

# Voter Registration Summary by State

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## Introduction

The coronavirus pandemic hit the US just as the 2020 state primaries season was beginning, affecting voter registration across the country. Pandemic measures strained registration processes throughout this year, seeing moving primary dates and deadlines, dramatic dips in registration rates in March and April, and new legislature and litigation surrounding access to registration. Prior to the first wave of coronavirus, countrywide registration rates from the 10 months leading to the general election were [already higher than 2016](#). These rates slowed significantly in many states as pandemic measures took hold, but appear to be picking back up more recently; however, this has not shown to be a uniform trend across all states, especially accounting for different registration methods, deadlines, and coronavirus peaks and responses.

This report aims to summarize voter registration information in [state reports](#) from the Healthy Elections Project and to expand on registration information that has emerged since, examining how 2020 monthly registration and breakdowns by party, race, and age differ from 2016. Florida and North Carolina will be used as demographic case studies, with charts on Georgia included in the appendix. In addition, current trends in laws and legal battles surrounding voter registration will be discussed.

## Note on Data

This report makes use of administrative data from the states of Florida, North Carolina, Georgia, and Pennsylvania in order to determine registration dates, party, age, gender, and race, where available. We also draw on data from [a report by the Center for Election Innovation & Research](#), which we supplement with the above state data, as well as publicly available registration numbers from the election offices in DC, Florida, Maryland, and Virginia.

## Sources of Registration and Deadlines

With each state in charge of its own registration process, there are many variations in how voters are expected to register. Since the start of the pandemic, it does not appear that any states have appreciably changed their sources of registration, though deadlines have shifted considerably for several states, especially as some March primaries were delayed because of coronavirus. For the general election, states like Virginia and Florida have extended their deadlines because their online voter systems crashed on the last day to register. Florida's website crashed due to extraordinarily high traffic, "[1.1 million requests per hour](#)" according to Secretary of State Laurel M. Lee, so the state extended the registration deadline to 7 PM of the following day. Virginia extended the deadline by 48 hours after a [cut fiber-optic](#) cable took out the registration site for most of the day.

Most states offer registration through more than one source — often some combination of online, at the DMV, by mail, or in person at a clerk's office. Online registration has gained traction over the past four years, with several states, like North Carolina and Ohio, adopting it after the 2016 election. Most of the states that offer registration through their Department of Motor Vehicles (or variation thereof) see that as the most popular means of registration, surpassing online registration even in 2020. Texas, which does not offer online registration, has seen a large increase in voter registrations since 2016, with [a record 16.9 million Texans registered to vote this fall](#) — in spite of a major slowdown in registrations in April and May.

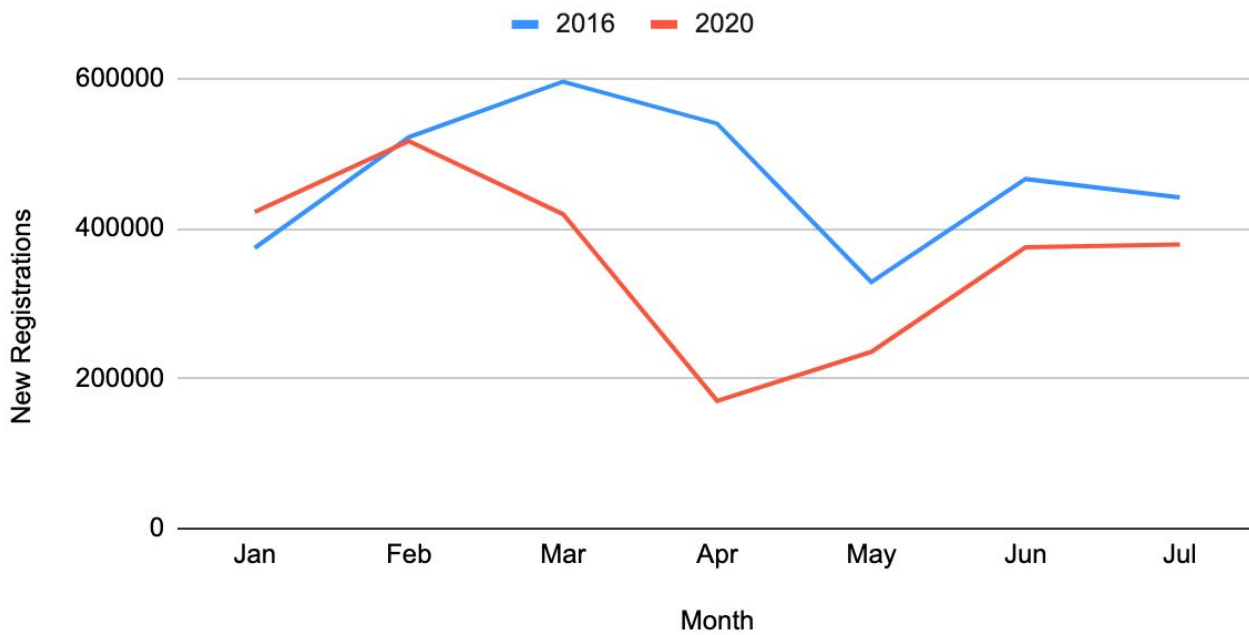
## Overall Trends in Registration

Voter registration country-wide saw a significant drop around the start of the pandemic, around late February and through March and April. Pre-pandemic, 2020 registration rates were on average higher than 2016, and seemed [on track to stay higher](#). Registration rates began to pick back up by the start of May and have continued to rise since, as can be seen in the chart below, which aggregates registration

numbers from select states based on data from [a report by the Center for Election Innovation & Research](#), as well as the Pennsylvania voter file, obtained directly from the state election office.

**Monthly voter registration totals**

CO, DE, DC, FL, GA, IL, MD, PA, TX, VA Registrations by Month (2016 vs. 2020)



Not all states have registration data to the current month. In the chart below, we’ve collected the most recent registration numbers that were publicly available, in combination with data from [the Center for Election Innovation & Research report](#). In a number of states, there are significantly fewer registrants in March and April of 2020 than 2016, but many states like Florida, Maryland, Illinois, and Virginia have been making up for those dips more recently, starting around June (Table 1). From the data we

have, several states still seem to have a registration deficit in comparison to 2016 numbers, though it's possible gains were made in the months we don't have data for.

**Table 1: Voter registration numbers by state, monthly total, and year.**

Month	AZ	CA	CO	DE	DC	FL	GA	IL	MD	NC	TX	VA
<b>2016</b>												
Jan	25,852	87,574	17,024	3,007	2,840	50,231	34,952	44,040	19,580	35,213	132,860	20,032
Feb	51,155	103,377	20,707	3,629	2,954	87,351	40,976	99,674	29,122	84,357	143,795	36,911
Mar	48,614	174,278	25,627	5,124	4,706	73,627	44,150	52,782	40,497	58,272	170,607	44,171
Apr	30,668	185,478	22,204	3,818	4,157	52,508	37,028	76,098	26,655	73,341	143,199	20,460
May			23,398	3,375	5,714	47,571	30,241	59,750	5,828		91,205	26,239
Jun			27,049	3,717	2,682	66,487	40,712	48,342	55,296		116,884	23,135
Jul			28,736	3,944	1,319	86,696	45,219	32,552	33,742		100,535	34,039
Aug				4,399	5,614	112,511	49,274	61,559	35,659		158,951	50,634
Sep				6,106	8,399	130,371	81,353	107,792	41,704		189,652	72,950
Oct				5,709	20,430	196,321	114,926	186,653	70,932		391,748	131,657
Nov				4,686	1,536	40,015	38,255	64,406	24,097		128,861	16,822
Dec					19,780	30,917	29,102		26,436		106,703	13,301
<b>2020</b>												
Jan	33,229	151,595	20,301	3,276	3,334	77,466	38,573	44,443	21,532	111,990	134,559	25,934
Feb	50,853	238,281	33,430	3,353	3,348	109,859	55,386	68,455	20,708	54,053	130,080	29,507
Mar	31,872	176,810	19,141	2,535	2,225	54,872	26,284	47,899	23,864	54,807	129,424	31,492
Apr	10,249	38,970	6,425	589	1,281	21,031	15,484	21,332	10,061	35,484	34,694	5,467
May		59,858	16,240	1,607	1,925	34,297	21,294	22,949	23,488	23,517	35,678	8,239
Jun		142,051	33,133	3,028	3,435	77,877	39,146	34,864	14,674	41,444	118,333	13,686
Jul		170,114	28,224	4,045	2,151	109,806	20,224	40,924	25,719	69,271	103,389	35,516
Aug					3,383	123,582		72,249	41,433	98,702	157,003	52,287
Sep					5,136				63,684			
<b>Difference</b>												
Jan	7,377	64,021	3,277	269	494	27,235	3,621	403	1,952	76,777	1,699	5,902
Feb	-302	134,904	12,723	-276	394	22,508	14,410	-31,219	-8,414	-30,304	-13,715	-7,404
Mar	-16,742	2,532	-6,486	-2,589	-2,481	-18,755	-17,866	-4,883	-16,633	-3,465	-41,183	-12,679
Apr	-20,419	-146,508	-15,779	-3,229	-2,876	-31,477	-21,544	-54,766	-16,594	-37,857	-108,505	-14,993
May			-7,158	-1,768	-3,789	-13,274	-8,947	-36,801	17,660		-55,527	-18,000
Jun			6,084	-689	753	11,390	-1,566	-13,478	-40,622		1,449	-9,449
Jul			-512	101	832	23,110	-24,995	8,372	-8,023		2,854	1,477

<b>Aug</b>					-2,231	11,071		10,690	5,774		-1,948	1,653
<b>Sep</b>					-3,263				21,980			
<b>Diff Total</b>	-30,086	54,949	-7,851	-8,181	-12,167	31,808	-56,887	-121,682	-42,920	5,151	-214,876	-53,493

## Demographic and Party Trends in Registration

Despite the pandemic, most states tracked below have more voters registered in 2020 over 2016 (Table 2). The only exception to date is Washington, which has about 240,000 fewer voters registered compared to 2016, as of September. There has been variation in party registration within states, however: The share of Democrats registered decreased in Florida, Kentucky, North Carolina, and Pennsylvania, while the share of Republicans registered decreased in New York and North Carolina. Florida and New York also experienced a larger increase in the portion of unaffiliated registrants compared to either Democratic or Republican party affiliates.

**Table 2: Comparison of 2016 and 2020 voter registration numbers by state and party**

	Year	Total registered (as of Sept)	Democrat	Republican	Minor Party	Unaffiliated
<a href="#">Florida</a>	<b>2016</b>	11,943,467	37.85%	35.11%	2.86%	24.18%
	<b>2020</b>	13,536,830	36.80%	35.17%	1.09%	26.90%
	<b>diff inshare</b>	1,593,363	-1.05	0.06	-1.77	2.72
<a href="#">Georgia</a> - as of 9/1	<b>2016</b>	6,637,939	--	--	--	--
	<b>2020</b>	7,024,692	--	--	--	--
	<b>diff inshare</b>	386,753				
<b>Kentucky - 2016 approximate (by mid oct.)</b>	<a href="#">2016</a>	3,300,000	51%	40%	9%	
	<a href="#">2020</a>	3,517,567	47.50%	43.58%	0.42%	8.50%
	<b>diff inshare</b>	217,567	-3.50	3.58	-0.08	
<a href="#">Maine</a> - as of 7/14	<b>2016</b>	1,058,444	31.97%	26.96%	4.74%	36.34%
	<b>2020</b>	1,063,383	36.37%	27.75%	3.92%	31.95%
	<b>diff inshare</b>	4,939	4.40	0.79	-0.82	-4.39
<a href="#">Michigan</a>	<b>2016</b>		--	--	--	--
	<b>2020</b>	7,915,352	--	--	--	--
<a href="#">Minnesota</a> - as of 5/1	<b>2016</b>	3,123,453				
	<b>2020</b>	3,392,082				

<a href="#">New York</a>	<b>2016 - April</b>	11,726,842	49.40%	23.29%	6.06%	21.25%
	<b>2020 - Feb.</b>	12,971,543	50.60%	21.92%	1.92%	25.55%
	<b>diff inshare</b>	1,244,701	1.20	-1.37	-4.14	4.30
<a href="#">North Carolina</a>	<b>2016</b>	6,749,460	39.77%	30.22%	0.44%	29.57%
	<b>2020</b>	7,200,188	35.76%	30.16%	0.72%	33.37%
	<b>diff inshare</b>	450,728	-4.01	-0.06	0.28	3.80
<a href="#">Ohio</a>						
<a href="#">Pennsylvania</a>	<b>2016 - 4/26</b>	8,273,703	49.10%	37.78%		13.12%
	<b>2020 - 6/2</b>	8,599,294	47.59%	38.27%		14.14%
	<b>diff inshare</b>	325,591	-1.51	0.49		1.02
<a href="#">Texas</a>	<b>2016</b>	14,238,436				
	<b>2020</b>	16,211,198				
	<b>diff inshare</b>	1,972,762				
<a href="#">Washington</a>	<b>2016</b>	4,872,385				
	<b>2020</b>	4,630,377				
	<b>diff inshare</b>	-242,008				
<a href="#">Wisconsin</a>	<b>2016</b>	3,505,062				
	<b>2020</b>	3,583,804				
	<b>diff inshare</b>	78,742				

[North Carolina](#) and [Georgia](#) are the only two states that report racial demographic data of registrants (Table 3). In North Carolina, interestingly, while white and Black voter registration rates decreased slightly, the ‘Other’ category doubled. This may be caused by a [“rise in nones.”](#) Prior to 2016, around 3% of voters did not provide ethnicity or racial information, but this number [jumped](#) to 19% of new voters in 2020.

**Table 3: Comparison of 2016 and 2020 voter registration numbers by state and demographic**

	2016 - % registrants by race					2020 - % registrants by race				
	White	Black	Hispanic	Asian	Other	White	Black	Hispanic	Asian	Other
<b>NC</b>	69.76%	22.26%	2.34%	--	7.16%	64.47%	20.75%	3.08%	--	14.01%
<b>GA</b>	56.27%	29.96%	2.60%	1.98%	9.19%	52.92%	29.99%	3.50%	2.52%	1.81%

## Case Studies

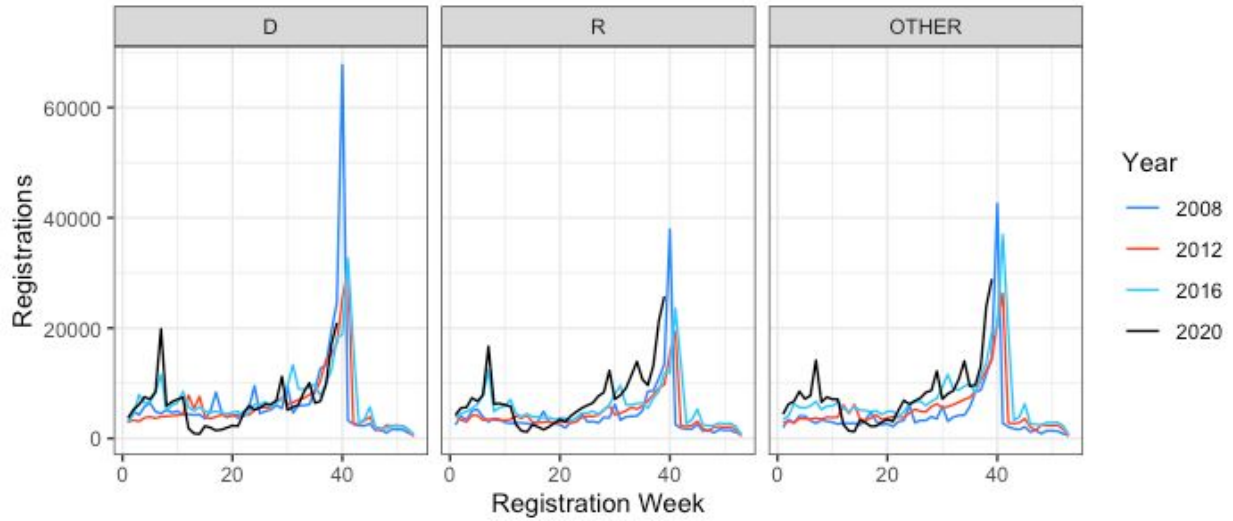
Using data from the voter files of Florida and North Carolina, we've taken a look at registration trends by week in the past four presidential election years. The charts here are broken out by party, race, age group, and gender, wherever it seems like there might be something to say.

Overall findings include a recent surge in Republican registrations in Florida and North Carolina, [as reported on by \*The New York Times\*](#), as well as a universal drop in registrations across all demographic and party groups at the start of the pandemic. Some racial and age groups recovered more quickly than others, however, as seen in the Florida study below.

### Florida by Party

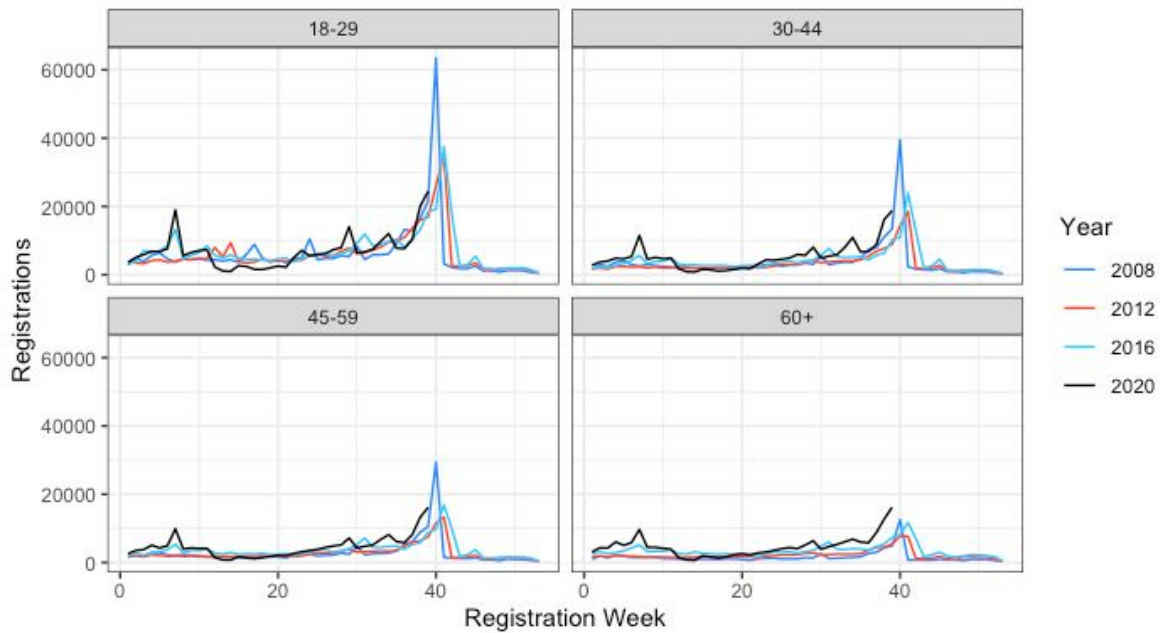
In Florida, where Democrats have historically had a registration advantage, Republican voter registration rates surged in recent months. Democratic registration rates, on the other hand, have remained more consistent with 2016 numbers. It may be interesting to note, as well, that there has also been a rise in registrations from voters choosing not to be affiliated with either the Republican or the Democratic parties.





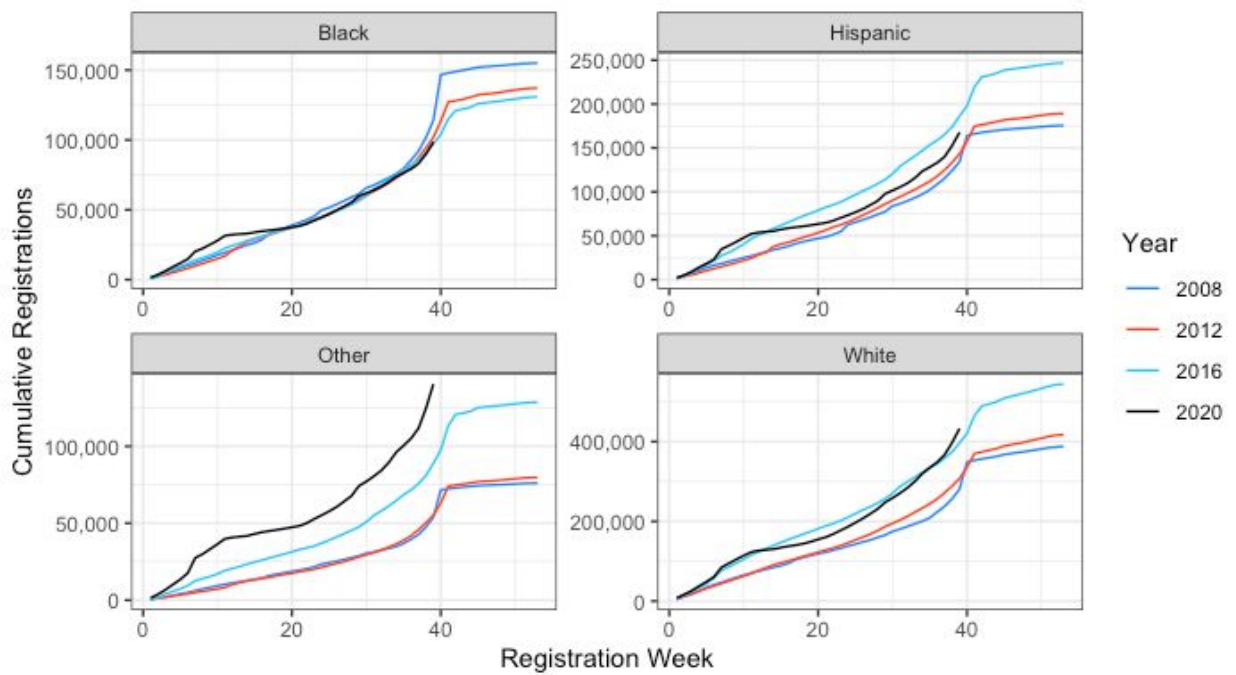
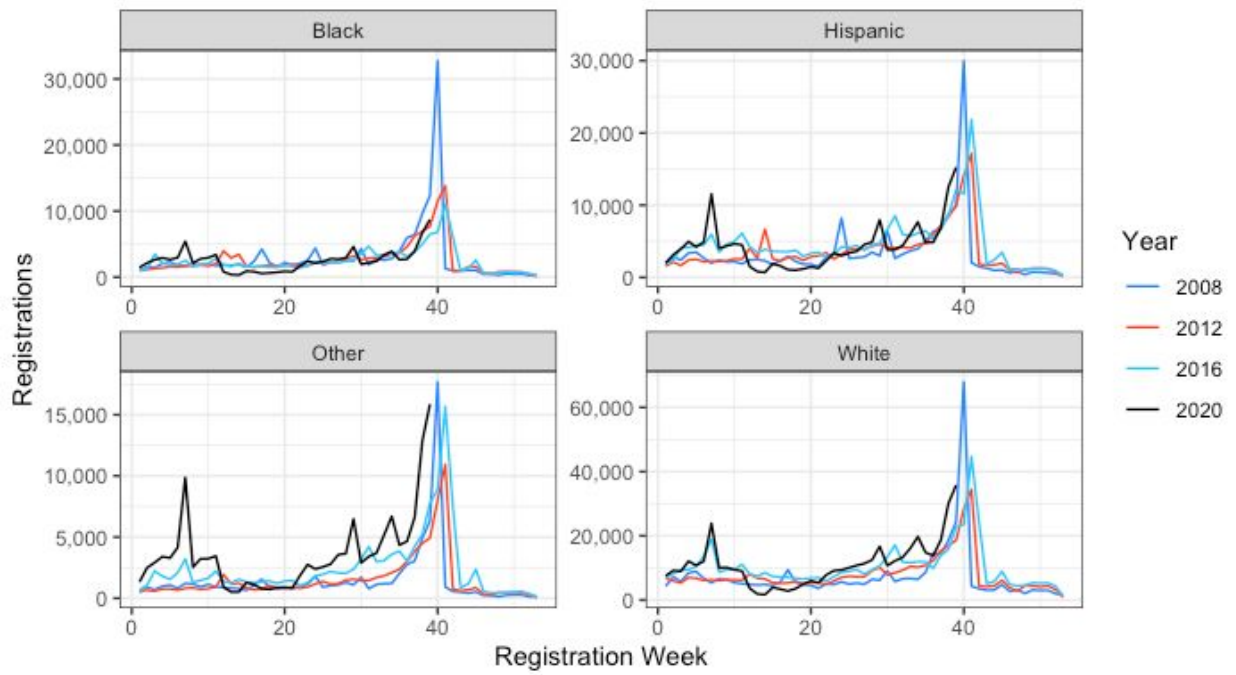
### Florida by Age Group

While voters in all age brackets saw a decline in registrations in April, all age groups began to recover registrations in the summer months, with the largest recoveries in registrations coming from voters aged 30+. Voters aged 18-29 still had not recovered 2016 numbers of registration by mid-September, however (and as expected, voters aged 18-29 make up the largest share of new registrants).



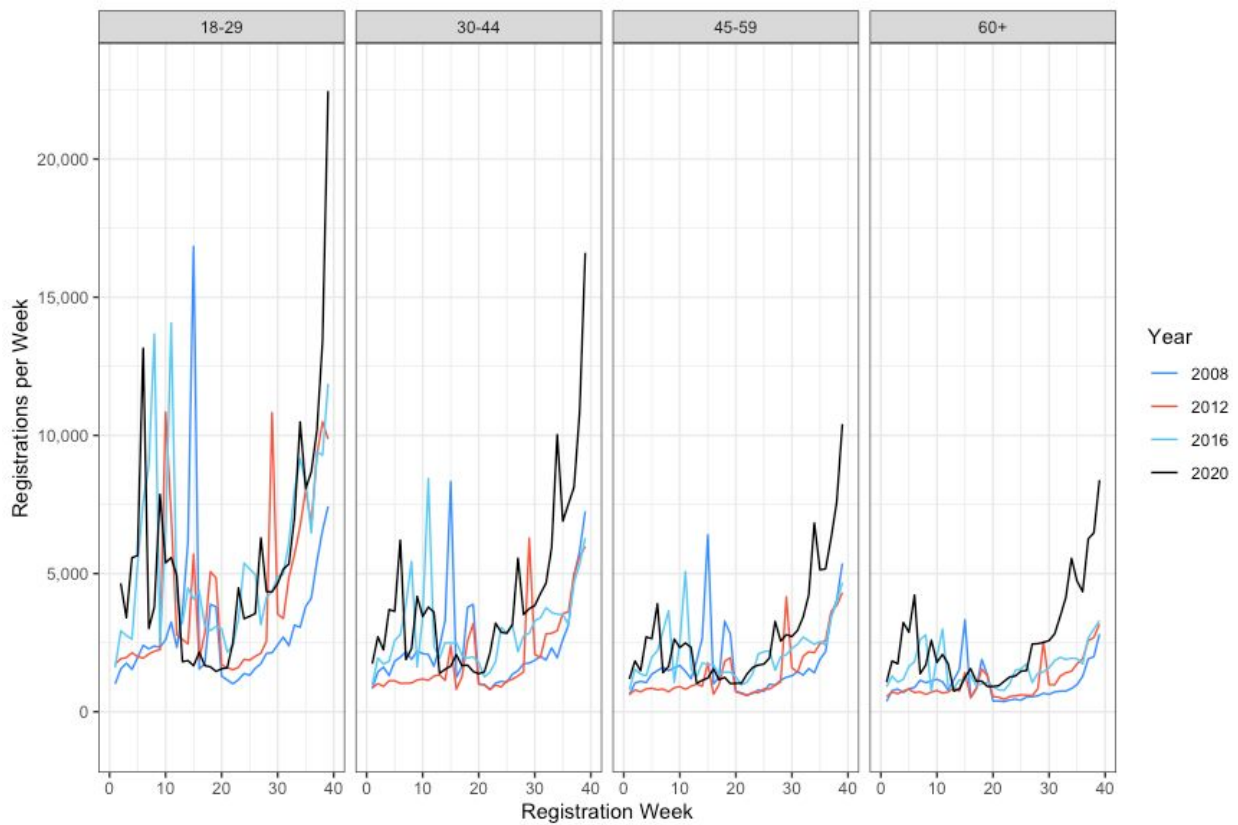
### **Florida by Race**

More variation in registration is seen across racial demographics of voters. While registrations across races dipped in April 2020, at the start of the pandemic, registrations for white voters fully recovered, with registrations in recent weeks surpassing 2016 rates. However, for Black voters and for Hispanic voters, especially, there is no comparable recovery.



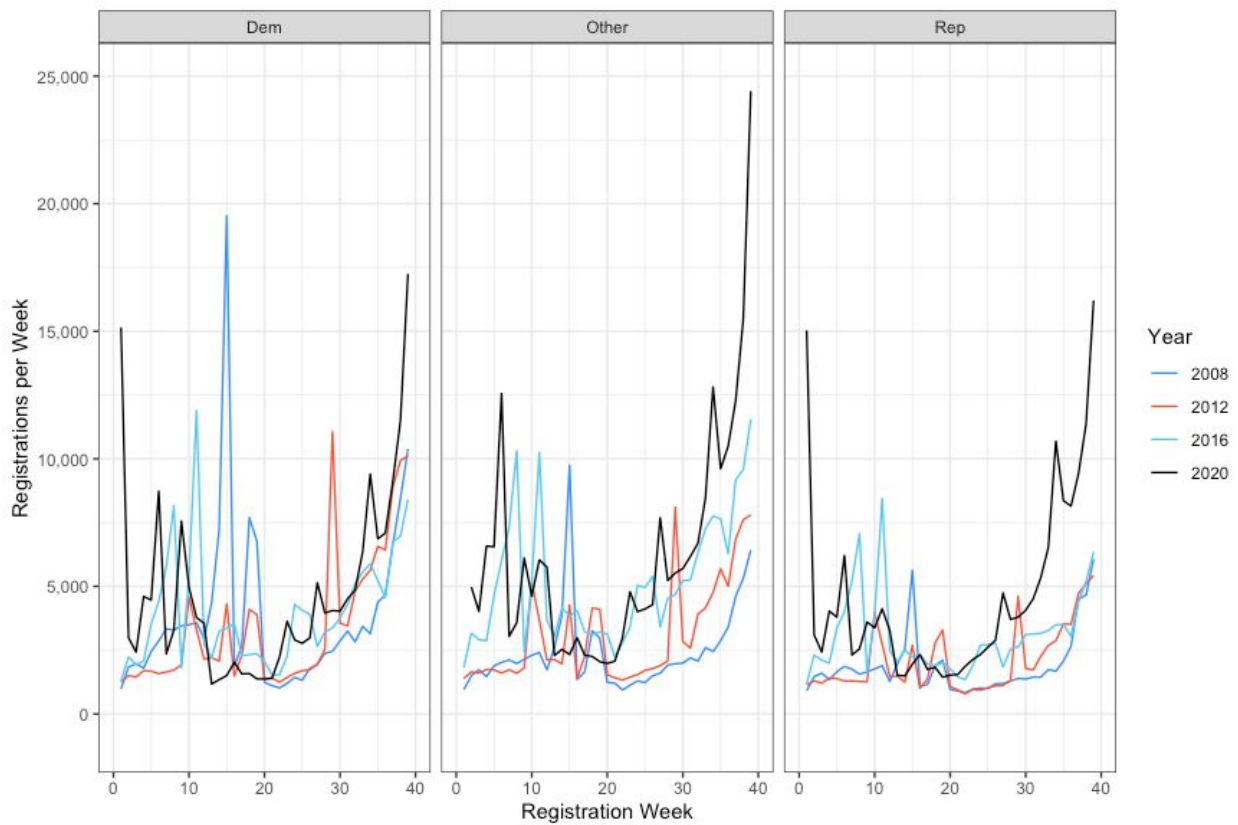
### North Carolina by Age

North Carolina has seen voter registrations recover to better-than-normal rates of registrations across all age groups in the last few months. Interestingly, the youngest groups did not have much improvement over previous years until the last few weeks, while voters over 30, and especially those over 60 have been seeing elevated registration numbers for months now. This could be due to the higher baseline for younger voters.



### North Carolina by Party

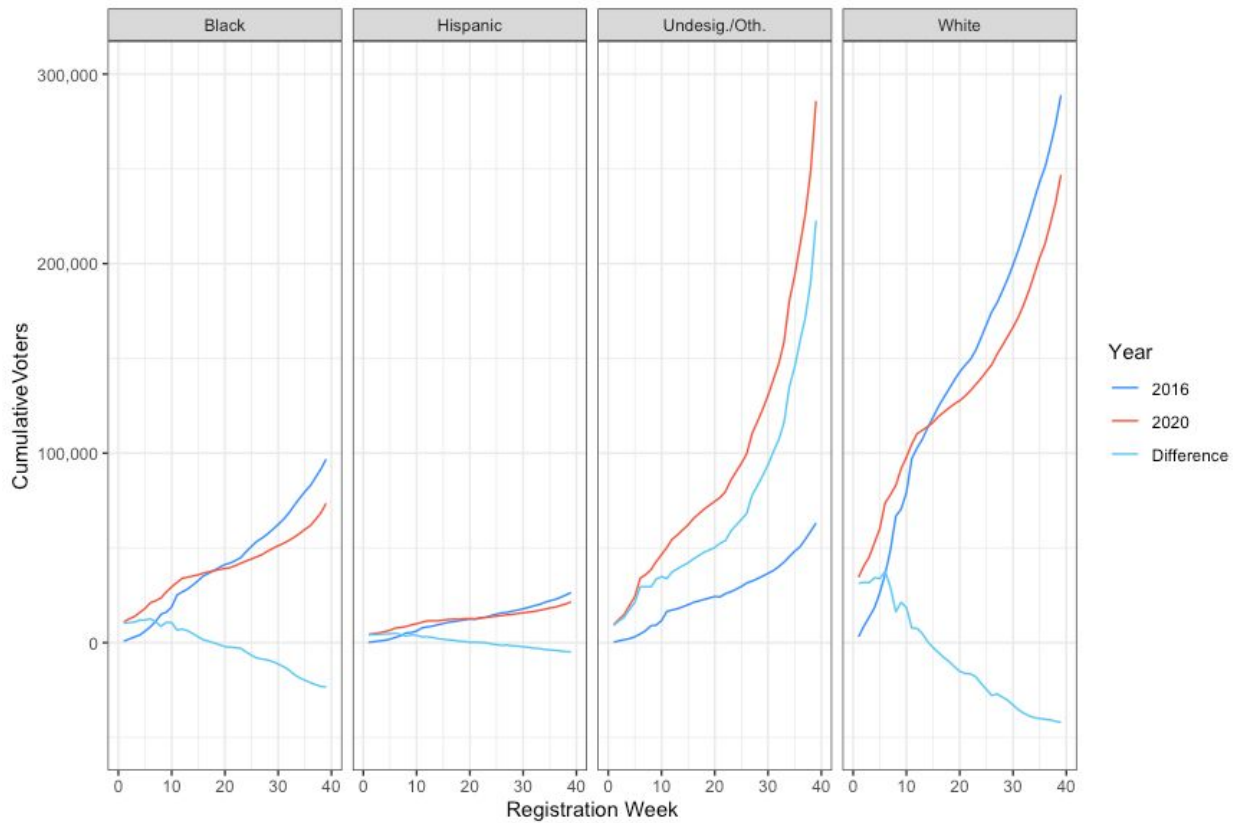
Similar trends can be seen in the by-party numbers for North Carolina, though with a more straightforward sorting based on views of the pandemic. Democratic voters have been registering at slightly higher rates than previous years in the last few weeks, but for the most part were tracking or slightly below previous years (though with a higher baseline, like younger voters). Republican voters, and to a lesser extent unaffiliated/other voters have shown registration rates significantly above historical years for several months, and mostly in line with Democrats in absolute number.



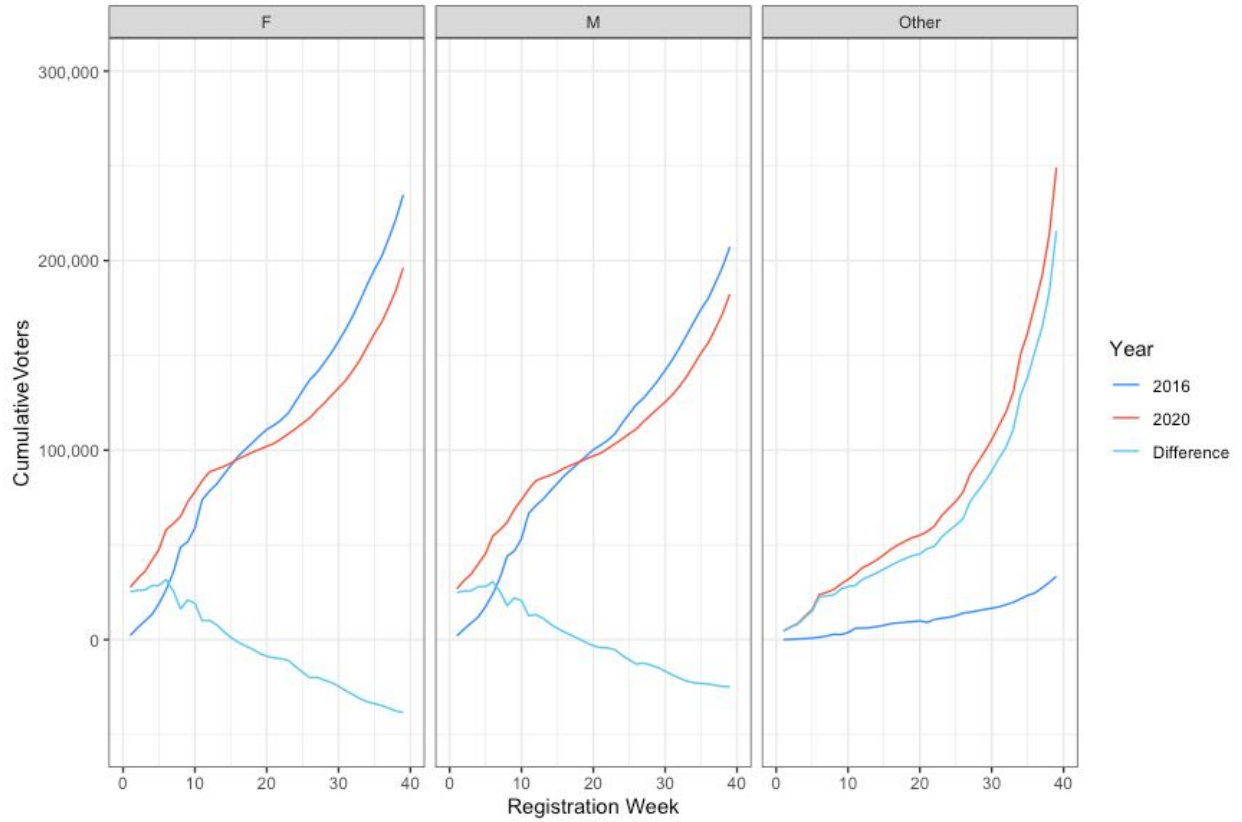
### North Carolina by Race and Gender

The 2020 registration numbers for North Carolina by race and gender are dominated by a trend some have called the “rise in nones,” where voter registrations of any specific demographic group are significantly down relative to years past. The charts below show cumulative registrations instead of weekly registrations to illustrate this point. By the election, fewer voters who identified as male, female, white, Black, or Hispanic will be registered than in 2016. This is made up for by huge increases in “other” categories which themselves are dominated by people not responding to the question, likely driven by increased online registration and these fields not being required, though the specific data to confirm that hypothesis are not in the voter file.

#### North Carolina by Race



### North Carolina by Gender



## Legal Battles and Legislation

While not every state has faced recent litigation and sudden changes to legislation in the realm of voter registration, there are some common themes to those that have. Accessibility to registration has been a hot button issue in several states, such as New Hampshire and Wisconsin. New Hampshire in particular recently had a senate bill struck down for making the registration process too complicated, and a house bill is currently up for debate as it seems to put a polling tax on students and transient people looking to register a vehicle or to vote in New Hampshire. New York, for contrast, has a bill on the governor's desk to set up automatic registration for state residents who interact with certain government agencies.

Both Wisconsin and New York have faced either ongoing civil suits or executive orders to move registration deadlines to 10 days before the election. On the flip side, Ohio kept their registration date for the primaries at 2/14, even when the election day itself was pushed back to 4/28, making the registration deadline effectively 74 days before election day, rather than the usual 30. Despite this, registration rates do not seem to have been affected by the pandemic in Ohio.

In addition to voter registration deadline challenges, parties have filed suits in several states to reduce or alter the identification requirements necessary to register to vote, the most notable of which is *DNC v. Bostelmann*, a Wisconsin case that reached the US Supreme Court requesting relief for vote-by mail registration deadlines and removing the requirement to provide a photocopy of one's government ID. Most jurisprudence in such cases involve the Purcell Doctrine, which advises against judicial intervention close to an election. For a more comprehensive list of litigation, The Healthy Election Project's [Covid-Related Election Litigation Tracker](#) tracks 300+ cases in 44 states.



## Conclusions

Voter registration patterns in 2020 have seen definite shifts from 2016, with changes stemming from the global pandemic and a major presidential election. In terms of sources of registration, online registration has been adopted in multiple states since 2016, including in Florida, North Carolina, and Ohio, yet registering through state Departments of Motor Vehicles has remained the most common method for registration in states that have the option.

As a general trend, the start of 2020 saw higher levels of registration than 2016, but a steep drop-off occurred with the beginning of the pandemic in March and April. While registration numbers began to recover across the board between May and October, some states saw more complete recoveries than others, and it may be impossible to determine the actual impact of the pandemic on what was gearing up to be a record year for voter registrations.

On a state level, demographic trends get a little more complicated. In North Carolina, there was [a large increase in the number of unreported values](#) for race and gender this year, making it tough to draw precise conclusions about trends. However, in Florida, while all racial groups saw a dip in registrations at the beginning of the pandemic, registrations of white voters completely recovered. On the other hand, registrations for Black voters and for Hispanic voters, especially, did not see a comparable recovery when compared to 2016, as of the October 2020 voter file from Florida.

On the flip side, age and party have been more consistently reported. Interestingly, while registration rates dropped for all age groups in Florida during April, voters aged 30+ recovered their numbers completely relative to 2016 in recent months, while voters aged 18-29 were slower to pick up in registrations (though as expected, voters aged 18-29 make up the largest share of new registrants). North Carolina also has shown higher registration numbers for those aged 30+ (especially in the 60+ cohort) with a relatively small increase in numbers for voters aged 18-29, though this younger age group still has a higher baseline number of registrants than the others.

By party, both North Carolina and Florida have seen a recent surge in Republican-affiliated registrants while Democrats have stayed more or less on par with 2016. In both states, this puts the total numbers of Republicans registered closer to the Democratic registration totals than they have historically been

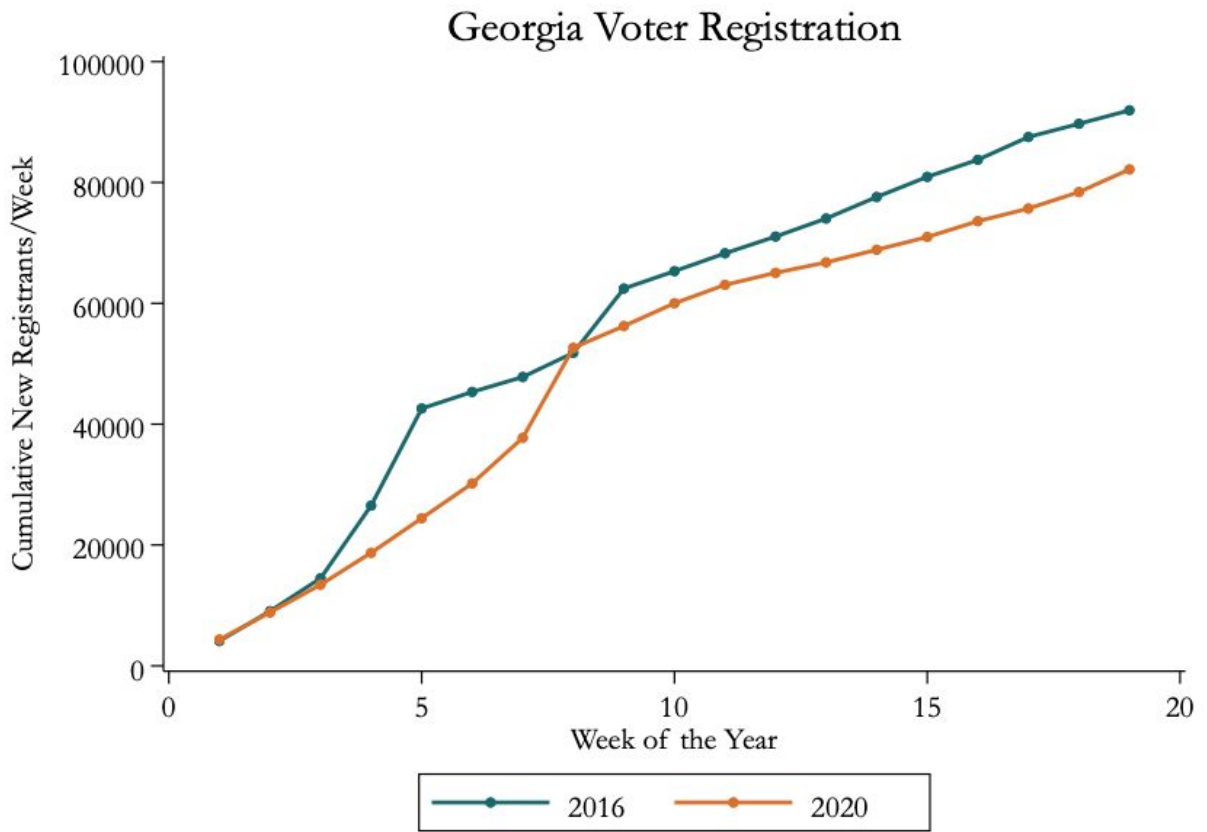
(in 2016, for example, Republican registrants in Florida trailed Democratic registrants by about 330,000 — [as of mid-October 2020, that gap is just 134,000.](#))

Election-related legislation and litigation has been more focused on vote-by-mail than on registration, though there are several legal battles around the country handling voter registration deadlines, ID requirements, and registration accessibility. In several of these cases, especially in swing states, lower level courts have leaned towards leniency in voter registration cases, while appeals courts have proved less flexible towards changing state voter registration protocols. There appears to be a central tension between courts and legislature over which branch ultimately has control on voter registration and how adaptable the process can be in the midst of the pandemic.

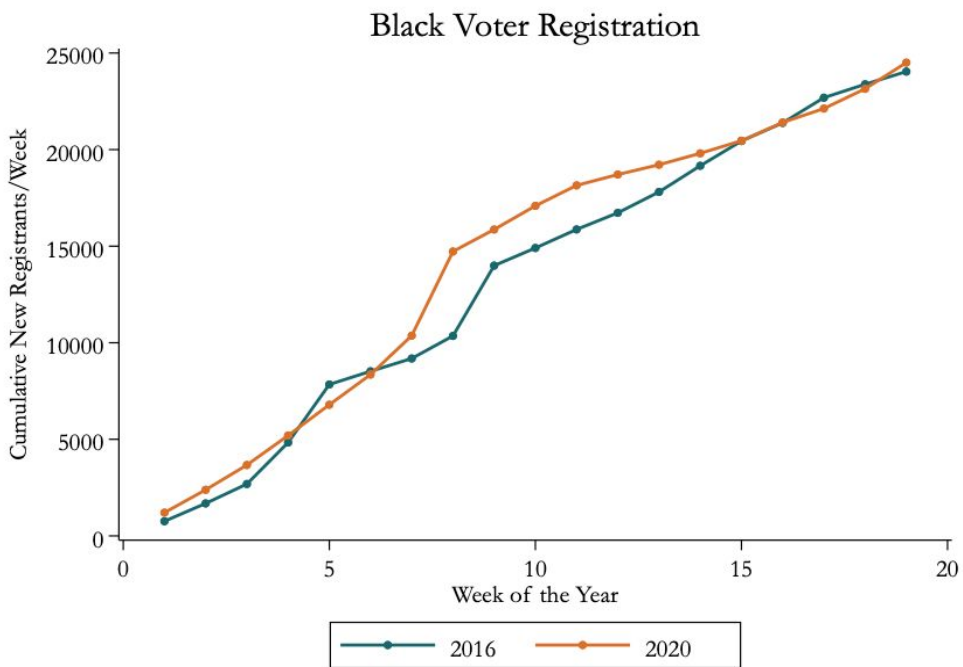
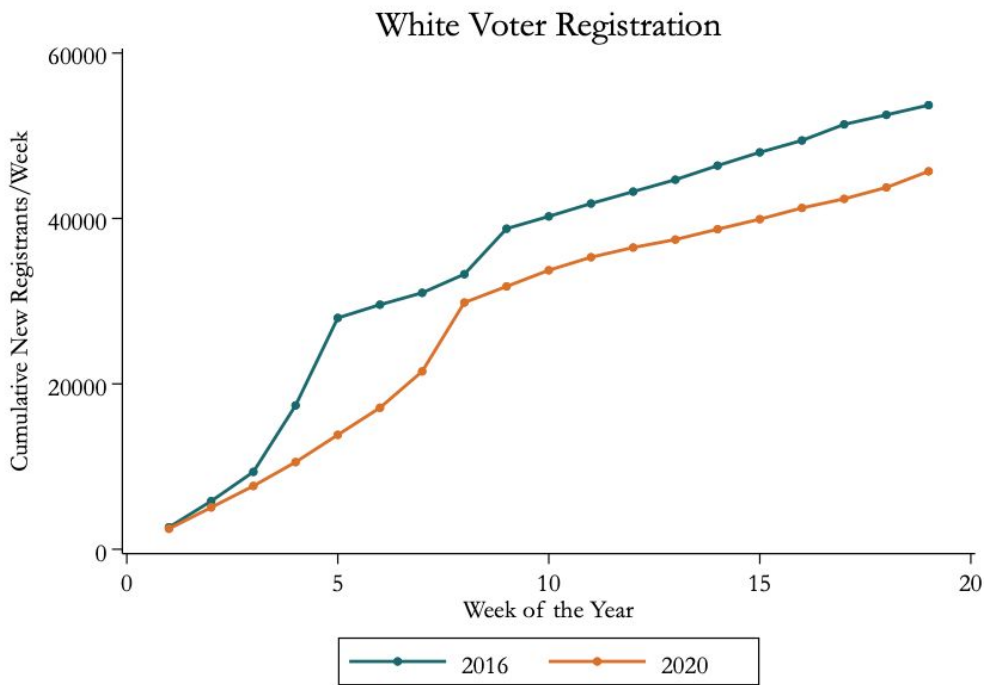
## Appendix

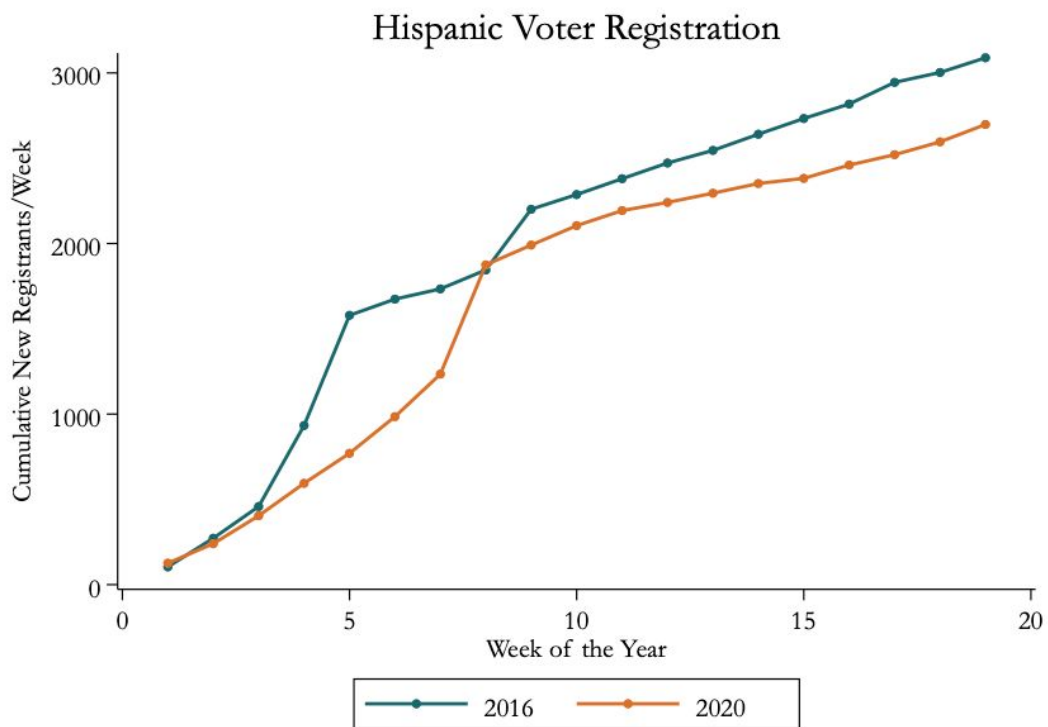
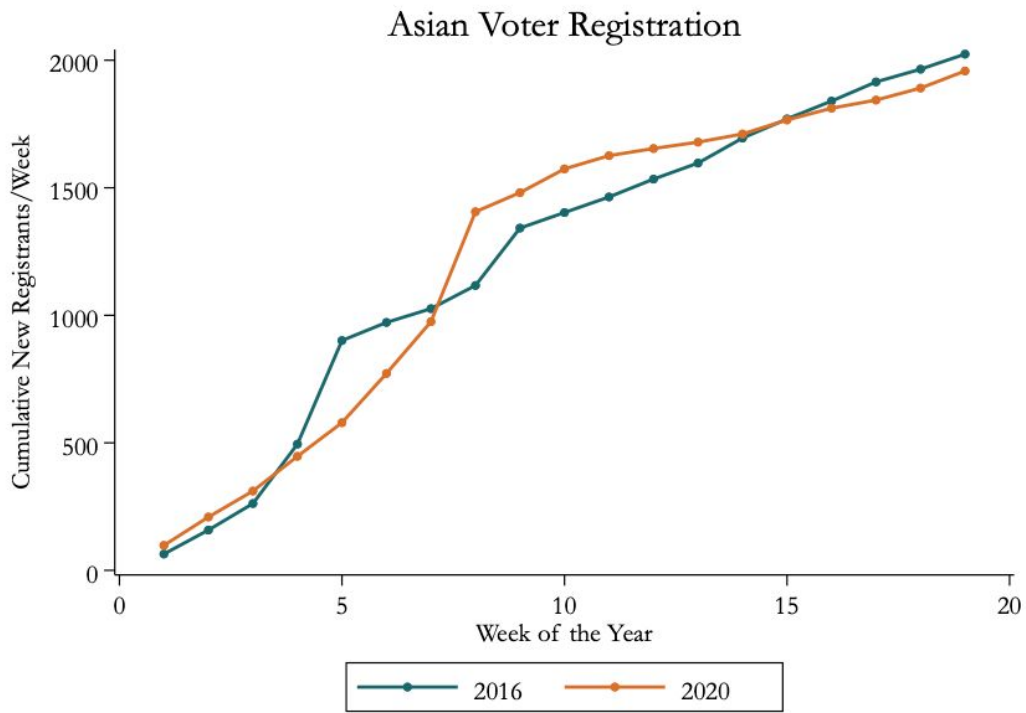
### Georgia Charts

#### Total



By Race:





By Age:

