



## COMMISSION ON THE FUTURE OF NC ELECTIONS

# ***FINAL REPORT:***

**CROSS-PARTISAN LEADERS FINDING  
COMMON GROUND ON FAIR, SAFE, &  
SECURE ELECTIONS IN NORTH CAROLINA**

**FEBRUARY 4, 2025**

A PROJECT OF THE N.C. NETWORK FOR FAIR, SAFE, & SECURE ELECTIONS,  
IN PARTNERSHIP WITH CATAWBA COLLEGE AND THE CARTER CENTER.



**COMMISSION ON THE FUTURE OF  
NORTH CAROLINA ELECTIONS**

This report is dedicated to the memory of

Former U.S. President Jimmy Carter

and

Former Salisbury Mayor Karen Alexander



## COMMISSION ON THE FUTURE OF NORTH CAROLINA ELECTIONS

### INTRODUCTION

The Commission on the Future of N.C. Elections (“The Commission”) is a project that grew out of the North Carolina Network for Fair, Safe and Secure Elections, a network funded and supported by The Carter Center. The Carter Center was founded in 1982 by former U.S. President Jimmy Carter and former First Lady, Rosalynn Carter. For decades, the Center has worked outside the U.S. to strengthen democracy, resolve armed conflicts, and fight disease. In the summer of 2020, with political polarization and violent rhetoric increasing, the Center launched a new stream of work dedicated to strengthening U.S. democracy and stability. This work has focused on six U.S. states, including North Carolina, that are political swing states and thus more likely to experience electoral disruption and possibly political violence.

The Carter Center work in North Carolina has been led in bi-partisan fashion by former Democratic Charlotte Mayor Jennifer Roberts and former Republican N.C. Supreme Court Justice Bob Orr. After organizing a series of Trusted Election Town Halls in 2022 and hearing a need for better understanding of election administration, the co-leads decided to bring together a commission of citizens to study and evaluate North Carolina’s election processes. They found that no organization had recently examined N.C. election law and administration, and decided to take a nonpartisan, academic approach. The Commission on the Future of N.C. Elections (“The Commission”) was formed as a partnership between the N.C. Network for Fair, Safe & Secure Elections, and Catawba College. The organizers envisioned a nonpartisan public ‘good government’ organization dedicated to upholding the integrity of election administration in North Carolina. Not beholden to any partisan or elected body, The Commission would have a primary goal of enhancing confidence and trust in N.C. elections by examining the system that exists in N.C., comparing it to best practices across the country, and suggesting improvement where needed.

Catawba College is a private independent college, not connected to public money or subject to political appointments in its governance. Founded in 1851, Catawba College is a four-year, private, liberal arts college located in Salisbury, N.C. Ranked as one of the best regional colleges in the South, Catawba is known for its intellectual rigor, dedicated faculty, beautiful campus, and strong commitment to sustainability and the environment. The College offers more than 70 undergraduate and four graduate programs allowing students to explore diverse interests. It is also the home to Dr. Michael Bitzer.

Dr. Bitzer joined Bob Orr and Jennifer Roberts on The Commission’s Steering Committee along with political scientists and authors Dr. Chris Cooper, Western Carolina University, and Dr. Martha Kropf, UNC Charlotte. The three professors have deep scholarly interest and activities in North Carolina politics and policy, especially related to political trends, voter demographics and trends, and election administration and outcomes. This Steering Committee reached out to over

### INTRODUCTION



## COMMISSION ON THE FUTURE OF NORTH CAROLINA ELECTIONS

60 individuals across the state, seeking to represent the diversity of the North Carolina population in terms of age, political ideology, profession, gender, race, ethnicity, and geographical location. Several members of The Commission have served as precinct chairs, election workers, or former election directors, and others have only moved to the state recently or are students who have only voted a few times in their lives. The North Carolina Commission on the Future of Elections comprises individuals from various sectors, including business, legal, nonprofit, and academic communities. By bringing together diverse perspectives, The Commission has endeavored to ensure the credibility and inclusive nature of its efforts.

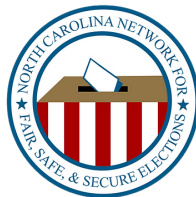
Over the course of the 2024 election cycle, The Commission examined and analyzed election-related issues by dividing into 11 different topic-focused committees. The Commission was launched at a meeting on October 7, 2023. This document is the result of over 80 committee meetings since that date, and is a comprehensive report of findings and any potential election reforms. It includes analysis from election experts; comparisons of N.C. election practices with those of other states; public input on the voter experience and trust in election processes; and deliberations of committees grappling with difficult issues. The Commission was able to include several polling questions about voting in surveys conducted by Meredith College, Elon University, and YouGov, and those surveys are appended here.

True to its cross-partisan nature, The Commission was not able to reach consensus on some of the more controversial aspects of election administration. In these instances, the report indicates that the issue remains a concern and that it merits further study and analysis in an attempt to find future compromise. The lack of a conclusion in these issues - such as ranked choice voting and re-districting - should not be interpreted as giving less weight to the importance of these issues in conducting fair, safe and secure elections. In fact, they are probably some of the issues that most merit future discussion as we continue to improve the integrity of and trust in our elections in North Carolina.

We encourage North Carolina voters, community leaders, teachers, voting advocates and elected officials to read this report, and hope that it leads to continued bipartisan discussion of elections and democracy. Everyone on this commission not only gained more understanding about election administration but also came to realize that different political ideologies could still find more agreement about elections and democratic processes than differences.

We acknowledge that many issues discussed herein may be affected by current and future legislation and litigation, and note that the conclusions are based on facts known as of the date of the final report. We maybe be updating certain sections before presenting this report to legislators and other officials.

## INTRODUCTION



## **COMMISSION ON THE FUTURE OF NORTH CAROLINA ELECTIONS**

Finally, we believe that by mobilizing this wide range of civic, religious, and community leaders as public anti-violence/pro-democracy advocates, we have also incentivized candidates for office and their supporters to adhere to the unwritten rules that have long made our democracy a success – including accepting election results and not inciting intimidation or violence. We have not endorsed any candidates or parties. Rather, we have attempted to build cross-partisan coalitions that can push candidates to agree to the principles outlined in an electoral code of conduct, including refraining from intimidation, violence, or the inciting of violence, and accepting elections results once the votes are counted and the results certified. It is our belief that such cross partisan commissions and study groups can help reduce the polarization that seems to run so deep in our state and country today. We hope this work continues in many different iterations, covering diverse topics and circumstances, and stand ready to assist others in the future.



## COMMISSION ON THE FUTURE OF NORTH CAROLINA ELECTIONS

### Steering Committee Members

Justice Robert Orr  
 Hon. Jennifer Roberts  
 Dr. Michael Bitzer  
 Dr. Christopher Cooper  
 Dr. Martha Kropf

### Commission Members

Mayor Karen Alexander  
 Tony Almeida  
 David Ashley  
 Caroline Avery  
 Darlene Azarmi  
 Sherra Blackburn  
 John Blackburn  
 Mayor Preston Blakely  
 Blake Brewer  
 Julius Brittman  
 Tom Campbell  
 Damon Circosta  
 Ryan Dayvault  
 Zachary Deason  
 Steve Duncan  
 Justice Bob Edmunds  
 Julie Eiselt  
 Hon. Mary Etheridge  
 Fikemi Fawehinmi  
 Hon. Kevin Frye

Leslie Garvin  
 Maria C. Garza  
 Dr. Nadine Gibson  
 Dr. Gil Greggs  
 Col. James Hardaway  
 Mariah Harrelson  
 Kathy Holland  
 Jillian Hopman  
 Dr. Andy Jackson  
 Hon. Susan Kluttz  
 Catherine Komp  
 Omar Lugo  
 Dr. Mary Jo McGowan  
 Jim Morrill  
 Tara Muller  
 Anna K. Neal  
 Dr. David Nelson  
 Myron Pitts  
 Dr. Greg Randolph  
 Rachel Raper

Brandon Rivers  
 Dr. Jason Roberts  
 Brandon Robinson  
 Dr. Deondra Rose  
 Lucy Russell  
 Rebecca Schmidt  
 Dr. Shawnee Seese  
 Mary Ellen Shiflett  
 Gen. George Smith  
 Teddy Stille  
 Dr. Stephen Tate  
 Kathryn Thomas  
 Judge Anna Mills Wagoner  
 Dr. Glenda Weinert  
 Robert Wilson  
 Tom Wilson  
 William F. Wolcott, III  
 Kathleen Wood  
 Bradley Young

### Report Editor

Jessica di Lustro



**COMMISSION ON THE FUTURE OF  
NORTH CAROLINA ELECTIONS**

**TABLE OF CONTENTS**

<b>COMMITTEE REPORTS</b>	<b>7</b>
1. BALLOT SECURITY, CYBER SECURITY, AND LIST MAINTENANCE	8
2. CAMPAIGN FINANCE	17
3. CANDIDATE FILING AND QUALIFICATIONS	27
4. CHALLENGES AND LAWSUITS—POST-ELECTION PROCESS	32
5. CIVIC EDUCATION	41
6. COUNTING VOTES	46
7. EARLY VOTING	61
8. ELECTION INFRASTRUCTURE AND ADMINISTRATION	68
9. MAIL-IN BALLOTS	87
10. PRIMARIES AND ELECTION DAY PROCESS	102
11. VOTER ACCESS AND REGISTRATION	125
<b>SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS</b>	<b>131</b>
AREAS WITH NO CONSENSUS	132
ADEQUATE FUNDING	133
PERSONNEL CHALLENGES	133
CIVIC EDUCATION	135
VOTER ACCESSIBILITY	135
SECURITY NEEDS	136
LEGISLATIVE PRIORITIES	136
<b>RESOURCES</b>	<b>138</b>
<b>APPENDICES</b>	<b>148</b>
APPENDIX A: COMMISSION ON THE FUTURE OF N.C. ELECTION MEMBER BIOS	149
APPENDIX B: PUBLIC FEEDBACK ON ELECTIONS FROM THE TRUSTED ELECTIONS TOWN HALL TOUR 2024	160
APPENDIX C: BIG IDEA TRENDS ACROSS COMMITTEES FOR THE COMMISSION	167
APPENDIX D: COMMUNITY PARTNERS: REFLECTIONS ON THE 2024 ELECTION	176
APPENDIX E: CHARTS ON NC VOTING TRENDS NOT INCLUDED IN BODY OF REPORT	178
APPENDIX F: INFORMATION ON ELECTION ISSUES IN <i>GRIFFIN V. NCSBE</i>	181
APPENDIX G: NORTH CAROLINA EXPENDITURES AND TRANSPARENCY	183
APPENDIX H: SUMMARY OF RECENT POLLS	188

**INTRODUCTION**

# THE COMMISSION ON THE FUTURE OF NORTH CAROLINA ELECTIONS



## COMMITTEE REPORTS

- 1. Ballot Security, Cyber Security, and List Maintenance**
- 2. Campaign Finance**
- 3. Candidate Filing and Qualifications**
- 4. Challenges and Lawsuits—Post-Election Process**
- 5. Civic Education**
- 6. Counting Votes**
- 7. Early Voting**
- 8. Election Infrastructure and Administration**
- 9. Mail-In Ballots**
- 10. Primaries and Election Day Processes**
- 11. Voter Access and Registration**





## COMMISSION ON THE FUTURE OF NORTH CAROLINA ELECTIONS

### 1. BALLOT SECURITY, CYBER SECURITY, AND LIST MAINTENANCE COMMITTEE FINAL REPORT

**Committee Members:** Stephen Tate (Co-Chair, Guilford)  
James Hardaway (Co-Chair, Wake)  
Tony Almeida (Rowan)  
Ryan Dayvault (Cabarrus)  
Omar Lugo (Alamance)  
Mary Jo McGowan (Mecklenburg)  
Anna Katherine Neal (Mecklenburg)  
Mary Ellen Shiflett (Guilford)  
Ted Stille (Surry/Wilkes)  
Brad Young (Wake)  
Jennifer Roberts (Steering Committee Lead)

#### **Executive Summary:**

The Committee on Ballot Security, Cyber Security, and List Maintenance was given the charge of investigating the operational security (technology and processes) of elections in North Carolina, with a particular focus on cyber attacks (frequency, sophistication, protecting election information), machine security (tabulators, DS200, hacking, modems, testing, etc.), ballot security (chain of command, retrievable ballots, adjudication process), procedural checks and balances on security (audits and hand/eye recounts), and technical vulnerabilities related to voter list maintenance. The committee invited several experts on both voting system security and election processes who gave presentations and answered questions from the committee. In addition, the committee sought public sentiment on these issues through questions designed for public polling and issues raised during town hall events.

Based on a combination of polling and in-person town hall feedback, three primary concerns are at the forefront for North Carolina voters regarding election infrastructure security. These apprehensions are driven by:

- A lack of trust and understanding in the technology behind our elections,
- A lack of confidence in the ballot chain of custody, and
- A lack of perceived transparency in voter roll and list maintenance

Based on these chief concerns (detailed further down in the report), this committee recommends the following:

### 1. BALLOT SECURITY, CYBER SECURITY, AND LIST MAINTENANCE



## COMMISSION ON THE FUTURE OF NORTH CAROLINA ELECTIONS

1. Introduce more election knowledge through increased voter engagement.
  - Produce easy-to-understand materials or infographics for voter and citizen education to combat common misconceptions with facts.
  - Deploy more aggressive advertising engagement opportunities (website, social media, open house, town halls, etc.) as part of a broader election education campaign.
  - Conduct recruiting drives for election workers to instill a deeper understanding of how North Carolina executes elections.
  
2. Introduce more transparency in how North Carolina executes cyber security audits to limit risk as technology and the threat evolves.
  - Publish audit results post-election to inform voters of relative security levels.
  - Review audit periodicity to inform resourcing decisions.

### **Final Report Methodology:**

#### Committee Focus Areas

- Cyber attacks: frequency, sophistication, protecting election information
- Machine security: tabulators, DS200, hacking, modems, testing, etc.
- Website vulnerabilities and fixes
- List maintenance and vulnerabilities
- Audit process and hand-eye counts
- Ballot security: chain of command, retrievable ballots, adjudication process
- Procedural checks and balances on security

#### North Carolina Election Practices Overview

N.C.G.S. § 163 addresses two common concerns of the general public:

- Issue 1: Trust in electronic voting equipment is not absolute, and paper ballots are always collected and preserved for audits and challenges. N.C.G.S. § 163-165.7(a)(4) mandates “With respect to electronic voting systems, that the voting system generate a paper ballot of each individual vote cast, which paper ballot shall be maintained in a secure fashion and shall serve as a backup record for purposes of any hand-to-eye count, hand-to-eye recount, or other audit.”
- Issue 2: Voting systems are never connected to the Internet and are never accessible to remote hackers. N.C.G.S. § 163-165.7(j): “No voting system used in any election in this State shall be connected to a network, and any feature allowing connection to a network shall be disabled. Prohibited network connections include the Internet, intranet, fax, telephone line, networks established via modem, or any other wired or wireless connection.”

### **1. BALLOT SECURITY, CYBER SECURITY, AND LIST MAINTENANCE**



## COMMISSION ON THE FUTURE OF NORTH CAROLINA ELECTIONS

### N.C. State Board of Elections (NCSBE) Security Guidance:

- Only equipment that has been evaluated and certified by an authorized Voting System Test Lab may be purchased and used by any county in North Carolina
- Conducting regular security assessments against its systems to identify and mitigate identified vulnerabilities before they can be taken advantage of by attackers
- Physical security reviews at the state and county levels
- Regular external vulnerability scanning and remediation of any findings
- Regular infrastructure system patching
- Formation of security policies in alignment with the N.C. Department of Information Technology
- Incident response planning, tabletop exercises, and awareness training
- Extra cybersecurity monitoring and response by all partners during election events
- Regular receipt and analysis of information and alerts related to cybersecurity risks
- State Board employee training on cyber security risks and best practices

### Public Survey Feedback:

The Commission created and distributed a survey composed of questions developed by committee members. Below are some additional insights from recent polling across North Carolina focused on election security issues:

The May 2024 Elon University Poll<sup>1</sup> is the most recent poll that addresses voter confidence in the election process, albeit briefly. The poll primarily focused on use of artificial intelligence in elections and campaigning, but one question asked about confidence in the election process. 38% of respondents indicated that they were either not at all confident or not too confident that “people's votes will be accurately cast and counted in this year's presidential election in November.” This is a significant increase from the 25% lack of confidence in the 2020 Meredith poll cited below. The Elon poll also reported a very significant partisan divide, with the overwhelming majority of Democrats expressing confidence, while a majority of Republicans indicated a lack of confidence.

The 2024 Meredith College Polls<sup>2</sup> did not specifically reference election security as a primary concern.

---

<sup>1</sup> *Elon University Poll*, ELON UNIVERSITY (Oct. 29, 2024), <https://www.elon.edu/u/elon-poll/>.

<sup>2</sup> *Meredith Poll Archives*, MEREDITH UNIVERSITY, <https://www.meredith.edu/meredith-poll/meredith-poll-archives/>.

## 1. BALLOT SECURITY, CYBER SECURITY, AND LIST MAINTENANCE



## COMMISSION ON THE FUTURE OF NORTH CAROLINA ELECTIONS

### ***2023 Meredith College Poll<sup>3</sup>***

The Meredith Poll conducted a survey of North Carolina registered voters. The online sample—from Dynata—used a quota based on the most recent U.S. Census estimates of North Carolina to sample respondents. After the survey was completed, the survey was weighted for gender, party affiliation, geographic location, race and ethnicity, and education so that the sample most closely resembles North Carolina. The sample had 973 respondents, giving a confidence interval of  $\pm 3\%$ . The survey was in the field February 3–7, 2023.

The way in which we conduct elections is much on the minds of North Carolinians, as it is on the minds of citizens around the country, as a result of claims and conspiracies about election integrity since the 2020 presidential election. The good news is that a large majority of respondents (76.2%) were aware that election administration in North Carolina was conducted at the county level. Also, over 80% of respondents would be concerned if a county lacked resources the county needed to adequately administer elections. In terms of potential problems with election administration, large majorities of North Carolinians would be concerned if county board of election members “went rogue” and decided to violate state election law and administer election processes according to other methods (76.4%), or if one or more of these county board of election members disagreed with their oaths of office and changed the way in which an election winner was determined (82.2%). In both cases, less than 4% of those surveyed indicated that they would have little or no concern for these issues. It is worth noting that in terms of knowledge about county administration of elections, as well as concern about maintaining the viability and integrity of election administration, that there were no significant differences among demographic groups. Democrats care just as much about these issues as Republicans and unaffiliated voters do.

### ***2020 Meredith College N.C. Primary Poll<sup>4</sup>***

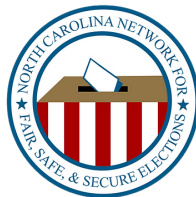
The Meredith College Poll conducted a mixed mode sample of 1,024 North Carolinians (308 live caller respondents and 716 online respondents) to registered North Carolina voters from February 16–24, 2020. The survey’s margin of error is  $\pm 3\%$ . Note that this poll was taken before the 2020 primaries and general election.

Election security was on the minds of North Carolinians throughout the 2020 election cycle. Over one-quarter of respondents indicated that they had no confidence or very little confidence in the voting processes used in the state, while 41% indicated that they were only somewhat confident that votes would be recorded accurately. The concern about the voting processes in the state cut across all demographic groups with Democrats and Republicans alike indicating lower-

<sup>3</sup> *Meredith Poll: February 2023*, MEREDITH UNIVERSITY (February 2023), <https://www.meredith.edu/wp-content/uploads/2023/02/Meredith-Poll-Report-Spring-2023.docx.pdf>.

<sup>4</sup> *Meredith Poll: The 2020 North Carolina Primary*, MEREDITH UNIVERSITY (February 2020), [https://www.meredith.edu/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/Final\\_Meredith\\_College\\_Poll\\_Report\\_February\\_2020.pdf](https://www.meredith.edu/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/Final_Meredith_College_Poll_Report_February_2020.pdf).

## **1. BALLOT SECURITY, CYBER SECURITY, AND LIST MAINTENANCE**



## COMMISSION ON THE FUTURE OF NORTH CAROLINA ELECTIONS

than-expected levels of confidence. Level of education, gender, and other characteristics do not seem to make a difference in people's perceptions. These concerns about the legitimacy of the voting processes in the state are related to events such as the 2018 absentee ballot fraud case in the 9th Congressional District and problems with vote gathering and reporting in the Iowa Democratic caucuses. Almost two-thirds of the respondents (64.2% with the 9th District problems and 60.4% with the Iowa caucuses) said they were very or somewhat familiar with those cases.

For additional public input, see Appendix B: Public Feedback on Elections from the Trusted Elections Town Hall Tour 2024.

### **Committee Findings:**

#### ***Area 1: Basic cyberspace security knowledge***

Concern: While most cyber security discussions speak to the fear of hacking voting machines, many do not see the broader security procedures required for comprehensive protection.

Discussion: Keeping North Carolina's elections secure is more than just guarding against hackers. NC's digital election infrastructure, to include its systems and networks, is protected through a layered approach that incorporates election staff, processes, and technology.

Every polling place is staffed with bipartisan, trained officials from the local community who take an oath to uphold state elections laws and work together to ensure election security. Bipartisan State and County Boards of Elections are trained to oversee all aspects of elections. Additionally, bipartisan election observers witness the voting process to ensure and validate elections are executed according to state laws and policies. North Carolina is one of few states with a dedicated Investigations Division, which is staffed by experienced professionals who investigate reports of fraud and other irregularities and refer cases to prosecutors when warranted. Lastly, elections officials are in regular contact and have strong and growing relationships with partners in federal and state governments, who assist with cyber and physical security, share information, plan for election events and respond to incidents.

Several processes converge to ensure election integrity. Voter ID verification, paper ballots, and post-election audits are just a few of the procedures that provide checks and balances on N.C. elections. All voters are asked to show a photo ID when they check in to vote. This verifies that the person wishing to vote is the registered voter on the registration rolls. Under state law, all 100 counties use paper ballots, producing a paper trail which can be easily audited or recounted. By federal law, ballot marking devices must be available at every polling place for any voter who needs or wishes to use one to mark a ballot. After every election and before results are certified, the State and County Boards of Elections conduct multiple checks designed to detect

## **1. BALLOT SECURITY, CYBER SECURITY, AND LIST MAINTENANCE**



## COMMISSION ON THE FUTURE OF NORTH CAROLINA ELECTIONS

irregularities, such as equipment tampering, ballot stuffing, and voting machine or tabulation errors. In the sample hand-count audit, for example, two voting sites are selected at random in every county, counted by hand by bipartisan teams, and compared with the machine-counted results. This audit helps confirm the accuracy of voting equipment.

From a technology perspective, no election system or voting system in the state has ever been the target of a successful cyberattack. By state law, voting machines may not be connected to the internet, limiting the possibility of cyber interference. No voting machine in North Carolina contains a modem or modem chip. Before every election, county boards of elections conduct logic and accuracy tests on every voting machine that will be used in the election to ensure proper coding of ballots and counting of votes for every contest on the ballot.<sup>5</sup>

### *Area 2: Election equipment knowledge*

**Concern:** How does the equipment used in North Carolina elections work, and how is it protected against digital vulnerabilities?

**Discussion:** All voting systems in North Carolina use paper ballots, marked either by hand or with a ballot-marking device, providing a paper trail of votes cast that can be audited or recounted by elections officials. Military and overseas voters, as well as visually impaired voters, can request, access, and submit an absentee ballot through a secure online portal provided by the State Board. All North Carolina counties comply with federal law by having ballot-marking devices available at every polling place for any voter who needs or wishes to use one to mark a ballot independently.

Each of the 100 county boards of elections, in conjunction with their county board of commissioners, decides which approved voting system will best serve their voters. Counties may only purchase any new system after public demonstrations of the equipment and test use in an election or simulated election. All counties in North Carolina currently use either ES&S or Hart equipment. Voting systems from three different vendors have been approved for use in North Carolina elections.<sup>6</sup>

1. Election Systems and Software (ES&S)<sup>7</sup>
2. Hart InterCivic (Hart)<sup>8</sup>
3. Clear Ballot<sup>9</sup>

<sup>5</sup> *10 Facts About Election Security in North Carolina*, NCSBE <https://www.ncsbe.gov/about-elections/election-security/10-facts-about-election-security-north-carolina>.

<sup>6</sup> *Voting Equipment*, NCSBE <https://www.ncsbe.gov/voting/voting-equipment>.

<sup>7</sup> Election Systems and Software, <https://www.essvote.com/>.

<sup>8</sup> Hart InterCivic, <https://www.hartintercivic.com/>.

<sup>9</sup> Clear Ballot, <https://www.clearballot.com/>



## COMMISSION ON THE FUTURE OF NORTH CAROLINA ELECTIONS

All voting systems used in North Carolina are certified by the State Board of Elections after extensive testing and public demonstrations, and must be approved by county officials before purchase. Voting systems used in North Carolina meet all applicable federal regulations governing voting systems and are certified, used, and audited in other states. Before every election, county boards of elections conduct logic and accuracy tests on every voting machine that will be used in the election to ensure proper coding of ballots and counting of votes for every contest on the ballot. After every election and before results are certified, the State and County Boards of Elections conduct multiple checks designed to detect irregularities, such as equipment tampering, ballot stuffing, and voting machine or tabulation errors.<sup>10</sup>

After pre-election testing is complete, voting equipment is sealed and locked in a secure area until transported to the voting place. Tamper-evident seals are placed on media ports. Voting machines are never connected to the internet. They do not have modems. A person would have to have physical access to the machine to install any type of virus or malware.

County boards document the chain of custody of their voting equipment when it is moved from its secure storage location. Additionally, even assuming unauthorized access were possible, the tabulators recognize only approved and verified media or USBs and will ignore any unverified media. The coding for a particular election is encrypted and, when it is loaded on a machine, requires the validation of a digital signature to confirm that the data is from a trusted source. System audit logs also identify the details of any changes to the software or access to the machines, with timestamps. Additionally, the machines require a unique physical equipment key to turn the equipment on and to access any media port on the equipment. Only authorized individuals may have keys and security codes to open voting machines.<sup>11</sup>

### *Area 3: Understanding how ballots are processed and counted*

Concern: How are votes counted by the tabulator and validated as correct before being recorded as official results?

Discussion: The committee learned about current practices in ballot handling and processing from invited guest Charlie Collicutt (Director, Guilford County Board of Elections) and from Forsyth County election officials at an elections “town hall” even in Winston-Salem. The chain of custody for ballots is highly protected and documented with redundant measures. Blank ballots and equipment are stored in locked containers with physical locks and tamper-evident

<sup>10</sup> *10 Facts About Election Security in North Carolina*, NCSBE <https://www.ncsbe.gov/about-elections/election-security/10-facts-about-election-security-north-carolina>.

<sup>11</sup> *Preparing for Accurate Elections*, NCSBE <https://www.ncsbe.gov/about-elections/election-security/preparing-accurate-elections>.

## 1. BALLOT SECURITY, CYBER SECURITY, AND LIST MAINTENANCE



## COMMISSION ON THE FUTURE OF NORTH CAROLINA ELECTIONS

seals that would indicate if any paper ballots or equipment had been accessed, including machine ports such as USB connections. Every voter's ballot is counted from a paper copy (marked by hand or device) that is inserted by the voter into a tabulator, and kept in a locked box. At the end of each day's voting, whether early voting or election day, voted ballots are transported in boxes with physical locks and tamper-evident seals to the vault at the county board of elections. Unique codes on tamper evident seals are signed off on at each site, and verified and signed off again at the board of elections. The count of ballots is matched to the number of voters that have been checked in and verified as legitimate registered voters, ensuring that no ballots are lost or added. Boxes in storage are kept locked and unopened unless or until needed for a post-election audit or recount. This documented chain of custody ensures that each ballot is tracked and that there is a one-to-one match between ballots cast and counted and registered voters who have checked in.

Vote counts are recorded with redundancy, with multiple copies of the evening master result tape signed off on at the polling site and copies handled by separate workers. In at least some counties (including Guilford and Mecklenburg), a copy of the result tape is placed in the U.S. mail for separate delivery to the county board of elections. Counties regularly "table top" scenarios and have developed contingency plans for unusual events, such as election officials being in car accidents when transporting ballots and results to the board of elections office.

### ***Area 4: Funding***

Concern: Does a lack of funding impact election security?

Discussion: Funding levels impact the type of physical security, training, and number of people that can be hired to reduce the risk of cyber attacks. Each layer is protecting against a potential vulnerability. In North Carolina, local governments shoulder the burden of administering and funding elections within their counties. While county and state election boards saw a temporary boost in federal support during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic (CARES funding), security technology concerns have pressured even more spending on upgraded high-speed scanners, tabulators, and ballot sorting machines to count absentee ballots and ensure appropriate health and safety measures remain for vulnerable populations. Post-pandemic, North Carolina has also seen federal assistance by way of the Help America Vote Act (HAVA), that's contributed approximately \$4.6M since 2022.<sup>12</sup> Spread across the state's 100 counties, it is easy to see that the assistance only goes so far.

---

<sup>12</sup> *Election Security Grant*, U.S. ELECTION ASSISTANCE COMMITTEE (Aug. 26, 2024), <https://www.eac.gov/grants/election-security-funds> (N.C. received \$1 million for 2024; \$1,817,084 for 2023; \$1,817,084 for 2022—about 4.6 million since the last federal election in 2020); Jennifer Shutt, *States struggle with unreliable federal funding for making sure elections are secure*, N.C. NEWSLINE (June 16, 2024), <https://ncnewsline.com/2024/06/16/states-struggle-with-unreliable-federal-funding-for-making-sure-elections-are-secure/>.

## 1. BALLOT SECURITY, CYBER SECURITY, AND LIST MAINTENANCE





## COMMISSION ON THE FUTURE OF NORTH CAROLINA ELECTIONS

Establishing a more concentrated and permanent solution to resource critical infrastructure improvements remains a key concern. While private investors have helped in some areas, the North Carolina General Assembly passed a law after the 2020 elections that prohibited private funding for election administration.<sup>13</sup> This is a burden the state government needs to solve if they expect to evolve election security to meet the ever-changing nature of the digital threat. Establishing permanent election funding can help resource critical infrastructure, including absentee voting security tools.<sup>14</sup>

### *Area 5: Voter List Accuracy*

Concern: How are voter rolls maintained to ensure registration is accurate and prevent ineligible voters from participating?

Discussion: During a presentation to the full Commission in February, Paul Cox (General Counsel for the N.C. State Board of Elections) discussed some of the ways the state and counties keep registered voter lists accurate. Lists are regularly checked and updated from state records (e.g., deaths, felony convictions, etc.), and mailings to voter residences confirm residency. The committee looked into whether voter rolls are coordinated with other states, for example to update records when voters have moved to a new state. At one point, North Carolina considered becoming part of a multi-state consortium to coordinate checks of voter rolls (ERIC, the Electronic Registration Information Center), but the specific group was seen by some as having partisan interests, and so North Carolina is not participating in this consortium. The committee feels that the general idea of states coordinating voter roll maintenance is important, but we are not endorsing any particular method or group. Any such effort must be seen as non-partisan and trusted across the board.

---

<sup>13</sup> N.C.G.S. § 163-22. (“The State Board shall not accept private monetary donations or in-kind contributions, directly or indirectly, for conducting elections or employing individuals on a temporary basis.”); *Prohibiting Private Funding of Elections*, NCSL (April 9, 2024), <https://www.ncsl.org/elections-and-campaigns/prohibiting-private-funding-of-elections>.

<sup>14</sup> Alissa Ellis & Tomas Lopez, *Recommendations for Elections Appropriations*, DEMOCRACY N.C. (Feb. 2021), <https://democracync.org/research/recommendations-for-elections-appropriations/>; Alexandra Forter Sirota, *Paying for Elections*, N.C. BUDGET & TAX CENTER (May 2023), [https://ncbudget.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/03/Election-Funding-Report-2023\\_final-pdfs.pdf](https://ncbudget.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/03/Election-Funding-Report-2023_final-pdfs.pdf).



## COMMISSION ON THE FUTURE OF NORTH CAROLINA ELECTIONS

### 2. CAMPAIGN FINANCE COMMITTEE FINAL REPORT

**Committee Members:** Mary Jo McGowan (Chair, Mecklenburg)  
 Blake Brewer (Nash)  
 Bob Edmunds (Guilford)  
 Susan Kluttz (Rowan)  
 Omar Lugo (Alamance)  
 David Nelson (Rowan)  
 Thomas Wilson (Craven)  
 Kathleen Wood (Yancey)  
 Brad Young (Wake)  
 Bob Orr (Steering Committee Lead)

#### **Executive Summary:**

The campaign finance subcommittee found **three areas** to address in current campaign finance policy in NC. First, we found that rules and regulations of campaign finance may confuse the general public and candidates alike. Creating a document to serve as a quick reference guide for candidates would be helpful.

Additionally, contribution rules and processes are a source of confusion to both candidates and the public. Citizens are apt to find the idea of money in elections an indicator of corruption, but money always has been and always will be part of campaigns and elections. A well-run system of campaign finance can alleviate fears of corruption by the citizens of North Carolina— but that system only works to alleviate fears if citizens know and understand how it works. To that end, we provide a primer on the basics of campaign finance contributions in North Carolina.

Finally, our third focus is on compliance. Compliance systems can build trust and confidence in elections. We found that the reporting and compliance system utilizes an out of date computerized system and the staffing is inadequate. We recommend an increase in compliance campaign finance staffers to monitor the campaign finance system and thereby boost confidence of citizens in our system. **We recommend that the state utilize these educational resources to help the people of North Carolina learn more about how well-run our elections are and we recommend an increase in funding for better technology and staffing.**



## COMMISSION ON THE FUTURE OF NORTH CAROLINA ELECTIONS

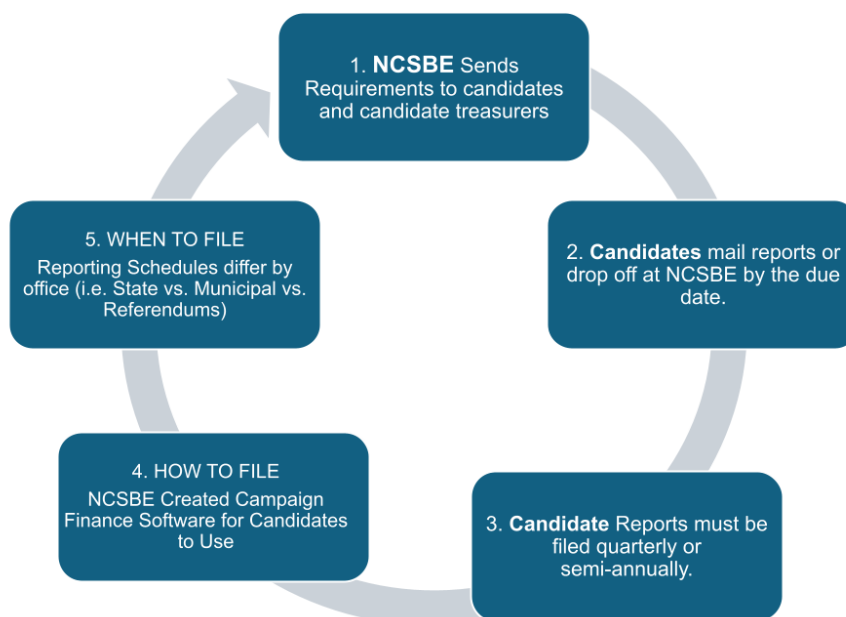
### Committee Findings:

#### 1. Responsibilities of Campaign Finance Compliance by Candidates: Processes, Procedures, and Audits

#### Local and State Candidate Campaign Finance Reporting Process:

Chart 2.1<sup>15</sup>

#### Local & State Candidate Campaign Finance Reporting Process



Step 1: Notice of reporting requirements sent by NCSBE to candidates and candidate treasurers.

Step 2: Reports may be mailed (prior to the due date, postmark required) or dropped off at NCSBE by the due date.

Step 3: Reports must be filed quarterly or semi-annually. A candidate committee, political party committee or PAC's status as a quarterly or semiannual filer is determined by N.C.G.S. § 163-278.9.

Step 4: Candidates can utilize the Campaign Finance Remote Software created by the NCSBE to file their required reports.

<sup>15</sup> Unless otherwise noted, all charts were created by members of The Commission.

## 2. CAMPAIGN FINANCE



## COMMISSION ON THE FUTURE OF NORTH CAROLINA ELECTIONS

Note: There are different reporting schedules for different offices (state, municipal, and referenda). The information detailed here covers only state offices.

### Local & State Candidate Campaign Finance Reporting Requirements:

#### Chart 2.2

#### Local & State Candidate Campaign Finance Reporting Requirements

For more detailed information <https://www.ncsbe.gov/campaign-finance>

##### Statewide Candidates

- Candidate Committees showing a CUMULATIVE total of more than \$5,000 in contributions, loans or expenditures for the election cycle

##### Political Committees

- Contributions or Independent Expenditures in excess of \$5,000 to candidates for statewide office or affecting contests for statewide office
- Contributions with a CUMULATIVE total of more than \$10,000 in contributions, loans or expenditures for the election cycle

##### FEDERAL Political Committees

- With a CUMULATIVE total of more than \$5,000 in contributions to statewide candidates, or more than \$10,000 in contributions to non-statewide candidates for the election cycle.

##### Independent Expenditure Organizations

- If the expense incurred is greater than \$5,000 during an election

Campaign finance reporting requirements vary based on the office sought and the amount of money raised. These requirements include:

Statewide Candidates: Candidate committees for statewide office that show a cumulative total of more than \$5,000 in contributions, loans, or expenditures for the election cycle.

Political Committees: If they make contributions in excess of \$5,000 to candidates for statewide office or make independent expenditures in excess of \$5,000 that affect contests for statewide office; if they show a cumulative total of more than \$10,000 in contributions, loans, or expenditures for the election cycle.

Federal Political Committees: If they show a cumulative total of more than \$5,000 in contributions to statewide candidates, or more than \$10,000 in contributions to non-statewide candidates for the election cycle.

## 2. CAMPAIGN FINANCE

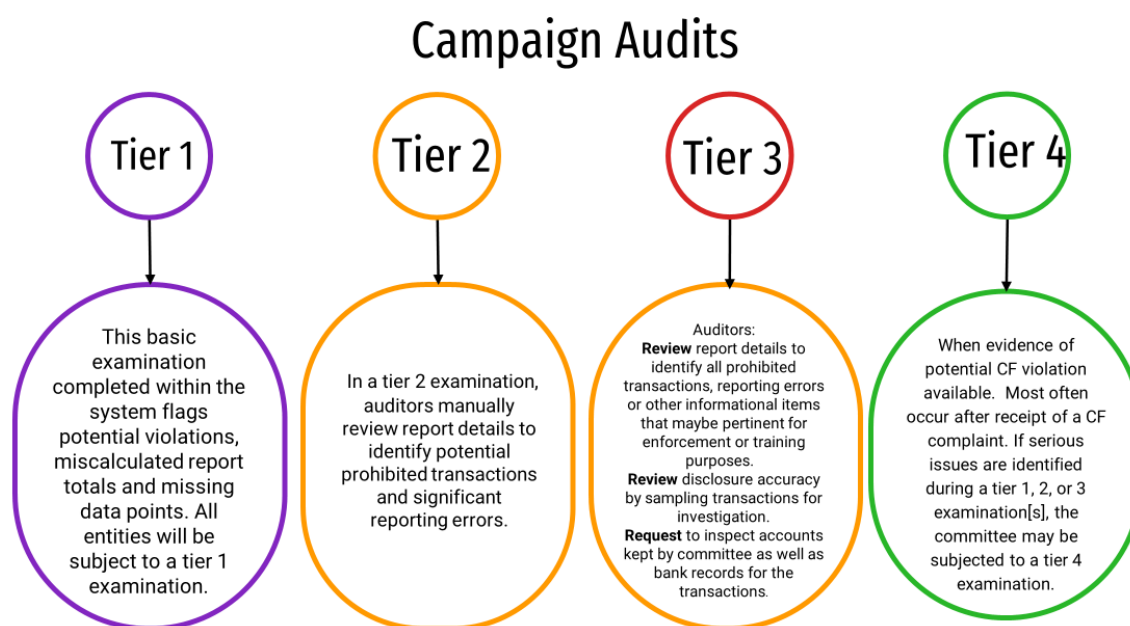


## COMMISSION ON THE FUTURE OF NORTH CAROLINA ELECTIONS

Independent Expenditure Filers: If the expense incurred is greater than \$5,000 during an election.

### Campaign Audits

Chart 2.3



Each disclosure report filed with the State Board of Elections (“State Board”) by a candidate committee, political party, political action committee, referendum committee, or other entity must be examined to determine whether the statement conforms to North Carolina law and to the truth. N.C.G.S. § 163-278.23 and N.C.G.S. § 163-278.24. These examinations, often referred to as audits, are performed by State Board auditors. Like all State Board employees, auditors are subject to N.C.G.S. § 163-39 (limiting certain political activities).

North Carolina has a four-tiered audit system:

Tier 1: This basic examination completed within the system flags potential violations, miscalculated report totals and missing data points. All entities will be subject to a Tier 1 examination.

## 2. CAMPAIGN FINANCE



## COMMISSION ON THE FUTURE OF NORTH CAROLINA ELECTIONS

Tier 2: In a Tier 2 examination, auditors manually review report details to identify potential prohibited transactions and significant reporting errors.

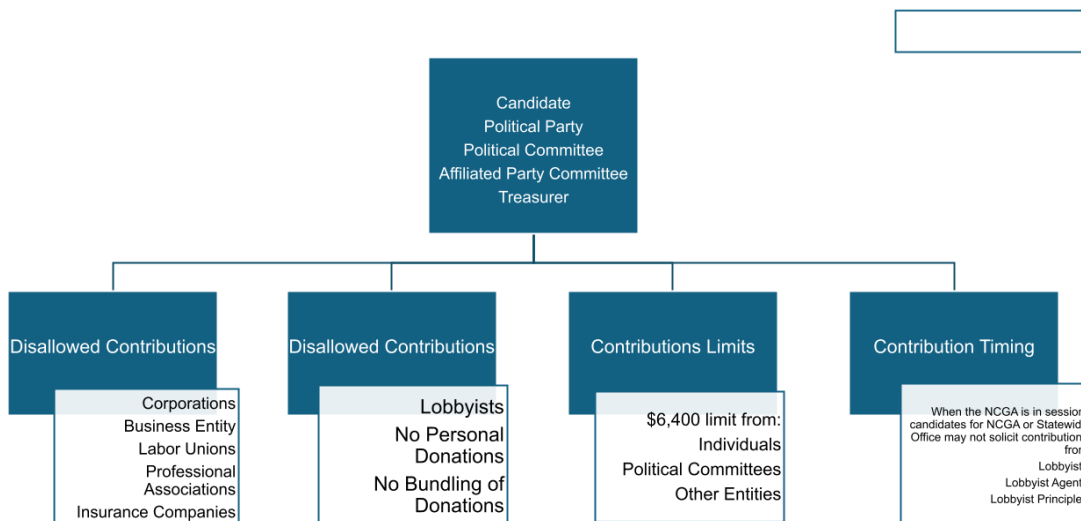
Tier 3: In a Tier 3 examination, auditors manually review report details to identify all potential prohibited transactions, reporting errors or other informational items that may be pertinent for enforcement or training purposes. During a Tier 3 examination, auditors review the accuracy of disclosures by selecting a sample of transactions for further investigation. In conducting this investigation, the auditor will request to inspect accounts kept by the committee as well as bank records for the selected transactions.

Tier 4: A Tier 4 examination is conducted when there is evidence of a potential campaign finance violation. Tier 4 examinations most often occur after receipt of a campaign finance complaint. If serious issues are identified during a Tier 1, 2, or 3 examination[s], the committee may be subjected to a Tier 4 examination.

### 2. Sources of Campaign Finance Funding: Limits and Regulations

Chart 2.4

## Campaign Finance Sources





## COMMISSION ON THE FUTURE OF NORTH CAROLINA ELECTIONS

North Carolinians can search campaign funding and spending reports and penalties using the NCSBE website.<sup>16</sup>

### 3. NCSBE Compliance and Reporting: Resources and Process

The State Board of Elections' Campaign Finance Office (CFO) has the primary responsibility for overseeing and policing the myriads of campaign finance laws pertaining to candidates, political parties, PAC's, independent expenditure groups and any and all other entities governed by the laws.

There are over 3317 entities responsible for filing campaign finance reports with the NCSBE, and most of those entities are usually required to file multiple reports during the campaign cycle.<sup>17</sup> It is impossible to know the amount of independent expenditure reports being filed because, due to the \$100 threshold, there are so many.

Given this large volume of work required by the CFO, and in addition to the already complex and multifaceted set of laws and regulations governing campaign finance, there are two main challenges hindering the extent to which they could be most effective in the process of processing, reviewing, and filing these reports:

#### A. The Campaign Finance Office is underfunded.

Based on added changes and responsibilities to the state board of elections for the 2024 General Election (Voter ID, absentee voting, election observers, etc.), the NCSBE has compiled a budget request document outlining the resources needed to ensure the agency can maintain its services provided to voters in the most effective manner possible.<sup>18</sup> This request is characterized by five main responsibilities:

- I. Securing election integrity
- II. Supporting the counties
- III. Improving voter services
- IV. Modernization

<sup>16</sup> *Search Campaign Funding and Spending Reports and Penalties*, NCSBE <https://www.ncsbe.gov/campaign-finance/search-campaign-funding-and-spending-reports-and-penalties>.

<sup>17</sup> *Reporting - Entity Trends - 5 - 2024*, <https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1aOEit94aaZNzkhaK8F1b6UY1PIVkwDMA/edit?gid=1621724652#gid=1621724652>.

<sup>18</sup> *Budget Requests*, NCSBE <https://drive.google.com/file/d/1h3rpWNUOz03Y1aQwrYZe6SIBVd6unePW/view>.



## COMMISSION ON THE FUTURE OF NORTH CAROLINA ELECTIONS

- a. Relevant to the campaign software used for auditing—the current software being used is 20+ year-old Microsoft software, which slows down the process considerably.

### V. Legal services

- a. Not only are reports hard to disclose in a timely manner due to outdated software, but the system for archived reports is currently paper-based and not at all digitized. Thus, archives are hard to access and easily lost due to lack of organization. *Transparency* is key to the CFO's work, but outdated software makes transparency nearly impossible.

### B. The Campaign Finance Office is understaffed

Two attorneys are assigned to CFO, although they have additional legal responsibilities other than campaign finance. Six to seven auditors are assigned to check the reports coming in. Ideally, the CFO needs at least two more auditors to manage the workload with the current software being used. One to two people handle investigations by the state board of elections.

**Bottom line:** The CFO is challenged in their duties by out-of-date technology and lack of adequate funding, limited staff given their large volume of work, and an overall complex and multi-faceted system of laws and regulations governing campaign finance.

In order for the NCSBE and the CFO to properly manage the campaign finance component of elections in the state, proper resources at both the state level and at the local level need to be allocated appropriately.

---

### Campaign Finance FAQs:

Campaign Contribution: A contribution is anything of value whatsoever, made to, or in coordination with, a candidate to support or oppose the nomination or election of one or more clearly identified candidates, or to a political committee, to a political party, to an affiliated party committee, or to a referendum committee, whether or not made in an election year, and any contract, agreement, or other obligation to make a contribution.<sup>19</sup> A contribution includes in-kind transfers. An in-kind contribution is a non-monetary contribution, such as a good or service, made to a committee.

Candidates and Candidate Committees: An individual running for a seat in the Senate or the House of Representatives or for President of the United States becomes a candidate when he or she raises or spends more than \$5,000 in contributions or expenditures. Presidential, House and Senate candidates must designate a campaign committee. This "authorized committee" takes in contributions and makes expenditures on behalf of the campaign.

---

<sup>19</sup> N.C.G.S. § 163-278.6(13).





## COMMISSION ON THE FUTURE OF NORTH CAROLINA ELECTIONS

Each candidate who has received funds or made payments or given consent for anyone else to receive funds or transfer anything of value for the purpose of bringing about that candidate's nomination or election for office is required to organize a political committee.<sup>20</sup> Filing a notice of candidacy with a board of elections also triggers the candidate's obligation to organize a political committee.

**Political Party Committee:** Political party committees represent a political party at a local, state or national level. Examples of political party committees include the Democratic National Committee, the Green Party of the United States, the Libertarian National Committee and the Republican National Committee. Political party committees can take in contributions and make expenditures to influence federal elections.

**Political Action Committee (aka Nonconnected Committee):** A nonconnected committee is a political committee that is not a party committee, an authorized committee of a candidate, or a separate segregated fund established by a corporation or labor organization.<sup>21</sup>

**Independent Expenditure (Committee):** Every person, group of persons or organization, other than a political committee, that makes certain communications may be required to file certain disclosure forms with the FEC, as well as comply with disclaimer requirements for specific types of communications. Host committees, convention committees and inaugural committees must register and file specific disclosure forms with the FEC regarding their activities.

An independent expenditure is an expenditure made to support or oppose the nomination or election of one or more clearly identified candidates that is not made in concert or cooperation with or at the request or suggestion of, the candidate the expenditure supports or the opponent of the candidate the expenditure opposes, the agent of a candidate, the candidate campaign committee or the agent of the candidate campaign committee.<sup>22</sup>

**Corporations and Labor Unions:** Corporations and labor organizations cannot make contributions to federal candidates, but they can establish and administer a special kind of political committee, called a separate segregated fund (SSF). SSFs can solicit contributions from a limited group of people. They can make contributions to candidates and make expenditures that are coordinated with candidates.

**Individual Contributions:** Individual donors play a significant role in financing political campaigns in North Carolina. These contributions can range from small donors from grassroots supporters to substantial contributions from wealthy individuals.

---

<sup>20</sup> N.C.G.S. § 163-278.7(a).

<sup>21</sup> 100.5(a) and 106.6(a). FEC

<sup>22</sup> See N.C.G.S. § 163-278.6(53) and N.C.G.S. § 163-278.6(20).



## COMMISSION ON THE FUTURE OF NORTH CAROLINA ELECTIONS

North Carolina also limits individual contributions to candidate committees on a per-election cycle basis. There are strict prohibitions on contributions by foreign nationals, registered lobbyists, corporations, and unions. Individual contributors may give unlimited amounts to state political party committees, affiliated party committees, and political action committees (PACs).

Political Action Committees (PACs): PACs can represent diverse interests in North Carolina, including business, labor, environmental, and other advocacy groups. PACs raise money from individuals, corporations, and other organizations, and then use those funds to support candidates through direct contributions or independent expenditures.

In the last 15 years, N.C. Free has documented an explosion of PAC spending in North Carolina. The top 21 PACs in the 2010 Election reported expenditures in North Carolina of \$5.2 million, compared to the \$20.2 million spent by the group of the same criteria in 2020.

Though lobbyists, corporate, and union contributions prohibitions do exist, lobbyists may contribute to political party committees, and corporations and unions may form PACs with their employees making contributions. Federal law, not North Carolina law, governs contributions to 501(c)(4) organizations or Internal Revenue Service-designated “social welfare organizations.”

Political Parties: Fundraising efforts by political parties include soliciting donations from individuals, organizing fundraising events, and seeking contributions from affiliated PACs and interest groups.

Special Interest Groups: Various special interest groups, such as those representing healthcare providers, educators, energy companies, and gun rights advocates, contribute to political campaigns in North Carolina. These groups pool resources to support candidates who align with their policy priorities and work to advance their interests through financial contributions.

Campaign Expenditures: An expenditure includes any purchase, transfer of funds, payment, gift, or anything of value whatsoever, whether or not made in an election year, and any contract, agreement, or other obligation to make an expenditure, to support or oppose the nomination, election, or passage of one or more clearly identified candidates, or ballot measure.<sup>23</sup> An expenditure includes any payment or other transfer made by a candidate committee.

North Carolina’s Campaign Finance Laws require candidates to disclose all contributions and expenditures. North Carolina laws also set source and contribution limits. Violations may result in criminal or civil penalties. North Carolina’s Campaign Finance Laws may be found in N.C.G.S. Chapter 163, Article 22A and Chapter 163, Article 22M. Advisory opinions and regulations may be found in Title 8, Chapter 14 of the North Carolina Administrative Code, and Title 8, Chapter 21 of the North Carolina Administrative Code.

---

<sup>23</sup> N.C.G.S. § 163-278.6(51).



## COMMISSION ON THE FUTURE OF NORTH CAROLINA ELECTIONS

Various entities can generally spend unlimited amounts for the purposes of campaigning. Expenditures can be for campaign literature, media advertising, staff salaries, and the like. Additionally, expenditures can also include contributions from one entity to another. Of note, individual contribution limits apply to political party committees and PACs that contribute, or expend funds, to individual campaign committees.

For a comprehensive overview of campaign finance in North Carolina, visit the State Board of Elections' website to review its published *Campaign Finance Manual*, which is a resource made available for candidates and the public.<sup>24</sup> For an overview of how North Carolina's campaign finance laws compare to other states across the country, visit the National Conference of State Legislatures' website and view their campaign finance resource page.<sup>25</sup>

---

<sup>24</sup> *Campaign Finance Manual*, NCSBE (Feb. 2022), [https://s3.amazonaws.com/dl.ncsbe.gov/Campaign\\_Finance/Campaign-Finance-Manual.pdf](https://s3.amazonaws.com/dl.ncsbe.gov/Campaign_Finance/Campaign-Finance-Manual.pdf).

<sup>25</sup> *NCSL's Campaign Finance Resources*, NCSL (Feb. 10, 2023) <https://www.ncsl.org/elections-and-campaigns/campaign-finance>; Colin Campbell, *N.C. Democratic Party outpaces NCGOP in fundraising*, WUNC (April 3, 2024), <https://www.wunc.org/politics/2024-04-03/nc-democratic-party-outpaces-ncgop-in-fundraising>.

## 2. CAMPAIGN FINANCE



## COMMISSION ON THE FUTURE OF NORTH CAROLINA ELECTIONS

### 3. CANDIDATE FILING AND QUALIFICATIONS COMMITTEE FINAL REPORT

**Committee Members:** Mary (Kitty) Etheridge (Chair, Currituck)  
 Caroline Avery (Burke)  
 Preston Blakely (Henderson)  
 Zachary Deason (Mecklenburg)  
 Oluwafikemi Fawehinmi (Mecklenburg)  
 Mariah Harrelson (Union)  
 Andy Jackson (Wake)  
 Myron Pitts (Cumberland)  
 Mary Ellen Shiflett (Guilford)  
 Kathleen Wood (Yancey)  
 Brad Young (Wake)  
 Chris Cooper (Steering Committee Lead)

#### **Executive Summary:**

The Committee on Candidate Filing and Qualifications learned about a range of issues facing candidates, including redistricting, unaffiliated voters, and the difficulties faced by unaffiliated candidates seeking access to the ballot. Our committee also discussed candidate filing and qualification, elections by district or at-large, filing fees, timing of candidacy, information resources for candidates, and the public perception of elections. The committee met six times to discuss these topics and conducted a survey to collect candidate feedback.

This committee found that candidates are fairly comfortable with the candidate filing process, with most respondents reporting that they understood campaign-related processes, including forming a candidate committee and campaign finance requirements.

This committee also learned about some of the challenges facing unaffiliated candidates seeking ballot access, including a requirement that they collect signatures from 4% of registered voters. The committee found an editorial about an unaffiliated Morganton candidate particularly helpful in understanding this issue.

Finally, the committee researched redistricting and set forward some suggestions about how to apply traditional redistricting criteria to improve the process.



## COMMISSION ON THE FUTURE OF NORTH CAROLINA ELECTIONS

### Public Meetings and Input:

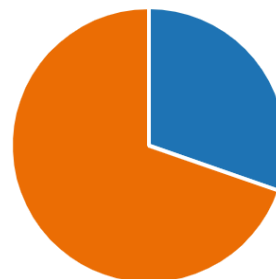
Our committee conducted a survey to learn about candidates’ thoughts on the filing process. The survey received 189 responses.<sup>26</sup>

The first question asked where candidates filed their Notice of Candidacy. 57 reported that they filed at the State Board of Elections, while 131 filed at their county board of elections.

Chart 3.1

### 1. Where did you file your Notice of Candidacy

●	State Board of Elections	57
●	County Board of Elections	131



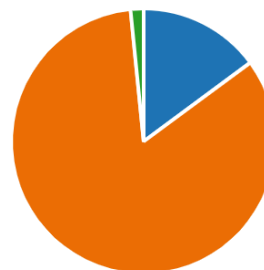
76 of the respondents reported that it was their first time filing for office, while 112 had filed for office before.

Most respondents (157) believed the amount they were required to pay for a filing fee was “just right,” while 28 believed it was too high and three believed it was too low.

Chart 3.2

### 3. How do you feel about the amount you were required to pay for a filing fee?

●	Too High	28
●	Just Right/Neutral	157
●	Too Low	3




---

<sup>26</sup> Full results can be found at <https://forms.office.com/Pages/AnalysisPage.aspx?AnalyzerToken=ZVVeM5XilhGK8wZwbuuQIYJ5ZpQUVHpk&id=h-OT-nak5ESdrydg29gNLpLhS2M2CWdOuFhkLnZnq4tUNEpTTFM3VUpWWVJNVFE3WVRJREg0SFBIUi4u>

## 3. CANDIDATE FILING AND QUALIFICATIONS



## COMMISSION ON THE FUTURE OF NORTH CAROLINA ELECTIONS

The next set of questions asked how informed candidates felt about various aspects of the filing process. They were asked to rate their understanding on a scale of 1 to 5, where 1 was “least informed” and 5 was “most informed.”

Understanding of what to expect during the candidate filing process was relatively strong, with an average score of 4.04. This was higher than understanding of how to create a candidate committee, which had an average score of 3.78, or campaign finance requirements, which had an average score of 3.79.

### **Committee Findings:**

#### County Directors

Our committee discovered that elections are certainly not uniform throughout the country or North Carolina. Every North Carolina county has different issues and resources. North Carolina has also seen high turnover in the county Director of Elections roles, with 61 changes in the last five years across North Carolina’s 100 counties. A knowledgeable and seasoned director is one of the best resources a county can have and will influence the perception of the process. The more information available to candidates and the public, the better the perception of fair and equitable elections.

#### Unaffiliated Candidates and Voters

North Carolina is experiencing a rapid increase in the number of unaffiliated voters. Our committee discussed the difficulties of ballot access. Currently in North Carolina, unaffiliated candidates need to obtain signatures from 4% of registered voters to be included on the General Election ballot. To give an example, take a look at Burke County, NC. The Paper featured the following editorial, reprinted in part below, in its January 19, 2024 edition.<sup>27</sup>

To say that the deck is stacked against unaffiliated candidates in North Carolina is to engage in profound understatement. Consider: Joe Schmoe is an unemployed 30-something who has no higher education, has never held a job, and lives in his mother’s basement, spending the day playing video games, and eating cheese puffs. Yet, if Mr. Schmoe had \$20 in his pocket and was registered as a member of the Republican, Democratic, Libertarian, Green, or No Labels political parties, he could have filed as a candidate for the Burke County Board of Education.

---

<sup>27</sup> *Hemstreet deserves spot on Burke election ballot*, PAPER (Jan. 19, 2024), [https://www.thepaper.media/news/elections/hemstreet-deserves-spot-on-burke-election-ballot/article\\_5e4c44c6-12e9-5830-b33a-da2fb7257e8e.html](https://www.thepaper.media/news/elections/hemstreet-deserves-spot-on-burke-election-ballot/article_5e4c44c6-12e9-5830-b33a-da2fb7257e8e.html).

### 3. CANDIDATE FILING AND QUALIFICATIONS



## COMMISSION ON THE FUTURE OF NORTH CAROLINA ELECTIONS

Morganton’s Dr. Don Hemstreet is about as far removed from Joe Schmoe as possible. Hemstreet founded Morganton Animal Clinic more than five decades ago and has been a literal pillar of this community for more than 50 years. Equally well known for his kind and compassionate nature and his lively sense of humor, Hemstreet is a clear-eyed realist who has always sought pragmatic, workable solutions to our county’s problems. A man of great faith, Hemstreet has put that faith into action through service to his church, through leadership roles at Burke United Christian Ministries, and through outreach ministries at local prisons. Recognizing Hemstreet’s contributions to the community, the Morganton Rotary Club chose to recognize him in 2019 as the Distinguished Person of the Year. More important to our example is the fact that Hemstreet served a term on the school board in the 1980s. He chose to run for the board again in 2015, was elected without opposition, and was reelected, again without opposition, in 2019. He racked up roughly 99 percent of the votes in both of those elections against scattered write-in choices. Yet when Dr. Hemstreet prepared to file to run—as an unaffiliated candidate—for a third term on the board, he was told that he would have to gather verified signatures from 2,341 Burke voters to have his name placed on the ballot.

With the numbers of unaffiliated voters outnumbering those of the two major parties, consideration needs to be given to these voters concerning candidacy and representation in the election process.

### Candidate Districts

The following were suggestions for redistricting reform by committee member, Andy Jackson, in his paper *Limiting Gerrymandering in North Carolina: Using Traditional Criteria, Banning Political Data, and Focusing on Local Communities*.<sup>28</sup>

It has been at least three decades since North Carolina produced a set of congressional and state legislative redistricting maps that have survived for an entire decade. Courts have struck down many of those maps for racial and, more recently, political gerrymandering. Even maps that survive litigation are widely seen as unduly benefiting the majority party in the North Carolina General Assembly.

---

<sup>28</sup> Andy Jackson & Jim Stirling, *Limiting Gerrymandering in North Carolina: Using Traditional Criteria, Banning Political Data, and Focusing on Local Communities*, JOHN LOCK FOUNDATION (May 2023), [https://www.johnlocke.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/05/Limiting\\_Gerrymandering\\_2023-reduced.pdf](https://www.johnlocke.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/05/Limiting_Gerrymandering_2023-reduced.pdf).

### 3. CANDIDATE FILING AND QUALIFICATIONS



## COMMISSION ON THE FUTURE OF NORTH CAROLINA ELECTIONS

Traditional redistricting criteria can be more strictly applied to limit the ability of those drawing legislative districts to benefit one political party. Those criteria include the following:

- Maintain current criteria from the North Carolina State Constitution. Those include equal population (with a small variance permitted for state legislative districts), contiguity, and minimizing county traversals.
- Do not use partisan data, such as voter registration and election results. Using that data allows map drawers to draw districts to benefit one party.
- Do not use racial data. Using racial data to guide district map-making risks making race the predominant factor in drawing district lines, a likely violation of the Equal Protection Clause of the 14th Amendment (see *Cooper v. Harris*, 581 U.S. 285 (2017)). Racial data is not necessary for compliance with the Voting Rights Act if those drawing maps follow traditional redistricting criteria such as compactness and keeping political communities whole.
- Do not consider incumbents' addresses to avoid "double-bunking" when drawing districts.
- Keep political communities of interest whole.
- Avoiding splitting counties when drawing state legislative districts. Continue to follow the *Stephenson* process (from *Stephenson v. Bartlett*, 355 N.C. 354 (2002)) for state legislative districts to minimize county transversals.
- Avoid splitting counties when drawing congressional districts. Have no more county splits than one less than the number of congressional districts in a congressional district map; split fewer counties if possible. Allow a population variation of one-tenth of one percent from the ideal population for congressional districts to help split fewer counties. If a county has a larger population than the ideal population of a district, place an entire district within that county.
- Avoid splitting municipalities within county boundaries. When possible, put all precincts that are wholly contained within a municipality in the same district.
- Minimize precinct (voting tabulation district) splits.
- Make districts reasonably compact.
- Draw districts in the open on a computer observable to members of the public.

These criteria can be implemented regardless of who draws districts. Jackson's research did not offer guidance on who (legislators, courts, independent commission, etc.) should draw the electoral districts.

While we recognize that further study and reform is needed, our bipartisan committee did not reach any conclusions regarding unaffiliated voters, redistricting, filing fees, timing of candidacy, fact sheets, or whether candidates should be elected by district or at-large.

### 3. CANDIDATE FILING AND QUALIFICATIONS





## COMMISSION ON THE FUTURE OF NORTH CAROLINA ELECTIONS

### 4. CHALLENGES AND LAWSUITS—POST-ELECTION PROCESS COMMITTEE FINAL REPORT

**Committee Members:** Bob Edmunds (Co-Chair, Guilford)  
 Jill Hopman (Co-Chair, New Hanover)  
 Blake Brewer (Nash)  
 Julius Brittan (Durham)  
 Damon Circosta (Wake)  
 Zachary Deason (Mecklenburg)  
 Mariah Harrelson (Union)  
 Anna Katherine Neal (Mecklenburg)  
 Brandon Robinson (Durham)  
 Anna Mills Wagoner (Rowan)  
 Thomas Wilson (Craven)  
 Robert Orr (Steering Committee Lead)

#### **Executive Summary:**

Over the course of several months, the Committee on Campaign Challenges has explored this area of election law with a variety of speakers who have engaged in election litigation and challenges. Primarily, the speakers have been attorneys who have represented both Republicans and Democrats in these challenges. In addition, our committee members, most of whom are attorneys, have had an opportunity to explore several issues in this specific area.

The state's election laws cover numerous situations that might precipitate an election challenge to a local or State Board of Elections on behalf of a candidate or political party or group. These potential challenges can range from issues pertaining to a candidate's qualifications to run for a specific office, to challenges pertaining to actual votes cast or eligibility to vote, to constitutional challenges of legislation or regulations governing the election process. In some cases, these issues are brought well in advance of an actual election cycle and courts have a reasonable amount of time to adjudicate the issue or issues. In other circumstances, when the election cycle is well under way or has in fact occurred, the timeframe in which to bring these challenges is extraordinarily compressed and the parties and the decision-making authority, whether a local board of elections or the State Board of Elections or a Court, is faced with the difficult task of making the correct decision within the timeframe set by the General Statutes. In addition, the decision needs to be made so as not to unduly delay the certification of the elections. For information on an outstanding election lawsuit that has not been decided as of Feb. 4, 2025, see the section on 2024 election challenges below.

The Committee has chosen three issues to focus on in our initial report that depart somewhat from the general context of traditional challenges referenced above. These issues pertain to: (1)



## COMMISSION ON THE FUTURE OF NORTH CAROLINA ELECTIONS

the lack of attorneys around the state interested and qualified to advise or engage in election law issues; (2) a lack of a statutory or regulatory process for challenging presidential candidates who are arguably disqualified under the U.S. Constitution; and (3) the potential for the General Assembly to decide a “contested election” for Council of State offices pursuant to Article VI of the N.C. Constitution.

### Committee Findings:

#### **I. There is a need for more attorneys in North Carolina to be engaged in election law matters.**

Over the course of 2023, discussions were held by co-chairs Roberts and Orr with various organizations around the state about our Election Commission efforts for 2024, including a meeting with leadership of the North Carolina Bar Association. What became patently clear was that the discrete area of election law did not receive any particular emphasis within the Bar Association’s programs. There are a multitude of practice areas and groups within the Association, but none devoted to election law. To the extent that the subject matter fell within any practice area, it was within the Government and Public Sector Sections, which does not focus on election law.

In addition to the Bar Association, meetings were held with the leadership of the N.C. League of Municipalities, the N.C. Association of County Commissioners, and the N.C. Board of Elections staff. Most local boards of election do not have an election law attorney assigned to the board to assist in addressing the range of legal questions and issues that arise in any given election cycle. Most local boards of election utilize the county attorney who may or may not have any election law expertise or ask the legal staff at the State Board of Elections. The State Board has a general counsel and an assistant counsel who oversee the Board’s duties as well as several other attorneys with discrete responsibilities such as campaign finance.

To the extent other attorneys around the state are engaged in and knowledgeable about election law, those attorneys with sufficient expertise are few and far between and are focused on representing one particular political party or that party’s candidates. Thus, these attorneys, whether Democrats or Republicans, assume an advocates’ role for one side or another. Both major parties are attempting to recruit lawyers to assist in election issues but again, these attorneys will be assuming a partisan perspective.

Among the attorneys that the Committee heard from was Michael McKnight, a Republican from Raleigh who has been engaged in various election law cases over his years in practice. Mr. McKnight told the committee that there was an increasing reluctance for attorneys, particularly those practicing with larger diversified firms, to participate in election law issues, in light of the partisan divisions within the state and country. Mr. McKnight noted that while the individual

## 4. CHALLENGES AND LAWSUITS—POST-ELECTION PROCESS



## COMMISSION ON THE FUTURE OF NORTH CAROLINA ELECTIONS

political parties were recruiting attorneys for the election, it was a challenge to find individuals willing to take on uncompensated matters, particularly if it embroiled them in hotly contested partisan fights in court.

There is room for more overall efforts to improve the recruitment and training for election law attorneys. While the State Board of Elections makes a concerted effort to train attorneys potentially representing the local boards and the Attorney General's office has two attorneys assigned to assist the State Board, there is still an overall shortage and need for greater training. Options to improve this situation could be an expanded effort by the State Board in conjunction with local boards to recruit attorneys and provide more extensive training. In addition, an effort can be made to work with the N.C. Bar Association leadership to incorporate some type of focus on election law in their programming and in their sections. A discrete section devoted to election law could be considered. Another possibility is to work with state law schools on educational programs to interest law students in election law.

### **II. There is a considerable lack of a statutory or regulatory process for challenging presidential candidates who are arguably disqualified under the US Constitution.**

In the recent US Supreme Court decision in *Trump v. Anderson*, the Court struck down a Colorado ruling based upon a challenge to the Trump candidacy for President that was grounded in the 14th Amendment's disqualification clause. In essence, the Court determined that there was no federal process in place for a state to enforce the disqualification clause and, therefore, the Colorado action must fail. Ultimately, the Court ruled that there could be no state challenge to a candidate for federal office until the Congress enacted a process for doing so.

While the Trump case was heavily laden with the political consequences surrounding it, the Court's decision appears not to have addressed an important function of state election systems dealing with challenges to candidates, specifically federal candidates, including candidates for President. While all candidates for public office in North Carolina have a filing requirement under state law, candidates for President do not. While paperwork by individual campaigns needs to be filed in NC, the candidates seeking a party's nomination do not themselves file for office but are authorized by the state party to be on the party's primary ballot in order to run in the presidential preference primary.

A candidate for President in the general election gains access to the North Carolina ballot by virtue of a nominating convention that submits the name of the nominee (and vice-presidential choice) to the State Board of Elections. Thus, the normal filing process under North Carolina state law, really does not apply to candidates for the Presidency who have been nominated by their respective parties. At this point, North Carolina has a multitude of political parties that are recognized by the State and eligible to submit names to be on the general election ballot for President and Vice-President.

## 4. CHALLENGES AND LAWSUITS—POST-ELECTION PROCESS



## COMMISSION ON THE FUTURE OF NORTH CAROLINA ELECTIONS

In GS 163, Art. 8 “Challenges,” North Carolina law sets out a process for a voter to challenge a candidacy that does not meet the constitutional or statutory qualifications required. However, that statute arguably applies only to candidates going through the “normal” process of filing a “Notice of Candidacy” with the state. Presidential candidates would not appear to fall within that process, and the State Board of Elections has, at least, questioned whether a challenge to a presidential candidate’s constitutional qualification could be raised and if so, how. If not, and particularly considering the decision in *Trump v. Anderson*, how would a voter in North Carolina institute such a challenge? That is the question this issue presents.

Again, while the *Trump v. Anderson* case dealt with a challenge under Section 3 of the 14th Amendment, dealing with “insurrectionists,” there are other qualifications (and thus potential disqualifications) under the U.S. Constitution. Article II, Sec. 1 of the US Constitution requires that a candidate for president be “a natural born citizen;” at least “35 years of age;” and “a resident of the United States for 14 years.” In addition, the 12th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution says that no person ineligible for president can be vice president.

So, to present a hypothetical: if the No Labels Party held a convention in August and nominated a 30-year-old Canadian citizen who had just moved to North Carolina in 2022, how could one challenge their candidacy under the North Carolina challenge statute to determine that he is disqualified to be on the ballot? Clearly, this candidate would not be qualified under the U.S. Constitution but, absent federal legislation providing a method of challenge, could they be kept off the ballot? A different hypothetical would be if a former President who had served the maximum two terms of office and thus was barred from serving as President again became the VP nominee of a party, how could that candidate be challenged? The 12th Amendment would clearly disqualify them, but what procedure is available to address the disqualification if no federal legislation exists?

While the scenarios posed above may never occur, the political parties eligible to run candidates in North Carolina are growing and could grow even more. Finding a mechanism, either through federal legislation or through state law, to keep such disqualified candidates from being on the ballot, should be a priority.

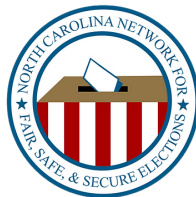
### **III. There are several potential issues that could arise out of the Article VI contested elections process.**

The 2020 election saw an unprecedented number of challenges to the validity of individual ballots, tabulated vote totals from certain precincts and counties, and even to the veracity of the election outcomes themselves.<sup>29</sup> These challenges are not cabined to certain kinds of races or to certain states but run up and down the ballot and all across the country. With these challenges

---

<sup>29</sup> See e.g., Ann Gerhart, *Election results under attack: Here are the facts*, WASHINGTON POST (Mar. 11, 2024), <https://www.washingtonpost.com/elections/interactive/2020/election-integrity/>.

## 4. CHALLENGES AND LAWSUITS—POST-ELECTION PROCESS



## COMMISSION ON THE FUTURE OF NORTH CAROLINA ELECTIONS

certain to continue—and likely to increase—in 2024,<sup>30</sup> increased public attention to the mechanisms by which these challenges operate is important to maintaining the integrity of the American electoral system.

This portion of the report proceeds in three parts. Part I details the constitutional and statutory text specifically related to challenges to the election of officers of the North Carolina Council of State that involve the General Assembly’s intervention. Part II describes briefly the history of how those provisions of law have operated in practice. Part III points out shortcomings with the current statutory structure.

### i. Constitutional and Statutory Text

The North Carolina State Constitution provides that a “contested election for any office established by Article III of this Constitution shall be determined by joint ballot of both houses of the General Assembly in the manner prescribed by law.”<sup>31</sup> Those offices include the Governor and the Lieutenant Governor,<sup>32</sup> and the other members of the Council of State.<sup>33</sup>

The manner prescribed by law for such challenges is codified in a statute first adopted in 2005 and last modified in 2018.<sup>34</sup> In general, it provides for the filing of a notice to contest an election,<sup>35</sup> a preliminary investigative and recommendation procedure,<sup>36</sup> and a requirement that the General Assembly need only determine the contest by a simple majority of the General Assembly sitting in joint session.<sup>37</sup> The statute also directs that the General Assembly is meant to limit its determination to the “eligibility or qualifications”<sup>38</sup> of the candidate, or to “which candidate received the highest number of votes.”<sup>39</sup>

Importantly, the statute also provides that upon the filing of an election contest with the General Assembly, all other contest proceedings, whether administrative or judicial, shall automatically

<sup>30</sup> See e.g., Matt Vasilogambros, *Republicans scrutinize voting rolls and ramp up for mass challenges ahead of election*, STATELINE (Apr. 9, 2024), <https://stateline.org/2024/04/09/republicans-scrutinize-voting-rolls-and-ramp-up-for-mass-challenges-ahead-of-election/>.

<sup>31</sup> N.C. CONST. art. VI, § 5.

<sup>32</sup> N.C. CONST. art. III, § 2.

<sup>33</sup> N.C. CONST. art. III, § 7(1).

<sup>34</sup> N.C. GEN. STAT. § 163-182.13A. However, this provision grows from an earlier one, now codified as N.C. GEN. STAT. § 147-4, dating in some form to 1897, and permitting the General Assembly to select a winning candidate only in instances of a tie in the popular vote.

<sup>35</sup> N.C. GEN. STAT. § 163-182.13A(b).

<sup>36</sup> N.C. GEN. STAT. § 163-182.13A(d).

<sup>37</sup> N.C. GEN. STAT. § 163-182.13A(e).

<sup>38</sup> N.C. GEN. STAT. § 163-182.13A(f)(1).

<sup>39</sup> N.C. GEN. STAT. § 163-182.13A(f)(2).

## 4. CHALLENGES AND LAWSUITS—POST-ELECTION PROCESS



## COMMISSION ON THE FUTURE OF NORTH CAROLINA ELECTIONS

stop until the General Assembly has resolved the contest.<sup>40</sup> Likewise, the determination of any election contest by the General Assembly is not reviewable by state courts.<sup>41</sup>

The procedural mechanisms of election contests under this statute are governed by those previously laid down for challenges to the election of members of the General Assembly.<sup>42</sup> Those provisions include no requirement that the person filing the contest be in any way related to the contest, either as an opposing candidate or a constituent.<sup>43</sup> Contests must be filed with the General Assembly between the canvass for that election, and generally within 10 days of the issuance of a certificate of election for the contested office.<sup>44</sup> Parties to a contest are generally permitted to file written arguments and conduct discovery.<sup>45</sup> While these procedures set no threshold basis on which a contest may be based or filed, they do permit a prevailing party against whom a challenge is initiated to recover costs of defending against the challenge if the challenge is found to be “in bad faith and without substantial justification.”<sup>46</sup>

### ii. Historical Application and Interpretation

#### The Fletcher-Atkinson Dispute

The General Assembly has exercised its power under Article VI, § 5 only once, in deciding the 2004 election for Superintendent of Public Instruction between Democrat June Atkinson and Republican Bill Fletcher. Fletcher contested the election, which at final count he lost by around 8,000 votes, on the basis of voting irregularities in Carteret County. Fletcher filed a protest with the State Board of Elections, which ruled in Atkinson’s favor and issued her a certificate of election. Fletcher subsequently sought review of the State Board’s decision in Wake County Superior Court, which likewise ruled for Atkinson. Fletcher appealed directly to the North Carolina Supreme Court.<sup>47</sup>

In that decision, the Supreme Court of North Carolina in *James v. Mitchell* noted in relevant part that the term “contested election” remained undefined in either the constitution or in statute.<sup>48</sup>

<sup>40</sup> N.C. GEN. STAT. § 163-182.13A(j).

<sup>41</sup> N.C. GEN. STAT. § 163-182.13A(k).

<sup>42</sup> N.C. GEN. STAT. § 163-182.13A(a) (directing that art. 3 of N.C GEN. STAT. 120 shall govern the procedure of election challenges for Council of State officers).

<sup>43</sup> N.C. GEN. STAT. § 120-10.3(a).

<sup>44</sup> N.C. GEN. STAT. § 120-10.3(b).

<sup>45</sup> See N.C. GEN. STAT. § 120-10.4 and 10.5 (answers and filings), N.C. GEN. STAT. § 120-10.6 (discovery), and N.C. GEN. STAT. § 120-10.7 (other petitions in the proceedings).

<sup>46</sup> N.C. GEN. STAT. § 120-10.13.

<sup>47</sup> See *In re Election Protest of Fletcher*, 175 N.C. App. 755, 756-58 (2006) for the facts and procedural history of the Fletcher-Atkinson dispute. For a fuller explanation of the Atkinson-Fletcher dispute, see also Robert P. Joyce, *The Last Contested Election in America*, 72 POPULAR GOVERNMENT 43 (Jan. 2007), [https://www.sog.unc.edu/sites/default/files/articles/article5\\_8.pdf](https://www.sog.unc.edu/sites/default/files/articles/article5_8.pdf).

<sup>48</sup> *James v. Mitchell*, 359 N.C. 260, 263-64 (2005).

## 4. CHALLENGES AND LAWSUITS—POST-ELECTION PROCESS



## COMMISSION ON THE FUTURE OF NORTH CAROLINA ELECTIONS

The Court ruled for Fletcher on the substance of his claims of ballot irregularities and remanded the case for further proceedings.<sup>49</sup>

After the Court had issued its decision in *James*, the General Assembly passed the first iteration of its Council of State challenge resolution statute. Atkinson subsequently filed a contest with the General Assembly, had Fletcher’s action in state court abated, and was declared the winner of the Superintendent election by a vote of the General Assembly in joint session. Fletcher appealed the order abating his protest.<sup>50</sup>

On remand, the Court of Appeals in *In re Election Protest of Fletcher* held that the General Assembly’s vote on Atkinson’s petition to that body and the subsequent issuance of the certificate of election to Atkinson under the new challenge statute finalized the case and made Fletcher’s complaint moot.<sup>51</sup>

### Other Mentions

Separate from disputes raised under its terms, Article VI, § 5 has been referenced in decisions in a number of other circumstances. In *Cooper v. Berger*, a separation of powers challenge over the structure of the Board of Elections, it is cited to indicate that the “General Assembly’s policymaking authority includes passing laws related to and regulating elections.”<sup>52</sup> *Harper v. Hall* cites it as a limitation on the apparently broad scope of the state constitution’s Free Elections Clause.<sup>53</sup>

### **iii. Contemporary Problems**

A number of major concerns arise from the vague and unbounded nature of Article VI, § 5’s expansive grant of authority to the General Assembly to resolve these election challenges, especially in an atmosphere of increasingly polarized and active partisans eager to intervene in election outcomes.

### Standing

As the North Carolina Supreme Court points out in *James v. Mitchell*, the phrase “contested election” is not defined by either the constitution or the statute providing for the General Assembly’s contest determination procedures. There thus appears to be no threshold above which a dispute or doubt must rise before a contest may be filed with the General Assembly and committing to it the sole discretion to elect the victor in that race, even in races where there is a clear winner by popular balloting.

---

<sup>49</sup> *Id.* at 271

<sup>50</sup> *Fletcher*, 175 N.C. App. at 758.

<sup>51</sup> *Id.* at 759.

<sup>52</sup> *Cooper v. Berger*, 370 N.C. 392, 437 n. 8 (2018).

<sup>53</sup> *Harper v. Hall*, 384 N.C. 292, 352 (2023).



## COMMISSION ON THE FUTURE OF NORTH CAROLINA ELECTIONS

Likewise, the statute does not require that challenges be filed by the candidate. By cross reference the law provides that “a contest may be initiated only by a contestant,”<sup>54</sup> but “contestant” is not defined and presumably includes anyone who might doubt or dispute the outcome of an election.

In short, the statute theoretically allows any die-hard partisan nursing a conspiracy theory to file a notice of contest with the General Assembly, and thus commit to the legislature the sole power, unreviewable by the courts of this state, to select statewide officers, including the Governor.<sup>55</sup>

### Other Remedies

Related to the issue of standing, the contest statute enacted under the General Assembly’s Article VI, § 5 power does not include any requirement for exhaustion of administrative or judicial remedies prior to seeking relief from the General Assembly. Parties are thus permitted to seek relief from the General Assembly as a first resort, despite the existence of a rather extensive challenge procedure available to them through the State Board of Elections.<sup>56</sup>

### Intersection with Federal Constitutional Provisions

The text of Article VI, § 5 limits it to the election of members of the Council of State. It, nor any statute enacted pursuant to its authority, cannot be exercised to permit the General Assembly to elect members of Congress or US Senators. And while the legal status of electors for President and Vice President is somewhat muddled, they are generally understood to act under authority of the federal constitution,<sup>57</sup> and so are not state officers and thus beyond the reach of the General Assembly’s electoral power.

That power may, however, be exercised to prevent candidates for election to a Council of State office on the basis of Section 3 of the 14th Amendment to the federal constitution, which prohibits any person who, “having previously taken an oath...as a member of any State legislature, or as an executive or judicial officer of any State, to support the Constitution of the United States, shall have engaged in insurrection or rebellion against the same.”<sup>58</sup> The U.S. Supreme Court was reticent to give meaning to Section 3 in the federal context absent enabling legislation by the U.S. Congress. Likewise, the State Board of Elections has been reluctant to clarify this issue in the context of presidential candidates. Ultimately, the General Assembly’s role in this area is paramount to provide clarity to challenges to presidential candidates.

<sup>54</sup> N.C. GEN. STAT. § 120-10.3(a).

<sup>55</sup> Even though the federal constitution provides that “the United States shall guarantee to every State in this Union a Republican Form of Government,” U.S. CONST. art. IV § 4, seeming violated by such an outcome, the US Supreme Court has held that the Guarantee Clause does not alone give rise to a justiciable claim. *Rucho v. Common Cause*, 139 S. Ct. 2484, 2506 (2019).

<sup>56</sup> See generally N.C. GEN. STAT. § 163-84 *et. seq.*

<sup>57</sup> See *Burroughs & Cannon v. United States*, 290 U.S. 534, 535 (1934).

<sup>58</sup> U.S. CONST. amend. XIV, § 3.

## 4. CHALLENGES AND LAWSUITS—POST-ELECTION PROCESS





## COMMISSION ON THE FUTURE OF NORTH CAROLINA ELECTIONS

There is an ongoing legal challenge in *Griffin v. NCSBE*. See Appendix F for a summary of developments in the case, current as of February 4, 2025. This is an ongoing case and subject to continuing updates.



## COMMISSION ON THE FUTURE OF NORTH CAROLINA ELECTIONS

### 5. CIVIC EDUCATION COMMITTEE FINAL REPORT

**Committee Members:** Jim Morrill (Co-Chair, Mecklenburg)  
 Lucy Russell Pittman (Co-Chair, Wilson)  
 Damon Circosta (Co-Chair, Wake)  
 Caroline Avery (Burke)  
 Tom Campbell (Wake)  
 Leslie Garvin (Guilford)  
 Maria Garza (Wake)  
 Andy Jackson (Wake)  
 Catherine Komp (Buncombe)  
 Brandon Rivers (Mecklenburg)  
 Martha Kropf (Steering Committee Lead)

#### **Executive Summary:**

The Civic Education Committee studied current assets in North Carolina that promote civic education and recommendations for future public awareness about elections. The Committee created asset maps by collecting information about groups engaging in civic education work across North Carolina. The Committee also conducted a survey to gather information about how county boards of elections share information with their communities and what resources would best support their work. From this survey, the Committee compiled best practices, such as partnering with community organizations and creating comprehensive websites, that other county boards of elections can enact to improve their civic education and outreach. The Committee recommends further research into how to help connect county boards of elections with community partners and how much funding should be spent on voter education.

#### **Committee Findings:**

Although a significant portion of civic education work is conducted in a partisan manner, we concentrated on non-partisan organizations. We found two main sources of civic education: non-partisan organizations and the boards of elections.



## COMMISSION ON THE FUTURE OF NORTH CAROLINA ELECTIONS

The Committee compiled an asset mapping document for North Carolina Civic Education groups, and discovered over 15 organizations doing civic education work in North Carolina.<sup>59</sup> Member campuses of the N.C. Campus Engagement have over 40 contacts.<sup>60</sup>

### State Board of Elections

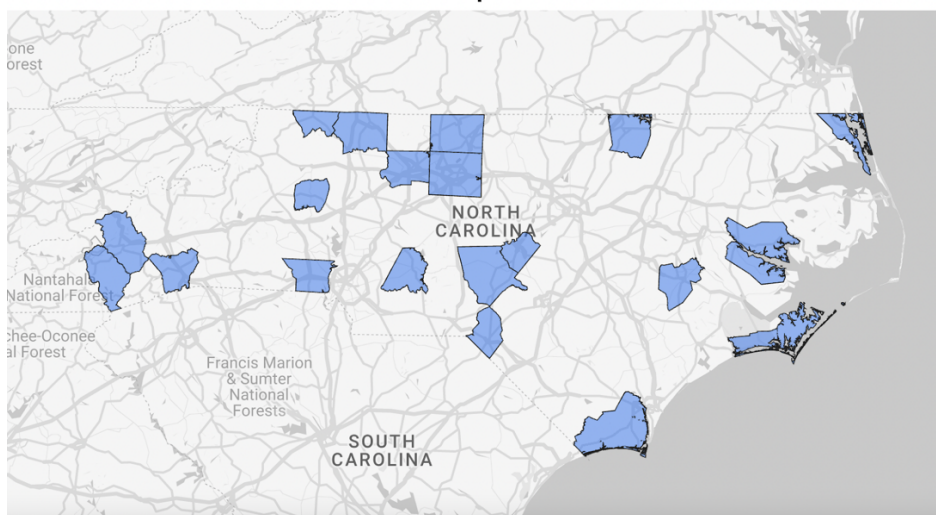
**Patrick Gannon - Public Information Director.** NCSBE sent out two mailers in 2024 as planned, one before the primary and one before the general election in early October, as well as a judicial voter guide. The NCSBE also hired an outreach specialist, who will be conducting in-person and virtual seminars across the state and by request.

### Survey Highlights

The Committee distributed a digital survey to the local directors of county boards of elections.<sup>61</sup> The survey had an almost 25% response rate; the respondents stretch to every corner of North Carolina, from Jackson County in the west to Currituck County in the east.

Chart 5.1

Who responded?



Over half the county offices do not have a staff person whose job description includes voter education.

<sup>59</sup> Research Asset Mapping for Civic Education: <https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1Pfcqp5p7sjv-ISCW8jZ9KmpvQLVsjeulAHkKdBzGUZM/edit?usp=sharing>.

<sup>60</sup> Nonpartisan Nonprofit Sector North Carolina Civic Education Asset Mapping <https://docs.google.com/document/d/1sjcta19xcovDeeTu6XeUG8fUkATt7VpoFXnmWBEuFQk/edit?usp=sharing>

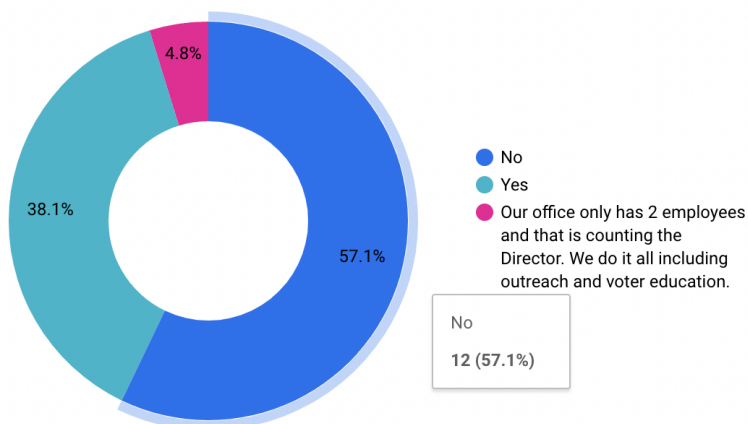
<sup>61</sup> A summary of survey responses can be found at: [https://lookerstudio.google.com/u/0/reporting/e8065619-ccfe-42ec-9437-bfd301e06a3d/page/p\\_o15phx2khd](https://lookerstudio.google.com/u/0/reporting/e8065619-ccfe-42ec-9437-bfd301e06a3d/page/p_o15phx2khd).



**COMMISSION ON THE FUTURE OF NORTH CAROLINA ELECTIONS**

Chart 5.2

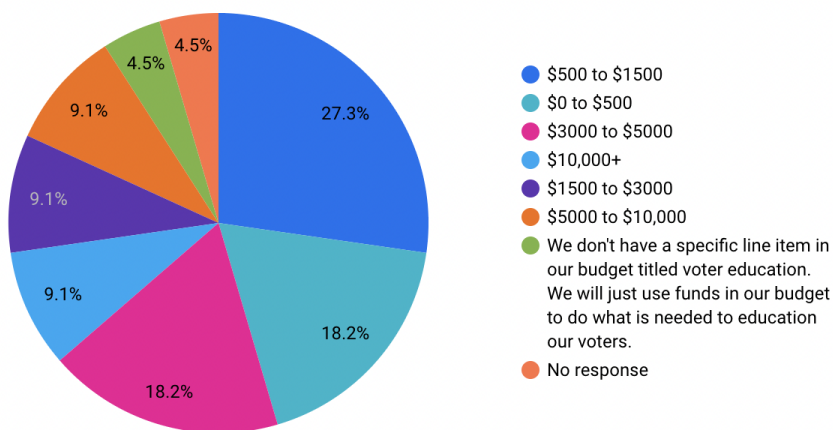
**Do you have a staff person whose job description includes education...**



Additionally, the budgets varied greatly for education, outreach, or marketing. Four counties only have \$0-500 and six counties have between \$500 and \$1,500. One county noted: “We don't have a specific line item in our budget titled voter education. We will just use funds in our budget to do what is needed to [educate] our voters.”

Chart 5.3

**What is your current budget for education/outreach/marketing?**



When asked “What else do you need to adequately reach the public with information on voting and elections,” the following are a selection of responses:

- Attendance [to public information meetings]. Public interest.
- Uniform materials specific to North Carolina all counties could utilize.

**5. CIVIC EDUCATION**



## COMMISSION ON THE FUTURE OF NORTH CAROLINA ELECTIONS

- Newspaper articles with local papers, samples of printed outreach materials would be beneficial. Time and money always helps.
- It's hard to reach the public. The May 14 second primary was a great example. So many people said they had no idea there was an election taking place even though we had multiple articles in the paper, posts of social media, signs at the BOE office etc. Samples of printed outreach materials would be beneficial.
- Wider Reach (like Spectrum News announcements).
- As a new director, I'm interested in knowing what has worked/hasn't worked for other counties and SBE. Aggregate data and sharing of best practices would be very helpful!
- Truly local media. We are covered by Hampton Roads (Virginia market) and they do not provide adequate coverage for our area.

Several counties shared best practices for educating voters:

- Forsyth County's Election Academy.<sup>62</sup>
- Direct contact with people. No one reads newspapers any longer.
- A well-maintained, comprehensive, and easily understandable county specific website has been the best practice. We have received many compliments on the amount of information we have available and its ease of use.
- Do training for local outreach organizations who can then spread information of BOE needs.
- We utilize precinct officials as representatives in the community and try to get the information out using other county partners, such as libraries and tax administration.
- Specialized websites: readytovote.com, wakevotesearly.com, beaufortncboe.org

### Takeaways:

- There are a number of nonpartisan civic education groups doing important work throughout the state, but they are not always connected with each other or local boards of election.
- Small counties with small budgets rely on community voter education groups.
- Public information is dependent on resources.

### Recommendations:

- Build stronger and broader relationships for the NCSBE to provide valid information to all stakeholders, including partisan and nonpartisan affiliates.

---

<sup>62</sup> *Election Academy*, Forsyth County Board of Elections,  
<https://www.co.forsyth.nc.us/assets/documents/electionacademy2023.pdf>



## COMMISSION ON THE FUTURE OF NORTH CAROLINA ELECTIONS

- Conduct further research to see if there is a recommended amount per voter that should be spent on education/outreach.<sup>63</sup> (see also report supplement on cost per voter in this report's appendix)

---

<sup>63</sup> See Dr. Martha Kropf's recent book, *A Republic If You Can Afford It: How Much Does It Cost to Administer Elections?* By Zachary Mohr, Martha E. Kropf, Mary Jo McGowan, and JoEllen V. Pope.



## COMMISSION ON THE FUTURE OF NORTH CAROLINA ELECTIONS

### 6. COUNTING VOTES COMMITTEE FINAL REPORT

**Committee Members:** Anna Mills Wagoner (Co-Chair, Rowan)  
 Gil Greggs (Co-Chair, Wake)  
 Caroline Avery (Burke)  
 Ryan Dayvault (Cabarrus)  
 Stephen Duncan (Rutherford)  
 Julie Eiselt (Mecklenburg)  
 Omar Lugo (Alamance)  
 Rachel Raper (Orange)  
 Brandon Robinson (Durham)  
 Glenda Weinerg (Buncombe)  
 Michael Bitzer (Steering Committee Lead)

#### Executive Summary:

The Counting Votes committee discussed nine separate questions:

1. How is the quality of vote counting machines and technology verified?
2. What is the process of ensuring ballots (via different ballot methods) are counted accurately and how is counting ballots managed against voter rolls?
3. What is the level of public observation and input regarding the counting of ballots?
4. What is the process for ballot curing?
5. What is the process for signature verification as related to absentee by mail ballots?
6. How are unaffiliated voters included in the process of counting ballots?
7. How are military and overseas ballots counted?
8. What, if any, role should ranked-choice voting have in North Carolina's voting process?
9. Finally, the report presents data on the number of ballots cast in presidential and midterm general elections between 2004 and 2024.

This report gives a primer about how votes are counted, including the technical processes of tabulating votes, opportunities for public observation, methods of testing ballots (including correcting ballots through the curing process and verifying identity through signature verification), and how voters in particular categories (such as unaffiliated, military, and overseas voters) have their ballots processed. This overview also includes a brief discussion of ranked-choice voting and discusses historical data about 21st century elections in North Carolina.

While North Carolina's system works well, improvement is possible. The Committee recommended increasing opportunities for voters to observe the counting process and further research into various aspects of how North Carolina counts its votes.

### 6. COUNTING VOTES



## COMMISSION ON THE FUTURE OF NORTH CAROLINA ELECTIONS

### Committee Findings:

This section uses the above questions to frame the current practice in North Carolina regarding the counting of ballots. Each question is restated, followed by relevant information garnered by the committee.

#### Legal Requirements for Ballot Counting

The process of counting ballots in North Carolina is governed by N.C. General Statute (“N.C.G.S.”) Chapter 163—Article 15A: “Counting Ballots, Canvassing Votes, and Certifying Results in Precinct and County” with further clarification and rules and regulations in the North Carolina Administrative Code (“N.C.A.C.” Title 8, Chapters 1–21) and from the N.C. State Board of Elections’ public website (“NCSBE”). The following overview regarding the process of counting ballots draws heavily from the statute, administrative rules, and the NCSBE website, with relevant sections of the statute or rule referenced for each component.

### 1. How is the quality of vote counting machines and technology verified?

#### Voting Technology

Initially, official ballots are marked by registered voters through one of several methods: electronically by voting equipment certified by the NCSBE; paper ballot; or through a secure online portal<sup>64</sup> managed by the NCSBE for military and overseas voters, as well as visually impaired voters. All such methods provide a resulting paper ballot, either marked by hand or with a ballot-marking device, thus providing a paper trail of votes cast that can be audited and/or recounted by election officials.

Certification of voting systems is governed by N.C.G.S. § 163-182.1(b), which delegates authority to the NCSBE to “adopt uniform and nondiscriminatory procedures and standards for voting systems.” The NCSBE had adopted, through 08 N.C.A.C. 04.0301, requirements for a “voting system used in any election in North Carolina.” Among these requirements for a voting system are the following:

- “It shall be designed to reasonably secure secrecy of the voter in the act of voting;
- It shall provide capacity for listing of all nominees of all recognized political parties and other lawful candidates;
- It shall permit the voter to vote for only as many persons for an office as the voter chooses and is lawfully entitled to vote for;
- It shall prevent the voter from voting for the same persons more than once for the same office;

---

<sup>64</sup> *Voting Equipment*, NCSBE <https://www.ncsbe.gov/voting/voting-equipment>.





## COMMISSION ON THE FUTURE OF NORTH CAROLINA ELECTIONS

- It shall permit the voter to vote for or against only the question(s) the voter may have the right to vote;
- It shall permit each voter in a general election but not in a primary, to write in the name of persons for whom he desires to vote, whose names do not appear upon the ballot, except where prohibited by G.S. 163-123 or other statutes;
- It shall be equipped for use in primary elections so that the voter may vote only in the primary election to which the voter is entitled to vote;
- When properly operated, it shall correctly register or record, and accurately count all votes cast for all ballot items;
- It shall contain a visible public counter that shall show at all times during an election the number of persons who have voted;
- It shall clearly indicate to the voter during the act of voting the ballot items the voter has selected;
- Vote totals for each ballot item shall be contained by a method that is locked and concealed at all times during the time the polls are open;
- It shall meet current Federal Voting System Standards or other applicable Federal Standards;
- It shall be suitably designed and durably constructed for the conduct of elections; and
- It shall be equipped to provide retrievable ballots during absentee voting where an absentee voter's ballot is linked to that voter for possible retrieval if it becomes necessary to take action as to that cast ballot.”

In addition, N.C.G.S. § 163-182.1(b)(2) requires that a voting system will also do the following:

- Notify the voter if the voter has selected more than the correct number of candidates or proposals in a ballot item;
- Alert the voter before the ballot is accepted and counted of the “effect of casting overvotes in the ballot item”; and,
- Provide an opportunity for the voter to correct their ballot before it is accepted and counted.

Before a voting system is approved for use in North Carolina, the NCSBE is required to collect a variety of information on the proposed system’s vendor, as found in 08 N.C.A.C. 04.0302, including: witnessing a demonstration of the voting system by the proposed vendor, receiving a copy of an Independent Testing Authority certification by a federal agency or the National Association of State Elections Directors, securing a copy of the system’s source code to be held in escrow by a NCSBE-approved third party, and ensuring that the system complies with North Carolina laws and rules related to voting systems.

The NCSBE has the authority to disapprove a voting system, as noted in 08 N.C.A.C. 04.0302(c).

## 6. COUNTING VOTES



## COMMISSION ON THE FUTURE OF NORTH CAROLINA ELECTIONS

### Testing Voting Systems<sup>65</sup>

Prior to the polls opening for an election, each county undergoes a series of tests of their voting systems, as required by regulations 08 N.C.A.C. 04.0304(a) and 08 N.C.A.C. 04.0307(a) and (b): acceptance testing, logic and accuracy testing, and zero-balancing.

According to the NCSBE, acceptance testing ensures that the voting system delivered to a county board of elections by a vendor is the exact system certified for use in North Carolina and that the equipment is in good working condition. Acceptance testing is conducted by the county boards of elections with oversight provided by State Board of Elections personnel and is performed as part of the voting system's procurement process.

Typically, the acceptance test will demonstrate the system's ability to work, including but not limited to:

- Processing ballots for each precinct or polling place in the jurisdiction.
- Rejecting overvotes and votes not in valid ballot positions.
- Handling write-in votes.
- Generating a final report of the election and providing interim reports as required.
- Generating system status and error messages.
- Complying with all applicable procedural, regulatory, and statutory requirements.
- Producing an audit log.

Next, logic and accuracy tests (commonly known as "L&A" tests) ensure machines will correctly read each ballot type and accurately count votes in an upcoming election. In all 100 counties, every voting machine used in the election, including backups, is tested for every election. Per the NCSBE, the process for conducting L&A tests include the following:

- Test ballots are marked by hand and by ballot-marking devices before they are counted by the tabulator. These test ballots are filled out according to a test script, which is designed to simulate the various combinations of selections voters could make on their ballots during actual voting.
- These marked, test ballots are inserted by hand into every tabulator that will be used for early voting, Election Day, or to count absentee-by-mail or provisional ballots.
- Test results from the ballots are recorded on a memory device in the tabulator.
- The tabulator also prints the test results onto a paper tape.
- The memory device is removed from the tabulator and inserted into a central computer in a secure area, where results stored on the memory device are compared to the paper tape

---

<sup>65</sup> *Preparing for Accurate Elections*, NCSBE <https://www.ncsbe.gov/about-elections/election-security/preparing-accurate-elections>.



## COMMISSION ON THE FUTURE OF NORTH CAROLINA ELECTIONS

results and the original test script used to mark the ballots. The results must match exactly for the test to be successful.

Following these tests, election officials ensure that the voting equipment is sealed and locked in a secure area until transported to the voting place. Tamper-evident seals are placed on media ports. Voting machines are never connected to the internet and do not contain modems. To install any type of virus or malware, an individual would need physical access to the voting machine.

Finally, officials ensure there is a “zero balance” among the counters or other methods before the polls are opened. Systems that produce a zero tape or other paper document must be maintained and secured.

### **2. What is the process of ensuring ballots (via different ballot methods) are counted accurately and how is counting ballots managed against voter rolls?**

#### Process of Voting an Official Ballot

When voters present themselves to cast a ballot, they are checked by precinct officials through an electronic poll book. 08 N.C.A.C. 04.0401(a) stipulates the certification requirements by the NCSBE to check voter registration, assign the voter their correct ballot, and record the voters’ check-in and ballot acceptance.

When voting with a certified voting machine (and resulting paper ballot issued at the conclusion of voting), voters are required to follow the instructions given by the voting system. As noted in 08 N.C.A.C. 04.0304, “Only official ballots shall be introduced into the voting system.”

If a voter spoils (marks incorrectly) or somehow damages a ballot, the voter must return the ballot back to the precinct official, who will then mark the ballot as “spoiled” and maintain the spoiled ballot. Voters may not receive an additional ballot until the spoiled or damaged ballot is returned to the precinct official and processed.

#### Process of Counting Ballots

Once a voter has completed their ballot and inserted the ballot into the precinct tabulator, the voter’s selections were recorded on a media card in the tabulator. These results were counted and reported publicly on election night.

Voters can ascertain whether their ballot was counted via the NCSBE’s webpage “Voter Search.”

Once the post-election process is completed in each county, the voter’s history will be updated to reflect the ballot cast (including the vote method and the election). Generally, this process of compiling a voter history record takes a few weeks following the election.

Once the voter has submitted the ballot, the following general legal principles govern the counting of ballots (N.C.G.S. § 163-182.1):

## 6. COUNTING VOTES



## COMMISSION ON THE FUTURE OF NORTH CAROLINA ELECTIONS

- Only official ballots shall be counted.
- Unless it is impossible to determine the voter’s choice on the ballot, no official ballot will be rejected due to issues in voter marking of their vote choices.
- If it is impossible to ascertain the voter’s choice for a specific ballot item, the official ballot shall not be counted for that ballot item, but all other ballot items where the voter’s choice is clear shall be counted.
- If the voter has selected more choices than allowed for a ballot item, that ballot shall not be counted for that ballot item, but all other ballot items where there are clear choices and no ‘overvote’ made shall be counted.
- If an official ballot is rejected by a scanner or other counting device, but human counters can clearly determine the voter’s choice, the official ballot shall be counted by hand and eye.

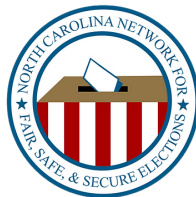
As written in N.C.G.S. § 163-182.2, the following general procedures and principles are required for initial counting of official ballots:

- Once the polls are closed, vote counting at the precinct “shall occur immediately” and “be continuous until completed.”
- Vote counting at the precinct shall be done before all precinct officials of all political parties present, and the public may witness the vote counting, but “No witness shall interfere” nor “participate” in the official counting of official ballots.
- A preliminary report of the vote counting on Election Day shall be made “as quickly as possible” to the county board of elections, yet this “report shall be unofficial [and] has no binding effect upon the official county canvass to follow.”
- In addition, the NCSBE is to adopt rules that “provide for the prompt and secure transmission of official ballots from the voting place to the county board of elections.”

Further policy and procedures are found in 08 N.C.A.C. 06B.0105: Counting of Official Ballots, which outlines further requirements and processes to be followed for ballot counting:

- (a) Following the close of the polls the official ballots shall be counted in accordance with G.S. 163-182.1(a). Precinct officials shall follow the procedures specified by the voting system manufacturer and in compliance with G.S. 163-182.1 and 163-182.2. The counting of the ballots shall be completed in the presence of the precinct election officials, observers, and any persons desiring to observe the count. All official ballots shall be counted at the precinct unless authorized by the State Board of Elections.
- (b) The counting of the ballots at the precinct shall be continuous until completed. From the time the counting of the ballots is begun until the votes are counted and the requisite documentation, including results tapes, is signed, certified as required, and delivered to the chief judge or judge chosen to deliver the documentation to the county board of elections, the precinct chief judge and judges shall not separate, nor shall any of them

## 6. COUNTING VOTES



## COMMISSION ON THE FUTURE OF NORTH CAROLINA ELECTIONS

leave the voting place except for unavoidable necessity, in which case the chief judge or judge who left the polling place shall not be permitted to return to the polling place. Unavoidable necessity means an emergency as determined by the departing precinct official.

- (c) *(not listed/enumerated)*
- (d) When the counting is completed the chief judge or his or her designee shall verbally announce the results at the precinct. The announcement of the results shall state the results are unofficial. The unofficial results shall be transmitted to the county board of elections in the manner determined by the county board of elections and the voting system. This report shall be unofficial and shall have no binding effect upon the official county canvass to follow. As soon as the precinct reports are received, the chair, secretary or designee shall publish the unofficial reports to the news media.
- (e) Provisional official ballots shall be counted by the county board of elections before the canvass. If the county board finds that an individual voting a provisional official ballot is not eligible to vote in one or more ballot items on the official ballot, the board shall not count the official ballot in those ballot items, but shall count the official ballot in any ballot items for which the individual is eligible to vote.

### Canvassing and Certifying the Election

The act of ‘canvassing’ is “the entire process of determining that the votes have been counted and tabulated correctly, culminating in the authentication of the official election results”<sup>66</sup>

Ten days following the election, county boards of elections meet at 11:00 am to complete the canvass of votes cast and to authenticate the county of every ballot item.<sup>67</sup> During the process, the county board of elections is charged with the following (per N.C.G.S.):

- Examine the returns from precincts;
- From absentee official ballots;
- From the sample hand-to-eye paper ballot counts; and,
- From provisional official ballots.

Three weeks following the election, the North Carolina State Board of Elections will meet at 11:00 am to complete the canvass of all ballot items and to authenticate the county of every county’s ballot items. Only then are the election results official.

---

<sup>66</sup> N.C.G.S. § 163-182.5.

<sup>67</sup> S.B. 382 passed in December 2024. When enacted, it will change this time frame to three days.



## COMMISSION ON THE FUTURE OF NORTH CAROLINA ELECTIONS

### Deceased Voters

If a voter submits a ballot (likely mail-in or early in-person), but dies before Election Day, what happens to that ballot?

It is policy, written by a NCSBE policy memo, that upon notification of the voter's death, "each county board of elections shall remove from its voter registration records any person the list shows to be deceased each week" as based on NC General Statute (§ 163-82.14. List maintenance.). Yet there's no mention of what happens to a ballot that is submitted within the statute.

Using this information, NCSBE states the following policy guidance:

"What if a voter dies after voting absentee-by-mail or early voting but before Election Day? 1. Prior to taking any action, obtain official confirmation of the death. Permissible sources include the DHHS List Maintenance Reports, death certificate from the local register of deeds, or a written, signed notification from a near relative. 2. Follow the Process for Disapproving the Ballot Application (if applicable) and Challenging the Ballot above. 3. Remove the voter pursuant to G.S. 163-82.14(b)."

Consideration should be given to whether a clearly enunciated policy regarding the status of a voter's submitted ballot is needed.

### **3. What is the level of public observation and input regarding the counting of ballots?**

As noted above, the public has several opportunities to engage with, and witness, the various processes of ballot counting, per administrative codes:

- "Any interested person may observe the testing of the voting system but shall not interfere with or impede the process" (08 N.C.A.C. 04.0307: Testing of Voting System Before Use In An Election).
- "Any persons interested in viewing" the examination of the voting system and counters to determine a "zero balance" may observe the process and procedure, but "shall not interfere or impede the process" (08 N.C.A.C. 04.0304: Operation and Matter of Voting on Voting Systems).
- Along with precinct officials and designated observers, "any persons desiring to observe the count" of ballots are permitted to do so (08 N.C.A.C. 06B.0105: Counting of Official Ballots). However, "No witnesses shall interfere with the orderly counting of the official ballots" and "Witnesses shall not participate in the official counting of official ballots," per N.C.G.S. § 163-182.2.

## 6. COUNTING VOTES



## COMMISSION ON THE FUTURE OF NORTH CAROLINA ELECTIONS

### 4. What is the process for ballot curing?

“Ballot curing” is the process of remediating, completing, or fixing an absentee by mail ballot, or an early voting or Election Day ballot, that has not met all the requirements for submission (for example, if a voter did not present a valid photo ID). Ballot curing can take place up until the day of canvass.

### 5. What is the process for signature verification as related to absentee by mail ballots?

In Senate Bill 747 (enacted Oct. 10, 2023), the NCSBE was instructed to conduct a pilot program during the 2024 primary election for signature verification on executed mail-in absentee ballots. The NCSBE selected 10 counties for the pilot program, and is required to submit a report on its findings and any recommendations to the General Assembly’s Joint Legislative Elections Oversight Committee.

More information on this aspect can be found in the Absentee by Mail Committee’s report at page 93–95.

### 6. How are unaffiliated voters included in the process of counting ballots?

Currently, only voters of the two major parties, or designated by an unaffiliated candidate, are eligible to participate as inside observers at early voting and Election Day voting sites.

As noted above (under “*What is the level of public observation and input regarding the counting of ballots?*”), any person who seeks to observe the process of counting ballots is allowed, per regulation.

### 7. How are military and overseas ballots counted?

The federal Uniformed and Overseas Citizens Absentee Voting Act (UOCAVA) is implemented through the N.C.G.S. § 163—Article 21A: Uniform Military and Overseas Voters Act.

Uniformed-service or overseas voters can register to vote and cast ballots via a regular application, a federal postcard application, or by an electronic application equivalent provided by the NCSBE.

If an UOCAVA voter submits a military-overseas ballot request, North Carolina county boards of elections are required to send a ballot and materials no later than 60 days before a statewide general election (in even-numbered years) and no later than 50 days before any other election (excluding a second primary election). UOCAVA voters can submit a request for a ballot up to 5:00 pm of the day before the election.<sup>68</sup>

---

<sup>68</sup> The N.C. Supreme Court made an exception to this timeline in 2024 due to the late removal of RFK Jr. from the ballot.



## COMMISSION ON THE FUTURE OF NORTH CAROLINA ELECTIONS

UOCAVA voters can submit a valid military-overseas ballot if the ballot is either be received by the appropriate county board of elections no later than the close of the polls, or the covered voter shall submit the ballot for mailing, electronic transmission, or other authorized means of delivery not later than 12:01 am, at the place where the voter completes the ballot, on the date of the election.

Confirmation of a voter’s registration and/or ballot is done by the NCSBE via electronic free access system (including telephone, electronic mail, or Internet).

### **8. What, if any, role should ranked-choice voting have in the North Carolina voting process?**

The Counting Ballots Committee heard from Diane Silver of FairVote, who advocated for the consideration of ranked-choice voting (RCV) for North Carolina’s elections. Ranked-choice voting is defined as: “Voters have the option to rank candidates in order of their preference,” and “RCV promotes majority winners in a contest; if no candidate has a majority of first-choice preferences, candidates are eliminated one-by-one in an ‘instant runoff’ until there is a majority winner.”

Silver provided a copy of her presentation, along with a 2023 Report on Voting Readiness Assessment for North Carolina.

The committee also reviewed an article written by Dr. Christopher A. Cooper of Western Carolina University, published in *The Assembly* and entitled “The Short Life and Quiet Death of Ranked-Choice Voting in North Carolina.”<sup>69</sup>

### **9. Data on Ballots Cast From 2004–2022:**

The number of ballots cast over the past two decades has been significant. In the 2004 presidential election, 3.2 million ballots were cast. In the 2020 presidential election, over 5.5 million ballots were cast. In 2024, there were over 5.7 million ballots cast.<sup>70</sup>

Chart 6.1 provides the number of ballots cast in presidential and midterm election years, as provided by data from the North Carolina Voter History Data file for each year.

<sup>69</sup> Christopher Cooper, *The Short Life and Quiet Death of Ranked-Choice Voting in North Carolina*, ASSEMBLY (May 13, 2024), <https://www.theassemblync.com/politics/elections/ranked-choice-votingnorth-carolina-elections/>.

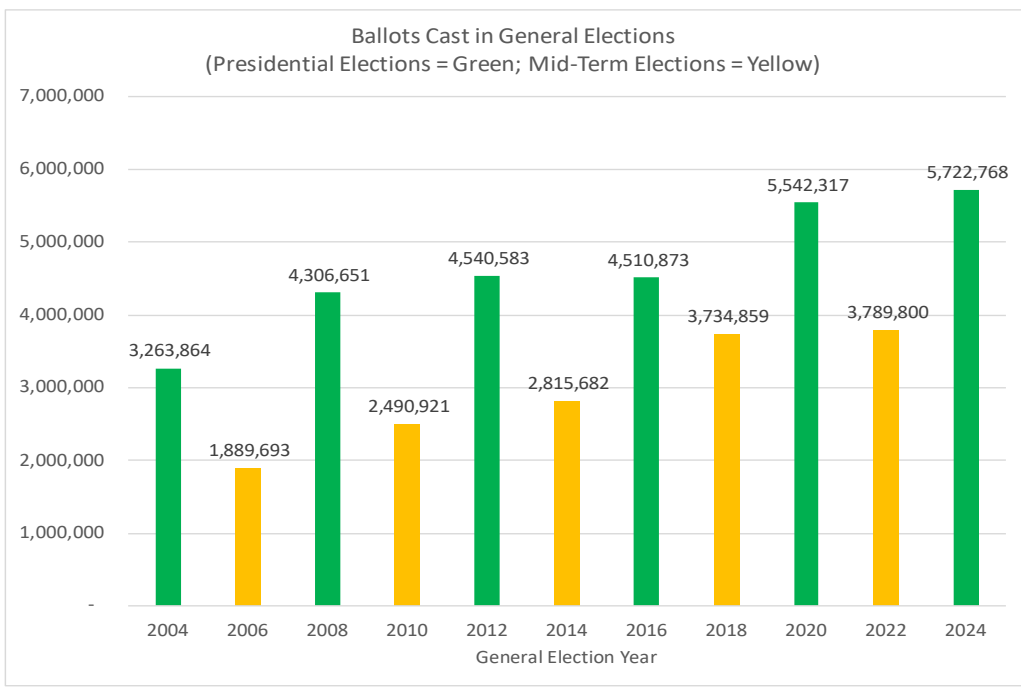
<sup>70</sup> 2024 General Election Canvass & Certification, NCSBE (Nov. 26, 2024), [https://s3.amazonaws.com/dl.ncsbe.gov/State\\_Board\\_Meeting\\_Docs/2024-11-26/Canvass/Canvass%20Report%2011-26-2024%20FINAL.pdf](https://s3.amazonaws.com/dl.ncsbe.gov/State_Board_Meeting_Docs/2024-11-26/Canvass/Canvass%20Report%2011-26-2024%20FINAL.pdf).





### COMMISSION ON THE FUTURE OF NORTH CAROLINA ELECTIONS

Chart 6.1



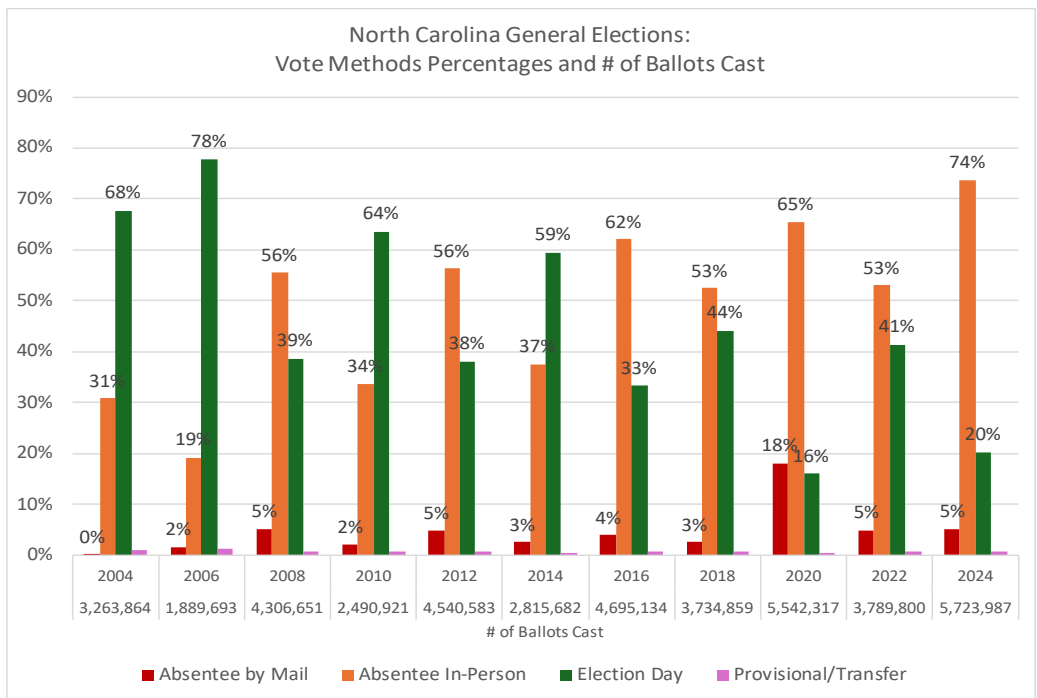
The vote methods within each presidential and midterm election year are provided in Chart 6.2, with the four major vote methods given (absentee by mail, absentee one-stop/in-person early votes (including curbside absentee ballots), Election Day (including curbside ballots), and Provisional/Transfer ballots.

## 6. COUNTING VOTES



**COMMISSION ON THE FUTURE OF  
NORTH CAROLINA ELECTIONS**

Chart 6.2



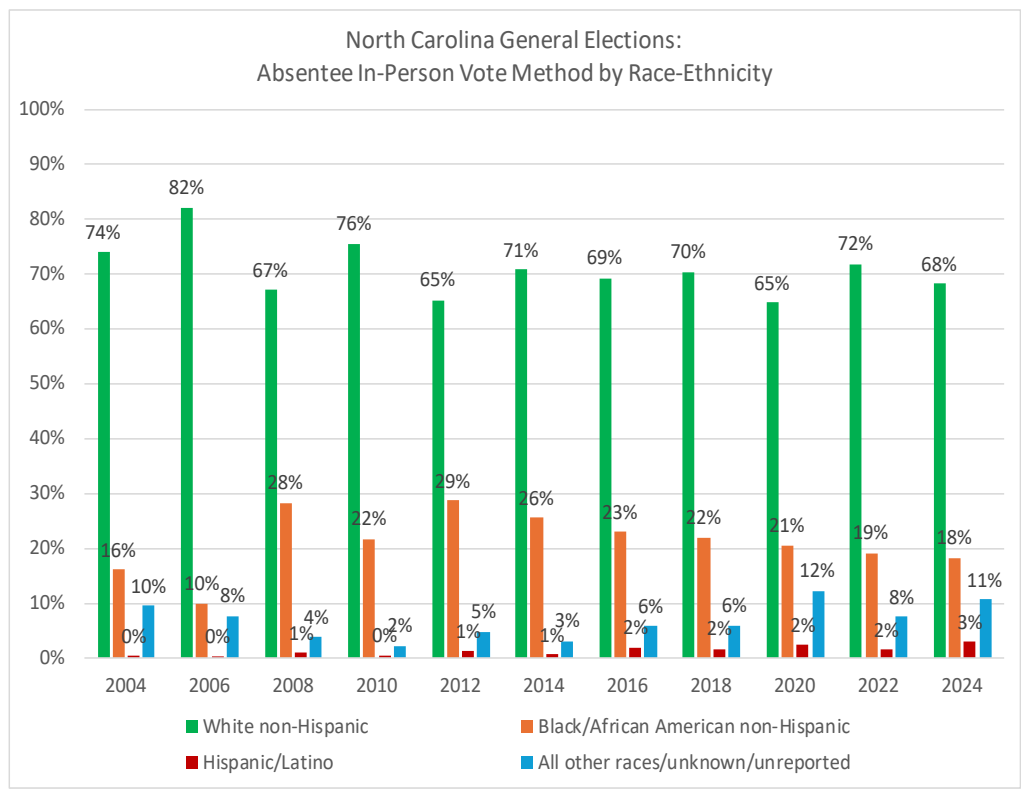
Charts 6.3-6.5 provide a breakdown by race-ethnicity for the four major vote methods of ballots cast. The data is derived from matching the NCSBE Voter History records with the NCSBE Voter Registration records of that year via the N.C. ID field.

**6. COUNTING VOTES**



### COMMISSION ON THE FUTURE OF NORTH CAROLINA ELECTIONS

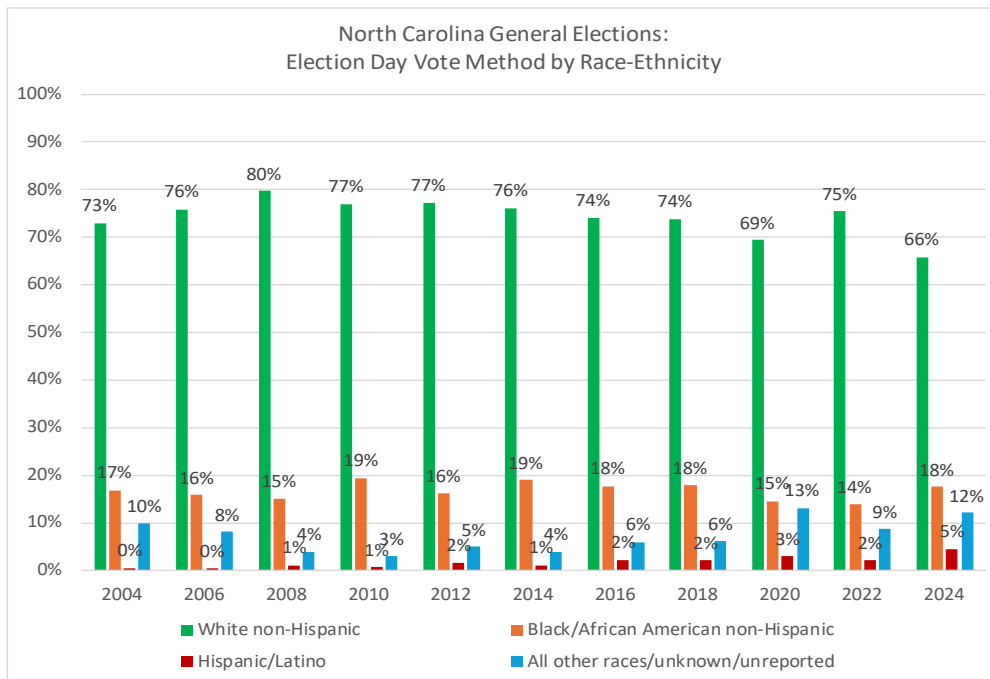
Chart 6.3





**COMMISSION ON THE FUTURE OF  
NORTH CAROLINA ELECTIONS**

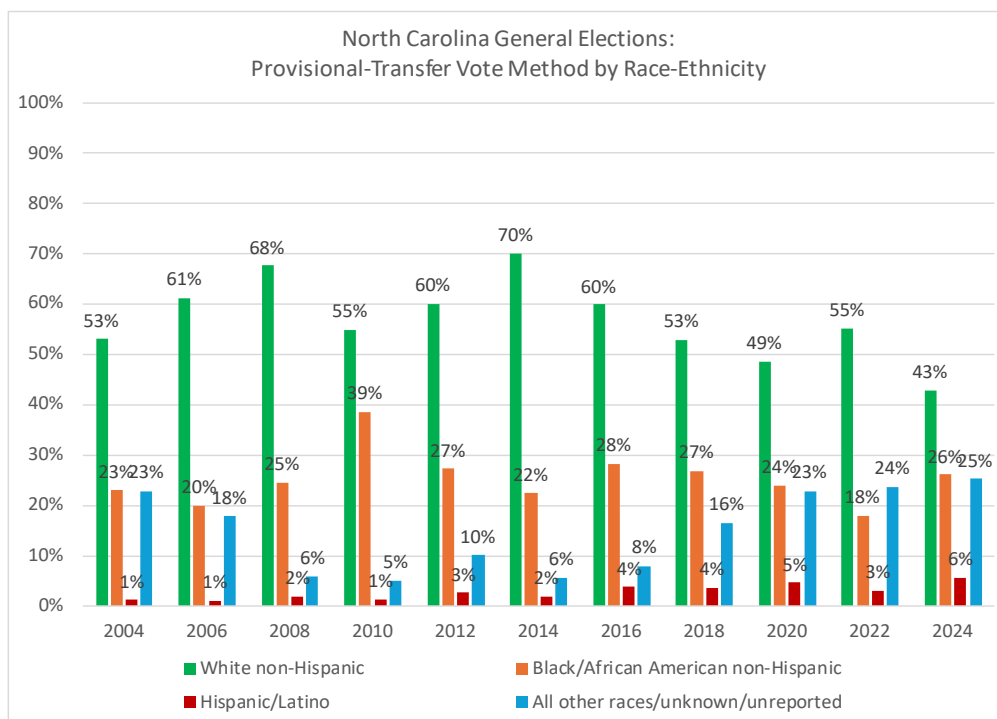
Chart 6.4





## COMMISSION ON THE FUTURE OF NORTH CAROLINA ELECTIONS

Chart 6.5



### Recommendations:

- Create opportunities for the public to observe the counting process (either in-person or via Zoom/technology).
- Ranked-choice voting received a full presentation from Fair Vote, who advocates for ranked choice voting, but there are still significant differences among the committee members as to what should be done so we made no conclusion here.
- Either reconsider joining ERIC (Electronic Registration Information Center) or some other accountability system for states to ensure voters are casting one ballot in only one state to ensure integrity of the balloting system.
- Explore ways to include unaffiliated voters more directly in the electoral process, such as considering their involvement in serving on county boards of elections.

**Conclusion:** North Carolina's system works well, but improvement is possible. Our committee believes these four recommendations should be considered to improve the security and accuracy of counting votes even further.



## COMMISSION ON THE FUTURE OF NORTH CAROLINA ELECTIONS

### 7. EARLY VOTING COMMITTEE FINAL REPORT

**Committee Members:** Karen Alexander (Co-Chair, Rowan)  
 Jim Morrill (Co-Chair, Mecklenburg)  
 Darlene Arzami (Buncombe)  
 Preston Blakely (Henderson)  
 Steve Duncan (Rutherford)  
 Leslie Garvin (Guilford)  
 Jill Hopman (New Hanover)  
 Susan Kluttz (Rowan)  
 Lucy Russell (Wilson)  
 Kathryn Thomas (Henderson)  
 Jennifer Roberts (Steering Committee Lead)

#### **Executive Summary:**

The Early Voting Committee researched various aspects of North Carolina’s early voting policies, including how North Carolina compares to other states, relevant statutory law, and how early voting is structured. The Committee researched questions about the length of the early voting period, how counties determine the number of early voting sites, and whether North Carolina should mandate a uniform requirement for providing opportunities to vote on the weekend. The Committee found that North Carolina’s current policies, especially the length of the early voting period, work well to allow voters ample time to cast a ballot, but that some aspects could be changed to allow for greater access.

#### **The 2024 Election Cycle:**

More than 4.2 million North Carolinians voted early (a.k.a. absentee in person) in the 2024 general election, beating the 2020 record of 3.6 million and emphasizing the popularity of the voting method.

Nowhere was it more remarkable than in the 25 mountain counties hit by Hurricane Helene, a Category 4 hurricane that devastated many communities in western North Carolina in October 2024. Voters there outpaced the state in early voting. Through November 2nd, the last day of early voting, turnout in those counties was 58.9%—about 2 points higher than statewide turnout.

“I am proud of all of our 100 county boards of elections and the thousands of election workers who are making this happen in their communities,” state elections director Karen Brinson Bell



## COMMISSION ON THE FUTURE OF NORTH CAROLINA ELECTIONS

said. “And I am especially proud of the workers and voters of Western North Carolina. You are an inspiration to us all.”<sup>71</sup>

Republicans appeared to overcome their long skepticism about early voting.<sup>72</sup> According to political scientist Michael Bitzer, more than 1.42 million Republicans voted early in person, compared to 1.4 million Unaffiliated voters and 1.36 million registered Democrats.

### Public Meetings and Input:

National surveys reflect broad support for some type of early voting. A Pew Research Center poll from January 2024 found that “At least six-in-ten among both parties also favor allowing two weeks of early in-person voting, making Election Day a national holiday and allowing convicted felons to vote after serving their sentences. Yet support for each of these policies is higher among Democrats than Republicans.”<sup>73</sup> The NCSBE also gathered public input in relation to approving the early voting plans for several counties, and the comments were overwhelmingly in favor of early voting and of voting on Sunday during the early voting period.<sup>74</sup>

### Early Voting: Access and Implementation

#### Background:

- **Early Voting began** in North Carolina in 1999 when the General Assembly authorized “one-stop absentee voting” for elections in even-numbered years. In 2001 it was extended to all elections. That year, lawmakers said early voting would start the third Thursday and end on the last Saturday before an election.<sup>75</sup>
- **Length of time:** North Carolina currently has 17 days of early voting. The national average is 20 days. The average start date is 27 days before an election; N.C. starts on the third Thursday before an election (meaning the number of days varies with the election date). Four states do not have any early voting. An early voting map can be found here:

<sup>71</sup> *In-Person Early Voting Ends with Record Turnout, on to Election Day*, NCSBE (Nov. 3, 2024)

<https://www.ncsbe.gov/news/press-releases/2024/11/03/person-early-voting-ends-record-turnout-election-day>.

<sup>72</sup> Paul Woolverton, *How N.C. Republicans Learned to Stop Worrying and Start Loving Early Voting*, ASSEMBLY (Dec. 5, 2024), <https://www.theassemblync.com/politics/elections/republicans-early-voting-record-north-carolina/>.

<sup>73</sup> *Bipartisan Support for Early In-Person Voting, Voter ID, Election Day National Holiday*, PEW RESEARCH CENTER (Feb. 7, 2024) <https://www.pewresearch.org/politics/2024/02/07/bipartisan-support-for-early-in-person-voting-voter-id-election-day-national-holiday/>.

<sup>74</sup> *Public Comments EV Plans 2024 General*, NCSBE,

[https://s3.amazonaws.com/dl.ncsbe.gov/State\\_Board\\_Meeting\\_Docs/2024-06-04/Early%20Voting%20-%202024%20General%20Election/Nonunanimous%20Plans/Public%20Comments/Public%20Comments%20EVPlans%202024%20General.pdf](https://s3.amazonaws.com/dl.ncsbe.gov/State_Board_Meeting_Docs/2024-06-04/Early%20Voting%20-%202024%20General%20Election/Nonunanimous%20Plans/Public%20Comments/Public%20Comments%20EVPlans%202024%20General.pdf)

<sup>75</sup> Robert Joyce, *Early Voting in North Carolina*, COATES’ CANONS N.C. LOCAL GOVERNMENT LAW (Oct. 5, 2010) <https://canons.sog.unc.edu/2010/10/early-voting-in-north-carolina/>

## 7. EARLY VOTING



## COMMISSION ON THE FUTURE OF NORTH CAROLINA ELECTIONS

- <https://www.ncsl.org/elections-and-campaigns/early-in-person-voting>
- <https://www.ncsl.org/elections-and-campaigns/state-profiles-elections>

The chart including the early voting rules for all states looks like this (only one part included here):<sup>76</sup>

State/Territory	Early Voting Begins	Early Voting Ends	Locations	Hours and Days	Statute(s)
<b>Alaska</b>	Fifteen days before election	Day of election	Elections supervisors' offices.  Other locations as designated by election director.	Normal business hours on weekdays,  10 a.m.-4 p.m. on the Saturday before an election,  12 p.m.-4 p.m. on the Sunday before an election	AS §15.20.064 AS §15.20.045
<b>Arizona</b>	Twenty-seven days before election	Friday before election	Recorder's office.  Any other locations in the county the recorder deems necessary.	Not specified	ARS §16-541  ARS §16-542
<b>Arkansas</b>	Fifteen days before election	5 p.m. Monday before election	Offices of county clerk.  Other locations as determined by county board of election commissioners.	8 a.m.-6 p.m. on weekdays,  10 a.m.-4 p.m. on the Saturday before the election,  until 5 p.m. the Monday before the election	AR Code §7-5-418
<b>California</b>	Twenty-nine days before election  Note: California conducts elections primarily by mail.	Day of election	County election officials' offices.  Satellite locations as determined by county election officials.	Varies from county to county	Elec. Code § 3000.5  Elec. Code §3001

- North Carolina is one of 22 states with **same-day registration**.
- **The use of early voting** has risen steadily in NC. According to political scientist Michael Bitzer, 55.6% of North Carolina voters voted early in the general election in 2008. That rose to 62.4% in 2020 and 74% in 2024. Smaller percentages vote early in off-year elections, but those numbers have risen as well. Voting early is also popular during primaries. State officials said that 36% of voters chose to vote early during the 2020

<sup>76</sup> *Early In-Person Voting*, NCSL (last updated Dec. 20, 2024), <https://www.ncsl.org/elections-and-campaigns/early-in-person-voting>.

## 7. EARLY VOTING





## COMMISSION ON THE FUTURE OF NORTH CAROLINA ELECTIONS

presidential primary, with 39% voting early in 2022 primaries. Early voting is the most popular period for general elections.<sup>77</sup>

- **Who administers early voting?** This is done by the county boards of elections in all 100 North Carolina counties. The board determines the number and location of sites, a process often limited by costs. As a result, there are discrepancies in the number and convenience of sites between counties. For example, Pender County is NC’s fortieth in size; it had four sites for the March 4 primary. Henderson, the twenty-fourth largest county, had a single early voting site.<sup>78</sup>
- **Does the location of early voting sites matter?** There’s some evidence that it does, at least in terms of convenience. UNC political scientist Michael Greenberger found that some early voting sites can present difficulty for voters to get to. He wrote:
  - “In practice, though it may not be intentional, these decisions unduly burden certain groups of voters. Particularly worrisome is that these choices have the potential to burden minority populations with histories of disfranchisement.”<sup>79</sup>
  - **The Center for Inclusive Democracy has an** online tool that suggests an optimal number of early voting sites for Henderson and other counties in North Carolina.<sup>80</sup>
- **Voters obviously like early voting, but** does it increase turnout? Some research says no: that voters who vote early likely would have voted anyway. “We’ve known for a long time that early voting only makes it more convenient for those who were going to vote anyway,” says Martha Kropf, a political scientist at UNC Charlotte.

### Current Practice in North Carolina:

Early voting is covered in N.C.G.S. Chapter 163: § 163-82.6B Same Day Registration; § 163-166.35 Site and hours for early voting; § 163-166.40 Early voting procedures.

N.C.G.S. § 163-82.6B defines the documents and process required for someone to register during the early voting period; N.C.G.S. § 163-166.35 defines the procedure for selecting sites and hours for early voting by the county Board of Elections, and requires the NCSBE to rule when the county vote is not unanimous; and N.C.G.S. § 163-166.40 lays out the process for voting and defines the parameters of the early voting period for any county: “Not earlier than the third

<sup>77</sup> In-person early voting for North Carolina primary election begins, WBTB (Feb. 15, 2024)

<https://www.wbtv.com/2024/02/15/in-person-early-voting-north-carolina-primary-election-begins/>

<sup>78</sup> Population: Kristen Carney, *North Carolina Counties by Population (2025)*, N.C. Demographics (Dec. 17, 2024)

[https://www.northcarolina-demographics.com/counties\\_by\\_population](https://www.northcarolina-demographics.com/counties_by_population); Voting Sites: *Early Voting Site List*, NCSBE [https://s3.amazonaws.com/dl.ncsbe.gov/One-Stop\\_Early\\_Voting/2024/Early%20Voting%20Schedules%20-%20March%205%2C%202024%20Primary%20Election.pdf](https://s3.amazonaws.com/dl.ncsbe.gov/One-Stop_Early_Voting/2024/Early%20Voting%20Schedules%20-%20March%205%2C%202024%20Primary%20Election.pdf).

<sup>79</sup> Michael Greenberger, *A Method to Detect Whether Countywide Vote Centers Are Located Optimally: The Case of North Carolina*, 22 ELECTION L.J. 105 (2023).

<sup>80</sup> *Henderson County*, CENTER FOR INCLUSIVE DEMOCRACY, <https://nc.cidvlot.org/county.html?county=089>.

## 7. EARLY VOTING



## COMMISSION ON THE FUTURE OF NORTH CAROLINA ELECTIONS

Thursday before an election in which a voter seeks to vote and not later than 3:00 pm on the last Saturday before that election.”

As mentioned above, N.C.G.S. § 163-166.35 requires the NCSBE to rule when the county vote is not unanimous concerning early voting sites and times. During this review period the NCSBE invites public comment on the plans through an online web form. We believe including resident input in the decision-making process is an important policy and practice.

There are several policy issues that our committee discussed and researched.

- Is North Carolina’s early voting period long enough?
- Should it start earlier? North Carolina’s early voting period starts on the third Thursday before an election, or 17 days before.
- Should there be more uniformity among counties in the number of early voting sites? For example, a specific number of sites per population.
- Should there be uniform requirements for weekend voting? For example, mandating at least one Sunday?

### Conclusions:

With reference to the above policy questions, the committee drew the following conclusions:

#### 1. Early Voting Period

The current early voting period of 17 days seems reasonable and adequate. North Carolina falls within the middle range of the early voting period for all states.

#### 2. Number of Early Voting Sites

There does not seem to be an urgent need for the early voting period to start earlier. The committee thought it reasonable for the state to have guidelines in a regular election (not a special election or second primary, for example), to have the number of early voting sites tied to the size and population of the county. We noted that there were a number of counties who requested additional early voting sites during the public comment period on decisions by the NCSBE. Some public comments included: “Please don't limit early voting. A democracy thrives when more citizens vote.” (New Hanover County voter), and “Please make voting as easy and accessible for as many people as possible as often as possible.” (Chatham County voter).<sup>81</sup> We did not settle on an exact number for these sites, however, as the diversity of the size of North Carolina counties makes this difficult to impossible to do. For example, in the March 2024 primary elections, large counties like Mecklenburg had 15 days of voting at 24 sites (one site for

<sup>81</sup> *Public Comments EV Plans 2024 General*, NCSBE, [https://s3.amazonaws.com/dl.ncsbe.gov/State\\_Board\\_Meeting\\_Docs/2024-06-04/Early%20Voting%20-%202024%20General%20Election/Nonunanimous%20Plans/Public%20Comments/Public%20Comments%20EVPlans%202024%20General.pdf](https://s3.amazonaws.com/dl.ncsbe.gov/State_Board_Meeting_Docs/2024-06-04/Early%20Voting%20-%202024%20General%20Election/Nonunanimous%20Plans/Public%20Comments/Public%20Comments%20EVPlans%202024%20General.pdf)

## 7. EARLY VOTING



## COMMISSION ON THE FUTURE OF NORTH CAROLINA ELECTIONS

every approximately 33,000 people), but, Bladen County, with 22,000 registered voters, had 17 days of early voting at four sites, meaning one site for every 5,500 voters. Bladen’s sites were open for both weekends, Saturday and Sunday, but Mecklenburg only had sites open for one full weekend. Many of the smaller counties only had one early voting site, at the Board of Elections office.

### 3. Early Voting on Weekends

The committee also thought it reasonable to require at least one weekend day—preferably Sunday—for voting during the early voting period, as the period includes two weekends. However, some counties chose not to include Sunday voting in March 2024 (such as Alexander, Avery, Bertie, Iredell, etc), and with the challenges to county budgets and hiring of election workers, the committee decided again it would be hard to mandate such a requirement. The state could recommend that at least one weekend day would help hourly workers have access to early voting, with Sunday being the best choice, but Saturday also being helpful. It should be noted that in hundreds of public comments to the NCSBE about the early voting plans for several counties, a majority of respondents supported not just one but two Sundays for early voting.<sup>82</sup>

### 4. Accessibility of Early Voting Sites

The committee also agreed that the location of early voting sites is important for voter access. It was noted that in some counties, sites had been moved farther away from colleges or universities, making it hard for those students without cars to access the sites. Numerous respondents in the public comments to the NCSBE about early voting supported sites located on college campuses. This makes it especially important for sites to be accessible to public transportation. Adequate parking should also be provided, and the site should have enough space to allow for curbside voting, which is used heavily by the disabled, elderly, and mobility challenged voters.

The chart below shows that early in-person voting has been used almost equally by Republicans, Democrats, and Unaffiliated voters in the last 2 elections.

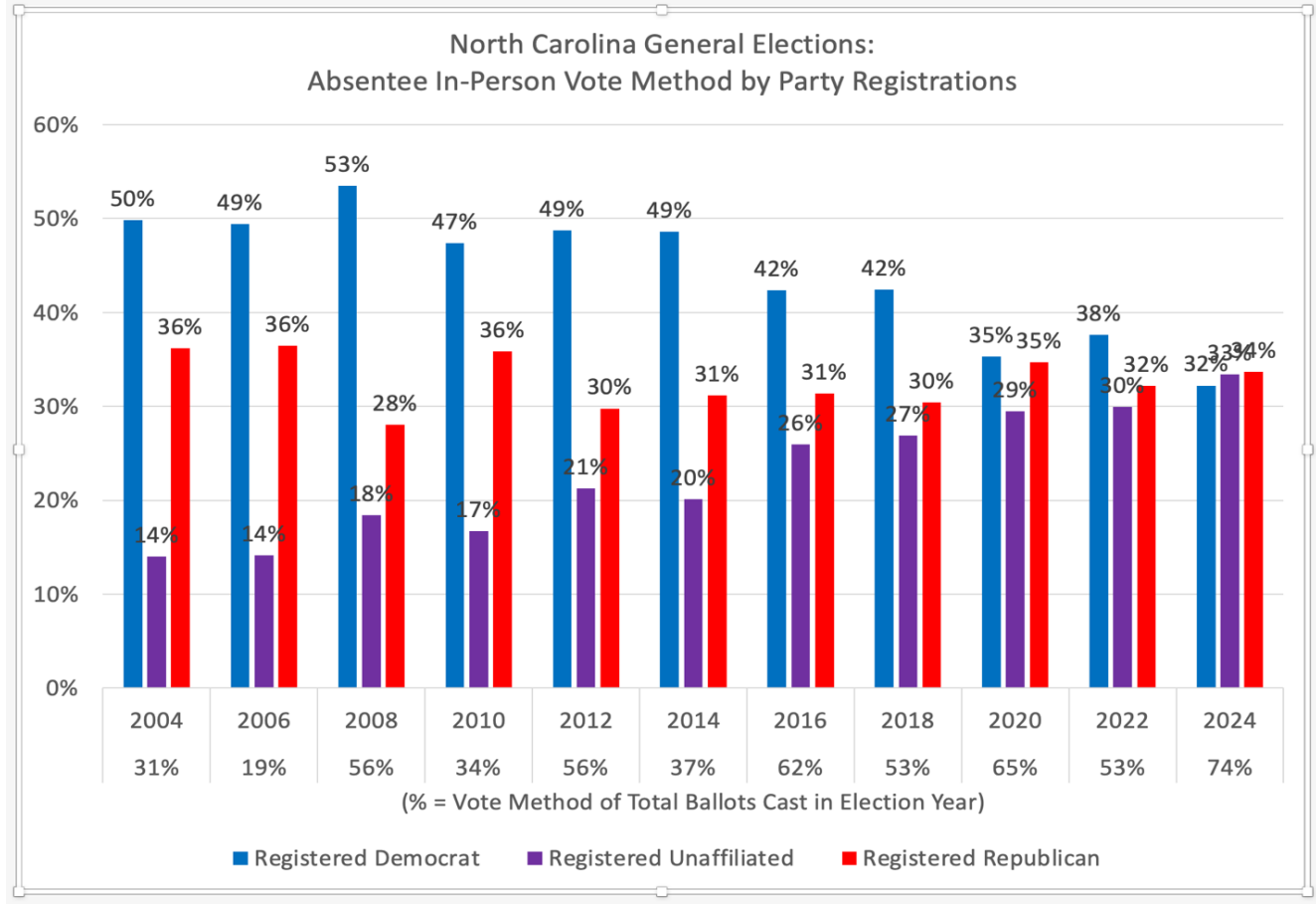
---

<sup>82</sup> *Id.*

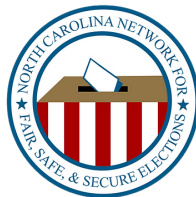


**COMMISSION ON THE FUTURE OF  
NORTH CAROLINA ELECTIONS**

Chart 7.1



**7. EARLY VOTING**



## COMMISSION ON THE FUTURE OF NORTH CAROLINA ELECTIONS

### 8. ELECTION INFRASTRUCTURE AND ADMINISTRATION COMMITTEE FINAL REPORT

**Committee Members:** Leslie Garvin (Chair, Guilford)  
Darlene Azarmi (Buncombe)  
Sherra Blackburn (Wake)  
Kathy Holland (Alamance)  
Catherine Komp (Buncombe)  
Greg Randolph (Orange)  
Kathryn Thomas (Henderson)  
Martha Kropf (Steering Committee Lead)

#### **Executive Summary:**

The Election Infrastructure and Administration Committee studied the safety of election workers; retention and career development; poll worker training, recruitment, and retention; and election expenditures.

The Committee found that both nationally and in North Carolina, election worker safety has become a growing area of concern. The Committee proposed solutions that could be implemented by a range of actors, including the federal government, state legislature, local election officials, and other state officials.

In the area of recruitment and retention, the Committee found that North Carolina has had high turnover for its election officials. Election staff are being driven away because of safety concerns, increasing complexity of election administration from changing voter policies, and a lack of adequate funding. Retaining experienced, dedicated election officials is more important than ever. The Committee recommends that investing in personnel, including through pay raises and professional development training, can help retain election officials.

In addition to challenges with retaining election officials, the Committee learned that counties are having trouble recruiting and retaining poll workers. The Committee recommends that the North Carolina Board of Elections create pathway programs for high school and college students to begin careers in election administration. These programs can include receiving class credit for election work or dedicated internship programs.

Finally, the Committee identified election expenditures as an area for growth. Counties are responsible for the primary costs of elections. Given variations in North Carolina counties' size and population, funding can also vary by county. A lack of funding hinders, among other things, the ability of county boards of elections to recruit and retain experienced staff. To meet these



## COMMISSION ON THE FUTURE OF NORTH CAROLINA ELECTIONS

needs, the Committee recommends that the State Board of Elections create an emergency fund, which the county boards of elections can apply for in the case of an emergency.

### Committee Findings:

#### 1. Safety of Election Workers

More than one in three local election officials (LEOs) nationwide have experienced threats, harassment, or abuse, according to a Spring 2024 nationwide survey conducted by the Brennan Center.<sup>83</sup> More than a quarter surveyed are concerned about their family or loved ones being threatened or harassed.

In North Carolina, about 25% of election directors report they have “personally experienced” a threat, according to a 2022 survey conducted by UNC Chapel Hill Professor Dr. Jason Roberts and University of Denver Professor Dr. Michael Greenberger.<sup>84</sup> About 10% of election staff members report threats as do about 4% of poll workers. 75% of election directors and 67% of staffers worry for their personal safety.<sup>85</sup>

Table 8.1

Table 7: Percent Indicating That They Are Somewhat Concerned or Very Concerned with \_\_\_\_\_ in Future Elections

	Election Directors	Staffers
Your personal safety	75.3	67.2
Safety of colleagues	89.2	75.0
Verbal harassment	81.7	76.6
Being assaulted on the job	61.3	45.3

As Roberts and Greenberger note, “Taken together these results present a grim picture of the work environment faced by Elections Directors and their staff. Workload is up, stress is up,

<sup>83</sup> *Local Election Officials Survey*, BRENNAN CENTER FOR JUSTICE (May 1, 2024)

<https://www.brennancenter.org/our-work/research-reports/local-election-officials-survey-may-2024>.

<sup>84</sup> Michael Greenberger & Jason Roberts, *Election Worker Recruitment and Retention in North Carolina*, MIT ELECTION DATA + SCIENCE LAB, (2024).

<sup>85</sup> *Id.*

## 8. ELECTION INFRASTRUCTURE AND ADMINISTRATION



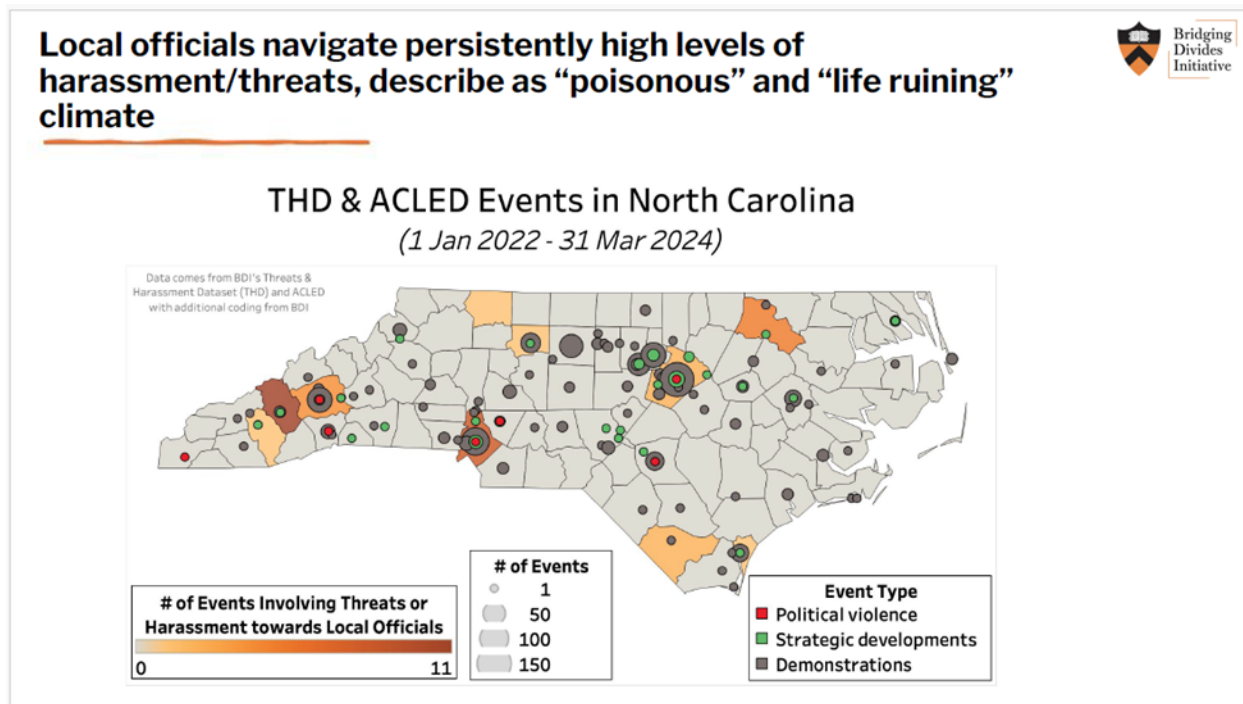
## COMMISSION ON THE FUTURE OF NORTH CAROLINA ELECTIONS

threats have increased, and there is little evidence that our respondents expect the situation to improve. Given these results it is little wonder that turnover in these positions is so high.”

In North Carolina, nearly 60 directors have left their jobs in the past five years, according to data from State Board of Elections Executive Director Karen Brinson Bell and reported by Carolina Public Press.<sup>86</sup>

Princeton University’s Bridging Divides Initiative also documents these incidents nationally and in North Carolina, including threats against local elected officials.<sup>87</sup>

Chart 8.1



<sup>86</sup> Mehr Sher, *N.C. counties losing elections directors. Concerns point to lousy pay, voter hostility*, CAROLINA PUBLIC PRESS (March 27, 2024), <https://carolinapublicpress.org/63583/elections-directors-nc-counties-leave-low-pay-voter-hostility/>.

<sup>87</sup> Bridging Divides Initiative presentation to The Commission. Find national data and register for state-specific updates here: <https://bridgingdivides.princeton.edu/updates/2024/bdi-launches-public-event-level-dataset-threats-and-harassment-against-local-officials>.



## COMMISSION ON THE FUTURE OF NORTH CAROLINA ELECTIONS

### What Has Been Done?

According to the Brennan Center survey, about 92% of election officials have taken some action to increase election security since 2020. These include implementing or improving cybersecurity protections for election technology, updating polling place contingency plans, contacting law enforcement to share information and/or create emergency response plans, and participating in or leading security trainings.

However, another 83% say their annual budget needs to grow to meet administrative and security needs. The survey also found that “most local election officials who reported legislation and additional funding to protect election workers say the changes were helpful.”

At least 18 states have passed laws to help protect election officials and staff, according to the National Conference of State Legislatures, which tracks this legislation.<sup>88</sup> North Carolina is not one of those states. A few of those measures include:

- Arizona S.B. 1061, which makes threats and harassment of election workers, including “doxing” or publishing personal information, a class 5 felony.
- Colorado H.B. 1273, which makes it unlawful to interfere in any manner with any election official in the discharge of their duties or to induce any election official to violate or refuse to comply with the election official's duty or any law regulating the same.
- Maryland H.B. 585, which makes it a misdemeanor to threaten to harm an election official or an immediate family member of an election official because of the election official's role in administering the election process.

The U.S. Department of Justice (DOJ) does have an Election Threats Task Force but it is not clear how effective the Task Force has been.<sup>89</sup> In particular, the DOJ is navigating the First Amendment. They announced in August 2022 that “of the more than 1,000 cases it had reviewed, just a handful of federal cases had been charged and only one sentence had been handed down.”<sup>90</sup>

---

<sup>88</sup> *State Laws Providing Protection for Election Officials and Staff*, NCSL (Jan. 13, 2025), <https://www.ncsl.org/elections-and-campaigns/state-laws-providing-protection-for-election-officials-and-staff>.

<sup>89</sup> *Election Threats*, U.S. D.O.J., <https://www.justice.gov/voting/election-threats>.

<sup>90</sup> Greta Bedekovics, *Protecting Election Workers and Officials From Threats and Harassment During the Midterms*, CENTER FOR AMERICAN PROGRESS (Oct. 13, 2022), <https://www.americanprogress.org/article/protecting-election-workers-and-officials-from-threats-and-harassment-during-the-midterms/>.





## COMMISSION ON THE FUTURE OF NORTH CAROLINA ELECTIONS

The Department of Justice has also just released a guideline on voter intimidation, reiterating that federal law prohibits intimidation, threats, and coercion throughout the voting process.<sup>91</sup>

### Recommendations:

- The North Carolina General Assembly should consider legislation that would do the following:
  - Ensure that laws that prohibit threatening election workers apply to all election workers and their families throughout the entire election process.<sup>92</sup>
  - Provide the attorney general and election workers with tools to bring civil actions against those making illegal threats.<sup>93</sup>
  - Prohibit doxing of election workers and their family members.<sup>94</sup>
  - Fund online safety training for election workers.
  - Fund de-escalation training for precinct chief judges, boards of elections and election directors. Trainings could be provided by law enforcement personnel as well as other groups in North Carolina.
  - Provide grant funding to increase physical security at election offices, and when necessary, homes.
  - Install door locks, bulletproof doors and windows, panic alarm systems, key card access controls, exterior and parking lot lighting, security gates and fencing, communications systems, personal security training, and personal information protection.<sup>95</sup>
- State officials should make home address confidentiality programs more accessible to election workers.<sup>96</sup>
- State and county election officials should take advantage of resources and training provided by the Department of Homeland Security's Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency (CISA).

---

<sup>91</sup> *Voter Intimidation Under Federal Law*, U.S. D.O.J. (April 2024), <https://www.justice.gov/crt/media/1348556/dl?inline>.

<sup>92</sup> Derek Tisler & Lawrence Norden, *Securing the 2024 Election: Recommendations for Federal, State, and Local Officials*, BRENNAN CENTER FOR JUSTICE (April 27, 2023), <https://www.jstor.org/stable/resrep49322.5?seq=5>.

<sup>93</sup> *Id.*

<sup>94</sup> *Id.*

<sup>95</sup> *Id.*

<sup>96</sup> *Id.*



## COMMISSION ON THE FUTURE OF NORTH CAROLINA ELECTIONS

- State officials should appoint regional election leads to work with local directors on CISA’s Physical Security Checklist for Polling Locations<sup>97</sup> and Guide to Operational Security.<sup>98</sup>
- “Election jurisdictions should clearly communicate to election workers safety precautions and applicable laws, including laws for election observers and firearms around election precincts and facilities, as well as voters’ rights. This can be included in training materials or as part of the information that organizations promoting election work—such as unions and universities—provide to their members.”<sup>99</sup>
- Local election officials who have not yet established relationships with law enforcement in their community should do so. At least one county in North Carolina has established an “on-call” task force on Election Day composed of local police agencies in case of violence or problems on election day.
- Election officials should encourage the presence of resource officers on site at polling places during early voting and on Election Day.
- Officials should establish a task force of “election experts and officials—especially those who are former law enforcement or members of the military—to help to educate local law enforcement, including police unions, about election disinformation and the security of elections.”<sup>100</sup>
- **Federal Government:** DHS, DOJ, CISA, and the EAC (Election Assistance Commission) should promote federal grant opportunities and help direct available funding to the areas of greatest need:
  - “The federal government should establish a separate and significant source of federal funding for states and jurisdictions to make safety improvements that officials don’t have to compete for, so they aren’t forced to choose between improvements for voters and their own safety.”<sup>101</sup>

---

<sup>97</sup> *CISA Releases Physical Security Checklist to Help Election Officials Secure Polling Locations*, CISA (April 22, 2024), <https://www.cisa.gov/news-events/news/cisa-releases-physical-security-checklist-help-election-officials-secure-polling-locations>.

<sup>98</sup> *CISA Releases Guide to Operational Security for Election Officials*, CISA (July 5, 2024), <https://www.cisa.gov/news-events/news/cisa-releases-guide-operational-security-election-officials>.

<sup>99</sup> Greta Bedekovics, *Protecting Election Workers and Officials From, Threats and Harassment During the Midterms*, CENTER FOR AMERICAN PROGRESS (Oct. 13, 2022), <https://www.americanprogress.org/article/protecting-election-workers-and-officials-from-threats-and-harassment-during-the-midterms/>.

<sup>100</sup> *Id.*

<sup>101</sup> *Id.*

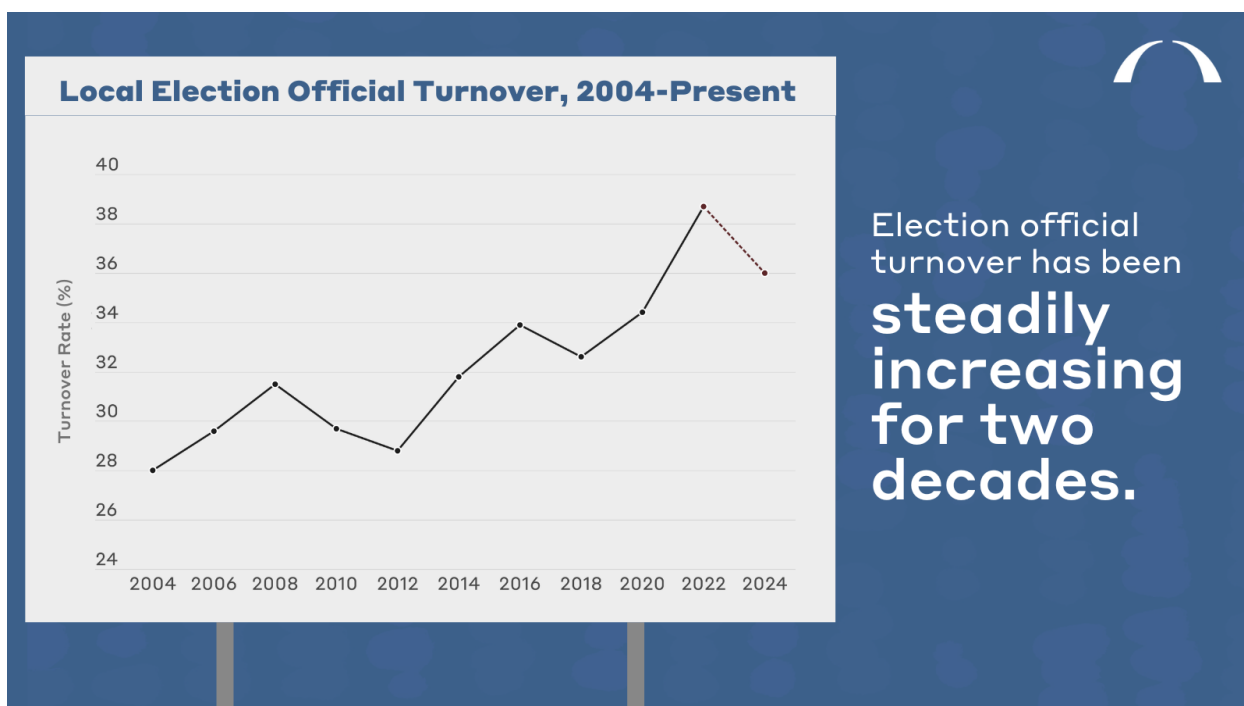


## COMMISSION ON THE FUTURE OF NORTH CAROLINA ELECTIONS

### 2. Retention and Career Development

Nationally, turnover among election officials has been increasing since 2004, according to new research published by the Bipartisan Policy Center.<sup>102</sup> The authors found turnover across geographic regions, in small and large jurisdictions, as well as conservative and liberal jurisdictions.

Chart 8.2



Increased turnover, writes the authors, has “translated into a decrease in the number of highly experienced election officials over time.”

In North Carolina, 61 out of the state’s 100 election directors have turned over in the last five years, including 10 counties that lost directors this year, according to a series by Carolina Public Press (CPP), highlighting concerns from stakeholders about the loss of institutional knowledge

<sup>102</sup> Josh Ferrer & Dan Thompson, *Election Official Turnover Rates from 2000-2024*, BIPARTISAN POLICY CENTER (Apr. 9, 2024), <https://bipartisanpolicy.org/press-release/new-insights-into-election-official-turnover/>. This report does not include complete data for 2024, since the year has not ended when these data were obtained. (Email from Josh Ferrer to Martha Kropf, May 17, 2024.)



## COMMISSION ON THE FUTURE OF NORTH CAROLINA ELECTIONS

and the costs involved in hiring and training new staff.<sup>103</sup> The series analyzed director salaries and found that “counties with the highest pay tended to keep directors longer while those with lowest pay tended to have more recent turnover.”

Director salaries are guided by state statute at “an amount recommended by the county board of elections and approved by the Board of County Commissioners and shall be commensurate with the salary paid to directors in counties similarly situated and similar in population and number of registered voters.”<sup>104</sup> The legislature sets minimum pay, which is \$12 per hour plus benefits, and has not adjusted that figure since 1999. CPP analyzed data from 68 counties received through a public records request for 2024 salaries and found they ranged from about \$19 per hour for a part-time director role to about \$200,000 a year.

New research from the University of North Carolina at Charlotte indicates that, on average across North Carolina counties from the years 2012–2021, election directors’ salaries were the second lowest among all the various county directors, as illustrated in the figure below taken from the research paper.<sup>105</sup>

---

<sup>103</sup> Mehr Sher, *Elections Brain Drain*, CAROLINA PUBLIC PRESS (June 2024), <https://carolinapublicpress.org/elections-brain-drain/>.

<sup>104</sup> N.C. GEN. STAT. § 163-35(c).

<sup>105</sup> McGowan, Mary Jo, Robert Hines, Zachary T. Mohr, and Martha Kropf. 2025. "Does Leslie Knope Make More Than Election Directors? Analysis of Election and Other County Directors in North Carolina Counties." Paper presented at the Election Science Conference within a Conference at the Southern Political Science Association, San Juan, Puerto Rico. Note that this figure does not include four outliers for county administrator salaries. These abnormally large county administrator salaries were more than \$400,000.

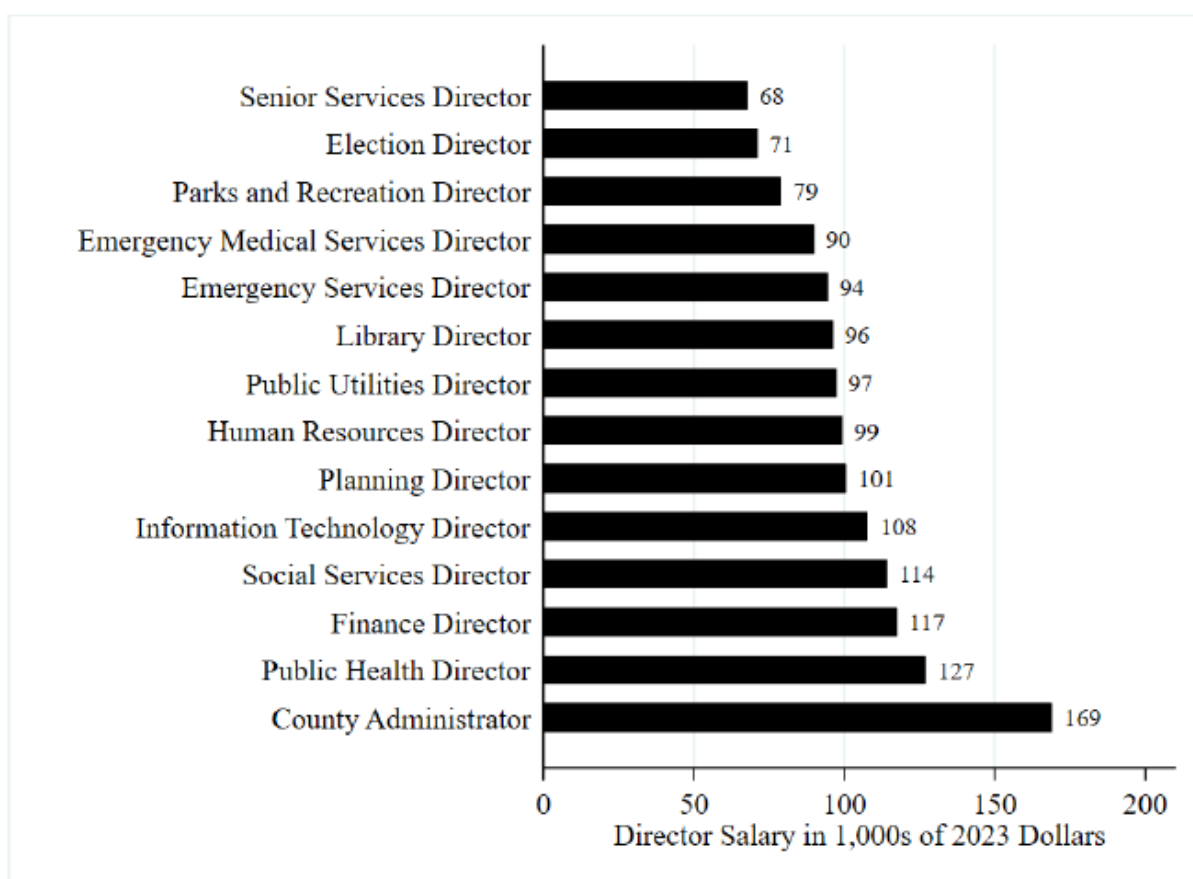
## 8. ELECTION INFRASTRUCTURE AND ADMINISTRATION



## COMMISSION ON THE FUTURE OF NORTH CAROLINA ELECTIONS

Chart 8.3

Figure 1: Director Level Pay in North Carolina Counties



Taken from McGowan, Hines, Mohr, and Kropf, 2025.

The role has changed dramatically over the last two decades, with early and mail-in voting, implementing new laws like voter ID, responding to changing technology and cybersecurity, and the growing need to address threats and safety. According to the Roberts and Greenberger survey, more than a third of North Carolina elections directors say the workload has increased “a lot.”

## 8. ELECTION INFRASTRUCTURE AND ADMINISTRATION



## COMMISSION ON THE FUTURE OF NORTH CAROLINA ELECTIONS

The survey, however, did find directors and staffers find their roles interesting and/or fulfilling and, for more than half, a pay raise would encourage them to stay on in their roles.<sup>106</sup>

Table 8.2<sup>107</sup>

Table 1: Percent Indicating that Election Work is Interesting and/or Fulfilling

	Election Directors	Staffers
Always	34.1	40.6
Usually	46.2	42.2
Sometimes	15.4	14.1
Not Usually/Never	4.4	3.1

Table 8.3

Table 8: Which of the following policies would be most likely to encourage you (elections directors/staffer) to stay on as an elections director in the future?

	Elections Directors	Staffers
Pay raise	53.8	56.3
More staff support	16.1	NA
Increased security	4.3	10.9
Increased training	3.2	9.4
Other	12.9	10.9

In terms of professional development, our research found that the N.C. State Board of Elections has certification programs but lacks specific course requirements.

NC's requirements for a certified elections director state that they must:

- Complete all certification assignments, including New Director Training.
- Participate in all election cycles over two years.
- Attend all conferences before the certification exam.
- Pass the certification exam with at least 80%.

<sup>106</sup> Michael Greenberger & Jason Roberts, *Election Worker Recruitment and Retention in North Carolina*, MIT ELECTION DATA + SCIENCE LAB, (2024).

<sup>107</sup> Tables from Jason Roberts and Michael Greenberger

## 8. ELECTION INFRASTRUCTURE AND ADMINISTRATION



## COMMISSION ON THE FUTURE OF NORTH CAROLINA ELECTIONS

Requirements for a certified elections administrator state that they must:

- Participate in one federal and one municipal election cycle.
- Attend two NCSBE conferences.
- Attend one additional NCSBE-approved training event.
- Complete all online certification assignments.
- Pass the certification exam with at least 80%.

In theory, someone could become a certified election official in North Carolina without having taken courses on key topics.

### Recommendations

#### *Pay:*

- Research referenced above indicates that Election Directors and staff report that workload has increased, but on average, salaries have not increased. The Legislature should revisit the workloads and pay statutes, structures and minimum wage.
- The Legislature should consider a fund to help smaller counties supplement pay increases.
  - According to Carolina Public Press (CPP): "State Rep. Allen Buansi, D-Orange, said legislators could easily provide funding to supplement salaries in counties that can't provide higher pay for elections directors. Buansi co-sponsored House Bill 293<sup>108</sup> last year, which included provisions to appropriate funds to support election systems and workers. But it was never heard in the General Assembly, he said."<sup>109</sup>
- Counties should bracket director pay to other director or department head positions within the county.

#### *Training and Succession Planning:*

- Election officials are not always able to create training materials that invest in the professional development of their staff.
  - There is a resource library managed by the State Board, and we recommend expansion and more sharing of these tools and resources across counties.
  - We recommend the creation of user groups for counties with similarities (for example, sizes) to support sharing of knowledge, resources, and best practices.
  - We recommend that someone do a post-election gathering of chief judges, election directors, and staff in each county to make recommendations for

<sup>108</sup> <https://www.ncleg.gov/BillLookup/2023/H293>

<sup>109</sup> Mehr Sher, *Changes to minimum pay, supplemental funding could help N.C. counties retain elections directors*, CAROLINA PUBLIC PRESS (June 12, 2024), <https://carolinapublicpress.org/64236/elections-brain-drain-3-pay-funding-legislation-retain-directors-nc-counties/>.



## COMMISSION ON THE FUTURE OF NORTH CAROLINA ELECTIONS

continuous improvement. The gathering should be as soon after the election as possible.

- There is not a strong support system for new election directors. We recommend the creation of a mentorship between seasoned directors and new directors.
- To ensure all directors are taking the same courses, the Director's Association could create a robust training and certification program in conjunction with a university, for example the UNC School of Government or UNC Charlotte. One model is Florida, which has a robust training program for new supervisors, created in conjunction with FSU, and includes 30+ courses.<sup>110</sup>
- Recruitment of new talent needs more attention and resources. The state should:
  - Create a summer internship among all county election boards in all 100 counties.
  - Create policy programs and MPA programs to encourage and enable students to enter election administration as a career.

### 3. Poll Worker Recruitment, Training, and Retention

#### Recruitment

Across the country, poll worker recruitment and retention is a major challenge, with 54% of jurisdictions reporting difficulty in recruiting poll workers in 2022, the most recent year for which these data are available.<sup>111</sup> Further, the average age of poll workers is 61, and 17% are first timers. The Election Assistance Commission data show that in 2022 in North Carolina, 48% of jurisdictions report difficulty recruiting. However, midsize counties, comprising half of North Carolina jurisdictions, have much greater difficulty recruiting, with, on average, 60% reporting difficulty. Election jurisdictions (counties) vary quite a lot in capacity to recruit poll workers.

Strategies are needed to recruit a sufficient level of supply and expertise among poll workers in order to effectively carry out local, state and national elections that the public can trust.

*Overarching Recommendation: Recruit High School and College Students to Work at the Polls*

We believe that engaging young people in high school and college is one of the most effective approaches to increasing the number of poll workers and election officials. We believe this creates a pipeline that will increase future engagement and sustainability of election administration.

<sup>110</sup> *Florida Certified Election Professionals*, FL SUPERVISORS OF ELECTIONS, <https://www.myfloridaelections.com/Certification-Training/FCEP>

<sup>111</sup> *Election and Voting Survey*, ELECTION ASSISTANCE COMMISSION (2022), <https://www.eac.gov/research-and-data/studies-and-reports>.

## 8. ELECTION INFRASTRUCTURE AND ADMINISTRATION





## COMMISSION ON THE FUTURE OF NORTH CAROLINA ELECTIONS

According to the Center for Information & Research on Civic Learning and Engagement (CIRCLE), the Minneapolis Election Judge Project found that precincts with a diverse population had higher youth voter turnout (ages 18–24) when they had multiple young poll workers.<sup>112</sup> This program demonstrated the positive impact of youth engagement on voter participation and community involvement. According to the 2020 U.S. Election Assistance Commission’s Election Administration and Voting Survey (EAVS), California had the highest rate of young poll workers in the 2020 election, with 22% of poll workers under age 25 and 13% under age 18.<sup>113</sup> This success can be attributed to targeted recruitment efforts and the creation of a welcoming environment for young people to participate in the electoral process.

We are fortunate that North Carolina is among the states that facilitates a formal Student Election Assistants program to recruit high school students, although there are no formal programs to recruit college students or recent college graduates.<sup>114</sup>

In 2003, the North Carolina General Assembly passed a law allowing high school students to work in the polls on election day.<sup>115</sup> These Student Election Assistants carry some of the same responsibilities as election officials and are compensated in the same way. To qualify, the applicant must be a U.S. citizen who will be at least 17 years old by election day and who resides in the precinct where they wish to serve. Applicants must be in good academic standing with the school where they are enrolled (including public, private, and home schools). They must also have permission from a parent (or guardian/legal custodian) and from their school principal or director.

### *Recommendations and Approaches for High School & College Poll Worker Recruitment*

Election officials should:

- Create a social media campaign to publicize the Student Election Assistant Program more broadly.
  - We know that younger cohorts utilize social media heavily. We recommend creating a marketing campaign toolkit which would include templates of posts, videos, and resources that county boards of elections could modify to disseminate.
- Develop a Youth-Led Recruitment Initiative.
  - During the pandemic, when many older poll workers were hesitant to serve, a group comprised of Princeton University students, several high schoolers and a

<sup>112</sup> Ruby Belle Booth, *Youth Poll Worker Programs are a Key but Underused Way to Grow Voters*, CIRCLE (Aug. 16, 2022), <https://circle.tufts.edu/latest-research/youth-poll-worker-programs-are-key-underused-way-grow-voters>.

<sup>113</sup> *Id.*

<sup>114</sup> *Become a Student Election Assistant*, NCSBE, <https://www.ncsbe.gov/about-elections/get-involved-elections/become-student-election-assistant>.

<sup>115</sup> *Id.*



## COMMISSION ON THE FUTURE OF NORTH CAROLINA ELECTIONS

graduate of University of Chicago’s Booth School of Business, formed the Poll Hero Project ([www.pollhero.org](http://www.pollhero.org)) to recruit 37,398 youth nationwide to serve as poll workers during the 2020 election. This initiative proves that young people are willing to participate and serve if asked, especially if recruited by their peers.

- The Andrew Goodman Foundation has created a resource “The Hitchhiker’s Guide to Building a Youth Poll Worker Project” to help college students design a campaign to recruit their peers to be poll workers.<sup>116</sup> We could ensure that all N.C. colleges and universities are aware of this tool.
- Utilize students, who have previously served as poll workers, to serve as recruiters and spokespeople. They could speak to classes and student organizations about their experiences. Such testimonials could also be shared in videos and social media posts. Hearing about the opportunity from peers can be highly motivating for other students.
- Establish an Election Fellowship Program.
  - In 2023, Arizona Governor Katie Hobbs issued Executive Order 2023-03 to create the Governor’s Bipartisan Elections Task Force, with the goal of identifying bipartisan proposals for improving the State’s elections. Due to a shortage of election officials, one recommendation was for jurisdictions to create a paid fellowship (or internship) program that would allow recent college or graduate school graduates to gain election experience and possibly compete for a job in the jurisdiction’s County Recorder or elections office upon completion.<sup>117</sup> In North Carolina, the equivalent would be for county boards of elections to create such a program.
- Mobilize Colleges and Universities or Existing Organizations that Promote Student Election Engagement.
  - Many colleges and universities in North Carolina focus on helping students vote. Several campuses have been recognized nationally for their activities in this area:
    - Voter Friendly Campus (Campus Vote Project)<sup>118</sup>
    - ALL IN Campus Democracy Challenge<sup>119</sup>
  - There are also several state-based organizations that work with colleges and universities to promote student election engagement:

<sup>116</sup> Evan Malbrough, *The Hitchhiker’s Guide to Building a Youth Poll Worker Project*, Andrew Goodman Foundation, <https://andrewgoodman.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/08/THE-HITCHHIKERS-GUIDE-TO-BUILDING-A-YOUTH-POLL-WORKER-PROJECT-Final.pdf>.

<sup>117</sup> Grace Klinefelter, *Arizona’s Bipartisan Election Task Force Finds Common Ground on Election Policy*, BIPARTISAN POLICY CENTER (Nov. 3, 2023), <https://bipartisanpolicy.org/blog/arizonas-bipartisan-election-task-force-common-ground-election-policy/>.

<sup>118</sup> *Designated Campuses*, VOTER FRIENDLY CAMPUS (2023-2024) <https://voterfriendlycampus.org/campus-designees-2024/#ncarolina>.

<sup>119</sup> *Participating Campuses*, ALL IN CAMPUS DEMOCRACY CHALLENGE, <https://voterfriendlycampus.org/campus-designees-2024/#ncarolina>.

## 8. ELECTION INFRASTRUCTURE AND ADMINISTRATION



## COMMISSION ON THE FUTURE OF NORTH CAROLINA ELECTIONS

- North Carolina Campus Engagement<sup>120</sup>
- Common Cause NC<sup>121</sup>
- You Can Vote<sup>122</sup>
- We recommend leveraging these existing initiatives to promote student poll worker recruitment. North Carolina could provide funding to create recruitment materials and incentives. We could create a competition amongst the 114 institutions of higher education that would incentivize recruitment. For example, the school that recruits the most students, and verifies that they actually work the polls, could receive a cash prize to support future student engagement.
- Alternatively, we could work with the system offices of the three higher education sectors—UNC System Office, N.C. Community College System Office and N.C. Independent College and Universities (NCICU)—to promote and incentivize recruitment.
- In February 2024, the U.S. Department of Education issued a statement that affirmed that Federal Work-Study (FWS) funds can be utilized to support college students in performing nonpartisan work on elections, including on-campus voter registration and assisting government agencies such as state and local election offices.<sup>123</sup> Importantly, leveraging federal work-study funds in this way is one way that institutions can fulfill their requirement under the Higher Education Act to make a “good faith effort” to register students to vote.
  - Several national organizations that promote student voting—ALL IN Campus Democracy Challenge; Campus Vote Project; and Students Learn, Students Vote—created a resource that addresses common questions and challenges that arise when establishing the position, as well as detailed strategies informed by campuses that have successfully established FWS positions for nonpartisan voter registration.
  - Another resource is the Federal Work-Study for Voter Registration Implementation Toolkit.<sup>124</sup>
  - In 2007, the U.S. Election Assistance Commission (EAC), which was established by the Help America Vote Act (HAVA) of 2002, disseminated a publication: “A Guidebook for Recruiting College Poll Workers.”<sup>125</sup>

<sup>120</sup> [www.nccampusengagement.org](http://www.nccampusengagement.org)

<sup>121</sup> <https://www.commoncause.org/north-carolina/our-work/elections/>

<sup>122</sup> [www.youcanvote.org](http://www.youcanvote.org).

<sup>123</sup> (*GEN-24-03*) *Use of Federal Work-Study Funds for Voter Registration*, FEDERAL STUDENT AID (Feb. 26, 2024), <https://fsapartners.ed.gov/knowledge-center/library/dear-colleague-letters/2024-02-26/use-federal-work-study-funds-voter-registration>.

<sup>124</sup> To access the Toolkit, please visit <https://secure.everyaction.com/MV-eyYLU206OT5ayoZqn3w2>.

<sup>125</sup> *A Guidebook for Recruiting College Poll Workers*, U.S. ELECTION ASSISTANCE COMMISSION (July 2007), [https://www.eac.gov/sites/default/files/eac\\_assets/1/1/Guidebook%20for%20Recruiting%20College%20Poll%20Workers.pdf](https://www.eac.gov/sites/default/files/eac_assets/1/1/Guidebook%20for%20Recruiting%20College%20Poll%20Workers.pdf).



## COMMISSION ON THE FUTURE OF NORTH CAROLINA ELECTIONS

While the publication is outdated, it does make the case for recruiting students and offers practical and successful methods of recruiting, training, and retaining college student poll workers, which are still relevant today. We could promote these approaches. A few examples of successful strategies included are:

- Professors including poll work in relevant course curricula or as part of a service-learning assignment.
- A college creating a recruitment campaign with posters, information tables, mass emails, media coverage, and peer recruiters.
- A political science department offering extra credit to students who serve as poll workers.
- Sororities and sports teams adopting a polling place where the students sign up to work.
- The Career Services departments including poll work as a job opportunity.\*
- We suggest framing poll work training as an opportunity for professional development and skill-building in areas such as customer service, problem-solving, and technology use. This can be particularly appealing to young people looking to build their resumés.

### *Recruiting Non-Youth Poll Workers*

1. “Snowball” Recruiting: This encourages current poll workers to recruit friends and family. Offering incentives for those who bring in the most new recruits can be effective. This method relies on the idea that a small initial group can grow exponentially as each person recruits a few more.
2. Adopt-a-Polling Place: This strategy involves partnering with nonprofits and companies to staff specific polling places. These organizations can be responsible for providing the necessary staff, similar to a potluck where each contributor brings a dish.
3. Targeting Specific Groups:
  - a. Retired or Former County Workers: These individuals often have transferable skills and experience with government procedures, making them ideal poll workers.
  - b. Future County Workers: People who have applied for government jobs but haven’t been placed yet may be interested in working the polls.
  - c. Retirement Communities: The North Carolina Department of Health and Human Resources could help in reaching out to retirement communities.

## 8. ELECTION INFRASTRUCTURE AND ADMINISTRATION



## COMMISSION ON THE FUTURE OF NORTH CAROLINA ELECTIONS

- d. Local Bar Associations: County Bar associations could create continuing legal education courses (CLEs) educating attorneys about the state and county boards of elections. These CLEs can serve as recruitment tools to enlist the involvement of more attorneys as poll workers.
  - e. Community Partnerships: Veterans groups, knitting clubs, Rotary chapters, Junior Leagues, the political parties, and other community and civic organizations could engage their members to work the polls. This can also include targeting groups based on specific skills needed, such as bilingual workers or tech-savvy individuals.
  - f. Corporate Partnerships: Businesses could help to recruit their employees. This can include reaching out through the company’s HR department or intranet. Also, many businesses offer their staff paid time off to volunteer. Pollworking could be promoted as an option. These partnerships can be mutually beneficial by enhancing the company’s community engagement profile.
4. Statewide Forms and Websites: Community partners could continue to promote and enhance the dedicated websites for election worker recruitment hosted by the NCSBE and all county boards of elections.
  5. Mailing Campaigns: The state or county could send poll worker applications to eligible voters, as done by the Nebraska Secretary of State’s office.
  6. Effective Messaging and Campaigns:
    - a. Celebrate Election Workers: The national Civic Holiday “Election Hero Day”<sup>126</sup> and campaigns like North Carolina’s “Democracy Heroes”<sup>127</sup> and Michigan’s “Democracy MVP”<sup>128</sup> celebrate and recognize the contributions of poll workers, appealing to their sense of civic duty and patriotism.
    - b. Public Service Announcements: Counties should continue to use local media, social media platforms, video platforms (ex. Wake County’s “Becoming a Precinct Official” video on YouTube) and public service announcements to spread the word about the need for poll workers.
  7. Recruit Extra Workers: Counties should have a pool of standby workers ready to replace no-shows. Examples include Wake County, North Carolina’s STAR team.

### Training

We also suggest each county board of elections, with support and funding from the N.C. Board of Elections, continue to develop comprehensive and engaging training programs to ensure

---

<sup>126</sup> Election Hero Day, <https://www.electionheroday.org/>.

<sup>127</sup> *Your Democracy Heroes*, NCSBE, <https://www.ncsbe.gov/about-elections/get-involved-elections/your-democracy-heroes>.

<sup>128</sup> Sarah Reinhardt, *Democracy MVP: Recruiting Quality Election Workers and Combatting Misinformation*, MI DEP’T OF STATE (2023), <https://www.nass.org/sites/default/files/awards/2023/MI-NASS-IDEAS-Nomination-2023.pdf>.

## 8. ELECTION INFRASTRUCTURE AND ADMINISTRATION



## COMMISSION ON THE FUTURE OF NORTH CAROLINA ELECTIONS

workers are confident and knowledgeable. This should include expanding existing training programs by offering multiple approaches, including in-person, virtual training options, peer-to-peer, and videos. We also suggest leveraging technology to develop innovative training and to simplify or improve on all election-related processes. For example, precincts are now using texting to update precinct officials on Election Day.

### Retention and Incentive Strategies

- Post-election debriefs and surveys can be used to assess and retain experienced poll workers, building relationships that encourage them to return and promote continuous process improvement.
- Leveraging national initiatives:
  - Help America Vote Day: This event utilizes resources and tool-kits provided by national initiatives to promote poll worker recruitment.<sup>129</sup>
- Incentives to encourage people to become poll workers:
  - Flexible Shifts: These allow poll workers to work split shifts rather than the entire day to make the role more accessible, especially for students and those with other commitments.
  - Financial Incentives: Increased stipends reflect the responsibilities and challenges of the job and can attract more people. Additionally, paying program administrators and faculty who help recruit students can sustain their participation.
  - Social and Community Benefits: Counties can emphasize the social benefits of working as a poll worker, such as the opportunity to engage in intense teamwork and meet new people. Using quotes from past workers about their positive experiences can be persuasive.
  - Transportation Assistance: Counties could provide transportation options or reimbursements for poll workers who need to travel to their assigned polling places. This can remove a significant barrier for many potential workers.
- Year-Round Outreach: We believe it is key that recruitment and outreach is facilitated year-round to educate potential poll workers about the importance of their role and the benefits of participating. This can include advertising the social and civic benefits of the activity.
- Use of Technology: Technology can be leveraged to enhance recruitment, training, and communication with poll workers. This can make the process more efficient and appealing, especially to younger, tech-savvy individuals.

---

<sup>129</sup> *Poll Worker Resources for Voters*, U.S. Election Assistance Commission (Aug. 30, 2024), <https://www.eac.gov/help-america-vote>.



## COMMISSION ON THE FUTURE OF NORTH CAROLINA ELECTIONS

By implementing these creative incentives, election officials can attract a diverse and committed pool of poll workers, ensuring the smooth operation of elections.

### 4. Election Expenditures

Scholars and policy analysts have long recognized that elections are underfunded in the United States. MIT Political Scientist and long-time election scholar Charles Stewart III wrote,

“Election officials are used to “making do” with what they have. They often express pride in pulling off the complicated logistical maneuvers necessary to conduct elections on a shoestring budget. One consequence of the frugality imposed on election administration is that services provided to voters vary considerably across the nation.”<sup>130</sup>

In fact, however, obtaining the exact amount that local election jurisdictions pay for election administration is just in its infancy. Recently, a team of scholars from the University of North Carolina at Charlotte published a book *A Republic if You Can Afford It: How Much Does It Cost to Administer Elections?*<sup>131</sup> They found that one can examine annual audited expenditure reports to get a sense of how much North Carolina is spending on election administration. In North Carolina, local county commissions provide the funding for elections. The State Election Board provides support, but the primary cost of elections is the responsibility of the county (See Appendix for report of spending for the past five years among North Carolina counties). We recognize that there is wide variation in the expenditures per registered voters in the state.

#### Recommendations

We recommend that the State Board of Elections create an emergency fund in cases such as the pandemic or other economic difficulties. Counties should be able to apply for the funds.

We recommend the State Board cooperate with universities to create educational programs for county commissioners and state legislatures so they can understand the technology, personnel, and infrastructure needs of elections as well as the importance of elections.

We recommend the State Board cooperate with universities to create programs for county commissioners and state legislatures so they can understand the importance of elections, the complexity of election administration, and the resources required to keep elections accurate, safe, and secure.

---

<sup>130</sup> Charles Stewart III, *The Cost of Conducting Elections*, MIT ELECTION DATA + SCIENCE LAB (2022), <https://electionlab.mit.edu/sites/default/files/2022-05/TheCostofConductingElections-2022.pdf>. Last accessed January 21, 2025.

<sup>131</sup> Mohr, Zachary, Martha Kropf, Mary Jo McGowan, & JoEllen Pope. Forthcoming. *A Republic If You Can Afford It: How Much Does It Cost to Administer Elections?* Cambridge University Press Elements.



## COMMISSION ON THE FUTURE OF NORTH CAROLINA ELECTIONS

### 9. MAIL-IN BALLOTS COMMITTEE FINAL REPORT

**Committee Members:**

- Shawnee Seese (Chair, Orange)
- Julius Brittman, Esq. (Durham)
- Stephen Duncan (Rutherford)
- Oluwafikemi Fawehinmi (Mecklenburg)
- Nadine Gibson (New Hanover)
- Brandon Rivers (Mecklenburg)
- Deondra Rose (Durham)
- Rebecca Schmidt (Yancey)
- George Smith (New Hanover)
- Glenda Weinert (Buncombe)
- Bill Wolcott (Buncombe)
- Michael Bitzer (Steering Committee Advisor)

#### **Executive Summary:**

The Mail-In Ballots Committee discussed various facets of the absentee ballot process in North Carolina. It conducted a survey to gather data related to public perception of election security. In addition to this data, the Committee studied trends in absentee by mail voting from 2004 to 2022. The Committee studied current laws and rules governing mail-in voting, especially North Carolina's procedures for absentee voting. Additionally, the Committee discussed the importance of public awareness and education, including the perceptions and attitudes North Carolinians hold about mail-in voting. The Committee determined that accessibility and security were particularly important aspects of mail-in voting.

Across these areas of study, the Committee developed recommendations to improve North Carolina's mail-in voting system. Among these were the implementation of a drop-box pilot program. The Committee also discussed North Carolina's signature verification pilot program.

#### **Public Meetings and Input:**

To gather comprehensive feedback from the public, we implemented a detailed data collection process through a Google form available on our website. This form requested participants to provide their zip code and indicate if they wished to remain anonymous, which allowed us to analyze the geographic distribution of the responses. Optional fields for names and counties were included to collect additional demographic data.

The form featured several key questions designed to capture a range of insights, such as:

1. "How did you hear about the NC Election Commission (NC EC)?"





## COMMISSION ON THE FUTURE OF NORTH CAROLINA ELECTIONS

2. "Have you voted in NC (once, fewer than 10 times, more than 10 times)?"
3. "Do you believe elections in NC are fair, safe, and secure?"
4. "What changes would you recommend and why?"
5. "Have you seen other states with election systems you prefer?"
6. "What do you like about the NC Election System?"

To ensure the survey remained concise, individual committees were also given the option to include specific questions pertinent to their areas of focus. This structured approach ensured that we gathered relevant and diverse input to inform our evaluations and recommendations.

### **Aggregate Data Results:**<sup>132</sup>

From 2004 to 2022, excluding 2020, the average percentage of total ballots cast by absentee mail-in voting in general elections was 3%. However, in 2020, this percentage surged to 18%, primarily due to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Analyzing party registration data between 2004 and 2024 reveals two distinct periods in absentee mail-in voting trends. From 2004 to 2016, registered Republicans typically held a plurality in absentee mail-in voting, reaching a majority in 2008, with their share ranging from 40% to 54%. During this period, registered Democrats constituted 28% to 42% of the absentee mail-in vote, while registered unaffiliated voters accounted for 14% to 28%.

However, in the general elections from 2018 to 2024 registered Democrats became a plurality, with their share of absentee mail-in votes ranging from 35% to 44%. This was followed by registered unaffiliated voters, whose share ranged from 31% in 2018 to 39% in 2024. Meanwhile, the share of registered Republicans in absentee mail-in voting declined from 27% in 2018 to 19% in 2022, but went back up to 26% in 2024.

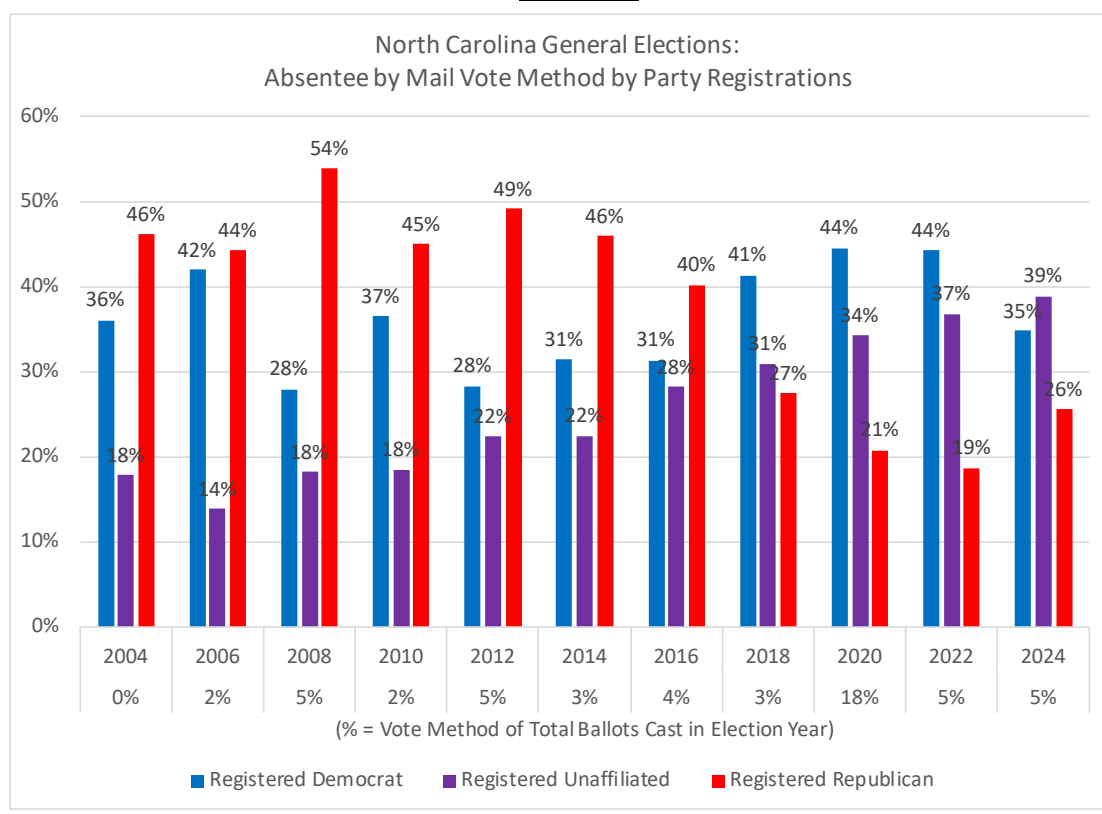
---

<sup>132</sup> Data analysis provided by Dr. Michael Bitzer.



**COMMISSION ON THE FUTURE OF  
NORTH CAROLINA ELECTIONS**

Chart 9.1



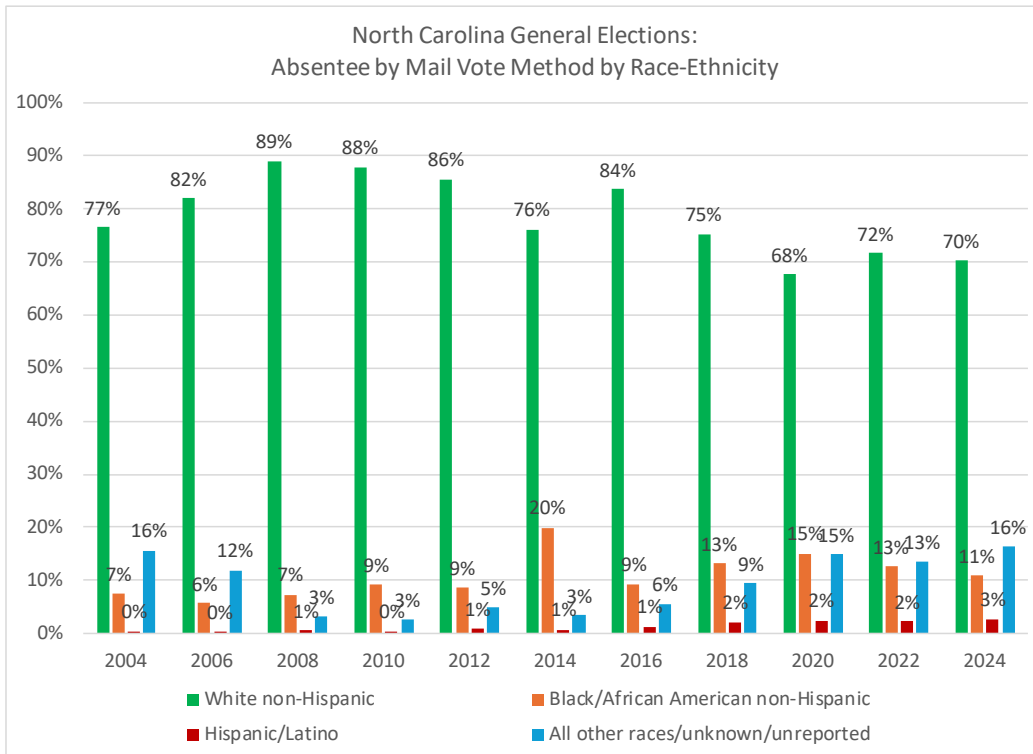
Based on voter race and ethnicity, a significant majority of absentee by mail ballots were cast by White non-Hispanic voters, with their share ranging from 68% in 2020 to 89% in 2008.

**9. MAIL-IN BALLOTS**



**COMMISSION ON THE FUTURE OF NORTH CAROLINA ELECTIONS**

Chart 9.2



The attached charts depict the percentages of votes cast through four different methods in North Carolina: absentee by mail, absentee one-stop/in-person, Election Day, and provisional/transfer. Additionally, the charts show the party registration and racial-ethnic composition of absentee voting by mail ballots cast.

**Topics Covered in the Discussions:**

The discussions encompassed a comprehensive range of topics crucial to the evaluation of North Carolina's mail-in voting processes. Key areas of focus included the current laws and rules governing mail-in voting, as well as the specific procedures for absentee or mail-in voting. The committee delved into the importance of public awareness and education, recognizing that a well-informed electorate is essential for effective participation in the voting process. Perceptions and attitudes towards mail-in voting were also examined, with particular attention to how these views are shaped by ongoing public discourse and current events.

**9. MAIL-IN BALLOTS**



## COMMISSION ON THE FUTURE OF NORTH CAROLINA ELECTIONS

Accessibility emerged as a significant topic, highlighting the need to ensure that all eligible voters, including those with disabilities and those lacking reliable mail access, can participate fully in the mail-in voting process. Security considerations were paramount, addressing concerns about potential fraud, tampering, and the overall integrity of mail-in ballots. The committee also had two main areas of special focus on signature verifications and the use of ballot drop-boxes.

Furthermore, the discussions explored the intersection of these issues with the broader context of current events and public discourse, understanding that the political and social climate can profoundly influence voter confidence and participation. By examining these interconnected topics, the committee aimed to develop a set of informed and effective recommendations to enhance the mail-in voting system in North Carolina.

### **Current Practice in North Carolina:**

The current practices for elections in North Carolina are governed by Chapter 163 of the North Carolina General Statutes, which covers a comprehensive range of electoral procedures and laws. Key areas include:

#### Voting Systems and Ballots

The statutes outline standards for official ballots, responsibilities for preparing them, and the requirements for different voting systems. This includes the powers and duties of the State Board of Elections and county boards of elections to ensure the adequacy and security of the voting systems used in each precinct.

#### Absentee and Mail-in Voting

North Carolina law specifies the procedures for voting absentee and the methods for transmitting these ballots to the county board of elections. Absentee ballots can be mailed, delivered in person, or sent via a commercial courier. They must be received by the county board by 5:00 p.m. on Election Day, with some exceptions allowing for postmarked ballots received within three days after the election.

#### Voter Education and Assistance

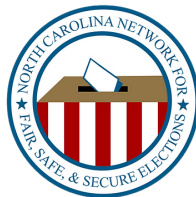
The statutes also address voter education, detailing the responsibilities of election officials to provide information and assistance to voters. This includes providing sample ballots and instructions, facilitating curbside voting, and ensuring access to voting for individuals with disabilities.

### **Committee Findings:**

#### Value Assumptions

The committee's robust discussions regarding North Carolina's mail-in voting processes were based upon a comprehensive set of value assumptions encompassing a range of topics. The intersection of these issues may have a strong connection to the level of public trust.

## 9. MAIL-IN BALLOTS



## COMMISSION ON THE FUTURE OF NORTH CAROLINA ELECTIONS

### Accessibility and Participation

- Voters lacking reliable mail access or those with disabilities may struggle to complete and return mail-in ballots independently, facing barriers to full participation in the voting process.
- Voters might have some awareness about mail-in voting but may lack clarity on the procedures, deadlines, or requirements, causing uncertainty about effective participation.

### Transparency

- Public trust in fair elections hinges on the transparency of NCSBE decision-making on mail-in voting, responsiveness to citizen and stakeholder concerns, and impartial enforcement of election laws.
- Some voters believe that mail-in voting lacks security compared to in-person voting due to concerns about tampering, fraud, or logistical issues like lost or mishandled ballots.

### Postal Service and Delivery Reliability

- Under USPS's procedures and safeguards, some mail-in ballots may still get lost, damaged, or delayed, raising voter concerns about postal service reliability and ballot delivery.

### Security and Integrity

- Voters have concerns about verifying ballots accurately and efficiently to prevent fraud, like signature mismatches or voter information discrepancies, which could compromise election integrity.
- Voters may have concerns about exploitation or manipulation by groups targeting vulnerable populations to influence election outcomes through coercion, misinformation, or unethical practices, potentially affecting their votes without full consent or understanding of the process.

### **Recommendations:**

The committee recognized that mail-in voting in North Carolina, akin to many other areas, presents a variety of challenges, shared lessons, and opportunities for meaningful solutions. The following areas are influential factors necessary to ensure public trust.

#### Ensuring Voter Accessibility and Participation

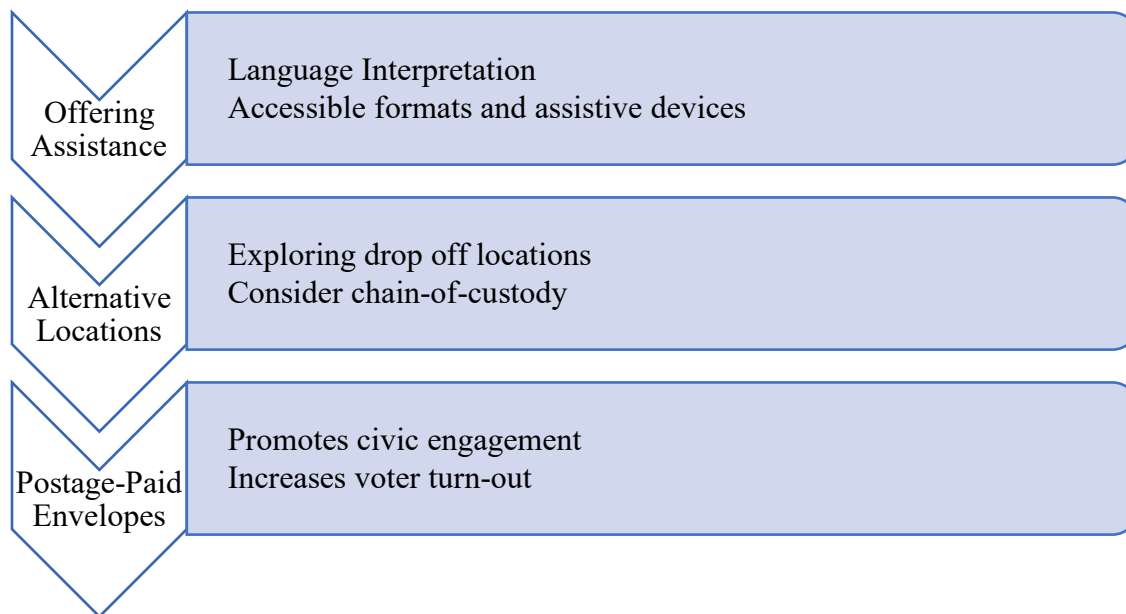
Programs may include providing language interpretation services, accessible voting materials, and voter assistance centers for support. Offering secure drop-off locations facilitates safe and convenient mail-in ballot submission, especially for those with postal or transportation challenges. Additionally, postage-paid envelopes remove financial barriers, ensuring economic status does not hinder participation in mail-in voting.

## 9. MAIL-IN BALLOTS



## COMMISSION ON THE FUTURE OF NORTH CAROLINA ELECTIONS

Chart 9.3



### Pilot Program for Ballot Drop Boxes

Ballot drop boxes have emerged as a prominent feature and point of contention in the consideration of the integrity of electoral practices. Some believe that offering voters an alternative method to securely submit their ballots outside traditional polling places and postal services allows for greater voter participation, while others believe that it poses substantial risk to chain of custody leading to the potential for election crime. The committee discussions were an honest and transparent exploration of the advantages, challenges, and considerations associated with the use of ballot drop boxes in elections.

### *Advantages*

Ballot drop boxes could significantly enhance accessibility and convenience for voters by eliminating traditional barriers such as limited polling place hours, long queues, and reliance on postal services. This accessibility empowers voters to deposit their ballots at their convenience, fostering broader civic engagement and promoting voter participation, particularly among those who prefer early voting or encounter difficulties accessing polling locations.

Moreover, well-designed ballot drop boxes could incorporate robust security measures, including tamper-evident seals, video surveillance, and regular monitoring by election officials. These features would ensure the integrity of deposited ballots, effectively mitigating risks of tampering or unauthorized access, and provide voters with a reliable alternative to postal voting during periods of heightened mail volume or logistical challenges. Additionally, in times of public health crises like pandemics or natural disasters, ballot drop boxes serve as a safe voting option

## 9. MAIL-IN BALLOTS



## COMMISSION ON THE FUTURE OF NORTH CAROLINA ELECTIONS

that supports social distancing measures, thereby safeguarding electoral participation without compromising public health considerations.

### *Challenges and Considerations*

Despite security measures, ballot drop boxes can be vulnerable to tampering or vandalism. Adequate surveillance, regular collection, and secure storage of deposited ballots are critical to maintaining public trust and electoral integrity. Unfortunately, the risks to maintaining the drop boxes are significant, especially considering that each county is subject to their own budget allocations, resources, training and even enforcement which create significant vulnerabilities.

Furthermore, implementing ballot drop boxes requires adherence to state and federal election laws, including guidelines on ballot collection, chain of custody, and accessibility standards. Compliance with regulations ensures that the use of drop boxes aligns with democratic principles and safeguards against potential legal challenges.

Managing ballot drop boxes involves logistical challenges such as installation, maintenance, and staffing. Coordination with election officials, law enforcement, and community partners is crucial to streamline operations and address any operational issues promptly.

### *Recommendations*

The committee agreed upon a consensus to recommend the implementation of a pilot program to assess the processes, efficacy, and the cost benefits and the risks of the use of ballot drop boxes in elections. The advantages in enhancing accessibility, promoting voter turnout, and supporting public health measures underscore their significance in modernizing electoral processes. However, addressing security concerns, ensuring equitable access, complying with legal standards, are critical factors in maximizing the effectiveness and integrity of ballot drop boxes.

### The Importance of Transparency in Mail-in Voting

Transparency is crucial for building voter confidence and trust in the electoral process, especially for mail-in voting. Clear and consistent communication about procedures, requirements, and deadlines reduces voter uncertainty and misunderstandings, ensuring a smoother voting experience. Transparent practices also enhance accountability and allow for oversight, which strengthens the credibility of election outcomes.

### Technology and Infrastructure Upgrades in North Carolina

Continuous improvement in North Carolina's voting process is essential to ensuring a fair, accessible, and efficient electoral system. This ongoing improvement is facilitated by embracing advancements in technology and upgrading essential infrastructure components. These enhancements will streamline processes, enhance security, and improve the voter experience.



## COMMISSION ON THE FUTURE OF NORTH CAROLINA ELECTIONS

One key area of improvement lies in implementing advanced systems for tracking mail-in ballots. By leveraging innovative tracking technologies, election officials can provide voters with real-time updates on the status and location of their mail-in ballots. This transparency not only reassures voters but also allows for timely interventions in case of any discrepancies or issues during transit. North Carolina currently uses a technology called BallotTrax, which allows any voter to track the progress of their mail-in ballot.<sup>133</sup>

Moreover, the adoption of secure methods for online absentee ballot applications is instrumental in simplifying the voting process for eligible absentee voters. Online platforms can offer intuitive interfaces, secure authentication protocols, and encrypted transmission of sensitive information, ensuring the integrity and confidentiality of absentee ballot applications.

Efficient communication channels play a crucial role in keeping voters informed throughout the mail-in voting process. Utilizing automated notifications, email alerts, and dedicated voter information portals, election authorities can proactively update voters about important deadlines, ballot receipt confirmations, and any changes or updates to voting procedures. This proactive communication strategy helps mitigate confusion, reduces voter uncertainty, and fosters trust in the reliability of the electoral system.

Overall, continuous improvement through technology and infrastructure upgrades is vital for enhancing the overall effectiveness, accessibility, and security of North Carolina's voting process. By embracing these advancements, election officials can better serve voters, uphold democratic principles, and ensure that every eligible voice is heard in the electoral process.

### Signature Verification Pilot Program

North Carolina Senate Bill 747 adopted in 2024 has enacted a mail-in ballot signature verification pilot program that will be implemented in 10 randomly chosen counties. This program will utilize specialized software to compare and verify voter signatures. Currently, there is a delay in information about the program. This will be an ongoing issue.

This committee discussed the current practices, applications, and implications of utilizing signature verification in the context of elections. At issue are the responsibility of election officials and stakeholders to address and maintain integrity and fairness in the electoral process. The following are key challenges the committee associated with signature verification:

#### *Subjectivity and Variability*

Signature verification relies on subjective judgment by election officials who compare the signature on a ballot envelope with the voter's signature on file and compare signatures between

---

<sup>133</sup> *BallotTrax*, NCSBE, <https://northcarolina.ballottrax.net/voter/>.





## COMMISSION ON THE FUTURE OF NORTH CAROLINA ELECTIONS

the witnesses and the voter. Variations in handwriting over time, different writing instruments, or changes due to health conditions can introduce inconsistencies in signature appearance, leading to subjective interpretations of similarity or dissimilarity.

### *Training and Expertise*

Ensuring that election officials are adequately trained in signature verification is crucial but challenging. Proper training requires ongoing education to keep officials updated on evolving handwriting trends and techniques for accurate verification. Inconsistencies in training standards across counties can lead to disparities in verification practices and outcomes.

### *Legal and Procedural Standards*

Establishing clear legal and procedural standards for signature verification is essential but can be complex. Guidelines regarding the threshold for matching signatures and the process for resolving discrepancies are not clear and therefore can be a precursor to conflict and confusion. Balancing stringent verification standards with accessibility and voter rights poses a challenge in ensuring fair treatment for all voters.

### *Time and Resource Intensiveness*

The process of manually verifying signatures can be time-consuming and resource-intensive, especially during high-volume election periods. Limited staffing, technological infrastructure, and budget constraints can impact the efficiency of verification processes, potentially delaying ballot counting and reporting election results.

### *Privacy and Security Concerns*

Handling sensitive voter information, including signatures, raises privacy and security concerns. Ensuring the confidentiality of voter signatures and protecting them from unauthorized access or misuse is critical to maintaining voter trust and compliance with data protection regulations.

### *Accessibility and Equity*

Strict signature verification requirements may disproportionately affect certain groups of voters, such as elderly individuals or individuals with disabilities whose signatures may vary more significantly over time. Ensuring that verification methods are inclusive and accessible to all eligible voters is essential for upholding democratic principles of fairness and equal participation.

### *Technological Integration*

The adoption of digital tools and technologies for signature verification introduces opportunities for efficiency and accuracy but also poses challenges. Ensuring the reliability and security of digital verification systems, addressing potential technical glitches or system failures, and



## COMMISSION ON THE FUTURE OF NORTH CAROLINA ELECTIONS

providing adequate training to election officials and staff are critical considerations in implementing technological solutions.

### *Legal Challenges and Dispute Resolution*

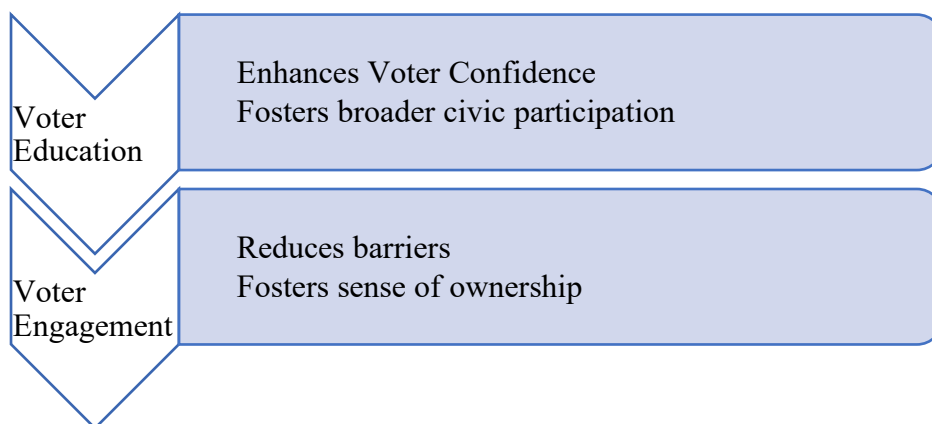
Disputes over signature verification, including challenges to rejected ballots or allegations of voter suppression, can lead to legal proceedings and public scrutiny. Establishing transparent and equitable procedures for resolving disputes and ensuring due process rights for affected voters is essential to upholding the legitimacy of election outcomes.

Addressing these challenges requires continuous improvement in training, technology, legal frameworks, and stakeholder collaboration. Election authorities must strive to implement fair and reliable signature verification processes that uphold electoral integrity while safeguarding the rights and accessibility of all voters.

### Community Engagement and Education

Community engagement and education play a pivotal role in promoting informed and active participation in the electoral process, as well as promoting public trust. When voters are well-informed about their rights, responsibilities, and the safeguards in place to protect the integrity of elections, they are more likely to have confidence in the fairness and transparency of the electoral process. This trust is fundamental to fostering broader civic participation.

Chart 9.4



In addition, community engagement and education initiatives serve to address barriers that may hinder voter participation. Moreover, community engagement fosters a sense of ownership and responsibility among voters towards the electoral process. By actively involving communities in discussions about voting rights, civic duties, and the importance of democratic participation, voters can have greater confidence and be more engaged in elections.

## 9. MAIL-IN BALLOTS



## COMMISSION ON THE FUTURE OF NORTH CAROLINA ELECTIONS

### Addressing Ballot Preparation Deadlines to Minimize Administrative and Financial Strain

#### *Background*

The 2024 general election highlighted a critical challenge regarding ballot preparation and distribution when a presidential candidate sought to remove their name after counties had completed ballot preparation. This led to significant administrative burdens, missed statutory deadlines, and financial strain on counties, as reprinting and re-testing were required. North Carolina's current statutory framework mandates that absentee ballots be available 60 days before the election (§ 163-227.10). However, it lacks a definitive deadline for finalizing candidate lists or party nominations, creating potential conflicts between ballot preparation and legal or political developments.

#### *Recommendation:*

To address this issue, the North Carolina Elections Commission should propose legislative changes to establish a Candidate and Party Nomination Finalization Deadline within a practical time frame that aligns with ballot preparation and mailing deadlines. This would ensure counties can fulfill their statutory obligations without unforeseen disruptions.

#### *Proposed Policy Changes*

1. Establish a Candidate/Party Nomination Finalization Deadline:
  - Deadline: Require candidates and political parties to finalize their status or nominations at least two weeks prior to the absentee ballot preparation period (e.g., by mid-August for a September 6 mailing deadline).
  - Rationale: This ensures counties have adequate time to complete ballot preparation, conduct logic and accuracy testing, and meet the 60-day deadline for distributing absentee ballots.
2. Codify a "Ballot Preparation Window" Prior to Mailing Deadlines:
  - Define a statutory "ballot preparation window" of no less than two weeks, during which counties finalize administrative activities, including design, printing, and testing of ballots.
  - Allow flexibility for counties to adjust timelines to meet statutory deadlines if unforeseen legal challenges arise.
3. Alignment with Political Party Conventions:
  - Collaborate with political parties to encourage scheduling conventions at least one week prior to the proposed candidate/party finalization deadline.
  - In instances where this is not feasible, establish a process for conditional ballot preparation, pending final confirmation of nominations.
4. Emergency Reprinting Contingency Fund:
  - Advocate for a state-administered contingency fund to cover costs of emergency ballot reprinting and testing caused by late-stage legal or political developments.



## COMMISSION ON THE FUTURE OF NORTH CAROLINA ELECTIONS

- This would alleviate the financial burden on counties and ensure uniformity in addressing disruptions.
- 5. Federal Coordination:
  - While North Carolina's absentee ballot deadline precedes federal requirements, work with federal election authorities to ensure consistency and compliance across jurisdictions.

### *Anticipated Benefits*

- **Administrative Efficiency:** Counties can streamline ballot preparation processes, minimizing disruptions and ensuring timely distribution of absentee ballots.
- **Cost Savings:** Reducing the likelihood of late-stage reprinting and re-testing would save counties substantial costs.
- **Voter Confidence:** Timely distribution of accurate ballots enhances trust in the electoral process.
- **Legal Clarity:** A defined timeline for candidate and party finalization reduces ambiguity and potential litigation.

### *Acknowledged Challenges*

1. Party Conventions Timing:
  - Aligning the nomination deadline with party conventions may require adjustments or accommodations.
  - Flexibility in preparation schedules may be necessary to address post-convention changes.
2. Unforeseen Appeals:
  - The statutory provision allowing ballots to be delayed in cases of ongoing appeals must remain in place but could be refined to include expedited resolution processes.
3. Stakeholder Agreement:
  - Achieving consensus among political parties, election officials, and other stakeholders on revised deadlines will require extensive consultation.

### **Conclusion:**

Balancing accessibility and security in mail-in voting is crucial for upholding the integrity of the electoral process while ensuring that every eligible voter can participate without barriers. Accessibility ensures that individuals from all walks of life, including those with disabilities, the elderly, and those living in remote areas, can exercise their right to vote conveniently and



## **COMMISSION ON THE FUTURE OF NORTH CAROLINA ELECTIONS**

without hindrance. It promotes inclusivity and democratization by removing physical barriers and expanding opportunities for voter engagement.

On the other hand, security is paramount to safeguarding the sanctity of the electoral system. It involves implementing robust measures to prevent fraud, tampering, and coercion, thereby preserving the trust and confidence of voters in the fairness of elections. Security measures encompass various aspects, such as authentication protocols, ballot tracking systems, and secure drop-off locations, all aimed at maintaining the integrity of mail-in voting and ensuring that each vote is counted accurately. Finding the delicate balance between factors that influence accessibility and security requires a comprehensive approach that considers the diverse needs of voters while upholding the highest standards of election integrity.

North Carolina leads the nation in election security and accessibility, further supporting the idea that our election processes exemplify excellence in election integrity. In sum, the Committee notes the following measures to ensure integrity within the mail-in voting system: inclusion of a voter ID with the mail-in ballot; the use of BallotTrax to track a voter's ballot; the use of paper ballots that have unique identifiers on them; and online services for people with disabilities.

The Committee believes that the following considerations should be explored to strengthen the safety, security, and fairness regarding mail-in voting as a vote method for North Carolinians:

- Improve Community Education and Awareness of the use and procedures regarding mail-in voting, especially with minority and rural communities
- Partner with the U.S. Postal System to improve process fidelity
- Invest in ongoing technology improvements
- Pre-paid postage envelopes for mail-in ballots
- Explore options using centralized drop-off locations for voters to submit ballots without having to mail them
- Improve chain-of-custody
- Improve transparency in rulemaking at the NCSBE regarding mail-in ballots

## **9. MAIL-IN BALLOTS**



## COMMISSION ON THE FUTURE OF NORTH CAROLINA ELECTIONS

### N.C. Election Integrity



Voter ID Required  
 BalloTrax allow real-time tracking  
 Paper Ballots  
 Ballots have unique identifier  
 Online Services for People with Disabilities

Improve Community Education and Awareness  
 Engage minority and rural communities  
 Partner with USPS to improve process fidelity  
 Invest in ongoing technological improvements  
 Pre-paid postage for ballots  
 Explore options using centralized drop-off locations  
 Improve chain-of-custody  
 Improve transparency in rulemaking at the NCSBE



## COMMISSION ON THE FUTURE OF NORTH CAROLINA ELECTIONS

### 10. PRIMARIES AND ELECTION DAY PROCESS COMMITTEE FINAL REPORT

**Committee Members:** Sherra Blackburn (Co-Chair, Wake)  
 Greg Randolph (Co-Chair, Orange)  
 Preston Blakely (Henderson)  
 Julie Eiselt (Mecklenburg)  
 Tara Muller (Wake)  
 Christopher Cooper (Steering Committee Lead)

#### **Executive Summary:**

The Committee on Primaries and Election Day Process studied a wide range of issues to develop this primer. In this report, the Committee first gives an overview of the general voting process, including background on how voters in North Carolina can register and methods of voting. In this section, the report also discusses the steps a voter will take to cast a ballot when they go to vote.

In addition to this background, the report covers discrete issues that impact how voters and election officials experience Election Day. It discusses how election officials prepare for emergencies, including contingency planning and communication with voters. Then, this section of the report covers the “ballot journey,” or how ballots are completed and handled during the voting process. It outlines how elections are made accessible for voters needing assistance or accommodations, as well as privacy and secrecy in the voting process.

The report details some of the people responsible for ensuring elections run smoothly, including poll workers and election day observers. It discusses how these people are selected, the roles they play in ensuring smooth elections, and requirements they must follow in their roles.

This Committee’s report also discusses processes related to the administration of elections, including opening and closing the polls, the tabulator system, vote counting, and certification. After their discussion on vote counting, the Committee studied alternative solutions to the counting process, such as runoff thresholds and ranked choice voting. Finally, the Committee discussed North Carolina’s semi-closed primaries, also included in this report. The Committee’s recommendations for improvement are listed at the end of this section.

#### **Committee Findings:**

##### **1. Overview of General Process on Election Day**

In general, elections in North Carolina involve several key processes:

### 10. PRIMARIES AND ELECTION DAY PROCESS



## COMMISSION ON THE FUTURE OF NORTH CAROLINA ELECTIONS

### Voter Registration

In order to vote in North Carolina on Election Day, one must be a U.S. citizen, resident of North Carolina, live in the precinct for at least 30 days, be at least 18 years old by Election Day, and not be currently serving a felony sentence. One may register by mail, in person, online, or at the North Carolina Department of Motor Vehicles. Same day registration is available during early voting, but not on Election Day.

### Voting Methods

One may vote in person on Election Day, vote at one of the early voting sites, or vote by mail-in absentee ballot.

### Primary Elections

Primary Elections in North Carolina are partially closed, meaning unaffiliated voters can choose any party's ballot if allowed by the party.

Runoff Elections are proscribed if no candidate wins 30% of the vote, and they include the top two candidates. Runoffs during primary elections are called second primaries.

### Voter ID Requirements:

One of the most significant changes to North Carolina's election process is the voter ID requirement. Voters must show a valid photo ID when they cast their ballot.

The following acceptable photo IDs must be unexpired or expired for one year or less, unless the ID holder is age 65 and up:

- North Carolina Driver License (NCDL) or North Carolina ID card for nonoperators
- United States Passport or United States Passport Card
- North Carolina Voter Photo ID Card, or
- Driver License or ID Card for nonoperators issued by another state, if the voter registered within 90 days.

The following photo IDs are acceptable, regardless of whether the ID contains an expiration of issuance date:

- Military or veteran ID card issued by the United States government
- Tribal enrollment card issued by a state or federally recognized tribe, or
- An ID card issued by a United States government agency or North Carolina for a public assistance program.





## COMMISSION ON THE FUTURE OF NORTH CAROLINA ELECTIONS

### Election Day Process:

On Election Day in North Carolina, the elections follow a specific process. Below are the key steps involved:

**Precinct Location:** Voters in North Carolina are assigned precincts based on their residential address.

**Registration Table:** On Election Day, voters go to their assigned precinct where they check in with the registration table. At the registration table, voters are asked to state or otherwise communicate their name and address and show an acceptable photo ID. The election official will look up the voter in the pollbook and repeat back the voter's name and address. For primaries, voters must state their party affiliation. Unaffiliated voters must state or otherwise communicate which ballot they choose to vote. Upon locating the voter in the pollbook, the election official will place the voter's identifying information on an authorization to vote form. The voter reviews the information and verifies that everything is correct by signing the form.<sup>134</sup> When a voter is not located in a pollbook, they are referred to the help table official.

**Ballot Table:** Once the voter receives an authorization to vote (ATV), they proceed to the ballot table where they receive a paper ballot. During primaries, the ballot table uses a scanner to ensure that the ATV matches the appropriate ballot for the voter. At this point, voters may also choose an accessible ballot to be used in the accessible vote machines, which in some counties are known as "express" machines. However, the majority of voters use a paper ballot and mark it with a pen in a voting booth. Only seven of NC's 100 counties use ballot marking devices, with a touchscreen, to mark the paper ballot.

**Voting Booth:** Once a voter receives their ballot, they are directed to choose a voting booth where they can mark their ballot in private. Voters with disabilities who need assistance have the option of bringing an assistant into the booth with them.

**Tabulator:** Once the voter is finished marking their ballot, they place the ballot into a ballot scanner called a tabulator, ensuring a paper trail for all votes cast at that precinct.

**Curbside Voting:** For voters who are unable to enter the voting place without physical assistance due to age or disability, election officials follow curbside voting procedures to process these voters.

---

<sup>134</sup> Signing an authorization to vote form with incorrect information may be deemed a crime, thus falling under voter fraud, which is illegal under both federal and state laws.



## COMMISSION ON THE FUTURE OF NORTH CAROLINA ELECTIONS

**Help Table:** In general, the help table official assists voters who encounter issues with their registration or are unable to receive a regular ballot. This includes handling provisional voting and precinct transfers. Voters may be directed to the help table for various reasons, such as discrepancies in their registration information or if they need to vote provisionally due to unreported moves or lack of proper identification.

### 2. Disaster Planning

On Election Day in North Carolina, disaster planning is handled through various procedures to ensure the safety and continuity of the election process. The State Board of Elections, along with County Board of Election officials, work together to develop and implement contingency plans in case of emergencies or disasters. Some of the key procedures include the following:

#### Emergency Preparedness

Election officials assess potential risks and develop plans to mitigate any potential disruptions. This includes identifying alternate polling locations, ensuring the availability of backup power sources, and coordinating with local emergency management agencies.

#### Communication

Effective communication is crucial during a disaster. Election officials utilize various communication channels to disseminate information to voters, poll workers, and any other people and/or entities affected. This may include emergency alerts, social media updates, and official websites.

#### Voter Information

In the event of a disaster, it is important to provide accurate and timely information to voters. Election officials ensure that voters are aware of any changes to polling locations, voting procedures, or election timelines through public announcements and outreach efforts.

#### Contingency Plans

Election officials have contingency plans in place to address different scenarios, such as severe weather, natural disasters, or infrastructure disruptions. These plans outline alternative voting methods, such as mail-in ballots or extended voting hours, to accommodate affected voters.

#### Precinct Level

During the lead up to Election Day, Precinct Chief Judges are responsible for assigning election officials with specific duties in the event of an emergency on Election Day. Specifically, these duties will involve securing and removing the tabulator and base; all completed authorizations to



## COMMISSION ON THE FUTURE OF NORTH CAROLINA ELECTIONS

vote forms; all boxes and open packs of unvoted ballots, including Express Vote ballots; all pollbooks; all sealed boxes of voted ballots; Help Table laptop; and, provisional ballots and pollbook pages bag (containing provisional envelopes).

### Coordination with Emergency Management Agencies

Election officials collaborate with local emergency management agencies to stay informed about potential emergencies and to coordinate response efforts. This ensures a unified and coordinated approach to disaster planning and response.

It is important to note that the specific procedures may vary depending on the nature and severity of the disaster. These procedures are designed to ensure the safety, accessibility, and integrity of the election process in the event of a disaster. Election officials continuously evaluate and update their plans to adapt to changing circumstances and ensure the integrity of the election process. This Subcommittee suggests that de-escalation training be given to Precinct Chief Judges prior to each election.

### **3. Ballot Journey**

Although all 100 counties can choose the specific voting equipment they utilize, our Committee was reassured by the robust safeguards in place regarding equipment, software and processes used to mark and record ballots.

*All voting systems in North Carolina use paper ballots, marked either by hand or with a ballot-marking device, providing a paper trail of votes cast that can be audited or recounted by elections officials. The only exception is for the very limited uses under UOCAVA (the online system used for US military members and families living overseas) and the N.C. Absentee Ballot Portal (the system for voters who are blind or visually impaired.)*

All voting systems are certified by the State Board of Elections after undergoing mandatory testing by nationally accredited laboratories. *All systems used in North Carolina have been tested, used, and audited in other states.*

As of 2017, any newly certified voting system in North Carolina must comply with the most recent Voluntary Voting System Guidelines (VVSG) for federal U.S. Election Assistance Commission (EAC) certification.

Under state law, with the exception of the UOCAVA and Absentee Ballot Portal, which are used only in very limited circumstances, voting equipment may not be connected to the internet or use wireless access on Election Day, limiting the possibility of outside interference. For more

## **10. PRIMARIES AND ELECTION DAY PROCESS**



## COMMISSION ON THE FUTURE OF NORTH CAROLINA ELECTIONS

information on the security of voting machines and cybersecurity in North Carolina elections, see the Report of the Committee on Ballot Security, Cyber Security, and List Maintenance at page 8.

Regarding absentee mailed ballots, once the ballot is received and accepted, that voter is marked in the system as having voted in that election. If that voter tries to vote in person, poll workers will not allow that person to vote another regular ballot. For more information on absentee ballots, see the Report of the Committee on Main-In Ballots at page 85.

The Committee also discussed exceedingly rare, but possible instances of machine or software errors and the value of voters identifying these issues early on and alerting poll workers.

### 4. Voter Accessibility and Voters Needing Assistance or Accommodations

#### General Information for Disabled Voters

Voters with disabilities sometimes face barriers learning about election procedure, registering to vote, elections deadlines, and candidates. Disability advocacy groups produce accessible materials at every election to enable voters with disabilities to access critical information about when, where, and how to vote as well as non-partisan information on candidates. It is distributed electronically, in large print to facility residents, in audio format (both English and Spanish), and distributed via Meals on Wheels partners who distribute educational materials with their meal deliveries, reaching people who may be isolated in their homes. Disability Rights N.C. also provides helpful resources, including the “Your Voting Rights” website.<sup>135</sup>

Also, North Carolina voters with disabilities have access to a hotline (**1-888-WEVOTE-2**) throughout the voting period for disabled voters who have questions or run into problems voting. Callers have access to immediate information and advice and, if needed, concerns can be elevated to the Chief Judge or others on behalf of the caller.

#### Voter Identification Requirements

The new voter ID requirements pose particular problems to many people with disabilities, who may not have a drivers’ license or other acceptable form of photo identification and who may face barriers accessing services to obtain that ID. The Board of Elections, recognizing these barriers, created a mechanism for people to obtain free IDs directly from their county board of elections office.<sup>136</sup> The Board of Elections also created a mechanism to allow institutions of higher learning such as universities and community colleges to apply for approval for their student and employee ID cards.

<sup>135</sup> *Your Voting Rights*, DRNC (Oct. 6, 2023), <https://disabilityrightsn.org/resources/your-voting-rights/>

<sup>136</sup> *Get a Free Voter Photo ID*, NCSBE, <https://www.ncsbe.gov/voting/voter-id/get-free-voter-photo-id>.



## COMMISSION ON THE FUTURE OF NORTH CAROLINA ELECTIONS

Despite these positive steps to help voters obtain ID cards, many voters, especially those in areas without accessible public transport, still lack a valid ID card due to lack of knowledge about the new requirement or challenges traveling to a physical location. To ensure that those voters are not disenfranchised, those voters with disabilities presenting without a valid ID may submit a provisional ballot and list “disability” on the photo ID exception form as a reason for inability to present a valid ID.

Disability advocacy groups also conduct a nonpartisan transportation project to connect voters with disabilities with rides to get acceptable ID to vote and to get to the polls. They partner with local paratransit providers and Medicaid transit providers to serve as many counties as possible.

As explained above, voters without acceptable ID can sign an “exception form” listing the reason they do not have ID. One of the options on the form is disability. 10 days after the election, local boards hold a meeting called “canvass” to decide if some ballots should not be counted. Disability advocates engage in canvass monitoring to ensure that the votes of people with disabilities are counted.

### Log of Non-Voters

Voters with disabilities comprise the majority of those voters who bring with them to the voting place a care partner or family member. North Carolina Session Law 2023-140 requires anyone not seeking to vote but present within the voting place (other than those under age 18, or an observer or runner) to enter their name and address on a log. The log shall include the printed name and address of the individual entering the voting place, the time the individual entered the voting place, and a space for that individual's signature. *While one version of a bill provided an exception for caregivers or family members of voters with disabilities, there is now no such exception.* The NCSBE provided information to county boards of elections regarding implementation of that log. The entry of a name onto the log does not in any way affect the actual ballot submitted. The vote is counted the same as any other.

### Curbside Voting

Curbside voting is a helpful option for people who want to vote in person but cannot, for reasons of their disability, safely access the facility. Every voting site in North Carolina, both during early voting and regular voting, must offer curbside voting for voters who are unable to enter the voting place without physical assistance due to age or disability. N.C.G.S. § 163-166.9. For purposes of curbside voting, the term “disability” means that the voter:

- Is unable to enter the polling place due to age or physical or mental disability, such as agoraphobia;
- Has a medical condition that puts them at increased risk of COVID-19;
- Should not wear a mask due to a medical or behavioral condition or disability; or
- Is experiencing symptoms of COVID-19.

## 10. PRIMARIES AND ELECTION DAY PROCESS



## COMMISSION ON THE FUTURE OF NORTH CAROLINA ELECTIONS

In many cases, curbside voting runs smoothly. However, from time to time, voters using curbside voting have to wait a long time to vote or are asked their disability when using curbside. Some voters report concerns that the poll worker did not follow protocol to keep the ballot covered and confidential after the voter submitted it. Voters often do not know that they can use curbside voting even without a “handicap” placard in their vehicle or other official designation, and that they do not have to explain the nature of their disability. Also, advocates have learned of barriers faced by vehicles carrying many voters with disabilities, such as vans from nursing homes being asked to drive through the line separately for each voter in the vehicle, resulting in enormous and needless delay. Nonpartisan advocates conduct curbside monitoring, employing local people with disabilities, community organizations, and volunteers to ensure curbside voting is administered properly and to advocate for corrections when needed.

### Signature Pilot

North Carolina Session Law 2023-140 required a pilot program during the May 2024 primary election for signature verification of absentee ballots, comparing an absentee voter's signature on record with the signature from their mail-in ballot envelope. While initial drafts of the bill were more expansive, the final law created a 10-county pilot program and provided that no ballots would be thrown out. The affected counties were Bertie, Cherokee, Durham, Halifax, Henderson, Jones, Montgomery, Pamlico, Rowan, and Wilkes.

This program, if it is broadened and/or extended to be used as a basis of rejecting a ballot, could significantly affect voters with disabilities. Disabilities such as those caused by serious mental illness, tremors or joint conditions, Parkinson’s Disease, Cerebral Palsy, etc., may result in handwriting changes over time.

While officials maintain that the software, currently used in other states, takes into account normal age-related changes in handwriting, it is unclear if deviations based on disability would be detected. Officials encountered delays implementing the pilot due to difficulty finding contractors, so the pilot did not occur during the primary election, but it did occur in the November 2024 general election. As of the date of this report, it is unclear what that data revealed and whether the program will be expanded in the future.

### Accessible Facility and Voting Machines

Many physical sites used for voting are not ADA compliant, so temporary measures are made to ensure access to voters with disabilities. Election officials are instructed to consider the accessible route into and through the polling place, including arrival, parking and drop off, moving through the facility, and exiting the facility. This helps identify physical barriers. A checklist of accessibility considerations is provided by the U.S. Department of Justice.<sup>137</sup>

---

<sup>137</sup> *ADA Checklist for Polling Places*, U.S. D.O.J. (Feb. 28, 2020), <https://www.ada.gov/resources/polling-places-checklist/#part-3-polling-place-accessibility-checklist>



## COMMISSION ON THE FUTURE OF NORTH CAROLINA ELECTIONS

Another physical accessibility issue is the machine itself. In counties where voters do not use electronic ballot marking devices, there is an accessible voting machine at every poll site. Sometimes, voters are unable to use the assistive technology when they vote because poll workers do not know how to work the accessible voting machine, they haven't turned it on and prepared it for use, or because the machine is broken. Disability advocates have encouraged voters to ask whenever they vote, especially if it is in the first week of early voting or early in the day on election day, to inquire about the location and readiness of the accessible machine at their poll site.

### Misinformation from Poll Workers

Most disabled voters report good experiences at the polls. In some cases, however, poll workers or others are often misinformed about voters' rights. Below are some examples:

- Voters with disabilities are turned away at the polls because poll workers believe they are being exploited by their support person.
- Poll workers do not allow a person to vote based on assumptions about their disability. They assume based on the severity of their disability that they do not have the capacity to vote.
- Poll workers ask people with disabilities to prove they have the capacity to vote, including asking them to demonstrate they can read and write.
- Voters are told they must communicate their own name and address verbally, even though another manner of communication is used due to disability. The law in fact provides that poll workers may not ask what the disability is or other personal questions.
- Poll workers offer to assist disabled voters, even though such offers are prohibited. Voters have the right to assistance from poll workers, but only if the voter asks for help.
- Voters are asked to explain the relationship of the person who is assisting them. The law states that they have the right to get assistance from anyone they choose, except a representative of their employer or union, and they do not have to explain themselves.

### **5. Voter Secrecy and Privacy**

In North Carolina, like in many other states, secrecy and privacy in elections are governed by state laws and regulations. Here are some key aspects of secrecy and privacy in elections in North Carolina:



## COMMISSION ON THE FUTURE OF NORTH CAROLINA ELECTIONS

### Secret Ballot

North Carolina law requires the use of secret ballots, ensuring that voters can cast their votes in private without fear of intimidation or coercion. This principle is fundamental to the integrity of the electoral process.

### Voter Registration Privacy

North Carolina has laws in place to protect the confidentiality of voter registration information. While voter registration records are generally considered public records, certain personal details, such as Social Security numbers and driver's license numbers, are kept confidential.

### Mail-In Voting

North Carolina allows for mail-in voting, and procedures are in place to protect the secrecy and privacy of mailed ballots. This may include using inner envelopes to shield the ballot from view and requiring voters to sign outer envelopes to verify their identity without revealing their vote.

### Early Voting and Polling Places

During early voting and on Election Day, North Carolina provides private voting booths or areas at polling places to ensure voter privacy. These areas allow voters to mark their ballots without interference or observation. Poll observers are not permitted to stand in any location where they can view voters' ballots.

### Election Security and Cybersecurity

North Carolina, like other states, implements measures to secure voting systems, protect voter databases, and safeguard against hacking, tampering, and misinformation campaigns. These efforts are essential for maintaining the integrity of elections while also protecting voter privacy.

### Election Observers

North Carolina has rules and regulations regarding election observers to ensure that they do not interfere with the voting process or violate voter privacy. Observers must follow guidelines and may be required to maintain a certain distance from voters and poll workers [see below for more details].

While specific rules and practices may vary, North Carolina, like other states, follows best practices for ensuring secrecy and privacy in elections. This includes regular audits and reviews of election procedures, training for election officials and poll workers, transparency in the electoral process, and collaboration with stakeholders to address emerging threats and challenges.





## COMMISSION ON THE FUTURE OF NORTH CAROLINA ELECTIONS

### 6. Precinct Election Officials (Poll Workers)

In North Carolina, the law regarding precinct election officials during elections is outlined in the North Carolina General Statutes, specifically in Chapter 163-41 and 42, Article 5. These officials, also referred to as poll workers, play an important role in ensuring the transparency and integrity of the voting process. For the purpose of this segment, precinct election officials include the Precinct Chief Judge, Judges, and Assistants. Here are some key points from the law:

#### Appointment of Chief Judges and Judges

One chief judge and two judges are appointed by county boards of elections for each precinct. Chief judges and judges are appointed for two-year terms. County boards of elections can appoint two or more assistants for each precinct to aid the chief judge and judges.

#### Qualifications

All precinct election officials must be registered voters of the county where the precinct is located, of good repute, and able to read and write. They cannot hold any elective office, be a candidate for nomination or election, or hold any office in a political party or organization. Additionally, they cannot be a manager or treasurer for any candidate or political party. Close relatives (spouse, child, sibling, etc.) of candidates cannot serve as precinct officials in the same election.

#### Duties

The chief judge is the lead precinct official and is responsible for organizing and assigning all Setup and Election Day activities, troubleshooting voter issues, as well as picking up and returning election day supplies before and after each election. The chief judge is responsible for all the ballots assigned to them on pickup day. The chief judge is responsible for filling out the reconciliation form after the closing of the polls on Election Day. The chief judge and judges must sign the reconciliation form. The chief judge is also responsible for contacting the polling place to arrange for access, set up, and closing up the room or facility on Election Day.

The judges work closely with the chief judge and are responsible for conducting the election. They must sign all official documents and assist resolving any challenges. Judges must assist the chief judge in setting up the tabulator before the opening of the polls on Election Day. Likewise, judges must assist the chief judge in closing down the tabulator after closing the polls on Election. In the case of curbside voters, only a chief judge or judge shall enter a voter's ballot into the tabulator. In the event a chief judge or one of the two judges is assisting a curbside voter, only a non-assisting judge or chief judge may insert the curbside voter's ballot in the tabulator.

Assistants serve at the direction of the chief judge.

## 10. PRIMARIES AND ELECTION DAY PROCESS



## COMMISSION ON THE FUTURE OF NORTH CAROLINA ELECTIONS

Help Table: The help table official can be a judge or assistant, but must have specialized training before being allowed to work the position. This specialized training must be taken before each election, other than runoffs and second primaries (provided the election official had help table training before the initial election). The help table official is responsible for managing precinct transfers and provisional ballots. The most common scenarios are unreported moves, late voter registration applications, and assisting voters with any questions they may have.

Elections are always held on Tuesdays. Setup day is always the Monday before election day and attendance is mandatory for each election. On election day, precinct officials must be in the voting place between 5:45–6:00 am and remain in the voting place until all votes have been counted and official documents signed (usually until 8:30–9:00 pm). N.C.G.S. § 163-47 requires that all precinct election officials remain at the voting place for the entire time the polls are open. No precinct election official may leave the voting place, except in extreme emergencies, for which a replacement will occur promptly.

### Training

North Carolina General Statutes, specifically in Chapter 163-46, Article 5, requires all precinct election officials to attend training sessions conducted by the county board of elections prior to each election, but not runoffs or second primaries. The training sessions cover specific issues related to the upcoming election, such as: the specific laws and procedures governing the upcoming election, including voter registration, absentee ballots, and provisional ballots; training on setting up and operating voting equipment; instructions on assisting voters, including curbside voting and handling voter ID checks; and, detailed guidance on election officials' roles and responsibilities on election day, including opening and closing the polls and securing the polling place. Training sessions are mandatory. Precinct election officials are paid to attend these training sessions in addition to their setup and election day compensation duties. The Wake County Board of Elections is an excellent model for training resources. It is this subcommittee's recommendation that Wake County Board of Elections' training materials be shared with the other 99 counties within North Carolina.

### County Political Party Chairs

The county chairs of each of the two major political parties have the right to recommend two Chief Judges and two Judges in each precinct. If the county board of elections receives these recommendations by the fifth day preceding the date in which appointments are made, the county board of election must make precinct appointments from the recommended names list. If the political party chair of the party having the greatest number of registered voters in the State, recommends a judge by the fifth day preceding the date in which appointments are made, the county board of election must appoint that person. N.C.G.S. § 163-41. If recommendations by party chairs are insufficient, the county board of elections, by unanimous vote by all its members, may appoint a precinct chief judge or judge. In general, the county board of elections



## COMMISSION ON THE FUTURE OF NORTH CAROLINA ELECTIONS

must try to appoint precinct chief judges and judges from the pool of registered voters within a precinct. After diligently seeking to fill these positions from within the precinct, if there is still an insufficient number of officials to work a precinct, the county board of elections may appoint to positions registered voters from other precincts of the county. In making its appointments, the county board of elections shall assure, wherever possible, that no precinct has a chief judge and judges all of the same party. In no instance shall the county board elections appoint out of precinct officials to a majority of the three positions of the chief judge and two judges in a precinct. Only one judge in each precinct shall belong to the same political party as the chief judge.

### 7. Election Observers

In North Carolina, the law regarding observers during elections is outlined in the North Carolina General Statutes, specifically in Chapter 163-45.1, Article 5. Like Poll Workers, Observers play an important role in ensuring the transparency and integrity of the voting process. Here are some key points from the law:

#### Appointment of Observers

Political parties, candidates, and nonpartisan civic organizations can appoint observers to monitor the voting process. Each party or candidate is allowed to appoint two observers per voting place, while nonpartisan organizations can appoint one observer per voting place.

#### Qualifications of Observers

Observers must be registered voters in North Carolina and must be approved by the appointing party or organization. They should not be candidates or related to any candidate on the ballot.

#### Observer Duties

Observers are allowed to be present at the voting place during the entire voting process, from opening to closing. Observers MAY do the following: make observations of election officials and voters and take notes including on a computer and/or phone (without capturing images, video, or audio); observe the Registration, Ballot, and Help Tables without impeding voters or Precinct Officials; report concerns and incidents to the Precinct Chief Judge; walk outside the voting enclosure to observe the curbside voting area or make phone calls, at the discretion of the Chief Judge; obtain the list of people who have voted at least at the following times: 10 am, 2 pm, and 4 pm; and, view bound sets of Authorizations to Vote (ATV's) without removing the binding. Practically speaking, most Observers sit at a distance from the Ballot Table and review the ATV's.

## 10. PRIMARIES AND ELECTION DAY PROCESS



## COMMISSION ON THE FUTURE OF NORTH CAROLINA ELECTIONS

### Observer Conduct

Observers must follow the instructions of the Chief Judge of the precinct and maintain order and decorum. They should not obstruct or disrupt the voting process. Any violations of the law or disruptive behavior can result in removal from the voting place. Specifically, Observers MAY NOT do the following: interfere with Precinct Officials when opening and closing the polls, but may observe these processes; speak to voters, voting assistants, or Precinct Officials (except the Chief Judge); wear or distribute campaign material; go behind the Registration, Ballot or Help Tables; enter the voting booth area or approach the voting equipment without the Chief Judge; position themselves to view confidential voter information on poll books, check-in laptops, or photo ID's; position themselves to see the contents of voted ballots, whether in the voting enclosure or at curbside; board a bus or other vehicle containing curbside voters; provide voter assistance; and, photograph or video voters in the voting enclosure.

It's important to note that the specific rules and procedures for observers may vary depending on the type of election, and there may be additional regulations or guidelines provided by the North Carolina State Board of Elections. It is advisable to consult the relevant statutes and guidelines or contact the local election officials for more detailed information.

### **8. Opening and Closing the Polls and Tabulator; Vote Counting and Certification**

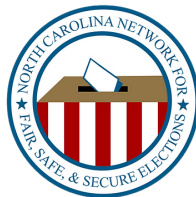
On Election Day, polling hours in North Carolina are open from 6:30 am to 7:30 pm. The process for opening and closing the polls, specifically the tabulator, involves several steps.

#### Opening the Precinct and Polls in North Carolina

On Election Day in Wake County and the other counties using ballot marking devices, the ES&S DS200 (or other approved machine) is set up as the primary tabulator at all voting locations. Here are the key steps for setting up the DS200:

- The DS200 is delivered to the polling place in a secure, locked condition on Election Day by the precinct chief judge.
- The DS200 is positioned so voters can easily insert their marked paper ballots for scanning and tabulation.
- The precinct chief judge and two judges unlock the physical locks on the tabulator using authorized keys.
- The machine is powered on, triggering an automatic self-diagnostic test to check for any errors or system changes.
- Officials enter access code to log into the system.
- The correct election definition is loaded via a proprietary, encrypted USB flash drive.
- The large touchscreen display is set up for voter and poll worker use. Once the tabulator boots up, the chief judge and two judges confirm that the Blue Official Election Seal has

## **10. PRIMARIES AND ELECTION DAY PROCESS**



## COMMISSION ON THE FUTURE OF NORTH CAROLINA ELECTIONS

not been voided. Once the screen message ‘Election Definition found’ appears, one of the three officials can press the ‘Open Polls’ button. At that point, a Zero Tape will print. This tape remains attached to the tabulator and the officials verify that the date, time, and precinct number are correct. Officials also verify that the zero tape shows that all ballots cast and vote totals show as ‘zero’ on the tape. Once the Zero Tape has finished printing, all three officials sign the tape, then roll and secure it behind a cover, where it remains until polls close. At this point, the tabulator screen should display “Public Count: 0” and “Welcome Please Insert Your Ballot.” If not, officials are instructed to call the helpline of their county board of elections immediately.

- A secure ballot storage bin is attached to collect scanned ballots.
- Tamper-evident seals are applied to secure access points. Throughout the day, the DS200 will scan and tabulate hand-marked paper ballots as well as those marked by the ES&S ExpressVote ballot marking device for voters with disabilities. The DS200 operates fully offline with no wireless capabilities to ensure security.

### Closing the Precinct and Polls in North Carolina

**Announcement:** At 7:30 pm, the Chief Judge or one of the Judges, announce the closing of the polls. Any voter who is in line before 7:30 pm is allowed to vote (including curbside voters), even if it extends past the official closing time.

**Completion of voting:** The polling officials ensure that all voters who were in line before 7:30 pm have the chance to cast their ballots. They guide the voters through the voting process and assist them with any questions or concerns.

**Closing procedures:** The precinct officials follow specific closing procedures, which includes reconciling the number of ballots issued, checking the integrity of the voting machines, and securing all election materials.

**Closing the Tabulator:** Once all eligible voters have completed their voting, the Precinct chief judge and the two judges begin the process of Closing the Polls on the Tabulator. The process of closing down the tabulators at the end of election night helps ensure the integrity of the data.

The poll workers use a security key or access code to initiate the closing procedure on the DS200 tabulator. The officials remove the Blue Official Election Seal from the tabulator and place it on the Reconciliation Form. One of the officials then presses the ‘Close Poll’ button.

The machine prints out a results tape, which provides a summary of all votes cast on that specific tabulator. This first results tape remains attached to the zero tape, which is detached from the tabulator and signed by the chief judge and two judges. This tape goes in a specially designated bag that gets transported to the county board of elections. The chief judge records the ‘Total

## 10. PRIMARIES AND ELECTION DAY PROCESS



## COMMISSION ON THE FUTURE OF NORTH CAROLINA ELECTIONS

Ballots' number from this first tape onto the Reconciliation Form. Four more results tapes are printed for a total of five results tapes. Tape number two and three are given to the two judges to mail from their home on the day after the election. Tapes two and three are signed by all three officials. Tape four is not signed, but is detached and placed on the outside of the voting enclosure for inspection by the public. Tape number five remains attached to the tabulator. Once the fifth results tape has printed, an official presses the "Power Button" until the tabulator initiates the shutdown process. Once this process is initiated, the tabulator screen will show "Continue Power Down." The user presses this button. Once the tabulator is fully powered down, the thumb drive is removed and sealed in a separate envelope, which is signed by all three officials. This thumb drive is transported by the chief judge back to a designated remote site managed by the county board of elections. Additional points:

The DS200 securely encrypts and digitally signs the election results data.

The encrypted results are transferred to a proprietary removable media device, likely a USB flash drive specifically designed for this purpose.

The ballot storage bin is sealed, and the tabulator is locked to prevent any further access.

### Additional considerations:

The removable media containing the encrypted results and the printed results tape are securely transported to the county board of elections for official tallying and canvassing. This process ensures the integrity and security of the vote count, as the DS200 operates fully offline and incorporates multiple layers of security, including physical locks, password protection, and data encryption.

**Secure Removal of Memory Cards:** By removing the memory cards or storage devices from the tabulators, the election officials ensure that the data is safely stored and protected from any potential tampering or unauthorized access.

**Proper Sealing:** The tabulators are typically sealed after closing them down. This sealing process helps maintain the integrity of the data by preventing any unauthorized access or tampering.

**Chain of Custody:** The closure process is usually conducted under the supervision of election officials and observed by representatives from different political parties or independent observers. This creates a chain of custody, ensuring that the tabulators and the data they contain are handled and secured in a transparent and accountable manner. Additionally, the voted ballots are boxed separately and sealed (the number of voted ballots will be indicated on the tabulator). Likewise, the unvoted ballots are counted, boxed, and sealed separately. The provisional ballots

## 10. PRIMARIES AND ELECTION DAY PROCESS



## COMMISSION ON THE FUTURE OF NORTH CAROLINA ELECTIONS

are counted and sealed in the red provisional table bag. The spoiled ballots are counted and sealed. All ballot numbers are imputed on the Reconciliation Form. These ballot numbers should add up to equal the number of ballots issued to the precinct chief judge on the Saturday or Sunday supply pickup day.

**Post-Election Audit:** The closed-down tabulators and the stored data are used for any necessary post-election audits or verification. This allows for a comparison and validation of the tabulated results, adding an extra layer of scrutiny to ensure the accuracy and integrity of the data. Overall, the process of closing down the tabulators at the end of election night is designed to safeguard the integrity of the data by following established procedures, maintaining transparency, and allowing for subsequent verification if needed.

**Reporting:** The polling officials report the results to the appropriate authorities and prepare the necessary documentation for the official vote tally.

It is important to note that the exact process is governed by the guidelines, procedures, and regulations set forth by the North Carolina State Board of Elections and the individual County Board of Elections.<sup>138</sup>

### Vote Counting and Certification:

In North Carolina, votes are counted and certified through a multi-step process. Here is a general overview of the process:

**Voting:** Registered voters can cast their ballots in person during early voting, by mail through absentee voting, or on Election Day.

**Vote Tabulation:** During polling hours, voters vote their paper ballots and enter them in a tabulator. During polling hours, the votes are continuously tabulated using electronic voting machines or paper ballots, depending on the county. Each county has a board of elections responsible for overseeing the vote counting process.

**Canvassing:** After the initial vote tabulation, a canvass is conducted to review and verify the results. This involves comparing the number of ballots cast with the number of voters who checked in at the polling places, as well as checking for any irregularities or errors.

**Provisional Ballots:** Any provisional ballots cast are reviewed by hand at the individual county Board of Elections to determine if they meet the eligibility requirements. This is done by members of the county board of elections, in bi-partisan manner, with one Democrat and one

---

<sup>138</sup> *Post-Election Procedures and Audits*, NCSBE, <https://www.ncsbe.gov/about-elections/election-security/post-election-procedures-and-audits>



## COMMISSION ON THE FUTURE OF NORTH CAROLINA ELECTIONS

Republican viewing and agreeing on each ballot. These are usually ballots cast by voters whose eligibility is in question, who fail to present a valid ID, or whose names do not appear on the voter rolls.

**Certification:** Once the canvassing is complete, the county boards of elections certify the results. They submit the results to the State Board of Elections, which also conducts a review and certification process.

**Audit and Recount:** In some cases, a post-election audit or recount may be conducted to ensure the accuracy of the results. This can be triggered by a close margin of victory or a request from a candidate or voter.

**State Certification:** After the review and certification process, the State Board of Elections certifies the final results. This certification includes the winners of each race and the official vote totals.

Note that this is a general overview, and specific procedures may vary slightly depending on a county by county basis. The North Carolina State Board of Elections provides detailed information and resources on the election process for voters and candidates.

### 9. Runoff Thresholds and Ranked Choice Voting

With an increasing number of voters feeling disenfranchised about the value of their vote, and with politics becoming more and more polarized, there is a growing call nationwide for election reform. Fewer people exercise their right to vote when they feel their vote “doesn’t count” or they don’t believe they have a choice in candidates due to a variety of factors.

#### Runoff Thresholds

In North Carolina in particular, the low electoral threshold for a candidate victory is one area that warrants consideration. North Carolina’s threshold is 30%. Coupled with the fact that most voters are in districts that are firmly skewed to one party or another, many voters don’t feel their vote will matter, and candidates can win an election with a relatively low number of voter participation. For example, in a 2021 North Carolina congressional primary race, the winning candidate earned 33% of the vote, with only 20% turnout. The candidate predictably went on to win the general election as the district was heavily skewed toward the candidate’s party. Therefore the primary race was the most consequential determinant of a victory, and effectively, only 6.6% of the voters determined who would be their congressional representative.

However if no candidate wins 30% of an electoral vote, the second place candidate can request a second election. These runoff elections are costly to the state and to counties, and likely result in even lower voter participation. In the recent May 14th primary runoff for two statewide races and

## 10. PRIMARIES AND ELECTION DAY PROCESS





## COMMISSION ON THE FUTURE OF NORTH CAROLINA ELECTIONS

one congressional race, less than 3% of eligible North Carolina voters cast a vote, and the election cost taxpayers millions of dollars.<sup>139</sup> North Carolina is only one of a few states that hold this form of runoff. And in other states that do, the threshold is typically higher, at 50%.

It is worth examining not only the practice of election runoffs and the threshold levels, as well as alternatives to our current electoral system that would result in more participation by voters, and an increase in voter confidence.

### Ranked Choice Voting

An electoral system that has gotten a lot of attention in the past few election cycles is Ranked Choice Voting (RCV), or Instant Runoff Voting. The N.C. General Assembly passed a law in 2006 to pilot RCV in certain N.C. jurisdictions that met particular criteria. However, after running a pilot in two jurisdictions, the statewide RCV law was repealed by the General Assembly in 2013 as part of a sweeping voter ID bill.

Although there are various methods for using Ranked Choice Voting, in its most basic form, candidates of all parties run against each other in a primary, with the top four voter-getters advancing to a ranked choice general election. Voters then rank candidates on the general election ballot in order of preference from first to fourth. If one candidate receives more than 50% on the first count of votes, they are declared the winner. If no one reaches that threshold, then the candidate with the fewest 1st-choice votes is eliminated and voters that ranked that candidate 1st have their 2nd place vote counted. This process continues until one candidate receives an outright majority of votes. Rank Choice Voting may be used in statewide and federal elections, in judicial or municipal elections, or even for a party convention nominating process.

However in the election of November 2024 voters in some states pushed back against the concept of Ranked Choice Voting. The prevailing reason was that many voters found the system confusing, and both parties felt the system of Ranked Choice Voting favored the other party, despite successes of candidates in both parties. Such was the case in Arizona, Colorado, Idaho, Montana, Nevada, Oregon and South Dakota, while an RCV ballot measure succeeded in the District of Columbia. A majority of voters in Missouri proactively cast ballots to prohibit Ranked Choice Voting. Alaska—one of the first states to implement Ranked Choice Voting statewide—narrowly voted to keep their system of voting. Ranked Choice Voting ballot measures did, however, succeed in local races, such as in Bloomington, MN; and Oak Park, IL; and Peoria, IL.

---

<sup>139</sup> Lt. Gov: Hal Weatherman and Jim O’Neill, Auditor: Dave Bolick and Jack Clark, NC-13: Brad Knott and Kelly Daughtry



## COMMISSION ON THE FUTURE OF NORTH CAROLINA ELECTIONS

Table 10.1

Pros of RCV	Cons of RCV
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reduces political polarization.</li> <li>• May increase voter turnout in particular in a district that leans heavily towards one party.</li> <li>• Fosters party unity because there is incentive to seek to be the 2nd or 3rd choice of the opponents' base.</li> <li>• Encourages voters to become more informed on all of the candidates and their issues.</li> <li>• Reduces negative campaigning because candidates need a coalition of support to be successful.</li> <li>• Shifts power of election outcomes from the political parties to the voters.</li> <li>• With proper funding to educate voters, can lead to greater voter participation</li> <li>• Can reduce overall election costs by eliminating the need for a run-off.</li> <li>• Reduces the dangers of vote-splitting or "spoiler" candidates</li> <li>• Doesn't structurally favor any particular party</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Can be a burden for election administrators and municipal clerks if there is not enough lead time for the transition, and more importantly, if funding for equipment, software updates, training and voter education is not appropriated. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Many jurisdictions suggest starting at the city or county level to study the outcomes and trying RCV for a few cycles before expanding to statewide races.</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Can be perceived as confusing if not properly rolled out to voters.</li> <li>• Although not necessarily an argument against the RCV method of voting, many political party leaders believe it takes power away from them, and as such are trying to pass laws to ban the use of RCV in their states</li> </ul>

Ranked Choice Voting has been used in some form for over 100 years in the United States, and is used in other democracies such as New Zealand, Ireland and Australia. In the United States, 63 jurisdictions have adopted some version of RCV, including Alaska; Maine; New York City; Minneapolis, MN; and San Francisco, CA. RCV has also been used to nominate a party's candidates for a general election. In 2020, it was used in the Democratic primary in four states, and in 2021, the Virginia GOP used it to select their statewide-office nominees (including governor) and for some congressional seats.

## 10. PRIMARIES AND ELECTION DAY PROCESS



## COMMISSION ON THE FUTURE OF NORTH CAROLINA ELECTIONS

Cary and Hendersonville participated in the Instant Runoff Voting/Rank Choice Voting pilot program for their elections in 2007. However, funding to prepare and educate voters and for voter mailings, media publicity, public demonstrations, and training of volunteers was not provided by the General Assembly and, as such, it was a limited, volunteer-led effort. Software at the time could not tabulate results and the voting was, for the most part, hand-counted.

According to FairVote.org, “Exit polls in Cary showed that 95% of voters said they understood ARV well or fairly well, and 72% preferred the system to voting for a single candidate”. 76% (Cary) and 65% (Hendersonville) of voters understood in advance of voting that the ballot would allow for ranking Town Council candidates. 68% and 67% preferred ranking candidates in order to avoid a run-off. 81% and 60% found the voting practice of ranking candidates easy to understand and 69% of voters in both jurisdictions ranked more than one candidate. Of those that did not choose to rank more than one candidate, 40% in both Cary and Hendersonville did not know enough about the other candidates while 23% and 17%, respectively, were concerned it would hurt their first-choice candidate. Although most voters expressed a preference for the RCV method, the lack of financial support from the General Assembly meant that there was no further experimentation with this voting method.

Should there be a future effort in North Carolina to move toward this system, the N.C. General Assembly would need to pass legislation to pilot or implement Ranked Choice Voting. At the moment, there does not appear to be support for such a move. However, there are groups working within the state that are educating voters and advocating for the opportunity to use RCV as an alternative to our current electoral system and this committee felt it is an issue worth further consideration.

### **10. NC’s Semi-Closed Primaries Approach**

North Carolina is a semi-closed primary state governed by state statutes, specifically N.C.G.S. § 163-119, which states: “Unaffiliated voters shall be allowed to vote in one primary of the voter’s choosing, subject to the provisions of N.C.G.S. §§ 163-59, 163-111, and 163-166.7. Each unaffiliated voter may vote in the primary of that party by announcing that intention under N.C.G.S. § 163-166.7(a).”

As a semi-closed primary state, North Carolina allows unaffiliated voters (those not registered with any political party) to participate in the primary election of their choice, while voters registered with a party can only vote in that party’s primary, which means such voters will only be given the ballot of that voter’s registered party.

The key points about North Carolina’s semi-closed primary system are:

- Registered party members can only vote in their own party’s primary;
- Unaffiliated voters can choose which party’s primary to vote in;

## **10. PRIMARIES AND ELECTION DAY PROCESS**



## COMMISSION ON THE FUTURE OF NORTH CAROLINA ELECTIONS

- If no candidate for a particular race receives 30% of the threshold amount of the vote, the second place finisher has the option of requesting a second primary (it is not automatic); and
- In a second primary, two types of unaffiliated voters are eligible to vote: (1) if they chose the party in the first primary that is running in the second primary, or (2) if they did not vote in the first primary.

In summary, while closed primaries restrict voting to only registered party members, North Carolina's semi-closed system opens up each party's primary to unaffiliated voters, giving those voters a choice of which party nomination to influence.

### **Recommendations:**

#### Incident and Disaster Planning

- North Carolina should consider providing and perhaps requiring de-escalation training for all local election officials and poll workers.

#### Training

- Wake County Board of Elections is a model of best practices. Their training materials and resources should be shared with the other 99 North Carolina counties for consistency and ease in running elections.

#### Ballot Journey

- The Commission and other stakeholders in North Carolina elections should publicize the extensive safeguards re: equipment, software and processes used to mark and record ballots to better assure the public of the integrity of N.C.'s election system. In particular, the fact that all voters have a paper ballot even if they used a machine to mark their ballots, the extensive vetting and approval process for voting systems in NC, and that state law forbids voting equipment from connecting to the Internet on voting days.
- Election workers should consider strengthening efforts to remind voters to review their paper ballots if they used a ballot marking device to generate their paper ballot.

#### Voter Accessibility and Voters Needing Assistance or Accommodations

- Voters with disabilities continue to need more education and outreach, especially about new procedures such as the new voter ID requirements, log of nonvoters, and the signature matching pilot. We recommend increasing external communications in accessible formats to voters with disabilities, especially those in underserved communities.



## COMMISSION ON THE FUTURE OF NORTH CAROLINA ELECTIONS

- Curbside voting option is another area where voters with disabilities could use additional education. Many people misunderstand it or believe they must have proof of disability to use it.
- Voters with disabilities and older adults in the affected counties should be instructed that, at least for now, the signature matching system cannot be used as a basis to reject a vote. There is concern that voters with some disabilities may be deterred from voting if they believe their handwriting is erratic or irregular.
- We recommend reducing physical barriers to safe parking and entry for voters with disabilities, and instances of accessible machine malfunctions or workers untrained on how to operate them. We recommend increased training for workers on all aspects of accessibility.
- We recommend increased training for workers and increased dissemination of voters' rights information, possibly in the form of flyers or wall hangings.

### Runoffs

- There are two competing issues to consider: maximizing the number of voters selecting a candidate and the high costs of runoffs. We suggest that the state evaluate whether changing the current runoff threshold merits consideration, in light of the high cost of potential runoffs.



## COMMISSION ON THE FUTURE OF NORTH CAROLINA ELECTIONS

### 11. VOTER ACCESS AND REGISTRATION COMMITTEE FINAL REPORT

**Committee Members:**

- Myron B. Pitts (Co-Chair, Cumberland)
- Ted Stille (Co-Chair, Surrey)
- Tony Almeida (Rowan)
- Nadine Gibson (New Hanover)
- Mariah Harrleson (Union)
- Susan Kluttz (Rowan)
- Tara Muller (Wake)
- Anna Katherine Neal (Mecklenburg)
- Brandon Rivers (Mecklenburg)
- Deondra Rose (Durham)
- Mary Ellen Shiflett (Guilford)
- Glenda Weinert (Buncombe)
- Robert Wilson (Wake)
- Martha Kropf (Steering Committee Lead)

#### **Executive Summary:**

We identified barriers that exist to voting for North Carolinians who fall into certain groups that make them vulnerable to such challenges. We looked at disabled and senior voters; voters who were felons and eligible to regain their right to vote; voters facing language barriers; college-age voters; and more transient voters, to include our large military community.

Consider these voter experiences:

Gertrude Stackhouse of Fayetteville, North Carolina, was 102 and legally blind when she cast her first ballot during early voting in October of 2020. Her son, Currie Stackhouse, rolled his wheelchair-bound mother into a polling precinct at a recreation center, and Ms. Stackhouse registered and voted with assistance from an excited team of precinct workers, as reporters filmed and took pictures. It took 20 minutes.

In November of the same year, Heather, a student at North Carolina Central University, a historically Black institution in Durham, was looking forward to casting her own first-ever vote. It was not as easy.



## COMMISSION ON THE FUTURE OF NORTH CAROLINA ELECTIONS

“Heather had registered to vote as a student in Durham, but because of COVID housing restrictions, she had moved back home to Raleigh,” *Duke Today* reported.<sup>140</sup> “Her first stop was her home polling site in Raleigh, but [she] was told she had to go to Durham, where she was registered. At her registered Durham site, she was rejected when she mentioned she was temporarily living back in Raleigh. That began a day of pinballing between polling sites and election offices.”<sup>141</sup>

She was finally able to cast a provisional ballot in Durham.

Both Mrs. Stackhouse and Heather belong to two groups who face unnecessary barriers to casting a ballot— senior and/or disabled voters, and college voters. They are the same in that they were casting their very first ballots, but their experiences were far from equal.

We, the members of the Committee on Voter Access and Registration, believe that should not be. As an MIT white paper on voter accessibility states: “Unequal participation can result from higher barriers to voting faced by some groups, and electoral systems should be designed and administered to lessen these barriers to promote equal access.”<sup>142</sup>

Our North Star guided our committee to identify what barriers exist to voting for North Carolinians who fall into certain groups that make them vulnerable to such challenges. We looked at disabled and senior voters; voters who were felons and eligible to regain their right to vote; voters facing language barriers; college-age voters; and more transient voters, including our large military community.

We also asked what changes, in practice or in additional resources, could we reasonably propose to knock down those barriers or at least address them.

To those ends, several members conducted research into what works here and in other states, and what may not work as well. Many members of our committee brought to the table extensive experience working in elections in their communities, and their on-the-ground observations proved valuable. We also heard from outside experts.

---

<sup>140</sup> *How a ‘Failsafe’ Protection for Voting Fails Students*, DUKE TODAY (Oct. 10, 2023), <https://today.duke.edu/2023/10/how-failsafe-protection-voting-fails-students>.

<sup>141</sup> *Id.*

<sup>142</sup> Lisa Schur, Mason Ameri, Joseph Dietrich, et al., *Ensuring Voting Access Across the Electorate: Best Practices and New Areas for Research*, MIT Election Lab, <https://electionlab.mit.edu/research/projects/mapping-election-science/white-papers/usability-accessibility>



## COMMISSION ON THE FUTURE OF NORTH CAROLINA ELECTIONS

Following are recommendations for improvement or areas that should be addressed when it comes to increasing voting access. Attached files include the research that informed our recommendations and our discussions.

### **Committee Findings:**

#### **1. Goal: Improve Accessibility for Disabled Voters and Senior Citizens**

Disabled voters and seniors often face a similar set of barriers, which include physical challenges in casting a ballot, lack of access to information, and travel limitations. We should take steps to address each of these.

#### Why:

With a growing population of seniors—53 million were eligible to vote nationwide in 2020—addressing any barriers is more critical than ever, especially with studies showing this demographic is more likely to vote than others. In North Carolina, approximately 13% of registered voters have a condition that makes voting difficult, affecting nearly 1 million people. 33% of these voters reported inadequate support or appropriate accommodations at polling sites. The turnout gap between voters with and without disabilities in North Carolina has narrowed but still lags behind the national average. Enabling an easier voting experience for seniors and those with disabilities likely improves the voting experience for all voters. National polling data reflects the reality that improvements that enfranchise voters with disabilities also do so for seniors and many other voters who may not identify as having a disability.

#### Recommendations:

We recommend curbside voting available to the greatest extent feasible and at least one site in all counties based on demographic densities of older voters and of voters with disabilities as possible. Further access to a standardized set of materials to enable a voter's autonomy and to ensure that all poll workers understand the laws, resources and accommodations available and how to use them. Finally, at least one election staff member or volunteer should be designated at each polling site to serve as a "subject matter expert" or navigator should a voter or poll worker require assistance or clarification.

Other recommendations include a need to do the following: expand mail-in voting, implement plain language signage, include people with disabilities on precinct staff, focus resources and training at early voting sites, ensure access to U.S. Election Assistance Commission training for assisting voters with disabilities, include information on accessibility accommodations in voter mailers, and expand access to acceptable photo ID for these two populations who are less likely to have a driver's license.

## 11. VOTER ACCESS AND REGISTRATION





## COMMISSION ON THE FUTURE OF NORTH CAROLINA ELECTIONS

### **2. Goal: Make it Easier for Felons to Restore Voting Rights.**

In our state, people convicted of felonies lose their voting rights during the period of incarceration and do not gain them back until they are clear of probation and parole. When they are paroled, in some cases they are given information on restoring their voting rights, but it is typically part of a flood of information they also receive about reentry. Their focus, understandably, is often elsewhere and on more immediate concerns, such as obtaining a job.

#### Why:

Studies indicate that felons who have their voting rights restored are less likely to re-offend. Voting is associated with positive behavior, and engagement in the electoral process can reduce feelings of alienation and disempowerment. Reduced recidivism leads to safer communities.

#### Recommendations:

Counties should make sure there is a standardized set of clear materials that everyone in the reentry process has access to and which can be distributed in collaboration with facilities, nonprofits and other organizations that work with reentry. It is vital that the community that welcomes these individuals understands and is aware of a formerly-justice-involved person's voting rights and how a newly eligible individual might register and vote. Our state should consider how to maintain a coherent list for both the formerly incarcerated and election officials detailing who is eligible to vote and who is about to be eligible to vote.

### **3. Goal: Expand Language Translation Services.**

Counties covered under Section 203 of the Voting Rights Act must provide bilingual ballots, registration forms and other election materials. Currently, no counties in North Carolina are covered under Section 203. Voter registration forms and absentee ballot requests are available in English and Spanish, and the state NCSBE website does provide translation into 14 languages. Enabling voter self-sufficiency relieves a burden of responsibility on English-only staff and volunteers and encourages participation.

#### Why:

Language barriers can significantly hinder voter participation. Offering translated materials ensures that all eligible voters can understand and engage fully in the voting process.

#### Recommendations:

Comprehensive language translation services should be provided for non-English speakers, including translated voting materials, ballots, and voter education resources. Focus on languages prevalent among North Carolina's voter demographics.



## COMMISSION ON THE FUTURE OF NORTH CAROLINA ELECTIONS

### **4. Goal: Make it easier for college students to register and vote.**

When it comes to voting, college students are affected by barriers that impact more transient populations. They often move away from their home communities to attend school, leading to logistical challenges in re-registering to vote and understanding new local candidates and issues. Many, of course, are also first-time voters to whom the registration and voting process may be unfamiliar.

#### Why:

Young people are less likely to vote, studies have shown. Young people who vote shortly after becoming eligible are more likely to become habitual voters, which is good for democracy.

#### Recommendations:

Wherever possible, county boards of elections should set up polling sites on campuses. Establishing voting centers on college campuses significantly increases student voter turnout by reducing the logistical and informational costs associated with voting. Additionally, early in-person voting has been shown to positively impact the election participation of young voters.

All efforts should be accompanied by a robust education and outreach campaign that could include registration drives, information sessions and campaign activities targeting students.

### **5. Goal: Reduce potential for fraud and confusion for voters who move to North Carolina from elsewhere.**

By comparing North Carolina voter rolls to those in other states, voters can more easily navigate the registration process and assist the accuracy of voter registration and eligibility.

#### Why:

Comparison of voter rolls protects against both bad actors and good-faith confusion or administrative oversight. This will be particularly helpful to members of the military in a state that has the fourth-largest number of military members in the country as well as an increasingly mobile work-force. While the military member themselves is counseled about change-of-residency and voter registration during a military move, there is not a systemic process for spouses and dependents. There certainly is no such process for nonmilitary changes of residency beyond the DMV.

#### Recommendations:

Adopt a system that can compare North Carolina voter lists with those from other states. This will help avoid duplications and reduce the possibility of fraud. One such system already in use is ERIC, although our N.C. General Assembly decided not to move forward with enrollment in the program at this time.



## COMMISSION ON THE FUTURE OF NORTH CAROLINA ELECTIONS

ERIC stands for Electronic Registration Information Center and is succinctly described by the Heritage Foundation: “ERIC functions by using data from voter registration records, motor vehicle departments, and other official data sources. Member states submit this data to ERIC, which then uses sophisticated matching algorithms to identify potential inaccuracies. The system generates reports that help states update their voter rolls by adding eligible voters and removing ineligible ones.”

ERIC’s pros: It improves the accuracy of participating states’ voter registration lists; provides low-cost ways to maintain voter rolls; and helps identify unregistered voters, which can lead to increased registration efforts and get more people participating in democracy.

ERIC’s cons: Some are concerned about privacy because of shared voter data; others fear it can be used for political purposes to remove eligible voters; ERIC is only as accurate as the data provided by states; and finally, there is concern whether the algorithms are strong enough.

# THE COMMISSION ON THE FUTURE OF NORTH CAROLINA ELECTIONS



## SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS

- 1. Areas with No Consensus**
- 2. Adequate Funding**
- 3. Personnel Challenges**
- 4. Civic Education and Best Practices**
- 5. Voter Accessibility**
- 6. Security Needs**
- 7. Legislative Priorities**



## **COMMISSION ON THE FUTURE OF NORTH CAROLINA ELECTIONS**

### **THEMES ACROSS COMMITTEES**

While each committee developed their own recommendations, some themes emerged that indicate issues across various areas of the electoral process. These are listed on the preceding page and include the following: a lack of adequate funding, personnel challenges, best practices for civic education and outreach, increasing voter accessibility, and improving security. The committees also developed legislative priorities, which are detailed at length in their committee reports and summarized below. Finally, on a number of issues, committees determined that more research was needed before making recommendations. Those issues are also listed below. This section is a high-level summary of issues common to the various committees, but does not represent an exhaustive or consensus view of remedial actions North Carolina should take.

### **AREAS WITH NO CONSENSUS**

The committees identified a number of issues that require greater research. The Candidate Filing Committee did not reach any conclusions on the process unaffiliated candidates should be required to follow when seeking access to the North Carolina general election ballot. They also did not find a concrete reform for redistricting, though they did put forward several criteria legislators should follow in creating new legislative districts. The Committee did not find consensus on filing fees, the timing of candidacies, creating fact sheets, and whether candidates should be elected by district or at-large.

The Counting Votes committee received a presentation on ranked-choice voting, but disagreed as to what should be done and whether ranked-choice voting should be adopted in North Carolina.

Given the wide variety in county size, resources, and population, the Early Voting Committee did not reach propose recommendations about how the state should regulate particular details of early voting, including the exact number of early voting sites and weekend early voting.

### **RECOMMENDATIONS**



## COMMISSION ON THE FUTURE OF NORTH CAROLINA ELECTIONS

### ADEQUATE FUNDING

Several of the committees found areas where increased funding could allow for an increase in resources available to serve voters, provide more community education, and ensure safer elections. There was no consensus on how much should be spent per voter, but committees did recommend increased spending on particular priorities. The Campaign Finance Committee recommends an increase in funding to pay for better technology (updating 20-year old software) and to help recruit and retain qualified election workers. The Election Infrastructure and Administration Committee recommends seeking grant funds to increase physical security at election offices and, when necessary, homes of election workers. These security measures could include door locks, bulletproof doors and windows, panic alarm systems, key card access controls, exterior and parking lot lighting, security gates and fencing, communications systems, personal security training, and personal information protection. Increased funding also went hand-in-hand with other recommendations from the committees, including measures to allow for greater voter accessibility and to meet operational challenges like outdated technology. Throughout the recommendations, a lack of adequate funding is a major barrier to improving North Carolina's election administration. An increase in funds to county boards of elections could enable many of the recommendations below.

### PERSONNEL CHALLENGES

As with a lack of adequate funding, a lack of sufficiently qualified and experienced personnel makes it more difficult to enact accessible, secure elections and prevents the implementation of many of the below recommendations. Adequate funding and sufficient personnel are threshold matters that enable successful election administration.

The committees recommended improvements in the areas of personnel recruitment, retention, pay, and training.

#### Recruitment

Several of the committees believe that recruiting new election workers requires more attention and resources. The committees suggested advertising for election positions and creating pipeline programs for students at various levels of education, from high school to graduate programs.

Pipeline programs targeted at students could leverage academic structures to incentivize students to work at the polls, for example by providing extra credit or work study. The Election Infrastructure and Administration Committee also recommended targeting specific, non-youth groups, such as retirement communities and local bar associations, to encourage their members to volunteer.

### RECOMMENDATIONS



## COMMISSION ON THE FUTURE OF NORTH CAROLINA ELECTIONS

The Election Infrastructure and Administration Committee had helpful recommendations about how to message election work opportunities. These included advertising to students and young people through their schools, creating opportunities to celebrate workers (for example, “Election Hero Day”), and leveraging national initiatives.

### Retention

The Election Infrastructure and Administration Committee recommends that salaries for Election Directors and staff should be reconsidered and increased. They also recommend using post-election debriefs and year-round outreach to engage past and potential workers, even outside of typical election schedules.

Using incentives, such as flexible shifts, increased stipends, and transportation assistance can help both recruit and retain workers. These benefits would reduce barriers that poll workers may otherwise face, such as work or academic commitments.

### Training

Through sharing best practices, election workers can both further their own professional development and improve election administration in their county. The Election Infrastructure and Administration Committee recommends creating a toolkit or library to compile best practices from across North Carolina. They also recommend the creation of statewide training materials and groups of similar counties to enable the sharing of best practices. The Primaries and Election Day Process Committee was particularly impressed by the Wake County Board of Elections, and held them out as a model of best practices. They recommended that Wake County’s training materials and resources be shared with other North Carolina counties.

Similarly, the Election Infrastructure and Administration Committee recommends the creation of a mentorship network between experienced directors and new directors. This, along with enhancing existing training and certification programs for election directors, perhaps by basing the training programs at a North Carolina university, can enable robust preparation and help reduce discrepancies between counties.

The Primaries and Election Day Process also was concerned about how counties can respond to disasters. This does not reflect at all on the terrific job done by the state board of elections and the western counties in recovering from the impact of Hurricane Helens, which showed great preparation and recovery from that disaster. These recommendations relate instead to providing (and perhaps requiring) de-escalation training for all local election officials and poll workers.

## RECOMMENDATIONS



## COMMISSION ON THE FUTURE OF NORTH CAROLINA ELECTIONS

### CIVIC EDUCATION

Several committees recommended increasing ways voters learn about elections. Increasing information can enable voters to feel more confident, both in the electoral process as a whole and in casting their own vote. This allows elections to run more smoothly, increases the sense of election security, and can decrease the anxiety that leads to harassment and intimidation of poll workers and voters.

Civic education was seen as a crucial tool to help build confidence in election integrity. The Ballot Security, Cyber Security, and List Maintenance Committee recommended producing more information to combat common misconceptions. They also encouraged counties to introduce more transparency into things like cyber security audits, including by publishing audit results after the election. The Counting Votes Committee also prioritized transparency in recommending that counties create opportunities for the public to observe the vote-counting process, either in person or virtually. The Primaries and Election Day Process Committee agreed, recommending that stakeholders publicize the extensive safeguards that protect the integrity of North Carolina's elections.

Similarly, increased information in the area of campaign finance can help candidates better understand what is required of them, and allows voters to better understand the role of money in campaigns. As the Civic Education Committee recommended, building relationships and sharing valid information with all stakeholders enables smoother, more secure elections.

### VOTER ACCESSIBILITY

Several committees recommend changes to election policy that would make it easier for voters, particularly voters who face unique challenges, to cast their ballot.

The Early Voting and Mail-In Ballots Committees discussed changes that could make their respective voting methods easier to use. For early voting, the location of sites can influence voter access. Sites on or near college campuses can make it easier for students to vote. The Voter Access and Registration Committee agreed that placing a polling place on college campuses can increase accessibility for college student voters. Things like proximity to public transportation and ample parking can make it easier for voters to reach the polling place. Similarly, mail-in voting can be made more accessible by providing ballot drop boxes or pre-paid envelopes.

Both the Mail-In Ballots Committee and the Voter Access and Registration Committee recommended expanding language translation services to enable non-English speakers to better access voting information.

The Primaries and Election Day Process Committee and the Voter Access and Registration Committee discussed how to improve accessibility for voters with disabilities. Requirements like

### RECOMMENDATIONS





## **COMMISSION ON THE FUTURE OF NORTH CAROLINA ELECTIONS**

voter ID and signature matching can make voting more difficult for this group, but reducing physical barriers to safe parking and entry, accessible machines, and improved training of election workers can make polling places more convenient for disabled voters. Furthermore, protecting curbside voting and educating voters about how to use it can help disabled voters cast a ballot without risking their health and safety.

The Voter Access and Registration Committee also discussed how to make voting more accessible for people who are re-entering the community after a felony conviction. They recommend that materials be distributed to these returning citizens informing them about their voting rights, and that the community help these voters however possible.

For some committees, operational challenges made the election process unnecessarily difficult and hindered voter accessibility. Solutions, such as improving technology and infrastructure, could help streamline processes, enhance security, and improve the voter experience. Among these changes, as suggested by the Mail-In Voting Committee, is continuing the use of BallotTrax, an advanced system for informing voters about how to track mail-in ballots. Counties could use automated notifications and alerts to inform mail-in voters about the status of their ballot.

### **SECURITY NEEDS**

Increasing election security can improve voter confidence and poll worker safety. The Election Infrastructure and Administration Committee recommended that counties work with existing programs, such as the Department of Homeland Security's Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency (CISA) and local law enforcement, to protect elections, both in the physical locations and in cyber space. They also recommended creating and communicating safety precautions, including around firearms at polling places.

The Voter Access and Registration Committee was also concerned with security needs with regards to voter registration. They recommended that North Carolina adopt a system that can compare North Carolina's voter lists with those from other states to avoid duplication and reduce the possibility of fraud.

### **LEGISLATIVE PRIORITIES**

Two issues stood out across all committee deliberations, with respect to state-wide needs for the smooth, safe and secure administration of our election system: funding (to improve election worker pay, software, training, and security needs) and civic education. It is the consensus of The Commission that any future legislation or budget discussions involving elections need to address these vital concerns first.

### **RECOMMENDATIONS**



## **COMMISSION ON THE FUTURE OF NORTH CAROLINA ELECTIONS**

The committees offered additional proposals for legislative reform. The Challenges and Lawsuits Committee recommended creating a mechanism to prevent candidates who are disqualified (for example, by the 14th Amendment), from being listed on the North Carolina ballot.

The Election Infrastructure Committee addressed funding specifically by recommending the creation of a fund to help smaller counties supplement pay increases for election directors. They also recommended election security legislation that would offer increased protections for poll workers, including funding safety training, prohibiting doxing of election workers, and creating a cause of action for election workers to bring civil actions against those who make threats against them.

To avoid future fiscal and operational challenges created by last minute changes to candidate names listed on ballots, The Commission recommends legislative changes to establish a Candidate and Party Nomination Finalization Deadline within a practical time frame that aligns with ballot preparation and mailing deadlines.

Many of the recommendations from the committees can be implemented at a county level, but state legislation would provide uniformity for all counties, and could increase credibility and ease implementation of the changes. State-level action could also prevent disparities between counties on the basis of population or resources.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**



## COMMISSION ON THE FUTURE OF NORTH CAROLINA ELECTIONS

### RESOURCES

#### 1. Ballot Security, Cyber Security, and List Maintenance:

##### Statutes<sup>143</sup>

- N.C.G.S. § 163-22
- N.C.G.S. § 163-82.13
- N.C.G.S. § 163-82.14
- N.C.G.S. Art. 14A
- N.C.G.S. Art. 15A

##### Websites

- *10 Facts About Election Security in North Carolina*, NCSBE  
<https://www.ncsbe.gov/about-elections/election-security/10-facts-about-election-security-north-carolina>.
- Clear Ballot, <https://www.clearballot.com/>
- *Election Security*, CISA, <https://www.cisa.gov/topics/election-security><sup>144</sup>
- *Election Security*, NCSBE, <https://www.ncsbe.gov/election-security><sup>145</sup>
- *Election Security Grant*, U.S. ELECTION ASSISTANCE COMMITTEE (Aug. 26, 2024), <https://www.eac.gov/grants/election-security-funds>
- Election Systems and Software, <https://www.essvote.com/>.
- Alissa Ellis & Tomas Lopez, *Recommendations for Elections Appropriations*, DEMOCRACY N.C. (Feb. 2021), <https://democracync.org/research/recommendations-for-elections-appropriations/>.

<sup>143</sup> <https://www.ncleg.gov/Laws/GeneralStatuteSections/Chapter163>

<sup>144</sup> **Stated mission:** CISA provides resources on election security for both the public and election officials at all levels and will remain transparent and agile in its vigorous efforts to protect America’s election infrastructure against new and evolving threats.

**Contains:** (1) Training and educational resources for election staff and the public.; (2) An election “toolkit” (<https://www.cisa.gov/cybersecurity-toolkit-and-resources-protect-elections>) to help state and local government officials, election officials, and vendors enhance the cyber resilience of U.S. election infrastructure.

**Recommendation:** This is a great place to find resources that explain threats to elections as well as how to assess vulnerabilities of a state’s election processes. Keep in mind CISA is a federal agency, so they probably won’t cover down on state-specific issues.

<sup>145</sup> **Stated mission:** The NCSBE is the state agency charged with the administration of the elections process and campaign finance disclosure and compliance.

**Contains:** (1) Articles about specific security concerns and how they are addressed by the NCSBE; (2) “Mythbusting” list that cites how specific rumors about elections have been proven false; (3) Legal resources and tips on how citizens can reinforce secure voting practices; (4) N.C. Voter Registration List Maintenance Guide (.pdf)

**Recommendation:** Would consider this fairly introductory material on election security basics. Good primer on how North Carolina sees the challenges while also providing a single portal with access to social media sites and election management points of contact.

- *Elon University Poll*, ELON UNIVERSITY (Oct. 29, 2024), <https://www.elon.edu/u/elon-poll/>.
- Hart InterCivic, <https://www.hartintercivic.com/>.
- *Meredith Poll Archives*, MEREDITH UNIVERSITY, <https://www.meredith.edu/meredith-poll/meredith-poll-archives/>.
- *Meredith Poll: February 2023*, MEREDITH UNIVERSITY (February 2023), <https://www.meredith.edu/wp-content/uploads/2023/02/Meredith-Poll-Report-Spring-2023.docx.pdf>.
- *Meredith Poll: The 2020 North Carolina Primary*, MEREDITH UNIVERSITY (February 2020), [https://www.meredith.edu/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/Final\\_Meredith\\_College\\_Poll\\_Report\\_February\\_2020.pdf](https://www.meredith.edu/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/Final_Meredith_College_Poll_Report_February_2020.pdf).
- MIT ELECTION LAB, <https://electionlab.mit.edu/><sup>146</sup>
- *Preparing for Accurate Elections*, NCSBE <https://www.ncsbe.gov/about-elections/election-security/preparing-accurate-elections>.
- *Prohibiting Private Funding of Elections*, NCSL (April 9, 2024), <https://www.ncsl.org/elections-and-campaigns/prohibiting-private-funding-of-elections>.
- Jennifer Shutt, *States struggle with unreliable federal funding for making sure elections are secure*, N.C. NEWSLINE (June 16, 2024), <https://ncnewsline.com/2024/06/16/states-struggle-with-unreliable-federal-funding-for-making-sure-elections-are-secure/>.
- Alexandra Forter Sirota, *Paying for Elections*, N.C. BUDGET & TAX CENTER (May 2023), [https://ncbudget.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/03/Election-Funding-Report-2023\\_final-pdfs.pdf](https://ncbudget.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/03/Election-Funding-Report-2023_final-pdfs.pdf).
- US EAC, <https://www.eac.gov/><sup>147</sup>
- VERIFIED VOTING, <https://verifiedvoting.org/><sup>148</sup>
- *Voting Equipment*, NCSBE <https://www.ncsbe.gov/voting/voting-equipment>.

## 2. Campaign Finance:

For a comprehensive overview of campaign finance in North Carolina, visit the State Board of Elections' website to review its published *Campaign Finance Manual*, which is a resource made

---

<sup>146</sup> **Stated mission:** “By applying scientific principles to how elections are studied and administered, MEDSL aims to improve the democratic experience for all U.S. voters.”

**Contains:** data and resource links on a wide range of topics, “explainers” with well-written overviews of issues (excluding BMDs, which are a relevant voting technology in NC). The “Voting Equipment” section at Verified Voting does a better job of explaining technology that is used.

<sup>147</sup> **Stated mission:** The U.S. Election Assistance Commission (EAC) is an independent, bipartisan commission whose mission is to help election officials improve the administration of elections and help Americans participate in the voting process.

**Contains:** (1) Sections on election administration, voting, and election technology; (2) Under “Election Technology” it talks about how equipment is certified, and Voting System Test Laboratories (VSTL) that provides vendor-independent equipment testing

<sup>148</sup> **Stated mission:** Verified Voting’s mission is to strengthen democracy for all voters by promoting the responsible use of technology in elections.

**Contains:** Sections with general information and some details about: Voting Equipment, Audits, Paper Records, Internet Voting, Election Security

**Recommendation:** Go to each of the five “Issues” and read the top-level information

available for candidates and the public. For an overview of how North Carolina’s campaign finance laws compare to other states across the country, visit the National Conference of State Legislatures’ website and view their campaign finance resource page.

### 3. Candidate Filing and Qualifications:

State Board of Elections website; North Carolina Constitution; North Carolina General Statutes; The Paper (Burke County); Carolina Public Press; The Carolina Journal; John Locke Foundation; Karen Brinson Bell, Executive Director of the NCSBE

#### Regulations

- F.E.C. 100.5(a).
- F.E.C. 106.6(a).

#### Statutes

- N.C.G.S. § 163-278.6(13).
- N.C.G.S. § 163-278.6(20).
- N.C.G.S. § 163-278.6(51).
- N.C.G.S. § 163-278.6(53).
- N.C.G.S. § 163-278.7(a).

#### Websites

- *Budget Requests*, NCSBE  
<https://drive.google.com/file/d/1h3rpWNUOz03Y1aQwrYZe6SIBVd6unePW/view>.
- Colin Campbell, *N.C. Democratic Party outpaces NCGOP in fundraising*, WUNC (April 3, 2024), <https://www.wunc.org/politics/2024-04-03/nc-democratic-party-outpaces-ncgop-in-fundraising>.
- *Campaign Finance Manual*, NCSBE (Feb. 2022), [https://s3.amazonaws.com/dl.ncsbe.gov/Campaign\\_Finance/Campaign-Finance-Manual.pdf](https://s3.amazonaws.com/dl.ncsbe.gov/Campaign_Finance/Campaign-Finance-Manual.pdf).
- *NCSL’s Campaign Finance Resources*, NCSL (Feb. 10, 2023) <https://www.ncsl.org/elections-and-campaigns/campaign-finance>
- *Reporting - Entity Trends - 5 - 2024*, <https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1aOEit94aaZNzkhaK8F1b6UY1PIVkwDMA/edit?gid=1621724652#gid=1621724652>.
- *Search Campaign Funding and Spending Reports and Penalties*, NCSBE <https://www.ncsbe.gov/campaign-finance/search-campaign-funding-and-spending-reports-and-penalties>.

### 4. Challenges and Lawsuits:

#### Cases

- *Burroughs & Cannon v. United States*, 290 U.S. 534 (1934).
- *Cooper v. Berger*, 370 N.C. 392 (2018).
- *Harper v. Hall*, 384 N.C. 292 (2023).
- *In re Election Protest of Fletcher*, 175 N.C. App. 755 (2006)
- *James v. Mitchell*, 359 N.C. 260 (2005).

## RESOURCES

- *Rucho v. Common Cause*, 139 S. Ct. 2484 (2019).

#### Constitutional Provisions

- N.C. CONST. art. III, § 2.
- N.C. CONST. art. III, § 7(1).
- N.C. CONST. art. VI, § 5.
- U.S. CONST. amend. XIV, § 3.
- U.S. CONST. art. IV § 4

#### Papers

- Robert P. Joyce, *The Last Contested Election in America*, 72 POPULAR GOVERNMENT 43 (Jan. 2007), [https://www.sog.unc.edu/sites/default/files/articles/article5\\_8.pdf](https://www.sog.unc.edu/sites/default/files/articles/article5_8.pdf).

#### People

- Patrick Bradey, UNC School of Law and School of Government JD/MPA Candidate – contributing author to Section III.
- John Wallace, lead litigation/voter-protection attorney for the NCDP.
- Mike Crowell, Executive director of North Carolina’s Commission for the Future of Justice and the Courts.
- Michael McKnight, attorney representing and advising non-profits, schools, and governmental agencies involving civil rights and campaign finance laws as well as state and federal constitutional requirements.

#### Statutes

- N.C. GEN. STAT. § 120-10.3(a).
- N.C. GEN. STAT. § 120-10.3(b).
- N.C. GEN. STAT. § 120-10.3(a).
- N.C. GEN. STAT. § 120-10.4.
- N.C. GEN. STAT. § 120-10.5.
- N.C. GEN. STAT. § 120-10.6.
- N.C. GEN. STAT. § 120-10.7.
- N.C. GEN. STAT. § 120-10.13.
- N.C. GEN. STAT. § 163-84 *et. seq.*
- N.C. GEN. STAT. § 163-182.13A.
- N.C. GEN. STAT. § 163-182.13A(a).
- N.C. GEN. STAT. § 163-182.13A(b).
- N.C. GEN. STAT. § 163-182.13A(d).
- N.C. GEN. STAT. § 163-182.13A(e).
- N.C. GEN. STAT. § 163-182.13A(f)(1).
- N.C. GEN. STAT. § 163-182.13A(f)(2).
- N.C. GEN. STAT. § 163-182.13A(j).
- N.C. GEN. STAT. § 163-182.13A(k).

#### Websites

- Ann Gerhart, *Election results under attack: Here are the facts*, WASHINGTON POST (Mar. 11, 2024), <https://www.washingtonpost.com/elections/interactive/2020/election-integrity/>.

- Matt Vasilogambros, *Republicans scrutinize voting rolls and ramp up for mass challenges ahead of election*, STATELINE (Apr. 9, 2024), <https://stateline.org/2024/04/09/republicans-scrutinize-voting-rolls-and-ramp-up-for-mass-challenges-ahead-of-election/>.

## 5. Civic Education:

### Books

- *A Republic If You Can Afford It: How Much Does It Cost to Administer Elections?* By Zachary Mohr, Martha E. Kropf, Mary Jo McGowan, and JoEllen V. Pope.

### Websites

- A summary of survey responses can be found at: [https://lookerstudio.google.com/u/0/reporting/e8065619-ccfe-42ec-9437-bfd301e06a3d/page/p\\_o15phx2khd](https://lookerstudio.google.com/u/0/reporting/e8065619-ccfe-42ec-9437-bfd301e06a3d/page/p_o15phx2khd).
- *Election Academy*, Forsyth County Board of Elections, <https://www.co.forsyth.nc.us/assets/documents/electionacademy2023.pdf>
- Nonpartisan Nonprofit Sector North Carolina Civic Education Asset Mapping <https://docs.google.com/document/d/1sjcta19xcovDeeTu6XeUG8fUkATt7VpoFXnmWB EuFQk/edit?usp=sharing>
- Research Asset Mapping for Civic Education: <https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1Pfcpq5p7sjv-1SCW8jZ9KmPvQLVsjeulAHkKdBzGUZM/edit?usp=sharing>.

## 6. Counting Votes:

NCSBE Data (<https://dl.ncsbe.gov/?prefix=data/>); N.C. General Statutes; Diane Silver of FairVote; Karen Brinson-Bell on March 2024 primary and results; Committee survey of county election directors who had 30% or greater turnout in March 2024 primary election.

### Regulations

- N.C.A.C. Title 8, Chapters 1–21
- 08 N.C.A.C. 04.0301
- 08 N.C.A.C. 04.0302
- 08 N.C.A.C. 04.0302(c)
- 08 N.C.A.C. 04.0304
- 08 N.C.A.C. 04.0304(a)
- 08 N.C.A.C. 04.0307
- 08 N.C.A.C. 04.0307(a)–(b)
- 08 N.C.A.C. 04.0401(a)
- 08 N.C.A.C. 06B.0105

### Statutes

- N.C.G.S. § 163-82.14(b)
- N.C.G.S. § 163-182.5.

### Websites

- *2024 General Election Canvass & Certification*, NCSBE (Nov. 26, 2024), [https://s3.amazonaws.com/dl.ncsbe.gov/State\\_Board\\_Meeting\\_Docs/2024-11-26/Canvass/Canvass%20Report%202011-26-2024%20FINAL.pdf](https://s3.amazonaws.com/dl.ncsbe.gov/State_Board_Meeting_Docs/2024-11-26/Canvass/Canvass%20Report%202011-26-2024%20FINAL.pdf).

## RESOURCES

- Christopher Cooper, *The Short Life and Quiet Death of Ranked-Choice Voting in North Carolina*, ASSEMBLY (May 13, 2024), <https://www.theassemblync.com/politics/elections/ranked-choice-votingnorth-carolina-elections/>.
- *Preparing for Accurate Elections*, NCSBE <https://www.ncsbe.gov/about-elections/election-security/preparing-accurate-elections>.
- *Voting Equipment*, NCSBE <https://www.ncsbe.gov/voting/voting-equipment>.

## 7. Early Voting:

### Papers

- Michael Greenberger, *A Method to Detect Whether Countywide Vote Centers Are Located Optimally: The Case of North Carolina*, 22 ELECTION L.J. 105 (2023).

### Websites

- *Bipartisan Support for Early In-Person Voting, Voter ID, Election Day National Holiday*, PEW RESEARCH CENTER (Feb. 7, 2024) <https://www.pewresearch.org/politics/2024/02/07/bipartisan-support-for-early-in-person-voting-voter-id-election-day-national-holiday/>.
- Kristen Carney, *North Carolina Counties by Population (2025)*.
- Will Doran, *Sunday voting disputes highlight political divides at NC elections board*, WRAL (June 4, 2024).
- *Early In-Person Voting*, NCSL (last updated Dec. 20, 2024), <https://www.ncsl.org/elections-and-campaigns/early-in-person-voting>.
- *Henderson County*, CENTER FOR INCLUSIVE DEMOCRACY, <https://nc.cidvlot.org/county.html?county=089>.
- *In-Person Early Voting Ends with Record Turnout, on to Election Day*, NCSBE (Nov. 3, 2024) <https://www.ncsbe.gov/news/press-releases/2024/11/03/person-early-voting-ends-record-turnout-election-day>.
- *In-person early voting for North Carolina primary election begins*, WBTB (Feb. 15, 2024) <https://www.wbtv.com/2024/02/15/in-person-early-voting-north-carolina-primary-election-begins/>
- Robert Joyce, *Early Voting in North Carolina*, COATES' CANONS N.C. LOCAL GOVERNMENT LAW (Oct. 5, 2010) <https://canons.sog.unc.edu/2010/10/early-voting-in-north-carolina/>.
- N.C. Demographics (Dec. 17, 2024) [https://www.northcarolina-demographics.com/counties\\_by\\_population](https://www.northcarolina-demographics.com/counties_by_population).
- *Public Comments EV Plans 2024 General*, NCSBE, [https://s3.amazonaws.com/dl.ncsbe.gov/State\\_Board\\_Meeting\\_Docs/2024-06-04/Early%20Voting%20-%202024%20General%20Election/Nonunanimous%20Plans/Public%20Comments/Public%20Comments%20EVPlans%202024%20General.pdf](https://s3.amazonaws.com/dl.ncsbe.gov/State_Board_Meeting_Docs/2024-06-04/Early%20Voting%20-%202024%20General%20Election/Nonunanimous%20Plans/Public%20Comments/Public%20Comments%20EVPlans%202024%20General.pdf).
- *Voting Sites: Early Voting Site List*, NCSBE [https://s3.amazonaws.com/dl.ncsbe.gov/One-Stop\\_Early\\_Voting/2024/Early%20Voting%20Schedules%20-%20March%205%2C%202024%20Primary%20Election.pdf](https://s3.amazonaws.com/dl.ncsbe.gov/One-Stop_Early_Voting/2024/Early%20Voting%20Schedules%20-%20March%205%2C%202024%20Primary%20Election.pdf).

## RESOURCES



- Paul Woolverton, *How N.C. Republicans Learned to Stop Worrying and Start Loving Early Voting*, ASSEMBLY (Dec. 5, 2024), <https://www.theassemblync.com/politics/elections/republicans-early-voting-record-north-carolina/>.

## 8. Election Infrastructure and Administration

### Bills

- N.C. H.B. 293 (2023)

### Papers

- Michael Greenberger & Jason Roberts, *Election Worker Recruitment and Retention in North Carolina*, MIT ELECTION DATA + SCIENCE LAB, (2024)
- McGowan, Mary Jo, Robert Hines, Zachary T. Mohr, and Martha Kropf. 2025. "Does Leslie Knope Make More Than Election Directors? Analysis of Election and Other County Directors in North Carolina Counties." Paper presented at the Election Science Conference within a Conference at the Southern Political Science Association, San Juan, Puerto Rico.
- Mohr, Zachary, Martha Kropf, Mary Jo McGowan, & JoEllen Pope. Forthcoming. *A Republic If You Can Afford It: How Much Does It Cost to Administer Elections?* Cambridge University Press Elements.
- Charles Stewart III, *The Cost of Conducting Elections*, MIT ELECTION DATA + SCIENCE LAB (2022), <https://electionlab.mit.edu/sites/default/files/2022-05/TheCostofConductingElections-2022.pdf>. Last accessed January 21, 2025.

### Statutes

- N.C. GEN. STAT. § 163-35(c).

### Websites

- *A Guidebook for Recruiting College Poll Workers*, U.S. ELECTION ASSISTANCE COMMISSION (July 2007), [https://www.eac.gov/sites/default/files/eac\\_assets/1/1/Guidebook%20for%20Recruiting%20College%20Poll%20Workers.pdf](https://www.eac.gov/sites/default/files/eac_assets/1/1/Guidebook%20for%20Recruiting%20College%20Poll%20Workers.pdf).
- *BallotTrax*, NCSBE, <https://northcarolina.ballottrax.net/voter/>.
- *Become a Student Election Assistant*, NCSBE, <https://www.ncsbe.gov/about-elections/get-involved-elections/become-student-election-assistant>.
- Greta Bedekovics, *Protecting Election Workers and Officials From Threats and Harassment During the Midterms*, CENTER FOR AMERICAN PROGRESS (Oct. 13, 2022), <https://www.americanprogress.org/article/protecting-election-workers-and-officials-from-threats-and-harassment-during-the-midterms/>.
- Ruby Belle Booth, *Youth Poll Worker Programs are a Key but Underused Way to Grow Voters*, CIRCLE (Aug. 16, 2022), <https://circle.tufts.edu/latest-research/youth-poll-worker-programs-are-key-underused-way-grow-voters>.
- Bridging Divides Initiative presentation to The Commission. Find national data and register for state-specific updates here: <https://bridgingdivides.princeton.edu/updates/2024/bdi-launches-public-event-level-dataset-threats-and-harassment-against-local-officials>.

- *CISA Releases Guide to Operational Security for Election Officials*, CISA (July 5, 2024), <https://www.cisa.gov/news-events/news/cisa-releases-guide-operational-security-election-officials>.
- *CISA Releases Physical Security Checklist to Help Election Officials Secure Polling Locations*, CISA (April 22, 2024), <https://www.cisa.gov/news-events/news/cisa-releases-physical-security-checklist-help-election-officials-secure-polling-locations>.
- *Designated Campuses*, VOTER FRIENDLY CAMPUS (2023-2024) <https://voterfriendlycampus.org/campus-designees-2024/#ncarolina>.
- *Election and Voting Survey*, ELECTION ASSISTANCE COMMISSION (2022), <https://www.eac.gov/research-and-data/studies-and-reports>.
- Election Hero Day, <https://www.electionheroday.org/>.
- *Election Threats*, U.S. D.O.J., <https://www.justice.gov/voting/election-threats>.
- Josh Ferrer & Dan Thompson, *Election Official Turnover Rates from 2000-2024*, BIPARTISAN POLICY CENTER (Apr. 9, 2024), <https://bipartisanpolicy.org/press-release/new-insights-into-election-official-turnover/>. This report does not include complete data for 2024, since the year has not ended when these data were obtained. (Email from Josh Ferrer to Martha Kropf, May 17, 2024.)
- *Florida Certified Election Professionals*, FL SUPERVISORS OF ELECTIONS, <https://www.myfloridaelections.com/Certification-Training/FCEP>
- *(GEN-24-03) Use of Federal Work-Study Funds for Voter Registration*, FEDERAL STUDENT AID (Feb. 26, 2024), <https://fsapartners.ed.gov/knowledge-center/library/dear-colleague-letters/2024-02-26/use-federal-work-study-funds-voter-registration>.
- Grace Klinefelter, *Arizona’s Bipartisan Election Task Force Finds Common Ground on Election Policy*, BIPARTISAN POLICY CENTER (Nov. 3, 2023), <https://bipartisanpolicy.org/blog/arizonas-bipartisan-election-task-force-common-ground-election-policy/>.
- *Local Election Officials Survey*, BRENNAN CENTER FOR JUSTICE (May 1, 2024) <https://www.brennancenter.org/our-work/research-reports/local-election-officials-survey-may-2024>.
- Evan Malbrough, *The Hitchhiker’s Guide to Building a Youth Poll Worker Project*, Andrew Goodman Foundation, <https://andrewgoodman.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/08/THE-HITCHHIKERS-GUIDE-TO-BUILDING-A-YOUTH-POLL-WORKER-PROJECT-Final.pdf>.
- *Participating Campuses*, ALL IN CAMPUS DEMOCRACY CHALLENGE, <https://voterfriendlycampus.org/campus-designees-2024/#ncarolina>.
- *Poll Worker Resources for Voters*, U.S. Election Assistance Commission (Aug. 30, 2024), <https://www.eac.gov/help-america-vote>.
- Sarah Reinhardt, *Democracy MVP: Recruiting Quality Election Workers and Combatting Misinformation*, MI DEP’T OF STATE (2023), <https://www.nass.org/sites/default/files/awards/2023/MI-NASS-IDEAS-Nomination-2023.pdf>.
- Mehr Sher, *Changes to minimum pay, supplemental funding could help N.C. counties retain elections directors*, CAROLINA PUBLIC PRESS (June 12, 2024),

## RESOURCES

<https://carolinapublicpress.org/64236/elections-brain-drain-3-pay-funding-legislation-retain-directors-nc-counties/>.

- Mehr Sher, *Elections Brain Drain*, CAROLINA PUBLIC PRESS (June 2024), <https://carolinapublicpress.org/elections-brain-drain/>.
- Mehr Sher, *N.C. counties losing elections directors. Concerns point to lousy pay, voter hostility*, CAROLINA PUBLIC PRESS (March 27, 2024), <https://carolinapublicpress.org/63583/elections-directors-nc-counties-leave-low-pay-voter-hostility/>.
- *State Laws Providing Protection for Election Officials and Staff*, NCSL (Jan. 13, 2025), <https://www.ncsl.org/elections-and-campaigns/state-laws-providing-protection-for-election-officials-and-staff>.
- Derek Tisler & Lawrence Norden, *Securing the 2024 Election: Recommendations for Federal, State, and Local Officials*, BRENNAN CENTER FOR JUSTICE (April 27, 2023), <https://www.jstor.org/stable/resrep49322.5?seq=5>.
- To access the Toolkit, please visit <https://secure.everyaction.com/MV-eyYLU206OT5ayoZqn3w2>.
- *Voter Intimidation Under Federal Law*, U.S. D.O.J. (April 2024), <https://www.justice.gov/crt/media/1348556/dl?inline>.
- *Your Democracy Heroes*, NCSBE, <https://www.ncsbe.gov/about-elections/get-involved-elections/your-democracy-heroes>.
- <https://www.commoncause.org/north-carolina/our-work/elections/>
- [www.nccampusengagement.org](http://www.nccampusengagement.org)
- [www.youcanvote.org](http://www.youcanvote.org).
- 

## 9. Main-In Ballots:

### Session Laws

- Act of Oct. 10, 2023, 2023 N.C.G.S. 140.

### Websites

- *State Board Finalizes Presidential Primary Candidates*, NCSBE (Jan. 2, 2024), <https://www.ncsbe.gov/news/press-releases/2024/01/02/state-board-finalizes-presidential-primary-candidates>.
- *Voter Registration and Voter History files*, NCSBE, <https://dl.ncsbe.gov/?prefix=data/>.

## 10. Primaries and Election Day Process:

North Carolina General Statutes, N.C.G.S. §§ 163-21, 45, 59, 111, 119, and 166.7; N.C. State Board of Elections website, accessed May 15, 2024; U.S. Vote Foundation; Vote411.org; Wake County Board of Elections 2024 Primary Election Manual; Wake County Board of Elections Chief Judge Pocket Guide, 2024 Primary Election

### Websites

- *ADA Checklist for Polling Places*, U.S. D.O.J. (Feb. 28, 2020), <https://www.ada.gov/resources/polling-places-checklist/#part-3-polling-place-accessibility-checklist>
- *Get a Free Voter Photo ID*, NCSBE, <https://www.ncsbe.gov/voting/voter-id/get-free-voter-photo-id>.

## RESOURCES

- *Post-Election Procedures and Audits*, NCSBE, <https://www.ncsbe.gov/about-elections/election-security/post-election-procedures-and-audits>
- *Your Voting Rights*, DRNC (Oct. 6, 2023), <https://disabilityrightsn.org/resources/your-voting-rights/>

## 11. Voter Access and Registration

### Papers

- Lisa Schur, Mason Ameri, Joseph Dietrich, et al., *Ensuring Voting Access Across the Electorate: Best Practices and New Areas for Research*, MIT Election Lab, <https://electionlab.mit.edu/research/projects/mapping-election-science/white-papers/usability-accessibility>

### Session Laws

- N.C.G.S. ch. 163

### Websites

- *How a 'Failsafe' Protection for Voting Fails Students*, DUKE TODAY (Oct. 10, 2023), <https://today.duke.edu/2023/10/how-failsafe-protection-voting-fails-students>.

# THE COMMISSION ON THE FUTURE OF NORTH CAROLINA ELECTIONS



## APPENDICES

- A. Commission on the Future of N.C. Elections Member Biographies**
- B. Public Feedback on Elections from the Trusted Elections Town Hall Tour 2024**
- C. Big Idea Trends Across Committees for the Commission on the Future of NC Elections**
- D. Community Partners: Reflections on the 2024 Election**
- E. Additional Trend Analysis (Charts)**
- F. Information on Election Issues in Griffin v. NCSBE**
- G. North Carolina Expenditures and Transparency**
- H. Summaries of Recent Polls**

## **Appendix A: Commission on the Future of N.C. Election Member Bios**

### **Steering Committee Leadership**

#### **Justice Bob Orr, Former Justice (R) of the N.C. Supreme Court**

Bob Orr was licensed as an attorney in North Carolina in 1975 and practiced law in Asheville for eleven years before being appointed by Governor James G. Martin to the N.C. Court of Appeals. He served on the Court of Appeals from 1986 to 1994 and as a Justice on the N.C. Supreme Court from 1995 to 2004. He won four statewide partisan elections throughout his judicial career. His election to the Court of Appeals in 1988 made him the first Republican since 1896 to win a statewide judicial election in North Carolina. He retired from the Supreme Court in 2004 when he became the founding Executive Director of the N.C. Institute for Constitutional Law, litigating state constitutional issues. He taught as an adjunct professor at UNC School of Law for over twenty years and since 2010 has been engaged in the private practice of law.

#### **Hon. Jennifer Roberts, Former Mayor (D) of Charlotte, N.C.**

Jennifer Roberts served as a four-term Mecklenburg County Commissioner and later as the 58th Mayor of Charlotte. After leaving public office she ran the Communities Program on climate solutions for a national environmental non-profit, ecoAmerica. She has long been a champion of issues related to education, equality, inclusion, and environmental protection. She is the only person to be elected to serve as both Chairman of the Mecklenburg County Commission and later as Mayor of Charlotte.

Before entering elected office, Roberts worked as a high school math teacher, a diplomat with the U.S. State Department, an international banker, and an adjunct professor at UNC-Charlotte. She currently serves on several community boards and commissions and has received numerous awards in recognition of her local leadership. In addition to her work with the Carter Center, she is the honorary chair of the Re-imagining America Project, a speaker and author, and a consultant on issues ranging from climate change to democratic engagement and leadership.

Roberts holds a B.A. degree with Highest Honors from UNC Chapel Hill, and two Masters Degrees, from the University of Toronto and the Johns Hopkins School of Advanced International Studies.

#### **Dr. Michael Bitzer, Professor at Catawba College**

A professor of politics and history at Catawba since 2002, Dr. Bitzer's teaching interests are in American politics, public administration, public policy, and the law, courts and judicial process area. His research interests are in Southern politics, North Carolina politics, campaigns & elections, law, and judicial politics. He currently holds the T.P. and J.C. Leonard Chair of Political Science and directs the Center for N.C. Politics and Public Service.

In 2021, Dr. Bitzer authored the book, *Redistricting and Gerrymandering in North Carolina: Battlegrounds in the Tar Heel State*, which explores the past forty years of politics and litigation over one of the most partisan activities in American politics. In this study, Dr. Bitzer explores each decade, since the 1980s, of lawsuits and partisanship when it comes to drawing both congressional and state legislative district lines.

Dr. Bitzer is also the author of several book chapters on North Carolina politics, including *The New Politics of the Old South: An Introduction to Southern Politics* and *The 2020 Presidential Election in the South*. He has been interviewed by local, state, national, and international news outlets on American politics and the politics of North Carolina, including *The New York Times*, *The Washington Post*, ABC, NBC, Fox, CNN, MSNBC, the BBC, and London Broadcast Company, among others. He also founded, manages, and writes for the political blog, *Old North State Politics*.

Dr. Bitzer earned an undergraduate degree in English from Erskine College and a master's degree in history (focusing on modern American history, Southern US political history, and the history of Nazi Germany) from Clemson University. During his doctoral work from The University of Georgia's School of Public and International Affairs, he was the one of five graduate student recipients of the university's Excellence in Teaching Award. In the 2011-2012 academic year, he served as the Swink Professor for Excellence in Teaching, the highest honor for classroom teaching at Catawba.

#### **Dr. Chris Cooper, Professor at Western Carolina University**

Christopher A. Cooper is Robert Lee Madison Distinguished Professor and Director of the Public Policy Institute at Western Carolina University. He has received Western Carolina University's highest

awards for research (University Scholar, 2011) and teaching (Board of Governors Teaching Award, 2013) and was named the 2013 North Carolina Professor of the Year by the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching.

Dr. Cooper's published academic research features over 50 peer-reviewed journal articles and book chapters on NC politics, state politics, southern politics, elections, and behavioral public administration. He is also co-author of *The Resilience of Southern Identity: Why the South Still Matters in the Minds of its People* (University of North Carolina Press) and co-editor of *The New Politics of North Carolina* (published by the University of North Carolina Press).

Dr. Cooper is a frequent source for news stories about North Carolina, as well as national politics and he has been quoted hundreds of times in a variety of media including the New York Times, Washington Post, New Yorker, Christian Science Monitor, Boston Herald, Al Jazeera, Charlotte Observer, The Hill, National Journal, Raleigh News and Observer, National Public Radio, CNN, FOX News, Blue Ridge Public Radio, WFAE (Charlotte) ABC News, and ESPN.com.

**Dr. Martha Kropf, Professor at UNC Charlotte**

Dr. Kropf received her PhD (1998) in Political Science from American University and served as Director of Public Policy at UNC Charlotte from 2015–2018. Her research focuses on election administration, political participation, and the policy process. She has work forthcoming in the American Journal of Political Science and has published in Public Opinion Quarterly, Journal of Politics and Review of Policy Research. She has authored two books: *Helping America Vote: The Limits of Election Reform* (Routledge; with David C. Kimball) and *Institutions and the Right to Vote in America* (Palgrave).

**Commission Members**

**Mayor Karen Alexander, Rowan County (1950–2024)**

Karen Kirks Alexander, architect and president of KKA Architecture, held a Master's Degree in Architecture and Urban Design from the University of North Carolina at Charlotte, and a Doctorate of Letters, Honoris Causa from India's Invertis University. She served as a Salisbury City Councilmember from 2013 to 2024, and was elected as Mayor in 2015. Congressman Ted Budd entered a Congressional Record Commendation in honor of her

outstanding service to her city, state, and nation. She was presented with a Proclamation from the Salisbury City Council in recognition of her exemplary leadership as President of the North Carolina League of Municipalities. She passed away on December 29, 2024 (the same day as President Carter), after making many contributions to this commission. This report is dedicated to her as well as to President Carter.

**Tony Almeida, Rowan County**

Tony Almeida is originally from Atlanta, GA and graduated from Vanderbilt University with a bachelor of arts degree in history and economics. He is retired from a 32-year career with Duke Energy in which he served as Vice President of Large Business Customers for Duke Energy U.S., Vice President of Business Relations and Economic Development for Duke Energy Carolinas, and Manager of Consumer Services for Duke Power. He also served as a sales representative for Proctor & Gamble, among other roles. Almeida was a Senior Economic Advisor to Governor Pat McCrory in 2013 and was a registered lobbyist for the NC Research Campus from 2015 to 2022. He is active in the community and serves at the Hurley YMCA, First Presbyterian Church of Salisbury, and Hood Theological Seminary. Almeida and his wife, Rev. Margaret Almeida, have three sons and seven grandchildren.

**David Ashley, Randolph County**

David Ashley is a former candidate for the North Carolina House of Representatives with an extensive 28-year career as a State Law Enforcement Special Agent. His career, primarily in the Charlotte, NC area, involved investigating international drug smuggling, money laundering, and wiretapping. He received recognition from the Organized Crime Drug Enforcement Task Force for the Federal Case of the Year and the North Carolina Meritorious Service Award for his exceptional narcotic investigations. David also held the position of Special Agent in Charge, where he commanded the Special Operations Group. Today, he serves as the President of A2 Training and Consulting LLC, showcasing his enduring commitment to the community and public safety.

**Caroline Avery, Burke County**

Caroline Avery was born and raised in Birmingham, Alabama, graduated from Vanderbilt University and served two years in Africa with Peace Corps. After moving to Morganton 37 years ago, she was founding President of Habitat for Humanity of Burke County. Most recently she was Vice President of Marketing

for EJ Victor preceding that as founding Executive Director of the Community Foundation of Burke County. Currently on the Board of the Community Foundation of Western North Carolina, she is active at Grace Episcopal Church and enjoys running, hiking, and reading.

#### **Darlene Azarmi, Buncombe County**

Darlene Azarmi (they/them) is the Senior Democracy Campaigner at Friends of the Earth and a Master of Public Policy Candidate at UC Berkeley. Darlene holds a BA in Environmental Studies from UNC Wilmington, studied "People, Politics, and Environment" in the Galapagos, and has a certificate in Nonprofit Management from Duke. Their passion for civic engagement, environmental justice, and racial equity culminated with their work at FOE. Darlene previously worked with Democracy North Carolina, the Oregon Public Interest Research Group, and Oceana in Washington, D.C. Darlene grew up in Lincolnton but calls Asheville home and enjoys watching Appalachian sunsets from their porch with their two hound dogs.

#### **Sherra Blackburn, Wake County**

Sherra Blackburn is an attorney and real estate investor with a JD from Campbell University's Norman Adrian Wiggins School of Law and a Bachelor of Arts in History from Western Carolina University. She has held key legal positions, including Assistant Attorney General at the North Carolina Department of Justice and Attorney at the North Carolina Licensing Board for General Contractors. She is also active in civic duty, having served as an election worker and precinct judge for many years.

#### **John Blackburn, Wake County**

John Blackburn graduated from Duke University with a bachelor's degree in geology. He served as a legislative assistant to US Senator Terry Sanford. While serving Senator Sanford, Blackburn advised on issues including agriculture, energy, environment, intelligence, natural resources, public lands, public works, science, and transportation. He had been a geologist and small farmer. He has largely spent his retirement as a private investor and a student of corporate media, analyzing potential biases.

#### **Mayor Preston Blakely, Henderson County**

Preston Blakely is currently serving as the 4th Mayor of Fletcher, NC. Mayor Blakely is an alumnus of UNC-Greensboro and Western Carolina University. In addition to serving as mayor, he works for his family business Quality Janitorial Group. Mayor

Blakely has been involved in many other committees and boards such as the Governor's Task Force for Racial Equity in Criminal Justice, Land of Sky Regional Council, Big Brothers Big Sisters of WNC, and Thrive (Henderson County).

#### **Blake Brewer, Nash County**

Blake Brewer is a Senior Consultant at APCO Worldwide and is based in Raleigh. He specializes in public policy and strategic communications, providing counsel to C-Suite executives. Mr. Brewer has a record of public service in North Carolina. Before entering the private sector, he served as Special Assistant to Chief Justice Paul Newby, providing administrative support to the Chief Justice, overseeing appointments to boards and commissions, managing special projects, and acting as a liaison from the Court to other state government departments and agencies. Prior to his role at the Supreme Court, Mr. Brewer served as Policy Advisor to Lieutenant Governor Dan Forest and also helped advise the Lt. Governor's gubernatorial campaign. Mr. Brewer is a proud graduate of Catawba College, where he earned his Bachelor of Arts in Politics.

#### **Julius Brittman, Durham County**

Julius Brittman is a native of Fayetteville, North Carolina. Brittman received his Bachelor's from Fayetteville State University in Intelligence Studies with a minor in Chinese. Brittman is a 2023 graduate of the University of North Carolina School of Law, where he was inducted into the James E. and Carolyn B. Davis Society. Brittman is a member of the North Carolina Bar and started his legal career with the North Carolina Association of Black Lawyers Land Loss Prevention Project. Brittman then went on to join the United States Army JAG Corps.

#### **Tom Campbell, Wake County**

Tom Campbell, known as "Tom Terrific," was born into a broadcasting family and began his career as a part-time announcer in high school. He played a pivotal role in expanding Campbell Broadcasting's radio stations across North Carolina and also owned WRAZ-TV "Fox50." Tom's three greatest loves are his family, broadcasting, and North Carolina. He has a rich family tradition of public involvement and served on various boards, including the NC Economic Development Board and NC Board of Transportation. Tom created the long-running show NC SPIN and conducted notable interviews. He was inducted into the North Carolina Association of Broadcasters Hall of Fame in 2011, Order of the Henry Clay Oak in 2017, and Order of the Longleaf Pine in 2018.



**Damon Circosta, Wake County**

Damon Circosta has been the Executive Director of the A.J. Fletcher Foundation since 2012, where he has spearheaded several initiatives that help nonprofits thrive. He believes that the best way to put the resources of the foundation to use is through partnership. Established in 1961, the Foundation supports public charities in NC that support many issues, including care for the elderly, education, artistic endeavors, public recreation, and the fostering of religious faith.

A native of Arizona, Circosta has lived in California, Hawaii and (for a few weeks each year) on the shores of Walloon Lake, Michigan. Previously, Circosta led the North Carolina Center for Voter Education, an organization dedicated to improving the electoral process. He served as the Chair of the North Carolina State Board of Elections from 2019-2023, after which he was honored with the Order of the Long Leaf Pine.

Circosta is also an adjunct professor at the Sanford School of Public Policy at Duke University. He is a graduate of the University of Arizona School of Law.

**Ryan Dayvault, Cabarrus County**

No bio available

**Zachary Deason, Mecklenburg County**

Zach Deason was born in Charlotte, NC and grew up in Union County, NC. He received his undergraduate degree from the University of North Carolina and his law degree from the University of Miami. He has practiced law in Charlotte for 17 years with the same firm. In his practice he represents the rights of injured parties in car wrecks, workplace injury claims, and disability matters. He has been involved in local county Democratic party politics and campaigns since 2007. He has served as a Congressional District Officer, Congressional District Chair, meeting parliamentarian, and as County Party Attorney. He is also active with the NCAJ legislative committee and its political action committee fund.

**Steve Duncan, Rutherford County**

Stephen G. Duncan, originally from Belmont, NC, has cultivated a successful real estate brokerage career spanning over two decades, focusing on residential and commercial properties in Asheville, Hendersonville, and Western North Carolina. In a significant 2021 venture, he acquired and transformed a historic property into The Preserve at Maple Creek, featuring a Glass Chapel, century-old

cabins converted into VRBO accommodations, event spaces, and extensive natural surroundings. Stephen's academic background includes degrees in Political Science, and he has held diverse roles, from Town Manager to Business Manager in North Carolina. Actively engaged in the community, he participates in advisory boards and demonstrates philanthropic leadership, reflecting his commitment to the regions he serves. His political campaign involvement underscores his dedication to civic engagement and leadership.

**Justice Bob Edmunds, Guilford County**

Bob Edmunds is a seasoned legal professional with a diverse background. He earned his law degree from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill and served in the United States Navy. Beginning as an assistant district attorney in Guilford County, he later became an Assistant United States attorney for the Middle District of North Carolina and was appointed as the United States Attorney by President Ronald Reagan, holding the position through President George H. W. Bush's administration. After his federal service, he practiced criminal and appellate law. In 1998, he was elected to the North Carolina Court of Appeals, followed by his election to the Supreme Court of North Carolina in 2000 and re-election in 2008. Bob, a specialist in appellate and state and federal criminal law, entered private practice in 2017 with Fox Rothschild, LLP, where he focuses on appellate law. His dedication to judicial education is evident through leadership roles in several legal organizations, and he has also served as an adjunct professor at law schools.

**Julie Eiselt, Mecklenburg County**

Julie Eiselt is originally from Milwaukee, Wisconsin. She earned a bachelor's degree in Spanish from Indiana University and a master's degree in international management/finance from the Thunderbird School of Global Management at Arizona State University. Her career experience includes working in commercial and investment banking in Latin America and Eastern Europe with NationsBank/Bank of America. In 2008 Eiselt founded Neighbors for a Safer Charlotte, a nonprofit community safety advocacy organization. She then ran for the Charlotte City Council in 2015 and served at-large for three terms, including as Mayor Pro Tem. Julie currently serves on the NC Turnpike Authority. Other transportation-related work includes having been a member of the Charlotte Regional Transportation Planning Organization, the NC First Commission and the Connect Beyond regional mobility initiative. Her other civic engagement

includes serving or having served on the NC State Banking Commission, the board of The Relatives, the Charlotte Arts and Culture Advisory Board, The Blumenthal Performing Arts Center and The Arts & Science Council.

**Hon. Mary Etheridge, Currituck County**

Mary (Kitty) Etheridge has been involved in elections since 1982. Her devotion to the election process started when she was asked to serve as a precinct official. Since that time, she has served in many roles, from board member to chairperson of the Currituck County Board of Elections, to the Director of Elections for Currituck County (1999) until her retirement in 2014. After retirement, Etheridge was elected in 2016 to the Currituck County Board of Commissioners as an At-Large member, and served until 2024. Etheridge attended the College of the Albemarle. She completed the NC State Board of Elections certification program and was a Certified NC Election Official and after becoming the Director, was certified as an NC Election Administrator. In 2005, through the Election Center and Auburn University, she obtained her national CERA certification (Certified Election Registration Administrator). During her tenure in elections, Currituck County modernized voting with its first voting tabulators and implementation of the state-wide voter registration system. Etheridge established the High School Election Assistants program in Currituck County, which she is most proud of because it promotes youth involvement in citizenship.

**Fikemi Fawehinmi, Mecklenburg County**

Oluwafikemi Fawehinmi was born in Lagos, Nigeria. Fikemi attended Catawba College where she graduated with great distinction in 2022. She earned a degree in Political Science, concentrating on Pre-law and a minor in Business Administration. In a gap year before law school, she interned for Congressman Richard Hudson at his district office, and worked as a Paralegal at two law firms in Charlotte, North Carolina. Fikemi is currently a student at the University of North Carolina School of Law, where she has served as a Black Law Student Association 1L Representative.

**Hon. Kevin Frye, Avery County**

Kevin Frye holds a Master's Degree in Criminal Justice and Management Certification from Arizona State University, a Bachelor's in Criminal Justice from Lees-McRae College, and extensive certifications in law enforcement. With over 20 years of teaching experience, he has developed criminal justice programs and managed budgets and

personnel. Kevin has held key positions, including serving as Sheriff of Avery County for four consecutive terms and working as a Narcotics Investigator and Patrol Officer. He's known for his involvement in law enforcement initiatives, including the NC Innocence Inquiry Commission, rural sheriff committee, and NC Justice Reinvestment Council, and has been recognized for his outstanding contributions, such as being named "Man of the Year" for Avery County in 2015.

**Leslie Garvin, Guilford County**

Leslie Garvin is the Executive Director of North Carolina Campus Engagement, a collaborative network of colleges and universities committed to strengthening democracy. Garvin is a skilled dialogue and civil discourse facilitator and trainer, a Collaborative Discussion Coach, and a moderator and member of Braver Angels. She serves on the Board of the National Issues Forum, on the National Advisory Committee of the Carnegie Community Engagement Elective Classification, and on the Advisory Board of guides vote. Garvin holds a Masters of Social Work from Washington University in St. Louis. For several years, she served as an election official in Guilford County.

**Maria C. Garza, Wake County**

Maria Garza is the CEO of the East Coast Migrant Head Start Project and is a graduate of Florida International University.

**Dr. Nadine Gibson, New Hanover County**

Nadine Gibson is an assistant professor in the Department of Public and International Affairs at the University of North Carolina Wilmington (UNCW). She received her Ph.D. in Government from the University of Texas at Austin in 2019. Her dissertation examined the impact of spending on voting equipment on turnout. At UNCW, she teaches courses in American political behavior and research methods. She has published empirical research on election services vendors as well as the impact of *Shelby County v. Holder* on turnout in North Carolina. Dr. Gibson also serves as an At-Large Board Member of the North Carolina Political Science Association.

**Dr. Gil Greggs, Wake County**

Gil Greggs is the Director of Academic Programs at St. David's School in Raleigh, NC and holds a Ph.D. from Yale University in Religious Studies with a concentration in Old Testament and Ancient Languages. He earned a Master of Divinity degree from Yale Divinity School and was ordained in the

United Methodist Church in 1985. He taught at Yale, the University of Missouri, and Duke before coming to St. David's. After graduating from Amherst College in 1975 he served as a VISTA worker in public housing projects in New Britain, Connecticut. Dr. Greggs defines himself as "a Democrat, though a fiscal conservative." He tells his children that "I am not going to heaven unless there are three things present there: coffee, baseball, and opera; though I am sure all three are there."

#### **Col. James Hardaway, Wake County**

Colonel (Retired) James Hardaway is from Greensboro and graduated in 1994 from NC State University with a BS in Civil Engineering. Hardaway served 27 years as an Army intelligence officer in Airborne, Artillery, Armor, Infantry, and Cyber units across the country, Europe, and the Middle East. Between 2003 and 2017, he deployed four times supporting combat operations in Iraq and Syria. Hardaway retired in 2021 and returned to Raleigh to pursue an MEd in Learning Design from NC State. Upon graduation, he joined Applied Research Associates managing their DoD tech modernization efforts in the areas of intelligence, cyber, and digital system integration.

#### **Mariah Harrelson, Union County**

Mariah Harrelson was born and raised in Charlotte, NC. She graduated with highest distinction from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill in 2019 with degrees in Public Policy and Political Science. During college, Harrelson spent two summers on Capitol Hill: in a House of Representatives member office and with the Ways and Means Committee. Before law school, she worked in Washington, DC at Deloitte's Government and Public Services Consulting practice, serving federal agency clients. She is currently a third-year law student at the University of North Carolina School of Law.

#### **Kathy Holland, Alamance County**

Kathy Holland served 32 years with the Alamance County Board of Elections. She retired as the Director of Elections in 2021 while serving as President of the North Carolina Association of Directors of Elections. She served in eight Presidential elections, presiding over five as Director. Under her leadership, she successfully guided Alamance County through the 2020 Presidential Election in the midst of local protests and unrest. Holland participated on multiple North Carolina State Board of Elections project teams during her tenure: implementation of a statewide computer system (SEIMS) in the early 1990's, unified best practices

through all 100 counties, voting equipment certification, and ADA accessibility improvement. She is a recipient of the Order of the Long Leaf Pine. She currently serves on the CSSSE (Committee for Safe and Secure Elections) Committee as an organizing and at large member, the Union of Concerned Scientists 2024 Election Science Task Force as well as the Commission on the Future of North Carolina Elections.

#### **Jillian Hopman, New Hanover County**

Jill Hopman is a practicing immigration and human rights attorney for the past 15 years and currently serves as Chair of the New Hanover County Democratic Party (NHCDP). Hopman grew up in Wilmington and won the John T. Hoggard Award as a high-school senior, before graduating cum laude from Duke University and earning her law degree from the University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill. While in law school, she served as the Executive Editor of the First Amendment Law Review and was the recipient of the Gressman-Pollitt Award for Exemplary Skill in Appellate Advocacy. Her work has been featured in many media sources, as well as published by the ACLU, in journals like *New Labor Forum*, and in books such as *Deportation: Who Goes and Who Stays?*. She has been honored by Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch, Southern Poverty Law Center, and the Ms. Foundation's Special Commendation for Excellence in Leadership. She has nearly 20 years of campaign and election experience, including serving as Volunteer Leader at national headquarters for Hillary Clinton's presidential campaign. In July 2020, Jill returned to Wilmington and began serving as an at-large poll observer for New Hanover County and overseeing voter-protection efforts for Brunswick County during the general election. She helped lead the recount campaign for Chief Justice Cheri Beasley and testified before the New Hanover County Board of Elections. Jill also oversaw voter-protection efforts for the 2021 municipal elections and 2022 midterm elections, while serving as the North Carolina Democratic Party's County Liaison for Voter Protection. In particular, Jill is passionate about voting rights, voter-protection initiatives, and free and fair elections. In addition to her election-related work, Jill serves on the Board of Directors for Opportunities for a Better Tomorrow, as a Judge for the NYU National Immigration Law Competition, on the Innovation Council for Eleanor's Legacy, and as a member of the Duke Alumni Admissions Committee.

**Dr. Andy Jackson, Wake County**

Andy Jackson is the Director of the Civitas Center for Public Integrity at the John Locke Foundation, where he focuses on government compliance with policy and law, especially regarding elections. He has experience teaching political science and has worked in various political campaigns and organizations. His writing has appeared in notable publications such as the Wall Street Journal and the Washington Examiner. He holds a Ph.D. in political science from the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, an M.A. in political management from George Washington University, and a B.S. in political science from Appalachian State University.

**Hon. Susan Kluttz, Rowan County**

Susan Kluttz grew up in Salisbury and is a graduate of Mt. Vernon Junior College, Washington, DC, and UNC-G. She served as Mayor of Salisbury from 1997-2011. In 2012 she was appointed NC Secretary of Cultural Resources by Governor McCrory and served until 2017. She currently serves on the Board of Governors for the Foundation for the Carolinas in Charlotte and the Board of Directors of F&M Bank and the Blanche and Julian Robertson Family Foundation, both in Salisbury.

**Catherine Komp, Buncombe County**

Catherine Komp has more than 20 years of experience in public and nonprofit media, serving as content director, senior editor, senior producer, reporter, announcer and host. A resident of Buncombe County, Komp is the interim editor and producer of NC Local, a weekly newsletter covering the state's news and information ecosystem, a service of Elon University's NC Local News Workshop. She previously served as Director of Content at Blue Ridge Public Radio, Senior Editor at Richmond, VA PBS/NPR affiliate VPM News and Senior/Features Editor at the international, daily radio program FSRN. She was a 2020 Fellow in the CPB/ASU Editorial Integrity and Leadership Initiative; a winner of the Virginia Press Association's 2020 Leadership and Innovation Awards; and has received dozens of other awards for her work. These include a 2022 RTDNAC Award for Community Impact, a 2021 Regional Murrow Award for the podcast Resettled, and a 2020 Regional Murrow Award for Overall Excellence.

**Omar Lugo, Alamance County**

Omar Lugo is a versatile leader in both politics and entrepreneurship. He formerly chaired the Alamance County Republican Party and served on the North

Carolina Republican Party's Hispanic Coalition Board. Currently, he holds key roles as a Financial Specialist and Marketing Advisor at DreamB Foundation and is the Founder and Marketing Coordinator of The Minority Machine, a platform championing underrepresented voices in social media.

**Dr. Mary Jo McGowan, Mecklenburg County**

Mary Jo McGowan is a faculty member at UNC Charlotte in the Department of Political Science and Public Administration. Her research focus is on public policies relating to elections and running for office. She is a part of a research team studying impacts of election administration on electoral outcomes. The team (Martha Kropf, Zachary Mohr, and Mary Jo McGowan) has published a study of election costs, *A Republic If You Can Afford It: How Much Does it Cost to Administer an Election*. Additionally, she studies candidate decision making, and women running for office.

**Jim Morrill, Mecklenburg County**

Jim Morrill covered politics for the Charlotte Observer for more than 35 years. He covered nine political conventions as well as more than three decades worth of state and local elections. He's also taught courses on N.C. politics at UNC Charlotte and Davidson College. Since retiring at the end of 2020, he's written political stories for The Assembly, Charlotte Magazine and other publications. A Chicago area native, he served as a Peace Corps Volunteer in West Africa for three years.

**Tara Muller, Wake County**

Tara Muller is a Policy Attorney at Disability Rights NC, the state's federally-mandated protection and advocacy organization for people with disabilities. She researches proposed and existing policy, working to gain legislative and agency support in areas affecting the lives of people with disabilities. Her scope of law is very broad, so she relies strongly on collaboration, engaging extensively with subject matter experts and external coalitions. In the elections and voting space, she works closely with DRNC's Accessible Voting Project, an initiative designed to ensure that voters with disabilities can cast a ballot safely, privately, and without barriers, in conformance with Section 208 of the Voting Rights Act. Originally from Asheville, she graduated from NC State University and Campbell Law School. For nearly 20 years before joining DRNC in 2020, she was a litigator in private practice, representing both businesses and individuals in workers' compensation and appellate matters. Tara was also a certified

mediator for several years and mediated a wide range of civil disputes across NC.

**Anna K. Neal, Mecklenburg County**

No bio available

**Dr. David Nelson, Rowan County**

David P. Nelson is the 24th President of Catawba College. Dr. Nelson brings strong academic experience and executive leadership to the Catawba presidency as the College focuses on its future through sustainable growth and engaging curricular and co-curricular experiences. Dr. Nelson's diverse background includes demonstrating strategic and organizational success, fulfilling community engagement within and outside the College, and transformative and collaborative vision. A first-generation college student, Dr. Nelson received his Ph.D. in Theology from Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary and a Master of Music and Bachelor of Music from Hardin-Simmons University. Throughout his administrative career, he has remained active in the classroom, teaching courses in religious studies, philosophy, and music.

**Myron Pitts, Cumberland County**

Myron B. Pitts is the Opinion editor and columnist for fayobserver.com and The Fayetteville Observer. He has won numerous N.C. Press Association awards for his editorials and columns. In 2021, he was chosen Best of Gannett for editorials for the Gannett/USA TODAY network, the country's largest newspaper publisher. A Fayetteville native, Pitts has served in several roles at the Observer in his more than two-decade career, from editor of the entertainment section to assistant editor in neighborhood news. He is currently part of the community engagement team for the website and newspaper, and an alumni of UNC's Table Stakes, an initiative to grow local newsrooms and make them sustainable.

**Dr. Greg Randolph, Orange County**

Greg Randolph, MD, MPH is a leader and subject matter expert with over 25 years of experience in quality improvement leadership, implementation, education, and research focused on improving population health. Dr. Randolph is currently an Adjunct Professor of Pediatrics and Public Health at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, as well as a principal and founder of Greg Randolph Consulting, LLC. In the recent past he served as the inaugural Executive Director of Population Health Improvement Partners, a nonprofit organization focused on improving population health in the US.

Nationally recognized for his expertise, Dr. Randolph has provided his insights through service on numerous national committees, expert panels, boards, and advisory boards in the governmental, private, and nonprofit sectors. He is also passionate about worldwide access to free and fair elections and has served on two international election observation missions for the Carter Center in Liberia. Dr. Randolph received his MD/MPH degree from UNC-Chapel Hill, completed an Academic General Pediatrics Fellowship and Preventive Medicine Residency at UNC-Chapel Hill, and is a CDC National Public Health Leadership Institute Scholar.

**Rachel Raper, Orange County**

Rachel Raper has served as the Elections Director for Orange County, N.C. since 2018. She previously served as Elections Director for Currituck County from 2014-2018. She holds a B.A. from Elizabeth City State University and a Masters Degree in Arts and Sciences from UNC Greensboro.

**Brandon Rivers, Mecklenburg County**

Brandon Rivers was born and raised in Charlotte and attended EE Waddell High School. After graduating Brandon attended North Carolina Central University for Political Science. After college Brandon worked as a Distributor for a National Sales Corporation and served in the community by volunteering and civic engagement throughout the state of NC. In 2021 Brandon was hired as Regional Director for You Can Vote, a non-partisan NPO, to work to make sure all eligible citizens are registered to vote as well as educated about the importance of voting and empower our communities. He recently became the Director of the new Democracy Center in Charlotte, NC, affiliated with the Center for Common Ground.

**Dr. Jason Roberts, Orange County**

Dr. Jason M. Roberts is a Professor specializing in American political institutions, with an emphasis on the U.S. Congress. He earned his B.S. in Political Science from the University of North Alabama (1998), his M.A. in Political Science from Purdue University (2000), and his Ph.D. from Washington University in St. Louis (2005). Prior to joining the faculty at UNC, Professor Roberts was an assistant professor of Political Science and Law at the University of Minnesota. His research interests include parties and procedures in the U.S. Congress and congressional elections. He is currently working on a project that explores the role of ballot type on the competitiveness of congressional elections in the United States.

**Brandon Robinson, Durham County**

Brandon A. Robinson is the President of the 16th Judicial District Bar and Durham County Bar Association, and a former member of the North Carolina Bar Association Board of Governors and North Carolina Bar Foundation. A Durham-based attorney with a focus in corporate law, international business, estate planning and business litigation, Robinson holds a B.A. in European history and philosophy, and M.A., in American history—both from Western Carolina University—and a J.D. from North Carolina Central University School of Law. Robinson previously clerked for former NC Supreme Court Justice Bob Orr at the NC Institute for Constitutional Law, and worked for President Tom Ross at the UNC System Office, before commencing his private practice. Robinson served as Board President of the Conservation Trust for North Carolina in 2022 and 2023, and currently sits on the Western Carolina University Foundation Board. In addition to law practice and service on various nonprofit boards, Robinson is also an independent historian with research interests in the American Presidency and Reconstruction, and recently contributed a chapter, "Andrew Johnson's North Carolina Legacy: How a Southern Capital Remembers its Native Son," to the volume, *Mourning the Presidents: Loss and Legacy in American Culture* (University of Virginia Press, 2023).

**Dr. Deondra Rose, Durham County**

Deondra Rose is the Kevin D. Gorter Associate Professor of Public Policy at Duke University's Sanford School of Public Policy with secondary appointments in the departments of Political Science and History. Her research focuses on U.S. higher education policy, political behavior, American political development, and the politics of inequality, particularly in relation to gender, race, and socioeconomic status. A summa cum laude, Phi Beta Kappa graduate of the University of Georgia, Rose received her M.A. and Ph.D. in Government from Cornell University, with a specialization in American Politics and public policy.

**Lucy Russell, Wilson County**

Lucy Russell is a proud lifelong North Carolinian. In 2020, she earned her bachelor's degree in Public Policy with highest honors from UNC-Chapel Hill. Russell started her career in the public school classroom. She has spent the last few years serving as a 2nd grade teacher in Warren and Wilson Counties. In 2022, she balanced teaching with managing a State Senate campaign across 10 counties in northeast NC.

She currently serves on the boards for the Wilson County Public Library system, the non-profit Seeds of Hope Wilson, and for the statewide organization Lillian's List.

**Rebecca Schmidt, Yancey County**

Rebecca Schmidt is the former Director of Governmental Affairs in DC for the Nuclear Regulatory Commission.

**Dr. Shawnee Seese, Orange County**

Dr. Shawnee Seese is a public servant with a Ph.D. in Public Policy and Administration, leveraging over 25 years of invaluable experience in government and community relations. Her leadership has fostered effective collaborations between public sectors and local communities, driving positive socio-political change domestically and internationally. Having actively served two terms as Secretary of the Orange County Board of Elections and other local government appointments, Dr. Seese has demonstrated a commitment to diplomacy, democratic processes, and civic engagement. Her blend of academic achievement and real-world involvement has sculpted her into a visionary professional, dedicated to bridging governance and society for a better tomorrow.

**Mary Ellen Shiflett, Guilford County**

Mary Ellen Shiflett is a Louisiana native whose interest in politics and government began with her college major in American Studies and became a real-life enterprise as she managed four successful state senate campaigns for her husband. She later earned a Master of Library and Information Studies just as digital age technologies arrived and spent her remaining work years teaching the information literacy skills needed to identify misinformation/disinformation so prevalent in today's world. After moving to North Carolina and retiring, Shiflett joined the League of Women Voters of the Piedmont Triad and has just completed a seventeen-month term as their president. She currently serves on their Board as President Emerita and on their Fair Elections Roundtable.

**Gen. George Smith, New Hanover County**

No bio available

**Teddy Stille, Surrey County**

Ted Stille recently moved back to North Carolina after more than 10 years in Alaska. He served as an officer in the Air Force, taught high school in Forsyth County and most recently directed a non-profit youth sports program. He is a graduate of the U.S. Air

Force Academy and holds an M.A.Ed. from Wake Forest University. He has lived (and voted) all over the country and, though a veteran, believes that leadership in the public space takes many forms and starts with the fundamental American right to vote.

**Dr. Stephen Tate, Guilford County**

Stephen Tate is currently Professor of Computer Science at UNC Greensboro, and an expert in cybersecurity with over 50 peer-reviewed research publications across a range of computer science topics. Dr. Tate came to UNCG in 2007 to start the Department of Computer Science, and he served as department head for 12 years leading existing B.S. and M.S. programs and establishing a new Ph.D. program. Before joining UNCG, Dr. Tate was on the faculty at the University of North Texas, where he directed the nationally recognized Center for Information and Computer Security. Dr. Tate received a B.E. from Vanderbilt University in 1986, and a Ph.D. from Duke University in 1991.

**Kathryn Thomas, Henderson County**

Kathryn Thomas (she/her) is a senior at Duke University majoring in public policy, with a human rights certificate and a political science minor. She grew up in Henderson County and is proud to call North Carolina home. Thomas is a passionate advocate for voting rights, with a focus on youth political engagement. She spent two years researching the implications of absentee and provisional voting policies on North Carolina voters. Her team's work culminated in an article about youth provisional voting in North Carolina published in the Rutgers University Law Review. At Duke University, Thomas serves as the news editor for The Duke Chronicle, has been a political engagement project fellow in the Hart Leadership Program, works as a teaching assistant in the Sanford School of Public Policy, and is a student pastor for Duke Wesley. Last summer, she interned on the research team at Issue One, the leading cross-partisan political reform organization in Washington, DC. She is writing her honors thesis researching how universities can best utilize convenience voting methods, such as on-campus early voting, to decrease barriers to the ballot and increase student political engagement.

**Judge Anna Mills Wagoner, Rowan County**

Anna Mills Wagoner is the recently retired Senior Resident Superior Court Judge for Rowan county who currently serves as an Emergency Judge and Mediator in the NC Superior courts. Prior to her election in 2011, she was the Presidentially appointed United States Attorney for the Middle District of

North Carolina for 11 years, a post from which she resigned in 2011 to stand for election to the Superior Court Bench. A cum laude graduate of Wake Forest University School of Law, she began her judicial career when she was first elected as a District Court Judge in 1990. Following her reelection, she was appointed as Chief District Court Judge by Chief Justice James G Exum of the N.C. Supreme Court and she continued in that capacity until her appointment as U.S. Attorney. She has been a member of numerous Boards and Commissions throughout the State and Country and was especially honored to serve as the Chair of the North Carolina Innocence Inquiry commission for 4 years. Judge Wagoner is admitted to practice before the United States Supreme Court, the Fourth Circuit Court of Appeals, the District of Columbia bar and all federal and state courts in N.C.

**Dr. Glenda Weinert, Buncombe County**

Dr. Weinert started her professional career as an accountant in the Atlanta corporate offices of The Home Depot, where she worked on general ledger, proformas, and relocations for 7 years. She returned to Asheville to own and operate Little Beaver Child Care. She grew the business from 1 to 5 centers, with a \$2.5 million annual budget - becoming the largest privately-owned child care company in the region. After selling the business in 2008, Dr. Weinert owned and operated a private duty home health company with annual revenues of \$1 million. Upon selling that business, she began consulting in various aspects of business management and administration, particularly for non-profit agencies and child care centers. Dr. Weinert is now a franchisee for a national fast-casual restaurant chain, with four locations in Buncombe County. She has served on numerous boards and commissions. She received her D.B.A. from the University of Phoenix, M.B.A. from Kennesaw State University, and B.A. in Accounting from Lee University.

**Robert Wilson, Wake County**

Robert E. Wilson, a thirty-year change-maker for North Carolina, boasts a distinguished career in state government. He served with dedication in roles within the Community College System, North Carolina Department of Corrections, and as Assistant Secretary of State. In the latter capacity, he spearheaded legislative efforts on corporate, charitable, notary, and lobbying matters, transcending political boundaries. Wilson's proudest achievement was fostering remarkable team diversity. A trailblazer in his family, he attended Fayetteville State University and excelled in athletics, even earning a place in their Athletic Hall of Fame. Beyond college,

he coached sports and became involved in numerous organizations. Robert has garnered multiple awards for his civic service, including the prestigious NC Order of the Long Leaf Pine.

#### **Tom Wilson, Craven County**

Thomas Reston Wilson (“Tom”) was born in St. Louis, Missouri. Wilson graduated from John Burroughs High School in 1995, Miami University of Ohio (cum laude) in 1999, and St. Louis University School of Law in 2003 (magna cum laude). In a gap year before law school, Tom worked at the Trinity Center in Carteret County teaching environmental education to North Carolina middle school students in the Sound to Sea Program. While in law school, Wilson was a summer intern at the North Carolina Attorney General’s Office working in the Environmental Section, focusing on coastal issues. He was admitted to the North Carolina Bar in August of 2003. After law school, he clerked for the Honorable J. Douglas McCullough on the North Carolina Court of Appeals from 2003-05. Wilson then moved to New Bern, North Carolina, where he worked at Stubbs & Perdue, P.A.; then Greene & Wilson, P.A.; and finally Kelly Greene, where he worked for 15 years, specializing in State and Federal Criminal law. Most recently, Wilson has completed 18 months fulfilling a judicial term on the North Carolina Superior Court bench, presiding over criminal and civil matters in over 25 eastern counties and overseeing a number of murder trials. He returned to his colleagues at Greene, Wilson, Crow & Smith P.A. in 2023. In addition to his case load, Tom is currently working on his LLM in English Law through Nottingham Law School, Nottingham England and currently serves as Board Chair for Public Radio East.

#### **William F. Wolcott, III, Buncombe County**

Wolcott, a lifelong resident of Asheville, has an undergraduate degree from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill and holds a Juris Doctor degree from the UNC School of Law. He was admitted to the practice law in North Carolina in 1972 and remained active in the private practice of law for five decades, working primarily in real property law and creditors’ rights. Wolcott also

worked for over 20 years as a Superior Court mediator certified by the N.C. Dispute Resolution Commission. He retired from the North Carolina law firm of Ward and Smith, P.A. in the winter of 2022, but still maintains limited active status as a pro bono attorney volunteering at Pisgah Legal Services, a 17-county WNC poverty law center, which he helped establish in the 1970s. Wolcott has been active in his community over the years, including as Elder at Grace Covenant Presbyterian Church, President of the 28th Judicial District Bar, and as a long-time participant on the Folk Heritage Committee of the Asheville Chamber of Commerce.

#### **Kathleen Wood, Yancey County**

Kathleen Wood has a strong background in sustainable agriculture and education. She was the former coordinator for the Sustainable Vegetable Production Apprenticeship for the NC State Extension and currently serves as the Apprenticeship Coordinator for the Center for Environmental Farming Systems, a collaborative effort between North Carolina State University, North Carolina Agricultural and Technical State University, and the North Carolina Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services.

#### **Bradley Young, Wake County**

Brad Young is the Executive Director of the North Carolina Institute of Political Leadership, a nonpartisan, nonprofit organization that provides leadership training programs for elected and appointed public servants. In its 37th year of operation, IOPL has more than 1,100 graduates representing 82 North Carolina counties. The Institute also hosts an annual Hometown Debates televised series in partnership with Spectrum News and the Women on Board program to prepare women for appointed public board service. Prior to joining the Institute, Young was the director of External Affairs for the North Carolina State Auditor and Press Secretary to the North Carolina State Treasurer. Young serves on the North Carolina Civil Rights Advisory Commission. A native of Jacksonville, North Carolina, Young earned his undergraduate degree at North Carolina State University and his MBA from Campbell University.



## **Appendix B: Public Feedback on Elections from the Trusted Elections Town Hall Tour 2024 (75 survey respondents)**

The Trusted Elections Town Hall tour visited 22 counties in 2024, and held a virtual event with over 100 listeners. In addition, 3 of the town halls were recorded, in Charlotte, Salisbury, and the virtual town hall. Including those who attended a town hall in person and those watching online, the Trusted Elections tour reached over 2,000 people.

Most of those who filled out a survey after the event had increased confidence in election safety and security. The aspects most often mentioned were:

1. Increased confidence in the machines and internet (29 replies)
2. Better understanding of the checks and balances to ensure security (14 replies)
3. The bipartisan nature of the system, with agreement by Democrats and Republicans (7 replies)
4. Confidence in the presenters, and the poll workers as professionals.

Attendees' confidence did improve after listening to a panel discussion, with a few exceptions from those who were already somewhat doubtful about the safety and security of elections. Overall, 93% of respondents indicated either that their confidence remained the same (38%) or increased (55%). Most of those whose confidence remained the same began with the highest trust in elections already (scoring 10 out of 10). Most of the audience self-identified as liberal or moderate, but there were conservative and very conservative attendees and also a few who self-identified as very liberal. Two of the survey respondents identifying as conservative did see their confidence in the security of elections increase.

Most of the suggestions for improvement concerned getting a bigger audience, especially in the last couple of weeks of the town halls. There were also suggestions for handouts with graphics, shorter answers from panelists, and a few complaints about the locations of the town halls. (With a less than 10% response rate from participants, however, it is not clear how well these comments represent the overall audience views).

### **Self-Assessment of the Efficacy of Town Halls for Civic Education:**

The organizing team for the Trusted Elections Tour learned the following from the 2022 and 2024 experience of bringing town halls into various North Carolina communities to educate the public about how elections are administered in our state:

1. In person town halls, with bi-partisan election experts on the panels, was an effective way to improve trust in NC election administration and in the professionalism of election officials for those able to attend. 93% of those attending who answered a survey indicated that their trust in elections either remained high or improved.
2. Having both Republicans and Democrats on the panels helped assure people that our election administration is not weighted to favor one party over another (especially when so many BOE members say that they hardly ever disagree when adjudicating ballots or setting policy, such as early voting locations and dates).

3. The length of time for the town halls – 90 minutes – seemed about right, with enough time to cover many topics but not too long to stretch attention spans.
4. Partnering with organizations, like the League of Women Voters NC (LWV NC), that have established chapters (with membership lists) around the state was helpful in getting the word out and spreading the information that was shared.
5. Reaching out to news media ahead of time helped amplify knowledge sharing about election administration, and in many cases - especially in smaller towns - the print media copied our press release word for word. It was also useful to have interviews with TV and radio shows about politics ahead of and even after the events.
6. In a few cases, having a media personality moderate the event helped get the word out better and added to the professionalism of the event. However, the TV personalities were better moderators, due to their familiarity with live audiences and hosting, than the print or radio personalities. In addition, we could have made a bigger ask of these media folks to ensure solid coverage of the topic by their media outlets.
7. The media reached was helped by support from media firm GMMB, who produced the following analysis of the audiences reached:
  - **Traditional media:** 35 articles, 14.68 million unique monthly visitors
  - **Broadcast media:** 137 news clips, 1.764 million listeners
  - **Social media:** 33 posts, 63,856 reach

Between 23 stops across the state and the associated media coverage, we reached over 2,000 attendees and generated 35 news articles and 137 broadcast segments – sharing timely and accurate information enhancing trust in our elections with *millions* of North Carolinians.

8. Probably the most beneficial and positive result of the Trusted Elections Tour was the support for the election staff and board of election members who served on the panels or came as attendees to a town hall. (At some of the town halls, the entire election staff came to support their director, who was a panelist). It was clear that election officials have felt harassed and targeted since the 2020 elections – and even earlier – and they were very grateful for the town halls.

#### **Areas for improvement:**

1. Not everyone has the time to attend an in person event, so the numbers we could reach were limited.
2. Most of the attendees were left-leaning or centrists (from survey data). It was hard to attract conservative and very conservative attendees.
3. The audiences dwindled as the events came closer and closer to the actual day of the election. Because NC was a swing state this year, many campaigns visited the state, drawing away potential attendees with competing events.
4. Having events one after the other was challenging to the NC co-leads and administration, and made it harder to get advance notice to partnering organizations who might have helped increase audience numbers.
5. Many of the venues were on community college campuses, which are often far away from city centers, and where the students are usually local and not resident. In addition

## **B. Public Feedback on Elections from the Trusted Elections Town Hall Tour 2024**

these campuses are large and the buildings are spread out, so in many cases it was hard to find the actual room where the events were being held. This did not lead to any increase in attendance and may have made it harder for residents to find and attend.

6. In a few cases, the venue changed between the time the flyers were created and the actual event occurred. This led to confusion in those locations and perhaps a drop in attendance from people who showed up at the wrong place. In the future, the team should be better at procuring sites well ahead of time, including the requisite insurance or security needed.
7. Given the resource and time constraints of the team, the original selection of 28 locations for town halls was likely too many. Because of hurricane damage, the tour reduced that number to 22 locations and one virtual event, but that was still a stretch on resources for publicity and for finalizing panels and event details.
8. The team could have worked harder to produce op-eds and follow up reporting on every event. There was a good amount of media coverage, but the team could have engaged more of the panelists or even attendees to write their own op eds after the events, to highlight the professionalism of the panel and the depth of information provided. Nevertheless, some of the election commission members and panelists for the Trusted Elections tour did submit op eds on their own about the security of election administration, although we did not capture metrics on every one of those articles. There were also other partner organizations, like the League of Women Voters and You Can Vote and more, that also did quite a bit of voter education, complementing the outreach of the Trusted Elections Tour.

### **Experience from the November 2024 election:**

#### Current issues and possible areas for improvement:

Mecklenburg County had over 5,000 provisional ballots, and Wake County had over 6,000, pointing to greater need to educate the public about 1) Voter ID and 2) appropriate polling locations. Only a percentage of these ballots were cured and counted, pointing to disenfranchisement of some type. There was some confusion especially in the larger counties about where people could vote during early voting vs. election day.

For the state, the total of provisional ballots was 64,388, with 58,423 cast on election day itself.

A close race for the NC Supreme Court has called into question certain registrations, with the NC Republican party challenging over 60,000 voter registrations. They have asked for several sets of data, including the list of deceased persons, the list of NC felons, and more. At the printing of this report, this statewide election is still under challenge in the courts and has not been certified.

New Hanover County delayed the counting of over 1,700 absentee ballots, possibly due to lack of resources and staff time. The board voted to stop counting any absentee ballots received after Oct. 31 and wait to count them on canvass day, November 15. There were questions raised as to whether this delay was counter to state elections law (unsettled as of the time of this report).

## **B. Public Feedback on Elections from the Trusted Elections Town Hall Tour 2024**

From an article on the ballots in Star News Online:<sup>149</sup> According to North Carolina General Statute 163-234, “Absentee ballots received prior to election day shall be counted on election day.”

In his communication with commissioners, Coudriet expressed concern about the legality of the process, stating that it "looks bad, wrong and plenty of other descriptors."

From Princeton University’s Bridging Divides Initiative (BDI),<sup>150</sup> a recount of the types of NC incidents that occurred in the final weeks of the election season:

- On October 22, **North Carolina** resident Barbara Wright found two sealed and signed mail-in ballots on the ground in her neighborhood and sought to return them to their rightful owners. After locating Marybeth and Eric Merkle, the couple confirmed their ballots had gone missing from their mailbox. Relieved by Wright’s efforts, the Merkles allowed her to take the ballots to the Wake County Board of Elections. However, election officials indicated that the Merkles would likely need to recast their votes due to concerns about the chain of custody. (BDI)<sup>151</sup>
- On October 29, volunteers at early voting sites accused **North Carolina** State Representative Erin Paré and her husband, Wayne Paré, of using intimidation tactics to discourage voters and disrupt poll workers, including standing “extremely close” to poll workers handing out literature, ringing bells, taking photos of poll workers, and using intimidating body language.<sup>152</sup>
- Actors of concern (i.e. groups or networks that are historically, ideologically, or readily prone to violence) have continued to engage in disaster response efforts in **North Carolina**, raising tensions with emergency management agencies, local organizers, and law enforcement. In particular, Veterans on Patrol (VOP)<sup>153</sup>—an anti-government, anti-immigrant militia — has increased activity in the state, leveraging the crisis to spread their ideologies, recruit new members, spread disinformation, and undermine trust in government institutions.
  - On October 21, tensions between VOP and the local community in Lake Lure escalated, leading to a confrontation with local organizers and the disruption of legitimate aid efforts.<sup>154</sup>
  - Throughout the past week, VOP has continued to spread common conspiracy theories, including accusing the military of sabotaging recovery efforts and using

---

<sup>149</sup> Madison Lipe, *As controversy swirls over uncounted ballots in New Hanover County, here’s what’s next*, STARNEWS ONLINE (Nov. 11, 2024), <https://www.starnewsonline.com/story/news/local/2024/11/11/new-hanover-county-ballots-remain-uncounted-possibly-impacting-results/76178512007/>.

<sup>150</sup> *Bridging Divides Initiative*, PRINCETON U., <https://bridgingdivides.princeton.edu/>

<sup>151</sup> Amalia Roy, *Cary woman finds couple after mail-in ballots found on the ground in neighborhood* (Oct. 22, 2024), <https://www.cbs17.com/news/local-news/wake-county-news/cary-woman-finds-couple-after-mail-in-ballots-found-on-the-ground-in-neighborhood/>.

<sup>152</sup> Chloe Courtney Bohl & Jane Porter, *Poll Volunteers Accuse NC Rep. Erin Paré and Husband Wayne of Intimidation at Early Voting Sites* (Oct. 29, 2024), <https://indyweek.com/news/wake/poll-volunteers-accuse-nc-rep-erin-pare-and-husband-wayne-of-intimidation-at-early-voting-sites/>.

<sup>153</sup> *Veterans on Patrol*, SPLC, <https://www.splcenter.org/resources/extremist-files/veterans-patrol/>

<sup>154</sup> *How a conspiracy-fueled group got a foothold in this hurricane-battered town*, WASHINGTON POST (Oct. 23, 2024), <https://www.washingtonpost.com/weather/2024/10/23/how-conspiracy-fueled-militia-got-foothold-this-hurricane-battered-town/>.

“weather weapons” to target pro-Trump areas. *For more information on recent events in North Carolina, contact BDI to receive our bi-weekly North Carolina SitRep. (BDI)*<sup>155</sup>

- On November 1, in **North Carolina**, multiple signs affiliated with the white supremacist group Patriot Front<sup>156</sup> were reported around Wilmington, raising community concerns.<sup>157</sup> The signs appeared outside the Northeast Regional Library, an early voting site, and were later seen along Military Cutoff and Market Street. The signs are likely intended to spread fear or recruit members, noting that many people may avoid removing them due to legal uncertainties.
  - Rae Hunter-Havens, Director of the New Hanover County Board of Elections, confirmed that current state guidelines do not provide a basis for removing Patriot Front signs from polling sites.
- On November 2, in a post to Facebook, the Democratic Women of Pender County alleged that Democratic poll greeters at the Hampstead Annex in North Carolina faced ongoing harassment from Republican poll greeters and supporters during the 15 days of early voting. The group claimed that Republican supporters displayed Trump flags near the Democratic table, parked close by, made obscene gestures, and verbally harassed volunteers. Despite complaints, they reported that county election officials did not take action to address the behavior. The Democratic Women of Pender County expressed concern over what they described as a lack of respect for fair election practices. They voiced worries about the safety of volunteers on Election Day. (BDI)
- CBS News reported bomb threats, but none in NC. There have been dozens of bomb threats in states including Georgia, Arizona, Michigan, Wisconsin and Pennsylvania, but federal and local law enforcement authorities have said they were not credible.

While a comprehensive count is not yet available, CBS is tracking 33 reported incidents and has confirmed the addresses of 22 threats through statements by elections, courts and law enforcement officials.

At this time, CBS News has confirmed that at least 21 of these threats were on active voting precincts.

- On November 6, Black students, activists, and organizers across at least 32 states and the **District of Columbia** received racist text messages telling them they were selected to “pick cotton at the nearest plantation.”<sup>158</sup> Affected states include Alabama, Arkansas, California, Connecticut, Florida, Georgia, Kansas, Kentucky, Louisiana, Maryland, Massachusetts, Michigan, Minnesota, Mississippi, Missouri, Nebraska, Nevada, New

---

<sup>155</sup> BDI’s contact form can be found at <https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSelgY-wli-KICV4fdksA4WKFT03XfJZl7IgNcY8zyCmSsgYGg/viewform>

<sup>156</sup> *Patriot Front*, SPLC, <https://www.splcenter.org/resources/extremist-files/patriot-front/>.

<sup>157</sup> *White supremacist group signs front and center outside of Wilmington voting site*, WECT (Nov. 1, 2024), <https://www.wect.com/2024/11/01/white-supremacist-group-signs-front-center-outside-wilmington-voting-site/>.

<sup>158</sup> Laura Doan, Julia Ingram, & Layla Ferris, *Officials condemn racist text messages sent to Black residents in at least 32 states* (Nov. 9, 2024), <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/racist-texts-black-residents-states/>.

Jersey, New York, North Carolina, Ohio, Oklahoma, Pennsylvania, South Carolina, Tennessee, Virginia, Washington, and Wisconsin. (BDI)

- The Virginia Kekoas, a Virginia-based militia, announced that they would travel to **North Carolina** starting **November 8** to assist with hurricane relief. They are believed to still be present in the state. Known for their focus on local protection and preparedness, the Kekoas have a history of conducting weapons and medical training and engaging in Second Amendment advocacy.
  - According to a GoFundMe<sup>159</sup> organized by Eddie Ray and Cody Beckner,<sup>160</sup> the group plans to head to areas like **Burnsville** and **Bat Cave** to help “remove trees, distribute supplies, and conduct outreach.”
  - The Kekoas frame their activities as community support. However, experts warn that militia groups, despite claiming community intentions, can pose risks by creating unofficial and potentially intimidating armed presences that operate outside legal authority.
- On November 12, in **North Carolina**, New Hanover County news outlets reported that around 1,750 mail-in ballots were left uncounted on Election Night.<sup>161</sup> Sitting Commissioner Dane Scalise filed a complaint, questioning potential legal violations and seeking answers. The county elections office set an October 31 cutoff date for counting absentee ballots, which the director claimed was based on state guidance — a claim the state elections board denied. Additional concerns arose from roughly 1,900 provisional ballots awaiting review. These uncounted ballots, especially mail-ins which often favor Democrats, could impact close races, including school board and county commissioner positions. The county scheduled a public meeting for November 14 to address the outstanding ballots, with final results to be certified at the County Canvass on November 15 at 11 am.
  - Election integrity activists are claiming this is a sign of cheating in the 2024 election in New Hanover county. (BDI)
- On November 6, members of online Boogaloo<sup>162</sup> spaces, some of which participated in on-the-ground “disaster tourism” efforts in western **North Carolina** after Hurricane Helene, celebrated Trump’s election. Some members called for “vengeance and retaliation” against perceived enemies of Trump, while others posted about, to uncertain degrees of seriousness, desiring to work at DHS under the incoming Trump administration to “take part in mass deportations.” (GPAHE, BDI, Alethea)

---

<sup>159</sup> *Support Virginia Kekoas’ Hurricane Relief Effort*, GOFUNDME, [https://www.gofundme.com/f/support-virginia-kekoas-hurricane-relief-effort?lang=en\\_US](https://www.gofundme.com/f/support-virginia-kekoas-hurricane-relief-effort?lang=en_US)

<sup>160</sup> *US-NEWS-US-GUN-CULTURE-VP*, GETTY IMAGES, <https://www.gettyimages.com.au/detail/news-photo/cody-sasquatch-beckner-wears-his-protective-militia-gear-at-news-photo/2158274484>

<sup>161</sup> Benjamin Schachtman, *NHC attorney suggests local elections office seek outside counsel, county manager defends elections investments*, WHQR (Nov. 12, 2024), <https://www.whqr.org/local/2024-11-12/nhc-attorney-suggests-local-elections-board-look-outside-council-county-manager-defends-elections-investments>.

<sup>162</sup> *Armed Extremism Primer: The Boogaloo*, EVERYTOWN (Aug. 11, 2021), <https://everytownresearch.org/report/the-boogaloo/>.

- On November 6, various groups, including individual active club<sup>163</sup> chapters and white nationalist groups, discussed using Trump’s election as a recruitment opportunity, with one such group claiming that Trump supporters “overwhelmingly were voting for OUR ideas,” and encouraging group members to “make fascism sexy again.”<sup>164</sup> (GPAHE, BDI)
- Veterans on Patrol have called for supporters to get “boots on the ground” and take action against an alleged FEMA plan to “forcibly acquire” land in **North Carolina**. Veterans on Patrol currently have a presence in the state to help provide hurricane Helene relief efforts, a strategy designed to increase visibility and normalize their presence. (Moonshot, BDI)

### Legislative actions on election administration

Information on issues across the country can be found in a Bill Tracker from the Voting Rights Lab.<sup>165</sup>

The entity making appointments for Boards of Elections changed in a new law passed by the NC General Assembly in December, SB382.

The GOP leadership in the General Assembly passed a law changing the authority to appoint Boards of Election members from the Governor (a Democrat) to the state Auditor (a Republican). Former GOP Governor Pat McCrory weighed in on this change: “North Carolinians, including me, elected the state auditor to investigate waste, fraud, and abuse in state government— not appoint the Board of Elections,” McCrory said in a statement. “The North Carolina Constitution assigns appointment powers of this nature to the governor, not the state auditor. Both political parties should stop playing games with the administration of elections, which shakes the confidence of voters in our voting system,” McCrory’s statement said.<sup>166</sup>

This bill also shortens the time that boards of elections have to certify elections, including the counting of provisional and absentee ballots, from 10 days to 2 ½ days.

Although the Governor’s veto of SB 382 was overridden, sections of the law are currently being challenged in court, so the full impact of the changes outlined there are yet to be finalized as of the date of this report.<sup>167</sup>

<sup>163</sup> *Active Club Network*, ADL (Jan. 10, 2023), <https://www.adl.org/resources/backgrounder/active-club-network>.

<sup>164</sup> *Following Election, American Extremists Celebrate and Call For Violence Against the Communities Trump has Targeted*, GPAHE (Nov. 6, 2024), <https://globalextrémism.org/post/following-election/>.

<sup>165</sup> *Issue Areas*, VOTING RIGHTS LAB, <https://tracker.votingrightslab.org/issues>.

<sup>166</sup> Lynn Bonner, *NC’s top elections official asks Senate leader to retract his statement casting doubt on elections*, NC NEWSLINE (Nov. 22, 2024), <https://ncnewsline.com/2024/11/22/ncs-top-elections-official-asks-senate-leader-to-retract-his-statement-casting-doubt-on-elections/>.

<sup>167</sup> Text of SB 382 can be found at [https://www.ncleg.gov/EnactedLegislation/SessionLaws/HTML/2023-](https://www.ncleg.gov/EnactedLegislation/SessionLaws/HTML/2023-2024/SL2024-)

[2024/SL2024-57.html#:~:text=SL%202024%2D57%20\(SB%20382\)&text=AN%20ACT%20to%20make%20modifications,Various%20changes%20to%20the%20law](https://www.ncleg.gov/EnactedLegislation/SessionLaws/HTML/2023-2024/SL2024-57.html#:~:text=SL%202024%2D57%20(SB%20382)&text=AN%20ACT%20to%20make%20modifications,Various%20changes%20to%20the%20law)

## Appendix C: Big Idea Trends Across Committees for the Commission on the Future of NC Elections (notes compiled in July 2024)

**Big Idea Trends Across Committees:** *(Note: Committees did not examine recent changes to election law, e.g. SB 747, as these laws had not been enacted yet. As of July 1, some new laws are in place, and more are still pending)*

1. **NC has a pretty good system.** Each committee looked at the NC system, researched other states' systems, and decided we do a pretty good job in election administration with high confidence in the security and safety of our ballots and elections. Most voters do not know about the security and checks and balances in the system, e.g. every ballot case in NC has a paper backup, and it is against the law for any electronic ballot marking device to be connected to the internet. The NC State Board website<sup>168</sup> shows all the cases of *alleged* fraud (the site does not show whether the allegations turned out to be true or not) over the years 2015 - 2022 and found only 674, or 0.002% of all votes cast.
2. **Public Education.** Each committee found a need for better public education on their given topic. The future of NC elections depends on public perception. Highlighting the biggest public myths about elections can help shed light on what is true vs. what is false in order to address rampant misinformation. Local media is disappearing, so the state needs to be creative in order to reach all age groups and audiences (e.g. through popular athletes). Public awareness increases participation.
  - *Committee(s) to Reference:* Ballot Access & Filing for Candidates; Campaign Finance; Civic Education; Voter Access & Registration; Ballot Security, Cyber Security, & List Maintenance; Primaries & Election Day Processes; Counting Votes.
3. **Trust and Transparency.** Along with public education, trust in and transparency on behalf of the government are key factors in increasing voters' confidence in elections and ultimate participation. The public thinks there is more corruption in elections (e.g., regarding money in elections and mail-in ballots) than there is, so it is important to highlight actual procedures and checks and balances in the system to increase public trust. The more these can be publicized, the better. NC is one of the most restrictive states for absentee ballots (2 witness signatures or notarized form, and no drop boxes) and pending legislation would add signature verification on top of that.

---

<sup>168</sup> 2015-2022 NCSBE Referred Cases, NCSBE, <https://s3.amazonaws.com/dl.ncsbe.gov/Investigations/NCSBE%20Referred%20Cases%202015-2022.pdf>.



- *Committee(s) to Reference:* Campaign Finance; Ballot Security, Cyber Security, & List Maintenance; Counting Votes; Mail in Ballots; Mail in Ballots; Primaries & Election Day Processes.
- 4. Unaffiliated Candidates/Voters.** The number of unaffiliated voters is growing rapidly in North Carolina (faster than any other party or registration), and yet it is extremely hard for unaffiliated candidates to get on a partisan ballot. Unaffiliated candidates and voters need to be included more in the electoral process. Changes to the rule stating that unaffiliated voters cannot serve on Boards of Election might be considered.
- *Committee(s) to Reference:* Ballot Access & Filing for Candidates; Counting Votes.
- 5. Voter Access.** Polling shows a need for better access across the board for voters. Right now, there are difficulties for groups such as disabled voters, English as a second language citizens, and college students, that limit their ability to exercise their right to vote. There could be better guidelines that can be used consistently across counties to ensure accessibility across the state.
- *Committee(s) to Reference:* Voter Access & Registration; Early Voting.
- 6. Safety of Election Workers and Lack of Resources.** Much of the electoral process in NC lacks adequate staffing and/or funding. It is important to raise public awareness about this so that county and state budgets better equip elections staff for their high volume of work, especially during election season. Public spending on elections increases participation. Surveys of election workers also indicate that harassment and intimidation are making it harder to recruit and keep election workers. De-escalation training, public education, better salaries, and increased security have been suggested. Because of resignations and retirements, over half of our 100 County Election Directors supervised a Presidential election for the first time in fall 2024.
- *Committee(s) to Reference:* Campaign Finance; Election Infrastructure & Administration; Challenges & Lawsuits, Primaries and Election Day Processes.
- 7. Additional areas of concern:** Other topics were discussed without conclusions by the committees. These include the following:
- The redistricting process is seen as unfair, but the path to having an independent commission was seen as nearly impossible.
  - Voters are concerned that if the outcome for “any elected office” is contested, the NCGA can decide it under Article VI of the NC Constitution and NCGS § 163-182.13A.

### C. Big Idea Trends Across Committees for the Commission on the Future of NC Elections

## **Committee Chairs Update Meeting (6/4/2024) – Recap of Main Ideas:**

### **Ballot Access and Filing for Candidates – Kitty Etheridge**

#### **1. Redistricting**

- Redistricting was discussed extensively and the committee agreed on a few guidelines, recognizing that big changes to the current process are unlikely.
- Recommend not using partisan data (including voter registration, past election votes, racial data, incumbent address, etc.)
- Avoid splitting districts, counties, and municipalities—make districts as compact as possible.

#### **2. The Unaffiliated Voter**

- Growing rapidly in NC—faster than any other party/registration—yet they cannot serve on Boards of Elections under current rules.
- Extremely difficult to be an unaffiliated candidate on the general election ballot in partisan races because you need 4% of voters to sign a petition.
  - Burke County example (Caroline Avery’s story)—great example for the media coverage
  - RFK got on the ballot by supporters forming a new political party to get around the 4% rule

#### **3. Public Perception**

- The future of North Carolina elections depends on the public perception of them
- Recommend creating a fact sheet containing essential information on elections (redistricting, residency requirements, etc.) to share with the media to help with public perception.
- Conducted a survey with candidates on their views of the process—still waiting on results.

### **Campaign Finance – Dr. Mary Jo McGowan**

- North Carolina has a good campaign finance system overall.
- Focused on suggestions to help educate the public because the public thinks any money in elections is corrupt. There is not as much corruption as the public thinks, so there is a need to get accurate information out.
- The committee did not consider public finance—had to narrow down to local level only considering how complex both the local & federal level systems are.

#### **1. Responsibilities of Campaign Finance Compliance by Candidates**

- Developed an infographic showing what exactly candidates have to do, money they can take, money they cannot take, etc. essentially to explain basic regulations.

#### **2. Campaign Finance Limits & Regulations**

- Developed another infographic explaining requirements for reporting contributions and expenses of campaigns.

## **C. Big Idea Trends Across Committees for the Commission on the Future of NC Elections**

- Discussed how contributions are monitored and audited, including the audit process & its four different tiers, and who conducts the audits.

### 3. State is Lacking Resources

- The state needs more funding to have adequate staffing for the campaign monitoring system in order to get audits done well.
- Publicizing the investment could increase legitimacy of elections in North Carolina.

### Civic Engagement – *Lucy Pittman*

- All committees found a need for public education—this could begin with a focus on the biggest public myths that committees discovered.
- *Guiding question:* How are voters getting information about elections?
  1. **Trusted organizations**
    - 15 organizations doing civic education work
    - 40+ campus education organizations
  2. **Current practice for State and Local county boards of elections**
    - Two mailers for voter ID changes before election
    - Outreach specialists
    - Committee survey of local directors of county boards had a 23% response rate.
      - Most don't have a staff person for voter education
      - Need better localized information due to disappearance of local media
- Recommendations for best practices coming.
- Get athletes, influencers, singers, etc. involved in ads to reach a younger crowd.

### Voter Access and Registration – *Myron Pitts*

- Voter education and access are both issue groups that continue to have access challenges.
  1. **Improve Voter Education**
    - Issue overlaps with the civic engagement committee..
    - Misinformation must be addressed.
    - Provide better information on voter rights & procedures and any legislative changes, leveraging nonprofit groups working on voting.
  2. **Improve Accessibility for Disabled Voters**
    - Ensure voting materials and polling places are fully accessible.
    - Recommend a standardized approach for a disabled voter that each precinct can utilize.
    - Put relevant information in a prominent place at voting sites.
  3. **Expand Language for Non-English Speakers**
    - Ballots currently only available in English and Spanish. Need to create more options for non-English speakers other than Spanish.

## C. Big Idea Trends Across Committees for the Commission on the Future of NC Elections

- Focus on language prevalent among specific N.C. demographics.
- 4. Facilitate Felon Voting Rights & Access**
  - Felon reentry process includes a lot of information at once, so voting information is often missed. Current materials are not increasing felon voting numbers.
  - Better coordination needed with individuals who work with reentry programs to make sure voting guides, absentee ballots, etc. are included.
- 5. Facilitate College Student Voting**
  - Boost education efforts on campuses & work with student-led organizations.
  - Promote voting access, where students can vote, early voting days posted on campuses, and surveys/focus groups to identify specific barriers college students face.

### **Ballot Security, Cyber Security – James Hardaway**

- 1. Voters do not Understand Digital Security in Depth**
  - Increase public education
  - Emphasize processes e.g. redundancies
    - Technology budget should prioritize equipment and websites
- 2. Increase Confidence in Ballot Chain of Custody**
  - Educate public on ballot accuracy – should people get a voting “receipt?”
  - Raise awareness of security in moving ballots (chain of custody )
- 3. Better Transparency in Voter List Maintenance**
  - Include information on who reviews/decides on changes to the list (authority/timing)
  - Keep voters in the loop (get feedback)

### **Mail in Ballots – Dr. Shawnee Seese**

- NC is a leader in mail in voting security & access.
  - Public education and awareness on the current rules governing mail in voting and absentee voting procedures is essential for effective participation. Need to improve what voters understand about mail in voting and how they can access their ballot, and to ensure that when they do mail it in, there are strong security measures to keep it safe.
  - Pay particular attention to how the media shapes public perceptions on mail in voting – the current political climate is a big influence in voter participation.
- 1. Accessibility**
    - Make sure ALL eligible voters (including rural, disabled, non-English speaking, etc.) can participate in the voting process.
    - Question of reliability of US Postal Service—ex. late & lost ballots
      - Financial assistance could remove barriers—e.g. all mail in voting envelopes could have prepaid postage
  - 2. Security**
    - N.C. does not use dropboxes.

## **C. Big Idea Trends Across Committees for the Commission on the Future of NC Elections**

- Raise public awareness about secure chain of custody and verification of ballots
- Trust and transparency with Board of Elections is key

### **Early voting** – *Jim Morrill*

#### **1. Use of early voting**

- Early voting is becoming increasingly popular for all voters
- Same day registration is also popular and current process is secure

#### **2. Time allowed for early voting**

- N.C. has 17 days for early voting, which is slightly below average, but seems adequate.

#### **3. Convenience of sites**

- Each county is in charge of selecting their own sites for early voting, and there is no real pattern or formula for selecting – might need guidelines of some sort for this process.
- Make sites geographically accessible, especially for students/colleges campuses.

### **Primaries & Election Day Process** – *Greg Randolph & Sherra Blackburn*

- Focused on a range of topics:

- Disaster planning (prior to the day)
- Ballot journey: how is the ballot marked and counted, etc.
- Casting ballots & voter assistance: folks who have accessibility issues and need assistance or accommodations
- Secrecy and privacy at polling sites
- Poll observers: their roles & requirements
- Vote counting and certification and closing the polls and tabulator
- Runoff thresholds & ranked choice voting
- Semi-closed primary process

#### **1. Log of Non-voters**

- Concern about new law requiring people who are assisting a voter to register at the polling place
- Caretakers should be included in the log of non-voters

#### **2. Tradeoffs with Runoff Thresholds**

- Reconsider and look at the cost of these runoff thresholds—do we need them? Is the value/cost worth it? Committee reached no conclusions but thought further study could help.

#### **3. Publicizing Ballot Integrity Process**

- N.C. has a strong ballot integrity process.
- Make the public aware of reassuring measures being taken (e.g. every ballot cast in N.C. has a paper back-up).
- Add a section on ballot integrity on election day or chain of custody on ballots

## **C. Big Idea Trends Across Committees for the Commission on the Future of NC Elections**

## Counting votes – *Dr. Michael Bitzer*

### 1. Ranked Choice Voting

- Committee discussed this way of voting and had a presentation on it, but did not come to any conclusions. There are pros and cons, and the committee may take more time later to discuss but did not sense an urgency to change voting methods at this time.– TBD.

### 2. Transparency

- Transparency is key to shining light on the integrity of the counting process
- Letting the public observe the counting process, either in person or via zoom, boosts confidence. This already happens in many counties.
- Overall, N.C. is well-regarded in terms of data transparency

### 3. Unaffiliated Voters

- Biggest block of registered voters are unaffiliated, and this block is growing.
- They feel left out of some of the process, e.g., they cannot serve on Boards of Elections. This possibility should be explored in the future.

## Election infrastructure and admin – *Leslie Garvin*

- *Two main problems:*

1. Turnover and shortages among election directors, election staff, poll workers and election officials.
2. Safety and security risks – verbal threats, violence, etc. which have grown since 2020.

- *Three potential solutions:*

1. **Recruitment Across the Lifespan** (framework approach to poll worker/election official recruitment)

- Promote and strengthen student election assistance program
- Election fellowship program for college students—ex. Arizona model
- Leverage existing initiatives for college students to incentivize them to want to work as poll workers
- Partner with businesses/organizations to incentivize employees to volunteer for these positions
- Use better technology and social media to promote

2. **Better Salaries**

- Conduct a comprehensive salary study for comparison
- Explore ways beyond salary to recruit and retain: transportation incentives, recognition and rewards for workers, career planning and succession planning.
- Disparities & Differences across Counties:

## C. Big Idea Trends Across Committees for the Commission on the Future of NC Elections

- Not a level playing field as counties are funded differently by county commissioners—explore ways to help counties without the adequate funding:
  - Create of a library of best practices
  - Host more frequent gatherings of election directors and staff so elections are administered more similarly across counties

### **3. De-escalation Training**

- Educate law enforcement on election security and election laws (e.g., what can observers do and not do?)
- Advocate for legislation to protect election workers

## **Challenges and lawsuits – Bob Orr**

- *Three issues:*

### **1. Lawyer Participation**

- Becoming increasingly more difficult to get lawyers to participate in the process, partly because of the partisan divide—many law firms recommend staying out of it altogether.
- Recommend working with professional groups (like the Bar Association) to increase number of lawyers educated on election laws from a neutral perspective.

### **2. Question of Disqualification of a Presidential Candidate (based on 14th amendment)**

- How to deal with disqualifications for presidential candidates, like age and citizenship?
- Ex. If No Labels ran a 28 year old Canadian candidate, the NC State Board of Elections would not have a process in place to handle it – so how to go about it?

### **3. Contested Elections**

- The General Assembly decides who wins a contested election in NC, not the court.
- If a candidate thinks they did not get the right number of votes, they can claim to have a contested case and it stops all judicial proceedings on that case
- Public is not aware of this – the process could be improved.

## **C. Big Idea Trends Across Committees for the Commission on the Future of NC Elections**

## **ADDITIONAL CONCERNS AFTER 2024 ELECTIONS**

Notes from conversations with various election directors in December 2024:

**Two big funding issues:** How do recounts get funded; how do last minute ballot printings get funded. Counties were upset by these two incidents that led to unexpected expenses. In 2020 with COVID, unexpected expenses had federal support. No monetary support came with these 2024 changes.

### **RFK ballot issue:**

There need to be clear rules about when the ballot is finalized and no more changes are allowed, otherwise there is technically no cutoff date. There is also a fairly low bar to get listed on the presidential ballot – does that need adjusting? (There were 7 names on the NC ballot). The NC Association of County Commissioners was upset by the burden that the RFK change put on smaller counties especially, when 2.5 million ballots had already been printed and had to be thrown out and re-done.

### **Implications of SB 382:**

Canvass will be very difficult to conduct in 3 days, which normally takes 10 days. In presidential years, this will mean operating election offices 24/7 for those 3 days, are board of elections members willing to put in 14 hour days? Sara Lavere, current head of the Association of NC Election Directors, sent a letter on behalf of the NC Association of Election Directors in opposition to this shortened time frame. For example, the DMV website kept shutting down and not updating in a timely fashion, making the canvass research more difficult. If that happens during the shorter canvass, research will not be able to be completed.

There should be a requirement for any new law impacting election administration to include the budgetary impact, including the source of the required funding. Also the proposed changes should be run by the experts doing the work BEFORE the law passes to ensure that the changes can actually be implemented in the way that the law proscribes.

**Western North Carolina:** there was legislation passed during early voting that required 2 new election locations in McDowell and in Henderson counties, but not in Buncombe. McDowell did not need the additional site but had to comply with the law and again this had budgetary and personnel implications that were hard to implement during active voting.

**General issues:** As usual, staffing and funding were big issues. Morale is low right now across the state in light of the ongoing challenges in the Riggs/Griffin race; passage of SB 382 without consideration of what changes will actually mean for election workers; comments by Berger for Griffin about “keep counting til you get the right number of votes” implying bad behavior by election officials; the number of recounts requested; uncertainty as to changes that 382 will bring and whether all 100 boards and staff will be changed out if the law stands after the numerous lawsuits filed against it.

## **C. Big Idea Trends Across Committees for the Commission on the Future of NC Elections**



## Appendix D: Community Partners: Reflections on the 2024 Election

### You Can Vote

YCV staff and student fellows assisted voters outside of 23 early voting locations and election day polling places in Mecklenburg, Guilford, Forsyth, Durham, Wake, Orange, Onslow, and New Hanover Counties. We targeted locations on or near college campuses, where students were likely to need assistance with voter registration during early voting and navigating NC's new voter ID requirements.

Across these 8 counties, we witnessed widespread confusion and misinformation about voter registration, voter ID, and the voting process in North Carolina. This included poll workers who were not properly trained on voter ID requirements, voters who thought they could register and vote same-day on election day, voters who were told by outside groups that the address on their ID must match their voter registration, voters who were misinformed about the types of ID that would be accepted, voters who were told that they could register online at the NC DMV website after the NC voter registration deadline and be allowed to vote on election day, and more.

Voters received corrected information from YCV staff and were encouraged to report these instances to the NC Election Protection Hotline. Our partners at Democracy NC, who manage the NC Election Protection Hotline, should have a more complete accounting.

### Summary of Experience with the 2024 Elections-League of Women Voters of Charlotte Mecklenburg

Members of the League of Women Voters of Charlotte Mecklenburg support the premise that elections affect all facets of our lives, and the key is choosing leaders whose decisions shape the direction of our country and community. Therefore, in consideration of the November 2024 Election, our Board decided to focus our efforts primarily on registering and educating voters and GOTV activities. LWVCM volunteers devoted countless hours in assuring our citizens had the information and opportunity to make their voices heard by casting their vote.

LWVCM volunteer efforts in support of the 2024 General Election from January 1, 2024, to mid-October 2024:

- Approximate number of LWVCM members serving as poll workers and Observers:50
- Approximate number of citizens reached through tabling, candidate forums, New Citizen Registrations and other in-person programs: 5,622
- Approximate number of citizens reached through Voter Education Contacts: 9,913
- Approximate number of citizens reached through phone banking; postcarding, letter writing & social media: 2,000
- Vote411 digital display ads (10/8-11/5 run dates): 411,800 impressions

*(This data represents our best estimates, however, may not fully represent all LWVCM members involved in poll work and citizens reached through our efforts)*

League Volunteers spent over 400 hours in GOTV and activities at plethora venues including farmers markets, museums, libraries, crisis centers, civics clubs, apartment blitzes, theatres, retail stores and universities. The League partnered with many other nonpartisan organizations including VoteRiders, Roof Above, The Carter Center, Common Cause NC, Democracy NC and AAUW.

The League allied with the Social Justice Committee of the Friendship Missionary Baptist Church for two candidate forums in October 2024 Council of State (10/1) and NC Supreme Court, NC House Districts 98, 99, 103, 104, 105 and Mecklenburg County Commission Districts 1, 2, 5 and 6.

Co-President Suzanne Elsberry represented LWVCM on a panel discussion airing October 8, sponsored by WFAE-PBS on “Disagreeing with Dignity.” The segment was a part of the Carolina Impacts Seeking Unity series on politics and elections seeking strategies to counter political polarization and disunity.

Challenges during the voting process observed included: long lines, voters lacking ID and having to vote provisional ballots. It is unknown how many voters did not vote due to no ID or because they found the vote by mail requirements too difficult. The vote was complicated by complicated and rather onerous instructions for the mail-in ballots (voter must sign envelope, furnish 2 witnesses and a copy of their photo ID (or exception form), print their name and provide complete address. (In some cases voters included their actual voter ID and the BOE had to return it to them.) Post election-The NCGA passed further voter suppression measures impacting future elections.

Many League volunteers served as monitors during the Mecklenburg County Post election canvassing process to determine the votes have been counted and tabulated correctly culminating in authentication of the official election results.

We are sincerely grateful for the stellar efforts of our members to continue the League’s mission to empower and protect the thousands of votes within our community.

#### **D. Community Partners: Reflections on the 2024 Election**

## Appendix E: Charts on NC Voting Trends Not Included in Body of Report

Chart E.1

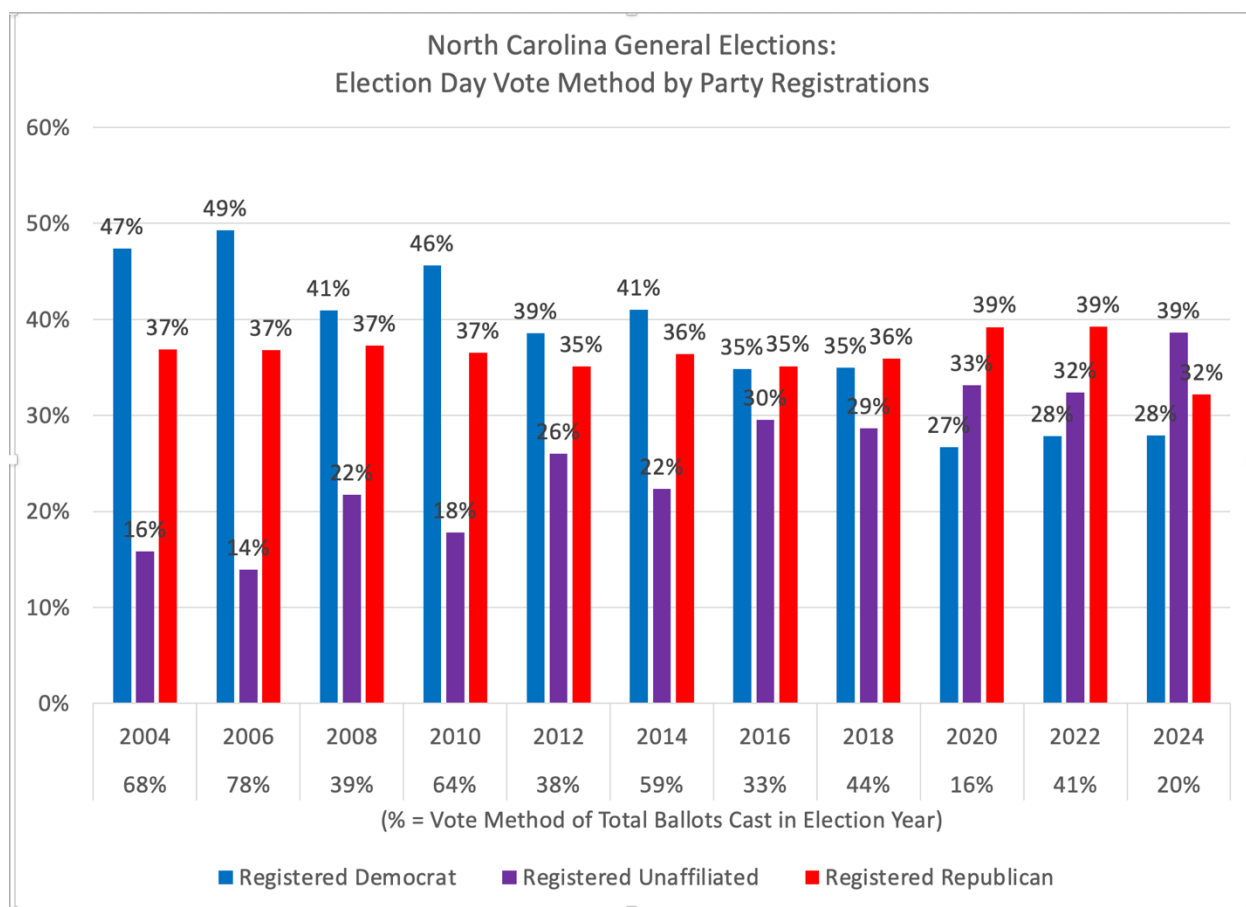


Chart E.2

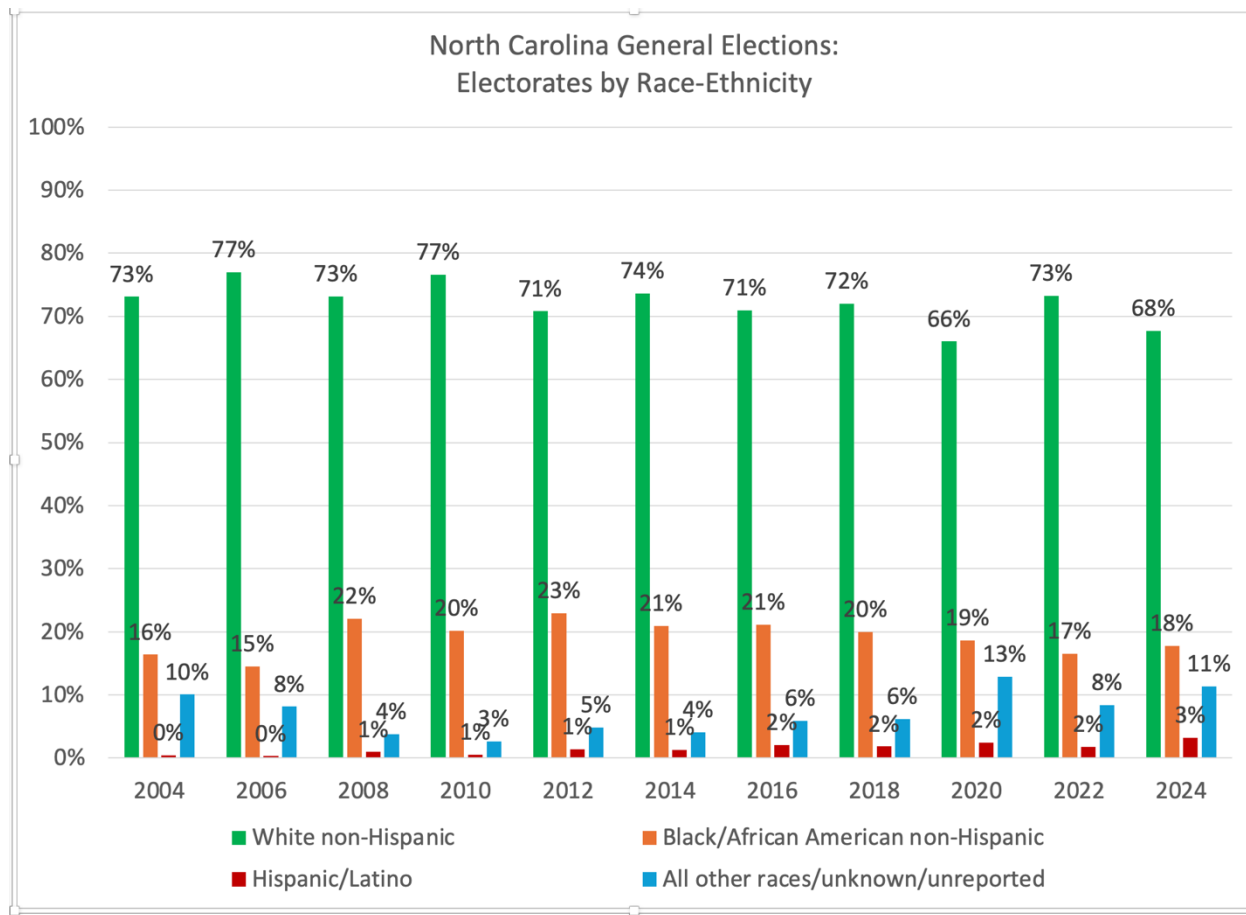
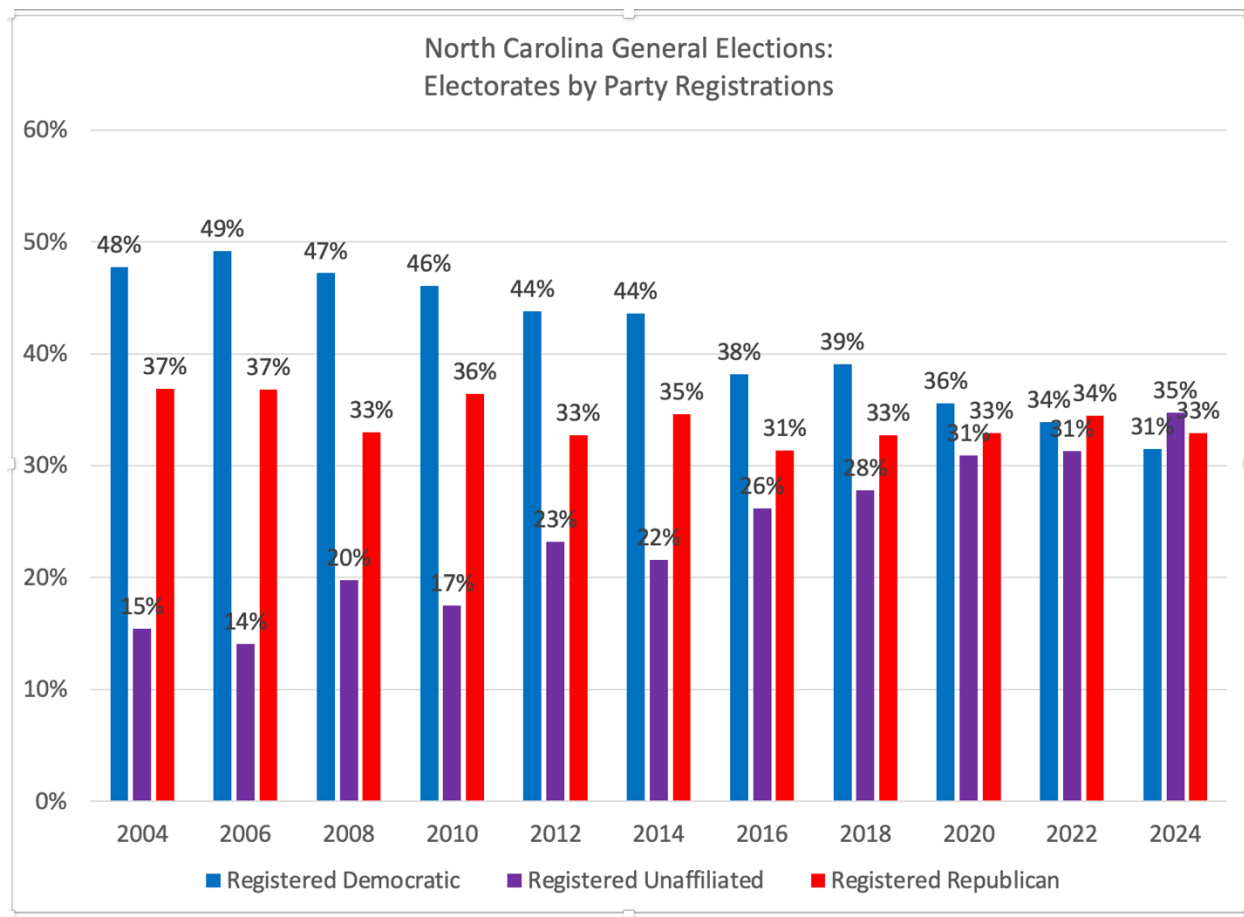


Chart E.3



## **Appendix F: Information on Election Issues in *Griffin v. NCSBE***

As of the date of printing for the final Election Commission Report there is still one major statewide election undecided across the entire United States – and that is right here in North Carolina. While there are several different lawsuits currently active in both state and federal court addressing in one way or another the issues in play, the primary focus here is on the appeal from the N.C. State Board of Elections confirmation that Justice Allison Riggs had won the statewide election for Seat No. 6 on the N.C. Supreme Court over Judge Jefferson Griffin. The margin for Justice Riggs in that race was 734 votes out of a total vote of 5,540,090.

After two recounts in the race as permitted by N.C. law, Judge Griffin filed a petition directly in the N.C. Supreme Court asking the Court to issue a writ of prohibition and a motion for temporary stay on 18 December 2024. The motion for a stay, which was granted, was aimed to temporarily block the State Board of Elections from certifying Justice Riggs' election to the Supreme Court pursuant to state law. The writ of prohibition sought to have the court ultimately decide the merits of Judge Griffin's election protests which the State Board of Elections had denied. Those protests involved three separate pools of registered voters who Judge Griffin claimed should not have their votes counted in the 2024 election.

The three pools of registered voters about which a protest was filed consisted of:

- (1) 266 people who voted pursuant to state law dating back to 2011, which permits individuals living overseas who are the descendants of North Carolina residents to vote in state elections. See NC Gen. Stat. 163-258.2(1).
- (2) 5,509 people challenged because they voted overseas either as civilians or members of the U.S. military and did not include a photo ID with their absentee ballot. The State Board of Elections has adopted a Rule during an administrative rulemaking process in 2023 interpreting two different state statutes including the new Photo ID law applicable for the first time in a presidential election cycle in 2024. The Rule did not require this pool of voters to include a photo ID when voting an overseas absentee ballot.
- (3) The third challenge was to more than 60,000 registered voters whose registration form in the state database lacked either a North Carolina driver's license number or the last four digits of a social security number for the voter required by HAVA and state law. These voters according to affidavits filed in the protests by Judge Griffin all voted in the 2024 election. Apparently, the state registration form for over a number of years did not provide for a space to include the driver's license number or the last four digits of their social security numbers.

At this point the merits of these protests have not been decided by any court as the various parties and intervenors have been in court fighting over the jurisdictional issues surrounding the cases. The State Board of Elections and Justice Rigg's and entities supporting her, have contended that the federal Help America Vote Act (HAVA) controls the merits decision in these cases and thus there is federal jurisdiction. Judge Griffin and entities supporting him, have contended that state law is determinative of the issues in the cases and thus, state courts should decide the issues in the cases. As of the date of this report, the cases

have been bounced back and forth between federal and state court trying to resolve once and for all where the case should be.

Regardless of the jurisdictional outcome and ultimately a court's final decision on the merits, there are several issues that should be considered by parties interested in election law and good government and ultimately addressed by legislation. These issues are as follows:

- (1) What is the best way to address situations where a voter registration form is inaccurate? In the Griffin – Riggs situation, the protest includes over 60,000 voters but what if the situation was individualized such as an incorrect middle name or initial or some other technical error? There is a statutory process for curing incorrect forms, but it would appear to require that the voter is aware of the error and take affirmative action to correct the error by the election.
- (2) What should the status be of people who live overseas, never registered to vote in another state and whose parents were North Carolina citizens? Should they be allowed to register and vote in North Carolina? Are there other criteria such as filing N.C. tax forms or first establishing a residence in state before moving back overseas and registering to vote? Whatever the answers to these questions, it ultimately should be determined by legislation.
- (3) Should civilian and military residents living overseas be required to provide a photo ID copy or otherwise authorized documents with their absentee ballot? There appears to be some question about the statutes currently being applied so this is an area where ultimately legislation clarifying the issue is needed.
- (4) In his dissent to the N.C. Supreme Court's Amended Order in the *Griffin v. State Board of Elections* case, Justice Richard Dietz invoked the federal doctrine called the "Purcell principle". The *Purcell* principle recognizes that, as elections draw near, judicial intervention becomes inappropriate because it can damage the integrity of the election process. However, North Carolina has never officially adopted this judicial principle, but Justice Dietz contended that North Carolina has acknowledged a state version of the doctrine. In the *Griffin* case the challenges were not to individual voters for their illegal conduct but to a broad pool of voters based on the group status and the State Board's actions in that regard. While a judicial decision might well decide this question in the North Carolina litigation, legislation clarifying whether the types of protests in play here should be allowed or disallowed to impact an election needs to be enacted.

Currently, the stay of the certification of the election is still in place. The Supreme Court dismissed the petition of prohibition and sent the case back to the Wake County Superior Court. The US 4<sup>th</sup> Circuit had a long, tortuous argument on January 27 over the jurisdictional question. How they rule and what the implications are is wide open. And the Wake County Superior Court hasn't even begun its review of the protest filed by Judge Griffin.

## Appendix G: North Carolina Expenditures and Transparency

Submitted to The Robert J. Dole Institute of Politics and the Edward M. Kennedy Institute for the United States Senate<sup>169</sup>

Martha Kropf, Ph.D.

University of North Carolina at Charlotte

### North Carolina and Its Elections

North Carolina is one of the most rapidly-growing states in the United States. From July 1, 2023 to July 1, 2024, North Carolina was the 4<sup>th</sup> fastest growing state, with a population of 11,046,024.<sup>170</sup> As of November 5, 2024, 7,839,911 of those individuals were registered to vote. North Carolina does not have a large enough Latinx population yet to trigger Voting Rights Act language requirements.

In considering North Carolina election spending, one should know that the primary responsibilities for conducting elections lie within the 100 counties, each with a bi-partisan, appointed, five-member Board of Elections and a professional Election Director.<sup>171</sup> Each county board administers elections, candidate filing, and campaign finance. They also certify the results in their county.<sup>172</sup>

### Fiscal Year and Other Information in North Carolina

North Carolina's fiscal year runs from July 1 through June 30. The fiscal year that begins in the middle calendar year 2020 is Fiscal Year 2021. In effect, this means that for a November election, expenses span two fiscal years (*set up costs, primary election in first fiscal year and general election costs in second fiscal year*). That is spending for the 2020 election began in FY2020 and ended in FY2021.

North Carolina has had an ongoing budget transparency initiative for the state and local governments since 2016.<sup>173</sup>

County Commissions in each county fund the elections within the county as part of its normal budget process.

### County Expenditures on Elections

Information concerning North Carolina county election expenditures are easily accessible<sup>174</sup> on the State Treasurer's website, with Annual Financial Report (AFR) information posted from

<sup>169</sup> <https://emkinstitute.org/about-the-institute/dole-institute-kennedy-institute-launch-initiative-to-strengthen-america-election-infrastructure/>

<sup>170</sup> Cline, Michael. 2024. "North Carolina Now Home to Over 11 Million People."

<https://www.osbm.nc.gov/blog/2024/12/20/north-carolina-now-home-over-11-million-people>. Last accessed January 8, 2024.

<sup>171</sup> § 163-33. Powers and duties of county boards of elections, available at

[https://www.ncleg.gov/EnactedLegislation/Statutes/HTML/BySection/Chapter\\_163/GS\\_163-33.html](https://www.ncleg.gov/EnactedLegislation/Statutes/HTML/BySection/Chapter_163/GS_163-33.html), last accessed November 29, 2024.

<sup>172</sup> For more detail on administering elections, see <https://www.ncsbe.gov/about-elections/county-boards-elections>, last accessed November 29, 2024.

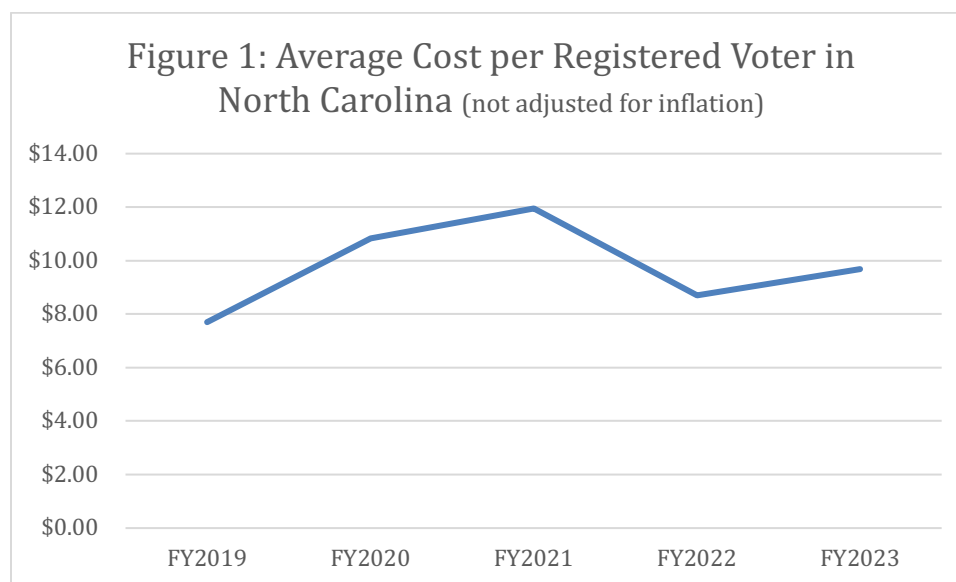
<sup>173</sup> Elliston, Jon. 2016. "Money Trail: NC Budget Transparency Push Slated for April 1." Carolina Public Press, March 18, 2016. Available at <https://carolinapublicpress.org/24566/money-trail-nc-budget-transparency-push-slanted-for-april-1/>, last accessed November 29, 2024.

<sup>174</sup> <https://www.nctreasurer.com/slg/lfm/forms-instructions/Pages/Annual-Financial-Information-Report.aspx>.



every county which submits a report.<sup>175</sup> <sup>176</sup> The reports separate out capital outlay for construction and purchases from operating expenditures. Expenditures do not specify the source of the election funding (*grants, State Board pass-through grants or county commission*). Rather, they only specify how much is spent. Figure 1 charts North Carolina election expenditures per registered voter over the past five years.<sup>177</sup> These amounts do not include capital outlays. *A Republic if You Can Afford It: How Much Does it Cost to Administer Elections* <sup>178</sup>() argues that using the AFR is the audited actual amount spent on elections throughout the year-. Unlike the budgeted amount, this number will not change.

Chart G.1



The reader can see that county election spending increased in both FY2020 and FY2021.<sup>179</sup> Those years spanned the 2020 general election—and the pandemic, though this chart does not compare pandemic expenses to past presidential election expenses. The data follow the pattern

<sup>175</sup> In the case where the data are not available on the State Treasurer’s website, I obtained data from county financial reports, available on their websites. Some financial reports are not available either way: FY2020 and FY2021: Edgecombe County’s is not available. In FY2022 Caswell, Edgecombe, Montgomery, Northampton, and Richmond County reports are not available. In FY 2023, Caldwell, Caswell, Cherokee, Edgecombe, Graham, and Onslow are not available. I am able to obtain an estimate for Cherokee County using its FY2023 budgeted amount, though the reader is cautioned that the amount listed in the budget report is not necessarily audited.

<sup>176</sup> North Carolina counties are required by state law to submit the Comprehensive Financial Annual Reports. North Carolina state law requires that local jurisdictions of all types follow the “The Local Government Budget and Fiscal Control Act.” See [https://www.ncleg.gov/EnactedLegislation/Statutes/PDF/ByArticle/Chapter\\_159/Article\\_3.pdf](https://www.ncleg.gov/EnactedLegislation/Statutes/PDF/ByArticle/Chapter_159/Article_3.pdf). According to Mohr and colleagues, “<sup>176</sup> ACFRs are the audited financial reports of local governments that comply with Generally Accepted Accounting Principles (GAAP). An ACFR is one type of AFR. Annual Comprehensive Financial Reports were formerly called Comprehensive Annual Financial Reports.”

<sup>177</sup> The number of registered voters comes from the North Carolina State Board of Elections website at the end (on dates 7/4/2020, 7/3/2021, 7/2/2022, and 7/1/2023).

<sup>178</sup> Mohr, Zachary, Martha Kropf, Mary Jo McGowan, and JoEllen Pope. 2024. *A Republic if You Can Afford It: How Much Does it Cost to Administer Elections?* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. See pp. 9-10.

<sup>179</sup> See Appendix for the same chart but adjusted to June 2020 dollars.

## G. North Carolina Expenditures and Transparency

Mohr and colleagues (2024) found nationally. That is, economies of scale apply with counties spending more per registered voter in the smaller precincts.<sup>180</sup>

One can see that the counties vary substantially on the amount spent per registered voter. The amount per registered voters is related to size, consistent with national data.<sup>181</sup> Table G.1 shows the highest level of spending within counties and the lowest level of spending for each year.

**Table G.1: Lowest and Highest Amounts Per Registered Voter** (not adjusted for inflation)

Fiscal Year	High per RV	# of Reg Voters	Low per RV	# Reg Voters
2019	\$34.04	2,189	\$4.24	115,801
2020	\$39.95	2,257	\$4.89	123,393
2021	\$39.95	2,256	\$4.89	128,760
2022	\$32.29	2,290	\$5.22	148,871
2023	\$36.76	2,304	\$4.49	134,730

What these data do not reveal are the line-item expenditures (*e.g., the amount spent on the ballots or salary/benefits*). Some counties do provide more detailed information within adopted budgets/budget ordinances.<sup>182</sup>

According to the National Association of Counties, after Intergovernmental Revenues, the largest source of revenue for North Carolina counties comes from property taxes.<sup>183</sup> It is highly likely that some counties receive funding from cities within their borders to fund municipal elections, but scholars know very little about these inter-local agreements.

### State Election Board Budget

The State Board has a number of responsibilities including supervision, oversight, and training of county boards, maintaining the state election information management system (SEIMS) as well as supervising county voter list maintenance, and maintaining the state's campaign finance reporting system. They certify voting systems for use in the state, as well as maintaining security of the IT platforms used in various aspects of election administration. Finally, the state has staff who investigate allegations of fraud. According to the National Conference of State Legislatures, some states compensate counties for running statewide elections.<sup>184</sup> While the State Board pays for things such as field support specialists to assist counties, training, and, as mentioned, maintains SEIMS, they do not directly pay for elections within counties.

One can locate the amount the North Carolina General Assembly appropriated to the State Board of Elections on the North Carolina Office of State Budget and Management webpage. Note that North Carolina operates on a biennial budget, which means the state budget covers two fiscal years.

<sup>180</sup> The relationship between expenditures per registered voter and number of registered voters is negative and statistically significant for each year.

<sup>181</sup> See Mohr, et al., 2024, op cite.

<sup>182</sup> On page 71 of the FY2025 adopted Mecklenburg County budget, one can see for example, how much the county spends on "Voter Education Outreach" (see <https://mecknc.widen.net/s/wnx99kzfp/adopted-budget-2025>, last accessed November 29, 2024). One can also see how many staff members work at the Board of Elections on page 79 (temporary staff members are not tracked).

<sup>183</sup> North Carolina County Government Overview.

[https://www.naco.org/sites/default/files/event\\_attachments/DRAFT\\_NorthCarolina\\_012022.pdf](https://www.naco.org/sites/default/files/event_attachments/DRAFT_NorthCarolina_012022.pdf), last accessed November 29, 2024.

<sup>184</sup> National Conference of State Legislatures. 2018. "Election Costs: What States Pay."

In Table G.2, one can see the amount appropriated to the state board for FY2025, and the past 11 years.<sup>185</sup>

**Table G.2: The Amount Appropriated to the State Election Board in the Certified Budget of North Carolina**

Fiscal Year	Appropriation
2014	\$5,302,373
2015	\$5,854,059
2016	\$6,764,842
2017	\$6,513,363
2018	\$6,624,283
2019	\$6,686,614
2020	\$8,218,941
2021	\$7,374,749
2022	\$12,867,588
2023	\$8,078,470
2024	\$12,078,048
2025	\$9,759,207

It is important to note that these data are not expenditures, but budgeted amounts.<sup>186 187</sup>

Concerning the state funding, recently State Board Director Karen Brinson Bell has lobbied the North Carolina General Assembly for more funding, particularly for modernizing the North Carolina’s SEIMS, which dates back to 1998.. SEIMS. “Brinson Bell, who likened the system to an Atari gaming system from the 1980s, said they have received about \$5 million of the \$8 million in funding they requested to complete the modernization.”<sup>188</sup>

Bell also tried to get the General Assembly to provide more field support specialists—moving the state from six field support specialists to eight. She was not successful.

The state received Help America Vote Act security funds in 2018, 2020, 2022, and 2023.<sup>189</sup> The state also received CARES Act funds in 2020.

### Recent Developments in Election Funding

In mid-September 2024, the North Carolina Supreme Court ruled that Robert F. Kennedy, Jr.’s name had to be taken off the state’s ballots. Ballots already printed had to be reprinted.

According to Voting Rights Group Democracy North Carolina, “over 2.9 million ballots had

<sup>185</sup> <https://www.osbm.nc.gov/budget/certified-budget/prior-certified-budgets>, last accessed November 22, 2024.

<sup>186</sup> The numbers are also different from those listed on the North Carolina State Board of Elections, 2023-24 Budget Presentation, February 9, 2023. Available at [https://www.johnlocke.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/06/FY2023-24-Budget-Presentation\\_State-Bd-of-Elections\\_2023-02-09.pdf](https://www.johnlocke.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/06/FY2023-24-Budget-Presentation_State-Bd-of-Elections_2023-02-09.pdf), last accessed November 29, 2024.

<sup>187</sup> One can see expenditures from the 2024 and 2025 fiscal years at North Carolina’s open budget website: <https://www.nc.gov/government/open-budget>, last accessed November 29, 2024.

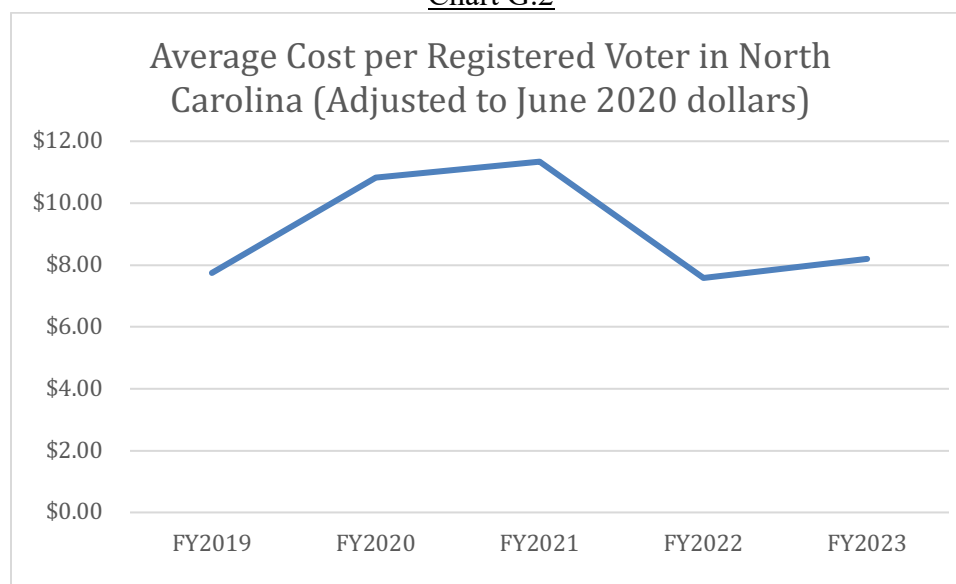
<sup>188</sup> Opeka, Theresa. 2024. “NCSBE Report Leaves Questions about Early Voting Site Deadline Change.” The Carolina Journal, April 19, 2024. <https://www.carolinajournal.com/ncsbe-report-leaves-questions-about-early-voting-site-deadline-change/>.

<sup>189</sup> The Election Security grants “provides states with additional resources to improve the administration of elections for federal office, including to enhance technology and make certain election security improvements.” <https://www.eac.gov/grants/election-security-funds>.

been printed, and now they must be reprinted at the counties' expense, costing approximately \$1 million.”<sup>190</sup>

Just about six weeks before Election Day 2024 and about one month before early voting began in North Carolina in 2024, Tropical Storm Helene hit North Carolina. The General Assembly passed a “Disaster Recovery Act” which committed \$5 million for emergency election measures in the 25 counties initially declared a disaster area. The State Election Board had requested \$2.1 million.<sup>191</sup> However, the State Board of Elections also received funds from FEMA and the State Emergency Management Office funded temporary tents, lights, and porta potties used in seven areas in the state and other necessities needed to enable those in western Carolina to vote.<sup>192</sup>

Chart G.2



<sup>190</sup> NC Supreme Court Ruling on RFK Ballot Lawsuit Hurts Local Election Funding. Democracy NC, September 10, 2024. Available at <https://democracync.org/news/nc-supreme-court-ruling-on-rfk-ballot-lawsuit-hurts-local-election-funding/>. Last accessed November 29, 2024.

<sup>191</sup> Michels, Sarah. 2024. “NC Legislators Commit \$5 million to Emergency Election Issues.” *Carolina Public Press*, October 9, 2024. <https://carolinapublicpress.org/66361/emergency-election-measures-millions-nc-legislators-helene/>, last accessed November 29, 2024.

<sup>192</sup> Interview with Karen Brison Bell, North Carolina Director of Elections, January 7, 2025.



## COMMISSION ON THE FUTURE OF NORTH CAROLINA ELECTIONS

### Appendix H: Summary of Recent Polls

Attached are summaries of several recent polls. More information can be found at the links referenced with each summary.

**Summary findings, Elon University Poll October 29, 2024** <https://www.elon.edu/u/elon-poll/elon-poll-october-29-2024/>:

#### Election Integrity

The poll revealed that North Carolinians continue to be apprehensive about the integrity of the election process itself. If Harris is officially declared the winner, 49% said they were “not at all” confident Trump would accept the results and another 21% were “only a little confident” he would do so. If the opposite happened – Trump were officially declared the winner – 65% of voters said they were “very” or “somewhat” confident Harris would accept the results, and 36% were “not at all” or “only a little” confident of that. “Many North Carolinians are on edge right now about the election, but what people worry about differs by party,” Husser said. “Republicans are more concerned about fair and accurate vote counts while Democrats are more concerned about the other party’s nominee not accepting the results of the election.

Voters of both parties are united, however, in that over 60% of both Democrats and Republicans see it as at least somewhat likely people working on behalf of either of the major presidential campaigns will try to fraudulently change the outcome of this year’s election.”

Some 47% said they had no trust or “only a little” trust in the U.S. Supreme Court to fairly resolve the outcome of the presidential election if there were a legal dispute. At the same time, 53% had “a great deal” or moderate level of trust the Court would make a fair ruling. Some 62% of Democrats said they had little or no trust the court would be fair, compared with 69% of Republicans who felt the court would be fair. The state’s voters were also worried about these election integrity issues: 62% said it is “highly likely” or “somewhat likely” that people working for either presidential campaign will try to fraudulently change the outcome of the election.

Overall, 54% said the election will produce a fair and accurate count of votes nationwide but there is a big partisan divide: 80% of Democrats said they expect a fair and accurate count while only 35% of Republicans and 42% of Independents expect there will be a fair and accurate count. 61% of voters were very or somewhat confident that most Americans will accept the election results, with Democrats slightly more confident than Republicans that the results will be accepted. 53% were very or somewhat concerned that voters will be intimidated or harassed when going to vote. And 39% of those planning to vote early said a reason for doing so is that they would feel uncomfortable or have safety concerns about voting at their polling location.

### H. Summary of Recent Polls

**Summary Findings, YouGov poll September 25, 2024.** <https://catawba.edu/news/all-news/2024/yougov-3/>:

### **North Carolinians Believe Early Voting Has the Right Amount of Days**

With North Carolina counties mailing absentee ballots this week, a majority of North Carolinians (53 percent) believe that mail-in votes should be received by the time polls close on Election Day, while 47 percent believe that a three-day grace period should be allowed if the ballots are post-marked by Election Day, according to a recent Catawba College-YouGov survey.

In 2023, North Carolina law was changed to require absentee by mail ballots be received at the county board of elections office by close of the polls on Election Day. Prior to this statutory change, mail-in ballots had a three-day grace period, if they were postmarked no later than Election Day.

According to the survey, partisan differences exist on mail-in voting delivery deadline: 80 percent of self-identified Republicans chose the Election Day poll closing receipt, while 72 percent of self-identified Democrats chose the three-day grace period.

Among the 1,000 North Carolinians surveyed from August 7 to 20, 2024, White and Black respondents had differences as well regarding when mail-in ballots should be due: 60 percent of White respondents picked the Election Day deadline, while two-thirds of Black respondents chose the three-day grace period.

Relatedly, a quarter of Republican respondents expressed the ‘coldest’ feelings towards absentee by mail voting in North Carolina, with only 12 percent expressing the ‘warmest’ feelings. In comparison, 40 percent of Democrats expressed warm feelings for mail-in voting, and only 6 percent expressed the coldest feelings.

“It’s likely that North Carolina Republicans continue the feelings expressed by former president Donald Trump regarding mail-in voting,” said Dr. Michael Bitzer, Catawba College’s Leonard Chair of political science and director of the Center for North Carolina Politics & Public Service. “Even with recent GOP efforts this year to encourage early voting, including mail-in voting, the fact that a quarter of Republican respondents have the coldest feelings to that vote method is notable.”

The Catawba-YouGov survey was administered for the independent cross-partisan Commission on the Future of North Carolina Elections about North Carolinians’ knowledge and awareness of election protections regarding the 2024 election and the administration of safe, secure, and fair elections in the state. The survey’s margin of error (adjusted for weights) is +/- 3.87 percent. This is the third release of the survey findings, with previous releases on voter confidence and concerns, along with knowledge and awareness, of election policies.

With North Carolina preparing to cast early, in-person voting starting on October 17, respondents were asked about the length of early, in-person voting and about Sunday early voting. Overall, 68 percent of North Carolinians believe that the state has “about the right

## **H. Summary of Recent Polls**

amount of days” for early voting, while 19 percent believed there are ‘too many days, needs to be reduced’ and another 12 percent believed there are ‘too few days, needs to be expanded.’

"North Carolina has one of the longest periods of early voting in the country and it is clear from this survey that the overwhelming majority of North Carolinians consider this a policy that's good for the state," said Dr. Christopher Cooper, Robert Lee Madison Distinguished Professor and Director of the Haire Institute for Public Policy Institute at Western Carolina University.

But like mail-in voting, partisan differences are notable regarding early in-person voting. While three-quarters of Democratic respondents said there was the ‘right amount of days,’ two out of ten responded there were too few and that early voting needed to be expanded. Conversely, among Republican respondents, while 64 percent said it was the ‘right amount,’ 31 percent said there were ‘too many days’ and that early voting should be reduced.

Within the different age groups, only 12 percent of the youngest respondents (18-35 years old) said there were too many early voting days, compared to a quarter of those 51 years and older who said there were too many early voting days.

When asked about the two Sundays occurring during early voting period, a majority—54 percent—of respondents said all 100 North Carolina counties should offer voting for each of the Sundays, while 31 percent said it should be left up to the individual counties if they should offer Sunday voting.

Among Democratic respondents, 72 percent said all 100 counties should offer voting on both Sundays, while only 37 percent of Republicans said so. Republican respondents had the largest percentage (29 percent) who said none of North Carolina’s counties should offer Sunday voting.

**Summary Findings, YouGov poll September 12, 2024** <https://catawba.edu/news/all-news/2024/yougov-2/>:

**Ballot Security, Voter ID, and Voter Awareness** In a Catawba College-YouGov survey of 1,000 North Carolinians conducted August 7 to 20, 2024, only 22 percent of North Carolinians correctly said that residents are allowed to cast a ballot if they do not have a photo ID. Nearly two-thirds (31.7 percent) were not sure.

Relatedly, more than 7 out of 10 North Carolinians were not sure if North Carolina allow voters to complete a "reasonable impediment form" if they don't have a photo identification at the time they cast a ballot. State law allows voters to complete such a form and cast a provisional ballot, if they return to the county board of elections office by the day before the county canvassing with a photo ID.

The Catawba-YouGov survey was administered for the independent cross-partisan Commission on the Future of North Carolina Elections about North Carolinians’ knowledge and awareness of election protections regarding the 2024 election and the administration of safe, secure, and fair

## H. Summary of Recent Polls

elections in the state. The survey’s margin of error (adjusted for weights) is +/- 3.87 percent. This is the second release of the survey findings, with a future release focusing on North Carolinians’ opinions on election policies.

“It seems there is still a lot that voters don’t know about photo ID. However, with several weeks to go before early voting and with so many organizations continuing to educate citizens, I am confident that most voters will come to the voting booth prepared,” said Jennifer Roberts, former Mayor of Charlotte and NC Elections Commission steering committee member.

With the current news regarding absentee by mail ballots, two questions were asked of North Carolinians about their awareness and knowledge of that vote method.

- A majority—53 percent—are not aware of a system that tracks the status of their mail-in ballots, along with receiving alerts notifying voters of various stages of where their mail-in ballot is in the election process.
  - The N.C. State Board of Elections offers *BallotTrax* service (<https://northcarolina.ballottrax.net/voter/>) to track their mail-in ballot, from printing to acceptance.
- Nearly 58 percent of North Carolinians are not aware that the state prevents the use of drop boxes for absentee ballots.
  - North Carolina Senate Bill 747, adopted in 2023, does not allow depositing an absentee by mail ballot “in a drop box or other location designated for the return of voted absentee ballots,” unlike other states that do allow drop boxes.

“What we may be seeing in North Carolina, when it comes to the use of drop boxes for example, is the nationalization of our news and our receptivity of that news,” said Michael Bitzer, Catawba College professor of politics and history and director of the Center for North Carolina Politics & Public Service. “A significant majority of poll respondents were not aware that North Carolina bans such devices to collect absentee by mail ballots, but when they hear of other states having drop boxes, they may automatically think that our state has them too. And that’s not the case, as with a lot of things in election administration: it’s 50 different systems to run elections.”

Another notable finding is that a majority—53 percent—of North Carolinians are not aware that polling-place equipment is not connected to the broader internet when voters cast ballots. Among both self-identified Republicans and Independents, 56 percent are not aware, while 45 percent of Democrats are not aware.

**Summary Findings, YouGov poll September 3, 2024** <https://catawba.edu/news/all-news/2024/yougov/>:

**Voter Safety and Trust in NC Elections.** Survey respondents are concerned about voters’ safety in casting their ballots: 48 percent said they were (very or somewhat) concerned in the safety of North Carolina voters casting ballots, compared to 49 percent who said they were not concerned.

## H. Summary of Recent Polls



The survey of 1,000 North Carolinians was administered from August 7 to 20, 2024, for the independent cross-partisan Commission on the Future of North Carolina Elections about confidence and concerns regarding the 2024 election and the administration of safe, secure, and fair elections in the state. The survey's margin of error (adjusted for weights) is +/- 3.87 percent.

"It's reassuring that a significant majority of North Carolinians are confident that their vote, the key act of participating in our democratic republic, will be counted accurately and with confidence in the integrity of our state's election system," said Dr. Michael Bitzer, professor of politics and history and director of the Center for North Carolina Politics & Public Service at Catawba College, who serves on the commission's steering committee. "We hope that the concerns about their safety in casting ballots won't deter fellow North Carolinians from being engaged and involved in this upcoming election," Bitzer added.

"This poll confirms what we have seen in numerous election town halls that we have conducted across NC: voters do trust the election procedures and officials closest to them in their local counties, where the poll workers are their friends and neighbors," said Jennifer Roberts, former Mayor of Charlotte and NC Elections Commission steering committee member. "We hope this will lead every North Carolinian to trust that their ballot will count and to vote with confidence in November."

This is the first of three releases of the survey; future releases will focus on North Carolinians' attitudes regarding their knowledge and awareness of North Carolina's election-related activities, along with their attitudes towards certain election policies in North Carolina.

Along with clear partisan differences in responses, one noticeable trend is that North Carolinians express higher levels of confidence in elections administered closer to home. While 75 percent of North Carolinians are somewhat or very confident that votes will be counted accurately in their county, and 71 percent are somewhat or very confident that other North Carolinians' votes outside their county will be counted accurately, that number dropped to 61 percent when asked about votes *outside* of North Carolina. Fully one third indicate that they were not confident in the vote counting accuracy of other states.

Chris Cooper, a political science professor at Western Carolina University and a steering committee member on the NC Elections Commission, noted that "Trusting the government closest to you is consistent with what we see in other parts of government. For example, political scientists have long demonstrated that people tend to trust their member of Congress much more than they trust the institution of Congress as a whole. Proximity breeds trust—and this is certainly true when it comes to perceptions of elections in North Carolina."

Bob Orr, former associate justice of the North Carolina Supreme Court and N.C. Elections Commission steering committee member, notes that "It was good to see this poll confirm that the overwhelming majority of North Carolinians believe in that basic tenet of democracy, requiring those who lose a certified election to accept the results."

In addition to questions on confidence and concerns, two questions regarding North Carolina's absentee by mail ballots, which NC county boards of elections will begin to mail on Friday,

## **H. Summary of Recent Polls**

September 6, to eligible voters who requested one for 2024’s general election, are included in this release.

### **Summary Findings, Meredith Poll February 13, 2023**

<https://www.meredith.edu/news/meredith-poll-explores-north-carolina-voter-opinions-on-election-administration-policy-issues-including-abortion-and-medicaid-expansion/>

### **Election Administration**

The way in which elections are conducted is much on the minds of North Carolinians, as it is on the minds of citizens around the country, as a result of claims and conspiracies about election integrity since the 2020 presidential election. The good news is that a large majority of respondents (76.2%) were aware that election administration in North Carolina was conducted at the county level. Also, over 80 percent of respondents would be concerned if a county lacked resources the county needed to adequately administer elections.

In terms of potential problems with election administration, large majorities of North Carolinians would be concerned if county board of election members “went rogue” and decided to violate state election law and administer election processes according to other methods (76.4%), or if one or more of these county board of election members disagreed with their oaths of office and changed the way in which an election winner was determined (82.2%). In both cases, less than four percent of those surveyed indicated that they would have little or no concern for these issues.

It is worth noting that in terms of knowledge about county administration of elections, as well as concern about maintaining the viability and integrity of election administration, there were no significant differences among demographic groups. Democrats care just as much about these issues as Republicans and unaffiliated voters do.

“North Carolina has a long history of well-administered elections that are overseen by county board of elections members who maintain professional standards,” said Meredith Poll Director David McLennan. “It is good to see that North Carolinians support this system and would be concerned if anyone violated election law to potentially subvert the will of the people.”

**Summary findings, Meredith Poll April 17, 2024** <https://www.meredith.edu/wp-content/uploads/2024/04/Meredith-Poll-April-2024-Report.docx.pdf>

### **NC Voter Attitudes on Important Issues: Challenges of voting, knowledge of who can vote, polarization**

**Challenges in Voting.** By and large, most North Carolinians see voting as an easy process. We asked questions about possible logistical challenges that voters may have faced in the past or could potentially face this year. Most respondents (54%) indicated that they have not faced challenges in the past and 57 percent say they will not face any logistical challenges in 2024. The

## **H. Summary of Recent Polls**

one issue that came up most frequently as a past concern, as well as a concern for this year, was uncertainty about where to vote. Ten percent of respondents indicated that was an issue in past elections and twelve percent were concerned about finding their polling place this year. Two groups of voters—the youngest voters and those with less than a high school diploma—indicated higher levels of concern.

About one-in-five of the youngest voters indicated concerns with several issues, like checking their registration status or uncertainty about where to vote. “North Carolina’s voting processes are well run by the state and county boards of elections,” said David McLennan. “The fact that most respondents indicated they did not expect to have issues with voting, even with presenting Voter ID, indicates the success of the boards of elections in communicating the process to voters. It is no surprise that young voters, many of whom will be voting for the first time, may have questions about the process of voting. I am confident that, with almost seven months left until Election Day, most of the concerns of voters will be remedied.”

Despite peoples’ confidence in understanding the voting process in North Carolina, one-quarter of voters stated that polling places only had some of the resources –translators or mobility-assistance– that people may need. Eight percent of respondents indicated that polling places did not possess any of the resources that voters would need to successfully cast a ballot. The results varied little among demographic groups. “The fact that one-third of voters felt polling places lacked some or all of the resources necessary to help voters cast their ballots is a significant issue,” said David McLennan. “Election administration budgets have been historically underfunded and the loss of election administration personnel, including poll workers, is a national problem. It is also critical to the 13 percent of voters that they possess a 9 physical, emotional, psychological, or other condition that would make it challenging to vote.”

**Knowledge of voting rights for felons and college students.** The voting rights of those convicted of criminal felonies is very misunderstood. Only sixteen percent of our respondents correctly knew that a person’s voting privileges were restored once they completed their sentence. Almost half (45%) did not know enough to venture a response to our question and 38 percent were wrong in terms of their answers. The percentage of our respondents who knew that college students could vote in the county of their college or university was higher than their knowledge of the voting rights of felons (50% correct), eleven percent were wrong, and 39 percent simply did not know the answer. “Although the N.C. Board of Elections is clear in communicating state law on the voting rights of felons and college students, we continue to have a misinformation issue around both,” said David McLennan. “On the issue of felon voting, different states have different laws and some states, like Florida, have attempted to change their laws. This may be part of the confusion.”

**Political Polarization in North Carolina.** Political polarization remains a major issue in North Carolina. Over eighty percent of North Carolinians (83%) think the country is more polarized than it was five years ago (2019) and just over 12 percent of the respondents think the country will be less polarized five years from now (2029). Generally, respondents representing all Demographic groups believe partisanship is bad and not going to get much better. The agreement among all North Carolinians also extends to the belief that our two major parties are not doing the best for the country and that another third party, which will be competitive with one or both

## H. Summary of Recent Polls

major parties, is needed. Almost two-thirds of the respondents hold this belief. “Although the country has always been polarized around policy issues, there is evidence that the polarization we are experiencing today is more what political scientists called ‘affective polarization’,” said David McLennan. “This is the idea that our differences are more about identity. Republicans dislike Democrats because they perceive them as culturally radical and Democrats dislike Republicans in a similar way. This can be seen in the poll results as Democrats feel that Republicans cannot run the federal government and are dishonest, while Republicans feel the same way about Democrats. There should be no surprise that Congress had its least productive year in 2023

### **Summary Findings, Meredith Poll on Voter Attitudes, February, 2020**

<https://www.meredith.edu/meredith-poll/poll-voter-preferences-election-security-women-as-political-leaders>

***Election Security*** Election security is on the minds of North Carolinians as they approach the primary election next week and the general election in November.

Results of The Meredith Poll show that over one-quarter of respondents have no confidence or very little confidence in the voting processes used in the state, while over 41 percent indicated that they were only somewhat confident that votes would be recorded accurately.

The concern about the voting processes in the state cut across all demographic groups with Democrats and Republicans alike indicating lower-than-expected levels of confidence. Level of education, gender, and other characteristics do not seem to make a difference in people’s perceptions.

These concerns about the legitimacy of the voting processes in the state are related to recent events such as the 2018 absentee ballot fraud case in the 9<sup>th</sup> Congressional District and the more recent problems with vote gathering and reporting in the Iowa Democratic caucuses. Almost two-thirds of the respondents (64.2% with the 9<sup>th</sup> District problems and 60.4% with the Iowa caucuses) said they were very or somewhat familiar with those cases.

“There is little doubt that the constant news stories about voting problems in North Carolina and Iowa contribute to the concerns that voters have about election security,” said McLennan. “The real question for the primary election, as well as the general election, is whether these concerns will translate into fewer people voting. There appears to be high voter enthusiasm in the state, but future stories about voting problems may dampen the enthusiasm.”

## **H. Summary of Recent Polls**

THE COMMISSION ON THE FUTURE OF  
NORTH CAROLINA ELECTIONS



# North Carolina's Public Opinions on Election Confidence & Integrity



Prepared for  
The Commission on the Future of N.C. Elections

Surveys Conducted by YouGov

August 2024 Survey sponsored by  
Catawba College's  
Center for N.C. Politics & Public Service

January 2025 Survey sponsored by  
Catawba College's  
Center for N.C. Politics & Public Service  
and  
Western Carolina University's  
Phil and Connie Haire Institute for Public Policy

## August 2024 Catawba-YouGov Survey

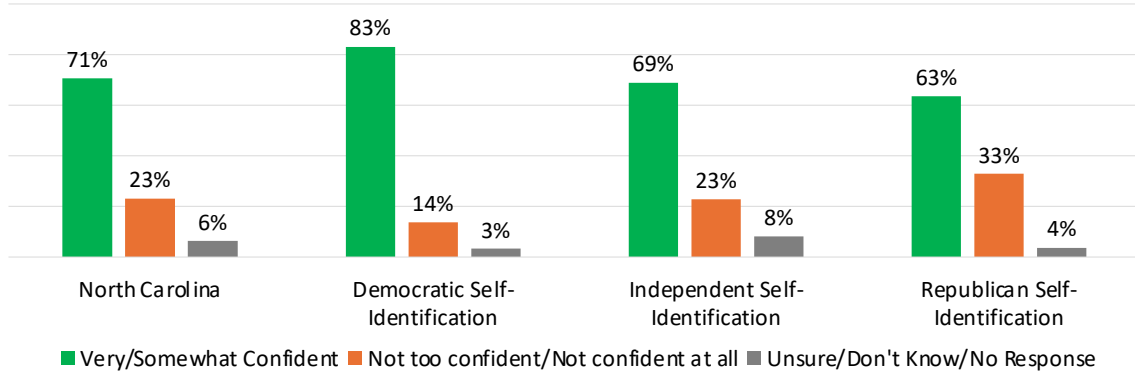
- Paid for by Catawba's Center for N.C. Politics & Public Service
- August 7 through 20, 2024, YouGov interviewed 1,100 online respondents from North Carolina (using respondent zip codes) who were then matched down to a sample of 1,000 to produce the final dataset.
- Weighted data included the 1,000 respondent sample who are 18 years and older and live in North Carolina, along with other demographic characteristics.
- The margin of error (adjusted for weights) is +/-3.87 %; all subgroups will have a higher margin of error.

## January 2025 Catawba-WCU-YouGov Survey

- Paid for by Catawba's Center for N.C. Politics & Public Service and Western Carolina University's Haire Institute for Public Policy
- January 7 through 30, 2025, YouGov interviewed 1,564 North Carolina respondents who were then matched down to a sample of 1,500 to produce the final dataset.
- Weighted data included a sample of 1,500 respondents who are 18 years and older, live in North Carolina, and other demographic characteristics.
- The margin of error (adjusted for weights) is +/-3.08 %; all subgroups will have a higher margin of error.
- ***All survey research contains unmeasured error, and results should be seen as informative, not definitive.***
- For more information on methodology, see Drs. Bitzer or Cooper.

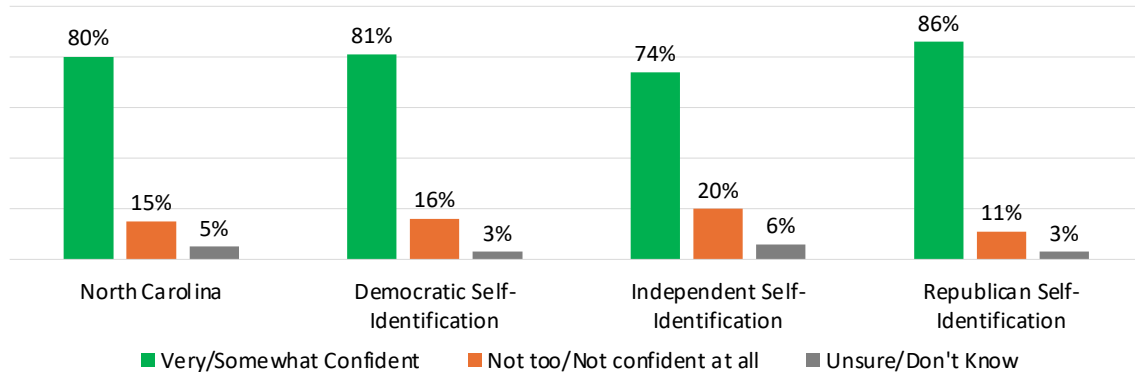
# August 2024 Survey

Regardless of whether your candidate or party wins or loses the election this November in North Carolina, how confident will you be in the safety, security, and integrity of the election in North Carolina?



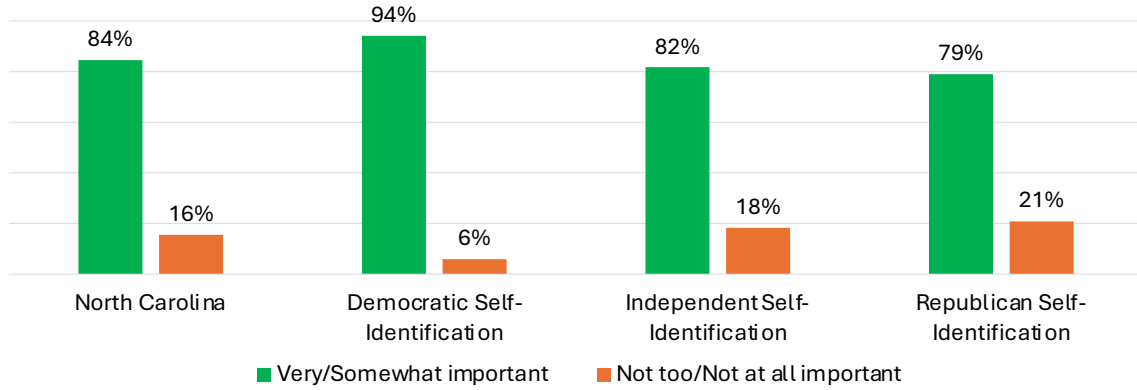
# January 2025 Survey

Regardless of whether your candidate or party won or lost the election in November in North Carolina, how confident were you in the safety, security, and integrity of the election in North Carolina?



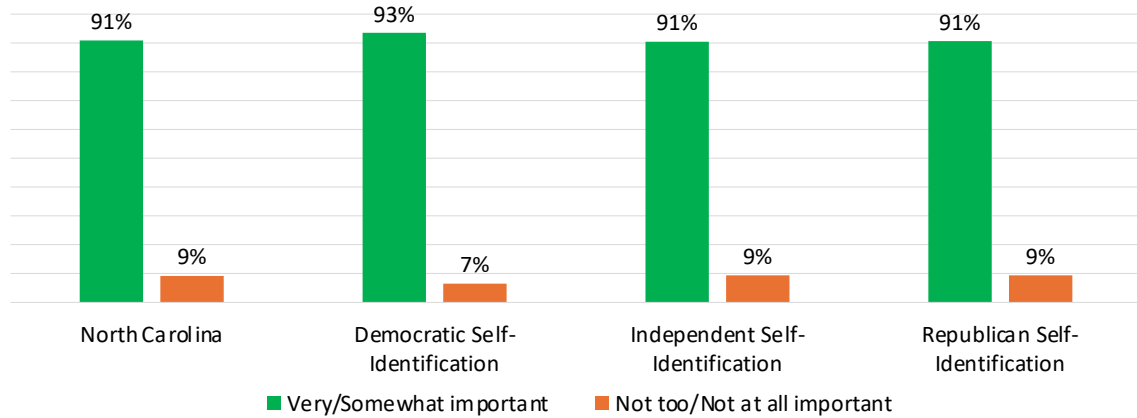
# August 2024 Survey

How important do you think it is for the losing candidates to publicly accept the winning candidates as the legitimate winners in North Carolina?



# January 2025 Survey

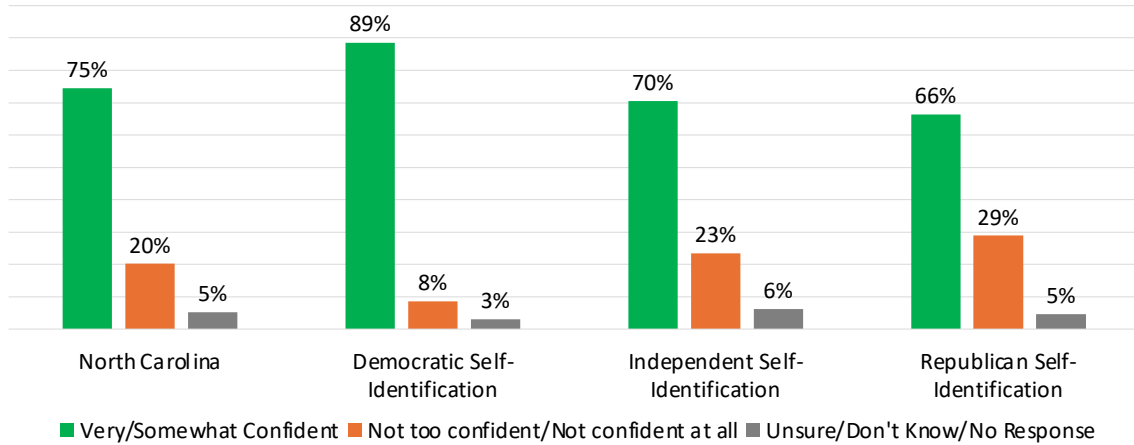
How important do you think it is for the losing candidates to publicly accept the winning candidates as the legitimate winners in North Carolina?





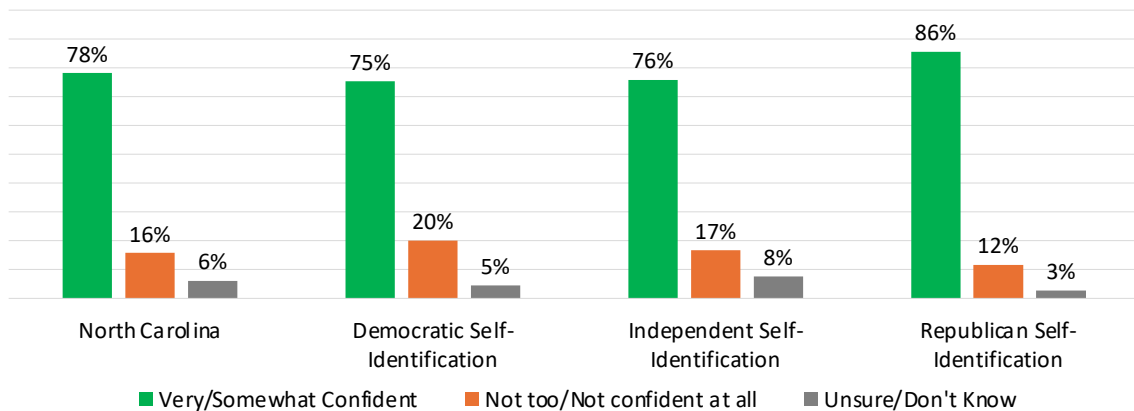
# August 2024 Survey

Confidence -- That votes in your county will be accurately counted in 2024.



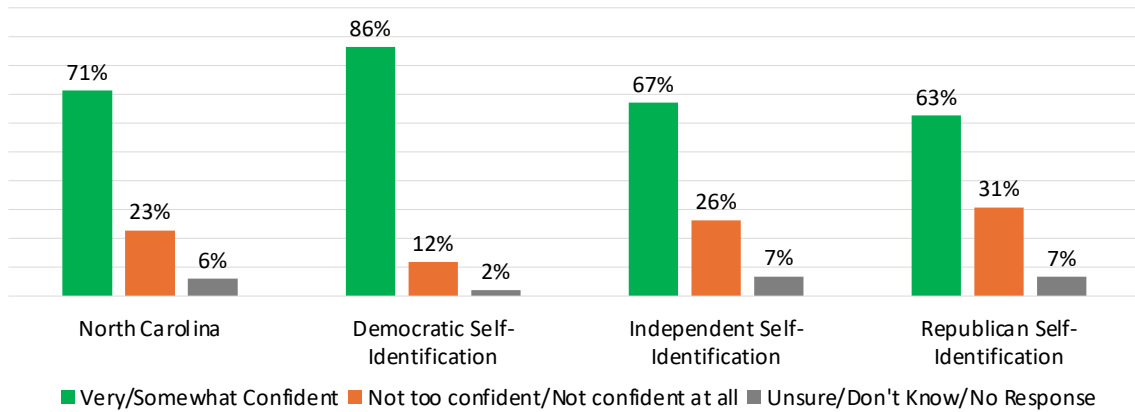
# January 2025 Survey

Confidence in election administration -- That votes in your county were accurately counted in 2024.



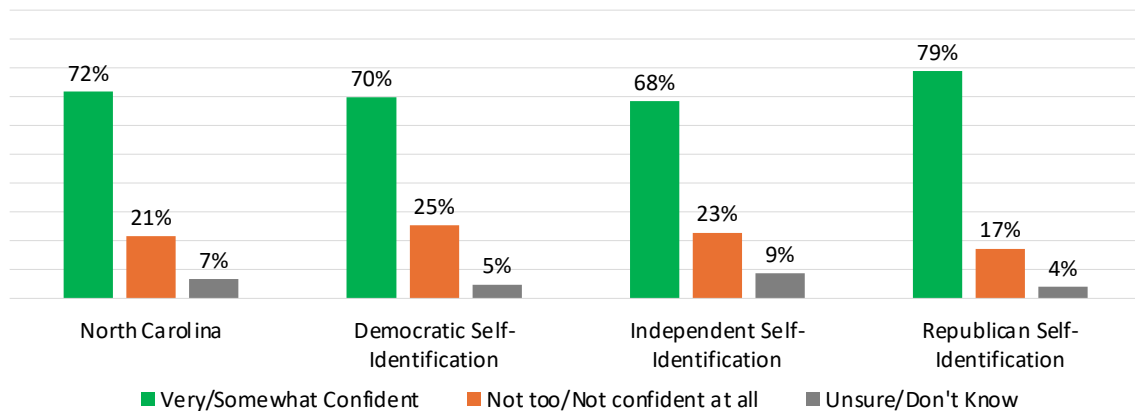
# August 2024 Survey

Confidence -- That other North Carolinian's votes beyond your county will be accurately counted in 2024.



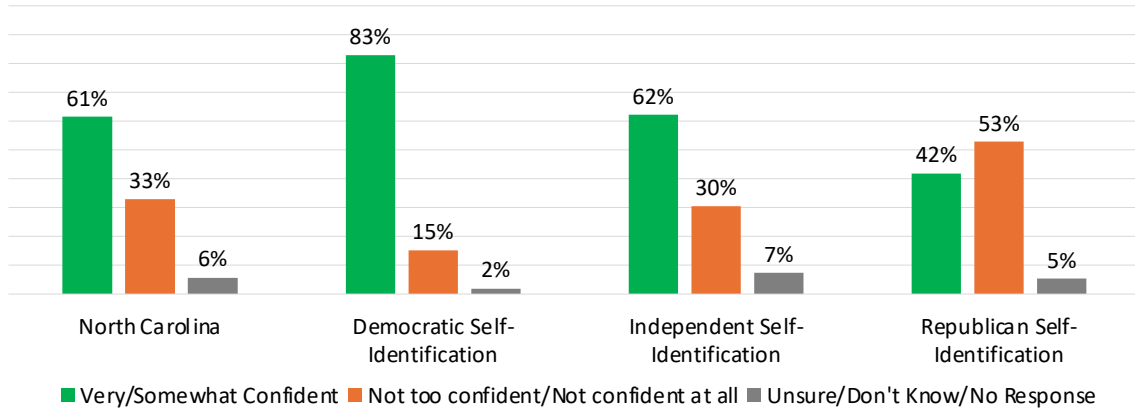
# January 2025 Survey

Confidence in election administration -- That other North Carolinian's votes beyond your county were accurately counted in 2024.



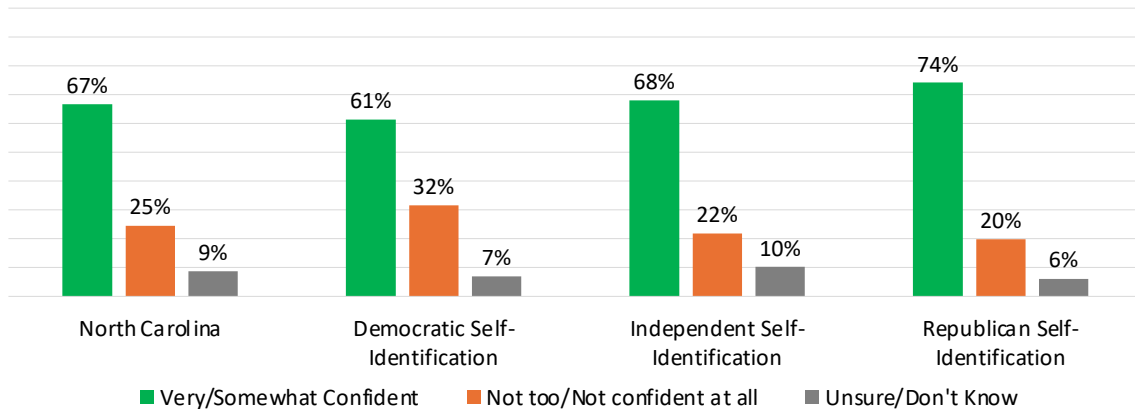
# August 2024 Survey

Confidence -- That votes outside of North Carolina will be accurately counted in 2024.



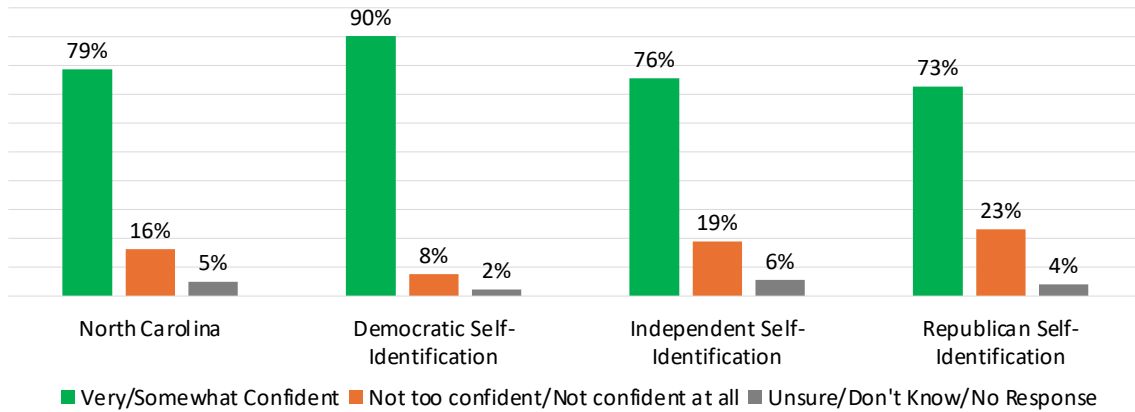
# January 2025 Survey

Confidence in election administration -- That votes outside of North Carolina were accurately counted in 2024.



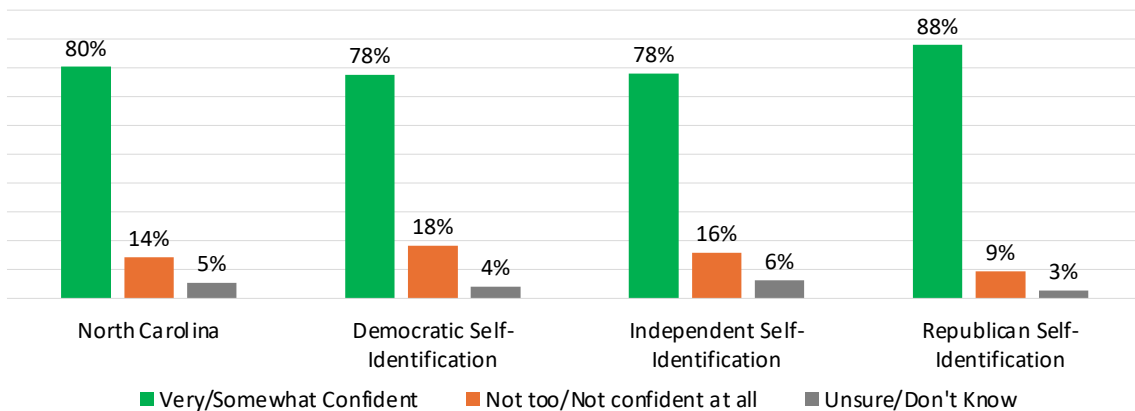
# August 2024 Survey

Confidence -- That elections in your local county will be administered with security and integrity.



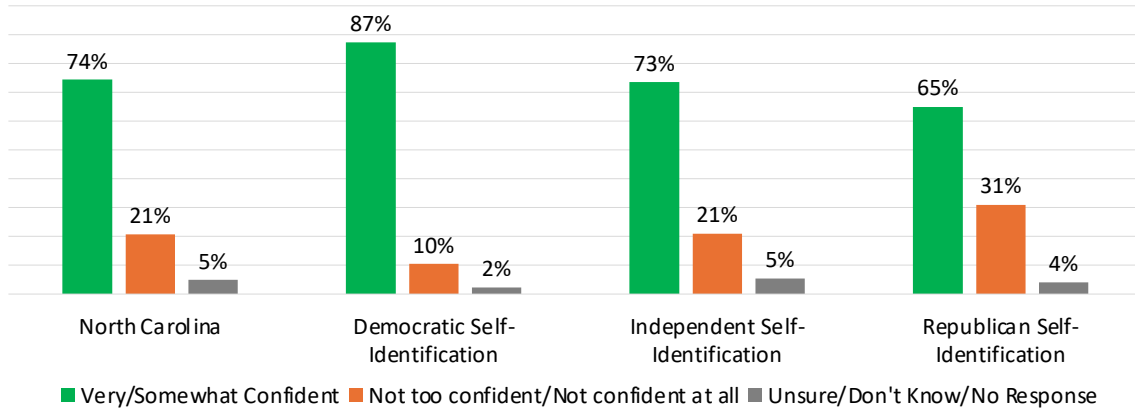
# January 2025 Survey

Confidence in election administration -- That elections in your local county were administered with security and integrity.



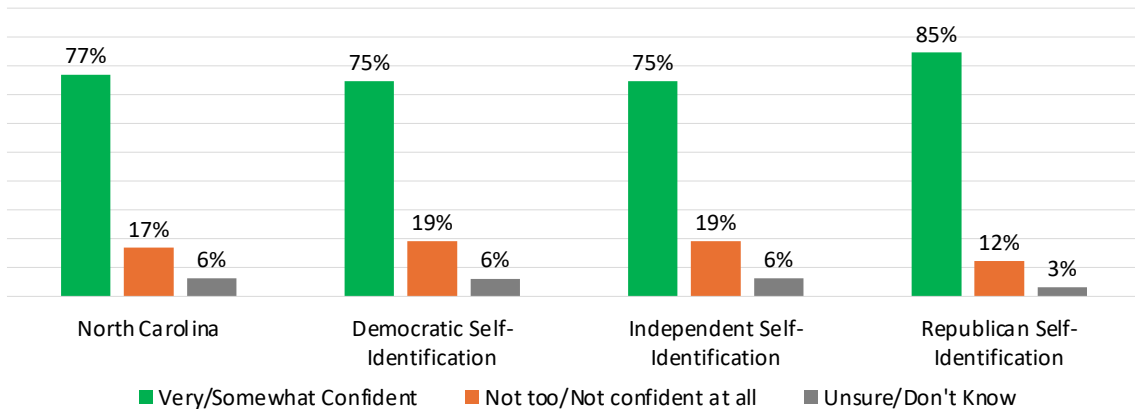
# August 2024 Survey

Confidence -- That elections in the state of North Carolina will be administered with security and integrity.



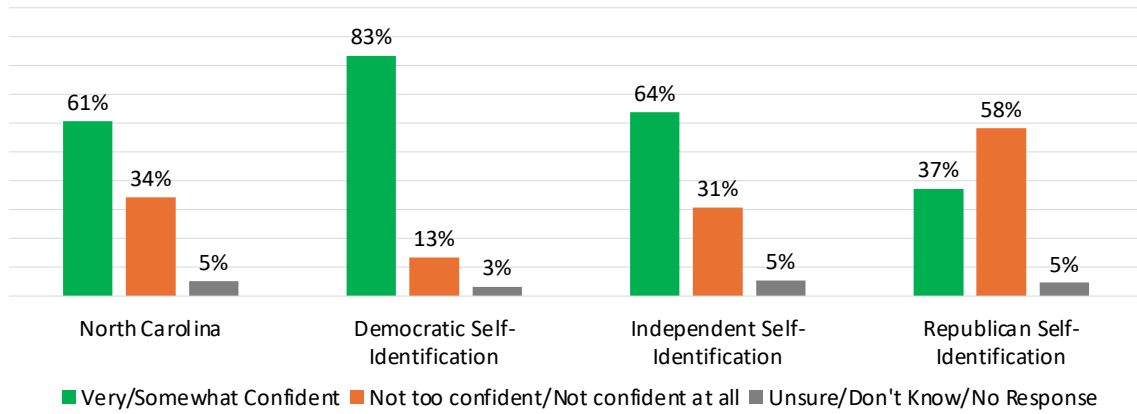
# January 2025 Survey

Confidence in election administration -- That elections in the state of North Carolina were administered with security and integrity.



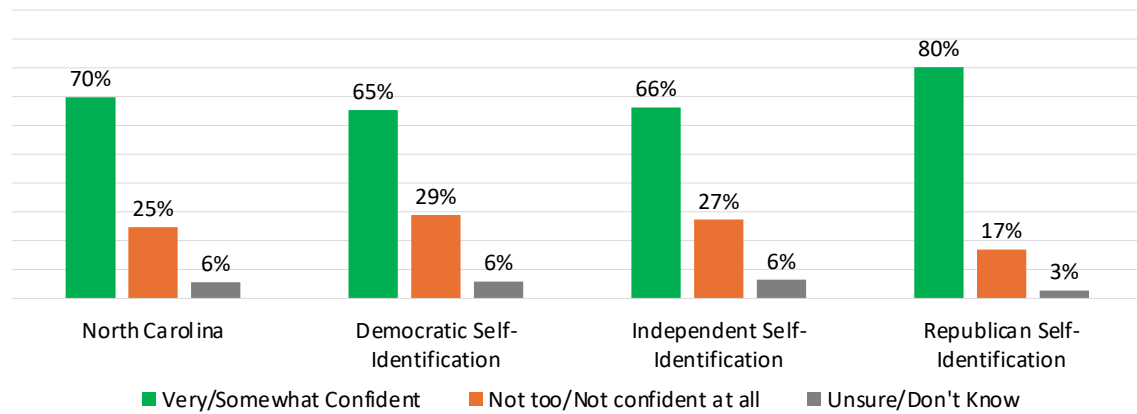
# August 2024 Survey

Confidence -- That elections in the United States overall will be administered with security and integrity.



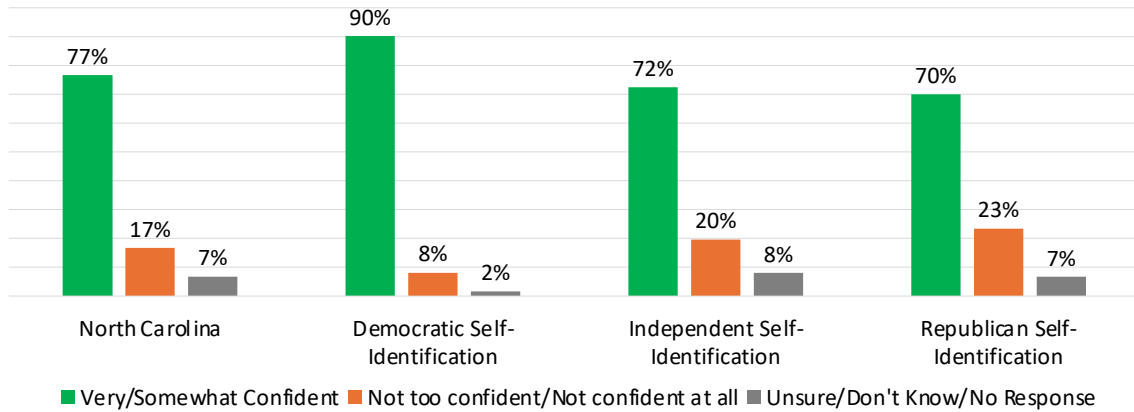
# January 2025 Survey

Confidence in election administration -- That elections in the United States overall were administered with security and integrity.



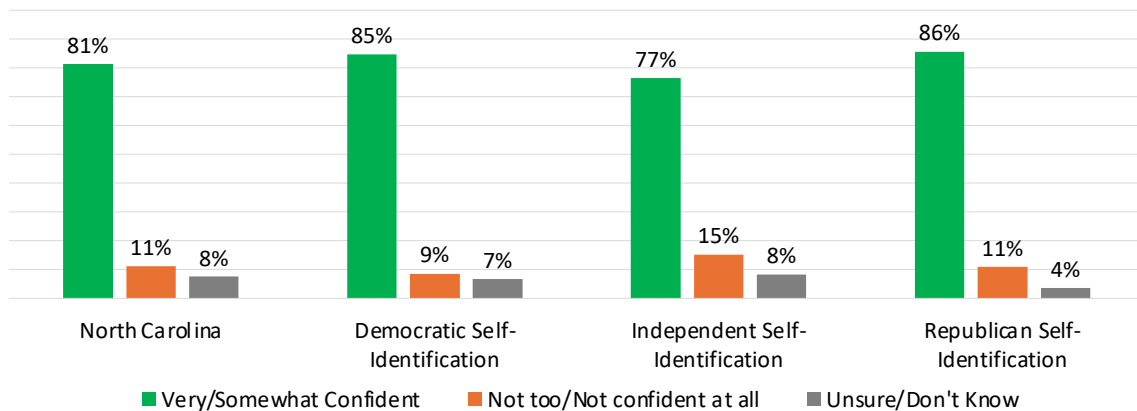
# August 2024 Survey

Confidence -- In the poll workers who administer early voting and Election Day voting in your community.



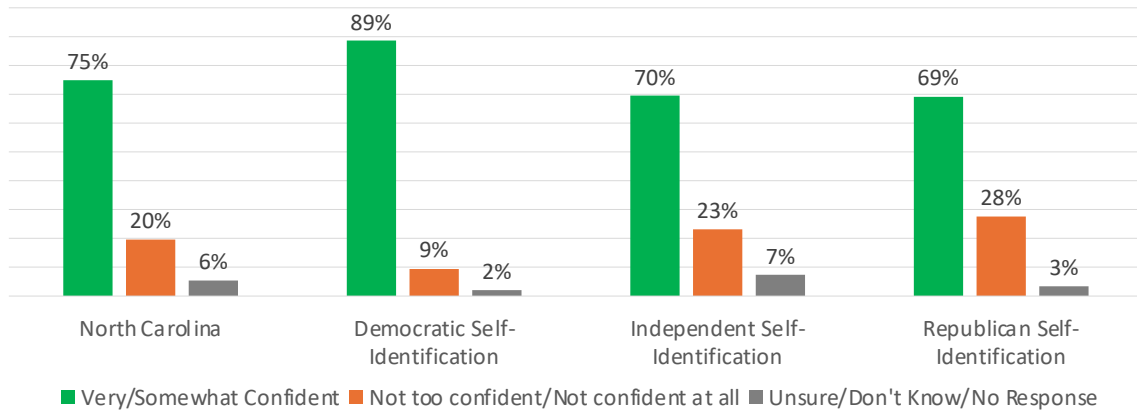
# January 2025 Survey

Confidence in election administration -- In the poll workers who administered early voting and Election Day voting in your community.



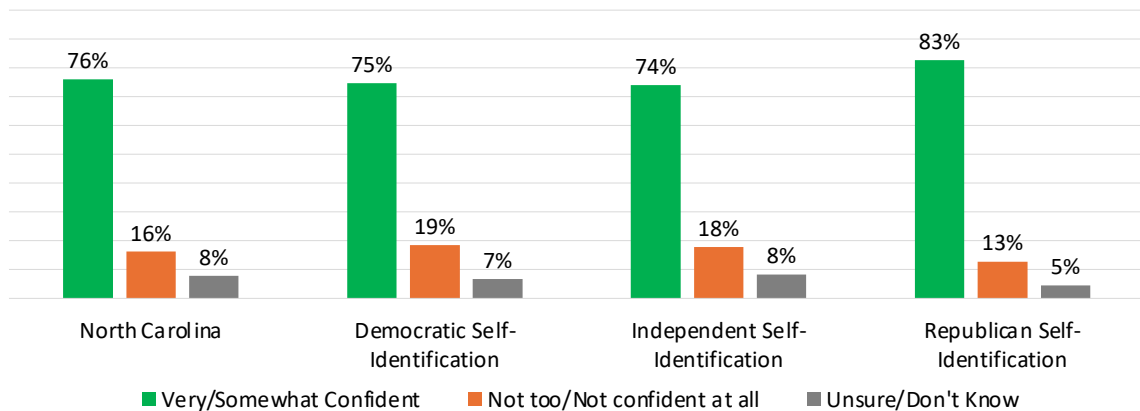
# August 2024 Survey

Confidence -- In your county's election administrators and staff who conduct elections.



# January 2025 Survey

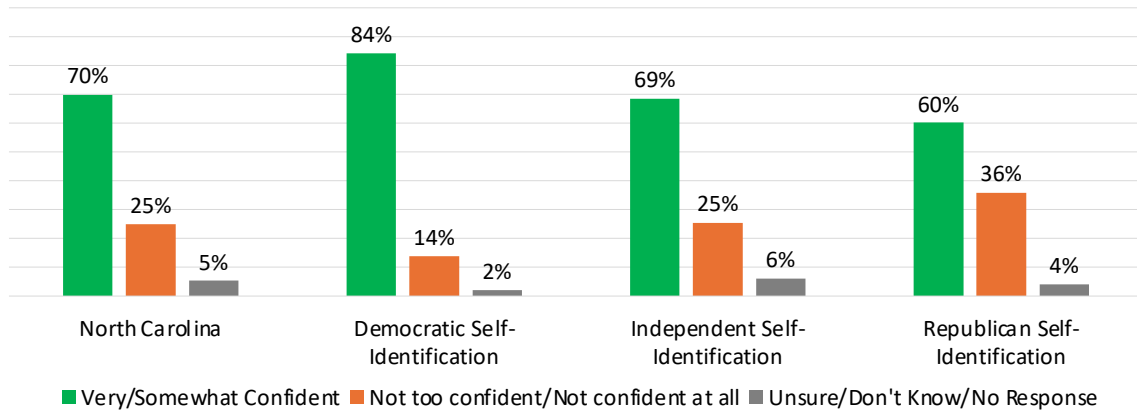
Confidence in election administration -- In your county's election administrators and staff who conducted elections.





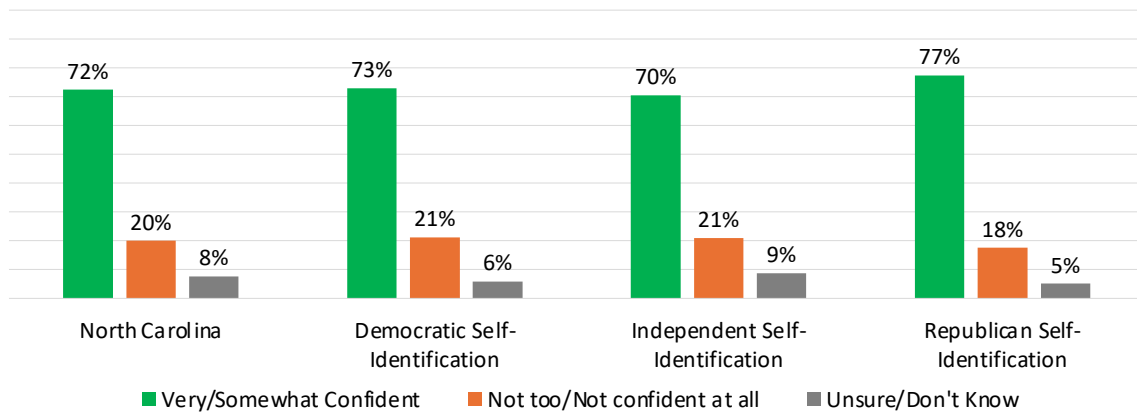
# August 2024 Survey

Confidence -- In the state-level election administrators and staff who oversee elections in North Carolina.



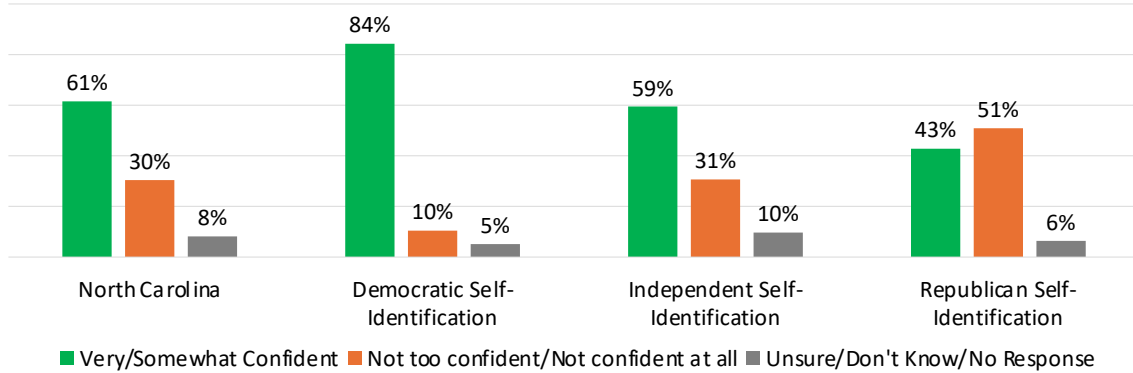
# January 2025 Survey

Confidence in election administration -- In the state-level election administrators and staff who oversaw elections in North Carolina.



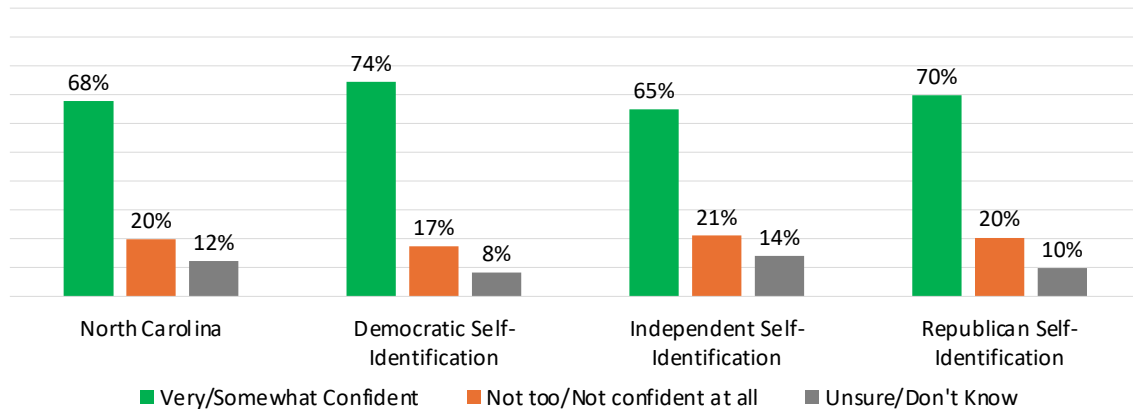
# August 2024 Survey

Confidence that activities are prevented -- How confident are in you that people [are] prevented from voting more than once in an election in North Carolina.



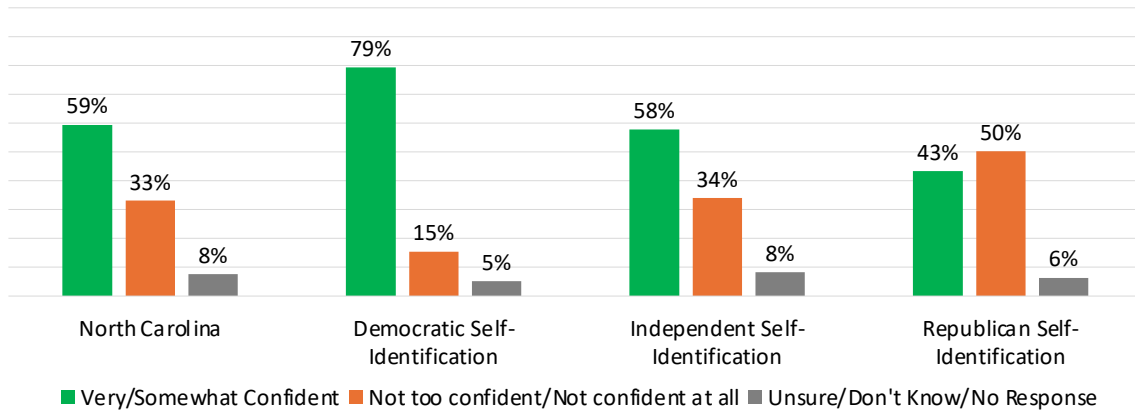
# January 2025 Survey

Confidence in prevention of election-related issues in NC 2024 -- People were prevented from voting more than once in North Carolina.



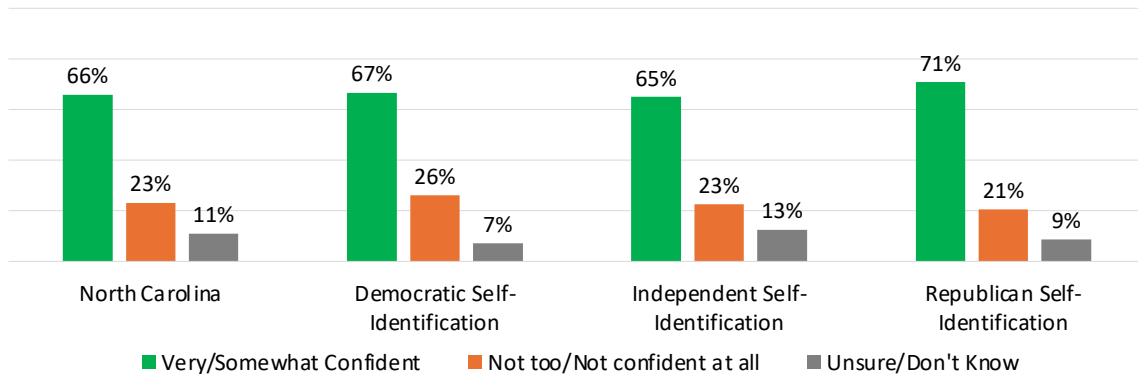
# August 2024 Survey

Confidence that activities are prevented -- People prevented from stealing or tampering with ballots that have been voted in North Carolina.



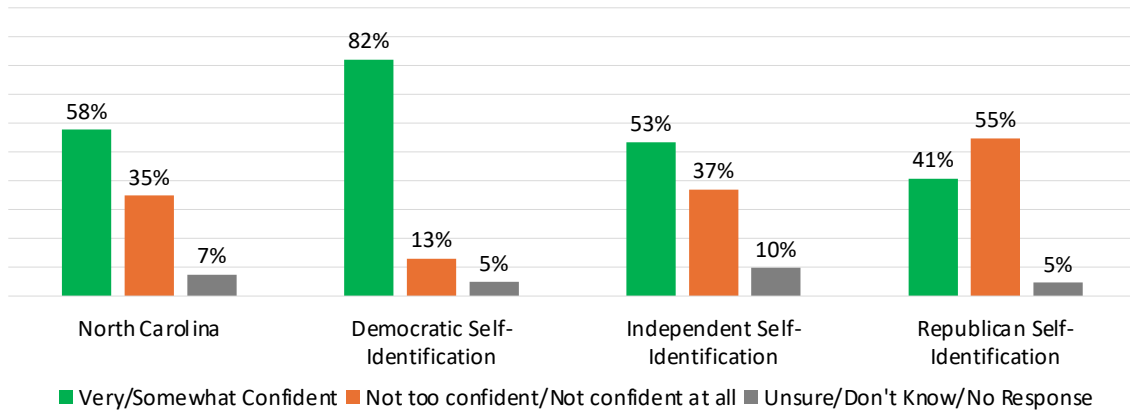
# January 2025 Survey

Confidence in prevention of election-related issues in NC 2024 -- People were prevented from stealing or tampering with ballots that have been cast in North Carolina.



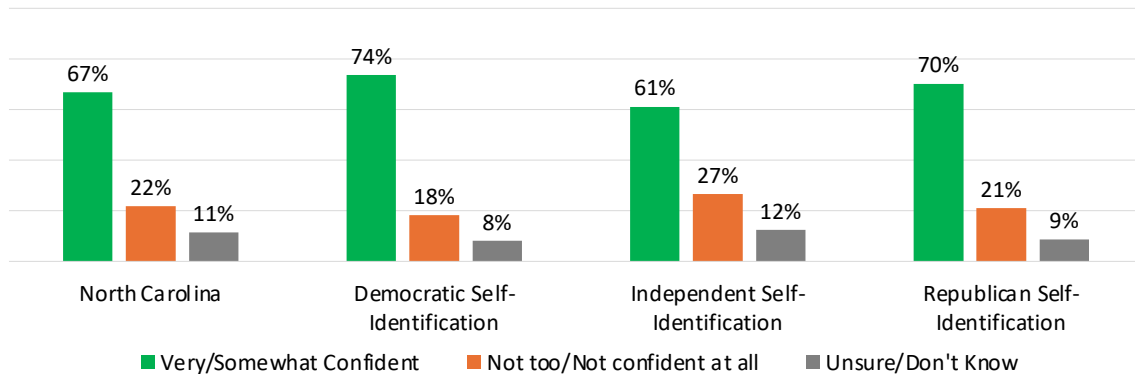
# August 2024 Survey

Confidence that activities are prevented -- People prevented from pretending to be someone else when going to vote in North Carolina.



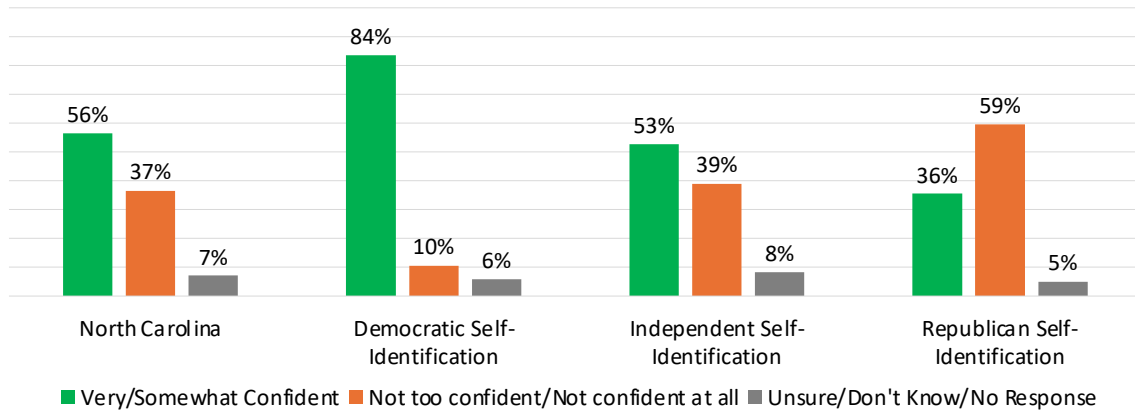
# January 2025 Survey

Confidence in prevention of election-related issues in NC 2024 -- People were prevented from pretending to be someone else when going to vote in North Carolina.



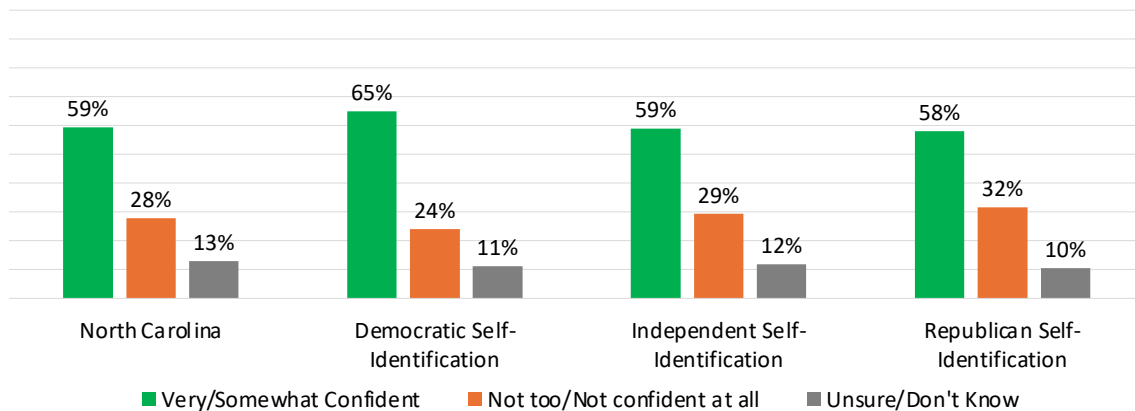
# August 2024 Survey

Confidence that activities are prevented -- How confident are in you that people [are] prevented from voting who are not U.S. citizens in North Carolina.



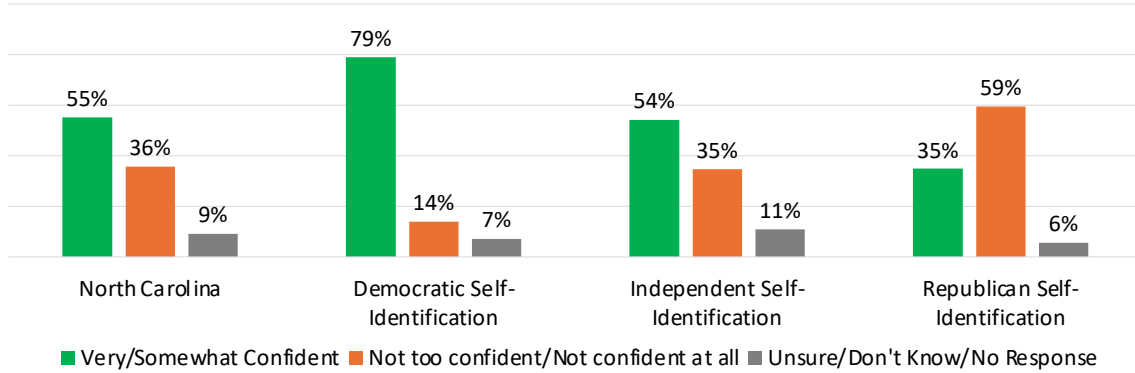
# January 2025 Survey

Confidence in prevention of election-related issues in NC 2024 -- People who are not US citizens were prevented from voting in North Carolina.



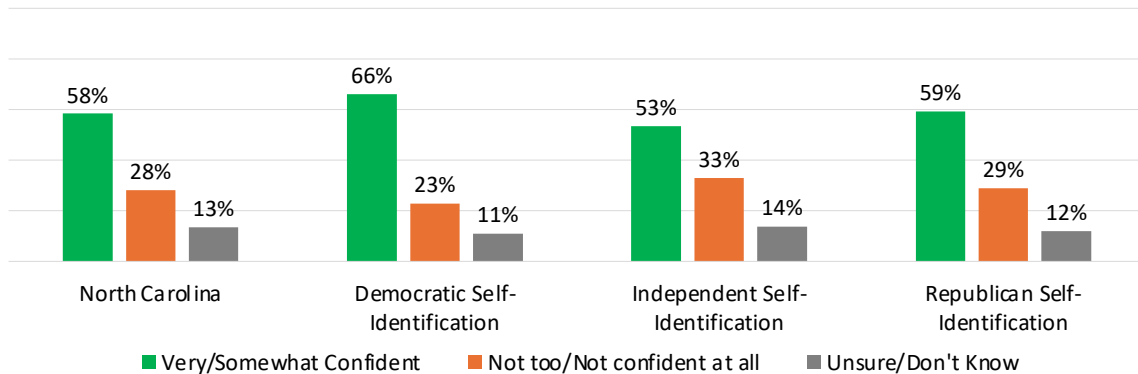
# August 2024 Survey

Confidence that activities are prevented -- How confident are in you that people [are] prevented from taking advantage of absentee or mail balloting to engage in vote fraud in North Carolina.



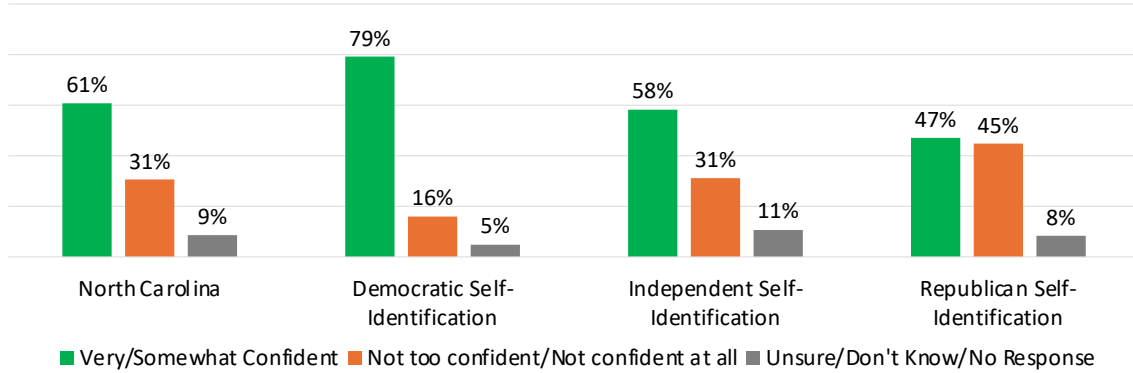
# January 2025 Survey

Confidence in prevention of election-related issues in NC 2024 -- People were prevented from taking advantage of absentee or mail balloting to engage in voter fraud in North Carolina.



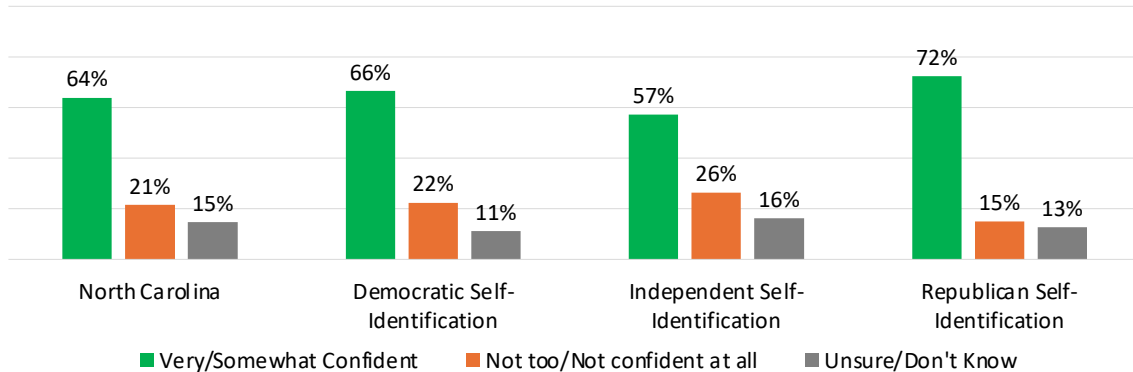
# August 2024 Survey

Confidence that activities are prevented -- Officials prevented from changing the reported vote count in a way that is not a true reflection of the ballots that were counted in North Carolina.



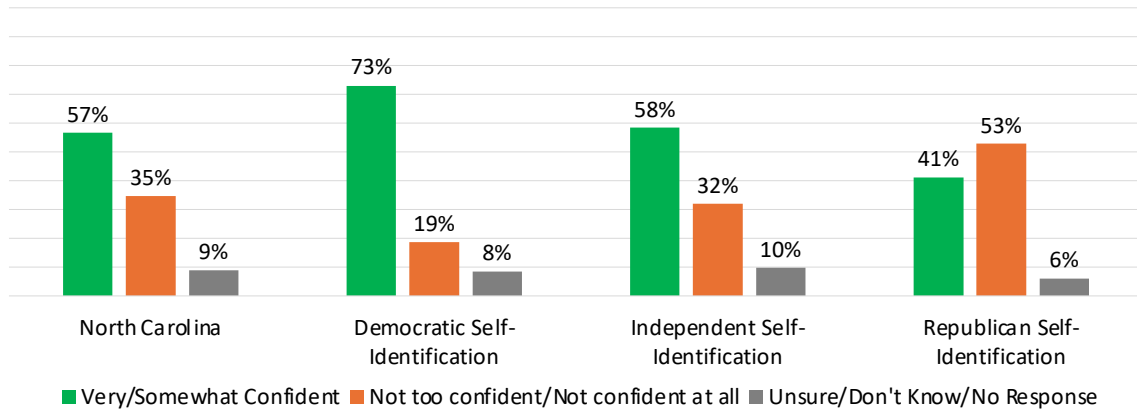
# January 2025 Survey

Confidence in prevention of election-related issues in NC 2024 -- Officials were prevented from changing the reported vote count in a way that is not a true reflection of the ballots that were counted in North Carolina.



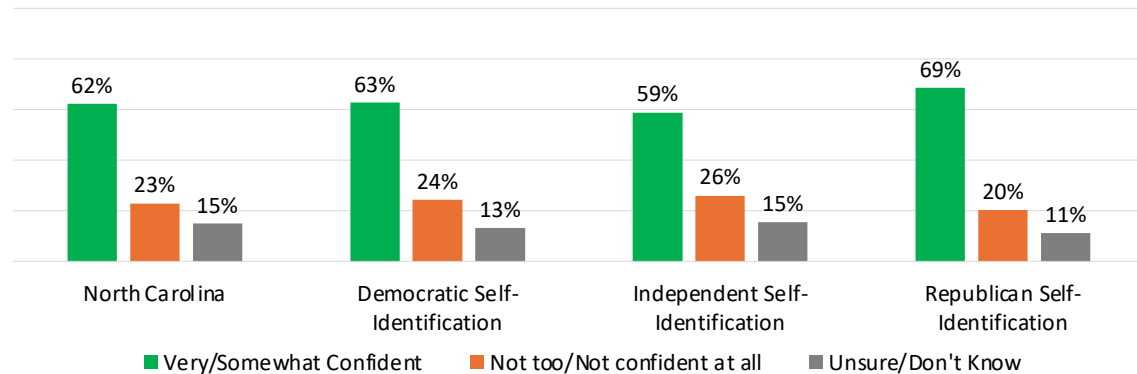
# August 2024 Survey

Confidence that activities are prevented -- Vote counting software prevented from manipulation in a way to not count ballots as intended in North Carolina.



# January 2025 Survey

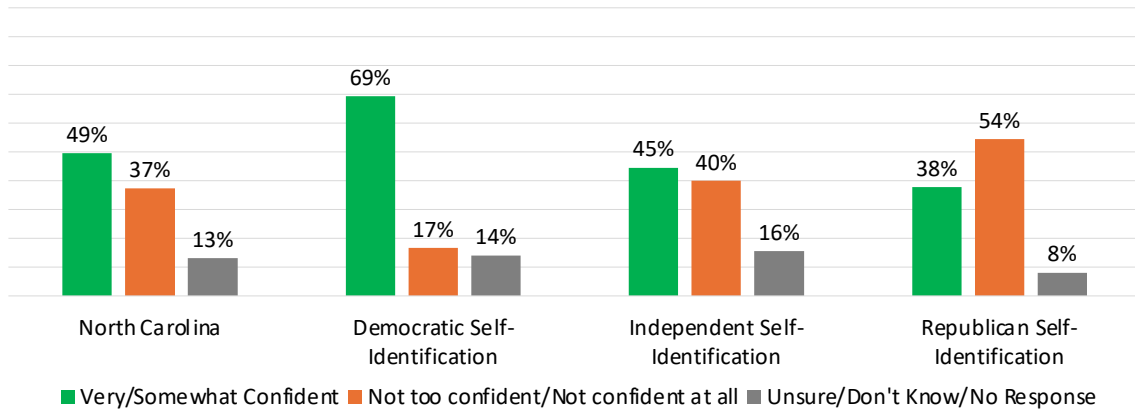
Confidence in prevention of election-related issues in NC 2024 -- Vote counting software was prevented from manipulation in a way to not count ballots as intended in North Carolina.





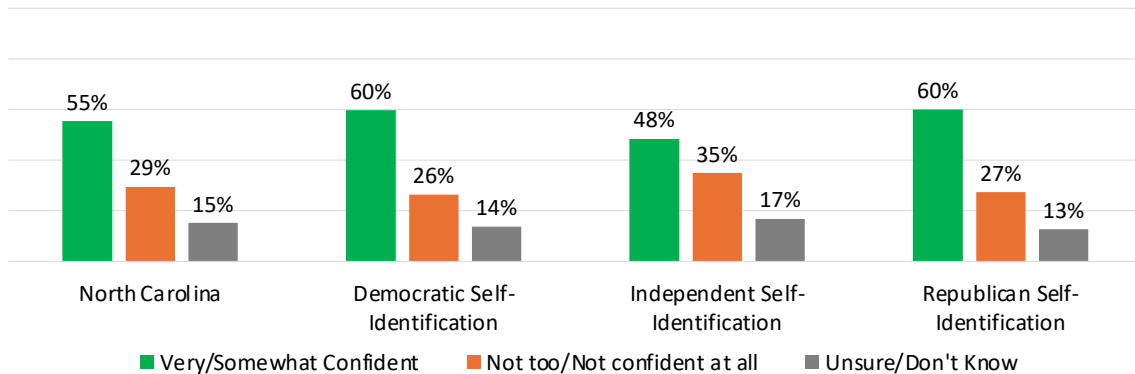
# August 2024 Survey

Confidence that activities are prevented -- Prevent paying voters to cast a ballot for a particular candidate in North Carolina.



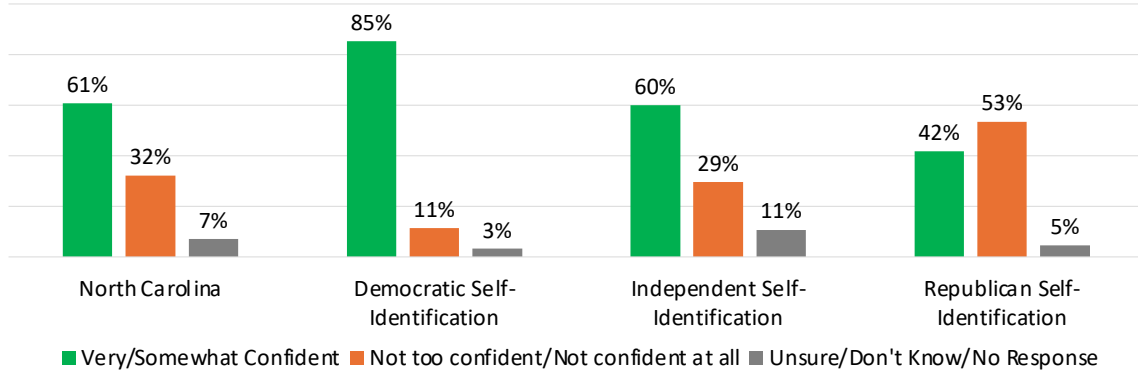
# January 2025 Survey

Confidence in prevention of election-related issues in NC 2024 -- People were prevented from paying voters to cast a ballot for a particular candidate in North Carolina.



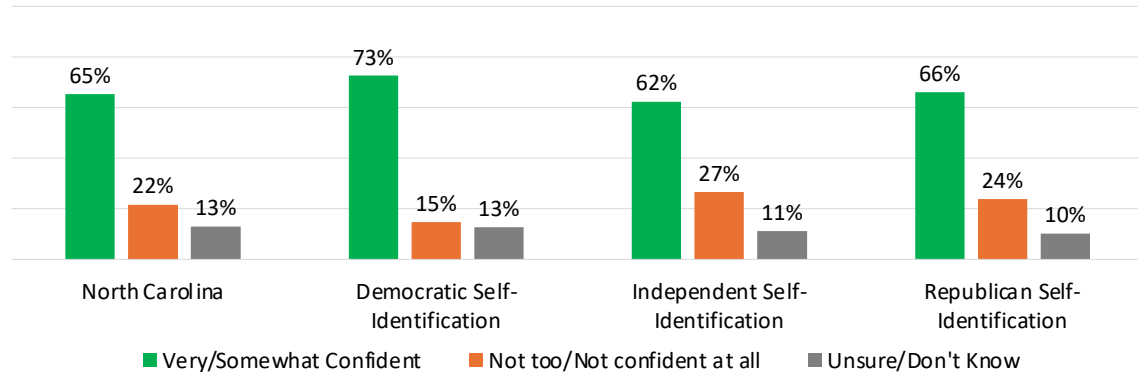
# August 2024 Survey

Confidence that activities are prevented -- Prevent voters from voting under fraudulent voter registrations that use a false phone name and address in North Carolina.



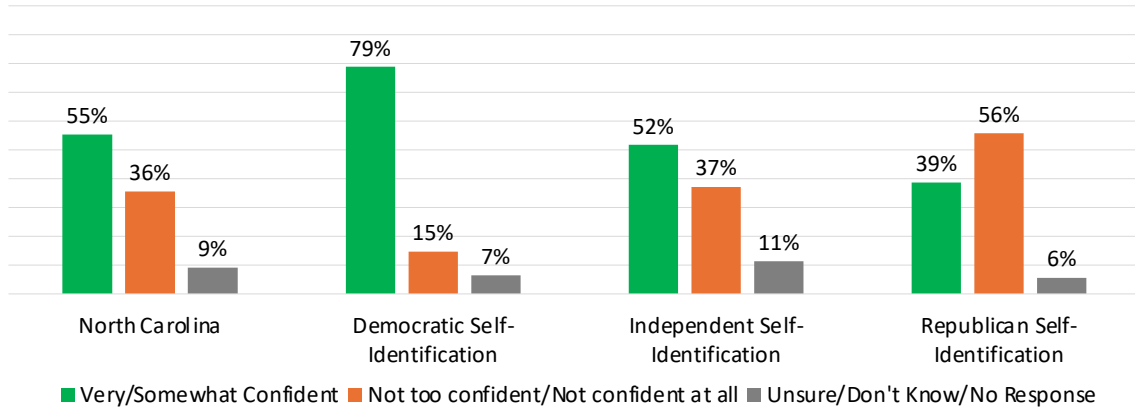
# January 2025 Survey

Confidence in prevention of election-related issues in NC 2024 -- People were prevented from voting under fraudulent voter registrations that used a false phone name and address in North Carolina.



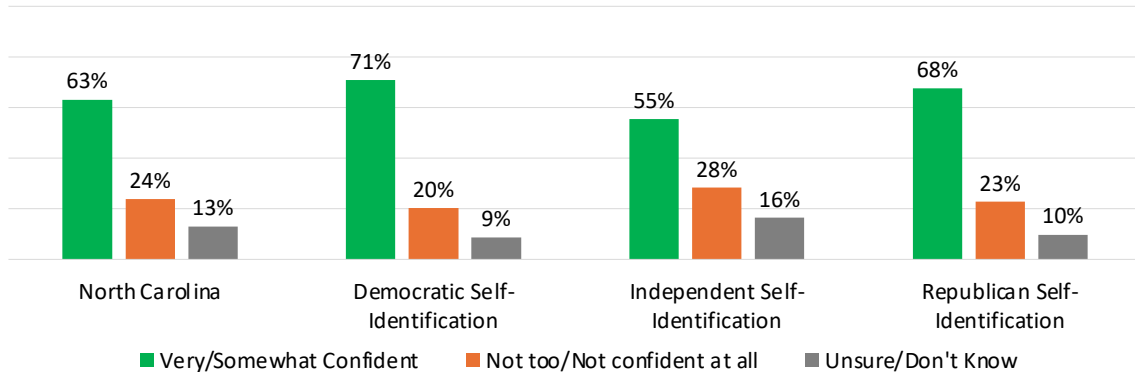
# August 2024 Survey

How confident are you that people [are] prevented from submitting too many ballots on behalf of others in North Carolina.



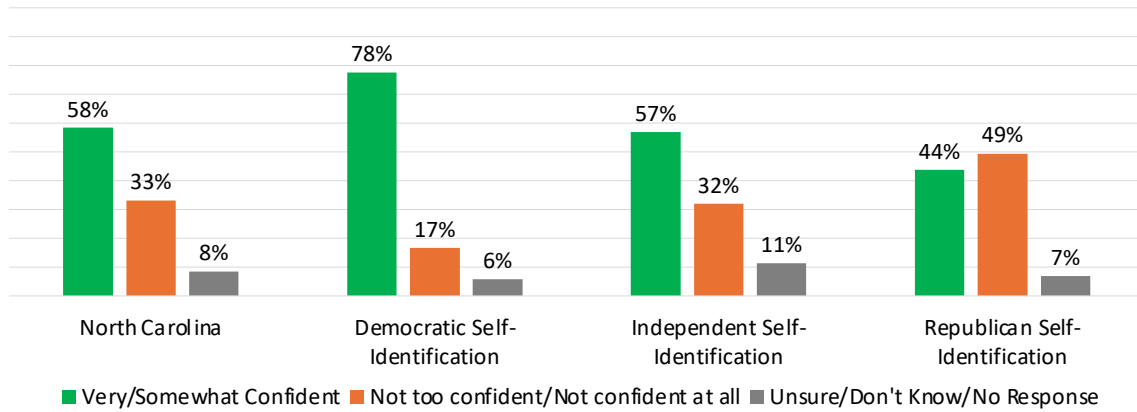
# January 2025 Survey

Confidence in prevention of election-related issues in NC 2024 -- People were prevented from submitting too many ballots on behalf of others in North Carolina.



# August 2024 Survey

Confidence that activities are prevented -- Preventing incorrect or intentionally misleading information on official election websites in North Carolina.



# January 2025 Survey

Confidence in prevention of election-related issues in NC 2024 -- Incorrect or intentionally misleading information was prevented on official election websites in North Carolina.

