North Carolina

State Rank: 18
Overall Score: MEDIUM

Index 1: Voter Registration - Confidence level - MEDIUM
North Carolina closes voter registration 30 days before Election Day, but it does offer same-day voter registration during early voting. The state provides online voter registration, but not automatic. Youth can pre-register to vote beginning at age 16. A 2022 court ruling allows returning citizens with felony convictions to regain their right to vote upon release, rather than after conditions of parole or probation have been met. Although North Carolina does not purge voters from lists for nonvoting no matter the number of years, it had one of the highest unnecessary purge rates of voters among all states in 2020.

Index 2: Voter Identification - Confidence level - MEDIUM
North Carolina requires no photo ID to vote. New state law in 2022 will fund the state to become a member of the Electronic Registration Information Center (ERIC) which seeks to help states improve accuracy of voter rolls - but only for one year to allow a review of the state’s voter registration system.

Index 3: Early Voting - Confidence level - MEDIUM
North Carolina offers early in-person voting beginning the third Thursday preceding Election Day and ends it the Saturday before. There may be weekend voting available depending on the locality. No-excuse required absentee voting is available.

Index 4: Safe Voting - Confidence level - LOW
North Carolina offers no-excuse absentee ballot voting. There is no proactive mailing of ballot applications to voters without request nor prepaid postage to return the ballot. Ballot drop-off options are restrictive. Due to 2022 court ruling, there are no longer anti-voter restrictions on who is allowed under state law to assist returning a ballot for a voter in need. The state does offer accessible electronic absentee ballots to voters with disabilities.

Learn more about how to vote and voting rights in North Carolina: VOTE411
Learn about voting laws recently passed or enacted in North Carolina: State Voting Rights Tracker by Voting Rights Lab
If you or anyone you know encounters problems while voting, call the Election Protection Hotline at 866-OUR-VOTE or 866-687-8683
Learn how to take action to protect voting rights in North Carolina: DemocracyMovement.us
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Index 5: Ballot Acceptance - Confidence level - MEDIUM
North Carolina had a low percentage of mail-in ballots returned in 2020 compared with the majority of states, with a low rejection rate. There is a statutorily required statewide ballot tracking program. The state authorizes election administrators to preprocess returned ballots, allows voters to correct for ballot discrepancies, and provides a signature verification program. The absentee ballot return envelope must be signed by two witnesses or a notary public. Absentee ballots must be received within three days after an election if postmarked on or before Election Day.

Index 6: Logistical Barriers in Voting - Confidence level - MEDIUM
North Carolina has no law allowing employees to take any paid or unpaid leave to vote. In addition to offering curbside voting and limited accessible voting machine options, state law authorizes voting at a different polling site if the original is inaccessible due to a voter's disability or language barrier, or for the ballot to be hand delivered to another location. The state has passed laws limiting the voting rights of college students. There was a medium ratio of poll workers to polling sites in 2020. North Carolina ranked in the top third among all states on how well it invested in the 2020 elections to improve processes while being cost effective.
North Carolina has established the constitutional right to a secret ballot and its election administration is designed to be nonpartisan by nature. State laws passed in 2021 shift election authority, shift emergency powers, and allow litigation interference by the state. Legislation pending in early 2022 sought to penalize election officials for their decisions, allow the review of other elections, and prohibit private funding of election administration. 2022 law enacted requires state board of election legislative approval before making any improvements to election processes.

Index 7: Equipment, Security, and Auditing - Confidence level - HIGH
North Carolina has a statewide verified paper audit trail. All voting centers use hand marked paper ballots and offer Ballot Marking Devices for voters with accessibility needs. The state tests the equipment according to federal accreditation and full certification required by statute. North Carolina uses E Poll Book technology statewide, which helps reduce discrepancies. Its election security systems received very high overall ratings in 2018. The state uses traditional audit methods to double-check for machine recording errors during the election process and the statutorily required post-election period. North Carolina scored among the top five states in this index.

Index 8: Independent Election Administration - Confidence level - MEDIUM
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Public opinion surveys showed that North Carolina voters had some trust in the 2020 election news coverage, while political scientists gave the state medium media integrity ratings. The state had a moderate number of demonstrations and a couple of riots during the last week of the general elections. North Carolina voters were targeted with robocalls to stay home and not vote. State law requires all poll workers to be trained, prohibits obstructing or hindering voters at the polls, criminalizes intimidation and false election speech, and authorizes law enforcement to be present only by request or on official business. There is no state law banning weapons at the polling site.

North Carolina is one of five states that has a split trifecta – the governor and the legislature – with a Democratic triplex - the governor, attorney general, and secretary of state are from the same political party. Based on the last two presidential elections, North Carolina is one of nine states with the most competitive elections (average voting margin under 4%), with a slight tilt toward Republicans. The state has an average GOP voting margin of 2.5% compared to the national average Democratic voting margin of 3%. According to the 2020 U.S. Census, the state’s population grew by 9.5% compared to the national average of 7.4%. North Carolina is less racially diverse than the rest of the country as a whole. During the past decade, the white population dropped from 84% to 79%. With the U.S. Census results, North Carolina will be one of five states to gain a representative in Congress.