

Audit: Checks in place to ensure accuracy of Denver elections

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In the era of Russian meddling in U.S. elections, checks on the accuracy of election results are fundamental. Denver's Elections Division recently took steps required by state law to ensure that its vote counts are indeed accurate, but it also wanted to double-check it was dotting its i's and crossing its t's. An audit has now concluded Denver is in compliance.

Denver election officials requested a review from Denver Auditor Timothy O'Brien's office to see if its procedures conformed to a 2009 state law that makes county elections officials use a risk-limiting auditing procedure. The procedure, first used in Colorado during the November 2017 election, provides checks on election results after the votes are tallied.

"The process is meant to help improve efficiency of election validation by allocating more resources to races with smaller margins of victory," O'Brien's office noted in a statement.

This is how it works: The Colorado Secretary of State chooses a statewide and countywide contest to audit, considering narrowness of victory and other factors when selecting a race. Election officials then manually compare selected batches of ballots from contests with recorded votes for the ballot scanning machine.

With Denver in compliance with the state risk-limiting procedure, O'Brien's office pointed to some changes to improve efficiency.

First, the auditor's office argues Denver's division should stop using Excel spreadsheets in the process to track ballots, as there is room for human error in data entry. Instead, switching to an automated system would reduce the risk of typos or other errors.

The audit also found problems with the state's ballot sampling method, considering Denver's two-page ballots. When randomly pulling ballots, there is no way to ensure the one pulled would have the contest being audited on it.

O'Brien's office also advised Denver create performance metrics for the auditing process to track the success of the project from year-to-year.

"Ensuring the integrity of our elections is integral to upholding the pillars of our democracy," O'Brien said. "I'm proud to see Denver leading the way nationally to make sure every vote counts the way the voters intended."