

Civics and Diversity

Community Strengths:

SOUND VOTING AND POLITICAL PROCESS:

The county has a higher voting participation rate than national averages. There is a good representation on a local level with many high quality candidates, and a variety of backgrounds are represented on committees.

COMMUNITY RESPONSIVE TO NEW DIVERSE POPULATIONS

The Community has worked hard to foster cultural understanding and provide equal opportunities and access for minorities. There are programs and services that have expanded to meet minority needs, including language programs within the educational system.

VOLUNTEERISM EVIDENT

The community has an active volunteer force.

FAIR HOUSING

Three agencies deal with housing discrimination complaints, and two of the agencies have toll-free numbers. Fair housing complaints can be filed with the Wisconsin Equal Rights Division (608-266-1997), United States Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD 1-800-765-9372) or Metropolitan Milwaukee Fair Housing Council (1-877-647-3247).

Community Challenges:

PARTICIPATION IN GOVERNMENT AND COMMUNITY

Voting processes and participation could be improved. Public involvement in civic and community meetings is low. The community needs more concerned and diversified quality candidates for public office.

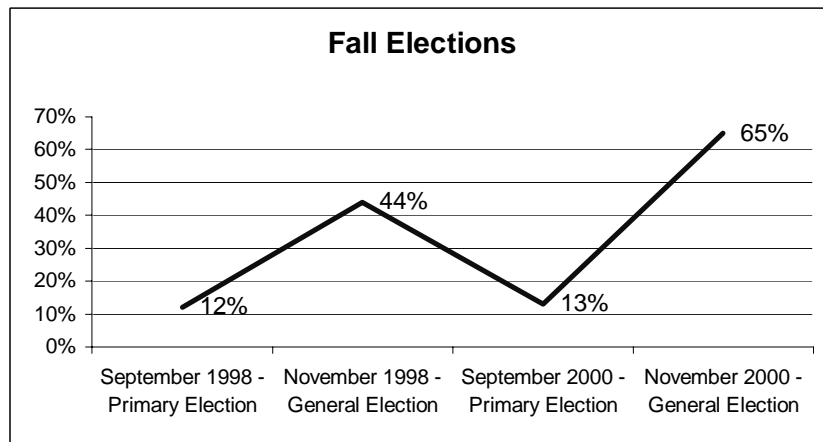
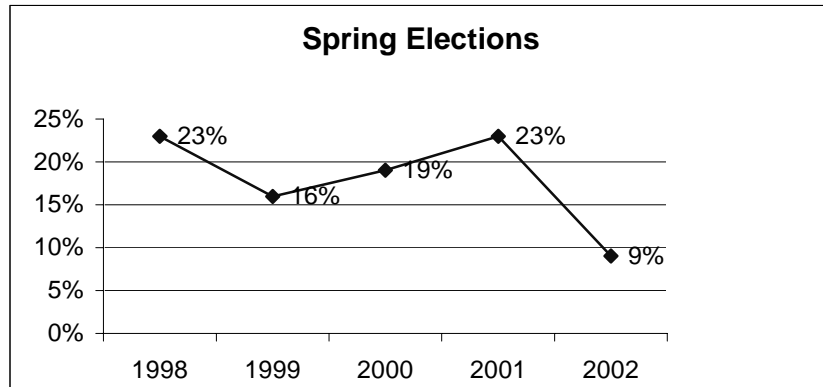
HOUSING DISCRIMINATION

Victims of housing discrimination in Oshkosh or Winnebago County may not file fair housing complaints because they are concerned about possible repercussions, have immediate priorities such as finding housing for their families, are unaware of their civil rights or for other personal reasons.

Voter Participation

Percentage of eligible Winnebago County voters who vote in general elections

- Of the 118,391 eligible voters in Winnebago County, 76,441 (65%) cast their votes in the fall 2000 presidential election.
- In Spring 2002 elections, 10,946 (9%) of the 119,796 eligible voters in Winnebago County went to the polls to vote for Court of Appeals, and various County Board Supervisor positions.



Why are we concerned?

Voting is one of the most fundamental of our rights as citizens. By casting votes, citizens express their preferences and contribute to the formation of public policy. Communities that have a high percentage of voters are more engaged in civic issues which results in a stronger quality of life.

powerful tool citizens can use to hold elected leaders accountable and ensure they are responsive to the concerns of all people. The percentage of eligible citizens who vote is the broadest possible measure of voting because it is not limited to only registered voters, but instead includes all people who could cast a vote if they chose to do so.

Voter Participation

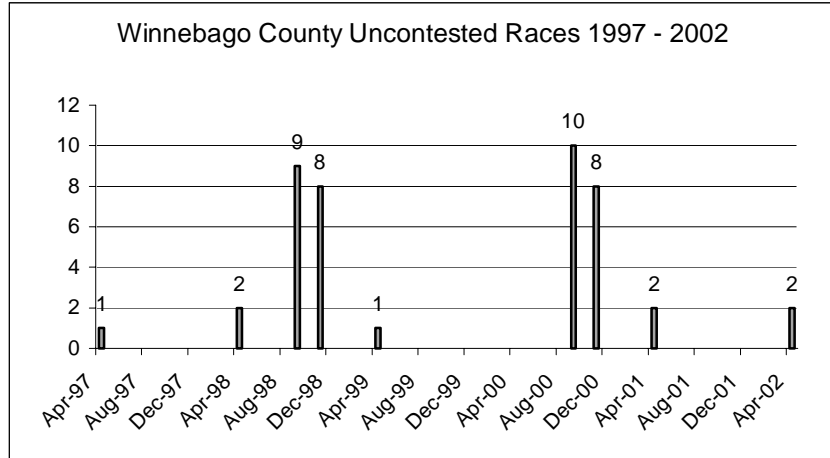
Voter participation is the most basic measure of political and civic engagement. U.S. citizens 18 years of age and over are eligible to vote. The vote is the most

Voter participation is generally higher during presidential, gubernatorial, and congressional elections, which take place in the fall.

Source: Winnebago County Clerk's Office

Political Races

Number of Winnebago County uncontested races



- Political races are considered contested when voting choices consist of more than one declared candidate.
- In November 1998 and in November 2000 there were 10 uncontested races in Winnebago County.

Why Are We Concerned?

A healthy civic arena depends upon the willingness of local citizens to run for county and municipal offices. When there are no declared candidates for races and many candidates are unopposed, the quality of the democracy is called into question.

Contested Political Races

Citizens who feel a sense of belonging and ownership in their community will create a superior civic environment. One important way to foster belonging and ownership in a community is to promote citizen involvement through serving in a public office. Public offices include county board supervisors, county and city clerks, mayors, city council members, and members of school boards.

The requirements and guidelines that must be followed in order to run for public offices vary by municipality.

Races are considered contested when voting choices consist of more than one declared candidate. When there are many contested races in a community, the political process works as it was intended. Contested races foster debate over important issues and raise different viewpoints and solutions to problems. On the other hand, a community with many uncontested races maybe a sign of political apathy and an unhealthy democracy.

Source: Winnebago County Clerk's Office

Equal Rights Division Complaints

- In Winnebago County, 82 percent of the complaints filed in 2001 were under Equal Employment Opportunity and Fair Employment.
- Statewide in 2001, there were 3,924 complaints filed under the state's Civil Rights Laws for a rate of 0.07 per 1,000 population. Winnebago County also had a rate of 0.08 per 1,000.
- In Winnebago County, disability (41percent), age (22 percent) and gender (16 percent) were the three highest basis for employment discrimination complaints in 2001.
- Typically, in Wisconsin 15 percent of complaints are settled out of court early in the process.

	1999	2000	2001
Fair Employment	87	102	106
Family/Medical Leave Act	5	11	10
Open Housing	5	8	10
Public Accommodations	1	2	1
Other	0	1	2
TOTAL	98	124	129

When discrimination occurs it erodes the quality of life for the whole community.

Civil Rights

Wisconsin's Equal Rights Division of the Department of Workforce Development administers the complaints regarding civil rights laws. These include employment discrimination covered under the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC), the Fair Employment Law (FEL) and the Family and Medical Leave Act provisions. Other complaints regard discrimination covered under the Public Accommodations Law, Open Housing Law, and retaliation against an employee for reporting abuse of an elderly person under the Elderly Abuse Law or hazards under the Public Employee Health and Safety Law.

Many of these laws exist to protect the rights of individuals to obtain gainful

employment and to enjoy privileges free from employment discrimination. Some common employment situations in which a person may be discriminated against include recruitment and hiring, pay, promotion, job assignments, leave or benefits, licensing, and union membership. A person who believes he or she has been the victim of unlawful employment discrimination can file a complaint with the Equal Rights Division.

It can take as long as a year to settle or resolve a complaint. In 25 percent of complaint cases there is probable cause to send the case to trial for a hearing. About 35 percent of cases are dismissed, as they do not have enough evidence.

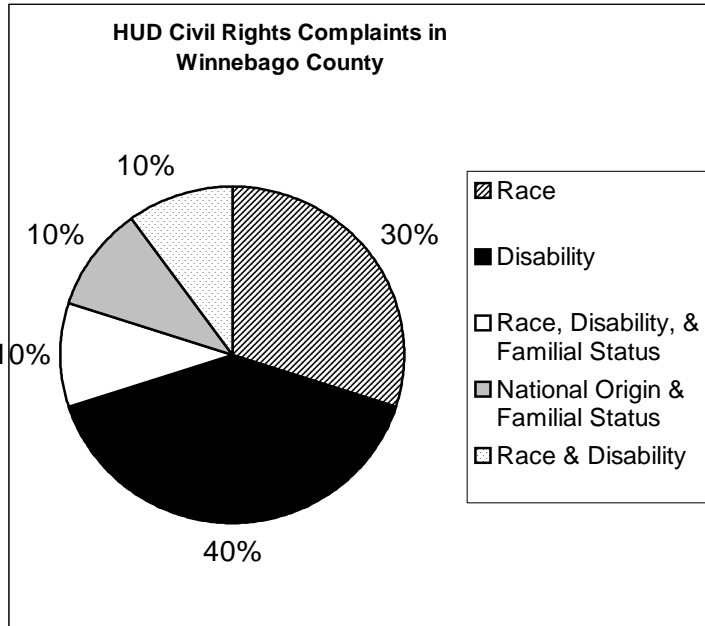
Sources: Wisconsin Department of Workforce Development, Equal Rights Division

Why Are We Concerned?

Treating someone less favorably than others on the basis of race, religion, color, national origin, ancestry, age, gender, disability, arrest/conviction record, sexual orientation, marital status, lawful source of income, family status, or military reserve membership is illegal under state civil rights laws.

Housing Discrimination

- According to HUD figures 10 complaints were filed for the five years (1996-2001), (30 percent) were based on race only, (40 percent) were based on disability only, (10 percent) were race, disability and familial status, (10 percent) were national origin and familial status, and (10 percent) were race and disability.
- Only 1999 Equal Rights Division (ERD) figures showing bases of discrimination were available. They are the following: (60 percent) race, (20 percent) disability and (20 percent) family status.
- Private fair housing figures for five years were broken down as the following: (51 percent) race/national origin, (22 percent) disability, and (26 percent) family status.



Discrimination

Federal, state, and local municipal fair housing laws provide protection for persons in the following classes: race, color, ancestry, national origin, age, religion, gender, sexual orientation, lawful source of income, familial/family status, marital status, and persons with handicaps/disabilities.

In Winnebago County, persons who believe that their fair housing rights have been violated can file fair housing complaints with any one or all three of the following agencies: United States Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), Wisconsin Department of Workforce Development, Equal Housing Division (ERD), or Metropolitan Milwaukee Fair Housing Council's (MMFHC) toll free number. (1-877-647-3247) All three organizations will conduct their own

investigations. MMFHC will inform the complainant of its findings and the options available to the complainant. Settlements can be reached or complaints withdrawn any time during the above-mentioned processes. HUD and ERD are required to make a finding of probable/reasonable cause or no probable/reasonable cause that fair housing discrimination may have occurred if complaint is not settled. If probable/reasonable cause is found to have occurred, the complaint then is referred for either an administrative or court hearing process. Complaints filed with HUD or ERD are public record.

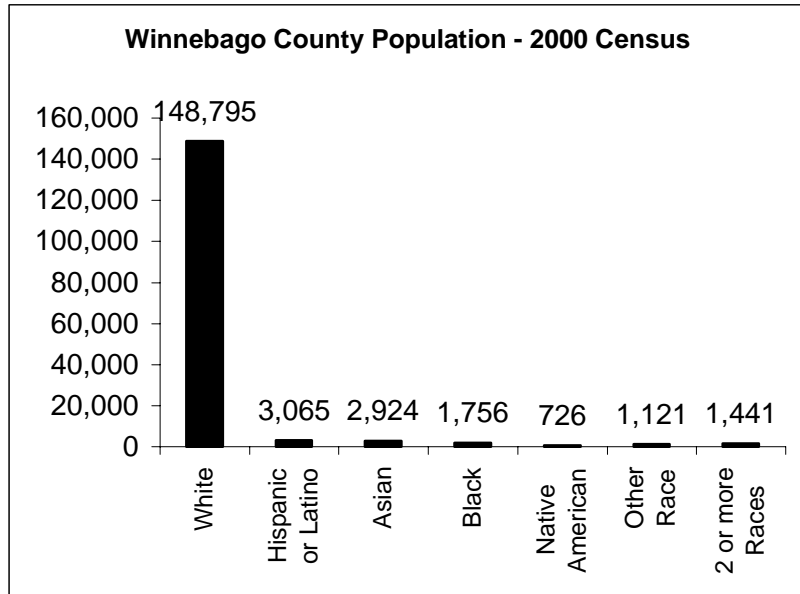
Sources: HUD, ERD, and MMFHC

Why Are We Concerned?

Differences in treatment in a housing transaction because of personal characteristics and qualities are an indication of illegal housing discrimination. The negative impact of illegal housing discrimination causes the quality of life to be lowered for both the individual and the communities where members discriminate against each other. Discrimination is unjust, as it disrupts people's lives and affects the nature of the community. Communities that are plagued by discrimination have a more difficult time working together to solve problems common to all.

Winnebago County population by race – 2000 census data

- Winnebago County's population grew by 15,002, an 11.7 percent increase over the 1990 census.
- The growth of the county's Asian, Hispanic, Black and other minority populations grew 20.2 percent between 1990 and 2000.
- The county's minority population including Blacks, Asians, Native Americans and others increased from 2.5 percent of the county population in 1990 to 4.2 percent or 7,968 people in 2000.
- The largest minority group in Winnebago County is the Hispanic or Latino origin; who made up 2 percent of the county's population.



Why Are We Concerned?

The nature of the relationships between a community's racial and ethnic groups greatly affects the rapport of a community. When diversity is viewed positively, relationships are fostered and the quality of life improves.

Impact of Cultural Diversity

Immigration is one factor resulting in a more diverse racial and ethnic mixture of residents. In the early part of this century, 88 percent of Americans were Caucasian. The 2000 U.S. Census results indicate that the number has dropped to 69 percent.

Because some immigrants are more likely to live in poverty, have higher unemployment rates, and lower incomes than native born people, a community initially feels

negative economic and social impacts. As a result, relationships between immigrants and long time residents can be stressed.

With increased understanding and awareness, racial and ethnic relations can be improved over time and diversity can be recognized as an asset.

Many public forums and functions, which are open to all residents, promote diversity. It is important that the perspective of all groups in a diverse society be heard when important decisions are being made in the community.

Sources: US Census Bureau
Oshkosh Northwestern May 9, 2001