However, there is still significant room for improvement. Issues such as political competition, electoral access, voter information, and others require careful consideration. Oklahoma needs to make a change in order to improve its civic health. Effective political engagement means that all of Oklahoma's residents are engaged in the electoral process and become more invested in and attached to their communities, which therefore can lead to an increase in the overall civic health of the state.

CONFIDENCE IN PUBLIC INSTITUTIONS

A significant component to the state's civic health is citizens' confidence in their public institutions, as this might connect strongly with their willingness to engage. While there are many possible explanations for current rates of confidence in major institutions, one theory is that the state of the economy might play a central role. Regardless, it seems to be true that Americans have had decreasing confidence in major institutions in recent years.

By a wide margin, most Americans have lost confidence that the federal government or large corporations can solve the country's current economic crisis. As affirmed in a nationwide poll conducted last year, Americans generally believe that it is small businesses (79%) and local business leaders (74%), not Congress (43.5%) or large corporations (45%), that can be trusted to come up with ideas for creating jobs.[40]

The lack of confidence in many of the country's largest public institutions, whether it is the federal government or large corporations, has gradually declined over the past four decades.[41] However, this downward trend may never have been so apparent than after the 2008 financial crisis and our country's labored attempts to climb out of the economic recession that followed.

Accountability and transparency are important traits of any successful public institution and its leaders. But when the public loses confidence in an institution's leadership, it can undermine the public's confidence in the entire institution. Such a deterioration of confidence, especially when the public institution is the federal government itself, can have dangerous ramifications to society in general:

"An erosion of confidence in major institutions of society, especially those of representative democracy, is a far more serious threat to democracy than a loss of trust in other citizens or politicians.... [L]oss of confidence in institutions may well be a better indicator of public disaffection with the modern world because they are the basic pillars of society. If they begin to crumble, then there is, indeed, cause for concern."[42]

Recent data suggests that American citizens are losing confidence in many public institutions and the leaders of these institutions. This erosion of public confidence can also be seen in 2011 CPS data examined below, along with other national research results.

21%

of those polled nationally had a positive view of large corporations, while 71% had a positive view of small businesses. (Gallup, 2012)

Photo credit: Patti Loughlin

Confidence in the Media

"Americans have grown more negative about the media in recent years, as they have about many other U.S. institutions and the direction of the country in general," according to a recent Gallup Poll, which found that only 21% of adults nationwide expressed a great deal of confidence in television media.[43] The Gallup poll was taken shortly after major television outlets