

Research Note: Measuring the Amish Vote in Lancaster County, Pennsylvania, 2024

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Abstract: The potential impact of Amish voting on the 2024 presidential election, especially in Pennsylvania, attracted considerable media coverage and speculation on the possible role Amish voters might play in the election outcome. This research note reports on Amish voting in 2024 in Lancaster County, Pennsylvania, drawing on a larger, ongoing research project into Amish voting across time in various states and settlements. While both the Amish vote total and the Amish turnout rate in Lancaster County were lower than in 2020, the numbers add to a growing body of data by the authors and raise new questions. Here, we place the 2024 data in context, offer several hypotheses, and suggest possible implications.

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Introduction and Background

The potential impact of Amish voting on the 2024 presidential election, especially in Pennsylvania, which was regarded as a swing state, attracted considerable media coverage. Journalists, commentators, and political operatives all speculated on the possibility of thousands of new Amish voters playing a decisive role in the election outcome. This research note reports on Amish voting in 2024 in Lancaster County, Pennsylvania. While the Amish vote total and turnout percentage were both lower than in 2020, the 2024 numbers add to a growing body of data by the authors.

As a general rule, Amish church members across the United States do not vote, citing as their reasons a variety of considerations including their sense of separation from “worldly” power, their desire to avoid being implicated in the federal government’s war-making activity, and their sharp sense of the separation of church and state. As one Amish publication put it, “If we don’t want the government to tell us how to conduct our church affairs, we had better not tell them how to run the government” (*1001 Questions and Answers*, 1992, p. 157).

Nonetheless, there are important exceptions to this generalization regarding not voting. In several settlements, including Holmes County, Ohio, Lancaster County, Pennsylvania, and others,



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voting by Amish individuals has a long history. For example, the correspondence of Pennsylvania Congressman W. W. Griest (1858–1929; in office 1909–1929) documents his outreach to Lancaster Amish voters in 1918 and implies he believed they had voted in the years before that date. Likewise, from the 1960s through the 1980s, Harold A. Hess (1919–2013), a Lancaster County livestock dealer, civic leader, and Church of the Brethren layman, was active in registering Amish voters for the Republican Party.¹

Kraybill and Kopko (2007) found that during the 1990s and early 2000s between 5% and 8% of eligible Amish voters in Lancaster County, Pennsylvania, went to the polls in any given election. In 2004, that percentage jumped to just over 13%, reflecting a grassroots effort by a local Republican activist to register new Amish voters. In 2016, the percentage of eligible Amish who voted was back down to about 7%. In 2020, however, more than 1,000 new Amish voters registered and some 2,940 went to the polls, representing around a fifth of eligible Amish voters (Kopko, 2023). Although there were key differences in each of these elections, including the candidates, salient issues, and socioeconomic contexts—factors that we have discussed elsewhere—the overall pattern of Amish voting in the Lancaster settlement was one that had a long history and exhibited considerable dynamism.

In 2024, the widespread perception that Pennsylvania would be a swing state resulted in high-profile voter registration drives across the Commonwealth and among many potential voting groups, along with saturation advertising and extensive media coverage. In that context, efforts to register Amish voters attracted considerable press. Republican operative Scott Presler, for example, sought attention for his efforts to register Amish voters (The Persistence, 2024). Underlying these stories was the assumption—not misplaced, we believe—that Amish voters cast their votes very heavily for Republican candidates and thus that the Amish could play a key role or, in some versions, “deliver” the state to Republican candidate Donald Trump.

The authors of this research note investigated Amish voting in 2024 as part of an ongoing research inquiry. Building on the work of Kraybill and Kopko (2007), we have been engaged since 2016 in a multiyear, multistate study of Amish voting, using quantitative, qualitative, and archival approaches and sources.

Methodology

Voter registration records do not report one’s church membership, of course. Some national and statewide opinion polls ask about respondent’s religion (e.g., mainline Protestant, non-Hispanic Catholic, Jewish) but the Amish population is far too small to register in such surveys and most phone- and internet-based polling methods would not capture Amish voters in any case. Establishing the number of Amish voters and their behavior is possible via a time-consuming process of carefully comparing publicly available Pennsylvania voter rolls with Amish settlement

¹ Because this research note focuses on Pennsylvania and largely on the Lancaster settlement, the historical examples included here are limited to that settlement. This research note does not address voting by Old Order Mennonites, which Kraybill and Kopko (2007) had shown to have many similarities to Amish voting.

directories.² Because Amish directories state that they may not be copied or entered into computer databases, we had to tabulate the data by hand and then create original spreadsheets with this hand-tabulated information.

For 2024, we obtained Pennsylvania voter rolls for select counties in spring 2025, after the previous fall election data had been certified. From the list of Lancaster County's 354,927 registered voters, we selected the subset of records that include potential Amish surnames, based on the limited number of surnames present in the Lancaster Amish population. Then we compared, name by name, the voter roll records with the 2024 *Church Directory of the Lancaster County Amish* to identify the number of registered Amish voters in Lancaster County on November 4, 2024. Identifying information that appears in both the voter rolls and the directory includes full names, dates of birth, and addresses. Researchers Steven Nolt, Megan Bliamptis of Mount Holyoke College, and Mildred Nwachukwu-Innocent of Elizabethtown College worked to identify Amish voters—in some cases reviewing the same sections of the voter rolls independently and then comparing results to ensure accuracy. Nolt performed checks of other sections. The process yielded 4,454 registered Amish voters, including young adult children living at home. Married adult children the directory indicates are not Amish church members were not included.

For each voter, the state voter registration file provides the date of registration, whether the individual voted in each of several recent elections, and whether they voted in person on election day, via absentee ballot, via mail-in ballot, or provisionally.³ Because Pennsylvania has a “closed primary” system, voters are encouraged to indicate a political party preference when they register; if they do, their party preference is also part of their voter record. To be clear, state voter rolls do not report *who* a particular voter voted for, only *that* the person voted.

Unlike our enumeration of registered Amish voters, our number of eligible Amish voters in Lancaster County is an estimate. To calculate that number, we began with the estimated Amish population in 2024 in Lancaster County (which is less than that of the entire Lancaster settlement, which extends into Chester County to the east and also includes a small number of households in Dauphin and Berks Counties, Pennsylvania, and Cecil County, Maryland), which we estimated to have been 35,700. Using the work of Joseph Donnermeyer (2023), we determined that 49% of the Lancaster Amish population is age 18 and older. The result is an estimated 17,490 eligible Amish voters in Lancaster County in 2024.

² The methodology described here mirrors that undertaken by Kraybill and Kopko (2007) when analyzing the 2004 election and that used by Kopko and Nolt for the 2016, 2020, and 2024 elections. Voter rolls from other states and settlement directories from other communities each have their own idiosyncrasies, but the procedure explained here generally describes the methods we used when examining Amish voting in other states and settlements.

³ A provisional ballot may be cast for a variety of reasons, including a change of address close to the election, lack of identification when voting for the first time, having requested a mail-in ballot but then choosing to vote in person rather than complete the mail-in ballot, and so forth.

Findings

As shown in Table 1, there were 4,454 registered Amish voters in Lancaster County at the time of the November 4, 2024, election, an increase of 329 over 2020. Figure 1 shows these voters' geographic distribution, which roughly matches the distribution of the Amish population in Lancaster County. The townships with the most Amish registered voters were Salisbury (850), Leacock (667), and Paradise (436), which are the historic heart of the Lancaster settlement.

Despite a modest increase in Amish voter registration, the Amish voter turnout in 2024 was well below the 2020 level (57.66% in 2024 vs. 71.27% in 2020); the number who voted was nearly 400 fewer in 2024 than in 2020. Figure 2 shows the percentage of Amish voter turnout by township. Among all registered Amish voters in Lancaster County, the earliest voter registration date is 1950 and the most recent is, of course, 2024. Those who registered in 2024 were more motivated to vote (340 of 488, or about 70% turnout); still, nearly a third of just-registered Amish voters did not cast a ballot.

Table 1

Voter Registration and Voter Turnout in Lancaster County, Pennsylvania

Year	Eligible Amish voters (est.) ^a	Registered Amish voters	Voter turnout among registered Amish voters	Voter turnout as percentage of eligible Amish voters
2004	10,350	2,134 (20.62%)	1,342 (62.89%)	13.37%
2016	14,900	2,062 (13.84%)	1,019 (49.42%)	6.84%
2020	16,180	4,125 (25.49%)	2,940 (71.27%)	18.17%
2024	17,490	4,454 (25.47%)	2,568 (57.66%)	14.68%

^a Estimates of the number of eligible Amish voters for 2016 and 2020 differ from the estimates used in Kopko (2022) because we have refined our population measures.

Figure 1

Registered Amish Voters by Township, 2024

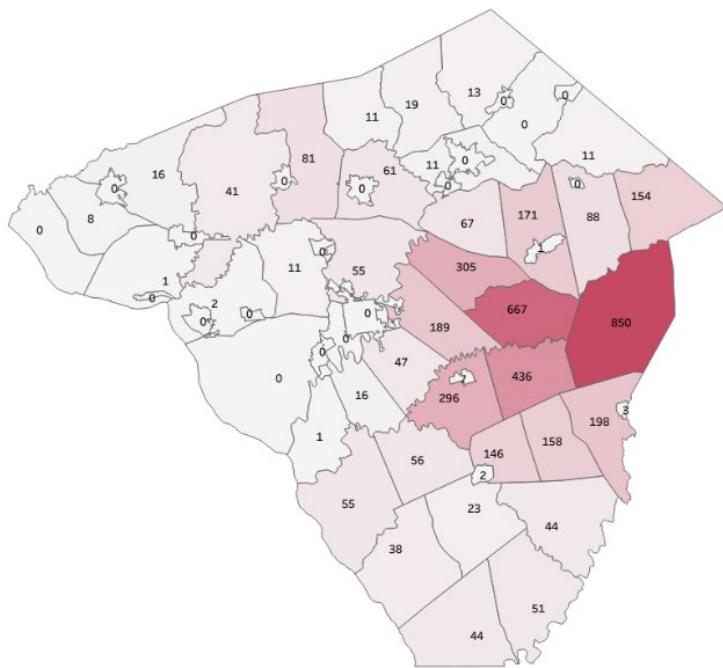
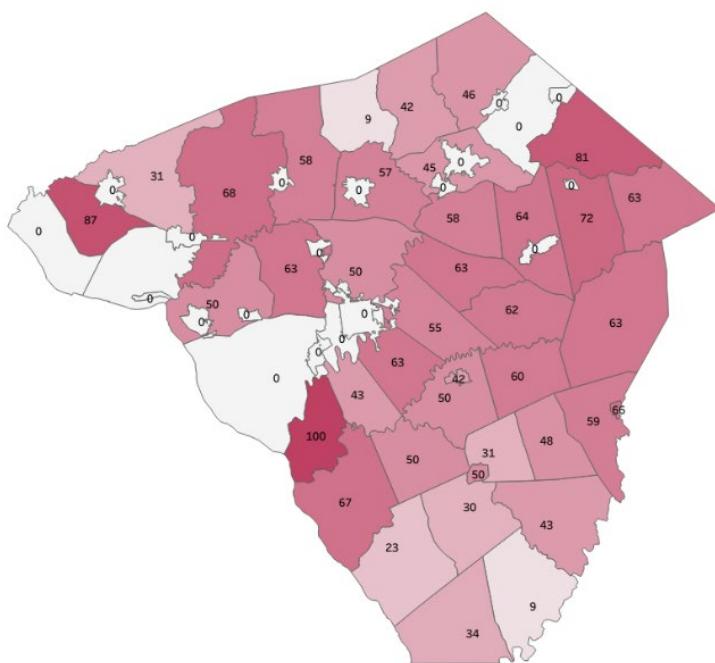


Figure 2

Percentage of Amish Voter Turnout by Township, 2024



The data from the voter rolls shows that 488 new Amish voters were registered in 2024 prior to the election, or 11% of the total number of registered Amish voters in the county. Although this is not an insignificant number, it is less than the number registered in some other years when voter registration drives were in full gear, notably 2020 and 2004, as shown in Table 2. Note that Table 2 reports the number of voters on the voter rolls in 2024 who were registered in the year indicated. In Pennsylvania, voter rolls are continuously updated as voters die, move out of a county, or are deemed inactive.⁴ Thus, for example, there likely were more than 587 Amish voters registered in 2004; however, since that time, some of those individuals have been removed from the rolls for the reasons just mentioned. The routine removal of inactive names from voter rolls also explains why the number of newly registered voters (488) was larger than the growth in the number of registered voters (329) from 2020 to 2024, as an increase in new voters is offset by the removal of inactive voters.

Table 2*Number of Registered Amish Voters in 2024, by Year First Registered*

Year	Number of Amish voters registered
2004	587
2008	45
2012	76
2016	234
2020	1,733
2024	488

Note. Read as “In 2024, ___ registered Amish voters had first registered in 20xx.”

Numbers do not total 4,454 because many Amish voters first registered before 2004 or in intervening years not listed in the table.

Mirroring a pattern we have seen in most other Amish communities, men outnumber women among Amish registered voters. In 2024, 3,077 (69.1%) of Amish voters were male and 1,377 (30.9%) were female. Of note, Amish men and women who actually cast votes in 2024 did so in almost identical proportions (69.5% male vs. 30.5% female). We believe the greater share of men voting reflects the importance of outside influences motivating voting in Amish circles, such as non-Amish coworkers, business associates, and customers (e.g., in the construction trades that employ a quarter of Amish men in the Lancaster settlement), as well as involvement in civic associations, such as rural volunteer fire companies, all of which are more common for Amish men than for women.

⁴ Pennsylvania counties mail notices to voters who have not voted in five years. If the voter does not vote or respond to the mail notice through two general elections, they may be removed from the rolls. A more complete explanation may be found here:

<https://www.chesco.org/FAQ.aspx?QID=1204#:~:text=Additionally%2C%20Voter%20Services%20sends%20out,in%20the%20previous%20five%20years.>

As noted above, Pennsylvania voter registration includes the registrant's party preference. Reflecting what we have found since 2004, about 95% of Lancaster Amish voters selected Republican as their preferred affiliation when they registered.⁵ Another 198 selected the "independent," "no affiliation," or "no party" options; 7 registered as Democrats, and 3 as a third party.

A subplot of the 2024 election in Pennsylvania involved the use of no-excuses mail-in ballots, made possible in Pennsylvania beginning in 2019 as a result of bipartisan legislation passed that year. In subsequent years, however, key Republican voices in the state—some reflecting the mixed messages from former president and candidate Donald Trump—discouraged mail-in-voting. In any case, despite the somewhat negative rhetoric around mail-in ballots from Pennsylvania Republican leaders, Republican activists in Lancaster County believed the option of mail-in ballots would boost Amish voting by allowing Amish voters to get around the perennial scheduling conflict many face due to their community's wedding traditions. In the Lancaster settlement, weddings are typically held on Tuesdays and Thursdays (Donnermeyer, 2023) and are concentrated in the weeks from mid-October to early December. With multiple weddings each Tuesday and Thursday during this time, there are always hundreds of Amish people attending one of the weddings that inevitably fall on Election Day. Would mail-in ballots be attractive to Amish voters? While not a rare choice, only a fifth of Amish voters chose mail-in ballots, as shown in Table 3. Among Amish who registered in 2024, mail-in voting was somewhat more appealing: 92 (27.06%) of the 340 newly registered Amish voters cast mail-in ballots. Still, the Amish affinity for mail-in ballots was greater than it was among Lancaster County Republican-aligned voters as a whole. In 2024, 14.76% of all votes cast in Lancaster County for Donald Trump were mail-in ballots (Commonwealth, 2025).

Table 3*Amish Voting in 2024 by Type of Ballot Cast*

Type of ballot	Votes cast
Absentee ballot	2 (0.08%)
In-person at polling place	2,026 (78.89%)
Mail-in ballot	493 (19.20%)
Provisional ballot	47 (1.83%)
Total	2,568 (100%)

⁵ The reasons for the Lancaster Amish affinity for the Republican Party are beyond the scope of this research note, but a key factor is the local political context. If one is interested in politics and connected to politically minded rural neighbors and coworkers, it would be surprising if one's political sentiments did not, to some extent, reflect that context, which is overwhelmingly Republican and has been since the 1860s. As well, there is also a popular perception in the region that the Republican Party cares more about agriculture and small business concerns—a perception shared in other rural regions of Pennsylvania. Third, Amish "two kingdoms" theology has a political flip side. For most Amish, theological separation motivates them not to vote. But for the minority who become politically active, this dualism seems to motivate support for candidates who represent minimally regulatory government, which they associate with Republican policy.

Discussion

Elections and voter behavior are complicated. A comprehensive discussion of the role of candidates, issues, local context, and socioeconomic issues is beyond the scope of this research note, though such matters are part of our research agenda.⁶ Here, we offer reflections and several hypothesis on the data presented above as it relates to Amish political participation, the question of an Amish vote impact, and further questions.

First, from the perspective of Amish political mobilization and behavior, we observe that Amish voter registration and voter turnout have been volatile in the past two decades. Within that pattern of volatility, why might Amish voter turnout have been notably lower in 2024? We offer two hypotheses, each somewhat unsatisfactory. The first is based on specific anecdotes, admittedly few in number, and involves voter disenchantment. Coauthor Nolt had conversations with Lancaster Amish in 2024 and early 2025 who volunteered that they had not voted in 2024 even though they were registered. When asked why they had made that choice, each responded with some version of irritation or disappointment with the tone and image of the Trump campaign, always illustrated with specific examples. For some, the negative campaign mailers they received were a turnoff. Certainly, both parties engaged in negative campaigning, but for Amish voters registered as Republicans, mailings came nearly exclusively from Republican-affiliated political action committees. The relentless stream of such mailings, as Pennsylvania's swing state status saw money for ad mailings pour in, was, they reported, unlike anything they had experienced and was unwelcome. Others cited the yard signs that featured vulgar and offensive wording aimed at President Biden and Vice President Harris. Although such signs were not distributed by the Republican Party itself, they were not infrequently paired with official campaign signs in Trump supporters' lawns and along the roadside. These signs created what might be called a "quality control" problem in which local Republican leaders were unable to control the signage popular with some members of their party's base that simultaneously alienated another segment of their constituency. This disenchantment hypothesis, while explaining the behavior of at least some Amish voters who sat out 2024, lacks the data—at this point—to suggest how far its explanatory merit may reach. Considerably more qualitative research is required to place these and other self-reported explanations in context.

A second hypothesis begins with a recognition that the 2020 Amish voter turnout rate is a bit of an outlier, and that Amish voter turnout in 2024 was closer to that in 2016 than to 2020 (see Table 1), even though Donald Trump was on the ballot in all three contests. Thus, we might hypothesize that the 2020 Amish vote was less a pro-Trump vote than a response to other factors, particularly a reaction against perceived federal and state Democratic Party-led policies during the COVID-19 pandemic. Various scholars have charted the tension engendered by pandemic

⁶ The role of outside actors, for example, is a complex factor, as illustrated by the creation in 2016 of Amish PAC, a non-Amish political action committee registered in Arlington, Virginia, under the umbrella of former U.S. House Speaker Newt Gingrich's extensive voter outreach operations. Federal Election Commission filings suggest much of Amish PAC's work has involved fundraising among non-Amish donors (Kopko et al., 2021, p. 55).

directives that virtual gatherings replace in-person events, recommendations that were impossible for Amish households lacking internet connectivity to adhere to (Corcoran et al., 2023; Corcoran et al., 2022; Stoltzfus, 2021). Nevertheless, this hypothesis for explaining differences in Amish voting between 2020 and 2024 is also less than persuasive since, a mere two years after 2020, when Republican gubernatorial hopeful Doug Mastriano focused his 2022 campaign on appealing to frustration with pandemic restrictions, the Amish response to his campaign was tepid. Amish voter turnout dropped by half, from 70% in 2020 to 35% in 2022 (1,337 votes cast), even though statewide voter turnout in 2022 surged to record highs. As with our first hypothesis, the second may explain some portion of Amish voter behavior, but more qualitative research is needed to theorize more broadly about the data.

We also return to the media stories of 2024 and consider the significance of the Amish vote in Lancaster for the 2024 election outcome. On one hand, the data make it obvious that the Amish did not “deliver” Pennsylvania to Trump since the county’s roughly 2,500 Amish votes—if we assume they were almost all cast for the Republican—were less than 1% of all votes cast in Lancaster County (Commonwealth, 2025). Put another way, more Amish voted in 2020 and Trump lost Pennsylvania; fewer Amish voted in 2024 and Trump won the state. Still, the 2024 Republican’s victory margin statewide was relatively narrow (1.70%) and, as political operatives on all sides affirm, every vote counts, so the Amish vote was certainly not inconsequential.

At the same time, to the degree that the Amish vote fits into broader state patterns in 2024, it helps us contextualize why the Amish vote in 2024 mattered less than in 2020. A precinct-by-precinct comparison of 2020 and 2024 Republican vote totals reveals that, in the rural precincts with many Amish residents, those totals were roughly the same or in some precincts lower in 2024 than they had been four years earlier. The remarkable developments in Pennsylvania’s 2024 election results were centered in Philadelphia and its near suburbs and in smaller cities and towns across the state, where urban white voters and Hispanic/Latino voters supported the Democratic Party less strongly than they had in recent decades (Hartig et al., 2025). Likewise, within Lancaster County, the greatest Republican gains were in Lancaster City and in boroughs such as Adamstown, Denver, Columbia, and other places lacking Amish residents.

As that last point underscores, electoral politics is an often surprising and unpredictable arena, which is one of the reasons we find the evolution of the “Amish vote,” in Lancaster and elsewhere, so intriguing. Despite the fluctuation in Lancaster Amish voting, we expect the number of Amish voters will continue to grow at some level, simply because the Amish population is increasing. Moreover, as the Lancaster Amish economy becomes more integrated with the regional economy, out-group contacts and influences are likely to increase, perhaps encouraging alliances with policy interest groups and lobbyists. Although the Democratic Party has put less effort into engaging rural voters in recent years, we expect Pennsylvania Republicans will continue to seek Amish votes and voters.

As our research continues, we are considering what Amish voting behavior tells us about the nature of Amish identity, economics, and relationships with nation and neighbors, not to mention

relationships among Amish settlements with different views on voting. We are also considering what the experience of this distinctive piece of the American democratic puzzle may tell us.

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