NINERTIMES
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Oct. 28, 2026

2026 VOTER GUIDE

NINERTIMES

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The Niner Times is UNC Charlotte's student-run news publication founded in 1947 and has received both state and national recognition.

We cover campus happenings, news and events in the city of Charlotte and North Carolina and topics that are important to students.

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Emmanuel Perkins/Niner Times

Upcoming UNC Charlotte events

Exhibition Reception: Global Studies 2026
Oct. 29, 1-3 p.m.
Lambla Gallery, Storrs

Football vs. Tulane
Oct. 30, 7 p.m.
Jerry Richardson Stadium

First-Gen Week Kickoff
Nov. 2, 9:30-11 a.m.
Belk Plaza

Haunted Union
Oct. 29, 6:30 p.m.
Popp Martin Student Union

Early Voting Ends
Oct. 31, 3 p.m.

Election Day
Nov. 3

From the Charlotte police logs (10/18 - 10/24)

Emily Schenkel | Asst. News Editor

Oct. 18 - Harassment

Dispatch received a call from a non-resident student about threatening texts from his former boyfriend, who is unaffiliated with the University. The texts contained vague threats. The student requested a Trespass Order to be sent to his former boyfriend.

Oct. 20 - Animal Control

Officers were dispatched to Woodward Hall because of a deer that crashed through a window. Upon arrival, Officers found a second broken window where the deer exited the building.

Oct. 21 - Investigate

Officers responded to Laurel Hall regarding an unwanted sexual advance. The female declined criminal charges but requested a No Contact Order against the other student. Both parties were served the No Contact Order, and the female received University resources.

NOTES FROM THE NEWSROOM:

Please, go vote

Kyle Boucher | News Editor



You may be tired of hearing everyone telling you to go to the polls and cast your vote. Election season can feel overwhelming; many people don't want to vote on something they dont feel strongly about. But that's exactly why you should vote: in a generation with low voter turnout, your vote truly makes a difference.

You don't need to have strong political opinions or be super knowledgeable about the ballot. You have the power to vote on who you want making your laws and running your country. If you have ever felt dissatisfied with current politics, please go vote.

If you dont know who to vote for, you don't need to vote for every office on the ballot. The first time I voted was for the 2024 presidential elections, and I only voted for the presidential candidate. I didn't know anything about anyone else on the ballot; all I knew was who I wanted as my president. Even in that small way, only voting for one office was still better than not voting at all.

Of course, it's always better to vote for several things, but even choosing one candidate is you making your voice heard. It is the majority will of the people that moves empires.

Where UNC Charlotte students can vote in the midterm elections

Kyle Boucher & Emily Schenkel | News Editor & Asst. News Editor

This midterm season, UNC Charlotte students must vote off campus, as there are no on-campus voting centers available.

Voting locations differ between early voting and Election Day. Early voting starts Oct. 15 and ends Oct. 31 at 3 p.m. During this period, Mecklenburg County voters can cast their ballots at any early-voting site in the county.

On Election Day, voters must go to their assigned polling place. To find your assigned polling location, use the NC State Board of Elections Voter Search Tool.

The closest voting location to campus is at the former University City Library, at 301 E. W.T. Harris Blvd. This location is approximately a two-minute drive or a 20-minute walk from campus.

Students can also take the LYNX Blue Line light rail to a voting center at Hal Marshall Annex, located at 618 N. College St. in Uptown. You can access this location from 9th Street Station or 7th Street Station.

Both locations have the same early voting hours: 8 a.m. to 7:30 p.m. Monday through Friday, 8 a.m. to 3 p.m. Saturday, and 1 to 5 p.m. Sunday.

Additional voting centers are available across Charlotte but require a 15-minute or longer drive from campus. You can find the addresses and hours of operation for other voting centers at https://vote.mecknc.gov/upcoming-elections.

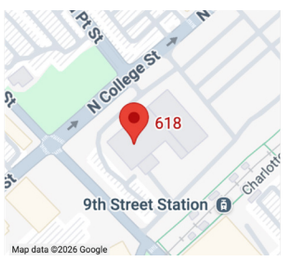
University City Library





Hal Marshall Annex

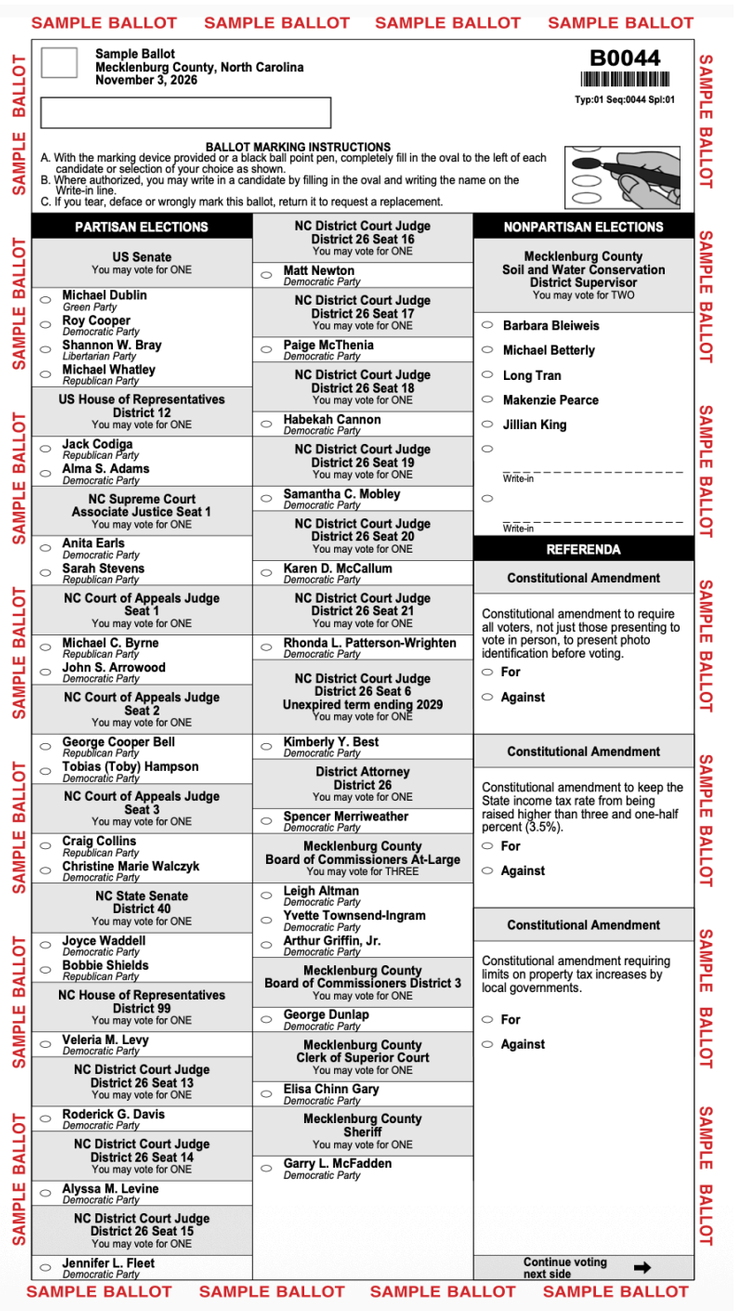




Where to find your sample ballot

Sample ballots are available on the North Carolina voter registration search website. To see your sample ballot, enter your first and last name, year of birth, and check "Registered." After selecting your name from the search results, the sample ballot will be accessible through a link under "Your sample ballot." The sample ballot changes depending on the county where you're registered to vote.

Several websites, including the North Carolina State Board of Elections, also list the statewide elections that all North Carolina residents vote on.



SAMPLE BALLOT SAMPLE BALLOT SAMPLE BALLOT SAMPLE BALLOT

Sample Ballot
Mecklenburg County, North Carolina
November 3, 2026

B0044

Typ:01 Seq:0044 Spl:01

BALLOT MARKING INSTRUCTIONS
A. With the marking device provided or a black ball point pen, completely fill in the oval to the left of each candidate or selection of your choice as shown.
B. Where authorized, you may write in a candidate by filling in the oval and writing the name on the Write-in line.
C. If you tear, deface or wrongly mark this ballot, return it to request a replacement.

PARTISAN ELECTIONS

US Senate — You may vote for ONE
- Michael Dublin, Green Party
- Roy Cooper, Democratic Party
- Shannon W. Bray, Libertarian Party
- Michael Whatley, Republican Party

US House of Representatives District 12 — You may vote for ONE
- Jack Codiga, Republican Party
- Alma S. Adams, Democratic Party

NC Supreme Court Associate Justice Seat 1 — You may vote for ONE
- Anita Earls, Democratic Party
- Sarah Stevens, Republican Party

NC Court of Appeals Judge Seat 1 — You may vote for ONE
- Michael C. Byrne, Republican Party
- John S. Arrowood, Democratic Party

NC Court of Appeals Judge Seat 2 — You may vote for ONE
- George Cooper Bell, Republican Party
- Tobias (Toby) Hampson, Democratic Party

NC Court of Appeals Judge Seat 3 — You may vote for ONE
- Craig Collins, Republican Party
- Christine Marie Walczyk, Democratic Party

NC State Senate District 40 — You may vote for ONE
- Joyce Waddell, Democratic Party
- Bobbie Shields, Republican Party

NC House of Representatives District 99 — You may vote for ONE
- Veleria M. Levy, Democratic Party

NC District Court Judge District 26 Seat 13 — You may vote for ONE
- Roderick G. Davis, Democratic Party

NC District Court Judge District 26 Seat 14 — You may vote for ONE
- Alyssa M. Levine, Democratic Party

NC District Court Judge District 26 Seat 15 — You may vote for ONE
- Jennifer L. Fleet, Democratic Party

NC District Court Judge District 26 Seat 16 — You may vote for ONE
- Matt Newton, Democratic Party

NC District Court Judge District 26 Seat 17 — You may vote for ONE
- Paige McThenia, Democratic Party

NC District Court Judge District 26 Seat 18 — You may vote for ONE
- Habekah Cannon, Democratic Party

NC District Court Judge District 26 Seat 19 — You may vote for ONE
- Samantha C. Mobley, Democratic Party

NC District Court Judge District 26 Seat 20 — You may vote for ONE
- Karen D. McCallum, Democratic Party

NC District Court Judge District 26 Seat 21 — You may vote for ONE
- Rhonda L. Patterson-Wrighten, Democratic Party

NC District Court Judge District 26 Seat 6 Unexpired term ending 2029 — You may vote for ONE
- Kimberly Y. Best, Democratic Party

District Attorney District 26 — You may vote for ONE
- Spencer Merriweather, Democratic Party

Mecklenburg County Board of Commissioners At-Large — You may vote for THREE
- Leigh Altman, Democratic Party
- Yvette Townsend-Ingram, Democratic Party
- Arthur Griffin, Jr., Democratic Party

Mecklenburg County Board of Commissioners District 3 — You may vote for ONE
- George Dunlap, Democratic Party

Mecklenburg County Clerk of Superior Court — You may vote for ONE
- Elisa Chinn Gary, Democratic Party

Mecklenburg County Sheriff — You may vote for ONE
- Garry L. McFadden, Democratic Party

NONPARTISAN ELECTIONS

Mecklenburg County Soil and Water Conservation District Supervisor — You may vote for TWO
- Barbara Bleiweis
- Michael Betterly
- Long Tran
- Makenzie Pearce
- Jillian King
- Write-in
- Write-in

REFERENDA

Constitutional Amendment

Constitutional amendment to require all voters, not just those presenting to vote in person, to present photo identification before voting.
- For
- Against

Constitutional Amendment

Constitutional amendment to keep the State income tax rate from being raised higher than three and one-half percent (3.5%).
- For
- Against

Constitutional Amendment

Constitutional amendment requiring limits on property tax increases by local governments.
- For
- Against

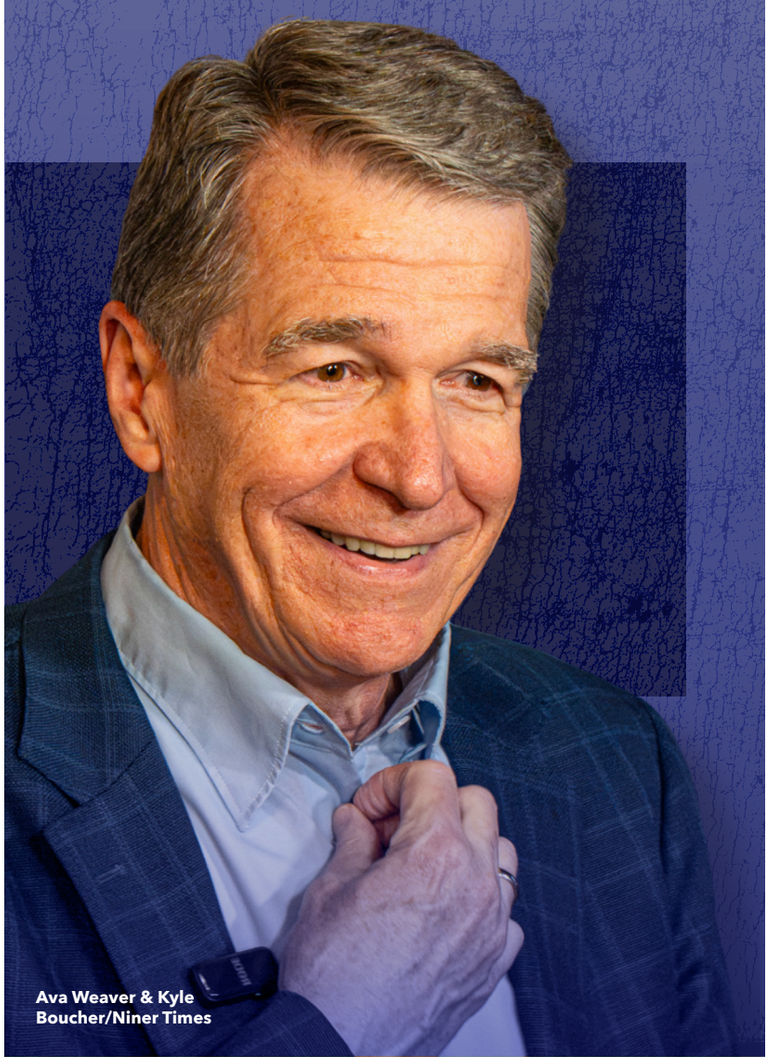
Continue voting next side

SAMPLE BALLOT SAMPLE BALLOT SAMPLE BALLOT SAMPLE BALLOT

Roy Cooper

Giselle Jimenez Del-Carmen | Staff Writer

Democratic Candidate for U.S. Senate



Ava Weaver & Kyle Boucher/Niner Times

Political history

Cooper was born and raised in Nashville, North Carolina, and earned his undergraduate and law degree from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. After earning his law degree, he returned to Nash County to practice law in Rocky Mount for 18 years.

Cooper began his political career when he was elected to the North Carolina House of Representatives in 1986 to represent District 72, which, at the time, included his hometown of Nashville and Rocky Mount. He served until 1991, when he was appointed to the North Carolina State Senate, where he served from 1991 to 2001.

In the state legislature, Cooper focused on raising teacher pay, strengthening law enforcement and writing the state's first children's health insurance initiative.

In 2000, Cooper was elected Attorney General of North Carolina, and he won re-election in 2004, 2008 and 2012.

Four years later, Cooper was elected governor of North Carolina on Nov. 8, 2016; he was re-elected in 2020, his term ending on Jan. 1, 2025, due to the gubernatorial term limit.

As governor, Cooper focused on creating jobs for North Carolinians and working with members of both the Democratic and Republican parties to pass bipartisan bills, which later led to a bipartisan agreement to expand Medicaid in the state.

His healthcare focus included enacting measures to relieve and prevent North Carolinians' medical debt by incentivizing hospitals to write off $4 billion in medical debt. He also focused on boosting public education and addressing the opioid crisis statewide.

Political positions: "Make Stuff Cost Less"

Leading up to election day, Cooper has been running his "Make Stuff Cost Less" campaign, where he brings attention to rising prices, particularly for groceries and food. To address the issue, Cooper wants to support local farmers and stop tariffs, which he believes raise costs for farmers who supply restaurants and grocery stores, and ultimately affect North Carolinians as consumers.

He also wants to cut energy costs in North Carolina, as he believes families are being taken advantage of with bills that get higher every year. To address energy costs, he hopes to cut them by requiring data centers to pay the full cost of the power they use, rather than making consumers pay.

To cut utility costs, he hopes to encourage large tech companies to build their own energy sources and modernize the energy grid for reliability and efficiency, while creating jobs.

Healthcare

Beyond food, groceries and electricity, Cooper will continue focusing on healthcare, with goals to foster bipartisan collaboration to reduce costs.

Cooper hopes to reform how insurance companies make coverage decisions, which he believes healthcare professionals should control.

He also hopes to reverse cuts to Medicaid and the Affordable Care Act, and reinstate its tax credits to make health insurance affordable for North Carolinians.

Cooper wants to require Medicare to expand negotiations with drug makers to lower prescription drug costs and enforce the upfront pricing of healthcare to improve transparency around the costs of necessary procedures.

Education

In education and childcare, Cooper aims to lower childcare costs for working parents, including those who work from home.

To achieve this, he wants to expand the Child and Dependent Care Tax Credit to better support working families. By increasing childcare quality and supply, Cooper hopes to build the childcare workforce through apprenticeships and better wages for childcare workers.

To improve childcare facilities' affordability and quality, Cooper hopes to cut "unnecessary red tape," such as serving packaged foods rather than fresh ones.

Housing affordability

Cooper wants to focus on housing affordability and address housing costs statewide by incentivizing companies to build new homes quickly while lowering costs for families.

He also wants to ban large corporations from buying single-family homes, which he believes is driving up home costs for newer families.

Cooper also wants to ban rent-setting algorithms used by companies that process real-time pricing data from landlords to recommend rent increases. He also wants to eliminate "unnecessary rules that drive up housing costs."

Michael Whatley

Republican Candidate for U.S. Senate

Political history

Whatley was born and raised in Blowing Rock, North Carolina. He earned his undergraduate degree from the University of North Carolina at Charlotte and later earned his master's degree from Wake Forest University. Whatley earned an additional master's in Theology as well as a law degree from the University of Notre Dame.

Whatley's political career began as counsel for U.S. Senator Paul Coverdell, a Republican from Georgia, in 2000. A year later, Whatley served as principal deputy assistant secretary for the U.S. Department of Energy during the George W. Bush administration.

In 2019, party leadership elected Whatley chair of the North Carolina Republican Party. He served until March 2024, when he was elected chair of the Republican National Committee (RNC). Whatley's election came after an endorsement from President Trump, with hopes that Whatley would lead the party's 2024 agenda.

In August 2025, Whatley announced he would be campaigning for the U.S. Senate after resigning from the RNC.

Political positions

Whatley wants to preserve the Republican majority in the U.S. Senate to advance President Trump's "America First" agenda, which has influenced the majority of Whatley's political positions and agenda.

Immigration

Whatley is also focused on immigration reform. He wants to advance President Trump's agenda of deporting undocumented immigrants who have committed crimes and securing the border. He believes an insecure border and lack of deportation are causes of repeat criminals.

Whatley claims this reform is necessary after President Biden allowed millions of undocumented immigrants who, according to Whatley, benefit from taxpayer handouts, traffic drugs into the country and are repeat criminals without the consequence of deportation.

Whatley criticized Cooper's veto of multiple bills, such as House Bill 370, during his time as governor that would have required local law enforcement to work with Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) on detainment requests.

Criminal justice

One of Whatley's goals is to focus on law enforcement in North Carolina; he is aiming to restore it by rolling back policies he believes are lenient and dangerous, made by the Democratic Party, and by supporting law enforcement alongside families and victims of crime.

This goal especially stems from his belief that Cooper was "soft on crime" as governor of North Carolina; he attributed incidents such as the murder of Iryna Zarutska on the Charlotte Lynx Light Rail in August of 2025 to Cooper's release of 3,500 inmates, which Whatley claims included Zarutska's murderer, Decarlos Brown Jr.

Whatley criticizes Cooper for policies he believes weakened the criminal justice system through cashless bail and pretrial release, which he described as creating a "revolving door" for criminals to enter and leave jail without fear of consequences or jail time.

Disaster preparedness

President Jimmy Carter created the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) in 1979 to "capably and impartially address disasters occurring in the United States".

President Trump appointed Whatley to serve on FEMA's council in January 2025.

Whatley says the president elected him in hopes that he would improve disaster response in North Carolina, especially after Hurricane Helene in late September 2024 — something Whatley wants to continue focusing on if elected. Whatley believes the handling of Hurricane Helene was a failure under Biden's and Cooper's FEMA responses.

Agriculture

Whatley has focused on agriculture throughout his political career, having advocated for farmers as the leader of President Trump's agriculture team during the president's 2016 campaign.

As a U.S. Senator, Whatley wants to focus on North Carolina farm families, saying they contribute $111 billion annually to the state's economy.

Whatley says fighting for tax, trade and policy reforms will help these families maintain their contribution to the state economy, something he believes is necessary for the state to succeed. In addition to calling agriculture the state's number-one sector, he believes farmers deserve a U.S. Senate representative to continue supporting their success.



Ava Weaver &
AP Photo/Matt Rourke

Alma Adams

Jacob Brindle | Video Editor

Democratic Candidate for U.S. House



Ava Weaver/Niner Times &
AP Photo/Karl B DeBlaker

As North Carolina approaches the general election on Nov. 3, incumbent U.S. Rep. Alma Adams and Republican challenger Jack Codiga offer contrasting visions for representing the state's 12th Congressional District, home to UNC Charlotte and surrounding communities.

Adams, a Democrat who has represented the district since 2014, seeks another term after decades of public service. Codiga, a financial professional running for office for the first time, is campaigning on affordability, government accountability and a smaller federal role in the economy.

Both candidates' positions on education, housing and health care could affect Charlotte residents, including college students.

Adams brings decades of experience

Before entering Congress in 2014, Adams served in the North Carolina House of Representatives from 1994 to 2014. She also served on the Greensboro City Council and the school board. According to the National Black College Alumni Hall of Fame Foundation, Adams taught art, art history and art education at Bennett College.

While in office, Adams has been guided by the "4 Hs": housing, hunger, health care and higher education. When describing Charlotte, Adams uses these to outline the community's needs.

"Look at the needs of the community. When I look at Charlotte, I'm representing the 12th district. Housing, healthcare, higher education and hunger — those are issues that matter to me. What matters to you matters to me."

Education has been central to Adams' work. She has advocated for public schools, college affordability and Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs). Additionally, Adams' congressional office reported that her initiatives secured more than $12 million in federal grants for colleges and universities.

Adams emphasized the impact of youth participation in the midterm elections.

"I think students and young people are going to play a big role because what happens today will affect them tomorrow. The Department of Education is being dismantled; we know we have to make things right so our students get the resources they need before they leave. Everything will be based on what we do as members of Congress."

If reelected, Adams says she will continue pursuing policies to address housing costs, food insecurity, health care access and education funding.

> "When I look at Charlotte, I'm representing the 12th district. Housing, healthcare, higher education and hunger — those are issues that matter to me. What matters to you matters to me."
>
> - Alma Adams

Jack Codiga

Republican Candidate for U.S. House

Codiga campaigns on affordability and limited government

Codiga moved from California to Charlotte in 2021 and holds a bachelor's degree in finance from Santa Clara University. He works in finance and has professional experience in commercial real estate lending. Unlike Adams, he has never held public office.

Codiga has emphasized his campaign on the rising cost of living, housing affordability, college debt and government accountability. He argues that government policies should address the underlying costs rather than relying on subsidies and expanding public spending.

Codiga's campaign begins with his commitment to the truth while also addressing issues the federal government ignores.

"My primary goal is to run a truthful campaign. Our system doesn't represent the American people as a whole. I'm addressing fundamental systemic issues that aren't addressed at the federal level, and they need to be. Since everyone has value, we need to value their freedom."

Codiga explained how his finance background is strengthening his political career and shaping his approach to seeking office. His finance experience helped him realize stability starts with creating a solid foundation Americans can build their lives on.

"[A finance background] very much helps, especially at a federal level. Something that has always bugged me is that asset values go up, and people's wages do not. That is because of how the currency is set up. I have always thought about how we can build a system with stable ground where people can get ahead. My experience is helping me run for federal office, but I am running because I love America and we need to make sure our country persists for another 250 years."

Codiga's positions reflect a broader emphasis on free markets and limiting federal intervention. If elected, he would enter Congress without prior legislative experience, making his proposed policies and his ability to build support for them important questions for voters.

The decision ahead

Voters in North Carolina's District 12 must choose between Adams and Codiga, two candidates with different professional backgrounds and visions for the federal government. Adams emphasizes her legislative experience and work in education, while Codiga focuses on affordability and economic freedom.

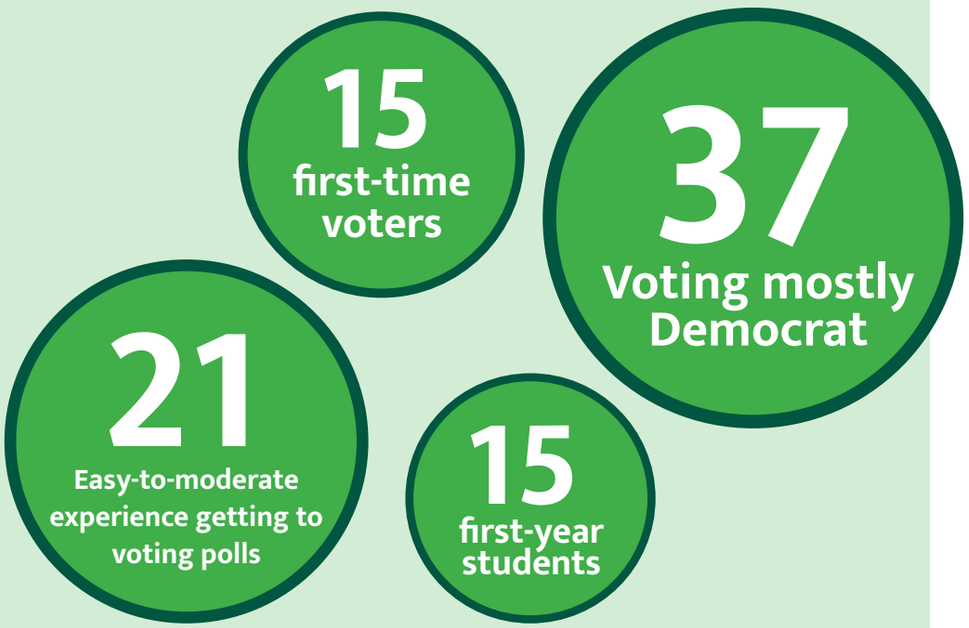
For UNC Charlotte students and Charlotte residents, the election outcome could help shape federal policies affecting education, living costs and access to essential services in the years ahead.

> "My primary goal is to run a truthful campaign. Our system doesn't represent the American people as a whole ... Since everyone has value, we need to value their freedom."
>
> - Jack Codiga

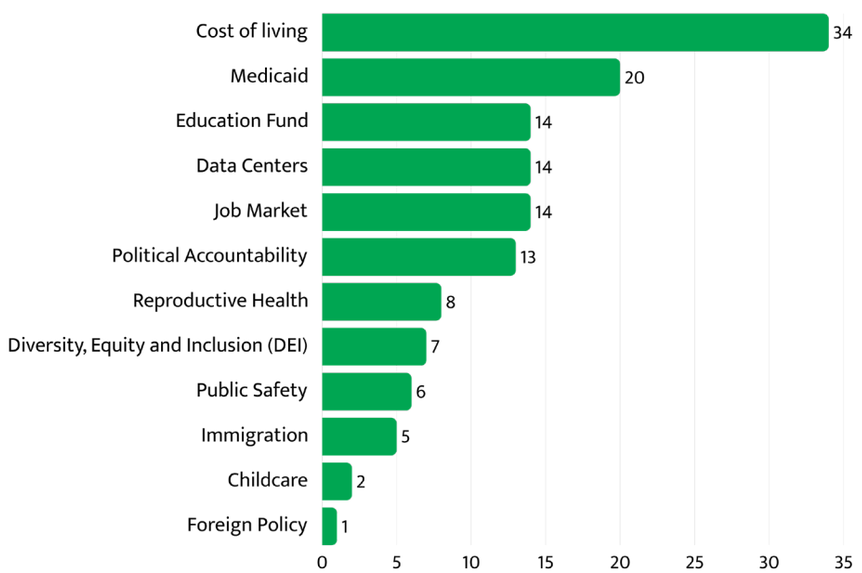


Ava Weaver/Niner Times & Courtesy of Jack Codiga

40 students answer an anonymous survey:



What are the top three issues you think need to be addressed by candidates?



UNC Charl students s midterm p voting pre

Emily Schenkel | Asst. News Editor

With early voting underway for the 2026 midterm elections, the Niner Times conducted an anonymous, weeklong survey of UNC Charlotte students to gauge their voting preferences, political priorities and views on the North Carolina ballot referenda.

Of the 40 students who responded to the survey, 92.5% said they plan to vote mostly Democratic, while 7.5% said they plan to vote mostly Republican.

Students' leading policy concerns

Respondents were asked to identify the top three issues that they thought candidates needed to address. Students said they are particularly concerned about the cost of living: 85% identified cost of living as one of their top three issues for candidates to address.

Beyond cost of living, students' next priority was Medicaid and universal healthcare, selected by 50% of respondents, followed by the job market, data centers and education funding, tied at 35%.

Other notable issues included:

- Political accountability - 32.5% of respondents
- Abortion and reproductive rights - 20%
- Diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) - 17.5%
- Public safety - 15%
- Immigration - 12.5%

Opposition to proposed North Carolina referenda

The survey also asked respondents how they plan to vote on three North Carolina ballot referenda concerning photo ID requirements, state income tax and property tax.

Responses were split on the photo ID referendum: 64.9% of respondents said they plan to vote against the proposal, while 35.1% said they plan to vote in favor of it. The referendum reads: "Constitutional amendment to require all voters, not just those presenting to vote in person, to present photo identification before voting."

For the state income tax referendum, 64.7% said they plan to vote against the new cap; 35.3% said they plan to vote in favor of it. The proposal reads: "Constitutional amendment to keep the State income tax rate from being raised higher than three and one-half percent (3.5%)."

otte hare riorities, ferences

The property tax referendum received similar results: 67.6% said they plan to vote against the limits and 32.4% said they plan to vote in favor. Its description reads: "Constitutional amendment requiring limits on property tax increases by local governments."

Students call for government accountability and policy changes

In the survey's final question, respondents were asked what changes they hoped to see following the 2026 midterm elections. Students' answers frequently emphasized government accountability, economic concerns and a desire for elected officials to represent the people better.

Several respondents called for elected officials to prioritize the needs of the public over wealthy individuals and corporate interests. One respondent hopes that officials will "actually act for what their constituents want and need," rather than maintain the status quo or prioritize corporate donors.

Others expressed concerns about political representation. One respondent called for "less corruption, more accountability," while another said they hope to see "more policies that favor the common people rather than the 1%."

Economic concerns also appeared in the written responses, echoing the survey's finding that cost of living was a significant issue for students. Respondents mentioned lower healthcare costs, improvements to the economy and jobs. One respondent stated they hope that there will be "tangible positive change to the economy and public life."

Many respondents expressed support for progressive policies and changes in congressional leadership, while others emphasized environmental protections, reproductive rights, and U.S. policy towards Israel.

Some respondents said they hope to see a Democratic sweep in North Carolina and Congress, while others expressed a preference for neither party to hold a large majority in the House or Senate.

Not all of the respondents were optimistic about change coming from this election. One participant wrote, "Not much, my expectations are low," reflecting uncertainty about whether the election would bring positive change.

What changes are you hoping to see from this election?

Anonymous, first-year

I hope more Americans can live in unity with each other, and without fear after this election.

Anonymous, first-year

I truly hope that the officials who are elected actually act for what their constituents want and need – not just voting to uphold the status quo or for corporate donors.

Anonymous, second-year

I hope more Americans can live in unity with each other, and without fear after this election.

Anonymous, first-year

Ultimately I know that whatever changes I hope for won't be solved due to Democrats inaction, but my one hope would be for more leftist politicans in the future.

Anita Earls

Kyle Boucher | News Editor

Democratic Candidate for Justice of N.C. Supreme Court



Ava Weaver/Niner Times & North Carolina Administartive Office of the Courts via AP

The second-highest judicial office in North Carolina, associate justice of the North Carolina Supreme Court, is up for election this November, with Democrat Anita Earls and Republican Sarah Stevens running.

North Carolina has six associate justices, but only one seat is up for election this year. Each justice serves an eight-year term and works under the chief justice, who serves as the head of the North Carolina Supreme Court.

Justices of the North Carolina Supreme Court determine whether or not an error was made in cases tried in lower courts.

In North Carolina, there are four levels of courts. District courts are the lowest level and handle small civil, criminal and juvenile cases; superior courts sit above district courts and handle major civil, criminal and business cases.

Above the superior courts is the North Carolina Court of Appeals, and at the top of the judicial hierarchy is the North Carolina Supreme Court.

The North Carolina Supreme Court and Court of Appeals are both appellate courts, which means they review cases from lower courts and decide whether the trial was conducted fairly and without error.

Earls' early career in civil rights

As a civil rights attorney, Earls' legal career focused on advocacy and protection for civil rights throughout the country.

She graduated from Yale Law School in 1987 and began practicing law in 1988 as a partner at the Charlotte law firm Ferguson, Stein, Watt, Wallas, Adkins & Gresham in North Carolina.

President Clinton appointed Earls as deputy assistant attorney general in the U.S. Department of Justice's Civil Rights Division in 1998.

Between 2000 and 2003, Earls was the director of the Voting Rights Project at the Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights Under Law. In 2007, she founded the Southern Coalition for Social Justice, a nonprofit legal advocacy organization that focused on southern communities. She served as the coalition's executive director until 2017.

Earls has also taught at several universities, including the University of Maryland, UNC Chapel Hill's School of Law, and Duke University's African and African-American Studies Department.

Supporting education, abortion and lower energy rates

In November 2018, Earls was elected to the North Carolina Supreme Court as an associate justice, and took office in January 2019. Her eight-year term ends in January 2027, and she is running for reelection to serve another eight years.

Earls has expressed disagreement with the U.S. Supreme Court decision to overturn Roe v. Wade, which made it more difficult for women to access legal abortions in the U.S.

She also believes that current policies on North Carolina education funding are inadequate and should be expanded. She hopes to uphold the North Carolina Constitution's promise to provide public education.

In 2022, Earls ruled to reverse a 2017 decision that removed over 220,000 retired state employees from publicly funded healthcare.

She opposes North Carolina's current energy rates and believes Duke Energy's dynamic pricing should not be allowed. She believes all North Carolina households should pay the same energy price.

Earls is endorsed by Planned Parenthood Votes! South Atlantic and the North Carolina Association of Educators. She has also partnered with Roy Cooper to encourage early voting.

Sarah Stevens

Republican Candidate for Justice of N.C. Supreme Court



Ava Weaver/Niner Times & Courtesy of Sarah Stevens

Stevens' experience in the state legislature

Being a UNC Greensboro and Campbell University School of Law alumna, Stevens began her legal career as a private attorney in Mount Airy, North Carolina, after graduating in 1986.

Stevens believes the judicial branch of North Carolina shouldn't be able to engage in judicial lawmaking, where judges can alter laws to become something different.

In 2009, Stevens joined the North Carolina House of Representatives as a Republican representing District 90, which covered Alleghany County and part of Surry County in Northwestern North Carolina.

She served as a legislator for this district until 2026, when she left the North Carolina House to run for the North Carolina Supreme Court.

From 2017 to 2024, Stevens served as speaker pro tempore, the second-highest position in the North Carolina House. This position's primary role is to take the gavel, lead floor sessions, maintain order and manage debates in the North Carolina House when the Speaker of the House is unavailable or absent.

Immigration, abortion and transgender rights

In 2023, Stevens supported a bill to ban abortions after 12 weeks of pregnancy. She has taken a stance that abortions violate basic constitutional rights.

She voted on several bills that expanded access to education, including one that expanded veterans' access to higher education.

In 2013, Stevens voted against a bill to expand Medicaid eligibility in North Carolina. She also opposed the legalization of marijuana in North Carolina.

She voted for a bill to expand local law enforcement's cooperation with Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE). She supports increasing funding for local law enforcement and broadening immigration enforcement policies.

Stevens voted for legislation that would prohibit transgender students from participating in girls' school sports. She also supported a bill that would protect parents from abuse or neglect charges for not supporting their child's transgender identity.

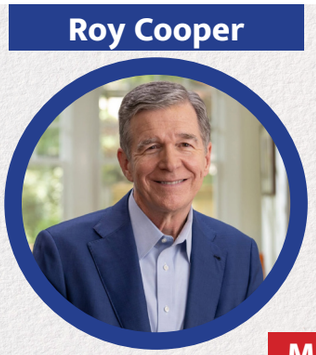
On environmental issues, Stevens supported a bill to reduce the number of single-use waste products, such as plastic bottles, wrappers and bags.

Making decisions on North Carolina laws

The open seat for associate justice of the North Carolina Supreme Court will impact how the Supreme Court decides on laws. Currently, the state Supreme Court has five Republican justices, including the chief justice, and two Democratic justices. Regardless of who wins this associate justice seat, the Republican Party will retain a majority in the state Supreme Court.

In the 2028 elections, the chief justice seat and two associate justice seats will be up for election. North Carolina has no term limits for justices, which means the current justices could run for reelection if they choose. Two more justice seats will be up for election in the 2030 elections, and another in the 2032 elections.

Supreme Court decisions are made by majority, and individual justices are supposed to make decisions based on objective views, rather than subjective views or political philosophy.













What's on the ballot?

Caroline Helms | Staff Writer

North Carolina Administrative Office of the Courts via AP

Courtesy of the United States Congress, Roy Cooper, Jack Codiga, Micheal Whatley & Sarah Stevens

This November, voters will cast their ballots in the general election. Here is what North Carolinians are voting for.

National elections

Candidates running for the U.S. Senate include Democrat Roy Cooper, Republican Michael Whatley, Green Party candidate Michael Dublin, and Libertarian Shannon W. Bray.

Michael Whatley is the former chairman of the Republican National Committee and chaired the North Carolina Republican Party from 2019 to 2024. This is his first time running for office, but President Trump has endorsed him, giving him executive support in the ongoing election.

Whatley plans to implement President Trump's America First agenda by increasing federal funding, implementing specialized training and providing high-tier equipment for law enforcement. He also hopes to strengthen law-and-order policies. He plans to deport undocumented immigrants from North Carolina as part of a plan to get fentanyl out of the state, cut federal taxes and expand domestic energy production.

Former North Carolina Gov. Roy Cooper served from 2017 to 2025. After his term ended and Gov. Josh Stein was elected, Cooper remained active in politics.

Cooper has popularized his "Make Stuff Cost Less" campaign, a plan to lower childcare costs with a federal childcare tax credit, reduce tariffs, block corporate grocery mergers and ban algorithmic pricing to reduce everyday costs. He also plans to cut healthcare costs through lower prescription drug prices, banning insurance denials and increasing Medicaid funding.

The ballot includes a referendum for three constitutional amendments. The first would require North Carolina residents to provide photo ID for all voting methods, not just in-person voting; the second would reduce the state income tax cap; the third would limit property tax increases.

Statewide elections

Several state-level offices are up for election, including seats in the North Carolina Senate and House of Representatives, as well as judicial offices.

One seat for North Carolina Associate Justice of the Supreme Court is up for election; the candidates are incumbent Democrat Anita Earls and Republican Sarah Stevens. The Associate Justices assist the Chief Justice in deciding North Carolina laws and cases appealed from lower courts.

Three seats on the North Carolina Court of Appeals are on the ballot. This court sits above district and superior courts, but below the North Carolina Supreme Court. The Court of Appeals hears appeals from cases already tried in lower courts. Appealing a case means asking a higher court to review a lower court's decision, and a citizen can do this when they believe there was a legal mistake in their trial or case.

North Carolina Court Judges for District 26 are up for election, with 10 seats open, each with a single Democratic candidate. District Attorney is also up for election, with only Democrat Spencer B. Merriweather running.

The North Carolina Senate seat for District 42 in Mecklenburg County has two candidates: Democrat Woodson Bradley and Republican Stacie McGinn. The North Carolina House of Representatives seat for District 103 has one candidate: incumbent Democrat Laura Budd. These legislative offices draft and pass bills that become state law.

Local elections

While many students live outside Mecklenburg County, everyone has the opportunity to vote for their district court judges, district House representative, court of appeals judges and district senator.

Mecklenburg County district attorneys are also up for election, as are the District Board of Commissioners and U.S. House of Representatives. The candidates on the ballot depend on the district where voters live.

All Mecklenburg County voters can vote for the Board of Commissioners at-large, a group of officials who make decisions for the entire county. Candidates include Leigh Altman, Yvette Townsend-Ingram, and Arthur Griffin, all running as Democrats.

The Clerk of Superior Court makes administrative and record-keeping decisions for Mecklenburg County's superior and district courts. Only one candidate is running for this office: incumbent Democrat Elisa Chinn Gary.

The Mecklenburg County Sheriff oversees public safety, manages the county jail and enforces court orders. This office also has a single candidate on the ballot: Democrat Garry L. McFadden.

The ballot also includes a nonpartisan election for Mecklenburg County Soil and Water Conservation District Supervisor. Voters can select at most two candidates from Barbara Bleiweis, Michael Betterly, Long Tran, Makenzie Pearce and Jillian King.

In Charlotte, there are a few laws to vote on, including transportation bonds to improve roads and parts of state highways, housing bonds to create more low-income housing projects, and neighborhood improvement bonds aimed at improving various Charlotte neighborhoods. All of these could increase property taxes.

Early voting began on Oct. 15 and ends on Oct. 31 at 3 p.m. Election Day is Nov. 3. Sample ballots are available on the North Carolina State Board of Elections website.

Midterm elections to decide which party controls Congress

Montserat Marcelo-Morales | Staff Writer

In the 2026 midterm elections, all U.S. House of Representatives and 33 U.S. Senate seats will be up for reelection.

At the congressional level, enough Senate and House seats are up for reelection to allow a potential party switch.

Currently, the United States is in a federal Republican trifecta, meaning both chambers of Congress and the president are Republican.

The U.S. Senate has 100 senators, two representing each U.S. state. The House of Representatives has 435 representatives, with numbers varying by state population.

U.S. Senate seats are up for reelection every six years, with no term limit. Senators represent their entire state.

U.S. House seats are up for reelection every two years, with no term limit. House members represent their specific congressional districts, with an average of 770,000 people per district.

The U.S. Senate confirms presidential nominations and treaties with a two-thirds majority vote. The Senate can also attach additional conditions to the treaty.

The U.S. House introduces bills that raise revenue. The House also uses a two-thirds voting system to override presidential vetoes, conduct impeachment trials, advise on treaties, remove members from the House or Senate and approve constitutional amendments.

Both chambers are responsible for making and passing laws, collecting taxes, naturalizing citizens, regulating money and declaring war.

Current political seats and U.S. Congress elections

Currently, Republicans control both chambers by a small majority. In the U.S. Senate, Republicans hold 53 seats, with Democrats holding 47.

In the U.S. House, Republicans hold 218 seats, and Democrats hold 214. One seat represents an independent member, and two seats are vacant: Republican Rep. Tony Gonzalez resigned on Apr. 14, 2026, and Democrat Rep. Sheila Cherfilus-McCormick resigned on Apr. 21, 2026.

If Republicans retain control of Congress following the elections, the Republican trifecta will continue until the 2028 presidential election, when the balance of power could shift again.

If Democrats win both chambers, the government will be a "divided government," with Republican President Trump still in power until 2028.

Swing states may see party changes, with different political parties leading them after the midterm.

Swing states swaying from one party to another

A swing state is one where support for both the Republican and Democratic parties is roughly equal. Depending on the candidates and the political climate during election season, a state may sway one direction.

In the 2024 elections, 33 seats were up for the U.S. Senate. In that election, 22 seats flipped parties, including a few in swing states.

Current swing states include Arizona, Georgia, Nevada, North Carolina, Michigan, Pennsylvania and Wisconsin.

During presidential elections, candidates appeal to swing states in hopes of turning them blue or red. Swing states are the main factor in reaching the 270 electoral votes needed to win. Electoral votes range from six in Nevada to 19 in Pennsylvania.

In swing states, the pressure to keep the state blue or red grows with each election season.

What do the elections mean for North Carolina nationally?

In North Carolina, one Senate seat is up for grabs, with former Gov. Roy Cooper and Republican Michael Whatley campaigning for the open spot.

Currently, North Carolina is represented in the Senate by Ted Budd and Thom Tillis, both Republicans. Budd will remain in office, and Tillis will be completing his term in January 2027.

North Carolina has 14 districts, each represented by a representative in the U.S. House of Representatives.

In the U.S. House, North Carolina's 1st, 2nd, 4th and 12th districts are Democratic, while the rest are Republican.

North Carolina's government has been divided since 2017. Currently, Republicans dominate the North Carolina State Legislature, and Gov. Josh Stein is a Democrat.

Other states with divided government include Alaska, Arizona, Kansas, Kentucky, Michigan, Minnesota, Nevada, Pennsylvania, Vermont and Wisconsin. Half of the states with divided governments are swing states.

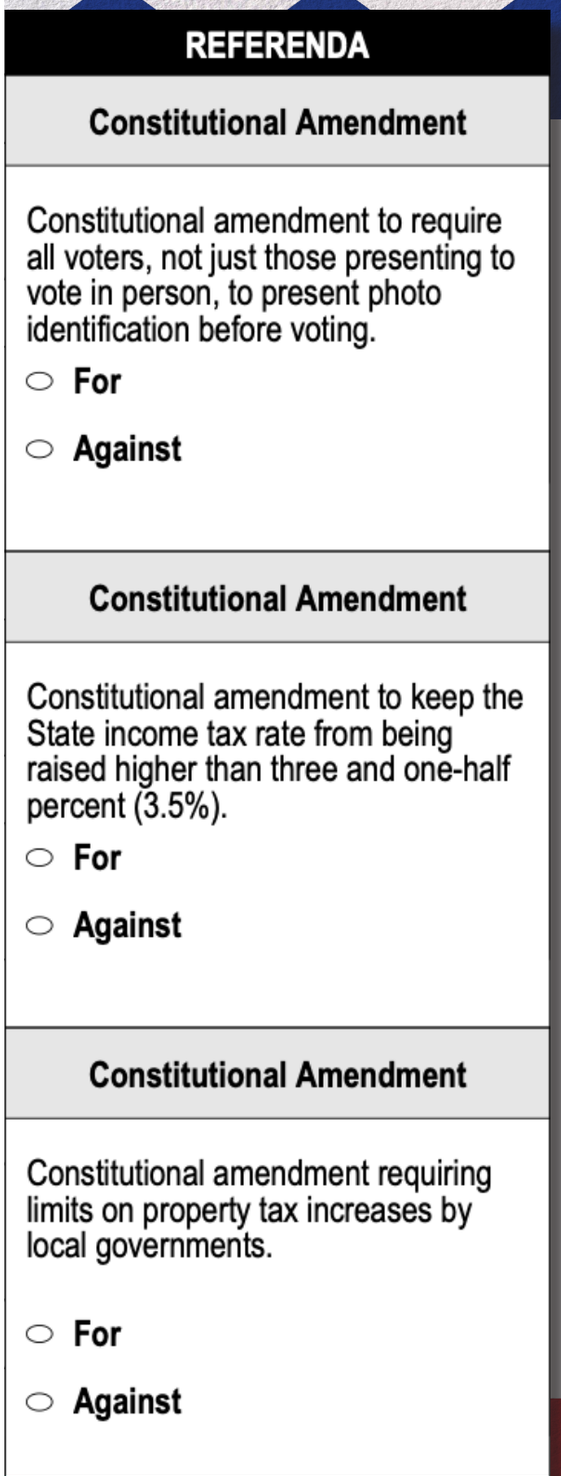
With Budd remaining in office, both U.S. Senators in North Carolina will be Republican, or the Senate delegation will be split, with both senators from different parties.

Regardless of whether U.S. Representatives in North Carolina are majority Democrat or Republican, the state will remain divided at the congressional level.

This will affect how different parties approach policies on healthcare, education, reproductive rights, immigration and taxes.



Ali Thiam/Niner Times & Courtesy of Pablo Martinez Monsivais



Referenda on the 2026 midterm ballot

Miguel Peña | Staff Writer

In the upcoming general election, North Carolina voters will decide on three proposed constitutional amendments addressing voter photo identification, the state income tax and property tax.

The referenda, approved by the state legislature, have sparked debate between Republicans and Democrats.

What is a referendum?

Each constitutional amendment on the ballot is a referendum. According to the North Carolina State Board of Elections website, "a referendum is any question, issue, or act referred to a vote of the people by the General Assembly, a local government, or a petition from voters as authorized by law."

A referendum is a proposed amendment or bond issue to the state's constitution that voters can vote for or against.

Valid photo ID

The first referendum, the "Require Voter Identification Amendment," reads as follows: "Constitutional amendment to require all voters, not just those presenting to vote in person, to present photo identification before voting."

This would require everyone to show their ID to cast a vote, not just those voting in person.

Currently, North Carolina voters who vote in person must provide a photo ID. Valid forms of ID include a driver's license, state ID, U.S. passport and a college student photo ID. To see all valid forms of identification, visit the North Carolina State Board of Elections website.

As of 2024, voters who request a mail-in absentee ballot have to include a photocopy of their ID. If their ID was stolen or lost, or if the voter is physically unable to attend the voting site, state law provides an ID exception form.

Supporters of the referendum say it is a security measure to prevent vote fraud. Opponents say it complicates voting by mail for voters physically unable to attend voting sites.

State income tax

The state income tax referendum reads: "Constitutional amendment to keep the State income tax rate from being raised higher than three and one-half percent (3.5%)."

Currently, North Carolina's income tax is a flat 3.99% for every resident. The amendment proposes lowering the maximum 7% rate to 3.5%, prohibiting the government from raising the income tax above 3.5%.

Senator Michael V. Lee introduced the amendment in May 2026 in Senate Bill 1080. The North Carolina State Senate and House of Representatives approved it with votes of 30-18 and 73-46, respectively.

Republicans supported the bill, with Lee arguing that North Carolinians have been able to keep more of their earnings in times of strong growth, and this bill will continue that by securing a lasting change.

On the contrary, Democrats say this referendum is a protection cap for millionaires, leading to an increase in sales tax and hurting lower-income families in the long run.

Property tax

The "Property Tax Levy Limit Amendment" reads: "Constitutional amendment requiring limits on property tax increases by local governments."

Currently, North Carolina does not have a limit on property taxes. If passed, the amendment would require the North Carolina General Assembly to pass laws limiting the maximum amount that property taxes may increase.

Property taxes vary across counties and are applied as a percentage of a property's assessed value.

Property taxes also differ for homes within city or town limits; they are subject to combined tax rates from the city and county governments.

Representative Brian Echevarria introduced the amendment, House Bill 1089, in April of this year. It was approved by the North Carolina House of Representatives and State Senate, with a 73-46 vote and a 31-15 vote, respectively.

Republicans argue that local government is overtaxing people and underdelivering with tax-funded services. They worry that local government will keep increasing property taxes until people cannot afford it.

Democrats opposed this, arguing that property taxes fund necessary services that otherwise are insufficiently funded by state funding alone. They also argue the focus should be on affordable housing and direct relief measures for families with high property taxes.

2026 midterms could reshape political power in North Carolina legislature

Montserat Marcelo-Morales | Staff Writer

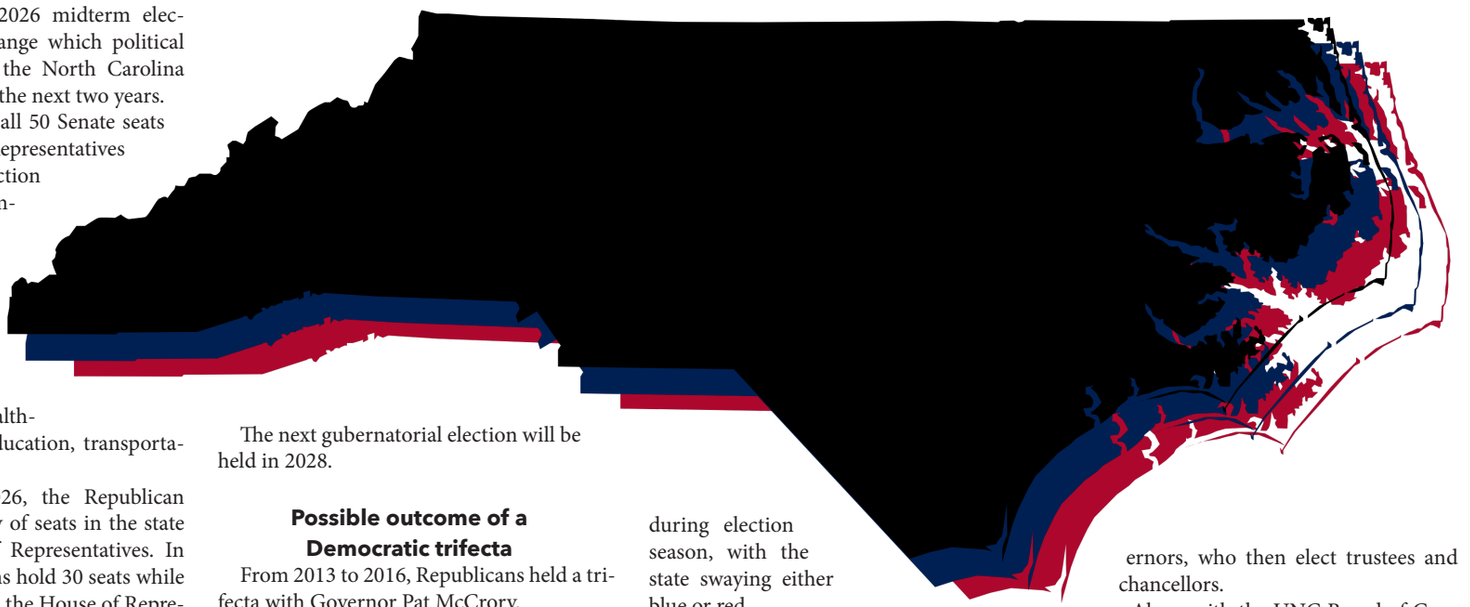
The upcoming 2026 midterm elections could change which political party controls the North Carolina General Assembly for the next two years.

In North Carolina, all 50 Senate seats and 120 House of Representatives seats are up for reelection this year; both chambers are up for reelection every two years with no term limit.

The North Carolina legislature creates laws on issues such as healthcare, state budgets, education, transportation and public safety.

As of October 2026, the Republican Party holds a majority of seats in the state Senate and House of Representatives. In the Senate, Republicans hold 30 seats while Democrats hold 20. In the House of Representatives, Republicans hold 71 seats while Democrats hold 47.

Although Republicans have dominated the legislature since 2011, the past two governors, Roy Cooper and Josh Stein, have represented the Democratic Party in the executive branch, with Cooper winning the 2016 gubernatorial election.



The next gubernatorial election will be held in 2028.

Possible outcome of a Democratic trifecta

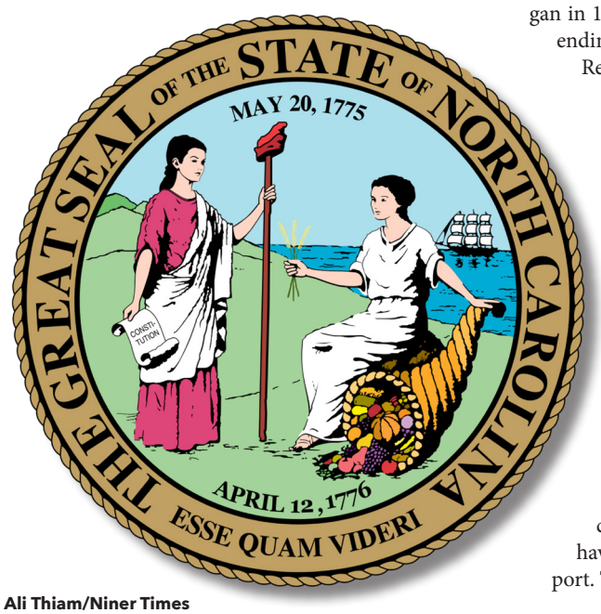
From 2013 to 2016, Republicans held a trifecta with Governor Pat McCrory.

Trifectas happen when the governor belongs to one political party and both legislative chambers are dominated by the same party.

With Stein still in office until 2028, Republicans will not gain a trifecta in this election.

Democrats could dominate the legislature and executive branch, with enough Democratic candidates to take the available seats.

The last Democratic trifecta began in 1999 and lasted 11 years, ending in 2010. Although Republicans took both chambers after the 2010 midterm elections, the executive branch remained Democratic under Governor Bev Perdue, who served from 2009 to 2013.



Ali Thiam/Niner Times

What does this mean for North Carolina as a swing state?

A swing state is a state where Democrats and Republicans have similar levels of support. That support often shifts during election season, with the state swaying either blue or red.

North Carolina is known as a swing state, along with Arizona, Georgia, Nevada, Michigan, Pennsylvania and Wisconsin. Uncertainty about whether a swing state will vote majority Democratic or Republican creates high tension; this anticipation urges citizens to vote.

In presidential elections, swing states are the final and most important determinant of who wins, so presidential candidates campaign more heavily there.

For the most part, Democrats and Republicans hold different views on topics such as abortion, taxes, education funding and environmental regulations.

The Republican Party in North Carolina focuses on boosting the state's economy, promoting natural gas and nuclear power, working with U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) and eliminating Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI) policies.

The Democratic Party in North Carolina focuses on providing economic opportunity for everyone, increasing funding for local law enforcement, expanding access to healthcare and investing in public education.

How is the UNC System affected?

The UNC System is affected by those who control the Senate and the House of Representatives, because the state legislature appoints members to the UNC Board of Governors, who then elect trustees and chancellors.

Along with the UNC Board of Governors and campus-level administrators, the state legislature influences budgeting and funding for the UNC System.

One example is the NC Promise Tuition Plan, which has reduced tuition costs for in-state students at schools such as Western Carolina University and UNC Pembroke by $500 per semester.

The legislature creates policies that set tuition costs for the rest of the UNC System and shapes DEI policies.

As of June 2026, DEI policies have been banned in public K-12 schools, public universities and workplaces. This is because of Senate Bill 558, which Stein originally vetoed, but was later overturned by the General Assembly.

For the UNC System, this means that DEI offices and hires are banned, and mandatory DEI training and classes are banned as graduation requirements.

At UNC Charlotte, this led to the closure of the Office of Diversity and Inclusion, the Office of Identity, Equity and Engagement (IEE), and the Office of Academic Diversity and Inclusion.

Because the North Carolina General Assembly is made up of lawmakers, students can search for candidates in their districts and vote for those who best align with their values.


VOTE
VOTE
VOTE