

**Voting Early and On Campus: How North Carolina
Universities Collaborate with County Governments to
Increase Student Voter Access and Turnout**

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Abstract

College-aged voters face magnified costs of voting and turnout in low numbers. North Carolina college students have voted early and on-campus at specific schools for over a decade. How have on-campus early voting locations impacted the voting behavior of college students in North Carolina between 2012 and 2020? To analyze this question through a multi-faceted lens, I employed an explanatory sequential mixed-methods approach that integrates qualitative and quantitative methods. First, I selected six North Carolina universities and analyzed post-election data from the National Study of Learning, Voting, and Engagement to evaluate the impact of early voting on voting rates. Second, I interviewed county election directors and university officials to understand the administrative decisions behind site placement. Finally, I surveyed college students about their beliefs and experiences with early voting. The findings illuminate a model of voter engagement that increases voter access and turnout in North Carolina. Early voting is associated with higher turnout rates. County election directors indicate that early voting sites on campus are an effective way to reach voters. University officials understand the value of on-campus early voting as an opportunity to support student voting rights. Students value the convenience and report high satisfaction with the voting method. These findings suggest that placing early voting sites on college campuses is a cost-effective method of expanding voting access. University employees, in partnership with county election officials, can use on-campus early voting to promote political participation and help young citizens overcome the costs of voting.

Table of Contents

<i>Acknowledgements</i>	2
Abstract	3
Chapter 1: Introduction	6
<i>A. Research Question</i>	9
Chapter 2: History of Youth Voting Rights and North Carolina Election Policy	10
<i>A. The Expansion and Restriction of Voting Rights in North Carolina</i>	10
<i>B. Relevant State and Federal Policies Regulating Student Voting Rights</i>	15
<i>C. Overview of Election Administration in North Carolina</i>	16
Chapter 3: Conceptualizing Youth Voter Turnout: The Theoretical Framework	17
<i>A. Theories of Impact of Early Voting Policies and Locations</i>	17
<i>B. Classic Theories of Voter Turnout</i>	18
<i>C. Theories of Institution as Citizen</i>	24
<i>D. Limitations of Prior Analysis</i>	26
Chapter 4: Methodology	28
<i>A. Case Selection: Location and Time</i>	29
<i>B. Quantitative Analysis of National Study of Learning, Voting and Engagement Data</i>	30
<i>C. Qualitative Interviews</i>	32
<i>D. Quantitative Survey</i>	34
<i>E. Hypotheses</i>	38
Chapter 5: Results	42
<i>A. Findings from National Study of Learning, Voting and Engagement Data</i>	42
<i>B. Thematic Analysis of Interviews with Election Directors</i>	49
<i>C. Thematic Analysis of Interviews with University Administrators</i>	59
<i>D. Findings from Student Early Voting Experience Survey</i>	67
Chapter 6: Discussion and Conclusion	80
<i>A. Theoretical Implications</i>	81
<i>B. Policy Recommendations</i>	86
<i>C. Limitations and Avenues for Future Research</i>	90
<i>D. The Big Picture: Bringing the Electoral Process to the People</i>	91
Appendix	94
References	110

Table of Figures

Table 1: Colleges and Universities Included in the Study	30
Table 2: Description of Political Engagement Score Variable	37
Table 3: Likert-Scale for Statements about Voting as a Student	38
Table 4: Participant Demographics (Election Directors).....	50
Table 5: Grouping of Initial Codes to Form Themes.....	51
Table 6: Participants Demographics (University Officials).....	60
Table 7: Grouping of Initial Codes to Form Themes (University Officials)	60
Table 8: Descriptive Statistics from NSLVE Data	94
Figure 1: Share of College Students Voting Early in North Carolina 2012-2020	44
Figure 2: Voting Rate Among College Campuses in North Carolina from 2012-2020	45
Figure 3: Registration Rate as a Function of Early Vote Rate, 2012-2018	46
Figure 4: Voting Rate as a Function of Early Vote Rate Among College Campuses in North Carolina from 2012-2018.....	48
Figure 5: Voting Rate as a Function of Early Vote Rate Among College Campuses in North Carolina from 2012-2018, by year.....	49
Figure 6: Demographic Breakdown of Survey Sample	68
Figure 7: On-Campus Early Voting Sites Made Voting Easier in 2020 and 2022	69
Figure 8: On-Campus Early Voting Locations Influence Students' Decisions about Whether, Where, When, and How to Vote	70
Figure 9: Students Expressed Satisfaction with the Early Voting Process on Their College Campus	71
Figure 10: Students Prefer Convenient and Early Voting Methods	72
Figure 11: Convenience of Accessing Voting Location Among Top Factor to Students When Making Voting Plan.....	73
Figure 12: Responses to Likert-Scale Questions	74
Figure 13: Frequency of Political Engagement Score	75
Figure 14: Political Engagement Score has a Weak Positive Association with Belief of University Responsibility.....	77
Figure 15: Political Engagement Score has a Weak Positive Association with Belief of County Responsibility	78
Figure 16: Political Engagement Score has a Weak Positive Association with Belief Regarding Consistency of On-Campus Early Voting Location	79

Chapter 1: Introduction

When the Watauga County Board of Elections proposed removing a polling location from Appalachian State University's campus in 2014, students responded by suing in state court ("Anderson v. North Carolina State Board of Elections," 2014). In *Anderson v. The North Carolina State Board of Elections*, the superior court found that removing the early voting site from the campus had "no other intent from [the] board's decision other than to discourage student voting" ("Anderson v. North Carolina State Board of Elections," 2014). Ultimately, the judge ruled in the student's favor and considered the move "a significant infringement" that "rises to the level of a constitutional violation of the right to vote" ("Anderson v. North Carolina State Board of Elections," 2014). The county relocated the polling location back on campus when the state appeals court refused to hear an appeal (Bromberg, 2019).

Infringements of students' right to vote are not a thing of the past. In April 2023, Cleta Mitchell, a Republican lawyer who aided Donald Trump's efforts to overturn the 2020 election, told Republican donors that conservatives must collaborate to "limit voting on college campuses," along with limiting election policies that make it easier to vote, such as same-day voter registration and pre-registration for sixteen- and seventeen-year-olds (Dawsey & Gardner, 2023). About North Carolina, Mitchell said, "They basically put the polling place next to the student dorm, so they just have to roll out of bed, vote, and go back to bed" (Dawsey & Gardner, 2023). Across the United States, partisan attacks continue to threaten students' right to vote, but universities possess the power to defend their students' right to democratic participation.

Students and election activists regularly request the apportionment of an on-campus early voting location under the notion that students having the option to cast their ballot in the same building they study for a midterm in will increase the turnout of young voters. Young people are

highly susceptible to the external costs of voting; therefore, a convenient voting location may help reduce these costs for citizens still developing political engagement habits (Holbein & Hillygus, 2020).

At a time when undemocratic actors permeate our electoral institutions and attempt to rewrite legislation and redraw congressional maps to limit young people's access to the ballot, scholars, university officials, and election administrators must understand how they can best support student voting access through the existing institutional and legal pathways. Within the last decade in North Carolina, the battle to promote on-campus early voting locations has occurred within the local county board of elections. Convenient voting access requires an ongoing partnership between the county government and university leadership.

Before this study, several researchers already asked essential questions about the impact of early voting as a public policy. When deciding whether they want to vote, voters endure a host of costs (Downs, 1957b; Riker & Ordeshook, 1968); however, institutional reforms, such as early voting, voting by mail, and online registration, have the potential to lower these costs (Leighley & Nagler, 2013; Wolfinger & Rosenstone, 1980). Election reforms intended to make voting easier may not reliably have this effect. Some findings suggest that early voting demobilized potential voters by diminishing the importance of Election Day (Burden et al., 2017; Walker et al., 2019). Research has also shown that administrative changes to early voting site placement have both a substitution and turnout effect on North Carolina voters (Bitzer et al., 2023). However, the impact of an on-campus voting location, mainly an early voting site, on youth turnout will differ from its impact on the general population. Preliminary evidence suggests that early voting sites located on college campuses can increase youth turnout (Shino & Smith, 2020). Researchers have started to study the efficacy of campus-based early voting sites.

However, many stones remain unturned regarding how on-campus early voting reforms reduce the external costs of voting for North Carolina college students. Further investigation was needed to fill in the gap in our understanding of the impact of on-campus early voting locations throughout the United States, including in the Tar Heel State.

This thesis examines how these early voting sites, which offer same-day voter registration, impact voting rates on college campuses. The scope of this study is limited to six universities across the state of North Carolina from 2012 to 2020. I employed an explanatory sequential mixed-methods approach that combines qualitative and quantitative methods. Through analysis of election data, interviews, and survey responses, I explored what it takes to have an on-campus early voting site in North Carolina and how it impacts the communities they serve.

The results presented in this thesis illuminate a model of voter engagement that increases voter access and turnout in North Carolina. Placing early voting sites on college campuses is a cost-effective method of expanding access to the democratic process. Voting early and on campus benefits from widespread support from all relevant stakeholders: county election directors, university officials, and, most importantly, students. University employees, in partnership with county election officials, can use on-campus early voting to promote political participation and help young citizens overcome the costs of voting.

These findings will inform policy recommendations to minimize costs and maximize student voting rates in future elections. Additionally, these conclusions contribute to the scholarship and policy at the intersection of election policy and democracy reform in several ways. First, this paper delivers data-grounded conclusions measuring the effectiveness of on-campus early voting sites in North Carolina. Second, the interviews with relevant stakeholders illuminate the internal politics behind early voting location selection and the frequent barriers

these actors face. Finally, this thesis offers recommendations for county officials and university administrators on how they can best support young voters using existing institutional pathways.

A. Research Question

The central research question for this thesis is: How have on-campus early voting locations impacted the voting behavior of college students in North Carolina between 2012 and 2020? The primary research question gives rise to several sub-questions, which I will refer to throughout the thesis with the names listed below.

1. **Impact Question:** To what extent does an on-campus early voting location impact young voters' registration and voting rates in North Carolina?
2. **County Election Board Question:** When county boards of elections decide where to place early voting sites, to what extent do they believe they are responsible for providing college voters convenient access to the ballot?
3. **Universities Question:** How do North Carolina universities incorporate early voting into their voter action plans? How do university officials interpret their role in helping students navigate the election process?
4. **Student Perspectives Question:** How does an early voting site on campus impact students' decisions on how, when, and where to vote? To what degree do students expect their university and county government to help facilitate their political engagement?

The answers to my primary research question and the associated sub-questions give rise to a policy implication question: How can higher education institutions best collaborate with county election officials to optimize convenience voting and increase student voter turnout?

Chapter 2: History of Youth Voting Rights and North Carolina Election

Policy

Early voting is the most popular method of voting in North Carolina. The majority of North Carolina voters have utilized early voting in every federal election since 2016, with roots dating back to the late 1990s (*Voter turnout*, 2023). State legislators from both major political parties have taken advantage of windows of opportunities to expand and restrict early voting access in the last twenty-five years. Much like a roller coaster, the history of youth voting rights in North Carolina has included its ups and downs. Campus voting locations, early voting, and same-day voter registration dominate the current narrative of student voter access, but the college campuses included in this study have a history of voting on campus that, in some instances, goes back more than a decade.

A. The Expansion and Restriction of Voting Rights in North Carolina

Young voters—between the ages of 18 and 21—earned the right to vote in 1971 with the ratification of the Twenty-Sixth Amendment. North Carolina was the last state needed to ratify the amendment and grant college-aged students nationwide the right to vote. Despite constitutional protection, many threats still limit young people’s voting rights, including policies that enforce voter ID laws, reduce early voting and same-day voter registration, roll back pre-registration programs, restrict polling sites on campus, intimidate voters, divide campuses through gerrymandering, and misuse provisional ballots (Bromberg, 2019, pp. 1107-1108). Fifty years after the passage of the Twenty-Sixth Amendment, young people continue to face targeted challenges limiting their ability to engage in democracy. The history of policies targeting young

voters' access to the ballot is rich, but bound to the scope of this thesis, I concentrate on North Carolina's history.

North Carolinians have had the opportunity to vote early for over twenty years. However, due to ongoing efforts of both major political parties, the specific policies for early voting have been different in nearly every election. Voters in North Carolina have experienced seismic changes to their voting rights, as they expand under Democratic leadership and contract with Republicans in charge.

The first version of early voting began in 1977 when the North Carolina General Assembly amended the laws for absentee voting to permit absentee-eligible voters to apply for and cast their vote at a county board of election in a single visit ahead of Election Day (Harris, 2022). Two critical pieces of legislation in 1999 made all voters eligible, regardless of disability status or physical location on Election Day, to request an absentee ballot and sanctioned the county board of elections to designate multiple "one-stop early voting locations" (Joyce, 2010). Two years later, the General Assembly passed House Bill 977, which extended the no-excuse provision to all federal, state, and municipal elections (Joyce, 2010).

When the Democratic party had control of both chambers of the General Assembly and the executive branch in the early years of the 21st century, they expanded voting access through same-day registration during early voting and pre-registration for sixteen- and seventeen-year-olds (Leloudis & Korstad, 2020, p. 97). In 2007, the Democratic majority in the North Carolina General Assembly passed House Bill 91, which introduced the policy of same-day voter registration (Joyce, 2010). The introduction of same-day voter registration, which allows someone to register and vote in one visit during early voting, corresponds with the rise in early voting usage in North Carolina in the 2008 election.

In 2010, the Republican party took control of both legislative chambers for the first time since 1898 and ushered in a new era of election policies in North Carolina (Wan, 2016). Republican legislators could not pass legislation without a sympathetic governor, but they researched and drafted legislation in preparation for their window of opportunity. In 2013, the United States Supreme Court struck down Section 4 of the Voting Rights Act of 1965 in the landmark case *Shelby County v. Holder*, which allowed state legislatures to alter election law without pre-clearance from federal officials. North Carolina Republicans seized this opportunity. Within five months, they passed House Bill 589, which became known as “the nation’s most comprehensive revision of election law” (Leloudis & Korstad, 2020, p. 1). This law enacted policies aimed to restrict access to the franchise: eradicating same-day registration during early voting, shortening the early voting period, eliminating the pre-registration program for sixteen- and seventeen-year-olds, and prohibiting the counting of provisional ballots cast in the wrong district (Bromberg, 2019).

Because of the policies enacted post-*Shelby* and the election of Republican Governor Pat McCrory¹, the county boards of elections did not provide on-campus early voting locations during the 2014 election. Prior to the 2014 cycle, four of the universities in my study had on-campus early voting locations for the 2012 election, but all of these were eliminated after Governor Pat McCrory took power. Select schools that lost their early voting sites between 2012 and 2014 included North Carolina State University, Duke University, University of North Carolina at Charlotte, North Carolina Agricultural and Technical State University, East Carolina University, and Winston Salem State University (D’Ercole, 2021, pp. 1686-1687). At this time,

¹ The majority party on the county boards of elections corresponds with the Governor’s party, so once Republican Governor Pat McCrory took office, the GOP controlled all one-hundred county boards of election across the state. For more on NC election administration, see Chapter 2 Section C.

reporting from the *News and Observer* found that the state Republican party urged county boards of elections to behave in a partisan manner when approving early voting plans (Campbell, 2016). In an email to Republican county board members obtained by the *News and Observer*, Executive Director of the NCGOP Dallas Woodhouse wrote, “no group of people are entitled to their own early voting site, including college students, who already have more voting options than most other citizens” (Campbell, 2016). Board members who shared this perspective limited students’ ballot access in the 2014 midterm elections, which potentially explains the low voting rates as seen on the table in Appendix A.

Following a three-year legal dispute, in 2016, the Fourth Circuit Court of Appeals struck down House Bill 589. The court ruled the law violated both the Constitution and Section 2 of the Voting Rights Act, because lawmakers intended to, as written in the ruling, “target African Americans with almost surgical precision” (“North Carolina NAACP v. McCrory,” 2016). An expert report filed in association with the case found that the law had “a cumulative negative impact on North Carolina voters” (NAACP & LWVNC, 2015). Removing the pre-registration program for high school students and eliminating the use of college and out-of-state issued identification represent two examples of how Republican state legislators exhibited the same near-surgical precision targeting the youth vote. Despite the negative impacts of the legislation on students and young voters, lawyers and judges “struggled to identify the appropriate standard of review to apply to Twenty-Sixth Amendment claims that reappeared in this new era” (Bromberg, 2022, p. 1678). Legal challenges regarding voting rights do not regularly invoke the Twenty-Sixth Amendment, but that does not mean young voters do not withstand specific challenges.

When confronted with changes in election administration that restricted their access to the ballot, North Carolina college students have a history of legal advocacy. In protest of the removal of their on-campus early voting site, Appalachian State University and Winston-Salem State University students confronted local officials. In many cases, students delivered public comment at board of election meetings to justify why the campus should be considered for an early voting site. Despite the passage of the Twenty-Sixth Amendment, young voters endure threats and barriers to their constitutional right to vote. Yet, students have found limited widespread success rectifying these wrongdoings through the courts, leaving the democratic promise of the Twenty-Sixth Amendment unfulfilled (Bromberg, 2019).

New state legislation will further limit young voters' ballot access by limiting one-stop early voting and same-day voter registration. In October 2023, Republican legislators used their veto-proof supermajority to override Democratic Governor Roy Cooper's veto on two bills that will harm student's ability to vote. The first law is Senate Bill 747, which limits access to early voting and same-day registration ("Senate Bill 747: Election Law Changes," 2023). The second law is Senate Bill 749, which overhauls election administration in North Carolina ("Senate Bill 749: No Partisan Advantage in Elections," 2023).² The vastly different priorities of the two major parties represent the roller coaster effect of voting access in North Carolina within the past 25 years. The Republican party, with a supermajority in both chambers of the General Assembly and control of the courts, has resumed its policies of entrenching voter suppression and limiting access to the ballot for minority and young communities. The Democratic party, with control of the executive mansion, has attempted to fight back through institutional pathways in the

² Senate Bill 749 changes the county boards of elections to 4-member boards, with equal members of both major political parties. This even-numbered structure creates the opportunity for deadlock on key votes.

executive branch but has met stopgaps because the Republicans have a supermajority in both chambers of the General Assembly and can override the governor's veto. Voting rights activists have filed several lawsuits in federal court challenging specific provisions of both pieces of legislation. The on-going struggle for full actualization of the democratic promise serves as a reminder that the conversation around voting access in North Carolina cannot take place in the past tense.

B. Relevant State and Federal Policies Regulating Student Voting Rights

In addition to the Twenty-Sixth Amendment, several state and federal policies regulate student voting rights and the roles that higher education institutions must take in upholding such rights. First, according to the North Carolina State Board of Elections, college students have the legal right to register and vote *either* in the county where they go to school or in their hometown (*Voting as a College Student in North Carolina*, 2023). Second, the Higher Education Act governs the administration of higher education programs in the United States. The 1998 reauthorization required colleges and universities to make voter registration forms available on campus before federal or statewide elections to alleviate barriers. The language of the statute reads: “[t]he institution ... will make a good faith effort to distribute a mail voter registration form, requested and received from the State, to each student enrolled in a degree or certificate program and physically in attendance at the institution, and to make such forms widely available to students at the institution” (“Higher Education Act of 1965,” 1965, p. 705). The National Voter Registration Act of 1993 informed the amendments and allowed states to identify public higher education institutions as designated agencies for voter registration (Becker & Cannan, 2022). However, this statute falters from low enforceability. Furthermore, several sections and subsections of the Voting Rights Act of 1965 apply to youth and student voting rights.

C. Overview of Election Administration in North Carolina

Election administration across North Carolina is decentralized, and county officials have substantial influence over the placement of early voting locations. The four main entities in North Carolina election administration include the state board of elections, the state election director, the county boards of elections, and the county election directors. North Carolina General Statute Chapter 163 outlines their duties and powers. Currently, all boards have five members, and the party of the Governor determines the majority party.³ The county boards conduct local elections, operate voting sites, and maintain voter registration lists, among several other aspects of election administration. The formation of the early voting plan is an essential function of each county board. North Carolina General Statute Chapter 163 § 227.6 details the process for approving sites and hours for one-stop voting ("Chapter 163: Elections and Election Laws," 2022). To approve a "Plan for Implementation," the county board of elections must approve the plan for sites and hours for one-stop voting by a unanimous vote. If a county board fails to reach unanimity, they can petition the State Board to adopt a plan for the county. Under this statute, county and state boards must "take into consideration whether the plan disproportionately favors any party, racial or ethnic group, or candidate" ("Chapter 163: Elections and Election Laws," 2022) Because they have the power to create and implement early voting plans, county board of election members hold significant influence over the access to the election process.

³ New legislation that was recently enacted will change the structure and makeup of county election boards, but this system described is accurate as of the 2022 midterm elections.

Chapter 3: Conceptualizing Youth Voter Turnout: The Theoretical Framework

A. Theories of Impact of Early Voting Policies and Locations

State and local government officials have the power to influence voter turnout through seemingly trivial administrative decisions, most notably early voting site placement. In North Carolina, county boards of elections construct and implement an early voting plan for the county.⁴ The policies administering early voting and the decisions allocating early voting site placement have measured impacts on turnout. Slight differences in the distance to the polls alter one's cost of voting and thus affect their decision to vote (Haspel & Knotts, 2005).

Early voting has received conflicting findings in terms of its impact on turnout. During the 2016 presidential election, changes in early voting policies did not bring about uniform effects on election turnout among the general voting population (Walker et al., 2019). These findings support previous research that argues early voting demobilizes potential voters by decreasing the importance of voting on Election Day (Burden et al., 2017). Changes in distance to early voting sites in North Carolina resulted in both a turnout and substitution effect, meaning that moving early voting precincts farther away from voters decreased turnout and motivated voters to find another method of casting their vote (Bitzer et al., 2023). These findings indicate that administrative changes to site placement influence the voting behavior of North Carolinians.

The influence that an on-campus voting location, particularly an early voting site, has on youth turnout will likely differ from the impact on the general voting-age population. A study of early voting locations at eight public universities in Florida found that youth turnout increased by

⁴ For a full explanation of North Carolina election administration, see Chapter 2 Part C.

a maximum of five percentage points in select counties following the introduction of on-campus early voting locations (Shino & Smith, 2020). Therefore, preliminary evidence suggests that early voting sites located on college campuses can potentially increase youth turnout (Shino & Smith, 2020). These results conflict with empirical findings that show early voting policies alone do not increase youth turnout (Holbein & Hillygus, 2020). However, same-day registration during the early voting period does increase youth turnout (Holbein & Hillygus, 2020, p. 166). Therefore, we might assume that same-day registration is the key to increasing student turnout during early voting, especially as this policy reduces the noncognitive load required to vote and can help close the follow through gap. The combination of existing literature suggests that the convenience of the early voting location and the ability to register through same-day registration policies create a positive impact on college students.

To answer the Impact Question and understand the extent that an on-campus early voting location impacts the registration and voting rates of young voters in North Carolina, existing scholarship provides important insights that answer related questions. Placing an early-voting site on campus, where students spend their day, increases turnout (Shino & Smith, 2020). However, additional days and extended hours do not automatically increase turnout and, in some cases, actually depress turnout by diminishing the significance of Election Day (Burden et al., 2017). Given these conflicting findings, the impact of early voting on campus may be more nuanced than the simple assumption that convenient voting locations result in higher turnout.

B. Classic Theories of Voter Turnout

Eighteen-year-olds gained the right to vote just over 50 years ago with the ratification of the Twenty-Sixth Amendment; however, young voters consistently turn out at significantly lower rates than their older counterparts (Holbein & Hillygus, 2020, p. 1). In North Carolina, the

estimated turnout rate for voters aged 18 to 25 during the 2020 presidential election was 60%, compared to 82% for voters aged 41 to 65 and 84% for voters 66 and older (*Voter turnout*, 2023). Many costs influence turnout among the general electorate, and these costs are stronger for the youngest subdivision of American voters.

Voting is costly. Most theories attempting to explain voter turnout utilize a microeconomic cost and benefit framework to interpret empirical evidence and build off the assumption that voter turnout is a “rational” behavior. Several pervasive barriers that particularly impact young voters and other highly mobile populations include the prerequisite of registering (Corvalan & Cox, 2018), the electoral procedural rules that determine when, where, and how people can vote (Leighley & Nagler, 2013), the navigation required to locate and travel to polling sites (Brady & McNulty, 2011), the long lines once arriving at polling sites (Pettigrew, 2021), the possibility of inclement weather on Election Day (Fujiwara et al., 2016; Henderson & Brooks, 2016) and the informational requirements to educate oneself about the candidates on the ballot and policy issues at stake (Wolfinger & Rosenstone, 1980). Even after they cast their ballot, young voters still endure outsized challenges to voting. In North Carolina, a young voter is more than fourteen times more likely to vote provisionally than a voter above the age of 65, and this statistic grows to twenty-three times more likely for a young Black voter (Peck et al., 2022). Put plainly, while voting is a fundamental right, participating in the grand democratic experiment requires the expenditure of time and resources. Voting also has opportunity costs. These costs offer explanations for why some people vote while others do not. In this section, I outline three fundamental theories that conceptualize youth voter turnout: the rational choice, the resource, and the follow through models.

The first theory of voter turnout is the rational choice model of voting, also referred to as the Calculus of Voting. The model introduced by Anthony Downs considers individual decisions within a larger cost vs. benefit framework. The rational choice theory uses a microeconomic approach to explain how utility-maximizing citizens come to a decision about whether or not to vote. Potential voters turn out to the polls if the benefits from voting exceed the costs (Downs, 1957b). Simply put, “if the returns outweigh the costs, he votes; if not, he abstains” (Downs, 1957a, p. 260). The rational choice model assumes that voters can fully anticipate the costs they will face and then factor them into their decision to vote (Holbein & Hillygus, 2020). Downs laid out four elements that influence the individuals’ perceived benefits from voting: the observed differences in policy platforms between the parties, the closeness of the election, the value of voting itself, and the number of other citizens who will vote (Downs, 1957b). However, this model hypothesizes that the costs associated with voting will almost always exceed the benefits because the likelihood of casting a deciding vote is marginally low. The Calculus of Voting suggests that the formula $pB - C$ represents the decision to vote, where p is the probability of casting the deciding vote, B is the benefit of having one’s preferred candidate or party in office, and C is the cost of voting (Downs, 1957b).

The problem with the rational choice theory is that it predicts unrealistically low turnout levels, leaving behind the question of why *do* people vote? This question is referred to as the paradox of voting (Fiorina, 1990). To address the paradox of voting, various scholars proposed adding fixed benefits to the calculus of voting and incorporating expressive benefits into the model (Blais, 2000; Ferejohn & Fiorina, 1974; Riker & Ordeshook, 1968). Ultimately, the rational choice model only considers the known costs and benefits that influence a potential

voter's intention to vote, ignoring the "unanticipated obstacles and distractions" that can complicate a voter's ability to vote (Holbein & Hillygus, 2020, p. 29).

Building off the rational choice model of voter turnout, John Aldrich argued that voting is such a low-cost, low-benefit activity that even marginal changes in costs and benefits result in changes regarding the turnout decision (Aldrich, 1993). According to Aldrich, strategic politicians play a critical role in influencing turnout, since campaign tactics will influence turnout regardless of individuals' rational calculations (Aldrich, 1993). Following this logic, politicians also influence turnout through legislative decisions that impact election policy.

The resource model is another theoretical framework that seeks to conceptualize why people turn out to vote. This model originated in the understanding that education is a strong empirical predictor of turnout (Brady et al., 1995). The resource model acknowledges the inherent costs of voting but recognizes that resources such as time, money, cognitive skills, and civic skills can predict one's level of political participation and ability to overcome these costs (Brady et al., 1995). Education helps voters develop their cognitive skills, which helps potential voters comprehend information about the political system: "Education is considered to increase turnout by developing the voters' cognitive skills which in turn enables them to process complex information about the political system" (Denny & Doyle, 2008, p. 291). The more education a potential voter has, the more likely they are to become an actual voter (Dee, 2004; Henderson & Brooks, 2016; Milligan et al., 2004; Sondheimer & Green, 2010). This positive correlation may be the result from higher education institutions seeking to develop civic-minded and engaged citizens (Labaree, 1997). Education increases voting through various phenomena. Some of the direct factors include on-campus political socialization (Bowman, 2011; Glynn et al., 2009), further development of political literacy (Cassel & Lo, 1997; Galston, 2001; Hillygus, 2005), and

access to politically-engaged networks (Hansen & Tyner, 2021; Kingston et al., 2003; Rolfe, 2012). Indirectly, educational attainment may increase someone's propensity to vote by increasing their socioeconomic status, pulling on other factors that increase turnout (Brady et al., 1995; Cassel & Lo, 1997; Kingston et al., 2003). The underlying assumption of the resource model is that access to resources predicts and promotes political participation because these resources reduce the costs of voting.

However, political knowledge and cognitive skills might not be enough to help overcome other systemic barriers to voting (Boudreau, 2009; Cramer & Toff, 2017; Holbein & Hillygus, 2020; Lupia, 2016). In response to the pervasive limitations of the classic theories of voter turnout, Holbein and Hillygus call attention to how unanticipated obstacles and distractions frequently derail turnout intentions and create what they call a "follow through gap" (Holbein & Hillygus, 2020). The classic theories of voter turnout do not consider what happens after a voter decides to vote "when unanticipated obstacles and distractions can interfere with the implementation of that decision" (Holbein & Hillygus, 2020, p. 29). In establishing the Follow Through Model, they propose that the act of voting requires cognitive skills and motivation to participate, and developed noncognitive skills such as "persistence, fortitude, energy, and patience to actually make it to the ballot box" (Holbein & Hillygus, 2020, p. 33). Noncognitive skills, such as "competencies related to self-regulation, effortfulness, and interpersonal interactions," have been proven to predict who follows through on their intentions to vote when they face impediments in the process (Holbein & Hillygus, 2020, p. 46). The costs of voting are more nuanced than the rational choice and resource models acknowledge.

Everyone experiences barriers to voting, but young voters and college students face higher and more complicated costs than older voters (Holbein & Hillygus, 2020). As political scientist Eric Plutzer argues:

As young citizens confront their first election, all of the costs of voting are magnified: they have never gone through the process of registration, may not know the location of their polling place, and may not have yet developed an understanding of party differences and key issues. Moreover, their peer group consists almost entirely of other non-voters: their friends cannot assure them that voting has been easy, enjoyable, or satisfying. (Plutzer, 2002, p. 42)

By nature of frequent address changes and underdeveloped habits, college students endure unique disadvantages when voting. Additionally, the rational choice theory under-recognizes the complexity of the costs of voting (Plutzer, 2002). College students, in particular, have to navigate a patchwork of laws regarding registering at a college address or their home address (Holbein & Hillygus, 2020). The confusion surrounding voting on campus particularly impacts out-of-state students who have the legal standing to vote in either their home state or the state they reside in for college. Duke University students gauge the competitiveness of the presidential race to determine which state or district to register and vote (Callard, 2021). Young citizens face higher costs of voting, meaning universities play a significant role in providing students with the resources, skills, and support they need to close the follow through gap and participate in democracy.

Young voters' participation in the democratic voting process strengthens their civic engagement and our democratic institutions in many ways. First, voting is the single most fundamental action of political participation in a democracy. Second, people who participate in the political process in the first years of their eligibility are more likely to become lifelong voters than those who do not vote (Coppock & Green, 2016; Fujiwara et al., 2016; Gerber et al., 2003;

Meredith, 2009). Voting is a habit, and the earlier people begin to vote consistently, the more likely the habit will continue throughout life. Third, turnout impacts which candidates win on election night and what issues elected officials prioritize during their term (Anzia, 2013; Bertocchi et al., 2020; Fowler, 2013; Lee et al., 2004). According to Median Voter Theory, when youth turnout is low, the public policy priorities of elected officials tend to prioritize the preferences of older citizens. Thus, the best way to increase overall turnout in future elections is to prioritize bringing as many young people into the political process as early as possible (Holbein & Hillygus, 2020). Democratic participation is a habit that must be initiated when voters first have the opportunity to vote and cultivated at an early age to prioritize youth policy interests in the political agenda.

These models explain the complicated nature of the intentional decisions to turn from a potential voter to an actual voter and can help diagnose the unique challenges college students face when making that decision. The existing theories of voter turnout and their application to young voters lay the groundwork to explore the Student Perspectives Question and understand how an on-campus early voting site impacts students' decisions.

C. Theories of Institution as Citizen

Institutions of higher education have unique responsibilities in building civically motivated students. A theoretical framework referred to as “Institutions as Citizens” stipulates that higher education institutions can and should be obligated to serve as important civic actors in protecting and promoting student voting rights (Becker & Cannan, 2022). This framework builds off the students as citizens model championed by Martha Nussbaum, who argues for a version of “higher education that cultivates the whole human being for the functions of citizenship” (Nussbaum, 2007). Becker and Cannan made use of the framework created by

Westheimer and Kahne, which outlines three distinct types of citizens: the personally responsible citizen, the participatory citizen, and the justice-oriented citizen (Westheimer & Kahne, 2004). A personally responsible citizen embraces the values of duty, honesty, integrity, self-discipline, and hard work by accepting the role of the individual within a community by working, paying taxes, and following laws. A participatory citizen “actively participate[s] in the civic affairs and the social life of the community at local, state, and national levels” (Westheimer & Kahne, 2004, p. 243). This type of citizen engages meaningfully with the community and partners with civil society members and the government to achieve collective projects. The participatory citizen prioritizes building resilient relationships, common goals, and trust that “reinforces a collective commitment to solve social problems and improve society” (Becker & Cannan, 2022, p. 1879). Going one step further, the justice-oriented citizen analyzes social, political, and economic structures and “calls explicit attention to matters of injustice and to the importance of pursuing social justice” (Westheimer & Kahne, 2004, p. 243).

Calling upon their experience as university administrators at Bard College, Becker and Cannan claim that colleges “too often play to the role of a personally responsible citizen, and passive ones at that” (Becker & Cannan, 2022, p. 1880). Becker and Cannan argue that institutions should go beyond making a “good faith effort” to register students to vote (as required by 20 U.S.C. § 1094(a)(23)(A)), and adopt a more participatory and ideally justice-oriented approach by putting institutional resources to use to “aggressively pursue student registration, actively defend student voting rights, and mobilize to effect changes in laws and practices that protect vulnerable student communities while promoting the same democratic principles they purport to uphold” (Becker & Cannan, 2022, p. 1880). There are many reasons colleges have not taken this step and a host of policies they can adopt to become more

participatory and justice-oriented (Becker & Cannan, 2022). Select policy suggestions proposed by Becker and Cannan include planning, leadership engagement, and monitoring of poll site assignments.

To move a university into a justice-oriented framework, senior leadership must be committed. As Nancy Thomas wrote, “when institutional leaders at the very top are involved, the result can transform a community and impact the culture of the institution” (Thomas, 1998, p. 21). While students play a critical role in motivating advocacy for on-campus polling locations, senior leadership must match and sustain their energies. Becker and Cannan propose that universities should pay particular attention to polling location assignment, for both Election Day and early voting, and “where possible, institutions should advocate for polling sites to be situated on campus in a central location that is easily identifiable and accessible to students” (Becker & Cannan, 2022, p. 1901).

By understanding the role universities can play in the fight to preserve voting rights and democracy, we can diagnose what type of “institution as citizen” approach reflects the status quo in North Carolina. The framing of the three types of citizens will help explore the answer to the Universities Question and contextualize how university officials interpret their role in helping students navigate the election process.

D. Limitations of Prior Analysis

Existing research fails to examine the impact that educational institutions and county governments have on the student voting rates and habits of enrolled college students. Most of the scholarship assesses how higher education achievement impacts adult turnout rates, failing to consider the important role institutions have in promoting student voting rights and democratic participation. One analysis utilized the variation of early-in-person voting across North

Carolina's counties to examine the impact of early-in-person voting on voter turnout for the general North Carolina population (Walker et al., 2019). Their findings illuminate the pervasive challenges associated with early voting, yet the study did not consider the unique conditions around early voting sites on college campuses.

Shino and Smith's 2020 study answers early questions about the degree to which on-campus early voting sites affect youth turnout in Florida, but the findings do not unequivocally generalize to the Tar Heel State due to differences in political environments, geography, and systems of higher education (Shino & Smith, 2020, p. 538). North Carolina has a wide variety of university settings that face different challenges when encouraging students to vote. Therefore, to gain a fuller understanding of the early voting landscape, understanding how on-campus early voting locations impact various types of higher education institutions is critical.

By placing the variety of theoretical frameworks introduced throughout this chapter in conversation with one another to understand a) how on-campus early voting locations have impacted the voting behavior of college students in North Carolina and b) how institutions of higher education can most efficiently collaborate with county election officials to optimize convenience voting, I draw connections between parallel scholarship and fill gaps in the current understanding of democratic participation as a college student.

Chapter 4: Methodology

To explore the multi-faceted nature of the research question, I employed an explanatory sequential mixed-methods approach that integrates both qualitative and quantitative research methods. To inform future policies that enhance voter access for college students, I examined the correlation between on-campus early voting sites and voting rates and the collaboration required to administer these sites. My research design, which leveraged the discrepancies surrounding on-campus early voting across North Carolina, allowed me to analyze the outcomes of this specific convenience voting reform, which I present in Chapter 5: Results.

My analysis utilized three types of data. First, I used post-election data from six universities in five federal elections from 2012 to 2020. This data comes from the National Study of Learning, Voting, and Engagement (NSLVE) at Tufts University and was made publicly available through the All In Democracy Challenge (All In Campus Democracy Challenge, 2023). Second, I analyzed transcripts from ten interviews I conducted with county election directors and university officials across North Carolina. Third, I explored data from a survey I conducted on North Carolina college students regarding their beliefs and experiences with early voting as college students. Overall, this thesis engages robust findings from qualitative and quantitative data collected in both a primary and secondary fashion.

The decision to use a mixed-methods design instead of only analyzing NSLVE data or surveying students originates from a recognition that the research problem posed in this thesis is complex and multifaceted. Thus, the research question deserves a more holistic understanding than any method alone could provide. The quantitative analysis of NSLVE data was essential in conducting statistical analysis, facilitating the exploration of trends over time and the correlation between early voting and voting rates. The qualitative interviews were chosen to depict the

context of election directors' and university officials' experiences, attitudes, beliefs, and perceptions regarding on-campus early voting. The quantitative survey was instrumental in learning about what students value when deciding how to vote. I aspired to go beyond analyzing the correlation between on-campus early voting locations to learn about the politics and other controlling forces behind early voting site placement. Ultimately, the mixed-methods approach was advantageous in addressing the research problem posed in this thesis because it allowed for a comprehensive evaluation of my research question by combining the strengths of various research methodologies and contributed to the holistic understanding of on-campus early voting in North Carolina.

A. Case Selection: Location and Time

For several reasons, North Carolina is a pertinent case analysis to study the impact of on-campus early voting locations (Nicholson-Crotty & Meier, 2002). First, throughout the period my study considers, state legislators and judges have expanded and retracted the prevalence of early in-person voting, creating a natural variation to explore in the data. Second, a wealth of publicly available data about North Carolina elections allowed me to glance into the past and analyze trends over time. Third, researchers often turn to North Carolina as a case study for election policy (Bitzer et al., 2023; Clinton et al., 2020). Fourth, the Cost of Voting Index ranked North Carolina as 22 out of the 50 states in terms of ease of voting, meaning that North Carolina represents a middle-ground level cost of voting and is not an outlier in either direction (Schraufnagel et al., 2022). Finally, the politics in North Carolina reflect the national political diversity and is reliably a battleground state (Cooper & Knotts, 2022).

For the study, I included a sample of six universities across North Carolina (see Table 1). I selected this sample to include representation from various geographic regions and represent

urban and rural campuses, public and private schools, and at least one historically Black college or university.

Table 1: Colleges and Universities Included in the Study

Colleges and Universities Included in the Study		
University	County	Type of University
Duke University	Durham County	Private
North Carolina Agricultural and Technical State University	Guilford County	Public
North Carolina State University	Wake County	Public
University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill	Orange County	Public
University of North Carolina at Charlotte	Mecklenburg County	Public
Western Carolina University	Jackson County	Public

Because NSLVE began collecting and reporting data with the 2012 election and the most recent data available recounts the 2020 election, the empirical analysis focused on the presidential and midterm elections between 2012 and 2020.

B. Quantitative Analysis of National Study of Learning, Voting and Engagement Data

1. Data Collection Method

To answer the Impact Question, which asks about the impact of on-campus early voting locations on youth voter registration and turnout rates, I used data from NSLVE in the Institute for Democracy & Higher Education at Tufts University. Tufts University founded NSLVE in response to the U.S. Department of Education issuing a “call to action” that extended a challenge to colleges and universities to support programming intended to increase civic engagement in

democracy (NSLVE, 2023). NSLVE collaborates with colleges across the country to study student registration and voting rates at the campus level by combining student enrollment data with voter history records to offer campus leaders insight into student voting behavior. The NSLVE dataset contains college voting data from over 1,000 campuses from all 50 states and the District of Columbia, offering institutional-level voting data from the 2012, 2014, 2016, 2018, and 2020 elections. The data used in this thesis originated in the NSLVE reports published on the All In Democracy Challenge Website (All In Campus Democracy Challenge, 2023).⁵ Additionally, the North Carolina State Board of Elections lists every early voting location in all 100 counties dating back to 2008, which I used to determine when each university had an on-campus early voting site (*Polling Place Data*, 2023).

2. *Variable Selection*

Because NSLVE combines student enrollment data with voter history data, it provides universities with robust data points exploring registration rates and voting rates of their students on a macro-level and broken down by a wide range of demographics. The primary variables I used included registration rate, voting rate of registered students, voting rate, early vote rate, and in-person on Election Day rate. The definitions of the variables I relied on can be found in Appendix B.

3. *Method of Data Analysis*

To identify correlations, trends, and patterns within the data, I employed a variety of descriptive and inferential statistics. I conducted the statistical analysis using Excel and R Studio. Specific inferential statistics methods included calculating simple liner regression models

⁵ Citations for all NSLVE reports are in the References section.

between the share of voters using early voting and the registration rate and voting rate. Additionally, I used descriptive statistics to compare voting rates among different sets of conditions. To address H_1 , I ran a linear regression measuring the correlation between early voting rates and registration rates. To test H_2 , I ran a linear regression measuring the correlation between early voting rates and voting rates. The specific hypothesis (H_1 and H_2) will be introduced in Section E of this chapter.

C. Qualitative Interviews

1. Data Collection Method

To answer the Universities and County Election Board Questions and explore a) the process of securing an on-campus early voting site, b) what approaches universities have found helpful or non-helpful, and c) the challenges universities face when securing an on-campus site and encouraging students to vote, I conducted ten qualitative interviews with election directors and university officials from the counties and colleges in North Carolina included in my case studies. Participants were recruited because of the relevance of their job to facilitating on-campus early voting. Election directors execute the administrative functions of running elections at the direction of the county boards of elections. I contacted election directors in all six counties and interviewed five of them.⁶ As for university representatives, I emailed directors of centers for civic engagement or other similar programs associated with voter engagement. These individuals were identified from university websites. In several cases, the first person I emailed connected me with someone who works more directly on early voting. While the interviewees from the university have a wide range of job titles, the participants directly coordinate with the county

⁶ The only election director I reached out to but did not interview was the Durham County Election Director. We had correspondence but due to scheduling conflicts were unable to conduct the interview.

board of elections to facilitate on-campus early voting and coordinate student voter engagement programs. In only one case, I interviewed a professor with expertise in the institutional history and programming, because the individual I initially contacted was new to the role. I received replies from and interviewed representatives from five of the six universities.⁷

Participants were recruited for a 30-minute interview via email and asked to read, sign, and return an informed consent form before the interview began. In the written form, all participants were informed about the study's purpose, the use of their data, and their right to withdraw. The interview plans and consent forms received approval from the Duke Campus Institutional Review Board (IRB). Demographic information, such as job title and years of experience, is presented in Table 4 and Table 6 (see Chapter 5: Results).

The interviews were partially structured (Singleton et al., 1988). I created a semi-structured interview guide, which asked participants to answer a series of questions about the context of early voting in their county or on their campus, about their relationship with the board of elections or university, and their perspective on the role of the university and county board of elections in supporting student voting rights. While I had a series of questions to guide the conversation, I also asked follow-up questions when appropriate. The interviews ranged from 16 to 47 minutes. A copy of my interview guide can be found in Appendix C for county board officials and Appendix D for university administrators. No new themes emerged from the final interview with each type of employee, so data saturation was achieved. Due to varying geographical locations, I conducted all interviews over Zoom or the phone. Everyone I interviewed permitted me to record the conversations and quote them with full attribution.

⁷ Due to institutional policies regarding outside researchers, I was unable to interview a university representative from North Carolina Agricultural and Technical State University.

2. Method of Data Analysis

After the interviews, I analyzed the findings to gain insight into the decision-making process surrounding early voting sites, the tradeoffs for counties and universities, and their perspectives on campus voting sites' impact on student turnout. Using thematic analysis, I identified and interpreted the recurring themes from the semi-structured interviews. First, I transcribed the audio recordings and removed filler words for clarity. Then, through multiple readings, I familiarized myself with the data and generated initial codes, carefully recording them using NVivo. Next, I grouped codes into themes and subthemes. The thematic analysis method allowed for identifying and interpreting repeated patterns and themes within the interview data.

D. Quantitative Survey

1. Data Collection Method

To answer the Student Experience Question, I employed a quantitative survey to collect and analyze data related to students' experiences and perspectives on early voting. The central purpose of the survey was to gain insight into what students think about early voting and the decisions they make when making their voting plans. I designed a structured questionnaire to collect quantitative data on the variables of interest. A sample size of 490 students participated in the survey about their experience and preference for on-campus early voting.

When developing the survey, I incorporated findings from a comprehensive literature review and input from survey design experts. Additionally, a focus group of Duke University students assisted me in brainstorming response options. Before launching the survey, I pre-tested it with a group of Duke University students to refine the wording, clarity, and options of questions and responses. Questions were closed-ended with options for multiple-choice

responses, Likert rating scales, multiple-select responses, and demographic information. The survey consisted of 44 total questions⁸ divided into six sections: screening and demographics, political identity, perspectives on early voting and voting obstacles as a college student, past voting history, experience voting in the 2020 election, experience voting in the 2022 election, and plans to vote in future elections and future resources. Duke Campus IRB reviewed and approved the survey. A full copy of the survey can be found in Appendix E.

An online survey provided the most efficient strategy for reaching a representative sample of participants, especially given time and monetary constraints. The survey was distributed using the online platform Qualtrics, which guarantees anonymity for respondents. Students did not have to provide their names or contact information to participate in the survey; however, they could submit their name and email in a separate Qualtrics form to enter the lottery for a compensation prize. Students could complete the survey on any computer or mobile device.

To recruit survey respondents, invitations were emailed to 10,544 students and the link was shared using online platforms. I explored various dissemination methods to sample a representative population free of biases while acknowledging the inherent selection bias related to who decided to respond. Students from North Carolina State University, Western Carolina University, Duke University, and the University of North Carolina were recruited. Due to administrative restrictions and varying applications of the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act, I could not contact students at North Carolina Agricultural and Technical State University and the University of North Carolina at Charlotte. Duke Campus IRB approved all

⁸ However, with different breaks and flows, not all 44 questions were asked to all participants.

recruitment materials, which included information about the study's purpose, confidentiality, and the voluntary nature of participation.

Participants had to be over 18 years of age, enrolled at one of the six colleges included in the study, and eligible voters in the United States. All participants were required to review informed consent information on the welcome page of the survey and to affirm their status as a student at one of the universities of interest before beginning the survey. Participants provided informed consent by selecting the "next" button on the first page of the online survey. Data collection for the quantitative survey took place from October 4 to October 27, 2023, allowing participants to respond at their convenience during this timeframe. This extended timeframe also allowed me to continue to communicate with external research offices at universities to obtain emails for recruitment.

2. Variable Selection

Several survey questions allowed me to calculate Political Engagement Scores and rank the degree of support for a variety of statements, with the purpose of quantifying students' level of political engagement and beliefs regarding early voting.

To measure survey respondent's level of political engagement, I used the three-category measure known as the Political Engagement Score. I adapted this measure from the Pew Research Center's Political Engagement Score, described below in Table 2 (Pew Research Center, 2018). At the beginning of the survey, respondents answered three questions about their interest in politics, consumption of political news, and participation in political activities. Based on their responses to these three questions, political engagement scores were calculated on a scale from two-13. Highly engaged individuals score between four and 13, moderately engaged

individuals score between two and three, and minimally engaged individuals score under two (Pew Research Center, 2018).

Table 2: Description of Political Engagement Score Variable

Political Engagement Score Variable	
Political Engagement Score (2-13)	Interest in Politics (1) Not interested at all in politics. (2) Not that interested in politics. (3) Somewhat interested in politics. (4) Very interested in politics.
	Frequency of Political News Consumption (1) Almost never (2) A few times a month (3) A few times a week (4) Almost everyday
	Participation in Political Activities (1) Attended a political rally or event. (1) Donated to a campaign or candidate. (1) Volunteered for a political campaign. (1) Been a member of an on-campus political group. (1) Supported a voter registration drive.

To operationalize students' beliefs about early voting, I asked a question (Question 18, found in Appendix E) that measured the degree to which survey participants agreed with certain statements related to voting as a college student. Table 3 shows the score associated with each response on the Likert-Scale for the statements used in the series of correlation tests.

Table 3: Likert-Scale for Statements about Voting as a Student

Statements	Likert-Scale Ranking
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • My college or university has a responsibility to make it as easy as possible to vote. • My county government has a responsibility to alleviate challenges students face when voting. • My college should always have an on-campus early voting location. 	(1) Strongly disagree (2) Somewhat disagree (3) Neither disagree or agree (4) Somewhat agree (5) Strongly agree

3. Method of Data Analysis

I analyzed the student experience survey data to answer the Student Perspectives Question and understand how convenience voting alters students' calculus of voting. R Studio was used to conduct data analysis and visualize findings. Inferential statistics, including correlation tests, were utilized to examine relationships between variables. To answer H₃, I ran a Pearson correlation test measuring the correlation between political engagement scores and responses regarding belief in university responsibility. To test H₄, I ran a Pearson correlation test measuring the correlation between political engagement scores and responses regarding belief in county government responsibility. To investigate H₅, I ran a Pearson correlation test measuring the correlation between political engagement scores and responses regarding the belief that their college should always host an on-campus early voting site. The specific hypothesis (H₃, H₄, and H₅) will be introduced in Section E of this chapter.

E. Hypotheses

The primary research question asks how on-campus early voting locations have impacted the voting behavior of college students in North Carolina from 2012 to 2020. The analysis is done through four distinct questions that document the experience of on-campus early voting. The Impact and Student Perspectives Questions take a quantitative approach and thus have

testable hypotheses, while the Universities and County Board Questions take a contextual qualitative approach and thus rely on the qualitative hypothesis-generating research approach (Barroga & Matanguihan, 2022). Now that I have introduced my research methodology, I will present the hypotheses used to test the significance of the data and what key themes I expected to uncover within the transcripts.

1. The Impact Question

Because early voting sites in North Carolina have same-day voter registration, I hypothesized that higher early voting rates (meaning that a higher percentage of voters are utilizing early voting) would be correlated with higher voting rates across years and campuses. In addition, I hypothesized that higher early voting rates would be correlated with higher registration rates across years and campuses.

H_{1-0} = *There is no correlation between early voting rate and registration rate: $p > .05$*

H_{1-A} = *There is a correlation between early voting and registration rate: $p < .05$*

H_{2-0} = *There is no correlation between early voting rate and voting rate: $p > .05$*

H_{2-A} = *There is a correlation between early voting and voting rate: $p < .05$*

2. The County Elections Board Question

To answer the County Elections Board Question, I anticipated that in addition to the legal requirements for early voting sites, election administrators across all the counties included in the study have similar factors that influence their decisions on where to establish early voting sites. I predicted that possible factors would consist of a) compliance with accessibility standards outlined in the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), b) availability of a space that can meet configuration and security requirements, and c) proximity to population centers. While I anticipated partisan affiliation would contribute to the board's decisions regarding early voting

sites on college campuses, I expected the general sentiment of county election directors to indicate a desire for every voter in their county to have easy and convenient access to the ballot.

3. The Universities Question

Regarding the Universities Question, I did not expect every university to construct their voter plans or engage with on-campus early voting sites in the same way. However, I predicted that most schools emphasize early voting in their voting plans primarily because of the benefits of same-day registration. Additionally, I anticipated that most colleges would interpret their role in helping students navigate the election process within the personally responsible or participatory framework, citing a preference for complying with state and federal laws but not entirely acting in line with a justice-oriented definition of civic engagement (Becker & Cannan, 2022).

4. The Student Perspectives Question

With respect to the Student Perspectives Question, I hypothesized that the presence of an on-campus early voting location would positively influence a students' decision regarding if, how, when, and where to vote. Additionally, I expected to find that more politically engaged students believe a) their university has an important role as a civic actor in protecting and promoting student voting rights, b) their county has an important role as a civic actor in protecting and promoting student voting rights, and c) their college campus should always host an on-campus early voting site. By measuring levels for support in relation to political engagement scores, I hope to diagnose any correlation between levels of political engagement and civic expectations of the university administration and county government.

H₃₋₀: *There is no relationship between the political engagement score and degree to which a student believes the university has a responsibility to alleviate the challenges they face when trying to vote, $p > .05$.*

H_{3-A}: *There is a relationship between political engagement score and degree to which a student believes the university has a responsibility to alleviate the challenges they face when trying to vote, $p < .05$.*

H₄₋₀: *There is no relationship between the political engagement score and degree to which a student believes the county government has a responsibility to alleviate the challenges they face when trying to vote, $p > .05$.*

H_{4-A}: *There is a relationship between political engagement score and degree to which a student believes the county government has a responsibility to alleviate the challenges they face when trying to vote, $p < .05$.*

H₅₋₀: *There is no relationship between the political engagement score and degree to which a student believes their college campus should always have an on-campus early voting site, $p > .05$.*

H_{5-A}: *There is a relationship between political engagement score and degree which a student believes their college campus should always have an on-campus early voting site, $p < .05$.*

Chapter 5: Results

To understand how on-campus early voting locations have impacted the voting behavior of college students in North Carolina from 2012 to 2020, I employed a mixed-methods research design that incorporates analysis of data from the National Study of Learning, Voting, and Engagement (NSLVE) with interview and survey data. This chapter presents the study's findings in four distinct subsections that correspond to each sub-question introduced in Chapter 1: Introduction.

A. Findings from National Study of Learning, Voting and Engagement Data

1. Description of Sample

To explore the Impact Question, I analyzed data from the NSLVE reports covering the 2012, 2014, 2016, 2018, and 2020 elections for all six universities included in my study. Relevant statistics in these reports include total student enrollment, total eligible voters, number of students who registered, number of students who voted, registration rate, voting rate of registered students, voting rate, early vote number, early vote rate, in-person on election day number, and in person on Election Day rate (see Appendix B for further explanation of these variables). All six schools in my study had NSLVE reports for every federal election since 2012, when NSLVE started creating these reports. NSLVE has not yet released data from the 2022 midterms. The only missing relevant data are Western Carolina University's early voting rates from the 2012 and 2016 elections.

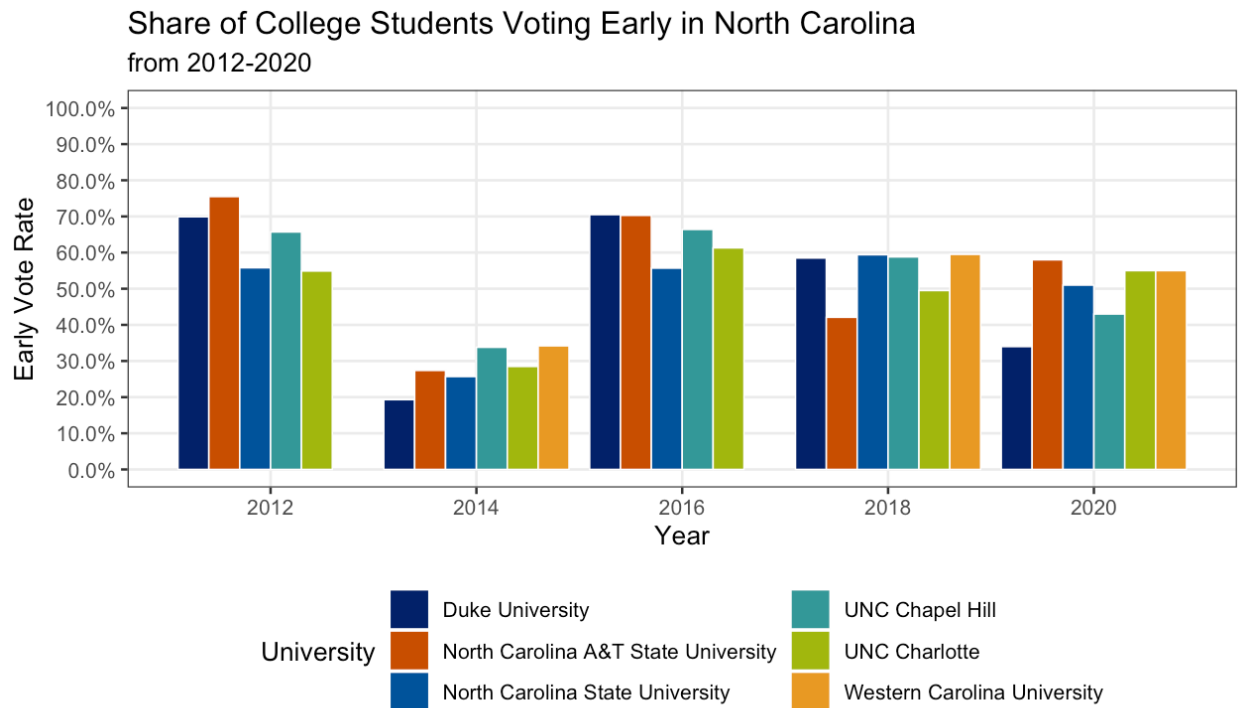
2. College Students Regularly Vote During the Early Voting Period

Access to early voting locations on-campus appears to positively impact voting rates. Two general observations relevant to the effects of on-campus early voting locations emerge from the NSLVE data. First, on college campuses across North Carolina, a high proportion (and

often a majority) of college students vote during the early voting period. Second, looking specifically at 2014, a midterm year where none of the colleges included in my study had an early voting site, yield and voting rates were at their lowest among the sample, even compared to the 2018 midterm election. The NSLVE records paint the picture of the rate at which students across North Carolina have been participating in elections in the past five federal elections. Table 8 in Appendix A shows the registration rate, voting rate of registered students, voting rates, early vote rate, and in-person on Election Day rates for all six universities.

Figure 1 below presents the share of college voters who used the early voting method in the past five federal elections where data are available (2012-2020). The grouped bar graph reveals distinct patterns in college student's preference for voting early. Two elections included in this graph had extraneous circumstances causing a change in voter behavior. First, in 2013, North Carolina had just passed H.B. 589 after the monumental *Shelby County v. Holder* decision from the United States Supreme Court in 2013, which had the effect of stripping early voting access down to bare bones. Second, in 2020, voters turned to vote-by-mail or absentee voting methods due to the restrictions in place because of the COVID-19 pandemic. Students' preference for early voting is similar to North Carolina voters' as a whole, as the North Carolina State Board of Elections reports that in 2016, 62% of voters used one-stop early voting (*Voter turnout*, 2023). In 2012, the statewide early voting rate was only 56%, indicating that in that election, the college student population used early voting at a higher rate than the statewide population (*Voter turnout*, 2023). The data in the figure below indicate that college students regularly vote during the early voting period.

Figure 1: Share of College Students Voting Early in North Carolina 2012-2020



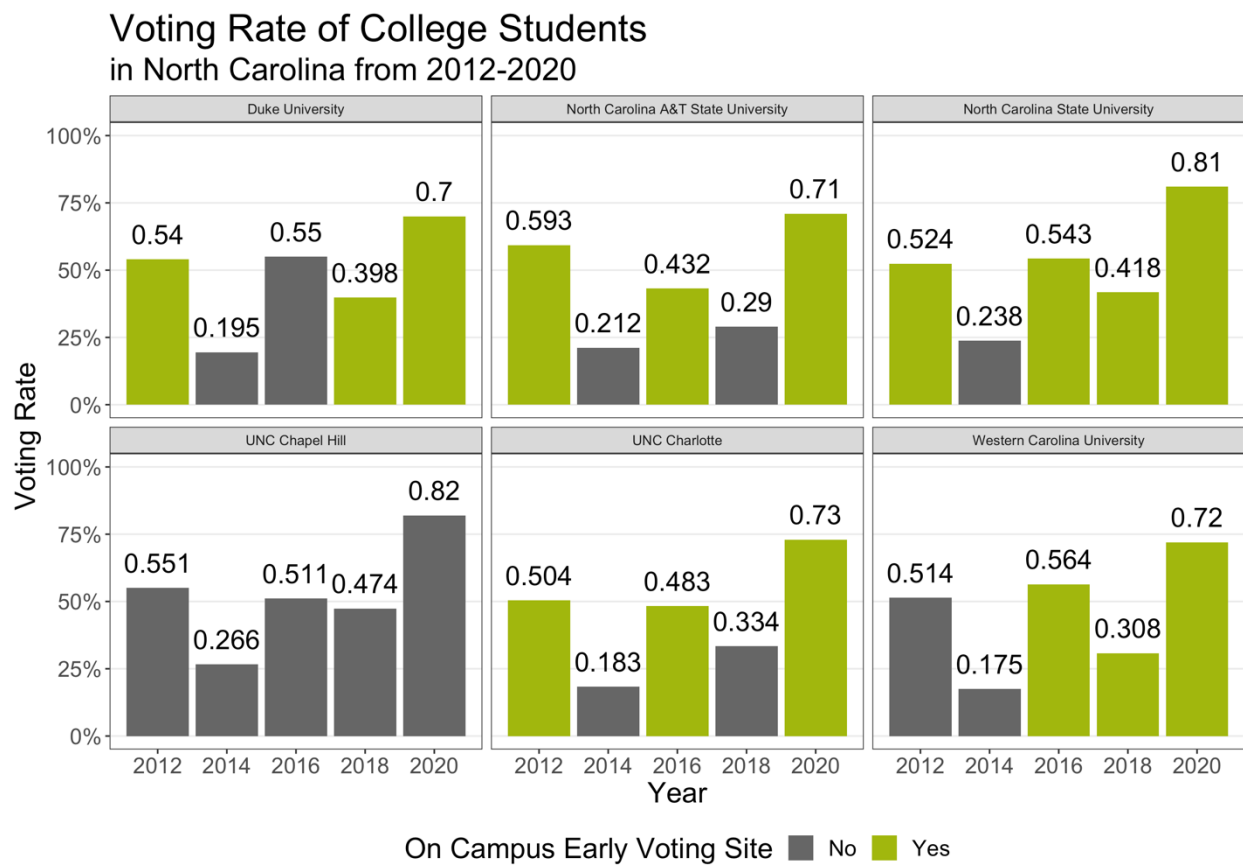
Data Source: Analysis of NSLVE Data

3. Descriptive Trends Suggest That Voting Rate is Influenced by On-Campus Early Voting Location

Figure 2 below presents the voting rate at each college included in the study from 2012 to 2020. Green bars specify that the campus had an early voting location for the general election that year and gray bars denote there was not an on-campus site. These data indicate that, in most cases, the voting rate is higher when a university has an on-campus early voting location. While many confounding variables influence the voting rate, the trends present in Figure 2 provide evidence that the proximity of early voting locations influences the voting rate. Three specific cases support this claim. First, comparing the voting rate at Duke University in 2020 to 2016, the voting rate was much higher in 2020 when the Karsh Alumni and Visitors Center served as an

early voting center. Second, during the midterm elections in 2014 and 2018, Western Carolina University had a higher voting rate in 2018 when it had an early voting location on campus compared to 2014, when students had to travel off campus to vote early. Third, in 2018 at North Carolina State University the voting rate was higher than in 2014, when the school did not have an on-campus early voting site.

Figure 2: Voting Rate Among College Campuses in North Carolina from 2012-2020



Data Source: Analysis of NSLVE Data

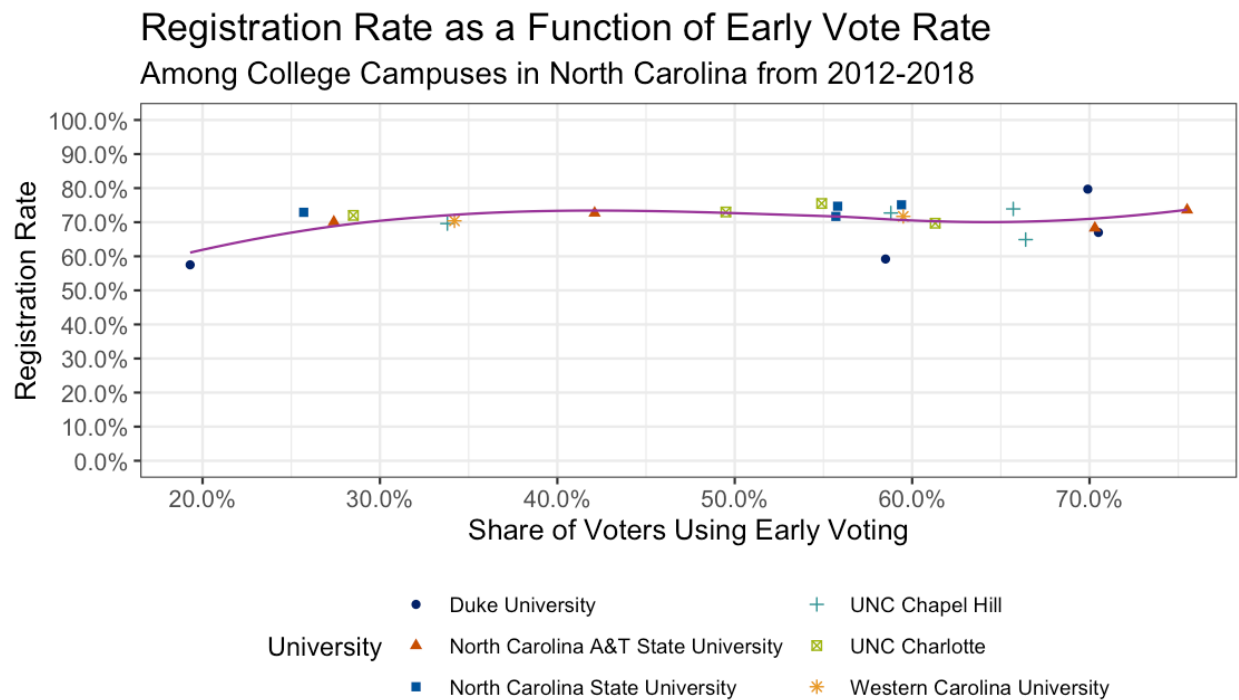
4. No Correlation Between Share of Voters Using Early Voting and Registration Rate

While on-campus early voting locations impact voting rates, early voting and voter registration rates are not similarly correlated. The first part of the Impact Question asks about the effects of an on-campus early voting site on registration rates. Based on the data graphed below

in Figure 3 and a linear model that did not yield statistical significance ($p = .27$), the data suggest no statistically significant correlation exists between early vote and voter registration rates.

Because the p -value does not meet the threshold of .05, I failed to reject the null hypothesis that there was no correlation between early voting and registration rates. The rate at which enrolled students vote early is not predictive of the registration rate of all eligible voters. One possible explanation is that, unlike voter turnout, registration rates fluctuate less from year to year so the registration rate is inherently more resistant to changes in the share of voters using early voting.

Figure 3: Registration Rate as a Function of Early Vote Rate, 2012-2018



5. Positive Correlation Between Share of Voters Using Early Voting and Voting Rate

To test the hypothesis that early voting rate is predictive of voting rate, with voting rate as the outcome variable and early voting rate as the predictor variables, I employed a simple linear regression model. A significant regression equation was found ($F(1, 20) = 77.5, p < .05$),

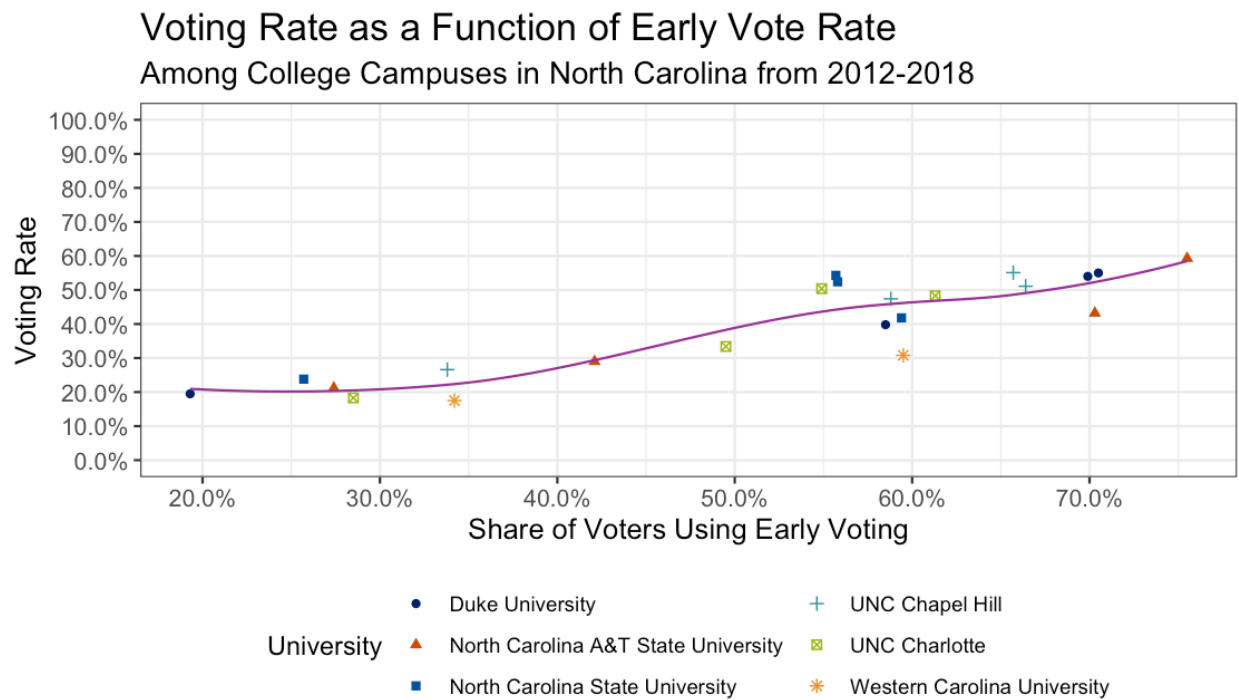
with an R^2 of .78. The predicted voting rate is equal to $.007 + .75(\text{EVR})$. The voting rate increased 0.75 for each additional one percent of voters casting their ballot early. The voting rate was found to be positively correlated with the early voting rate, and the resulting equation is below.

$$y = .75x + .007$$

Based on the statistical significance of the regression coefficient, I reject the null hypothesis H_{2-0} , which predicted no significant correlation between the early vote rate and the voting rate. A higher proportion of student voters using early voting is positively associated with higher voting rates. I elected to remove 2020 from this analysis because it was an outlier due to the forced change in voter behavior in response to health concerns brought upon by the COVID-19 pandemic. The relatively small sample size in the study and other confounding factors behind turnout may limit the generalizability of these findings. Nonetheless, these results support the hypothesis that access to early voting is associated with higher turnout in general elections.

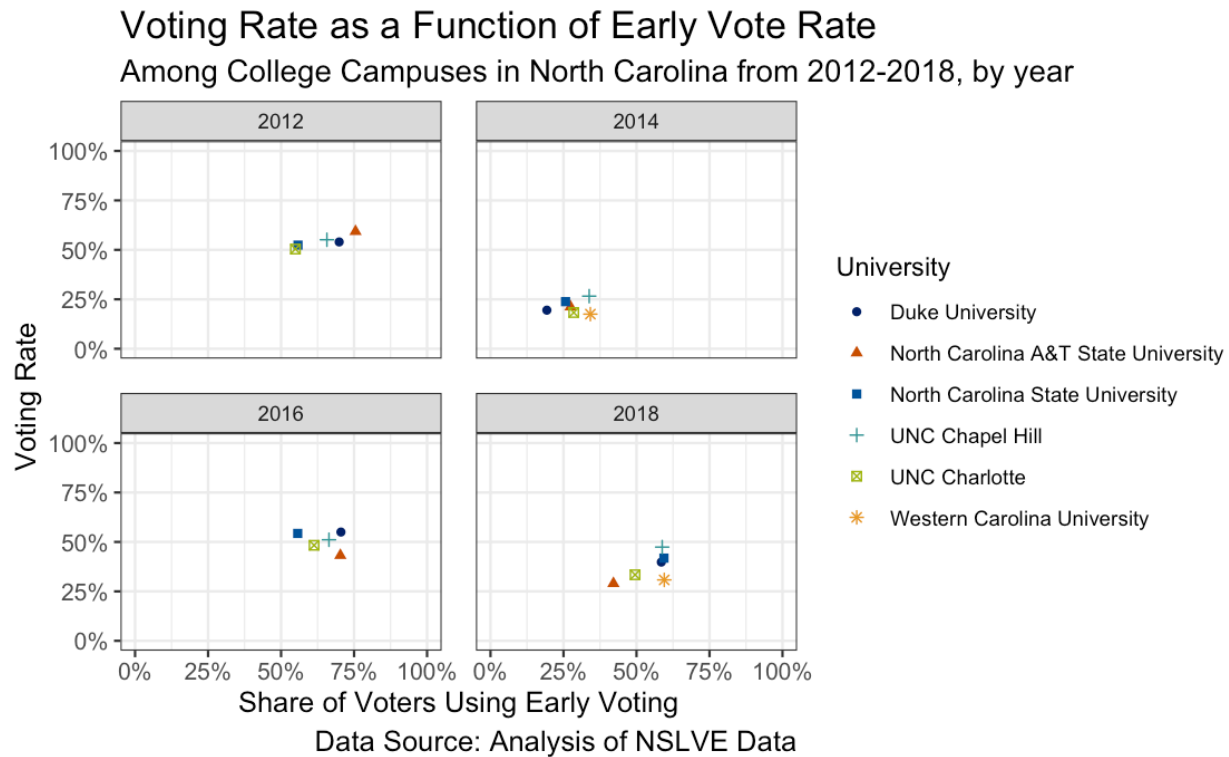
The graphs below show the voting rate at specific colleges in specific years as a function of the share of voters using early voting. Figure 4 visualizes the positive correlation affirmed through the linear model discussed above. Figure 5 depicts the same data as Figure 4 but is broken down by year. Even within individual election years, there appears to be a positive relationship between the share of voters using early voting and the voting rate.

Figure 4: Voting Rate as a Function of Early Vote Rate Among College Campuses in North Carolina from 2012-2018



Data Source: Analysis of NSLVE Data

Figure 5: Voting Rate as a Function of Early Vote Rate Among College Campuses in North Carolina from 2012-2018, by year



B. Thematic Analysis of Interviews with Election Directors

Election directors serving the counties where the universities are located were interviewed to assess how county boards of elections decide where to place early voting sites and view their responsibility to provide college students with convenient access to the ballot. The analysis of these interviews seeks to answer the County Elections Board Question, which asks how county boards of elections view their responsibility to provide college students with convenient access to the ballot and how that duty factors into their decision of where to place the early voting sites. The five election directors I interviewed shared ample information about how their boards of elections create early voting plans, how they work with the universities in its county, and how they view the universities' and elections office's roles in helping students vote.

The election director interviews varied from 16 to 47 minutes, and I conducted them over Zoom or the phone. All participants have been working in North Carolina elections for at least 15 years, combining for more than 106 years of experience. In all five interviews, I asked the same questions found in Appendix C and directed the conversation through follow-up and clarifying questions as applicable. Table 4 shows the names, counties, and associated universities for each of the five election directors I interviewed.

Table 4: Participant Demographics (Election Directors)

Name	County	Associated University	Years of Experience
Charlie Collicutt	Guilford County	North Carolina Agricultural and Technical State University	10.5 years as Guilford County Election Director, 19 years full-time with the Elections Department
Michael Dickerson	Mecklenburg County	University of North Carolina at Charlotte	25 years as Mecklenburg County Elections Director
Lisa Lovedahl	Jackson County	Western Carolina University	29 years at Jackson County Board of Elections
Rachel Raper	Orange County	University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill	6 years at Orange County Board of Elections, spent 12 years working at Currituck County
Olivia McCall	Wake County	North Carolina State University	6 months as Wake County Elections Director, 15 years in elections in various counties

1. Presentation of Themes

The thematic analysis produced four themes, which are previewed in Table 5. Although each county faces distinctive challenges, the election directors shared similar answers to many of the interview questions.

Table 5: Grouping of Initial Codes to Form Themes

Initial codes grouped to form theme	<i>n</i> of participants contributing (N = 5)	<i>n</i> of transcript excerpts assigned
Theme 1: Board of elections have specific factors they consider when creating early voting plans	5	28
Theme 2: County election directors describe cooperative relationships with universities	5	15
Theme 3: County election directors have varying explanations of the board of elections' role in student political participation	5	8
Theme 4: Students tend to vote during early voting, according to election directors	4	9

2. Theme 1: Boards of Elections Have Specific Factors They Consider When Creating Early Voting Plans

When drafting and voting on early voting plans, which describe the location and hours of operation of early voting sites, board members have to consider several essential factors.

Throughout my interviews with county election officials, they all brought up a similar list of what they consider when visiting potential early voting sites and making recommendations to the board. This list includes parking, accessibility, configuration and security of the space, budgetary costs, and proximity to population centers. This checklist must be satisfied before any building joins the shortlist of potential early voting sites and provides a rationale for past decisions surrounding on-campus early voting.

a) Parking

Parking is a primary concern for all election officials when locating early voting sites. On parking, Wake County Election Director Olivia McCall said, "Parking is a big one because with

early voting, you know, it's a higher turnout than usually Election Day. So, we have to have ample parking allocated for voters, and sometimes on campuses, that's a challenge." Michael Dickerson, the election director in Mecklenburg County, echoed this sentiment, saying he seizes the opportunity for a site with parking. The importance of parking has resulted in placing early voting locations on the outskirts of campus, according to Charlie Collicutt, the election director in Guilford County. For Orange County Election Director Rachel Raper, parking is also a deal-breaking consideration. The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, located in Orange County, has not had an early voting site since 2010 because parking is unavailable near any building on campus that could potentially support early voting.

In select cases, collaborations between the two stakeholders have arisen to find a space with the correct configuration and security measures near a parking location. At Western Carolina University in Jackson County, university officials have collaborated with the board of elections to provide parking access. "They even allow an area for parking for voters, which, you know, campus parking is always very variable, but they make that area available," said Jackson County Election Director Lisa Lovedahl. Access to parking for poll workers and voters is one of the most essential factors when election officials consider possible early voting locations. Since colleges have well-recorded challenges when it comes to parking, this is of particular concern when attempting to place an early voting location on a college campus.

b) Accessibility

When listing the relevant factors to early voting location placement, election directors frequently mentioned accessibility and compliance with Title II of the Americans with

Disabilities Act (ADA) as a deciding factor. Election directors indicate accessibility is not a negotiable factor, and all potential early voting locations must adhere to ADA requirements.⁹

c) Configuration of Space and Security

Another critical factor that election directors must consider when selecting early voting locations to recommend to the boards includes the configuration and ability to secure the physical space. Rachel Raper, the election director in Orange County, said that while her office worked with the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill to find a space for a voting location on campus, the teams ultimately could not locate a building or room that met the configuration and security needs. Depending on the number of early voting machines and check-in stations, the county requires rooms of particular sizes and configurations with specific abilities to secure the voting materials at night when poll workers leave the facility. Olivia McCall, the election director in Wake County, shared that they re-key the doors to the room where ballots and voting materials stay overnight to ensure that no one external to the elections team can access the space during the early voting period. Therefore, in addition to having enough space for all the voting machines, the room must also be able to guarantee ballot security.

d) Budgetary Costs

As public servants, the financial costs and returns on investment for each early voting location remain front of mind for election administrators. Several election directors shared that under North Carolina election law (General Statute Ch. 163), county boards of elections do not have to pay to use public, tax-funded buildings, including all the buildings on the campus of a public university. The costs are different for private universities and other privately owned

⁹ For the most up-to-date version of the ADA Checklist for Polling Places, issued by the U.S. Department of Justice Civil Rights Division, see <https://www.ada.gov/resources/polling-places-checklist/>.

spaces. The election directors I spoke with indicated the waived rental fee was one benefit they viewed to using taxpayer-funded spaces for an early voting site while still recognizing their responsibilities to use taxpayer money efficiently. “I don’t have budget fights about this, but there’s still being a good steward of the taxpayer money,” said Guilford County Election Director Charlie Collicutt. For Michael Dickerson, election director in Mecklenburg County, early voting is “more cost-effective” because he can use the same equipment for 17 days instead of just one day on Election Day. The analysis of interview transcripts indicates that on the election offices’ side, budget is not a primary advantage or disadvantage to using colleges as early voting locations.

e) Proximity to Population Centers

While voting rights activists often speak of on-campus early voting locations as serving the student body, election officials are also responsible for ensuring the surrounding community can access the selected early voting locations. When discussing the need to balance serving the campus community and the broader community in nearby neighborhoods, election officials referred to parking and transportation challenges posed by otherwise ideal early voting locations.

Several election directors referenced distributing early voting locations proximate to population centers. Lisa Lovedahl, election director in Jackson County, a rural county in Western North Carolina, said, “Jackson County is a big county, so we try to have sites where the drive time is not going to be far, so we try to have it east, central, west, north, south, anywhere there’s a large population.” In Mecklenburg County, with a population well over one million, Election Director Michael Dickerson said, “we also want to make sure it’s near our population centers.” Orange County Election Director Rachel Raper said, “we look at our voter population as a whole and we look at where our population density is and that’s where we gravitate towards placing

early voting sites.” She clarified that they do not look for groups of homogenous populations to accommodate early voting sites. “We want to use our resources to place sites so that all voters in Orange County have an equal opportunity to use that site,” Raper added. Election directors do not prioritize providing one community specialized access to an early voting site; instead, they balance the needs of various communities that fall within their jurisdiction using measures of population density.

3. Theme 2: County Election Directors Describe Cooperative Relationships with Universities

All five election directors I interviewed reported having a collaborative working relationship with the university in their county. Facilitating an early voting site on a college campus requires advanced communication between the election office and the university administration. In many cases, election directors and universities communicate months, if not upwards to a year, before the election to discuss using a site on campus as an early voting site. To this point, Olivia McCall, the election director in Wake County, said of North Carolina State University, “because it is historically used, we have a really good relationship with their contact there, and he pretty much puts it on the calendar.” Michael Dickerson, the election director in Mecklenburg County, described the University of North Carolina at Charlotte audience as “receptive.” For Jackson County Election Director Lisa Lovedahl, the support from Western Carolina University makes it “much easier” to “justify the cost from our Board of Elections office” because the university supplies a lot of materials that help keep costs down. Lovedahl also noted that the support her office receives from Western Carolina University is unique. “I have talked to other county directors, and I know that some of the colleges do not provide what WCU provides for us,” she said. She noted that when a college is more involved, it makes it easier for the counties to justify the cost.

Even in cases without an on-campus early voting site, election offices and universities have strong relationships. Orange County Election Director Rachel Raper County said she appreciates the University's direct-to-student communication. She also said the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill goes "above and beyond with trying to help make students getting to a voting location at Chapel of the Cross, which is the voting location adjacent to campus for early voting." The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill wanted an early voting site on campus, but they could not find a site that met all the factors for an early voting location.

While all of the election directors note having wonderful relationships with the universities in their counties now, it appears that student activism sparked many of these relationships and ultimately the placement of early voting sites. Lisa Lovedahl, the election director in Jackson County, recalled that the relationship began between the elections office and Center for Community Engagement and Service Learning. She said the university and its students played "a huge part in getting a polling place on campus." Lovedahl said, "there were five [students], and they petitioned, they came to the board meetings, and they were able to get the board to vote to have a polling place on campus" even at a time when the Republicans had a majority on the county board. According to Lovedahl:

It all boils down to having a really great relationship with the college, and the college being willing to help us. It benefits the students, and by us working together, we're able to provide a convenient way for the students to vote, and you know that's the whole purpose is to get young voters, first-time voters voting, and for it to be as convenient as possible.

When colleges and election offices collaborate, they can deliver a convenient method of voting to students, and all of the election directors interviewed described having cooperative relationships with their respective universities.

4. Theme 3: County Election Directors Have Varying Explanations of The Boards Of Elections' Role in Student Political Participation

In response to a question about the role of a county election office in using existing legal pathways to help reduce the burden of voting for college-aged voters, election directors did not offer a uniform response about the responsibilities of the county government. While each election director presented unique evaluations about the responsibilities of the county board of elections to support student voting, everyone recognized the virtue of locating early voting sites in a location that is accessible to the student population in their county.

The responses related to the government's role in student voter engagement varied. The Mecklenburg County election director took the most limited approach when he described his role as the administrative wing of the board of elections as going out and "try[ing] to locate sites." The Orange County election director said her office does not prioritize the student population in Orange County over any other population. "We don't just say, well, where's a group of young people? Just like we don't say, well, where's a group of our older people? We really look at just numbers when we're looking at where we want to use our resources to place sites so that all voters in Orange County have an equal opportunity to use that site," said Rachel Raper.

In Wake County, Olivia McCall said that the responsibility of her offices goes hand in hand with the university's role: "getting out the information." Guilford County Election Director Charlie Collicutt said that if the campus is in a precinct where the majority of registered voters are students, then "you need to put something where those students can access that on Election Day." He also described early voting as a "really good tool to use for these universities that are larger." Collicutt went on to say, "In these elections where we know we're gonna have high turnout, it is a good idea; it helps the administrative cost. And obviously, if you're doing that,

you're helping alleviate that burden on these students that may not know where they're registered."

Lisa Lovedahl, election director in Jackson County, took the most pro-student voting access approach in her response. She said, "we just need to make it convenient. We need to make it accessible for students to vote so that they have a lifetime of voting ahead of them." North Carolina county election directors expressed a range of philosophies about supporting student voting access, but they all recognized the benefits of an on-campus location.

5. Theme 4: Students Tend to Vote During Early Voting, According to Election Directors

According to the election directors, students tend to vote towards the end of the early voting period and use same-day voter registration. Several of the election officials in the study said they predominantly noticed the students in their county using the early voting resources to cast their ballots. "It's not balanced, it's early voting," said Rachel Raper, the election director in Orange County. Jackson County Election Director Lisa Lovedahl said, "They're definitely one-stop, early voting. They definitely do that, and it could be that because we offer one-stop voting on campus. But you know it makes it very convenient for them."

In addition to voting early, several election directors highlighted that students often take advantage of the opportunity to register to vote during the early voting period using same-day registration. "A lot of the students will use the same-day registration process. And that's what I see, the bulk of our students, our UNC students, will vote early," said Rachel Raper, the election director for Orange County. "A lot of them do use same-day registration," echoed Lovedahl. Guilford County Election Director Charlie Collicutt also responded that he noticed the students in his county frequently register during the early voting period. "Same day registration is a big deal ... because that's where, as an administrator, [early voting] earns its keep," said Collicutt.

While these election directors reported that the students vote during the early voting period, this does not mean that tendencies to procrastinate were not in effect. Mecklenburg County Election Director Michael Dickerson said, “Students have the propensity to vote late,” meaning in the final days or even hours of the early voting window. County election officials agree that early voting—and more specifically, same-day voter registration—are essential and often-used tools for young voters.

C. Thematic Analysis of Interviews with University Administrators

Interviews conducted with university officials assessed how universities view their role in helping students navigate the election process and incorporate early voting into their voter action plans. The analysis of these interviews seeks to answer the Universities Question. The five university officials I interviewed shared stories about the early voting sites on or near their campuses, described their campuses’ voter mobilization efforts, and what they view as the role of the school and the elections office in helping students learn to participate in elections. The interviews of university administrators ranged from 29 to 41 minutes and occurred over Zoom due to travel and time limitations. In all five interviews, I followed the interview guide found in Appendix D and guided the conversations through follow-up questions as applicable. Table 6 shows the names, titles, and universities of each of the five university officials I interviewed.

Table 6: Participants Demographics (University Officials)

Name	Title	University
Brian Mathis	Associate Director Student Leadership and Engagement	North Carolina State University
Christopher Cooper	Madison Distinguished Professor Director, Public Policy Institute Political Science & Public Affairs	Western Carolina University
Anna Helms	Director of Constituent Relations	University of North Carolina at Charlotte
Natasha Young	Leadership Development Program Coordinator	University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill
Katie Lipe	Assistant Director, Duke State Relations	Duke University

1. Presentation of Themes

The thematic analysis of the transcripts with university officials produced four themes, which are previewed in Table 7.

Table 7: Grouping of Initial Codes to Form Themes (University Officials)

Initial codes grouped to form theme	<i>n</i> of participants contributing (N = 5)	<i>n</i> of transcript excerpts assigned
Theme 1: Universities develop voter action plans around early voting, citing convenience and same-day registration as key benefits	5	54
Theme 2: University officials believe they have a responsibility to support student voter engagement and build better citizens	5	17
Theme 3: University officials credit the role students play in advocating for voting locations	5	12
Theme 4: “Bridge building” partnerships with county board of elections	5	36

2. Theme 1: Universities Develop Voter Action Plans Around Early Voting, Citing Convenience and Same-Day Registration as Key Benefits

The leaders of non-partisan voter mobilization organizations at North Carolina universities appreciate hosting early voting sites and building their voter action plans around early voting. As members of the All In Campus Democracy Challenge,¹⁰ universities write, submit, and implement a voter action plan for every federal election. The action plans and interviews indicate that universities prioritize early voting over Election Day and encourage students to vote during the early voting period for various reasons. First, because the early voting period in North Carolina is 17 days long, and includes weekend hours, early voting offers students a flexible alternative to a Tuesday in November. Second, same-day registration during early voting allows students a fail-safe opportunity to register or update their registration and cast their ballot all in the same visit.

Same-day registration is a critically important policy for first-time voters in North Carolina. At Western Carolina University, Professor Cooper shared that “Western has among the most, if not the most, depending on the election cycle, same-day registrants of any early voting location of the state. And so, I think that’s a really good sign. If part of what we’re trying to do is to create new voters, I think that’s pretty ironclad evidence that it’s working.” Despite not having an early voting site directly on campus, Natasha Young at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill echoed the importance of early voting: “we really try to push students to go to early voting instead of Election Day because you don’t have the time to iron out any issues with your

¹⁰ The All In Campus Democracy Challenge “empowers colleges and universities to achieve excellence in nonpartisan student democratic engagement” through enhanced programming for civic learning, political engagement, and voter participation. See the organization’s theory of change here: <https://allinchallenge.org/wp-content/uploads/ALL-IN-Challenge-Theory-of-Change.pdf>

registration if there's an issue." In direct agreement with colleagues at peer institutions, Brian Mathis said that because of the opportunities afforded with same-day registration, North Carolina State University's "preference is absolutely having an early voting site at campus." Anna Helms at the University of North Carolina at Charlotte also stated that the 49er Democracy Challenge builds a lot of their plans "around early voting" because of the convenience of the location on campus and benefits offered with same-day voter registration.

3. Theme 2: University Officials Believe They Have a Responsibility to Support Student Voter Engagement and Build Better Citizens

Regarding voter engagement, university officials believe their responsibility is to increase convenience of voting locations, and they commonly define this responsibility within the legal framework of the Higher Education Act. Early voting removes barriers to voting by allowing for a longer window to vote and same-day registration. At Duke University, Katie Lipe said that having an early voting location on campus is less burdensome for students. Lipe also noted that "college students may face more barriers, and so anything [the university] can do to encourage voting access to all citizens is of the utmost importance." For Anna Helms at the University of North Carolina at Charlotte, the convenience of early voting is linked to students' limited means of transportation. Helms recognized that not every student has a car or access to personal transportation and highlighted that having "access right on campus" alleviates transportation challenges.

Professor Cooper at Western Carolina University said, "the early voting site on campus is the single most important thing we've done. It's raised visibility. It's increased turnout. It's a great partnership with the board of elections too." Brian Mathis of North Carolina State

University took a stronger approach in defining the responsibility of the university in promoting student voting rights. He said:

We see as our role of institutions of higher education to support the health of our democracy by educating our students to be active citizens in the process ... We should make voting as easy as possible while respecting the integrity of the electoral process.

Mathis went on to describe an on-campus early voting site as the “least burdensome way possible” to ensure that students have the ability to cast their ballot.

In addition to the definitions of the university’s role presented above, many university officials referenced the provisions in the Higher Education Act that require postsecondary institutions to “make a good faith effort to distribute a mail voter registration form, requested and received from the State, to each student enrolled in a degree or certificate program and physically in attendance at the institution, and to make such forms widely available to all students at the institution” (“Higher Education Act of 1965,” 1965).

Several university officials framed their voter empowerment work within a broader goal of building engaged citizens and lifelong voters. Professor Christopher Cooper at Western Carolina University described his vision of the university’s responsibility as one of “building better citizens.” He said, “We are building better citizens, and whether they stay in Cullowhee or, more likely, whether they move somewhere else, hopefully, they’ll be in the habit of voting.” University officials believe the university has an obligation to encourage student voter engagement and build lifelong voters.

4. Theme 3: University Officials Credit the Role Students Play in Advocating for Voting Locations

Despite their temporary duration as active members of the university community, students play an indispensable role in securing early voting locations on campus and mobilizing

students to register to vote and cast their ballots. At North Carolina State University, Brian Mathis recalled that the student government voiced an interest in an early voting location in Talley Student Union. After the students came to Mathis with the idea to host an early voting site in the student union, he helped them prepare to attend Wake County Board of Elections meetings, where students presented their case for hosting an on-campus early voting location and ultimately convinced the board to approve the site. In 2016, Western Carolina University also had a well-documented “student-led movement” that resulted in the placement of the on-campus early voting site, according to Professor Christopher Cooper. “If it weren’t [for] the students, it would not have happened,” Cooper added. The Mecklenburg County Board of Elections has also received requests from university students. According to Anna Helms at the University of North Carolina at Charlotte, student organizations will reach out and write letters to the Mecklenburg County Board of Elections.

At many schools, beyond advocating for the placement of an early voting location, students lead the charge to educate, register, and mobilize their peers to vote. At Duke University, student leaders run Duke Votes, which is a non-partisan, student-led organization working to register, educate, and mobilize Duke students to vote. Katie Lipe said the “biggest advantage of Duke Votes is that it’s student led, so they are boots on the ground.” Voter engagement is also student-led at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. Natasha Young said student organizations “lead a lot of the programming and initiatives around voter registration.” Through advocating for an on-campus early voting site at a board of elections meeting or registering students to vote in the dining hall, students profoundly impact how the democracy experiment plays out on their campus.

5. Theme 4: “Bridge Building” Partnerships with County Board of Elections

Universities know they cannot complete the work necessary to help students overcome barriers to the ballot and teach young adults how to be civically minded citizens alone, and that is why university administrators often rely on their partnerships with the county board of elections. All of the university officials interviewed reported having great working relationships with the county board of elections, and several said they are already planning on-campus early voting locations for the 2024 primaries and general elections. Katie Lipe of Duke University and Brian Mathis of North Carolina State University both described the working dynamic as “wonderful.” Mathis added that the Wake County Board of Elections “want[s] to make sure every eligible citizen in the county has the right and the opportunity to cast their ballot.” At the University of North Carolina at Charlotte, Anna Helms said her office has “a great working relationship with the Mecklenburg Board of Elections,” and both parties want to have a site on campus as long as space is available. She shared that her office is in constant communication with the board of elections and the university takes it upon itself to locate possible sites based on the criteria the board of elections provides the school. Even those officials who work less closely with the county election office, such as Natasha Young, report that the staff at the board of elections have been very helpful in answering questions about voter registration or providing more registration forms upon request.

Counter to election officials, university officials’ views on the role the county government should play in supporting student voter engagement are much more uniform. Many of the university administrators interviewed cited the population density of college campuses as a primary rationale for placing early voting sites at institutions of higher education. Katie Lipe of Duke University said the Durham County Board of Elections understands the value of

“partnering with institutions like Duke and [North Carolina Central University] to make sure that they’re making voting locations accessible to students.” She justified the need for an on-campus early voting location “because there is such a large number of registered voters in Durham County that are within that 18 to 24 range.” She also noted that the county board has always provided Duke positive feedback about having a site at the Karsh Alumni and Visitors Center. Lipe said that the Durham County Board of Elections is “interested in trying to help support college students.”

At North Carolina State University, Brian Mathis stated that the board of elections should take every step to ease the burden of voting, particularly for students. He also noted that the staff members and the board members at the county election office may at some points have conflicting motivations. Regarding the staff, he said they should do “everything within their power to ensure that every eligible citizen has the right to vote” in a non-burdensome way. On the board side, he noted their responsibility is to set policy and they need to be given all the information to make decisions “representative of the county.”

The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill has not had an on-campus early voting location since 2010 because they have been unable to find a location on campus that meets all the standards of the board of elections. With this context in mind, Natasha Young expects the Orange County Board of Elections to understand the intricacies associated with serving a college town and inherently college voters. Young referenced how the transient population of students who move regularly can inform student-targeted messaging about the voting process. She also mentioned that the board of elections and university officials should collaborate to share a list of all students who live on campus to facilitate same-day registration. She described her role in collaborating with the board of elections as bridging the university and the county government so

“students have that opportunity to vote and participate in democracy, for sometimes the first time ever.”

Again, citing the population density that comes with a college campus, Anna Helms at the University of North Carolina at Charlotte said that the county board of elections has a responsibility to ensure students have access to a voting site, “whether it be on campus or, but if it’s not on campus, nearby campus, so we are able to build that bridge for students.” Helms also said that “college campuses have a large, condensed population that needs to be able to access voting.” The University of North Carolina at Charlotte has 30,000 students and around 5,000 faculty and staff, “so the county should recognize that that is a pretty large population to serve in the university area,” said Helms. Christopher Cooper of Western Carolina University also spoke of the opportunity for an on-campus location to serve a densely populated area. He asked, “If we want to bring the electoral process to where people are, what better place than a college campus?” For Professor Cooper, the county board of election’s job is to “help people vote and to make sure it’s safe and secure.”

Based on the way that university officials described their relationships with and defined the responsibilities of the board of elections, they view their partnerships with election administrators as building a bridge for students to cross from potential voter to habitual voter. They believe the dense residential and working populations on college campuses are a reason to invest in on-campus early voting and view the county boards of elections as necessary partners in helping to “build better citizens.”

D. Findings from Student Early Voting Experience Survey

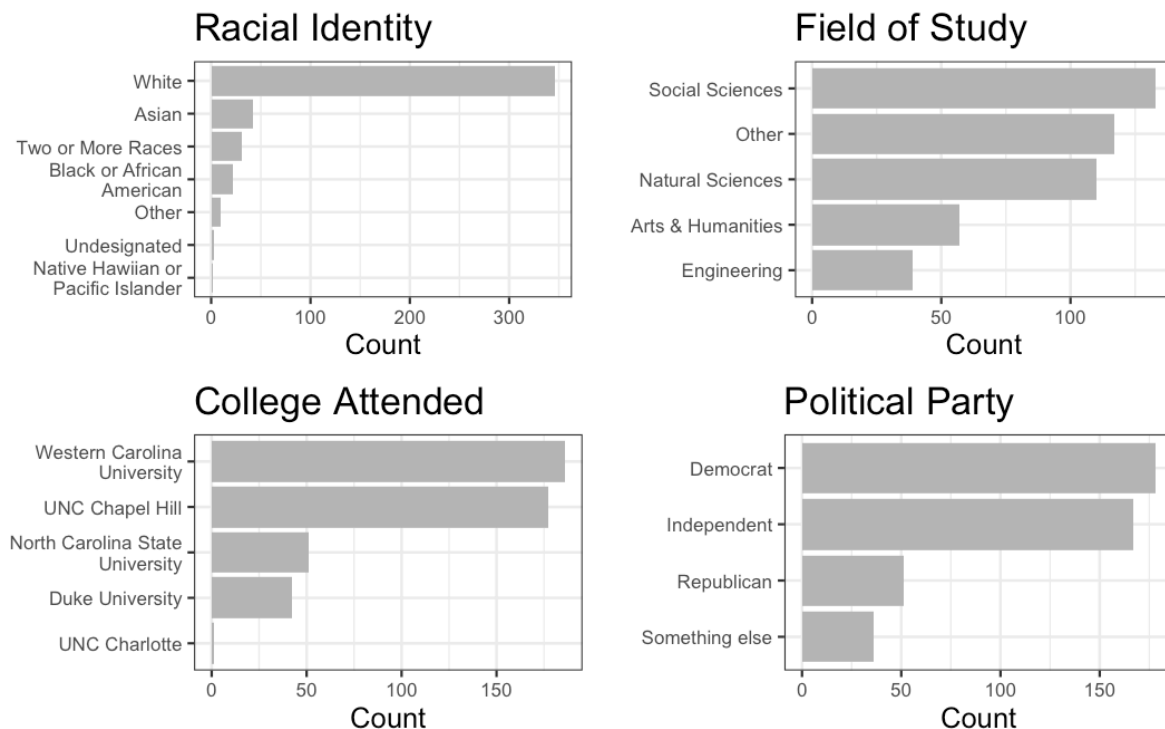
College students value the convenience early voting offers and believe their university and county government are responsible for reducing barriers to democratic participation.

Students across North Carolina were surveyed on their beliefs and experiences with early voting to answer the Student Perspectives Question, which asks a) how an early voting site on campus impacts students' decision on how, where, and when to vote and b) to what degree students expect their university to help facilitate their political engagement.

1. Description of Participants

The final sample consisted of 490 respondents. After cleaning the data for incomplete responses, I used 432 responses for statistical analysis. Figure 6 presents the demographic characteristics of the survey participants broken down by four demographic questions: racial identity, field of study, college attended, and political party affiliation.

Figure 6: Demographic Breakdown of Survey Sample

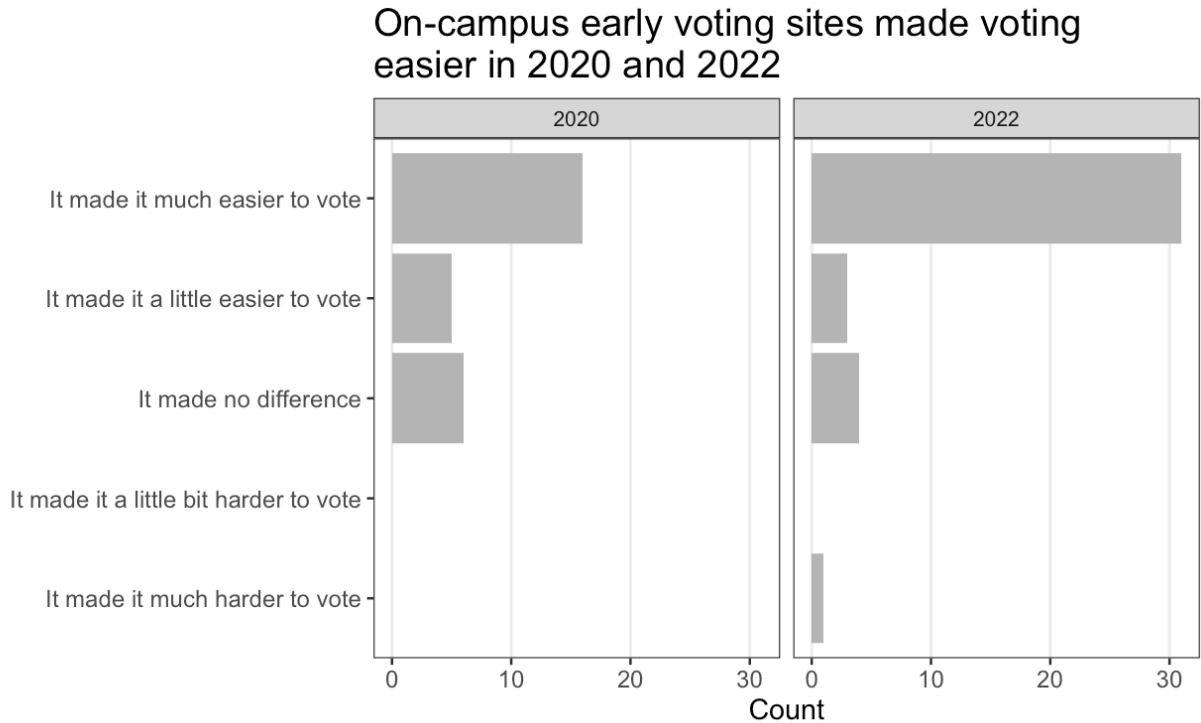


Data Source: Survey of NC college students conducted October 4-27, 2023.

2. Students Report High Levels of Satisfaction with On-Campus Early Voting

To understand how an on-campus early voting site impacts students' decision-making regarding electoral participation, I asked questions about their beliefs surrounding early voting and their experience voting in the 2020 or 2022 elections. Students with on-campus early voting experience reported high satisfaction with the voting method. One-hundred and fifty-five participants voted in November 2022, and 138 participants voted in the November 2020 election. However, only a small number voted early on their college campus. Within the sample, 19 participants voted early and on campus in 2020, compared to 32 in 2022. In both years, the majority of participants reported that the on-campus early voting site made voting easier, as displayed below in Figure 7.

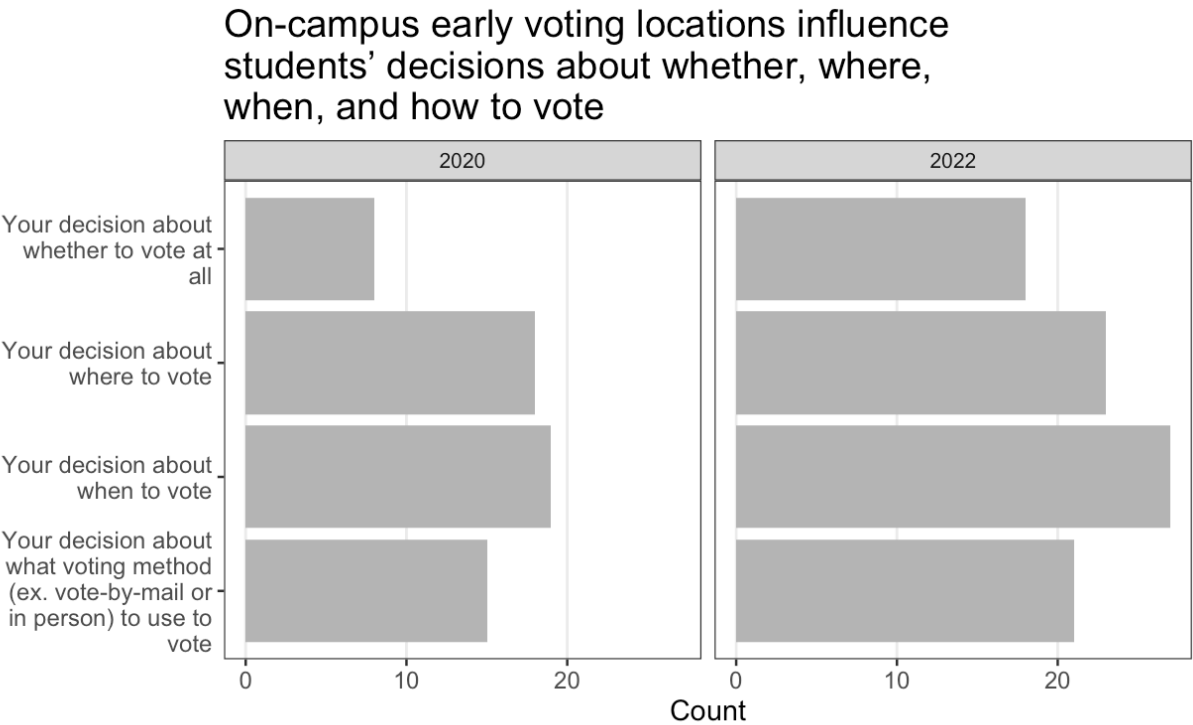
Figure 7: On-Campus Early Voting Sites Made Voting Easier in 2020 and 2022



Data Source: Survey of NC college students conducted October 4-27, 2023.

On-campus early voting locations impact how students devise personal voting plans. As shown below in Figure 8, an on-campus early voting location is most influential in determining when a student will vote, followed by where and what voting method they use. The early voting location impacted fewer students' decisions about whether to vote at all, but the convenient location still motivated many students. The trends revealed in these responses suggest that substitution and turnout effects may be in play regarding the impact of on-campus early voting locations (Bitzer et al., 2023).

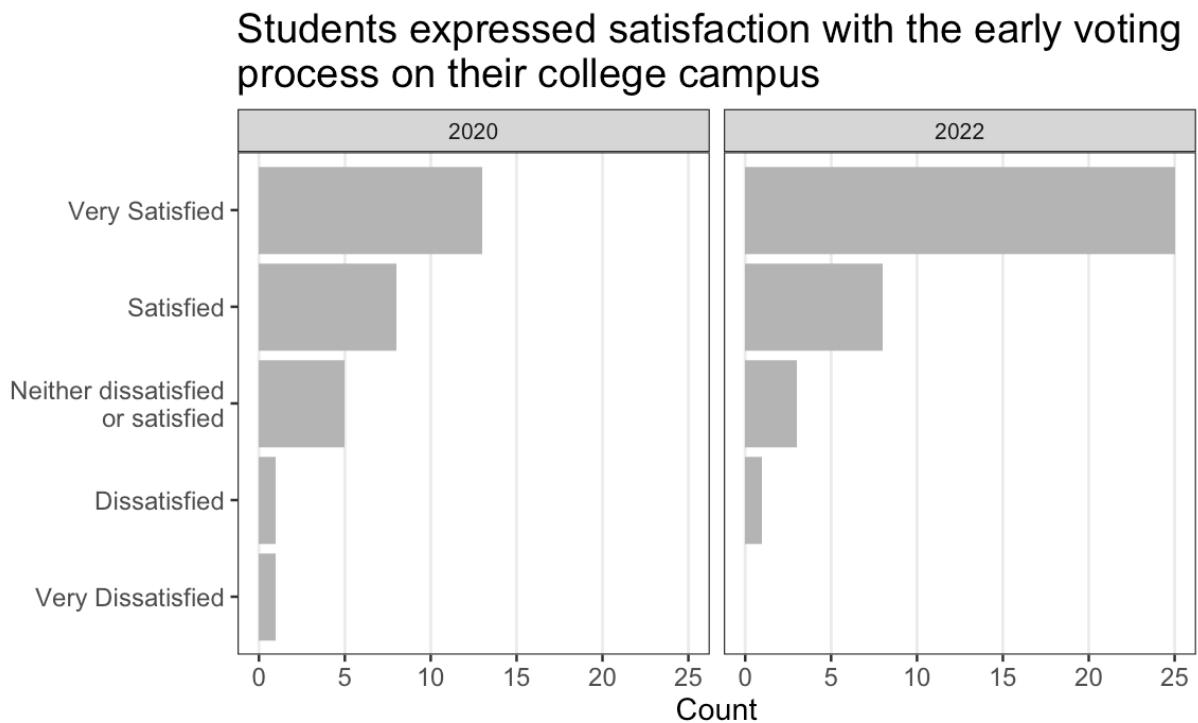
Figure 8: On-Campus Early Voting Locations Influence Students' Decisions about Whether, Where, When, and How to Vote



Data Source: Survey of NC college students conducted October 4-27, 2023.

Students reported feeling satisfied with the early voting process on their college campus, and the vast majority (91.8%) said they would consider voting early and on campus again if given the opportunity. The level of satisfaction is presented below in Figure 9.

Figure 9: Students Expressed Satisfaction with the Early Voting Process on Their College Campus



Data Source: Survey of NC college students conducted October 4-27, 2023.

3. Students Value the Convenience Provided by On-Campus Early Voting

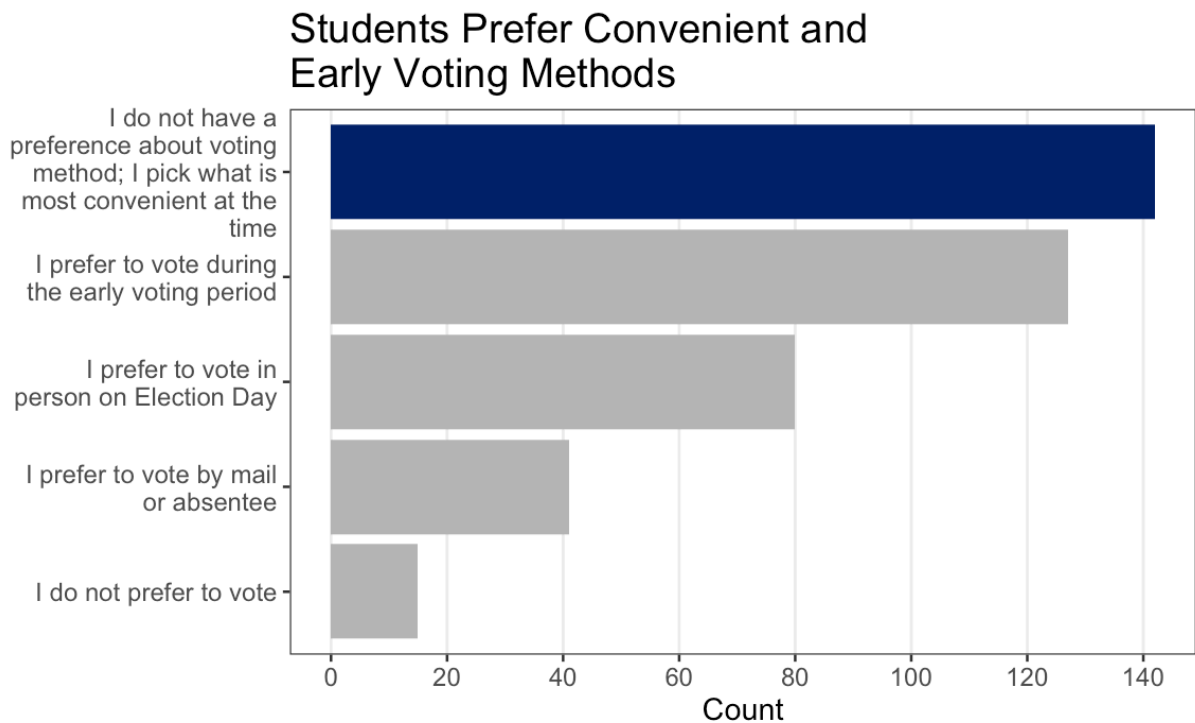
The survey included questions regarding students' preferred voting method (Question 16 in Appendix E) and specific factors that are important to them when deciding where, when, and how to vote (Question 17 in Appendix E) to address the first sub-question, which explores the impact of an early voting site on a students' decision on where, when, and how to vote.

The analysis revealed several key findings. First, students prefer to select the most convenient voting method. Second, the convenience of accessing the voting location and travel

time ranked among the top two most important factors when deciding where, when, and how to cast their ballot.

Students prefer convenient voting methods. When asked how they prefer to vote, the plurality (35%) of students selected, “I do not have a preference about voting method; I pick what is most convenient at the time.” Thirty-one percent of students selected early voting as their preferred voting method. Figure 10 below presents how students responded to the question, “How do you prefer to vote?”

Figure 10: Students Prefer Convenient and Early Voting Methods

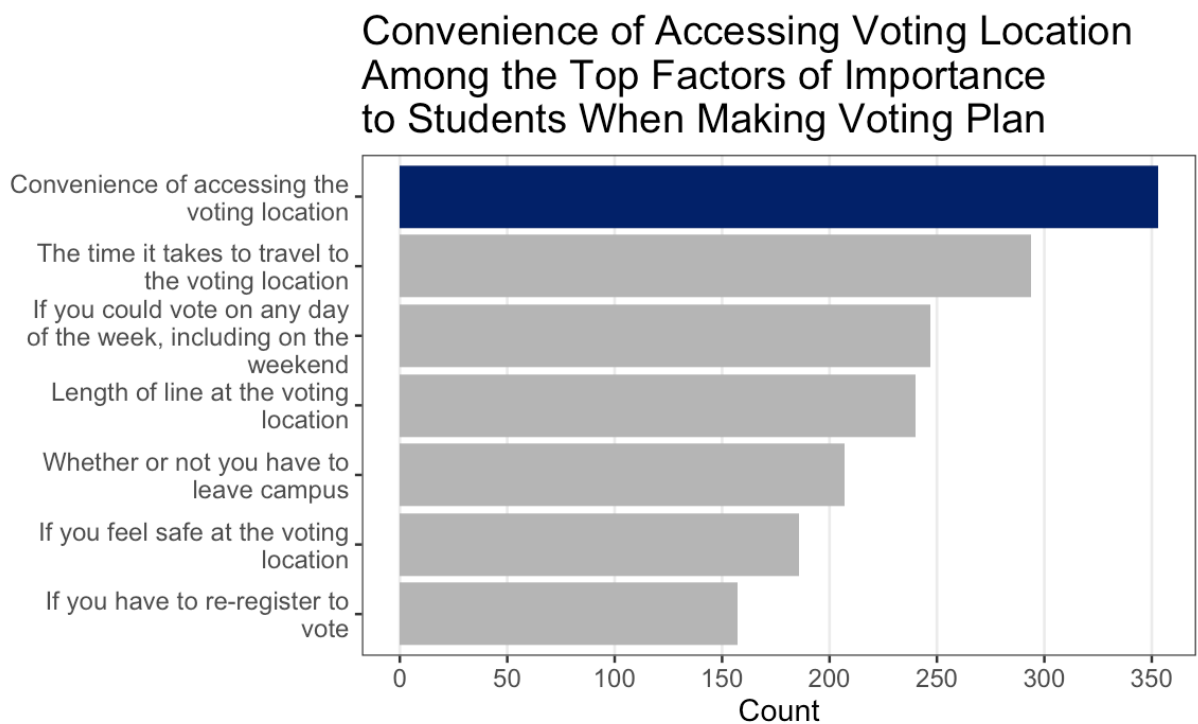


Data Source: Survey of NC college students conducted October 4-27, 2023.

Many factors impact when people choose to do any errand, and the same is true for voting. I asked students to select all of the factors they consider important when making their voting plan (Question 17 in Appendix E). Figure 11 below shows the possible answer choices on the y-axis and the frequency of responses on the x-axis. Roughly 87% of survey participants

selected “convenience of accessing the voting location” as a priority when making their voting plan. The remaining top-three factors of importance included the travel time to the voting location and the option to vote on any day, including weekends.

Figure 11: Convenience of Accessing Voting Location Among Top Factor to Students When Making Voting Plan



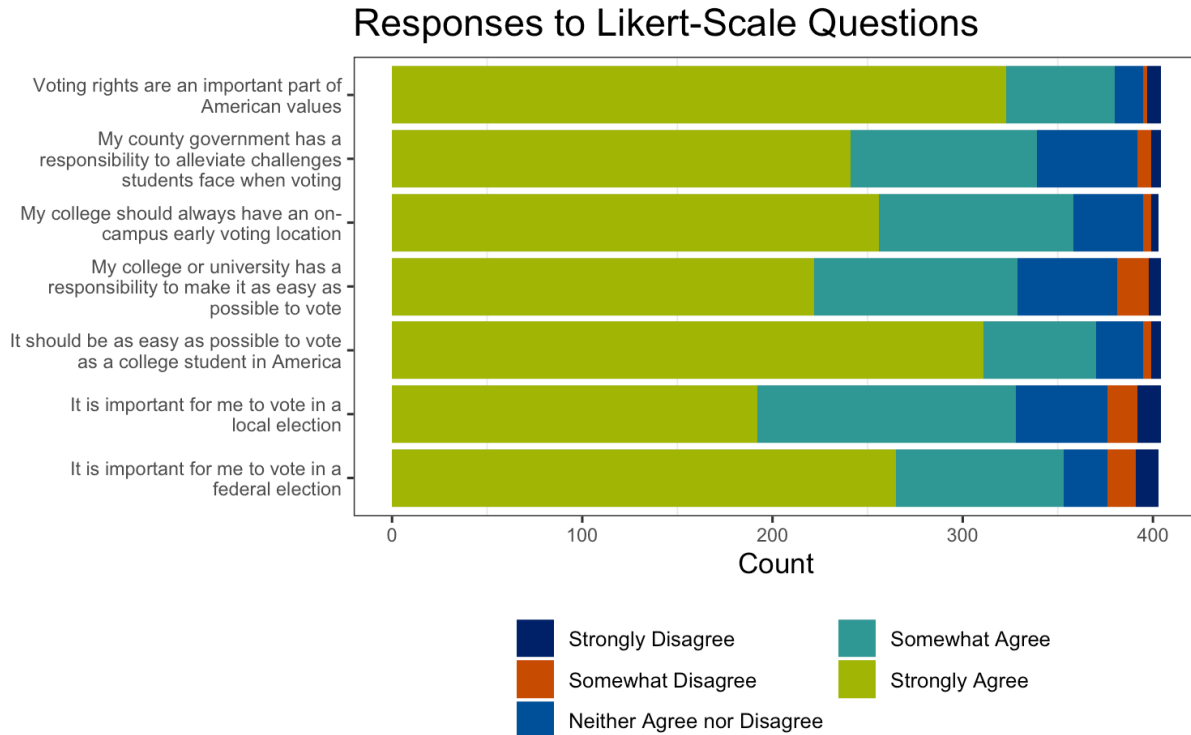
Data Source: Survey of NC college students conducted October 4-27, 2023.

4. Students Broadly Support On-Campus Early Voting and Enhanced Support From County and University Officials, Irrespective of Political Engagement Score

Students feel their university and county officials should take action to reduce the barriers to democratic participation. The second piece of the Student Perspectives Question asked how students perceive the role of their university administration and county government in assisting them with political participation. Through the survey, I asked students about the degree to which they agreed with several value statements (Question 18 in Appendix E) and factors that would

make them more likely to consider voting early on their campus (Question 43 in Appendix E). The analysis revealed the following key findings. First, participants overwhelmingly (91%) believe that it should be as easy as possible to vote as a college student in America. Second, survey respondents believe that both their university and county government are responsible for alleviating the challenges students face when voting. Eighty-one percent of students responded that they strongly or somewhat agree that the university has a responsibility, and 84% strongly or somewhat agreed that the county must reduce the costs of voting. Third, an overwhelming majority of students (89%) responded that they strongly or somewhat agree that their college should always have an on-campus early voting location. The breakdown of responses to these statements (among others) are presented in Figure 12 below.

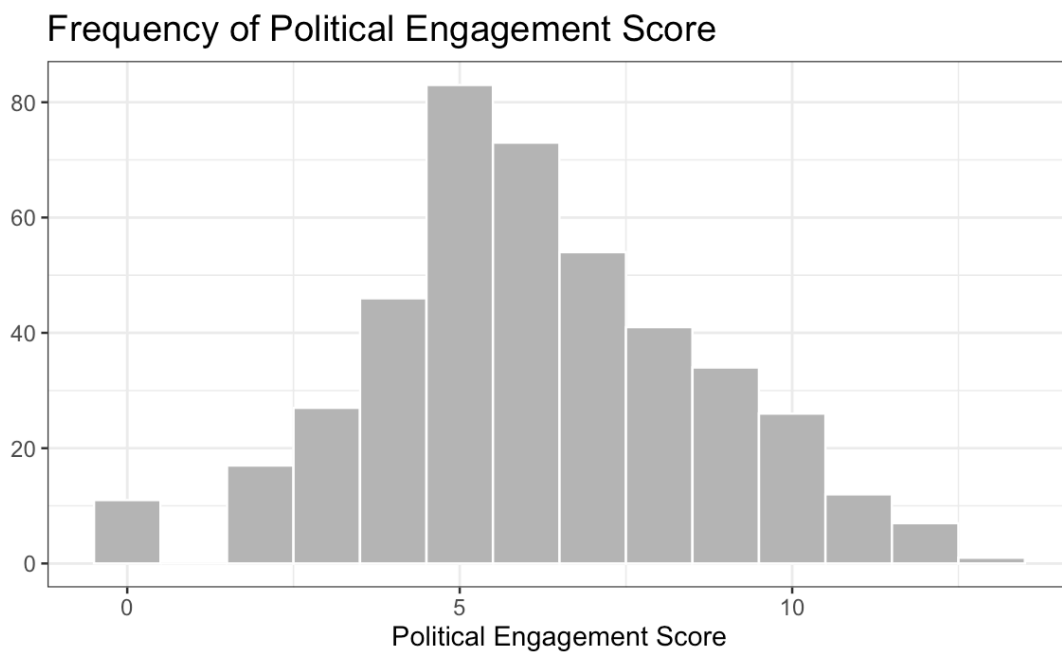
Figure 12: Responses to Likert-Scale Questions



Data Source: Survey of NC college students conducted October 4-27, 2023.

The hypotheses (H₃, H₄, and H₅) for the second sub-question predicted that more politically engaged students would be more likely to believe that a) their university has a responsibility to make it as easy as possible to vote, b) the county government has a responsibility to alleviate challenges students face when voting, and c) their university should always have an on-campus early voting location. To test this hypothesis, political engagement was measured using the Political Engagement Score described in Chapter 4: Methodology. To calculate this score, survey participants answered three questions about their interest in politics, consumption of political news, and participation in political activities (Questions 9, 10, and 11 in Appendix E). The scale has a range of 0 to 13. Highly engaged individuals score between 4 and 13 on the scale, moderately engaged individuals score between 2 and 3, and minimally engaged individuals score under 2 (Pew Research Center, 2018). Figure 13 below shows the distribution of political engagement scores among the sample (n = 432).

Figure 13: Frequency of Political Engagement Score



In examining the relationship between political engagement score and strength of belief that the university has a responsibility to support student voting, a Pearson's correlation test revealed a significant correlation, $\rho = .1959, p < .05$. This finding indicates a very weak positive linear relationship between the two variables, suggesting that a political engagement score does not predict the degree to which a student believes their college should invest resources in supporting student voting. Because the correlation is statistically significant ($p < .05$), I reject the null hypothesis H_{3-0} .

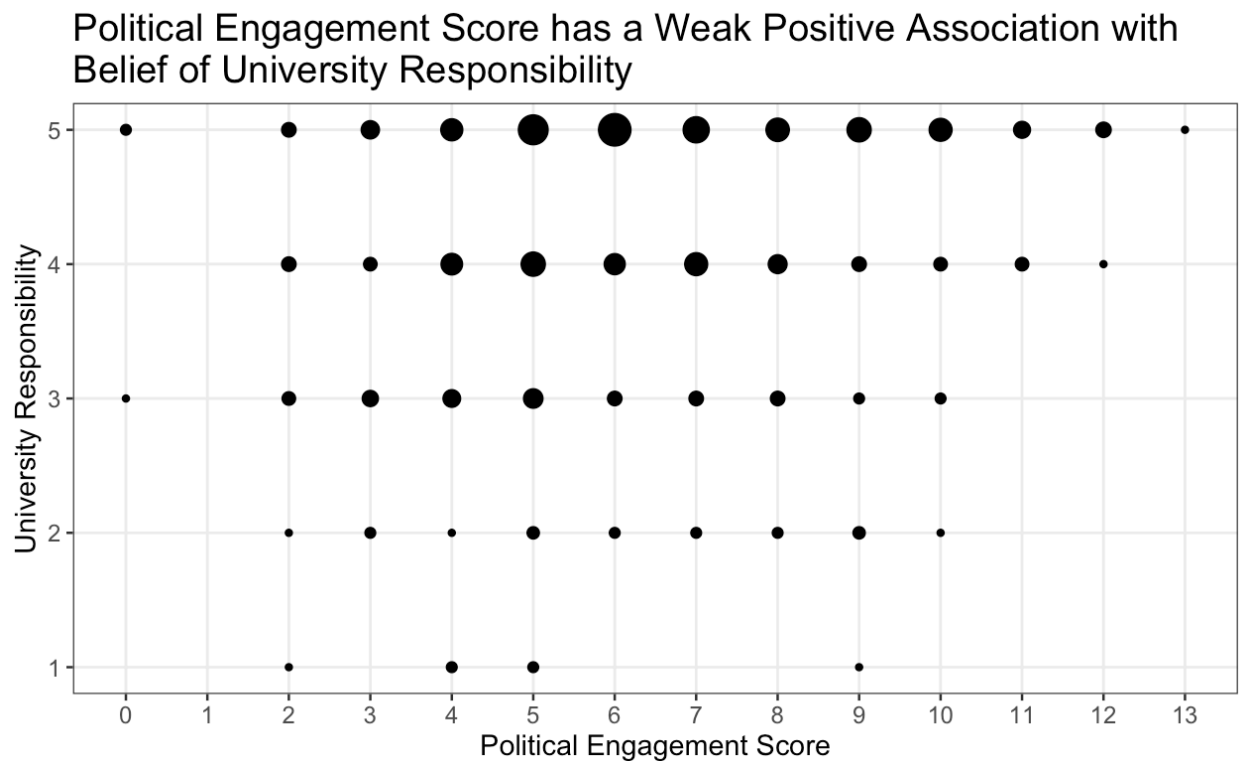
A Pearson's correlation test was also used to analyze the connection between political engagement score and strength of belief that the county government has a responsibility to support student voting. The correlation test revealed a statistically significant correlation, $\rho = .1878, p < .05$. This result indicates there is a very weak positive linear relationship between the two variables, suggesting that a political engagement score does not predict the degree to which a student believes their college should invest resources in supporting student voting. Because the correlation is statistically significant ($p < .05$), I reject the null hypothesis H_{4-0} .

In other words, political engagement is not a strong predictor of a belief that institutions of higher education or county governments have a duty to support student voting. Students of all levels of political engagement believe their colleges and counties should engage in projects serving young voters.

In the density plots below in Figure 14 and Figure 15, point size represents the number of observations at each position. Larger points indicate higher concentrations of responses. Both plots reveal that most students "somewhat agree" or "strongly agree" with the notions that their university and county government are responsible for supporting their democratic participation.

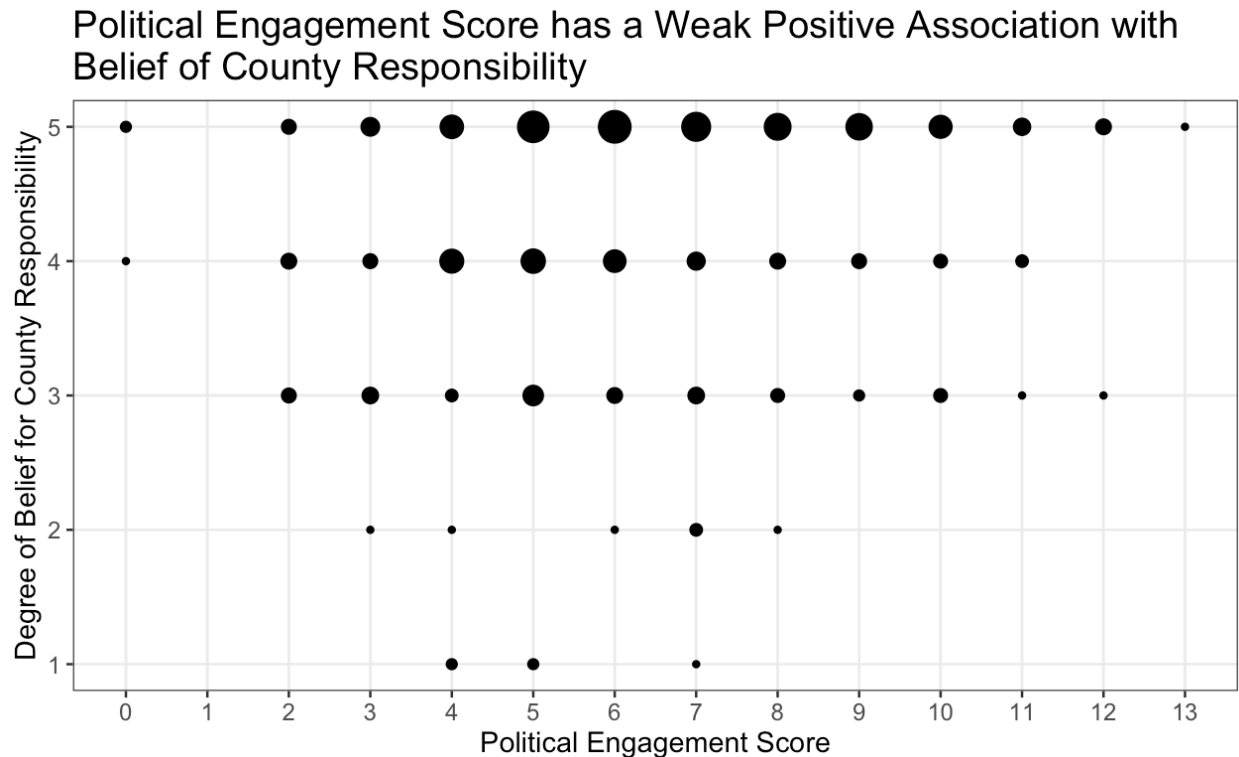
Consistent with the aforementioned correlation tests, there does not appear to be any preference for support among students with higher political engagement scores.

Figure 14: Political Engagement Score has a Weak Positive Association with Belief of University Responsibility



Data Source: Survey of NC college students conducted October 4-27, 2023.

Figure 15: Political Engagement Score has a Weak Positive Association with Belief of County Responsibility



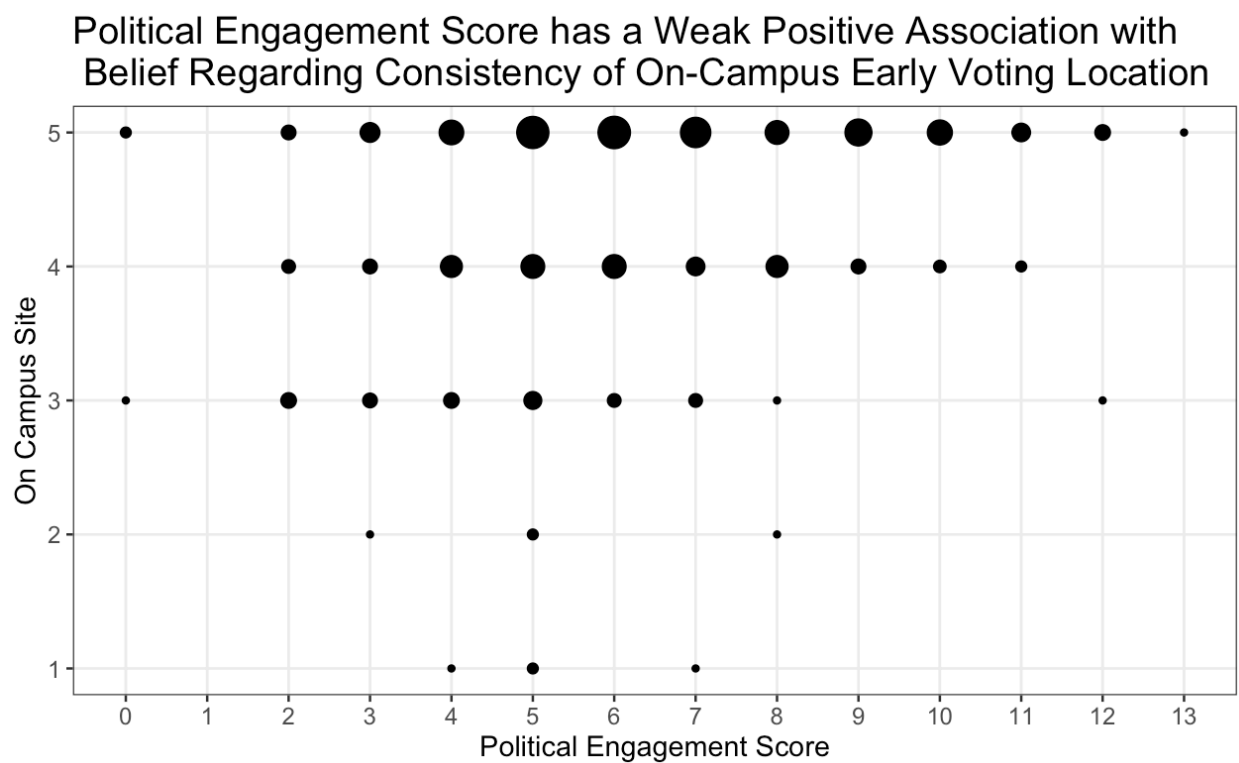
Data Source: Survey of NC college students conducted October 4-27, 2023.

Consistent with the preferences for university or county government support, a Pearson's correlation test revealed a weak positive correlation between political engagement score and belief that the university should always have an on-campus early voting location, $\rho = .2623$, $p < .05$. This result indicates a weak positive linear relationship between the two variables, suggesting that a political engagement score does not predict the degree to which a student believes their college should always have an on-campus early voting location. Because the correlation is statistically significant ($p < .05$), I reject the null hypothesis H_{5-0} . Simply put, political engagement is not a strong predictor of students' belief that their campus should always

have an early voting site. Students of all levels of political engagement desire the convenience of on-campus early voting.

The density plot below in Figure 16 illustrates that the majority of students “strongly agree” or “somewhat agree” that their college should always have an on-campus early voting location and that this belief is not strongly associated with the level of political engagement.

Figure 16: Political Engagement Score has a Weak Positive Association with Belief Regarding Consistency of On-Campus Early Voting Location



Data Source: Survey of NC college students conducted October 4-27, 2023.

Chapter 6: Discussion and Conclusion

In 2014, Appalachian State University students sued the Watauga County Board of Elections over the removal of their on-campus early voting location. In 2016, Western Carolina University students successfully built a bipartisan coalition of support from administrators and students, gained broad support from the community and political leaders, and presented their case for bringing an on-campus early voting location to their campus. In 2019, North Carolina Agricultural and Technical State University students attended weekly meetings at the Guilford County Board of Elections to advocate for an on-campus voting site. Time and time again, college students advocated for accessible and convenient voting access for themselves, their classmates, and all future students at their universities. When college campuses lack accessible opportunities to vote, students' ability to vote is severely limited. Voting is the single most crucial act of political participation one can take in a democracy, yet turnout rates for college-age voters consistently lag behind older Americans (Leighley & Nagler, 2013; Wolfinger & Rosenstone, 1980). Fortunately, on-campus early voting locations are a singular process that reduces the cost of voting for students, ultimately decreasing the follow-through gap between turnout intention and behavior.

At the onset of this project, I advanced a policy question: How can higher education institutions best collaborate with county election officials to optimize convenience voting and increase student voter turnout? Voting is both a right and a responsibility, and higher education institutions enjoy a unique position to support young citizens in overcoming arduous barriers to voting and building the habits of a lifelong voter. In exploring this question, I examined quantitative data from a large-scale study on college voting, conducted qualitative interviews with county election directors and university officials, and surveyed college students. Based on

my research, I conclude that placing early voting locations at the heart of communities full of students is an effective method for county and university leaders to work together to reduce the cost of voting for college-aged students and in turn increase voting rates. My findings offer a fresh perspective on the relationship between students, universities, and local election officials and provide encouraging opportunities for future scholarly research, policy reform, and partnerships in service of building better citizens. This final chapter provides an interpretation of the key findings and their theoretical and policy implications, followed by a brief acknowledgment of the limitations and avenues for future research.

A. Theoretical Implications

On-campus early voting locations have contributed to increased voting activity among college students in North Carolina by providing a convenient voting option and giving university officials an on-campus early voting location to build their voter action plans. The Impact Question asked how on-campus early voting access impacts registration and voting rates of young voters. In line with the hypothesis that early voting access and usage is positively correlated with overall voting rates, my findings support further investments in voting infrastructure that offer college students the opportunity to vote early and on campus. These findings align with existing literature on the turnout effect of on-campus early voting locations (Shino & Smith, 2020), but deviate from the general impact of early voting on young voters, who may or may not be in college (Holbein & Hillygus, 2020). A possible explanation for this deviation may be that North Carolina offers same-day voter registration during early voting, which independently increases youth voter turnout (Holbein & Hillygus, 2020). Additionally, several university and county election officials said that same-day voter registration is essential for the student (and first-time voter) communities. Those administrators

recall substantial proportions of their students using this process. These nuances in the data suggest that the administrative decisions behind the placement of early voting locations hold a great deal of influence on both the ease of voting and the final voting rate. These findings suggest renewed or first-time investments in supporting on-campus early voting will benefit overall student voting rates. If leaders value building more engaged citizens and bringing young people into the democratic process, no better investment offers students the ability to cast their ballots right on campus.

County board of election members play a significant role in determining the ease of voting access for any given election. Through my interviews, to answer the County Boards Question, I sought to understand the extent to which county boards of elections consider college voters when developing early voting plans. Thematic analysis of interview transcripts reveals that while the boards must consider a wide array of factors when determining early voting locations, they understand the value of providing convenient voting access to a densely populated community. The data suggest that when partnered with cooperative universities that meet the physical requirements needed for an early voting location, democratically appointed boards have been receptive to students' requests for on-campus early voting locations. To the best of my knowledge, none of the existing literature that centers on administrative decisions such as early voting locations has focused on the beliefs and perspectives of individual county officials, so in that regard, this research has started a new narrative about the role that local election officials play in student voter access.

University officials appreciate hosting early voting sites and building their voter engagement plans around early voting due to the benefits of same-day registration. The Universities Question asked how North Carolina colleges incorporate early voting in its voter

action plans and interpret their role in helping students navigate the election process. Across the state, North Carolina university officials tasked with managing relationships with the county board of elections and facilitating student voter mobilization appreciate early voting for at least three reasons. First, they recognize that not all students have access to transportation to an off-campus voting location. Second, on-campus early voting offers the university a direct and unique experience to facilitate the development of regularly active citizens beyond the traditional bounds of the classroom. Third, early voting in North Carolina offers potential voters the unique experience to become voters through same-day voter registration, which university officials consider a keystone for early voting. Universities recognize their responsibility in helping students navigate the election process by building better, more engaged, and habitually voting citizens.

All six colleges included in this study have gone beyond the “good faith effort” that underpins the personally responsible citizen. Within the “Institution as Citizen” framework introduced in Chapter 3: Conceptualizing Youth Voter Turnout: The Theoretical Framework, each of these colleges has taken a ‘participatory citizen’ approach. Through collaborations with local government and innovative student-led programming, these institutions have emphasized building strong relationships in pursuit of common goals. While the justice-oriented approach is still attainable, the colleges included in this study should serve as a model for any school that wants to increase the likelihood that any one student votes by reducing their costs and providing them the resources they need. The findings from my interviews provide new insight into university officials’ role in defending their students’ rights and access to the ballot. Voting rights activists should consider these results when organizing and engaging with students on college campuses.

Students value the convenience early voting offers and believe their university and county government have a responsibility to reduce barriers to democratic participation. Regarding the Student Perspectives question, I asked a) how an on-campus early voting site impacts students' decisions on how, when, and where to vote and b) to what degree students expect their university and county government to help facilitate their political engagement. Students with experience voting early and on campus overwhelmingly reported that this process made it much easier to vote. The convenient location also impacted students' decisions regarding voting method and when, where and whether to vote. Consistent with common perception, students prefer convenient methods of voting. Additionally, a vast majority of students responded that they strongly or somewhat agree that their university and county have a responsibility to work to reduce the costs they face when voting. The results indicate that early voting is a popular policy among college students in North Carolina.

Voting imposes costs onto individuals, but these findings suggest that students feel on-campus early voting helps to reduce those costs. An adaptation of the rational choice model of voter turnout suggests because voting is a low-cost, low-benefit activity, marginal changes in costs and benefits change the decision to turnout (Aldrich, 1993). Therefore, we might assume that marginal changes in the cost of voting, such as the ease of accessing the voting location, can potentially change an individual's turnout decision. The Follow Through Theory suggests that young people fall victim to the "follow through gap" that emerges when they lack the noncognitive skills to overcome internal and external barriers to participation. Offering an on-campus early voting site provides a substantial way to help reduce the noncognitive load for students. In the context of the models of voter turnout introduced in Chapter 3, the findings from the student experience survey suggest that students find early voting is a means of reducing the

costs of voting. These results contribute a clearer understanding of how early voting, and specifically on-campus early voting, alters one's calculus of voting *just* enough to turn a non-voter into a voter.

The findings presented in this thesis illuminate a model of voter engagement and mobilization that increases voter access and turnout in North Carolina. Early voting is associated with higher turnout rates. County election directors indicate that early voting sites on campus can be an effective way to reach a large number of voters. University officials understand the value that on-campus early voting brings to their student bodies as an opportunity for the school to support student voting rights. Students value the convenience of on-campus early voting and report high levels of satisfaction with the voting method. Placing early voting sites on college campuses is a cost-effective method of expanding access to the democratic process. My results suggest universities can better promote political participation, help young citizens overcome the costs of voting, and close the follow-through gap through partnerships with county election officials that bring the electoral process to the college campus.

While policies governing early voting and election policies more broadly are determined inside the Legislative Building in Raleigh, the decision to offer students and university staff convenient voting access is made in county office buildings across the state. This is a lesson in the importance and stakes of policy decisions made at all levels of government. On-campus early voting has been a part of the North Carolina election landscape for years and should continue because the combination of on-campus voting locations, same-day registration, and early voting addresses many of the burdens students face when attempting to vote.

B. Policy Recommendations

The conclusions drawn from this analysis offer several policy recommendations for legislators, county boards of elections members, university administrators, and students. Put plainly, the retention and expansion of on-campus early voting locations is vital to breaking down the costs of voting for young voters. No single legislative action delivered the current version of on-campus early voting. In the same way, no single policy can sustain this model of convenient voting for future elections. Sustained commitment from county election officials, universities, students, and legislators is critical to ensuring students can vote at a conveniently located early voting location.

1. What County Boards Of Elections Can Do

Regarding decisions surrounding early voting, county boards of elections must recognize the degree of influence they wield. Administrative site placement decisions can have astronomical impacts on the political participation of communities living and working near the early voting site. County boards of elections must step away from partisan politics to recognize the benefit of bringing the electoral process to the people — students, faculty, and staff alike — by placing an early voting site on a college campus. They should seek out and invite partnerships with local universities. Western Carolina University and the Jackson County Board of Elections offer a great example of mutual support, as the university covers some of the additional costs associated with the early voting site, such as signage and printed materials. The examples included in this study provide a model for how county government officials and university administrators can identify mutual interests and collaborate to achieve a common goal.

2. What Universities Can Do

Given the positive impact that an early voting site has on voter engagement, universities should ensure students have an institutional structure to make their voices heard by the board of elections. Additionally, universities pursuing a justice-oriented level of civic engagement should continue to nurture their relationships with the board of elections staff. For schools that do not have an on-campus early voting site at this time, staff should identify suitable locations on campus, build a coalition of students, and present the case at a board of elections meeting. Drawing from the models of Western Carolina University, Appalachian State University, and North Carolina Agricultural and Technical State University, including students in the process is not only effective at procuring the early voting location, but also at teaching crucial civic engagement skills. Colleges must also amplify the visibility of non-partisan voter engagement and mobilization programs on the campus. Universities should send county boards of elections enrollment lists and ensure the university-issued identification card is an accepted form of voter identification to reduce the possibility of challenges while registering and voting.

At universities where on-campus early voting sites are not feasible for logistical reasons, the university can still play an important role in encouraging and supporting students to vote at an off-campus site. Shuttles or marches to the polls that ensure all students have access to safe and reliable transportation are programs that facilitate access to an off-campus location. University leadership must prioritize collaborating with county election officials to facilitate convenient, on-campus voting access for their students, faculty, and staff. Even if these efforts come up short of providing an on-campus early voting location, the schools have a number of policy options available to maximize the convenience of voting.

3. What Students Can Do

Students should feel empowered by the success their peers have had at convincing county boards to place an early voting location on college campuses and not curtail their activism. Whether their college regularly has an early voting site or lacks convenient voting access, students should use the skills they are learning in the classroom by participating in public comment periods at the board of elections and demonstrating the breadth of student support for on-campus voting locations. Additionally, students must continue to lean on the university's election mobilization programs when they have questions or concerns about voting as a college student.

4. What Legislators Can Do

As detailed through the history of early voting in North Carolina, local, state, and federal lawmakers possess a variety of different levers that control voting access. Election officials have a moral responsibility to make voting accessible to every eligible voter, and that undertaking begins with the decisions made in Washington, DC and Raleigh. To increase student voting rates, young people deserve electoral reforms that make voting more convenient and provide additional legal pathways to challenge future politically motivated attacks on voting access. Three actions state and federal legislators can take include a) protect and expand same-day voter registration, b) allocate additional funding to counties for the purpose of administering elections, and c) refrain from passing legislation that introduces a blanket requirement for on-campus sites.

The significance of same-day voter registration cannot be understated. North Carolina's early voting model works because voters can register to vote and cast their ballot all in one visit. According to Christopher Cooper of Western Carolina University, the early voting site at Western Carolina University had the highest number of same-day registrants across North

Carolina.¹¹ Same-day voter registration programs increase youth turnout more than any other election policy (Holbein & Hillygus, 2020). The same-day voter registration policy brings new voters into the democratic system at critical points and must be protected. State and federal legislators must recognize the proven effects of same-day voter registration policies and work to protect or enact them where appropriate.

American elections are critically underfunded (Beckel et al., 2023). In North Carolina, the counties fund elections (Altamirano et al., 2023). Several election directors cited being a good steward of tax-payer money and the cost of an additional set of voting machines, election workers, and additional materials as factors they consider when presenting site locations. If the federal and state governments allocated sufficient funding to counties, the decision to include an early voting site at a college campus would not come at the expense of a voting location elsewhere in the county. With additional resources, county election officials will be better equipped to offer all residents convenient and accessible voting access.

Despite the benefits afforded through on-campus early voting sites, lawmakers should resist the urge to pass a blanket requirement calling for their existence. The “Youth Voting Rights Act” has been introduced in Congress and includes a provision that requires all public universities to have a voting site on Election Day. While this provision could be expanded to include early voting, my findings do not support top-down legislation that mandates on-campus early voting sites for several reasons. First, some campuses, like the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, cannot meet the physical requirements the board of elections requires, and students are similarly served by an early voting site a safe walking distance from campus.

¹¹ This statistic was shared during the interview on October 5, 2023.

Second, county election officials must be trusted to make autonomous decisions for their county. The power of the North Carolina election administration is centralized within the counties, and tension could arise between the politically appointed boards and university representatives that damages existing and future partnerships. Finally, the inevitable stipulations and exceptions to the rule would grant counties additional means to justify restricting student voter access.

C. Limitations and Avenues for Future Research

While the research design provides valuable insights into our collective understanding of early voting, specific limitations may impact the generalizability of my findings and lay the groundwork for future research. First, the generalizability of the results is limited by the nature of the single-state approach because election administration and university policy differ by state. However, if desired, this research methodology could be replicated in other states. Second, due to the case study nature of my research design, I did not have sufficient observations to run a difference-in-difference (DID) model testing the impact of on-campus early voting locations. A DID approach is a commonly used statistical tool to analyze the impact of various election policies, but it requires far more data points than I had available for this study. Third, because I only looked at six relatively large universities in North Carolina, these findings may not translate as well to a smaller institution without the resources or local support for on-campus voting.

Potential biases such as social desirability and interview biases might have impacted the findings from the interviews. Because I only interviewed ten individuals, the generalizability of these findings is limited, and caution should be exercised when generalizing findings beyond North Carolina.

While I had a relatively large sample ($n = 490$) from my student experience survey, some limitations are still worth reporting. Considering I surveyed students one to three years after their

voting experience, their memories of voting may be impacted by the passage of time. Also, many students who had voted early and on campus in 2020 graduated and thus were more challenging to recruit. This explains why the survey questions asking about experience with on-campus early voting have a smaller sample size than other questions, because many of the students in the sample have not had the opportunity to vote at an on-campus site. These findings should be interpreted with caution; however, the trends in responses were consistent between 2020 and 2022. In the future, it would be worthwhile to repeat the survey shortly after the 2024 election to gain a larger and more recent sample. While I tried to write questions in a way to reduce the effect of social desirability bias, the potential impacts of this bias are always present. Finally, while I was pleased with the 5% response rate, the non-response and self-selection biases could have impacted the findings from the survey. Future research endeavors should address these limitations and continue to build upon the insights gained in this thesis.

Several additional directions for future research emerge from the new policies that restructure county boards of elections and eliminate same-day registration. Special attention should be paid to the implementation and legal challenges of legislation that seeks to restrict voting access and targets college students.¹² These bills could have disastrous implications for student voting access in 2024 and thus warrant academic attention and consideration.

D. The Big Picture: Bringing the Electoral Process to the People

All politics are local, and that could not be more true regarding early voting location distribution across North Carolina. The Tar Heel State is home to dozens of four-year colleges

¹² The legal challenges to SB 747 and SB 749 are already taking place. Several lawsuits have been filed from a variety of plaintiffs including the Democratic National Committee, Governor Roy Cooper, and DemocracyNC. On Nov. 30, 2023, three trial judges issued a preliminary injunction on portions of SB 749, which would alter the appointment process for County Boards of Elections (Robertson, 2023). Appeals are expected and the final decisions in these cases are still pending.

and universities. For at least the last decade, students have attended county board of election meetings demanding an on-campus early voting location that offers students, who face an undue burden, convenient access to the ballot. Considering the six schools identified in my study and other relevant examples, some universities in North Carolina have encountered board members who welcomed the students' request, while others have found themselves engaged in year-long court battles over early voting plans. Colleges have built their entire voter mobilization strategies around on-campus early voting locations, notably because of the fail-safe benefits of same-day voter registration. Still, consistent and convenient voting access requires an ongoing partnership between the county government and university leadership.

My findings have meaningful implications for the scholarship and policy at the intersection of election law and democracy reform. This thesis has delivered data-driven findings evaluating the impact of on-campus early voting sites at the largest universities in North Carolina. Through interviews with county election directors and university officials, I have illuminated the internal policies that motivate early voting location placement and how these stakeholders view their responsibility to support student voting. Using a state-wide survey, I have presented evidence that students not only value the convenience early voting offers but also believe their university and county are responsible for reducing barriers to political participation.

Not only does this thesis make the case for providing access to student voters through convenient voting locations and policies, but it indicates that the resources county officials and university administrators allocate toward voter education and empowerment yield high returns. On-campus early voting locations have positively impacted the voting behavior of college students in North Carolina by reducing barriers to democratic participation and, in turn, resulted in higher voter turnout. Institutions of higher education can optimize convenience voting to

increase student voter turnout by maintaining constructive relationships with the staff at the county board of elections and encouraging students to use the early voting options available to them. Every American deserves to have convenient access to our democracy, and college students should not be unfairly burdened due to their age or status as a student.

Appendix

Appendix A: Descriptive Statistics from NSLVE Reports (2012-2020)

Table 8: Descriptive Statistics from NSLVE Data

Descriptive Statistics from NSLVE Data

	<u>2012</u>	<u>2014</u>	<u>2016</u>	<u>2018</u>	<u>2020</u>
Duke University					
On Campus Early Vote Site	Y	N	N	Y	Y
Registration Rate	79.8%	57.5%	67.0%	59.2%	79.0%
Voting Rate of Registered Students	67.7%	33.9%	82.1%	67.2%	89.0%
Voting Rate	54.0%	19.5%	55.0%	39.8%	70.0%
Early Vote Rate	69.9%	19.3%	70.5%	58.5%	34.0%
In-Person on Election Day Rate	15.7%	66.3%	15.1%	25.6%	4.0%
North Carolina Agriculture and Technical State University					
On Campus Early Vote Site	Y	N	Y	N	Y
Registration Rate	73.6%	70.1%	68.3%	72.7%	92.0%
Voting Rate of Registered Students	80.7%	30.2%	63.2%	39.9%	77.0%
Voting Rate	59.3%	21.2%	43.2%	29.0%	71.0%
Early Vote Rate	75.5%	27.4%	70.3%	42.1%	58.0%
In-Person on Election Day Rate	21.4%	69.0%	21.6%	46.7%	10.0%
North Carolina State University					
On Campus Early Vote Site	Y	N	Y	Y	Y
Registration Rate	74.7%	72.9%	71.7%	75.1%	92.0%
Voting Rate of Registered Students	70.2%	32.7%	75.7%	55.7%	87.0%
Voting Rate	52.4%	23.8%	54.3%	41.8%	81.0%
Early Vote Rate	55.8%	25.7%	55.7%	59.4%	51.0%
In-Person on Election Day Rate	30.3%	62.3%	29.5%	28.4%	11.0%
University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill					
On Campus Early Vote Site	N	N	N	N	N
Registration Rate	73.9%	69.6%	64.9%	72.4%	92.0%
Voting Rate of Registered Students	74.6%	38.3%	78.8%	65.4%	90.0%
Voting Rate	55.1%	26.6%	51.1%	47.4%	82.0%
Early Vote Rate	65.7%	33.8%	66.4%	58.8%	43.0%
In-Person on Election Day Rate	20.2%	51.6%	17.4%	24.9%	8.0%
University of North Carolina at Charlotte					
On Campus Early Vote Site	Y	N	Y	N	Y
Registration Rate	75.5%	72.0%	69.7%	73.0%	90.0%
Voting Rate of Registered Students	66.8%	25.4%	69.3%	45.8%	81.0%
Voting Rate	50.4%	18.3%	48.3%	33.4%	73.0%
Early Vote Rate	54.9%	28.5%	61.3%	49.5%	55.0%
In-Person on Election Day Rate	36.1%	65.4%	30.9%	42.9%	13.0%
Western Carolina University					
On Campus Early Vote Site	N	N	Y	Y	Y
Registration Rate	74.6%	70.4%	80.5%	71.7%	91.0%
Voting Rate of Registered Students	68.9%	24.9%	70.0%	42.9%	79.0%
Voting Rate	51.4%	17.5%	56.4%	30.8%	72.0%
Early Vote Rate	N/A	34.2%	N/A	59.9%	55.0%
In-Person on Election Day Rate	N/A	54.1%	N/A	30.0%	12.0%

Data Source: NSLVE Reports 2012-2020

Appendix B: Data Dictionary for NSLVE Data

Variable	Definition
Total student enrollment	The total number of students enrolled at the university
Total eligible voters	The total number of eligible voters enrolled at the university
Number of students who registered	The total number of students enrolled at the university who were registered to vote
Number of students who voted	The total number of students enrolled at the university who voted in a particular election
Registration rate	The percent of voting-eligible students who registered to vote
Voting rate of registered students	The percent of registered students who voted. Also referred to as yield rate.
Voting rate	The percentage of eligible students who voted. Also, the product of the registration and yield rates.
Early vote number	The number of students who utilized the early voting method.
Early vote rate	The percentage of students who utilized the early voting method.
In-person on election day number	The number of students who voted on Election Day.
In person on Election Day rate	The percentage of students who voted on Election Day.

Appendix C: Interview Questions for Election Directors

- How long have you been working as the Elections Director for ____ county? (Did you work at the ____ county election office before taking this current role? OR where did you work before taking this current role?)
 - **Follow Up:** Have you personally overseen any of the proceedings to determine if **COLLEGE** should be included on the list of early voting locations?
- Tell me about the process to designate a campus as an early voting site, from the first step all the way through to Election Day.
- What considerations (or factors) does the Board of Elections and your team have in mind when deciding where to distribute early voting locations throughout the county?
- Please describe the nature of your office's relationship with the University.
- Academic research suggests that people who participate in the political process in their first years of eligibility are more likely to become lifelong voters than those who do not vote. Therefore, voting is a habit. Tell me about any student-specific resources or information your office provides to help young people in ____ County navigate the election process for what may be the first time.
- Senator Elizabeth Warren and Representative Nikema Williams have introduced the Youth Voting Rights Act. Alongside many other provisions that work to expand young people's access to the ballot, the bill would require institutions of higher education to have on-campus polling places. What benefits and/or challenges would your county face if this proposal was enacted?

These next few questions are about your observations when it comes to trends you are likely to have observed in voting method and timeline.

- When do you notice the majority of college-aged voters casting their ballots? Does it seem like they consistently use one voting method — absentee, early, election day — more than any other method?
- What age demographic uses same-day registration most frequently? From your perspective and the data, you have access to.

For Counties Where the College Has an On-Campus Early Voting Site: (All Others)

- Just to confirm the timeline, did you work elections in ____ county before ____ university got the early voting site?
 - IF YES: To what extent did you notice a change in voter activity among young voters once an on-campus early voting site was introduced?
 - Was that trend reflected in the data as well?
 - IF NO: To what extent did your co-workers or predecessors notice a change in voter activity among young voters once an on-campus early voting site was introduced?
- **IF SITE IS ONLY IN PRESIDENTIAL YEARS:** According to my records, early voting is only offered on campus in presidential election cycles, not midterm or municipal years. Do you notice a difference in youth political engagement in elections with and without early voting sites on campus?
 - Do you wish you had an early voting site for the students during a midterm year?

For Counties where the College does NOT have an On-Campus Early Voting Site: (UNC)

- Why is there not an early voting site on UNC's campus?

- Has the university asked for one, and it was not granted? Why?
- Do you think the lack of an on-campus precinct makes it harder for young college students to vote? Does this decrease possible turnout? To what extent?
- My records show that in 2008/2010 year, UNC had an early voting site on-campus, but no longer has one. What caused this change?
- Do you believe students' right/ability to vote is inhibited because there is not a voting location on campus?

Before we wrap up, I just have one final two-part question ...

- Please describe your understanding of the **role of a county election office** in using existing legal pathways to help reduce the **burden** of voting for college-aged voters.
 - What role do you believe the university has in helping students navigate the election process?

Appendix D: Interview Questions for University Officials

- How long have you been at ____ University and in your current role?
 - What does your job entail, particularly regarding civic and voter engagement?
- Briefly tell me about the process to designate your campus as an early voting site. *What year, who led the push, what type of activism was involved...*
 - What challenges arose in the process of securing an early voting site? And how did the university overcome them?
 - ***Alternate Wording:*** What did it take to secure an early voting site on your campus?
 - ***FOR UNC:*** Why does your campus not have an early voting site?
- Please describe the nature of your office's relationship with the Board of Elections.
 - ***Alternate Wording:*** How do you collaborate with the NAME County Board of Elections to secure an on-campus voting site and prepare for each election?
- Academic research suggests that people who participate in the political process in their first years of eligibility are more likely to become lifelong voters than those who do not vote. Therefore, voting is a habit. What programming does your administration conduct to help students alleviate institutional barriers to voting?
- Senator Elizabeth Warren and Representative Nikema Williams have introduced the Youth Voting Rights Act. Alongside many other provisions that work to expand young people's access to the ballot, the bill would require institutions of higher education to have on-campus polling places. What benefits and/or challenges would your university face if this proposal were enacted?
 - This law is specifically referring to Election Day precincts, but we can also imagine how it would play out under early voting.
- In 2016, the Executive Director of the North Carolina Republican Party wrote that "no group of people are entitled to their own early voting site, including college students, who already have more voting options than most other citizens." What is your reaction to this statement?

For Counties Where the College Has an On-Campus Early Voting Site: (All EXCEPT UNC)

- Just to confirm the timeline, did you work at the university before the early voting site was introduced?
 - **IF YES:** To what extent did you notice a change in voter activity among young voters once an on-campus early voting site was introduced?
 - Was that trend reflected in the data as well?
 - **IF NO:** To what extent did your co-workers or predecessors notice a change in voter activity among young voters once an on-campus early voting site was introduced?
- **IF SITE IS ONLY IN PRESIDENTIAL YEARS (NC A&T, UNCC):** According to my records, early voting is only offered on campus in presidential election cycles, not midterm or municipal years. Do you notice a difference in student political engagement in elections with and without early voting sites on campus?
 - Tell me what that's like -- what do you notice.
 - Do you wish you had an early voting site for the students during a midterm year?

- Is this something your office is working towards in the future?

University Specific Questions

- **For North Carolina A&T:**
 - In the Voter Engagement 2.2 Report, you all added securing an early vote site on-campus for **every election** to your list of long-term goals. Does this include municipal/local elections or are you all just referring to federal elections? Have you all seen any progress to this goal, and what steps are you taking to reach it?
- **For Duke University:**
 - What unique challenges or opportunities does Duke face as a private institution?
- **For Western Carolina University:**
 - What unique challenges do you see WCU and its students facing as a factor of its location in a rural part of Western North Carolina?
- **For NC State:**
 - In NC State's 2020 Action Plan with the Campus Democracy Challenge one of your goals was to host an early voting site and reach a 60% voting rate. According to the NSLVE data, the voting rate at NC State was 81% in this election. We know there were several confounding variables associated with higher turnout in the 2020 election, but what programming from your office do you think helped contribute to this success?
- **For UNC CHARLOTTE:**
 - I read in the 2022 Democracy Experience Voter Engagement Plan that the Office of Constituent Relations advocates for on-campus early voting during midterm and presidential elections. And if you all are not "awarded" a site you work with Athletics and Parking Services to arrange free shuttle transportation to the early voting sites. How many students, faculty and staff are making use of this resource?
- **For UNC Chapel Hill:**
 - I read in the All in Democracy Challenge plan you all wanted to have a "wellness" day on election day or during early voting, how did that pan out?
 - Have students requested an early voting site on campus? What format has this activism taken?
 - My records show that in 2008/2010 year, UNC had an early voting site on campus, but no longer has one. What caused this change?
 - Rachel Raper at the Board of Elections told me that you all tried to find a site on campus to put an early voting site but could not find a space that met all of the expectations. Can you tell me a little more about those deliberations?
 - **Do you think the lack of an on-campus precinct makes it harder for young college students to vote? Does this decrease possible turnout? To what extent?**

FINAL QUESTIONS

RAPID FIRE QUESTION: What is your top priority regarding student voter engagement as your office prepares for the 2024 presidential election cycle?

Before we wrap up, I just have **one final two-part question ...**

- Please describe your understanding of the **role of the university** in using existing legal pathways to help reduce the **burden** of voting for college-aged voters.
- What role do you believe the **county election office** has in helping students navigate the election process?

Appendix E: Student Early Voting Experience Survey

Introduction Student Early Voting Experience Survey

Thank you for taking the time to participate in the "Student Early Voting Experience Survey." Your perspective is crucial in understanding the experiences of college students as it relates to democratic engagement on our college campuses.

Key Information

Purpose of the Survey: You are invited to take part in a research study conducted by Kathryn Thomas, an undergraduate student studying public policy at Duke University, and her advisor, Suzanne Katzenstein. The purpose of the study is to examine college student's experiences and perceptions about on-campus early voting.

Participation Request: Participation in the study involves completing a survey that will ask you questions about yourself, how you see yourself politically as a voter, and your experience voting in past elections.

Survey Duration: The total time for completing the survey should not exceed 10 minutes.

Confidentiality: If you choose to participate, the data you provide will not be associated with your name or any other identifying information. Collected data will not be made public or used for future research purposes. Survey data will be stored on the Qualtrics website.

Risks and Benefits: The research will not benefit you personally. We know of no risks resulting from participating in the study.

Voluntary Participation and Withdrawal:

Your participation is voluntary. You may withdraw at any time, and you may choose not to answer any question.

Compensation: By participating and fully completing the survey — including passing attention checks — you will be entered in a lottery to win one of 25 \$10 Amazon gift cards. Winners will be chosen at random when the survey closes. The chance of winning a prize is approximately 1 in 8. Winners will be notified immediately by email and provided with information on how to receive the prize. Emails will be collected in a separate survey form after completion of the survey to protect the confidentiality of your responses.

Instructions: *Please read each question carefully and provide your honest feedback based on your experiences voting as a college student.*

Let's Begin: If you are interested in taking part in this survey, please click to the next screen.

If you have any questions about me or the research, feel free to email me now at kathryn.thomas@duke.edu. My faculty advisor is Suzanne Katzenstein, and she can be reached at sk272@duke.edu if you have additional questions. If you have questions about your rights as a research subject, contact Duke University's Institutional Review Board at campusirb@duke.edu or at 919-684-3030. If contacting the IRB, please reference protocol ID#2023-0459.

End of Block: Introduction

Start of Block: Section 1 + 2: Screening + Demographics

Before we dive into your voting experience, we would appreciate your assistance in providing some essential background information. Please take a moment to answer the following questions to help us better understand the demographics of survey participants.

Q1 What college do you attend?

- Duke University
- North Carolina Agricultural & Technical State University
- North Carolina State University
- University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill
- University of North Carolina at Charlotte
- Western Carolina University
- Other (Please specify)

Q2 What year do you expect to graduate with your bachelor's degree?

- 2023
- 2024
- 2025
- 2026
- 2027
- Other (Please specify)

Q3 What year were you born?

▼ 1995 ... 2006

Q4 What is your primary field of study?

- Social Sciences
- Natural Sciences
- Arts & Humanities
- Engineering
- Other (please specify)

Q5 Please select your race.

- Asian
- Black or African American
- White
- Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander
- Two or More Races
- Undesignated
- Other (Please Specify)

Q6 Please select your ethnicity.

- Not Hispanic/Latino
- Hispanic/Latino

Q7 Are you an eligible voter in the United States at the time you are taking this survey (both above the age of 18 and a U.S. Citizen)?

- Yes
- No

Skip To: End of Survey If Are you an eligible voter in the United States at the time you are taking this survey (both above... = No

End of Block: Section 1 + 2: Screening + Demographics

Start of Block: Section 3: Political Identity

Q8 When it comes to registering to vote, some students register while others may be too young or have not gotten around to it yet.

What about you, are you registered to vote in the United States?

- Yes
- No

Q9 Some people are very interested in politics, while others cannot stand politics. Would you describe yourself as ...

- Not interested in politics at all
- Not that interested in politics
- Somewhat interested in politics
- Very interested in politics

Q10 How often do you consume political news or information?

- Almost never
- A few times a month
- A few times a week
- Almost every day

Q11 Have you participated in any of these activities since 2020? Please select all that apply.

- Attended a political event or rally
- Donated to a campaign or candidate
- Volunteered for a political campaign
- Been a member of an on-campus political group
- Supported a voter registration drive
- None

Q12 In politics today, do you consider yourself a Republican, Democrat, Independent, or something else?

- Republican
- Democrat
- Independent
- Something else

Q13 Are you registered to vote at a permanent home address or a college (on- or off-campus) address?

- College address (on- or off-campus)
- Home address in North Carolina
- Home address in a state other than North Carolina
- Other (please specify)

Display This Question:

If When it comes to registering to vote, some students register while others may be too young or hav... = No

Q14 Do you plan to register to vote before the next federal election in 2024?

- Yes
- No

End of Block: Section 3: Political Identity

Start of Block: Section 5: Perspective on Early Voting and Voting Obstacles as a College Student

Q15 How easy or difficult do you think it is for college students like you to vote?

- Very easy
 - Somewhat easy
 - Neither easy or difficult
 - Somewhat difficult
 - Very difficult
-

Q16 How do you prefer to vote?

- I prefer to vote in person on Election Day
 - I prefer to vote during the early voting period
 - I prefer to vote by mail or absentee
 - I do not have a preference about voting method; I pick what is most convenient at the time
 - I do not prefer to vote
-



Q17 Select all the factors that are important to you when deciding where, when, and how to cast your ballot. Please select all that apply.

- The time it takes to travel to the voting location
 - Whether or not you have to leave campus
 - If you have to re-register to vote
 - Length of line at the voting location
 - Convenience of accessing the voting location
 - If you feel safe at the voting location
 - If you could vote on any day of the week, including on the weekend
 - Other (Please specify)
-



Q18 Please read and rate the degree to which you disagree or agree with each of the following statements.

Scale: Strongly disagree, Somewhat disagree, Neither disagree or agree, somewhat agree, strongly agree

Statements:

- It is important for me to vote in a federal election.
 - It is important for me to vote in a local election.
 - Voting rights are an important part of American values.
 - It should be as easy as possible to vote as a college student in America.
 - My college or university has a responsibility to make it as easy as possible to vote.
 - My county government has a responsibility to alleviate challenges students face when voting.
 - My college should always have an on-campus early voting location.
-

Q19 For the most recent federal election (the midterm elections in November 2022), did your campus have an early voting location on campus?

- Yes, it did have an early voting location on campus
 - No, it did not have an early voting location on campus
 - I'm not sure
 - I was not a student during the 2022 election
-

Q20 In what year was the last presidential election? This question is to check your attention for entry into the incentive lottery, please select "2020."

- 2022
- 2021
- 2020
- 2019

End of Block: Section 5: Perspective on Early Voting and Voting Obstacles as a College Student

Start of Block: Section 4: Past Election History

Q21 Please select all federal elections you have voted in.

If you haven't voted in a federal election before (because you were too young, hadn't had a chance to register, or for any other reason), please select, "I have not voted in a federal election."

- November 2022 Midterm Election
- November 2020 Presidential Election
- I have not voted in a federal election

End of Block: Section 4: Past Election History

Start of Block: Section 4D: Past Election History 2020

Q22 What voting method did you use during the **2020 presidential election?**

- Absentee-By-Mail
- Early In Person
- In Person on Election Day
- I don't remember
- Other (Please specify)

Display This Question:

If What voting method did you use during the 2020 presidential election? = Early In Person

Q23 Did you vote at an early voting location **on your college campus in 2020?**

- Yes
- No
- I don't remember

Display This Question:

If What voting method did you use during the 2020 presidential election? = Early In Person

Q24 How did the on-campus early voting site affect your experience voting in **2020?**

- It made it much easier to vote
- It made it a little bit easier to vote
- It made no difference
- It made it a little bit harder to vote
- It made it much harder to vote
- I did not vote on my campus in 2020

Display This Question:

If What voting method did you use during the 2020 presidential election? = Early In Person

Q25 What method of transportation did you use to get to the early voting location in **2020?**

- Walked
- Car
- Personal transportation (such as a bike or scooter)
- University transportation
- Public transportation
- Ride-share (ex. Uber or Lyft)
- Other (Please specify)

Display This Question:

If What voting method did you use during the 2020 presidential election? = Early In Person

Q26 Did the early voting location on campus in **2020** influence any of the following? Please select all that apply.

- Your decision about whether to vote at all
- Your decision about what voting method (ex. vote-by-mail or in person) to use to vote
- Your decision about when to vote
- Your decision about where to vote
- I did not vote at an on-campus early voting location

Display This Question:

If What voting method did you use during the 2020 presidential election? = Early In Person

Q27 How satisfied were you with the early voting process on your college campus during the **2020 presidential election**?

- Very dissatisfied
- Dissatisfied
- Neither dissatisfied or satisfied
- Satisfied
- Very satisfied
- I did not vote at an on-campus early voting location

Display This Question:

If What voting method did you use during the 2020 presidential election? = Early In Person

Q28 After your experience voting in the **2020 presidential election**, if given the opportunity,

would you consider voting early and in person on your college campus again?

- Yes
- No
- I'm not sure
- I did not vote at an on-campus early voting location

Display This Question:

If What voting method did you use during the 2020 presidential election? = Early In Person

Q29 If on-campus early voting had not been an option, would you have traveled off-campus to vote in **2020**?

- Yes
- No
- I'm not sure
- I did not vote at an on-campus early voting location

Display This Question:

If What voting method did you use during the 2020 presidential election? != Early In Person

Q30 You previously responded that you did not vote on your college campus, so how did you cast your ballot in **2020**?

- At another voting site in the county in which you attend school
- In person at a home precinct
- By mail in your home precinct
- By mail at your college precinct
- Other (Please specify)

End of Block: Section 4D: Past Election History 2020

Start of Block: Section 4B: Past Election History 2022

Q31 What voting method did you use during the **2022 midterm elections?**

- Absentee-By-Mail
- Early In Person
- In Person on Election Day
- I don't remember
- Other (Fill in the Blank)

Display This Question:

If What voting method did you use during the 2022 midterm elections? = Early In Person

Q32 Did you vote at an early voting location **on your college campus in 2022?**

- Yes
- No
- I don't remember

Display This Question:

If What voting method did you use during the 2022 midterm elections? = Early In Person

Q33 How did the on-campus early voting site affect your experience voting in **2022?**

- It made it much easier to vote
- It made it a little bit easier to vote
- It made no difference
- It made it a little bit harder to vote
- It made it much harder to vote
- I did not vote at an on-campus early voting location

Display This Question:

If What voting method did you use during the 2022 midterm elections? = Early In Person

Q34 What method of transportation did you use to get to the early voting location in **2022?**

- Walked
- Car
- Personal transportation (such as a bike or scooter)
- University transportation
- Public transportation
- Ride-share (ex. Uber or Lyft)
- Other (Please specify)

Display This Question:

If What voting method did you use during the 2022 midterm elections? = Early In Person

Q35 Did the early voting location on campus in **2022** influence any of the following? Please select all that apply.

- Your decision about whether to vote at all
- Your decision about what voting method (ex. vote-by-mail or in person) to use to vote
- Your decision about when to vote
- Your decision about where to vote
- I did not vote at an on-campus early voting location

Display This Question:

If What voting method did you use during the 2022 midterm elections? = Early In Person

Q36 How satisfied were you with the early voting process on your college campus during the **2022 midterm elections**?

- Very dissatisfied
- Dissatisfied
- Neither dissatisfied or satisfied
- Satisfied
- Very satisfied
- I did not vote at an on-campus early voting location

Display This Question:

If What voting method did you use during the 2022 midterm elections? = Early In Person

Q37 After your experience voting in the **2022 midterm elections**, if given the opportunity, would you consider voting early and in person on your college campus again?

- Yes
- No
- I'm not sure
- I did not vote at an on-campus early voting location

Display This Question:

If What voting method did you use during the 2022 midterm elections? = Early In Person

Q38 If on-campus early voting had not been an option, would you have traveled off-campus to vote in **2022**?

- Yes
 - No
 - I'm not sure
 - I did not vote at an on-campus early voting location
-

Display This Question:

If What voting method did you use during the 2022 midterm elections? != Early In Person

Q39 You previously responded that you did not vote on your college campus, so how did you cast your ballot in **2022**?

- At another voting site in the county in which you attend school
- In person at a home precinct
- By mail in your home precinct
- By mail at your college precinct
- Other (Please specify)

End of Block: Section 4B: Past Election History 2022

Start of Block: Interlude

Q40 Almost done! We just have a one more set of questions about your plans to vote in future elections.

End of Block: Interlude

Start of Block: Section 6: Plans to Vote in Future Elections & Future Resources

Q41 In November 2024, the next presidential election will be held. How likely are you to vote in the general election?

- Very likely
 - Somewhat likely
 - Neither likely or unlikely
 - Somewhat unlikely
 - Very unlikely
-

Q42 If you plan to vote in 2024, what method do you anticipate using?

- In person on Election Day
- In person during early voting
- By mail or absentee ballot
- Not sure yet
- I do not intend on voting in 2024
- Other (please specify)



Q43 Which of the following factors would make you **more likely to consider voting early on your college campus** in a future election? Please select your top five responses.

- Early voting is available during the weekend, and you cannot make it to a polling location during the week
- The early voting site is closer to where you live than the Election Day precinct
- A professor tells you about early voting in class
- University administrators email you with information about how to register and vote early on campus
- You pass the early voting site while walking to class or another activity on campus
- The hours (regardless of day) for early voting work better with your schedule
- The line is generally shorter during early voting
- You voted early before and had a pleasant experience
- You notice many of your peers are also voting early
- You receive a special sticker for voting early
- You can utilize same-day registration during early voting
- Other (please specify)

Q44 What is the farthest (in minutes) you would travel to cast your ballot in a presidential election?

0 10 20 30 40 50 60 70 80 90 100

Distance
(in
minutes)
you would
travel to
vote in a
presidential
election
()



Q45 If your campus had an early voting site on-campus in the next election, how likely would you be to use vote at the on-campus location?

For the purposes of this question, please assume that you will still be living on or near your college campus during the 2024 presidential election.

- Very likely
- Somewhat likely
- Neither likely or unlikely
- Somewhat unlikely
- Very unlikely

End of Block: Section 6: Plans to Vote in Future Elections & Future Resources

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