

STRENGTHENING DEMOCRACY IN WASHINGTON

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 Washington?

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 Washington.



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 Washington 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 Washington, people of color are almost four 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 newspapers in Washington declined 11%. A decline in local journalism 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 Washington, though turnout in the state 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 Washington below.

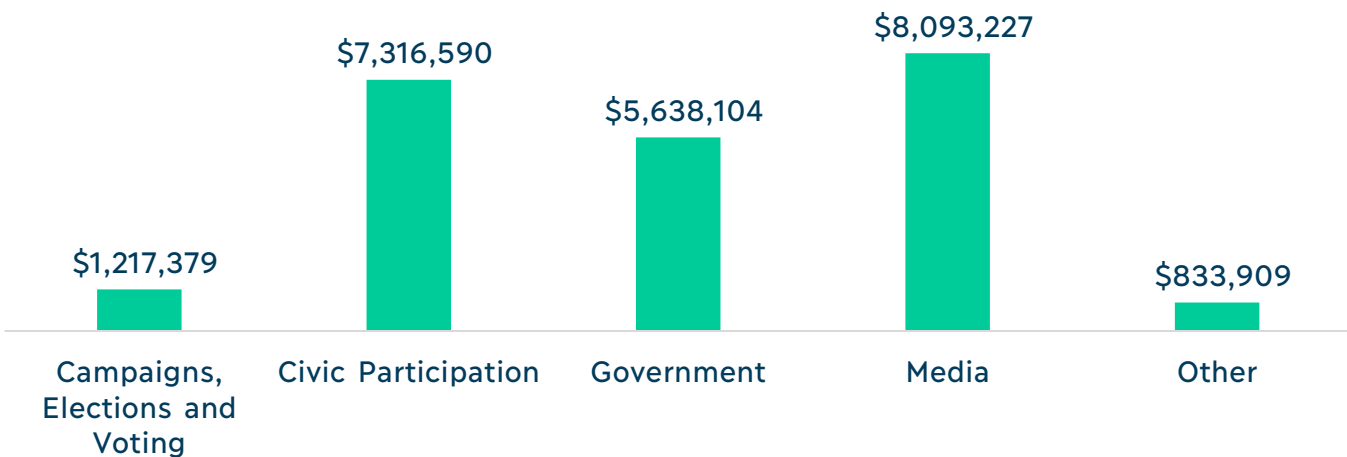
Democracy Funding to Grantees in Washington

The data below suggests that most funders are not engaged in democracy activities in Washington, but those that do make a significant impact in the state. However, voting-related issues received much less grant funding than for other topics.

167 Funders
gave democracy-related grants to Washington in 2019 (4.3% of all funders giving to Washington)

\$20.1M in Grants
went to democracy-related causes to Washington in 2019 (2.1% of all grantmaking to Washington)

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

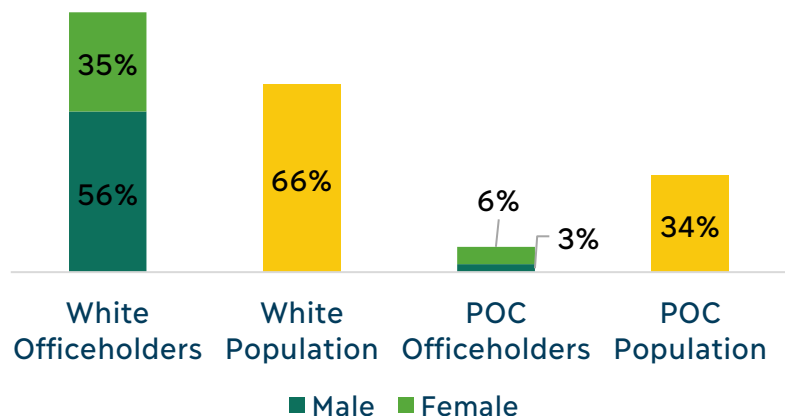


Public Participation in Democracy

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 Washington. People of color are 34% of the population but only 9% 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

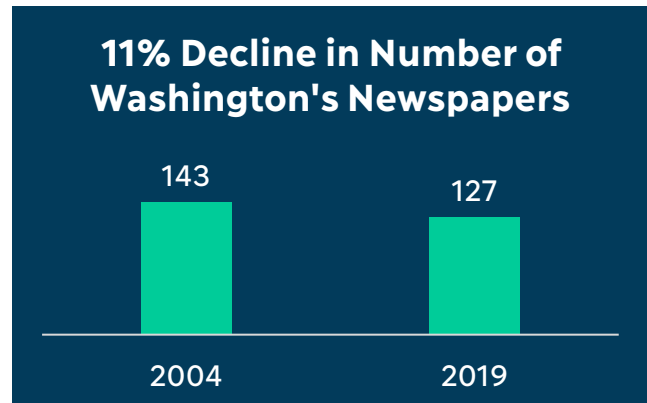
Washington Elected Official Demographics - 2021



problem with policy advocacy for systems change, reducing economic barriers to run for office, supporting diverse leadership development and more.

Support for Local Journalism

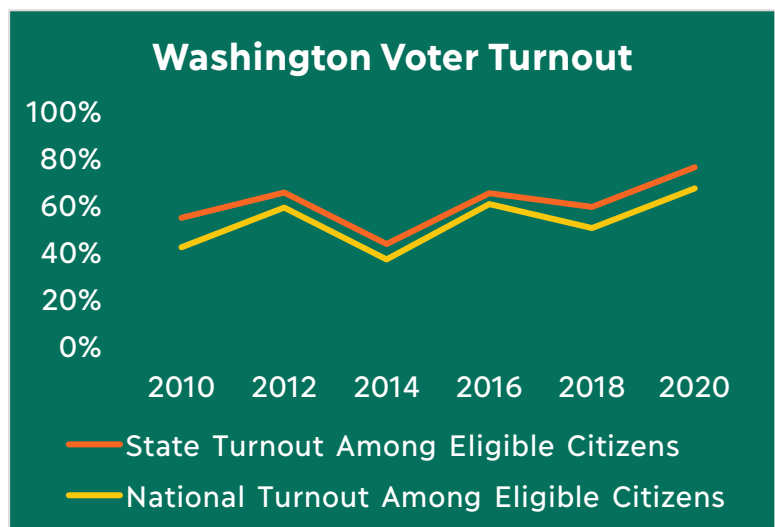
In recent decades, the number of newspapers in Washington declined 11% (a net loss of 16 papers), highlighting a concerning decline in local journalism that provides crucial information to the state’s residents. One county has no local newspaper at all. Philanthropies can collaborate with and fund diverse local news outlets so that all residents have access to quality news on events that impact them.

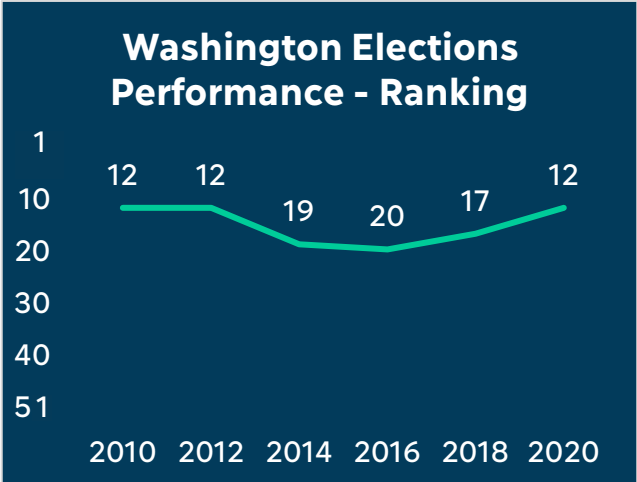
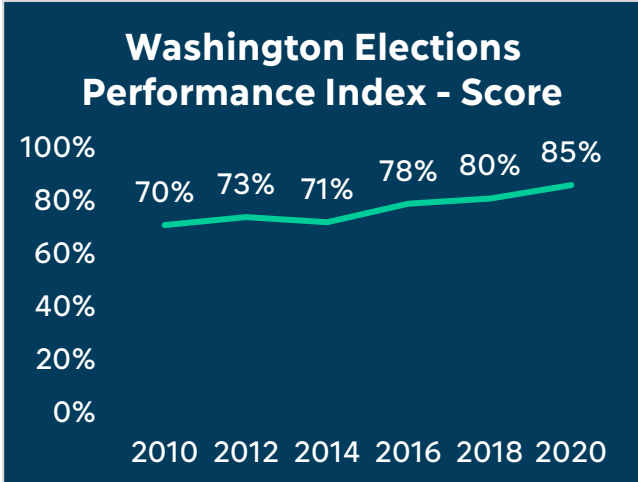


Voter Turnout and Election Effectiveness

Voting provides another snapshot of the public’s involvement in civil society. Washington’s turnout has grown and remains above the national average – peaking at 76% in 2020 – but there is room for funders to foster more civic engagement so more Washingtonians 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 Washington’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.). The state has improved and ranks high compared to most other states, but still struggles with access issues like unreturned military and overseas ballots, rejected mail ballots and more.





To see the real-world impact, check out the [Washington Bright Spots](#), which showcase examples of how funders have had success in improving democracy. The case studies cover an effort to expand rural journalism, a cross-sector platform to strengthen civic infrastructure and a public financing system for electoral campaigns in Seattle. To see Democracy Charts and Bright Spots for other states in our region, please visit our [Democracy Lens webpage](#).