2020 NC ELECTION UPDATE
November 4, 2020

After what feels like years of campaign commercials, mailboxes full of flyers and politically charged social media posts, election day finally arrived in North Carolina. By all accounts, it was as tumultuous an election season as the state has ever seen with the political division at the national level permeating debates and campaigns here in the Old North State.

In addition to the divisive nature of politics this year, the coronavirus pandemic added an unprecedented dynamic to the 2020 election season. Campaign events were either canceled or took on a different look and feel as candidates held smaller events and implemented social distancing. State and local elections officials scrambled to implement measures to protect public health while ensuring access to ballots.

North Carolina continues to be an important battleground state in the race for President, and both President Trump and former Vice President Biden visited the state often. As a result of the competitive race for the U.S. Senate seat, the state was also pivotal in the fight for control of that body.

Another factor in this year's election was the influence of judicially mandated redistricting. Judicial panels required new maps for the U.S. House districts and also ordered that House districts in 28 counties and Senate districts in 21 counties be redrawn for the 2020 elections. Changes made to North Carolina's congressional districts and state Senate districts effectively converted two districts from Republican to Democrat in each of those bodies. And the alterations to a handful of state senate and house districts in some cases produced more competitive races.

We also saw the continuation of the trend of North Carolinians choosing to cast their ballots prior to election day via in-person early voting or absentee ballots. The increase in the number of voters avoiding the polls on election day is attributable to a number of factors, including ease, voter enthusiasm, health concerns related to the coronavirus, and additional hours for early voting. More than 4.5 million North Carolinians cast their ballots prior to election day. Over 3.6 million people voted via in-person early voting and an additional 929,000 voted absentee. Combined, that's nearly 62% of the state's 7.3 million registered voters.

However, the absentee voting process wasn't without drama. Roughly 10,000 voters returned mail-in ballots with some imperfection (e.g., a missing signature or address). Local boards of elections contacted these voters and sent new ballots to voters whose previous ballot did not include a witness signature. For other problems, such as a missing address for the witness or a signature in the wrong place, the voter was sent an affidavit to sign and return attesting that the ballot was valid.

There was also a legal battle over the deadline for accepting mail-in ballots. House Speaker Tim Moore (R) and Senate leader Phil Berger (R) challenged the authority of the Democrat-controlled State Board of Elections to extend the deadline without action from the legislature. State law establishes a deadline of 5 p.m. on Nov. 6th, but the state board pushed the deadline to 5 p.m. on Nov. 12th in response to concerns regarding postal service delays. Ultimately, state and federal courts, including the U.S. Supreme Court, declined to block the extension. Ballots must still be postmarked on or before Nov. 3rd

and problems with ballots received after the 3rd can be fixed as late as the ballot receipt deadline of the 12th.

Because absentee ballots that are postmarked no later than election day and received by the deadline of Nov. 12th will be accepted, the results announced last evening are technically unofficial. The State Board of Elections previously announced that it anticipated that the results reported by the end of election night would include 97 percent or more of all ballots cast. In other words, absentee ballots received on election day through Nov. 12th, along with provisional ballots, could account for as much as three percent of all ballots that are ultimately counted. These ballots will be added to the totals from last evening. Thus, the outcome of races where one candidate leads by an extremely narrow margin will remain unofficial until Nov. 13th.

In addition to the Presidential race and U.S. Senate election, North Carolina's 13 U.S. House seats, all 170 members of the State Legislature, the ten members of the Council of State, including the Governor, and eight statewide judicial seats, including the Chief Justice of the NC Supreme Court, were also on the ballot.

Republican incumbent Thom Tillis defeated Democrat challenger Cal Cunningham in an intense and competitive race. In North Carolina's U.S. House races, Democrats won former Republican-held seats in North Carolina's 2nd and 6th Congressional Districts.

At the state level, Governor Roy Cooper won re-election by besting Republican Lt. Governor Dan Forest. Newcomer Mark Robinson defeated former Democrat State Representative Yvonne Holley Lewis, becoming the first African American to hold that seat in North Carolina.

In the General Assembly, assuming that last night's unofficial results don't change, Democrats have a net pickup of one seat in the Senate and Republicans and four seats in the House. Republicans will retain their majority in the Senate (28-22) and the House (69-51).

Below is an overview of the unofficial results. Again, these numbers do not include pending provisional and absentee ballots that will be counted on November 13th. We have identified the races where the possibility exists that these pending ballots could have an impact on the outcome, and where the margin entitles the losing candidate to a recount. Those races are denoted with "pending" as they are awaiting the counting of additional ballots and/or a possible recount.

Presidential
This year's Presidential race was a spirited affair which kept voters across America on their toes. The run-up to the election included a feisty Presidential debate, President Trump testing positive for COVID-19, and the untimely death of beloved Supreme Court Justice Ruth Bader Ginsberg and ensuing appointment of a new Supreme Court Justice.

President Trump narrowly carried North Carolina by just under 1.5% and obtained the state's 15 electoral votes.

U.S. Senate
Republican incumbent Thom Tillis outlasted former state Senator Cal Cunningham 48.7% to 47% in a competitive and costly U.S. Senate race. When aggregating the spending of the candidates and national and third-party groups, this was the most expensive Senate race ever with more than $242 million spent on ads. Outside spending was significant in part because this contest was one of a few whose outcome ultimately decided which party will control the Senate.

Cunningham's campaign was strong in the summer and early fall and polls showed him with a comfortable lead. However, he was forced to admit to an inappropriate relationship with a woman who is not his wife after intimate texts between the two were made public. She also told the press that their relationship went beyond texting, and the Army Reserve opened an investigation of Cunningham, who is a lieutenant colonel.

U.S. House
In 2019, a three-judge panel ruled that North Carolina's 13 Congressional Districts could not be used for the 2020 elections due to partisan gerrymandering. In response, the General Assembly redrew the maps resulting in two of the districts, District 2 and District 6, switching from strong Republican districts to strong Democrat districts. The incumbent Republicans in these districts, Congressman George Holding (District 2) and Congressman Mark Walker (District 6), decided not to run for re-election.

Ultimately, Democrat Deborah Ross defeated Republican Alain Swain for NC's 2nd Congressional District seat and Democrat Kathy Manning defeated Republican candidate Joseph Lee Haywood for NC's 6th Congressional District seat. Ross is a lawyer and former state legislator, and Manning is an attorney and community volunteer.

The most competitive U.S. House race was in the western part of the state, as Republican Madison Cawthorn, an owner of a real estate investment firm, was elected to represent the 11th district defeating Democrat Moe Davis. Cawthorn will become the youngest member of the U.S. House of Representatives when he is sworn in in January. The seat is vacant after former Congressman Mark Meadows was appointed to be White House Chief of Staff. Cawthorn first made news when he won a close Republican Primary election defeating President Trump's endorsed candidate, Lynda Bennett, in a run-off election in June.

Republicans control eight of NC's Congressional Districts, and Democrats now represent the remaining five seats.

Election results for North Carolina's U.S. House races are below, with winners in the column on the left.

NC-1	**G.K. Butterfield (D)***	Sandy Smith (R)
NC-2	**Deborah Ross (D)**	Alan Swain (R)
NC-3	**Greg Murphy (R)***	Daryl Farrow (D)
NC-4	**David Price (D)***	Robert Thomas (R)
NC-5	**Virginia Foxx (R)***	David Wilson Brown (D)
NC-6	**Kathy Manning (D)**	Joseph Lee Haywood (R)
NC-7	**David Rouzer (R)***	Christopher Ward (D)
NC-8	**Richard Hudson (R)***	Patricia Timmons-Goodson (D)
NC-9	**Dan Bishop (R)***	Cynthia Wallace (D)
NC-10	**Patrick McHenry (R)***	David Parker (D)
NC-11	**Madison Cawthorn (R)**	Moe Davis (D)
NC-12	**Alma Adams (D)***	N/A
NC-13	**Ted Budd (R)***	Scott Huffman (D)

*Incumbent

Gubernatorial
Incumbent Democrat Governor Roy Cooper won re-election, defeating Republican Lt. Governor Dan Forest 51.5 percent to 47 percent. Governor Cooper's campaign focused on his leadership during the pandemic and his effort to have North Carolina expand Medicaid. Forest countered by promising to remove the COVID-19 limitations on businesses and schools and to repeal Governor Cooper's statewide facemask mandate.

State Senate
As discussed above, judicially mandated changes to North Carolina's state Senate districts effectively converted two districts from Republican to Democrat. Democrats Sarah Crawford (Wake) and DeAndrea Salvador (Mecklenburg) won those seats.

Elsewhere, however, it was a strong evening for the Republicans. Michael Lee won his rematch with incumbent Democrat Harper Peterson in New Hanover County, and in Alamance County Amy Galey defeated Democrat JD Wooten in an open seat race that was hotly contested. Incumbents Joyce Krawiec (Forsyth) and Bob Steinberg (Chowan) retained their seats in multi-million-dollar races with control of the chamber at stake.

At the end of the evening, Democrats netted one seat in the state Senate. Republicans still hold the majority, 28-22.

Here is an overview of the most significant races:

Competitive Seats:
Joyce Krawiec (R)*- 53.13%
Terri LeGrand (D)- 46.87%

Open Seats:
Senate District 11
Lisa Stones Barnes (R)- 55.05%
Allen Wellons (D)- 44.95%

Senate District 18
Larry Norman (R)- 44.46%
Sarah Crawford (D)- 52.06%

Senate District 24
Amy Galey (R)- 52.53%
JD Wooten (D)- 47.47%

Senate District 39
DeAndrea Salvador (D)- 62.16%
Joshua Niday (R)- 37.84%

Rematch:
Senate District 9
Harper Peterson (D)*- 49.4%
Mike Lee (R)- 50.6%

Senate District 19
Kirk deViere (D)*- 51.47%
Wesley Meredith (R)- 48.53%

*Incumbent

State House
Democrats needed a net gain of at least six seats in the House of Representatives in order to take control of the chamber. Republicans picked up six seats, while Democrats only picked up two seats, resulting in a net gain of four seats for the Republicans, guaranteeing their hold on the majority. When the House convenes the long session in January, there will be 69 Republicans and 51 Democrats serving in the body.

There were a number of notable incumbents who were defeated. Four term member Steve Ross (R-Alamance) was a victim of judicially mandated redistricting, as he lost 54%-46% to Democrat Ricky Hurtado, a professor at UNC - Chapel Hill. In addition, several first-term House members lost tough re-election races as well. Rep. Perrin Jones (R-Pitt) was beaten 48.9% to 51.1% by Democrat Brian Farkas, a Pitt County native who works for his family's architecture firm. Rep. Scott Brewer (D-Richmond) lost 40.07% to 59.93% to Republican Ben Moss, a railroad engineer. Rep. Ray Russell (D-Watauga) was bested 53.07% to 46.93% by Republican Ray Pickett, a Watauga County businessman. Rep. Sydney Batch (D-Wake) lost 46.83% to 50.07% to Republican Erin Pare, a small business owner. Rep. Joe Sam Queen (D-Haywood) lost 45.9% to 54.10% in a rematch against Republican Mike Clampitt. In another rematch, Rep. Christy Clark (D-Mecklenburg) lost 48.34% to 51.66% to former Representative John Bradford.

Here is an overview of the most significant races:

Competitive Seats:
House District 21
Raymond Smith (D)*- 52.93%
Brent Heath (R)- 47.07%

House District 45
John Szoka (R)*- 50.97%
Frances Jackson (D)- 49.03%

House District 47
Charles Graham (D)*- 52.27%
Olivia Oxendine (R)- 47.74%

House District 59
Jon Hardister (R)*- 52.31%
Nicole Quick (D)- 47.69%

House District 82
Kristin Baker (R)*- 53.03%
Aimy Steele (D)- 46.97%

House District 83
Larry Pittman (R)*- 51.33%
Gail Young (D)- 48.67%

Open Seats:
House District 74
Jeff Zenger (R)- 51.16%
Dan Besse (D)- 48.84%

House District 43
Dr. Kimberly Hardy (D)- 48.15%
Diane Wheatley (R)- 51.85%

*Incumbent

Council of State
The Council of State is comprised of the ten statewide elected officials and includes the Governor, Lieutenant Governor, Secretary of State, Auditor, Treasurer, Superintendent of Public Instruction, Attorney General, Commissioner of Agriculture, Commissioner of Labor and Commissioner of Insurance. All ten were on the ballot.

There were three open seats on the Council in yesterday's election - Lieutenant Governor, Commissioner of Labor, and Superintendent of Public Instruction.

Election results for North Carolina's Council of State races are below with winners in the column on the left.

Governor	Roy Cooper (D)*	Dan Forest (R)
Lieutenant Governor	Mark Robinson (R)	Yvonne Lewis Holley (D)
Secretary of State	Elaine Marshall (D)*	E.C. Sykes
State Auditor	Beth Wood (D)*	Anthony Wayne Street (R)
State Treasurer	Dale Folwell (R)*	Ronnie Chatterji (D)
Superintendent of Public Instruction	Catherine Truitt (R)	Jen Mangrum (D)
Attorney General (pending)	Josh Stein (D)* (pending)	Jim O'Neill (R)
Commissioner of Agriculture	Steve Troxler (R)*	Jenna Wadsworth (D)
Commissioner of Labor	Josh Dobson (R)	Jessica Holmes (D)
Commissioner of Insurance	Mike Causey (R)*	Wayne Goodwin (D)

*Incumbent

Judicial Races
Three seats on the North Carolina Supreme Court and five seats on the North Carolina Court of Appeals were on the ballot yesterday. Republicans swept all eight races.

Senior Associate Justice Paul Newby will be the head of North Carolina's highest court after defeating Chief Justice Cheri Beasley in the race for NC Supreme Court Chief Justice by roughly .06 percentage points. As stated above, this result is unofficial and is pending the counting of absentee and provisional ballots.

As for the rest of the court, Court of Appeals Judge Phil Berger Jr. (R) defeated Democrat Lucy Inman (D) for NC Supreme Court Associate Justice Seat 2. Justice Mark Davis was unseated by former state Senator Tamara Barringer for NC Supreme Court Associate Justice Seat 4. After yesterday's election results, the NC Supreme Court now has a 4-3 Democratic majority.

Election Results for all of North Carolina's Judicial races are below with the winners in the column on the left.

NC Supreme Court Chief Justice	Judge Paul Newby (R)	Judge Cheri Beasley (D)*
NC Supreme Court Associate Justice Seat 2	Phil Berger Jr. (R)	Lucy N. Inman (D)
NC Supreme Court Associate Justice Seat 4	Tamara Barringer (R)	Mark Davis (D)*
NC Court of Appeals Judge Seat 4	April C. Wood (R)	Tricia Shields (D)
NC Court of Appeals Judge Seat 5	Fred Gore (R)	Lora Christine Cubbage (D)
NC Court of Appeals Judge Seat 6	Chris Dillon (R)*	Gray Styers (D)
NC Court of Appeals Judge Seat 7	Jeff Carpenter (R)	Reuben Young (D)*
NC Court of Appeals Judge Seat 13	Jefferson Griffin (R)	Chris Brook (D)*

*Incumbent