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The 2024 Vote Count: What to Expect

A qualitative analysis of how long we expect vote counting to take for the presidential race, and what could extend it.

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Our focus: when the presidential race will be unofficially called

There is a difference between (1) the “unofficial” race call by news outlets and (2) the official state canvass in which every single ballot is counted and verified (and recounted and reverified if needed).

The focus of this analysis is on when races will be called by news outlets, which can occur before every ballot is counted.

We **are not** estimating the time required for post-election processes, which could include recounts, potential litigation, and the certification of results.



How do outlets make their calls?

Generally, [outlets](#) call the race when they determine that **there are not enough outstanding votes for the trailing candidate to catch the leading candidate.**

This involves factors such as:

- What is the current margin?
- How many outstanding ballots are there?
- Who/where are those outstanding ballots coming from?

Additionally, if the race is within the recount margin for a state, **outlets may delay their calls until after a recount has taken place.**



Caveats:

1. There are a significant number of unknowns in terms of turnout, how people will vote, ballot counting speeds, etc.
2. We are not modeling data or making a scientific prediction.
3. We are not trying to predict which state will be the tipping point for this election. We are trying to understand the following:

Given what happened in 2020 presidential race and what has changed since then, when might we expect each swing state to be called in 2024?



When were states unofficially called in 2020?





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**Margins are the most
important factor in how
long results will take.**



**We likely will not know
who won the presidency
on Election Night.**



If the margin in a state is greater than 0.5%, we'll generally see faster results than in 2020.

Our best guess: The presidential race will be called by the same date or faster in 2024 in the following states.

How long it took for each state to be called in 2020 vs our estimate for 2024:

	Michigan	Wisconsin	Pennsylvania	Nevada	Arizona	North Carolina	Georgia
2020	1 full day (after polls closed)	1 full day (after polls closed)	4 days	4 days	9 days*	10 days	16 days*
2024 (estimate)	Same	Same	Faster	Same or faster	Same or faster	Faster	Faster

* Margin was less than 0.5% in 2020.



If the margin in a state is greater than 0.5%, we'll generally see faster results than in 2020.

Why do we think this?

- There will be **significantly** [fewer mail ballots than in 2020](#), and states will be able to count them faster.
- 3 states [expanded pre-canvassing](#)*: Arizona, Georgia, Michigan
- 3 states have [earlier deadlines](#) for when mail ballots must arrive: North Carolina, Nevada, Pennsylvania

What could slow results down?

- [Arizona](#): 2 page ballots, new requirement to hand count the number of mail ballots dropped off on Election Day.
- North Carolina: [new requirement](#) that tabulation of early and absentee votes can't start until polls close, [accommodations](#) for voters affected by Helene.

* *processing of mail ballots before Election Day, which can include removing envelopes and verifying signatures.*



If the margin in a state is close (e.g. less than 0.5%), we'll see prolonged uncertainty.

If the race is close, **every ballot will need to be counted and potentially re-counted**. This includes provisional ballots, late-arriving ballots*, and ballots that are cured, all of which extend the vote-counting timeline. There might be large numbers of these ballots in [PA](#), [NV](#), and [NC](#) especially, due to different state-specific policies.

A recount could delay the race call in the affected state significantly. In general, outlets will not call a race if there is an automatic recount, or if there is a requested recount and the margin is close. In 2020, Georgia was not called until after the hand audit, **16 days** after the election.

* *ballots that arrive after Election Day but are still eligible to be counted.*



If the margin in a state is close (e.g. less than 0.5%), we'll see prolonged uncertainty.

Additionally, the fight over **which ballots should count** will become even more contested, and any legal battles could delay results indefinitely. There are [currently lawsuits](#) underway in/about:

- **Pennsylvania:** UOCAVA ballots*, provisional ballots, and misdated/undated mail ballots.
- **Nevada:** late arriving ballots, mail ballots without a postmark.
- **North Carolina:** UOCAVA ballots, unsealed mail ballots, and ballots from the 225,000 voters targeted in a [lawsuit](#) re: NC's registration form.
- **Michigan:** UOCAVA ballots.

* *Uniformed and Overseas Absentee Voting Act*



We're less likely to see blue shifts. If we do, they won't be as drawn out.

Why do we think this?

- Fewer mail ballots + expanded pre-canvassing = faster counting of mail ballots.
- While mail ballots still heavily favor Democrats, the partisan divide is not as lopsided as it was in 2020.

Probable blue shift	Possible blue shift	Probable red shift
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Pennsylvania	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Wisconsin• Michigan• Nevada	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Arizona• North Carolina• Georgia



We're less likely to see blue shifts. If we do, they won't be as drawn out.

Where might we see a blue shift?

- *Probably:*
 - **Pennsylvania:** there are a substantial number of mail ballots, which still favor Democrats, and no pre-canvassing.
- *Possibly, particularly if the margins are tight:*
 - **Michigan, Wisconsin:** would be driven by small counties reporting faster than big counties more so than mail ballots.
 - **Nevada:** has a substantial number of mail ballots, most of which will be from Clark County, which is reliably blue.

Where might we see a red shift?

- **Arizona, North Carolina, Georgia:** will likely report the results of early and mail votes first, which will favor Democrats, before reporting results from Election Day votes and mail ballots dropped off on Election Day.



What could happen during the waiting period:

	Expected	Unusual
Not concerning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Close margins require more ballots to be counted or trigger a recount. • Extra steps before counting some ballots: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Mail ballots being processed ○ Provisional ballots being verified ○ Ballots being transported to central election offices 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Weather events that disrupt voting or counting. • Malfunctioning equipment (e.g. a water main break in a ballot processing site).
Subversion concerns	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Legal challenges targeting ballots, counties, and underlying voter registration data (similar to those that have already been filed). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stopping the counting of ballots before unofficial results are in, which could lead to no unofficial results. Could happen if: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Protests ○ Political violence ○ Election officials acting rogue • Claiming an early victory before enough votes are tallied for the race to be called.



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Arizona

What happened in 2020:

- Margin was **10,457 votes**, or **0.3%**.
- Called on **Nov 3/4** by Fox and AP, but other outlets didn't follow until **Nov 12** (9 days after Election Day) when almost all mail ballots had been counted.
- Experienced a "**red shift**" from the results of the earliest mail ballots being reported first, which disproportionately came from Democrats.

What's new in 2024:

- Mail ballot processing can **[start earlier](#)**.
- **[New requirement](#)** to hand count the number of mail ballots dropped off on Election Day.
- **[2-page ballots](#)** in Maricopa + other counties.
- **[Automatic recount margin](#)** raised from 0.1% to 0.5%.



Arizona

What to expect in 2024 if margins are tight:

- **If the margin is less than 0.5%:** an automatic recount and a potential fight over provisional and cured ballots.
- **Another “red shift”:** the results of early votes and mail ballots that arrive before Election Day will be reported first, and those are expected to disproportionately favor Democrats.



Georgia

What happened in 2020:

- Margin was **11,779 votes**, or **0.2%**.
- Called on **Nov 19** (16 days after Election Day), after a hand audit was completed.
- Experienced a **significant “blue shift”** (Trump held the lead **until ~58 hours** after polls closed) from the results of the Election Day and early votes being reported first, and mail and provisional ballots being counted slowly over time.

What’s new in 2024:

- **Much lower mail turnout** expected ([5-10%](#), down from [26%](#)).
- Mail ballot processing can [begin earlier](#).
- Mail and early vote results **must be reported [by 8pm](#)** on Election Day.



Georgia

What to expect in 2024 if margins are tight:

- **If the margin is less than 0.5%:** another audit and requested recount, and a potential fight over signature verification (again), provisional ballots, and/or late-arriving UOCAVA ballots.
- **A probable “red shift”:** unlike in 2020, early and absentee results must be reported by 8pm on Election Day. These are expected to favor Democrats, and as Election Day votes are gradually reported afterwards, this lead will likely fade.



Michigan

What happened in 2020:

- Margin was **154,188 votes**, or **2.8%**.
- Called the evening of **Nov 4** (1 day after Election Day).
- Experienced a **small “blue shift”** (Trump held the lead **until ~12 hours** after polls closed) as the final ballots to be counted were mail ballots from overwhelmingly Democratic areas.

What’s new in 2024:

- **Lower mail turnout** expected ([35-45%](#), down from [59%](#)).
- Mail ballot processing can [begin earlier](#).
- Availability of [in-person early voting](#), with ballots that can be scanned immediately.



Michigan

What to expect in 2024 if margins are tight:

- **If the margin is less than 0.5%, but greater than 2000 votes:** a delayed call as more ballots need to be counted – could be delayed until the deadline for late-arriving UOCAVA ballots (6 days after the election).
- **If the margin is less than 2000 votes:** an automatic recount, and a potential fight over late-arriving UOCAVA ballots and/or cured ballots.
- **A possible small “blue shift”:** while there are fewer mail ballots expected and expanded pre-canvassing will allow them to be counted faster, mail ballot results being released later, along with small “red” counties reporting faster than large “blue” counties, may still produce a blue shift.



Nevada

What happened in 2020:

- Margin was **33,596 votes**, or **2.4%**.
- Called on **Nov 7** (4 days after Election Day).
- **Did not** experience a definitive blue or red shift while votes were counted.

What's new in 2024:

- **Similar or higher mail turnout** expected (50-60%, up from 48%).
- **Shorter acceptance window** for later-arriving ballots (accepted up to 4 days after the election, down from 7 days).
- Early votes can be tabulated earlier, when polls open on Election Day.
- New and faster equipment (ballot tabulators/sorters, signature matching).



Nevada

What to expect in 2024 if margins are tight:

- **If the margin is less than 0.5%:** a possible requested recount, and a potential fight over same-day provisional ballots, late-arriving ballots, and/or signature matching.
- **A possible “blue shift”:** mail and provisional ballots in Clark County are likely to be the last to be counted, so if the margins are closer than 2020, a lead change from Trump to Harris is possible.



North Carolina

What happened in 2020:

- Margin was **74,483 votes**, or **1.3%**.
- Called on **Nov 13** (10 days after Election Day).
Uncertainty about the number of outstanding mail ballots delayed the call until after Nov 12, the deadline for late-arriving ballots.
- Experienced a **“red shift”** from the results of mail and early votes being reported first, which disproportionately came from Democrats.

What’s new in 2024:

- **Much lower mail turnout** expected ([5-10%](#), down from [18%](#)).
- [No late-arriving ballots](#) will be accepted (except those from UOCAVA voters).
- Counties [must wait until polls close](#) to begin tabulating early votes.
- [New voter ID requirement](#) may produce more provisional ballots.
- **Voters affected by Helene** [can return ballots outside](#) their county of registration.



North Carolina

What to expect in 2024 if margins are tight:

- **If the margin is less than 10,000 votes:** a requested recount, and a potential fight over provisional ballots, late-arriving UOCAVA ballots, cured ballots, and/or ballots from the 225,000 voters targeted in a [lawsuit](#) re: NC's registration form.
- **Another “red shift”:** the results of early votes and mail ballots that arrive before Election Day will be reported first, and those are expected to disproportionately favor Democrats.



Pennsylvania

What happened in 2020:

- Margin was **80,555 votes**, or **1.2%**.
- Called on **Nov 7** (4 days after Election Day).
Uncertainty about the number of outstanding provisional ballots delayed the call until those ballots began to be counted, which was after the deadline for late-arriving mail ballots (Nov 6).
- Experienced a **significant “blue shift”** (Trump held the lead **until ~61 hours** after polls closed) from the results of the Election Day votes being reported first, and mail ballots being counted slowly over time.

What’s new in 2024:

- **Lower mail turnout** expected (20-30%, down from 38%).
- No late-arriving ballots will be accepted (except those from UOCAVA voters).
- Counties that accepted Act 88 grants must count mail ballots continuously starting 7am on Election Day.
- New and faster equipment (ballot sorters, envelope openers).



Pennsylvania

What to expect in 2024 if margins are tight:

- **If the margin is less than 0.5%:** an automatic recount, and a potential fight over provisional ballots, late-arriving UOCAVA ballots, and/or cured ballots.
- **A probable “blue shift”:** PA did not expand pre-canvassing for this election, so Election Day results will likely be reported faster than mail and absentee results, which are once again expected to significantly favor Democrats. However, since mail ballot counting is expected to be faster than in 2020, any blue shift will not be as drawn out as it was then.



Wisconsin

What happened in 2020:

- Margin was **20,608 votes**, or **0.6%**.
- Called on afternoon of **Nov 4** (1 day after Election Day).
- Experienced a **small “blue shift”** (Trump held the lead **until ~12 hours** after polls closed) as the results from mail ballots in Milwaukee were reported overnight, flipping the race.

What’s new in 2024:

- **Much lower mail turnout** expected ([10-20%](#), down from [41%](#)).
- [New and faster equipment](#) (ballot sorters).



Wisconsin

What to expect in 2024 if margins are tight:

- **If the margin is less than 1%:** a requested recount in specific counties (in 2020, recounts were filed in Dane and Milwaukee Counties).
- **A possible small “blue shift”:** while there are fewer mail ballots expected, mail ballot results being released later, along with small “red” counties reporting faster than large “blue” counties, may still produce a blue shift.



Thank you.

For additional information, contact us at
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