

# Voter Registration and Engagement Within the PA Profession: A Connecticut-based convenience sample

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*“In lieu of a role in public office, health professionals should demand greater health and scientific literacy from politicians.” – Forbes et al*

## BACKGROUND

In the United States (US), 66.7% of eligible voters are registered. 51-60% of registered voters participated in the 2020 presidential election.

US physicians are noted to have lower-than-average rates of voter registration. A 2021 multivariable logistic regression analysis of voting habits between 2004-2018 found that physicians (n=3009) voted at rates that are 12% (95% CI 8%-17%) lower than the national average. While the same study estimated that PAs (n=342) voted at rates 11% (95% CI 0%-22%) lower than the national average. There did not appear to be a statistically significant difference in voting habits when contrasted with other health professionals, including dentists 0.77 (95% CI 0.68-0.86), pharmacists 0.95(95% CI 0.88-1.03), registered nurses 0.90 (95% CI 0.87-0.93). Unlike professionals in other sectors, such as lawyers 1.13 (95% CI 1.09-1.17), postsecondary teachers 1.18 (95% CI 1.14-1.12), chief executives 1.06 (95% CI 1.03-1.09) where greater-than-average civic engagement was identified.

Rates of civic engagement by PA students do not appear in the literature. While in 2020, the American Medical Student Association partnered with a nonpartisan voter registration organization to increase voter access, engaging 80 medical schools in 31 states and DC. The activity drove behavior change among participants who reported developing skills in civic engagement, civil health, community organizing, communication, vertical networking, voting rights, and voter suppression.

## SPECIFIC AIM

Assessing the PA profession's civic engagement may inform professional practice advocacy strategies. This poster presents findings on voter registration, ever voted, and voting in 2020 among a single-state, convenience sample predominantly of PA students in Connecticut.

## METHODS AND MATERIALS

A survey was conducted on July 19, 2021, of a convenience sample of participants (n=24) attending a free PA professional education event, hosted virtually utilizing video conferencing technology.

The event was organized by two PA student fellows of the 2020-21 cohort of the PA Education Association Student Health Policy Fellowship (SHPF), with support from their faculty mentors, and jointly sponsored by their PA programs, Yale PA Online and Quinnipiac. SHPF objectives are to enhance PA students' understanding of the political process and health policy while inspiring and preparing fellowship alumni for lifelong grassroots advocacy, both in Washington and at home, and promoting the PA profession as an integral part of the health care system.

Survey participants were invited through multiple channels including all 6 PA programs within CT and the leadership of the CT state PA association.

At the beginning of the event, participants were queried utilizing the video conferencing platform's anonymous polling feature regarding their level of education, voter registration status, and rates of participation in the 2020 presidential election, as well as rates of having ever voted.

The survey could not be linked back to an individual due to the anonymous method of collection, thus did not meet the criteria necessitating IRB review.

## RESULTS

Participant levels of education were reported as PA students (85%), graduate PAs (9%), and pre-PAs (4%).

## THE BIG DEAL

**92%** of participants reported having registered to vote  
**92%** of participants reported having ever voted  
**89%** of participants reported having voted in the 2020 Presidential election

**PA Education Association's Student Health Policy Fellowship (SHPF) objectives are to enhance PA students' understanding of the political process and health policy while inspiring and preparing fellowship alumni for lifelong grassroots advocacy, both in Washington and at home, and promoting the PA profession as an integral part of the health care system.**

## DISCUSSION & CONCLUSION

Connecticut PA practice is suboptimal: lacking collaboration as the regulatory term and maintaining a legal requirement for a specific relationship between a PA and any other healthcare professional.

Participants were mostly PA students who will soon be joining the PA profession's ranks and may have a greater commitment to civic engagement than experienced PAs who have been adapted to a suboptimal practice environment. PA students commonly invest over six figures to attain entry to the PA profession and therefore may have heightened interest in ensuring their political needs as future licensed PAs are being addressed.

Awareness and enhancement of the PA profession's level of civic engagement may inform future advocacy tactics within the 47 states with suboptimal PA practice environments.

Study limitations include the small cohort size, convenience sampling including lack of understanding to what degree this convenience sample is generalizable to the PA community in CT and more broadly across the US, and lack of a control group.

The authors recommend the future study of larger, more representative samples to explore variations in PA civic engagement, civic engagement between PA students and graduate PAs, and associations between PA's civic engagement and optimal practice environments.

Strengths include the participation of PA students from each of the six PA programs located in CT.

## CITATIONS

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