



ASPEN TECH
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POLICY



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Enhance North Carolina's Post-Election Audit with Risk Limiting Audits

Efficiently improving election security by improving North Carolina's mandatory post-election audit

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Many states have moved, or are moving, to paper ballots when conducting elections. North Carolina will be moving to paper ballots in 2020. However, computers are still used throughout the election process, from preparing ballots to tabulating the results. Since inherent flaws exist anywhere a computer is present in the election, paper ballots are only truly effective at preventing election malfeasance when they are paired with a post-election audit. Risk-limiting audits are currently the gold standard of post-election auditing. North Carolina has a unique opportunity to implement RLAs as many counties are buying new voting systems, and should take the opportunity to do so.

RECOMMENDATIONS

North Carolina statute requires that a manual audit be conducted following every election. However, this audit is neither efficient nor is it comprehensive. It is not efficient because it is prescriptive: [entire precincts must be manually counted](#). The current audit is also not comprehensive. Despite four Council of state races being [decided by a margin of less than 1 percent](#) – including one race that was decided by .0006 percent of the vote – the current audit only reviews a single race at the top of the ticket and thus may not catch any interference targeted at down ballot races.



To address these deficiencies, this project recommends that the North Carolina Board of Elections implement a risk-limiting audit on a trial basis in the primary for the upcoming election. Such an audit would give election administrators both the confidence and the evidence necessary to push for statutory change.

Additionally, it recommends that the state Board of Elections enhance the existing statutorily required audit by using a risk-limiting audit to validate races further down the ticket. Since risk-limiting audits require fewer ballots to achieve a similar level of confidence, the state Board will only need to examine a small number of ballots in precincts outside of the ones chosen in the process of conducting the mandatory audit. This means the state Board can greatly improve their confidence in the entirety of the ballot with relatively little incremental effort.

HIGHLIGHTS



The state Board of Elections already possesses the technical and statutory authority necessary to implement risk-limiting audits under [§163-22 \(a\)](#).



Many counties are purchasing new voting systems, which requires creating entirely new operational plans for conducting elections using the new equipment. This provides the state board a unique opportunity to ensure these new operational plans are compatible with the processes necessary to carry out an RLA.



Risk-limiting audits require examining fewer ballots than the currently-mandated system, meaning that the extra audit capacity can be allocated towards examining more down ballot races.

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