

Arizona State Report Update

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Introduction

Arizona’s state primary elections were held on July 30, 2024, without any major issues in election administration. Audits in many counties and even a recount of a close race confirm that votes were counted accurately. Throughout the summer, the composition of registered voters in the state has continued to follow trends that were established as early as 2020. The number of registered Democrats in fall 2024 is lower than it was in fall 2020, but the number of registered Republicans and other registrants are both higher than they were four years ago. The state’s 1.4 million Republicans outnumber both other groups. The number of ballots cast in the Democratic state primary was less than it was four years ago and also less than the number of ballots cast in the Republican state primary. However, both Democrats and Republicans cast more ballots in their respective state primary contests than they had in the presidential primaries of 2024, though there were very few competitive primary contests in Arizona at either a state or federal level this year.

Election Performance in the 2024 Primaries

Overall, the administration of Arizona’s 2024 primary election appeared to be largely uneventful, and no major issues or controversies arose. Two notable windows into the successful administration of these elections are the audits and recounts that took place.¹

¹ Arizona Secretary of State, 2024. “2024 Election Information”. URL: <https://azsos.gov/elections/election-information/2024-election-information>. Archive link: <https://web.archive.org/web/20240918155703/https://azsos.gov/elections/election-information/2024-election-information>. Accessed October 22, 2024.

Hand counts of ballots are required to check the results of Arizona primary election contests.² In the presidential primary contest, audits were performed in nine of the state’s fifteen counties (Apache, Cochise, Coconino, Gila, Maricopa, Mohave, Navajo, Pima, Pinal, and Yavapai). In six counties (Apache, Graham, Greenlee, La Paz, Santa Cruz, and Yuma), the state records that the hand count was “[n]ot performed as the County Chairs of the two political parties did not designate the required members for the Hand Count Election Board (A.R.S. § 16-602(B)(7)”. Importantly, an Arizona Senate bill passed in the last legislative session, SB1342, aims to address this issue, so there is reason to expect that all county audits will be performed on votes cast in the 2024 general election. Of the nine counties in which audits were performed, the state reports “no discrepancies found” in eight of them.

The only exception was Pima County. In that county, the votes cast for a presidential candidate in either the Democratic or Republican presidential primaries were audited across 1% of all early votes as well as 2% of all vote centers. The absolute difference in vote totals as a result of the audit was 2, out of nearly 2,000 votes audited, with a further 2 discrepancies that appeared to not affect the candidates’ vote totals.³

The results of the state primary audit were broadly similar. This time, ten counties performed the audit, and five could not. In seven of the ten counties that performed an audit, no discrepancies were found. In the remaining three counties, there were no serious discrepancies.

In addition to these election audits, one contest was close enough that votes were re-counted to ensure that the correct result had been declared. In the Democratic primary contest for the U.S. House of Representatives in District 3, the candidates were initially separated by just 42 votes: Yassamin Ansari held 19,087 votes and Raquel Terán’s vote

² Arizona Revised Statutes, 16-602 B. URL:

<https://www.azleg.gov/viewdocument/?docName=https://www.azleg.gov/ars/16/00602.htm>. Archive link: <https://web.archive.org/web/20240702032235/https://www.azleg.gov/viewdocument/?docName=https://www.azleg.gov/ars/16/00602.htm>. Accessed October 22, 2024.

³ Pima County Elections Office, March 25, 2024. “Hand Count / Early Ballot Audit Report”. URL:

https://apps.azsos.gov/election/2024/ppe_handcount/2024_ppe_hc_pima.pdf. Archive link: https://web.archive.org/web/20240913203606/https://apps.azsos.gov/election/2024/ppe_handcount/2024_ppe_hc_pima.pdf?cfchlrttk=rniGM59twfGfAG9tmrlNTfwH6giCXX6qCuWl5RoVmgY-1726259767-0.0.1.1-5012. Accessed October 22, 2024.

total sat at 19,045.⁴ This automatically triggered a recount, which occurs in Arizona whenever the margin between the candidates is less than 0.5% of the votes cast for either of them.⁵ The recount identified 3 extra votes for Terán, narrowing the gap to 39 votes, a net shift of only 3 votes from the original vote count.⁶

Voter Registration

The changes in the number of Arizona’s voters are a particularly informative way to set the stage for how the state’s politics have shifted over the course of the summer in 2024, and how its politics now compare to its politics in 2020. Updates on the number of registered voters are not posted regularly in Arizona, but rather become available at a few somewhat inconsistent time points throughout the year.⁷ Figure 1 shows every time point available in both 2020 and 2024, without explicitly comparing them, because data were not released at corresponding time points in the two election years.

⁴ Arizona Secretary of State, 2024. “Arizona Election Results: 2024 Primary Election”. URL: <https://results.arizona.vote/#/featured/46/0>. Archive link: <https://web.archive.org/web/20240914072210/https://results.arizona.vote/#/featured/46/0>. Accessed October 22, 2024.

⁵ Arizona Revised Statutes, 16-661. URL: <https://www.azleg.gov/ars/16/00661.htm>. Archive link: <https://web.archive.org/web/20240915013526/https://www.azleg.gov/ars/16/00661.htm>. Accessed October 22, 2024.

⁶ Arizona Secretary of State, 2024. "AZ03 Recount Result". URL: <https://azsos.gov/news/833>. Archive link: <https://web.archive.org/save/https://azsos.gov/news/833>. Accessed October 22, 2024.

⁷ Arizona Secretary of State, 2024. “Voter Registration Statistics”. URL: <https://azsos.gov/elections/election-information/voter-registration-statistics>. Archive link: <https://web.archive.org/web/20240910123021/https://azsos.gov/elections/election-information/voter-registration-statistics>. Accessed October 22, 2024.

Figure 1: The change in the number of registered voters of each party in Arizona between each month in 2020 and the corresponding month in 2024.

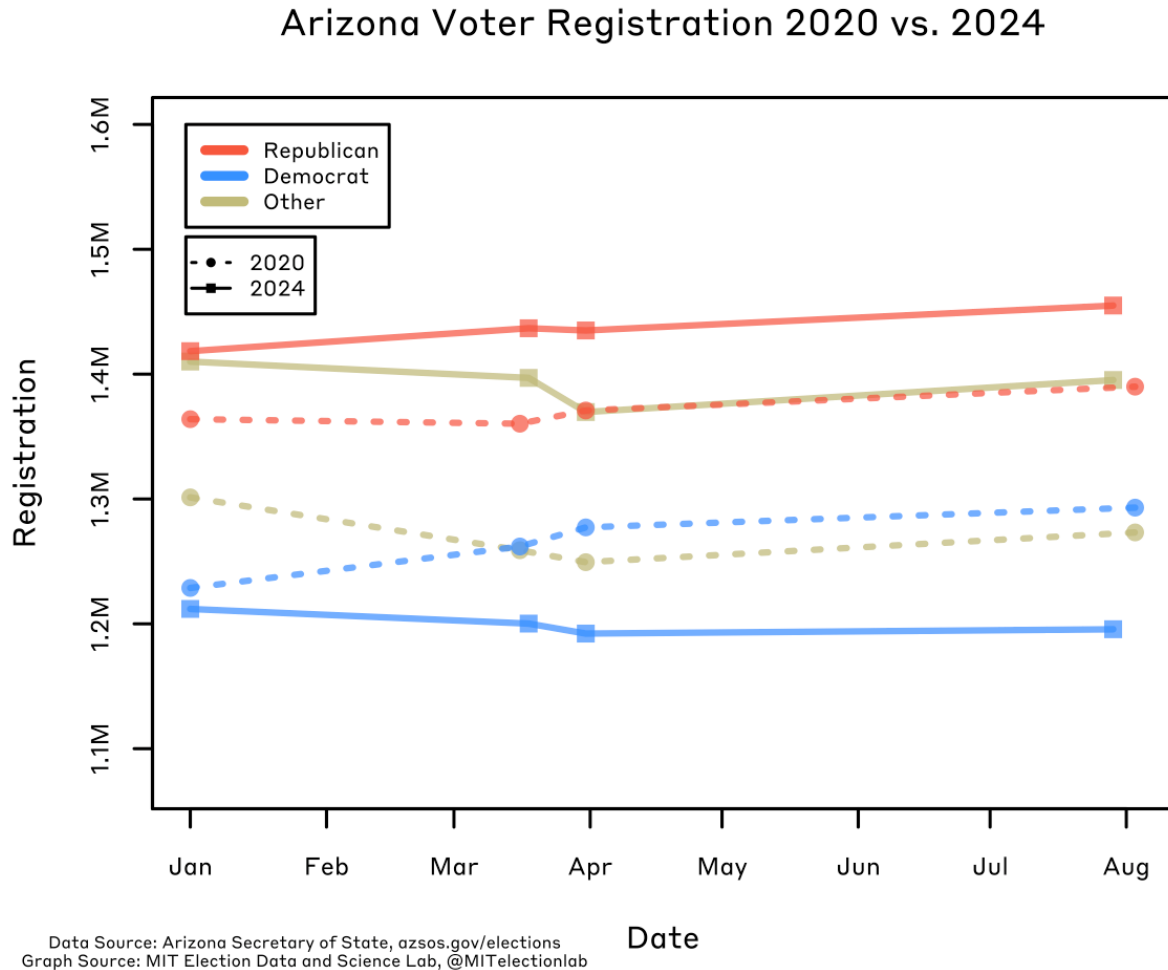


Figure 1 tells a clear story about the changing Arizona electorate. Between August 2020 and August 2024, the number of registered Democrats in Arizona fell from about 1.3 million down to about 1.2 million. The change appears to have largely taken place over the course of the two election years, not in between them, since January 2024 and January 2020 saw very similar numbers of registered Democrats in the state (with both figures resting at slightly more than 1.2 million). Whereas the number of Democrats increased to about 1.3 million between January and August 2020, over the course of 2024, so far the number of Democrats has remained fairly flat, even decreasing slightly.

This relative decline in the number of Democrats is presumably the result of the comparative competitiveness of each year's presidential primary contest. The 2020 Arizona primary was held early enough in that primary season that there were still multiple viable candidates, and Joe Biden won with 268,029 votes against Bernie Sanders's 200,456 votes. In 2024, in contrast, Biden was running as the incumbent president, and the primary was effectively uncontested. The number of registered Democrats shows a slow decline, which has not received the boost of a contested presidential primary.

The number of Republicans in 2024 has exhibited a similar effect since that party also did not have a meaningfully contested presidential primary in Arizona this cycle. Over the year so far, the number of Republicans has slightly increased, from just under to just over 1.4 million. The number of other registered voters has slightly dipped over the course of 2024 so far, but since 2020 it has jumped from about 1.3 million to about 1.4 million.

Together these trends suggest that the number of Arizona Democrats may be on a very gradual downward trend while the number of Republicans and other registrants is slightly trending upwards, but a competitive presidential primary can substantially punctuate this process.

Notably, the state primary contests did little to change any of these relationships, and the numbers now are broadly similar to the numbers at the time of the 2024 presidential primary contests. Like the presidential primaries, neither partisan state primary had a particularly competitive high-attention contest. One of Arizona's seats in the U.S. Senate is up for election this November, but on the Democratic side, only Ruben Gallego officially contested the seat, while in the Republican contest, Keri Lake was a clear frontrunner and won by nearly 16 percentage points. There were some tightly contested U.S. House contests, particularly in the Democratic Party primary, but evidently, that was not enough to meaningfully increase voter registrations.⁸

⁸ Arizona Secretary of State, 2024. "Arizona Election Results: 2024 Primary Election". URL: <https://results.arizona.vote/#/featured/46/0>. Accessed October 22, 2024.

State Primary Turnout

Against this backdrop of voter registrations, how did turnout in the 2024 state primary compare to the state’s most recent primary competitions?⁹ Four years earlier, in the 2020 state primary, 695,219 ballots were cast by voters in Democratic primary contests, and 752,869 ballots were cast by voters in Republican contests. In the 2024 state primary contest, Democrats cast fewer ballots: just 521,158. Republicans, in contrast, cast 750,903, a very similar number to the number of ballots cast four years ago.

Figure 2 compares the number of votes cast by members of each party within each Arizona county in that party’s 2020 state primary contest to the number of ballots cast by members of that party in the same county in 2024. The number of votes is displayed on a log-log scale.

⁹ All data in this section are taken from the Arizona Secretary of State’s 2024 election result data pages, linked at their “Election Information” page. URL: <https://azsos.gov/elections/election-information>. Archive link: https://web.archive.org/web/20240909212208/https://azsos.gov/elections/election-information?_cf_chl_rt_tk=1K7Z8dIW3ZhHDXb0EUCNWEEQYyg1j_eBpNAhP7A.QDc-1725916928-0.0.1.1-5225. Accessed October 22, 2024.

Figure 2: The number of votes cast in the 2024 Democratic (blue) or Republican (red) state primaries within each county, compared to the number of votes cast in the 2024 state primary of that party in the same county.

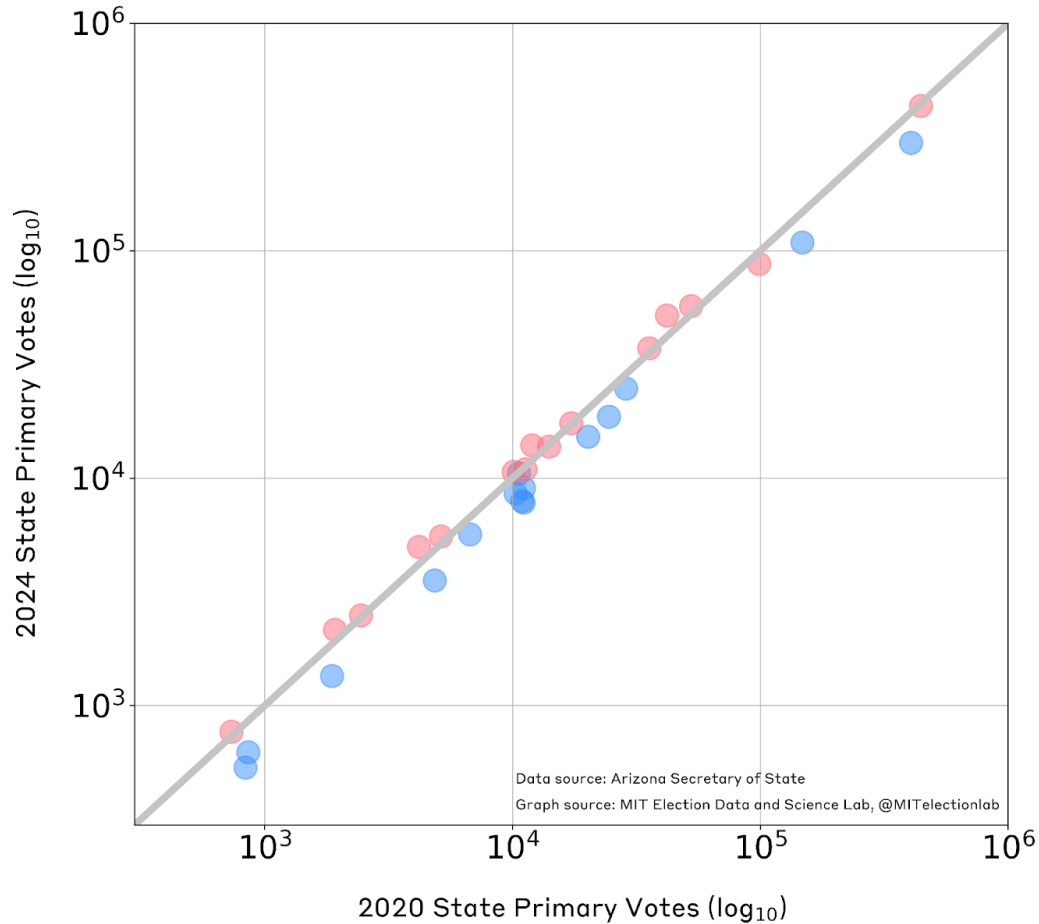


Figure 2 reinforces that Republican turnout was larger, and indeed larger in nearly every county, in the 2024 state primary than it had been in the 2020 state primary. Because there was no clear difference in the competitiveness of the primary contests between the parties, this is presumably a reflection of the fact that more Arizonans are registered as Republicans than in 2020, whereas fewer Arizonans are now registered as Democrats than were in 2020.

We next supplement our comparison of the two state primaries by comparing the number of votes cast by party in the 2024 presidential primary to the number of votes cast by party in the 2024 state primary. Both parties saw more votes cast in the state primary than in the (effectively uncontested) presidential primaries. The number of Republican

ballots cast rose from 624,420 in the 2024 state primary to 750,903 in the 2024 presidential primary, while ballots cast by Democrats rose from 410,174 in the 2024 presidential primary to 521,158 in the 2024 state primary. Figure 3 shows the relationship between the total ballots cast in these elections, split by county and by party.

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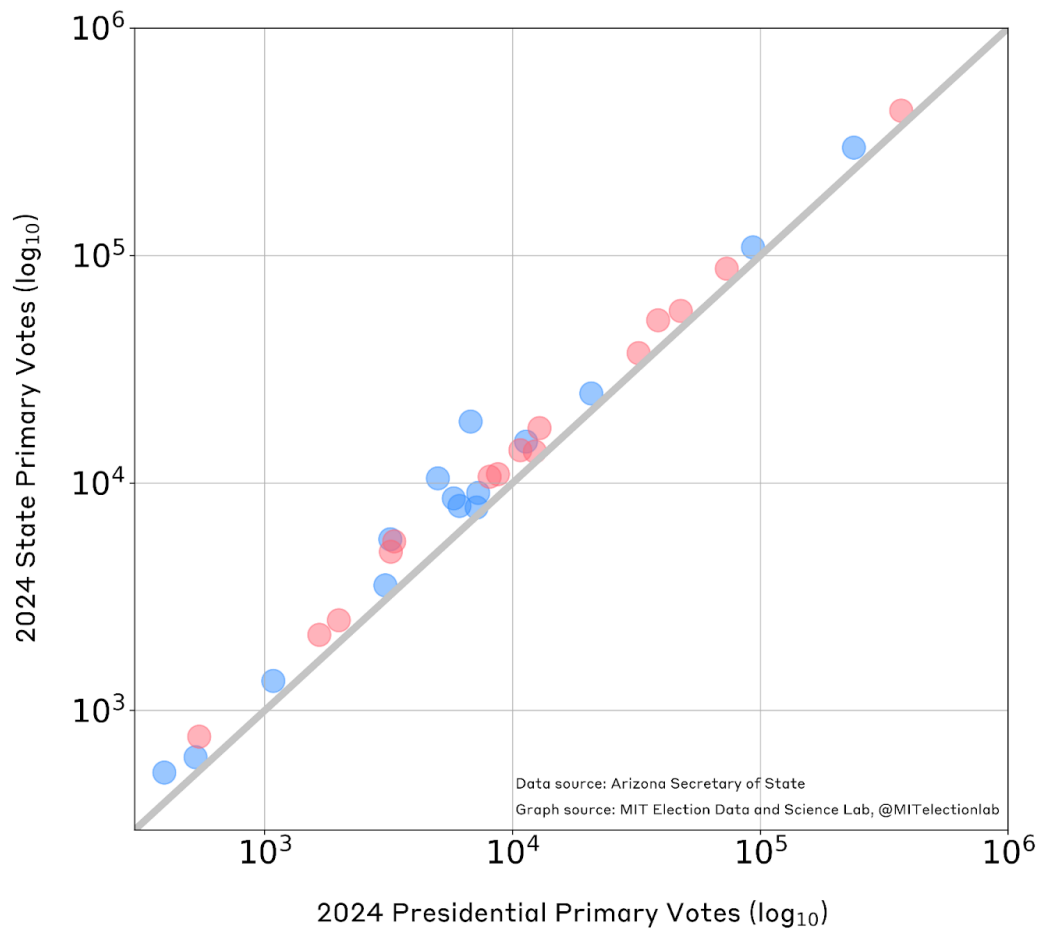


Figure 3 underscores that participation was higher in the state primary than in the presidential primary for both parties. This lends credence to the interpretation offered in the 2024 Elections Performance Central report that low turnout in Arizona’s presiden-

tial primary was largely due to the fact that neither party had a particularly competitive contest.¹⁰

Conclusion

Audits and recounts confirm that Arizona’s primary elections were conducted accurately, and so far, there have been no major issues with administering the state’s elections in 2024. Voter registration and participation in the state are in keeping with long-term trends, following the steady growth over the last few years in the number of Republicans and voters who are either unaffiliated or registered with a third party, and a relatively constant number of Democrats.

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10 Fleisher, Max. 2024. “Arizona 2024 State Report”. In the *Stanford-MIT Elections Performance Central*. URL: https://www.elexcentral.org/sites/default/files/2024-08/Arizona-State-Report_EPC_2024.pdf. Archive link: https://web.archive.org/web/20240913193059/https://www.elexcentral.org/sites/default/files/2024-08/Arizona-State-Report_EPC_2024.pdf. Accessed October 22, 2024.