

THE ELECTIONS TRANSPARENCY PROJECT

ELECTIONS INTEGRITY THROUGH TRANSPARENCY

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BACKGROUND

THE ELECTIONS TRANSPARENCY PROJECT is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit corporation. We were born from the *Humboldt County Election Transparency Project (HCETP)*, a group recognized for the discovery of significant errors in the certified election results in the November 2008 Presidential Election in Humboldt County, California. Because of that discovery, the county Registrar-Recorder, Carolyn Crnich, decertified the original results and the California Secretary of State, Debra Bowen, decertified identical Diebold voting equipment throughout California.

The *HCETP* began verifying election results in Humboldt County, California in June of 2008 and we incorporated as a nonprofit of August 2014. Since 2008, in cooperation with the Humboldt County Elections Department, a core group of citizen volunteers and wider group of “election season” volunteers have been digitally scanning the ballots cast in each public, county-administered election in Humboldt County, California. We do this in order to create a set of images of all the ballots cast. We have been using regular, off-the-shelf Fujitsu scanners. The images are created using scanning equipment

that is entirely independent of the county’s regular voting equipment. During this ballot auditing process, each ballot is imprinted with a unique numeric identifier. This allows us to match an image with a individual ballot. This set of images is then made publicly available so that anyone can count the votes cast. You can read more about this process in the “[Overview](#)” section.

KEY CONCEPTS

The Elections Transparency Project is based on two simple ideas.

First, the people who vote in an election have the right to see the ballots that were cast, because that’s the best way to keep election results honest.

Second, allowing unlimited access to the ballots creates practical difficulties in keeping them secure, so having an independent group with the cooperation of the the elected registrar-recorder Kelly Sanders and the Elections Department to generate digitally-signed images of the ballots is a more practical alternative to allowing unlimited access to the paper ballot to each voter.

We’ve been doing this in Humboldt County, California for nearly a decade, complete with our own independent and open source software to count the votes from the ballot images. We believe it has helped the citizens of Humboldt County maintain high confidence that the elections office results accurately reflect the cast ballots.

Any citizen who wants a copy of the images is welcome to them and can ; they can then count votes from the images using whatever approach they think best. During the scanning process, each individual ballot is numbered just before it is scanned, so if there is ever a question of whether an image accurately reflects a ballot, the original ballot can always be produced. And

we have developed independent open source software to automate our independent count.

It's easy to modify digital images, but once they are digitally-signed it's as if they are in a tamper-proof package — any change to the images, no matter how tiny, would be easily detected by the signature-checking software.

And because at the time the ballots are scanned they've been shuffled from the order in which they were cast, there is no way that a voter can be identified from their ballot.

Ballots with distinguishing marks have their votes duplicated onto clean ballots by the elections office before the project is provided with ballots to scan, so even if a voter specially marked a ballot, that mark would not appear on scans. And ballots that are not anonymous — where a voter signs their name, for example — are already invalid under California law.

We believe our approach provides the best balance between practical security considerations and the need for voters to have proof that their elections are being counted accurately.

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