



**NORTH CAROLINA CENTER FOR
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NEWS RELEASE

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CENTER SAYS SENIORS ARE A HUGE CIVIC RESOURCE FOR THE STATE

A new study by the N.C. Center for Public Policy Research finds that the civic contributions of the elderly are a huge civic resource for the state and will be even more important as the state's population ages. The elderly vote at higher rates than the population at large. They return the census at higher rates than other age groups. They give a higher percentage of their income to nonprofits in the community. And surprisingly, for those that use the Internet, they are even more likely than the Baby Boom generation (born in 1946-64) to be civically engaged online.

Mebane Rash, editor of the Center's journal, *North Carolina Insight*, says, "North Carolina's population aged 65 and over will double during the next 20 years as Baby Boomers begin turning 65 in 2011. We need to utilize this great civic resource. Our current seniors vote, volunteer, donate money to nonprofits, and return the census at higher rates than succeeding generations. They do the hard work of being a citizen. The more civically engaged our future generations of seniors are, the better off North Carolina will be."

Bill Friday, former President of the UNC System, says, "Thoughtful North Carolinians need to consider the talent pool of the elders that are living in our state. They are people of great ability. Some are people with international experience. They all have something to contribute. The question is how to best utilize this great accumulation of talent."

Seniors Have Higher Voting Rates

In the November 2008 elections, 1.14 million North Carolinians aged 65 and over were registered to vote in North Carolina. Voter turnout for this group was 76 percent, compared with 70 percent for all age groups. Male voters aged 65 and over had an even higher voter turnout rate of 78 percent.

Elderly Have Higher Rates of Returning Census Forms

Mandated by the U.S. Constitution, the census is a headcount of everyone residing in the United States. With the 2010 census forms just arriving in people's homes, the Center's study found that older North Carolinians have the highest return rates. Nationwide, the census return rate in 2000 was 78.4 percent. Those aged 65 and older had the highest return rate of 89.1 percent. Those aged 45-64 followed with a return rate of 82.4 percent.

Charitable Giving

In North Carolina, those aged 70 and older give the highest percentage of their incomes to nonprofits in their communities. But, a higher percentage of the Baby Boom generation give. In a 2008 survey, 73 percent of Baby Boomers had given money in the past 12 months to a nonprofit, and 71 percent had given money to a place of worship. Over the next several decades, Baby Boomers will have more money to give because they will receive a great deal of wealth through bequests. Nationally, Boomers are less likely to give money to religious organizations, opting to donate to umbrella organizations like United Way and to youth and family nonprofits. How Boomers give money may reshape the nonprofit sector.

Service on Juries: Another Possible Way of Serving

Looking around a jury room, it often seems like a disproportionate number of jurors are aged 65 and older – even though age actually provides potential jurors an excuse from jury duty in 26 states. Jurors are excused at age 65 in six states; at age 70 in 16 states; age 72 in two states, including North Carolina; and age 75 in two states. Though age is an excuse to avoid jury duty in North Carolina, it does not keep seniors from serving.

Civic Engagement Online

In September 2009, the Pew Internet and American Life Project released the results of a survey about Internet users and civic engagement. The N.C. Center for Public Policy Research obtained the raw data and analyzed the responses by generation.

Perhaps surprisingly, those aged 72 and over who use the Internet were more likely to be civically engaged online than Baby Boomers who use the Internet. The pattern continued when respondents were asked about discussing politics and public affairs with others. For those aged 72 and over, 17.3 percent discuss public affairs on the Internet at least once a week, and 8.1 percent do so every day.

The next generation of senior citizens are called Leading Boomers by the Pew Project. They are age 54 to 62 and have a different style of civic engagement – doing more in person and less online. Almost 25 percent of Leading Boomers attended a political meeting on local, town, or school affairs compared to 18 percent of those aged 63-71 and 15 percent of those aged 72 and older. And, 17 percent of the Leading Boomers were active members of a group that tries to influence public policy or government, compared to 13 percent of those aged 63-71 and 6 percent of those aged 72 and older.

Volunteering

Older adults in North Carolina aged 65 and older volunteer more than most other generations, but they trail their age group nationally. While 22.7 percent of older adults in the state volunteered in 2008, North Carolina still ranks only 34th in the nation. The Baby Boomer volunteer rate in North Carolina was higher at 29 percent, also ranking 34th nationally. Baby Boomer volunteer rates were surpassed only by college students in North Carolina – ranked 14th with a volunteer rate of 32.9 percent. Nationally, 30 percent of Baby Boomers volunteer, while only 26.3 percent of college students volunteer.

Just over 25 percent of all North Carolinians volunteer. In 2008, 1.7 million North Carolinians volunteered with an organization, performing 221.1 million hours of service. Nationwide, 26.4 percent of all residents engaged in civic life by volunteering, attending public meetings, or working with neighbors informally to improve their communities. Of those, 35.9 percent volunteered with a religious organization and 26.7 percent in education in 2008. This represents a big change since 1989 when 49.4 percent volunteered with a religious organization and 11.5 percent volunteered in education. In North Carolina, almost 42 percent of those who volunteer do so with a religious organization.

In 2008, when 25.3 percent of all North Carolinians volunteered, the state ranked 35th among the 50 states and the District of Columbia. In terms of the average annual volunteer hours per state resident, North Carolina ranked 37th at 32.1 hours per year. North Carolina ranked 32nd in the percentage of volunteers who continue their service for more than one year (64.5 percent).

“Seniors who volunteer also give twice as much in charitable contributions – so they give back to the community in two ways,” says Jane Kendall, President of the N.C. Center for Nonprofits. “They can volunteer on their own or through programs like the Retired & Senior Volunteer Program (RSVP), Executive Service Corps, Foster Grandparents, and Senior Companions. Baby Boomers believe things can change, and they want to be part of that change.”

According to the Corporation for National and Community Service, “Baby Boomers in their late 40s to mid-50s have higher volunteer rates than past generations had at the same ages.” The Center’s study suggests that state and local governments should leverage this trend toward rising civic engagement.

In December 2009, Governor Beverly Perdue re-established the N.C. Commission on Volunteerism and Community Service. The Commission, first created in 1994, is charged with developing and implementing a comprehensive statewide service plan for promoting and recognizing volunteerism. “As governor,” said Perdue at the time, “I’ve asked all North Carolinians to make service a way of life.”

In 2008, California became the first state in the nation to create a cabinet position for service and volunteering. New York followed suit. Bonnie Cramer, the national Board Chair of AARP who lives in Raleigh, says, “The goal is to change the perception of service and volunteerism from ‘nice to do’ to ‘must do.’”

Mebane Rash, the editor of the Center’s journal, says, “North Carolina needs to tap the civic resources that our seniors represent. Older adults are looking for encore careers. Many want to volunteer for nonprofits or public agencies, but they have never been asked. The state needs to play a role in matching those who want to serve with opportunities for service.”

About the N.C. Center for Public Policy Research

The Center’s report on civic contributions of the elderly is part of a larger study of key issues facing the state’s aging population to be published later this year in the Center’s journal, *North Carolina Insight*. Last year, the Center released research on the growth in the elderly population and on fraud committed against the elderly. Earlier this year, the Center released research on Medicaid and North Carolina’s aging population. The larger study also will include reports on the crisis in the number of caretakers for the elderly, the impact of the growing aging population on the state budget, and the need for an aging policy plan for the future. Reports will be released as they are completed.

The N.C. Center for Public Policy Research is an independent, nonpartisan, nonprofit research organization created in 1977 to evaluate state government programs and to study public policy issues facing North Carolina. The Center is supported in part by a grant for general operating support from the Z. Smith Reynolds Foundation in Winston-Salem, with additional support from 12 other private foundations, 120 corporate contributors, and about 500 individual and organizational members.

This research on key issues facing the aging population in North Carolina is funded by grants from the Kate B. Reynolds Charitable Trust of Winston-Salem, The Hillsdale Fund of Greensboro, and Mission Health System of Asheville. The Center publishes a journal called *North Carolina Insight*, a citizens’ guide to the legislature, and in-depth research reports such as a study of governance of the state’s public universities. The Center recently has conducted studies of the history of mental health reform in North Carolina, key issues facing community colleges in North Carolina, how to prevent high school dropouts, and ways to reduce

domestic violence. Upcoming studies will examine other key issues facing the state's aging population, mental health reform, and policies on financial aid for students in public and private colleges and universities.

The Center's 35-page study of the civic contributions of seniors is available to download electronically for \$10. If you become a Center e-member at \$50, you will receive other articles in the Center's study of aging as they are completed, future issues of *North Carolina Insight*, and the Center's quarterly e-newsletters for a year as part of your membership. To order or join the Center, call Tammy Bromley at (919) 832-2839 or send an email to tbromley@nccppr.org.

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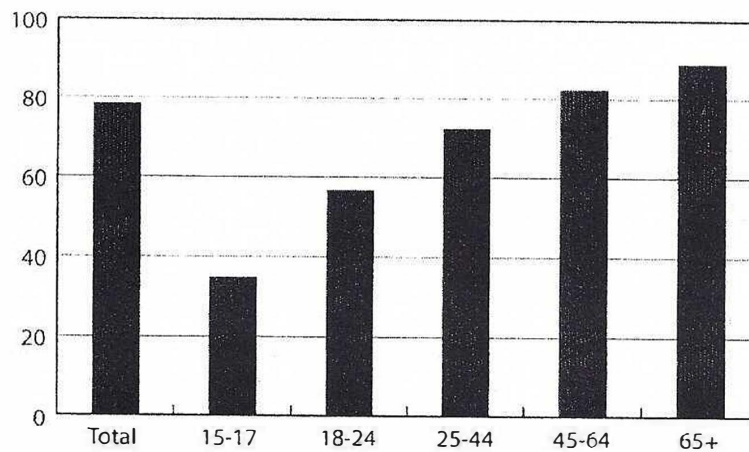
For more information, call Mebane Rash, editor of *North Carolina Insight*, at the N.C. Center for Public Policy Research, at (919) 832-2839, or email her at mrash@nccppr.org.

Table 2. Voter Turnout Percentages for Age 65 and Over in North Carolina, November 2008

	Total Voters	Registered Voters	Turnout Percentage
North Carolina	4,354,052	6,262,566	70%
Age 65 and over	868,889	1,140,618	76%
Democrats	471,528	630,610	75%
Republicans	288,206	364,358	79%
Unaffiliated	109,023	145,470	75%
Libertarian	132	180	73%
Black	134,686	176,568	76%
White	716,935	938,490	76%
American Indian	3,743	6,264	60%
Asian	1,892	2,680	71%
Multi-Race	589	757	77%
Hispanic	2,366	3,431	76%
Female	482,878	645,519	75%
Male	382,657	490,456	78%

Source: Based on data provided by Jacque Blaeske, N.C. State Board of Elections.

Figure 2. Final U.S. Census Return Rates, by Age Group, 2000



Source: Herbert F. Stackhouse and Sarah Brady, "Census 2000 Mail Return Rates," Final Report, U.S. Census Bureau, Washington, DC, Jan. 30, 2003, Table 8, p. 19.

Table 5. National and State Volunteering, by Age Cohort, 2008

	U.S.	N.C.	N.C. Rank
Volunteer rates	26.4 %	25.3 %	35
Volunteer hours per resident	34.7	32.1	37
Volunteer retention rates	64.5 %	64.5 %	32
Older adult volunteer rates	26.4 %	22.7 %	34
Baby Boomer volunteer rates	30.0 %	29.0 %	34
Young adult volunteer rates	26.4 %	20.6 %	36
College student volunteer rates	26.3 %	32.9 %	14

Note: Rates and rankings are based on a three-year moving average.

Source: Volunteering in America Website, Corporation for National and Community Service, Washington, DC. On the Internet at <http://www.volunteeringinamerica.gov/rankings/States/Volunteer-Rates/2008>, accessed on Oct. 20, 2009.

Table 6. Survey Results on Civic Participation, by Generation, 2008

Generation:		After work (age 72+)	Matures (age 63-71)	Leading Boomers (age 54-62)	Trailing Boomers (age 44-53)
In the past 12 months, have you attended a political rally or speech?	Yes	9.9%	12.9%	12.5%	11.1%
	No	89.5%	86.1%	87.4%	88.9%
In the past 12 months, have you attended a political meeting on local, town, or school affairs?	Yes	14.6%	17.6%	24.9%	24.8%
	No	85.0%	82.2%	74.9%	75.2%
In the past 12 months, have you worked or volunteered for a political party or candidate?	Yes	6.4%	6.8%	9.9%	6.4%
	No	93.3%	93.2%	90.1%	93.6%
In the past 12 months, have you made a speech about a community or political issue?	Yes	3.2%	3.9%	6.5%	5.6%
	No	96.5%	96.1%	93.2%	94.1%
In the past 12 months, have you been an active member of any group that tries to influence public policy or government, not including a political party?	Yes	6.2%	13.4%	16.7%	15.4%
	No	93.5%	86.6%	82.9%	84.5%
In the past 12 months, have you called into a live radio or TV show to express an opinion?	Yes	2.5%	3.2%	9.4%	7.1%
	No	97.0%	96.8%	90.6%	92.9%

Source: "The Internet and Civic Engagement," Pew Internet and American Life Project, Washington, DC, Aug. 2008. On the Internet at <http://www.pewinternet.org/Shared-Content/Data-Sets/2008/August-2008--Civic-Engagement.aspx>, accessed Oct. 20, 2009. Outputs generated by the N.C. Center for Public Policy Research.