North Carolina Mail Ballot Trends

October 19, 2020

The accompanying graphs document important trends related to absentee ballots in North Carolina. The data were downloaded from the website of the North Carolina State Board of Elections. Request data are based on aggregate weekly reports supplied by the state. Return data are based on daily reports of returned mail ballots, aggregated to correspond with the weekly request reports. Ballots outstanding are calculated by subtracting returned from requested ballots for the relevant time periods.

Note that these statistics pertain to individual ballot requests and returns. A small number of voters may have more than one request or return, because of problems encountered with the ballots. (For instance, if a voter “spoils” a ballot—that is, makes a mistake and asks for a new ballot—both the spoiled and replacement ballot will appear in the dataset.) We have not removed duplicates such as these. Therefore, there are slightly more requests reflected in this document than there are individuals who requested mail ballots.

Each week runs from Sunday to Saturday. The data on the x-axis is the Sunday that begins the week.

Authors: John A. Curiel and Emily Kohn

Of Note this Week

- As of last week, nearly 1.37 million mail ballots have been requested. In all of 2016, a total of 106,000 were requested.
- Over 44% of requested ballots have yet to be returned, including over half among those that were requested in early August or before.
- The number of mail ballots requested has been in steady decline for six weeks.
- Registered Democrats have continue to dominate cumulative returned mail ballots, though return rates are starting to converge for all party groupings.
- Ballots not accepted continue to steadily decline for Black voters and are starting to converge with that of voters for Whites and other races.
  - Rejection rates by party are effectively identical.

General trends

For the week of October 11:

- 41,004 mail ballots were requested. This brings the total number requested to 1,371,530.
  - 44.01% of all requested ballots have been returned for counting.
- 122,368 mail ballots were returned. This bring the total number returned to 603,660.
- 767,870 mail ballots are still outstanding.

By race

For the week of October 11,

- The breakdown of requests by race for the week was White 23,623, Black 6,894, and other race 10,487. Cumulatively, the breakdown of requests is White 896,690, Black 241,675, and other race 233,165.
  - 57.61% of ballots came from White voters, 16.81% from Black voters, and 25.58% from voters of other races. Cumulatively, 65.68% of requests have come from White voters, 11.57% from Black voters, and 22.74% from voters of other races.
• The breakdown of mail ballots returned by race for the week was White 81,745, Black 19,904, and other race 20,719. Cumulatively, the breakdown of returns is white 423,915, Black 95,788 and other race 83,957.
  – For the week, 66.8% of ballots were returned by White voters, 16.27% from Black voters, and 16.93% from voters of other races. Cumulatively, 30.91% of mail ballots returned have been from White voters, 39.64% from Black voters, and 17.68% from voters of other races.
  – Thus far, 70.22% of ballots requested by White voters have been returned, compared to 15.87% of ballots requested by Black voters and 13.91% of ballots requested by voters of other races.

• The breakdown of mail ballots still outstanding was White 472,775, Black 145,887, and other race 149,208.

By party
For the week of October 11,

• The breakdown of requests by party for the week was Democrat 14,862, Republican 10,780, and other or no party affiliation 15,362. Cumulatively, the breakdown of requests is Democrats 638,341, Republican 265,562, and other or no party affiliation 467,627
  – For the week, 36.25% of requests came from Democrats, 26.29% from Republicans, and 37.46% from voters of other or no party affiliation. Cumulatively, 46.54% of requests have come from Democrats, 19.36% from Republicans, and 34.1% from voters of other or no party affiliation.

• The breakdown of mail ballots returned by party for the week was Democrat 54,109, Republican 26,070, and other or no party affiliation 42,189. Cumulatively, the breakdown of returned ballots is Democrat 299,916, Republican 111,215 and other or no party affiliation 192,529.
  – For the week, 44.22% of ballots were returned by Democrats, 21.3% from Republicans, and 34.48% from voters of other or no party affiliation. Cumulatively, 49.68% of mail ballots returned have been from Democrats, 18.42% from Republicans, and 31.89% from voters of other or no party affiliation.
  – Thus far, 46.98% of ballots requested by Democrats have been returned, compared to 41.88% of ballots requested by Republicans and 41.17% of ballots requested by voters of other or no party affiliation.

• The breakdown of mail ballots still outstanding was Democrat 338,425, Republican 154,347, and other or no party affiliation 275,098.

Ballots not accepted for counting

• For the week, 1.54% of ballots returned for counting were not accepted. Cumulatively, 2.3% of ballots were not accepted.

• For the week, rates of non-acceptance by race were White 1.29%, Black 2.1%, and other race 1.88%. Cumulative rates by race have been White 1.75%, Black 4.27%, and other race 2.42%.

• For the week, rates of non-acceptance were Democrat 1.68%, Republican 1.34%, and other or no party affiliation 1.42%. Cumulative rates by party has been Democrat 2.55%, Republican 2.16%, and other or no party affiliation 1.84%.
Appendix 1: Aggregate Ballot Request and Return Trends

Cumulative number of absentee ballots requested by the end of each week

Percentage of all requested ballots that have been returned as of the end of this week
Appendix 2: Ballot Request and Return Trends by Race

Total number of absentee ballots requested each week, by race

Cumulative number of absentee ballots requested by the end of each week, by race

Percentage distribution of ballots requested each week, by race

Notes: Dashed lines reflect proportion of registered voters
Data source: North Carolina Board of Elections
Graph source: MIT Elections Data and Science Lab
Graph date: 10/19/2020
Appendix 3: Ballot request and return trends by party

Total number of absentee ballots requested each week, by party

Cumulative number of absentee ballots requested by the end of each week, by party

Percentage distribution of ballots requested each week, by party

Data source: North Carolina Board of Elections
Graph Source: MIT Election Data and Science Lab
Graph date: 11/19/2020

Note: Dashed lines reflect proportion of registered voters
Data source: North Carolina Board of Elections
Graph Source: MIT Election Data and Science Lab
Graph date: 11/19/2020
Appendix 4: Trends in ballot non-acceptance

Cumulative percentage of returned ballots that have not been accepted for counting

Weekly percentage of ballots not accepted for counting, by race