



# INSIGHTS INSIDER

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## VOTING IN WORCESTER COUNTY

### INTRODUCTION

In the next 20 days, Worcester County and the rest of the United States will head to the polls to vote in local, state, and Federal elections, including for President of the United States. Like many places across the United States, municipalities in Worcester County differ widely from one another in registered voters, the percentage of those voters who actually “turn out” to vote, and the change in that percentage between elections. *Insights Insider: Voting in Worcester County* explores voting trends across the County at the municipal level.

### WHY VOTE?

Voting for our leaders is encoded into the DNA of the United States. Every year there is an election, whether it is local—for City Councils, Select Boards, etc—State, or Federal. In general, there are known patterns of voting turnout: elections featuring the President generally have the highest turnout, elections featuring Congressional and State offices but not the President have lower turnout, and local elections have lower turnout still. Elections that take place in parts of the year other than November (generally of municipal importance, depending on the community) have smaller turnout still.

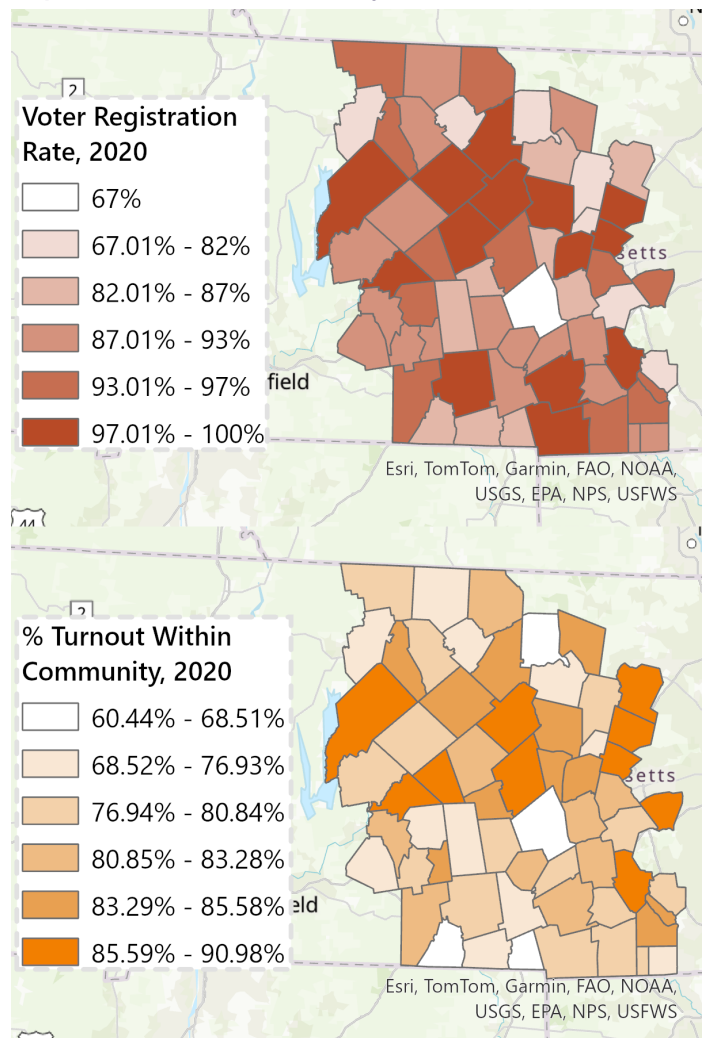
Given that this is a Presidential election year, this *Insider* is focused on the most recent Presidential election in 2020. However, it is important that, no matter what the election, everyone goes to vote. Local elections play key roles in the lives of every citizen, putting into place leaders who can set property tax rates, decide on school policy and budgets, clean the streets of snow, and the like. State elections can help set statewide tax policy and budgetary priorities, fix major highways, fund public transit, and more. Civic engagement from every citizen, no matter the year, is key to fulfilling a core tenet of the Declaration of Independence: “to secure these rights, Governments are instituted among Men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed.”

### EXAMINING REGISTERED VOTERS AND TURNOUT

In 2020, across 60 communities, Worcester County had a population of 862,099. There were an estimated 652,152 people over 18, of which 573,246 (about 88%) were registered to vote. This represents 12% of all registered voters in Massachusetts. **Map 1** shows an estimate of the percentage of registered voters in 2020 across Worcester

Map 1: Voter Registration Rate, 2020

Map 2: % Turnout within Community, 2020



Source: Worcester County Insights Dashboard, 2024

County (based on the number of registered voters and the Census estimate of residents over 18). Worcester had the lowest estimated registration rate, at 67%.

**Map 2** shows each community's turnout, i.e., the percentage of registered voters that voted. Here, despite the fact that Worcester contributed the most voters to the County total, only 64.66% of its registered voters actually voted. Harvard had the greatest share of registered voters turn out, at 90.98%—4,157 out of 4,569. Southbridge, at 60.44%, or 7,309 out of 12,093 voters, saw the lowest turnout. In Worcester County as a whole, 75.87% of registered voters turned out to vote; median turnout across the County was 81.27%. The County contributed 11.9% of all voters statewide.

**Map 3** shows the percentage change in turned-out voters between 2016 and 2020. Every municipality saw more people turned out for the 2020 election compared to the 2016 election (similarly, more people turned out to vote in the 2016 election in every community compared to 2012). Boylston saw the largest increase between elections, at 16.08%, while Southbridge saw the smallest, at 4.7%. Overall, Worcester County saw a 9.8% increase in turned-out voters between the 2016 and 2020 elections

**Map 4** shows turned-out voters from each community as a percentage of the total amount of turned-out voters in the County. That is, on Election Day, 434,921 people in Worcester County cast their vote; in Worcester alone, 71,996 people voted, making up 16.55% of total voters that day. The community that provided the next most voters was Leominster, at 4.98% of the County total.

### KEY TAKEAWAYS

While 75.87% of Worcester County voters voted on Election Day 2020, there is plenty of room to grow. About 140,000 people were registered to vote in 2020 but for their own reasons did not. There are many reasons people might not make it out to the polls, and figuring out those reasons, and any potential barriers, is crucial to increasing turnout. Massachusetts does offer a number of options for accessible voting, including going to the polls day of, voting early in-person, or even mailing one's vote ahead of time; making people more aware of these options should, over time, increase turnout.

While these maps focus on Presidential election years, this *Insider* would be remiss not to mention again that turnout during midterm years is much lower (and in municipal only years, lower still), and there is much work to be done to close that turnout gap. As an example, in 2022, only 51.5% of voters turned out to vote in Worcester County—a year in which the Governor of Massachusetts was on the ballot. Increasing turnout in so-called "off" years should be a key focus of a civically engaged and concerned citizenry.

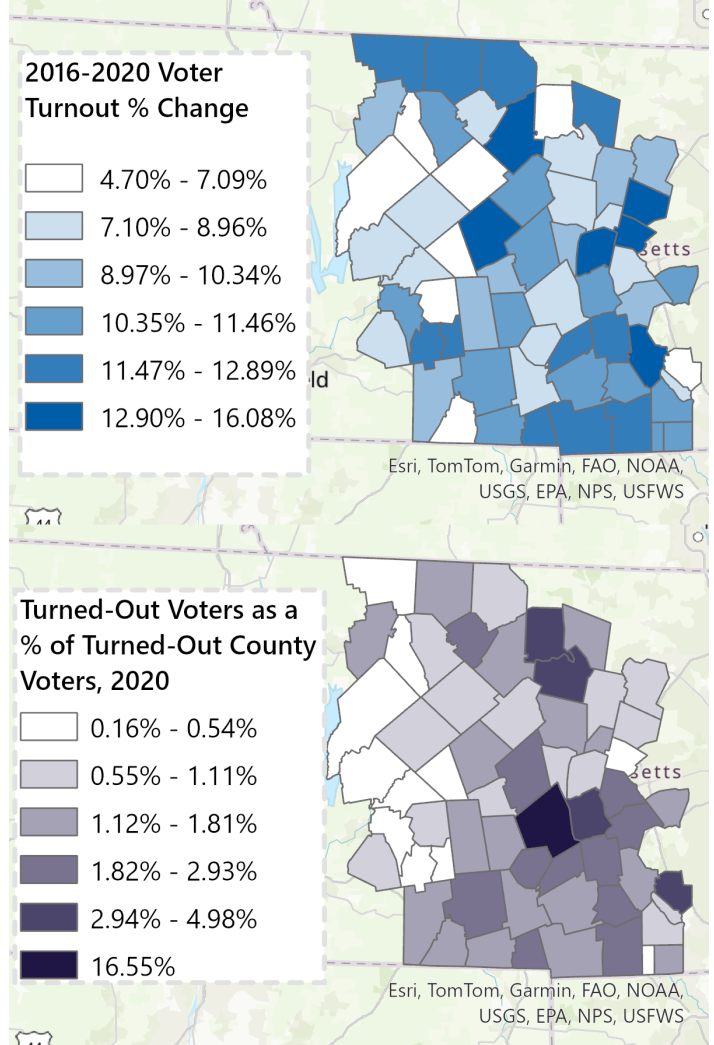
Offices on the Ballot in 2024	
Federal	
President & Vice-President	
U.S. Senator	U.S. Representative
State	
Governor's Councillor	State Senator
State Representative	Register of Deeds
Clerk of Courts	
Five Statewide Ballot Initiatives	
Local	
Check with Your Local Town or City Clerk's Office	
Deadlines	
Registration	October 26, 2024
Vote by Mail Application	October 29, 2024
Election Day	November 5, 2024

To register to vote, update your registration, or view this year's voter's guide, visit the website of the Secretary of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, at:

<https://www.sec.state.ma.us/divisions/elections/elections-and-voting.htm>

**Map 3: 2016-2020 Voter Turnout % Change**

**Map 4: Turned-Out Voters as a % of Turned-Out County Voters, 2020**



Source: Worcester County Insights Dashboard, 2024