



Voting in Ohio: An Update

September 2023 Study Pages

These study pages look at three areas related to voting in Ohio:

- Voter turnout – Who shows up to vote and why?
- Review of new photo ID rules
- Update on redistricting

Who Turns Up to Vote?

The chart below shows the percentage of registered voters who voted the last few years in the Cincinnati area.

Cincinnati Area Voter Turnout
Percentage of registered voters who voted in the election

Counties	Nov 2020 Presidential	May 2022 Primary	Nov 2022	Aug 2023 Special Election
Hamilton	72%	17%	52%	39%
Butler	73%	17%	51%	35%
Warren	82%	21%	60%	42%
Clermont	77%	19%	56%	40%

Notice that the table includes only registered voters and not the people who are eligible, but are not registered. It is estimated that about 22% of people who are eligible are not registered to vote. Of people who are not registered, one study found that 62% said they had never been asked to register to vote.¹

One partial reason turnout is so low in Primaries is the majority of registered voters are not Republican or Democrat, but are “unaffiliated” with a political party. Ohio’s voter database currently shows 1.3 million registered Republicans, 1 million registered Democrats, and 5.7 million unaffiliated.²

¹ <https://www.pewtrusts.org/en/research-and-analysis/issue-briefs/2017/06/why-are-millions-of-citizens-not-registered-to-vote>

² <https://ohiocapitaljournal.com/2023/06/28/ohio-republicans-propose-two-measures-to-close-primary-elections-ahead-of-2024-presidential-race/>

The research shows various reasons why people do not vote. For any individual, the reasons are likely mixed.

Non-voters have less faith in the electoral system than voters. Non-voters say they don't vote for many reasons, including not liking the candidates and feeling their vote doesn't matter. Compared with voters, they have less faith in the electoral system, don't feel they have enough information, and are less likely to think increased participation in elections is good for the country.³

If family and friends vote, that makes people more likely to vote, the survey found.⁴

There are strong socioeconomic correlations between voting and not voting. Nonvoters tend to make less money, have lower levels of education, be less likely to own their home or are less likely to be married.⁵

One interesting analysis looked specifically at young people 18-29 years of age and the reasons for low voting rates.

But the reality is that most young people are neither apathetic nor ideologically disengaged. They aren't turning out to vote because their lives are not set up for it. Young people are attending college, often in a different location from where they grew up. They're working full-time or part-time while attending school, often at low-wage jobs that can have unstable work schedules. They don't have access to transportation. They move around a lot, change schools, or study abroad. They don't know where they'll be living three months in the future.⁶

Ohio New Photo ID Rules

The voter laws changed in Ohio in 2022 to require photo identification. The laws were in place in the May 2023 primary and the August 2023 Special Election, but still come as a surprise to many voters. The only acceptable ID at the polls on Election Day or when early voting at the Board of Elections are:

- Ohio driver's license or State of Ohio ID card issued by the Ohio BMV;
- A US passport or US passport card;
- US military ID card; Ohio National Guard or US Department of Veterans Affairs ID card

Photo IDs must have the voter's name, a photograph of the voter, and an expiration date that has not passed. It does NOT need to have the voter's current address. If voters don't have one

³ <https://knightfoundation.org/press/releases/new-study-sheds-light-on-the-100-million-americans-who-dont-vote-their-political-views-and-what-they-think-about-2020/>

⁴ <https://www.npr.org/2020/12/15/945031391/poll-despite-record-turnout-80-million-americans-didnt-vote-heres-why>

⁵ Ibid

⁶ <https://www.vox.com/21497637/election-2020-youth-vote-young-people-voting>

of the above IDs, they can request and vote a mail-in ballot. Any registered voter can choose to vote by mail in Ohio. The mail-in ballot requires only a social security number for identification.

Ohioans who are 17 years and older can receive a state ID card at no cost from the Bureau of Motor Vehicles (BMV). In addition to voting, it is a useful ID for people who don't drive to carry for identification. The BMV requires several forms of identification when you apply for the state ID. Check its website before going in person to know what to bring. There is an organization called [VoteRiders](#) that helps individuals obtain the documents (e.g. birth certificates) they need for the state ID, and can help with the cost. Check for them online, or call the helpline at 866.ID.2.VOTE.

Redistricting Reform in Ohio 2.0

The League of Women Voters has been working on redistricting reform in Ohio for decades, through Republican administrations and back when Democrats controlled the statehouse. Working with lots of partners, amendments to the Ohio Constitution were approved overwhelmingly by voters in 2015 (state legislative districts) and 2018 (Congressional districts). Those reforms took the map-making decisions away from the direct control of the state legislature and created an Ohio Redistricting Commission.

However, the Commission was still controlled by politicians. The members are elected officials and only two of the seven members are guaranteed to be from the minority party. These minority members were generally ignored during the recent redistricting process as the Commission adopted maps that were ruled unconstitutional by the Ohio Supreme Court multiple times. Both Ohio's U.S. Congressional district maps and Statehouse maps were declared unconstitutional gerrymanders by a bipartisan majority of the former Ohio Supreme Court, but voters were nevertheless forced to vote under them in 2022 after Republicans on the Ohio Redistricting Commission ran out the clock and appealed to a federal court.

Although the court cases are ongoing, the makeup of the Ohio Supreme Court has changed and it is considered likely that the current Court will approve whatever maps the politicians submit. There is much disappointment that the reforms we fought so hard to achieve in 2015 and 2018 have not been successful in ending partisan gerrymandering. Our current districts still are strange shapes and manipulated to give an advantage to the current majority party. So we must try again.

A new coalition has been formed and is beginning to collect signatures to put on the ballot in 2024 an Ohio constitutional amendment that would replace the current redistricting process with an Ohio Citizens Redistricting Commission. The 15 citizen members of this independent commission can NOT be elected officials or lobbyists. The intent is to take the map-making power away from the politicians who have shown they cannot be trusted. The League of Women Voters will be actively involved in collecting signatures and informing the public. Details and requests to get involved will be coming shortly. We will not give up until we have fair districts!

Discussion Questions

Voter Turnout: why don't people vote?

1. Review the table in the Study Pages on turnout rates. What are you hearing about why people don't vote, from family and friends or when you've done League of Women Voters outreach?
2. What can we (those at this meeting) do to help get out the vote in November? Brainstorm a few project ideas and commit to one.

New Photo ID Rules

3. For whom do the new photo ID rules create a barrier or discouragement to voting? What groups are impacted the most?
4. What voter education could the League of Women Voters do to reduce the barrier for voters who do not have one of the approved IDs?

Redistricting Update

5. How big a problem are Ohio's gerrymandered districts?
6. Will there be enough citizen energy for another round of redistricting reform, to collect signatures (again) and to explain and campaign for a ballot issue?