

What’s Up With Mail-In Voting in NC in 2026?

Answers to frequently asked questions about mail-in voting in North Carolina, which got underway Sept. 4, the earliest in the nation

North Carolina was the first state in the nation to begin mail-in voting in the 2026 general election, with county boards of elections beginning to send absentee ballots to voters on Sept. 4. Any registered North Carolina voter may vote by mail without providing an excuse.

Who Can Vote by Mail in North Carolina? Any registered voter is allowed to vote by mail. It’s used by many North Carolinians who live overseas or are stationed in the military away from home. However, any North Carolinian can vote absentee, without an excuse.

Absentee voting isn’t nearly as popular as early voting or Election Day voting, but thousands of North Carolinians use it. In the 2022 general election, 187,660 people cast absentee ballots. That’s just under 5% of all ballots cast that year. **What Do Absentee Voters Have to Do?** Voters must first request a ballot by 5 p.m. on October 20. Military and overseas voters have until 5 p.m. on Nov. 2. Ballots can be requested through the absentee ballot portal or by completing a paper request form and returning it to the county board of elections.

Each voter must fill out their own ballot in the presence of either a notary public or two witnesses age 18 or older. Witnesses must sign and print their names and addresses in the appropriate place on the ballot envelope.

Voters must also comply with North Carolina’s photo ID requirement by including a photocopy of an acceptable photo ID or a Photo ID Exception Form. The copy can be black and white but must be readable. Voters should not send their actual ID.

Completed ballots must be returned to the voter’s county board of elections. They may be mailed or returned in person to the county board or an early voting site. Ballots must arrive by 7:30 p.m. on Election Day, regardless of when they are postmarked.

Can Anyone Help With an Absentee Ballot? Voters may receive some assistance in requesting and returning absentee ballots. A legal guardian or near relative may sign the absentee ballot request form on the voter’s behalf and may return a sealed ballot by mail or in person. Voters with disabilities may choose someone to assist them with their ballot, and trained bipartisan assistance teams are also available.

When Should Ballots Be Returned? As soon as possible. Because ballots must be received by 7:30 p.m. on Election Day, voters are advised not to wait until the last minute. Absentee voters can track their ballots through BallotTrax.

“Make sure you get your request in early,” State Board Executive Director Sam Hayes said. “Make sure you fill out the ballot when you receive it. Follow all instructions and get it in early because again, there is no grace period. Those ballots are due by close of the polls on election night, 7:30 p.m. Don’t take any chances.”

What if a Voter Changes Their Mind? Once a county board receives an absentee ballot, the voter is marked as having voted and cannot vote again in person. However, if the board has not received the ballot, or the voter has not returned it, the voter may instead vote early or on Election Day. Any absentee ballot received afterward will be discarded.

Are the Rules Different for Military and Overseas Voters? Yes. Military and overseas voters can request an absentee ballot until 5 p.m. on Nov. 2 and may use a Federal Postcard Application to register and request a ballot. The article notes that so-called Never Residents - U.S. citizens living abroad who have never resided in North Carolina but whose parents or legal guardians last did - may not vote in NC elections.

How Secure Is Absentee Voting? North Carolina has several safeguards for absentee voting, including identification information on ballot requests, witness or notary requirements, photo ID requirements and restrictions on who may return ballots. County boards review absentee ballot envelopes to ensure legal requirements have been met.

The article notes that North Carolina experienced a high-profile absentee ballot fraud case in the 2018 9th Congressional District election. Election officials identified discrepancies and ultimately ordered a new election. State lawmakers subsequently strengthened absentee ballot laws, including penalties for attempted fraud and restrictions on who may sign request forms and return ballots.

What if There Is a Problem With a Ballot? Some mistakes require an absentee ballot to be rejected and reissued, including missing witness names or signatures or an improperly notarized envelope. Voters should carefully follow instructions for sealing the ballot and including the required photo ID documentation.

Other problems may be “cured” without starting over, such as a missing voter signature in the proper location or certain photo ID issues. County election officials will notify voters when possible and provide instructions for correcting the problem.

Important 2026 Dates The 2026 general election is Tuesday, November 3. The voter registration deadline is October 9 at 5 p.m. In-person early voting runs October 15 through October 31. The absentee ballot request deadline is October 20 at 5 p.m., and completed absentee ballots must be received by 7:30 p.m. on Election Day. Different deadlines apply to military and overseas voters.

By Sarah Michels, Carolina Public Press

NC Voters Trust Local Elections More Than National

North Carolinians continue to trust their local elections, but are more skeptical about elections across the country, according to a new poll. The Catawba College-YouGov survey released in August found 70% of North Carolinians are very or somewhat confident in the security, safety, and integrity of the state’s elections, regardless of which party wins. Only 22% said they were not confident, and 8% said they were not sure.

The results are almost unchanged from a poll Catawba College conducted in August 2024 about North Carolinians and their confidence in elections.

As for votes being counted accurately in the 2026 election, 75% of North Carolinians said they were confident about votes cast in their own county, compared with 70% for votes elsewhere in North Carolina and 58% for votes cast outside the state.

“With an unusually clear 17-point county-to-national confidence gap in this survey, what stands out is how consistently North Carolinians draw a distinction between the elections they experience directly and elections farther from home,” said Michael Bitzer, professor of politics and history and director of Catawba’s Center for North Carolina Politics and Public Service.

At the national level, President Donald Trump has repeatedly made claims of election fraud when he isn’t happy with the results. This included the 2020 presidential election, where his supporters attacked the U.S. Capitol to stop Congress from certifying the results.

Respondents answered similarly about whether elections are administered with security and integrity. Most said they were confident about results in their local county’s elections at 77%, 74% said they were confident in North Carolina elections overall, and only 58% said they were confident in elections across the country.

“The challenge for election officials is to build on that local confidence while helping voters understand how the broader election system works and why its safeguards are in place,” said Bitzer.

North Carolinians also highly valued candidates accepting election results, with 88% saying it’s very or somewhat important for losing candidates to publicly accept winning candidates as legitimate winners. There was broad agreement across partisan groups, including 92% of Democrats, 90% of independents, and 82% of Republicans.

The survey had a sample size of 1000 North Carolina residents above the age of 18, conducted between July 30 and Aug. 10. The adjusted margin of error is plus or minus 3.59 percentage points. By Christine Zhu, NC Newsline, [ncnewsline.com](https://www.ncnewsline.com)

Tips for Celebrating Halloween Without Scaring Your Budget

Halloween spending is expected to hit \$13.5 billion this year, but families can keep some of that money in their pockets

Halloween is supposed to be frightening, but the Better Business Bureau says the scariest thing this October might be the amount of money Americans spend celebrating it.

Halloween spending is expected to reach \$13.5 billion in 2026, according to the National Retail Federation’s annual survey conducted by Prosper Insights & Analytics. About 74% of Americans are expected to participate in Halloween-related activities this year.

Fortunately, BBB says having fun on October 31 doesn’t require frightening the family checking account. One of the easiest ways to save is to start at home. Before buying a costume, look through closets for clothing and other forgotten treasures that might be transformed into something suitably spooky. Creativity costs considerably less than a brand-new costume — and may finally provide a purpose for that thing in the back of the closet nobody remembers buying.

Another option is renting a costume, particularly for something likely to be worn only once. BBB recommends researching rental companies at BBB.org, checking policies on trying on costumes, inspecting the outfit and carefully reading the rental agreement.

When it comes to candy, buying in bulk can lower the cost per piece. Factory-wrapped candy also keeps well if there are leftovers. BBB points out that leftover Halloween candy is hardly the worst problem a household can have.

Shoppers should also understand return policies before buying decorations, costumes and other seasonal merchandise. Temporary Halloween stores may have different rules from year-round retailers. And buying decorations with the intention of using them for Halloween and returning them afterward isn’t clever budgeting — BBB notes that it is considered fraud.

Online shoppers should make sure a website is secure, review its privacy policy and contact information, and be wary when legitimate contact information is missing. BBB also recommends paying with a credit card rather than a debit card because credit cards generally provide additional protections and make fraudulent charges easier to dispute.

Extra caution is worthwhile at seasonal “pop-up” stores. Ask whether the business will remain open after Halloween and whether returns will still be accepted. BBB recommends keeping receipts, finding out which purchases are final sale and determining whether the business has a website or another way to be contacted after the pumpkins disappear and the store does too.

Finally, anyone planning to visit a haunted house or other special Halloween attraction should research the company before purchasing tickets. BBB recommends checking [BBB.org](https://www.bbb.org) for customer reviews and complaints, searching BBB Scam Tracker for reports involving the event host, and searching the company’s name online along with terms such as “complaint,” “reviews” or “scam.”

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