

They're typically quiet and nonpartisan. How have local elections changed in the age of Trump?

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Voters mark their ballots at Second Congregational Church in Westfield on Super Tuesday in 2024. (The Westfield News / file photo)The Westfield News

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• [Daniel Jackson | djackson@repub.com](#)

It appeared in mailboxes in Enfield, Connecticut, a flyer invoking a national political fight in the days before a local election.

“FROM THE WHITE HOUSE TO TOWN HALL, MAGA REPUBLICANS ARE DESTROYING AMERICA & DEFUNDING SCHOOLS,” says the mailer sent by Enfield Democrats. “STOP TRUMPISM. BE A VOTER.”

Democrats there want to flip the Town Council and Board of Education, which Republicans [took control of](#) two years ago.

They are some of the races for mayors, city councilors and board of education members that will be decided on Election Day, nearly a year since Trump won a second term in office.

In the 2024 elections, Massachusetts grew a little less blue compared to the elections of 2020. Presidential candidate Kamala Harris won the Bay State by a smaller margin than Joe Biden did four years before. Massachusetts swung red by 8.2 percentage points, one of the [biggest changes in the nation](#), according to The Brookings Institution.

In the months following, the state saw a wave of anti-Trump activity through [rallies and standouts](#).

Since the start of Trump's second term, how have local politics and the electorate changed? Conversations with local party leaders, both Republican and Democrat, yield a handful of takeaways.

— **Takeaway No. 1: Because Massachusetts' municipal elections are nonpartisan, races tend to focus on candidates and the solutions they bring to hometown issues.**

Campaigns focus on interpersonal interactions with voters, such as through door knocking. "You're not going to have a presidential candidate call you back and answer your question," said Dan O'Brien, a mayoral candidate running in West Springfield. While candidates may take action through their ideological lenses, the issues center around local schools, municipal budgets and Main Street development.

— **Takeaway No. 2: The rhetorical fire seen in the national discourse is showing up locally.**

"I think the vitriol at the national level is boiling down or trickling down into local politics here in the Pioneer Valley," said Fran Frederick, chair of the West Springfield Democratic Committee.

— **Takeaway No. 3: The energy sparked by Trump's reelection, especially for Democrats, has not yet moved people to engage with local politics.**

The problem of low voter participation in local elections remains. Democratic Party officials say they saw an increased interest in party involvement following the 2024 elections, but they have struggled to convert interested residents into local candidates.

"That's a longer project that we need to be engaged in. ... It may not pay dividends in '25, it may be '27," said Jeffrey Gunther, who chairs the Westfield Democratic City Committee.

— **Takeaway No. 4: Remember, most of the voters in Massachusetts are not enrolled in either party.**

While this year's elections appear to be quiet, parties have begun to look towards next year's statewide elections. Massachusetts may have a reputation for being a blue state, but voters in recent political history have elected Republicans to statewide office. (Think U.S. Sen. Scott Brown and governors Mitt Romney and Charlie Baker.)

No. 1: Nonpartisan mindset

Frederick, chair of the West Springfield Democratic Committee, said she received an email recently from a resident who did not want to support any local candidates backing Trump. The writer asked Frederick to ID the party affiliations of the local candidates.

She declined. "I support the Democratic Party," Frederick said. "I absolutely do. I also support the fact that local elections are nonpartisan."

In last year's election, West Side voters were nearly evenly split. While West Springfield supported President Joe Biden 7,157 to 6,067 in 2020, the community came close joining

municipalities across Massachusetts that flipped for Trump in the 2024 election. Harris [won the town](#) by 51 votes.

But local elections have not reflected the rancor of national political discourse, she said. The Democratic Party in the town held a [candidate forum](#) a few weeks ago. It was standing room only. Candidates were polite and civil, Frederick said.

“They have different opinions about things, but we are neighbors,” Frederick said. “And that, that’s something that seems to be being lost on the national stage.”

Even in Enfield, where Democrats warned of Trumpism at town hall, campaigning means talking with voters about issues facing the town.

“Running a local campaign, that’s about getting new shoes because you’ve worn them out from door-knocking,” said Ian Graves, chair of the Enfield Democratic Town Committee.

Enfield tends to support Republicans on odd years and Democratic candidates on the even ones. Voters examine candidates and split tickets. The campaigns that work the hardest to reach out to voters and convince them of their platform tend to come away with a narrow win, he said.

Enfield Republicans are pitching transparency and fiscal responsibility to voters. Democrats, meanwhile, are telling voters the local GOP slashed the education budget, [eliminating scores](#) of positions in the schools.

The local issues reflect the attitudes of the parties nationally, Graves said.



Political flyers have been distributed by the Enfield Democratic Town Committee ahead of the local elections in November. Oct. 31, 2025. (Douglas Hook / The Republican)
Douglas Hook

No. 2: Rhetorical heat



Linda Vaccon stood up at the Holyoke City Council meeting Oct. 7 and held up a poster her husband found on a utility box, clear tape still affixed to its edges. It showed her face along with three of her fellow city councilors next to a burning cross.

“(Expletive) YOU, I WON’T DO WHAT YOU TELL ME,” some of the text read. Below it, a photo showed protesters holding anti-ICE signs.

A national flashpoint had found its way to City Hall.

Vacon had helped introduce a measure that she said was meant to clarify that Holyoke was not a sanctuary city. The move prompted protests, and the Holyoke City Council withdrew the proposal at the Oct. 7 meeting.

The poster crossed a line, she said at the meeting, as it was “inciting hostility in the context of attempted and accomplished assassinations in this country.”

Vacon, a Massachusetts Republican State Committee member for Hampden and Hampshire counties, said she saw that conduct in her own race and a handful of other races: “Looming very large in the local elections is this anti-Trump theme where local campaigners continue to bring in President Trump and any supporters into the discussion and debate about the local issues,” she said in an interview.

Vacon is running unopposed for the Ward 5 seat on Holyoke City Council. The resistance movement Indivisible, she said, is working to make partisan what should be a nonpartisan election.

But that has not been the norm in local elections in the Bay State.

No. 3: Where are voters ... and candidates?

Tim Vercellotti, a political science professor at Western New England University, said there is little connection between what plays out on the national stage and what goes on in city halls and town meetings. The nonpartisan nature of the elections makes it “difficult to map the candidates to the national political scene,” he said.

It also contributes to low voter turnout in local elections.

“People who don’t have the time or the inclination to put in the work ahead of time are going to stay home because it’s costly to learn about politics,” Vercellotti said.

The “D” or “R” before candidates’ names is often used as a shortcut for residents to help make up their mind about candidates, Vercellotti said. Absent political party, people have to read the news and study campaign literature to learn which candidates to support.

When the Pioneer Valley held municipal elections in 2023, [turnout ranged](#) between 17%-33% of registered voters.

Voters are not the only ones staying home.

This year, Westfield is seeing a spate of uncontested races. There are three open spots for School Committee and three candidates running. Only one ward race out of six on the City Council is contested.

Jeffrey Gunther said Westfield Democrats saw a glimmer of interest following the election. Residents were reaching out and people were “looking for something to do,” he said. Democrats in West Springfield saw similar activity.

“Now I view the party’s job as converting that into candidates for local office,” Gunther said, who chairs the Westfield Democratic City Committee. That means connecting someone with an interest in education, say, with the local board that oversees schools.

That didn’t happen immediately in this election cycle.

When Gunther broached the topic with people, he said they told him the timing wasn’t right.

At the same time, Westfield Republican City Committee Chair Dan Allie said the election of Trump was not about one candidate, and he’s hoping for thousands of candidates to seek office, from school boards to state legislatures.

“It’s all out of control,” Allie said. “And they’re not making it any easier to run.”

Allie believed voters went to the polls in 2024 to give vent to frustration that had been building for years, such as media coverage of Hunter Biden’s laptop or Robert Mueller’s investigation into the 2016 presidential election.

“I think 2024 was really just a culmination of people having become more aware of things that had occurred,” Allie said.

Similar frustration has been felt by residents when they, say, oppose an unwanted project in their communities like the [battery storage facility](#) that was once proposed in Westfield, he said.



A Trump rally near the Riverdale Shops in West Springfield. (Dave Roback / Special to The Republican) Dave Roback / Special to The Republican

No. 4: What speaks to unenrolled voter?

These days, the Massachusetts GOP is focused on broader, statewide campaigns, said Vacon.

Three Republicans have announced they are running for governor, challenging Gov. Maura Healey when she seeks reelection in 2026: [Mike Kennealy](#), [Brian Shortsleeve](#) and [Michael Minogue](#).

They are running their races like they will be decided in a couple days, not next year, said Anthony Cignoli, a political advisor based in Springfield who has worked on [hundreds](#) of political campaigns. They're attending events. They're raising money.

It's helping the Massachusetts GOP and the Republican State Committee "fire up the base to find other folks that are interested" in running for seats in the House and Senate, he said.

U.S. Sen. Ed Markey, a Democrat, is seeking reelection, and Republican John Deaton, a cryptocurrency attorney, says he is [considering running](#) against him.

The perception is that Democrats dominate Massachusetts politics, Cignoli said. But out of the state's 5 million [registered voters](#), about 3.25 million are unenrolled.

Registered Democrats number about 1.3 million and there are 423,000 Republicans.

Some messages appeal to a wide variety of voters.

Polling, Cignoli said, suggests everyone – left, right and center – are angry, angry about the high cost of living, and at the price of utilities in particular.

It may become a theme in next year's races.

"It's expensive here right now," Cignoli said of that issue. "And it's party-proof. It doesn't matter if you're Republican or Democrat. This is something you can agree on."

While the party has moved to the right thanks to the MAGA movement, candidates like former governors Bill Weld and Charlie Baker "found ways to hit on common sense proposals or philosophies and win governorships by getting independent and unenrolled voters into their corner," Cignoli said.