

Ctrl Vote Delete

Does e-voting get a tick or a cross for democracy?

By Steven McCarron

'Everything can be manipulated.' While this might sound like the argument of one of the growing number of campaigners who are against the use of computers in elections, it is, in fact, the blunt statement found on the website of Nedap. This voting computer manufacturer is behind 90% of the machines that will be used in Wednesday's elections. Nedap do follow the statement up with a swift defence of their security systems, however, and they've fought tooth-and-nail to ensure their systems play a full part in the upcoming electoral contest. But their words still emphasise democracy's fragility in modern times.

Across the world, barely an election goes by where the results aren't contested or protested. Look no further than self-proclaimed 'greatest democracy in the world'—the United States—where voting computers were at the heart of huge controversies in the wake of the 2000 and 2004 elections, with regular occurrences of malfunctioning equipment and accusations of large-scale tampering. Unfortunately, it's typically left to small volunteer groups like Black Box Voting—stars of recent controversial documentary *Hacking Democracy*—to dig the dirt and question the accuracy of computer-based voting.

Until recently, Amsterdam was a bastion of paper balloting, and the ensuing change to electronic voting is drawing opposition. Campaigners Wij Vertrouwen Stemcomputers Niet ['we don't trust voting computers'] say 'there has to be a voter-verified paper copy of every vote cast. And these paper votes need to be regularly counted.' As it stands at the moment, in districts using computers the pressure group's demands aren't being met. Since forming, they've been labelled 'part of an international network that spreads all kind of conspiracy theories concerning our voting machines,' by Jan Groenendaal, the owner of Nedap, who then went on to blurt out on the website of the German Nedap importer that 'their exact motivation is beyond me. They're making trouble for trouble's sake.'

Through riling executives and hassling politicians, Wij Vertrouwen Stemcomputers Niet have made a huge difference in a short amount of time. On 30 October, Atzo Nicolai, Minister for Binnenlandse Zaken en Koninkrijksrelaties [Internal Affairs] announced that the swanky NewVote computers made by SDU, which were to be used throughout Amsterdam's voting districts, were being banned from these elections because they leak enough signal to be snooped upon—a criminal offence—although questions have also been asked about further tampering vulnerabilities.

This could be viewed as a reprieve for Amsterdam, despite prohibitive costs and



the later discovery that many old ballot boxes had been sold off to the public, but with a Wi-Fi modem running on Microsoft Windows, this voting system could have seen you waking up the morning after to the CAD ('Ctrl-Alt-Delete') as the ruling party. Instead, with 100,000 red pencils reportedly on order and awaiting delivery, one can only imagine that Sinterklaas and his Zwarte Pieten are going to be dishing out voting materials on Dam this weekend.

Wij Vertrouwen Stemcomputers Niet's real headline-grabber last month was to hack a regular Nedap voting computer to play chess, which succeeded in overshadowing their additional claims that leaking radio signals from these machines could not only be read, but they could also be made to record inaccurate votes. As things stand, Nicolai remains satisfied with Nedap's security.

The chess stunt does, however, warn us that computer hardware is only as good as the software running on it. It doesn't take a computer scientist to see the potential of reprogramming dated '80s hardware. The Nedap/Groenendaal ES3B machines being used are widely accepted as over the hill, so maybe one day they can be handed over to the Netherlands' creative public to play chess, stand as art, or perhaps audiences will one day await the world premiere of an ES3B Ensemble at Muziekgebouw. Insertion of additional RAM and sound modules doesn't take a big stretch of the imagination.

As for the realm of voter turnout, it could easily be argued that the best way forward is to lock all the contenders up in the *Big Brother* house. The election could then climax in a day of *X-Factor* turns, and in such a tight political climate, is there any fairer way than laying down a vote for whoever nails the most patriotic rendition of 'Heb Je Even Voor Mij?' But when it

comes to that issue of democratic trust, there's no hiding from this computer debate, which is likely to demand more scrutiny year by year. **W**

No fakin' that bakin'!

Hartog lauded for 110 years of quality products.

By André Dryansky

Wibautstraat is conceivably the dreariest street in Amsterdam. Especially when you're out on your bike, with the wind and rain seeping through your pants and buffeting you about. But Dad wants 'that good Dutch bread' for a special dinner.

Hartog's Volkoren Bakkerij en Maalderij sits on the corner of Ruyschstraat and Wibautstraat. It was cho-

