

For Candidates: How to Assure that Votes in Your Race are Counted Accurately

Many of the historical reasons we have had for faith in the integrity of the vote count in American elections have gradually been undermined in recent years. We have gone from a dispersed system run by civic-minded, non-partisan volunteers to machines, with results collected electronically in central tabulators. These machines are manufactured and serviced by a few companies, and they have fought to protect the secrecy of the computer programs inside.

The rapid change in voting technology has increased the reach of one person to introduce errors in election results. Some of the same partisans whose mission it is to help those in office retain power have been placed in charge of the very election systems which we count on to be unbiased and fair.

The election industry lacks the independent manual audits that are used in other industries to detect and correct errors. Detailed vote count data which permits vote count errors to be detected and corrected are not publicly released by county election officials.

Before the Election

Know the voting technologies that are used within your district.

Become familiar with the systems for tabulating votes, and the people in charge of implementing those systems.

In areas where the process does not permit manual counts of voter-verifiable paper ballot records, ask your constituents to vote by mail-in or absentee ballot, so there is a paper record available for recount, should the need arise. Voters should make a copy of these mail-in ballots and obtain and keep a receipt proving delivery of the mail-in ballot to the Board of Elections. Also candidates need to have hotlines, or websites, for their voters to record the fact that they voted mail-in or absentee and where they did this.

Make Open Records Requests for Vote Count Data

Make open records requests to the election office in each county where you are on the ballot. Ask for electronic versions of unofficial and official detailed vote counts broken out by precinct and by precinct and vote type* as soon as they become available after the election. Sample open records request letters will be available at ElectionArchive.net.

**Absentee, overseas, military, Election Day, Early, Early-provisional, and Election Day-provisional, etc.*

Prepare for Hand Recounts and Legal Challenges

The time to request a recount after an election is often very limited. You must be prepared to pursue a recount quickly. Find out the cost of a manual recount. Earmark sufficient campaign funds for a recount or identify donors who will pay for a recount if one is needed.

Learn state election laws and deadlines for filing election contests and be prepared to contest your election unless your election is transparently verifiably accurate.

Register for a “Parallel Citizen Vote Count”

If you register with a site, such as VoteNow2006.net, your voters can participate in a “parallel citizen vote count”. Voters will be asked to enter their street and email addresses, what type of ballot they used, and register that they voted for you. Their information will be held confidential but verified against voter registration information that you provide. After the election, the number of "parallel citizen" votes registered for you in each precinct will be compared with official reported counts available on ElectionArchive.net.

If any precinct has fewer reported votes for you than were registered in the "parallel citizen" count, then your voters can be contacted via email and asked to fill out affidavits for an election contest or recall petition.

Obtain a list of precincts and polling locations

Obtain a list of precincts & polling locations from county election offices and upload them to ElectionArchive.net. This information is needed in order to detect if any precincts have suspicious or impossible counts.

After The Election – Ensure That Every Vote Is Counted

Refuse To Concede until after you have received the detailed vote count data and had it analyzed by independent statisticians.

Conventional wisdom in the past has been that candidates should not challenge a vote tabulation unless the result is exceedingly close. But recent changes in voting technology raise the possibility that large miscounts may be recorded. If your opponent adopts a posture of ridicule and scorn in response to your questions, you have to wonder what he may be hiding.

Without detailed precinct-level vote counts broken out by vote-type (absentee, early, provisional, overseas, military, election day, etc.), it is possible to hide the evidence of wrongfully padding votes for a candidate in one vote-type, while wrongfully subtracting votes for a different candidate in another vote-type; or to hide evidence of miscounts in one vote-type.¹

Submit Your Detailed Vote Counts to ElectionArchive.net

NEDA's statisticians may be able to help identify signs that an election has been miscounted. Upload your detailed vote count data files to ElectionArchive.net where they will be made publicly available for independent analysts to examine.

Make Sure That All Legal Absentee, Overseas, Military, and Provisional Ballots are Accurately Counted Before Conceding

Take time to ensure that all votes are transparently accurately counted prior to conceding.

Request Independent Audits or Manual Recounts

When you expose the system to scrutiny, you help assure an honest tabulation for your own race, and contribute to a legacy of election protection. The expectation of public examination will deter future interference with the vote count.

Advice for Political Parties and Voters is available on ElectionArchive.org.

¹ See "How Can We Ensure Accurate Election Results"
Electionarchive.org/ucvAnalysis/US/election_officials/Audits_Monitoring.pdf