

RX KIDS: A NEW PRESCRIPTION FOR CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

November 2025



BACKGROUND:

Launched in January 2024 in Flint, Michigan, Rx Kids is the nation's first community-wide prenatal and infant cash-prescription program, providing \$1,500 during pregnancy and \$500 per month throughout the baby's first year. In Flint, nearly every eligible newborn is enrolled in the program, and the program has delivered over [\\$11 million to over 2,000 Flint families](#). There is substantial evidence that Rx Kids [reduces financial hardship, improves mental health](#) and well-being, enhances [birth outcomes](#), and revitalizes local economies. The program's early success has garnered widespread, bipartisan support. Backed by strong public-private partnerships and championed by elected officials, Rx Kids is now in [eleven Michigan communities](#) and with [recent state investment](#), is poised to reach tens of thousands of families in communities across the state, becoming the largest cash transfer program of its kind.

Could providing an efficient and effective solution to economic instability also improve civic engagement?

YES!

MAIN TAKEAWAYS:

- Survey research reveals that Rx Kids-exposed mothers have higher trust in government, compared to moms in Flint before program launch and moms in nearby communities.
- In the November 2024 election, research finds that Flint young women aged 18-34 years had a higher increase in voter turnout rates than other demographics (older women and men) and a higher increase in voter turnout rates than similar communities and the entire state.
- Comparing the 2020 to 2024 election, voter turnout rates among women in Flint went up five percentage points, and this increase was even larger among young women in Flint (8.7 points).
- Analysis of state voter files indicates that the surge in 2024 turnout was highest among Rx Kids enrollees. Across the board, Rx Kids enrollees were nearly 5 percentage points more likely than their non-Rx Kids counterparts to vote in 2024.
- Notably, among a pool of Flint young women who did not vote in 2020, Rx Kids enrollee turnout rates were 10 points higher than young women who were not enrolled in the program during the 2024 election.
- In addition to measurable improvements in family financial security and health, Rx Kids could be a potent treatment to enhance civic engagement.



Recent survey findings published in the [American Journal of Public Health](#) found that Rx Kids exposed moms were more likely to express high levels of trust in government than their counterparts who were ineligible for Rx Kids. And in Rx Kids qualitative research, many moms equate the Rx Kids program with support: they express that the payments are more than just the money, it's a sense that someone out there cares.

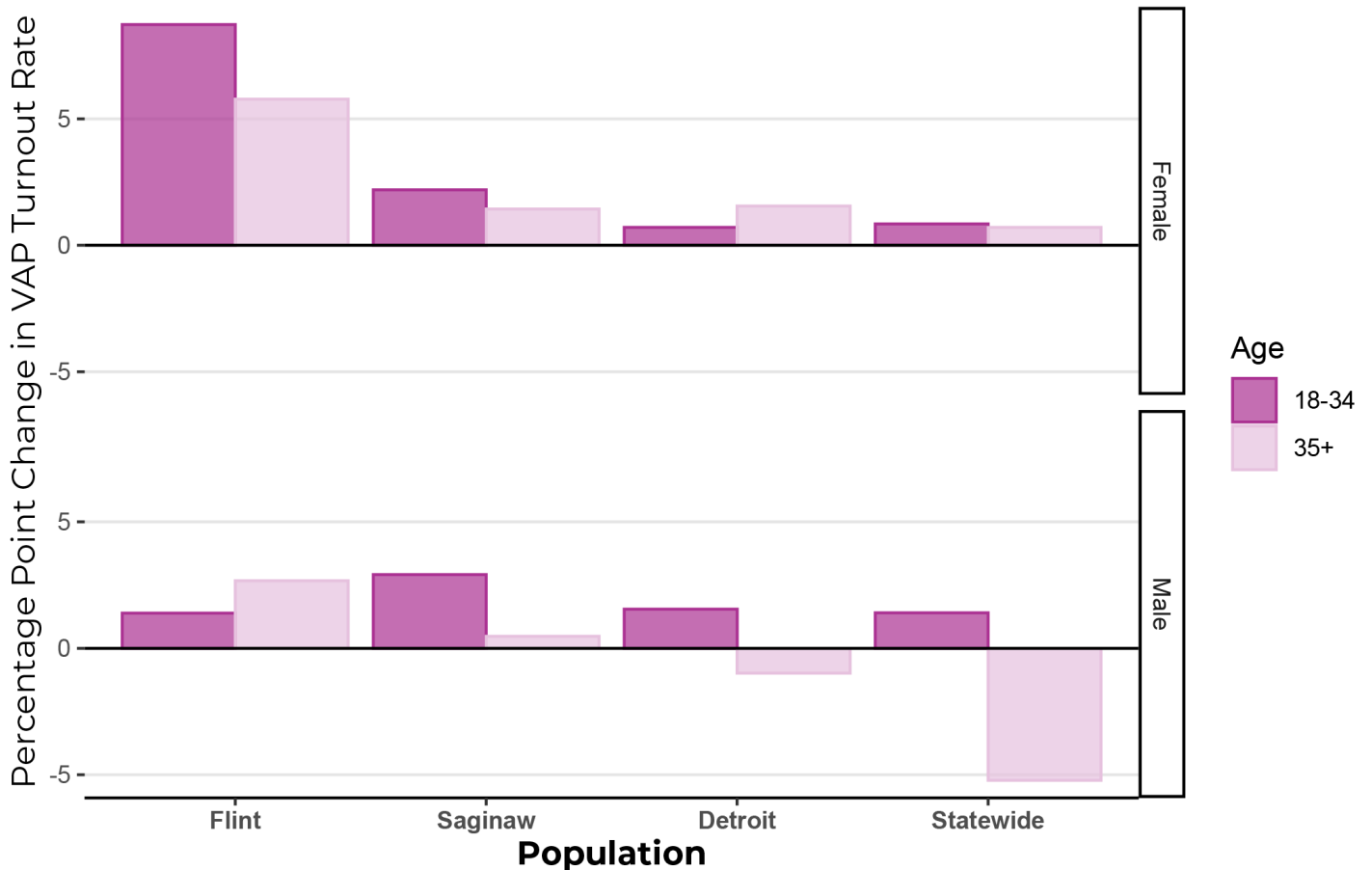
Recognizing that the [number one issue for voters](#) in almost every election is the **economy**, could this renewed sense of a social contract and economic relief translate to increased voter participation? Research finds that [economic instability can impede an individual's capacity to vote](#), both because it limits access to things like transportation or childcare and because it reduces cognitive bandwidth to engage civically. Theoretically, unconditional cash could address both these types of barriers by providing the resources needed to get to the polls and reducing stress. And there could be even more of a motivation to vote if the program is delivered in part by government support and championed by elected officials. The question remains: Could Rx Kids impact voter participation?

ANALYSIS:

To assess whether the roll-out of Rx Kids is positively related to voter turnout, we compare turnout¹ in the 2024 presidential election in Flint (the only Rx Kids site in November 2024) to Saginaw and Detroit, two communities that are demographically similar to Flint, have also experienced population loss in recent decades, and were exposed to similar rates of attention in the 2024 election. Using voter file data, we compare the voter turnout rates of women ages 18-34, (which, in Flint, includes 90% of Rx Kids program participants), to voter turnout rates of women age 35 and older across the 2020 and 2024 elections. We perform a similar set of analyses for men to evaluate whether differences are specific to women in the community.

2024 Change in Voter Turnout Rate from 2020

by Age, Gender, and Community



¹ We calculate the turnout rate as a percentage of voting age population (VAP), by counting the number of people who voted for each age group and gender in the voter file data and then dividing it by available Census estimates of the total number of adults living in each community.

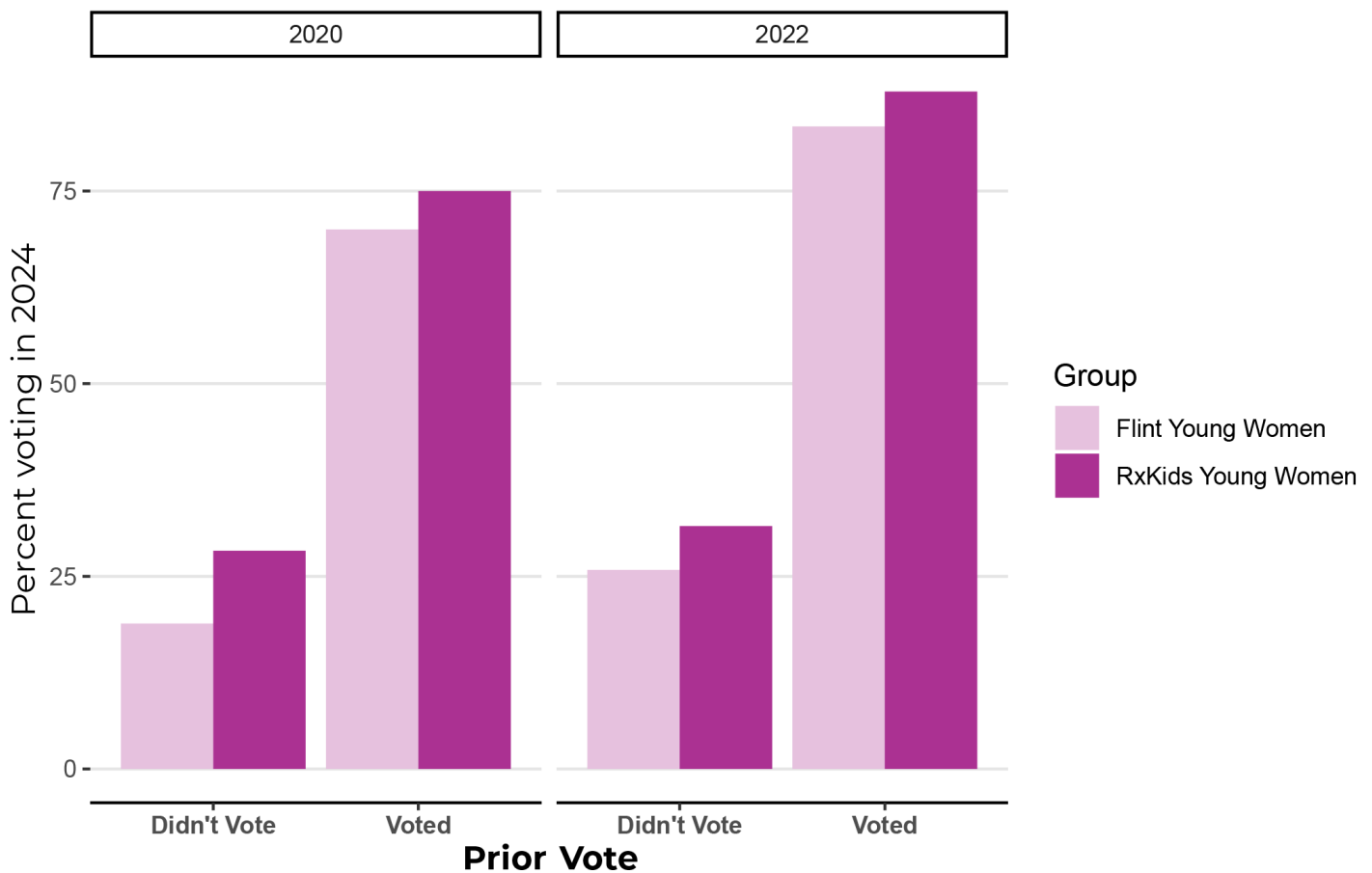
In this analysis, **we find that women voters in Flint saw a large increase in turnout rates** after adjusting for population in 2024 compared to 2020. Overall, turnout rates among Flint women were up by 5 percentage points. These gains are even more notable among younger women: turnout rates among young women were up by 8.7 percentage points in Flint. This dynamic is specific to women in Flint and young women especially; voter turnout rates among male voters in Flint also increased only modestly over 2020 rates, (and not differentially from comparison cities).

When comparing these large jumps in turnout rates for women in Flint to similar communities like Saginaw and Detroit, the increase in Flint’s turnout among young women looks even more distinct. The turnout rate of young women in Saginaw (same congressional district) only increased by 2.2 points, less than one quarter of the estimated spike in Flint. Detroit saw only a slight increase of 0.7 points in turnout rates among younger women.

Could these changes in voting behavior of Flint women be driven by Rx Kids? To further investigate the impact of Rx Kids participation on voter turnout, we matched Rx Kids participants to state voter files. We compare voter turnout between Rx Kids participants and their non-Rx Kids counterparts (Flint women of reproductive age, defined as 18-34) based on prior turnout history.

2024 Turnout Rate by Prior Turnout

Flint Women 34 and Younger vs. RxKids Women 34 and Younger



Rx Kids enrollees is nearly 10 percentage points higher than young women who were not enrolled in Rx Kids (19.5% vs. 28.7%). For Flint young women who did vote in 2020, turnout is 4 percentage points higher for Rx Kids young women. Comparing turnout to 2022, regardless of voting turnout history, Rx Kids enrollees have turnout rates about 5 percentage points higher than non-Rx Kids young women. percentage points higher than non-Rx Kids young women.

DISCUSSION:

In addition to improving economic stability, maternal and infant health, maternal mental health and wellbeing, and local economic stimulus, it appears that Rx Kids is also improving civic engagement with notable improvements in trust in government and voter participation. The increase in voter turnout is likely multifactorial. Research suggests that increased economic stability affords voters both the material resources needed to vote (e.g. childcare, transportation costs, etc.) as well as the cognitive bandwidth needed to participate in an election. [Findings on Rx Kids to date](#) support the idea that Rx Kids both improves moms' material conditions as well as their wellbeing, reducing depression and improving measures of psychological flourishing.

In the 2024 election, voters rated the economy as the most important issue in the election at the highest rate since the great recession — and Rx Kids is a direct solution to economic instability. The perception of Rx Kids by voters as a positive economic tool, as well as the saliency of the economy in the 2024 election, may have had a synergistic effect, driving people to vote. In addition, the purposeful linking of Rx Kids to government officials, both at events and in program messaging, may have influenced participants' perspectives on the role of government.

In short, after the implementation of Rx Kids, Flint saw an increase in trust in government and voting among the demographic most likely to be impacted by the program—women of childbearing age. Rx Kids-enrolled moms were more likely to vote than their counterparts, when controlling for prior turnout history. These findings have significant implications for policymakers everywhere: **a simple solution to economic instability can serve as a powerful tool for rebuilding the social contract and reinvigorating civic participation.**

An academic-nonprofit partnership, Rx Kids is led by Flint-based Michigan State University Pediatric Public Health Initiative, in collaboration with Poverty Solutions at the University of Michigan and administered by GiveDirectly.

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