POLICY BRIEF

BALL STATE & INDIANA VOTING TRENDS

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Introduction. The Center for Economic and Civic Learning (CECL) at Ball State University aims to enhance civic engagement and democratic participation among students and the broader community. This report presents an analysis of regional voting trends, focusing on data from Ball State University and the state of Indiana. Data is drawn from the NSLVE Campus Report 2022 for Ball State University and the Indiana Election Turnout and Registration report for the 2022 General Election.

Key Points: A significant decline in student voting rates from 2018 to 2022, with a 11% drop overall. Declines observed across all demographic groups and age ranges. Decrease in registration rates indicates potential barriers to voter registration among students. Notable decreases in voting rates among Black, Hispanic, and young voters, suggesting targeted interventions are needed. Females generally had higher voting rates than males, but both groups saw a decline. Voting rates vary significantly by field of study, with lower participation in technical and vocational fields compared to humanities and social sciences.

Ball State Voting Rates:

- The overall student voting rate in 2022 was 20.8%, a significant decrease from 31.8% in 2018. This trend aligns with a general decline observed across many institutions.
- The registration rate in 2022 was 64.0%, down from 74.6% in 2018.
- The yield rate (percentage of registered students who voted) also declined from 40.1% in 2018 to 31.8% in 2022.

Ball State Voting Methods:

- In-person voting was the most common method among Ball State students.
- While there was a notable increase in absentee and early voting in 2020, these methods decreased in 2022.
Comparative Analysis of Voting Trends

Indiana’s voter turnout in the 2022 General Election was 40%, with significant variation across counties. For example, Delaware County, where Ball State University is located, had a turnout of 39%. Other counties had higher turnout rates, such as Hamilton County with 48% and Floyd County with 49%. Conversely, some counties had lower turnout rates, such as Marion County with 34% and Clark County with 37%. Across Indiana, there was a mix of voting methods utilized, with a significant portion of voters opting for absentee ballots or early voting.

The voting rate at Ball State (20.8%) is significantly lower than the overall state turnout (40%) in the 2022 General Election (Indiana Secretary of State, 2023; NSLVE, 2024). This indicates a gap in student engagement in the electoral process compared to the general population of Indiana. In addition, Ball State’s registration rate (64%) is slightly lower than the overall state registration rate, highlighting potential barriers to voter registration among students (NSLVE, 2024).

In-person voting remains the predominant method at Ball State, like the broader trends in Indiana. However, Ball State saw a surge in absentee and early voting in 2020, which aligns with state-level increases in these voting methods during the COVID-19 pandemic (Indiana Secretary of State, 2023; NSLVE, 2024).

Indiana's Election Landscape

Indiana received national attention as the first state to introduce a photo identification requirement to vote, upheld by the Supreme Court in Crawford v. Marion County Election Board, 553 U.S. 181 (2008).

Since 2001, Indiana has allowed counties to adopt vote centers, enabling voters to cast their ballots at any center in the county regardless of their address. By 2018, nearly half of Indiana’s voters cast ballots at a vote center.

The Secretary of State, Indiana’s chief election official, works with a bipartisan state election commission and county election boards to administer elections. Voter registration can be completed in-person, by mail, or online, and Indiana maintains a centralized voter registration database (Indiana Secretary of State, 2023).

Policy Recommendations

- Enhanced Voter Education: Develop comprehensive voter education programs targeting students to increase awareness of the importance of voting and the voting process.
- Improved Registration Initiatives: Implement on-campus voter registration drives and provide easy access to registration resources to increase student registration rates.

A comparative analysis of voting trends at Ball State and Indiana highlights gaps in student voter participation. By implementing strategic initiatives focused on voter education, registration, and accessibility, we can enhance civic engagement and ensure that students are active participants in the democratic process.
Indiana Civic Health Index

The 2023 Indiana Civic Health Index provides a broader context to the voting trends observed at Ball State University. The report emphasizes the importance of civic health as a measure of community well-being and democratic engagement. Key findings from the report include:

- **Statewide Civic Engagement**: Indiana ranks in the lower half of states for voter turnout, which reflects broader challenges in civic participation.

- **Youth Engagement**: There is a notable decline in civic engagement among younger populations, highlighting the need for targeted interventions in educational institutions.

- **Barriers to Voting**: Common barriers include lack of information about the voting process, limited access to voting locations, and logistical challenges such as transportation.

These findings reinforce the need for enhanced voter education, improved registration initiatives, and increased accessibility to voting methods as critical steps to improve civic engagement and voter participation among students at Ball State University and across Indiana.

References

- Indiana Secretary of State. (2023). General Election Turnout and Registration.

