

U.S. Elections: Will the Dead Vote and Voting Machines be Hacked?

Electronic voting machines leave no paper trail

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"He who casts a vote decides nothing. He who counts the vote decides everything."
Joseph Stalin

Whether or not he said it, Stalin's quote has entered into folklore. For a vote to mean anything, those counting the ballots must have a greater respect for the integrity of democracy than they have lust for power.

Since Stalin's time, the technology has changed. With electronic voting machines, which leave no paper trail and are programmed with proprietary software, the count can be decided before the vote. Those who control the electronics can simply program voting machines to elect the candidate they want to win. Electronic voting is not transparent. When you vote electronically, you do not know for whom you are voting. Only the machine knows.

According to most polls, the race for the White House is too-close-to-call. History has shown that when an election is close and there's no expectation for a clear winner, these are the easiest ones to steal. Even more important, the divergence between exit polls, perhaps indicating the real winner, and the stolen result, if not overdone, can be very small. Those who stole the election can easily put on TV enough experts to explain that the divergence between the exit polls and the vote count is not statistically significant or is because women or racial minorities or members of one party were disproportionately questioned in exit polls.

There have been recent reports that, because of costs, exit polls in the 2012 presidential election will no longer be conducted on the usual comprehensive basis in order to save money. If the reports are correct, no check remains on election theft.

Digital Votes

In a fascinating article in Harper's Magazine (October 26, 2012) Victoria Collier notes that in the old technology, election theft depended on the power of machine politicians, such as Louisiana Senator Huey Long, to prevent exposure.

With the advent of modern technology, Collier writes that "a brave new world of election rigging emerged." The brave new world of election theft was created by "the mass adoption of computerized voting technology and the outsourcing of our elections to a handful of corporations that operate in the shadows, with little oversight or accountability. This privatization of our elections has occurred without public knowledge or consent, leading to

one of the most dangerous and least understood crisis in the history of American democracy. We have actually lost the ability to verify election results.”

The old ballot-box fraud was localized and limited in its reach. Electronic voting allows elections to be rigged on a statewide and national scale. Moreover, with electronic voting there are no missing ballot boxes to recover from the Louisiana bayous. Using proprietary corporate software, the vote count is what the software specifies.

The first two presidential elections in the 21st century are infamous. George W. Bush’s win over Al Gore was decided by the Republicans on the US Supreme Court who stopped the Florida vote recount.

In 2004, George W. Bush won the vote count although exit polls indicated that he had been defeated by John Kerry. Collier reports:

“Late on Election Day, John Kerry showed an insurmountable lead in exit polling, and many considered his victory all but certified. Yet the final vote tallies in thirty states deviated widely from exit polls, with discrepancies favoring George W. Bush in all but nine. The greatest disparities were concentrated in battleground states – particularly Ohio. In one Ohio precinct, exit polls indicated that Kerry should have received 67 percent of the vote, but the certified tally gave him only 38 percent. The odds of such an unexpected outcome occurring only as a result of sampling error are 1 in 867,205,553. To quote Lou Harris, who has long been regarded as the father of modern political polling: ‘Ohio was as dirty an election as America has ever seen.’”

The electronic vote theft era, Collier reports, “was inaugurated by Chuck Hagel, an unknown millionaire who ran for one of Nebraska’s U.S. Senate seats in 1996. Initially Hagel trailed the popular Democratic governor, Ben Nelson, who had been elected in a landslide two years earlier. Three days before the election, however, a poll conducted by the Omaha World-Herald showed a dead heat, with 47 percent of respondents favoring each candidate. David Moore, who was then managing editor of the Gallup Poll, told the paper, ‘We can’t predict the outcome.’”

“Hagel’s victory in the general election, invariably referred to as an ‘upset,’ handed the seat to the G.O.P. for the first time in eighteen years. Hagel trounced Nelson by fifteen points. Even for those who had factored in the governor’s deteriorating numbers and a last-minute barrage of negative ads, this divergence from pre-election polling was enough to raise eyebrows across the nation.”

“Few Americans knew that until shortly before the election, Hagel had been chairman of the company whose computerized voting machines would soon count his own votes: Election Systems & Software (then called American Information Systems). Hagel stepped down from his post just two weeks before announcing his candidacy. Yet he retained millions of dollars in stock in the McCarthy Group, which owned ES&S. And Michael McCarthy, the parent company’s founder, was Hagel’s campaign treasurer.”

Vote theft might also explain the defeat of Max Cleland, a Democratic Senator from Georgia. As Collier documents:

“In Georgia, for example, Diebold’s voting machines reported the defeat of Democratic senator Max Cleland. Early polls had given the highly popular Cleland a solid lead over

his Republican opponent, Saxby Chambliss, a favorite of the Christian right, the NRA, and George W. Bush (who made several campaign appearances on his behalf). As Election Day drew near, the contest narrowed. Chambliss, who had avoided military service, ran attack ads denouncing Cleland – a Silver Star recipient who lost three limbs in Vietnam – as a traitor for voting against the creation of the Department of Homeland Security. Two days before the election, a Zogby poll gave Chambliss a one-point lead among likely voters, while the Atlanta Journal-Constitution reported that Cleland maintained a three-point advantage with the same group.”

Rigged Game

“Cleland lost by seven points. In his 2009 autobiography, he accused computerized voting machines of being ‘ripe for fraud.’ Patched for fraud might have been more apt. In the month leading up to the election, Diebold employees, led by Bob Urosevich, applied a mysterious, uncertified software patch to 5,000 voting machines that Georgia had purchased in May.”

“We were told that it was intended to fix the clock in the system, which it didn’t do,” Diebold consultant and whistle-blower Chris Hood recounted in a 2006 Rolling Stone article. “The curious thing is the very swift, covert way this was done. . . . It was an unauthorized patch, and they were trying to keep it secret from the state. . . . We were told not to talk to county personnel about it. I received instructions directly from [Bob] Urosevich. It was very unusual that a president of the company would give an order like that and be involved at that level.”

When the Republican Supreme Court prevented the Florida recount in the deciding state between George W. Bush and Al Gore in the 2000 presidential election, the Democrats’ response was to acquiesce in order not to shake the confidence of Americans in democracy. Similarly, John Kerry acquiesced in 2004 despite the large disparity between exit polls and vote counts. But how can Americans have confidence in democracy when voting is not transparent?

For now Republicans seem to have the technological advantage with their ownership of companies that produce electronic voting machines programmed by proprietary software, but in the future the advantage could shift to Democrats. Early voting aids electronic election theft. Successful and noncontroversial theft depends on knowing how to program the machines. The victory needs to be within the range of plausibility. Too big a victory raises eyebrows, but if the guess is wrong in the other direction theft fails. Early voting helps the voting machine programmers decide how to set the machines.

Voting 2.0

The absence of transparency is a threat to whatever remains of American democracy. In the Summer 2011 issue of *The Trends Journal*, Gerald Celente made the point that “if we can bank online, we can vote online.”

Think about it! Across the globe, trillions of dollars of bank transactions are made each day, and rarely are they compromised. If we can accurately count money online, we can certainly count votes accurately online. The only obstacles blocking online voting are entrenched political interests intent upon controlling the ballot box.

The lack of transparency has given rise to election litigation. Yesterday, *The Washington*

Postreported that “thousands of attorneys, representing the two major presidential candidates, their parties, unions, civil rights groups and voter-fraud watchdogs, are in place across the country, poised to challenge election results that may be called into question by machine failures, voter suppression or other allegations of illegal activity.”

Voting online, if properly arranged, can provide the transparency that the current system lacks. While the GOP might remain active in voter suppression, the Democrats could no longer vote graveyards, and the count of those who do manage to vote would not be subject to secret proprietary software.

In 2005 the nonpartisan Commission on Federal Election Reform concluded that the integrity of elections was compromised by those who controlled the programming. Proprietary private ownership of voting technology is simply incompatible with transparent elections. A country without a transparent vote is a country without democracy.

Dr. Paul Craig Roberts was Assistant Secretary of the Treasury for Economic Policy and associate editor of the Wall Street Journal.

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