

10-5-1: A Free Press campaign to boost voter turnout this August

Detroit Free Press Editorial Board

Published 6:00 a.m. ET May 6, 2018 | Updated 6:48 a.m. ET May 6, 2018



(Photo: Detroit Free Press/ USA Today Network)

Everywhere you go, people are talking about this November's midterm election.

But for the majority of Michigan voters who reside in congressional and legislative districts stacked decisively in favor of one party, November may be too late to play a meaningful role in deciding who'll represent them in Washington and Lansing.

For those voters, the more important election will take place Aug. 7, when a small subset of those who cast ballots in the November election will choose the Republican and Democratic nominees for Congress, governor and the state Legislature.

In Democratic-leaning districts, the candidates who win the August Democratic primary will likely coast to easy victories in November. In the majority of congressional and legislative districts drawn to favor Republicans, GOP primary winners will make similarly short work of their general election opponents.

One of the most egregious examples of this phenomenon will play out in the heavily Democratic 13th Congressional District, where nine Democrats and one Republican are vying to succeed U.S. Rep. John Conyers (D-Detroit).

Whoever wins the Aug. 7 Democratic primary will likely go on to win the Nov. 6 election with 75% or more the vote. David Dudenhoefer, the lone Republican candidate, will be lucky to capture 20%.

Republican candidates hold a lesser but still prohibitive advantage in most of Michigan's other congressional districts. Only three or four of the state's 14 congressional elections, and perhaps a fifth of its 148 legislative contests, are likely to be competitive in November.

In all the rest, whoever prevails in the dominant party's August primary is a virtual lock to be sworn in next January.

Brian Dickerson: [Confessions of a recovering elitist \(/story/opinion/columnists/brian-dickerson/2018/05/06/boosting-primary-turnout/577045002/\)](https://www.freepress.com/story/opinion/columnists/brian-dickerson/2018/05/06/boosting-primary-turnout/577045002/)

Left with the dregs

If you were invited to a smorgasbord and warned you that only one or two entrees would remain available after the first hour, you'd make it a point to be there when the doors opened.

Yet if history is any guide, only about one in five adults eligible to vote in the Aug. 7 primary election will do so, even though their choices will be greatly diminished thereafter.



In the last 10 election cycles, voter turnout in the August primary has exceeded 20% only once — in 2002, when 23% of the electorate picked Jennifer Granholm and Dick Posthumous to head their parties' tickets.

Four years later, less than 17% turned out for the August primary.

That makes no sense — and no government by, for and of the people can last very long if more than 80% of the people opt to watch from the bleachers.

So we've resolved to do something about it, right now: And with your help, the Free Press is determined to boost participation in this year's primary to record levels.

How?

We know persuading Free Press readers to vote in August won't make much difference — because people who stay abreast of the news are *already* the most likely to vote. You're the backbone of the engaged minority who can be depended on to cast their ballots in election after election.

But we also know that nothing is more effective at turning non-voters into voters than a personal appeal made by someone they know.

And *that's* where you come in.

10-5-1

If you think representative government is something worth saving and strengthening, we're asking each of you to take the 10-5-1 pledge:

By July 1: Send emails or postcards to **10 family members, friends, or acquaintances** you suspect aren't planning to vote in the primary election, inviting them to join you at the polls Aug. 7.

By Aug. 1: Have phone or face-to-face conversations with **at least 5** of those you contacted, renewing your invitation to vote.

On or before Aug. 7: Take one of the people you contacted with you when you go to cast your own vote or absentee ballot.

Between now and Aug. 7, the Free Press will provide information to make your recruiting efforts more effective and your vote better informed:

- We'll suggest ways to approach fair-weather voters in your circle, explain how they can find out whether they're registered to vote and how to register if they're not.
- We'll provide detailed information about the most important races, focusing on those in which the primary victor is all but certain to win the November general election.
- We'll highlight what other groups are doing to register, engage and mobilize primary voters, calling attention to special events for those planning to participate in the primary.
- We'll provide tools to assist readers in recruiting friends and family members for the big vote.

And maybe, after the primary ballots are counted August 7, we'll awake to something that looks less like a failed experiment in self-governance and more like the sort of representative democracy our state can take pride in.

Who can vote in Michigan's Aug.7 primary?

You are eligible to vote in Michigan's Aug, 7, 2018 primary election if:

- You are a U.S. citizen
- You will be at least 18 years old by Aug. 7, 2018
- You are a resident of Michigan
- You are resident of the city or township where you are applying to register to vote
- You are registered to vote on or before Monday, July 9
- You are not currently in jail or prison for a crime of which you have been convicted

Key dates on the road to Aug. 7 primary

June 4: Secretary of State certifies candidates for August primary election

June 23: Secretary of State mails absentee ballots to military and overseas voters

June 25: Absentee ballots available from city, township election clerks

July 9: Last day to register to vote in Aug. 7 primary

Aug. 4: Last day to request absentee ballot by mail

AUG. 7: ELECTION DAY, ABSENTEE BALLOTS DUE

Can your organization help?

Is your organization planning an event to register Aug. 7 primary voters, or help eligible voters cast ballots? Send an email to editpg@freepress.com and include #primariesmatter in the subject line, and we'll help publicize your event.

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