

Post-Election Audit Standards

2014 POLICY GUIDE



State Policy

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By setting standards for risk-limiting post-election audits, states can significantly mitigate threats of error and fraud in elections and improve public confidence.

The Problem: Post-election audit procedures safeguard the election process. However, with inadequate audit procedures, there is no guarantee that the reported election results are accurate. Nearly all U.S. elections today are counted using some degree of electronic voting. Such voting systems risk result-changing errors through problems with hardware, software, and/or procedure. Errors can also occur in hand counting of ballots or in the compiling of results. Serious errors may go undetected if results are not well-audited.

The Solution: Congress and states should adopt uniform standards for risk-limiting post-election audits. Well-designed and executed audits are integral to vote counting systems in that they can mitigate errors. Traditional audits of hand-tallied ballots involve recounting ballots from randomly-chosen precincts to confirm tallies. A post-election audit of electronically tallied ballots is most effectively

done, however, by comparing votes on paper records (either the optically scanned ballot or touchscreen machine receipt) with the electronic record of that ballot used in the tally. Audited ballots should be chosen randomly and increased in relation to the victory margin (up to full recounts in very close contests). Additionally, using more than one software tallying program to produce election results would further ensure accurate election results. All jurisdictions and all ballot types, including absentee, mail-in, and accepted provisional ballots should be subject to a risk-limiting auditing process. While election traditions, laws, administrative structure, and voting systems vary widely among states, guiding principles for effective audits can be applied across all jurisdictions.

Note: Post-election audits differ from recounts. They routinely check voting system performance regardless of how close margins of victory appear to be.

Key Facts

Implementing post-election audit standards can have numerous positive effects, including: ensuring public confidence in the results of an election, deterring fraud, detecting systemic errors, and providing feedback for more accurate and efficient election administration in the future.

Fiscal Impact

Potential costs include providing for more ballots at the polling places, printing different colored ballots, and increased training for poll workers. For instance, after the 2006 general election in Minnesota, the cost of the wages for poll workers to count votes has been estimated at \$24,500 to \$27,000 statewide (9 to 10 cents per hand-counted vote), and about 1.2 cents per voter in the election. While audit costs will vary depending on the scope of the audits and other considerations, they can be expected to be a small fraction of election administration costs.

Part Two Resources

- Model Statutory Language

Related Reforms

- Poll Worker Training
- Democracy Index