

# PARTNERS IN DEMOCRACY



## Massachusetts Democracy Scorecard 2022

## Massachusetts voters are dissatisfied with outcomes on:

- Housing
- Transit and transportation
- Schools
- Climate
- Black-white wealth gap

**□ And unhealthy democracy blocks the transfer of voters' desires into state action.**

# Democracy is not healthy in Massachusetts

Despite being the cradle of democracy,  
**MASSACHUSETTS** is:

**37th** in the country for the gap between BIPOC population and BIPOC legislative representation;

**41st** in the country for monetary competitiveness of candidates;

**48th** in the country for the gap between white and BIPOC turnout;

**50th** in the country for state legislature effectiveness;

**50th** in the country for competitiveness of elections;

**□ Achieving inclusion & competitiveness requires a suite of 360° democracy renovations**

In Massachusetts  
2020 and 2022 US Census data  
show voter registration **below the  
national average** for black,  
Hispanic, and Asian Americans  
citizens in Massachusetts.

# Health Indicators

We have identified 10 indicators of democracy health.

1. Voting is easily accessible
2. Availability of choices
3. Total turnout
4. Parity in turnout
5. Ease of ballot access
6. Candidate representativeness
7. Accessibility of campaigning
8. Legislative & administrative transparency
9. Strength & breadth of press coverage
10. Government responsiveness to voter preferences

# Health Indicator 1: Voting Is Easily Accessible

## MASSACHUSETTS Successes

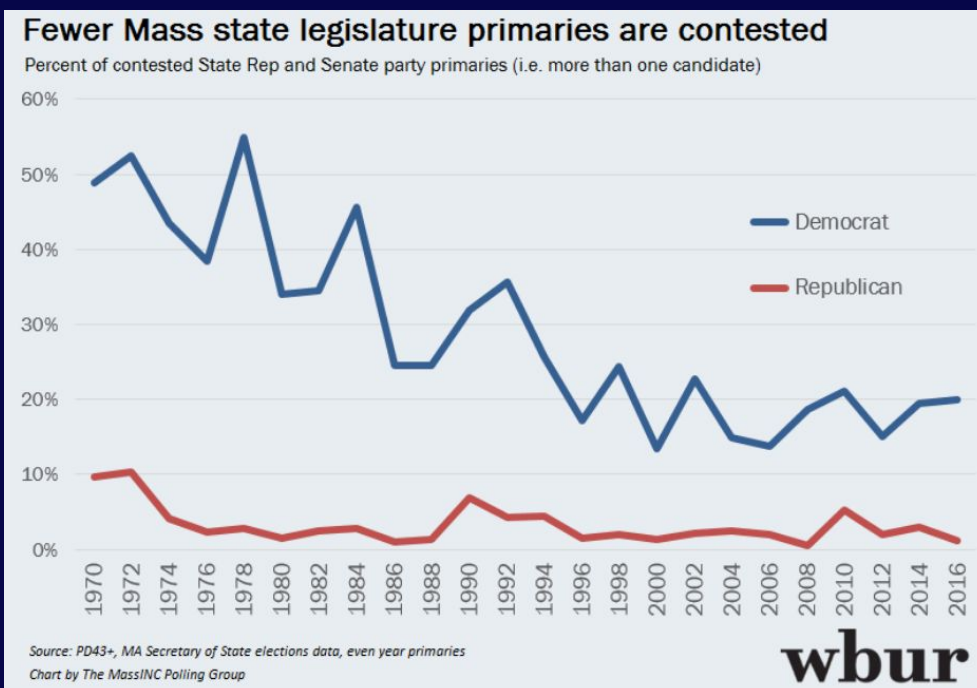
- Opt-in automatic voter registration when potential voters interact with certain services (driver's license, taxes)
- Permanent vote-by-mail and in-person early voting

## MASSACHUSETTS Areas for Improvement

- No universal automatic voter registration, (available in 14 other states)
- No same-day registration (available in 19 other states)
- Relatively brief in-person early voting
- No electronic voting methods (4 states and DC)
- Election Day is not a holiday
- Primaries often held immediately before or after Labor Day
- Large number of special elections and off-cycle elections mean voters must take time off to vote many times a year
- Still has inactive voter rolls
- Voters can only vote in-person at their precinct polling place

# Health Indicator 2: Availability of Choices

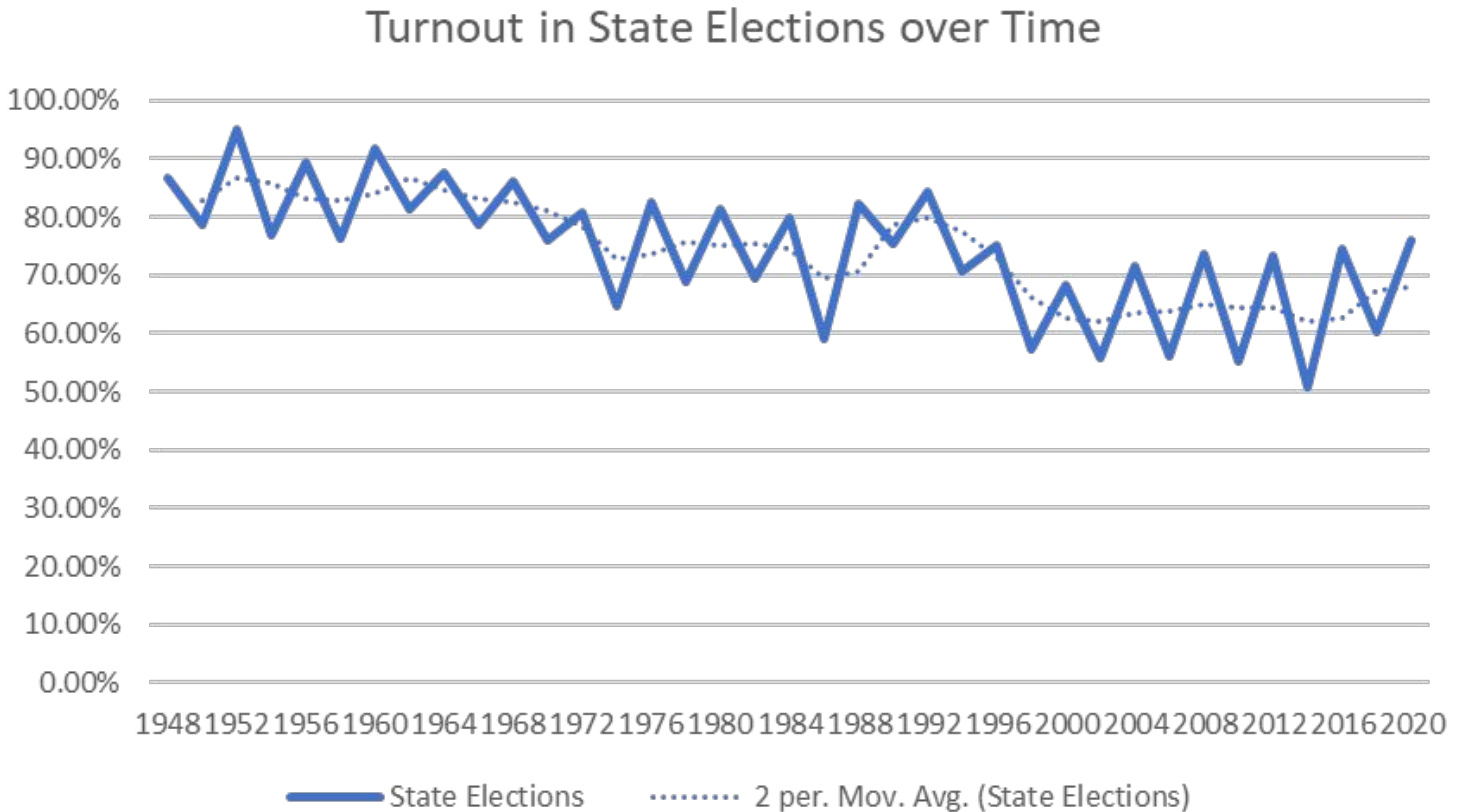
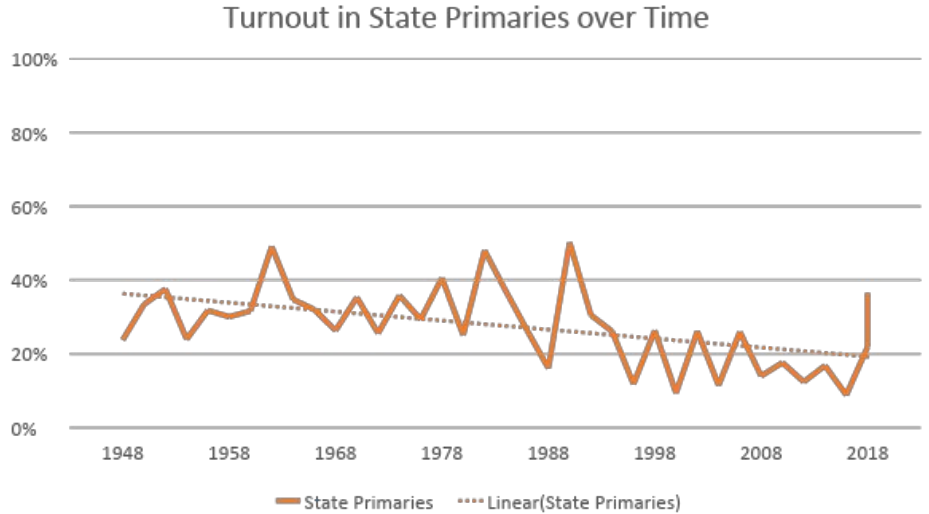
- In the 2022 cycle, Democrats had primary choices in just 20% of state legislative seats in either chamber. Republicans had a primary choice in just 5% of Senate and 1.25% of House seats.
- In 2018, 160 of MA's 219 state and federal elections went uncontested.
- In 2020, MA had the **least competitive legislative elections of all states**, judging by number of open elections, contested primaries, and contested generals.



The problem is worsening over time.

# Health Indicator 3: Total Turnout

Turnout in state elections and state primaries has been declining since the mid 20th century. However, the Trump years saw a reversal of this trend.



Presidential primaries see wide fluctuations—low in 2012 (Obama reelection), higher in Trump years. Turnover has not been over 50% since 1952.



## Health Indicator 4: Parity in Turnout

- In 2020, MA had the country's lowest turnout among Black voters. At 36%, Black turnout was just over half of white turnout (71%), measured as a percentage of the voting eligible population.
- Black, Latinx, and AAPI voters have seen **increased vote share** in recent elections but remain **highly underrepresented**.
- Black, Latinx, and AAPI voters cast 13.3% of votes in 2022. These groups account for 26.3% of MA's population.

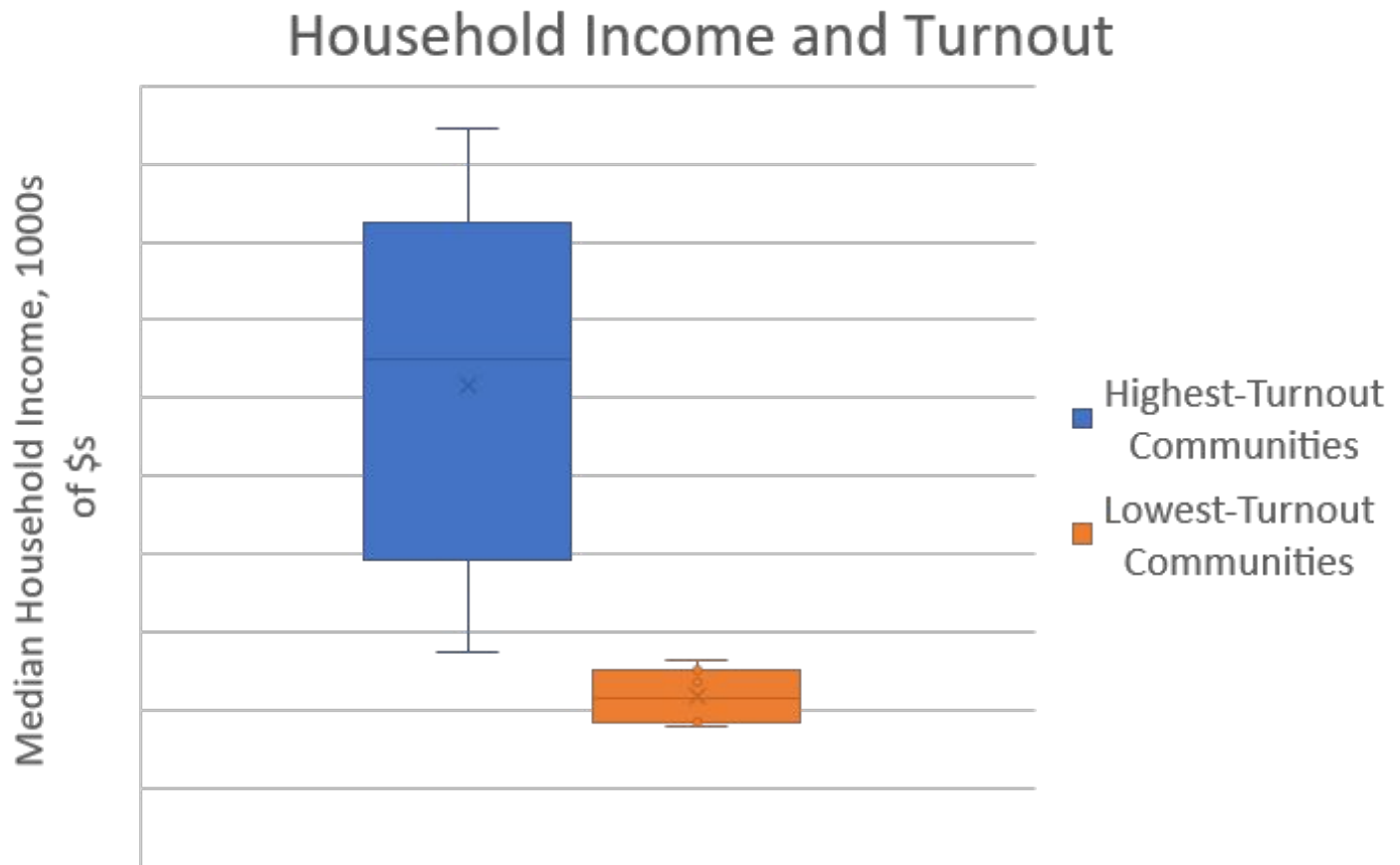
# Health Indicator 4: Parity in Turnout

- The 10 communities with highest turnout include:
  - **6 Boston suburbs**
    - Harvard
    - Medfield
    - Dover
    - Sudbury
    - Wenham
    - Cohasset
    - Carlisle
  - **3 communities in Western MA**
    - Westhampton
    - Mount Washington
    - Plainfield

# Health Indicator 4: Parity in Turnout

- The 10 communities with the lowest turnout are:
  - **9 Gateway Cities:**
    - Springfield
    - Lawrence
    - New Bedford
    - Chelsea
    - Holyoke
    - Lowell
    - Fall River
    - Brockton
    - Lynn
  - and **the working-class town** of Southbridge

# Health Indicator 4: Parity in Turnout

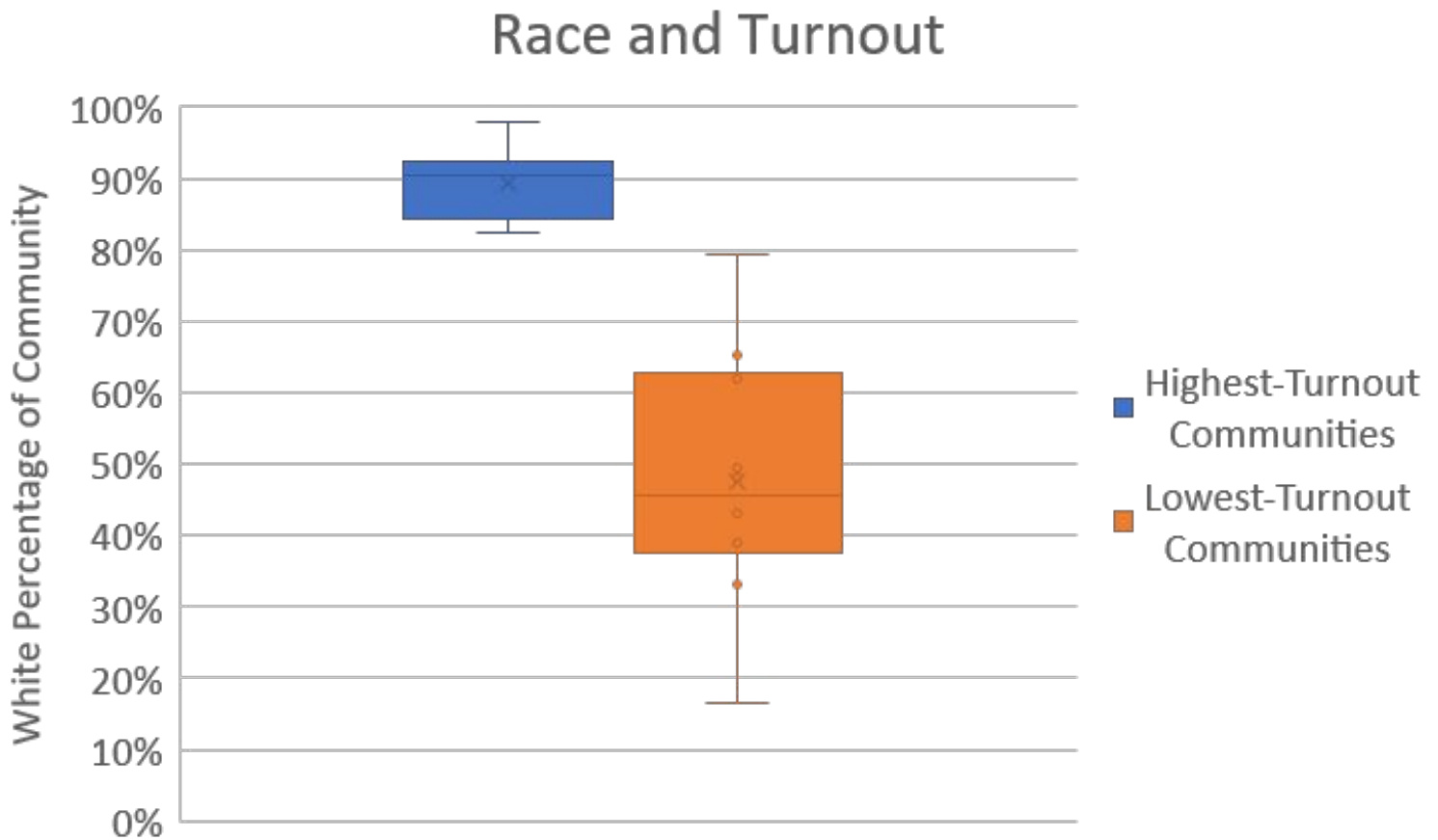


The 10 **highest-turnout** communities have median incomes between \$55k and \$189k (avg: \$123k).

The 10 **lowest-turnout** communities are between \$36k and \$53k (avg. \$43k).

All highest-turnout communities have a higher median income than all lowest-turnout communities.

# Health Indicator 4: Parity in Turnout



The 10 **highest-turnout** are between 83% and 98% white (avg: 89%); the 10 **lowest-turnout** are between 33% and 79% white (avg: 48%).

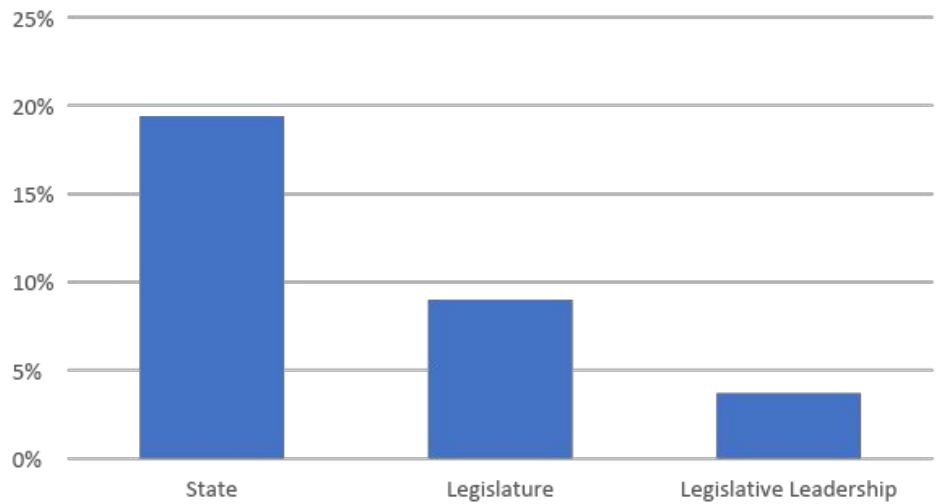
All highest-turnout communities are whiter than all lowest-turnout communities.

# Health Indicator 5: Ease of Ballot Access

- Accessing a party primary ballot is functionally necessary to run a serious campaign in MA
  - (Massachusetts has only 1 independent state legislator, none in Congress)
- The Democratic and Republican parties' 15% convention rule plus the state's 10,000 signature requirement add up to one of the country's most restrictive ballot access regimes

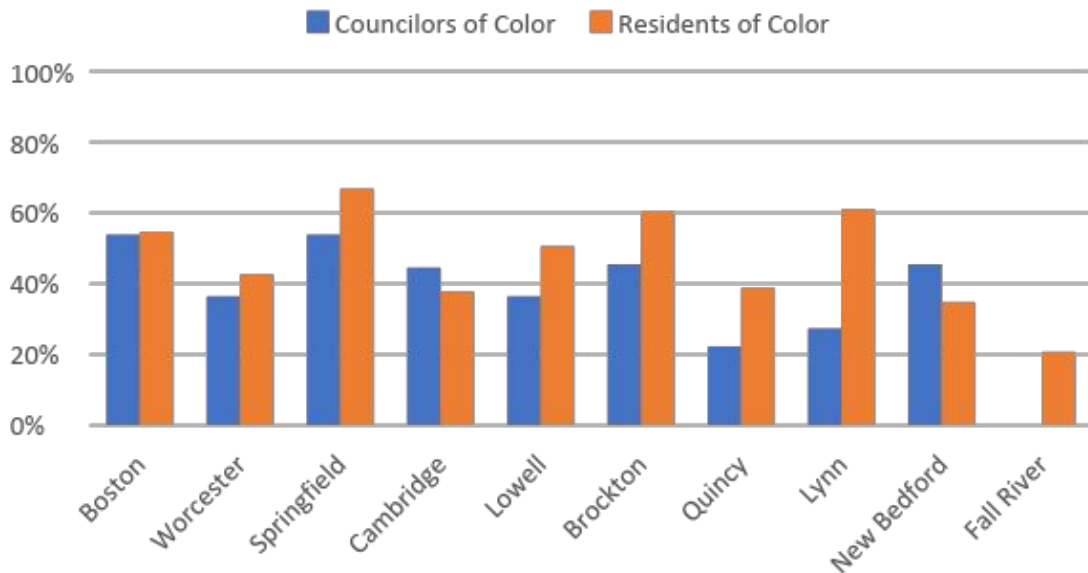
# Health Indicator 6: Candidate Representativeness

% of People of Color in State, Legislature, and Leg. Leadership



Among the Commonwealth's 10 largest cities, people of color make up a smaller share of the City Council than the population in 7. Fall River has no councilors of color.

City Council Representation



# Health Indicator 7: Accessibility of Campaigning

- MA has the longest primary season of all states—candidates must campaign from February to September to get on the general election ballot
- Public campaign financing is only available to statewide candidates and subject to limits well below candidates' usual fundraising totals
- Public employees have strict limits on campaign fundraising activities



## Health Indicator 8: Legislative & Administrative Transparency

- MA does not require committee votes and often does not require floor votes—to get a floor vote, 16 representatives must demand it
- Amendment texts are removed from website after votes
- Bills often killed by being “sent to study”
- Legislature often waits until the very end of session to complete business, leading to rushed processes with limited potential for public oversight
- Lack of public voting records & incentives to follow leadership make it difficult to discern the positions of individual legislators
- Locally, the availability of public vote records, contact information for elected officials, and pending policy proposals varies widely by municipality

## Health Indicator 9: Strength & Breadth of Press Coverage

- Hedge funds are buying up and consolidating local news, with areas outside Boston facing the greatest decrease in local news
  - One hedge fund owns all the “Wicked Local” papers in MA
- Sinclair owns 72% of US household local TV news, including many channels in MA
- The legislature established a commission to study ways to improve the health of MA’s journalism sector in 2019

# Health Indicator 10: Government Responsiveness to Voter Preferences

- Lack of transparency, diffused elections, and legislative changes to ballot question results all make it difficult for voters to see the policy implications of their electoral choices.
- Two-year long legislative term, rushed end-of-session lawmaking, and weakened press coverage combine to give voters less insight into the legislative activity of their representatives
- The state and its localities have not, for the most part, used new technologies to encourage more robust participation in governance

# What's Next?

**To stay up to date on  
our work, visit:**  
[partnersindemocracy.us](https://partnersindemocracy.us)

Partners In Democracy will use this scorecard and the 360° Democracy Standard to test the potential prongs of a ballot initiative and to engage communities across the Commonwealth in a discussion of how to achieve a healthier democracy.