Increasing Voter Turnout in St. Paul: 
A Look at Precinct 1-9

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Introduction

Ramsey County Elections staff have identified St. Paul Precinct 1-9 as having chronically low voter turnout. This paper will provide a brief overview of St. Paul 1-9 and the turnout over the last decade. In the findings section, we go through classic factors that impact voter turnout, including election laws and demographics of the community. We will provide a comparative analysis of turnout of the voting age population in Ramsey County and the metro area, along with a review of outreach efforts by the Minneapolis Elections and Voter Services department.

To increase voter turnout in 1-9, we recommend the following:
- Collect more data
- Refocus voter outreach & education efforts
- Bring voting to the people

Background on St. Paul 1-9

Geographic Overview
St. Paul Precinct 1-9 sits at the geographic center of St. Paul. The southern boundary of the precinct runs along University Avenue from Dale Street North to Rice Street, with the northern boundary as the Burlington Northern Santa Fe (BNSF) railroad tracks north of Minnehaha Avenue West. The precinct is within the neighborhood known as Frogtown and the polling place is Jackson Elementary School, a part of the St. Paul School District (District 265).

2017 Elected Officials for St. Paul 1-9
St. Paul City Council (Ward 1): Dai Thao
Ramsey County Commissioner (District 3): Janice Rettman
State House Representative (65A): Rena Moran (DFL)
State Senate (65): Sandy Pappas (DFL)
U.S. House Representatives: Betty McCollum (DFL)
U.S. Senate: Amy Klobuchar (DFL) and Al Franken (DFL)

Demographic Overview
The Minnesota Demographic Center provides demographic estimates, using data from the U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey 2011-2015. In St. Paul 1-9, the average age of the population is relatively young with only 8.99% or less of the population being age 65 or older. In St. Paul 1-9 is Asian. The estimated percent of people

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1 https://mn.gov/admin/demography/data-by-topic/aging/
with at least a Bachelor’s degree (age 25+) for St. Paul 1-9 is between 12.6%-19.25%. The estimated percent of the population that is living in poverty is 26.23% or higher.

**Turnout of Registered Voters**

The five year estimate of the Citizen Voting Age Population (CVAP) was published by the U.S. Census Bureau on February 1, 2017. However, due to the complexity of calculating precinct specific estimates of the voting age population, we are analyzing turnout data among registered voters. The drawback to this approach is that turnout of registered voters inflates turnout because Minnesota has not implemented automatic voter registration. As such, there are eligible voters that may reside in 1-9 that are not registered, but are not captured as non-voters in this analysis. An additional way to measure turnout is with the estimated eligible voting age population, which is calculated by the United States Election Project and will be discussed further in the Findings section.

Over the last decade, voter turnout among registered voters in St. Paul 1-9 has followed a similar pattern (see Table 1). In Presidential elections, turnout has fallen in the range of 54% to 69%. In midterm elections, turnout has been consistently lower, averaging around 34% in each three of the midterm elections in the last decade.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Election</th>
<th>Persons Registered as of 7 am</th>
<th>Persons Registered on Election Day</th>
<th>Total number of persons voting</th>
<th>Turnout among total registered voters</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2016</td>
<td>2276</td>
<td>346</td>
<td>1657</td>
<td>63%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2014</td>
<td>2210</td>
<td>88</td>
<td>773</td>
<td>34%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2012</td>
<td>2071</td>
<td>744</td>
<td>1949</td>
<td>69%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2010</td>
<td>1337</td>
<td>89</td>
<td>486</td>
<td>34%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2008</td>
<td>1596</td>
<td>302</td>
<td>1031</td>
<td>54%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2006</td>
<td>1588</td>
<td>95</td>
<td>569</td>
<td>34%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3 https://mn.gov/admin/demography/data-by-topic/education/
4 https://mn.gov/admin/demography/data-by-topic/income-poverty/
To put this into context, it is important to compare the turnout to both the county level and statewide turnout. St. Paul 1-9 lags behind both Ramsey County and the state of Minnesota (see **Graph 1**). The lowest 10% of turnout among registered voters in all Minnesota precincts was at or below 75.63%. In Ramsey County, there were 38 precincts that were in the bottom 10% for registered voter turnout. Thirty-seven of these 38 precincts were located in St. Paul, with one non-St. Paul precinct in Mounds View P-4 (See **Appendix A**). The majority of these low turnout precincts are geographically adjacent, clustered around University Avenue and into downtown St. Paul.

**Graph 1:**

![Comparative Analysis of W1-P9 Turnout, 2006 - 2016](image)

**Findings**

There are four classic factors that impact voter turnout rates including: electoral competitiveness, election type (local/midterm/presidential), election laws, and demographics. Election administrators do not have control over the competitiveness of the election or which election is taking place in order to increase voter turnout. Similarly, election administrators have a low level of control over election laws unless they are working with the chief election officer for the state or with the legislature to write, amend or provide rule guidance on election statutes.
Demographics of a jurisdiction are also not a controllable factor for election administrators, but demographic trends can be monitored by election administrators to get a better understanding of how to serve voters.

In this section, we will look at the election laws in Minnesota and provide a comparative demographic overview of Ramsey County and the seven county metro area. Then we will turn to a review of the turnout of the voting age population in Ramsey County, Minnesota and the metro area. Finally, we will briefly discuss data collection and provide a comparative analysis of the Minneapolis Elections and Voter Services department.

**Election Laws**
Voter turnout has been shown to be statistically significantly impacted by the institutional procedures and laws that govern elections (Smets 2013 and Geys 2006). With this regard, Minnesota has relatively unrestricted electoral laws: Election Day registration was established in 1974 and in 2013 the legislature passed a bill that eliminated the requirement to provide an excuse to receive an absentee ballot. The latter reform also opened up the window to provide an extended early voting period of 46 days prior to Election Day.

While early voting has yet to be proven effective when not grouped with other reforms, new early voting sites coupled with voter turnout initiatives could prove helpful in low voter turnout areas. Current studies are also focused on expanded hours and the proliferation of any early voting within states. There is overall limited data on the effectiveness of implementing more early voting sites. Regardless of the studies reporting on the efficacy of implementing early voting in states, the administration of early voting must be equitable. The current system may not be adequately serving all areas and as it stands, early voting is more likely to be utilized by regular voters. Early Voting has also proven to be a process requiring voter education. Those who are not regular voters generally do not seek out this information proactively. Bringing early voting sites to underserved neighborhoods would be a first step in extending information about the process directly into communities most in need of electoral education.

**Demographics**
In 2015, the Minnesota county with the highest percentage of persons of color was held by Mahnomen (53%), followed by Nobels (38.8%), Ramsey (36.5%) and Hennepin (30.1%). Among the seven county metro area, Ramsey County has the highest percent of Asian population at 14.4%. Looking at cities in the metro area, St. Paul has the third most persons of color as a

8 http://www.mncompass.org/demographics/race#7-5053-g
percent of age population at (45.8%), only preceded by Brooklyn Center (57.6%) and Brooklyn Park (51.9).9 Minneapolis ranks fifth with 39.7% of the population as persons of color.10

According to Minnesota Compass, which uses U.S. Census Bureau population estimates, Ramsey County also has the lowest median age in the seven county metro area at 34.89 years old in 2015.11 Scott County had the second lowest median age at 36 years old, with Hennepin in third at 36.3 years old. The U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey 2011-2015 estimates percent of people with at least a Bachelor’s degree (age 25+) in Ramsey County (40.4%) and Hennepin County (47%).12 Similarly, the U.S. Census Bureau uses the Small Area Income and Poverty Estimates (SAIPE) to estimated percent of the population that is living in poverty. The 2015 SAIPE for Ramsey County was 15.1% and Hennepin County it was 10.9%.13

**Turnout of Voting Age Population**

The United States Election Project provides the estimated eligible voting population by modifying CVAP for ineligible voters per state law.14 In Minnesota, a citizen who is 18 or older that has been convicted for a felony is not eligible to vote until he/she has completed his/her probation. Due to the limited availability of precinct level estimates of the eligible voting age population, we are using CVAP analysis going forward.

The CVAP for St. Paul in 2016 was 227,299 and the total number of votes cast was 140,210, providing for a turnout of the voting age population at 61.7%.15 To illustrate that the turnout of registered voters overestimates the turnout, we can divide the total number of votes cast by the number of registered voters in St. Paul on Election Day 2016 (179,618) to find a turnout of registered voters of 78%. Furthermore, in the seven county metro area, Ramsey County had the lowest turnout among the voting age population at 66%.16 Furthermore, reviewing the turnout of voting age population over the last decade, we can see that St. Paul lags behind both the city of Minneapolis and Minnesota turnout in each election (see **Graph 2**).
Data Collection
Data collection plays a critical role in advancing the goals of elections departments nationwide. There are several different uses for election data and numerous data collection methods. While Ramsey County currently has voter turnout data and registration data, it lags behind other jurisdictions in its use of electoral data collection to advance measures aimed at increase voter turnout. Data is a proven tool and if used correctly, can directly increase turnout.17 There is no single right answer when addressing voter turnout, but data allows any jurisdictions to pinpoint effective policies for consideration and implementation.

Comparative Analysis with Minneapolis
There are important differences between Minneapolis and St. Paul, however, they also provide a relatively strong natural comparison as adjacent urban cities. First, though, it is important to note that Minneapolis has an Election and Voter Services Division that operates out of the Minneapolis City Hall. On the other hand, St. Paul contracts with Ramsey County for election

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services. The population of Minneapolis is larger than St. Paul and, as previously mentioned, St. Paul is more diverse and has a lower median age than St. Paul.

On their website, Minneapolis Elections and Voter Services has a section dedicated to Outreach & Education. There are a variety of resources for voters on this page, from a three step guide for voters, to information on voter registration drives, education materials and information for organizations and partners of Minneapolis Elections. On top of this, Minneapolis implements several initiatives aimed at educating and communicating with people. Minneapolis Elections representatives regularly attend community events and community centers to register voters and provide information to those who need it. This initiative has only been expanded in the last year with the implementation of community specialists from various communities throughout the city. Unlike at community events, these staff members specialize in a certain area and provide information and help as they deem it necessary.

Minneapolis has also worked recently to upgrade its technological outreach. Through digital campaigns and social media, the city has focused more on bringing new people into the process. A digital marketing company was even brought in before the last election cycle to revamp the image and message of the elections department to further promote civic pride and getting involved in the city. However, this outreach has not been limited to online communications. Minneapolis has proactively provided mailer educational materials for elections such as Ranked Choice Voting in 2009. The department has also sent people out to neighborhoods to answer questions and provide further educational information on all parts of the process.

Recommendations

Collect More Data
Data is a critical and emerging feature of elections that is not just used in analyzing results but increasing participation. The collection of data can inform election officials and save future resources and money on a large scale. Using data effectively can change the way a municipality runs an election and collection of it should be a priority for every large scale election operation. There are numerous uses for data in elections and based on the needs of Ramsey County, some of the most important uses are listed below.

Targeted Future Outreach Efforts: Putting together a comprehensive database of demographic and electoral data for Ramsey County will better guide future outreach efforts. Without an effective database, it will be impossible to guide and analyze future outreach efforts. Data is constantly used to measure the success of various voter outreach activities. In New Haven Connecticut in 1999, a study found that direct canvassing increased voter turnout by six
percent.\textsuperscript{18} With Ramsey County looking to increase turnout in St. Paul precincts, targeted specific data is necessary to understand the effectiveness of similar outreach efforts. In this case, New Haven was able to confirm the effectiveness of a canvassing campaign in addressing their voter turnout concerns. Having precinct specific demographic and electoral database, will give Ramsey County a baseline for measuring outreach efforts and future initiatives in the city. It is important to collect and store this information in a format that can be easily analyzed against future data. Maintaining a living database will allow changes and improvements to be made annually.

**Track Changes in Registration/ Voting Patterns:** Similarly, a database of basic demographic and electoral data will notify the County of shifts and patterns in voter registration and voting. With a database in place, it will be easy to identify precinct level patterns. This will allow administrators to target precincts and areas based on shifts or already existing discrepancies in participation. This will not only inform future voter outreach efforts, but will also help with resource allocation and planning. It is much harder to identify trends with statewide turnout data. Recording more specific data will better illustrate trends and allow the department to more quickly pick up on outreach opportunities throughout the county.

**Polling Place Efficiency:** It is also important to focus data efforts on polling place efficiency. More densely populated areas have longer lines and longer lines reduce voter turnout.\textsuperscript{19} Making lines throughout the county as equitable as possible, will help ensure some voters are not facing a higher barrier to voting than others. While this report does not have data on the distribution on polling place efficiency in Ramsey County, it is important to ensure voters are not facing disproportionately long wait times. The only way to address this issue is to collect point of service data in Ramsey County precincts. Point of service data will allow the election department to target problem areas within the process as well as problem precincts with the resources needed to bring more efficiency to the process. Knowing how long voters are involved in the various parts of the voting process provides invaluable information for future elections.

**Identify Geographic Areas in Need:** Collecting data will expand existing geographic targeting. Precinct level data is scarce in Ramsey County and even such, there is less data that transcends precinct boundaries. Trends don’t always follow precinct boundaries and being able to survey exact addresses and demographic characteristics would provide more precise answer to lower voter turnout numbers. E-Poll Book technology can be used to further advance this geographic


data. Getting accurate and immediate voter turnout data would be a significant step forward in addressing low voter turnout in precincts like St. Paul’s 1-9.

**Inform Voters:** As noted earlier, long lines and other logistical barriers have been proven to decrease voter turnout. Data can not only be used to target problem areas but inform voters about wait times and voting processes. With the gradual implementation of e-Poll Books in Ramsey County, there is a unique opportunity to use these devices to update their website in real time with voter wait times. Voters knowing wait times before traveling to the polls can help them plan accordingly and not get discouraged if they arrive to a long line. This would require enabling legislation, but with the advancement of e-Poll Book technology, it is worth considering all of the data capabilities of the device.

**Refocusing Voter Outreach & Education Efforts**

Outreach is widely accepted as a crucial component to election administration. It is important to get out into the communities and supply educational information to ensure election officials do not become detached from the communities they serve. It is equally important to ensure that there are adequate resources provided for voter outreach and education both online and in print. Ramsey County could benefit from refocusing outreach efforts and making information more accessible to communities with lower participation. Listed below are several proven initiatives that can produce higher turnout and better engage potential voters throughout Ramsey County.

**Website and Other Materials:** Election websites are often modeled from the perspective of election administrators and as such, contain ample information, but little direction. Approaching information from the perspective of a voter can greatly increase the usability of election information. Ramsey County provides the required information of elections but fails to guide voters through the process online. Using the website and other materials as instructional mediums for voters can increase voter participation and not discourage those with less experience with the process. Websites must convey to voters what is required of them and how to accomplish it step by step, not just provide the information. An approach focused on the process that voters go through will give them a starting point with the County and allow them to navigate the process in a self-sufficient and rewarding way.

**Multimedia/ Social Media:** Using innovative tools to present and disseminate information can help engage communities traditionally outside of the electoral process. Online videos and social media interaction can extend the reach of election offices while putting information in an easily digestible format. With the resource constraints of an elections office, social media will prove an invaluable resource in increasing voter turnout city and county-wide. Ramsey County is not as aggressive as other municipalities in its use of multimedia. While voters are more and more likely to get their information online, it is critical that Ramsey County keeps pace with its

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availability of educational materials online. This will also allow Ramsey County to present information and deadlines in a form and manner as to guide voters through the process. A sense of civic pride has also proven to increase turnout, and effectively using online media can create an awareness and civic pride in the election process of Ramsey County.21

Community Specialists: Some cities like Minneapolis are starting to use community specialists as a means of getting information into all of the city's communities. While this is a city-wide effort in Minneapolis, a targeted approach in 1-9 and surrounding precincts would be an excellent start and trial run at expanding voter participation in St. Paul. While there are obvious costs to this effort, voter education is a critical tool in increasing turnout and community specialists will offer specialized education in low turnout areas. A specialist would not only know how to most effectively bring information to their community, they would be a dependable and trustworthy face within their community. As a liaison between communities and government offices, at need areas of the city would be given unique access to governmental personnel and services. An otherwise intimidating process could prove easier for would be voters who could benefit from information and support being brought to them.

FTE dedicated to community outreach: This solution, while appealing, carries economic and logistical restraints. However, the benefits of having a staff member dedicated specifically to this pursuit cannot be understated. This position would ensure that effective outreach policies are pursued and the efficacy of such initiatives can be properly analyzed. Instead of being an afterthought, there would be someone working every day to get the relevant information into these areas with unique and innovative initiatives. Most importantly, this FTE would be able to analyze and interpret data throughout the county to better understand the patterns and effectiveness of turnout efforts. This development would help to break out of the centralized tendencies of election offices and promote a more hands-on approach to community outreach.

Bringing Voting to the People
Similar to direct voter outreach, voter turnout can only be increased by finding new ways to engage with and reach new people. Decreasing the centralization of election offices and bringing information into the communities of needs ensures that people are educated about the process. It is inevitable that some turnout is depressed because of lacking information. Bringing information and resources directly into low turnout areas can bridge the information gap and brings new voters into the electoral process. There are many ways to do this, but below there are few starting points that offer great opportunities for progress.

Tenant Notification of Voter Registration (TNVR): In 2016, Minneapolis instituted Tenant Notification of Voter Registration (TNVR). This ordinance set up a system in which property owners and managers were required to “provide all new tenant with information about how to register to vote at the time they move in.” While this is a new initiative, it is designed to serve more transient communities and give relevant information to voters who are clearly no longer successfully registered. Such a system is a great way to get information into the hands of renters and those who might not seek out the information themselves. Over 62% of the population in the W1-P9 area of St. Paul are renters. With such a high percentage of renters in an area with low voter turnout, registration information is critical. TNVR is the perfect way to get that information out in a cost-effective manner.

Early Voting Sites: In St. Paul, if a voter wishes to vote in person before Election Day, they only have one option. The Ramsey County government center is a convenient location for those with a car or who live nearby. The problem is that many of the precincts with low voter turnout are far from the site. While voters are still able to request a ballots via mail, not having accessible sites, doesn’t allow for traditional early voting. Additional sites throughout the city would give adequate options for precincts in low turnout areas while bringing needed information and outreach directly into communities. These sites could also serve as home bases for any community specialists and offer hubs for the various communities throughout the city. More early voting sites would not only provide better access to the polls, but they can serve to reduce wait times on Election Day.

Ramsey County will have to work with the St. Paul city council to figure out an agreeable system for expanded early voting sites. This task does face some logistical hurdles, but expanding early voting is critical in promoting fairness throughout the electoral process in St. Paul. By advocating for funding and approval of expanded early voting, Ramsey County can argue the benefits of early voting and the demonstrated need in communities like that of precinct 1-9. Minneapolis successfully instituted new early voting sites throughout the city for the 2016 election and they were widely used. Although it is too soon to argue that these actions explicitly increased turnout, the new sites successfully shifted the Election Day turnout burden to less high pressure periods before the election. Considering wait times have proven to push people away from voting on Election Day, it is fair to say that the significant participation in these new early voting sites is a good start to increasing turnout.

Canvassing: As mentioned earlier, canvassing has proven an effective tool in increasing voter participation. While election offices are unable to go door to door informing every citizen of their voting rights, there are methods that should be considered. First, informing or even training community activists in voter registration is a great way to spread the reach of Ramsey County

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22 [http://vote.minneapolismn.gov](http://vote.minneapolismn.gov)
23 [https://www.census.gov/data.html](https://www.census.gov/data.html)
Elections. Giving non-partisan information on how to register voters will give communities another resource in accessing the often difficult process of voting. Second, targeting outreach in low-turnout communities like St Paul’s 1-9 could prove more effective considering the more considerable ground to gain. Targeted canvassing will also allow a more specific approach geared towards the demographics of the area. Being able to fully understand the voting needs of the community will only enhance canvassing and outreach efforts. In a city as diverse as St. Paul, universal outreach efforts may not always be accessible. Finally, making canvassing materials and information more readily accessible will better include low turnout communities within the voting process. Seeking out community centers and other places to send information would be a step in the right direction.
Appendix B:

Graph 1 Data: W1-P9, Ramsey County and Minnesota Turnout Among Registered voters

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Election</th>
<th>W1-P9 Turnout among total registered voters</th>
<th>Ramsey County Turnout among total registered voters</th>
<th>Minnesota Turnout among total registered voters</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2016</td>
<td>63.20%</td>
<td>80.83%</td>
<td>81.91%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2014</td>
<td>33.64%</td>
<td>58.60%</td>
<td>60.56%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2012</td>
<td>69.24%</td>
<td>82.87%</td>
<td>81.70%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2010</td>
<td>34.08%</td>
<td>59.81%</td>
<td>62.33%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2008</td>
<td>54.32%</td>
<td>74.60%</td>
<td>78.04%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2006</td>
<td>33.81%</td>
<td>61.70%</td>
<td>65.00%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Graph 2: Turnout of Voting Age Population (even year elections 2006-2016)
Source MN Compass: Voter Turnout

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Minneapolis</td>
<td>50.00%</td>
<td>69.00%</td>
<td>46.00%</td>
<td>68.80%</td>
<td>42.30%</td>
<td>66.40%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>St. Paul</td>
<td>49.30%</td>
<td>67.40%</td>
<td>43.60%</td>
<td>65.80%</td>
<td>39.40%</td>
<td>61.70%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minnesota</td>
<td>57.10%</td>
<td>73.70%</td>
<td>52.80%</td>
<td>71.90%</td>
<td>47.70%</td>
<td>70.10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>U.S.</td>
<td>38.20%</td>
<td>57.70%</td>
<td>38.80%</td>
<td>54.20%</td>
<td>33.90%</td>
<td>55.00%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

24 http://www.mncompass.org/civic-engagement/voter-turnout#7-200-d