Guide to Establishing a Poll Watching Group

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This is a step-by-step guide to establishing a group to observe elections held on Direct Record Electronic (DRE) voting machines. It was designed for poll watching in Georgia, which uses Diebold TS machines. Use it and distribute it freely, but be aware that details may be slightly different for other DRE voting machines.

Research the State Laws and Specific Voting Machines

Observers need to know which actions are within the law and which ones aren't, so the legal information should be included in the training packet.

√ Check with your political party to make sure you have the appropriate paperwork to get badges for all the observers. Find out the number of observers allowed at each polling place. Laws may vary from state to state. Georgia law, for example, allows any party on the ballot to designate two observers in each precinct.

√ Contact the state election office to get their training materials for election observers. These materials should explain what is acceptable behavior for observers.

√ Find out if your state allows "roving" observers who can move between precincts to deal with problems.

√ Find out the legal requirements for opening the polls, conducting the election, reporting results, and closing the polls at the conclusion of the elections. Make sure to find out if the law requires printing reports at the precinct after the polls close.

√ Find out if your state law allows for a failed DRE to be replaced in the middle of the election (Georgia law does allow it).

√ Work with an attorney to gather pertinent state laws for each legal issue you think might be challenged by an election official. If the observers have the pertinent legal information, the Poll Manager will be less likely to prohibit the observers' actions.

√ Gather information to familiarize poll observers with the structure and operation of the DREs used in your county. If you don't have access to detailed and specific information, refer to the Compuware report for general information about any of the four major DREs.

√ Find out the date and time of voter education programs and the L&A test. Observers can learn a lot about the operation of the DREs by attending the training and the public testing.

√ Obtain a copy of the poll workers guide to use in the training sessions.

Assemble a Team and Get Credentials

The team should include: Attorneys at your headquarters, Poll Observers (fixed and roving), and Precinct Captains. Trained HQ personnel should have their base at HQ to take field calls and send requests to the person who can handle it (Captain, Attorney, etc.). Attorneys should be prepared with copies of state election law.

√ Assemble the list of volunteer poll observers.

√ If your state allows "roving" poll observers, enlist addition people so you can have trained personnel who can move between precincts and deal with problems. You may find that an organized

group, such as the NAACP, is willing to help.

√ Submit the appropriate paperwork to your political party to get badges. If you encounter resistance from the party, insist on getting credentials for your poll watching group.

<B>The Training Program

Set up a training program to explain what to watch for and how to report incidents. Include:
√ State guidelines for poll watcher behavior. It is crucial for all poll watchers to follow the state's rules and guidelines on acceptable poll watcher behavior.

√ Legal requirements for opening the polls, conducting the election, reporting results, and closing the polls at the conclusion of the elections.

√ Pertinent laws to counter any invalid challenges by Poll Managers.

√ Information about the structure and operation of the DREs. The poll worker training guide will be very helpful. In addition, encourage observers to attend voter education sessions conducted by the county, and to attend the pre-election testing.

<B>Specific Guidelines for Observers

<B>A. Monitor the Procedures for Opening the Polls: Preparing the Machines
Observe each machine being opened and set for the election. Ensure that only one machine at a time is prepared and that L&A testing is completed on each machine.

√ Zero Total Reports.
This report must be run on each DRE before the polls open. It shows that there are no votes recorded on the memory card. (In the Diebold DRE, the Zero Total Report cannot be run unless the memory card is blank.) As each machine is opened and prepared for the election, log the serial number of each DRE and the serial number from the top of every report for the precinct.

√ Drive Bay.
Monitor the opening of the drive bay door, inspect it to determine if slot √2 (bottom slot) is occupied. If it is occupied, log a description of what you see inside the slot and contact HQ. The concern is that there might be a wireless modem in slot # 2 (bottom slot).

<B>B. During the Election: Monitor PCMCIA (Memory) Cards
It is crucial to understand that the memory cards hold the ballots and are the actual "ballot box." Log all observations about memory card treatment that would be inappropriate with a "true" box.

√ Voter Access Cards.
If your state requires this re-programming of access cards, insist that each card be re-programmed before each use.
[Georgia procedures require that each voter access card be re-programmed before it is used for the correct ballot. This was not done in Georgia during the March 2004 primary. The voter access cards were re-used all day with no re-programming.]

√Watch for Voter Confusion
Watch for voters who appeared to be confused or struggling at the voting machine, and ask poll workers to assist them.
[There have been extensive reports of voters receiving the incorrect ballot at the polling place, and it is likely that your state prohibits observers from interacting with voters. In Georgia's primary, observers taking this recommended action were very effective at every precinct in helping voters

avoid casting incorrect partisan DRE ballots.]

√ Watch for Upset Voters.
If a voter leaves the polling place angry or visibly upset, follow the voter out of the polling place and determine the problem, offer possible solutions, and get contact information from the voter in case you need a sworn affidavit regarding the voters' experience. If a poll observer or Precinct Captain is available outside, turn this responsibility over to them and return to the polling place inside. If the problem is severe, call your headquarters and ask for assistance for the voter.

√ Track the Turnout.
Keep a running tally of voters throughout the day, and in a primary, the number of voters requesting a Republican, Democrat or Non-Partisan ballot, if possible. This can be very effective for determining turnout as the day progresses. [In the Georgia primary, some of the poll observers were allowed to observe and log the values of the hourly count of the DRE public counter conducted by the poll workers. Some poll managers prohibited this activity.]

√ Monitor Replacements if Machines Fail.
1.   The Failed Machine.
For any machine that fails, Pay particular attention to any machine that fails. Log the serial number and all observations. Of primary concern is the custody of the memory card (PCMCIA). Notice:
(a) what happened to the card in the failed machine;
(b) did someone print and post a Vote Total Report?;
(c) what happened to the failed machine?
(d) what is the technician's name?

2.   Replacement Machine.
 If the law does not allow for replacements, strenuously insist that the law be followed. In cases where replacements are allowed, notice whether standard poll-opening procedures were followed:
(a) did the technician run an L&A test?;
(b) is the memory card blank?
(c) was slot √2 (bottom slot) in the drive bay empty;
(d) did someone print the Zero Total Report before the machine was used?

<B>C. Monitor the Procedures for Closing the Polls:

Two reports are critical to the possibility of proving modem or off site vote manipulation if it occurs. Checking these reports is one of the most important tasks of observers. It will provide some protection for the votes at their precinct.
All observers should know the legal codes related to the printing of vote totals at the precinct, so they can demand that the reports be printed in case they encounter objections. [Printing totals and posting them at the precinct are required in Georgia.]

√ Monitor the Vote Total Reports.
1.   Ensure that two copies of the totals report are printed from EACH DRE as the elections supervisor begins the poll closing process, and before they remove the PCMCIA card from the drive bay.
2.   Log the vote counts for each DRE.
3.   Ask for an additional copy of the report for you to keep, though you may not be legally entitled to it.

√ Monitor the End of Day Totals Report.
1.   Be ready to be aggressive and request that no modem be connected until the accumulation process has been completed and the End of Day Total Report is printed at the location.
2.   Log the vote counts for each precinct. While there may not be a law to allow this (there is not, in

Georgia), they should explain the importance of this procedure to the Poll Manager, emphasizing that it protects the work of all the poll workers and the Poll Manager.
3.   Make sure the End of Day Totals Report is posted on the door in every polling place.
4.   Ask for an additional copy of the report for you to keep, though you may not be legally entitled to it.

√ Monitor Modem Transmissions.
Log all observations about the process of transmitting totals via modem.

√ Monitor Closing and Sealing the Machines.
Observe the closing and sealing of each DRE and log anything out of the ordinary.

<B>D. Observing at Election Central:
Take notes on all your observations and all responses to questions.
√ If possible, observe the entire day of operations at the central election office. If the law in your state allows this, insist on it. Log anything out of the ordinary, and log the names of the relevant people.
√ Ask questions about how absentee ballots and early voting ballots are handled.
√ Find out who monitors the modem communications coming in from the precincts to the central tally computer. Does someone check the validity of the transmission before allowing it to be received?

√ Ask if technicians have been required to take the same oath as poll workers to conduct a legal election. Monitor and log calls for assistance the election office receives from the precincts:

1.   Which precinct did the call come from?
2.   What is the problem?
3.   Was a technician dispatched?
4.   How is the technician dispatched?
5.   Did the technician take replacement machines to the precinct?
6.   How long did it take to resolve the problem?

√ Log the names of all people operating the central tally computer. Observe what each one does, if possible.
√ As poll workers bring the reports and memory cards back to election center, notice and log:
1.   Do HQ Poll workers check the seals when they receive the envelopes containing the reports and the memory cards? What happens to the envelopes? Are they tracked?
2.   Do HQ Poll worker register the number of cards indicated in handwriting on the envelope?
3.   What happens to the Zero Total Reports and the End of Day Precinct Totals Report inside the envelopes? Are they removed, saved, logged? Are the totals tracked?
4.   What happens to the memory cards after the HQ Poll worker breaks the seal? What recording does the HQ Poll Worker do? Are the cards counted (there should be one for every DRE)? By whom? How many times? What happens to the accumulator card containing the precinct totals?
5.   Does the HQ poll worker check or verify the serial numbers or any other identifying information on the memory cards?
6.   What happens if none of the cards in an envelope contains the accumulated totals? Is the accumulation process performed on a machine at HQ? Are all the cards from the precinct kept together?
7.   Observe whether data from "accumulator" cards is uploaded to the central computer. Does someone track which precincts have been transmitted by modem and which are to be uploaded from the cards?