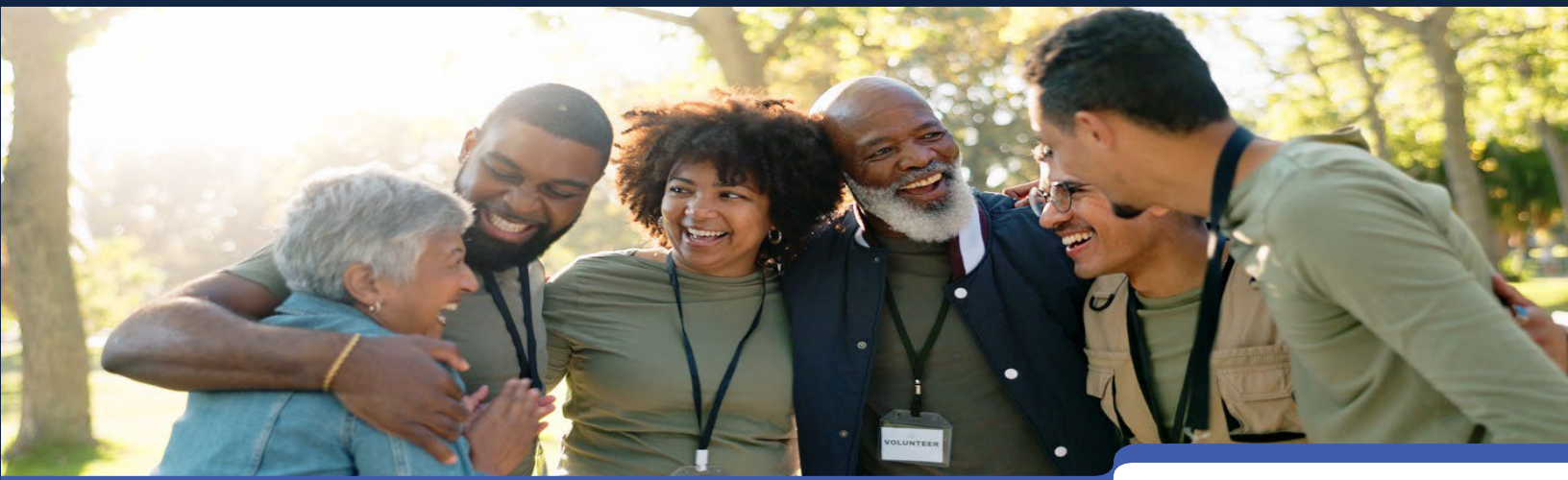


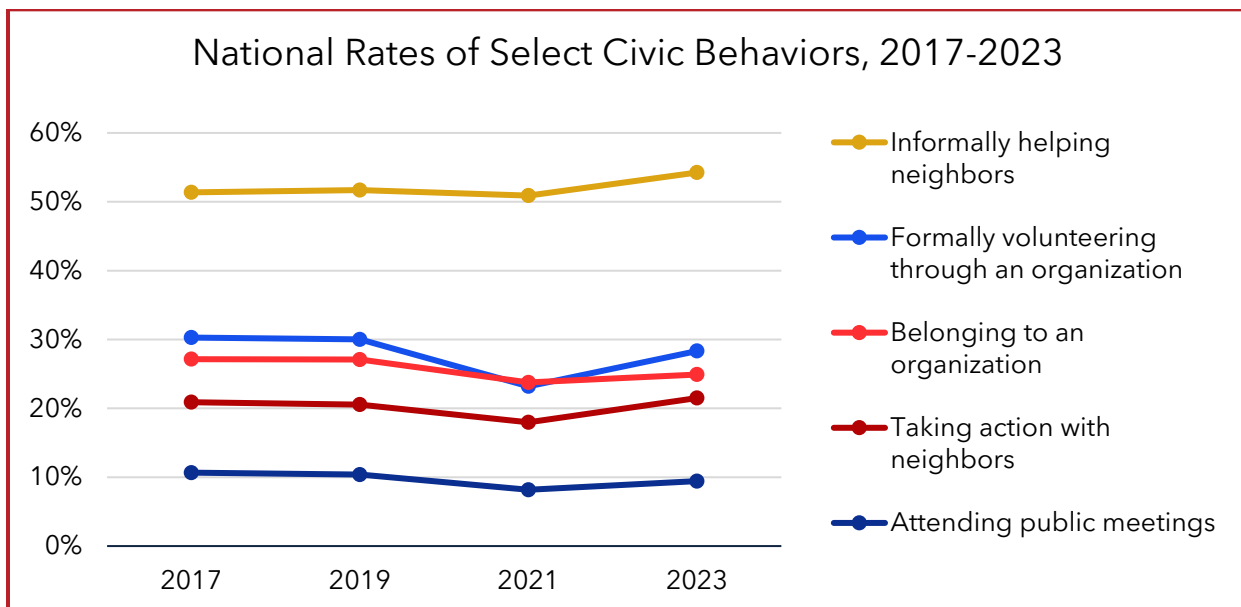


# Renewed Engagement in American Civic Life



Every two years, AmeriCorps partners with the U.S. Census Bureau to conduct the most robust survey about civic engagement across the United States and over time. The data informs AmeriCorps' [Volunteering and Civic Life in America](#) research, a comprehensive look at how Americans make a difference in their communities and promote the common good. This latest analysis finds that:

- **Overall, the picture emerging** from findings about formal volunteering, informal helping, and other metrics **is one of renewed engagement in American civic life.**
- **Formal volunteering is rebounding.** Over 28 percent of Americans volunteered through an organization between September 2022 and 2023, an increase of five percentage points from the historic low documented in 2021.<sup>1</sup> Other civic behaviors that declined substantially during the COVID-19 pandemic are following the same trend.
- **Informal helping is climbing.** From 2017 to 2021, about half of Americans consistently helped their neighbors informally. The 2023 data shows a national informal helping rate of 54 percent, a meaningful three percentage point increase from previous years.



## BUILDING UNDERSTANDING OF CIVIC ENGAGEMENT IN AMERICA

[AmeriCorps' mission](#) is to improve lives, strengthen communities, and foster civic engagement through service and volunteering. The AmeriCorps Office of Research and Evaluation advances this mission, in part, by building our nation's understanding of [civic engagement](#). For example, over 400,000 exiting members have completed the [AmeriCorps Member Exit Survey \(MES\)](#) since 2015, reporting on their service experiences and future plans to engage in civic behaviors like participating in organizations and donating time and money. AmeriCorps has also partnered with the [U.S. Census Bureau](#) to track civic engagement trends through supplements to the Current Population Survey for over two decades. The current version, the Civic Engagement and Volunteering (CEV) Supplement, launched in 2017. This nationally representative biennial survey of 45,000 American households asks about a range of activities such as formally volunteering through an organization, attending public meetings, and informally helping neighbors. Taken together, the AmeriCorps MES and CEV represent the most robust surveys about the varied ways AmeriCorps members and Americans overall make a difference in their communities and promote the common good across the country and over time.

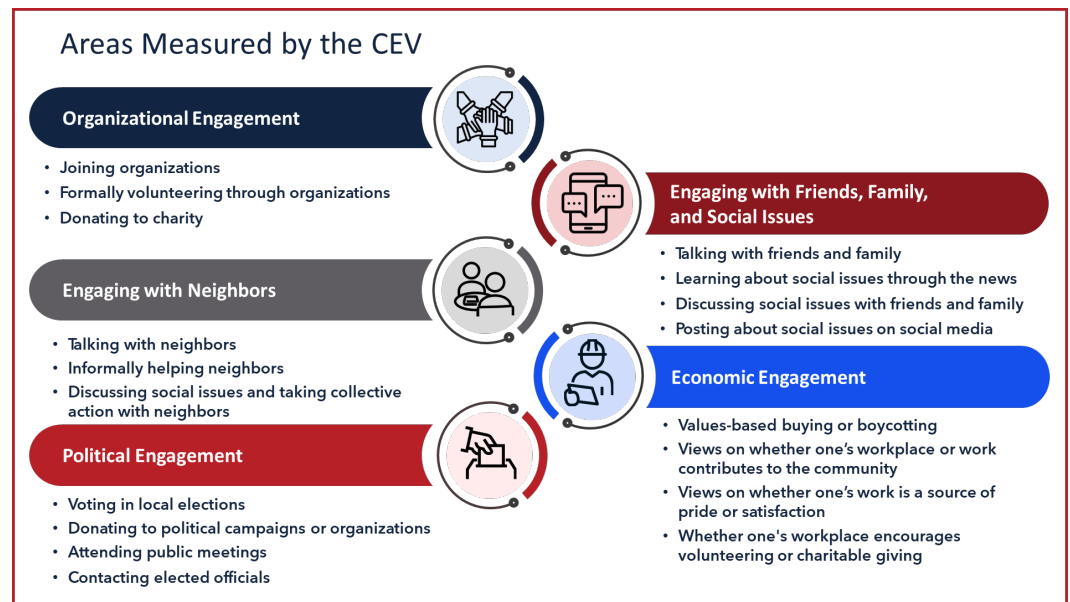
*The CEV is the most comprehensive longitudinal survey about volunteerism and other forms of civic engagement in the United States. Conducted by the U.S. Census Bureau in partnership with AmeriCorps, the CEV takes the pulse of our nation's civic health every two years.*

The figures presented in this report are based on AmeriCorps' analysis of CEV data collected by the U.S. Census Bureau in September 2023 and previous waves of the CEV conducted in 2017, 2019, and 2021. Over 47,000 Americans age 16 and up completed the latest survey. Their responses were then weighted to generate statistics about the prevalence of specific civic behaviors at the national level, within each state, and in the largest twelve Metropolitan Statistical Areas (MSAs) where it is possible to produce reliable estimates.<sup>ii</sup>

The CEV includes measures of civic-oriented attitudes and behaviors related to five areas: engaging with organizations (including, for the first time, [virtual volunteering](#)); engaging with neighbors; political engagement; economic engagement; and engaging with friends, family, and social issues. To produce this report, AmeriCorps

systematically analyzed each measure individually and in comparison to other measures in the same area. Each page that follows highlights key insights within one area, focusing on trends that are both statistically significant and substantively meaningful. Additional insights are available via an [interactive CEV dashboard](#).

Taken together, findings from the 2023 CEV underscore the breadth and depth of volunteering and civic life in America.



## ORGANIZATIONAL ENGAGEMENT

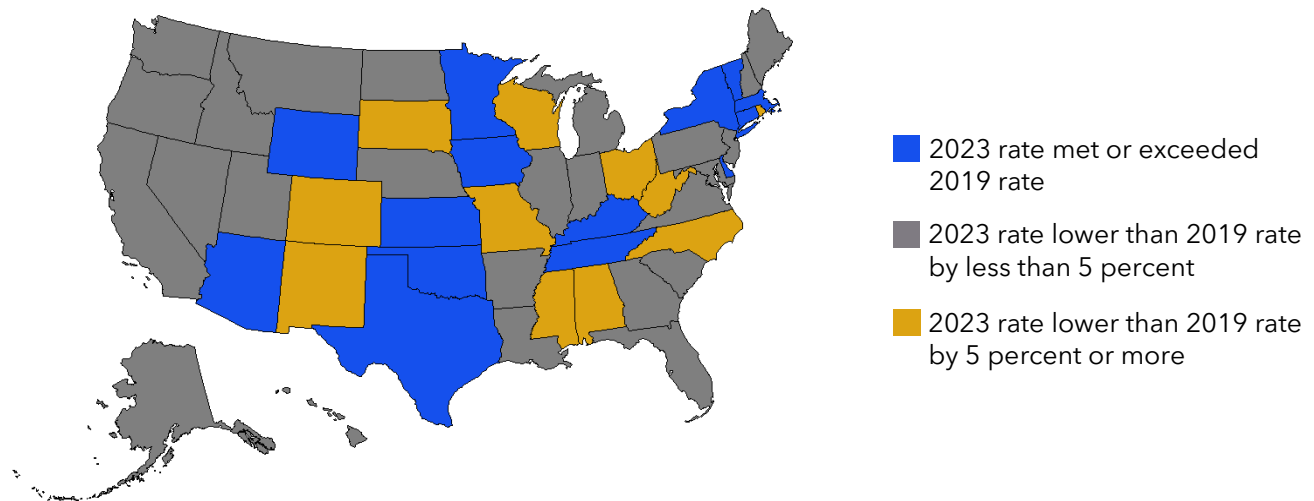
The CEV asks about three ways individuals can engage with organizations to make a difference in their communities and promote the common good: formally volunteering, charitable giving, and joining groups like nonprofits or neighborhood associations. National rates of all three measures are rebounding in the latest data, but the largest relative gains are in formal volunteering and belonging to an organization.

**Over 28 percent of Americans—or 75.7 million people—volunteered for an organization between September 2022 and 2023.** Half of formal volunteers served 24 hours or more during this period.<sup>iii</sup> Collectively, formal volunteers served an estimated 4.99 billion hours and contributed over \$167.2 billion in economic value.

A first-of-its-kind measure of [virtual volunteering](#) introduced in 2023 also shows that **18 percent of formal volunteers served completely or partially online.**<sup>iv</sup>

The 2023 national formal volunteering rate is five percentage points higher than the historic low documented in 2021, which represents an unprecedented growth rate of 22 percent over a two-year period.<sup>v</sup> Yet **rebounds are unequally distributed at the state level and within the largest twelve metro areas** where reliable estimates are available. The latest rates of formal volunteering match or exceed 2019 levels in 14 states and five of the largest metro areas: Boston, Dallas, New York, Phoenix, and San Francisco. In contrast, formal volunteering rates remain more than five percentage points below pre-pandemic figures in 11 states and the District of Columbia metro area.

Changes in State-Level Formal Volunteering Rates, 2019-2023



CEV data also shows that **one in four Americans—over 62.9 million people—belonged to an organization in 2023.** Most (54 percent) members belonged to two groups or more. Although the latest national organizational membership rate remains two percentage points below pre-pandemic levels, the rebound between 2021 and 2023 represents a meaningful growth rate of five percent in two years.

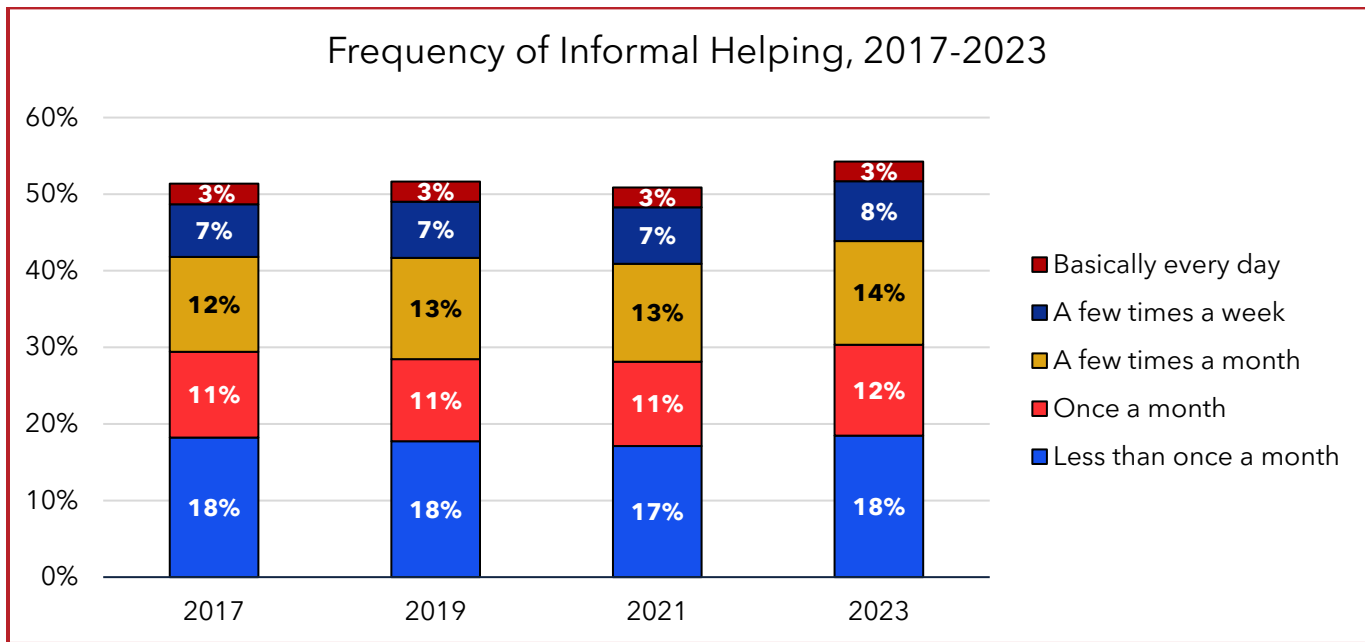
**Charitable giving continues to be the most common way Americans engage with organizations.** Almost 49 percent gave more than \$25 to a non-political group between September 2022 and 2023, which equates to a national donor base of at least 121.8 million people. Although the 0.4 percentage point increase between 2021 and 2023 is small in both relative and absolute terms, it's also notably the first uptick ever recorded by the CEV.

Consistent with previous research by [AmeriCorps](#) and [other scholars](#), different forms of organizational engagement track together in the 2023 CEV data. Rates of belonging to organizations and charitable giving are substantially higher among Americans who formally volunteer.

## ENGAGING WITH NEIGHBORS

Interactions that build social capital outside an organizational context also promote community well-being. The CEV includes four measures of civically engaging with neighbors: informally helping neighbors, taking action with neighbors to do something positive for the community, talking with neighbors, and discussing social issues with neighbors. National rates of informal helping and taking action with neighbors to do something positive for the community climbed in 2023. National rates of talking and discussing social issues with neighbors, however, have stagnated since 2019.

The national informal helping rate was relatively stable between 2017 and 2021, with about half of Americans consistently reporting they helped their neighbors informally with tasks like house sitting, watching each other’s children, or lending tools at least once in the past year. **Informal helping has become even more prevalent in the wake of the pandemic.** Over 54 percent of Americans, or 137.5 million neighbors, informally helped each other between September 2022 and 2023. This three percentage point jump is both statistically significant and impactful on day-to-day lives: it translates into 12.9 million more informal helpers in 2023 than in 2021. About one in ten Americans informally helped their neighbors a few times a week or more in the latest data.



Over 22 percent of Americans or 54.5 million people took action with their neighbors to do something positive for the community between September 2022 and 2023. **Despite a historic decline during the pandemic, taking action with neighbors is now more prevalent nationally than at any time since 2017.** This trend exemplifies how people are finding meaningful ways to make a difference at the neighborhood level even as they rebuild their lives in the wake of the pandemic.

**In contrast, the national rate of talking with neighbors has not rebounded from a notable drop between 2017 and 2019.** In the past three waves of the CEV, about 70 percent of Americans have consistently reported they had a conversation or spent time with neighbors in the past year. Of the 178.4 million Americans who talked with neighbors in 2023, 57 percent did so at least once a month and eight percent talked with their neighbors “basically every day.”

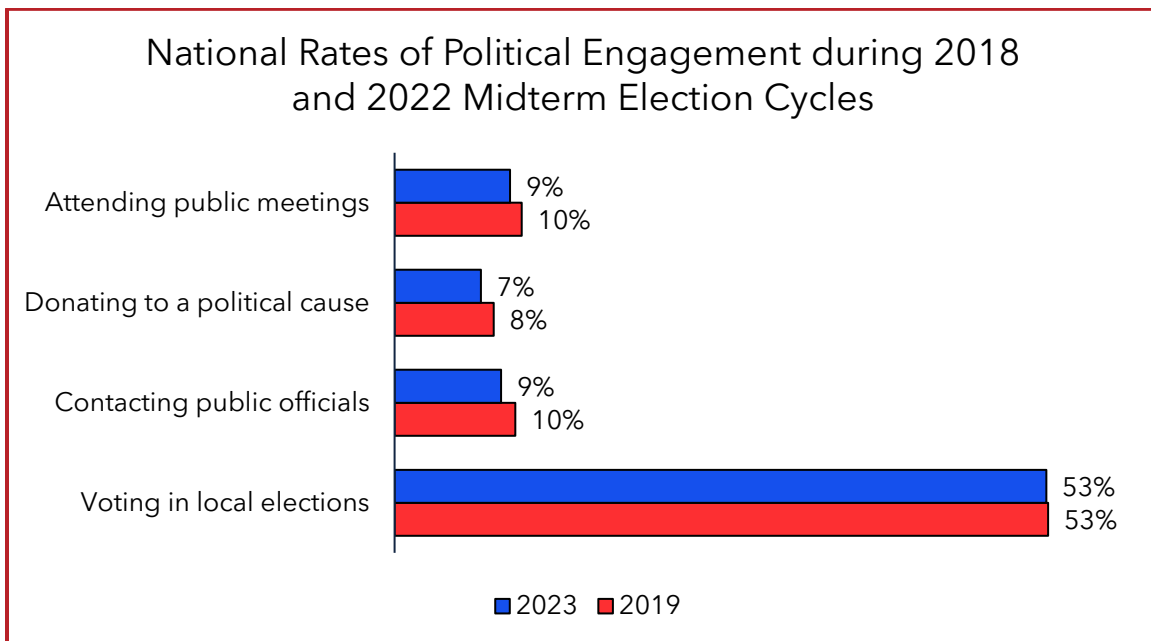
**The national rate of discussing social issues with neighbors has followed a similar trajectory.** The CEV recorded a meaningful decline in the share of Americans who talk about political, societal, or local issues with their neighbors from 33 percent in 2017 to 29 percent in 2019. The national rate has stagnated since then. About 72.8 million Americans discussed social issues with their neighbors between September 2022 and 2023, with one in ten doing so less than once a month.

## POLITICAL ENGAGEMENT

Although voting is the most common metric of political engagement, there are many ways that people can engage with democratic institutions and decision-making processes to promote the common good.<sup>vi</sup> The CEV asks about voting in local elections, donating to a political cause, contacting public officials, and attending public meetings. Local voter turnout and political donations tend to fluctuate with federal election cycles. Although national rates of contacting public officials have steadily declined since 2017, attending public meetings is bouncing back in the latest data after a substantial decline during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Every other September, the CEV asks Americans about their civic participation in the previous year. This means that 2023 CEV data captures political engagement that took place between September 2022 and 2023, a period that includes voting in the 2022 midterm elections. Similarly, 2019 CEV data captures the 2018 midterms.

**In both midterm election cycles, 53 percent of Americans age 18 and over reported they voted in the last local elections.** These 123.4 million voters for mayor, school board, and other local offices represent about five times the number of people who donated to a political cause, contacted a public official, or attended a public meeting in 2023.



**Donating to a political cause is consistently the least prevalent form of civic engagement measured in the CEV, political or otherwise.** Only seven percent of the nation—or 17.7 million people—reported they gave more than \$25 to a political organization, party, or campaign between September 2022 and 2023. The national rate of donating to a political cause was eight percent in 2019, representing a 13 percent rate of decline between these two midterm election cycles.

Similarly, **only nine percent of Americans contacted or visited a public official**—at any level of government—to express their opinion during this period. Among the 21.9 million people who did so, 83 percent also voted in the last local election.

Like formal volunteering, **the national rate of attending public meetings declined dramatically between 2019 and 2021 but is rebounding in the latest data.** Nine percent of Americans—over 23.8 million people—attended a zoning, school board, or other public meeting to discuss a local issue between September 2022 and 2023. As a critical metric of the vitality of American civic life, 2023 public meeting attendance signals a moment of renewal.

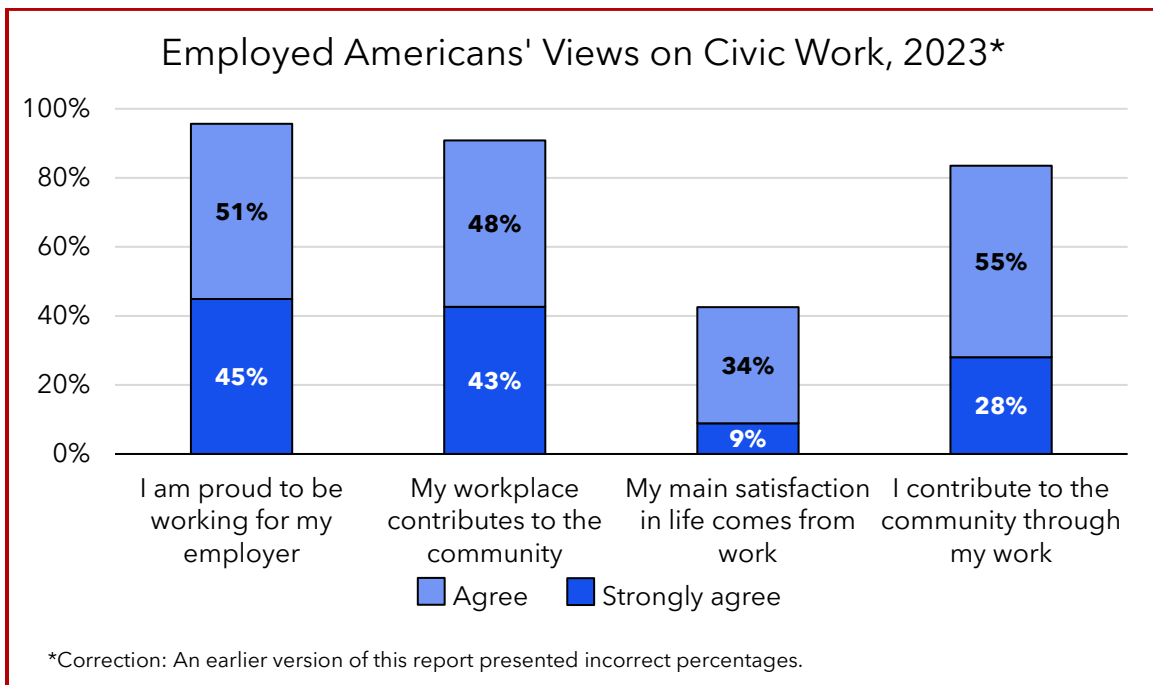
## ECONOMIC ENGAGEMENT

Peoples' choices as consumers and workers are gaining recognition as forms of civic engagement. The CEV measures strategies Americans use to leverage their purchasing power for the common good. It also includes measures related to **civic work: the ways in which people opt into or create workplaces that support their civic goals**. The latest CEV data shows ongoing increases in national rates of boycotting or boycotting and the share of American workers whose employer promotes volunteering or charitable giving. It also shows that, on average, employed Americans' views on the "civic-ness" of their workplace have remained stable between 2021 and 2023.

The CEV asks about buying or boycotting products or services based on the political values or business practices of a company. The national boycotting or boycotting rate has climbed steadily from 14 percent of Americans in 2017 to 17 percent in 2023. In other words, **over 44 million Americans took the community into account at the cash register** between September 2022 and 2023.

Similarly, **the share of employed Americans who report their workplace has asked or encouraged them to volunteer or donate to charity has increased by five percentage points** since the measure was introduced in 2021. Over 61.3 million people—or 40 percent of employed Americans—were encouraged to participate in a workplace volunteering day, provide pro bono services, or make a difference in the community through some other means in 2023.

When it comes to work and civic life, **about nine in ten American workers said their workplace contributes to the community** and they are proud to be working for their employer, respectively. Over eight in ten said they contribute to the community through their work in 2023.



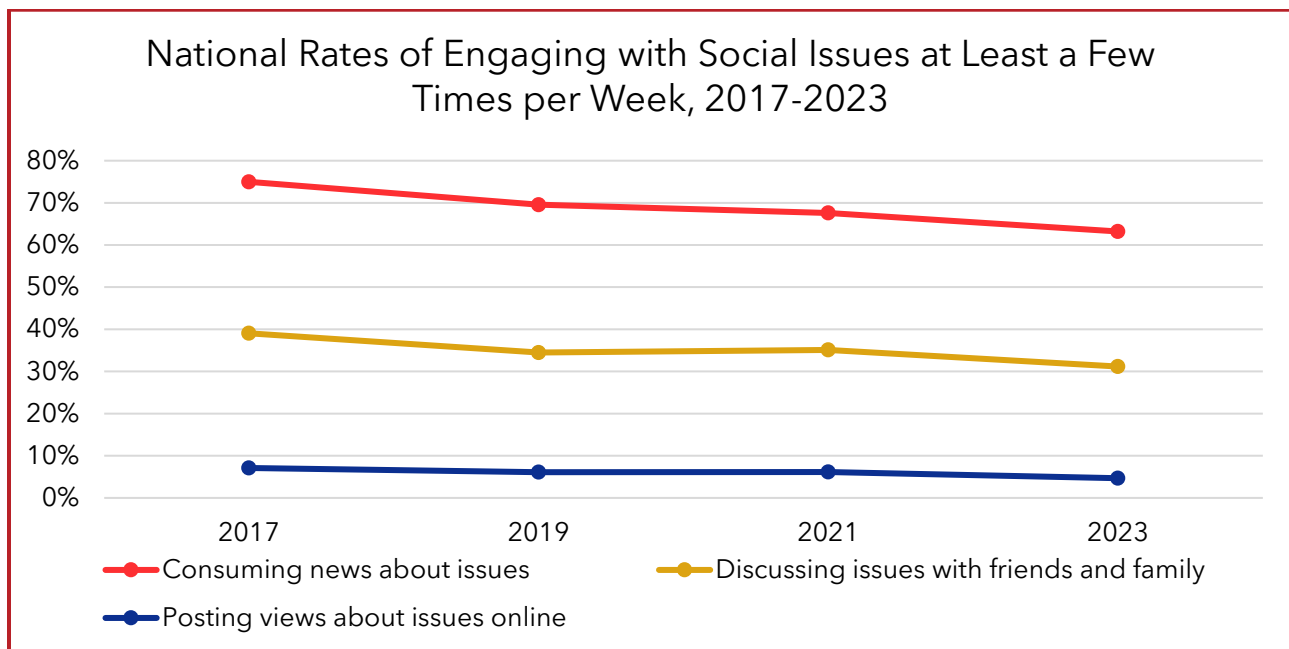
Even as many workers have come to view their jobs as outlets to pursue passions, express values, and make a difference in the community, it is clear that **experiences off the clock are also central to workers' well-being**. Well over half of employed Americans disagreed that their main satisfaction in life comes from work in both 2021 and the latest data.

## ENGAGING WITH FRIENDS, FAMILY, AND SOCIAL ISSUES

Just as informal interactions with neighbors build social capital and cohesion, relationships with friends and family are part of the fabric of civic life. Social ties also shape—and are shaped by—the ways people understand and act on political, societal, or local issues. The CEV asks about four ways of engaging with friends, family, and social issues: talking with friends and family, discussing social issues with friends and family, consuming news about social issues, and posting views about social issues online. Nationally, rates of frequently talking with friends and family are rebounding in 2023. Rates of measures related to engagement with issues, however, have continued to decline in the latest data.

A supermajority of Americans consistently report they talk to or spend time with family at least once in the past year. Although the CEV recorded a notable drop in **the share who engaged with friends and family at least a few times a week** between 2019 and 2021, that figure **rebounded to 83 percent—over 212.3 million people—in 2023**.

**Americans’ frequency of engaging with issues—in conversation with friends and family or otherwise—has steeply declined since the CEV began in 2017.** The most dramatic example is staying informed. Three quarters of the nation reported they read, watched, or listened to news or information about political, societal, or local issues at least a few times per week in 2017 compared to only 63 percent in 2023. Only 43 percent of Americans—over 107.8 million people—consumed news about issues on a near-daily basis. The CEV does not ask about sources of news, although the growth of [misinformation](#) in recent years clearly also has implications for civic engagement.



**National rates of discussing social issues with friends and family and posting views about issues online follow a similar trendline.** Aside from a slight uptick in 2021 (when the CEV captured civic engagement during the 2020 presidential election cycle), the share of Americans who frequently engage in these behaviors has been steadily declining since 2017.

The national rate of discussing social issues with friends and family at least a few times per week was 31 percent in 2023 compared to 39 percent in 2017. The rate of frequently posting views about social issues online was only five percent in the latest data compared to seven percent when the CEV began. Although the picture emerging from findings about volunteering, informal helping, and many other metrics presented in this report is one of renewed engagement in American civic life, engagement with social issues represents a critical exception.

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*Taken together, our research shows an inflection point in American civic life. Formal volunteering, informal helping, and many other forms of civic engagement are on the rise. AmeriCorps has always recognized that service and civic renewal go hand in hand. Everyone can make a difference.*

**Dr. Mary Hyde, Director, AmeriCorps Office of Research and Evaluation**

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## LEARN MORE AND MAKE A DIFFERENCE

### Explore the Data

- Use AmeriCorps' [interactive CEV dashboard](#). Explore findings across the country and over time at [Data.Americorps.gov](#).
- Run your own analysis. [CEV data, documentation, and user support materials](#) are publicly available.

### Dive Deeper

- Read AmeriCorps' Spotlighting the CEV research briefs at [AmeriCorps.gov/VolunteeringInAmerica](#).
- Explore AmeriCorps' [Volunteer Management and Engagement Resource Guide](#).
- For more information about the CEV, reach out to the AmeriCorps Office of Research and Evaluation at [AmeriCorpsCEV@americorps.gov](mailto:AmeriCorpsCEV@americorps.gov).

### Engage in Your Community

- Watch this [introduction to AmeriCorps](#).
- Donate your time and talent. Find volunteer opportunities near you at [AmeriCorps.gov/Volunteer](#).
- Make a sustained commitment through national service. Find your fit for long- and short-term opportunities at [AmeriCorps.gov/Serve](#).
- Become an AmeriCorps partner. Apply for people power and funding at [AmeriCorps.gov/Partner](#).

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**About the Office of Research and Evaluation:** The [AmeriCorps Office of Research and Evaluation](#) assists AmeriCorps and its partners in collecting, analyzing, and disseminating data and insights about AmeriCorps programs and civic life in America.

**About AmeriCorps:** AmeriCorps, the federal agency for national service and volunteerism, provides opportunities for Americans to serve their country domestically, address the nation's most pressing challenges, improve lives and communities, and strengthen civic engagement. Each year, the agency places more than 200,000 AmeriCorps members and AmeriCorps Seniors volunteers in intensive service roles; and empowers millions more to serve as long-term, short-term, or one-time volunteers. **Learn more at [AmeriCorps.gov](#).**

<sup>i</sup> Following historical U.S. Census Bureau practice, formal volunteering rates are calculated as the estimated share of volunteers in the population over the estimated total civilian noninstitutional population, which includes respondents coded as "do not know," "refusal," and "no answer."

<sup>ii</sup> For methodological details, please see the full technical documentation and frequently asked questions about the CEV at [data.americorps.gov](#).

<sup>iii</sup> Nationally, formal volunteers served 24 hours at the median and 70 hours at the mean between September 2022 and 2023. Almost a third of formal volunteers (32 percent) served less than once a month and 19 percent served a few times a week or more during this period.

<sup>iv</sup> In 2023, the CEV introduced the first measure of virtual volunteering to be administered in a population survey by the U.S. Census Bureau. An [analysis by the University of Maine and AmeriCorps](#) finds that one in five formal volunteers served at least partially online between September 2022 and 2023. The majority (82 percent) of formal volunteers served completely in-person, 17 percent engaged in a mix of in-person and online activities, and one percent volunteered completely online.

<sup>v</sup> In 2017, the U.S. Census Bureau and AmeriCorps changed the way they collected data on formal volunteering by moving the survey question from the beginning to the end of the supplement. The change in the national formal volunteering rate from 25 percent in 2015 to 30 percent in 2017 is at least partially due to "order effects," the fact that earlier items in a questionnaire tend to get more responses. The true national rate of formal volunteering likely stayed relatively constant between 2015 and 2017.

<sup>vi</sup> For inventories of civic engagement measures, see [Civic Engagement and Social Cohesion: Measuring Dimensions of Social Capital to Inform Policy](#) and [Compendium on Civic Engagement and Population Health](#).