Exit Poll Election Forensics
What We've Found in 2016 & Need To Do

"THATS WHATS THE MATTER"
Boss Tweed: "As long as I count the Votes,
What are you going to do about it?"

graphic: Thomas Nast

by Jonathan Simon

Computerized votecounting takes place in the darkness of cyberspace. Memory cards, computer code, and voter-marked paper ballots are all regarded as corporate property and strictly off-limits to inspection by public, candidates, and election administrators alike. We essentially hand our ballots to a man-behind-a-curtain who then announces that so-and-so won with no means of verification.

Since computers took over the votecounting in America, analysts are relegated to checking the announced results with exit polls as the only means of verification. Their conclusions have found a pervasive and signal disparity between exit polls and votecounts in the hundreds of electoral contests that have come to determine the balance of political power in America and set national policy and direction. The moment that computers began to count votes is when exit polls suddenly ceased to match reported votecounts. We have called it the "red shift" because, with hardly any exceptions, the disparity between the exit polls and the votecounts favors the candidate (or proposition) further to the right on the political spectrum. The red shift is frequently so great as to be outcome-determinative—producing results "that Karl Rove would smile to see."

This year's primaries have presented a pattern of dramatic difference between exit poll "accuracy" in the Republican vs. the Democratic primaries. Through the New York primary, exit polls on the Republican side predicted the results within 0.5%. On the Democratic side, in stark contrast, the average exit poll-votecount disparity was a whopping 6.0%! The difference, statistically speaking, is enormous.

We must ask why, in state after state, the same professional pollsters employing the same methodology at the same polling places on the same days would know just what they were doing and perform splendidly when questioning Republican voters, but somehow turn into bumbling amateurs when questioning the Democrats. This stark nationwide pattern is a glaring red flag.

But as bizarre and suggestive as the whole pattern of exit-poll-based data is in 2016, I return to my opening point: none of this kind of indirect analysis, however telling, should be necessary. Nor should it be the basis for trust or distrust of our elections and the votecounting process. The ballots sitting in the storage bins of those opscans (and on the chips of touchscreen machines and central tabulators too) are OUR BALLOTS. They belong, or should belong, to the public, not some shadowy corporation. If the voters cannot view them and count them observably in public, then our government no longer has the consent of the governed. It is time to reclaim that basic right and assume that basic duty to our democracy. The "smoking gun" of electronic fraud lies within those ballot bins. It is time these were opened to determine the validity of our elections, one way or the other.

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Exit Poll Manipulation

Could something be intrinsically wrong, and apparently unfixable, about the exit polls? Investigations by mainstream media suggest that pollsters always oversample Democrats or that Republicans habitually lie and say they voted for Democrats or that pollsters, acknowledged as the best in the business, simply do not know what they are doing.

Explanations such as these, while theoretically possible, are very unlikely. Exit polls "work" in other countries: in Germany — which now has gone back to hand counting its ballots — exit polls are consistently within one percent of votecounts. Media explanations of the red shift refuses to consider the votecounts.

Exit pollsters study the disparities between exit polls and votecounts, and weight their exit poll results as much as they believe necessary to avoid the serial embarrassment of continually getting elections "wrong" in the same direction.

In the Democratic primaries this Spring, 17 of 19 states announced votecounts favoring Hillary Clinton, far out of the margin of error when compared to exit polls. The Oklahoma disparity, however, shifted 6.1% of the vote from Clinton to Sanders. Interestingly, Oklahoma is the only state in which the state, rather than a corporation, programs the votecounting computers. The fact that Oklahoma was significantly shifted the other way suggests that exit pollsters weighted the raw, exit-poll data expecting a votecount shift to Clinton that did not happen because would-be manipulators did not have access to the state-controlled programming process.

Does the glaring exception that is Oklahoma suggest that other states also were subject to pre-adjusted exit polls? Would the exit-poll/votecount disparities have been egregiously larger without the pre-adjusted exit polls throughout the Democratic primaries? Would those disparities scream even louder that electronic manipulation was endemic and that the announced votecounts are the problem, not the exit polls?