

Wisconsin Elections Commission

State of Wisconsin

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Turnout History for Wisconsin Partisan Primaries

MADISON, WI – Turnout for Wisconsin’s Partisan Primary over the last decade has averaged 15.23 percent of the voting-age population, ranging from a high of 19.6 percent in 2010 to a low of 8.96 percent in 2008.

The Wisconsin Elections Commission does not make turnout predictions, but provides historical data, which is a good predictor.

Points to consider:

- Turnout in the 2014 and 2016 Partisan Primaries was nearly identical – 14.46 and 14.47 percent.
- Turnout in the 2012 Partisan Primary was 19.45 percent largely attributed to a competitive Republican primary for U.S. Senate.
- Absentee voting for the 2018 Partisan Primary has been strong.

Despite the large field for the Democratic gubernatorial nomination, there are actually fewer candidates on the ballot for state and federal offices this year than in 2016 – 307 this year compared to 344 in 2016. Some voters will also have primaries for county offices such as county sheriff, clerk of circuit court and coroner (where applicable), and there are six local referenda.

This year, there are 15 candidates on the ballot for governor – two Republicans and 10 Democrats, plus one each for the Libertarian, Wisconsin Green and Constitution parties. There are also five candidates on the ballot for the Republican Party’s contested U.S. Senate nomination. And, there are contested primaries in both the Democratic and Republican parties for Secretary of State and State Treasurer. Complete candidate lists are available on the Commission’s website: <https://elections.wi.gov/elections-voting/2018/fall>.

To find out what’s on their ballots, voters should visit the MyVote Wisconsin website: <https://myvote.wi.gov>.

In-person absentee voting in municipal clerks’ offices generally runs through Friday, August 10. The legal cut-off is Sunday, but the WEC only aware of two cities offering in-person absentee voting on Saturday – Madison and Milwaukee -- voting for the Partisan Primary.

As of 7:30 a.m. on Thursday, August 9, 106,314 absentee ballots had been issued and 77,739 absentee ballots had been returned. Here’s how that compares to past years.

Wisconsin Partisan Primary Absentee Voting and Voter Turnout				
Year	Absentee Ballots Issued	Absentee Ballots Returned	Total Ballots Cast	Turnout
2018 (as of 8/9)	106,314	77,739	???	???
2016 (total)	101,803	86,862	645,619	14.5%
2014 (total)	75,762	65,525	638,677	14.5%
2012 (total)	100,361	84,830	851,572	19.4%
2010 (total)	76,603	59,586	857,027	19.6%

Comparisons of this year’s to-date numbers with similar points in time before earlier elections is not possible, but will be in future years.

Wisconsin’s 2017 estimated voting-age population was [4,469,475 people](#). The 2018 estimate will be issued soon. Some municipal clerks calculate voter turnout based on the number of registered voters, resulting in a higher percentage. Those percentages should not be confused with turnout of the voting-age population, which is the method used by the Elections Commission. This is, in part, due to the availability of Election Day voter registration, which makes pre-election registration numbers less relevant. Calculating turnout based on voting-age population also ensures consistency across election cycles as well as states, and also produces a more meaningful result due to fluctuations in the number of registered voters which are unrelated to the population of eligible voters.

Historically, the highest voter turnout in a fall partisan primary since 1960 was 27.9 percent in September 1964. Statistics on past voter turnout and current voter registration are available at <https://elections.wi.gov/elections-voting/statistics>.

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The Wisconsin Elections Commission is responsible for administration and enforcement of election laws in Wisconsin. The Commission is made up of six Commissioners – four appointed directly by the State Senate Majority Leader, Speaker of the Assembly and the Minority Leaders in the State Senate and Assembly. The remaining two Commissioners are by the Governor with confirmation by the State Senate from lists of former municipal and county clerks submitted by the legislative leadership in each party.