

PART TEN

PARTISAN TECHNOLOGY FIRM IS IMPLICATED IN JOHN KERRY'S IMPLAUSIBLE LOSS IN OHIO 2004



Massive exit poll discrepancies, numerous reports of voter suppression, corrupt election administrators, unbelievable precinct results, and suspicious involvement of highly partisan technology firms all point to the election being stolen from John Kerry in Ohio 2004.
PHOTO: [Ken Zirkel](#) (CC).

Two years later, John Kerry lost the presidency in Ohio. In this key swing state, election monitors were besieged by complaints of GOP-orchestrated voter suppression, intimidation, and fraud. Myriad voting-machine anomalies were reported, including “glitches” that flipped votes from Kerry to Bush.

A phony terror alert in Republican Warren County (the FBI later denied issuing any such warning) allowed officials to move ballots illegally to an auxiliary building and count them out of public view. Presiding over the election was the Republican secretary of state, J. Kenneth Blackwell, a fiercely partisan fundamentalist Christian who also served as co-chair of Ohio’s Committee to Re-Elect George W. Bush.

The exhaustive evidence of voting irregularities in Ohio was documented in a 2005 report commissioned by Representative John Conyers, “[Preserving Democracy: What Went Wrong in Ohio](#).” At the time of that report, however, a major piece of the puzzle was still missing: the role of GOP computer guru Michael Connell.

Connell was the Bush campaign’s chief IT strategist. He was also a zealous anti-abortion activist whose two Ohio-based companies built websites and email systems for the Republican National Committee, Swift Boat Veterans for Truth, and many of the most powerful figures in the GOP, including Karl Rove, Jeb Bush, and Jack Abramoff. It was one of Connell’s websites that reported the surprising (many say unbelievable) surge of votes in Ohio that handed George W. Bush the White House for the second time.

In 2004, Connell was hired by Blackwell to design a website that would post Ohio election results to the public. Connell’s contract also required that he create a “mirror site” that would kick in to display the vote totals if the official Ohio servers were overwhelmed by Election Day traffic.

For the latter portion of the job, he turned to SmarTech, a little-known company headquartered in Chattanooga, Tennessee. SmarTech was as partisan as Connell himself, and the company’s servers hosted hundreds of high-profile Republican websites (and, later on, an assortment of anti-Obama websites).



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— Cliff Arnebeck

Four years later, Ohio attorney (and former Republican) Cliff Arnebeck began gathering evidence to file a racketeering claim against Karl Rove, which included the charge that Rove had masterminded the theft of the 2004 election. “We detected a pattern of criminal activity,” Arnebeck told the British journalist Simon Worrall. “We identified Connell as a key witness, as the implementer for Rove.” On November 3, 2008, he took a sworn deposition from Connell, who had repeatedly tried to quash Arnebeck’s subpoena.

Initially Connell denied any role in choosing SmarTech to host the mirror site. Questioned further, he admitted that he “may have” made use of the Tennessee servers, but denied any knowledge of whether the mirror site had even been activated in 2004. His job, he insisted, was simply to display vote counts, “taking the public results as they are currently being reported and aggregating them into totals.”

In fact, the SmarTech site went into action at 11:14 p.m. on Election Day. At this point, Arnebeck believes, the data being routed to Tennessee was used by GOP partisans to target Ohio counties that were ripe for vote tampering. “The SmarTech people may have been guiding the manipulation of paper ballots in places like Warren County,” Arnebeck told me.

Others argue that SmarTech’s role was far more insidious and involved partisan control of the total vote count. Stephen Spoonamore, an IT specialist (and Republican) who has consulted on cybersecurity for Boeing, MasterCard, the Navy, and the State Department, has studied the electronic “architecture map” used by Ohio during the 2004 election. He speculates that SmarTech might have been able to use Connell’s interface to gain access to and modify vote totals. In a sworn affidavit, Spoonamore said that the “variable nature of the story” and “lack of documentation available” would, for any of his banking clients, provoke “an immediate fraud investigation.”

Arnebeck hoped to have Connell testify in open court against Rove. But the prospective witness died on December 19, 2008, at age forty-seven, when his single-engine Piper Saratoga, which he was piloting alone, crashed en route from Washington, D.C., to Ohio. The circumstances of his death were viewed with suspicion by his family and close friends and sparked a firestorm of conspiracy chatter on the Internet, but no criminal investigation was launched.

Whether Rove and his collaborators orchestrated the electronic theft of the 2004 election will likely never be known. Still, Election Day exit polls make a compelling case that somebody may have been tampering with the presidential vote count, in Ohio and elsewhere.

Late on Election Day, John Kerry showed an insurmountable lead in exit polling, and many considered his victory all but certified. Yet the final vote tallies in thirty states deviated widely from exit polls, with discrepancies favoring George W. Bush in all but nine. The greatest disparities were concentrated in battleground states—particularly Ohio. In one Ohio precinct, exit polls indicated that Kerry should have received 67 percent of the vote, but the certified tally gave him only 38 percent.

The odds of such an unexpected outcome occurring only as a result of sampling error are 1 in 867,205,553. To quote Lou Harris, who has long been regarded as the father of modern political polling: “Ohio was as dirty an election as America has ever seen.”

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