

ERRATA

Blocked from the Ballot Box

Structural Obstacles Depress Turnout, Exacerbate Ballot Rejections Across Racial Lines

Effective participation in elections is at the heart of our political system, but not everyone is equally represented. Class and race disparities affect whether a person votes and how likely their ballot is to be counted—and inconsistent and inequitable rules exacerbate these inequities. Groups that experience more institutional barriers throughout the voting process and who are less likely to have their ballots counted are underrepresented in the political process, and public policies are less likely to protect their health, safety, and well-being. It can be difficult to even access clear, usable data about turnout and ballot rejections.

Fortunately, there are active measures we can take to advance racial equity in elections. Better policies for ballot design, including expanding language and disability access, can decrease rejection rates. And more election data transparency—making sure key election data is clear, accessible, and usable—can help us better understand and alleviate these gaps.

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Below is a list of specific updates and corrections made between the original version of this report published on September 24, 2025, and this revised report. During post-publication review, we identified some issues affecting the specificity of turnout and rejection calculations, which we have addressed. Although none of these changes altered the core findings of the report, they do refine our calculations and improve the overall precision of the analysis. We wish to thank Sharon Dolente for her help in identifying the issues related to Wayne County and for her assistance in obtaining the relevant data.

In addition to these specific changes, the revised report contains a modestly expanded discussion of the challenges of this type of data collection, formatting, and processing. Finally, our complete dataset has been updated to reflect the stated changes.

Correction: Wayne County, Michigan, 2024 voter turnout rates

In the original report, our estimated registered turnout percentages for precincts located in Detroit (within Wayne County) were incorrect. Unbeknownst to us at the time of data collection, Detroit election data files report only in-person votes in geographic precincts, while absentee ballots are assigned to separate absentee counting precincts. As a result, our calculated registered turnout rates for Detroit precincts were artificially low. Because we were unable to obtain data that would allow us to sort mail ballots by geographic precinct, we now rely on voter file data from the Michigan Department of State.

Correction: Wayne County, Michigan, provisional ballots

In the original report's analysis of 2020 Wayne County data, we erroneously categorized provisional ballots cast by voters who lacked proper identification but signed an affidavit about their identity as rejected. This error was corrected in the revised version, and these ballots are now correctly classified as counted rather than rejected.

In the original analysis of the 2024 data, we mistakenly believed that Wayne County data included both precinct-level provisional ballots cast and provisional ballots rejected. However, upon a review of the raw data, we determined that the data only included provisional ballots rejected. As a result, we were unable to accurately calculate rejection rates for Wayne County in 2024, and this was, therefore, excluded from the analysis.

Clarification: ballot rejection calculation

In the original version of this report, we calculated rejection rates as the percentage of absentee and/or provisional ballots rejected out of all ballots cast. In this revised version, we calculated rejection rates as the percentage of absentee and/or provisional ballots rejected out of all absentee and/or provisional ballots cast. While neither approach is inherently incorrect, we believe this revised approach is preferable as it limits the analysis to only the subpopulation of ballots that are eligible for rejection.

Clarification: adjustments to registered turnout estimates

Some registered turnout rates vary slightly from those reported in the original report due to minor refinements we made to our formula. To refine our turnout estimates, we compared county-reported registered turnout figures to aggregated precinct-level registration rates calculated using two data sources, the Voting and Election Science Team data from the University of Florida (VEST 2020) and data from Dave’s Redistricting Hub (RDH n.d.), whereas the original report used the same data source for all counties. For each county, we utilized the figures closest to the county-reported turnout rates.

Clarification: additions of CVAP turnout measures and models

Originally, we planned to include citizen voting age population (CVAP) turnout rates as part of a supplemental report. However, because the original report was already undergoing revisions, we decided to incorporate these data directly into the main analysis. We determined that both measurements of political participation—registered and CVAP turnout—should be represented in our report, as both are commonly used in related media coverage and in the study of elections (MEDSL 2021; Smith 2015). Furthermore, including both rates illustrates the level of variation that can and does occur based on which turnout methodology is employed, and demonstrates that election scholars, administrators, and the media often use very different turnout figures when evaluating electoral participation.

References

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