

# What is a Risk-Limiting Audit?

VerifiedVoting




## About Risk-Limiting Audits







A **Risk-Limiting Audit (RLA)** is a post-election audit which gives statistical evidence that the machine-tabulated results are consistent with what a full hand count of ballots would reveal. Unlike fixed percentage audits, an RLA limits the risk that the wrong election result will be certified because of a tabulation error. They also allow jurisdictions to strategically allocate resources to check more ballots when needed in close contests, and fewer ballots in contests with wider margins.

## What does a Risk-Limiting Audit require?

The risk-limiting audit process can be conducted on any set of paper ballots that has a **record of the number of ballots cast, how they are stored, and how to retrieve any particular ballot** (ballot manifest). For an RLA to meaningfully support confidence in the reported election outcome, the standard is higher:

-  Paper ballots preferably marked by hand, and supplemented with a ballot marking device for those who need to use one.
-  A deliberate and intentional step for a voter to check the paper ballot for accuracy before casting the ballot (voter verification).
-  Rigorous ballot accounting and a properly maintained chain of custody of the ballots.

## How are RLAs different from other post-tabulation audits or recounts?

-  **RLAs are not focused on checking individual districts or machines.** They are designed to audit contest results by looking at a sample of ballots from across all ballots validly cast in that contest, thus giving public confidence in the reported contest outcomes.
-  Traditional post-tabulation audits may conclude without giving the public confidence in the contest results, specifically for close contests. When an RLA concludes, **there is statistical evidence to support the previously reported tabulation or trigger a recount.**
-  Unlike procedures that simply rescan and retabulate ballots, **RLAs manually examine paper ballots** (by hand) to ensure that any machine-tabulated results align with the paper ballots.
-  **RLAs can save time and resources** in contests with wide margins by avoiding checking unnecessary ballots. Even in close contests, the risk limit can often be achieved without a full hand count.

## How is an RLA conducted?

-  Our handy **Flowchart for Conducting Risk-Limiting Audits** is included on the back of this page and can be downloaded at [verifiedvoting.org/verified-votings-guide-to-rlas-in-one-infographic](https://verifiedvoting.org/verified-votings-guide-to-rlas-in-one-infographic).

A Verified Voting *flowchart* for conducting

# Risk-Limiting Audits

**Conduct Elections**  
with voter-verified  
and machine-scanned  
paper ballots



**Store, organize,  
and catalog  
paper ballots**  
for later retrieval

**Identify contest(s) to  
be audited according  
to state law and rule**



**Pull sampled  
paper ballots,  
examine,  
and record  
information**



**Select a  
scientific random  
sample of ballots**  
for hand auditing



**Does the information from the sampled  
paper ballots give enough evidence to  
support the reported outcome(s)?**

**YES**

Voters can have  
confidence in  
reported outcome!



For more info, contact  
[audit@verifiedvoting.org](mailto:audit@verifiedvoting.org)

**NO**

More ballots are  
needed to provide  
evidence, up to and  
including a full hand  
count of all validly  
cast ballots