Clink * Montana Library Association * Election Guide LibGuide

Voting voting voting! I always feel a little proud/happy/patriotic when I fill in my ballot. I'm an election judge so I have the insider perspective of election days, how much work goes in to making sure things are fair and above-board. Rules about where the signs must be posted, where the flag must be flown, how many languages the voting info must be displayed in, who's eligible, who is not, who can help a voter, how to run the poll pads, how to do the count at the end of a very long day. Voting behaviors and policies are complex and changing all the time. A brief literature review provides some, not exhaustive context.

Churchill said in the House of Commons in 1947 that "Many forms of Government have been tried and will be tried in this world of sin and woe. No one pretends that democracy is perfect or all-wise. Indeed, it has been said that democracy is the worst form of Government except for all those other forms that have been tried from time to time."

Democracy is better than the alternatives in the voters heads, mostly, but WHILE "A vast majority are **positive** about having a democratic political system (85 percent) but a surprisingly large proportion think **experts**, not the government, should be making political decisions (53 percent) or that a **strong leader** who does not have to bother with the legislature or elections should be making the decisions (38 percent) (Theiss-Morse, et al., 2023, p. 27)". Sadly, it is considered too much hassle, "For many people, dealing with political issues is too much of a **bother.** Conflict over policy, by definition, involves weighing difficult trade-offs and making choices among costly alternatives. The benefits to be gained from taking the effort to wade through the competing claims and thinking about the implications in order to formulate a personal stand are distant and murky, at best" (Lewis-Beck, 2008, p. 166).

Socioeconomic status is a key predictor of turnout. People who are **better educated, wealthier, and in more professional occupation**s consistently turn out to vote at a higher rate than those from a lower socioeconomic status and see it as a duty (62 percent) compared to those from lower socioeconomic status who view it as a choice (Theiss-Morse et al, 2023, p.69). What factors matter in terms of voting behaviors and party affiliation? Franko et al., (2023) found that while class differences

still hone to party affiliation (those who are in favor of policies which redistribute wealth to those in need lean democratic party) that value is less salient now than previously, as identity and social issues are more likely to determine voting choices. Voter turnout is different between racial groups: "In three elections from 2018 to 2022, 43% of eligible white voters cast their ballots every time, while that figure for Black voters was 27%, 21% for Asian American voters and 19% for Hispanic voters"(Kim, 2024). Hispanic youth especially, and black youth are adversely impacted by voting limitations. The authors argue if young people do not habituate themselves to voting, the habit of not voting remain for a lifetime (Coll & Juelich, 2022). There is no "statistically significant" difference between **rural and urban** voting on political behavior such as putting up signs, sending letters to their legislators, or voting, though urban folks are more likely to self-report following a political story (Lin et al., 2023).. The **LGBT** identity of a candidate is one factor in their electability, but using a manipulated scenario, it was not found to outweigh the partisanship and policy pronouncements of a candidate (Loepp et al., 2022).

Party endorsement isn't a factor as much as it used to be, nor is preference given to those with **prior previous experience** (Manento et al., 2022). Menento and colleagues write that "voter distrust in the political system threatens parties' control over their nominations" (p. 1633). Optimists may think that civics classes might increase political activities and voting. Nope. Researchers used a health dataset that included voting behaviors "with a wide array of individual and family measures such as cognitive ability, parental civic engagement, parental income and parental educational attainment plus a large sample of siblings, which allowed them to replicate some aspects of a controlled experiment, with siblings from the same family functioning, essentially, as each other's control group (Weinschenket al., 2022, p. 936). Weinschenket et al. (2022) found **civics classes have null effect** on voter turnout in adults, though parental education and parental involvement in politics were statistically significant.

Processes matter—voting can be easy to register for, easy to do…or hard. Every state is different, and even communities in the same state may vary. Even age varies. In some states if a voter is 17 during the primary but 18 by the general election, they are allowed to vote in the primary. One writer, Fraga,

argued that "Putting aside for the moment the fact that income and education are, at least in part, determined by one's racial/ethnic background… Income, education, and age do not explain the entirety of persistent gaps in voter turnout between Whites and minority groups. (Fraga, 2018, 68). Fraga discusses **structures** that create persistent voter turnout gaps, including gerrymandering, felon disenfranchisement, **voter identification laws**, and new restrictions on convenience voting. Felons right to vote is prohibited in most states while incarcerated, reinstated after incarceration in 23 states, and involves extra processes in 11 states (NCLS, 2023).One racial group not as evident in the studies as others is Native Americans. "Native Americans living on reservations in Montana are often located great distances away from their county courthouses, where citizens are expected to vote. Registering to vote or casting a ballot can require traveling over one hundred miles round-trip. Montana permits counties to establish satellite election offices with in-person absentee voting and late voter registration, but historically, counties refused when tribes requested satellite offices Refusals sometimes took explicitly discriminatory forms, but more typically, counties responded that they lacked the time and resources to establish and run satellite offices. (Wyman 2023, p. 861).   Interestingly, while racism and sexism were shown to be more salient in 2018 election, "most clearly seen in the analysis of *vote switching*; lower levels of racism denial and sexism were strongly related to switching from voting Republican to Democratic in 2018, whereas Republicans did not see a net gain in votes among those with above-average levels of racism and sexism"(Schaffner, 2022, p. 500).

The closure of so many **local newspapers** is shown to result in more partisanship and less voter turnout, partially because local issues tend to be less understood. Local representatives are more focused on non-partisan issues such as potholes. Arnold (2004) was quoted in a Darr study (2018) that, in a study of 25 legislators, the median legislator earned 14.9 articles per month in a **local** paper."   Not going to happen in the national paper. "There are plenty of reasons to be troubled about the loss of local newspapers, not the least of which are concerns about journalists' ability to perform the watch-dog role in their community. Readers may reach different conclusions about whether our identified effect of split-

ticket voting is normatively troubling, but the amount of public concern presently expressed about

polarization suggests our findings offer one more reason to bemoan the decline of local newspapers.

(Darr et al., 2018, 1022). "A Pew Research Center study revealed that liberals had wide variety of main

sources for news, including CNN, MSNBC, NPR, and the NYT. Conservatives, on the other hand,

overwhelmingly chose Fox" (Theiss-Morse, 2023, p.221). Is it important? (Holbein et al, 2023) studied to

see if voting was **transformative**. They concluded, "using two waves from a uniquely large survey of

young people in the United States, pairing this with a regression discontinuity design and   new meta-

analysis of all causally-identified studies **it isn't**. Just because people vote, it doesn't increase their

subsequent interest in politics or policy. However, if citizens do vote, I want to give them resources to

understand the issues because librarians are all about providing resources.

I work at an academic library and always create a LIBGUIDE that sits on our political science page

but is also used when we table to encourage students to register to vote. The most important element is

probably the how-to. Minnesota's Secretary of State website is robust, voters can a way of figuring out

polling place, study at a sample ballot (I always look for articles about the judges, because those are the

candidates I'm least familiar with) , and see all the myriad ways of voting—before the day, on the day

(we have same-day-registration), at the polling place, at the County office. I crafted a **Montana *LibGuide***

and some of these elements include the following although you all know better than I do what is needed

for your communities:

- Montana Secretary of State

  Includes links to:

  *Election Forms

  *Election Calendars

  *Ballot Measures

- League of Women Voters Montana

  Issues, voter information, link to County Clerk and Recorder Offices, Montana's Constitution.

- [Washington State residents in college in Montana--Absentee Voting](#)

- [Colorado residents studying in Montana--Voting Info](#)

If you're not familiar with the *League of Women Voters*, Montana's points to resources on understanding misinformation, presentations about the state's Constitution, and the Equal Rights Amendment, to name but a few. Also here I've posted information about how those maybe studying at one of Montana's Universities can still vote in their home state by absentee ballot.

I then looked for **general** sources of information on the upcoming election. These include Vote *411*, *538* (number of electors in the electoral college)-- which has a massive collection of cross tabulated polls of all sorts), *Ballotpedia*, an online encyclopedia of political terms and current controversies, *Council on Foreign Relations* in a year when there are plenty of world events shaping the future, *Election Lab* from *MIT*, *FactCheck* **[Annenberg Public Policy Center]**, *Open Secrets* (where all the donations come from), *Pew* (because while we like to make up our own minds, it is interesting to see public opinion polling), *Politifact* [Poynter Institute] (similar to FactCheck, familiar to most from "mostly true" to *Pants on Fire* Factometer), *ProPublica* (investigative journalism), *Real Clear Politics* (polling AVERAGES), *U.S. Census Narrative Profiles* (one of my favorite ways to understand in a nutshell, with words AND numbers a community , county, or state), *Urban Institute* (because I've come to trust their studies), and *YouGov*, a much cited polling central resource.

The next tab points to a variety of GENERAL news sources' central Election 2024 landing page. These are some of the standard ones, such as *AP*, *CNN*, *Fox*, but also points to *Vox,* which is more analytical, and *Watching America*, which gathers together how other countries are seeing American politics.

The next tab points to Montana News. I had our political science professor, (native to Montana) vet these, but clearly you all know best what to include. I looked for the newspapers with large circulations and others that I have enjoyed myself, such as the Montana Public Radio's coverage of issues.

MONTANA NEWS

Billings Gazette

Bozeman Daily Standard   *Missoulian*

Daily Inter-Lake   *Montana Free Press*

Great Falls Tribune   *Montana Media Lab*

Independent Record of Helena   *Montana Public Radio*

The next thing I tried for was finding resources that addressed what appeared to be pressing issues in Montana. Housing affordability is a concern everywhere, but perhaps very pressing in Montana. I pointed to some agencies I found; locals could probably find different ones. But one is the *National Low Income Housing Coalition MONTANA* that reports, "Across Montana, there is a shortage of rental homes affordable and available to extremely low-income households (ELI), whose incomes are at or below the poverty guideline or 30% of their area median income (AMI). Many of these households are severely cost burdened, spending more than half of their income on housing. Severely cost burdened poor households are more likely than other renters to sacrifice other necessities like healthy food and healthcare to pay the rent, and to experience unstable housing situations like evictions." The *Montana Budget and Policy Center* offers up analysis, but the reports are from 3 years ago. One link points to an article from the *Montana Free Press*. One points to *Homeward*, which states "Since *Homeword* began in 1994, we have developed or preserved 1,542 homes for more than 2,000 Montanans, including 600 children, these homes are located in 35 locations in 14 cities and towns throughout the state. We developed 27 of these homes for homeownership." And I point to the *National Coalition to End Homelessness: Montana.* All of these resources can provide potential voters with information to ask important questions of those running for public office.

The following tab directs users to resources around conservation and climate mitigation, including *Montana Climate Assessment*, a product of the Montana Institute on Ecosystems at Montana State University which addresses water, agriculture, and forests. The

Montana Grass Conservation Commission (MGCC) is a governor-appointed board whose mission is to conserve, protect, restore, and facilitate the proper utilization of grass, forage, and range resources in the state of Montana. The MGCC does this by organizing and administering the state grazing districts and promoting cooperation between agencies and the state grazing districts. The next, the *Montana Climate Solutions Council* is to provide recommendations to the Governor, legislature, and citizens of Montana on strategies to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, prepare the state for climate impacts, foster innovation across Montana's economy and address the needs of communities in transition through appropriate economic development and workforce strategies. The following one, *Blackfeet Country and Climate Change*, looks at that community's efforts to respond to climate change. *Climate Smart Glacier Country* is to address the challenges that a changing climate creates for water and food security, public health, and recreation in the Glacier National Park region—"We engage the public to develop local solutions that will conserve resources, promote clean energy, and foster a thriving community for ourselves and future generations. " *350Montana.org* "provides information about climate and climate action in and for Montana. We welcome announcements for climate action events in Montana, and we will publish them on our calendar." *Citizens for Clean Energy, Inc.* (CCE) is a 501(c)3 non-profit organization of Montana citizens from many backgrounds and political persuasions. "Our objective is to convince decision makers that adequate, clean, efficient, and cost-effective energy for our community, state and region can be obtained without destroying our health, lifestyle, environment, and heritage."

Health is everything. One of the tabs points to agencies and nonprofits working on health, access to healthcare, etc. First, *America's Health Rankings, MT*. Next up, the *Montana Healthcare Foundation* funded a study of healthcare access in Montana. There's a work on *Deaths of Despair* in Montana. Overdoses are a huge issue in most communities across America. The *Centers for Disease Control* published a document about how Montana's prioritizing their investments in dealing with the issue. *KFF* health news covers Montana. *Montana Public Health Institute* points to research reports about emergency preparedness, behavioral health, a toolkit for local and tribal public health departments and so much more in their resource library. *NAMI Montana* is represented. They support, educate, and advocate for

Montanans with mental conditions and their families. The *Montana Behavioral Health* website takes the user to committees, conferences, and news about behavioral health initiatives.

Cost of living is a concern all over the world. I point to various resources that include energy costs, a tax calculator, and the Smart Asset guide to the cost of living in Montana.

And has Montana seen some controversy around education? Yes it has. This page points to everything from the *Ballotpedia* entry on public education in Montana, a compare the tuition tool*, Indian Achievement Data Report*, the *Montana Office of Public Instruction*, the *Quality Education Coalition*, *Montana Report Cards*, and *the State Library*. Depending on the ballot initiatives in your community, you might want to add more or fewer of these.

Public libraries are trusted by most communities. They are the only place where people can come in and not have to spend a time. They were envisioned as an arsenal of democracy and we can do our part to see that people have ready access to study the issues. One of those issues is actual voting behaviors? What makes a person a voter? The final tab is the result of this years' reading for me. Looking at voter behavior is just so interesting. Some of the factors that have been confirmed as factors in voting behavior is habit and just plain and intrinsic or nurtured (by parents, by a community, there are a lot of possibilities here) interest in politics. But policy wonks are busy studying various other factors –racial, gender, socioeconomic, parental voting behaviors, voting in a social media world we live in, bots providing us with false information, rural, urban. There is much to explore here. I will let you read what interests you. This is a distillation of what seemed most interesting or most cited:

Voter Behavior: A Bibliography ×

American National Election Studies. https://electionstudies.org/data-center/

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supreme-court

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   Primary Elections. *Political Behavior, 44*(4), 1633–1656. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11109-020-

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National Conference of State Legislatures. (2023, December). *Restoration of Voting Rights for Felons.*

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LINKS

Montana Secretary of State https://sosmt.gov/elections/

League of Women Voters Montana https://my.lwv.org/montana

Wash. Secretary of State https://www.sos.wa.gov/elections/voters/voter-eligibility-resources/voters-away-

       college

Colorado https://www.sos.state.co.us/pubs/elections/FAQs/college.html

411 https://www.vote411.org/

538 https://projects.fivethirtyeight.com/polls/

Ballotpedia https://ballotpedia.org/Elections#Looking_ahead_to_2020

Council on Foreign Relations https://www.cfr.org/

Election Lab https://electionlab.mit.edu/

Factcheck https://www.factcheck.org/

Findlaw (voting laws) https://www.findlaw.com/voting.html

Open Secrets https://www.opensecrets.org/

Pew https://www.pewresearch.org/

Politifact https://www.politifact.com/

Propublica https://www.propublica.org/

Real Clear Politics https://www.realclearpolitics.com/elections/2024/

U.S. Census https://www.census.gov/acs/www/data/data-tables-and-tools/narrative-

      profiles/2016/?eml=gd&utm_medium=email&utm_source=govdelivery

Urban Institute https://www.urban.org/

YouGov https://today.yougov.com/

AP News https://apnews.com/hub/election-2024

CNN https://www.cnn.com/election/2024

C-SPAN https://www.c-span.org/classroom/lessons/

Fox https://www.foxnews.com/elections

The Hill https://thehill.com/

Huffington Post https://www.huffpost.com/

NPR https://www.npr.org/sections/elections/

Politico https://www.politico.com/news/2024-elections

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Homeword https://homeword.org/news/

National Alliance to End Homelessness https://endhomelessness.org/homelessness-in-america/homelessness-

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Montana Climate Assessment https://montanaclimate.org/chapter/climate-change

Montana Department of Natural Resources https://dnrc.mt.gov/Conservation/Conservation-

     Programs/montana-grass-conservation-commission

Montana Climate Solutions Plan https://deq.mt.gov/files/DEQAdmin/Climate/2020-09-

     09_MontanaClimateSolutions_Final.pdf

Blackfeet Climate Change https://blackfeetclimatechange.com/

Climate Smart Glacier Country https://climatesmartglaciercountry.org/

350 Montana https://www.350montana.org/about/

Citizens for Clean Energy https://www.ccemontana.org/

America's Health Rankings Montana https://www.americashealthrankings.org/search?q=montana

2020 Report on Health Coverage and Montana's Uninsured https://mthcf.org/wp-content/uploads/2020-MT-

     Uninsured-Rate-Report_10.27.20-FINAL.pdf

America's Communities Projects https://www.americancommunities.org/chapter/deaths-of-despair-in-

     montana/

Montana Overdose Investment Snapshot

> https://www.cdc.gov/injury/budget/policystatesnapshots/Montana.html

KFF https://kffhealthnews.org/news/tag/montana/

Montana Public Health Initiative https://www.mtphi.org/

NAMI Montana https://www.namimt.org/

Behavioral Health Alliance of Montana https://montanabehavioralhealth.org/

Cost of Living in Montana https://www.sofi.com/cost-of-living-in-montana/

Montana State Energy Profiles https://www.eia.gov/state/print.php?sid=MT

Montana Housing Market https://www.noradarealestate.com/blog/montana-housing-market/

Montana Tax Calculator https://smartasset.com/taxes/montana-tax-calculator

Ballotpedia https://ballotpedia.org/Public_education_in_Montana

College Tuition Compare https://www.collegetuitioncompare.com/

Montana American Indian Achievement

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Montana Library Association https://www.mtlib.org/

Montana Office of Public Instruction https://opi.mt.gov/

Montana Quality Education Coalition https://www.mqec.org/

Montana Report Cards https://opi.mt.gov/Leadership/Academic-Success/Every-Student-Succeeds-Act-

> **ESSA/Report-Card**

Montana State Library https://msl.mt.gov/