

Has early voting and no-excuse absentee voting in Ohio increased voter turnout in Presidential Elections?

The statistics in this report were generated to analyze the impact of early voting and no excuse absentee voting in Ohio and its impact on voter turnout. (Voter turnout is overall votes cast – not just presidential votes.)

Conclusion: While early in-person voting and no-excuse absentee voting in Ohio has reduced waiting times on Election Day, it has had no measureable impact on increasing voter turnout. Clearly a significant percentage of Ohio voters like early voting, but the data suggests that it does not increase voter turnout.

Early voting and no-excuse absentee voting were enacted into law following a record turnout in 2004. In the three presidential year elections since early voting and no-excuse absentee voting began, overall voter turnout has been below 2004 in two out of three succeeding elections. In 2008, the one presidential election that voter turnout did increase; it was less than 1 percent.

Year	Turnout	Inc./Dec.	Inc./Dec. %
2000	4,795,989	157,881	3.4 %
2004	5,722,443	926,454	19.3 %
2008	5,773,777	51,334	0.9 %
2012	5,633,246	-140,531	-2.4%
2016	5,607,641	-25,605	-0.5%

In the five Presidential Elections prior to 2004 average voter turnout was 4,729,300. In 2000 voter turnout was 4,795,989.

In 2004 voter turnout in Ohio exploded to 5,722,443, an increase of 19.3% over 2000. Nationally the voter turnout increase was 15%. [1]

The increase in voter turnout was almost identical in the counties won by the Republican (+19.0%) and won by the Democrat (+19.6%). See Ohio regional turnout table below.

Region	2000	2004	2004 vs. 2000	2004 vs. 2000
Central	859,375	1,087,306	227,931	26.5 %
Northeast	1,913,051	2,261,408	348,357	18.2 %
Northwest	436,993	508,449	71,456	16.4 %
Southeast	253,777	284,408	30,631	12.1 %
Southwest	723,488	857,563	134,075	18.5 %
West	609,305	723,309	114,004	18.7 %
State	4,795,989	5,722,443	926,454	19.3 %

In 2008 Ohio began early voting and no-excuse absentee voting in presidential elections for the first time in its history. Early voting began 35 days in advance of the election and included what is commonly referred to “Golden Week”. The 88 county boards set different hours and times in each county. **Voter turnout in 2008 was 5,773,777, an increase of less than one percent (.90%) over 2004.** Nationally turnout went up 7.3%. [1]

2008 turnout in counties won by the Democrat increased by a .12% over 2004 and by 2.2% in counties won by the Republican. See regional table below.

Region	2004	2008	2008. vs. 2004	2008 vs. 2004
Central	1,087,306	1,139,733	52,427	4.8 %
Northeast	2,261,408	2,245,306	-16,102	-0.71%
Northwest	508,449	512,052	3,603	0.7 %
Southeast	284,408	277,146	-7,262	-2.6%
Southwest	857,563	878,948	21,385	2.5 %
West	723,309	720,592	-2,717	-0.4%
State	5,722,443	5,773,777	51,334	0.90 %

In 2012 Ohio had its most expansive early voting period. Early voting began 35 days before the election. All 88 county boards were required to be open the same days and hours for early in-person voting. There were 26 days and 246 hours of in-person early voting. **Voter turnout was 5,633,246, a decrease of -2.4% compared to 2008.** Nationally voter turnout decreased by -1.7%.

In 2012 turnout in counties won by the Democrat decreased by -2.6% over 2008 and by -2.2% in counties won by the Republican. See regional table below.

Region	2008	2012	2012 vs. 2008	2012 vs. 2008
Central	1,139,733	1,142,724	2,991	0.3 %
Northeast	2,245,306	2,170,863	-74,443	-3.3%
Northwest	512,052	491,255	-20,797	-4.1%
Southeast	277,146	261,979	-15,167	-5.5%
Southwest	878,948	869,292	-9,656	-1.1%
West	720,592	697,133	-23,459	-3.3%
State	5,773,777	5,633,246	-140,531	-2.4%

In 2016 “Golden Week” was eliminated. There were three fewer days (26 days in 2012 and 23 days in 2016) and 39 hours less (246 hours in 2012 and 207 hours in 2016) of in-person early voting. Voter turnout in 2016 versus 2012 was 5,607,641 a decrease of one half of one percent (0.5%) compared to 2012. Nationally voter turnout increased by 6.6%

Despite the decrease in Ohio the number of days and hours in 2016, there were 665,526 votes cast early in-person compared to 600,647 votes cast early in-person in 2012, an increase of 10.8%. (In-person early voting numbers for 2008 were not reported separately by the Secretary of State in 2008)

2016 turnout in counties won by the Democrat decreased by -1.7% over 2012 and increased by 0.5% by in counties won by the Republican. See regional table below.

Region	2012	2016	2016 vs. 2012	2016 vs. 2012
Central	1,142,724	1,178,317	35,593	3.1 %
Northeast	2,170,863	2,111,088	-59,775	-2.8%
Northwest	491,255	481,014	-10,241	-2.1%
Southeast	261,979	264,456	2,477	0.9 %
Southwest	869,292	883,273	13,981	1.6 %
West	697,133	689,493	-7,640	-1.1%
State	5,633,246	5,607,641	-25,605	-0.5%

In 2008, 1,717,256 absentee ballots were counted, which was 29.7% of the state total ballots counted. In 2012, 1,862,984 absentee ballots were counted, which was 33.1% of the state total ballots counted. In 2016, 1,879,630 absentee ballots were counted, which was 33.5% of the state total ballots counted.

Region	2008 Ballots Counted Absentee	2012 Ballots Counted Absentee	2016 Ballots Counted Absentee
Central	431,834	432,517	439,853
Central Absentee % of State Total	25.1%	23.2%	23.4%
Central % Of Total State Vote	19.8 %	20.3 %	21.0 %
Absentee % vs. State %	5.4%	2.9%	2.4%
Northeast	677,652	747,724	723,175
Northeast Absentee % of State Total	39.5%	40.1%	38.5%
Northeast % Of Total State Vote	38.9 %	38.5 %	37.6 %
Absentee % vs. State %	0.6%	1.6%	0.9%
Northwest	131,380	141,728	131,810
Northwest Absentee % of State Total	7.7%	7.6%	7.0%
Northwest % Of Total State Vote	8.9 %	8.7 %	8.6 %
Absentee % vs. State %	-1.2%	-1.1%	-1.6%

Southeast	71,945	85,283	86,998
Southeast Absentee % of State Total	4.2%	4.6%	4.6%
Southeast % Of Total State Vote	4.7 %	4.6 %	4.7 %
Absentee % vs. State %	-0.6%	0.0%	-0.1%
Southwest	219,196	246,621	270,344
Southwest Absentee % of State Total	12.8%	13.2%	14.4%
Southwest % Of Total State Vote	15.3 %	15.5 %	15.8 %
Absentee % vs. State %	-2.5%	-2.2%	-1.4%
West	185,249	209,111	227,450
West Absentee % of State Total	10.8%	11.2%	12.1%
West % Of Total State Vote	12.5 %	12.4 %	12.3 %
Absentee % vs. State %	-1.7%	-1.2%	-0.2%
State Absentee Ballots Counted	1,717,256	1,862,984	1,879,630

Mike Dawson
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[1] Source United States Election Project – electproject.org