

Was the 2004 Election Fixed?

By PAUL CRAIG ROBERTS

As coincidence would have it, Mark Crispin Miller's new book, "[Fooled Again](http://www.amazon.com/exec/obidos/ASIN/0465045790/counterpunchmaga)" (Basic Books), documenting the Republican theft of the 2004 presidential election, arrived in the same mail delivery with the January 12 edition of the Defuniak Springs Herald, the locally owned weekly newspaper in a Florida panhandle county seat.

The Florida panhandle is thorough-going Republican. Even Democrats run as Republicans. Nevertheless, the newspaper's editor, Ron Kelley, believes that American political life is measured by something larger than party affiliation. In his editorial, "The shepherds and the sheep," Kelley reports that two Florida counties have banned any further use of Diebold voting machines after witnessing a professional demonstration that the machines, contrary to Diebold's claim, are easily hacked to record votes differently from the way in which they are cast by voters.

The pre-election statement by Diebold's CEO that he would work to deliver the election to Bush was apparently no idle boast. In five states where the new "foolproof" electronic voting machines were used, the vote tallies differed substantially from the exit polls. Such a disparity is unusual. The chances of exit polls in five states being wrong are no more than one in one million.

Miller describes considerably more election fraud than voting machines programmed to count a proportion of Kerry votes as Bush votes. Voters were disenfranchised in a number of ways. Miller reports incidences of intimidation of, and reduced voting opportunities for, poorer voters who tend to vote Democrat.

Some of Miller's evidence is circumstantial. However, he documents widespread Republican dirty tricks and foul play. The media's indifference to a stolen election burns Miller as much as the stolen election itself.

Miller is not alone in his concerns. The non-partisan US Government Accountability Office (GAO) in response to congressional request investigated a number of complaints regarding the electronic voting machines.

Here are some of the problems noted in the GAO's September 2005 report:

* Some voting machines did not encrypt cast ballots or system audit logs, and it was possible to alter both without being detected.

* It was possible to alter the machines so that a ballot cast for one candidate would be recorded for another.

* Vendors installed uncertified versions of voting system software at the local level.

* Access was easily compromised and did not require a widespread conspiracy. A small handful of people is sufficient to steal an election.

Curiously, the media has shown no interest in the GAO report. In my opinion, a free press has proven to be inconsistent with the recently permitted highly concentrated corporate ownership of the US media.

The electronic voting machines leave virtually no paper trail and their use involves private potentially partisan corporations tabulating the votes with proprietary software that is not transparent.

A number of counties in various states have decided to return to paper ballots that can be verified and recounted. But now that Republicans have learned that they can use the electronic machines to control election outcomes, the disenfranchisement of Democrats is likely to be a permanent feature of American "democracy."

Other reports claim that the under-sampling by pollsters of Democratic voters creates a percentage bias that exaggerates the number of Republican voters by as much as 5 percent, thus providing cover for vote fraud. If hard-to-reach Democratic voters, such as the working poor, are less likely to answer telephones, polls can create the illusion that there are more Republican voters than in fact exist. If the electronic voting machines are then rigged to shift 5 or 6 percent of the vote to the Republican candidate, the result is not at odds with the expected result and can be used as "evidence" to counter the divergence between exit polls and vote tally.

The outcome of the 2004 presidential election has always struck me as strange. Although Kerry was a poor candidate and evaded the issue most on the public's mind, by November of 2004 a majority of Americans were aware that Bush had led the country into a gratuitous war on the basis either of incompetence or deception. By November 2004 it was completely clear that Saddam Hussein had no weapons of mass destruction and that Bush had rushed to war. People were concerned by the changing rationales that Bush was offering for going to war. Moreover, the needless war was going badly and the results bore no relationship to the rosy scenario painted at the time

of the invasion. It seems contrary to American common sense for voters to have reelected a president who had failed in such a dramatic way.

Miller directs our attention to Bush's high-handed treatment of dissenters. If electronic voting machines programmed by private Republican firms remain in our future, dissent will become pointless unless it boils over into revolution. Power-mad Republicans need to consider the result when democracy loses its legitimacy and only the rich have anything to lose.

Paul Craig Roberts has held a number of academic appointments and has contributed to numerous scholarly publications. He served as Assistant Secretary of the Treasury in the Reagan administration. His graduate economics education was at the University of Virginia, the University of California at Berkeley, and Oxford University. He is coauthor of The Tyranny of Good Intentions. He can be reached at: paulcraigroberts@yahoo.com

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