

Broken Ballots: Will Your Vote Count?
By Douglas W. Jones and Barbara Simons
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Broken Ballots: Will Your Vote Count? is the product of a collaboration between Douglas W. Jones, a computer science professor at the University of Iowa, and Barbara Simons, a former IBM Research employee. *Broken Ballots* takes a deep, methodical dive into the popular vote tradition in American electoral history and the automation of the voting process, making certain repeating patterns of election controversy quite clear.

Jones and Simons begin with a brilliant opening line: “This book should never have been written.” It’s a bold opening statement that’s immediately followed up with a detailed explanation: “In 1934, the Brookings Institution published a great book by Joseph Harris, entitled *Election Administration in the United States*. Had people followed Harris’ advice, there would be no need for our book.” However, to state the obvious, people—namely the government officials making election-related decisions for the past eighty years—did not follow Harris’ advice. It’s startling to consider that election tampering and voter fraud was enough of a concern 80 years ago for someone to write a book about it. And these election-related cracks in American democracy were not new then—they’d been slowly spreading since the birth of the nation. How far we simply haven’t come becomes quite apparent the further the reader gets into *Broken Ballots*.

Given the extensive government inquiry following the 2016 presidential election and the level of turmoil regarding the validity of each American’s vote, one might suspect that *Broken Ballots* was published in the aftermath of that election. They would be incorrect.

Broken Ballots was published in 2012—and the tumultuous election to which the authors make the most reference is that of 2000. For those readers who need a refresher on what made the outcome of that election so contentious, Al Gore lost the electoral college vote to George W. Bush thanks to Florida even though he won the popular vote. After a recount and a Supreme Court decision, Bush was declared the winner. But many suspected that certain discrepancies in the voting process could be attributed to flaws in the Votomatic machines that many Floridians used to cast their vote.

Swap out Bush for Trump, Gore for Clinton, and the Florida debacle with Russian election tampering, and the overall outcome of the 2016 election parallels that of the 2000 election quite eerily. Even though Simons’ and Jones’ book is almost 7 years old at this point, the content is hardly dated. If anything, it should be required reading for high school students taking AP Government. Jones and Simons address the dangers of online voting and the ease with which voting machines can be tampered and internet voting can be hacked by a third party. More than four years before the 2016 election, they were basically telling their readers how it would end.

It’s not clearly marked which chapters or sections were authored by Jones or Simons. The writing is clear and seamless—no one section seems more or less well written than any other. Anytime either author appears as a character in the narrative, so to speak, they are referred to in the third person. The rather interesting narrative decision has the effect of conveying to the reader both that Jones and Simons themselves have nothing to hide and emphasizes their importance in the perhaps rather small sphere of academically inclined experts in electronic voting.

Simons and Jones have the unique talent of taking a rather pedantic subject and making it more than palatably interesting. I recommend reading *Broken Ballots* before the next time you cast a vote.

Review by Jeanette S. Ferrara, MA