

DataHaven

Classroom Materials

Title of Material: Types of Elections

Topics Discussed: Elections, democracy, voter turnout rates, voter trends

Skills Utilized: Reading skills, annotating, graph analysis, reflection

Format: Individual or in small groups, discuss as a class

In Person or Online: Either

Procedure/Instruction Suggestions:

Helpful in explaining the upcoming election cycle!

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Types of Elections

And Their Turnout

Democracy, or the power to choose your leaders by vote, is a cornerstone of American life. There are several different elections that take place in the United States on the local, state, and national level. Each type of election takes place in a cycle of a certain amount of years, decides on an individual to perform a certain role, and has different voter turnout — the number of people who “turn out” to vote compared to the total people who are eligible. For example, every four years there is a country-wide presidential election. There are also midterm elections, which take place at the halfway mark of a president’s four-year term. These elections decide the members of the House of Representatives and a third of the Senate. In most states, governor elections (or gubernatorial elections) also take place every four years.

As is the trend nationally, voter turnout in regions like Greater Hartford varies by type of election, with greater turnout for state and national elections. The region’s turnout rate was 79 percent in the 2016 presidential

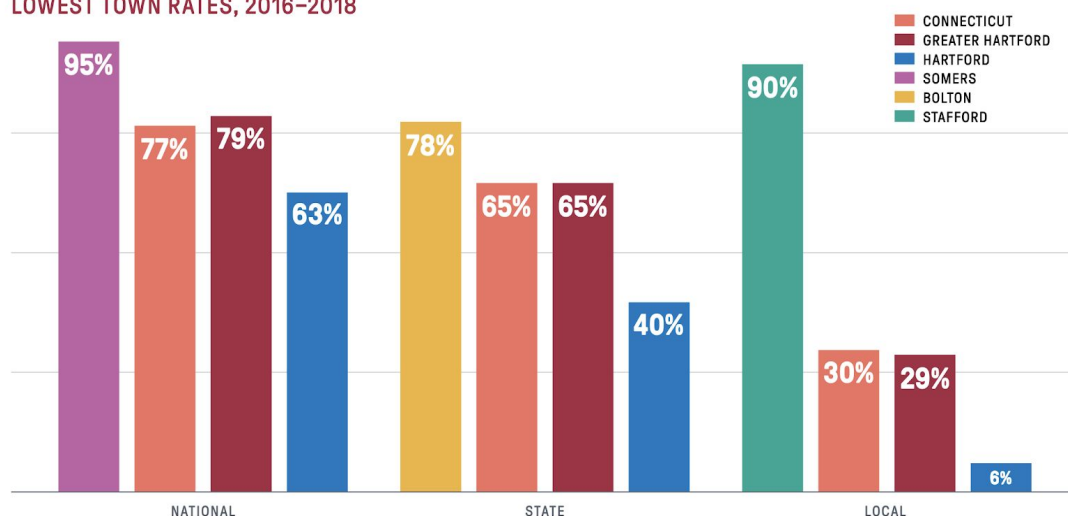
election, 65 percent in the 2018 midterm election, and only 29 percent in the 2017 municipal (local) election. Nationally, turnout in the 2018 midterms was the highest in four decades, reversing a trend of declining interest in midterm elections and likely reflecting the tumultuous political landscape following the 2016 presidential election and vast efforts to encourage voter turnout. Low voter turnout is driven by a range of factors, including a lack of basic information on elections, access

to polling stations and hours of operation, inflexible work schedules, limited transportation, and other barriers that disproportionately affect economically distressed communities and communities of color.

Between 2015 and 2018, Greater Hartford adults’ perceived ability to influence local government decision-making increased substantially—a trend also seen statewide. The share of residents believing they had at least a little influence on local government increased by 8 percentage points—from 64 percent to 72 percent for Greater Hartford (and from 62 percent to 70 percent statewide). This jump may reflect the recent surge in political energy and interest across the nation, and particularly among younger voters. Voter turnout for adults ages 18 to 29 increased a whopping 79 percent between the 2014 and 2018 midterm elections nationwide. The share of Greater Hartford residents ages 18 to 34 who felt they had at least a little influence on local government increased 7 percentage points between 2015 and 2018 to 73 percent—similar to the region’s overall rate.

Voter turnout is high for national and state elections, but much lower in municipal ones

PERCENT OF ELIGIBLE VOTERS WHO VOTED IN ELECTIONS, WITH GREATER HARTFORD HIGHEST AND LOWEST TOWN RATES, 2016–2018



Thought Questions

1. What are some of the different elections that take place in the United States? Do they all take place at the same time?
2. Look at the graph; what are at least three conclusions you can make based on the data on voter turnout?
 - a.
 - b.
 - c.
3. What have the recent voter trends been in Connecticut? For both state and national elections?
4. Why might voters be more inclined to vote in the national elections? How is the attitude about influence on local government decision-making changing?
5. What are some factors that contribute to voters not voting in an election? How can those factors be addressed?
6. How can we use this data to encourage voter turnout?