

E-Voting's Corporate Pedigree

Swindlers Offering "Results Management Assistance"

by Bev Harris



As of 2016, three companies dominate computerized voting in the US: ES&S, Dominion, and Hart.

The computer voting industry evolved in the following way:

- First, someone offered a need-fulfilling product/service: ballot printing.
- Then, a few people invented what they believed to be better mousetraps: initially, lever machines.
- Over time, ballot printing corporations that best met "customer needs" accumulated accounts. In politics, "customer needs" can include products and "the need to hold power."
- Over time, inventors who could best market their voting machines gained market share. In politics, "marketing" of voting machines can include offering kickbacks and "results-management assistance," as well as supplying equipment.

Ballot printing corporations remained regional for many years, but lever machine companies expanded quickly, consolidating into two companies: Shoup Voting Machines Corporation and Automatic Voting Machine Corporation.

Automatic went bankrupt in 1983. Saved by a group of investors, it became Sequoia Voting Systems, then moved into electronic voting. Shoup went through a series of acquisitions and then began a romance with computerized punch card company Computer Election Systems (CES). Sequoia, Shoup, and CES all expanded partly through kickbacks. Over the years, salesmen from all three firms were convicted of bribery and related offenses.

Sequoia became a multinational corporation when acquired by Ireland's Jefferson Smurfit, then by Great Britain's De La Rue, from whence Sequoia moved into a brief dalliance with Venezuela's

Smartmatic. Sequoia is now part of Canada's Dominion Voting Systems. Through Dominion, voting systems with Sequoia genealogy still operate throughout the US and are often found in traditionally Democratic strongholds.

Cronus Industries Inc. acquired Computer Election Systems, and in turn was acquired by Business Records Corporation (BRC), then by American Information Systems (AIS), a firm whose chairman, Chuck Hagel, later was elected to the US Senate for two terms and subsequently became US Secretary of Defense. AIS changed its name to Election Systems & Software (ES&S). The Justice Dept. split up the company on antitrust grounds giving part to Sequoia and the rest to ES&S.

ES&S machines, especially popular with Republicans, are used throughout America.

Two other companies emerged around 2000: Diebold Election Systems and Hart Intercivic. Diebold had mixed political bloodlines, with a heavily Republican management but its lobbyist, Joe Andrew, was former chair of the DNC.

Diebold Inc. got into the business by purchasing a sketchy Canadian firm called Global, founded by two felons and a swindler — Michael K. Graye, embezzler & stock fraud; Norton Cooper, "defrauding the queen," and Charles Hong Lee, bilked Chinese immigrants out of \$600,000. Control of Global changed in 2000, when ownership transferred to 23-count embezzler Jeffrey Dean's wife, then owner of a ballot printing firm called Spectrum Print & Mail. Jeffrey Dean had developed vote-by-mail technology. He brought in prison buddy John Elder (narcotics trafficking) and together they got control of contracts in Colorado, Washington and 17 California counties. Global acquired Spectrum, making Jeff Dean's wife its largest stockholder and putting Jeff in charge.

If there was a political trend to Dean's associates, it was through elite Democratic players whose big push was to vastly expand vote-by-mail. As Jeffrey Dean developed vote-by-mail he worked with brother Neil Dean, whose company was acquired by Omaha's PSI Group, later acquired by Pitney Bowes, which now has strong mail-voting market share.

Diebold Election Systems, after name-change to Premier Election Systems, was acquired by ES&S. The Justice Dept. split the purchase between ES&S and Dominion for antitrust reasons.

The fourth major company, Hart Intercivic, grew from a Texas ballot printing firm. Hart's relatively tidy demeanor won it large contracts in central and western US markets. Hart was acquired by HIG Capital, a spinoff of Bain and Co. with ties to Mitt Romney donation bundlers.

As of 2016, three companies dominate computerized voting in the US: ES&S, Dominion, and Hart. A number of private middlemen, often working from their homes, service accounts, provide programming and other help. These middlemen get high levels of inside access.

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You don't count because we don't count.
graphic: Dave Ward