



MARYLAND
DEMOCRACY INITIATIVE



CENTER FOR
DEMOCRACY AND
CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

Improved voting policies and voter education efforts in Maryland have resulted in 64% of 18-year-olds being registered to vote. Additional reforms are needed to close the remaining gap.

More than 78,000 people turn 18 in Maryland every year. A new analysis by The Civics Center and the University of Maryland show how much existing reforms have accomplished and where we need to grow.

Laura W. Brill

CEO and Founder, The Civics Center

Michael Hanmer

Co-PI, Maryland Democracy Initiative

Director, Center for Democracy and Civic Engagement

Professor, Government and Politics

University of Maryland

Sam Novey

Chief Strategist, Center for Democracy and Civic Engagement

University of Maryland

More than 78,000 people turn 18 in Maryland every year. Over the last 15 years, Maryland has enacted many policy reforms that have improved the state's ability to serve these new voters.

- In [2010](#), Maryland became the [5th state](#) to allow young people to pre-register to vote beginning at age 16.¹
- In 2011, Maryland began electronically registering people to vote when they got drivers licenses at the Motor Vehicles Administration and launched online voter registration in 2012.
- In 2013, Maryland began allowing voters to register and vote at early voting locations, and in 2018 Maryland voters overwhelmingly approved a ballot measure allowing voters to register and vote at Election Day polling sites as well.
- During the 2018 legislative session, the Maryland General Assembly passed an automatic voter registration package that expanded electronic voter registration services to all types of public benefit interactions.
- And in 2020, Maryland enacted the Student and Military Voter Empowerment Act which clarified the roles and responsibilities of higher education institutions and the military to facilitate voter registration and education that meet the unique needs of the students and soldiers they serve.

And it's not just election policies that matter. Maryland's American Government curriculum [framework](#) includes voter registration drives as a topic of student assessment and many Maryland schools have developed impactful voter registration and education programs.

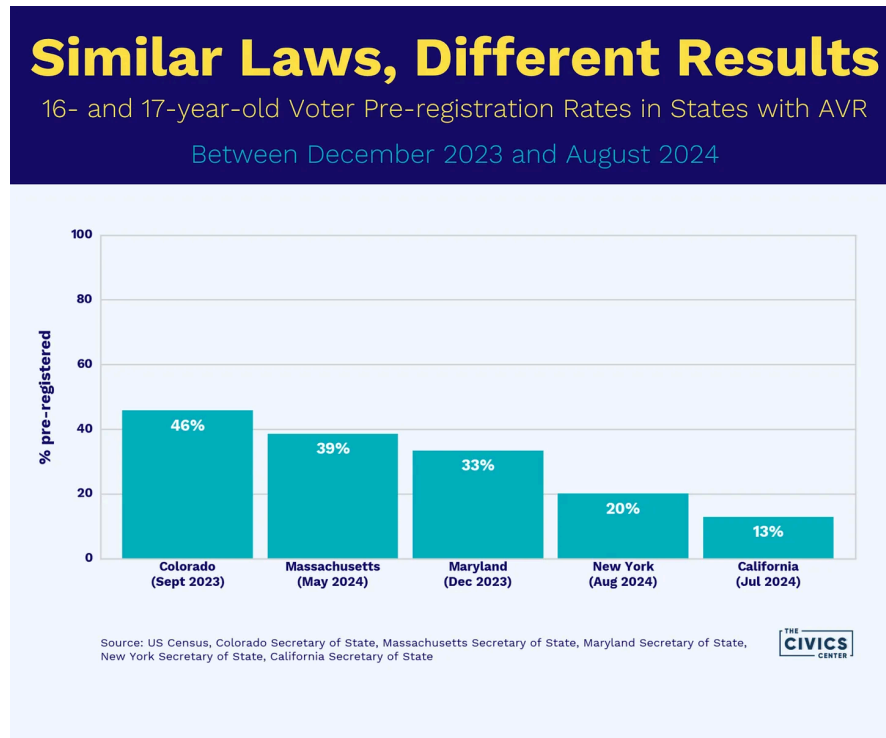
In part 1 of this report, we compare data from the Maryland Voter File and the U.S. Census Bureau's American Community Survey to quantify how well Maryland is serving new voters and which new voters are still left behind. Later this fall we will use additional data sources to assess various options Maryland has for registering 100% of eligible new voters and lay out the portfolio of policy reforms that are necessary to achieve this entirely achievable goal. We will also share reactions to the data from grassroots leaders and policy makers around the state and their reflections about what steps Maryland can take to equitably serve all new voters.

This report is a joint effort of [The Civics Center](#), the [Maryland Democracy Initiative](#) and [Center for Democracy and Civic Engagement](#) at the [University of Maryland](#). It is the first published analysis of the impact of Maryland's pre-registration law [since 2019](#), when The Civics Center first published data about the state.

¹ Today, [19 states and the District of Columbia](#) have such laws on the books, and pre-registration has been [shown](#) to increase turnout rates among the youngest voters. A brief history of pre-registration is [here](#).

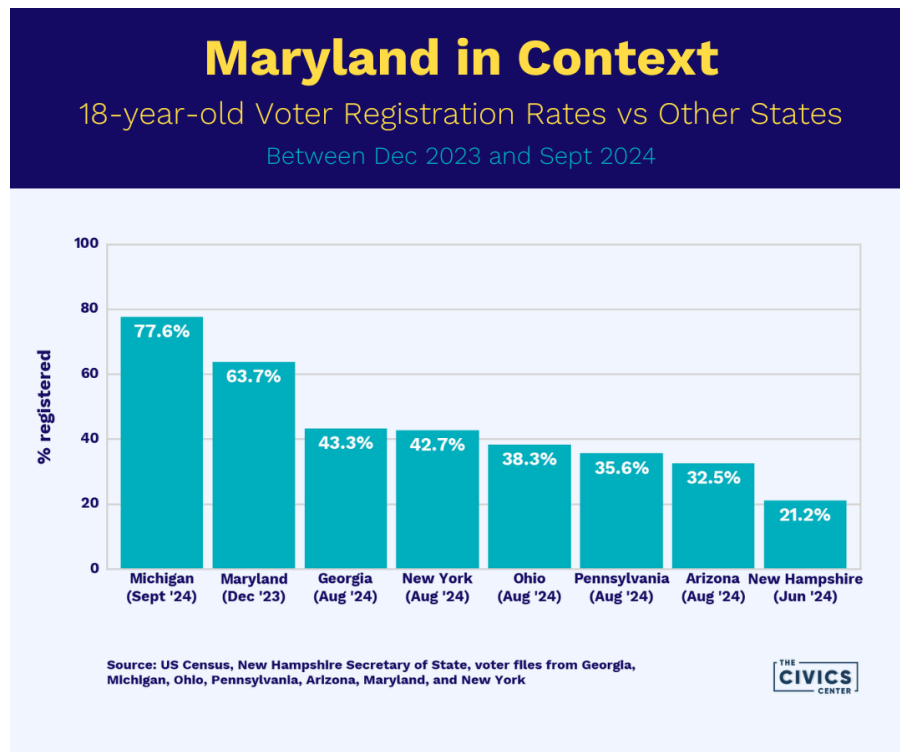
1) One third of eligible Maryland 16- and 17-year-olds use pre-registration and nearly two thirds of eligible 18 year olds are registered.

Our report finds that Maryland's pre-registration policy resulted in tens of thousands of 16- and 17-year olds getting registered to vote. As of the close of 2023, there were 52,510 pre-registered 16- and 17-year-olds in Maryland whose registrations were set to become active as soon as they come of age.



This is a step in the right direction, but the law is still being implemented in ways that leave too many young voters behind. More than 100,000 16- and 17-year-old Marylanders are eligible for pre-registration yet remain unregistered.

We also see the impact of the pre-registration laws and other Maryland reforms that serve new voters in the high percentage of 18-year-olds that are registered to vote. 64% of Maryland 18 year-olds are registered to vote. This is more than double the rate of 18-year-olds registered in [Pennsylvania](#) as of the same time period which only recently enacted automatic voter registration and still does not allow pre-registration beginning at age 16. Even New York state which implemented pre-registration in 2020 lags far behind Maryland.



But again, even though Maryland is serving 18-year-old voters better than many other states, it still fails to serve tens of thousands of new 18-year-old Maryland potential voters every year. 81% of Marylanders over the age of 45 are registered to vote. While Maryland's gap between newer and older voters is smaller than other states, there are still significant opportunities to implement reforms that would close this gap.

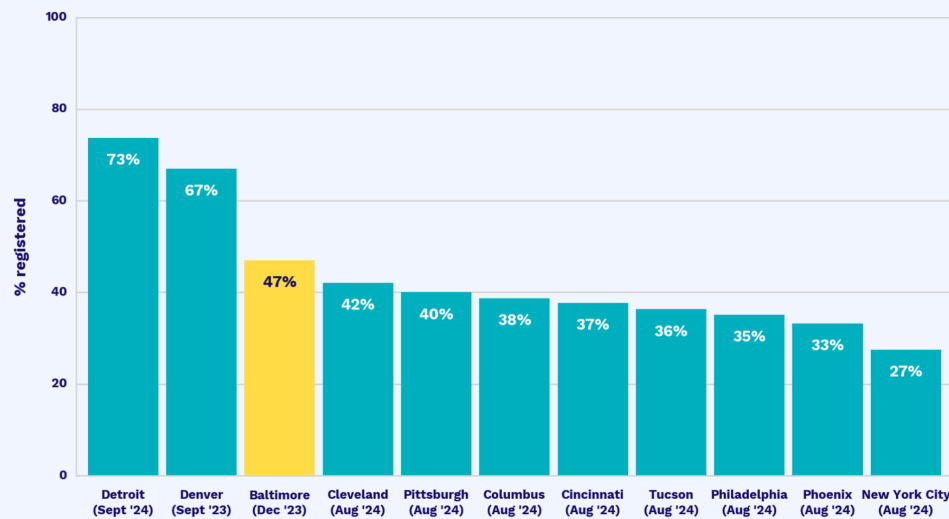
2) Maryland counties have high registration rates for new voters compared to peers nationally. But large disparities between Maryland counties suggest new reforms are needed to equitably serve all new voters in Maryland.

Thanks to Maryland's reforms since 2010 and the hard work of election officials, educators, and voter education groups, even the Maryland counties with the lowest rates of pre-registration and 18-year-old voter registration are doing better than peers nationally. For example, Baltimore City's 18 year-old registration rate *from the end of last year* is nearly double that of New York City as of *August 2024*.

Baltimore vs Major US Cities

18-year-old Voter Registration Rates

Between Sept 2023 and Sept 2024



Source: US Census, Colorado Secretary of State, voter files from Michigan, Maryland, Ohio, Pennsylvania, Arizona, and New York

But large inequalities emerge when we compare pre-registration and 18-year-old registration rates across Maryland counties.

FUTURE VOTER SCORECARD

Counties in MD
as of December 4, 2023

Rank	County	Est. Pre-registered	Rank	County	Est. Pre-registered
1	Worcester	45.6%	13	Caroline	35.5%
2	Queen Anne's	45.1%	14	Somerset	34.9%
3	Frederick	42.5%	15	Kent	34.6%
4	Anne Arundel	42.1%	16	Calvert	34.0%
5	Talbot	41.8%	17	Wicomico	32.9%
6	Harford	41.4%	18	Washington	32.9%
7	Garrett	39.0%	19	Charles	31.6%
8	Cecil	38.2%	20	Saint Mary's	30.2%
9	Carroll	38.1%	21	Baltimore County	30.0%
10	Montgomery	37.8%	22	Dorchester	24.5%
11	Howard	37.1%	23	Prince George's	24.0%
12	Allegany	35.5%	24	Baltimore City	19.2%
Pre-registration rates for 16 and 17 year olds. Sources: MD voter file (12/04/2023); 2022 5-year American Community Survey					Maryland 33.4%

FUTURE VOTER SCORECARD

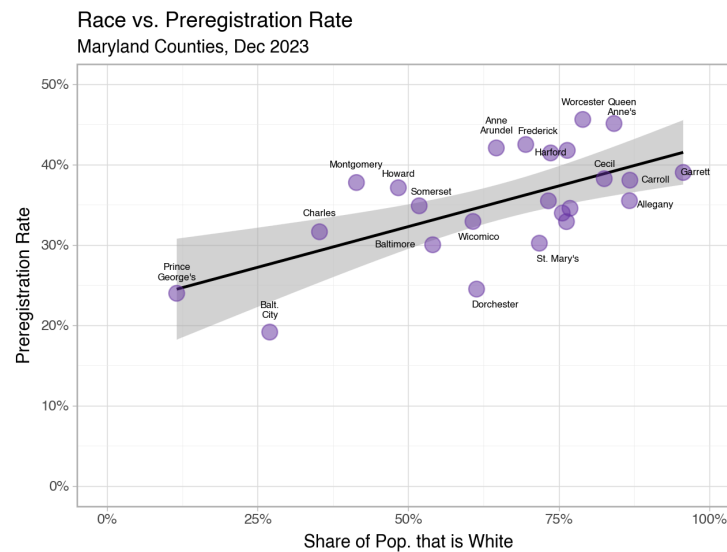
Counties in MD
as of December 4, 2023

Rank	County	Est. 18 Year Olds Registered	Rank	County	Est. 18 Year Olds Registered
1	Worcester	76.6%	13	Calvert	62.6%
2	Frederick	74.4%	14	Charles	61.5%
3	Talbot	73.9%	15	Washington	60.9%
4	Harford	70.8%	16	Baltimore County	60.3%
5	Anne Arundel	70.8%	17	Wicomico	59.3%
6	Montgomery	70.5%	18	Saint Mary's	57.7%
7	Carroll	69.4%	19	Caroline	56.8%
8	Howard	69.3%	20	Prince George's	55.2%
9	Cecil	68.4%	21	Somerset	54.4%
10	Queen Anne's	67.1%	22	Kent	52.9%
11	Allegany	66.6%	23	Dorchester	51.0%
12	Garrett	64.7%	24	Baltimore City	47.1%
Registration rates for 18-year-olds. Sources: MD voter file (12/04/2023); 2022 5-year American Community Survey					Maryland 63.7%

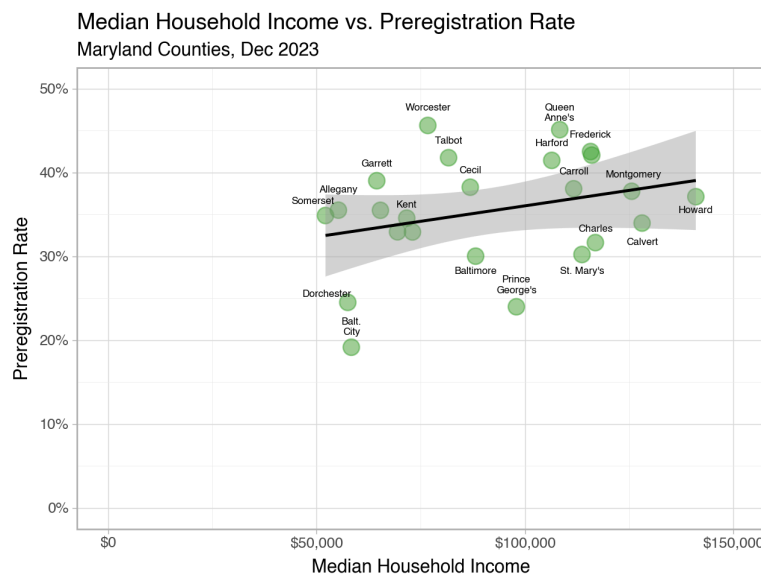
The pre-registration rate for 16- and 17-year-olds is over 40% in 6 counties while it lags under 25% in Baltimore City, Dorchester, and Prince George's counties.

Similar but not identical disparities emerge with 18-year-old voter registration rates as well. Six counties have more than 70% of 18-year-olds registered, while less than half of 18-year-olds in Baltimore City are registered.

These disparities are correlated with other attributes of the counties.



Having more white voters in the county is strongly correlated with the pre-registration rate.



Median household income is also correlated with the county pre-registration rate (although not as strongly as race).

A regression model that includes race, income, and education plus the share of the population that speaks a language other than English at home shows that race stands out. In a regression on pre-registration rates, the share of the population that is white is the only variable that is statistically significant ($p < 0.01$, 2 tailed). More importantly, the result is substantively significant, as the model predicts that a 10 percentage point increase in the share of the population that is white (or a change of one-half of one standard deviation) is associated with a nearly 3 percentage point increase in the pre-registration rate. The regression results are similar when examining the registration rate of 18-year-olds.

Unlike differences between MD counties and peers in other states, these differences show up in counties that are operating in the same policy environment. These findings are consistent with The Civics Center's analyses of other geographic areas in which The Civics Center has conducted similar analyses, including [New York State](#) and [Los Angeles County, CA](#).

A geographically, racially, and socioeconomically equitable approach to welcoming new voters in Maryland and providing all with an equal, practical opportunity to participate in the political process will require both improved services for all counties and targeted policies that address the way that some Maryland counties are particularly underserved.

3) What Maryland can do to leave no new voters behind

Maryland has made extraordinary strides since 2010 to improve its service to new voters. But that progress has stalled. The pre-registration rate in Maryland has actually dropped by 2 percentage points since 2019. Counties in the top half based on pre-registration rate in 2019 generally remained in the top half in 2023.

While Maryland's registration rates have plateaued since 2019, other states have implemented new reforms and are seeing strong results. Colorado has a pre-registration rate of 45.8% (and rising!) thanks in part to their strong Secure Automatic Voter Registration Policy (which has [doubled the rate of pre-registration for eligible customers at the Colorado Department of Motor Vehicles](#)) and their strong policies supporting voter education in schools.

These educational policies include establishing a specific voter registration point of contact at each high school, running a statewide voter education recognition program for high schools, and supporting a statewide student poll worker program. All these policies are low cost and have the potential to dramatically improve how well Maryland serves its newest voters.

In a subsequent report, we will use state and county level data to model the specific impact some of these and other reforms might have. We hope this data can help Maryland educators, election officials, policy makers, and youth leaders understand their options as they explore ways to make Maryland a state that equitably ensures that every new voter in all 24 Maryland counties is registered and ready to vote.