Rank Choice Voting and the 2013 Minneapolis Elections

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Our article in the Star Tribune on February 13, 2014 presents evidence from the 2013 elections in Minneapolis that Rank Choice Voting leaves open voting gap that favors white voters and the affluent. In particular, our statistical analyses of voting results reveals a clear pattern: voters who were more affluent and white turned out at a higher rate, completed their ballots more accurately, and were more likely to use all three opportunities to rank their most preferred candidates compared to voters living in low-income neighborhoods and in communities of color.

Below we describe our data, measures, and findings in more detail.

To estimate the percentage of people living under the poverty line and the percentage of people of color in each of the wards, we used census information on Minneapolis neighborhoods. Neighborhood-level race data is available at http://www.minneapolismn.gov/census/2010/index.htm, and neighborhood-level income data is available at http://www.mncompass.org/twincities/neighborhoods.php. We assigned each neighborhood to the ward it was in, or split neighborhoods between wards if they fell across ward boundaries. We then ranked the wards to determine the wards with most/least residents of color and which had the most/least poverty residents living below the poverty line. Table 1 shows these data for all 13 wards. Specifically, we compared the three wards that stood out as the most affluent (11, 12, and 13) with those that were least (2, 3, and 5), as well as those that had the highest percent of white voters (10, 11, 12, and 13) with those with greatest proportion of people from communities of color (4, 5, and 9). (We did not include Ward 6 because its voting participation was an outlier; the disparities we describe below are stronger when Ward 6 is included.)

To examine undervoting, we used the actual vote data provided by the City Clerk (available at http://vote.minneapolismn.gov/results/2013/index.htm under 'Mayor Data File .xslx). We coded whether each voter had ranked all three possible mayor choices, or whether s/he had only used one or two of the available choices (undervoted). We then compared the percentage of people who undervoted in the wards with the highest percentage of residents of color to the wards with the lowest percentage of residents of color, for the wards with the most/least residents living below the poverty line. Figure 1 presents the results of our analyses of undervotes. The green bars compare the average percentage of undervotes among the most and least affluent wards and the blue bars compare the average percentage of undervotes among the wards with the lowest and highest percentage of residents of color.

To examine spoiled ballots, we used the summary data provided by the City Clerk (available at http://www.minneapolismn.gov/meetings/canvassing/WCMS1P-116625 under 'Municipal Canvas Report'). To find the percentage of spoiled ballots in each ward (or subset of wards), we took the number of spoiled ballots and divided it by the total number of the ballots (spoiled or unspoiled) cast in that ward. We then compared the percentages as above. Figure 2 presents the results of our analyses of spoiled ballots. The green bars compare the average percentage of spoiled ballots among the most and least affluent wards and the blue bars compare the average percentage of spoiled ballots among the wards with the lowest and highest percentage of residents of color.

Finally, to examine turnout, we used the same basic approach as for the analysis of spoiled ballots (available at http://www.minneapolismn.gov/meetings/canvassing/WCMS1P-116625 under 'Municipal Canvas Report'). To find the turnout for each ward, we followed the City Clerk by dividing the number of voters by the number of registered voters (including same-day registrations). We then compared the percentages as above. Figure 3 presents the results of our analyses of turnout. The green bars compare the average turnout percentage among the most and least affluent wards and the blue bars compare the average turnout percentage among the wards with the lowest and highest percentage of residents of color.

Table 1. Racial composition and income by Minneapolis ward

Ward	% white residents	% living over poverty line
1	71%	76%
2	72%	62%
3	57%	65%
4	39%	77%
5	18%	63%
6*	39%	68%
7	64%	82%
8	51%	81%
9	50%	79%
10	75%	81%
11	75%	90%
12	78%	91%
13	88%	97%

Note: ward demographics were estimated using data from the neighborhoods in each ward. Neighborhood race data from minneapolismn.gov/census. Neighborhood poverty data from mncompass.org.

*Ward 6 excluded from analysis as an outlier.

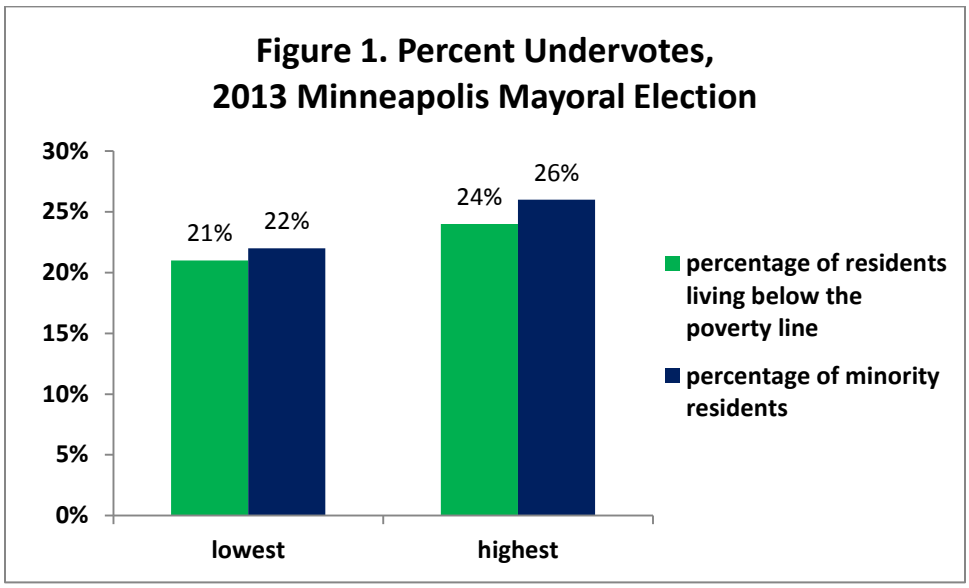
Figure 1. Percent Undervotes,
2013 Minneapolis Mayoral Election
30%
25%
20%
15%
10%
5%
0%
21%
22%
24%
26%
lowest
highest
percentage of residents living below the poverty line
percentage of minority residents

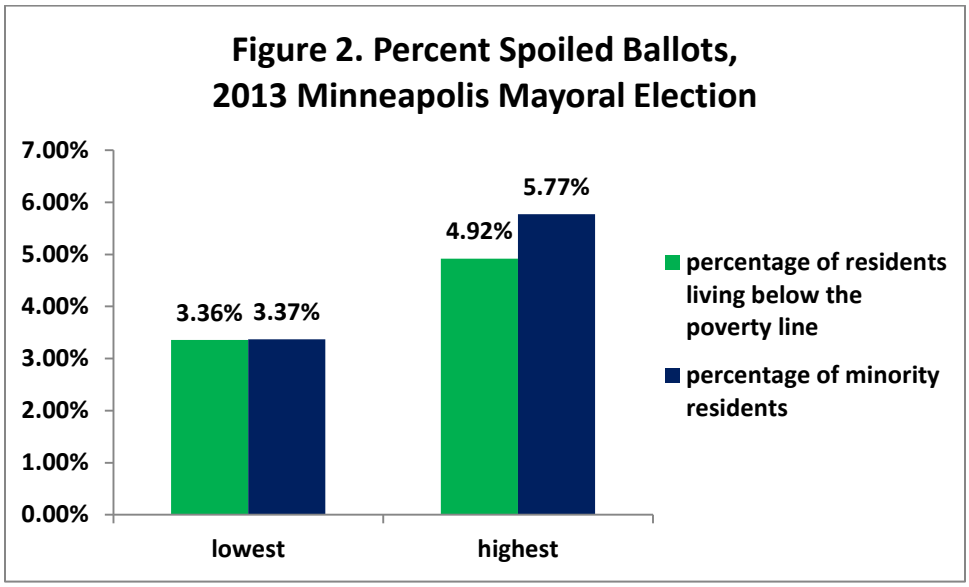
Figure 2. Percent Spoiled Ballots,
2013 Minneapolis Mayoral Election
7.00%
6.00%
5.00%
4.00%
3.00%
2.00%
1.00%
0.00%
3.36%
3.37%
4.92%
5.77%
lowest
highest
percentage of residents living below the poverty line
percentage of minority residents

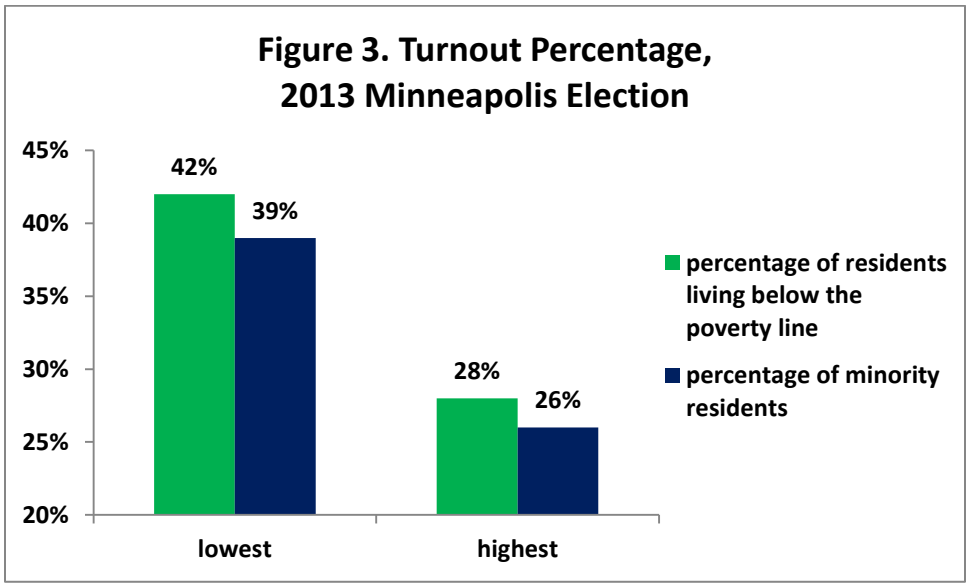
Figure 3. Turnout Percentage,
2013 Minneapolis Election
45%
40%
35%
30%
25%
20%
42%
39%
28%
26%
lowest
highest
percentage of residents living below the poverty line
percentage of minority residents