

Formal and Empirical Arguments for Open Web Access to Voting Records

presenter: Todd Davies (joint work with Jeffrey Gerard, Reid Chandler, and Gordon Lyon)

To be presented at the Annual Meeting of the Public Choice Society, Las Vegas, NV, March 5-8, 2009

Abstract:

We describe the thinking behind Who Voted?, a new website where voter histories from U.S. elections that are legally available to the public can be uploaded and viewed by anyone with an Internet connection. The Who Voted site is a research prototype which addresses the aspect of secret ballot election integrity that relies on verification of the list of those who voted. It also aims to promote voting, by making the list of those who voted (but not who they voted for) easier to see. The site is controversial, and is legal and feasible for data only from some U.S. states (others are omitted presently). We offer two types of justification for Who Voted?: (1) a formal argument based on necessary conditions for secure secret ballot elections, and (2) an empirical argument based on evidence of the effect of voter visibility on turnout rates.