

Lights out: Voter Roll Anomalies during the 2020 Election, East Lansing, Michigan

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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Thank you to Patrice Johnson for her help in editing this report.

GRAPHICAL SUMMARY

| Ineligible votes cast E. Lansing, MI, Nov. 2020 Election: 1,936 | | |  |
|--|--|-----------------------------|---|
| <i>Anomaly</i> | <i>Ineligible Registered Voters in QVF</i> | <i>Voted Absentee (ABS)</i> | <i>Voted in Person (I)</i> |
| Address of record does not exist | 165 | 41 | 6 |
| Deceased | 58 | 5 | |
| Closed MSU dorms (19 of 27) | 1,738 | 174 | 102 |
| Address of record sold prior to Sep. 30, 2020 | 767 | 67 | 18 |
| Invalid residence at fraternity, sorority & co-op address | 526 | 33 | 17 |
| Moved: Registered voters no longer at QVF recorded address | 5,718 | 1,043 | 429 |
| SUM | 9,077 | 1,363 | 572 |
| TOTAL ineligible absentee & in-person votes | | | 1,935 |

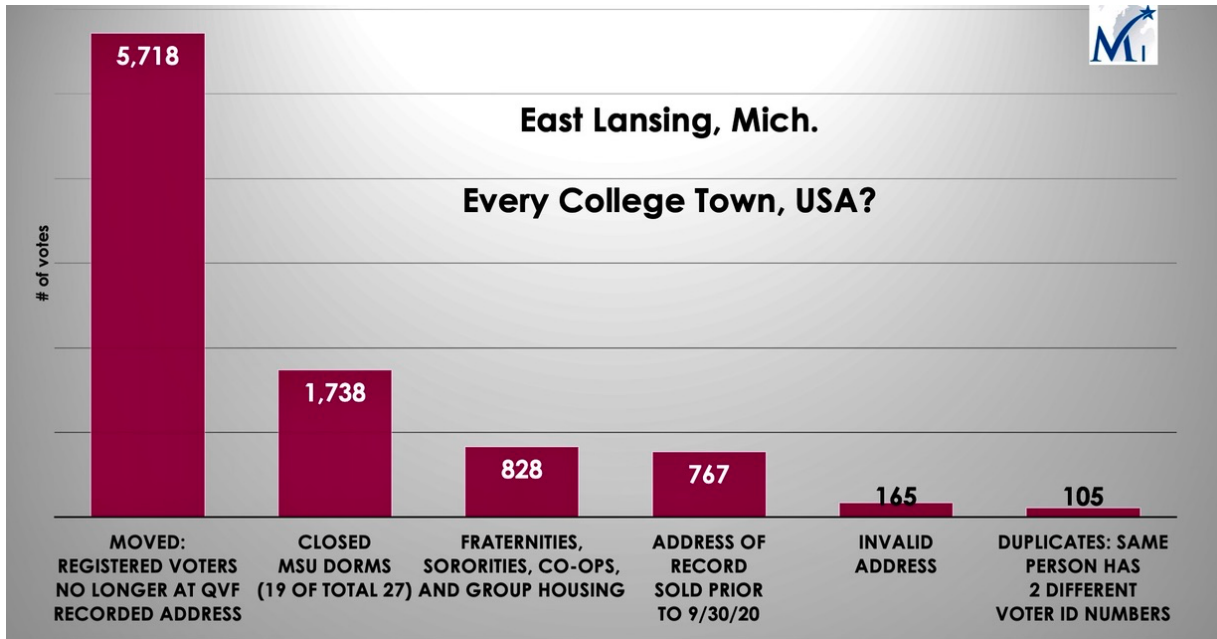


Chart by Bill Richardson



Chart by Patrice Johnson

BACKGROUND

The City of East Lansing is 13.5 sq. miles in size and located in Ingham County with a small portion in Clinton County. The information for East Lansing includes precincts in both counties. East Lansing is home to Michigan State University, which has about three-square miles of property in the southern portion of East Lansing. The university has 27 residence halls and three apartment complexes on campus. These on campus residential facilities can house 17,500 students and faculty.

Off campus are 118 properties issued a Class 6 Rental license (Class B licenses issued by the City to fraternities, sororities, cooperatives, and other group living situations) to persons or organizations. The City currently has 1,008 Class 4 Rental Licenses (single family or two-family unit housing with no more than three unrelated persons) and 201 Class 5 Rental Licenses (Class A, typically comprises apartment complexes). According to a recent housing study for the City of East Lansing by LandUse USA, LLC, nationally renters move every three years. However, in a college town environment, relocation ranges between every one or two years.¹

The U.S Census Bureau reported a 2020 population of 47,471 (a reduction from the 2010 population of 48,579) with 8.3% of the population under 18 years old. It also reported 8.5% of the population as 65 years or older.²

Immediately after the 2020 General election, a PIME supporter/this author/Anne Hill submitted a Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) submission to the city clerk for the Qualified Voter File (QVF) and History Files for that election (indicating absentee and in person voters, and those who did not vote). The author received this information on Nov. 12, 2020.

MSU closed its campus for the 2020/2021 school year due to the pandemic and offered many classes online in order to reduce the number of students on campus. Only eight of the 27 residence halls and three apartment complexes were open in the fall of 2020. According to the MSU Community Relations Department, these opened facilities “were not anywhere near capacity.”³

As a result of the closures, when the students departed in the spring of 2020, they had to move to another location. They could not have received mail at these closed locations. Students and staff never moved into the closed dorms, which were described as “lights out.”

RESOURCES

Several different types of resources for researching information were used. These include, but are not limited to:

- Qualified Voter File (QVF) and History File for the Nov. 3, 2020, general election. Files were FOIAed and received via emailed link from the City of East Lansing Clerk’s Office on Nov. 12, 2020. This file contained 25,545 names of registered voters on the QVF with 15,142 of them casting a vote.
- BSAonline.com. Local governments use this publicly available source for documenting parcel and lot information, including street name and number, property owner, property class, residency exemption percentage, sale history (date, grantor, grantee, sales price, terms of sale), and rental license classification.
- Oversized map of the City of East Lansing including an index of all streets and their location.
- Google search
- Findagrave.com

- Googlemaps.com
- Smartbackgroundchecks.com
- LinkedIn
- East Lansing Precinct Map
- MSU Dorm Map

ANOMALIES:

Address of record is an invalid address. An invalid address includes vacant lots; non-residential buildings (e.g., office buildings, restaurants, post office, retail or convenience stores, and warehouse); the street exists but the street number does not; or a street with that name does not exist. There were 165 registered voters listed at an invalid address. These include:

Address of Record is a post office. The address of record for eight registered voters was a post office address. Two people voted in person and one absentee.

Address of Record is a vacant lot. The address of record for ten registered voters was a vacant lot. One voted in person.

Address of Record is a non-existent street number. The address of record for 41 registered voters was a non-existent street number. The street exists, but that street number does not exist (verified by BSAonline and Googlemaps). Eight voted absentee and three voted in person.

Address of Record is a non-existent street.

Cherry Lane was listed on the index of the map provided by the city but could not be found with the location index data. A call to the clerk's office revealed that the street was demolished at least ten (10) years earlier and another housing development was constructed on the site. Cherry Lane no longer exists and has not existed for more than ten years. However, the QVF file listed 50 eligible voters as registered to this street at various numbers, many of which displayed apartment extensions.

Moreover, the History File shows that 15 of these registered voters voted absentee in the Nov. 3, 2020, general election. When asked how this could be, the city clerk's response was that these residents may have been military personnel who were overseas. Military personnel are permitted to use their last U.S. address indefinitely as long as they are in the service. However, on review of the birth years of these individuals, most were past the mandatory retirement age of the U.S. military (64 years of age).

Spartan Village is an apartment complex on MSU's campus. It is used for visiting scholars who typically stay three months to less than one year. The complex is located on Middlevale Road. There is no street named Spartan Village. However, 23 registered voters' record of address is a street address of Spartan Village. Ten voted absentee.

University Village is an apartment complex on MSU's campus served by Garden City Road. There is no street named University Village. Eight registered voters' record of address is a street address of University Village. Seven voted absentee.

Address of record is a residence sold prior to Sept. 30, 2020. Using BSAonline.com, each residential property that did not have a rental license had a comparison of the QVF name with the name listed under “Owner Information.” If there was no match, a comparison of registered voters listed in the “Sales History” section was completed. Smartbackgroundchecks.com was used to verify if there was a familial relationship or if the person had lived at the residence and since moved to another location.

A total of 767 registered voters were associated with residences sold more than 30 days prior to the election. They were, therefore, no longer eligible to vote in the election. Of these, six property sales of residences dated back to 1999.

All of these residential houses were sold via conventional warranty deed transfers. One of the properties had another conventional warranty deed sale since the 1999 sale. A second property had two other conventional warranty deed sales since its sale in 1999. Of the six 1999 sales, one registered voter did vote absentee in the Nov. 3, 2020, election.

Of the 767 voter-registrant addresses in which the owner had sold the property prior to Sept. 30, 2020, several subsequent sales transactions (not including Quit Claims or Family Transactions) had occurred, yet the registered voter continued to be listed on the QVF as residing at the no-longer valid address.

The clerk was asked how this could happen since real estate transactions are processed through the Assessor’s Office, located in the same building as the clerk’s office. The response was that the prior owner of the property had not informed her office that they had sold the property and moved to another address.

Of the 767 voters registered as resident at these illegitimate addresses, 67 voted absentee and 18 voted in person.

Duplicates. There were 105 instances of the same person having two different voter ID numbers and one instance of one person having three voter ID numbers. In one instance a person had four voter ID numbers. These appeared in several different ways with the most common as follows:

- Married vs. maiden name. When a woman was married, the voter ID with her maiden name remained and a new voter ID was issued with her married name. This occurred whether she remained at the same address or not. This was verified using BSAonline.com and Smartbackgroundchecks.com. (This site has a section for also known as, AKAs, or other names this person has gone by). In some instances, the full middle name was listed on the duplicate as only the middle initial. This error occurred in 11 instances.
- Initials vs. full names with address changes. The first, middle, and last name the same, but address changed. The first and last name the same, but one used full middle name and other used middle initial, plus the address changed. The most frequent instances of duplication occurred during moves from a dormitory to an apartment or from one apartment to another. 55 instances.
- Initials vs. full middle name, same address. First and last name the same and address the same, but one had full middle name and other had middle initial. 9 instances.
- First, middle, and last name the same AND address the same. In most instances, the registration date was the same. 9 instances.
- One character different in the name (“N” vs “R,” “E” vs “O,” “F” vs “G,” “S” vs “SS,” “T” vs “TT”). 12 instances.

Closed Dorms. Nineteen of MSU's 27 dorms were closed. There were 1,738 voters on the QVF file registered to an address of one of the closed dorms. Of those with addresses of a closed dorm, 124 voted absentee, and 102 voted in person.

The QVF showed no alternate address for any of these voters registered to an ineligible dorm address. Of those recorded as voting absentee from the closed dorm address, multiple registered voters were not listed as having a room number.

When asked how someone could vote absentee from the address of a closed dorm, the clerk stated that the voter probably came to the clerk's office to pick up an absentee ballot or went online and requested the ballot be sent to another address. However, none of these actions were recorded on the QVF, and the clerk said she did not know if this was the case. She indicated she did not follow up to verify any of the hypothetical situations.

It is unknown if these individuals duplicated their votes by voting in their hometowns over the summer or from new addresses in the greater Lansing area.

Fraternalities, sororities, co-ops, and group housing. Four primary sources were used to identify these properties in East Lansing, as there is no single organization (city or MSU) that accurately has that information. Therefore, using BSAonline, all properties with a Class 6 license are included (per City ordinance, Class 6 licenses are for "fraternities, sororities, co-ops and other group living situations").

These properties were compared to lists of fraternities and sororities: 1) issued at a December 2021 Planning meeting, 2) submitted by a city resident at that meeting, and 3) published on the MSU website. Results were then further researched by using Google search and Google Maps. Over time, some co-operative and group housing (single family rental properties with a record of typically 6 to 18 bedrooms) were the home of fraternities and sororities. These properties maintain their licenses even after the fraternity or sorority leaves as the license stays with the property and not the fraternal or co-operative organization.

According to input from MSU staff, local citizens, city staff and elected officials, very few students remain in a fraternity past their sophomore year. By age 20 or 21, most move to apartments, single family housing rentals, or smaller group housing properties. Therefore, individuals 24 years old and younger who lived at properties associated with fraternities, sororities, or co-ops, were considered eligible voters unless clear evidence existed that they had left MSU and were employed in another city or state. Sources of evidence included the voter's publication in their LinkedIn accounts or current employer announcements regarding the voter gaining employment in another city or state.

There were 828 registered voters on the QVF who met that criteria, and 526 were registered as residing at properties associated with a specific fraternity, sorority or cooperative (Note: smaller group housing properties with a Class 6 rental license from the city were excluded). Of these, 342 registered voters were 40 or more years old. Eight absentee voters and four in person voters were not eligible to vote and registered as residing at fraternity/sorority/co-op. In addition, of all registered voters residing at Class 6 rental properties, including group housing, 33 voted absentee and 17 voted in person.

The November 2020 QVF records one property with 11 female registered voters between the ages of 48 to 53 years of age living at a currently active fraternity, housing 19- to 22-year-old males. Over 25 years ago, the property appears to have been used to house a now defunct sorority. The names of these registered voter sorority sisters have yet to be removed from the list of Qualified Voters.

Moved: No longer at QVF reported address. As mentioned earlier, the impact of MSU on housing for students, faculty and staff is significant. A typical incoming freshman class for MSU averages around 8,000 students. Freshmen stay mainly in the dorms, as do some upper classmen, but upper classmen frequently move to apartments designed for students, sororities/fraternities/co-ops, or general single family rental properties. Plus, many of these non-dorm residents move every year or two.

While some graduates stay to pursue advanced degrees, members of a graduating class typically find a job outside the local area or out of the state. Almost all relocate. This assumption was verified using the MSU website commencement information (by year and term), registered voter's LinkedIn accounts showing the year they graduated or attended MSU, the town/city in which they now reside, the company for which they work, their Facebook accounts showing the town/city in which they live, and when they started, left, or graduated from MSU, and Google searches announcing when various graduates would be joining their organization and the position they now hold.

It is natural to expect a much higher rate and continual movement of these people compared to jurisdictions without a college or university. In fact, Clerk Chris Swope, of the Michigan Association of Municipal Clerks and the Council of Election Officials, stated in his testimony before the Michigan Senate Election Committee on Sept. 1, 2021, "There are other situations, such as University towns that end up pushing that limit, because every year primarily a quarter of the kids move away, and so many of them we don't get processed out."

According to Univstats, "At Michigan colleges, there are 537,083 students, including 458,713 undergraduate and 78,370 graduate schools' students in total for academic year 2020-2021."
(<https://www.univstats.com/states/michigan/student-population/>)

With approximately 25% of the students on the permanent absent voter list becoming ineligible every year, over a four-year election cycle, the permanent absent voter list would gain approximately 537,083 ineligible student voters.

The core issue to address is: How to clean up the voter rolls, especially in regard to high college voter turnover rate of residents migrating off campus and out of the state each year?

The November 2020 QVF recorded 5,718 registered voters, confirmed using the methods described above, as residing at incorrect addresses. These erroneously recorded registered voters had moved, and the listed address was no longer their residence. Of these, 1,043 voted absentee and 429 voted in person.

The age groups of these individuals breaks down as follows: 18 to 30 years old, 2,770; 31 to 40 years old, 1,750; 41 to 50 years old, 532; and over 50 years old, 666.

Deceased. There were 58 registered voters deceased before Sept. 1, 2020. Of those deceased, five are listed as voting absentee, even though they passed away at least nine months prior to the November 2020 election. Two passed away in 2014, two in 2019, and two in 2020 (between January and March). The oldest registered voter on the QVF has a birth year of 1896, which would make that person an incredible 124 or 125 years of age.

Another type of invalid address was found in multi-unit residential properties such as apartment complexes, senior housing, convalescent centers, dormitories, or other residential properties. These have room numbers or apartment numbers. For the post office to deliver an absentee ballot, addressees must have an apartment or room number.

The quantities of registered voters associated with invalid addresses due to multi-unit addresses without extension numbers like apartment or room numbers were too large for this report to attempt to capture.

It should be noted, however, that many of these unverified registered voters cast absentee ballots and voted in person.

TABLE: East Lansing Anomalies in Qualified Voter Rolls, November 2020

| <i>Anomaly</i> | <i>Registered Voter in QVF</i> | <i>Voted Absentee (ABS)</i> | <i>Voted In Person</i> | <i>Total Votes</i> | <i>Notes</i> |
|---|---|-----------------------------|------------------------|--------------------|---|
| Invalid address Includes vacant lots; non-residential buildings (office buildings, restaurants, post office, retail stores); the street exists, but the street number does not; street with that name does not exist.) | 165 | | | | Class 6 licensed rental properties include 526 student-occupied fraternities, sororities, and co-ops. |
| -Address of record does not exist: Cherry Lane | 50 | 15 | | 15 | Not military voters. Most of these registered voters exceeded the mandatory military retirement age of 64 years old. |
| -Address of record suspect: MSU's Spartan Village for visiting scholars who typically stay 3 months to less than 1 year | 23 | 10 | | 10 | The complex is located on Middlevale Road. No street name exists called Spartan Village. |
| -Address of record does not exist: University Village. MSU's University Village apartment complex is served by Garden City Road. | 8 | 7 | | 7 | Addresses are on the non-existent University Village road. |
| -Address of record is a post office address | 8 | 1 | 2 | 3 | |
| -Address of record is a vacant lot | 10 | | 1 | 1 | |
| -Address of record does not exist. No such street number | 41 | 8 | 3 | 11 | The street exists, but that street number does not exist. |
| -Address of record ineligible: Multi-unit residential property such as an apartment complex, senior housing, convalescent center, dormitory, or other residential properties in which QVF shows no room or apartment number. | Number too large to capture this type of invalid address. | | | | Postmaster could not deliver an absentee ballot. Many of these unverified registered voters cast absentee ballots and voted in person. |
| Deceased persons: registered voters deceased before Sept. 1, 2020: | 58 | 5 | | 5 | - 2 were deceased in 2014, 2 in 2019, and 2 between Jan. and Mar. 2020. - The eldest person on the QVF has a birth year of 1896, which would have made the person 124-125 yrs. of age. |

| <i>Anomaly</i> | <i>Registered Voter in QVF</i> | <i>Voted Absentee (ABS)</i> | <i>Voted In Person</i> | <i>Total Votes</i> | <i>Notes</i> |
|---|---|-----------------------------|---------------------------|---------------------------|---|
| Closed MSU dorms (19 of total 27) | 1,738 | 174 | 102 | 276 | |
| Address of record sold: Residence sold prior to Sept. 30, 2020 | 767 | 67 | 18 | 85 | |
| Invalid registered voters with addresses at fraternities, sororities, and co-ops <i>Age group</i> --23-24 yr. old --25-29 yr. old --30-39 yr. old --40 & 40+ yr. old Total | | | | | --For purposes of consistency, group housing properties, which contains non-students, excluded from total Class 6 rental properties: --All 23-24 yr. olds were verified as living in another town/city/state per their LinkedIn account. --Eleven (11) females between ages of 48 to 53 yrs. old registered as living at currently active fraternity housing for 19- to 22-yr.-old males. |
| Moved: Registered voters no longer at QVF recorded address | 5,718 | 1,043 | 429 | 1,472 | 18-30 yrs. old = 2,770 31-40 yrs. old = 1,750 41-50 yrs old = 532 >50 yrs. old = 666 |
| Duplicates: --Same person has 2 different voter ID numbers: --Same person has 3 voter ID numbers: --Same person has 4 voter ID numbers: --Maiden vs. married names show different IDs: --Initials versus full names with address changes --Initials vs. full middle name, same address --First, middle, and last name the same and address the same --One character different in name -- College students voting from closed dorms and also from hometown or new addresses Total duplicates | 105 1 1 11 55 9 9 12 Undeter-mined N/A | Undete r-mined N/A | Unde ter-mined N/A | Unde ter-mined N/A | New voter ID issued for married name, and maiden name voter ID remained active |
| Total anomalous votes cast | 9,077 | 1,364 | 572 | 1,935 | |

RECOMMENDATIONS:

1. When properties are sold or deeds transferred, the register of deeds should be required to notify the clerk's office. The clerk should be required to remove a voter's name from that no-longer valid address.
2. To clean up the voter rolls, especially in regard to high college-voter turnover and residents migrating off campus and out of the state each year, college graduates and USPS National Change of Address information should be monitored and acted on annually in every college town.
3. Clerks in college or university towns should work with owners or management of multi-unit housing and the college or university to educate students of the need to notify the clerk's office when they move.
4. The state should develop a more robust process for notifying local clerks when a registered voter is deceased. These notifications are especially important when the death occurs out of state or out of the decedent's county of residence.
5. Michigan should exit at once ERIC, the Electronic Registration Information Center.

ENDNOTES:

1. Sharon Woods, *The City of East Lansing, Michigan Residential Target Market Analysis Market Study Report*, LandUse USA, Urban Strategies. Housing Commission meeting, May 6, 2021.
2. U.S. Census Bureau, 2020 Census of Population and Housing, updated every 10 years. Decennial Census by Decades.
3. Letter from Suchita Webster to Janet Lillie and Anne Hill, Oct. 15, 2021, 2020-2021 Housing.

About Pure Integrity Michigan Elections and the Election Integrity Force and Fund

Pure Integrity for Michigan Elections is a premiere and growing grassroots group whose mission is to help restore election integrity to the Great Lakes state. PIME is a peaceful, nonpartisan political movement that welcomes all who support election integrity and the U.S. and Michigan Constitutions. We urge you to join our growing team of supporters. There is no charge to belong. Simply go to the website and sign up for the newsletter.



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Election Integrity Force and Election Integrity Fund are conglomerate, non-profit organizations formed by citizens concerned with attempts to subvert the integrity of our elections.

Vision: Ensure transparent and trusted elections

Mission: Advocate and educate for legislation and processes to deliver election integrity

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