

Democracy North Carolina

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For Release Monday, December 30, 2013

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PROFILE OF NC VOTERS DIFFERS WIDELY BY COUNTY

Mecklenburg County, with over 650,000 registered voters, has seen a net increase of 14,700 Democrats and 26,100 black voters since 2008, but a loss of 13,900 Republicans and 11,800 white voters, after taking into account deaths, moves, and party registration changes.

By contrast, next door in Gaston County with nearly 133,000 voters, Democrats have lost 2,400 members over the past five years while Republicans added about 800 and voters with no party affiliation jumped by 6,100; the number of white voters held steady, but registrations of African Americans increased by more than 2,500.

Voters in Gaston County are now 79% white, 38% Republican and 26% unaffiliated, while in Mecklenburg they are 58% white, 26% Republican and 28% unaffiliated.

The differences in these neighboring counties illustrate the wide variations in the make-up of voters across North Carolina's 100 counties by race, party and growth patterns, according to an analysis of data from the State Board of Elections by the election watchdog group Democracy North Carolina.

In 36 counties, the number of registered voters actually declined from November 2008 to November 2013 – which means new registrations did not offset the number of voters dying or moving away. But even in these counties, some segments of the electorate are growing.

In Guilford County, for example, there are 6,500 fewer voters on the rolls, but 9,300 more who are unaffiliated with any party, 6,500 more African Americans and 2,400 more Latino voters. Meanwhile, the number of Democrats, Republicans and whites registered in the county has fallen by 5% or more since 2008.

The study found that in every county except Hoke, a majority of new voters are choosing not to sign up as Democrats or Republicans – and that's about the only feature the counties seem to have in common. Statewide, unaffiliated voters are now 26% of all voters, up from 8% in 1993.

In North Carolina, unaffiliated voters can participate in either party's primary – but their turnout rate is consistently lower than voters who register with a party, said Democracy NC researchers.

In 44 of the 100 counties, unaffiliated voters already outnumber either the Democrats or Republicans. For example, independent or unaffiliated voters outnumber Republicans in Durham, Wake, Buncombe, Orange, Mecklenburg, Cumberland, Pasquotank, Robeson, Chatham, Dare, Jackson, Halifax and Bladen counties, among others. They outnumber Democrats in Henderson, Currituck, Mitchell, Randolph, Avery, Davie, Carteret, Moore and several other counties.

While the once-dominant Democratic Party is seeing its statewide share of the electorate fall, Republicans have lost share, too, and an even larger share than Democrats in 13 counties since

Nov. 2008, when the two parties hit their peak membership. The 13 counties include the state's seven largest: Mecklenburg, Wake, Guilford, Forsyth, Durham, Cumberland, and Buncombe.

Meanwhile, Democrats are losing ground to independents at a faster rate than Republicans in all of the counties along the coast except Pasquotank, as well as in many fast-growing counties surrounding the big cities (e.g., Union, Cabarrus, Johnston) and in several counties affected heavily by expanding military facilities (Onslow, Wayne, Hoke, Harnett).

The only other feature every county shares is a net gain in Latino voters since 2008 – from 5 added in Northampton and 6 in Hyde to 6,800 added in Wake and 8,400 in Mecklenburg. The total number of self-identified Latino voters has nearly doubled in five years to 116,500. Democracy North Carolina says the real number is likely over 140,000 because the State Board of Elections only began asking voters their ethnicity in 2002.

White voters have declined slightly since 2008 (down 1,300 to 4.6 million voters or 71% of all voters), while African-American voters increased by 99,200 to 1.45 million or 23% of the electorate, according to the [analysis of statewide changes released by Democracy North Carolina earlier this month](#). The remaining 6% are American Indians, Asians, other racial groups, and individuals who choose “two or more races” or who make no designation.

White voters fell in a surprising 63 counties spread across the state, including a net drop in the five years of 12,900 white registrations in Cumberland, 4,600 in Catawba, 1,900 in Nash and 1,300 in Henderson. Those losses were largely offset elsewhere, including a net gain of 18,300 white voters in Wake, 11,700 in Union, 6,600 in Forsyth, 5,300 in Brunswick, 4,800 in Iredell and 4,200 in Buncombe counties.

Warren County had the most significant loss of black voters – a drop of 845 or 11% of its black voters from 2008 to 2013. But African Americans are still 53% of Warren's electorate; it is one of eight counties in eastern NC where blacks are over 50% of the voters. The only counties west of Fayetteville where African Americans are over 30% of the voters are Anson (45%), Scotland (40%), Hoke (39%), Caswell (36%), Guilford (34%), Richmond (33%) and Mecklenburg (33%).

A few other highlights from the data:

- The 53,000 registrations of American Indians is a 9% jump over 2008, much higher than the statewide 3.4% increase for all registrations. About half (25,700) live in Robeson County.
- Women are 53.7% of voters who designate their gender on the registration form. They are more than 54% in 17 of the 22 counties where blacks are over 35% of the voters but in just 1 of the 23 counties where blacks are under 4.5%, which Democracy NC says reflects the higher rate of felony sentences for African-American men and wrong information about re-enfranchisement.
- Forsyth County, with 240,000 voters, is one of a handful of counties that increased registration among all parts of the electorate, with an overall 8% gain since 2008, more than twice the state's growth rate. It added an equal number of blacks and whites (6,600); county voters are now 67% white, 28% black, 44% Democrats, 32% Republicans, 0.3% Libertarian and 24% Unaffiliated.
- Pitt County's registration growth rate of 6.6% was twice the state's rate, with most of gain from unaffiliated voters; it added four times as many black voters as whites (4,476 vs. 1,037).
- Rowan County grew by only 1% with Democrats losing 8% of their members (down 2,735) while unaffiliated voters gained 18% (up 3,536) and Republicans held fairly steady (down 82).