

# Data Analysis Project

Isabelle Jensen, Sonia Vargas

12/17/24

## Undervoting Analysis

Maryland Republican primary voters showed more displeasure with their choices for president than Maryland Democrats. In every county, there were more Republican primary voters who decided not to vote for president than Democratic primary voters who decided not to vote for presidential candidates. This suggests that despite all the discussion about Biden being having a poor primary performance in Maryland Republicans are more frustrated with their options than Democrats are. On average counties undervoted for president in Democratic primaries at around 0.69% compared to Republican primaries which had an average undervote of 2.36%. The average difference between Republican and Democrat undervotes is 1.67 percentage points. Counties with a higher percentage of Democratic voters had a larger percentage of Republican undervotes. This includes some of the most populated Maryland counties such as Prince George's County and Montgomery County. Other states and cities such as [Georgia] (<https://www.11alive.com/article/news/politics/elections/democratic-primary-georgia-biden-protest-vote-leave-it-blank-results-metro-atlanta/85-bb13b56e-e609-4364-95b5-cc8bc3de9ea6>) , Sacramento , and Chicago noticed massive undervoting for Democratic President Biden. Not voting for Biden seemed like a coordinated protest but what is happening with Republicans not voting for president? Do these people feel unrepresented by their current options? What does not voting for president mean to them? Why is Maryland different? National trends or at a minimum trends in other democratic areas seemed to disapprove of Biden as a candidate but this does not seem to be true in Maryland. Investigation why Maryland is different or how Republicans are considered here would be a new avenue of inquiry. Although I believe this data is fairly reliable there are issues and it does need to be verified. First, our analysis is missing some data files for the bigger counties. I have no reason to believe that those files are systematically different so I believe our results would hold but further work would need to be to take all voters into account. Second, retrieving voter files from specific counties and coding it to check it against our current data would be a good step to confirm our results. To make this a fuller story, we would need to find people who decided not to vote for president in the Republican primary. Why did they do this? Who are they? Furthermore, I would want to talk to Democrats in Maryland who didn't vote for president in the primary. How are the way that both parties are displeased different? Is one reason more powerful than another at least in Maryland. The data is just the beginning.

## Board of Elections and Split-Ticket Voting Analysis

In the second portion of our investigation, a surprising pattern emerged in the non-partisan Board of Education races: voters split their ballots at notable rates, with significant variation between Republicans and Democrats. In counties like Washington and Talbot, up to 23% of Democratic voters and 36% of Republican voters broke from expected party-aligned endorsements. This phenomenon raises questions about the role of partisanship in supposedly non-partisan elections and highlights a growing trend of voter independence in local education governance – a battleground increasingly dominated by ideological divides in Maryland (1) (2), Florida, and Indiana.

This piece of the story will explore how and why voters defied party-backed candidates, what this trend means for school board politics in Maryland, and how these splits reflect broader national narratives around education, partisanship, and local governance. Our analysis of Maryland’s 2024 primary election votes focused on four counties: Anne Arundel, Frederick, Talbot, and Washington. We examined split-ballot voting in the non-partisan Board of Education races, where voters either supported or rejected known conservative-backed candidates. Key takeaways include how across all counties, Republicans split their ballots at far higher rates than Democrats. Washington County stands out as the only place where Democratic split-ballot rates surpassed 20%, suggesting local factors or candidate dynamics drove higher splits. The high frequency of splits, even among Republicans, challenges assumptions that Board of Education races are purely ideological contests. Voters in these counties appear to prioritize local concerns or candidate-specific qualities over partisan endorsements.

The Maryland vote file is a robust and detailed resource that allows for granular analysis of voting patterns by party affiliation. Its strength lies in its comprehensiveness and timeliness, particularly in the context of the increasingly politicized school board races. However, while the data identifies split-ballot voting, it does not reveal the underlying motivations behind voters’ decisions. Additionally, the analysis is limited to four counties, so findings may not generalize statewide. Relying on endorsements to identify conservative-backed candidates introduces potential subjectivity, as public reporting and transparency around endorsements can vary.

Verification would involve cross-referencing known conservative-backed endorsements with reliable sources such as local GOP chapters, conservative PACs, and grassroots organizations like Moms for Liberty. To contextualize these findings, I would analyze historical election data to determine whether split rates have increased over time. Interviews with local candidates, political analysts, and election officials would confirm the accuracy of the vote file and candidate endorsements. Additionally, surveying voters would help uncover their motivations, whether driven by candidate quality, local issues, or skepticism of endorsements.

To complete the story, I would interview Board of Education candidates, campaign organizers, and endorsing groups to understand the dynamics behind split-ballot results. Speaking directly with voters in Washington, Talbot, and other highlighted counties would provide crucial firsthand perspectives on their decisions. Visiting these areas would help uncover local issues driving these behaviors, such as school performance concerns or candidate appeal. Finally, I would tie these findings to national trends, consulting experts in voting behavior and education politics to provide broader context while making the story relatable to local readers.

This story uncovers a compelling and timely trend that Maryland voters, particularly Republicans, are splitting their ballots in non-partisan Board of Education elections at remarkable rates. This finding raises broader questions about partisanship, voter independence, and the role of local issues in shaping electoral outcomes. With additional reporting and interviews, this story will resonate with readers who care about education, local governance, and the evolving dynamics of voter behavior in polarized times.

## Conclusion:

### Bridging Voter Discontent and Independence in Maryland’s 2024 Primaries

Maryland’s 2024 primary election highlights two trends: voter dissatisfaction and growing independence. Republican undervotes for president far exceeded those of Democrats, signaling greater frustration with their options despite national discontent with President Biden. At the same time, split-ballot voting in non-partisan Board of Education races showed voters prioritizing local concerns over party endorsements, with Republicans leading in breaking from expected choices. Together, these patterns reflect shifting voter dynamics and the complex interplay between partisanship and individual decision-making.

Taken together, these findings reveal a deeper complexity in Maryland’s electoral landscape. The undervote patterns point to a widening gap between voters and their perceived representation in higher-profile contests, while the split-ticket behavior in Board of Education races demonstrates how voters reclaim agency in less

polarized, hyper-local elections. Both stories call for further exploration into voter motivations, whether they stem from dissatisfaction, pragmatism, or a growing skepticism of party politics.

By connecting these threads, we can uncover a compelling narrative about Maryland voters navigating dissatisfaction and independence in their political choices. Interviews with undervoters and split-ballot voters, along with further analysis of local and national trends, would illuminate the underlying drivers of these behaviors. Together, these stories not only offer insight into Maryland's unique electoral dynamics but also provide a lens for understanding broader shifts in American voter attitudes and their implications for the future of governance