



## MAKING PROGRESS REPORT Electoral Participation 2013

**F**ORSYTH FUTURES' MAKING PROGRESS REPORTS (MPR) serve as a tool to inform Forsyth County, N.C., residents about current issues, conditions, and trends in six areas: Economic Self-Sufficiency, Educational Success, Engaged Community, Physical and Mental Health, Safety, and Sustainable Environment.

The **Making Progress Report: Electoral Participation** is part of the Engaged Community sector. In engaged communities, residents have a sense of ownership and pride in where they live. Measurements of engaged communities include voting rates, participation in community events, support and enjoyment of cultural opportunities, and levels of volunteering.

In past Making Progress Reports, Forsyth Futures has tracked the following Engaged Community indicators:

- Cultural and Recreational Opportunities
- Electoral Participation
- Library Usage
- Neighborhood Support
- Volunteerism

Data and analysis of other indicators in the series are located on the Forsyth Futures' website ([www.forsythfutures.org](http://www.forsythfutures.org)). The following report provides a description of the electoral participation indicator, identifies measures of electoral participation, and establishes benchmarks for continuing to make progress in Forsyth County.

### REPORT HIGHLIGHTS

- Approximately 72 percent of eligible residents cast ballots in the 2012 presidential election.
- Participation rates increased by 28 percent between the 2006 and 2010 general elections.
- In the 2012 presidential election, about 56 percent of votes were cast by early voting.
- An estimated 73 percent of Black or African American voters cast ballots at early voting sites in 2012.
- In 2012, approximately 74 percent of candidates running for office in Forsyth County were male.

## DESCRIPTION

The degree to which people exercise their right to vote and participate in elections measures the extent that residents, individually and collectively, influence policies and legislation.

The voter participation rate\* is a measure of residents' engagement in the decision-making processes of the community. Another measure of engagement in the political process is whether individuals running for office reflect the diversity of the population.

### HOW WE MEASURED

Participation Rate for Presidential Elections

Participation Rate for General Elections

Demographics of Candidates

## KEY FINDINGS

### Voter Participation

- Approximately **72 percent** of residents eligible to vote cast ballots in the 2012 presidential election. As seen in Figure 1, the voter participation rate in Forsyth County is comparable to the participation rates of Guilford and Mecklenburg counties, but it is less than rates in Durham and Wake counties.
- Figure 2 demonstrates that participation rates in presidential elections are higher than in general elections. In general, participation rates in presidential elections are approximately twice as high than in general elections.
- In Forsyth County, the voter participation rate for presidential elections increased by **7 percent** from the 2008 to the 2012 election.
- An estimated **40 percent** of eligible residents voted in the 2010 general election, an increase of **28 percent** from the 2006 general election.

**APPROXIMATELY 72% OF RESIDENTS ELIGIBLE TO VOTE CAST BALLOTS IN THE 2012 PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION, COMPARED WITH 40% OF ELIGIBLE RESIDENTS WHO VOTED IN THE 2010 GENERAL ELECTION.**



FIGURE 1. Voter Participation Rate by County, 2012

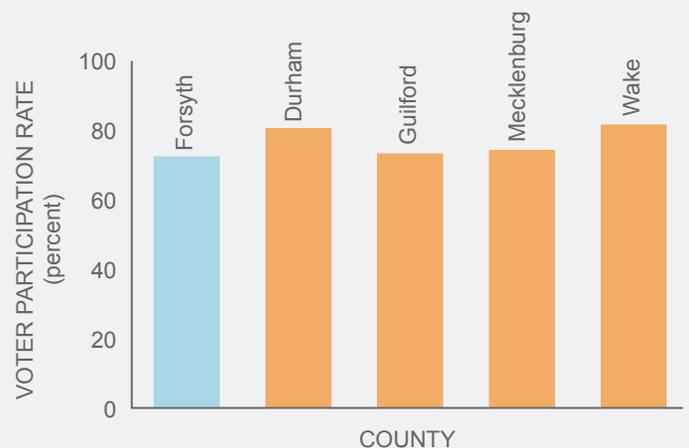
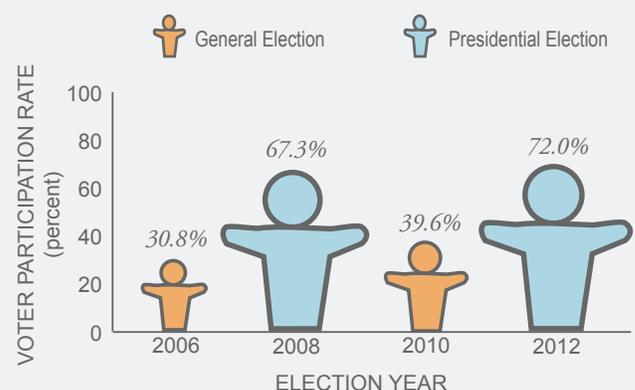


FIGURE 2. Participation Rates by Election Type, 2006 - 2012

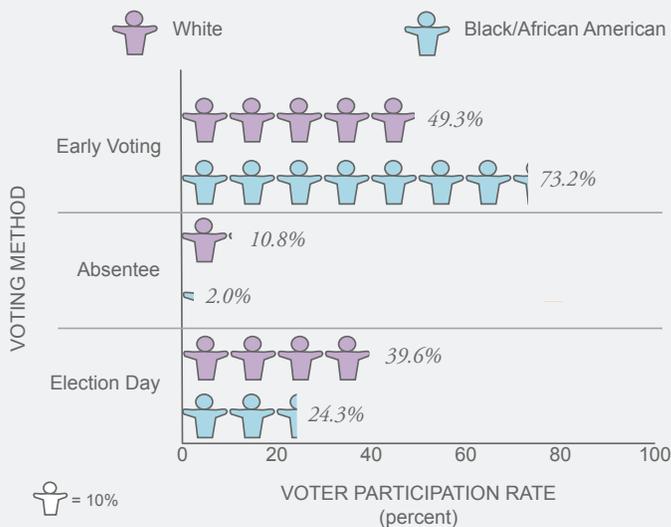


\* A description of how voter participation rates were calculated can be found on page 4.

## Voter Demographics\*

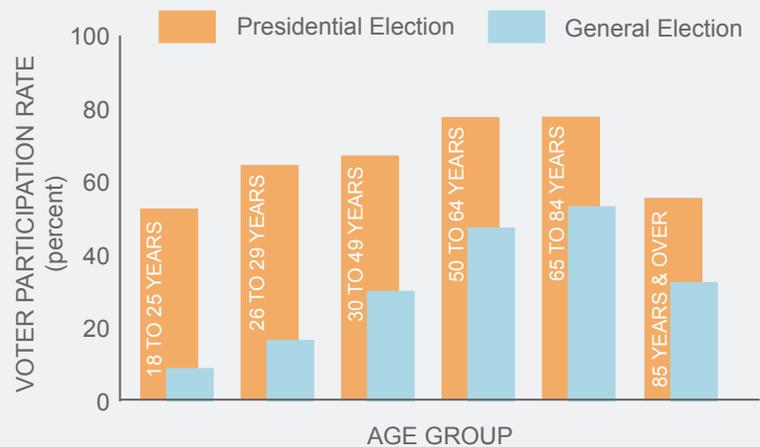
- As seen in Figure 3, on average **77 percent** of eligible residents ages 50 to 84 vote in presidential elections. In general elections, residents ages 65 to 84 have the highest participation rate at approximately **53 percent**.
- Residents ages 18 to 25 consistently have lower voter participation rates. On average, only **half** of eligible residents ages 18 to 25 vote in the presidential elections, and an average of only **9 percent** vote in general elections.
- White and Black or African American residents who are eligible to vote have similar participation rates in presidential elections, an estimated **67 percent** and **74 percent** respectively.
- The average participation rate in general elections of Black or African American eligible residents is 26 percent lower than the participation of White eligible residents, participation rates are **28 percent** and **38 percent** respectively.

FIGURE 4. Voting Method by Race, 2012



**ON AVERAGE ONLY HALF OF ELIGIBLE RESIDENTS AGES 18 TO 25 VOTE IN THE PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS, AND ONLY 9 PERCENT VOTE IN GENERAL ELECTIONS.**

FIGURE 3. Average Voter Participation by Age, 2006 - 2012



## Voting Methods

- In the 2012 presidential election, **56 percent** of votes were cast by absentee one-stop voting, or early voting, while only **35 percent** of votes were cast on election day.
- In 2010, **26 percent** of votes were cast during early voting compared with approximately **8 percent** of votes cast through this method in the 2006 general election. This represents a 238 percent increase in votes at early voting sites.\*\*
- Figure 4 demonstrates that an estimated **73 percent** of Black or African American voters cast ballots during early voting in the 2012 presidential election compared to **49 percent** of White voters.

## Demographics of Candidates

- An estimated **66 percent** of candidates running for office in 2012 were White, and **26 percent** were Black or African American, reflecting the general population of Forsyth County.
- Approximately **74 percent** of candidates in 2012 were male, however, only about 47 percent of the Forsyth County population is male.

\* Data on Hispanic and Latino voters was not included in this report because of a high percentage of missing ethnicity information on Forsyth County voters.

\*\* A possible reason for the large increase in early voting in general elections is the addition of early voting sites. In 2006 only one early voting site existed compared with eight for the 2010 general election.

## HOW DO WE MAKE PROGRESS?

To demonstrate a continuous improvement of electoral participation rates in Forsyth County, Forsyth Futures set a target to increase voter participation rates in the 2022 general election and 2024 presidential election by 10 percent. Table 1 shows that to reach this target, participation rates need to increase to 79 percent for the 2024 presidential election and to 44 percent for the 2022 general election.

TABLE 1. Making Progress by Measures of Electoral Participation

MEASURE	WHERE WE ARE	WHERE WE COULD BE	
	CURRENT (YEAR)	NEEDED CHANGE PER ELECTION	TO GET TO → TARGET (YEAR)
Participation Rate for Presidential Elections	72% (2012)	2.4	79% (2024)
Participation Rate for General Elections	40% (2010)	1.3	44% (2022)

## DEFINITIONS

**CANDIDATES:** Citizens who filed with the Forsyth County Board of Elections to run for office in 2012. Race and gender of candidates was determined through their self-identification during voter registration.

**ELIGIBLE RESIDENTS:** For the purpose of the MPR: Electoral Participation, a person eligible to vote was identified as a resident who is at least 18 years of age and a U.S. citizen. Population data to calculate number of eligible voters is from 3 Year Estimates of the American Community Survey, a product of the U.S. Census Bureau.

**ONE-STOP ABSENTEE VOTING (EARLY VOTING):** One-Stop Voting or Early Voting allows any registered voter to cast an absentee ballot in-person on select days prior to Election Day. One-Stop Voting begins on the third Thursday prior to Election Day and ends on the last Saturday before the Election. *Source: North Carolina State Board of Elections. (n.d). One-stop Absentee Voting. Retrieved from: <http://www.ncsbe.gov>*

## Making Progress Reports: Technical Notes

**TREND STATUS:** A trend status was not calculated for the MPR: Electoral Participation because of limited availability of historical participation rate data. To complete a trend status analysis, Forsyth Futures requires three or more comparable years of data.

**TARGET GOALS:** If a local, state, or federal entity sets a target related to the indicator, then Forsyth Futures uses that target as its Making Progress goal. When there is not a set target, Forsyth Futures establishes a goal of a 10 percent change in a desired direction.

**PARTICIPATION RATE CALCULATIONS:** The voter participation rate was calculated based on the number of residents who voted out of the number of eligible voters in Forsyth County. Since voters who have moved or died might not be removed from the registration rolls for up to two federal elections, this calculation provides a more accurate estimation of voter participation rates than estimates based on voter registration. Because of the difference in calculation, estimates of voter participation in the Making Progress Report may differ from other estimates of voter participation.

## Sources

HOW WE MEASURED	DATA SOURCE	SOURCE OF TARGET GOAL
Voter Participation Rate	Forsyth County Board of Elections. Voter Data Files [Data file]. Personal communication with Board of Elections staff. 29 May 2013.	10 % Change
	North Carolina Board of Elections. 2012 Election Results. <a href="http://www.ncsbe.gov">www.ncsbe.gov</a>	
Demographics of Candidates	List of Candidates. Forsyth County Board of Elections. Accessed 8 September 2013. <a href="http://www.forsyth.cc/elections/candidates.aspx">www.forsyth.cc/elections/candidates.aspx</a>	N/A
Forsyth County Population	Bridged-Race Population Estimates 1990 - 2012. National Center for Health Statistics, Centers for Disease Control, United States Department of Health and Human Services. <a href="http://wonder.cdc.gov/bridged-race-v2012.html">wonder.cdc.gov/bridged-race-v2012.html</a>	N/A

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