Pennsylvania Counties' New Voting Systems Selections: An Analysis

It is rarely the case that county officials have the luxury of selecting a better product at a lower price than the alternatives. When it comes to voting systems, hand-marked paper ballots are dramatically cheaper than ballot-marking devices with fewer security risks.

About the Analysis

Pennsylvania’s counties have selected new voting systems, with implications for the security, reliability, and auditability of elections across the Commonwealth and beyond. Our organizations’ analysis of county selections reveals that several have decided to purchase expensive electronic machines with security challenges (BMDs) over the better option: hand-marked paper ballots (HMPB).

In fact, many counties have chosen the All-BMD configuration and are paying a hefty sum for it—twice as much per voter as counties that selected systems that rely principally on voters hand-marking their ballots. Pricier electronic systems also carry greater security risks and make it harder for voters to verify their ballots before casting.

Data as of February 28, 2020
The nation's largest voting system vendor—ES&S—has been the clear dominant vendor. Thirty-eight of the Commonwealth’s 67 counties, accounting for more than 60 percent of the registered voters in Pennsylvania, have selected ES&S. This includes Pennsylvania’s two most populous counties: Allegheny and Philadelphia.

**The Facts**

- Counties that have selected BMDs are paying twice as much per voter as counties that have selected HMPBs.
- Counties buying expensive BMDs will receive a disproportionate share of state funds under the Governor’s plan to reimburse counties through a bond issuance for 60% of their actual costs for new voting systems.

For interactive maps and additional data, please visit [cyber.pitt.edu/votingsystemsanalysis](http://cyber.pitt.edu/votingsystemsanalysis)

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