

Wisconsin 2026 Report

October 1, 2026

Author(s): Honor Durham, Aamuktha Kottapalli, Erin Parker, and Zayne Sember

Contents

Contents	1
Introduction.....	2
General Election Calendar.....	3
Data Availability	4
Election Administration Landscape	4
WEC Administrator Appointment Controversy.....	4
Decentralized Municipal Administration.....	6
Wisconsin Supreme Court	8
Redistricting.....	9
Federal Involvement in 2026.....	10
State Investigations.....	12
Voting Hour Extensions.....	13
Recent Policy and Law Changes.....	14
Enacted Legislation.....	14
Withdrawal of Candidacy	14
Circulator Residency	14
Electoral Count Reform Act.....	15
Absentee Voting	15
Drop Boxes.....	15

Spoiling a Returned Ballot (Bins v. WEC)	16
Curing a Defective Ballot (League of Women Voters v. WEC, May 2026).....	17
Delayed Mail and Provisional Ballots (League of Women Voters v. WEC, July 2026).....	17
Prediction Markets and Voter Qualification	18
2026 Primary Election Analysis	19
Notable Results	19
Gubernatorial Race	19
Lieutenant Governor	24
3rd Congressional District	27
7th Congressional District	28
Election Night Problems and Responses	30
Election Reporting Timelines	32

Introduction

As one of the most competitive battleground states in the country, Wisconsin receives significant attention for both its election results and its election administration system. The latter is among the most decentralized in the country, and just under 2,000 county and municipal clerks administer the state's elections. Wisconsin election officials and poll workers have faced increased public scrutiny following challenges to the 2020 presidential election results. Wisconsin Elections Commission Administrator Meagan Wolfe faced threats to her safety and challenges to her leadership, while election officials and Milwaukee poll workers were interviewed by FBI agents as part of a federal investigation.

Structural changes to Wisconsin's legislative maps and shifts in the partisan composition of Wisconsin's Supreme Court reflect the evolving and contentious nature of the state's political landscape as Democrats and Republicans seek greater influence. Despite this, the state legislature passed three election-related, bipartisan bills covering candidate withdrawal, circulator residency, and compliance with the federal Electoral Count Reform Act of 2022. Litigation has also focused on absentee ballots, including

drop boxes, spoiling returned ballots if a candidate withdraws from the race, ballot curing, and mail delivery issues.

This report provides an overview of Wisconsin's election administration landscape, recent changes, and its 2026 primaries—including its most notable 2026 primary contest, the Democratic gubernatorial race. State Assemblywoman Francesca Hong was favored to win that race as Election Day approached but lost by fewer than 4,000 votes to Milwaukee County Executive David Crowley. The field itself was not settled until less than two weeks before Election Day—Crowley suspended his campaign in early July before reentering the race, and two other candidates withdrew but remained on the ballot. Beyond the gubernatorial race, this report also covers the Republican primary for lieutenant governor, the general election rematch in the 3rd Congressional District, and the competitive Republican and Democratic primaries for the 7th Congressional District. It also breaks down the administrative problems that occurred on primary Election Night in Milwaukee and Green County.

General Election Calendar

The dates and deadlines for the 2026 general election calendar are provided by the [Wisconsin Elections Commission](#). Wisconsin has Election Day registration, which means that voters can both register and vote at their precinct polling place on Election Day. There is [no same-day registration at the polls during early voting](#), though voters may still register in person at their municipal clerk's office during the early voting period. Voters can register online or by mail through October 14, and in person through October 30.

- + **Sept. 17:** Deadline for clerks to distribute absentee ballots to voters with valid requests on file
- + **Oct. 14 (11:59 pm):** Last day to register to vote by mail or online
- + **Oct. 20:** First day early/in-person absentee voting is allowed

- + **Oct. 29 (5 pm):** Absentee ballot request deadline for regular and overseas voters
- + **Oct. 30 (5 pm):** Last day to register to vote in person before Election Day
- + **Nov. 1:** Last legally permissible day of early/in-person absentee voting
- + **Nov. 3 (7 am until 8 pm):** Election Day, polls open
- + **Nov. 3 (8 pm):** Deadline for all absentee ballots to be delivered to the polling place or central count location

Data Availability

The [Wisconsin Elections Commission](#) (WEC) publishes [certified election results](#), [voter registration counts](#), [daily absentee ballot reports](#), [statewide turnout series](#), and [per-election voting and registration statistics](#). Wisconsin has no statewide election night reporting system. The WEC posts results only after each county canvass is certified, generally a few weeks after the election, and each of the state's 72 county clerks posts unofficial election night returns separately. Some individual counties and municipalities publish results below the state canvass, cast vote records, and breakdowns of votes by voting mode. The [Legislative Technology Services Bureau](#) publishes ward-level results joined to ward boundaries, and individual voter registration and absentee records are sold through [Badger Voters](#).¹ Our [Wisconsin Data Guide](#) provides more information on Wisconsin's election data.

Election Administration Landscape

WEC Administrator Appointment Controversy

The Wisconsin Elections Commission (WEC) was [established](#) by the Wisconsin Legislature in 2016 to oversee election administration in the state, replacing the [Wisconsin Government Accountability Board](#). The WEC [supports](#) local officials by

¹ Wisconsin's wards are the functional equivalent of precincts in other states.

providing education, training, and other resources while also carrying out statewide election responsibilities such as ensuring compliance with state and federal election laws and maintaining the statewide voter registration database.

The WEC is [governed](#) by six commissioners who serve five-year terms, with three commissioners from each of the state's two major political parties. Four commissioners are [appointed](#) directly by legislative leaders; the Senate majority leader, Senate minority leader, Assembly speaker, and Assembly minority leader each make one appointment. The remaining two commissioners are former county or municipal clerks [nominated](#) by the governor from lists submitted by the leadership of the state's two major political parties, and are subject to Senate confirmation. The commission is [overseen](#) by a nonpartisan administrator who serves as Wisconsin's chief election official and leads the WEC's staff. The administrator is [appointed](#) by a majority of the WEC's members, subject to state Senate confirmation, to a four-year term that expires on July 1 of an odd-numbered year.

The appointment process became the subject of a prolonged [dispute](#) after Administrator Meagan Wolfe's four-year term expired on July 1, 2023. As the leader of the WEC during 2020, Wolfe faced [threats and harassment](#) from those who believed that the 2020 presidential election was stolen, and [conspiracy theories](#) about her role in "rigging" the election led to efforts to oust her from the role. On June 27, 2023, all three Republican commissioners voted to [appoint](#) Wolfe to another four-year term, while the commission's three Democratic members abstained, fearing that the Republican-controlled state Senate would vote to fire her. Because Wolfe [received](#) only three votes, she did not receive the majority required to be appointed to another term. The Democratic commissioners [cited](#) a 2022 Wisconsin Supreme Court decision holding that an appointee could remain in office after their term expired, meaning Wolfe could continue serving without being formally reappointed.

Despite the lack of a new appointment, the Republican-controlled state Senate voted on the matter on September 14, 2023, a vote Senate leaders [treated](#) as rejecting Wolfe's appointment. The WEC and Wolfe then [sued](#) Republican legislative leaders, arguing that Wolfe could lawfully remain as administrator after her term expired and that the Senate had not rejected any appointment. The legislators [agreed](#) during the litigation that Wolfe was lawfully serving as a holdover and that the Senate could not reject an appointment that was not pending, but argued that the WEC was required to appoint a new administrator once Wolfe's term ended.

The dispute ultimately reached the Wisconsin Supreme Court, which [unanimously ruled](#) in February 2025 that the WEC was not required to replace Wolfe merely because her term had expired. The court [held](#) that state law requires the WEC to appoint a new administrator when a vacancy occurs, but that the expiration of an administrator's term does not itself create such a vacancy. Because Wolfe was lawfully [serving](#) as a holdover and the administrator position was therefore not vacant, the WEC was not required to appoint a replacement. The court also [concluded](#) that the Senate's September 2023 vote had no legal effect because the WEC had not made an appointment for the Senate to consider. The ruling [allowed](#) Wolfe to continue serving as Wisconsin's chief election official despite the expiration of her four-year term.

Decentralized Municipal Administration

Wisconsin has one of the most decentralized election administration systems in the country, with nearly [2,000](#) county and municipal clerks responsible for administering elections across the state. Approximately 1,850 of these officials are municipal clerks (nonpartisan), while 72 are county clerks (partisan). [Municipal clerks](#) supervise election administration and voter registration within their municipalities, including overseeing and training local election officials. County clerks [serve](#) four-year terms and are responsible for accumulating results from municipalities, canvassing election returns,

coordinating ballot preparation and election programming, and performing other county-level election responsibilities.

Wisconsin's decentralized system also gives municipalities some discretion over how they process absentee ballots, within the restrictions established by state election laws. Most municipalities process absentee ballots at individual precincts, while [Milwaukee and 41 other municipalities](#) use central count facilities where absentee ballots are processed and tabulated in a single location. Under current state law, election workers [cannot](#) begin processing absentee ballots until 7 am on Election Day, regardless of which system a municipality uses. This restriction has had a [particularly visible effect](#) in Milwaukee, where tens of thousands of absentee ballots [are](#) processed at a location known as Central Count on Election Day, and results can be reported late at night or early the following morning.

Milwaukee's central count operation has experienced several administrative issues in recent elections. In November 2024, the city [restarted](#) its absentee ballot tabulation after an election observer discovered that panel doors on the city's tabulators had not been properly secured. More than 30,000 ballots had already been tabulated when officials [decided](#) to restart the count as a precaution, although city officials and election observers reported no evidence that the machines had been tampered with. During the August 2026 primary, Milwaukee officials [left](#) the central count facility without properly exporting results from five of the city's nine tabulators, an oversight that required officials' return to the facility and delayed the reporting of results by approximately [one hour](#). This issue is described in more detail [later in this report](#).

Consequently, the timing of absentee-ballot processing has been the subject of repeated legislative debate in Wisconsin. Election clerks [have advocated](#) for allowing absentee ballots to be processed before Election Day, arguing that the change would reduce the burden on local election officials and allow results to be reported more quickly. A

[bipartisan proposal](#) allowing clerks to begin processing absentee ballots on the Monday before Election Day passed the Assembly in 2023 but stalled in the state Senate.

Republican lawmakers [revived](#) the proposal in 2025 as part of a broader package that also included regulations for absentee-ballot drop boxes and restrictions on clerks correcting errors on absentee-ballot envelopes. The proposal ultimately [stalled](#) and did not become law, leaving Wisconsin's existing absentee-ballot processing rules in effect for the 2026 elections.

Increased Spending in Wisconsin Supreme Court Elections

Wisconsin Supreme Court elections are officially nonpartisan, but recent races have featured [substantial involvement](#) from the state's Democratic and Republican parties and other political groups, leading to notable fundraising increases and concerns about election bribery. The ideological balance of the seven-member court [shifted in 2023](#), when Janet Protasiewicz defeated former Justice Daniel Kelly. Her victory ended a 15-year conservative majority and established a [4-3](#) liberal majority. More than [\\$51 million](#) was spent on the 2023 contest, making it the most expensive state Supreme Court election in U.S. history at the time. This record was subsequently broken in 2025 when the court's ideological balance was [again](#) at stake in the spring election between Susan Crawford and Brad Schimel. Crawford won the April 2025 election with [55%](#) of the vote, preserving the court's 4-3 liberal majority. The contest generated more than [\\$100 million](#) in spending, nearly doubling the previous national record for a state judicial race. Although the election was formally nonpartisan, the Wisconsin Democratic Party contributed more than [\\$10.4 million](#) to Crawford, while the Wisconsin Republican Party contributed more than [\\$9.5 million](#) to Schimel. Turnout reached [51%](#) of eligible voters, an unusually high level for a spring election in which the Supreme Court race was the highest office on the ballot. The court's liberal majority [expanded](#) to 5-2 after the 2026 election after conservative Justice Rebecca Bradley declined to seek reelection and Chris Taylor defeated Maria Lazar in the subsequent election. Spending [declined](#) substantially

in this contest, likely because partisan control of the court would have remained the same no matter who won.

Elon Musk became heavily involved in the 2025 race, with Musk and groups connected to him spending more than [\\$20 million](#) in support of Schimel. During the campaign, America PAC offered registered Wisconsin voters [\\$100](#) to sign a petition opposing “activist judges.” At the same time, Musk separately announced plans to give [two \\$1 million payments](#) to Wisconsin voters, prompting Attorney General Josh Kaul to sue Musk and America PAC under the state’s election-bribery law. Musk ultimately distributed [two \\$1 million checks](#) at a Green Bay event, and the Wisconsin Democracy Campaign and two voters later filed a separate civil lawsuit [alleging](#) that the broader payment program constituted election bribery, an unlawful lottery, civil conspiracy, and public nuisance. In July 2026, the WEC separately [voted](#) 5–1 that there was probable cause to believe Musk had violated Wisconsin’s election-bribery law and referred two complaints for potential prosecution. On August 25, La Crosse County District Attorney Tim Gruenke [declined](#) to charge Musk, concluding that the original post was ambiguous, was quickly corrected, and ultimately resulted in no one receiving anything of value for voting or promising to vote.

Redistricting

State legislative districts in Wisconsin changed substantially ahead of the 2024 elections. In December 2023, the Wisconsin Supreme Court ruled in [Clarke v. WEC](#) that the state’s existing maps were unconstitutional because they contained districts composed of noncontiguous territory, ordering that new maps be adopted before the 2024 election. In February 2024, the Republican-controlled Legislature [passed](#) maps proposed by Democratic Governor Tony Evers, which were subsequently signed into law. The new Assembly and state Senate districts [reduced](#) the substantial Republican advantage.

Separate litigation is ongoing over Wisconsin's congressional districts, which were not replaced alongside the state legislative maps in 2024. Wisconsin's current congressional map was adopted by the state Supreme Court in [2022](#), and Republicans currently [represent](#) six of the state's eight congressional districts. In 2025, Democratic-aligned groups [brought](#) separate challenges to the congressional map, but three-judge circuit court panels dismissed the suits, in part reasoning that lower courts lacked authority to overturn congressional maps adopted by the Wisconsin Supreme Court. However, in June 2026, the state Supreme Court [agreed](#) to hear appeals from the congressional map challenges, reopening the possibility that the districts could eventually be redrawn. The court [heard](#) nearly eight hours of arguments on September 16 over whether the two challenges should proceed. The litigation [will not](#) change the districts for the November 2026 election because the court's briefing schedule extends too late into the election cycle for new maps to be implemented. However, the cases [could](#) result in new congressional districts for the 2028 elections and make redistricting an important issue for the court beyond the current election cycle.

Beyond the ongoing litigation, Wisconsin officials have also debated changing the redistricting process itself. In March 2026, Evers [called](#) a special legislative session to consider a constitutional amendment prohibiting partisan gerrymandering in Wisconsin. The proposed amendment [states](#) that districts cannot provide a disproportionate advantage or disadvantage to a political party, although Republican lawmakers criticized the proposal for providing few details about how that standard would be implemented. Amending the state constitution [would require](#) the proposal to pass two consecutive sessions of the Legislature before it could be submitted to Wisconsin voters for approval. Republican legislative leaders [postponed](#) rather than adjourned the April special session, leaving a "[window of opportunity](#)" for future discussion.

Federal Involvement in 2026

Wisconsin has been involved in several disputes with the federal government over election administration ahead of the 2026 midterm elections. Wisconsin [joined](#) 22 other states and D.C. in challenging President Trump's [Executive Order 14399](#), which directed federal agencies to develop state citizenship lists for determining eligibility in federal elections and imposed new requirements related to mail voting. In June 2026, a federal district court [ruled](#) that the challenged provisions were unconstitutional and blocked their implementation in the 23 plaintiff states for the November 2026 election. The Trump administration appealed, but the First Circuit [declined](#) to stay the ruling. On August 24, the Supreme Court [granted](#) the administration's emergency application and stayed the district court's injunction while the appeal proceeded. The Court [concluded](#) that the administration was likely to succeed in arguing that the states' claims were not justiciable because the states had not demonstrated a sufficiently concrete and imminent injury. The Court [emphasized](#) that its decision did not resolve whether the executive order itself is lawful. A separate federal injunction [issued](#) in August 2026 was not affected, preventing the U.S. Postal Service from implementing the executive order's mail-ballot provisions.

Litigation over the EO continued after the USPS issued its [final rule](#) implementing new mail-ballot requirements for federal elections on August 21, 2026. Voting-rights groups and states, including Wisconsin, [challenged](#) the final rule, and on August 27, the district court temporarily blocked portions of it from taking effect. On September 4, the court [replaced](#) that temporary order with a preliminary injunction barring USPS from enforcing the rule's mandatory provisions through the November 3 election. The Trump administration appealed that decision and [asked the Supreme Court](#) to stay the injunction while the litigation proceeds. On September 14, 2026, the Supreme Court [denied](#) the government's application, concluding that the government was unlikely to succeed on the merits of its challenge to the preliminary injunction and that the equitable factors did not favor a stay. As a result, the injunction blocking enforcement

of the USPS rule [remains](#) in effect for the 2026 election while the underlying litigation continues.

Wisconsin is also challenging the Trump administration's effort to condition federal emergency-preparedness funding on changes to state election administration. In July 2026, Wisconsin [joined](#) a coalition of 26 states in suing the Department of Homeland Security and FEMA over conditions attached to federal grants, including the Homeland Security Grant Program, through which Wisconsin receives approximately [\\$7 million](#) annually for state and local counterterrorism efforts. The conditions [require](#) that states use paper-ballot systems, conduct manual audits of voting systems, adopt a federally prescribed process for reconciling voters and ballots, and use the DHS SAVE system to verify the citizenship of registered voters and election workers. States that do not comply could lose at least [20%](#) of their Homeland Security Grant Program funding. The conditions separately require states to provide their voter registration lists to DHS.

The federal government has separately sought access to Wisconsin's voter registration records. The U.S. Department of Justice (DOJ) sued the WEC after the commission declined to provide the state's unredacted voter registration list. In May 2026, a federal district court [dismissed](#) the lawsuit, citing previous cases in Michigan and Arizona as precedent (see our reports on [Michigan](#) and [Arizona](#) for more details). The Trump administration [appealed](#) the decision to the Seventh Circuit, where Wisconsin has continued to argue that the federal government lacks authority to obtain the unredacted voter file.

Federal scrutiny has also extended directly to Wisconsin election officials and workers through an FBI investigation into the 2020 election. By June of 2026, federal agents had interviewed or approached current and former election officials as well as 2020 poll workers in Milwaukee. Agents also [interviewed](#) Milwaukee poll workers about allegations raised following the 2020 election, including claims that had previously

appeared in litigation challenging Wisconsin's presidential results. The Wisconsin investigation is part of a broader federal effort examining the 2020 elections that has also included seizure of ballots in Fulton County, Georgia, and subpoenas for election records in Maricopa County, Arizona (see our reports on [Georgia](#) and [Arizona](#) for more details). The investigation has also [raised questions](#) about more than 250,000 absentee ballots from Milwaukee's 2020 election that remain under a litigation hold despite Wisconsin [law](#) generally allowing election records to be destroyed after 22 months. WEC Chair Don Millis, a Republican, has [called](#) for the ballots to be destroyed to protect ballot secrecy, while Republican Commissioner Bob Spindell has argued that they should be made available to federal investigators.

State Investigations

Green Bay's city election officials were investigated after [separate errors](#) resulted in duplicate absentee ballots being mailed for two consecutive elections. During the April 2026 election, [152](#) voters received duplicate ballots after mailing labels were accidentally printed twice. Officials [contacted](#) affected voters and said ballot audits would ensure that only one ballot per voter was counted.

A second incident occurred ahead of the August primary, when Green Bay estimated that [244](#) duplicate ballots were mistakenly sent to voters. The recurrence [prompted](#) the WEC to open an investigation into the clerk's office and require Green Bay to explain both incidents. City Clerk Celestine Jeffreys was placed on administrative leave in July and [resigned](#) on August 7 after the initial stage of the investigation examined her role in the duplicate-ballot incidents.

The duplicate-ballot incidents also [prompted](#) Green Bay officials to consider a broader review of the city's election procedures. Two city council members [proposed](#) an independent operational audit focused on absentee-ballot processing, internal controls, election-management software, staff procedures, and corrective actions taken after

earlier errors. The proposed [review](#) aimed to identify procedural deficiencies and recommend changes to prevent similar mistakes in future elections.

On September 10, the WEC concluded its investigation and [unanimously found](#) probable cause that Clerk Jeffreys violated state law by issuing duplicate ballots for the April election. It also found that she abused her discretion by failing to institute adequate safeguards before the August primary. Finally, it is important to note that no voter cast two ballots in either election.

Voting Hour Extensions

The authority of Wisconsin courts to extend polling hours is also under dispute following litigation stemming from the 2024 presidential election. On Election Day in 2024, a Walworth County judge [extended](#) voting at two Whitewater polling locations until 10:30 pm after reports of long lines and delays, including at the University of Wisconsin-Whitewater campus. The Wisconsin Court of Appeals [reversed](#) that decision in July 2026, ruling that state circuit courts lack statutory, inherent, or equitable authority to extend voting beyond Wisconsin's 8 pm closing time for voters who were not already in line. The ruling is now being challenged before the Wisconsin Supreme Court. Black Leaders Organizing for Communities and Law Forward [filed](#) an amicus brief urging the court to hear the case, arguing that Wisconsin courts must retain authority to extend voting hours when extraordinary circumstances threaten voters' constitutional right to vote.

Recent Policy and Law Changes

Wisconsin's election statute changed little in 2026. Three bipartisan bills concerning candidacy and the certification of results passed and will take effect for the first time. However, guidance from Wisconsin courts and the Wisconsin Elections Commission (WEC) drove consequential policy changes concerning absentee voting and voter qualification.

Enacted Legislation

In 2025 and 2026, Wisconsin passed three notable bills on withdrawal of candidacy, circulator residency, and compliance with the [Electoral Count Reform Act](#).

Withdrawal of Candidacy

[Wisconsin Act 43](#), enacted in October 2025, was a response to Robert F. Kennedy Jr's [attempt to withdraw from the ballot](#) during the 2024 presidential election. It allows candidates to withdraw from the ballot if they file to withdraw no later than the seventh business day before June 10 (preceding the partisan primary) or the seventh business day before the fourth Tuesday in August (preceding the general election), submit a notarized statement, and pay a fee to the WEC. Governor Evers [signed the bill into law on October 31, 2025](#).

Circulator Residency

Under [Wisconsin Act 126](#), enacted in March 2026, a person must be an eligible Wisconsin voter to circulate nomination papers or recall petitions, except for those working on behalf of presidential candidates. Circulating nomination papers is how a candidate gets onto the ballot. A candidate must gather a threshold number of signatures from voters in the district they seek to represent, and the circulator is [the person who carries the petition, witnesses each signature, and signs a certification](#) attesting that they personally obtained them. Previously, a circulator could be [any U.S. citizen aged 18 or older](#) who would not be disqualified from voting in Wisconsin. Because Act 126 took effect shortly before the 2026 signature-gathering cycle, several local municipal or county websites distributed older, pre-Act 126 forms. Opponents therefore challenged several candidates' nomination papers on these grounds, but [the WEC declined to sustain those challenges](#), holding that the template wording was not consequential because circulators filed the necessary documentation and qualified as electors regardless.

Electoral Count Reform Act

[Wisconsin Act 214](#), passed in April 2026, aligns Wisconsin's presidential canvass and certification timeline with the federal [Electoral Count Reform Act](#) (ECRA) of 2022, which was created to [reduce ambiguities](#) in the electoral process. Governor Evers signed the bill on April 8, 2026, which passed [with bipartisan support](#). During the 2024 presidential election, Wisconsin's Republican electors were [unsure of the date they should cast their votes](#), as state and federal law set different dates for the Electoral College meeting, which [led to a lawsuit](#) by the Republican Party of Wisconsin. The new law ensures that the state's dates align with the federal timeline. The act also sets a new deadline for the Wisconsin Election Commission's preparation and the governor's issuance of the certificate of ascertainment, which is the document that lists the state's presidential electors (whose appointment the governor certifies) and is used by Congress when counting electoral votes. Under Act 214, the certificate must be issued no later than the sixth day before the presidential electors convene. For presidential recounts, the deadline to appeal the recount to circuit court drops from five business days to one, and any appeal of the circuit court's decision goes directly to the Wisconsin Supreme Court within one day, bypassing the Court of Appeals. Act 214 will first apply to the 2028 general election, and with its passage, Wisconsin joins [more than 20 states](#) that have aligned state law with ECRA.

Absentee Voting

Drop Boxes

Wisconsin laws on drop box use have been reversed twice in three years. In [Teigen v. WEC, 2022 WI 64](#), the Wisconsin Supreme Court held that absentee ballots could not be returned to unstaffed drop boxes. Two years later, [Priorities USA v. WEC, 2024 WI 32](#), overruled *Teigen* as unsound, holding that delivery "to the municipal clerk" encompasses a drop box that the clerk maintains. Attempting to override that result, legislators introduced [Assembly Bill 560](#) in October 2025. The bill would have barred any municipality from using a drop box to return absentee ballots, but it [failed to pass](#) in

March 2026. Going into November 2026, the use of drop boxes remains lawful and is under each clerk's discretion.

Spoiling a Returned Ballot (*Bins v. WEC*)

On July 23, 2026, three Dane County Democratic voters—Joseph Bins, Thomas Elert, and Susan Roberts—[sued the WEC](#). All three cast absentee ballots for Lieutenant Governor Sara Rodriguez, who [withdrew](#) from the Democratic primary for the gubernatorial race. The voters hoped to change their vote and [“cast new \[ballots\]” to “vote in a meaningful way in the gubernatorial primary.”](#) Their ballots had not yet been counted, but under the [WEC's July 9 guidance](#), they could not be retrieved or replaced because a voter changing their mind was not a valid reason to spoil a returned ballot. Two Democratic commissioners sided with the plaintiffs, or the voters, arguing that the guidance [imposed an unconstitutional burden](#) on the right to vote since a voter who spoils a ballot at a polling place may be issued a replacement.

Dane County Circuit Judge David Conway [denied the plaintiffs' request for a temporary injunction](#) in an order signed July 29, 2026, finding the plaintiffs unlikely to succeed on the merits. He held that the statute is unambiguous: a voter may not spoil or recast an absentee ballot once it has been returned to the clerk, and that this was true before the July 9 guidance as well as after, even where individual clerks had permitted it. On the equal protection claim, Conway reasoned that in-person and absentee voters are treated alike, because neither may alter a ballot once it has been submitted to election officials. [Around 112,000 voters](#) returned absentee ballots for the August 11 primary at the time when the preliminary injunction was denied. Further discussion about how this ruling impacted the gubernatorial primary can be found in the [primary election analysis section](#) of this report.

Curing a Defective Ballot

(League of Women Voters v. WEC, May 2026)

Under Wisconsin law, clerks are not required to allow voters to cure an issue with their ballot. If an absentee certificate is missing a voter's signature or a witness's address, [clerks "may" return the incomplete ballot](#) to the voter. The WEC's guidance on what counts as a defect does not require clerks to follow these guidelines uniformly, which can lead to varying practices within and across municipalities. In late April 2026, Mequon's clerk rejected five absentee ballots [under a stricter standard](#) for the declared witness address than the WEC requires; on April 30, the Wisconsin Elections Commission [ruled](#) that these ballots had been wrongly excluded and had to be counted in the official canvass.

Beyond varying standards, clerks also raise feasibility, since curing is far harder for ballots that arrive late. Milwaukee, for example, received around 150 mail ballots [minutes before polls closed](#) in 2024, and municipalities vary in their capacity to cure defective ballots. For instance, a part-time rural clerk operates under different constraints than a municipal central count operation. Election scholar Marc Meredith notes that the 8 pm Election Day receipt deadline could not also function as the cure deadline if the aim was "[to get every...ballot cured](#)."

The [League of Women Voters of Wisconsin](#), [represented by](#) the Fair Elections Center, [sued the Elections Commission](#) in Dane County Circuit Court on May 13, 2026, arguing that the current discretionary system where ballot notification and cure procedures are left up to the clerks themselves violates the [Wisconsin Constitution's](#) Due Process Clause, because some absentee voters receive notice and a chance to correct a defective ballot while others who made the same error do not; the complaint also alleges that ballots arriving closer to Election Day have [less chance of being cured](#). The suit asks the court to order the WEC to establish uniform, mandatory procedures for ballot curing. The case remains pending in Dane County Circuit Court.

Delayed Mail and Provisional Ballots

(*League of Women Voters v. WEC*, July 2026)

In July 2026, the League of Women Voters of Wisconsin (LWVWI) filed a [suit](#) against the WEC over guidance in the *Election Law & Administration in Wisconsin Manual* that prohibits voters from casting a ballot in person on Election Day if they believe their mail ballot will not arrive in time to be counted. During the spring primary, unprecedented mail delays significantly disrupted mail ballot delivery. In a [post-election survey](#) by the WEC, more than 300 clerks from 69 of Wisconsin's 72 counties submitted written comments largely referencing a lack of confidence in the “[larger postal system](#)”, and roughly two-thirds of the more than 900 responses reported problems with mail travel times. Many clerks described receiving ballots postmarked weeks ahead of the election that arrived too late to be counted. Milwaukee [rejected 336 absentee ballots](#) that arrived the day after the election; Fond du Lac [rejected more than 100](#). In a [May 27 letter](#), the WEC thanked the Postmaster General for USPS’s “incredibly difficult and overwhelmingly successful work,” while simultaneously urging faster delivery ahead of the fall elections.

Under WEC guidance, voters whose ballots will not arrive in time to be counted cannot be issued a new ballot at the polling place on Election Day. The [LWVWI suit alleges that](#) this guidance disenfranchises affected voters by failing to provide an alternative way to cast a ballot. It seeks declaratory and injunctive relief for voters that guarantees their right to vote a provisional ballot in these circumstances. If granted, voters whose mailed ballots did not arrive in time to be counted can arrive in-person on Election Day and vote a provisional ballot. Election officials would seal these ballots and set them aside until they confirm the voter’s mailed ballot did not arrive in time. Once officials confirm this, they would count the provisional ballots and include them in the tally. The plaintiffs did not seek relief before the August 11 primary, and the case remains unresolved as of this report’s publication.

Prediction Markets and Voter Disqualification

In April 2026, Wisconsin [sued five prediction markets](#), including Kalshi, arguing that betting and commercial gambling have long been illegal in the state. The [CFTC then sued Wisconsin](#), asserting the state lacks authority to sue the platforms at all. Trading volume on Kalshi, meanwhile, exceeded [\\$16 million](#) for the August 11 Democratic gubernatorial primary alone.

In a July 2026 [memo](#), WEC staff addressed prediction markets, election gambling, and voter qualification. In it, they evaluated whether trades made on a prediction market would be included under the state's [statutory prohibition](#) on Wisconsin electors placing "any bet or wager" that depends on the election's result. The WEC concluded that such trades would qualify, and therefore would fall under the [provision governing "Disqualification of electors,"](#) which is a law that [dates back to 1849](#) but has been largely dormant until now. The memo noted that no federal law specifically prohibits all election prediction markets, although the Commodity Futures Trading Commission regulates federally listed event contracts under the Commodity Exchange Act. (However, the [Stop Trading on Predictions and Corrupt Bets Act of 2026](#) had been introduced in Congress to ban them.) The memo noted that there are "ongoing legal disagreements" concerning the definitional and regulatory questions at issue, but ultimately concluded that "Wisconsin law is relatively clear" that making trades on a prediction market concerning an election would disqualify a Wisconsin elector from voting.

Citing that conclusion, the Commission issued an [advisory](#) on July 21 stating that voters cannot legally bet on an election and cast a ballot in it, and warned that those in violation could face voter-qualification administrative challenges and potential felony charges.

Kalshi, one of the platforms [named](#) in the state’s suit, pushed back publicly. General Counsel Robert Denault [called the guidance](#) “unconstitutional and illegal,” arguing that Wisconsin has an issue with the CFTC rather than individual voters. Another Kalshi executive, Benjamin Freeman, [characterized the advisory](#) as voter suppression, citing hundreds of thousands of Wisconsin users. [Democratic Commissioner Ann Jacobs replied](#) that the advisory announced no new policy and simply restated existing law, and that the prohibition exists so that [people vote solely on the merits](#) of each candidate. Republican Chair Don Millis [noted a “non-zero chance”](#) that courts would classify the platforms as betting operations. Practical enforcement in Wisconsin remains unlikely since the Commission has [no ability to police](#) these platforms.

2026 Primary Election Analysis

Notable Results

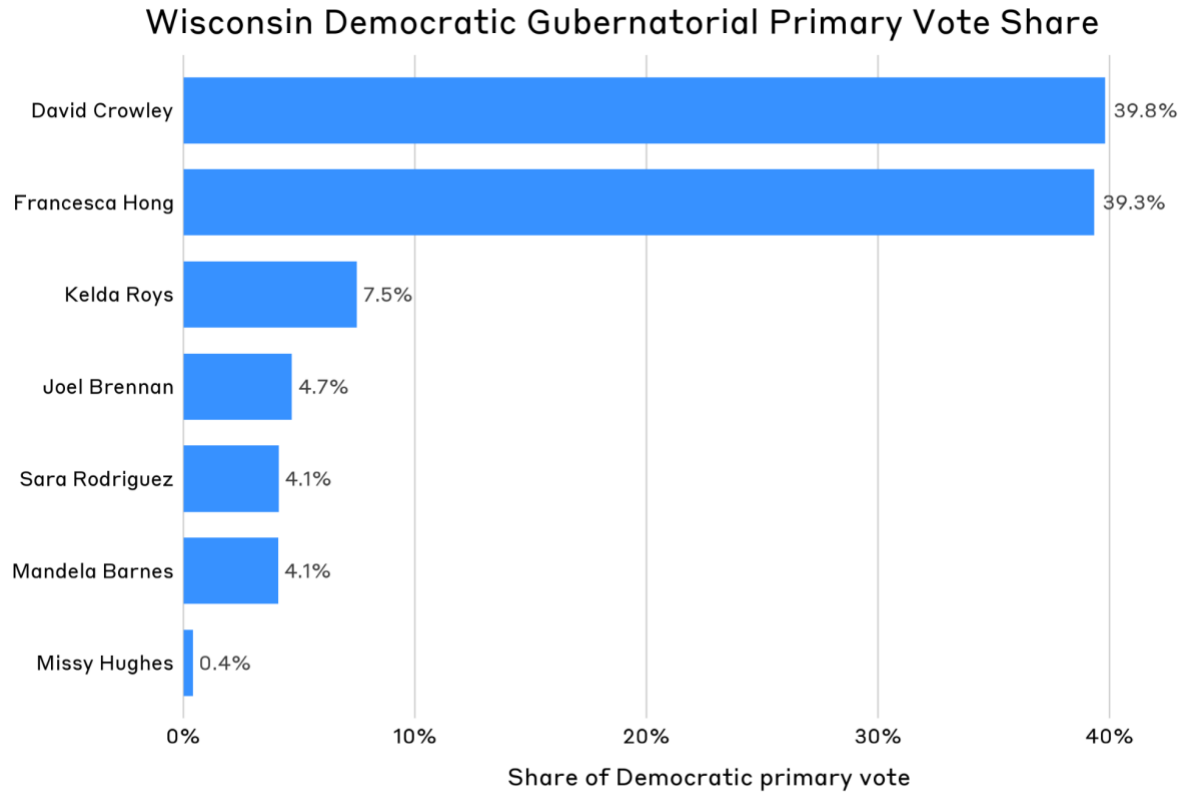
Gubernatorial Race

The Democratic primary for the 2026 gubernatorial race in Wisconsin was one of the most high-profile contests of the cycle. Democratic socialist and current state Assemblywoman Francesca Hong was the frontrunner in polls leading up to the primary. Her rise to prominence in this race was attributed to [several factors](#): the decision of prominent Wisconsin Democrats, including Governor Tony Evers and State Attorney General Josh Kaul, to stay out of the race, major donors choosing not to unify support around one of the many moderate Democratic candidates, and Hong’s ability to build momentum, especially around [her opposition to data centers](#). [Her strong lead in the polls](#) in the months ahead of the primary fueled expectations that Hong would win, and polling conducted the week before the election predicted she would win by a [double-digit margin](#). Hong’s perceived ascendancy over her fellow Democratic candidates led to surprise on primary Election Night when Milwaukee County Executive David Crowley won the nomination, earning [39.8%](#) of the vote compared to

Hong's 39.3%. He will face Republican Tom Tiffany, the current representative for Wisconsin's 7th Congressional District, in the November general election.

Crowley [originally suspended his campaign](#) in July because of low poll numbers and funding concerns, but he re-entered the race after current Lieutenant Governor Sara Rodriguez ended her campaign and Governor Evers endorsed Crowley. He won the primary by [just under 4,000 votes](#). One possible explanation (though there could be others) for the inaccurate polls leading up to the primary election is that they did not account for [previously undecided voters](#) who made their choice very close to the election date. The polls predicted Hong's vote share relatively accurately, but they underestimated Crowley's, suggesting many undecided voters chose Crowley on Election Day.

The figure below shows each candidate's share of the statewide Democratic primary vote. Crowley and Hong together accounted for roughly four in five votes cast, separated by [less than half a percentage point](#), while no other candidate reached double digits. State Senator Kelda Roys finished third, ahead of a tail of candidates that included some who had withdrawn but remained on the ballot. In a contest this close, the votes cast for withdrawn candidates alone exceeded the final margin.



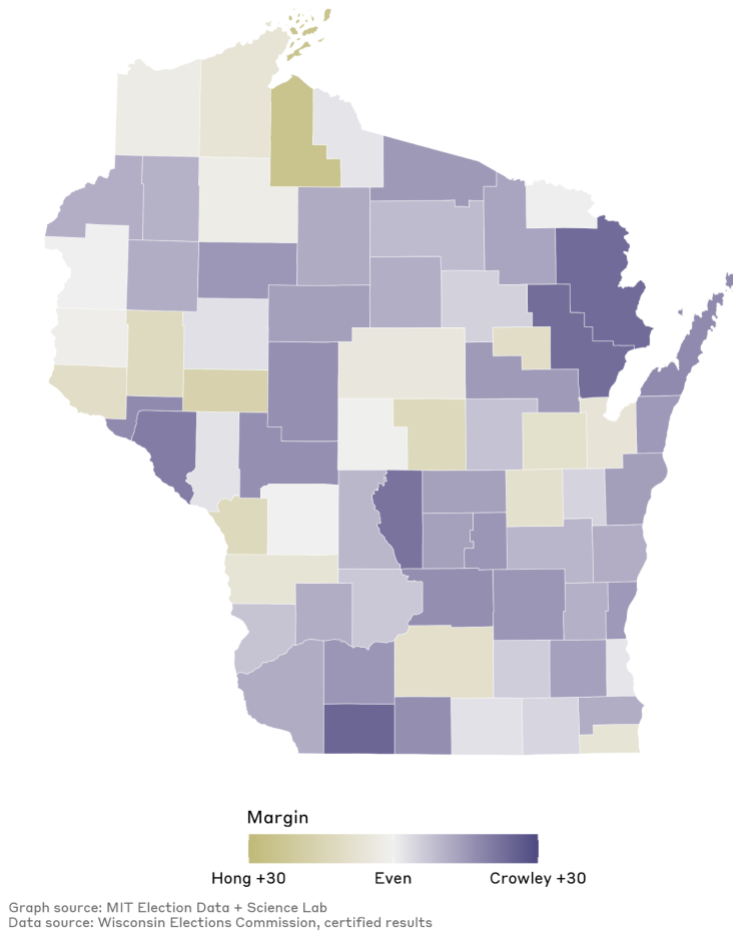
Graph source: MIT Election Data + Science Lab
 Data source: Wisconsin Elections Commission, certified results

Write-in and scattering votes (0.04% combined) are not shown.

This figure shows the share of the statewide vote received by each named candidate in the Democratic gubernatorial primary. Write-in and scattering votes, together less than one-tenth of a percent, are not shown. Vote totals are certified results from the Wisconsin Elections Commission.

The map below shows the margin between Crowley and Hong in each county. Crowley carried 52 of the state's 72 counties, with his strongest performance in the rural northeast and southwest and across the Milwaukee suburbs, while Hong carried counties along the state's western edge together with many of its mid-sized population centers, including Brown, Outagamie, and Eau Claire counties. Notably, the state's two most populous counties diverged: Crowley won his home Milwaukee County by under two percentage points, while Hong won Dane County by roughly nine. The county pattern is consistent with the polling-miss account described above, though county totals alone cannot establish when voters made up their minds.

Crowley-Hong Margin in the Democratic Gubernatorial Primary



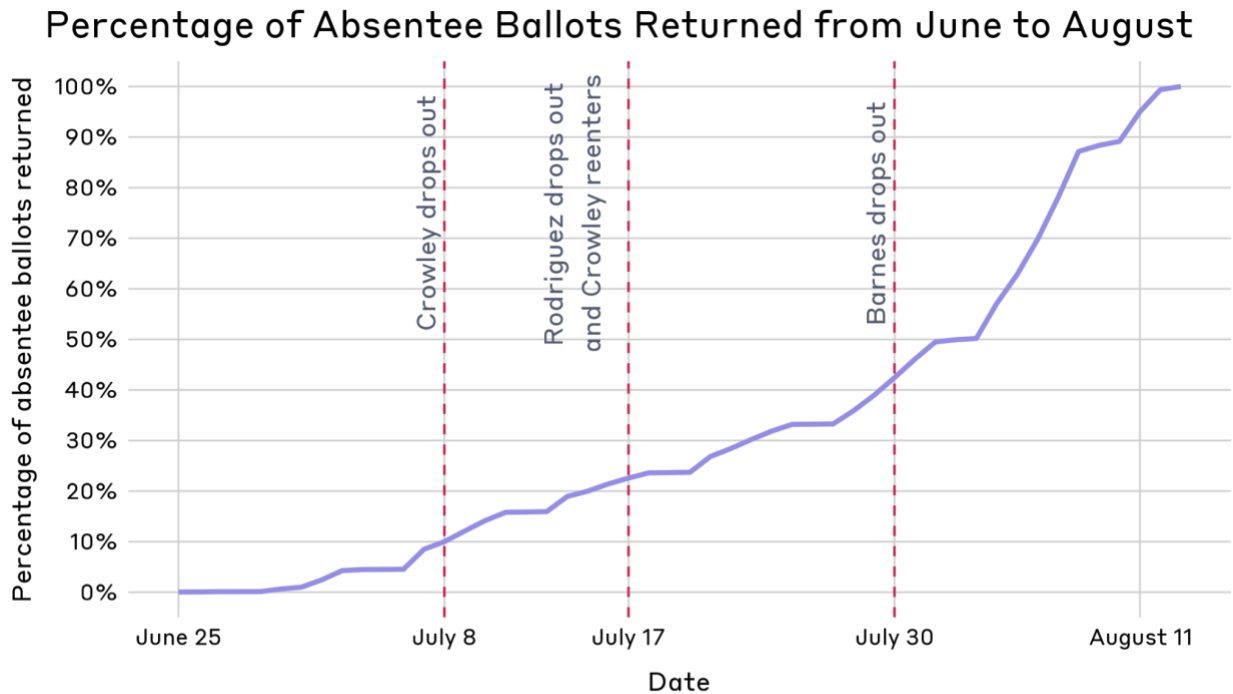
This figure shows the county-level margin between David Crowley and Francesca Hong in the Democratic gubernatorial primary, measured as a share of their combined vote. Counties where Crowley received more votes are shown in purple and counties where Hong received more votes are shown in gold. Vote totals are certified results from the Wisconsin Elections Commission.

Nearly [120,000](#) ballots, however, were returned while the candidate field was still changing. Lieutenant Governor Sara Rodriguez ended her bid for governor on [July 17](#) after facing [campaign finance mismanagement problems](#), and former Lieutenant Governor Mandela Barnes ended his campaign on [July 30](#) after Hong surged in the polls. However, absentee ballots began returning as early as [late June](#), and early voting started

on [July 28](#), meaning many voters could vote for candidates who later withdrew and were no longer in the contest by the final day of voting. In addition, some Wisconsin voters cast ballots in the Democratic primary after their eventual nominee had withdrawn from the race, since Crowley stepped away from the campaign for just over a week in July.

The flux of candidates entering and dropping out of the party's gubernatorial primary led some Democrats to wish they had the option to redo their ballots. As described [earlier](#) in this report, [three of these voters in Dane County](#) filed a lawsuit against the WEC after the commission's July 9 ruling, which said that a ballot could only be "spoiled" if a voter made a mistake when filling it out, not if they changed their mind about which candidate to support or if their candidate dropped out. The petitioners filed their lawsuit in the Dane County Circuit Court and [requested an injunction](#) to block the WEC's ruling. They argued that Wisconsin voters had previously been allowed to request a new ballot if they changed their mind, and that the WEC's decision unfairly changed the rules during an active primary. The WEC's July decision remained in place for the August 11 primary.

As Crowley defeated Hong by less than 4,000 votes and Rodriguez and Barnes each received about [4.1%](#) of the vote (over 32,000 votes each), it is possible that the primary's outcome might have shifted if voters who had already cast ballots for a withdrawn candidate had the option to recast their vote for Hong or Crowley. As the figure below shows, nearly half of the absentee ballots cast in the election were returned before the pool of candidates running in the primary election was definitively set (July 30).



Graph source: MIT Election Data + Science Lab
 Data source: Absentee Ballot Report from the Wisconsin Elections Commission

This line graph shows the percentage of absentee ballots returned by dates ranging from late June to August. Each point reflects the total percentage returned by or on that date, not just the percentage returned on that date. Key dates relating to candidate entry and drop-out during July are marked with the red dotted lines. This figure was inspired by [analysis](#) by [John D. Johnson](#), a Research Fellow in the Lubar Center for Public Policy Research and Civic Education at Marquette Law School.

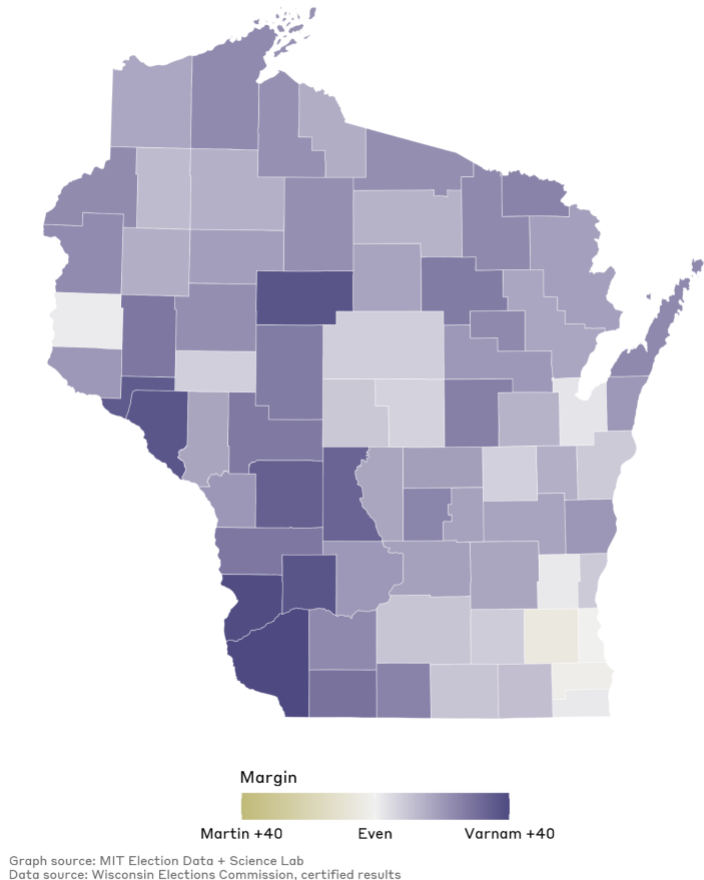
Lieutenant Governor

In Wisconsin, the governor [does not select their running mate](#), even though the governor and lieutenant governor run on the same ticket in the general election. Each party decides its lieutenant governor nominee through a separate primary contest; in the Republican primary this year, the candidates were David Varnam and Will Martin. Varnam is the [former mayor of Lancaster](#) and [previously worked](#) as a federal policy analyst and congressional aide, while Martin is a [businessman](#) who previously served as [deputy director](#) of the governor's office and held other roles in Wisconsin state and local

government. Though Martin was [endorsed](#) by the Republican Party of Wisconsin, Varnam [won the nomination](#) with 55.5% of the vote compared to Martin's 44.3%. One possible explanation is March 2026 reports revealing that Martin had [previously donated](#) to former President Barack Obama and other Democratic candidates. Varnam publicly [responded](#) to these reports, saying that they “concern[ed]” him and “Republicans should be troubled” that Martin only started donating to Republican candidates in Wisconsin in 2021, right before running for office as a Republican. Other [potential reasons](#) for Varnam's victory could be that party establishments have different preferences than voters, and the months between endorsements and the primary election leave time for momentum shifts.

The map below shows the vote margin between Varnam and Martin in each county. Varnam carried 69 of the state's 72 counties, with his largest margins in the southwest around Grant County, where he had served as mayor of Lancaster. His margins narrowed toward the southeast, where Martin picked up his only three counties—Waukesha, Racine, and Milwaukee—none by more than six percentage points. Two of those three (Waukesha and Milwaukee) were the top two counties in votes cast, which kept the statewide margin closer than the map alone suggests.

Varnam-Martin Margin in the Republican Lieutenant Governor Primary



This figure shows the county-level margin between David Varnam and Will Martin in the Republican primary for lieutenant governor, measured as a share of their combined vote. Counties where Varnam received more votes are shown in purple, and counties where Martin received more votes are shown in gold. Margins larger than 40 points are shaded at the scale's maximum. Vote totals are certified results from the Wisconsin Elections Commission.

3rd Congressional District

The 2026 matchup for Wisconsin's 3rd Congressional District is a rematch from 2024: current Republican Representative Derrick Van Orden will face Democrat Rebecca Cooke in the general election. Van Orden has served in Congress since 2023 and previously [served in the U.S. Navy](#). Cooke is a [small business owner and nonprofit](#)

[leader](#) whom [Governor Evers](#) appointed to the Wisconsin Economic Development Corporation. When Van Orden and Cooke faced each other in 2024, Van Orden received [51.3%](#) of the vote. Cooke received [48.6%](#), outperforming Kamala Harris' vote share in the district ([45.5%](#)). This contest marks the third time Cooke has run for Wisconsin's 3rd Congressional District; she first ran in 2022 and lost in the Democratic primary. In the 2026 primary election, Cooke [comfortably defeated](#) Emily Berge in the Democratic primary while Van Orden ran [uncontested](#) in the Republican primary. Cooke carried 18 of the district's 19 counties. Her single loss was Eau Claire County, where Berge had served on the city council since 2018 and as its president since 2023, and where Berge won by roughly three and a half points.

The November election is anticipated to be close. After the April 2025 election in Wisconsin and initial reports of Cooke's fundraising numbers, the Cook Political Report [shifted its classification](#) of the 3rd District contest from "leans Republican" to a "toss-up" race; this seat is the only congressional race in Wisconsin classified as a "toss-up" by the Cook Political Report. Fundraising and support for Cooke have continued through the primary election, as House Democrats [added Cooke](#) to their "Red to Blue" program, which provides [staff, training, and fundraising help](#) to Democrats trying to flip Republican-held seats. As of August 2026, Cooke has also [raised](#) more than [\\$1 million more than Van Orden](#). The district is still [Republican-leaning](#), but it remains to be seen whether voters in the 3rd Congressional District will support Van Orden and [his record of supporting Republican legislation in Congress](#) or elect a new Democratic representative instead.

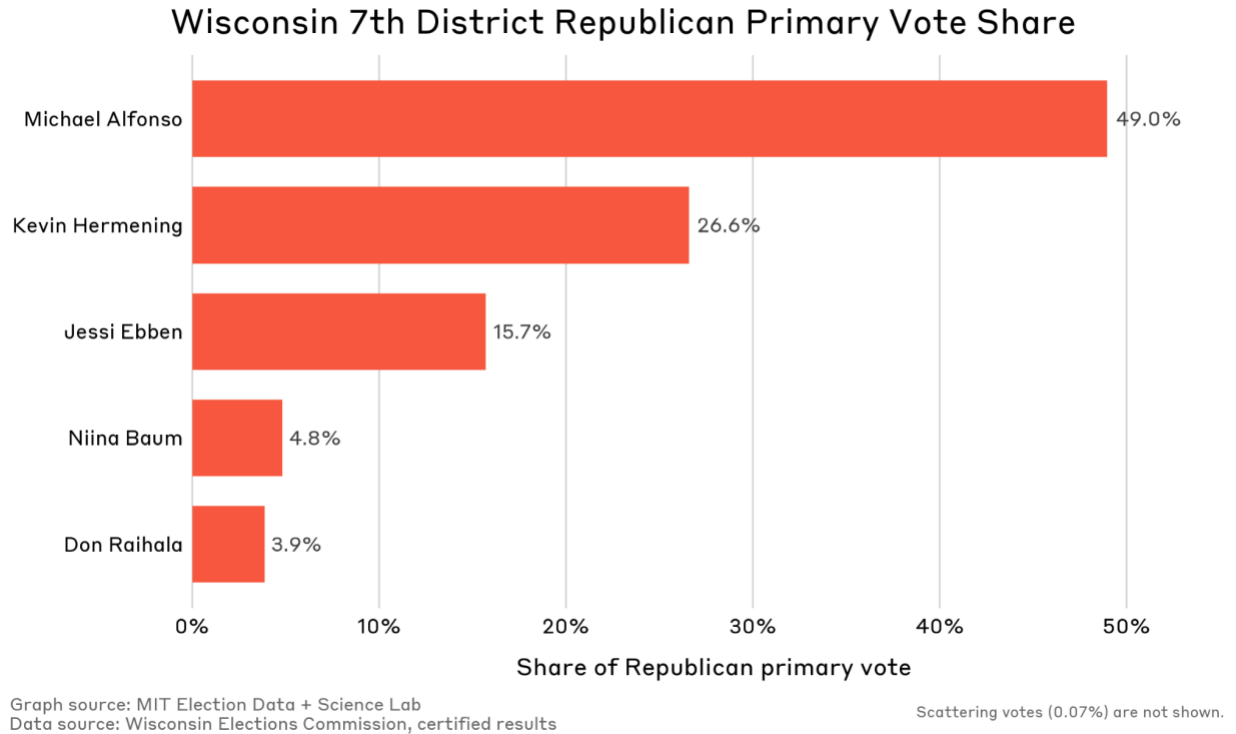
7th Congressional District

The Democratic and Republican primaries for Wisconsin's 7th Congressional District were both notable contests, despite the district being considered [solidly Republican](#). The seat is currently held by Republican Representative Tom Tiffany, who is the Republican nominee for the 2026 Wisconsin gubernatorial race and therefore not

running for reelection. Michael Alfonso won the Republican primary, and Fred Clark won the Democratic primary.

Michael Alfonso is a [podcast producer](#), [former construction worker](#), and son-in-law of current Transportation Secretary Sean Duffy, who [held the same congressional seat](#) from 2011 to 2019. He was [endorsed](#) by President Donald Trump in January 2026. Though he is the favorite to win in the general election, he faced a competitive primary. His main primary challenger was Kevin Hermening, a former [Republican chairman](#) and [school board president](#) in Marathon County who [previously served](#) in the U.S. Marines and was [held hostage](#) during the Iran hostage crisis in 1979. Alfonso's challengers attacked him for [skipping primary debates](#), [lacking political experience](#), and [registering to vote in Florida](#) in October 2024. Nevertheless, Alfonso defeated his four GOP challengers in the Republican primary with [49%](#) of the vote (Hermening received the next-highest share: 26.6%).

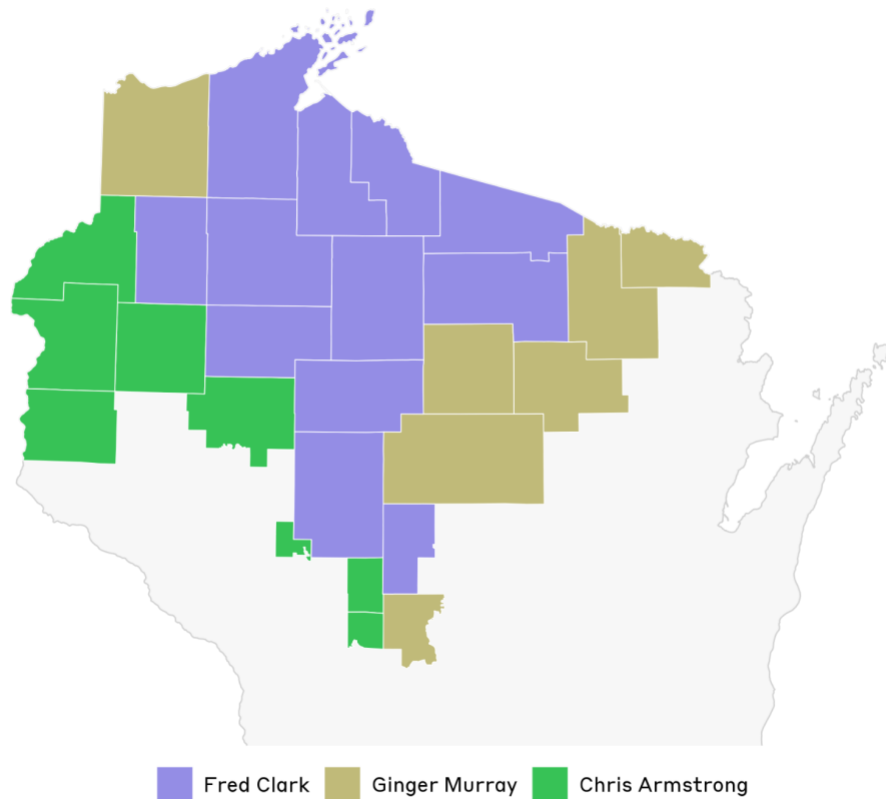
The figure below shows the full field of candidates. Hermening finished closer to third-place Jessi Ebben than to Alfonso, and the two remaining challengers, Niina Baum and Don Raihala, together took under nine percent of the vote. Alfonso carried all 26 counties in the district, but his narrowest margin came in Marathon County, Hermening's home base, where he won by fewer than seven percentage points.



This figure shows the share of the vote received by each candidate in the Republican primary for Wisconsin's 7th Congressional District. Vote totals are certified results from the Wisconsin Elections Commission.

Alfonso's opponent in the general election will be former state representative Fred Clark, the winner of the competitive Democratic primary. Clark served as [Baraboo's representative](#) in the state Assembly from 2009 through January 2015 and has a [background in logging and forestry consulting](#). Clark received [37.7%](#) of the vote in the primary while his opponents, Ginger Murray and Chris Armstrong, received 31.8% and 30.4%, respectively. The map below shows that all three candidates carried multiple counties. Clark's twelve formed a nearly continuous block across the northern tier, where he ran up his largest margins, winning Bayfield County by 60 percentage points and Ashland County by 39. Armstrong took seven counties along the western edge of the district, including St. Croix and Polk in the Minneapolis-St. Paul exurbs. Murray's seven centered on Marathon County, the district's largest source of primary votes, which she carried by just over two points.

County Winners in the 7th District Democratic Primary



Graph source: MIT Election Data + Science Lab
Data source: Wisconsin Elections Commission, certified results

This figure shows the county-level winners in the 2026 Democratic primary for Wisconsin's 7th Congressional District. Counties won by Fred Clark are shown in purple, counties won by Ginger Murray in gold, and counties won by Chris Armstrong in green. County shapes are clipped to the district boundary, and for the five counties split between the 7th and 3rd districts only the portion inside the 7th is shown. Vote totals are certified results from the Wisconsin Elections Commission.

Election Night Problems and Responses

One noteworthy incident on Wisconsin's primary election night was an error downloading results during Milwaukee's Central Count. Just before midnight, Milwaukee County Clerk George Christenson announced an issue with [downloading](#)

[absentee ballot results](#). Additional information provided by the Milwaukee Election Commission's executive director, Paulina Gutiérrez, clarified that this mishap was a result of "[human error](#)" and the "[wrong button being pressed](#)," and was not caused by any problems with tabulating machines. Five of the nine USB sticks used to download absentee results from tabulators at the Central Count location contained only audit logs, not election results; officials discovered the error after transporting them to the Milwaukee County Election Commission. After discovering the error, city election officials returned to the Central Count location to re-download the correct results. The city is [not seeking disciplinary action](#) against the person who pressed the wrong button. State Representative Scott Krug, a member of the Assembly Campaigns and Elections Committee, said he will submit a [formal request](#) asking city officials to provide a report on what happened and who was at fault.

Milwaukee was not the only place in Wisconsin that experienced reporting problems on Election Night. Cudahy also reported [technology issues](#) with tabulators and electronic poll books on Election Day, though they caused only brief disruptions. Meanwhile, Green County election officials noticed [a problem](#) with their county's server and reporting software around 9 pm. The results from [16 of Green County's municipalities](#) were delivered to the server without any issues, but the officials could not access the encrypted files because the software used to access them was not working. They could not solve the problem Tuesday night, so they initially had municipal clerks call with the results or send copies of their tapes so county officials could enter them manually. The next morning, municipal clerks brought physical memory cards from the voting tabulators and other election materials to the Green County clerk's office, allowing county officials to quickly report the results. They were able to finish reporting their unofficial results by 11:30 am on Wednesday.

Election Reporting Timelines

Election Night:

Time	Description
8:00 pm	Polls close (though voters who are already in line by 8 pm may still vote). All absentee ballots must be received by this time.
8:00 pm–Midnight and beyond	Precinct results reported. County clerks are obligated to post all returns online no later than 2 hours after receiving them from lower-level clerks.

*****After Election Night:**

- + Municipalities must report election returns to the designated county clerk no later than 2 hours after the votes are tabulated.
- + Municipal clerks must deliver the ballots, statements, tally sheets, lists, and envelopes to their county clerk by **Wednesday, Nov. 4 at 4 pm**, but this deadline is extended to **Thursday, Nov. 5 at 4 pm** if the municipality uses a [municipal board of canvassers to canvass absentee ballots](#).
- + Municipal boards of canvassers must reconvene no later than **Monday, Nov. 9 at 9 am** to count provisional ballots that have been verified as valid. Municipal clerks must deliver the amended statements, tally sheets, lists, and envelopes for these provisional ballots to their county clerk by **Monday, Nov. 9 at 4 pm**.
- + Each county board of canvassers must open and publicly examine the returns by **Tuesday, Nov. 10 at 9 am**.
- + The deadline for county clerks to deliver their certified results to the Wisconsin Elections Commission is **Tuesday, Nov. 17**.
- + The last day for the chairperson of the Wisconsin Elections Commission to certify the election results is **Tuesday, Dec. 1**.