

Checks and Balances in North Carolina: Important Dates for the 2026 November Election

North Carolina's elections are governed by a number of laws and regulations that ensure there are checks and balances throughout the process. Bipartisan teams of election workers at the local, county, and state levels go through a meticulous list of steps to verify the count, check for accuracy, and ensure all rules are followed.

Below, we detail the dates for each step to provide greater transparency into the rigorous efforts underway to deliver a free and fair election in North Carolina. Importantly, this is nonpartisan educational research intended for 501(c)(3)-compliant purposes only. It is not to be used for any partisan, political, or electioneering activities by any organization.

Voting by Mail

- [Friday, Sept. 4](#) - Absentee ballots will be made available and distributed to military and overseas voters.
- [Tuesday, Sept. 29](#) - County boards of election must begin to conduct absentee meetings at 5 p.m. every Tuesday until Election Day.
- [Tuesday, Oct. 20](#) - Deadline for voters (other than military and overseas voters) to request an absentee ballot. The appropriate county board of elections must receive applications by 5 p.m.
 - **Emergency provision for absence for sickness of physical disability** - If a voter expects to be unable to go to the voting place to vote in person on Election Day because of that voter's sickness or other physical disability, they may request absentee ballots in person to the county board of elections where the voter is registered after 5 p.m. on the second Tuesday before the election but not later than 5 p.m. on the last business day before the election.
- [Monday, Nov. 2](#) - Deadline for military and overseas (UOCAVA) voters to request an absentee ballot. Applications must be received by 5 p.m.
- [Tuesday, Nov. 3 \(Election Day\)](#) - All absentee ballots, including UOCAVA ballots returned via electronic means, must be received by the county election board by 7:30 p.m. to be eligible to be counted.
- [Friday, Nov. 6](#) - The appropriate county board of elections must receive a cure

certification form to cure deficient absentee ballots by 12 p.m.¹

- [Thursday, Nov. 12](#) - Deadline for UOCAVA ballots returned via mail to reach the county board of elections office. The ballots must be put in the mail by 12:01 a.m. on Election Day (voter's local time) and reach the county board of elections office by 5 p.m. (This is the last business day before the county canvass).

In-Person Voting (Early & Election Day)

- [Friday, Oct. 9](#) - Regular voter registration deadline. Extension applies to certain voter registration applications. Qualified individuals may still be able to register and vote or make changes (except for party affiliation) to their voter registration and vote during the early voting period.
- [Thursday, Oct. 15](#) - In-person early voting begins. Eligible individuals who reside in a county but are not yet registered to vote there may [register during the in-person early voting period](#). After registering, the newly registered voter can immediately vote at that same site.
- [Saturday, Oct. 31](#) - In-person early voting ends at 3 p.m.
- [Monday, Nov. 2](#) - Deadline for military and overseas (UOCAVA) voters to register to vote. Applications must be received no later than 5 p.m.
- [Tuesday, Nov. 3](#) - **Election Day**
 - **6:30 a.m.** - Polling locations open.
 - **7:30 p.m.** - Polling locations close. All voters still in line after polls close must be allowed to vote.

Counting, Canvassing, & Certification

- [Tuesday, Nov. 3](#) - **Election Day**
 - UOCAVA ballots may be counted starting at 9 a.m.
 - All non-UOCAVA ballots may be counted starting at 5 p.m. Localities may start earlier at 2 p.m. if a resolution was passed previously by the county board.
- [Friday, Nov. 13](#) - County canvass begins at 11 a.m.²
- [Thursday, Nov. 19](#) - County boards of elections issue certificates of election, if no election protest is pending.³
- [Tuesday, Nov. 24](#) - State canvass begins at 11 a.m.

¹“Cure” is the process by which a voter may fix certain deficiencies or issues with their absentee ballot. In North Carolina, a voter may cure their ballot with a cure certificate if the voter did not sign the Voter Certification or signed their absentee ballot in the wrong place.

²“Canvassing” is the process by which the appropriate authority checks the results from each voting location and ballot counting location for accuracy and compliance with statutory procedures. After these checks, the results from each location are compiled to create results for each race on the ballot. In North Carolina, the county canvass is typically conducted by the county board of elections. The state canvass is conducted by the state board of elections.

³“Certification” is the process by which winners in elections are officially declared following the completion of the canvass. For local races that can be determined following the county canvass, certification will occur after the county canvass. For federal, state, and multicounty races that must be determined by the state canvass, certification will generally occur immediately following the completion of the state canvass.

Recounts

- [Monday, Nov. 16](#) - Local candidates may file a request for a recount to the appropriate county board of elections until 5 p.m.
- [Tuesday, Nov. 17](#) - Candidates may file a request for a recount to the State Board of Elections until 12 p.m.

Election Protests

- [Friday, Nov. 13](#) - Deadline to file protests concerning the manner in which votes were counted or results tabulated. Protests must be filed by 11 a.m., before the beginning of the county board of elections canvass meeting.⁴
- [Tuesday, Nov. 17](#) - Deadline to file protests concerning the manner in which votes were counted or results tabulated, if there is good cause shown for the delay in filing before the statutory deadline. Protests must be filed by 5 p.m.
- [Tuesday, Nov. 19](#) - Deadline to file protests concerning an irregularity other than vote counting or result tabulation. Protests must be filed no later than 5 p.m.

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⁴ A protest concerning the conduct of an election may be filed with the county board of elections by any registered voter who was eligible to vote in the election or by any person who was a candidate for nomination or election in the election.