TO: INTERESTED PARTIES
FROM: OPINION DIAGNOSTICS
PATRICK SEBASTIAN, PARTNER
BRIAN WYNNE, PRESIDENT
DATE: MAY 1, 2026
RE: SURVEY OF 829 REGISTERED NORTH CAROLINA VOTERS

Opinion X Diagnostics

COOPER LEADS EARLY IN SENATE RACE; VOTERS FAVOR STATE CONTROL OF ELECTIONS, VETERAN INVOLVEMENT INCREASES CONFIDENCE IN ELECTION SYSTEM

Roy Cooper holds a clear early advantage over Michael Whatley, leading 50% to 41% with 8% undecided. This reflects an early Democratic-leaning environment, though a meaningful share of persuadable and lower-propensity voters suggests the race has room to tighten as it becomes more defined.

At the same time, voters strongly favor maintaining state control over election administration. By a margin of 69% to 12%, North Carolinians say states — not the federal government — should run elections, a view that holds across party lines, including 73% of Democrats, 63% of Republicans, and 70% of Unaffiliated voters.

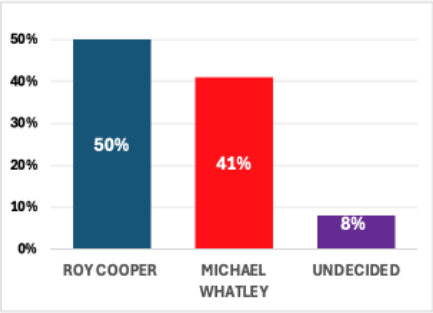
The survey also finds that providing voters with information about how military members and veterans participate in North Carolina's election system significantly increases confidence in the election system. Roughly half of voters report higher confidence after learning about military vote-by-mail or veteran involvement in election administration, with particularly strong movement among voters who were initially skeptical.

UNITED STATES SENATE – ROY COOPER (D) LEADS MICHAEL WHATLEY (R)

The survey tested a hypothetical general election matchup between Roy Cooper, the Democratic nominee, and Michael Whatley, the Republican nominee, for United States Senate. Virtually no general election advertising has taken place, and this may be the first race where Roy Cooper does not hold a significant spending advantage, which could lead to a tighter contest.

- In the initial ballot test, Cooper leads Whatley 50% to 41%, with 8% undecided.
- Cooper wins Democrats by 87 points and Whatley wins Republicans by 79 points. Cooper wins Unaffiliated voters by 15 points.
- Whatley leads Cooper by 19 points among voters 65 years and older.
- Cooper leads in every region of the state except for the Charlotte region.

There is still a long way to go in this race. While Cooper begins with a clear advantage, it likely reflects the current political environment and his time in public office, rather than a fully defined contest. A high-intensity campaign for and against both candidates could significantly reshape the race.



Numbers do not add up to 100% due to rounding

STRONG MAJORITY FAVORS STATE VS. FEDERAL CONTROL OF ELECTIONS

Voters show a clear and consistent preference for keeping election administration at the state level.

- 69% say individual states should run their own elections with only a limited role for federal agencies. 12% say federal agencies should be the ultimate decision-makers on election administration.
- 73% of Democrats, 63% of Republicans, and 70% of Unaffiliateds say the states should be in charge of their own elections.

SIGNIFICANT MINORITY DO NOT TRUST THE ELECTIONS SYSTEM

The survey tested both long-term perceptions of election trustworthiness and immediate confidence that election results will accurately reflect the votes cast.

- **Perceived trustworthiness:** A significant plurality of voters, 31%, believe elections are becoming less trustworthy, while 15% say elections are becoming more trustworthy - resulting in a net -16% in perceived trustworthiness. 44% say trust in North Carolina elections is staying about the same.
- **Confidence in results:** Despite this, voters express relatively strong confidence that the results of the 2026 election will be accurate, with 67% saying they are confident (28% very / 39% somewhat), compared to 25% who are not confident, for a +42 net confidence margin.
- **Perceptions of the 2020 election vary significantly by level:** While 36% of voters say the 2020 election nationally had widespread problems or fraud that affected the outcome, just 18% say the same about North Carolina — where 55% say there were not significant or only minor administrative problems.

While long-term trust is soft and in some cases declining, confidence that votes will be counted accurately remains strong — suggesting skepticism is more about perception and rhetoric than direct experience with election administration.

CURRENT NORTH CAROLINA ELECTION POLICY VIEWS

The survey tested a series of policies related to early voting rules, absentee voting, election administration, and voter eligibility. Voters support maintaining current systems in several areas, while showing more division on changes to election rules and oversight.

- **Early voting length:** A majority (53%) prefer keeping the current early 17 in-person voting period the same, with voters evenly split on changes (21% lengthen / 20% shorten). This is an increase from our September poll that showed 32% strongly or somewhat supported cutting the number of in-person voting days to fewer than the current 17 days – while 58% strongly or somewhat opposed the idea.
- **Same-day registration:** 66% support allowing voters to register and vote at the same time during early voting, compared to 23% opposed. In September, 69% supported same-day voter registration, while 26% opposed.
- **Voter ID:** 77% support North Carolina's voter ID requirement, with just 16% opposed.
- **Mail-in voting:** Voters are divided — 48% agree mail-in voting is convenient and secure, while 42% agree it opens the door for fraud.

- **Absentee ballot deadline:** Voters are closely divided — 47% say ballots must be received by Election Day, while 43% say postmarked ballots should count.
- **Early voting site flexibility:** Under current law, early voting sites must be open for a minimum required period, and every site in a county must meet that same standard. A proposal to allow additional sites to operate for fewer days than others receives strong support, with 68% in favor and 17% opposed — suggesting voters are open to expanding access through greater flexibility.
- **Proof of citizenship requirement:** Voters are more divided, with 51% supporting requiring additional proof of citizenship (such as a passport or birth certificate) and 42% opposed. Compared to other policies tested, this reflects a more polarized response to new eligibility requirements beyond existing voter ID laws.

CONCERN ABOUT THE ELECTIONS SYSTEM

Voters express broad concern across multiple risks, led by particularly high concern about court decisions changing election rules close to Election Day (79%) and cyberattacks affecting results (75%). Majorities also express concern about election officials not following procedures (64%), federal pressure on North Carolina officials (62%), and premature declarations of victory (61%).

POTENTIAL RISKS TO THE 2026 ELECTION	CONCERNED	NOT CONCERNED
Court decisions changing election rules close to Election Day	**79%**	17%
Cyberattacks affecting results	**75%**	22%
Election officials not following procedures	**64%**	33%
Federal pressure on North Carolina officials	**62%**	31%
Premature declarations of victory	**61%**	35%
Non-citizens voting	**56%**	42%
National Guard or ICE at or near polling places	**56%**	41%
Vote counting being too slow	**45%**	50%

MILITARY VETERAN PARTICIPATION IN ELECTIONS INCREASES CONFIDENCE

The survey tested several factual statements about the role of military members and veterans in North Carolina's election system to determine whether providing this information increases or decreases voter confidence.

- **Military vote-by-mail:** When told that members of the United States Military often use vote-by-mail and have been doing so for over a century, nearly half of respondents (50%) said this makes them more confident in the election system, including 32.5% who say it makes them much more confident.
    - Of the respondents who said they believe voting by mail invites fraud into the elections system, 49% said they felt more confident in the elections system after hearing members of the U.S. Military vote by mail.

- **Veterans serving as poll workers:** A similar share (48%) report increased confidence, including 31.5% much more confident, for a +45 net increase. This reinforces that direct involvement of veterans in election administration is broadly viewed as credible and reassuring.
    - These effects are strongest among skeptical voters — including those concerned about procedures or who believe the 2020 election had issues, where roughly half report increased confidence after learning about veteran participation.
    - Of the respondents who believe the 2020 election in North Carolina had widespread problems that affected the outcome, 41% said they were more confident after learning U.S. Military Veterans serve as poll workers.
- **Veterans working in elections full-time:** Confidence increases for 46.3% of voters, including 30.9% much more confident, yielding a +42.3 net increase. Even in a less visible administrative role, the presence of veterans continues to positively influence perceptions of election integrity.
    - Of the respondents who said they were "very concerned" over the possibility of elections officials not following procedures for counting ballots, 50% said they were more confident in the elections system after learning U.S. Military Veterans work for elections boards in a full-time capacity.
    - Of the respondents who believe the 2020 election in North Carolina had widespread problems that affected the outcome, 39% said they were more confident after learning U.S. Military Veterans work for elections boards in a full-time capacity.

Across all three statements, fewer than 6% of voters report decreased confidence, indicating these messages are broadly effective — particularly among voters who previously expressed skepticism.

METHODOLOGY STATEMENT

The survey was fielded April 21-24, 2026. Potential respondents were randomly selected from a database of North Carolina voters and contacted via either a live-operator phone call or an SMS message that led to a web-based survey. The hyperlink in each SMS contained a unique alphanumeric unique identifier to ensure the survey could only be taken a single time by a single person using that link. Respondents were screened to ensure they were registered North Carolina Voters. Results were weighted using an iterative proportional fitting process to match the known attributes of the North Carolina registered electorate on the variables of gender, age, ethnicity, educational attainment, geographic area, and political party affiliation. This weighting model was created using data sourced from the North Carolina State Board of Elections as well as the United States Census Bureau American Community Survey Public Use Microdata. The final sample of qualified respondents is n=829 registered voters, and the survey has a margin of error of ±3.4% with 95% confidence. The survey was commissioned by RightCount.

Opinion Diagnostics is a public opinion polling and market research firm based in the Carolinas and New England. Our team has a collective 30 years of experience in opinion research, and has surveyed public opinion at every level – from local to national. Our publicly-released work has been covered by more than 300 media publications nationally and internationally, and our clients include Congressional leadership, statewide and federal officeholders, Fortune-500 corporations, and nationally recognized non-profits.