

# Democracy North Carolina

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## **Black Turnout Up in May Primary, But Drops in 32 Counties 82% of State's Increase Centers in 12 Counties with Hot Races**

Republican attorneys and the State of North Carolina are [telling a federal judge](#) today that about 44,500 more blacks voted in North Carolina's 2014 primary than in the previous midterm primary, and therefore all the claims about changes in the state's election law causing voter suppression and discrimination should be dismissed as hogwash.

But an analysis of county-by-county voting patterns by the nonpartisan watchdog group Democracy North Carolina shows that focusing on the statewide total distorts large differences experienced by voters depending on where they live. Here are some findings from that analysis, using a [county-by-county Excel file](#) created by Democracy NC from data on the State Board of Elections FTP site for voter history and registration:

- Yes, more African Americans voted in the 2014 midterm primary than in the 2010 primary, but black turnout decreased in 8 of the 15 counties where African Americans are over 39% of the registered voters – that is, it decreased in the percent of registered black voters who voted and also decreased in the actual number of votes cast.
- In fact, black turnout as a percent of registered voters who cast ballots declined in 32 of the 100 counties from the 2010 primary to 2014 primary, including 16 counties where African Americans are over 29% of the registered voters.
- Two thirds (66%) of the increased number of votes cast by black voters statewide came from just 7 counties where there were hot races and/or stronger Early Voting opportunities than offered in 2010.
- For example, Mecklenburg County had the state's biggest increase – 8,282 more black votes cast in 2014's primary than in 2010. That's understandable. The county was a major center of the hotly contested 12th Congressional District Democratic primary for replacing Mel Watt, plus it had contested Democratic primary races for sheriff and county commission seats. Moreover, in contrast to its pitiful 2010 Early Voting plan that opened only 1 site, the county opened an astonishing 13 Early Voting sites for 2014, the largest expansion in the state.
- Guilford County had the second biggest increase – 7,150 more black voters cast ballots than in 2010. The turnout effort in the 12th Congressional District race was even more intense, with two major candidates and the ultimate winner from Guilford. The county also had several other contested Democratic primary races, and its 2014 Early Voting plan was arguably as good or better than the 2010 plan. In 2010, it only opened 2 sites the first week during work hours, then opened 6

more the last 10 days with evening weekday hours; by contrast, in 2014, it opened 8 sites for 10 days with 7 sites open evening weekday hours and all 8 open an additional hour on a Saturday beyond what the 2010 plan offered.

- Other counties in the top 7 for the turnout gains featured African-American candidates running in hotly contested races for county commissioners (in Halifax County), board of education (in Durham County), and sheriff (in Lenoir County).
- Adding the next 5 counties with the biggest gains (Cumberland, Franklin, Wayne, Chatham and Nash) brings the total gain from the top 12 counties to 36,681 of the 44,562 of the additional black voters in 2014 over 2010 – or 82% of the increase. Several of these counties (Cumberland, Franklin Chatham, and Nash) also had black candidates running for sheriff in the Democratic primary, and in some case, in other competitive races.

Ironically, the State/GOP's brief emphasizes the dominant influence of election competitiveness and investments in grassroots mobilization on voter participation in order to discount the impact of Early Voting, Same-Day Registration, and other procedures on the record turnouts in 2008 and 2012. But then the State doesn't want to acknowledge that the increase in turnout of African-American voters from 2010 to 2014 is also heavily influenced by changes in the competitiveness of local and Congressional elections and the resources invested in grassroots mobilization.

In truth, turnout is affected by access to the polls AND competitiveness of elections.

It's also true that using statewide or even county totals obscures the actual discrimination experienced by individual voters, such as the woman in Pitt County who was wrongly asked for a photo ID, or the dozens of voters who were not able to update their registrations when they went to an Early Voting site, or the scores who could no longer vote at the most convenient polling place in their county on Election Day. At least the more localized numbers help point to the reality on the ground.

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