

Michigan 2026 Report

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Introduction

Michigan is one of the country's most competitive swing states, and it is administering its 2026 elections under rules voters recently rewrote. Proposal 2 of 2022 added early voting, a permanent absentee¹ list, and other changes to the state constitution, and the November election will be only the second general election conducted under them. This year has also seen conflicts over how elections are run: between the federal government and the state, including Department of Justice records demands, a lawsuit over Michigan's voter file, and federal monitors sent to Detroit, Lansing, and East Lansing; between the Republican-led House and Democratic-led Senate over competing election bills; and between state and local officials over voter list maintenance. This report covers those developments and the recent policy changes behind them.

Michigan has also hosted several closely watched primaries with record turnout this cycle. More than 2.5 million ballots were cast—the most in a Michigan gubernatorial primary in half a century. Progressive candidates won several Democratic nominations, most notably Dr. Abdul El-Sayed, who defeated Rep. Haley Stevens by about one point for the U.S. Senate nomination. Analysis of how those ballots were cast points to a shift in how Michiganders vote: absentee ballots were still a majority of the primary vote, but the primary was less mail-heavy than 2024 as in-person voting surged, and in the Senate race absentee and in-person voters split sharply, with Stevens carrying the absentee vote while El-Sayed won Election Day and early in-person ballots. This report breaks down these trends across notable contests, voting modes, turnout, and the speed of vote reporting.

¹ Michigan election law typically refers to “absent voters” for those who cast a mail ballot. In this report, we use the more common adjective “absentee” to refer to such voters.

General Election Calendar

The dates and deadlines for the 2026 general election calendar are provided by the [Michigan Secretary of State](#). Michigan allows [same-day registration](#) during the constitutionally mandated early voting period (Oct. 24 to Nov. 1) and on Election Day (Nov. 3). However, any new voter registrations that take place between Oct. 19 and Nov. 3 must be done in person at a local clerk's office or satellite office, and proof of residency is required.

- + **Sept. 24:** Absentee ballots become available to voters
- + **Oct. 19:** Last day to register to vote by mail or online
- + **Oct. 24:** First day of early voting period²
- + **Oct. 30:** Last day to request an absentee ballot online or by mail
- + **Nov. 1:** Last day of early voting period
- + **Nov. 2:** Last day to request an absentee ballot in-person
- + **Nov. 3 (7 A.M. until 8 P.M.):** Election Day, polls open
- + **Nov. 3 (8 P.M.):** Absentee ballot return deadline
- + **Nov. 6 (5 P.M.):** Absentee ballot signature curing deadline

Data Availability

Michigan publishes its election data centrally through the Department of State's Bureau of Elections, which indexes results, registration and turnout statistics, candidate listings, and voting equipment reports on a [single election results and data page](#). Michigan reports precinct-level results with downloadable files for every November

² Optional early voting in Michigan begins October 5, but the constitutionally mandated early-voting period does not start until October 24. Michigan voters should check mi.gov/vote to see when exactly early voting is offered in their jurisdiction.

general election from 1998 through 2024. Primaries, special elections, and odd-year consolidated elections can be read one contest at a time through the [Michigan Voter Information Center](#), but are not available as bulk, machine-readable downloads. Statewide turnout statistics reach back to 1948 for general elections and 1978 for primaries, and county registration totals are posted annually, but both series are published as PDFs rather than machine-readable files. In the weeks around an election, the [Michigan Voting Dashboard](#) reports absentee, early in-person, and Election Day voting daily, beginning 45 days before Election Day and freezing 30 days afterward. The statewide voter roll, the [Qualified Voter File](#), is provided only by request. More information on Michigan's election data is provided in our [Michigan Election Data Guide](#).

Election Administration Landscape

The Impacts of Michigan Proposal 2 (2022)

Michigan's current election administration framework is largely the product of [Proposal 2](#), a constitutional amendment approved by voters in November 2022, and the legislation enacted to implement it. By placing many election administration policies directly into the Michigan Constitution, Proposal 2 expanded voting rights while limiting the Legislature's ability to modify those policies through legislation. Specifically, Proposal 2 amended the Michigan Constitution to [establish or constitutionalize](#) the following election administration policies:

- + **Early voting:** Required at least nine consecutive days of statewide early in-person voting before each statewide election.
- + **Absentee voting:** Created a permanent absentee voter list, guaranteed voters the right to request absentee ballots, and established procedures for signature verification and curing signature discrepancies.
- + **Ballot accessibility:** Required the state to provide prepaid postage, ballot tracking, and secure absentee ballot drop boxes.

- + **Military and overseas voting:** Required absentee ballots from military and overseas voters that are postmarked by Election Day to be counted if received within six days after Election Day.
- + **Voter identification:** Constitutionalized Michigan's existing voter ID requirement³ while preserving the affidavit option for voters without photo identification.
- + **Election certification:** Required county and state canvassing boards to certify election results based solely on the official vote totals, making certification a ministerial duty.
- + **Election audits:** Required post-election audits to be conducted by election officials under publicly established procedures and prohibited political party officials from directing or supervising audits.
- + **Voting rights protections:** Prohibited laws or conduct that harass, intimidate, interfere with, or unreasonably burden the fundamental right to vote.
- + **Election administration funding:** Allowed local election officials to accept publicly disclosed private donations for election administration, provided the funds were not from foreign sources.

To implement these constitutional reforms, the Legislature [enacted](#) a broad package of election administration legislation before the 2024 election. The legislation updated Michigan's presidential election certification process to conform with the federal [Electoral Count Reform Act](#) and clarified procedures for resolving presidential election certification disputes and election contests (Public Acts [269](#), [255](#), and [256](#)). Lawmakers also expanded voter registration opportunities by modernizing online and automatic voter registration and permitting eligible 16- and 17-year-olds to preregister to vote (Public Acts [257](#), [258](#), [260–262](#), [268](#)). Additional measures strengthened protections for

³ Michigan voters [are not required to present photo ID to vote](#). Those without one may cast a regular ballot by signing an affidavit stating they lack valid photo ID.

election officials and workers by increasing penalties for intimidation and further insulated post-election audits from partisan influence by prohibiting party officials from directing or supervising them (Public Acts [252-254](#)).

The effect of these reforms on vote modes became evident during the 2024 presidential election, the first conducted under the new constitutional framework. The constitutional amendment established a [minimum nine-day early voting period and expanded absentee voting protections](#), contributing to significant shifts in how Michiganders cast their ballots. More than [1.2 million](#) Michiganders voted during the state's first statewide early voting period, nearly 40% cast absentee ballots, and a majority of voters cast their ballots before Election Day. (See the section on [Voting Modes](#) for more details on the 2026 trend.)

A consequence of Proposal 2 (and the earlier [Ballot Proposal 3 in 2018](#)) is that new administration requirements have transformed how elections are run in Michigan and led to [a heavier workload, higher costs, and increased staffing demands](#), especially in smaller townships. Michigan's election administration system is [decentralized](#) and run at the local level, meaning over 1,500 local election officials are tasked with administering elections and implementing new reforms. Some officials have said the expansion of absentee and early in-person voting has led to [substantial cost increases](#), mainly paid for by counties, not the state. To support local election officials as they implement new administrative changes and to address the current statewide voting system contract expiring in early 2027, Governor Gretchen Whitmer included [more than \\$43 million](#) for new voting equipment in her proposed 2027-2028 budget. However, [this fund](#) was not included in the finalized budget, meaning that local election officials will [continue to face higher administrative costs](#) without consistent support from the state government.

Department of Justice Involvement

Since the change in administration in 2025, the Department of Justice (DOJ) has increased federal scrutiny of Michigan's election administration through a series of investigations, document requests, and litigation.

In April 2026, the DOJ [demanded](#) that Wayne County, Michigan's most populous county, produce all ballots cast in the November 2024 federal election, including absentee and provisional ballots, ballot envelopes, and ballot receipts. The DOJ [stated](#) that the records were needed to investigate potential violations of federal election laws, and cited [three](#) previous Wayne County fraud convictions as well as a 2020 [lawsuit](#) alleging fraud in the county as justification for the request. Michigan officials responded to the request, saying the fraud cases had already been investigated and prosecuted, and that the lawsuit had been dismissed after a judge found its allegations "[incorrect and not credible](#)." Top state officials further [criticized](#) the DOJ's request as an attempt to interfere with state elections and undermine confidence in Michigan's election system. As of August 2026, Michigan has not complied with this request.

The DOJ has also sought access to Michigan's unredacted Qualified Voter File ([QVF](#)) as part of a national effort to obtain voter registration data from states. Michigan [provided](#) the public version of its voter file but redacted personally identifying information including voters' birth dates, driver's license numbers, and partial Social Security numbers. The DOJ subsequently sued Michigan, arguing that it was [entitled](#) to the unredacted voter file under the [National Voter Registration Act](#) and the [Help America Vote Act](#). In February 2026, the United States District Court for the Western District of Michigan [ruled](#) that federal law did not require Michigan to disclose the requested information. In June 2026, the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Sixth Circuit [upheld](#) the decision, the [first appellate decision](#) on the issue.

In late June 2026, the DOJ [sent](#) letters to election administration officials in Detroit, East Lansing, and Lansing, notifying them that federal election monitors would be

deployed during the August primary election. Concerns about long lines, the availability of provisional ballots, and the accessibility of voting equipment during the 2024 election [formed](#) the basis of the DOJ's reasoning. Michigan officials [disputed](#) those allegations, describing them as unsupported and arguing that the requests reflected an unprecedented level of federal scrutiny of the state's election administration. While federal election monitors are routinely deployed to observe compliance with federal voting rights laws—Detroit was among the [86 jurisdictions](#) monitored during the 2024 election—they are [limited](#) to observing and documenting potential violations and have no authority to question voters, inspect ballots or voting equipment, or otherwise interfere with election administration. The 2026 deployment nevertheless drew heightened attention because it followed allegations of election irregularities and was accompanied by requests for election administration records. On August 4, the DOJ [confirmed](#) that federal personnel were monitoring polling sites in Detroit, East Lansing, Lansing, and Hamtramck, expanding the deployment to a fourth city.

In President Trump's [address to the nation about election security](#) on July 16, 2026, he suggested that an FBI investigation be conducted over [alleged voter registration fraud in Muskegon](#) during the 2020 presidential election. He also instructed the DOJ "[to prosecute those responsible for any crimes.](#)" This controversy started in October 2020, when the Muskegon City Clerk's Office [received voter registration forms](#) with nonexistent addresses and phone numbers and signatures without a match. However, these forms were not processed by the office, and were flagged as fraudulent immediately. The case was also [previously investigated](#) by Michigan agencies and the FBI, which found that no illegal ballots were sent out or cast. As of August 2026, the DOJ has not opened a formal investigation in Muskegon to investigate this fraud allegation again.

Litigation over DHS and FEMA Funding Conditions

In July 2026, the Michigan Attorney General's office [joined](#) a coalition of 26 states in challenging new election-related conditions attached to the [Homeland Security Grant Program](#). The lawsuit [argues](#) that the U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS) and

the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) exceeded their authority by conditioning federal counterterrorism funding on states adopting specified election administration policies, including using the federal SAVE system to verify voter citizenship, transitioning to voting equipment that reads hand-marked paper ballots, and conducting post-election audits under future DHS guidelines. States that do not comply could lose [up to 20%](#) of the Homeland Security Grant Program funding. The plaintiff states [argue](#) that these conditions unlawfully interfere with states' constitutional authority to administer elections.

Conflict between State and Local Election Officials

Antrim County Clerk Victoria Bishop was [elected](#) in 2024 after campaigning on a promise to "restore election integrity" by removing deceased and ineligible voters from the county's voter rolls. After taking office in 2025, Bishop [initiated](#) a "corrective audit" to review the county's voter registration records, including sending voter confirmation and cancellation notices and making changes within Michigan's Qualified Voter File (QVF). After roughly [1,800 voters](#) received notices, the Michigan Bureau of Elections (BOE) [opened](#) an investigation. In an April 14 [letter](#), the BOE stated that county clerks were not authorized to independently modify voter registration records or issue confirmation notices on behalf of local jurisdictions, and alleged that Bishop had exceeded her statutory authority. In June 2026, the BOE [concluded](#) its investigation, finding that Bishop's actions did not comply with the Michigan election law and fell outside the scope of a county clerk's authority. As a result, the BOE [suspended](#) Bishop's access to the QVF and required her to complete election administration training, certify compliance with Michigan election law, and provide the outstanding information the Bureau requested before restoring her access. In July 2026, the BOE [directed](#) township clerks to review and reverse unauthorized voter registration changes before the August primary and notify affected voters of any restored registrations.

Similar tensions emerged between Macomb County and the Michigan Department of State over methods for identifying potential noncitizen voters. In January 2026, County Clerk Anthony Forlini, who is also the Republican nominee for Michigan Secretary of

State, announced that his office had identified [15 potential noncitizen](#) registrations by comparing jury questionnaires with Michigan's QVF. The Michigan Department of State [responded](#), noting that comparing jury records with voter registration data can produce false positives because jury lists include, for example, lawful permanent residents who later become naturalized U.S. citizens. A subsequent Bureau of Elections review found that only [three](#) of the 15 individuals had any voting history, including one U.S. citizen who had legally cast a ballot. In March, the Bureau of Elections [issued](#) guidance recommending that clerks coordinate with the state when using jury questionnaire responses to identify potential noncitizen registrations and verify citizenship before canceling voter registrations. Forlini later [announced](#) that, with assistance from federal officials using the Department of Homeland Security's Systematic Alien Verification for Entitlements ([SAVE](#)) system, they had identified additional potential noncitizen registrations. The matter later [attracted](#) federal attention when the Department of Homeland Security subpoenaed voter registration records from Macomb County as part of an investigation into potential noncitizen voting.

Fusion Voting Proposal

In May 2026, the Michigan Common Sense Party and the Michigan Libertarian Party [filed](#) lawsuits in the Michigan Court of Claims and Ingham County Circuit Court challenging Michigan's longstanding prohibition on fusion voting, a practice that allows multiple political parties to nominate the same candidate and aggregate votes cast under each party label. The litigation [comes](#) as several groups have sought to expand political options for voters in competitive swing states without requiring them to choose between supporting a minor party and backing a candidate with a realistic chance of winning. Under current Michigan law, a candidate may [not](#) appear in more than one party column on the ballot, requiring candidates nominated by multiple parties to select a single party designation. The plaintiffs [argue](#) that the prohibition violates the Michigan Constitution by restricting the rights of political parties and voters to associate, express political preferences, and cast meaningful votes. If successful, the lawsuits would [permit](#) candidates to appear on the ballot under multiple party labels,

with votes cast on each party line combined toward the candidate's total vote. Even if this lawsuit does not result in the enactment of fusion voting, it may be a symptom of growing dissatisfaction with both the [Democratic](#) and [Republican](#) parties in one of the country's most significant swing states.

The Divided State Legislature: Conflicts and Bill Proposals

During the 2025–2026 legislative session, Michigan's divided legislature advanced competing election legislation, reflecting broader disagreements over voter eligibility, election administration, and voting rights.

The Republican-controlled state House advanced several proposals focused on voter eligibility and election security. [House Resolution 244](#) urged the U.S. Congress to enact the federal Safeguard American Voter Eligibility (SAVE) Act, which would require documentary proof of U.S. citizenship to register to vote in federal elections. [House Bill 4765](#) similarly proposed requiring the Secretary of State to verify voter citizenship using state and federal databases, creating a “federal-only voter” designation for applicants whose citizenship could not be verified immediately. A voter in that category could cast a ballot only in races for federal office (president, U.S. Senate, and U.S. House) and not in state or local contests, until they supplied documentary proof of citizenship. The [bill](#) would also modify Michigan's automatic voter registration system to incorporate citizenship verification while preserving opportunities for applicants to later verify their citizenship and receive full voting eligibility. Modeled after the federal SAVE Act, [the bill passed](#) the state House along party lines and was then [referred](#) to the state Senate for consideration. The bill's sole sponsor, State Representative Jason Woolford (R), [stated](#) that the legislation would strengthen election integrity by ensuring that only U.S. citizens can vote and by adding safeguards to Michigan's election systems. Opponents [contended](#) that the legislation's identification requirements were insufficiently defined and could make voter registration more burdensome for eligible voters by requiring enhanced identification or additional documentation.

Legislation introduced in the Democratic-controlled state Senate has focused on expanding voting rights, increasing transparency, and supporting election administration. [Senate Bill 815](#) would move the annual filing deadline for candidate financial disclosure reports from May 15 to April 15, beginning in the 2027 election cycle. This move [would make](#) candidates' financial disclosures available before primary elections rather than after. In June 2026, the state Senate [passed](#) the Michigan Voting Rights Act (Senate Bills [961](#), [962](#), [963](#), and [964](#)), and it was [sent](#) to the state House for consideration. These bills would prohibit the state government and local governments from enacting policies that would reduce voting access for protected classes, create a Michigan Voting Rights Assistance Fund and the Michigan Voting and Elections Database—a research center, built with a Michigan public university, that would preserve election data and support training on election administration—and expand election accessibility practices, among other changes.

Despite broader disagreements over election policy, state lawmakers from both parties advanced several bipartisan election administration reforms during the 2025–2026 legislative session. In March 2026, the state Senate [approved Senate Bills 691–698](#), a bipartisan package that would move Michigan's primary election from August to May beginning in 2028 while shifting the state's regular May election to February. State lawmakers from both parties have also [introduced](#) companion constitutional amendments that would move the nomination of Michigan's Attorney General and Secretary of State from party conventions to statewide primary elections beginning in 2030. As of July 2026, however, none of these proposals have passed both chambers.

Absentee Ballot Stubs Controversy

Michigan law [requires](#) election officials processing absentee ballots to compare the unique number printed on a ballot's detachable stub with the corresponding number on the ballot return envelope as part of the ballot verification process. In 2024, Secretary of State Jocelyn Benson issued guidance directing election officials to count ballots with

missing or mismatched stubs as “[challenged](#)” ballots if no other issues were identified, preserving the ballots for review in the event of an election contest. The Republican National Committee, the Michigan Republican Party, and Chesterfield Township Clerk Cindy Berry [challenged](#) that guidance, arguing that state law required such ballots to be rejected. In June 2026, the [Michigan Court of Appeals](#) reversed a lower court ruling, holding that Michigan election law requires inspectors to compare ballot stub numbers but does not require ballots to be rejected when the numbers do not match or when a stub is missing. The ruling [allowed](#) the existing guidance to remain in effect ahead of the August 2026 primary, although the decision may still be appealed to the Michigan Supreme Court.

Past Election Integrity Concerns & Expectations for 2026

Following the 2020 election, Michigan has experienced repeated disputes over the certification of election results. In 2020, two Republican members of the Wayne County Board of Canvassers initially [refused](#) to certify the county's election results before reversing their decision following significant public and legal pressure. In 2024, Delta County canvassers initially [refused](#) to certify the results of a local recall election after outside groups raised unsupported concerns about voting machines, but reversed course. That same year, the ACLU of Michigan [filed](#) a preemptive lawsuit against a Kalamazoo County canvasser who suggested he might refuse to certify the November election. [Proposal 2](#) and its implementing legislation strengthened the framework, although the 2024 incidents demonstrates that [disputes](#) can still occur.

As of July 2026, there have been no comparable incidents or credible public reports indicating that county or state canvassing boards intend to refuse certification of the 2026 election. However, Michigan's recent history makes certification an issue worth monitoring.

Primary Crossover Voting Confusion

Michigan is an [open primary state](#), meaning voters do not register with a political party and may choose either the Democratic or Republican ballot in a primary election. However, when casting their votes, voters must cast all of their partisan votes within a

single party column. Selecting candidates from both parties, known as "[crossover voting](#)," invalidates the partisan portion of the ballot while leaving nonpartisan contests and ballot measures unaffected.

Despite [ballot instructions](#) warning voters not to "split" their vote, election officials [estimate](#) that thousands of partisan votes are rejected during each August primary because of crossover voting. In Macomb County alone, nearly [6,300 ballots](#) (3.6% of all ballots cast) had their partisan votes rejected because of crossover voting in the 2022 primary, while analysis from Washtenaw County suggests approximately [1,400 ballots](#) (1.5% of ballots cast) were similarly affected. Election officials report that the issue [disproportionately affects](#) absentee voters, who do not receive the real-time tabulator warnings available to in-person voters and may not realize their partisan votes were not counted.

Recent Policy and Law Changes

Changes to the Automatic Voter Registration Process

Michigan voters passed a [constitutional initiative](#) in 2018 that adopted several new voting policies, including automatic voter registration (AVR). This change meant that Michigan residents would automatically be registered to vote when they applied or renewed a driver's license or state-issued personal ID card, except in cases where the resident declined to be registered or was ineligible. This process was implemented by the Michigan Secretary of State and the Michigan Department of State in [September 2019](#) by adding an "opt-out" box to driver's license and personal ID card applications.

Since the 2024 general election, the most notable change to the AVR system modifies when Michigan residents have the opportunity to "opt out" of registering. In 2023, Governor Gretchen Whitmer signed Public Acts [260](#), [261](#), [262](#), and [268](#), which created a new opt-out procedure for the AVR system. Instead of having an "opt-out" box on the

application for a driver's license or personal ID card, the Michigan Department of State now mails each newly registered voter a notice that confirms their registration. This notice [provides](#) a form and an envelope with pre-paid postage that the voter can fill out and send back to remove their registration from the Qualified Voter File (QVF). This change went into effect on June 1, 2026.

Standardizing Term Start Dates to Protect UOCAVA Ballots

In late June 2026, the state legislature and Governor Whitmer enacted new, bipartisan legislation (Public Acts [17](#), [18](#), [19](#), and [20](#) of 2026) to implement provisions of [Proposal 2 of 2022](#). [Among other changes](#), Proposal 2 requires that ballots from military or overseas voters (also known as [UOCAVA](#) voters) be counted if they are postmarked by Election Day. The changes implemented by the four new bills passed in June aim to ensure that all votes are counted before elected officials take office. Public Acts 19 and 20 (originally Senate Bills [240](#) and [241](#)) set [uniform start dates](#) for township and village elected officials; no local elected official may take office before December 1. Similarly, Public Acts 17 and 18 (originally House Bills [4358](#) and [4359](#)) create the same start date restriction for city and village officers. Under this timeline, [UOCAVA ballots will be counted](#), and [voting results will be certified](#) before any elected official is sworn into office. The bipartisan effort was characterized by lawmakers as “[cleanup](#)” legislation that made improvements to an “[impractical](#)” system where elected officials could be sworn in before results were certified.

AI/Deepfake Political Ad Disclosure Laws

Michigan became the [fifth state](#) to enact legislation regulating artificial intelligence (AI) usage in elections when Governor Whitmer signed House Bills [5141](#) and [5144](#) alongside other election-related bills in 2023. These bills require political advertisements to disclose any AI used to create the ad (House Bill 5141), and ban any “[materially deceptive media](#)” produced with AI without disclosure that aims [to harm a candidate's electoral prospects](#) (House Bill 5144). [Violating this law](#) constitutes a misdemeanor, and offenders must serve jail time for up to 90 days, pay up to a \$500 fine, or both. A second

violation within five years is a felony and punishable by up to five years in jail, a \$1000 fine, or both. The disclosure requirement does not apply to advertisements “[that constitute satire or parody](#).” The criminal prohibition has no parody exception, but does not apply to media that carries a prominent disclaimer stating that it has been manipulated by technical means and that it depicts speech or conduct that did not occur.

Additionally, in 2025, Michigan passed [Public Act 11](#), which punishes creators of “deep fakes” of other individuals if 1) the creator knew the creation and dissemination of the deepfake would cause harm to the individual portrayed, 2) the deepfake shows intimate body parts or sexual activity, and 3) the portrayed individual is identifiable in the deepfake.

While these laws show that lawmakers are trying to mitigate harmful impacts of AI in election campaigns, they do not deter candidates from using AI for advertisements or prevent them from creating violent images depicting politicians being harmed. For example, AI was used to generate [several ads](#) in Michigan’s Republican gubernatorial primary this year, with one ad showing candidate Aric Nesbitt driving a tractor at Governor Whitmer, who was lying on the ground in the deepfake (pictured below).



This photo is a still from an ad circulated by Republican gubernatorial candidate Aric Nesbitt's campaign. It depicts current Michigan Governor Gretchen Whitmer lying on the ground while Nesbitt drives a tractor toward her. Image is from [Aric Nesbitt's X account](#).

After facing backlash for the ad, Nesbitt's campaign defended the video as a “[parody](#)” and maintained that it complied with Michigan's AI regulations. Another ad showed Perry Johnson chasing down John James, ending with Johnson tackling James on a golf course. These ads may comply with Michigan's AI disclosure requirements, but they demonstrate the limits of laws aimed at deception rather than at violent imagery. Whether these laws apply to federal contests is disputed. Both statutes cover federal races on their face, but the Michigan Bureau of Elections [has said](#) the requirements do not regulate candidates for federal office because state law is preempted by federal statute—a reading the law's sponsor disputes. If the Bureau's interpretation stands, ads in U.S. Senate or House contests would fall outside the state's requirements.

2026 Primary Election Analysis

Notable Results

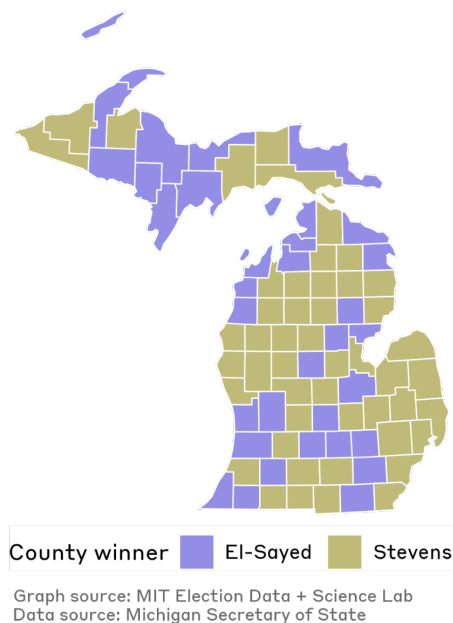
U.S. Senate Race

One of the highest-profile primary contests in the country has been the Democratic primary for U.S. Senate in Michigan. The two frontrunners in this contest were U.S. Representative Haley Stevens, who has served in Michigan's 11th congressional district [since 2019](#), and Dr. Abdul El-Sayed, an [epidemiologist, educator, and former city and county health director](#). This contest has been viewed as a litmus test for the Democratic Party as it continues to face internal debate between moderates and progressives about the future of the party. In this primary, Stevens was supported by much of the party's leadership, including [U.S. Senate Minority Leader Chuck Schumer](#), and was endorsed by [Michigan Governor Gretchen Whitmer](#) and [Senator Gary Peters](#) (whom Stevens ran to replace). Stevens positioned herself as a moderate Democrat, advocating to save [Michigan manufacturing jobs](#) and voicing support for Israel. Her opponent, El-Sayed, was endorsed by many progressive leaders, including [Senator Bernie Sanders](#), [Representative Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez](#), and [Senator Elizabeth Warren](#). In contrast to Stevens, El-Sayed has run on more progressive messaging, advocating for abolishing ICE and expanding healthcare coverage and condemning the [Israeli government](#).

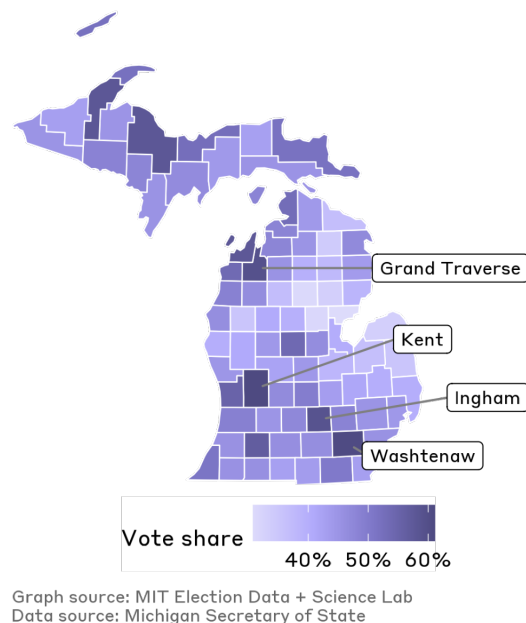
Ultimately, over 1.5 million votes were cast in this contest, setting a [new voter turnout record](#) in Michigan in non-presidential Democratic primaries going back to at least 1998. The race was called for El-Sayed the morning after the election; his margin of victory was 1 percentage point ([48.5% to 47.5%](#)). In the general election, he will face Republican Mike Rogers, a former congressman and the Republican nominee for the 2024 U.S. Senate contest in Michigan. Rogers was uncontested in the 2026 Republican primary.

El-Sayed's victory [echoed Democratic primaries across the country in 2026](#), in which voters have favored progressive insurgents over moderates backed by party leaders, with support for Israel a recurring dividing line. This primary contest was one of a string of victories for progressive candidates this cycle, many of whom overcame heavy spending by groups opposed to their candidacy, including those affiliated with the [American Israel Public Affairs Committee](#)—which became a flashpoint in the Michigan race, where the organization spent more than \$30 million spent supporting Stevens, its largest investment in any race this cycle as of writing.

Democratic U.S. Senate Primary Results

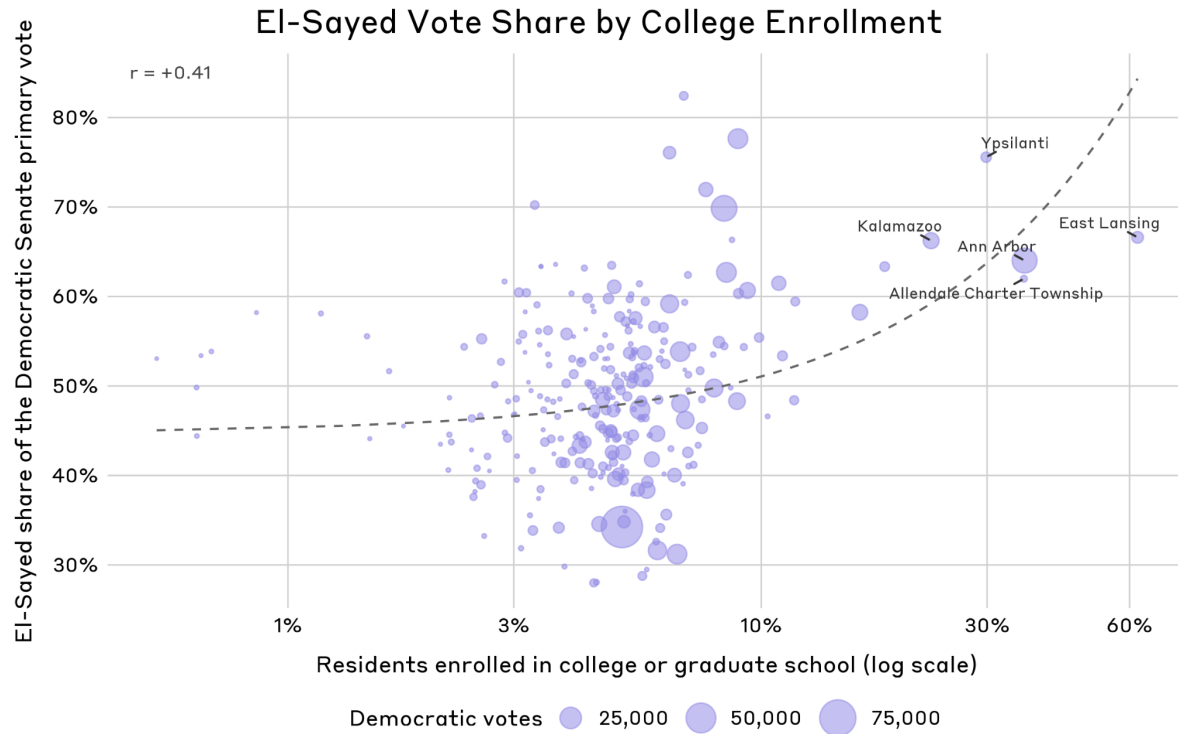


El-Sayed Vote Share



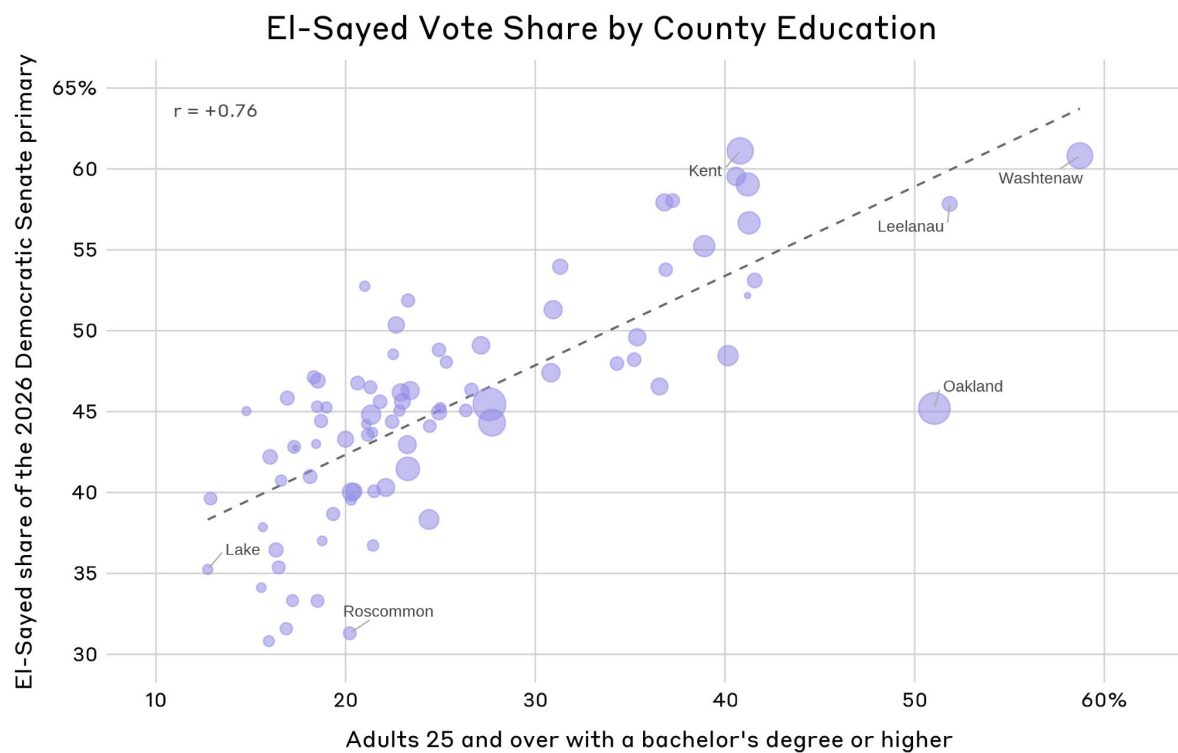
The two figures above depict the county-level breakdown of the Democratic primary results for the U.S. Senate race in Michigan. For the figure on the left, each county is shaded by the candidate who received the most votes in that county. The figure on the right is shaded by the share of the vote that went to Abdul El-Sayed, the winner of the primary. Darker hues of blue correspond to a higher vote share that went to El-Sayed.

While El-Sayed won the most votes overall and thus won the election, Stevens won more counties, receiving the highest vote share in 49 of Michigan's 83 counties. El-Sayed's victory came from strong performances in counties such as Kent, Washtenaw, Grand Traverse, and Ingham, while Wayne, Oakland, and Macomb—Michigan's three most populous counties—each saw him win less than 46% of the vote. Washtenaw and Ingham are home to the University of Michigan and Michigan State University, respectively, indicative of El-Sayed's strong performance among young, more highly educated voters. While Kent and Grand Traverse do not host major universities, they are among the state's most highly educated counties, according to the [U.S. Census American Community Survey](#), with around 40% of their adult population holding a bachelor's degree or higher—well above the statewide rate of 32.4%.



Graph source: MIT Election Data + Science Lab
Data source: County clerk precinct reports; ACS 2024 5-year

Counties: Baraga, Genesee, Ingham, Iron, Kalamazoo, Kent, Leelanau, Macomb, Oakland, Ottawa, Washtenaw, Wayne.

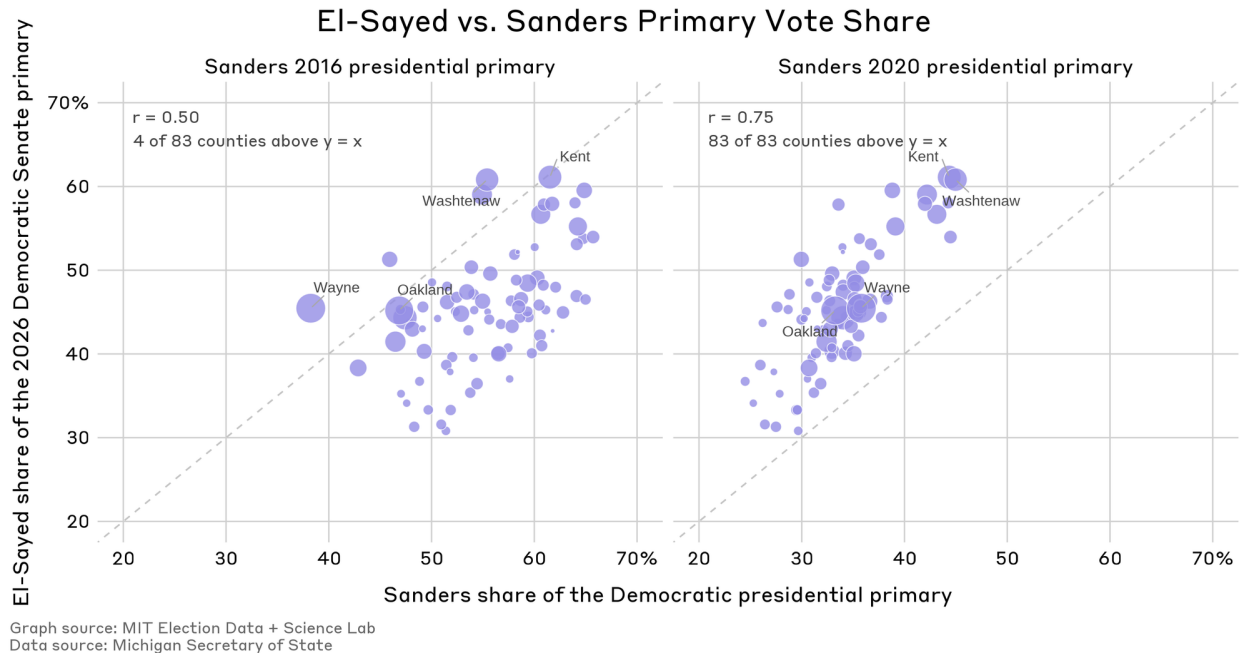


Graph source: MIT Election Data + Science Lab
Data source: Michigan Secretary of State and ACS 2024 5-year estimates

All 83 Michigan counties.

The first figure above shows El-Sayed's vote share by jurisdiction for the twelve counties that publish precinct results, compared with the percentage of residents enrolled in college or graduate school; the x-axis is plotted on a log scale, since enrollment is heavily skewed toward a handful of campus towns. Each point corresponds to one township or city and is sized by the number of Democratic votes. The second figure compares each county's percentage of adults age 25 or older with a bachelor's degree or higher with El-Sayed's vote share. The two variables show a strong, positive correlation ($r = 0.76$).

East Lansing (located in Ingham County and home to Michigan State University), Ann Arbor (located in Washtenaw County and home to the University of Michigan), and Kalamazoo (located in Kalamazoo County and home to Western Michigan University) voted for El-Sayed at higher rates than other precincts within their counties. Overall, precincts with large student populations were areas where El-Sayed received a significant majority of the vote. This suggests that support from university communities was a major reason for his strong performance in several counties in Southern Michigan. Similarly, El-Sayed's vote share was also higher in counties where more adults had bachelor's degrees (or higher), supporting the idea that El-Sayed was able to [clinch the nomination](#) by winning over young people and the highly educated.



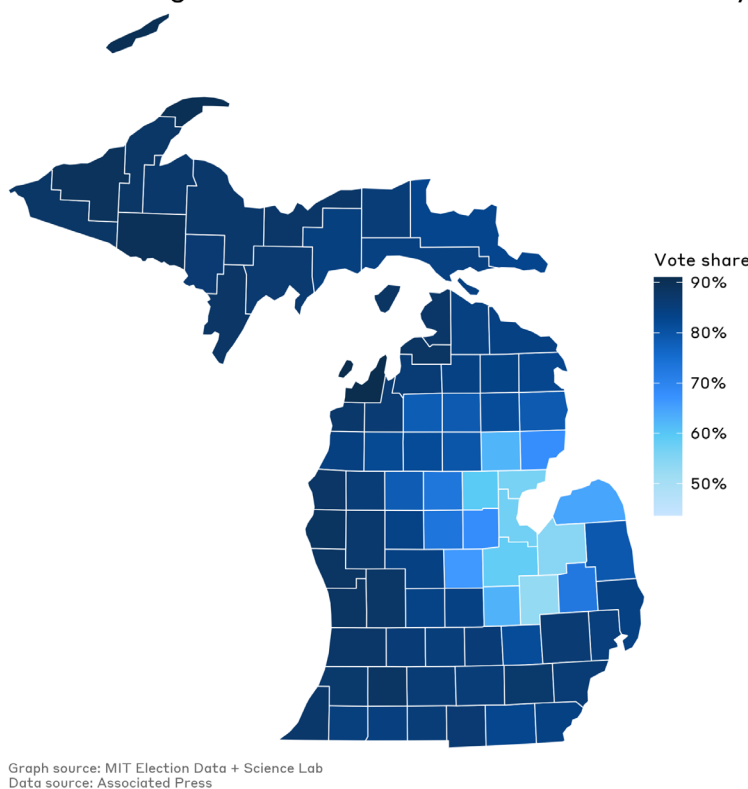
This figure compares El-Sayed's performance in each county with how well Senator Bernie Sanders, another progressive candidate, did in the 2016 presidential primary (left) and the 2020 presidential primary (right). Each point represents a county, and more populated counties have larger points. The $y = x$ lines on each of the two plots denote where points would fall if El-Sayed's vote share was the same as Senator Sanders'.

El-Sayed's victory was viewed as a [breakthrough victory](#) for the progressive wing of the Democratic Party. However, this primary was not the only time that a progressive candidate has won over Michiganders in recent years. Senator Bernie Sanders sought the Democratic nomination in the 2016 and 2020 presidential elections, and [narrowly won](#) the Michigan primary in 2016. Comparing Sanders' primary vote share in 2016 with El-Sayed's in 2026 in the left panel of the above figure, El-Sayed generally performed worse across most Michigan counties, except in larger counties with large populations of college students like Wayne, Washtenaw, and Ingham. El-Sayed's vote share across counties was typically smaller than Sanders' vote share in the presidential primary a decade earlier; he secured the nomination through significant support from a few counties in the southern part of the state.

Gubernatorial Race

The current Michigan Governor, Gretchen Whitmer, is term-limited and cannot seek a third term, so neither the Democratic nor Republican gubernatorial primaries included an incumbent. The Democratic primary was uncompetitive; current Michigan Secretary of State Jocelyn Benson decisively defeated Genesee County Sheriff Chris Swanson. Benson received over [83%](#) of the vote and [won all 83 counties](#). Swanson accumulated endorsements from [numerous](#) labor unions but [struggled](#) to compete with Benson's fundraising and statewide recognition. Benson performed strongly across the state, winning 62 of 83 counties by over 80%. Her weakest performance was in the Flint/Saginaw corridor, likely as a result of Swanson's [level of labor endorsement](#) in those counties. Even so, Benson still carried Genesee County, Swanson's home county, with nearly 53% of the vote.

2026 Michigan Democratic Gubernatorial Primary

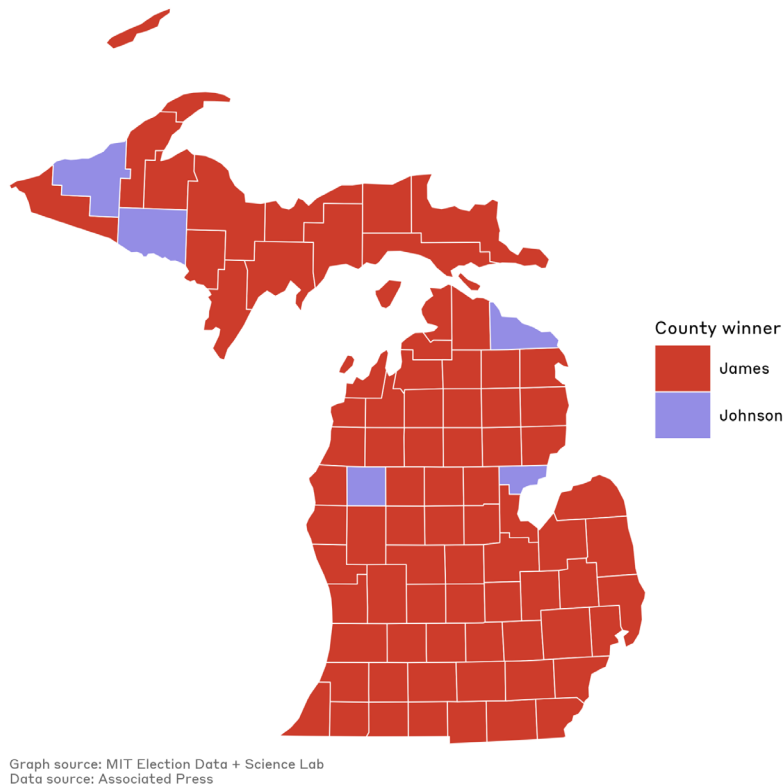


The figure above depicts the county-level breakdown of the 2026 Michigan Democratic gubernatorial primary. Each county is shaded by the share of the vote received by Jocelyn

Benson, the winner of the primary. Darker hues of blue correspond to a higher vote share for Benson.

The Republican primary was a more contentious, four-candidate contest, headlined by U.S. Representative John James, who has served Michigan's 10th congressional district since 2023, and Perry Johnson, a businessman who previously ran for governor in 2022. Trump endorsed James on June 22, saying James has the “[courage and wisdom to deliver strong results](#)” for Michigan. Following the endorsement, Michigan Senate Minority Leader Aric Nesbitt [dropped](#) out and endorsed James. Former Attorney General Mike Cox followed, saying Trump's endorsement had placed James “[out of reach](#)” in the primary. Both remained on the ballot despite suspending their campaigns, and went on to draw 13.00% (Cox) and 1.75% (Nesbitt) of the primary vote. Johnson, despite spending nearly [\\$32 million](#) of his own money in what became the most expensive gubernatorial primary in Michigan history, lost to James by roughly [15 percentage points](#). Johnson carried only five counties, all small and rural, concentrated in the Upper Peninsula and northern Lower Peninsula, while James won every major population center in the state and saw his strongest support in southwest Michigan.

2026 Michigan Republican Gubernatorial Primary



The figure above depicts the county-level breakdown of the 2026 Michigan Republican gubernatorial primary. Each county is shaded by the candidate who received the most votes. Counties won by John James are shown in red, while the counties won by Perry Johnson are shown in purple.

7th Congressional District

Michigan's 7th Congressional District is expected to be [one of the country's most competitive U.S. House races](#) in 2026 and could play an important role in determining control of the House of Representatives. The district encompasses all of Clinton, Ingham, Livingston, and Shiawassee counties, most of Eaton County, and portions of Genesee and Oakland counties. Republican incumbent Tom Barrett, an Army veteran and former state legislator, is seeking a second term after [flipping](#) the open seat in 2024. Barrett is widely [viewed](#) as one of the Republican Party's strongest pickups during the

2024 election cycle and one of the most at risk for 2026. Barrett [ran](#) unopposed in the Republican primary.

Democrats nominated Lansing political organizer and [Sunrise Movement](#) co-founder William Lawrence after he defeated former U.S. Ambassador to Ukraine Bridget Brink and retired Navy SEAL Matt Maasdam, winning about [43%](#) of the vote in the Democratic primary. The Democratic primary attracted national attention because it [highlighted](#) broader ideological divisions within the Democratic Party. Lawrence, [endorsed](#) by Senator Bernie Sanders, consolidated support among progressive voters, while Brink and Maasdam split support among more moderate Democrats. Lawrence [campaigned](#) on progressive priorities, including Medicare for All, while also making [opposition](#) to hyperscale data center development a defining issue of his campaign. Following the primary, Democratic leaders quickly [united](#) behind Lawrence, and the race is expected to attract significant national attention and outside spending through November.

8th Congressional District

The Republican primary in Michigan's 8th Congressional District produced one of the most unexpected results of Michigan's 2026 primary elections. The seat is currently held by first-term Democratic Rep. Kristen McDonald Rivet, who is seeking reelection in a district that [Donald Trump carried](#) in 2024. Retired engineer Thomas J. Smith won [50.44%](#) of the Republican primary vote, defeating Trump-endorsed Navy veteran and former law enforcement officer Amir Hassan, who received 33.19%, and Al Lemmo, who received 16.37%. Smith had [suspended](#) his campaign in mid-July and endorsed Lemmo, but his name remained on the ballot and he ultimately won the primary by more than [17](#) percentage points. Hassan entered the primary as the [clear favorite](#), securing Trump's endorsement and raising roughly \$700,000, compared with just \$1,850 reported by Smith. His loss marked the first [defeat](#) of a Trump-endorsed congressional candidate in the 2026 election cycle. The result also prompted some discussion of Islamophobia among Republican primary voters, including [anti-Muslim rhetoric](#) from far-right

figures responding to Hassan's loss. Smith has since [returned](#) to the race and will face McDonald Rivet in November.

13th Congressional District

Michigan's 13th Congressional District, encompassing much of Detroit, produced one of the state's most significant primary upsets. Democratic incumbent Shri Thanedar, first elected in 2022, was [defeated](#) in the Democratic primary by state Representative Donovan McKinney by roughly a 4-point margin. The district leans heavily Democratic, making McKinney the heavy favorite in the general election against Republican nominee T.P. Nykoriak, who ran [unopposed](#) in the Republican primary. McKinney, who has represented Michigan's [District 11](#) in the state House since 2025, [campaigned](#) on a progressive platform that emphasized a Green New Deal, reducing corporate influence in politics, and ending U.S. military aid to Israel. He was endorsed by [Senator Bernie Sanders](#) and several Detroit-area elected officials, and his victory was viewed as part of a broader wave of progressive successes across Michigan's Democratic primaries. The race also carried symbolic significance because McKinney's victory is [expected](#) to restore Black representation for Detroit in Congress. Thanedar's [election in 2022](#) marked the first time since [1955](#) that Detroit did not have a Black representative in the U.S. House following Representative Rashida Tlaib's [move](#) to the neighboring 12th District after redistricting.

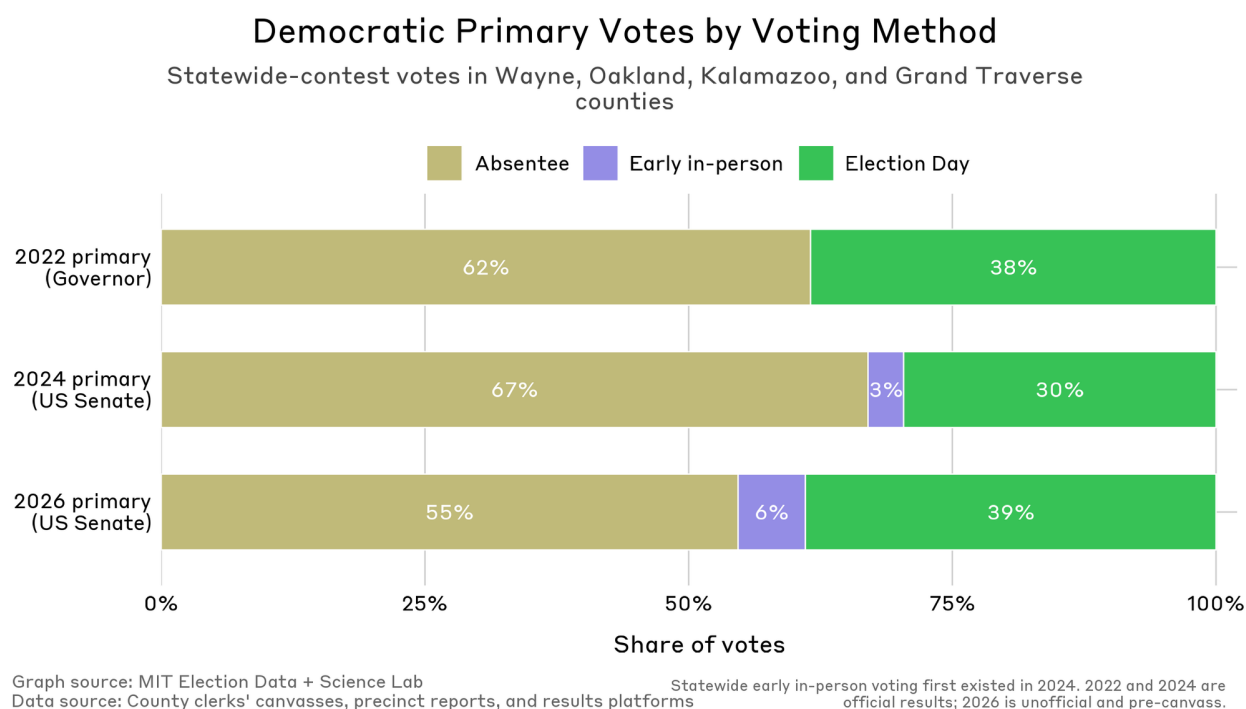
Voting Modes

Michigan's official results do not report votes by how the ballot was cast, but the Department of State's [voter data dashboard](#) tracks the three ways Michiganders can vote: absentee, early in-person, and at the polls on Election Day. In the August primary, voters largely chose to vote before Election Day, returning [1.3 million absentee ballots and casting around 139,000 ballots at early voting sites](#)—together, about 59% of the roughly 2.5 million ballots cast.

That continues the pattern seen in Michigan's August primaries since [Proposal 3](#) established no-excuse absentee voting in 2018: a majority of primary ballots now arrive

before Election Day, mostly by mail. Early in-person voting remains a small share of the total ballots cast in primaries, but plays a much larger role in high-turnout general elections. In the November 2024 general election, early votes accounted for 21% of all ballots statewide, with absentee and Election Day voting each taking about 39%.

In the four counties that reported votes by mode in each of the last three August primaries (Wayne, Oakland, Kalamazoo, and Grand Traverse, constituting about two-fifths of this year's Democratic Senate primary vote), the 2026 primary was actually the least mail-heavy of the four, as the figure below shows. Absentee ballots accounted for 62% of the counties' Democratic statewide-contest votes in 2022 and 67% in 2024, but were just 55% of all Democratic votes cast in 2026. That share fell not because absentee voting shrank (absentee votes grew 30% over 2024) but because more of the electorate showed up in person: Election Day votes more than doubled from 2024, and early in-person votes doubled their share, from 3% to 6%.

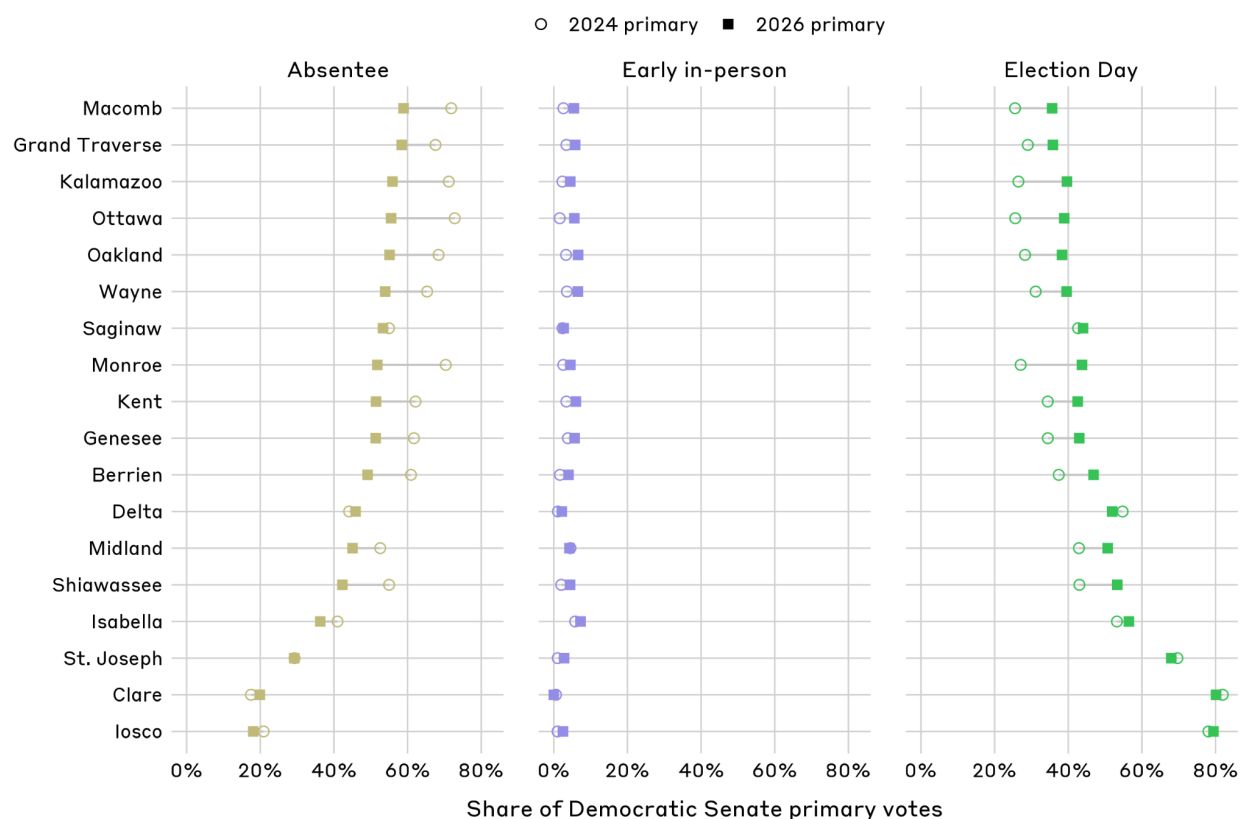


This figure shows the share of Democratic statewide-contest votes cast by each voting method in the last three August primaries—the 2022 gubernatorial primary and the 2024 and 2026 Senate primaries—in Wayne, Oakland, Kalamazoo, and Grand Traverse counties, the three where

results by voting method are available for all three elections. Absentee ballots are shown in gold, early in-person votes in purple, and Election Day votes in green. Statewide early in-person voting first existed in 2024. Results for 2022 and 2024 are official; 2026 results are unofficial. Data from county clerks' official canvasses and precinct reports.

This shift was not confined to Wayne and Oakland, which together cast about nine in ten of those four counties' votes. The figure below tracks the same shift across the eighteen counties that reported results by voting method in both primaries, with one panel per method. In the absentee panel, the 2026 square sits to the left of the 2024 circle in almost every county: the absentee share of the Democratic vote fell in sixteen of the eighteen, by a median of 10 percentage points. The two in-person panels are the mirror image, with the early in-person share increasing in sixteen counties and the Election Day share increasing in fifteen. The record participation in this primary came disproportionately in person.

County Vote Mode Shares in the 2024 and 2026 August Primaries



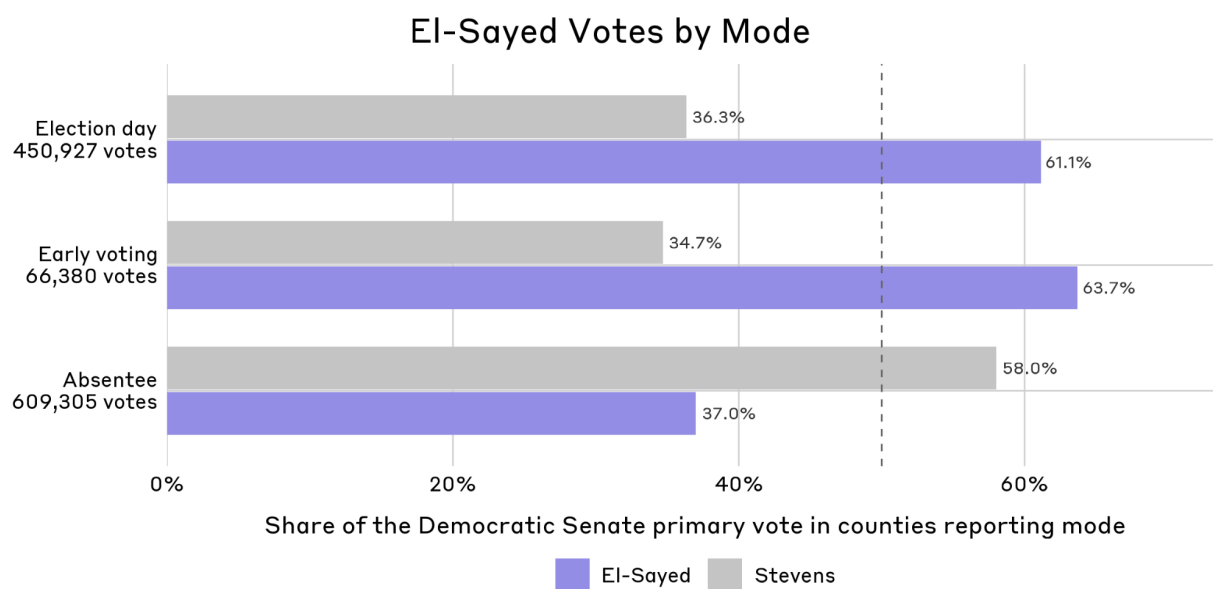
Graph source: MIT Election Data + Science Lab
Data source: County clerks' canvasses, precinct reports, and results platforms

This figure shows each county's share of Democratic statewide-contest votes cast by each voting mode in the August 2024 primary (open circles) and the August 2026 primary (filled squares), for the eighteen counties reporting results by voting mode in both years. Absentee shares are shown in gold, early in-person in purple, and Election Day in green, with counties ordered by their 2026 absentee share. Results for 2024 are official; 2026 results are unofficial. Data were compiled by the MIT Election Lab from county clerks' canvasses, precinct reports, and results platforms.

Despite this, absentee ballots remained a majority of the primary vote. One driver of the primary's absentee dominance is the permanent absentee ballot list created by [Proposal 2 in 2022](#), which lets voters sign up once to automatically receive an absentee ballot for every election. The list now includes about [1.9 million voters](#), and according to the dashboard's county figures, it generated more than nine in ten of the primary's absentee ballot requests in all but one of Michigan's 83 counties, up from roughly three in four

requests at the 2024 general election. In practice, the permanent list means a large share of the Michigan electorate now receives a ballot at home without taking any action.

How people voted also shaped the Senate race itself. Twenty-four counties' election reports (covering all five of the state's largest counties and 74% of the statewide Democratic Senate vote) break out results by how ballots were cast, and those returns show a clear split. As the figure below shows, Stevens won these counties' absentee ballots 58.0% to 37.0%, while El-Sayed won their Election Day votes by nearly the mirror image, 61.1% to 36.3%, and their early in-person votes by an even wider one. Absentee ballots were 54% of the twenty-four counties' Democratic Senate votes. The pattern was remarkably uniform: across all 191 cities and townships in the nine counties with precinct-level mode data where at least 200 Democratic Senate votes were cast, El-Sayed ran ahead of his absentee share on Election Day in every single one, by a median of about 25 points.



Graph source: MIT Election Data + Science Lab
Data source: County clerks' precinct reports and election results platforms

24 counties publishing results by mode,
casting 74% of the statewide vote.

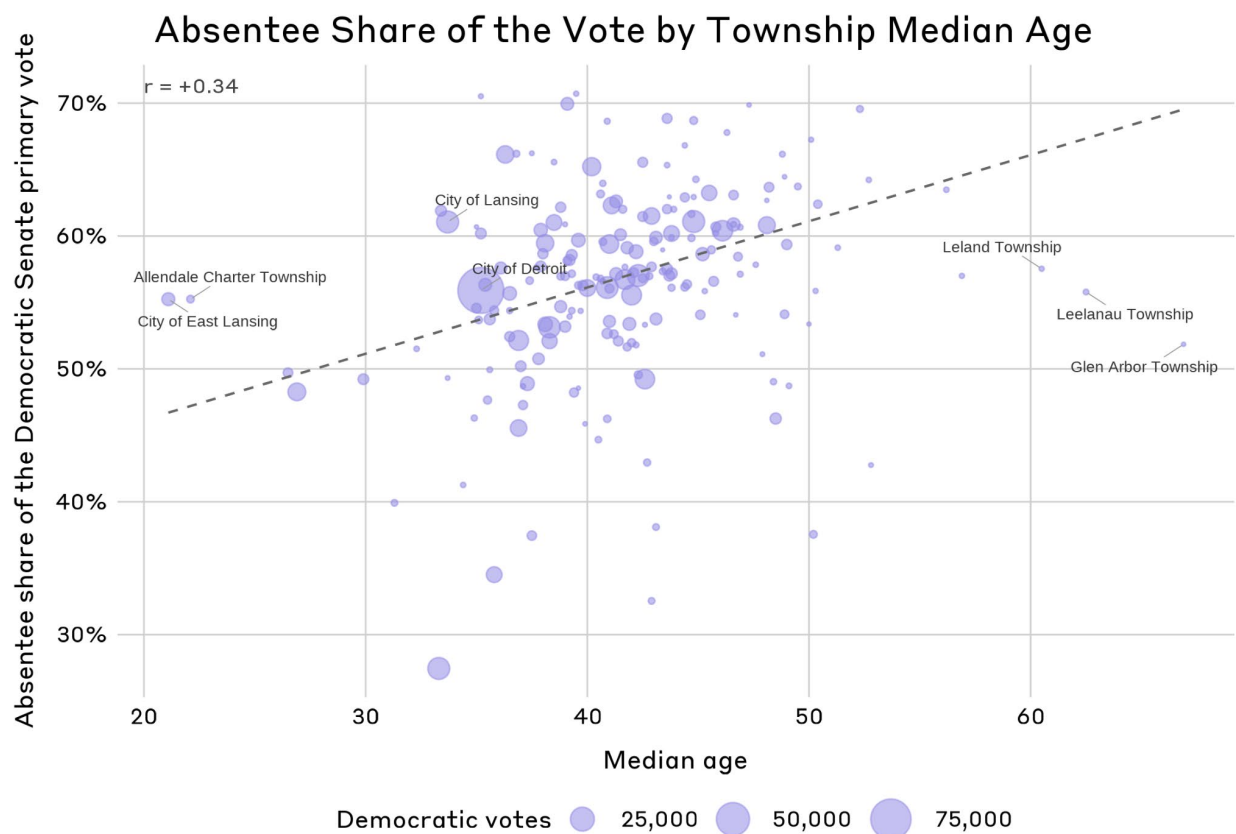
This figure shows the share of the Democratic U.S. Senate primary vote won by El-Sayed (purple) and Stevens (gray) for each way ballots were cast, in the 24 counties whose election reports break out results by voting method. The number of votes cast by each method across

those counties is listed on the left. The dashed line marks 50%. Data were compiled from county clerks' precinct reports and election results platforms, and are unofficial.

Why did absentee and in-person voters split so differently? The returns cannot answer that on their own, but the polling points to two overlapping explanations. The first is timing. Absentee ballots went out about six weeks before Election Day, and the race moved sharply inside that window: a [Detroit News/Glengariff poll](#) taken July 8–11 had Stevens ahead by 7 points, while an [Emerson College survey](#) conducted three weeks later had El-Sayed ahead 54% to 39%. By the second week of July, a fifth of likely primary voters said they had already returned a ballot, casting their votes while Stevens still led. The mid-July poll saw voters who had already returned an absentee ballot favoring Stevens 52% to 43%, and likely Election Day voters favoring El-Sayed 50% to 32%. The same pattern holds for early in-person votes: cast during the final nine days, when the polls showed El-Sayed ahead, they split like the Election Day vote.

The second explanation is related to who votes by mail in the first place. The same Emerson survey found Stevens' strongest support was among voters over 60, who backed her over El-Sayed 53% to 39% even as she trailed by 15 points overall, and voters 65 and older [vote early or by mail at the highest rates of any age group](#). Timing cannot be the whole story: mid-July voters who had not yet returned their absentee ballot, and so would cast it after the race had moved, still favored Stevens 60% to 33%, her widest margin of any group.

Michigan's own returns show the same relationship. Across the nine counties' cities and townships, and consistent with broader research on [who votes by mail](#), age predicts absentee use better than anything else. As the figure below shows, older communities cast far larger shares of their votes absentee (a correlation of +0.34, weighting communities by their votes)—a pattern that holds from the younger college towns to Leelanau County's retirement townships. Income and education add little once age is accounted for.



Graph source: MIT Election Data + Science Lab
 Data source: County clerk precinct reports; ACS 2024 5-year

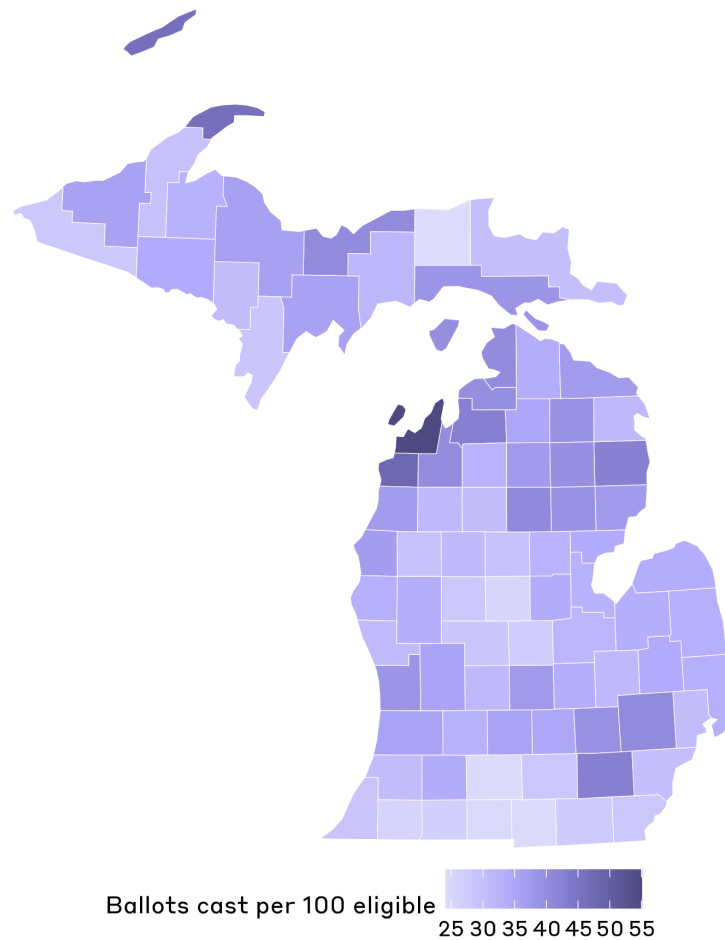
Counties: Baraga, Genesee, Ingham, Kalamazoo,
 Leelanau, Macomb, Oakland, Ottawa, Wayne.

This figure plots, for each city and township in the nine counties, the share of its Democratic Senate primary votes cast absentee against its residents' median age, with larger circles for places casting more votes. The dashed line shows the overall trend: older communities voted absentee at substantially higher rates. The correlation shown on the panel weights communities by their votes. Communities are labeled at the extremes. Data were compiled by the lab from county clerks' precinct reports and the 2024 American Community Survey.

Looking ahead to November, both recent history and the structure of Michigan's voting modes point the same way: a majority of ballots are likely to be cast before Election Day, anchored by the nearly two million registered voters who will receive absentee ballots automatically. Early in-person voting, a marginal mode in the primary, should claim a much larger share in the general election, as it did in 2024, when more than 1.2 million voters cast their ballots during the state's first statewide early voting period.

Voter Turnout

August 2026 Primary Turnout by County



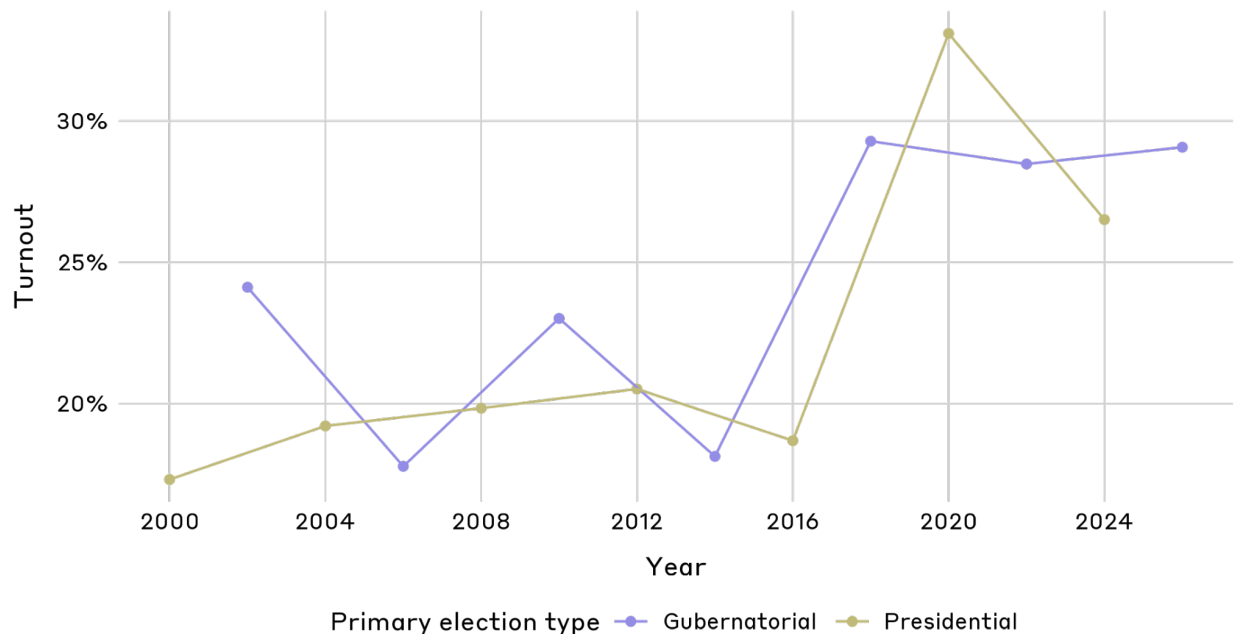
Graph source: MIT Election Data + Science Lab
Data source: Michigan Secretary of State; ACS 2024 5-year and 2020 Census

This figure shows the number of ballots cast in the 2026 primaries per 100 eligible voters in each county. Lighter shades of purple correspond to counties that had lower turnout rates and darker shades correspond to counties with higher turnout.

While there do not appear to be specific county-level patterns in voter turnout for the 2026 primary, statewide numbers show that participation was significant overall. According to the data published on Michigan's [voter data dashboard](#), 35% of active registered voters participated in the 2026 primary elections. This means over 2.5 million people cast a ballot, the largest number of Michiganders to turn out in a midterm primary [over the last fifty years](#). Primary turnout has remained elevated relative to most pre-2018

elections, and the 2026 primary set a modern midterm-primary record. In 2024, over [5.7 million](#) voters voted in the general election, a [2.3% increase](#) from the previous record set by the 2020 general election. While Michigan primary participation does not reach general election numbers, turnout in primaries has been increasing over time, even in midterm years like 2026.

Michigan Primary Turnout (Share of Voting-Eligible Population)



Graph source: MIT Election Data + Science Lab
Data source: Michigan Secretary of State and UF Election Lab

This figure shows how primary turnout has changed in Michigan from 2000 to 2026. Ballots cast come from the [Michigan Secretary of State](#); the voting-eligible population comes from the [University of Florida Election Lab](#), with 2026 using the latest available (2024) estimate. The gold line shows primary turnout during presidential election years, and the purple line shows primary turnout during midterm/gubernatorial election years. Michigan's gubernatorial races coincide with every midterm election year, so every federal election year is either a presidential election year or a Michigan gubernatorial election year.

Since 2016, primary turnout in Michigan has generally increased as Michigan has gained prominence as one of the nation's most important swing states; this trend is evident in both presidential and midterm election years. Though [participation in the Democratic](#)

[primary](#) likely drove high turnout rates during the 2026 primary elections, it appears as though record-breaking turnout has been a Michigan trend over the last few federal elections.

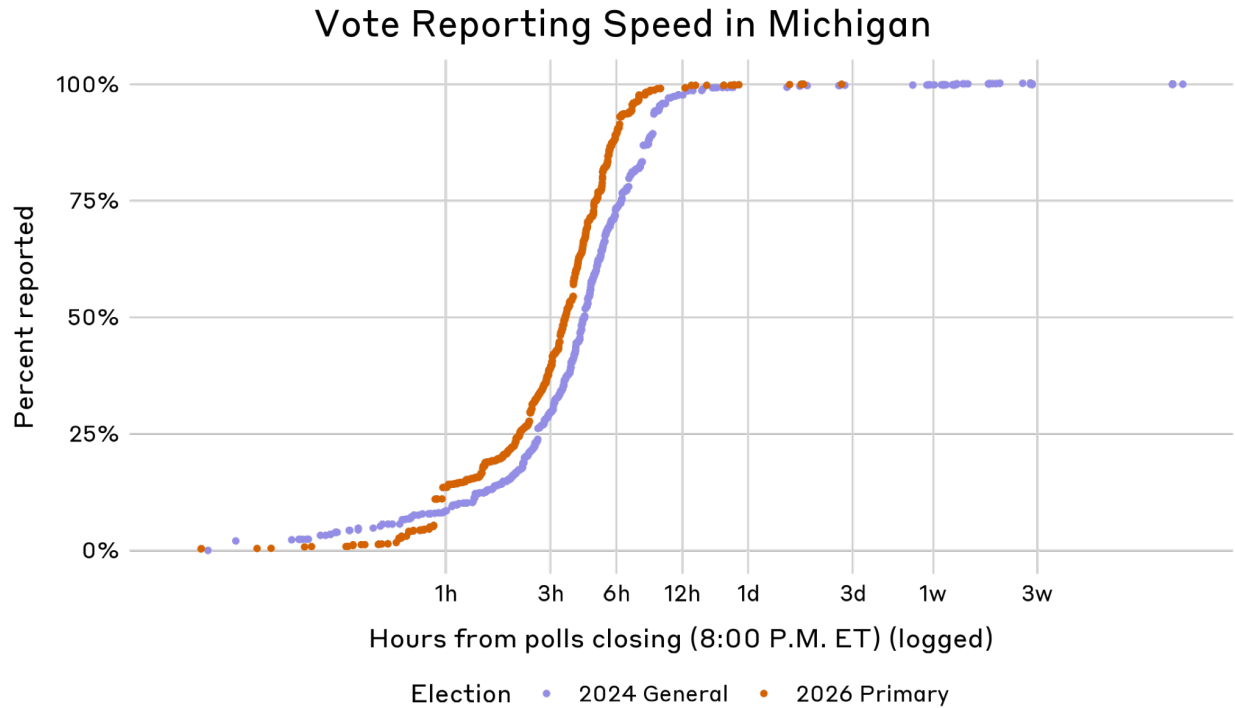
Election Reporting Timelines

Election Night:

Time	Description
8:00 pm	Polls close (though voters who are already in line by 8 pm may still vote).
8:00 pm–Midnight and beyond	Precinct results reported.
After election night***	Military and overseas absentee ballots will be added to the results.

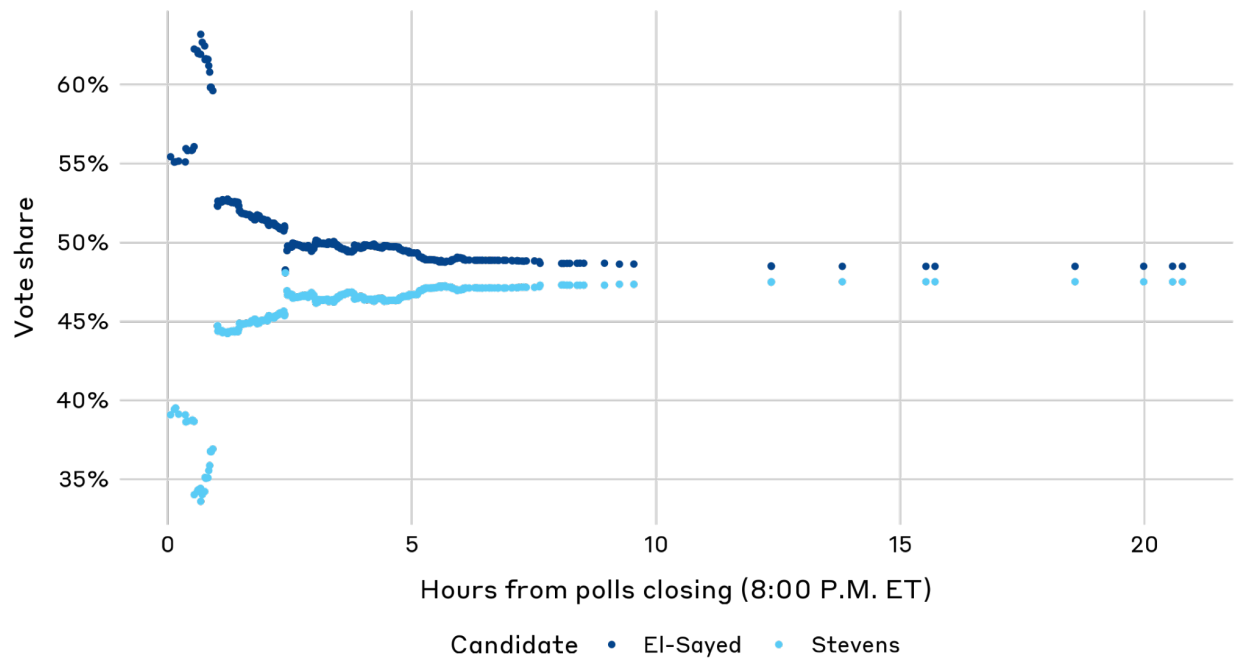
*** [After Election Night:](#)

- + The deadline for boards of county canvassers to meet to canvass the election is **Thursday, Nov. 5 at 9 am.**
- + The deadline for a voter to cure their signature on their absentee ballot envelope is **Friday, Nov. 6 at 5 pm.**
- + The deadline for a ballot submitted by a UOCAVA voter (that was sent on or before Election Day) to be received and counted is **Monday, Nov. 9.**
- + The deadline for local clerks to deliver UOCAVA ballots to the county clerk is **Tuesday, Nov. 10.**
- + The deadline for the boards of county canvassers to complete the canvass of the November General Election is **Tuesday, Nov. 17.**
- + The deadline for the Board of State Canvassers to meet to canvass the November General Election is **Monday, Nov. 23.**



Source: MIT Election Data + Science Lab

U.S. Senate Michigan Democratic Primary: Election Night Reporting



Source: MIT Election Data + Science Lab

The first figure above compares vote-reporting speed in Michigan in the 2024 general election and the 2026 primary. The 2024 general election is shown in purple, and the 2026 primary is shown in orange. The second figure shows how the vote shares for El-Sayed and Stevens

changed over time as more votes were being reported. El-Sayed's vote share is shown in navy and Stevens' is shown in light blue.

Vote reporting during the August 2026 primary occurred faster than in 2024 for most of the election night, as shown in the first figure above. Both elections were reported relatively quickly, especially compared with [Michigan's vote-reporting speed in 2020](#) during the global pandemic, suggesting Michigan may be on track for timely reporting in the 2026 general election. This vote-reporting data can also be used to examine why it took a long time to determine that El-Sayed won the Democratic primary for U.S. Senate. Though El-Sayed appeared to have a lead in the first hour or two after the polls closed, the race eventually narrowed as more votes for Stevens were reported, which made it more difficult to definitively call the race for El-Sayed.