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Electronic Voting

Never say Die-bold: So you don't think the Bush campaign stole this election? Think again

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November 5, 2004—If you're looking for one word to sum up the way the Bush-Cheney campaign stole another election Tuesday besides obvious ones like "cheated," try this one: Diebold.

An election judge where I voted Tuesday in a heavily Democratic precinct in Maryland knows what that means and wasn't averse to sharing his opinion of the Republican-owned company. As I was about to vote with the electronic system, I asked this judge if they had a way to check people's votes through a paper backup.

The official said no, and then in a low voice so no one else would hear, added, "And that really makes us nervous, with Diebold as the owner of that system."

Goodbye, hanging chads. Hello, computer fraud that leaves no trace.

Diebold Inc. of North Canton, Ohio, supplied scores of machines and counted millions of votes Tuesday, while reportedly discarding many votes for Democrat John Kerry, according to investigative reporter Greg Palast. Walden O'Dell, chief executive of Diebold and a top fundraiser for the Bush campaign, wrote in a fund-raising letter last year that he was "committed to helping Ohio deliver its electoral votes to the president next year."

That he did.

Software errors involving the system can change results, computer scientists say. Since the majority of touch screens in the United States do not produce paper records, the machines could alter ballots without anyone noticing.

"What has most concerned scientists are problems that are not observable, so the fact that no major problems were observed says nothing about the system," David Jefferson, a computer scientist at Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory in California, told the Associated Press. "The fact that we had a relatively smooth election yesterday does not change at all the vulnerability these systems have to fraud or bugs."

Some 8.2 percent of touch-screen votes in senatorial elections between 1998 and 2000 were lost, according to an MIT/CalTech study. That was more than any other system except lever machines, which lost 9.5 percent of votes.

Bev Harris, author of Black Box Voting and the BlackBoxVoting.org website, has documented numerous cases of electronic disasters. One occurred in Volusia County, Fla., in 2000 in which county election officials hand recounted more than 184,000 paper ballots used to feed the computerized system, after the central ballot-counting computer showed a Socialist Party candidate receiving more than 9,000 votes and Al Gore getting minus 19,000. Another 4,000 votes were received for Bush that should not have been there.

Election officials eventually tallied Gore beating Bush by 97,063 votes to 82,214. But the wrong numbers had already been sent to the media, which were used by FOX and other networks to erroneously call the election for Bush and swing the public relations part of the recount battle in his favor.

On Tuesday, Election Protection, a program of People for the American Way, had more than 15,000 calls to its hotline about ballot problems, voter intimidation and other situations.

The Institute for Public Accuracy also outlined various problems. Susan Truitt, co-founder of the Citizens Alliance for Secure Elections, was quoted on its site saying that seven counties in Ohio had electronic voting machines without paper trails, and scientific exit polls showed Kerry with the lead. But verifying votes was impossible, she said.

“A recount without a paper trail is meaningless; you just get a regurgitation of the data,” Truitt said. “A poll worker told me [Wednesday] morning that there were no tapes of the results posted on some machines; on other machines the posted count was zero, which obviously shouldn’t be the case.”

Other problems Include Ohio’s Version of Katherine Harris

There were many other problems in Ohio. Like in Florida, the Ohio secretary of state, Ken Blackwell, made decisions on what could be counted and other important matters even as he shilled for Bush as a co-chair of his campaign. This raised serious conflict-of-interest concerns, said Ohio state Senator Teresa Fedor.

“There is a pattern of voter suppression; that’s why I called for Blackwell’s resignation more than a month ago,” she said. “Blackwell, while claiming to run an unbiased elections process, was also the co-chair of the Bush-Cheney campaign in Ohio. Additionally, he was the spokesperson for the anti-business, anti-family constitutional amendment ‘Issue 1,’ and a failed initiative to repeal a crucial sales-tax revenue source for the state. Blackwell learned his moves from the Katherine Harris playbook of Florida 2000, and we won’t stand for it.”

The Ohio tally also included a version of the Florida butterfly ballot, said Bob Fittrakis, an attorney with Election Protection. The absentee ballots were misleading in Franklin County,” he said. “Kerry was the third line down, but you had to punch number four to vote for him. Bush was getting both his votes as well as Kerry’s.”

There were also far fewer machines in the inner-city districts than in the suburbs, Fittrakis said. “I documented at least a dozen people leaving because the lines were so long in African-American areas,” he said. “Blackwell did a great deal of suppressing before the election—like attempting to refuse to process voter registration forms.”

I heard a report that one Ohio voter had to wait in line 15 hours to vote. In one of the busiest precincts in Columbus, Blackwell only supplied it with three voting machines. How many people gave up and did not vote there?

Dirty tricks by Republicans on the Rise

A few days before the 2004 election, the Washington Post published an article detailing increasing dirty tricks, mostly by Republicans.

In Lake County, Ohio, some people received a memo on bogus board of elections letterhead informing voters who registered through Democratic and NACCP drives that they could not vote.

In the Sunshine State’s Leon County, students at Florida State and Florida A&M universities who signed petitions to legalize medical marijuana or impose stiffer penalties for child molesters unknowingly had their party registration switched to Republican and their addresses changed. The latter would affect their

ability to vote since they would not be registered at the proper site. The media traced the source to a group hired by the Florida Republican Party.

In Allegheny County, Pa., fliers on a bogus county letterhead were handed out and mailed, saying that “due to immense voter turnout expected on Tuesday,” the election had been extended. Republicans should vote Tuesday, while Democrats should vote on Wednesday, the wrong day.

In some Milwaukee black neighborhoods, a flyer warned people that they could not vote in that election if they had already voted in another election that year. “If you violate any of these laws, you can get ten years in prison and your children will get taken away from you,” the flyer said.

In Charleston County, S.C., a fake letter supposedly from the NAACP threatens voters who have outstanding parking tickets or have failed to pay child support with arrest. A similar flyer was distributed in Baltimore in 2002.

Such tricks are not new. There are famous examples like the 1971 break-in of Democratic National Committee headquarters by Nixon operatives. There are also many lesser known examples. In 2002, Ron Kirk, a former Dallas mayor who ran as a Democrat for U.S. Senate, reported a bogus automated phone message dialed to voters in Austin and other cities. The message asked voters to support Kirk because he supported same-sex marriages and gay adoptions. Kirk said he didn't support either issue and blamed more Republican pre-election dirty tricks. His Republican opponent, John Cornyn, denied being behind the false phone bank.

U.S. Has a Long History of Rigged Elections

The U.S., of course, is no stranger to rigged elections, even well before Tuesday's and the one in 2000. A famous case was the controversial way that the late President Lyndon B. Johnson won a U.S. Senate seat in 1948 in Texas on his way to the White House that reportedly involved votes from dead people. What some overlook in this case was how LBJ had lost an election in a similar disputed fashion seven years before.

Another lesser known case involved the 1984 landslide presidential election of the late Republican Ronald Reagan. In Dallas, where both Bush and Cheney lived at one time, there were 217 ballots cast in a precinct that had zero registered voters. That would not affect the election, but it demonstrates that fraud has existed for a long time.

As early as 1986, Michael Shamos, a Pennsylvania computer scientist, testified during a Texas hearing that the computer hardware and software used to tabulate voters' ballots could easily be manipulated.

“Computers can be manipulated remotely, by wire or radio, or by direct physical input,” Shamos said. “The memories on which these computers operate can easily fit into a shirt pocket and can be substituted in seconds. The software can be set to await the receipt of a special card, whose presence will cause all the election counters to be altered. This card could be dropped into the ballot box by any confederate. The possibilities for this type of tampering are endless, and virtually no detection is possible once tabulation has been completed . . . Even if the software is not altered, there is no reason to believe that it is correct. Many tests performed on such programs have revealed faulty logic and wildly incorrect results.”

Suzan Kesim, then-vice president of a security consulting firm in South Bend, Ind., also testified in 1986 that “many of the computer auditing procedures used by the banking industry that have been tried and true could easily be modified or used as they are for auditing elections. . . . Fraud possibilities include ‘hidden programs.’”

Texas even had its own voter purge almost two decades before Florida attempted to strike some 60,000 voters from the rolls with false accusations of felony convictions. In 1982, lists were provided to Texas election officials that made mostly false accusations of felony convictions against voters. The accused included public officials who successfully sued for slander. The state also hired armed officers at minority

voter precincts and posted signs warning voters against casting illegal ballots. Charles Knutson pointed out in a [Democrats.com](#) report that the Texas purge probably involved Bush mastermind Karl Rove, who worked for then-Texas Republican Gov. Bill Clements in 1982.

Another odd case involved a West Texas county where the system's optical scanners misread ballots and at first reported landslide wins for two Republican commissioners in 2002. But the next day, after alert poll workers became suspicious of the wide margins of supposed victory, they discovered a defective computer chip in the scanner system. After two hand recounts and another count with a replacement scanner chip, officials announced that Democrats Jerry House and Chloanne Lindsey actually won by wide margins.

"It was hard to believe that that type of mistake had happened," Robbie Floyd, one of the Republicans who lost, said in one press report.

So could Kerry have been ripped off by a defective computer chip in Ohio and Florida, where scientific exit polls indicated Kerry wins? We will never know since, unlike the Texas machines in 2002, the Diebold machines in Ohio and Florida have no paper trail.

How convenient.

Popular Vote Fixed?

With all the former and current Republicans supporting Kerry—even a long-time Texas Republican friend of mine voted for a Democrat for the first time for president on Tuesday—it's hard to believe that Bush got about 3.5 million more votes than Kerry and 8 million more than he received in 2000.

There can't be that many new devil worshippers or Christian fundamentalists.

A larger turnout—Tuesday's 60 percent turnout was the largest since 1968—has favored Democrats in the past. But about 6 million of those votes have not been counted.

Some said that exit polls were accurate in states that had paper trails, but not in ones without the paper trails for e-voting.

Even though Kerry conceded, groups like the International Labor Communications Association refused to follow suit. The group is waging a campaign to count all the votes in Ohio.

Kerry's concession was really strange and disappointing. Would Howard Dean have conceded so fast to Bush? Gore fought Bush harder than Kerry. I don't get it since Kerry even had Bruce Springsteen play "No Retreat, No Surrender" at a campaign appearance and used that song during other events. John Edwards also pledged to make sure votes were counted. Then they surrendered without putting up a fight in the overtime phase. That was most disappointing, more so than Gore's concession in 2000.

Did Skull & Bones members blackmail Kerry into conceding without a real fight?

Perhaps Kerry simply foresaw the inevitable result, but he still could have seen the counting of provisional ballots through to the end. It would have raised some more awareness about the problems with Diebold and possibility of vote tampering. It would have shown Bush-Cheney that Democrats weren't backing down, especially with so many questions about vote reliability and reports of Republican voter suppression and dirty tricks.

But Kerry called for unity with the Evil Empire. Why is it that Democrats are always trying to call for unity and compromise with Republicanazis? As Carolyn Kay with [MakeThemAccountable.com](#) said, we have to completely remake the Democratic Party. We have to learn from right wingers to "take a licking and come back kicking. It is absolutely essential that as soon as possible we pick ourselves up, dust ourselves off,

and start working to take over the Democratic Party. It has lost its moorings, and because of that it is losing elections, over and over and over again.”

Sure, the deck was stacked against Kerry. Perhaps the last week of bad news for Bush, the Washington Redskins loss, the exit polls, and other omens that seemed to spell a Kerry victory were mere ploys by Rove to make his side work harder and our side slack off a bit.

One thing I know: We have to keep fighting these cheating thieves, not try to make peace with them. And I hope many people on our side won't move away—though I realize moving out of the country is the ultimate protest and I understand that choice. We all have to figure out what is the best path to take for ourselves.

As for me, I'm staying in the belly of the beast, in the shadow of the Evil Empire, to continue to sucker punch it in its bloated, bullshit-filled gut. Starting now, just as many conservatives boycotted France for its correct stance against the Iraqi invasion, I'm boycotting the state of Texas, where I lived for 40 years before moving to friendlier and more progressive confines last year. Bush got his political start in Texas, where the Republicanazis imposed a redistricting scheme that made that far-right state even more Republican. Every statewide official is a Republican there. The Texas Republican Party platform reads like a Nazi playbook, even calling for getting out of the UN, abolishing numerous federal agencies, making homosexuality a crime and teaching the Bible in public schools.

Enough is enough. Fuck Texas and the horses that Bush and Cheney rode in on.

And fuck Diebold, too.

As for you, Sen. Kerry, I appreciate your hard work, your intelligence, your dedication to this campaign, although I was disappointed by your finish. But, with all due respect, you know where you can stick your call for unity . . .

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