Rexburg has the lowest local election turnout rate of any college town in the Mountain West, at 6.7% of all voting-age residents or 20.9% of non-student voting-age residents, according to an investigation by *Scroll*.

College towns often have low voter turnout because university students rarely bother to move residency from their home state or students don’t worry about the long-term effects of city policies.

However, that doesn’t explain the gap between Rexburg and other college towns.

Scroll gathered voter turnout data for the most recent mayor election of nine college towns across the Mountain West, from eastern Washington to Montana and Utah. Of the nine towns, Rexburg has the lowest turnout by multiple metrics.

GRAPH OF TOTAL POPULATION

Matt Miles, a professor of political science at BYU-I who specializes in American and comparative political behavior, says Rexburg’s low turnout isn’t surprising.

“Most people in the community vote Republican, and there are rarely non-Republicans on the ballot,” Miles said. “There are not a lot of people proposing big changes, so it doesn’t really matter who wins or loses an election in Rexburg.”

Miles said that three factors impact whether people vote: how easily they can vote, how intrinsically rewarding they find voting, and how much the winner matters to them.

The same results hold true when we assume that no students will vote, and remove them from the voting population. Rexburg scores last in our sample with 20.9% of eligible voters

**METHODOLOGY**

Rexburg has 39,423 residents, according to the U.S. Census Bureau, including 9,028 people under the age of 18. Mayor Jerry Merrill won the 2019 mayoral election with 2,045 votes, and BYU-I enrollment that year counted 20,592 students.

From that data, we calculate what percentage of Rexburg residents voted: 6.7%

*Scroll* pulled data from the University of Idaho in Moscow, Idaho; Idaho State University in Pocatello, Idaho; Montana State University in Bozeman, Montana; Eastern Washington University in Cheney, Washington; Washington State University in Pullman, Washington; Utah State University in Logan, Utah; BYU in Provo, Utah; Utah Valley University in Orem, Utah and BYU-I.

College towns in Wyoming and eastern Oregon were omitted because their local elections run on even-numbered years, coinciding with national elections that draw more voters.

Compared to the other eight towns, Rexburg has an average amount of student residents.

However, it stands out when compared to voter turnout.

Each year, the First Presidency of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints sends a [statement](https://www.thechurchnews.com/leaders/2023/6/6/23751117/first-presidency-letter-emphasizes-participation-in-elections-reaffirms-political-neutrality) for church leaders to read to their congregations, encouraging members to vote.

“We urge Latter-day Saints to be active citizens by registering, exercising their right to vote, and engaging in civic affairs, always demonstrating Christlike love and civility in political discourse, ” reads the June statement.

Varying reports estimate that [90](https://www.bestplaces.net/religion/city/idaho/rexburg)% to [95%](https://www.thechurchnews.com/2004/9/25/23237736/rexburg-unique-in-all-the-world) of Rexburg residents are Latter-day Saints, but that message to vote seems to be ignored in Rexburg.

“This is just another area in which church members don’t follow the prophet,” Miles said. “If they did, voter turnout in Rexburg would be about 80%.”

But these numbers aren’t a curse. Brenda \_\_\_, one of the election officials for Madison County, says she never knows what to expect in an election.

“Sometimes I think that nobody will come, and there ends up being more than I thought,” \_\_\_ said. “Other times I think there’s an import question on our ballot and this is going to bring out a lot of people, but nobody comes in.”

Polling places open until 8 p.m. Tuesday