

QUESTIONS YOU MAY BE ASKED

In the months leading up to elections, questions arise on all sides. The closer the election appears, the more important the offices at stake, the more questions, and the more heated their discussion. The 2020 election season promises to be very heated, and people may be reluctant to raise issues that concern them, even very important issues, because they want to avoid fights with people who are, or turn out to be, partisan.

Because You Can Vote is strictly non-partisan, people know they can count on our staff and volunteers to help them with questions, even touchy and sensitive questions, that they would not ask people who might be partisan. Here are some questions you may be asked and some suggested responses:

1. Is voter fraud common? Are there lots of people who are ineligible to vote who somehow manage to vote anyway?

No. Careful study has proved conclusively that voter fraud is extraordinarily rare. A University of Chicago study of more than 1 billion votes cast nationwide between 2000 and 2014 found only 31 that appear to have been cast by people not eligible to vote. Voter fraud can entail several interpretations, and most commonly people mean that someone votes in person using another person's name.

2. Are noncitizens finding ways to vote?

No. Voting by noncitizens in US elections is also very rare, not least because possible penalties are very severe: imprisonment, fines of as much as \$10,000, and deportation. A survey of 2016 elections in 42 jurisdictions where more than 23 million votes were cast found only 30 votes that appear to have been cast by noncitizens across the US. Eligibility for voting is outlined in the voter registration application, as well as the affirmation that each voter signs before voting their ballot. Absentee ballots and in-person ballots have strict requirements to affirm under penalty that the voter is eligible and registered correctly.

3. What causes voting machines to malfunction? Is it the work of hackers?

Maybe. But the aging of voting machines is also a cause of machine failure. NC has 3 types of voting machines used in our counties and each undergoes testing before every election. Your county BOE can answer specific questions about what machines they use and how recently they were purchased.

More Info: <https://www.ncsbe.gov/Voting-Options/Elections-Voting-Systems>

4. If the counting and reporting of votes takes longer than expected and reaches into the next day, is mischief the likely cause?

No. A more likely cause is a close election. The count takes longer with a huge influx of absentee and provisional ballots expected, and in those instances it is especially important to get the count right the first time. With local and county races often decided by a handful of votes, it can be difficult to report results immediately.



5. If the election result is not the one the media predicted, should I be suspicious?

Not without good reason. The margin in a close, hard fought election may be won by only a few votes, which makes suspicion more likely but not more justified. Absentee ballots also take more time to process and count, and results from absentee and provisionals are not available immediately on Election Night (day of canvass). Often election results are predictions based on exit surveys, not on the actual ballot count.

6. Is it legal and appropriate to help people request absentee ballots?

Most states allow specified individuals - e.g., family members, health care providers, legal guardians - to assist voters to prepare and submit requests for absentee ballots. On the other hand, no state allows tampering with the ballot request or the ballot ready for submission. NC voters must list the assistants name on the request form. Organizations and people (other than near relatives) cannot return the request form on behalf of a voter.

More Info: youcanvote.org/mail

7. Can I request an absentee ballot and then decide to go in person to vote?

Yes. Voters who choose to request an absentee ballot can complete it fully and mail it back, or complete it fully and return it in person to an Early Voting site during the 17-day Early Voting period. If you request a ballot but then want to vote in person, you can disregard the absentee ballot. It is illegal to vote using both methods in the same election, so make sure to only cast one ballot per election.

More Info: youcanvote.org/mail

8. Is it possible for everyone in NC to vote by mail this year?

No. States who have switched to mail-only voting advise other states to increase vote-by-mail slowly over time to avoid overwhelming Boards of Elections capacity and to prepare voters to accurately understand the process. In past NC elections, only 4% of voters typically vote by mail. Up to 20% of these ballots are rejected due to mistakes by the voter. Rejected ballots disproportionately impact voters of color.

More Info: youcanvote.org/mail

9. Do provisional ballots count?

Yes. Provisional ballots are counted and official election results are not final until every provisional ballot is reviewed. Each county Board of Elections conducts a Day of Canvass after each election to certify the election, which includes review of every type of ballot. In 2016, just under half of all provisional ballots counted entirely or partially (44%). But for voters who cast provisional ballots because they were at the wrong precinct (called “out of precinct” voting), or because they moved within the county and did not update their registration, more than 90% of ballots counted in whole or in part. The most common way someone ends up voting a provisional ballot is if a poll worker cannot find a voter’s registration record at the time of check in at the polling place. You can find the status of your provisional ballot through the State Board website or by calling the 800 number on your receipt. Each voter who votes provisionally is given a personal pin to help track their ballot.