is a check on voter fraud, but it has also been used to disenfranchise voters in the past. Thus, rote registration statistics present difficulties in their use as a measuring civic health.

According to MIT, roughly 94 percent of eligible Americans were registered to vote in 2020. But even MIT concedes that number is likely inflated. People die, go to prison, and move away without being removed from the voting rolls. Federal and State law ensure that voters are not removed prematurely and thereby disenfranchised.

Based on the available data on inactive voters, MIT further revises its estimate to roughly 85 percent of eligible voters are registered.<sup>iv</sup> This may be more accurate, but it is still likely inflated given that persons move between the intervals of activity (elections). In short, an indeterminant number of people are likely oversampled in national registration statistics.

**Taking into account voter roll maintenance was largely ignored from 2012 through 2019 in Kentucky, and recent clean-up efforts can only “catch up” so fast due to federal and state law, it is likely that Kentucky is probably close to being in line with national registration trends.**

Nonetheless, voter registration nationwide and in Kentucky appear to be high; and while voter registration may be

high (though probably deceptively so), voter turnout is objectively low. According to the Washington Post, the 2020 election produced the highest turnout of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century thus far, at 66 percent. That means that one in three persons who registered to vote chose not to – in our best year. In comparison, the 2000 election only produced a slightly better than 50 percent turnout.<sup>v</sup>

Kentucky lagged national averages, producing only 60.3 percent turnout in 2020.<sup>vi</sup> Yet in 2000, Kentucky surpassed the national average, posting a 61.3 percent turnout.<sup>vii</sup>

Midterm elections report lower voter turnout. Nationally, the 2018 midterm was the highest in twenty years at just under 50 percent turnout. The Washington Post estimates the 2022 midterm election saw a decline to 46 percent. Throughout the 21<sup>st</sup> Century midterm elections have enjoyed roughly a 30 to 35 percent turnout.<sup>viii</sup> In other words 2 in 3 registered voters chose not to vote in the midterms.

Again, Kentucky seems to go from the front of the pack to lagging national averages. In 2022 Kentucky turnout was 41.9 percent, or about 8.9 percent less than the estimated national turnout. Interestingly, Kentucky seemed to significantly outpace the national average through the 2014 midterm, where national turnout was around 30 percent and Kentucky turnout was 45.9 percent; by the next midterm in 2018, Kentucky lagged by 7 percent.<sup>ix</sup>

**The shift from a relatively high turnout state to a moderately low turnout state can likely be attributed to previous failures to maintain voting roles.** For almost a decade, every ineligible person who remained on the

Kentucky voting rolls artificially depressed turnout statistics.

Moreover, immense efforts go into voter registration drives under the auspice of improving civic health. **When more than 90 percent of eligible voters are registered and between half and two thirds of them choose not to vote, the problem does not appear to be in the unregistered voters.**

**Taking into account voter roll maintenance was largely ignored from 2012 through 2019 in Kentucky, and recent clean-up efforts can only “catch up” so fast due to federal and state law, it is likely that Kentucky is probably close to being in line with national registration trends.**

Nonetheless, midterm elections are especially important in judging civic health, and their generally lower turnout is troubling.

While members of Congress vote on national issues, they must be cognizant of local affairs. Unlike a presidential election, where a candidate may never visit a state, let alone a geographic area within the state, candidates for Congress must physically be in the districts.<sup>2</sup> Thus, these elections are less flashy, but more localized. A civically healthy populace should be relatively engaged in these elections.

As we note, Kentucky is likely not outside the national trend, but the national trend is not encouraging.

**Have you checked the Blinker Fluid on your Government lately?**

Have you checked your blinker fluid lately?

That is something of joke car enthusiasts say to each other, but it is also a rudimentary test of how knowledgeable people are about how a car works.

There is no such thing as blinker fluid. It is the automotive equivalent of snake oil. But a person’s reaction to that question tells the asker all they need to know about the other’s knowledge of cars. An unscrupulous mechanic or car salesman may use variations of this joke to know if they can sell you products and repairs you do not need.

Catching the con does not mean you know how to overhaul the engine or replace a broken tie-rod, but you probably don’t need to pay extra to have a professional clean your battery terminals or check your tire pressure – or have your blinker fluid topped off.

We hope politicians and other civic actors may be more honest in their dealings (pause for laughter), but a basic understanding of the government machine helps protect citizens from similar kinds of deceptions.

As part of our survey we asked some rudimentary knowledge questions about government and the actors therein. Questions included naming the three branches of government, naming Kentucky’s two federal senators, identifying current Kentucky constitutional officers with the offices they hold, and confirming whether respondents could name one of their state legislators and one local official (city, county, or school board).

<sup>2</sup> Note, Members of the House of Representatives are not required to live in their districts, but

presumably they would still need to campaign and locate district offices there.

There was no trick; we were simply attempting to get a barometer of how knowledgeable Kentuckians were of the government they elected, even at a very minimal level.

One point of clarification. Just because you do not know blinker fluid is not a thing, it does not mean you do not have a right to drive or that a puddle of oil on your driveway or the knocking under the hood is not a good sign. You have a right to have a mechanic fix those problems at a mutually agreeable price.

The same is true of government. Our government is a government by the people, and all people have a right to engage as they see fit – even if they do not understand it. It is perfectly acceptable to engage civically without basic knowledge of the machinery of government.

If you want to buy a quart of proverbial blinker fluid, that is your choice. However, we all can agree, that is not a healthy purchase. The same is true of government; knowledge is power – not just the power to get recourse for policy issues, but to resist deceptions.

### *Civically Knowledgeable Voters*

As noted in the methodology section, we commissioned a survey of 800 likely voters.<sup>x</sup> Almost 91 percent report voting in every or almost every election. They were representatively split by age, education, geography, party affiliation, and race. In short it was a very representative sample of people that vote in Kentucky elections.

Overall, Kentucky performed better than national trends. Only 8.3 percent of those polled in our survey could not name the governor. According to a Johns

Hopkins' study, about one-third of Americans cannot. While only 20 percent of Americans can name a state legislator, 44.8 percent of Kentuckians can.<sup>xi</sup> Almost 52 percent of Kentuckians could name all three branches of government; less than half of that percentage nationally could do the same according the American Federation of Teachers.<sup>xii</sup>

Still, being less unhealthy than others does not make one healthy.

Of those that could name all three branches of government, only 71.1 percent knew both Kentucky senators. Of this sample, 80.9 percent were able to name the Governor, 62.7 percent knew who the Attorney General was, and approximately 50 percent knew the other four Kentucky constitutional offices. Approximately 60 percent knew at least one of their state legislators and local officers.

In aggregate, approximately one-fourth of likely Kentucky voters fully met this basic mark of civic knowledge.

We also can deduce that roughly one-third of likely voters can name all branches of government and at least three or four of the most prominent state-wide elected officials and the offices they hold. Another 5 percent of our sample correctly named two branches of government, both U.S. senators and a statewide constitutional officer.

**Therefore, slightly less than two-thirds of regular Kentucky voters appear to have a minimum knowledge of government.**

This is an encouraging statistic and more informative than measures of voter registration and voter turnout. We can ascertain who the proverbial gym members are (voter registration), how many check-in

on a regular basis (voter turnout), but now we can determine how many actually have a basic understanding of the equipment and facilities.

However, we must be cautious with this assessment. Government is considerably more complicated than the limits of our survey. Knowing there are three branches of government does not necessarily mean one knows how those branches operate and interact. Knowing Kentucky's senators does not mean someone understands federalism. Knowing who is the state Treasurer or Auditor, does not mean a person knows how money is spent and accounted.

These people might not be sold on a quart of governmental blinker fluid, but they are still vulnerable to misinformation and deception.

Moreover, these results may not be encouraging given the timing of the survey. It was conducted in an election year and less than one year removed from a senatorial election. At the time of the survey, five of the seven constitutional officers were seeking statewide election, and the other two had been candidates for statewide office prior to the primary, only a few months earlier. Less than a year earlier Kentucky reelected one of its federal senators and held state legislative elections.

In other words, at the time of the survey, Kentuckians should have been the most aware of who represents them and in what capacities. Yet, 42.7 percent of respondents could not name the U.S. senator reelected (not a new senator) less than a year earlier. More than one-fourth of respondents could not place the Attorney General with his office, despite being his party's nominee for Governor in an election that would occur in less than 90 days. Of the remaining four constitutional officers, at best 35.8 percent of participants were able to place the officeholder with his or her office.

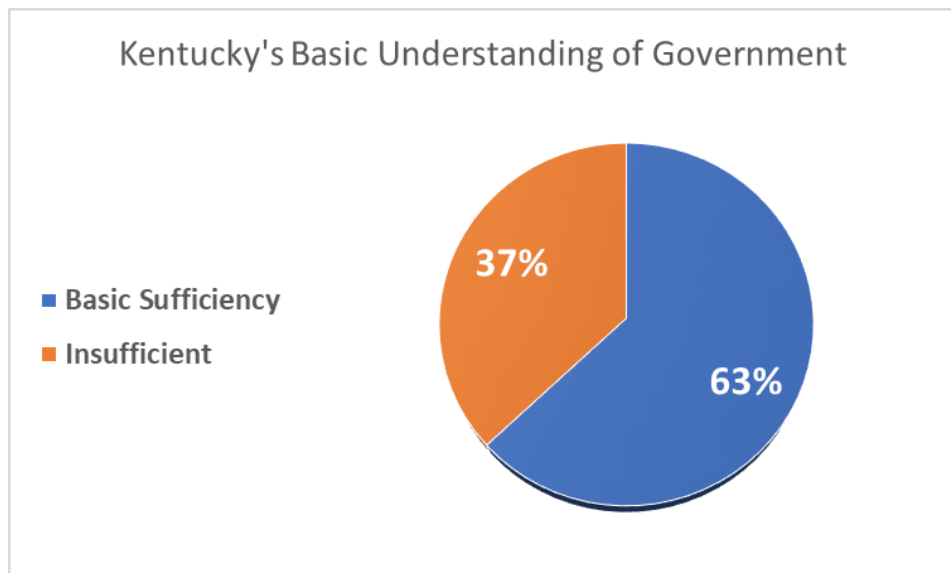


Figure 1-Results of Civic Health Survey - Knowledge Assessment

That is not encouraging. **Even worse, and certainly troubling, is that slightly more than one-fourth of our respondents, who are regular voters, could not successfully name ONE branch of government. Of this group, 71.3 percent could not name either of Kentucky's senators, and 36 percent could also not name the Governor.**

### *Undervote and Rational Ignorance*

Society tends to equate not voting with not caring or not being engaged, and thus not being civically healthy. A previous subsection (and most civic assessments) make such an argument - that low turnout equates to some degree of civic deficiency.

However, social scientists of all disciplines, but particularly political science, recognize a concept of *rational ignorance*. The theory is a person may feel insufficiently informed (or able to become informed) to make a reasoned choice in an election, and that because of that, it is more prudent to not participate.

It may be a civically healthy behavior to refrain from engagement when one feels unprepared to engage.

It is impossible to determine, of those not voting, how many do so because of rational ignorance.

However, we can measure the “undervote” of voters to ascertain the number of rationally ignorant voters.<sup>3</sup> According to MIT, “[a]n intentional undervote occurs when a voter takes into account the information available on the ballot about a particular contest and chooses to not cast a vote because of indifference, strategic abstention, or to protest the choices available.”<sup>xiii</sup>

In other words, on a race-by-race basis these voters switch between active voters and rationally ignorant voters. They feel qualified to vote in one race on a ballot but not another.

Data on national undervote is sparse at best. However, MIT looked at Florida in the context of undervote in the

2018 midterm election, a year with an open governor’s race at the top of the ballot.

What MIT found was informative. Undervote for voters who voted for a major party’s gubernatorial candidate was less than three percent for a down-ballot statewide race.

Among the three statewide down ballot races, (Attorney General, Treasurer, and Agriculture Commissioner) undervote was the lowest for Attorney General, and highest for Treasurer, with Agriculture Commissioner in between. Nonetheless the highest race specific undervote was 2.7 percent.<sup>xiv</sup>

A year later Kentucky held a similar election including the same three down-ballot officers examined in Florida. For each of the three offices Kentucky’s undervote was higher though generally in line with Florida. The one exception to this trend is more than double the percentage of Kentucky voters undervoted for Agriculture Commissioner. In fact, nearly 6 percent of persons that voted in 2019, did not vote in the Agriculture Commissioner race.<sup>xv</sup>

While agriculture does touch every voter, and the Agriculture Commissioner’s scope of office is somewhat broader than may appear at first glance, this office is the narrowest in terms of natural constituency. So, it is not surprising, and arguably it is encouraging, that six percent of Kentucky voters appear to have made the rationally ignorant decision to undervote in this race.

Overall, the data would seem to demonstrate that a small but not insignificant segment of Kentucky voters

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<sup>3</sup> An undervote occurs when someone casts a ballot but does not make a selection in one or more races.



are willing to restrain themselves if they feel incapable of making an informed choice.

### *Blindly Obligated*

If considered restraint is a civically healthy behavior, then one must reason that the inverse would be civically unhealthy. One manifestation of this is the *blindly obligated voter*.

A blindly obligated voter is a person that believes obligation to vote outweighs lack of knowledge about the candidate and office for which he or she is voting. As we have already seen, approximately one-third of Kentucky voters generally fall into this category.

In the previous subsection we noted that a relatively small, but not insignificant population of voters undervote in down-ballot offices.

However, in our survey, we found that **between 27.1 and 75.1 percent of likely Kentucky voters did not know what down-ballot office the persons elected in 2019 actually hold.**<sup>xvi</sup> Yet the highest undervote in 2019 was less than 6 percent. In other words, this indicates that a significant amount of *blind voting* occurs down-ballot.

While it is important that everyone who wants to vote and has the right to vote, is allowed to vote regardless of knowledge of candidates and offices sought, one would be hard pressed to make an argument for blind voting as beneficial to the democratic process.

In fact, most states take blind voting serious enough that they produce voter guides and blue books which provide an overview of the elected officers in the state and state government in general (blue books) and/or election specific information for voters (voter guide).

These are user-friendly tools that citizens can use to educate themselves about both the existing structure of their government and/or upcoming elections.

Blue books<sup>4</sup> are something of a state political almanac, while voting guides are information packets specific to an election. In both cases these are usually produced by the Secretary of State.

Kentucky is one of only a handful of states that do not produce either a blue book or a voting guide. In fact, 42 states publish one or the other, while ten do both.<sup>xvii</sup> Some are entirely online, while others are still made available in print.<sup>5</sup>

These guides are not a magic cure to blind voting, but certainly provide important information about the offices and candidates to the voters. Most find the guides important to encourage voters to vote in the first place.

And while blue books are not election-specific, we found they were associated with between 3.27 and 5.75 percent higher turnout than the national average. Voters' guides had a small but positive association with turnout.

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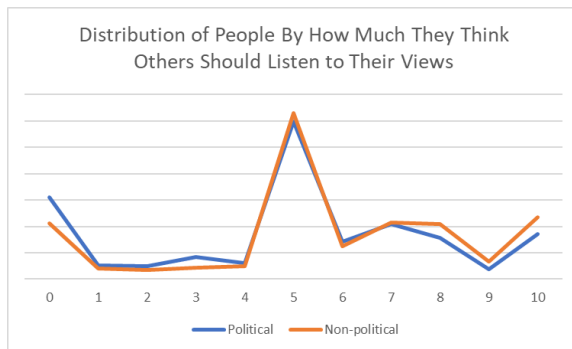
<sup>4</sup> Historically having blue covers

<sup>5</sup> The Kentucky Secretary of State's office does offer candidates an opportunity to place a statement about their candidacy on the SOS website.

### *Irrationally Knowledgeable Voter*

If a rationally ignorant person and a blind voter exist, there must also be an *irrationally knowledgeable* voter. This is in practice a blind voter that feels sufficiently knowledgeable.

In our survey, we asked people to what degree they believed others should listen to them about political issues and separately asked the same question about non-political issues. Presumably people answered both questions relatively similarly.



As the chart depicts, we were correct, respondents answered similarly. Although, generally confidence in non-political views were higher. Respondents with a high confidence<sup>6</sup> in their non-political views outnumbered those with high confidence in their political views by 40.4 percent.

This implies that people are generally less certain about their political views and knowledge than they are about non-political issues. So, one could assume the 18.3 percent of responses that identified with a high political confidence, must have some certainty in their political/civic knowledge.

**Instead, we found 45.6 percent identifying as politically confident failed**

<sup>6</sup> Those answering 8-10 on a 10 point scale.

**to correctly name the three branches of government. Of the same politically confident group, 38.5 percent could not name both Kentucky U.S. Senators, and between 13 and 43.6 percent could not link a down-ballot constitutional officer with the office held. Finally, of this highly confident group, 42.9 percent couldn't identify their state legislator and a similar 41.3 percent could not identify a local official.**

This voter profile is similar to those we identified earlier as insufficiently knowledgeable voters. Since the two are not mutually exclusive, they may apply to both. The inverse of this data suggests that approximately half of these highly confident voters may be justified in that view.

Regardless, not only are one in three voters insufficiently knowledgeable about the people and offices they are voting for – in effect blind voting - but one in three of those voters believe they are exactly the opposite: highly knowledgeable voters. That is not civically healthy.

### *Civics Education*

While there are some encouraging findings from our survey, there is a lot about which to be concerned.

In his *Notes on the State of Virginia (1781)*, which included Kentucky at the time, Thomas Jefferson, argues for a public system of education as a means of ensuring and protecting democracy.

Every government degenerates when trusted to the rulers of the people alone. The people themselves therefore are its only safe depositories. And to

render even them safe their minds must be improved to a certain degree. <sup>xviii</sup>

Jefferson is arguing that government by the people has inherent dangers, but that knowledge deposited in the people helps mitigate such ills.

We all know from bell bottoms, slap bracelets, and pet rocks that sometimes people can get caught up in a trend. That might be OK for fashion, but it can be extremely dangerous for self-government.

Checks and balances, republican government, and federalism all help resist popular deceptions and ill-considered trends. But Jefferson and others argued that formal education was also key to building good citizens who would not be susceptible to such follies.

Jefferson did not want us to buy blinker fluid and education was key.

How are we doing?

According to the American Federation of Teachers (AFT), about a quarter of all Americans cannot name the three branches of government. This is not surprising given that only 23 percent of eight-graders “performed at or above the proficient level on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) civics exam, and achievement levels have virtually stagnated since 1998.”<sup>xix</sup>

While Jefferson saw school as a means to build good citizens, school seems to have lost appreciation for that mission. Only nine states require one full year of civics education, while 30 states provide a half year. Eleven states, including Kentucky, do not require dedicated civics education in high school.<sup>xx</sup>

**Funding varies by state, but the federal government only invests five cents per student on K-12 civics education, while spending \$54 per student on STEM education.<sup>xxi</sup> That is a 0.0009 to 1 ratio in spending.<sup>7</sup> That ratio may hold for knowledge of the respective subjects too.**

Nationally, fewer than a quarter of 8<sup>th</sup> graders are proficient in civics. We are unable to report how Kentucky 8<sup>th</sup> graders compare because NAPE only displays state-level data for Math, Reading, Science, and Writing. The exclusion of state level civics data is telling in terms of what the federal government expects states to prioritize.

Kentucky schools may not be required to teach civics, but every high school graduate must pass the U.S. Naturalization Exam before obtaining a diploma.<sup>xxii</sup>

According to U.S. News and World Report, Kentucky has a 94 percent high school graduation rate.<sup>xxiii</sup> Consequently,

<sup>7</sup> At the same time, per Executive Order 14019 (Biden 2021), a condition to receive such funding is

that schools must make voter registration cards available to eligible students.

such graduates must have passed the civics exam.

Does this indicate Kentucky high school graduates have demonstrated competency in civics? Immigrants seeking citizenship have an 89.5 percent passage rate on their first attempt, and 96.1 percent pass eventually.<sup>xxiv</sup> For both groups, new citizens and Kentucky high school graduates, only 60 percent correct is required to pass.

The low threshold and high success rate for non-citizens indicates the test is probably not a good barometer of civic competency for a U.S. high school graduate. Certainly, high school students should be as competent civically as naturalized citizens.

However, the two populations are different; the citizenship test may be fully appropriate for someone who is a post high-school immigrant - someone new to this country who was not schooled in our system of government. We should expect a higher competency for the product of a Kentucky education.

An examination of the citizenship exam material shows this minimum standard is hardly on a high school level competency. The citizenship test asks test takers, and by proxy Kentucky high school students, to name ONE branch of government; and “president,” as opposed to the proper name, “Executive,” is an acceptable answer. Another question is, “who vetoes bills,” a third is, who the current president is, and fourth is who is the commander-in-chief of the military?<sup>xxv</sup>

Meanwhile a sample Governor’s Cup question for elementary school kids is:

The person holding this federal office can veto bills and is the

nation's commander-in-chief. The office is the head of the executive branch of the federal government. What political position is held by Barack Obama?<sup>xxvi</sup>

In other words, to graduate from a Kentucky high school we expect a high school student to have the same relative understanding of what the president does as we do an elementary school student - albeit a somewhat advanced elementary school student.

If an elementary school student is expected to know basic concepts about the president, a high school student should be expected to understand in greater detail - explain the differences in a signing statement, an executive order, a regulation, and a law. If an elementary school student is expected to know the legislature passes laws, at the least one would hope a high school senior could name the two legislators that represent Kentucky in the U.S. Senate.

For those questions in our survey not also on the citizenship exam, **the closer a respondent was to high school age, the less likely a response was correct.** This implies that our minimal high school requirement is leaving our graduates less informed about Kentucky government than people who have independently acquired knowledge of their own volition, including those who have moved from out of state.

A Kentucky high school student must pass Geometry to graduate, which includes such things as the Pythagorean theorem and determining the area of a circle or a square. However, if this requirement were analogous to the civics

# What's the Difference?

## Expected Civics Knowledge of Kentucky School Students

**High School**

- What is the name of the President of the United States now?
- Who vetoes bills?
- Who is in charge of the executive branch?
- Who is the Commander in Chief of the military?

**Elementary School**

- The person holding this federal office can veto bills and is the nation's commander-in-chief. The office is the head of the executive branch of the federal government. What political position is held by Barack Obama?

standard, students would simply have to identify a triangle, a square, and a circle, with a 60 percent success rate.

While Kentucky is not alone in using the Naturalization test as its standard, it might be wise to look to neighboring Ohio for guidance.

Ohio's civics/government high school graduation test has fewer questions but requires more depth of knowledge.<sup>xxvii</sup> A full sample test can be found in Appendix 2, but two examples are published below.

Sanjay is reading a new book on Congress to see if it will work as a source for his report on the legislative branch.

In the Answer Document, select the letters before two sentences from biographical information about the author that can help Sanjay determine the author's credibility.

(A) Asha Torres is the best-selling author of *To Counteract Ambition: The Fights of the Founding Founders*. (B) She proudly passed out flyers for her father's school board campaign at age 16. (C) After she graduated from college, she worked for the governor as an administrative assistant. (D) She represented Ohio's 20th district in Congress from 2003 to 2015. (E) She is now the head of the political science department at State University. (F) She lives with her family in Youngstown. (G) You can sign up for her current events newsletter to read her opinion on the latest news from Washington.

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Which statement accurately describes the relationship between the Ohio Constitution and the U.S. Constitution?

- A. Ohio laws overrule federal laws when there is a conflict.
- B. All articles of the Ohio Constitution must be the same as all articles of the U.S. Constitution.



C. The structure of the Ohio Constitution does not resemble the structure of the U.S. Constitution.

D. The Ohio Constitution is consistent with the key principles of the U.S. Constitution, but contains some laws that differ from the laws of the U.S. Constitution.

## Social Civics

### National Spotlight

As mentioned in the introduction, social interactions are an important contributor to civic health. This manifests in several ways, not the least of which is in developing non-political bonds in advance of political discussion.

Bowling leagues and other social ventures were a central theme of Robert Putnam's *Bowling Alone* because such activities bring people together from different walks of life for a common purpose. That purpose may establish a bond, but subsequent bonds can develop through additional interactions. The plumber may talk to the retailer, while also bowling with the factory worker and banker. And in so doing they share something of their lives, their families, their professions, and their backgrounds.

Putman shows that by establishing these friendships, political tribalism is muted to some extent and we become civically healthier for it.

Politics today, from the left and right, follows a philosophy that one's beliefs are reasoned, moral, and just; and thus, opposing views must be based on ignorance, corruption, or hate. Therefore,

we are not receptive to opposing views, or even facts that challenge our perceptions.<sup>8</sup>

Social relationships can show others are not ignorant, corrupt, or hateful in a non-political context. Despite political disagreement, both actors are more inclined to listen and understand each other in a political context – even if they ultimately disagree.<sup>xxviii</sup>

In short, you are more likely to be friendly about politics, government, and civic society, if you are already friendly.

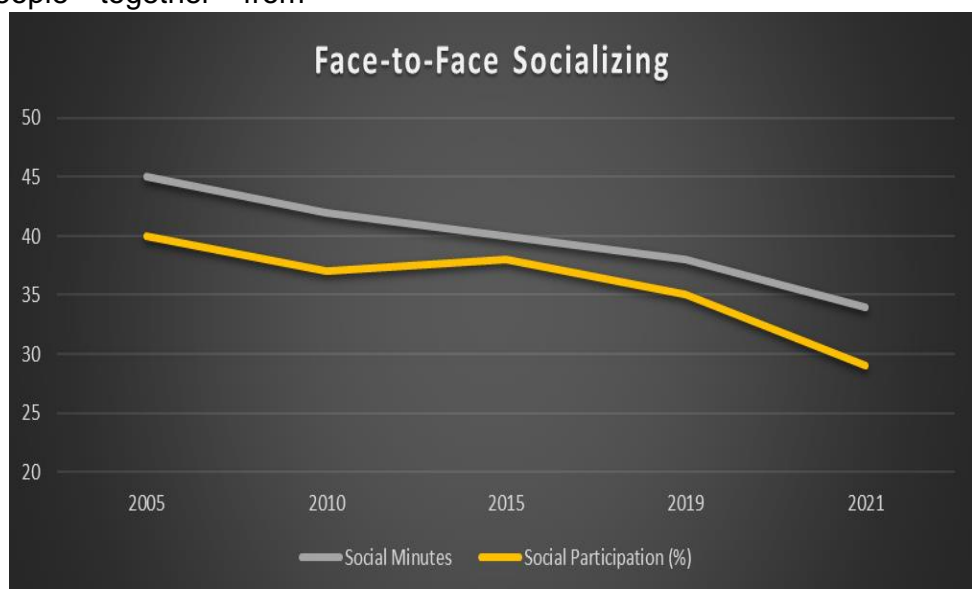


Figure 2- BLS Time Use Survey -Leisure Statistics.

In fact, you do not even have to be friends or even know each other. Two researchers from Stanford and the University of California Berkeley found that when random "outpartisans" (people with opposing views) are forced to discuss their "perfect day," their partisan animus was nearly eliminated; "a topic that fosters a discussion of shared views or experiences, rather than discussing areas of disagreement, may prove a more effective

<sup>8</sup> This is more fully discussed in the next section, under the subsection of "Politically Fixed Mindset"

way [than discussing differences] of reducing affective polarization.”<sup>xxix</sup>

The lasting effects continue for a few months...for strangers. How much better could the effect be in an ongoing relationship?

Not only do we become more politically peaceful, we become more civically minded and healthy. The same dynamics of incomplete, false, and misleading information still exist in this context. Much like how the free-market helps society learn about and evaluate products and services, a freer exchange of personal experiences and political preference helps facilitate greater civic understanding.

It is convenient to believe opposing views are irrational, and that our own are correct. If we do not know the person challenging us, we can easily dismiss him or her as ignorant, evil, or corrupt. We can be very ignorant and feel very correct in our positions.

**But if we cannot dismiss one with an opposing view, we may have to consider that view. This requires us to understand our opponent’s position better and in so doing, examine our own in more depth. And that makes us much more civically healthy.**

### Declining Social Interactions

As these types of interactions decline, our civic understanding would follow suit. Unfortunately, we know these kinds of interactions are declining. In America today, we are less likely to engage in activities that bring us together with diverse people.

According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, Americans spend roughly 5 hours every day on “leisure and sport” activities. We spend 3 hours watching TV, the majority of our leisure time. That has been consistent throughout the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. Meanwhile, we devote just 34 minutes (11% of leisure time) of every day, on average, to social activities such as “visiting with friends or attending or hosting social events.”<sup>xxx</sup>

Over time, we have seen a decrease in face-to-face social leisure participation. In 2005, 40 percent of Americans engaged in face-to-face leisure. Today that number is only 29 percent, a 32 percent drop.<sup>xxxi</sup>

What about social media? Is it a good substitute for bowling leagues and churches? We will discuss social media more in the next section, however, there is a wide range of research on how, and if, social media is an appropriate stand-in for in-person interactions. Most research comes to the same general conclusion: Facebook can’t replace face-to-face, at least not in terms of quality. The main issue is that while, “face-to-face conversation which can flow naturally, easily segueing from one topic to the next, online conversations may be more restricted.”<sup>xxxii</sup>

Contrast bowling leagues, churches, or PTAs to a Facebook group. In a face-to-face interaction, conversations tend to deviate and explore numerous topics. This creates non-political bonds that help temper our political fury.

A Facebook post or even a Twitter (“X”) feed are discrete broadcasts that are more akin to yelling in a crowd than to talking in a group. Think of talking to someone (friend or stranger) by the punch

bowl at a social event. Talk is natural, you comment on the venue, the weather, the food, how you are dressed, others at the event, etc.

**If politics comes up in a face-to-face conversation, it is one of many subjects being explored. Controversy can be blunted by deviating to another subject. Even in a controversial discussion there is rarely an audience to perform to, and supporting facts are drawn from memory not the corners of the internet.**

That can prompt an, “I’ll look into that response,” allowing people to conduct their own research, under more temperate conditions, and for their own edification as opposed to scoring argument points.

The exact opposite is true on social media. You are talking to a crowd as much as another party and conversation does not evolve. Though supporting facts may be more readily at our disposal, they are less trusted (we will discuss that later).

Online there is also lower risk. We do not really know the person whom we went to high school with, three states over, 20 years ago. If they get offended or they offend you, you can easily walk away, almost

instantly, without really affecting your life.

In face-to-face

communication, you might lose a partner you depend on for some activity, or at the least you may have to avoid someone for an hour at a social event.

As we decrease face-to-face social interactions, and gravitate to social media, our civic health suffers.

### How Kentucky Stacks Up

Unfortunately, the Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) does not break down data on leisure time usage by state. It is hard to make a direct comparison between Kentucky and the national statistics, but our survey can shed some light on Kentuckians’ social civic health.

According to our survey, only 3.3 percent of Kentucky voters (henceforth referred to as Social Interactors) report social interactions with friends and coworkers as a main source of their political leanings. We separately asked about social media, so these people were distinctly face-to-face persons.

It is likely, some people are Social Interactors but did not list social interaction as their primary source of political opinions. A friend may tell you about something, which you later research and therefore identify as a “Reader” as opposed to a Social Interactor.

However, when 29 percent of people nationally report regular face-to-

face social engagement, and only 3.3 percent of Kentuckians are self-identified

Social Interactors, we may infer that Kentucky is less socially engaged than the national average.

That is disappointing because, we know from our survey that Social

**With 3.3 percent of Kentuckians self-identifying as Social Interactors, we may infer that Kentucky is less socially engaged than the national average.**

**That is disappointing because, we know from our survey that Social Interactors excel in civic health.**

Interactors excel in civic health. We asked in our survey how political opinions had changed over time; 22.2 percent reported having never changed an opinion on a political issue – any issue, ever. Social Interactors showed only 6.4 percent had never changed a political view. This is more than 10 points below the next lowest group, Readers.

It is possible people who are influenced by friends and coworkers might simply bend in the wind, follow the crowd, and be more likely to change their views. The survey did not support that assumption, as 55.6 percent of Social Interactors report only changing one or two opinions on political issues over their lifetime. Social Interactors lead by more than 6 points over those who cite religion as their main political influence.

In other words, these people are the least likely to be absolutely rigid, but the most likely to be fairly rigid. That indicates a certain level of consideration on policy issues. They are not following a crowd, but they are not dogmatically dug in either.

This is further enforced by this group not showing ignorance of government. They were more likely to be able to name the three branches of government than those that got their information from national news networks, local Kentucky television stations, or social media. Furthermore, they were dramatically more likely to name at least one branch of government over all other groups but Readers. Social Interactors were also the most likely group to have contacted an elected official in the past year.

One interesting anomaly with Social Interactors was that they were one of the worst groups in knowing Kentucky's U.S. senators but were generally more likely to know down-ballot constitutional officers, state legislators, and local elected officials.

Taken in whole, they were one of the most knowledgeable groups in our survey.

Obviously Social Interactors were one of the most likely groups to discuss political issues with friends and family several times a week. But their moderate rigidity suggests these are not echo-chamber conversations.

Our survey seems to support that assumption. Social Interactors were the most willing to have friendships with people they disagreed with politically, reporting 13 points higher tolerance than the total sample. This group was almost evenly split of what they spent more time researching before making a decision, a candidate to vote for or a major purchase. All groups significantly favored researching one decision over the other.

In other words, they appeared more likely to be exposed to differing views - be they political or consumer - and to follow up with their own research, just as we discussed in the previous subsection.

Social Interactors were within the averages for whom they voted for president in 2020 but were dramatically more likely to identify as a political independent<sup>9</sup> and evenly split on ideology. Interestingly, this group was slightly more male but disproportionately young. The gender disparity could be a product of the small size of this group, but 86.7 percent

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<sup>9</sup> Though not necessarily registered as such.



reported being under age 50, whereas across all groups, half fell on either side of age 50.

The geographic distribution of Social Interactors was interesting. Almost all other groups reported a geographic distribution relatively consistent with the whole sample. Instead, social interactors were disproportionately concentrated in Lexington and the Cincinnati suburbs.

**Social Interactors demonstrated the highest level of civic health of any group – signifying knowledge, consideration, and engagement more consistently than any other group. They also showed the least level of polarization. They were, however, the smallest group in our survey.**

Readers were the largest group, at 36.6 percent. They are also civically healthy. In most categories, Readers and Social Interactors were closely aligned. Social interaction could also lead to reading about issues and reading about issues could prompt social interactions.

While Readers and Social Interactors were mutually exclusive in our survey, they are not in practice.

Readers were extremely likely to discuss politics with friends and family and were knowledgeable and engaged. However, they were more likely to be absolutely rigid in their views and less tolerant of opposing opinions. This could signal that Readers socialize in echo-chambers, but they were not so dramatically different from Social Interactors to indicate that is the case.

People who got their information from religion and family (which were measured as separate categories) were also fairly informed, somewhat engaged,

and somewhat receptive to opposing views. Readers and Social Interactors still rank higher.

While not classified as Social Interactors, these are all broadly social classifications – churches and families are communities. If we broadly categorize this group as the “Socials” then the other broad group that appears is the “Media Consumers.”

Media Consumers would consist of those that rely on National, Local, and Social Media. Together they represented more than 36.5 percent of our sample.

We determined Media Consumers to be the least civically healthy group. They were consistently among the least informed, least engaged, least deliberative, and most polarized respondents to our survey.

This all seems to support the *Bowling Alone* hypothesis. A greater emphasis on social engagement seems to correlate with greater civic health.

## Polarization

### The National Spotlight

No analysis of civic health in this day and age should ignore the current state of polarization in the nation. To the extent we are socializing still, we are doing so in more homogeneous groups. Bill Bishop chronicles this in *The Big Sort*, documenting America's trend to self-segregate along political lines.

Increasingly our human sorting pattern has led to homogeneity in our communities. We choose to live around people like us and do things with people we agree with.<sup>xxxiii</sup> We all can name a liberal city or a conservative's preference in vehicle. People who work at that company are usually conservative, people who do that activity tend to be liberal.

We see this in several different measures and observations. Moreover, we see these preferences, these sorts, increasing in frequency and concentration.

### Split Senate Delegations

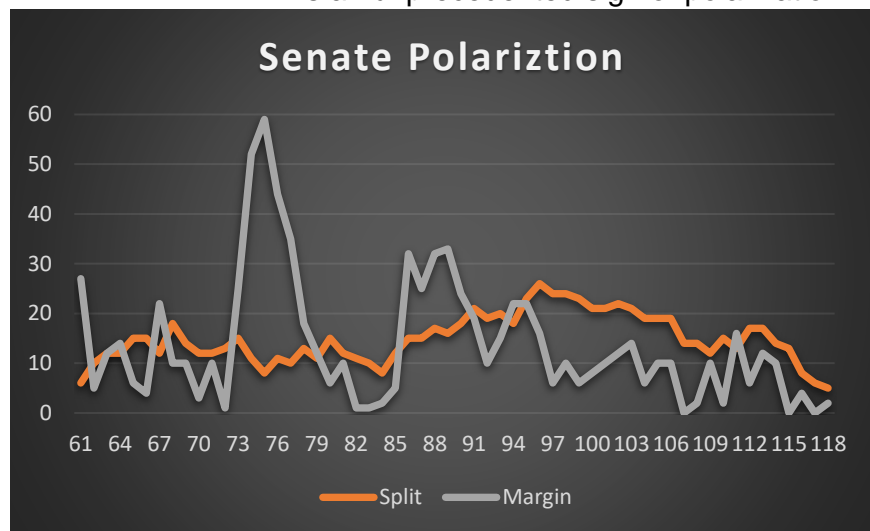
One way to look at polarization is the makeup of the U.S. Senate in terms of split states. Each state gets two senators, and their geographic boundaries stay the same over time. A split state (one with a senator from each party) indicates some level of political heterogeneity, and greater prevalence of such states indicates less polarization at-large in America. We can also contrast the number of

split states with the size of the majority's margin in that Congress's Senate.

The chart below depicts the number of split states and the majority margin going back to the 61<sup>st</sup> Congress, which met from 1909 until 1911. Over the past 115 years, there have been giant swings between large and razor-thin majorities. Several times the Senate was evenly split in terms of its membership, while during the Depression Era and in the 1960s Senates, Democrats enjoyed large majorities.

On average, when the majority's margin is 2 or fewer, 10.9 states have split Senate delegations. When the majority margin is 10 or more, we see an average of 15.75 split states, almost 1 in 3 states. Over the entire series we see an average of almost 15 (14.95) states that split their Senate delegation.

Yet, during this entire time, we have never seen so few states that split their Senate delegations as we see today. The 118<sup>th</sup> Congress has just five split state Senate delegations, less than half of what we should expect for 51-49 Senate. This is an unprecedented sign of polarization.



Even geographically, we see sorting. A person could successfully drive to every uniformly Republican state in the continental U.S. without ever having to cross a uniformly Democratic or split state. Democratic states tend to group at the coasts, with seven connected states in the West and eleven in the Mid-Atlantic and Northeast. The five split states are all on the edges of where red and blue masses meet.<sup>10</sup>

This should not be taken as an indictment of any one state for having a uniform delegation. Split states have rarely been anywhere close to a majority. There are also numerous factors that go into the election (either directly or indirectly) of a member of the U.S. Senate. There are certain parochial issues, the personalities involved, party operations, changing political preferences, etc.

For that reason, it is not particularly instructive to look at any one state's prevalence for party splitting in isolation. Rather this measure is more aimed at noting the degree of polarization and sorting that exists nationwide.

### Our View of the Other Side

In *The Big Sort*, Bishop also discusses how homogeneous thought is developed and refined. It is not just that we choose to live and associate with people like ourselves; we also demand conformity and push ourselves to extremes.

Bishop cites studies of how persons that take individually moderate positions become extreme in those positions when

grouped together with like-minded moderates.<sup>xxxiv</sup>

Stanley Milgram and Solomon Asch conducted pioneering research on conformity in the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century. In one study, persons were enticed to give the demonstrably wrong answer when they believed that was the group preference. In another study Milgram planted one person looking to the sky on a street corner. Within minutes a crowd formed all looking to the heavens, collectively looking at nothing, but conforming nonetheless.<sup>xxxv</sup> In both studies, participants conformed to the group despite personal misgivings.

Milgram's most famous experiment enticed an astounding number of people to commit murder, or at least they believed they were (they weren't). As troubling as that is, more troubling was how when questioned later, people rationalized their actions as moral and just – the authority told them.<sup>xxxvi</sup> An authority they had no reason to trust, and was not actually an authority in the subject they believed him to be.

Another experimenter, Muzafer Sherif created two arbitrarily selected groups at a summer camp. Organically these groups began to hate each other and see themselves as superior and more moral. Competition only exacerbated these feelings.<sup>xxxvii</sup> Just separation fostered a belief in self-pride and other's inferiority.

The famous Stanford prison experiment done by Richard Zimbardo, showed how group dynamics and authority coupled together could lead to dangerous results.<sup>xxxviii</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Georgia is the only uniformly blue state that does not touch another blue state or split state.

There is a long history of social science research that demonstrates how humans become polarized and radicalized in our beliefs, particularly in the context of homogeneity. What is worse, is give the right conditions, in group or authoritative dynamics, people come to fervently believe in what they originally questioned.

### *Politically Fixed Mindset*

These observations which have been observed in lab settings are now becoming more obvious in our everyday American lives, particularly in our civic engagement. The Pew Foundation reported, “A month before the [2020] election, roughly 8 in 10 registered voters in both camps said their differences with the other side [was] about core American values, and roughly 9 in 10—again in both camps—worried that a victory by the other would lead to ‘lasting harm’ to the United States.”

This tribalism matriculates out to other areas of our lives. A 2016 survey found that roughly 60 percent of Americans would have difficulty with their child marrying a supporter of a different political party than their own.<sup>xxxix</sup> Another study from the same year found half of Americans felt discussing politics with those of opposing views as more stressful than informative.<sup>xi</sup>

If we are stressed simply by talking to those we disagree with, there must be something more at play than just group conformity. Sorting is one thing, but why is it so hostile?

Stanford psychologist Carol Dweck’s research on mindset might shed some light on this. Dweck wanted to

understand why some people aggressively avoid challenges while others invite testing. What she found is there are two types of mindsets - fixed and growth.

A growth mindset sees challenges and failures as opportunities to grow and learn. A discussion about opposing views may be informative.

A fixed mindset sees ability as innate, and thus challenges and especially failures may call those basic abilities into question; “obstacles, setbacks, or criticism, ...[are] just more proof that they didn’t have the abilities that they cherished.”<sup>xli</sup> A discussion about issues could expose one as being less informed or less morally superior than they believe they innately are.

Dweck was not looking at politics/civics, but the application seems to make sense in the context of sorting. A 2021 survey found that 75 percent of Americans believe they are “fundamentally a good person.” [emphasis added] Astonishingly, 46 percent felt they were better than everyone else they know.<sup>xlii</sup>

**She had never met the person; she just knew he lived next door and supported the candidate she did not.**

**What was causing her strife; what was her struggle? After a snowstorm, the neighbor shoveled her driveway without being asked. Perhaps this was an act of kindness but how could she reconcile this good act with his “bad” political views?**

If that is the case, a policy disagreement, is a challenge to one’s innate goodness, not an opportunity to learn.

A great example of this is a 2021 Los Angeles Times column,<sup>xliii</sup> chronicling the columnist’s struggles with a supporter

of an opposing candidate next door. She had never met the person; she just knew he lived next door and supported the candidate she did not.

What was causing her strife; what was her struggle? After a snowstorm, the neighbor shoveled her driveway without being asked. Perhaps this was an act of kindness but how could she reconcile this good act with his “bad” political views?

She speculates in her column he did not know she was from the other team, or he did and was trying to assimilate her. Was it a form of gaslighting? She reasons he must want something and struggles with whether it was simply an act of kindness. How could someone she so adamantly disagrees with politically, possibly do a kind act and appear to be a good person?

She imagines her neighbor is trying to atone for his political beliefs and resolves to offer, “a wave and a thanks, a minimal start on building back trust. I’m not ready to knock on the door with a covered dish yet.” [emphasis added] However, she will only go so far, “Free driveway work, as nice as it is, is just not the same currency as justice and truth.”

This is a fixed mindset at work, sorting her. This neighborly act is a challenge to her cherished belief. If the neighbor is not a bad person, how can he disagree with her on tax policy, or when it is appropriate to go to war, or how to balance conflicting rights between individuals? Her positions on those issues are all based on her fundamental, innate goodness.

These two have never met, but as she frames it, their disagreement over politics represents a kind of betrayal of

trust. To her, he cannot be associated with truth and justice – those are hers alone.

This author wrote an entire column in the Los Angeles Times before saying “hello, thank you, I’m so-and-so,” to her neighbor. Not to mention that the Los Angeles Times, the fourth largest paper in the country,<sup>xliv</sup> saw fit to publish the rant.

If these two were to interact like neighbors, and in the spirit of a growth mindset, they might learn to disagree without hostility.

Imagine if the columnist approached it from the growth mindset. The neighbor’s disagreement is no longer a challenge, but an opportunity to learn. Why does he believe his approach to an issue is better, what makes hers better? What is he missing, what is she missing?

They may never agree; but like Putman, Bishop, and Dweck show, they will almost always be better off, both civically and otherwise.

Sorting is comfortable, but it is not civically healthy.

## How We Inform Ourselves

### *Conventional Media*

It is no secret that the information age seems to have made us less informed. The *Courier-Journal* published an AP story, “Poll: Misinformation a problem,” in October 2022 which discusses a Peterson Institute poll that found that 91 percent of adults believe the spread of misinformation is a problem, and 71 percent think it is a major problem.<sup>xlv</sup>

If virtually everyone agrees misinformation is a problem, then how does it persist? As the chart on the next page shows, people believe they consume



trusted news while the other guy is the one being misled.

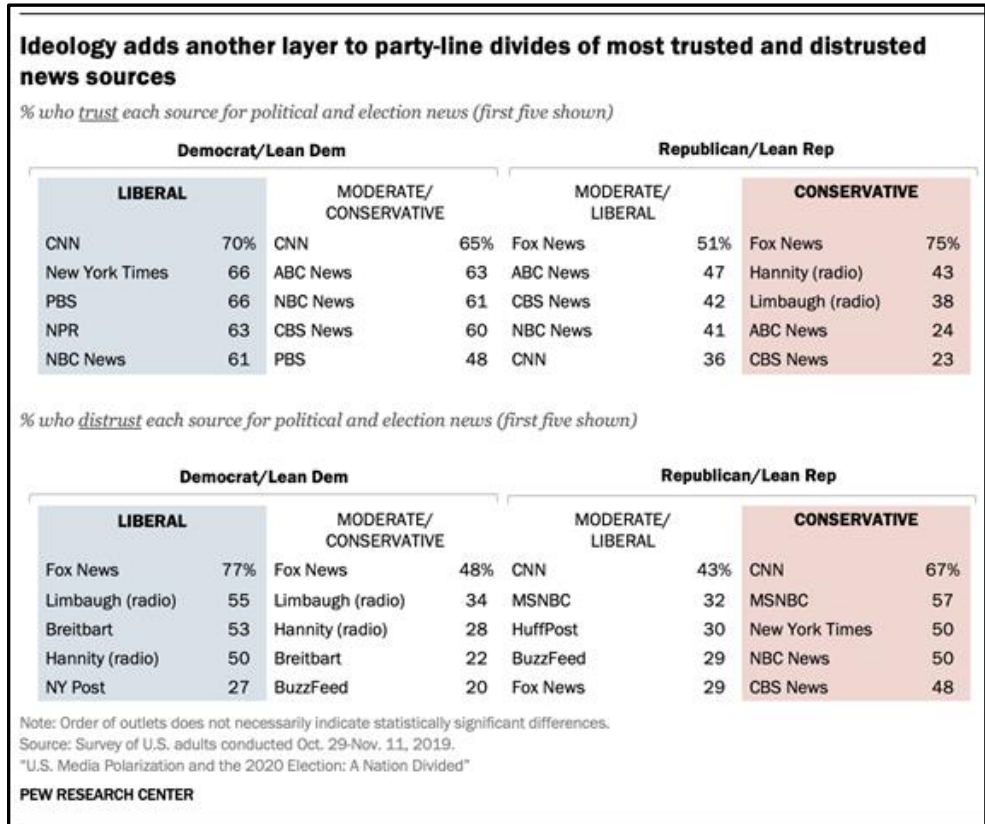
Gallup found that just 34 percent of Americans trusted mass media to, “...report the news ‘fully, accurately and fairly.’”<sup>xlvi</sup> At the same time the Pew Foundation reports that just 58 percent of Americans “say they have at least some trust in the information that comes from national news organizations.” [Emphasis added]

Astonishingly, “A large majority of Americans (75%) still say they have at least some trust in the information that comes from local news organizations.”<sup>xlvii</sup>

A year earlier the same Pew Foundation found **people that relied on local news for political information were the least informed of any group based on their primary source of political information.**<sup>xlviii</sup> Our most trusted source is the one that is least informative.

Despite our consternation about the accuracy of news, a Gallup survey found that more than 80 percent of Americans, “believe the news media are critical or very important to our democracy.”<sup>xlix</sup>

Interestingly, the same survey found that Americans are equally divided (48%-48%) on whose responsibility it is to ensure people are accurately informed



about politics, half believing it is the news, the other half believing it is individuals themselves.<sup>1</sup>

In other words, it appears we trust the news, but not too much, and mostly the news that affirms our already held beliefs. We think misinformation is the other guy’s problem; we are misinformed in that belief.

*The Internet and Social Media*

The internet provides us access to information that is more accessible than at any other time in history. Conventional media must condense information to fit its format - to a time slot, a word count, or a column length. By its very nature it must take something larger and cut it down to size.

Thanks to the internet, we can now view masses of source material in their



original form. We do not have to rely on cable or local news to tell us about a bill before Congress - we can view the bill in its full form online. We do not have to watch a clip of a politician's speech on social media or a news broadcast; we can watch the entirety of a speech ourselves.

Unfortunately, few of us avail ourselves of these advantages. We found no research which tried to catalog people's use of source information. Instead, we found countless articles and studies indicating that the internet has allowed for an even larger proliferation of intermediaries.

Obviously, some internet intermediaries pick up the pieces that conventional media may have dropped, but others may fabricate new pieces of information or add inference and opinion as fact. It has also allowed subjects to bypass the media entirely, creating their own original content and disseminating it through various internet means. And of course, the internet has allowed the spread of opinions to go beyond the editorial pages of newspapers, to across the globe.

Social media has played a major role in amplifying the reach of different content producers. One major concern is that on the web we may segregate in much the same way we have in other aspects of life.

Further, social media platforms will curate content to affirm our preferences, creating echo chambers. Much like in *The Big Sort*, the concern is that even moderates, in internet echo chambers, will push themselves to extremes. Social media echo chambers are radicalizing us and causing increased polarization.

Some studies have shown this and most start with that hypothesis. However, there is a curious disconnect. We know America is becoming more polarized in general, yet the Pew Foundation finds that only about 20 percent of Americans are in internet echo chambers.<sup>li</sup> In other words, more people are polarized than actually find themselves in the conditions we assume cause polarization.

Additional research of social media is refuting the theory of internet echo chambers and polarization. A University of Virginia study into the social media echo chamber effect found "no evidence that the use of social media is limiting the information sources that users choose to consume—instead, with respect to information diversity we find a range of outcomes from effectively neutral (no change) to positive (broadening diversity)."<sup>liii</sup>

This study looked at multiple platforms and found interesting results. Facebook (which highly curates content) and Reddit, "were each associated with increases in information source diversity across all measures, with the estimated effects of Reddit significantly larger than those of Facebook."<sup>liiii</sup> [emphasis added]. More interesting was that though Facebook users were exposed to more diverse information, they were also associated with a more partisan shift in beliefs – greater polarization.

Somehow, at least as this one study would indicate, more information, and from more diverse sources, is making us more dogmatic in our political beliefs. This might make sense when taken in the context of a few other studies.

A National Academy of Sciences study required participants to follow a

Twitterbot specifically designed to expose them to content they disagreed with for one month. **The hypothesis was that, “...disrupting selective exposure to partisan information will decrease political polarization because of intergroup contact effects.” In short, hearing the other side on social media will make us less extreme.**

**They found the exact opposite effect. All Republicans and Democrats became more extreme in their beliefs, and the more engaged the participant, on average, the more extreme still.<sup>liv</sup>**

Another study from Northeastern University found similar results. One set of subjects were either allowed to select their own news sources while the others were given a dose of broad-spectrum news.

As conventional wisdom would dictate, the group that could select their own news picked sources that leaned towards their already established biases. The assumption was this would lead to more extreme beliefs within this group. That assumption proved wrong; it was the group that got broad-spectrum news that became more radicalized.<sup>lv</sup>

We can only speculate why exposure to opposite beliefs online appear to make us more polarized. Donghee Jo, one author of the Northwestern study has his theory:

Let’s say I’m a liberal person who reads *The New York Times*. I know that they’re generally more liberal, so I can watch for that bias when I’m reading about a new topic. If I were a liberal person learning about a new topic from Fox News [which

typically falls more to the right], it’s hard to understand their exact bias and weed out the facts from the politics.

Jo’s theory and research, coupled with that of the National Academy and UVA, seem to all suggest that people are fairly resistant to misinformation they agree with online. It seems they are more radicalized by what they perceive to be misinformation from the opposite side.

This marries up well to what Plumridger said in the previous section. On the internet and on social media we do not get the kind of human interaction we get in person; we do not get context directly or as a conversation evolves. We can easily stereotype because we only hear what others are saying, not why. In person we are much more likely to get the “whys” and get them in a more organic way.

### How Kentucky Stacks Up

Thankfully, Kentucky seems to be a lot less polarized than national trends.

Kentucky has rarely been a split state in its Senate delegations. From 1957 to 1972 it was uniformly Republican; from 1977 to 1985 uniformly Democrat; and from 1999 to present uniformly Republican – uniformity in the Senate delegation 48 of 67 years.<sup>lvi</sup> However, as we noted earlier, this measure has less validity at the state level than at the national level.

That only tells part of the story. While 60 percent of Americans reported having difficulty with their child marrying someone of a different political view than their own, **60.2 percent of Kentuckians reported in our survey they themselves**

**would be willing to have a romantic relationship someone of an opposing view.** In fact, 80 percent of Kentuckians would be comfortable with their child growing up to disagree with them politically.

Almost 72 percent of Kentuckians have changed their minds on at least one political issue in their lives. **More than three-fourths of Kentuckians believe that political ideology is not important in friendship.** These people would not struggle to waive at a neighbor who shoveled their driveway.

**Only 46.4 percent of liberals thought they could have such [romantic] relationships with people they disagreed with; and 46.6 percent of self-identified liberals were sure they could not. We found almost exactly the same number of liberals likewise would struggle being in friendship with a person of opposing views.**

We did not specifically poll how comfortable people would be with the other party being in charge, but we did find that over 75 percent of Kentuckians did not think others should listen to them on political issues and **61.7 percent said they believed it is best for lawmakers to compromise.** This is not indicative of a population with a politically fixed mindset, one that fears the other party to the degree national polls indicate.

While these numbers in aggregate are promising, when we analyzed the data by self-identified political ideology some markers of polarization presented themselves. Though few, these markers predominantly were associated with self-identified liberals.

The partisan split in our poll was relatively even - 42.7 percent Republican, 40.4 percent Democrat; 41.2 percent of

respondents identified as conservative while 17.7 percent of respondents as liberal, and 34.9 percent checking in as moderates.

However, because liberals represented such a small share of the total, deviations of this group did not have a noticeable effect on aggregate averages we just discussed. Taken in isolation, there is some room for concern.

Regarding our questions of being in a romantic relationship with someone who disagreed with you politically; nearly 60 percent of conservatives and 70 percent of moderates had no objections. **Only 46.4 percent of liberals thought they could have such relationships with people they disagreed with; and 46.6 percent of self-identified liberals were sure they could not.** We found almost exactly the same number of liberals likewise would struggle being in friendship with a person of opposing views.

Conservatives and moderates were almost identical at approximately 70 percent on willingness to work for an employer of a different political ideology; liberals were 10 percent less likely to work for an employer of a different political ideology.

**Ironically, though liberals seemed less likely to compromise on their personal relationships, they do want politicians to compromise. In this category conservatives showed a more extreme position. Both moderates and liberals expressed more than a 70 percent preference for compromise. Only 50 percent of conservatives shared this view.**

When it comes to media consumption and trust, Kentucky is somewhat more in line with national trends. This is also where conservative polarization was most noted.

Nearly 70 percent of Kentuckians believe journalists insert their political biases into news stories while on average 42.4 percent distrust any given news source. However, 50.1 percent of conservatives distrust any given news source and 77.6 percent believe journalists show bias in their reporting.

As the chart shows, Kentucky conservatives are generally more distrustful of media. **Conservatives are 12.9 percent more distrusting of media than they are trusting.** Moderates are down the middle with a non-zero positive trust, while liberals have a 13.7 percent trust preference.

Even conservative mainstays like Fox News only garnered 51.1 percent trust from Kentucky conservatives. Nationally 75 percent of conservatives trust Fox (See chart on page 28). In fact, Kentucky liberals trust CNN, MSNBC, NPR/PBS, and Local News more than conservatives trust any one news source.

What is most amazing about this finding is that **conservatives, with 27.7 percent of their respondents, were the most likely group to base their political leanings on broadcast media consumption** - 61 percent more likely than liberals.

The opposite was true of liberals and social media. Liberals were equally as likely to rely on social media as broadcast

media for their main source for political information.

**While liberals have an overall positive trust in conventional broadcast media and two-thirds do not trust social media, they are equally likely to choose one as the other.**

That means that a significant population of both self-identified liberals and conservatives are forming their political views based on news sources they, themselves, do not trust.

As we know from earlier in this section, media in any form can be a trigger for polarization – particularly the consumption of opposing views through

|                        | TRUST  |        |        | Distrust |        |        |
|------------------------|--------|--------|--------|----------|--------|--------|
|                        | Con    | Mod    | Lib    | Con      | Mod    | Lib    |
| Fox News               | 51.10% | 26.80% | 5.80%  | 40.50%   | 65.80% | 84.10% |
| CNN                    | 13.80% | 40.10% | 63.10% | 75.10%   | 51.70% | 24.80% |
| MSNBC                  | 15.80% | 35.90% | 67.80% | 68.60%   | 50.60% | 16.50% |
| Newsmax                | 40.10% | 16.30% | 3.10%  | 24.50%   | 46.80% | 56.60% |
| Public Radio/TV        | 37.80% | 67.10% | 77.60% | 44.50%   | 22.30% | 7.10%  |
| Kentucky TV/Local News | 51.60% | 73.70% | 68.10% | 34.60%   | 17.40% | 14.30% |
| Digital Publications   | 13.70% | 25.30% | 36.40% | 60.00%   | 52.50% | 44.50% |
| Kentucky News Papers   | 23.00% | 62.10% | 69.40% | 53.00%   | 24.00% | 11.90% |

Figure 3 Results of Civic Health Survey RE: Media Trust. Green indicates a level below national trends, Red indicates a level above national trend.

media seems to drive us deeper into our own homogeneous camps. Eventually we may choose to self-segregate. If that occurs, it becomes incredibly hard to build face-to-face social bonds that allow us to challenge our political dogmas and hone our positions.

When over one-third of voters are relying on polarizing sources, how sorted are we already the Commonwealth? As it turns out, not very much.

Without a doubt there are more Democrats in the cities and more Republicans in the rural areas. In terms of

ideological heterogeneity, Kentucky is not so bad off. Statewide, 41.2 percent identified as conservatives, 34.9 percent as moderate, and 17.7 percent as liberal.<sup>11</sup>

Based on our survey, respondents from Lexington are almost an exact match to those percentages. Louisville did not report being the liberal bastion which many would have assumed. In fact, self-identified conservatives outnumbered those identifying as liberal by 9 percent. At 38 percent, moderates were the largest group in Louisville.

The Cincinnati suburbs are somewhat more polarized than anywhere else in the state. This area is predominantly conservative with 45.8 percent, but outside of Louisville, this is the only other region where liberals exceed their state average checking in at 23.5 percent. As a result, this area is also home to the smallest number of moderates.

Western and Eastern Kentucky have the highest absolute polar tilt, mostly due to a lack of liberals. Both regions reported the highest number of people that were unsure how to classify themselves.

Taken in whole, Kentucky does not appear to have internally sorted itself. Conventional stereotypes about different regions did not completely hold up.

Overall, when it comes to polarization, Kentucky seems to lag national averages. This seems to be the area of civics in which the Commonwealth is most healthy. Kentuckians are less self-

segregating, both geographically and in our interpersonal relationships. However, the Commonwealth can improve where and how we get our information.

The seeds of polarization and echo chambers have fallen in the bluegrass, but they have not yet found fertile ground to grow.

As the nation bends to the disease of polarization, Kentucky seems to remain healthy, but we must engage our collective immune systems to avoid getting ill.

**In terms of ideological heterogeneity, Kentucky is not so bad off. Statewide, 41.2 percent identified as conservatives, 34.9 percent as moderate, and 17.7 percent as liberal.**

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<sup>11</sup> 6.2 percent did not know or refused to respond



## Final Assessment

This assessment started with questioning the wisdom of assessing one's health by such factors as gym memberships and frequency of use and how using similar measures in civic life would not give us a true understanding of civic health. We sought to explore civic health more deeply, by digging into such additional factors as social health and polarization. **We did not want to just ask the "What" questions, but also, the "Whys."**

On the surface, we found some indications of a civically healthy America and Kentucky. Looking behind the curtain, we found very strong indicators of a civically unhealthy society. This is similar to a gym member who smokes, engages in risky activities, and eats a poor diet, but thinks he is healthy because of a gym membership.

This is certainly a national phenomenon; however, we see that Kentucky is not immune.

Kentucky seems in line with national trends on the traditional measures of civic health. Our voter registration is a little high, and our turnout a little low, but we had let ourselves go for a while by not following a list maintenance schedule (got a little flabby) and we are in the process of getting back in shape.

We know some basic things about how our political bodies work. We are ahead of the national curve in a few knowledge measures; however, about one third of us still do not meet a minimal knowledge mark. Moreover, it is difficult to state that the two-thirds who meet the mark truly have the requisite knowledge necessary for a well-informed citizenry.

Worse, we tell ourselves we are getting healthier by requiring easily passed citizenship exams to graduate from high school and point to the high percentage of success as good civic health. We are basically patting ourselves on the back for getting a diet Coke to go with our two Big Macs.

There is hope. We've found a civic workout routine and diet plan that pays great dividends. Kentuckians (and Americans) need to socialize with diverse groups and almost every aspect of civic health will improve. Face-to-face socialization may well be to civics what Jazzercise was to physical fitness in the 80s.

The problem is only about 3 percent of us in the Commonwealth are strapping on some civic Nikes and taking to the streets. It is a national problem - we are simply less social. Kentucky seems to be declining faster, and that is a problem because that will leave us susceptible to the disease of polarization.

It is no secret across America people are more polarized and that tends to leave us civically unhealthy. It is a civic disease, and if we catch the polarization bug, particularly if we self-segregate, our social interactions lose value, and our civic health declines all around.

Kentucky has caught this bug. But while America overall, and certainly some states appear quite ill, it has not taken the kind of hold here that is beyond our immune system to fight.

What is our grade? How civically healthy are we in the bluegrass?

In traditional measures we are a C. We are in line with the rest of the country in some areas and ahead in others. Some

would say that should garner an A or at least a B, but as a nation, we are not knocking it out of the park.

Social civics for Kentuckians are lackluster. Very few of us are exploring and forming political opinions in a healthy way. Kentucky is ahead of the curve in declining social interactions and that is not positive. On this measure we assess the Commonwealth to be at a D+ level.

We are excelling at our resistance to polarization. Kentuckians are willing to hear and accept others who have opposing views, even if we do not adopt those views ourselves. We seem to have something of a growth mindset in this regard.

But some, in fact probably too many, have caught the polarization bug; both in how we see others and how we seek and consume information. While we would like to assess this aspect of civic

health as resounding A, we must be honest and mark ourselves down for a B.

**Taken together on total we assess Kentucky's civic health too be a high C, but still short of a C+. Unfortunately, if left unchecked, we think this grade will decline in the coming years.**

There is an immense opportunity and potential to raise our scores. It is not a hard lift either - resist the catalysts for polarization, socialize face-to-face more, see disagreement as growth opportunities, and bulk up on our understanding of civics, particularly in K-12.

The following section discusses some prescriptions for improvement. Will we rise to the challenge?

## Prescription for Improvement

We have discussed many of the problems associated with civic decline and presented some clear remedies. The following are some potential avenues to improve our civic health. In fact, they are not just a list of things we can do, but a challenge to us all. If we want a better society, a better democracy, and a better understanding, it is imperative we put in some work. Is Kentucky up to the challenge?

### What the state can do:

- **Improve civic education.** Most states require some form of formal civic instruction in the classroom - Kentucky is one of the few that does not. Current high school graduation requirements only dictate 3 years of social studies, adding a 4<sup>th</sup> year dedicated to civics instruction would not only be a logical move, but may reap increasable benefits. Also, a more robust civics exam for our high school graduates, similar to Ohio's, is needed.

Not only will these requirements reap benefits in terms of citizenship, but also in other academic pursuits. Research from Harvard and the U.S. Chamber of Commerce Foundation have found that many of the so-called soft skills needed to succeed in a 21<sup>st</sup> century workforce is associated with higher levels of civic education.<sup>lvii</sup>

- **Produce a Blue Book for the Commonwealth of Kentucky.** Kentucky has never produced a true, blue book – an almanac of state government. Fortunately, most of the requisite information is readily available. It only need be compiled in one source. Simply compiling existing information into a handy reference guide would not be difficult or costly. Such a guide could be in print, online, or both. Many states charge for a print copy or only provide free copies to schools and libraries. Having this resource is associated with higher voter turnout in other states. This is a simple approach that could reap great benefits.
- **Produce a Voters' Guide.** Based on our research this tool would be less impactful than Blue Books, at least as it relates to voter turnout. However, it is difficult to imagine such documents do not aid in higher overall voter education and knowledge. At the least such a guide, can provide voters with information about the offices and candidates for which they vote. Unlike a blue book that provides more comprehensive information about the government as it is, a voters' guide is tailored to a specific election and aimed at providing voters with candidate and office specific information to aid in electoral decision making. As our assessment shows, most voters currently do not educate themselves on down-ballot candidates. Voters' guides may change that, and such a document could be produced at minimal cost to taxpayers.

## What you can do:

- **Join a non-political group** – In our frenzied society, it is easy to hunker down at home and to self-segregate. Avoidance is a defense with a lasting negative consequence. The challenge is to stop evading and start embracing social opportunities. We need to stop living in our bubbles and instead explore new connections. Clubs, workshops, sports, and other social activities are a great way to do this.

Be cautious. There are plenty of clubs and activities which attract people of a similar political ilk. Though there is nothing wrong with finding a group that reflects your beliefs, the aim is to meet people who are not the same. The goal is to develop non-political bonds with many people and not just people with whom we agree. If the club or activity is not inclined to a particular political leaning, that is probably a good one to try.

- **Adopt a Civic/Political Growth Mindset** – This is probably the easiest to do, and the hardest to adopt. It is easy because all you must do is adopt a philosophy that someone challenging your views is presenting you an opportunity to grow, and you in turn can present them with that same opportunity. It is hard to adopt because no one wants to feel they could be wrong. It is comforting to feel we hold our policies preferences as an objective prescription from a smart, just, and caring people. It is a lot harder to accept smart, just, caring people can have different positions and maybe our own do does not have to be so absolute.
- **Build a Basic Knowledge (and keep adding to it)** – Make a point every year to read one book that expands your knowledge of civic institutions, not political books that discuss issues but books that describe civic institutions and concepts of democracy and society. We've mentioned a few in this report: *Bowling Alone* and *The Big Sort*. Others are *Infamous Scribblers* (about early American journalism) or *Summer of 1789* (about the formation of the Constitution). We provide an expanded list at the end of this section.
  - **Read at least one “foundational” political book that you agree with and one you do not** – Most political books argue about issues and are often written by pundits and politicians. A foundational political book explains the logic behind a type of political thinking. Such books are not based on what and how society should be organized, but why. Reading books which focus on why we believe what we do and that expose us to opposite “whys” will help us both understand ourselves and others better. This will also help develop our civic growth mindsets.

- **Trust But Verify** – As discussed, we tend to rely on intermediaries to condense knowledge and transmit it to us. There is nothing inherently wrong with this, but the distillation process means important facts get left out, sometimes intentionally. With the internet, we can investigate and analyze what we are told before we decide or form an opinion. Instead of putting trust into a talking head, you can read the actual bill or watch the entire speech before forming an opinion.

If you have become more social, you can distill and refine information you receive from social interactions. This is not to say you take what is said during social interactions at face value. Social interactions can prompt you to better ways of researching issues than one-sided media, even social media. In the Tools and Approaches subsection that follows, we provide a checklist you can use to Trust But Verify, there is also a handy pocket card in Appendix 1 that you can print out for daily use.

- **Talk about something else first** – We know we are going to have a political conversation with someone we disagree with. This may be a short conversation and as simple as someone asking you to sign a petition or vote for a candidate. As the Stanford/Cal study discussed in this paper notes, talking about something neutral initially can prevent political hostility later, even if it does not change our minds. Make a point to begin the conversation with something nonpolitical, even if for just a minute. Weather and sports teams are usually a good start.
- **Avoid using too much reliance on media, including social media, for political information.** It is impractical to entirely cut ourselves off from these media. But if we become more social and build a better foundational knowledge, we can resist the polarization bug these outlets deliver.
- **Watch Congress on C-Span, and the Kentucky General Assembly on KET.**
- **Attend meetings of local government**



## Tools and Approaches

### Civic Social Hours

Civic social hour may be an avenue to build civic health for yourself and your community. A civic social hour is, as it implies, a social event of some kind: maybe a cocktail party, a game night, or other get together. Invite people you know who have different political views – even strong ones. Prohibit political conversations for the first half-hour. You could start with an ice breaker: “What would be the perfect day for you,” “Who was your favorite grandparent and why,” “What toy did you really want Santa to bring, but you never got under the tree?”

### Trust But Verify Checklist

- Is this an Original Source?
- Where/who are the Original Sources?
- Is this presenting facts or opinions?
  - What are the facts?
  - What are the opinions?
- What are supporters and opponents saying and Why?
- Repeat

See reference card on Appendix 1

## Reading list

### **Knowledge**

*1920: The Year of Six Presidents* – David Pietrusza

[https://www.goodreads.com/book/show/414883.1920?ref=nav\\_sb\\_noss\\_l\\_4](https://www.goodreads.com/book/show/414883.1920?ref=nav_sb_noss_l_4)

*Coolidge* – Amity Shlaes

[https://www.goodreads.com/book/show/12345967-coolidge?ref=nav\\_sb\\_noss\\_l\\_6](https://www.goodreads.com/book/show/12345967-coolidge?ref=nav_sb_noss_l_6)

*Master of the Senate* – Robert Caro

[https://www.goodreads.com/book/show/86525.Master\\_of\\_the\\_Senate?ref=nav\\_sb\\_noss\\_l\\_17](https://www.goodreads.com/book/show/86525.Master_of_the_Senate?ref=nav_sb_noss_l_17)

*Summer of 1787: the Men Who Invented the Constitution* – David Stewart

[https://www.goodreads.com/book/show/514565.The\\_Summer\\_of\\_1787?ref=nav\\_sb\\_noss\\_l\\_14](https://www.goodreads.com/book/show/514565.The_Summer_of_1787?ref=nav_sb_noss_l_14)

*Democracy In America* – Alexis de Tocqueville

[https://www.goodreads.com/book/show/16619.Democracy\\_in\\_America?ref=nav\\_sb\\_noss\\_l\\_13](https://www.goodreads.com/book/show/16619.Democracy_in_America?ref=nav_sb_noss_l_13)

*Founding Brothers: The Revolutionary Generation* – Joseph Ellis

[https://www.goodreads.com/book/show/7493.Founding\\_Brothers?ref=nav\\_sb\\_noss\\_l\\_12](https://www.goodreads.com/book/show/7493.Founding_Brothers?ref=nav_sb_noss_l_12)

*Washington A Life* – Robert Chernow

[https://www.goodreads.com/book/show/8255917-washington?ref=nav\\_sb\\_noss\\_l\\_11](https://www.goodreads.com/book/show/8255917-washington?ref=nav_sb_noss_l_11)

*John Adams* – David McCullough

[https://www.goodreads.com/book/show/2203.John\\_Adams?ref=nav\\_sb\\_noss\\_l\\_7](https://www.goodreads.com/book/show/2203.John_Adams?ref=nav_sb_noss_l_7)

*Infamous Scribblers: The Founding Fathers and the Rowdy Beginnings of American Journalism* – Eric Burns

[https://www.goodreads.com/book/show/119964.Infamous\\_Scribblers?ref=nav\\_sb\\_noss\\_l\\_13](https://www.goodreads.com/book/show/119964.Infamous_Scribblers?ref=nav_sb_noss_l_13)

*American Creation: Triumphs and Tragedies in the Founding of the Republic* – Joseph Ellis

[https://www.goodreads.com/book/show/196717.American\\_Creation?ref=nav\\_sb\\_ss\\_1\\_17](https://www.goodreads.com/book/show/196717.American_Creation?ref=nav_sb_ss_1_17)

*The Great Upheaval: America and the Birth of the Modern World 1788-1800* – Jay Winik

[https://www.goodreads.com/book/show/795301.The\\_Great\\_Upheaval?ref=nav\\_sb\\_noss\\_l\\_14](https://www.goodreads.com/book/show/795301.The_Great_Upheaval?ref=nav_sb_noss_l_14)

### **Social Civics**

*Bowling Alone* – Robert Putnam

[https://www.goodreads.com/book/show/478.Bowling\\_Alone?from\\_search=true&from\\_srp=true&qid=HbCUVlfJUJ&rank=1](https://www.goodreads.com/book/show/478.Bowling_Alone?from_search=true&from_srp=true&qid=HbCUVlfJUJ&rank=1)

## **Polarization**

*The Big Sort* – Bill Bishop

[https://www.goodreads.com/book/show/2569072-the-big-sort?ref=nav\\_sb\\_noss\\_l\\_12](https://www.goodreads.com/book/show/2569072-the-big-sort?ref=nav_sb_noss_l_12)

*Intellectuals and Society* – Thomas Sowell

[https://www.goodreads.com/book/show/7285385-intellectuals-and-society?ref=nav\\_sb\\_ss\\_1\\_19](https://www.goodreads.com/book/show/7285385-intellectuals-and-society?ref=nav_sb_ss_1_19)

*Death of Expertise* - Thomas Nichols

[https://www.goodreads.com/book/show/26720949-the-death-of-expertise?ref=nav\\_sb\\_ss\\_1\\_12](https://www.goodreads.com/book/show/26720949-the-death-of-expertise?ref=nav_sb_ss_1_12)

*Obedience to Authority* – Stanley Milgram

[https://www.goodreads.com/book/show/676723.Obedience to Authority?ref=nav\\_sb\\_ss\\_1\\_15](https://www.goodreads.com/book/show/676723.Obedience_to_Authority?ref=nav_sb_ss_1_15)

*Mindset: The New Psychology of Success* - Carol Dweck

[https://www.goodreads.com/book/show/40745.Mindset?ref=nav\\_sb\\_noss\\_l\\_7Divide](https://www.goodreads.com/book/show/40745.Mindset?ref=nav_sb_noss_l_7Divide)

*Dissent: Kentucky Politics 1930-1963* – John Ed Pearce

[https://www.goodreads.com/book/show/3558554-divide-and-dissent?ref=nav\\_sb\\_ss\\_5\\_15](https://www.goodreads.com/book/show/3558554-divide-and-dissent?ref=nav_sb_ss_5_15)

## Endnotes

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- <sup>ii</sup> <https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/fastats/obesity-overweight.htm>
- <sup>iii</sup> Putnam, Robert D; *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community*, New York: Simon & Schuster, 2000
- <sup>iv</sup> Ibid
- <sup>v</sup> <https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/interactive/2022/voter-turnout-2022-by-state/>
- <sup>vi</sup> <https://elect.ky.gov/Resources/Documents/voteturnoutagesex-2020G-20210302-043012.pdf>
- <sup>vii</sup> <https://elect.ky.gov/SiteCollectionDocuments/Election%20Statistics/turnout/1996-2000/00gen.pdf>
- <sup>viii</sup> <https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/interactive/2022/voter-turnout-2022-by-state/>
- <sup>ix</sup> Ibid
- <sup>x</sup> SOS Survey
- <sup>xi</sup> <https://www.governing.com/archive/gov-americans-knowledge-state-government.html>
- <sup>xii</sup> [https://www.aft.org/ae/summer2018/shapiro\\_brown](https://www.aft.org/ae/summer2018/shapiro_brown)
- <sup>xiii</sup> <https://electionlab.mit.edu/articles/learning-about-undervotes-ballot-level-data>
- <sup>xiv</sup> <https://electionlab.mit.edu/articles/learning-about-undervotes-ballot-level-data>
- <sup>xv</sup> Calculated using SBE race specific results against total turnout.
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- <sup>xviii</sup> <https://docsouth.unc.edu/southlit/jefferson/jefferson.html>
- <sup>xix</sup> [https://www.aft.org/ae/summer2018/shapiro\\_brown](https://www.aft.org/ae/summer2018/shapiro_brown)
- <sup>xx</sup> Ibid
- <sup>xxi</sup> <https://defense360.csis.org/bad-idea-prioritizing-stem-education-at-the-expense-of-civic-education/>
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- <sup>xxiv</sup> <https://www.uscis.gov/citizenship-resource-center/naturalization-related-data-and-statistics/naturalization-test-performance#:~:text=The%20diagram%20below%20shows%20that,passed%20during%20a%20re%2Dexam.>
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# Appendices

## Appendix 1 - Trust But Verify Hand Card



Office of the Secretary of State  
Commonwealth of Kentucky  
Trust But Verify Initiative

America was founded on an idea, that power came from the consent of the governed; that every citizen, should have his or her a say. For most of us, our say comes at the ballot box; but we also hold our elected officials accountable by telling them what we think with phone calls, letters, and through social media.

To be effectively engaged in civil affairs, it is important to be an informed citizen. Fortunately, we live in the information age; never before have we had as much access to information as we do now. But how do you know what information to trust and what is misleading or false?

By asking these simple questions you can build a fuller picture of the issues of our time, understand policy better, and be a more informed voter:

- Is this an original source?
- Where/who are the original sources?
- Is this presenting facts or opinions?
  - What are the facts?
  - What are the opinions?
- What are supporters and opponents saying and Why?
- Repeat

FOLD

- Is this an Original Source  
A lot of information we receive is from secondary sources, like the news media or even friends. No matter how trusted and honest they are, these sources are summarizing what they have learned from someone or something else. Just like in the old game of telephone, sometimes facts get left out or misinterpreted in transmission.
- Where/Who is the Original Source  
With the internet today, we don't have to rely solely on secondary sources. We have great capacity to go watch full video of what people actually said or read documents and legislation as written.  
In Kentucky you can find every bill before the General Assembly at:  
<https://legislature.ky.gov/Legislation/Pages/default.aspx>  
And before Congress at:  
<https://www.congress.gov/>
- Is this presenting facts or opinions?  
It is important to discern between a source's opinion and the facts. It is warm today is an opinion. It is 60 degrees outside is a fact.
- What are supporters and opponents saying?  
There is nothing wrong with opinions, but to get a clearer picture of an issue it is important to get competing views. Why do some believe 60 degrees is warm and other believe it is cold? You don't have to trust all sides, but it can help to know what people you trust, don't trust, or don't know think of an issue.

FOLD

NOTES

# Ohio's State Tests

**PRACTICE TEST**

**AMERICAN  
GOVERNMENT**

Student Name

The Ohio Department of Education does not discriminate on the basis of race, color, national origin, sex, religion, age, or disability in employment or the provision of services.

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**Directions:**

Today you will be taking the Ohio American Government Practice Assessment.

There are several important things to remember:

1. Read each question carefully. Think about what is being asked. Look carefully at graphs or diagrams because they will help you understand the question. Then, choose or write the answer you think is best in your Answer Document.
2. Use only a #2 pencil to answer questions on this test.

3. For questions with bubbled responses, choose the correct answer and then fill in the circle with the appropriate letter in your Answer Document. Make sure the number of the question in this Student Test Booklet matches the number in your Answer Document. If you change your answer, make sure you erase your old answer completely. Do not cross out or make any marks on the other choices.
4. For questions with response boxes, write your answer neatly, clearly and only in the space provided in your Answer Document. Any responses written in your Student Test Booklet will not be scored. Make sure the number of the question in this Student Test Booklet matches the number in your Answer Document.
5. If you do not know the answer to a question, skip it and go on to the next question. If you have time, go back to the questions you skipped and try to answer them before turning in your Student Test Booklet and Answer Document.
6. Check over your work when you are finished.

## American Government—Part 1

1. A town council faces budget cuts and can no longer afford to pay for landscaping in town parks.

How could a citizen work within his or her own community to help the local government address this problem?

- A. by emailing Ohio’s congressional delegation to inform them of this issue
  - B. by organizing a group of residents to volunteer for weekly park maintenance
  - C. by requesting that the governor supply the town with state funds for park maintenance
  - D. by running for a seat in the General Assembly with a promise to increase funding for local parks
2. The Necessary and Proper Clause of the U.S. Constitution is shown.

The Congress shall have Power ... To make all Laws which shall be necessary and proper for carrying into Execution the foregoing Powers, and all other Powers vested by this Constitution in the Government of the United States, or in any Department or Officer thereof.

Why did Federalists want to include this clause in the Constitution?

- A. to protect the individual liberties of all citizens
  - B. to provide a guarantee of sovereignty to individual states
  - C. to allow the national government to efficiently run the country
  - D. to give citizens more opportunities to select government officials
3. The following question has two parts. In the **Answer Document**, first, answer part A. Then, answer part B.

### Part A

Which right allows U.S. citizens to directly participate in the electoral process?

- A. the right to vote
- B. the right to a trial by jury



- C. the right to religious freedom
- D. the right to legal representation

### Part B

What is a responsibility of exercising the right that you selected in Part A?

- A. serving on a jury
  - B. paying attorney fees
  - C. obtaining a college degree
  - D. being informed on public issues
4. Following the Supreme Court's decision in *Brown v. Board of Education*, African-American students began applying to colleges and universities that had previously been segregated. In 1963, the governor of Alabama, George Wallace, tried to physically stop three African-American students from registering at the University of Alabama. President Kennedy ordered the Alabama National Guard to force Wallace to move aside and allow the students to register.

Why did President Kennedy take this action?

- A. The state judicial branch refused to comply with an executive order.
  - B. The state executive branch refused to comply with a federal court ruling.
  - C. The federal judicial branch refused to comply with a ruling by the state judicial branch.
  - D. The federal legislative branch refused to comply with a state executive branch decision.
5. In the presidential election of 1800, there was a tie in the Electoral College vote for president. How was the U.S. Constitution amended to change the election procedures of the Electoral College?
- A. Separate balloting was required for candidates for president and vice president.
  - B. The vice president was required to belong to a different party than the president.
  - C. Voters were required to vote directly for presidential candidates instead of having electors.
  - D. Electors were required to vote for the candidate who received the most votes in their state.





## American Government—Part 1

6. Sanjay is reading a new book on Congress to see if it will work as a source for his report on the legislative branch.

In the **Answer Document**, select the letters before **two** sentences from biographical information about the author that can help Sanjay determine the author’s credibility.

- A. Asha Torres is the best-selling author of *To Counteract Ambition: The Fights of the Founding Founders*. **B** She proudly passed out flyers for her father’s school board campaign at age 16. **C** After she graduated from college, she worked for the governor as an administrative assistant. **D** She represented Ohio’s 20th district in Congress from 2003 to 2015. **E** She is now the head of the political science department at State University. **F** She lives with her family in Youngstown. **G** You can sign up for her current events newsletter to read her opinion on the latest news from Washington.

7. Before the U.S. Constitution was adopted, each state held a ratifying convention to discuss and vote on the Constitution.

Alexander Hamilton attended the New York state ratification convention. A quote from one of his speeches during the convention is shown.

Here [in the U.S. House of Representatives], sir, the people govern; here they act by their immediate representatives.

Which basic principle of governance is Hamilton highlighting in this quote?

- A. federalism
- B. limited government
- C. popular sovereignty
- D. separation of powers



8.

This item cannot be rendered as a paper/pencil item.

9. In 1851, Ohio drafted a new constitution that was meant to address problems of the original state constitution. These problems included:

- An overburdened judicial branch
- A significant amount of state government debt
- An overly powerful legislative branch

In the **Answer Document**, select all of the ways that the Ohio Constitution of 1851 addressed these problems.

- A. It created district courts.
- B. It instituted debt limitations.
- C. It forgave all outstanding state debt.
- D. It allowed the judicial branch to appoint legislative officials.
- E. It required major executive officials to be elected into office.
- F. It restricted the number of cases that could be brought to trial in the state each year.

10. In the **Answer Document**, select the letter before each correct word to complete the summary of government taxation and spending policies. The federal government controls taxation and spending policy. These are



## American Government—Part 1

both parts

- A. fiscal
- B. monetary

of policy. If the government were to raise taxes

and decrease

spending, this would be an example of an attempt to

- A. encourage
- B. slow

economic growth.

11. Which statement accurately describes the relationship between the Ohio Constitution and the U.S. Constitution?
- A. Ohio laws overrule federal laws when there is a conflict.
  - B. All articles of the Ohio Constitution must be the same as all articles of the U.S. Constitution.
  - C. The structure of the Ohio Constitution does not resemble the structure of the U.S. Constitution.
  - D. The Ohio Constitution is consistent with the key principles of the U.S. Constitution, but contains some laws that differ from the laws of the U.S. Constitution.

Use the following information to answer questions 12 and 13.

### Ratifying a treaty

*The president is trying to secure approval of a treaty he was instrumental in drafting. A treaty must be approved by two-thirds (67 members) of the U.S. Senate. The president's advisors have prepared an analysis of the Senate's position on the treaty. Their analysis is shown.*

#### Analysis of Senate Position on the Treaty

The Senate is divided into several groups with respect to opinions regarding approval of the treaty. If the treaty were to be voted on in its present form, 50 senators would vote for it and 50 would vote against it. A breakdown of the groups' positions is listed.

- **Opposition party group (15 members):** opposes the treaty because they disagree with the president's policies in general.
- **Moderate opposition party group (35 members):** supports most of the provisions of the treaty but strongly opposes one of the provisions. This group will vote for approval if that provision is not implemented.



- **Moderate members of the president’s party (40 members):** support the treaty as it appears; members mainly follow the president’s leadership and will vote the way the president wants them to.
- **Strongly ideological members of president’s party (10 members):** want stronger language in the treaty and will not vote for approval if the provisions of the treaty are weakened.

*The president’s advisors have also prepared several strategies using the tools of consensus building, compromise and persuasion to target groups within the Senate.*

### Strategies to Achieve Ratification of the Treaty

- **Consensus building:** meet with the leadership of each group of senators to find provisions of the treaty on which they all can agree.
- **Compromise:** make concessions to meet a group’s demands; alter language of the bill to address the concerns of a particular group.
- **Persuasion:** the president should use his political influence by traveling across the country to build popular support for the bill with the people, in the hope that they will pressure their senators to support it.

*The president chooses to use the persuasion strategy, targeting the moderate members of the opposition party. The president’s cross-country trip takes a great deal of time and distracts him from other public policy objectives. Despite this drawback, the trip builds enough support across the country to convince some senators to support the treaty. The treaty is approved by a vote of 69 to 31.*

“Ratifying a treaty” written for the Ohio Department of Education.

12. Factors outside of constitutionally established governmental processes often affect public policy.

In the **Answer Document**, select the boxes to identify whether each factor would increase, decrease or have little impact on the likelihood of approval of a treaty by the Senate.

|  | Increase | Decrease | Little or No Impact |
|--|----------|----------|---------------------|
| The president is a close friend of the chief justice of the Supreme Court.                                 | <b>A</b> | <b>B</b> | <b>C</b>            |
| There is little public interest in the treaty, but a vocal minority of the public is highly opposed to it. | <b>D</b> | <b>E</b> | <b>F</b>            |



## American Government—Part 1

|  |          |          |          |
|--|----------|----------|----------|
| Interest groups that favor the treaty are contributing large sums of money to lawmakers' campaign funds.   | <b>G</b> | <b>H</b> | <b>I</b> |
| Political parties are encouraging their members to hold to their original positions in order to appear decisive and unified ahead of an upcoming election. | <b>J</b> | <b>K</b> | <b>L</b> |

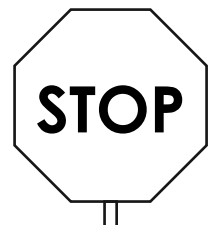


## American Government—Part 1

13. Suppose the President decided that none of the proposed strategies will work and directed his advisors to develop negotiation based strategies.

In the **Answer Document**, select the **two** strategies that the president’s advisors could propose that represent forms of negotiation.


- A. threaten to veto all bills until the Senate approves the treaty
- B. conduct media interviews about the treaty and why it should be approved
- C. meet with a group of senators opposed to the treaty to discuss their concerns
- D. give a speech to the Senate outlining reasons that they should approve the treaty
- E. hold meetings with members of both parties to settle differences on aspects of the treaty











Do not go on Do not go on Do not go on

1. Citizens must choose between a plan to build a new city auditorium or a plan to restore the old one. Supporters of the new auditorium claim that building a new auditorium would be more economical than restoring the old one.

In evaluating the credibility of this claim, citizens should pay particular attention to

- A. the number of performances held in the auditorium each year.
- B. the amount of money the supporters spend on promoting their position.
- C. the popularity of the supporters as community leaders.
- D. the projected cost data provided by architects and accountants.

2.

This item cannot be rendered as a paper/pencil item.

3. How can a citizen become involved in addressing problems that affect the entire state?

- A. by joining a community watch group
- B. by volunteering for the fire department
- C. by signing petitions to place issues on the ballot
- D. by attending a meeting of the local school board

4. Two constitutional amendments are shown.

**15th Amendment**

Section 1. The right of citizens of the United States to vote shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or by any State on account of race, color, or



## American Government—Part 2

previous condition of servitude. Section 2. The Congress shall have the power to enforce this article by appropriate legislation.

### **24th Amendment**

Section 1. The right of citizens of the United States to vote in any primary or other election for President or Vice President, for electors for President or Vice President, or for Senator or Representative in Congress, shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or any State by reason of failure to pay any poll tax or other tax. Section 2. The Congress shall have power to enforce this article by appropriate legislation.

What was the result of the addition of these amendments to the U.S. Constitution?

- A. The requirements for citizenship were revised.
  - B. Civil rights were extended to disenfranchised groups.
  - C. New powers were granted to states to regulate election rules.
  - D. Strict restrictions were placed on federal campaign fundraising.
5. This question has two parts. In the **Answer Document**, first, answer Part A. Then, answer Part B. **Part A**

An excerpt from the U.S. Bill of Rights is shown.

Amendment 3: No Soldier shall, in time of peace be quartered in any house, without the consent of the Owner, nor in time of war, but in a manner to be prescribed by law.

What was the effect of this amendment?

- A. the protection of individual rights
- B. the establishment of a standing army
- C. the outlawing of mandatory military service
- D. the strengthening of state and local governments **Part B**

How was the effect in Part A brought about?



- A. by expanding the role of citizens in government
- B. by formalizing the federal system of government
- C. by defining the separation of powers in government
- D. by placing limits on the power of the federal government

6.

This item cannot be rendered as a paper/pencil item.

7. How did a constitutional amendment alter an aspect of the Electoral College?
- A. The District of Columbia was granted electoral votes despite not being a state.
  - B. States were granted additional electoral votes based on the size of their economies.
  - C. Electoral votes from the home states of presidential nominees were redistributed to other states.
  - D. Citizens living abroad were granted their own block of electoral votes despite not living in a state.
8. What was one change made by the 1851 Ohio Constitution that affected how the state was governed?
- A. The 1851 Ohio Constitution increased the power of the General Assembly.
  - B. The 1851 Ohio Constitution limited the amount of debt the state could accumulate.
  - C. The 1851 Ohio Constitution permitted the General Assembly to enact retroactive laws.





## American Government—Part 2

- D. The 1851 Ohio Constitution lifted a restriction on how the state could spend its tax funds.

9.

This item cannot be rendered as a paper/pencil item.

10. The following question has two parts. In the **Answer Document**, first, answer part A. Then, answer part B. **Part A**

In the United States, rights carry responsibilities.

Which is a civic responsibility of citizens?

- A. serving on a jury
- B. attending college
- C. donating money to charity
- D. being active in a political party

### Part B

Which right of U.S. citizens does the civic responsibility that you selected in Part A safeguard?

- A. right to an education
- B. right to an impartial jury
- C. right to be mayor of a city
- D. right to read the newspaper



11. Your city is debating whether to install a skateboard park on city-owned land. You want to support the park.

Which method would be effective in helping to determine public policy on this decision?

- A. Participate in the governor's re-election campaign.
  - B. Send an email to your U.S. senators expressing your point of view.
  - C. Attend the meeting of the city council and present the benefits of a park.
  - D. Organize a letter-writing campaign to members of the Ohio General Assembly.
12. What was one way the Constitution was amended to address African American inequality during Reconstruction?
- A. by extending citizenship to former slaves
  - B. by prohibiting the segregation of public facilities
  - C. by providing financial compensation to former slaves
  - D. by appointing African American governors in Southern states



## American Government—Part 2

13. Which statement summarizes the original Federalist position on the Bill of Rights?
- A. Additional amendments were needed, given the Constitution's lack of individual protections.
  - B. Adopting the Bill of Rights was too risky because it might threaten ratification of the Constitution.
  - C. The Bill of Rights should be adopted because national sovereignty should always come before states' rights.
  - D. No amendments were needed, as the Constitution already had protections against excessive government power.



