



Highlights of [GAO-08-814](#), a report to the Chairman, Committee on House Administration, House of Representatives

Why GAO Did This Study

The 2002 Help America Vote Act (HAVA) created the Election Assistance Commission (EAC) and, among other things, assigned the commission responsibility for testing and certifying voting systems. In view of concerns about voting systems and the important role EAC plays in certifying them, GAO was asked to determine whether EAC has (1) defined an effective approach to testing and certifying voting systems, (2) followed its defined approach, and (3) developed an effective mechanism to track problems with certified systems and use the results to improve its approach. To accomplish this, GAO compared EAC guidelines and procedures with applicable statutes, guidance, and best practices, and examined the extent to which they have been implemented.

What GAO Recommends

GAO is making recommendations to EAC relative to establishing and implementing plans to better define and implement its certification program. GAO is also proposing that Congress consider expanding EAC's role under HAVA to include facilitating understanding and resolution of shared problems with noncertified voting systems and providing it with the resources to accomplish this. EAC stated that it generally agrees with GAO's conclusion that its certification program needs to improve and that it accepts GAO's recommendations. It also provided other comments, some of which GAO used to clarify its findings, one recommendation, and its proposal to amend HAVA.

To view the full product, including the scope and methodology, click on [GAO-08-814](#). For more information, contact Randolph C. Hite at (202) 512-3439 or hiter@gao.gov.

ELECTIONS

Federal Program for Certifying Voting Systems Needs to Be Further Defined, Fully Implemented, and Expanded

What GAO Found

EAC has defined an approach to testing and certifying voting systems that follows a range of relevant practices and statutory requirements associated with a product certification program, including those published by U.S. and international standards organizations, and those reflected in HAVA. EAC, however, has yet to define its approach in sufficient detail to ensure that certification activities are performed thoroughly and consistently. This lack of definition also has caused voting system manufacturers and test laboratories to interpret program requirements differently, and the resultant need to reconcile these differences has contributed to delays in certifying systems that several states were intending to use in the 2008 elections. According to EAC officials, these definitional gaps can be attributed to the program's youth and the commission's limited resources being devoted to other priorities. Nevertheless, they said that they intend to address these gaps, but added that they do not yet have written plans for doing so.

EAC has largely followed its defined approach for each of the dozen systems it is in the process of certifying, with one major exception. Specifically, it has not established an effective and efficient repository for certified versions of voting system software, or related procedures and tools, for states and local jurisdictions to use in verifying that their acquired voting systems are identical to what EAC has certified. Further, EAC officials told GAO that they do not have a documented plan or requirements for a permanent solution. As an interim solution, they stated that they will maintain copies of certified versions in file cabinets and mail copies of these versions upon their request by states and local jurisdictions. In GAO's view, this process puts states and local jurisdictions at increased risk of using a version of a system during an election that differs from the certified version.

Under its voting system testing and certification program, EAC has broadly described an approach for tracking problems with certified voting systems and using this information to improve its certification program. While this approach is consistent with some aspects of relevant guidance, key elements are either missing or inadequately defined. According to EAC officials, while they intend to address some of these gaps, they do not have documented plans for doing so. In addition, even if EAC defines and implements an effective approach, it would not affect the vast majority of voting systems that are to be used in the 2008 elections. This is because the commission's approach only applies to those voting systems that it has certified, and it is unlikely that any voting systems will be certified in time to be used in the upcoming elections. Moreover, because most states do not currently require EAC certification for their voting systems, it is uncertain if this situation will change relative to future elections. As a result, states and other election jurisdictions are on their own to discover, disclose, and address any shared problems with these noncertified systems.