The Democrats' Countrypolitan Problem in North Carolina: Progressive Challenge and Opportunity

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Summary

For the last few decades North Carolina has represented a political puzzle to national commentators, especially those with a progressive bent. Progressive perplexity has mounted after Joe Biden's failure to carry North Carolina in 2020. It added a 10th loss to the string of Democratic presidential defeats in the state interrupted only by Barack Obama's 2008 victory.

Instead of North Carolina, Georgia turned out to be the other southern state joining Virginia in the 2020 Democratic winner's circle. Much to the chagrin of North Carolina Democrats, the national media hailed the Peach, not the Tar Heel, state as crucial to Biden's victory.[1]

Inquiring progressive minds can't help but ask: Why has North Carolina remained stuck on the cusp of turning into a solidly blue state? Or in more formal political science parlance: Why hasn't a durable Democratic majority emerged in North Carolina? Or to borrow a famous phrase from the annals of progressive complaint: What's the matter with North Carolina?[2]

Some analysts see the presence of an ideologically driven "urban-rural divide" as explaining North Carolina politics today. It is true that Biden in 2020 won and mainly gained impressive majorities in 10 of the 11 counties with the state's biggest cities. And Trump won strong majorities in most of the state's 50 nonmetropolitan (rural and small-town) counties.

Yet the analysis here identifies the state's "Countrypolitan" counties as the principal political problem for North Carolina Democrats in the 2020 election.[3] North Carolina's Countrypolitan counties are the 28 outlying[4] counties across the state in the same "metropolitan statistical areas" (MSAs) with bigger-city counties. According to the federal Office of Management and Budget (OMB), these 28 outlying counties belong in such metropolitan areas due to their significant economic (job commuting) ties with neighboring big-city counties. At the same time, these counties retain significant rural and/or small-town legacies. The label "Countrypolitan" is designed to capture their hybrid status.[5]

Since fewer than 75,000 votes separated Biden from Trump in NC, precincts from across the state were crucial. And Trump's performance uptick in North Carolina's non-metro counties certainly contributed to his victory. ***But the state's 28 Countrypolitan MSA counties represented Trump's strongest base of percentage support (63%) and Biden's lowest percentage (36%).[6] These Countrypolitan MSA counties also provided Trump with his largest number of votes (934,667) in the state.*** *Trump's Countrypolitan total significantly exceeded his total number of votes in all of North Carolina's 50 nonmetro counties (616,299).*

In terms of median income and percentage of college graduates, North Carolina's Countrypolitan counties mainly fall in a mid-range status between big-city counties and nonmetro counties. But the White population shares in North Carolina's 28 Countrypolitan counties constitute the largest in the state. Contrary to stereotypical assumptions, the state's 50 non-metropolitan counties have comparatively more racial diversity.[7]

Our analysis in this document comes in three sections.

Section 1 below provides a reworking of the rural-urban divide narrative for North Carolina. [8] *The chart in this section identifies 5 county categories developed from OMB's metropolitan/nonmetropolitan framework. The chart highlights the crucial political role that North Carolina's 28 Countrypolitan counties played in Trump's 2020 (as well as 2016) statewide win.*

As Section 2 demonstrates, the Countrypolitan problem for North Carolina Democrats was especially clear in the state's biggest MSA of Charlotte.[9] *While Biden rolled out of Charlotte/Mecklenburg with a 35-point lead, Trump won 6 – and gained large double-digit red margins in 5 – of the 7 Countrypolitan counties around Charlotte. As a result, Biden won North Carolina's biggest MSA by less than 4 points (and Clinton lost the MSA in 2016).*[10]

The contrast with the biggest metros in Virginia and Georgia is striking. Strong majorities for Biden throughout most of the outlying Northern Virginia counties (in the Washington DC MSA) set the pace for his 10-point statewide victory. Similar impressive majorities in the immediately MSA outlying counties around Atlanta were crucial in Biden's exceedingly narrow statewide victory there.

As the close loss of Terry McAuliffe in the 2021 gubernatorial race demonstrates, the electoral fortunes of Democrats even in Virginia are not immune to significant slippage. But Virginia's pattern in presidential and other elections through 2020 established a clear metropolitan-led path for repeated Democratic victories. The 2020 election also witnessed the blazing of an electorally narrow metropolitan-led path in Georgia. But due to the continuing Republican-red bent of the state's 28 outlying Countrypolitan counties, a metropolitan-led path for Biden remained elusive for North Carolina Democrats in 2020.

Section 3 explores whether North Carolina's Countrypolitan counties are lost causes for Democrats in the absence of more significant demographic change. Most of these counties do not currently exhibit the racial diversity, college graduation percentages, or higher median incomes found in Northern Virginia or the counties immediately outlying Atlanta. North Carolina's Countrypolitan problem could thus continue to dampen progressive hopes for turning the state blue.

But since Biden only lost North Carolina by 1.3%, his campaign would have turned the state blue by simply losing somewhat less in Countrypolitan counties. Democrats would then have rolled up bigger overall margins throughout metropolitan North Carolina.

One strategy for North Carolina Democrats to "lose less"[11] in Countrypolitan counties involves the targeting of potentially swing voters who are more affluent, more college-educated, and predominately White. The precincts closest to Charlotte/Mecklenburg in western Union County, for example, are home to such voters.

But another, more progressive opportunity may exist for North Carolina Democrats. They could focus on expanding existing but overlooked pockets of local Democratic support in certain town centers – especially county seats – within otherwise solid red Countrypolitan counties. Such blue outposts now have or recently had mayors who are registered Democrats or Democratic city council majorities or both.

Examples of such blue outposts include the racially diverse county seats of Monroe in Union County and Gastonia in Gaston County (both in Charlotte's MSA), and Reidsville in Rockingham County (Greensboro MSA). Hendersonville in Henderson County (Asheville MSA) is another kind of blue county seat in a red Countrypolitan county; it features a percentage of college graduates above the state average.

This strategy of focusing on local blue-ish Democratic outposts could be extended beyond Countrypolitan counties to other red-Republican counties across the state. Examples in smaller-city MSAs include the county seats of Morganton (Burke County), New Bern (Craven County), and Goldsboro (Wayne County) plus the town of Burlington (Alamance County). Moreover, examples in red non-metro counties include Sanford (Lee County) and Beaufort (Carteret County), and Albemarle (Stanly County).

So, while North Carolina's bigger-city counties have come close to establishing a progressive electoral majority in the state, more attention to blue-ish outposts in Countrypolitan as well as other red counties could strengthen Democrats' chances in presidential and other statewide elections.

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Section 1: Analysis of North Carolina 2020 presidential election results in five county categories

The Big Takeaway

NC's 28 Countrypolitan counties constituted Trump's strongest base of support (63%), his biggest vote total (934,667), and Biden's smallest vote percentage (36%).

Other Notes

- Despite losing badly in Biden's 10 bigger-city counties (63-35%), Trump gained his second biggest vote total from these counties (875,158) due to their sizable statewide vote share (44.8%).
- Trump received more votes in Biden's 10 bigger-city counties (874,158) than in all 50 nonmetropolitan counties (616,299).

Chart 1: NC 2020 Results

County Type	Trump	Biden	Share of Statewide Vote
A. Biden's 10 Bigger-City Metropolitan/MSA Counties	**35%** 875,158 (36%)	**63%** 1,560,218 (59%)	**44.8%** (45%)
B. 28 Outlying "Countrypolitan" Counties in Bigger-City (+83,000 pop.) MSAs	**63%** 934,667 (63%)	**36%** 527,336 (33%)	**26.8%** (25.8%)
C. 12 Smaller-City MSA Counties	**61%** 332,651 (60%)	**38%** 208,597 (37%)	**9.9%** (10%)
Metropolitan NC Subtotal	**48%** 2,142,476 (48%)	**51%** 2,296,151 (48%)	**81.6%** (80.8%)
D. 25 Micropolitan/Small-Town Counties	**60%** 429,813 (58%)	**39%** 274,492 (38%)	**12.9%** (13.4%)
E. 25 Most Rural Counties	**62%** 186,486 (59%)	**38%** 113,649 (39%)	**5.5%** (5.8%)
Nonmetropolitan NC Subtotal	**61%** 616,299 (58%)	**38%** 388,141 (38%)	**18.4%** (19.2%)
100 Counties Total	**49.93%** 2,758,775	**48.59%** 2,684,292	**100%**

(Notes*:* 2016 percentages in parentheses. See Appendix A for county results in each category.)

10 Summary Points

1. Biden's 10 bigger-city counties were Wake (Raleigh), Mecklenburg (Charlotte), Guilford (Greensboro and High Point), Forsyth (Winston-Salem), Durham, Orange (Chapel Hill-Carrboro), Cumberland (Fayetteville), New Hanover (Wilmington), Pitt (Greenville), and Buncombe (Asheville).[12] Biden won these 10 bigger-city counties by a decisive 63-35% margin.[13]

Yet because these 10 big-city counties contain such a sizeable share of the statewide vote (44.8%), Trump still received his second-largest number of votes (875,158) from them – more than he received in the state's 50 nonmetropolitan counties (616,299).

2. NC's 28 Countrypolitan counties provided Trump with his strongest percentage base of support (63%) as well as largest vote total (934,667). Moreover, Biden received his lowest percentage (36%) in Countrypolitan counties. These are NC's outlying counties in bigger-city MSAs. With significant economic (job commuting) ties to big-city counties, these counties have developed varying levels of "metropolitan" and even "mini-urban" elements or influences. At the same time, these counties retain significant "rural" and/or "small-town" legacies.

NC's 28 outlying Countrypolitan counties are Cabarrus, Union, Gaston, Iredell, Rowan, and Lincoln, and Anson (Charlotte MSA), Johnston and Franklin (Raleigh MSA), Randolph and Rockingham (Greensboro MSA), Davidson, Davie, Stokes, and Yadkin (Winston-Salem MSA), Chatham, Person, and Granville (Durham-Chapel Hill MSA), Henderson, Haywood, and Madison (Asheville MSA), Hoke and Harnett (Fayetteville MSA), Pender (Wilmington MSA), Brunswick (Myrtle Beach MSA), Gates, Currituck, and Camden (Virginia-Beach MSA).[14]

3. Trump received significantly more votes in these 28 Countrypolitan MSA counties (934,667) than he did in NC's 50 nonmetropolitan counties (616,299). And while statewide voter turnout increased by 16.5% from 2016, only the Countrypolitan counties experienced any increase in its percentage share from 2016 (26.8% up from 25.8%).

4. Trump won 25 of the state's 28 Countrypolitan counties – 20 of his victories exceeded 20 points, and 23 victories were in double digits. Trump's smallest victory (53%-46%) was in Granville County (Durham-Chapel Hill MSA). The county's 57.8% White population is below the 62.6% state average.[15] Trump also won Cabarrus County by nearly 10 points (54%-44%). On Cabarrus, see Section 3 of this document.

5. The state's 28 Countrypolitan counties are NC's most White counties.[16] The White population reaches above 70% in 19 Countrypolitan counties – and above 75% in 14 of them.

Only two Countrypolitan counties – Hoke in the Fayetteville MSA and Anson in Charlotte's MSA – have White percentages below 50%. Hoke and Anson represented two of Biden's three wins in the Countrypolitan county category.

Biden's only other win was Chatham County in the Durham-Chapel Hill MSA. Chatham has a White population percentage (72.1%) above the state average (62.6%). At the same time, however, Chatham is the Countrypolitan county with the highest percentage of college graduates (42.4%) and third highest median income level ($67,031).

6. NC's 25 most rural counties are mainly split between the eastern coastal plain (13 counties) and the western mountains (10 counties). Biden won 4 eastern counties (Hertford, Warren, Bertie, Washington) and Trump received less than 60% in 7 others (6 in the east). All 11 of these counties have majority or otherwise significant Black/Minority populations.[17]

While experiencing his biggest percentage uptick in these most-rural counties (from 59% in 2016 to 62% in 2020), Trump received only 186,486 total votes and gained a total lead of only 72,837 votes over Biden in these counties. Trump therefore gained an increased margin of only 16,798 votes from 2016. And the already small statewide vote share of these most rural counties slightly *decreased* in 2020 (from 5.8% in 2016 to 5.5%).

In contrast, the Countrypolitan counties provided Trump with 934,667 total votes and a margin of 407,331 total votes in 2020. That represented an increased margin for Trump of 33,989 votes from 2016. And the statewide vote share of the Countrypolitan counties slightly *increased* in 2020 (from 25.8% to 26.8%).

7. Trump experienced a similar uptick in the state's 25 small-town/micropolitan counties.[18] But Biden was also more competitive in these micropolitan counties than in the Countrypolitan counties.

Biden won 6 micropolitan counties (Halifax, Northampton, Pasquotank, Vance, Watauga, and Wilson), and Trump received less than 60% in 9 others. Of these 15 counties, 10 have majority or otherwise significant Black/Minority populations. Biden was also competitive in 3 counties with strong higher education connections: he won (53-45%) in the "university-county" of Watauga (Appalachian State), received 45% in Jackson (Western Carolina University), and received 41% in Transylvania County (with the college-town of Brevard).[19]

As in the case of its 25 most rural counties, the statewide vote share of NC's 25 micropolitan counties ticked downward from 2016 (from 13.4% to 12.9% in 2020). In the 2020 election, therefore, the already small share of the vote in NC's nonmetropolitan counties declined rather than increased. [20]

8. Standard commentary emphasizing the urban-rural divide misses Biden's more competitive performance in nonmetropolitan NC because it ignores or glosses over the racial diversity in a substantial number of those 50 counties.[21]

9. **The problem was NOT that Biden's *"urban"* support from these 10 bigger-city counties was too weak[22] or that Trump's *"rural"* support was too strong.[23]** Biden's support in his NC 10 bigger-city counties (63%) was stronger on a percentage basis than Trump's support in the state's 50 nonmetropolitan counties (61%). And Biden's number of votes in his 10 bigger-city counties (1,560,218) far outpaced Trump's votes in the state's 50 nonmetropolitan counties (616,299).

Some analysts may want to increase Trump's "rural/small town" amount by adding his vote total in NC's 12 MSA counties with smaller city centers.[24] Trump gained 61% (or 332,651 votes) of the total in these 12 MSA counties.[25] However, even after such a hypothetical expansion, Trump's total rural/small-town vote would only reach 948,950 and Biden's total from his 10 bigger-city counties (1,560,218) would still be larger. Moreover, Trump's total *metropolitan* vote from Biden's 10 big-city counties plus the 28 Countrypolitan MSA counties (1,809,825) would still nearly double such a hypothetically expanded rural/small-town vote.[26]

10. The problem was that Trump routed Biden in NC's 28 Countrypolitan counties (63-36%). Biden won the rest of NC by a 53.4%-45.1% margin (2,156,956 to 1,824,108).

Section 2: Comparing the "Big-Metro" vote in North Carolina, Georgia, and Virginia

The Big Takeaways

- By far the weakest "big-metro" link for Biden in the three states was Charlotte's MSA due to the strength of Trump's support in 6 of its 7 outlying Countrypolitan counties.
- Biden gained significant winning margins throughout Northern Virginia. And he did the same throughout most of the immediate outlying counties in the Atlanta area. But Biden ran into a red NC wall of outlying Countrypolitan counties in the Charlotte and Raleigh MSAs.

Chart 2: Presidential election comparison, 2016 and 2020

	Margin		Difference	Change in Vote Share	2016 Share	2020 Share
	2016	2020				
Georgia (16)	5.2 R	0.3 D	+5.5 D			
Atlanta	8.1 D	15.5 D	+7.4 D	+.03	58.4	59.1
North Carolina (15)	3.7 R	1.3 R	+2.4 D			
Charlotte	1.5 R	3.6 D	+5.1 D	+.08	20.1	20.9
Raleigh	12.0 D	17.3 D	+5.3 D	+.05	13.6	14.1
Virginia (13)	5.3 D	10.1 D	+4.8 D			
Northern Virginia	25.8 D	31.6 D	+5.8 D	+0.5	35.1	35.6
Richmond	9.0 D	14.2 D	+5.2 D	+0.1	16.3	16.4
Virginia Beach	9.1 D	15.2 D	+6.1 D	-0.3	19.1	18.8

Notes: R=Republican; D=Democratic. Excerpted from Damore, et al., "In 2020, The Largest Metro Areas Made the Difference for Democrats," *Brookings* (2/4/21).

10 Summary Points

1. The Charlotte MSA is the biggest metro in the state (pop. 2.226 million in NC).[27] Biden's 3.6% win there stands out as his weakest victory among "big metros" (MSAs with populations over one million) in the three states of North Carolina, Georgia, and Virginia.[28]

2. Biden's Charlotte MSA problem was **NOT** due to a weakness in his Charlotte city/Mecklenburg County vote. Biden won Mecklenburg by a 67-32% margin. Mecklenburg produced the largest numerical county lead for Biden in the state (198,896 votes).

3. But Trump overwhelmingly won 6 of 7 outlying Countrypolitan counties outside Mecklenburg: Cabarrus (54-45%), Union (61-37%), Gaston (63-35%), Iredell (65-33%), Rowan (67-31%), and Lincoln (72-26%). Biden's only win came in the small White minority county of

Anson by a 52-48% margin of 468 votes. (In 2016 Clinton won Anson by a 56-43% margin of 1,353 votes.)[29] Biden's small overall victory in the Charlotte MSA reflected an improvement in Democratic performance – Trump won the Charlotte MSA by 1.4% in 2016.

4. The state's other big MSA is the Raleigh MSA (pop. 1.39 million). Biden rolled out of Raleigh/Wake County with a 62-36% margin and a lead of 167,139 votes. The Countrypolitan diminishment of Biden's lead was not as severe because the Raleigh MSA has only two smaller outlying counties. But Trump gained impressive victories in both Johnston (61-37%) as well as Franklin (56-43%). Biden ended up winning the Raleigh MSA by a 57.7%-40.4% margin and 135,021 votes.

5. The Brookings data above show that Biden's 31.6-point victory in Northern Virginia far outpaced his 17.3-point win in the Raleigh MSA and his anemic 3.6-point win in the Charlotte MSA.

Biden's 17.3-point win in the Raleigh MSA however may appear to compare favorably with his 15.5-point win in the Atlanta MSA.[30] But that pairing is not a proportionate, apples-to-apples comparison in geographic or population terms. The massive 29-county Atlanta MSA represented 59.1% of the Georgia statewide vote. The Raleigh MSA constituted only 14.1% of the North Carolina vote. Combined with the Charlotte MSA's 21.1% of NC's statewide vote, these two big NC metros represent 35% of the statewide vote.

6. The more politically equivalent match with North Carolina's two big metros is the sub-metro region around Atlanta's Fulton County containing 10 immediately outlying counties which belong to the Atlanta Metropolitan Regional (AMR) planning organization. In that comparative frame (using the Brookings data for Northern Virginia), Biden's big-metro performance in the three states was as follows:

- *A **31.6-point victory in the 36% share** of the statewide vote from Northern Virginia;*[31]
- *A **27.6-point victory (63.1-35.6%) in the 48% share** of the Georgia vote from Atlanta/Fulton plus the 10 immediately outlying counties in the AMR sub-metro region;*
- *Only a **9-point victory (53.7-44.6%) in the 35% share** of the North Carolina statewide vote from the Charlotte and Raleigh MSAs.*

Some analysts see it as "a statistical fluke" in the federal OMB framework that the Durham-Chapel Hill area and the Raleigh area form separate MSAs rather than being part of a combined "Triangle MSA."[32] Creating such a Triangle MSA[33] would obviously enhance Biden's big-metro margin in NC. The smaller Durham-Chapel Hill MSA (pop. 644,367) indeed provided the strongest percentage margin for Biden among big-city MSAs (70-28%). It also gave him a bigger total vote margin (154,447) than the Raleigh MSA (135,021).

But even after adding in the Durham-Chapel Hill MSA, Biden's NC big-metro victory margin would still be less than half of his margin in Northern Virginia and just barely over half his margin in the immediate Atlanta metro sub-region. Biden's comparative performance would be as follows:

- *A **31.6-point victory in the 36% share** of the statewide vote from Northern Virginia;*
- *A **27.6-point victory (63.1-35.6%) in the 48% share** of the Georgia vote from Atlanta/Fulton plus the 10 immediately outlying counties in the AMR sub-metro region;*
- *A **14.3-point victory (56-42%) in the 42% share** of the North Carolina statewide vote from the Charlotte, Raleigh, **and Durham-Chapel Hill** MSAs.*

The big comparative difference was Biden's strength in Northern Virginia as well as the outlying AMR counties in Georgia versus his losses in 6 of the 7 Charlotte Countrypolitan MSA counties and both Raleigh Countrypolitan MSA counties.[34]

Biden won 7 of the 10 outlying AMR counties in the Georgia MSA – and 4 of them by 60% or more. He won 11 of Northern Virginia's 18 jurisdictions in the Washington DC MSA – including all 6 of the biggest jurisdictions (the counties of Fairfax, Prince William, Loudon, Arlington, Stafford, and the city of Alexandria). All but one of Biden's 11 victories ranged from a minimum of 24 to a maximum of 64 percentage points.

8. Thus while NC's outlying Countrypolitan counties in the Charlotte-Raleigh MSAs were key to *Trump's victory* in the state, the outlying MSA Counties in Northern Virginia and the Atlanta/AMR region were key to *Biden's victories* in those states:

- Without Northern Virginia, Trump wins the rest of the state – 1,430,550 (49.9%) to 1,383,570 (48.3%).[35]
- Without the 10 outlying Atlanta/AMR counties, Trump easily wins Georgia – 1,746,439 (55.9%) to 1,340,621 (42.9%).
- But without the 9 outlying "Countrypolitan" counties in the Charlotte-Raleigh MSAs, Biden wins North Carolina by over 100,000 votes – 2,409,245 (50.5%) versus 2,294,900 (48.1%).

9. On race and education, Northern Virginia and the outlying Atlanta/AMR counties in Georgia present striking demographic contrasts with the Countrypolitan counties of the Charlotte-Raleigh MSAs.[36]

Beyond the small near-Black majority (44.8%) county of Anson won by Biden, all the Charlotte and Raleigh MSA's Countrypolitan counties have White populations above the state average of 60.5%. Black residents represent less than a quarter of both these NC "big metro" populations. The Black population in Charlotte's MSA is 24.4% – which is just above the state average (22.2%). The Black population in the Raleigh MSA is a few points lower at 20.7%. NC's two big metros contain only around a third (38%) of the state's total non-White population.

Georgia's statewide Black population is 32.6% – over 10 points higher than in North Carolina (22.2%). The same 10-point difference exists in the Black share of the eligible voting populations (Georgia 32% versus NC 22%). Moreover, in contrast to NC's non-White percentage of 37.4%, Georgia's non-White percentage is near the 50% level (48%).

Almost two-thirds of GA's non-White population (63%) is concentrated in the Atlanta MSA. An estimated 60% of Georgia's eligible Black voting population live in the Atlanta MSA. In contrast, only 34% of NC's eligible Black voting population live in the Charlotte and Raleigh MSAs.[37]

Among Biden's 7 outlying Atlanta/AMR counties, 6 have non-White majority populations and the non-White percentage in the seventh (Cobb) is 48.9%. In the whole 29-county Atlanta MSA, Black residents represent 33.5% of the population and White residents constitute only a 47% plurality.

Virginia exhibits even more multi-racial diversity. Compared to NC, Virginia's statewide Black percentage (19%) is lower but the non-White percentage (38.7%) is higher. Similarly, while Northern Virginia's Black percentage is even lower (12.1%), its non-White percentage is higher (46%). Only 1 of Biden's 12 Northern Virginia jurisdictions have a non-White population below 40% (Arlington County 38.6%).

But the larger contrast with Northern Virginia involves the percentage of college graduates. All but two of the 9 Countrypolitan counties in the Charlotte-Raleigh MSAs have percentages of college graduates *below* NC's statewide average (31.3%). All 11 pro-Biden jurisdictions in Northern Virginia have percentages of college graduates *above* the statewide average (38.8%).

While NC and Georgia have the same statewide college-graduate average of 31.3%, the 3 biggest outlying Atlanta/AMR counties (Dekalb, Cobb, Gwinnet) have college-graduate percentages *above* the statewide Georgia average and were deep-blue Biden counties.

The contrast on median income levels is not as striking. Most of the 8 outlying pro-Trump counties in the Charlotte-Raleigh MSAs have median incomes *above* or near the statewide average ($54,602). Only 2 counties fall below $50,000 (Rowan $48,667, and Anson $40,213). All but one of the 7 pro-Biden outlying Atlanta/AMR counties have median incomes above the Georgia average ($58,700). All 11 pro-Biden Northern Virginia counties have median incomes above the state average ($74,222).

10. Based on the mixed NC demographic data, the Brookings team of authors in the recent *Blue Metros, Red States* volume characterized the Charlotte-Raleigh MSAs as two of the most ***"semi-countrified*** urban complexes in the nation."[38]

Section 3: Without more demographic change, are NC's above-average White Countrypolitan counties lost causes for Democrats?

1.The need to "lose less" in NC's Countrypolitan counties? The Bitzer analysis (political scientist Michael Bitzer, Catawba College)

- "[Prof.] Bitzer says the threshold to watch in Union County is roughly 60 percent: If Republicans win more than that percentage of the vote, it's going to be a good election for them up and down the ballot. But if Democrats can eat into that margin, it bodes well for the party…."
  – Quoted in Graham, "Trump's Fate Rests on Countrypolitan Counties," *Atlantic* (10/26/20)

- "In the [Charlotte MSA's] surrounding suburban counties [like Union] … what's the Republican margin of victory? Is it 20 points? Is it 15 points?" Bitzer said. "If it gets below 20, there's something … dynamic going on."
  – Quoted in Woolverton, "Trump Needs North Carolina in 2020 Election, But the Swing State Is a Toss-Up," *Fayetteville Observer/USA Today* (10/12/20)

2. Does the 2020 Vote in Cabarrus County Signal a Better Countrypolitan Future for NC Democrats?

- In 2020, Trump won Cabarrus by a 9-point margin (54-45%).
- Trump won Cabarrus by double that margin in 2016 (20 points, or 58-38%).[39]

3. Or does the example suggest that other Trump Countrypolitan counties in the Charlotte MSA and across the state first need to become more racially diverse, more "urban," and more college-educated?[40]

- *Cabarrus is comparatively less White.* Its White population (63.4%) is now just above the statewide average (62.6%*).* In Charlotte's MSA, the White majorities throughout the other five Trump Countrypolitan counties exceed 71%. The only other Trump Countrypolitan counties with White percentages below 70% are Johnston (67%) and Franklin (63%) in the Raleigh MSA, Person (66%) and Granville (58%) in Durham-Chapel Hill MSA, Harnett (61%) in the Fayetteville MSA, and Gates (64%) in the Virginia Beach MSA.
- *Cabarrus has been experiencing significant population growth.* It had the third highest growth rate (26.8%) among Countrypolitan counties from 2010-2020. Over half (15) of NC's 28 Countrypolitan counties registered growth rates *below* the state average (9.5%) during this period. While the relationship between population growth and Countrypolitan voting patterns is a loose one, most higher growth NC Countrypolitan counties registered support levels of less than 70% for Trump.[41]

- *Cabarrus is more "urban."* Its county seat of Concord has 105,240 people. Concord is bigger than the Democratic strongholds of Asheville (94,589) and Greenville (87,521).[42] Concord is the home of NASCAR's Charlotte Motor Speedway and high-profile NASCAR racing teams. It is also becoming a significant auto research center.[43]

  Also nearby in Cabarrus, Kannapolis now has a population of 53,114. It is the home of the North Carolina Research Campus (NCRC) on the grounds of the abandoned Pillowtex textile plant. Attempting to emulate the collaborative spirit of the Research Triangle Park, NCRC promotes research involving the corporate sector and NC higher educational institutions in the health sciences.[44]

  Neighboring Gaston County is NC's only other Countrypolitan county for Trump with a town above 60,000. County seat Gastonia has 80,411 people.[45]

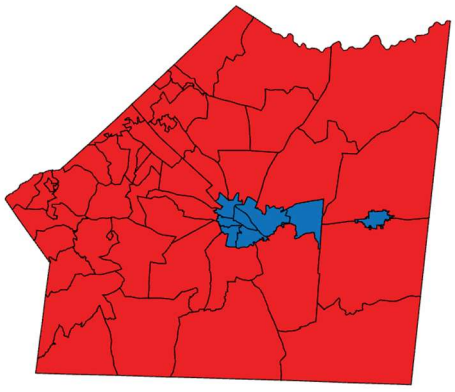
- *Cabarrus is more college-educated.* Its percentage (32.3%) is above the statewide average (31.3%). The only other pro-Trump Countrypolitan counties with college-graduated percentages above the statewide percentage are neighboring Union (35.4%) and Henderson (31.8%) in the Asheville MSA.[46]

4. Union County as a test case for more immediate Democratic strategies to "lose less" in Countrypolitan counties: the option of targeting mainly White and affluent "swing" voters

- Union County might be the most likely Countrypolitan domino to fall in line with neighboring Cabarrus and become a place where Democrats "lose less."[47] In addition to being the pro-Trump Countrypolitan with the highest percentage of college graduates, its median income level ($80,033) is also by far the highest among Countrypolitan counties and ranks second highest in the state.
- After Cabarrus, Union also exhibited the smallest Trump Countrypolitan majority in the Charlotte MSA. Trump barely broke the 60% threshold (61%) in Union and Biden registered 37% – which represented a 2-point drop for Trump and a 5-point uptick for Biden from Clinton's percentage in 2016.
- Such analysts as *Washington Post* columnist E.J. Dionne have identified "the precincts closest to Charlotte in Republican-heavy Union County" as prime sources of "suburban cross-over voters" for Democrats.[48] In some of those western Union County precincts, Trump fell below 60%.
- But the progressive-minded political historians Lily Geismer and Matthew Lassiter have warned Democrats about relying on persuasion strategies which "cater to white swing voters in affluent suburbs." A political strategy dedicated to "turning affluent suburbs blue," in their view, "is not capable of building … a stable long-term majority nor a policy blueprint worthy of the progressive mantle."[49] For more background, see the profile of Union in Graham, "Trump's Fate Rests on Countrypolitan Counties," *Atlantic* (10/26/20).

6. Another strategic option: strengthening and expanding blue-Democratic pockets of support in Union and other red-Republican Countrypolitan counties

- Recognizing the county patterns of the 2020 votes is important. Yet, as political scientists John Sides, Michael Tesler, and Lynn Vavreck have put it, "Counties do not vote. People do."[50] Due to their hybrid mixes, even strong red-Republican Countrypolitan counties may have "metropolitan/urban" as well as "country/rural" outposts that can vote more Democratic. Beyond the commonly-recognized phenomenon of "college towns,"[51] such places as county seats – with their status as local government centers – may constitute mini-or semi-urban/metropolitan outposts.[52]
- Take, for example, the town of Monroe in the middle of Union County. Monroe is Union's county seat and second-biggest town (34,562). It is the ancestral home of Jesse Helms. As of 2020 however Monroe had no registered Republicans in city office. For the last 16 years, the mayor had been a registered Democrat. The city council had a biracial coalition of three other Democrats and three Independents. (In the wake of the mayor's decision to retire, the independent mayor pro-tem won the 2021 race to succeed him. And even more unfortunately for Democrats, Republicans gained three seats on the city council. Along with the new mayor, the city council now has two other Independents. But it has only one Democrat.)[53]
- Monroe has a 57% non-White majority – with 25.8% Black and 29.6% Latinx residents.[54] Its percentage of college graduates is 16.9% and its average median income is $51,754.
- In 2020, 6 of 15 precincts in Monroe (the 15 precincts in the 2019 Monroe Mayor's election) constituted an island of blue for Biden (along with one precinct in the nearby college town of Wingate and one in the small town of Marshville) in an otherwise red Union County.
- Clinton won the same Union precincts. But the vote increase for Biden over Clinton's 2016 total in these 6 Monroe precincts was only 2.6%. In contrast, Biden's vote total increased nearly 10 times more (17.7%) in Mecklenburg.[55]
- Is there low-hanging fruit still to be picked in terms of Democratic-oriented voters in and around Monroe? Have these voters not been targeted enough in the past because they live in such an otherwise red/Republican county? Could a place like Monroe serve as a long-term foundation for expansion of the Democratic base in a key Countrypolitan county?



Union County 2020 Results

- Other Trump-red Countrypolitan counties also have comparatively blue-ish outposts. Examples include the county seats of Gastonia (Gaston County),[56] Hendersonville (Henderson County),[57] Roxboro (Person County),[58] and the town of Reidsville (Rockingham County).[59]

7. Could existing blue-Democratic pockets be strengthened and expanded in red-Republican counties across the state?

- Comparatively blue-ish outposts can be found in other red NC counties beyond the Countrypolitan ones. In smaller-city MSAs, examples include the county seats of Morganton (Burke),[60] New Bern (Craven),[61] Goldsboro (Wayne),[62] and the town of Burlington (Alamance).[63] Examples of micropolitan county seats include Sanford (Lee),[64] Beaufort (Carteret),[65] and Albemarle (Stanly).[66]
- And elsewhere throughout NC, the Democratic vote in other strong Republican counties is often concentrated in county seats or comparatively bigger towns.
- Focusing more on deepening and expanding such blue pockets would heed the recent warning from NC's Rev. William Barber: "Democrats have too easily accepted that their political fortunes depend on increasing turnout in reliably blue districts …."[67]
- Similarly, Georgia's Stacey Abrams has emphasized the strategic importance of competing "across the state … from the rural towns to the big cities."[68]
- In sum, NC's Democratic big-city counties are coming close to fulfilling political scientist V.O. Key's prediction back in 1949 that "the growth of cities contains the seeds of [progressive] political change for the South."[69] But they may need more assistance from other parts of the state for a durable and progressive Democratic majority to develop.

ENDNOTES

Unless otherwise indicated, we rely in this paper on the following sources. For NC election data, see North Carolina State Board of Elections (NCSBE), Election Results Dashboard. For the partisan voting registration of local NC officials, see NCBSE, Voter Search and Voter Registration Records/NC. For statewide NC general population and racial demographic information, see United States Census Bureau, Race and Ethnicity in the United States: 2010 Census and 2020 Census/"North Carolina." For county-level NC racial demographic data, see Population Estimates Program (PEP) Annual County Resident Population Estimates: 2010-2019; also available at U.S. Census Bureau Quick Facts. For other NC demographic information, see American Community Survey, 2014-2019; also available at U.S. Bureau Census Quick Facts. For metropolitan designations, see Office of Management and Budget Bulletin.

Appendix A provides the 2016 NC results and Appendix B provides the 2020 NC results by Countrypolitan counties and other county categories. Visit our Tableau interactive map to explore county-by-county election results, with each county identified as Countrypolitan or another county category.

[1] The media celebration of Georgia as the new Southern Democratic state was especially frustrating for NC Democrats because the Biden-Trump difference between the two states was so small. Trump won NC with 49.83% of the vote and lost Georgia with 49.2% of the vote – a difference of less than 7/10th of a percentage point. As Western North Carolina University political scientist Christopher Cooper put it in his insightful post-election analysis:

> "Of all the states colored red on the map, Donald Trump's margin of victory was the smallest in North Carolina. Conversely, of all the states colored blue on the map, Joe Biden's two-party share was the smallest in Georgia. Said differently, in 2020, Georgia was the reddest blue state in the country and North Carolina was the bluest red state in the country."

See Cooper, "Georgia, North Carolina, and the Illusion of Turning 'Blue'," Asheville *Citizen Times* (2/7/21).

Moreover, at the level of state offices, NC is somewhat of a purple state while Georgia remains uniformly red. Republicans have majority control of both state legislative chambers in NC as well as Georgia. But in 2020, incumbent NC Democrats won re-election for Governor, Attorney General, Secretary of State, and State Auditor. Stacy Abrams' 2018 candidacy for Governor came close to breaking the Republicans' total lock on Georgia statewide offices. And momentum gained from 2020 might make 2022 a break-through year for Georgia Democrats at the state level despite the voting changes that Georgia Republicans engineer. See Waldron, "Georgia is How American Democracy Falls Apart," *HuffPost* (9/19/21); Corasaniti and Epstein, "What Georgia's Voting Law Really Does," *New York Times* (4/2/21).

NC currently exhibits something of a partial return to what political scientists had called the "dual partisanship" or "split-level realignment" that started to develop as Republicans won races first at the federal level in the post-war era. See Hadley, "Dual Partisan Identification in the South," *Journal of Politics* (1985): 254-68; Rae, *Southern Democrats* (1994) 51-52, 155 (split-level realignment); Glaser, *Race, Campaign Politics, and the Realignment in the South* (1996), 178-181; Aistrup, *Southern Strategy Revisited: Republican Top-Down Advancement in the South* (1996) 14. In the wake of Biden's presidential victory there and the surprising Democratic victories in the two 2020 US Senate run-offs, Georgia reflects a new upside-down or reverse split-level alignment.

[2] White, "What's the Matter with Kansas?" [Topeka Emporia] *Gazette* (August 15, 1896); Frank, *What's the Matter with Kansas? How Conservatives Won the Heart of America* (2004).

[3] Our analysis here focuses only on the presidential vote in NC. But our review of all 2020 NC statewide races (including the six appellate judicial ones narrowly swept by Republican candidates) indicate that the Trump-Biden race set the basic voting parameters for all these races. The essential NC political story in 2020 could be summarized as partisan/ideological "polarization all the way down."

As analyst J. Miles Coleman of the University of Virginia's Center for Politics has pointed out, the evidence suggests that even the losing Senate candidacy of Democrat Cal Cunningham – who became embroiled in a late-breaking sex scandal after leading in late summer polling – fits this polarized pattern. As Coleman put it, "a Cunningham win would have really stood out as a pro-Democratic outlier compared to the other statewide results, given that Trump carried the state, no Republican incumbent statewide officeholders lost, and some Democratic statewide incumbents has very close calls *without* the kinds of problems that Cunningham had." Incumbent Democratic Governor Cooper won by a considerably smaller margin (4.5%) against an opponent who was short on campaign money and had been polling badly. Moreover, incumbent Democratic auditor Beth Wood won by only 2 points against a Republican opponent who did not mount a serious campaign and was facing unresolved criminal charges from 2012. See Coleman, "Did Scandal Cost North Carolina Democrats a Senate Seat?" *Sabato's Crystal Ball* (4/8/21). On Gov. Cooper's raising almost four times the amount of his Republican opponent and the GOP's success in other state-level races, See Robertson, "Cooper Raised $41 Million; Outspent GOP Candidates Still Won," *Associated Press* (1/14/21).

Analysts have also emphasized NC's comparative political "inelasticity" or lack of variation in county voting patterns across election cycles. See Jan, "Elasticity in Swing States," *Sabato's Crystal Ball* (10/28/20); Silver, "Swing Voters and Elastic States," *FiveThirtyEight* (5/21/12); Hood, "Few Voters Split Their Tickets," *Carolina Journal* (10/29/18).

Part of the story behind the better performance of NC Democrats at the state level in 2018 (when they broke the GOP super-majorities in both legislative chambers) may be that it was a "blue moon" election with no statewide federal candidates on the ballot. No federal level race at the top of the statewide ticket thus could so rigidly establish polarized parameters for state races.

[4] We have chosen to use "outlying" as a more neutral term to describe the geographical location of Countrypolitan counties in NC's bigger-city MSAs. Other analysts have used the term "fringe" – which we see as too urban-centric and implying that such counties have little to no political centrality.

NC's outlying Countrypolitan counties conform to the definition of "exurban" counties established by a team of Brookings authors led by Alan Berube in their 2006 paper entitled "Finding Exurbia America's Fast-Growing Communities at the Metropolitan Fringe." The Brookings team focused on high-growth locales in the largest MSAs. Yet the Brookings team acknowledged that a generic definition of "exurbs" should also include "slow/low growth" communities on "the urban fringe" of all metropolitan/MSA areas where a significant percentage of workers commute to jobs in more urbanized communities (pgs. 1-2, 6-7). We have nevertheless chosen not to use "exurb" because the term is subject to such varying and culturally bound uses that do not provide very helpful guides to NC's 28 Countrypolitan counties.

Auguste Comte Spectorsky – who went on to become associate publisher at Hugh Hefner's *Playboy* magazine – coined the term in his semi-satiric 1955 book *The Exurbanites.* Spectorsky used the term as shorthand for "extra-urbanites." His prime examples were members of the professional class who commuted mainly by public rail transportation into Manhattan from affluent towns in Connecticut, New Jersey, and Pennsylvania. On Spectorsky, see Gilbert, *Men in the Middle: Searching for Masculinity in the 1950s* (2008) 199-213. See also Fraterrigo, "The Answer to Suburbia: *Playboy's* Urban Lifestyle," *Journal of Urban History* (July 2008) 747-774.

The cultural context of Spectorsky's original exurbanites was thus quite different from those of today's less affluent car drivers who commute today from and back to NC's outlying Countrypolitan counties. At its most ideological extreme, the difference is between Yankee commuters on trains reading the *New York Times* versus Southern car drivers listening to Rush Limbaugh.

Taking the term in a different direction, recent political commentators such as David Brooks have portrayed "exurbia" as the land of "new places" and frontier-like "towns that have barely been built." See Brooks, "Take A Ride to Exurbia," *New York Times* (11/9/04). But as historians Andrew Needham and Allen Dietrich-Ward have

pointed out, this kind of analysis can display the bias of treating "suburban" and exurban" places as "of little importance until they are suddenly transformed into … members of the metropolis by the arrival of the first subdivision." See Needham and Dietrich-Ward, "Beyond the Metropolis: Metropolitan Growth and Regional Transformation in Postwar America," *Journal of Urban History* (2009) 943-69, 947.

The example of NC's Countrypolitan counties fits far better with an older and now too neglected tradition of analysis which emphasized, in historian Russell Nye's words, the "interpenetration of rural and urban traits and values" in "rurbanized" areas. Nye, "Changes in Twentieth-Century Rural Society," *American Studies* (Spring 1969) 25-40, 29. See Galpin, *Rural Life* (1914) 64; Sorokin and Zimmerman, *Principles of Rural-Urban Sociology* (1929) 611; Parsons, *Essays in Sociological Theory* (1949) 435.

The eminent Southern and UNC-trained historian C. Vann Woodward specifically invoked the term "rurbanization" to describe change throughout the region in the post-World War II period. Woodward used the term to emphasize that many southern people and communities were moving away from the rural but "skipping" the conventional city "phase of urbanization entirely." (6-7) On the one hand, they were joining the metropolitan way of life. But Woodward expressed doubt about what he called the "Bulldozer Revolution" developing new political cultures rather than in a more hybrid fashion absorbing the historical legacies of racial and populistic grievance historically embedded in such places. See "The Search for Southern Identity" (1958) in Woodward, *The Burden of Southern History* (1960, 1993) 6.

So, for example, "White flight" constitutes a significant part of but does not entirely explain metropolitan growth around the bigger cities of such southern states as North Carolina. In *The Silent Majority: Suburban Politics in the Sunbelt South* (2006), political historian Matthew Lassiter charted the role of White flight in the development of metropolitan Charlotte. Yet Lassiter has also pointed out that *after* the Supreme Court's affirmation of its busing remedy for school desegregation Charlotte exhibited "a lower percentage of 'White flight' than most other large cities in the nation." Lassiter, Suburban Strategies: The Volatile Center in Postwar American Politics," in Jacobs et al, eds, *The Democratic Experiment: New Directions in American Political History* (2003) 327-49, 340.

As historians Needham and Dietrich-Ward have put it, "no one really knows what percentage of suburban growth" has been due to "rural in-migration versus [urban] out-migration" across the nation (960). Research on the magnitudes of migration into Countrypolitan-type counties from cities versus rural and small-town areas (in-state as well as from out-of-state) could be essential to understanding better the exact cultural mixes in them.

[5] In music circles, the term "Countrypolitan" identifies the movement in "the Nashville Sound" away from country music's "hillbilly" origins to more of a pop crossover style. See Monroe, *Southern Music, American Music* (1979, 2003) 131. In his survey of Southern urban history, UNC-Charlotte historian David Goldfield described "Countrypolitan" as referring to "urban versions" of country music. Goldfield, *Cottonfields and Skyscrapers: Southern City and Region, 1607-1980* (1982) 221. But historians have also emphasized the hybrid city-fied elements of country music dating back to the emergence of Grand Old Opry radio broadcasting from Nashville in the 1920s. See, e.g., Monroe, "The Rural South Moves to the City: Country Music Since World War II," in Hurt, ed., *The Rural South Since World War II* (1998) 95-121; Kyriakoudes, *The Social Origins of the Urban South: Race, Gender, and Migration in Nashville and Middle Tennessee, 1890-1930* (2003) 8, 17-18.

See also Watson, *William Faulkner and the Faces of Modernity* (2019) 43 (portraying "early county-music performers" as "rustic Countrypolitans … whose expressive efforts introduced new forms, sensations, intensities, and commodities into urban and national as well as rural American life."). Watson argues that such a pre-eminent White Southern literary figure as William Faulkner also grasped the hybrid nature of the supposedly traditional rural South. Watson's comment about country music came in his Chapter 1 entitled "Rus in Urbe: Faulkner's Rural Modernisms," 41-74. "Rus in Urbe" is a Latin phrase whose literal meaning can be translated as "the country in the city." See Merriam Webster Dictionary Online. Watson pointed out that *Rus in Urbe* was the title that Faulkner initially chose for his 1957 novel *The Town* (44). See also Mancini, "'Messin with the Furniture Man': Early Country Music, Regional Culture, and the Search for an Anthropological Modernism," *American Literary History* (July 2004) 208-37.

For use of "Countrypolitan" as a political label, see the memoir of former Wake County GOP state legislator Rick Eddins entitled *Call Me Countrypolitan* (2008). And in our view, for an insightful portrayal of an NC Countrypolitan type, see the profile of Rockingham County native Dean Price in Packer, *The Unwinding: An Inner History of the New America* (2013). On Price, see also Christensen, "The Country's Unwinding as Told Through NC Man," Raleigh *News and Observer* (1/21/14). For an analysis agreeing that North Carolina is more demographically "Countrypolitan" than Virginia, see Jones," "North Carolina Is More Likely To Become Georgia than Virginia," *PoliticsNC* (1/27/21). And for the view that a Countrypolitan style or mode can be traced back to the settlement of NC colonial towns, see Beaman, "Urban Archaeology in the 'Cradle of the Colony:' The Archaeology of Historic Edenton, A Colonial Country-Politan Port Community," *North Carolina Archaeology* (2017) 74-108

Scholarship outside the US has focused more on analyzing such hybrid or in-between places. A common scholarly label for such hybrid places is "peri-urban." See Ravetz, Fertner, and Nielsen, "The Dynamics of Peri-Urbanization," Chapter 2 in Nilsson et al, eds., *Peri-Urban Futures: Scenarios and Models for Land Use Change in Europe* (2013) 13-44. For a recent application of the peri-urban concept to the Countrypolitan county of Cabarrus in Charlotte's MSA, see Koch, et al, "Modeling Landowner Interactions and Development Patterns at the Urban Fringe," *Landscape and Urban Planning* (2019) 101-13 (the interdisciplinary team of authors included three N.C. State scholars). For more on Cabarrus, see the text on pgs. 13-14 and endnotes 39-46.

Scholarship in other disciplines has also focused more on the hybridity of places between the city and the country. See, e.g., the essays in Hornburg, ed., *Vincent Van Gogh: Timeless Country – Modern City* (2009). See especially Sund, "Country Man/City Man: Dichotomy and Hybridity in Van Gogh's Figure Paintings," 73-88.

[6] We often refer in this paper to the pioneering work on NC politics from Catawba College political scientist Michael Bitzer and his *Old North State Politics* blog. Our Countrypolitan county category resembles Prof. Bitzer's NC category of "surrounding suburban counties" in the same MSAs with what Prof. Bitzer calls "urban counties." In August 2019, Prof. Bitzer anticipated our emphasis when noting that "surrounding suburban counties to urban counties are among the most reliable Republican voting areas in the state, more so than rural counties." See Bitzer, "Previewing the NC 9th Congressional District Election on Sept. 10," *Old North State Politics* (8/9/19).

And for many years, now retired UNC-CH journalism professor Ferrel Guillory has been a mentor and source of political wisdom for McCorkle. On our Countrypolitan theme, see Guillory, "Red State? Blue State? An Education State," *EdNC* (10/30/20); see also his quote in Wallace, "North Carolina's Changing Electorate Creates New Battleground Areas, Complicating Urban Blue, Rural Red Divide," *Fox News* (11/10/21) ("Some rural areas, particularly those rural areas with … majority White population, have become increasingly Republican. But what the urban-rural divide construct analysis misses is what happens in Union County, which is just outside Charlotte, and Johnston County, just outside of Raleigh. These are formerly small-town communities but are now major suburban communities of fast growth."). See also Pearce, "Will North Carolina Become A Bluetopia," *New Day for NC* (11/2/20) (McCorkle's Countrypolitan thesis points out that dividing NC into "Democratic cities and Republican rural areas and small towns … leaves out … in-between North Carolinians – those living in metropolitan areas outside the state's big cities….")

Our analyses have also been informed by the individual NC county political profiles from Darren Janz and John Wynne on Thomas Mills' *PoliticsNC* website.

[7] On the comparative racial diversity of nonmetropolitan NC, see the analysis in the text at pg. 7 and endnote 20. See also See Bitzer, "A Deeper Exploration of North Carolina's Urban/Suburban/Rural Voters," *Old North State Politics* (8/6/18) (In NC "'urban 'central cities' have the greatest racial diversity … while surrounding suburban [largely what we call Countrypolitan] counties have the least diverse voter pool.")

[8] For a historical tracing of the national narrative about a rural-urban divide as the source of modern partisan political conflict, see Eagles, "Urban-Rural Conflict in the 1920s: A Historiographical Assessment," *The Historian* (Nov. 1986) 26-48. For North Carolina and the urban-rural divide, see Hood, "Urban-Rural Gap Is Nothing New,"

Carolina Journal (1/18/17) (quoting a passage from the 1931 book entitled *The Country Church in North Carolina* by rural sociologist Jesse Marvin Ormond of Duke University stating that "rural institutions are not keeping up with the march of social progress" and "the result is that a social chasm between the ruralite and urbanite is evident.") and Hood, "It's Not About Urban Versus Rural," *Carolina Journal* (12/3/18). See also Lassiter and Kruse, "The Bulldozer Revolution: Suburbs and Southern History Since World War II," *Journal of Southern History* (August 2009) 691-706, 692) (while "an urban-suburban dichotomy took hold in community studies of the postwar North and Midwest, … the geographic divisions and political conflicts within the modern South" have been primarily narrated through the "categories" of "rural versus urban (or sometimes metropolitan).")

[9] In this paper, we focus on NC's red Countrypolitan counties in the state's biggest metros of Charlotte and Raleigh in contrast to the blue outlying counties in Georgia and Virginia's biggest metros. Obviously the Countrypolitan notion could have some applicability to bigger metros in other Southern states, especially the Nashville area in Tennessee. Nashville's MSA fits with NC's red Countrypolitan pattern: the consolidated Nashville-Davidson urban county area is a Democratic bastion surrounded by 12 outlying red-Republican counties in the MSA whose overall vote numbers swamp it. See, e.g., Ross, "A Big, Blue Dot in a Deep Red State, Ready for Biden (10/31/20); Smith, "Nashville Lies at the Heart of a Divided Country," *Guardian* (3/18/17); "Tennessee Presidential Election Results," *New York Times* (3/26/21). The phenomenon of outlying counties wiping out Democratic city leads also exists in a substantial number of metropolitan areas across the rest of the country, especially below the mega-level of the MSAs centered around New York City, Los Angeles, and Chicago. See Florida, "How Metro Areas Voted in the 2020 Election," *Bloomberg City Lab* (12/4/20) and Florida, "Mapping How America's Metros Voted in the 2016 Election," *Bloomberg City Lab* (12/1/16).

[10] In pointing out that NC Democrats have a comparative Countrypolitan problem especially in their largest MSAs of Charlotte and Raleigh, we are not at all suggesting that the 2020 results establish Democrats in Georgia as now having a durable electoral majority. See Bacon, "Democrats Hope Georgia Will Become the Next Virginia, But It Could End Up Being the Next North Carolina," *FiveThirtyEight* (1/5/21) (quoting the comparative insights of NC political scientists Susan Roberts of Davidson and Whitney Ross Manzo of Meredith College). Given the closeness of the Biden-Trump margins in both states (see endnote 1) and the strength of the Biden margin in the Atlanta MSA, it is fair to say that the continuing challenge for Georgia Democrats is their comparative weakness in the rest of the state.

And we are not suggesting that Democratic candidates in NC are always fated to lose or do worse than Democratic candidates in Georgia. Not only did the incumbent Governor Roy Cooper and three other incumbent statewide Democratic officials win in 2020. But on Election Day incumbent Georgia GOP Senator David Perdue in fact came closer to a majority (49.73%) than did victorious incumbent NC GOP Senator Thom Tillis (48.09%). But Georgia's distinctive 50% requirement dictated a January runoff with Democrat Jon Ossoff. Moreover, the presence of multiple Republican candidates in Georgia's distinctive nonpartisan primary system scrambled GOP chances of avoiding a runoff. That Senate seat was only in play because popular GOP incumbent Senator Johnny Isakson retired early due to health reasons. For a political retrospective piece on former Senator Isakson upon his recent death, see Bernstein, "Courtly Republican GA. Senator Took a Bipartisan Approach," *Washington Post* (12/19/21).

Virginia has come far closer to qualifying as a state now with a durable Democratic majority. See Tavernise and Gebeloff, "How Voters Turned Virginia from Deep Red to Solid Blue," *New York Times* (11/9/19). In stark contrast to all other Southern states, Virginia Democrats in 2020 had full control of state government, both US Senate seats, a congressional delegation majority (7-4), and Biden gained a 10-point victory there. In 2021 the Democratic candidate for Governor lost and Democrats lost control of the Virginia House of Delegates. See endnote 20. But the pattern in recent elections through 2020 had established a clear "metropolitan" path for Democratic victories there not present in NC due to the continuing red-Republican bent of its Countrypolitan counties.

[11] For use of the phrase "lose less," see the comments of *RuralOrganizing.org* executive director Matt Hildreth in Brownstein, "The GOP is Voting Against Its Base," *Atlantic* (4/9/21).

[12] Biden's 10 bigger-city counties include 11 of NC's 12 biggest cities. These cities range from Charlotte (pop. 874,579) to Greenville (pop. 87,521). To this county list, we have added Orange because the combined populations in its immediately adjoining towns of Chapel Hill (61,960) and Carrboro (21,295) compose what would be the state's 13th biggest city (pop. 83,255). Two Biden bigger-city counties have two cities above 100,000 in population – Wake (Raleigh as well as Cary) and Guilford (Greensboro as well as High Point). Only one county in the Trump column has a locale whose population exceeds 83,000. This is Cabarrus; its county seat of Concord has a population of 105,240. For more on Concord and Cabarrus, see text on pgs. 13-14 and endnotes 39-46.

[13] Biden's only less than double-digit victory in the 10 bigger-city counties was his 50-48% New Hanover win. In 2016 Clinton also won all these bigger-city counties except for New Hanover (where Trump won 49-46%). For an analysis of the mixed 2020 partisan results in New Hanover, see Lennon, "Collaboration with Trump Campaign Was a Cornerstone of Local Republicans' Strategy," *Port City Daily* (12/2/20).

Clinton's overall margin in these 10 bigger-city counties was 59-36%. In 2020 over 300,000 more voters within the 10 bigger-city counties turned out (2,477,672) compared to 2016 (2,133,557). And Biden received almost 300,000 more votes in those 10 counties (1,560,218) than Clinton (1,262,043). But the statewide vote share in these 10 big-city counties (44.8%) was virtually unchanged from 2016 (45%). See Chart 1 on p. 5.

Biden (and Clinton) clearly ran up even higher margins inside the cities. Vote totals inside NC cities are not readily available from the State Board. Some precincts moreover mix votes from inside and outside city limits. But visual review of the State Board's precinct data shows strong concentrations of "blue" Biden support within all 12 big cities.

The pioneering work of Prof. Bitzer further confirms our analysis here. He subdivides NC into four categories—(i) "central cities," (ii) "urban suburbs," (iii) "surrounding suburban counties," and (iv) "rural counties."

Prof. Bitzer's analysis underscores Biden's vote strength inside the state's bigger cities. Bitzer's estimate is that Biden ran up an overall margin of 70-30% (of the two-party vote) against Trump among a dataset including the biggest "central cities" in each of NC's 15 total MSAs. He calculates that Clinton's margin was 68-32%.

Biden (and Clinton) assuredly ran up bigger overall margins inside our more concentrated set of 12 big Democratic cities. The Bitzer dataset for example does not include the Biden strongholds of Cary and High Point because they are second, not the "central," cities in their counties. The Bitzer calculations also include MSAs with central cities containing more than 50,000 people but less than our bigger-Biden-city standard (83,000 or more) – such as the Trump stronghold of Hickory in the so-called western-piedmont "Unifour" MSA.

Prof. Bitzer has estimated that Trump won an overall 54-46% majority of the two-party vote in the "urban suburban" outskirt areas outside the state's 15 central MSA cities but still within the same counties. This margin represented an improvement for Trump from 2016 when these outside-the-central-cities areas split 50%-50% for Trump and Clinton. It is safe to say that both Biden's and Clinton's comparative performances were better throughout our more concentrated set of 10 Biden bigger-city counties than throughout Prof. Bitzer's larger collection of all 15 MSA counties.

As we have already noted (see endnotes 6 and 7), Prof. Bitzer's "surrounding suburban counties" category closely resembles our Countrypolitan-county category. But Bitzer's category includes the outlying counties in NC's 15 MSAs (plus those in the Myrtle Beach, SC and Virginia Beach MSAs). Our 28 Countrypolitan counties are only those outlying counties in the state's 9 MSAs with Biden's bigger cities (plus those in the Myrtle Beach, SC and Virginia Beach MSAs). Nevertheless, his two-party vote percentages for "surrounding suburban counties" for the 2020 and 2016 elections are very similar to those for our Countrypolitan counties. While Trump's victory over Biden in the Bitzer surrounding suburban category was by a 64-36% margin, it was a 63-36% win in our Countrypolitan counties. And while Trump prevailed by a 66-34% margin over Clinton in this Bitzer category, it was a 63-33% win in our Countrypolitan category.

Prof. Bitzer's "rural" category largely corresponds to our combination of 50 non-metropolitan counties (25 micropolitan and 25 "most rural"). Here again the Bitzer numbers for 2016 and 2020 are quite comparable to ours. While Trump won over Biden and Clinton by an identical 61-39% margin in Bitzer's "rural" category, we have Trump beating Biden by 61-38% and Clinton by 58-38%.

Prof. Bitzer's percentages differ somewhat from ours in part because his reflect the two-party vote. We are using the official percentages from the NC Elections Board for the total vote (including minor parties and write-ins) for counties and statewide in 2016 and 2020.

For Prof. Bitzer's NC vote data and the terms of his analysis regarding the 2016 and 2020, see especially Bitzer, "What Precinct Polarization Might Tell Us About NC's Politics Before Redistricting Kicks Off," *Old North State Politics* (8/6/21) and Bitzer, "Are NC 'Suburbs' Trending Like National Suburbs?" *Old North State Politics* (11/7/19); and Bitzer, "Year in Review and Looking Forward for North Carolina's 7.2 Million Voters," *Old North State Politics* (1/3/22).

On turnout patterns in 2020, see also Bitzer, "A First Look at 2020's Election Turnout: GOP and Suburban Voters Dominated," *Old North State Politics* (1/7/21) 4 ("Central-city voters had the lowest turnout rate at 70 percent, while suburban voters – both inside the urban counties and surrounding counties – had the highest, at 77 percent."). See also Mills, "If Democratic Turnout Kept Pace with Republicans, The State Would Have A Bluer Hue," *PoliticsNC* (2/3/21) and the post-election analysis from the Raleigh-based Democratic consulting firm led by Dr William Busa entitled "Political Demographics of NC's Urban-Rural Divide" (5/2/21).

On turnout among NC Black voters in particular, see Harry, "N.C.'s Black Voter Turnout Was Up in 2020. What Was Behind It?" *WFAE* (1/27/21). Harry cited data from the NC Elections Board estimating that turnout among registered Black voters rose from 64% in 2016 to 68% in 2020 (1,038,375 total Black voters) and represented 18.7% of the statewide vote. Using data from the GA Board, Tom Bonier of the Democratic-oriented Target Smart consulting firm estimated that the Black vote constituted 28.92% of the statewide vote there (negligibly down from the 29% share in 2016). Bonier, "How Georgia Turned Blue," *Medium* (11/17/20). This 10-percentage point difference in vote share is hardly surprising given the 10-percentage point larger size of GA's total Black population and eligible voting population. But in a more surprising post-election analysis for the Flip NC political organization, the Catalist political data firm estimated that voter turnout among the smaller share of registered Black voters in NC was 65% while turnout among the significantly bigger pool of Black voters in GA was 57% (Summary of the Catalist study in McCorkle's possession).

[14] NC's 28 Countrypolitan counties thus stretch across 8 of the state's total 15 MSAs plus the Virginia Beach MSA and the Myrtle Beach, SC MSAs. These 8 NC MSAs contain all of Biden's 12 big cities and 10 big counties except for Grenville/Pitt because the Greenville MSA has no outlying Countrypolitan counties.

The Virginia Beach MSA overall delivered a larger percentage victory for Biden (15.2%) than did the Charlotte MSA (3.6%). See Damore, et al., "In 2020, The Largest Metro Areas Made the Difference for Democrats," Brookings (2/4/21). (Table 1).

But the Myrtle Beach SC MSA failed to follow the NC pattern of central counties with the biggest cities representing a Biden stronghold. Trump instead won the county containing Myrtle Beach (Horry County) by a larger margin (66-33%) than in the outlying NC Countrypolitan county of Brunswick (62-37%). See South Carolina Election Commission, 2020 Statewide General Election Reporting.

The OMB's move of Brunswick away from the Wilmington MSA and into the Myrtle Beach MSA – which first occurred in 2013 – continues to receive criticism and challenge from business leaders in the Wilmington area. See O'Neal, "Local Business Leaders Weigh In on Brunswick's MSA Future," *WilmingtonBiz* (5/6/21) On the 2020 results in the Wilmington MSA if Brunswick was still its second Countrypolitan county along with Pender County, see endnote 29.

Critics might particularly question the inclusion of a county like Anson in the Countrypolitan category. Anson indeed has a rather anomalous history among outlying counties in Charlotte's MSA. During the 2012 election cycle, the level of commuting from Anson met OMB's standards to qualify it as part of the MSA. But by the 2016 election cycle, Anson had dropped below OMB's commuting standards. Then by the 2020 election cycle, Anson's commuting had again qualified it for MSA status. Anson does not have a "micropolitan" small-town center. It has thus been cycling in and out of OMB's "remainder" county category – or what we are calling the "most rural" counties. Based on 2010 Census data, Anson has a 78.5% rural population density.

But Anson's removal would not change the status of the Countrypolitan category as Trump's biggest source of total votes and his largest base of percentage support. Anson accounted for only 11,194 total votes. And since Trump lost Anson – by less than 500 votes – the loss of Anson would make the Countrypolitan category a slightly more pro-Trump base. And if counted in the "most-rural" category, Anson as a White minority county (44.3%) for Biden would incrementally improve Democratic performance in that category. It thus would further undermine the stereotypical rural-urban divide view of NC's most rural counties as the heaviest White and strongest sources of support for Trump.

It appears that the Brookings team in *Blue Metros, Red States* used the pre-2020 MSA categories for NC and did not include Anson in the Charlotte MSA. See *Blue Metros,* 65 (Table 2-3 showing Charlotte's MSA with only 7 NC counties). But as discussed above, the removal of Anson from the Countrypolitan category would not be significant due to its small vote. It for example would not change the Brookings' team's calculation that Biden won Charlotte's MSA by only 3.6 points and Clinton lost it by 1.5 points.

But for Anson's possible status as a southern or national bellwether in the 2022 midterm elections, see endnote 55.

In 2020 the other three counties moving into the outlying Countrypolitan MSA category were Granville in the Durham-Chapel Hill MSA, Harnett in the Fayetteville MSA, and Camden in the Virginia Beach MSA. All three moved up from the nonmetropolitan "micropolitan" county category.

Removing the new MSA counties of Granville and Harnett from the Countrypolitan category would have the same incremental effect as removing Anson. Since Granville was Trump's narrowest Countrypolitan win (53-46%) and Trump's win in Harnett (60-38%) was below his overall Countrypolitan average (63-36%), the Countrypolitan category would become even more strongly pro-Trump without those two counties. And contrary to the standard rural-urban divide view, the nonmetropolitan /micropolitan category would become slightly less pro-Trump.

Camden is a small county in Northeastern NC previously connected with Pasquotank County in the Elizabeth City micropolitan area. It is heavily White (80.5%), and Trump's 72-26% winning margin was above the Countrypolitan average (63-37%). But due to its small number of votes for Trump and Biden (4,312-1,537), removing it from the Countrypolitan category would not significantly reduce Trump's performance levels or come close to politically offsetting the opposite partisan effect of removing Granville and Harnett.

Below is a chart showing the 2020 NC presidential election results that reflects our county categories as of 2016 before the OMB change moving these four counties (Anson, Granville, Harnett, and Camden) into the Countrypolitan category. The Countrypolitan county category remains Trump's strong percentage base of support. The only change of significance is that the largest number of *Trump votes comes from the 10 bigger-city counties*; this category outpoints the Countrypolitan county by less than 3,000 votes. This version of county categories circa 2016 also thus fails to provide support for the standard rural-urban divide narrative.

NC 2020 Presidential Results According to OMB's 2016 County Designations

County Type	Trump	Biden	Statewide Share
Biden's 10 Bigger-City Metropolitan Counties	**35%**	**63%**	**44.8%**

	875,158	1,560,218	
24 Metro Fringe/Exurban "Countrypolitan" Counties	**63%** 873,210	**35%** 483,352	**24.9%**
12 Smaller-City Metro Counties	**61%** 332,651	**38%** 208,597	**9.9%**
Metropolitan NC Subtotal	**48%** 2,081,019	**52%** 2,252,167	**79.6%**
28 "Micropolitan" Small-Town Counties	**60%** 482,832	**39%** 310,665	**14.5%**
26 Most Rural Counties	**61%** 194,924	**38%** 121,460	**5.8%**
Nonmetropolitan NC Subtotal	**61%** 677,756	**39%** 432,125	**20.4%**
100 Counties Total	**50%** 2,758,775	**49%** 2,684,292	**100%**

[15] For a 2020 political profile of Granville, see Jacobs, "Caught in the Middle: A Battleground County in Battleground NC Shows a Tight Race for President," *WFAE* (9/29/20). Jacobs noted the recent history of Granville as a swing county: "In 2008 and 2012 … voters there [Granville] went for Barack Obama by healthy margins. But the county flipped in 2016, going for Trump by two percentage points."

[16] See Bitzer, "A Deeper Exploration of North Carolina's Urban/Suburban/Rural Voters," *Old North State Politics* (8/6/18) (In NC "'urban 'central cities' have the greatest racial diversity … while surrounding suburban counties [largely what we call Countrypolitan] have the least diverse voter pool.")

[17] Trump's performance incrementally rose or stayed the same in all 25 of these most-rural counties. Biden won the same four counties as Clinton in 2016 (Hertford, Warren, Bertie, and Washington). But Biden's performance ticked downward in all 4 winning counties. At the same time, Biden's (losing) percentages were more competitive than Clinton's in 9 counties.

We see these counties as fitting the comparative label "most rural" in multiple ways. All 25 are NC's "remainder" counties which fail to qualify as micropolitan small-town counties in the OMB framework because they lack economic, job-commuting town centers with populations of 10,000 or more. Not surprisingly, given this economic isolation, 17 of these most rural counties fall into the NC Commerce Department's 2022 "tier" of counties in the most economic distress (Tier 1) and none qualify for the most prosperous (Tier 3). See the November 2021 publication from the NC Dept. of Commerce, "County Distress Rankings (Tiers)." None has a median income level over $50,00 (versus NC's statewide median of $54,602). All but one (Polk) have poverty rates above NC's 13.6% state average. Only three counties (again Polk, Macon, and Clay) have percentages of college graduates above 23% (versus the state average of 31.3%).

In addition, these 25 counties have disproportionately low or "rural" population densities according to US Census Bureau data. The Bureau rates 9 of these counties as having a 100% rural density. All but 3 have a rural density rating of 75% or more, and those three (Hertford, Washington, and Chowan) have ratings above 65%.

But commentators should be wary of relying too simply on the Census Bureau's "rural" and "urban" designations as political categories. The Census' rural and urban designations represent proxies for degree of population density alone; they do not include or refer to any other social or economic measure.

In fact, the Bureau has no definition of "rural" – it is a catch-all for areas that do not meet the Census designation of "urban." The Bureau's either-or binary framework furthermore does not make room for a "suburban" or any other in-between designation. As a result, areas that might otherwise be considered "suburban" can fall rather arbitrarily into either the urban or rural category.

In some clear ways, the Bureau's "urban" definition moreover can be significantly over-inclusive for purposes of NC political analysis. For example, any locale with a minimum of 50,000 people and continuous density of 1,000 people per square mile (with some exceptions allowing even lower square-mile standards) is an "urban" area. Moreover, locations with no more than 2,500 people can qualify as "urban" clusters if they meet the density standard of 1,000 people per continuous square mile. As a result, such small NC towns as Warsaw (pop. 3,119) in Duplin County and Wallace (3,891) in Duplin and Pender qualify as "urban" along with Charlotte and Raleigh. See Gomes, "Why Rural Is Hard to Define," *Carolina Demography* (9/20/21).

Nevertheless, some political commentators interpret the Census Bureau data as establishing that NC has the biggest "rural" population after Texas among the nation's ten most populous states. For purposes of a rough general comparison between states, such population density data can be helpful to consider. The Bureau methodology (using 2010 Census data) designates 66% of NC's population as living in locations with "urban" population densities and the other 34% living in locations with "rural" or "non-urban" densities. In contrast, the Bureau rates the urban-rural density of Georgia as well as Virginia as 75%-25%. For the urban-rural density percentages by state, see U.S. Census Bureau, Percent Urban and Rural in 2010 by State.

Still all such urban-rural density designations are highly problematic for political analysis. For if 66% of North Carolinians are treated as "urban" and only 34% as "rural" for political purposes, how do any Democratic statewide candidates lose with such an "urban" super-majority in their favor? And how can Republican candidates ever win in Georgia and Virginia if they face 75% urban super-majorities?

In the OMB's metropolitan-nonmetropolitan framework (as of 2019), NC is more comparable to Virginia and particularly Georgia. NC splits 79% metropolitan and 21% nonmetropolitan. Georgia's split is 81.9%-18.1% and Virginia's split is 87.7%-13%. NC's larger nonmetropolitan population is due the larger number of its people living in micropolitan/small town counties rather than in its most rural counties.

NC has a comparatively smaller percentage of its population living in such isolated rural counties without a significant job-commuting center. Only 5.4% (562,501) of NC's total population (10,439,388) live in NC's 25 most-rural counties (state total 100). In Georgia, this most-rural percentage is 7.4% (782,370 out of total 10,617,423 population). In Virginia, it is 9.4% (800,437 out of total 8,535,519 population). OMB places 54 of 159 total Georgia counties and 44 of Virginia's 133 total jurisdictions in this isolated remainder group which we are characterizing as "most rural" category.

Of course, the problem is even more severe if political analysis wrongly equates all of OMB's "metropolitan" counties with areas containing strong progressive, Democratic-oriented majorities. How could any Republican candidates ever come close to being competitive if Virginia and Georgia as well as NC have 80% of their populations living in strongly "blue" metropolitan areas?

Our Countrypolitan analysis avoids this kind of political unreality by demonstrating that metropolitan NC is divided, contested territory, with strongly red-Republican counties immediately outside Biden's 10 bigger-city blue counties. And as the Brookings *Blue Metros* team points out, metropolitan areas beyond the blue "big metros" of Northern Virginia and the Atlanta MSA as well are often contested, divided territories.

The issue of public opinion is another reason for political analysis to avoid relying too much on the high levels of the Census Bureau's "urban" or OMB's "metropolitan" designations. We do not know of any data on how people in metropolitan or nonmetropolitan counties specifically identify the places in which they live. But according to the A.P. VoteCast survey work conducted by the University of Chicago's National Opinion Research Center for the 2020

election, only 53% of NC's voters statewide chose to respond that they lived in either an "urban" (15%) or "suburban" (38%) area. A substantial 48% minority chose either "small town" (21%) or "rural" (28%). (VoteCast rounded up the total here to 101%.) In our view, such voter/public-opinion data reinforce our Countrypolitan analysis for NC and its recognition of continuing rural as well as small-town legacies in counties which now formally qualify as "metropolitan." In the AP VoteCast survey work, somewhat more voters in Virginia and Georgia chose "urban" and "suburban" while fewer chose "small town" and "rural."

[18] A "what-if" scenario underlines the less significant nature of the 2020 margin upticks for Trump in the 25 most-rural counties and 25 micropolitan counties. This "what-if" scenario hypothesizes that the margin upticks for Trump in NC's 50 nonmetropolitan counties did not occur and the Trump-Biden 2020 percentages were the same as the Trump-Clinton 2016 nonmetropolitan margins. In that scenario, Trump would have won NC's 25 most-rural counties by the smaller margin of 59%-39% (not 62%-38%) and its 25 micropolitan counties by 58%-38% (not 60%-39%). Based on that hypothetical "2016" percentages scenario for NC's 50 nonmetropolitan counties in the 2020 vote, Biden would have reduced Trump's margin by only 24,238 votes, and he would have still lost NC by 49,439 votes.

Another way of underlining the prime significance of the Countrypolitan counties is to point out the size of Trump's "over-performance" there compared to the nonmetropolitan counties. As shown below, Trump received 33.9% of his votes from the Countrypolitan counties. That is 7% more than the Countrypolitan share of the statewide vote (26.8%). His 7% Countrypolitan overperformance is the highest among our county classifications by a wide margin.

	Share of Total Vote	Share of Trump Vote	Trump "Overperformance"
10 MSA Bigger-City Biden Counties	44.8%	31.7%	-13.1%
28 MSA Countrypolitan Counties	26.8%	33.9%	7.0%
12 Smaller-City MSA Counties	9.9%	12.1%	2.1%
25 Most Rural Counties	5.5%	6.8%	1.3%
25 Micropolitan Counties	12.9%	15.6%	2.7%

[19] Compared to its 25 most rural counties, NC's 25 micropolitan counties have a more mixed demographic profile. The micropolitan category contains 3 counties with median income levels higher than the state average ($54,602) – the golf- and retirement-oriented Moore ($59,963) plus the coastal, tourist-oriented Dare ($59,381) and Carteret ($57,194). Four counties have percentages of college graduates above the state average (31.3%) – Watauga (42.2%) Moore (37.4%), Dare (34.7%), and Transylvania (32.6%). Two others are close to the state average – Jackson (30.4%; home of Western Carolina University) and Carteret (29.1%). The Census Bureau ranks 8 micropolitan counties as having "urban" population densities above 50%. But NC Commerce ranks as many as 13 of 25 micropolitan counties economically distressed enough to be in Tier 1 (versus 17 in the 25 most rural counties).

Some commentary on the 2020 election in NC has emphasized the relatively big expansion of Trump's vote in Robeson – which is the biggest (pop. 116,530) and poorest (median income of $34,976) micropolitan county. Robeson also has a low White population percentage (24.7%) and the highest Native American population (42.3%) in the state. Trump's surprising 51-47% win there over Clinton in 2016 provided him a margin of 1,746 votes. But Trump's 59-40% win there over Biden yielded a margin of 8,786 votes. This increase of 7,540 votes represented Trump's biggest margin increase in any NC county. See, e.g., Kruse, "How Trump Won One of America's Most Diverse Counties – By A Lot," *Politico* (12/10/20).

Robeson certainly constitutes a cautionary tale regarding assumptions about non-White majorities ensuring Democratic victories. (See also endnote 40.) A rising cultural conservatism among Robeson's Lumbee Native Americans probably played a significant role in dashing such assumptions. But so did the immediate economic

interests of the Lumbees in gaining official federal status as an independent tribe and thus access to such eventual tribe opportunities as casino ownership. At a late October 2020 rally in the county seat of Lumberton, the former casino-owner president completed the Republican turn on the issue and proclaimed his support for the Lumbee tribal status. See, e.g., Flores, "Lumbees Show Appreciation After President Trump Supports Lumbee Recognition Act," *WPDE/ABC News 15* (10/24/20); Shaffer, "Who Are the Lumbee and How Important Would Federal Recognition Be For the Tribe?" Raleigh *News & Observer* (12/13/21).

Scotland County also flipped from a 53-45% Clinton victory in 2016 to a 51-49% Trump win in 2020. That represented a net swing of 1,350 votes to Trump.

Biden however made advances over Clinton's performances in three micropolitan counties. His 53-45% win in Watauga netted him a margin gain of 2,230 votes from Clinton's squeaker 47-46% victory. He also narrowed Trump's winning margins in two other micropolitan counties with higher educational institutions – Jackson (from 53-41% to 53-45%) and Transylvania (from 59-37% to 57-41%). This trio of micropolitan counties together created a margin swing of 3,392 votes to Biden.

In the other 20 micropolitan counties, Trump's performance improved by 1-3 percentage points. At the same time, Biden ticked up above or matched Clinton's performance in these 20 Trump micropolitan counties while ticking downward in the five counties that he and Clinton won.

These various political swings resulted in a 2-point increase for Trump (from 58% to 60%) and a 1-point increase for Biden from Clinton's performance in 2016 (39% versus 38%) in the Micropolitan category.

[20] A contrast in the "rural" vote therefore may have played a lesser role in NC's 2020 presidential year election than in Virginia's 2021 gubernatorial election.

An initial *FiveThirtyEight* analysis of the 2021 gubernatorial race emphasized that "[p]erforming well in the suburbs … is key to unlocking Virginia, and Youngkin made serious inroads in those parts of the state." A prominent "suburban" example in the *FiveThirtyEight* analysis was the outlying Northern Virginia of Loudoun – where Trump lost by 25 points while Youngkin lost by 11 points. But the analysis more generally concluded that "the simplest way to describe how Youngkin won is basically that he just performed better across the board. It particularly downplayed the notion that Youngkin gained some "markedly" distinctive boost from Virginia's rural areas. Skelley, "How Republicans Swept a Bluish State," *FiveThirtyEight* (11/3/21)

In contrast, an NBC News analysis gave quantitative grounding to journalistic claims that the rural vote played a key role in Youngkin's victory. The NBC analysis showed a 21-point jump in rural vote support from a 6-point Trump margin (52-46%) to a 27-point Youngkin margin (63-36%). It moreover showed an overall increase in the rural share of the statewide vote from 16% in 2020 to 19% in 2021. Chini, "Youngkin's Rural Voter Landslide Sounds Alarms for Democrats," *Meet the Press/NBCNews* (11/7/21) For another journalistic claim about the importance of the rural vote, see Montellaro and Schneider, "Rural Democrats Stare Into the Abyss After Virginia," *Politico* (11/6/21). See also Herndon and Golmacher, "Democrats Thought They Bottomed Out in Rural America. It Wasn't the Bottom," *New York Times* (11/7/21)

Due to our lack of understanding particularly about the definitions of the "rural" vote used in the conflicting *FiveThirtyEight* and NBC News analyses, we await more definitive analysis of the 2021 Virginia governor's race.

[21] North Carolina does not conform well to the generic kind of urban-rural divide model recently sketched by analyst Will Wilkinson which depicts the "urbanization" process as yielding "a nonurbanized population … homogeneously White." Wilkinson, "The Density Divide: Urbanization, Polarization, and Populist Backlash," *Niskanen Center Research Paper* (June 2019) 5; see also Wilkinson, "The Density Divide and the Southernification of Rural America," *Substack* (8/30/21).

According to the Brookings authors in *Blue Metros* (p. 12), NC has "a substantial [racial] diversity in rural areas." Similarly, as political scientist Jonathan Rodden has emphasized in *Why Cities Lose* (2019) 173, NC is one of those southern states where "rural African-Americans [are] relatively efficiently distributed." See also Bitzer, "Some Preliminary Findings from the NC Ninth: What Can We Learn?, *Old North State Politics* (9/12/19) ("[O]ne North Carolina exception to the national trend of rural politics is the strong presence of voters of color" in such congressional districts as the 9th Congressional District, which extended eastward from Charlotte); Barkin, "Point Taken: A Different Twist on the Urban-Rural Divide," *Business North Carolina* (March 2021). Barkin's criticisms regarding the idea of a single White rural NC highlights the PhD analysis of N.C. Justice Center policy analyst Dr. William Munn. See Munn, "Running Away From Home: Social and Economic Explanations of Net Migration in North Carolina Black Belt Counties (NC A&T 2016). See generally Alijore, "The Role of Communities of Color in the 2020 Election," *Center for American Progress* (12/22/20); Love and Loh, "The Rural-Urban Divide Furthers Myths about Race and Poverty …," *Brookings* (12/8/20); and Tieken, "There's a Big Part of Rural America That Everyone's Ignoring," *Washington Post* (3/24/17).

[22] See also endnotes 12-13. In recognition of their usual solid majorities or even super-majorities for Democratic candidates down to the local level, conservative commentator John Hood has acknowledged that the days of "robust partisan politics" in North Carolina's "most populous cities" are "over, for the most part." Hood, "Political Future May Surprise Us," *Carolina Journal* (10/9/20).

Most of Biden's 12 big cities have nonpartisan local elections. See UNC School of Government, Forms of Government and Methods of Election in North Carolina Cities (showing that only Charlotte and Winston-Salem have partisan elections). Yet all but two (High Point and Greenville) of these cities have mayors who affiliate with the Democratic party. Many of their city councils moreover are becoming training grounds for a new generation of left progressives. See, e.g., Killian, "Is Greensboro Becoming One of the South's Most Progressive Cities?" Greensboro *News & Record* (3/16/16); Pitkin, "Young Progressive Wave Rolls Over Charlotte City Council, *Creative Loafing* (11/8/17); Yeoman, "What Happens After the Progressive Revolution Comes to a City Like Durham?" *Nation* (3/12/18); Vigdor, "North Carolina City [Asheville] Approves Reparations for Black Residents," *New York Times* (7/16/20). Moreover in 2018, voters throughout the seven most populous of Biden's big-city counties elected Black sheriffs (Wake, Mecklenburg, Guilford, Forsyth, Cumberland, Durham, and Buncombe). See Shaffer, "With Focus on Immigration, Voters in North Carolina's Most Populous Seven Counties Elected Black Sheriffs," Raleigh *N&O* (7/13/18) and Yeoman, "New Sheriffs in Town as African Americans Win Top Law Enforcement Posts in N.C.," *Washington Post* (1/4/19) (noting that Pitt County elected North Carolina's first Black female sheriff, Paula Dance). Both Shaffer and Yeoman took special note that Quentin E. Miller was elected Buncombe's first Black sheriff while the county's population is over 90% White.

[23] The use of quotes reflects our skepticism about the wisdom of efforts to apply absolute dividing lines regarding what counties should be considered "urban" and "rural."

The analysis pursued by reporter Andrew Carter in the Raleigh *News and Observer's* front-page postmortem on the NC 2020 presidential race might appear to constitute such an opposing strict urban-versus-rural approach. According to Carter's apparent working definition, "urban" NC includes the state's "largest cities and counties" but all other counties in the state are "rural" – and they combined to put Trump over the top against Biden. As our analysis shows, all of NC's 90 other counties beyond its 10 big-city counties basically need to be considered "rural" in order to claim, as Carter did, that "the considerable advantage for Democrats in more urban areas disappeared completely in rural North Carolina, so much that Biden, like Clinton before him, failed to carry the state."

Yet at the same time Carter's analysis expressed ambivalence about the "rural" label for such outlying MSA counties as Johnston in the Raleigh MSA and Union plus others in the Charlotte MSA. He even cited UNC political scientist Sarah Treul's comment that such outlying metropolitan counties are different than "the *true rural* communities and counties across North Carolina." See Carter, "North Carolina's Urban-Rural Divide Widens in 2020 Election," *News & Observer* (11/7/20).

For an outstanding exploration regarding the Countrypolitan character of Johnston, see the student essay by Johnston native Katherine Tamer, "The Convergence of Urban-Rural Divide in Johnston County, North Carolina" (final paper in McCorkle's 2017 "North Carolina Politics and Policy" Master's Seminar at Duke's Sanford School of Public Policy; paper in the authors' possession).

In our view, characterizing such counties as Countrypolitan is far analytically superior to stretching out the "rural" label to include them. The term "Country-politan" captures the depth of rural and small-town legacies even in such outlying NC metropolitan counties next door to big-city counties. At the same time, it does not confuse them with what Prof. Treul called the "true rural" counties in the rest of NC. Our distinguishing emphasis on NC's 25 Countrypolitan counties moreover underlines the key point that Trump's strongest base of support was in metropolitan NC rather than the more rural and small-town counties of nonmetropolitan NC.

Finally, our analysis underscores that "regional" political characterizations of, for example, "Eastern" versus "Western" NC have become antiquated and misleading. The analysis from *Washington Post* reporters David Weigel and Lauren Tierney entitled "The Six Political States of North Carolina" (8/23/20) might initially appear to follow such an old-fashioned regional approach. Yet the top factor that Weigel and Tierney emphasized in analyzing the partisan blue-red divisions within each of NC's "six states" was whether each region had a higher or lower "share of people living in cities [than the] the state average."

[24] The demographic profiles of these 12 smaller-city counties ranging across 6 MSAs do not fit any uniform pattern. OMB rates all of them as metropolitan based on their economic/commuting patterns. And the Census Bureau rates most of them (9 of 12) as having urban-majority population densities. But all 12 counties have median income levels and college graduate percentages below statewide averages. From 2010-2020, only two – Onslow (15%) and Alamance (13%) – had population growth rates above the state average (10%). Only one other county had a growth rate above 2% (Catawba 4.1%), and 9 of these counties experienced negative growth.

Alamance is the single county in the Burlington MSA. It is the second biggest (171,415) and second fastest growing county in this 12-county MSA category. While not yet economically connected with them at OMB's requisite commuting levels, Alamance is sandwiched between the bigger-city Durham-Chapel Hill and Greensboro MSAs.

Military installations are in three other small-city MSA counties with over 100,00 people. Two – Onslow and Wayne – constitute single-county MSAs. Onslow County in the Jacksonville MSA has the Camp Lejeune Marine Base. It also has the highest population of all 12 counties (204,576). The Seymour Johnson Air Force Base is in Wayne (117,333), and Wayne is the single county in the Goldsboro MSA. The Cherry Point Marine Base is in the multiple-county New Bern MSA. While the Census Bureau rates Craven (100,720) as having a 72.3% urban population density, the two small outlying counties with commuter connections to it – Pamlico and Jones – are both ranked as having 100% rural population density.

The biggest MSA in this category is the western piedmont Hickory-Lenoir-Morganton MSA – which is informally known as the "Unifour" MSA. Its three main counties – Catawba, Burke, and Caldwell – have majority-urban population densities. Catawba is the one county in the MSA with over 100,000 in population (160,610) The much smaller Alexander County (37,497) has only a 27.2% urban density. This Unifour MSA might be considered the most "metropolitan" in this category since its four counties form the 8th most populous MSA (365,276) – ahead of the MSAs containing the bigger cities of Wilmington and Greenville.

At the same time, all four Unifour counties have heavy White majority populations. Catawba has the lowest of the four at 74.9%. Trump ran up super-majorities above 66% in all four counties.

At the other political pole is the Rocky Mount MSA in eastern NC. Its two counties have White-minority populations – Nash (48.9%) and Edgecombe (36%). Biden narrowly won Nash (50-49%) but easily carried smaller Edgecombe (63-36%). The Census Bureau rates both Biden-blue counties as having urban-density majorities – Nash (52%) and Edgecombe (55%). Yet their urban-density majorities are at lower levels than the main three and very

Republican-red counties in the Unifour MSA. For 2021, NC Commerce ranked Edgecombe as the most economically distressed county in the state. See Commerce's 2021 North Carolina Development Tier Designations.

Nash and Edgecombe were the only small-city MSA counties won by Biden. But Trump's majorities failed to reach 60% in 4 additional counties – Alamance, Wayne, Craven, and Jones. All 4 counties have White population majorities of less than 66%. (So does the 64-34% Trump county of Onslow, which is 65.7% White).

[25] For a similar point about the composition of Trump's vote at the national level, see Van Dam, "Trump Wasn't Just a Rural Phenomenon. Most of His Supporters Come from Cities and Suburbs," *Washington Post* (11/18/20)

[26] In January of 2021 OMB proposed a tightening of its metropolitan standards so that all MSA counties would have or be economically connected to "core" areas containing at least 100,000 in population. In July, after a largely critical round of public comment, OMB withdrew the proposal. See Macagone, "OMB Backs Off Change…," *Roll Call* (7/13/21). For a critical review, see Pipa and Gesimar, "The New 'Rural'? The Implications of OMB's Proposal to Redefine Nonmetro America," *Brookings* (3/18/21). See also Marema, "What Would Redefining Metro Counties Mean for Rural America? It's Complicated," *Daily Yonder* (3/5/21).

The proposed OMB standard would have technically applied to "core" contiguous areas including but extending beyond formal city or town limits. The NC counties in the Jacksonville, Burlington, and Hickory-Lenoir-Morganton MSAs would have remained in the metropolitan category. The counties in the Goldsboro, New Bern, and Rocky Mount MSAs would have dropped down into the nonmetropolitan/micropolitan category. See Tippett, "Proposed Standards Impact Who Is Urban In NC," *Carolina Demography* (3/10/21) Gov. Cooper's administration filed an objection to the OMB proposal. See Tippett and Coates, "NC Urges Delayed Action on Proposed Metro Standards (3/17/21).

[27] The total population of the Charlotte MSA is 2.64 million. It contains 3 counties in South Carolina – York, Lancaster, and Chester – with a total population of 411,235. All references in the text of this paper are to the NC population in the Charlotte MSA.

[28] The status of metropolitan Charlotte probably represents the biggest source of confusion about NC politics. In August 2016, for example, the Raleigh *News & Observer* ran an AP story on the front page which emphasized Trump's NC troubles due to Clinton's strong support in "the Charlotte area." See Beaumont, "N.C.'s Changing Voter Base Hurts Trump in a State He Needs," *N&O* (8/21/16) Yet, as the Brookings chart in the text (page 9) shows, *Trump ended up winning the Charlotte metropolitan area by 1.5%.* And in 2020, national publications issued numerous stories about how suburban voters around Charlotte were rather uniformly opposed to Trump. See, e.g., Schneider, "Booming Suburbs Boost Biden in North Carolina," *Politico* (10/21/20) ("… growing metro areas like Charlotte have tilted against the GOP"): Glucek, "Trump Is Selling White Grievance. The Suburbs Aren't Buying It." *New York Times* (7/10/20). Biden did perform better than Clinton but still only won the Charlotte metropolitan area by 3.6% – versus his double-digit victory over Trump in Wake County and his even larger drubbings of Trump in Northern Virginia and the immediately outlying AMR counties of the Atlanta MSA.

The confusion is somewhat understandable because Mecklenburg County registered such large vote numbers and percentages for Clinton as well as Biden. On the Democratic transformation of Charlotte and the rest of Mecklenburg County, see Lacour, "Outmanned Old Party: The GOP in Charlotte, Past and Present," *Charlotte Magazine* (7/1/20) and Harrison, "… Biden Won Almost Every Charlotte Precinct, Sweeping Former GOP Strongholds," *WFAE* (1/25/21).

A big source of the confusion may well be that the word "suburban" today appears to be winning the dubious prize for being the most overworked term in American political analysis. Especially since the 2018 midterm elections, liberal-minded commentators have been claiming that "the suburbs" are turning Democratic blue. See, e.g., Canipe, "Suburban Districts Moved Toward Democrats in 2018," *Axios* (11/9/18); Montgomery, "Suburban Voters Gave Democrats Their Victory," *Bloomberg City Lab* (11/7/18). More conservative-minded commentators deny the

staying power of any such shift. See, e.g., Kotkin, "The Next Election Will Be Decided by the Suburbs," *Los Angeles Daily* News (12/15/19).

The reality however is that politically different kinds of suburbs can be found in too many different places. As the work of Prof. Bitzer (see especially endnote 13) has emphasized, the vote in "suburbs" *inside* such NC big cities has been trending solidly blue Democratic, the "suburbs" *outside* such cities and in the same county is trending bluer but still constitute contested territories, while the "suburbs" in outlying NC metropolitan counties has remained the Republican base in NC. See also Bitzer, "Are NC 'Suburbs' Trending Like National Suburbs?" *Old North State Politics* (11/7/19).

Due to this political diversity, our analysis here has chosen to avoid "suburban" as a key term of NC analysis.

[29] The 7 outlying counties in the Charlotte MSA constituted 40.5% of the statewide Countrypolitan vote (600,926 out of a 1,482,637 total). The red-Trump nature of outlying Countrypolitan counties in other MSAs also significantly countered Biden's big-city county margins in NC metropolitan areas beyond Charlotte. For example:

- Biden won the Greensboro MSA by only 50.5%-48.2% and 9,207 votes after gaining a 60.8%-37.7% margin and a vote lead of 65,792 in Guilford.
- He lost the Winston-Salem MSA by 42.0%- 56.6% or 52,596 votes after gaining a 56.2-42.2% margin and a vote lead of 27,969 in Forsyth. The Winston-Salem MSA contributed the second largest Countrypolitan vote in 2020 (10.2%, or 159,451 out of the 1,482,637 total).
- He lost the Wilmington MSA by 46.9%-51.4% and 7,426 votes after gaining a 50.2-48.0% margin and a vote lead of 2,807 in New Hanover.
- He won the Asheville MSA by 50.7%-47.7% and only 8,514 votes after gaining a 59.7%-38.6% margin and a vote lead of 34,103 in Buncombe.

If Brunswick County was still in the Wilmington MSA, Trump' overall margin would have more than tripled to 29,996 votes and resulted in a 55-43% victory. See endnote 14.

But this phenomenon of smaller metropolitan areas going red-Republican overall is not unique to NC. As the Brookings authors pointed out in *Blue Metros, Red States,* the phenomenon of "outer suburban" areas "offset[ting] … Democratic voting power" in counties below the "big metro" level occurs throughout Virginia and Georgia as well. See pages 103, 105, 138. The big comparative difference with NC is that the outlying counties in the leading *big metros* of Northern Virginia as well as the immediately outlying Atlanta/AMR counties have been departing from this overall red-Republican pattern. We thus concentrate on this crucial comparative difference among the "big metros" in these three states.

[30] Throughout the text, we refer for convenience's sake to the Atlanta MSA, the Northern Virginia MSA, and the Charlotte MSA. But all three of these MSAs have secondary job-commuting centers which appear in the OMB's formal titles. The formal titles are the Atlanta-Sandy Springs-Alpharetta MSA, Washington-Arlington-Alexandria MSAs, and the Charlotte-Concord-Gastonia MSA. The Raleigh MSA is the only one of the four MSAs without any secondary job-commuting center.

[31] As the Brookings team of authors explained in *Blue Metros* (p. 127), Virginia has "independent cities" plus counties with no incorporated cities. Northern Virginia's only incorporated/independent city with a population above 100,000 is Alexandria (159,428). The MSA also contains counties above that population mark – Fairfax (1,147,532), Prince William (470,335), Loudon (413,538), Arlington (236,842), Stafford (152,882), Spotsylvania (136,215). Spotsylvania was the only above-100,000 jurisdiction won by Trump (52.5%-45.7%). For individual county results, see Virginia Department of Elections, "2020 Presidential General Election." See also text pgs. 10-12 and endnotes 30-36.

The Brookings team in *Blue Metros* calculated that Northern Virginia had 17 total jurisdictions. In 2020 OMB added one more jurisdiction – Madison County -- to increase the total to 18. The *Blue Metros* volume was probably written in substantial part before this change. And it appears that the Brookings team's post-election analysis in "The Largest Metro Area Made the Difference for Democrats" stayed with the prior designation of 17 Northern Virginia jurisdictions. That may explain our slightly different numbers. We find that the 18 Northern Virginia jurisdictions represented 35.7% of the statewide 2020 vote and provided Biden with a 31.2% lead (64.6%-33.3%). Madison County is the second smallest jurisdiction in the region with a population of only 13,312. Trump won Madison in 2020 by a 5,300-2,698 margin.

[32] See McShane, "Innovation and the Endless Frontier ….," *Substack* (5/19/21).

[33] OMB also recognizes looser and larger statistical areas beyond the metropolitan level. OMB characterizes them as "Combined Statistical Areas." Our hypothetical "Triangle MSA" would conform to the Raleigh-Durham-Cary Combined Statistical Area. This combined area has a population of 2.08 million – which makes it very comparable in size to the NC population in Charlotte's MSA (2.2 million).

[34] For more background on Northern Virginia and its political influence, see Chapter 3 "Mid-Atlantic: Pennsylvania and Virginia" in the Brookings team's *Blue Metros, Red States* volume at 81-127 (section on Virginia starts at p.99) For background on Georgia, see Chapter 4 "South Atlantic: Georgia and North Carolina" at 129-169 (section on Georgia ends at p. 146) For especially the demographic and political changes in the Atlanta area, see also Badger, "How Atlanta's Politics Overtook the Suburbs, Too," *New York Times* (12/9/20); Thompson, "Georgia on My Mind," *New York Review Daily* (11/19/20); Pooley, "Segregation's New Geography: The Atlanta Metro Region, Race, and the Declining Prospects for Upward Mobility," *Southern Spaces* (4/15/15). For individual county results, see Georgia Secretary of State, "November 3, 2020 Presidential Recount."

For an outstanding ethnographic profile of an outlying Atlanta/AMR county – Rockdale – before its emergence as a new Democratic stronghold, see Garner, "'Perfectly Positioned': The Blurring of Urban, Suburban, and Rural Boundaries in a Southern Community, *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* (July 2017) 46-63. In our view, the blurring of urban, suburban, and rural mentalities highlighted by Garner reflects a quintessentially Countrypolitan characteristic. See also Hallerman, "How Changes in Henry, Rockdale Helped Biden Capture Georgia," *Atlanta Journal-Constitution* (12/30/20); and the statement of Democratic analyst David Shor in Stanton, "How 2020 Killed Off Democrats' Demographic Hopes," *Politico* (11/12/20) ("The real story behind Georgia … is just these enormous swings in the Atlanta suburbs, which make up most of the state. There are a bunch of precincts where Obama got 30 percent of the vote, where now Trump got 30 percent of the vote – absolutely wild swings in these highly educated suburbs.")

[35] See also "Without Northern Virginia, Trump Would Have Won the State," *Inside NOVA* (11/12/20) (analysis showing that Trump would have won the state by a 50.2%-47.9% margin if a more narrowly defined "Northern Virginia" composed of 9 pro-Biden jurisdictions – Arlington, Fairfax, Loudon, Prince William, Alexandria (City), Fairfax, Fairfax City, Falls Church (City), Manassas City, and Manassas Church City – is excluded from the statewide total.)

[36] For the general demographic (but not voting) data pertaining to whole MSAs and statewide in NC, Georgia, and Virginia in paragraph 9 of the text pgs. 11-12, see the analysis of the Brookings Institution team in Damore et. al, eds., *Blue Metros, Red States: The Shifting Urban-Rural Divide in America's Swing State* (2021) 17, 41, 49. For more on the demography of the Countrypolitan counties in the Charlotte MSA, see the profiles in "Our Region" compiled by the UNC Charlotte Urban Institute.

On the different Black shares of the voting population in Georgia versus NC, see Budiman, "Key Facts about Black Eligible Voters in 2020 Battleground States," *Pew Research Center* (10/21/20). For an emphasis on Georgia's comparative strength in terms of Black voters, see the 2020 strategy analysis published by Stacey Abrams and her Fair Fight organization entitled "The Abrams Playbook: The Strategy and Path to Victory in 2020" ("Black voters, the most reliably Democratic voting bloc, comprise a significantly higher proportion of Georgia's eligible electorate

than that of any other competitive state. Georgia has, by far, the largest base of voters a 2020 campaign can turn out …. [p.7]").

[37] Budiman, Key Facts about Black Eligible Voters…," *supra.*

[38] *Blue Metros,* 148.

[39] In 2018 and 2020, Democratic candidate Aimy Steele lost relatively close 53-47% contests in races for the Cabarrus-area state House district (House #82). Steele is a Black woman from Concord who was a Spanish teacher and a school principal. She is now the executive director of the recently launched New North Carolina Project. Its goal is to use Stacey Abrams' efforts in Georgia as a model for further expansion of the North Carolina electorate. See Murphy, "New Group Aims to Flip NC, through 1 Million People of Color Who Didn't Vote in 2020," Raleigh *News & Observer* (10/8/21); Kinery, "North Carolina Group Looks to Deploy Stacey Abrams's Georgia Strategy," *Bloomberg* (10/6/21); and Soloff, "How One New Group is Stacey Abrams-ing North Carolina," *Axios Charlotte* (12/3/21).

A complementary NC organization is the New Rural Project. Two former Democratic candidates – Cynthia Wallace, the 9th Congressional District candidate in 2020, and Helen Probst Mills, the State Senate candidate in the 25th District for the 2018 and 2020 election cycles – are cofounders of The New Rural Project. One of its main goals is the registration of voters as part of its mission to promote civic engagement in marginalized communities. Its geographic focus is on seven counties – Moore, Hoke, Robeson, Union, Anson, Richmond, and Scotland. See Sasser, "New Rural Project Aims to Increase Civic Engagement," Richmond County *Daily Journal* (11/5/21); Mills, "Regaining Trust of Rural Voters," *PoliticsNC* (12/3/21. See the Project's website here.

[40] In October 2020, a team of demographic and political analysts sponsored by the Center for American Progress released a report estimating the political impact of projected demographic changes in each of the 50 states. The CAP team projected NC's current non-White percentage of 32% rising to 38% by the time of the 2036 election cycle. The CAP team moreover suggested that this movement upward of NC's non-White vote could lead to the establishment of a durable NC Democratic electoral majority by 2028 – and perhaps by 2024 if the progressive pattern among Millennial generation voters continues. See Griffin, Frey, and Teixeira, "America's Electoral Future: The Coming Generational Transformation," *Center for American Progress* (10/19/20). For an interesting and updated NC demographic analysis with similar conclusions, See *Carolina Forward,* North Carolina 2030 (2021) (report in McCorkle's possession).

Such analysts as Jed Kolko have further suggested that more blue-oriented young and non-White voters appear to be moving into the outlying "lower-density suburbs of large metros" which currently "lean red" and they may "bring their politics with them." See Kolko, "Red Counties + Blue Folks = Purple? Reading the New Census Data," *Bloomberg* (3/22/18). Such migration in NC could turn such booming Countrypolitan counties as Union and Johnston as well as Cabarrus into more purple places in relatively short order. See also McWhirter and Overberg, "New Life and Work Choices Revitalize Exurbs, Bringing New Strains," *Wall Street Journal* (8/29/21) (focusing among other places on the Charlotte metropolitan area).

But the demographic inevitability of such a progressive scenario is subject to question. Especially due to increased voting for Trump among Latinx voters in such states as Florida and Texas, some analysts are emphasizing that such voters will never be as solidly in the Democratic column as Black voters have been. See Levins, "Latino Vote Turnout Spikes, Shifts Election in Some Unexpected Ways," [Charlotte] *WCNC* (11/4/20) ("'There's nothing inevitable about Democrats winning this group of voters,' [NC State political scientist Steven] Greene added. 'And we saw that this time.' Exit polls showed Democrats didn't secure the Latino voters they were hoping for in states like Florida, Texas, Nevada, and parts of North Carolina.")

Some post-election analysis has also specifically indicated that Republicans in NC made incremental "gains among Black supporters, particularly in non-urban areas." Marshall and Tran, "2020 Post-Election Analysis, *Third Way* (May 2021). See also endnote 19 on the big shift to Trump among Lumbee Native Americans in Robeson County.

Other analysts question how the Census Bureau calculates its "White" category and its claims that the US is heading toward becoming a "majority-minority" nation. See, e.g., Alba, *The Great Demographic Illusion: Majority, Minority, and the Expanding American Mainstream* (2020) and Alba, "The Myth of a Majority-Minority America," *Atlantic* (June 2021). For a review of this growing debate, see Rosenfeld, "Majority-Minority Myths," *Dissent* (Spring 2021). See also Teixeira, "Demography is Not Destiny," *Persuasion* (7/16/21); Serwer, "Demography is not Destiny," *Atlantic* (8/20/21); Stanton, "How 2020 Killed Off Democrats' Demographic Hopes," *Politico* (11/12/20); Pearce, "Can Democrats Do the 2022 Math?" *New Day for NC* (5/17/21). And in the wake of Virginia's 2021 gubernatorial race, see Douthat, "The Diminishing Democratic Majority," *New York Times* (11/21/21).

Western Carolina political scientist Christopher Cooper has furthermore warned that the long realignment of Whites away from the Democratic Party has been slower in NC than in many other Southern states – and thus may continue over subsequent election cycles. See Cooper quoted in Adams, "Electoral Patchwork: Both Parties Look for Success in a South That is Less Monolithic," *Daily Yonder* (10/12/20) ("The realignment never finished here [NC] ….").

Finally, the idea that demographic change guarantees a "blue" NC must contend with the fact that a significant amount of change has already occurred over the last half century and has not yielded that result. In his classic exploration entitled *Inside U.S.A. (1947),* for example, journalist John Gunther noted the strikingly native-born nature of the state's population. Gunther declared that some people even referred to NC as "the most American of all the states" because "not less than 99.6 percent of its people (by North Carolina figures anyway) are native born" (p. 718). Yet today over 40% of NC's population was born outside the state. See Stanford, "Non-Native NC Residents, 2012-2016," *Carolina Demography* (3/15/18). But for a solid exposition of the argument that continuing in-migration from "movers" to NC and the rest of the South politically favors Democrats, see North Carolina State political scientist Irwin Morris' new book *Movers and Stayers: The Partisan Transformation of Twenty-First Century Southern Politics* (2021).

Regardless of the demographic question, the best strategy for NC Democrats may well be to exhibit a hungry "underdog" mentality about the prospects for victory rather than seeing themselves as destined to triumph. See McCorkle, "'The Dread Handwriting is on the Wall:' Confronting the New Republican South," *Southern Cultures* (1998) 28-42.

[41] The other pro-Trump NC Countrypolitan counties with growth rates above the state average were Johnston (28% growth / 61% Trump - 37% Biden), Brunswick (27%/62-37%), Currituck (19%/72-26%), Union (18%/61-37%), Iredell (17%/65-33%), Harnett (16%/60-38%), Pender (15%/64-34%), Franklin (13%/56-43%), Lincoln (10.9%/72-26%), and Gaston (10.6%/59-40%). Six Countrypolitan counties experienced no or negative growth – Anson (-18%), Gates (-14%), Stokes (-6%), Yadkin (-3%), Rockingham (-3%), and Person (-1%). Biden won Anson while Trump won Gates with less than 60% (56-43%). See also text p.14. For a recent analysis of Brunswick as a high-growth NC county with strong "conservative Republican leanings," see Morris, *Movers and Stayers: The Partisan Transformation of Twentieth-Century Southern Politics* (2021) 110-11.

[42] As already noted (see endnote 30), Concord and Gastonia represent large enough secondary job-commuting centers for the OBM to formally identify this metropolitan area as the "Charlotte-Concord-Gastonia" MSA.

[43] See Muccigrosso, "Production of Army Vehicles Powered by NASCAR Team Underway in Concord Now," *Charlotte Observer* (5/4/21); Smoot, "General Motors Announces Racing Tech Facility in Concord," *Charlotte Observer* (1/24/20). See, e.g., Andrejev, "Today's Coke 600 is Important for the Future of NASCAR, Motorsports in North Carolina" (5/30/21).

[44] See Cuthrell, "Kannapolis Presses On With Hefty UNC Aid, *Business North Carolina* (Jan. 2020). Kannapolis' percentage of college graduates (21.8%) still falls below the statewide average of 31.3%). And its median income average of $53,365 is slightly below the $54,602 statewide average. Its White percentage of 60.1% is slightly below

the 62.6% statewide average. For a view of Kannapolis's continuing conservative legacy, see Martin, "Growing Up in a Trump Town," *Deadspin* (11/11/16). See also Boraks, "Kannapolis Sells Off More Blocks as Downtown Vision Takes Shape," *WFAE* (11/25/20). A smaller portion of Kannapolis is in Rowan County.

[45] For more on Gastonia, see the text pg. 15 and endnote 56.

[46] For more on Henderson County, see the text pg. 15 and endnote 57.

[47] In quintessential Countrypolitan fashion, Union's official "2019 Community Profile" portrays the county as containing "a unique blend of rural and metropolitan lifestyles."(p.2) See also endnote 34 on Garner, "'Perfectly Positioned': The Blurring of Urban, Suburban, and Rural Boundaries in a Southern Community, *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* (July 2017). All five of the county commissioners in Union are middle-age to older White male Republicans. But for an analysis demonstrating that the Union commissioners have not been devoted to an old-school fiscal conservatism, see Schwartz, et al, "Economic Growth and Public Debt; The Case of Union County, North Carolina," *Research in Business and Economics Journal* (Sept. 2013).

[48] Dionne, "In North Carolina, A Portrait of a Deeply Torn Nation," *Washington Post/Salt Lake City-Tribune* (9/11/19)

[49] Lassiter and Geismer, "Turning Affluent Suburbs Is Not Worth the Cost," *New York Times* (6/9/18); see also Geismer and Lassiter, "Stop Worrying about Upper-Class Suburbanites," *Jacobin* (1/2/21).

[50] *Identity Crisis: The 2016 Presidential Campaign and the Battle for the Meaning of America* (2018) 172.

[51] Najmabadi and Knott, "Yes, You're Right, Colleges are Liberal Bubbles: Here's the Data," *Chronicle of Higher Education* (11/14/16), see also Jasper, "These North Carolina Cities Rank Among the Top US College Towns. Here's Why," *Raleigh N&O* (12/2/21).

[52] Too much current political commentary ignores the existence of such blue mini-urban outposts in Countrypolitan and other red counties because it seems to assume that the urbanization process is somehow confined to the biggest cities. Yet more than five decades ago the famed historical sociologist Charles Tilly emphasized the fallacy of truncating urbanization in such a fashion. Urbanization instead needs to be understood as a comprehensive process encompassing even the "increased involvement of the members of rural communities in sets of activities, norms, and social relationships that reach beyond the limits of their own localities." Tilly, *The Vendee* (1964) 11-12; see also Sewell, "Three Temporalities: Toward an Eventful Sociology," in McDonald, ed., *The Historic Turn in the Human Sciences* (1996) 252.

Another way to frame this sociological fallacy limiting or truncating urbanization is found in the phrase "timeless country – modern city." Scholar Cornelia Hornburg used the phrase to describe the artistic license that Van Gogh used in some of his works. Hornburg noted that Van Gogh could portray "the countryside as an environment where traditions and values remained the same throughout the centuries, even though he knew perfectly well that it was changing all the time." See Hornburg, "Imaging City and Country," in Hornburg, ed., *Vincent Van Gogh: Timeless Country – Modern City* (2009) 19-36, 19.

On the possible political significance of county seats, see generally Dacey, "A County-Seat Model for the Areal Pattern of an Urban System," *The Geographical Review* (Oct. 1966) 527-42. See generally Rodden, "Red America is an Illusion: Postindustrial Towns Go for Democrats," *Washington Post* (2/14/17). ("Simplistic county-level maps … colored red" can miss the reality that even "towns" in "largely rural counties" may have "a solidly Democratic core.") But no iron law dictates that all Countrypolitan or other red counties must possess blue-town outposts.

[53] See Graham, "Trump's Fate Rests on Countrypolitan Counties," *Atlantic* (10/26/20); Newell, "Monroe's Mayor Pro Tem Edges Out Competition to Win Mayoral Race," *WBTV/*Charlotte (11/3/21). For the new city council, see here and 2021 city council election results here.

[54] On the growth of the Latinx population in the Charlotte area and Monroe in particular, see McShane, "Charlotte Region's Hispanic Population Grows At a Rapid Pace," *UNC Charlotte Urban Institute* (7/7/21). ("As early as 1991, the *Charlotte Observer* noted a growing population of Hispanic workers living in and around Monroe.")

[55] In a similar emphasis on low Democratic turnout, NBC News Political Director Chuck Todd has also recently taken note of Anson County in the Charlotte MSA as a "'bellwether" turnout challenge for NC Democrats. From our perspective, the important comparative point is that all the 6 Trump Countrypolitan counties in the Charlotte MSA experienced significant double-digit increases in 2020 turnout rivaling the statewide average of 16.5%. Rowan registered a 14% increase and Gaston's increase was 19.8%. The other 4 Trump Countrypolitan counties registered increases above 20%. Yet Anson with its almost Black majority population experienced only a 6.2% increase and a significant shrinkage in the Democratic margin from 2016. See text p. 10. As Todd recently put it about Anson's bellwether turnout status, "If Democrats figure out how to get [stronger] African-American … turnout [in a place like Anson], that is going to tell you about … the [2022] Senate race not just in NC but the statewide races in South Carolina and the statewide races in Georgia." Todd referred to Anson as a "rural" county, and as we have explained its status has fluctuated between the most rural and Countrypolitan status. See endnote 14. But as we also point out, blue-ish Democratic outposts exist in nonmetropolitan as well MSA Countrypolitan counties. See text p. 16. Anson may be an example of a whole county that NC Democrats need to target due to its comparative low turnout performance. On Todd's comments, see Thompson, "Anson County Could Be National Bellwether for Midterm Elections," *WCNC/Charlotte* (10/23/21).

[56] On Gastonia as "a blue speck in a red county with a majority Democratic city council for the first time in recent history," see Karni, "Why Trump Can't Take Red Counties in North Carolina For Granted," *New York Times* (10/25/20). As Karni pointed out, Trump's decision to hold a late October rally in Gastonia made him the first presidential candidate since George W.H. Bush in 1992 to visit Gaston County. In contrast, a Biden supporter in Gastonia reported that she could not even get a Biden-Harris campaign sign until she purchased one on Amazon and made it one of the "rare sightings" of support for the Democratic ticket in Gastonia.

[57] For a 2016 presidential election analysis pointing out Clinton's relative strength in Hendersonville and other central towns in NC western counties, see Taylor, "Breaking Down the Mountains: Precinct-Level Analysis of WNC's Vote," *Carolina Public Press* (11/14/16).

[58] As of the local elections this fall, the five-person Roxboro city council has four members who are registered Democrats and people of color constitute a majority for the first time. See, "Lavigne, "People of Color Grab First-Ever Majority on Roxboro Council," *WRAL. Com* (10/6/21).

[59] The new mayor of Reidsville is Donald Gorham. See "[2021] Rockingham County Municipal Election Results," *WXII2 News.* He is succeeding Jay Donecker, who had been mayor since 2013 and had also served as mayor from 1997 to 2005. See "Candidate Profiles: Reidsville Mayor's Race," Greensboro *News & Record* (10/11/17). Gorham is Black and a registered Democrat. Donecker is White and a registered Democrat as well.

[60] See Kruse, "One of These Two People is the Future of the Democratic South," *Politico* (10/29/21) (covering Morganton mayor Ronnie Thompson's public endorsement of visiting US Senate candidate Cheri Beasley).

[61] See Dunnell, "New Bern Representative to Run for Mayor in the Upcoming Election," New Bern *Sun Journal* (10/7/21) (noting that current mayor Dana Outlaw ran as a Democrat in the 2019 2nd District congressional race).

[62] See Connors, "Goldsboro Mayor Resigns Amidst Continuing Health Battle," *Goldsboro Daily News* (6/15/21).

[63] See Groves, "Butler to be Mayor of Burlington; Wall and Owen Return to the Council," Burlington *Times-News* (11/3/21). On Burlington as a Democratic base, see Yeoman, "A New Democratic Playbook," *The Assembly* (4/21/21) (story on the successful 2020 insurgent campaign against a GOP incumbent in state House District 63 waged by Ricky Hurtado, the lone Latinx member of the NC General Assembly).

[64] For a report about the Clinton campaign belatedly rushing VP running mate Tim Kaine to Sanford in late October 2016, see Bouie, "Black Voters Aren't Turning Out in North Carolina …," *Slate* (11/1/16). According to the UNC Institute of Government's *Forms of Government and Methods of Elections*, the mayor's race in Sanford is a partisan election.

[65] See Starkey, "Beaufort Mayor Rett Newton to Announce 2022 Race for Senate," *Carteret County News-Times* (3/26/21).

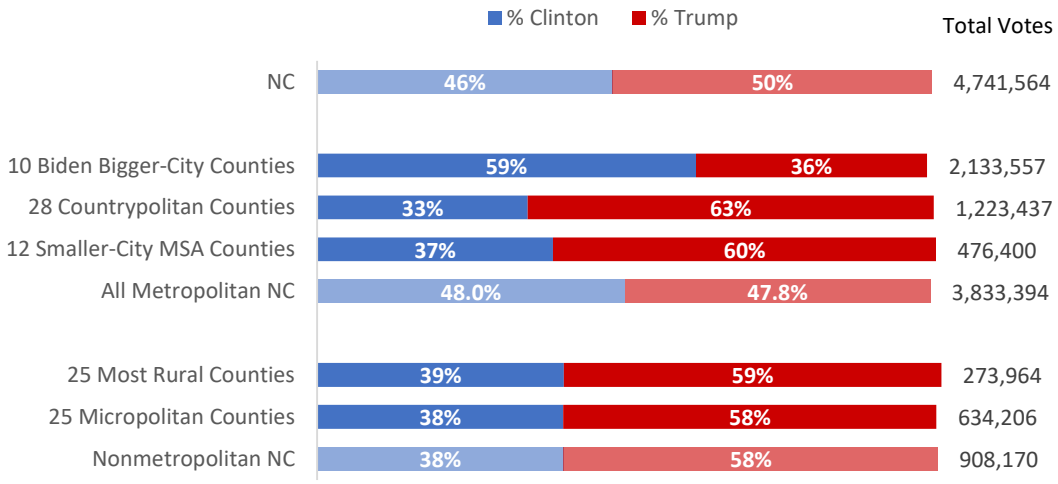
[66] See Miller, "Stanly County is Overwhelmingly Republican, But One Precinct Continually Votes Democratic," *Stanly News & Press* (12/1/20).

[67] Barber and Wilson-Hartgrove, "Who Holds the Key to a New America," *New York Times* (6/4/18). See also Peck, "Learning the Right Lessons: How the Dems Lost North Carolina," *Medium.com* (2/3/17) (criticizing the too exclusively "urban focus" of the Clinton campaign in NC); Spikes, "Georgia's Rural Black Voters Were Ignored and Suppressed. Now They Might Flip the Senate," *USA Today* (1/4/21); Paschal, "How Rural Black Organizers Helped Democrats Win the Senate," *Facing South* (1/12/21); Abbott, "The Left Needs More Than the Low-Hanging Fruit to Win Power," *Jacobin* (11/12/21) (emphasizing that progressives should develop strategies "to compete effectively outside traditional Democratic strongholds").

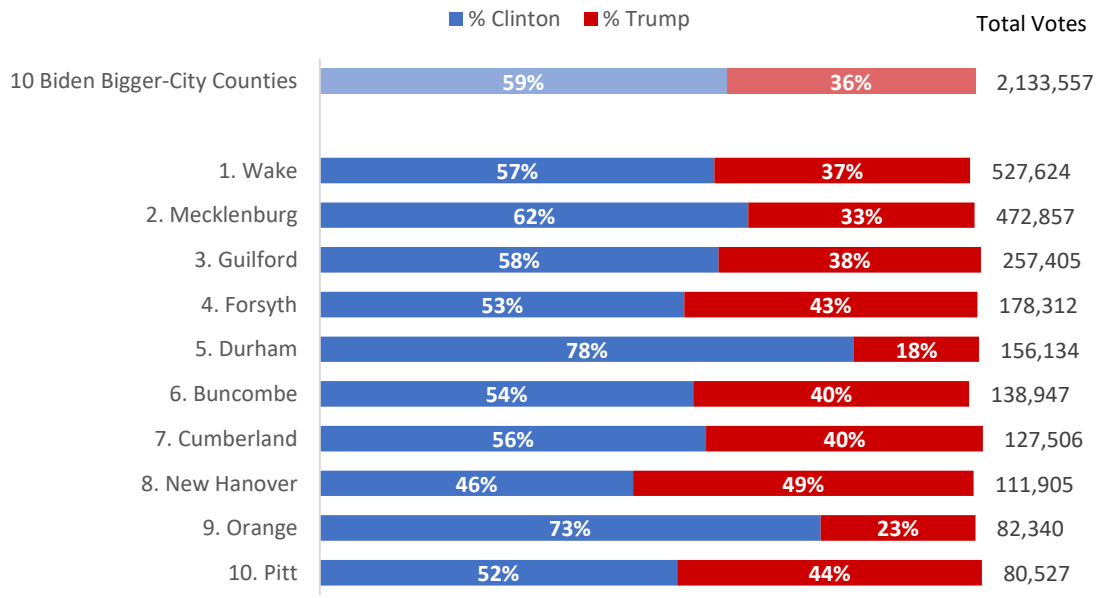
[68] "The Stacey Abrams Playbook…," 12. See also Abrams and Groh-Wargo, "How to Turn Your Red State Blue," *New York Times* (2/11/21) (emphasizing the strategic need for a "multiracial, multiethnic, multigenerational, and truly statewide coalition").

[69] Key, *Southern Politics in State and Nation* (1949) 673-74. Such a blue-outpost strategy would obviously need to complement the continuing effort to turn out more Democratic voters in the state's bigger-city counties and other Democratic strongholds. For a recent collection of political history essays questioning the significance of the red/conservative versus blue/progressive dichotomy, see Cebul et al, eds., *Shaped by the State: Toward A New Political History of the Twentieth Century* (2018).

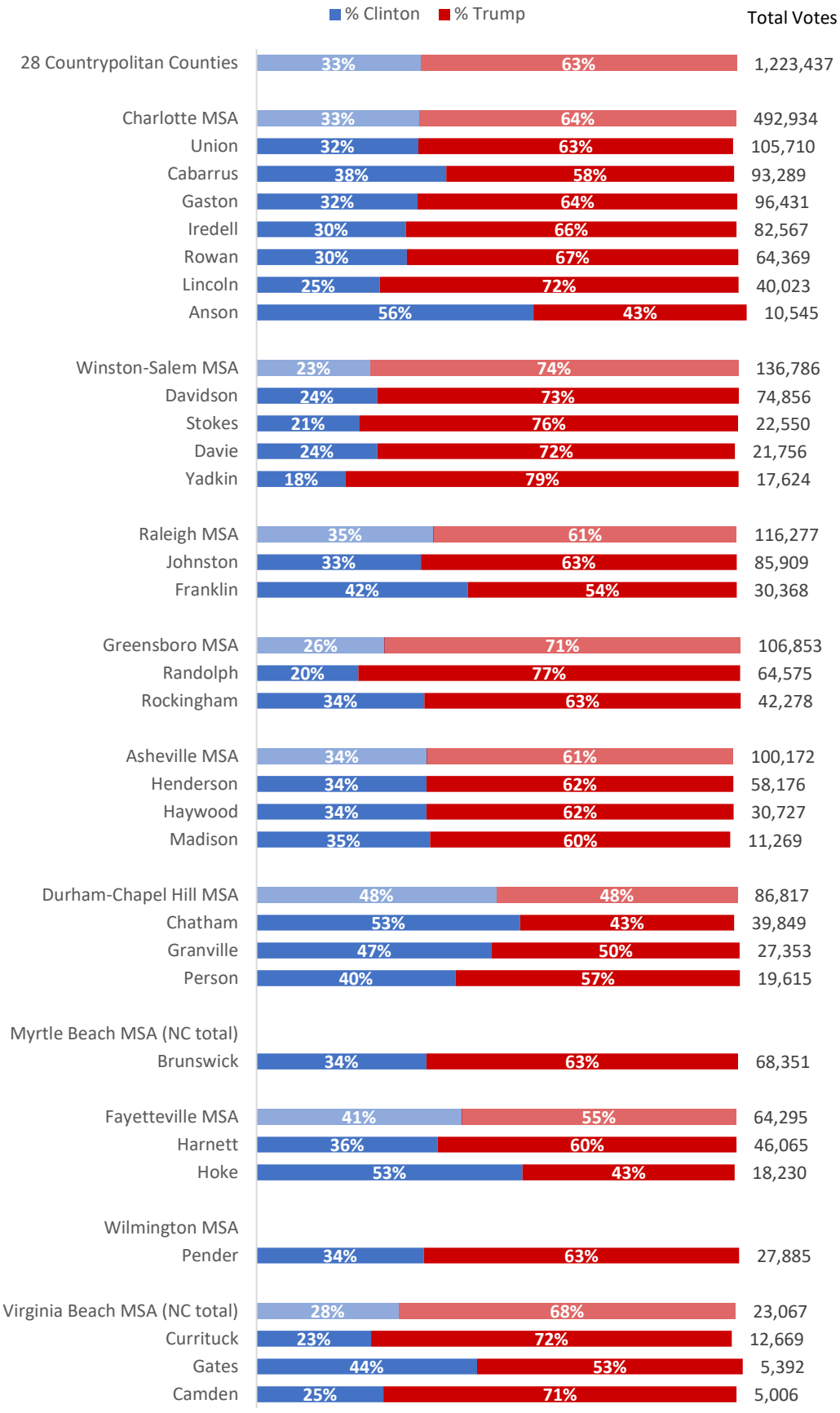
Overall	% Clinton	% Trump	Total Votes	Clinton	Trump
NC	*46%*	*50%*	*4,741,564*	*2,189,316*	*2,362,631*
10 Biden Bigger-City Counties	59%	36%	2,133,557	1,262,043	770,560
28 Countrypolitan Counties	33%	63%	1,223,437	402491	775833
12 Smaller-City MSA Counties	37%	60%	476,400	175,378	285,096
All Metropolitan NC	*48.0%*	*47.8%*	*3,833,394*	*1,839,912*	*1,831,489*
25 Most Rural Counties	39%	59%	273,964	105525	161564
25 Micropolitan Counties	38%	58%	634,206	243879	369578
Nonmetropolitan NC	*38%*	*58%*	*908,170*	*349,404*	*531,142*



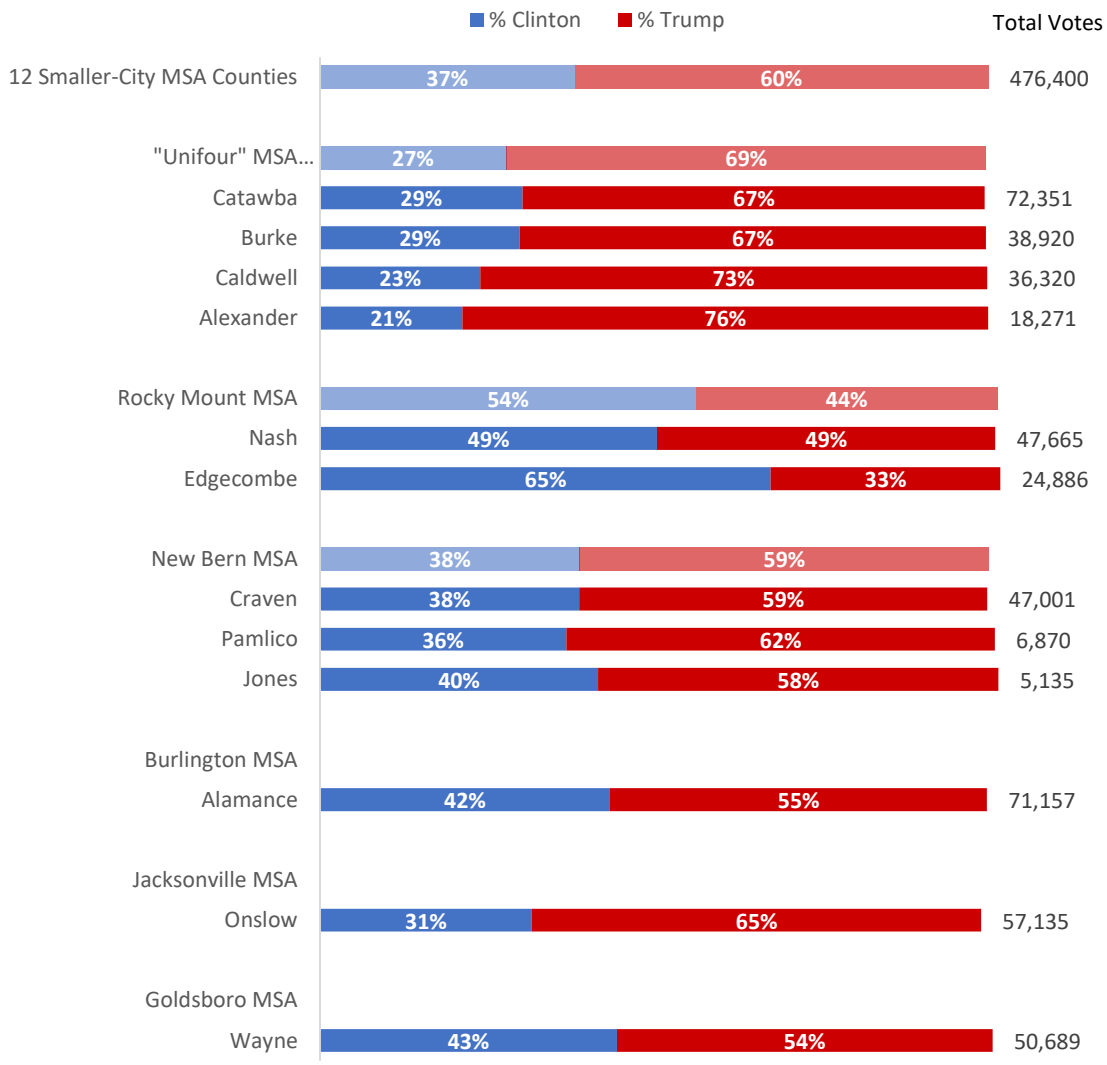
10 Biden Bigger-City Counties	% Clinton	% Trump	Total Votes	Clinton	Trump
10 Biden Bigger-City Counties	59%	36%	2,133,557	1,262,043	770,560
1. Wake	57%	37%	527,624	302,736	196,082
2. Mecklenburg	62%	33%	472,857	294,562	155,518
3. Guilford	58%	38%	257,405	149,248	98,062
4. Forsyth	53%	43%	178,312	94,464	75,975
5. Durham	78%	18%	156,134	121,250	28,350
6. Buncombe	54%	40%	138,947	75,452	55,716
7. Cumberland	56%	40%	127,506	71,605	51,265
8. New Hanover	46%	49%	111,905	50,979	55,344
9. Orange	73%	23%	82,340	59,923	18,557
10. Pitt	52%	44%	80,527	41,824	35,691



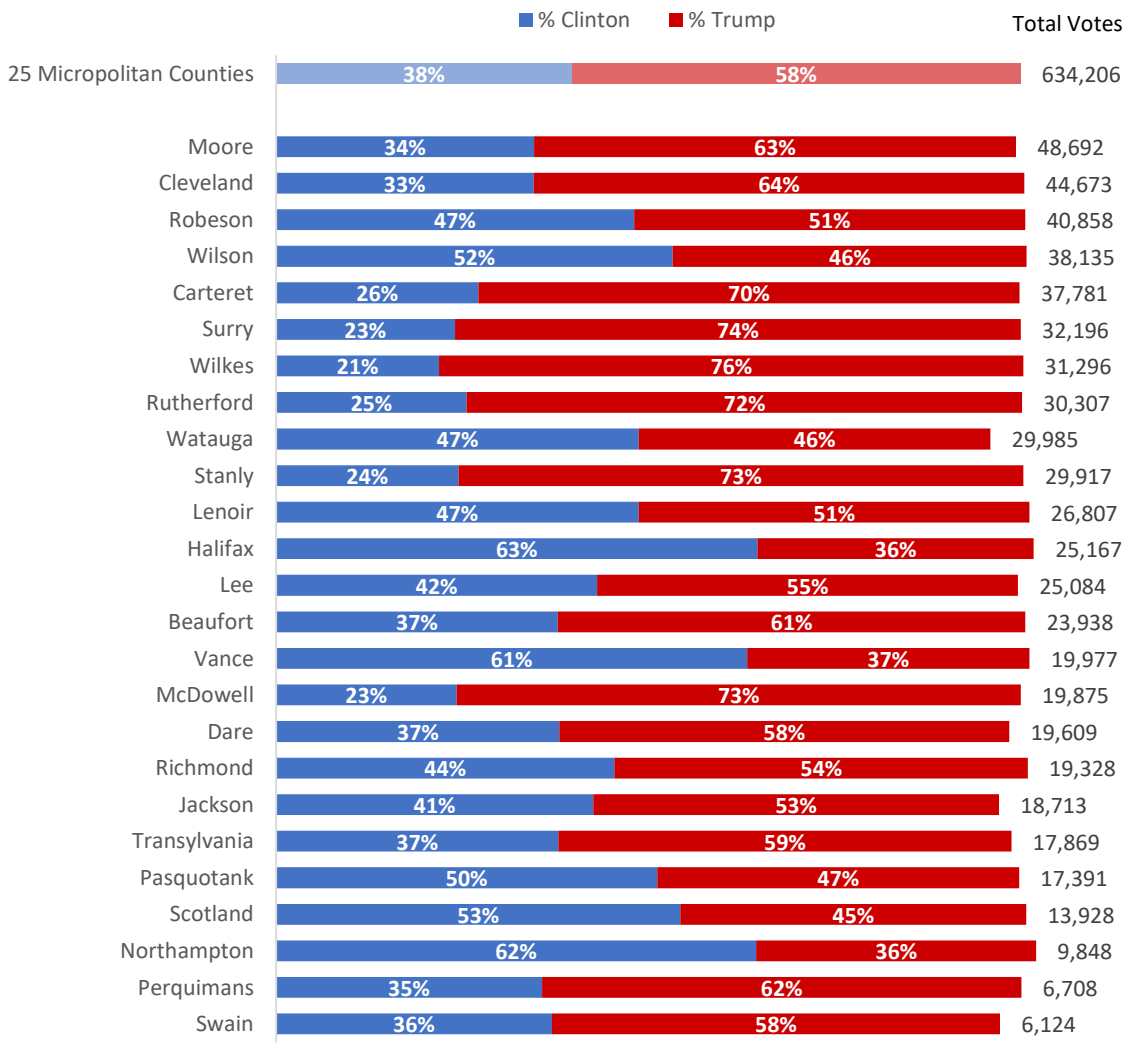
28 Countrypolitan Counties	% Clinton	% Trump	Total Votes	Clinton	Trump
28 Countrypolitan Counties	33%	63%	1,223,437	402,491	775,833
Charlotte MSA	33%	64%	492,934	160,925	313,200
Union	32%	63%	105,710	34,337	66,707
Cabarrus	38%	58%	93,289	35,521	53,819
Gaston	32%	64%	96,431	31,177	61,798
Iredell	30%	66%	82,567	24,734	54,754
Rowan	30%	67%	64,369	19,400	42,810
Lincoln	25%	72%	40,023	9,897	28,806
Anson	56%	43%	10,545	5,859	4,506
Winston-Salem MSA	23%	74%	136,786	31,204	100,915
Davidson	24%	73%	74,856	18,109	54,317
Stokes	21%	76%	22,550	4,665	17,116
Davie	24%	72%	21,756	5,270	15,602
Yadkin	18%	79%	17,624	3,160	13,880
Raleigh MSA	35%	61%	116,277	41,236	70,740
Johnston	33%	63%	85,909	28,362	54,372
Franklin	42%	54%	30,368	12,874	16,368
Greensboro MSA	26%	71%	106,853	27,422	76,260
Randolph	20%	77%	64,575	13,194	49,430
Rockingham	34%	63%	42,278	14,228	26,830
Asheville MSA	34%	61%	100,172	34,226	61,521
Henderson	34%	62%	58,176	19,827	35,809
Haywood	34%	62%	30,727	10,473	18,929
Madison	35%	60%	11,269	3,926	6,783
Durham-Chapel Hill MSA	48%	48%	86,817	41,807	41,881
Chatham	53%	43%	39,849	21,065	17,105
Granville	47%	50%	27,353	12,909	13,591
Person	40%	57%	19,615	7,833	11,185
Myrtle Beach MSA (NC total)					
Brunswick	34%	63%	68,351	23,282	42,720
Fayetteville MSA	41%	55%	64,295	26,463	35,374
Harnett	36%	60%	46,065	16,737	27,614
Hoke	53%	43%	18,230	9,726	7,760
Wilmington MSA					
Pender	34%	63%	27,885	9,354	17,639
Virginia Beach MSA (NC total)	28%	68%	23,067	6,572	15,583
Currituck	23%	72%	12,669	2,913	9,163
Gates	44%	53%	5,392	2,385	2,874
Camden	25%	71%	5,006	1,274	3,546


% Clinton
% Trump
Total Votes
28 Countrypolitan Counties
33% 63% 1,223,437
Charlotte MSA
33% 64% 492,934
Union
32% 63% 105,710
Cabarrus
38% 58% 93,289
Gaston
32% 64% 96,431
Iredell
30% 66% 82,567
Rowan
30% 67% 64,369
Lincoln
25% 72% 40,023
Anson
56% 43% 10,545
Winston-Salem MSA
23% 74% 136,786
Davidson
24% 73% 74,856
Stokes
21% 76% 22,550
Davie
24% 72% 21,756
Yadkin
18% 79% 17,624
Raleigh MSA
35% 61% 116,277
Johnston
33% 63% 85,909
Franklin
42% 54% 30,368
Greensboro MSA
26% 71% 106,853
Randolph
20% 77% 64,575
Rockingham
34% 63% 42,278
Asheville MSA
34% 61% 100,172
Henderson
34% 62% 58,176
Haywood
34% 62% 30,727
Madison
35% 60% 11,269
Durham-Chapel Hill MSA
48% 48% 86,817
Chatham
53% 43% 39,849
Granville
47% 50% 27,353
Person
40% 57% 19,615
Myrtle Beach MSA (NC total)
Brunswick
34% 63% 68,351
Fayetteville MSA
41% 55% 64,295
Harnett
36% 60% 46,065
Hoke
53% 43% 18,230
Wilmington MSA
Pender
34% 63% 27,885
Virginia Beach MSA (NC total)
28% 68% 23,067
Currituck
23% 72% 12,669
Gates
44% 53% 5,392
Camden
25% 71% 5,006

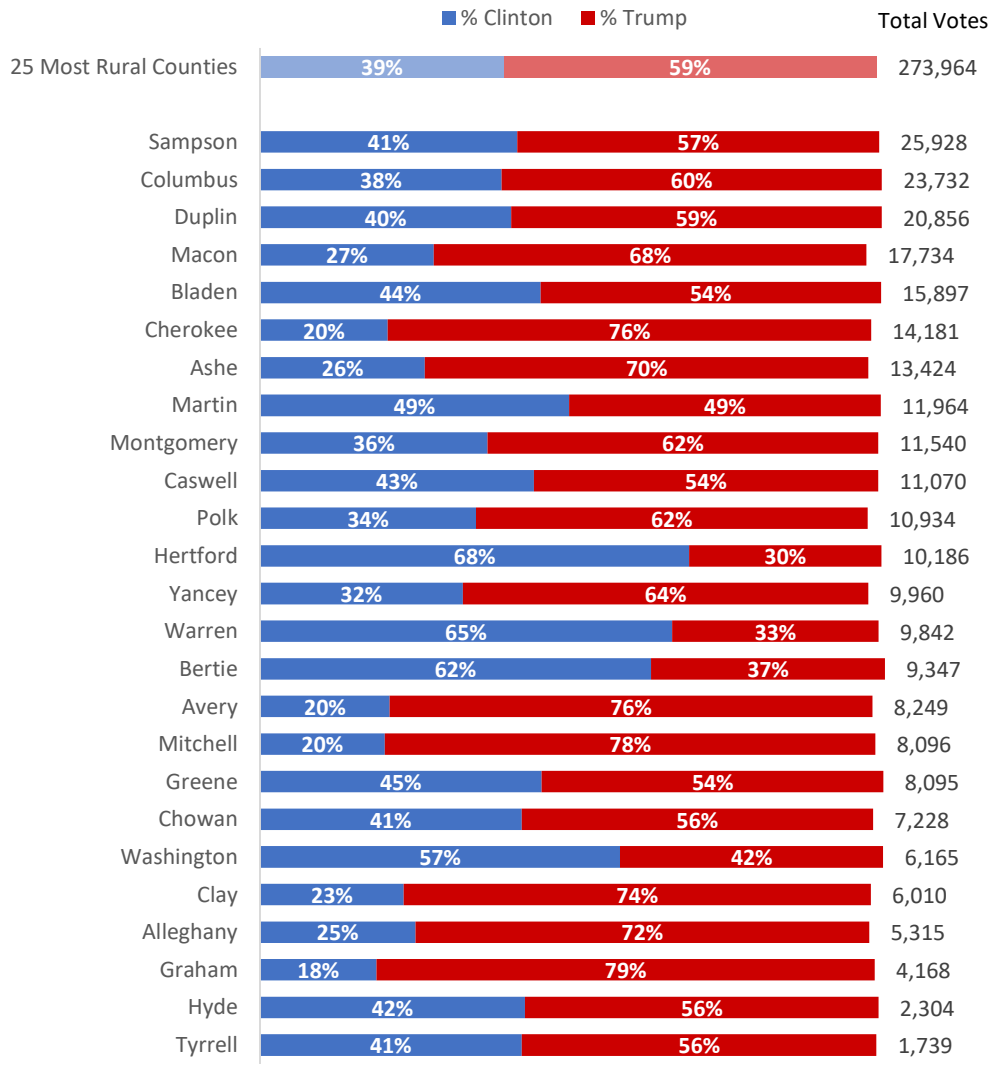
12 Smaller-City MSA Counties	% Clinton	% Trump	Total Votes	Clinton	Trump
12 Smaller-City MSA Counties	37%	60%	476,400	175,378	285,096
"Unifour" MSA					
(Hickory-Lenoir-Morganton)	27%	69%	165,862	44,659	115,076
Catawba	29%	67%	72,351	21,216	48,324
Burke	29%	67%	38,920	11,251	26,238
Caldwell	23%	73%	36,320	8,425	26,621
Alexander	21%	76%	18,271	3,767	13,893
Rocky Mount MSA	54%	44%	72,551	39,459	31,580
Nash	49%	49%	47,665	23,235	23,319
Edgecombe	65%	33%	24,886	16,224	8,261
New Bern MSA	38%	59%	59,006	22,143	34,963
Craven	38%	59%	47,001	17,630	27,731
Pamlico	36%	62%	6,870	2,448	4,258
Jones	40%	58%	5,135	2,065	2,974
Burlington MSA					
Alamance	42%	55%	71,157	29,833	38,815
Jacksonville MSA					
Onslow	31%	65%	57,135	17,514	37,122
Goldsboro MSA					
Wayne	43%	54%	50,689	21,770	27,540


% Clinton
% Trump
Total Votes
12 Smaller-City MSA Counties
37%
60%
476,400
"Unifour" MSA...
27%
69%
Catawba
29%
67%
72,351
Burke
29%
67%
38,920
Caldwell
23%
73%
36,320
Alexander
21%
76%
18,271
Rocky Mount MSA
54%
44%
Nash
49%
49%
47,665
Edgecombe
65%
33%
24,886
New Bern MSA
38%
59%
Craven
38%
59%
47,001
Pamlico
36%
62%
6,870
Jones
40%
58%
5,135
Burlington MSA
Alamance
42%
55%
71,157
Jacksonville MSA
Onslow
31%
65%
57,135
Goldsboro MSA
Wayne
43%
54%
50,689

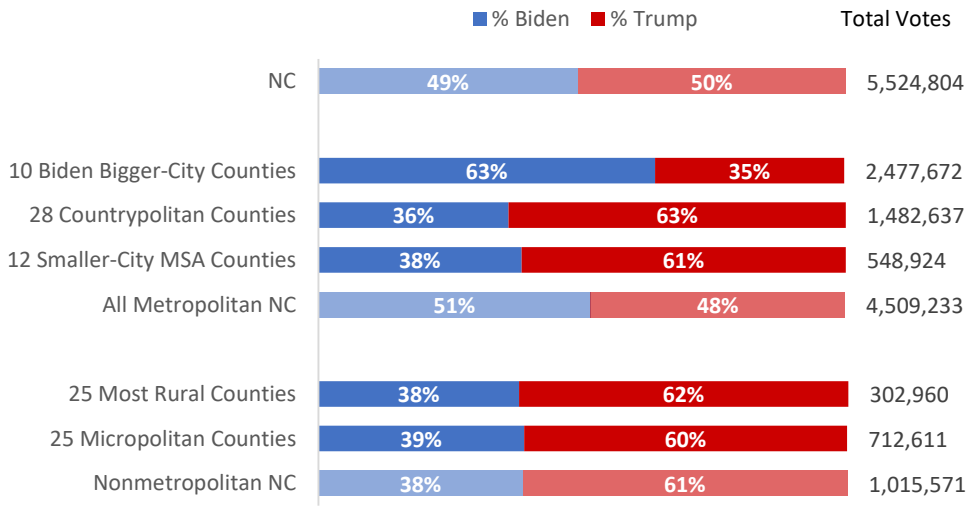
25 Micropolitan	% Clinton	% Trump	Total Votes	Clinton	Trump
25 Micropolitan Counties	38%	58%	634,206	243,879	369,578
Moore	34%	63%	48,692	16,329	30,490
Cleveland	33%	64%	44,673	14,964	28,479
Robeson	47%	51%	40,858	19,016	20,762
Wilson	52%	46%	38,135	19,663	17,531
Carteret	26%	70%	37,781	9,939	26,569
Surry	23%	74%	32,196	7,488	23,671
Wilkes	21%	76%	31,296	6,638	23,752
Rutherford	25%	72%	30,307	7,512	21,871
Watauga	47%	46%	29,985	14,138	13,697
Stanly	24%	73%	29,917	7,094	21,964
Lenoir	47%	51%	26,807	12,634	13,613
Halifax	63%	36%	25,167	15,748	9,031
Lee	42%	55%	25,084	10,469	13,712
Beaufort	37%	61%	23,938	8,764	14,543
Vance	61%	37%	19,977	12,229	7,332
McDowell	23%	73%	19,875	4,667	14,568
Dare	37%	58%	19,609	7,222	11,460
Richmond	44%	54%	19,328	8,501	10,383
Jackson	41%	53%	18,713	7,713	9,870
Transylvania	37%	59%	17,869	6,558	10,520
Pasquotank	50%	47%	17,391	8,615	8,180
Scotland	53%	45%	13,928	7,319	6,256
Northampton	62%	36%	9,848	6,144	3,582
Perquimans	35%	62%	6,708	2,319	4,177
Swain	36%	58%	6,124	2,196	3,565


% Clinton
% Trump
Total Votes
25 Micropolitan Counties 38% 58% 634,206
Moore 34% 63% 48,692
Cleveland 33% 64% 44,673
Robeson 47% 51% 40,858
Wilson 52% 46% 38,135
Carteret 26% 70% 37,781
Surry 23% 74% 32,196
Wilkes 21% 76% 31,296
Rutherford 25% 72% 30,307
Watauga 47% 46% 29,985
Stanly 24% 73% 29,917
Lenoir 47% 51% 26,807
Halifax 63% 36% 25,167
Lee 42% 55% 25,084
Beaufort 37% 61% 23,938
Vance 61% 37% 19,977
McDowell 23% 73% 19,875
Dare 37% 58% 19,609
Richmond 44% 54% 19,328
Jackson 41% 53% 18,713
Transylvania 37% 59% 17,869
Pasquotank 50% 47% 17,391
Scotland 53% 45% 13,928
Northampton 62% 36% 9,848
Perquimans 35% 62% 6,708
Swain 36% 58% 6,124

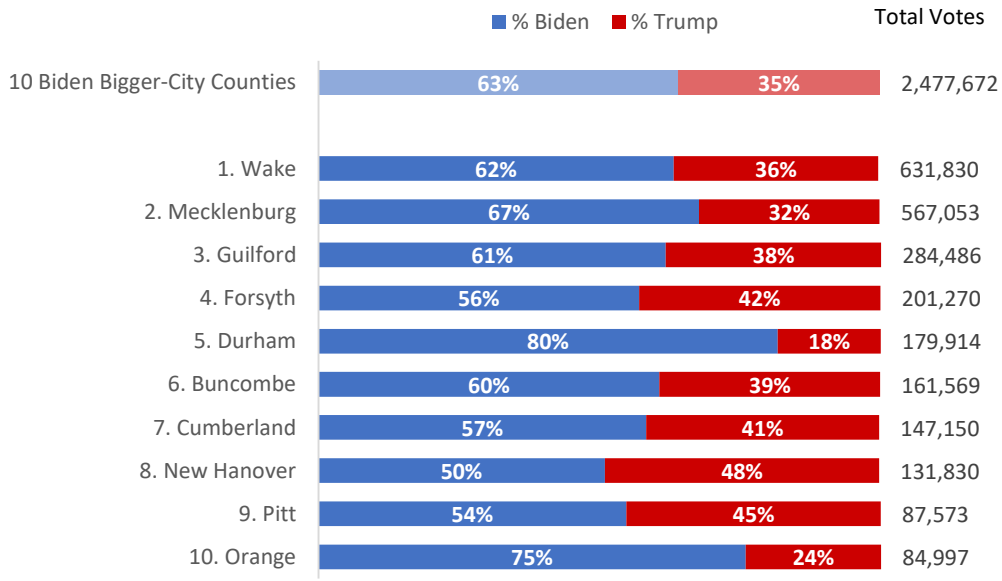
25 Most Rural	% Clinton	% Trump	Total Votes	Clinton	Trump
25 Most Rural Counties	39%	59%	273,964	105,525	161,564
Sampson	41%	57%	25,928	10,547	14,838
Columbus	38%	60%	23,732	9,063	14,272
Duplin	40%	59%	20,856	8,283	12,217
Macon	27%	68%	17,734	4,876	12,127
Bladen	44%	54%	15,897	7,058	8,550
Cherokee	20%	76%	14,181	2,860	10,844
Ashe	26%	70%	13,424	3,500	9,412
Martin	49%	49%	11,964	5,846	5,897
Montgomery	36%	62%	11,540	4,150	7,130
Caswell	43%	54%	11,070	4,792	6,026
Polk	34%	62%	10,934	3,735	6,768
Hertford	68%	30%	10,186	6,910	3,099
Yancey	32%	64%	9,960	3,196	6,385
Warren	65%	33%	9,842	6,413	3,214
Bertie	62%	37%	9,347	5,778	3,456
Avery	20%	76%	8,249	1,689	6,298
Mitchell	20%	78%	8,096	1,596	6,282
Greene	45%	54%	8,095	3,605	4,374
Chowan	41%	56%	7,228	2,992	4,014
Washington	57%	42%	6,165	3,510	2,564
Clay	23%	74%	6,010	1,367	4,437
Alleghany	25%	72%	5,315	1,306	3,814
Graham	18%	79%	4,168	768	3,283
Hyde	42%	56%	2,304	965	1,288
Tyrrell	41%	56%	1,739	720	975


% Clinton
% Trump
Total Votes
25 Most Rural Counties 39% 59% 273,964
Sampson 41% 57% 25,928
Columbus 38% 60% 23,732
Duplin 40% 59% 20,856
Macon 27% 68% 17,734
Bladen 44% 54% 15,897
Cherokee 20% 76% 14,181
Ashe 26% 70% 13,424
Martin 49% 49% 11,964
Montgomery 36% 62% 11,540
Caswell 43% 54% 11,070
Polk 34% 62% 10,934
Hertford 68% 30% 10,186
Yancey 32% 64% 9,960
Warren 65% 33% 9,842
Bertie 62% 37% 9,347
Avery 20% 76% 8,249
Mitchell 20% 78% 8,096
Greene 45% 54% 8,095
Chowan 41% 56% 7,228
Washington 57% 42% 6,165
Clay 23% 74% 6,010
Alleghany 25% 72% 5,315
Graham 18% 79% 4,168
Hyde 42% 56% 2,304
Tyrrell 41% 56% 1,739

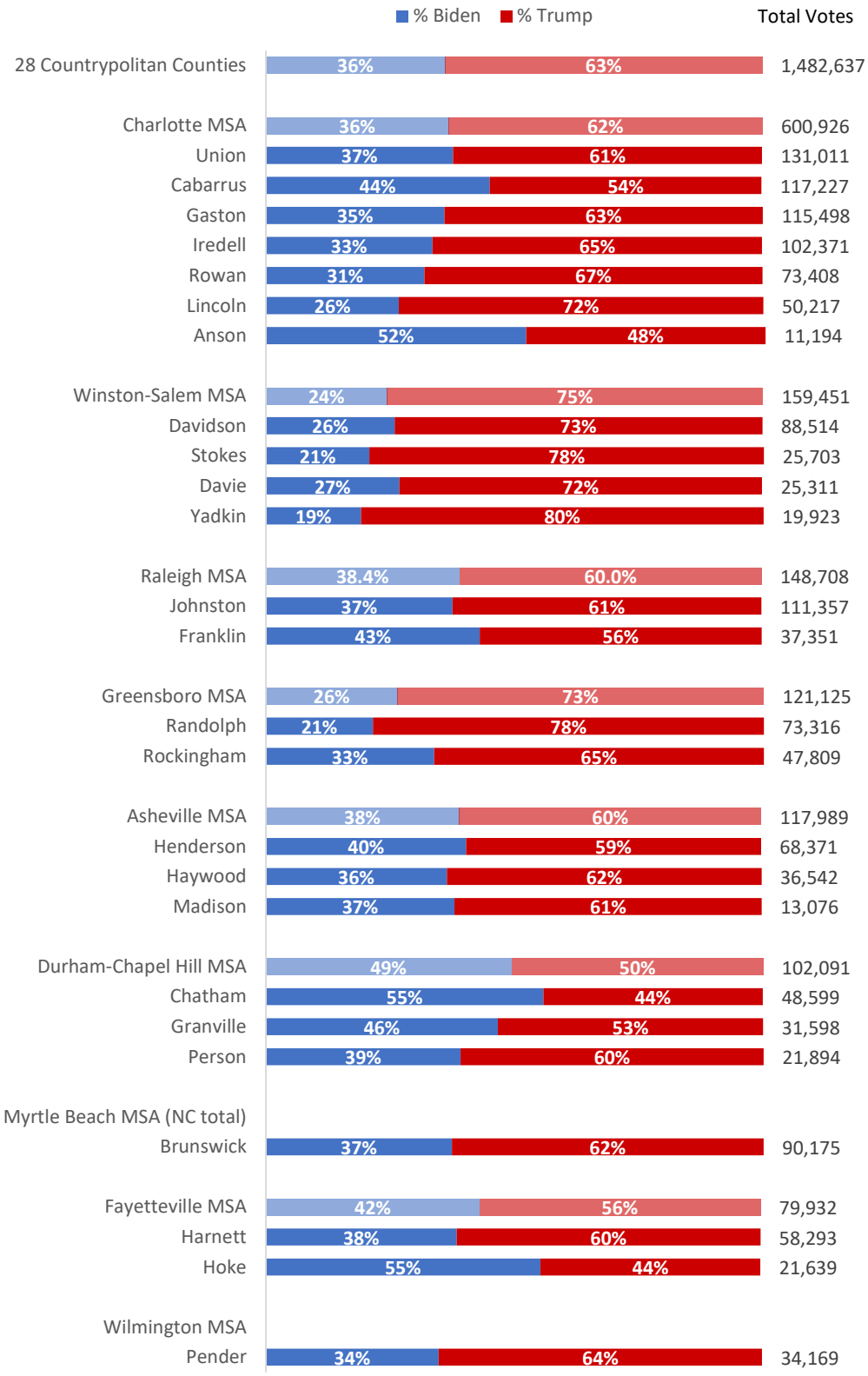
Overall	% Biden	% Trump	Total Votes	Biden	Trump
NC	49%	50%	*5,524,804*	*2,684,292*	*2,758,775*
10 Biden Bigger-City Counties	63%	35%	2,477,672	1,560,218	875,158
28 Countrypolitan Counties	36%	63%	1,482,637	527,336	934,667
12 Smaller-City MSA Counties	38%	61%	548,924	208,597	332,651
All Metropolitan NC	*51%*	*48%*	*4,509,233*	*2,296,151*	*2,142,476*
25 Most Rural Counties	38%	62%	302,960	113,649	186,486
25 Micropolitan Counties	39%	60%	712,611	274,492	429,813
Nonmetropolitan NC	*38%*	*61%*	*1,015,571*	*388,141*	*616,299*



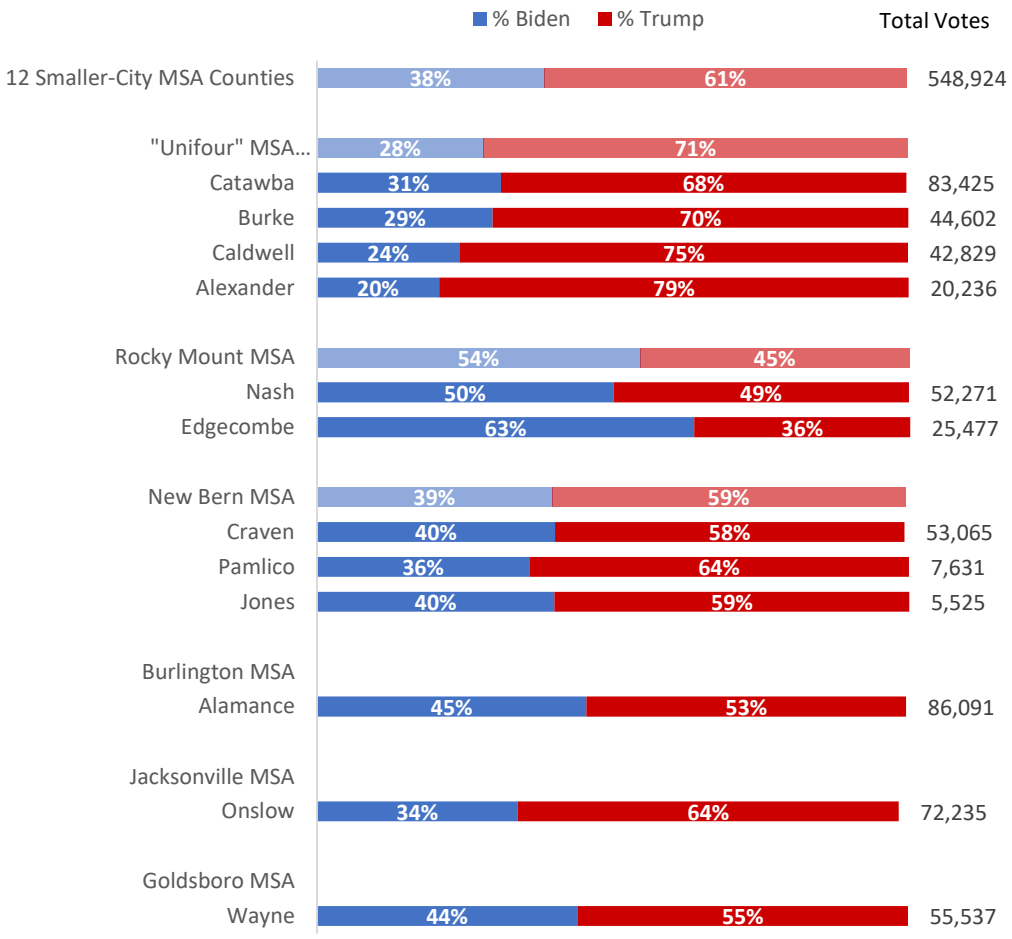
10 Biden Bigger-City Counties	% Biden	% Trump	Total Votes	Biden	Trump
10 Biden Bigger-City Counties	63%	35%	2,477,672	1,560,218	875,158
1. Wake	62%	36%	631,830	393,336	226,197
2. Mecklenburg	67%	32%	567,053	378,107	179,211
3. Guilford	61%	38%	284,486	173,086	107,294
4. Forsyth	56%	42%	201,270	113,033	85,064
5. Durham	80%	18%	179,914	144,688	32,459
6. Buncombe	60%	39%	161,569	96,515	62,412
7. Cumberland	57%	41%	147,150	84,469	60,032
8. New Hanover	50%	48%	131,830	66,138	63,331
9. Pitt	54%	45%	87,573	47,252	38,982
10. Orange	75%	24%	84,997	63,594	20,176



28 Countrypolitan Counties	% Biden	% Trump	Total Votes	Biden	Trump
28 Countrypolitan Counties	36%	63%	1,482,637	527,336	934,667
Charlotte MSA	36%	62%	600,926	217,911	374,621
Union	37%	61%	131,011	48,725	80,382
Cabarrus	44%	54%	117,227	52,162	63,237
Gaston	35%	63%	115,498	40,959	73,033
Iredell	33%	65%	102,371	33,888	67,010
Rowan	31%	67%	73,408	23,114	49,297
Lincoln	26%	72%	50,217	13,274	36,341
Anson	52%	48%	11,194	5,789	5,321
Winston-Salem MSA	24%	75%	159,451	38,398	118,963
Davidson	26%	73%	88,514	22,636	64,658
Stokes	21%	78%	25,703	5,286	20,144
Davie	27%	72%	25,311	6,713	18,228
Yadkin	19%	80%	19,923	3,763	15,933
Raleigh MSA	38.4%	60.0%	148,708	57,136	89,254
Johnston	37%	61%	111,357	41,257	68,353
Franklin	43%	56%	37,351	15,879	20,901
Greensboro MSA	26%	73%	121,125	31,610	88,195
Randolph	21%	78%	73,316	15,618	56,894
Rockingham	33%	65%	47,809	15,992	31,301
Asheville MSA	38%	60%	117,989	45,256	70,845
Henderson	40%	59%	68,371	27,211	40,032
Haywood	36%	62%	36,542	13,144	22,834
Madison	37%	61%	13,076	4,901	7,979
Durham-Chapel Hill MSA	49%	50%	102,091	49,817	51,017
Chatham	55%	44%	48,599	26,787	21,186
Granville	46%	53%	31,598	14,565	16,647
Person	39%	60%	21,894	8,465	13,184
Myrtle Beach MSA (NC total)					
Brunswick	37%	62%	90,175	33,310	55,850
Fayetteville MSA	42%	56%	79,932	33,897	44,630
Harnett	38%	60%	58,293	22,093	35,177
Hoke	55%	44%	21,639	11,804	9,453
Wilmington MSA					
Pender	34%	64%	34,169	11,723	21,956
Virginia Beach MSA (NC total)	29%	69%	28,071	8,278	19,336
Currituck	26%	72%	16,147	4,195	11,657
Gates	43%	56%	5,971	2,546	3,367
Camden	26%	72%	5,953	1,537	4,312


% Biden
% Trump
Total Votes
28 Countrypolitan Counties
36%
63%
1,482,637
Charlotte MSA
36%
62%
600,926
Union
37%
61%
131,011
Cabarrus
44%
54%
117,227
Gaston
35%
63%
115,498
Iredell
33%
65%
102,371
Rowan
31%
67%
73,408
Lincoln
26%
72%
50,217
Anson
52%
48%
11,194
Winston-Salem MSA
24%
75%
159,451
Davidson
26%
73%
88,514
Stokes
21%
78%
25,703
Davie
27%
72%
25,311
Yadkin
19%
80%
19,923
Raleigh MSA
38.4%
60.0%
148,708
Johnston
37%
61%
111,357
Franklin
43%
56%
37,351
Greensboro MSA
26%
73%
121,125
Randolph
21%
78%
73,316
Rockingham
33%
65%
47,809
Asheville MSA
38%
60%
117,989
Henderson
40%
59%
68,371
Haywood
36%
62%
36,542
Madison
37%
61%
13,076
Durham-Chapel Hill MSA
49%
50%
102,091
Chatham
55%
44%
48,599
Granville
46%
53%
31,598
Person
39%
60%
21,894
Myrtle Beach MSA (NC total)
Brunswick
37%
62%
90,175
Fayetteville MSA
42%
56%
79,932
Harnett
38%
60%
58,293
Hoke
55%
44%
21,639
Wilmington MSA
Pender
34%
64%
34,169

12 Smaller-City MSA Counties	% Biden	% Trump	Total Votes	Biden	Trump
12 Smaller-City MSA Counties	38%	61%	548,924	208,597	332,651
"Unifour" MSA					
(Hickory-Lenoir-Morganton)	28%	71%	191,092	53,197	135,614
Catawba	31%	68%	83,425	25,689	56,588
Burke	29%	70%	44,602	13,118	31,019
Caldwell	24%	75%	42,829	10,245	32,119
Alexander	20%	79%	20,236	4,145	15,888
Rocky Mount MSA	54%	45%	77,748	42,036	35,033
Nash	50%	49%	52,271	25,947	25,827
Edgecombe	63%	36%	25,477	16,089	9,206
New Bern MSA	39%	59%	66,221	26,058	39,161
Craven	40%	58%	53,065	21,148	31,032
Pamlico	36%	64%	7,631	2,713	4,849
Jones	40%	59%	5,525	2,197	3,280
Burlington MSA					
Alamance	45%	53%	86,091	38,825	46,056
Jacksonville MSA					
Onslow	34%	64%	72,235	24,266	46,078
Goldsboro MSA					
Wayne	44%	55%	55,537	24,215	30,709


% Biden
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Total Votes
12 Smaller-City MSA Counties
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"Unifour" MSA...
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Goldsboro MSA
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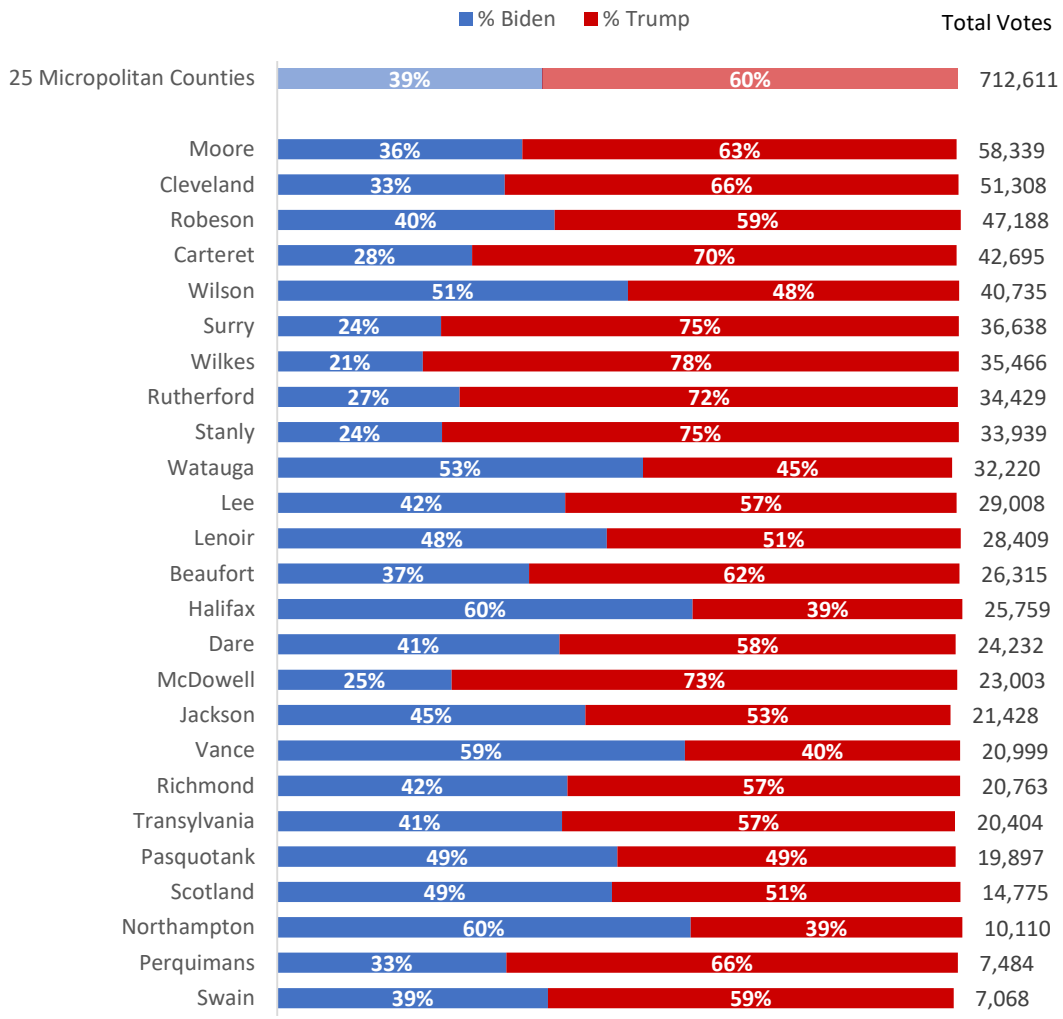
25 Micropolitan Counties	% Biden	% Trump	Total Votes	Biden	Trump
25 Micropolitan Counties	39%	60%	712,611	274,492	429,813
Moore	36%	63%	58,339	20,779	36,764
Cleveland	33%	66%	51,308	16,955	33,798
Robeson	40%	59%	47,188	19,020	27,806
Carteret	28%	70%	42,695	12,093	30,028
Wilson	51%	48%	40,735	20,754	19,581
Surry	24%	75%	36,638	8,721	27,538
Wilkes	21%	78%	35,466	7,511	27,592
Rutherford	27%	72%	34,429	9,135	24,891
Stanly	24%	75%	33,939	8,129	25,458
Watauga	53%	45%	32,220	17,122	14,451
Lee	42%	57%	29,008	12,143	16,469
Lenoir	48%	51%	28,409	13,605	14,590
Beaufort	37%	62%	26,315	9,633	16,437
Halifax	60%	39%	25,759	15,545	10,080
Dare	41%	58%	24,232	9,936	13,938
McDowell	25%	73%	23,003	5,832	16,883
Jackson	45%	53%	21,428	9,591	11,356
Vance	59%	40%	20,999	12,431	8,391
Richmond	42%	57%	20,763	8,754	11,830
Transylvania	41%	57%	20,404	8,444	11,636
Pasquotank	49%	49%	19,897	9,832	9,770
Scotland	49%	51%	14,775	7,186	7,473
Northampton	60%	39%	10,110	6,069	3,989
Perquimans	33%	66%	7,484	2,492	4,903
Swain	39%	59%	7,068	2,780	4,161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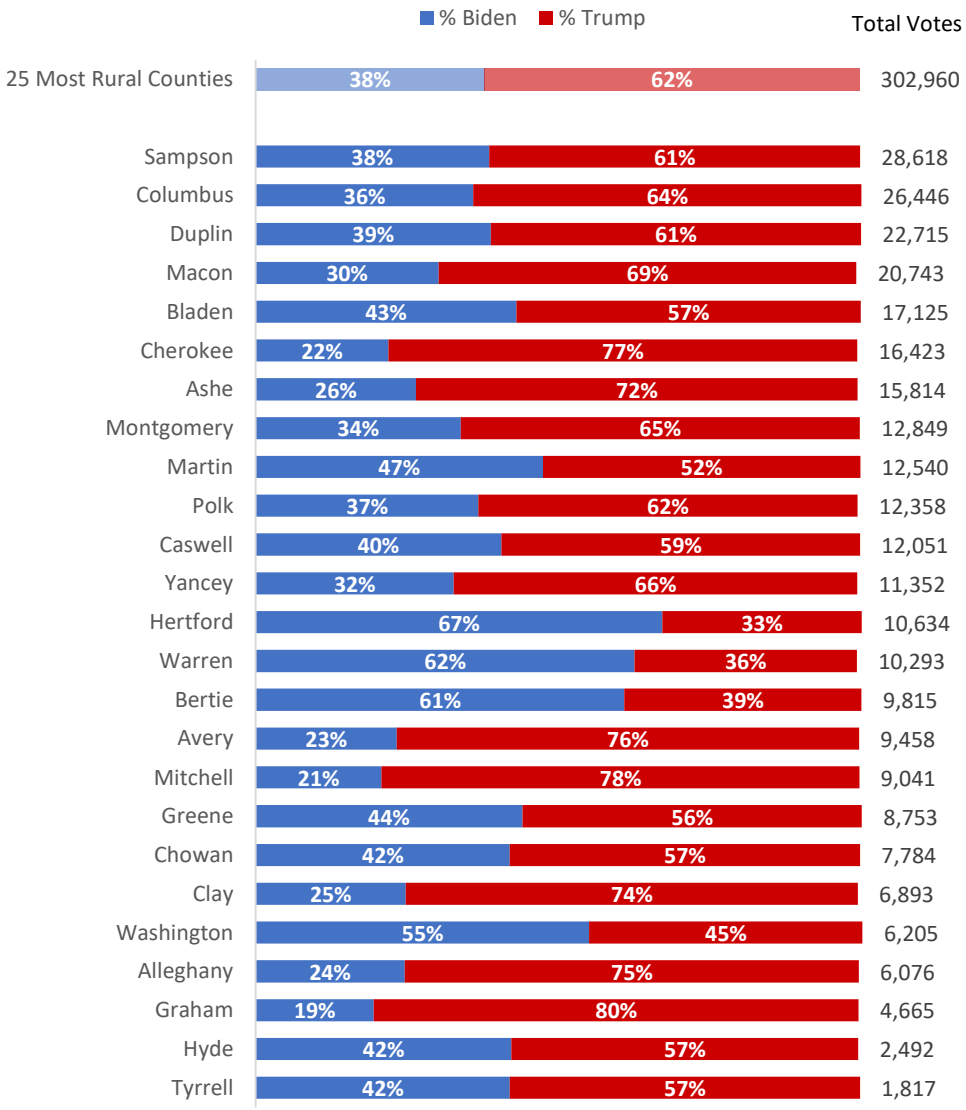
25 Most Rural Counties	% Biden	% Trump	Total Votes	Biden	Trump
25 Most Rural Counties	38%	62%	302,960	113,649	186,486
Sampson	38%	61%	28,618	10,966	17,411
Columbus	36%	64%	26,446	9,446	16,832
Duplin	39%	61%	22,715	8,767	13,793
Macon	30%	69%	20,743	6,230	14,211
Bladen	43%	57%	17,125	7,326	9,676
Cherokee	22%	77%	16,423	3,583	12,628
Ashe	26%	72%	15,814	4,164	11,451
Montgomery	34%	65%	12,849	4,327	8,411
Martin	47%	52%	12,540	5,911	6,532
Polk	37%	62%	12,358	4,518	7,689
Caswell	40%	59%	12,051	4,860	7,089
Yancey	32%	66%	11,352	3,688	7,516
Hertford	67%	33%	10,634	7,097	3,479
Warren	62%	36%	10,293	6,400	3,752
Bertie	61%	39%	9,815	5,939	3,817
Avery	23%	76%	9,458	2,191	7,172
Mitchell	21%	78%	9,041	1,867	7,090
Greene	44%	56%	8,753	3,832	4,874
Chowan	42%	57%	7,784	3,247	4,471
Clay	25%	74%	6,893	1,699	5,112
Washington	55%	45%	6,205	3,396	2,781
Alleghany	24%	75%	6,076	1,486	4,527
Graham	19%	80%	4,665	905	3,710
Hyde	42%	57%	2,492	1,046	1,418
Tyrrell	42%	57%	1,817	758	1,044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