

Democracy North Carolina

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20 Tips for Navigating the 2016 Election

Opinion Column by Bob Hall, October 21, 2016 – Published in 15+ newspapers

Even before voting began this week, headlines warned about rigged elections and voter intimidation. It can feel overwhelming and may even discourage you from participating in this historic election.

Do not fear. At Democracy North Carolina, we believe solid information will help you overcome confusion, scary rhetoric and false rumors.

Here are 20 tips for a positive voting experience, as verified by the State Board of Elections:

1. You do not need to show an ID to vote – except in the two cases described in #6.
2. Ballots cast through the mail or during the early voting period (Oct. 20 to Nov. 5) will count just like those cast on Election Day.
3. You can use any early voting location in your county to vote, not just the one nearest your precinct.
4. If you missed the October 14 regular voter registration deadline, you can register at an early voting location in your county (visit ncvoter.org for details). You may not use “same-day registration” on Election Day.
5. It’s smart to use early voting because you can resolve any registration issue and avoid the chance of bad weather on Election Day.
6. The easiest time to vote, when lines are generally shortest, is in the mid-morning or early afternoon.
7. If you use same-day registration or if your registration was not fully verified, you will be asked to show an identifying document, such as a utility bill, government document with your name and address, or a student ID with a school document showing your address. It’s always good to carry an ID with you.
8. Because of the many state and local races, it’s a good idea to preview your ballot before voting. To view your sample ballot, visit ncvoter.org.
9. North Carolina no longer has “straight-party” or “straight-ticket” voting. Voters must mark their choice in each race. Vote the whole ballot; flip it over, check out the back.

10. You may vote for any candidate of your choice, regardless of your political party affiliation.
11. You can take a paper list or a list on your cell phone into the polls to help remember your choices. But don't talk on your cell phone, and no selfies! Photos are not allowed inside the polls.
12. You may wear a button, hat, or shirt with a candidate's name as you quietly vote, but you may not actively draw attention to your choices.
13. You don't need an excuse to vote by mail (absentee voting). You or your parent or near relative must use an official application to request an absentee ballot (see demnc.co/mail). The county board of elections must receive the application by 5 pm, November 1.
14. A citizen convicted of a felony in any state may register and vote in North Carolina after serving his or her sentence, including probation or parole. No special document is needed.
15. If you have an outstanding warrant, bankruptcy, traffic ticket, civil fine, or misdemeanor conviction, you may still vote.
16. If your name doesn't appear on the registration rolls or you have any problem when you vote, you should be offered a provisional ballot – and a toll-free number to learn if the ballot was counted or, if not, the reason why.
17. On Election Day, vote at your precinct's poll. If necessary, you may vote with a provisional ballot at any polling place in your county on Election Day, but your choices will only count for the items that also appear on your home precinct's ballot.
18. A near family member may help you vote. Voters with a disability or reading hardship may get help from anyone except their employer or union agent.
19. It's against the law to intimidate voters or intentionally distribute false information about the voting process.
20. If you have questions about voting, have problems at the polls, or see suspicious activity, call the nonpartisan voter hotline at 888-OUR-VOTE.

Bob Hall is director of the Democracy North Carolina, a nonpartisan center that promotes voter participation and fair elections.