

Fewer Ohioans have voted early so far ahead of the November election, but more have requested ballots

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COLUMBUS, Ohio – Slightly fewer Ohioans have voted early ahead of the Nov. 7 election compared to the state's last election in August. But significantly more have requested absentee ballots, which eventually should translate to higher overall early voting totals.

Through last Friday, which marked two weeks of early voting, 212,133 state voters had cast early ballots, either in person or by filling out and returning an absentee ballot. That's about 3,600 less than the 215,759 who had voted by the equivalent time ahead of the election last August, according to a [cleveland.com](https://www.cleveland.com) / Plain Dealer analysis of state voting data.

Looking in greater detail, early voting has increased in rural areas while dropping in urban areas, generally a favorable sign for opponents of a pair of ballot issues that will be decided this November: State Issue 1, which would add abortion rights to the Ohio constitution, and State Issue 2, which would legalize recreational marijuana for adults 21 and up.

But Ohio voters have requested 291,722 absentee ballots, 50% more than the 194,307 they had requested at the same time in August. The increase in early-vote requests is roughly equal in urban and rural areas at numbers that could offset the urban areas' drop in early voting.

In suburban counties, meanwhile, early voting is relatively stable, while absentee ballot requests are up, but at a lower rate than in rural and urban areas.

Changes in early voting numbers can foreshadow changes in voter enthusiasm, particularly in Democratic-leaning areas, where voters tend to vote early more often than in Republican areas.

[A marked surge in early voting in August, particularly in urban and suburban areas](#), ended up heralding higher than expected voter turnout in an election when voters were asked whether to approve a ballot issue making it harder to amend the state

constitution. The measure was soundly defeated, with opponents burying it in the early vote, in what was widely seen as a warm-up vote for Issue 1.

But it's always an open question whether a shift toward early voting comes at the expense of people who otherwise would have voted on Election Day instead, or whether delays in early voting could just be a sign of voters taking longer to make up their minds.

This election, Issue 1 opponents are coming off a low bar in August, [when early voting in rural areas lagged badly initially before later catching up somewhat](#). Republicans also are continuing an effort to promote early voting among GOP voters, attempting to dispel suspicions stoked for years by ex-President Donald Trump.

The numbers for this story compare early voting from July 11-21 to Oct. 11-20, the first two weeks of early voting for each election. Early voting continues through Nov. 6. The November early-voting period has one less day than the August window because of the Columbus Day holiday.

How do the numbers vary by area?

The relative drop in voting numbers can be attributed to reduced voting in three of the state's largest urban counties. The largest numerical drops occurred in Cuyahoga, Lucas and Hamilton counties, where voters cumulatively have cast 8,801 fewer votes than they had at the same time in August.

Early voting was up in four of Ohio's other largest counties though: Franklin, Mahoning, Stark and Summit counties.

Rural areas, meanwhile, have seen a corresponding increase in early voting. In 73 counties classified by [cleveland.com](#) and The Plain Dealer as rural counties, voters have cast 5,293 more ballots than they had at the same time in August. The overall effect is a roughly 14,000-vote shift in favor of rural areas, a generally positive sign for opponents of both ballot issues.

However, rural counties and urban counties both have seen a roughly 50% increase in absentee ballot requests. This translates to an extra 27,842 requests in rural counties and 62,052 extra requests in urban counties.

Early voting, meanwhile, is more stable overall in suburban counties when comparing the two elections. Early votes in these counties are down 1.5% overall, but

absentee ballot requests are up by about 33%, with voters requesting 7,818 more ballots than they had at the same time in November.

Amy Natoce, a spokesperson for the anti-Issue 1 campaign group Protect Women Ohio, said the implications for the November election are clearer than in August, when voters heard competing arguments about why it should or shouldn't be harder to amend the state constitution.

"This is something our people have seen coming, and they've known we were going to have this big push come November," Natcoe said. "It's something they've been ready for, and there's not as much confusion as there was in August with messaging."

Natoce also pointed to the initiative from state and national Republicans to emphasize early voting to GOP voters in general.

"Republicans tend to be Election Day voters, but we've been telling our folks this issue is too important to wait until the last day," Natoce said.

Gabriel Mann, a spokesperson for the pro-Issue 1 Ohioans United for Reproductive Rights, said the group's supporters include more than 700,000 people who signed the petition last summer that placed the measure on the ballot.

"From early vote numbers to the thousands of conversations volunteers are having with voters, what we're seeing across Ohio is strong support for protecting reproductive rights, ending the dangerous abortion ban, and voting yes on Issue 1," Mann said.

What about Cuyahoga County?

Early voting [got off to an unusually fast start in Cuyahoga County ahead of the August election](#), with numbers that were exponentially higher than in May 2022, the last roughly equivalent election. The increase included an unusual spike in early-in-person voting that was more reminiscent of a November election for governor.

Those numbers have leveled off – averaging 610 early, in-person votes a day, compared to 703 in August – although overall early voting is on track to be higher than before.

In Cuyahoga County, 24,833 voters have cast ballots so far, compared to 28,633 at the same time in August. But 76,241 voters have requested absentee ballots, which

typically make up the lion's share of the early vote, compared to 60,233 at the same time in August.

Tony Perlatti, director of the Cuyahoga County Board of Elections, said that early voting hasn't been as robust as he expected. But, he said he thinks the mail-voting numbers still point to overall turnout higher than what the county saw in August.

Perlatti isn't sure why voter behavior had changed. He said it could partially be due to the difference in voters' schedules in the summer months versus the traditional election season in fall.

"It also could be it's more of an involved ballot," Perlatti said, pointing to August's single question compared to the two ballot issues, plus local candidates, charter amendments and tax levies that voters are considering in November.