

# Democracy North Carolina

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## **MOST CITIZENS NOT VOTING IN NORTH CAROLINA**

### **Young Adults More Likely to Be Binge Drinkers Than Voters**

A new “Civic Participation Index for North Carolina” shows that only two out of five adults bother to vote in the typical state election. (Participation is higher for presidential elections but lower in other years; overall, the turnout rate is 40.8% for even-year elections, 1984 to 2006.)

The Index says that young North Carolinians age 18 to 25 are half as likely to vote as their grandparents – and more likely to engage in binge drinking than participate in elections.

And it says more men own guns than cast ballots.

The Index also shows that nearly one million adult citizens are not even registered to vote in North Carolina, and almost 400,000 of them are between 18 and 25.

The Index is based on an analysis of state and federal data by the nonpartisan Democracy North Carolina. Most of the figures detail the state’s poor record of voter participation. For example, less than a third of adults voted in 2006, ranking North Carolina 47<sup>th</sup> out of 50 states.

The Index highlights one positive achievement for North Carolina: The use of “early voting” sites has become so popular that a record 55 percent of voting-age adults participated in the 2004 presidential election, the highest turnout rate in a century.

The 55 percent turnout ranked North Carolina 35<sup>th</sup> nationally, still in the bottom third of states, but a solid improvement from a 45<sup>th</sup> ranking in the 1984 presidential election.

The top 5 states in 2004 had turnout rates of 67 to 73 percent of their voting-age adults.

Bob Hall, Democracy NC’s research director, pointed out that North Carolina boasted turnout rates of over 70 percent of eligible adults during the hotly contested elections of the post-Civil War, Reconstruction era, but those rates plummeted with the disenfranchisement of many black and poor white voters through the poll tax, literacy tests, and other Jim Crow practices.

In recent years, none of the states with high turnout rates have been in the South. “The statistics show that North Carolina is still suffering from the legacy of a Jim Crow mentality that pushes, or even forces, people away from participating in their own government,” said Hall.

“Civic education programs and practical reforms like early voting can reverse that pattern and gradually make an important difference,” he added.

Hall said one of the biggest problems depressing turnout is North Carolina's requirement that people register 25 days before an election. "Young people and busy blue-collar workers don't pay attention to the election until the final week or so, and by then it's too late," he said.

The Index points out that men have cast only 44 percent of the votes in the past two presidential elections, and 2.3 adults over age 65 vote for every 1 adult under age 25 who does.

The lack of participation by nearly one million unregistered adults, particularly youth and male wage earners, retards "the development of democracy of, by and for the people," Hall said.

Overall, the state's average turnout in presidential elections from 1984 through 2004 was 48 percent, ranking North Carolina 43<sup>rd</sup> nationally, ahead of South Carolina and Georgia, but behind Virginia, Tennessee and Alabama.

The top three states with the best performance (Minnesota, Maine and Wisconsin) boasted an average turnout of 64 to 68 percent over that 20-year period.

All three of those states allow citizens to register and vote on Election Day. In fact, seven of the 14 states the highest turnout rates have used Election Day registration for many years (MN, ME, WI, NH, ID, WY) or require no registration at all (ND).

A broad coalition in North Carolina is backing a bill, which passed the state House last week, to allow citizens to register and vote during the early voting period, but not on Election Day itself. The early voting period extends from 19 days to three day before the Election Day.

The proposal requires new registrants to show identification, complete a registration application, swear under penalty of a felony that the address given is current and that they are a U.S. citizen, and then vote with a retrievable ballot. Verification of the information must begin within two business days. The process includes computerized checks for matches in databases of the State Board of Elections, Division of Motor Vehicles, and Social Security Administration, along with a non-forwarding mailing to the address.

In a letter to Rep. Deborah Ross, the lead sponsor of H-91, State Board of Elections executive director Gary Bartlett wrote, "Following the procedures described in this legislation, I believe we can preserve the security and integrity of the election process and provide additional access for citizens who miss the registration deadline."

Opponents say the measure will promote fraud in elections without more safeguards. During the House floor debate, one opposition leader said five of the seven states with Election Day registration require voters to first show a driver's license or government-issued photo ID. But Hall said that claim is not true. "I'm appalled that a legislator who says he's concerned about fraud would make such a false statement. In fact, none of those seven states – not one – requires a government-issued photo ID as the only proof of identity in order to register and vote on the same day, and they suffer no more fraud than our state does now."

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# Civic Participation Index for North Carolina

Voting-age population in November 2006: **6,701,500**

% voting-age population who voted in 2006 Congressional elections: **29%**

Rank among 50 states for 2006 turnout, with #1 being best: **47<sup>th</sup>**

% 2004 voting-age population who voted in 2004 presidential election: **54.6%**

Number of voters who used One-Stop Early-Voting Sites in 2004: **984,300**

% of voters in 2004 who voted at One-Stop Early-Voting Sites: **28%**

Rank among 50 states for 2004 turnout: **35<sup>th</sup>**

% of 2000 voting-age population who voted in 2000 presidential election: **47.5%**

Rank among 50 states for 2000 turnout: **39<sup>th</sup>**

Average % of voter turnout for 6 presidential elections, 1984 to 2004: **47.8%**

Rank among 50 states for 1984-2004 turnout: **43<sup>rd</sup>**

Average % of voting turnout in 12 even-year elections from 1984 through 2006: **40.8%**

Previous "high" turnouts, based on eligible population: **1968 – 54.1%; 1960 – 54.1%**

Rapid decline in turnout with Jim Crow: **1886 – 85.3%; 1900 – 70.2%; 1904 – 46.1%**

Number of voting-age citizens, March 1, 2007: **6,400,000**

Number of registered voters, March 1, 2007: **5,485,000**

Number of voting-age citizens who are not registered: **915,000**

Number of citizens age 18 to 25 who are not registered: **370,000**

Ratio of registered voters, whites to people of color: **3.3 to 1**

Ratio of unregistered potential voters, whites to people of color: **2.4 to 1**

% of voting-age adults who are -- Age 18-25: **16%**    Over 65: **15%**    Men: **49%**

% of registered voters who are -- Age 18-25: **11%**    Over 65: **17%**    Men: **45%**

% of voters in 2000-04 who are -- Age 18-25: **9%**    Over 65: **19%**    Men: **44%**

% of 18-to-25 year olds who voted in a major election, average of 2000 and 2004: **29%**

% of 18-to-25 year olds who were "binge drinkers" within 30 days of 2004 election: **37%**

% of adults over 65 who voted in a major election, average of 2000 and 2004: **67%**

Ratio of turnout rate for adults over 65 to rate for 18-to-25 year olds: **2.3 to 1**

% of voting-age men who voted in a major election, average of 2000 and 2004: **48%**

% of voting-age men who own a firearm: **49%**

Sources: Turnout of voting-age population (not of registered voters) is based on votes for the top federal office; data are from the US Elections Project ([electproject.org](http://electproject.org)). Voting by groups (ballots cast by age, sex, One-Stop Sites, etc.) and voter registration data are from State Board of Elections. Population data are from NC State Data Center, adjusted to relevant month. Data on "binge drinkers" (5 or more drinks on one occasion in past 30 days) are from Substance Abuse & Mental Health Services Admin., US Department of Health & Human Services. Gun ownership is from a 2001 survey by the NC State Center for Health Statistic's Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System and a 2004 survey by Harvard University's Injury Control Research Center.