

## WCU Early Voting Site Summary Data for 2024 Primary

Chris Cooper, Madison Distinguished Professor and Director of the Haire Institute for Public Policy,  
Western Carolina University ([ccooper@email.wcu.edu](mailto:ccooper@email.wcu.edu))

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Western Carolina University once again hosted a polling site during the 2024 primary election early voting period. The table below includes summary data comparing 2024 to 2022 (a midterm election which fell during Spring Break), and 2020 (the last presidential election).

**Turnout:** As you can see, turnout at the WCU location was higher than the 2022 midterm (as expected) but fell below 2020 turnout. While turnout was down statewide from 2020, the size of the drop was higher at the WCU location than in the statewide average. Within the county, the WCU site had more voters than Qualla (272), but trailed Cashiers (546), Cullowhee Rec. (725), and Jackson County Board of Elections (1,552).

### Primary Election Summary Data for WCU Early Voting Site

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Day	2020 (Presidential) Ballots Accepted	2022 (Mid-term) Ballots Accepted	2024 (Presidential) Ballots Accepted
1	73	30	66
2	53	20	33
3	45	13	43
4	35	21	29
5	52	30	38
6	26	21	41
7	19	14	42
8	50	11	16
9	67	11	27
10	69	18	36
11	82	16	32
12	226	28	43
13	78	15	57
14			40
Total Votes Accepted	875	248	543
Same Day Registrations	241	11	123 (2 <sup>nd</sup> in state)
Avg. Age	29	46	36
<u>Voter Party</u>			
Dem	46%	44%	35%
Republican	11%	9%	12%
Unaffiliated	42%	46%	52%
<u>Ballot Type Requested</u>			
Dem	83%	71%	64%
Republican	15%	27%	34%

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*The Fine Print:* Compiled by Chris Cooper, Madison Distinguished Professor of Political Science and Public Affairs and Director of the Haire Institute for Public Policy. Data were downloaded from publicly available data collected by the NC State Board of Elections. 2022 was a midterm election; there was no presidential election that year. The early voting period for the 2022 primary also ran from 4/28-5/14. The last day of class that semester was 4/29 and graduation was 5/7.

**Growing New Voters:** Eligible voters in North Carolina can complete Same Day Registration (SDR) during the early voting period (meaning they can register to vote and cast a vote in the same trip). The WCU site processed the 2<sup>nd</sup> most SDRs in the state (only the site at NC State processed more). Even better: almost one in every four ballots at WCU (23%) was cast in tandem with SDR—the highest percentage in the state (the next highest was 15%). The average age of voters at the WCU location (36) is also well below the state average (64). Together, these pieces of data indicate that the WCU early voting site is doing its job in growing new voters.

**Partisanship:** Young people and in-migrants are increasingly registered as Unaffiliated (the largest registration category in North Carolina). From that you might expect that we would have a lot of Unaffiliated voters at the WCU site. What you might not expect is that we had the largest proportion of Unaffiliated voters in the state (52%)! There was only 1 other site statewide that exceeded 50% (Camden County Board of Elections).

**Race:** Voters at the WCU site appear to be slightly more diverse than Jackson County voters as a whole (83% of voters at the WCU site identify as white v. 92% county-wide), but less diverse than the statewide average (75% white).

**What We Don't Know:** Please remember that these data are from the WCU primary early voting site, not from all WCU voters. If a student (or staff, or faculty member) cast a vote by mail, at another site (in Jackson County or elsewhere), or on election day, they are not reflected in these data. And, of course, we have no idea how anyone voted—just which ballots they chose.

**A Caution:** I ran these data Monday morning March 4. There will be a few small adjustments in the data over the next few days—this is normal.

**My Takeaway (w/some editorializing):** Although the numbers were down a bit from the last presidential election primary, the evidence here (and elsewhere) suggests that the WCU early voting site is a valuable contributor to WCU's civic education mission. The site was frequently-used and arguably did the best job of any site in the state of growing new voters. Further, the site's presence at the center of campus reminded students and the campus community of the election—no doubt raising awareness. Finally, in a time of civic unrest, it is important and noteworthy that the WCU early voting site ran smoothly—there were no incidents, and no negative headlines. It was, frankly, a little bit boring—and that's the highest compliment I can give to anyone administering elections.