

Eyes on the Vote Count:

Non-partisan Observer Reports on Minnesota's 2008 Post-Election Audit and Recount

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Report Summary

This report describes the manual counting process in the 2008 Minnesota post-election audit and US Senate recount based on the reports of non-partisan observers. For the 2008 post-election audit, 155 volunteers served as non-partisan observers and covered 75% of counties in Minnesota. For the 2008 recount, 77 volunteers served as non-partisan observers and covered 36% of all recount locations in Minnesota. This report analyzes the audit and recount in these areas: transparency, counting process, chain of custody, and general observer concerns.

***“Minnesota's
manual recount
procedures are
solid overall.”***

~Eyes on the Vote Count

Based on these reports, transparency and the counting process were found to be sound in both the audit and recount, although increased use of 2-person counting and blind counting protocols could improve the efficiency and transparency of the process. Chain of custody was also good in the overwhelming majority of counties for both the audit and recount. Only a handful of minor issues occurred. Clarifying best practices and current chain of custody procedures would help to prevent future issues. Finally, no systematic concerns were raised by observers in the post-election audit or recount.

In addition to the data from the observers, this report analyzes the accuracy of the optical scanners used in the audited precincts, finding that the voting machines were indeed accurate by over 99.9%. It also calculates the time and cost to conduct the audit, which averaged out at 2 hours and 45 minutes per location and 9 cents per audited vote (a total estimated cost of \$35,243). This report also compares the vote margin change in the US Senate recount with three other state legislative recounted races and finds that the change in vote totals for all 2008 recounts was quite similar and comparable.

This report also provides an extensive analysis of the forms that counties use to report audit information to the Secretary of State. The findings reveal inconsistent reporting, due to both the design of the form as well as mistakes made by the counties. Audit reporting forms should be revised so that categories are clearly defined and guidelines are provided.

This report concludes with a list of recommendations for future audits and recounts, as well as rationale for moving Minnesota to a risk limiting audit model. While most of the audit and recount procedures were solid, some procedures not covered in the report are in need of improvement such as the absentee ballot process. We hope the lessons learned from the observer reports and the unprecedented scrutiny of the US Senate recount can help to improve Minnesota's elections procedures.

For more information or to read the full report, visit CEIMN's website: www.ceimn.org