

Taking a closer look at physician engagement in the political process: Physician voting behaviors

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A new study investigated changes in physicians' voting behavior in modern day elections using nationally representative data. Results of the

study, "Analysis of Reported Voting Behaviors of US Physicians, 2000-2020," appear online in *JAMA Network Open* on January 10.

Physicians in the U.S. have historically been shown to vote at lower rates than the [general population](#), though recent evidence of their voting behavior and [civic engagement](#) has been limited. With the emergence of the COVID-19 pandemic and diverging visions for the American healthcare system between the two [political parties](#), researchers sought to better understand physicians' engagement with the political process.

The team utilized data from US Census Bureau Current Population Survey Voting and Registration Supplement, a biennial, nationally representative household survey, and examined U.S. physicians who participated in the survey between 2000 and 2020. The study provides a needed update on recent changes in [physician](#) voting behavior on a national level and across time.

"Physicians represent an important voice and carry valuable expertise related to [patient care](#) and [population health](#)," said first author Ahmed Ahmed, a third-year medical student at Harvard Medical School. "Their engagement in the political process, particularly through voting, is key for shaping public policy, which affects patient health and clinical practice."

The researchers found that voter turnout among US physicians has grown over the past two decades. Physicians were just as likely to vote as the general population in the recent midterm (2018) and more likely to vote in the latest presidential (2020) election. Physicians in states that allowed no-excuse mail-in voting had higher turnout than in those states that did not.

"Though our work highlights growth in civic and voting engagement among physicians, it also shows that barriers like registration and work

schedule conflicts still remain," said senior author Xiaojuan Li, Ph.D., Instructor of Population Medicine at Harvard Medical School and the Harvard Pilgrim Health Care Institute. "Our findings help identify potential opportunities for further growth through policy changes and targeted interventions."

More information: Ahmed Ahmed et al, Analysis of Reported Voting Behaviors of US Physicians, 2000-2020, *JAMA Network Open* (2022). 10.1001/jamanetworkopen.2021.42527

Provided by Harvard Pilgrim Health Care Institute

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