Voter Participation

DESCRIPTION

With a government that affects every aspect of our lives from schools to health care to homeland security, voting is an important right in our society. Engagement through voting is essential for a healthy community, as voting offers people the means to elect leaders and to influence policy to meet their needs and the needs of their community.[1] A mark of a thriving democracy is high voter turnout, which is measured in more than one way. Voting-age turnout is calculated by dividing the ballots cast by the voting-age (18+) population (VAP). Voting-eligible turnout is calculated by dividing the ballots cast by the voting-eligible population (VEP). Minnesota historically has higher voter turnout than the national average, having had the nation's highest voter turnout for eight of the past nine presidential elections.[2]

HOW WE ARE DOING

In the 2010 general election, 49% of the voting-eligible population in Ramsey County voted. In 2012, the percentage increased to 71% but then went back down to 45% in the 2014 general election. In the 2016 general election, 65.8 percent of the voting-eligible population in Ramsey County voted, compared to 74.8 percent statewide.[3] The proportion of voting by absentee ballot has increased dramatically since 2012, when 8.7 percent of voting in the general election in Ramsey County was done by absentee ballot compared to 23.3 percent in 2016.3 This was likely influenced by enactment of a 2014 law lifting restrictions on absentee voting (previously, voters had to attest that they would be physically unable to get to their polling places because of travel, illness or several other specific reasons).[4] In addition, older voters are more likely to use absentee ballots.

BENCHMARK INDICATOR

Healthy People 2020[5]:

1) Increase the proportion of persons eligible to participate in elections who are registered to vote.

2) Increase the proportion of persons eligible to participate in elections, who are registered, and report voting in the most recent November election.

U.S. Targets: Healthy People 2020 tracks these measures for informational purposes and will set a target in the future.

DISPARITIES

Voter turnout varies by factors including race, income and education. In the 2016 general election in the Twin Cities metropolitan area, the voting-age turnout for white (nonHispanic) citizens was 72.5 percent compared to 57.9 percent for citizens of color; turnout was highest for individuals with a family income of $100,000 or more and lowest for individuals with a family income of less than $50,000. Those with a high school degree or less had a voting-age turnout rate of 50.8 percent, compared to a rate of 87.9 percent for those with advanced degrees. Typically, individuals age 35 and older are more likely to vote than those aged 18-34.[6]

[1] Voter Turnout. United States Elections Project. http://www.electproject.org/home/voter-turnout. Accessed August 2018.

[2] Voter Turnout. Minnesota Compass. http://www.mncompass.org/civic-engagement/voter-turnout. Accessed August 2018.

[3] Ramsey County Elections Department.

[4] Salisbury B. Early voting in Minnesota starts Friday — from the comfort of your own home. Twin Cities Pioneer Press. 2018. https://www.twincities.com/2018/06/28/primary-election-early-voting-in-minnesota-starts-friday-from-the-comfort-of-your-own-home-absentee-ballot/. Published June 28, 2018. Accessed August 7, 2018.

[5] Social Determinants of Health. Healthy People 2020. https://www.healthypeople.gov/2020/topics-objectives/topic/social-determinants-of-health/objectives. Accessed August 2018.

[6] Voter Turnout. Minnesota Compass. http://www.mncompass.org/civic-engagement/voter-turnout#1-639-g. Accessed August 2018.
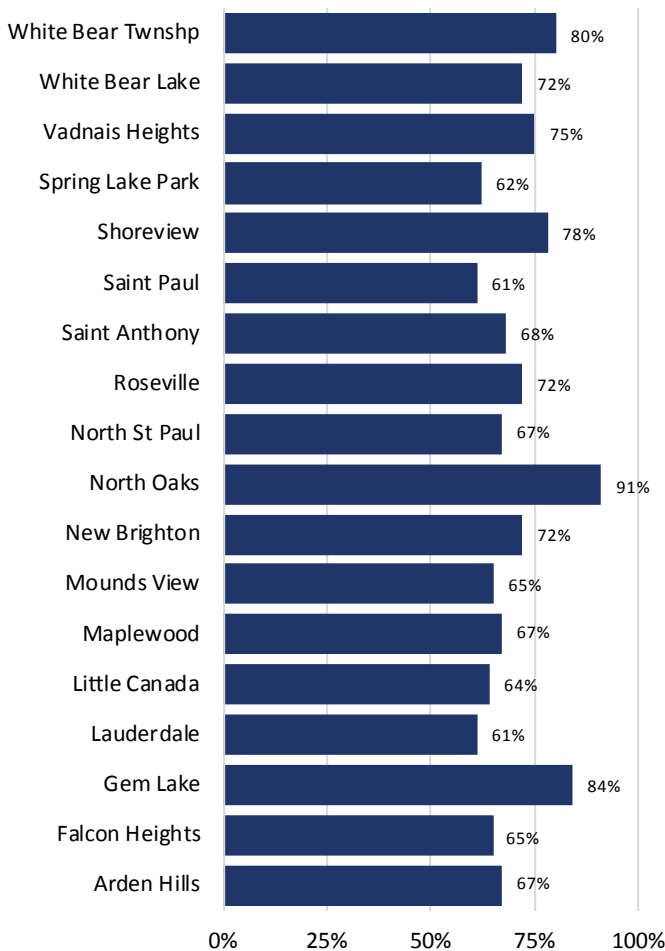
RISK FACTORS

In a national survey, individuals who reported they did not vote in the 2016 general election cited various reasons. The top three reasons given were: Did not like candidates or campaign issues (24.8 percent), not interested, felt vote would not make a difference (15.4 percent), and too busy, conflicting work or school schedule (14.3 percent).[7]
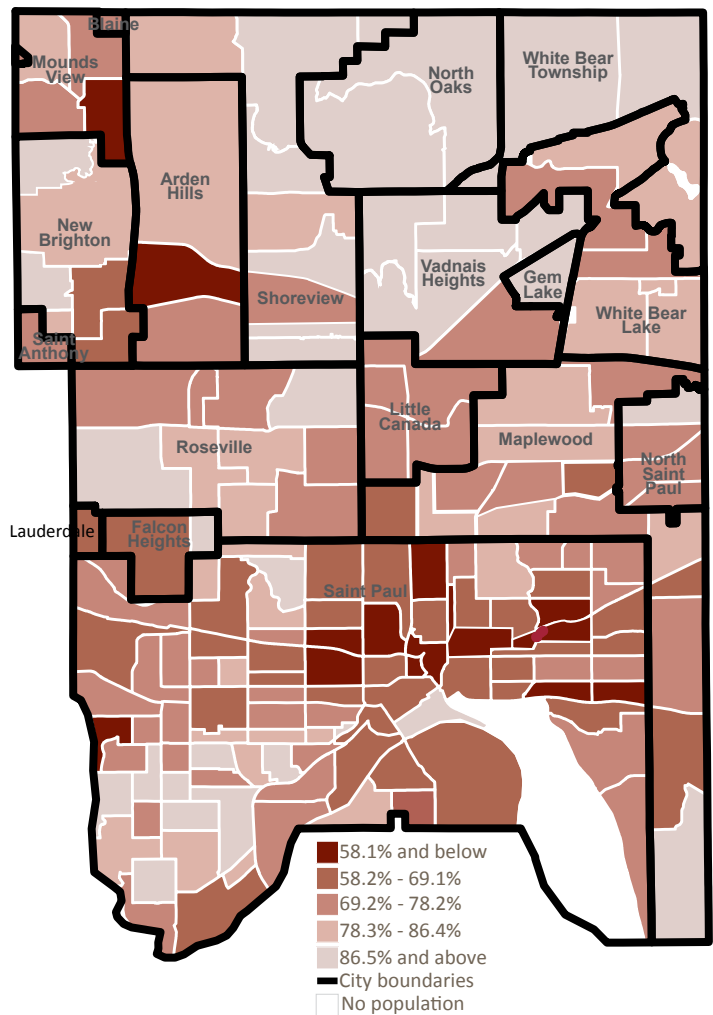
WHAT RAMSEY COUNTY GOVERNMENT IS DOING

The Ramsey County Elections Department partners with many community groups including the League of Women Voters, Minnesota Voices, Saint Paul Public Schools, to encourage voter participation by distribution of election information, providing a greater range of voting options, conducting voter registration outreach, and recruiting election judges. Teacher liaison positions are being established in Ramsey County schools to coordinate classroom instruction in the electoral process and facilitate student participation in election-related activities such as serving as an election judge. To increase voting convenience, Ramsey County operated 11 early voting locations the week before the 2018 primary election. In addition, targeted outreach focuses on neighborhoods and populations where voter registration and participation is low.

Voter Turnout in State General Election by City, Ramsey County, 2016

City	Turnout
White Bear Twnshp	80%
White Bear Lake	72%
Vadnais Heights	75%
Spring Lake Park	62%
Shoreview	78%
Saint Paul	61%
Saint Anthony	68%
Roseville	72%
North St Paul	67%
North Oaks	91%
New Brighton	72%
Mounds View	65%
Maplewood	67%
Little Canada	64%
Lauderdale	61%
Gem Lake	84%
Falcon Heights	65%
Arden Hills	67%

Source: Ramsey County Elections Department

Percentage of Residents 18 Years and Older Who Are Registered to Vote, Ramsey County, 2017

Legend:
- 58.1% and below
- 58.2% - 69.1%
- 69.2% - 78.2%
- 78.3% - 86.4%
- 86.5% and above
- City boundaries
- No population

Source: Ramsey County Elections Department

[7] Lopez G, Flores A. Dislike of candidates or campaign issues was the most common reason for not voting in 2016. Pew Research Center. 2016. http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2017/06/01/dislike-of-candidates-or-campaign-issues-was-most-common-reason-for-not-voting-in-2016/. Published June 1, 2017. Accessed August 2018.