Is Your Vote Safe?
Unlock the Truth of Montanta Election Audits

Did you know that Silver Bow County certified its 2024 Montana primary election despite counting 1,131 more ballots than voters? Here's the math: 12,077 ballots were counted but only 10,934 county residents voted in the recent primary. That's a whopping 10% discrepancy.

The cause of this alarming mishap? Linda Sajor-Joyce, the Silver Bow County Election Administrator, believes an extra 1,023 votes came from a memory stick (USB thumb drive) she used to test the equipment prior to the election. However, it should be noted that this procedure also did not follow secretary of state rules which requires the testing to occur the day real ballots begin to get counted, not the day or days before counting the real primary ballots.

The Election Administrator claims another 96 ballots were counted because the wrong thumb drive was inserted on election day, and these ballots were not cleared prior to scanning real ballots. The source of the remaining excess ballots has not been identified; although a forensic audit would undoubtedly get to the bottom of it.

In the aftermath of the Silver Bow County incident, vulnerabilities were revealed. The Senate Select Committee on Elections, assigned to probe the discrepancy, decided by a 4 to 1 vote against conducting an audit of the utilized election equipment. Furthermore, they did not request a review of the cast vote records

(CVR). Senator Theresa Manzella was the lone advocate for the audit. The committee, it appears, attributed the incident to human error and opted to proceed without further investigation.

The county certified the election despite the fact that this large discrepancy was apparent in the post-election audit results, which did NOT meet the criteria required by law!

The cause of this alarming mishap? Linda Sajor-Joyce, the Silver Bow County Election Administrator with over 20 years' experience, isn't sure, but she suspects the extra 1,100 votes came from a USB thumb drive she used in a public demonstration two weeks prior to the election and inadvertently

used for the primary election without wiping it clear. The thumb drive had 1,100 votes loaded on it from that demonstration that she claims were inadvertently added to election day tallies. In the new results from the recount that was required as a result of this error, an election for a Republican Precinct Committeeman race flipped and the leader in the County Attorney race was changed (though both candidates will appear on the general election ballot).

Even their post-election audit did not catch this egregious error. What's worse, the county certified the election.

"This confirms it takes a computer and a government worker to REALLY screw things up!" United

Sovereign America's (USA) Doug Bohn said.

Bohn believes Montana should go back to hand counting ballots. He serves as the Analyst for USA's Montana chapter. His point is that machines make election tallying more complex and vulnerable. Moreover, in a state with a small population like Montana, hand counting is simpler to implement, faster, more transparent, more secure and less expensive and prone to hard-to-find errors. Silver Bow was not the only Montana County in the June 2024 primary that had a BIG discrepancy in the total of ballots counted versus the number of people that voted. However, it was the only county where the election administrator cooperated and requested a recount to try and determine the cause of the discrepancy.

If the acceptable criterion of 0.5% were applied to the ballot/voter discrepancies as is applied to post-election audits, 38 of the 56 counties in Montana DID NOT meet this standard, yet in all those counties their county commissions went ahead and certified the election. With a discrepancy of 27%, Powell County had the largest % discrepancy, nearly 3x that of Silver Bow County.

No safeguards were or are in place in the counties or the office of the SOS to appropriately find, question or deal with an egregious error such as this in a timely manner. This incident was brought to light thanks to the proactive measures of an election watchdog group affiliated with United Sovereign Americans unite4freedom.com/. In order to be able to monitor and identify these discrepancies, they had to invest more than $5,000 of their own funds to purchase a subscription to Montana's voter rolls. Without their diligent efforts,

this significant discrepancy would surely have slipped through unnoticed and unresolved.

The problem with voting machines used by Montana counties is clear. Errors in software, so-called bugs, are commonplace, as any computer user knows. Computer programs regularly malfunction, sometimes in surprising and subtle ways. This is true for all software, including the software used in voting machines.

In close races, errors can obviously affect the outcome of elections. That's the point of having a recount. A recount is an alternate system of tabulating votes: one that is slower because it's manual, simpler because it just focuses on one race, and therefore more accurate.

In Montana, the recount laws are structured in such a way that obtaining one can be rather challenging. The legal framework mandates that only an impacted candidate or the initiator of a ballot measure can make a request for a recount. Additionally, this request must be submitted within a stringent deadline of five days following an election.

To make that five-day recount deadline even more challenging, the process of vote counting can extend beyond election day due to several factors. Some jurisdictions permit ballots to be tallied for several days post-election, while provisional ballots might require over a week for review. Additionally, access to results may face delays, creating an information gap for candidates and the public. This often hinders their ability to request a recount within the designated narrow time frame of five days post-election.

The majority of our election laws were drafted during a time when manual ballot counting was the

standard process. The introduction of computerized voting systems has dramatically and unnecessarily increased the vulnerability of the electoral process to human error and, worse, possible manipulation.

Here's a case in point. In 2012, after the election in Montana was audited and certified, Senator Rick Ripley from Lewis and Clark County noted that his small county precinct of 25 people, which consisted mostly of family members, didn't register a single vote for him. So he inquired with the county.

Per the image of the letter in this article, you can see the election administrator contacted ES&S to determine the cause of the error. They admitted they had a programming error in that one race in that one precinct and that indeed Sen. Ripley should have been credited with 25 additional votes.

This of course is once again after the post-election audit and after certification of the election. The letter further stated that the ES&S team looked at all the code for all other races in the state and there were no other errors to be found. However, no state employee or independent third party was involved to verify ES&S's claim. Therefore, we do not know if ES&S did inspect every line of code or that no other errors were found.

Since this error by ES&S in the Montana 2012 election, this same problem has occurred in numerous races across the country. However, such a problem is only uncovered when a blatant error similar to Sen. Ripley's occurs and a recount or equivalent course of action can be sought.

Here are a few examples of election errors that caused by errors involving voting machines and their software:

1. In 2022, an unexpected turn of events occurred in the DeKalb County, Georgia, Commissioner's race due to tabulator machine computer programming errors. The individual who came last in an election, which was audited and certified, turned out after a recount to have garnered the most votes out of all candidates. An investigation revealed that this error was prevalent across all voting precincts in the county. The candidate, Michelle Long Spears, was shortchanged by 3,792 votes which took her from a last place finish with 24% of the vote to a first-place finish with 43% of the vote.
2. In North Hampton, PA, in 2023, a voting machine coding error caused votes to be flipped on a ballot question that asked whether a pair of incumbent state appeals judges should be retained. Voters were asked to decide whether Pennsylvania Superior Court Judges Jack Panella and Victor Stabile should be retained for additional 10-year terms. The "yes" or "no" votes for each judge were switched because of the error, according to County Executive Lamont McClure. If a voter marked "yes" to retain Panella and "no" on Stabile, for example, it was reflected as "no" on Panella and "yes" on Stabile.
3. In Boone County, Iowa, the electronic vote-counting equipment showed that more than 140,000 votes had been cast in the municipal elections, even though only half of the county's 50,000 residents were eligible to vote.

There are hundreds of similar stories. What's important about these problems is not only that they resulted in a less accurate tally, but also that the errors were not uniformly distributed. They affected one candidate more than the other. You can't assume errors will cancel each other out. Rather, you must assume that any error will skew the results significantly and affect the result of the election.

As shown in these examples, the post-election audit and certification processes did nothing to notice or uncover the serious errors in the tabulation equipment's tallies. Compared to hand counting, a lot can go completely undetected when using election machines.

Here's a list of some things that can go wrong with voting machines, either by mistake or with intent:

1. The wrong election software can be loaded, resulting in tallies being read improperly.
2. Tabulators can be tested but the election administrator can forget to clear the tallies on the equipment before counting real ballots.
3. The equipment manufacturer can make errors programing the software that runs the election resulting in inaccurate vote tallies (see inserted letter regarding Sen. Ripley's 2012 election in Lewis and Clark County).
4. Votes can be manually preprogrammed to start at a certain number or loaded in tabulators before the actual ballots are counted, fraudulently inflating a candidate's totals.
5. The same ballots can be run through the equipment more than once (even multiple times), inflating vote counts.

It is for these reasons that citizens who understand what is at stake with ensuring the integrity of our elections wanted a full forensic audit of Silver Bow's 2024 primary election to confirm for certain what caused the errors, and to also find out from the audit if the same errors could have occurred in some or all of the other 38 Montana counties that had large errors but did not get scrutinized.

It matters not whether the error is a programming error by the manufacturer, or a mistake by an election administrator. The point is that mistakes are not only easy to make, but some are also difficult or impossible to find. Either way, county commissioners are certifying their elections without addressing these mistakes.

The situation demands additional scrutiny as it represents a critical example of how vulnerable our elections are to human error, not to mention how easy it is for bad actors to take advantage of the same vulnerabilities.

Technology gets in the way of accuracy by adding steps. Each additional step means more risk of errors, simply because no technology is perfect.

Consider an optical-scan voting system. The voter fills in ovals on a piece of paper, which is fed into an optical-scan reader. The reader senses the filled-in ovals and tabulates the votes. This system has several steps: voter to ballot, to ovals, to optical reader, to vote tabulator, to centralized total. At each step, errors can occur. Mistakes in tabulation—either in the machine or when machine totals get aggregated into larger totals—also cause errors.

A manual system of tallying the ballots by hand, and double-checking the results, is more accurate simply because there are fewer steps.

According to Bruce Schneier, Harvard University's Berkman Klein Center for Internet and Society Fellow and security technologist, the error rates in tabulator equipment can be significant. Some voting technologies have a 5% error rate, which means one in twenty people who vote using the system have their votes counted incorrectly.

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CONSOLIDATED OFFICE OF TREASURER/CLERK AND RECORDER

November 20, 2012

Senator Rick Ripley
8920 Mt Highway 200
Wolf Creek, Mt 59648

Dear Senator Ripley:

My name is Marilyn Bracken and I am the person that you talked to here in the office about the discrepancy in your final vote count in the general election.

I appreciate you pointing out this issue to me, so that we could check into the matter and get a correct answer. I contacted Election Systems and Software in Omaha, Nebraska. This is the company the Secretary of State contracts with for coding of ballots, etc. ES &S found an error in coding in the race for Senate District 9. They did check all the other other races for us and your race was the only one that was affected.

We hand-counted your race with Mr. Szabo yesterday, and the final count was 742 votes for you and 220 votes for your opponent. Again, I want to thank you for pointing out this error so we could determine the correct results.

Sincerely,

MARILYN BRACKEN
Election Supervisor
Lewis and Clark County

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A system like this operates under the assumption that most of the time the errors don't matter. If you consider that the errors are uniformly distributed—in other words, that they affect each candidate with equal probability—then they won't affect the outcome of elections except in very close races. This is assuming the errors are inadvertent. However, what if errors are intentional and skew races toward one candidate?

Election software can be hacked, and it's not that hard to do.

Another issue is that election software can be 'hacked'. That is, someone can deliberately introduce an error that modifies the result in favor of a preferred candidate. Although there is some threat of this happening on election day if equipment is connected to the Internet, the real threat is that the computer code could be modified while it is being developed and tested, either by one of the programmers or a hacker who gains access to the voting-machine company's network. It's much easier to surreptitiously modify a software system than a hardware system, and it's much easier to make these modifications undetectable.

Malicious changes or errors in election software can have far-reaching effects. A problem with a manual machine just affects that one machine. A software problem, whether accidental or intentional, can affect hundreds of machines and skew the results of an entire election.

Some have argued in favor of tabulator systems, citing the millions of dollars that are handled every day by ATMs and other computerized financial systems. That argument ignores another vital characteristic of voting systems: anonymity.

Computerized financial systems get most of their security from audits. If a problem is suspected, auditors can go back through system records and figure out what happened. If the problem turns out to be real, the transaction can be unwound and fixed. However, because elections are anonymous, that kind of security just isn't possible, as the same level of backup data isn't available.

This means we need to recognize the vulnerabilities of tabulator systems. To this end, computer security experts recommend:

1. Paper trails. Let the voter see how their vote was counted and have both a digital and a paper trail to show how it was counted.
2. Software used on voting equipment must be open to public scrutiny. This transparency has two functions: it allows any interested party to examine the software and find bugs, which can then be corrected, and it increases public confidence in the voting process. If the software is public, no one can insinuate that the voting system has unfairness built into the code. Companies that make these machines regularly argue that they need to keep their software secret for proprietary and security reasons. Don't believe them. In this instance, secrecy has nothing to do with security.
3. Computerized systems with these characteristics won't be perfect. No piece of software is. But they'll be much better than what we have now. We need to treat voting software like we treat any other high-reliability system.
4. The auditing that is conducted on slot machine software in the US is significantly more meticulous than that applied to voting software. The development process for mission-critical airplane software makes voting software look like a slapdash affair. If we care about the integrity of our elections, this must change.
5. Proponents of voting equipment often point to successful elections as "proof" that the systems work. That completely misses the point. The truth is that errors in the software—either accidental or deliberately introduced—can undetectably alter election results.
6. An election without any detected problems is no more proof that the system is reliable and secure than a night that no one broke into your house is proof that your locks work. Maybe no one tried to break in, or maybe someone tried and succeeded. Either way, you simply don't know.

Geographic Information Systems could help secure elections.

There are technologies that could help secure our Montana elections. For example, Geographic Information Systems (GIS), which are found in many Montana counties, could be used to verify that a residential address exists at the address listed on a voter registration form.

Every registered voter's form should go through the county's GIS database to verify the accuracy of the information before the voter's registration is accepted. The process ought to be automated, and in cases where an address is returned, it's imperative that the election administrator contact the voter to understand the core issue. This could involve determining whether the individual is homeless or incorrectly wrote their address.

Even if we get the technology right, we still won't be finished. If the goal of a voting system is to accurately translate voter intent into a final tally, the voting machine itself is only one part of the overall system. In the 2020 US election, problems with voter registration, untrained poll workers, ballot design, and procedures for handling problems, resulted in votes

being left uncounted, as well as more than 10 million votes cast using factually invalid voter registrations. See unite4freedom.com/progress/ for details.

Regardless of hand counting or using a tabulator or both, the integrity of the voter rolls comes first. If ballots are cast that should not legitimately be cast because the person no longer lives in the district or because someone filled out another voter's ballot, then neither tabulators nor hand counting can correct that issue. This method of fraud has been around since voting was conceived and is the reason why maintaining accurate voter rolls is paramount. This is also not a new situation. In Missoula in the 2020 election, the initial recount noted there were 4,596 more votes counted than voters. Nine months later the Missoula election office claimed to have found two more boxes with thousands of absentee signature envelopes that supposedly accounted for the bulk of the missing ballots. However, with no chain of custody and many months to fake additional envelopes, there was no way to accurately ascertain that those signature envelopes were from authentic voters, and no transparency when those boxes allegedly went missing and were therefore unavailable for the initial recount.

None of these scenarios leads to faith in the current election process being followed. That is the crux of the problem. Tabulator errors are extremely difficult to spot and can be undetectable if hidden in programming code, whether inadvertently or intentionally.

For the average person working as an election judge or administrator, or a county commissioner who certifies election results, the process can be so complex and overwhelming that serious errors can go unnoticed. This can undermine the integrity of the entire process.

Opting for hand counting elections provides a clearer understanding of the process and ensures its transparent execution. This method minimizes the risk of severe election mistakes that could easily go undetected. Although not without issues, the transparency offered by hand-counting ballots preserves the integrity of the election outcome
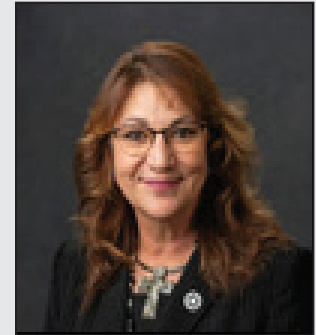
Call your senators to demand a forensic audit

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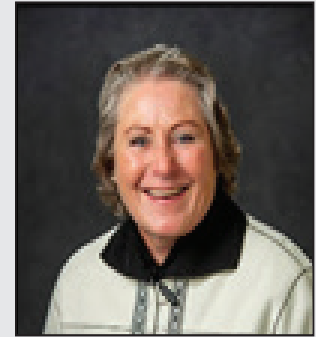
Shelley Vance (R) - SD34
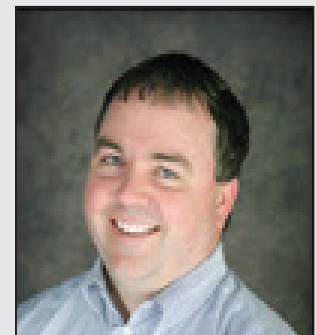Shelley.Vance@legmt.gov
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better and makes it easier to find and correct errors.

In Carbon County for the June 4, 2024, primary, 4,323 voters voted, with 3372 who voted absentee (78%) and 966 who voted the day of the election (22%). Using tabulators to count votes, elections results were not available until 4:30am the next day. One can only guess at what led to the delay in tabulating the results. With only 966 in-person votes to tally the entire day, and half of them received by 3pm with the afternoon pick-up, it leaves one to wonder why it took from 8pm to 4:30am to count less than 500 votes. The posting of results more than eight hours after the polls closed certainly raises questions about the efficiency of the tabulator counting process.

In 1900, Carbon County Montana had more than 15,000 residents. Yet the county was able to hand-count ballots in one night, without machines. So why, when in 2024 we have only 7,000 ballots to count, do our officials say it is impossible to hand count them? Maybe what Carbon County needs is an abacus instead of tabulators. Then we might get quicker election results.

In spite of this large discrepancy that could alter the outcome of many of the races, the Silver Bow commissioners rubber-stamped the results and certified the election without hesitation or questions.

The Silver Bow County discrepancy event highlights how easy mistakes can be made or tallies can be compromised, either inadvertently or intentionally, and then certified without scrutiny or question.

Montana's existing election administration process is multifaceted, with a set of guidelines that may not sufficiently address all potential election complications or irregularities. Additionally, existing regulations do not provide comprehensive coverage for every potential area of error or mishap. As shown by what occurred in Silver Bow County, one simple misstep could unintentionally jeopardize an entire election.

This incident underscores the ease with which such mistakes can occur. What's more concerning is we are told there are safeguards in place to prevent such errors. However, when they are put to the test, they fail to perform their role, or even address the errors.

The blunder in Silver Bow underscores the fragility of the system. It reveals that the measures we think are in place to catch such mistakes fall far short. What's more alarming is the reluctance of election officials to demand machine audits and recertifications before these machines are entrusted with future elections. It is time to advocate for change to ensure that our voting process is reliable and secure.

Considering the numerous vulnerabilities that can compromise election results, getting improvements in our Montana election security is a daunting task. However, we have a viable solution at our disposal. We can transition back to hand counting ballots at the precinct level. Many Montana citizens are demanding this simple step toward greater election security.

Manual ballot counting would provide a superior level of control, significantly reducing the chance of unnoticed errors because paper ballots are easier to understand and track. Moreover, they offer greater transparency, which is sorely needed in our elections today. 🔔