



ROY COOPER HOLDS NARROW LEAD OVER MICHAEL WHATLEY IN FIRST POLL OF 2026 US SENATE RACE IN NORTH CAROLINA

With more than a year until the 2026 general election, both sides of the race for US Senate in North Carolina have all but picked their candidate. Democrats have consolidated their support behind former Governor Roy Cooper, while Republicans (led by President Trump himself) are rallying behind RNC Chair Michael Whatley. Today, our poll provides the very first insight into what this heavyweight matchup will look like. Let's dive in.

As the race currently stands, Cooper leads Whatley by approximately 3% (*Figure 1*). But before Democrats get too excited, that's the best news they'll get in this poll. When undecided voters are asked which candidate they're leaning towards, Cooper's lead falls to less than 1% (*Figure 2*). Furthermore, the remaining 12% of voters who aren't leaning towards either candidate yet tilt heavily in Republicans' favor (*Figure 3*). 18% of them are Republicans (only 11% are Democrats), and another 40% are independents who said that they voted for more Republicans than Democrats the last time they voted (only 5% the other way around). If Republican and Republican-leaning undecideds all vote for Whatley, and Democratic and Democratic-leaning undecideds all vote for Cooper, the advantage shifts to Whatley, who would then be favored by 4.2 points.

Figure 1: General Election Ballot

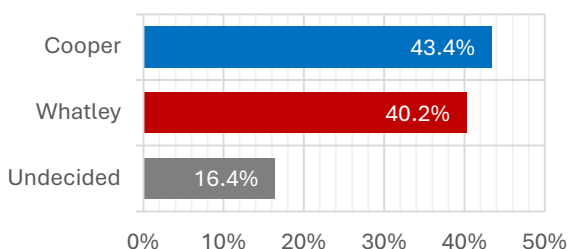


Figure 2: Ballot with Leanners

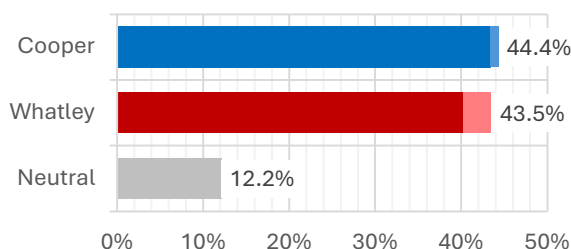
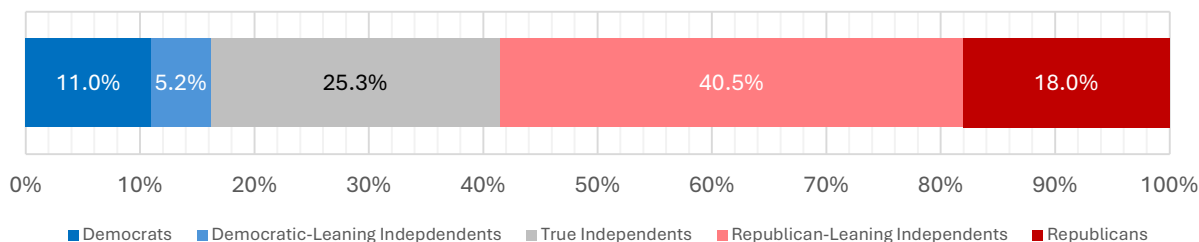


Figure 3: Partisan Breakdown of Neutral Undecided Voters



And we haven't even discussed Name ID yet. Far fewer voters know of Whatley (59%) than of Cooper (92%) (*Figure 4*). It's reasonable to presume that Whatley's share of the vote, particularly among Republicans and Republican-leaning independents, will increase as his Name ID catches up to Cooper's, *ceteris paribus*.

Finally, we must consider the overall makeup of the electorate, which is yet another tailwind for Whatley. 51.7% of the electorate leans to the right, compared to only 42.9% who lean to the left (*Figure 5*). This translates to an R+8.8% advantage, far outpacing the meager R+1.5% registration advantage in the poll's sample.

Figure 4: Name ID & Favorability Metrics

Ratings	Trump	Cooper	Whatley	Stein	Robinson
1	41.5%	27.1%	16.0%	18.4%	40.5%
2	6.9%	16.3%	7.5%	9.1%	12.0%
3	6.2%	10.8%	14.8%	18.8%	16.7%
4	13.9%	11.5%	11.4%	9.7%	7.8%
5	28.2%	26.8%	9.0%	22.4%	8.3%
No Opinion	3.4%	7.5%	41.4%	21.7%	14.7%
Positive Name ID	42.0%	38.2%	20.4%	32.1%	16.1%
Negative Name ID	48.4%	43.4%	23.5%	27.4%	52.5%
Total Name ID	96.6%	92.5%	58.6%	78.3%	85.3%
Avg. Opinionated Rating (AOR)	2.80	2.94	2.83	3.11	2.20
AOR Among Republicans	4.27	1.83	3.90	2.17	2.98
AOR Among Democrats	1.28	4.42	1.66	4.33	1.39
AOR Among NPAs/Others	2.70	2.67	2.59	2.85	2.19

In summary, despite a generally favorable electorate for Republicans, Cooper is starting out with a lead, which corroborates the conventional wisdom that Cooper was a strong choice for the Democratic nomination. However, Whatley has plenty of room to grow, and all signs indicate he'll have the funding and campaign infrastructure to do so.

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This poll was not commissioned by any candidate or political committee. It was conducted July 28-30, 2025, among 600 likely voters throughout North Carolina, via Text-To-Web, Interactive Voice Response, and AI Agent-Conducted Live Calls. For media inquiries and interview requests, please contact Victory Insights at info@victory-insights.com or (929) 388-6585.

Figure 5: Electorate Breakdown

