

## GAO\* Report Finds Flaws in Electronic Voting

Summary from [www.TruthOut.org](http://www.TruthOut.org)  
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Rep. Waxman led twelve members of Congress today in releasing a new GAO report that found security and reliability flaws in the electronic voting process.

In a joint press release, Rep. Waxman said, "The GAO report indicates that we need to get serious and act quickly to improve the security of electronic voting machines. The report makes clear that there is a lack of transparency and accountability in electronic voting systems - from the day that contracts are signed with manufacturers to the counting of electronic votes on Election Day. State and local officials are spending a great deal of money on machines without concrete proof that they are secure and reliable."

The GAO report found flaws in security, access, and hardware controls, as well as weak security management practices by voting machine vendors. The report identified multiple examples of actual operational failures in real elections and found that while national initiatives to improve the security and reliability of electronic voting systems are underway, "it is unclear when these initiatives will be available to assist state and local election authorities."

Rep. Waxman also released a fact sheet summarizing the report's key findings.

### Fact Sheet

#### Overall Findings

In October 2005, the Government Accountability Office released a comprehensive analysis of the concerns raised by the increasing use of electronic voting machines.

Overall, GAO found that "significant concerns about the security and reliability of electronic voting systems" have been raised (p. 22).

GAO indicated that "some of these concerns have been realized and have caused problems with recent elections, resulting in the loss and miscount of votes" (p. 23).

According to GAO, "election officials, computer security experts, citizen advocacy groups, and others

have raised significant concerns about the security and reliability of electronic voting systems, citing instances of weak security controls, system design flaws, inadequate system version control, inadequate security testing, incorrect system configuration, poor security management, and vague or incomplete standards, among other issues. ... The security and reliability concerns raised in recent reports merit the focused attention of federal, state, and local authorities responsible for election administration" (p. 22-23).

#### Specific Problems Identified by GAO

Based on reports from election experts, GAO compiled numerous examples of problems with electronic voting systems. These included:

##### Flaws in System Security Controls

Examples of problems reported by GAO include (1) computer systems that fail to encrypt data files containing cast votes, allowing them to be viewed or modified without detection by internal auditing systems; (2) systems that could allow individuals to alter ballot definition files so that votes cast for one candidate are counted for another; and (3) weak controls that allowed the alteration of memory cards used in optical scan machines, potentially impacting election results. GAO concluded that "these weaknesses could damage the integrity of ballots, votes, and voting system software by allowing unauthorized modifications (p. 25).

##### Flaws in Access Controls

Examples of problems reported by GAO include (1) the failure to password-protect files and functions; (2) the use of easily guessed passwords or identical passwords for numerous systems built by the same manufacturer; and (3) the failure to secure memory cards used to secure voting systems, potentially allowing individuals to vote multiple times, change vote totals, or produce false election reports.

According to GAO, "in the event of lax supervision, the ... flaws could allow unauthorized personnel to disrupt operations or modify data and programs that are crucial to the accuracy and integrity of the voting process" (p. 26).

##### Flaws in Physical Hardware Controls

In addition to identifying flaws in software and access controls, GAO identified basic problems with the physical hardware of electronic voting machines. Example of problems reported by GAO included locks that could be easily picked or were all

\* U.S. Government General Accountability Office