



No Clear Front-Runner in Potential Three-Way Governor Matchup

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A representative survey of Michigan adult residents completed the March State of the State Survey from March 2-24, 2026 ($n=1000$). The survey asked respondents about a possible Michigan Governor matchup in November:

In November 2026, Michigan will hold an election for governor. Suppose the election for Governor of Michigan were held today, who would you vote for if the candidates were the following (Responses 1-3 rotated):

1. *Jocelyn Benson, Democratic Secretary of State*
2. *John James, Republican U.S. Representative*
3. *Mike Duggan, Independent, former Mayor of Detroit*
4. *Someone else*
5. *Undecided or Don't know*

If “Someone else” or “Undecided or Don’t know” selected, then responses received a follow-up question:

Do you lean more toward one of these candidates, or do you not lean either way?

1. *Lean Jocelyn Benson*
2. *Lean John James*
3. *Lean Mike Duggan*
4. *Do not lean either way*

Top-line Results

No candidate had a commanding lead among respondents. “Undecided/Don’t Know” was the most popular response for the initial preference item:

- 32.5% **Undecided/Don't know (+/- 4%)**
- 27.0% **Jocelyn Benson (D)**
- 18.7% **John James (R)**
- 15.6% **Mike Duggan (I)**
- 6.3% **Someone else**

No candidate showed a clear advantage among those without an initial preference

- 73.9% **Does not lean either way**
- 10.5% **Lean John James**
- 9.1% **Lean Mike Duggan**
- 6.5% **Lean Jocelyn Benson**

When combining these responses to include a respondent's lean or initial preference, Secretary of State Jocelyn Benson is only slightly more popular than those who do not lean either way.

2026 Michigan Governor's Matchup Poll

Among Michigan adult residents — March 2026

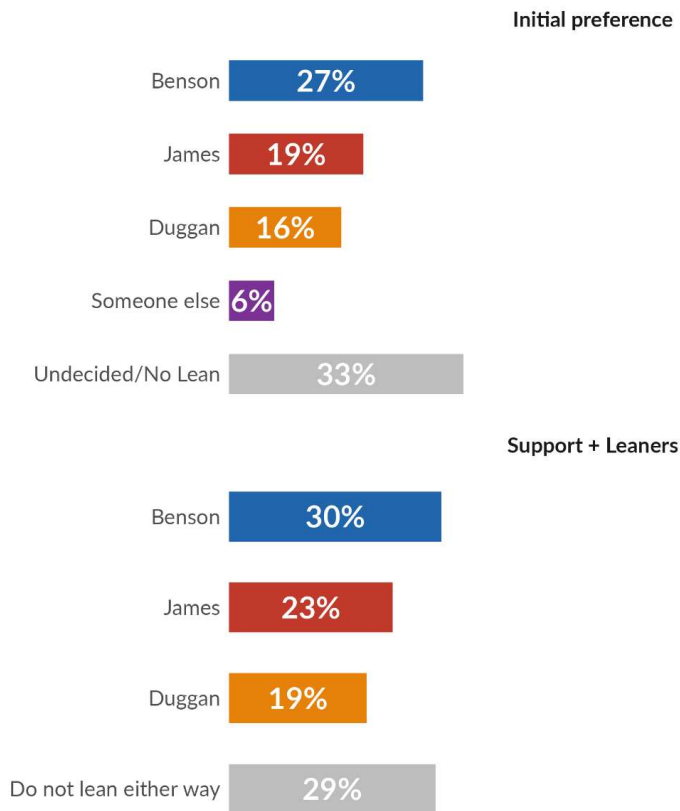


Table 1. Support/Lean Toward Each Candidate by Subgroup

(weighted, % among those with a preference or undecided)

	Benson	James	Duggan	Undecided
All adults	29.5	22.7	19.1	28.6
Electorate-weighted	30.1	22.9	20.0	27.1
<i>Party Identification</i>				
Republicans (w/leaners)	2.8	52.4	20.3	24.4
Democrats (w/leaners)	65.0	0.7	19.3	15.0
Independents	7.5	11.4	16.5	64.6
<i>2024 Presidential vote</i>				
2024 Trump voter	2.2	54.0	21.7	22.1
2024 Harris voter	69.0	1.7	18.8	10.6
<i>Gender</i>				
Female	31.2	23.1	17.0	28.8
Male	27.9	22.5	21.5	28.2
<i>Ideology</i>				
Conservative	7.1	50.9	19.8	22.3
Moderate/Don't Know	17.9	10.0	20.5	51.6
Liberal	68.9	0.9	17.0	13.3
<i>Race</i>				
Black	37.1	5.4	24.9	32.6
White	28.6	25.7	19.2	26.5
Other	29.4	18.3	12.0	40.3
<i>Age</i>				
18-29	27.9	23.2	16.1	32.8
30-39	33.1	16.6	18.1	32.2
40-49	25.8	23.1	14.1	37.0
50-59	30.3	19.8	23.5	26.5
60-69	25.5	27.2	24.7	22.6
70+	35.3	24.5	16.3	23.9
<i>Education</i>				
Non-college graduate	24.1	23.0	17.7	35.2
College graduate	41.9	22.1	22.5	13.5

	Benson	James	Duggan	Undecided
<i>Region</i>				
Detroit	30.4	2.8	26.1	40.7
Metro Detroit + Detroit	30.3	16.2	26.5	27.0
Detroit Collar	27.7	18.9	28.1	25.4
West Michigan	32.8	28.8	9.3	29.1
Lansing/Flint/Saginaw	31.5	20.8	15.8	31.9
Northern Michigan + UP	21.0	33.4	15.8	29.8
<i>Union household</i>	22.9	23.7	27.0	26.4
<i>Community type</i>				
Rural/Small town	22.0	29.2	18.0	30.8
Suburban/Urban/Other	37.2	16.1	20.3	26.5

Source: IPPSR State of the State Survey 93, Michigan State University, March 2–24, 2026. N=1,000 Michigan adult residents.

Table 1 provides a breakdown of support by various survey demographic as well as when weighting the data to account for differential turnout and the 2026 electorate’s likely age and region composition. The three most consequential patterns are discussed below.

Differences in Party Unity Indicate Future Tight Race, Duggan Pulls from Both Parties

The partisan breakdown of support reflects the status of each party’s nomination contests and suggests the race would be essentially a tie if James was a presumptive nominee, with Mike Duggan pulling nearly equal levels of support from both groups of partisans.

With no major opposition to her nomination candidacy, Jocelyn Benson’s slight lead is largely reflective of her being more in control of her party’s base: 65 percent of Democrats support or lean toward her, but nearly one in five Democrats (19 percent) supports or leans toward Duggan.

On the Republican side, John James is facing some well-financed and active competitors for the nomination. He naturally shows a smaller advantage among GOP identifiers at 52 percent, with a larger percentage of Republicans (24 percent) still undecided. Duggan

draws 20 percent of Republican support which is essentially equal to his level of support among Democrats.

Among pure independents, those who do not lean toward either major party, 65 percent are undecided, with Duggan leading the three candidates at 16 percent, followed by James at 11 percent and Benson at 7 percent.

These patterns largely hold when comparing respondents by whether they reportedly voted for Donald Trump or Kamala Harris in the 2024 election. Trump voters are twice as likely as Harris voters to yet have a preference (22.1% and 10.6% undecided respectively). This difference accounts for most of James' lower levels of support among 2024 voters for his party (54% among Trump voters vs. Benson receiving 69% of support among Harris voters). Notably, Mike Duggan does slightly better among Trump voters (22% support) than among Harris voters (19% support).

Duggan faces greater regional hurdles

Duggan's strength is understandably concentrated in the Detroit metropolitan area where he is clearly Benson's main competition. In metro Detroit (Wayne, Oakland, and Macomb counties), Duggan's support is at 27 percent, nearly matching Benson's 30 percent; James is drawing only 16 percent. That level of support extends to Michigan counties surrounding metro Detroit (Washtenaw, Monroe, Lapeer, Lenawee, Livingston, St. Clair), where Duggan and Benson remain essentially tied at 28 and 28 percent respectively.

But Duggan's support is much lower outside those counties. He has 16 percent support among respondents in central and northern Michigan, and support drops to as low as 9 percent in West Michigan counties. Considering this is a region where Benson and James have relatively equal levels of support, it is unclear if greater success here would disproportionately pull from one nominee's supporters.

In contrast, Benson's support is relatively consistent around 30 percent across most Michigan regions, dropping to 21 percent in northern Michigan and the Upper Peninsula. James's support is strongest in northern Michigan and west Michigan. He looks to gain the most if Duggan's third-party candidacy struggles by gaining support in Macomb and Oakland counties.

Who is undecided?

Those people who are most undecided point to the work that each candidate needs to do. These are either traditional supporters who have yet to be brought back into the fold or voters that are up for grabs.

That group of voters in Michigan certainly includes political independents and ideological moderates. Both groups report rates of being undecided at over a 50 percent rate.

41 percent of Detroit respondents are unwilling to say they prefer or lean toward a candidate. Considering James has less than 5 percent support in Detroit, it is fair to assume that uncertainty is largely about whether Benson or Duggan is their preferred choice.

35 percent of respondents without a college degree report no preference, a rate over 20 percentage points higher than college graduates.

Younger respondents are usually more likely to be undecided than older respondents. But that pattern holds true in this survey for adults who are even in their forties. Only when looking at respondents who are 50 or older do we find rates of being undecided below 30 percent.

About the Survey

The State of the State Survey (SOSS 93) was conducted by the Institute for Public Policy and Social Research at Michigan State University. Interviews were conducted March 2–24, 2026, among 1,000 Michigan adult residents using a YouGov online panel. Respondents were recruited via a web-based probability panel and matched to a sampling frame of Michigan adults. The response rate was 61.9 percent (AAPOR Response Rate 3).

Survey weights were provided by YouGov and adjust for age, gender, race/ethnicity, education, and geography to be representative of Michigan adults. Results reported as "likely electorate-weighted" apply additional post-stratification using voter file simulations of the expected 2026 general election electorate, targeting birth-year quintile distributions and five-region geographic distributions (Metro Detroit, Southeast Collar, West Michigan, Lansing/Flint/Saginaw Valley, and Outstate/Northern Michigan). Individual weights are capped at 7 and normalized to a mean of 1. The margin of sampling error for the full sample is approximately +/- 3-4 percentage points at the 95 percent confidence level; margins for subgroups are larger.

The State of the State Survey has been conducted continuously since 1994. More information is available at <https://ippsr.msu.edu/survey-research/state-state-survey-soss/about-soss>

Weighted sample profile

Gender

- Male: 48.8%
- Female: 50.8%
- Other: 0.4%

Age

- 18-29: 18.1%
- 30-39: 16.1%
- 40-49: 13.0%
- 50-59: 14.6%
- 60-69: 21.8%
- 70+: 16.5%

Education

- No 4-year College Degree: 67.0%

- 4-year College Graduate: 33.0%

Race (1% over 100 due to multi-racial respondents)

- White: 79.5%
- Black: 13.1%
- Other: 8.5%

Party Identification

- Republican: 38.3%
- Pure Independent: 20.3%
- Democrats: 41.4%

2024 Presidential Vote

- Donald Trump: 34.9%
- Kamala Harris: 34.2%
- Did not vote: 29.6%
- Other: 1.3%

Ideology

- Conservative: 37.9%
- Moderate/Don't Know: 31.3%
- Liberal: 30.8%

Region

- Detroit: 6.6%
- Detroit + Metro Detroit: 34.0%
- Detroit Collar: 10.0%
- West Michigan: 23.5%
- Lansing/Flint/Saginaw: 18.3%
- Outstate/North: 14.3%