

Results of a Survey of North Dakota College Students on Their Voting Experiences in the 2014 Election

A survey of undergraduate and graduate students across North Dakota found that 3.2 percent of respondents who attempted to vote in the 2014 midterm elections were unable to participate due to confusion over residency requirements. Many students were unaware that recent changes in the state's voter identification laws meant they needed to update their addresses by October 5, 2014 if they wanted to vote in the precinct where they lived. The impact of this confusion was most acute for students at Bismarck State College, North Dakota State University, and the University of North Dakota. Extrapolating the results of this survey to the general population indicates that 689 students were unable to vote due to residency issues.

The survey was conducted as part of a larger study underwritten by the Upper Midwest Regional Center on Public Policy at North Dakota State University (NDSU). The results also indicated that 1.5 percent of respondents who attempted to vote were unable to participate due to issues related to absentee ballots.

In order 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. According to newspaper accounts, many students had driver's licenses with their parents' residential address rather than their campus address. In previous elections, someone without proper identification

could sign an affidavit stating that they were an eligible voter. The Secretary of State's office would then verify voter eligibility afterwards. However, changes to the state voter identification laws in 2013 eliminated the affidavit option, thereby creating problems for voters without an updated student identification certificate.

Problems with student voting were reported in the *Fargo Forum*, *Grand Forks Herald*, and other sources during the aftermath of the 2014 elections.¹ However, these reports were largely based on anecdotal reports. This study is the first attempt to quantify student problems with voter identification.

An invitation to participate in the survey was sent to students at the eleven North Dakota University System colleges and universities shortly after the election. Students completed their surveys between November 12, 2014 and January 26, 2015. Of the 48,920 students invited to participate, 1,797 completed the survey for a total response rate of 3.7 percent. Of those, 1,613 answered questions regarding their ability to vote. The University of North Dakota had the greatest number of respondents at 800 followed by North Dakota State University with 479.

Students were asked, 'Did you vote in the 2014 election?' with three response options: 'Yes,' 'No,' and 'I attempted to vote but was unable to.' Those who selected the third option were asked to give an open-ended description of what prevented them from voting. These answers were categorized as (1) issues related to residential address; (2) problems with absentee ballots; and (3) miscellaneous issues. Miscellaneous issues

¹ Examples include: "North Dakota Secretary of State Fielding Comments About Voter ID, Campaigning," *Fargo Forum*, November 4, 2014; "Easy as Pie?: Students Face Voting Challenges," *NDSU Spectrum*, November 10, 2014; "Voting ID Laws Caused 'Many Problems' For Students," *Grand Forks Herald*, November 13, 2014.

included such things as trying to vote after 7 PM; not realizing it was Election Day; and studying abroad. All respondents who chose this option provided some type of narrative explanation.

It should be noted that the results provided here are not based upon a random sample. Thus, the respondents may not reflect the experiences of the general population.

Results related to a respondent's attempt to vote are broken down by campus in Table 1. As can be seen, 64.0 percent of respondents voted successfully in the 2014 election, 31.1 percent did not vote, and 4.9 percent attempted unsuccessfully to vote. Turnout was greatest amongst Dickinson State University respondents at 71.0 percent and lowest amongst Williston State College at 40.0 percent. Respondents from Mayville State University did not answer this particular set of questions. Turnout amongst NDSU and UND respondents was 64.3 percent.

In contrast, the North Dakota Secretary of State's office reported that 46.8 percent of all eligible voters across the state turned out for the November 2014 elections. Turnout varied considerably by county.

The results related to what prevented students from voting are presented by campus in Table 2. As can be seen, 92.9 percent of respondents seeking to vote were successful in their efforts, 3.2 percent were prevented from voting due to residency requirements, 1.5 percent were prevented from voting due to issues with absentee ballots, and 2.3 percent were unable to vote for miscellaneous reasons. Bismarck State College had the greatest problem with the residency requirements with 7.7 percent of its

respondents prevented from voting. Some 3.6 percent of North Dakota State University respondents and 2.9 percent of University of North Dakota respondents were rejected due to the residency requirements.

Respondents from Dakota College at Bottineau, Dickinson State University, Lake Region State College, Mayville State College, Valley City State University, and Williston State College did not report any issues with the thirty-day residency requirements or the absentee voter procedures.

Cross tabulations between respondents who attempted to vote but could not and other relevant variables are found in Table 3. These respondents were most likely be sophomores or juniors males and to self-identify as conservative. Their political knowledge tended to be medium, as was their interest in the campaign.² Thus, the respondents who had the most trouble voting tended to be those who were following the election but not obsessively so.

To gauge the potential impact of changes in residency requirements, the findings of this study are extrapolated to the general 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 correct 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

² “Medium” political knowledge represents the 31st to 65th percentile on a nine-question standard battery of political knowledge questions. “Medium” political interest indicates that the respondent noted he or she had been “somewhat interested” in the political campaigns this year.

the Secretary of State's office pegged Cass County voter turnout at 44.4 percent, the study assumes voter turnout for NDSU students was the same percentage.³

Extrapolating the findings proceeds as follows:

Bismarck State College = (5,352 students) X (0.5498 turnout rate for Burleigh County) X (0.077 unable to vote due to residency problems) = 226.6

Minot State University = (3,217 students) X (0.3892 turnout rate for Ward County) X (0.021 unable to vote due to residency problems) = 26.3

North Dakota State College of Science = (3,024 students) X (0.4724 turnout rate for Richland County) X (0.038 unable to vote due to residency problems) = 54.3

North Dakota State University = (13,332 students) X (0.4440 turnout rate for Cass County) X (0.036 unable to vote due to residency problems) = 213.1

University of North Dakota = (15,102 students) X (0.3849 turnout rate for Grand Forks County) X (0.029 unable to vote due to residency problems) = 168.6

Extrapolated total for state = 688.9 students who tried to vote but were unsuccessful due to residency issues.

It is noteworthy that the residency requirements were an issue for respondents from the largest universities. The universities located in Bismarck, Fargo, and Grand Forks were more likely to have students who have moved from their home town than students who attend the other colleges. These students are more likely to have their

³ Young adults tend to vote at lower rates than older demographics, though voting rates increase with levels of formal education. These two countervailing trends may bring the NDUS college student turnout relative close to the county-wide voter turnout rate, though it remains an estimation.

parents' address listed as their mailing address, thus making them vulnerable to exclusion. This study provides evidence that this was a real problem and perhaps more widespread than initially suspected.

Full wording of the survey questions, as well as additional descriptions of the data, are available on the Upper Midwest Regional Center on Public Policy's web-site at www.ndsu.edu/centers/publicpolicy/.

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Table 1: Full Survey Results by Campus

	Voted	Did Not Vote	Tried to vote (unsuccessful)	Total
Bismarck State College	57 (70.4%)	16 (19.8%)	8 (9.9%)	81 (100%)
Dakota College at Bottineau	4 (66.7%)	2 (33.3%)	0 (0.00%)	6 (100%)
Dickinson State University	22 (71.0%)	8 (25.8%)	1 (3.2%)	31 (100%)
Lake Region State College	10 (55.6%)	8 (44.4%)	0 (0.0%)	18 (100%)
Mayville State University	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)
Minot State University	89 (63.6%)	45 (32.2%)	6 (4.3%)	140 (100.0%)
North Dakota State College of Science	24 (52.2%)	20 (43.5%)	2 (4.3%)	46 (100.0%)
North Dakota State University	308 (64.3%)	146 (30.5%)	25 (5.2%)	479 (100.0%)
University of North Dakota	514 (64.3%)	249 (31.1%)	37 (4.6%)	800 (100.0%)
Valley City State University	1 (50.0%)	1 (50.0%)	0 (0.0%)	2 (100.0%)
Williston State College	4 (40.0%)	6 (60.0%)	0 (0.0%)	10 (100.0%)
Total	1,033 (64.0%)	501 (31.1%)	79 (4.9%)	1,613 (100.0%)

Table 2: Student Voting Attempts by Campus

	Successfully Voted	Unsuccessful due to address problems	Unsuccessful due to absentee voter problems	Unsuccessful due to miscellaneous	Total
Bismarck State College	57 (87.7%)	5 (7.7%)	1 (1.5%)	2 (3.1)	65 (100%)
Dakota College at Bottineau	4 (66.7%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	4 (100%)
Dickinson State University	22 (95.7%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	1 (4.3%)	23 (100%)
Lake Region State College	10 (100.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	10 (100%)
Mayville State University	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)
Minot State University	89 (93.7%)	2 (2.1%)	3 (3.2%)	1 (1.1%)	95 (100.0%)
North Dakota State College of Science	24 (92.3%)	1 (3.8%)	0 (0.0%)	1 (3.8%)	26 (100.0%)
North Dakota State University	308 (92.5%)	12 (3.6%)	4 (1.2%)	9 (2.7%)	333 (100.0%)
University of North Dakota	514 (93.3%)	16 (2.9%)	9 (1.6%)	12 (2.2%)	551 (100.0%)
Valley City State University	1 (100.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	1 (100.0%)
Williston State College	4 (100.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	10 (100.0%)
Total	1,033 (92.9%)	36 (3.2%)	17 (1.5%)	26 (2.3%)	1,112 (100.0%)

Table 3: Percentage of Group that reported trying to vote but not being able to

	Group	Percentage (Frequency)
	All respondents	4.9 (79)
Gender	Men	7.0 (41)
	Women	4.0 (34)
Year in School	First-Year	3.0 (9)
	Sophomore	7.0 (16)
	Junior	8.0 (18)
	Senior	6.0 (21)
	Graduate	4.0 (11)
Party	Democrat	5.0 (26)
	Independent	5.9 (11)
	Republican	5.5 (38)
Ideology	Liberal	4.9 (22)
	Moderate	3.9 (9)
	Conservative	6.1 (43)
Political Knowledge	Low	3.3 (14)
	Medium	5.6 (35)
	High	5.3 (30)
Interest in the Campaign	Low	3.5 (18)
	Medium	7.0 (46)
	High	3.4 (15)