

Big Brother Goes Global

Assembling electronic dossiers on millions of people

By [Global Research](#)

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We bring to the attention of our readers three press reports, which point to the practice of buying and selling electoral lists with voters' profiles to the US Justice Department.

In this case, the voters records of some 10 Latin American countries were purchased by a US company ChoicePoint Inc, acting on behalf of the US government. ChoicePoint was on contract to the State of Florida in screening electoral lists and stripping "people thought to be convicted felons from voting rolls" in the 2000 Presidential elections.

Choice Point, has assembled "a data bank containing the personal information of 65 million voting-age Mexican citizens, information which the U.S. government purchased to help law enforcement and other investigations."

The fact of the matter is that Big Brother through a private company has extended its tentacles into Latin America.

November 25, 2003

Three Suspected of Treason Get House Arrest

ASSOCIATED PRESS

MEXICO CITY (AP) - Three people suspected of selling data from Mexican voter records to a U.S. company have been placed under house arrest for 30 days, investigators said Tuesday.

They said officials were investigating possible charges of treason and cover-up.

The federal attorney general's office sought the court order for house arrest after months of investigations into the sale of information to Georgia-based ChoicePoint Inc. (USA)

The investigators from the attorney general's office spoke on condition they not be named and they did not identify the three people involved. Mexican law sharply restricts how much information officials can reveal about investigations before charges are filed.

ChoicePoint had assembled a database containing the personal information of 65 million voting-age Mexican citizens, information which the U.S. government purchased to help law enforcement and other investigations.

An Associated Press report in April about the database led to outcry in Mexico and other Latin American countries and set off investigations into how ChoicePoint had obtained the supposedly confidential records.

After the Mexican government complained that the material had probably been obtained illegally and then sold to ChoicePoint, the suburban Atlanta company cut off access to that information.

Mexican law punishes treason with a prison sentence of up to 40 years while cover-up brings three months to three years in prison.

ChoicePoint sells personal data to U.S.

Tim Wheeler

ChoicePoint, Inc., a data-processing firm, is selling government data bases on residents of 10 Latin American nations to the U.S. government, allowing them to track immigrants entering or living in this country ChoicePoint is notorious for purging Black and Latino voters in Florida to help George W. Bush steal the 2000 elections.

The Justice Department (DOJ) has signed a \$67 million contract with ChoicePoint to provide the FBI, Immigration and Naturalization Service, Border Patrol and other law enforcement agencies with access to ChoicePoint's 13 billion files.

The FBI paid ChoicePoint \$8 million for dossiers on almost every adult living in the United States. The Atlanta-based firm, with a market value of \$2.5 billion and 2002 revenues of \$594 million brags that it has bought the records of residents of Mexico, Guatemala, Honduras, El Salvador, Nicaragua, Costa Rica, Colombia, Venezuela, Brazil and Argentina.

Chris Hoofnagle, deputy counsel at the Washington-based Electronic Privacy Information Center (EPIC), told the World, "This is a question of national sovereignty. Do these nations want another country to have such extensive personal data about their citizens?" In Mexico, ChoicePoint bought the country's entire voter registry and sells the names, one at a time, to the U.S. government.

ChoicePoint has purchased Colombia's entire citizen ID database which the Bush administration can buy for \$90 per name. "I don't believe 31 million Colombians authorized that," Nelson Remolina, a Colombian lawyer and privacy advocate, said.

Hoofnagle pointed out that the 1974 Privacy Act forbids U.S. government agencies from collecting many categories of personal information. "It created an incentive to privatize dossier building, turning it over to private companies," he said. "Thirty years ago the FBI would have to follow you around to find this information. Now they download it from the ChoicePoint web site."

The EPIC website (www.epic.org) features an internal DOJ memo containing a ChoicePoint price list for retrieval of records. For example, DOJ agreed to pay \$20 for the drivers' license record of individual Mexicans. But the website also included the price list for information on individuals in Florida, Texas, Georgia, Ohio, and New York. According to the list, DOJ would pay ChoicePoint only \$2.00 per name for voter registration records in Texas.

Hoofnagle pointed out that the Pentagon's Total Information Awareness Program (TIAP), headed by Adm. John Poindexter, convicted for his role in the Iran Contra scandal, has been delayed by legislation authored by Sen. Ron Wyden (D-Ore). The legislation gives the Pentagon until mid-May to tell Congress why d this "super-snoop" agency is needed.

“Wyden’s bill slowed it down but it didn’t kill it,” Hoofnagle said. “You can be sure the Pentagon is preparing that report.” But in the meantime, he said, ChoicePoint is collecting much of that same data and selling it to Homeland Security Dept., the Justice Dept., the FBI and the Pentagon. “The more information they have about our personal lives, the more power they have over us.”

Hoofnagle paid \$20 to obtain ChoicePoint’s dossier on himself. “They said I was a member of a community organization. They listed me as a ‘high risk’ property owner because I once owned a condo in a building that had a disco in the basement. If you have a predisposition to union organizing, it will be in your file.”

ChoicePoint offers “pre-employment screening” to both private and public sector employers through its Online Job Applicant Personality Profiling System. Baxter Gillespie of ChoicePoints WorkPlace Solutions Group says their TestProfiles provides employers with a speedy, cost effective way to make smarter hiring decisions.”

Jay Stanley, a specialist on privacy rights for the American Civil Liberties Union, told the World the ChoicePoint contract reveals the dangers of allowing unaccountable corporations to assemble electronic dossiers on millions of people. “The technology is moving so quickly it allows for end runs around privacy laws and the U.S. Constitution.”

The lush federal contracts are a Bush administration payback for ChoicePoint’s central role in the 2000 election when Florida Sec. of State Katherine Harris, on orders from Gov. Jeb Bush, paid a ChoicePoint subsidiary, Data Base Technologies (DBT) of Boca Raton \$2.3 million to purge the state’s voter rolls. ChoicePoint-DBT, dominated by rightwing Republican extremists like former Minnesota Congressman Vin Weber, billionaire Ken Langone, and Home Depot CEO Bernard Marcus, prepared a list of 66,000 voters, predominantly Black and Latino, for removal from Florida’s voting rolls mostly on spurious grounds they were ex-convicts.

Greg Palast, an American writing for The Observer of London, revealed that 8,000 of those “ex-cons” had moved to Florida from Texas and had committed “nothing more serious than misdemeanors such as drunk driving (like their governor, George W. Bush).”

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Tuesday, August 10, 2004, Common Dreams

Will The Gang That Fixed Florida Fix the Vote in Caracas this Sunday?

by Greg Palast

Hugo Chavez drives George Bush crazy. Maybe it’s jealousy: Unlike Mr. Bush, Chavez, in Venezuela, won his Presidency by a majority of the vote.

Or maybe it’s the oil: Venezuela sits atop a reserve rivaling Iraq’s. And Hugo thinks the US and British oil companies that pump the crude ought to pay more than a 16% royalty to his nation for the stuff. Hey, sixteen percent isn’t even acceptable as a tip at a New York diner.

Whatever it is, OUR President has decided that THEIR president has to go. This is none too easy given that Chavez is backed by Venezuela’s poor. And the US oil industry, joined with local oligarchs, has made sure a vast majority of Venezuelans remain poor.

Therefore, Chavez is expected to win this coming Sunday's recall vote. That is, if the elections are free and fair.

They won't be. Some months ago, a little birdie faxed to me what appeared to be confidential pages from a contract between John Ashcroft's Justice Department and a company called ChoicePoint, Inc., of Atlanta. The deal is part of the War on Terror.

Justice offered up to \$67 million, of our taxpayer money, to ChoicePoint in a no-bid deal, for computer profiles with private information on every citizen of half a dozen nations. The choice of which nation's citizens to spy on caught my eye. While the September 11th hijackers came from Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Lebanon and the Arab Emirates, ChoicePoint's menu offered records on Venezuelans, Brazilians, Nicaraguans, Mexicans and Argentines. How odd. Had the CIA uncovered a Latin plot to sneak suicide tango dancers across the border with exploding enchiladas?

What do these nations have in common besides a lack of involvement in the September 11th attacks? Coincidentally, each is in the throes of major electoral contests in which the leading candidates — presidents Lula Ignacio da Silva of Brazil, Nestor Kirchner of Argentina, Mexico City mayor Andres Lopez Obrador and Venezuela's Chavez — have the nerve to challenge the globalization demands of George W. Bush.

The last time ChoicePoint sold voter files to our government it was to help Governor Jeb Bush locate and purge felons on Florida voter rolls. Turns out ChoicePoint's felons were merely Democrats guilty only of V.W.B., Voting While Black. That little 'error' cost Al Gore the White House.

It looks like the Bush Administration is taking the Florida show for a tour south of the border.

However, when Mexico discovered ChoicePoint had its citizen files, the nation threatened company executives with criminal charges. ChoicePoint protested its innocence and offered to destroy the files of any nation that requests it.

But ChoicePoint, apparently, presented no such offer to the government of Venezuela's Chavez.

In Caracas, I showed Congressman Nicolas Maduro the ChoicePoint-Ashcroft agreement. Maduro, a leader of Chavez' political party, was unaware that his nation's citizen files were for sale to U.S. intelligence. But he understood their value to make mischief.

If the lists somehow fell into the hands of the Venezuelan opposition, it could immeasurably help their computer-aided drive to recall and remove Chavez. A ChoicePoint flak said the Bush administration told the company they haven't used the lists that way. The PR man didn't say if the Bush spooks laughed when they said it.

Our team located a \$53,000 payment from our government to Chavez' recall organizers, who claim to be armed with computer lists of the registered. How did they get those lists? The fix that was practiced in Florida, with ChoicePoint's help, deliberate or not, appears to be retooled for Venezuela, then Brazil, Mexico and who knows where else.

Here's what it comes down to: The Justice Department averts its gaze from Saudi Arabia but shoplifts voter records in Venezuela. So it's only fair to ask: Is Mr. Bush fighting a war on terror — or a war on democracy?

Greg Palast is author of the NY Times bestseller *The Best Democracy Money Can Buy* (Penguin USA 2003). See Greg Palast's award-winning reports for BBC Television and the Guardian papers of Britain at <http://www.GregPalast.com>. Contact Palast at his New York office: media@gregpalast.com.

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