

Arizona 2024 State Report

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Summary

In 2020, Arizona was one of the most contested states during the presidential campaign and election, which Joe Biden carried by just 10,457 votes, or 0.3% of votes cast. The state is once again expected to serve as an electoral battleground in 2024. This label entails a higher level of election scrutiny by statewide political parties, voting rights organizations, advocates, and the campaigns themselves.

This report will review historical election and voter registration trends in Arizona, election administration performance in the 2024 Presidential Preference Election (PPE), potential controversies and challenges for the 2024 General Election, and post-election issues that may arise.

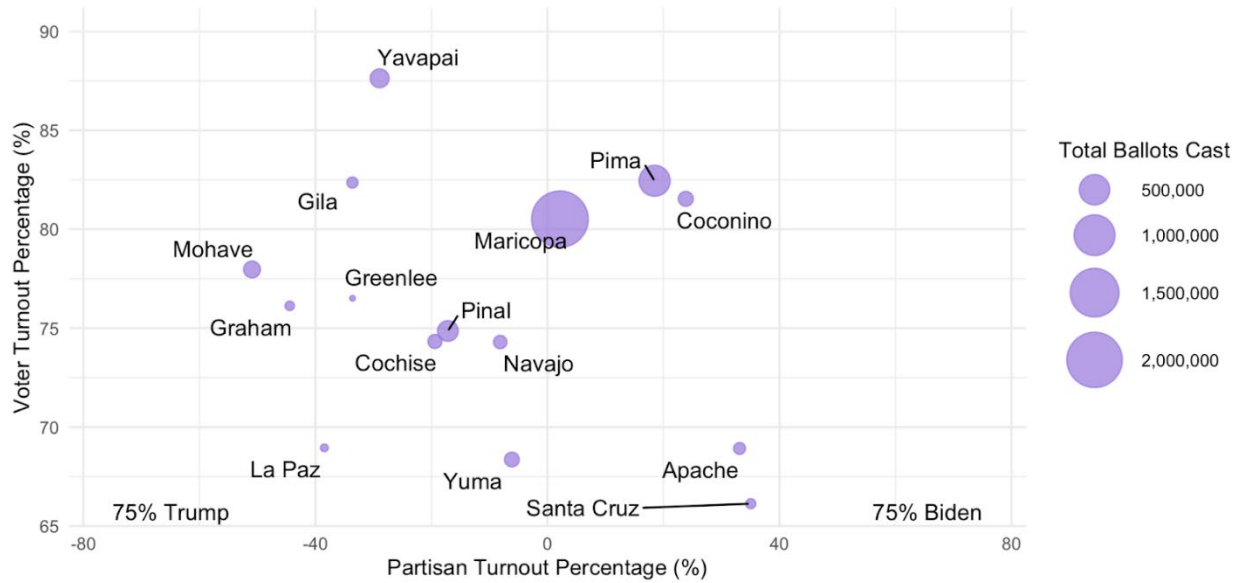
A topic of particular interest is the role of election audits in recent Arizona elections. The state gained national attention in 2020 and 2021 when the state legislature initiated what they termed a “forensic audit” of Maricopa County’s election administration and ballot tabulation. Judicial and legislative action in the state has altered the ability of state and local officials to conduct hand counts and audits, and this report will detail these changes. The role of skepticism about the outcomes of the 2020 election in Arizona cannot be understated, and its influence on state officials, elections offices, and the general public will continue into the 2024 general election and its aftermath.

Analysis of Primary Results and Historical Data

2020 General and Comparing PPE Turnout

In Arizona, statewide election results largely depended on returns from Maricopa County, which [makes](#) up 62% of the state’s total population and 59% of the state’s [registered voters](#). Larger counties, such as Maricopa (Phoenix) and Pima (Tucson), leaned towards Biden in 2020 and contributed to his slim victory in the state. Figure 1, below, shows county-level results from the 2020 General Election comparing registered voter turnout with partisan vote share, where zero on the x-axis represents a 50-50 split between Trump and Biden in a particular county. Voter turnout was notably above 80% in Yavapai, Gila, Pima, Coconino, and Maricopa counties, and it sank below 70% in Santa Cruz, Apache, Yuma, and La Paz counties, where populations are sparse.

Figure 1: Arizona 2020 Presidential Election Turnout by County



No major issues arose in the administration of the Arizona Presidential Preference Election (PPE) in March. Still, the 2024 presidential primary turnout, in which [39.75% of registered voters](#) cast a ballot, was lower than other recent presidential primary contests in Arizona. In 2020, when there was a competitive Democratic presidential primary [but no Republican](#) presidential primary, [48.82% of registered voters](#) participated. This matches a nationwide [pattern](#) of relatively low turnout in the 2024 PPE compared to the more competitive primary contests of recent election years. Although the past four years following the 2020 General Election have seen highly active litigation and legislation regarding election administration in Arizona, election administrators across the state successfully conducted a fair, accessible, and secure election in March 2024.

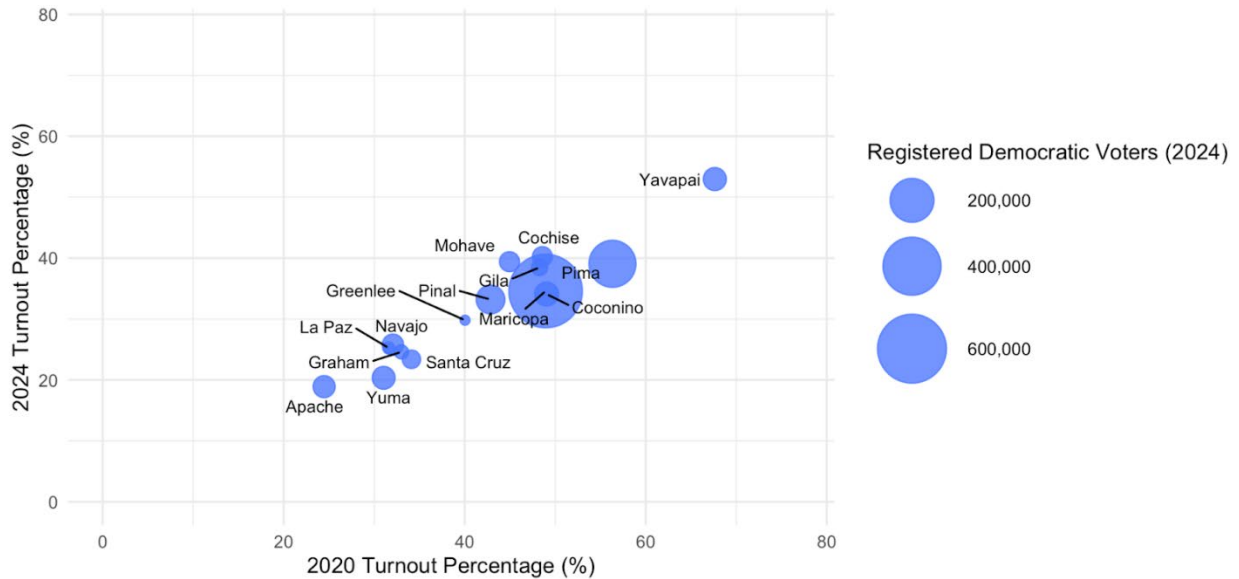
Both major two-party candidates, President Joseph Biden and former President Donald Trump, [won their party's Arizona PPE](#) decisively, claiming 89.3% and 78.8% of the vote respectively. Trump faced a stronger opposition for the nomination than Biden, even though former South Carolina Governor Nikki Haley and his other major opponents had already [dropped out](#) of the race for the Republican nomination by the March 19 PPE. Ultimately Trump lost 17.8% of the vote to Haley. [In some states](#), Biden faced an organized movement for Democratic PPE voters to select an 'Uncommitted' or 'No Preference' option, but Arizona [does not have such an option](#) on either partisan primary ballot.

This meant a dip in turnout for the state compared to the 2020 Democratic Presidential Preference Election, where major candidates like Senator Bernie Sanders and Senator Elizabeth Warren contested President Biden’s candidacy more formidably. Figures 2, 3, and 4 show these shifts, where Biden received approximately 43% of the vote in Maricopa County in the 2020 PPE compared to almost 90% in 2024. From 2020 to 2024, there were also major dips in turnout, with a roughly 14 and 17 percentage point decrease in turnout in urban centers like Maricopa and Pima counties, respectively. Turnout in rural counties lagged as well: Coconino and Yavapai counties’ turnout fell nearly 15 points between primaries, and historically low-turnout counties like Apache remained below 30% of registered voters.¹

Figure 2, below, compares turnout by county in the 2020 and 2024 PPEs. This bubble plot only displays turnout for the Democratic PPEs because Republicans in Arizona [decided](#) against holding a Republican PPE in 2020. Figure 2 displays a roughly linear relationship in which turnout percentages are consistent but lower in 2024 than in 2020 (with the sole exception of Yavapai County, which was a slight positive outlier.).

¹ An important caveat is that the turnout among Voting Age Population or citizen Voting Age Population would naturally be much lower than just among registered voters. Arizona has been growing rapidly, with the state’s [Office of Economic Opportunity](#) estimating a nearly 5% increase in the state’s population between 2020 and 2023. It is entirely possible that turnout among voting age population exhibits different trends than turnout among registered voters, but the fact that the number of ballots cast is *lower* now than in the past, while Voting Age Population is almost certainly *higher* now than in the past, suggests that if anything, the decline in turnout that we document in this report actually understates the decline in turnout among the eligible population at large. In the absence of confident estimates of citizen Voting Age Population at the exact time points of interest, namely the 2020 and 2024 presidential primary election dates, we restrict our attention to the (less interesting but much more knowable) question of turnout among registered voters rather than all eligible voters.

Figure 2: Arizona Democratic Presidential Primary Election Turnout (2020 versus 2024)



How does turnout track with Biden’s vote share? We might expect either that in places where Biden has the lowest vote share people are less engaged in the electoral contest and are also less inclined to vote. It is also possible that those counties which have the highest Biden vote share are also places where electors judged that the contest was least competitive, and hence would have lower turnout. Figures 3 and 4 display this relationship.

Figure 3: Arizona 2020 Democratic Presidential Primary Election Turnout by County

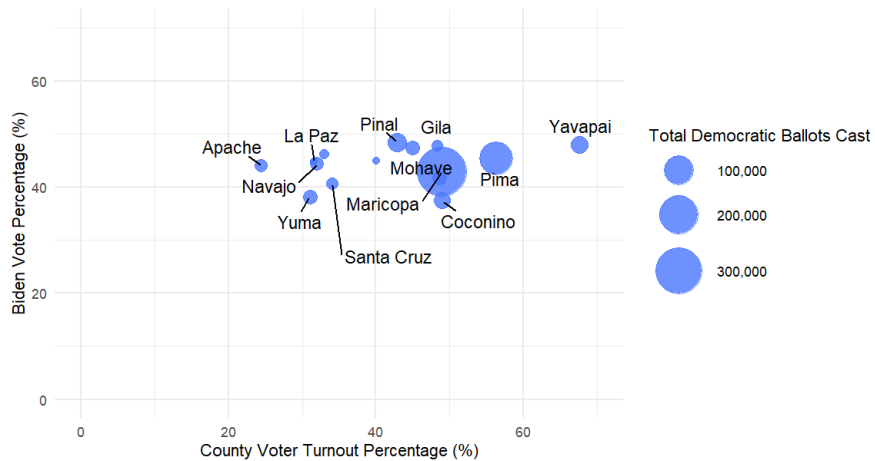
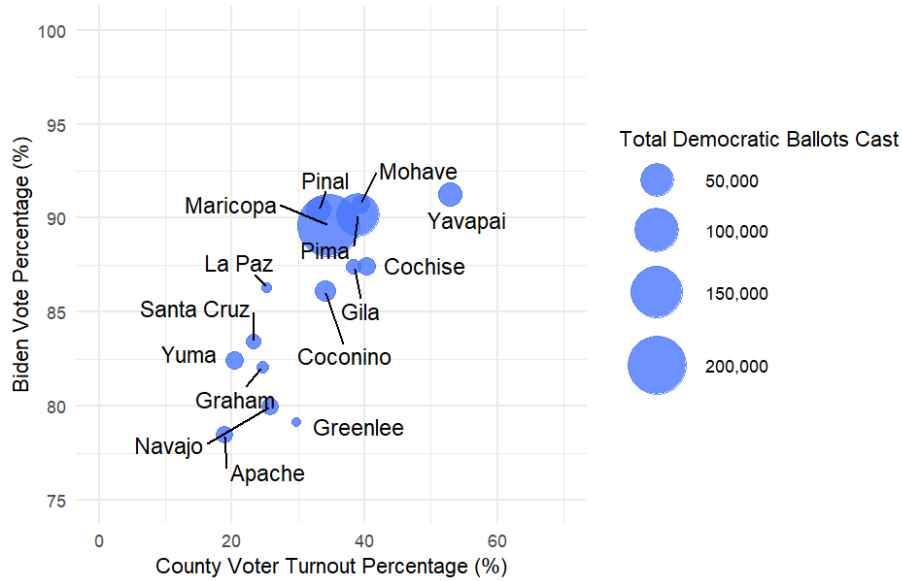


Figure 4: Arizona 2024 Democratic Presidential Primary Election Turnout by County



In both Figure 3 and Figure 4, there is a positive and roughly linear relationship between Biden’s vote percentage in a county and that county’s turnout. In the 2020 election, Biden received less than half of the vote in Arizona’s Democratic PPE (but still won a plurality).. A linear regression produces a p-value of 0.34, indicating no statistically significant relationship between turnout and Biden’s performance in the Democratic primary. In 2024, in contrast, Biden received the overwhelming majority of all votes, and there is a much tighter positive linear relationship between turnout and Biden’s vote share demonstrated by a p-value of 0.0005.

Notably, Apache, Navajo, and Greenlee counties gave Biden less than 80% of the primary vote in 2024 and were the only ones in the state to do so. Apache and Navajo counties encapsulate the majority of Arizona’s portion of the Navajo Nation, and Donald Trump carried Greenlee County, a county with just under 10,000 people, by almost 34 points in 2020.

Figure 5: Arizona 2024 Republican Presidential Primary Election Turnout by County

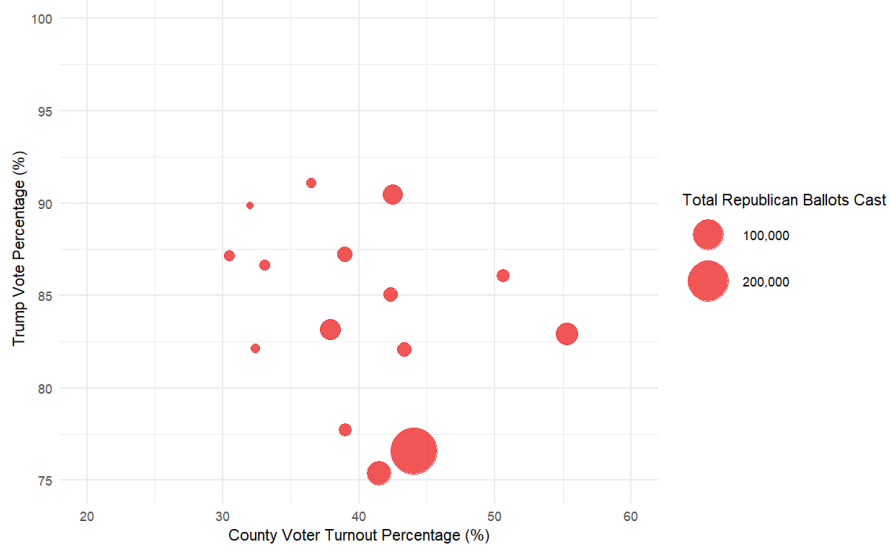


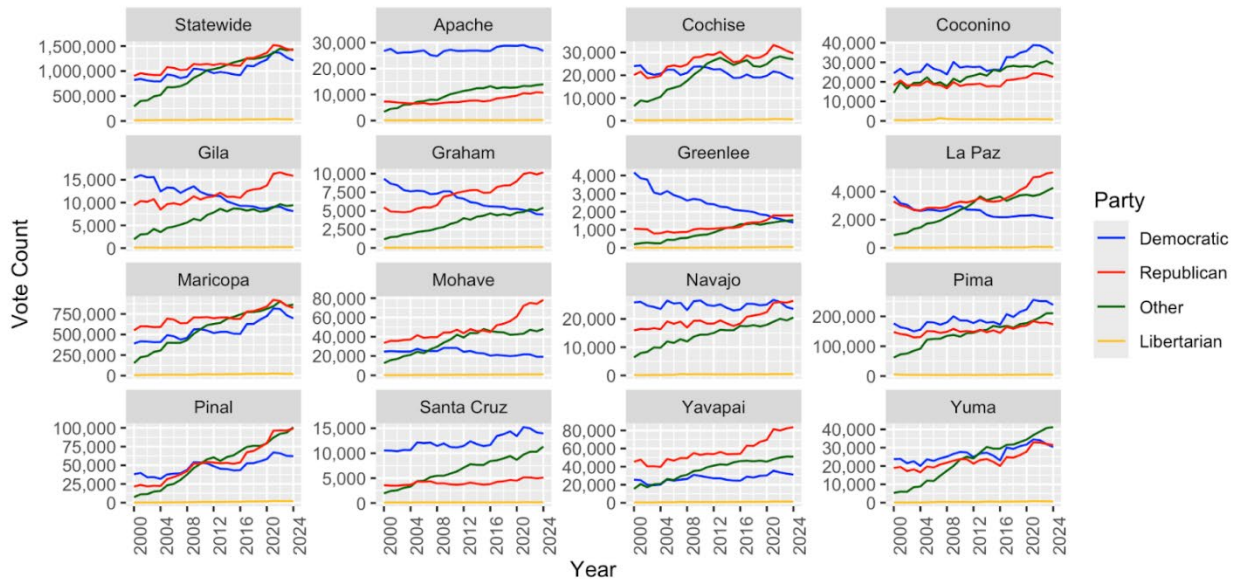
Figure 5, above, shows results from the 2024 Republican PPE, where voters in urban counties like Maricopa and Pima gave Trump less support in March. Like in the Democratic PPE, Republican voters in Apache County, Santa Cruz County, and Graham County turned out at a low rate, all under 35%. Republican voters in La Paz, Greenlee, and Mohave counties supported Former President Trump at the highest rates in the state, where Trump received near to or above 90% of the vote. Critically, Figure 5 displays an example of a dominant candidate with a roughly negative relationship between voter turnout and vote share. In high turnout and population counties (Maricopa, Yavapai, and Pima), voters were more likely to cast protest votes, mostly for Nikki Haley (Haley received 18% of the PPE voted, compared to Trump's 79% and Ron DeSantis's 2%). The opposite trend occurred in the Democratic primary, where high-turnout and high-population counties supported Joseph Biden more often than low-turnout and low-population counties in the state.

Voter Registration

Voter registration data is reported several times each year in Arizona, with the state regularly tracking party affiliations for the Democrats, Republicans, Libertarians, and non-affiliated voters. Figure 6 displays the number of registered voters in each county in Arizona from 2000 until the present, using data from January of each year. Each county is displayed in a separate subplot, with the statewide voter registration trends in the top-

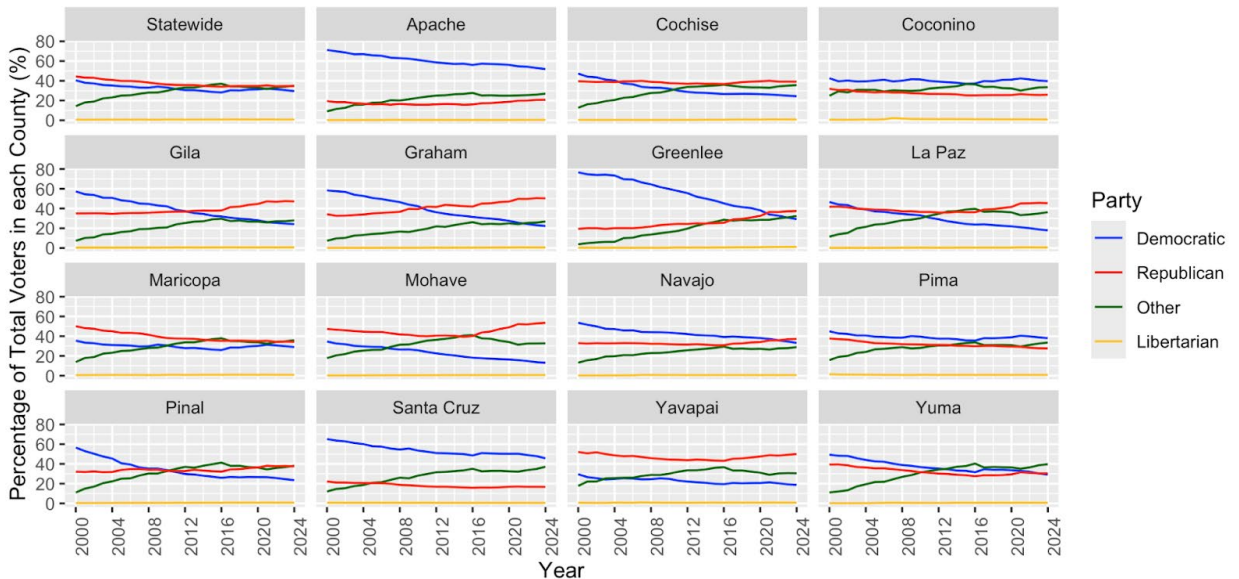
left. Note that because the subplots describe regions with very different total populations, the y-axes are on different scales so that the trends within each plot are visible.

Figure 6: Arizona Voter Registration Count by County and Party (2000-2024)



While the raw number of registered voters often shows an increase over time, the registration numbers as a proportion of each region’s population often tell a different story. Figure 7 shows those proportions.

Figure 7: Arizona Voter Registration Proportions by County and Party



Arizona is one of the [fastest-growing states](#) in the country, growing from 5.1 million in 2000 to 7.2 million in 2020, an increase of 41.2%. In comparison, the total population of the U.S. grew by 17.8% in the same period. Total registration figures have roughly kept pace over this period, but this growth has been associated with an explosion in voters who are unaffiliated with a party. The result is that in 2024, the Arizona electorate was divided into roughly thirds—Democrats, Republicans, and all others (who were predominantly unaffiliated.)

Most counties have experienced the same statewide growth in unaffiliated voters, although the number of Democrats and Republicans has varied notably across counties. Some counties have experienced major shifts in the number of registered voters by party over the last 24 years. In rural counties like Greenlee and Graham, Democratic Party registrations have plummeted since 2000, with corresponding increases in the number of voters registered with the Republican Party or unaffiliated.

In urban centers like Pima and Maricopa, change is less apparent. These counties have tended to follow (or drive) the overall state trend, which has seen a slight decrease in both Democratic and Republican voters as a proportion of the state's population (though the raw number of both has increased slightly for most of the period). In contrast, the share of voters registered unaffiliated increased by nearly 20 percentage points from 2000 to 2024.

Voting by Mode

Arizona, like many Western states, has an [especially long history](#) with mail-in voting. Arizona is one of the few states where, for years before the COVID-19 pandemic, [a large majority of voters](#) cast their ballots by mail. Arizona's use of a permanent absentee ballot list (now called the Active Early Voting List) has facilitated the rise of mail ballots in the state over the past decade. Still, during the pandemic, the state [saw](#) a slight increase in the share of votes cast by mail as voters took safety precautions.

Figure 8: Vote Mode in Arizona Federal Elections (2016-2022)

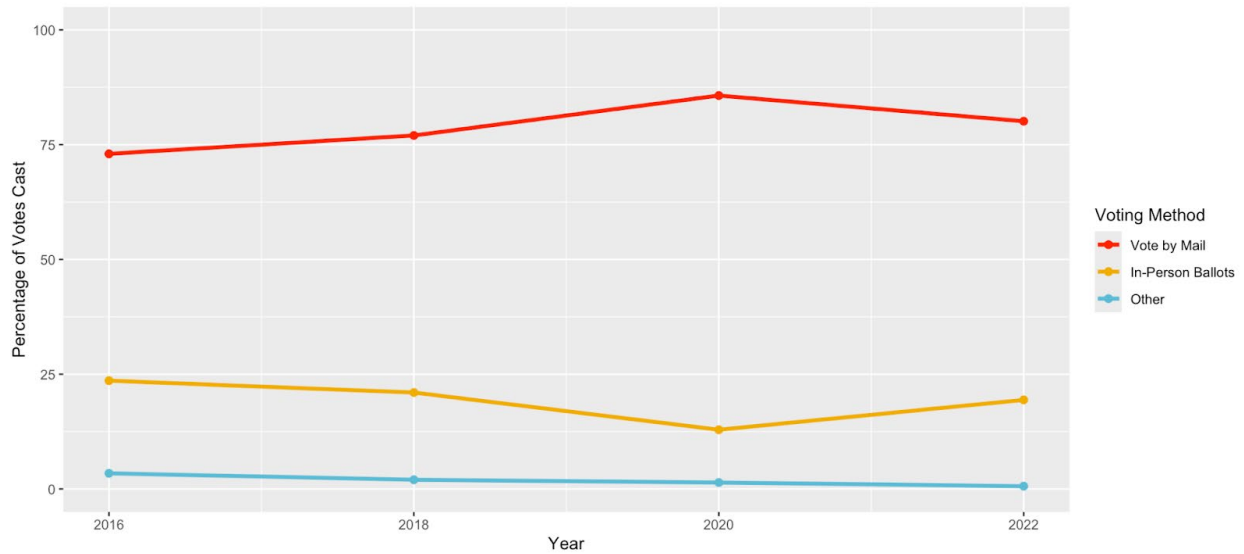
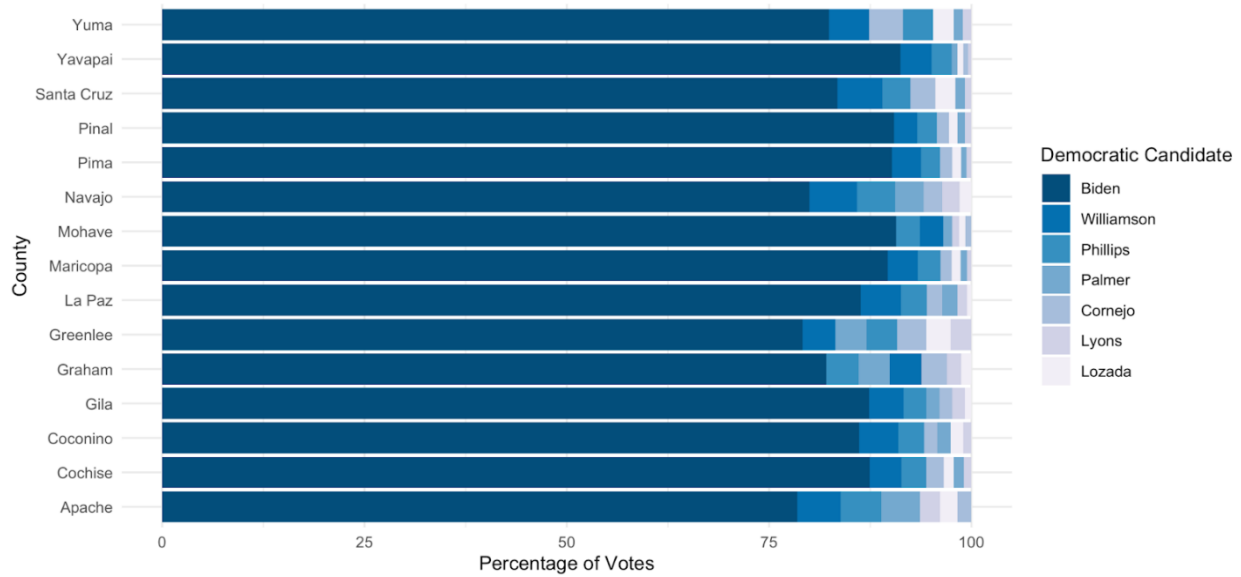


Figure 8, above, displays the change in vote mode in the state in each major election from 2016-2022.

2024 PPE Vote Distribution

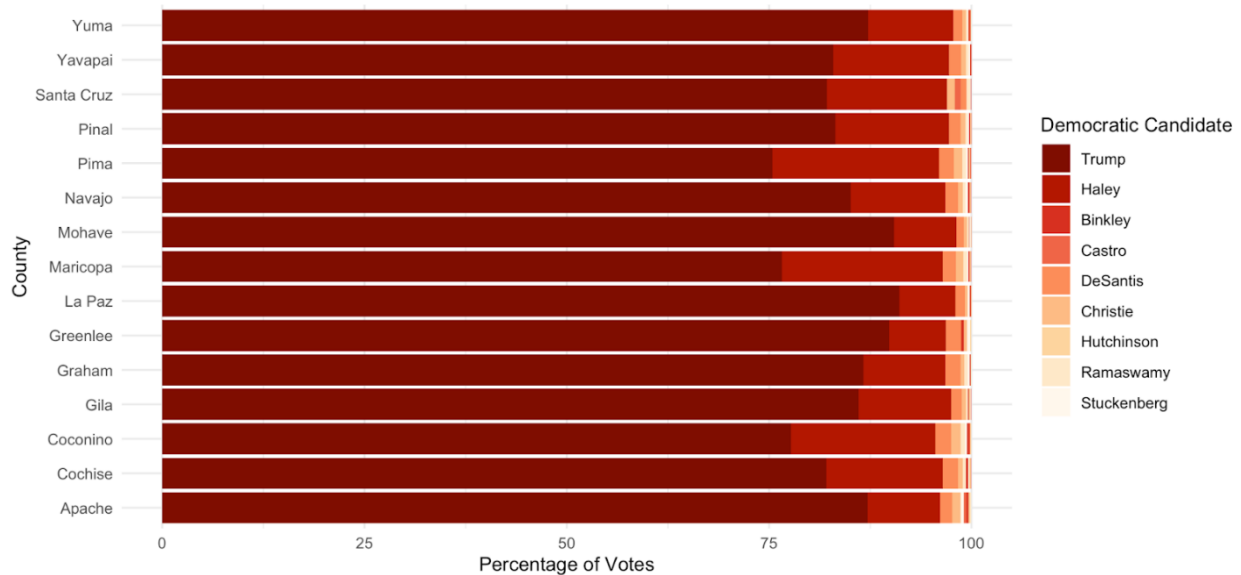
Although there is no “Uncommitted” or “No preference” option on the ballot in Arizona’s PPE contests, the Democratic primary election ballot had seven candidates, and support for the winner varied across Arizona’s counties. Figure 9 shows Joe Biden's vote share in each county.

Figure 9: Democratic Candidate Vote Share by County in 2024 PPE, Arizona



While Biden received a substantial majority of the vote in every county, more than 15% of the voters in Yuma, Santa Cruz, Navajo, Greenlee, Graham, and Apache counties cast ballots for a candidate other than Biden. The largest non-Biden vote shares were in Navajo, Apache, and Greenlee counties, where more than 20% of Democratic voters chose another candidate.

Figure 10: Republican Candidate Vote Share by County in 2024 PPE, Arizona



The Republican Presidential Preference Election in Arizona was even more contested. Figure 10, above, displays the vote share by county in that contest. Nikki Haley received nearly 25% of Republican ballots in Pima and Maricopa counties, the locations of the largest cities in the state, and Coconino County, with a large Native American population. Pima and Maricopa counties are Arizona's largest, making up roughly 79% of the state's population. Former President Trump carried Arizona's rural counties more easily – Republican voters in both La Paz and Mohave counties voted for the presumptive nominee at rates over 90%.

Topics of Interest

Election Skepticism

Since 2020, Arizona elections have been a major target of the movement to deny the legitimacy of that year's presidential election results. In the span of a few days after the election, Arizona's counties [completed hand audits](#) of the election results, which produced identical or very nearly identical results to the original vote count in every county. [This is a normal procedure](#) for establishing that election results are accurate, and the results of the hand audit were quite typical for accurately counted elections. Nevertheless, attempts to discredit the accuracy of the vote count began quickly after the November 2020 election.

In December 2020, the President of the Arizona State Senate, Karen Fann, and the State Senate's Judiciary Committee Chair, Eddie Farnsworth, issued a [subpoena](#) for Maricopa County's 2020 ballots and voting machines, [in pursuit of evidence](#) regarding the false claims of voter fraud and inaccurate vote counting that then-President Donald Trump was propagating. Amid legal complications, Fann and State Senator Warren Peterson (the new Senate Judiciary Chair) issued [another subpoena](#) at the beginning of 2021. A Maricopa County Superior Court judge allowed the state to initiate another round of election auditing, and [a court ruled](#) that Maricopa County election officials would need to make the ballots available for further auditing, which they did.

Republican leaders then [appointed](#) a security consultancy group, called the Cyber Ninjas, to conduct what they termed a “forensic audit” of Maricopa County's federal election results. Researchers of election audits [have noted](#) that the concept of a “forensic audit” is

not well-defined and that the partisan audits of ballots in Arizona differed from standard audit practice in important ways that make it difficult to interpret their findings meaningfully.

Ultimately, though, the Cyber Ninjas [affirmed](#) all election results in Maricopa County, reporting fewer than 400 discrepancies among Maricopa County's approximately 2.1 million ballots cast, while Arizona Attorney General Mark Brnovich concurrently [reported](#) that accusations of hundreds of deceased voters were unfounded.

According to the [National Conference of State Legislatures](#), Arizona currently holds that an election audit must be conducted "within 24 hours after the polls close," and before the votes are officially canvassed. The audit is a traditional post-election tabulation audit, in which a fixed number or percentage of votes are counted a second time, and the second count is compared to the first count to ensure that no major errors are made. The current requirement is to audit "2% of precincts [or vote centers] in a county or two precincts (whichever is greater)", and that the audit must include "1% or 5,000 early ballots in the county (whichever is less)". This is standard election auditing practice that does not stand out among state election auditing regimes.

Maricopa County

Maricopa County is Arizona's largest county and contains major cities such as Phoenix, Mesa, Chandler, Gilbert, Glendale, Scottsdale, Peoria, and Tempe. The county [is home to](#) voting blocs that are widely seen as likely to play a pivotal role in the outcome of important 2024 general contests, including Hispanic voters, moderate suburban Republicans, and older voters. Residents have traditionally leaned towards Republican candidates in presidential elections, but in 2020, the county [swung](#) to Democrats for the first time [since](#) Harry Truman in 1948. The jurisdiction is home to much of the state's election administration controversies, meaning election officials at both the county and state levels are working to ensure a smooth election in Maricopa. Election officials are currently working to [hire thousands of temporary election workers](#) ahead of the November election in order to ensure that votes can be counted accurately and in a timely manner.

Maricopa is one of the subjects of [Strong Communities of Arizona v. Yavapai County](#), in which Trump Administration Senior Advisor Stephen Miller's legal group challenged

election administration practices in Yavapai, Coconino, and Maricopa counties. In the case, plaintiffs assert that the counties distributed election centers disproportionately in Black and Hispanic neighborhoods while depriving white and Native American voters of ballot box access. The suit also charges that all three counties make it too easy for a voter to [‘cure’ their mail ballot](#) in cases when the signature on the ballot doesn’t match that in voter registration records. Strong Communities of Arizona petitioned to bring the case from a state appeals court to the Arizona Supreme Court on June 12th.

Election Administration Priorities and Controversies

Two major themes leading up to a high-stakes election in Arizona are the ways that election officials in the Arizona Secretary of State’s Office and county election offices are responding to conspiracy theories about the accuracy of vote counting in the state, and the potential threats of AI-powered disinformation. At the state level, Secretary of State Adrian Fontes [has established](#) an information security team tasked with defending Arizona’s election infrastructure from cyberattacks and monitoring the internet for misinformation and election threats.

Responding to criticism that the program risks stepping into the territory of surveillance and suppression of free speech, Fontes [emphasized](#) the loss of senior election officials in twelve of the state’s fifteen counties due to violent threats. [Research by the Bipartisan Policy Center](#) suggests that election official turnover is increasing over time, potentially due to hostility against those officials, and Arizona [is a particular locus](#) of this turnover. [Research has documented violent threats](#) against election officials, and shown that the way the public interacts with them online has grown [steadily harsher over the last decade](#).

In addition to cyber security and monitoring threats, the state’s new information security team will also play a role in combating AI-fueled disinformation. The Election Assistance Commission [awarded](#) Fontes’ office a National Clearinghouse Award for Outstanding Innovation in Election Cybersecurity and Technology by the Election Assistance Commission for these efforts.

One frontier of election administration that has played a particularly large role in Arizona is the availability of [Cast Vote Records](#), which are statements of the information that was contained on a single ballot. These records declare that a voter exists who selected some combination of candidates across all the contests on the ballot. Importantly, they are

anonymized, and [the release of Cast Vote Records alone should not](#) make it possible to identify the voter who casts any given ballot, though the practical release of these kinds of data may render some times of privacy violations more likely.

Arizona and especially Maricopa County have been at the national forefront of the controversy surrounding the release of Cast Vote Records. A bipartisan bill, House Bill 2560, [would have required](#) Local Election Officials to scan individual ballots and send them to the Secretary of State's Office, which would then publish the scans as public records. The legislation was a state-level effort to boost voter confidence permanently, but critics argued that the legislation could compromise voter privacy, and would open the door to more partisan audits like the one conducted by the CyberNinjas in 2021. House Bill 2560 passed both chambers but was vetoed by Gov. Hobbs in 2023.

In the same jurisdictions, election officials are [struggling](#) to retain all races on one ballot page. Arizona has not been required to handle a multi-page ballot in recent years, and the addition of a second (or third) page in counties like Maricopa would mean additional strain on election workers and potentially higher ballot rejection rates. This is partially due to the legislature's decision to refer more than seventy bills to be decided by voters, likely due to Governor Hobbs' [record veto count](#) of 143. Election administrators have reported issues with ballot tabulation, result calculation, rejection rates, tabulation machine function, recounts, and postage costs associated with multi-page ballots. Aside from the logistics of a multi-page ballot, [research](#) suggests that voters examine and evaluate their choices less closely, especially further down the ballot. In response to an anticipated two-ballot election for many municipalities, Maricopa County conducted a mock election in late May. After this test run, election staff [verbalized](#) confidence in their ability to administer an election with multi-page ballots.

A similar tactic was taken by Pima County, where the Recorder's Office [held](#) its first public event on May 3 to explain how mail ballots are processed and counted in an attempt to restore voter trust. Both Democratic and Republican community members were in attendance, and the county plans to hold similar events until election day.

Finally, [House Bill 2785](#), passed in [February 2024](#) with strong bipartisan support, contained various provisions intended to speed up the count of ballots. One such provision required the number of mail ballots mail ballots dropped off on Election Day to

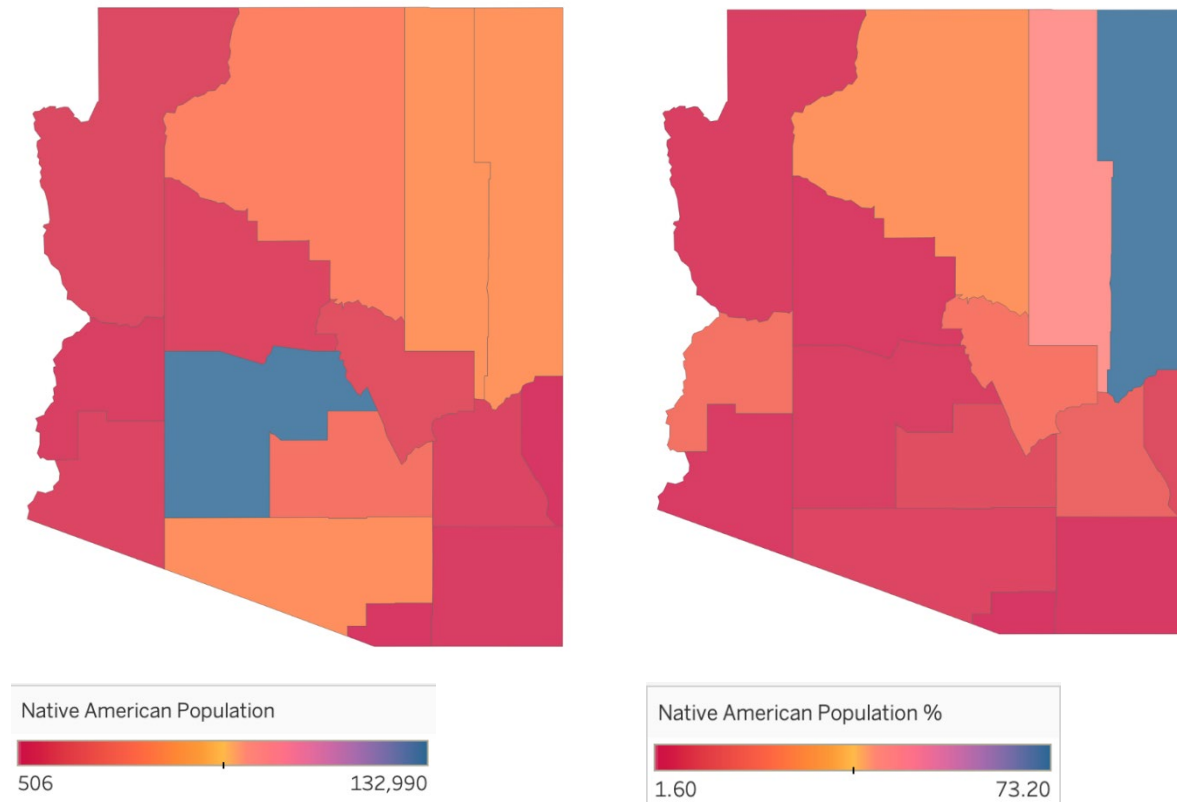
be reported, but the interpretation of the law has sparked confusion among counties, leading different counties to interpret the law differently. The controversy centered on whether these mail ballots had to be counted at the polling place where they were dropped off or at the central election office. In Pinal County, election officials originally [planned](#) to count the number of mail-in ballots received at the county's main counting location due to concerns about the safety and efficiency of counting the number of mail ballots at each vote location. However, the Arizona Secretary of State's Office [addressed](#) this issue, stating that LEOs must manually count the number of mail-in ballot envelopes at each vote location before counting and recording ballots at the main counting location.

Native American Voting

Native Americans in Arizona [make up](#) nearly 6% of Arizona's population and 15% of the state's rural population. Over half of this population lives on the Navajo Nation reservation, which [stretches](#) over 27,000 square miles, which makes running elections particularly difficult with limited internal resources to staff, fund, and coordinate rural election administration. Figures 11 and 12 show the geographic concentration of Native voters in Arizona.

Figure 11: Native American Population Count in Arizona, 2023

Figure 12: Native American Population Percentage in Arizona, 2023



In 2024, the Navajo Nation tactically [moved its tribal election date](#) to match the earlier Arizona July 30th primary election date, citing concerns of lower Navajo turnout and election administration issues if the Nation attempted to hold two elections in two weeks.

The Native American vote in Arizona is particularly important in 2024 for several reasons. The Native American population is very likely large enough to decide which presidential candidate will receive Arizona's eleven electoral votes in November. The 2022 midterm election was similar in margins: the Governor's race between Gov. Katie Hobbs and Kari Lake was decided by just over 17,000 votes, while the Attorney General race was decided by just 280. While many slices of the electorate have more voters than these small

margins, an intriguing signal from recent elections is that the only two Arizona counties with higher turnout in 2022 than in 2018 were [Apache and Navajo counties](#). An increase in turnout solely in counties with very large numbers of Native American voters may mean that these counties will grow relatively more impactful on the outcomes of a state with very tight electoral contests.

Second, as the Election Assistance Commission has noted, Native American voters can [face distinctive barriers to voting](#), and in the case of Arizona, legislation regarding ballot drop boxes may introduce new [pressures on voter turnout](#), particularly on reservations.

Third, legislation and judicial decisions regarding minute details in election administration can have distinctive effects on Native American voters in Arizona. Turnout may be particularly responsive to in-person voting location sites in a population where so many voters live on a reservation, especially for those who [would prefer to vote early](#). Apache and Navajo counties also consistently have the [highest levels](#) of rejected early and provisional ballots in the state, where provisional ballots are [consistently rejected](#) at a higher rate than the national average. The causes of provisional ballot rejection [are not well understood](#), but these rates may point to particular problems with voter registration or identity and residence verification.

Looking Ahead

Critical Races

Aside from the Presidential race, Arizonans will decide on several key races at the state and district levels. These contests include a United States Senate election that has no incumbent since Senator Kyrsten Sinema decided not to seek reelection in November. Sinema's seat and the battle for it are among the highest-profile contests this election cycle, particularly because of its high-profile candidates. Former television news anchor Kari Lake and Pinal County Sheriff Mark Lamb are the frontrunners for the Republican nomination, while Congressman Ruben Gallego (AZ-3rd District) is the presumptive Democratic nominee.

Sinema's decision not to run comes after her exit from the Democratic Party in 2022, much to the frustration of Democrats who aimed to maintain some kind of Senatorial

control. The sitting Senator was polling higher with Republicans in March, which may indicate potential success for the Republican nominee, but some analysts in the state [argue](#) that “Republicans [in Arizona] are decidedly fractured.” In the wake of the Trump convictions, local parties anticipate and will work towards higher turnout than usual as Arizona Republicans reckon with Lake and Trump on the bigger ticket ballots. The fruits of these efforts will be clear if undervoting is present at the top of the Republican and/or Democratic ticket(s) in the Arizona Primary.

The latest [polling](#) for the race suggests Lake holds a comfortable lead over Sheriff Lamb, and the primary will be decided along with Arizona’s Supreme Court nominees, along with Arizona’s 1st, 2nd, 3rd, 6th, and 8th Congressional Districts, on July 30th. An addition to this initial report will cover the state’s election administration outcomes and political implications in the second primary of this election cycle.

Election Reporting Times

Arizona’s Secretary of State and all sixteen counties successfully reported the official county-level March 19 primary results in a timely manner, but an additional level of scrutiny may cause slowdowns in the reporting process, particularly after the elimination of large-scale hand counts. In the 2024 Presidential Preference Election, official county-level results continued for eight days to March 27th, when Santa Cruz, Navajo, and Apache counties finalized results. Gila and Mohave counties finished tabulating on the 26th. However, longer reporting times for Santa Cruz, Navajo, and Apache counties are unrelated to high turnout levels: Santa Cruz and Apache had the lowest in the state in March.

It will be worth keeping an eye on Santa Cruz, Navajo, and Apache counties in November, especially considering Arizona’s statutory shifts since 2020. In November, the state will be forced to comply with [SB 1008](#), which would have triggered four recounts in Maricopa County alone in 2020, and the Electoral Count Reform Act, which creates a deadline for presidential elector ballots nationally. Arizona’s state policies for mail ballot returns, especially from overseas, are more lax than those of other states, meaning the battleground will likely struggle to get results across the finish line in November.

Conclusion

Over the last four years, Arizona has faced some of the most intense election scrutiny in the country, particularly because a single county election office is tasked with administering elections for 59% of the state's registered voters. The state will surely be at the forefront of election concern and focus again in November 2024, and election administrators will need to manage understaffed election offices, securely and quickly tabulate votes, and fend off accusations from election denialists who aim to initiate a second complete audit. Turnout in the Presidential Primary Election in March was historically low, and a repeated instance of low turnout would make the state electorally volatile in November.