

# CIVIC ENGAGEMENT ISSUE BRIEF

## Factors that influence voting in Milwaukee

### Background and Data

The [2023-2028 MKE Elevate Community Health Improvement Plan](#) is a community-driven effort convened by the City of Milwaukee Health Department. It has an overarching priority of health and racial equity that includes three goals:

- Increasing household income;
- Raising life expectancy; and
- Increasing civic engagement and knowledge

In order to increase civic engagement, MKE Elevate seeks to increase voting and voter registration and expand knowledge about local and state politics.

This issue brief summarizes themes from voting stories collected by the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee's Center for 21st Century Learning (C21). The brief identifies factors that influence voting in Milwaukee and potential solutions to increase civic engagement.

 **Voter registration rates have decreased in Milwaukee**  
77% in 2014  
68% in 2022

 **Among registered voters, turnout has increased overall but varies greatly by ward**  
66% in 2014  
85% 2024

Scan to see voter turnout by ward



Scan to listen to stories



### Factors that Influence Voting

In the Summer of 2024, C21 interviewed Milwaukee residents to learn about trust or distrust in the U.S. voting system. An analysis of 32 stories from C21's [Story Cart: Trust & The Vote](#) identified common themes and explored barriers and facilitators shaping trust in the U.S. voting system.

Two thirds of participants reported generally being trustful of voting systems. Four interviewees were not asked to rate their trust in voting. Twelve themes surfaced throughout the stories as factors that could influence trust and voting.

The most common factors participants identified include:

Beliefs about importance of voting	Connections to community	Experience with voting & civic activities	Voting accessibility	Civic knowledge & education	Views on candidates & elected officials
"It's extremely important to vote because your voices matter, and if you work together as a group, anything is possible"	"When I go to vote in my neighborhood, in the South side of Milwaukee, the people working the polls are my neighbors, and I trust my neighbors. The people who are voting alongside me are my neighbors.."	"My mom was from Birmingham, AL. The civil rights movement, 16th St Baptist Church, all that was part of our DNA ... and the conversations we had. It was drilled into me that there was a responsibility to go vote. We had all the pictures and pins from marches. I came from a family that's very civically engaged."	"So many people in the city don't have a car. It's interesting seeing the way my own disability impacts the way I vote."	"Honestly, I think it's civics. There's so frequently a loose grasp on civics. People don't know a lot about what voting processes are like"	"I distrust the system because I don't think politicians are very honest"

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### Barriers to Voting

And Resources to Address Them

These issues can make it harder for people to vote and can disproportionately impact people of color, people with lower incomes, and people with disabilities.

Additional barriers include language access challenges and competing work or caregiving responsibilities

#### Voter ID

- [Milwaukee Election Commission](#)
- [Bring it to the Ballot](#)
- [Wisconsin DMV Information](#)

#### Voting Rights and Incarceration

- [Wisconsin Legislative Council brief](#)
- [Sentencing Project brief](#)
- [ACLU Wisconsin](#)

#### Accessibility

- [Rides to the Polls](#)
- [Wisconsin Disability Vote Coalition](#)

#### Access to Accurate Information

- [Vote411.org](#)
- [MyVote.Wi.gov](#)

### Voting and Health

Systemic racism, including voter suppression, creates unequal access to resources and opportunities. These inequities increase exposure to health risks and contribute to poorer physical and mental health outcomes.

[Vot-ER](#) is a nonpartisan, nonprofit organization working to integrate civic engagement into healthcare settings.

In 2024, the Wisconsin Public Health Association passed a resolution affirming that **voting is a social determinant of health.**

### Call to Action

*What Works for Health* identified that **voter registration** and **voter turnout initiatives** are both scientifically supported strategies to increase opportunities for civic participation. Trust and the Vote participants also identified the importance of **community connections and representation** to build trust and voting participation.



#### Voter Registration Initiatives

- Support voter registration drives
- Expand registration sites
- Promote same day voter registration
- Implement Vot-ER in healthcare settings
- Explore Automatic Voter Registration (24 states currently have this, Wisconsin does not)



#### Voter Turnout Initiatives

- Promote early in person voting
- Offer absentee voting with secure dropboxes
- Develop get out the vote campaigns
- Provide multilingual resources on voting eligibility, registration status, where to vote, candidate information, etc.



#### Community Connections and Representation

- Sign up to be a poll worker
- Run for office
- Organize a town hall in your neighborhood
- Attend advocacy days for issues you care about
- Promote voting across the lifespan and intergenerational connections

#### Sources

Voter Registration Data  
[https://law.marquette.edu/assets/community/lubar/posts/MilwaukeeVoterTurnout\\_3-9-2023.html](https://law.marquette.edu/assets/community/lubar/posts/MilwaukeeVoterTurnout_3-9-2023.html)  
Voter Turnout Data  
<https://city.milwaukee.gov/ElectionResults/2014/November-4.htm>  
<https://city.milwaukee.gov/election/ElectionInformation/ElectionResults/OfficialElectionResults>  
Voter Identification Laws and Turnout in the United States  
<https://www.annualreviews.org/content/journals/10.1146/annurev-polisci-051215-022822>  
The Racial Implications of Voter Identification Laws in America  
<https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.1177/1532673X18810012>

What Works for Health  
<https://www.countyhealthrankings.org/strategies-and-solutions/what-works-for-health/strategies>  
MKE Indicators  
<https://experience.arcgis.com/experience/ce3cc3b5969d4a719c5e4ed61744aa83/page/Equity-%26-Access?views=Civic-Engagement>  
WPHA Resolutions: Voting as a Social Determinant of Health  
[https://cdn.ymaws.com/www.wpha.org/resource/resmgr/2024/annual\\_meeting/Voting\\_as\\_a\\_Social\\_Determina.pdf](https://cdn.ymaws.com/www.wpha.org/resource/resmgr/2024/annual_meeting/Voting_as_a_Social_Determina.pdf)  
Accessing the Right to vote Among System-Impacted People  
<https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/full/10.1177/14624745241230199>