

# Democracy North Carolina

1821 Green St., Durham NC 27705 • 919-489-1931 or 286-6000 • democracy-nc.org

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Contact: Bob Hall, 919-489-1931

## **Analysis of 30 Subgroups of Voters in Each NC County Profiles Who Participated in the 2012 Election**

A detailed analysis of the 4.5 million North Carolina voters participating in last year's election shows that Republicans turned out their members at a higher rate than Democrats in 65 of the 100 counties.

On the other hand, the percent of black voters who cast a ballot exceeded the turnout rate for registered whites in 64 counties – and 85% of African-American voters are registered as Democrats.

The statewide gap in participation rates for the major parties was 3 percentage points – 73% of registered Republicans voted, compared to 70% of Democrats. But in 21 counties (mostly west of I-85), Republicans outperformed Democrats by more than 7 points; and in 13 counties (mostly in the east), Democrats outdid Republicans by more than 5 percentage points.

More women voted than men in every single county, and seniors over age 65 outnumbered young voters ages 18 to 25 in all but four counties with major universities – Orange, Watauga, Pitt and Durham. Young voters had the lowest participation rate of any age group, except in college counties like Jackson, Pasquotank, Scotland and Guilford and in several eastern counties where African Americans are the majority of voters, including Hertford, Northampton, Bertie and Edgecombe.

The voter participation analysis by the nonpartisan election reform group Democracy North Carolina is based on data provided by the counties to the State Board of Elections. (Some figures are adjusted to account for differences in time delays in data collection and posting on the Board's website.)

Statewide, 68% of the state's 6.6 million registered voters cast ballots in 2012, but there's a wide gap in the turnout rate between the best and worst performing counties. Chatham County, where 76% of registered voters cast ballots, ranked first in turnout – as it did in 2008 – while the military-dependent Onslow County ranked last, with a 53% turnout rate.

“It's fascinating to see all the variations in performance among age, gender, race and party groups in the counties,” said Bob Hall, executive director of Democracy North Carolina. “Our state has a long history of low participation, going back to the days of the literacy tests and poll tax. Studying high and low performing groups in counties can help communities improve participation and civic life.”

The two groups with the most enthusiasm to vote in 2012 were African-American women and white Republicans; they each posted a 74% turnout rate, well ahead of the 68% statewide rate. “The presidential election was a polarizing, emotional experience for core supporters of both major candidates,” said Hall. “Candidates, parties and interest groups invested in mobilizing voters and helped them understand that their vote was important for themselves and for society.”

Hall said the split results in the 10 counties with the highest turnout reflects North Carolina's swing state status: Five went for Republican Mitt Romney (Davie, Person, Moore, Greene and Beaufort) and five went for Democrat Barack Obama (Chatham, Warren, Wake, Granville and Hertford).

Although voters unaffiliated with a political party now outnumber registered Democrats or Republicans in 42 counties, they are less engaged and voted at a lower level than members of the

major parties in 97 of the 100 counties (the exceptions are Avery, Bertie and Mitchell). Statewide, 60% of unaffiliated voters cast ballots compared to 70% of Democrats and 73% of Republicans.

The impact of the criminal justice system on the African-American community also shows up in the voting data, Hall said. Women cast 54% of the white votes in 2012, but a remarkable 61% of the black votes, largely because so many black men have been convicted of a felony. North Carolina temporarily suspends a person's right to vote while the person serves a felony sentence, but Hall said many people believe the suspension is permanent. "This is one more area where education is critical and where barriers have a real impact on participation," he said.

For the county details of who voted, see: <http://democracy-nc.org/downloads/2012TurnoutByCounty.xls>

For an overview of statewide turnout, see: <http://democracy-nc.org/downloads/NCVoterTurnout2012PR.pdf>

## 2012 Voter Turnout for NC Counties

***Chatham, Warren, Wake and Davie:*** Counties with the highest voter turnout

***Onslow, Swain, Robeson and Hoke:*** Counties with the lowest voter turnout

***Warren, Chatham, Wake and Greene:*** Counties with highest turnout among women

***Edgecombe, Wilson, Vance, Pitt and Cumberland:*** Counties with the largest gap in turnout between women and men

***Wake, Chatham, Moore and Davie:*** Counties with highest turnout for seniors

***Cherokee, Gates, Hyde and Robeson:*** Counties with lowest turnout for seniors

***Onslow, Brunswick, Transylvania and Polk:*** Counties with largest gap between turnout of old and young voters

***Warren, Chatham, Person and Granville:*** Counties with highest turnout for African-American voters

***Hoke, Richmond, Gates, Cleveland and Cumberland:*** Counties where black turnout most exceeds white turnout

***Davie, Wake, Johnston and Moore:*** Counties with highest Republican turnout

***Chowan, Nash, Mecklenburg and Buncombe:*** Counties with the smallest gap between turnout for Republicans and Democrats

***Rowan, Forsyth, Harnett and Haywood:*** Counties with the smallest turnout gap between Republican men and African-American women

***Graham, Randolph and Sampson:*** Counties where Republican turnout exceeded turnout of Unaffiliated voters by more than 20 percentage points