

# PARTNERS IN DEMOCRACY



## Ohio Democracy Scorecard 2024

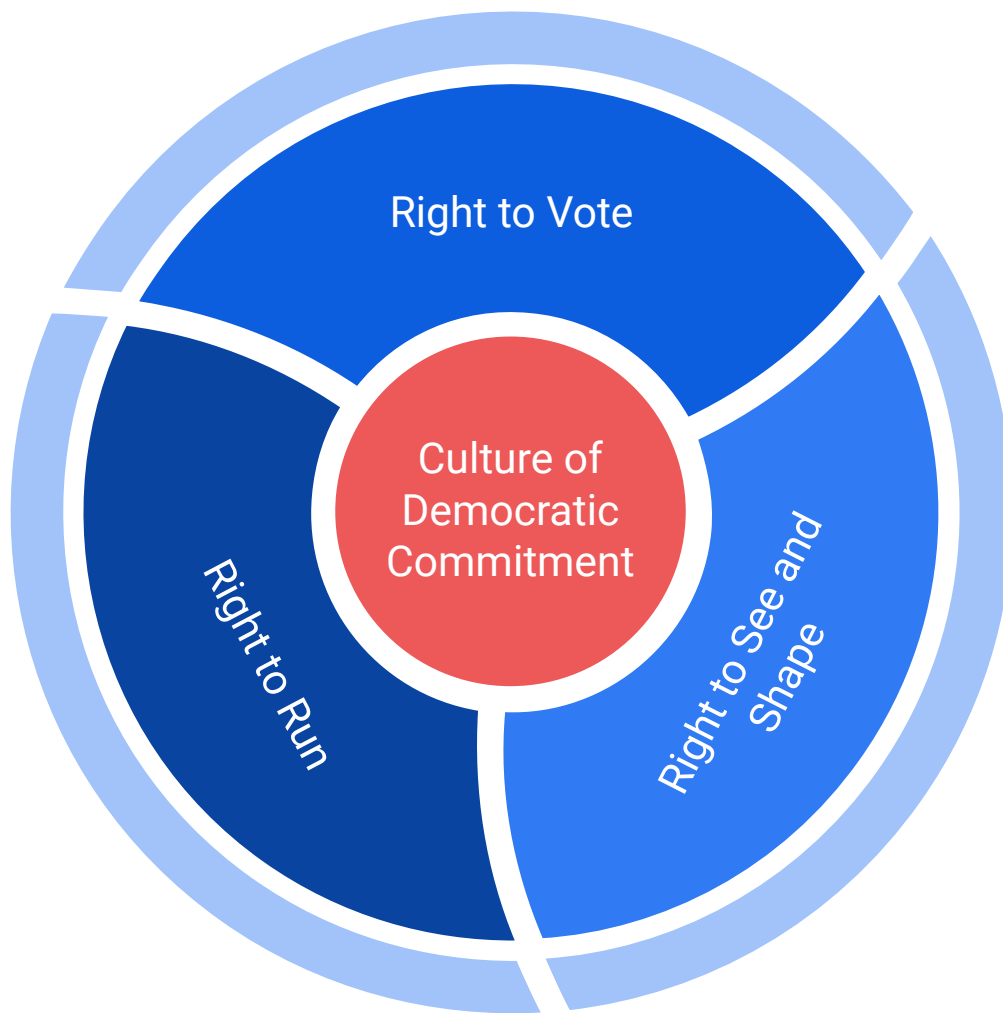
# Introduction

The Partners In Democracy 2024 Ohio Democracy Scorecard is an extensive assessment of the health of democracy in Ohio. The scorecard is rooted in PID's 360° Democracy Standard, and evaluates strengths and weaknesses in the core pillars of democracy: the right to vote, the right to run for office, and the right to see and shape our communities.

Research for this scorecard was conducted by the PID team, and input from community members and fellow democracy organizations helped shape the areas of research.

Our goal: to help Ohioans learn about their democracy in more depth, and to provide a springboard for people to push for progress towards a healthier democracy in Ohio.

# Our 360° Democracy Standard



Our 360° Democracy Standard provides a holistic approach to fixing our democracy, where we **focus on all the pillars of a healthy democracy**, rather than a single issue or individual piece of the puzzle.

# Health Indicators

We have identified 13 indicators of democracy health, including 3 indicators specific to Ohio.

1. **Voting access**
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**
11. **Transparency & fairness in campaign finance**
12. **Strength of digital infrastructure**
13. **Modernization of voting method**

# Health Indicator 1: Voting Access

---

**Is it easy for eligible voters to register and cast their vote?**

# Health Indicator 1: Voting Access

## OHIO Successes

### *Voting Schedule*

- Early voting is available throughout Ohio for all state elections, including some weekend hours.<sup>1</sup>
- Ohio is one of only 6 states that allows early voting on Sundays, and one of only 18 states that allows early voting on Saturdays.<sup>1</sup>
- All voters are eligible to vote by mail.<sup>1</sup>
- General Election Day is a legal holiday.<sup>2</sup>
- In presidential years, the state primary is held with the presidential primary which boosts turnout.<sup>3</sup>

## OHIO Areas for Improvement

### *Voting Schedule*

- Early voting is available only at select polling places, while Election Day voting wait times are often unreasonably long in certain counties, reducing access.
- Mail voting requires multiple steps with restrictive timelines.<sup>4</sup>
- Though Election Day's status as a legal holiday requires employers to allow employees to take a reasonable amount of time to vote, these protections are limited.<sup>5</sup>
  - The amount of time allowed is determined by employers, who can require proof and/or advance notice.
  - Protections apply only to salaried employees, not to hourly or commissioned/piecework employees.<sup>6</sup>
  - Eligibility is limited to certain work/commute hours.<sup>6</sup>
  - Public and county employees do not receive paid leave or holiday pay, and public agencies are not required to close.<sup>7</sup>

# Health Indicator 1: Voting Access

## OHIO Successes

### ***Voter ID***

- Ohio residents without a valid driver's license can receive a state issued ID card for free.<sup>8</sup>
- Only registered voters may challenge another voter's registration and must do so 30-days before an election under a penalty of election falsification which is a fifth-degree felony.<sup>9</sup>

### ***Language & Disability Accessibility***

- Where language may be a barrier, voters may bring someone to assist.<sup>10</sup>
- A lawsuit recently struck down HB 458, a law that tightly restricted who was authorized to assist voters with disabilities in casting absentee ballots.<sup>11</sup>

## OHIO Areas for Improvement

### ***Voter ID***

- In 2023, Ohio became one of nine states who have adopted a strict photo ID law. Without photo ID, only a provisional ballot may be cast and the voter is required to present their valid photo ID within 4 days of the election at the Board of Elections or the ballot is cancelled; whereas 27 additional states hold voter id laws, all of them allow identification to be either non-photo identification or allow verification of identification in through alternative methods such as affidavits.<sup>12</sup>
- Approx. 3 million drivers face debt-related suspensions annually<sup>13</sup> — reducing access to voter ID, particularly for lower income people.

### ***Language & Disability Accessibility***

- Translators are not systematically placed at polling locations in counties with high populations for whom English is either a 2nd or 3rd language.<sup>14</sup>
- Despite the striking down of HB 458, the Sec. of State's website still lists the restrictive list of persons that were approved to possess/return an absentee ballot under HB 458, and in practice, guidance remains inconsistent from county to county.<sup>15</sup>

# Health Indicator 1: Voting Access

## OHIO Areas for Improvement

### ***Voter Purges & Voter Education***

- Ohio has a history of aggressively purging voters. In 2018, Ohio's practice of purging voters because of failure to return a change of address mailing was upheld by the Supreme Court — setting a new national precedent.<sup>16</sup> Purges are carried out frequently, at the Secretary of State's discretion, rather than on a fixed and predictable timeline.<sup>17</sup>
- Nearly 155,000 voter registrations were removed from voter rolls<sup>18</sup>, many due to an address change, ahead of the November 2024 presidential election; according to civil rights advocates, more than half were registered in counties where a majority of the population are BIPOC.<sup>19</sup>
- Inactive voters can be removed from the rolls for reasons as simple as not responding to a change of residence postcard.<sup>20</sup>
- Voters are not notified if they're removed from the rolls. Coupled with restrictive registration timelines/lack of same day voter registration and voter ID barriers, this lack of transparency can easily cause someone to lose the chance to vote.<sup>21</sup>
- The Ohio Secretary of State continues to focus on referrals to the Attorney General office for noncitizen voter registration despite the fact that the 1,216 referrals over the past 5 years re account for less than .02% of the states total registered voters in 2024.<sup>22</sup>
- Voter education outreach was diminished in a 2021 state budget provision, this provision blocks non-governmental organizations (like nonprofits, businesses, and churches) from collaborating with election officials at the state or county level to do voter education, registration, or turnout outreach.<sup>23</sup>



# **Health Indicator 2: Availability of Choices**

---

**Do voters have meaningful  
choices on their ballot?**

## Health Indicator 2: Availability of Choices

### OHIO Successes

- A proposed amendment to create an **Independent** Redistricting Commission is on the November 2024 ballot.<sup>24</sup>

### OHIO Areas for Improvement

- Millions of Ohioans live in districts where elections for state representatives are consistently either **uncompetitive or uncontested**, nearly **half** the districts in the 99-member Ohio House **did not hold a primary** contest to nominate the candidate expected to win in November 2024.<sup>25</sup>
- Gerrymandered maps have resulted in the November 2024 General Election having 15 districts with only one major party candidate and 62 uncompetitive districts.<sup>25</sup>
- On Tuesday, September 26, 2023, the existing Ohio Redistricting Commission, whose members are elected officials, unanimously approved a legislative map deemed by the Supreme Court to have a partisan advantage.<sup>26</sup>

# Health Indicator 2: Availability of Choices

An April 2024 report by the Brennan Center for Justice highlights the high rates of uncontested and uncompetitive races in Ohio's state house elections using data provided by the Ohio Secretary of State Unofficial 2024 Primary Election results report from March 2024.<sup>25</sup>

## Ohio State House Districts by Category

GENERAL ELECTION		PRIMARY ELECTION	
<b>Uncontested</b>	<b>15</b>		
Districts with only one major party candidate on the November ballot.		<b>Uncontested Primary</b>	<b>11</b>
		<b>Contested Primary</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>Uncompetitive</b>	<b>62</b>		
Formally contested districts where victory is effectively out of reach for a given major party, regardless of circumstances.*		<b>Uncontested Primary for Favored Party</b>	<b>36</b>
		<b>Contested Primary for Favored Party</b>	<b>26</b>
<b>Contested</b>	<b>22</b>		
Formally contested districts that are either competitive or could be competitive depending on candidate quality and other circumstances.		<b>Uncontested Primaries for Both Parties</b>	<b>14</b>
		<b>Contested Democratic Primary Only</b>	<b>2</b>
		<b>Contested Republican Primary Only</b>	<b>4</b>
		<b>Contested in Both Primaries</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>99</b>		

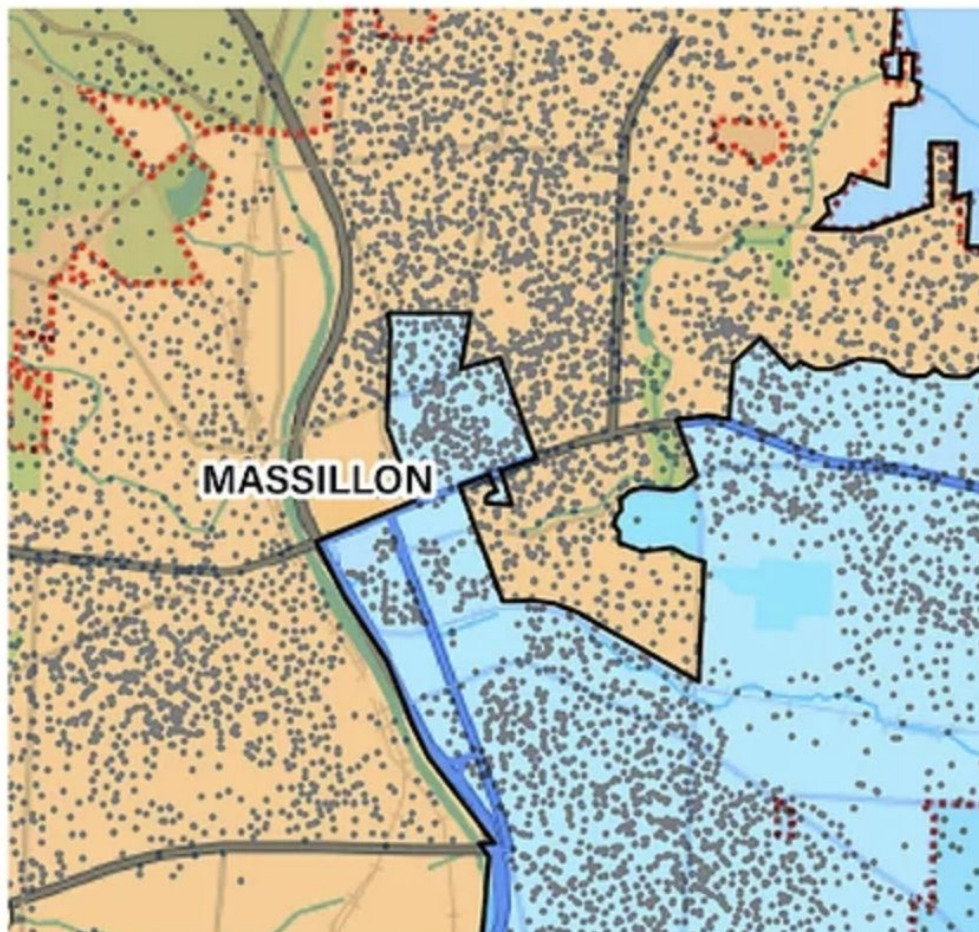
\*We distinguish districts as being out of reach for a given major party, regardless of circumstance, if that district's partisan composition is 55 percent or more Republican or Democratic. For more information on how partisan composition is calculated, see footnote 5 and Appendix 1B.

**Source:** Ohio Secretary of State Unofficial 2024 Primary Election Results, March 28, 2024.

## Health Indicator 2: Availability of Choices

Ohio is among the most gerrymandered states. Gerrymandering allows politicians to choose their voters, rather than voters choosing politicians, and leads to fewer and less representative choices on the ballot.

For example, current Congressional District Maps split up African American populations, thereby drowning out their votes.<sup>27</sup>



Dots represent concentration of minority voters. The blue area is the 6th District. The beige area is 13 th.

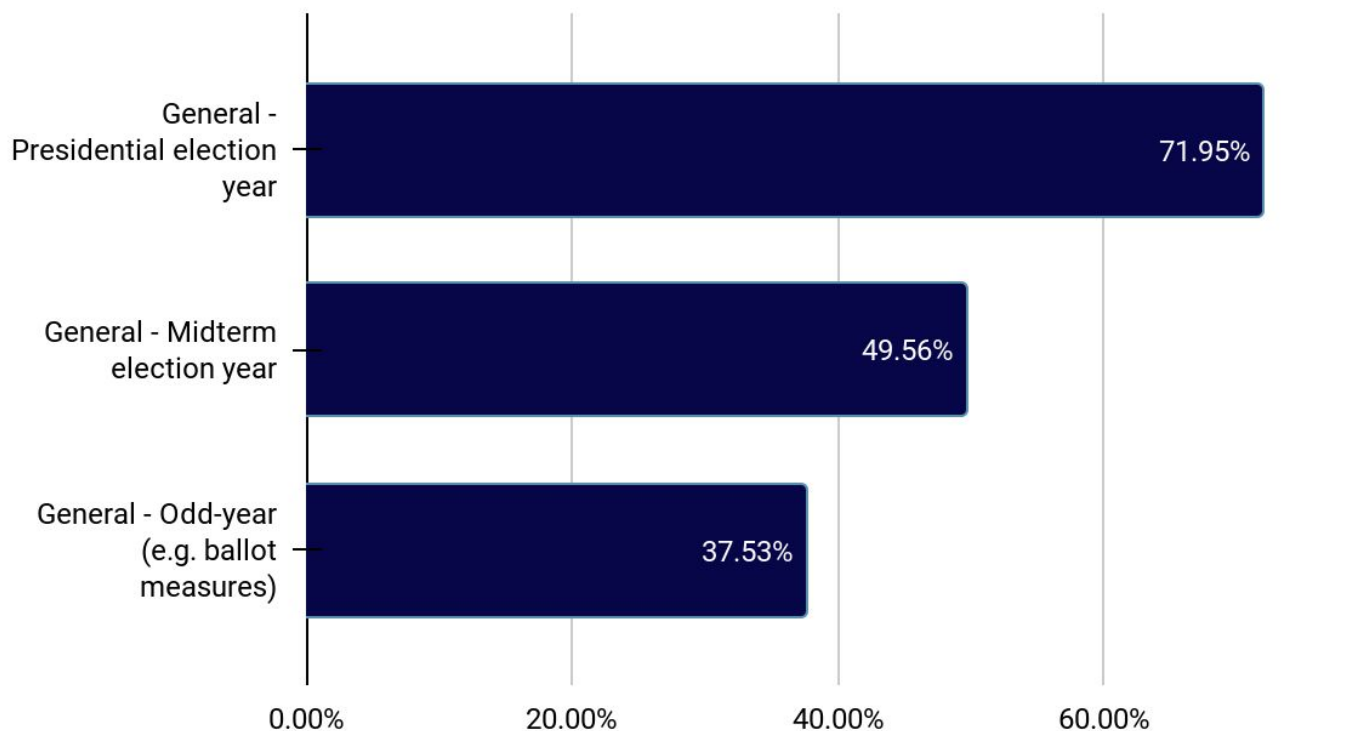
# Indicator 3: Total Turnout

---

**Are voters turning out to make  
their voices heard?**

# Health Indicator 3: Total Turnout

## Voter Turnout Rates



NOTE: Data set includes elections from 2012-2023.

These numbers reflect the percentage of registered voters who voted. As of 2024, Ohio ranks **27th in the country** for turnout, when assessing turnout of all eligible voters.<sup>28, 29</sup>

# Health Indicator 3: Total Turnout

Election	Jurisdiction / Population	Registered Voters	Ballots Counted	Voter Turnout Percentage
Special Congressional <sup>30</sup> General Election June 11, 2024	905,794 (6th Congressional district)	532,899	60,051	<b>11.27%</b>
Statewide Referendum <sup>31</sup> Special Election: August 8, 2023	Statewide	7,950,303	3,103,213	<b>39.03%</b>
Special Congressional <sup>32</sup> General Election November 2, 2021	3,661,938 (11th & 15th Congressional districts)	997,700	274,464	<b>27.51%</b>

Turnout numbers this low mean that election outcomes are determined by a small portion of the population.

# Indicator 4: Parity in Turnout

---

**Are voter turnout rates higher  
or lower for certain  
demographics?**



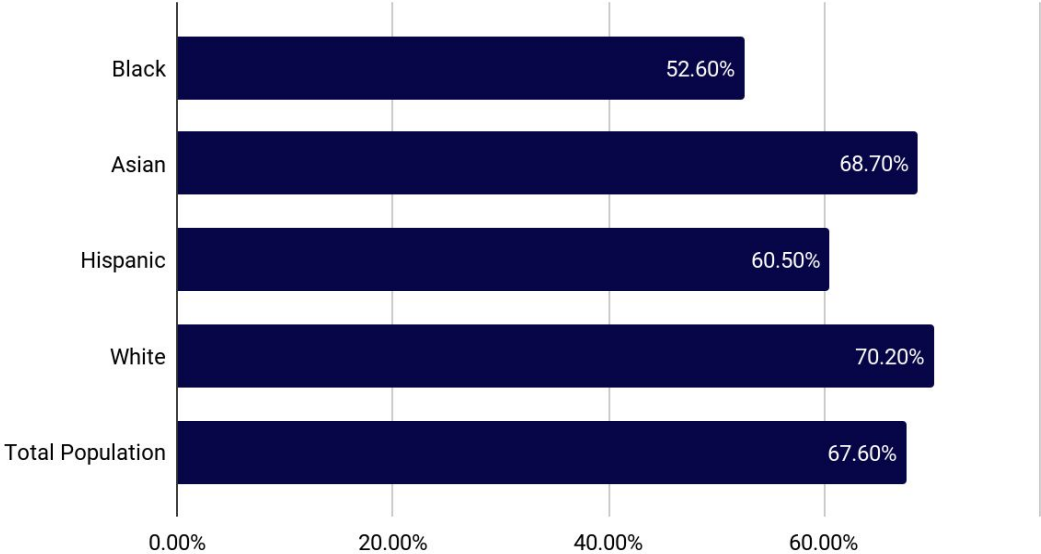
# Health Indicator 4: Parity In Turnout

OHIO Successes
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Nearly 76% of women in Ohio are registered to vote, surpassing the national average for women at 68.2%.<sup>33</sup></li></ul>

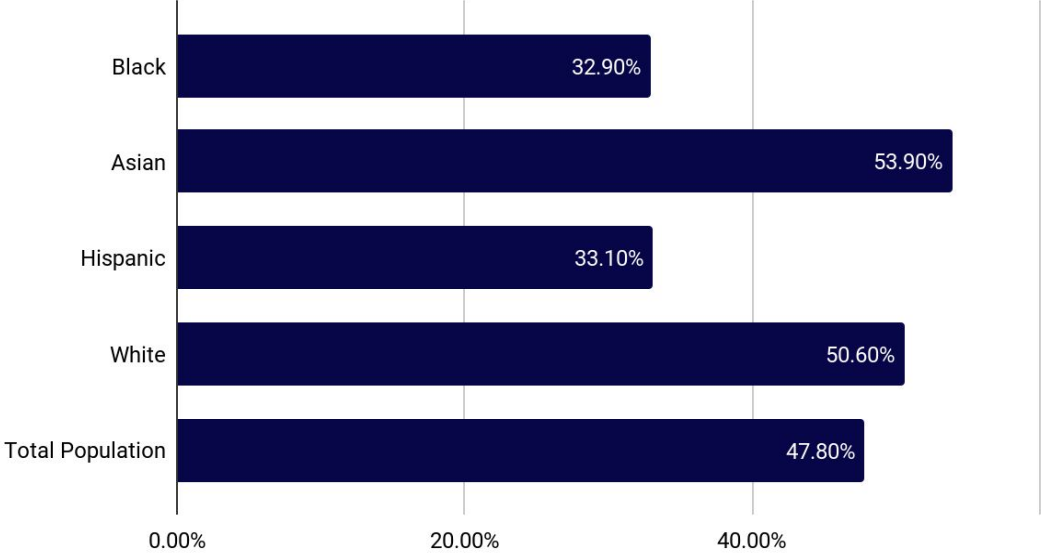
OHIO Areas for Improvement
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>All communities of color have lower voter registration rates than white Ohioans.<sup>34</sup></li><li>Black and Hispanic voters have significantly lower voter turnout rates than white voters.<sup>35</sup></li></ul>

# Health Indicator 4: Parity In Turnout

### Voter Registration Rate by Race/Ethnicity



### Voter Turnout by Race/Ethnicity



Average turnout & registration rates from 2014, 2016, 2018, 2020, and 2022, based on U.S. Census data. Rates of registration are percentage of citizen population.

In both voter registration and turnout, Ohio shows systemic and significant disparities by race.

# Health Indicator 4: Parity In Turnout

## Focus Locales in Ohio

15 counties in the state have a  
**voter turnout at 21% or below.**<sup>36</sup>

### Low Voter Turnout Counties ( $\leq 21\%$ )

Hamilton  
Franklin  
Paulding  
Lucas  
Van Wert  
Pike  
Defiance  
Jackson  
Butler  
Auglaize  
Crawford  
Summit  
Muskingum  
Cuyahoga  
Allen

# Health Indicator 4: Parity In Turnout

**Fifteen of the eighteen** cities and/or towns with populations over 5,000 whose population is **majority-minority** are in the low turnout counties.

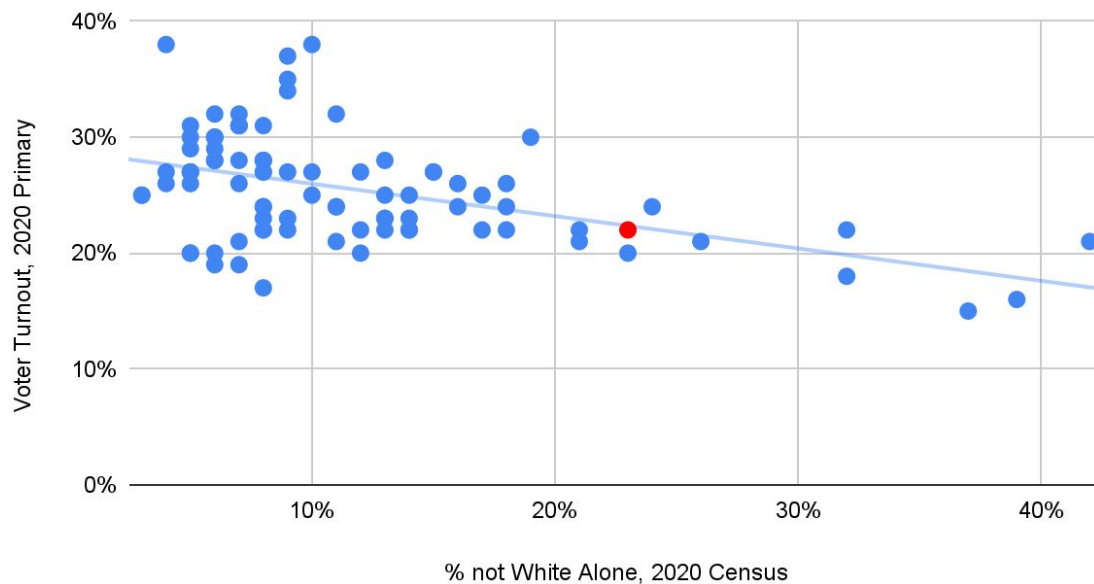
City	% Minority Population	% White / Not Hispanic Population	County
Warrensville Heights	96.00%	4.00%	Cuyahoga
East Cleveland	92.00%	8.00%	Cuyahoga
Bedford Heights	85.70%	14.30%	Cuyahoga
Forest Park	78.50%	21.50%	Hamilton
Maple Heights	72.70%	27.30%	Cuyahoga
Trotwood	71.10%	28.90%	Montgomery
North College Hill	68.00%	32.00%	Hamilton
Euclid	67.00%	33.00%	Cuyahoga
Cleveland	65.80%	34.20%	Cuyahoga
Richmond Heights	63.00%	37.00%	Cuyahoga
Garfield Heights	61.00%	39.00%	Cuyahoga
Bedford	59.90%	40.10%	Cuyahoga
Springdale	59.50%	40.50%	Hamilton
Whitehall	57.90%	42.10%	Franklin
Youngstown	57.20%	42.80%	Mahoning
South Euclid	56.60%	43.40%	Cuyahoga
Cleveland Heights	53.20%	46.80%	Cuyahoga
Cincinnati	51.80%	48.20%	Hamilton

\* County has voter turnout at or below 21%

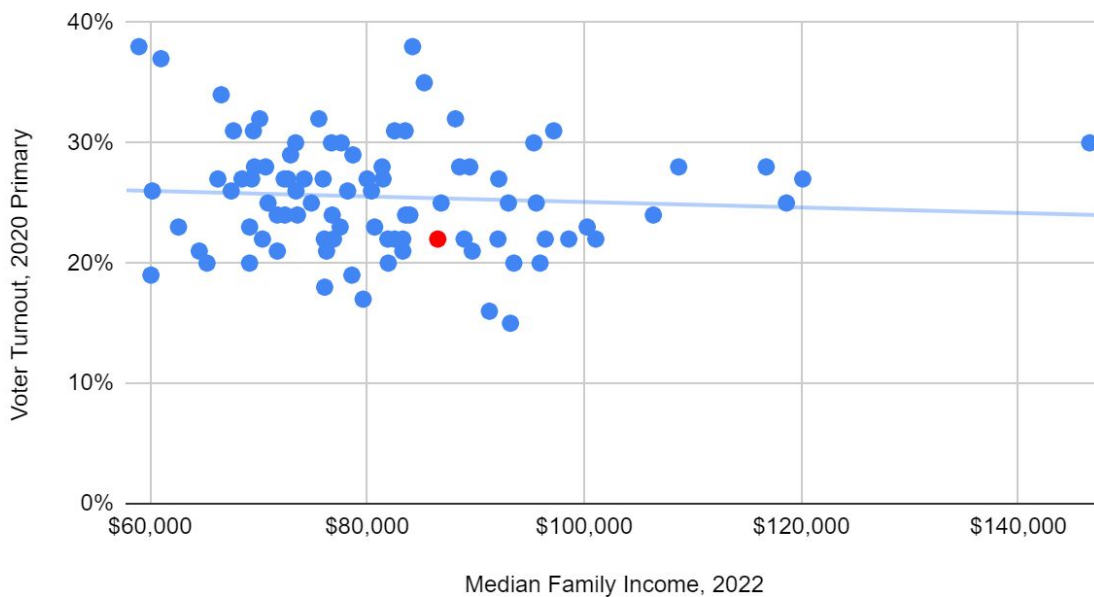
# Health Indicator 4: Parity In Turnout

The counties with the largest populations of color show systematically lower turnouts. Income does not appear to be a meaningful factor.<sup>37, 38</sup>

Counties with larger communities of color show lower turnout



A county's income level appears to be less of a factor



Each blue dot represents one county. The red dots represent Ohio as a whole.

# Indicator 5: Ease of Ballot Access

---

**Are candidates from all backgrounds able to get their name on the ballot and run for office, relatively easily?**

# Health Indicator 5: Ease of Ballot Access

## OHIO Successes

- For all elections, the only prerequisite to getting on the primary ballot is to collect signatures and file through either the Board of elections or Ohio's Secretary of State's Elections Division-Columbus.<sup>39</sup>

## OHIO Areas for Improvement

- Ohio has the only state law that requires presidential candidates' certification 90 days before the general election to be on the ballot; most states' certification deadlines are 60-75 days before Election Day.<sup>40</sup> Because of this, Ohio was one of two states at risk of not listing a Democratic presidential and vice presidential nominee on the November 2024 ballot. Two bills were passed in bipartisan fashion which delivered temporary extensions to the certification deadline in 2024, but there has been no long-term resolution of this issue.<sup>41</sup>
- The filing deadline for party candidates is 90 days before the Primary Election, and 1 day before the Primary Election for independent candidates. Ohio ranks 34th in filing deadlines furthest out from the Primary for state elections.

# Health Indicator 5: Ease of Ballot Access

## OHIO Successes

- For major and recognized minor party candidates, Ohio signature requirements<sup>42</sup> are low compared to other states, reducing barriers to ballot access. Ohio's races for U.S. Senate, Supreme Court Justice, and Governor require 1,000 signatures for major party candidates and 500 signatures for minor party candidates. Candidacy for State Board of Education has a requirement of 100 signatures, and for all other races, the requirement ranges from 5 to 50 signatures.

## OHIO Areas for Improvement

- While major party candidates for the state legislature need only 50 signatures to access the ballot in most races, the requirement for independent candidates varies—often to numbers greater than 50. This creates an inequitable barrier to independent voters running for office.
- For state offices, independent candidates must gather 5,000 signatures in contrast to the 1,000 required for major party candidates.



# Indicator 6: Candidate Representativeness

---

**Do candidates represent the full  
diversity of Ohio's voters?**

# Health Indicator 6: Candidate Representativeness

## OHIO Successes

- According to the National Conference for State Legislatures (NCSL), the racial composition of Ohio’s state legislature closely aligns with the racial makeup of the state’s overall population as of 2020.<sup>43, 44</sup>

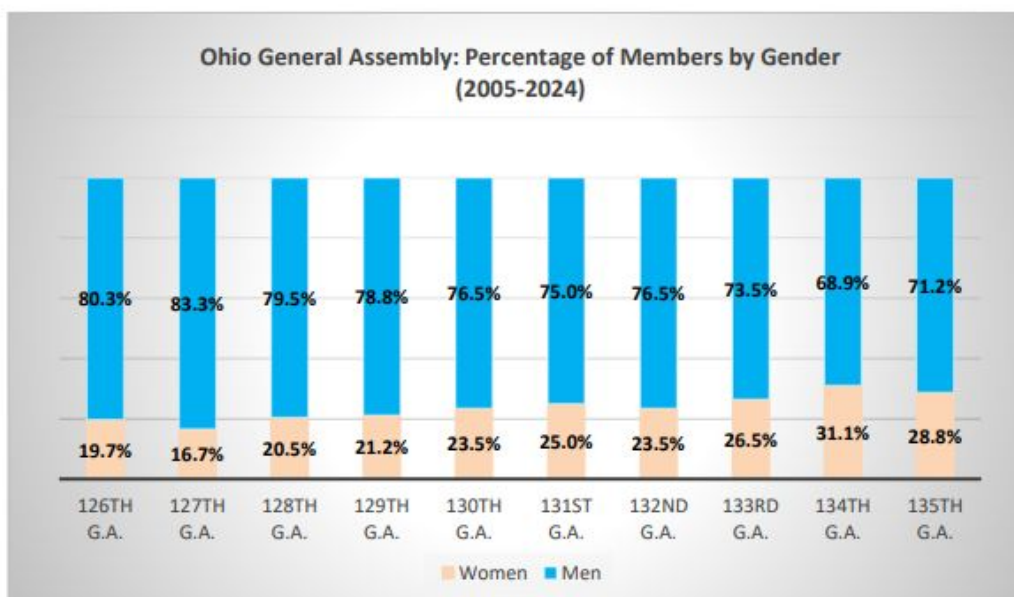
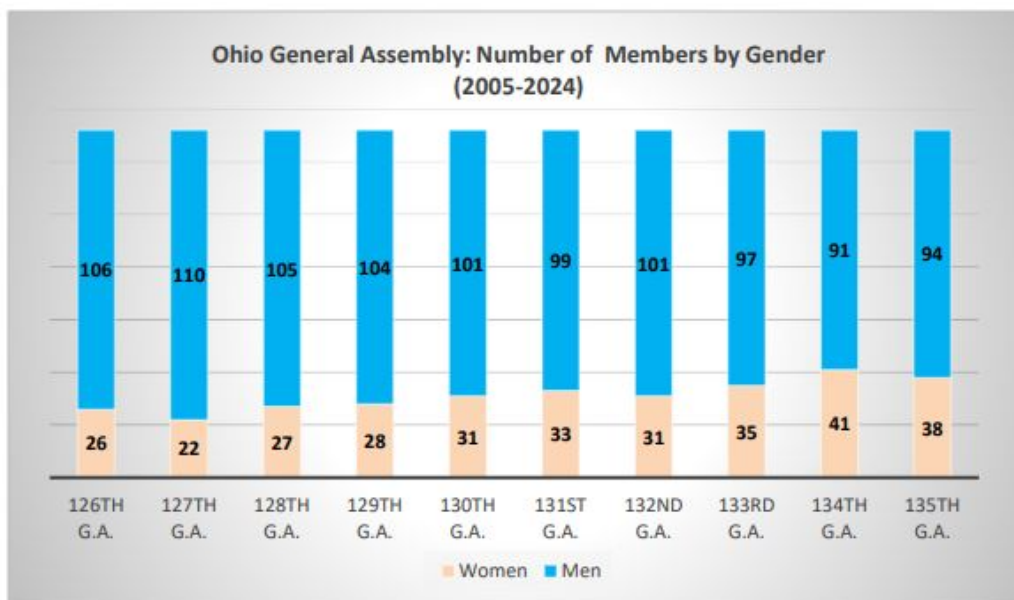
Race / Ethnicity	Legislature <sup>11</sup>	Ohio Population <sup>12</sup>
White / Caucasian	82%	82%
Black / African American	14%	14%
Hispanic / Latino	2%	3%
Asian/Pacific Islander	1%	3%
American Indian / Native American	0%	2%
Multiracial / Other	2%	no data

- Ohio’s first two Somali American representatives were elected to serve in the Ohio House in 2022 and 2024.
  - Ohio has the second largest Somali American population in the nation.

# Health Indicator 6: Candidate Representativeness

## OHIO Successes

A report from Ohio's Legislative Service Commission shows that the percentage of women being elected into the state legislature has risen since 2005.<sup>45</sup>



Note: Totals and percentages for both charts are as of the November election prior to the beginning of each General Assembly. They do not reflect changes due to vacancies or appointments.

# Health Indicator 6: Candidate Representativeness

## OHIO Areas for Improvement

- Gerrymandered maps make it harder for candidates who represent the full diversity of Ohio's population to get elected; see Indicator 10 for more detail.
- Women make up half of Ohio's population and yet only make up 28.8% of the state legislature, 23.5% of congressional seats and 0% of statewide administrative offices.<sup>46</sup>
- The Governor has been male and white for 236 consecutive years (with one exception: Nancy Hollister, who served for 11 days in 1998).<sup>47</sup>
- Ohio has a Republican trifecta and Republican triplex, controlling the offices of the Governor, Secretary of State, and Attorney General, as well as both chambers of the state legislature — even though Democrats represent a significant percentage of registered voters, and the vast majority of registered voters (71%) are unaffiliated.<sup>48</sup>
- Voters in Ohio can declare a party affiliation by participating in that party's primary election.<sup>49</sup> If they choose to remain unaffiliated, they are able to vote on public issues but have no vote to express support of party candidates for the general election.<sup>50</sup>

# Indicator 7: Accessibility of Campaigning

---

**Is running for office  
prohibitively expensive or  
otherwise out of reach for some  
candidates or potential  
candidates?**

# Health Indicator 7: Accessibility of Campaigning

## OHIO Areas for Improvement

- Ohio law prohibits lawful U.S. permanent residents from making contributions to ballot initiatives or candidates, reducing community members' ability to support candidates and make their voices heard (*this law has been blocked by a judge as of Sept. 1 2024*).<sup>51</sup>
- Individual campaign contribution limits vary by office and rise with inflation. For statewide offices, State Assembly, and State Senate, the limit is approximately \$15,500.<sup>52</sup> This enables wealthy voters to have greater influence through campaign donations.
- Ohio does not have public funding matching programs for campaign funds.<sup>53</sup>

# **Indicator 8: Legislative & Administrative Transparency**

---

**Does the legislative process give voters the information and tools needed for real accountability?**

# Health Indicator 8: Legislative & Administrative Transparency

## OHIO Successes

- Every introduced bill must be considered in a public hearing and all votes are public, including at the committee level.<sup>54</sup>
- An independent entity has the authority to audit all branches of government, respond to ethics violations, and recommend new anti-corruption laws.<sup>55</sup>
- State and local government audit reports — for all 88 counties, from fiscal year 1995 to 2024, and conducted by both public & private sector professionals — are publicly available.<sup>56</sup>

## OHIO Areas for Improvement

- Corruption is a recurrent and major issue. Most recently, in 2023, high-ranking elected officials were found guilty of a \$61 million racketeering conspiracy in which they helped bail out failing utilities in exchange for campaign dollars.<sup>57</sup>
  - The legislature is attempting to pass legislation in response, including the Ohio Anti-Corruption Act (to eliminate “dark money” from Ohio politics) and a bill requiring utility companies to disclose their political spending.<sup>58, 59</sup>
  - Bailout of utilities continues to cost Ohioans an estimated \$510,492 per day.<sup>60</sup>



# Health Indicator 8: Legislative & Administrative Transparency

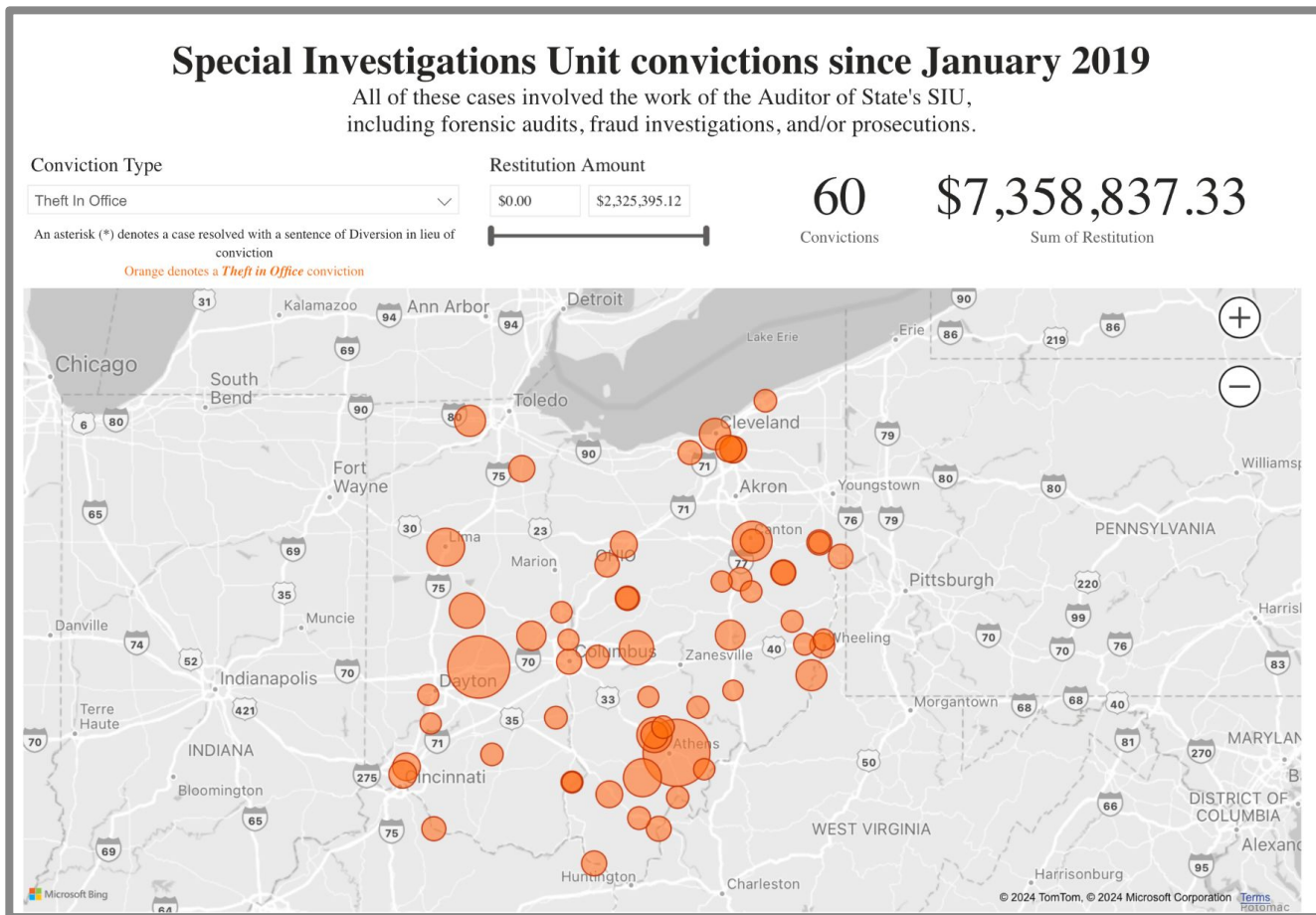
## OHIO Successes

- The state legislature's website is easy to navigate, and Ohioans can sign up for alerts to track bills in order to engage in real time with the legislative process.<sup>61</sup>
- All sessions and committee hearings, with the exception of the Rules and Reference committee, are broadcast live on public access channels and on The Ohio Channel website.<sup>62</sup>
- The Ohio Constitution requires that the proceedings of each house of the General Assembly itself be open to the public unless 2/3 of those present decide that secrecy is required.<sup>63</sup>

## OHIO Areas for Improvement

- To date, Ohio Auditor's Special Investigations Unit work led to 60 convictions and \$7,358,837.33 in restitution since 2019 of theft and betraying public trust while in office.<sup>64</sup>
  - 85 former government officials have been charged with theft in office for millions of stolen taxpayer dollars since 2011.<sup>65</sup>

# Health Indicator 8: Legislative & Administrative Transparency



The volume and geographic distribution of corruption convictions in OH suggest a problem with elected officials skirting public oversight.<sup>64</sup>

## Health Indicator 8: Legislative & Administrative Transparency

### OHIO Successes

- Ohio has a powerful public meetings law, which mandates that if a public body is meeting to discuss and decide on public business, the meeting must be open to the public. This means anyone can attend the meeting of a governing body without the burden of having to provide justification or advance notice.<sup>66</sup>
- Post-election audit results are published online.<sup>67</sup>

### OHIO Areas for Improvement

- If a public records request is denied, citizens must go through the costly court system to appeal the decision. Further, the public access to information process is not enforced or monitored by any independent entity.<sup>68</sup>

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

---

**Can people across Ohio consistently get reliable, quality information about their government, democratic processes, and local issues from statewide and local news outlets?**

# Health Indicator 9: Strength & Breadth of Press Coverage

## OHIO Successes

- In 2022, Ohio launched The Ohio Newsroom, a public radio network, to combat the decline in local media outlets.<sup>69, 70</sup>
- The American Journalism Project, in collaboration with Ohio-based organizations, helped launch Signal Ohio to build local news in all local communities — supporting civic engagement.<sup>71</sup>

## OHIO Areas for Improvement

- Local news access is deteriorating in Ohio faster than the national average; the country has lost about a third of its newspapers since 2005, but Ohio has lost half. Between 2022 and 2023 alone, Ohio lost 30 newspapers.<sup>72</sup>
- Following the 2019 merger of GateHouse Media and Gannett Co., most of the state's local newspapers are owned by the same company.<sup>73</sup>

# Health Indicator 9: Strength & Breadth of Press Coverage

## OHIO Successes

- Current and archived press releases are readily available on most government websites.

## OHIO Areas for Improvement

- Less populated, low-income and rural areas are less likely to have access to reliable local news. Holmes and Guernsey counties have no local news outlet.<sup>74</sup>
- Wealthier, more populous areas are also experiencing a decline in local news; Warren County has no local news outlet.<sup>74</sup>

# Indicator 10: Government Responsiveness to Voter Preferences

---

**When Ohioans vote for policies through citizen-led ballot measures, do lawmakers respect the will of voters and implement changes?**

# Health Indicator 10: Government Responsiveness to Voter Preferences

OHIO Successes	OHIO Areas for Improvement
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Ohioans have the right to propose changes to the law and state constitution via citizen-led ballot measures.<sup>75</sup> This right was upheld in 2023;<sup>76</sup> a citizen-led constitutional amendment on the drawing of electoral districts will be on the ballot in November.<sup>77</sup></li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>After Ohio voters voted overwhelmingly (71% of voters in 2015 and 75% in 2018) to implement measures ending gerrymandering, state officials repeatedly proposed gerrymandered redistricting plans.<sup>78, 79</sup></li><li>This issue has persisted over a number of years. Supreme Court rulings have found officials' redistricting plans to be in violation of the law five times since 2022.<sup>80</sup></li></ul>

“Ohioans...voted overwhelmingly to end the hyper-partisan redistricting process that yielded the 2012 maps...

If a watershed constitutional referendum and four state Supreme Court rulings are not enough to change this broken redistricting process, what is?”

— **U.S. District Court for the Southern District of Ohio, Eastern Division**<sup>81</sup>



# **Indicator 11: Transparency & Fairness in Campaign Finance**

---

**Do campaign finance laws encourage a level playing field for candidates and allow Ohioans to clearly track how campaign finance affects their elections?**

# Health Indicator 11: Transparency & Fairness in Campaign Finance

## OHIO Areas for Improvement

- Political parties in Ohio often receive more campaign funding from donors outside of Ohio (funding sources can be obscure and hard to trace).<sup>82, 83</sup>
- The 2024 Ohio Senate race is one of the most expensive in the nation's history, with a \$200 million reservation in ads (pending final reports).<sup>84, 85</sup>

# Indicator 12: Strength of Digital Infrastructure

---

**Do all Ohioans have reliable access to quality digital infrastructure that allows them to follow along with and participate in their democracy?**

# Health Indicator 12: Strength of Digital Infrastructure

## OHIO Successes

- The state legislature’s website provides a digital tool that allows Ohioans to track bills, helping Ohioans engage in the legislative process.<sup>86</sup>
- Ohio’s Digital Opportunity Plan is deploying funding to improve internet access, and in 2023, training programs expanded across the state to develop a workforce to build internet infrastructure like broadband.<sup>87</sup>

## OHIO Areas for Improvement

- Ohio’s lack of internet access is a barrier to following the legislative process, accessing news, and being able to see and shape one’s community. Ohio ranks 38th in the nation for internet coverage, speed and availability.<sup>88</sup> One million Ohioans (more than 300,000 households) can’t access the internet due to inadequate infrastructure, and one in five Ohioans feel they do not have sufficient device access to meet household needs.<sup>87</sup>
- Although more than 76.7% of the states residents are reported to have affordable and accessible internet, only 21.7% of minority and 32.5% of rural residents are reported to have that same access.<sup>87</sup>
- Approximately 40% of Black households don’t have high-speed, fixed broadband, compared with 28% of white households.<sup>89</sup>

# Health Indicator 12: Strength of Digital Infrastructure

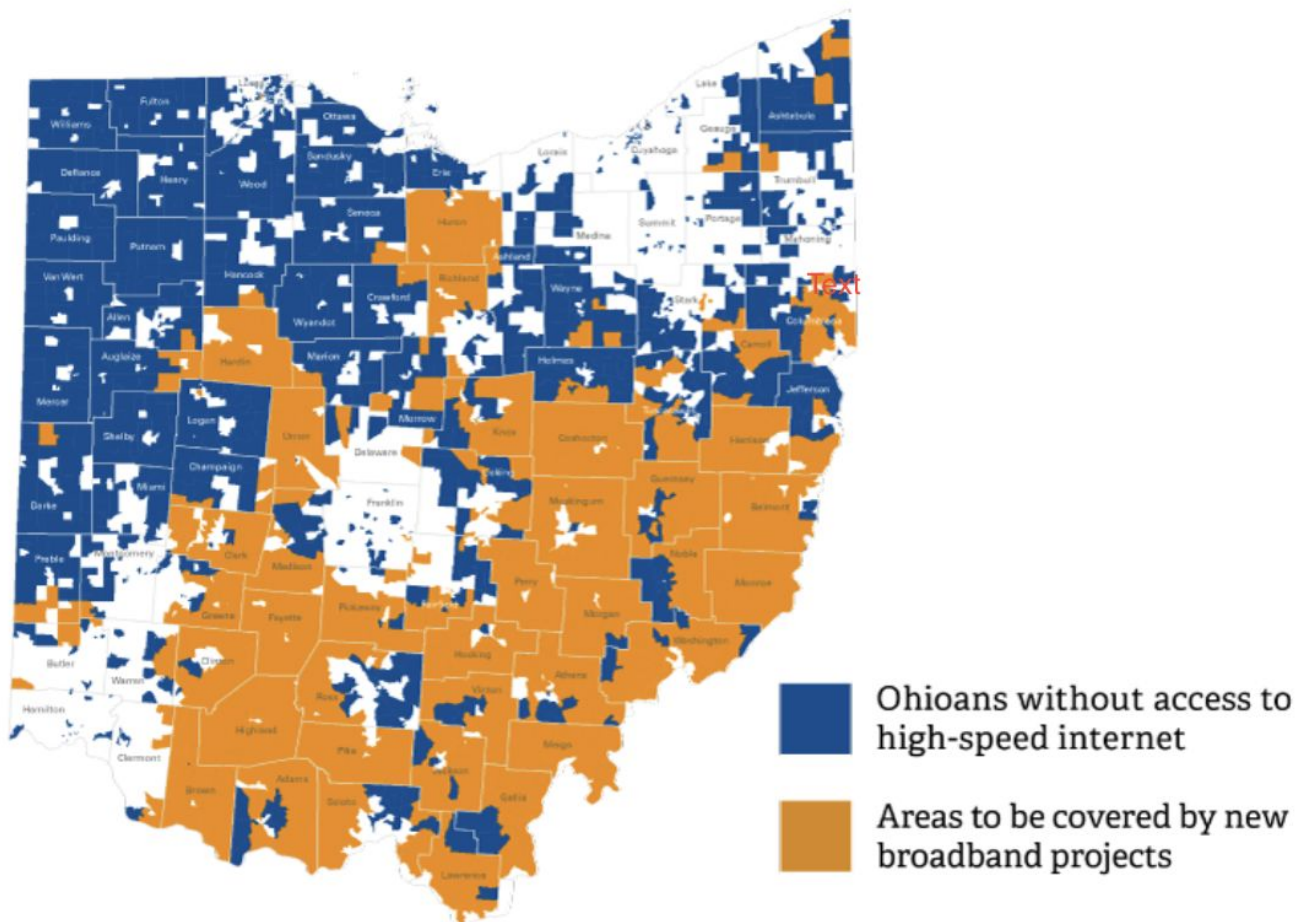
## OHIO Successes

- Broadband Ohio released a 2023 strategy aimed to bring reliable, affordable, high-speed internet to every Ohioan, and the Affordable Connectivity Program was developed to help low-income households afford internet service.<sup>90</sup>

## OHIO Areas for Improvement

- Public data is increasingly compromised by malware attacks to city government IT infrastructure; both Columbus and Cleveland have experienced severe disruptions in recent years.<sup>91, 92, 93</sup>

# Health Indicator 12: Strength of Digital Infrastructure



While state resources are being allocated to improve internet access, a significant portion of the state is not being prioritized for support, particularly in northwestern Ohio.<sup>94</sup>

# Indicator 13: Modernization of Voting Method

---

**Has modern voting technology been implemented across Ohio to promote accuracy in counts and reduce barriers to voting?**

# Health Indicator 13:

## Modernization of Voting Method

### OHIO Successes

- Ohio's standards for voting machine security exceed federal standards. An Ohio law prohibits voting machines from having wireless connectivity, in line with the advice of election tech security experts.<sup>95, 96</sup>

### OHIO Areas for Improvement

- Voting systems technology is not consistent across Ohio; local boards of elections have the power to choose their own voting systems.<sup>97</sup> The state has at least 10 different voting systems across 88 counties.<sup>98</sup>
- In 47 counties, voters still use hand-marked paper ballots — creating greater risk of ballots being rejected.<sup>99</sup>
- Accessing voting electronically is limited: only select uniformed personnel and overseas citizens can receive an absentee ballot electronically, and they must meet certain criteria to do so.<sup>100</sup>
- Ohio does not allow use of virtual ID (via Apple Wallet) in voting, despite this being a hugely popular tool for ID access.<sup>101</sup> Around 75,000 Ohioans used this service within two days of its launch.<sup>102</sup>



# Key Takeaways

In Ohio, significant progress is needed in order to protect the three pillars of democracy fully: the right to vote, the right to run for office, and the right to see and shape your community. Some clear areas for work, as well as positive foundations for further progress:

1. **Ohio voters of color face significant and disproportionate barriers to making their voices heard.** Voting access barriers, and more, contribute to disproportionately low voter registration and turnout rates for BIPOC communities.
2. **Fair redistricting is vitally necessary to build a healthier democracy in Ohio.** Gerrymandering is one of the most entrenched issues in Ohio's democracy. Districts designed around partisan agendas are vastly limiting Ohioans' voice and choice in their representation.
3. **Independent voters have limited voice and power. They're also the majority.** 71% of Ohio voters are unaffiliated, but running for office as an independent comes with disproportionate barriers.
4. **A widespread lack of internet access limits Ohioans' ability to see and shape their communities.** A significant proportion of Ohioans don't have adequate internet access. This is a barrier to engaging in the legislative process, following local and statewide news, and taking action in Ohio's democracy.
5. **Strong legislative transparency laws are a powerful foundation to build on in strengthening Ohio's democracy.** Thanks to public meetings law, digital tools for tracking bills, and public hearings practices, Ohioans have tools to closely follow the lawmaking process — a first step in ensuring accountability.

# Ohio Democracy Scorecard

Voting Access
Availability of Choices
Total Turnout
Parity in Turnout
Ease of Ballot Access
Candidate Representativeness
Accessibility of Campaigning
Legislative & Administrative Transparency
Strength & Breadth of Press Coverage
Government Representativeness to Voter Preferences
Transparency & Fairness in Campaign Finance*
Strength of Digital Infrastructure*
Modernization of Voting Method*

Our Ohio Democracy Scorecard measures the health of democracy in the state.

Healthy
Concerning
Critical

\*Ohio Specific Indicator as determined by PID's Ohio Democracy Coalition

# What's Next?

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

Partners In Democracy will work with Ohio communities and support partners who seek to drive progress in Ohio's democracy, using this scorecard and our 360° Democracy Standard to identify important opportunities for action.

# Sources

<sup>1</sup><https://www.ohiosos.gov/elections/voters/current-voting-schedule/2024-schedule/>

<sup>2</sup><https://codes.ohio.gov/ohio-revised-code/section-5.20>

<sup>3</sup><https://www.ncsl.org/elections-and-campaigns/2024-state-primary-election-dates>

<sup>4</sup><https://www.ohiosos.gov/elections/voters/absentee-ballot/>

<sup>5</sup><https://codes.ohio.gov/ohio-revised-code/section-3599.06>

<sup>6</sup><https://www.employerlawreport.com/2012/10/articles/wage-hour/what-ohio-employers-need-to-know-about-employees-taking-time-off-to-vote/>

<sup>7</sup><https://www.lsc.ohio.gov/assets/organizations/legislative-service-commission/files/state-holidays.pdf>

<sup>8</sup><https://dam.assets.ohio.gov/image/upload/publicsafety.ohio.gov/free-ID-palm-card.pdf>

<sup>9</sup>[https://www.ohiosos.gov/globalassets/elections/directives/2023/eom/eom\\_fullversion\\_2023-12.pdf](https://www.ohiosos.gov/globalassets/elections/directives/2023/eom/eom_fullversion_2023-12.pdf), pg 130

<sup>10</sup>Researchers contacted election officials with the Franklin County Board of Elections which holds one of the most diverse populations in the state. The official advised, “we do our best to understand pockets of populations where English may be a 2<sup>nd</sup> or 3<sup>rd</sup> language” in the past we’ve worked with organizations to recruit poll workers to help translate. They can also bring someone to assist”, <https://vote.franklincountyohio.gov>

<sup>11</sup><https://www.lww.org/newsroom/press-releases/federal-court-strikes-down-restrictions-voters-disabilities-ohio>

# Sources

<sup>12</sup><https://www.ncsl.org/elections-and-campaigns/voter-id>

<sup>13</sup><https://laslev.org/roadtonowherereport/>

<sup>14</sup><https://codes.ohio.gov/ohio-revised-code/section-3501.221>

<sup>15</sup><https://www.ohiosos.gov/globalassets/elections/directives/2022/eom/dir2022-11-ch07.pdf>

<sup>16</sup><https://www.npr.org/2018/06/11/618870982/supreme-court-upholds-controversial-ohio-voter-purge-law>

<sup>17</sup>[https://www.supremecourt.gov/opinions/17pdf/16-980\\_f2q3.pdf](https://www.supremecourt.gov/opinions/17pdf/16-980_f2q3.pdf)

<sup>18</sup><https://www.dispatch.com/story/news/politics/elections/2024/08/02/ohio-purges-155000-voters-from-rolls-ahead-of-november-election/74602499007/>

<sup>19</sup><https://ohiocapitaljournal.com/2024/07/25/ohios-voter-purge-disproportionately-targets-voters-of-color-civil-rights-organizations-say/>

<sup>20</sup><https://codes.ohio.gov/ohio-revised-code/section-3503.21>

<sup>21</sup><https://www.13abc.com/2024/07/18/ohio-is-about-purge-thousands-inactive-voters-see-if-your-name-is-list/>

<sup>22</sup><https://ohiocapitaljournal.com/2024/05/17/ohio-sec-of-state-frank-larose-thinks-hes-found-noncitizens-on-the-voter-rolls/>

<sup>23</sup><https://www.democracymarket.com/news-alerts/ohio-budget-provision-limits-voter-education-efforts/>

<sup>24</sup><https://www.ohiosos.gov/media-center/press-releases/2024/2024-07-232/>

# Sources

- <sup>25</sup><https://www.brennancenter.org/our-work/research-reports/ohios-gerrymandered-state-house-districts-lack-electoral-competition>
- <sup>26</sup>*League of Women Voters of Ohio v. Ohio Redistricting Comm.*, 172 Ohio St.3d 597, 2023-Ohio-4271
- <sup>27</sup><https://www.lwvohio.org/strangers-in-the-district>
- <sup>28</sup><https://worldpopulationreview.com/state-rankings/voter-turnout-by-state>
- <sup>29</sup>[www.ohiosos.gov/elections/election-results-and-data/historical-election-comparisons/voter-turnout-in-general-elections/](http://www.ohiosos.gov/elections/election-results-and-data/historical-election-comparisons/voter-turnout-in-general-elections/)
- <sup>30</sup><https://www.ohiosos.gov/elections/election-results-and-data/2024-official-election-results/>
- <sup>31</sup><https://www.ohiosos.gov/elections/election-results-and-data/2023-official-election-results/>
- <sup>32</sup><https://www.ohiosos.gov/elections/election-results-and-data/2021-official-election-results/>
- <sup>33</sup><https://www.communitysolutions.com/resources/status-of-women-social-indicators>
- <sup>34</sup><https://www.kff.org/other/state-indicator/voting-and-voter-registration-as-a-share-of-the-voter-population-by-raceethnicity/?currentTimeframe=0&selectedRows=%7B%22states%22:%7B%22ohio%22:%7B%7D%7D%7D&sortModel=%7B%22colId%22:%22Location%22,%22sort%22:%22asc%22%7D>
- <sup>35</sup><https://www.odvn.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/Voter-Registration-and-Turnout.pdf>

# Sources

- <sup>36</sup><https://www.cleveland.com/data/2022/12/every-ohio-city-from-1-to-247-for-minority-population-new-census-estimates.html>
- <sup>37</sup><https://www.census.gov/library/stories/state-by-state/ohio-population-change-between-census-decade.html>.
- <sup>38</sup><https://www.cleveland.com/datacentral/2020/01/every-ohio-city-and-county-ranked-for-median-family-household-income-census-estimates.html>
- <sup>39</sup><https://codes.ohio.gov/ohio-revised-code/section-3513.05>
- <sup>40</sup><https://www.reuters.com/fact-check/ballot-deadline-has-not-passed-any-us-states-2024-07-30/>
- <sup>41</sup><https://abcnews.go.com/Politics/ohio-state-lawmakers-reconvene-biden-ballot-access-bill/story?id=110678340>
- <sup>42</sup>[https://ballotpedia.org/Ballot\\_access\\_requirements\\_for\\_political\\_candidates\\_in\\_Ohio](https://ballotpedia.org/Ballot_access_requirements_for_political_candidates_in_Ohio)
- <sup>43</sup><https://www.ncsl.org/about-state-legislatures/state-legislator-demographics>
- <sup>44</sup><https://www.census.gov/library/stories/state-by-state/ohio-population-change-between-census-decade.html>
- <sup>45</sup><https://www.lsc.ohio.gov/assets/organizations/legislative-service-commission/files/appendix-g-ohio-general-assembly-demographics.pdf>
- <sup>46</sup><https://cawp.rutgers.edu/facts/state-state-information/ohio>
- <sup>47</sup><https://www.nga.org/former-governors/ohio/>
- <sup>48</sup>[https://ballotpedia.org/Party\\_control\\_of\\_Ohio\\_state\\_government](https://ballotpedia.org/Party_control_of_Ohio_state_government)
- <sup>49</sup><https://www.boe.ohio.gov/pickaway/voter-registration-information/declare-or-change-party>

# Sources

<sup>50</sup><https://www.ohiosos.gov/media-center/press-releases/2024/2024-05-10a/>

<sup>51</sup>Opawl v. Yost, 2024 U.S. Dist. LEXIS 162107, \_\_ F.Supp.3d \_\_ (United States District Court for the Southern District of Ohio, Eastern Division August 31, 2024, Filed).

<sup>52</sup><https://www.ohiosos.gov/globalassets/candidates/limitchart2023.pdf>

<sup>53</sup><https://www.ohiosos.gov/globalassets/candidates/cfguide/2022/campaign-finance-handbook-chapter2.pdf>

<sup>54</sup><https://www.lsc.ohio.gov/assets/organizations/legislative-service-commission/files/chapter-5-enacting-legislation.pdf>

<sup>55</sup><https://codes.ohio.gov/ohio-revised-code/section-117.10>

<sup>56</sup><https://ohioauditor.gov/auditsearch/search.aspx>

<sup>57</sup><https://www.justice.gov/usao-sdoh/pr/jury-convicts-former-ohio-house-speaker-former-chair-ohio-republican-party>

<sup>58</sup><https://www.wosu.org/politics-government/2024-04-29/bill-could-fine-utility-companies-and-require-more-transparency>

<sup>59</sup><https://www.legislature.ohio.gov/legislation/135/hb112>

<sup>60</sup><https://www.occ.ohio.gov>

<sup>61</sup><https://www.legislature.ohio.gov>

<sup>62</sup><https://www.ohiochannel.org/about>

<sup>63</sup><https://www.lsc.ohio.gov/assets/organizations/legislative-service-commission/files/general-assembly-open-meetings-law.pdf>



# Sources

<sup>64</sup>[https://ohioauditor.gov/fraud/convictions\\_map.html](https://ohioauditor.gov/fraud/convictions_map.html)

<sup>65</sup>[https://ohioauditor.gov/publications/docs/2\\_Theft\\_in\\_Office.pdf](https://ohioauditor.gov/publications/docs/2_Theft_in_Office.pdf)

<sup>66</sup><https://www.ohioattorneygeneral.gov/Media/Newsletters/Open-Book/August-2021/The-Open-Meetings-Act-An-Overview>

<sup>67</sup><https://www.ohiosos.gov/publicintegrity/post-election-audits/>

<sup>68</sup><https://publicintegrity.org/politics/state-politics/state-integrity-investigation/ohio-gets-d-grade-in-2015-state-integrity-investigation/>

<sup>69</sup><https://npr.brightspotcdn.com/1b/f9/8e2cf9eb40f0a36153319cc7dbb8/the-ohio-newsroom-press-release-030322.pdf>

<sup>70</sup><https://www.statenews.org/about-the-ohio-newsroom>

<sup>71</sup><https://www.theajp.org/grantees/signal-ohio/>

<sup>72</sup><https://www.wgte.org/ohio-newsroom/ohio-lost-dozens-of-local-newspapers-last-year-what-comes-next>

<sup>73</sup><https://www.wosu.org/news/2019-08-05/gatehouse-media-buying-gannett-bringing-most-ohio-newspapers-under-one-owner>

<sup>74</sup><https://localnewsinitiative.northwestern.edu/projects/state-of-local-news/explore/#/state-localnewslandscape?state=OH&stateCode=39>

<sup>75</sup><https://www.ohioattorneygeneral.gov/Legal/Ballot-Initiatives>

<sup>76</sup>[https://ballotpedia.org/Ohio\\_Issue\\_1,\\_60%25\\_Vote\\_Requirement\\_to\\_Approve\\_Constitutional\\_Amendments\\_Measure\\_\(2023\)](https://ballotpedia.org/Ohio_Issue_1,_60%25_Vote_Requirement_to_Approve_Constitutional_Amendments_Measure_(2023))

# Sources

- <sup>77</sup><https://www.ohiosos.gov/media-center/press-releases/2024/2024-07-232/>
- <sup>78</sup>[https://ballotpedia.org/Ohio\\_Issue\\_1\\_Redistricting\\_Commission\\_Amendment\\_\(2015\)](https://ballotpedia.org/Ohio_Issue_1_Redistricting_Commission_Amendment_(2015))
- <sup>79</sup>[https://ballotpedia.org/Ohio\\_Issue\\_1\\_Congressional\\_Redistricting\\_Procedures\\_Amendment\\_\(May\\_2018\)](https://ballotpedia.org/Ohio_Issue_1_Congressional_Redistricting_Procedures_Amendment_(May_2018))
- <sup>80</sup><https://www.brennancenter.org/our-work/research-reports/timeline-ohios-gerrymandered-maps-how-ohio-politicians-defied-court>
- <sup>81</sup>Gonidakis v. LaRose, 599 F. Supp. 3d 642, 2022 U.S. Dist. LEXIS 72172 (United States District Court for the Southern District of Ohio, Eastern Division, April 20, 2022, Filed).
- <sup>82</sup><https://www.brennancenter.org/our-work/analysis-opinion/ohio-congressional-races-illustrate-2024-campaign-finance-trends>
- <sup>83</sup><https://projects.iq.harvard.edu/futureofmedia/political-donations-0>
- <sup>84</sup>[https://www.opensecrets.org/outside-spending/by\\_race](https://www.opensecrets.org/outside-spending/by_race)
- <sup>85</sup><https://www.washingtonexaminer.com/news/senate/3117187/political-ad-spending-senate-races/>
- <sup>86</sup><https://www.legislature.ohio.gov>
- <sup>87</sup>[https://dam.assets.ohio.gov/image/upload/broadband.ohio.gov/04292024\\_Ohio\\_Digital\\_Opportunity\\_Plan.pdf](https://dam.assets.ohio.gov/image/upload/broadband.ohio.gov/04292024_Ohio_Digital_Opportunity_Plan.pdf)
- <sup>88</sup><https://broadbandnow.com/Ohio>
- <sup>89</sup><https://www.mckinsey.com/industries/public-sector/our-insights/closing-the-digital-divide-in-black-america>

# Sources

<sup>90</sup><https://broadband.ohio.gov/grant-opportunities/federal-resources-and-grants/affordable-connectivity-program>

<sup>91</sup><https://signalcleveland.org/cleveland-city-hall-attacked-by-ransomware-what-does-that-mean/>

<sup>92</sup><https://www.wkyc.com/article/news/local/cleveland/cleveland-confirms-cyber-incident-it-systems-ransomware-attack-city-hall/95-6e5daa21-d891-455e-b494-64e2bc9e5ccd>

<sup>93</sup><https://www.nbc4i.com/news/local-news/columbus/city-hack/columbus-head-of-tech-claims-ransomware-group-ignored-city-before-data-leak/>

<sup>94</sup><https://broadband.ohio.gov/grant-opportunities/broadband-expansion/orbeg>

<sup>95</sup><https://statescoop.com/ohio-takes-tougher-line-on-election-tech-wireless-connectivity/>

<sup>96</sup><https://freespeechforpeople.org/ohio-bans-wireless-connectivity-in-voting-systems/>

<sup>97</sup><https://electionlab.mit.edu/landscapes/ohio>

<sup>98</sup><https://www.ideastream.org/government-politics/2022-12-14/88-ohio-counties-11-different-voting-systems-will-that-change-anytime-soon>

<sup>99</sup><https://www.ohiosos.gov/elections/voters/security-and-voter-education/>

<sup>100</sup><https://www.ohiosos.gov/secretary-office/military/>

<sup>101</sup><https://www.bmv.ohio.gov/dl-mobile-id.aspx>

<sup>102</sup><https://www.govtech.com/products/about-75-000-ohioans-take-drivers-licenses-digital-in-2-days>