

Election Integrity Win in Georgia: Election Board Reprimands Fulton County, Will Appoint Monitor for 2024

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The Georgia Election Board voted Tuesday to reprimand Fulton County for its conduct of the 2020 election and direct the appointment of an independent monitor to oversee this fall's general election. The [Georgia Recorder](#) reported that the 2-1 vote came after investigators from the Georgia secretary of state's office confirmed the county double-scanned 3,075 ballots during a statewide recount of the 2020 presidential election. There also was a dispute over 17,000 ballot images that are missing, according to a complaint.

Investigators concluded the errors in question would not have changed the overall result of the 2020 election in Georgia. Democrat Joe Biden defeated then-President Donald Trump by [11,779 votes](#), or about 0.3 percent of the nearly 5 million ballots cast. Biden carried Fulton County by approximately [243,000 votes](#), or 73 percent to 26 percent.

During the Election Board meeting, an investigator noted that an independent [audit](#) published in January 2021 and a Performance Review Board [review](#), requested by the Georgia lawmakers and released in January 2023, found significant issues in Fulton County's handling of ballots.

Georgia voter Joe Rossi [alleged](#) in a complaint reviewed by the board that the 2020 election was flawed, both in the machine count to certify the election and the hand recount done afterward. At Tuesday's [meeting](#), board member Janice Johnston asked [Charlene McGowan](#), general counsel for the Georgia secretary of state, about the more than 3,000 ballots that were double-scanned during the machine recount. "We did partially substantiate that we believe that there are duplicate ballot images. Whether or not those were actually included in the tabulated results is inconclusive," McGowan said.

Board chairman [John Fervier](#) followed up by noting there had been three different counts in Georgia in 2020: the election night results, the [machine recount](#) results and the results of the [hand recount](#) conducted later in November following discrepancies revealed by the machine recounts in some counties. The hand recount found Biden's win over Trump to be by about 1,200 fewer votes.

“So if there were duplicate ballots [counted], they would have shown in the hand recount ... Correct?” Fervier asked. “I think that's a reasonable assumption,” McGowan answered.

“The results of the recount were lower, somewhat lower, marginally lower than the originally certified results,” she said. “So if you had 3,000 ballots that were counted twice, you would expect the results to be larger by that amount.” Johnston also asked about 17,000 ballots that were counted but not scanned, wondering if the ballots really existed. “We have the paper ballots,” McGowan responded. “The paper ballots exist. There's no 17,000 missing ballots. The discrepancy, the 17,000 discrepancy, was because of that scanner error, the programming error in the scanner that got corrected. “The results were recertified and re-reported and that accounted for the 17,000 difference. There was no missing ballots. ... We have hand-counted every single ballot.”

Johnston chose to vote against the motion to simply reprimand Fulton County and appoint a monitor, arguing it did not go far enough. “With over 140 violations of election laws and rules, it would be a travesty not to refer this to the Attorney General and let this ride,” she said, according to the Georgia Recorder. Rossi, who was in attendance at Tuesday's board meeting, said his concerns about the 2020 election were vindicated. “It has now been factually proven both the hand audit and the certified machine count have both been found to be in violation of Georgia election law,” he told the board. “I'll close with one word: vindicated.”

The January 2021 independent audit [report](#) commissioned by the board identified [many abnormalities](#) in Fulton County's handling of ballots in the 2020 general election. “There were persistent chain of custody issues throughout the entire absentee ballot processing system,” the report said. It added that “the fact that ballots were delivered to State Farm Arena in unsecured mail carts is very concerning. ... Protocol for securing ballots exists not only to protect the ballots themselves but also to ensure that no ballot box stuffing occurred.”

On election night, party observers and media at [State Farm Arena](#) in Atlanta, the venue where votes were counted, were told counting had stopped, only for it to resume for nearly two more hours soon thereafter. The election review concluded that “the truth about what happened on the night of November 3rd between 10:30PM and 11:52PM [at State Farm Arena] continues to be elusive ... but if the [GOP] poll watchers are correct, then there is a serious problem.”

Fulton County registration chief [Ralph Jones](#), who was present at State Farm Arena that night, resigned in August 2021 after coming under intense criticism for the county’s handling of the 2020 election. Georgia Secretary of State Brad Raffensperger had called for his [firing](#), along with that of county election director Rick Barron, the previous month. Barron [resigned](#) in December 2021.