

Georgia Primary Election Analysis

September 15, 2020

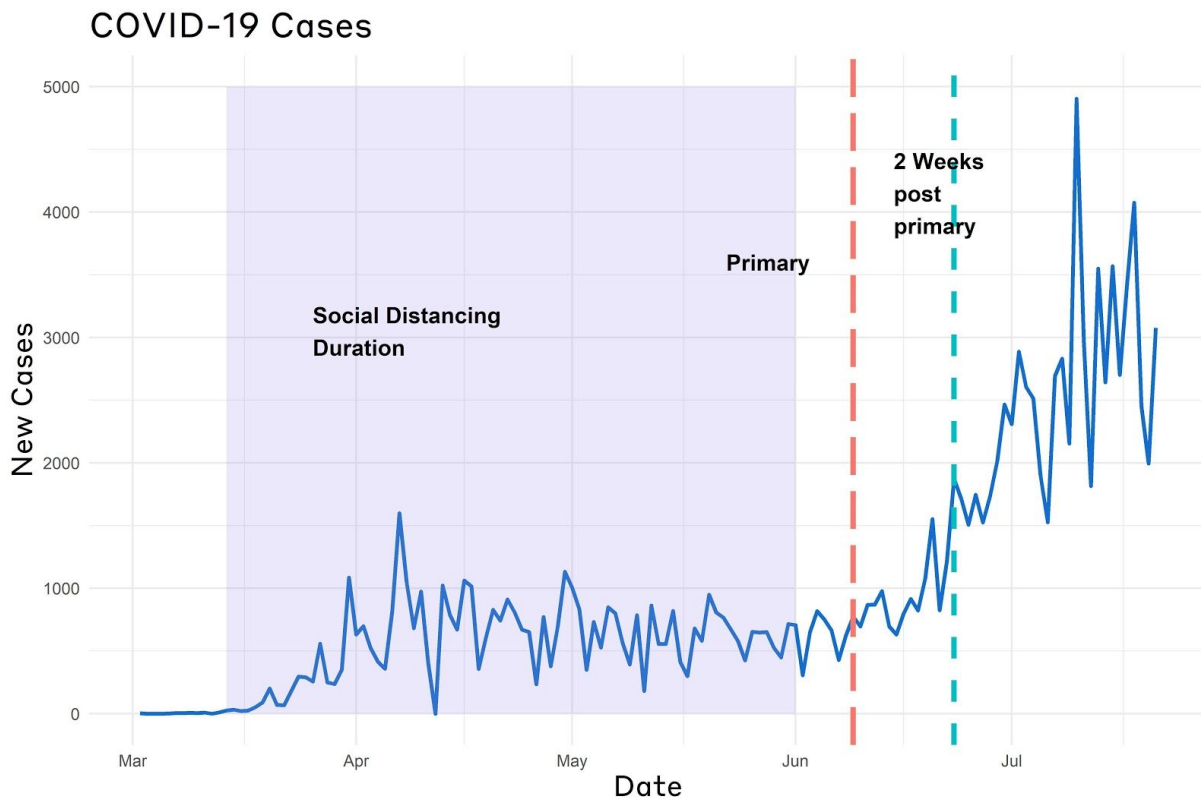
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Introduction

Georgia held a combined primary election on June 9, 2020, after delaying both the presidential preference primary (originally scheduled for March 24) and the general primary (originally scheduled for May 19). Coronavirus cases in Georgia were rising leading up to the presidential preference primary (PPP). On March 14, Governor Brian Kemp declared a public health state of emergency in Georgia and postponed the presidential primary to be held with the general primary on May 19, 2020. As cases continued to increase throughout March and early April, Governor Kemp extended the state of emergency on April 9, and Secretary of State Brad Raffensperger rescheduled the May 19 combined primary to June 9, 2020. Overall turnout for the 2020 Combined Primary election was over 2.2 million, representing a 10% increase from the previous high for primary turnout in the 2016 Presidential Preference Primary.



Timing of the COVID Pandemic and 2020 Primary Election Dates in Georgia

On April 27, the Georgia Secretary of State [started sending absentee](#) ballot applications to all 6.9 million active voters in advance of the newly scheduled combined primary election. Voters still had to fill out and return the application in time in order to receive their absentee-by-mail ballots. In the

end, in the 2020 primary over 1.6 million voters submitted applications for absentee-by-mail ballots, and over 1.1 million voters successfully cast their ballots by mail. This represents a 3,000% increase in mail-in voting in Georgia relative to the primaries held in 2016. The surge led to [issues processing and delivering ballots to voters on time](#), and following election day, the large increase in absentee ballots led to [delays in finalizing vote tallies as election officials struggled to count mail-in ballots](#) quickly.

Despite the large increase in mail-in ballots, about 800,000 people still voted in-person on election day, and another 320,000 voted early in-person. On election day, [contemporaneous reports](#) documented a variety of problems across a number of large counties. About ten percent of all Georgia polling locations and nearly 80 precincts in the metro Atlanta area [were closed prior to the election due to COVID-19](#). According to reports, [many typical poll workers in Georgia were over 70 years old](#), making them a high-risk group in the pandemic, who decided not to volunteer this year to avoid exposure to the coronavirus. Trained poll workers originally committed to working the primary in March [withdrew due to health concerns](#), resulting in new poll workers being trained in a short amount of time. [The state was using new voting machines, which caused a significant amount of confusion among poll workers](#). Access cards were put in backwards, problems were reported as workers used new tablets to check people in, poll workers sometimes had to manually type in access codes as overrides to submit ballots, and user confusion played a big part in the increased amount of time it took to cast a ballot. Lines were 3-hours long or longer in some places, reportedly causing some voters to leave without casting a ballot. [About 11% of polling locations closed an hour late to accommodate long lines, and three-fourths of polling stations in Fulton County stayed open until after 8pm](#). For a more in-depth analysis of the election day challenges faced by Georgia officials, see [our other Georgia Primary Election Analysis Memo published on the Healthy Elections website](#).

This report addresses the following questions:

- How did the large increase in the use of absentee-by-mail ballots vary by partisanship, race, age, and other demographics?
- How did the COVID-19 pandemic influence turnout and vote mode?
- What were the county-level differences in vote by mail rates and election day turnout, and how did this compare to 2016?
- What type of voters were more likely to vote by mail, and who was most likely to have their mail-in ballots rejected?

Summary of Findings

- Despite the [issues faced by election officials](#), turnout for Georgia's 2020 combined primary election was over 2.2 million, an increase of 10% relative to the old record turnout in the 2016 Presidential Preference Primary.
 - Democratic turnout increased by 56%
 - Republican turnout decreased by 21%
 - Total non-partisan ballots increased significantly, going from only 410 votes in the 2016 PPP to 59,386 votes in the 2020 primary.
- Almost half of all voters in the 2020 Georgia primary voted by mail.
 - The vote-by-mail rate was 3,000% higher in the 2020 combined primary relative to either of the 2016 primaries.
- Of the 1.6 million absentee ballots requested, 79% were returned to election officials, and less than 1% of returned ballots were rejected.
 - The most common reason for rejection in 2020 was ballots being returned late (~72%),
 - The second most common reasons for rejection in 2020 was a missing or invalid signature (~27%)
 - In contrast, 17% of returned ballots were rejected in 2016; late ballot rejections made up 93% of these rejected ballots, while signature problems made up only about 1% of these rejections.
 - Democrats, non-white voters, and younger voters were more likely to have their mail-in ballots rejected.

Analysis of 2020 Primary

To analyze the election results, we utilize the state's voter file along with voter absentee files and voter history files for the 2016, 2018, and 2020 primaries and general elections. We merge these files together to create a comprehensive dataset of voter demographics and voter history. All data used in this report was downloaded and is available from the Georgia Secretary of State website (see the Appendix A for more details).

Turnout and Vote Mode

In the 2020 combined primary on June 9, 2.2 million voters turned out--either in person or via absentee ballots. This turnout represents 31% of active voters in Georgia in 2020. This broke the previous record for primary turnout, which was about 2 million voters in the 2016 Presidential Preference Primary (PPP). About 50% of voters in 2020 submitted absentee-by-mail ballots in the 2020 combined primary, representing an over 3,000% increase in mail-in ballots relative to the 2016 primaries.

2016 vs. 2020 Vote Mode

Compared to the 2016 PPP, Democratic turnout increased by 56%, while Republican turnout decreased by 21%. Total non-partisan ballots increased significantly, going from only 410 votes in the 2016 PPP to 59,386 votes in the 2020 combined primary. This does not appear to be a coding error, and it is still a mystery as to why non-partisan ballots increased so much between elections. While nearly 80% of voters submitted ballots for the 2016 PPP on election day, only about 35% of voters submitted ballots on election day in 2020.

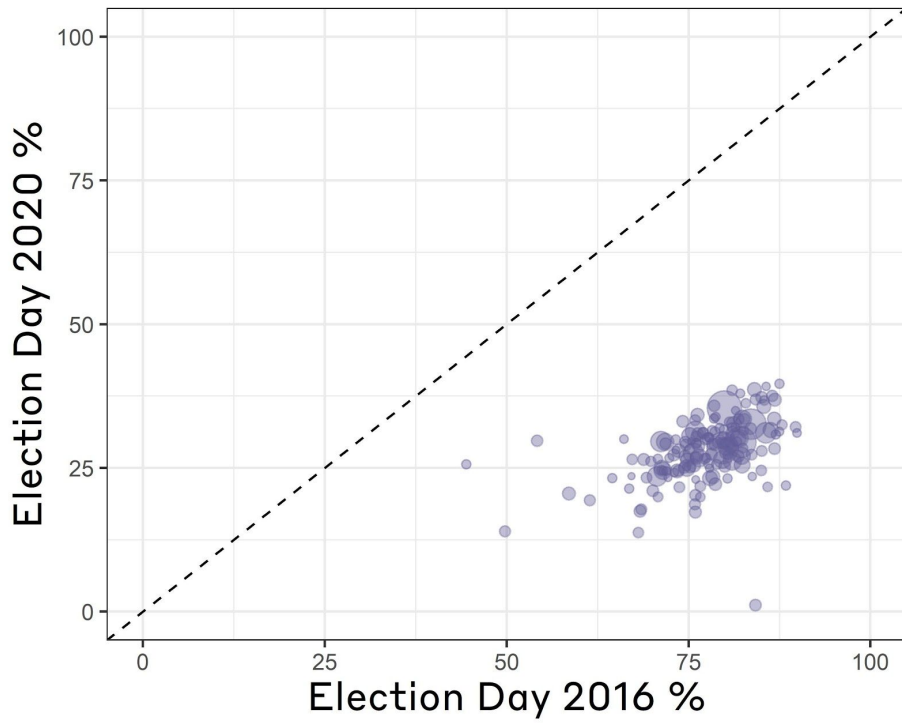
	2016 % of Votes Cast (PPP)				2020 % of Votes Cast (Combined Primary)			
	Mail	Early	Election Day	Total Votes	Mail	Early	Election Day	Total Votes
Democrat	1.5%	19.5%	79.0%	766,620	50.2%	13.9%	35.9%	1,197,258
Republican	1.8%	18.8%	79.4%	1,296,070	51.3%	15.5%	33.2%	1,021,909
Non-Partisan	15.1%	81.0%	3.9%	410	43.2%	4.3%	52.5%	59,386
Total	1.7%	19.1%	79.2%	2,063,100	50.5%	14.4%	35.1%	2,278,553

For the remainder of the report, we combine the absentee ballots submitted for the Presidential Preference Primary,¹ originally scheduled for March 24, with the ballots cast for the combined general primary that actually occurred on June 9th, and use these consolidated numbers to report turnout and vote mode statistics for the combined primary. We focus on the comparisons between the 2016 PPP and the 2020 combined primary to understand how the coronavirus impacted the primary election.

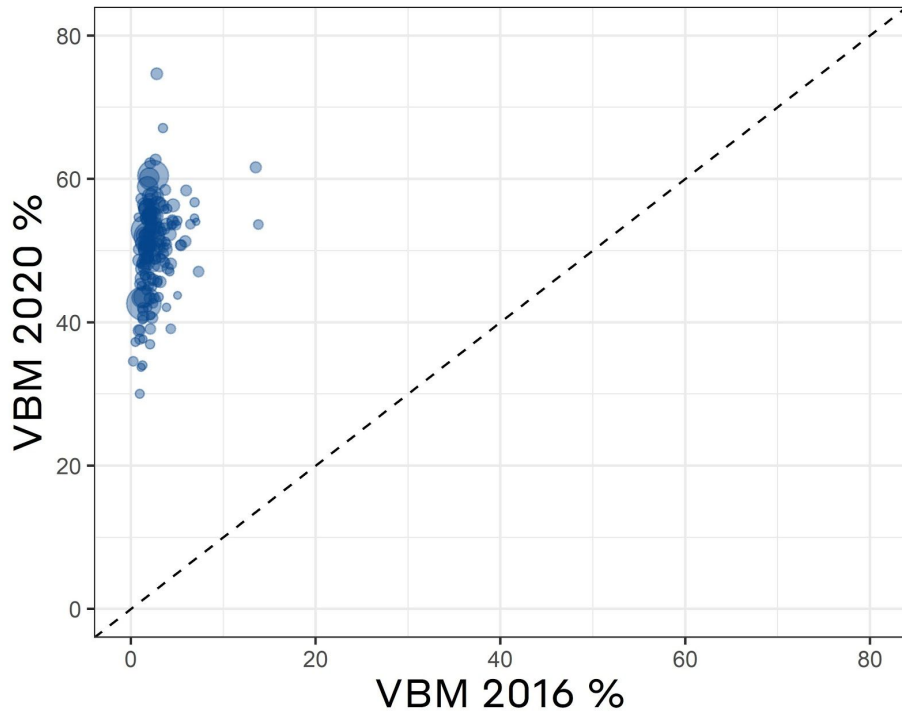
Only 1.7% of voters voted by mail in the 2016 Presidential Preference Primary. At the county level, only two counties had vote-by-mail (VBM) rates higher than 10% in 2016 (Rabun and Hancock counties). In the 2020 combined primary, county-level VBM rates increased significantly everywhere, and ranged from 30% to nearly 75%, with only a slight positive correlation between voting-by-mail rates in 2020 and previous county-level VBM behavior.

¹ The absentee-by-mail ballots submitted for the 2020 PPP numbers are as follows: Democrats -- 26,601 mail ballots; Republicans -- 18,713 mail ballots; and Non-Partisan -- 247 mail ballots.

Election Day Voting Rates by County, 2016 PPP and 2020 Combined Primary

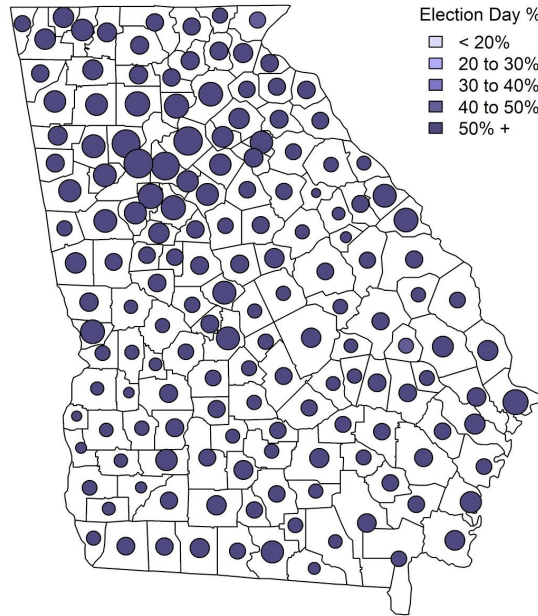


Vote-By-Mail Rates by County, 2016 PPP and 2020 Combined Primary

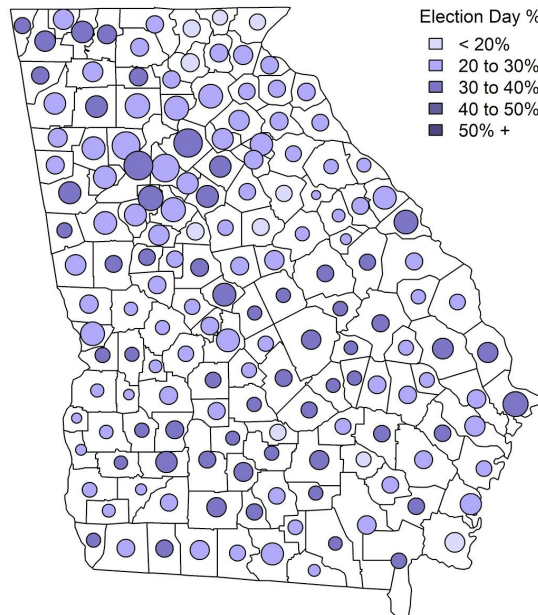


Election Day Voting Rates by County and Year

2016

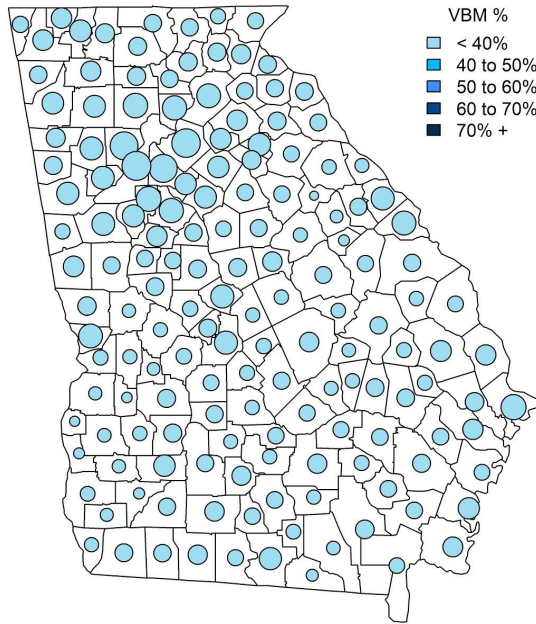


2020

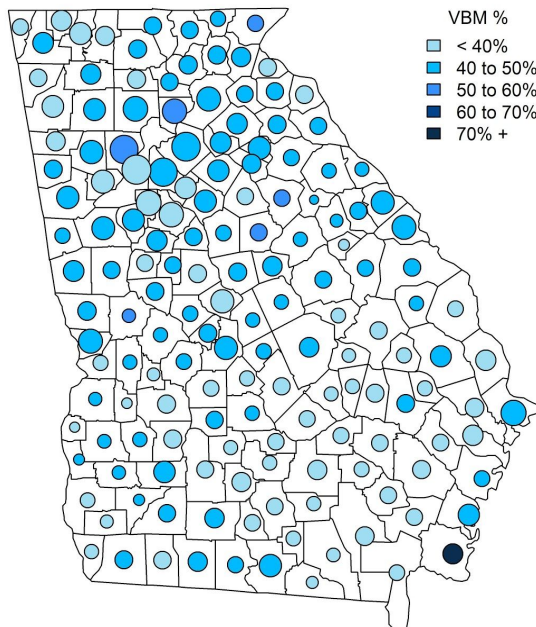


Vote-By-Mail Rates by County and Year

2016



2020



By Age: 2016 vs. 2020 Vote Mode

In the 2020 Combined Primary, voters age 60+ were most likely to vote by mail (about 60%), and voters age 30-44 were least likely to vote by mail, for both Democratic and Republican voters. In 2020, Democratic voters were slightly more likely to vote early than were Republican voters, while Republican voters were slightly more likely to vote by mail or on election day.

Democratic Vote Mode by Age								
	2016 % of Votes Cast (PPP)				2020 % of Votes Cast (Combined Primary)			
	Mail	Early	Election Day	Total Votes	Mail	Early	Election Day	Total Votes
18-29	2.5%	10.6%	86.9%	48,504	32.4%	18.8%	48.9%	189,764
30-44	0.5%	9.5%	89.9%	157,769	31.7%	19.3%	49.0%	289,496
45-59	0.4%	15.1%	84.5%	219,776	39.9%	25.8%	34.3%	374,168
60+	2.1%	28.6%	69.4%	313,295	59.7%	28.1%	12.3%	544,034
Total	1.3%	19.3%	79.4%	739,344	44.9%	24.4%	30.8%	1,397,444

Republican Vote Mode by Age								
	2016 % of Votes Cast (PPP)				2020 % of Votes Cast (Combined Primary)			
	Mail	Early	Election Day	Total Votes	Mail	Early	Election Day	Total Votes
18-29	3.4%	12.3%	84.2%	49,369	38.2%	16.0%	45.7%	69,773
30-44	0.6%	9.0%	90.4%	185,354	31.3%	16.9%	51.8%	129,496
45-59	0.5%	13.1%	86.4%	362,226	37.5%	19.8%	42.7%	282,833
60+	2.2%	24.9%	72.8%	643,388	58.9%	22.0%	19.1%	626,845
Total	1.5%	18.6%	79.9%	1,240,337	48.9%	20.4%	30.6%	1,108,947

By Race: 2016 vs. 2020 Vote Mode

In both 2016 and 2020, white voters were most likely to vote by mail and Hispanic voters were most likely to vote in person on election day, for both Democratic voters and Republican voters. On the Democratic side, black voters, who made up more than half of the ballots cast for the Democratic primary, were slightly more likely to vote by mail than on election day (39.4% vs 34.0%).

Democratic Vote Mode by Race								
	2016 % of Votes Cast (PPP)				2020 % of Votes Cast (Combined Primary)			
	Mail	Early	Election Day	Total Votes	Mail	Early	Election Day	Total Votes
White	1.8%	17.7%	80.5%	222,776	56.4%	21.6%	22.1%	427,874
Black	1.1%	21.1%	77.9%	433,063	39.4%	26.6%	34.0%	784,750
Hispanic	0.6%	9.6%	89.8%	14,843	35.1%	17.9%	47.0%	32,085
Asian	1.6%	13.4%	85.0%	7,616	46.7%	17.4%	35.9%	24,560
Other	0.9%	16.1%	83.0%	61,046	42.1%	23.0%	34.9%	128,175
Total	1.3%	19.3%	79.4%	739,344	44.9%	24.4%	30.8%	1,397,444

Republican Vote Mode by Race								
	2016 % of Votes Cast (PPP)				2020 % of Votes Cast (Combined Primary)			
	Mail	Early	Election Day	Total Votes	Mail	Early	Election Day	Total Votes
White	1.6%	18.9%	79.6%	1,127,017	49.3%	20.6%	30.1%	1,010,336
Black	0.7%	16.5%	82.8%	20,342	34.3%	23.1%	42.5%	17,125
Hispanic	0.6%	11.7%	87.7%	13,243	39.4%	17.1%	43.6%	9,022
Asian	1.3%	12.6%	86.1%	8,249	55.2%	11.9%	32.9%	9,541
Other	1.2%	17.1%	81.7%	71,486	48.5%	18.3%	33.2%	62,506
Total	1.5%	18.6%	79.9%	1,240,337	48.9%	20.5%	30.6%	1,108,947

Demographics of Vote-By-Mail Voters

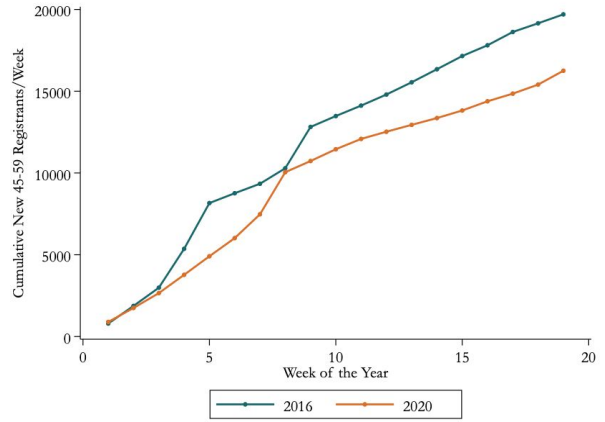
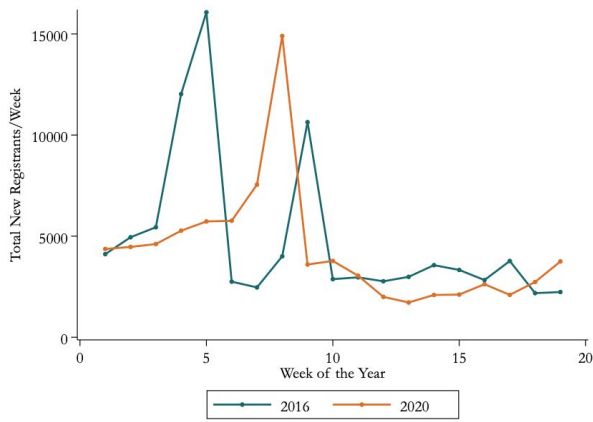
2020 Georgia Primary Vote-By-Mail Voters vs In-Person Voters						
	Voted-By-Mail in 2020 (46.7% of all partisan voters)			In-Person Voting (Early and Election Day) (53.3% of all partisan voters)		
	Dem (53.6%)	Rep (46.4%)	All (1,170,136)	Dem (57.6%)	Rep (42.4%)	All (1,337,365)
Male	38.8%	45.8%	42.1%	37.3%	49.4%	42.4%
Age 18-29	9.8%	4.9%	7.5%	16.7%	7.6%	12.8%
Age 30-44	14.6%	7.5%	11.3%	25.7%	15.7%	21.4%
Age 45-59	23.8%	19.6%	21.8%	29.2%	31.2%	30.0%
Age 60+	51.8%	68.0%	59.3%	28.5%	45.5%	35.7%
Mean Age	57.2	64.1	60.4	48.3	56.0	51.6
White	38.4%	91.6%	63.1%	24.2%	90.6%	52.3%
Black	49.3%	1.1%	26.9%	61.7%	2.0%	36.4%
Hispanic	1.8%	0.7%	1.3%	2.7%	1.0%	2.0%
Asian	1.8%	1.0%	1.4%	1.7%	0.8%	1.3%
Other	8.6%	5.6%	7.2%	9.6%	5.7%	8.0%
New Voters	9.9%	8.4%	9.2%	9.6%	5.7%	8.0%
VBM 2016 (PPP)	3.2%	4.9%	4.1%	0.3%	0.4%	0.4%
VBM 2016 (primary)	6.7%	7.6%	7.2%	0.6%	0.4%	0.5%
VBM 2016 (general)	9.1%	10.8%	9.9%	1.7%	1.3%	1.5%
VBM 2018 (primary)	5.5%	7.4%	6.4%	0.4%	0.3%	0.4%
VBM 2018 (general)	14.9%	11.5%	13.3%	2.7%	1.0%	2.0%

2016 Georgia Presidential Primary Vote-By-Mail Voters vs In-Person Voters						
	Voted-By-Mail in 2016 (1.7% of all partisan voters)			In-Person Voting (Early and Election Day) (98.3% of all partisan voters)		
	Dem (32.8%)	Rep (67.2%)	All (35,413)	Dem (37.2%)	Rep (62.8%)	All (2,027,277)
Male	27.5%	32.4%	30.8%	35.6%	46.4%	42.4%
Age 18-29	13.1%	9.0%	10.3%	6.5%	3.9%	4.9%
Age 30-44	9.0%	5.7%	6.8%	21.5%	15.1%	17.5%
Age 45-59	9.2%	9.2%	9.2%	30.0%	29.5%	29.7%
Age 60+	68.7%	76.2%	73.7%	42.0%	51.5%	48.0%
Mean Age	65.1	68.8	67.6	55.0	59.0	57.5
White	35.3%	74.4%	61.5%	29.0%	87.2%	65.5%
Black	39.0%	0.6%	13.2%	56.8%	1.6%	22.1%
Hispanic	0.8%	0.3%	0.5%	2.0%	1.0%	1.4%
Asian	1.1%	0.5%	0.7%	0.1%	0.1%	0.1%
Other	6.0%	4.7%	5.1%	8.3%	5.8%	6.7%

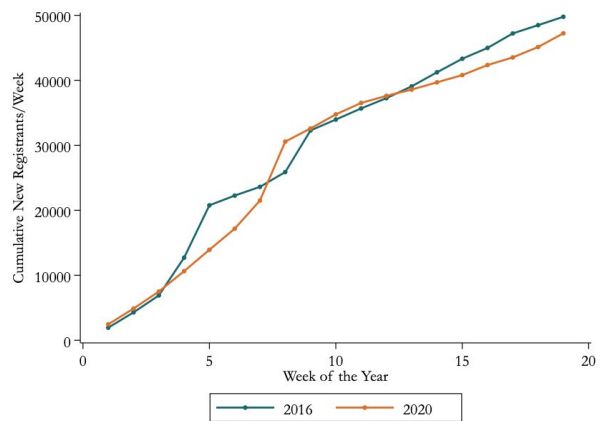
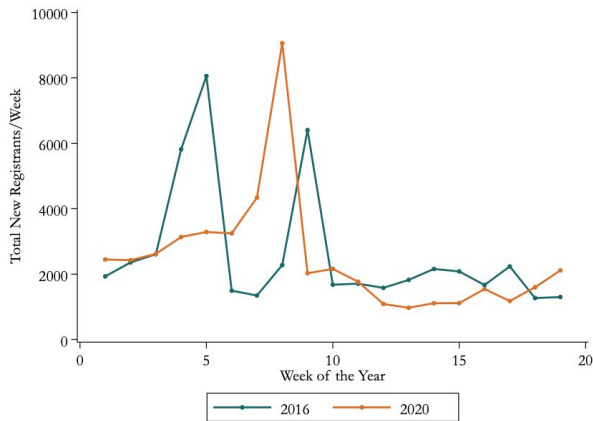
Voter Registration

In the time leading up to the 2020 combined primary, there were 6.9 million active voters according to the Georgia SOS office. [This includes about 700,000 new registered voters since the 2018 midterm elections.](#) In total, there were fewer cumulative new registrants for the 2020 primary relative to the 2016 primary. In general, this is true for most demographic subgroups leading up to the primary date. The notable exceptions being that voters aged 18-29 saw more new registrants in 2020, and total new Black registrants were at about the same levels in 2016 and 2020. (See also Appendix B for other registration statistics for other demographic groups).

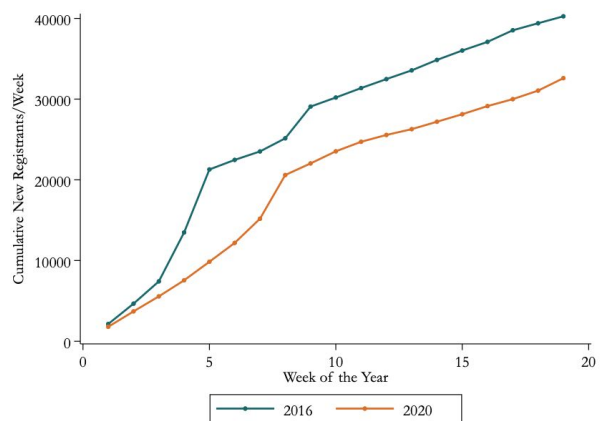
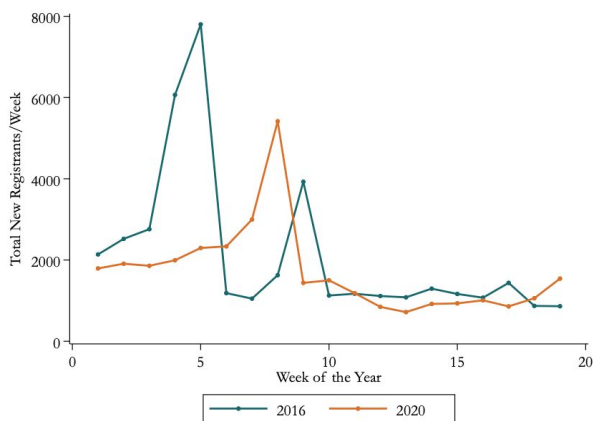
New Registrants Over Time



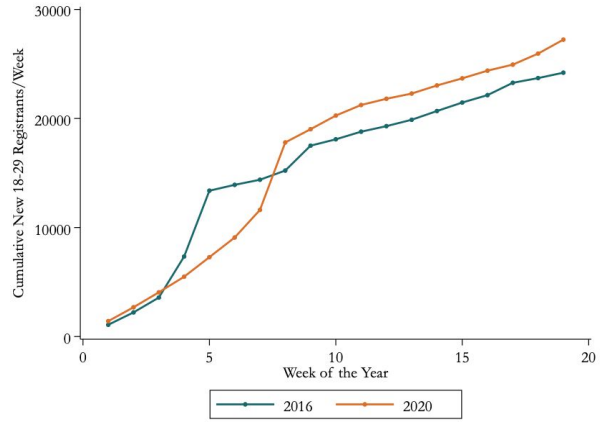
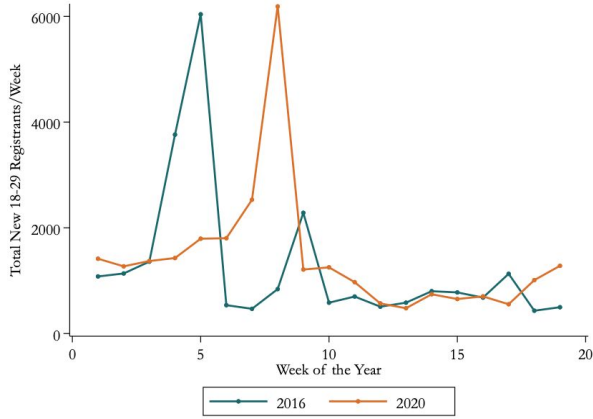
New Democratic Registrants Over Time



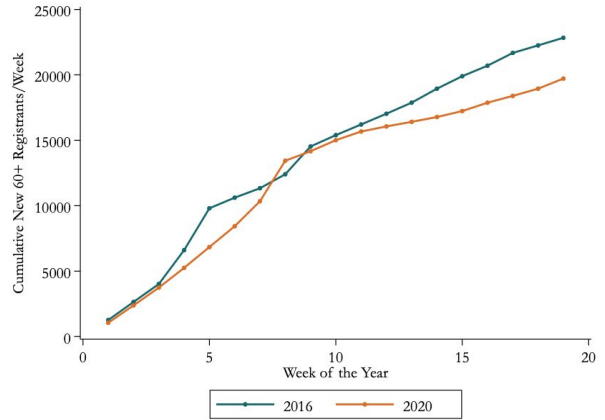
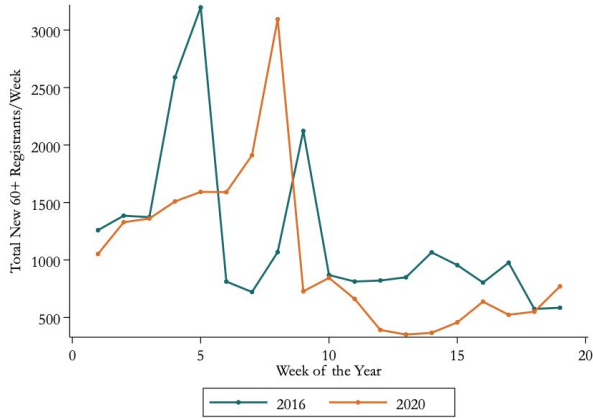
New Republican Registrants Over Time



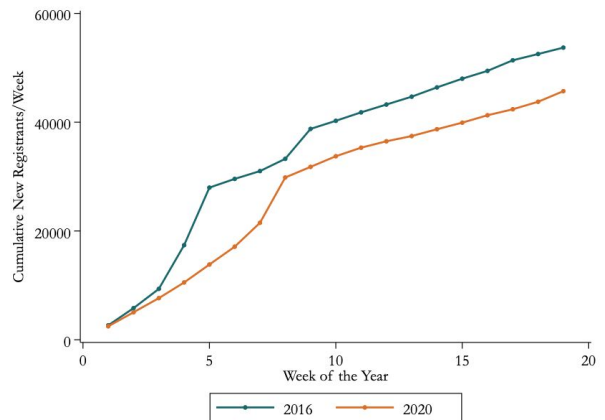
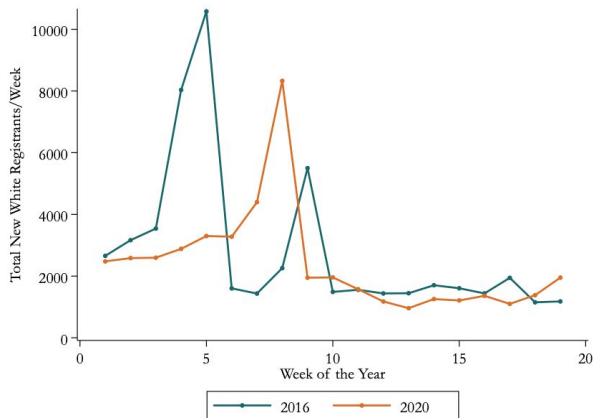
New Age 18-29 Registrants Over Time



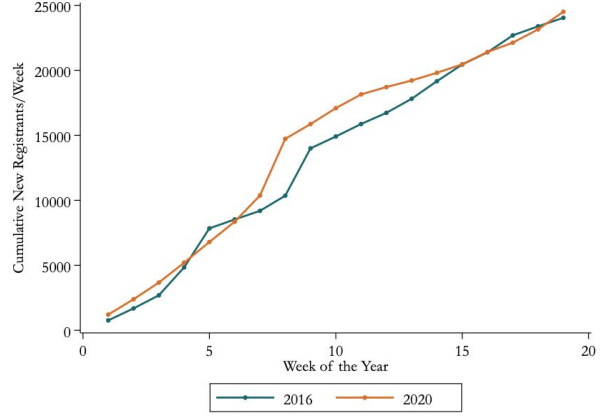
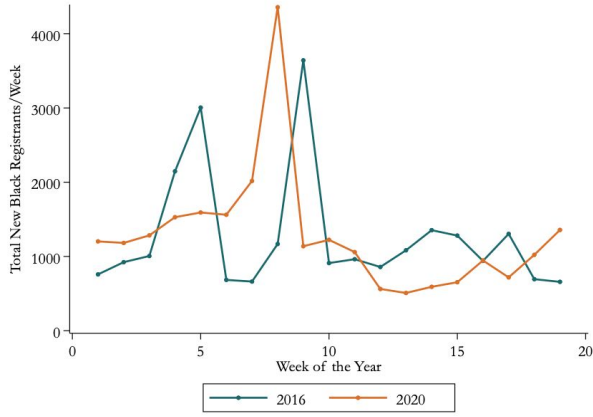
New Age 60+ Registrants Over Time



New White Registrants Over Time



New Black Registrants Over Time



Absentee Ballots

Absentee Ballot Statistics, 2016 vs. 2020

In the 2020 combined primary, over 1.6 million voters applied for absentee ballots. Nearly all (99.6%) of these were issued to voters, according to the Georgia SOS absentee ballot file. Only 78.6% of ballots that voters applied for were returned, meaning that about 300,000 voters applied for absentee ballots but did not return them. Of all requested ballots, ultimately 71.2% of them were used by voters to successfully cast a vote, and slightly less than 1% of them were rejected by county election officials.

Relative to 2016, the total number of absentee ballots increased by over 3,000%. The return rate in 2020 was about 20 percentage points lower than it was in 2016 (78.6% in 2020 vs. 97.2% in 2016). The rate of rejection of absentee ballots was 20 times higher in 2016 than it was in 2020, but due to the large increase in absentee ballots the total number of rejected ballots was higher in 2020.

In some cases, counties inconsistently reported late and rejected ballots. [Reports revealed that some counties were over- or under-counting rejected and late absentee ballots.](#) The two major discrepancies we know of were in Fulton County and in Polk County. In Fulton County, officials did not record any ballots that were rejected for being late; however, in interviews with county election officials they said they had received and rejected 951 late ballots. In Polk County, officials marked 764 ballots as rejected for being late even though the ballots had never been returned. The aggregate results in the rest of this section adjust for these two issues, but all of the analyses by demographics are unadjusted, because we cannot identify at the individual-level which ballots were marked incorrectly.

	2016 Presidential Primary and 2020 Combined Primary - Vote-By-Mail Ballots			
	2016 Totals	Percent of Applied	2020 Totals	Percent of Applied
Applied	45,348	-	1,679,954	-
Issued	44,551	98.2%	1,673,161	99.6%
Returned	44,091	97.2%	1,320,311	78.6%
Accepted	35,475	78.2%	1,196,039	71.2%
Cancelled	1,485	3.3%	122,240	7.3%

Rejected	7,858	17.3%	11,889	0.7%
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By Party: Absentee Ballot Statistics, 2016 vs. 2020

There were no large differences in the use of absentee ballots across parties in the 2020 combined primary. Absentee ballots requested for the Democratic primary were slightly more likely to be returned and accepted than absentee ballots for the Republican primary.

2016 Presidential Primary and 2020 Combined Primary - Democratic Votes				
	2016 Totals	Percent of Applied	2020 Totals	Percent of Applied
Applied	15,517	-	829,488	-
Issued	15,336	98.8%	827,811	99.8%
Returned	15,152	97.7%	678,842	81.8%
Accepted	11,622	74.9%	627,110	75.6%
Cancelled	496	3.2%	50,361	6.1%
Rejected	3,250	20.9%	6,720	0.8%

2016 Presidential Primary and 2020 Combined Primary - Republican Votes				
	2016 Totals	Percent of Applied	2020 Totals	Percent of Applied
Applied	29,335	-	783,037	-
Issued	29,041	99.0%	782,057	99.9%
Returned	28,784	98.1%	610,151	77.9%
Accepted	23,791	81.1%	543,031	69.8%
Cancelled	785	2.7%	66,767	8.5%
Rejected	4,530	15.4%	4,464	0.6%

Absentee Ballot Rejection Reasons, 2016 vs. 2020

The most common reason for absentee ballots to be rejected was due to ballots being returned after the election deadline. In 2020, about 72% of rejected ballots were rejected due to being returned late, while in 2016 about 93% of ballots were rejected for being late. In contrast, there was a significantly higher proportion of rejections due to signatures not matching in 2020 relative to 2016; 27% in 2016 vs less than 1% of rejected ballots in 2020.

	2016 Pres Primary		2020 Combined Primary
Returned Late	93.4%		72.3%
Signature Not Matched	1.3%		27.0%
Address Not Matched	0.7%		0.0%
Other	4.5%		0.6%
Total Rejected	7,858		11,889
Total Returned	44,091		1,320,311
Returned Ballot Rejection Rate	17.8%		0.9%

By Party: Absentee Ballot Rejections, 2016 vs. 2020

While Democrats were slightly more likely to use absentee ballots in 2020 than were Republicans, they made up a disproportionately higher share of the total rejected ballots. Specifically, in 2020 Democrats submitted 51.4% of absentee ballots but made up 56.2% of the rejected ballots, while Republicans submitted 46.2% of absentee ballots but only made up 32.5% of rejected ballots.

	2016 Pres Primary		2020 Combined Primary	
	Dem	Rep	Dem	Rep
Returned Late	93.6%	93.5%	70.7%	74.0%
Signature Not Matched	1.6%	1.1%	28.5%	25.8%
Address Not Matched	0.5%	0.8%	0.0%	0.0%
Other	4.2%	4.7%	0.8%	0.3%
Total Rejected	3,121	4,360	6,680	3,868
Percent of All Rejected*	41.3%	57.7%	56.2%	32.5%
Percent of All Returned Ballots	34.4%	65.3%	51.4%	46.2%

*Non-Partisan voters not shown here, but used in the calculation of this row

By Race: Absentee Ballot Rejections, 2020

White voters submitted 63.1% of absentee by-mail ballots in 2020, but made up only 47.1% of the total rejected ballots. Non-white voters had disproportionately higher rejection rates. The reasons for rejections were similar across all racial groups except for Hispanic voters, who were more likely to have their ballots rejected for arriving late and less likely to have signature matching issues.

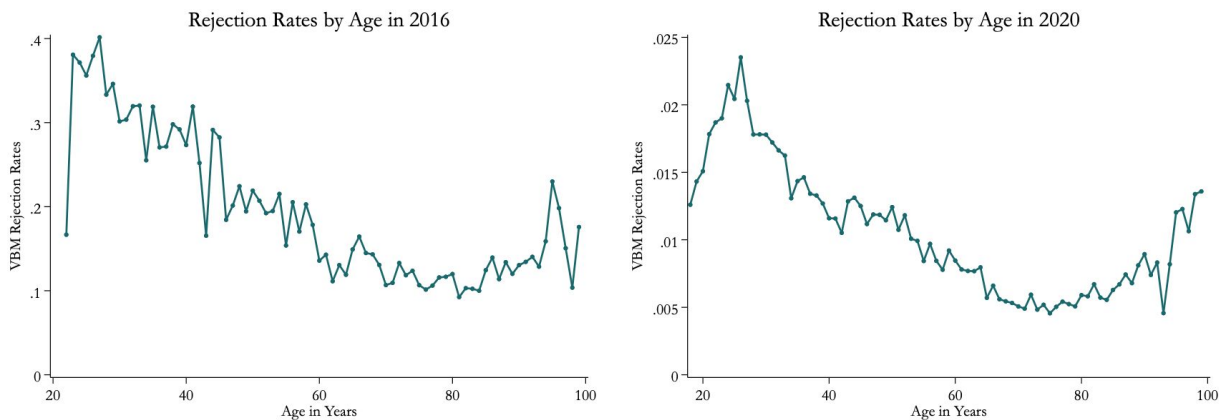
	2020 Combined Primary				
	White	Black	Hispanic	Asian	Other
Returned Late	74.6%	68.5%	82.3%	73.5%	72.8%
Signature Not Matched	25.0%	30.7%	17.1%	26.0%	26.7%
Address Not Matched	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
Other	0.4%	0.8%	0.7%	0.5%	0.5%
Total Rejected	5,595	4,253	299	392	1,153
Percent of All Rejected	47.1%	35.8%	2.5%	3.3%	9.7%
Percent of All Returned Ballots	63.1%	26.8%	1.3%	1.5%	7.3%

By Age and Gender: Absentee Ballot Rejections, 2020

Male and female voters were similarly likely to have their ballots rejected, though female voters had a higher number of total absentee ballots and so made up a higher percentage of rejected ballots. Age significantly affected rejection rates, with voters aged 18-29 more likely to have their mail-in ballots rejected and older voters aged 60+ the least likely to have their ballots rejected. This effect of age was qualitatively similar in 2016 and 2020, even while the overall rejection rates in 2016 were significantly higher.

	2020 Combined Primary					
	Male	Female	Age 18-29	Age 30-44	Age 45-59	Age 60+
Returned Late	69.9%	74.2%	77.6%	81.3%	76.6%	63.6%
Signature Not Matched	29.5%	25.3%	21.2%	18.5%	23.2%	35.8%
Address Not Matched	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
Other	0.6%	0.5%	1.2%	0.2%	0.2%	0.6%
Total Rejected	5,014	6,654	1,885	2,099	3,016	4,692
Percent of All Rejected	42.2%	56.0%	15.9%	17.7%	25.4%	39.5%
Percent of All Returned Ballots	42.1%	57.7%	7.7%	11.6%	22.4%	58.2%

Rejection Rates by Age, 2016 vs 2020



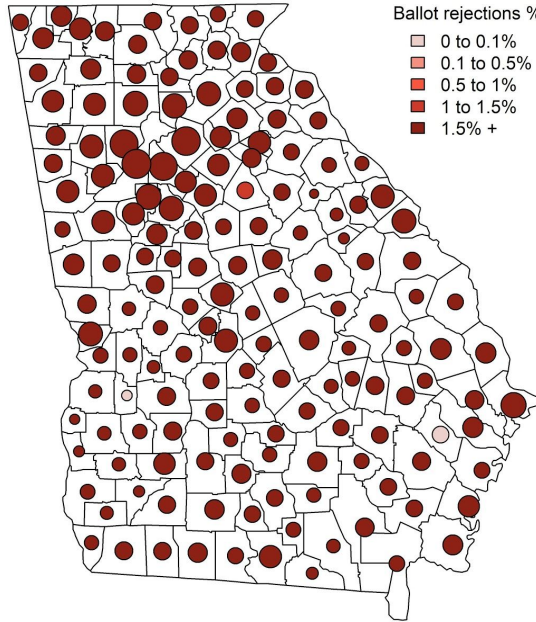
County-Level Rejection Rates

As noted earlier in this report, certain counties inconsistently reported late and rejected ballots. [Again, the two major discrepancies we know of were in Fulton County and in Polk County.](#) In the aggregate county-level results here, we correct the totals approximately by adding 951 late rejected ballots to Fulton County and subtracting 764 late rejected ballots from Polk County. For analyses by demographic groups here, for example the county-level rejection rates by race, we do not adjust for these discrepancies because we cannot identify individual ballots or voters whose absentee voters were misclassified.

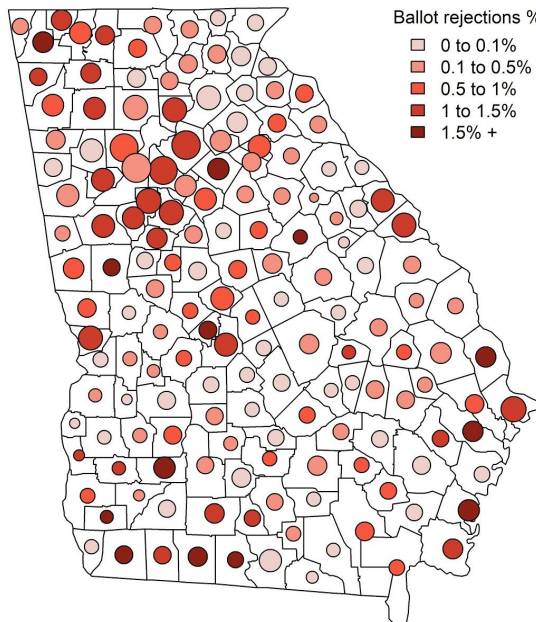
The county-level rejection rates of absentee by-mail ballots in 2020 was significantly lower than in 2016 across the board. The Atlanta Metropolitan area had a relatively high absentee ballot rejection rate in the 2020 combined primary, ranging generally from a 1% to 1.5% rejection rate, relative to a statewide rejection rate of about 0.7%. Within the same county, the absentee ballot rejection for Black voters was generally higher than that of White voters. Dougherty county had the highest absentee ballot rejection rate (adjusting for the Fulton under-reporting and Polk over-reporting issues) at 3.4% of absentee ballots rejected.

Absentee Rejection Rates, by County and Year

2016

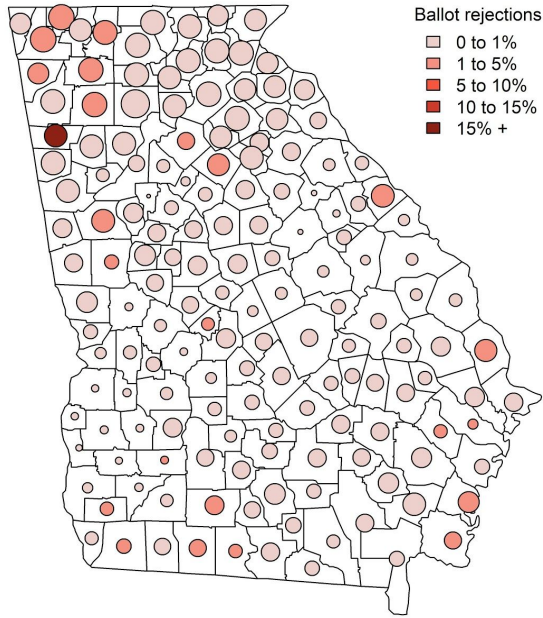


2020

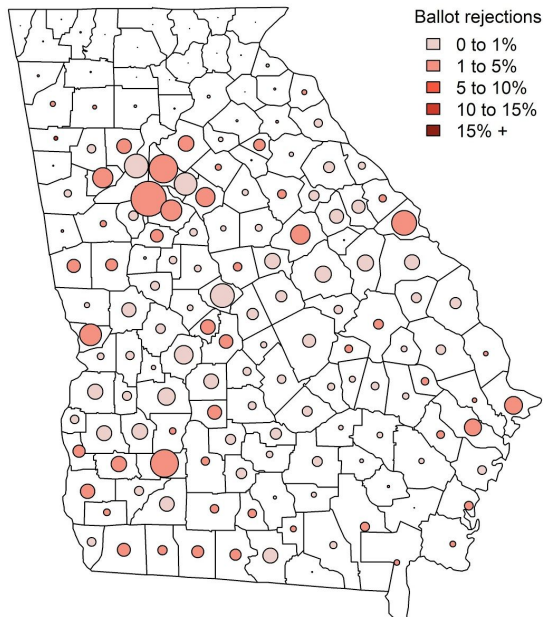


White and Black Absentee Rejection Rates, by County

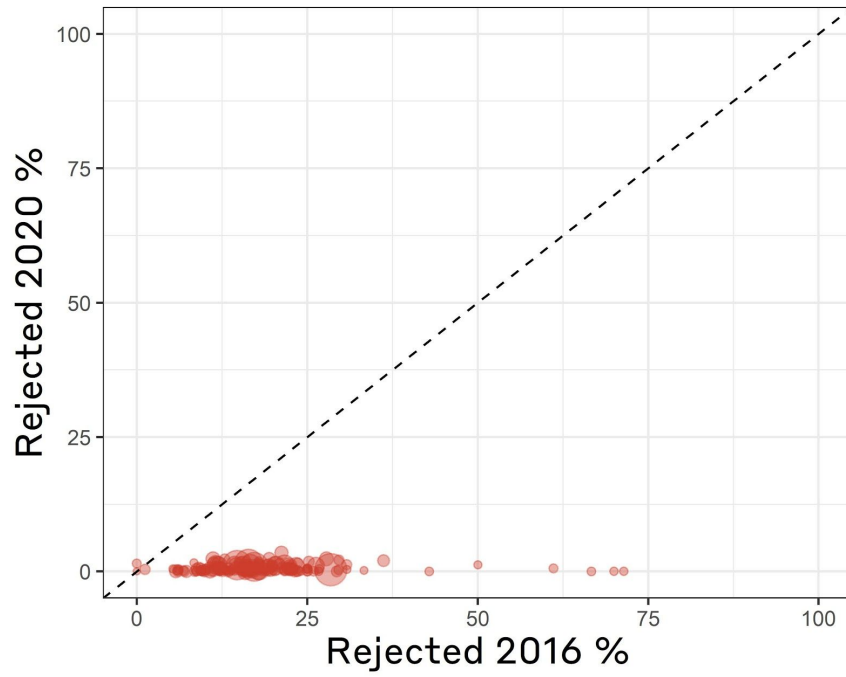
White Rejection Rates



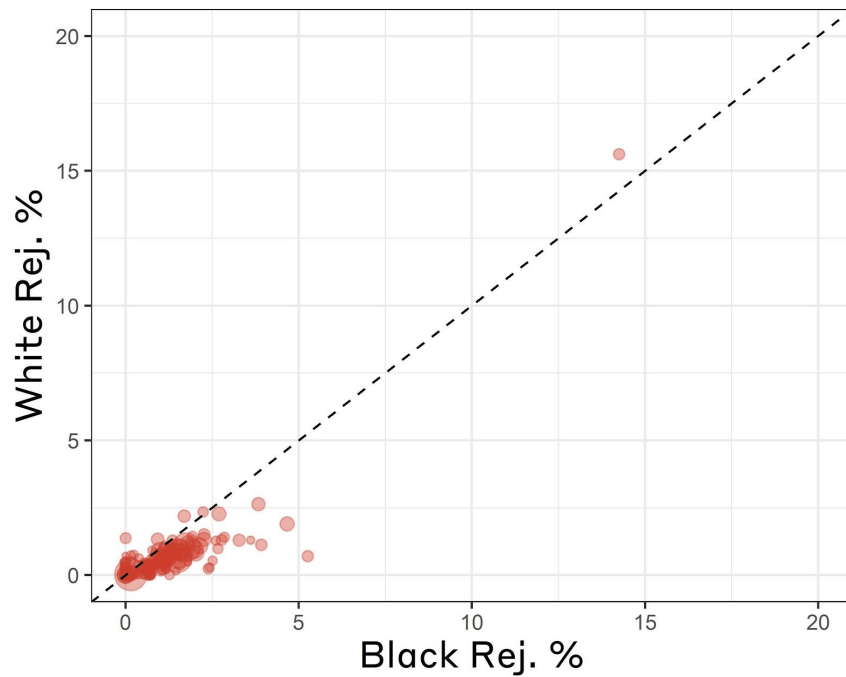
Black Rejection Rates



County-Level Rejection Rates by Year

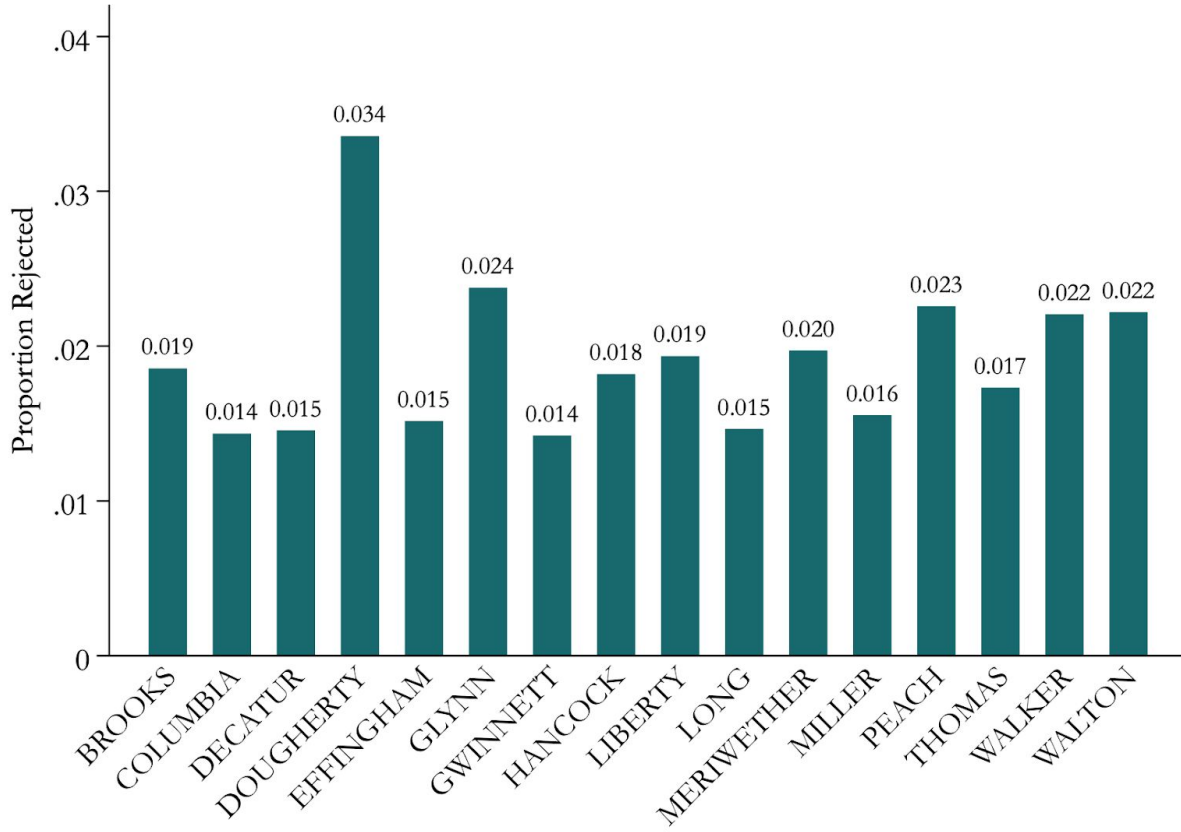


County-Level VBM Rejection Race in 2020, by Race²



² The outlier at ~15% is Polk County, which has misreporting issues with their rejected ballots in 2020 (see text for details). For this figure we do not adjust for these issues because we cannot identify individual ballots that were misclassified.

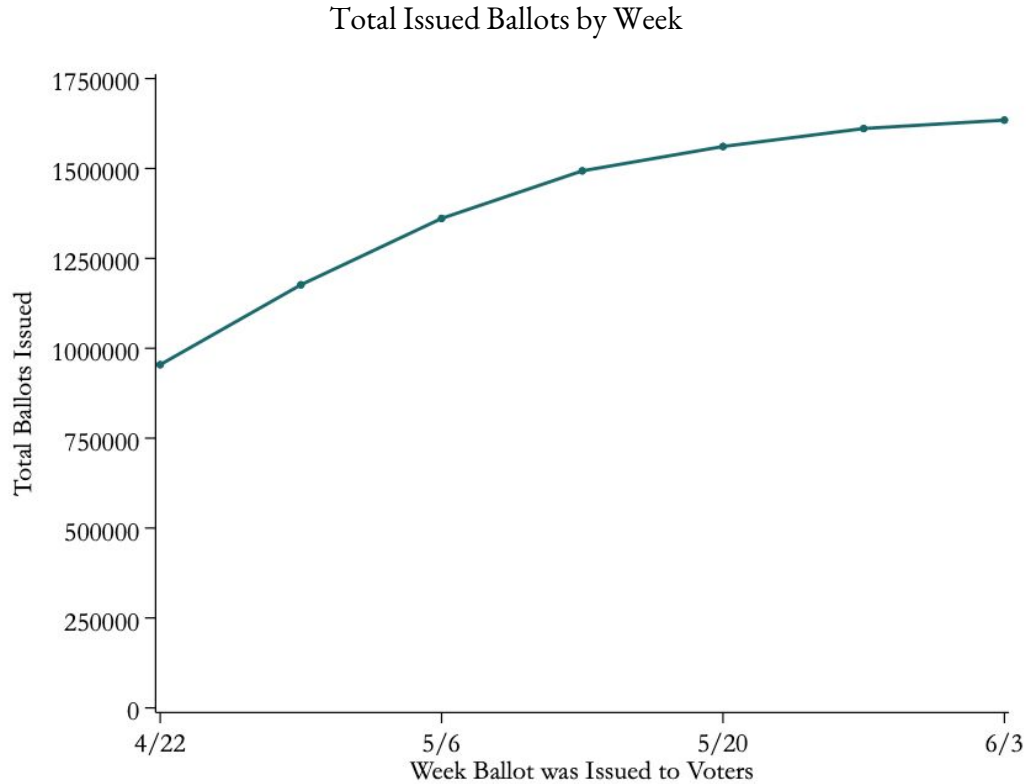
VBM Ballot Rejection Rates by County, 2020



Note: Adjusted for the Polk County over-reporting of unreturned ballots as rejected and Fulton County under-reporting of late ballots as rejected. See: <https://news.wjct.org/post/least-8000-absentee-ballots-georgia-rejected-coming-late>

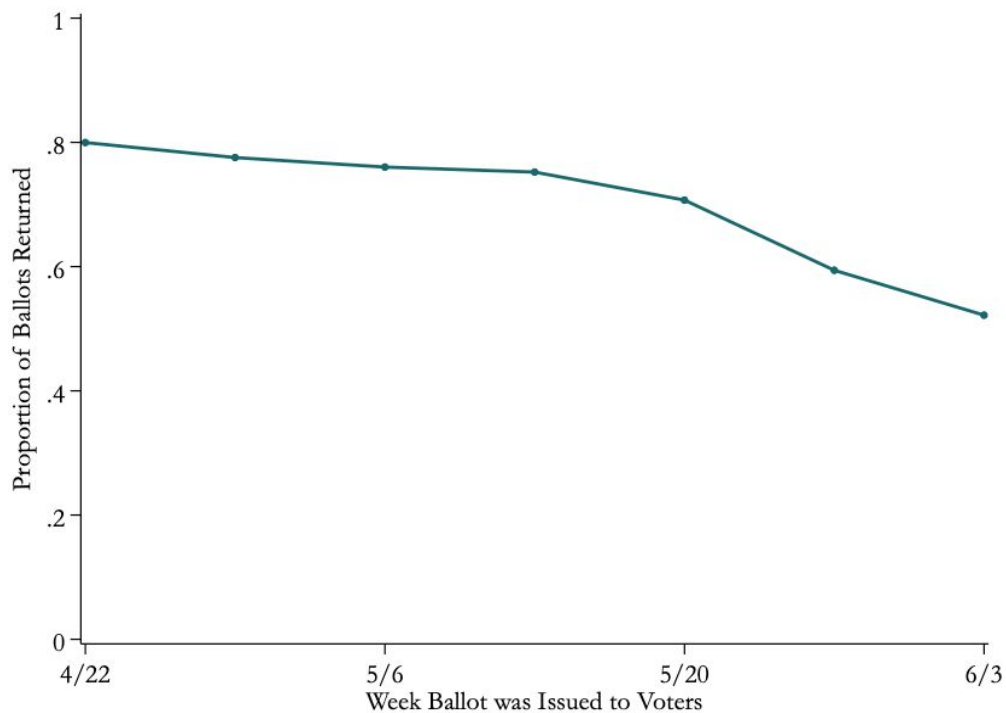
Vote Mode by Ballot Issue Date

By primary election day in 2020, the Georgia Secretary of State had received requests for and issued over 1.6 million absentee ballots. The figure below shows that nearly 1 million of these were issued by the week of April 22. On election day, many voters reported going to the polls because they never received their ballot in the mail. In the figures below, we look at how the timing of ballots being issued to voters affects whether the absentee ballot was returned, rejected, turned in late, or cancelled.



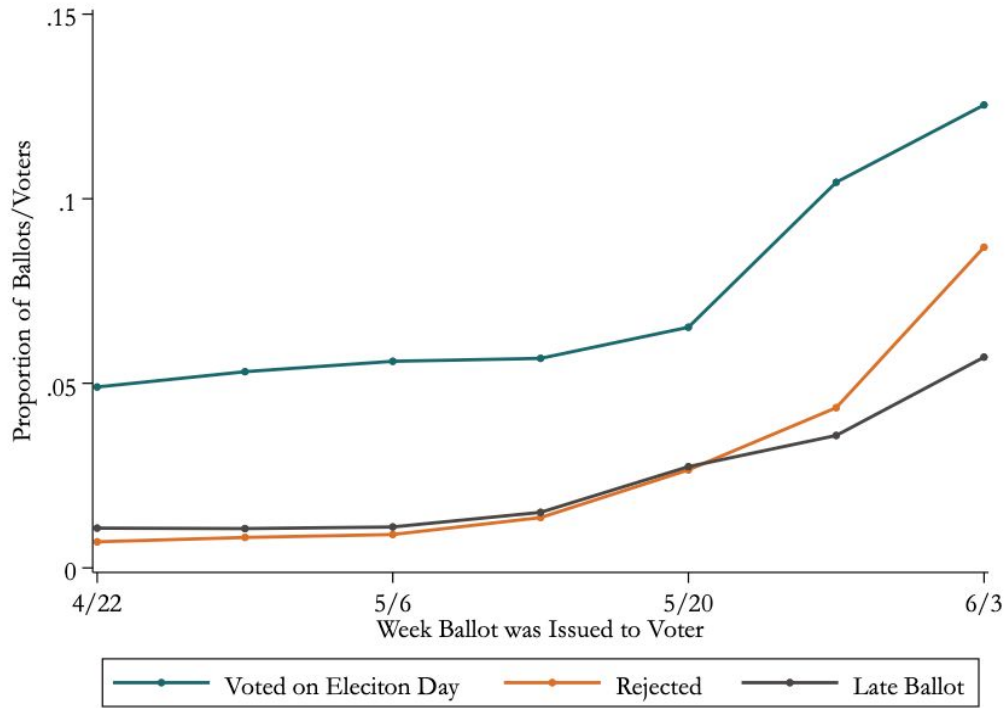
In the weeks leading up to election day on June 9th, the probability that a voter would return their requested mail-in ballot decreased from about 80% for ballots issued by the end of April to around 50% for ballots issued the week before the election. In the figures here, a “returned” ballot includes ballots that were intentionally cancelled by voters who decided to vote in-person despite having requested a mail-in ballot, as well as ballots that were mailed back to election officials. The probability that a voter who had requested an absentee ballot decided to instead vote on election day increased from about 5% to 12.5% for ballots issued the week before election day. The largest jump occurs between 3 and 2 weeks before the election, where it nearly doubles from 6.5% to 10.4%.

Returned Ballots by Ballot Issue Week

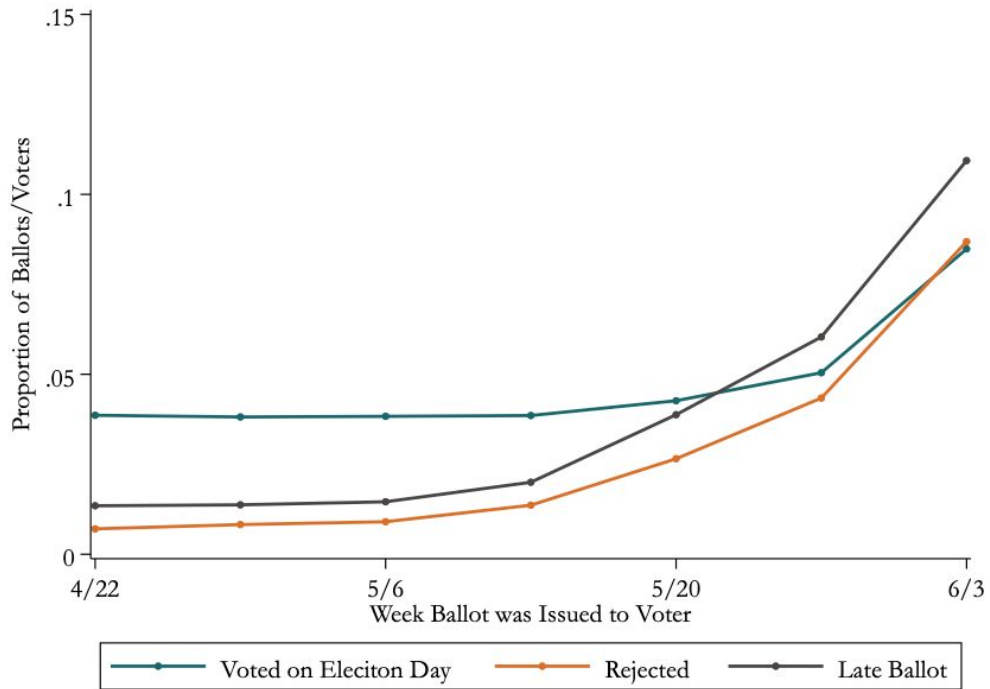


The probability that an absentee ballot would be rejected also increased as the issue date of the ballot moved closer to primary election day; less than 1% of ballots issued at the end of April were rejected or received by county officials late, while ballots issued the week leading up to the election had a rejection rate of 8.6%, with 5.7% of the ballots issued having been received late (accounting for two-thirds of rejections for ballots issued at this time). The patterns are similar when looking only at requested absentee ballots that were actually returned.

Vote Mode by Ballot Issue Week, All Ballots



Vote Mode by Ballot Issue Week, Returned Ballots Only



Conclusion

Despite the dangers of COVID-19 and the various challenges faced by election officials and voters, Georgia's 2020 combined primary saw record turnout. Over 1.6 million absentee ballots were requested by voters, and about half of all voters cast in the primary were by mail. The cumulative number of new registered voters in 2020 lagged slightly behind the numbers in 2016, except for younger voters (age 18-29) who had higher registration numbers in 2020.

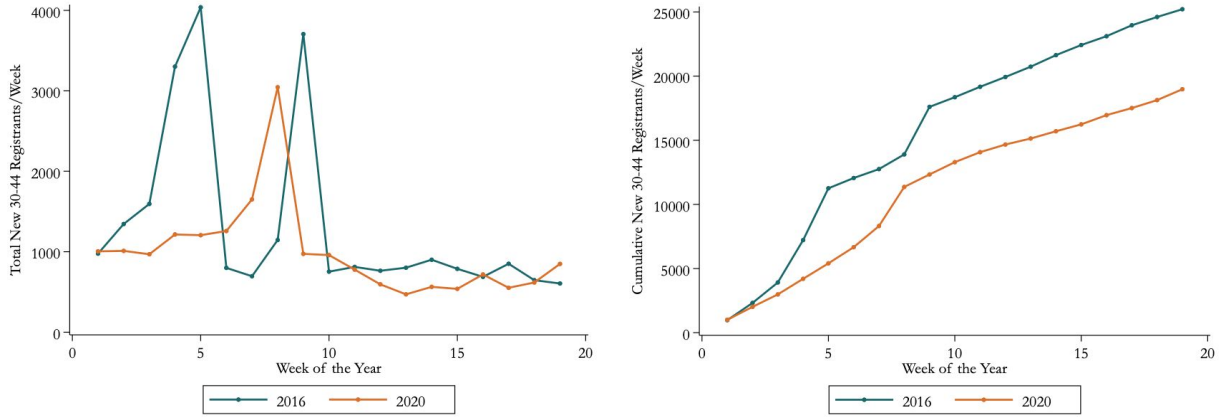
Only about 1% of returned mail-in absentee ballots were rejected, the most common reason being returned after the election deadline. Democrats, non-white voters, and younger voters were more likely to have their mail-in ballots rejected, and ballots that were issued close to election day were more likely to be returned late and/or rejected. A significant portion of voters who requested mail-in ballots decided to vote in-person, either early or on election day.

Appendix A: Data Sources

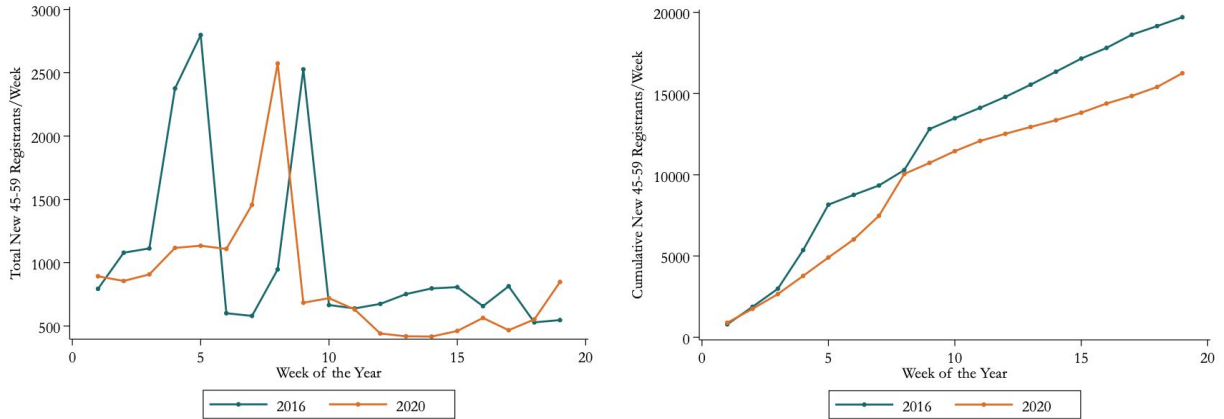
1. Georgia Voter File: The full voter file data from the Georgia Secretary of State's office used in this report was purchased in early June and downloaded through a secure FTP link on June 15, 2020.
 - <https://georgiasecretaryofstate.net/collections/voter-list-1/products/state-wide-voter-list>
2. Georgia Voter Absentee Files: Absentee voter files can be downloaded for each election from the Secretary of State's website. For 2020, we use both the voter absentee files for the originally scheduled Presidential Preference Primary (March 24) as well as the combined PPP and General Primary on June 9, 2020. The June 9th Gen. Pri./Gen. NP/Spec. Election absentee file and the March 24 PPP absentee file were downloaded July 30, 2020. According to the website the June 9th absentee file we use was last modified on 07/02/2020 at 11:50:41 PM, while the March 24 PPP absentee file was last modified on 4/2/2020 at 9:38:55PM.
 - <https://elections.sos.ga.gov/Elections/voterabsenteefile.do>
3. Georgia Voter History Files: We combined all available voter history files for 2016, 2018, and 2020. For 2020, we use both the voter history files for the originally scheduled Presidential Preference Primary (March 24) as well as the combined PPP and General Primary on June 9, 2020. The June 9th Gen. Pri./Gen. NP/Spec. Election and March 24 Presidential Primary Preference voter history files were downloaded July 30, 2020. According to the website, the June 9th voter history file we use was last modified on 07/30/2020 at 1:37:80AM, while the March 24 PPP voter history file we use was last modified on 7/29/2020 at 1:31:21AM.
 - <https://elections.sos.ga.gov/Elections/voterhistory.do>

Appendix B: More Results

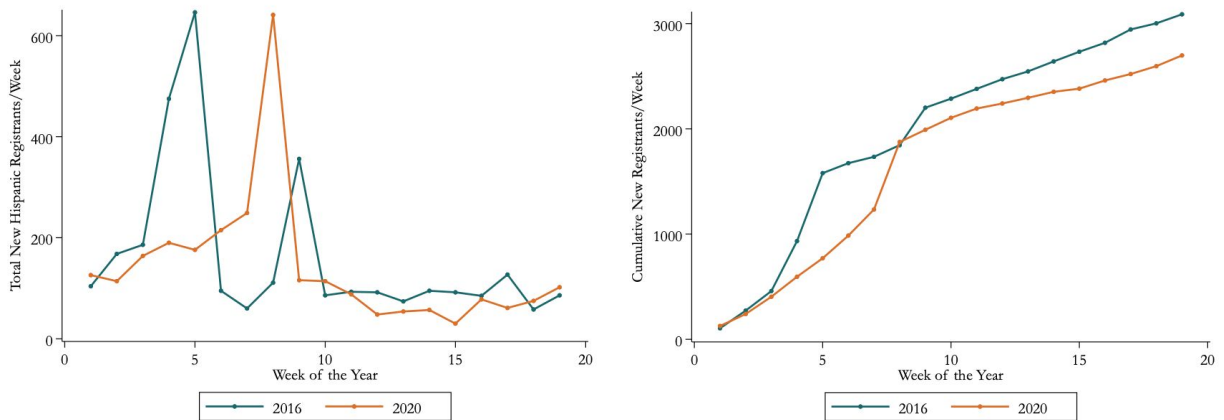
New Age 30-44 Registrants Over Time



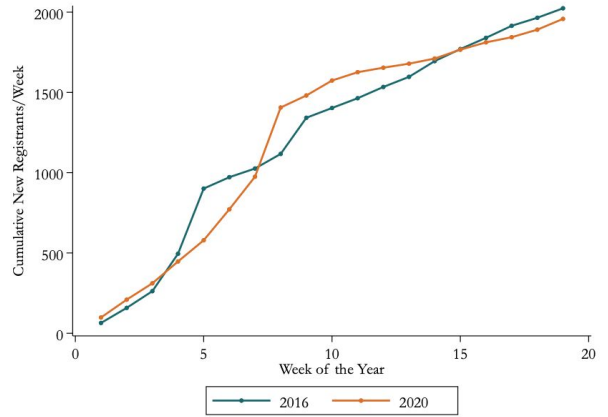
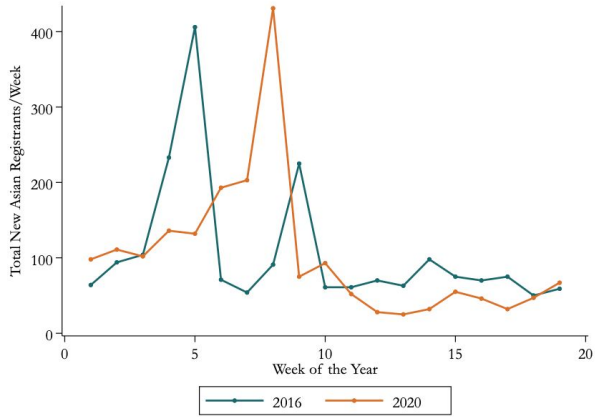
New Age 45-59 Registrants Over Time



New Hispanic Registrants Over Time



New Asian Registrants Over Time



New Other Registrants Over Time

