



## ***Voter Turnout and Election Information***

### **September 2024 Study Pages**

These study pages look at three areas related to voting in Ohio:

- Voter turnout – Who shows up to vote and why?
- New LWVUS position on the decline of local news
- Voter information and misinformation

### **Who Turns Up to Vote?**

The chart below shows the percentage of registered voters who voted the last few years in the Cincinnati area.

**Cincinnati Area Voter Turnout**  
Percentage of registered voters who voted in the election

<b>Counties</b>	<b>Nov 2020 Presidential</b>	<b>Aug 2023 Special Election</b>	<b>Nov 2023</b>	<b>March 2024 Primary</b>
Hamilton	72%	39%	48%	15%
Butler	73%	36%	46%	20%
Warren	82%	43%	54%	26%
Clermont	77%	40%	52%	23%

Notice that the table includes only registered voters and not the people who are eligible, but are not registered. It is estimated that in Ohio about 32% of people who are eligible are not registered to vote.<sup>1</sup> Of people who are not registered, one study found that 62% said they had never been asked to register to vote.<sup>2</sup>

Also notice that in Presidential election years, when turnout is the highest, still about 25% of registered voters do not vote.

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.kff.org/other/state-indicator/number-of-voters-and-voter-registration-in-thousands-as-a-share-of-the-voter-population/?currentTimeframe=0&sortModel=%7B%22colId%22:%22Location%22,%22sort%22:%22asc%22%7D>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.pewtrusts.org/en/research-and-analysis/issue-briefs/2017/06/why-are-millions-of-citizens-not-registered-to-vote>

One partial reason turnout is so low in primaries is the majority of registered voters are not Republican or Democrat, but are “unaffiliated” with a political party. Ohio’s voter database currently shows 1.3 million registered Republicans, 1 million registered Democrats, and 5.7 million unaffiliated voters.<sup>3</sup>

Lots has been written on why people don’t vote. One major survey done after the 2020 election found that feelings of political alienation and apathy about voting are widespread among non-voters. In general, nonvoters are disengaged, disaffected and don't believe politics can make a difference in their lives. They are also more likely to be Latino, younger, make less money and have lower levels of education than voters.<sup>4</sup>

However, if family and friends vote, that makes people more likely to vote, the survey found.<sup>5</sup> This suggests LWV efforts to be visible in the community with a positive message about voting could be effective. While it doesn’t change minds that are made up, it can add peer pressure encouraging participation in a common activity.

## **LWVUS New Position on Local Media**

At its 2024 national convention this summer, LWVUS adopted a new position, “The Decline of Local News and Its Impact on Democracy.” It was adopted as a concurrence based on a study and position adopted by the League of Women Voters of Washington (state).

The study showed local news media is declining at an alarming rate nationwide and is impacting our democracy in several ways: (1) fewer candidates for office; (2) lower voter turnout; (3) increased political divisiveness; (4) decreased civic engagement; (5) increased government costs; and (6) public health challenges.

### **Position**

*The League of Women Voters believes it is the responsibility of the government to provide support for conditions under which credible local journalism can survive and thrive.*

- *The League supports credible and ethical local journalism, in whatever format it is published, as essential to our democracy.*
- *The League of Women Voters supports efforts to ensure everyone has access to information necessary for casting an informed ballot and that credible local news sources are integral to this pursuit.*
- *The League of Women Voters believes that support for the viability of local news may take a variety of forms. Control of the content must remain exclusively with the news organizations.*

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<sup>3</sup> <https://ohiocapitaljournal.com/2023/06/28/ohio-republicans-propose-two-measures-to-close-primary-elections-ahead-of-2024-presidential-race/>

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.npr.org/2020/12/15/945031391/poll-despite-record-turnout-80-million-americans-didnt-vote-heres-why>

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

- *The League of Women Voters also believes media literacy and news education, including support for journalism students, are essential. These opportunities should be expanded in schools and throughout communities.*
- *The League of Women Voters believes that everyone should have access to comprehensive, credible local news and that barriers to access should be removed. These barriers include, but are not limited to, geography, economic status, and education.*

The loss of local news media has hit Ohio particularly hard. Since 2005, the nation has lost about one-third of its newspapers. Ohio has lost half.<sup>6</sup> Northwestern University’s Medill School of Journalism produces an annual report on the State of Local News.<sup>7</sup> It includes a national map showing the number of local news outlets in each county, defined as outlets that provide “consistent and general news coverage.” It shows Hamilton County has 5 local news outlets. Butler County has 2 and there are none in Warren County.

## **Election Information and Misinformation**

Propaganda and slander have always been part of our political process, but with the emergence of the internet and social media, communication of all kinds has increased, and with it the opportunity to confuse and misdirect voters.

*Misinformation* is inadvertently sharing false information without the intent to harm. It’s frighteningly easy to spread misinformation. Remember the game “telephone” and how it shows that our messages get distorted over time? Every day, we play telephone in our face-to-face conversations and over social media with important political information.

*Disinformation* is intentionally sharing false information with the intent to harm. Remember the covert Russian disinformation campaign during the 2016 presidential election? The evidence showed that Russian operatives tried to sow polarization and feed a general lack of faith in the democratic process.<sup>8</sup> Foreign disinformation campaigns have grown in this election cycle and are using AI generated “deep fakes” to appear credible.<sup>9</sup>

In 2016 the Sixth Circuit U.S. Court of Appeals ruled an Ohio law prohibiting campaign lies violated the First Amendment right to free speech. “Political speech is at the core of First Amendment protections. Even false speech receives some constitutional protection.” So it is up to voters to sort out who’s lying and who’s not in a political campaign.

The League of Women Voters has several initiatives to counter the spread of mis- and disinformation. National LWV holds Weekly Election Rumors Briefings for members on growing national and local trends in mis-and-disinformation. The briefing highlights pieces of

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<sup>6</sup> <https://www.wosu.org/2024-01-25/ohio-lost-dozens-of-local-newspapers-last-year-what-comes-next>

<sup>7</sup> <https://localnews.knilab.com/projects/state-of-local-news/2023/report/#introduction>

<sup>8</sup> "Inside a 3-Year Russian Campaign to Influence U.S. Voters". *The New York Times*, February 16, 2018.

<sup>9</sup> <https://www.nytimes.com/2024/04/01/business/media/china-online-disinformation-us-election.html> ; <https://www.usnews.com/news/us/articles/2024-05-09/fbi-warns-that-foreign-adversaries-could-use-ai-to-spread-disinformation-about-us-elections>

disinformation that have made headlines and how best to track and address it. At the end of the briefing there is time for questions. To sign up, [register here](#).

LWV is also partnering on the Civic Listening Corps (CLC), a volunteer network of individuals trained to monitor, critically evaluate, and report misinformation on topics central to our civic life. By participating in CLC, volunteers learn how to identify misinformation and empower organizations with tools to combat it. Sign-up using [LWV's specific link](#) and join a network dedicated to civic responsibility for understanding and identifying harmful and misleading messages.

The League's longstanding efforts to provide reliable election information through the Voter Guide, Vote 411, and Speakers Bureau are also an antidote to misinformation. This graphic was posted on LWV social media; consider sharing it within your networks. Print copies also are available for distribution.

**THE DO'S AND DON'TS OF ELECTION DISINFORMATION**

- ✓ DO VERIFY BEFORE YOU SHARE**  
Consider the source, check the date, and cross-check the information across outlets.
- ✓ DO QUESTION THE CONTENT**  
Read past the headline and question emotionally charged content.
- ✓ DO SHARE ACCURATE INFORMATION**  
Without mentioning the wrong info, set the record straight by sharing the correct messages.
- ✓ DO REPORT IT**  
Report inaccurate info to social media platforms, group administrators, and election officials.
- ✗ DON'T CLICK OR SHARE**  
If you quote the bad information, you help spread it.
- ✗ DON'T ENGAGE PUBLICLY**  
If someone you know is sharing bad info, message them privately and ask them to take it down.

Find trusted, nonpartisan voting information at [VOTE411.org](https://VOTE411.org)!

**LWV** LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS

## **Discussion Questions**

### **Voter Turnout: why don't people vote?**

1. Review the table in the Study Pages on turnout rates. What are you hearing about why people don't vote, from family and friends or when doing League of Women Voters outreach?
2. What can we (those at this meeting) do to help get out the vote in November? Brainstorm a few project ideas and commit to one.

### **LWV Position on Local Media**

3. What media do you use for local news? Be specific, which websites, TV channels, email newsletters? Please also tell if you follow major media on a social media platform like Facebook or X.
4. In the Cincinnati area, what local issues are well covered by media? Are there local issues that you have trouble getting information about?

### **Election Information and Misinformation**

5. What do you think is the purpose of foreign disinformation about the election?
6. How do you judge the credibility of a news source?