



NORTH CAROLINA

STATE BOARD OF ELECTIONS

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Post-Election Audit Report for the March 3, 2026 Primary Election

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Overview

The North Carolina State Board of Elections (State Board) is the state agency that oversees all primary and general elections in North Carolina. The State Board works closely with the 100 county boards of elections to ensure accessible, safe, secure, and accurate elections for more than 7.7 million registered voters.

To help meet these objectives, after every election, the county boards of elections and the State Board conduct audits designed to ensure vote counts are accurate and that voters can be confident in the results.

The statewide 2026 primary election was held on March 3, 2026, across all 100 counties in North Carolina. More than 1.5 million voters cast ballots, or a turnout of about 19.7% of the more than 7.6 million voters eligible to vote in these contests.

With post-election audits now complete, State Board staff presents the information below to the State Board members, who will vote on whether to certify the 2026 primary results at a meeting on March 25, 2026.

Each section below includes a description of the audit and a summary of the audit's findings.

Voter History Audit

Audit Description: When voters check in at polling places, they fill out authorization to vote (ATV) forms on Election Day or early voting applications during early voting, which are treated the same as an ATV. Voters who cast absentee ballots complete an application as part of the ballot return envelope. These documents are used to assign voter history for each voter (i.e., a record that a voter participated in an election). When ballots are run through tabulators, tabulation software provides election return data that identifies the number of ballots cast.

The Voter History Audit compares the number of ATV forms, early voting applications, and absentee applications with the number of physical ballots cast. These two numbers should match. However, they can be slightly off for various reasons. For example, small voter history discrepancies may result from election worker error in assigning voter history to a voter, or from a voter checking in, then deciding not to vote.

This audit is designed to identify significant discrepancies, which could be a sign of election fraud, such as ballot stuffing, fraudulent manual entries, or tampering with media cards. It can also identify certain ballot coding errors. Although not required by law, this audit is conducted as a best practice in election administration and to give voters confidence in election results.

Findings: All but one county has completed the voter history process for the March 2026 primary election. This process involves assigning voter history to voters who cast ballots and reconciling that number with physical ballots cast. Of the 99 counties, 44 counties' voter histories and ballots cast matched exactly, while 48 counties had minor differences of three (3) ballots or fewer. No county had a difference of more than 10 ballots. The absolute combined value of all variances for these 99 counties is 100 ballots or, on average, about one (1) ballot per county.

This audit identified no evidence that vote totals or ballots cast were manipulated. Except for the small, explainable differences noted above, the physical ballots cast matched the number of voters who checked in at Election Day polling places or early voting sites or returned an absentee ballot.

Sample Audit

Audit Description: A post-election sample audit that checks the accuracy of the voting equipment across the state is required by statute. [N.C.G.S. § 163-182.1\(b\)\(1\)](#). On the day following each election, state elections officials randomly select a statistically significant number of precincts or absentee/early voting groupings, typically two, for each county board of elections. Bipartisan teams at each county board of elections – in open, public meetings – conduct hand-eye counts of one contest on all ballots in those precincts or groupings. In presidential election

years, this is always the presidential contest in the primary and general election. In other primaries and elections, these contests are often the top contest on the ballot. In the 2026 primary, the county boards counted the U.S. Senate primary contests for the Democratic and Republican parties.

These hand-count results are compared to the machine counts, and any variances are noted. The county boards of elections send the machine counts and hand counts to the state, along with explanations for any discrepancies.

Minor variances most often result from the following situations: (1) human error in the hand-eye audit count itself; (2) the voter did not fill in the write-in oval or square, but wrote a name in the write-in line; or (3) the machine did not count a choice that the voter made by a checkmark or “x,” or a choice that was circled or poorly shaded on the ballot.

Findings: A total of 200 ballot groupings were chosen randomly statewide. Of the 200 samples, 165 were Election Day precincts, 26 were early voting sites, and 9 counties conducted a hand-eye audit of all absentee ballots.

Of the 200 samples audited, five (5) had differences between machine counts and human hand-eye counts of one(1) or two (2) votes. Most differences were attributed to human error in marking ballots, such as using check marks instead of filling in the bubble, or human error when conducting the sample audit. Aside from the differences noted above, in all other counties, the machine count and hand-eye count matched exactly in the sampled precincts. In other words, in 195 of 200 samples, the hand and machine counts were the same.

The results of this sample audit show once again that the certified and tested machines used to count ballots do so with great accuracy.

Please see the table at the end of the report showing the differences along with an explanation.

Voter Eligibility Audit

Audit Description: Starting with the November 2024 general election, the State Board began conducting a voter eligibility audit during the canvass period following each election. Although not required by law, this audit provides data on potentially ineligible early and absentee voters to the county boards of elections. This data identifies ballots that were potentially ineligible because the voter died, was serving a felony sentence, voted more than once, or had their registration removed or denied. The county boards then challenge those ballots that they determined were ineligible, pursuant to [Numbered Memo 2022-05](#). The county boards carefully review their records to ensure they challenge only those ballots that were provably ineligible. This audit also included similar data regarding voters who cast a provisional ballot, to assist the county boards of elections in their provisional research during the canvass period.

Findings: As a result of the voter eligibility audit after the March elections, the county boards were informed of a possible 80 ineligible early voting or absentee ballots cast because the voters may have cast their ballot and then died before Election Day, may have been serving a felony sentence as of Election Day, or were in a removed or denied registration status. The county boards reviewed their records and determined that certain voters should be challenged and that their ballots should be removed from the count, if that challenge was successful. The county boards also identified certain voters in the audit who were eligible after all, such that their ballots should not be challenged or, after challenging the voter, determined their ballot should not be removed from the count because the county board was able to confirm the voter's eligibility at a hearing on the challenge.

Sample Audit Differences

March 3, 2026 Primary Election

County	Type	Sample Name	Contest	Candidate	Machine Count	Hand to Eye Count	Count Difference	Difference Explanation
BEAUFORT	EARLY VOTING	BEAUFORT COUNTY BOARD OF ELECTIONS OFFICE	US SENATE - DEM	Justin E. Dues	7	8	1	Likely human error during hand-to-eye count of 4,453 ballots
BEAUFORT	EARLY VOTING	BEAUFORT COUNTY BOARD OF ELECTIONS OFFICE	US SENATE - DEM	Orrick Quick	10	11	1	1 undervote was counted for Quick
BEAUFORT	EARLY VOTING	BEAUFORT COUNTY BOARD OF ELECTIONS OFFICE	US SENATE - DEM	Robert Colon	7	5	2	Likely human error during hand-to-eye count of 4,453 ballots
BEAUFORT	EARLY VOTING	BEAUFORT COUNTY BOARD OF ELECTIONS OFFICE	US SENATE - REP	Elizabeth A. Temple	147	148	1	1 undervote was counted for Temple.
BEAUFORT	EARLY VOTING	BEAUFORT COUNTY BOARD OF ELECTIONS OFFICE	US SENATE - REP	Michele Morrow	199	198	1	Likely human error during hand-to-eye count of 4,453 ballots
BEAUFORT	EARLY VOTING	BEAUFORT COUNTY BOARD OF ELECTIONS OFFICE	US SENATE - REP	Thomas Johnson	223	222	1	Likely human error during hand-to-eye count of 4,453 ballots
MITCHELL	EARLY VOTING	SPRUCE PINE FIRE DEPARTMENT	US SENATE - REP	Michael Whatley	591	592	1	Voter marked ballot with a checkmark instead of filling in the bubble. Vote counted for Whatley.
MOORE	PRECINCT	PHB2_PINEHURST B2	US SENATE - REP	Michael Whatley	189	190	1	Voter marked ballot with X instead of filling in the bubble. Vote counted for Whatley.

PAMLICO	EARLY VOTING	PAMLICO COUNTY BOARD OF ELECTIONS OFFICE	US SENATE - REP	Donald M. (Don) Brown	75	74	1	Audit workers marked one extra tally on tally sheets.
PAMLICO	EARLY VOTING	PAMLICO COUNTY BOARD OF ELECTIONS OFFICE	US SENATE - REP	Michael Whatley	396	397	1	Voter marked ballot lightly. Vote counted for Whatley
TRANSYLVANIA	PRECINCT	CM_CEDAR MOUNTAIN	US SENATE - REP	Donald M. (Don) Brown	15	16	1	Machine correctly tabulated the vote as an undervote, because the voter marked outside of the oval. Bi-partisan team determined the voter's intent was to vote for Brown.