

Maryland voter registration analysis

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The Baltimore Sun conducted an analysis of Maryland voter registration statistics from the state's Board of Elections.

The analysis provided information for the October 15, 2018 Baltimore Sun story titled "[Maryland nears record high voter registration — and independents make up the fastest-growing group](http://www.baltimoresun.com/news/maryland/politics/bs-md-2018-voter-registration-20181011-story.html)" (<http://www.baltimoresun.com/news/maryland/politics/bs-md-2018-voter-registration-20181011-story.html>).

Here are the key findings of the data analysis, which is documented below and based on data from the Maryland State Board of Elections [Monthly Voter Registration Activity Reports](https://elections.maryland.gov/voter_registration/stats.html) (https://elections.maryland.gov/voter_registration/stats.html):

- As September 30, 2018, 18 percent of voters were registered as "unaffiliated."
- The number of unaffiliated voters increased by 8 percent between September 2014 and September 2018.
- Democrats and Republicans each saw 6 percent increases over the four-year period between September 2014 and September 2018.
- Unaffiliated voters make up more than 20 percent of active, registered voters in eight Maryland counties.
- There have been more recent increases in unaffiliated voters since 2016.
- As September 30, 2018, the number of active, registered voters was 3,975,309 — just a couple thousand short of the state record of 3,977,637, set in January 2017.
- Democrats continue to hold a 2-to-1 registration advantage over Republicans, making up slightly more than half of active, registered voters.
- Like Republicans, Democrats saw a rise in registrations right before the 2016 presidential election.

How we did it

Run `01_processing.ipynb`

The Maryland State Board of Elections provides the Monthly Voter Registration Activity Reports as PDFs.

Data was extracted from the January through September 2018 reports (September 2018 was the most recent data available at the time of publication), and from the September 2014 and September 2016 reports (for a point-in-time comparison of 2018 with the most recent election years), using [Tabula \(https://tabula.technology/\)](https://tabula.technology/), an open-source tool "for liberating data tables trapped inside PDF files."

The `01_processing.ipynb` notebook contains code that was used to process and combine the files for each month and year into cleaned data files for analysis.

The cleaned CSV files are in the `output/` folder:

- `totals.csv` : total active registration, by county and party
- `changes.csv` : voter registration changes, by county and change type (address or name, or changes from* a particular party)
- `new.csv` : new registrations, by party and method of registration
- `removals.csv` : removals from the registered voter list, by party and reason for removal

Our story only uses the `totals.csv` file, but we have included the other files for completeness, so that others may conduct their own analyses.

The files in the `input/` folder correspond exactly to the columns in the PDF reports. The PDFs for each month and year are in the `pdf/` folder, for reference.

*The state does not track which party voters switched to.

Import R data analysis libraries

```
In [1]: suppressMessages(library('tidyverse'))
        suppressMessages(library('lubridate'))
        suppressMessages(library('reshape2'))
```

Read in the `totals.csv` data for analysis.

```
In [2]: totals <- suppressMessages(read_csv('output/totals.csv'))
```

Here are the first six rows:

```
In [3]: head(totals)
```

county	dem	rep	grn	lib	unaf	oth	total	date	conf.mailing	inactive	de
ALLEGANY	13864	21284	135	284	7117	302	42986	2018-01-31	234	2981	3
ANNE ARUNDEL	159780	134468	832	2708	82760	1223	381771	2018-01-31	4660	21399	4
BALTIMORE CITY	301200	31039	1264	1416	45782	1658	382359	2018-01-31	5347	27109	7
BALTIMORE CO.	305849	142241	1449	3096	90743	4448	547826	2018-01-31	6215	28367	5
CALVERT	23607	26554	136	489	13265	393	64444	2018-01-31	2012	4291	3
CAROLINE	6853	9156	29	107	3821	117	20083	2018-01-31	98	1039	3

Finding: As September 30, 2018, 18 percent of voters were registered as "unaffiliated."

Filter the `totals` dataframe to include county totals for September 30, 2018. The `unaf_perc` column provides the percent of active, registered voters who were "unaffiliated."

```
In [4]: totals %>% filter(county == 'Total' & date == '2018-09-30') %>% select(unaf_perc)
```

unaf_perc

18.04056

```
In [5]: print(paste("As September 30, 2018,",
                    trunc(totals %>% filter(county == 'Total' & date == '2018-09-30')
                    %>% select(unaf_perc)),
              "percent of voters were registered as unaffiliated."))
```

```
[1] "As September 30, 2018, 18 percent of voters were registered as unaffiliated."
```

Finding: The number of unaffiliated voters increased by 8 percent between September 2014 and September 2018.

Create a dataframe, `totals.pch`, which consists of the percent change between 2014 and 2018 (`pch_14_*`) as well as the percent change between 2016 and 2018 for each party (`pch_16_*`). Other parties (not Democrat or Republican) are combined into `other`.

```
In [6]: totals.pch <- totals %>% mutate(other_perc = grn_perc + lib_perc + oth_perc,
                                     other = grn + lib + oth) %>%
select(-grn_perc, -lib_perc, -oth_perc) %>%
group_by(county) %>%
filter(date == '2014-09-30' |
       date == '2016-09-30' |
       date == '2018-09-30') %>%
arrange(county, date) %>%
mutate(pch_16_dem = (dem/lag(dem) - 1) * 100,
       pch_16_rep = (rep/lag(rep) - 1) * 100,
       pch_16_unaf = (unaf/lag(unaf) - 1) * 100,
       pch_16_other = (other/lag(other) - 1) * 100,
       pch_14_dem = (dem/lag(dem, 2) - 1) * 100,
       pch_14_rep = (rep/lag(rep, 2) - 1) * 100,
       pch_14_unaf = (unaf/lag(unaf, 2) - 1) * 100,
       pch_14_other = (other/lag(other, 2) - 1) * 100
) %>%
filter(date == '2018-09-30') %>%
ungroup() %>%
select(-conf.mailing, -inactive)
```

The `pch_14_unaf` column provides the percent change in active, registered unaffiliated voters between 2014 and 2018. For the story, we chose to compare 2018 to 2014, since that was the year of the last midterm elections.

```
In [7]: totals.pch %>% filter(county == 'Total') %>% select(pch_14_unaf)
```

```
pch_14_unaf
8.17601
```

```
In [8]: print(paste("The number of unaffiliated voters increased by",
                    trunc(totals.pch %>% filter(county == 'Total') %>% select(pch_14_u
naf)),
            "percent between September 2014 and September 2018."))
```

```
[1] "The number of unaffiliated voters increased by 8 percent between Septemb
er 2014 and September 2018."
```

Finding: Democrats and Republicans each saw 6 percent increases over the four-year period between September 2014 and September 2018.

The `pch_14_dem` and `pch_14_rep` columns provide the percent change in active, registered Democratic and Republican voters between 2014 and 2018. For the story, we chose to compare 2018 to 2014, since that was the year of the last midterm elections.

```
In [9]: totals.pch %>% filter(county == 'Total') %>% select(pch_14_dem, pch_14_rep)
```

pch_14_dem	pch_14_rep
6.646361	6.358201

```
In [10]: print(paste("The number of Democratic voters increased by",
                    trunc(totals.pch %>% filter(county == 'Total') %>% select(pch_14_d
em)),
                "percent between September 2014 and September 2018.))

print(paste("The number of Republican voters increased by",
            trunc(totals.pch %>% filter(county == 'Total') %>% select(pch_14_r
ep)),
        "percent between September 2014 and September 2018.))
```

```
[1] "The number of Democratic voters increased by 6 percent between September
2014 and September 2018."
```

```
[1] "The number of Republican voters increased by 6 percent between September
2014 and September 2018."
```

Finding: Unaffiliated voters make up more than 20 percent of active, registered voters in eight Maryland counties.

Filter the `totals` dataframe to include counties with more than 20 percent of registered unaffiliateds as of September 30, 2018. These are the eight counties:

```
In [11]: totals %>% filter(date == '2018-09-30' & unaf_perc > 20) %>%
          arrange(desc(unaf_perc)) %>% mutate(row_number = row_number()) %>%
          select(row_number, county, unaf_perc)
```

row_number	county	unaf_perc
1	FREDERICK	22.85382
2	HOWARD	22.51406
3	CECIL	22.01056
4	MONTGOMERY	21.93508
5	ANNE ARUNDEL	21.77415
6	ST. MARY'S	20.58683
7	CALVERT	20.49780
8	WASHINGTON	20.32497

Finding: There have been more recent increases in unaffiliated voters since 2016.

For the story, we chose to compare 2018 to 2014, since that was the year of the last midterm elections. However, we can also compare 2018 with the most recent presidential election year, 2016. The `pch_16_unaf`, `pch_16_dem` and `pch_16_rep` columns in the `totals.pch` dataframe provide the percent change in active, registered unaffiliated, Democratic and Republican voters between 2014 and 2018.

```
In [12]: totals.pch %>% filter(county == 'Total') %>% select(pch_16_unaf, pch_16_dem, pch_16_rep)
```

<code>pch_16_unaf</code>	<code>pch_16_dem</code>	<code>pch_16_rep</code>
5.635676	1.824224	0.06177157

Increases in unaffiliated registered voters have outpaced that of Democrats and Republicans since 2016.

As September 30, 2018, the number of active, registered voters was 3,975,309 — just a couple thousand short of the state record of 3,977,637, set in January 2017.

Filter the data to include the total number of active, registered voters as of September 30, 2018.

```
In [13]: totals %>% filter(county == 'Total' & date == '2018-09-30') %>% select(total)
```

<code>total</code>
3975309

The record high number of 3,977,637 for January 31, 2017 was obtained by reviewing the State Board of Election Monthly Voter Registration Activity Reports: https://elections.maryland.gov/voter_registration/stats.html (https://elections.maryland.gov/voter_registration/stats.html).

Finding: Democrats continue to hold a 2-to-1 registration advantage over Republicans, making up slightly more than half of active, registered voters.

Create a column, `dem_rep_ratio`, that represents the ratio of Democrats to Republicans in terms of active, registered voters.

```
In [14]: totals <- totals %>% mutate(dem_rep_ratio = dem/rep)
```

Filter to the total for all counties:

```
In [15]: totals %>% filter(county == 'Total') %>% select(date, dem_rep_ratio, dem, rep)
          %>%
          arrange(date)
```

date	dem_rep_ratio	dem	rep
2014-09-30	2.139903	2043479	954940
2016-09-30	2.108561	2140253	1015030
2018-01-31	2.120768	2133813	1006151
2018-02-28	2.121533	2134776	1006242
2018-03-31	2.124091	2136893	1006027
2018-04-30	2.126237	2141975	1007402
2018-05-30	2.129083	2149873	1009765
2018-06-30	2.133123	2155862	1010660
2018-07-31	2.137281	2160753	1010982
2018-08-30	2.142831	2169094	1012256
2018-09-30	2.145701	2179296	1015657

The ratio of active, registered Democrats to active, registered Republicans as of September 30, 2018 is around 2:1. This has been the case since at least September 2014.

Finding: Like Republicans, Democrats saw a rise in registrations right before the 2016 presidential election.

The `historical_registration.csv` file in the `output` folder contains voter registration totals for the months of January and September between 2000 and 2018. These were obtained from the State Board of Election Monthly Voter Registration Activity Reports for those months and years:

https://elections.maryland.gov/voter_registration/stats.html

(https://elections.maryland.gov/voter_registration/stats.html), and the `source` column in the CSV provides links to the individual PDF reports.

```
In [16]: historical <- suppressMessages(read_csv("output/historical_registration.csv"))
```

Create a column, `party2`, which combines party categories other than Democrat, Republican and unaffiliated into a single category called "other." Note that the third parties recognized by the state have changed over the years. Also note that in 2000 and January 2001, unaffiliated voters were not placed into their own category (`dec/oth` refers to voters who declined to register with a party as well as voters who specified other parties).

```
In [17]: historical <- historical %>% mutate(date = mdy(date),
                                             party2 = case_when(party == 'dem' ~ 'dem',
                                                                  party == 'rep' ~ 'rep',
                                                                  party == 'unaf' ~ 'unaf',
                                                                  party == 'total' ~ 'total',
                                                                  TRUE ~ 'other'))
```

Calculate the percent change between the Septembers of each year.

```
In [18]: historical.pch <- historical %>% filter(month == 'September') %>% group_by(date, party2) %>%
          summarise(n = sum(number)) %>% ungroup() %>%
          arrange(party2, date) %>% group_by(party2) %>%
          mutate(pch = (n/lag(n) - 1) * 100)
```

The `pch` column for `date == 2016-09-30` represents the percent change in active, registered voters by party between September 30, 2015 and September 30, 2016.

```
In [19]: historical.pch %>% filter(date == '2016-09-30')
```

date	party2	n	pch
2016-09-30	dem	2140253	5.9426294
2016-09-30	other	58136	2.3683330
2016-09-30	rep	1015030	5.7729481
2016-09-30	total	3892326	4.6459502
2016-09-30	unaf	678907	-0.5842755

Democrats and Republicans both saw rises in registrations during this period.

Plots included in the story

Versions of the following plots were included in the story:

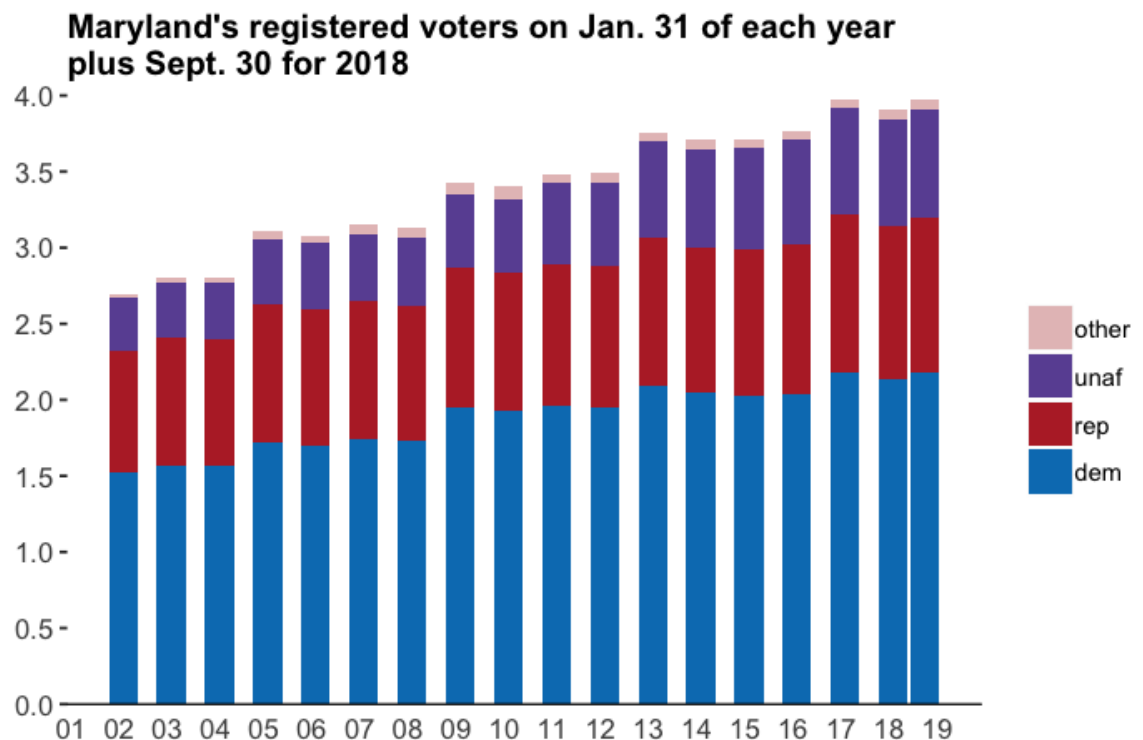
Active, registered voters by party as of January 31 of each year from 2002-2018 (plus Sept. 30, 2018)

Here is a plot of active, registered voters by party as of January 31 of each year from 2002 (the first year for which unaffiliated voters were broken out separately) through 2018. Note that registration as of September 30, 2018 is also plotted as the rightmost bar.

```
In [21]: options(repr.plot.width = 6, repr.plot.height = 4)

historical$party2.f <- factor(historical$party2,
                             levels = c('other',
                                           'unaf', 'rep', 'dem'))

print(ggplot(historical %>% filter(year > 2001 & (month == 'January' | year ==
2018) &
                             party2.f != 'total'), aes(x = date, y = number/1000000
,
                                                         group = party2.f,
fill = party2.f)) +
  geom_bar(stat='identity') + labs(x = '', y = '',
                                  title = "Maryland's registered voters on Ja
n. 31 of each year\nplus Sept. 30 for 2018") +
  scale_x_date(date_breaks = "year", date_minor_breaks = "1 week",
               date_labels = "%y") +
  scale_y_continuous(breaks = seq(0, 4,.5), limits = c(0,4), expand = c(0,0))
+
  scale_fill_manual(values = c('#E5C1C1', '#6B52A2', '#B82B30', '#007DBE' )) +
  theme(panel.background = element_blank(),
        panel.grid.major = element_blank(),
        panel.grid.minor = element_blank(),
        axis.text = element_text(size = 10),
        plot.title = element_text(size = 12, face = "bold"),
        axis.ticks.x = element_blank(),
        axis.line.x = element_line(),
        legend.title = element_blank()))
```



Active, registered voters by party for each county as of September 30, 2018

Here is a plot of active, registered voters by party for each county as of September 30, 2018.

```

In [21]: options(repr.plot.width = 6, repr.plot.height = 6)

totals.m <- melt(totals %>% mutate(other_perc = grn_perc + lib_perc + oth_perc
,
                                other = grn + lib + oth) %>%
                                select(-grn_perc, -lib_perc, -oth_perc), id.vars = c(
'county', 'date'))
totals.m$party.f <- factor(totals.m$variable,
                          levels = c('rep_perc', 'other_perc', 'unaf_per
c',
                                     'dem_perc'))

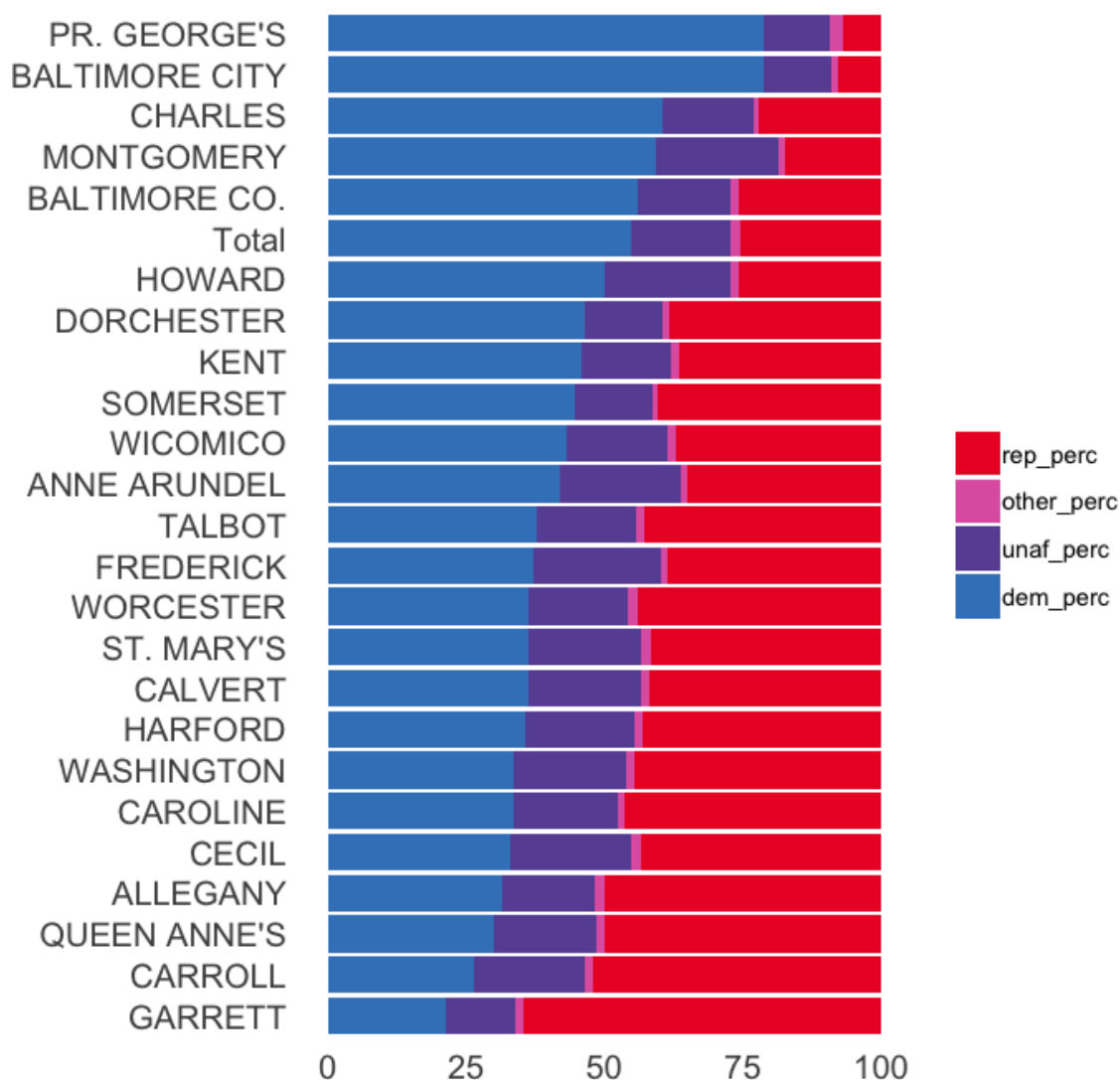
sep.totals <- totals.m %>% filter(date == '2018-09-30')
sep.dem <- sep.totals %>% filter(variable == 'dem_perc')

sep.totals$county.f <- factor(sep.totals$county,
                              levels = sep.dem$county[order(sep.dem$value)])

print(ggplot(sep.totals %>% filter(grepl('perc', variable))) +
      geom_bar(aes(x = county.f, y = value, fill = party.f), stat="identity") +
      coord_flip() + scale_fill_manual(values = c('#eb212e', '#df65b0', '#6a51a3',
'#3e83c2')) +
      theme(panel.grid.minor.x = element_blank(), plot.title = element_text(face =
"bold"),
            axis.ticks = element_blank(),
            axis.text = element_text(size = 12),
            panel.background = element_blank(),
            legend.title = element_blank()) + la
bs(x = '',
y= '', title = 'Maryland voter registration as of Sept. 30, 2018'))

```

Maryland voter registration as of Sept. 30, 2018



Note: the story also includes some historical information on voter registration in Maryland prior to the year 2000 (the earliest year for which the State Board of Elections produces monthly reports). For example, the following passage:

"In 1978, the Maryland electorate was 70 percent Democratic, 23 percent Republican and 7 percent independent. Most of the shift appears to have been among Democrats, as Republican registration has remained in a narrow band between 23 percent and 27 percent since at least 1962."

This information was provided by political scientist Todd Eberly, citing a book by former Maryland Secretary of State and executive in residence at the University of Baltimore's School of Public and International Affairs [John T. Willis](http://www.ubalt.edu/cpa/faculty/alphabetical-directory/john-t-willis.cfm) (<http://www.ubalt.edu/cpa/faculty/alphabetical-directory/john-t-willis.cfm>), "Presidential Elections in Maryland."