

# Florida Election Analysis

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## Introduction

Florida's 2020 presidential preference primary was held on March 17, just as COVID-19 was becoming a national concern and states began recommending social distancing measures. On that date, Florida had reported only 216 cases of COVID-19. (By early June, the total number of cases was over 58,000). The pandemic had not affected the voting calendar up to that point, although the presidential primary in Ohio, which was also scheduled for March 17, ended up being postponed to late April.

This report addresses three key questions:

- How did Florida voters respond to the onset of COVID-19 (turnout and vote mode) in their presidential preference primary?
- How did Florida voting behavior differ by race, age, and first-time voter status?
- Finally, as the coronavirus crisis increases the need for vote-by-mail (VBM), can we determine whether certain groups have disproportionately seen their VBM ballots unaccepted for counting?

## Summary of Findings

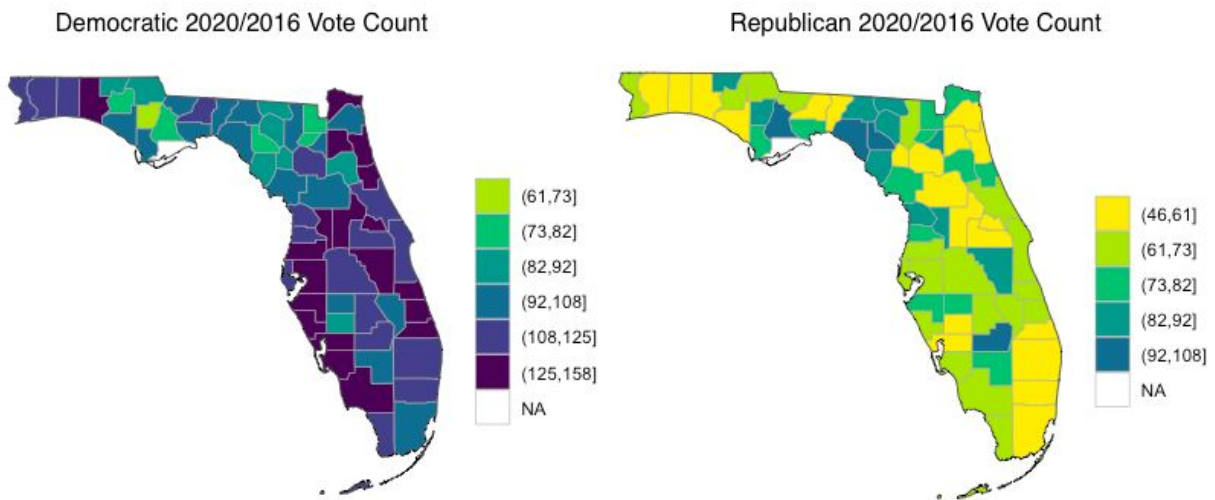
- Overall turnout was lower in the 2020 presidential primary as compared with the 2016 primary. By party, however, more Democrats turned out to vote this year, reflecting the high level of competition among Democratic candidates in the Florida primary, while Republican turnout dropped from 2016 as President Trump was essentially unopposed.
- Vote-by-mail became the most common mode of voting in 2020's presidential primary, replacing Election Day voting as the most common mode in the 2016 primary. Also in 2020:
  - Republicans were more likely to vote by mail (55%) than Democrats (40%).
  - White and Hispanic voters were more likely to vote by mail (49% and 48%, respectively) than Black voters (28%).
  - Voters aged 60+ were most likely to vote by mail (53%) — and the majority of VBM ballots were cast by voters aged 60+ (70%).
- Overall, 1.3% of voters who attempted VBM in the 2020 Florida primary failed to have their ballots counted.
  - However, certain groups were much more likely to have their VBM ballots not counted:

- 18-29 Age Group (3.56% uncounted VBM)
- 30-44 Age Group (2.38% uncounted VBM)
- First-time Voters (2.54% uncounted VBM)
- Black Voters (2.32% uncounted VBM)
- Hispanic Voters (2.19% uncounted VBM)
- Other Minority (2.06% uncounted VBM)

## I. Analysis of 2020 Primary

### A. Turnout

Overall, over 2.9 million voters turned out for the 2020 presidential preference primary, compared to over 3.4 million in 2016.<sup>1</sup> However, more Democrats voted in 2020 (1.7 million) compared to 2016 (1.5 million), while Republican turnout fell from 2.0 to 1.2 million. This reflects the high level of competition for the Democratic nomination at the time of the Florida primary, compared to the Republican primary, where President Trump was essentially unopposed.



Note: The data in the map reflect the percentage change in the total number of votes cast in the Democratic and Republican primaries, comparing 2020 to 2016.

<sup>1</sup> Unless otherwise indicated, the analysis in this paper is based on the May 2020 release of the Florida voter file. It appears that Franklin County, which had 2,282 votes cast in the primary, still has not been updated to reflect turnout in the primary.

## B. Vote Mode

Florida voters had three main modes of participating in their presidential primary: early voting, voting by mail (VBM), and Election Day voting.

In 2016, voters were most likely to vote at the polls on Election Day (50%), but in 2020, VBM became the most common mode of participation (46%). This pattern held true for both parties, although Republicans were more likely to vote by mail in 2020 than Democrats (55% vs. 40%). This pattern is interesting in light of the fact that in 2016, Republicans and Democrats used the three voting modes in virtually identical proportions.

### By Party: 2016 vs. 2020 Vote Mode

	2016 % of Votes Cast				2020 % of Votes Cast			
	VBM	Early	Election Day	Vote Count	VBM	Early	Election Day	Vote Count
<b>DEM</b>	29%	22%	49%	1,454,443	40%	25%	35%	1,725,225
<b>REP</b>	29%	21%	50%	1,986,611	55%	17%	28%	1,229,999
<b>Total</b>	<b>29%</b>	<b>21%</b>	<b>50%</b>	<b>3,441,054</b>	<b>46%</b>	<b>22%</b>	<b>32%</b>	<b>2,955,224</b>

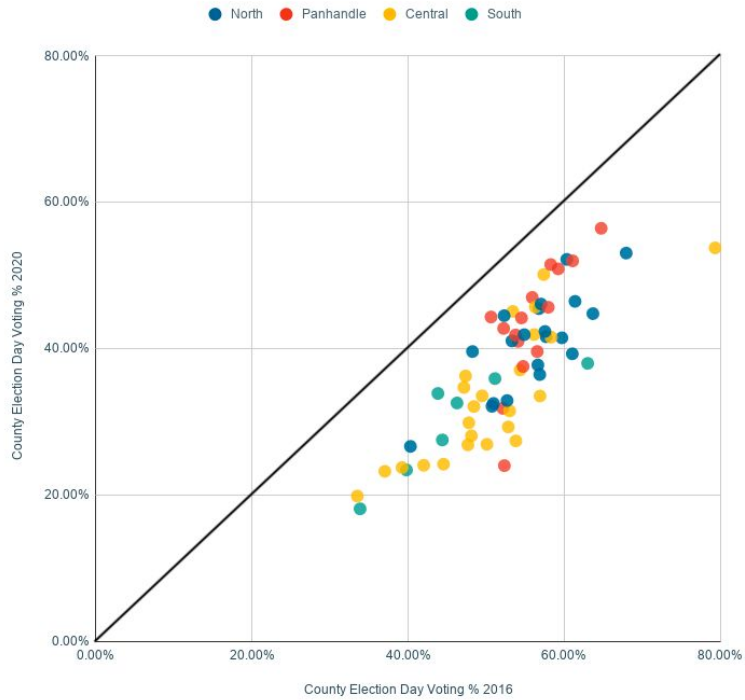
### By County: 2016 vs. 2020 Vote Mode

In the 2016 and 2020 Florida presidential primaries, Election Day voting tended to be heaviest in the Panhandle counties, while mail voting was more prevalent in Central and South Florida. Across all counties, there was a drop in Election Day voting and an increase in mail voting from 2016 to 2020. Central and South Florida counties also saw larger percentage point increases in mail voting from 2016 to 2020 — and larger drop-offs in Election Day voting. Early voting, however, was spread across the state and did not change significantly from 2016 to 2020.

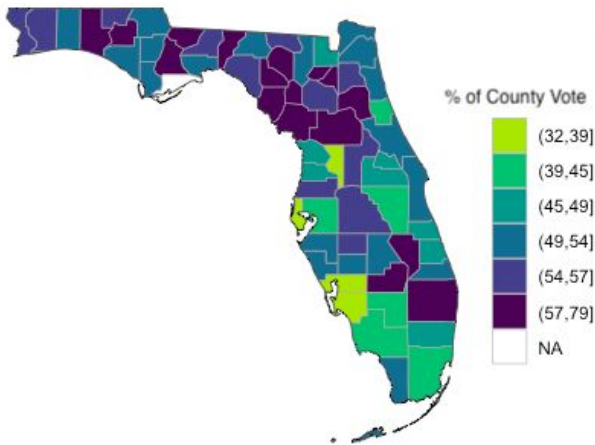
In terms of overall 2020 turnout by county as compared with 2016, changes in mail and Election Day voting were not strong predictors: Turnout in the Florida Panhandle, for example, was variable between counties, though nearly all those counties saw relatively small shifts from Election Day voting to mail voting.

# Election Day Voting

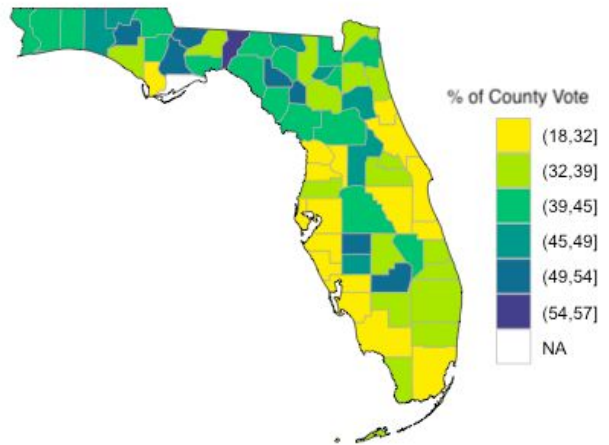
Election Day Voting % 2020 vs. Election Day Voting % 2016



2016: Election Day Vote %

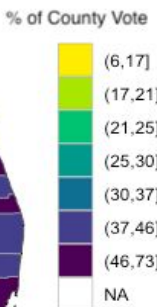
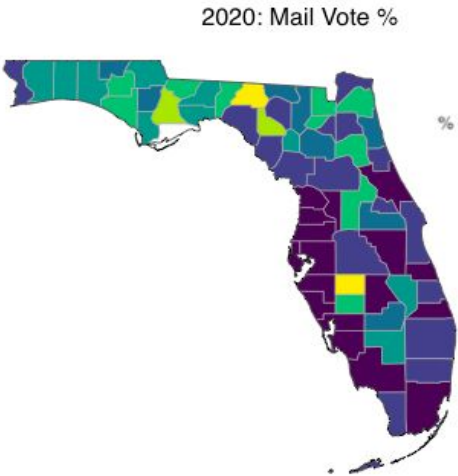
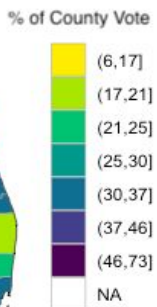
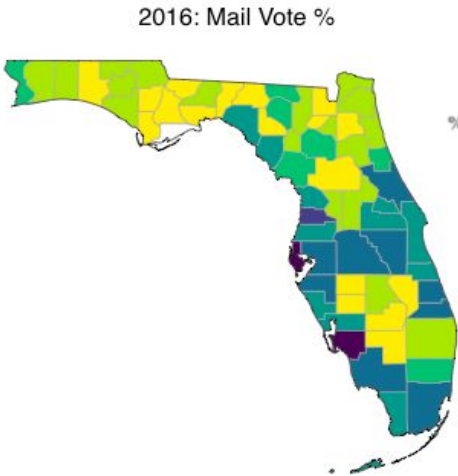


2020: Election Day Vote %



Note: The data in these figures reflect the fraction of Democrats and Republicans who voted on Election Day in the 2016 and 2020 presidential preference primaries.

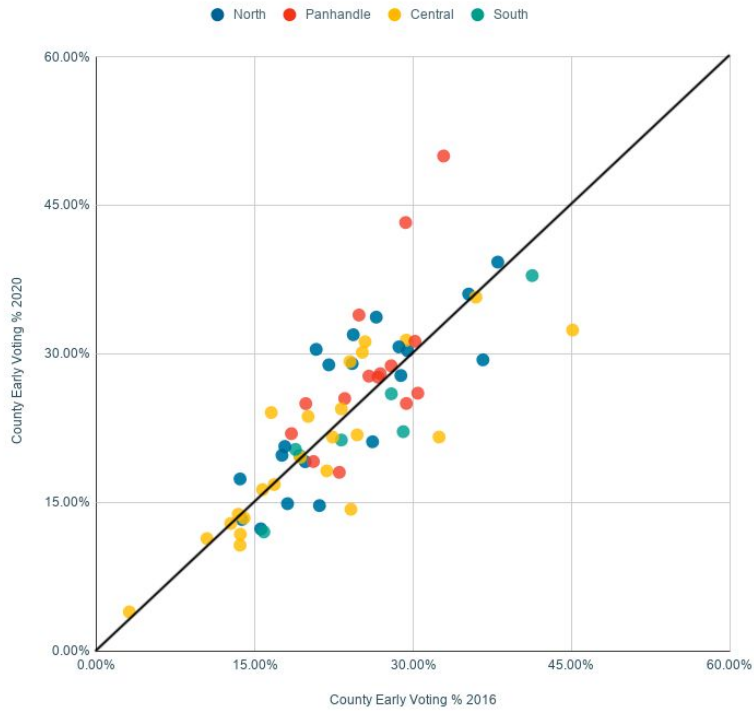
# Mail Voting



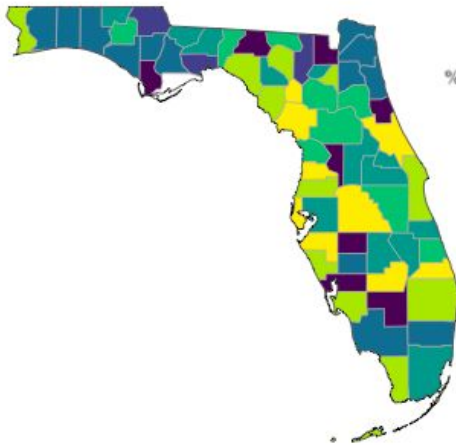
Note: The data in these figures reflect the fraction of Democrats and Republicans who voted by mail in the 2016 and 2020 presidential preference primaries.

# Early Voting

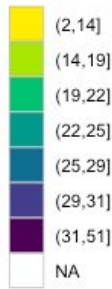
Early Voting % 2020 vs. Early Voting % 2016



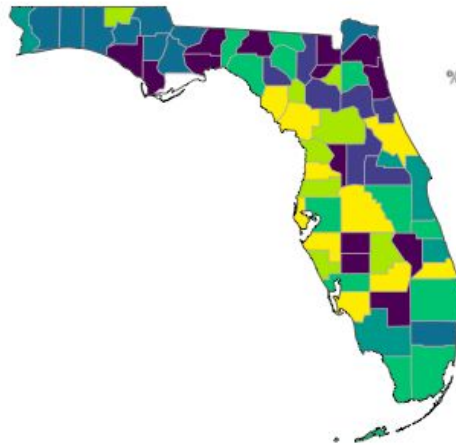
2016: Early Vote %



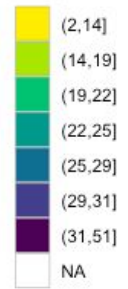
% of County Vote



2020: Early Vote %



% of County Vote



Note: The data in these figures reflect the fraction of Democrats and Republicans who voted early in person in the 2016 and 2020 presidential preference primaries.

### By Age: 2016 vs. 2020 Vote Mode

- The percentage of votes cast by mail increased across all age groups relative to 2016, but there was a larger shift for older voters (+17 percentage points for the 60+ age group, compared to +10 for 18-29).
- Republicans shifted more to VBM across all age groups (more than +20 percentage points for all groups, compared to an average +11 points for Democrats).
- The shift away from Election Day voting was more uniform across age groups, but Democrats were more likely to vote on Election Day in 2020 than Republicans across all age groups.

Republican Vote Mode by Age Bucket								
	2016 % of Votes Cast				2020 % of Votes Cast			
	VBM %	Early %	Election Day %	Total Votes Cast	VBM %	Early %	Election Day %	Total Votes Cast
<b>18-29</b>	19%	18%	64%	105,484	43%	14%	43%	43,608
<b>30-44</b>	19%	16%	65%	237,484	48%	13%	39%	89,036
<b>45-59</b>	22%	20%	58%	578,587	46%	16%	38%	251,668
<b>60+</b>	36%	23%	41%	1,065,056	59%	18%	24%	845,687
<b>Total</b>	29%	21%	50%	1,986,611	55%	17%	28%	1,229,999

Democratic Vote Mode by Age Bucket								
	2016 % of Votes Cast				2020 % of Votes Cast			
	VBM %	Early %	Election Day %	Total Votes Cast	VBM %	Early %	Election Day %	Total Votes Cast
<b>18-29</b>	17%	21%	61%	131,726	25%	28%	47%	171,295
<b>30-44</b>	17%	20%	63%	219,896	29%	25%	46%	248,908
<b>45-59</b>	23%	22%	55%	380,029	31%	27%	42%	363,258
<b>60+</b>	37%	23%	40%	722,792	49%	24%	27%	941,764
<b>Total</b>	29%	22%	49%	1,454,443	40%	25%	35%	1,725,225



### By Race: 2016 vs. 2020 Vote Mode

- By race, the percentage of votes cast by mail increased across all groups.
- However, while white and Hispanic voters shifted out of Election Day voting (-15 and -18 percentage points, respectively), Black voters only dropped 11 points — and were still most likely to vote on Election Day versus voting by mail or voting early in the 2020 presidential primary.
  - This could partially be attributed to racial differences within the parties: As we saw above, Republicans were more likely to shift away from Election Day voting, and Black voters have overwhelmingly voted Democrat. However, even when taking only Democratic votes into consideration, Black voters relied more heavily than other groups on Election Day voting in the 2020 presidential primary.

Republican Vote Mode by Race								
	2016 % of Votes Cast				2020 % of Votes Cast			
	VBM %	Early %	Election Day %	Total Votes Cast	VBM %	Early %	Election Day %	Total Votes Cast
<b>White</b>	29%	21%	51%	1,725,760	54%	17%	29%	1,084,466
<b>Black</b>	22%	23%	55%	12,428	42%	23%	35%	7,899
<b>Hispanic</b>	32%	22%	46%	192,903	67%	13%	20%	98,862
<b>Other</b>	29%	21%	50%	55,520	56%	16%	28%	38,772
<b>Total</b>	29%	21%	50%	1,986,611	55%	17%	28%	1,229,999

Democratic Vote Mode by Race								
	2016 % of Votes Cast				2020 % of Votes Cast			
	VBM %	Early %	Election Day %	Total Votes Cast	VBM %	Early %	Election Day %	Total Votes Cast
<b>White</b>	33%	21%	46%	844,742	44%	24%	31%	1,039,705
<b>Black</b>	21%	24%	54%	378,910	28%	29%	43%	395,020
<b>Hispanic</b>	26%	21%	53%	167,303	39%	23%	37%	191,580
<b>Other</b>	27%	23%	50%	63,488	37%	26%	37%	98,920
<b>Total</b>	29%	22%	49%	1,454,443	40%	25%	35%	1,725,225

### C. 2020 First-time Voters

Overall, first-time<sup>2</sup> voters represented 6% of the 2020 presidential primary vote; Democrats represented 66% of those first-time votes.

#### 2020 by Party: First-time Voters

First-time voters represented 5% and 6% of the Republican and Democratic presidential primary votes, respectively. Democrats represented 66% of first-time voters.

Party	% of First-Time Voters	First-time Voters	% of Returning Voters	Returning Voters	Total Vote
DEM	6%	110,760	94%	1,627,599	1,738,359
REP	5%	56,685	95%	1,182,404	1,239,089
Total	6%	167,445	94%	2,810,003	2,977,448

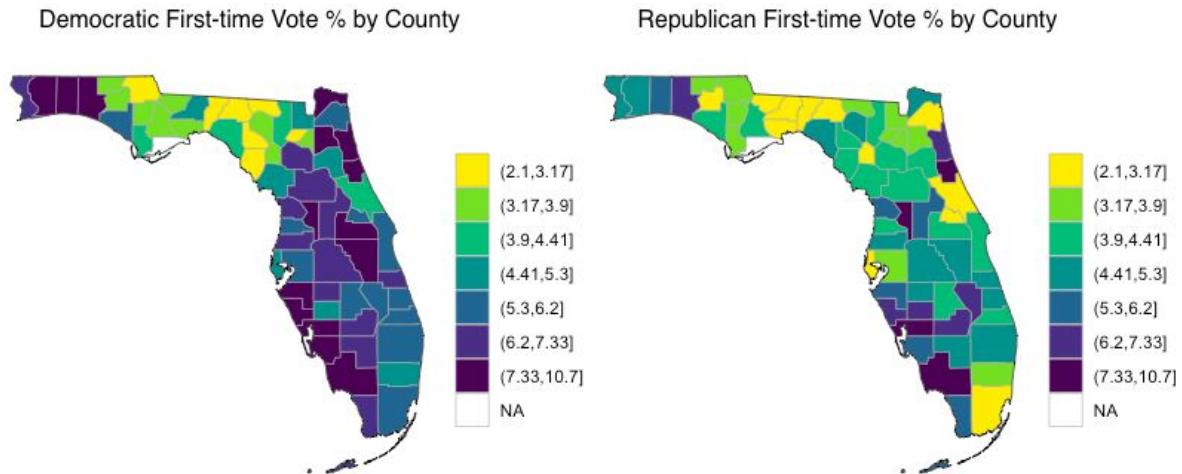
#### 2020 by County: First-time Voters

For both parties, first-time voters were largely concentrated in the most densely populated counties. First-time voters made up a greater share of the Democratic vote, compared to the Republican vote, in a majority of counties.

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<sup>2</sup> For the purposes of this analysis, first-time voters are those whose 2020 Florida votes were their first since at least 2006, which is the earliest date in the voter history file. From the May 2020 update of the Florida Voter History file: [https://www.dropbox.com/sh/4uvbd0v88icod4r/AAAhpkSO-2gnrZHyPGIoHQ7a/States/FL/Voter%20file%20May%202020?dl=0&subfolder\\_nav\\_tracking=1](https://www.dropbox.com/sh/4uvbd0v88icod4r/AAAhpkSO-2gnrZHyPGIoHQ7a/States/FL/Voter%20file%20May%202020?dl=0&subfolder_nav_tracking=1)

## 2020 by Vote Mode: First-time Voters



Note: The data in these figures reflect the fraction of Democratic and Republican primary voters who were voting in their first election in Florida since at least 2006.

- Overall, first-time voters were most likely to vote at polls on Election Day (47%), followed by mail voting (28%), and then by early voting (24%).
- However, Democratic first-time voters were less likely to vote by mail (24%) compared to Republican first-time voters (35%).
- First-time voters were also more likely to run into problems voting by mail: About 2.5% of first-time voters who attempted to vote by mail did not succeed in having their ballots counted, compared with 1.3% in the returning voter group.<sup>3</sup>
  - Democrats were slightly more likely to have their VBM ballots unaccepted for counting than Republicans, for both first-time (2.64% vs. 2.4%) and returning voters (1.51% vs. 1.09%).

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<sup>3</sup> The Florida voter history file contains a code to indicate voters who attempted to vote by mail, but were unsuccessful. The reason for being unsuccessful is not coded. From discussions with Florida election officials, it appears that most of these are mail ballots that were returned too late to be counted.

<b>2020 by Vote Mode: Republican First-time and Returning Voters</b>					
<b>Vote Mode</b>	<b>% of First-Time Vote</b>	<b>Vote Count</b>	<b>% of Returning Vote</b>	<b>Vote Count</b>	<b>Total Vote</b>
<b>Election Day</b>	44%	25,015	27%	324,560	349,575
<b>VBM</b>	35%	19,888	55%	654,499	674,387
<b>Early</b>	20%	11,136	17%	195,670	206,806
<b>Not Counted VBM</b>	1%	490	1%	7,181	7,671
<b>Not Counted Provisional</b>	0%	156	0%	494	650
<b>Total</b>	100%	56,685	100%	1,182,404	1,239,089

<b>2020 by Vote Mode: Democratic First-time and Returning Voters</b>					
<b>Vote Mode</b>	<b>% of First-Time Vote</b>	<b>Vote Count</b>	<b>% of Returning Vote</b>	<b>Vote Count</b>	<b>Total Vote</b>
<b>Election Day</b>	49%	54,011	34%	550,976	604,987
<b>VBM</b>	24%	26,227	41%	660,824	687,051
<b>Early</b>	26%	29,337	25%	404,269	433,606
<b>Not Counted VBM</b>	1%	712	1%	10,121	10,833
<b>Not Counted Provisional</b>	0%	473	0%	1,409	1,882
<b>Total</b>	100%	110,760	100%	1,627,599	1,738,359

## 2020 by Age: First-time Voters

Young voters (18-29) represented a more significant portion of first-time votes relative to the returning 2020 primary votes (29% vs. 6% overall). This difference was much more pronounced for Democrats, where the 18-29 group made up the largest portion of first-time voters at 35%, compared with just 18% for Republicans (51% of first-time Republican voters were 60+).

2020 by Age Group: Republican First-time and Returning Voters					
Age Group	% of First-Time Vote	Vote Count	% of Returning Vote	Vote Count	Total Vote
18-29	18%	10,211	3%	34,094	44,305
30-44	10%	5,805	7%	84,327	90,132
45-59	21%	11,814	20%	241,868	253,682
60+	51%	28,855	70%	822,115	850,970
<b>Total</b>	100%	56,685	100%	1,182,404	1,239,089

2020 by Age Group: Democratic First-time and Returning Voters					
Age Group	% of First-Time Vote	Vote Count	% of Returning Vote	Vote Count	Total Vote
18-29	35%	38,360	8%	135,098	173,458
30-44	15%	16,937	14%	234,264	251,201
45-59	17%	18,376	21%	347,489	365,865
60+	33%	37,087	56%	910,748	947,835
<b>Total</b>	100%	110,760	100%	1,627,599	1,738,359

## 2020 by Race: First-time Voters

For both parties, Black and non-Hispanic white voters were more heavily represented in the returning voter group, while Other voters<sup>4</sup> made up more of the first-time vote. Hispanic voters represented the same share of the Republican first-time and returning votes, but were more strongly represented in the Democratic first-time vote (15%), compared to the Democratic returning vote (11%).

2020 by Race: Republican First-time and Returning Voters					
Race	% of First-Time Vote	Vote Count	% of Returning Vote	Vote Count	Total Vote
White	84%	47,813	88%	1,043,901	1,091,714
Black	1%	455	1%	7,533	7,988
Hispanic	8%	4,410	8%	95,793	100,203
Other	7%	4,007	3%	35,177	39,184
<b>Total</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>56,685</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>1,182,404</b>	<b>1,239,089</b>

2020 by Race: Democratic First-time and Returning Voters					
Race	% of First-Time Vote	Vote Count	% of Returning Vote	Vote Count	Total Vote
White	57%	62,848	60%	983,524	1,046,372
Black	17%	18,287	23%	379,881	398,168
Hispanic	15%	16,163	11%	177,625	193,788
Other	12%	13,462	5%	86,569	100,031
<b>Total</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>110,760</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>1,627,599</b>	<b>1,738,359</b>

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<sup>4</sup> “Other” here refers to voters coded as American Indian/Alaskan Native, Asian/Pacific Islander, Other, Multi-racial, or Unknown in the Florida voter file

## D. Uncounted Mail Ballots

The 2020 Florida presidential primary already saw a significant increase in vote-by-mail participation over 2016. Considering that social distancing requirements have only grown stricter since March 17, the need for vote-by-mail will likely continue and deepen into this election cycle.

The Florida voter history file contains a code for voters who attempted to vote a mail ballot, but were unsuccessful. The voter file itself does not contain information about why these mail ballots were unsuccessful; however, they appear to be due to two major causes: ballots that were returned on time but had a defect that prevented them from being counted, and ballots that arrived after 7:00 p.m. on Election Day. (Overseas voters have a later deadline.)

Although uncounted VBM ballots make up only a small percentage of VBM attempts, as we increasingly rely on VBM to hold safe elections, the repercussions of patterns we see in VBM failures will be amplified. Are there groups and jurisdictions in which voters were less likely to have their mail ballots counted? As we see below, uncounted mail ballots are more prevalent among Democrats, younger and first-time voters, and among Black and Hispanic voters.

### Overall 2020 VBM Ballots Not Accepted for Counting

Outcome	% of VBM Ballots	Vote Count
Vote by Mail Counted	98.66%	1,361,438
Vote by Mail Not Counted	1.34%	18,504
Total	100%	1,379,942

### 2020 by Party: Uncounted Mail Ballots

Outcome	% of Democratic VBM Ballots	% of Republican VBM Ballots	Vote Count
Vote by Mail Counted	98.45%	98.88%	1,361,438
Vote by Mail Not Counted	1.55%	1.12%	18,504
Total	100%	100%	1,379,942

### 2020 by First-time Status: Uncounted Mail Ballots

As mentioned above, first-time voters were more likely to run into problems voting by mail: About 2.5% of first-time voters who attempted to vote by mail did not succeed in having their ballots counted, compared with 1.3% of returning voters. This trend was consistent across parties, though

Democrats were slightly more likely to have their VBM ballots unaccepted for counting than Republicans, for both first-time voters (2.64% vs. 2.4%) and returning voters (1.51% vs. 1.09%).

**2020: Republican Uncounted VBM by First-Time Status**

Outcome	% of First-Time VBM Ballots	% of Returning VBM Ballots	Vote Count
Vote by Mail Counted	97.60%	98.91%	674,387
Vote by Mail Not Counted	2.40%	1.09%	7,671
<b>Total</b>	<b>100.00%</b>	<b>100.00%</b>	<b>682,058</b>

**2020: Democratic Uncounted VBM by First-Time Status**

Outcome	% of First-Time VBM Ballots	% of Returning VBM Ballots	Vote Count
Vote by Mail Counted	97.36%	98.49%	687,051
Vote by Mail Not Counted	2.64%	1.51%	10,833
<b>Total</b>	<b>100.00%</b>	<b>100.00%</b>	<b>697,884</b>

**2020 by Age: Uncounted Mail Ballots**

Younger voters (18-29 and 30-44) were more likely than average to have their VBM ballots uncounted. Voters in the 18-29 age group, in particular, were more than twice as likely to make an unsuccessful VBM attempt compared with the average VBM voter.

**2020: Republican Uncounted VBM by Age Group**

Age Bucket	% Vote by Mail Not Counted	Vote By Mail Ballots Not Counted	Total Attempted Vote by Mail Count
<b>18-29</b>	3.13%	608	19,394
<b>30-44</b>	2.14%	945	44,056
<b>45-59</b>	1.39%	1,646	118,145
<b>60+</b>	0.89%	4,472	500,463
<b>Total</b>	<b>1.12%</b>	<b>7,671</b>	<b>682,058</b>



**2020: Democratic Uncounted VBM by Age Group**

Age Bucket	% Vote by Mail Not Counted	Vote By Mail Ballots Not Counted	Total Attempted Vote by Mail Count
18-29	3.74%	1,658	44,292
30-44	2.52%	1,857	73,814
45-59	1.86%	2,138	114,842
60+	1.11%	5,180	464,936
<b>Total</b>	<b>1.55%</b>	<b>10,833</b>	<b>697,884</b>

**2020 by Race: Uncounted Mail Ballots**

Hispanic, Black, and other minority voters were twice as likely to have their VBM ballots not accepted for counting compared to non-Hispanic white voters.

**2020: Republican Uncounted VBM by Race**

Race	% Vote by Mail Not Counted	Vote By Mail Ballots Not Counted	Total Attempted Vote by Mail Count
White	1.02%	5,987	588,834
Black	2.08%	71	3,421
Hispanic	1.87%	1,267	67,826
Other	1.57%	346	21,977
<b>Total</b>	<b>1.12%</b>	<b>7,671</b>	<b>682,058</b>

**2020: Democratic Uncounted VBM by Race**

Race	% Vote by Mail Not Counted	Vote By Mail Ballots Not Counted	Total Attempted Vote by Mail Count
White	1.15%	5,359	467,969
Black	2.33%	2,669	114,714
Hispanic	2.48%	1,923	77,512
Other	2.34%	882	37,689
<b>Total</b>	<b>1.55%</b>	<b>10,833</b>	<b>697,884</b>

## II. Voter Registration

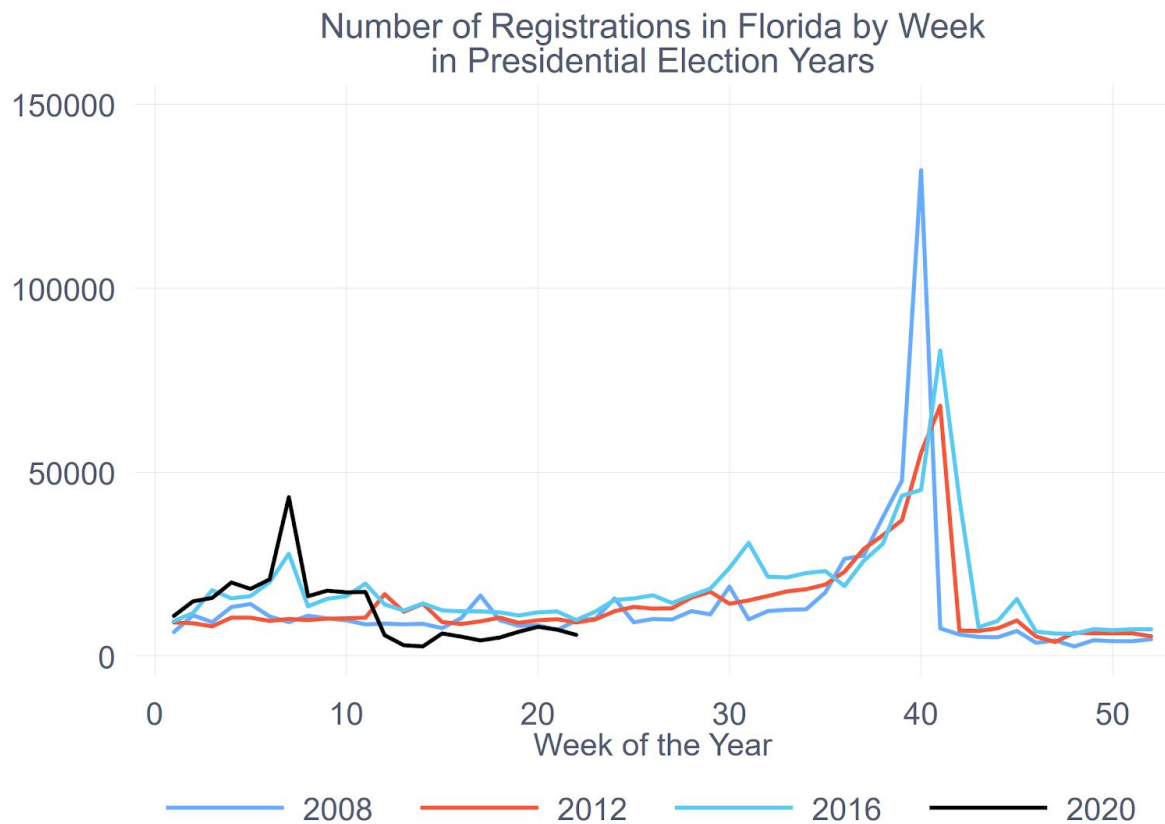
Most voter registration in Florida is handled through the Florida Department of Highway Safety and Motor Vehicles (DHSMV). Over the four-year period running from calendar years 2016 to 2019, the DHSMV was the source of 57% of Florida’s 3.1 million registrations.<sup>5</sup> Since 2016, Florida has also allowed for online voter registrations, which have made up roughly a third of registrations. Another 11% of registrations came through third-party voter registration drives. The number of DHSMV registrations is fairly equal from year to year, but third-party registrations mostly happen in federal election years.

Although the presidential preference primary occurred before the brunt of the pandemic hit the state and the nation, voter registration statistics reported since then suggest that the effect of emergency measures imposed in Florida, along with social distancing practices, have dampened voter registration activity in the state.

The following figure graphs the number of new voter registrations in the state, by week, for the past four presidential election years, including 2020. The patterns associated with the 2008, 2012, and 2016 elections are similar — fairly stable registration rates through week 30 of the year, which is in July, and then a gradual growth heading into the election, with a dramatic peak associated with the voter registration deadline, 29 days before the election. There were also smaller peaks associated with the presidential preference primaries in 2016 and in 2020. (Because the 2008 and 2012 primaries were held at the end of January, the peaks associated with those primaries would have occurred late in the previous year. Furthermore, Democrats held a caucus, not a primary, in 2012.)

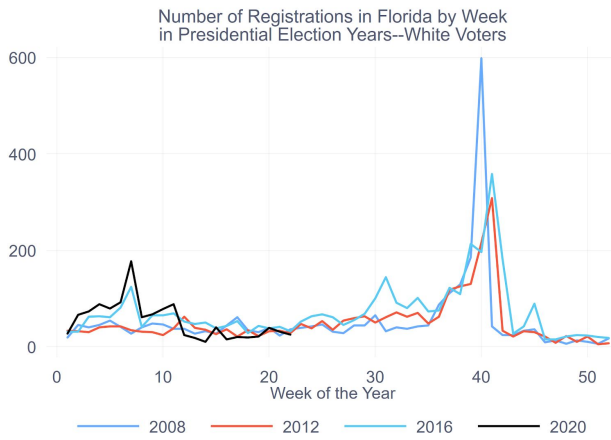
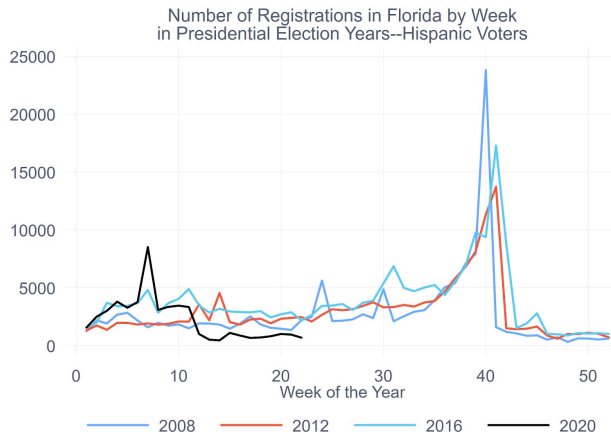
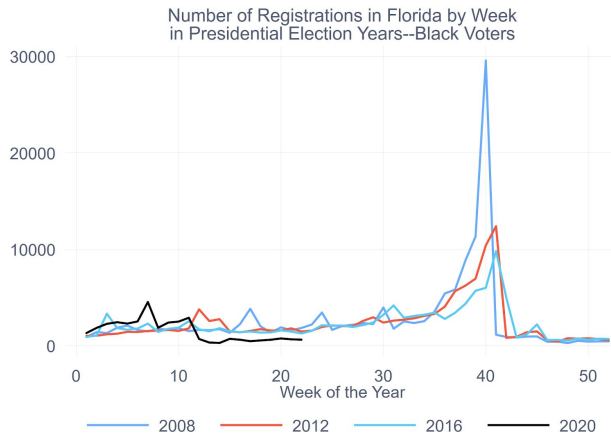
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<sup>5</sup> <https://dos.myflorida.com/elections/data-statistics/voter-registration-statistics/voter-registration-reportsxlsx/>.



Note, however, that in 2020, the number of registrations took a nosedive between Week 11 (16,620 registrations) and Week 12 (5,628 registrations). Week 12 was both the week of the primary and the beginning of an acceleration of nationwide concern over public gatherings.

Overall, voter registration took a nosedive on Week 12, but the nature of the registration decline varied across racial groups. As the accompanying graphs show, both Black and Hispanic registration levels have remained below the past three presidential elections, on a week-to-week basis, while at the same time, registration levels for white voters have kept pace with prior years.



Although the voter file does not contain information about the source of voter registrations, statistics reported by the Secretary of State provide some insight into their decline. As the following table shows, compared to 2016, March 2020 registrations were down by over 173,000, with reductions coming from across-the-board. (One exception is notable — third-party registrations, which held their own compared to 2016.) The volume of April 2020 registrations was less than 10% of the volume seen in 2016, this time with all sources of registration virtually drying up. Third-party registrations ground to a halt, while DHSMV and mail registrations slowed to a trickle.

**Source of Voter Registrations, First Four Months of 2016 and 2020**

	DHSMV	Mail	Third Party	Online	SOE	Other	Total
	<b>2016</b>						
<b>January</b>	35,940	9,332	1,196	0	8,888	1,097	56,453
<b>February</b>	40,882	25,346	4,232	0	20,161	4,725	95,346
<b>March</b>	40,654	19,502	3,016	0	15,100	2,551	80,823
<b>April</b>	34,629	12,456	3,806	0	7,958	1,254	60,103
<b>May</b>	33,978	7,276	4,919	0	6,180	1,049	53,402
<b>June</b>	42,221	15,744	8,425	0	6,653	1,468	74,511
	<b>2020</b>						
<b>January</b>	42,498	9,750	14,144	10,482	8,769	602	86,245
<b>February</b>	39,971	11,724	17,401	38,476	9,939	1,450	118,961
<b>March</b>	24,484	5,145	9,418	14,897	4,725	415	59,084
<b>April</b>	4,869	9,423	133	7,712	312	68	22,517
<b>May</b>	24,603	5,095	105	7,590	559	45	37,997
<b>June</b>	40,499	11,653	1,245	28,597	2,467	191	84,652
	<b>Difference</b>						
<b>January</b>	6,558	418	12,948	10,482	-119	-495	29,792
<b>February</b>	-911	-13,622	13,169	38,476	-10,222	-3,275	23,615
<b>March</b>	-16,170	-14,357	6,402	14,897	-10,375	-2,136	-21,739
<b>April</b>	-29,760	-3,033	-3,673	7,712	-7,646	-1,186	-37,586
<b>May</b>	-9,375	-2,181	-4,814	7,590	-5,621	-1,004	-15,405
<b>June</b>	-1,722	-4,091	-7,180	28,597	-4,186	-1,277	10,141

**Correction: A previously published version of this memo included cumulative registration numbers from 2016 — this table has been corrected to reflect the registration number for each month instead.**

Presumably, as movement restrictions in Florida continue to be lifted and the public becomes more comfortable going outside their homes, the pace of registrations will pick up as the November election comes more firmly into view. Nonetheless, the past two months have created a hole in the pace of new registrations in Florida that could be difficult to fill in the next few months.

### III. Conclusion

Florida's experience with voting during the COVID-19 pandemic provides a glimpse into some of the issues that have arisen as election officials attempt to expand the availability of mail balloting. It is important to note, however, that Florida's experience with the 2020 primary may not be entirely generalizable to other states.

First, Florida has been relatively divided among voting modes for many years. With both early in-person voting and no-excuse mail balloting, it is fairly easy for Florida voters to shift between voting modes. In addition, although there is variability in the use of voting modes across Florida's 67 counties, all counties have experience running significant vote-by-mail operations. As a consequence, although Florida's voters did shift away from Election Day voting in the 2020 presidential preference primary, there was also a fair amount of continuity in voting patterns across the state.

Second, by voting on March 17, Florida's voters and election officials had not yet faced the full effect of the challenges presented by voting during the COVID-19 pandemic. Certainly, the pandemic was felt in Florida and put great burdens on election officials as they coped with the unfolding health crisis — recall that Ohio decided to delay its presidential primary, rather than hold it on March 17 — but the pandemic did not put the same types of strains on the system that were experienced in Wisconsin, for instance, where voters and election officials faced a health emergency that was by then more widespread, and there was uncertainty about whether voting would actually go forward.

Nonetheless, there are lessons from Florida that may help predict how adaptations related to COVID-19 will play out in other states. First, amid rising health concerns, Florida voters shifted swiftly to voting by mail across the state. Second, despite the fact that political elites have polarized around the issue of mail balloting, with Republicans and Democrats associated with anti- and pro-mail positions, respectively, it was Republicans who were more likely to shift to VBM than Democrats. This difference in partisan response is consistent across other factors, such as age and race. Third, elderly voters, who were most at risk in the COVID-19 outbreak, shifted to mail balloting to a much greater degree than younger voters. Fourth, minority voters and young voters were more likely to persist in voting on Election Day than white and older voters — even taking political party affiliation into account.

Finally, the experience of first-time mail voters suggests that those mail voters are most at risk of not having their votes accepted for counting. The number of first-time voters overall — regardless of the mode they used — was relatively small in the presidential primary, representing only 6% of ballots cast. This fraction will be much larger in the general election. It is impossible to predict how much larger those numbers will be, but we can set our expectations based on the 2016 presidential election in which 15% cast a vote in Florida for the first time, and another 10% were casting a ballot for only the second time. (The median voter was casting a ballot in their sixth election.)

In thinking about what the 2020 general election will look like in Florida, a number of considerations need to be kept in mind. For starters, by November, the state — and the rest of the nation — will have greater experience living with the pandemic. Public health experts have projected that it is unlikely a vaccine will be widely available before the November election,<sup>6</sup> but a lowered rate of infections may reduce concerns about voting in person — or, as some models predict, a spike in infections may occur in the fall, with the opposite effect. At the same time, the shift over to mail balloting in the presidential preference primary may presage a more permanent shift to that mode regardless of the public health situation. The August 18 state primary will provide greater clarity about whether the March experience represents a one-time change or a continuing trend.

The general electorate will also be quite different from the presidential primary electorate. For one thing, it will contain more Republicans who, from what we have seen in the primary, are more likely to vote by mail. On the other hand, the general election will also include more young and first-time voters, who have generally been more likely to vote in person, as they did in the presidential primary. Given these factors and what we have seen from the March 17 primary, as well as other primaries held since then, Florida seems poised to experience record levels of mail balloting in the November election. Even so, in-person voting is likely to be robust. Given Florida's recent history, that in-person voting may focus during the early voting period, not on Election Day. Either way, the state's election officials still have a lot of work to do to ensure that all forms of voting in November will be safe, secure, and accessible.

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<sup>6</sup> <https://www.rev.com/blog/transcripts/dr-anthony-fauci-cdc-director-senate-testimony-transcript-may-12>

## Appendix

- As of March 17, 2020:
  - Florida had 216 confirmed cases of COVID-19.
  - Florida had ordered all bars and nightclubs to close for 30 days.
  - Ohio postponed their primary that had been scheduled for the same day.
- Incomplete data from Franklin County.

## Data

- Election results
  - <https://dos.myflorida.com/elections/data-statistics/elections-data/>
- Florida voter file
  - [https://www.dropbox.com/sh/4uvbd0v88icod4r/AAAhlpkSO-2gnrZHyPGIoHQ7a/States/FL/Voter%20file%20May%202020?dl=0&subfolder\\_nav\\_tracking=1](https://www.dropbox.com/sh/4uvbd0v88icod4r/AAAhlpkSO-2gnrZHyPGIoHQ7a/States/FL/Voter%20file%20May%202020?dl=0&subfolder_nav_tracking=1)