



STATE OF MICHIGAN
JOCELYN BENSON, SECRETARY OF STATE
DEPARTMENT OF STATE
LANSING

2020 General Election Audit Processes

Secretary of State Jocelyn Benson has been a proponent of post-election audits before and since she was sworn into office. The Michigan Bureau of Elections and local election clerks have conducted more than 120 procedural audits in jurisdictions across the state during her tenure, and conducted the nation's largest ever risk limiting audit pilot – including 277 Michigan jurisdictions – after the March 10, 2020, presidential primary, which quickly demonstrated the accuracy of the state's tabulation machines.

The November 3, 2020, general election will also be comprehensively audited. A statewide risk limiting audit will be conducted to ensure the accuracy of tabulation machines, and procedural audits will be carried out in dozens of jurisdictions to examine and identify errors. Audits of absent voter counting boards will also be conducted. Notably, Michigan election law does not allow audits prior to certification of election results and until after recounts are completed. Audits are used to determine opportunities for improvement in future elections. The county and state canvass process is itself a form of audit that is conducted prior to certification, in which canvassers themselves are responsible for actively reviewing all the processes and procedures of the election.

Candidates who doubt the outcome of an election that has ended have the right to request a hand recount of any and all precincts where they were on the ballot. In addition to precincts that are in balance (meaning the number of votes tabulated matches the number of names on the pollbook), or those that are out-of-balance with an explanation, recounts also include precincts that are out of balance without explanation, as long as the number of ballots in the ballot container matches the number tabulated by the machine. This means that in Detroit, for example, at least 72% of precincts that are balanced or explained were recountable, and more would have likely been found to be recountable, but no recount was requested. Only one state-level recount request was made following the Nov. 3 election, by a candidate for the 71st District of the State House of Representatives in Eaton County.

Risk-limiting audits are carried out by randomly selecting a statistically significant number of precincts and ballots for hand recount to determine if they confirm the outcome of an election within a pre-determined margin of error. The parameters of the risk-limiting audit for the Nov. 3 election have not yet been determined.

Procedural audits are conducted to examine and identify errors made by clerks, election workers and tabulation machines. Ballot containers are opened and ballots recounted and compared to paper tallies of the vote counts and the number of voters tracked on paper printouts of all data that was in the e-pollbooks. Audits of some absent voter counting boards will also be conducted.

Unfortunately, some leaders have called for audits with various terms that do not appear in Michigan election law and have no precedent in Michigan – such as 'forensic audit,' 'comprehensive audit,' and more. This demonstrates a lack of understanding of election administration as no such audits exist, have never been conducted in the state, and could not serve any purpose that is not already served by Michigan's time-tested set of checks and balances to the election process—including the canvass, recount and procedural audit processes.