



[The 2024 Michigan Presidential Primaries Highlight the Salience of the War on Gaza](#)

Michigan has long been a decisive state in U.S. presidential elections. In the 2016 election, former President Trump won Michigan by less than 11,000 votes; and then in 2020, Michigan helped deliver President Joe Biden's eventual victory as he won the state by around 154,000 votes. These thin margins demonstrate the anticipated importance of Michigan in the upcoming 2024 general election. It is a battleground state with 15 electoral votes, and candidates who have won Michigan in the general election have historically tended to win the presidency. In this way, the results of the Michigan presidential primaries help give us insight into what to potentially expect come November. On the Republican side of the Michigan primaries, the results showed that Trump is the clear heavy front-runner to win the party's nomination, beating Nikki Haley by a wide gap of around 68% to 26%. Trump has been sweeping Haley in primaries across the nation, suggesting that he is near certain to be the 2024 presidential candidate for the Republican Party. Surveys conducted do however indicate that some Republicans – especially college-educated, moderate, and suburban voters – have reservations about voting for Trump due to his array of legal woes. This segment of the electorate may end up gravitating towards third-party candidates. On the Democratic side of the primaries, incumbent President Biden unsurprisingly won with 81% of votes, but a noteworthy 13% - which amounts to over 100,000 voters, cast their ballots as "uncommitted" due to backlash against Biden's support of Israel's destructive War on Gaza that has killed nearly 30,000 Palestinians. Although it still registers as a presidential primary victory for Biden, the results signal that Democratic voters in Michigan are not nearly as enthusiastic as they were during the last cycle. In 2020, a total of 840,360 Michiganders voted for Biden in the Democratic primary compared to around 625,000 this time around. Several factors can explain this shortcoming, but the most significant among them is that many Michigan Democrats disapprove of Biden's handling of the War on Gaza.

A grassroots campaign called "Listen to Michigan" was thrown together to unite anti-war and pro-human rights Michiganders. Voters were urged to choose the "uncommitted" slot in the Democratic Party's presidential primary, as a statement protest vote denouncing the Biden administration's stance on the Gaza War. The aim of casting an "uncommitted" vote, according to "Listen to Michigan" campaign manager Layla Elabed, was to warn President Biden that voters were dissatisfied with his position and that he could lose key swing state votes in the general election if a permanent ceasefire was not put into place. The original goal of the group was to garner at least 10,000 votes, a similar margin to Trump's victory total back in 2016. In the end, over 100,000 people, around 13% of all Democratic primary participants, decided to vote "uncommitted" – a substantial number more than 10 times higher than the stated goal. Considering that the presidential general election margins in 2016 and 2020 were between 10,000 and 155,000 total votes, this is an amount that could have a major impact on whether Michigan goes "blue" or "red" come November.

The notable number of "uncommitted" voters appears to have come from two key demographics in the state, Arab-Americans and young voters. Michigan is home to more than 310,000 people of Middle Eastern and North African descent, which comprises about 3.1% of the state's total population. According to NPR, 70% of Michigan's heavily Arab-American counties supported Biden back in 2020. Furthermore, Michigan has a high young voter turnout, and 75% of voters aged 18-29 have overwhelmingly disapproved of Biden's handling of the War on Gaza. The Democratic Majority for Israel (DMFI), a pro-Israel group, attempted to combat "Listen to Michigan" by

running ads in support of Biden and urging people to vote for him in the primary. DMFI is simultaneously attacking progressive Democrats who are critical of Israel's actions, especially the Congressmen and Congresswomen known as "The Squad," making efforts to recruit challengers to these members. It is believed that The American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC), which has affiliations with other pro-Israel groups such as DMFI, plans to spend at least \$100 million this election cycle to combat those who disapprove of Israel's actions.

The results of the Michigan presidential primaries strongly suggest that we are on course for a rematch between Biden and Trump in the general election. If the Democratic primary is any indication, Biden's foreign policy positions may play an impactful role in dissuading Michiganders – particularly Arab-Americans and young voters – from casting their ballot for him in November. Polls conducted in recent months seem to substantiate the belief that there will be a tight race in Michigan, as the current gap there between Trump and Biden sits at approximately 4 percentage points (which is also equal to the poll's margin of error). In an upcoming November election that is expected to be so close, it is extremely feasible to forecast that a significant number of voters deciding to cast ballots for third-party candidates or abstaining from voting altogether could sway the election in one direction or the other. One thing that we know for certain from the outcome of the Michigan primaries is that the "uncommitted" vote has underscored the salience of the War on Gaza for many people.