

Michigan 2024 State Report

July 31, 2024

Author: Janaki Kapadia

Other Contributors: *Samuel Baltz*

Contents

Introduction	2
Election Calendar	2
Voter Registration	2
Presidential Primary Results and Turnout	5
Non-Trump or Biden Vote	8
Absentee and Mail-In Voting	11
Election Policy Changes	12
Conclusion	14

Introduction

As Americans look to the 2024 general election, trends from the 2024 primary in Michigan, which took place on February 27, 2024, can highlight both strengths in election administration and potential challenges as November approaches. The 2020 presidential election in Michigan saw record turnout and an increased use of absentee ballots and early voting, a trend seen nationwide as election officials responded to the COVID-19 pandemic. The electoral process proceeded smoothly as voters participated despite unprecedented challenges.¹ This report will look at results from the 2024 presidential primary in the state, recent changes in Michigan election law and administration, and trends in voting behavior. By understanding these trends and changes in election administration, we can anticipate some challenges that may continue in the general election and its effects on election administration in Michigan and nationwide.

Election Calendar

The state website provides a detailed [election calendar](#). Election Day is **November 5**. The deadline to register to vote in the November election is **October 21, 2024**. The early voting period in any jurisdiction can start as early as **October 6**, no later than **October 26**, and runs through **November 3**. Absentee ballots must be received by a local clerk by 8 PM on Election Day. In contrast, UOCAVA [ballots](#) must be postmarked by Election Day and arrive within six days of the election.

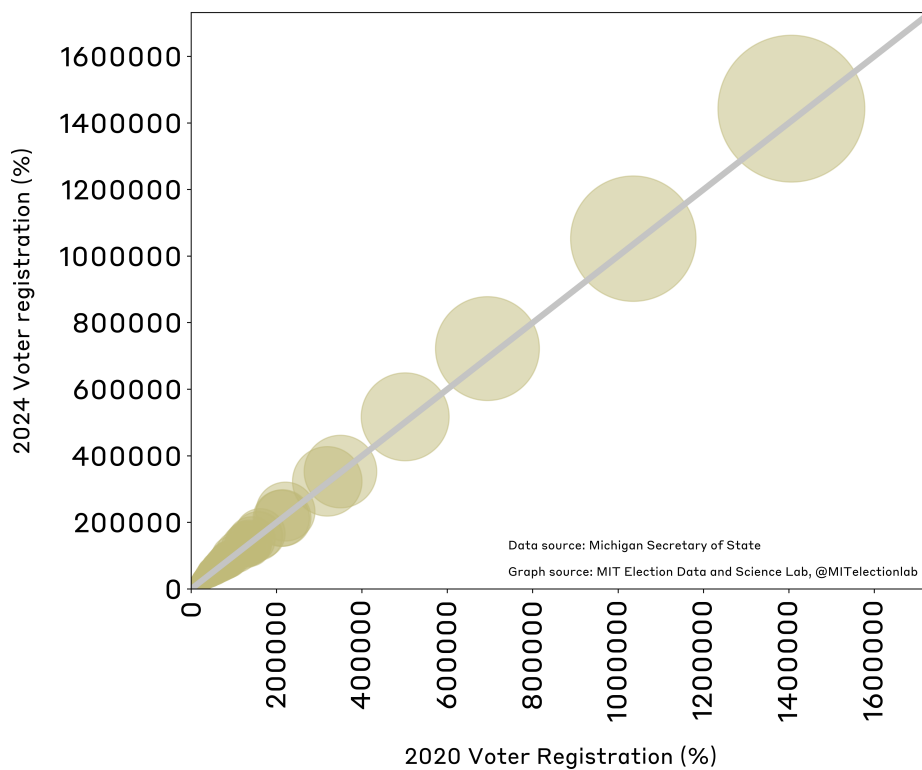
Voter Registration

The last four years in Michigan have seen a modest overall growth in the [number of registered voters](#). At the time of the 2020 general election in the state, a total of 8,105,524

¹ One important controversy in Michigan's 2020 election administration concerned an error made in the initial tabulation of votes in [Antrim County](#), which was the subject of a comprehensive [report](#) by a state senate committee. The report debunked charges that the error was due to hacking of the county's voting machines.

individuals were registered to vote. As of mid-July 2024, 8,354,396 people are registered. Between the 2020 general election and around the time of the 2024 primary election, there was a net increase of 221,045 Michiganders registered to vote. The change by county has been minimal, and these two time points do not show evidence of any major episode of voters either being added to or removed from the rolls, with counties now by and large having very similar registration totals to counties in 2020, as shown in Figure 1.

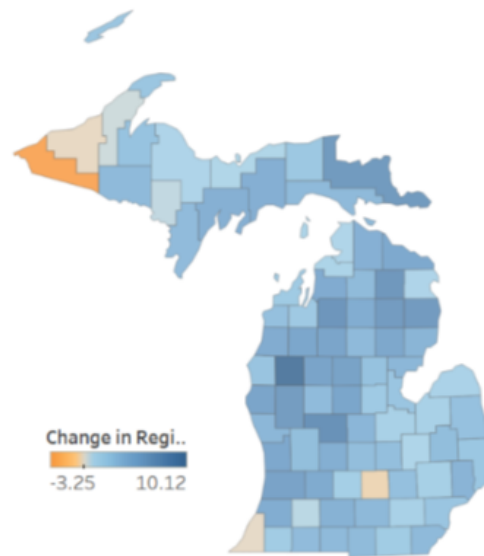
Figure 1: Voter registration by county, 2020 vs. 2024



The median change by county in voter registration percentages was around 3.6%, with Shiawassee County seeing an increase in 3.67% in registered voters and a 3.78% increase in Menominee county. Lake County saw the greatest increase in voter registration by 10%, with an increase in 1046 registered voters. Gogebic County was one of only two out of 83 counties to see a decrease in voter registration, with 441 fewer registered voters on the

rolls in 2024 than in the 2020 general election. Wayne County, the largest in the state, saw an increase of 3% in voter registrations, with 42,579 new voter registrations in the period between 2020 and 2024. This was also the largest increase in numbers of any county in the state. Figure 2 represents the county-level registration changes as a map.

Figure 2: Map of voter registration change in Michigan's counties since 2020



In Michigan, [voters can](#) register online, by mail, or in person up to 15 days before election day. The 14 days before election day and on Election Day, voters must register in person at their county clerk's office and provide documentation of proof of residency in the state.

[In order to register](#), voters must be Michigan residents, citizens of the United States, 17.5 years of age at the time of registration and 18 by Election Day, and not be serving a jail or prison sentence at the time of registration. In 2023, [House Bill 4569](#) passed, allowing eligible 16- and 17-year-olds to pre-register to vote. [This would allow](#) their voter registrations to automatically become active once they reach the age of 17.5 and can vote through both in-person and absentee voting as long as they turn 18 by Election Day.

To count for Michigan residency, voters must have resided in their city or township [for at least 30](#) days prior to Election Day. In-person voters [are asked to show](#) a photo ID when

they vote, but if they cannot provide one, they have the option of signing a form attesting to their eligibility, before casting their ballot like other voters.

Citizens who have a past criminal record with a felony or misdemeanor conviction [are eligible to vote](#) as long as they are not serving an active sentence in jail or prison. Citizens who are detained before their trial or are in pre-sentencing are also able to register to vote. In a policy change reminiscent of Automatic Voter Registration, planned to take effect in 2025, the Michigan Department of Corrections and the Michigan Secretary of State [will coordinate](#) to register eligible voters upon their release from prison automatically.

Presidential Primary Results and Turnout

The Michigan presidential primary took place on February 27, 2024, and was one of the earlier primary contests in the national presidential race (the state primary is scheduled to occur on August 6). On the Democratic ballot, there were three candidates: the incumbent, Joe Biden, Dean Phillips, and Marianne Williamson. An [uncommitted option was also available](#) on the ballot in the state, as well as the option to write in a candidate. In the Republican primary, voters could choose from seven options: former President Donald Trump, Ryan Binkley, Chris Christie, Ron Desantis, Nikki Haley, Asa Hutchinson, and Vivek Ramaswamy. An uncommitted option was similarly available, as was a write-in option.

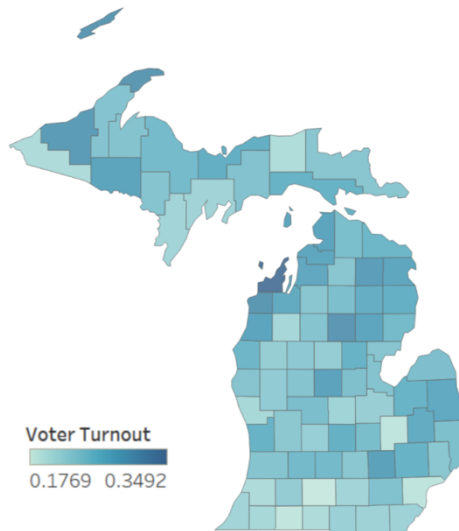
Neither primary was seriously contested. Trump easily won the Republican vote in the state, with most but not all of his opponents having long since ended their campaigns. Biden also avoided any substantial competition, and [won 625,221 votes](#), an order of magnitude more than the next challenger, Marianne Williamson, who won 22,865 votes. What is more interesting is that, while he was so far ahead of the next candidate, Joe Biden only won 81.1% of votes in the Michigan Democratic primary. This is because 101,623 voters, or 13.2% of those voting in the election, chose to cast an uncommitted ballot. This election took place in the context of an organized movement, focused on the Democratic primary, to vote Uncommitted rather than supporting Biden [to signal opposition](#) to the incumbent Biden administration's foreign policy and approach to the

war in Gaza. This movement began in Michigan and then [affected primary contests in other states](#). We study this protest vote in more detail below.

Paralleling Biden’s overwhelming but far from unanimous support, Donald Trump won the Republican Primary in the state, [winning 761,163 votes](#) (68.1%), ahead of Nikki Haley’s 297,124 votes (23.4%). Trump won a meaningfully lower share of the more competitive Republican primary than Biden won in the Democratic primary.

Although the Michigan Democratic primary was largely uncontested, turnout was comparatively high, compared to other cycles without two competitive party primaries. Michigan's overall voter turnout rate was around 23.05% of registered voters (all turnout numbers in this report are percentages of *registered* voters, not *eligible* voters or voting age population, which requires a more involved estimate), and the turnout percentage by county is shown in Figure 3.

Figure 3: Map of voter turnout percent of registered voters in Michigan’s counties



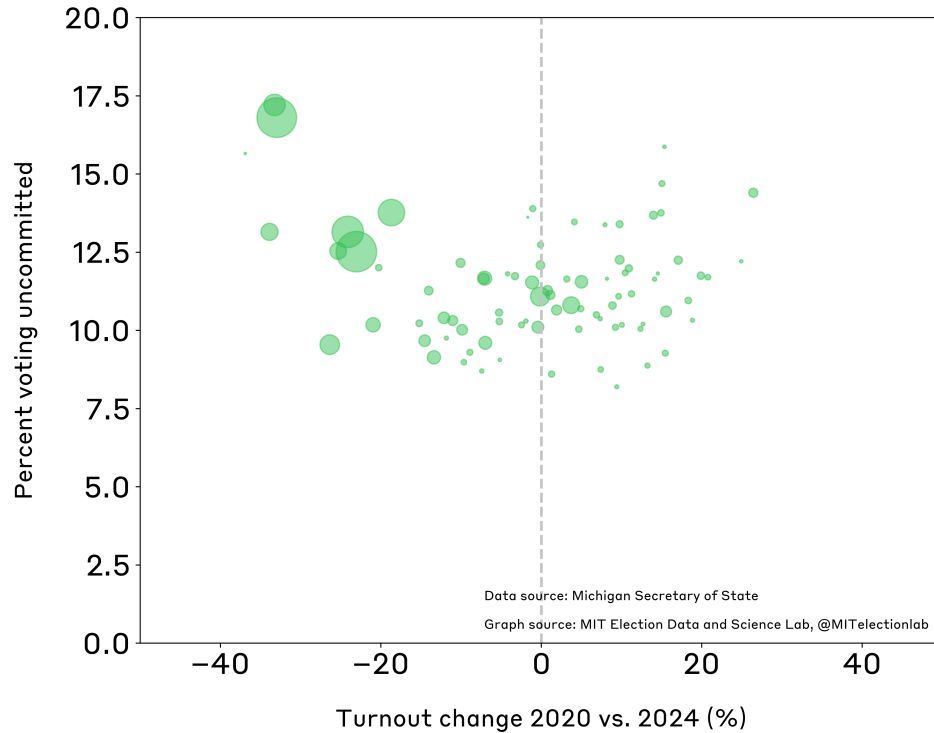
From [voter registration data](#) obtained from the Michigan Secretary of State’s Office and [turnout numbers reported](#) from the Michigan 2024 primary, Calhoun County had the lowest voter turnout, with 17.69% of registered voters casting a ballot in February. The highest was in Leelanau County, with 34.9% of registered voters voting. Wayne County, which has the highest number of registered voters, at 1,442,666, had a turnout rate of

18.61%, while Keweenaw County, with 2,109 registered voters, the lowest of any county in Michigan, had a turnout rate of 30.49%.

As one point of comparison, the [Michigan Department of State reports](#) that 1,216,310 people voted in the 2012 presidential primary contest. In 2024, the [Department of State reported](#) 1,919,002 votes cast in the presidential primaries. While the 2024 number lags behind the 2020 primary, when the Democratic nomination was still somewhat competitive (with all competitive candidates except Bernie Sanders having ended their campaigns and endorsed Joe Biden before the Michigan primary that year), it does so only by about four hundred thousand votes. The last year with highly contested Michigan presidential primaries for both parties [was 2016](#), when Bernie Sanders narrowly defeated Hillary Clinton by just over one percentage point, while Donald Trump won about 37%, with Ted Cruz and John Kasich winning about a quarter of the vote each.

Could Michigan's relatively high voter turnout in 2024 be a result of the organized effort to get people to vote uncommitted? If this movement brought just over 100,000 people to the polls who would otherwise have abstained, that might have narrowed the gap between the typical turnout for a competitive primary and the turnout that would otherwise have happened in this largely uncontested election year. The impact could conceivably be even more than 100,000 or so votes for Uncommitted in the Democratic primary, for example if the movement to vote uncommitted gave prospective voters the feeling that the contest was, in a sense, contested, spurring higher voter turnout overall. If that is the case, though, one reasonable corollary would be that voter turnout would have decreased less in the places where more people voted Uncommitted. Figure 4 shows the relationship between the change in voter turnout from 2020 to 2024 in each county, and the percent of Democratic primary voters in that county choosing the Uncommitted option.

Figure 4: Voter registration by county, 2020 vs. 2024

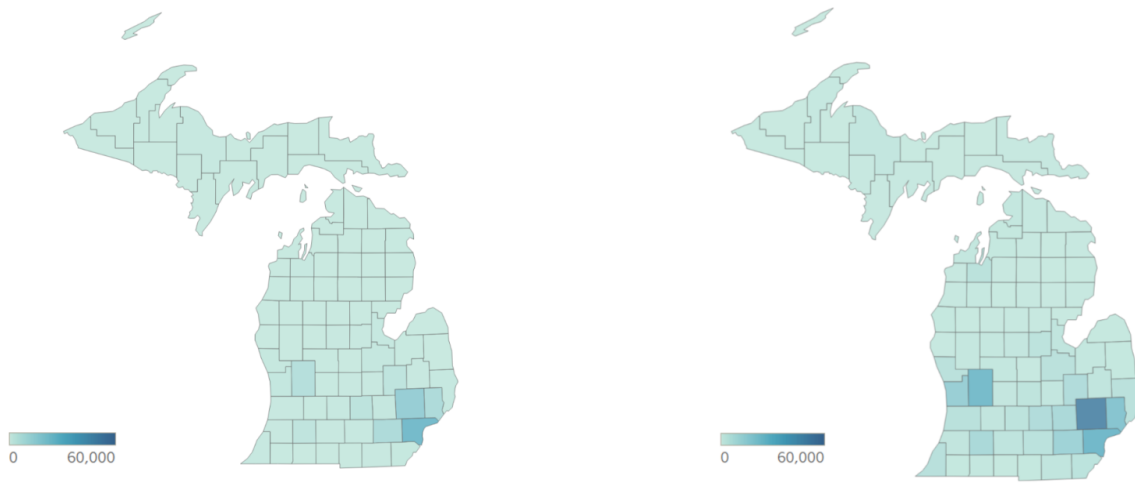


The largest vote shares for Uncommitted were in counties that saw sharp declines in turnout since 2020, and the largest several counties simultaneously had above-average vote shares for Uncommitted and a larger-than-average decline in turnout. Figure 4 does not support the idea that the Uncommitted vote boosted turnout (though of course it does disprove the claim; it merely suggests otherwise). These aggregated data do not provide any reason to suppose that the two are related. The next section moves beyond this comparison with turnout to focus on the Non-Trump and Non-Biden vote overall, which takes on new meaning given that Joe Biden will not be the Democratic party nominee.

Non-Trump or Biden Vote

More than 100,000 voters cast an uncommitted ballot in the Democratic primary, the first primary in the country to have an organized movement to do so. Figure 5 shows the proportion voting Uncommitted by county across the state in map form.

Figure 5: Map by county of uncommitted vote percentage in the Democratic primary (left) and Nikki Haley's vote percentage in the Republican primary (right)



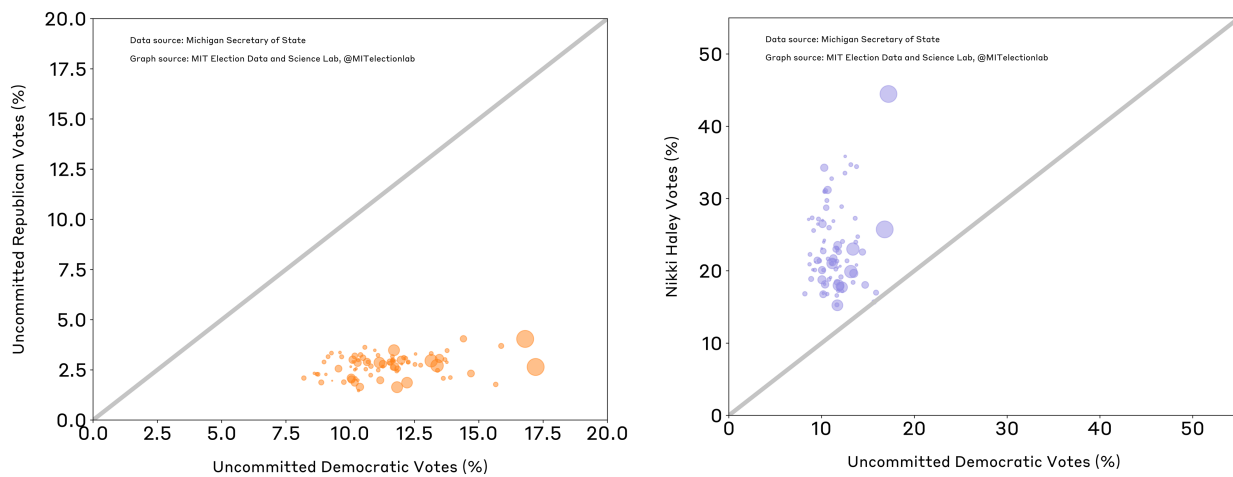
The number voting Uncommitted in the 2024 Democratic presidential primary is [an order of magnitude greater](#) than the uncommitted vote share in some recent presidential primaries, with, for example, 1.2% of Democratic primary voters choosing uncommitted in 2016's heavily contested primary. It is, however, not the first time that Michigan has seen a mass movement of uncommitted votes during the Democratic primary; in [2008](#), 40% of Democratic voters cast an uncommitted vote due to Barack Obama not being on the ballot in the state. Interestingly, four years later, when Obama was the last Democratic presidential incumbent until Joe Biden, [he won](#) 89.3% of the vote, with the remaining voters choosing uncommitted (though Obama was the only other option on that ballot, whereas in 2024, the uncommitted vote was only one of three non-Biden options). However, it is widely expected that Michigan will have a very close 2024 general election contest for President, so results in November could potentially rest on what the uncommitted voters from the Democratic primary decide to do in the coming months.

In 2024, in [Dearborn](#), the largest city in the U.S. where a majority of people are Arab-American, over 56% of voters chose uncommitted, in contrast to Biden's 40% vote share in the primary there. In nearby [Hamtramck](#), also home to large Muslim and Arab American populations, around 61% of voters went uncommitted. Notably, since 2022, [ballots have been available in Arabic](#) in Dearborn and Hamtramck, which Hamtramck

mayor Amer Ghalib said, “makes it easy for people to understand the ballots and make the right choices and will decrease the number of voided ballots.”

How did the vote shares of non-Biden or Trump options compare across the partisan primaries? Did the same counties see large proportions of Uncommitted votes in the Democratic primary and Republican primary? Relatedly, did vote share for Uncommitted in the Democratic primary correlate with vote share for Nikki Haley in the Republican primary? Figure 6 shows the relationship between the two Uncommitted vote shares on the left, and on the right it compares Uncommitted votes in the Democratic primary to Haley votes in the Republican primary.

Figure 6: County-level Democratic Uncommitted share vs. Republican Uncommitted share (left), and Democratic Uncommitted share vs. Nikki Haley share (right)



There are some notable outliers. Wayne County, the largest county in Michigan by population, is split between the 6th, 12th, and 13th Congressional districts. Wayne County is [among the most racially diverse](#) in Michigan, with about 52% of the population not being white. Black or African American people make up about 38% of the population, and voters identifying as ethnically from the Middle East and North Africa [make up 7.8%](#). The county [saw](#) 77.96% of Democrats voting for Biden, with the second most popular choice among Democratic primary voters being uncommitted, which received 16.75% of

the vote share. Within the Republican Primary, 68.13% of votes went to Donald Trump, with Nikki Haley coming in second with 25.71% of votes. The third most popular option was uncommitted, with 4.04% of Republican voters choosing the option.

Oakland County, Michigan's second-largest county and part of the greater Detroit Metropolitan area, saw a turnout rate of 26.5%. Oakland saw 81.8% of Democrats voting for Biden, with the second-place choice being uncommitted, with 12.5% of Democratic voters there choosing the option. In the Republican primary, 61.4% voted for Donald Trump, with Nikki Haley coming in second with 33.5%. The third most popular option was uncommitted, receiving 2.8% of the votes.

Absentee and Mail-In Voting

[As of February 2024](#), nearly 1.3 million voters in Michigan had requested an absentee ballot, marking an 80% increase from the 2020 primary election (which took place the day before the WHO characterized COVID-19 as a pandemic, launching vote-by-mail to unprecedented prominence across the country, as documented throughout the [2020 Stanford-MIT Healthy Elections Project](#)). 1,287,265 Michigan voters had requested an absentee ballot as of February 6, and a majority were issued to voters by that date. More information about rules and policies related to absentee voting is available in Michigan's [Election Officials' Manual, Chapter 6: Michigan's Absent Voter Process](#).

In the 2024 presidential primary, over [900,000](#) voters cast early absentee ballots, and over 78,000 voted in person at an early voting site, resulting in over one million early and absentee ballots being cast. The day before the 2020 primary in Michigan, 960,284 absentee ballot requests had been received. That number went up by 46% to 1,402,194 in the 2024 primary. 779,715 voters returned absentee ballots in 2020. In 2024, 934,478 voters returned absentee ballots by the day before the election.

In 2020, [Michigan saw](#) 2,841,696 early voting ballots returned to the Secretary of State's Office, resulting in a return rate of 85.6% based on the number of mail-in ballots requested. The age bracket requesting the most mail-in ballots was those 65 and up, and they also were the group with the highest return rate, with 93.7% of ballots being returned. Individuals ages 18 to 24 requested the fewest mail-in ballots, 240,070, and returned 179,242 of them, resulting in a return rate of 74.4%.

Election Policy Changes

In the years since the last presidential election, Michigan has seen a string of major legislative changes to its election administration. Together, these laws have addressed almost every major feature of election administration.

An important backdrop for these changes is the role of election skepticism in Michigan, particularly following the 2020 election. While nothing in recent years has matched the events that preceded the 2020 election and accompanied the early days of the pandemic in Michigan, including the [plot to kidnap Michigan's governor](#) and the [armed riot inside its state capitol](#), already in 2024 there have been warning signs that election skepticism will play a role in Michigan's 2024 election landscape.

[In May of 2024](#), two prominent election activists who doubted the legitimacy of the 2020 election results were charged with sharing voter data with an unauthorized third party and tampering with election equipment. The two defendants had been involved in leaking emails from Dominion Voting Systems, a company that sells electronic voting machines and hardware, to try to discredit the official results of the 2020 presidential election.

After the 2024 primary in Michigan in February, [two Republican members of the Delta County](#) canvassing board refused to sign off on election results that would lead to a recall of three Republican members of the county commission, even though there was no legally justified reason to doubt the results of that election. A warning from state officials led them to sign off on the results.

Nevertheless, the state has been amending election laws and policies since 2020. One of the first major changes came in 2022 when Michigan voters approved [Proposal 2](#), the “Promote the Vote” initiative to amend the Michigan constitution, which would add several policies related to voting and elections to the constitution. Proposal 2 was on the ballot in the midterm election on November 8, 2022. [2,586,255](#) voters voted in favor of the measure (59.99%), with 1,725,110 voters opposing it. The proposal entrenches specific election provisions in the state constitution. [Summaries of the proposal](#), available [from the Michigan legislature](#), describe a law with provisions concerning disparate and highly salient features of contemporary election administration. These include guaranteeing a “fundamental right to vote” alongside requirements related to the counting of domestic

absentee ballots and those cast through the Uniformed And Overseas Citizens Absentee Voting Act (UOCAVA), identification requirements, election audits, the duration of early in-person voting, election funding, and vote count certification. Many voters had their first experience with the new early voting provisions when they voted in the 2024 primary, and this may be related to the substantial increase in early and absentee voting compared to the 2020 election (although that effect may also be due to other intervening changes, including the COVID-19 pandemic's influence of peoples' preferred vote modes).

Broadly, Proposal 2 aimed to [loosen restrictions](#) on how people can vote. County clerks [are now required](#) to provide voters with a nine-day early voting period, available eight hours a day, for all state-wide elections. The proposal specifies a standardized time period for in-person early voting, which will now run from the second Saturday before an election to the Sunday before the election (it is standard for early voting to end at least a day before Election Day, to give election administrators time to prepare and make any changes necessary to be ready on Election Day). This nine-day period is a minimum, not a maximum. Clerks can extend this period at their discretion, as the law allows [up to 29 days of early voting](#) in all statewide elections.

All precincts are also allowed to [start tabulating and processing ballots](#) between 7 AM and 8 PM the Monday before Election Day, to ensure that voters can be notified if their absentee application or ballot was rejected and any issues need to be fixed. This period is extended up to eight days before Election Day for municipalities with over 5,000 residents. However, reporting results is not allowed until after 8 PM on Election Day when polls close (reporting earlier [could affect election results](#)).

Against the backdrop of [violent threats](#) and [increasingly harsh public rhetoric](#) directed at election officials, which has prompted [diverse responses from many levels](#) of the U.S. government, the Michigan Legislature passed [HB-4129](#) in 2023, which made intimidation and other threats directed towards election officials and poll workers that would prevent them from doing their duties a crime. These penalties would start at 93 days in jail, and a fine of up to \$500 would be charged for the first offense. [Secretary of State Jocelyn Benson](#) remarked in November 2023 that there had been an uptick in intimidation of election workers in recent cycles and that the law would protect workers.

In 2023, the Michigan Legislature passed, and Governor Whitmer signed [HB 4568](#). Until this law was enacted, [Michigan had been](#) one of the few states where paying for a rideshare, such as an Uber or Lyft, to take a voter to a polling location was illegal. This stemmed from an 1895 law, and Michigan was considered the last state to have such a prohibition. 2024 will be the first presidential election in which Michigan voters will have access to paid transportation, but it is unknown whether and by how much this might increase voter turnout.

On July 8, 2024, Governor Gretchen Whitmer signed into law [Senate Bills 603](#) and [604](#), which address a range of issues relating to the recount process, investigation of voter fraud, and enforcing violations of Michigan election law. Recounts have now been classified as a purely administrative process, and ballot question committees may petition for a recount. A standard form has been put in place to file for a recount petition or to counter a petition, and petitioners must allege an error to call for a recount rather than alleging a mistake or fraud. SB 603 will also raise the bar of the deposit needed to file for a recount petition; excluding allegations of voter fraud as the basis to request a recount is meant to reduce further the number of recounts conducted. [Part of the goal](#) of these amendments is to ensure that recount requests are based in good faith and motivated by a reasonable suspicion that there was an error in the vote count.

Senate Bill 604, accompanying SB 603, further outlines the sentencing guidelines for Michigan election laws. [The new law makes it](#) a five-year felony to interfere with recount and recount-related activities instead of just misconduct by an election employee in a recount.

Conclusion

Since 2020, Michigan implemented a series of legislative changes that attempt to balance the need to keep elections secure while also making voting and the electoral process more accessible. Over the last few years, substantial changes introduced by the Michigan Legislature, Governor Gretchen Whitmer, and Secretary of State Jocelyn Benson have altered how Michigan approaches many highly salient areas of its election administration. Whether coincidentally or because of these changes, how Michiganders vote is noticeably different from 2020. Most notable is that participation through absentee

voting was substantially higher in the 2024 presidential primary than in the corresponding primary contest four years before. Turnout was also greater than one might expect, given that the presidential election was effectively uncontested for both parties. Given the experience and performance in the primary of this presidential battleground, there are reasons for both optimism and concern as we approach the general election. One red flag of particular note is the continued life of election skepticism among some elected officials in the state.