Ohio Mail Ballot Trends

October 26, 2020

The accompanying graphs document important trends related to absentee ballots in Ohio. The data were downloaded from the websites of the county board of elections within Ohio. Clermont, Hancock, Huron, Mercer, Morrow, Sandusky, Wayne, Stark, and Wyandot counties were excluded from the data due to either lack of data availability or data quality issues. Early in-person voters, in-office absentee voters, and absentee ballot requests that were rejected were also excluded from the data. Voter registration in Ohio closed on October 5th and absentee ballots were first sent out on October 6th. The deadline for registered voters to request a ballot by mail in Ohio is October 31st. Request data are based on cumulative absentee ballot registration information provided by individual county board of elections in Ohio. Return data are available either within absentee ballot registration datasets or in daily reports of returned mail ballots. Ballots outstanding are calculated by subtracting returned from requested ballots for the relevant time periods.

Note that these statistics pertain to individual ballot requests and returns. A small number of voters may have more than one request or return, because of problems encountered with the ballots. (For instance, if a voter “spoils” a ballot—that is, makes a mistake and asks for a new ballot—both the spoiled and replacement ballot will appear in the dataset.) We have not removed duplicates such as these. Therefore, there are slightly more requests reflected in this document than there are individuals who requested mail ballots. Due to the missing data issues at the county level, the number of requests and returns in this dataset are likely an undercount. However, as we include the major metropolitan areas of Ohio we expect the general trends to hold for Ohio. Data regarding race was imputed using Bayesian Improved Surname Geocoding (BISG) on the surname and ZIP code surname fields of the Ohio absentee voter files. Elliot et al. found that BISG is relatively accurate in imputing overall racial/ethnic prevalence and individual race/ethnicity.

As noted by the U.S. Elections Project, in the Ohio ballot reports “Party” refers to party affiliation, which is the record of the last party primary a voter participated in within the last two calendar years. Therefore plots and statistics regarding absentee ballot requests and returns by party do not reflect party registration and should not be interpreted as such. In the above link the U.S. Elections Project also reports that for Ohio’s April 28, 2020 presidential primary, 124,628 more voters participated in the Democratic primary than Republican primary. This has lead party affiliation in Ohio absentee ballot reports skewing more towards Democrats for the 2020 Presidential General Election.

Each week runs from Sunday to Saturday. The data on the x-axis is the Sunday that begins the week.

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Of Note this Week

- As of last week, over 2.18 million mail-in ballots have been requested. In all of 2016, a total of 1.29 million mail ballots were requested.
- Over 710,000 mail-in ballots were returned during the week of October 18th and over 1.5 million mail-in ballots have been returned cumulatively. Over 30% of requested ballots have yet to be returned.
- Mail-in ballot requests and returns appear to be led by White voters with around 76% of ballots requested coming from White voters.
- Of returned ballots, White voters account for around 77% of the cumulative returns while Black voters account for around 13% of cumulative returns and voters of other races have account for around 11% of cumulative returns.
• Cumulatively, Democratic affiliated voters and unaffiliated or third-party affiliated voters have returned twice as many mail-in ballots as Republican affiliated voters.

• Democratic affiliated voters have returned nearly 83% of requested mail-in ballots while Republican affiliated voters have returned nearly 73% of requested mail-in ballots. Around 40% of requested mail-in ballots from voters with other or no party affiliation are yet to be returned.

General trends

For the week of October 18:

• 131,459 mail ballots were requested. This brings the total number requested to 2,185,722.
  – 69.92% of all requested ballots have been returned for counting.

• 711,747 mail ballots were returned. This bring the total number returned to 1,528,309.

• 657,413 mail ballots are still outstanding.

By race

For the week of October 18,

• The breakdown of requests by race for the week was White 90,874.02, Black 23,142.49, and other race 17,442.49. Cumulatively, the breakdown of requests is White 1,660,783, Black 282,799.8, and other race 242,138.9.
  – For the week, 69.13% of requested ballots came from White voters, 17.6% from Black voters, and 13.27% from voters of other races. Cumulatively, 75.98% of requests have come from White voters, 12.94% from Black voters, and 11.08% from voters of other races.

• The breakdown of mail ballots returned by race for the week was White 543,934.3, Black 86,994.48, and other race 80,818.23. Cumulatively, the breakdown of returns is white 1,173,294, Black 193,598.5 and other race 161,416.1.
  – For the week, 76.42% of ballots were returned by White voters, 12.22% from Black voters, and 11.35% from voters of other races. Cumulatively, 76.77% of mail ballots returned have been from White voters, 12.67% from Black voters, and 10.56% from voters of other races.
  – Thus far, 70.65% of ballots requested by White voters have been returned, compared to 68.46% of ballots requested by Black voters and 66.66% of ballots requested by voters of other races.

• The breakdown of mail ballots still outstanding was White 487,488.9, Black 89,201.31, and other race 80,722.8.

By party affiliation

For the week of October 18,

• The breakdown of requests by party affiliation for the week was Democrat 29,160, Republican 14,652, and other or no party affiliation 87,647. Cumulatively, the breakdown of requests is Democrats 675,725, Republican 353,697, and other or no party affiliation 1,156,300
– For the week, 22.18% of requests came from Democrats, 11.15% from Republicans, and 66.67% from voters of other or no party affiliation. Cumulatively, 30.92% of requests have come from Democrats, 16.18% from Republicans, and 52.9% from voters of other or no party affiliation.

• The breakdown of mail ballots returned by party for the week was Democrat 221,801, Republican 121,032, and other or no party affiliation 368,914. Cumulatively, the breakdown of returned ballots is Democrat 559,047, Republican 270,979 and other or no party affiliation 698,283.

– For the week, 31.16% of ballots were returned by Democrats, 17% from Republicans, and 51.83% from voters of other or no party affiliation. Cumulatively, 36.58% of mail ballots returned have been from Democrats, 17.73% from Republicans, and 45.69% from voters of other or no party affiliation.

– Thus far, 82.73% of ballots requested by Democrats have been returned, compared to 76.61% of ballots requested by Republicans and 60.39% of ballots requested by voters of other or no party affiliation.

• The breakdown of mail ballots still outstanding was Democrat 116,678, Republican 82,718, and other or no party affiliation 458,017.

Appendix 1: Aggregate Ballot Request and Return Trends
Appendix 2: Ballot Request and Return Trends by Race

![Graphs showing ballot request and return trends by race.](image-url)

- Total number of absentee ballots requested each week, by race.
- Cumulative number of absentee ballots requested by the end of each week, by race.
- Percentage distribution of ballots requested each week, by race.

Data source: County Board of Elections within Ohio.
Graph source: MIT Election Data and Science Lab.
Graph date: 10/20/2020.
Cumulative percentage distribution of ballots requested by the end of each week, by race

Data source: County Board of Elections within Ohio
Graph source: MIT Election Data and Science Lab
Graph date: 10/26/2020

Number of ballots returned each week, by race

Data source: County Board of Elections within Ohio
Graph source: MIT Election Data and Science Lab
Graph date: 10/26/2020

Cumulative number of ballots returned by the end of each week, by race

Data source: County Board of Elections within Ohio
Graph source: MIT Election Data and Science Lab
Graph date: 10/26/2020

Percentage of ballots returned out of each week’s requests, by race

Data source: County Board of Elections within Ohio
Graph source: MIT Election Data and Science Lab
Graph date: 10/26/2020
Appendix 3: Ballot request and return trends by party affiliation