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**Democratic counties outpace GOP strongholds in absentee voting for Aug. 11 primary**

*By WisPolitics.com*

Voters in five of the state’s traditional Democratic counties were more likely to vote absentee than those in five key Republican counties in the Aug. 11 primary, according to a WisPolitics.com check of numbers available so far.

Some 83 percent of Dane County voters cast absentee ballots, the highest mark of the 10 counties reviewed. Meanwhile, about 64 percent of voters in Waukesha County did the same, the highest share for the traditionally GOP counties reviewed, as of Aug. 21.

The finding comes amid ongoing signals that Democrats will rely more heavily on absentee voting this fall. President Trump has repeatedly raised questions about the security of mail-in ballots, often without any evidence; but he has in recent weeks begun to suggest absentee balloting in states like Florida, where he’s registered, is safe.

A recent Marquette University Law School Poll found 35 percent of registered voters planned to vote by mail, while 46 percent said they would vote in-person on Election Day. Another 12 percent said they will vote early in-person.

Among Republicans, 67 percent said they planned to vote in-person on Election Day, while 55 percent of Democrats planned to vote absentee by mail. Twelve percent of Democrats and Republicans said they planned to vote early in-person.

Poll Director Charles Franklin last week noted the reliance on absentee ballots in the April election, when nearly three-fourths of the 1.55 million votes cast were via absentee ballot. He said the survey may have underestimated how much voters planned to rely on absentee ballots this fall, and their use in last week’s primary offers a benchmark of what to expect for the November election.

Final numbers on absentee ballots cast in the Aug. 11 primary were still rolling in as local clerks finish reporting figures to the Elections Commission. At the time of the WisPolitics.com review of numbers, they had logged 636,965 absentee ballots returned.

WisPolitics.com compared what the commission had reported as returned against overall turnout numbers from the 10 counties.

Besides Dane County’s 83 percent, in the other Democratic counties, three-fourths of voters in Milwaukee and Rock counties cast absentee ballots, while the mark was 62 percent in La Crosse County and 57 percent in Eau Claire.

In addition to Waukesha County’s 64 percent, in the other GOP counties, Ozaukee and Sheboygan were around 63 percent, while it was 58 percent in Fond du Lac County and 57 percent in Washington County.

Looking ahead to November, the Elections Commission is planning to mail all registered voters an absentee ballot application unless they already have one on file.

And both parties say they plan to push the option this fall, though they declined to share details of those efforts.

“We’re planning a full-court press for absentee and early votes this fall, just like we always do,” said state GOP Executive Director MarkJefferson. “We’re also going to fight attempts by Democrats to curb Election Day voting.”

Democratic spokesman Phil Shulman said the party’s effort will build on what it did in the lead-up to the April 7 election. Part of that will include making sure voters know how to properly fill out their absentee ballots, which require a witness in most cases. The ballots also require things like the voter’s signature.

For the April election, 2,659 ballots were rejected because they were returned after the deadline. Another 20,537 were rejected for other reasons.

In 2016, Donald Trump won Wisconsin by 22,748 votes.

“It’s a continuation of the great success we had in April and pushing folks to do that early so their voices can be heard,” Shulman said.

*The Capitol Report is written by editorial staff at WisPolitics.com, a nonpartisan, Madison-based news service that specializes in coverage of government and politics, and is distributed for publication by members of the Wisconsin Newspaper Association.*

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