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Electronic Voting Casts Shadow over Elections

There are no hanging chads or Supreme Court challenges looming (yet). But the nation isn't satisfied with electronic voting machines.

By Brad King

November 8, 2006

Last night's election was one of the most hotly contested midterm elections in recent memory. Millions raced to the polls, casting votes that eventually overthrew the Republican leadership in the House of Representatives and left its hold on the Senate in jeopardy.

Despite the feel-good voting hangover many Americans have this morning, not everyone is convinced that our current system—now made up largely of electronic voting machines—serves our republic well.

The main culprit: distrust in electronic voting machines.

There were numerous reports from polling stations around the country concerning glitches with the e-voting machines. While most of the reports indicated that the glitches happened during the first hours the polls were open, the cascade effect was that lines got longer throughout the day.



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Some attributed this to the newly installed machines, since nearly one-third of all e-voting systems were installed for this election.

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evident. Throughout the day, the news in Ohio—the state at the heart of the controversial 2004 presidential election—focused on the potential for voter fraud.

And maybe that wasn't such a bad idea. After all, election officials reported hundreds of calls about problems with e-voting machines. From *Forbes*:

By early afternoon the hotline had received over 500 calls reporting problems in Ohio alone, according to coordinating lawyer Jennifer Scullion.

As more glitches popped up around the country, nervous editorial boards began calling for yet another overhaul of the vote-counting system, claiming that doubt sowed by e-voting machines undermines our democracy. From the *Houston Chronicle*:

The right to a free and fair vote is the essence of a functioning democracy. The confusion evident Tuesday calls out for continued improvement. Every electronic machine should produce a backup paper trail. Provisional paper ballots should be on hand in case the entire system goes down. Alternatives such as Oregon's system of mail-in ballots also should be considered.

Other news sources, such as Wired News, are calling for a more rational "debugging" approach to the election. Find the problems, address them, and build a better voting machine. **T**

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