

QR CODES & HAVA

What voters verify, what tabulators read, & what audits check

Some ballot marking devices (BMDs) print both human-readable selections and a QR code or barcode encoding those selections. Voters review the printed text. Depending on the system, a tabulator may count human-readable marks or vote-encoded data.

What does a QR code on a ballot actually do?

Some BMDs produce a paper ballot with two versions of the voter's selections:

- Human-readable text the voter reviews.
- A QR code or barcode that allows compatible equipment to read vote-encoded data.

The voter reviews the printed selections on the paper ballot. Depending on the voting system and its configuration, the scanner may tabulate the human-readable marks or the vote-encoded data. Not every voting system uses vote-encoded QR codes or barcodes. Systems that do use them do not all operate the same way.

SAMPLE BALLOT
General Election
County of Example

For Governor
Vote for One

☒ George Washington
☐ Alexander Hamilton
☐ James Madison



Human-readable text the voter reviews

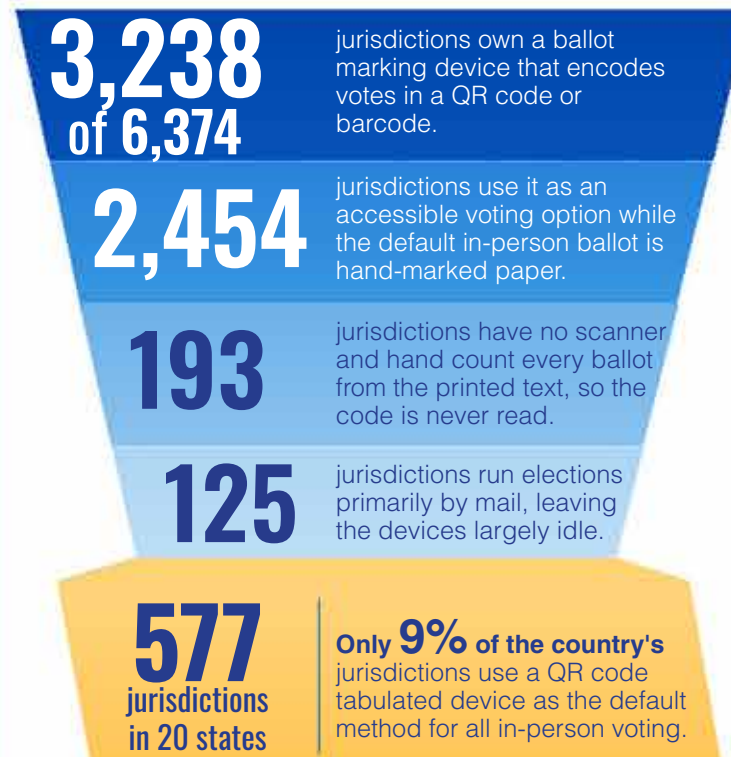
QR code or barcode the scanner may read

Why are codes used?

Encoded data give tabulators a standardized way to read a stack of ballots that have:

- several ballot styles
 - randomized candidate order
 - multiple languages
 - ranked-choice voting
- The code is printed on the paper ballot next to the human-readable text. The paper ballot remains available for post-election procedures such as audits and recounts.

How common are QR code configurations for voters?



 Georgia alone accounts for **159** of those jurisdictions.



Absentee and mail voters use hand-marked paper ballots, so they don't interface with QR code configurations.

The vote-encoded QR code is the counting mechanism for a small and shrinking slice of American ballots.

What is the DHS/DOJ HAVA inquiry?

The federal inquiry focuses on a legal question under the Help America Vote Act, or HAVA. The issue is whether certain voting system configurations that tabulate vote selections from a QR code or barcode satisfy HAVA's requirements for a manually auditable permanent paper record.

52 U.S.C. § 21081(a)(2)(B)(i): *"The voting system shall produce a permanent paper record with a manual audit capacity for such system."*

The DHS letter alleges that QR codes can be "disassociated" from the human-readable text. More plainly, that means DHS claims the QR codes and the text don't match.

What does the evidence show?

There is no evidence of widespread code/text mismatches. The audit results listed below prove not only the lack of mismatches but that there were in fact none.

- **Georgia 2024 General Election:** 5,297,262 ballots audited. No confirmed QR-code/text mismatches.
- **Georgia November 2025 Special & Municipal Elections:** 1,581,539 ballots audited. No confirmed QR-code/text mismatches.
- **Georgia May 19, 2026, Primary:** 2,081,900 ballots audited. No confirmed QR-code/text mismatches.
- **Georgia June 16, 2026, Primary Runoff:** 1,111,856 ballots audited. No confirmed QR-code/text mismatches.

The known mismatch case — Northampton County, Pennsylvania (2023)

A ballot-programming error caused the printed human-readable text for two judicial retention questions to show the voter's "yes" and "no" selections swapped. The barcode recorded each voter's actual choice correctly, and the official tally was accurate. Voters caught the error because they read the printed text.

So, what is the problem?

Currently, very few states specify that IF there is a discrepancy between the QR code and the human-readable text, the voter verified human-readable text is the artifact of record—meaning that the words the voter read and confirmed are their official vote, not what the QR code says. If the text presumptively controls, the paper the voter reviewed is the record against which any audit or recount measures the machine count. And, the QR code is reduced to what it has always been in practice: a reading aid for the scanner, not the vote itself.

Sources: Verified Voting, *The Verifier* – November 2026 (jurisdiction and equipment data as of Oct. 6, 2026); DHS letter to DOJ, Sept. 2, 2026; Georgia Secretary of State ballot image audits (2024, 2025, May 2026, June 2026, combined May–June 2026).