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Hawaii voter turnout in general election slumps to all-time low

Published: Wednesday, November 5th 2014, 8:50 am HST
Updated: Wednesday, November 5th 2014, 8:50 pm HST

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HONOLULU (HawaiiNewsNow) - Newly released data shows that voter turnout in Hawaii is at a record low, according to the Hawaii Office of Elections.

In Tuesday's general election, 706,890 people were registered to vote, but only 52.3 percent of those registered actually cast ballots, making that the lowest statistic on record for a general election. The second lowest year was 2006, when 52.7 percent of the 662,728 registered voters casted ballots.

In looking at voter turnout rates dating back to the 90s, voter turnout was at its peak in 1992, with 82.4 percent of the 464,495 registered voters in Hawaii.

"As a U.S. citizen it's the most important right that we have," said Hans Brown, who voted yesterday.

Keoni Hughes did not. "I guess I'm too young to actually care."

Experts say because the state is such a Democratic stronghold, many people don't vote because they don't believe it affects the outcome -- others because they don't like who they have to choose from.

"If people are saying, 'I don't vote because there's no one that inspires me' then what can we do to include more people in the pool of candidates and encourage more people to run for office," said Carmille Lim, Executive Director of Common Cause Hawaii'i.

"Sometimes people just don't really get excited or interested in the election until right before it happens -- and in that case it's too late to register. So one thing, one easy fix I'd like to see the state do is same-day voter registration," explained Hawaii News Now political analyst Colin Moore.

Political analysts say voting is a learned behavior that needs to start at an early age so our keiki believe their voice matters.

"One of the purposes of Kids Voting and We Vote Hawaii'i originally was to encourage the young people -- our children -- to influence the adult voter turnout. It was called the trickle-up effect, because we felt if the kids were talking about what is happening in school and in life than maybe the parents would take it seriously," said Lyla Berg, the founder of Kids Voting Hawaii'i."

Officials say nationally, only 20% of youth voted in this year's mid-term elections.

"If you don't vote than you shouldn't have a say in anything," said Vaimoana Atonio, who did not vote.

"It's really important for me to make sure that the choices made for Hawaii are from the right people," described Glenda Supnet who did vote.

Experts say voter turnout was at its peak in 1992 -- when an impressive 82.4% of Hawaii's registered voters cast a ballot.

"It's shameful that Hawaii'i used to be one of the highest in the nation when it came to voter turnout and to see us really fall as far as we have is really embarrassing and it's just not right and it's going to take a community to fix that," said Alexander Santiago, the Program Director for "No Vote, No Grumble".

Political analysts say mid-term voting turn-out is traditionally low across the Nation.

"Voting gives democracy its legitimacy -- even if you don't know exactly who you support. I think knowing that you're going to vote makes you learn about this, so that helps but also this is your responsibility as a citizen. I think even if you vote no preference for every single candidate that's better than not voting at all," said Moore. "How low does it have to go before we can't even really say that our candidates have true democratic support? I don't know, I hope we never have to have that conversation, but I think we're getting dangerously close."

Office of Elections voter turnout numbers since 1990:

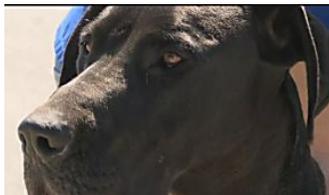
Year	Registered voters	Turnout percentage
1990	453,389	78.1%
1992	464,495	82.4%
1994	488,889	77.1%
1996	544,916	67.9%

1998	601,404	68.6%
2000	637,349	58.2%
2002	676,242	57.0%
2004	647,238	66.7%
2006	348,988	52.7%
2008	691,356	66.0%
2010	385,464	55.8%
2012	705,668	61.9%
2014	706,890	52.3%

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