

# Safe and Nurturing Social Environment *Civic Vitality*

## *Voting and Civic Participation*

### **What are the Most Important Goals?**

- *Informed populace*
- *Visionary leaders*
- *Engaged institutions*
- *Accessible services*
- *Balanced demographics*
- *Good health*
- *Creative economy*
- *Continuous education*
- *Directed growth*
- *Valued ecosystems*
- *Integrated infrastructure*

### **What is this Indicator?**

This indicator looks at the number of adults (aged 18 and older) who are eligible to vote, the percentage of these who are registered to vote, and the percentage who actually turned out to vote in town elections.

### **Why is this Indicator Important?**

Voting is one of the most basic rights of a democratic society. Voting expresses our shared commitment to public values and goals that shape our lives and communities. As voter participation declines, fewer people influence local decision-making. It signals a decline in how vested we are as citizens of our community, state and nation, and how willing we are to commit to building a common future.

### **Analysis of Data**

The number of permanent Cape Cod residents aged 18 or older who were eligible to vote increased by approximately 20% between 1990 and 2000, from 147,375 in 1990 to 176,790 in 2000. The number who actually registered to vote increased by approximately 42%, from approximately 117,000 in 1990 to 166,007 in 2000.

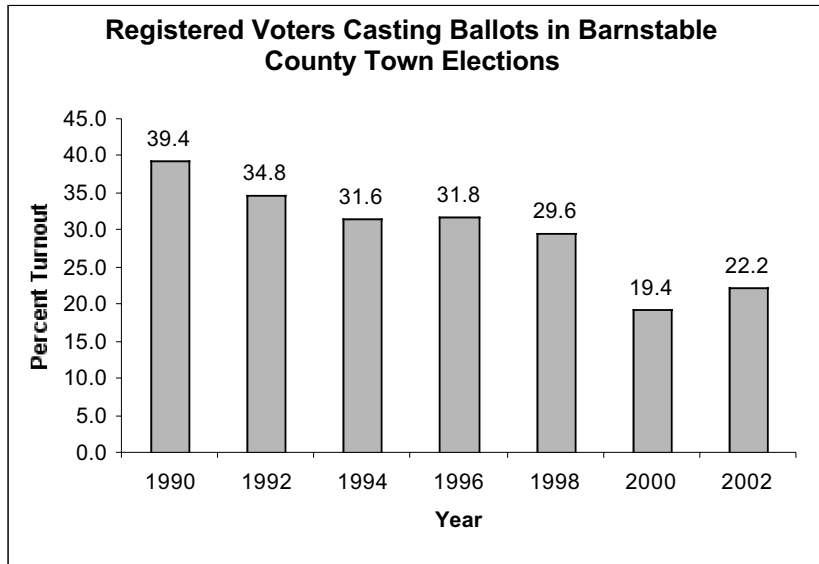
Although voter eligibility and registration have risen, voter participation in town elections has decreased dramatically since 1990. While participation in individual town elections varies depending on local issues and races, the overall voting rate is plummeting. The average turnout in Barnstable County town elections in fell from 39.4% in 1990 to 22.2% in 2002 (Figure 1).

This trend is reflected in statewide elections as well. Barnstable County's participation in statewide elections declined from 75% in 1994 to 64% in 2002, as seen in Figure 2. Across the Commonwealth, the voter turnout in statewide elections has also declined from 71% in 1990 to 56% in 2002.

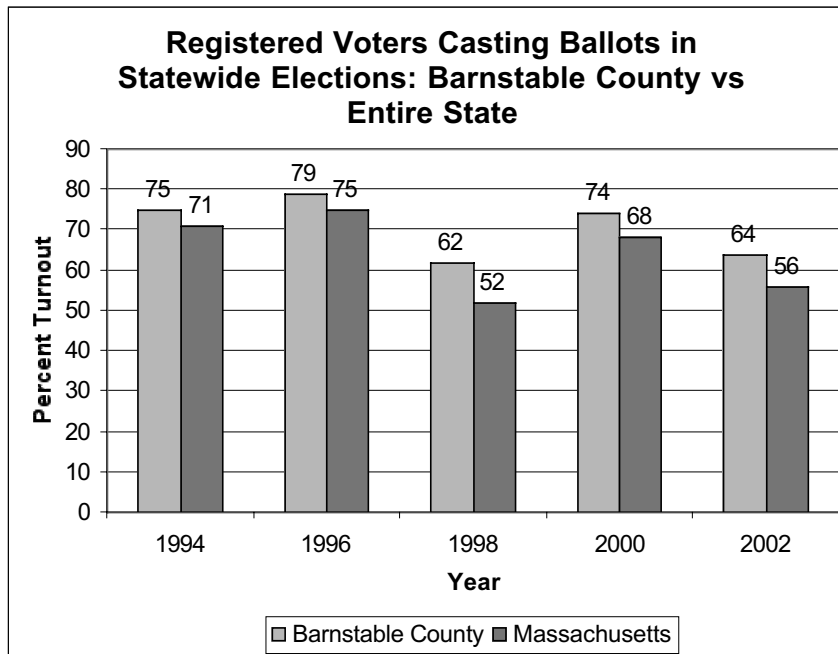
However, there is one positive note to report: voter participation in Barnstable County exceeds the statewide average in these elections.



**Figure 1.**



**Figure 2.**





### **What Can We Do?**

#### ■ **Individuals:**

- *Register to vote.*
- *Vote.*
- *Encourage family and friends to vote.*
- *Become familiar with important issues and the candidates' stand on them.*
- *Attend community discussions of key issues as well as candidate debates and forums.*
- *Run for office yourself.*
- *Participate in civic advocacy and voting organizations such as the League of Women Voters.*

#### ■ **Communities:**

- *Establish a strong community ethic to encourage voting.*
- *Organize community discussions of key issues as well as candidate debates and forums.*
- *Bring civic involvement programs, such as Kids Voting, into school education curricula.*

#### ■ **Decision-makers:**

- *Encourage voting.*
- *Listen to your constituents and share your views with other members of your community.*
- *Learn and teach others about community issues influenced by the electoral process.*

### **What Connections Does this Indicator Have?**

Voting represents the heart of the democratic process. The right and responsibility to vote gives citizens the ability to directly affect decisions that govern most aspects of their lives.

#### ■ **Economic**

Voting elects our representatives who make decisions that affect our economic interests in areas such as taxes, cost of education, cost of municipal expenditures, job growth, health care and economic development.

#### ■ **Environmental**

Voting decreases the possibility that decisions about zoning, land use, water, air, forests, wetlands, open space and hazardous materials will be made by a small number of decision-makers with narrow, vested interests. By voting, Cape Codders help ensure that environmental issues receive broad and thorough public scrutiny.

#### ■ **Social**

Voting is often used as a measurement of the civic health of a community. It is at the heart of participatory democracy, as it allows each voter to have a voice in key issues that affect the community. It is a fundamental right and responsibility. Voting provides a means for raising the quality of life for a community, and indicates a commitment to the community's well-being.