

Ohio early voting for November election on track to exceed August

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COLUMBUS, Ohio – Early voting is on track to exceed the number of people who voted early in August, according to a cleveland.com / Plain Dealer analysis of state data.

Through Oct. 26, the most recent date for which statewide numbers are available, 384,768 Ohioans had voted early, either in person or via mail-in absentee ballot, about 31,400 more than the number who had voted at the equivalent time ahead of the August election.

In addition, another 249,129 voters have received absentee ballots but have yet to return them, compared to 121,700 at the equivalent time before. The increased number of mail ballots in particular points to a larger overall early vote, since around 90% of requested absentee ballots typically are returned.

Voters are casting ballots in a rare statewide off-year election to decide state Issue 1, which would enshrine abortion rights in the state constitution, and state Issue 2, a proposal to legalize recreational marijuana, in addition to school board races and other local elections across the state. In August, voters rejected a constitutional amendment that sought to thwart the abortion amendment's prospects for passing.

The early vote for November also shows an increase in the number of rural voters casting early ballots, but not by enough to significantly offset increased mail-ballot requests by residents of large counties. The combination could be a favorable sign for supporters for Issue 1, since a heavy advantage in the early vote translated to a swift election night defeat of the anti-Issue 1 measure in August.

But it's always an open question whether increased early voting comes at the expense of people who would have otherwise would have voted on Election Day instead. The general electoral conditions are different for the November election too – in August, the only thing on the ballot was the anti-Issue 1 constitutional amendment proposal.

The numbers for this story compare early voting from July 11-27 to Oct. 11-26, nearly the first three weeks of early voting for each election.

Early voting for the current election continues through Nov. 6. This week, hours expanded for early-in person voting. For Oct. 31, elections offices are open for early voting from 7:30 a.m. through 8:30 p.m., while for Wednesday through Friday, the hours are 7:30 a.m. through 7:30 p.m.

The hours will change for weekend early voting. For Saturday, Nov. 4, they are 8 a.m. to 4 p.m., and for Sunday, they are 1 p.m. to 5 p.m.

Tuesday was the last day to request a mail ballot.

How do voting numbers vary by area?

Zooming in, [a greater number of rural Ohioans continue to vote early compared to the August election](#). The development comes as Republicans have worked to promote early voting among GOP voters, attempting to dispel suspicions stoked for years by ex-President Donald Trump.

Across the state, absentee ballot requests are up more than 50%. But assuming voters return their ballots at normal rates, those numbers translate to increased early rural voting not being enough to offset similar percentage increases in mail voting in urban and suburban areas.

Voters in 73 rural counties already have cast 166,473 early ballots, up 14% from the 146,259 for the same time in August. That includes a chunk of mail-in absentee ballots. Absentee ballot requests have increased in rural areas compared with the August election, and 78,997 still have not been returned.

Meanwhile, voters in Ohio's eight urban counties have cast 165,493 ballots, up 6% from the 156,596 who voted at the same time ahead of the previous election. Absentee ballots requests are up in even greater numbers in urban counties, with 126,210 not yet returned.

In suburban counties, 50,521 residents have voted early, about 5% more than 47,910 who voted in the equivalent period in August. There are still 26,966 ballots unreturned absentee ballots in those counties as well.

What about Cuyahoga County?

Early voting in Cuyahoga County is up, but not as much on a percentage basis as other counties. If the trend holds, that means Cuyahoga County will make up a smaller share of the early vote for the November election than it did in August.

Through Oct. 26, 50,852 people had either voted early in person or returned their absentee ballot, compared to 47,702 at the equivalent time ahead of the August election.

Another 90,012 Cuyahoga County residents have requested absentee ballots, compared to 73,078 absentee ballot requests at the equivalent time before.

That's a 7% increase in votes, and a 23% increase in absentee requests, smaller than the 9% increase in votes and 52% increase in absentee requests statewide.

Of the Cuyahoga County voters who have requested absentee ballots, 46,974 have yet to return them.