

Nevada 2024 State Report

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Introduction

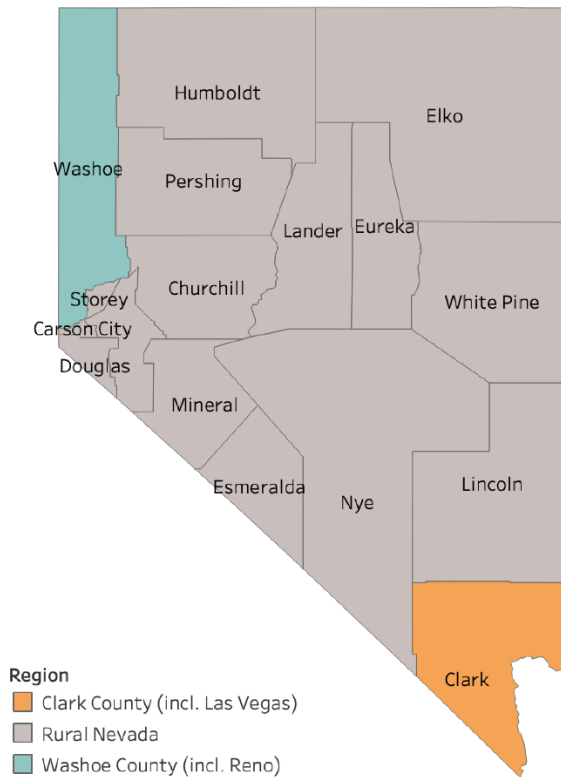
Nevada has emerged as a critical battleground for the 2024 election after Democratic presidential candidates took the state's six electoral votes by 2.4 percent in both 2016 and 2020. In addition to its potentially pivotal electoral votes, a key Senate seat and three swing House of Representatives districts are on the ballot in 2024. Against this backdrop, two developments are central to the 2024 election in the Silver State.

A major development in this election cycle is the state's adoption of universal mail voting, after offering it as an emergency measure in 2020. While in-person voting opportunities will still be offered on Election Day and during an early voting window, the 2021 enactment of [Assembly Bill \(AB\) 321](#) made a COVID-era policy of mailing ballots to all registered voters permanent.

The other major development in this cycle was also sparked by a legislative change. The passage of [AB 422](#) created a top-down statewide voter registration database and system called the Voter Registration & Election Management Solution (VREMS) Project. It replaces the current decentralized system in which counties keep track of their voters separately and report data to the Secretary of State. [According to the Secretary of State's Office](#), maintaining a registry at the statewide level will ensure a more efficient operation, prevent voter fraud and problems with registrations, and hasten the reporting of election results. Implementation took longer than anticipated and was postponed until after the June 11 state primary. The new system should be in place for the November 5 general election.

These developments play out against Nevada's political geography. The Silver State has the second-highest proportion of residents living in urban areas, according to the [Census Bureau](#). About 70 percent of votes cast in 2020 election came from Clark County in Southern Nevada, which is home to Las Vegas and its suburbs. Eighteen percent of votes come from Washoe County in western Nevada, which contains Reno. Figure 1 displays a county map of Nevada, highlighting the two counties which contribute the vast majority of votes in the state.

Figure 1: Nevada Counties



Election Calendar

Initially, Nevada was set to have three major statewide contests this election cycle:

- + The state-run presidential preference primary (PPP) on February 6 for Democrats and Republicans. This primary was established by [AB 126](#) by the Democratic-controlled legislature in 2021 and replaced the traditional late-February Nevada presidential caucuses, which were organized by political parties.
- + The state primary election on June 11 for municipal, state, and congressional contests.
- + The November 5 general election.

Complicating matters, state Republicans [organized](#) a separate presidential caucus on February 8, stipulating that candidates in the primary could not contest the caucus and that delegates would be rewarded only based on caucus results. Votes could only be cast

for the caucus in person and on paper by voters with a government-issued ID; these requirements, and this caucus in general, were developed in response to Republican concerns about the [integrity of mail voting](#) in a predominantly Vote By Mail (VBM) state. Donald Trump withdrew from the Republican state-run primary, and delegates were only to be awarded from the caucus results.. [As a result](#), “none of these candidates” received 50,763 votes out of 80,249 cast. (Nikki Haley, the only major candidate on the ballot, received 24,583 votes.)

A more minor change to the election calendar occurred when Lyon County [misprinted](#) its ballots for the June 11 primary election. As a result, the county will hold make-up special elections on July 23 for the two local races at issue (trustees for Fernley City Council, Ward 5, and the Stagecoach General Improvement District).

Legislation and Policy Shaping Nevada Elections

The policy environment surrounding Nevada elections has changed since 2020, both legislatively and through administrative decisions by Secretary of State Cisco Aguilar. This changing elections landscape was shaped both by Republican Joe Lombardo’s defeat of Democratic Governor Steve Sisolak and by the replacement of former Secretary of State Barbara Cegavske, a Republican, with Aguilar, a Democrat, in the 2022 elections. Nevada legislators have emphasized structural changes to the Silver State’s election process to ensure it runs smoothly in 2024.

Several significant bills were passed during the 2021 legislative session:

- + [AB 126](#), as previously discussed, established a shift from holding presidential caucuses to presidential preference primaries.
- + [AB 321](#) made COVID-19 mail voting policies more permanent by ensuring that all registered voters are mailed a ballot unless they opted out, which then-governor Steve Sisolak [hoped](#) would improve voter access.
- + [AB 422](#), also as previously discussed, will implement a top-down voter registration system and database before the November election, centralizing election administration within the Secretary of State’s office.
- + [AB 432](#) expanded automatic voter registration, first implemented in the 2020 election cycle.

During the 2023 session, despite changes in the state’s political landscape following the election of a new governor, state lawmakers continued to consider and pass election-related legislation. This legislation included [Senate Bill 406](#), which made it a felony to interfere with an election or intimidate election officials. [Other bills](#) made voting access easier for Indigenous voters, especially those on reservations. Nevada also enacted laws changing [requirements](#) regarding acquiring ballots and envelopes for mail voting while also [codifying](#) how manuals for election procedures should be produced and utilized.

After assuming office in early 2023, Secretary of State Cisco Aguilar has implemented several new administrative policies. One example is related to AB 422, which called for creating a top-down voter registration system in Nevada. Under this law, the Secretary of State’s office is responsible for implementing the VREMS Project system. Previously, the state used a bottom-up approach in which each county maintained its data independently and shared it with the state, which aggregated it; now, the [Secretary of State’s office](#) will maintain the database and coordinate county election management systems. Proponents of the new law argued that shifting to a top-down system would improve efficiency and protect privacy. However, when a mock election exercise this spring revealed issues with the new system, all 15 Nevada county election officials requested a [delay](#) of VREMS implementation until after the June 11 primary; Aguilar [granted](#) this request. The Secretary also [instituted](#) new policies calling for the tabulation of mail ballots and early votes at 8 am on Election Day, to speed up the counting and reporting process.

Primary and Turnout Results

According to the [Nevada Secretary of State](#), 134,735 Democrats and 81,007 Republicans cast ballots in the February 6 presidential preference primaries, for a total of 215,742 votes. This amounted to 18.6 percent of all Democratic and Republican registered voters. The Republican presidential caucus featured an additional 60,522 voters, many of whom also voted in the official primary. Nevada has closed state-run primaries, which means voters can only cast ballots in their own party’s primary. On the Democratic side, President Joe Biden ran against Marianne Williamson and other minor candidates, while the Republican contest featured Nikki Haley against minor and withdrawn

candidates; Trump was not on the ballot. Both races also featured a “none of these candidates” option (NOTC). The results are displayed in the table below.

Democratic PPP			Republican PPP			Republican Caucus		
Biden	119,758	89.3%	NOTC	50,763	63.3%	Trump	59,982	99.1%
NOTC*	7,448	5.6%	Haley	24,583	30.6%	Binkley	540	0.9%
Williamson	4,101	3.1%	Others	4,903	6.1%	Total	60,522	100.0%
Others	2,780	2.1%	Total	80,249	100.0%			
Total	134,087	100.0%						

While Biden won his race with 89 percent of the vote to Williamson’s 3 percent and 6 percent for “none of these candidates,” Haley’s vote share fell significantly short of “none of these candidates,” 63 percent to 31 percent. Only Donald Trump and Ryan Binkley contested the party caucuses, which Trump [won](#) with 99 percent of the vote. Trump’s caucus votes exceeded his primary votes. Assuming Trump supporters voted for “none of these candidates” in the primary, this means that more Trump supporters participated in the caucuses than voted in the primary. Fifty-seven percent of all Republican votes—adding up PPP and caucus totals—were cast in the primary (note that many Republicans cast ballots in both contests, though some only voted in one or in neither).

Biden and Trump each swept all of Nevada’s delegates. Figure 2 below shows that Biden and Haley posted their best performances in the same counties, notably the counties with the two largest urban areas—Clark County (Las Vegas and Henderson) and Washoe County (Reno and Sparks)—and the state capital region of Carson City and neighboring Douglas County. Haley also tended to earn a higher vote share in the counties where Democrats comprised a greater share of the PPP vote.

Figure 3 plots Haley’s share of the PPP vote against the proportion of all Republican votes (from the PPP and the party caucus) cast in the primary. Haley’s best counties

cluster in the top right, and these counties all had a greater percentage of votes cast in the primary vis-à-vis the caucus than the statewide average. By contrast, the counties she did worse in are scattered across the horizontal axis; there is no clear connection for those counties between Haley’s performance and the proportion of Republican votes cast in the state-run primary.

Figure 2: Haley’s PPP Vote Share vs. Biden’s PPP Vote Share

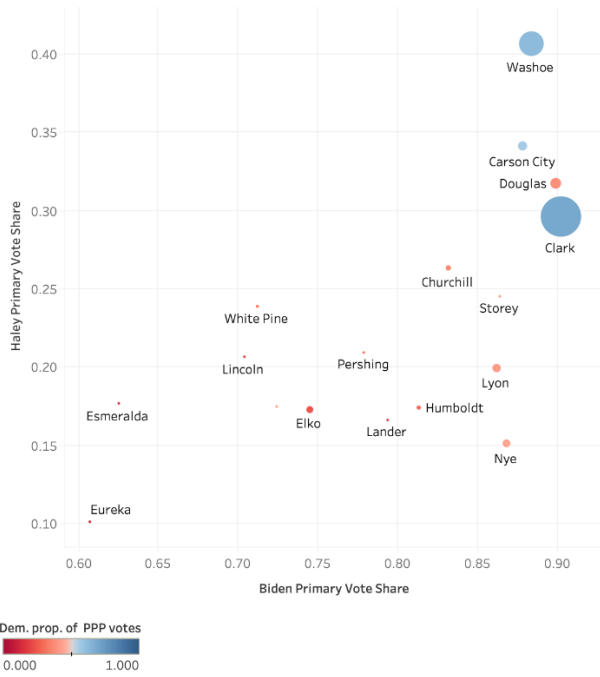
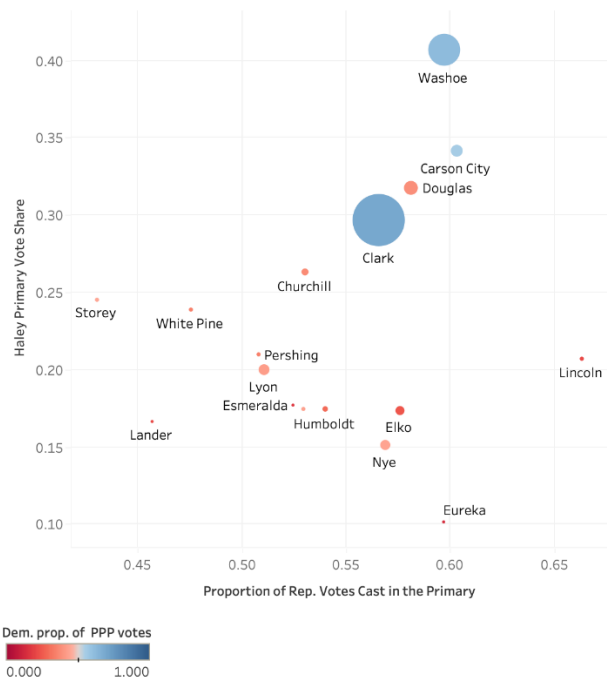


Figure 3: Haley’s PPP Vote Share vs. Proportion of all Republican Votes (PPP + Caucus) Cast in the PPP



The state’s shift from the caucus system used in 2020 to statewide primaries makes it difficult to compare the 2020 and 2024 nomination contests; comparison is further complicated by the parallel party-run Republican caucus in 2024. However, the results still point toward broader trends. First, Joe Biden consolidated Democratic support throughout most of the state, although he was weakest in the smallest rural counties in the central part of the state. While interpreting Republican results requires more caution, Nikki Haley’s decisive defeat by “none of these candidates” in the GOP primary indicates her failure to gain traction statewide; her relative strength in larger Democratic counties underscores Trump’s challenges in the state’s population centers. The results point to Trump’s vulnerability in Washoe County—a pivotal county home to Reno, with the highest level of educational attainment in the state, per [data](#)

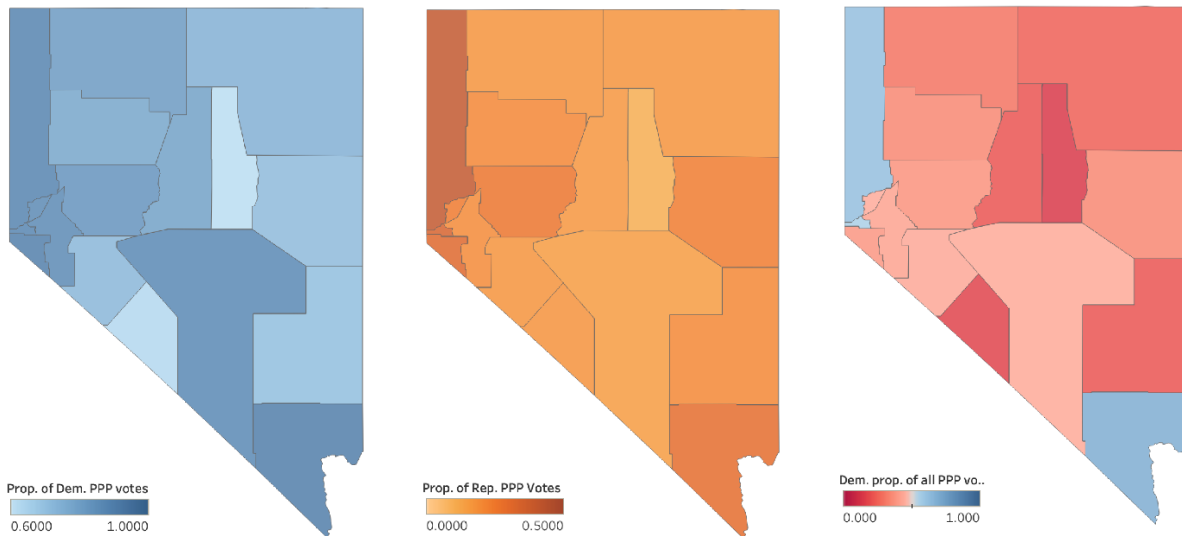
from the 2020 Census—as Haley won 40 percent of the primary vote (versus 30 percent statewide).

Figures 4 to 6 below illustrate where Biden and Haley performed best, as well as the partisan vote share in Nevada’s presidential preference primaries overall.

Figure 4: Biden’s Vote Share

Figure 5: Haley’s Vote Share

Figure 6: Partisan Vote Share
(Dem. proportion of all PPP votes)



Turnout in the Nevada primaries was notably low this year, which most likely reflects the lack of competition. Furthermore, apples-to-apples comparisons are frustrated by the unusual split between the state-run presidential primary and the party-organized caucus on the Republican side.

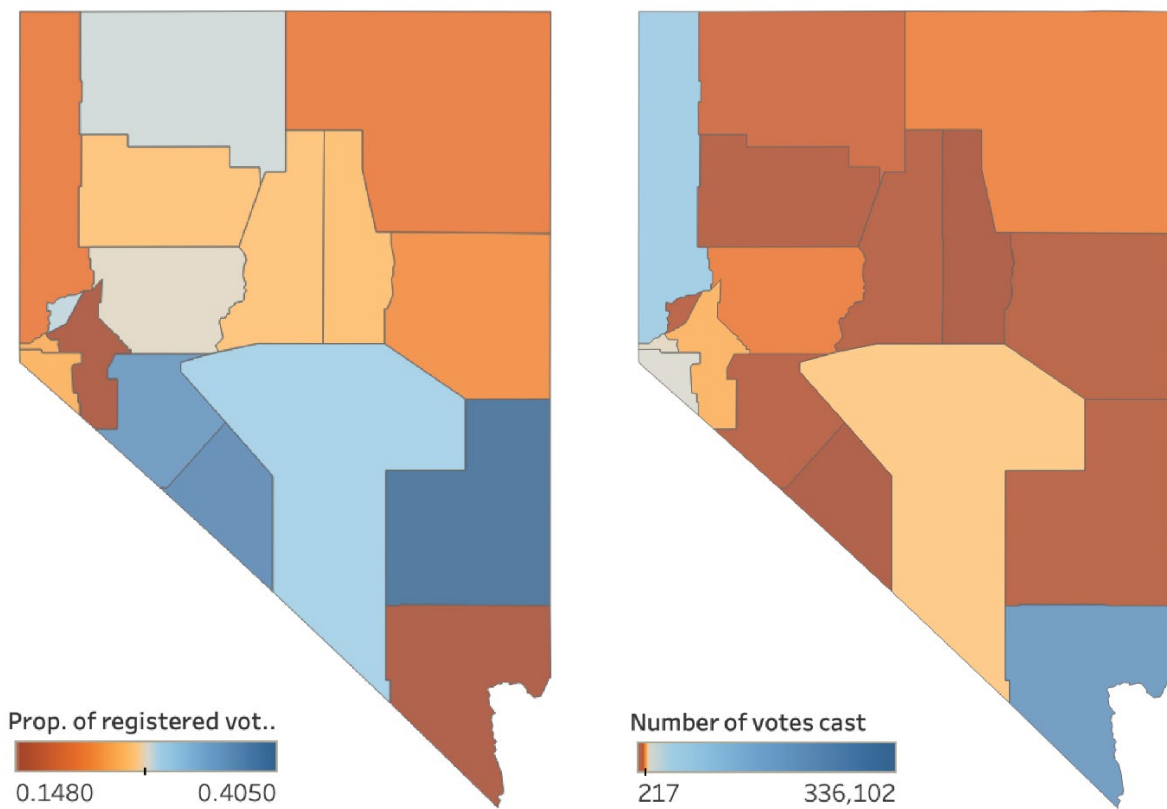
The [state primary](#) in June featured 336,102 ballots cast and a 16.8 percent turnout rate (calculated out of the number of *total* registered voters, regardless of party), with 139,093 Democratic votes, 151,956 Republican votes, and 45,053 other ballots cast. The sizable turnout differential between the two parties may be driven by the presence of competitive primaries on the Republican ballot, which included a race for the U.S. Senate (the only statewide contest) and three U.S. House districts. Meanwhile, incumbent Democrats faced token opposition in the Senate contest and two of the House districts on the ballot; incumbent Rep. Dina Titus ran unopposed, and the party did not contest Nevada’s Second District, by far the most conservative and Republican-

leaning of Nevada’s four congressional districts. Local contests were on the ballot for many voters, including the Las Vegas mayoral race.

Figures 7 and 8 report turnout by county, as a percentage of registered voters, and in terms of totals. Note that turnout as a proportion of registered voters tended to be the lowest in more Democratic counties. For instance, Clark County, traditionally a Democratic stronghold, saw a turnout rate of 14.8 percent, compared to neighboring Nye County, a Republican stronghold, which had a turnout rate of 29.3 percent.

Figure 7: Turnout (prop. of registered voters, state primary)

Figure 8: Turnout (votes cast, state primary)



Low turnout in this contest stands in stark contrast to turnout in 2020’s state primary, conducted in June after the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. That election, conducted almost entirely via mail, saw [turnout](#) reach 29.5 percent of registered voters—nearly 13 percentage points higher than in 2024. Turnout declined in all but two counties, including by 12.2 percent in Clark County and 12.5 percent in Washoe County. These two counties account for a large majority of the votes cast in each election: In the 2020

general election, nearly 70 percent of votes cast came from Clark County, while 18 percent were submitted in Washoe County. In 2024, turnout increased in Mineral and Lincoln Counties, each by nearly two percentage points. In Mineral County, turnout only increased by 22 votes, while Lincoln County’s vote total decreased despite the slight rise in the turnout rate.

Mail and Early Voting

Most Nevada votes are usually cast before Election Day via mail or in-person early voting. This pattern has existed since before the pandemic—the percentage of voters casting ballots in person was only 30.6 percent in 2016, 34.2 percent in 2018, and just 11.2 percent in the pandemic election of 2020—and is likely to continue this year. Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, early voting was preferred by a majority of Nevada voters. The table below shows turnout [statistics](#) from the Nevada Secretary of State’s office by vote mode for these three elections.

General Election	2016		2018		2020		2022	
Election Day	334,470	30.6%	334,080	34.2%	158,007	11.2%	215,414	21.0%
Early Voting	702,387	62.4%	554,242	56.8%	577,848	41.1%	283,976	27.8%
Mail and Absentee	79,756	7.0%	87,658	9.0%	671,906	47.7%	524,227	51.2%
Total	1,125,429	100.0%	975,980	100.0%	1,407,761	100.0%	1,871,188	100.0%

The pandemic affected Nevadans’ voting patterns. In 2020, Nevada mailed a ballot to every registered voter in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, a marked shift for a state

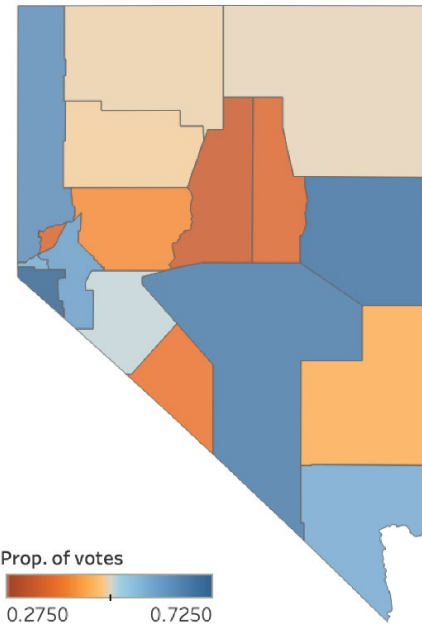
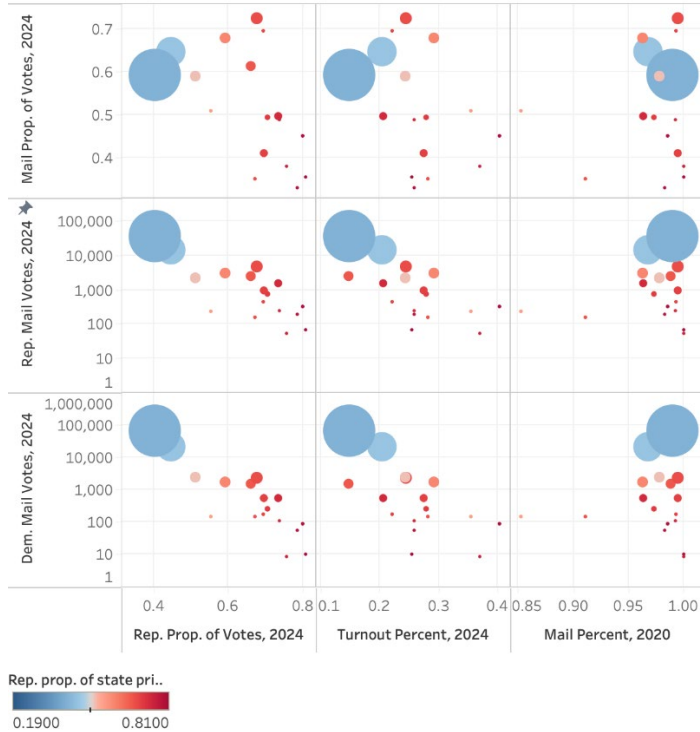
where only seven percent of voters opted for a mail ballot in the 2016 presidential election. [Over 98 percent](#) of all votes in the state's June 2020 primary were cast by mail.

Mail voting has been a critical element of Nevada elections ever since, especially since Assembly Bill 321 was enacted in 2021, making the temporary shift to widespread mail elections permanent by establishing that all registered voters would be mailed a ballot for each forthcoming election. In the 2022 general election, 51.2 percent of voters utilized mail voting options. Eighty percent of Democratic and 75 percent of Republican votes in the state's February 2024 presidential preference primary were mail ballots. However, the Republican results are perhaps incomparable, considering the parallel in-person-only caucus two days later. In the June 11 state primary, 60 percent of votes were cast via mail, including 74 percent of Democrats' ballots and 53 percent of Republicans'. These data reflect the extent to which mail voting has become normalized by both parties' voters in advance of the 2024 election. Although Democrats have generally been more supportive of mail voting since the onset of COVID-19 in 2020, it appears that Republican leaders have [diminished their public hostility](#) toward voting by mail for strategic reasons.

Figure 9: Mail voting scatterplots for the state primary (county dots sized by the number of votes cast, logarithmic y-axis in the lower two rows)

Figure 10: Proportion of Votes Cast via Mail, State Primary

Figure 9: Absentee/Mail Voting Scatterplots



The above plots illustrate the usage of mail voting across Nevada in the June state primary. The map on the right shows that mail voting was popular in the state’s urban centers—Clark and Washoe counties—and generally around Reno and Carson City. Rural counties in the Second Congressional District stand out in orange in the north of the map; mail voting was unpopular there. Since Democrats disproportionately favor mail voting, this could be attributed to a drop-off in Democratic turnout caused by the lack of a Democratic primary in these Second District counties. The scatterplots on the left illustrate that the counties with the highest proportion of Republican votes tend to have the smallest percentage of mail votes and that high-turnout counties also generally have slightly lower rates of mail voting.

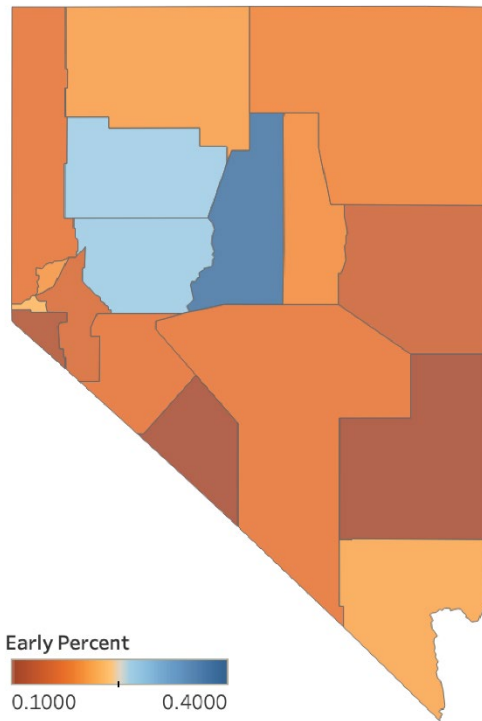
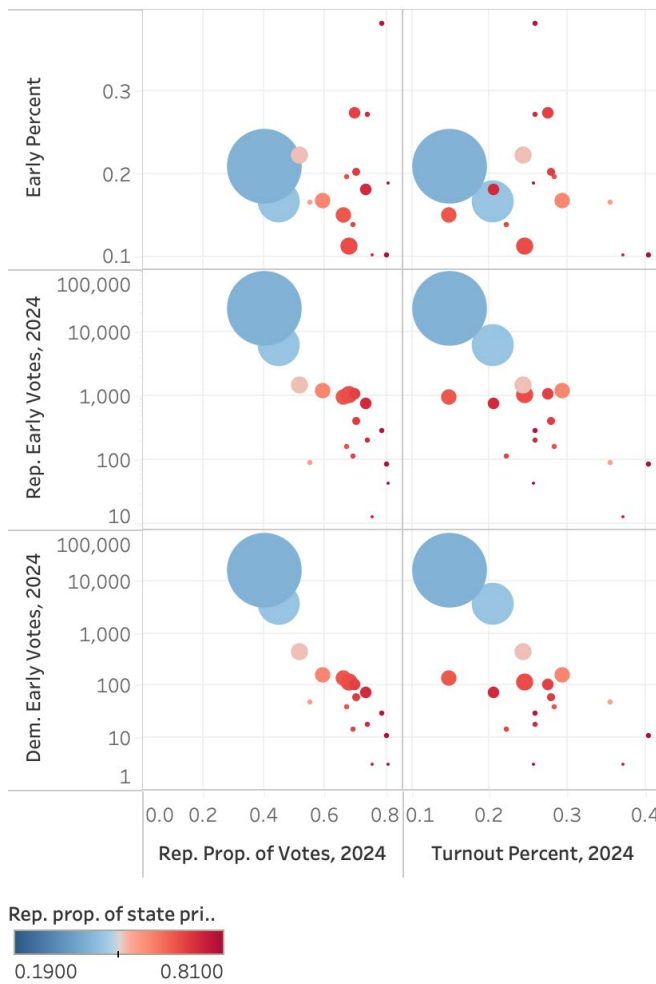
These data point toward a tendency for Democrats to disproportionately prefer mail voting, though they also exhibit regional and likely turnout-related dynamics. Furthermore, within each county, a greater proportion of ballots cast via mail are sent in by Democrats than by Republicans. Statewide, over 70 percent of Democratic ballots

were mailed in, versus 24.3 percent of Republican ballots. The usage of mail ballots in the 2020 primary is uncorrelated with their usage in 2024, though, likely because over 90 percent of voters used mail ballots in most counties in 2020 due to the pandemic.

The story is slightly different for early in-person voting, which was far less popular statewide in June—only 19.5 percent of voters cast their ballots in this manner in the state primary. Higher early voting rates were found in the rural, northern portion of the state, with 38 percent of votes being cast early in Lander County—the highest proportion in the state. Clark County’s rate of early voting nearly matched the statewide average, at just under 21 percent. There is no strong correlation between early voting and partisanship here.

Figure 11: Early Voting Scatterplots, State Primary

Figure 12: Proportion of Votes Cast Early, State Primary



Conclusion

Nevada has spent most of the 21st century as a swing state, and this cycle may prove the most competitive—and contentious—in its recent political history, with six potentially decisive electoral votes, a critical Senate seat, and three battleground congressional districts on the ballot (in addition to state legislative seats and ballot measures). The presidential preference contests in February and the state primary in June provided the first test of the state’s elections infrastructure ahead of the November general election and give us some ideas of how 2024 might play out in the Silver State.

First, the institutionalization of mail voting following a 2021 bill stipulating that all registered voters will be mailed a ballot ahead of the election has sparked controversy, reshaped the election calendar, and even led some Republicans to reconsider their opposition to this early-voting method. In February, this went so far that the Nevada Republican Party withdrew from the state-run presidential preference primary, choosing instead to run their own caucus two days later—with only in-person voting and strict voter ID policies. However, acceptance is growing, and mail voting is popular with Silver State voters, even Republicans. Indeed, a supermajority of Nevadans in the state primary opted for the convenience of a mail ballot over voting in person on Election Day or during the early voting window, including 53 percent of Republicans.

Another major change is the VREMS Project’s top-down voter registration system, which will centralize voter registration within the office of the Secretary of State instead of dispersing authority among the state’s 17 counties. The state tested and refined this system during mock elections and the primary. Implementing the system late in the election cycle could yield challenges in time for the November general election.

Additionally, Secretary of State Cisco Aguilar has provided guidance and standards to local election officials; these include measures to speed up counting the state’s early and mailed ballots on Election Day in November. Given that Nevada has received significant attention in recent years for counting ballots relatively slowly, which inflamed concerns about election integrity, this step may help address those concerns.