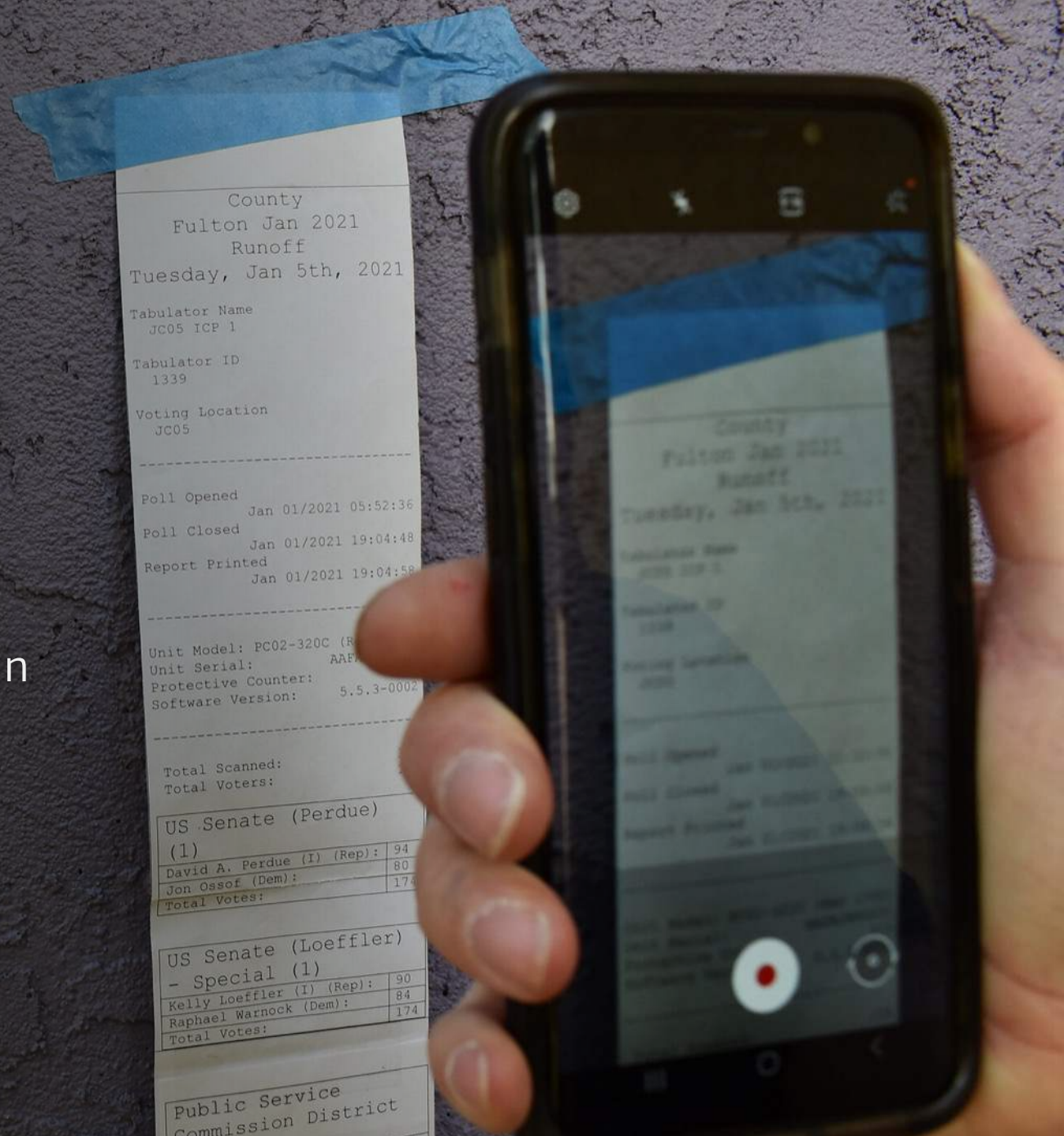
America Counts

Recording poll tapes with Actual Vote

How the app works, how to get ready, how to make a plan, and how to take recordings we can actually use.

Volunteer training · America Counts · October 2026



America Counts

A **non-partisan non-profit** working to improve election transparency and accuracy.

- ✓ **We make free election-auditing apps anyone can use**
- ✓ **We help build trustworthiness in elections**
- ✓ **A program of Democracy Counts, a 501(c)(3)**

OUR WEBSITE
americacounts.us

NEW TO ACTUAL VOTE? START HERE
americacounts.us/start-here

QUESTIONS
info@democracycounts.org

THIS PRESENTATION
americacounts.us/files/actual-vote-recording-training.pdf

INTRODUCTION

What is Actual Vote?

Actual Vote is a free app from America Counts that enables large-scale, nationwide vote report auditing with poll tapes.

With Actual Vote, people like you video-record poll tapes after they're printed. We compare those recordings with the official results.

INTRODUCTION

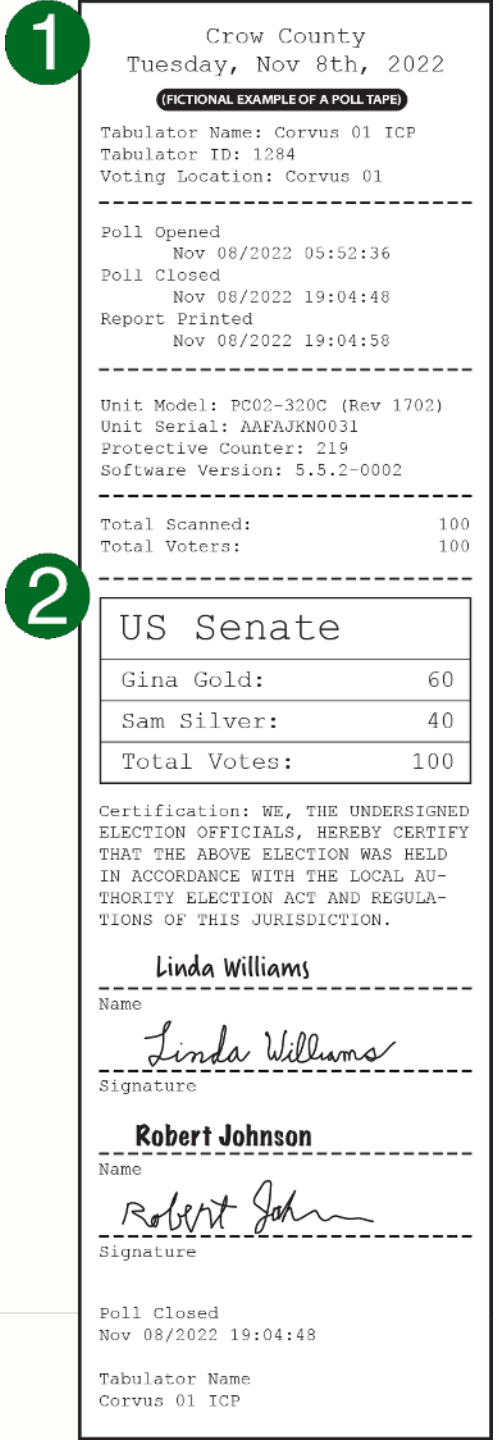
What is a poll tape?

A long strip of paper the tabulator prints when the polls close. It shows the **vote totals from one polling place.**

1. **The header:** county, election date, tabulator and polling place. It tells us exactly which tape this is
2. **The contest totals:** the votes for each candidate. These are the numbers we compare with the official results

Below that, the poll workers sign to certify the totals.

> You can download a copy of this example poll tape at
> americacounts.us/practice-poll-tape



WHY THIS MATTERS

Vote reporting is vulnerable to error and fraud

Shelby County, TN, 2015

A known software bug dropped 1,001 votes from the election-night count. One photo of one poll tape exposed it.

Georgia, 2020

In four counties, memory cards were never uploaded. Nearly 5,800 votes were missing until the hand recount.

Monmouth County, NJ, 2022

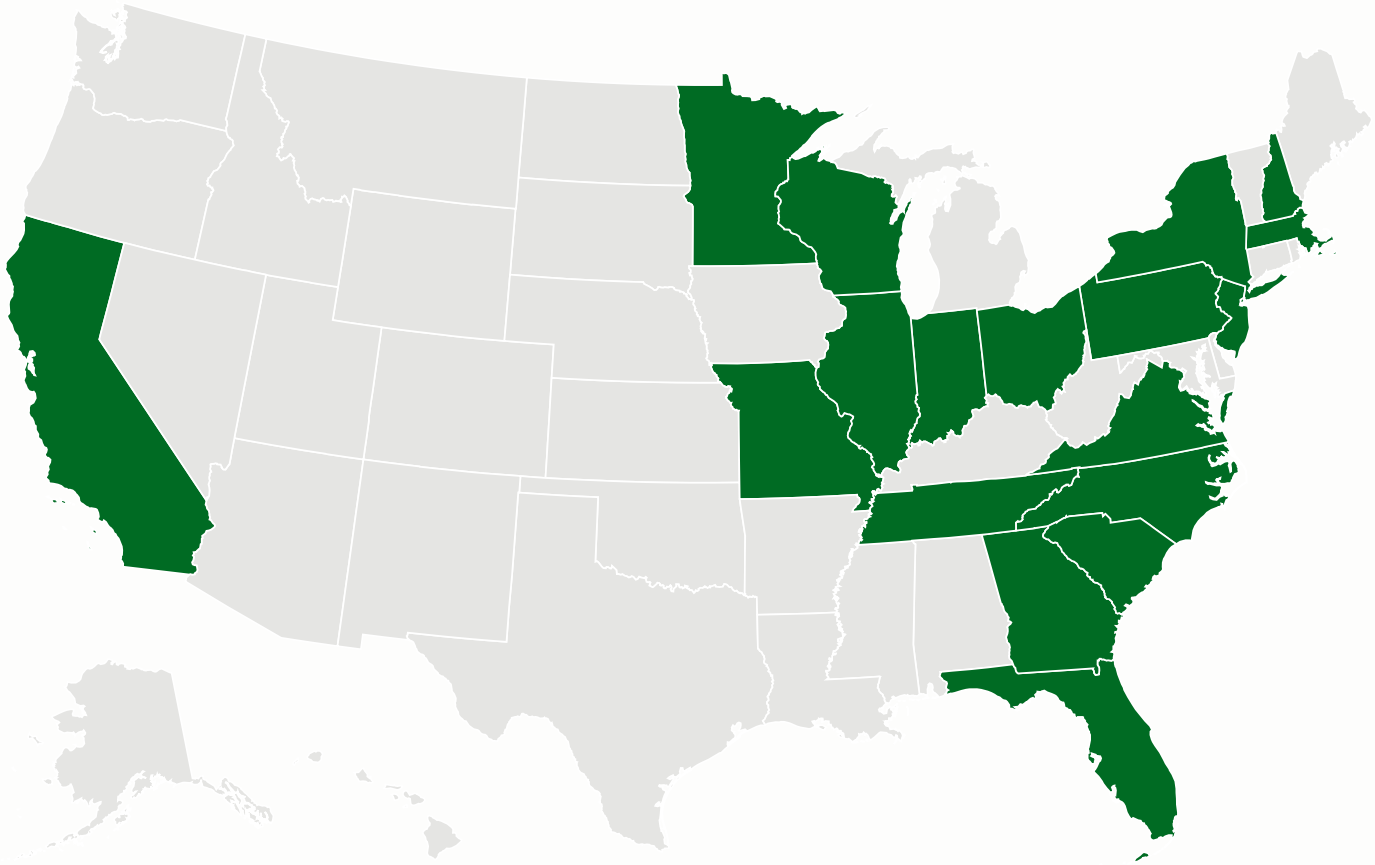
One precinct's results were counted twice. The poll tapes had the correct totals.

It's also vulnerable to **false accusations** of error and fraud. Recordings of the poll tapes answer both with evidence.

More on these cases: americacounts.us/start-here/why-you-should-care

INTRODUCTION

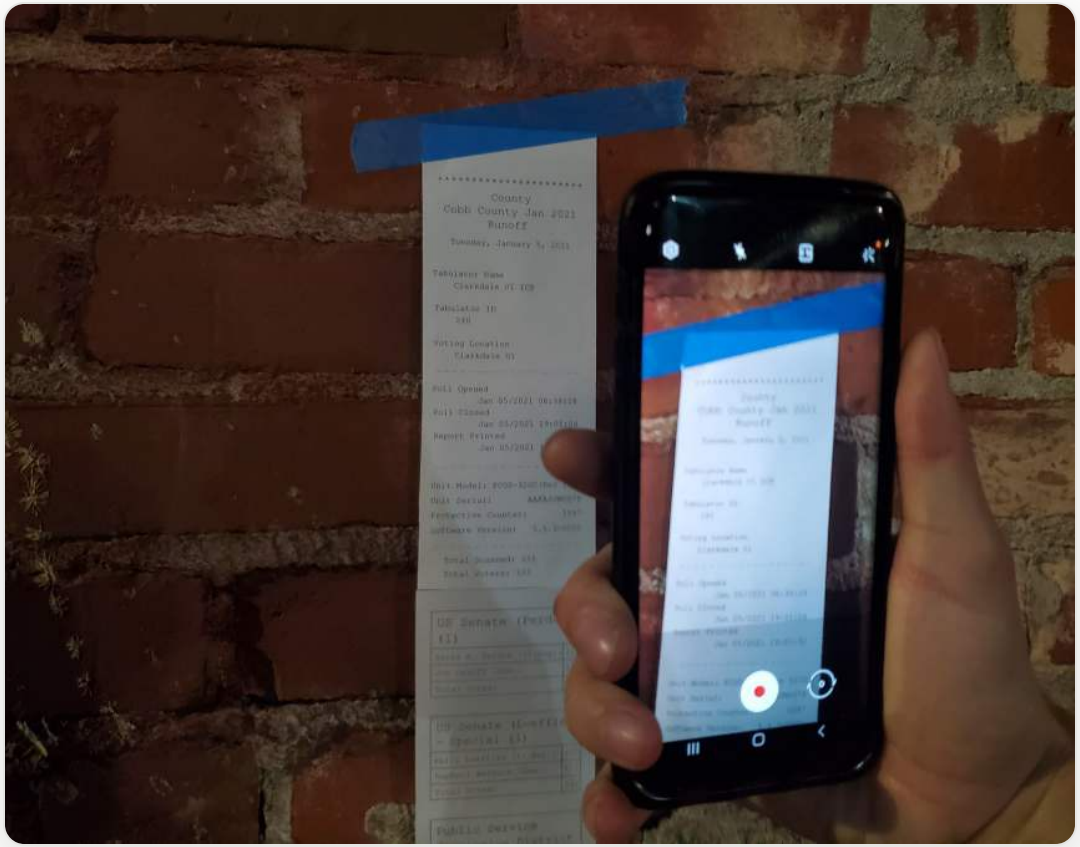
Actual Vote has been used in these states



- California
- Florida
- Georgia
- Illinois
- Indiana
- Massachusetts
- Minnesota
- Missouri
- New Hampshire
- New Jersey
- New York
- North Carolina
- Ohio
- Pennsylvania
- South Carolina
- Tennessee
- Virginia
- Wisconsin

States with published recordings or audit reports, as of October 2026. Past recordings: av.democracycounts.org

From the wall to the report



YOU

Record **one poll tape** per video

THE APP

Uploads it automatically, even later if you had no signal

THE ARCHIVE

We review it, then publish it at `av.democracycounts.org`

AMERICA COUNTS

Compares its numbers with the official results

Recording poll tapes on election night (reenactment)

WATCH FOR

- Walking up to the polling place after the polls close
- Finding the tapes at night with a flashlight
- Typing the precinct before recording
- Recording one tape, from the header down, slowly and steadily

Watch the 58-second video at `americacounts.us/make-your-plan` (section 5). It was filmed with an earlier version of the app; the screens look different, but the steps are the same.

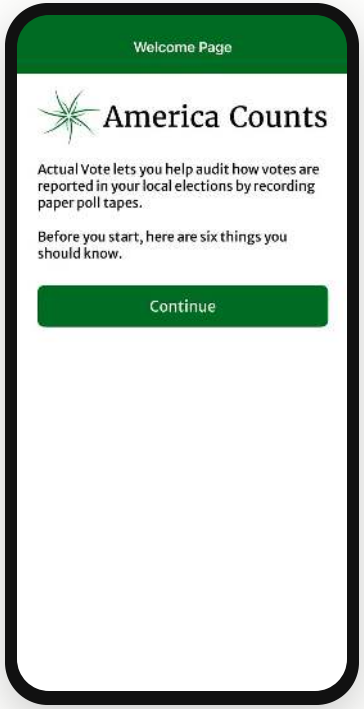
Get the app

- **Free** on iPhone and iPad (iOS 15 or later) and Android (8.0 or later): roughly any phone sold since 2017
- You sign in with a **Google account**. No account yet? Make one now, not on election night
- Each recording is about **20 MB**. Clear some space
- Or search **"Actual Vote"** in the App Store or Play Store

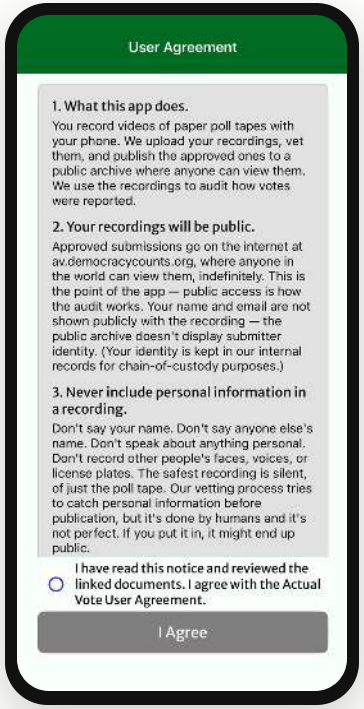
Download links

`americacounts.us/get-actual-vote`

First-time setup

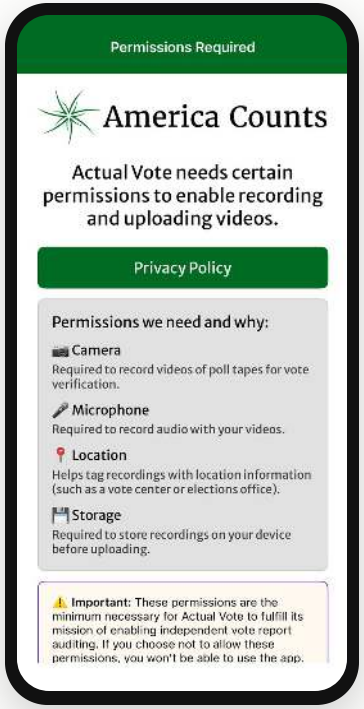


1 Welcome



2 Read it, especially **"your recordings will be public"**, and agree

3 America Counts isn't a government agency



4 **Allow** camera, mic, location and storage

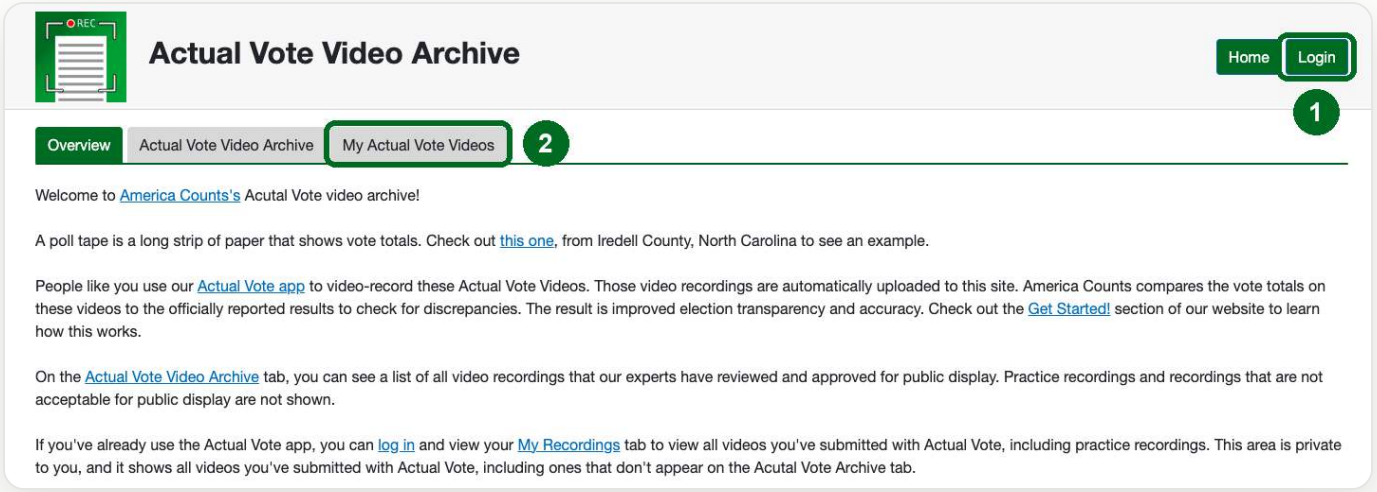
PART 2 · GET IT AND TEST IT

Practice before election night

1. Print the **practice poll tape** (americacounts.us/practice-poll-tape) and tape it to a wall (a grocery receipt works too)
2. Tap **Record** (you can type **"Practice"** as the precinct, or nothing) and record it top to bottom
3. Tap **Use Video**, then open **My Recordings** and wait for ✓ **Uploaded**
4. Watch it at av.democracycounts.org (next slide)

> **No app? Your phone's camera works.** Record the tapes and email **info@democracycounts.org** to arrange sending the videos. They're just as useful.

Watch your practice recording



1. Go to `av.democracycounts.org` and tap **Login**
2. Sign in with the **same Google account** you used in the app, then open **My Actual Vote Videos**
3. Watch your recording. Can you read every number?

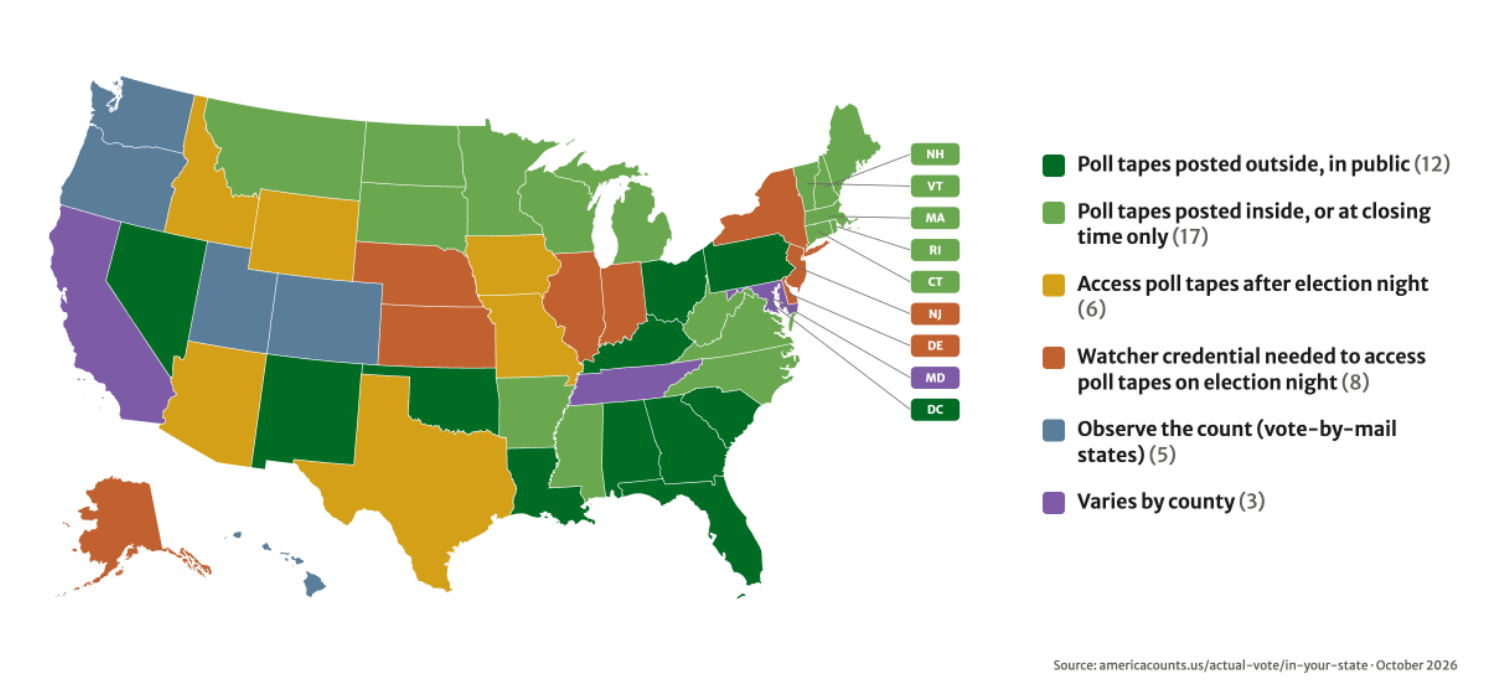
> **Only you can see it.** Practice recordings are never published.

Six ways to get poll tapes

WAY	WHERE IT WORKS	WHAT IT TAKES
1 **Record posted tapes at polling places**	States that post tapes outside	1–3 hours on election night
2 **Be there at the close, or observe the count**	States that post inside or count in public	One place at closing time
3 **Record early-voting tapes**	Most states with early voting	A phone call, then election night
4 **Serve as a poll worker, watcher or observer**	Any state, with an appointment	A full election day
5 **Book an appointment at your elections office**	Any state	A few hours, on your schedule
6 **File a public-records request**	Any state	Weeks of waiting

Your state's page says which ways work there, with phone and email scripts: americacounts.us/actual-vote/in-your-state

What's the deal in your state?



Every state handles poll tapes differently. Look yours up: what's posted, where and when, and the law behind it.
americacounts.us/actual-vote/in-your-state · Printable summary:
americacounts.us/files/poll-tape-access-by-state.pdf

Planning an election-night run

1. **Call your county elections office.** Confirm that tapes will be posted, and where
2. **Pick 1–4 polling places** and map a route. Allow about 15 minutes per stop
3. **Go with a partner**, or tell someone your route and when you'll be home
4. **Tell America Counts your plan** so we expect your videos

> Check your state's poll closing time. That's when poll workers **start** closing. The tapes can go up an hour or more later.

Tapes go up on doors, windows and walls, and not always at the front entrance.

A real run (Broward County, FL, 2020): 4 polling places, 7 tapes, home in just over 2 hours.

What to bring, and handy tips

Always go with a partner

Safer, and one of you can hold the light. Share your route with someone at home.

A flashlight, or two

Tapes are often posted in the dark. Bring a spare.

Phone fully charged, with free space

A full battery, room for every tape on your route, and the app open and signed in.

Sticky notes and a Sharpie

For jotting down the precinct, the time, or anything you want to remember.

Painter's tape

Masking or blue tape holds a curled tape flat without damaging it.

Comfortable shoes

You may walk a bit from the parking lot to where the tapes are posted.

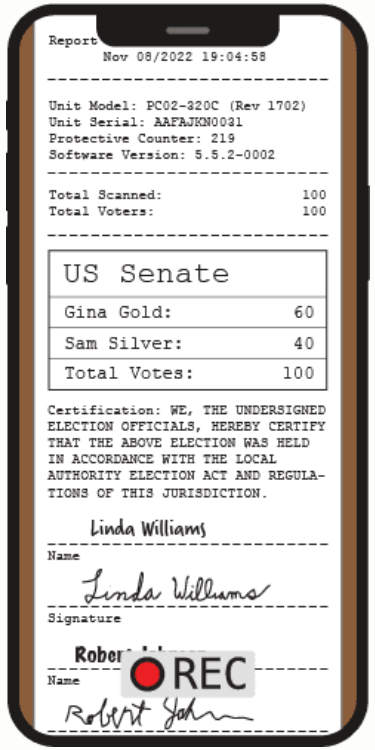
Dress for the weather

It's November, and you'll be outside after dark.

A folding step stool

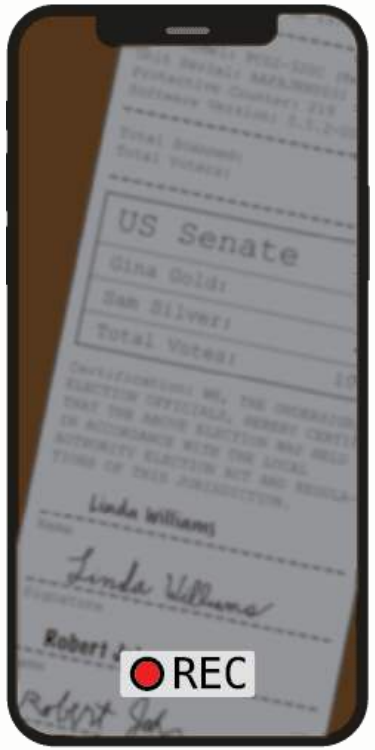
If you're not tall. Some tapes are posted high.

What a usable recording looks like



GREAT RECORDINGS ARE

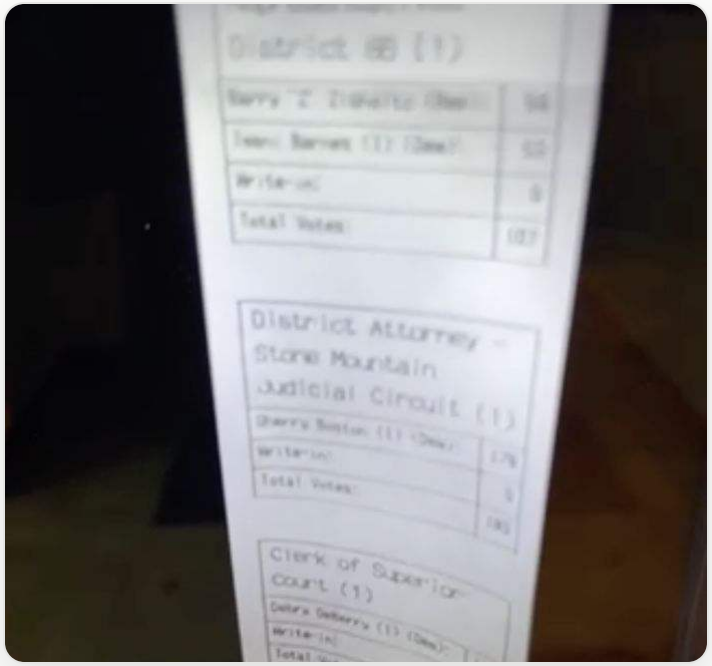
- ✓ In focus
- ✓ Straight
- ✓ Legible
- ✓ Well lit



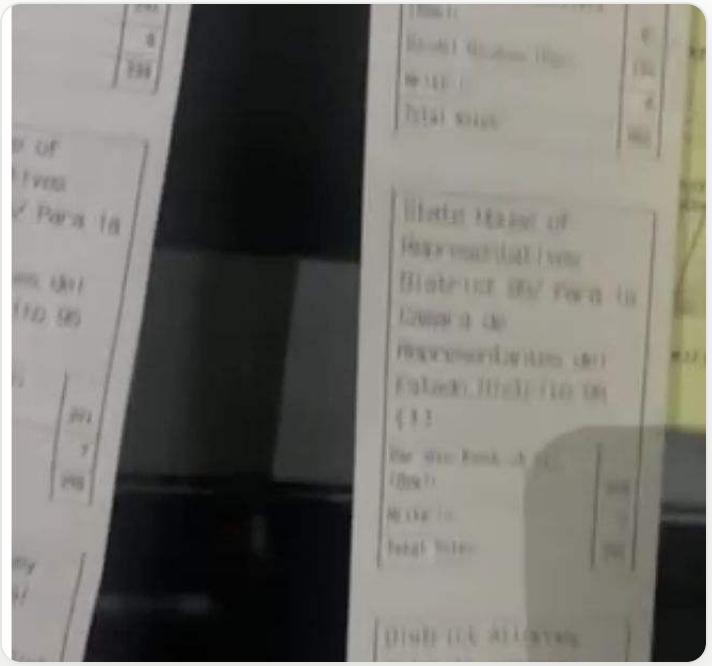
BAD RECORDINGS ARE

- ✗ Blurry
- ✗ Crooked
- ✗ Hard to read
- ✗ Dark

One tape per recording



One tape: AI reads it easily

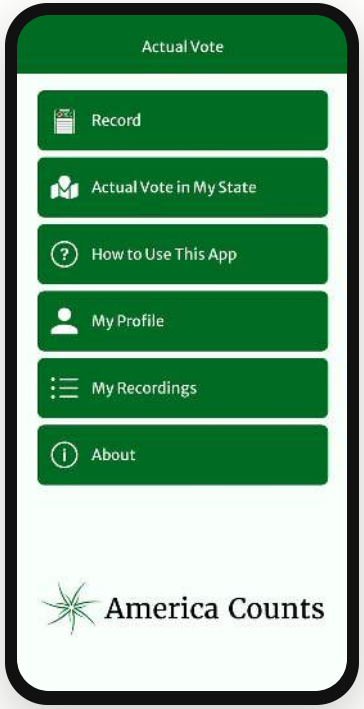


Angled, with a neighbor: doable

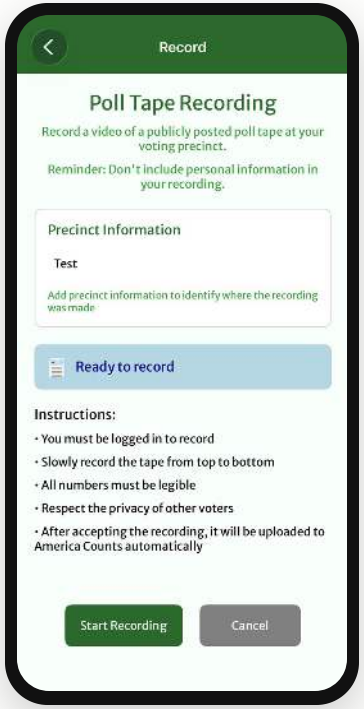
Several tapes: exhausting

Tapes posted side by side? Make **a separate recording for each one.**

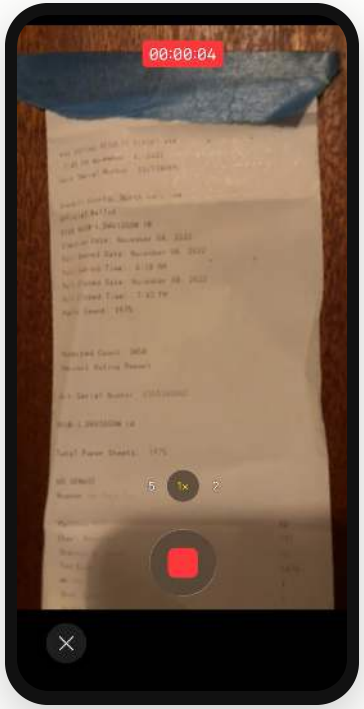
Making a recording in the app



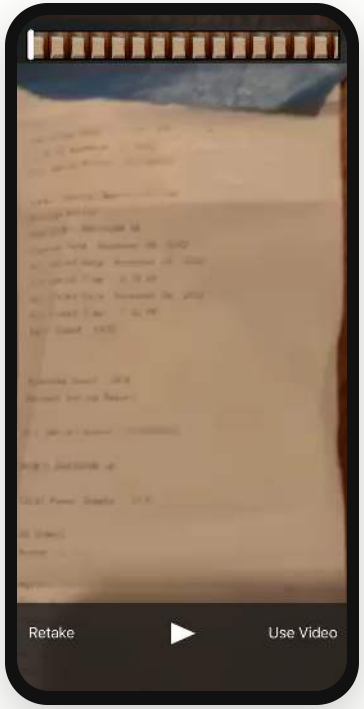
1 Tap **Record**



2 Optionally type the **precinct name**, then **Start Recording**



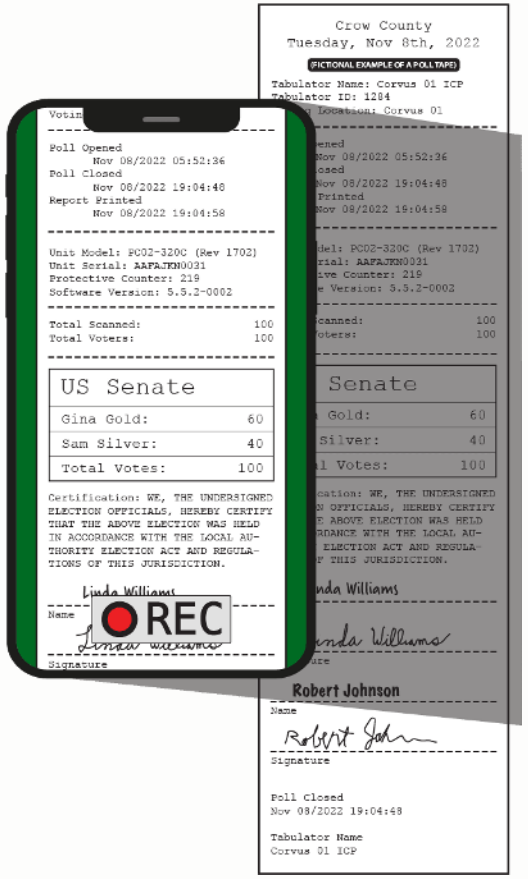
3 Record **slowly, top to bottom**. Tap the red button to stop



4 Blurry? **Retake**. Good? **Use Video**, and it uploads

How to record a tape

1. **Light it from an angle**, not head-on, so the flashlight doesn't glare off the paper or glass
2. **Start at the header** (county, precinct, date) and **pan slowly** down to the signatures
3. **Keep the tape straight** and upright in the frame
4. **Hold steady.** Brace your hand or phone against the wall
5. **Curled tape?** Tape the bottom down first
6. **Blurry?** Tap **Retake** and record it again



When it isn't perfect, record what you can

The tape is hard to read

Behind a window, partly blocked, ripped, or with tape covering a total? **Record whatever you can see.**

We'll use every number we can read, even if part of the tape is missing. The same goes for any odd situation we haven't covered here.

There are no tapes posted

If the tapes aren't where they're supposed to be, **record the empty spot**, and say out loud what you're seeing:

"There are no poll tapes posted on the door at this polling place."

Then tell us where and when.

Zero tapes and results tapes

- **Record every poll tape you see**, zero tapes included
- But know the difference. A **zero tape** is printed **before** the polls open: every total is 0, showing the machine started empty
- A **results tape** is printed **after** the polls close and shows the real vote totals. **That's the one the audit needs**
- **Only zero tapes?** Look around for the results tapes: other doors, windows and walls. If there are none, the poll workers may have posted the zero tape by mistake. Record it, and **tell us**

ZERO TAPE · BEFORE THE POLLS OPEN

*** Zero Totals Report ***

US Senate	
Gina Gold:	0
Sam Silver:	0
Total Votes:	0

RESULTS TAPE · AFTER THE POLLS CLOSE

Total Scanned:	100
Total Voters:	100

US Senate	
Gina Gold:	60
Sam Silver:	40
Total Votes:	100

Your recording will be public

The audio is published too

- **Try to keep other people's voices out** when it's practical
- Someone talks while you record? **No need to retake.** Background noise and passing conversation are fine
- You can **say the precinct name** out loud on the video
- Never anything **inappropriate**: personal details like names, phone numbers or addresses, or offensive language

Keep these out of frame

- Other people, especially children
- License plates
- Other papers with personal information
- Your own reflection in the glass

Never record while the polls are open unless poll workers say you may. Wait until closing is under way.

If someone approaches you

CURIOUS

"I'm recording the poll tapes with Actual Vote. America Counts compares them with the official results. It's non-partisan, and you can do it too."

SKEPTICAL, OR A POLL WORKER ASKS YOU TO STOP

"These tapes are public documents. Recording them after the polls close is legal, and it isn't for any campaign."

Give **one** calm explanation, and show our letter. If the answer is still no, stop and leave.

HOSTILE

"Okay, I'm leaving. Have a good night."

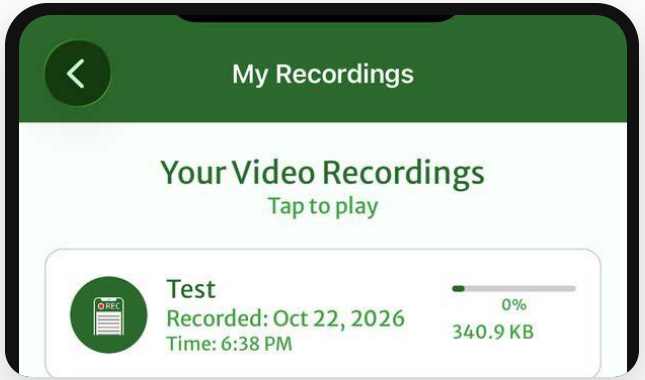
Then go. **Don't delete your recordings.** If police or the property owner ask you to leave, leave.

Carry our letter. Print the America Counts letter, on our letterhead, that explains what you're doing, and show it if someone asks. americacounts.us/files/field-letters/generic.pdf

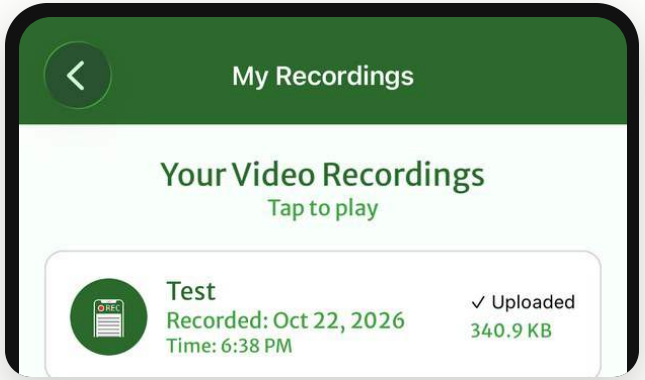
Be professional and friendly. Most people who ask are just curious, and some will want to join in.

Before you head home

- ☐ Open **My Recordings** and check that every recording says ✓ **Uploaded**
- ☐ **No signal?** The app keeps your recordings and uploads them once you're connected. **Don't delete the app**
- ☐ **Anything unusual?** No tape posted, only zero tapes, asked to leave: write down where and when, and tell us.

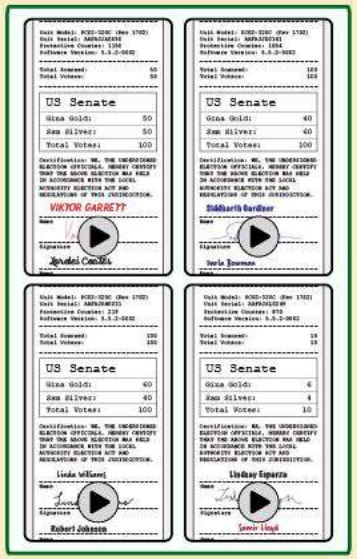


Still uploading (0%)



✓ **Uploaded:** done

Actual Vote Comparison Analysis



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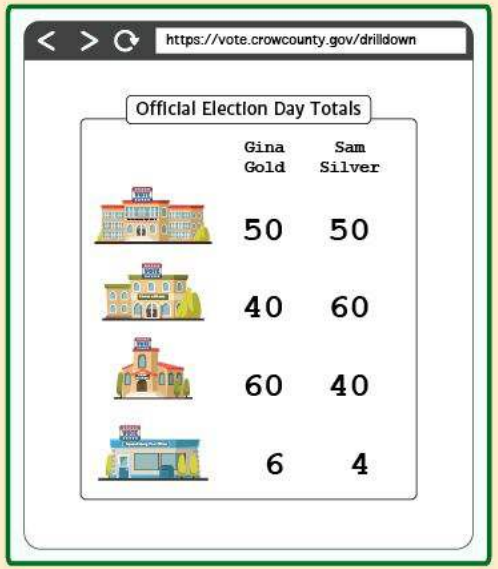


=

	Gina Gold		Sam Silver	
Precinct Name	Poll Tape	Official	Poll Tape	Official
Raven Academy High School	50	50	50	50
Clawson Library	40	40	60	60
Corvus Hill Community Center	60	60	40	40
Squawksburg Post Office	6	6	4	4

Everything checks out!

PART 5 · WHAT HAPPENS AFTER

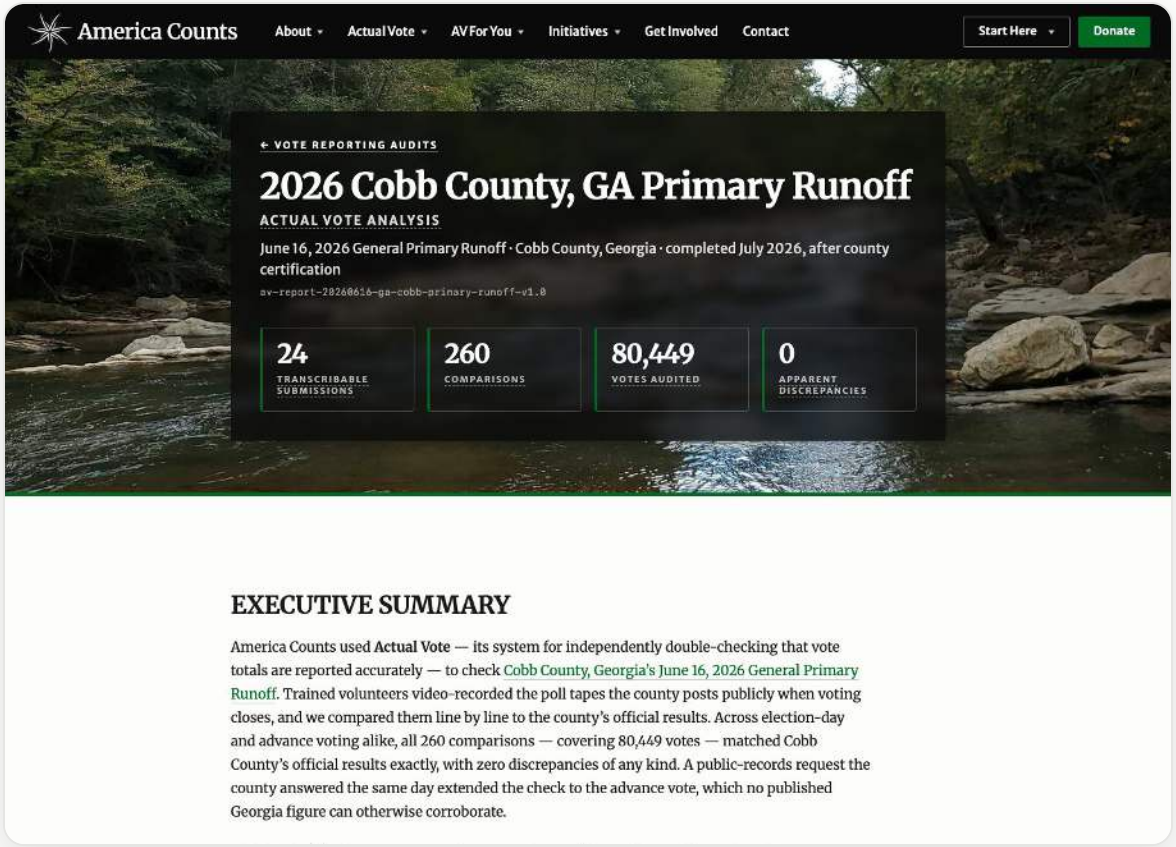
What happens to your recordings

1. A person **reviews** it
2. **Published** to the public archive
3. **Actual Vote Assist** reads the numbers. People check the unclear ones
4. **Compared** with the official results
5. Any difference is **investigated** with the county
6. A **public report**

This happens in the weeks after the election, aiming to finish before certification. **Most of the time everything checks out, and that confirmation is valuable.**

PART 5 · WHAT HAPPENS AFTER

Your recordings become a public report



- **Cobb County, GA, June 2026 runoff:** 24 volunteer recordings, 260 comparisons, 80,449 votes audited, 0 discrepancies
- Every tape is compared line by line with the county's official results, and every recording is linked so anyone can check
- **That's the transparency your work creates:** not "trust us", but public evidence that the votes were reported correctly

All our reports:
americacounts.us/actual-vote/vote-reporting-audits

PART 5 · WHAT HAPPENS AFTER

Fast enough to matter

THOUSANDS OF VIDEOS
Volunteers across the country upload them on election night

→

AI TRANSCRIPTION
High-throughput AI reads the numbers off every tape. People check the unclear ones

→

BEFORE CERTIFICATION
So we can finish the analysis before the results are certified

→

ACT OR CONFIRM
A discrepancy can still be acted on. No discrepancies? We publish the evidence

> If there's a problem, it's found while it can still be fixed. If there isn't, there's public evidence that the votes were reported correctly.

PART 5 · WHAT HAPPENS AFTER

Tell us your plan

Email **info@democracycounts.org** before election day with:

- Your county
- Which way you'll get the tapes
- About how many places or tapes

Then we know your videos are coming and can get them analyzed before certification.

Make your plan

americacounts.us/make-your-plan

GET STARTED

Try it yourself

Install the app, sign in, record the practice poll tape, and find your video in the archive (only you can see it).

1 · Get the app

americacounts.us/get-actual-vote

2 · Practice poll tape

americacounts.us/practice-poll-tape

3 · Find your video

av.democracycounts.org

Questions or your plan: info@democracycounts.org · Full guide: americacounts.us/using-actual-vote