

# Wisconsin State Report Update

October 31, 2024

**Author:** Annabelle Liefke

---

## Contents

Introduction.....	2
Voter Registration.....	2
State Primary Turnout.....	3
Spotlight Issues .....	5
<i>Noteworthy Races</i> .....	6
<i>Regions of Interest</i> .....	8
Brown County.....	8
WOW Counties.....	9
Dane & Milwaukee Counties .....	10
<i>Administration of the 2024 State Primary</i> .....	11
Conclusion .....	11

## Introduction

On August 13, Wisconsin held its state primary, deciding the nominees for various federal, state, and local positions. In addition, there were two ballot questions presented to voters. Overall, administration went smoothly across the state. Turnout was remarkably high for a presidential election year primary at 26% of the voting-age population casting ballots. Despite this engagement, voter registration continues to lag slightly behind that of the 2020 election cycle, though the gap is shrinking.

## Voter Registration

In Wisconsin, voters do not register with a party and thus are not restricted in their primary participation according to their registration. As a result, there is one key figure for us to examine: the total number of registered voters. As of October 1, the Wisconsin Elections Commission (WEC) reported the state had 3,583,804 registered voters.<sup>1</sup> For reference, the WEC cites the 2022 estimated voting age population as 4,676,183 people,<sup>2</sup> yielding an approximate 76% registration rate as of five weeks before the election.

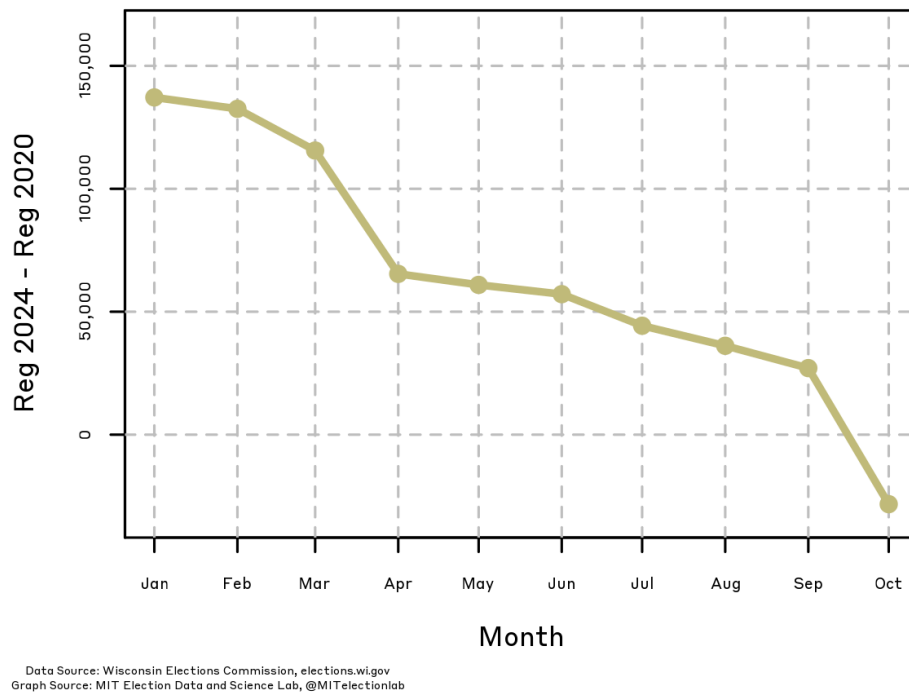
How does voter registration in 2024 compare to voter registration at a similar time in 2020? Figure 1 captures this difference on a month-by-month basis. There was a much larger gap early in the year, with a difference of nearly 150,000 registered voters in January. However, much of this difference diminished between March 1 and April 1, leading up to the presidential preference primary in early April. By October 2024, the number of registered voters was less than the number of registered voters in October 2020.

<sup>1</sup> <https://elections.wi.gov/resources/statistics/october-1-2024-voter-registration-statistics>

<sup>2</sup> <https://elections.wi.gov/statistics-data/voter-turnout>

## Stanford-MIT Elections Performance Central

Figure 1: The change in the number of registered voters of each party in Wisconsin between each month in 2020 and the corresponding month in 2024.



The early October numbers nearly reflect the size of the electorate on election day, since for those planning to register online or by mail, the deadline to do so was on October 16th. However, voters can also register in person at their municipal clerk's office until November 1st and in person at their polling place on Election Day.<sup>3</sup>

## State Primary Turnout

Election results for the 2024 state primary contest can be obtained from the Wisconsin Elections Commission.<sup>4</sup> Turnout totals can be obtained from the same source.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>3</sup> <https://myvote.wi.gov/en-us/Voter-Deadlines>

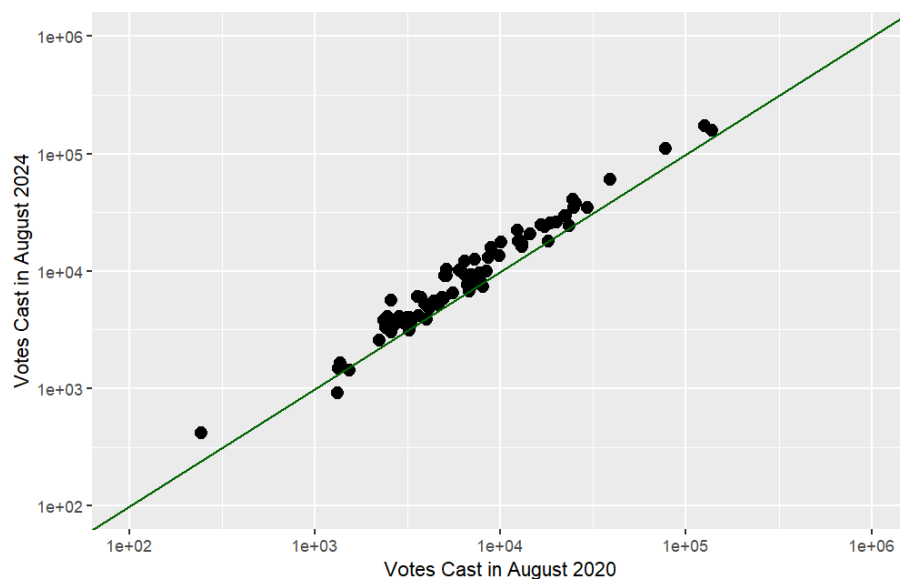
<sup>4</sup> <https://elections.wi.gov/elections/election-results#accordion-11291>

<sup>5</sup> <https://elections.wi.gov/resources/statistics/2024-partisan-primary-voting-and-registration-statistics-report-0>

Despite registration numbers at the same levels as 2020, turnout in the August 13th state primary was quite high. Nearly 1.3 million votes were cast,<sup>6</sup> making up approximately 26% of the state's Voting Age Population (VAP). As of August 1st, there were 3,456,732 registered voters<sup>7</sup> in the state, meaning almost 35% of registered voters cast votes in the primary. These are the highest turnout figures for a state primary in a presidential election year since 1964.<sup>8</sup> This is, however, slightly lower than the 27% VAP primary turnout in 2022 that included the Republican primary for governor and Democratic primary for Senate to contest the seat held by incumbent Senator Ron Johnson.

Trends in turnout can be analyzed at a slightly more granular level by looking into votes cast by county. Specifically, we want to see how the number of votes cast varies from other primaries. Figure 2 compares the number of votes cast in the 2024 state primary to those cast in the 2020 state primary, with each point representing a single county. Most counties saw a slight increase in turnout, falling a small margin above the line. Only seven counties had fewer votes cast this August, and, in many such states, this decline was by only tens of votes.

*Figure 2: The number of votes cast in the 2024 state primaries within each county, compared to the number of votes cast in the 2024 state primary in the same county.*



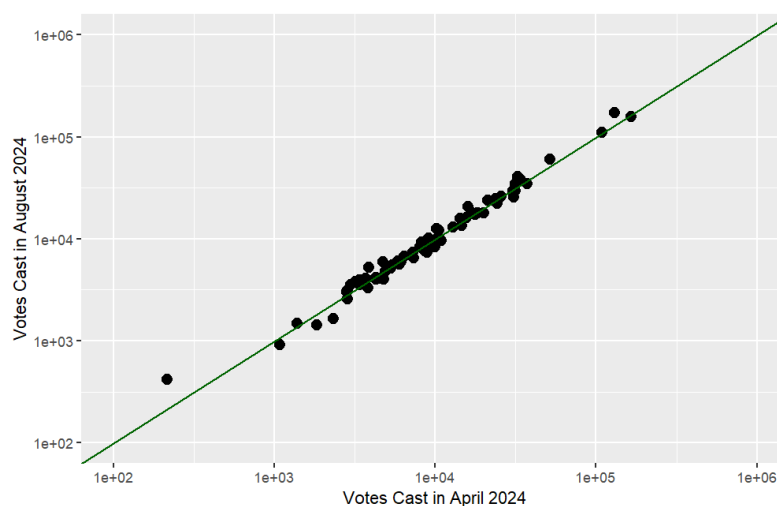
<sup>6</sup> <https://www.cnn.com/election/2024/primaries-and-caucuses/results/wisconsin>

<sup>7</sup> <https://elections.wi.gov/resources/statistics/august-12024-voter-registration-statistics>

<sup>8</sup> <https://apnews.com/article/wisconsin-election-turnout-senate-24ac974d995a286fb79eb9a277e8435e>

Figure 3 compares the two primaries from this year: the spring presidential preference primary in April and the state primary in August. In Figure 3, we see more clustering around the equivalence line, meaning most counties saw a similar number of votes cast in April as in August. In specific, thirty counties saw a decrease in votes. With respect to each county's population, the decreases were marginal. Similarly, of the 42 counties that received more votes in August than April, only one saw a stark increase with respect to its population. Menominee County saw a near double in votes cast between April and August. However, it has a small population: the change was only from 215 to 422 votes cast.

*Figure 3: The number of votes cast in the 2024 state primaries within each county, compared to the number of votes cast in the 2024 presidential primary in the same county.*



## Spotlight Issues

In the initial report discussing election administration and the presidential preference primary in Wisconsin, various ongoing stories were spotlighted.<sup>9</sup> Now, moving away from

<sup>9</sup> See Liefke, Annabelle (2024). "Wisconsin 2024 State Report". Available at [https://www.elexcentral.org/sites/default/files/2024-07/Wisconsin-2024-State-Report\\_EPC\\_2024.pdf](https://www.elexcentral.org/sites/default/files/2024-07/Wisconsin-2024-State-Report_EPC_2024.pdf).

the state primary toward the general election, some of these issues have updates, and others have drawn new attention.

## Noteworthy Races

In the 2024 state primary, there were a handful of races that attracted substantial public attention. Whether this was due to the level of office, the candidates themselves, or the competitiveness of the contest, there are a few key races worth being attentive to.

Perhaps one of the biggest races from a national perspective, the Republican primary for the US Senate, was won by Trump-endorsed Eric Hovde. Hovde won with 86.3% of the primary vote statewide, securing at least 70% of the vote in every county. In the general election, he faces two-term incumbent Senator Tammy Baldwin. This seat may decide the majority party within Congress's upper chamber, and, as of now, it appears to be a close race.<sup>10</sup>

In the US House of Representatives, House District 8, which contains 11 counties in northeastern Wisconsin, had three candidates in the Republican primary after the unexpected resignation of Representative Mike Gallagher, the district's four-term representative, in April.<sup>11</sup> Tony Wied, the Trump-endorsed candidate, won the race with 41.3% of the vote. Wied does not have a political background and is well known in the area as the former owner of a chain of dinosaur-themed gas stations.<sup>12</sup> His opponents were Roger Roth, former president of the Wisconsin Senate, who received 33.8% of votes, and Andre Jaque, former member of the Wisconsin Assembly and current state Senator, who received 24.8% of the vote. In House District 3 – which contains parts of 18 counties in the southwestern and western parts of the state – the Democratic primary had three candidates. Rebecca Cooke won with 50.5% of the vote.<sup>13</sup> Cooke is a retail business owner from Eau Claire who has not previously held elected office but was appointed to the Wisconsin Economic Development Corporation by Governor Evers.<sup>14</sup> Her opponents were Katrina

<sup>10</sup> <https://www.newsweek.com/wisconsin-senate-race-tammy-baldwin-eric-hovde-toss-1966032>

<sup>11</sup> <https://clerk.house.gov/members/WI08/vacancy>

<sup>12</sup> <https://www.jsonline.com/story/news/politics/elections/2024/04/05/ex-owner-of-dino-stop-stations-weighing-run-for-mike-gallagher-seat/73206019007/>

<sup>13</sup> <https://apps.npr.org/primary-election-results-2024/states/WI.html>

<sup>14</sup> <https://cookeforwisconsin.com/en/meet-rebecca-cooke/>

Shankland, a representative of Assembly District 71, who received 41.6% of the vote, and Eric Wilson, who received 7.9% of the vote.

There were a few strikingly close races for state legislative seats. In Assembly District 28, former state Assembly member Rob Kreibich beat Brady Penfield, a student at the University of Wisconsin - River Falls, for the Republican nomination by less than one percentage point: Kreibich received 50.4% of the vote; Penfield received 49.6%. In Assembly District 92, the Democratic race saw the same margin. Joe Plouff, another former Assembly representative, got 50.4% of the vote against Cody Berg, a current bartender.

There were a few other races worth noting, given the recent redistricting in the state. Statewide, seven incumbents lost their seats as a result of the redistricting: 4 Republicans and 3 Democrats.<sup>15</sup> There were seven races in which two incumbents were faced against each other with the new district lines. In such cases, at least one of the incumbents necessarily lost their seat. In a few cases, one of the candidates stepped down preemptively; others faced off and lost. Notably, State Senator Dan Knodl has represented District 8 since a special election in 2023. Senator Duey Stroebel had represented District 20, an adjacent district on the previous district maps, since 2015. With the new district maps, the two were both set to run in District 8. As a result, Senator Knodl stepped down and instead won the Republican nomination in Assembly District 24 against incumbent Representative Janel Brandtjen with 65% of the vote.<sup>16</sup> Knodl previously represented District 24 in the Assembly from 2009 to 2023<sup>17</sup>.

Naturally, the presence of districts where incumbents face each other means that there are districts with no incumbent. There are five such districts in the coming election.<sup>18</sup> State Senate districts 2, 4, 16, 18, and 28 have no incumbent Senator. The campaigns for these races are expected to be some of the most expensive in state legislative history. In a Senate of 33 members, these seats will be significant to the overall composition of the presently Republican-majority chamber.

<sup>15</sup> <https://apnews.com/article/wisconsin-legislature-primary-incumbents-redistricting-b5ac200615ad-fbf82eda7cb2f6d15a32>

<sup>16</sup> <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2024/08/13/us/elections/results-wisconsin-primary.html>

<sup>17</sup> <https://legis.wisconsin.gov/senate/08/knodl/about/>

<sup>18</sup> <https://isthmus.com/news/news/political-parties-target-five-wisconsin-senate-seats/>

Finally, there were two amendments on the ballot for Wisconsin voters. Both were drafted by Republicans in the state legislature and served the purpose of limiting the governor's ability to spend state funds. Question 1 read, "Shall section 35 (1) of article IV of the constitution be created to provide that the legislature may not delegate its sole power to determine how moneys shall be appropriated?"<sup>19</sup> and 57.5% of voters voted against it.<sup>20</sup> Question 2 read, "Shall section 35 (2) of article IV of the constitution be created to prohibit the governor from allocating any federal moneys the governor accepts on behalf of the state without the approval of the legislature by joint resolution or as provided by legislative rule?"<sup>21</sup> and, similarly, 57.5% of voters opposed it.<sup>22</sup>

## Regions of Interest

In the initial report about Wisconsin, a handful of counties were identified as particularly noteworthy going into the upcoming election. This notability stemmed from either political diversity, as in the case of Brown County, or political homogeneity in Dane, Milwaukee, and the WOW counties (Waukesha, Ozaukee, and Washington). Given their potential significance, it is useful to highlight the relevant updates of each region.

### Brown County

In Brown County, 60,590 ballots were cast in the August 13 primary.<sup>23</sup> This is a notable increase compared to 51,859 ballots cast in the April 2 presidential preference primary.

In terms of the contents of the ballot, all countywide Democratic races on the ballot were uncontested. Still, a total of 25,083 ballots were cast in Democratic contests, accounting for 41.3% of total votes cast in the primary. Of countywide Republican contests, Eric Hovde got 82.9% of the vote, and Tony Wied won the county with 45.0% of the voters.

<sup>19</sup> <https://docs.legis.wisconsin.gov/2023/related/proposals/ajr6>

<sup>20</sup> <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2024/08/13/us/elections/results-wisconsin-question-1-prohibit-legislature-from-delegating-appropriations.html>

<sup>21</sup> <https://docs.legis.wisconsin.gov/2023/related/proposals/ajr6>

<sup>22</sup> <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2024/08/13/us/elections/results-wisconsin-question-2-require-legislative-approval-for-federal-funds.html>

<sup>23</sup> <https://www.browncountywi.gov/i/f/files/County-Clerk/Elections/Election%20Results/2024/August/summary7.pdf>



Further down the ballot, 51.1% of voters opposed the first referendum, and 40.9% opposed the second<sup>24</sup>.

Moving into the general election, part of Brown County is contained by State Senate District 2, one of the elections with no incumbent.

### WOW Counties

The WOW counties – Waukesha, Ozaukee, and Washington – contain much of the northern and western suburbs of Milwaukee, the state’s largest city. All are known for their consistent Republican leaning and are some of the most affluent in the state.

In Waukesha County, the largest WOW county, 105,078 ballots<sup>25</sup> were cast, which is very similar to the 105,396 votes cast in the April presidential preference primary.<sup>26</sup> Waukesha includes a “party preference” question for voters to communicate which set of contests they will be voting on. Thirty-eight point five percent of voters selected Democrat, and 61.3% selected Republican. In April, 32.2% of voters cast votes in the Democratic contests, and 67.8% voted in the Republican contests. In the Republican Senate race, Eric Hovde received 90.4% of the vote. Parts of Waukesha County are in Senate district 28, one of the races without an incumbent.

In Ozaukee County, 27,411 ballots were cast<sup>27</sup> which is a slight increase from 26,393 voters in the spring primary.<sup>28</sup> In their party preference, 46.34% of voters selected Democrat, and 53.41% chose Republican. This is a notable shift from April, when only 40.49% of voters selected Democrat and 59.51% selected Republican. For the Republican Senate nomination, Hovde got 90.4% of the vote. Each of the ballot questions got 50.1% of voters’ support.

<sup>24</sup> <https://www.browncountywi.gov/i/f/files/County-Clerk/Elections/Election%20Results/2024/August/summary7.pdf>

<sup>25</sup> This number was obtained from unofficial reporting on the county website but was since taken down, and the official certified result may be slightly larger.

<sup>26</sup> <https://www.waukeshacounty.gov/globalassets/county-clerk/election-information/election-results/2023/web-summary-state-boc-fed-state-co.pdf>

<sup>27</sup> <https://www.ozaukeecounty.gov/DocumentCenter/View/25411/August-2024-Summary>

<sup>28</sup> <https://www.ozaukeecounty.gov/ArchiveCenter/ViewFile/Item/640>

Finally, in Washington County, 38,067 ballots were cast, a slight increase from the 34,269 in the spring. Regarding party preference, 27.4% of voters selected Democrat, and 72.4% chose Republican. This is similar to April: 27.9% of voters chose Democrat, and 72.1% selected Republican. Eric Hovde won the Republican Senate contest with 89.2% of the vote in the county. On the first referendum, 64.9% of voters selected ‘yes.’ On the second, 65.5% of votes were in favor.

### Dane & Milwaukee Counties

Dane and Milwaukee counties contain Madison, the state’s capital, and Milwaukee, the state’s largest city, respectively. Each has been a Democratic stronghold for decades.

In Dane County, 171,680 ballots were cast,<sup>29</sup> strikingly more than the 130,960 votes cast in the April primary.<sup>30</sup> A total of 133,212 Democratic ballots were cast, accounting for 77.6% of the county’s votes. In the Republican race for Senate, Eric Hovde won with 82.0% of the vote. On the ballot questions, a vast majority of voters were opposed: on Questions 1 and 2, 82.0% and 82.8% chose ‘no,’ respectively. In November, much of Dane County that falls in State Senate District 16 will have a race with no incumbent.

In Milwaukee County, 158,487 ballots were cast,<sup>31</sup> falling slightly short of the 165,073 ballots cast in April.<sup>32</sup> Seventy-five percent of voters selected Democrat on the party preference question, and 24.7% chose Republican. In the Republican Senate race, Eric Hovde got 89.2% of the vote. On the ballot questions, 71.2% of voters chose ‘no’ to the first, and 72.1% opposed the second. The southern part of the county falls in Senate District 28 where the race in November will have no incumbent on the ballot.

<sup>29</sup> <https://elections.countyofdane.com/Election-Result/168#race0008>

<sup>30</sup> <https://elections.countyofdane.com/Election-Result/164#race0005>

<sup>31</sup> <https://county.milwaukee.gov/EN/County-Clerk/Off-Nav/Election-Results/8-13-24-Partisan-Primary---Unofficial-Results>

<sup>32</sup> <https://county.milwaukee.gov/files/county/county-clerk/Election-Commission/ElectionResultsCopy-1/2024/4-2-24-Spring-Election--Presidential-Preference--Summary.pdf>

## Administration of the 2024 State Primary

Overall, the administration of the 2024 state primaries went smoothly in Wisconsin. However, due to the very decentralized nature of election administration in the state, there was one case of an administrative error.

Summit is a small town in northwestern Wisconsin. After the redistricting earlier this year, residents of Summit became members of the 74th Assembly district, having previously been represented in the 73rd district. However, this transition was not correctly captured by the ballots given to residents. Approximately 700 voters in Summit were given ballots that included the 73rd district's races — featuring a contested Democratic race — rather than the 74th district, which had a contested Republican race. While the remainder of the ballots' content was correct, the error was on all Election Day and absentee ballots in Summit.<sup>33</sup> The Wisconsin Election Commission communicated that it was to be handled by Douglas County.

While there was not enough time to re-administer the election for these residents, the impact of the misprinted ballots could not have been decisive in the affected contest: Republican candidate Scott Harbridge lost by 968 votes,<sup>34</sup> which is greater than the 188 ballots cast by residents of Summit, and larger even than the 682 registered voters in the town.<sup>35</sup>

## Conclusion

Wisconsin's August 13 featured federal, state, and local contests, as well as two statewide ballot measures. There were no major controversies in the election administration besides one local ballot printing error. Despite lower voter registration numbers at the beginning of October 2024 than in October 2020, the state primary contest set a record for state primary turnout in a modern presidential election year, perhaps signaling increased engagement by at least part of the Wisconsin electorate.

<sup>33</sup> <https://www.douglascountywi.gov/DocumentCenter/View/14874/Press-Release---Town-of-Summit?bidId=>

<sup>34</sup> <https://www.jsonline.com/elections/results/2024-08-13/race/50392>

<sup>35</sup> <https://www.douglascountywi.gov/ArchiveCenter/ViewFile/Item/3781>