

Voting Distortion

by Beth Clarkson

Voting is ritual, with tremendous cultural significance, but a ritual that has lost contact with reality. We are only allowed a funhouse mirror reflection of our national character. With computerized vote tabulation, used by all states, we have no transparency regarding the accuracy of the reported results. Polling numbers are routinely adjusted to match the official results of the election and raw data is not publicly released. Statistical analysis of official election results is frequently consistent with suspicions of election rigging. We have a government more and more skewed; a caricature rather than an accurate reflection of our cultural values.

Our voting process is systemically corrupt. This is not an indictment of the people working to conduct elections. Here in Sedgwick County, Kansas, election office employees work hard to run an election. The fault lies with our voting process designated by our elected representatives and implemented by officials appointed by them. Systemic bias is part of the design. The entire system allows only a façade of accuracy and security.

My expertise is in process control and quality improvement, certified as a quality engineer for nearly 30 years, with a Ph.D. in statistics. I know how to evaluate a process and audit to verify the results. The voting system where I live, which is similar to most of the rest of US, gives me no reason to expect accurate results. In many Kansas counties, it is a non-transparent system without a paper trail. Where paper trails exist those paper records are not audited by officials and no independent audits are performed or, in fact, even permitted!

I unsuccessfully sued Kansas Secretary of State Kris Kobach in 2015, for access to the Sedgwick County records necessary to audit the

official results. Secrecy with voting records is not unusual. Many states have laws exempting ballots from open records requests.

Mr. Kobach concentrates on voter fraud not election process corruption. He finds the idea of voter fraud so heinous that he was granted special powers to prosecute it. So far, six elderly Kansans with out-of-state property have been found to be afool of the law, hardly the legions of illegal voters Mr. Kobach has railed against.

In contrast, the idea of systemic election rigging via voting machine manipulation is not sufficient justification for him to support my independent academic inquiry into the accuracy of our county voting machines, an inquiry which would cost nothing but his endorsement. Instead, he chose to fight for a legal interpretation that would not allow it.

Kobach did introduce vote-audit legislation in the Kansas House as a result of my lawsuit. Sadly, the proposed law would give his office the authority to determine which precincts would be audited. This makes the difference between results we can have faith in, and results that we can't. Precincts to be audited must be chosen at random after the election, or we must audit them all. Anything else leaves the way open for all manner of systemic cheating. Imagine, for example, being able to tell police with a search warrant which rooms they can look in.

If something does not change before November, I will have no reason to believe that the reported election results of most states are accurate. Our voting process – from the collection of names of registered voters to the final tabulation on election night – has big, gaping, quality, security, and transparency holes. Why should the results be believed? Without transparent and accurate vote counts, voting is theater, not a realistic reflection of the voting public's wishes. Lack of sunlight rots the system!

Beth Clarkson is chief statistician for Wichita State University's National Institute for Aviation Research.

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