

Democracy North Carolina

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NC Adds 1 Million Voters from Obama to Trump New Voters Reject Party Labels; Democrats, GOP Growing Older

North Carolina has added nearly one million voters to the registration rolls since Barack Obama's first victory in the state in May 2008 – and a surprising four out of five of them (80%) refused to choose a party label, according to an analysis by the voting rights group Democracy North Carolina.

“Ironically, while the General Assembly is busy passing laws to add party labels to more statewide and local elections, new voters are rejecting the major parties at a record rate,” said Bob Hall of Democracy North Carolina. *(The 80% not selecting a party beats the 65% of new voters from 2000 to May 2008 who were unaffiliated.)*

He also pointed out that today's 2.02 million unaffiliated or independent voters are relatively young. About half of them are under age 41, while only a third of the 2.64 million Democrats and 30% of the 2.05 million Republicans are under 41.

“The rapid growth of independent voters will have a lasting impact on Tar Heel politics,” said Hall. “North Carolina will continue being a swing state in presidential elections, with a notable bias for candidates outside the mainstream.”

“Studies show that independent voters across the ideological spectrum want ethical politicians who [keep their promises](#) and [focus less on partisan maneuvering than on solving problems](#) for their communities,” he added. North Carolina polls show that unaffiliated voters strongly [support redistricting reform](#) and protecting the court system from [special-interest influence](#).

New Voters Avoid the Parties

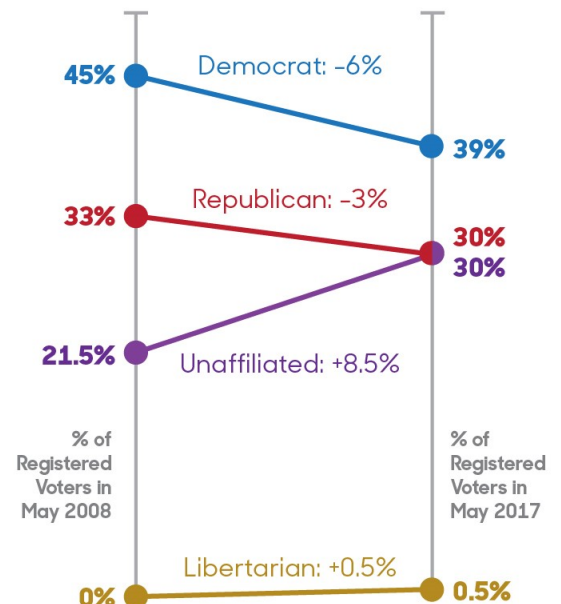


NC added almost 1 million voters since May 2008 – and **4 out of 5** are rejecting any party affiliation (779,119 out of 973,776)

Unaffiliated – 80%
Democrat – 2%
Libertarian – 3%
Republican – 14%

Non-Partisan Voters Are Larger Share

Unaffiliated voters will soon **outnumber** Republican Party members. Democrats and Republicans have a **shrinking share** of NC voters.



“But as the word ‘unaffiliated’ suggests, these voters are less attentive to election campaigns or policy debates, so their potential influence remains unrealized,” he said. In 2016, only 63% of unaffiliated voters cast ballots, compared to 75% of registered Republicans and 68.5% of Democrats.

Hall said he expects that unaffiliated voters will outnumber Republicans by the end of this year, and they will continue to reduce the Democratic Party’s once-dominant share of NC registered voters, which is now down to 39%, a drop from 45% in 2008 and 50% in 2000.

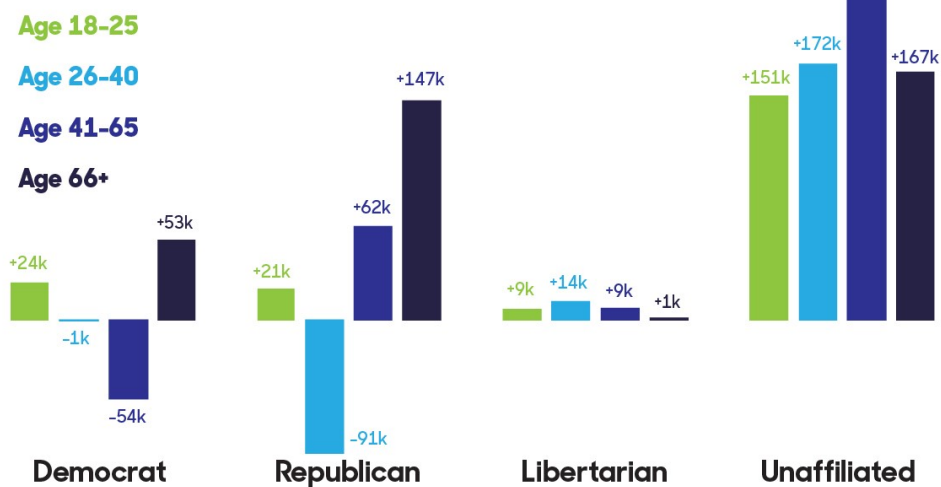
He pointed out that unaffiliated voters already outnumber Democrats and Republicans in both the 18-25 and 25-40 age groups.

Jenn Frye, associate director of Democracy North Carolina and an unaffiliated voter, said people’s disaffection with the major parties will continue without significant changes. “Legislators and candidates from the major parties need to adjust their messages and behavior if they want to attract new supporters and keep up with independent voters,” she said.

After Barack Obama won the May 6, 2008, Democratic primary, the Democratic Party saw its membership swell. It climbed from 2,615,500 on the eve of that primary to a peak of 2,878,200 right after the November 2012 presidential election, a 10% increase. But with people moving in and out of the state, dying, or changing party affiliations, the Democratic Party is

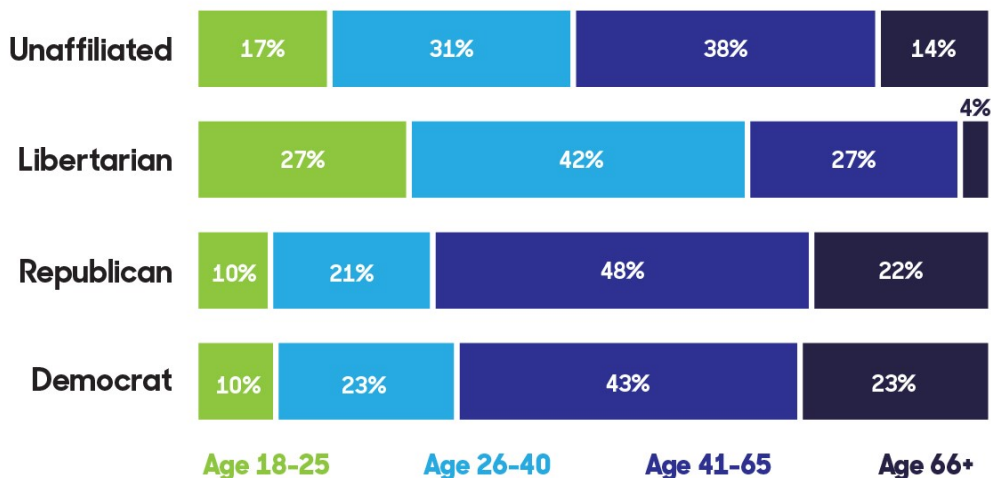
Major Parties Losing Middle-Age Voters

Unaffiliated Voters are growing rapidly in all age groups. Graphs depict net change in thousands of voters affiliated with a party, by age group, from May 2008 to May 2017.



Unaffiliated Voters & Libertarians are Much Younger

Percentage of party members by age group as of May 6, 2017.



back to 2,638,200 members as of May 6, 2017, for a net gain over nine years of less than 1%.

Data from the State Board of Elections show the Republican Party hit a record high of 2,099,600 members at the end of 2016, after the surge of support for Donald Trump. But that number has now declined to 2,048,700 after the normal post-election removal from the registration rolls of voters who have moved or otherwise become disqualified.

In the nine years from May 2008 to May 2017, Republican membership increased by 7% while the number of unaffiliated voters grew by 63%.

The major growth for Republicans is among senior citizens. Because of moves, aging, and registration changes, the GOP has 90,600 fewer members in the 26-40 age group, but gained 147,500 in the 66 and up group. Meanwhile, the Democratic Party has suffered net losses in the 26-40 and 41-65 age groups, and it picked up only 53,300 new members among the 66 and older group.

Since May 2008, the number of unaffiliated voters has grown by more than 150,000 voters in each of the four age groups – something no partisan or racial group has done, despite the state's population increase.

Libertarians, who did not qualify as a party in 2008, now have 32,500 members or less than one half a percent of the state's 6,742,200 voters.

The 973,800 net new voters added since May 2008 include 139,700 Republicans (14% of the new voters); 22,800 Democrats (2%); 32,500 Libertarians (3%); and 779,100 unaffiliated voters (80%).

As of May 6, 2017, the state's 6,742,200 registered voters include 2,048,700 Republicans (30.4% of total); 2,638,200 Democrats (39.1%); 32,500 Libertarians (0.48%); and 2,022,800 unaffiliated voters (30.0%).

Voter Registration By Party & Age Group, May 2008 and 2017					
May 6, 2008	Total	Unaffiliated	Democrats	Republicans	Libertarians
Age 18-25	623,565	200,936	247,038	175,520	-
Age 26-40	1,562,576	444,505	606,380	511,538	-
Age 41-65	2,593,985	485,704	1,197,062	911,097	-
Age 66-Up	988,344	112,508	564,987	310,838	-
Total	5,768,470	1,243,653	2,615,467	1,908,993	-
May 6, 2017	Total	Unaffiliated	Democrats	Republicans	Libertarians
Age 18-25	828,389	351,937	271,361	196,316	8,775
Age 26-40	1,656,842	616,739	605,395	420,917	13,791
Age 41-65	2,899,755	774,707	1,143,154	973,145	8,749
Age 66-Up	1,357,260	279,389	618,332	458,339	1,200
Total	6,742,246	2,022,772	2,638,242	2,048,717	32,515
Change '08-'17	Total	Unaffiliated	Democrats	Republicans	Libertarians
Age 18-25	204,824	151,001	24,323	20,796	8,775
Age 26-40	94,266	172,234	(985)	(90,621)	13,791
Age 41-65	305,770	289,003	(53,908)	62,048	8,749
Age 66-Up	368,916	166,881	53,345	147,501	1,200
Total	973,776	779,119	22,775	139,724	32,515