



New Voter Registrations in 2020

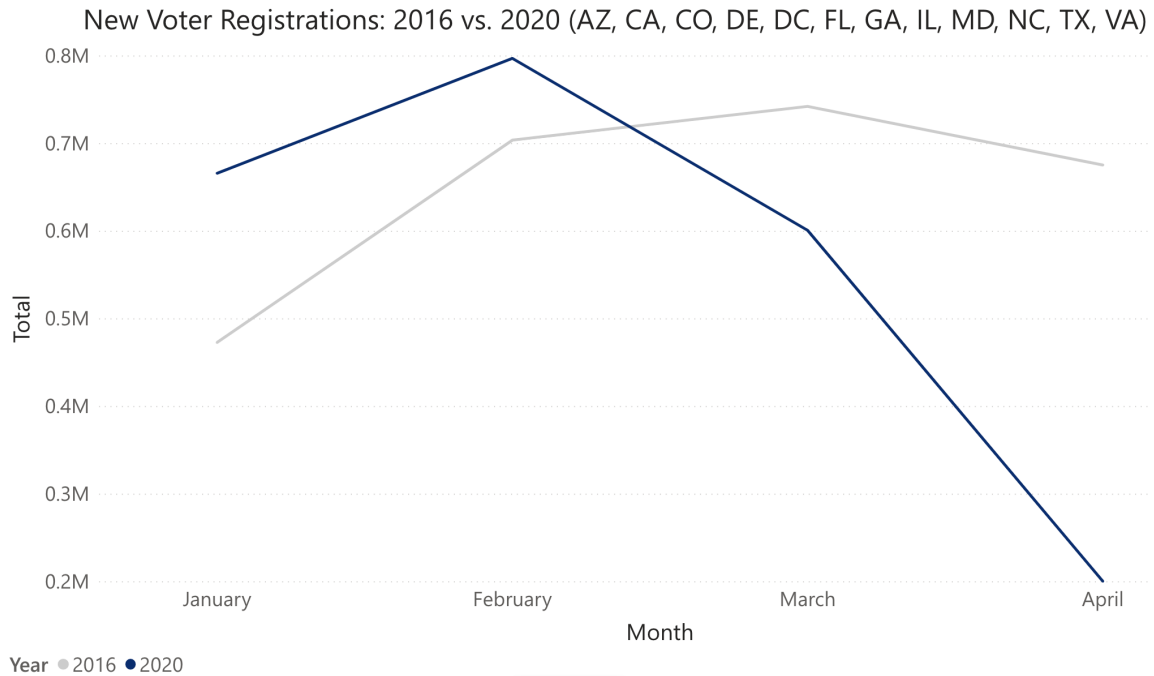
The Center for Election Innovation and Research

June 10, 2020

In recent months, several states have experienced a remarkable decline in their new voter registration numbers. This trend is especially notable when compared with new voter registration numbers from the months leading up to the last presidential election in 2016.

The Center for Election Innovation and Research compiled official new voter registration for the spring of 2020 and compared them with figures from 2016. We procured official voter registration data directly from sources in Arizona, California, Colorado, Delaware, the District of Columbia, Florida, Georgia, Illinois, Maryland, North Carolina, Texas, Wisconsin, and Virginia.¹

¹Statistics for Arizona, California, Colorado, Delaware, Georgia, Illinois, North Carolina, and Texas, were obtained directly from state election offices. Data for the District of Columbia, Florida, Maryland, Virginia, and Wisconsin are publicly available. (Sources continued on next page.)



Note: Only voters identified by these states as new registrants were included in our analysis. Due to changes in Wisconsin’s data recording practices, 2020 voter registration numbers may include voters who have re-registered at their same address. For this reason, Wisconsin was excluded from our graphs. Graphs and additional information about data for all other individual states are available in the Appendix.

(Continued from previous page.) District of Columbia Board of Elections, “Voter Registration Statistics,” <https://www.dcboe.org/Data-Resources/Voter-Registration-Statistics>; Florida Department of State, Division of Elections, “Voter Registration Reports,” <https://dos.myflorida.com/elections/data-statistics/voter-registration-statistics/voter-registration-reportsxlsx/>; Maryland State Board of Elections, “Voter Registration Statistics,” https://elections.maryland.gov/voter_registration/stats.html; Virginia Department of Elections, “Registration Statistics and Polling Places,” <https://www.elections.virginia.gov/resultsreports/registration-statistics/>; Wisconsin Elections Commission, “Voter Registration Statistics,” <https://elections.wi.gov/publications/statistics/registration>.

For each of the 13 jurisdictions studied, new voter registrations in January 2020 exceeded those from the same month in 2016. For six of the 13, this trend continued through February. However, in 11 states, totals in March 2020 began to show a substantial decrease from March 2016, and all 13 dropped in April.²

It is likely that much of the decline in new voter registrations can be attributed to distancing and closures related to the COVID-19 pandemic. Department of Motor Vehicle closures, limited in-person interactions, and a halt to large public gatherings have curbed traditional sources of registration such as motor-voter and get-out-the-vote registration drives.

Third-party groups often rely on door knocking campaigns and tables at public events to reach and enroll eligible voters. Without the possibility for widespread community interaction, many of these contact-based registration efforts have stalled.³ Shuttering government offices has had similar consequences.

As DMV transactions have declined, registrations have dwindled. The plummet in new voter registrations is especially troubling in states which have implemented automatic voter registration (AVR) systems since 2016 (including California, Colorado, the District of Columbia, Georgia, Illinois, and Maryland). Under AVR, eligible voters are automatically

registered at the DMV unless they “opt-out.” This practice has added millions of eligible Americans to their state’s voter rolls in recent years and should have led to this year’s new voter registrations overshadowing those of 2016.

The virus’ potential long-term impacts on voter registration are not yet clear. While new voter registration deficits may be difficult to overcome, they could spark a push to make up for lost time as states reopen. Long-time voters may also be affected, particularly as more voters choose the option of voting by mail. Without new address updates as a result of motor vehicle transactions, it may be difficult for voters to keep their contact information up-to-date. Accurate addresses are critical to ensuring voters receive the correct ballot with plenty of time to return it.

The steep decline in new registrations may prove to be a sizable obstacle to what was set, pre-pandemic, to be a record election for turnout. This challenge requires innovative solutions. Outreach efforts such as those pursued by the thirty states that are members of the Electronic Registration Information Center (ERIC) may be particularly important in light of the challenges presented by the pandemic.⁴ ERIC states will be contacting over 20 million citizens who are eligible but unregistered to vote, likely leading to several million new registrations this fall.

²Only California and Wisconsin saw more new registrations in March 2020 than March 2016.

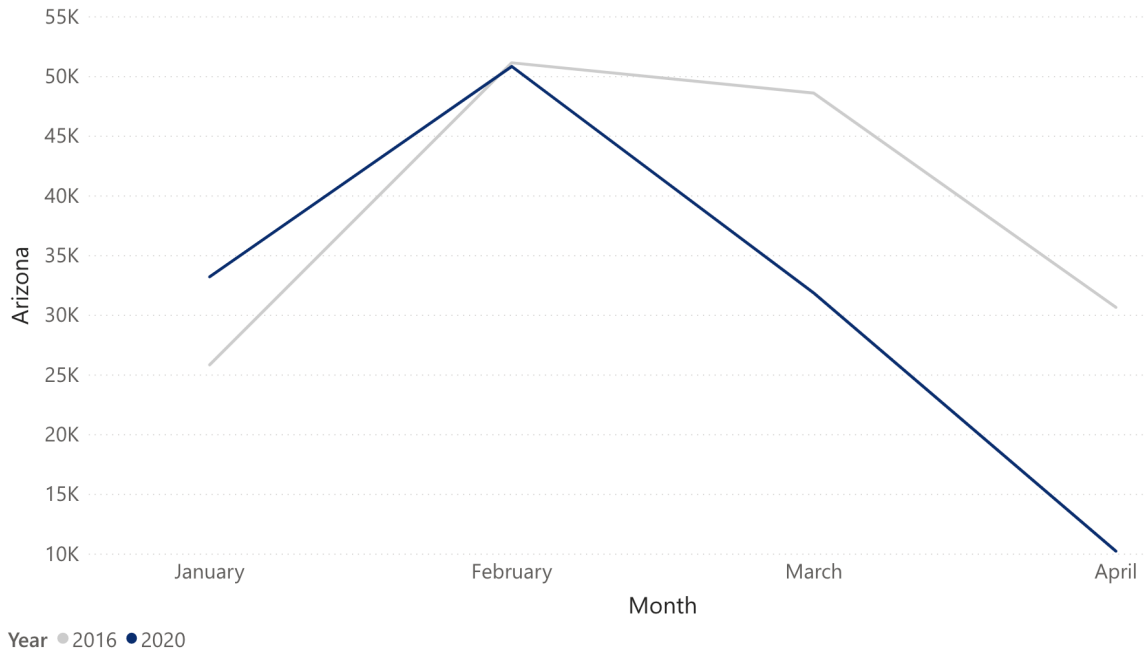
³Jacqueline Alemany, “Voting Registration Activists Are Shifting Their Message to Health Care during the Coronavirus Pandemic,” *The Washington Post*, May 18, 2020, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/2020/05/18/voting-registration-activists-are-shifting-their-message-health-care-during-coronavirus-pandemic/>; Patrick Svitek, “GOP Voter Registration Group Shatters amid Coronavirus Challenges,” *The Texas Tribune*, May 29, 2020, <https://www.texastribune.org/2020/05/29/texas-republican-voter-registration-group-folds-coronavirus/>.

⁴The Electronic Registration Information Center, “Home,” ERIC, <https://ericstates.org/>.

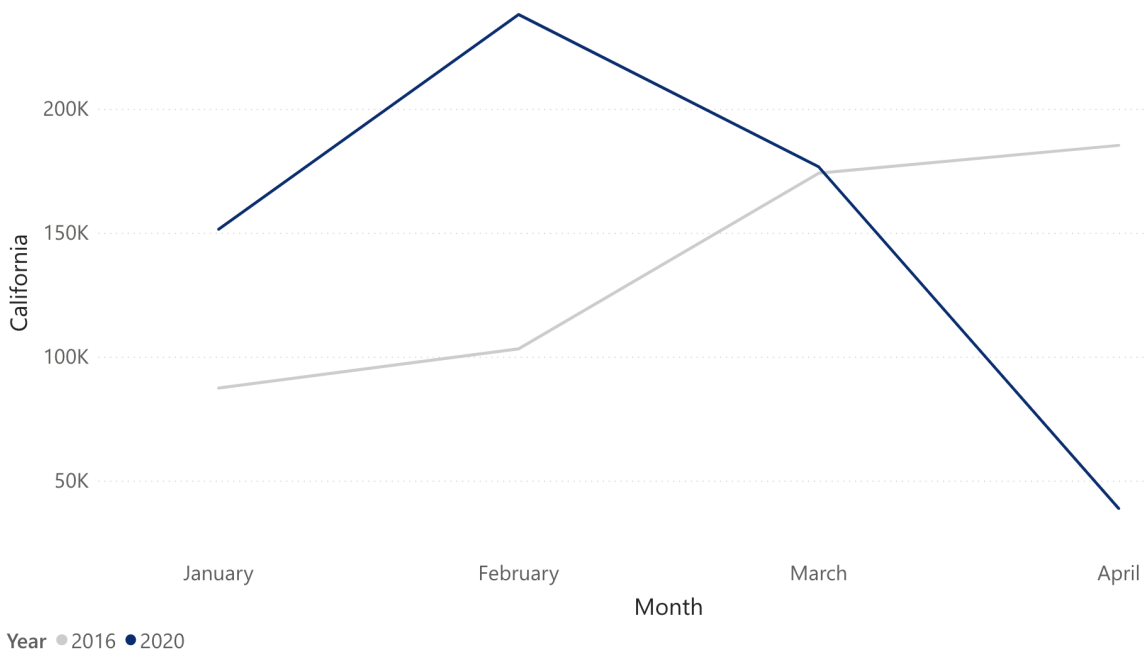
Appendix

Additional Information about State Data		
State	Date Received or Last Accessed	Notes
Arizona	5/27/20	Final data for April 2020 pending
California	5/18/20	
Colorado	5/15/20	
Delaware	5/14/20	
District of Columbia	6/10/20	
Florida	5/27/20	
Georgia	5/14/20	Final data for March and April 2020 pending
Illinois	5/26/20	
Maryland	5/22/20	
North Carolina	5/29/20	
Texas	5/26/20	
Virginia	5/14/20	

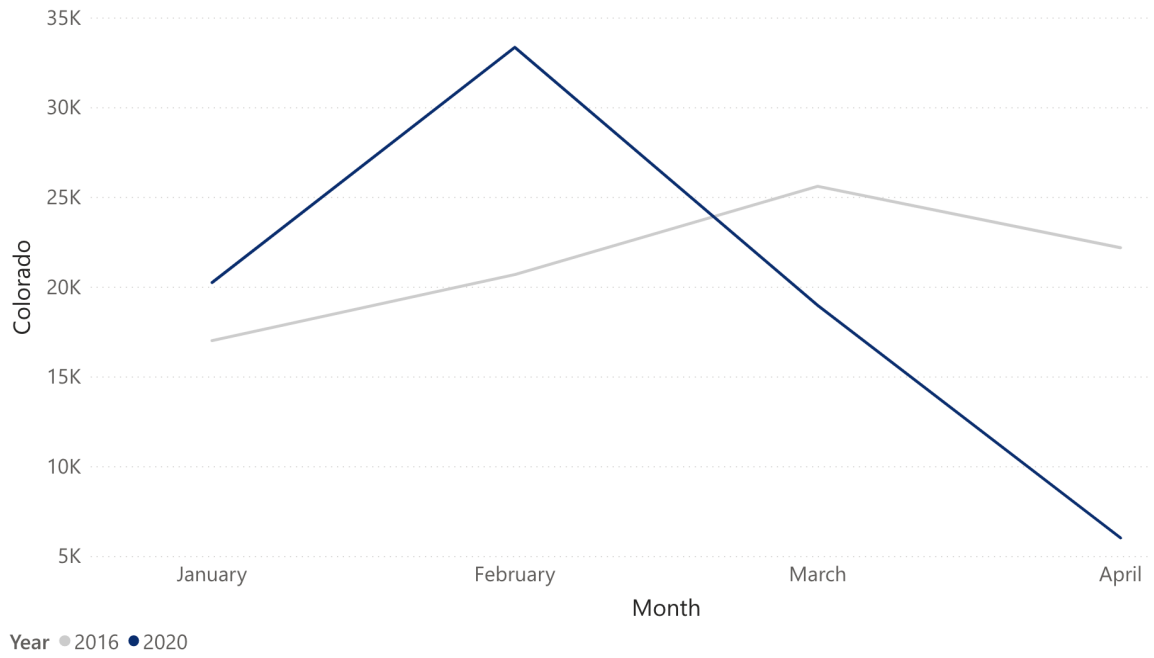
Arizona New Voter Registrations: 2016 vs. 2020



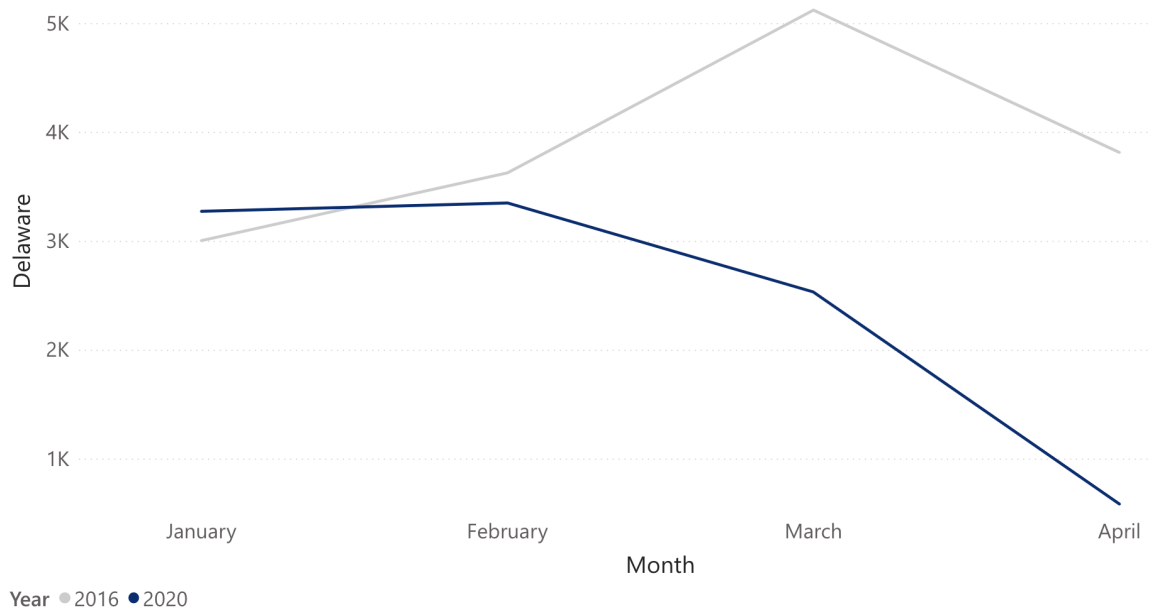
California New Voter Registrations: 2016 vs. 2020



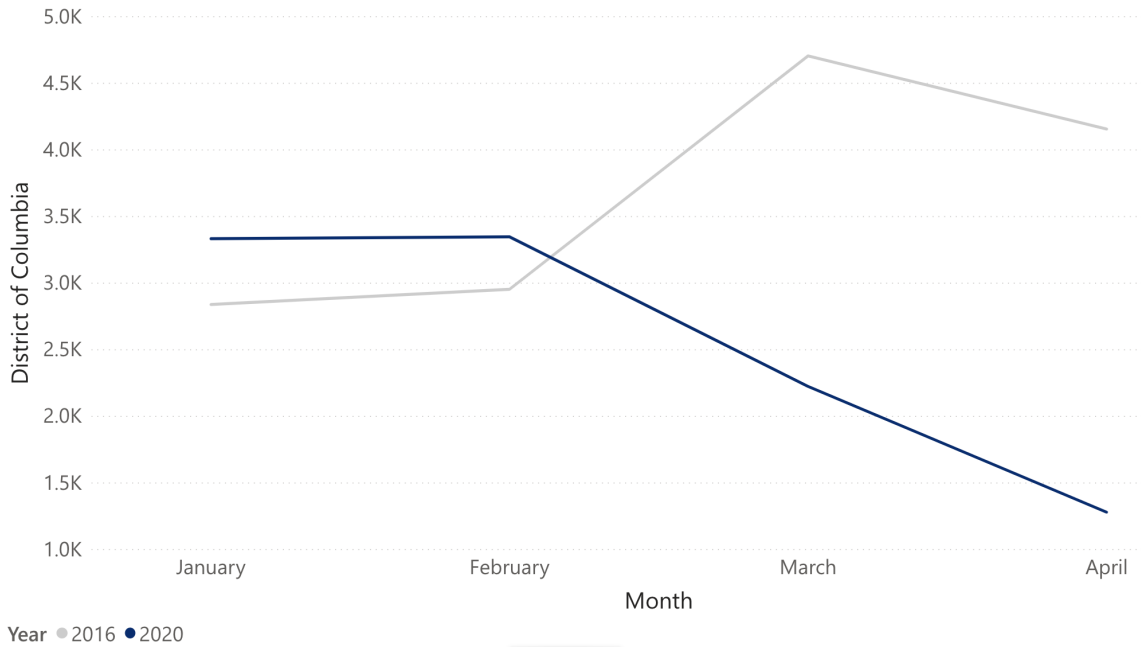
Colorado New Voter Registrations: 2016 vs. 2020



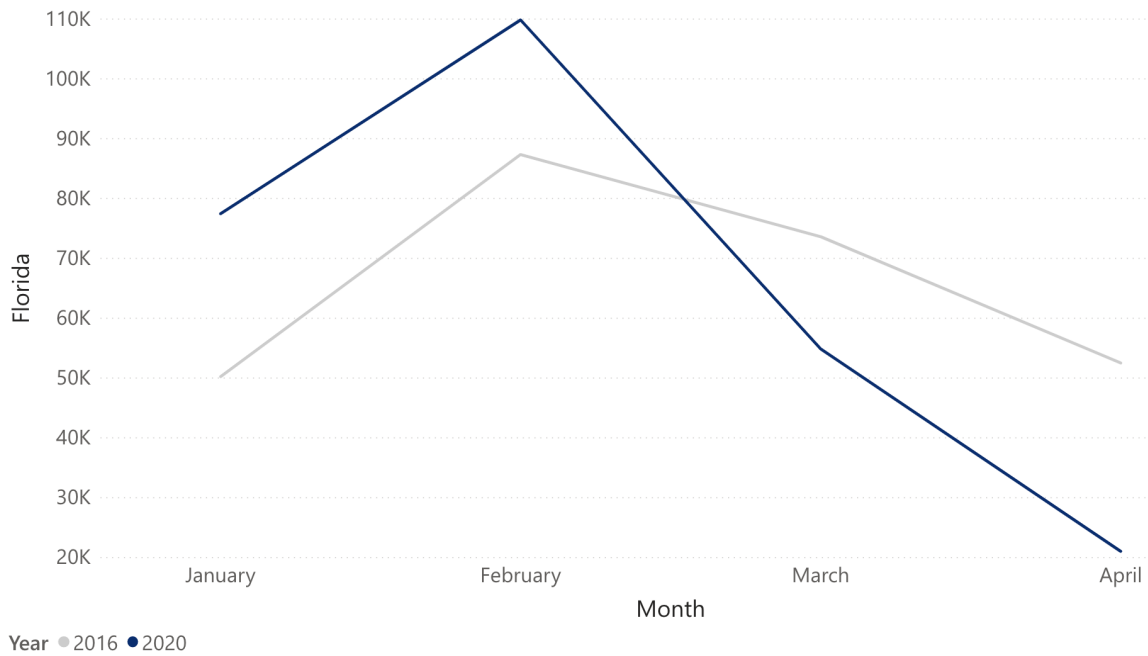
Delaware New Voter Registrations: 2016 vs. 2020



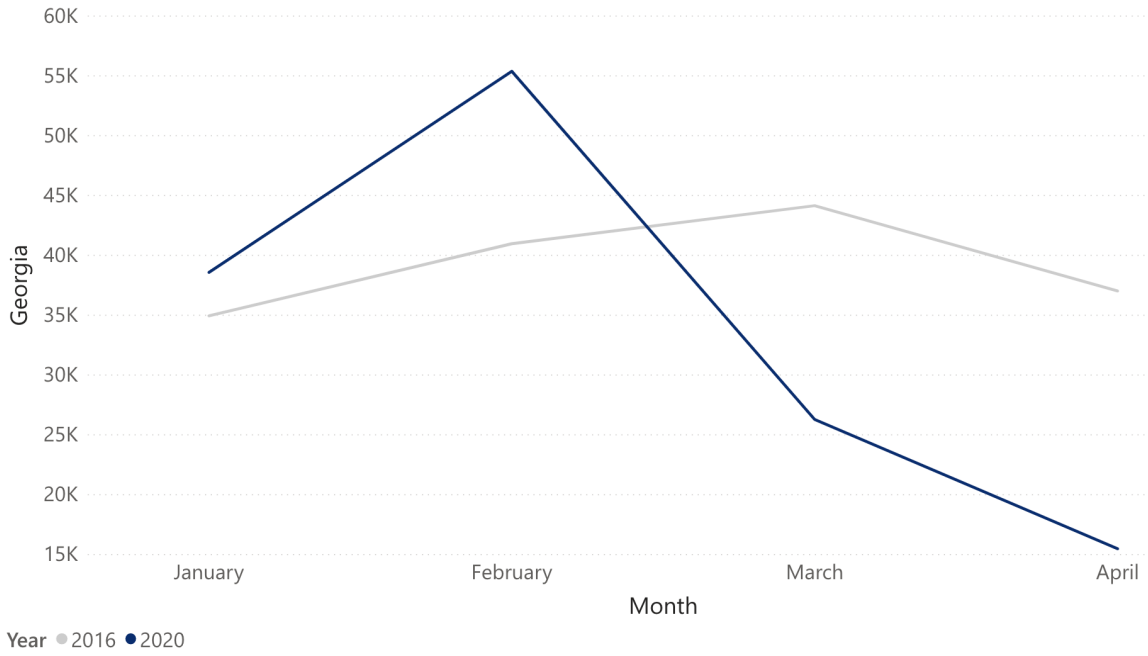
District of Columbia New Voter Registrations: 2016 vs. 2020



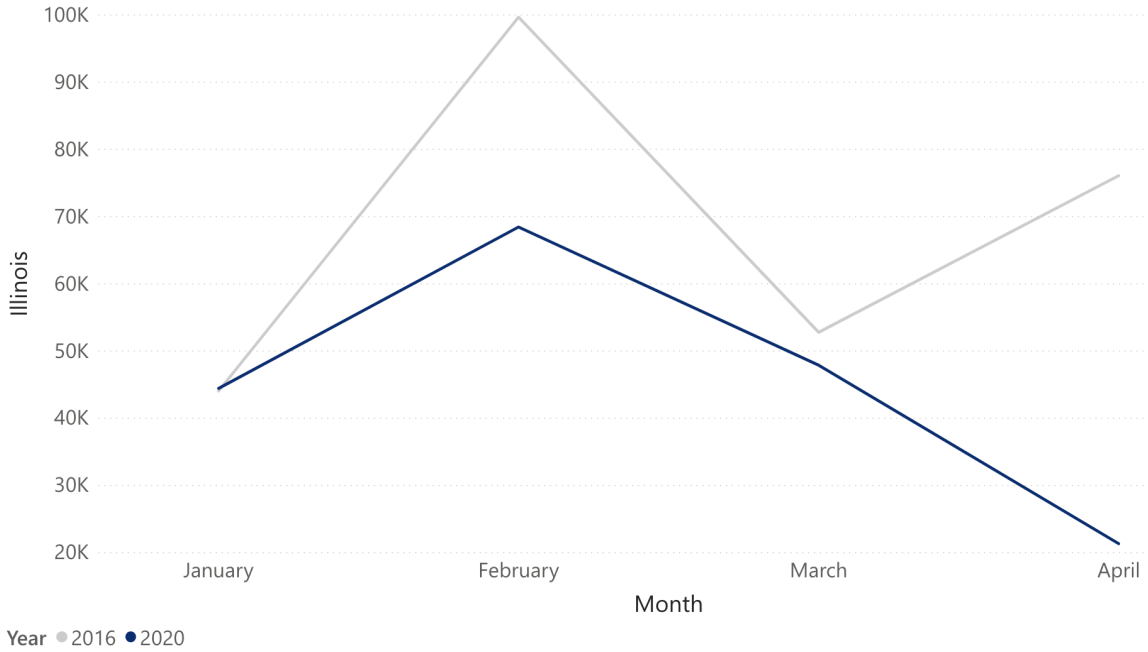
Florida New Voter Registrations: 2016 vs. 2020



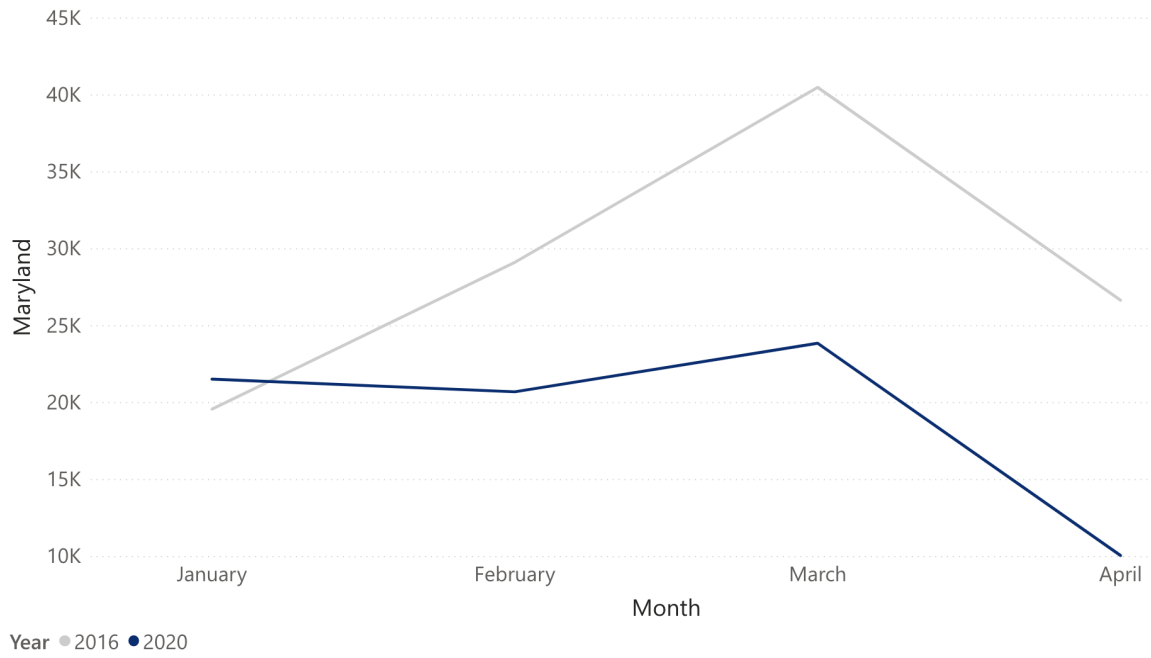
Georgia New Voter Registrations: 2016 vs. 2020



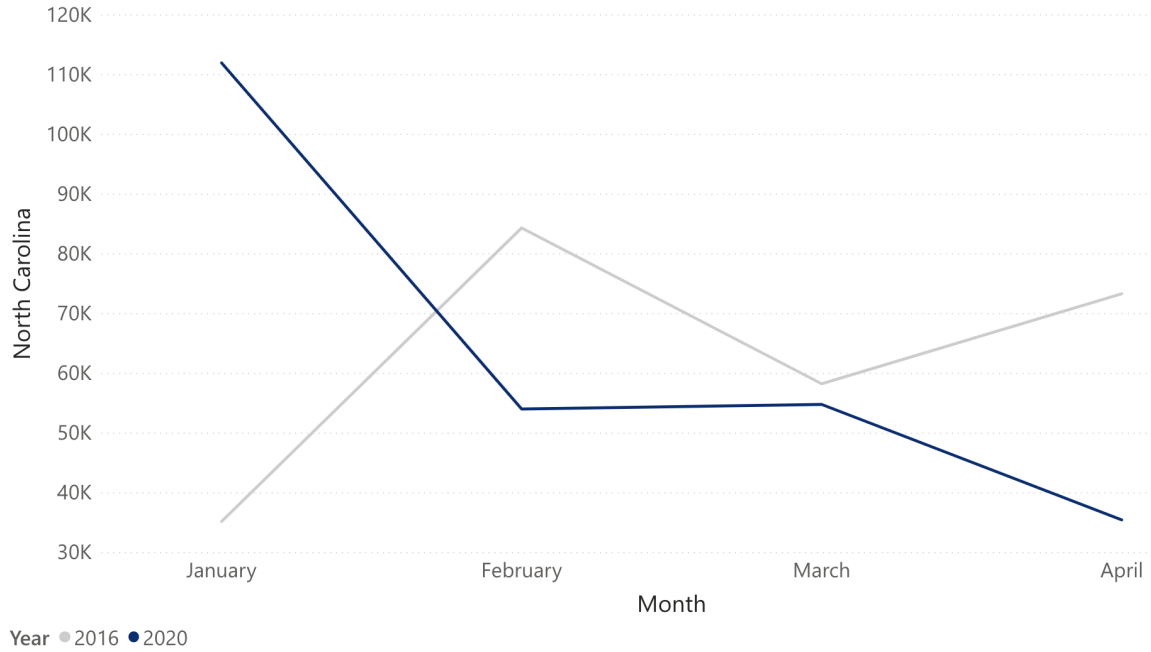
Illinois New Voter Registrations: 2016 vs. 2020



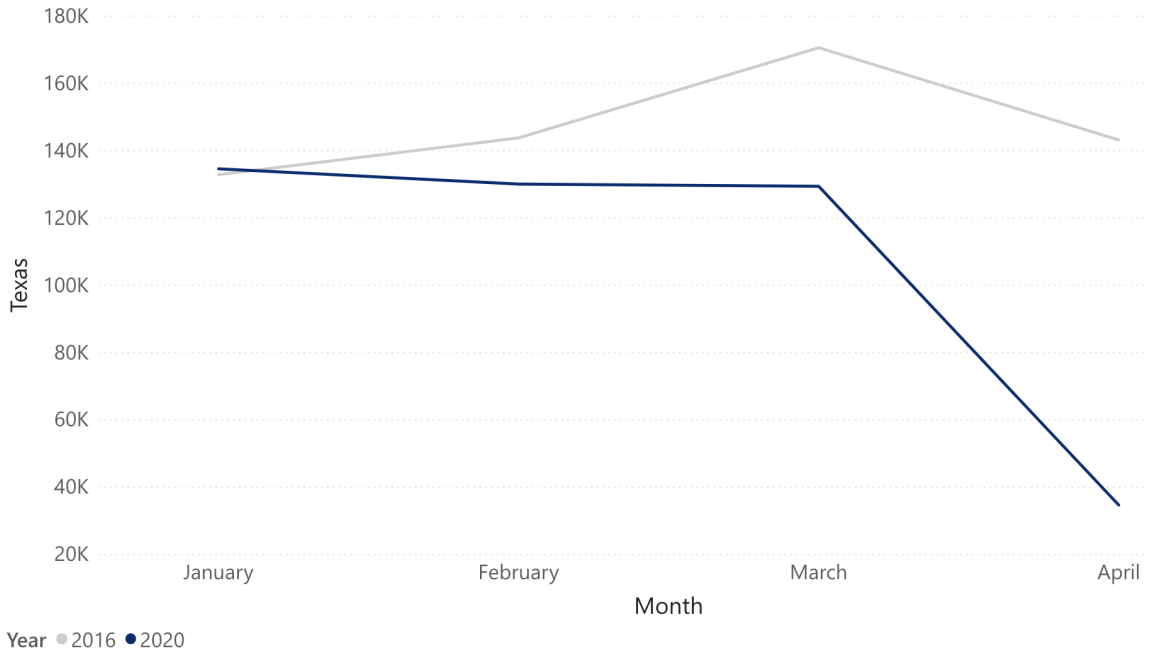
Maryland New Voter Registrations: 2016 vs. 2020



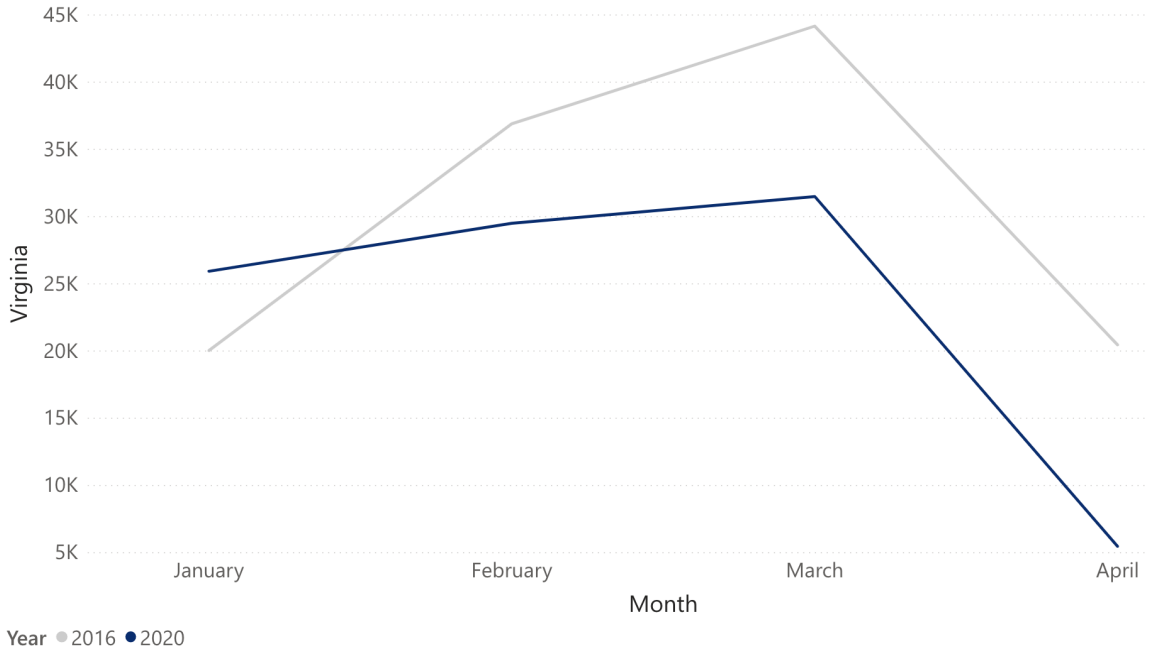
North Carolina New Voter Registrations: 2016 vs. 2020



Texas New Voter Registrations: 2016 vs. 2020



Virginia New Voter Registrations: 2016 vs. 2020





About CEIR

The Center for Election Innovation and Research (CEIR) is an innovative non-profit with a proven track record of working with election experts from around the country and from both sides of the aisle. We seek to build voter trust and confidence, increase voter participation, and improve the efficiency of election administration.