

# What causes a high turnout in CSG elections?



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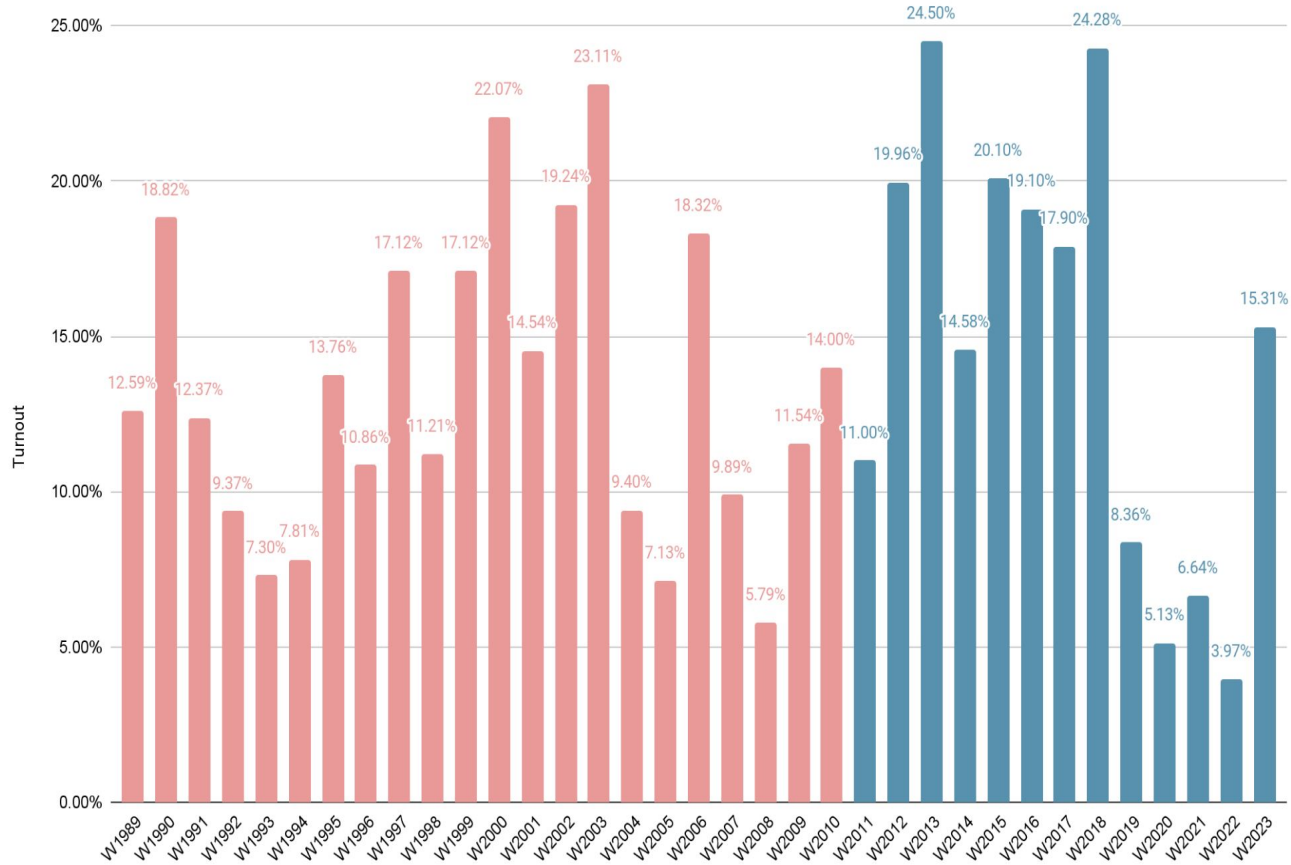
Zoe Blackburn  
Ind. Spec. Prosecutor

## Goals of this Presentation

1. Describe past trends in election turnout
2. Describe what causes high turnout
3. Describe what the F2023 Election Team will be doing
4. Give you all a chance to see the data, ask questions, and provide feedback

# The Basics

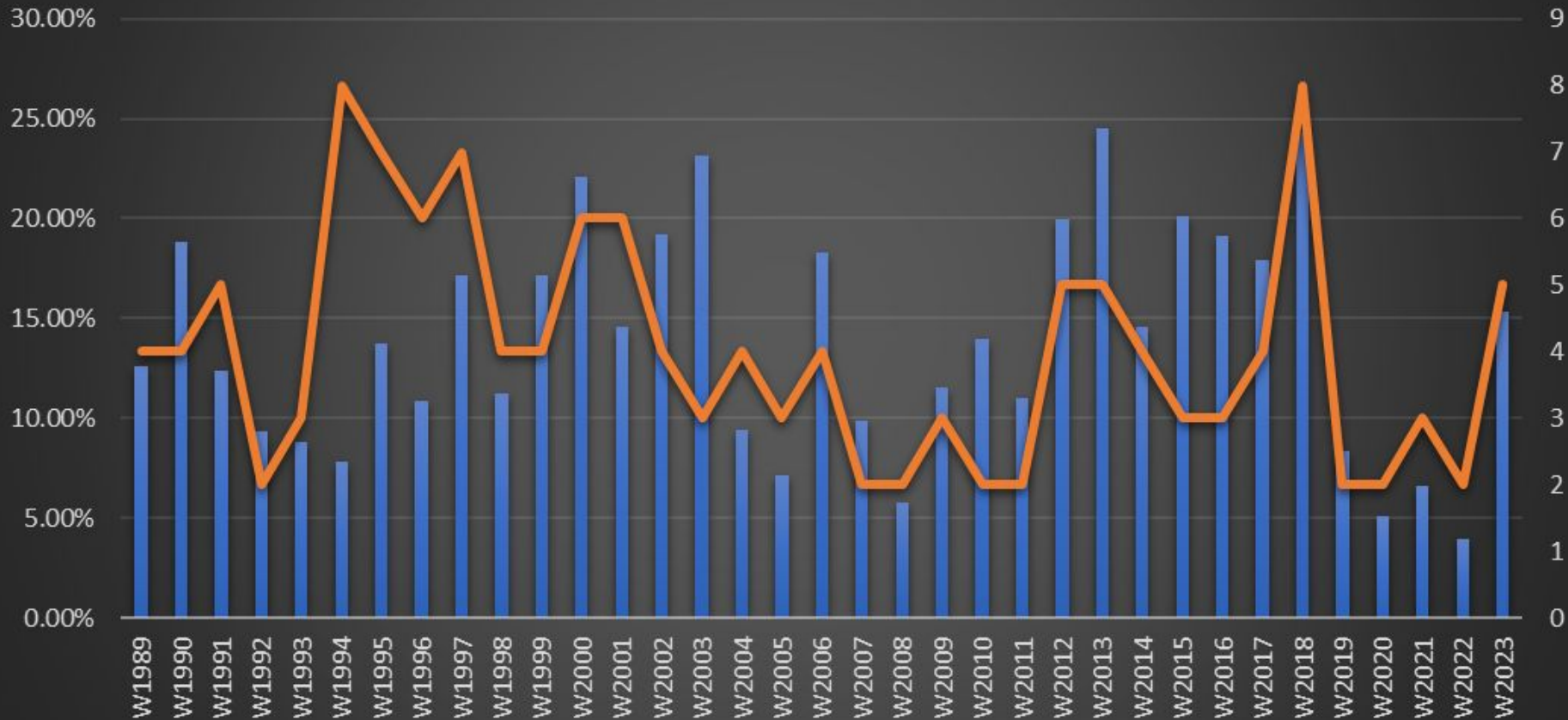
## CSG/MSA Election Turnout



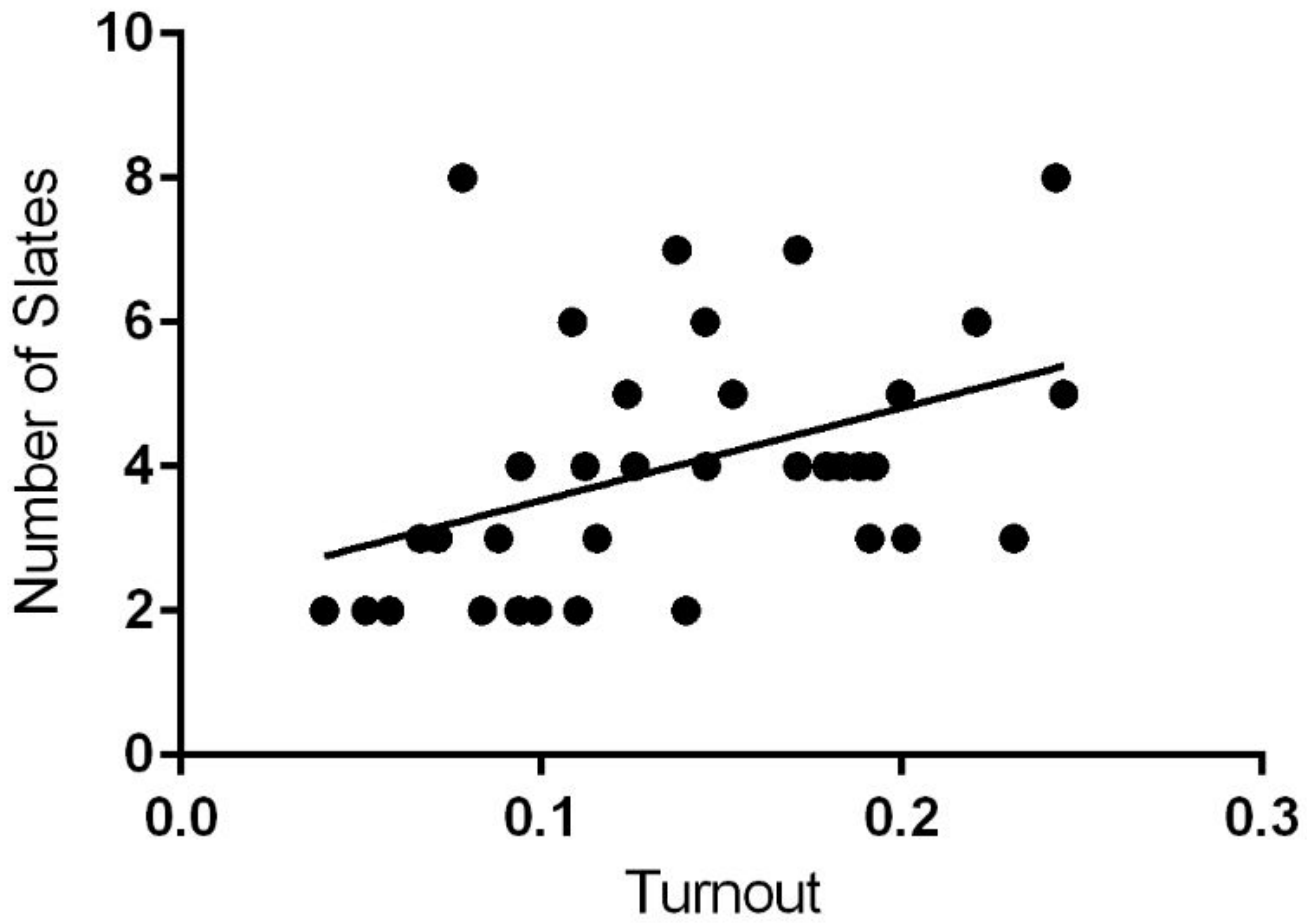
**MSA  
Elections**

**CSG  
Elections**

## % Turnout v. # of Presidential States







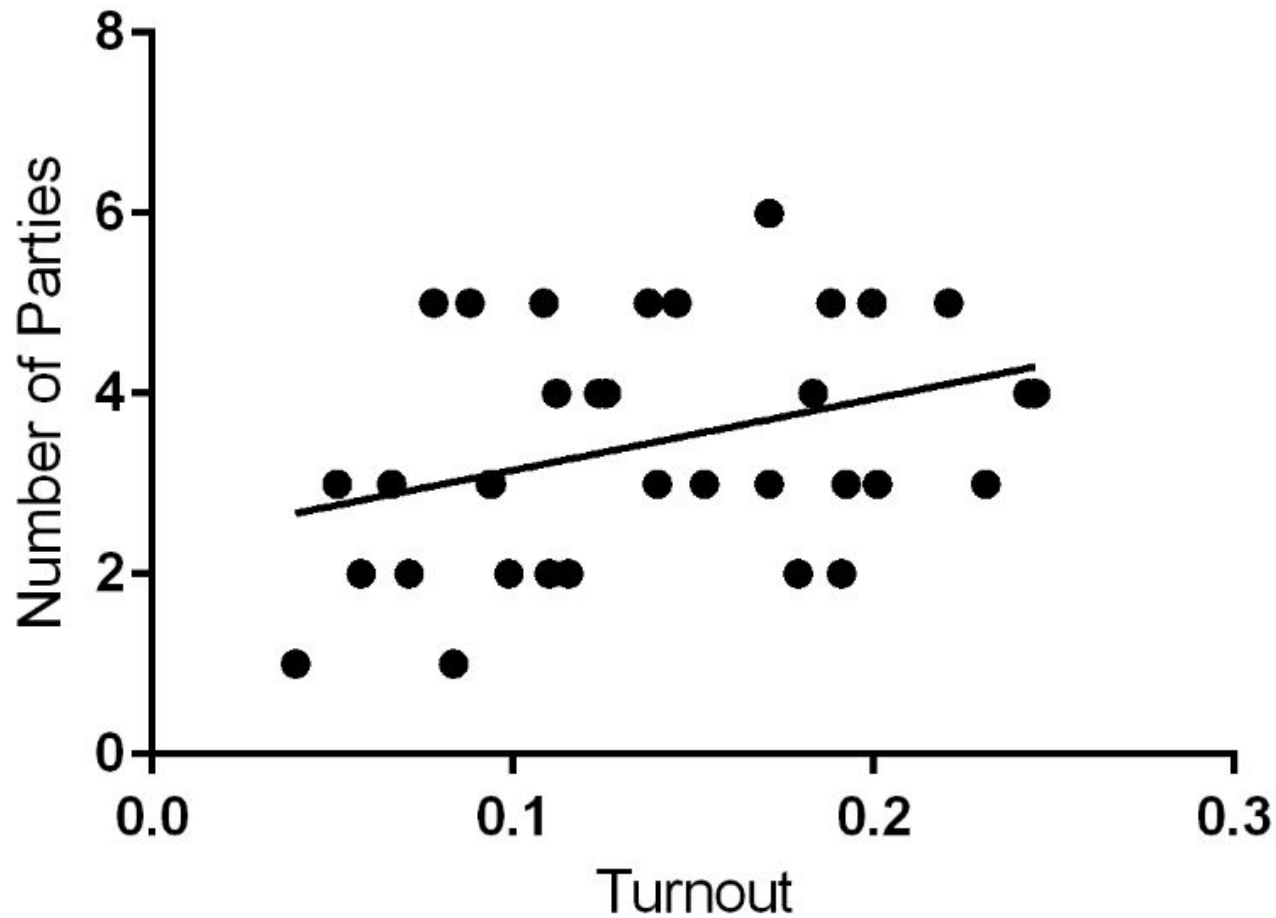
1989-2023  
Turnout v. **Slates**  
Data as a Linear  
Regression

## Linear Regression Results:

- **Line of Best Fit:  $Y = 12.86 * X + 2.245$**
- **Standard Error ( $S_{y.x}$ ) = 1.620**
- **P = 0.0124**
  - Indicates a high probability of statistical significance. This means that there's some sort of connection between the two variables.
- **R square = 0.1749**
  - Indicates that the number of slates is partially, but not wholly indicative of turnout
    - *What could the other factors be?*

## % Turnout v. # of Parties





1989-2023  
Turnout v.  
Parties  
Data as a Linear  
Regression

## Linear Regression Results:

- **Line of Best Fit:  $Y = 7.925 * X + 2.357$**
- **Standard Error ( $S_{y.x}$ ) = 1.252**
- **P = 0.0425**
  - Indicates a high probability of statistical significance. This means that there's some sort of connection between the two variables.
- **R square = 0.1189**
  - Indicates that the number of parties is partially, but not wholly indicative of turnout

# Do Parties Boost Turnout?

- A heavily caveated **yes\***
  - Parties lead to more candidates
  - Candidates lead to higher turnout
    - *But what if they all ran as independents?*
    - *Would party-bound candidates run in the first place if it wasn't for their party?*
- Do parties hinder popular perceptions of CSG?
  - Do they make us seem cliquy?
- Would it be harder for outsiders to enter CSG without a party?
  - Last time an independent won the CSG presidency: 2012

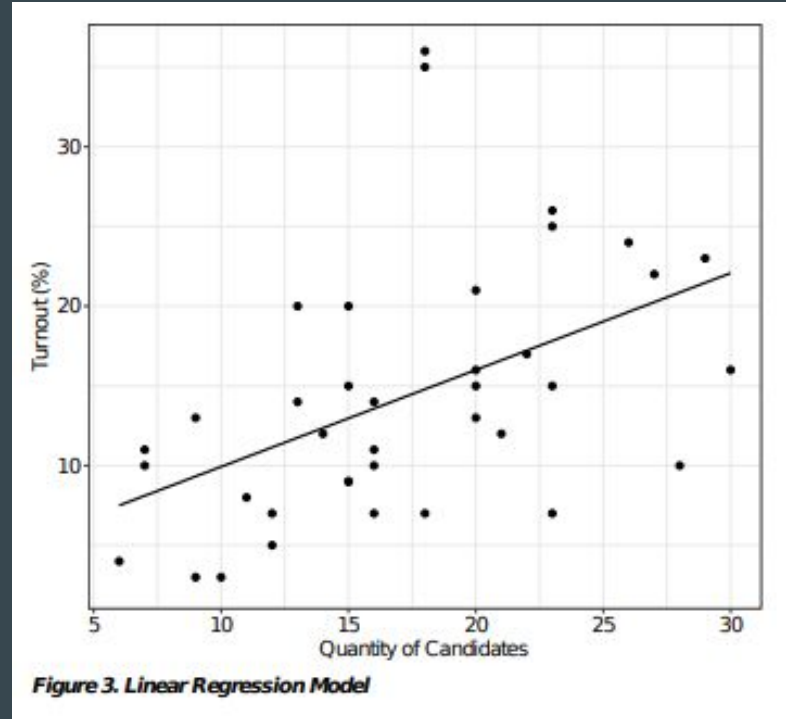
This year's election saw a significant jump in voter turnout, something the MSA Election Board was actively working to improve. Last winter, 2,246 votes were cast in the election — about 6.4 percent of the student body. This year's election had more than twice that, with 4,497 students casting votes for the executive slate.

Election Director Emily Winter said the more than 100-percent increase in voter turnout was largely due to the fact that this year's election did not feature a single, dominating party.

**The Number of Presidential Slates and  
Parties Impacts Turnout, But What Else?**

# Peer Case: University of California (Davis), 2003-2022

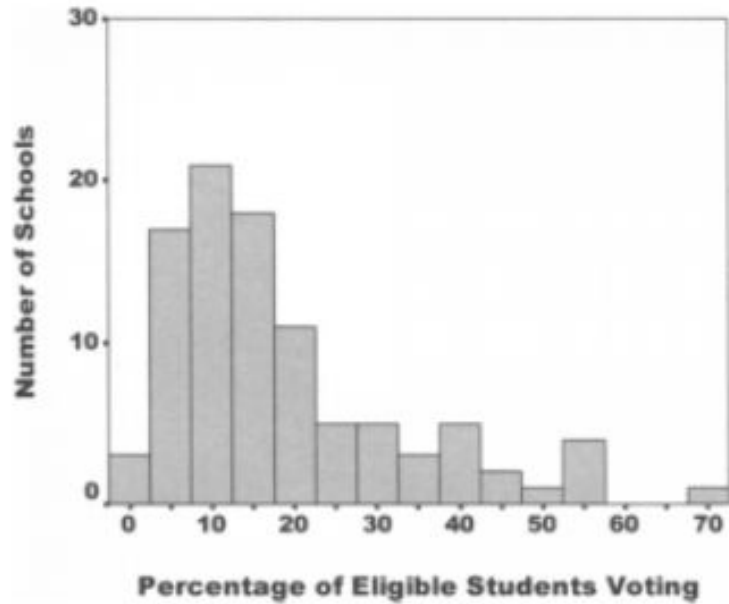
- Quantity of candidates (assembly + executive) demonstrates positive relationship with overall turnout
  - So do “fee measures”, which are any ballot question which polls the students on devoting more funds to their student government.
- Like U-M, UCD conducts presidential elections concurrently with its Assembly elections
  - Election cycles that elect UCD’s resident and Senators routinely have a higher turnout, like CSG’s



Lunde, 2022



**Figure 1**  
**Distribution of Turnout in Student**  
**Government Presidential Elections**



PS October 2005

## Lewis & Rice Study (2003-2004; pub. 2005)

- “We find solid evidence that the option to vote online increases turnout in student government elections” (p. 7)
- “Keeping the polls open for more than a day has no effect on turnout” (p. 7)
- “One way to increase turnout would be to attract more students from well-to-do and well-educated families” (p. 6)
- “Holding presidential elections at the same time as other student government elections... depresses turnout by 4%” (p. 6)
- “Schools that encourage more campaign advertising... would probably also see a modest increase in turnout” (p. 6)

## Limitations of Lewis & Rice Study

- The data was collected before some Assemblymembers were even born (so, it's pretty outdated)
- Some of the findings directly conflict with U-M election data
  - For instance, we have demonstrated a correlation between CSG presidential elections and higher turnout years. Lewis & Rice say that this isn't factor.
- Some factors are literally out of our control
  - Having wealthier students from well-educated backgrounds is not something that CSG can affect (it's also problematic in other ways)
- The option to vote online is now ubiquitous and universal.

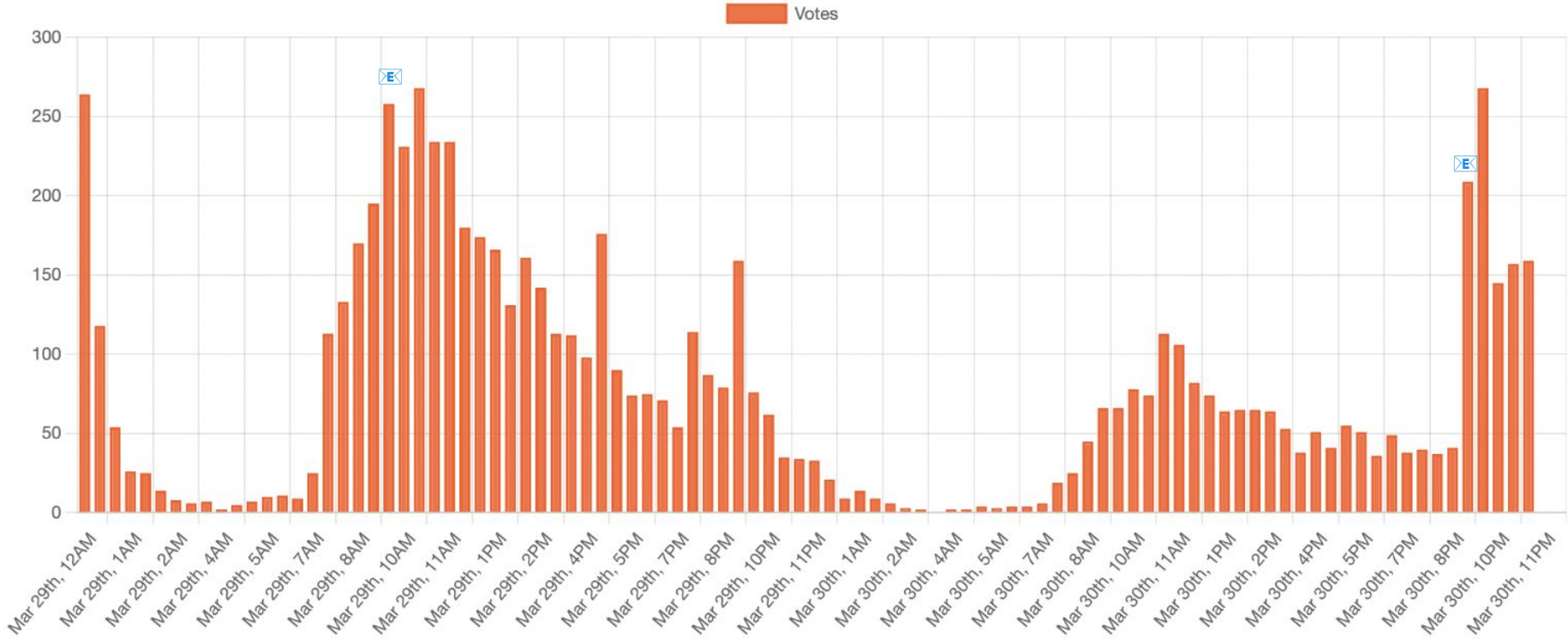


# Emails and Turnout

# CSG Election Turnout, W2023

 = Indicates when an email blast was sent by CSG election staff

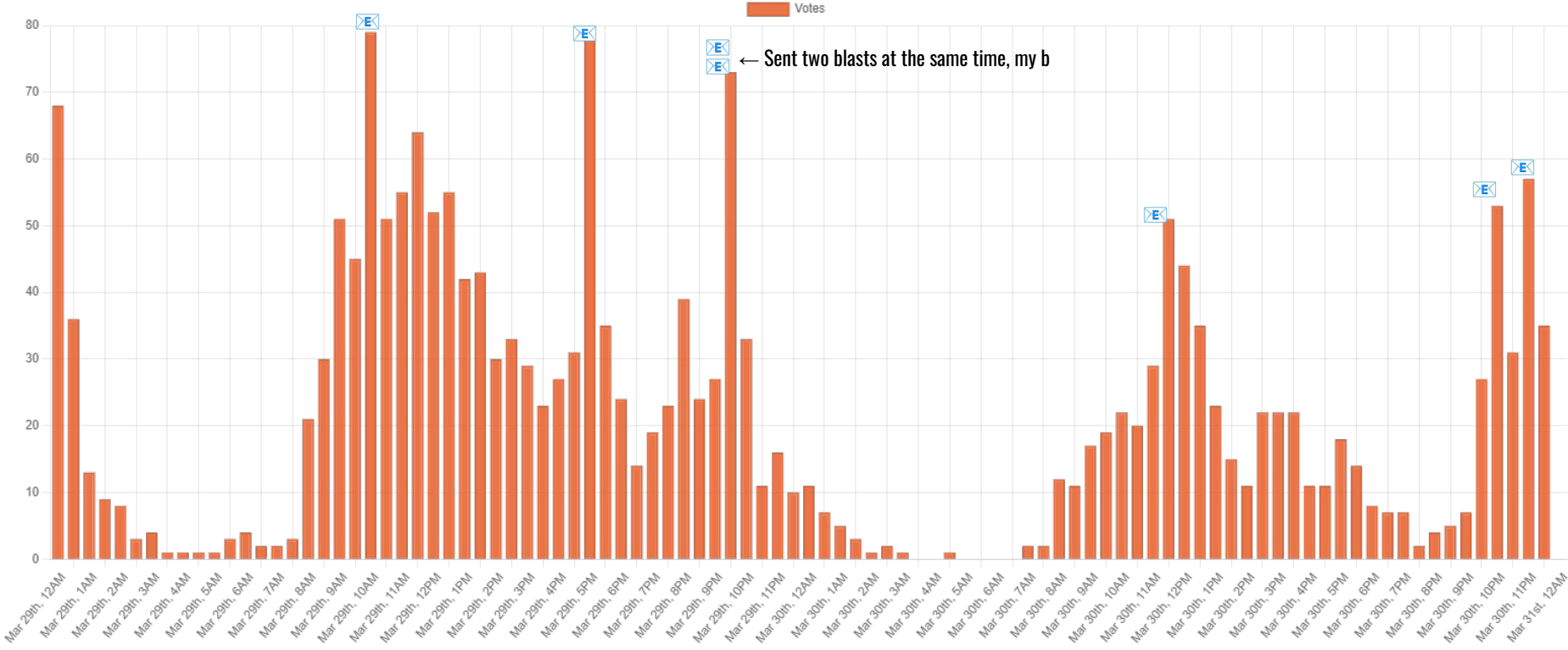
*(Once a voter voted, they were removed from the email blast list)*

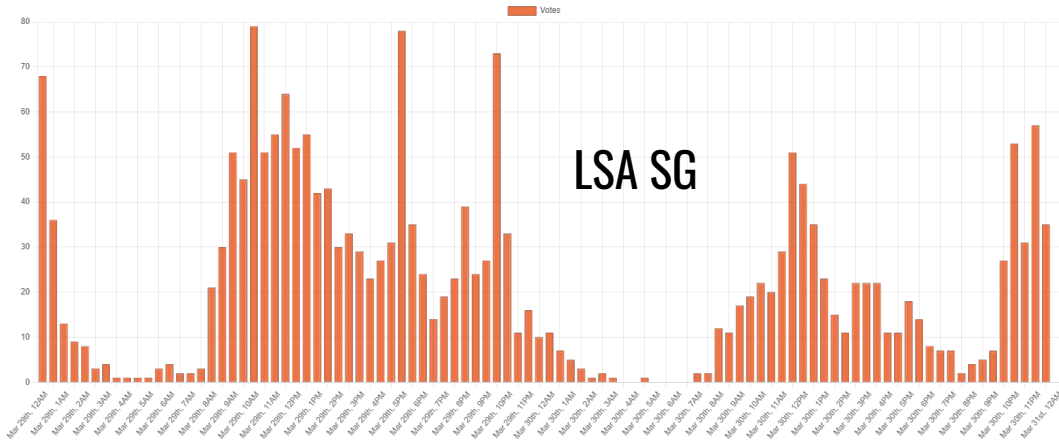
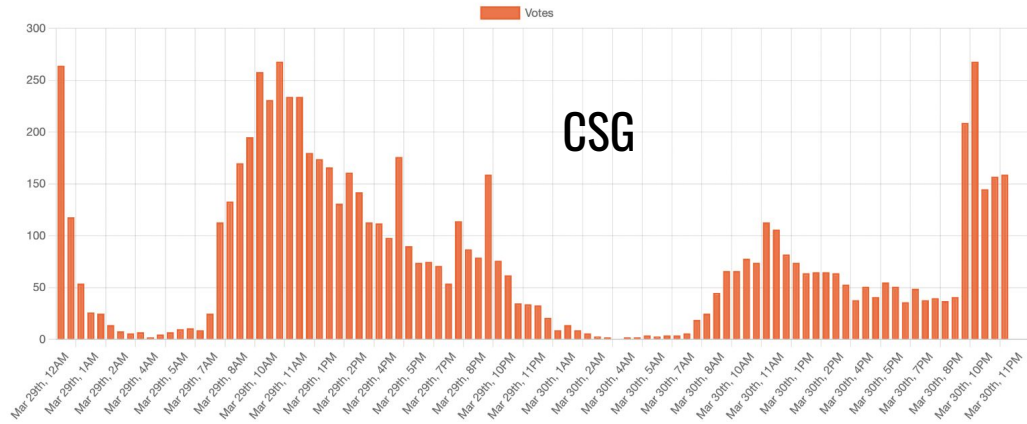


# LSA SG Election Turnout, W2023

 = Indicates when an email blast was sent by LSA SG election staff

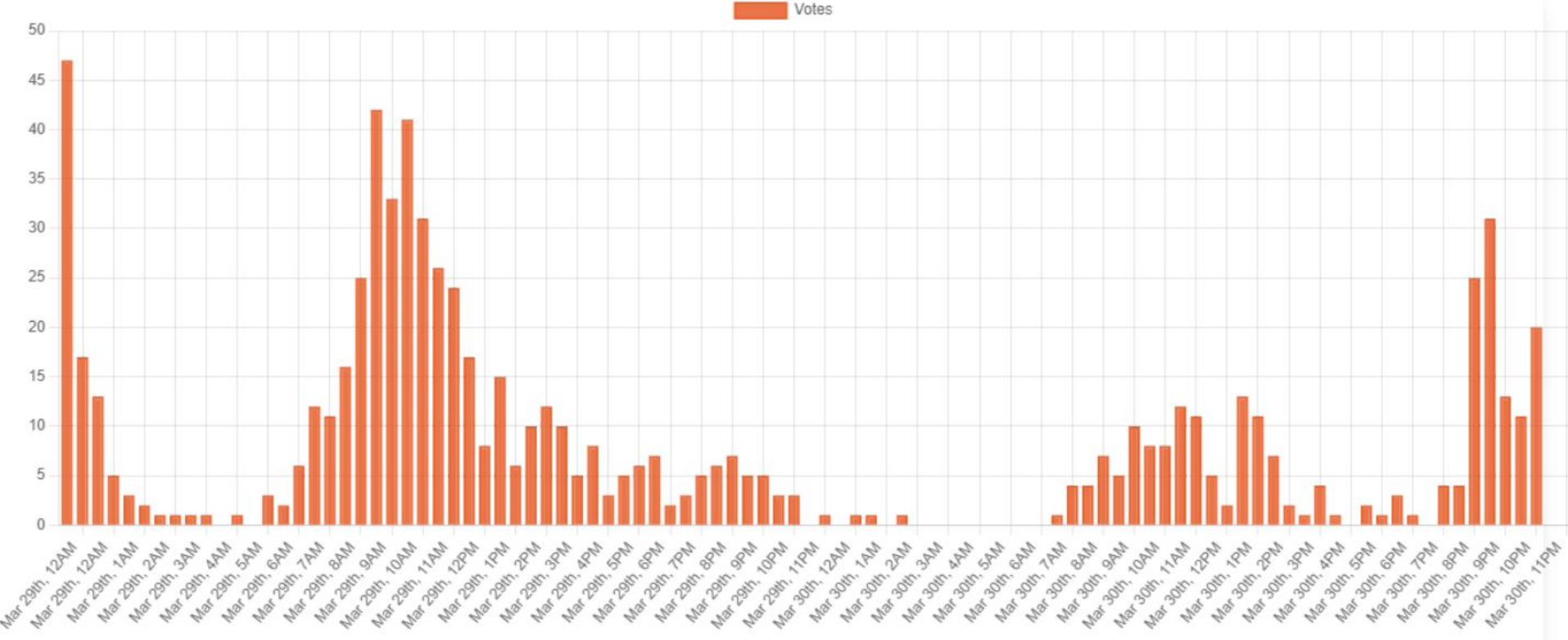
*(Once a voter voted, they were removed from the email blast list)*



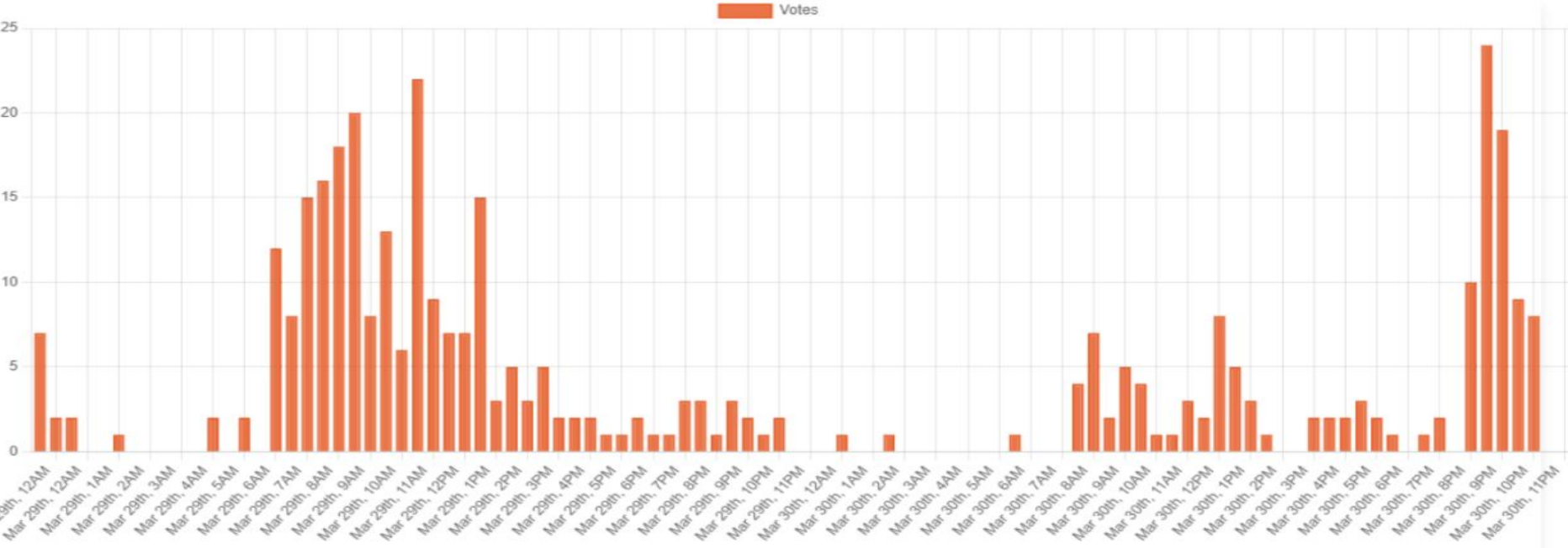


- CSG's turnout was positively affected by LSA SG's email blasts
- Imagine the impact if all student governments send out mass emails!

# CoE Election Turnout, W2023

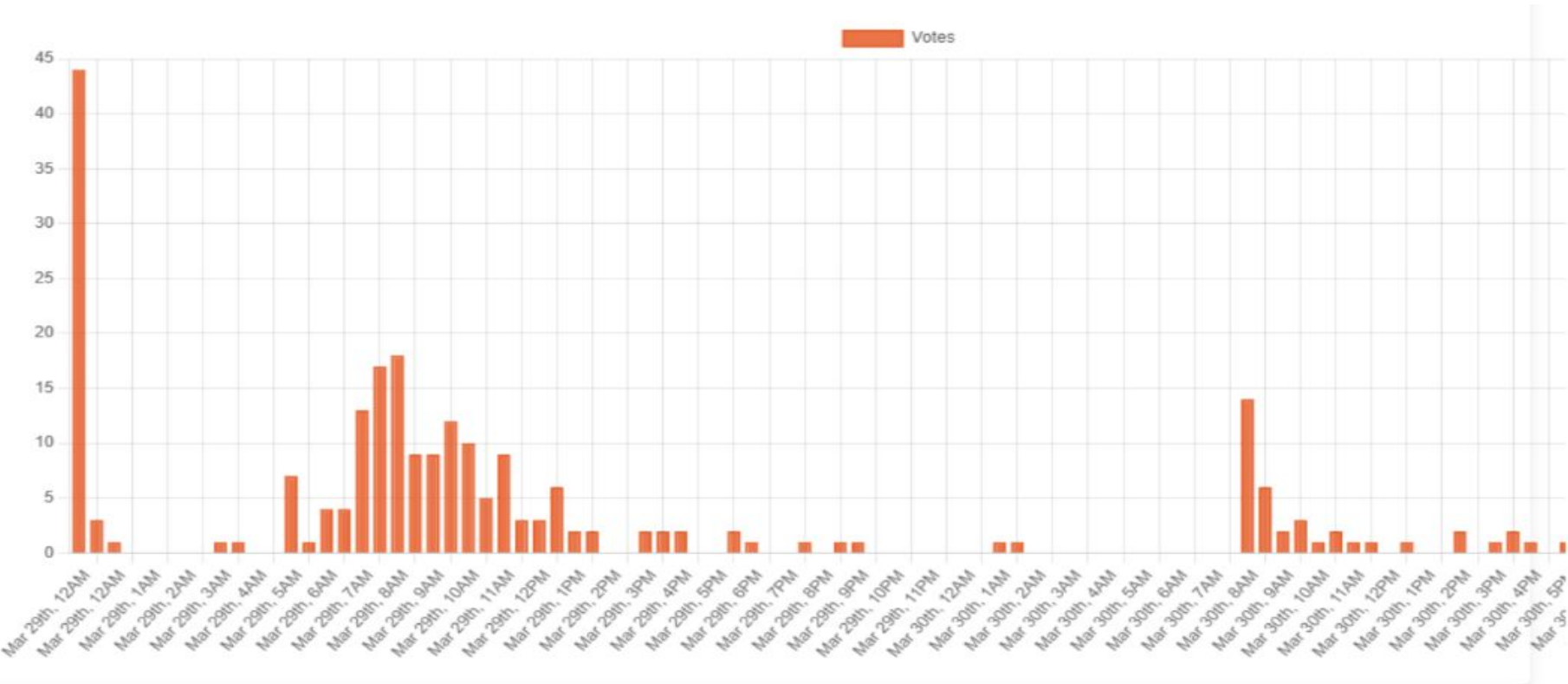


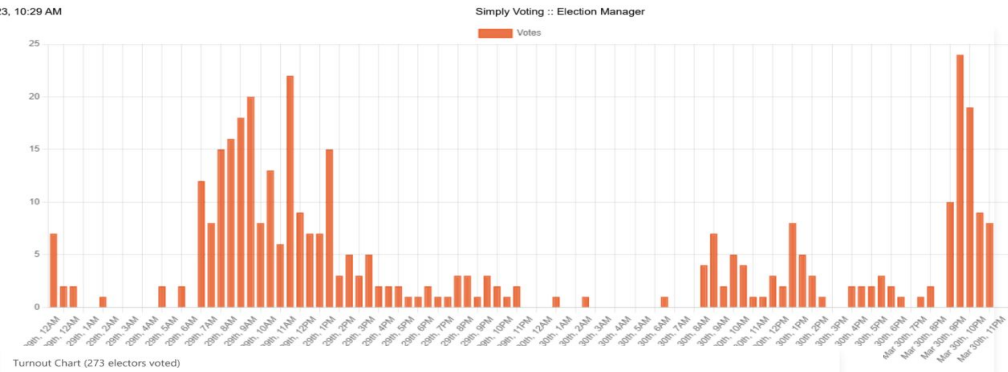
# Rackham Election Turnout, W2023



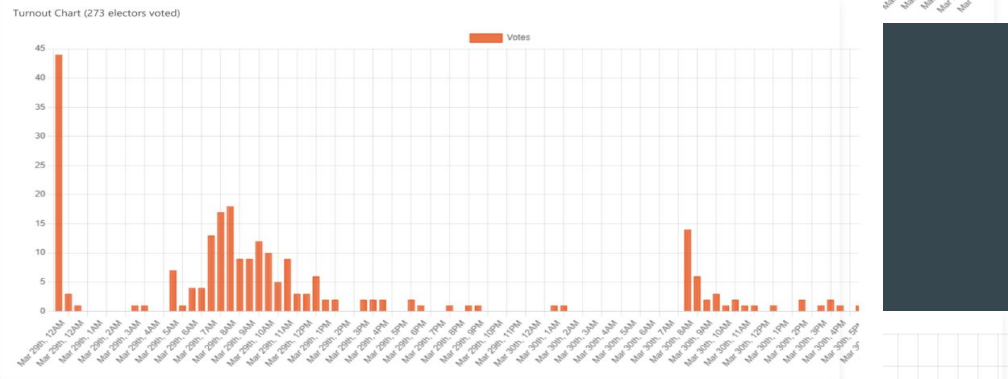


# Law School Election Turnout, W2023

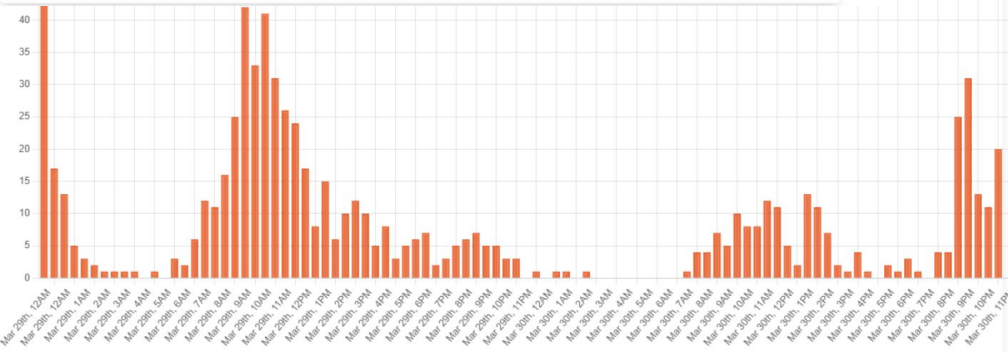




Rackham  
369/9091 (4.1%)



Law School  
273/1032 (26.5%)

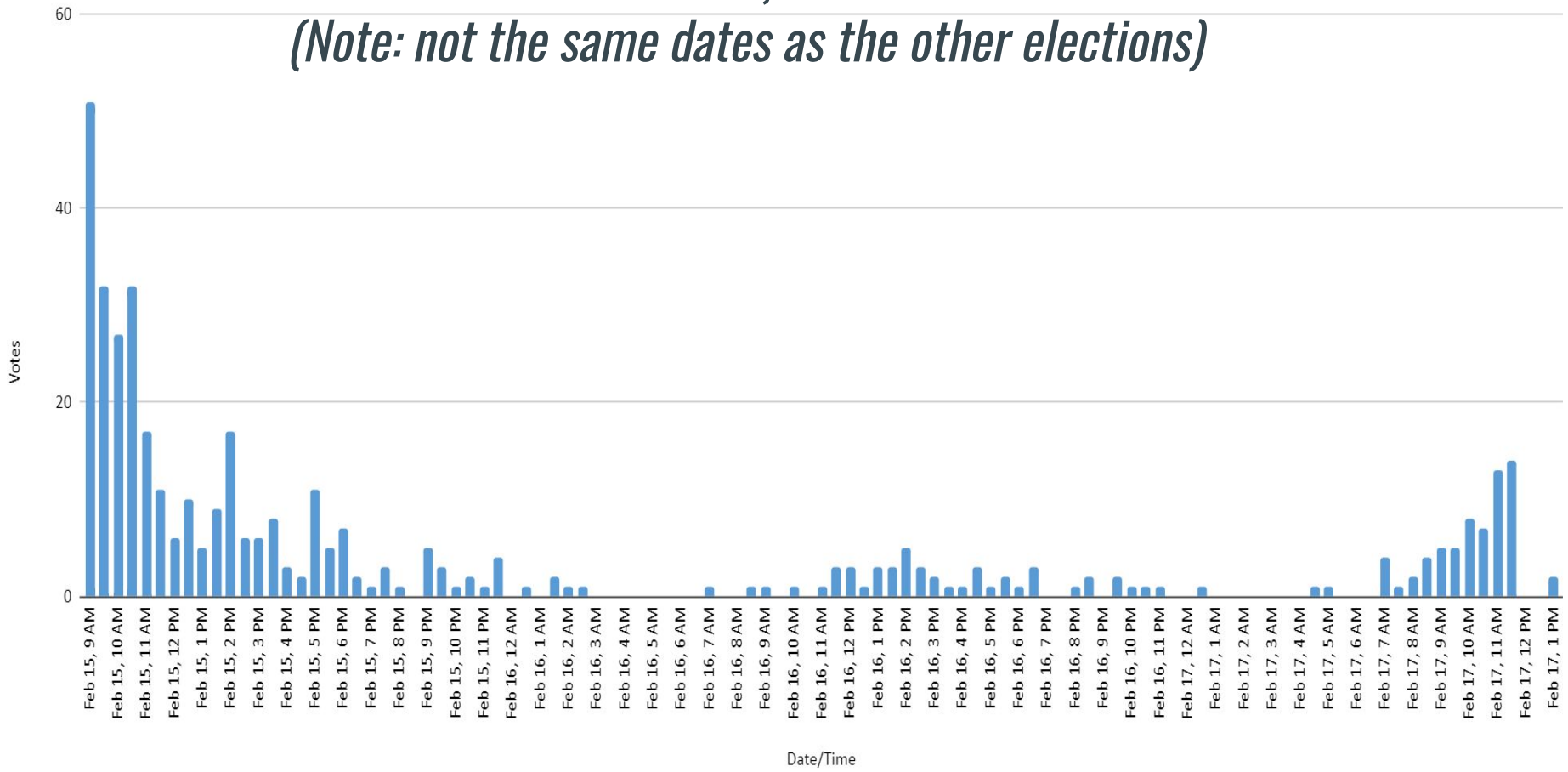


Engineering  
750/10358 (7.2%)

Votes vs. Date/Time

# Ross Election Turnout, W2023

*(Note: not the same dates as the other elections)*



Email Attrition Effect =

More blasts make people frustrated; they choose to unsubscribe instead of voting

2,034 Voters

262 Unsubscribers

# To summarize:

## What Boosts Turnout?

1. **Plentiful candidates and parties** (particularly among presidential candidates)
2. **Aggressive advertising** campaign
  - a. There were noticeable bumps in LSA SG election turnout after email blasts
3. **Media attention**
4. **Coordinating** with unit student governments
5. **Ease of voting**
  - a. The W2000 was the first to incorporate all-digital voting; turnout was the highest ever at that point

## What Hinders Turnout?

1. **The opposite of everything that boosts turnout**
2. **Bad weather**
  - a. Reported anecdotally in F1999, when a snowstorm closed the Diag polling place
  - b. Poor weather impacted the Diag polling place in W2022 and W2023.



# Theoretical Factors That May Increase Turnout

- Longer voting period
- Universal election dates among unit student governments
- More email blasts
- New forms of eye-catching signage:
  - Yard signs
  - Door tags



**What will the Election  
Team Do Now?**

# A Quick Word on Fall Elections

- We didn't analyze Fall election data earlier, since records are notoriously unavailable before 2019
- Turnout is notoriously hard to generate:
  - F2019: 1.64%
  - F2020: 2.23%
  - F2021: 3.61%
  - F2022: 2.74%
- But the F2023 election team will be deploying the lessons learned from our research in their efforts to generate turnout this cycle!





# Tried & True Tactics

- The filing period is extra long this year (nearly a full month) to encourage more candidates
- The SimplyVoting system has built-in mass email functionality. We're gonna use that, and work with other Election Directors so that they do the same.
- Bipasha and University Council have enabled us to coordinate with other unit SGs; those holding their elections at the same time are:
  - LSA SG
  - Engineering SG
  - Rackham SG
  - Social Work Council
  - Nursing SG



# New Tactics

- Getting into newsletter emails where possible
  - Like those that Honors, Residential College, etc., send to their students
  - Next semester: academic departments?
- Coordinating email blasts with unit SGs
- Shifting from lots of paper posters, to larger, reusable signage
  - Look out for these 100 of these on the Diag (with a special CSG design)!



Questions!

