



Written by [Kurt Hyde](#) on February 4, 2020

Iowa Democratic Party Caucuses — App Malfunction Causes Delay in Reporting

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The Iowa Democratic Party held its caucuses yesterday evening and, as of noon CST today, the official party website shows all zeros for vote totals. Most news reports point to an [app that apparently malfunctioned](#), causing the delay in reporting results. But with or without an app that malfunctioned, this is a good time to ask why the process wasn't just run the old-fashioned way, either by show of hands or by paper ballots counted in front of the voters, and the results proclaimed immediately. Each caucus location could have had a website of its own or place to post results on a common website. If they wanted to use an app in parallel to see which would report results faster, that would have been a great idea. The biggest mistake may not be in the app that malfunctioned, but rather in the decision to make the results reporting dependent on a single technology that opened the door to a method of reporting results that was vulnerable to a single point of failure.

There are other problems that can happen when using technology to report election results. The potential single point of failure may also be a single point where election results can be altered. Unless an election is completely open and transparent, an outside attacker or an insider might be able to alter results undetected. At this point, there is no indication that anyone with access to alter results was in the system behind closed doors, but the fact that there aren't already partial results being posted for some of the counties and precincts on the Iowa Democratic Party website shows how difficult the transparency is to accomplish in these caucuses.

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There are three things that can happen when an election or its results are not transparent and provable. The first two are well-known: Something might go wrong and be inaccurate by accident, or



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something might go wrong owing to a deliberate act of election fraud. The third thing that might go wrong — while not as well known but certainly possible in Iowa — is that the results, when finally pieced together, might be accurate and honest, but the inability to prove the election results are accurate and honest could lead to someone with an ax to grind being able to cast doubts on an election when such doubts are not well-founded.

In many countries, doubts over election results result in violence, and people lose faith in the ballot box so they reach for the bullet box. Let's not let that happen in America. It's time to return to time-honored principles of traditional American elections: complete transparency in the processes, elections open to the public to monitor, votes counted in public immediately after the polls are closed, and a completely transparent method of reporting results that is open to the public each step of the way.

The New American has been an advocate of the paper trail in voting as well as other traditional American principles of transparency in elections. An example of previous reporting in Iowa caucuses was [our coverage of the 2016 Republican caucuses](#).

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