

Political Trends & Their Impact in NC

Leadership North Carolina
November 6, 2025

2024



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Rough Plan

- Still Purple?
- The New NC Voters—hope for new candidates?
- The Old and New Geographic Divides
- Purple statewide, calcified counties
- 2026 Outlook

North Carolina: Still Purple?



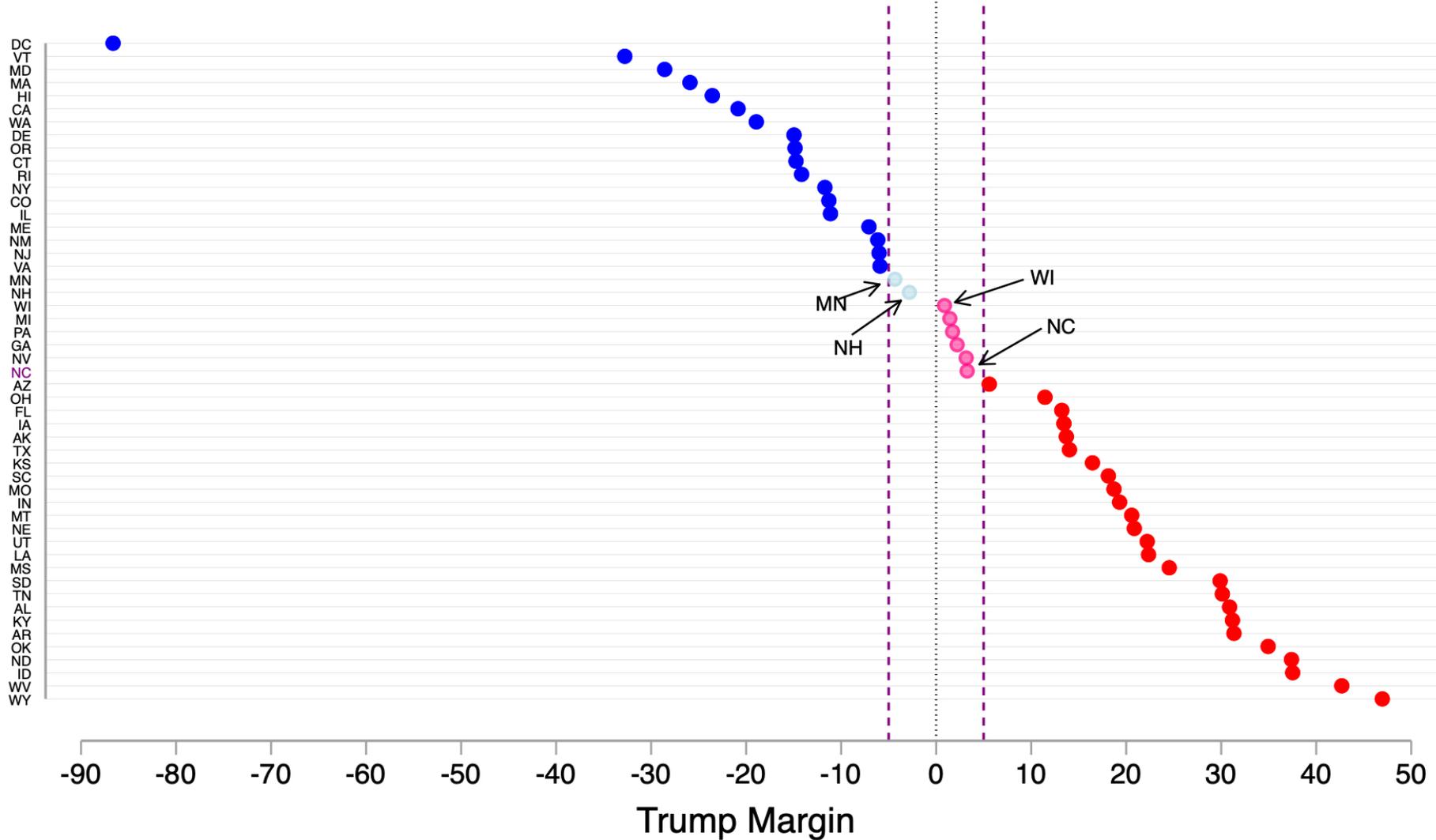
Democratic hopes of winning NC

Reality

The Presidential results in NC from one perspective



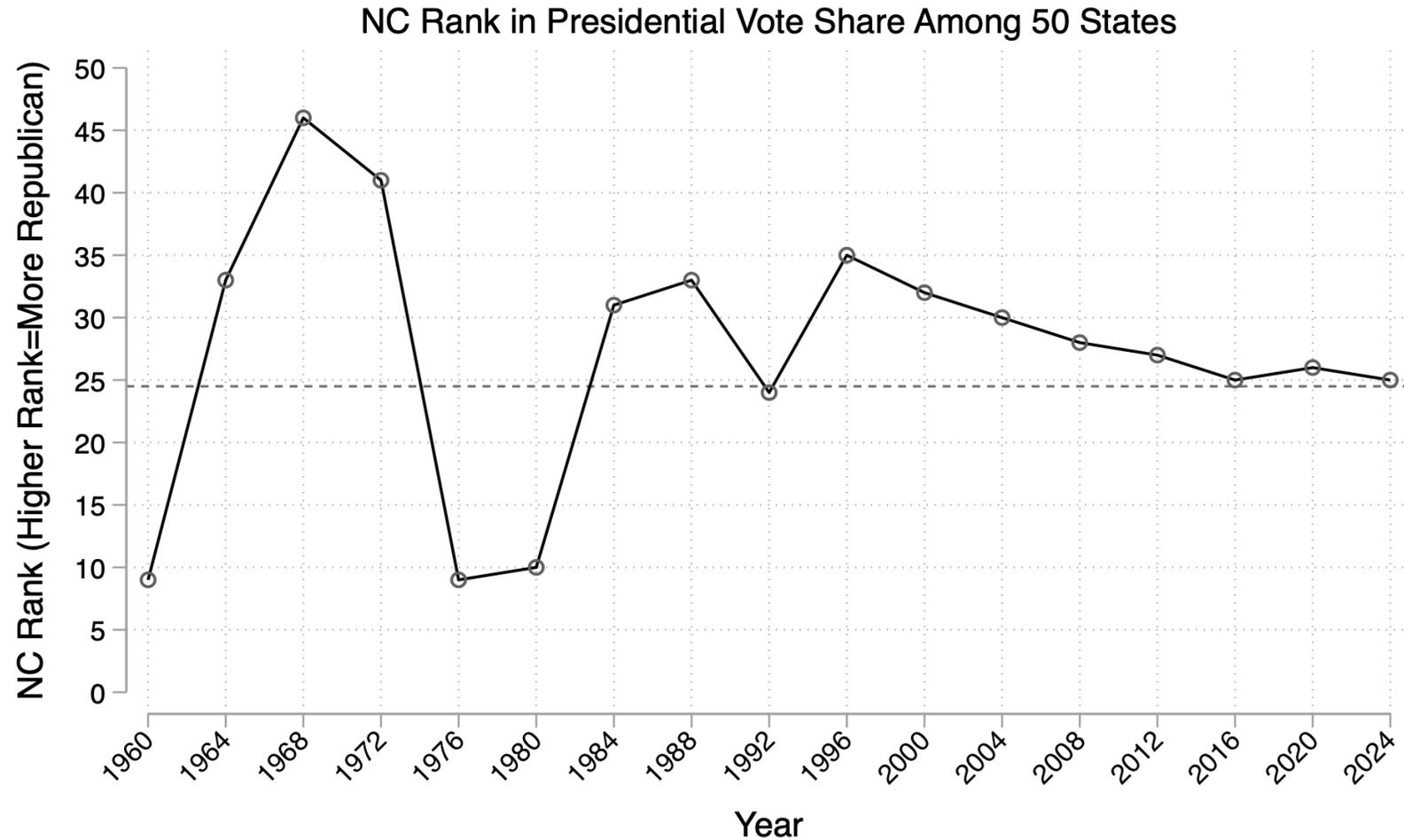
2024 Trump 2-Party Vote Share by State



From another perspective-a battleground once again

Note: Graph by Chris Cooper (@chriscooperwcu). Purple lines vertical lines represent Trump + 5 & Harris + 5.

Purple Statewide



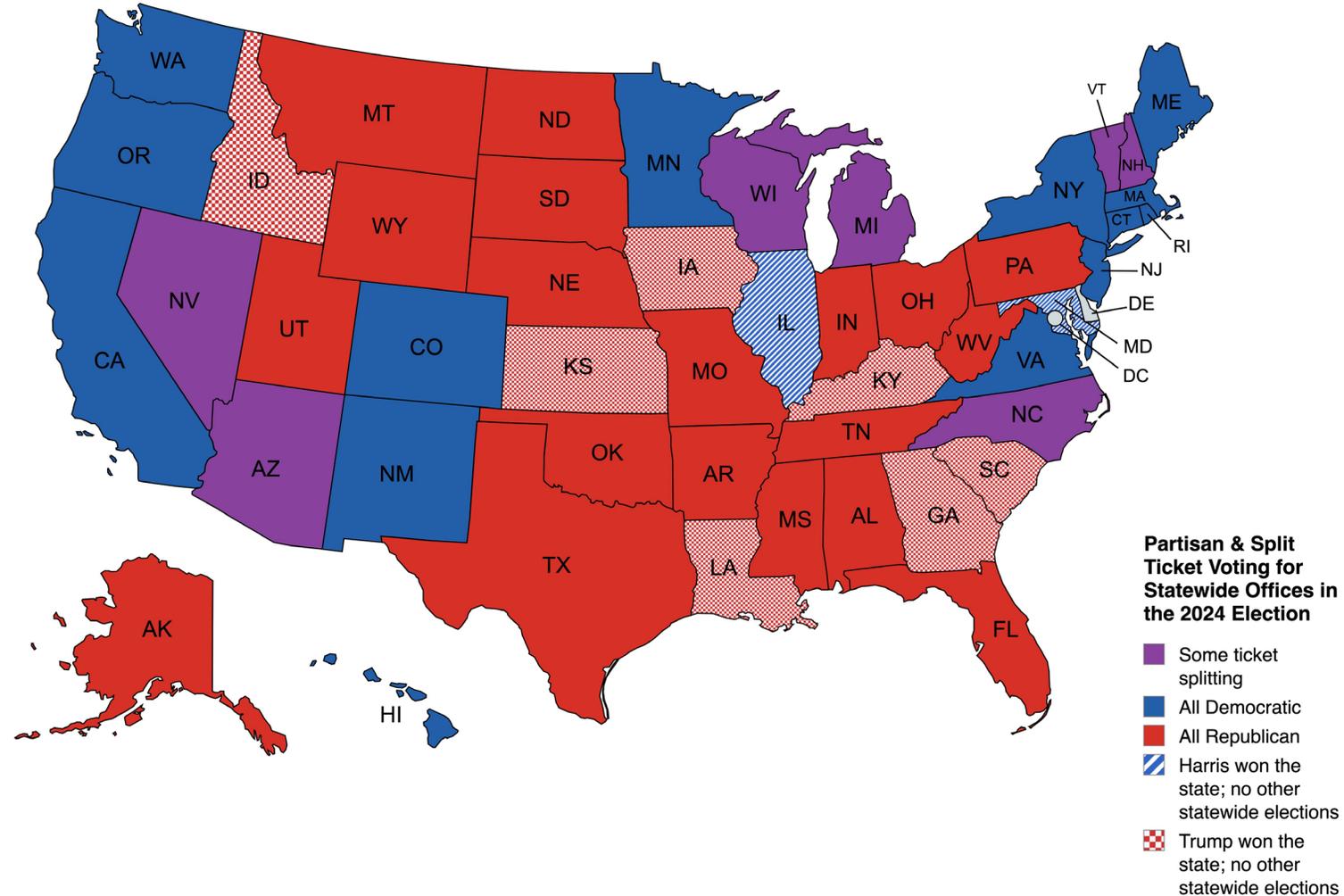
Notes: Data from David Liep's Atlas of U.S. Presidential Elections. Graph by Chris Cooper.
Update of Graph 2.2 in Anatomy of a Purple State

Statewide Offices Brought Split Ticket Voting in NC...again

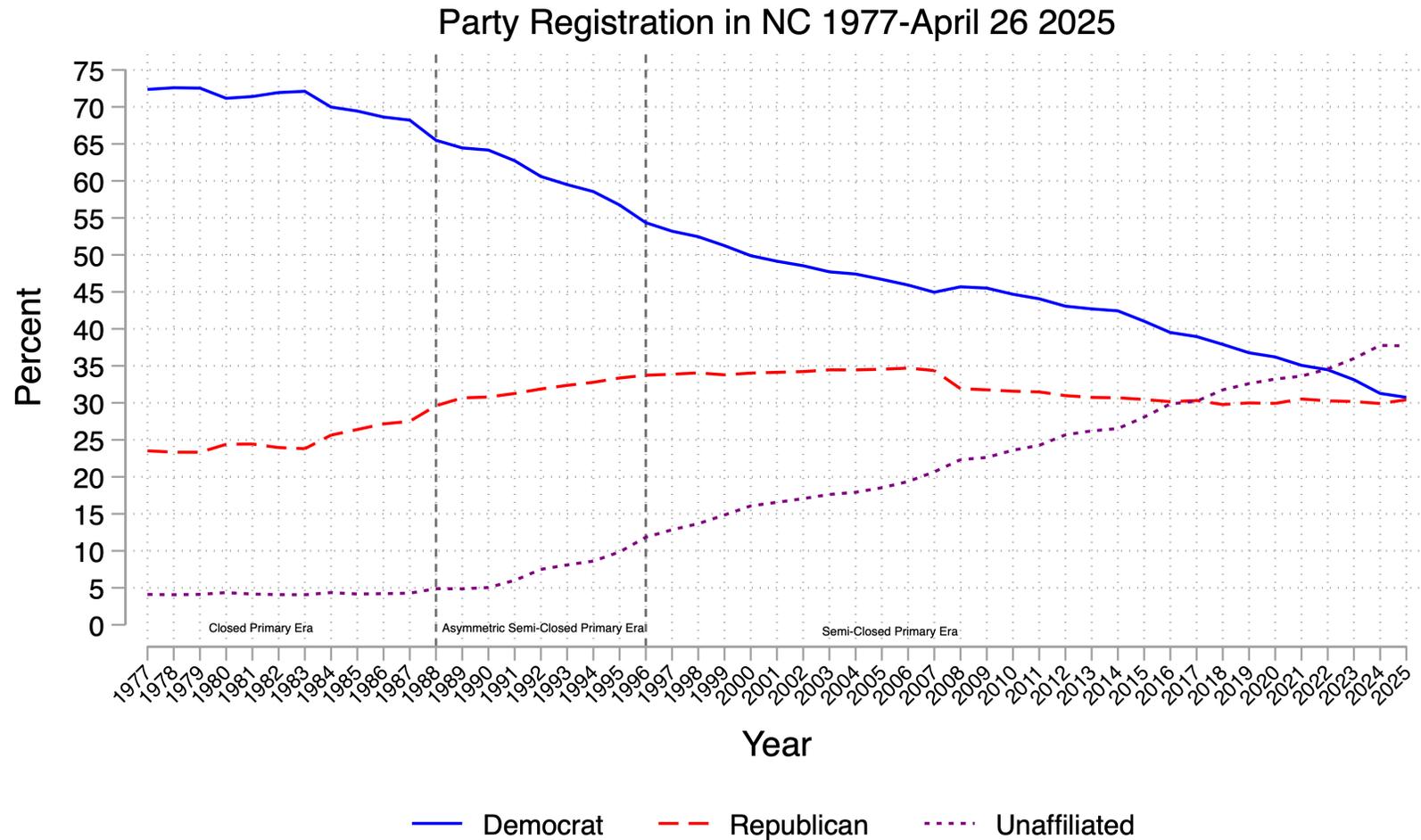
Republicans won 9/15 statewide offices

Dem Statewide wins in NC

- Gov
- LG
- Atty. Gen.
- Public Instruction
- Sec. of State
- NC Sup. Ct



The Decline in Democrats & the Rise of None of the Above



Notes: Data from NCSBE & NC Manual. Graph by Chris Cooper. Previous version appears in Anatomy of a Purple State, Graph 7.1
 Vertical lines indicate when Republicans and then Democrats opened their primaries to Unaffiliated voters.

In Simple Terms

- Unaffiliated are the largest group of registered voters under 40 years old
- Unaffiliated are the smallest group of registered voters over 40 years old
- Unaffiliated are the largest group of registered voters born outside NC
- Unaffiliated are the smallest group of registered voters born in NC

Will This Lead to More Unaffiliated Office-Holders?

Van Duncan

Shelane Etcheson



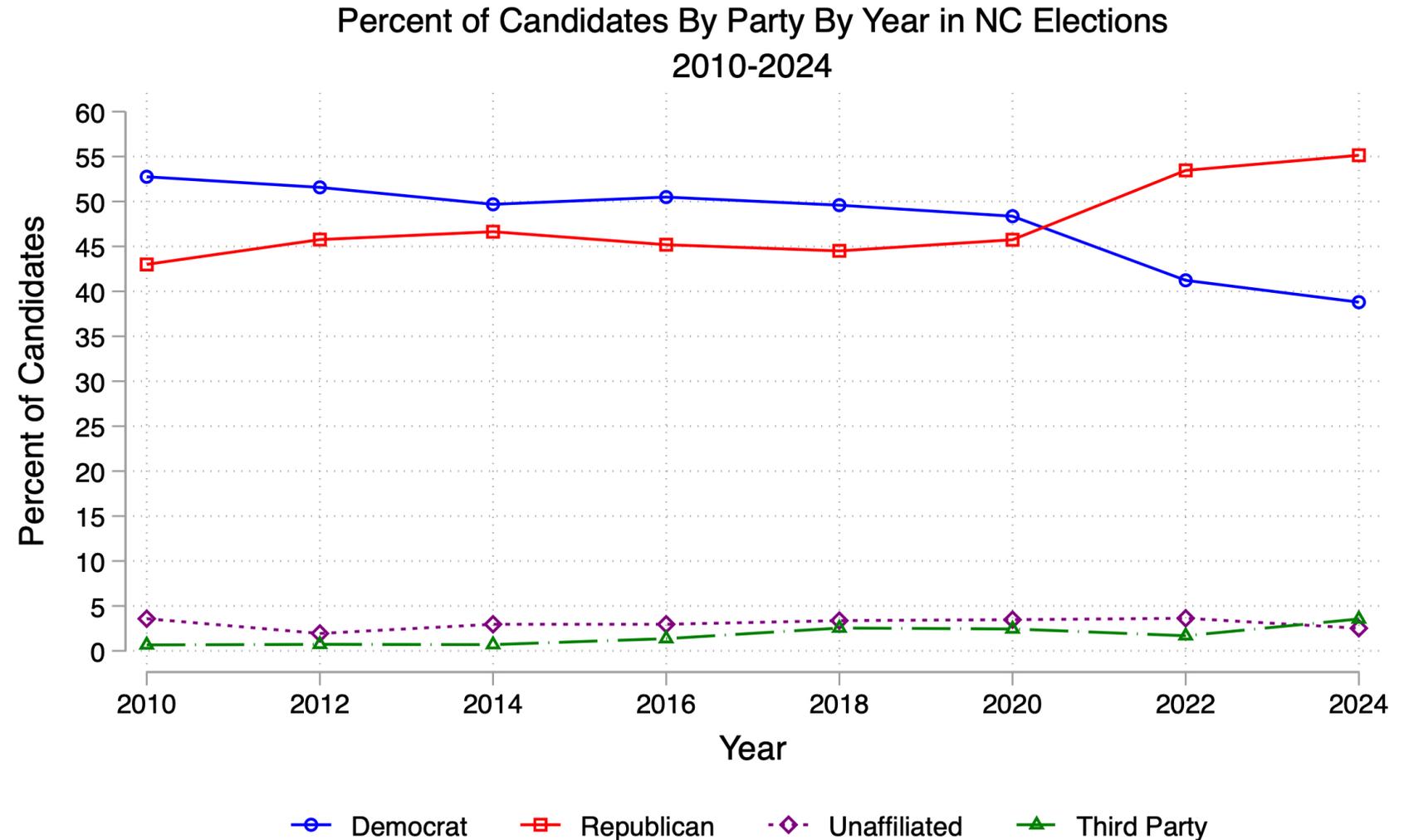
BUNCOMBE COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS CHAIRMAN (VOTE FOR 1)
Precincts Reported: 80 of 80 [View Contest Details](#)

NAME ON BALLOT	PARTY	BALLOT COUNT	PERCENT
Amanda Edwards	DEM	89,236	60.81%
Van Duncan	UNA	57,505	39.19%

US HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES DISTRICT 09 (VOTE FOR 1)
Precincts Reported: 169 of 169 [View Contest Details](#)

NAME ON BALLOT	PARTY	BALLOT COUNT	PERCENT
Richard Hudson	REP	208,775	56.42%
Nigel William Bristow	DEM	139,357	37.66%
Shelane Etchison	UNA	21,874	5.91%

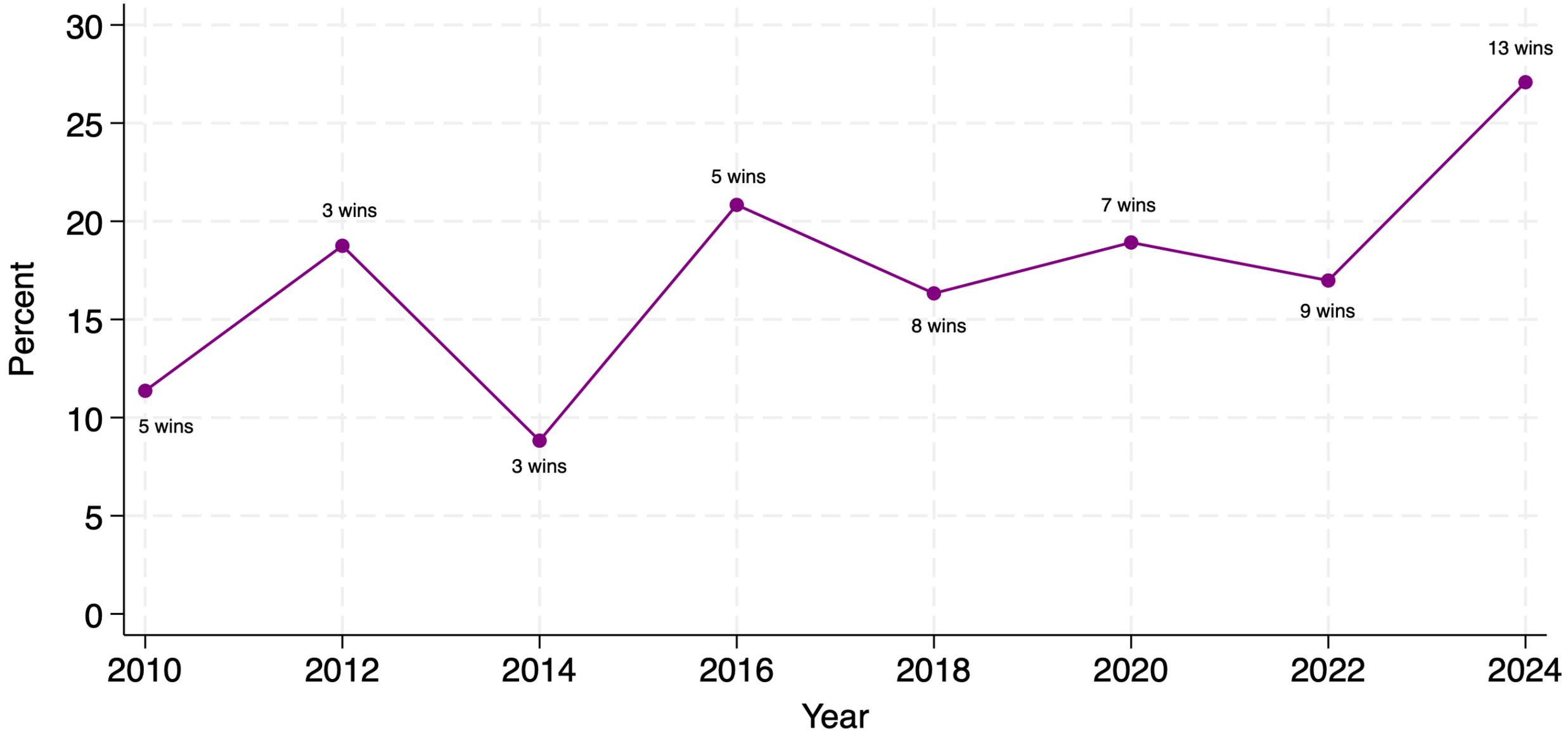
Will This Lead to More Unaffiliated Office-Holders?



Notes: Even years only. Candidate lists from NCSBE. Analyzed & Graphed by Chris Cooper (@chriscooperwcu)

Unaffiliated Winning Percentage in NC Elections

2010-2024



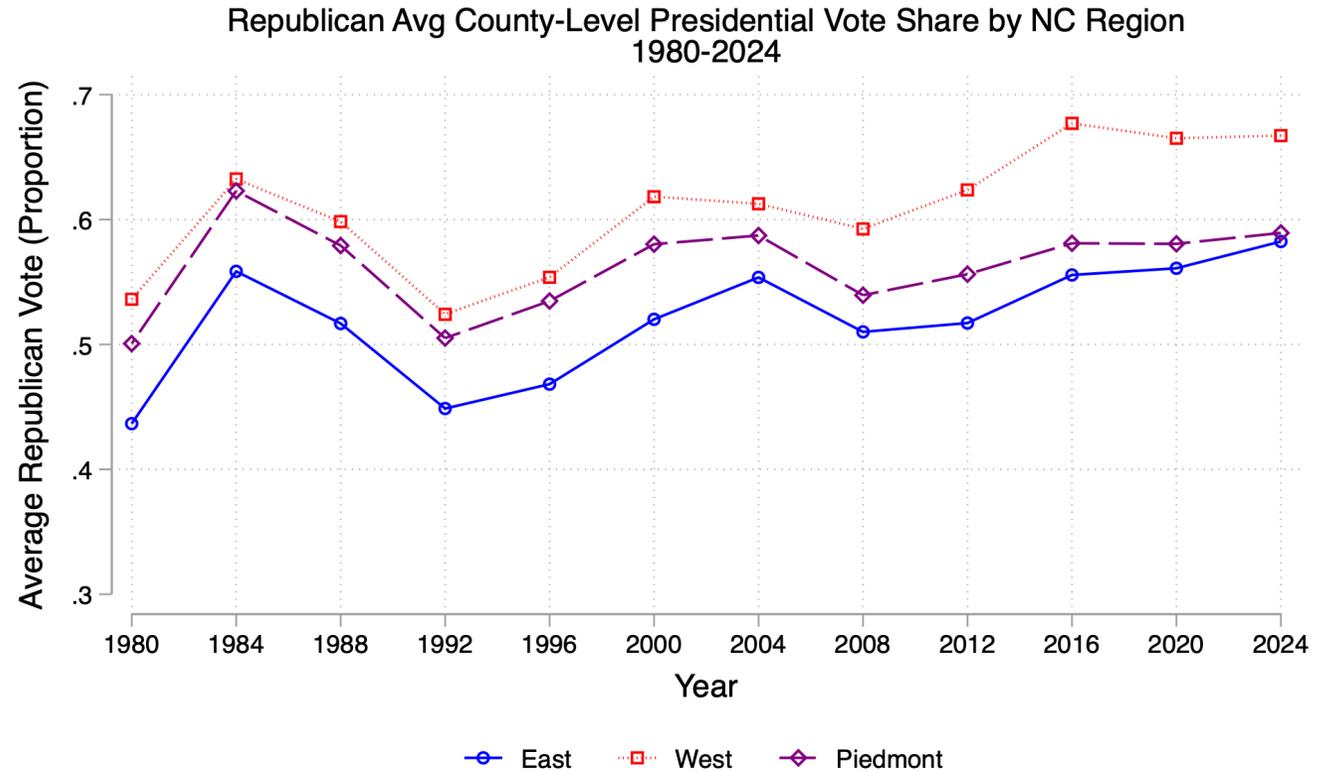
Notes: Even years only. Data from NCSBE. Analyzed & graphed by Chris Cooper (@chriscooperwcu).

The Old Divide: Region

V.O. Key, *Southern Politics in State and Nation* (1949)

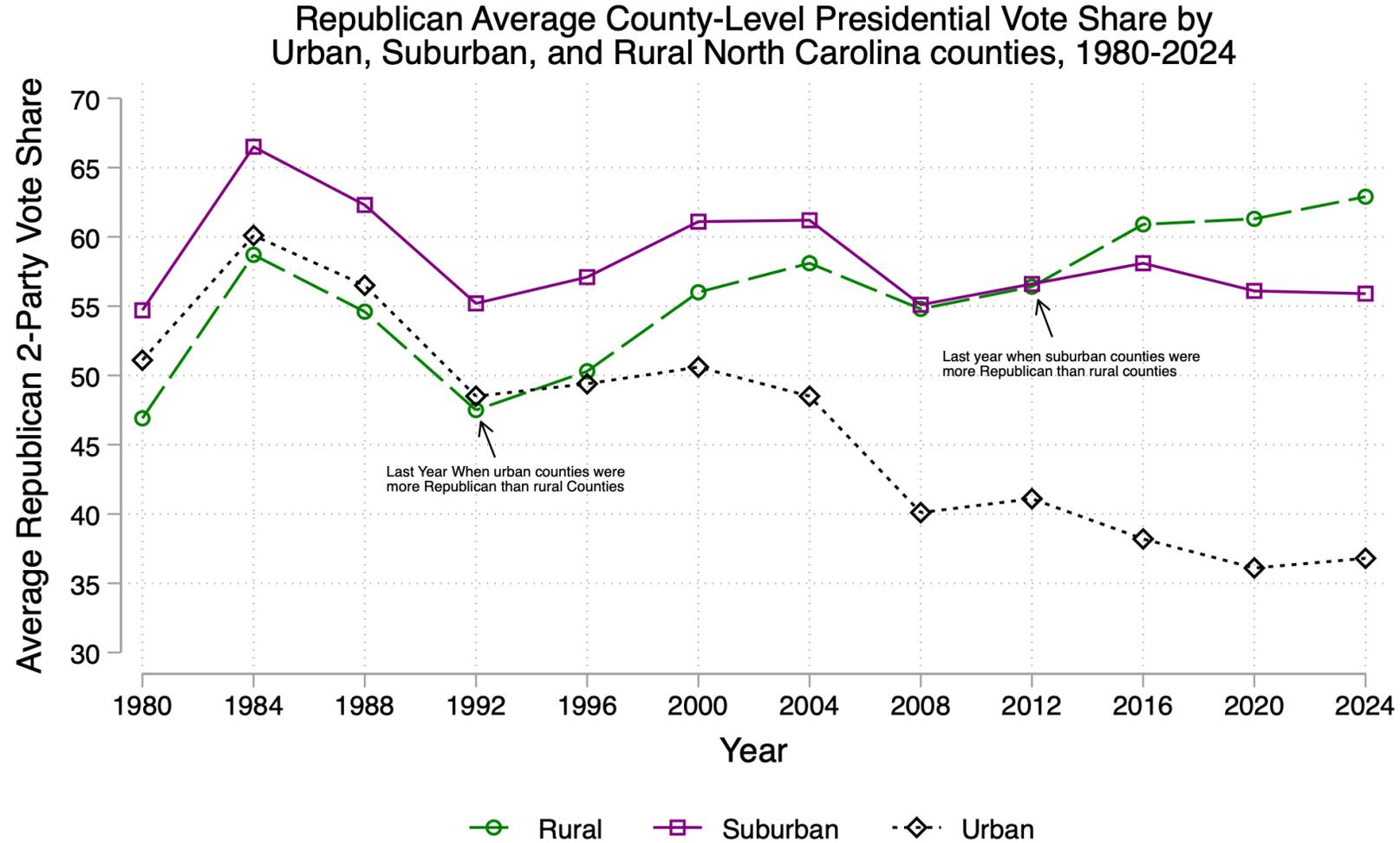
“the political questions in North Carolina have always been questions of east and west, or the upcountry against the lowlands of crystalline schists and granites against unconsolidated clays, sands, and gravels.”

“North Carolina has more-tender sectional sensibilities than any other state in the South, including even tripartite Tennessee.”



Source: David Leip's Atlas of US Presidential Elections. Analysis & graph by Chris Cooper
Graph is updated version of Graph 3.1 of Anatomy of a Purple State

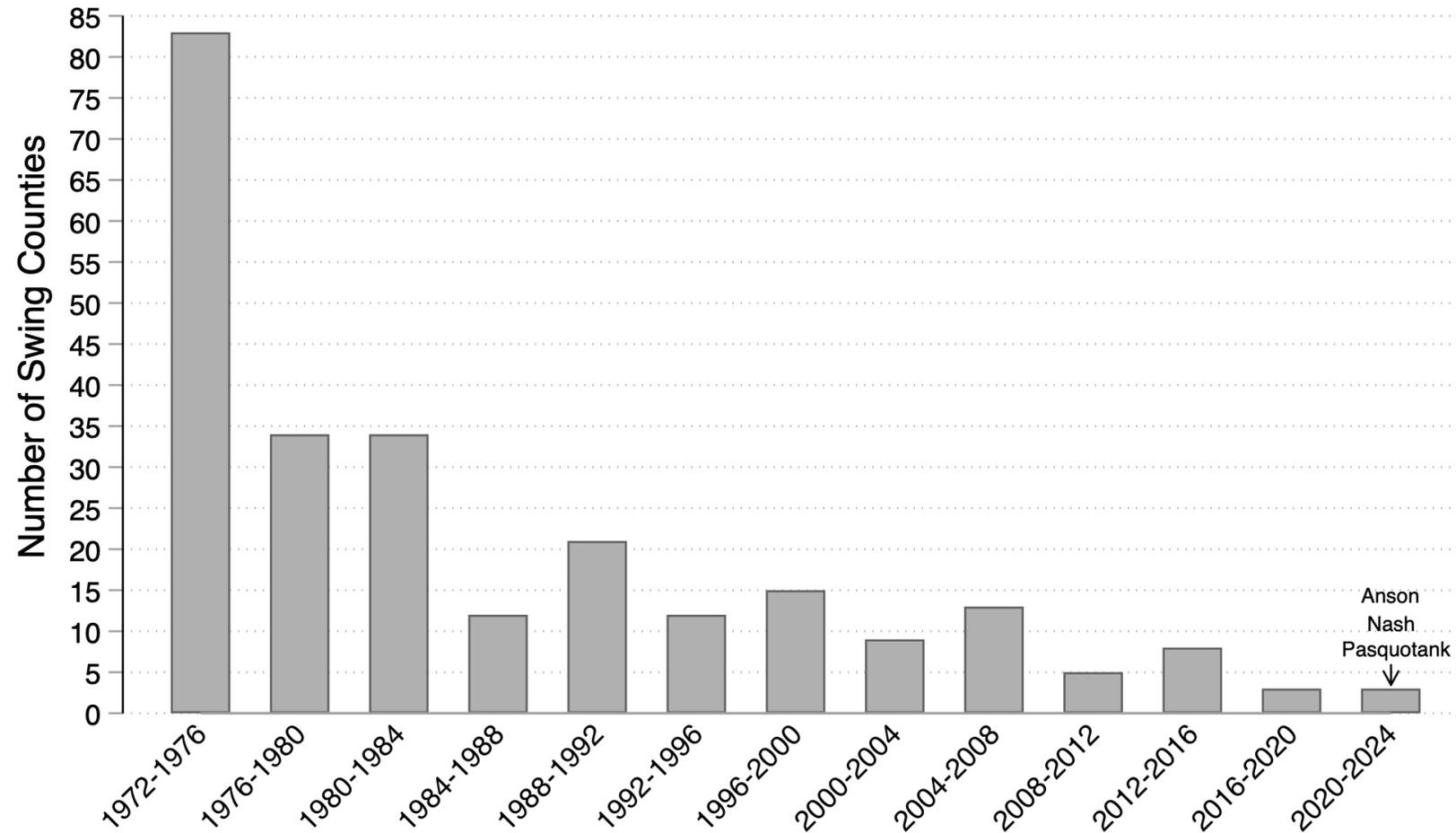
The New Divide: Urbanization



Notes: Data from various sources. Graph by Chris Cooper is an update of Graph 3.2 from Anatomy of a Purple State (UNC Press, 2024)

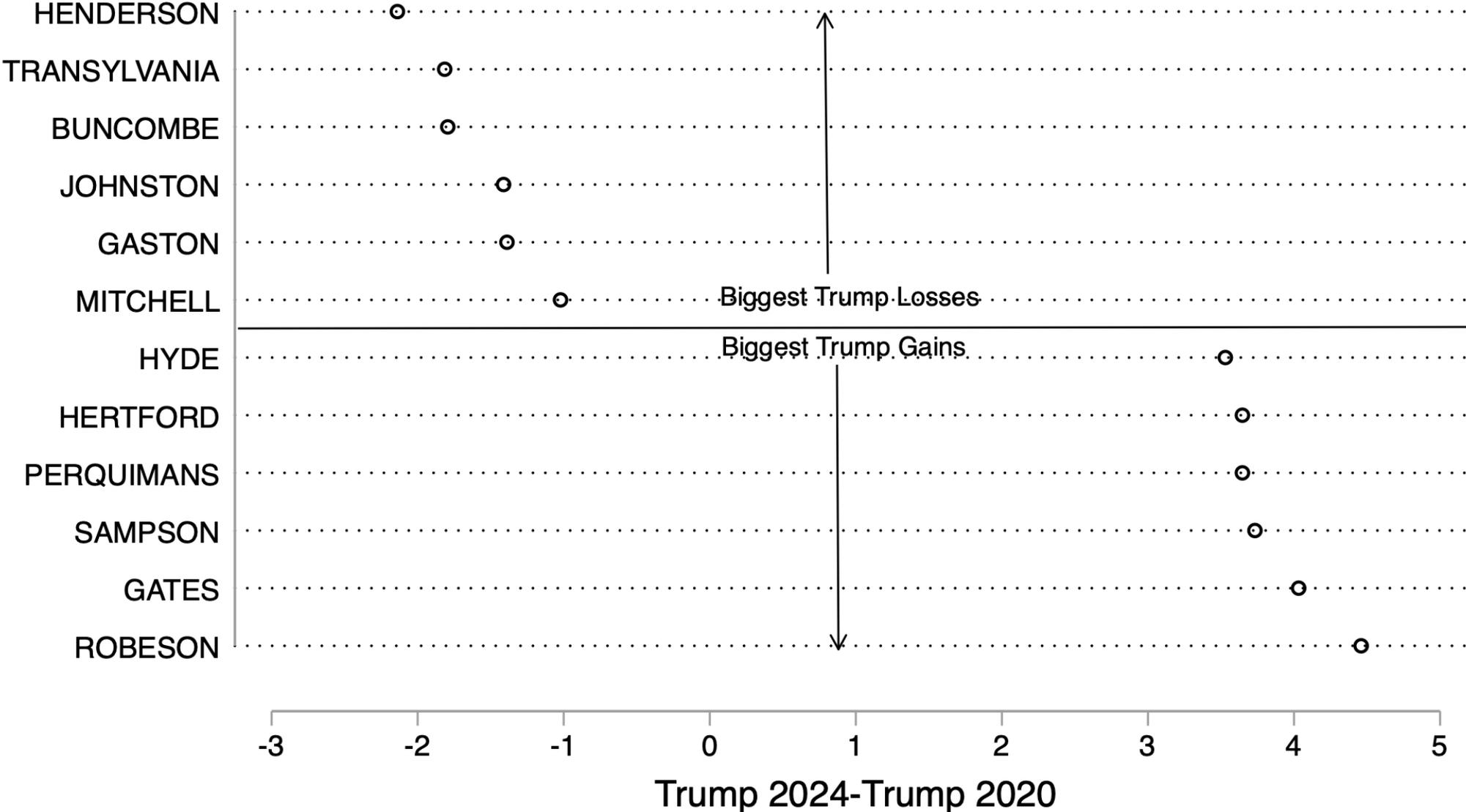
Calcified Counties

Swing Counties in North Carolina 1972-2024



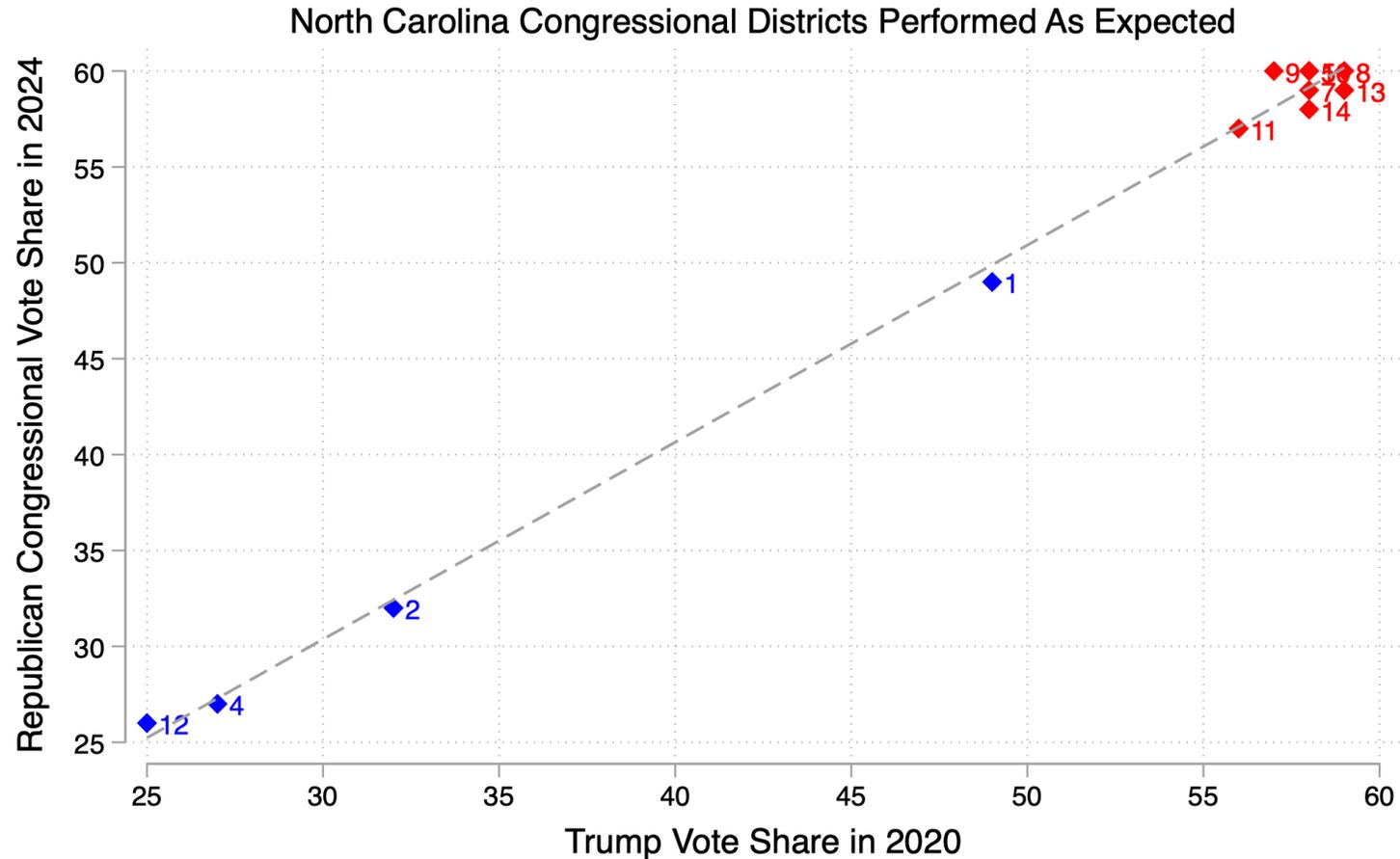
Notes: Data are from David Leip's Atlas of U.S. Presidential Elections & NCSBE Data. Analysis and Graph by Chris Cooper (@chriscooperwcu)

Counties That Moved Most Towards or Away from Trump 2020-2024



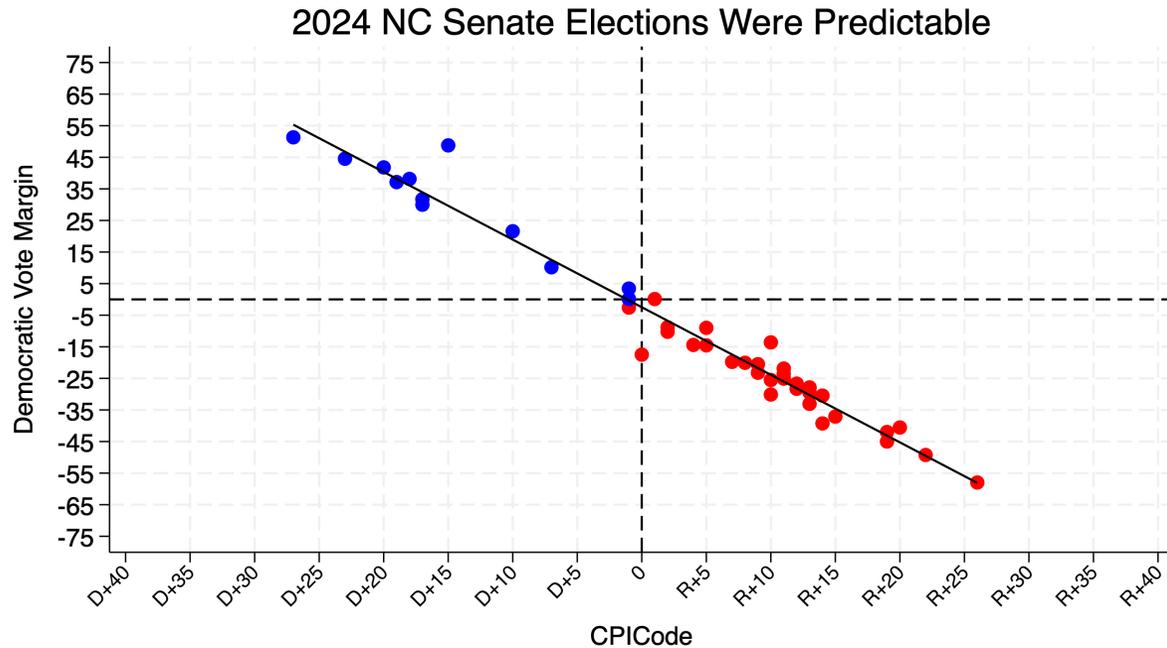
Notes: Data from NCSBE. Graph and analysis by Chris Cooper (@chriscooperwcu)

NC Congressional Districts Performed... Pretty Much Exactly As Expected

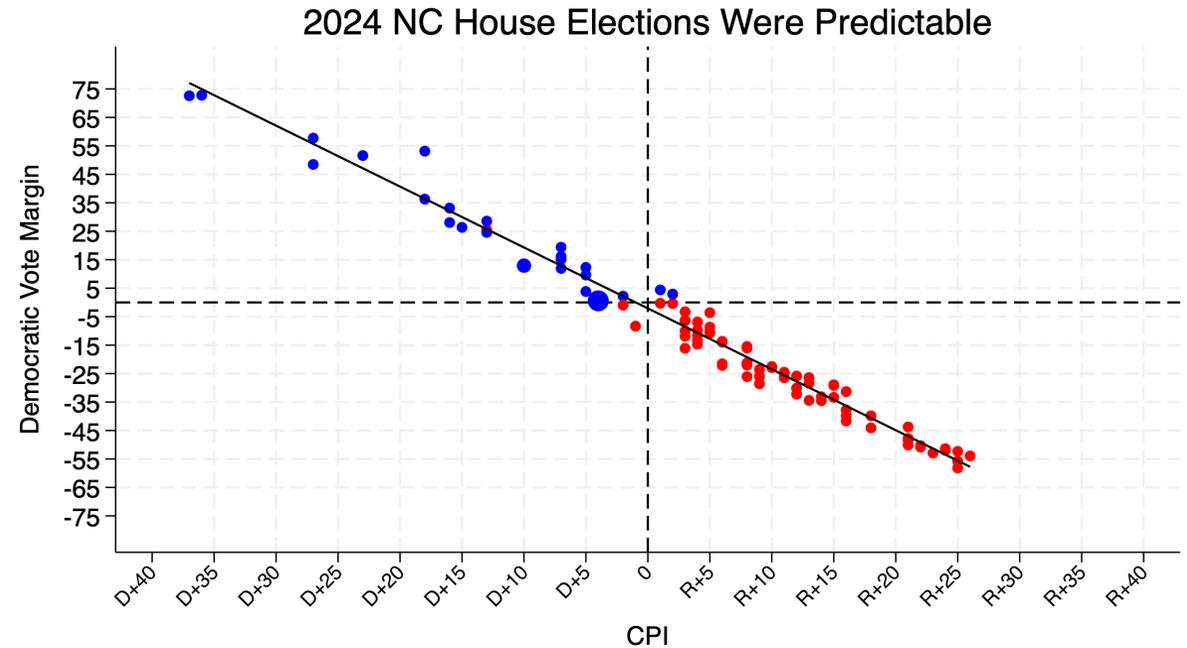


Notes: All percentages are two-party vote (excluding 3rd parties). Analysis & graph by Chris Cooper (@chriscooperwcu)

General Assembly Districts Performed... Pretty Much Exactly as Expected



Notes: CPI from the Locke Foundation. Margins computed from NCSBE data. Graph and analysis by Chris Cooper (@chriscooperwcu)



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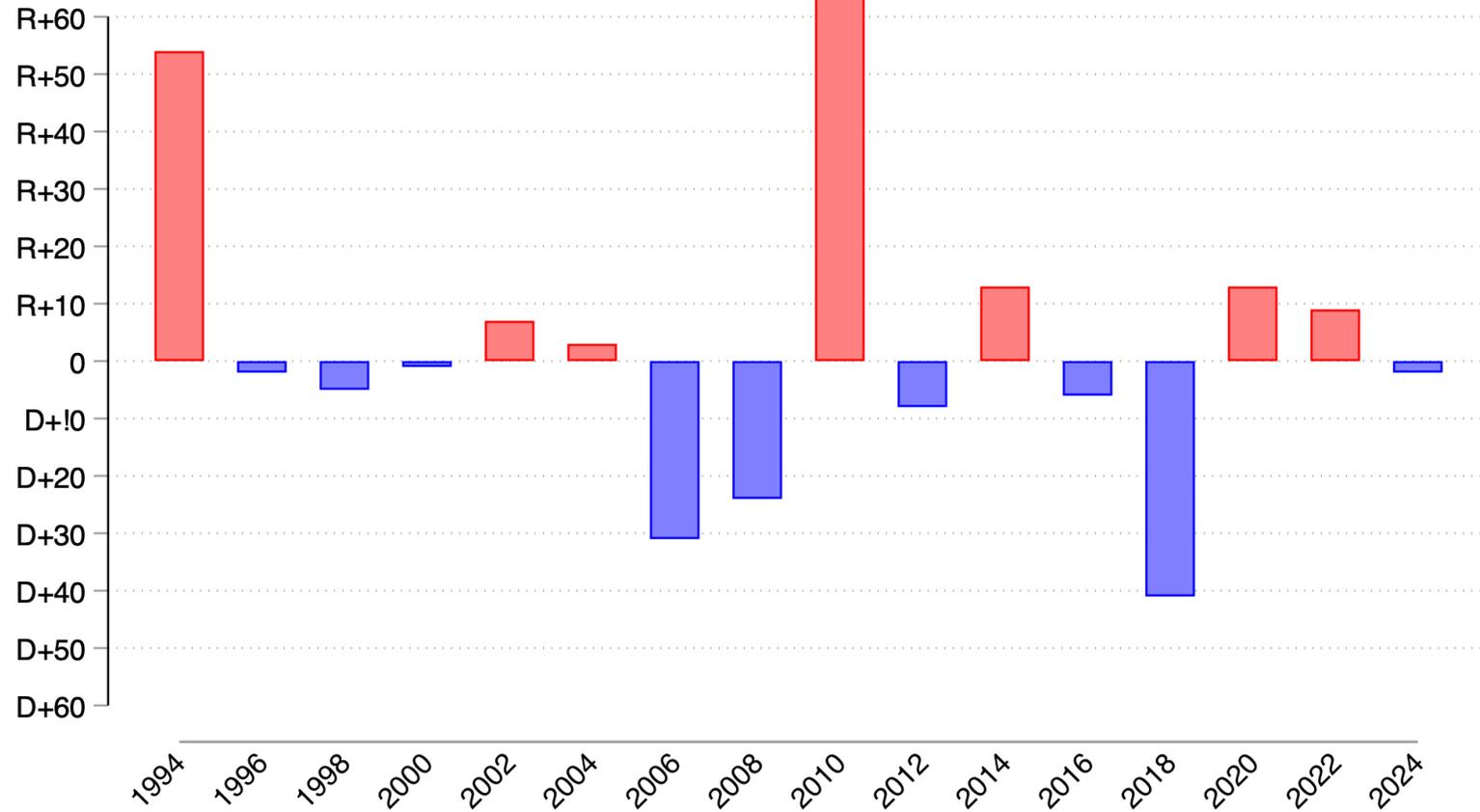
- But, what if there is *variation* within Counties & districts?



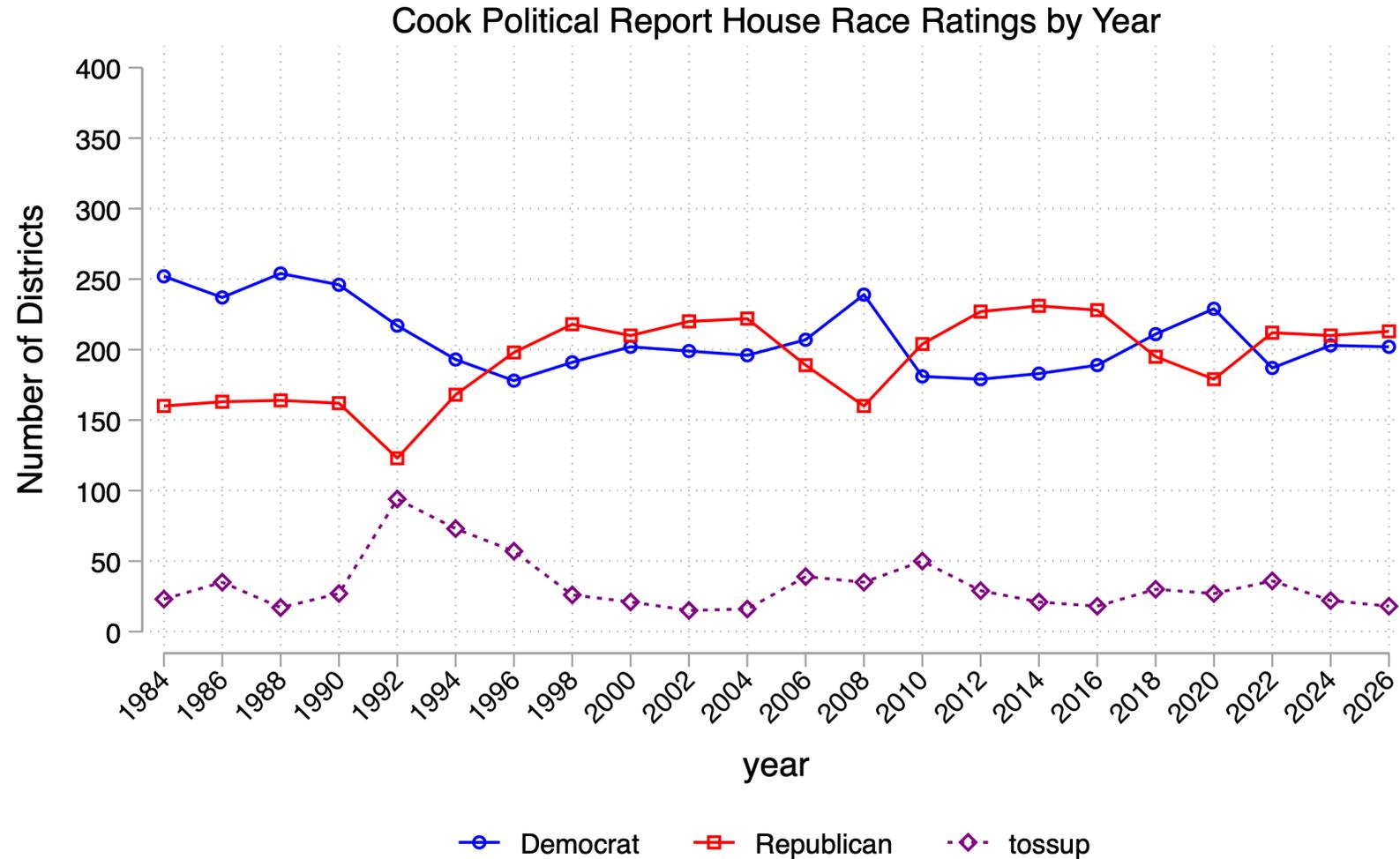
Within County Variation

- Incorporated/Unincorporated: the new urban/rural divide
- Democrats are the largest group of registered voters in incorporated places
- Democrats are the smallest group of registered voters in unincorporated places

Republican and Democratic Party Gains in US House of Representatives Elections 1994-2024



A Small Number of Competitive Seats



Source: Data from Cook Political Report. Graph by Chris Cooper. 2025 estimates from Sept. 11 2026

The Tit-for-Tat Redistricting Wars

- Current map: 219 (R) – 214 (D)
- Passed Maps (R+3)
 - Texas: 5 additional Reps
 - California: 5 additional Dems (pending referendum vote)
 - Missouri: 1 more Rep
 - North Carolina: 1 more Rep
 - Ohio: 2 more Rep
 - Utah: 1 more Dem
- Active Discussions/Proposals (D+3)
 - Virginia (up to 3 more Democrats)
- Other states where it might happen (Even)
 - Republicans control redistricting: Indiana (R+2), Kansas (R+1), Florida (R+3), New Hampshire (R+1),
 - Democrats control redistricting: Maryland (D+1), Illinois (D+1), Oregon (D+1), Wisconsin (D+2)
- Waiting for Callais (R+3)
 - Louisiana (R+1), Alabama (R+1)

Tuesday Oct. 14



Raleigh, N.C. — Today, legislative leaders agreed to hold votes during the previously scheduled October legislative session to block the efforts of blue state Democrats to take control of Congress from Republicans.

This follows President Donald Trump’s call urging legislatures across the country to take action to nullify Democrat redistricting efforts.

The General Assembly anticipates returning to Raleigh next week to consider a new Congressional map.

singular

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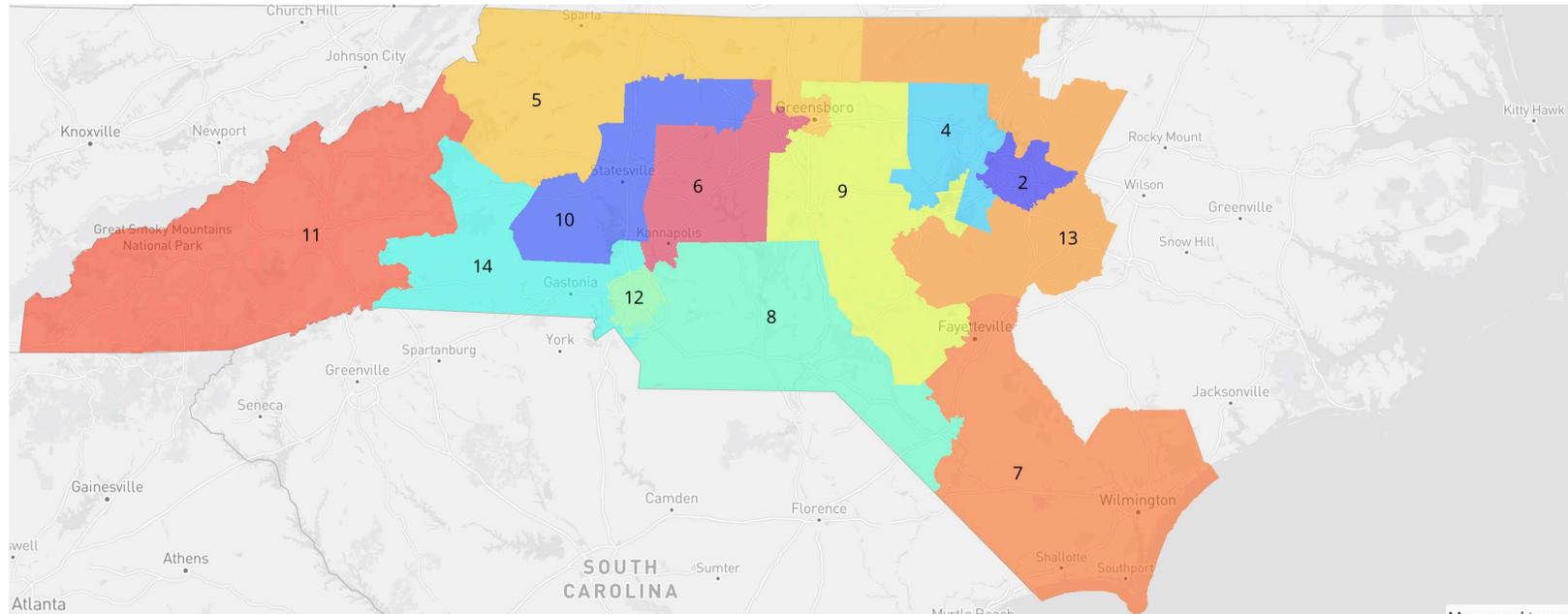
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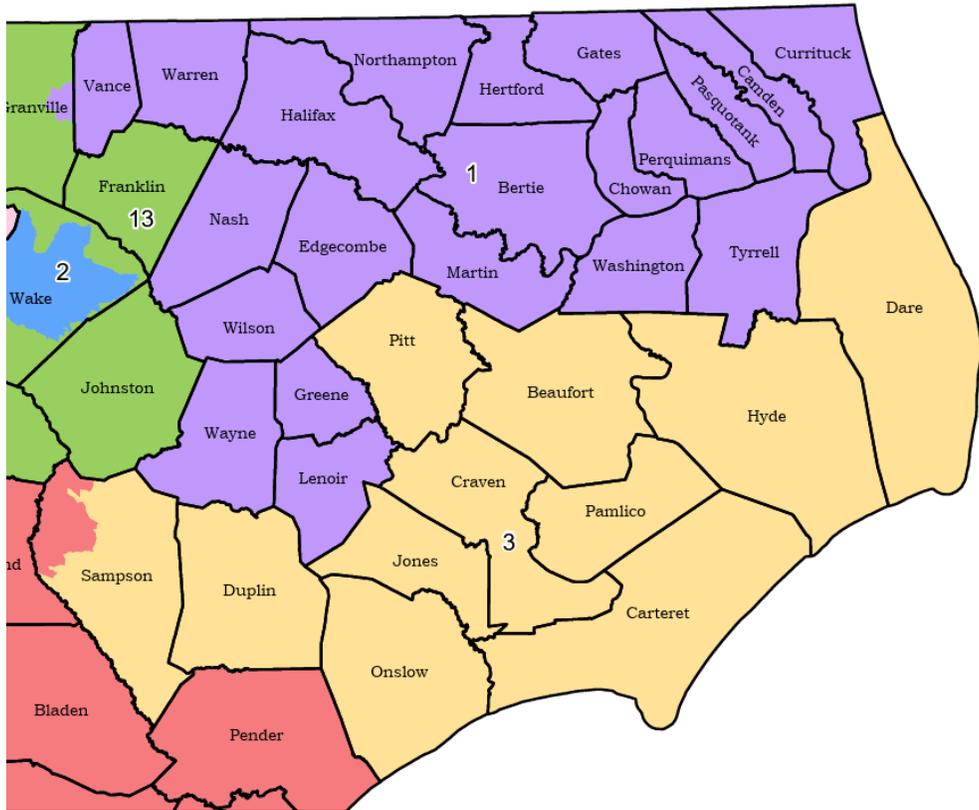
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House Speaker Destin Hall (R-Caldwell) said, “President Trump earned a clear mandate from the voters of North Carolina and the rest of the country, and we intend to defend it by drawing an additional Republican Congressional seat. Our state won’t stand by while Democrats like Gavin Newsom redraw districts to aid in their effort to obtain a majority in the U.S. House. We will not allow them to undermine the will of the voters and President Trump’s agenda.”

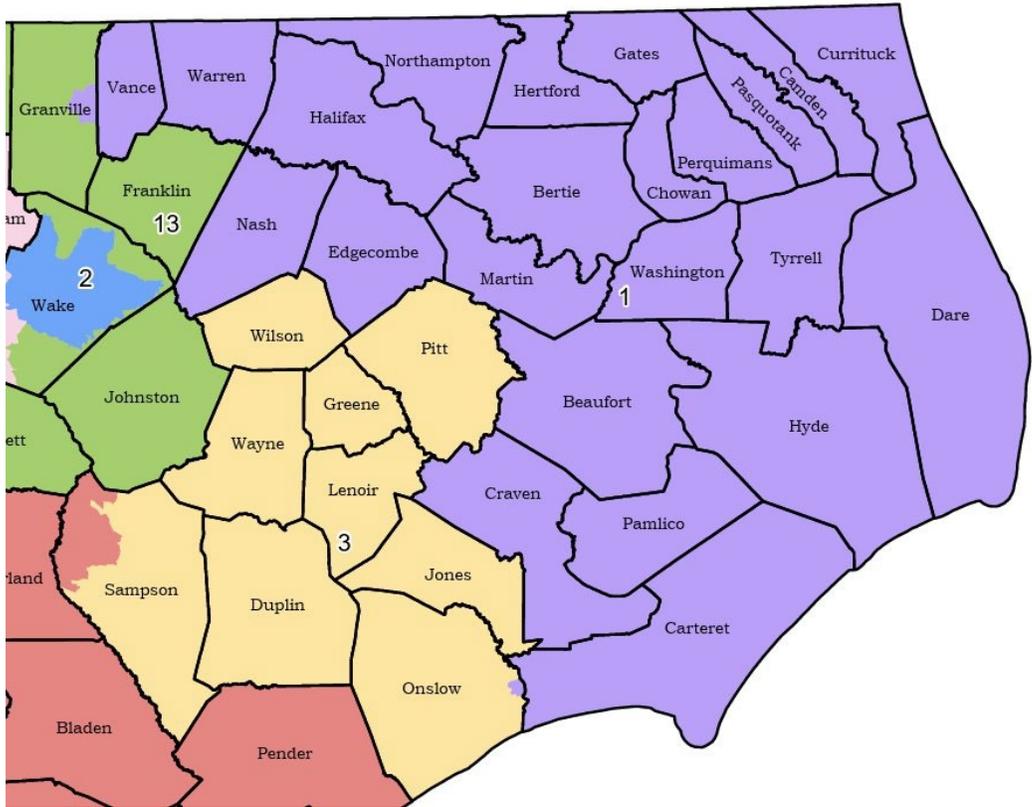
New Map Released Friday Oct. 17

- 12 of North Carolina's 14 congressional districts remained unchanged





2024



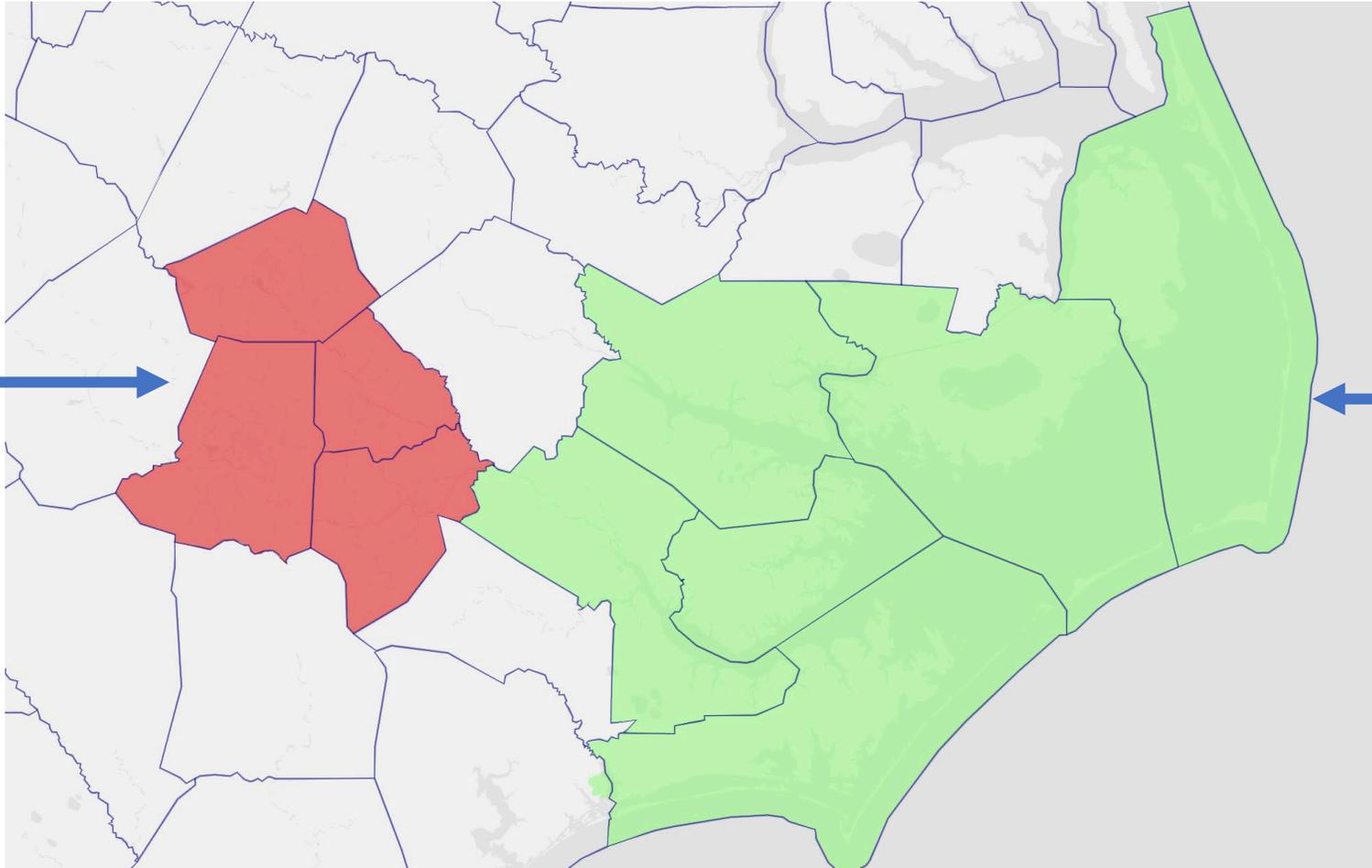
2026

What Changed?

Moved from NC-1
to NC-3



Greene
Lenoir
Wayne
Wilson



Moved from
NC-3 to NC-1

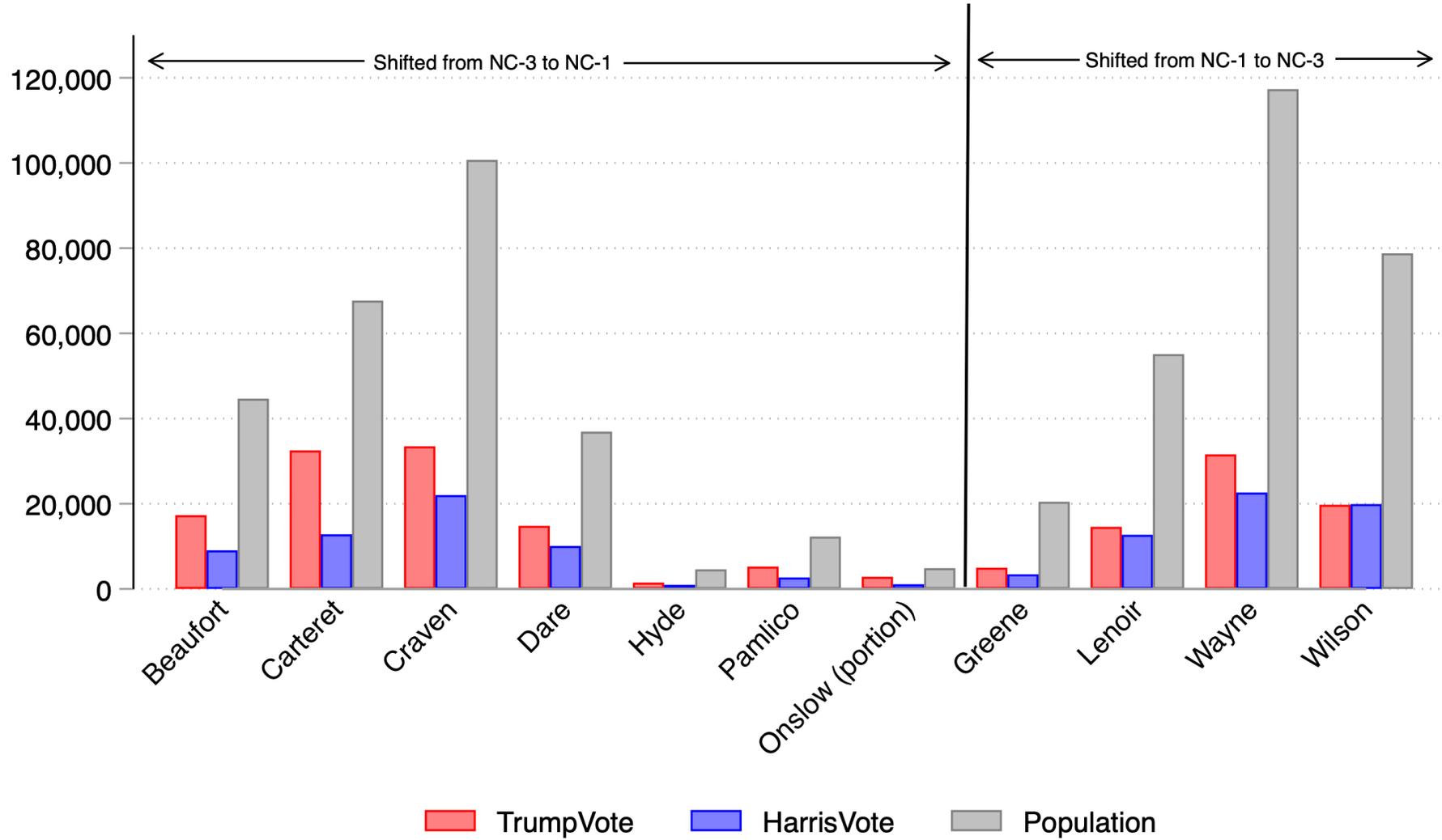
Beaufort
Carteret
Craven
Dare
Hyde
Pamlico
Onslow
(portion)

Current v. Proposed

	NC-1			NC-3			
	2024		2026		2024		2026
% Trump 2024	50	↔	55		61	↔	56
% Harris 2024	48	↔	44		39	↔	43
% Rep DRA Composite	48	↔	51		57	↔	52
% Dem DRA Composite	51	↔	47		41	↔	46
% Non-White	49	↔	40		35	↔	44
% Black	40	↔	32		21	↔	29

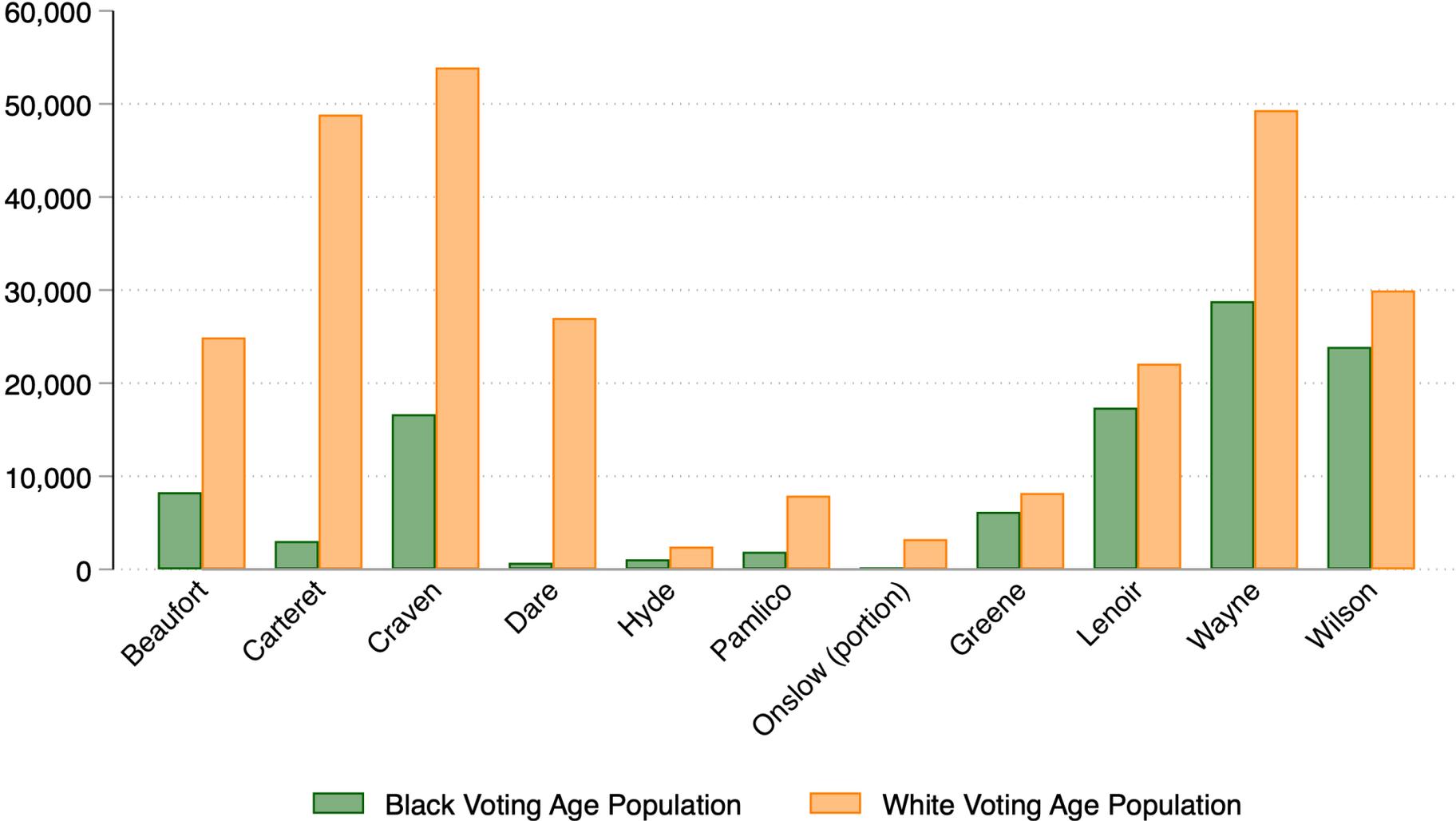
* Trump & Harris 2024 numbers for proposed map from NCGA Stat Pack. 2024 numbers from current districts from the Downballots (amazing) database of presidential results by congressional districts. 2016-2020 Composites, Minority & Race Numbers from Dave's Redistricting. Composite includes 2016 Presidential, 2020 Presidential, 2016 Senate, 2020 Senate, 2020 Governor, & 2020 Attorney General. Mistakes by Chris Cooper. Feel free to let him know if you see any (nicely, please).

2024 Presidential Vote and Population of Counties Affected by 2025 Redistricting in NC



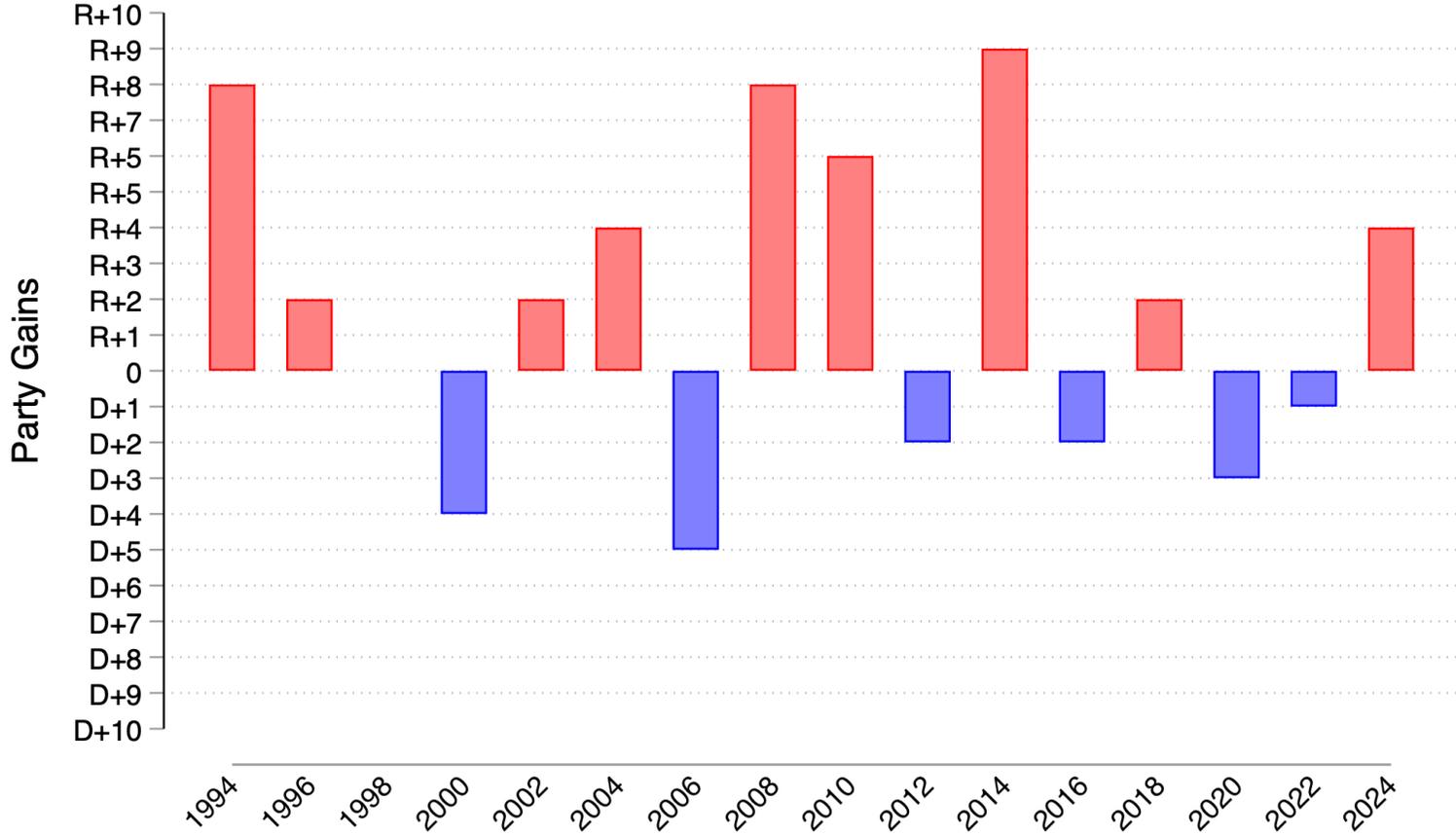
Notes: Data from North Carolina State Board of Elections. Graph by author.

White and Black Voting Age Population of Counties Affected by 2025 Redistricting in NC



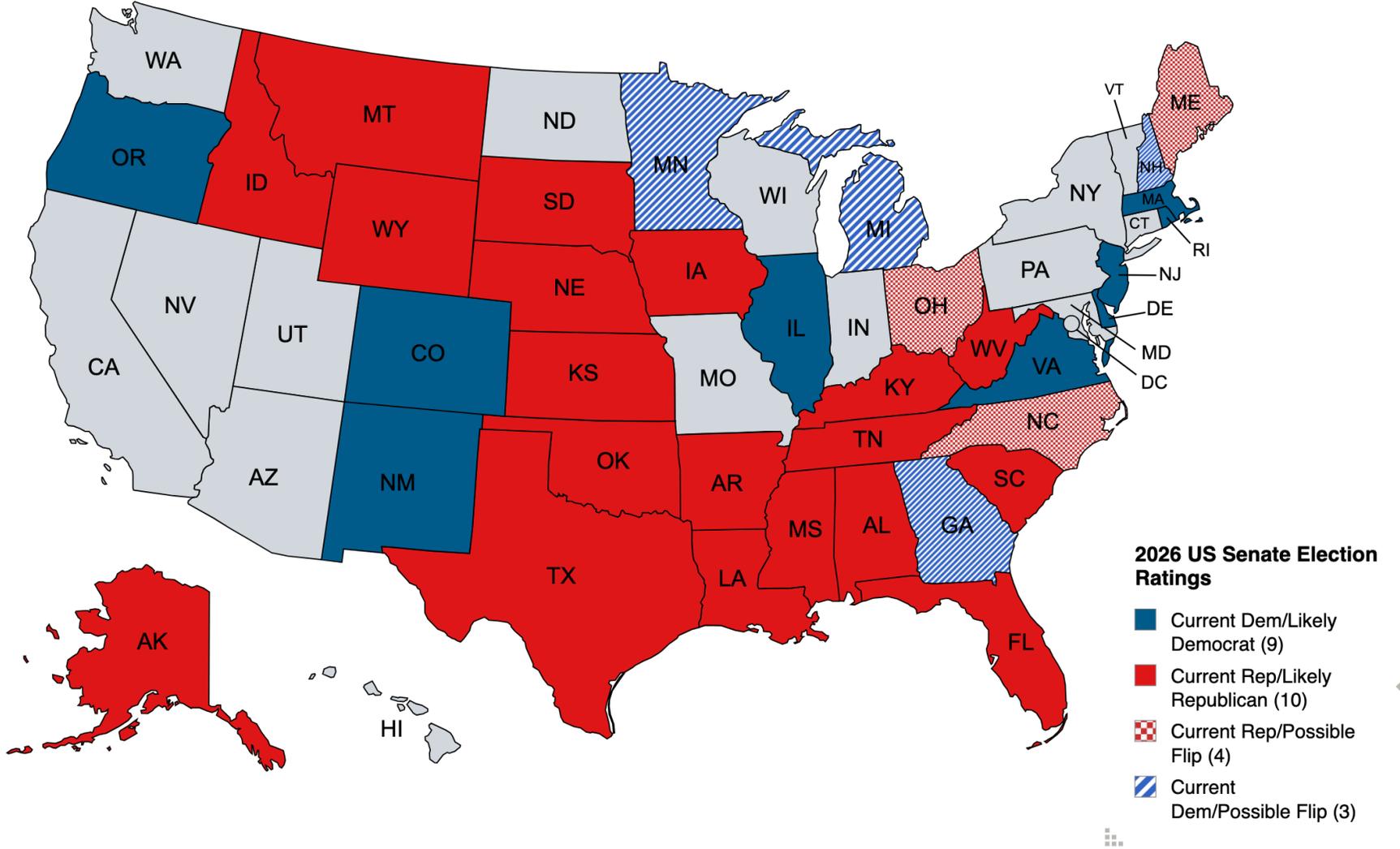
Notes: Data from Dave's Redistricting. All numbers are 2020 VAP. Graph by author

Democratic and Republican Party Gains in US Senate Elections 1994-2024



Notes: Graph and analysis by Chris Cooper (@chriscooperwcu)

Dems Need
to Gain 4
Seats in 2026



Thinking about the US Senate Election in NC

- Dem hasn't won a US Senate Election in NC since 2008
- But, there were no US Senate elections in NC in
 - 2018 (Trump's 1st Midterm)
 - 2020 (Biden Victory)

What About the General Assembly?

	NC House		NC Senate	
	R	D	R	D
Current	71	49	30	20

What About the General Assembly?

	NC House		NC Senate	
	R	D	R	D
R Sweeps Splits				
Hold Pres Outcomes				
Current	71	49	30	20
Prather Metric				
D Sweeps Splits				
Robinson Metric				

What About the General Assembly?

	NC House		NC Senate	
	R	D	R	D
R Sweeps Splits	76	44	33	17
Hold Pres Outcomes	72	48	31	19
Current	71	49	30	20
Prather Metric	67	53	30	20
D Sweeps Splits	63	57	28	22
Robinson Metric	46	74	22	28

The Bottom Line

- North Carolina is a purple state
- We are purple because we are a mix of blue and red—not because we are all purple
- We live in a time of nationalized politics--& it's trickled down to the local level.
- None of that is likely to change soon

What Good Governance Looks Like

It's the Tuesday after Helene had hit and I'm walking outside to get something out of my car, the county offices are closed but we're all here because the election is coming, we don't have a choice, well I mean, we had a choice, but we're all election nerds so we're going to be here come hell or high water, well regardless of the hell or the high water we were here, so I'm walking out to my car, and this lady pulls into the handicap spot, and she's probably in her mid-50s, and she asked me, she says: "are you guys open?" and I said, "well technically the county offices are closed, but what can I help you with?" and she goes, just kind of does that exhausted laugh that we all sort of did during Helene, a lot, and she goes: "I just moved here 2 weeks ago. I don't have running water, I don't have electricity, my phone doesn't work, and I was just out looking for any resources I could get and I saw the elections office" and she's like "I just wanted one normal, to do one normal thing, and I wanted to register to vote." So, of course, of course, we got her registered and everything".

QUESTIONS & CONVERSATION



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