



2026 Michigan Election Survey Report

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Michigan Voters Show Economic Pessimism and a Democratic Edge

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Summary: A survey of nearly 1400 Michigan likely voters shows that they favor Democrats for Governor and Senate contests, driven by economic pessimism, disapproval of Trump, and a desire to improve affordability and reduce political corruption.

To account for possible survey imbalance, model-based estimates of support among 1,383 respondents are regularized and calibrated for projection onto a voter-file sample of over 160,000 registered voters across the state, from which a likely electorate of nearly 100,000 voters is drawn. These produce the following estimates.

- **For Governor:** Democrat Jocelyn Benson has the support of 48.5% of likely voters, compared to 38.7% for Republican John James, 3.3% for other candidates, and 9.6% undecided (with a margin of error of approximately ± 3.1 percentage points).
- **For U.S. Senate:** Democrat Abdul El-Sayed has the support of 48.0% of likely voters, compared to 41.8% for Republican Mike Rogers, 3.4% for other candidates, and 6.8% undecided (with a margin of error of approximately ± 2.9 percentage points).

Traditional weighted top-line survey estimates tell a similar story, with a slightly larger Democratic advantage.

This support is largely associated with high levels of economic discontent, disapproval of President Trump, and concern about corruption.

- Nearly 48.6% of Michigan likely voters say they are worse off financially than they were a year ago, with only 11.3% saying they are better off.
- Only 29.5% of Michigan likely voters rate President Trump's performance as good or excellent.
- Over 85% of Michigan likely voters agree with the statement "Wealthy people and corporations have too much influence over government."
- The top two priorities Michigan voters select for the next governor are lowering the cost of living (59.7%) and reducing political corruption (29.0%).

About the Survey and the results. The 2026 Michigan Election Survey-Pre-Election Wave was completed by 1,530 respondents recruited through mail and text messaging in a joint collaboration between the Office of Survey Research at Michigan State University (osr.msu.edu) and Verasight (verasight.io). Respondents completed the survey between October 8 and October 23. The percentages reported in this report are only of likely voters, weighted by age, gender, congressional district, county, August primary vote choice, and race to be reflective of the expected 2026 November electorate and have sample sizes that range from 1,310 to 1,383 respondents unless noted and margins of error $\pm$ 3.7-3.8 percentage points. Funding for the survey comes from the College of Social Science and the Department of Political Science at Michigan State University.

What unites Michigan voters entering the election?

Despite political divides, a majority of Michigan voters show remarkable unity across many areas.

1. **Economic pessimism is widespread:** Nearly half of respondents (48.6%) say they are worse off financially than a year ago, compared with 11.3% who say they are better off. When looking ahead, 28.2% expect to be better off next year, 47.9% expect to be about the same, and 23.9% expect to be worse off. 59.7% of voters selected “lowering the cost of living and making Michigan more affordable” as a top priority for the next governor (1st overall), and increasing the supply of affordable housing also rated as a top two priority for 18.7% of voters (4th overall).
2. **Michigan is viewed as falling behind:** Respondents are nearly ten times more likely to say Michigan has fallen behind than moved ahead when compared to other states over the past ten years across multiple metrics:
 - 58.0% say Michigan has fallen behind on typical household income.
 - 48.6% say Michigan has fallen behind on the health of Michigan residents.
 - 53.3% say Michigan has fallen behind in overall quality of life.

Only about 5-7% say Michigan has moved ahead on these measures. Governor Whitmer’s performance rating is better than President Trump’s, but less than half of Michigan voters (44.3%) rate her performance as either Excellent or Good. Despite this dour evaluation of state performance, 52.4% of likely voters say they are either “extremely” or “very” proud to be a resident of the state of Michigan.

3. **Voters want more spending on roads, health care coverage; less spending on Israel:** Likely voters were asked if government was spending too much, about the right amount, or too little in seven areas.¹ Over 60% of voters agreed in the direction of spending across three of those areas:
 - 60.0% of likely voters say we spend too little on roads, bridges, and infrastructure compared to only 9.3% saying too much. Improving roads and infrastructure rated as the voters’ third-highest priority for Michigan’s next governor (22.7%).

¹Four areas were randomly assigned to each respondent, reducing sample size to approximately 780-800 for each item.

- 60.9% of likely voters say we spend too little on health care coverage and services, compared to 16.2% saying we spend too much. Improving access to quality health-care rated as the voters' fifth top priority for Michigan's next governor (17.6%).
- 63.9% of likely voters say we spend too much on "aid to Israel" with only 4.9% saying we spend too little.

4. **Distrust of big business and national government is broader than partisan divides:** An astounding 85% of Michigan likely voters agree with the statement "Wealthy people and corporations have too much influence over government." Controversies over local data centers also represent a shared concern among Michigan voters. 59.9% of voters view data center developments as more risk than opportunity, compared to 14.9% who see them as more opportunity than risk. 29.0% of likely voters selected "reducing political corruption and ineffectiveness" as a top priority for Michigan's next governor (ranking 2nd). And only 38.2% of likely voters trust the federal government to do what is right most or some of the time, compared to 58.5% for state government and 68.0% for local government.

Confidence in elections below 2024, but has not returned to 2020 lows

Political debates over election and voter fraud have seemingly lowered confidence in Michigan's vote counting. But it has not produced the level of doubts observed after the 2020 election. 68.3% of Michigan likely voters are very or somewhat confident that the statewide count will be accurate. That is below 2024 highs (88.3% post-election) that the Survey of the Performance of American Elections found in Michigan, slightly below 2022 levels (71.2% post-election), and five points higher than what was surveyed in 2020 (62.9% post-election). Partisan divides remain substantial.

Democrats are more united than Republicans

Despite greater focus on the divisions in the Democratic party following a contested primary, respondents and model estimates fail to demonstrate significant differences in Democratic support between Benson and El-Sayed, with much of Benson's larger margin attributed to a decline in Republican support for James compared to Rogers.

- 82.4% of Democrats who voted against El-Sayed and voted for Stevens or McMorrow in the August primary now report voting for him in November. Benson is winning 91.8% of the vote among voters who report identifying with or leaning toward the Democratic Party, El-Sayed is winning 93.1% among that same group.
- In contrast, James is only registering 68.8% of the Governor vote among Republicans who voted for Perry Johnson or another primary candidate, compared to 82.2% support for Rogers in the Senate among that same group. Among voters who report identifying with or leaning towards the Republican Party, James is winning 82.1% and Rogers is winning 86.5% among that same group.

Top-of-the Ticket Support

Governor and Senate survey estimates are calibrated using Multilevel Regression and Post-stratification (MRP) at the county level (splitting Detroit from the rest of Wayne County) to

account for survey imbalances and differential partisan response across the state.

MRP estimates model candidate preferences as a function of voters' demographic characteristics, August primary participation and reported vote (Did not vote, El-Sayed vs. others among Democrats, and James vs. others among Republicans), geography, and county-level political context (2024 Trump Vote %, El-Sayed's 2026 Democratic Primary Vote %, John James's 2026 Republican Primary vote). These estimates are applied to the September voter-file sample of over 160,000 randomly selected registered voters, after calibration to match observed county totals in the August primary, and then weighted by a voter's projected November turnout probability to generate statewide, county, and congressional-district estimates.

The MRP estimates for governor are applied to two measures: the first column shows the initial response to the question "If the election were held today, which candidate for Michigan governor would you vote for?" (or among those who voted already: "Which candidate for Michigan governor did you vote for?"; People who responded undecided or don't know to this question were then asked a follow-up question: "If you had to choose today, which way are you leaning?" - the second column presents support along with the lean of undecided voters. The ordering of the two major parties was randomized across respondents for each item.

Governor MRP estimates		
	Initial Response	Leaner follow-up
Jocelyn Benson, the Democrat	48.5%	50.9%
John James, the Republican	38.7%	41.5%
Someone else or none of these	3.3%	7.7%
Don't know yet, Undecided	9.6%	-

A corresponding set of questions was asked for the Senate contest, and were each modeled using MRP:

Senate MRP estimates		
	Initial Response	Leaner follow-up
Abdul El-Sayed, the Democrat	48.0%	50.5%
Mike Rogers, the Republican	41.8%	43.1%
Someone else or none of these	3.4%	6.4%
Don't know yet, Undecided	6.8%	-

County-level Estimates of Support

With support estimated among approximately 100,000 voters, it is possible to examine the estimated level of support for each candidate at the county level.

Figure 1 shows the estimated Benson-James margin by county. Note that Benson is expected to perform well above the Harris-Trump margin of 2024, but is expected to perform slightly worse than the Democrat-Republican party August 2026 primary split.

Figure 2 shows the estimated El-Sayed-Rogers margin by county. Note two things: 1) the

Figure 1: Estimated Benson-James Margin By County

County-level MRP D-R Advantage vs. Past Elections: Governor
Positive values indicate a Democratic advantage

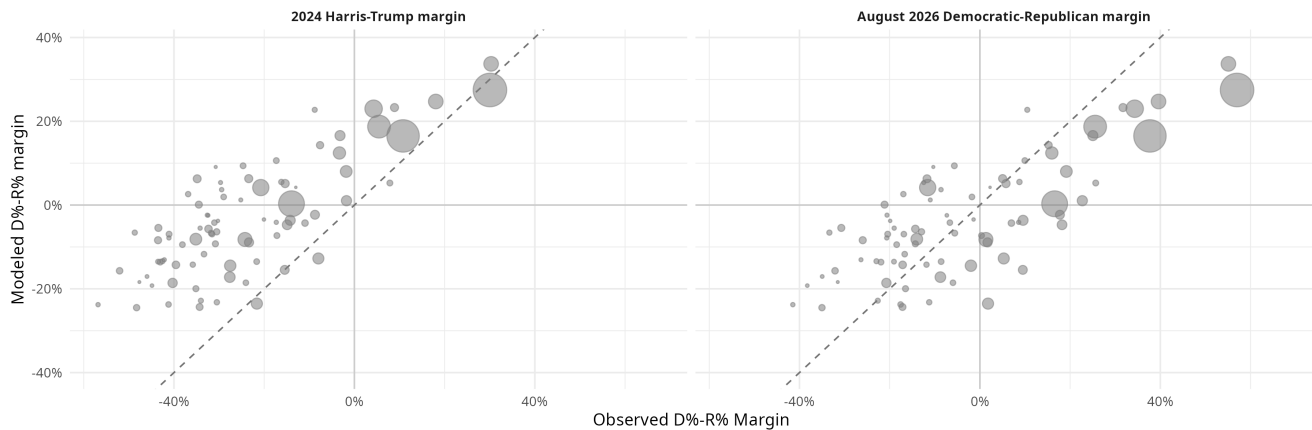
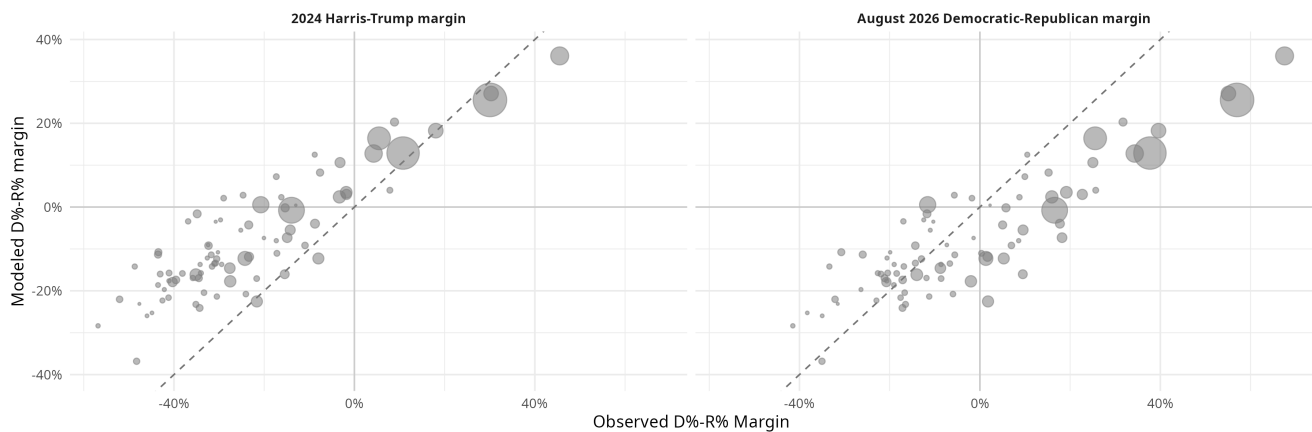


Figure 2: Estimated El-Sayed-Rogers Margin By County

County-level MRP D-R Advantage vs. Past Elections: Senate
Positive values indicate a Democratic advantage

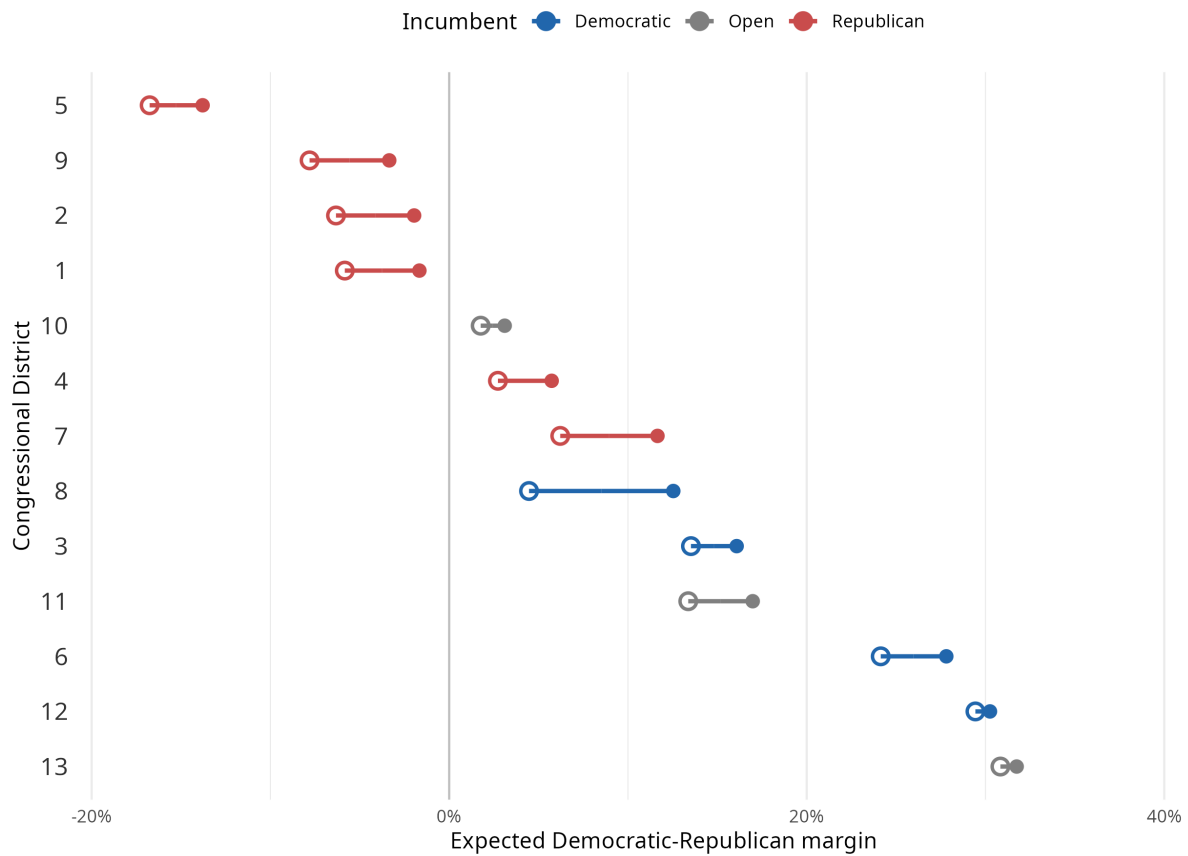


tighter county-level fit by 2024 Trump margin suggests the El-Sayed-Rogers vote reflects a more nationalized partisan division; 2) El-Sayed is underperforming Benson’s expected margin, but only slightly.

Top-of-ticket Margin by Congressional District

The voter-file based projections also provide a way to identify U.S. House Districts that may be the closest on election night. House Districts 4 (Huizenga), 7 (Barrett), and 10 (Open) are all rated as “toss ups” by Cook Political Report. The MRP estimates are consistent with this classification. Of these, MI-7 is the hardest district for Republicans to run since it favors Democrats the most, but this does not account for incumbency advantages or the challenger’s profile. If there is to be a surprise loss on election night, I would look to MI-1 (Bergman) as most vulnerable to a surprise loss.

Figure 3: Estimated Governor/Senate Margin by US House District
 Top-of-Ticket Democratic-Republican Margins by Congressional District
 Positive values indicate a Democratic advantage; solid dots are Governor, hollow dots are Senate



About the survey and analysis

The 2026 Michigan Election Survey was overseen by Professor Corwin D. Smidt in the Department of Political Science at Michigan State University. The survey implementation and design was supported by the Office for Survey Research at Michigan State University and in collaboration with the national survey vendor Verasight.

Verasight collected responses from October 8–23, 2026, from 1,400 Michigan adults. Respondents were recruited either by text message from the vendor voter file and supplemental commercial records (60.3%) or by email from the Verasight community (39.7%). The final sample was limited to respondents who consented, confirmed that they currently lived in Michigan, and passed Verasight’s data-quality checks.

The Office for Survey Research collected responses from October 13–23, 2026 from 130 Michigan adults. Respondents who were considered likely voters and 70 years of age or older or who live in northern Michigan areas with limited high-speed cell phone coverage were randomly sampled from the Michigan voter file. 1500 mailings were sent for a response rate of 8.7%.

The primary descriptive estimates are calibrated to age, August 2026 primary participation, primary-party status among August voters, congressional district, race, and selected county targets. The MRP analysis models candidate preferences using age, gender, geography, and August primary categories, then projects the modeled preferences onto the September 2026 voter-file sample using existing November turnout probabilities.

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Additional Survey Results

Weighted Likely-Voter Sample Characteristics

The following distributions describe the weighted likely-voter sample used for the descriptive analysis. Percentages are weighted and may differ from the unweighted composition of respondents.

Age distribution

Age	Percent
18-29	11.96%
30-39	12.52%
40-49	14.06%
50-59	15.92%
60-69	19.98%
70+	25.56%

August 2026 vote status

Status	Percent
Did not vote	49.95%
Voted	49.52%
Unregistered	0.53%

August 2026 primary party among August voters

Primary status	Percent
Democratic primary	58.12%
Republican primary	36.08%
Neither/other	5.80%

Partisan lean

Partisan lean	Percent
Democrat + Lean Democrat	46.34%
Republican + Lean Republican	43.46%
Independent/other	10.20%

Congressional district

District	Percent
1	8.68%
2	7.87%
3	7.63%
4	7.72%
5	7.17%
6	8.48%
7	8.24%
8	7.49%
9	8.48%
10	7.52%
11	8.43%
12	6.51%
13	5.78%

Additional Top-Line Results

Governor survey estimates		
	Initial Response	Leaner follow-up
Benson	49.5%	51.4%
James	38.7%	41.2%
Other	2.9%	7.4%
Undecided	8.9%	-

Senate survey estimates		
	Initial response	Leaner follow-up
El-Sayed	49.6%	51.4%
Rogers	41.4%	42.2%
Other	3.3%	6.4%
Undecided	5.8%	-

Selected Issue Toplines

Personal financial situation compared with a year ago

“Would you say that you (and your family living with you) are better off or worse off financially than you were a year ago?”

Response	Percent
Better off financially than a year ago	11.3%
About the same	40.1%
Worse off financially than a year ago	48.6%

Expected personal financial situation a year from now

“Looking ahead, do you think that a year from now, you and your family living with you will be better off financially or worse off financially?”

Response	Percent
Will be better off a year from now	28.2%
Will be about the same	47.9%
Will be worse off a year from now	23.9%

Michigan compared with other states over the past ten years

“And now turning to Michigan specifically. Compared to other states, do you think Michigan has moved ahead, fallen behind, or stayed about the same over the past 10 years in each of the following areas:”

Measure	Ahead	Same	Behind	Don't know
Typical household income	5.5%	31.6%	58.0%	4.8%
Health of Michigan residents	5.5%	39.4%	48.6%	6.6%
Overall quality of life	6.7%	35.6%	53.3%	4.4%

“Wealthy people and corporations have too much influence over government and politics.”

“There is a lot of talk about what is wrong in this country of late. Please indicate how much you agree with each of the following statements.”

Response	Percent
Strongly agree	65.1%
Somewhat agree	20.1%
Neither agree nor disagree	10.0%
Somewhat disagree	3.8%
Strongly disagree	1.0%

Trust in government to do what is right

“People have different ideas about how much they can trust government to do what is right. These ideas don’t refer to Democrats or Republicans in particular, but just to the government in general. We want to see how you feel about this for each of the levels of government.”

Level of government	Nearly always/most	Some	Seldom	Almost never
Federal government	3.7%	34.5%	34.9%	26.9%
State government	7.8%	50.7%	26.5%	15.1%
Local government	14.6%	53.5%	20.1%	11.9%

Perceived opportunity and risk of data-center development

“Overall, do you think allowing large-scale data centers in Michigan represents more of an opportunity or more of a risk for Michigan’s future?”

Response	Percent
More opportunity than risk	14.9%
About equal opportunity and risk	25.1%
More risk than opportunity	59.9%

Political priorities for Michigan’s next governor

“Campaigns talk about many different issues. Which TWO of the following should be the highest priorities for Michigan’s next Governor and Legislature? Select up to two:”

Priority	Percent
Lowering the cost of living and making Michigan more affordable	59.7%
Reducing political corruption and the ineffectiveness of state government	29.0%
Improving roads, infrastructure, and energy systems	22.7%
Increasing the supply of affordable housing	18.7%
Improving access to hospitals and quality health care	17.6%
Protecting Michigan’s environment and natural resources	16.8%
Attracting new businesses and investment to Michigan	13.8%
Reducing crime and improving public safety	11.7%
Preparing and attracting a skilled workforce	8.3%

Views on government spending

“We are interested in your views about government spending. Thinking about spending across federal, state, and local governments combined, do you think government is spending too much money, too little money, or about the right amount in each of the following areas?”

Area	Too much	Right amount	Too little	Don't know
Health care coverage and health services	16.2%	17.9%	60.9%	5.1%
Roads, bridges, and other infrastructure	9.3%	26.4%	60.0%	4.3%
Food and government assistance for needy families	20.4%	21.9%	53.3%	4.4%
Environmental protection	20.9%	21.0%	49.1%	8.9%
University and medical research	15.2%	30.6%	40.2%	14.1%
Border security and immigration enforcement	51.9%	27.5%	16.3%	4.3%
Aid to Israel	64.0%	21.5%	4.9%	9.7%