

Florida 2024 State Report

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Introduction

Following two decades as one of the nation’s premier swing states, Florida was hotly contested in the 2020 presidential election. Donald Trump ultimately won his home state by over three percentage points, a notable step to the right after the former president won the state by just over one percentage point in 2016.¹

Florida’s provision of data on first-time voters is of particular utility. Using the May 2024 voter file, we discover that the rejection rate for mail ballots in the 2024 Republican presidential preference primary was 2.5 times greater for first-time voters than for returners. This is especially noteworthy because the Sunshine State has entered the 2020s as one of the fastest-growing states in the nation, driven in part by domestic migration,² which has significant implications for election administration and outcomes.

Other aspects of voting behavior and policy changes in Florida have contributed to a changing election landscape over the last several years. Major shifts in voter registration and vote mode trends since 2020 may affect how Floridians vote in the upcoming election. This report will analyze the 2020 primary and general elections before turning to contemporary controversies relevant to the 2024 election in Florida.

Summary of Findings

- + Overall, voter turnout decreased in the 2024 Republican presidential preference primary from 2020 (there was no Democratic presidential primary in Florida this year since the nomination was only contested by one candidate in the state³) and

¹ <https://results.elections.myflorida.com/Index.asp?ElectionDate=11/3/2020&DATAMODE=>
(http://web.archive.org/web/2024000000000*/https://results.elections.myflorida.com/Index.asp?ElectionDate=11/3/2020&DATAMODE=)

² <https://www.census.gov/library/stories/2022/12/florida-fastest-growing-state.html#:~:text=Florida's%20population%20increased%20by%201.9,previous%20year's%20fastest%2Dgrowing%20state.>

(<https://web.archive.org/web/20240801085450/https://www.census.gov/library/stories/2022/12/florida-fastest-growing-state.html>)

³ <https://floridaphoenix.com/2023/12/11/fl-democrats-wont-have-a-vote-in-presidential-primary-in-24-what-about-voters-in-other-states/>

decreased by almost half compared to 2016. At the county level, Republican vote share decreased in over 80% of counties from 2020 to 2024 and declined in over 90% of counties from 2016 to 2020. Democratic turnout was greater by comparison, with about 35% of counties increasing their turnout from 2016 to 2020.

- + In 2016, most Florida voters voted on Election Day in the presidential preference primary, though in 2020, most voted by mail. Despite a decline in Republican rates of mail voting in other states, a strong plurality of Florida’s Republicans still preferred mail voting in the March primary.
- + There does not seem to be any correlation between Trump’s performance in 2024 and his performance in 2016. However, counties with a greater protest vote against Trump in 2020 tended to also have comparatively strong support for his opponents in 2024.

2024 Election Calendar

The Florida Department of State identifies⁴ three statewide election dates during the 2024 election cycle. The state’s presidential preference primary was scheduled for **March 19**, with all congressional and statewide primaries on **August 20**. The general election will take place on **November 5**. Other important dates are listed below.

- + Florida State Primary: **August 20**
 - Voter Registration Deadline: July 22
 - Mail Ballot Request Deadline: August 8
 - Early Voting: August 10–17
- + General Election: **November 5**
 - Voter Registration Deadline: October 7
 - Mail Ballot Request Deadline: October 24
 - Early Voting: October 26–November 2

(http://web.archive.org/web/2024000000000*/https://floridaphoenix.com/2023/12/11/fl-democrats-wont-have-a-vote-in-presidential-primary-in-24-what-about-voters-in-other-states/)

⁴ <https://dos.fl.gov/elections/for-voters/election-dates/>

(<http://web.archive.org/web/20240809044327/https://dos.fl.gov/elections/for-voters/election-dates/>)

New Election Law

Since the 2020 election, various legislative changes have been made to Florida’s election administration. While none stand out as radically reshaping the election experience for most voters, some, but not all, of the laws have been criticized for limiting voting choices for some voters. The table below summarizes the bills passed and signed into law, courtesy of the National Conference of State Legislatures’ State Elections Legislation Database.⁵

| <i>Bill</i> | <i>Summary</i> |
|------------------------------|--|
| 2021 SB 90 | Requires opted-in “all elections” mail voters to send in new vote-by-mail requests and requires new voter registration applications for any registration changes. Regulates third-party voter registration organizations. Prohibited specified people from settling certain actions, consenting to conditions, or agreeing to certain orders in specified circumstances. Prohibited agencies and officials from using private funds for election administration. |
| 2022 SB 144 | Requires the Department of Highway Safety and Motor Vehicles to issue or renew identification cards free of charge for those with a valid voter’s registration card and claiming financial hardship. |
| 2022 SB 524 | Requires the Secretary of state to notify the Attorney General if signatures required for a petition are no longer valid. Authorizes the Secretary of State to resubmit a petition to the Attorney General if necessary conditions are met. Requires the Attorney General to withdraw their petition for a Supreme Court advisory opinion if they have been notified by the Secretary of State that the petition no longer fulfills the requirements for review. |
| 2022 HB 1493 | Expands the board of Alachua County commissioners to seven members. Requires election of a commissioner for each of the county’s five districts and two county commissioners. |
| 2023 SB 4 | Allows the Office of Statewide Prosecution to investigate and prosecute any crime involving voting in an election with state or federal offices or referendums or initiatives on the ballot. |

⁵ <https://www.ncsl.org/elections-and-campaigns/state-elections-legislation-database>
(<http://web.archive.org/web/20240704023207/https://www.ncsl.org/elections-and-campaigns/state-elections-legislation-database>)

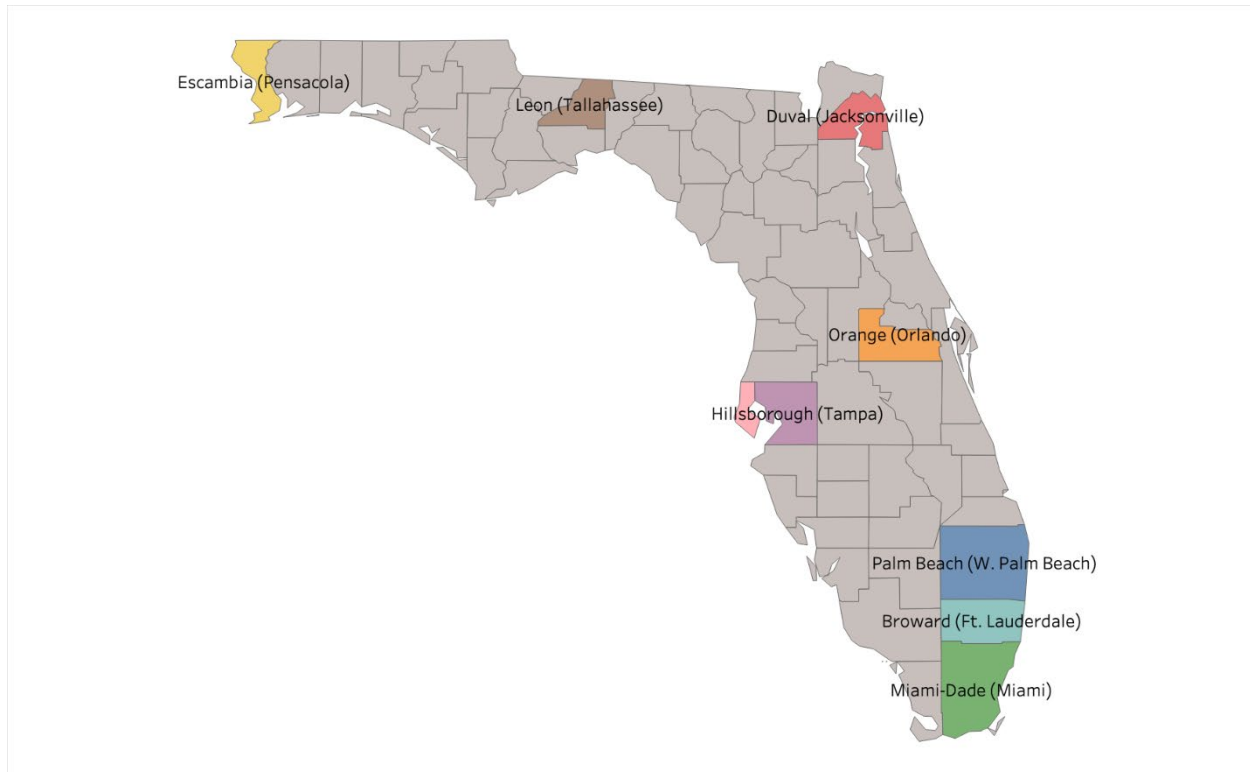
| | |
|------------------------------|--|
| 2023 SB 666 | Revised the address provided by candidates for judicial and non-federal offices within their candidate oath. |
| 2023 SB 7050 | Requires the Secretary of State to provide mandatory formal signature matching training to all election workers whose duties involve signature matching. Transfers authority to review complaints of election irregularity from the Florida Election Code from the Florida Election Commission to the Office of Election Crimes and Security. |
| 2024 SB 74 | Made edits, corrections, and revisions of various statutes to improve clarity and correctness. Required that charges related to voter registration must contain general allegations stating the judicial circuits and counties in which crimes are alleged to have occurred or the judicial circuits and counties alleged to have been affected. |
| 2024 HB 135 | Specifies that new registration without party affiliation is to be left as unaffiliated but, for those updating registration, affiliation must be changed specifically, not through failure to designate a party affiliation. |
| 2024 HB 919 | Requires political advertisements, electioneering communication, and other miscellaneous advertisements of political nature that contain content generated by artificial intelligence to include a disclaimer. |
| 2024 HB 7003 | Provides an exemption for information regarding pre-registered voter registration applications who are minors from public record requirements. Authorized the disclosure of confidential information to a governmental entity that needs such information to fulfill its duties as they relate to election administration. |

Analysis of the 2024 Presidential Preference Primary

Florida’s presidential preference primary (PPP) was scheduled for March 19, two weeks after Super Tuesday, following Nikki Haley’s withdrawal from the Republican contest. Since only Joe Biden was named as a candidate for the Democratic primary ballot, and Florida does not hold uncontested elections, the Democratic primary was canceled.⁶ Before diving into the details, some background on Florida’s geography could be helpful.

⁶ <https://www.wfla.com/news/florida/why-arent-florida-democrats-having-a-presidential-preference-primary/> (<http://web.archive.org/web/20240705084852/https://www.wfla.com/news/florida/why-arent-florida-democrats-having-a-presidential-preference-primary/>)

Figure 1: A map of Florida highlighting its major population centers.



Florida is a large, diverse state. It ranks third by population after California and Texas and has an electorate of about 13.4 million registered voters (as of June 2024).⁷ The above map serves as a useful reference for where the state's major population centers are.

Voter Registration

The maps below illustrate where Republican and Democratic registered voters are concentrated in the state. The most populous conurbation stretches from Miami-Dade County to Palm Beach County in the state's southeast, sometimes referred to as Florida's Gold Coast; this area has nearly a million registered Republicans and about 1.3 million registered Democrats. Other major population centers are the Tampa Bay area,

⁷ <https://dos.fl.gov/elections/data-statistics/voter-registration-statistics/voter-registration-reports/voter-registration-by-party-affiliation/>

(<http://web.archive.org/web/20240811215157/https://dos.fl.gov/elections/data-statistics/voter-registration-statistics/voter-registration-reports/voter-registration-by-party-affiliation/>)

centered on Hillsborough and Pinellas Counties along Florida’s Gulf Coast, and the Orlando area in central Florida. Jacksonville’s Duval County is in the far northeast.

Figure 2: The number of registered Republicans (left) and Democrats (right) in each county.

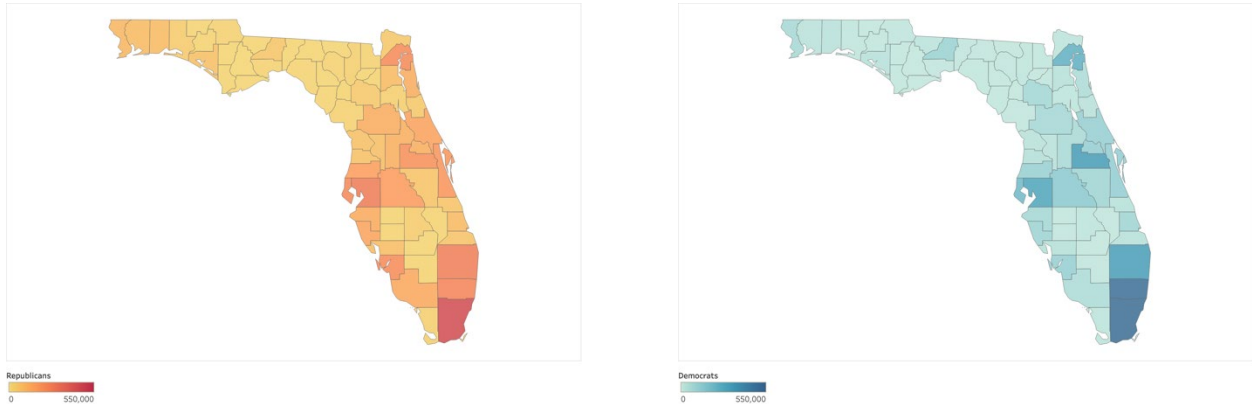
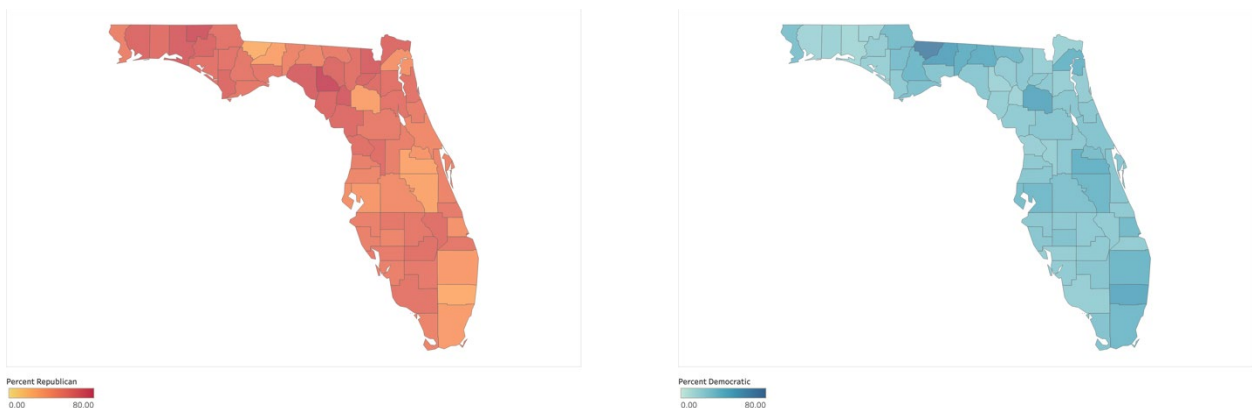


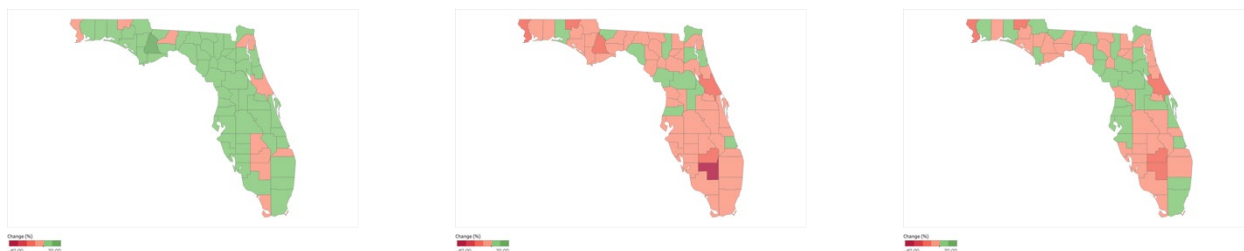
Figure 3 shows the percentage of registered voters in each county that belong to the Republican Party (on the left) or the Democratic Party (right). Registered Republicans are concentrated in northeast Florida, the Panhandle region, and in the southwest along the Gulf Coast. Democrats are sparse among the Gulf Coast and more concentrated in the southeast, far north near Tallahassee, and in the Tampa, Orlando, and Jacksonville areas. Unaffiliated registrants comprise a substantial share of the electorate, especially in the Orlando metropolitan area and in Miami-Dade County.

Figure 3: Percent of registered voters from the Republican Party (left) or Democratic Party (right).



Florida Department of State data also provides insights into how registration numbers have changed in each county in the first six months of 2024.⁸ The first observation—visualized below in Figure 4—is that Republican registrations are growing in most of the state, except for Duval County, Escambia County, and a few other jurisdictions. Meanwhile, the number of Democratic registrations is declining throughout numerous South and Central Florida counties. Registrations for voters not affiliated with any party (NPA) are generally declining in much of South Florida, except for Miami-Dade and Broward Counties and in the populous counties of Northern Florida, while they are growing in the Tampa Bay area and near Miami.

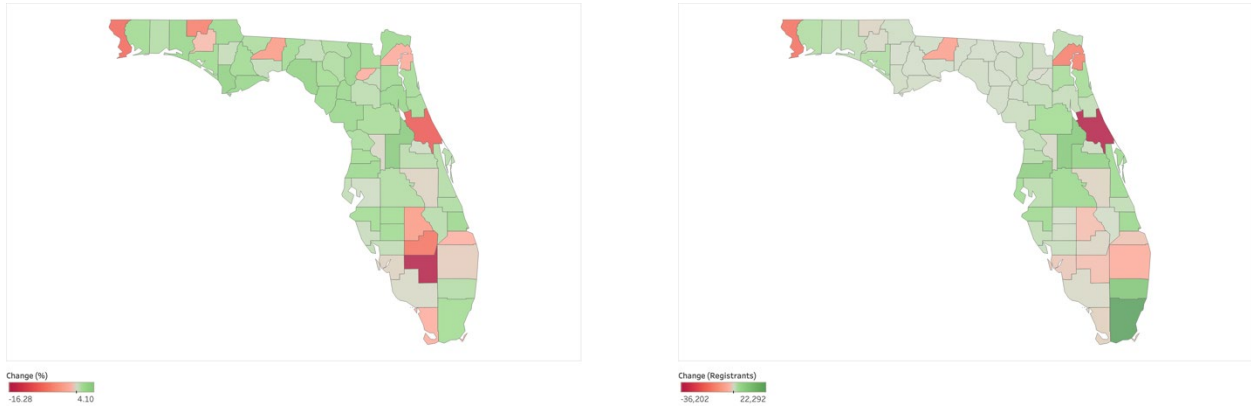
Figure 4: Percent change in registered voters belonging to the Republican Party (left) and the Democratic Party (center), as well as the change in unaffiliated voters (right).



Looking at raw registration changes, the greatest growth in voter registrations is visible in Miami-Dade County, while the decline was steepest in Volusia County, followed by the northern counties of Escambia, Leon, and Duval. Much of Central Florida shows modest growth, and Northern Florida counties' registration numbers are slowly growing, too.

⁸ <https://dos.fl.gov/media/708173/copy-of-party-affiliation-by-county-2024-post.xlsx>

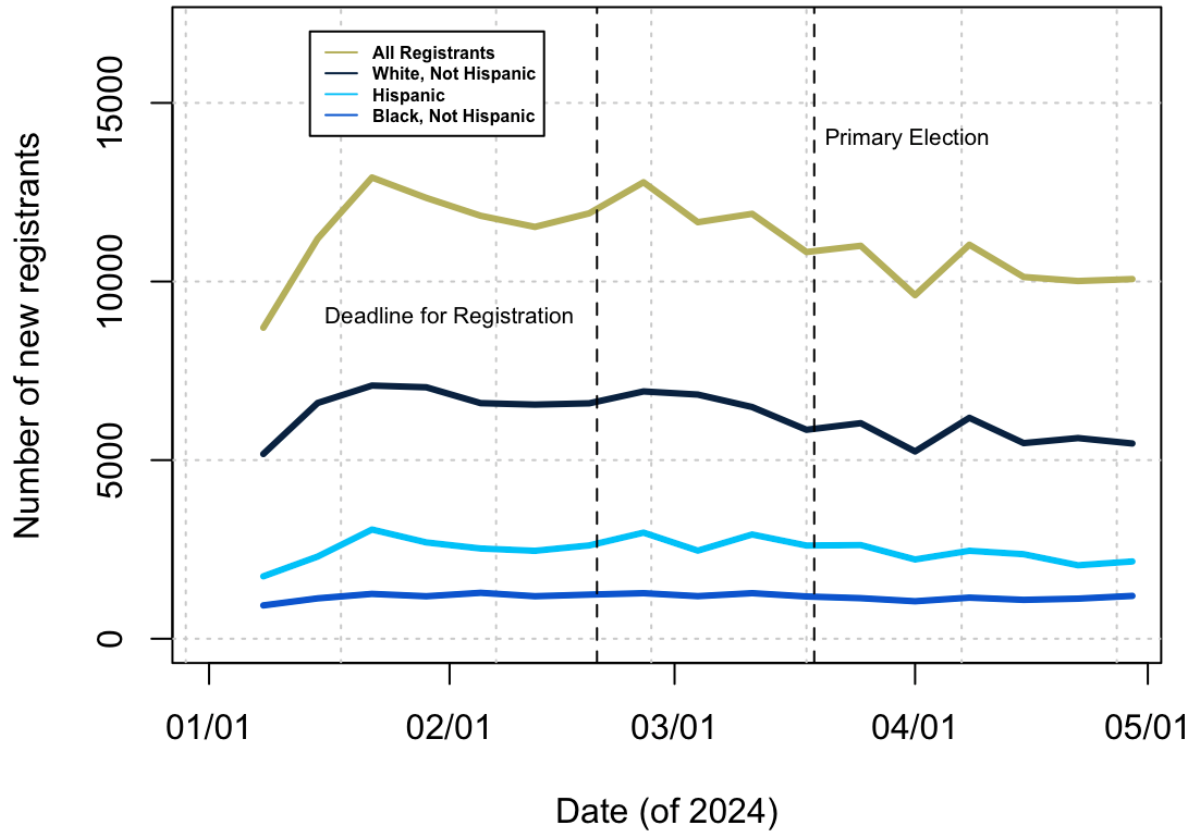
Figure 5: Change in registrations by county (left: by percent; right: raw numbers).



How have individual registration rates progressed this year so far? Figure 6 uses data from the Florida voter file⁹ to show the number of new voter registrations in Florida during the first four months of 2024, divided according to the racial categories available in the voter file. Each week, around 1,000 Floridians registered to vote; about half of these were identified within the May 2024 voter file as white. After a spike in late January and again in February, the rate of registrations slowly leveled off.

⁹ <https://dos.fl.gov/elections/data-statistics/voter-registration-statistics/voter-extract-request/>
 (http://web.archive.org/web/20240808035552/https://dos.fl.gov/elections/data-statistics/voter-registration-statistics/voter-extract-request/)

Figure 6: Number of new registrations in Florida, according to the Florida voter file, divided according to the racial categories available in the dataset.



Florida recorded 283,656 new registrations in the first six months of 2024.¹⁰ With 134,280 active registrations and 11,698 inactive registrations removed from the voter rolls, the net gain was just over 137,000 voters, or about 1%. In July, the state added 97,392 voters and removed 8,676 active registrations.¹¹

Analysis of Presidential Preference Primaries in 2016, 2020, and 2024

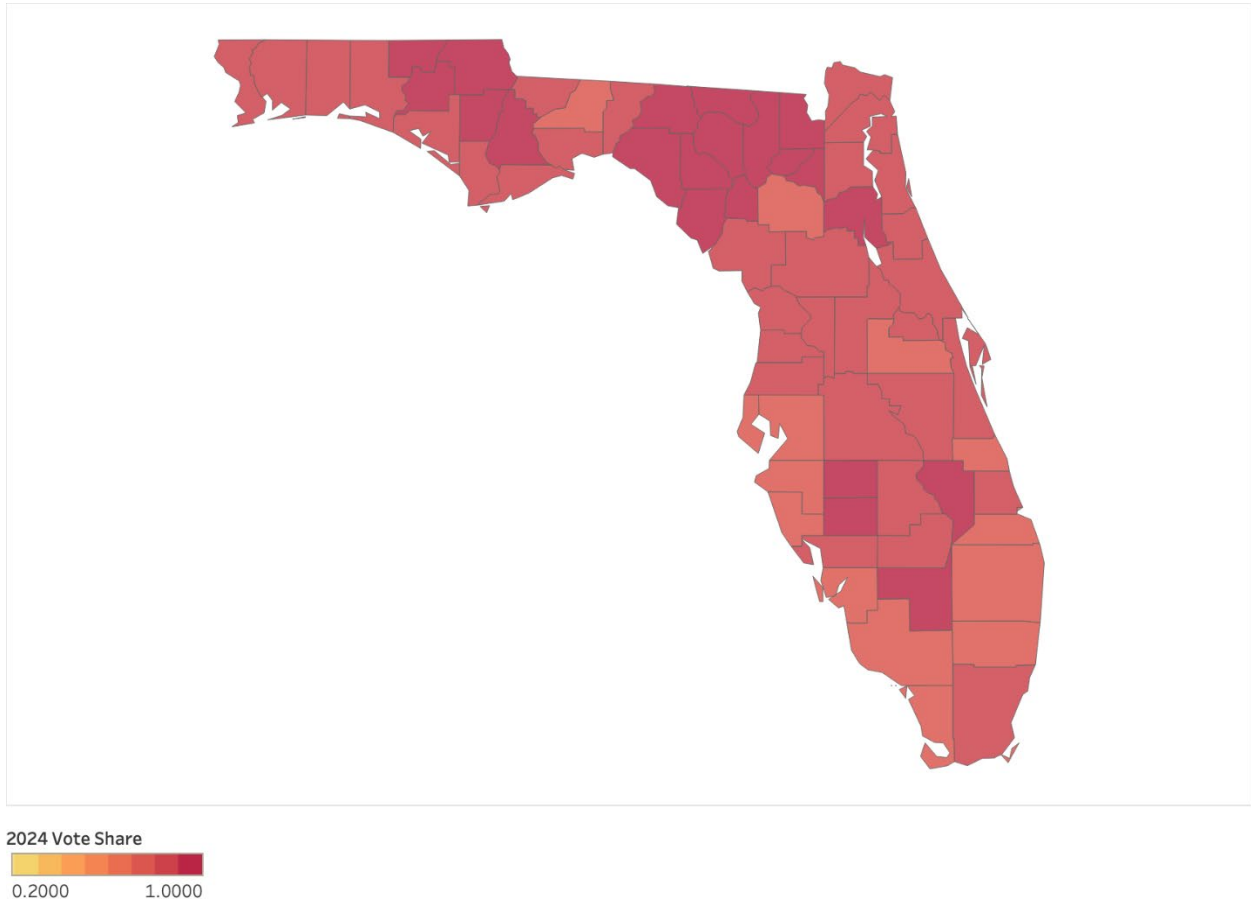
On the Republican ballot, Donald Trump faced only Ryan Binkley and former candidates, including Nikki Haley and Governor Ron DeSantis. Trump swept all of the

¹⁰ <https://web.archive.org/web/20240715191213/https://dos.fl.gov/elections/data-statistics/voter-registration-statistics/voter-registration-reports/voter-registration-new-and-removed/>

¹¹ <https://dos.fl.gov/elections/data-statistics/voter-registration-statistics/voter-registration-reports/voter-registration-new-and-removed/>

state’s 125 delegates, winning over 80 percent of the statewide primary vote. The map below displays where his support was the strongest.

Figure 7: Trump’s vote share by county in the 2024 PPP.

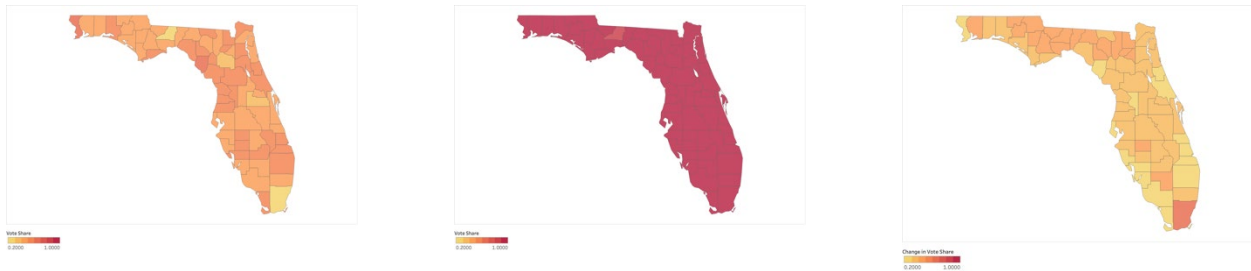


Trump generally performed best in the northern reaches of the state, while his vote share was lower along the southwestern and southeastern coasts, along with Leon and Alachua counties, home to the state capital and the University of Florida, respectively. Miami-Dade was a bright spot for him; this represents a marked shift from 2016, when his vote share in Miami-Dade was among his lowest in any county. Nikki Haley earned almost 14 percent of the 2024 primary vote, totaling over 150,000 votes compared to Trump’s 900,000. Trump’s weakest counties—and Haley’s strongest—were concentrated along the state’s growing western coastal counties, like Pinellas and Lee Counties, and Democratic strongholds like Leon, Orange, and Broward Counties. Trump also

performed very well in Northern Florida, winning over 90% of the vote in many counties, and held up well in Miami-Dade County, which he won with 87% of the vote.

Because Donald Trump has appeared in the past three Republican presidential primaries, it is possible to compare his performance within each county over time across the different contexts of those elections. The plots below show his performance in 2016 by county and his improvements by county from 2016 to 2024.

Figure 8a, 8b, and 8c: Trump’s vote share by county in the 2016 PPP (left) and the 2020 PPP (center); change in Trump’s vote share between 2016 PPP and 2024 PPP (right).

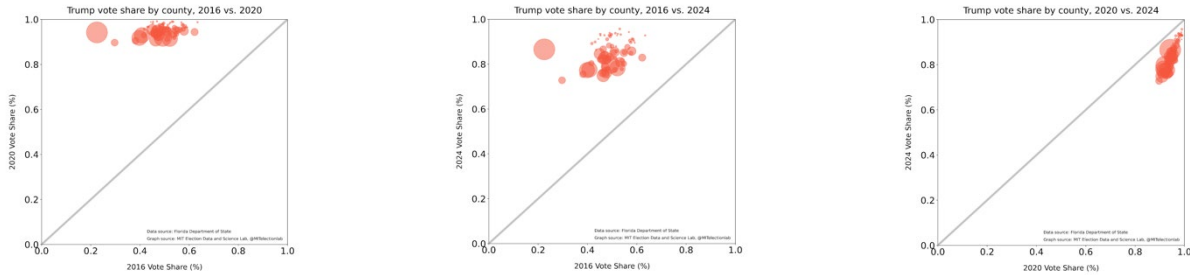


In 2016, Trump defeated Florida Senator Marco Rubio, the next highest vote-getter, by almost 20 percentage points, winning every county except Miami-Dade. This overwhelming support for Trump led to Rubio’s withdrawal from the primary. Trump went on to win the 2016 Republican nomination and the presidency, flipping Florida along the way.

After his win in a distant but contested election in 2016, Trump had almost no competition in his 2020 re-election campaign, winning 94% of the primary vote and 90% of delegates nationwide that year.¹² Florida was no exception, with the incumbent making large gains in every county in the state. This strength continued into the general elections, where he improved on his 2016 numbers to win the state despite losing the election as a whole.

¹² <https://www.thegreenpapers.com/P20/R>
 (<https://web.archive.org/web/20240706053908/https://www.thegreenpapers.com/P20/R>)

Figure 9a, 9b, and 9c: Comparisons of Trump’s primary vote share in 2016 vs. 2020, 2016 vs. 2024, and 2020 vs. 2024 (from left to right).



The three subplots in Figure 9 show pairwise comparisons of Trump’s performance by county across the last three Republican Presidential Preference Primaries: 2016, 2020, and 2024. Figure 9a shows that Trump’s near-unanimous support across every Florida county in 2020 had little correlation to his performance in 2016. The protest vote against his candidacy was minimal, with Trump earning over 90% of the vote even in the most anti-Trump 2016 counties. In 2020, his election was close enough to unanimous that no meaningful correlation is apparent, either in Figure 9a (comparing 2016 to 2020) or Figure 9c (comparing 2020 to 2024). Figure 9b, however, shows that in 2024, Trump improved on his 2016 vote share in every county, but the places where he received the lowest vote shares in 2024 were also counties where he performed worst in 2016, perhaps pointing to pockets of quite limited but perhaps enduring opposition to his leadership of the party.

Trump entered an increasingly crowded contest for the 2024 Republican party nomination in November 2022, months after several other prominent candidates.¹³ However, Trump obtained a sizeable lead in national polls in early 2023, which he steadily expanded through the remainder of the year,¹⁴ winning a series of early primary state contests.¹⁵ Even though his strongest opponent, Ron DeSantis, was the sitting

¹³ <https://www.cnn.com/2022/11/15/politics/trump-2024-presidential-bid/index.html>

(<http://web.archive.org/web/20240718044226/https://www.cnn.com/2022/11/15/politics/trump-2024-presidential-bid/index.html>)

¹⁴ <https://projects.fivethirtyeight.com/polls/president-primary-r/2024/national/>

(<http://web.archive.org/web/20240812000913/https://projects.fivethirtyeight.com/polls/president-primary-r/2024/national/>)

¹⁵ <https://www.cnn.com/election/2024/primaries-and-caucuses/results/republican-party/president?election-data-id=2024-PR&election-painting-mode=projection&filter-key-races=false&filter-flipped=false>

governor of Florida, by mid-2023, Trump had opened a substantial lead in polls of the state, and that lead only grew.¹⁶ By the time of the Florida presidential primary elections, nearly every candidate (including popular Florida governor Ron DeSantis) had suspended their candidacy. In the 2024 presidential primary contest in Florida, Trump won 81% of the statewide vote, but with a substantial amount of the remaining vote going to Haley, who had recently withdrawn.¹⁷

An important storyline in that contest was Trump's performance among Hispanic Republican voters. Figure 10 explores this relationship at the county level. As an initial and straightforward investigation into this relationship, we simply correlate the share of registered Republican voters in each county that is Hispanic with Trump's vote share in that county. As with any similarly simple attempt at ecological inference, the crucial caveat is that, even if a strong relationship were observed between these two variables at the county level, that would not support any confident inference about individual-level behavior. Nevertheless, the strength of the correlation warrants a brief remark.

(<https://www.cnn.com/election/2024/primaries-and-caucuses/results/republican-party/president?election-data-id=2024-PR&election-painting-mode=projection&filter-key-races=false&filter-flipped=false>)

¹⁶ <https://projects.fivethirtyeight.com/polls/president-primary-r/2024/florida/>

(<http://web.archive.org/web/20240723230920/https://projects.fivethirtyeight.com/polls/president-primary-r/2024/florida/>)

¹⁷ <https://results.elections.myflorida.com/Index.asp?ElectionDate=3/19/2024&DATAMODE=>

(<http://web.archive.org/web/20240418162505/https://results.elections.myflorida.com/Index.asp?ElectionDate=3/19/2024&DATAMODE=>)

Figure 10: Trump’s primary vote share, plotted against the proportion of Hispanic Republicans in each county in 2016 (left) and in 2024 (right).

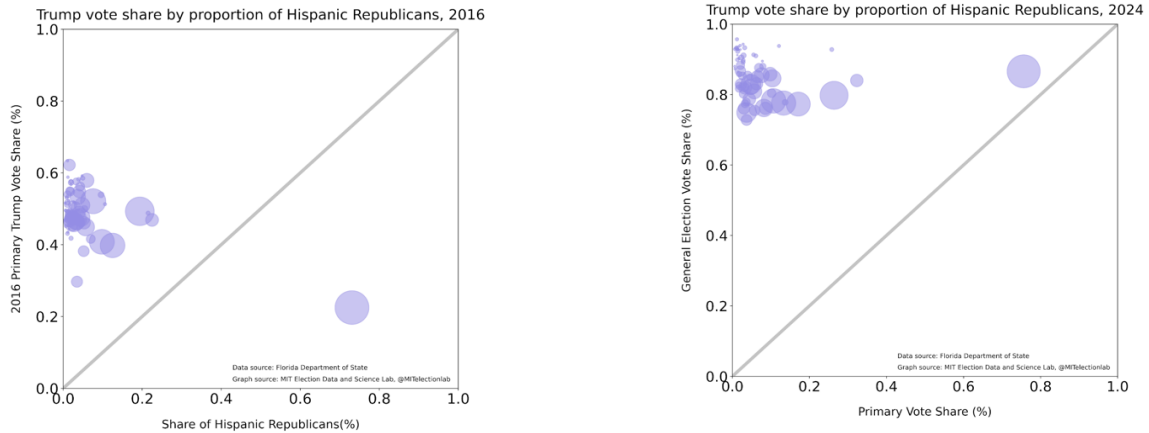


Figure 10 suggests, with the caveat above, that Trump has gained substantial support from Hispanics in the state. Miami-Dade, the largest county with a large Cuban population, went from being the only county in the 2016 primary that Trump did not win, to a county he lost by only 10 points in the 2020 election (2016 Democratic nominee Hillary Clinton beat Trump in this county by 30 points).¹⁸ Miami-Dade also saw the single highest percentage increase for Trump from the 2016 primary to the 2024 primary. In the 2016 primary election, Trump’s vote share among Cuban Americans may have suffered from competition by Marco Rubio, a Cuban American from Miami and a sitting member of the U.S. Senate from Florida. Some of the increasing vote share for Trump in Miami-Dade may be because his subsequent opponents have had weaker bases of support there. Still, the growing trend in Trump’s general election vote shares suggests that the absence of Marco Rubio in his subsequent contests is not the only cause of his more robust performance in that county over time. Trump’s performance in 2020 was also a *relatively* good indicator of his performance in 2024, with the counties with a small amount of anti-Trump sentiment in 2020 (around 10% of the vote going against Trump) also having a larger anti-Trump vote in 2024.

¹⁸ <https://dataverse.harvard.edu/dataset.xhtml?persistentId=doi:10.7910/DVN/VOQCHQ>
(<http://web.archive.org/web/20240725225653/https://dataverse.harvard.edu/dataset.xhtml?persistentId=doi:10.7910/DVN/VOQCHQ>)

Turnout in primary (by party) in 2016, 2020, and 2024

On March 19, 2024, roughly 1.1 million Florida Republicans voted in the presidential preference primary.¹⁹ This total was slightly lower than the Republican turnout in the 2020 presidential primary (around 1.2 million),²⁰ and a substantial decrease from the 2016 primary, where Republican turnout was approximately 2 million.²¹ There was very little competition on the 2024 Republican ticket, for Donald Trump secured the nomination with 81.2% of the vote.²² This stands in stark contrast to the 2020 primary, when the Democratic contest was highly competitive, and Donald Trump ran virtually unopposed.

Looking at the breakdown by county, voter turnout for the 2016 Republican presidential preference primary ranged between 29.9% of registered voters (Liberty County) and 62.8% of registered voters (Sumter County).²³ Turnout decreased overall in 2020, ranging between 19.5% (DeSoto County) and 44% (Sumter County). The overall turnout decreased further in 2024, with the lowest total again in DeSoto County (12.8%) and the highest turnout in Sumter County (36.2%). Figures 11a, 11b, and 11c each show a different comparison of the change in turnout from one recent primary election to another. Figure 11a shows how turnout changed in the Democratic primary from 2016 to 2020, Figure 11b shows the change in turnout in the Republican primary from 2016 to 2020, and Figure 11c shows the change in turnout from the 2020 Republican primary to the 2024 Republican primary (recalling that there was no Democratic primary in 2024).

¹⁹ <https://results.elections.myflorida.com/Index.asp?ElectionDate=3/19/2024&DATAMODE=>
(<http://web.archive.org/web/20240418162505/https://results.elections.myflorida.com/Index.asp?ElectionDate=3/19/2024&DATAMODE=>)

²⁰ <https://results.elections.myflorida.com/Index.asp?ElectionDate=3/17/2020&DATAMODE=>
(<http://web.archive.org/web/20240623092901/https://results.elections.myflorida.com/Index.asp?ElectionDate=3/17/2020&DATAMODE=>)

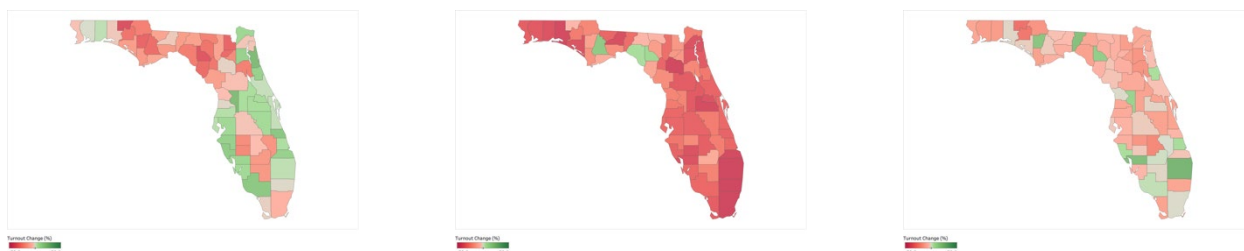
²¹ <https://results.elections.myflorida.com/Index.asp?ElectionDate=3/15/2016&DATAMODE=>
(<http://web.archive.org/web/20240623092905/https://results.elections.myflorida.com/Index.asp?ElectionDate=3/15/2016&DATAMODE=>)

²² <https://results.elections.myflorida.com/Index.asp?ElectionDate=3/19/2024&DATAMODE=>
(<http://web.archive.org/web/20240418162505/https://results.elections.myflorida.com/Index.asp?ElectionDate=3/19/2024&DATAMODE=>)

²³ <https://results.elections.myflorida.com/Index.asp?ElectionDate=3/17/2020&DATAMODE=>
(<http://web.archive.org/web/20240704074638/https://results.elections.myflorida.com/Index.asp?ElectionDate=3/17/2020&DATAMODE=>)

Counties in red indicate the turnout decreased compared to the previous election, and counties in green indicate turnout increased compared to the prior election.

Figure 11a, 11b, and 11c: Change in turnout between the Democratic PPPs in 2016 and 2020, the Republican PPPs in 2016 and 2020, and the Republican PPPs in 2020 and 2024 (from left to right).



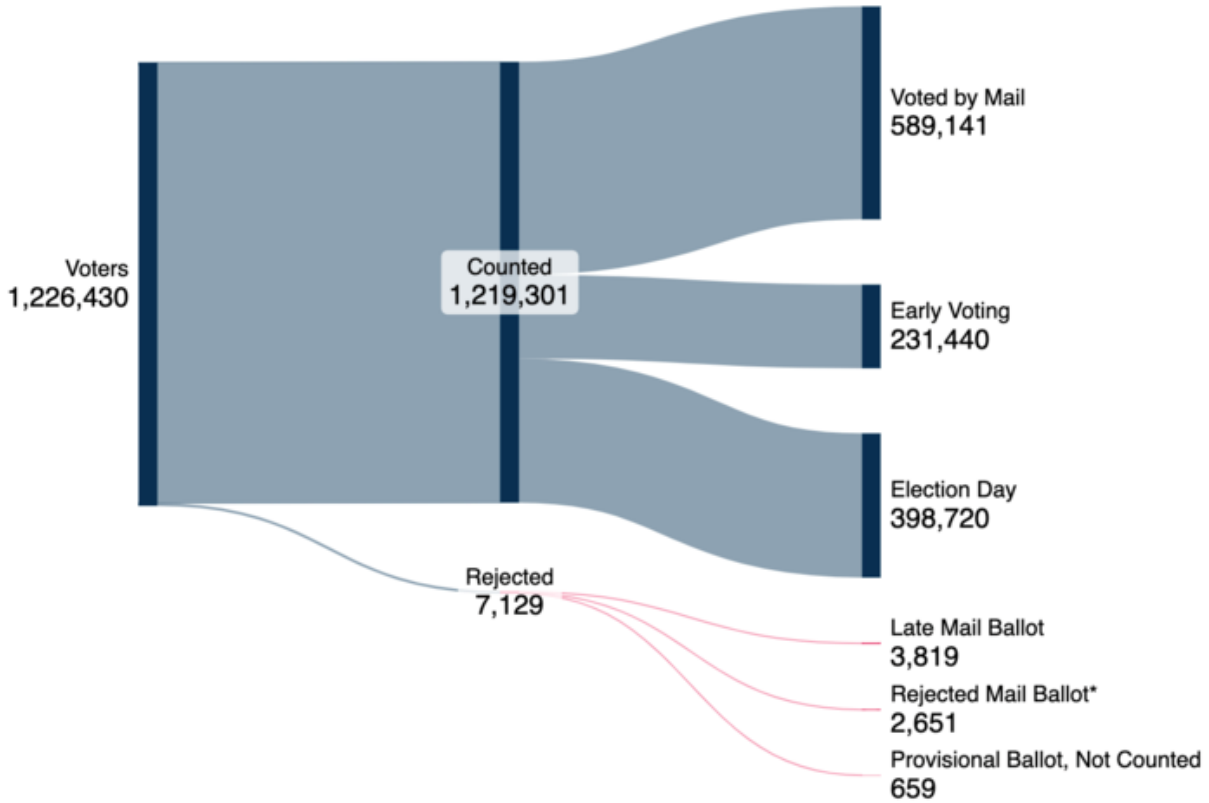
Comparison of vote mode usage in 2016, 2020, and 2024

Florida voters have three main modes of participating in their presidential primary: early voting, voting by mail (VBM), and Election Day voting. The figure below presents original analysis based on the Florida absentee ballot file, showing how Florida's 1,226,430 2024 Republican presidential preference primary voters opted to cast their ballots and the fate of the very few that could not be counted.²⁴

²⁴ <https://countyballotfiles.floridados.gov/VoteByMailEarlyVotingReports>

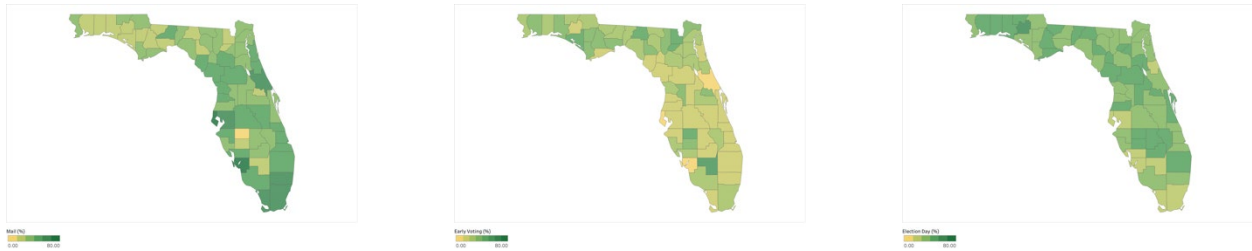
(<http://web.archive.org/web/20240807093003/https://countyballotfiles.floridados.gov/VoteByMailEarlyVotingReports>)

Figure 12: The path of every ballot submitted in the 2024 Republican PPP.



Vote-by-mail continues to be popular among Florida Republicans. In 2020, VBM was the most common mode of participation (46% of voters), though Republicans were more likely to vote by mail in 2020 than Democrats (55% vs. 40%). This was a change from 2016, when most voters voted on Election Day (50%). In the 2024 Republican presidential preference primary, 48% of successfully counted Republican ballots were cast by mail, 30% were cast in person on Election Day, and 20.8% were submitted during early voting. The maps below show the prevalence of each vote mode by county, with darker greens indicating a higher percentage of votes in a county cast via a particular mode. The following figure summarizes vote mode data from the presidential primaries in 2016, 2020, and 2024; Democratic results from 2024 are again omitted since that party did not have a 2024 primary in Florida.

Figures 13a, 13b, and 13c: Percent of 2024 Republican PPP votes cast by mail, early and in person, and on Election Day in each county (from left to right).

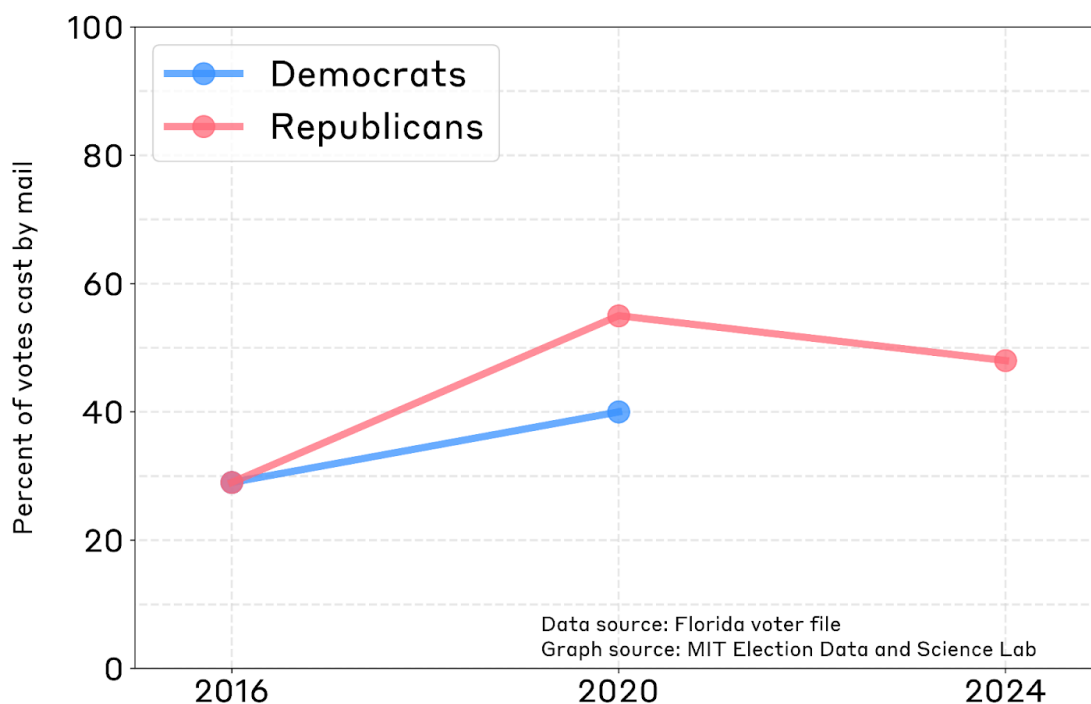


Vote mode by age and race in 2016, 2020, and 2024

Using the May 2024 voter file and data calculated from previous voter files for a June 2020 analysis²⁵ of Florida’s elections written for the Healthy Elections Project, we can study the intersection of demography and vote mode choices in the March 2024 Republican presidential primary. Here, we focus primarily on party, race, and age. Figure 14 begins by comparing the number of votes cast by mail in the Democratic and Republican primaries in 2016, 2020, and 2024.

²⁵ <https://web.mit.edu/healthyelections/www/sites/default/files/2020-10/FloridaElection.pdf>
 (http://web.archive.org/web/20240711063648/https://web.mit.edu/healthyelections/www/sites/default/files/2020-10/FloridaElection.pdf)

Figure 14: The share of ballots cast by mail in the Democratic and Republican PPPs in 2016 and 2020, and the Republican PPP in 2024.



Republicans have been subjected to mixed messaging about the security of mail-in voting from prominent messengers in their party,²⁶ and Figure 14 shows particularly interesting movement among Republicans' vote mode choices over the last several elections. In 2020, the share of Florida's Republican primary voters who voted by mail was only 29%, matching the share of Democrats voting by mail. In the 2020 election, both parties' voters' propensities to vote by mail surged in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic (Florida's presidential primaries in 2020 occurred less than a week after the virus had been classified as a global pandemic by the World Health Organization).²⁷ In

²⁶ <https://www.pbs.org/newshour/politics/trump-changes-tone-on-mail-in-ballots-and-other-forms-of-early-voting> (<http://web.archive.org/web/20240812060839/https://www.pbs.org/newshour/politics/trump-changes-tone-on-mail-in-ballots-and-other-forms-of-early-voting>)

²⁷ <https://web.mit.edu/healthyelections/www/vote-mail-resource-guide.html> (http://web.archive.org/web/20240000000000*/https://web.mit.edu/healthyelections/www/vote-mail-resource-guide.html)

2024, a solid plurality of Republicans voted by mail again, in contrast to the collapse in mail-in voting by Republicans that some other states have witnessed.²⁸

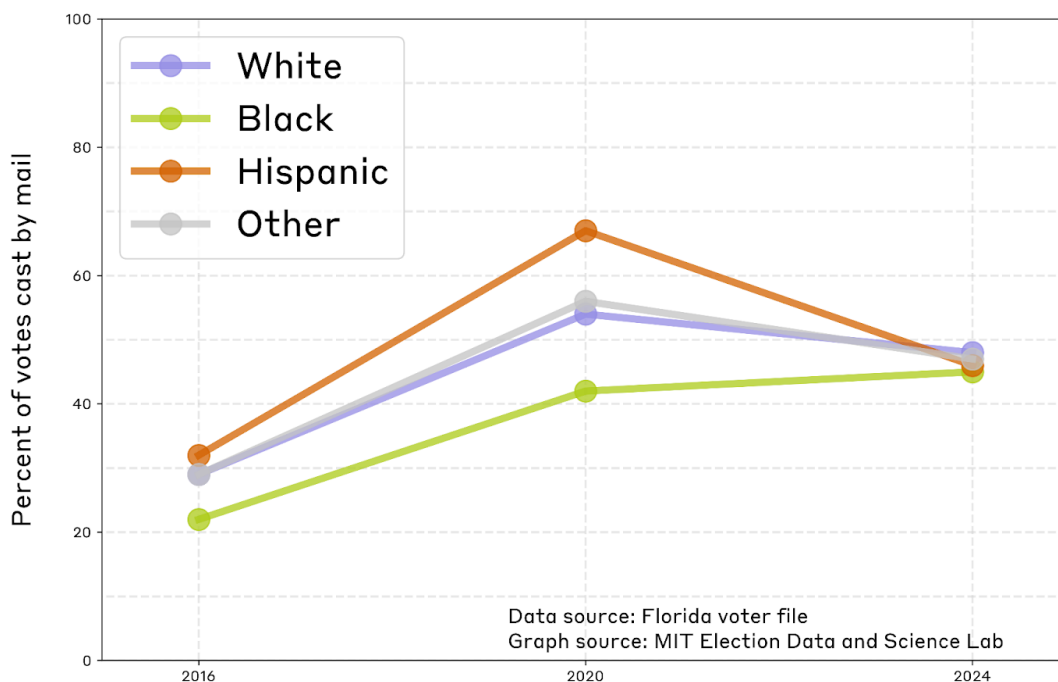
Did the increase in mail-in ballots by both Republicans and Democrats in 2020, and the sustained level of mail-in voting by Republicans in 2024, draw from some other vote mode? In the 2020 pandemic election, in-person voting on Election Day fell sharply for both parties, as many voters presumably switched to mail-in voting to avoid infection. In 2016, approximately half of all ballots cast in both partisan primaries were cast in person on Election Day, but in 2020 that number fell to roughly a quarter or a third for both Democrats and Republicans, and in the 2024 Republican primary, the share remained around that level. Unlike in several other states, voting by mail appears to have replaced Election Day voting for many of Florida’s Republicans. In contrast, the level of in-person early voting in Florida’s partisan primaries has seen very little movement over the last decade, between roughly a sixth or a fifth of votes cast each time.

In addition to party, other demographic variables are available on the Florida voter file, including race and age, which makes it possible to investigate how the choice of vote mode has trended across different demographic groups over time. Because there was no 2024 Democratic primary, we limit our attention to Republicans in the following analyses: each group is Republican primary voters of a specific demographic, so, a trend among Black voters should be understood as a trend among Black voters in a Republican primary. We focus on the trends among white, Black, and Hispanic Republicans, binning the other categories to match the practice in the 2020 Florida Healthy Elections project reports.²⁹ Figure 15 shows the evolution of vote modes by race.

²⁸ E.g. see our report on the 2024 primaries in Texas: https://www.elexcentral.org/sites/default/files/2024-08/Texas-state-report_EPC_2024.pdf (http://web.archive.org/web/20240813151413/https://www.elexcentral.org/sites/default/files/2024-08/Texas-state-report_EPC_2024.pdf)

²⁹ <https://web.mit.edu/healthyelections/www/sites/default/files/2020-10/FloridaElection.pdf> (<http://web.archive.org/web/20240711063648/https://web.mit.edu/healthyelections/www/sites/default/files/2020-10/FloridaElection.pdf>)

Figure 15: The share of ballots cast by mail in the Republican PPPs in 2016, 2020, and 2024, divided into three racial categories that are available on the Florida voter file (white, Black, and Hispanic) and combining all other categories.

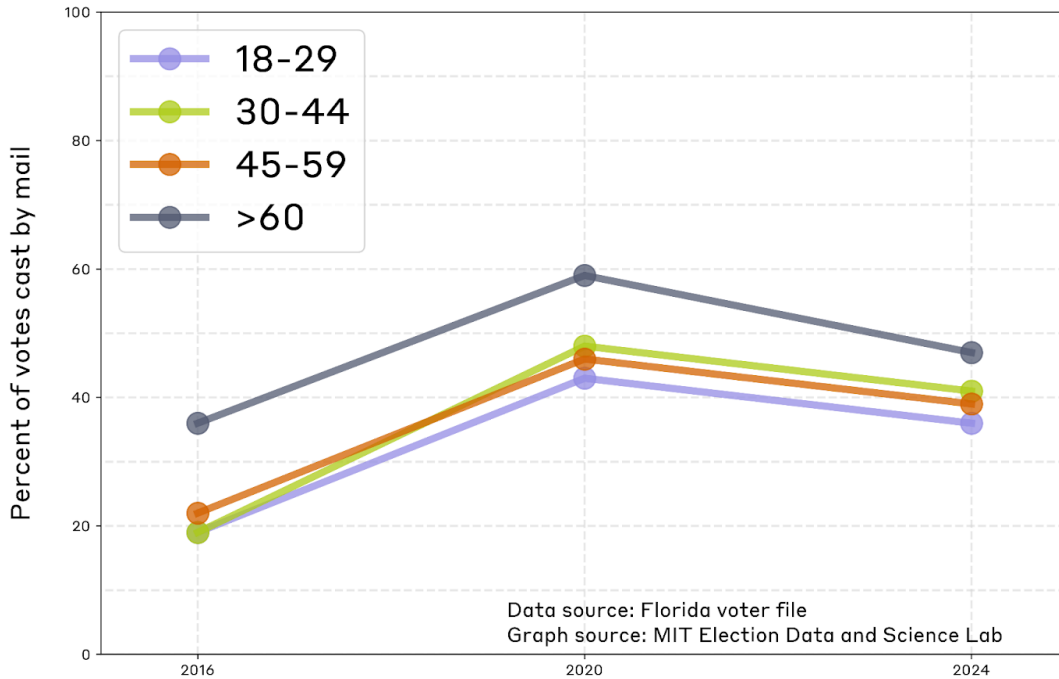


In 2024, race had a far weaker relationship to vote mode choice than in prior years. In all four groups analyzed in that year, mail voting was preferred by between 45% and 48% of voters—compare this to the 22%–32% range in 2016 and the 42%–67% range in 2020. In those two elections, and especially in 2020, Hispanic Republicans had a greater preference for mail voting than the electorate as a whole, while Black Republicans opted more for voting early and especially on Election Day. By 2024, Hispanic Republicans opted most frequently for early voting (accounting for 25% of votes cast). Meanwhile, 35% of Black Republicans chose to vote in person on Election Day, compared to 28% of Hispanic Republicans and 33% of white Republicans.

Figure 16 shows the corresponding figures when breaking the electorate into four age brackets. Ages were calculated using birth dates found within the Florida voter file.³⁰

³⁰ Voters can choose to keep their birth dates from the public voter file, and legacy registrations also lack a date of birth. This results in 111,310 voters that we could not categorize, comprising about 9% of 2024 Republican presidential primary voters.

Figure 16: The share of ballots cast by mail in the Republican PPPs in 2016, 2020, and 2024, among voters aged 18–29, 30–44, 45–59, or over 60.



Florida’s vote mode demographics have historically shown great heterogeneity with respect to age, and though this dynamic is somewhat muted in 2024, it is still noticeable. In 2016 and 2020, older Republicans were the most prolific mail voters, while younger cohorts favored Election Day voting. In 2024, these trends largely continued, though all cohorts’ voting patterns were closer to the statewide averages.

The voters without a date of birth in the 2024 voter file, who are presumably mostly legacy registrants and likely also some of the oldest voters in the registry, were largely mail voters—57% of them voted by mail, compared to 48% of the electorate overall and 47% of voters 60 and older. Only 13% of this group voted early (versus 19% overall), while 29% voted on Election Day (33%).

First-time voters

According to the Florida voter file, about 5% of ballots cast in the March 2024 Republican presidential primary were cast by first-time Florida voters. This proportion matches the proportion in 2020 when 5% of Republican PPP voters were also first-

timers (and 6% of Democratic PPP voters were first-timers). Figure 17 shows the number (left) and percentage (right) of first-time voters in Florida’s 2024 PPP by county.

Figure 17: The number (left) and percentage (right) of first-time voters by county in Florida’s 2024 Republican PPP.

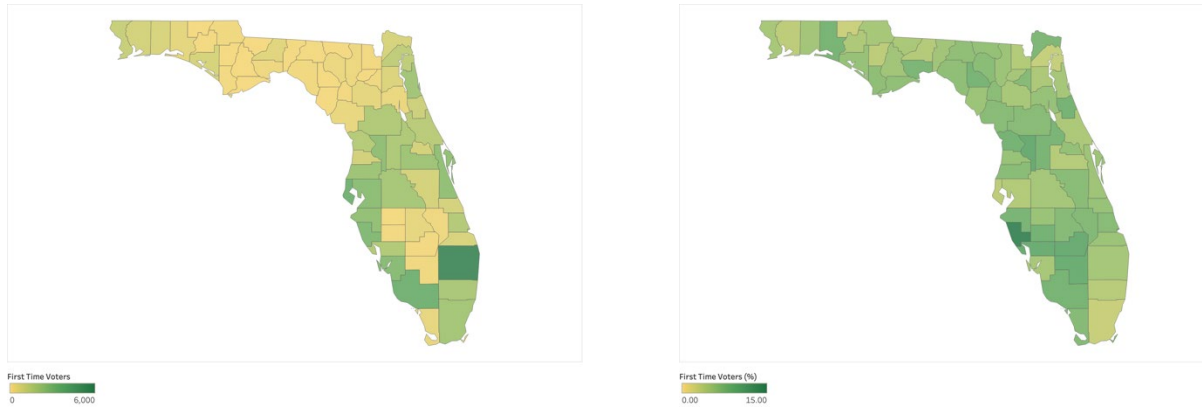


Figure 17 shows that first-time voters were mainly concentrated in southern Florida, with the largest proportion in the southwestern part of the state, and the largest raw number of first-time voters in Palm Beach County in the southeast. North Florida had the fewest first-time voters by raw numbers. In contrast, the proportion of first-time voters was fairly low in Miami-Dade County (home to Miami) and Duval County (Jacksonville).

The chart below shows that first-time voters’ vote mode choices are distinct from returning voters’ preferences. They are much more likely to prefer voting on Election Day (47% to 32%), commensurately less likely to vote by mail (31% to 49%) , and about as likely to vote early (21% to 19%). They also had substantially higher rates of unsuccessful votes—about 1.1% of first-time voters’ ballots were not counted, versus about 0.5% of returning voters’ ballots. Despite comprising just 5% of the electorate, first-time voters made up 28% of uncounted provisional ballots.

| 2024 Republican Presidential Preference Primary: Vote Mode by First-Time Voter Status | | | | | |
|---|----------------------|---------------|---------------------|------------------|------------------|
| Vote Mode | % of First-Time Vote | Vote Count | % of Returning Vote | Vote Count | Total Vote |
| Election Day | 47% | 30,405 | 32% | 368,315 | 398,720 |
| VBM | 31% | 20,000 | 49% | 569,141 | 589,141 |
| Early | 21% | 14,145 | 19% | 217,295 | 231,440 |
| Not Counted VBM | ~0.9% | 561 | ~0.5% | 5,909 | 6,470 |
| Not Counted Provisional | ~0.2% | 182 | ~0.04% | 477 | 659 |
| Total | 100% | 65,293 | 100% | 1,161,137 | 1,226,430 |

Age is a likely confounding variable in the relationship between first-time voter status and mode of choice. It is reasonable to imagine that first-time voters are more likely to be younger, since the older a person is, the more opportunities they have had to participate in an election. Since older voters are more likely to vote by mail, the difference in vote mode between first-time voters and returning voters may be due to a systematic difference in age across the two groups. The Table below shows the frequency of first-time voters in each age bracket reported on the Florida voter file.

| 2024 Republican Presidential Preference Primary: Age and First-Time Voter Status | | | | | |
|--|----------------------|---------------|---------------------|------------------|------------------|
| Age | % of First-Time Vote | Vote Count | % of Returning Vote | Vote Count | Total Vote |
| 18-29 | 12% | 7,596 | 2% | 20,221 | 27,817 |
| 30-44 | 9% | 5,698 | 5% | 59,603 | 65,301 |
| 45-59 | 17% | 11,129 | 14% | 159,898 | 171,027 |
| 60+ | 55% | 36,210 | 70% | 814,765 | 850,975 |
| Total | 100% | 65,293 | 100% | 1,161,137 | 1,226,430 |

The table shows that first-time voters are six times more likely to belong to the youngest age bracket (18–29) and three-quarters as likely to be in the oldest age bracket (60+). This paints a picture of first-time Republican primary voters as younger and substantially more likely to vote in person on Election Day, compared to returning voters who are older and more likely to choose to vote by mail.

Differences in other demographics between first-time and returning voters are minimal. There is little difference by race or gender between first-time voters and returning voters. Among the 65,293 first-time voters in Florida’s 2024 Republican PPP, the voter file classifies 54,554 as white (85%), 6,179 (9%) as Hispanic, 992 (2%) as Black, and 3,568 (5%) as “Other.” The percentage of returning voters who are Black and Hispanic is the same as that percentage among first-time voters (2% and 9%, respectively), whereas the proportion of white voters is 2 percentage points higher. As might be expected actuarially, the returning voters, who tend to be older, are slightly more likely to be women (53% among first-returning voters compared to 49% among first-time voters).

Uncounted mail ballots

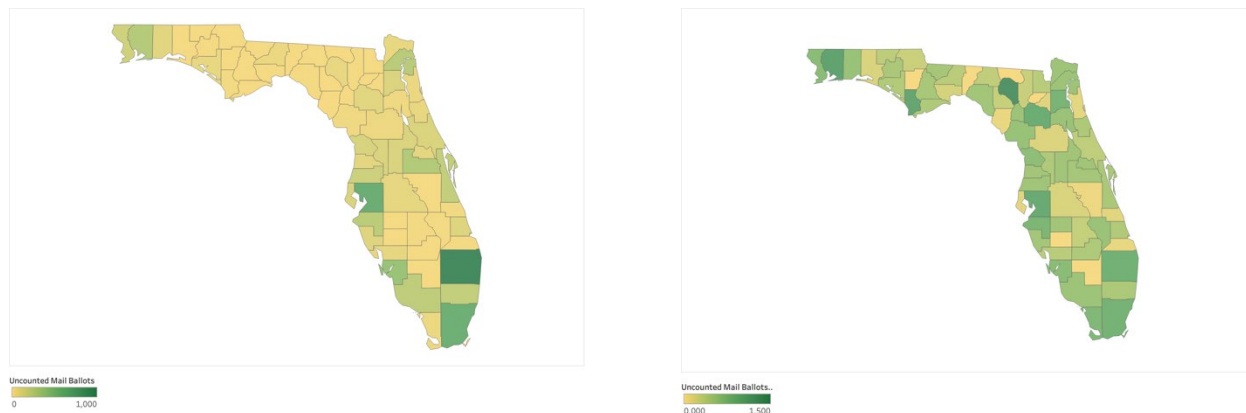
Over 5,000 mail ballots in the March 2024 Republican presidential primary were rejected—about 1% of the total, and approximately half of these were rejected because they were received too late. The table below shows the number of mail-in ballots cast and the proportion that were counted, late, or received on time but rejected for other reasons.

| 2024 Republican Presidential Preference Primary: Uncounted Mail Ballots | | |
|---|------------------|----------------|
| VBM Outcome | % of VBM Ballots | Vote Count |
| Counted | 98.91% | 589,141 |
| Not Counted (Received Late) | 0.64% | 3,819 |
| Not Counted (Other) | 0.45% | 2,651 |
| Vote Count | 100% | 594,611 |

The maps in the Figure below show the number (left) and percentage (right) of mail ballots in Florida that could not be counted. There is no obvious pattern, though

rejection rates appear slightly higher in Tampa’s Hillsborough County, Alachua County (home to the University of Florida), and in the state’s southeast.

Figure 18: The number (left) and percentage (right) of mail ballots that were not counted by county in Florida’s 2024 Republican PPP



The charts below dive into the demographics behind uncounted mail ballots in the Florida Republican presidential primary. Most stark is the difference between first-time and returning voters: the rate of uncounted mail ballots is 2.5 times greater among first-time voters than returners. About 9% of uncounted mail ballots were cast by first-time voters—even though these voters made up just over 3% of all attempted mail ballots.

Contemporary demographic trends make these findings particularly significant. Florida is an epicenter for population growth—in December 2022, the Census Bureau reported that the Sunshine State was the fastest-growing state in the nation by percentage and by raw growth³¹; it also contains four of the ten metropolitan areas that grew the most from 2022 to 2023.³² That migration—especially domestic migration—is one driver of this growth and has implications for Florida election administration. Eligible voters who

³¹ <https://www.census.gov/library/stories/2022/12/florida-fastest-growing-state.html#:~:text=Florida's%20population%20increased%20by%201.9,previous%20year's%20fastest%2Dgrowing%20state>.

(<https://web.archive.org/web/20240801085450/https://www.census.gov/library/stories/2022/12/florida-fastest-growing-state.html>)

³² <https://www.census.gov/library/stories/2024/03/florida-and-fast-growing-metros.html>

(<https://web.archive.org/web/20240814174908/https://www.census.gov/library/stories/2024/03/florida-and-fast-growing-metros.html>)

recently moved to Florida may register to vote in advance of the 2024 election, and if they cast ballots, they'll be first-time Florida voters. Since this population is susceptible to disproportionate mail ballot rejection rates, we may see greater rates of uncounted mail ballots in the August primary and the November general election due to these new voters.

| 2024 Republican Presidential Preference Primary: Uncounted Mail Ballots by First-Timer Voter Status | | | |
|---|----------------------|-------------------------|--------------------------|
| Status | % of VBM Not Counted | VBM Ballots Not Counted | Attempted VBM Vote Count |
| First-Time | 2.73% | 561 | 20,561 |
| Returning | 1.03% | 5,909 | 575,050 |
| Total | 1.09% | 6,470 | 595,611 |

While there were no major differences in mail ballot rejection rates between women (1.07%) and men (1.10%), there were substantial discrepancies between white voters and Black and Hispanic voters. Whereas 0.99% of mail ballots cast by white voters were rejected, the rate for Black voters was 1.98%—two times higher. Among Hispanic voters, 1.57% of ballots were rejected.

| 2024 Republican Presidential Preference Primary: Uncounted Mail Ballots by Race | | | |
|---|----------------------|-------------------------|--------------------------|
| Status | % of VBM Not Counted | VBM Ballots Not Counted | Attempted VBM Vote Count |
| White | 0.99% | 5,097 | 513,047 |
| Black | 1.98% | 214 | 10,807 |
| Hispanic | 1.57% | 785 | 50,097 |
| Total | 1.09% | 6,470 | 595,611 |

The ballot rejection rates broken down by age are especially illustrative. Among the oldest cohort, only 0.84% of ballots were not counted. This figure rises with younger subsets of the electorate. For voters 45–59, the rejection rate is 1.44%, and for those 30–44, it is 2.24%. The youngest cohort, which had the lowest proportion of voters opting for mail ballots in the first place and the highest proportion of first-time voters, saw a particularly high rejection rate: 4.55%. The rejection rate for voters without a date of birth within the voter file was 1.35%.

| 2024 Republican Presidential Preference Primary: Uncounted Mail Ballots by Age | | | |
|--|----------------------|-------------------------|--------------------------|
| Status | % of VBM Not Counted | VBM Ballots Not Counted | Attempted VBM Vote Count |
| 18–29 | 4.55% | 462 | 10,159 |
| 30–44 | 2.24% | 608 | 27,147 |
| 45–59 | 1.44% | 960 | 66,750 |
| 60+ | 0.84% | 3,578 | 427,488 |
| Total | 1.09% | 6,470 | 595,611 |

Ballot Issues in Florida

There are several pertinent issues in Florida that are likely to impact the administration of the general election and surrounding discourse. Two controversial topics—increased abortion access and the legalization of marijuana—will be on the ballot in November, and advocacy surrounding these issues has already begun to have an effect on voter turnout and fundraising efforts.

In April of 2024, the Florida Supreme Court approved a ballot initiative that would protect abortion access in the state. Currently, most abortions are banned after six weeks,³³ but the potential amendment says that "no law shall prohibit, penalize, delay,

³³ <https://www.tampabay.com/news/florida-politics/2024/04/04/florida-abortion-six-week-ban-pregnancy-planned-parenthood/>

or restrict abortion before viability or when necessary to protect the patient's health, as determined by the patient's healthcare provider."³⁴ Controversy surrounding the proposed amendment has already begun to have repercussions on the state's election landscape, including fueling hopes by some national and state Democrats that the ballot initiative will improve voter turnout among their supporters.³⁵

Access to recreational marijuana is also on the ballot in November. The proposed amendment would make possession of marijuana for personal use legal, and would allow companies to sell medical marijuana to adults over 21.³⁶ This, too, could motivate Democrats to turn out in greater numbers.

In Florida, proposed constitutional amendments require 60% of the vote to pass.³⁷ In addition to voting on abortion rights and marijuana access, Floridians will consider ballot measures relating to campaign finance, whether school board elections should be partisan, property tax breaks, and whether the state constitution should protect a right to fishing and hunting.

(http://web.archive.org/web/2024000000000*/https://www.tampabay.com/news/florida-politics/2024/04/04/florida-abortion-six-week-ban-pregnancy-planned-parenthood/)

³⁴ <https://abcnews.go.com/Politics/florida-voters-ballot-measure-enshrine-abortion-rights-court/story?id=108721012>

(<http://web.archive.org/web/20240813085644/https://abcnews.go.com/Politics/florida-voters-ballot-measure-enshrine-abortion-rights-court/story?id=108721012>)

³⁵ <https://abcnews.go.com/Politics/abortion-dominate-2024-election-florida-democrats-flip-state/story?id=109384582>

(<http://web.archive.org/web/20240812081116/https://abcnews.go.com/Politics/abortion-dominate-2024-election-florida-democrats-flip-state/story?id=109384582>)

³⁶ <https://apnews.com/article/florida-abortion-marijuana-2024-election-supreme-court-ad831352cb90abd5bbc873f498cbf286>

(<https://web.archive.org/web/20240813015352/https://apnews.com/article/florida-abortion-marijuana-2024-election-supreme-court-ad831352cb90abd5bbc873f498cbf286>)

³⁷ <https://www.wlrn.org/government-politics/2024-04-03/the-six-issues-going-on-the-2024-november-ballot> (<http://web.archive.org/web/20240809130823/https://www.wlrn.org/government-politics/2024-04-03/the-six-issues-going-on-the-2024-november-ballot>)

Conclusion

Florida has been regarded as a perennial swing state and a microcosm of American politics throughout the twenty-first century. As the fourth-largest state in the country and the most populous battleground, its electoral votes—now numbering 30, an increase of 1 following the 2020 Census³⁸—make it the most valuable prize for presidential candidates. In recent years, the Sunshine State has veered further from the political median and more toward the Republican Party. In 2020, Florida swung right and in the opposite direction of the nation as Donald Trump expanded his margin in the state by 2.2 percentage points (from 1.2 percentage points to 3.4) while losing 2.4 percentage points in the national popular vote.

Even if Florida’s electoral votes and Senate seat are not decisive this year, the state’s voluminous and publicly available data make it a valuable case study before the November 5 general election. With a wealth of data available for analysis, a diverse and unique electorate, and high-profile propositions on the November ballot, the Sunshine State can teach us a great deal about election dynamics during this cycle, even if the state does not end up as a key battleground for the presidency.

³⁸ <https://dos.fl.gov/elections/candidates-committees/presidential-electorselectoral-college/>
(<http://web.archive.org/web/20240722211722/https://dos.fl.gov/elections/candidates-committees/presidential-electorselectoral-college/>)