The Honorable Senator Jim Carlson
The Honorable Senator Mark Koran
The Honorable Senator Tou Xiong
The Honorable Senator Andrew Lang

The Honorable Representative Mike Freiberg
The Honorable Representative Duane Quam
The Honorable Representative Ginny Klevorn
The Honorable Representative Jim Nash

Dear Senators and Representatives:

Minnesota Session Law 2023, Chapter 62, Section 136, Subd 4 requires:

> The secretary of state must provide an interim report and a final report describing the secretary's work to the chairs and ranking minority members of the legislative committees with jurisdiction over state government finance and elections policy and finance. The reports must include:
> (1) findings related to voter-facing issues, voter engagement and education, and technical aspects of implementing ranked choice voting; and
> (2) draft legislation, if any, to supplement the study's findings.

The Office of the Secretary of State is required to submit an interim report by February 1 and a final report no later than June 30, 2025.

Enclosed you will find the Office's interim report. To complete the first phase of the voting study, the Office contracted with Management Analysis and Development (MAD), a section of Minnesota Management and Budget that provides consulting services for state agencies. In session law, the legislature called for input from a large number of constituencies and MAD performed this outreach by conducting surveys in the spring of 2024 and group discussions of the required groups in the summer and fall of 2024.

Please feel free to contact me with any questions.

Sincerely,

NICOLE FREEMAN
Government Relations Director

cc: Legislative Reference Library

# Voter Engagement, Education, and Improvements

Office of the Secretary of State
December 30, 2024

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## Management Analysis and Development

Management Analysis and Development is Minnesota government's in-house fee-for-service management consulting group. We are in our 40th year helping public managers increase their organizations' effectiveness and efficiency. We provide quality management consultation services to local, regional, state, and federal government agencies and public institutions.

## Alternative Formats

To request a reasonable accommodation and/or alternative format of this document contact us at 651-259-3800, Management.Analysis@state.mn.us, or accessibility.mmb@state.mn.us.

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# Executive summary

In 2023 the Minnesota Legislature passed a law (Laws of Minnesota, 2023 [chapter 62, article 4, section 136](#)) directing the Office of the Secretary of State (OSS) to conduct a study of issues related to voter engagement, education, and improvements to the election system. The legislation called for input from a large number of parties, including election administration officials, Minnesota's ethnic councils, organizations representing LGBTQIA2S+ individuals, individuals with disabilities, new Americans, seniors, people living in poverty, people of color and Indigenous people, Greater Minnesotans, community organizations with interest and experience in voting methods and elections, and members of legislative committees with jurisdiction over state elections. The legislation also directed OSS to provide opportunities for public input and comment, which was gathered through surveys of the groups noted above and their networks, as well as through group discussions with representatives from those groups. OSS asked Management Analysis and Development (MAD), a section of Minnesota Management and Budget that provides consulting services for state agencies, to conduct these surveys and group discussions. The surveys were conducted in the spring of 2024, with group discussions following in the summer and fall.

Most respondents to the voter survey said they were voters, and reported they faced no barriers to voting, though a small number of respondents did report barriers such as accessibility, transportation, and language. Several respondents to open-ended questions acknowledged they do not personally face barriers to voting, but said they understand language, transportation, and accessibility may be significant barriers to other members of the community. It should be noted that respondents were generally white, older, and homeowners.

The largest barrier reported was a lack of information on candidates running for office, especially for local and judicial races. While very few nonvoters responded to the survey, they also indicated that a lack of information on candidates was a significant barrier to voting, and more information on candidates would potentially get them to vote.

Election administrators also pointed to a lack of information on candidates as a significant barrier to voting in their jurisdictions, as well as voters simply not liking the candidates on the ballot. Many also reported community members not knowing there was an election as a barrier to voting and said more outreach about upcoming elections could address that barrier. Election administrators reported voters have trouble understanding instructions for absentee and mail-in voting, and instructions for those two voting methods need to be simplified to help voters navigate the process successfully.

In follow-up group discussions, voters and election administrators reiterated their frustrations with a lack of candidate information. While OSS provides candidate information on sample ballots on their website, many candidates do not provide a link to their website, or the links there are dead or broken, according to some group discussion participants. Respondents to the voter survey and group discussion participants expressed appreciation for the work of the League of Women Voters (LWV) in providing nonpartisan candidate information, but several noted LWV is not necessarily viewed as impartial as it has been in the past.

Combatting misinformation and disinformation around elections is a significant concern for election administrators and voters alike. Both groups said they would like to see more resources devoted to addressing misinformation and disinformation but did not have concrete ideas on how to do that.

Many survey respondents and group discussion participants talked about the ease of voting in Minnesota, with a variety of early voting options, as well as the availability of absentee and mail-in voting options. Many also noted they are proud that Minnesota is always among the top states when it comes to voter turnout. OSS has the opportunity to build on Minnesota's already strong culture of voting in the future. Based on the results of the survey and follow-up conversations with election administrators and voters, MAD offers the following recommendations:

- **More and better candidate information:** OSS should work to educate candidates about the importance of providing information that voters can link to via sample ballots. OSS could explore partnerships with community organizations or other groups to help provide information on candidates and issues, if only to provide funding and background assistance for those efforts. Survey respondents and group discussion participants pointed to states such as California and Colorado that mail voter guides to every household in the state as an example OSS could follow.

- **Education about elections:** OSS should increase education efforts about the election process in Minnesota to ensure voters know elections are happening, and how and where to vote. Many survey respondents and group discussion participants said this education can and should start in schools, before students are even eligible to vote. Education efforts should also address current and potential voters who may be unfamiliar with where they need to go to vote, what is on their ballots, and how to vote via absentee ballot, early in-person voting, and other methods. OSS should take every opportunity to simplify and clarify instructions about voting processes.

- **Transparency and election security:** OSS should expand its efforts to communicate what Minnesota does to ensure safe and secure elections. Many survey and group discussion participants who had served as election judges said that experience helped them see that votes are counted properly and elections in Minnesota are secure. While total transparency may not be possible, many survey respondents and group discussion participants said they believe OSS could do more to explain how the measures used in Minnesota ensure safe and secure elections.

- **Increase accessibility and language access:** While recent changes in legislation have been aimed at expanding language access for voters whose native language is not English, OSS should continue to work to expand those efforts, as well as working to ensure polling places are accessible for voters who have a disability or experience mobility and other issues that may make navigating a polling place difficult.

# Background

The Minnesota Legislature passed a law in 2023 (2023 [Minnesota Session Laws, Chapter 62, Article 4, Section 136](#)) directing the Office of the Secretary of State (OSS) to conduct a study of issues related to voter engagement, education, and improvements to the election system. The legislation called for input from a large number of parties, including election administration officials, Minnesota's ethnic councils, organizations representing LGBTQIA2S+ individuals, individuals with disabilities, new Americans, seniors, people living in poverty, people of color and Indigenous people, Greater Minnesotans, community organizations with interest and experience in voting methods and elections, and members of legislative committees with jurisdiction over state elections. The legislation also directed OSS to provide opportunities for public input and comment.

Minnesotans have a number of options when it comes to voting. The most common is in-person voting at a polling place on election day. If voting in-person on election day is not an option, Minnesotans can vote early in-person; they can request an absentee ballot to be returned through the mail or dropped off in person; or in some rural areas with fewer than 400 registered voters, through mail-in ballots. In mail-only jurisdictions, voters do not have to request a ballot as they would if they chose to vote with an absentee ballot. Survey respondents and group discussion participants answered questions and volunteered responses about all of these voting options.

OSS asked Management Analysis and Development (MAD), a section of Minnesota Management and Budget that provides consulting services for state agencies, to conduct a survey of both voters and election administrators to gather initial public input and comment on what works well for voters in Minnesota, what barriers voters face, and what improvements could be made to the voting process. Following the survey, MAD conducted several group discussions with participants from the groups noted above and their networks to gather additional feedback on their own and their communities' experiences with voting in Minnesota.

# Methodology

## Survey

MAD conducted two surveys in the Spring of 2024, one for election administrators in Minnesota and the other for voters. OSS distributed the survey to election administrators, and MAD sent an open survey link and QR code that directed to the survey to more than 356 organizations representing Minnesota's ethnic councils, organizations representing LGBTQIA2S+ individuals, individuals with disabilities, new Americans, seniors, people living in poverty, people of color and Indigenous people, Greater Minnesotans, community organizations with interest and experience in voting methods and elections, and members of legislative committees with jurisdiction over state elections. Everyone who received the email invitation was encouraged to share the link and/or QR code with their networks. This could include staff, clients, constituents, individuals on their mailing lists, and others. The surveys were open from April 15 through April 26. The election administrator survey was also an open link, and OSS sent it to election administrators in all 87 counties in Minnesota, as well as some local officials. Recipients were encouraged to share with their colleagues. The election administrator survey received

132 responses, and the voter survey received 1,321 responses. Questions for the election administrator survey can be found in Appendix A, and voter survey questions are available in Appendix B.

## Group discussions

Both the voter survey and election administrator survey included a question that asked respondents to provide contact information if they were interested in participating a group discussion. MAD contacted the 20 election administrators who indicated interest, as well as 25 additional election administrators suggested by OSS to ensure jurisdictions of various sizes from around the state were represented, and to ensure participation of representatives from jurisdictions that use ranked choice voting (RCV).

For the voter groups, MAD first contacted more than 90 organizations representing or including populations mentioned in the legislation: Minnesota's ethnic councils, organizations representing LGBTQIA2S+ individuals, individuals with disabilities, new Americans, seniors, people living in poverty, people of color and Indigenous people, Greater Minnesotans, community organizations with interest and experience in voting methods and elections, and members of legislative committees with jurisdiction over state elections. MAD provided a form for interested individuals to indicate their availability for conversations. After contacting those individuals and groups three times and not reaching a suitable number of respondents, MAD opened the opportunity to the more than 450 voter survey respondents who indicated interest in participating in conversations. About 220 individuals from that list received an email with a link to the interest form.

MAD conducted ten group conversations. Two of these were made up of only election administrators, and the remaining eight were representatives of the groups mentioned above, as well as general voters. Sixteen individuals participated in the election administrator discussions, and forty-two individuals participated in the voter discussions. At the conclusion of early group discussions, participants were asked to share the link to the interest form with their networks if they wished to do so. These conversations were conducted in the summer and fall of 2024. The group discussion conversation questions are available in Appendix C, and Appendix D features a list of participating organizations.

# Survey results

While most voters who responded to the survey reported they faced no barriers to voting, a small group of respondents did report barriers such as accessibility, transportation, and language. Several respondents to open-ended questions acknowledged they do not personally face barriers to voting, but said they understand language, transportation, and accessibility may be significant barriers to other members of the community. It should be noted that survey respondents were mostly white, older, homeowners.

The largest barrier voters reported was a lack of information on candidates running for office, especially for local and judicial races. Very few nonvoters responded to the survey, but most of those respondents also said a lack of information on candidates was a significant reason they do not vote, and that more information on candidates would potentially get them to vote.

Election administrators also pointed to a lack of information on candidates as a significant barrier to voting in their jurisdictions, as well as voters simply not liking the candidates on the ballot. Many also reported community members not knowing there was an election as a barrier to voting and said more outreach about upcoming elections could address that barrier. Election administrators reported voters have trouble understanding instructions for absentee and mail-in voting, and instructions for those two voting methods need to be simplified to help voters navigate the process successfully.

# Voter survey responses by group and topic

## Voting frequency and method

For the nearly 99 percent of survey respondents who said they do vote, 83 percent reported they vote in every election, with about 12 percent reporting they vote every two years (11.7 percent). About 3 percent indicated they voted every four years, for presidential elections (3.3 percent), and 2 percent indicated "other."

**Table 1. Voting frequency (n=1279)**

| How often do you vote? | Percent |
|---|---|
| Every election | 83.0% |
| Every two years/governor and statewide elections | 11.7% |
| Every four years/presidential elections | 3.3% |
| Other, please specify | 2.0% |

Asked about their method of voting, respondents who reported voting were allowed to choose more than one option. Nearly 85 percent responded that they vote in person on election day (84.1 percent)., and 41 percent said they vote early in person, 36.7 percent vote by absentee ballot; 4.5 percent vote by mail in a vote-by-mail-only jurisdiction, and less than 1 percent report voting via military or overseas ballot (0.5 percent).

**Table 2. Voting method (multiple selections allowed) (n=1279)**

| How do you vote? | Percent |
|---|---|
| In-person on Election Day | 84.1% |
| Absentee ballot (mailed in) | 36.7% |
| Early in-person | 41.1% |
| Mail (in a vote-by-mail-only jurisdiction) | 4.5% |
| Military/overseas voting | 0.5% |

## Barriers to voting

The survey asked voters about barriers they face when they vote, and the majority (59.7 percent) reported facing no barriers. Just more than 30 percent reported they lack information on candidates (30.1 percent). About 8 percent said they face timing or schedule issues as a barrier (8.4 percent), and 5.9 percent reported they did not know there was an election. Figure 1 below includes the remaining breakdown of barriers, including transportation to and from their polling place (2.1 percent), not enough information on how to vote (1.9

percent), accessibility at their polling place (1.9 percent), not knowing where to vote (1.6 percent), and language barriers (0.8 percent). Respondents who chose "other" (9.2 percent) had the opportunity to provide additional feedback through an open-ended response. Those responses are summarized below the figure.

**Figure 1. What barriers do you face when you vote? (Select all that apply) (n=1267)**
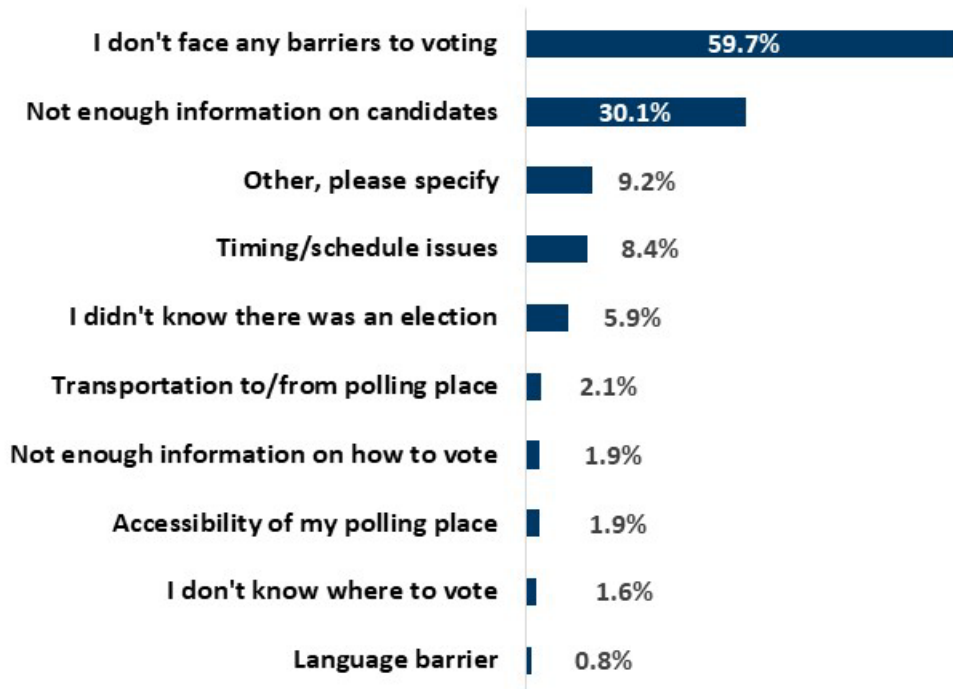


The survey collected 169 open-ended responses related to barriers in voting. Of those responses, nearly one-third named a lack of information as a barrier to voting, especially information on local candidates and judges. Others also wanted more trustworthy, nonpartisan information on candidates. Several wanted more information on when, where, and how to vote, particularly for voting absentee or by mail.

Around 10 percent of respondents commented on absentee and mail-in voting. Several said mail-in voting is helpful and critical to ensuring voting accessibility for everyone. One respondent said, "I am disabled and use a walker. Voting by mail is essential for me." At the same time, a few others described barriers in the absentee balloting process, such as the process being confusing, not having enough clear information, and staff being unhelpful when there were questions or complications.

Around 8 percent of respondents noted barriers related to their polling place, such as frustrations at the frequency in which their polling places have changed, long lines at their polling place, and feeling uncomfortable voting in a place of worship.

Other open-ended responses related to barriers in voting included comments regarding outreach and inclusion, access to reliable information, and other barriers such as being a felon. A few expressed support for ranked

choice voting (RCV), stating it would improve candidate options and voting preferences. A few also expressed support for requiring an ID to vote and shared concerns related to election transparency and security, stating their lack of confidence in vote tabulations and legal voting. Several respondents expressed no barriers to voting.

## Improvements to voting experience

When asked to choose one or more options for what would make their voting experience better, more than two-thirds of respondents wanted to have better information on the candidates and/or the issues (67.8 percent). About 13 percent said that friendly, helpful poll workers (13.3 percent) would improve their experience. Nearly 6 percent of respondents said more or better transportation options to and from their polling place would improve their experience (5.7 percent), and the same amount said they would like to see better signage on where to go at their polling place. Figure 2 includes the remaining items respondents said would improve their voting experience, including easier-to-follow voting instructions at their polling place (4.6 percent), improved accessibility at their polling place (4 percent), and more translated materials, translators, or interpreters at their polling place (3.6 percent). Twenty-nine percent of respondents chose "other" and gave additional feedback in an open-ended response. Those responses are summarized below the figure.

**Figure 2. What would make your voting experience better? (Select all that apply) (n=1051)**
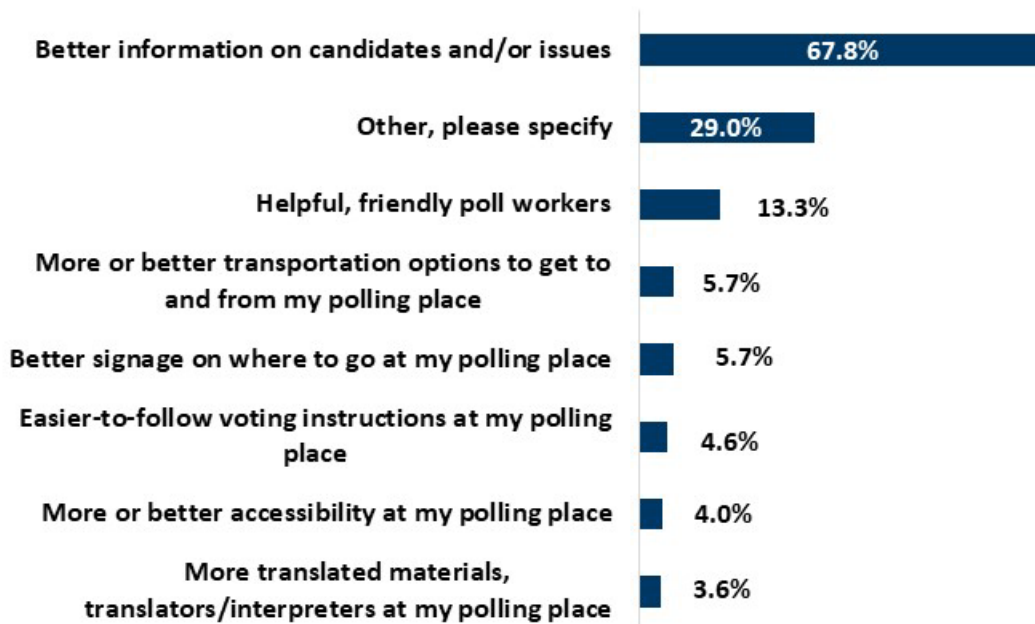


The survey collected 426 open-ended responses answering the question "what would make your voting experience better?" Nearly 20 percent of those respondents reported general satisfaction with their voting experience said nothing would make their experience better.

Around 10 percent of survey respondents commented on their voting options. Of those, nearly 40 percent wanted to expand absentee voting, with many stating they would like the ability to vote by mail in every election without having to apply every year. A few said they would like more information about how to vote absentee, while several others wanted to only allow for in-person voting. Several respondents wanted other voting methods such as voting online, by phone, or having one central voting location in each city.

Around 8 percent of commenters wrote in support of requiring voters to show a drivers' license or photo ID when voting (voter ID).

Around 7 percent of commenters expressed a desire for more information on candidates, with a third of them specifically wanting more information and expressing difficulty finding information on judicial candidates. Another third of these commenters thought OSS should provide more information on candidates, such as listing information on ballots, on election administration websites, or on pamphlets sent with absentee ballots. Others indicated they want more accurate and impartial information.

About 6 percent of commenters discussed the timing of elections. Nearly one-third of these wanted election day to be a federal holiday. As one respondent said, "when I was working, getting to the polls to vote was challenging - either go before or after work. Leaving work in the middle of the day was so inconvenient as to make it impossible. Make it a holiday!" Nearly another third of this group wanted voting to occur only on election day, with a few expressing that only in-person voting should be allowed. At the same time, nearly another third called for expanding voting times to occur at later hours and on weekends. One person wanted to change the timing of the primary from August to June.

About 5 percent of respondents who made comments talked about election security and transparency. A third of those respondents made general comments about wanting to safeguard the integrity of elections, increasing election security, and eliminating voter fraud. Another third of these respondents called for verifying ballots and tabulations by hand counting; ending the use of electronic sign-in and vote-counting devices; and having vote receipts. Several respondents said they wanted to ensure only eligible voters and US citizens were voting, and a few others called for more secure drop boxes, and elimination of same-day registration, ballot harvesting, and RCV.

Another 5 percent of open-ended responses did not fit into any category. Some of those responses included wanting larger print on ballots, limiting the number of candidates who can run for a specific office, improving access for all people, banning political advertising, and wanting better candidates.

Close to 5 percent of comments related to RCV. Nearly all of those comments were in support of RCV as a way to make their voting experience better. One respondent said, "I live in Minneapolis and like ranking my options in local elections because I feel I have more power over my vote, but we can't rank candidates in state and presidential elections, and I wish we could." Three of those responses were against using RCV.

About 3 percent of commenters said reducing barriers would improve their voting experience With about a third each wanting more interpreters at polling locations and translated materials for those whose native language is not English, more transportation options for those who cannot drive or get to the polls, and other general accessibility improvements like having larger print, not being able to stand in line, and ensuring greater accessibility for those who have disabilities, language barriers, and transportation needs.

About 2 percent of commenters said better communication would improve their voting experience, ranging from earlier notification about an upcoming election, easier to access information, and greater outreach to young voters.

Several commenters mentioned poll workers, ranging between positive and negative sentiments.

## Information on voting and candidates

The survey asked respondents where they get information about voting, and they were free to select more than one option. The largest percentage of respondents, 67.7 percent, said they get information about voting from local news, including newspapers, radio, and TV. About 62 percent said they get information from candidates (61.7 percent). National news rounded out the top three sources of information about voting with 56.1 percent of respondents reporting they get information about voting from national newspaper, radio, and television sources. More than half (52.5 percent) said they get information on voting from OSS, and slightly less than half (49.4 percent) get that information from political parties. Figure 3 includes the remaining sources of information about voting, with 39.5 percent getting information from family and friends, 39.1 percent from local governments, 34.1 percent from community organizations, 32.5 percent from social media, 5.7 percent from church and 3 percent from school. The 10 percent of "other" responses included sources such as the League of Women Voters, candidate forums, trusted websites and blogs, candidate forums, and their own research conducted through a variety of sources.

**Figure 3. Where do you get information about voting? (Select all that apply) (n=1252)**
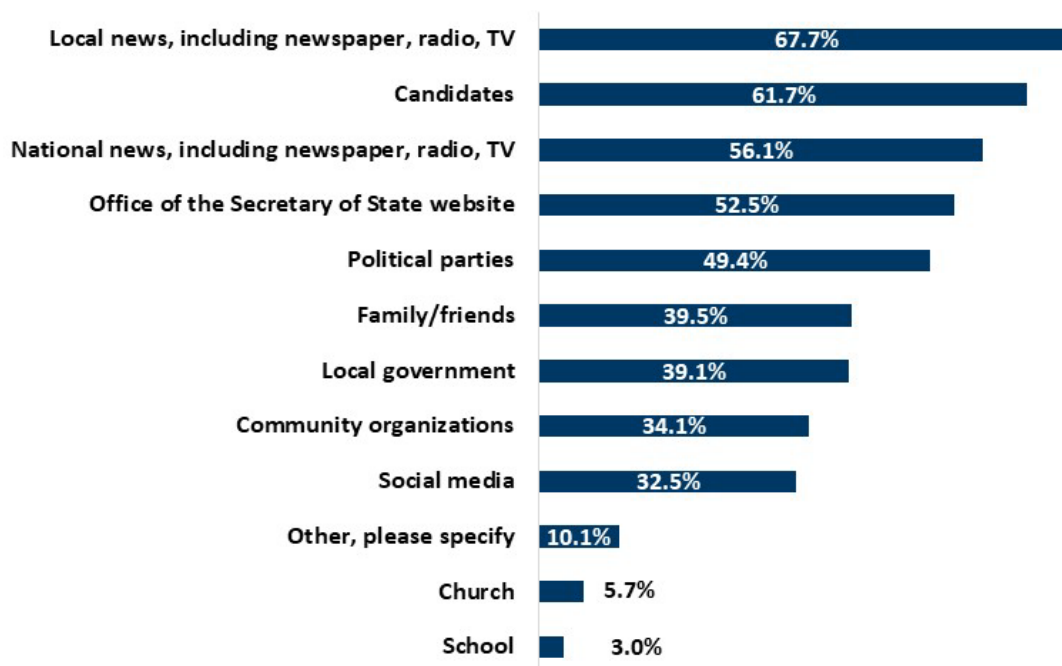
# Ranked choice voting

The majority of respondents (56.8 percent) reported their jurisdiction does not use RCV, with 22 percent reporting their jurisdiction does use RCV. Nearly as many respondents, 21.2 percent, reported not knowing whether their jurisdiction uses RCV or not. RCV is used in just five cities in Minnesota: Minneapolis, St. Paul, St. Louis Park, Bloomington, and Minnetonka.[1] .

**Figure 4. Does your jurisdiction use Ranked Choice Voting? (n=1266)**
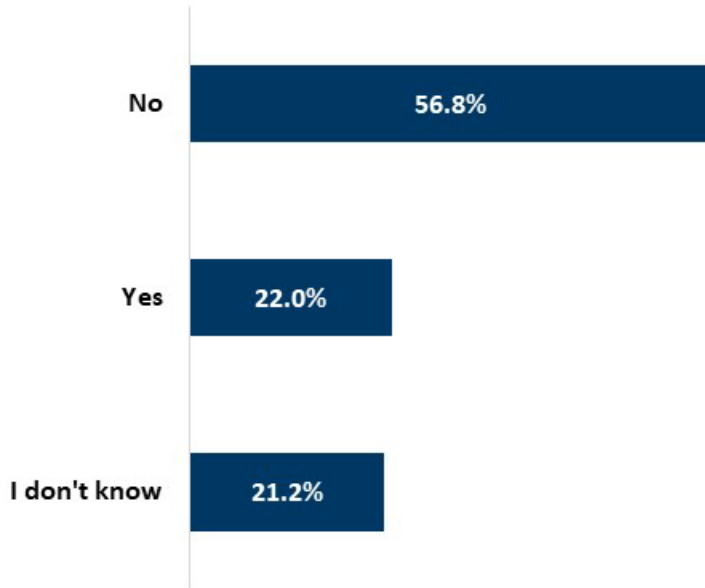


# Final voter thoughts

## Positive experiences

More than 1,000 respondents responded to a final open-ended question with additional feedback on a wide variety of topics, with the largest group of about 20 percent (205 respondents) submitting generally positive comments about voting in Minnesota.

These respondents said they appreciate that it is easy, simple, and straightforward to vote in Minnesota. Several people noted that while they do find voting in Minnesota easy, they understood it may not be the case for all voters, especially those facing language, accessibility, and transportation barriers. Some quotes from respondents include:

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[1] "Minnesota's RCV Experience," *FairVote Minnesota*, undated, accessed November 26, 2024, https://fairvotemn.org/progress/

- "Minnesota does an outstanding job of making it easy to vote. Election officials at the local, county, and state level are friendly and helpful. They truly believe in voting access for everyone."
- "It is a good experience and feel that all the hype for needed changes is not necessary and perhaps not founded on honest motives."
- "I feel lucky to live in Minnesota where voting is made easier, not harder, and the voting experience is beautifully uneventful."
- "MN has done a great job of ensuring that our elections are free and fair. I have never had an issue with voting, but also recognize my privilege in saying that. Many other states are doing things to make it harder for people to vote, while MN is working to make it easier. This is one of many reasons that I am proud to live here! Voting is a basic civic responsibility...it should NOT be a burden or a challenge. I will never vote for a single candidate that EVER suggests anything that will make it more difficult to vote."

Many respondents talked about how they perceive Minnesota's election systems to be trustworthy, including a few who have lived and voted in other states, and others who have worked as election judges and experienced that part of the process first-hand.

- "We are fortunate to have an outstanding Secretary of State in Minnesota's Steve Simon. He is a great defender of voting rights and an able guardian of the mechanics which make voting in Minnesota practical and possible."
- "I feel very confident in the secure, transparent, honest, and accurate voting process and administration in [Minnesota]."
- "I think Minnesota is a model state for fair, open and transparent voting laws and procedures."
- "Minnesota elections are very safe, secure and of the highest integrity."
- "I think Minnesota has, perhaps, the best and fairest system for conducting elections in the US."

Another group talked about the variety of voting options available in Minnesota, including early voting, mail-in voting, and absentee voting.

- "I like mail in ballots! My mother was handicapped and it was so nice to have a mail in ballot for her. With mail in ballots I can research each candidate and then vote. It gives me time to research each candidate. Voting in person I don't have time to research each candidate and then remember each decision I had made."
- "I'm proud that our state offers a variety of options for voting. Keep up the good work Minnesota!"
- "I am happy with Minnesota's approach to voting -- there are lots of options for how and when to vote, and there is encouragement to do so. I have also been an election judge, which reinforced my confidence in our voting system. I go back and forth to Iowa for work (which also makes me appreciate our absentee and early voting options), and I prefer Minnesota's policies which make voting accessible and convey that everyone's vote matters. When I moved to [Minnesota] over 20 years ago, I was surprised at how low-tech the system was (paper ballots, no voting machines), compared to voting in several large East Coast cities. After various election complications and controversies nationally since I moved here, I now think that Minnesota has a good balance of low tech (paper ballots that provide a record) and high tech (poll pads). One suggestion: I wondered if we need so many early in-person voting days for primaries, since the number of voters is lower. On the other hand, this year may not predictive of voter turnout for years when there is more competition among the major party candidates."

Several respondents specifically mentioned being proud to vote in Minnesota, and that they appreciate the good work of elections staff at all levels. They also said they appreciate the trustworthy, safe, easy, and accessible voting process.

- "I'm proud of our state's efforts to Get Out the Vote. I'm fairly certain that citizens feel safe."
- "I am proud of Minnesota's trustworthy election system."
- "I think we have a safe and accessible voting process. Workers at the polls are well trained to be helpful."
- "I'm proud that Minnesota has such good voter turnout."
- "I am very happy with how elections are managed by the state and local governments. I am proud of that."

Several respondents said their experience interacting with or serving as election judges has informed their positive view of elections in Minnesota.

- "I am proud of Minnesota's trustworthy election system. I was an election judge for the first time this spring and it was a wonderful experience. So many dedicated and knowledgeable election workers!"
- "Minnesota does an outstanding job of making it easy to vote. Election officials at the local, county, and state level are friendly and helpful. They truly believe in voting access for everyone."
- "I'm proud to live in a state where people vote and feel it's fair. The poll workers always appear extremely conscientious."
- "We have got an excellent system of election judges and it drives me crazy when people try to depict our elections as crooked. There could be things that need change, but as an election judge and sometimes auditor of recounts and regular vote checks, I think our system works well."

Other positive experiences respondents mentioned included appreciation for same-day registration and easy access to voting, as well as Minnesota's high rate of voter turnout.

## Ranked choice voting

Nearly 14 percent of the open-ended respondents (139 respondents) had thoughts on RCV, with most (115 respondents) in favor of RCV. Those who would like to see RCV expanded in Minnesota believe it brings more candidates to an election, especially more diverse candidates. They see it as an opportunity to vote for the candidates they truly want to vote for, and not necessarily the candidate they believe will win.

- "Ranked choice voting would improve the voting experience substantially, through more diverse candidates and less divisiveness. Please do all you can to implement ranked choice voting statewide."
- "I want Ranked Choice Voting so I can vote for who I really want."
- "Implement RCV and open nonpartisan primaries so I have choices to vote for and my vote has value."
- "I am a huge supporter of Ranked Choice Voting. We must change the current system to allow 3rd party options as well as focus on the issues over rhetoric."

Respondents in favor of RCV believe the process introduced more civility into political campaigns. They perceive more focus on issues, less negativity, and improved discourse.

Those respondents who do not want to see RCV expanded (23 respondents) cited a lack of trust in the way votes are allocated and counted, a belief that RCV on its face is fraudulent, and that it is difficult for voters to understand.

## Transparency and election security

Ten percent of respondents (105 individuals) addressed transparency and election security in their open-ended responses. Many of them talked about voting options in Minnesota, some who perceived the wide variety of voting options in Minnesota as a positive, while many others disagreed. These respondents said they would like to see limits on absentee and mail-in voting (many seemed to use these two voting types interchangeably instead of seeing them as two separate methods), limits to same-day registration, and limits to early voting, up to only allowing voting in-person on election day.

- "Stop any reason mail in ballots and go back to ballots by a specific reason, such as out of the area, in hospital, and other legitimate reasons. And use provisional ballots for ALL same day registrations on election day."
- "Mail in ballots and ranked choice voting appear to be fraudulent. I would like to see voter ID with verified citizenship."
- "Voters need to go to the polls on Election Day or vote absentee if they are out of town. No general mail in ballots! Mail in ballots created too many opportunities for fraud."

Many respondents who addressed transparency and election security said they want paper ballots (which Minnesota uses), hand counting of ballots, and to eliminate the use of machines and computers in voting and ballot counting.

- "All voting should be by paper ballet only. All ballots to be tabulated by hand counting and machines with no modem."
- "Lack of transparency is troubling. Especially when all the use of computers and transmitting results over the internet. It is my understanding state law prohibits the use of modems or basically using the internet yet it is part of the current process. Makes one feel like the voting is being manipulated and state or county agencies Don't need to follow the law. Besides knowing the security of the systems could be tapped into at any time by someone wanting to manipulate results. No need to make it easy to not be totally accurate/protect the honestly of the election) regardless of what side anyone is on."
- "Get rid of voting machines. The manufacturers of them cannot be trusted. Ask "We the People" to help out doing the counts on elections."
- "Paper ballots. Too easy for fraud with computers"
- "I want [Minnesota] to move to full paper ballot processing."

Several respondents expressed concerns about voter eligibility. They perceive a lack of controls that would keep ineligible people from voting, including noncitizens and incarcerated people. Many of these respondents also expressed a desire for Minnesota to require voter identification.

- "I believe only legal citizens of this country should be able to vote. I believe you should you have to produce a valid ID in order to vote."

- "I am concerned that people are voting that should not be because there are too many ways to cheat the system including not having to show an I.D. of some sort."
- "Get ID for every person before they vote. Prisoners should not be able to vote until time is served. Illegal aliens should not vote until they become citizens of our country. Tighten up absentee ballots."
- "Illegals and felons should not be allowed to vote under any circumstance. Should only have day of election, in person and paper ballot voting with reasonable exceptions for military and out of state at time of election people."

Addressing misinformation and disinformation was an area of concern for several respondents. They described a need for more education to combat this misinformation and disinformation and parties using concerns about misinformation and disinformation to make it more difficult for Minnesotans to vote.

- "I'm concerned about the accuracy of social media and how to verify trusted sources."
- "It is disheartening and discouraging to hear people, including my own legislators, use "election integrity" as a code for restricting peoples' right to vote, by suggesting, without evidence there are problems with elections. At a minimum, people who allege "fraud" or take up the time of county election officials with specious information requests and undocumented complaints, should be fined if they persist without documentation. Their constant calls for info from county election officials takes time and taxpayer dollars to respond to. That's a burden they should bear, not the taxpayer."
- "I am concerned about so-called "election fraud" becoming an excuse for members of one party to make it more difficult for others to vote. I do not like the idea of people coming to the polls to intimidate or challenge others' right to vote."

Several respondents also expressed concerns specifically about cheating in elections. As noted above, a few respondents see many of Minnesota's expanded voting options as ripe for cheating, especially with mail-in ballots (which could include absentee ballots, as several respondents appear to use the terms interchangeably). A few mentioned personal anecdotes of witnessing cheating, including seeing the names of minors on voter rolls, and people using their dead family members' names to vote.

- "Voters are very apt to not vote because they think the elections are crooked. This has happened after mail in ballots became popular. I am a city clerk, also an election judge, and in rural MN I think elections are fair and just. I do not think it could ever be fair and just in a big city or county that except mail in ballots. MY opinion, there is no way you can be assured that all of your mailed in ballots are true and correct in a heavily populated area. Our whole County only has 5000 plus people and we, as election judges, know everyone personally. We need voter ID and in person voting before people will trust the system."
- "Have seen minors names listed as registered voters."
- "I have been very disappointed in the recent law changes and the ones currently being discussed which are removing any form of election integrity to our voting system in [Minnesota]. Elections should be performed, led, counted, etc. at the local city/municipality level without interference from the State."
- "I believe that the current voting committees give more attention/weight to issues that effect a very small minority of voters to supposedly make things more fair for all but also gives more opportunities to commit voter fraud."

Several respondents had positive perceptions of transparency and security in Minnesota's elections, as well.

- "I believe Minnesota's elections are fair and secure, but better voter education is needed about why that is true."
- "I think that voting in MN is the most organized and secure in the nation; that's why we have consistently high turnout on election day. Also, having the ability to vote absentee makes my life easier as I don't have to worry about being in town for election days."
- "I am impressed by all the security and clarity surrounding voting in [Minnesota]."
- "I wish the general public was more aware of the level of security—at every level in Minnesota—to ensure the safety and integrity of our elections. The detail involved at every step is simply astonishing."
- "I feel fortunate to live in a state with clean government and clearly accurate and ethical voting processes. Citizens of Minnesota stand up for their right to vote and I trust the process that counts them. Keep up the good work!"

## Voting methods

Fewer than 8 percent of respondents (76 individuals) provided additional feedback on Minnesota's voting methods. As noted previously, it seemed that several respondents used the terms "mail-in voting" and "absentee voting" interchangeably, especially using the term mail-in voting to stand in for absentee voting. The summary below will address them separately, based on the term respondents used.

Many commenters would like to see mail-in voting limited in Minnesota, though a few advocated for its expansion in Minnesota, similar to states like Washington, where all voters are mailed a ballot and do not need to request one.

- "I would like to see Minnesota adopt mail in voting (such as in Washington state) and mailing a voter guide to all voters (like California or Washington state does) to help voters know who is on the ballot."
- "Have a ballot mailed to everyone in Minnesota. Make voting as easy as possible."
- "My vote is important to me and I think it should be in person with a minority of the votes cast to be absent tee. All this mail in ballots only causes mistrust and increases the opportunity for miss use. Voter ID should be the law of the land."
- "Mail-in voting is very convenient and I hope it continues being available."
- "Mail in ballots are a farse and are subject to fraud. Voting is an important right for all LEGAL AMERICANS, it is one day out of the year. Everyone knows when it is, so should be able to get to the ballot box in person. Absentee ballots only. Make it a holiday so people can get to the polls. If anything, extend it to 2-3 days IN PERSON. GET RID OF MAIL IN BALLOTS! MORE FRAUD WASTE AND ABUSE."

Respondents who talked about absentee ballots generally appreciate the option or would like to see it made easier, but a few said they would like to see it used less.

- "Would appreciate no witness signature required on Absentee Ballots voting."
- "We need to make voting automatic. If I've voted absentee before, please send me a ballot before and not require me to plan to get to the polls or request a ballot to be mailed to me."
- "We should absolutely require ID and in-person voting, with the exception of absentee voting only when truly absent or due to disability not allowing physical in-person voting."

Respondents were split on early voting options in Minnesota.; Several would like to see them scaled back, while others want to see those options expanded and made easier.

- "I would also like to see easier early voting--more sites, less paperwork."
- "I appreciate being able to vote early and that we can track our ballots to be sure of safe arrival. Minnesota does a great job with elections! No crazy long lines and a variety of options for voting. I wish all states would do the same."
- "One day, in person voting. 45 days is ridiculous. People could literally vote before they move out of state."
- "Voters have 46 days to vote via mail or in-person. Why have polling places on Election Day? Waste of money and resources."
- "In person voting only, on election day only is my vote. If a person can't get to the polls one day out of the year, that's on the person - their choice. Absentee ballots only. Mail in voting is a joke and not safe."

Several respondents talked specifically about how Minnesota's wide variety of voting options are important to them and make it easier for citizens to vote.

- "Please continue to offer mail in/absentee voting; it works best with my work schedule. More advertising of when it's available would be helpful."
- "Grateful for our accessible voting laws and that a driver's license isn't required. Need automatic absentee mailing system so that voters don't have to fill out an absentee application for every election."
- "Universal mail-in ballots would be helpful, although I personally enjoy going to vote."
- "In person early voting has been very helpful for me to vote. And being able to register same day is also very important."
- "I'm proud that our state offers a variety of options for voting."

## Voter ID

Another group of respondents (7.6 percent) provided thoughts about voter ID. Most expressed a desire for the use of voter ID in Minnesota. They believe it will increase election security and keep ineligible people from voting. A few of these respondents, however, said they appreciate that voters do not need ID to be able to vote in Minnesota.

## Other issues

- **Reducing barriers:** Around 5 percent of commenters (55 individuals) talked about the need to reduce barriers to voting in Minnesota. They noted that a lack of transportation or transportation options can be barriers to voting for rural voters and voters with a disability, especially. They expressed concern about accessibility for voters who have a disability, as well as general barriers that could lead to potential voters being disenfranchised. A few respondents wanted to see more election judges recruited from diverse communities in Minnesota. Other concerns about barriers to voting in Minnesota include language barriers and not enough education for young voters, especially.

- **Election judges and polling place staff:** Another 5 percent of respondents (53 individuals) mentioned election judges and polling place staff in their open-ended responses. They see a need for more diversity among election judges, to make more voters feel welcome. A few respondents who had served as election judges expressed concerns about their fellow election judges expressing openly partisan views while working at their polling place. Other respondents expressed generally positive or generally negative views of the election judges they encounter.
- **More information:** Nearly 5 percent of commenters talked about a need for more information about elections and voting in Minnesota (45 respondents). Several said there is a need for more information on upcoming elections and how and where to vote. Several also expressed a desire for more information on candidates.

## Demographics

More than 40 percent of survey respondents (41.7 percent) were 66 years old or older. The next largest group was half that size, with those 56-65 years old making up 20.4 percent of respondents followed by 46–55-year-olds with 13.5 percent of responses, and 36–45-year-olds making up 12.2 percent of respondents. Around 10 percent of respondents fell into the 26-35 (6.7 percent) and 18-25 (3.3 percent) age brackets.

**Figure 5. Respondent age (n=1229)**
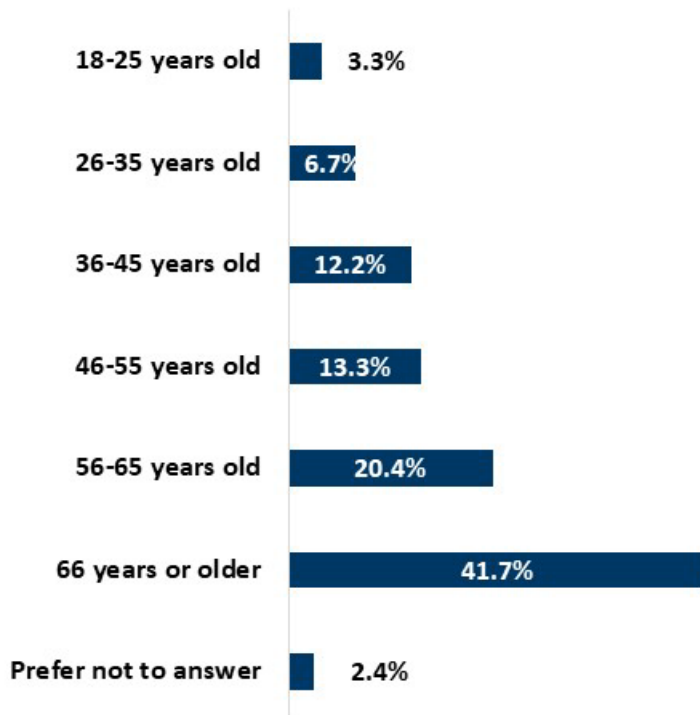


The majority of respondents (63.8 percent) identified as women, with 30.5 percent identifying as men. Figure 6 below shows the remaining breakdown, with those preferring not to answer representing 4.3 percent of

responses, cisgender 3.8 percent, nonbinary 1.8 percent, those preferring to self-describe 1.6 percent, and 0.9 percent identified as transgender.

**Figure 6. Respondent gender identity (Select all that apply) (n=1221)**
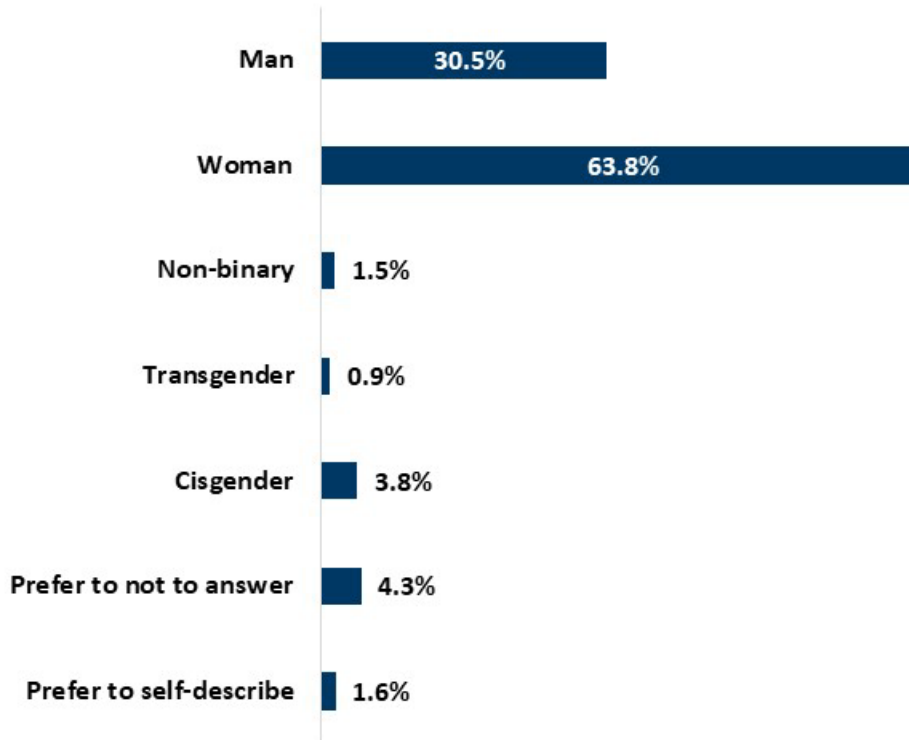


Most survey respondents (83.9 percent) identified as white, with those who preferred not to answer making up the next-largest group (6.7 percent). Other groups had 4 percent or fewer responses, as shown in Figure 7.
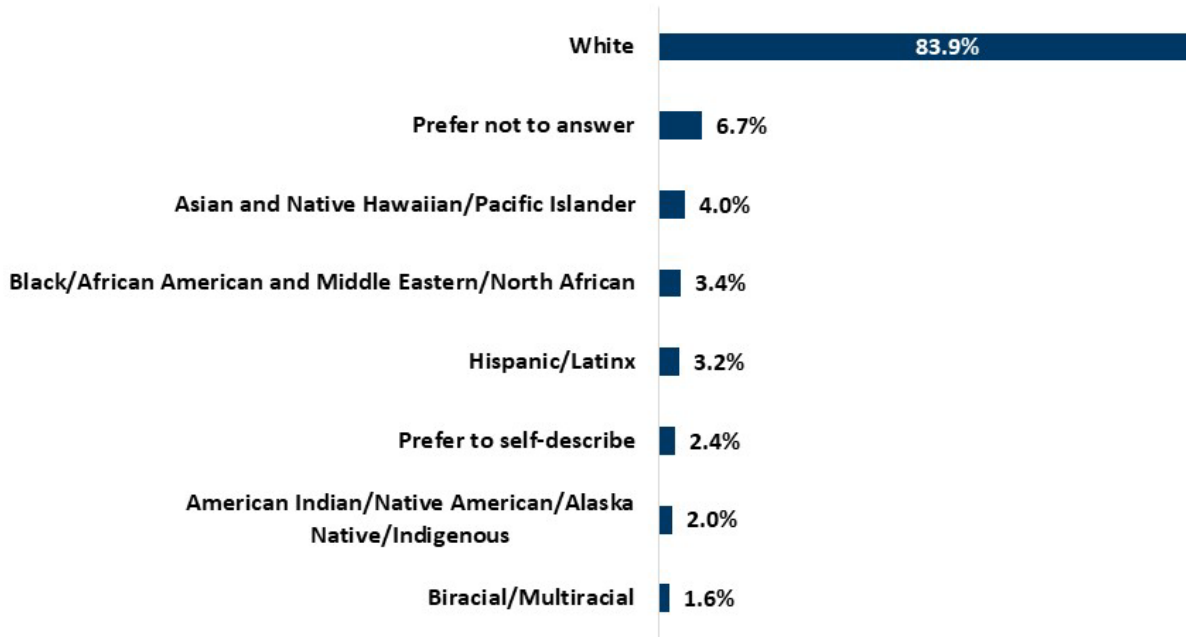
**Figure 7. Respondent racial/ethnic identity (n=1220)**

| Category | Percent |
|---|---|
| White | 83.9% |
| Prefer not to answer | 6.7% |
| Asian and Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander | 4.0% |
| Black/African American and Middle Eastern/North African | 3.4% |
| Hispanic/Latinx | 3.2% |
| Prefer to self-describe | 2.4% |
| American Indian/Native American/Alaska Native/Indigenous | 2.0% |
| Biracial/Multiracial | 1.6% |

Figure 8 shows that more than 80 percent of respondents (83.2 percent) reported they owned their home, 13.2 percent reported renting, and nearly one-third reported a living situation other than owning or renting.

**Figure 8. Home ownership and renting (n=1217)**

| Category | Percent |
|---|---|
| Own | 83.2% |
| Rent | 13.2% |
| Other, please specify | 32.6% |
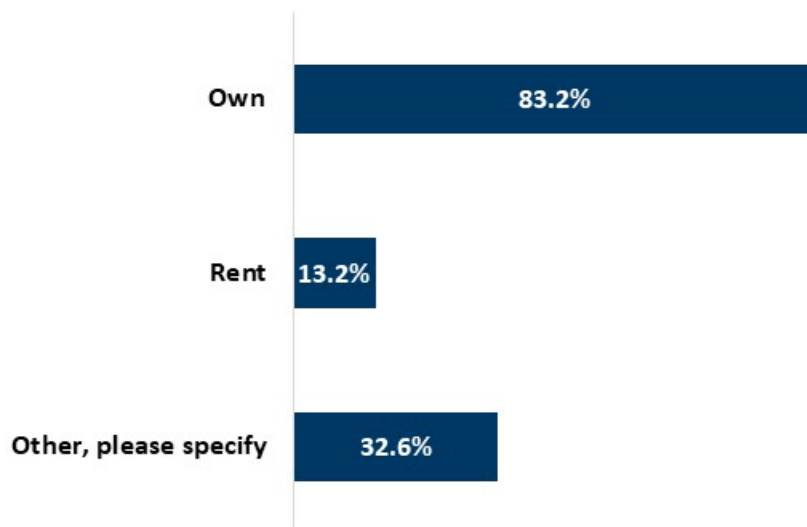
# Nonvoters

Just 1.2 percent of survey respondents reported they did not vote. Figure 9 below shows the reasons respondents reported for not voting, and respondents could choose more than one reason. Nearly 46 percent said they lack information on the candidates (45.5 percent), which is a topic that came up elsewhere in the survey and in group discussions. More than one-third of respondents (36.4 percent) reported they do not know where to vote, and another 36.4 percent said that they do not support any of the candidates. More than one-fourth (27.3 percent) reported not voting because they do not trust the system. (Figure 9)

**Figure 9. Reasons for not voting (Select all that apply) (n=16)**
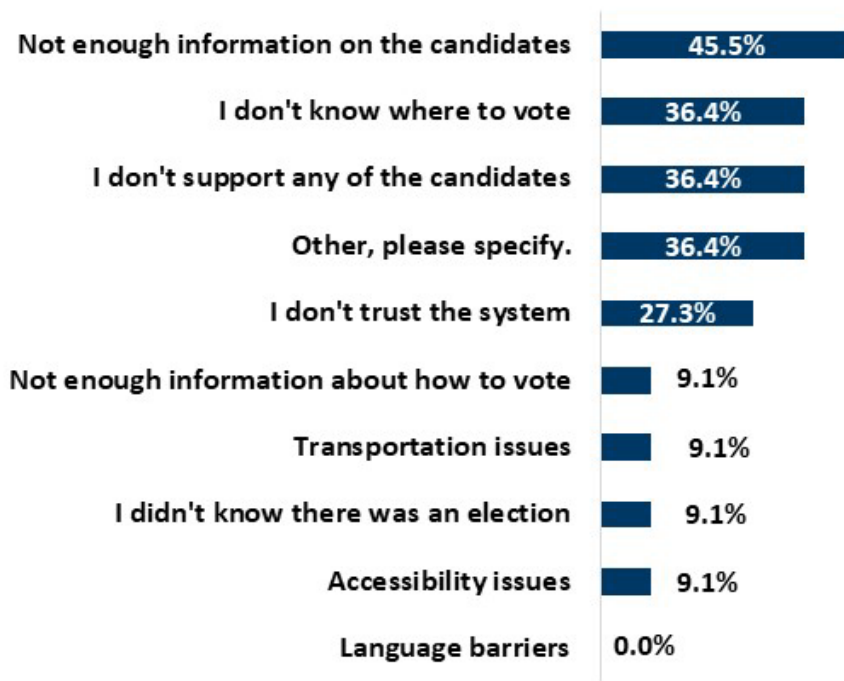


The survey asked respondents who reported not voting what would get them to change their mind about voting. Figure 10 below shows the breakdown of options (respondents could choose multiple options). About 78 percent said more information on candidates and issues could get them to vote (77.8 percent). Two-thirds of respondents said they would vote if there were different candidates (66.7 percent). Nearly 56 percent reported they would vote if they had more or easier-to-access information on where to vote (55.6 percent). More or better transportation options to and from, and accessibility at polling places would get about 22 percent of respondents to vote (22.2 percent).

**Figure 10. What would get you to change your mind about voting (Select all that apply) (n=9)**
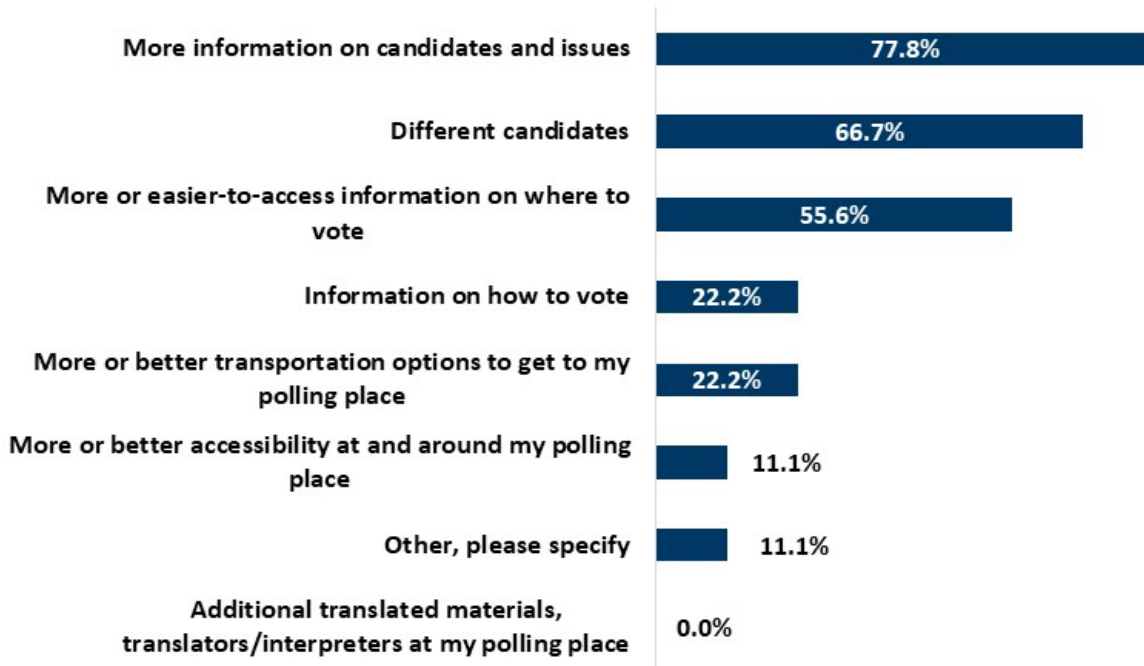


# Election administrators survey

Election administrators from each county in Minnesota received the survey, as well as elections officials from cities, townships, and school districts around the state. From this group, 136 people responded to the survey.

## Barriers to voting

When asked what they perceived to be the biggest barriers facing voters in their communities, 48.8 percent of election administrators reported there is not enough information on candidates, which voters also reported was a significant barrier. Election administrators and voters repeated this issue in group discussions, as well.

Nearly 43 percent of election administrators (42.9 percent) said not knowing there was an election was another significant barrier for voters in the community. The next largest group of responses was voters not knowing where to vote, with 26.2 percent of respondents choosing that option. Figure 11 includes the remaining responses, with 14.3 percent reporting transportation as a barrier, followed by not enough information on how to vote (8.3 percent), timing and schedule (8.3 percent), accessibility (7.1 percent), and language barriers (6 percent).

**Figure 11. What are the biggest barriers facing voters in your community? (Select all that apply) (n=84)**
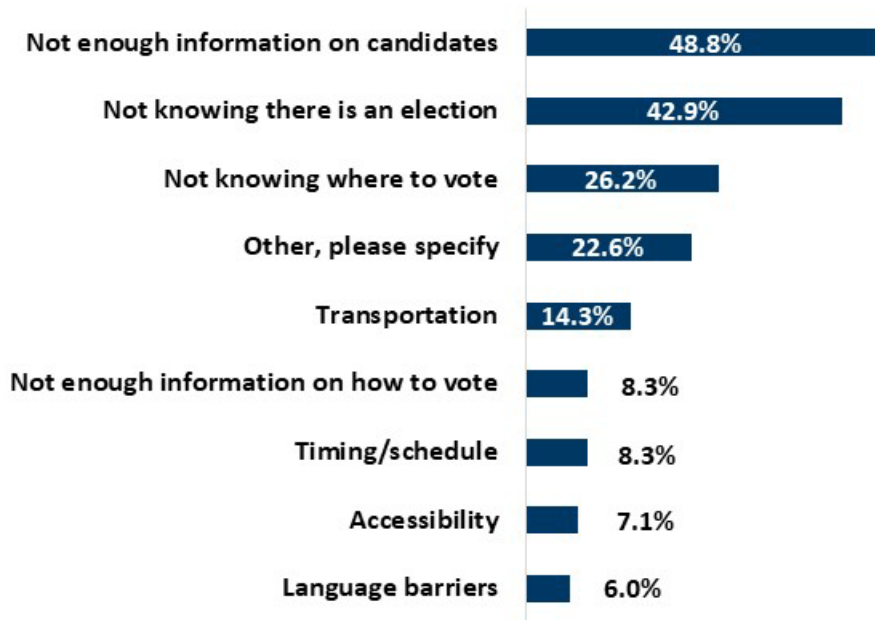


Nearly one-quarter of respondents (22.6 percent) provided additional responses to the "other" option, including a lack of public education and outreach, voters feeling their votes do not matter, difficulty recruiting staff and election judges, misinformation, and voter confusion.

## Improvements to the system

Election administrators were asked to identify things that could be improved in the voting system to better serve voters. Nearly 60 percent wanted more nonpartisan information on candidates or ballot questions (59.3 percent), with 43.2 percent indicating additional outreach on how to vote prior to the election. Figure 12 includes the remaining options, with 12.3 percent of respondents saying that allowing RCV, and 8.6 percent each saying additional language assistance in a polling place and more options to vote prior to the election could improve the system.

**Figure 12. What ways could the voting system be improved to better serve voters? (Select all that apply) (n=81)**
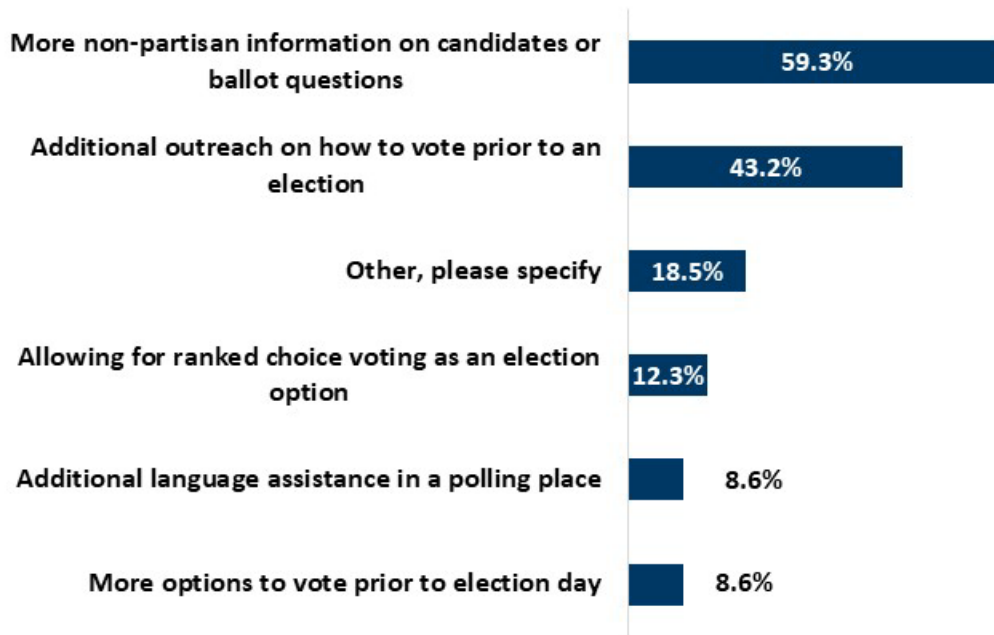


Respondents provided additional improvements they would like to see through the "other" response. More than 18 percent of respondents (18.5 percent) provided suggestions such as more public education, limiting mail-in voting, and using photo identification and citizenship verification.

## Challenges in the polling place

Figure 13 shows the biggest challenges that election administrators think voters face when they are at their polling place. The most significant challenge election administrators perceive is that voters in their jurisdictions do not like or support the available candidates (51.3 percent). Needing more information on candidates and issues is also a significant challenge for voters (48.8 percent). Responses dropped to 17.5 percent for voters not knowing where to go to vote and lacking information on how to vote, 11.3 percent for voters facing transportation challenges in getting to and from their polling place, and 6.3 percent for voters facing challenges with language and accessibility.

**Figure 13. Biggest challenges for voters at the polling place? (n=80)**
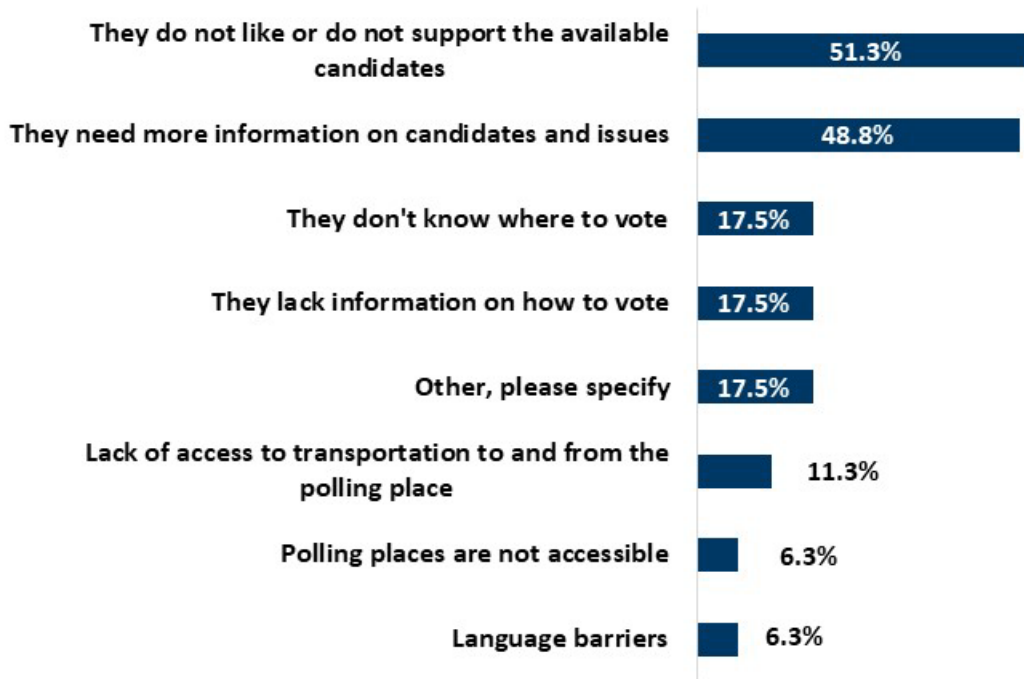


Fourteen respondents provided additional information for the "other" option (17.5 percent) about the biggest challenges voters face in their polling places. These responses mentioned a need for more information for voters about vote tabulation, better physical accessibility, better ballot design, and better election judge training.

## Absentee voting

Figure 14 shows the most significant challenges election administrators saw for absentee voters. Most survey respondents (80.5 percent) said voters not following instructions on how to use their ballot is the biggest problem for absentee voters. Not understanding deadlines for requesting or submitting an absentee ballot was reported as the next-largest problem (42.9 percent). About one-third of respondents said not knowing how to get an absentee ballot (33.8 percent) and difficulty finding someone to witness their signature (33.8 percent) were also significant challenges.

**Figure 14. Biggest challenges for absentee voters (n=77)**
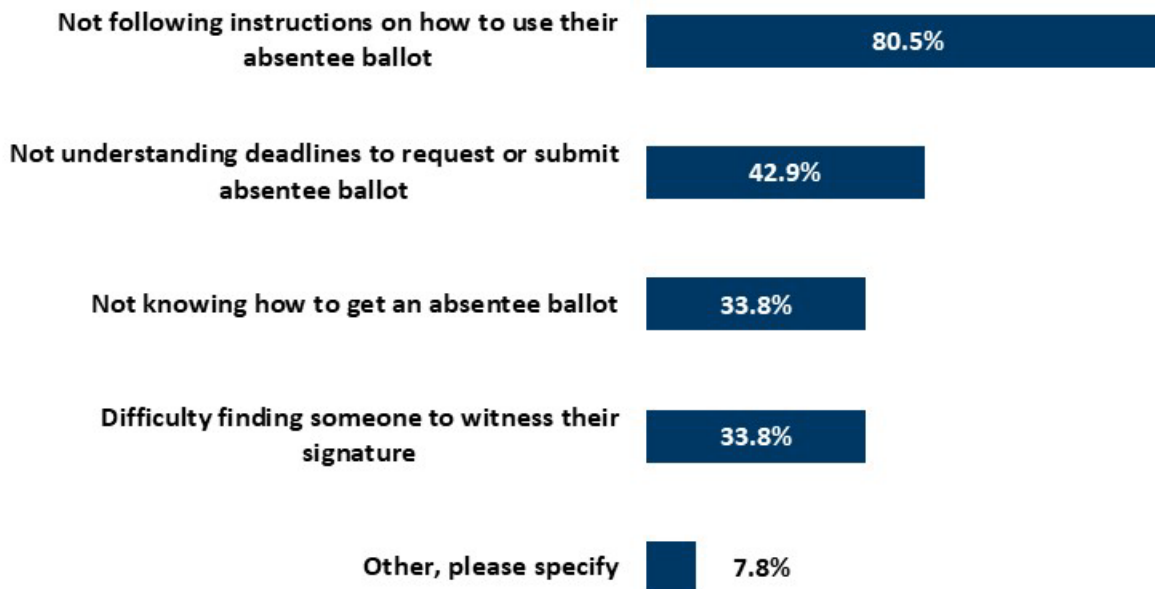


## Mail-in voting

Cities and towns in Minnesota with fewer than 400 registered voters have the option to hold their elections by mail only. Registered voters in these jurisdictions are mailed ballots, unlike absentee ballots, which voters must request. Election administrators said that challenges for voters in mail-in only jurisdictions are similar to those absentee voters experience. Most respondents (72.7 percent) said voters not understanding the process was the most significant challenges for mail-in voting. Not having a witness was the second-biggest challenge (38.2 percent), followed by not having a polling place near their home on election day (30.9 percent). Not being registered was also a challenge for these voters (14.5 percent).

**Figure 15. Biggest challenges for mail-in voting (in mail-in only jurisdictions)? (n=55)**
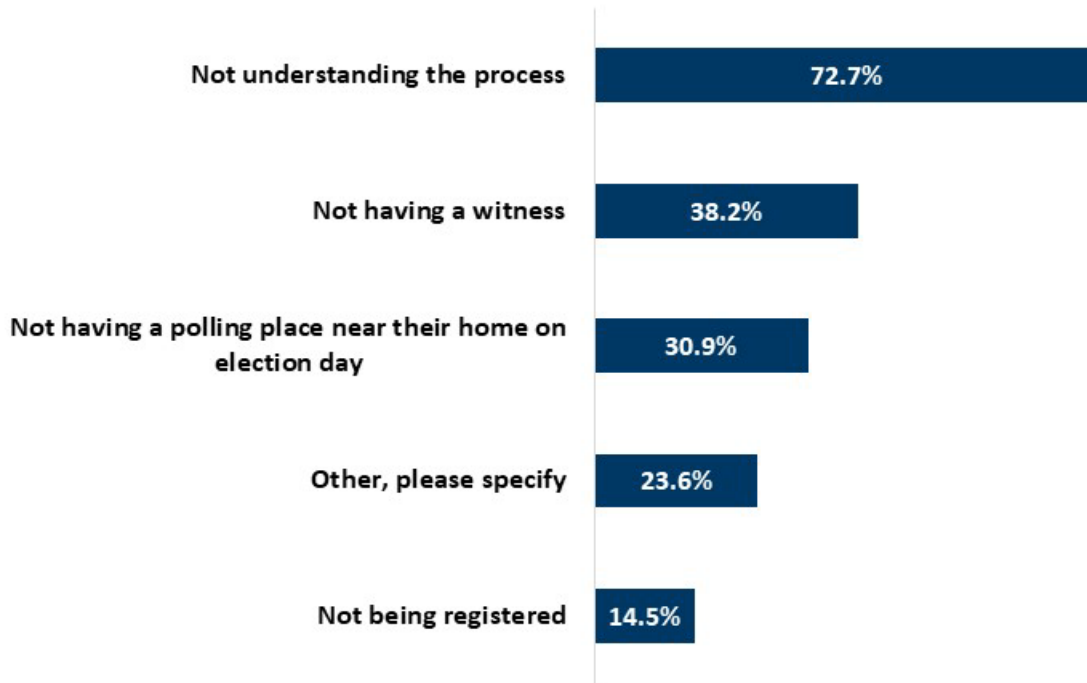


Nearly one-quarter of respondents (23.6 percent) provided additional feedback about challenges voters face with mail-in ballots, including not following instructions, losing their ballots, and not indicating a choice.

## Uniformed and Overseas Citizens Absentee Voting

More than half of election administrators reported the most significant challenge for those using Uniformed and Overseas Citizens Absentee Voting (UOCAV) was not having time to return the ballot (53.7 percent). Election administrators also said UOCAV voters not having access to a printer in order to print materials received via email is a challenge (46.3 percent), and that many also do not understand how to apply (40.7 percent).

**Figure 16. Biggest challenges for voters using Uniformed and Overseas Citizens Absentee Voting (n=54)**
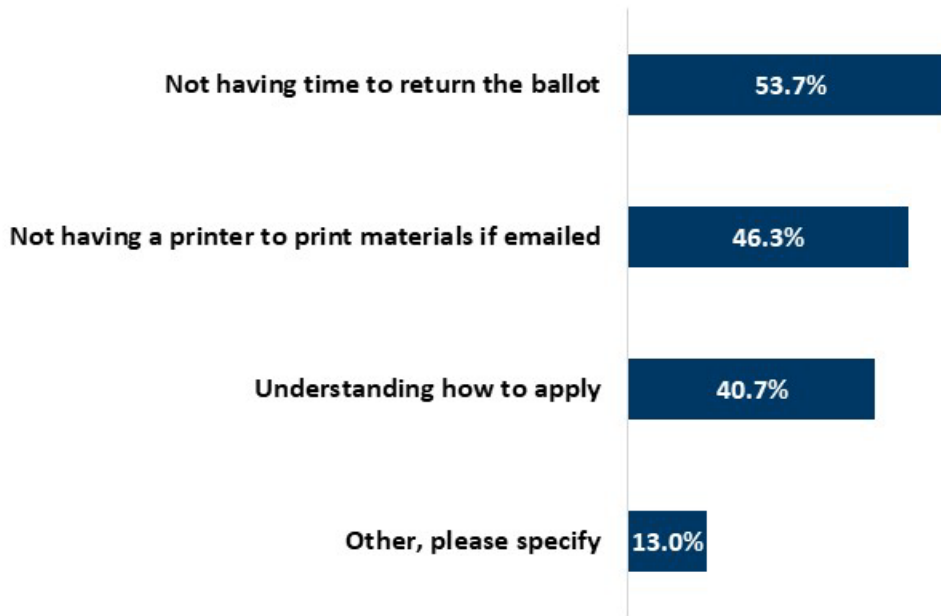


# Training improvements

Figure 17 shows the improvements to elections-related job training election administrators would like to see. Nearly three-quarters would like an onboarding program for all new election officials in the state (73 percent), followed by more peer-to-peer mentorship opportunities (62.5 percent). Rounding out the top three improvements was more virtual or on-demand training from the state (58.1 percent). A little more than half of election administrators who responded to the survey want more frequent in-person training from the state (51.4 percent), with less than 20 percent wanting more printed materials from the state (18.9 percent).

**Figure 17. Improvements to elections-related job training (n=74)**
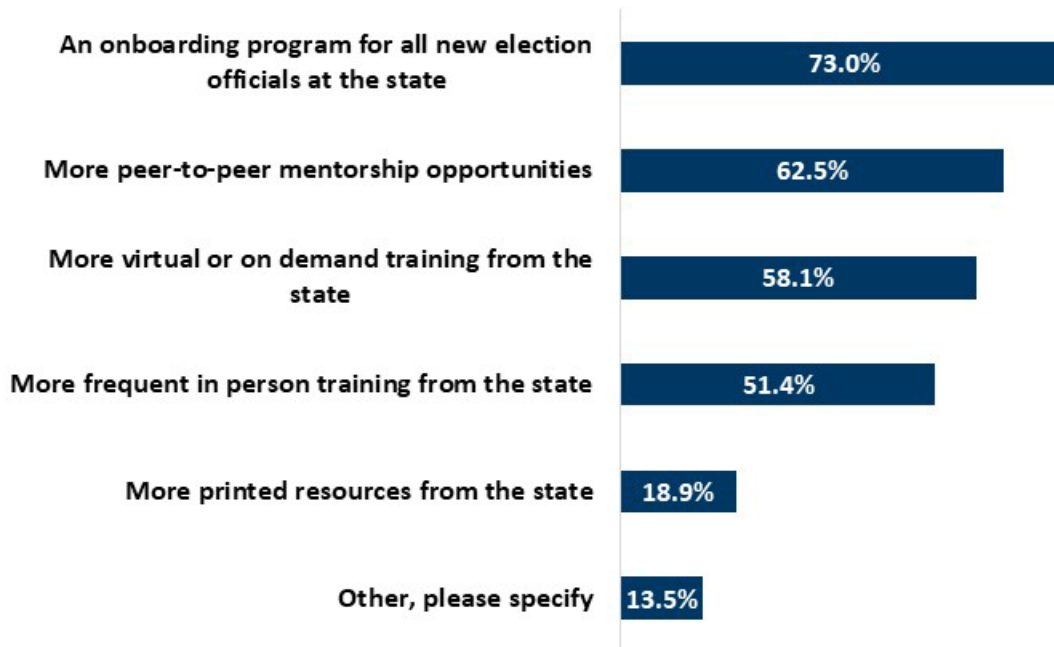


Several respondents who selected "Other" in response to this question provided additional suggestions for improvements to elections-related job training, such as training in areas of cybersecurity, data requests, legal questions, and consistency. They called for training options provided both in-person and online, and for odd-year elections. A few mentioned wanting more election administrator certification and election judge training and recruitment.

## Challenges for election administrators

Most election administrators who responded to the survey (80.3 percent) said the most significant challenge they face is voter misinformation about how elections work, followed by a lack of trust in the election system (71.8 percent). (Election administrators who participated in group discussions spoke at length about these challenges, as well.) Nearly 40 percent reported challenges with financial resources (38 percent) and 31 percent said aging infrastructure was a challenge for them. Personal safety (14.1 percent) and a lack of support from their county, the state, or other jurisdiction (7 percent) were also concerns for election administrators.

**Figure 18. Challenges for election administrators (n=71)**
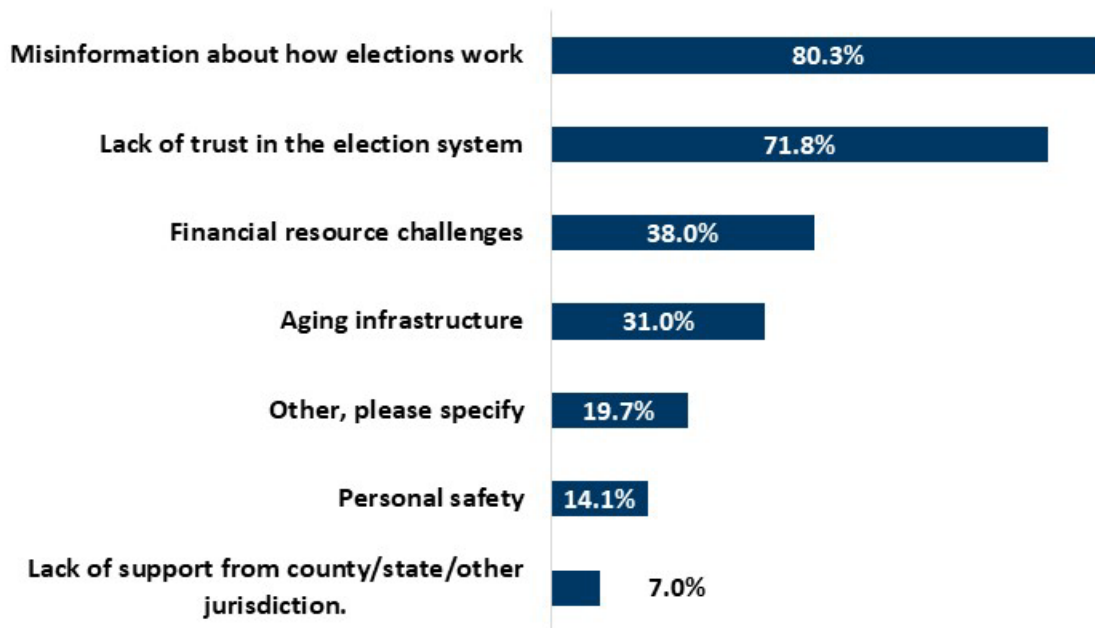


About 20 percent of respondents described additional challenges through the "other" option. These challenges include election judge training, recruitment, and retention; funding for voter outreach, voting administration, and equipment upgrades; combatting misinformation; and addressing staff burnout and mental health.
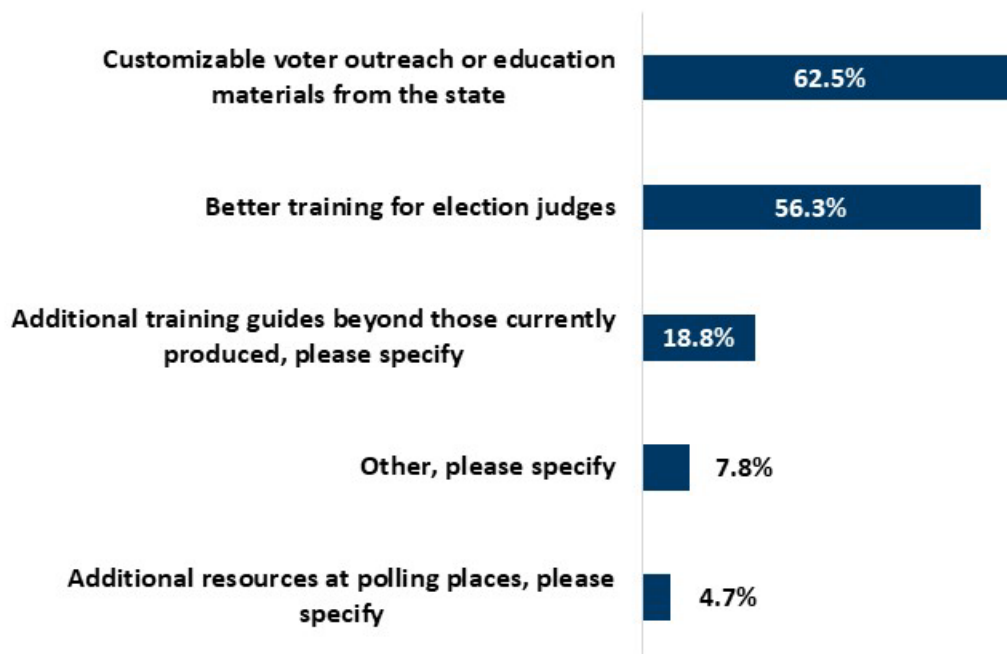
## Supports for election administrators

Most election administrators who responded to the survey (57.7 percent) want more funding from the state, and additional voter education resources from the state. More than half would like additional administrator education resources from the state (52.1 percent), and 22.5 percent would like to see law changes. These could include addressing burdensome law changes and legal inconsistencies, rolling back absentee voting options, making election day a holiday, increasing election security and addressing voter mistrust. and improving ballot structure. Other suggestions respondents provided include improving election judge training, and training and recruitment of election administrators.

**Figure 19. Improvements to support election administrators (n=71)**



Additional funding from the state — 57.7%

Additional voter education resources from the state — 57.7%

Additional administrator eduction resources from the state — 52.1%

Law changes, please specify — 22.5%

Other, please specify — 16.9%
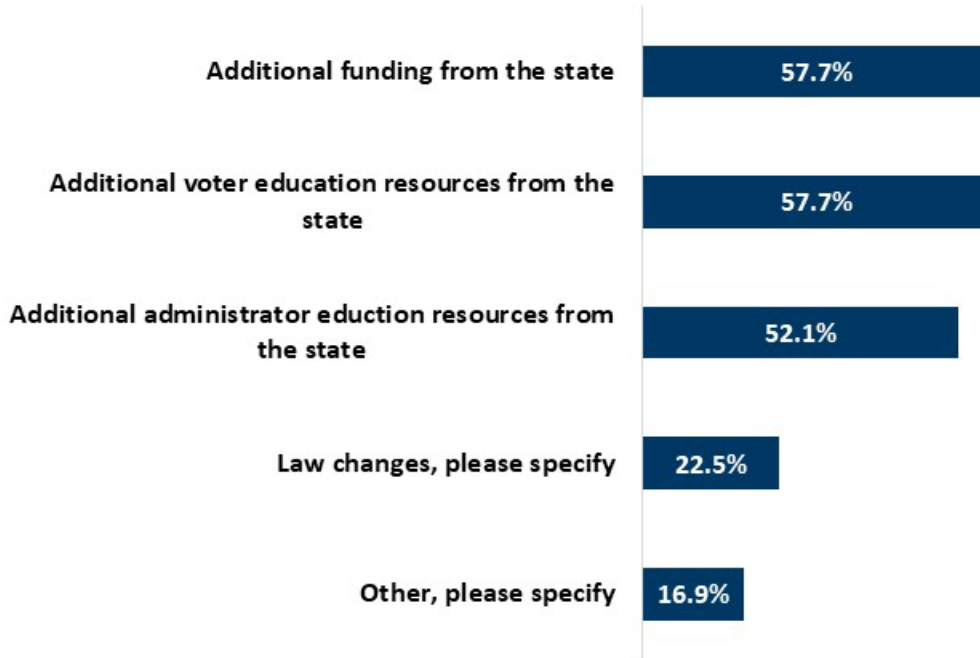
## Resources for election administrators

Figure 20 shows the types of resources election administrators would like to see for their own use. A majority want customizable voter outreach or education materials from the state (62.5 percent), and more than half want better training for election judges (56.3 percent). Less than 20 percent are interested in additional training guides beyond those currently produced (18.8 percent), which could include more guides and updated guides, online training, and guides for new administrators. A small number would like more resources at polling places (4.7 percent), which they said would include more staff at polling places, resources for "what if" situations, and voter ballot instruction guides.

**Figure 20. Resources for election administrators (n=64)**



Customizable voter outreach or education materials from the state — 62.5%

Better training for election judges — 56.3%

Additional training guides beyond those currently produced, please specify — 18.8%

Other, please specify — 7.8%

Additional resources at polling places, please specify — 4.7%

# Jurisdictions

Figure 21 shows the types of jurisdictions election administrator respondents represent. Most work for counites in Minnesota (60.8 percent), followed by cities (20.3 percent) and townships (17.7 percent). No respondents reported working for school districts.

**Figure 21. Election administrator jurisdiction (n=79)**



County — 60.8%

City — 20.3%

Township — 17.7%

Other, please specify — 1.3%

School district — 0.0%
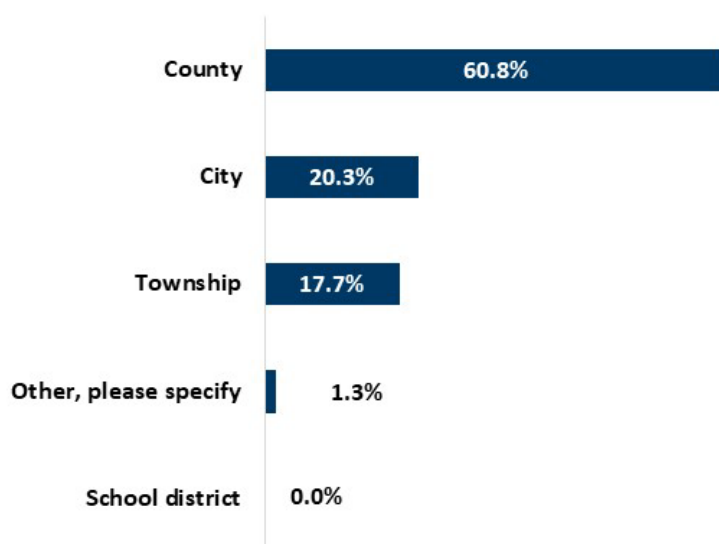
Election administrators who took the survey represented a variety of jurisdiction sizes, with 31.8 percent representing small jurisdictions, with populations of up to 5,000. About one-fourth of respondents represented jurisdictions with populations of 5,001 to 25,000 (25.6 percent), and 21.8 percent of respondents represented both jurisdictions with populations of 25,001 to 100,000 and with more than 100,000, respectively.

**Figure 22. Jurisdiction size (n=78)**



## Tenure

More than 40 percent of respondents have been in their current position for 1 to 5 years (41.8 percent), with the next-largest group in their position for 6 to 10 years (16.5 percent), followed by those with 11 to 15 years of experience at 12.7 percent. Those respondents with the least tenure in their current position (less than one year), made up 11.4 percent of the respondent pool. Respondents with more than 21 years of experience were 10.8 percent of the pool, and the smallest group was those in their current position for 16 to 20 years at 7.6 percent.

**Figure 23. Tenure in current position (n=79)**
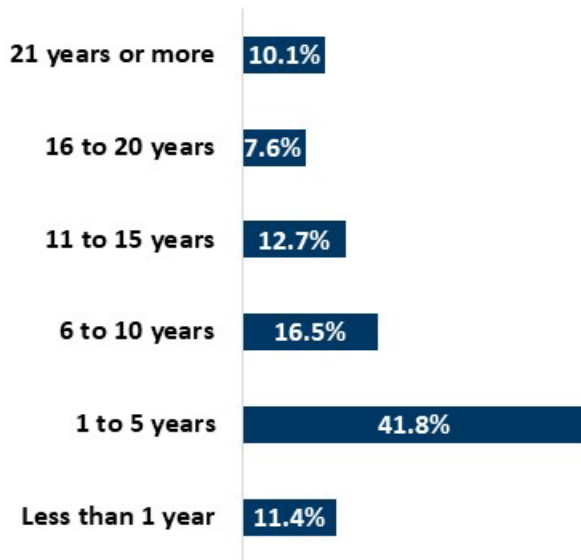


When it comes to experience in the field of election administration, the largest percentage of respondents were those in the field for 1 to 5 years, at 38.5 percent. Election administrators with 6 to 10 years and 16 to 20 years in the field each made up 15.4 percent of responses each, 21 or more years were 14.1 percent of respondents, and 11.5 percent had 11 to 15 years in the field. The smallest group were those election administrators new to the field, with less than one full year of experience (5.1 percent).

**Figure 24. Tenure in election administration (n=78)**
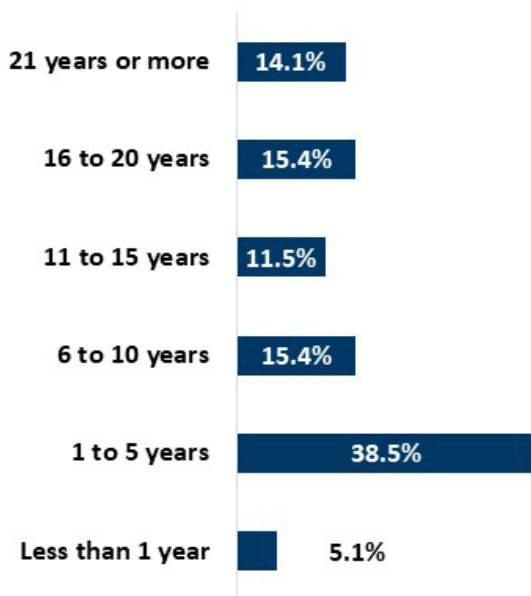
# Group discussions

After the conclusion of the survey and preliminary data analysis, MAD conducted ten group discussions with election administrators, legislators, representatives from advocacy organizations, and general voters in order to follow up on themes that emerged in the survey results. These discussions were held online via Zoom.

## Election administrators

In total, fifteen election administrators from across Minnesota participated in the election administrator discussion groups. This group included elections directors, city clerks, elections assistants, and treasurers. Twenty percent of election administrators were representing jurisdictions from greater Minnesota, while 80 percent represented jurisdictions in the seven-county metropolitan area.

### Biggest obstacles

Many election administrators named misinformation as a major obstacle in their role of running elections, leading to heightened scrutiny and lack of trust. This heightened scrutiny and lack of trust create further capacity constraints due to an increase in information requests and a need for further public education, and at times lead to security concerns for election workers and increased burnout for staff.

Administrators also named other logistical and resource constraints, such as inconsistent communication between the state and cities, budget constraints, staff retention, finding appropriate polling locations, and keeping up with newly required voting hours with limited staff. Lastly, many election administrators named the recruiting of election judges as a major obstacle, with many having difficulty in finding the appropriate number of judges and attaining party balance in their election judge ranks.

### Strengths

Conversation participants talked about what their jurisdictions do best when it comes to elections, and what they thought the state did best. Many election administrators named the preparation and training of election judges as something their jurisdiction does best when it comes to elections. This training and preparation includes running mock elections, in-person and online training, and various tools and materials. Many administrators also highlighted their dedicated staff, customer service, and communication with voters as something they do well. Lastly, one administrator highlighted various "fail safes" and quality assurance processes they have been able to implement to fix past mistakes and assure accuracy of vote counts.

Election administrators generally felt positive about their relationship with OSS. They said that OSS does a good job with communication and supporting local jurisdictions in fighting misinformation and disinformation. Some noted that while there were improvements that could be made to OSS resources and training, the amount of support they provide is still superior to what other states provide to their jurisdictions.

## Support and training

In the survey of election administrators, about one-third of respondents said they would like customizable voter outreach or education materials from the state, and nearly 60 percent wanted better training for election judges. In the group discussions administrators talked more about what those materials and training could look like, and about support they need that they are not receiving. For example, many wanted to see OSS provide up-to-date resources and guides and mentioned that the clerk guide and the absentee voting administration guide were still listed as 2022. Additionally, election administrators wanted guidance and information updated more quickly when new voting laws are passed. Some administrators wanted more information and support in answering tough questions, such as how voter registration works behind the scenes. While there was consensus in wanting more robust training and greater ability to share resources, administrators had differing opinions about whether training should be standardized or customizable based on jurisdiction.

## Misinformation and trust in election systems

Election administrators wanted more information, data, and tools to know how processes work, in order to help combat misinformation. For example, some election administrators said they would like actual statistics on voter fraud, more transparency, and help to better understand the voter registration processes. Others appreciated OSS being the statewide voice and supporting jurisdictions with messaging, although they still wanted more in the form of talking points. Several participants noted it is not enough to say, "our elections are safe and secure," but that voters need to see how elections are safe and secure. Others expressed a need to educate their own elected officials and want to see more support from them. They shared a desire for local elected officials to help combat the misinformation. "I feel like nobody has our backs except for the secretary of state," said one election administrator.

## Candidate information

As noted several times in this report, a major issue both voters and election administrators raised in the surveys and group discussions was a lack of information available on candidates, especially for local races. Election administrators noted they are unable to provide information on specific candidates to citizens. Most participants said they referred questions to OSS, specifically to the sample ballots available on the OSS website. However, that information is only as good as what the candidates provide, and many of the candidates in smaller, local races do not provide a link to their website, or the links they provide may be dead or broken. A few participants said there needs to be more education of candidates to ensure they provide that information when they are filing. A few participants said they also may refer voters who have questions to the League of Women Voters (LWV), as they provide nonpartisan candidate information. One participant said their jurisdiction has tried to get other organizations to sponsor voter or candidate guides, without much success.

## Improving absentee and mail-in voting processes

In the survey, election administrators noted voters who use absentee or mail-in ballots often have trouble ensuring their ballots are filled out and submitted correctly. Election administrators who participated in the group discussions said that better and more simple instructions would go a long way toward solving many of the

problems with absentee and mail-in voting. They suggested putting the instructions on the top of the documents and highlighting where voters need to fill in information or where they need to sign. Another participant noted that the "wall of text" that is the instructions can intimidate voters and suggested employing images or pictograms to make it easier to understand. One election administrator said they had moved to Minnesota from a state that uses vote by mail, and the instructions there are much more simple. Minnesota's requirement that someone witness a voter's signature causes particular problems for voters.

Other suggestions included providing a QR code that would send voters to a short video demonstrating how to put the ballot and envelopes back together in the correct order and making it clear in the instructions what will happen if the voter does not follow instructions correctly. A few participants added that they would like to see a better explanation of what happens after a voter submits their ballot and perhaps more materials from OSS, they could provide to voters about the ballot tracker. One participant said they make a business-card sized document with the ballot tracking website information on it to provide to voters and would like to see something similar from OSS.

## Ranked choice voting

Conversation participants came from a variety of jurisdictions, including some that use RCV and others that did not. Participants from jurisdictions that use RCV said voter education can be an issue, but voters generally understand how it works, though they may have questions as to why it is not used in even-year elections. The election administrators whose jurisdictions use RCV said their most significant concern was tabulating votes in elections that use RCV. Because there are only a few jurisdictions in the state that use RCV, they do not have software or other equipment necessary to tabulate the votes easily. These jurisdictions use spreadsheets to tabulate votes and said this creates unneeded pressure for staff who do the work. It takes longer to tabulate the votes this way, which adds to the pressure. Software that would make tabulating votes in RCV elections easier is available, but the Legislature would need to enact a change in statute to allow the use of it.

A few participants talked about the belief among RCV proponents that it will produce more diverse local governments or lead to greater stability in elections, saying they did not see those changes happening in their jurisdictions. However, they did agree that using RCV can save money by eliminating a primary election.

Participants from jurisdictions that didn't use RCV said there did not seem to be interested in using it in their communities.

## Dream improvements

The group discussions with election administrators closed with the question, "If you had a magic wand, what one thing would you change about voting in Minnesota?" Several participants expressed a desire for more clarity and practicality in legislation. One participant added that this would likely require educating legislators about what works and what doesn't, and how the process could be made easier and more understandable for voters. Several participants said voters get confused about how early voting works, especially early in the process when it is in-person absentee and not true early voting. Some voters also do not understand why they cannot simply insert their ballots in the tabulator to be counted the way they would on election day. Participants also said the extended early voting window is a strain on election administrators and local staff, leading to

burnout. One participant suggested not allowing early voting the day before the election to give staff some administrative time before election day. Another participant also suggested making election day a holiday.

# Voters

MAD contacted organizations and individuals from all groups listed in the legislation, but many did not fill out the interest form or otherwise respond, and others were not available for the group discussions as they were scheduled. Forty-two participants in eight voter focus groups represented a wide range of communities in Minnesota. The individuals who did participate represented civic and election organizations, regional development commissions and corporations in Greater Minnesota, organizations serving older adults, organizations serving immigrants, people with disabilities, young people, Asian Americans, religious organizations, state agencies who may have interests in elections, legislators, and current and former election judges. Many individuals identified themselves as part of the League of Women Voters in Minnesota. A number also identified themselves as members of FairVote Minnesota or supporters of ranked choice voting. Nearly all identified themselves as voters with no participants saying they were not voters.

## Strengths

Most focus group participants named ease and accessibility as their favorite thing about voting or elections in Minnesota, with many naming specifics like same-day registration and vote by mail. Many also described the pride and empowerment that comes from voting, doing their civic duty, and making their voices heard. A number of people also named Minnesota's smoothly run elections and its election integrity as strengths. Other notable mentions include Minnesota's high voter turnout, the number of resources available to voters, and feeling safe while voting.

## Barriers and challenges to voting

A majority of participants in voter focus groups named lack of education and information as their most significant barrier. In particular, many of them wanted more information on down-ballot candidates, such as judges or candidates in other local races. In addition, many participants named accessibility as a significant challenge, citing the need for language access, time off work, making election day a holiday, transportation, access to voting resources, assistance with voting machines used for people with disabilities, and polling place changes. Misinformation and disinformation were also named by many as significant challenges with participants unsure where to get unbiased information and unable to trust the voting process. Other challenges mentioned included safety at polling locations, better election judge training, and public apathy.

## Concerns about the system

 A number of focus group participants said they were concerned about safety, safety including safety for election judges, fear of their information becoming public, and voter intimidation. Election transparency was another concern, with some people wanting more information about what happens to their ballots, wanting to allow voters to observe counting, and wanting more data on voter fraud allegations. Some thought the secretary of state could do more to improve transparency. Some participants wanted to see greater efforts to prepare young

people to vote, more information on judicial races, ensuring election judge party balance, and voter ID. A few individuals named implementing ranked choice voting as a way to improve the voting system.

## Candidate information

A lack of information on candidates, particularly in local elections, emerged as a major theme in the survey results and group discussions for both voters and election administrators. Many voter focus group discussion participants said the LWV would be a good option for providing candidate information, in large part because they have been doing exactly that for many years. Participants appreciated the organization's long history of providing neutral candidate information. However, a few said the group's image as impartial is not as strong as it once was.

Several participants said they would like to see the state, in particular OSS, provide unbiased information on candidates. Many understood their sample ballots would have a link to candidate information, where available, but hoped for something more substantive, and expressed frustration with candidates who do not provide a link to a website that explains their positions. A few participants suggested the information could come from other governmental agencies perhaps providing information to community groups. Regardless of the level of government, they said funding this information collection and distribution should be funded by the state.

Several participants had experience with voter guides that are mailed to all households in other states, such as Colorado and California. A few participants talked about education needing to start in schools, well before students are eligible to vote, in part to help them understand the voting process and be able to better discern between valid information and misinformation. Other suggestions included the media, with participants hailing MPR's voter guides as a good example, and nonprofit organizations.

## Ranked choice voting

Discussion participants were asked if their jurisdiction uses RCV, and if so, whether they liked it or not, and if they do not have it, if they understood how it works. Many participants said their jurisdiction did use RCV, and they liked it. Many others did not have it in their jurisdiction but had a positive view of RCV. The participants who support RCV noted that it saves money by eliminating a primary election, and they also perceive a more equal playing field for diverse candidates and more civil discourse among candidates. Because voters rank their top three choices in RCV, those who support it said they see at least some candidates campaigning on positive messages and even working with fellow candidates to ask voters to rank them together.

Several participants did not have a positive view of RCV, with a few pointing out that many voters have difficulty understanding the process, including native English speakers, and that it may be difficult for voters whose first language is not English to understand RCV. A few other participants took issue with the positions of those participants who claimed RCV leads to more diverse candidates and more civil elections. They said their personal experience as well as research indicated those claims were not true. RCV detractors also noted the patchwork approach to it in Minnesota, with only some jurisdictions using it in some elections. They said the average voter may not understand why that is happening. The length of time it takes to tabulate votes was also a concern for a few participants.

# Appendix A: Election administrator survey questions

1. What are the biggest barriers to voting in your community? (Select all that apply.)
   a. Not enough information on candidates
   b. Not enough information on how to vote
   c. Transportation
   d. Not knowing where to vote
   e. Not knowing there is an election
   f. Accessibility
   g. Language barriers
   h. Timing/schedule
   i. Other, please specify.
2. What ways could the voting system be improved to better serve voters? (Select all that apply.)
   a. More non-partisan information on candidates or ballot questions
   b. Additional outreach on how to vote prior to an election
   c. Additional language assistance in a polling place
   d. More options to vote prior to election day
   e. Allowing for ranked choice voting as an election option
   f. Other, please specify.
3. What are the biggest challenges voters face when voting at the polling place?
   a. They do not like or support the available candidates
   b. They don't know where to vote
   c. They lack information on how to vote
   d. They need more information on candidates and issues
   e. Lack of access to transportation to and from the polling place
   f. Polling places are not accessible
   g. Language barriers
   h. Other, please specify
4. What are the biggest challenges voters face in absentee voting? (Select all that apply.)
   a. Not knowing how to get an absentee ballot
   b. Difficulty finding someone to witness their signature
   c. Not understanding deadlines to request or submit absentee ballot
   d. Not following instructions on how to use their absentee ballot.
   e. Other, please specify.
5. What are the biggest challenges voters face in mail voting (for those in mail-only jurisdictions)? (Select all that apply.)
   a. Not being registered
   b. Not understanding the process
   c. Not having a witness
   d. Not having a polling place near their home on election day
   e. Other, please specify.
6. What are the biggest challenges Uniformed and Overseas Citizens Absentee Voting Act (UOCAVA) voters face? (Select all that apply.)
   f. Understanding how to apply

g. Not having time to return the ballot
h. Not having a printer to print materials if emailed
i. Other, please specify.

**Administration Questions:**

7. Do you work for a…
   a. County
   b. City
   c. Township
   d. School district
   e. Other, please specify
8. What is the size of your jurisdiction?
   a. 0 to 5,000
   b. 5,001 to 25,000
   c. 25,001 to 100,000
   d. More than 100,000
9. What is the title for your current position?
   a. County auditor, elected
   b. County auditor, appointed
   c. City, town, or school clerk
   d. Other/please specify
10. How many years have you been in your current position?
    a. Less than 1 year
    b. 1–5 years
    c. 6–10 years
    d. 11–15 years
    e. 16–20 years
    f. 21 years or more
11. How many years have you worked in the field of election administration?
    a. Less than 1 year
    b. 1–5 years
    c. 6–10 years
    d. 11–15 years
    e. 16–20 years
    f. 21 years or more
12. What improvements would you like to see for elections-related job training? (Select all that apply.)
    a. An onboarding program for all new election officials at the state
    b. More printed resources from the state
    c. More frequent in person training from the state
    d. More virtual or on demand training from the state
    e. More peer-to-peer mentorship opportunities
    f. Other, please specify
13. What are the biggest challenges that you face as an election administrator? (Select all that apply.)
    a. Lack of trust in the election system
    b. Misinformation about how elections work
    c. Lack of support from county/state/other jurisdiction.
    d. Personal safety
    e. Financial resource challenges

      f.   Aging infrastructure

      g.   Other, please specify

14. How could the system be improved to better support election administrators? (Select all that apply.)
   a. Additional funding from the state
   b. Additional administrator education resources from the state
   c. Additional voter education resources from the state
   d. Law changes, please specify
   e. Other, please specify.

15. In addition to funds, what resources would be helpful to election administrators? (Select all that apply.)
   a. Better training for election judges
   b. Customizable voter outreach or education materials from the state
   c. Additional training guides beyond those currently produced, please specify
   d. Additional resources at polling places, please specify
   e. Other, please specify.

**Closing**

16. Is there anything else you would like to share? (Open-ended)
17. If you would be interested in participating a follow-up discussion to provide more feedback, please provide your contact information below. This information will only be used to contact you to participate in an interview or group discussion.
   o Name
   o Email

# Appendix B: Voter survey questions

1. Do you vote?
   a. Yes (Skip to question 4)
   b. No (Skip to question 2)
2. If no, why? – route to what would get you to vote? (select all that apply)
   a. Not enough information on the candidates
   b. Not enough information about how to vote
   c. I don't trust the system
   d. Transportation issues
   e. I don't know where to vote
   f. I didn't know there was an election
   g. Accessibility issues
   h. Language barriers
   i. I don't support any of the candidates
   j. Other, please specify
3. If you do not vote, what would get you to change your mind about voting? (select all that apply) (Route question 8)
   a. Different candidates
   b. More or easier-to-access information on where to vote
   c. More information on candidates and issues
   d. More or better transportation options to get to my polling place
   e. More or better accessibility at and around my polling place
   f. Additional translated materials, translators/interpreters
   g. Information on how to vote
   h. Other, please specify
4. How often do you vote?
   a. Every four years (presidential election years)
   b. Every two years (governor and other statewide elections)
   c. Every election
   d. Other, please specify
5. How do you vote? (Select all that apply.)
   a. In-person on Election Day
   b. Absentee ballot (mailed in)
   c. Early in-person
   d. Military/overseas voting
   e. Mail (in a vote-by-mail-only jurisdiction)
6. What barriers do you face when you vote? (select all that apply)
   a. Not enough information on candidates
   b. Not enough information on how to vote
   c. Transportation
   d. I don't know where to vote

- e. I didn't know there was an election
- f. Accessibility of my polling place
- g. Language barriers
- h. Timing/schedule
- i. I don't face any barriers to voting
- j. Other, please specify

7. What would make your voting experience better? (select all that apply)
    - a. More/better transportation options to get to my polling place.
    - b. Better information on candidates or issues
    - c. Easier-to-follow voting instructions at my polling place
    - d. Better signage on where to go at my polling place
    - e. More or better accessibility at my polling place
    - f. More translated materials/translators/interpreters
    - g. Helpful, friendly poll workers
    - h. Other, please specify.

8. Where do you get information about voting? (Select all that apply.)
    - a. Office of the Secretary of State website
    - b. Local government
    - c. Candidates
    - d. Political parties
    - e. Family/friends
    - f. Social media
    - g. School
    - h. Community organizations
    - i. Local news sources, including newspaper, radio, TV, and other sources
    - j. National news sources, including newspaper, radio, TV, and other sources
    - k. Other, please specify

9. Does your jurisdiction use ranked choice voting?
    - a. Yes
    - b. No
    - c. I don't know

10. Is there anything else you would like to share about your experience as a voter in Minnesota? (open-ended)

11. If you would be interested in participating in a follow-up discussion to provide more feedback on your experiences as a voter in Minnesota, please provide your contact information (name and email) below. This information will only be used to contact you to participate in an interview or group discussion, and will not be connected to your survey responses.
    - a. Name (first and last):
    - b. Email:

# Appendix C: Group discussion guides

## Election administrators

1. Could you tell me a little about your role in election administrations?

2. What would you say is the biggest obstacle you face as an election administrator?

3. What does your jurisdiction do best when it comes to elections? How about the state?

4. About one-third of survey respondents said they would like customizable voter outreach or educational materials from the state, and nearly 60 percent want better training for election judges. What does that look like to you?  What other support do you need that you are not receiving?

5. How does misinformation impact the desire to participate in the system? Do you have any ideas on how to address this? What about the lack of trust in the election system?

6. Both election administrators and voters who responded to the surveys said voters need and want more information on candidates when they prepare to vote and are voting. How can the state help address this lack of information?

    a. Who else could help provide this information?

7. Survey participants noted problems with voters who use absentee ballots or who voted by mail not following instructions on their ballots and not understanding the process. How could the processes be improved to address these problems?

8. Does your jurisdiction use ranked choice voting? If yes, what do you think about it? Regardless of whether your jurisdiction uses RCV or not, do you think voters understand it? What are the positives and negatives of RCV?

9. If you had a magic wand, what one thing would you change about elections in Minnesota?

10. Is there anything else you would like to share with us today? Is there anyone else we should be speaking with?

## Voters

1. Could you tell me a little about your role in elections? Do you work with an organization that does work around elections, or with an organization that works with one of the groups mentioned in the legislation? Are you voter?

2. What is your favorite thing about voting or elections in Minnesota?

3. What would you say are the most significant barriers or challenges you or people in your community face when voting or attempting to vote? What would help reduce those barriers?

4. Are there concerns about the system that make you hesitant to vote? What can the state or other jurisdictions (your county, city, etc.) do to address these concerns?

5. Both voters and election administrators who responded to the survey indicated voters need and want more information on candidates. What kind of information do you need or want? Who do you want to see providing or distributing this information?

6. Does your jurisdiction used ranked choice voting? If your jurisdiction does use it, do you like it or not? Why or why not? Whether your jurisdiction uses ranked choice voting or not, do you feel you understand how it works?

7. If you had a magic wand, what one thing would you change about elections in Minnesota?

8. Is there anything else you would like to share with us today? Is there anyone else we should be speaking with?

# Appendix D: Group discussion participants

MAD contacted more than 90 organizations representing the groups named in the legislations, as well as about 25 election administration officials identified by OSS in an attempt to schedule them for participation in a group discussion. MAD also contacted more than 220 individuals who indicated interest in participating in the group discussions when they took the survey, and 20 additional election administration officials who took that survey and indicated they would be interested in participating in the survey. Of those contacted, MAD was able to schedule nearly 60 individuals who participated in 10 group discussions conducted in the summer and fall of 2024. Those participants represented organizations, communities, or local jurisdictions, and several were voters who responded to the survey and indicated interest in participating. Representatives from the following groups, organizations, or jurisdictions participated in group discussions, in addition to several individuals:

- African American Leadership Forum
- Anoka County
- Arrowhead Regional Development Organization
- Asian American Organizing Project
- Cass County
- City of Apple Valley
- City of Bloomington
- City of Minneapolis
- City of Minnetonka
- City of Rosemount
- City of St. Louis Park
- Common Cause Minnesota
- Council on LGBTQIA2S+ Minnesotans
- Dakota County
- FairVote Minnesota
- Immigrant Law Center of Minnesota
- Lao Assistance Center of Minnesota
- LeadingAge Minnesota
- League of Women Voters (multiple chapters)
- Lutheran Social Services
- Minnesota Council on Latino Affairs

- Minnesota legislature:
  - Sen. Jim Carlson, Elections Committee Chair
  - Rep. Ginny Klevorn, State and Local Government Finance and Policy Committee Chair
  - Sen. Mark Koran, Senate Elections Ranking Minority Lead on Elections
  - Sen. Bonnie Westlin, Elections Committee Vice Chair
  - Beth Fraser, Committee Administrator for Senate Elections Committee
- Minnesota Statewide Independent Living Council
- National Federation of the Blind
- Ramsey County
- Region Nine Development Commission
- Sibley County
- Stearns County
- Udac, Inc.
- Voices for Racial Justice