



**NORTH CAROLINA CENTER FOR
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News Release

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**New Anthology on North Carolina's State Government, Politics, and Policy
Designed To Promote Civic Engagement**

As the nation celebrates its independence, membership in many organizations -- from the Boy Scouts to the PTA to the Red Cross -- has declined 25 to 50 percent since the 1960s. Only 19 percent of Americans say they trust the government to do the right thing. In North Carolina, the number of registered voters who actually vote has declined from 76 percent in 1968 to 60 percent in 1996, both presidential election years.

All of these trends are symptoms of declining citizen interest in public affairs. Unfortunately, North Carolina is not immune, and these trends have affected the quality and quantity of civic participation in our Tar Heel State.

To help citizens know more about their government and to use that knowledge, the N.C. Center for Public Policy Research has published an invaluable resource for North Carolina citizens called *North Carolina Focus: An Anthology on State Government, Politics, and Policy*. *Focus* is an 817-page text that explores in depth the policy issues facing North Carolina, combining scholarly research with the readability of good journalism. The Center is an independent, nonpartisan, nonprofit corporation that evaluates state government programs and educates the public about public policy issues facing North Carolina.

"Citizens and teachers across North Carolina can benefit from *North Carolina Focus*," says Mebane Rash Whitman, policy analyst at the Center. "Civic education is essential, and citizens can use this book to learn about state politics, state and local government, and the important policy issues facing North Carolina. This will help citizens not only understand the problems, but become a part of the solution. This is particularly true at a time when both President Clinton and Governor Hunt are sponsoring summits on volunteerism and community service."

Because an informed citizenry is the bedrock of civic engagement, one of the goals of the N.C. Center for Public Policy Research is to make its research accessible to individuals across North Carolina. That's where *Focus* comes in. In part because it is so comprehensive and easy to use, university professor and state Rep. Paul Luebke (D-Durham) says, "This is an excellent sourcebook for any citizen."

To promote easier access to information about state and local government, the Center encourages citizens, university professors, and public school teachers to use *Focus*. "*Focus* is a great research tool for reliable information," says Shirley Simmons, a teacher in Fuquay-Varina. "It's very hard -- almost impossible -- to find articles on state government in North Carolina. The pro and con articles in *Focus* are especially insightful."

Almost every article in *Focus* promotes civic education -- from an interview with the director of the State Board of Elections to articles on the changing demographics in North Carolina, the increasing role of African Americans and women in politics, and the merits of civic journalism as newspapers try new tactics to engage readers in community issues.

An article entitled "The Price of Democracy: Citizen Responsibility" by Sandra Trivett, past president of the Asheville-Buncombe County League of Women Voters, explores various ways for citizens to exercise responsibility in a democracy. "Public involvement or civic engagement can be as simple as staying informed on community issues, voting, paying taxes, serving on a jury, returning your census form, and volunteering," says Trivett. "Each creates an opportunity for citizen input on the formulation of public policy through participation in our democratic system."

North Carolina Focus is an anthology of 72 articles divided into three sections -- one on the state's political history, another on the state's constitution and related issues, and a third on key public policy issues facing the state in the future. "*Focus* is like one-stop shopping. Anyone who needs information on our state's history, constitution, public policy issues, politics, or just plain reliable data, needs *Focus*," says Ran Coble, executive director of the Center. This is the third edition of *North Carolina Focus* with previous editions published by the Center in 1981 and 1989.

The opening section of *Focus* provides a unique, four-decade perspective on North Carolina's political history with articles analyzing the state's politics and demographics written in 1949, 1976, 1983, and 1993. These include V.O. Key's seminal article describing North Carolina as a "Progressive Plutocracy." The second section features clear treatment of constitutional issues with chapters on the rights of citizens; the legislative, executive, and judicial branches of government; and how state government is financed. Articles such as "Executive-Legislative Relations in North Carolina" and "The Role of the Judiciary in Making Public Policy" allow citizens to explore continuing constitutional values and issues, such as the separation of powers between the branches of state government. The North Carolina Constitution is reprinted in the Appendix.

The third section of *Focus* examines key public policy issues that currently dominate the political landscape and are crucial to North Carolina's future. These include chapters on economic development, education, health care, the environment, prisons, and the role of the media in covering government and politics. Tax incentives, workforce preparedness, health care cost containment, coastal environmental issues, structured sentencing, and campaign finance reform all find a forum in *Focus*.

The articles in *Focus* are research-based, and much of the data is presented in easy-to-use tables. Examples includes census and employment data, trends in the state's economy, statistics on voter turnout, per-pupil expenditures for schools by county, election results, the number of judges appointed versus the number elected, health statistics on causes of death and spending on health care, land acquisition costs at state parks, and figures on the average costs of running for elected office.

To help with this project, the Center organized and consulted an Advisory Committee of 20 North Carolinians who provided invaluable guidance and assistance. "*Focus* is a wonderful resource," says Advisory Committee Member Mary Thornberry, a professor at Davidson College, "a must for those exploring politics or policy in the state." Many of the committee members are professors who will use *Focus* in their classrooms.

The Center has lots of experience in enhancing civic affairs and promoting an informed citizenry. Its evaluations of state programs have helped improve the performance of state agencies. Based on the Center's research, recent laws designed to increase voter registration and participation have been enacted. Other Center products, such as *Article II: A Guide to the N.C. Legislature*, help citizens learn how to access and influence lawmakers. Last year, the Center distributed pro and con essays on the three constitutional amendments on the November ballot to help citizens make informed decisions.

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The 817-page *North Carolina Focus: An Anthology on State Government, Politics, and Policy* is available for \$36, which includes postage, handling, and sales tax. To order, contact the N. C. Center for Public Policy Research by phone (919-832-2839), fax (919-832-2847), mail (P.O. Box 430, Raleigh, NC 27602), or order on the Internet (<http://www.nando.net/insider/nccppr>).

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