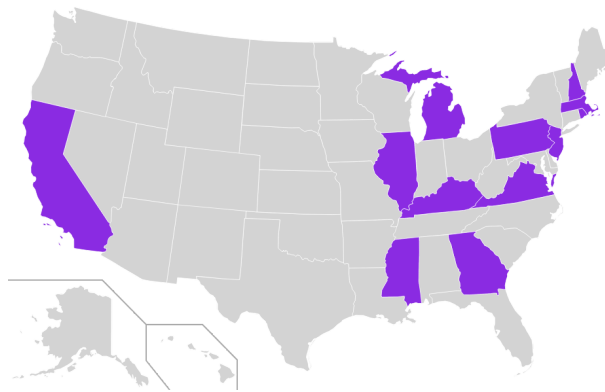


Election Security After the Polls Close

Democracy depends upon trust in the democratic process. Although there has been extensive reporting on voter registration, ballot access, and trade-offs between in-person and absentee voting, voters are much less informed about what happens after polls close.

VotingWorks is a non-partisan, non-profit dedicated to building secure and affordable voting technology. We've worked with the Department of Homeland Security on securing election tabulation, and over a dozen states and many more local jurisdictions on election security, ballot custody and post-election audits.



If you're looking to get up to speed quickly, here are some key facts and a primer on what happens on and after Election Night:

- There are never official results on election night, and while the press often calls a winner, it's not always correct (see 2000). This year, with a significant increase in vote-by-mail, it may be even harder to call a winner on election night. That's just the way it is in a pandemic year - we can't shortcut the time necessary to accurately count the ballots.
- Every swing state (and most other states) are now using voter-verifiable paper ballots. This is a really big win.
- The auditing methods applied to the tabulators used to count those ballots is significantly more advanced than it used to be, with 5 or more states performing the "gold standard" Risk-Limiting Audit.

1. Polls close and the first precinct results are published

- Poll workers seal each ballot box, poll book, and/or data storage device from accessible machines and prepare for transport to a central location.

- If ballots are scanned and tabulated at the precinct, poll workers typically publish the results for anyone present.

2. Local jurisdictions report unofficial results to the state

- At a central location, ballots that have not yet been counted (absentee or in-person) are scanned and tallied. Those results are combined with precinct counts and uploaded to the state's Election Management System, which is used to share real time updates with the media.
- Ballots are inventoried and placed in sealed storage containers.

3. Remaining absentee ballots are counted

- Some jurisdictions allow ballots that are received after election day up until a certain date to be counted. In the days following the election, these ballots are processed and counted and added to the totals that were shared on election night.
- Voters whose absentee ballots were challenged due for example to signature not matching the signature on file have a period of time (often a week) to arrive in person at a central location and "cure" or correct their absentee ballot.

4. Provisional ballots are qualified and counted

- As established by HAVA, every voter has the right to cast a provisional ballot if their right to vote is challenged on election day. These votes are kept in special provisional ballot envelopes.
- After the election has closed, election officials review provisional ballots and determine which should be counted. Those qualified ballots are then tabulated.

5. The counted ballots are stored

- Ballots that have been counted are stored in sealed containers in locked rooms - often in a courthouse or election office.

6. One week to one month after the election, the results are audited

- Election officials review each precinct's poll book and compare the number of voters to the number of ballots tabulated and retabulate when there is a mismatch.
- In addition, most states mandate that a sample of ballots is hand counted and compared to the tabulated results before the election results are certified.
- Several states conduct a Risk-Limiting Audit, the most efficient way to gain certainty that the winner reported by the voting system is correct.

- If the margin of victory in a contest is close, a candidate or party may demand a full hand recount or such a recount may be required by law. This involves thousands of participants inspecting and recording every vote cast.

7. Certification

- After the audit or a full hand recount is complete, the Secretary of State will certify the results of the election.

Questions?

We're happy to answer your questions or explain more. Please contact press@voting.works