

PART FOURTEEN

GERMANY AND IRELAND HAVE RESTORED SECURE AND TRANSPARENT VOTING SYSTEMS



Countries across northern Europe have backed away from the cliff of insecure electronic voting systems. Germany (pictured) and Ireland in particular have restored sanity to their elections by hand counting ballots in public. PHOTO: [PBS NewsHour](#) (CC).

It is Germany, however, that has now become the standard-bearer for clean elections. In 2009, that nation’s constitutional court upheld the basic principle of the public nature of democratic elections. By ruling that the vote count must be something the public can authenticate—and without any specialized expertise—the decision directly challenged the use of computers in elections.

Ireland followed suit in June 2012, sending all its electronic voting machines to the scrap heap. Minister for the Environment Phil Hogan called the computerized voting system a poorly conceived, scandalous waste of money and said he was “glad to bring this sorry episode to a conclusion on behalf of the taxpayer.”

The November elections will be a watershed for American democracy. A handful of contested Senate seats stand between a right-wing juggernaut and a moderate-progressive counterforce. A few battleground states—notably Florida, Ohio, Virginia, and Wisconsin—hold the key to the presidential election, which may determine the ideological balance of the Supreme Court for decades to come.

Mitt Romney is regarded tepidly by the right wing of his own party. His Mormon faith and the moderate positions he took as governor of Massachusetts have limited his ability to rally the activist base. Consequently, even a weakened Obama may prove too powerful an incumbent to rig out of the White House.

But if the Republicans gain complete control of Congress, they can probably render Obama toothless for his second term and blame him for the economic upheavals that are sure to come in the next four years. Their focus, then, will probably be on the Senate, where Democrats still hold a precarious edge.



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No matter how cynical we may have become about our elections, doing nothing to secure an accurate vote count is not an option. It may be too late to completely prevent vote rigging in the 2012 election. But the spotlight of increased public scrutiny may deter the most brazen acts of fraud—and perhaps dissuade those who believe that shifting votes by minuscule percentages in the electronic dark will go unseen.

Where paper ballots still exist, we can demand that local election clerks allow them to be counted by hand before they leave the precinct. Organizing citizen volunteer groups to count them may be necessary. Sheila Parks, who founded the Center for Hand-Counted Paper Ballots, has also urged citizens with legal standing to file injunctions to impound ballots, memory cards, and even voting machines after the polls close. “This prevents tampering with any of these items after an election,” she told me, “and gives us access to them with a secure chain of custody.”

Staring at the outside of a black-box voting system and attempting to detect fraud, however, will not ultimately produce clean elections. It is an exercise in futility if we do not take the next steps now. In preparation for the 2014 election, we must demand that our representatives pass comprehensive election reform, including publicly financed races and a secure, transparent vote count.

A privatized, secret ballot count must be viewed as a violation of our civil rights. Once that principle is clear, as it is now in Germany and Ireland, the rest will naturally follow. If we the people do not feel the outrage, or lack the courage to fight for this most basic right of American self-governance, who will?