

State of Wisconsin \ Government Accountability Board

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Chairperson

KEVIN J. KENNEDY
Director and General Counsel

MEMORANDUM

DATE: For the September 1, 2015 Board Meeting

TO: Members, Wisconsin Government Accountability Board

FROM: Kevin J. Kennedy, Director and General Counsel

Prepared and Presented by:
David Buerger and Jennifer Webb – Elections Specialists

SUBJECT: Electronic Poll Book Survey

I. Background

In July 2013 Director Kevin Kennedy assembled a team to research and prepare for the potential use of electronic poll books in Wisconsin. The team was also charged with recommending standards for approval of electronic poll books pursuant to Wis. Stat. § 6.79(1m). The initial research report was presented to the Board at its December 2013 meeting. Board staff presented the final report at the March 2014 meeting with two recommendations. First, that the Board direct staff to continue to research and develop standards for approval of electronic poll books pursuant to Wis. Stat. § 6.79(1m); and second that the staff should conduct an analysis of the costs and benefits of developing in-house a custom electronic poll book system for use in Wisconsin. Both motions failed and Director Kennedy noted that based on the decision of the Board, staff would not devote any significant resources to further electronic poll book research.

At the April 2015 meeting, Manitowoc County Clerk Jamie Aulik appeared to request that the Board revisit the development of standards for electronic poll books and presented a letter signed by 107 municipal and county clerks requesting the same. At the June 2015 meeting, both voter advocates and election officials spoke in support of developing standards for the approval of electronic poll books for use in Wisconsin. During the Elections Division report the Board discussed the growing clerk interest in having the Board develop standards for certification and approval of electronic poll books. A motion to direct staff to develop standards for consideration at the September meeting failed, but the Board directed staff to survey the clerks to determine their level of support for development of standards and the actual use of electronic poll books, if approved. This memorandum summarizes the survey results.

II. Survey Design

Board staff developed a nine-question survey for municipal and county clerks to ascertain their support for electronic poll books. The key survey questions were:

1. Do you support having the G.A.B. develop standards and procedures for the use of electronic poll books?
2. Are you interested in having the option to use electronic poll books in your municipality?
3. Have you attended or viewed a demonstration of an electronic poll book system?
4. Are you interested in learning more about electronic poll books?

The survey began on July 31, 2015 with a Clerk Communication posted to the agency website requesting that Wisconsin's 1853 municipal clerks and 72 county clerks provide their input.

III. Survey Results

Final survey results summarized in this memorandum were collected on August 17, 2015. As of that date there were 806 total responses to the survey with at least one respondent in each county in Wisconsin except Menominee County. Respondents included 25 county clerks and 781 municipal clerks. See Addendum A for a map illustrating the municipalities who responded to the survey. Below is brief summary of the results of the survey.

Q1: Do you Support Having the G.A.B. Develop Standards and Procedures for the Use of Electronic Poll Books?		
	#	%
Yes	541	67%
No	145	18%
No Preference	120	15%
Total	806	

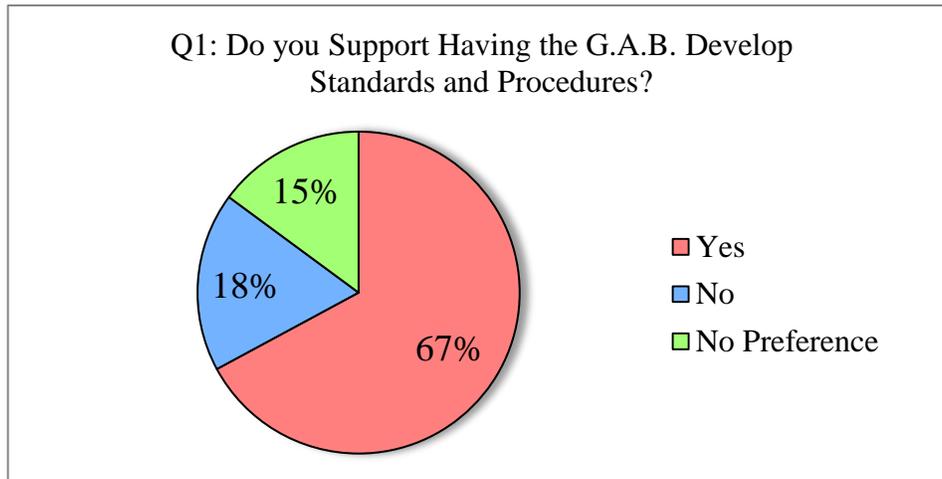
Q2: Are you Interested in Having the Option to Use Electronic Poll Books in your Municipality?		
	#	%
Yes	468	58%
No	236	29%
No Preference	102	13%
Total	806	

Q3: Have you Attended or Viewed a Demonstration of an Electronic Poll Book System?		
	#	%
Yes	156	19%
No	650	81%
Total	806	

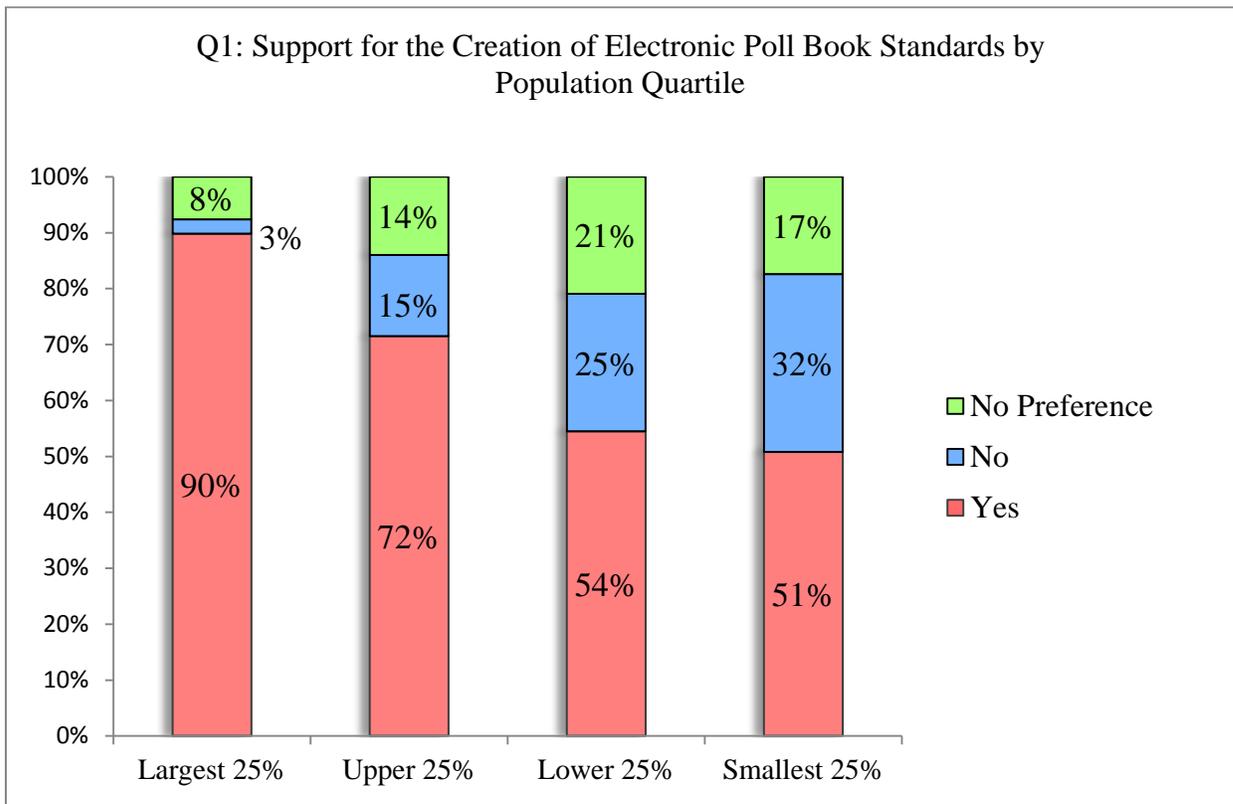
Q4: Are you Interested in Learning More About Electronic Poll Books?		
	#	%
Yes	621	77%
No	185	23%
Total	806	

IV. Analysis

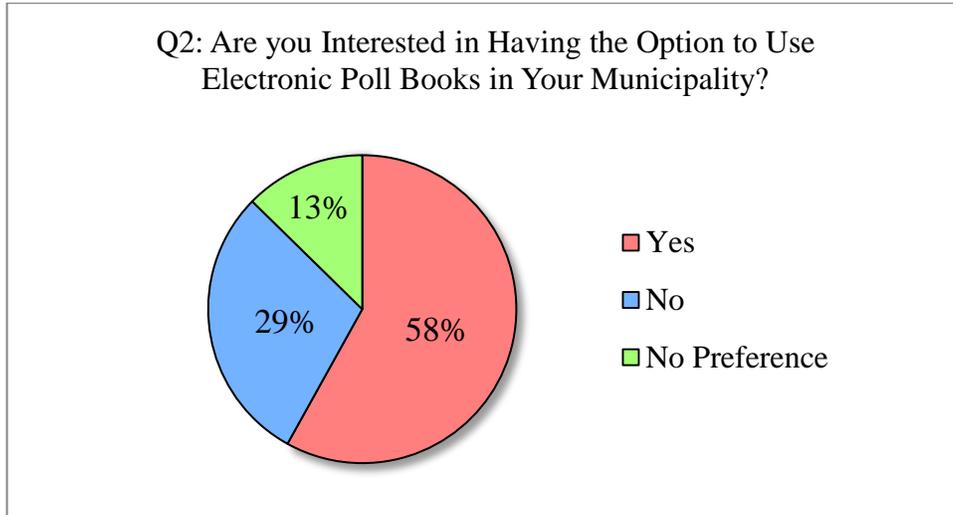
Overall, respondents are in favor (67%) of having the G.A.B. develop standards and procedures for the use of electronic poll books. See Addendum B for a map illustrating how each municipality responded to Question 1.



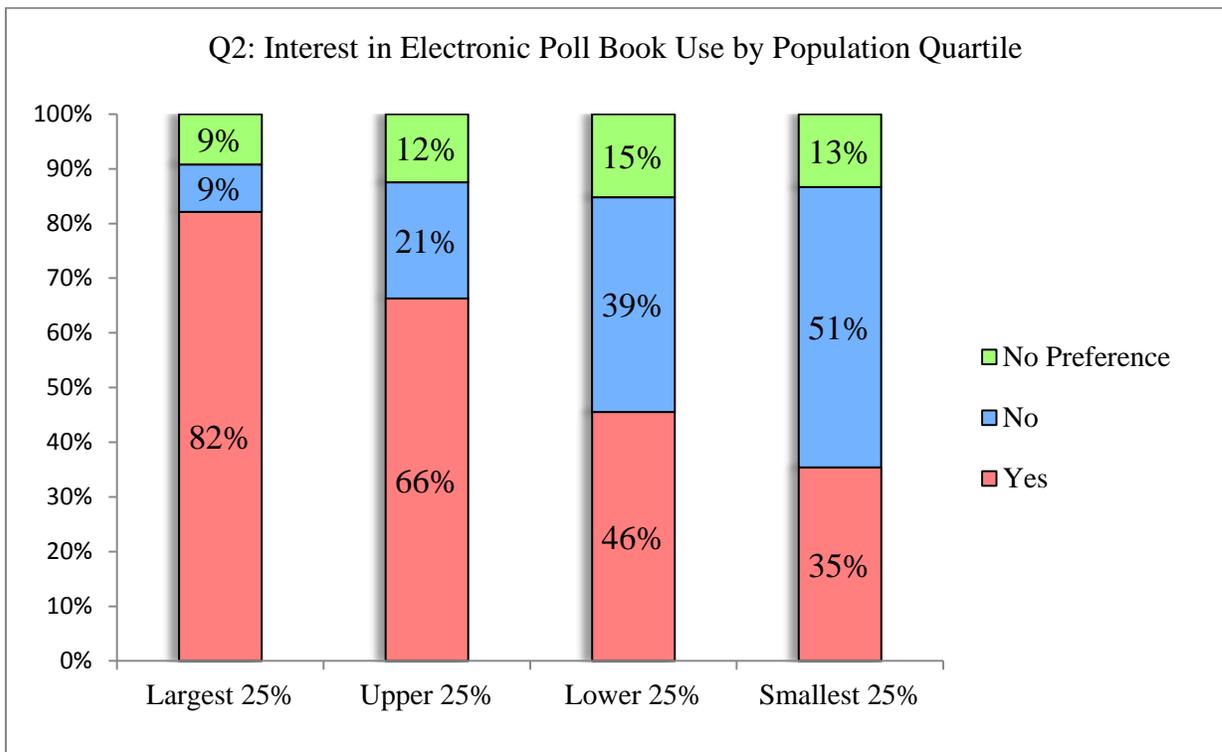
Clerks responding in support represent municipalities ranging from the smallest to the largest municipalities, including one township of 39 residents. Those who were opposed (18%) or indifferent (15%) also covered municipalities of every size; however, there was a noticeable trend of diminishing support in less populated municipalities.



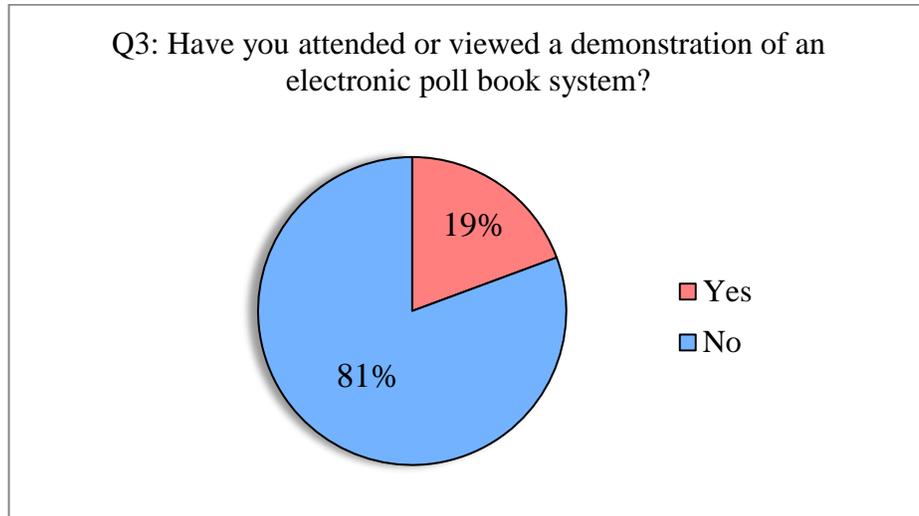
The majority of respondents are interested in the option of using electronic poll books (58%). Those municipalities which expressed interest in the use of electronic poll books serve approximately 3.2 million of Wisconsin's estimated 5.7 million residents (56%) and operate 1,963 of Wisconsin's approximately 2,700 polling places (73%). See Addendum C for a map illustrating how each municipality responded to Question 2.



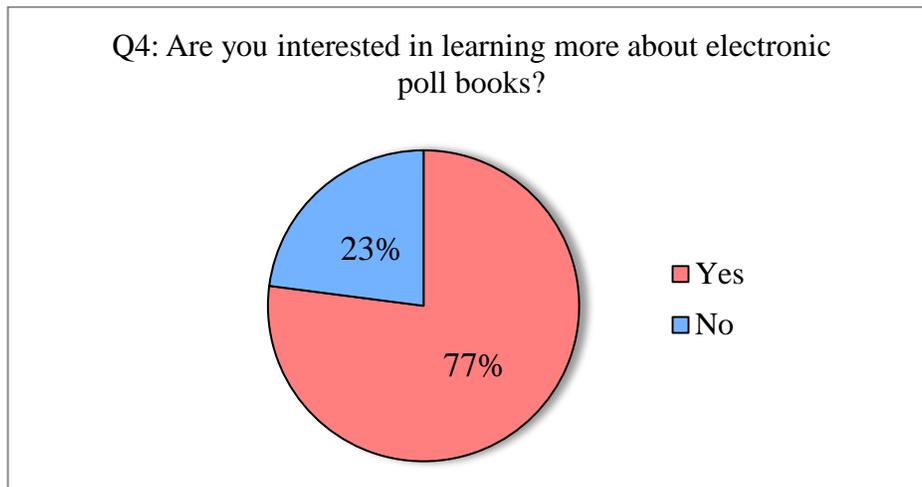
There were significantly more clerks not interested in using electronic poll books (29%) than those opposed to development of standards and procedures (18%), which suggests that some clerks support the G.A.B. allowing the option of using electronic poll books even though their own municipality may not wish or cannot afford to use such a system. There was also a similar decline in interest by the size of the municipality.



The overwhelming majority of respondents have not attended or viewed a demonstration of an electronic poll books system (81%).



A similar amount of respondents also indicated they were interested in learning more about electronic poll books (77%).



The fact that interest in learning more about electronic poll books is higher (77%) than support for development of standards (67%) or interest in using electronic poll books (58%) suggests that at least some election officials who responded that they do not support development of standards or do not have interest in using electronic poll books at this time may be open to reconsidering their opinion.

Respondents were given the opportunity to provide comments or suggestions at the end of the survey. The raw responses were reviewed by staff and consolidated where feedback was similar. The top five comments were:

1. No Internet/Phone/Computer Access
2. Positive Comments/Support
3. Poll Worker Concerns

4. Cost Concerns
5. Interested in More Information

The most common feedback received from respondents was the concern that electronic poll books require an internet connection or a computer at the polling place to function. This is an erroneous assumption. Internet connectivity is an optional feature of electronic poll books that may enhance its capabilities, but is not required for use.

As for poll worker concerns, the other states surveyed in the original electronic poll book research report indicated that there was some initial resistance to the use of electronic poll books, primarily from those with limited experience with computers. But after some small group training classes focused on teaching basic computer proficiency most poll workers quickly became comfortable with the new technology and now would never want to go back to the prior paper-based system.

Cost is a common concern and unfortunately not one that the G.A.B. can directly address as election budgets are a local issue and prices are set by the vendor depending on a number of factors. Anecdotally, other states have reported significant savings through use of electronic poll books, primarily through the elimination of the time-consuming chore of individually entering into the statewide voter registration system each voter's participation in the election and any associated Election Day registrations. However, at this time Board staff is unaware of any studies that could further quantify these savings. Each interested municipality would need to examine its own historical costs for these tasks and compare that to the vendor's quoted price to determine if an electronic poll book system would be cost-effective to implement.

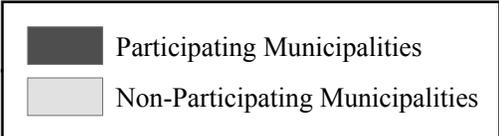
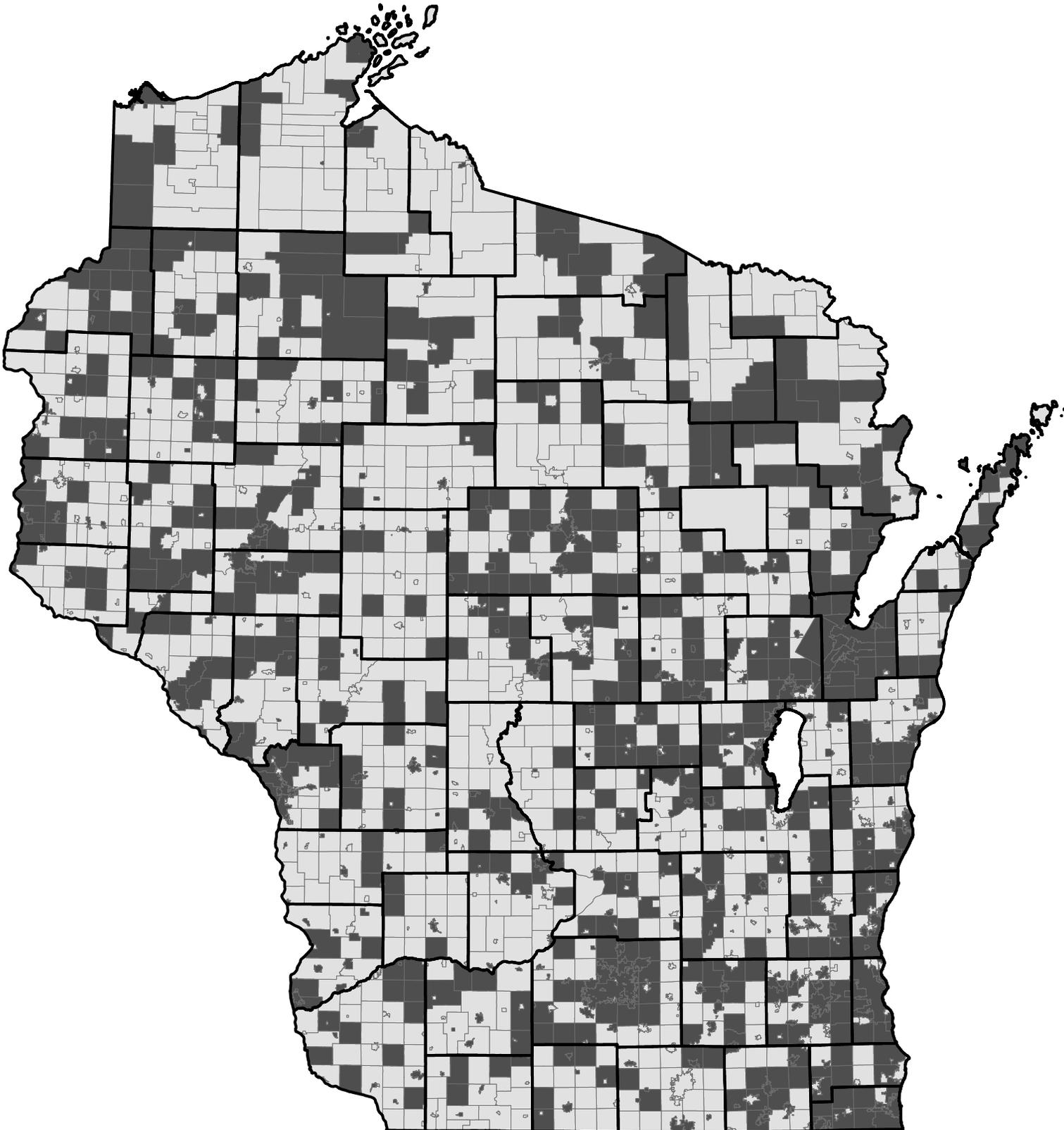
V. Next Steps

No specific Board action is requested by staff at this time. If the Board wishes to direct staff to develop standards and procedures for approval of electronic poll books, staff would recommend the Board also direct staff to develop a pilot program for the 2016 election cycle. A pilot program would help Board staff further refine the draft standards and could help identify potential technological, administrative, and legal challenges prior to a full municipal or county-level implementation. Interested vendors could be paired with interested municipalities to implement an electronic poll book system on a limited scale prior to final approval. Pilot programs have been successfully used in other states such as Minnesota and California to develop standards for approval and would help limit the risk otherwise present with a full-scale implementation of new technology in a busy election cycle. Based on a pilot program, staff could then analyze the costs and benefits of developing in-house a custom electronic poll book system for use in Wisconsin.

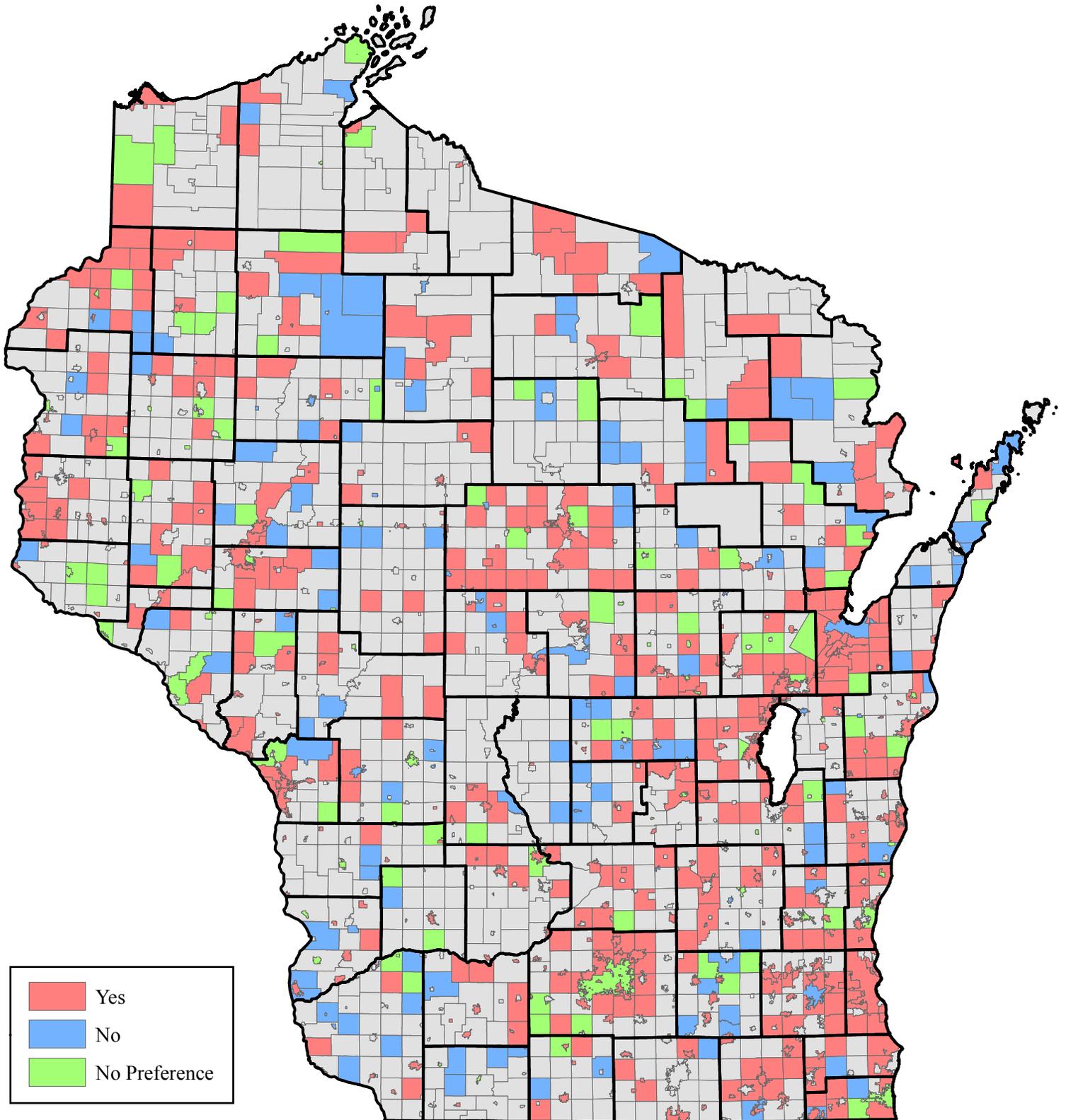
VI. Attachments

- Addendum A – Survey Response Map by Municipality
- Addendum B – Response Map for Question 1: Support for the Development of Standards by Municipality
- Addendum C – Response Map for Question 2: Interest in Using Electronic Poll Books by Municipality

Survey Response Map by Municipality



Response Map for Question 1: Support for the Development of Standards by Municipality



Response Map for Question 2: Interest in Using Electronic Poll Books by Municipality

