

2020 **VOTER** **TURNOUT** REPORT



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DEMOCRACY NC

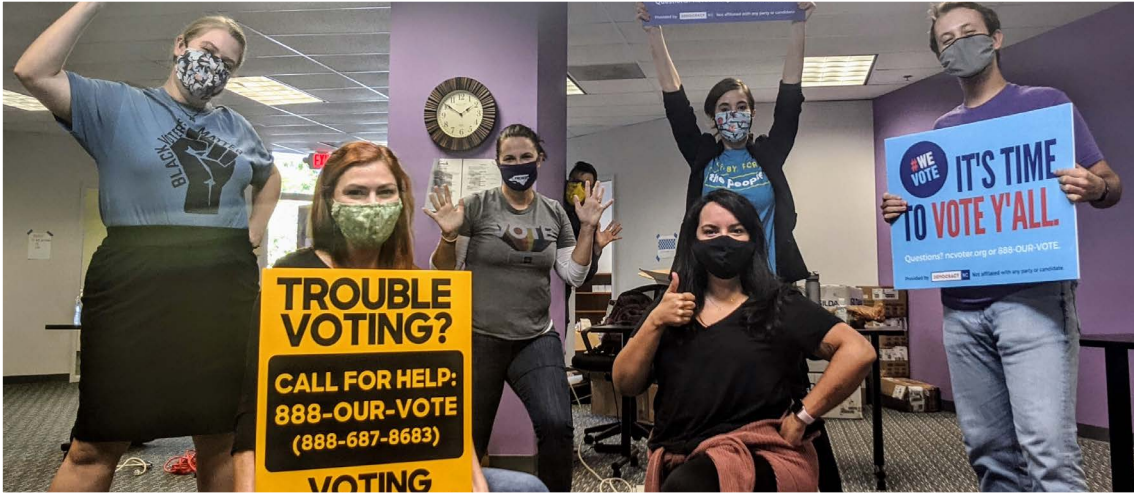


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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report examines who voted in North Carolina during the 2020 General Election, and by what means they chose to cast a ballot.

By analyzing North Carolina State Board of Elections data, we identify new and recurring trends with voter registration and voter turnout across ages, racial / ethnic groups, and geographical regions of our state.

OUR ANALYSIS FOUND

- 1 **Voter turnout from 2016 to 2020 increased in every county in NC, across all age and racial/ethnic groups.**
- 2 **The number of voters who cast a ballot by mail grew exponentially in 2020.** The percentage of voters who cast their ballot by mail ballooned from only 4% in 2016 to 18% in 2020.
- 3 **Young voters were the most likely age group to vote by mail in 2020.** Nearly 4 in 10 voters aged 18-25 cast their ballot by mail in 2020.
- 4 **Voting on Election Day has become the least popular voting method in North Carolina.** Only 16% of voters cast a ballot on Election Day in 2020 — down from 33% in 2016.

- 5 **Sunday was the most popular day of Early Voting.** In 2020, 52% of counties offered Sunday voting hours, compared to just 21% of counties in 2016.
- 6 **Far fewer provisional ballots were cast in 2020 than in 2016.** Provisional ballots are used as a “backup” method, when a regular ballot cannot be used.
- 7 **In-person Early Voting was by far the favored method of voting.** Over 3.5 million North Carolinians cast their ballot in person during Early Voting (66%), compared to just over 1 million voters who voted by mail (18%), and just under 900,000 voters who voted in person on Election Day (16%).
- 8 **Voters are becoming less rural and more urban.** In 2020, over two-thirds of ballots were cast by voters who live in urban or suburban areas.
- 9 **The number of registered Latiné voters skyrocketed from 2016 to 2020 — growing by over 36%.** However, Latiné voters only make up 3% of all registered voters in our state.

For in-depth analysis of the voter experience in 2020, please read the 2020 Election Protection Report. This report includes a thorough account of how Democracy NC and our partners protected the vote in 2020, and recommendations for how our election policies can be improved to ensure all voters can make their voices heard.

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About Democracy North Carolina

Democracy NC works to strengthen democratic structures, build power among historically disenfranchised communities, and inspire confidence in a transformed political process that works for all, through organizing, research, and training.

TERMINOLOGY

Race & Ethnicity

North Carolinians who register to vote may identify their race (African American/Black, American Indian/Alaska Native, Asian American, Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander, White, Multiracial, or Other) and their ethnicity (Hispanic/Latiné or Not Hispanic/Latiné) on their voter registration form. We have used this information to create the following racial and ethnic groups, which we will use throughout this report:

Black: voters who designated themselves as African American/Black

Latiné: voters who designated themselves as Hispanic/Latino

Indigenous: voters who designated themselves as American Indian/Alaska Native

Asian American: voters who designated themselves as Asian American

Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander: voters who designated themselves as Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander

Multiracial: voters who designated themselves as Multiracial

White: voters who designated themselves as White

Other: voters who designated themselves as Other

Unknown: voter did not select a race / ethnicity on voter registration



Voting by Mail

The terms “absentee voting” and “mail voting” are often used interchangeably to describe the method of casting a ballot by mail. While this is correct, this report will only use the term mail voting or voting by mail to avoid confusion.

Land Acknowledgement

Democracy NC acknowledges that the land where our organization is located in Morrisville, North Carolina, occupies ancestral lands of the Lumbee and Skaruhreh/Tuscarora people.

We also acknowledge these traditional territories in relation to our goal to achieve a democracy that is transparent, inclusive, and accessible to all North Carolinians. We understand that our democracy is

founded on colonialism and violence, and continues to exclude generations of Native and Indigenous peoples in North Carolina and across the United States. We know this land acknowledgment is only one step towards reconciliation and will continue to educate ourselves and the larger community on the relationship between democracy and colonialism.

To learn more about Native lands and Indigenous territories, visit native-land.ca.

INTRODUCTION

The COVID-19 pandemic created unprecedented challenges in nearly every area of life throughout 2020 — including the General Election.

Federal and local safety guidelines necessitated significant changes to in-person voting sites, voting procedures, and a need for personal protective equipment (PPE). The pandemic also led to poll worker recruitment on a massive scale. Meanwhile, political figures and media stoked fear about the validity of the election, leading to voter confusion and political unrest.

Despite these challenges, the 2020 General Election resulted in the highest voter turnout¹ in recent U.S. history.² Over 5.5 million North Carolinians cast a ballot during the General Election — nearly 72% of the state’s voting-eligible population.³ When compared to other states, North Carolina ranked 17th in the nation for voter turnout.

The following analysis attempts to identify the key trends in North Carolina’s 2020 General Election: who turned out to vote, and how they voted. Due to the profound negative impact



that colonialism and racism have had on our state, we examine disparities between racial and ethnic groups. We also attempt to tease out the impact that policy changes — both big and small — may have had on turnout and voter registration in our state.

Regardless of how one might interpret the 2020 turnout data, one clear fact remains: in-person voting on Election Day continues to decline in popularity among North Carolinians. In order to make our democracy more equitable and reflective of voters’ wants and needs, policymakers must continue offering voting methods that are flexible and accessible.

¹ Voter turnout refers to the number of voters who cast a ballot out of the total number of registered voters. Voter turnout is not a measure of how many people voted out of the entire voting-age population of the state or the country.

² US Census Bureau. “Voting and Registration in the Election of NOVEMBER 2020.” The United States Census Bureau, Apr. 2021, www.census.gov/data/tables/time-series/demo/voting-and-registration/p20-585.html.

³ “2020 November General Election Turnout Rates.” United States Election Project. <http://www.electproject.org/2020g>



SECTION I

VOTER REGISTRATION

Over 7.3 million North Carolinians were registered to vote in time for the November 2020 Election, compared to 6.9 million at the time of the November 2016 Election. This increase marks the biggest jump in voter registration since the 2012 General Election.⁴

Online voter registration significantly contributed to the increase in registered voters. Beginning in March 2020, North Carolinians had the opportunity to register to vote or update their voter registration online for the first time in state history.⁵ It is important to note that online voter registration is only available to North Carolinians with a DMV ID card or Driver's License.

In 2020, over half a million North Carolinians used the online portal to update their registration or register to vote.⁶

REGISTRATION BY RACE / ETHNICITY

Although online voter registration paved the way for more North Carolinians to register to vote, it also posed new challenges. The online portal does not require voters to provide their race, ethnicity, or gender.

As a result, the race/ethnicity of many new registrants is listed as 'Unknown' in the voter file.

The number of registered voters whose race was categorized as 'Unknown' ballooned from 3% in 2016 to 10% of all registered voters in 2020. As of December 2021, this issue remains unsolved.

With that said, we can draw some conclusions from the 2020 voter registration data:

- 1 The number of registered Latiné voters skyrocketed from 2016 to 2020 – growing by over 36%.** There were 227,869 registered Latiné voters in 2020, compared to 167,111 in 2016. However, Latiné voters only make up 3% of all registered North Carolinians.
- 2 The number of Asian American voters also dramatically increased from 2016 to 2020 – growing 29%.** In 2020, there were 104,361 registered Asian American voters compared to 81,210 in 2016, making up 1% of all registered North Carolinians in 2020.
- 3 For the first time, election data included a category for Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander voters in 2020.** At the time of the November 2020 election, 376 Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islanders were registered to vote.
- 4 The number of registered voters listed as Black, Indigenous, multiracial, or white decreased slightly from 2016 to 2020.** This may be explained in part or in whole by the fact that race data is missing for so many more voters due to aforementioned issues with the online voter registration portal.

⁴ Hall, Bob. "Analysis: Who Voted in 2016 and Who Didn't." *Democracync.org*, Democracy North Carolina, 26 Jan. 2017, democracync.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/05/WhoVoted2016.pdf.

⁵ "State Board, DMV Partner to Expand Online Voter Registration Service." *NCSBE.gov*, North Carolina State Board of Elections, 30 Mar. 2020, www.ncsbe.gov/news/press-releases/2020/03/30/state-board-dmv-partner-expand-online-voter-registration-service.

⁶ "NVRA Registration Statistics." *NCSBE.gov*, North Carolina State Board of Elections, www.ncsbe.gov/registering/national-voter-registration-act-nvra/nvra-registration-statistics.

REGISTRATION BY AGE

The number of registered voters in all age brackets grew from 2016 to 2020, with two groups showing the biggest gains: younger voters (age 18–25) and older voters (older than 65). Similar to 2016, the largest group of registered voters in 2020 were voters aged 41 to 65.

Age Group	# Registered Voters - 2016	Percentage by Age	# Registered Voters - 2020	Percentage by Age
18-25	868,779	12.5%	980,240	13.3%
26-40	1,731,904	25.0%	1,846,508	25.0%
41-65	2,967,488	42.9%	2,989,040	40.5%
66 & older	1,356,089	19.6%	1,562,798	21.2%
Total	6,924,260	--	7,378,586	--

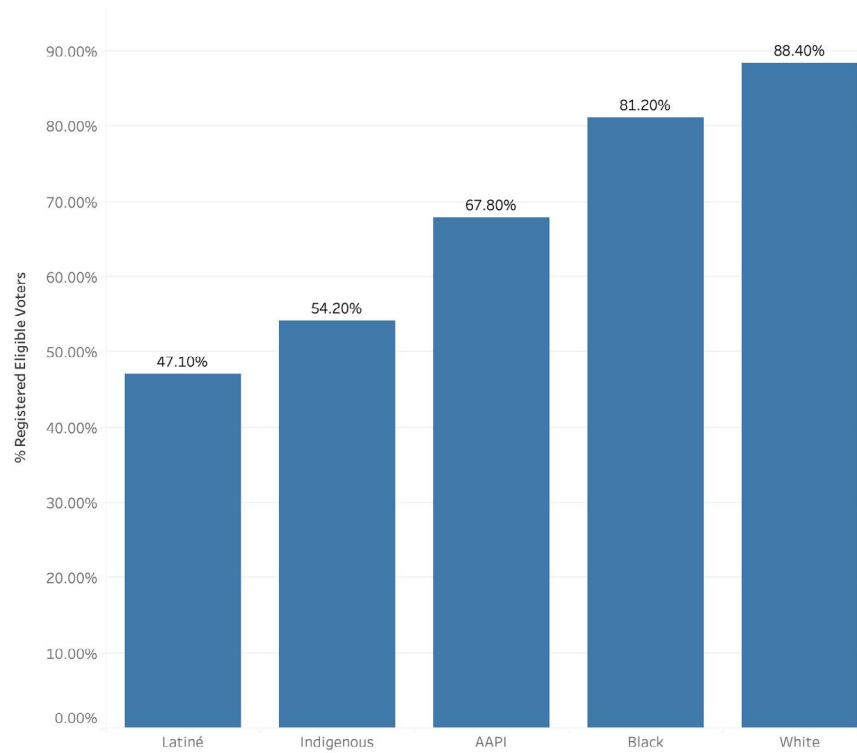
UNREGISTERED ELIGIBLE VOTERS ⁷

In Spring 2021, Blueprint North Carolina released estimates of the number of North Carolinians who are eligible to vote, but remain unregistered. This data showed significant disparities across race and ethnicity groups. Over 88% of all eligible white North Carolinians are registered to vote, while just 47% of eligible Latiné North Carolinians are registered. Blueprint estimates the registration rate to be 66% for eligible Asian Americans, and 37% for Indigenous North Carolinians. Nearly 400,000 eligible Black North Carolinians are not registered to vote.⁸

⁷ Eligible but unregistered voters refers to North Carolina residents who are eligible to vote but are not registered. Analysis conducted by Blueprint NC on eligible but unregistered voters was conducted prior to the release of 2020 United States Census data, and therefore relies on North Carolina Office of State Budget and Management projections and 5-year American community survey data.

⁸ 2021 Unregistered Population Estimates. Blueprint North Carolina, Apr. 2021, docs.google.com/presentation/d/1OichsenxJeBH6yVrh-O4DWwU6g8rAzvG4oXcZ_SRPQM/edit#slide=id.gc05d722c05_0_845.

Percent of Eligible Voters Registered (2021)

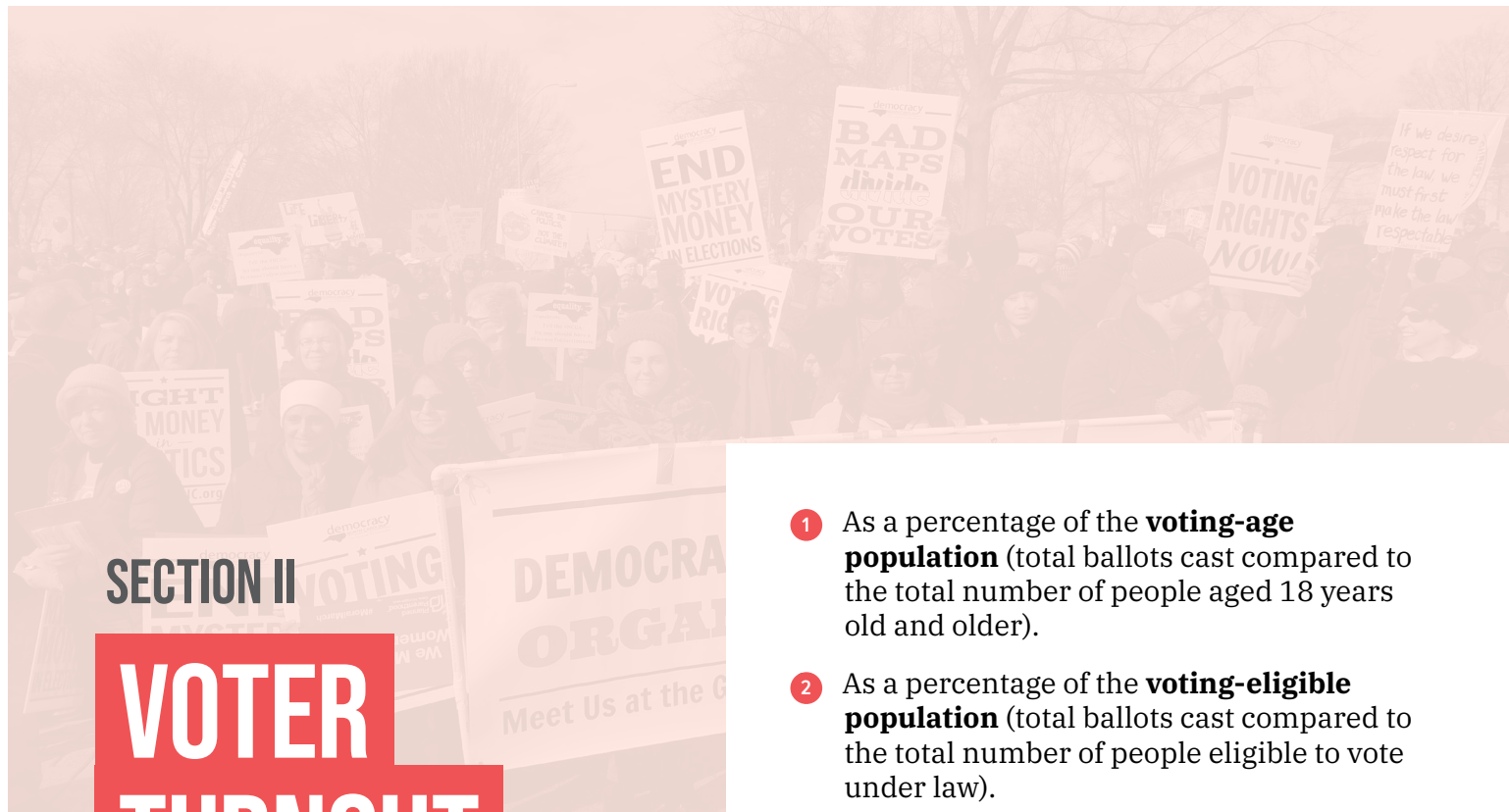


Graph 1

2021 Unregistered Population Estimates

Total Potential Voters	1,452,319
Asian American	50,945
Black	368,690
Indigenous	75,000
White	723,341
Latiné	258,125





- 1 As a percentage of the **voting-age population** (total ballots cast compared to the total number of people aged 18 years old and older).
- 2 As a percentage of the **voting-eligible population** (total ballots cast compared to the total number of people eligible to vote under law).
- 3 As a percentage of **registered voters** (total ballots cast compared to the total number of registered voters).

“Voter turnout” may seem like an obvious metric, but there are at least three common turnout calculations used:

For this report, we use the third option: **voter turnout is defined as the percentage of registered voters who cast a ballot in 2020.** This is the model used by the NC State Board of Elections when reporting on voter turnout.



A record setting 5.5 million North Carolinians cast ballots in the November 2020 General Election — a turnout rate of 75% of registered voters, compared to 69% of registered voters in the November 2016 Election.⁹

Our analyses use publicly available data to examine turnout across the state of North Carolina by county, age, race, and ethnicity. Astonishingly, voter turnout from 2016 to 2020 increased across all age groups, and across race and ethnicity, and across every county in North Carolina.

Voting Demographic	Registered Voters, 2016	Registered Voters, 2020	Percent Increase
Total Voters	6,924,296	7,371,229	6.5%
Asian	81,210	104,361	28.5%
Black	1,536,677	1,518,972	-1.2%
Indigenous	56,661	56,100	-1.0%
Multiracial	47,560	47,112	-0.9%
Other	166,529	199,123	19.6%
Native Hawaiian/ Pacific Islander	Category Not Yet Established in 2016	376	Category Not Yet Established in 2016
Unknown	233,217	743,971	219.0%
White	4,802,439	4,701,214	-2.1%
Hispanic/Latiné	167,111	227,869	36.4%
Non Hispanic/Latiné	5,391,230	5,218,442	-3.2%
Unknown	1,365,955	1,924,918	40.9%
Age 18–25	868,779	978,443	12.6%
Age 26–40	1,731,904	1,844,326	6.5%
Age 41–65	2,967,524	2,986,322	0.6%
Age Over 66	1,356,089	1,562,138	15.2%

⁹ “North Carolina Voter Turnout.” North Carolina State Board of Elections, www.ncsbe.gov/results-data/voter-turnout.

TURNOUT BY COUNTY

North Carolina's population continues to increase after decades of substantial growth, especially in the state's urban regions. Turnout data from the 2020 Election helps illustrate NC's demographic shift from rural to urban, with over two-thirds of votes being cast in urban or suburban areas.

Of the 5.5 million voters who cast their ballots in 2020, about 2 million live in urban counties, 2.1 million in rural areas, and 1.4 million in suburban counties or counties with regional cities.¹⁰

1 Among North Carolina's six urban counties, Wake County had the highest turnout rate (80%). Over 600,000 ballots were counted from Wake County alone, making up more than 1 in 10 ballots counted in the state. In other major urban

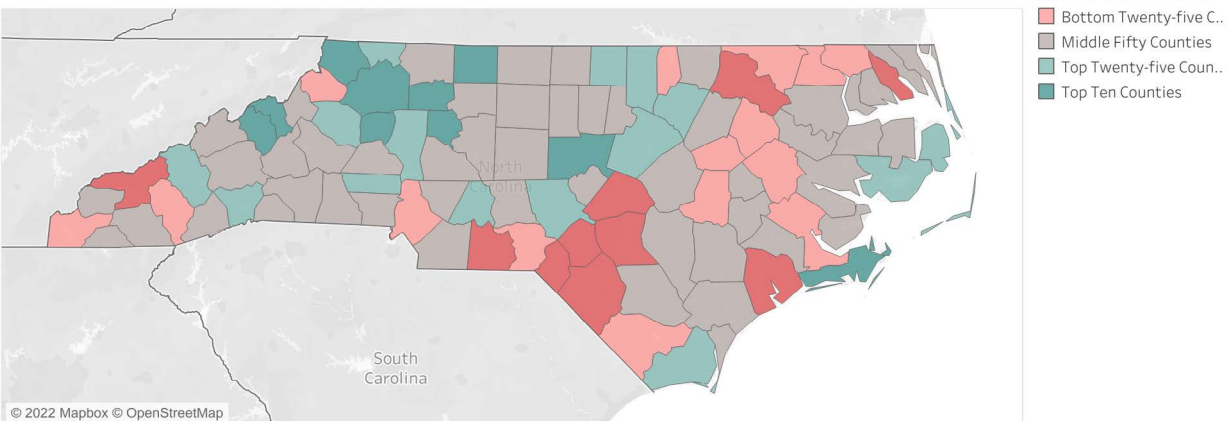
areas, 74% of registered voters in Durham, Forsyth, Guilford, and New Hanover Counties voted, as did 72% of registered voters in Mecklenburg County.

2 In the 14 counties that are suburban or contain regional cities, an average of 76% of registered voters voted in 2020. Lincoln County led the group with 80% turnout, followed by Iredell, Henderson, Buncombe, Union, Cabarrus, Davidson, and Alamance Counties with 78% turnout. Pitt and Cumberland were the only counties in this group that fell below the statewide average.

3 North Carolina's 80 remaining rural counties saw the most variety in voter turnout. Chatham County had the highest county turnout in the state (84%) and 12 rural counties had turnout rates of 80% or above. Robeson and Onslow Counties had the lowest turnout rates in the state — about 62% of registered voters in each county cast ballots in 2020.

¹⁰ These classifications come from the NC Rural Center. Eighty NC counties are classified as rural, with an average population density of 250 people per square mile or less, fourteen NC counties are classified as Regional City and Suburban Counties, with an average population density between 250 and 750 people per square mile, and six NC counties are classified as urban, with an average population density that exceeds 750 people per square mile. More information can be found at <https://www.ncruralcenter.org/about-us/>

2020 Turnout by County



Map 1

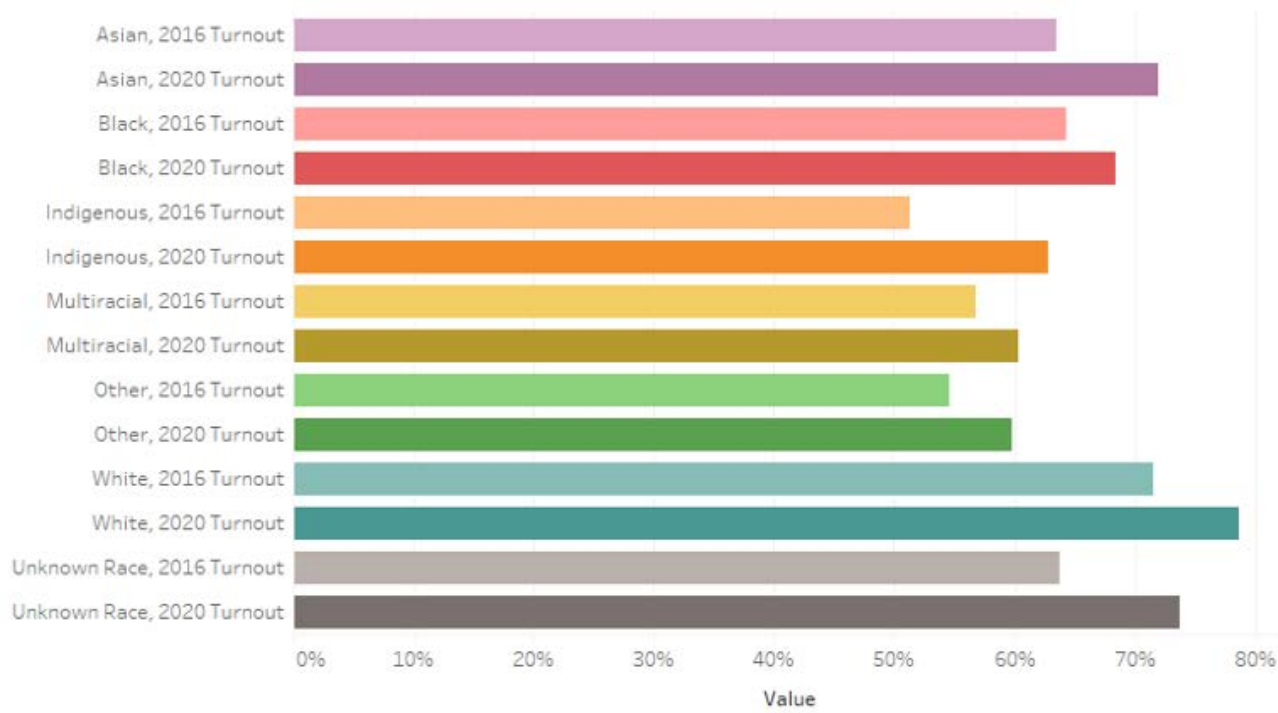
TURNOUT BY RACE / ETHNICITY

Voter turnout increased across every race and ethnicity in 2020. Key findings:

- Asian American voter turnout increased most significantly among all races as compared to 2016, reflecting a nationwide trend.¹¹
- Turnout among Indigenous voters rose by 12 percentage points, from 51% in 2016 to 63% in 2020.
- The Asian American turnout rate rose by 8 percentage points from 2016, reaching 72% in 2020.
- Approximately 79% of white voters showed up to vote in 2020, up from 72% in 2016.
- Turnout among Black voters rose by 4 percentage points, from 64% in 2016 to 68% in 2020.
- Voters who identify as multiracial also turned out in higher numbers in 2020 at a rate of 60%, up 3 percentage points from 57% in 2016.
- 1% more voters who identified as Latiné also voted in 2020 than in 2016. In 2020, 59% of registered Latiné voters participated in the election, compared to 58% in 2016.
- The Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander category was not used in 2016, so we cannot make a direct comparison to previous years.

¹¹ US Census Bureau. "Voting and Registration in the Election of NOVEMBER 2020." The United States Census Bureau, Apr. 2021, www.census.gov/data/tables/time-series/demo/voting-and-registration/p20-585.html.

Turnout Growth By Race, 2016 to 2020



Graph 2

Race	# Votes Cast: 2016	Vote Share	# Votes Cast: 2020	Vote Share
White	3,433,127	72.0%	3,698,464	66.7%
Black	987,339	20.7%	1,038,375	18.7%
Unknown Race	148,808	3.1%	548,968	9.9%
Other Race	90,961	1.9%	119,125	2.1%
Asian American	51,516	1.1%	75,060	1.4%
Indigenous	29,090	.06%	35,221	.06%
Multiracial	27,026	.05%	28,449	.05%
Total	4,767,867	--	5,543,662	--

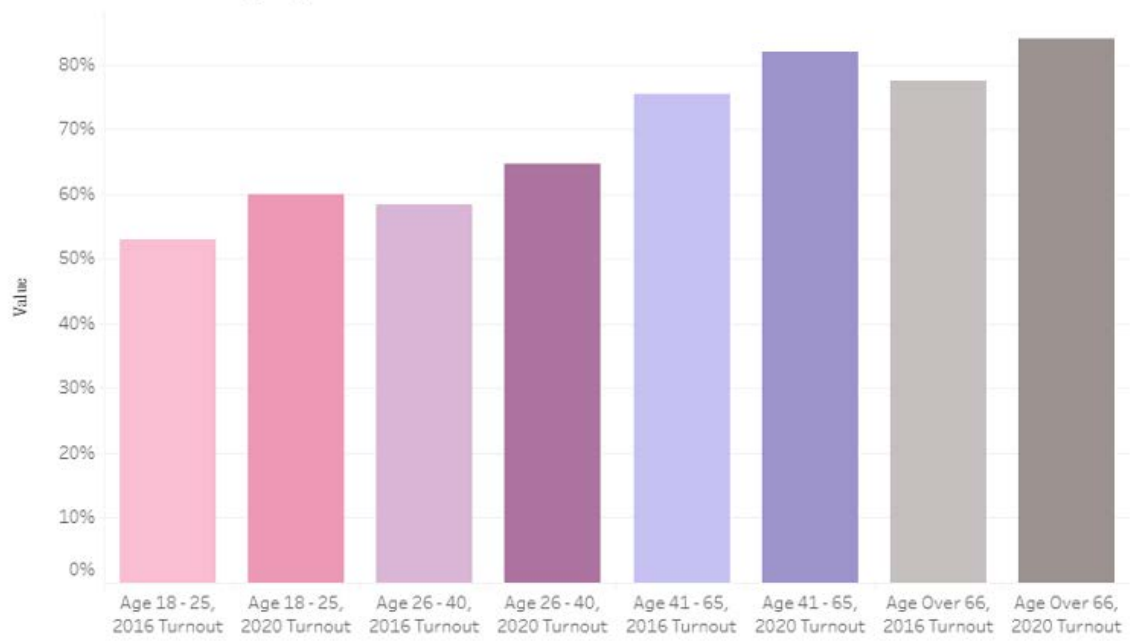
Ethnicity	# Ballots Cast 2016 Election Day	% Overall Turnout	# Ballots Cast 2020 Election Day	% Overall Turnout
Latíné	36,638	0.08%	27,246	0.05%
Not Latíné	1,284,903	26.9%	650,485	11.7%
Unknown Ethnicity	299,195	6.3%	235,064	4.2%
Total	1,620,736	34.0%	912,795	16.5%



TURNOUT BY AGE

Nationally, voter turnout was highest among those ages 65 to 74, and lowest among U.S. residents ages 18 to 24.¹² North Carolina followed this national trend, with voters age 18-25 showing the lowest turnout.

Turnout Growth by Age, 2016 to 2020



Graph 3

Age Group	Votes Cast: 2016	Vote Share	Votes Cast: 2020	Vote Share
18-25	459,718	9.6%	587,340	10.6%
26-40	1,012,711	21.2%	1,194,333	21.5%
41-65	2,242,958	47.0%	2,447,884	44.2%
66 & over	1,052,691	22.1%	1,314,455	23.7%

¹² Ibid.

SECTION III

VOTING METHODS

The following section explores the method by which voters cast a ballot in 2020: by mail, at an Early Voting site, or at an Election Day polling place. In 2020, the way that voters cast their ballots shifted dramatically from previous years:

- 1 **The percentage of voters who voted by mail grew exponentially**, from just 4% percent in 2016 to 18% in 2020.
- 2 **Early Voting continued to surge in popularity**. Nearly two-thirds of North Carolinians chose to cast their ballot during Early Voting.

- 3 **Voters had more Early Voting hours and sites than in previous years**. There was an 80% increase in Early Voting hours from 2016 to 2020.
- 4 **Voters shifted away from voting in person on Election Day**. Just one in six voters chose to cast their ballot on Election Day, compared to one in three in 2016.
- 5 **Nearly one in three voters (36%) who requested a mail ballot did so via a new online portal**.

Year	Mail Voting		Early Voting		Election Day		Total
	Total # Ballots	% Total	Total # Ballots	% Total	Total # Ballots	% Total	Total # Ballots
2020	1,001,717	18	3,629,461	65	896,815	16	5,545,848
2016	191,603	4	2,955,580	62	1,594,183	33	4,768,079

VOTING BY MAIL

More than 1 million voters (18.1%) successfully voted by mail in the 2020 election, making up almost 1 in 5 of all ballots cast, compared to just 1 in 25 in 2016.

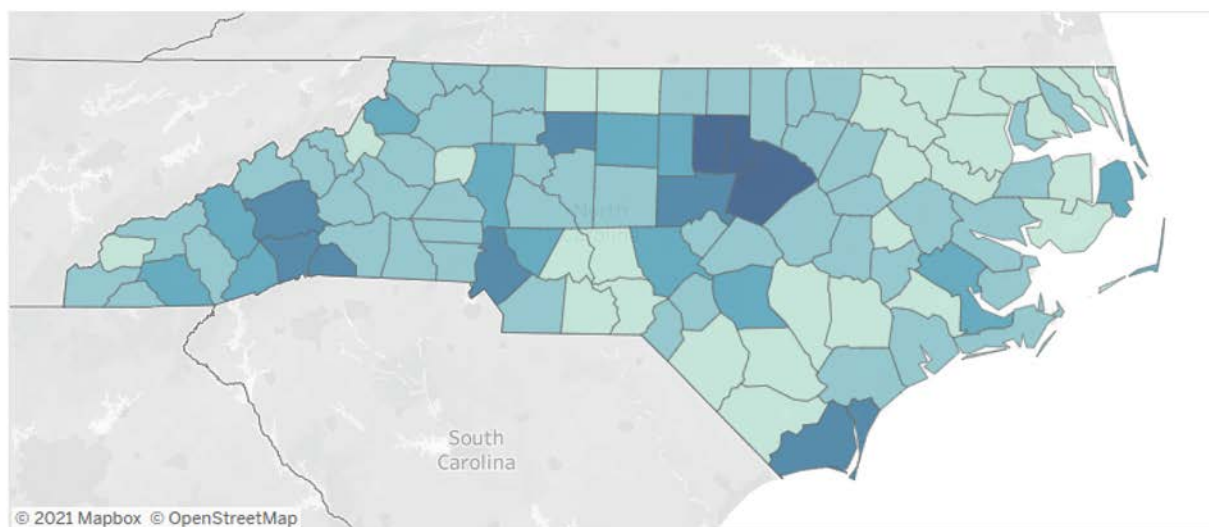
In North Carolina, voting by mail is a two-step process. First, a voter must request an absentee ballot. Once it arrives, the voter must fill out the ballot and return to their county board of elections. The rollout of a new mail ballot application – as well as the addition of an online mail ballot request portal – made the application process more accessible to voters

than in previous years. Nearly one in three requests for mail ballots in 2020 were made via the online portal.¹³

More voters cast their ballots by mail than by any other means in Orange (31%), Wake (28%), Durham (27%), Chatham (25%), and Mecklenburg (24%) Counties, suggesting that voters in or adjacent to metropolitan areas were more likely to vote by mail. As seen in the map below, higher percentages of voters in metropolitan, suburban, and rural western counties voted by mail.

¹³ Gannon, Patrick. Online Voter Engagement Numbers. 29 Sept. 2021.

Percentage of Ballots Cast by Mail, by County



Map 2 Key: Light green: 10% or less. Next shade: 10-15%. Next shade: 15-20%. Dark green: over 20%

According to the North Carolina State Board of Elections, 98% of ballots cast by mail were accepted – compared to just 90% in the 2020 primary. The NCSBE credits this marked increase to: (1) improvements in the process,

(2) the option to request ballots online, and (3) the ability to track ballots through stages of the process. Part of this effort included the creation of an online voting portal for blind and visually impaired voters.¹⁴

¹⁴ “NC Votes Top 1 Million.” NCSBE.gov, North Carolina State Board of Elections, 16 Oct. 2020, www.ncsbe.gov/news/press-releases/2020/10/16/nc-votes-top-1-million.

Mail Ballot Curing

2020 marked the first year that voters in North Carolina could correct mistakes made on their mail ballots – such as forgetting to sign, or signing in the wrong place. The new policy followed a court order in which Democracy North Carolina was a plaintiff.¹⁵

Nearly 20,000 voters received notice of an issue on their mail ballot and were able to either correct their ballot or vote using

different means. At least 9,461 corrected ballots were accepted during the 2020 General Election, but publicly available data remain incomplete. For more information, [see Southern Coalition for Social Justice's report on ballot curing in 2020](https://southerncoalition.org/process-for-curing-mail-in-ballot-errors-in-north-carolina-clarified-following-federal-court-ruling/).

EARLY VOTING

Early Voting refers to the 14-day period in which North Carolinians can register to vote and cast a ballot at an Early Voting site. This period is also sometimes referred to as “one-stop early voting.”

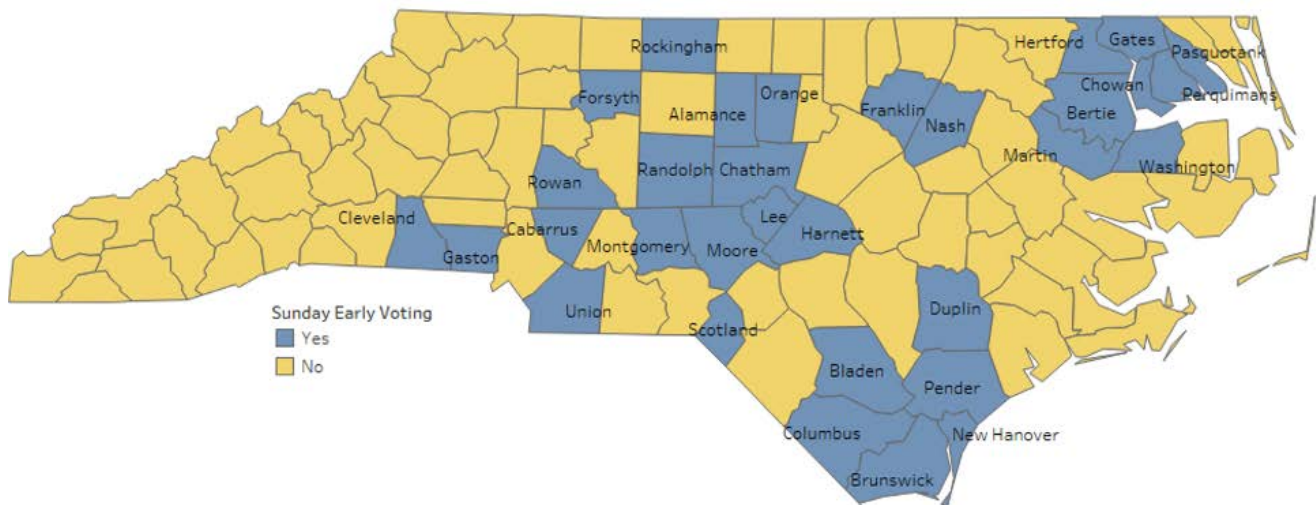
Due to policy changes in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, North Carolina provided an unprecedented number of weekend voting options across the state. This led to a nearly 80% increase in Early Voting hours compared to 2016.

Sunday Early Voting sites had the highest frequency of voters per hour, outpacing both the average weekday and Saturday. This is

especially noteworthy because of the dramatic increase in counties offering Sunday Early Voting – up to 52% in 2020, from 21% in 2016.

During the 2020 General Election, many counties offered Sunday voting after not having done so in 2016, including: Alamance, Bertie, Bladen, Brunswick, Cabarrus, Chatham, Chowan, Cleveland, Columbus, Duplin, Forsyth, Franklin, Gaston, Gates, Harnett, Hertford, Lee, Martin, Montgomery, Moore, Nash, New Hanover, Orange, Pasquotank, Pender, Perquimans, Randolph, Rockingham, Rowan, Scotland, Union, and Washington.

Counties That Offered Sunday Voting in 2020 That Did Not in 2016



¹⁵ “Process For “Curing” Mail-In Ballot Errors in North Carolina Clarified Following Federal Court Ruling.” Southern Coalition for Social Justice, <https://southerncoalition.org/process-for-curing-mail-in-ballot-errors-in-north-carolina-clarified-following-federal-court-ruling/>

ELECTION DAY

On Election Day, voters must cast a ballot within the precinct in which they live. By law, every precinct in North Carolina must have a voting site open on Election Day from 6:30 AM to 7:30 PM.¹⁶ Voters are not able to register to vote or update their voter registration on Election Day.

Since 2008, casting a ballot on Election Day has decreased in popularity. In 2016, one in three North Carolinians cast a ballot on Election Day. In 2020, just 16% of voters cast their ballot on Election Day, continuing this downward trend.

CURBSIDE VOTING

Curbside voting – which is required at every Early Voting site and Election Day polling place – allows voters who are unable to enter the voting booth to cast a ballot from outside the building. This is an essential service for disabled and elderly voters, and was especially important during the COVID-19 pandemic.¹⁷

The percentage of voters who used curbside voting slightly increased in 2020: from 2% in 2016 to 3% in 2020. The low rate of curbside voting usage may be due to the lack of advertising about this service, as well as problems with curbside voting that have been documented in recent years.¹⁸

Year	Curbside: Early Voting		Curbside: Election Day		Total	
	Total # Ballots	Vote Share	Total # Ballots	Vote Share	Total # Ballots	Overall Vote Share
2020	168,889	3.2%	15,121	0.3%	184,010	3.5%
2016	79,894	1.7%	15,564	0.3%	95,458	2%

PROVISIONAL VOTING

Provisional ballots act as a safety net for voters who have an issue with their registration or for whom there is some question about their eligibility to vote. Any voter who is denied a regular ballot must be allowed to vote a provisional ballot. These ballots are then reviewed and researched by county boards of election staff prior to when election results are finalized.

According to the NCSBE, 40,769 provisional ballots were cast in the 2020 General Election – far fewer than 2016, despite the fact that more voters cast ballots in 2020.

Research on provisional ballot usage is tricky. A high number of provisional ballots could signal that more voters encountered a problem – or, it may demonstrate that polling officials are offering provisional ballots to voters, instead of turning them away. A low number of provisional ballots may mean that there are fewer voters who have issues – or, it could mean provisional ballots are not being adequately offered, or that poll workers discouraged voters from casting them.

Based on the elections environment and data in 2020, we hypothesize that the combined impacts of online voter registration, expanded

¹⁶ North Carolina General Statutes 163-166.01, https://www.ncleg.gov/EnactedLegislation/Statutes/PDF/BySection/Chapter_163/GS_163-166.01.pdf.

¹⁷ Brinson Bell, Karen. “Numbered Memo 2020-20: Curbside Voting.” Legal Requirements for Curbside Voting, 1 Sept. 2020, https://s3.amazonaws.com/dl.ncsbe.gov/sboe/numbermemo/2020/Numbered%20Memo%202020-20_Curbside%20Voting.pdf.

¹⁸ For more information about the problems with curbside voting, see the 2020 Election Protection report.

Early Voting options, expanded voting by mail, and the decline in Election Day voting resulted in fewer voters needing to utilize the provisional ballot safety net.

- 1 **Online Voter Registration:** Earlier this year, North Carolina rolled out an online voter registration system that enabled North Carolinians with a DMV ID to update their registration online. With an additional method of registering – one that is comparatively more accessible than printing and mailing in a registration form – more people can keep their registration up to date, and thus more people can use a regular ballot.
- 2 **Same Day Registration at Early Voting sites.** Voters have the ability to register or update their registration during Early Voting, thus negating the need for provisional ballots. North Carolina voters had an unprecedented number of Early Voting hours to utilize in 2020 – with many counties offering Sunday voting for the first time in recent history. With these

increases, more people were able to use Same-Day Registration and cast a regular ballot instead of a provisional ballot on Election Day.

- 3 **Voting by Mail Increase and Election Day Voting Decrease.** Due to the fact that many voters shifted away from in person voting on Election Day and towards other methods, particularly voting by mail, many voters who may have had an issue voting on Election Day that would have led them to need a provisional ballot were able to utilize other methods of voting.

A breakdown of provisional ballot usage by reason can be found in the chart below. The vast majority of voters (60%) received a provisional ballot because they were not found in the system as being a registered voter. A smaller percentage of voters cast a provisional ballot due to being previously registered but removed, moving and failing to update their voter registration, OR being at the wrong precinct.

Reason for Provisional Ballot	# of provisional ballots issued	% of all provisional ballots cast
NO RECORD OF REGISTRATION	24,652	60.5
PREVIOUSLY REMOVED	5,287	13.0
INCORRECT PRECINCT	3,886	9.5
UNREPORTED MOVE	3,843	9.4
UNRECOGNIZED ADDRESS (GEOCODE ISSUE)	1,008	2.5
VOTER ALREADY VOTED	914	2.2
ID NOT PROVIDED	743	1.8
JURISDICTION DISPUTE	416	1.0
INCORRECT PARTY	15	0.04
VOTED DURING EXTENDED HOURS	5	0.01
TOTAL PROVISIONAL BALLOTS	16025	100

After researching each provisional ballot, county board of election staff present the board of elections with recommendations on which ballots to count fully, partially, or not at all. Partially-counted ballots often belong to people who vote out of precinct on Election Day. In these cases, a voter's selections for federal, state, and county wide races may count, but not their votes for precinct level races.

In 2020, 33% of provisional ballots were fully counted, 7% were partially counted, and 60% did not count. The majority of the

ballots that did not count at all were due to underlying registration issues. Wake, Mecklenburg, Cumberland, Forsyth, and Robeson Counties saw the highest number of provisional ballots cast in the state.

Latiné voters who cast provisional ballots were more likely to have them rejected than white voters. Of the 2,089 provisional ballots cast by Latiné voters, 68% did not count, while 57% of the provisional ballots cast by white voters did not count. Below, the groups who saw provisional ballot rejection rates higher than the statewide average are highlighted in blue.

2020 Provisional Data	Total Number of Provisionals Cast	Number Approved or Partially Counted	Number Not Counted	Percent Accepted or Partially Counted	Percent Not Counted
Asian American	475	141	334	30%	70%
Black	7601	3325	4276	44%	56%
Native American	879	521	358	59%	41%
Multiracial	490	155	335	32%	68%
Other	1399	484	915	35%	65%
Pacific Islander/ Native Hawaiian	29	6	23	21%	79%
Race Undesignated	14324	5142	9182	36%	64%
White	15572	6627	8945	43%	57%
Hispanic/ Latiné	2089	668	1421	32%	68%
Not Hispanic/ Latiné	18126	7809	10317	43%	57%
Ethnicity Undesignated	20554	7924	12630	39%	61%
Total	40769	16401	24368	40%	60%

VOTING METHOD BREAKDOWN BY RACE / ETHNICITY

Voting method trends by race and ethnicity roughly followed the statewide trends – with some exceptions:


- ☑ **Asian American voters** disproportionately favored voting by mail, while fewer Black voters cast their ballot by mail than average.
- ☑ **Indigenous voters** were more likely to cast a ballot on Election Day than any other racial / ethnic group.
- ☑ **Black voters** cast curbside ballots at significantly higher rates than other racial / ethnic groups.


Voting Method	State Average	Asian	Black	Indigenous	Multiracial	Other	Pacific/Hawaii	White
Early Voting	65%	54%	66%	60%	61%	59%	81%	62%
Vote by Mail	18%	35%	15%	16%	21%	22%	7%	19%
Election Day	16%	10%	12%	20%	15%	17%	12%	16%
Curbside	.01%	1%	6%	3%	2%	1%	0%	3%
Provisional	.01%	0%	1%	1%	1%	1%	.01%	0%




VOTING METHOD BREAKDOWN BY AGE


The following section breaks down how people of different age groups chose to cast a ballot in 2020. Our key findings:


 **Young voters were the most likely age group to vote by mail.** Nearly 4 in 10 voters aged 18-25 cast their ballot by mail in 2020.

 **Interestingly, Early Voting was the least popular option for 18-24 year olds,** with only 15% casting their ballot at an Early Voting site (compared to 44% on Election Day).

 **All age groups preferred either voting by mail or Early Voting** as opposed to voting on election day.



 **Early voting options proved particularly appealing to voters aged 41 and over,** with nearly 60% of people in this age group choosing to vote early.

 **Casting a ballot on Election Day was the most popular among young voters,** and the least popular option among older voters.

	Mail Voting	Early Voting		Election Day		
Age Group	Vote by Mail	Curbside	In Person	In Person	Curbside	Provisional
State Average	18%	.01%	65%	16%	.01%	.01%
18-25	38.8%	1.4%	14.5%	44.0%	0.2%	1.1%
26-40	15.8%	0.8%	62.3%	20.6%	0.09%	0.5%
41-65	14.5%	2.1%	67.0%	16.0%	0.2%	0.3%
66 & Over	27.6%	8.0%	54.2%	9.5%	0.6%	0.08%

	Early Voting / Mail Voting				Election Day Voting			
Age Group ¹⁹	Vote by Mail	Early Curbside	Early In Person	Total Vote Share	In Person	Curbside	Provisional	Total Vote Share
18-25	98,297	3,535	36,744	2.5%	111,496	408	2,818	2.1%
26-40	187,878	9,138	741,337	16.9%	244,787	1,186	5,858	4.5%
41-65	353,448	51,184	1,638,037	36.8%	391,142	5,042	6,259	7.3%
66 & Over	362,093	105,032	712,450	21.3%	125,088	8,485	1,090	2.4%
Subtotal	1,001,716	168,889	3,128,568	—	872,513	15,121	16,025	—
Total	4,299,173			77.5%	903,659			16.3%

¹⁹ Please note that totals from this chart will not amount to the total voter turnout for 2020 because of administrative barriers: nearly 600 voters had incomplete age information.

CONCLUSION

Efforts by advocacy groups, state and local boards of elections, and the North Carolina General Assembly to make voting safer during the COVID-19 pandemic contributed to North Carolina's highest turnout rate in recent history:

- ★ **Over half a million people took advantage of North Carolina's new online voter registration system.**
- ★ **Significant increases in Early Voting sites and hours gave voters more options** for casting a ballot in person.
- ★ **More Early Voting sites and hours** may have contributed to lower rates of provisional ballot usage.
- ★ **Nearly 8,000 mail ballots that would have otherwise been discarded were counted** due to an improved, secure process for correcting errors on ballots.
- ★ **Perhaps most significantly, thousands of voters were able to vote safely during a pandemic** because of improvements to voting laws and additional financial support for county board of elections.

The success of the 2020 election was due in part to decades of advocacy. Same day registration, extended Early Voting sites and hours, online voter registration, and a better mail voting process all paved the way for voters to register and cast a ballot in record numbers.

If democracies are of, by, and for the people, then every democracy should strive for 100% voter turnout in an effort to make all voices heard. The 2020 General Election will go down as having one of the highest turnout rates ever, and therefore will no doubt be referred to as one of the most successful elections in history.

Progressive voting policies like the ones that contributed to the success of the 2020 Election remain under threat. Democracy NC will continue fighting to ensure that every North Carolinian has access to the ballot. Join us at democracync.org.

METHODOLOGY & AUTHOR'S NOTES

All analysis in this report uses data released by the North Carolina State Board of Elections (NCSBE), unless otherwise noted.

The NCSBE sometimes releases data as 2-3 page statistics reports prior to uploading complete datasets with more granular detail. Occasionally, data released in preliminary reports will differ slightly from the complete datasets. This is due to administrative delays such as adding same day registrants to the

complete voter history file. Statistics reports also group categories together which are treated distinctly in the data sets. For example, NCSBE statistics reports generally combine voting by mail and voting early in-person into the category of One Stop Early voting.

This report used only the complete datasets to ensure accuracy. In some cases, numbers are obtained from NCSBE staff, and therefore are subject to be slightly different if and when they are publicly available.

