

Honest Elections U.S.

Working Towards a Fair American Voting System

Basic Philosophy of a Voting System

In none of the many meetings on voting issues I've participated in, at all levels of government and various organizations, has there been discussion of the basic philosophy of what a proper voting system must entail. Without this we have no idea of our essential goals, and it is irresponsible and irrational to move forward, especially considering the great distrust the public has of our election system. The many failures of our present system is evidence of our overlooking these fundamentals. We **MUST** outline the essential criteria a voting system needs to meet and keep them in mind during the entire decision-making process.

Essential Election System Requirements

(Note: Most present voting systems in the U.S. utterly fail to fulfill nearly all of the below requirements.)
Suggested remedies appear in green type.

- 1) **Fully reproducible down to the individual ballot** - Primarily, we need a **discreet and lasting paper record of EACH vote that is the official record of the election and is the actual item that is counted**. Redundancy and permanent records are an absolute necessity as failures do occur, and there must be a **full backup** of the entire process. **Every part of an election should be able to be reproduced manually without any hardware**. In the fully electronic systems that we have today, there is no way to truly audit and recreate the vote, thus recounts are meaningless and we cannot recover from errors.
- 2) **Built in error detection** - Currently the many errors that have been found have tended to be noticed by chance. Happenstance and serendipity are not acceptable as the primary methods of finding problems. No present system has any form of meaningful general or automated error detection. **Just as is commonly done in systems such as double entry bookkeeping, one reliable method used outside the U.S., that detects errors up front, is to count the votes twice by two different groups/methods and to compare the two counts**.
- 3) **Provisions for extension or repeat of election** - When problems occur, as in the case of Denver in 2006, where it appears that around 10% of those who intended to vote did not get to do so, there must be a remedy. An election is invalid if ALL citizens who try to vote are not able. No voter should be disenfranchised due to government error. **Elections should continue until all are able to vote**.
- 4) **Easy citizen participation** - **Voting day should be an official holiday so that employed people will not be burdened by work conflicts and will have time to volunteer at polling places**. A holiday would offset the reasons for the problematic consolidated "vote centers" as people would vote near their homes rather than work. Allowing multiple polling place work shifts would greatly ease the burden of long election days for volunteers. Voting needs to be available to all citizens regardless of physical ability, race or income. **Hybrid paper/electronic systems that assist those with special needs while still producing a discrete paper ballot can be used**.
- 5) **100% transparent** - Every single part of the system must be available for examination by any citizen. There should not be any proprietary part, such as inaccessible software code. **Detailed voting data should be made available for free and easy access by having it available in a standardized format for download on the Internet**. Monitors of vote counting and other processes must be close enough to hear and see what is taking place. The entire system should be accessible and understandable to a human being without the need for special equipment.
- 6) **Meaningful testing and certification, and demonstrable accuracy** - **Tests and audits must use statistically significant sample sizes, be scientifically meaningful, and be done in real world conditions, including during actual elections**. Present testing and certification is essentially meaningless and often fraudulent. Sample sizes are too small, tests are not done with problem ballots, and much of the testing shows consistency, not accuracy. Error rates for vote counting, when tested by independent parties, have been found that are beyond the margin of victory of typical elections. Examination of VVPAT (Voter Verified Paper Audit Trail) tapes has shown that they often do not agree with the machine count.
- 7) **Decentralize as much of the system as possible** - Centralized systems magnify error and fraud while decentralization substantially minimizes the effect of fraud or error and prevents the tainting of the entire system. **Counting of ballots can be done in SMALL batches at the precinct level by inexpensive mechanical and hand methods for speed and accuracy**.

8) **Investigation, recourse and penalties** - Presently, recounts, provisional ballots, investigations and audits serve mostly as placebos to placate the public, but have little real world effect as the laws are written to make their use difficult. **Investigative and oversight groups must be given power, and it is especially important for them to have significant numbers of members who are not from the major political parties.** Citizens need access to records, and a process for recourse needs to be strong and readily available. Testing and examination of systems should be done by disinterested third parties. **Penalties for election fraud need to be severe felonies. Auditing and recounts should be an open process and should be immune to political pressure**

9) **No conflict of interest** - **No official who counts the vote should have any involvement in any campaign. Election officials at all levels who are running for office should have to take a leave of absence a significant time before the election. Elections should be a public enterprise, not a private one** where for-profit vendors of election equipment are the major source of information and major sponsors and contributors to organizations of election officials as is the case with the National Association of Secretaries of State.

10) **Result reflects the will of the people** - **The biggest failing of the present system is that candidates can and often do win with a minority of the votes.** This is not rational nor acceptable. **The plurality system in use in the U.S. simply cannot demonstrably represent the will of the voters and is the worst of all voting methods.** Other **systems, such as RANGE VOTING, are commonly used in making business decisions and are far superior in that they operate the way our mind works and in the manner with we make decisions in everyday life.** IRV (Instant Runoff Voting), as proposed by many, is a slight improvement, but does nothing to alleviate many of the problems of our present system.