

Election Audits

What is an Election Audit?

An election audit is a set of procedures designed to investigate whether an election was conducted properly, the voting equipment counted votes accurately, only qualified voters cast ballots in the election, and the rights of eligible citizens to vote and to experience an efficient and fair voting process were respected.

An election audit involves activities undertaken before or during elections, such as the following: the voter registration process, use of electronic poll books, and exercise of appropriate controls on the chain of custody for all election materials. Procedures to determine the accuracy of the reported election results themselves are usually referred to as a **post-election audit**.

What is a Post-Election Audit?

A post-election audit usually refers to using hand-to-eye counts of voter-marked, voter-verified paper ballots. A small percentage of the total ballots cast is recounted from randomly selected precincts for the audit. If the results of the audit agree (within a predetermined margin) with the total results, the election can be confirmed. Otherwise, the audit is extended to a larger sample. If there is not sufficient agreement, the audit may be extended to a recount of all the ballots.

Why have post-election audits?

- Reveal when recounts are necessary
- Verify election outcomes
- Facilitate transparency and openness
- Find errors, whether accidental or intentional
- Deter/detect fraud
- Provide for continuous improvement in the conduct of elections
- Promote public confidence in elections

Post-election audits differ from recounts

Post-election audits routinely check voting system performance in contests, regardless of how close margins of victory appear to be. Recounts repeat ballot counting when preliminary results show a close margin of victory. Post-election audits that detect errors can lead to a full recount.

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