

Families in their Communities

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HAWAI'I FAMILY TOUCHSTONES

The Center on the Family developed Hawai'i Family Touchstones to monitor the well-being of families in our state. Relevant and measurable indicators are tracked over time to provide an overview of Hawai'i's families at a given point and in relation to the past.

The data for Family Touchstones are gathered from a variety of public and private sources. In addition, the Center on the Family conducts periodic surveys on a representative sample of Hawai'i's families to collect data unavailable from other sources. In 2002, the sample consisted of 1,051 families. These data often focus on the quality of family interactions and relationships.

The inaugural Hawai'i Family Touchstones report, published in 1999, presented baseline indicator data. These data are regularly updated and reported on the Center on the Family's Web-based Data Center on Children and Families (www.uhfamily.hawaii.edu), which the reader is encouraged to visit for a presentation of all project indicators and trend data.

Families are the cornerstone of our society. They are where we nurture our children, teach them values and skills, and foster the well-being of individuals for a better society. Families possess characteristics that promote well-being and resiliency in their members. A body of research has identified the qualities of *strong families*,¹ families that teach their members problem-solving skills, provide positive support and a sense of unity, and, in the process, develop resilience to stress and crisis. The communities in which families reside also affect the well-being of families and their members. Communities, like families, possess qualities that can promote well-being when present or pose challenges to individuals and families when lacking.

The presence of positive conditions, such as social support networks (e.g., helpful and supportive neighbors and adult mentors and role models for children), can help families remain healthy, build strengths, and buffer stress.² Social networks can be a source of instrumental support (e.g., money, child care assistance, or employment connections), as well as a source of emotional support (e.g., advice or a "sounding board" when needed). Social networks further provide for the development of common values and standards, or rules of conduct that promote social organization.³ Social support networks are particularly critical to vulnerable families or those living in high-risk neighborhoods where resources may be limited.⁴

Community institutions also play a significant role in strengthening individual and family resiliency to produce better outcomes. Churches and faith-based organizations, for example, have historically played a central role in providing



additional networks of support to families through the bonds and friendships that people form in their congregations. Faith-based organizations have also increasingly become a source of important community and social services, such as food pantry programs, self-help groups, and recreational programs.⁵ Schools are another example of community institutions that can significantly impact well-being beyond childhood. Schools that foster caring and supportive teacher-student relationships, positive peer relationships, opportunities to participate in school activities, and opportunities for parent involvement have been found to produce a host of positive outcomes with life-long implications, including better educational outcomes, delayed onset of sexual activity, and reduced rates of substance use and problem behaviors.⁶

The presence of opportunities to participate in organized civic, recreational, and cultural activities in their communities has also been associated with positive outcomes for families.⁷ Organized community-based activities, such as Parent-Teacher Association (PTA) events, sports league events, and neighborhood celebrations provide connections to others, further building and strengthening the networks that can serve as resources for their members. Such activities foster cohesive communities and a sense of belonging as they engage residents, including children and youth, in the productive use of leisure time and reinforce lessons of responsibility to and trust in others.

These community “qualities” have been captured and explained by social scientists as a concept

called *social capital*, defined as the “features of social organization, such as networks, norms, and trust that facilitate coordination and cooperation for mutual benefits.”⁸ Simply put, social capital—whether generated through informal groups like family and friends, through community institutions like churches or schools, or through organized activities—is the supply of the social networks found in communities and their natural trust and tendencies to do things for each other and to solve common problems. Evidence suggests that there is a decline of social capital in communities throughout our nation, as indicated by the downward trend in the proportion of Americans who are politically active, are involved in community and religious organizations, and are spending quality time with their friends and neighbors.⁹ Naturally, some communities have less social capital than others.¹⁰ When social networks are frayed, when opportunities to make connections and build trust are lacking, and when resources are therefore limited, communities become poor in social capital. The impact is evident in increased crime rates, lower educational performance, reduced personal well-being, and limited economic opportunities, to name a few family-related outcomes.¹¹ Similarly, the opposite can be true in communities that are rich in social capital.

Understanding the community context in which families live is therefore critical as we track and document the well-being of Hawai‘i’s families. While Hawai‘i Family Touchstones is not a study in social capital, the indicators discussed in the following

sections help us to identify the presence or absence of some of the community factors described above, as well as describe how families view and engage in their communities. These data are aimed at providing a picture of Hawai‘i’s families in their communities—what families offer to their communities, and what the communities offer them for sustained well-being.

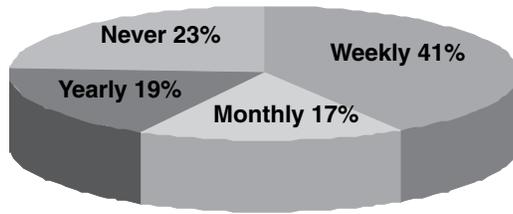
Building Strong Networks

Religious participation

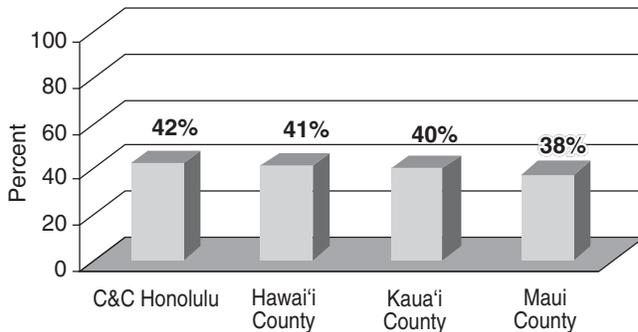
At the individual family level, research has shown that one of the qualities shared by strong families is the belief in a greater good or power in life.¹² Religious faith helps families to cope with, rather than be devastated by, the stresses and crises of life. Religious engagement also expands social networks, and therefore the resources and assistance, available to families.¹³ To that end, faith-based organizations serve as an important source of social capital in our communities. They promote attention to the well-being of others and to community involvement. Indeed, religious involvement has been found to be positively associated with volunteerism and philanthropy, as well as with other forms of civic involvement such as voting, participating in secular and political organizations, and general forms of socializing.¹⁴ Thus, individual families’ level of religious involvement has implications for the well-being of the larger community and its members.

It is important to note that self reports of attendance at religious services tend to be

Percentage of Adults Attending Religious Services—State Data



Percentage of Adults Attending Religious Services Weekly—County Data*



Hawai'i Family Touchstones Survey, Market Trends Pacific, Inc.
 *Percentage of families responding “weekly” to the question: *On the average, how often do you attend religious services?*

higher than actual behaviors. In addition, attendance at religious services is only one measure of religiosity and may not capture the full scope of religious involvement. Nevertheless, the present indicator provides a good estimate of the level of religious engagement of Hawai'i's families, a quality that is difficult to assess.

Forty-one percent (41%) of Hawai'i residents surveyed said they attend religious services weekly, and 17% reported they attend at least monthly. Weekly attendance at religious services is similar to national averages. In a recent national survey, 41% of respondents indicated they attend “church, synagogue or other place of worship” once a week or more often. In another national survey, 43% indicated they attend religious services at least weekly.¹⁵ Religious attendance at the county level is quite

comparable to state data, with Maui having a lower percentage (38%) of adults reporting weekly religious participation.

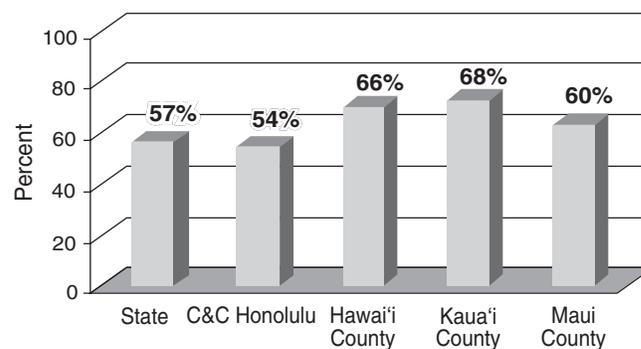
Participation in community activities

When families spend their leisure time participating in community activities, they engage in civic

life and contribute to the vitality of their community. Participation in community events generates commitment and care for the communities in which our families live. Such social engagement provides opportunities for families to expand their social networks, strengthen bonds, and build trust among neighbors. Unfortunately, opportunities to cultivate social networks and trust are especially difficult to find in some low-income communities where organized neighborhood activities are limited or inaccessible. Overall, the poorest communities throughout the country, where all sources of social capital are critically needed, often have fewer parks, playgrounds, and open spaces for neighborhood celebrations and cultural events.¹⁶

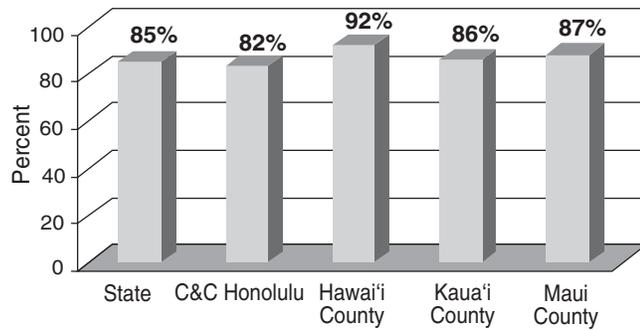
In Hawai'i, well over half of survey respondents said they attend neighborhood celebrations and cultural events in their communities. That percentage was higher for neighbor island residents, with Kaua'i having the largest percentage (68%) of residents who engage in community activities. In 2002, Hawai'i Family Touchstones collected data on this indicator

Percentage of Adults Attending Community Activities*



Hawai'i Family Touchstones Survey, Market Trends Pacific, Inc.
 *Percentage of families responding “yes” to the question: *Do you attend neighborhood celebrations, like block parties, and cultural events in your community?*

Percentage of Adults Who Can Rely on Others in the Community



Hawai'i Family Touchstones Survey, Market Trends Pacific, Inc.

*Percentage of adults responding “yes” to the question: *Is there someone in your community, outside of your family, that you feel you can rely on in time of need?*

for the first time; no comparable national data are available. However, a recent local study on social capital conducted for the Hawai'i Community Foundation examined *organized social involvement* as a dimension of the construct and found that Hawai'i has about the same percentage of people who “attended a parade, local sports or arts events” in the last year as does the rest of the nation (about 75%), and a few more (49%) who attended more than four such events in a year’s time than did nationwide (45%).¹⁷

A Sense of Trust and Safety

Relying on others in the community

When people need help, they typically turn first to their families. Having someone outside of the family in time of need expands the circle of support and promotes reciprocity, which, in turn, builds and strengthens social networks. Turning to neighbors reflects a sense of social connectedness, security, and trust, and contributes to the health of a community. A national study of social capital

found that personal happiness and perceived quality of life are closely tied to the level of community social connectedness and trust, more so than income or educational levels.¹⁸ On the other hand, when families lack a sense of social trust, they tend to be isolated and more vulnerable to stress and poor coping when problems occur. The importance of community social trust and connectedness was illustrated in a study that compared neighborhoods with high and low rates of child abuse. Researchers in that study found that residents in the high-abuse communities were more reluctant to seek

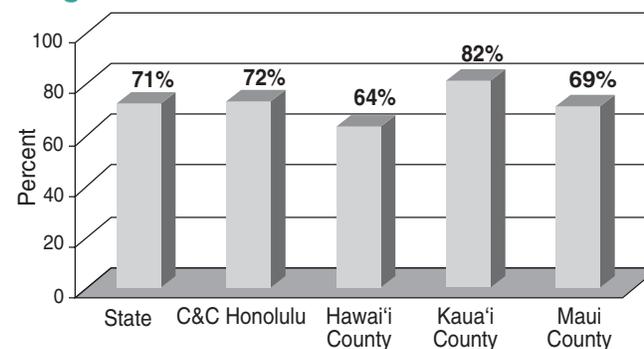
help from their neighbors when needed.¹⁹

In our survey of Hawai'i residents, 85% of adults indicated they can rely on another person in their community, outside of their family, for help in time of need. The proportion of residents who can rely on neighbors is higher in Hawai'i and Maui counties, with 92% and 87% of respective county residents indicating so. Results of the 1999 Hawai'i Family Touchstones survey were quite similar, with 83% of state residents surveyed indicating they can turn to another in their community.²⁰ Though not a direct comparison, the local survey of social capital found that 82% of Hawai'i residents surveyed trust the people in their neighborhood (either “some” or “a lot”), the same as the national average.²¹

Safety perceptions

The perception of a safe neighborhood affects a family’s daily behavior. It determines whether children are allowed to play outdoors and determines the families’ activities and interactions in areas near their home. A sense of safety is therefore related to how “connected” a family can be

Percentage of Adults Who Feel Safe in Their Neighborhood*



Hawai'i Family Touchstones Survey, Market Trends Pacific, Inc.

*Percentage of adults responding “no” to the question: *Is there an area near where you live, that you are afraid to walk alone at night?*

to their community, indicative of whether they participate in community activities, turn to neighbors for help, or extend the spirit of *aloha* to others in their community. Research suggests that in neighborhoods where residents participate in community activities and where social ties are tight, crime rates are low.²²

Survey respondents were asked whether there is an area near their home where they would be afraid to walk alone at night. Seventy-one percent (71%) answered no, indicating they feel safe in their neighborhoods. However, well over a quarter of our residents indicated they did not feel safe in their neighborhoods. Neighbor island perceptions of community safety varied. City and County of Honolulu and Maui county perceptions were similar to the state average. However, Kaua'i had the highest proportion of respondents (82%) indicating a sense of community safety. It is interesting to note that only 64% of Hawai'i county residents surveyed said they feel safe in their neighborhoods, yet Hawai'i county had the highest proportion (92%) of residents indicating they can rely on neighbors for help, and the second highest (66%) who said they engage in community events.

Family/ Community- School Bonds

Parental school volunteerism

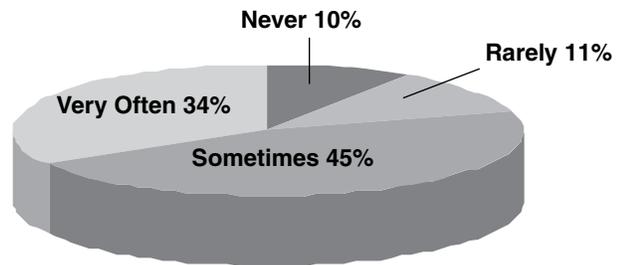
As community institutions, schools have the capability to support the well-being of family members, in this case children,

throughout a lifetime. When educators view children within the context of the family and community, they tend to also engage these units as partners in children's education and development, promoting better outcomes along the way. Children do better academically and have fewer behavior problems when parents are actively involved in school-related activities.²³ Despite existing models for effective parent-school partnerships, schools do not always do everything in their power to engage families positively in the education of their children.²⁴ Schools, particularly those in economically distressed communities, are more likely to engage with families to report problems or difficulties with children despite

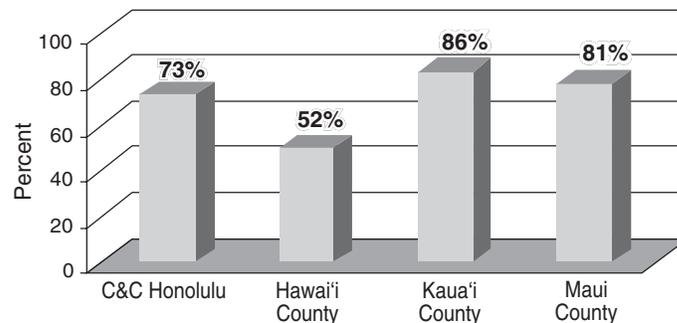
research that suggests parents typically want to be actively and authentically involved in their children's education and that their involvement is most effective when they are empowered with real decision-making authority.²⁵

To get a sense of the level of parent involvement in our community schools, we asked parents of elementary school students how often they attend PTA meetings, volunteer or mentor students in their child's classroom, chaperone field trips, or participate in fundraising activities. Because parent involvement in school activities tends to drop after elementary school, we focused this indicator on parents of elementary school-aged students. Thirty-four percent (34%) of parents surveyed indicated they volunteer for such

Percentage of Parents Who Volunteer at Their Child's School—State Data



Percentage of Parents Who Volunteer at Their Child's School—County Data*



Hawai'i Family Touchstones Survey, Market Trends Pacific, Inc.

*Percentage of parents with children in elementary school responding "very often" or "sometimes" to the question: *How often do you attend PTA meetings, volunteer or mentor students in your child's classroom, chaperone field trips, or participate in fundraising activities?*

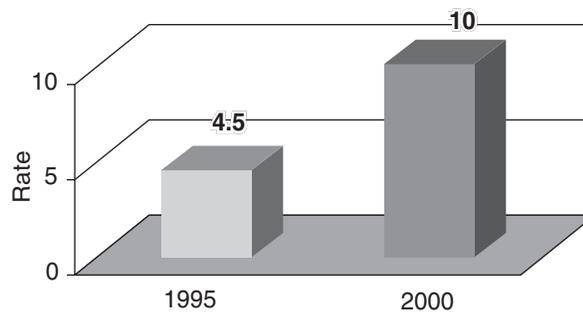
activities very often, and another 45% said they did so sometimes. Kaua'i county had the highest proportion (86%) of parents indicating they participate in such activities at their child's school, while Hawai'i county had the lowest (52%). The Child Trends project tracks a similar indicator at the national level. For that project, parent involvement was defined as parental attendance/participation in a general school meeting, a parent-teacher meeting, or a school event; volunteering in the school; or serving on a school committee. In 1999, 92% of all students had parents who participated in at least one of these activities, while 96% of elementary school-age students had parents who were involved with the schools in this capacity.²⁶

School volunteerism

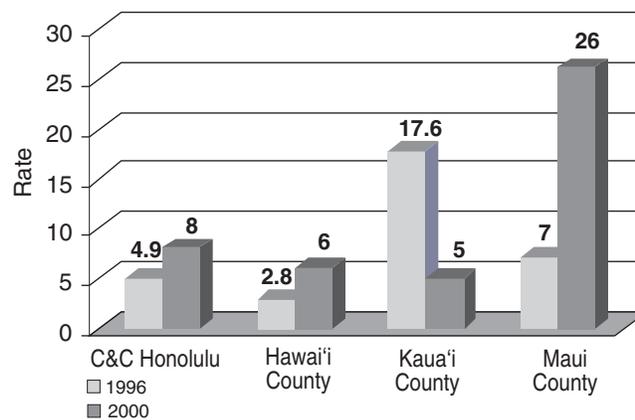
The contributions and involvement of other adults from the community are also critical to developing successful learning environments in the schools. Research indicates that learning is influenced by the social capital found in the wider community.²⁷ Adult school volunteers, whether family of students or community members, help to build strong bonds between schools and communities, increasing resources and helping to meet educational goals. School volunteers further model the importance of giving back to the community, perpetuating social capital in the process of doing so.

The data presented here are based on reports from the schools within the public education system, which keeps track of school volunteers such as school board members, tutors, and clerk typists. While these data are

Rate of School Volunteers per 100 Students—State Data



Rate of School Volunteers per 100 Students—County Data



Office of the Governor, State Volunteer Services, Annual Survey of Volunteers
 *Note: Regular volunteer defined as “any person engaged in specific voluntary service activities on an ongoing or continuous basis without receipt of any compensation, except meals, temporary lodging, transportation reimbursement, and mileage.”



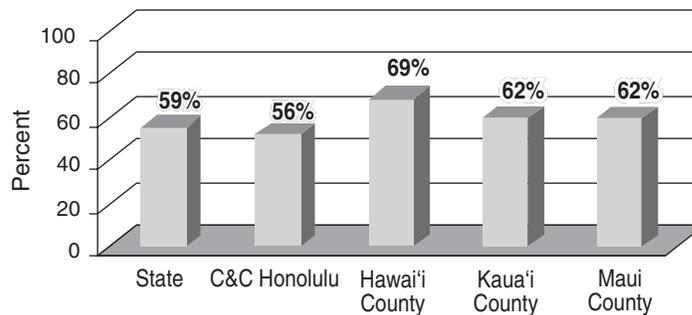
Photo by UH Relations

based on school reports and may reflect variability in reporting and duplication of volunteer counts, they nevertheless provide the best picture we have of adult and community involvement in our schools. The state volunteer rate more than doubled between 1995 and 2000. County data were not available until 1996. Between 1996 and 2000, we see a similar increasing trend in the number of school volunteers in the City and County of Honolulu and the County of Hawai‘i. The rate of school volunteers on Maui nearly tripled, while Kaua‘i saw a decrease in the rate of volunteers.

Giving to the Community Volunteerism

Americans have a long and rich history of altruism. Historically, helping others grew out of religious involvement. By the twentieth century, however, with the advent of community foundations and charitable organizations, volunteering and philanthropy became more “professionalized” and also became a matter of civic rather than just religious duty.²⁸ Today, Americans are more likely to give and volunteer than are citizens from other countries.²⁹ Helping others is a fundamental measure of social capital. It grows out of the depth of one’s social networks and community involvement, which is why we continue to see the strong links between religious and civic involvement and philanthropic behaviors.³⁰ The more people one is connected to, the more likely one will be asked to give time or money, and the more likely one is to give. In contrast, those who are socially isolated are

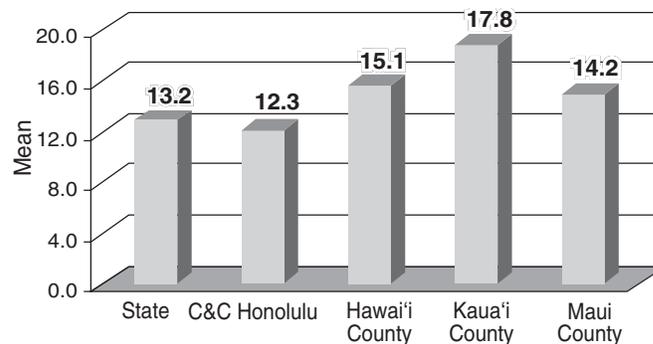
Percentage of Adults Who Volunteer*



Hawai‘i Family Touchstones Survey, Market Trends Pacific, Inc.

*Percentage of adults responding “yes” to the question: *In the past year, have you done any volunteer work for any church, charity, or community group?*

Mean Number of Times Volunteering



Hawai‘i Family Touchstones Survey, Market Trends Pacific, Inc.

Data represent the mean response to the question: *How many times did you volunteer?*

less likely to engage in giving.³¹ Volunteering and giving can actually increase stocks of social capital in communities, raising resources and services where they may be lacking and enriching the lives of families and community members. Volunteer activities further provide opportunities for families to engage with others in the community and to build social networks and social trust.

Fifty-nine percent (59%) of survey respondents said they volunteer their time in church, charity, or community groups. Volunteerism was slightly higher on the neighbor islands, with Hawai‘i county having the highest percentage of volunteers. Volunteers give their time an average of 13 times per year,

with neighbor island volunteers once again giving more of their time. Volunteerism in Hawai‘i seems higher than in the rest of the nation. One national survey found that 44% of adults over the age of 21 volunteered with a formal organization in the year 2000.³² The Hawai‘i social capital study conducted by the Hawai‘i Community Foundation supports the notion that volunteerism is higher in Hawai‘i. In that study, a higher proportion of people in Hawai‘i than nationally indicated that they volunteered for neighborhood/civic (26% vs. 21%), religious (33% vs. 28%), and youth/school causes (44% vs. 33%), or had worked on a community project in the past year (41% vs. 38%).³³ The

study also suggests that Hawai‘i volunteers give time slightly more often than volunteers nationwide, with 45% indicating they volunteered more than four times in the past year vs. 41% nationally. There is evidence that volunteering goes hand in hand with other forms giving.³⁴ A study on giving in Hawai‘i conducted for the Hawai‘i Community Foundation indicated that Hawai‘i residents also contributed more in money or goods to charity than the national average. More households contributed in Hawai‘i than nationwide, 88% vs. 69%, and the average contribution across all households was also greater in Hawai‘i, \$883 vs. \$696.³⁵

Civic Involvement

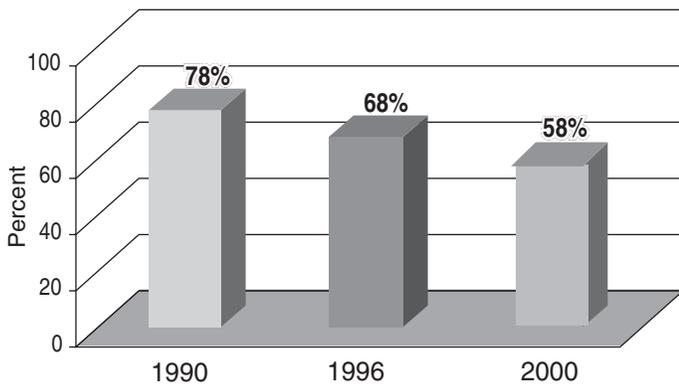
Civic participation

A key measure of community engagement is the degree to which citizens are politically involved. Voting is a dimension of political participation and one of the most important rights available to citizens in a democratic society. Voting is associated with other forms of good citizenship and community engagement, such as philanthropy and community activism.³⁶ When parents vote and participate in improving the conditions of their community and state, they also teach their children to be good citizens and ensure a better quality of life for future generations.

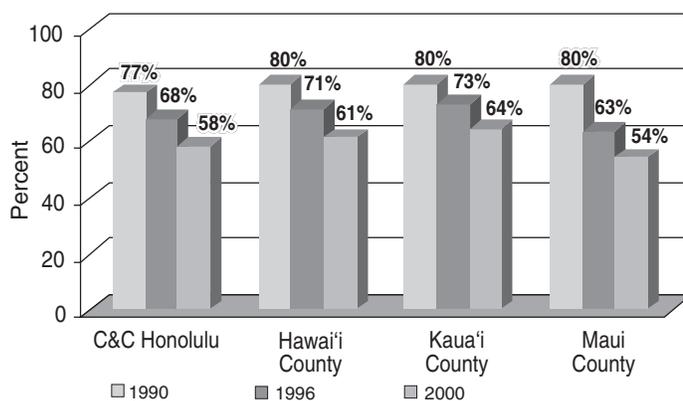
Unfortunately, in America, fewer voters exercise this right than in most other democracies.³⁷ Perhaps the 2000 presidential election best demonstrated the importance of voting: following that election, 74% of national survey respondents indicated they were “now more of the opinion that every vote matters.”³⁸

The percent of registered voters voting in general elections has declined steadily in the past 10 years. While the number of registered voters has increased steadily over the past 10 years, the number of people actually voting in November elections has remained steady or has increased at a much slower rate. In 2000, 58% of those registered to vote did so on election day. County data mirror statewide trends, with Maui county seeing the greatest percentage decrease. Nationwide, a greater proportion of registered voters vote: 68% of registered voters voted in the 2000 presidential election.³⁹ Voting in America, however, has generally decreased in the past several decades, with voting rates in Hawai‘i consistently below the national average. According to the Federal Election Commission, the percentage of the national voting age population (in this case, the population over the age of 18) that voted in presidential elections dropped from 63% in 1960, to 54% in 1976, and to 51% by the 2000 election. In Hawai‘i, half of the voting age population voted in 1960, 47% in 1976, and only 41% in the 2000 election.⁴⁰

Registered Voters Who Voted—State Data



Registered Voters Who Voted—County Data



State of Hawai‘i, Office of Elections

Summary

Our review of how Hawai'i's families view and engage in their communities suggests the presence of community qualities that promote well-being in families, as well as areas where we can work with or improve on community assets in an effort to support families. Hawai'i's families seem to be connected to their neighbors, as indicated by the large majority who said they can rely on a neighbor for help. More than half say they engage in leisure activities in their communities, with that percentage being higher on the neighbor islands. Hawai'i families also perceive their communities as generally safe. This sense of community trust and safety bodes well for the development of strong social networks and can contribute to personal happiness and perceived quality of life.

A *spirit of aloha* is captured and expressed through the generosity of our residents. By various accounts, Hawai'i residents give more of their time and money to various charitable causes than do most Americans. Such philanthropic acts generate resources where needed in communities, improving the lives of families throughout the state.

Much, however, needs to be done to improve Hawai'i's civic engagement through voting. While the declining proportion of registered voters who actually vote follows national trends, Hawai'i's voting patterns are well below the nation's. The careful selection of policy-makers and political leaders who represent our interests at both the local and federal levels and who put the well-being of our children

and families at the forefront is critical to the overall health of our communities. Clearly, these selections should involve more of our voting-eligible citizens and include the process of educating citizens for informed decision-making when voting.

With an understanding of how the community context influences individual family well-being, we can then begin to see how those qualities in our communities that generate social networks and a sense of connectedness and trust can be cultivated. Community leaders and institutions, for example, can do much to promote neighborhood activities that connect residents to one another. Given the strong association between religious engagement and philanthropy and civic involvement, faith-based institutions are in a pivotal position to galvanize sources of social capital in our communities. Schools can also do more to improve and maintain family bonds by engaging parents in creative ways, especially those parents who work full time or at multiple jobs and are not available during typical school hours.

As a community, we need to support families. In doing so, the challenge for Hawai'i's communities is to build social trust and networks, reduce the isolation of individuals and families, and expand and increase civic involvement.

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