

How the 2nd Congressional District of Minnesota Was Won in the 2016 General Election



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Abstract

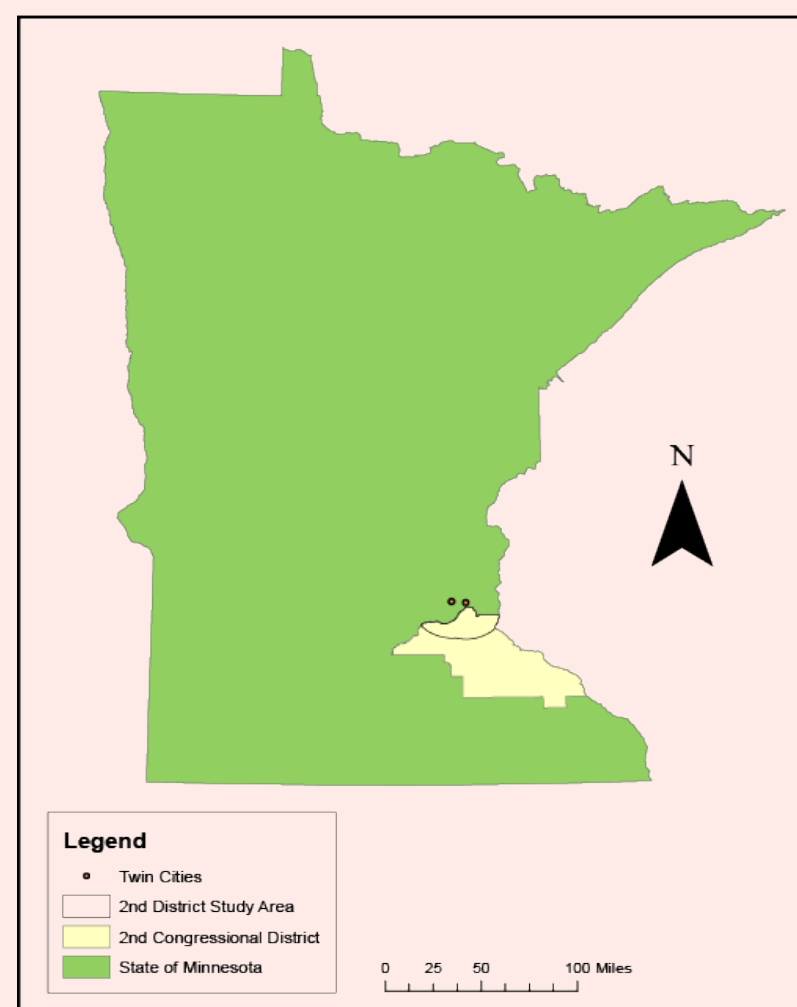
The purpose of this research projects seeks to find the constituents and other outside factors that made the 2016 race for the 2nd Congressional District of Minnesota the closest contest in recent memory. This district was chosen for a variety of reasons. It was the first time since 2002 that incumbent John Kline (Republican) would not be running. The race was also impacted by independent Paula Overby, a transgender woman running on a progressive platform. Statistics were compiled using the U.S. Census and the Secretary of State for Minnesota's respective websites. Demographic information was then compared with prior election results reaching back to 2012. ESRI ArcMap was used to map the data. Despite polling data suggesting a Democratic win, the Republicans retained the seat. However, the margin of victory was only 1.8% in contrast to the 2014 race's 17.1 % Republican victory. Results should suggest that an increasingly diverse and educated 2nd District could create another opportunity for a progressive Democratic candidate to finally flip the district from red to blue in 2018.

Introduction

When John Kline announced his decision to forgo running for re-election, Democrats (Democratic-Farmer-Labor in Minnesota) across the state of Minnesota saw an opportunity in the 2nd Congressional District. For the first time in more than ten years, Democrats believed that they had the chance to finally flip the district from red to blue. Lead up to the general election saw DFL candidate Angie Craig winning in the polls. Political neophyte and Republican candidate Jason Lewis also trailed in fundraising by a large margin due to Craig's backing from the Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee's Red to Blue Program (DCCC). On the night of November 9th, 2016, the constituents of the 2nd District made their decision. To the shock of academia and media around the state, Lewis scored an upset victory. Lewis won with 46.95% of the total vote compared to Craig's 45.16%. Although the Democrats were defeated in a contest they hoped to win, this race was won by the closest of margins in more than a decade.

Study Area

In the district's current form dating back to 2012, it occupies southeastern Minnesota along the Mississippi River and stretches into the suburbs of the Minneapolis-Saint Paul metro area. As of the 114th Congress, 681,358 people live in the 2nd District. Of that total population, 79.7% live inside 114 census tracts that are within 20 miles of the Twin Cities.



Methods

Demographic data and election results were taken from the United States Census Bureau and Minnesota Secretary of State, respectively. Shapefiles taken from the United Census website were then joined with the relevant data in ESRI ArcMap. Finding the voter turnout data for the 2nd Congressional District was more problematic as no agency makes these exact numbers public or accessible. Instead, the total number of people over 18 from each election year's population survey was taken. This number was then divided by the total number of votes casted.

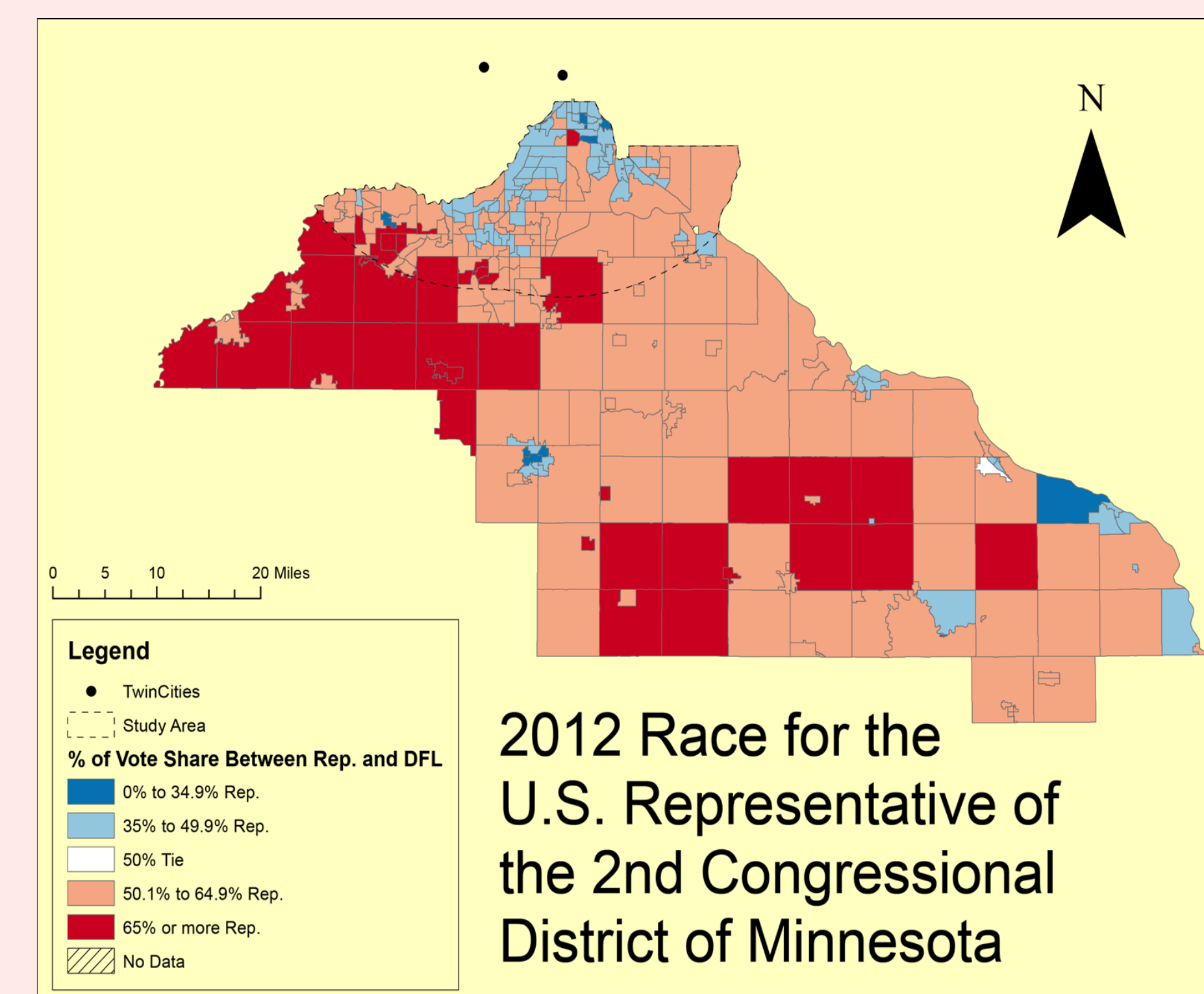
Demographics

Compared to the rest of United States, the 2nd District and the state of Minnesota itself are fairly homogeneous. The country as a whole is 73.6% white; on the other hand, the 2nd Congressional District of Minnesota and the state have white populations of around 86% and 84.8%, respectively. The median age of the district is 37.2, which is similar with the rest of state and the country. However, what makes this district truly distinct from Minnesota as a whole and the country is the level of affluence that can be found here. The 2nd district's median household income of \$75,564 skyrockets past the state and the national levels of \$61,492 and \$53,889, respectively. From a statistical perspective, this district is the perfect recipe for a Republican victory due to the wealth and lack of diversity.

Statistics

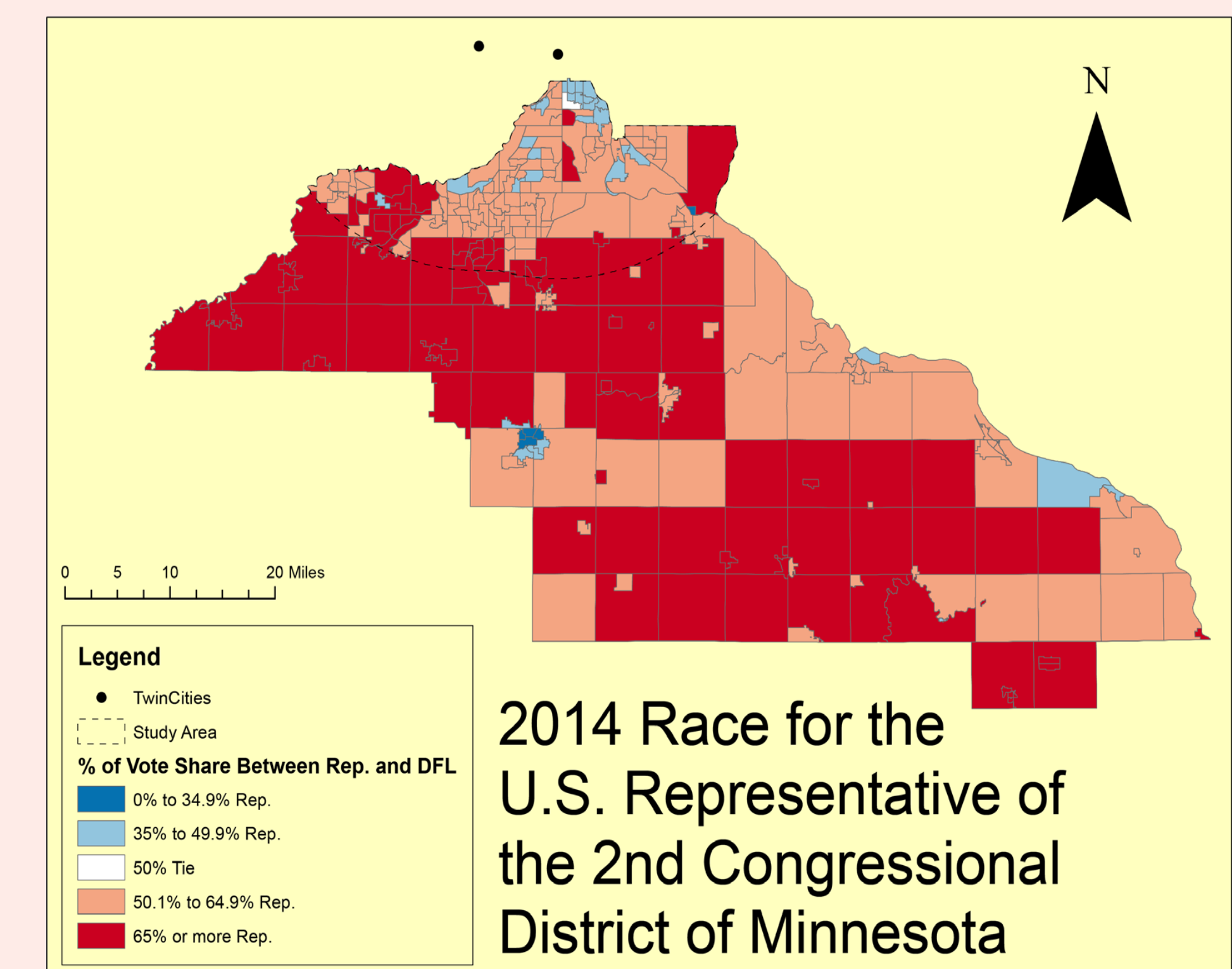
	2012	2014	2016
Republicans			
Total # of Rep. Voters in District	193,587	137,778	173,970
% of Rep. Voters in SA (% of District)	75.91%	75.89%	73.72%
% of Total Voters in SA that are Rep. (No Write Ins)	53.58%	55.70%	45.95%
# of Precincts Won in SA	106	145	72
Democrats (DFL)			
Total # of DFL Voters in District	164,338	95,565	167,315
% of DFL Voters in SA (% of District)	77.47%	77.48%	77.34%
% of Total Voters in SA that are DFL (No Write Ins)	46.42%	39.44%	46.36%
# of Precincts Won in SA	62	23	97
Overby (Independence)			
Total # of Overby Voters in District	N/A	12,319	28,869
% of Overby Voters in SA (% of District)	N/A	73.95%	74.35%
% of Total Voters in SA that are Overby (No Write Ins)	N/A	4.85%	7.69%
Population			
District Population Over 18	500,778	513,669	519,896
District Total Votes Cast	358,446	245,848	365,827
District Voter Turnout %	71.58%	47.86%	70.37%
Total State Voter Turnout	76.42%	50.51%	74.72%

Spatial Results: 2012, 2014, and 2016



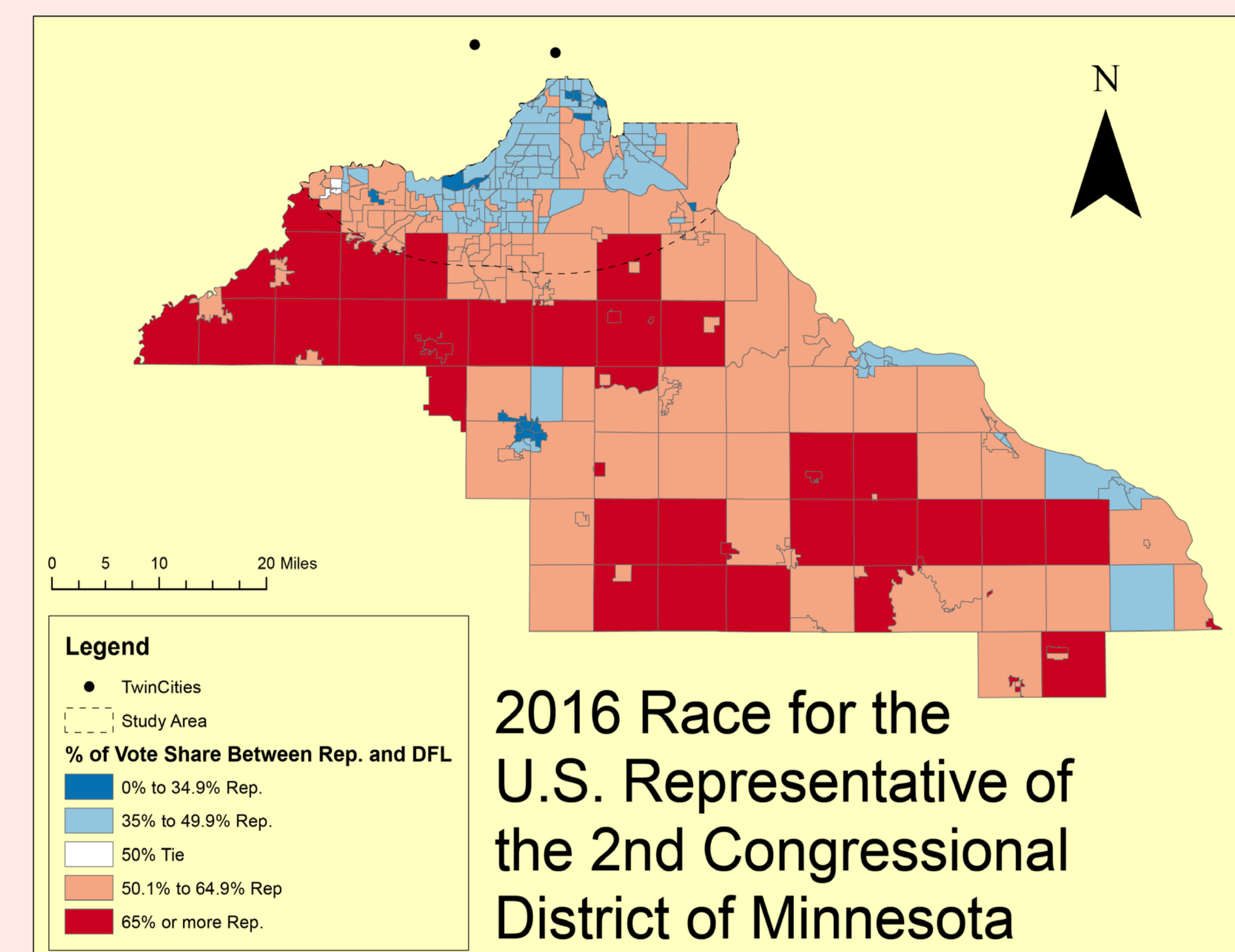
2012 Race for the U.S. Representative of the 2nd Congressional District of Minnesota

Figure 1



2014 Race for the U.S. Representative of the 2nd Congressional District of Minnesota

Figure 2



2016 Race for the U.S. Representative of the 2nd Congressional District of Minnesota

Figure 3

Results

Republicans were able to win the 2nd Congressional District due to two factors. The first factor being that the party increased their support in the more rural parts of the district. They increased their margin of victory in precincts in the southeastern and central portions of the district when comparing the 2016 (Figure 3) elections to the 2012 (Figure 1) elections. The GOP increased their share of voters outside the study area in 2016 when compared to 2012 by 2.1%. The final factor why Republicans were able to retain power in the district was that progressive voters were split into two major camps. In 2012, the two major parties garnered 99.85 % of the vote including write-ins. However, in 2016 the vote was more divided. The two major parties only controlled 92.11% of total voters. The DFL actually increased the number of supporters in the district by 2,977 voters, but saw their total share of the vote decrease by 0.69%. The cause for the decrease in major party support this election cycle was the appearance of progressive-minded Paula Overby. Her results took away 28,869 voters that theoretically would have went to the more liberally-aligned DFL.

Conclusions

Although the Republicans were victorious in 2016, there are a number of concerns for the party going forward. The amount of voters choosing a Republican in 2016 are 19,617 fewer than 2012 despite the 2nd District's growing population. Also for the first time since redistricting in 2012, Republicans ceded the study area's voting majority to the DFL. When comparing the two parties head-to-head, the DFL garnered 50.22% of the vote in the most populous region of the district. However, the news becomes grimmer for the GOP when factoring in Overby's results. The Independence party candidate saw her win-share of the vote in the study area increase from 2014 (Figure 2) to 2016 (Figure 3) by almost 3%. These numbers then put the total number of constituents voting left-of-center in the study area at 54.05%. Going forward, if the DFL are able to present a more progressive-minded candidate, the party may finally see unification between the two liberal factions. Combined with reasonable turnout numbers among voters in the district, Democrats might finally complete their quest in flipping the 2nd from red to blue in 2018.

Acknowledgments

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