

‘Sweating the Midterms: Results of a Survey of North Dakota College Students Regarding Attitudes and Voting Experiences in the 2018 Midterm Election’

A 2018 survey of undergraduate and graduate students across North Dakota found an increase in the percentage of respondents who attempted to vote but were unable to do so. Whereas a 2016 survey found that 3.56 percent of students attempting to vote in the general election were unable to do so, the 2018 results indicate 5.60 percent were unable to vote. Extrapolating these findings to the general population of students indicates that an additional 398 students were unable to vote in the 2018 midterm elections despite their efforts to do so.

The survey was underwritten by the Upper Midwest Regional Center on Public Policy at North Dakota State University (NDSU). It should be noted that the survey was not based upon a random sample. Thus, the results may not reflect the experiences of the general population of college students.

An invitation to participate in the survey was sent via email to students enrolled at the eleven North Dakota University System colleges and universities the day after the 2018 elections. Of 45,745 students invited to participate, 2,678 completed the survey for a response rate of 5.9 percent. The University of North Dakota had the greatest number of respondents at 977 followed by North Dakota State University with 976.

Students were asked, ‘Did you vote in the 2018 election?’ with three response options: ‘Yes,’ ‘No,’ and ‘I attempted to vote but was unable to.’ As shown in Table 1, some 82.4 percent of respondents to this question voted successfully in the 2018 election, 12.7 percent did not vote, and 4.9 percent attempted unsuccessfully to vote. Successful turnout was greatest amongst Lake Region State College respondents at 90.9 percent and lowest amongst North Dakota State College of Science (NDSCS) respondents at 62.0 percent. Turnout amongst NDSU and UND respondents combined was 83.6 percent.

In contrast, the North Dakota Secretary of State’s office reported that 57.0 percent of all eligible voters across the state turned out for the November 2018 elections.ⁱ However,

turnout varied considerably with Billings County reporting the highest turnout at 75.2 percent and Ward County the lowest at 46.2 percent.

Table 2 presents the percentage of respondents who attempted to vote but were unable to do so by institution. This percentage is calculated by dividing the number of respondents who were unable to vote by the number of respondents who tried to vote, successfully or not. NDSCS had the highest rate at 12.50 percent followed by Williston State College at 8.00 percent. Lake Region State College had the lowest rate at 0.00 percent. NDSU was 6.19 percent and UND was 4.49 percent.

For comparison, the results of the 2016 student survey can be found in the third column of Table 2 with the differences between the two cross-sections placed in the fourth column.ⁱⁱ As can be seen, there was an overall rise in the percentage of respondents unable to vote, but these differences vary considerable by institution. NDSCS had the greatest increase at 7.29 percentage points from 2016 to 2018 while Dakota College at Bottineau experienced a 10.79 percentage point decrease. Indeed, four institutions saw a decrease in the percentage of respondents unable to vote.

To gauge the potential impact, the findings of this study are extrapolated to the student population. This is done by applying the results by each campus and then adjusting for turnout rates. It is likely that the survey respondents turned out to vote at a higher rate than the general student population. To account for this difference, the study assumes that actual student turnout rates will reflect those of the county in which their campus is located. For example, if the Secretary of State's office pegged Cass County voter turnout at 56.7 percent, the study assumes voter turnout for NDSU students was the same percentage.

Extrapolating the findings proceeds as follows: 2018 County Turnout% x 2018 school enrollment x (2018 unable – 2016 unable).

Bismarck State College

$$(0.6428) \times (3778) \times (0.0219) = 53$$

Dakota College at Bottineau

$$(0.6484) \times (996) \times (-0.1079) = -70$$

Dickinson State University

$$(0.5511) \times (1392) \times (-0.074) = -57$$

Lake Region State College

$$(0.5829) \times (2072) \times (-0.0278) = -34$$

Mayville State University

$$(0.6113) \times (1184) \times (0.0087) = 6$$

Minot State University

$$(0.4619) \times (3189) \times (-0.0137) = -20$$

North Dakota State College of Science

$$(0.5756) \times (2957) \times (0.0729) = 124$$

North Dakota State University

$$(0.5665) \times (13796) \times (0.0340) = 266$$

University of North Dakota

$$(0.5035) \times (13847) \times (0.0148) = 103$$

Valley City State University

$$(0.5973) \times (1547) \times (0.0111) = 10$$

Williston State College

$$(0.4698) \times (1124) \times (0.0329) = 17$$

Total = 398

The extrapolation indicates that when comparing the percentage of students who tried to vote but were unable to do so from 2018 to 2016, an additional 398 students were unable to cast their ballots in 2018.

The survey did not ask students why they were unable to vote in 2018. However, North Dakota has revised the rules governing voter identification over the last few election cycles.

To receive a ballot in North Dakota, a voter must show identification that includes their residential address and date of birth. Valid identification includes a driver's license, a non-driver ID card issued by the Department of Transportation, or a university-issued student identification certificate. In 2012, someone without proper identification could sign an affidavit stating they were an eligible voter. The Secretary of State's office would then verify voter eligibility afterwards. However, changes to the voter identification laws in 2013 eliminated the affidavit option, thereby creating problems for student voters without an updated identification. A 2014 survey of North Dakota students found that 3.2 percent could not vote due to residency requirements.ⁱⁱⁱ

A federal court ruling on North Dakota's voter identification laws brought back the affidavit option for the 2016 general election. This had a considerable impact: North Dakotan voters filed more than 16,000 affidavits. A 2016 survey of North Dakota students indicate that students had considerably less difficulty voting when compared to 2014.^{iv} However, the state tightened voter identification laws once again after the 2016 election thereby eliminating the affidavits option.^v

It is possible that these revisions greatly complicated the ability of college students to cast a vote in North Dakotan elections.

Table 3 presents the reported vote by institution for some of the high profile 2018 contests. The respondents strongly supported Heidi Heitkamp (D) for reelection to the US Senate with 57.1 percent stating they cast their vote for her. Support was particularly strong amongst NDSU students at 59.3 percent and UND students at 65.2 percent. Support was lowest amongst Bismarck State College respondents at 29.3 percent and Mayville State respondents at 39.9 percent.

Heitkamp received 44.3 percent from all voters across the state.^{vi}

Survey respondents favored Kelly Armstrong (R) in the US House election with 50.7 percent indicating their vote for Armstrong. Support amongst Bismarck State respondents was particularly strong with 74.3 percent voting for Armstrong. Support was more lukewarm at NDSU with 47.5 percent for Armstrong and UND with 45.0 percent.

Armstrong received 60.2 percent from all voters across the state.

Survey respondents were strongly in favor of Measure 1 ('Pertaining to the Transparency of Funding Sources, Lobbyists, Conflicts of Interests, and the Establishment of an Ethics Commission') with 68.8 percent voting 'yes.' Some 70.6 percent of NDSU respondents and 71.2 percent of UND respondents indicated their vote in support of this measure.

Measure 1 received 53.6 percent from all voters across the state.

Respondents supported Measure 2 ('Pertaining to the Elections in Which a Qualified Elector May Vote') with 51.8 percent voting 'yes.' However, there was something of a split on this measure with more than 65 percent of respondents from Bismarck State, Dakota College, Lake Region, Mayville State, Valley City State, and Williston State supporting Measure 2. However, only 44.8 percent of Minot State respondents, 47.6 percent of NDSU respondents, and 47.1 percent UND respondents reported casting a vote for this measure.

Measure 2 received 65.9 percent from all voters across the state.

Respondents supported Measure 3 ('Pertaining to the Legalization of Marijuana') with 54.9 percent voting 'yes.' Some 61.5 percent of UND respondents and 53.9 of NDSU respondents voted for the measure. However, only 35.3 percent of Mayville respondents,

41.7 percent of Valley City respondents, and 42.3 percent of Dickinson State respondents voted in favor.

Measure 3 received 40.6 percent from all voters across the state.

Further 2018 survey results

Approval of the way **Donald Trump** is handling his job as president: 13.1% strongly approved of Trump, 29.3% approved of Trump, 20.7% disapprove of Trump, and 36.9% strongly disapproved of Trump. These results were based upon 2,102 respondents.

Thus, 42.4% of respondents approved of Trump, 57.6% disapproved of Trump.

The state of the **economy these days in the United States**: 2.5% believed the US economy was very good, 15.9% believed the US economy was good, 32.2% believed the US economy was neither good nor bad, 37.4% believed the US economy was bad, and 12.1% believed the US economy was very bad. These results were based upon 2,061 respondents.

The state of the **economy these days in North Dakota**: 1.7% believed the ND economy was very good, 10.1% believed the ND economy was good, 35.0% believed the ND economy was neither good nor bad, 41.9% believed the ND economy was bad, and 11.3% believed the ND economy was very bad. These results were based upon 2,057 respondents.

The **tax reform bill** passed by Congress and signed by the president last year: 11.9% strongly supported the tax reform bill, 37.5% supported the tax reform bill, 34.1% opposed the tax reform bill, and 16.5% strongly opposed the tax reform bill. These results were based upon 1,909 respondents.

Thus, 49.4% of respondents supported the tax reform bill while 50.6% opposed it.

A federal ban on the sale of assault weapons and high-capacity magazines: 31.6% strongly supported a ban, 26.5% supported a ban, 21.6% opposed a ban, and 20.3% strongly opposed a ban. These results were based upon 1,989 respondents.

Thus, 58.1% of respondents supported a federal ban on the sale of assault weapons and high-capacity magazines while 41.9% opposed.

Repealing and replacing the Affordable Care Act (Obamacare): 18.0% strongly supported repealing and replacing the Affordable Care Act, 26.4% supported repealing and replacing the Affordable Care Act, 29.6% opposed repealing and replacing the Affordable Care Act, and 26.0% strongly opposed repealing and replacing the Affordable Care Act. These results were based upon 1,975 respondents.

Thus, 44.4% of respondents supported repealing and replacing the Affordable Care Act while 55.6% opposed.

Allowing businesses to refuse service to gays and lesbians if homosexuality violates the owner's religious beliefs: 14.1% strongly supported allowing businesses to refuse service, 17.1% supported allowing businesses to refuse service, 21.5% opposed allowing businesses to refuse service, and 47.3% strongly opposed allowing businesses to refuse service. These results were based upon 1,998 respondents.

Thus, 31.2% of respondents supported allowing businesses to refuse service to gays and lesbians if homosexuality violates the owner's religious beliefs while 68.8% opposed.

Support or oppose abortion always being legal as a matter of personal choice: 39.5% strongly supported abortion, 23.2% supported abortion, 15.0% opposed abortion, and 22.3% strongly opposed abortion. These results were based upon 1,998 respondents.

Thus, 62.7% of respondents supported abortion always being legal as a matter of personal choice while 37.3% opposed.

Support or oppose Brett Kavanaugh's confirmation to the Supreme Court: 17.5% strongly supported Kavanaugh's confirmation, 24.0% supported Kavanaugh's confirmation, 21.0% opposed Kavanaugh's confirmation, and 37.6% strongly opposed Kavanaugh's confirmation. These results were based upon 1,954 respondents.

Thus, 41.5% of respondents supported Kavanaugh's confirmation while 58.5% opposed.

Support or oppose the tariffs between the US and some of its trading partners: 5.1% strongly supported the tariffs, 35.0% supported the tariffs, 41.9% opposed the tariffs, and 18.1% strongly opposed the tariffs. These results were based upon 1,911 respondents.

Thus, 40.1% of respondents supported the tariffs while 59.9% opposed.

Selected demographics

Of 2,360 respondents, 21.6% identified as **urban**, 45.6% as **rural**, and 32.8% as **suburban**.

Of 1,873 respondents, 18.6% **voted in person before Election Day**, 36.0% **voted by mailing in an absentee ballot**, and 45.4% **voted in person on Election Day**.

Of 2,005 respondents, 20.4% identified as First Year, 17.5% as Sophomore, 17.8% as Junior, 22.4% as Senior, and 22.0% as Graduate or Professional.

Of 1,992 respondents, 90.6% identified as White and 9.4% identified as something else.

Of 1,926 respondents, 33.5% identified as Democrats, 32.4% as Republicans, 26.6% as Independent, and 7.5% as some other party.

Of 1,757 respondents, 40.6% identified as Male.

Responses and Response Rate by NDUS Institution

Bismarck State College – 125 (3.5%) Dakota College at Bottineau – 25 (2.4%)

Dickinson State University – 33 (2.6%) Lake Region State College – 28 (1.3%)

Mayville State University – 54 (4.5%) Minot State University – 133 (4.2%)

North Dakota State College of Science – 92 (3.1%)

North Dakota State University – 976 (6.8%) University of North Dakota – 977 (7.0%)

Valley City State University – 97 (9.0%) Williston State College – 38 (3.4%)

Total statewide – 2,678 respondents. These schools had 45,745 enrolled students in 2018, indicating a response rate of 5.9%.

Table 1: ‘Did You Vote in the 2018 Election?’ by Institution.

Institution	Yes	No	Attempted to Vote but was unable to do so
Bismarck State College	80.2% (N = 85)	14.2% (N = 15)	5.7% (N = 6)
Dakota College at Bottineau	86.4% (N = 19)	9.1% (N = 2)	4.5% (N = 1)
Dickinson State University	83.9% (N = 26)	12.9% (N = 4)	3.2% (N = 1)
Lake Region State College	90.9% (N = 20)	9.1% (N = 2)	0.0% (N = 0)
Mayville State University	84.4% (N = 38)	13.3% (N = 6)	2.2% (N = 1)
Minot State University	83.1% (N = 98)	11.9% (N = 14)	5.1% (N = 6)
North Dakota State College of Science	62.0% (N = 49)	29.1% (N = 23)	8.9% (N = 7)
North Dakota State University	84.3% (N = 728)	10.2% (N = 88)	5.6% (N = 48)
University of North Dakota	83.1% (N = 724)	13.0% (N = 113)	3.9% (N = 34)
Valley City State University	76.5% (N = 62)	17.3% (N = 14)	6.2% (N = 5)
Williston State College	71.9% (N = 23)	21.9% (N = 7)	6.3% (N = 2)
Totals (statewide)	82.4% (N = 1,872)	12.7% (N = 288)	4.9% (N = 111)

Table 2: Percentage of respondents who attempted to vote but were unable for 2016 and 2018.

Institution	2018	2016	Difference
Bismarck State College	6.59% (N = 91)	4.40% (N = 273)	+2.19
Dakota College at Bottineau	5.00% (N = 20)	15.79% (N= 19)	-10.79
Dickinson State University	3.70% (N = 27)	4.44% (N = 45)	-0.74
Lake Region State College	0.00% (N = 20)	2.78% (N = 36)	-2.78
Mayville State University	2.56% (N = 39)	1.69% (N = 59)	+0.87
Minot State University	5.77% (N = 104)	7.14% (N = 224)	-1.37
North Dakota State College of Science	12.50% (N = 56)	5.21% (N = 96)	+7.29
North Dakota State University	6.19% (N = 776)	2.79% (N = 1,360)	+3.40
University of North Dakota	4.49% (N = 758)	3.01% (N = 1,360)	+1.48
Valley City State University	7.46% (N = 67)	6.35% (N = 126)	+1.11
Williston State College	8.00% (N = 25)	4.71% (N = 85)	+3.29
Totals (statewide)	5.60% (N = 1,983)	3.56% (N = 3,683)	+2.04

Table 3: Percentage Vote and Total Responses by Institution.

Institution	Voted Heitkamp (D) for US Senate	Voted Armstrong (R) for US House	Voted for Measure #1	Voted for Measure #2	Voted for Measure #3
Bismarck State College	29.3% (75)	74.3% (70)	58.1% (74)	70.8% (72)	42.9% (77)
Dakota College at Bottineau	50.0% (20)	41.2% (17)	63.2% (19)	68.4% (19)	68.4% (19)
Dickinson State University	48.0% (25)	64.0% (25)	73.1% (26)	53.8% (26)	42.3% (26)
Lake Region State College	45.0% (20)	68.4% (19)	75.0% (20)	85.0% (20)	55.0% (20)
Mayville State University	38.9% (36)	65.6% (32)	51.5% (33)	78.8% (33)	35.3% (34)
Minot State University	48.9% (92)	58.5% (82)	65.5% (87)	44.8% (87)	54.8% (93)
North Dakota State College of Science	58.3% (36)	51.6% (31)	77.1% (35)	64.7% (34)	55.0% (40)
North Dakota State University	59.3% (487)	47.5% (444)	70.6% (479)	47.6% (483)	53.9% (499)
University of North Dakota	65.2% (466)	45.0% (429)	71.2% (451)	47.1% (452)	61.5% (475)
Valley City State University	44.8% (58)	61.7% (47)	56.6% (53)	66.0% (53)	41.7% (60)
Williston State College	52.6% (19)	52.9% (17)	66.7% (18)	66.7% (18)	47.4% (19)
Statewide	57.1% (1,334)	50.7% (1,213)	68.8% (1,295)	51.8% (1,297)	54.9% (1,362)

Endnotes

ⁱ See <https://results.sos.nd.gov/VoterTurnoutDetails.aspx> for a full report on voter turnout during the 2018 general election.

ⁱⁱ See the reports at https://www.ndsu.edu/centers/publicpolicy/studies_and_reports/ for further information.

ⁱⁱⁱ For further information, see

https://www.ndsu.edu/fileadmin/centers/publicpolicy/2014_North_Dakota_Student_Voter_study_report.pdf

^{iv} For further information, see

https://www.ndsu.edu/fileadmin/centers/publicpolicy/2016_North_Dakota_College_Student_Voter_Study_part_1.pdf

^v See https://bismarcktribune.com/news/state-and-regional/north-dakota-student-groups-fight-voter-id-confusion-ahead-of/article_da7e69dc-407c-5c4d-a07a-4e97b899fd08.html

^{vi} The 2018 general election results for all North Dakotan voters is derived from the North Dakota Secretary of State at <https://results.sos.nd.gov/Default.aspx?map=Cty> .

Report by Dr. Nick Bauroth and Dr. Kjersten Nelson, Department of Criminal Justice and Political Science, North Dakota State University. For further information, contact Dr. Bauroth at nicholas.bauroth@ndsu.edu.