Pennsylvania Mail Ballot Trends

October 21, 2020

The accompanying graphs document important trends related to absentee ballots in Pennsylvania. The data were downloaded from the website of the Pennsylvania Board of Elections. The Request data and Return data are based on aggregate weekly reports supplied by the state. 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.

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 2.4 million mail ballots have been requested. In all of 2016, a total of approximately 230,000 were requested.
• Over 91% of requested ballots have yet to be returned.
• The number of mail ballots requested reached its peak the week of September 27th.
• Registered Democrats have continue to dominate cumulative requested returned mail ballots.
• Rejected ballots by race are lower for White voters than their proportion of registered voters, and higher for voters of Hispanic, Asian and other races compared to their proportion of registered voters.

General trends

For the week of October 11:

• 349,956 mail ballots were requested. This brings the total number requested to 2,668,880.
  – 25.46% of all requested ballots have been returned for counting.
• 3,899 mail ballots were returned. This bring the total number returned to 679,526.
• 1,989,354 mail ballots are still outstanding.

By party

For the week of October 11,

• The breakdown of requests by party for the week was Democrat 193,667, Republican 106,425, and other or no party affiliation 49,864. Cumulatively, the breakdown of requests is Democrats 1,718,948, Republican 657,933, and other or no party affiliation 291,999.
  – For the week, 55.34 of requests came from Democrats, 30.41 from Republicans, and 14.25 from voters of other or no party affiliation. Cumulatively, r dem\_obj2b' of requests came from Democrats, 24.65 from Republicans, and 10.94 from voters of other or no party affiliation.
• The breakdown of mail ballots returned by party for the week was Democrat 2,121, Republican 1,297, and other or no party affiliation 481. Cumulatively, the breakdown of returned ballots is Democrat 508,450, Republican 115,001, and other or no party affiliation 56,075.
For the week, 70.83% of ballots were returned by Democrats, 20.36% from Republicans, and 8.81% from voters of other or no party affiliation. Cumulatively, 0.75% of ballots were returned by Democrats, 0.17% from Republicans, and 0.08% from voters of other or no party affiliation.

Thus far, 29.58% of ballots requested by Democrats have been returned, compared to 17.48% of ballots requested by Republicans and 19.2% of ballots requested by voters of other or no party affiliation.

- The breakdown of mail ballots still outstanding was Democrat 1,210,498, Republican 542,932, and other or no party affiliation 235,924.

**Ballots not accepted for counting**

- For the week, 14.83% of ballots returned for counting were not accepted. Cumulatively, 0.65% of ballots were not accepted.

- Of the ballots requested for this week that were not accepted by race, 67.99% were from White voters, 14.05% from Black voters, and 17.95% from other races. Cumulatively, 66.02% were from White voters, 13.52% from Black voters, and 20.45% from other races.
Appendix 1: Aggregate Ballot Request and Return Trends
Appendix 2: Ballot request and return trends by party

Total number of absentee ballots requested each week, by party

Cumulative number of absentee ballots requested by the end of each week, by party

Percentage distribution of ballots requested each week, by party

Note: Dashed lines reflect proportion of registered voters
Data source: Pennsylvania Department of State
Graph source: MIT Election Data and Science Lab
Graph date: 10/1/2020