Post-Election Audits

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Purpose of the study

- HB 448 (2023) required study of methods of election auditing

- Includes Signature and post-election audits as well as ballot handling.

- To prepare our report, we:
  - Reviewed Utah law
  - Surveyed Academic literature
  - Interviewed county clerks from around Utah
  - Reviewed materials and reports from other states

- We have a survey going out in the weeks ahead to assess public opinion

- Report is available now through the LG's office; survey report will be disseminated subsequently

Utah's current audit process: Signatures

- All signatures are reviewed in a multi-stage review process.

- Before ballot envelopes are opened, a signature audit is performed to review 1% of signatures.

- Signature audit is performed by individuals independent of those who performed the original signature audit.

- All counties perform this audit.

- Details of our evaluation of the signature verification process are contained in the report.

Utah's current audit process: Tabulation

- Counties submit list of ballot batches (and number of ballots in each batch)

- LG's office randomly selects batches for audit for 1% of ballots or 1,000 ballots, whichever is fewer. 50 ballot minimum

- 2 people involved in the audit. At least 1 must be from outside the clerk's office to ensure independence.

- 15 minutes before the appointed audit time, LG notifies the auditors of which batches are to be audited.

- Auditors recount each ballot. Original paper ballot is reviewed, hand-counted, and compared to machine tallies to ensure a match.

- Checks machine accuracy, reviews a sample of actual ballots, considers all races on each ballot.

- We find that current audit practices provide strong assurance of correct election outcomes. Our report contains some recommendations to make marginal improvements to an already strong process

Common Post-Election Audit Approaches

- Tabulation audit (traditional post-election audit)
- Risk-Limiting audit
- Post-Election Logic & Accuracy

Tabulation (traditional) Audit

- Goal: Verify the accuracy of the election by ensuring equipment functioned properly on a sample of actual ballots

- Utah's current approach

- 35 states require it (2 additional allow it but don't require it)

Risk-Limiting Audit (RLA)

- Goal: Verify the accuracy of the election by reviewing a random sample of ballots to achieve a given level of statistical confidence

- 3 states require it (12 more have pilot or optional RLA programs)

- Begin with a specified number of randomly selected ballots (determined by software) and continue counting until specified level of confidence is reached

- Audits specific race(s)

- Typically uses a level of confidence in the 90% to 95% range

- Requires additional staff time and money

Post-election logic & accuracy test

- Two states perform logic & accuracy again after the election using simulated ballots to ensure the equipment tallies them as predicted.

- This approach is weaker as it doesn't review actual ballots from the election

Traditional Tabulation vs RLA

	Tabulation Audit	Risk-limiting Audit
Reviews actual ballots	x	x
Ballots sampled are designed to be representative of election outcomes to a given level of confidence		x
Audits all races on selected ballots	x	
Tests equipment accuracy	x	x
Can be performed with Ranked-choice voting	x	
Number of ballots reviewed depends on closeness of the race		x

Things to consider

- Data on public opinion about different audit types is coming

- Both tabulation and RLA audits have pros and cons to weigh

- RLA is a complex process that involves added cost, extra time to perform, and uncertainty. A bad RLA implementation would do more to harm voter confidence than help it

- If the state opts to explore RLA, we recommend a gradual transition that allows counties to opt-in and develop experience that can be shared with other counties over time.

Questions

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