

What is a Risk-Limiting Audit?

VerifiedVoting

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A risk-limiting audit (RLA) is a type of post-election audit that **gives the public justified confidence in election outcomes**. RLAs are designed as a rigorous, efficient tool for election officials to check reported election outcomes against voters' ballots. An RLA can stop as soon as it finds strong evidence to support the reported outcome. Or, if the reported outcome was incorrect because ballots were miscounted, an RLA is very likely to lead to a full hand count that corrects the outcome before the election results are certified.

What do best-practice risk-limiting audits require?



Paper ballots preferably marked by hand, with ballot marking devices for those who need or prefer to use them (*voter-verified paper ballots*)



Reliable records of how and where ballots are stored (*ballot manifests*)



Rigorous *ballot accounting* and properly maintained *chain of custody* of the ballots



Transparency and observability throughout the auditing process, including the timely publication of the audit outcome



How are RLAs different from other 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.



Unlike traditional tabulation audits, RLAs are designed to provide high assurance of correct election outcomes even in close contests.



Unlike procedures that simply rescan and retabulate ballots, RLAs examine paper ballots hand-to-eye to ensure that machine-tabulated results align with the paper ballots.



RLAs allow jurisdictions to save time and resources by checking more ballots when needed in close contests, and fewer ballots in contests with wider margins. Even in close contests, the risk limit can usually be achieved without a full hand count.



How is an RLA conducted?



Our handy [Flowchart for Conducting Risk-Limiting Audits](#) is included on the next page.

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

NO

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