

Did Networks Fake Exit Polls, While AP 'Accessed' 2,995 Mainframe Computers?

by Lynn Landes 1/5/05

Date: 1/7/05 7:52:26 PM Central Standard Time  
From: [lynnlandes@earthlink.net](mailto:lynnlandes@earthlink.net) (lynn Landes)

Why have exit polls historically matched election results? How about this? It's all made up. It's a scam. A con. A fake. A fraud. Since they first started "projecting" election night winners in 1964, the major news networks have never provided any 'hard' evidence that they actually conducted any exit polls, at all. Researchers and activists who point to the disparity between the early exit polls and the 2004 election results, have failed to consider the obvious - that exit polls never existed to begin with.

That was the conclusion of the late-Collier brothers, authors of the book, *VoteScam: The Stealing of America*. In 1970, Channel 7 in Miami projected with 100% accuracy (a virtual impossibility) the final vote totals on Election Day. When the Colliers asked where the networks where got their exit poll data, both Channel 3 & Channel 7 claimed that the League of Women Voters sent it in from the precincts. But, the League's local president tearfully denied it, saying, "I don't want to get caught up in this thing." The broadcasters then told the Colliers that a private contractor used the data from a single voting machine to project the winners. But, the contractor said he got the data from a University of Miami professor, who in turn denied it. In the end, the news broadcasters appeared to have pulled the polling numbers out of thin air.

Not much has changed since then. According to their website, The National Election Pool (NEP) was created by ABC, AP (Associated Press), CBS, CNN, Fox, and NBC to provide tabulated vote counts and exit poll surveys for the 2004 election. These six major news organization appointed Edison Media Research and Mitofsky International as the sole provider of exit polls for the most important political races of 2004. The AP collected the vote tallies.

But actually, the networks and Mitofsky have been collaborating under different organizational titles, such as Voter News Service, since 1964. And the AP may be doing more than "collecting" vote tallies.

Nothing about the 2004 election makes sense. The numbers don't add up.

The surveys don't match up. But, the networks have clammed up. Despite mounting questions and controversy, the networks continue to stonewall. Citing proprietary claims (something the voting machine companies like to do), the NEP won't release the raw exit poll data. Okay. Maybe they have a point. However, they also won't release any logistical information either, particularly where and when the exit polling was conducted. And that's definitely not cricket.

John Zogby, President of Zogby International, a well-known polling company, said that such complete non-transparency is a "violation of polling ethics". Under the American Association for Public Opinion Research code, Section III, Standard for Minimal Disclosure: "Good professional practice imposes the obligation upon all public opinion researchers to include, in any report of research results, or to make available when that report is released, certain essential information about how the research was conducted. At a minimum, the following items should be disclosed, Part 8 - Method, location, and dates of data collection."

When looking at the data that the networks do provide, things don't check out. According to the NEP website, 5000 people were hired for Election Day, 69,731 interviews were conducted at 1,480 exit poll precincts. However, NEPs raw exit poll data has just been released on the Internet by the alternative news magazine, Scoop, <a href="http://www.scoop.co.nz/stories/pdfs/Mitofsky4zonedata/">http://www.scoop.co.nz/stories/pdfs/Mitofsky4zonedata/</a>.

It seems legit. It indicates that on November 2nd, the results of 16,085 exit poll interviews were published by 3:59 pm, 21,250 interviews by 7:33 pm, and 26,309 by 1:24 pm on Nov 3 (which doesn't make sense, maybe they meant 1:24 am). Anyway, that grand total comes to 63,664 interviews. But, that number may not be right, either. Edie Emery, spokesperson for the NEP, wrote an email to this journalist stating, "On Election Day, 113,885 voters filled out questionnaires as they left the polling places." Where did that number come from, I asked? No answer from Edie. She said that the networks would make more information available in their "archives" sometime in the first quarter of this year.

That's not very timely. Perhaps, that's the idea.

At any rate, it appears that nearly a third of the results of the exit polls were not available until after midnight! Woow, Nellie! What happened to the stampede to "project the winner" right after the polls closed, like the networks used to do? What went wrong this time?

And that's not the only mystery. It looks like Mitofsky/Edison used two very different forms for their exit poll surveys. One survey is about what you would expect - <a href="http://www.cbsnews.com/htdocs/pdf/natepoll.pdf">http://www.cbsnews.com/htdocs/pdf/natepoll.pdf</a> - a double-sided single sheet of paper that the voter is supposed to fill out. However, the other form, which matches the Scoop data, is several pages long; it is huge - <a href="http://election.cbsnews.com/election2004/poll/poll\_p\_\_\_u\_s\_\_all\_us0.shtml">http://election.cbsnews.com/election2004/poll/poll\_p\_\_\_u\_s\_\_all\_us0.shtml</a>. It is impossible to believe that anyone would take the time or trouble to answer all those questions on Election Day.

And then there's the second half of NEP's role on Election Day 2004. The NEP website states that vote totals were "collected" from 2,995 "quick count precincts". I don't know what that means either, because the NEP spokesperson refused to answer my questions. So, I'll theorize. Does that mean that nearly 3,000 mainframe tabulating computers were accessed directly by the AP? Although, the AP admits it was the sole source of raw vote totals for the major news broadcasters on Election Night, AP spokesmen Jack Stokes and John Jones refused to explain to this journalist how the AP received that information. They refused to confirm or deny that the AP received direct feed from central vote tabulating computers across the country.

Thankfully, American Free Press reporter, Christopher Bollyn was in the right place at the right time on Election Night 2004. He spotted an AP employee connecting her laptop to an ES&S computer at the Cook County (IL) election headquarters. But, was she downloading or uploading data? In an interview with this reporter, Bollyn said, "When I asked the AP "reporter" if she had "direct access" to the mainframe computer that was tallying the votes, she said yes and then Burnham (a Cook County official) stepped in and re-asked my question for me. Again the answer was, "Yes."

I called Cook County this week and spoke with Cass Cliatt, their spokesperson. She said that, after the polls close, any reporter can use the county's "connector cables" that allow them to download the latest vote totals. Cliatt said that this did not constitute a connection to the mainframe computer. She did admit that AP employees were there on Election Night and had cables dedicated to them

specifically. But, she again insisted that the AP cables were not connected to the mainframe computer. Bollyn disagrees.

"Cook County had a complete press room set up in the back room where there were about 8 computer terminals hooked up to the internet. So why was this AP woman and her helper, a man, setting up their lap top in the front room with wires that came across the counter only for them? And the real question is why was Scott Burnham so dedicated to defending this AP "reporter" and not allowing me to talk to her? He did not care if I talked with the Fox News guy or the CLTV people. It was only the AP "reporter" who was being protected. Scott Burnham is David Orr's (county clerk) right hand man and PR person. What was the county clerk's office trying to hide? I have never seen something like that and Burnham was very firm about that - I was not allowed to talk to the AP reporter directly. As you recall, I saw she had more important things to do - she was in deep into the middle of a novel as the first numbers came in from Cook County," wrote Bollyn in an email to this journalist.

I asked computer security specialist, Dr. Rebecca Mercuri, a fellow at the Radcliffe Institute for Advanced Study at Harvard University, for her reaction. Was it a good idea to allow reporters to "hook up" to a cable in order to access vote tabulation data? She didn't think so. "It's not as if they are handing them a cd with the data on it. That would be the safest thing to do and probably faster. Why would they allow them to connect up?" she asked.

So, what's really going on? Do we have an unholy alliance between those who control the computerized voting machines (including election officials) and the major news networks? State election officials across the country have outsourced the tabulation of the vote to a handful of Republican and foreign-owned corporations. There is no meaningful public oversight of the count. No one knows if votes are being added, subtracted, or switched. Meanwhile, the news networks publish exit polls numbers, but refuse to offer any hard evidence that they have ever conduct any exit polls, at all.

What if the polls are all a fake? What's the point? What are the networks trying to accomplish? There are various possibilities. But, I have my own theory. I think that the networks simply match their bogus exit polls to extensive pre-election polling. Then, if someone wants to rig an election and not raise red flags, the exit polls get tweaked. That accounts for their great track record historically. Imagine the market for that kind of service. Imagine the power the networks would have to control legislation affecting their industry -

and the industries of their corporate parents. I must admit, until recently, I didn't factor in the possibility that the networks had direct access to mainframe vote tabulating computers, as well.

On the other hand, what does it mean when the exit poll system appears to break down, as it has recently? Maybe the networks are not only engaged in selling a service, but executing a sort of "squeeze play" to boot. For instance, in this past election it looked like Kerry was going to win. Then everything changed. Maybe, deals were getting cooked during the day. Mitofsky said that when all was said and done, everything checked out fine; the exit polls matched the election results. Really? Where's the proof?

Over the years the Colliers tried in vain to pierce the veil of secrecy surrounding the networks' Election Day operations. For the 2002 and 2004 election, this journalist called the exit pollsters and the networks and got the same stonewall. With the Justice Department intent on burying its head in the sand, it will be up to all of us to - as Reagan put it - "Tear down this wall".

In the meantime, there's no good reason to believe exit polls or election results. They're as fake as a \$3 dollar bill and worth about half as much.

=====

Lynn Landes is one of the nation's leading journalists on voting technology and democracy issues. Readers can find her articles at <a href="http://www.ecotalk.org/">EcoTalk.org</a>. Lynn is a former news reporter for <a href="http://www.dutv.org/">DUTV</a> and commentator for the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC). Contact info: <a href="mailto:lynnlandes@earthlink.net">lynnlandes@earthlink.net</a> / (215) 629-3553