

Increasing Voter Trust Through Automated, Independent Audits

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As of 2024, 48 states currently conduct some form of a post-election audit after some or all elections, and it is likely that audit requirements will continue to expand in the coming years. The most commonly adopted audit type is a conventional post-election tabulation audit, but there are also risk-limiting audits (RLAs); procedural audits; post-election logic and accuracy tests, and automated, independent audits.¹

As with all post-election auditing methods, the goal of an automated, independent audit is to verify the accuracy of the primary voting system while increasing transparency and confidence in the election process. Advancements in voting technology and election administration have made our democratic processes more accessible, accurate, and secure than ever before, but bolstering voter trust continues to be a struggle for many election officials heading into a highly-contested Presidential election. Exploring new avenues to audit a larger percentage of ballots cast without the cost and complexity of a hand count can offer jurisdictions another tool for communicating election integrity and increasing confidence.

What is an Automated, Independent Audit?

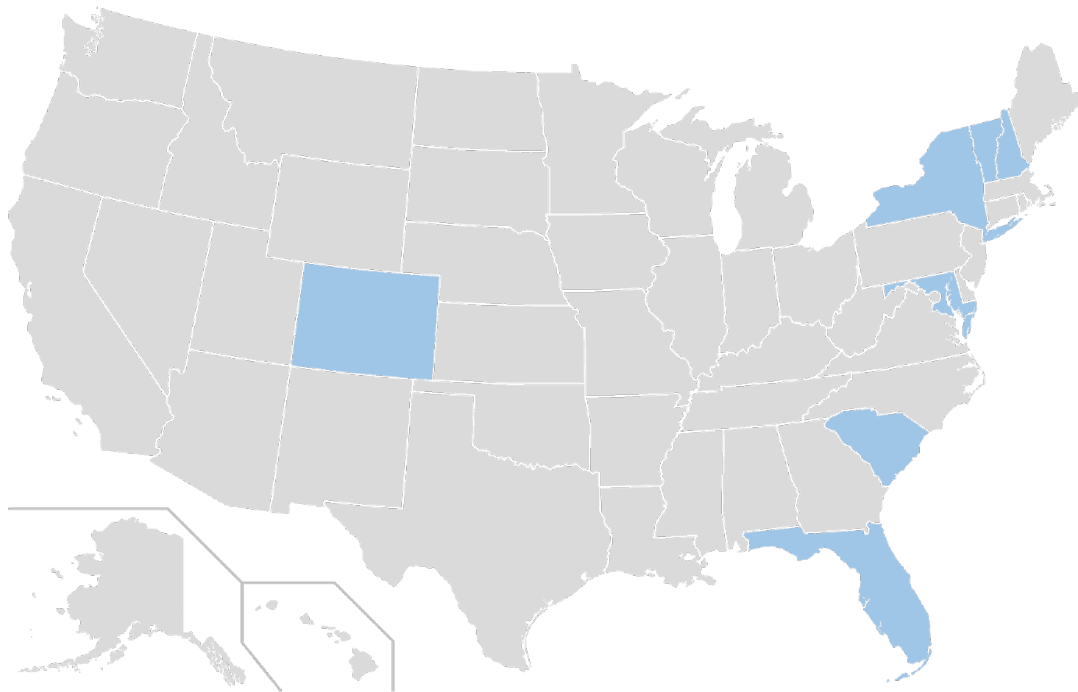
A growing number of jurisdictions are adopting automated audits that use a second, independent tabulation system to verify their election results. This allows jurisdictions to verify up to one hundred percent of their election results by either importing previously captured ballot images from their primary system or rescanning their physical ballots post-election through high-speed scanners. The independent second tabulation of results supplements or replaces the need to hand count batches of ballots by instead using a trusted, independent system to count the ballots and compare the results.

With an automated, independent audit, jurisdictions are able to compare both the results from their initial tabulation and their second tabulation to identify any discrepancies or identify any instances of uncaptured voter intent. These types of audits are currently conducted statewide in Maryland and South Carolina, for selected jurisdictions in Vermont

and New Hampshire, and at the county level in Florida and New York. These audits have also previously been conducted at the county level in Colorado.

States With Automated Independent Audits

(Past & Present)



Seeing Beyond the Human Eye

Unlike hand count audits of a small batch of ballots, independent, automated audits offer the unique ability to tabulate all types of ballots, whether selections are marked by voters filling in an oval or encoded into a barcode or QR code read by the primary voting system. In an audit conducted by hand, only full-faced paper ballots and the human-readable text portions of summary ballots can be audited. With a machine-assisted independent audit, the secondary tabulation system can read how the votes were tabulated by the system, not just what text is on the ballot. In the event that there is a discrepancy between the barcode or QR code and the voter-verifiable text on the ballot, these automated, independent audits can catch those discrepancies and determine how the votes were cast and interpreted, making them more thorough than a manual audit.

Adapting to Rising Audit Thresholds

As election officials work to bolster voter confidence and find effective ways to increase trust in the election process among candidates and the public, automated, independent audits offer an effective tool for quickly scaling up the amount of ballots reviewed after each election based on the needs of each jurisdiction. In Florida, counties can choose between conducting a hand count audit of 2% of their precincts or doing a machine-assisted audit of at least 20% of their precincts but many counties choose to independently verify 100% of their ballots due to the efficiency of the re-tabulation process. The Florida Department of State issues guidance to counties to explain what requirements must be met for both types of audit, including accuracy and software testing of the automated system.² Similarly, Maryland and South Carolina have audited 100% of their ballot images in previous federal elections, with automated audits allowing them to scale up their auditing processes during these highly-publicized elections.

With a higher percentage of ballots and precincts being verified, election officials are able to conduct a more thorough audit of their election results, increasing transparency in the process. Machine-assisted audits allow for faster and more accurate large-scale review than manual tabulation, which can be time consuming and costly. Additionally, when election officials or poll workers are dealing with complex ballots throughout lengthy hand count audits, auditors can easily count ballots multiple times, skip over ballots, or misread a voter's intent, making a one hundred percent hand audit prone to potential errors.³

Integrating with Hand Counting

Automated audits offer election officials the flexibility to set their own desired thresholds for the percentage of votes to be tabulated, allowing for the option to include manual hand counting measures if desired as a second layer of control and verification. This could be accomplished by conducting a fixed percentage manual audit first followed by an independent tabulation of results or by conducting a smaller risk-limiting audit in conjunction with the automated process. Automated, independent audits can be easily integrated into a jurisdiction's procedures depending on their preferred auditing process. Each state can choose how many ballots to audit based on the needs of their constituents and what will increase their confidence.

Increasing Voter Trust

There are many options for election officials today to conduct robust post-election audits. Independent, automated audits provide the greatest flexibility, efficiency, and accuracy by

allowing election officials to set their own audit thresholds based on the needs of their jurisdiction without the cost and complexity of a hand count. Automated audits allow for a more in-depth review of election results that can supplement or replace existing manual processes, and these factors combined can help increase voters' trust in the accuracy of their election results.

ABOUT CLEAR BALLOT

As the leader in election innovation, Clear Ballot has introduced a new class of tools and a modern approach to voting, enabling unprecedented speed, accuracy, and transparency that officials and the voting public have sought for decades. Clear Ballot entered the election industry with its first product in 2012, disrupting the industry with the nation's first independent, automated audit, and four years later developed a complete voting system which is now the fastest growing voting system in the industry. Clear Ballot's election technology is currently used in thirteen states, serving more than 40 million registered voters.

1: "Report on Post-Election Audits." National Conference of State Legislatures, National Conference of State Legislatures, 26 Mar. 2024, www.ncsl.org/elections-and-campaigns/post-election-audits.

2: "Post-Election Voting System Audit Procedure Summary." Palm Beach County Supervisor of Elections, Florida Department of State, 2022, [www.votepalmbeach.gov/Portals/PalmBeach/2022 General Election/DE Guide 0011 - Post-Election Audit Procedure Summary_FINAL.pdf?ver=hY-of2FQJKKkVnWdD-UJ1g%3D%3D](http://www.votepalmbeach.gov/Portals/PalmBeach/2022%20General%20Election/DE%20Guide%200011%20-%20Post-Election%20Audit%20Procedure%20Summary_FINAL.pdf?ver=hY-of2FQJKKkVnWdD-UJ1g%3D%3D).

3: Goggin, Stephen N., et al. (PDF) Post-Election Auditing: Effects of Procedure and Ballot Type on Manual Counting Accuracy, Efficiency, and Auditor Satisfaction and Confidence, 5 Mar. 2012, www.researchgate.net/publication/265200703_Post-Election_Auditing_Effects_of_Procedure_and_Ballot_Type_on_Manual_Counting_Accuracy_Efficiency_and_Auditor_Satisfaction_and_Confidence.