

The Extent of Election Fraud

Edward D. Duvall
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It's election time again, and as usual the two main Parties are riling up their base by claiming the other Party is attempting to steal the election. The Republicans are whimpering that too many voters are ineligible, and are passing laws in some states requiring voters to show an ID despite the fact that there is no evidence as yet that such fraud has tilted an election result. If the Democrats were smart (which they're not) they would use their large monetary assets to provide people with the means to obtain whatever legitimate ID is required; this would open up other doors to full participation in the society.

Meanwhile, the Democrats are whimpering about the manipulation of voting hours in some states, claiming that closing the polls early or regulating early voting somehow deprives poor people on welfare of their voting rights, even though the pressing schedule of a welfare recipient on the first Tuesday after the first Monday in November is no different than any other Tuesday. If the Republicans were smart (which they're not), they would keep the polls open until midnight on Election Day and give the working people extra time to cast their ballot.

Those arguments are about being able to cast a ballot. But I have a more fundamental problem with our election system, one that has bothered me for a long time, and which neither main Party has ever chosen to discuss. That is: how do you, the voter, know that your vote has even been counted after you cast your ballot? Every ballot is numbered and associated with a precinct. Those ballots are supposedly collected and counted, usually by machine. Although the ballots are numbered, and the list of those who voted is collected at the polling place, there is no feedback by which a voter can prove to themselves that their vote was actually counted. The two main Parties, who control the counting of ballots, insist that we blindly trust them on this.

We now have the technology to implement a verification system to prove to every voter that his ballot was indeed counted. We the people should demand that the ballots be re-engineered such that each voter obtains a numbered receipt for his ballot, and that within three days of the election, the entire vote tally shall be publicly accessible, and indexed by ballot receipt number (and precinct, district etc.). Each voter should be able to enter in his receipt number, and verify that his ballot was accepted and that the preferences he chose were correctly interpreted. Only then will each interested voter be able to ensure that his ballot was received; and any discrepancy may be challenged by presenting the original ballot receipt. This is the first step required to gauge the true extent of any election fraud.

The preceding receipt method is necessary but not sufficient to demonstrate that a voter's ballot was actually counted. Although the voter may verify that his ballot was accepted, it would not in and of itself allow the voter to determine if his ballot was actually included in the vote totals. The voter would require the capability to observe all the ballots in one place, and verify that the total thereof, including his, came to the same value as the reported total for each race (an example is for the election commission to arrange all the ballots in a spreadsheet and allow each user to independently verify the totals). There is another way: every voter should vote for himself in at least one race on the ballot. Surely, every ballot contains one race in which a candidate is running unopposed, or a race for an office that is unfamiliar, or one for which the voter does not care about the outcome. Every voter should choose one such race on the ballot and vote for himself. If every ballot is counted, as the Parties continue to tell us, and every vote accounted for, the official returns should reflect the names of every voter; granted, they would be spread around various races. If the voter, armed with his receipt, found his name listed in the race for which he wrote in his own name, he may be reasonably certain that the rest of the votes he cast on that ballot were included in the other totals. There is no way to guarantee it of course, but the probability that his other votes were counted is much higher than with any other simple system.