Can we trust the vote count anywhere? In any race? In any election?

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November 14, 2002—Do you think that our voting system could be corrupted? Not in little ways, such as "dead people voting," or people voting twice, but by people behind the scenes not counting our votes or substituting other numbers for the vote count that our selections on election day should mandate. Even worse, could a computer programmer working for a private company adjust the tallies for candidates and propositions in ways which might not be detectable? Although I am only beginning to research this topic, I am already beginning to find answers that are rather unsettling.

I located an article originally published in "Relevance" in November, 1996 (Vol. III, No. V) edited by Philip M. O'Halloran. An editor's note at the beginning of the article states:

"Ed. Note - When we began researching the integrity of the election process, we wanted to believe that the talk of "votescam" was just overblown hype. However, we have discovered that the computer voting system in this country is a veritable can of worms, so open to tampering that if there is no organized election fraud going on, the criminals are falling down on the job."

In a section of that article, entitled "Secret Ballot–Secret Tally - Electronic Voting on Trial," the author(s) goes on to state, "The counting of 70% of our votes goes on inside a literal and figurative black box by a technical process that you have no legal right to inspect. The results from that black box are then counted by local election officials who send their results to the state, where they are later certified as accurate and honest. However, these election officials have no legitimate means of certifying that the results are indeed "accurate" and "honest." In fact, in numerous interviews, we found that no individual at the state, county, city or township level has had any meaningful insight (or even a clear understanding) into the vote counting process at the crucial level of the election computers in each jurisdiction."[1]

"When the polls close, the voting tallies feed out from the back of the machine on a strip of paper that looks like a cash register receipt. These slips are then sent to the county, the state and the media for further counting. In many heavily-populated areas, the Votomatic Punch cards or optical scan ballots are taken to a central counting site where they are fed into from one to 12 larger computers called tabulators at the rate of up to 1,000 per minute."[2]

The computers which tabulate the votes cannot be examined by anyone with a direct interest in a fair election. Neither voters, nor poll workers, city clerks, county election supervisors, state elections directors or even federal election officials are permitted to view or examine the "source code," the computer programming instructions (software) that direct the computers in the tabulation of the votes in all of the races.

The "source codes" are deemed proprietary, i.e. a "trade secret," and hence the only people who are allowed to view or examine them are the companies that make the computers and their agents.

But this is not the half of it. Not only are we not able to examine the computer program which "tabulates" our votes. We can't even find out if there are felons or ex-felons working for (or owning or managing) the companies which produce the voting machines, election equipment and software. The major companies which make most of the equipment (and software) involved in the election process are private companies which are not required by law to disclose ownership information. In fact, research indicates that not only are there questions of criminal activity (vote fraud, obstruction of justice) on the part of present or past members of these firms, the ties of these companies to extreme right wing political operatives are becoming more and more apparent.[3]

Beverly Harris is a courageous and persistent woman who is determined to find answers to these questions. (See Talion.com, 2002 Election) She has catalogued more than 30 instances of serious election irregularities, computer glitches and charges of voter fraud that have occurred in many U.S. jurisdictions and overseas that call into question the integrity and reliability of the voting equipment, especially the vote-counting machines.[4]

She also attempts to penetrate the maze of companies and shell companies, owners and investors that make up the constellations of organizations that make up, control, own, have agreements with or are subsidiaries of the vote-counting firms. She found that there were four companies in this business, but for all intents and purposes the fourth (Shoup Voting Solutions) has had its personnel and machines merged into the other three:

Election Systems and Software (ES&S), the largest company making vote-counting equipment, was founded by Todd and Bob Urosovitch, and was originally financed largely by the politically active Ahmanson family, a facilitator and financier of many extreme right-wing political causes.

Sequoia Pacific shares technology and software with ES&S under a shared licensing agreement.

Global Election Systems (now part of Diebold) is headed by ES&S co-founder Bob Urosovitch, brother of ES&S's vice president.[4]

Given all the irregularities that have resulted from voting "snafus," "computer glitches" and other mistakes connected with the electronic vote-counting process, it is amazing that this has not become a scandal of national proportions. It appears that the media have had a hand in diverting the public's attention away from this. The rare times they do report incidents in this arena are usually very local, unless there is an unavoidably newsworthy breakdown such as occurred during the Florida presidential circus in 2000. However, these kinds of snafus and irregularities have been going on for decades, along with other types of shenanigans and voting barriers, such as those experienced by many minorities during that Florida vote, which have had the effect of discouraging many would-be voters and creating cynicism in the minds of many more. What is even more insidious is that any reasonably sophisticated vote fraud in the tabulation equipment and software would not even be noticed, much less investigated and proven.

With all the "improvements," "refinements, and "standardization" as a result of all the election glitches during Florida's vote-counting two years ago, we now have a host of new creative possibilities for those who might wish to commit vote fraud. There is now a plethora of new voting machines which do not leave a paper trail. This means that we do not have any way of re-counting those votes at the source, and no back-up record of how the voters voted at the precinct level.

In addition, we now have modems installed in a goodly number of voting machines. People have observed voting machine company employees re-booting a voting machine by merely dialing a number on a cell phone. Central counting facilities can also "talk" with the precinct voting machines and thus establish intermediate tallies. If outside computers can "talk with machines inside the precincts, they may also influence their electronic signals, and thus potentially alter the vote count totals stored at the machine or the central counter level.

There is a story in the book "Votescam," by James and Kenneth Collier, relating how George H. W. Bush, during the 1988 Presidential Primary season, lost to Bob Dole in the Iowa caucuses and was behind 8 percentage points in the New Hampshire Primary in the week before the voting. He made a telephone call to computer expert and Governor John Sunnunu, and—lo and behold—when the polls closed on primary night the pollsters were dumbfounded. Bush won by 9 percentage points. It has been theorized that anyone knowing the proper phone number, using a machine that can output a precise series of frequencies, could input a new set of counting instructions into the state's vote-counting machines.

VNS

On the next level, we need to consider VNS, the Voter News Service, founded as News Election Service (NES) in 1964. According to James Collier, co-author of Votescam and a 20 year student of computer vote fraud (especially in Florida), this vote projection service monopoly came about as a result of a meeting between representatives of the CIA, the FBI and the powers behind the media, who met in secret and hammered out a deal. If the heads of the major media would acquiesce in the Warren Commission's lame conclusion that Lee Harvey Oswald was the "lone nut" gunman in the assassination of John F. Kennedy, then they would be given a great deal of power in the selection of the winners in future elections. This one organization conducts all the election day exit polling and does all the reporting of the vote-tallying from the major counting centers on election night, and forwards their tabulations to all the major media.[5]

What if the people who controlled the election night exit polling, projections, and vote tabulations were able to intelligently (and corruptly) collaborate with the vote-counting equipment (and software) manufacturers, which program and adjust the voting equipment? Could Candidate A, who in reality has received 60 percent of the vote over Candidate B, find the numbers reversed when the networks announce that the exit polling and the vote tabulations agree that Candidate B has won out over Candidate A by a 60/40 margin? Could this happen? What recourse would anyone have if it did? What proof could anyone offer to decide the case one way or the other?

I am not saying this has happened, is happening or will happen. I am asking the question: Why couldn't it happen? There is enough conflict of interest, potential for manipulation, lack of disclosure and secrecy involved in the vote-counting process that it leaves me wondering if we can trust the vote tallies and vote totals in any electoral district in the country.

There are a number of partial solutions bruited about for some of the big questions and doubts about the integrity of the electoral process. However, there is only one solution consistently cited by people who have really studied this issue—one solution that eliminates the possibility of vote tampering through proprietary source code software alterations, outside input through modems, and "computer glitches" caused by weather, electrical surges or other factors.[6]

It involves going back to a simpler era. It is just this. Hand counting all ballots at the precinct level by the election workers under the watchful eyes of the community, and the posting of the results at each precinct station, plus the saving of the individual ballots so that they may be reviewed or re-counted at any time.

This might appear to many as an extreme Luddite solution. But I submit that it has much more going for it than do the insincere and self-serving arguments used by James Baker and the Bush forces during the process of their stealing of Florida's electoral vote and the presidency in 2000. I remember Baker saying something to the effect, "It is un-American to count votes by hand after they have already been counted by machine."

I contend that the forces which would use offensive and irrational arguments such as the one above, who would send their own operatives by bus to Miami-Dade County Election Headquarters asking them to behave like thugs, bullies and "storm troopers" in order to frighten

election workers into stopping their vote-count, who would pressure other election workers into counting obviously invalid absentee votes sent from overseas, and who would commit all sorts of other heinous, ugly, unjust and criminal acts just to ensconce their candidate in the White House—would be very happy to have computer programs and polling numbers adjusted to facilitate the "right result" in local, state, and national elections.

I do not believe the situation is hopeless. On the contrary, I really believe the statement of Michael Ruppert, who has been a rock in the efforts to bring out the truth of what really happened on September 11, 2001. He stated, "When you have had the game rigged in your favor for a long time, you tend to get stupid." So let us stay cool, intelligent and observant. Let's go to the polls and vote, hopefully for Democrats, Greens, Libertarians, independents—people of conscience and creativity. At the same time, let us observe very carefully everything we see happening during the election process. Then I request that you write up your observations and send them to http://www.votewatch.us/. We need to document as much of the process as possible.

At some point we need to challenge both the right of these companies to hide the names of their owners and employees, and whether they have conflicts of interest, criminal records, etc, and the right to keep the source codes private and unexamined by election officials, neutral parties and representatives of the voting public. I think that there is an argument that voting is a sacred right and thus the "proprietary" right to view the computer "source code" lies with the public and their "honest representatives," not with the firms which may have economic interests in a dishonest and clever count.

Footnotes:

1. "Pandora's Black Box - Did it Really Count Your Vote?"; Relevance, Nov., 1996 Editor: Philip M. O'Halloran, p. 2 of 32.
2. Op. Cit., p. 3 of 32.
3. Who Makes the Vote-Counting Machines? By Beverly Harris http://www.talion,.com/election-machines.html
4. 31 City Papers Document Major Errors in Elections, by Beverly Harris http://www.talion.com/election-mistakes.html
5. a) Do the Math; Election Returns Don't Add Up (Votescam Revisited in '86 Primaries) by James Collier; http://www.votescam.com/articleone.html
b) Election Night Projections–Cover for Vote Rigging Since 1964 Lynn Landes 9/23/02 http://www.votescam.com/coverforvoterigging.html
c) Vote Scam, excerpted from Conspiracies, Cover-Ups and Crimes, By Jonathan Vankin; http://www.votescam.com/stolen.html
d) Your Stolen Vote - The Missing Piece of the Puzzle, by Victoria Collier http://www.votescam.com/stolen.htm
6. a) How Safe are our Voting Machines? Rage Against the Machine by Ronnie Dugger, The New Republic Online http://www.tnr.com/120400/dugger120400.html
b) Manufacturers Admit Voting Machines Unreliable By Christopher Bollyn, The Spotlight http://www.spotlight.org/11_07_00/VMachines/vmachines.html
c) Lynn Landes, Op. cit.
d) The Greatest Cover-Up of All - Vote Fraud in America By James J. Condit, Jr. http://www.votescam.com/articletwo.html
e) Victoria Collier, Op. cit., p. 6 of 6.