



SURVEY OF LIKELY NORTH CAROLINA VOTERS · SEPTEMBER 2026

Cooper Leads Whatley by Ten; Voters Are Motivated and Confident in the Count

857 likely November 2026 general election voters · September 17–20, 2026 · Margin of error $\pm 3.3\%$

The Senate Race · Motivation to Vote · Confidence in the Count · News Sources

CONDUCTED BY

Opinion 
Diagnostics

Prepared for Common Cause North Carolina
September 24, 2026

How the Survey Was Conducted

The survey

The survey was fielded September 17–20, 2026. Potential respondents were randomly selected from the North Carolina voter file and contacted by live-operator phone call or by an SMS message linking to a web survey; each SMS link carried a unique identifier so the survey could be taken only once. Respondents were screened as registered North Carolina voters who are definitely or probably voting in the November 2026 general election. Results were weighted using an iterative proportional fitting process to match the known attributes of the likely November 2026 electorate on party registration, region, gender, age, race/ethnicity, educational attainment, and 2024 presidential vote. The final sample is n=857 likely general election voters, with a margin of error of $\pm 3.3\%$ at 95% confidence. The survey was commissioned by Common Cause North Carolina. The electorate is modeled on registrants who voted in recent general elections; a high-turnout November drawing more heavily on lower-propensity registrants would produce a younger and more Democratic electorate than this model assumes.

What voters were asked

This report covers the U.S. Senate race; confidence that votes will be counted accurately; whether what voters have seen and heard about elections has made them more or less motivated to vote; and the news sources voters rely on for North Carolina politics. Each question is printed in full on the page that reports it.

How to read this report

Figures are rounded once from the unrounded result, so options may not sum exactly to the subtotals shown. Margins are stated as Cooper minus Whatley. Party figures are the share of each party's voters giving that answer. Subgroup differences are directional; smaller groups carry wider margins of error. Group sizes given in this report count people interviewed; the ClearTabs report weighted sizes.

857

likely November
2026 voters
interviewed

 $\pm 3.3\%$

margin of error at
the 95%
confidence level

90%

say they will
definitely vote in
November

33 / 34 / 33

Democrats /
Republicans /
unaffiliated share of
the weighted
sample

4 days

in the field:
September 17–20,
2026

2 modes

live-operator calls
and text-to-web,
from the voter file

Regions used in this report

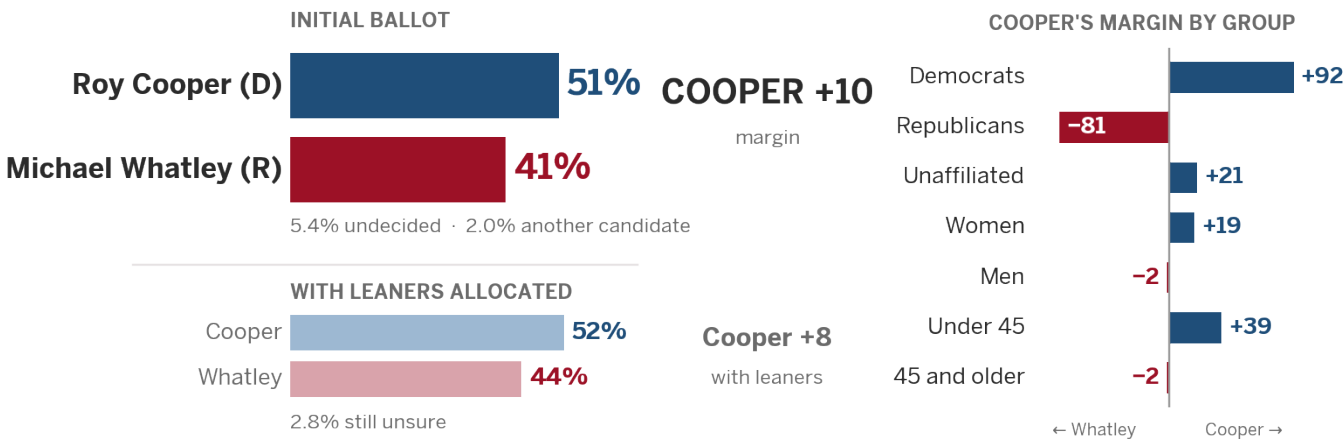
Groups of media markets, assigned from each respondent's ZIP code.

Western	Greenville-Spartanburg-Asheville, Chattanooga, and Atlanta
Charlotte	Charlotte
Greensboro	Greensboro-High Point-Winston-Salem
Raleigh	Raleigh-Durham-Fayetteville and Myrtle Beach-Florence
Eastern	Greenville-New Bern-Washington, Wilmington, and Norfolk

Cooper leads Whatley 51 to 41

Initial ballot. “If the 2026 general election for United States Senate were held today, would you vote for Roy Cooper, the Democratic nominee, or Michael Whatley, the Republican nominee?” Candidate order was rotated.

Lean follow-up, asked only of undecided respondents. “And if you had to choose a candidate today, would you say you lean closer to Roy Cooper, the Democrat, or Michael Whatley, the Republican? Or are you still unsure?”



Cooper leads by ten points, 51 to 41, with 5.4 percent undecided. Allocating the leaners closes the race to eight: undecided voters who expressed a preference broke to Whatley by roughly seven to one.

- **Partisans are locked in; unaffiliated voters decide the race.** Cooper takes 95 percent of Democrats and Whatley 88 percent of Republicans. Unaffiliated voters break to Cooper by 21 points (18 with leaners).
- **A wide gender gap.** Cooper leads among women by 19 points and trails among men by 2.
- **A sharp break at age 45.** Voters under 45 back Cooper by 39 points; voters 45 and older give Whatley a narrow edge of 2.
- **The leaners favor Whatley.** Among the 5.4 percent initially undecided, the follow-up moved 2.2 points to Whatley and 0.3 points to Cooper, leaving 2.8 percent with no preference. With those leaners allocated the race stands at Cooper 52, Whatley 44.

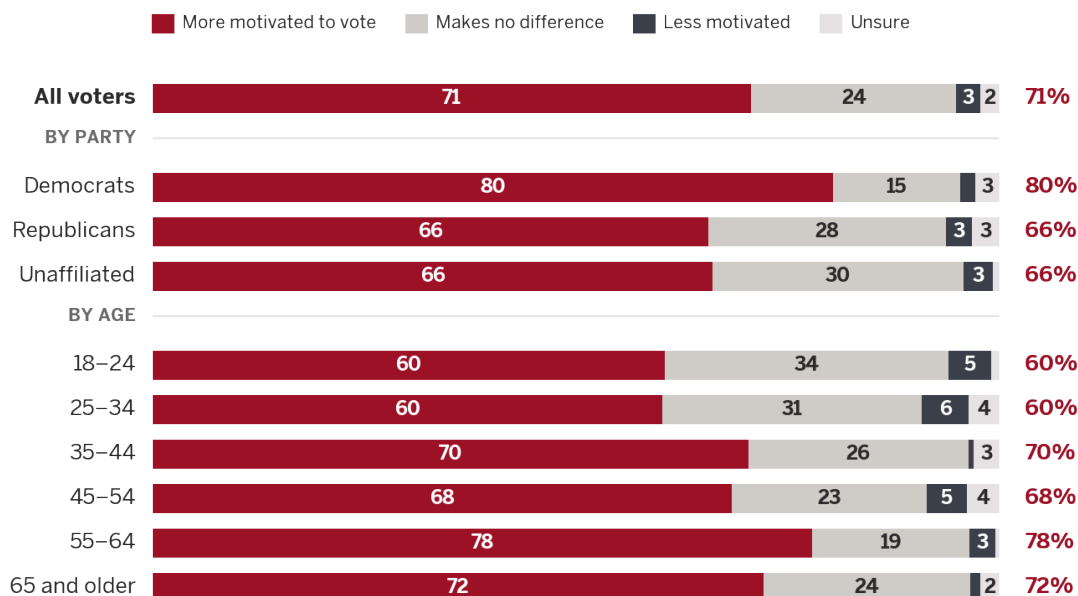
COOPER'S MARGIN UNDER ALTERNATIVE ELECTORATE MODELS

Weighted to	2018/2022 average (this report)	2024 electorate	2022	2020	2018
	+10	+11	+9	+11	+11

The results in this report are weighted to an electorate modeled on the average of the 2018 and 2022 general elections, the two most recent midterms. Weighting to any single recent electorate instead moves Cooper's margin by about a point either way.

Election news has made voters more motivated, not less

Motivation to vote. “Thinking about everything you have seen and heard about elections recently, are you more motivated to vote this fall, less motivated to vote, or does it make no difference in whether you plan to vote?”



The right-hand column repeats the share who say they are more motivated, for scanning. Age groups are shown on the same base as the rest of the report.

Recent election news has engaged far more voters than it has put off: 71 percent say it makes them more motivated to vote against 3 percent less motivated, and that holds in every party group and every age group.

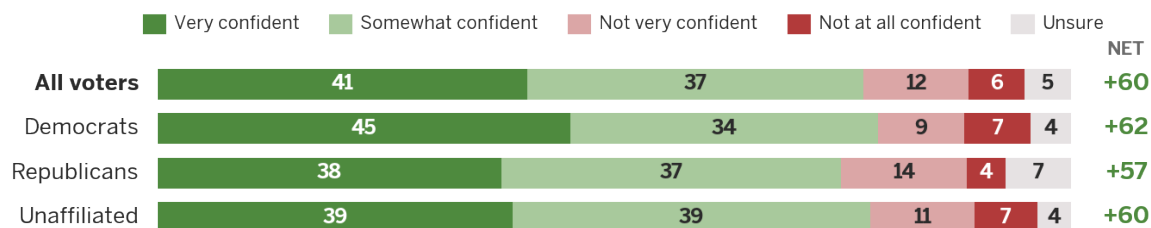
- **Motivation runs overwhelmingly one way.** 71 percent are more motivated, 3 percent less, and 24 percent say it makes no difference. For every voter the news has discouraged, roughly 25 say it has engaged them.
- **Democrats are the most engaged party group, and the other two are level.** 80 percent of Democrats say more motivated, against 66 percent of Republicans and 66 percent of unaffiliated voters — a 14-point gap between Democrats and each of the others.
- **The sharpest split is by age, and it cuts against the age pattern in the ballot.** Voters 55 to 64 are the most motivated at 78 percent; the two youngest bands are the least, both at 60 percent. Both are Cooper strongholds — he leads voters 25 to 34 by 50 and voters 18 to 24 by 30 — yet they report the least engagement, while the 55-to-64 group, which Whatley carries narrowly, reports the most.
- **Read this as engagement with the election, not as a turnout forecast.** The question asks what recent election news has done to voters' motivation. It is a measure of attention and interest in the subject, not a prediction of who will actually turn out in November.

CONFIDENCE IN THE COUNT

Voters are confident their votes will be counted

Confidence in the count. “How confident are you that your vote will be accurately counted in North Carolina’s elections?”

CONFIDENCE THAT YOUR VOTE WILL BE COUNTED ACCURATELY



Net = percent confident minus percent not confident.

77 percent of likely voters are confident their vote will be counted accurately, including 41 percent very confident — and the confidence holds across party lines.

- **Confidence is high in every party group.** Democrats are at 79 percent confident, unaffiliated voters 78, and Republicans 75 — a spread of 4 points.
- **Where doubt exists, it is not intense.** 41 percent are very confident, against 6 percent who are not at all confident.
- **Older voters are the most confident.** 83 percent of voters 65 and older are confident, the highest of any age group; voters 25 to 34, at 70 percent, are the lowest.
- **Every region is majority-confident.** Confidence runs from 68 percent in the west to 81 percent in the Raleigh market.

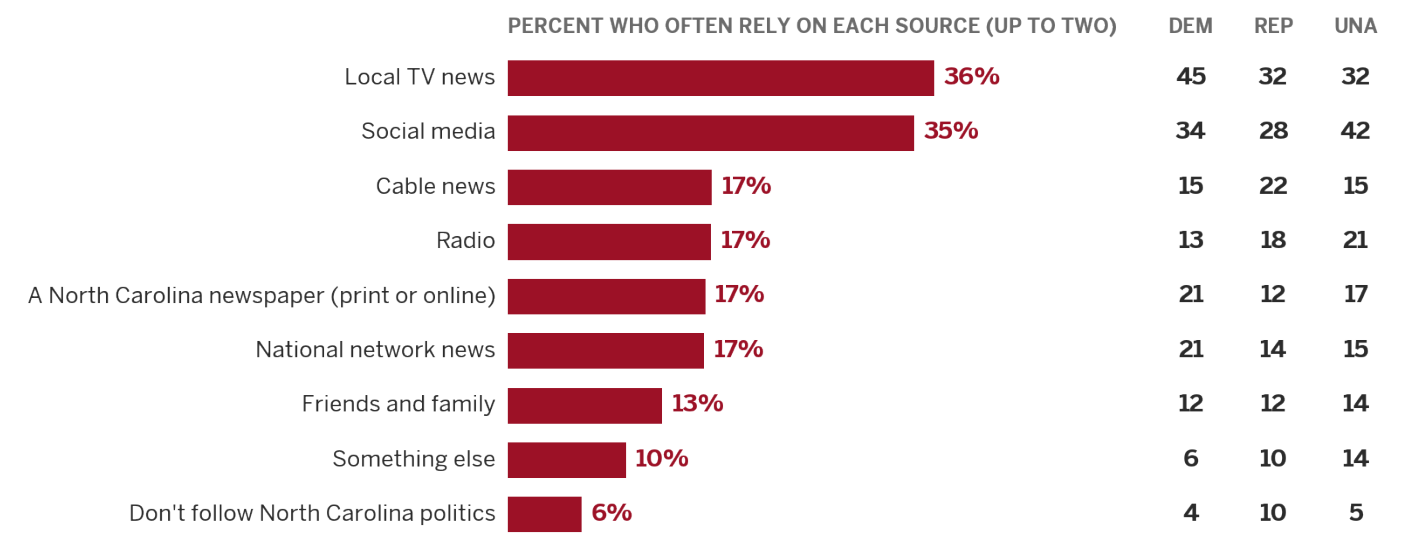
PERCENT CONFIDENT, BY GROUP

By party	Democrats 79%		Unaffiliated 78%		Republicans 75%	
By age	18–24 75%	25–34 70%	35–44 73%	45–54 76%	55–64 76%	65+ 83%
By region	Raleigh 81%	Greensboro 80%	Charlotte 77%	Eastern 73%	Western 68%	

Percent confident = very confident plus somewhat confident.

Local TV and social media, far ahead of everything else

News sources. “Which of the following sources do you often rely on for news and information about North Carolina politics and government? You may select up to two.” Because two answers were allowed, figures do not sum to 100 percent.



- **Local TV news and social media each reach about a third of voters;** no other source reaches more than 17 percent. Because voters could name up to two sources, the two audiences overlap — 8 percent name both — so together they reach 63 percent of voters, not the 71 percent their shares add to.
- **Democrats are more likely than Republicans to name a North Carolina newspaper,** 21 percent to 12 percent, with unaffiliated voters between them at 17. Democrats are also the heaviest local TV audience, at 45 percent, against 32 percent of Republicans and 32 percent of unaffiliated voters.
- **Unaffiliated voters are the heaviest users of social media for state political news,** at 42 percent, against 34 percent of Democrats and 28 percent of Republicans.
- **Cable news leans Republican; radio leans unaffiliated.** Cable news is named by 22 percent of Republicans against 15 percent of Democrats and 15 percent of unaffiliated voters. Radio runs the other way: 21 percent of unaffiliated voters name it, ahead of 18 percent of Republicans and 13 percent of Democrats. Republicans are the most likely to say they do not follow North Carolina politics at all, at 10 percent, against 5 percent of unaffiliated voters and 4 percent of Democrats.
- **The audiences differ sharply on the Senate race.** Newspaper readers back Cooper by 48 points and cable news viewers back Whatley by 9.

WHO RELIES ON EACH SOURCE, BY AGE

Social media	18–24 69%	25–34 55%	35–44 49%	45–54 39%	55–64 28%	65+ 15%
Local TV news	18–24 29%	25–34 34%	35–44 21%	45–54 28%	55–64 41%	65+ 48%
Cable news	18–24 5%	25–34 2%	35–44 13%	45–54 11%	55–64 23%	65+ 26%

Social media reaches 69 percent of voters 18 to 24 and 55 percent of those 25 to 34, against 15 percent of over-65s.

About Opinion Diagnostics

Opinion Diagnostics is a polling, market research, and consulting firm based in Massachusetts and North Carolina. Established in 2023, our team brings a combined thirty years of experience across polling, data analytics, and predictive modeling.

Our clients range from Fortune 500 corporations to nationally recognized non-profits and Congressional leadership.

Our publicly released research has been covered by more than 600 national and international media publications, including:

 THE WALL STREET JOURNAL The New York Times The Washington Post  USA TODAY Forbes POLITICO

 CBS NEWS  abc NEWS ESPN Sports Illustrated Daily  Mail The  INDEPENDENT

AXIOS THE HILL  USNews TORONTO STAR

 The News&Observer The Charlotte Observer SPECTRUM NEWS

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Subgroup differences are directional; smaller demographic cells carry wider margins of error than the full sample.