



NORTH CAROLINA

STATE BOARD OF ELECTIONS

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Post-Election Audit Report for the Municipal Elections on November 7, 2023

Published November 28, 2023

Overview

The North Carolina State Board of Elections (NCSBE) is the state agency that oversees all primary and general elections in North Carolina. NCSBE works closely with the 100 county boards of elections to ensure accessible, safe, secure, and accurate elections for more than 7.3 million registered voters.

To help meet these objectives, after every election, the county boards of elections and NCSBE conduct a series of audits designed to ensure vote counts are accurate and that voters can be confident in the results.

Municipal elections were held on November 7, 2023, in 465 municipalities across 86 of North Carolina's 100 counties. More than 515,000 voters cast ballots, or a turnout of about 15.9% of the approximately 3.25 million voters eligible to vote in these contests.

With post-election audits now complete, NCSBE staff presents the information below to the State Board members, who will vote on whether to certify the November 7 election results at a meeting on November 28, 2023. Each section includes a description of the audit and a summary of the audit's findings.

Voter History Audit

Audit Description: When voters check in at polling places, they fill out authorization to vote (ATV) forms on Election Day or one-stop applications during early voting. Voters who cast absentee-by-mail ballots complete an application as part of the ballot return envelope. These documents are used to assign voter history for each voter. When ballots are run through tabulators, tabulation software provides election return data that identifies the number of ballots cast.

The Voter History Audit compares the number of ATV forms, one-stop applications, and absentee-by-mail applications with the number of physical ballots cast. These two numbers should match. However, they can be slightly off for various reasons. For example, small voter history discrepancies may result from election worker error in assigning voter history to a voter, or from a voter checking in, then deciding not to vote.

This audit is designed to identify significant discrepancies, which could be a sign of election fraud, such as ballot stuffing, fraudulent manual entries, or tampering with media cards. It can also identify certain ballot coding errors.

Findings: All 86 counties that conducted November municipal elections have completed the voter history process, assigning voter history to voters who cast ballots and reconciling that number with physical ballots cast. Of these 86 counties, 54 counties' voter histories and ballots cast matched exactly, while 32 counties had minor differences. The majority of those counties were off by a single ballot. The absolute combined value of all variances for counties is 75 ballots or, on average, fewer than one (1) ballot per county. The county boards of elections have explained these differences.

This audit identified no evidence that vote totals or ballots cast were manipulated. Except for the small, explainable differences noted above, the physical ballots cast matched the number of voters who checked in at Election Day polling places or early voting sites or returned an absentee ballot.

Sample Audit

Audit Description: A post-election sample audit that checks the accuracy of the voting equipment across the state is required by statute. [N.C.G.S. § 163-182.1\(b\)\(1\)](#). On the day following each election, state elections officials randomly select a statistically significant number of precincts or absentee/early voting groupings, typically two, for each county board of elections. Bipartisan teams at each county board of elections – in open, public meetings – conduct hand-eye counts of one contest on all ballots in those precincts or groupings. In presidential election

years, this is always the presidential contest. In municipal elections, these contests are often the top contest on the ballot, such as a mayoral contest.

These hand-count results are compared to the machine counts, and any variances are noted. The county board of elections sends the machine counts and hand counts to the state, along with explanations for any discrepancies.

Minor variances most often result from the following situations: (1) human error in the hand-eye audit count itself; (2) the voter did not fill in the write-in oval or square, but wrote a name in the write-in line; or (3) the machine did not count a choice that the voter made by a checkmark or “x,” or a choice that was circled or poorly shaded on the ballot.

Findings: A total of 167 ballot groupings were chosen randomly statewide, including two samples for most counties with November 7 elections, and one sample for three counties (Alleghany, Tyrrell, and Yancey). Of the 167 samples, 131 were Election Day precincts, 25 were early voting sites, and 11 counties conducted a hand-eye audit of all absentee-by-mail ballots.

Of the 167 samples audited, differences between machine counts and human hand-eye counts were found in 12 groupings. Most differences were one or two ballots, and most discrepancies were attributed to human error in marking ballots. Aside from the differences noted above, in all other counties, the machine count and hand-eye count matched exactly in the sampled precincts. In other words, in 155 of 167 samples, the hand and machine counts were the same.

The results of this sample audit show once again that the certified and tested machines used to count ballots do so with great accuracy.