Pennsylvania Mail Ballot Trends

October 27, 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 2.9 million mail ballots have been requested. In all of 2016, a total of approximately 230,000 were requested.
- Approximately half of requested ballots have yet to be returned.
- Registered Democrats have continue to dominate cumulative requested and returned mail ballots.
  - Distribution of ballots requested have been approximately proportional by race according to their proportion of registered voters
- Rates of returned ballots are approximately equal by race over time.

General trends

For the week of October 18:

- 289,701 mail ballots were requested. This brings the total number requested to 2,900,911.
  - 50.17% of all requested ballots have been returned for counting.
- 49,546 mail ballots were returned. This bring the total number returned to 1,455,351.
- 1,445,560 mail ballots are still outstanding.

By race

For the week of October 18,

- The breakdown of requests by party for the week was White 202,464, Black 30,489, and other race 56,749. Cumulatively, the breakdown of requests is Whites 2,150,901, Black 332,957, and other race 417,055.
  - For the week, 69.89 of requests came from Whites, 10.52 from Blacks, and 19.59 from voters of other or no party affiliation. Cumulatively, 74.15 of requests came from Whites, 11.48 from Blacks, and 14.38 from voters of other races.
- The breakdown of mail ballots returned by party for the week was White 34,814, Black 4,171, and other or no party affiliation 10,561. Cumulatively, the breakdown of returned ballots is White 1,078,492, Black 182,027, and other race 194,832.
For the week, 76.41% of ballots were returned by Whites, 9.94% from Blacks, and 13.65% from voters of other or no party affiliation. Cumulatively, 74% of ballots were returned by Whites, 13% from Blacks, and 13% from voters of other or races.

Thus far, 50.14% of ballots requested by Whites have been returned, compared to 54.67% of ballots requested by Blacks and 46.72% of ballots requested by voters of other races.

- The breakdown of mail ballots still outstanding was White 1,072,409, Black 150,930, and other race 222,223.

By party

For the week of October 18,

- The breakdown of requests by party for the week was Democrat 157,688, Republican 86,367, and other or no party affiliation 45,646. Cumulatively, the breakdown of requests is Democrats 1,837,346, Republican 731,642, and other or no party affiliation 331,923.
  - For the week, 54.43 of requests came from Democrats, 29.81 from Republicans, and 15.76 from voters of other or no party affiliation. Cumulatively, 54.22 of requests came from Democrats, 26.22 from Republicans, and 11.44 from voters of other or no party affiliation.

- The breakdown of mail ballots returned by party for the week was Democrat 33,470, Republican 10,879, and other or no party affiliation 5,197. Cumulatively, the breakdown of returned ballots is Democrat 1,028,509, Republican 293,582, and other or no party affiliation 133,260.
  - For the week, 66.09% of ballots were returned by Democrats, 23.68% from Republicans, and 10.23% from voters of other or no party affiliation. Cumulatively, 67.11% of ballots were returned by Democrats, 24.02% from Republicans, and 9.09% from voters of other or no party affiliation.
  - Thus far, 55.98% of ballots requested by Democrats have been returned, compared to 40.13% of ballots requested by Republicans and 40.15% of ballots requested by voters of other or no party affiliation.

- The breakdown of mail ballots still outstanding was Democrat 808,837, Republican 438,060, and other or no party affiliation 198,663.

Ballots not accepted for counting

- For the week, 0.78% of ballots returned for counting were not accepted. Cumulatively, 0.6% of ballots were not accepted.

- Of the ballots requested for this week that were not accepted by race, 0.81% were from White voters, 0.59% from Black voters, and 0.74% from other races. Cumulatively, 0.65% were from White voters, 0.36% from Black voters, and 0.54% from other races.
Appendix 1: Aggregate Ballot Request and Return Trends
Number of ballots returned each week

Cumulative number of ballots returned by the end of each week

Number of ballots still outstanding, as of the end of the week

Data source: Pennsylvania Department of State
Graph Source: MIT Election Data and Science Lab
Graph date: 10/27/2020
Appendix 2: Ballot request and return trends by race
Appendix 3: Ballot request and return trends by party
Cumulative percentage distribution of ballots requested by the end of each week, by party

Note: Dashed lines reflect proportion of registered voters
Data source: Pennsylvania Department of State
Graph source: MIT Elections Data and Science Lab
Graph date: 10/27/2020

Number of ballots returned each week, by party

Data source: Pennsylvania Department of State
Graph source: MIT Elections Data and Science Lab
Graph date: 10/27/2020

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

Data source: Pennsylvania Department of State
Graph source: MIT Elections Data and Science Lab
Graph date: 10/27/2020

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

Data source: Pennsylvania Department of State
Graph source: MIT Elections Data and Science Lab
Graph date: 10/27/2020
Appendix 4: Ballot not accepted trends