UCONN
SCHOOL OF SOCIAL WORK
NANCY A. HUMPHREYS INSTITUTE FOR POLITICAL SOCIAL WORK

Assessing the Health of your Local Democracy

Local government should be accessible and accountable, but low participation and engagement are a threat to the health of any democracy and ultimately the overall health of our communities. A range of factors can provide insight into how inclusive, responsive and accountable government is in your community.

Voter Turnout

- What is the voter turnout and participation in local elections?
- Which districts have the highest rates of voter participation? Does this tell a story about power and resource allocation in your community?
- Whose votes and power are missing in local elections and policy? (Factors might include age, home ownership, justice involvement and race)
- Does one party dominate in local politics? What is the voter turnout in the last primary election? ,

Civic Engagement

- Is there active engagement in city council and other public meetings?
- Are there community groups engaging people in civic life?
- Do citizens feel they can voice concerns? Are elected officials readily available to the public?

Access to Information

- Is local government information readily available and transparent? (This includes information about elected officials, boards and commissions, and local public agencies.)
- Are meetings open and transparent?
- Is there a strong local media presence?
- Can you find information on local party committees, their meetings, members, and how to join?

Representation and Accountability

- Are elections conducted fairly? Do all constituents have access to the information and tools they need to vote?
- Do local elected leaders reflect the diversity of the community?

Government Responsiveness

- Do elected officials respond to citizen concerns?
- Do voters hold leaders accountable through their votes?

Ethics and Transparency

- Are there strong ethical standards for local officials?
- Are financial dealings transparent?

For more information:

Organizations like International IDEA provide frameworks to help citizens assess their local democracies.
https://www.idea.int/publications/catalogue/state-local-democracy-assessment-framework

For more information go to votingissocialwork.org