



Report of November 3, 2020 Election in Needham

Prepared by the League of Women Voters of Needham

The November 3, 2020, election was conducted during the COVID-19 pandemic. In July, the Massachusetts legislature passed, and the governor signed the “Act Relative to Voting Options in Response to COVID-19,” which expanded early voting by mail and early in-person voting, changed the voter registration deadline to 10 days prior to the election rather than 20 days, and modified other election-related processes. The law covered both the November 3 election and the September 1 primary.

As required by the new law, in mid-July a Vote by Mail application (postcard) was mailed to every person who was registered to vote as of July 1 and who had not already requested an absentee ballot for the primary or for all elections this year. A second mailing was sent out in September to all voters who had not already applied for a Vote by Mail ballot for the November election. The applications were pre-addressed to the Needham Town Clerk’s Office, and no postage was necessary. Applications could also be downloaded, completed and submitted to the Town Clerk via email, fax or mail/drop box.

Ballots were mailed to voters’ homes from the Needham Town Clerk’s Office as applications were received and processed. Voters returned their completed ballot by mail or by depositing it in the special drop box in front of Town Hall for the November 3 election. The Town Clerk’s Office processed nearly 18,000 early ballots which were either mailed in, dropped off, or completed in person during public sessions held prior to election day at Town Hall.

League members observed the public processing of early voting ballots for both the primary and general election, and of the Needham precinct A state audit.

The League of Women Voters of Needham prepared, for both elections, online “toolkits” that included voting quick links, voting options, voter guides, candidate forums, and ballot question information (general election only). Announcements about the toolkits were posted in both Needham newspapers, Needham, MA Facebook page, and LWV-Needham social media sites.

Primary toolkit: <https://lww-needham.org/ma-primary-sept-1/>

General election toolkit: <https://lww-needham.org/toolkit-election-2020/>

This report presents the voting options Needham and state voters used, the Needham certified results, and the audit of the November election. It also includes a summary of the visits to the LWV-Needham.org website during the election periods for both the primary and general elections.

Sources for this report include the Secretary of the Commonwealth’s Elections Division (voter turnout and voting options), Town of Needham certified election results (downloaded after November 18), Jetpack website analytics, and Facebook insights data.

General Election Turnout and Voting Options

As shown in Figure 1, voter turnout in Needham was 85% of registered voters (20,263 of 23,897). Statewide turnout was 76% (3,657,972 of 4,812,909). Needham turnout according to precinct is shown in Figure 2.

Figure 1. Voter Turnout in Needham and Statewide (November 2020)

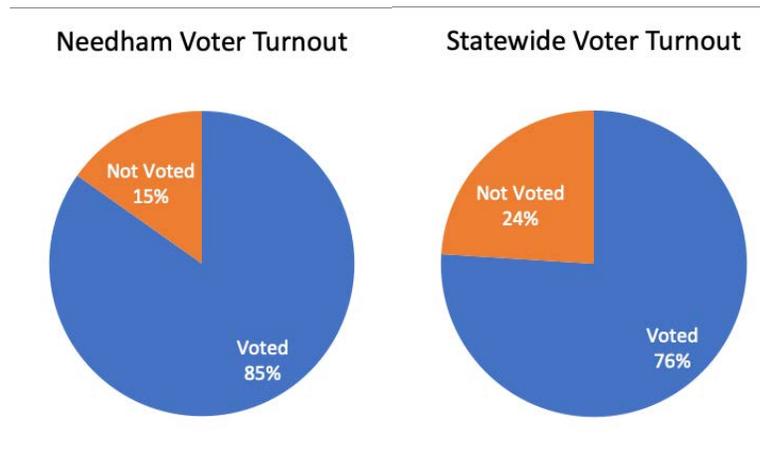
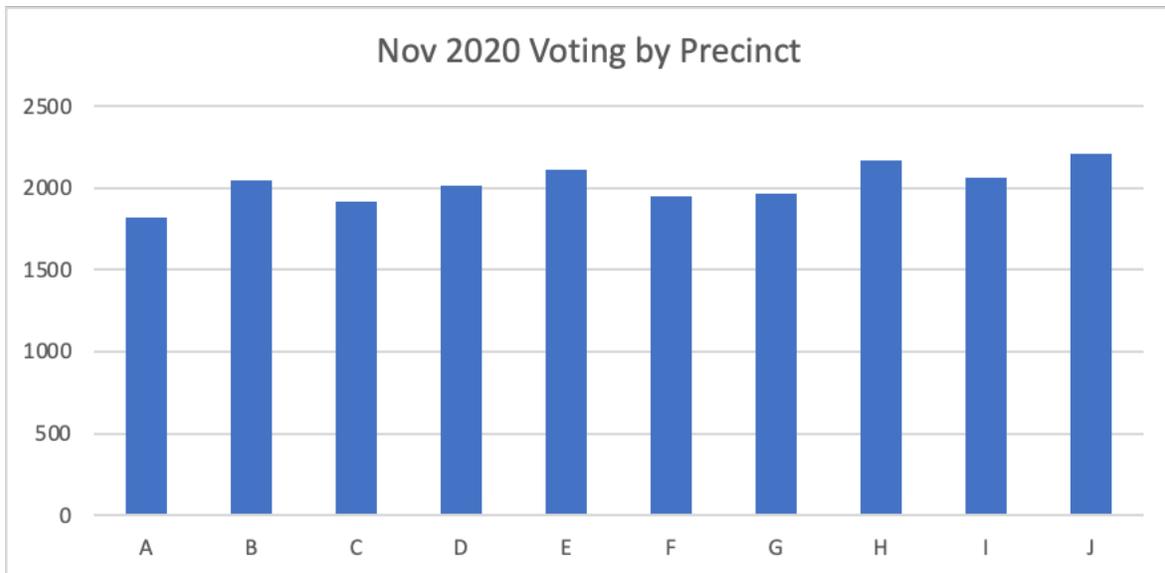
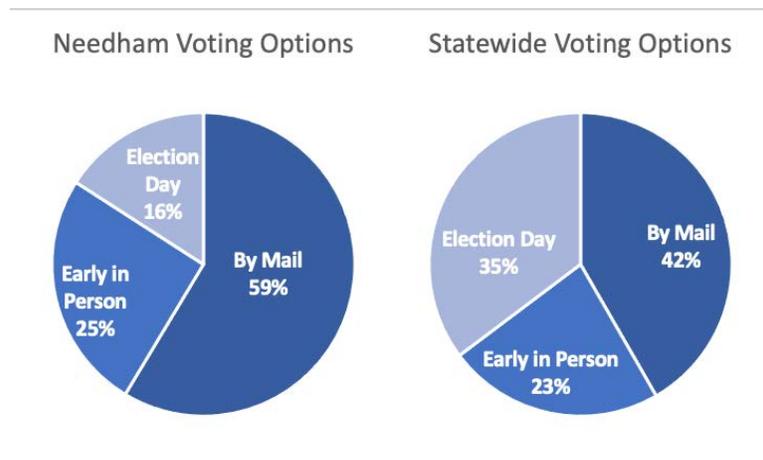


Figure 2. Voter Turnout in Needham According to Precinct



Early voting, either by mail or in-person, was more popular in Needham (84%) than in the state (65%). As shown in Figure 3, early voting by mail was particularly popular in Needham (59%). It should be noted that early voting by mail involved requesting a ballot (by mailed postcard/application, fax, email), receiving the ballot by mail, and returning the ballot by mail or by dropping it off at Town Hall in a dedicated drop box. An online request system for mail-in ballots was made available in October.

Figure 3. Voting Options Used in Needham and Statewide (November 2020)



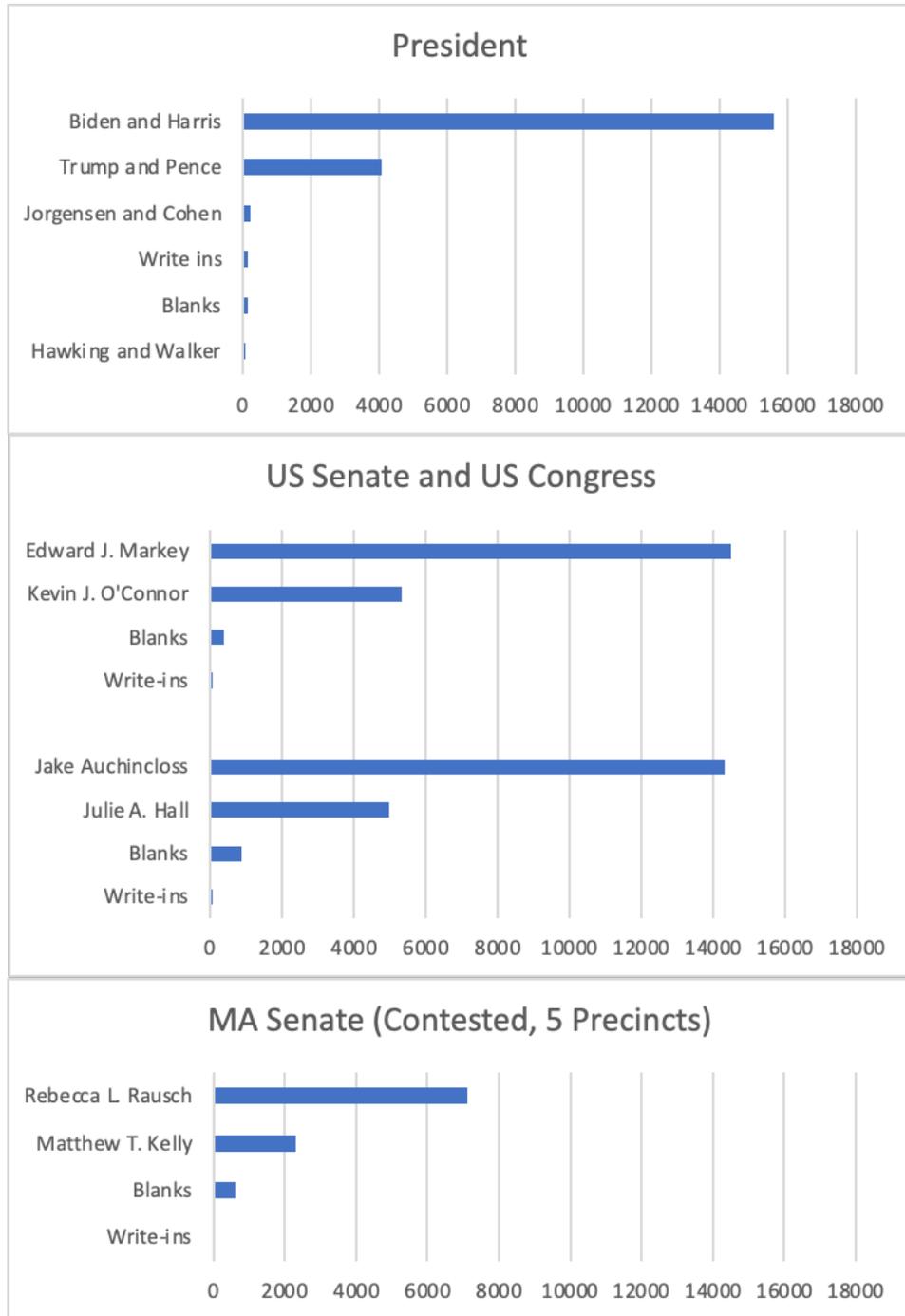
Of the 17,099 ballots received early (either by mail or in person), 59 were rejected (0.35%). Reasons included late (7), failed delivery (33), no signature (5), missing envelope (10), voter died (1), not qualified (2), and other (1). Statewide the rejection rate was 0.84%.

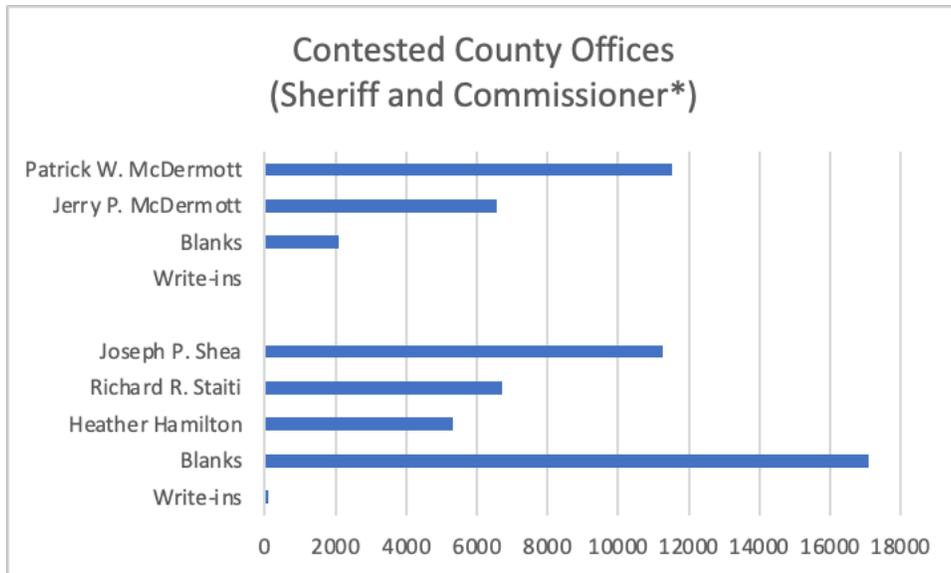
Needham Election Results

For the November 3 general election, Needham voted in contested races for President/Vice President, US House of Representative, US Senate, State Senate (5 Needham precincts), Norfolk Sheriff, Norfolk County Commission (elected 2), and two ballot questions.

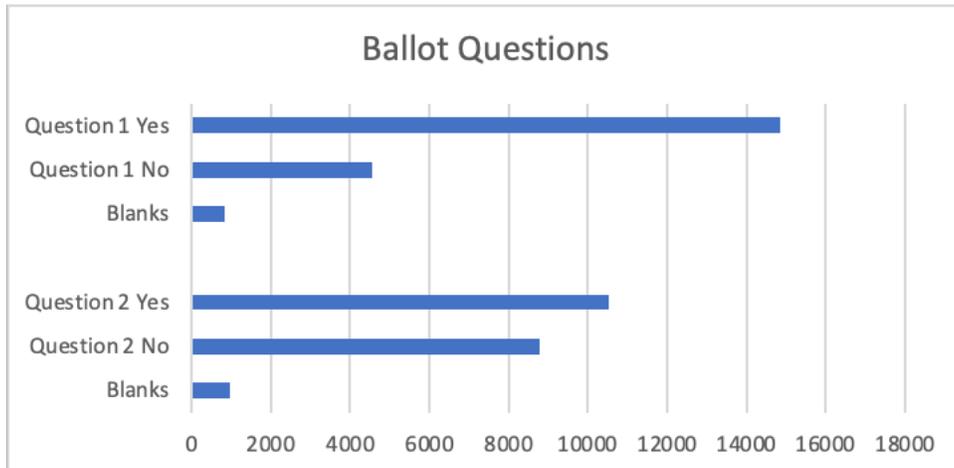
In the contested races (Figure 4), with one exception Needham voted for the eventual winner. The exception was Question 2 (ranked choice voting). Needham voters favored yes on Question 2, but it failed statewide.

Figure 4. Needham Certified Election Results for Contested Races (November 2020)



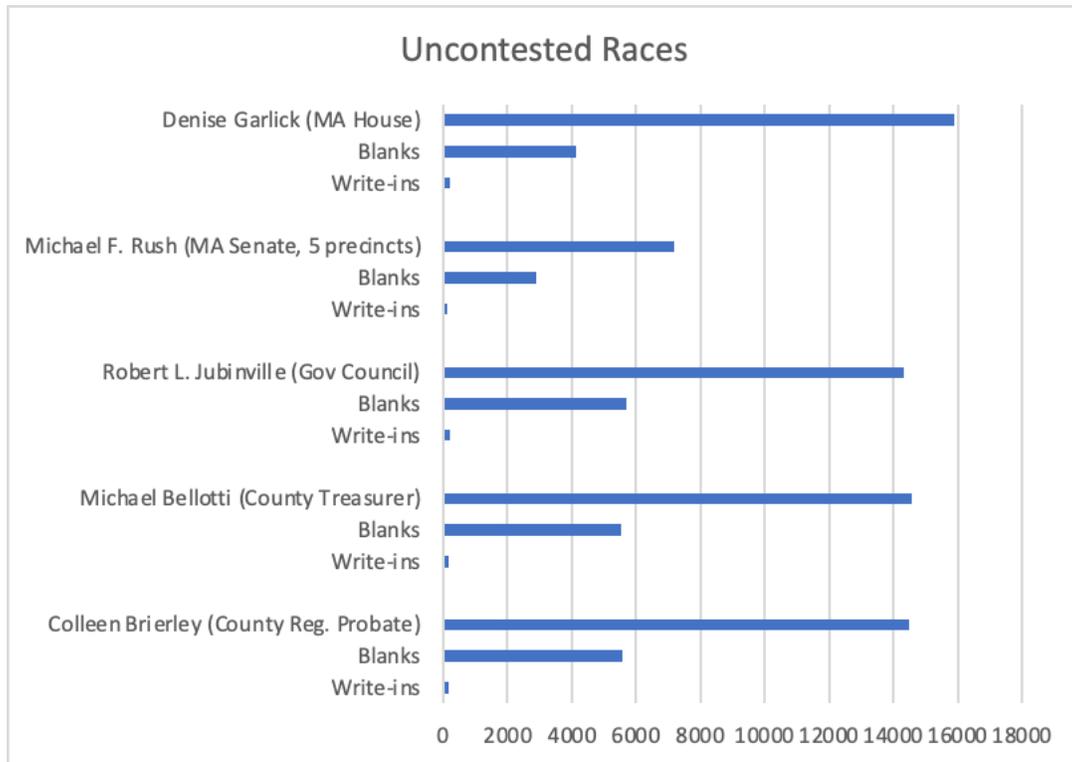


* Voters could vote for up to two candidates for County Commissioner, and the top two were elected. When voters choose to vote for only one candidate, it leads to a large number of blanks.



Uncontested seats included State Representative, State Senate (5 Needham precincts), Governor’s Council, County Treasurer, and Register of Probate, shown in Figure 5.

Figure 5. Needham Certified Election Results for Uncontested Race



State Post-Election Audit of Precinct A

In 2016, Massachusetts began a program of post-election audits every four years. In 2020 Needham Precinct A was randomly selected for audit, which was conducted in a public process at Needham Town Hall on November 10, 2020.

A discrepancy of votes cast in Precinct A was detected when comparing the election night results to the audit results, showing 12 more votes were reported as cast on election night compared with the audit. The audit report stated: “In one precinct, a difference of 12 fewer ballots in the audit may be the result of poll workers incorrectly tallying votes for every office on ballots containing write-in votes, rather than counting only the write-in votes for the offices not already counted by the tabulator.”

2020 Audit Report Narrative and Data

<https://www.sec.state.ma.us/ele/elepostelection/postelectionidx.htm>

League of Women Voters Website and Social Media for Primary and General Election

The League of Women Voters of Needham’s website, www.lwv-needham.org, had an unprecedented number of visits during the 2020 elections, especially prior to the September 1 primary. As shown in Figure 6a, visits in August topped 15,000. Less modest increases were seen in September and October (general election November 3) and May (local Needham election with expanded early voting by mail).

Figure 6a. Number of Visits to lwv-needham.org According to Month (through November 4, 2020)

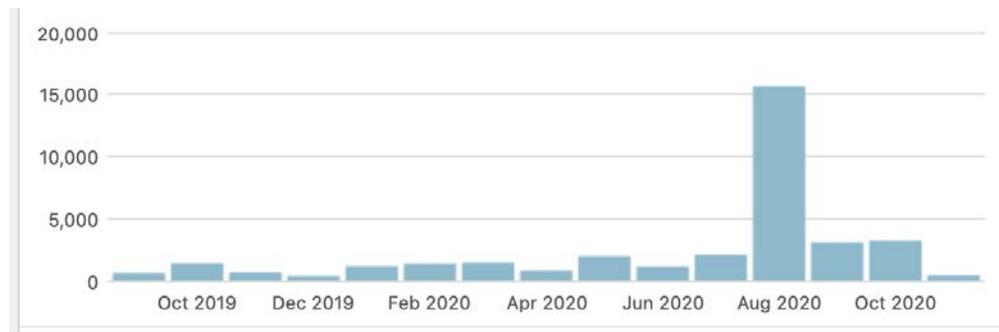


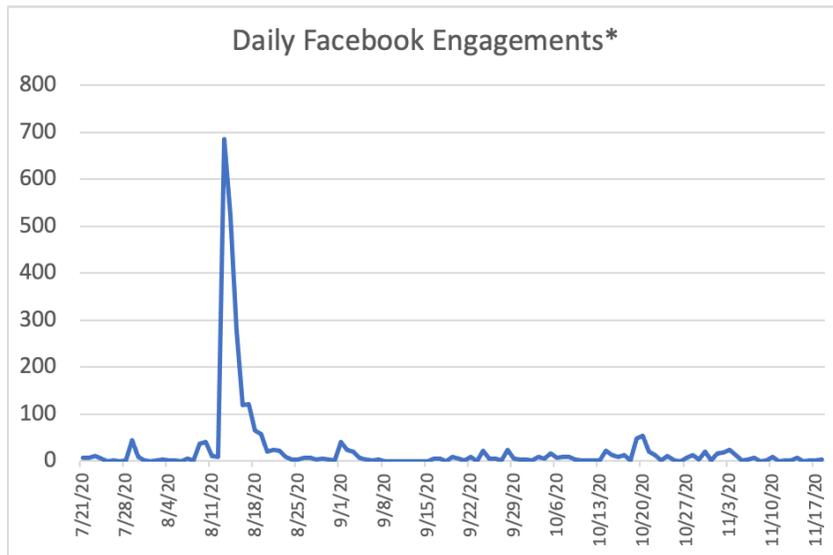
Figure 6b list the top posts for the year and the number of visits. The most interest was in the Norfolk County Primary Candidates and primary candidates in general, as reflected in the spike in visits shown in Figure 6a. We should note that there were 14 candidates running in the four races, Sheriff (3), Commissioner (4), Treasurer (2), and Register of Probate (5). The Sheriff race was featured in a forum separate from the other three.

Figure 6b. Web Posts with Highest Number of Visits (through November 4, 2020)

Top Posts	
Norfolk County Primary Candidates	6,071 Views
Voter Guide to the Primary Candidates	4,095 Views
Home	3,874 Views
Sheriff Candidate Forum	1,306 Views
Meet the Norfolk County Primary Candidates	1,200 Views
Voting in Sept. 1 Primary	980 Views
Toolkit for MA Primary	783 Views

LWV-Needham social media posts (Facebook and Twitter) were used to drive voters to the voter information posted on the LWV-Needham website. Daily Facebook engagements are plotted in Figure 7. LWV Needham shares Facebook posts about the elections with the Needham, MA Facebook page, which has a larger reach. The spike in mid-August was due to a post about the placement of the Big Red ballot drop box in front of Town Hall. It was posted on August 13 and had over 2,500 engagements.

Figure 7. Daily Facebook Engagements in 2020



*Facebook defines engagements as the number of people who engaged with your page. Engagement includes any click or story created. (Unique Users)

LWV League of Women Voters of Needham, MA
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The **Town of Needham** has a brand new, shiny red secure drop box for your "mail-in" ballots. Needham voters can drop off their mail-in ballot applications and completed mail-in ballots here rather than using the US mail. It is on the far right side of Town Hall, across from Walgreens.

🌱 **Get More Likes, Comments and Shares**
 When you boost this post, you'll show it to more people.

10,185 People Reached **2,541** Engagements [Boost Post](#)