



UNIVERSITY OF NEBRASKA AT OMAHA

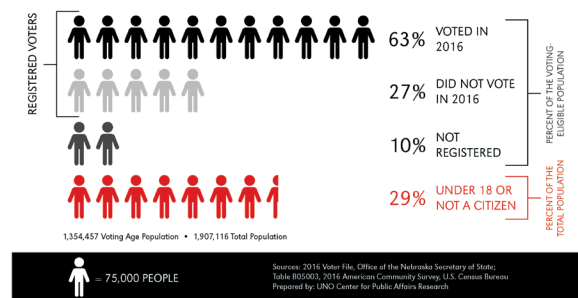
# CENTER FOR PUBLIC AFFAIRS RESEARCH

## Nebraska Voter Turnout | 2014, 2016, 2018 | Executive Summary

The **Center for Public Affairs Research** at the University of Nebraska at Omaha acquired the “Voter Files” for years 2014, 2016, and 2018 from the Office of the Nebraska Secretary of State in August 2018 to provide original calculations of voter turnout across a range of geographies and variables. Data from the U.S. Census Bureau is used to provide context for the analyses.

This report focuses on the **state of Nebraska**.

**63%** of the eligible voting population turned out to vote in 2016, which is above the national average.

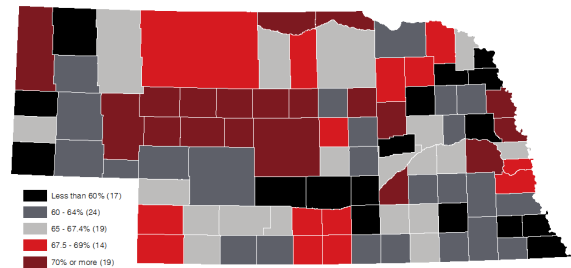


Voter turnout was **41%** in 2014 for the last midterm election, similar to the national average.

The lowest voter turnout in both 2014 and 2016 was among 18-29-year-olds.

Over **250,000 18-29-year-olds** did not vote in the 2014 midterm election. Turnout is also low among 30-44-year-olds across Nebraska.

**Voter turnout varies across the state of Nebraska.**  
*2016 voter turnout as % of eligible population*



Sources: 2016 Voter File, Office of the Nebraska Secretary of State; Table B05003, 2012-2016 American Community Survey 5-year estimates, U.S. Census Bureau

Other findings include, low turnout among the Latino population of Nebraska, surprising lack of engagement among registered voters, and partisan and turnout divides between metropolitan and rural counties.





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# Nebraska Voter Turnout | 2014, 2016, 2018

## **Why Vote?**

Voting is a fundamental act of civic life. Those that vote send a clear signal to elected officials about what matters most to them. That signal, especially when combined with other vital acts of political engagement, such as directly contacting elected representatives, joining political or advocacy organizations, contributing resources, volunteering, publicly speaking out, or even running for office, helps to shape and define the future of our towns, counties, state, and nation.

Voting is essential to the American system of government—a democratic, constitutional republic—and the right to vote is part of the historic fabric of these United States. As a result, the level of voter turnout warrants our attention.

## **Data**

This report focuses on voter turnout in 2014 and 2016 general elections, and 2018 registered voters as of Sept. 1, 2018, in Nebraska.

The Center for Public Affairs Research in the College of Public Affairs and Community Service at the University of Nebraska at Omaha acquired the “Voter Files” or “Voter Registration Records” for years 2014, 2016, and 2018 from the elections unit of the Office of the Nebraska Secretary of State in September 2018.

The main purpose of the report is to provide original calculations of voter turnout across a range of geographies and voter characteristics. Data from the U.S. Census Bureau is used to provide context for our analyses, including, the Current Population Survey, Voting and Registration Supplement, annual American Community Surveys, and the 2012-2016 American Community Survey 5-year estimates. Because these are original calculations, the results may be slightly different from other sources using similar data but all should be within a small margin of error.

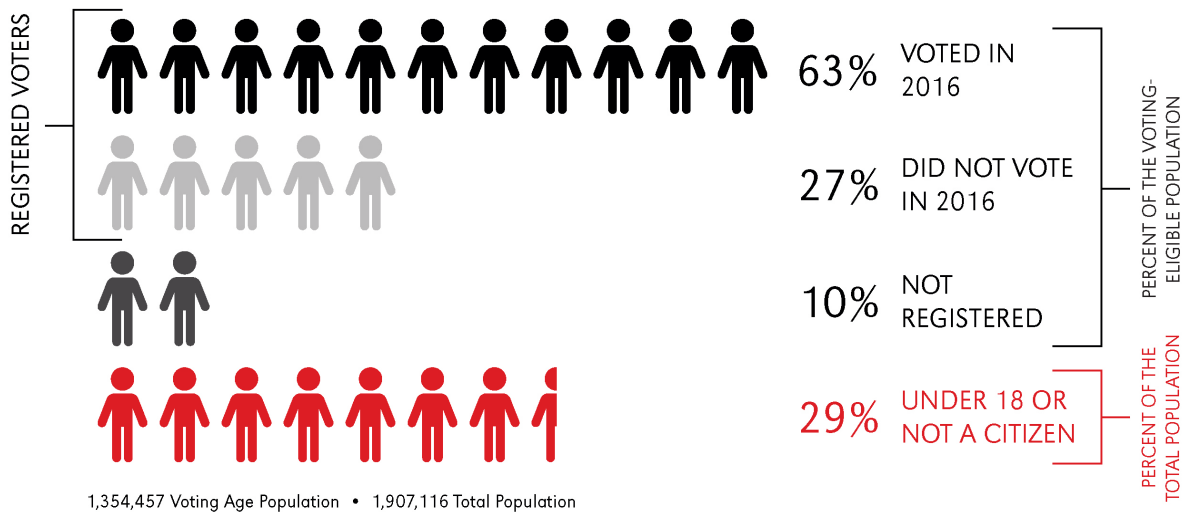
## Registered Voters

In Nebraska, all citizens age 18 years and over may register to vote. A person convicted of a felony temporarily loses the right to vote. Voting rights are restored two years after the completion of incarceration plus any period of parole or probation, and after submitting a new voter registration application. In order to vote, a person must be registered within approximately two weeks of the election. **October 26, 2018, is the registration deadline for the November 6, 2018, midterm election.**

In 2016, the total population of Nebraska was 1,907,116. The citizen voting age population was 1,354,457. Of those, 1,214,718 were registered to vote, a slight increase from 2014 (1,160,122).

**Figure 1**

**In 2016, 90% of the citizen voting age population was registered to vote**

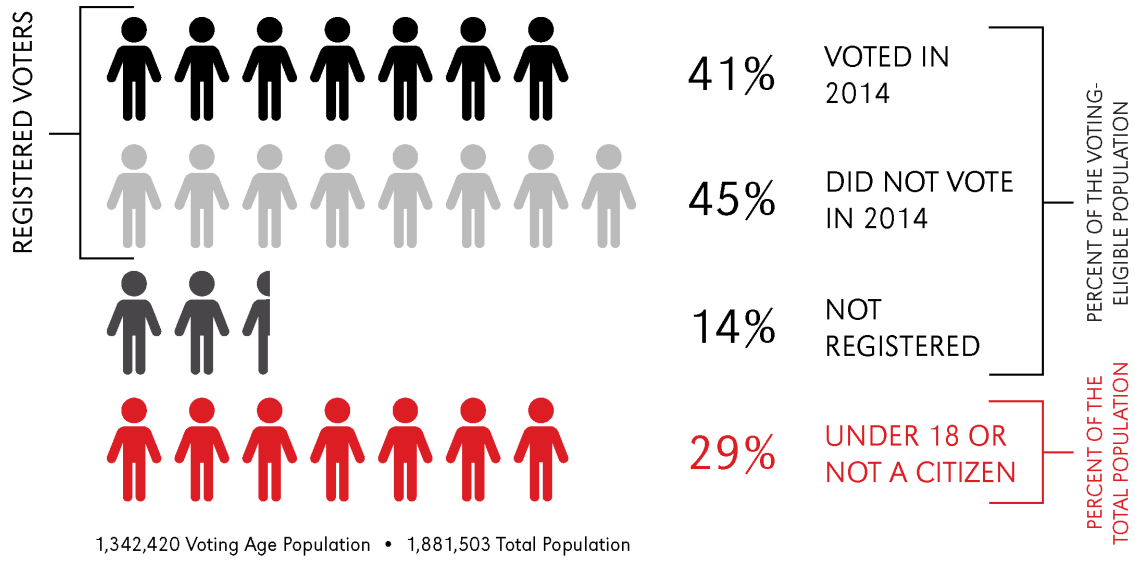


= 75,000 PEOPLE

Sources: 2016 Voter File, Office of the Nebraska Secretary of State; Table B05003, 2016 American Community Survey, U.S. Census Bureau  
Prepared by: UNO Center for Public Affairs Research

**Figure 2**

**In 2014, 87% of the citizen voting age population was registered to vote**



 = 75,000 PEOPLE

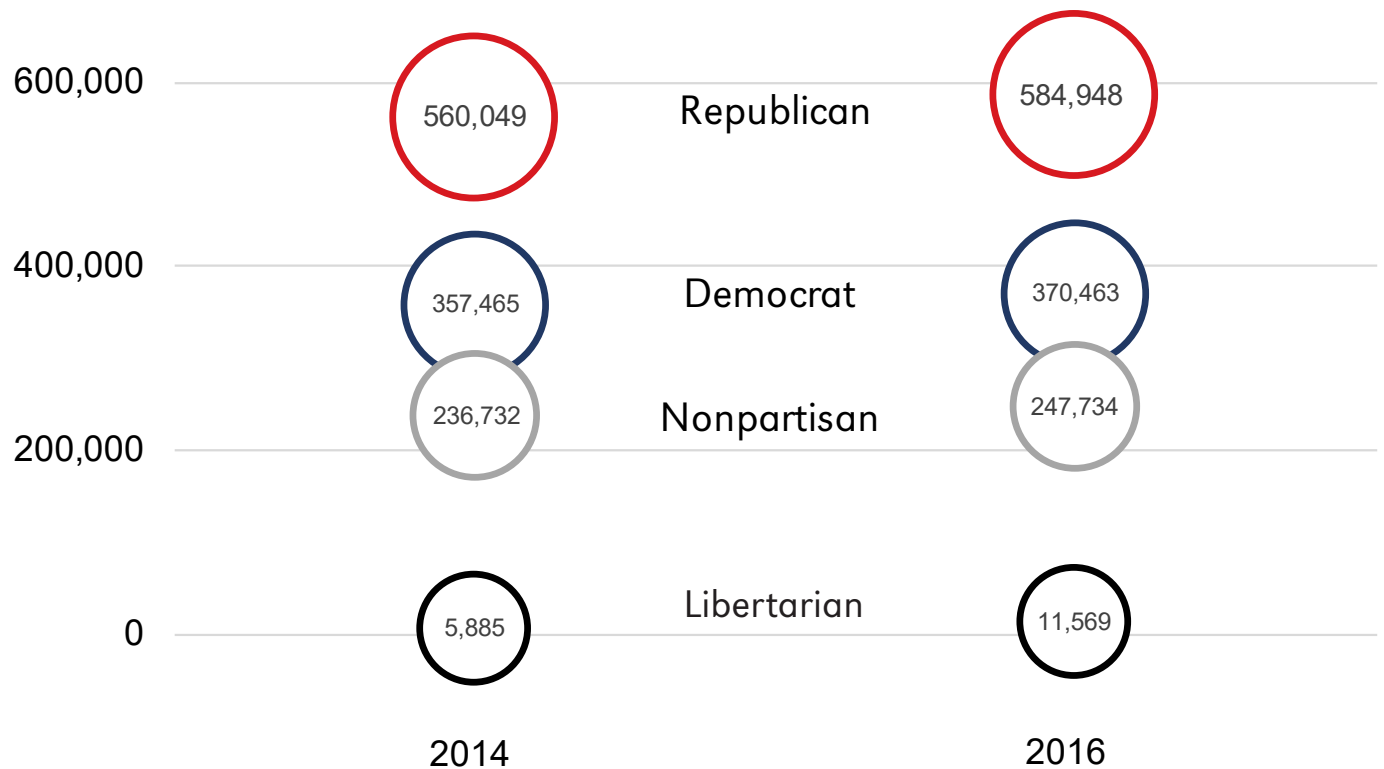
Sources: 2014 Voter File, Office of the Nebraska Secretary of State;  
Table B05003, 2014 American Community Survey, U.S. Census Bureau  
Prepared by: UNO Center for Public Affairs Research

## Registered Voters and Political Parties

When a person registers to vote, he or she may choose to register with a political party. Nebraska has more registered Republicans than any other party. This was true in 2014 and 2016. In 2016, over 500,000 Nebraskans were registered as Republicans, shown in Figure 3.

**Figure 3**

### Most Nebraskans are registered as Republicans *Number of registered voters in 2014 and 2016*



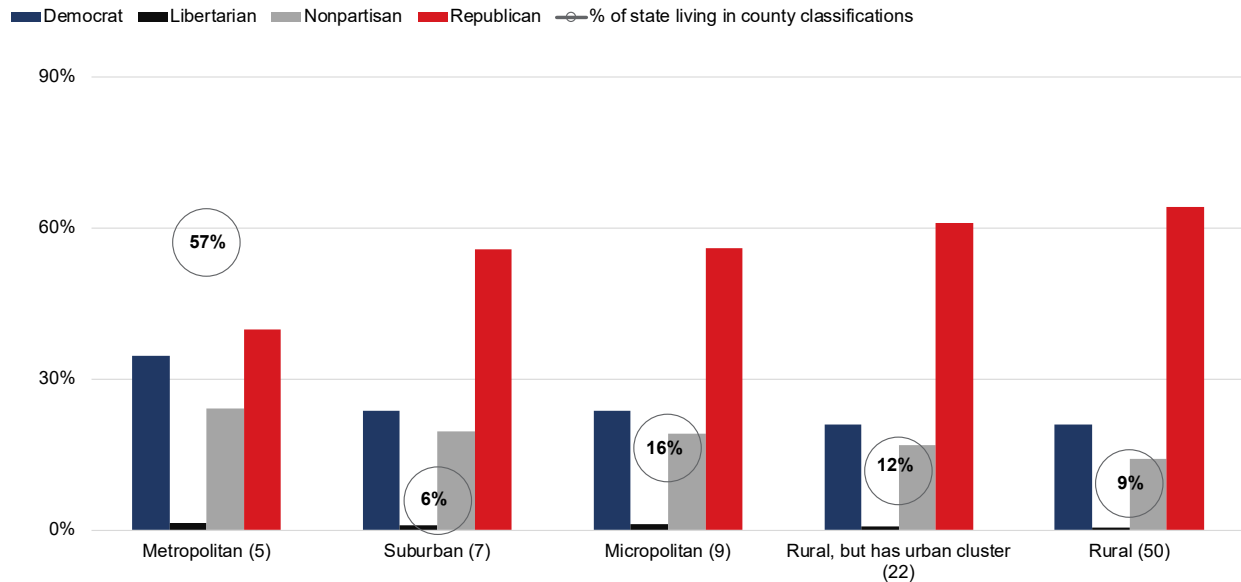
Source: 2014 and 2016 Voter Files, Office of the Nebraska Secretary of State

While persons in the state predominately register as Republican, there is variation in registration across Nebraska. Figure 4 shows the percent of the population registered with political parties by county classification as of September 1, 2018. Nebraska's five metropolitan counties, where 57% of the population lives, are politically divided between Republicans (40%) and Democrats (35%). As you move from metropolitan to suburban to micropolitan to rural the percentage of the population that is registered Republican increases, while the percent of the population that is registered with other parties decreases. Nonpartisan voters are the most populous in metropolitan counties (24%).

**Figure 4**

**Rural counties are more Republican; Urban counties, where more of the Nebraska population lives, has a smaller divide in the number of registered Republicans to Democrats**

**2018 % of registered voters and % of population living in county classifications**



Source: 2018 Voter File, Office of the Nebraska Secretary of State

**Voter Turnout**

Voter turnout tends to vary by election type and across the country as can be seen in Table 1 and Table 2.

**General elections**, like 2016 in which a president is chosen tend to have greater turnout than general, **mid-term elections**, as November 2018 will be. In midterm elections, many local, state, and national representatives are chosen, but not the president.

**Table 1**

**Voter turnout in Nebraska varies by election type**  
*% of eligible population*

Presidential 2008	Midterm 2010	Presidential 2012	Midterm 2014	Presidential 2016
65%	41%	67%	44%	62%

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Survey, Voting and Registration Supplement

**Table 2**

**2016 voter turnout in Nebraska is similar to national and benchmark states' voter turnout**  
*% of eligible population*

Nebraska	United States	Iowa	Kansas
62%	62%	69%	63%

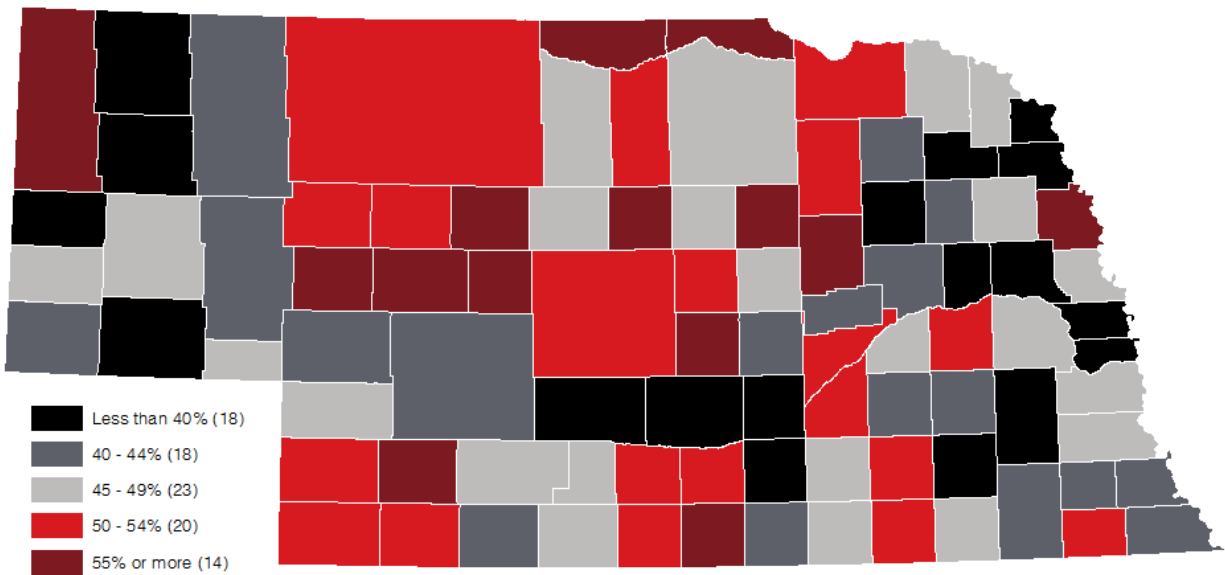
Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Survey, Voting and Registration Supplement

Voter turnout also varies across counties in Nebraska. Figure 5 shows county voter turnout for 2014 and 2016, respectively.

**Figure 5**

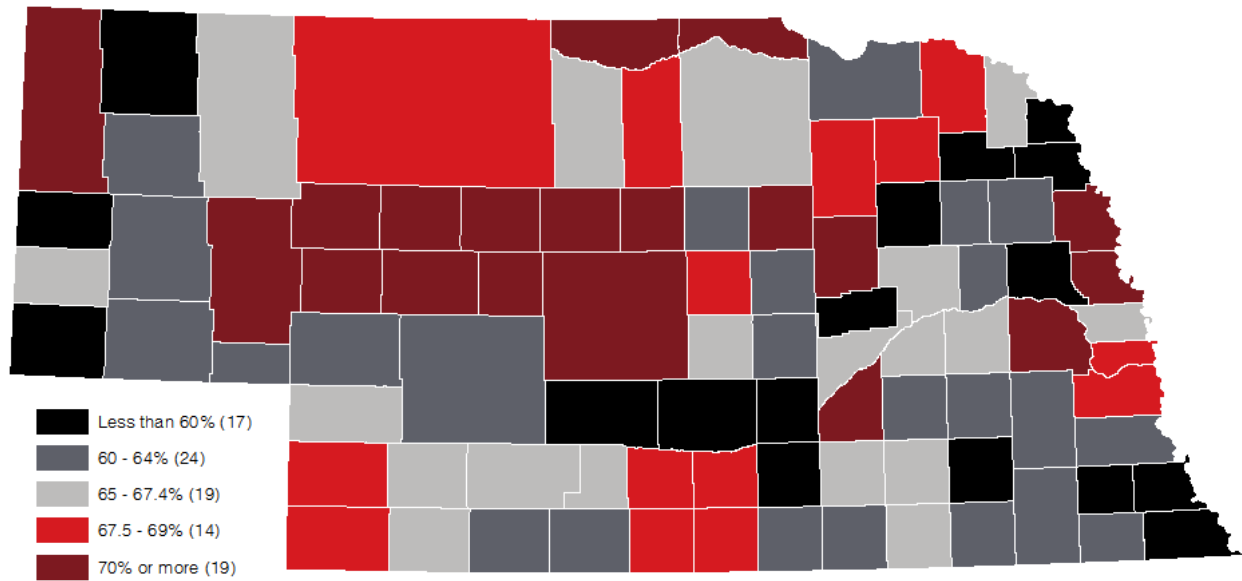
**Voter turnout varies across the counties of Nebraska**

*2014 voter turnout as % of eligible population*



Sources: 2014 Voter File, Office of the Nebraska Secretary of State; Table B05003, 2012-2016 American Community Survey 5-year estimates, U.S. Census Bureau

**2016 voter turnout as % of eligible population**



Sources: 2016 Voter File, Office of the Nebraska Secretary of State; Table B05003, 2012-2016 American Community Survey 5-year estimates, U.S. Census Bureau

The five counties with the highest and lowest turnout in 2014 and 2016 are provided in Table 3 for further reference.

**Table 3**

Top 5 Counties in Voter Turnout		Bottom 5 Counties in Voter Turnout	
2014	2016	2014	2016
McPherson	Arthur	Dakota	Thurston
Loup	Loup	Thurston	Wayne
Keya Paha	Keya Paha	Hall	Dakota
Boyd	McPherson	Wayne	Johnson
Wheeler	Grant	Colfax	Dawes

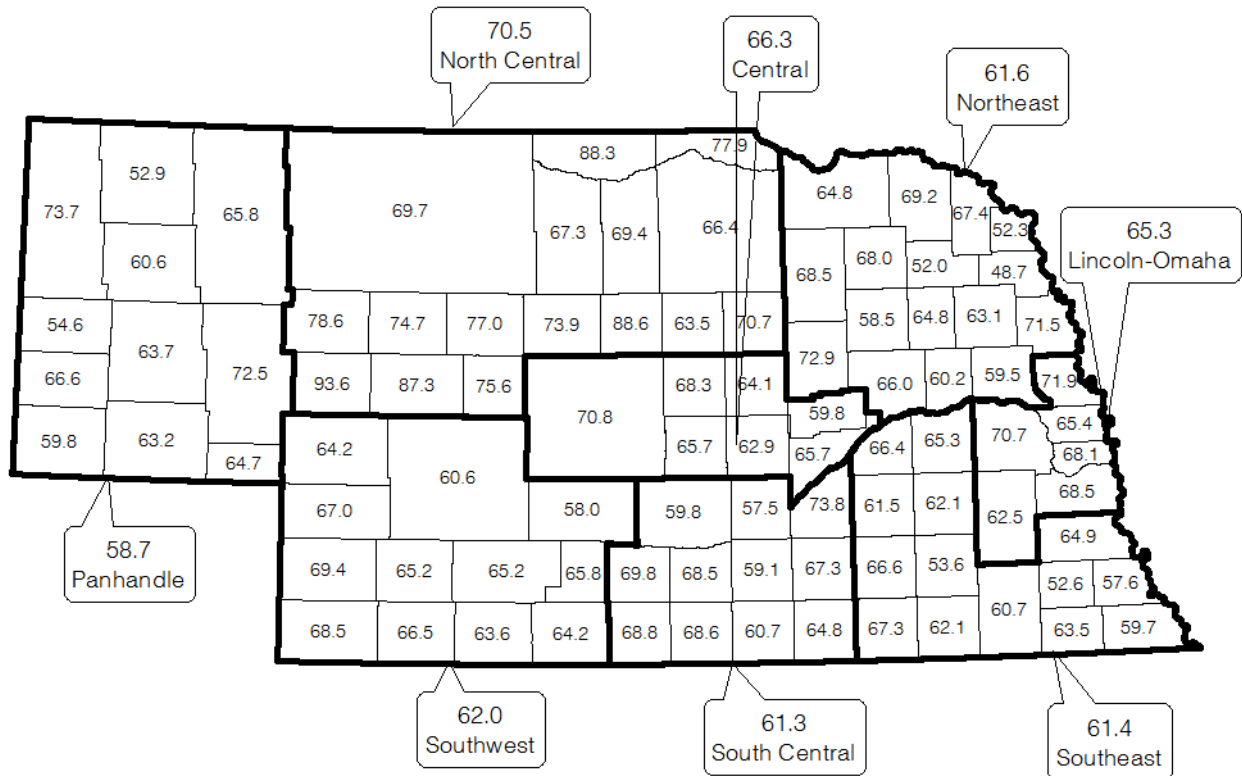
Sources: 2014 and 2016 Voter Files, Office of the Nebraska Secretary of State



Voter turnout also varies across the regions of Nebraska, as shown in Figure 6. The highest turnout is in North Central Nebraska (70.5%). The lowest turnout is in the Panhandle (58.7%).

**Figure 6**

**Voter turnout varies across the regions of Nebraska  
2014 voter turnout as % of eligible population**

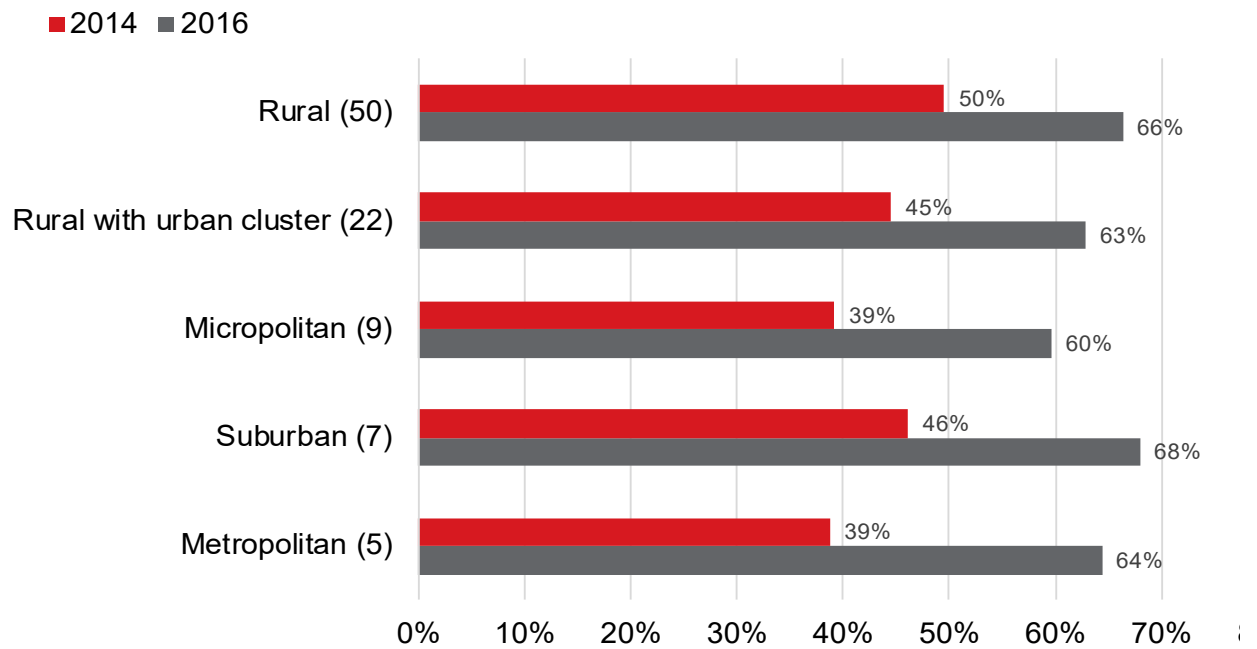


Source: 2014 Voter File, Office of the Nebraska Secretary of State; Table B05003, 2012-2016 American Community Survey 5-year estimates, U.S. Census Bureau

In comparing voter turnout across metropolitan, suburban, micropolitan, and rural counties (designations largely based on population) there are trends in voter turnout, as seen in Figure 7. In 2014, the 50 counties in Nebraska that are entirely rural had the highest voter turnout (50%). The five counties of Nebraska that comprise core metropolitan areas had the lowest turnout (39%). The pattern for turnout was a bit different in 2016. Suburban counties, of which there are seven in Nebraska, had the highest voter turnout (68%). Rural voter turnout remained high (66%) in 2016 but metropolitan counties made a big jump from last to third with a voter turnout of 64%.

**Figure 7**

**Rural Nebraska has high voter turnout compared to metropolitan Nebraska**  
*% share of eligible voters (number of counties in classification)*



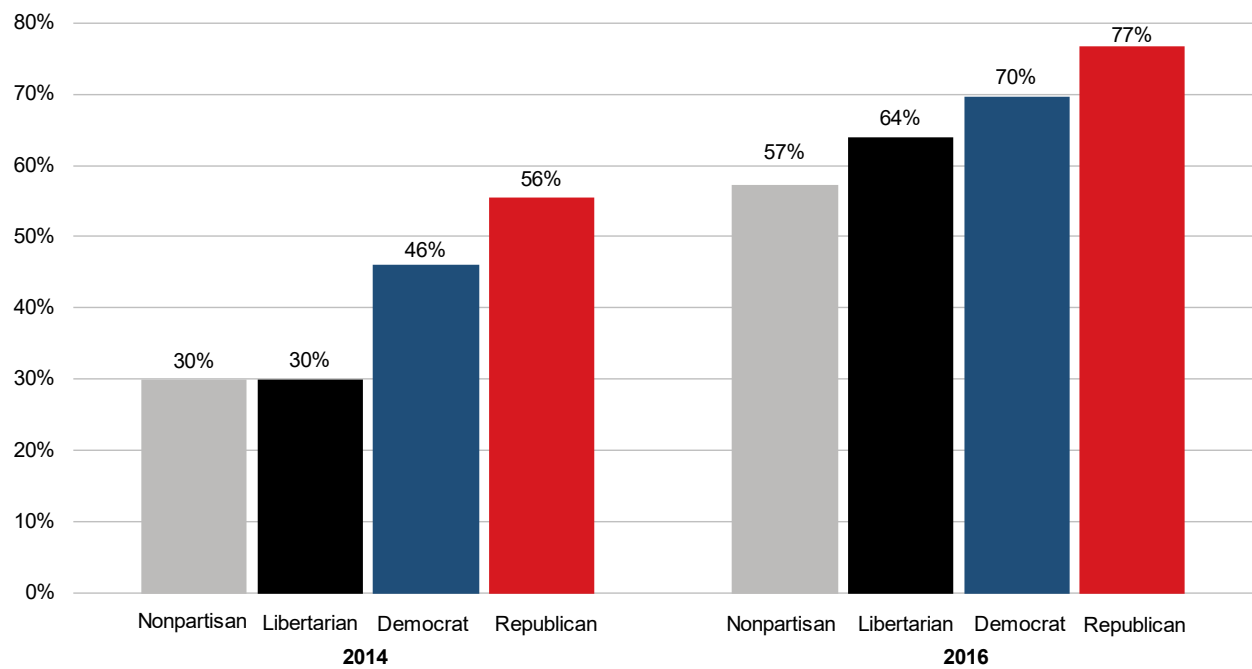
Sources: 2014 and 2016 Voter Files, Office of the Nebraska Secretary of State; Table B05003, 2012-2016 American Community Survey 5-year estimates, U.S. Census Bureau

## Voter Turnout and Political Parties

Voter turnout also varies by political party in Nebraska. Those registered as Republicans turned out to vote at higher rates than other political parties in both 2014 and 2016. Voter turnout among registered Democrats did increase in 2016 as did turnout among all other political parties; however, that jump is consistent with higher turnout in presidential, general elections.

**Figure 8**

**Nebraska voter turnout has been higher for Republicans than Democrats, with nonpartisans the lowest**  
*2014 and 2016 voter turnout as a % of registered voters*



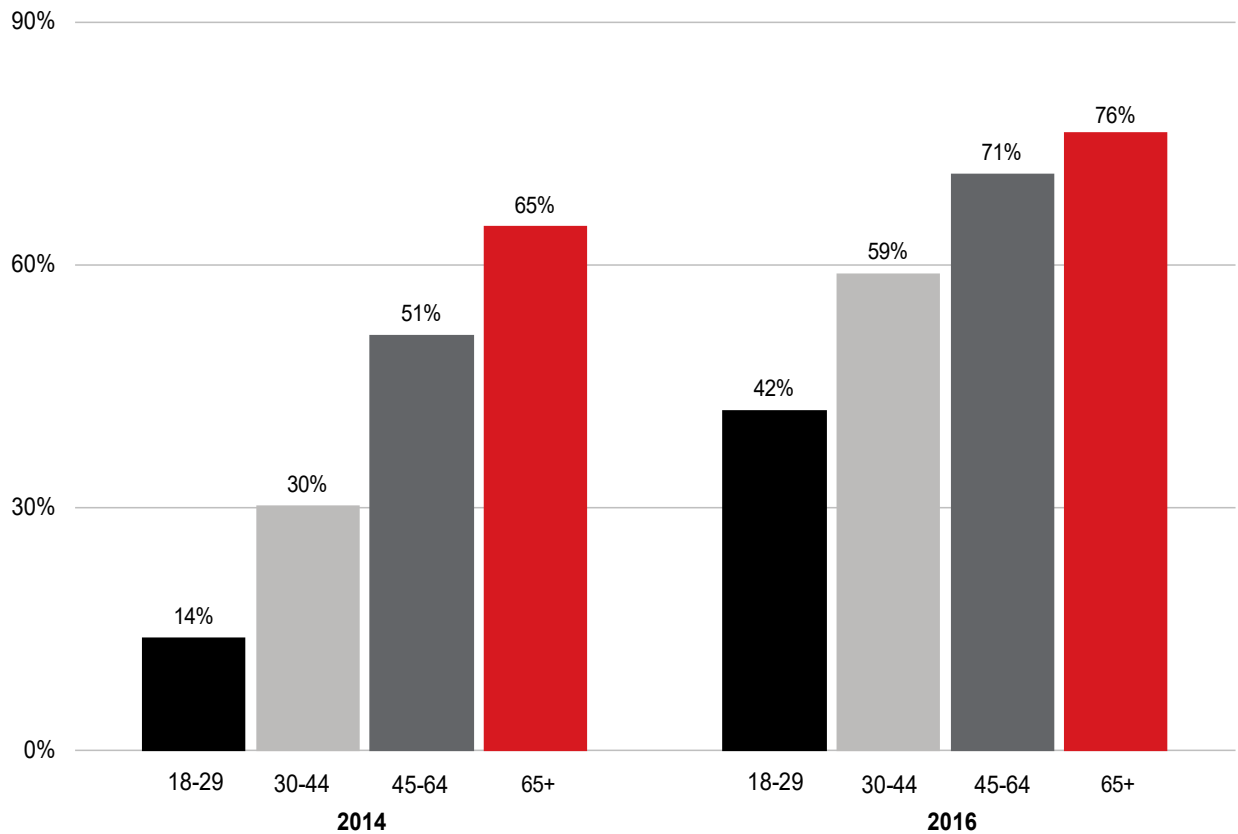
Sources: 2014 and 2016 Voter Files, Office of the Nebraska Secretary of State

### Voter Turnout and Age

In Nebraska, voter turnout varies by age groups. The population age 65 years and over votes at much higher rates than the youngest voting age group, 18-29-year-olds, and all other age groups as well, as shown in Figure 9.

**Figure 9**

#### **Voter turnout increases with age 2014 and 2016 Nebraska voter turnout as a % of eligible population**



Sources: 2016 and 2016 Voter Files, Nebraska Secretary of State; Table B01001, 2012-2016 American Community Survey 5-year estimates, U.S. Census Bureau

Interestingly, many registered voters do not vote. This is true for all age groups, but especially true among young and middle-aged voters. In 2016, 37% of 18-to-28-year-olds were registered to vote and did not vote, that is 107,578 people that were registered but did not vote. About the same is true for 30-44-year-olds. In 2016, 32%, or 106,189, 30-44-year-olds were registered but did not vote.

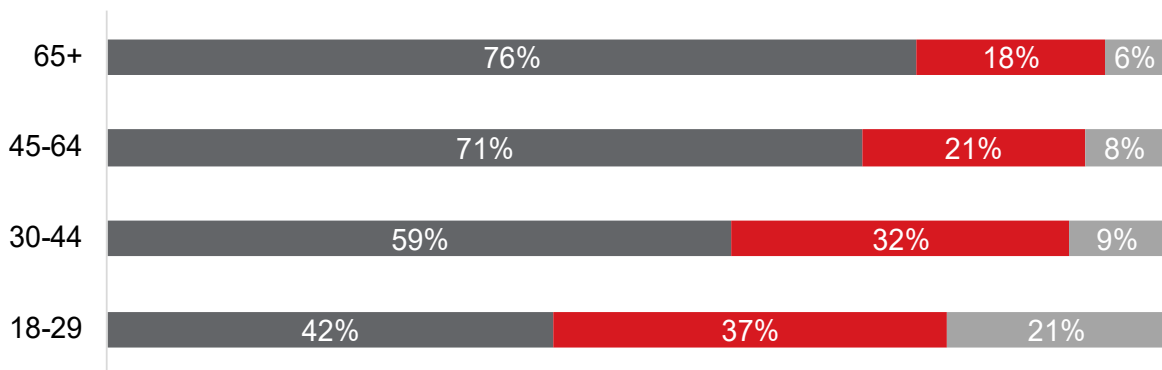
**Figure 10**

**In all age groups, large portions of the Nebraska population are registered to vote, but many young and middle aged voters are not making it to the polls**  
*% of voting age population, in 2016*

**In all age groups, large portions of the Nebraska population are registered to vote but many young and middle aged voters are not making it to the polls**

2016, % of voting age population

■ Voted ■ Registered, Did Not Vote ■ Not Registered



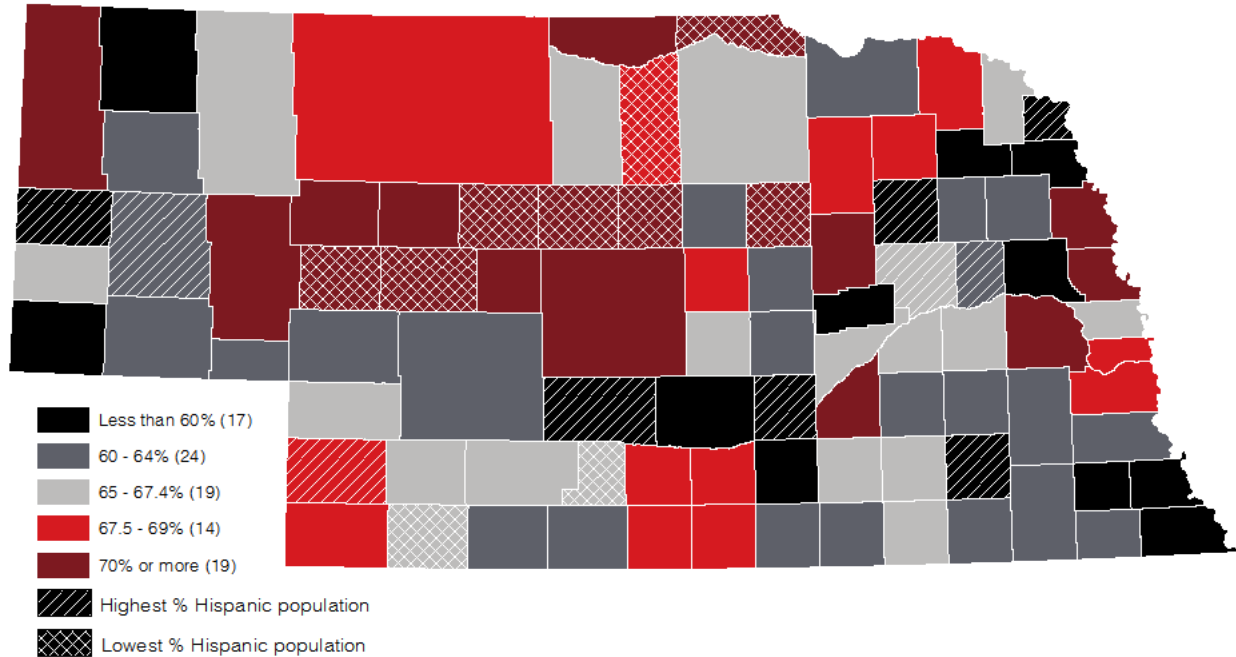
Source: 2016 Voter File, Office of the Nebraska Secretary of State

**Voter Turnout and the Hispanic Population**

The analysis also finds that counties with a higher Hispanic population have lower voter turnout than other counties as shown in Figure 11. The counties with the highest percentage of the population that identifies as Hispanic also has some of the lowest turnout rates in both 2014 and 2016.

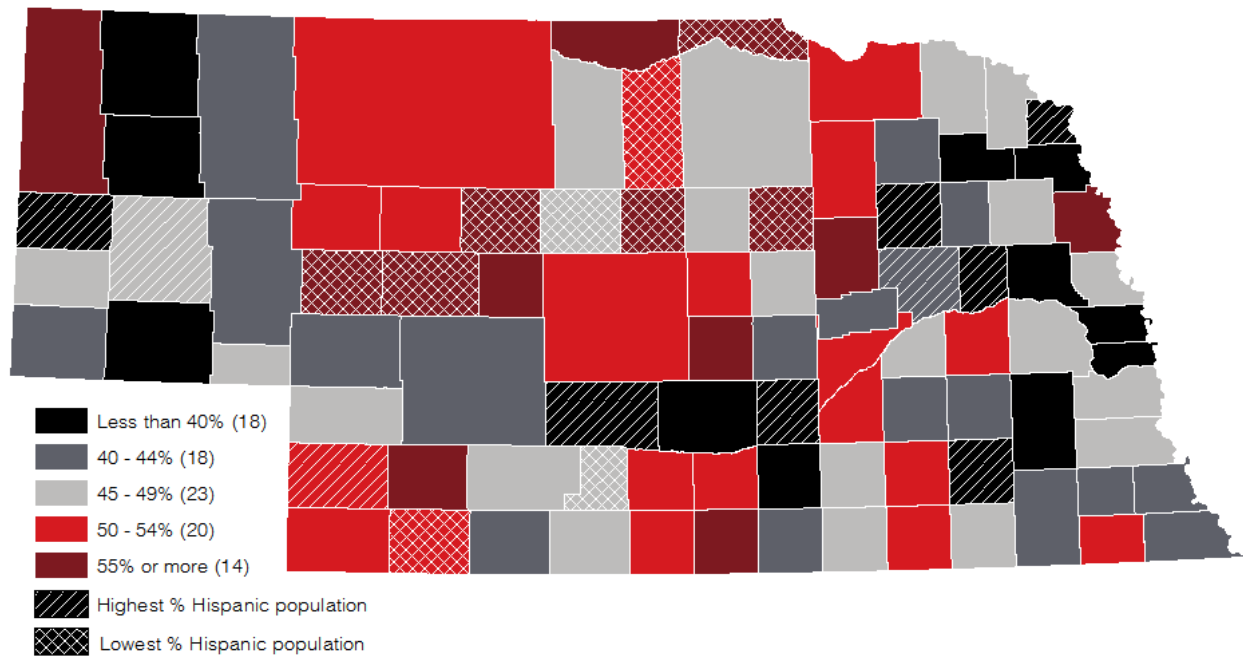
**Figure 11**

**Counties with the highest % of Hispanic population have lower voter turnout  
2016 voter turnout as % of eligible population and % Hispanic population**



Sources: 2016 Voter File, Office of the Nebraska Secretary of State; Table B03002, 2012-2016 American Community Survey 5-year estimates, U.S. Census Bureau

**2014 voter turnout as % of eligible population and % Hispanic population**



Sources: 2014 Voter File, Office of the Nebraska Secretary of State; Table B03002, 2012-2016 American Community Survey 5-year estimates, U.S. Census Bureau

## Conclusions

Citizens in Nebraska are part of the fabric of American democracy in many ways, but in particular, through exercising the right to vote. Consistent with nationwide patterns, there is a fair amount of variation in voter turnout across the state of Nebraska and its demographics.

## Key Findings

- 1. Low voter turnout in the midterm election of 2014.** Mid-term elections in Nebraska and nationally have consistently low turnout among all age groups and geographies. November 2018 will also be a midterm election. If past voter turnout is any indicator for November, we should be concerned that eligible voters will not exercise their civic right and responsibility to vote. While mid-term elections do not feature a presidential race, elected officials at the national, state, and local levels are on the ballot and can have great effect on life in Nebraska.
- 2. 18-29-year-old voter turnout in Nebraska is low but so is middle-aged, 30-44-year-old, voter turnout.** Young voters rarely turn out to vote at high rates, but the report finds low engagement among middle-aged voters in Nebraska as well. The citizen voting age population of 30-44-years-olds in 2016 was 333,017 and only 196,495 voted; meaning they about halved their electoral clout in 2016. In 2014, turnout was 25 percentage points higher among Nebraskans age 65 and older than among the age 30-44 group and over 50 percentage points higher than the age 18-29 group.
- 3. Voter turnout varies across the state of Nebraska.** The highest turnout is in North Central Nebraska and the lowest turnout is in the Panhandle.
- 4. In Nebraska, there is a growing metropolitan-rural divide in partisanship.** As of September 1, 2018, the state of Nebraska had more registered Republicans than Democrats. In the 50 rural counties of Nebraska the ratio of Republicans to Democrats, is about 3-to-1. However, only 9 percent of the state lives in those 50 rural counties. In the five urban counties of the state, where 57 percent of the population lives, the ratio of Republicans to Democrats is about 1-to-1. As the metropolitan population continues to grow and the rural population declines, we should expect changes in the partisan composition of the state.
- 5. Counties with a higher percentage of the population that identifies as Latino have lower voter turnout.** The portion of the Nebraska citizen, voting age population that identified as Latino was 5.7% in 2017. The counties in Nebraska with the highest percentage of Latino population in 2016, had an average voter turnout of 58% compared to 73% voter turnout in the counties with the lowest percentage of Latino population. This small, but growing population in the state of Nebraska, is not exercising their right to vote at the same rates as non-Latino voters.

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