

How McCain Could Win

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It's November 5 and the nation is in shock. Media blame it on the “Bradley effect”: Americans supposedly turned into Klansmen inside the voting booth, and Barack Obama turned up with 6 million votes less than calculated from the exit polls.

Florida came in for McCain and so did Indiana. Colorado, despite the Democrats’ Rocky Mountain high after the Denver convention, stayed surprisingly Red. New Mexico, a state where Anglos are a minority, went McCain by 300 votes, as did Virginia.

That’s the nightmare. Here’s the cold reality.

Swing state Colorado. Before this election, two Republican secretaries of state purged 19.4 percent of the entire voter roll. One in five voters. Pfft!

Swing state New Mexico. One in nine voters in this year’s Democratic caucus found their names missing from the state-provided voter registries. And not just any voters. County by county, the number of voters disappeared was in direct proportion to the nonwhite population. Gore won the state by 366 votes; Kerry lost it by only 5,900. Despite reassurances that all has been fixed for Tuesday, Democrats lost from the list in February told me they’re still “disappeared” from the lists this week.

Swing state Indiana. In this year’s primary, ten nuns were turned away from the polls because of the state’s new voter ID law. They had drivers’ licenses, but being in their 80s and 90s, they’d let their licenses expire. Cute. But what isn’t cute is this: 566,000 registered voters in that state don’t have the ID required to vote. Most are racial minorities, the very elderly and first-time voters; that is, Obama voters. Twenty-three other states have new, vote-snatching ID requirements.

Swing state Florida. Despite a lawsuit battle waged by the Brennan Center for Justice, the state’s Republican apparatchiks are attempting to block the votes of 85,000 new registrants, forcing them to pass through a new “verification” process. Funny thing: verification applies only to those who signed up in voter drives (mostly black), but not to voters registering at motor vehicle offices (mostly white).

And so on through swing states controlled by Republican secretaries of state.

The Ugly Secret

Here’s an ugly little secret about American democracy: We don’t count all the votes. In 2004, based on the data from the US Elections Assistance Commission, 3,006,080 votes were not counted: “spoiled,” unreadable and blank ballots; “provisional” ballots rejected; mail-in ballots disqualified.

This Tuesday, it will be worse. Much worse.

That's what I found while traveling the nation over the last year for BBC Television and Rolling Stone Magazine, working with voting rights attorney Robert F. Kennedy Jr. This we guarantee: there will be far more votes disappeared by Tuesday night than the three million lost in 2004. A six-million vote swipe, quite likely, shifts 4 percent of the ballots, within the margin of error of the tightest polls.

Begin with this harsh statistic: since the last election, more than ten million voters have been purged from the nation's vote registries. And that's just the start of the steal.

If the noncount were random, it wouldn't matter. But it's not random. A US Civil Rights Commission analysis shows that the chance a black voter's ballot will "spoil" or be blank is 900 percent higher than a white voter's.

Does that mean the election's stolen and you should forget voting and just go back to bed for four years? Hell, no. It means you vote and vote smart, learn how to pry their filthy little hands off your ballot (there's a link at the end).

How to Steal an Election in Five Easy Steps

Here's how they can pull off the steal. Take out your calculator and add it up.

Step One: The "Dumpster" Vote - Purge Voters, Provisional Ballots

Ten million voters purged? What the hell is going on here? Why are we removing millions from the voter rolls?

The answer is the GOP's secret weapon, the Help America Vote Act, signed by George Bush in 2002. When Bush tells us he's going to help us vote, look out. But Democrats didn't. They signed on to the GOP bill, believing this "reform" law would prevent "another Florida." Instead, "Help America Vote" Floridated the entire nation.

Here's how: Help America Vote empowered secretaries of state to remove fraudulent and suspicious voters from the voter registries. It was the trick used by Katherine Harris in Florida in 2000 when she purged "felon" voters. Except they weren't felons. And now her GOP confrères are doing it in dozens of states, calling folks felon voters, "inactive" voters, suspect voters, whatever.

Take Colorado. The GOP didn't exactly trumpet it's erasing 19.4 percent of voters' names. It was, as detectives say, "hidden in plain sight," buried deep inside a US Elections Assistance Commission administrative report, among tables of mind-numbing stats through which I was trawling some months ago. (I used to teach statistics at Indiana University, so I enjoy reading matrices like others enjoy novels.)

For BBC TV and Rolling Stone, I asked the current Colorado Secretary of State Mike Coffman, "Why all the purging?" No answer, not a word, stonewalled even when I flew into Denver and stood outside his door. He was, I guess, too busy preparing to count his own votes as Republican candidate for Congress.

So, where are the Democrats? That's the really scary part. I spoke with Paul Hultin, appointed by Colorado's Democratic governor to the state's Election Reform Commission.

Hultin's a terrific attorney. He knows, and says, that Help America Vote was a law "born in corruption," but he's spent his time on Colorado's voting machines, which he knows are busted. He's the Democrats' expert, and he didn't know that a fifth of his state's voters had vanished from the voter rolls.

Well, don't worry. Hultin's official committee will be holding hearings on the voting debacle in Colorado ... on November 19.

Then there's New Mexico, with those one in nine Democrats missing. I spoke with San Miguel County elections supervisor, Democrat Pecos Paul Maez, who was none too happy that 20 percent of his voters, the majority poor and Hispanic, were not on the voter rolls, especially because he was one of the missing. He blamed the state for using a suspect contractor to tag names for the Big Purge, as required by the Help America Vote Act. The contractor that conducted the New Mexico purge, Electronic Systems and Software (ES&S), was founded by Republican Senator Chuck Hagel.

The company and state choose the purging "algorithms," those mathematical formulae that, depending on how you tweak them, can go through a voter roll like a hot knife through cream cheese.

So, what happens to the purged voters? They're told to scam when they arrive to vote or, if they squawk, they get a "provisional" ballot on which they can pretend to vote.

Now, here are the facts about provisionals: they don't get counted. And there are lots of them. The great unreported story of the 2004 election was that there were more than three million voters shunted to provisional ballots. Over a million (1,090,000) were never counted, just chucked in the dumpster. That's what caused Kerry to lose New Mexico, Iowa and Ohio. This time, because of Help America Vote and a Republican campaign to challenge voters, the number of provisionals will rise, as will rejections.

Whatever keeps you from getting a real ballot - purged name, for example - keeps you from having the provisional counted as well. That's because Democrats won the right of every voter to get a provisional ballot, but not the right to have that ballot counted. And how many will go uncounted? Double the 1.1 million loss in 2004 - not just because of the GOP's purge-mania, but because of a vicious little codicil in Help America Vote that went into effect since the last election ...

Step Two: "Verification" (and Elimination) of New Voters

For the first time in US history, new voters will face special new obstacles to voting. When we say "new" voters, let's be clear - we mean Obama voters. A Wall Street Journal poll shows new voters prefer Obama by an eye-popping three to one (69 percent to 20 percent).

So, the Republican game plan is simple: don't let new voters vote. There are three steps to this block-and-steal tactic. First, under the new law, states can deny new voters registration on the grounds their names can't be verified against government data files. Sounds reasonable, but it's not, because we don't have Soviet-style citizenship files in the US. The Social Security Administration is rejecting nearly half of the names submitted because there is no multi-state compatible tracking system. Of course, the Republicans know that.

New voter verification losses are huge. In California, a Republican secretary of state rejected 42 percent of new registrations, a trick discovered by his Democratic successor, Debra Bowen. She told me most of the rejected vote applicants had Hispanic, Vietnamese, Islamic and other “odd” names – odd, that is, for Republicans.

It used to be that you filled out a registration card and, bingo, you were registered. Not any more. That’s also what happened in Florida to the 85,000 new registrants. They were victims of strict “matching” algorithms. Other states are also playing the “match” game. The result is voters will find themselves simply missing (or in some states, required to show extra ID – another horror show we’ll discuss below). But don’t worry, a of couple million new voters will get provisional ballots. That way, they can practice filling out their ballots for the day when democracy returns to America.

Step Three: New ID Laws

Karl Rove said, “I go to the grocery store and I wanna cash a check to pay for my groceries I gotta show a little bit of ID. Why should it not be reasonable ... at the voting place they ought to be able to prove who they are by showing some form of ID.” And so, while buying his Pampers, Rove came up with a game-winner for the GOP.

Karl, let me answer your question. The reason, according to several studies by the Bush administration itself, is that lots of folks don’t have government ID. Some are nuns, some are poor, lots are brown or old. I was on Fox TV with Lady Rothschild a couple of weeks ago. The lady, a McCain supporter, approved of the ID requirement – and was truly surprised to find out that some poorer Americans don’t have passports. “Why don’t they?” her Fox-mates asked, incredulous. Well, not every barrio kid has just returned from his estate outside London.

Rove knows that. He certainly knows that, for example, Professor Matthew Barreto of the University of Washington found that 10 percent of white voters in Indiana don’t have the needed ID. And, for blacks, it’s about double – 19 percent lack the ID required to vote. New ID laws will add to the turn-aways, provisionals and rejecteds on Tuesday by at least two million – and that’s way conservative, assuming the new laws in swing states are only one-fourth as restrictive as Indiana’s.

Step Four: Spoiling Ballots

Your chad gets hung. The touch screen doesn’t like your touch. Or, your paper ballot had that extra mark that made the machine spit out your ballot like day-old beer with a cigarette floating in it.

In the last election, 1,389,231 ballots were zeroed-out, “spoiled,” because the machines lost them, couldn’t read them, mangled them or simply didn’t register them. But it’s not random, not by a long shot. In New Mexico in 2004, I found that 89 percent of blank and spoiled ballots were cast in minority precincts – a sum of uncounted ballots way over the Republican “victory” margin in that state.

Another study shows that Hispanics’ vote choices are six times as likely to fail to be recorded when they vote on computers versus paper ballots.

In the primaries and in 2006, the “spoilage” and blank (“undervote”) totals were horrific. There is every reason to believe the “spoilage” total will be as high as in the 2004 election.

That is, no less than one million votes, overwhelmingly in minority districts, will just vanish. (“Spoilage” is not the same as vote tampering. There is the concern that “black-box” computers will switch your vote via an evil software hack job. That’s another matter completely – and more votes lost if it happens, a sum I’m not including here.)

Step Five: Rejecting Mail-In Ballots

You’ve mailed in your ballot. Last time around, over half a million mail-in ballots were junked: everything from postage due to not liking your signature to a circle checked, not filled in. Mailing in a ballot is playing Russian roulette with it. About a tenth get junked.

This time, the GOP has a new game for trashing your absentee vote. In states like Florida, some FTFs (First-Time Federal voters) will have to include a photocopy of their ID in with the absentee ballot. Bet you didn’t know that. They’re counting on you not knowing that. In Florida, for example, you have to place the ID photocopy outside the inner envelope, but inside the outer envelope – Got that? – or your vote is toast. I’ve spoken to one student voter, who lost his vote for failing to use the two envelopes – though he only received one. (Have a mail-in ballot in hand? Then, for God’s sake, walk it in to the polling place or local board of elections. Sign, seal and deliver it in person.)

You may get it right, but historic data suggest that, when combining the FTF games with the usual mail-in cock-ups, Obama will lose another million votes to mail-in disqualifications.

Exit Polls and Exit Stratagems

These millions of uncounted ballots – spoiled ballots, provisional ballots rejected, absentee ballots disqualified – fully explain the difference between exit polls (which, for example, gave Kerry Ohio in 2004 and Gore a win in Florida in 2000) and the official count. Exit pollsters ask, “Who did you vote for?” They never ask, and can’t know, “Did your vote count?”

How would they get away with it? Well, they begin explaining away how the “pollsters” get it wrong, how pollsters didn’t figure the “Bradley Effect” of lying, racist voters. They’ll tell us the new, young and Black Obamaniacs gave money, went to rallies – but never bothered to vote. But the real reason will never be whispered: They cast votes that just weren’t counted.

Will the election be stolen on Tuesday? No, it’s already been stolen. That is, several million voters are doomed to lose their ballots; most won’t even know it. Overwhelmingly, they are the poor, minorities, new voters – Obama voters. Does that mean McCain’s got it in the bag and you’re helpless? Not at all.

Don’t Steal Your Own Vote

In 2004, I and other investigators wrote, long before Election Day, “Ohio’s stolen.” We were deadly right.

It’s happening again. For six years, the Democratic Party has been snoozing through a quiet, brilliantly executed Republican operation to block, stop and purge voters by the millions. As New Mexico voting rights attorney John Boyd put it, “I don’t think the Democrats get it. All these new rules and games are turning voting into an obstacle course that could flip the vote to the GOP in half a dozen states.”

Karl Rove once said, “We have elections like those run in countries where the guys in charge are, you know, colonels in mirrored glasses.” He wasn’t complaining; he was boasting.

I know that the Obama campaign is not happy that I bring up the issue of a possible theft of the election. They fear voters will be “discouraged” by the possibility that the election is fixed.

Well, frankly, if you’re too bummed out by this recitation of facts and statistics to vote, then maybe you don’t deserve to vote, or to drive or to reproduce. Did Martin Luther King say, “I have a dream ... so I’m going back to sleep”?

Votes can’t be saved by “hope” alone. There are simple ways to protect your own vote, from walking in your “mail-in” to refusing a provisional ballot. (You can download the list at StealBackYourVote.org, written with Bobby Kennedy, a professor of law.)

It comes down to this: Can the margin of trickery, vote suppression and ballot destruction – three to six million votes – be overcome? Yes. Because they can’t steal all the votes all the time. Two days before the election, John McCain is down by only 4 percent in some polls. But these are polls of “likely” voters. They exclude first-time and many low-income voters.

So, the answer to vote suppression is for something unlikely to happen – for the “unlikely” voters to simply overwhelm the statistical assumption of their laziness. As I’m sure Mr. Obama, a professor of constitutional law, could tell you: the best legal response to systematic vote suppression is to get off yo’ ass!

Greg Palast is the co-author of “Block the Vote,” in this month’s *Rolling Stone Magazine*, with Robert F. Kennedy Jr. Palast and Kennedy are also co-authors of the investigative comic book, “Steal Back Your Vote.” Palast, who reports on election fraud for BBC Television, is a Nation Institute/Puffin Foundation fellow for investigative reporting. Prior to his becoming a journalist, Palast was a forensic economist, fraud investigator and taught economics and statistics at Indiana University. palast@gregpalast.net

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