

Module 13



Hard Core Evidence: Adopt Part of an Election Monitor the Counting

Watching the *counting* of the vote may be even more important than watching the voting. Widely attributed to Stalin, the saying goes: "Those who cast the votes decide nothing; Those who count the votes decide everything."

In many jurisdictions, vote-counting begins before the election with absentee counting (though we are promised that no one looks at the results from this early counting).

The dramatic action happens on Election Night, beginning when the polls close and continuing until the wee hours of the night. After the election, counting of absentee ballots and provisional ballots continues.

Guide for Watching the Count

Goals:

Become a "human audit log" and document who is there, what you see happening, problems, crashes, huddles, and carrying things from here to there. Here's where you'll see that citizens cannot actually authenticate the accuracy of vote counting at all. Nevertheless, you can gather a lot of information.

It is not unusual for serious problems occur during the counting of the votes.

What to bring with you:

- Binoculars (for viewing detail on computer screens)
- Video camera / audio recorder / digital camera
- Notebook and writing implement
- Phone numbers for local news reporters
- Cell phone
- Laptop
- Timekeeping device

What to Look For:

- Videotape, photograph, or write down a detailed description of the machines and peripherals.
- Avoid the conversation trap. You are there to document, not socialize.
- Don't go home early. The most interesting problems happen from 10 p.m. to 1 a.m.
- If they haven't finished uploading the votes by midnight, call a friend and settle in for the wee hours. This is when things get interesting.
- Keep a written audit log. Jot down the time every five minutes and note events. For significant events, write down the exact time. If you see any significant events, call them in to reporters.
- Can you see the computer screens? Can you see everything in the counting room?
- Document the names and positions of each person who enters the counting room.
- If you see anyone working for a vendor touch the machine, document it.
- Can you observe handling and processing of memory cards or cartridges.
- Collect each interim results report and keep it, especially if they come around and try to collect them or ask for them back, and especially if they say there is an error on it.
- Document chain of custody when they take things from one place to another
- Note the time and circumstances when you see conferences or huddles. (Note: Some elections offices use a "wrangler" who will attempt to distract observers during time periods when there are significant problems).
- Document what the official party observers do. Are they making an audit log, or are they chatting, sleeping, reading books, or wandering around. Do they seem to know what events are significant, or do they only wake up when results are printed?
- Check to see if results for any candidate go down when more votes come in

Other problems:

- Memory cards won't upload
- Computer crashes
- They turn off the machine or blank the screen so you can't see what's on it (for example, hiding error messages)
- Technicians working on voting system during the count

- Submit a written request for the audit logs and system event logs for the evening. Compare the computer logs with your own "human audit log."

Questions to ask when observing:

- Even if you are technically savvy, keep your questions simple and innocent and you'll elicit more information. For example:
 - "What's that?"
 - "Who's that guy?"
 - "How come he's..."
 - "What's he doing?"
 - "What did he just put in the machine?"
 - "Where's he taking that?"
 - "Where do those cables go?"
 - "Where are the [Diebold/ES&S] guys?"

Document any obstructive behavior

- You are not allowed to see the computer screens
- You cannot see who is in the counting room
- Some of the processing and tabulation takes place in rooms you cannot see
- They won't tell you where any other networked machines are or, they won't let you observe the area where other networked machines are
- You cannot see who is handling memory cards (or cartridges, or disks)
- They won't tell you the names (and/or who employs) the people who are tabulating and processing votes;
- You cannot see all of the computers processing your vote
- You are not allowed to have the all of the results reports (They usually run "interim" reports every 30 minutes)
- You are not allowed to see the polling place results tapes at the precinct (end of day precinct results)
- You are not allowed to watch the processing of the absentee ballots

Your Own Additions to the Monitor the Counting Module

You can share your ideas by sending to crew@blackboxvoting.org



What worked well?

What new ideas did you come up with?

Was there anything that didn't work very well?
