



A P M R E S E A R C H L A B

WHAT IS THE ONE THING MINNESOTANS WOULD CHANGE ABOUT THE STATE?

2017 GROUND LEVEL SURVEY OF MINNESOTANS

FROM AMERICAN PUBLIC MEDIA®

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: JANUARY 3, 2017

AUTHORS: ERIC GARCIA MCKINLEY, KASSIRA ABSAR, AND CRAIG HELMSTETTER

apmresearchlab.org

Bringing facts into focus

The APM Research Lab & Analyst Group is a division of American Public Media, intended to help the company accomplish ambitious goals related to informing the public by producing credible research- and analysis-based content.

Mission: To foster an engaged democracy by inspiring curiosity, inquiry and discussion through fact-driven, credible research and analysis.

Values: Independent, Useful, Informative, Non-partisan

The APM Research Lab is home to a team of researchers and analysts who inform and equip the communities we serve with both original and curated research, facts and analysis. This work helps inform journalists, civic and business leaders, and others who want to know what the best data and the best research has to say about the challenges and opportunities facing families, communities, and organizations throughout the nation.

The Research Lab will inform the work of partner organizations and the broader public through traditional reports, as well as infographics, blog posts, interactives, presentations, and other platforms.

Contact: info@apmresearchlab.org | apmresearchlab.org

Acknowledgements

Funding for this project was provided by the Blandin Foundation, the Bush Foundation, the McKnight Foundation, and the Knight Foundation Donor Advised Fund at The Miami Foundation, as well as donors and members of Minnesota Public Radio.

The survey was designed with input from several members of the MPR Newsroom, including Nancy Cassutt, Mike Edgerly, Mike Mulcahy, and Bill Wareham.

SSRS of Glenn Mills, Pennsylvania, provided data collection services.

Andi Egbert of the APM Research Lab provided helpful input to this analysis.

We would like to thank all of the Minnesotans who took part in the survey.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Overall findings	9
Findings by geographic regions of Minnesota	10
Findings by gender	11
Findings by age groups	11
Findings by race groups	12
Findings by income groups	12
Findings by educational attainment	13
Findings by political affiliation and approval or disapproval of President Trump	13
Technical Notes	15

TABLE OF FIGURES

Figure 1: Minnesotans’ recommendations for changes that would improve the state	9
Figure 2: Minnesotans’ recommendations for changes that would improve the state, by region	10
Figure 3: Minnesotans’ recommendations for changes that would improve the state, by gender	11
Figure 4: Minnesotans’ recommendations for changes that would improve the state, by age	11
Figure 5: Minnesotans’ recommendations for changes that would improve the state, by race ...	12
Figure 6: Minnesotans’ recommendations for changes that would improve the state, by annual income	12
Figure 7: Minnesotans’ recommendations for changes that would improve the state, by educational attainment (Minnesotans age 25+)	13
Figure 8: Minnesotans’ recommendations for changes that would improve the state, by political affiliation	14
Figure 9: Minnesotans’ recommendations for changes that would improve the state, by Trump approval and disapproval	14

Background

This report summarizes responses to an open-end question included in the 2017 Ground Level Survey of Minnesotans: “If there is one thing that you would like to see changed in Minnesota to improve our state, what would that be?” Respondents were not provided any answer choices and were allowed to say whatever they were thinking at the time. Interviewers recorded the answers verbatim. This question was asked to the entire sample.

To make sense of the responses, two researchers read through all of them and coded the responses into thematic categories based on patterns and topics that arose from the data. The researchers then compared their coding and ultimately harmonized themes with the aid of a third researcher. This paper reflects a breakdown of top themes by various respondent characteristics.

The following themes, arranged from most to least common, were derived from the verbatim responses recorded by interviewers. Each theme is illustrated with select examples of real responses from the survey:

Politics: Responses mentioned party politics or political leadership at the state or federal level.

“Get rid of the Democrats.”

“To get rid of the Republican party.”

“Get a different governor.”

“Political climate. It is pretty much broken and needs to be fixed.”

“Make the legislature work better.”

“Less Democrats. It needs to be about 50/50 so we can work together and get things moving. Minnesota is mostly a democrat state and it’s hard to do anything with such a big divide.”

Taxes: Responses explicitly mentioned taxes.

“Lower taxes.”

“I think that the wife and I are over 70, and I’m retired and I still have to pay these taxes. They waste money. We do have budgets, Minnesota runs on a fiscal budget but they manage to squeeze money. I don’t mind paying taxes but there are people out there who make a lot more money than me who have kids running around and don’t have to pay a dime.”

“Tax structure, well the tax is one of the highest in the nation.”

“Senior citizens should have a tax break.”

“I think Minnesota needs to start being more business friendly. Taxes are too high. I mean more small business friendly.”

“The distribution of tax dollars, metro versus outstate.”

Social issues: Responses mentioned issues of diversity, inclusion, race, relationships between groups or communities, or treatment of others.

“I would like the division between urban and rural to disappear.”

“Better racial relationships.”

“Better urban rural dialogue.”

“I wish everyone would stop being offended by everybody and everything.”

“People getting along better.”

“I think we’re getting too much mixed people here. Too much mixed culture in our town.”

Infrastructure: Responses that mention infrastructure generally or types of infrastructure such as roads, bridges, transit, etc.

“Better roads.”

“Infrastructure. We need better bridges.”

“I would improve the rail system throughout the state.”

“Less construction.”

“Better roads in the northern part of the state.”

“Public transportation. The North Star Rail. Currently it goes from Target [Field] to North Lake. There is talk of bringing it farther north nothing has happened.”

Education: Responses that mention education, schools, curriculum, tuition, higher education, cost, or disparities or gaps within the education system.

“Improvements upon education; reduction of the achievement gap.”

“College should be more affordable.”

“Fully funding education. K-12 through college.”

“Wants to see a melding of towns to take part in moral education.”

“Education – go back to teaching people that physical work is what you are supposed to do. Not twiddle your thumbs. Young people have to use a calculator, they can't think for themselves.”

Health & Health care: Responses that mention cost, insurance, access, policies, specific health issues, and other aspects of health and health care.

"I don't know right now. Something to do with health insurance. We need to figure that out. Fairly dispersed. Medicare and Medicaid lower cost and the working class pays the difference. Healthcare should be more affordable for everyone, not just a few."

"Universal health care."

"Continued investigation into Alzheimer's disease."

"We don't get the mental health and heroin epidemic education for the workers who take care of the people and we need more workers."

"Eliminate health disparities."

"Rescind Obamacare."

Economy: Responses that mention jobs, wages, housing, specific industries, or economic equality or equity.

"Well, I worked very hard and I only get \$795 a month. The income is too small and it's hard to make ends meet. I was a tailor and a seamstress, a nurse's aide and also a small business owner before retirement and live off of \$795 a month."

"To get new jobs on the Range without opening up mining again."

"Improve economic opportunities."

"Tiered system on minimum wage."

"Housing; there's a huge number of homelessness among the younger people like college students."

"Better jobs."

Public safety: Responses mention crime, violence, safety, police or policing, security, drunk driving, or traffic laws.

"More peace, just not so much violence."

"Have Minnesotan police be better trained to de-escalate a situation."

"Stricter enforcement of proper laws such as traffic violations and common-sense laws and practices."

"Less crime. Less guns on the street. More respect for the police offices."

Social services: Responses mention programs such as welfare or services for different groups such as veterans or seniors.

“Better things for the veterans. I think veterans need to be taken care of before anyone else.”

“Crack down on the generous welfare state, not make it so easy for people from other states to come here and collect welfare.”

“More benefits for the poor and the minorities.”

“I would like to put more government assistance food care and welfare in people’s hands. Any kind of assistance really.”

“I think public services for aging population.”

Environment: Responses that mention environment, energy, water, mining, conservation or protection, or other aspects of environment.

“Mining reduction.”

“Attention to water quality.”

“Reopen the taconite mines.”

“Pursue wind and solar alternative sources”

“Leave nature, and stop building on top of it, and taking away habitats.”

“Conservationism comes first, people come second. People think we own the planet but we don’t and if we don’t take care of it, we will be gone too.”

“Anti-mining sentiment.”

Policies: Responses mention specific policies on issues such as marijuana legalization, women’s health, guns, persons with disabilities, gambling, or sex trafficking.

“Maybe safeguards to prevent large donations that impact political campaigns and influence the politicians.”

“Paid maternity leave.”

“Gun control.”

“Constitutional carry.”

“Legalize medical and recreational marijuana for tax revenues for the state.”

“Get rid of the abortion clinics. I am pro-life.”

“Raise awareness about and take action against sex trafficking.”

Immigration: Responses that mention acceptance of immigrants generally, specific groups of immigrants, or immigration laws and policies.

“Immigration policy.”

“Quit bringing the Somalians in.”

“Stop welcoming so many people into the state and the country when were in debt.”

“We would not be a sanctuary state or have sanctuary cities.”

“Drastically decrease refugee placement.”

“Immigration laws implemented.”

Government: Responses that mention government or topics under government purview broadly without mentioning party politics, political leadership, or specific policies.

“More transparent government.”

“Less government.”

“More public funding.”

“Less regulation.”

Recreation & Leisure: Responses mention art, parks, and/or tourism.

“More recreational areas, more trails and such things like that.”

“More places for kids – parks and museums.”

“More funding for parks and bike trails.”

“More bike paths and playgrounds.”

Other: Responses that were unclear, did not fit into other codes, or were very uncommon and thus did not merit their own code.

Only themes that were mentioned by at least 10 percent of the respondents of a specific group are highlighted in this report.

This report is one in a series on the findings from the MPR News | APM Research Lab 2017 Ground Level Survey of Minnesotans. For additional information, including detailed methods reports and survey findings, including a complete listing of all responses to the survey’s open-ended questions, please see: <https://www.apmresearchlab.org/stories/2017/11/13/ground-level>

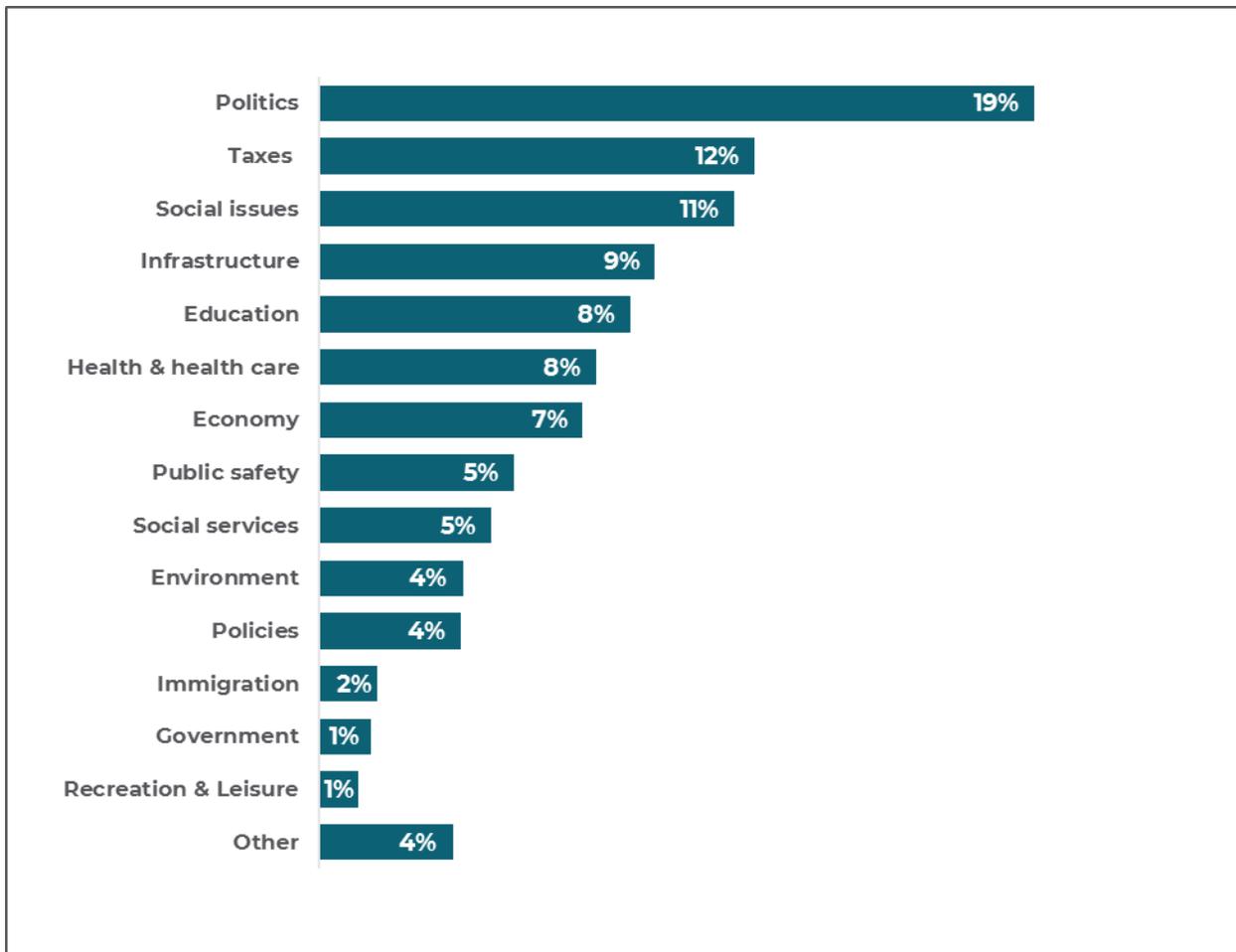
Please find MPR News’ extensive coverage of the survey findings, and related discussions and events, at <https://www.mprnews.org/topic/ground-level>

Overall findings

The most common recommendations that Minnesotans have for improving their state have to do with improving the state’s politics. That theme appears in about a fifth of the responses, followed by *taxes* and *social issues*, both surfacing in just over a tenth of the responses.

The next most common categories have to do with *infrastructure*, *education*, *health and health care*, and *economy*, with just under a tenth of responses falling under each of these themes. *Public safety*, *social services*, *environment*, and *policies*, emerge in around five percent of responses. Lastly, *immigration*, *government*, and *recreation and leisure* make a small appearance in the open-end responses.

Figure 1: Minnesotans’ recommendations for changes that would improve the state



Source: MPR News | APM Research Lab 2017 Ground Level Survey of Minnesotans.

Findings by geographic regions of Minnesota

See the *Technical Notes* at the end of this document for the definitions of geographic regions.

The relatively large sample size of this survey allows us to study the perspectives of residents from eight discrete regions throughout the state, including Minneapolis-St. Paul, their surrounding Twin Cities Suburbs, three regional centers (the Duluth Area, the St. Cloud Area, and the Rochester Area), as well as three bands of counties (Northern Minnesota, Central Minnesota, and Southern Minnesota) with predominantly rural and small- to mid-sized town character.

Across all regions, the most common recommendations for improving the state have to do with *politics*. *Taxes* is a primary theme for residents of all regions but Minneapolis-Saint Paul.

Beyond *politics* and *taxes*, the prominent themes vary somewhat by region. For example, recommendations relating to improving the state’s *infrastructure* are common only among residents of the Twin Cities Suburbs, whereas residents of other regions are more likely to emphasize changes to the *economy* or *health and health care* as the single most important area of improvement for the state’s future. Similarly, *public safety* is a prominent theme only among residents of Minneapolis-St. Paul, and *immigration* is a common primary concern only among residents of the St. Cloud Area.

Similar themes—*social issues* and *health and health care*—emerge as common recommendations among residents of the St. Cloud Area, as well as the Northern and Southern regions. Recommendations having to do with *education* are common among residents of the Twin Cities Suburbs, Minneapolis-St. Paul, the Rochester Area, and Central Minnesota.

Improvements to Minnesota’s *economy* are more commonly on the minds of those living in Minneapolis-St. Paul, the Duluth Area, and Northern Minnesota. At least 10 percent of the responses from the St. Cloud Area, Rochester Area, Northern Minnesota, and Southern Minnesota have to do with *health and health care*.

If we group the eight regions into the Twin Cities 7-County region and 80-County Greater Minnesota, we see that residents of both areas commonly mention *politics*, *taxes*, and *social issues* as areas deserving of change. *Health and health care* is the only other primary theme for Greater Minnesota, while, among residents of the 7-county region, the themes *infrastructure* and *education* also surface from the responses.

Figure 2: Minnesotans’ recommendations for changes that would improve the state, by region

Theme	Minn.-St. Paul	Twin Cities Suburbs	Duluth Area	St. Cloud Area	Rochester Area	Northern MN	Central MN	Southern MN
Politics	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
Taxes		x	x	x	x	x	x	x
Social issues	x	x		x		x		x
Health and health care				x	x	x		x
Education	x	x			x		x	
Economy	x		x			x		
Public Safety	x							
Infrastructure		x						
Immigration				x				

Source: MPR News | APM Research Lab 2017 Ground Level Survey of Minnesotans.

Findings by gender

For both men and women, *politics* and *taxes* are top themes. For men, *infrastructure* is the single most important area to address in Minnesota, whereas women primarily recommend changes that have to do with *social issues*, *education*, and *health and health care*.

Figure 3: Minnesotans' recommendations for changes that would improve the state, by gender

Theme	Men	Women
Politics	X	X
Taxes	X	X
Infrastructure	X	
Social Issues		X
Education		X
Health and health care		X

Source: MPR News | APM Research Lab 2017 Ground Level Survey of Minnesotans.

Findings by age groups

Politics emerges as a top concern among Minnesotans of all ages. *Taxes* is an area that most needs changing according to Minnesotans age 35 to 74.

Responses from the book ends of the age groups, those age 18 to 44 and 65 or older, yield *social issues* as a major theme. Interestingly, *education* surfaces as a common theme for Minnesotans age 45 to 64 in addition to younger adults (age 18-34).

Middle age and older Minnesotans (age 45-54 and 65-74, respectively) mention *infrastructure* as the top thing they would like to see changed in Minnesota. The responses of those age 35 to 44 commonly include either *health and health care* or the *economy*. Additionally, responses from those age 55-64 reveal *health and health care* as a major theme, while *economy* is a top theme for those 75 and older. *Public safety* was a leading theme for one age group, 18-34.

Figure 4: Minnesotans' recommendations for changes that would improve the state, by age

Theme	18-34	35-44	45-54	55-64	65-74	75+
Politics	X	X	X	X	X	X
Taxes		X	X	X	X	
Social issues	X	X			X	X
Infrastructure			X		X	
Education	X		X	X		
Health and health care		X		X		
Economy		X				X
Public safety	X					

Source: MPR News | APM Research Lab 2017 Ground Level Survey of Minnesotans.

Findings by race groups

Politics and *social issues* are leading concerns for both White Minnesotans and Minnesotans of Color. At least 10 percent of White Minnesotans mention *taxes* as the most important thing to change in the state, whereas Minnesotans of Color are more likely to make recommendations having to do with *infrastructure* and *public safety*.

Figure 5: Minnesotans’ recommendations for changes that would improve the state, by race

Theme	White Minnesotans	Minnesotans of Color
Politics	x	x
Social issues	x	x
Taxes	x	
Infrastructure		x
Public safety		x

Source: MPR News | APM Research Lab 2017 Ground Level Survey of Minnesotans.

Findings by income groups

The Ground Level Survey results were parsed by three broad groups of reported annual household income: below \$50,000; \$50,000-\$99,999; and \$100,000 or higher.

Unsurprisingly—given the pattern seen throughout this analysis—*politics* is a primary theme for Minnesotans at all income levels. Responses from Minnesotans with an income of at least \$50,000 commonly emphasize *taxes* and *infrastructure* as areas in need of improvement. Minnesotans who have an income between \$50,000-\$99,999, commonly recommend changes having to do with *health and health care*, while those with an income of at least \$100,000 emphasize *education* in at least 10 percent of responses. *Social issues* and *economy* are primary themes for those with annual incomes under \$50,000.

Figure 6: Minnesotans’ recommendations for changes that would improve the state, by annual income

Theme	Under \$50,000	\$50,000-\$99,999	\$100,000+
Politics	x	x	x
Taxes		x	x
Social issues	x		
Infrastructure		x	x
Economy	x		
Health and health care		x	
Education			x

Source: MPR News | APM Research Lab 2017 Ground Level Survey of Minnesotans.

Findings by educational attainment

The findings below examine the responses of the population age 25 or older in Minnesota by highest reported level of education.

In addition to *politics*, Minnesotans with a high school degree or less identify *taxes* and *social issues* as the top things they would like to see changed. *Health and health care* emerges as a second major theme for respondents with some college education. Those with at least a college degree identify either *taxes*, *infrastructure*, or *education* as the single most important change needed to improve Minnesota.

Figure 7: Minnesotans’ recommendations for changes that would improve the state, by educational attainment (Minnesotans age 25+)

Theme	High school degree or less education	Some college or an associate’s degree	At least a bachelor’s degree
Politics	x	x	x
Taxes	x		x
Social issues	x		
Health and health care		x	
Infrastructure			x
Education			x

Source: MPR News | APM Research Lab 2017 Ground Level Survey of Minnesotans.

Findings by political affiliation and approval or disapproval of President Trump

Examining survey responses by Minnesotans’ political party affiliation¹ and approval or disapproval of President Trump² reveals similar patterns among Trump disapprovers and Democrats and Trump approvers and Republicans.

Although these groups were sometimes diametrically opposed in what sort of political change they would recommend for the state, at least ten percent of each group indicate that something related to *politics* should change to improve Minnesota.

In addition to politics both Independents and Republicans commonly mention *taxes* and *infrastructure* as the major change needed in Minnesota, while *social issues* is a prominent theme for both Democrats and Independents. Independents’ responses, however, stand alone with *economy* and *social services* as top themes. Democrats’ mention *education*, *health and health care*, or *public safety* as the primary areas that need to be changed in Minnesota.

Politics is not the only theme to cross the line of Trump approval and disapproval—*taxes* is a common theme for both Trump approvers and disapprovers. Similar to Democrats, *education* and *social issues* are

¹ “Republicans” and “Democrats” include those who indicated they lean toward one party or the other.

“Independents” includes stated “Independents” as well as those who did not provide a party preference.

² “Approvers” and “disapprovers” were tallied based upon yes and no responses to the following survey question: Do you approve or disapprove of the way Donald Trump is handling his job as President?

Overall, 71 percent of Republicans approved of Trump at the time of the survey (and 23% disapproved), while only seven percent of Democrats approved of Trump (91% disapproved).

major themes for Trump disapprovers, though *infrastructure* is a major area of concern for this group as well.

Figure 8: Minnesotans’ recommendations for changes that would improve the state, by political affiliation

Theme	Republican	Democrat	Independent
Politics	x	x	x
Taxes	x		x
Social issues		x	x
Infrastructure	x		x
Education		x	
Health and health care		x	
Public safety		x	
Economy			x
Social services			x

Source: MPR News | APM Research Lab 2017 Ground Level Survey of Minnesotans.

Figure 9: Minnesotans’ recommendations for changes that would improve the state, by Trump approval and disapproval

Theme	Approvers	Disapprovers
Politics	x	x
Taxes	x	x
Social issues		x
Infrastructure		x
Education		x

Source: MPR News | APM Research Lab 2017 Ground Level Survey of Minnesotans.

Technical Notes

Graph notes: Readers are cautioned that not all observed differences in the graphs are statistically significant. Graphs do not show the percentage of survey respondents who said they “don’t know” or otherwise didn’t give a response. For this reason, graphs will not sum to 100%.

Race group definitions: All race groups shown are non-Hispanic. Excepting the White group, all individual race groups contain multiracial persons. For example, a survey respondent who indicated he was both Black and American Indian would appear in both race groups in data summaries.

Geographic regions definitions: The survey was conducted across Minnesota in eight regions—discrete geographies by which results are reported. Survey respondents were sorted into regions by disclosing their zip codes at the beginning of the survey. In the cases where zip codes crossed county boundaries, they were also asked which county they resided in. Each region’s geographic definition is discussed below:

1. **Duluth Area:** Consists of the following 11 residential U.S. Postal Service zip codes in or nearby the city of Duluth, in portions of St. Louis County: 55802, 55803, 55804, 55805, 55806, 55807, 55808, 55810, 55811, 55812, and 55814. The Duluth Area stratum contains an estimated 117,100 residents (2% of the state population) and 47,400 households.
2. **Northern Minnesota:** Comprises 19 counties in northern Minnesota, excluding the embedded geography represented by the Duluth Area region. The counties are: Aitkin, Beltrami, Carlton, Clearwater, Cook, Hubbard, Itasca, Kittson, Koochiching, Lake, Lake of the Woods, Mahnomon, Marshall, Norman, Pennington, Polk, Red Lake, Roseau, and St. Louis. The Northern Minnesota stratum contains an estimated 379,200 residents (7% of the state population) and 158,700 households.
3. **St. Cloud Area:** Consists of the following 8 residential USPS zip codes in or nearby the city of St. Cloud, located in portions of Stearns, Sherburne, and Benton counties in Central Minnesota: 56301, 56303, 56304, 56369, 56374, 56377, 56379, and 56387. The St. Cloud Area stratum contains an estimated 126,800 residents (2% of the state population) and 48,100 households.
4. **Central Minnesota:** Comprises 23 counties in central Minnesota, excluding the embedded geography represented by the St. Cloud Area region. The counties that represent this region are: Becker, Benton, Cass, Chisago, Clay, Crow Wing, Douglas, Grant, Isanti, Kanabec, Mille Lacs, Morrison, Otter Tail, Pine, Pope, Sherburne, Stearns, Stevens, Todd, Traverse, Wadena, Wilkin, and Wright. The Central Minnesota stratum contains an estimated 834,800 residents (15% of the state population) and 321,300 households.
5. **Minneapolis-St. Paul:** Represented by the actual boundaries of the adjacent cities of Minneapolis and St. Paul, which contain portions of Hennepin and Ramsey counties. The Minneapolis-St. Paul region contains an estimated 695,000 residents (13% of the state population) and 281,400 households.
6. **Twin Cities Suburbs:** Comprises seven counties home or adjacent to Minneapolis and St. Paul, excluding the Minneapolis-St. Paul region. The seven counties are Anoka, Carver, Dakota, Hennepin, Ramsey, Scott and Washington. The Twin Cities Suburbs region contains an estimated 2,257,100 residents (42% of the state population) and 868,800 households.

7. **Rochester Area:** Consists of the following four residential USPS zip codes in or nearby the city of Rochester, located in portions of Olmsted county in southern Minnesota: 55901, 55902, 55904, and 55906. The Rochester Area region contains an estimated 121,700 residents (2% of the state population) and 47,800 households.

8. **Southern Minnesota:** Comprises 38 counties located in southern Minnesota, excluding the Rochester Area stratum. The counties are Big Stone, Blue Earth, Brown, Chippewa, Cottonwood, Dodge, Faribault, Fillmore, Freeborn, Goodhue, Houston, Jackson, Kandiyohi, Lac Qui Parle, Le Sueur, Lincoln, Lyon, McLeod, Martin, Meeker, Mower, Murray, Nicollet, Nobles, Olmsted, Pipestone, Redwood, Renville, Rice, Rock, Sibley, Steele, Swift, Wabasha, Waseca, Watonwan, Winona, and Yellow Medicine. The Southern Minnesota stratum contains an estimated 887,400 residents (16% of the state population) and 351,300 households.



A P M R E S E A R C H L A B
apmresearchlab.org