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Are American elections fixed?

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“The right of voting for representatives is the primary right by which all other rights are protected. To take away this right is to reduce a man to slavery.”—Thomas Paine

“It doesn’t matter who casts the ballots. What matters is who counts the ballots.”—attributed to Joseph Stalin

Доверяйте но проверяйте (Trust, but verify)—Ronald Reagan’s favorite Russian proverb

April 3, 2003—Might it be possible that, due to GOP control of computer voting machines, the electoral “fix” is in, and that as a result nothing short of a revolution will ever budge the Republican Party from control of the Congress and the White House? In other words, is it not conceivable that our “democracy” is more than “threatened”—it is in fact *finished, done for, kaput?* And we are not even aware of it?

Imagine the following election procedure:

- Paper ballots are marked, in secret and deposited by the voters in sealed ballot boxes. (So far, so good).
- The ballot boxes are then delivered to the offices of a private firm, which is publicly known to be a supporter of and contributor to one of the political parties.
- Upon receipt of the ballot boxes, the doors are locked and no one other than employees of that firm is allowed to inspect and validate the counting.
- The ballots are then destroyed, after which the results are announced.
- The firm’s favorite candidate is declared the winner. The final results vary radically from pre-election polls.

Sounds like a Soviet “election,” doesn’t it? Like something that a dictator might dream up to assure himself a lifetime office. But surely, such a “fix” is too transparently and shamelessly obvious for anyone to think he could get away with it.

And yet this scenario is an exact analogy, in all relevant respects, to the “computer touch screen” voting system that has been rushed into use, following the fiasco of the 2000 presidential election.

Consider:

- There are, in all, 13 manufacturers of electronic voting machines, of which two, ES&S and Diebold, are predominant. Both are owned and operated by individuals with right-wing political views, who are heavy contributors to the Republican Party.
- ES&S and Diebold machines use “proprietary” source codes (i.e., not available for public inspection and analysis), and leave no “paper record” of their tallies.

- “Exit polling,” a reliable validation method which has proven to be much more accurate than pre-election polling, was “withdrawn” soon after the polls closed in the November 2002 election. Voter News Service (VNS), a consortium owned by the major cable and broadcast TV networks, reported that the system “collapsed,” due to “technical problems.”
- In a comparison of the polling and results of 19 2002 election races by [Scoop](#), 14 showed a post poll swing to the Republicans (many far outside the margin of error), two showed a swing to the Democrats (all within the margin of error), and three were “close to correct.” If the pre-election poll predictions had been correct, the Democrats would now control the Senate.
- “The state where the biggest upset occurred, Georgia, is also the state that ran its elections with the most electronic voting machines.” (The “swing” to the Republican was from 9–12 points). ([Scoop](#)).

Finally, and most significantly: Does all this suggest that “the fix was in?” *Perhaps*. Is there any way of knowing this? *Absolutely not*: The exit polls were cancelled, there is no independent record (e.g., on paper) of the ballots, and the machines and their software are not available for inspection.

In sum, writes [Thom Hartmann](#):

You’d think in an open democracy that the government—answerable to all its citizens rather than a handful of corporate officers and stockholders—would program, repair, and control the voting machines. You’d think the computers that handle our cherished ballots would be open and their software and programming available for public scrutiny. You’d think there would be a paper trail of the vote which could be followed and audited if there was evidence of voting fraud or if exit polls disagree with computerized vote counts.

You’d be wrong.

So is it possible, just possible, that the electoral “fix” is in, and that as a result nothing short of a revolution will ever budge the Republican Party from control of the Congress and the White House? In other words, is it not conceivable that our “democracy” is more than “threatened”—it is in fact *finished, done for, kaput*? And we are not even aware of it?

This issue of ballot integrity—the very heart of a democratic politics—should be the number one political issue in the United States today.

And yet, this issue is totally absent from the corporate media. I can testify that I have not heard or read a word about it on television, the radio, or the commercial press.

Have you?

It seems that the studies and reports of this potentially ultimate betrayal of our democracy, are confined to the progressive Internet. (For “gateway” to this issue, see [“Electoral Integrity”](#))

Meanwhile on the progressive Internet (while it lasts!) the optimists hopefully predict that the Bushistas will be thrown out of office in 2004. On the other hand, the pessimists suspect that due to a “national emergency,” the 2004 election will be cancelled.

But if our worst fears about the betrayal of our franchise are true, both speculations are moot. Why should those who own the ballot boxes and who program the “proprietary” software (meaning, “those who count the votes”), fear, much less cancel an election when they control the outcome? *Of course* there will be an election following which George Bush and his Republican Congress will be proclaimed “the peoples’ choice”—a result which will be predetermined by those damnable “black boxes”—“the peoples’ will *IN*, and Garbage *OUT*.”

Only an aroused public can prevent this—a public demanding investigation by the media (fat chance!) and/or the Congress or state legislatures.

We can well imagine the rebuttals to these concerns: “Aw, c’mon! These are paranoid ravings! Surely you can’t believe that our national elections are fixed and that our national leaders are not fairly and honestly elected?”

Well, perhaps our critics are right. The ballot boxes, and hence our elections, are 100 percent copacetic. But, given the nature of the technology, *how can we know this?* Moreover, and fundamentally, *don’t we have a right to verifiable guarantees that our votes, all of them, will be counted?*

If our elections are to be fair races, then neither party should have any objections to the adoption of rigorous validation procedures, most notably: (a) random inspection of computer voting machines after the election, (b) publication of the software code, and (c) paper “receipts” given to each voter to inspect upon completion of his voting, to be then deposited in a “backup” ballot box.

“Backup” validation procedures, most notably a preservation of paper ballots, have been implicit in our elections from the very founding of our republic. Until now, that is.

These methods for protecting our fundamental citizen rights to free and fair elections are simple, straightforward and compellingly obvious. Accordingly, if any political party or faction objects to such validation procedures, especially if supporters of that party manufacture, own, program and control those machines, we should immediately become suspicious and demand accountability.

Again, perhaps the condition of our franchise is entirely benign and our fears are unfounded. But we are entitled to more than the word of the partisans who own and control the machines.

It is up to the citizens to demand legislation that mandates accountability and validation in our elections. And if our senators and congressmen do not support such legislation, we must then insist that they explain their opposition.

While we demand action at the federal level, we must at the same time take the issue up with the states. Best case: find a state government with a Democratic governor and legislature, and insist that they launch an investigation. If they hit “pay dirt,” then their discoveries will have immediate application to the nation as a whole.

Candidates defeated in questionable elections should file suit, and then use the weapon of legal “discovery” to full advantage.

We must demand investigations of the election of 2002, including a thorough technical examination of the computer voting machines and their software. Simulated machine-generated voting distortions should be attempted and studied (e.g., software which converts 50/50 input to 60/40 output). Error detection programs must be required in the software.

Finally, we must insist that unless these and the aforementioned safeguards (e.g., paper receipts) are met, balloting that can’t be confirmed must be outlawed outright.

This is all so simple, so obvious, so fundamental to the integrity of our (alleged) democracy.

So why do we hear nothing about this in our Congress?

Why are the media silent about this issue?

Causes one to wonder and to harbor dark suspicions, doesn’t it?

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