



Highlights of [GAO-08-874](#), a report to the Chairman, Committee on Rules and Administration, U.S. Senate

Why GAO Did This Study

Our Nation's overall election system depends on all levels of government and the interplay of people, processes, and technology, which includes the voting systems that are used during an election. GAO has previously reported on issues and challenges associated with ensuring that voting systems are secure and reliable. The states, territories, and the District of Columbia (District) each play a pivotal role in managing voting systems to ensure that they perform as intended.

In light of this role, GAO was asked to answer the following questions relative to states, territories, and the District: (1) what voting methods and systems are these entities using in federal elections and what changes are underway; (2) how do they certify or otherwise approve voting systems; (3) what other steps do they take to ensure the accuracy, reliability, and security of voting systems; (4) how do they identify, evaluate, and respond to voting system problems; and (5) how do they view federal voting system-related resources and services.

To accomplish this, GAO conducted a Web-based survey of election officials in all 50 states, the four U.S. territories, and the District and received responses from all but three states; contacted the officials to better understand their approaches and issues; and reviewed documentation provided by survey respondents and other contacts.

To view the full product, including the scope and methodology, click on [GAO-08-874](#). To view GAO's survey of election officials, click on [GAO-08-1147SP](#). For more information, contact Randolph C. Hite at (202) 512-3439 or hiter@gao.gov.

ELECTIONS

States, Territories, and the District Are Taking a Range of Important Steps to Manage Their Varied Voting System Environments

What GAO Found

The mix of voting methods and systems that were used in the 2006 general election varied across states, territories, and the District, and this mix is not expected to change substantially for the 2008 general election. This variety is due to several factors, but particularly the degree of influence that these governments have exerted over local jurisdictions in selecting systems.

In establishing their voting environments, states, territories, and the District reported approving or otherwise certifying their systems against requirements and described largely similar approaches in doing so. Further, they reported facing some of the same challenges, such as ensuring that vendors meet requirements and completing the approval process on time; and identified steps they have taken to address these challenges.

To further ensure that their approved systems performed as intended, these entities also reported conducting one or more types of postapproval voting system testing—acceptance, readiness, Election Day parallel, postelection audit, and security. Certain types of tests—such as acceptance and readiness—were reported as being conducted by many states, territories, and the District, while others—such as parallel—were reported as being employed by only a handful. The manner of performing the tests also varied.

Notwithstanding their system approval and testing efforts, most states, territories, and the District nevertheless have reported experiencing problems on Election Day. While these entities largely described the problems as isolated and having minimal impact, a few reported that they experienced problems that were more widespread and significant. However, the full scope of the problems that may have been experienced is not clear because states and others reported that local jurisdictions were generally not required to report problems. To address this, a few states and territories reported that they are becoming more active in identifying and resolving problems, for instance, by developing policies and procedures to address them. However, election officials also cited related challenges, such as determining the cause of the problems and appropriate corrective actions.

To aid states, territories, and the District in managing their voting system environments, the federal government, through the Election Assistance Commission, provides a number of services and resources, such as federal certification of systems and guidance. With the exception of the timing of the certification process, most entities reported that they are largely satisfied with these services and resources, although some are not satisfied.

While following similar approval and testing approaches and resolving voting system problems, differences in how each entity executes these approaches offer important opportunities for these governments to share knowledge and experience. To the extent that this occurs, the manner in which systems perform on Election Day can only improve.