

The 2022 Midterms: Uncertainty reigns for North Carolina's electoral lines and candidates



This year's mid-term elections have been further complicated as many states look to redistrict their congressional electoral boundaries. [Christopher Cooper](#) reports on the latest from North Carolina, where the State Supreme Court has recently ruled that the district maps drawn by the state's Republican-led legislature are unconstitutional gerrymanders. He writes that not only are North Carolina's election boundaries in flux, Republican candidates, including US House Representative, Madison Cawthorn, have been subverting traditional assumptions about who runs, and where.

- Looking ahead to elections across the US in 2022, our mini-series, '[The 2022 midterms](#)', explores aspects of elections at the presidential, Senate, House of Representative and state levels, and also reflects on what the results will mean for US politics moving forward. If you are interested in contributing, please contact Rob Ledger (ledger@em.uni-frankfurt.de) or Peter Finn (finn@kingston.ac.uk).

Uncertainty defines North Carolina politics. Consider the 2020 election—before the votes were cast, it was [anyone's guess](#) as to who would prevail. After the votes were counted, it was clear who had won, but less clear what the vote totals suggested for the future of the politics of the Tar Heel State or the political leanings of its citizens. Republican Donald Trump received the state's electors, but his [margin of victory in North Carolina](#) was smaller than in any other state in the country. Democrat Roy Cooper was [re-elected](#) to the Governor's mansion, but [Republican Mark Robinson won the Lt. Governorship](#). A rundown of North Carolina election and voter data is a series of “on the one hand, on the other hand” observations, with the only logical conclusion being that neither party is assured victory.

The 2022 election promises all of that uncertainty we've come to expect from the purplest of the purple states, plus an extra dosage of uncertainty brought on by questions around redistricting and filing deadlines.

The Extra Dose of Uncertainty

Like all states, North Carolina needs to redistrict its state legislative and congressional lines prior to the 2022 election. The redistricting process in North Carolina gives [absolute power](#) over drawing the districts lines to the General Assembly, which is currently controlled by the Republican Party. The Democratic Governor has no veto power over redistricting thanks to a [bill](#) he sponsored when he was in the General Assembly.

Once passed, all three maps were challenged in State court as unconstitutional gerrymanders. An initial three judge panel [ruled](#) for the legislative defendants, but the case was then appealed to the State Supreme Court who ruled that all three legislative maps [must be redrawn](#).

What this means is that the details of the district lines are in flux and the subject of considerable uncertainty—uncertainty which affects both candidates, who may not know which district they will run in, and voters who likewise, may not know which elections they will be eligible to vote in.

While the location of the district lines has received the lion's share of the attention, the second order effects of the challenge was to [move](#) back the dates of the primary from March 8 to May 17th and the start of candidate filing from February 24 to March 24. To make matters even more uncertain, on a party-line vote, the General Assembly then [moved](#) the candidate dates back one more time—this time to June 7. And, just when the North Carolina politics world was settling in on the new dates, the Governor [vetoed](#) the third dates, returning the primary date to May 17.

Leave it to Cawthorn to Add Even More Uncertainty

Just in case there was not enough uncertainty in the 2022 election in North Carolina, Republican member of Congress Madison Cawthorn ([a young GOP radical](#)) [announced](#) that he would not be running in his home district, but would instead run in North Carolina's 13th congressional district, which does not include his home county of Henderson and excludes the vast majority of the 11th, district which he was previously elected to represent. Along the way, Cawthorn also unveiled his "[plan for North Carolina](#)" that promoted his preferred candidates along with the race he preferred them to run in. In short, Madison Cawthorn took the assumption that candidates would run where they live and turned it on its head.



"Madison Cawthorn with attendee" (CC BY-SA 2.0) by Gage Skidmore

Cawthorn's move to run out of his home district has had effects that have rippled into the General Assembly races. Soon after Cawthorn's announcement the Speaker of the NC House Tim Moore, who had been expected to run for Congress in the 13th district, [announced](#) that he would stay in the General Assembly. Cawthorn's exit from his home district also opened the door for State Senator Chuck Edwards to [announce](#) that he would be running for Congress.

Uncertainty Defines the US Senate Race As well

Three-term Republican Senator Richard Burr is not running for re-election, making the election for North Carolina's Class 3 Senate seat one of the most [watched](#) in the country. And while the US Senate cannot be redistricted, uncertainty over the future district lines has bled into the Senate race in a number of important ways.

The primary date and filing deadline for the Senate has also been moved back to match the House election calendar, [extending the length of the primary](#). While the Democrats have rallied around Cheri Beasley as the [presumptive nominee](#), the Republicans are engaged in a high-profile and [expensive](#) primary fight. Former Governor Pat McCrory and current member of Congress Ted Budd are generally considered the top-two candidates in this race. A third candidate, former member of Congress Mark Walker had hinted that he might opt to run for Congress and pull out of the Senate race, but just when he was expected to make that announcement, he instead [announced](#) that he would stay in the Senate race and unveiled a new bus. Although Walker is unlikely to emerge victorious, his presence could affect the outcome in other important ways—a recent [poll](#) shows Budd with a much better chance of victory if Walker is out of the race.

When Will the Uncertainty End?

Uncertainty will continue to be the watchword in the 2022 election, but some details will fall into place relatively soon. The Supreme Court [order](#) requires that the new maps be approved by noon on February 23, 2022, which should hopefully allow candidate filing to resume the next day.

Once the district lines and the candidates are set, we will return to some semblance of normalcy in North Carolina politics, and I'll return with an update of the races as they are shaping up. Of course, normalcy in North Carolina politics hews a little closer to chaos than order.

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Note: This article gives the views of the author, and not the position of USAPP – American Politics and Policy, nor the London School of Economics.

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