

Checks and Balances in Georgia: The Post-Election Day Process

American elections are run by local and state officials alongside tens of thousands of our friends and neighbors from both political parties. These bipartisan teams count, canvass, and audit every ballot — whether in person or by mail — verifying identities, inspecting ballots, and ensuring each is counted as intended. This rigorous process leads to the final step: certification. This is the straightforward phase of the process, in which election officials declare the winners.

This memo outlines the checks and balances in Arizona that ensure all state and local rules are followed. Importantly, this is nonpartisan educational research intended for 501(c)(3)-compliant purposes only. It is not to be used for any partisan, political, or electioneering activities by any organization.

Counting: Technology and Bipartisan Oversight Work to Triple-Check Results for Accuracy

Georgia law mandates specific processes for counting ballots using automatic tabulation equipment. The counting process is generally overseen by local election superintendents.

Quality-Tested Technology Leads to Trustworthy Results

Election workers use automatic tabulation equipment to count ballots at polling sites. Under Georgia law, the equipment must be tested to ensure its reliability. Election officials begin Logic and Accuracy (L&A) testing on or before the third day before early ("advanced") voting, which starts on the fourth Monday before Election Day.¹ L&A testing checks the electronic poll books, electronic ballot markers, printers, and ballot scanners. During this process, officials must confirm that the tabulation in the ballot scanner can be accurately uploaded to the election management system and that the tabulated results match the selections indicated on the paper ballot.²

¹ Ga. Comp. R. & Regs. r. 183-1-12-.08

² Ga. Comp. R. & Regs. r. 183-1-12-.08

Transparent, Bipartisan Processes Instill Confidence

Each political party may appoint up to two official poll watchers in each precinct who are allowed to be present for observation of counting and recording of votes at tabulation centers and other locations.³ In Georgia, voters at polling sites insert their voter card into the voting machine, make their selections, receive a printed ballot with a QR code, and insert their own ballots into the tabulation equipment that scans the code.⁴ Officials at each precinct begin tabulating votes at the close of polls and after the last voter has submitted their ballot.⁵ Election officials may begin counting mail ballots at 7 a.m. on Election Day.⁶ Once tabulation at precincts is complete, officials must post a copy of the tabulated results for the precinct on the door of each precinct for public viewing.⁷

Canvassing: Election Officials Securely Check Results

Canvassing is the process of compiling vote totals reported in returns from throughout a jurisdiction. In Georgia, canvassing occurs at the county and state level.

County Canvass: An Open Meeting of the County Election Board

It is the duty of the election superintendent (in many counties, the county election board) to canvass, sign off on, and announce the votes for the county. Generally, election superintendents are required to report the total number of votes cast by 11:59 p.m. on Election Day.⁸

The official county canvass must occur at a meeting open to the public. Election officials must give the public notice of the time and place of the canvassing meeting at least one week before Election Day.⁹ To ensure the security of the process, only individuals employed by the election superintendent or who have been duly sworn can enter the immediate area where officers tabulate and consolidate the election results.¹⁰

At the meeting, the election superintendent breaks the seal, opens each envelope, and removes the memory card and results tape. Election officers insert the memory card into the election management system for official consolidation. During the canvass, election officials may investigate discrepancies in precinct returns, but must ultimately certify all consolidated returns. On completion of the county canvass, the election superintendent must send the final returns to the secretary of state.¹¹

³ Ga. Code Ann. § 21-2-408

⁴ Ga. Comp. R. & Regs. r.183-1-12-.11

⁵ Ga. Comp. R. & Regs. r.183-1-12-.12(a)(1)

⁶ Ga. Code Ann. § 21-2-386(a)(1)(B)

⁷ Ga. Comp. R. & Regs. r.183-1-12-.12(c)

⁸ Ga. Code Ann. § 21-2-421

⁹ Ga. Code Ann. § 21-2-492

¹⁰ Ga. Comp. R. & Regs. r.183-1-12-.12

¹¹ Ga. Comp. R. & Regs. r. 183-1-12-.12

Audits Give a Final Check Before State Canvassing

To further ensure the accuracy of automatically tabulated results, local election officials conduct risk-limiting audits after the county canvass and before the state canvass.¹² The audits consist of a manual inspection of a random sample of official paper ballots. Additionally, the process must be done in public view, and the results must be provided to the public within 48 hours after completion.¹³

State Canvass: The Secretary of State Compiles the Results and Makes Them Public

The secretary of state conducts the state canvass for all statewide elections and federal elections.¹⁴ Per new legislation signed during the 2026 Special Session, an automatic manual recount must be completed by the secretary of state for statewide offices at the top of the ballot if the winning candidate and second-place candidate have no more than a .5 of 1% margin of the total votes cast. After receiving the certified returns from the election superintendents, the secretary of state must conduct the state canvass of votes for candidates and ballot questions.¹⁵ A statewide canvass is a review and computation of vote totals received around the state. After the canvass is complete, the secretary of state certifies the election results.

Certification: The Voters Have Spoken

Locally, each county or municipal superintendent transmits forms certifying the returns to the secretary of state.¹⁶ After certifying returns, winners of local offices issue a certificate of election.¹⁷ When the secretary of state completes the tabulation and presents certified results, the governor must “immediately issue certificates of election and commissions under the seal of the state.” The secretary of state, after receiving certified returns for presidential electors, must certify the returns and present them to the governor no later than 5 p.m. on the 17th day after the election.¹⁸ The governor must certify the presidential electors by 5 p.m. the following day.

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¹² Ga. Code Ann. § 21-2-498

¹³ Ga. Code Ann. § 21-2-498

¹⁴ Ga. Code Ann. § 21-2-499

¹⁵ Ga. Code Ann. § 21-2-499

¹⁶ Ga. Code Ann. § 21-2-497

¹⁷ Ga. Code Ann. § 21-2-502

¹⁸ Ga. Code Ann. § 21-2-499