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Voters encounter long lines, problems at Hawaii polling places

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By HNN Staff [CONNECT](#)

HONOLULU (HawaiiNewsNow) - Hawaii voters grappled with long lines and frustrating equipment malfunctions statewide Tuesday, as a larger-than-expected turnout appeared to overwhelm a number of polling places.

At 6 p.m., when polls were set to close, 125 polling places were still open to accommodate those who were still in line. By 7:30 p.m., 29 Oahu polling places remained open.

"They are in turmoil," said Kapolei voter Rene Ortega, in a Facebook post. "The line is very long, waiting for over an hour, machine is full and they have been on the phone for over 15 minutes and still can't figure out what to do."

Hawaii polls opened at 7 a.m., and many voters said the lines at polling sites were among the longest they'd ever seen. Lines trailed out the doors at Makaha Elementary School, University Laboratory School and Waianae Intermediate School.

And in Kapolei, voters reported waiting in line for upwards of an hour to cast a ballot.

Voter Rick Steinbauer said he's lived in Kapolei for 16 years "and this is probably the busiest I've seen it."

Tira Akina agreed. "It was great. It was great," she said. "I'm anxious to see the turnout."

There was also a spate of malfunctions at voting sites; 18 polling places statewide reported equipment snags, including problems with ballot scanning machines. But by mid-day, state elections officials said the issues that had at times caused significant voter concern were resolved.

Meanwhile, a voter who was at Kahala Elementary School told Hawaii News Now that dozens of people were in line to hand in their election ballots because of a possible broken machine. She said she was worried about the security of her ballot.

About 415,792 people turned out to vote in Hawaii, about 55.4 percent of the total number of registered voters. Although that's less than the 2012 election, officials say it was a healthy number.

During the last presidential election, when Obama sought re-election, nearly 62 percent of registered voters in Hawaii cast ballots.

Scott Nago, the state's chief election officer, assured all Hawaii voters will have their ballots counted.

"If you went and the machine was down, your ballot would go into a secure location then scanned at a later time," he said.

Other sites with malfunctions were McKinley Community School for Adults, Jefferson Elementary School, Kapunahala Elementary School and Aiea High School.

Jesse Burgess, who voted at Jefferson Elementary, called his voting experience "disorganized."

"They didn't expect it," he said. "They didn't check the machine before everybody lined up and the confusion back and forth."

In addition to casting ballots in the presidential race, Oahu voters were deciding Tuesday on who should [head up Honolulu Hale](#) and making their opinions known on 20 proposed charter amendments. Also Tuesday, Hawaii voters weighed in on who should replace the late U.S. Rep. Mark Takai.

In the days before Election Day, a polarizing presidential race and a contentious run for mayor appeared to be driving up turnout, with early voting tallies rivaling the figures seen in the 2012 general election, when native son Barack Obama made his re-election bid for the White House.

Also, registration was way up this election thanks to an online voter registration system that tens of thousands of people took advantage of. The state also for the first time allowed voters to register on-site at early walk-in polling places.

Hawaii has long struggled with a lowest-in-the-nation turnout, and the move to an online registration system was designed to address that. In the primary election this year, though, turnout hit a new low -- at just 35 percent. Officials said that nearly 252,000 of Hawaii's registered voters cast ballots.

One good sign heading into Election Day: Early voting was up.

As of Saturday, the state Office of Elections had received 157,605 mail ballots and 44,122 early walk-in ballots. That's up from previous years.

"Right now the absentee walk numbers are actually a little higher than they were in 2012," said Chief Election Officer Scott Nago. "But you've got to realize that our registration went up so the percentage might not necessarily correlate to a higher percentage."

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