Essay 1

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Against E-Voting

The computer, which is the most important advance in modern communication technology, is in fact a threat to our democratic elections. With computer technology advancing daily, many activities that used to require many long hours can now be accomplished in a few minutes and sometimes even seconds. For the most part, these technological innovations promise to save time and money and to make people's lives easier and more comfortable, but not every aspect of life should be taken care of by computers. In particular, societies should not vote with computers or other electronic media because elections are too important to trust to cyberspace.

In years past, people voted on paper ballots and marked them with ink or some similar means. Voters could look over their ballots to ensure that they did not make a mistake. Also, when there was a dispute over the results of an election, paper ballots allowed election officials to count votes by hand. This process was tedious, but the results could be easily verified to see if there were any deviations between vote tallies. Several countries still use this traditional system of voting, and it provides a crucial foundation for ensuring fairness.

Without this traditional system of voting, however, voters do not really know whether e-voting systems count their votes accurately. It is quite possible that a computer programmer could develop a program so that a person could select one candidate on a computer screen, yet the vote would be counted for another candidate. Although some people might think this scenario sounds unlikely, serious problems with computer security have occurred throughout the world. The simple fact is that hackers can gain access to many computer systems for illegal purposes. By illegally entering an online polling site, they could easily change the outcome of an election. Citizens should also question whether electronic voting enhances the voting process. As Celeste, Thornburgh, and Lin (2006) point out, "the desirability of electronic voting systems should be judged on the basis of whether their use will significantly improve the process of election administration" (p. 131). As the old saying tells us, "If something isn't broken, don't fix it."

If government officials decide to use electronic voting machines, they should ensure that all voters receive receipts for their votes that could then be collected for subsequent verification. These paper receipts would clearly state that the voters really voted for the candidates that they selected. Furthermore, if any candidate suspects that an election is unfair, these receipts could be counted by hand and checked against the results that the computers provided. At the very least, as Alvarez and Hall (2008) argue, voting should be a simple, secure, and consistent process, regardless of the voting procedure that is being used.

Computer technologies have improved the quality of our lives vastly, but these technologies are not a cure for all of society's problems. Sometimes a little more human work ensures a better, more precise result. Since voting is critically important to the effective and honest working of society, citizens should rely on a much older technology—paper and ink—rather than on computers for all elections.