

STRENGTHENING DEMOCRACY IN MONTANA

Philanthropy's success depends on a thriving democracy. When democracy does not work for everyone, funders' impacts shrink – no matter the issue area their organization focuses on. Any funder can work toward a more inclusive and accountable democracy.

How can philanthropy strengthen democracy in Montana?

Philanthropy Northwest produces the Democracy Lens, a set of resources to demonstrate how democracy issues have impacted your state. The Democracy Lens includes case studies known as [Bright Spots](#), which show how funders invest in democracy and where they can do more, and Democracy Charts, which highlight key statistics. In this resource, you will find the Democracy Charts for Montana.



Philanthropy Northwest's discussions with our members and our own research illuminate concerning trends affecting the health of democracy throughout our region, including:

- Democracy-related grants make up a small amount of funding in Montana and from only a few funders, indicating room to grow in this space. We see this trend in other states in the region as well.
- Elected officials across the region are much less diverse than the populations they serve. In Montana, people of color are more than three times less likely than average to be in elected office. The disparity may result in missing community perspectives and less accountability in public policy decisions.
- In recent decades, the number of Montanan newspapers declined 6%. A decline in local journalism in a highly rural state can make it harder for communities to stay informed and have their issues gain awareness.
- A large portion of eligible voters in the Northwest do not vote, including in Montana, though turnout has grown and remains above the national average.

See the data on democracy funding, equity in representation, support for local journalism, voter engagement and election effectiveness in Montana below.

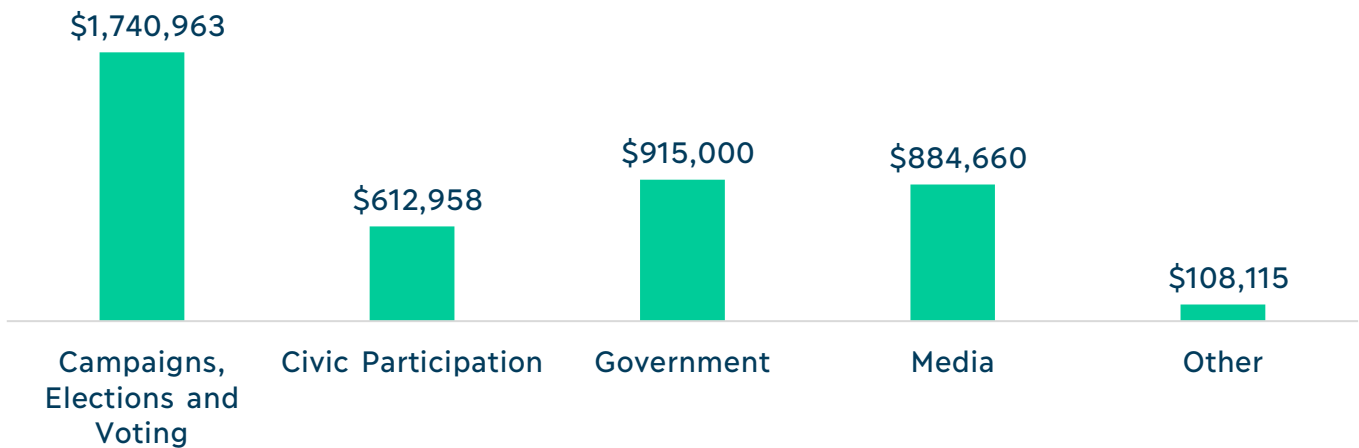
Democracy Funding to Grantees in Montana

The data below suggests that most funders are not engaged in democracy activities in Montana, but those that do make a significant impact in the state.

58 Funders
gave democracy-related grants to Montana in 2019 (3.9% of all funders giving to Montana)

\$4.2M in Grants
went to democracy-related causes to Montana in 2019 (2.1% of all grantmaking to Montana)

Montana Democracy Funding by Category - 2019 (Grants can be in Multiple Categories)

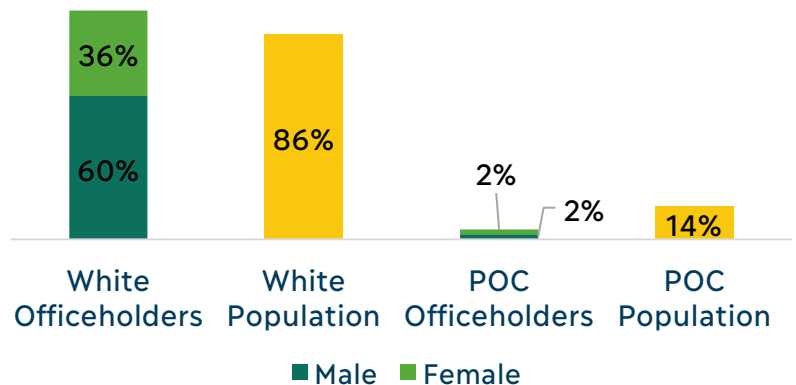


Public Participation in Democracy

Equity in Representation

Political candidacy is a way to ensure that democracy is reflective of the public good, but not all demographic groups are equally likely to run for office in Montana. People of color are 14% of the population but only 4% of elected officials. The disparity may reflect missing community perspectives in political representation, which can limit the government's accountability to address the full range of community needs. Funders can address this problem with policy advocacy for systems change,

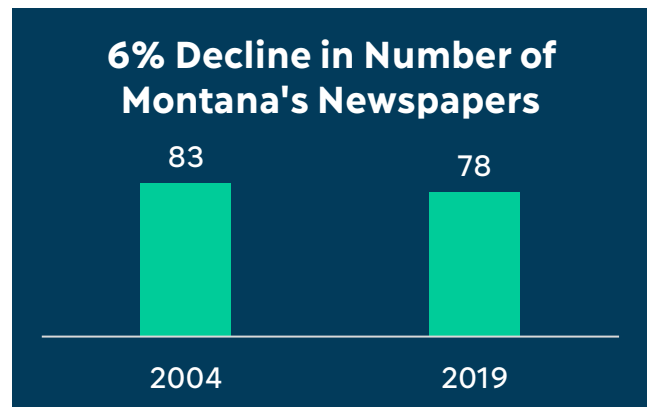
Montana Elected Official Demographics - 2021



reducing economic barriers to run for office, supporting diverse leadership development and more.

Support for Local Journalism

In recent decades, the number of Montanan newspapers declined 6%. This decline is less steep than in the rest of the Northwest, but an overall drop of five newspapers has still left a few counties with no local paper at all. This highlights a concerning stagnation in local journalism that provides crucial information to the rural state’s residents. Philanthropies can collaborate with and fund diverse local news outlets so that all residents have access to quality news on events that impact them.

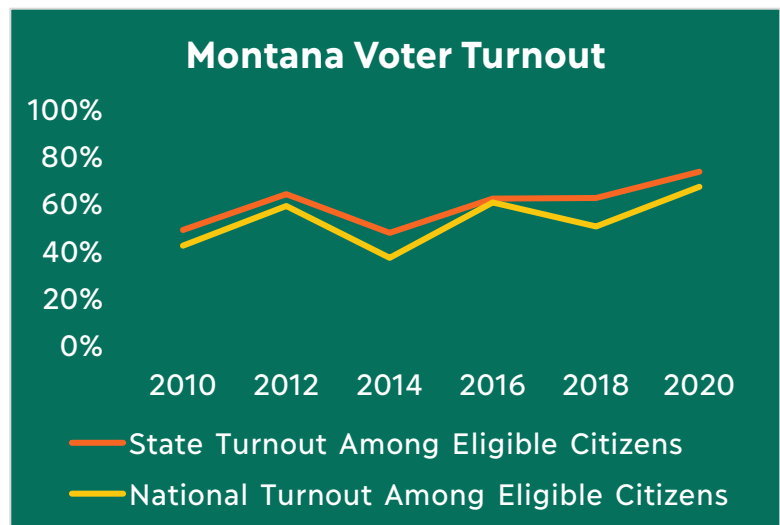


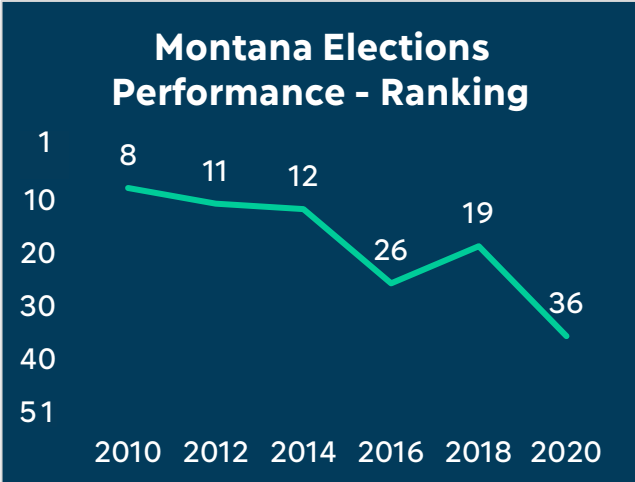
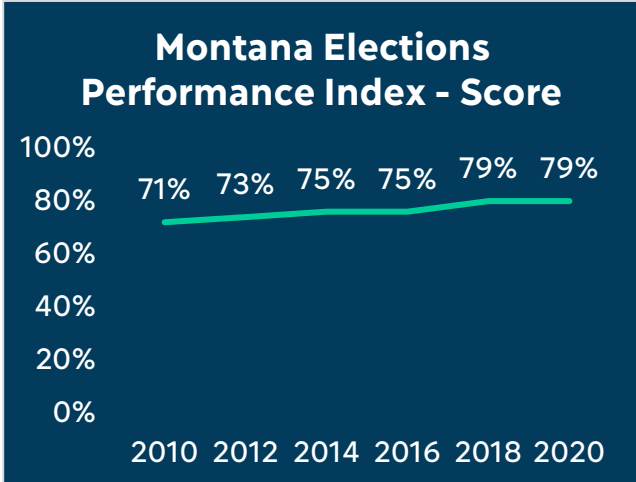
Voter Turnout and Election Effectiveness

Voting provides another snapshot of the public’s involvement in civil society. Montana’s turnout has grown and remains above the national average – peaking at 73% in 2020 – but there is room for funders to foster more civic engagement so more Montanans are included in the democratic process.

Limited voter turnout may also highlight a need for funders to advocate for improvements to the electoral system. The Massachusetts Institute of Technology scores elections performance based on

election participation rates, voting accessibility measures and data accuracy protocols. Below is Montana’s aggregate score on a percent scale (100% being the highest) and ranking (one being the highest out of 50 states plus Washington D.C.). In the early 2010s the state performed better than most states but has since fallen into the bottom tier, particularly struggling with issues like registration and absentee ballot problems and more.





To see the real-world impact, check out the [Montana Bright Spots](#), which showcase examples of how funders have had success in improving democracy. The case studies cover a policy-focused youth civic engagement project, a convening of current and former legislators to find policy solutions and a discussion of the charitable sector’s role in Montana’s civic culture. To see Democracy Charts and Bright Spots for other states in our region, please visit our [Democracy Lens webpage](#).