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## Hawaii News

# Voter registration up, but come Nov. 8 ...

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City and County elections clerk Richard Salvador helped Honolulu resident Juanita Young register to vote Monday at the Capitol.

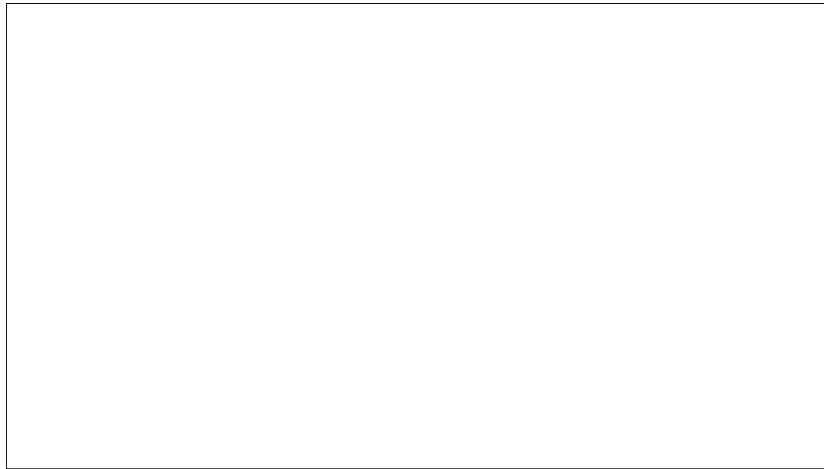
Hawaii saw a record-low turnout in the August primary election but hit record voter registration numbers Monday. What to expect come Nov. 8 is the big question.

"Hawaii is unique in the nation," said Colin Moore, a University of Hawaii associate professor of political science and director of the UH Public Policy Center.

"Registration's going up while actual voting is going down. You'd expect our voter turnout numbers would increase. Instead, our low voter turnout is one of the great mysteries of Hawaii politics."

By Monday's deadline to register to vote in November's general election, more than 740,000 people had registered to vote across the islands. Among the biggest races on the ballot are for U.S. president and Honolulu mayor.

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By comparison, 706,890 people registered to vote for the 2014 general election, while only 705,668 people registered to vote in the 2012 presidential election.

But Hawaii set a record for voter apathy in a primary election in August, when only 34.7 percent of registered voters bothered to cast ballots. In all, 251,959 people voted.

People who missed Monday's deadline can still register to vote at early walk-in voting locations statewide, including Honolulu Hale, during a new "late registration" period from Oct. 25 through Nov. 5.

Then, in 2018, Hawaii plans to switch to so-called "same-day registration" to allow people to register and vote on Election Day.

Nedielyn Bueno, spokeswoman for the state Elections Office, helped register voters outside the state Capitol on Monday and said the record number of voter registrations could be the result of efforts to make registering easier.

"We definitely exceeded our 2014 general registration," Bueno said. "We definitely have bigger numbers this year."

She did not rule out the possibility that voters may have been inspired by Sunday's second of three presidential debates between Donald Trump and Hillary Clinton.

But Bueno cautioned that high voter registration does not ensure actual voter turnout.

"Maybe the debates prompted more people to come out to register," Bueno said. "Our mission is to raise awareness of dates and deadlines. It takes voters to take the next step and cast their vote."

Neal Milner, a political pundit and retired University of Hawaii political science professor, doubts that record registration numbers will translate into voter turnout next month.

"Registration is no guarantee," Milner said. "There's often a disparity between increased registration and who actually votes."

Milner contends that the Democratic Party-dominated political climate helps deter voting in Hawaii because registered voters have few options to excite them enough to actually vote.

"During the primary the only serious race on Oahu was the mayoral" election that resulted in November's runoff between incumbent Kirk Caldwell and former U.S. Rep. Charles Djou, Milner said.

Otherwise, Milner said, "you're continuing a tradition of uncontested elections in a state where races simply are not competitive. That keeps turnout down."

The presidential election that coincides with the mayor's race could produce an uptick in voter turnout next month, but Milner doubts it.

"The (presidential) candidates are not liked very much," Milner said. "You don't have much going on here to get voters excited."

If true, there's little hope that registered voters will turn around soon and actually cast their ballots in future elections, Milner said.

"Just as voting is a habit," he said, "so is nonvoting."