

# Defending against election hacking

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July 25, 2018

Presented at the Iowa State Association of County Auditors  
meeting in Iowa City

# The threat:

- **Regardless** of whether there was collusion
- Russia tried to meddle in 2006, and they almost certainly believe it worked.

- It doesn't matter if it really worked

**What matters is their belief**

- We must assume **they will try again**

# We must defend against

- Fake news, social media manipulation, etc.  
Election officials can't really help here
- Attacks on **voter registration systems**  
A huge issue
- Attacks on the actual **voting process**  
A significant issue

# Voter Registration Vulnerabilities

- HAVA forced **state wide voter databases**  
these are **an attractive target**
- In 2006, **Russia got into the Illinois database**
- **The threat is serious**  
Suppose they de-registered undesirable voters?

# Voter Registration Defenses

- Provisional ballots
- Same-day registration
- A large scale attack would lead to
  - **long lines** because of paperwork
  - more **paperwork** at the election office

# Weaknesses

- Long lines **disenfranchise** some voters
  - some people will not wait
- Paperwork will **disenfranchise** some voters
  - some people won't have necessary papers
- Long lines, even **the appearance of chaos**
  - play into fake-news narratives

# Voting Process Vulnerabilities

- Worst case scenario
  - assume **Russia hacks the voting machines**
- Malware installed on **precinct tabulators**
- Malware installed on **county election servers**
  - **Stuxnet** shows how it could be done
- **Vendor support systems** penetrated

# Voting System Defenses

- We use **paper ballots** in Iowa
  - they can be **recounted!**
  - we **recount enough** that we're competent
- Today's **voting systems are hardened**
  - **cryptography**
  - **digital signatures**



# Weaknesses

- Recounts create the **appearance of chaos**
  - look at the big statewide recount in Minnesota
- Only the **newest** voting systems are truly hard
  - and are they really that hard?
  - security is in the **proprietary details!**

# We could do better

- Iowa's **election audits** are a tentative first step
- California had **mandatory audits** since 1965
  - only 1% (not enough)
  - but done **before vote is certified**
- Modern **risk-limiting audits** offer much more
  - **too late** to change law this election cycle

# Closing Thoughts

- **Transparency** is crucial
  - democracy depends on the trust of the voters
- Avoid the **Wizard of Oz defense**:
  - don't look behind that curtain, it's all OK!
- **The job of an election** is to convince the supporters of the losers that they lost fair and square.