

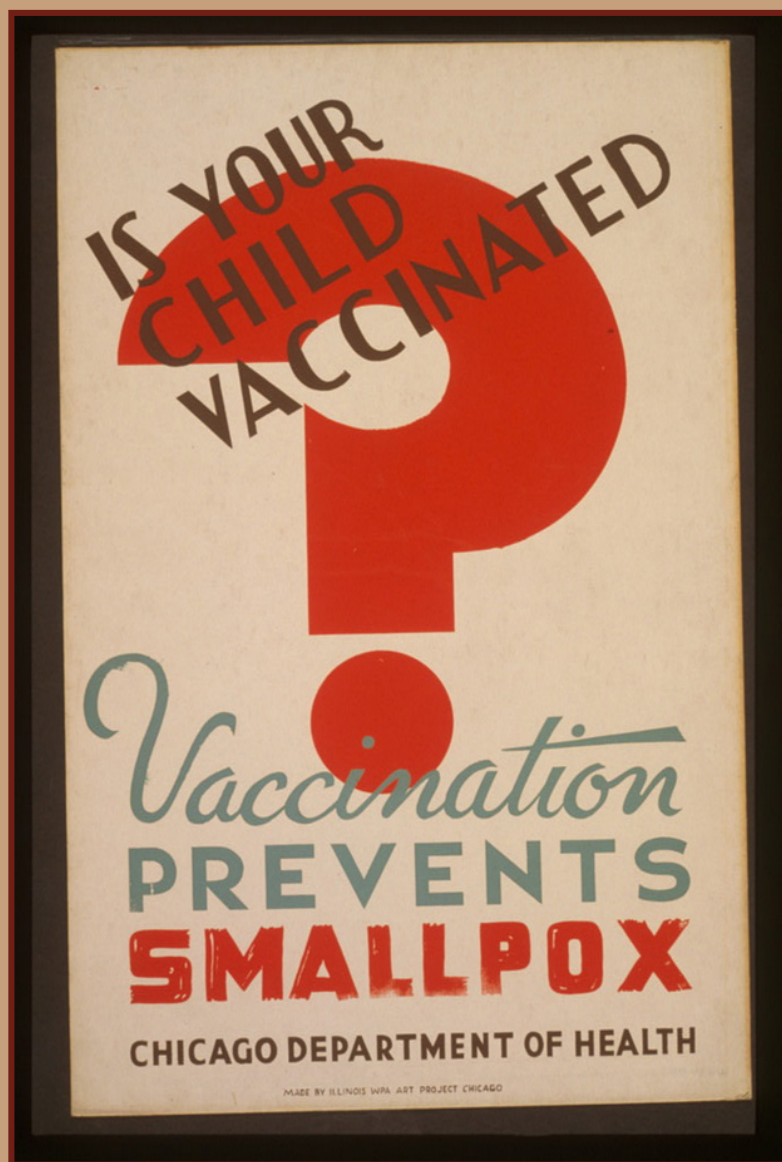
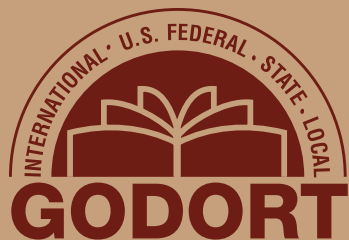
In This Issue:

- Protecting Privacy, Protecting Democracy: Government Surveillance in U.S. Libraries
- Proactive Public Awareness: AMBER Alerts
- Election Fraud & Reform: A Historical Perspective Using Government Documents

DttP

Documents to the People

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Get to Know . . .

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Editor's Corner: Keep Shining

Elizabeth Sanders

As I noted in my editorial in our Spring 2025 issue, the current federal administration's actions have been troubling, with large impacts throughout the government information landscape. At that time, I encouraged readers to focus on the lights in the darkness and how small efforts could culminate into larger impacts.¹ I would like to extend that message of hope to this editorial as well.

Within *DttP*, I am proud that our Summer 2025 issue helped shine light on contemporary efforts to resist censorship² and to connect users to government information and data rescue projects³ as federal information becomes increasingly removed and fragmented. I am equally proud that, in this issue, we have the privilege of sharing student papers on AMBER alerts, election fraud, and government surveillance in U.S. libraries. These students' early engagement with government information shows a spark that we will hopefully encourage to grow.

I would also like to highlight some recent resources that highlight how we must continue to stay abreast of new developments related to government information in the current administration. First, the Union of Concerned Scientists published a report indicating that 182 final rules from six science agencies have "bypassed the public notice and comment period," which are legally required.⁴ Second, *Nature* published an article highlighting efforts from scientists, including grant tracking and letter writing, made in response to changes in the federal government.⁵ Third, Pride in Exile (PIE) maintains a list of restored government information and Trump administration information related to equal access employment for LGBTQ+ individuals.⁶ Finally, a draft report from the Department of Energy, *A Critical Review of Impacts of Greenhouse Gas Emissions on the U.S. Climate*,⁷ led to published criticism from both scientists and legislators⁸; the panel that produced this draft report has been disbanded.⁹

To conclude, I would like to once again encourage our engagement with contemporary government information and challenges, both within GODORT and beyond. I acknowledge that doing so can be stressful or difficult, both personally and professionally. We may be legally limited in what we are able to say or do. We may be able to concentrate on only one, small area. We may need to disengage, for a time, to protect our well-being. None of these situations, however, diminish the importance or potential impact of our efforts. Let us keep shining, in whatever means we can.

The views expressed in this editorial are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the views of the Government Documents Round Table (GODORT), the American Library Association (ALA), Lamar University, or any other entity.

Elizabeth Sanders (esanders5@lamar.edu), Director of Learning & Research, Lamar University

Notes

1. Elizabeth Sanders, "Editor's Corner: A Light in the Darkness," *DttP* 53, no. 1 (2025): 2-3, <https://doi.org/10.5860/dttp.v53i01.8452>.
2. Lisa Schiff, "Resisting Censorship and Defending the Integrity of Federally Supported Information," *DttP* 53, no. 2 (2025): 9-14, <https://doi.org/10.5860/dttp.v53i2.8521>.
3. Olivia Ivey, Jessica Breen, Sarah Gilchrist, and Gwendolyn Reece, "On the Same (Web)Page: Using LibGuides to Connect Researchers to Government Information and Data Rescue Projects," *DttP* 53, no. 2 (2025): 15-18, <https://doi.org/10.5860/dttp.v53i2.8522>.
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From the Chair

Julia Ezzo

I first joined GODORT in 2013 when I was a baby librarian. Having earned my MLIS from Wayne State University in 2011, my experience was limited to a single role as an Assistant Copyright Librarian before embarking on my government information journey. The ALA behemoth was intimidating, yet I was eager to find my place. While I had been active in the New Members Round Table, I yearned for a true professional home—and I found it in GODORT.

When I went to my first GODORT meeting in Chicago at ALA Annual 2013, I was nervous. My knowledge of government documents was minimal, since I had only been in the government information role for less than two months, and I feared being excluded and treated as an outsider. Instead, I was met with warmth and inclusion. The GODORT community embraced me, making me feel valued and connected. At its core, GODORT is its people—dedicated members united in our mission to ensure free access to government information, regardless of jurisdiction or format.

This year has posed unprecedented challenges for government information in the United States. While we've always grappled with helping people find and access information, while preserving it for the future (as is evidenced by the existence of GODORT's Rare and Endangered Government Publications Committee), this year has been especially challenging. The transition to a new Presidential Administration in January 2025 brought alarming removals of government websites and datasets, threatening our collective history. Yet, in the face of these challenges, our community has shown remarkable resilience. From preserving access to advocating for the future, we've leaned on each other to safeguard what matters most.

While government information professionals have always excelled at collaboration, this year has highlighted our strength in unity. Through partnerships like the End of Term Archive with the Internet Archive, grassroots initiatives like the Data Rescue Movement, and even unconventional efforts on platforms like the Data Hoarders subreddit, we've utilized every available network. We've worked our networks, and searched for more partners to help us, any way we could. While not all of us have the technical expertise or resources to preserve data and information ourselves, we've used our collective voice to raise awareness and rally support for protecting critical government information.

This collaborative spirit not only strengthens the resilience of our documentary heritage but also reinforces the vital role of information professionals in upholding democratic accountability. We won't sit idly by watching the erasure of history and knowledge. Though challenges may arise, and things may seem bleak, our united GODORT community stands strong, committed to protecting, preserving, and ensuring free access to government information at every level. This is a pivotal moment in history, and GODORT continues to play a vital role. I'm looking forward to my role as GODORT Chair and guiding us through what lies ahead.

Julia Ezzo (julia@msu.edu), Government Information, Packaging, and Political Science Librarian, Michigan State University

Get to Know ...

Aimée Quinn

Gwen Sinclair

Veteran documents librarian Aimée Quinn draws on her experience in a variety of settings for her current position as Campus Librarian for Northern Arizona University (NAU) in Yuma. As the sole librarian, she does it all: reference, instruction, and collection development. In addition, she is in charge of the Student Research Symposium and is delving into AI so that she can teach students to use it ethically.

Unlike many librarians who accidentally find their way to government documents, Aimée was directed to this career path by an important mentor, documents librarian Eulalie Brown. Aimée worked at the library at the University of New Mexico (UNM) as a student. She had fully intended to pursue a degree in theatre; however, a serious accident derailed those plans, and she ended up back at UNM and eventually found her way into a government documents position. Although Aimée was working on a master's degree in Renaissance drama, Brown had other plans. She told Aimée, "I don't know why you're working on all this. You're going to become a docs librarian—we just know it!" She arranged for Aimée to receive a scholarship to get her library degree at Louisiana State University. Aimée was fortunate enough to attend the program when it still offered a certificate in government documents librarianship, and she credits this plus her on-the-job training for honing her expertise.

After finishing her library degree, Aimée took a position at Texas A&M University. A ground-breaking project that she worked on was the Department of Energy's (DOE's) Information Bridge, which brought together a number of documents librarians to help DOE figure out how to structure an electronic documents repository. As a relatively new librarian, Aimée also volunteered with the Dupont Circle Group, a group of government information librarians that developed recommendations to help GPO weather a period of legislative upheaval and budget challenges.

Aimée subsequently took a position as the documents coordinator at Eastern Washington University. She then moved to the University of Nevada at Las Vegas and later to the University of Illinois at Chicago (UIC), where she worked with John Shuler on the DOSFAN project, a partnership between UIC, GPO, and the U.S. Department of State to host a digital archive of State Department documents. Next, Aimée returned to Albuquerque to work as the associate director at a community college. She later spent several years at UNM before moving on to Central Washington University for a few years prior to taking her current position.

Although some of her positions have not been in a government documents role, Aimée said, "I think everybody's a government documents librarian, whether they admit it or not. If you work with data, you're working with government data. If you're working with education information, you're dealing with ERIC in some form or another. Almost every database you use is based on government information. I deal with government information every day, so I'm always a government documents librarian in my soul."

Aimée greatly values lifelong learning and professional development. She is fascinated by early congressional publishing and rare books in general, so she aspires to attend the Rare Book School someday. And she still maintains a connection with the theatre: she is currently re-reading *Richard III*, which she does every fall, "because I think it should have been a comedy, and I think that's what Shakespeare really meant it to be."

Aimée says that GODORT "has truly been a lifeline." For her, it is an organization whose members share her love of the works of Andriot and Schmeckebier and appreciate the arcane nature of government documents.¹ She was GODORT's chair in 2006-2007 and has continued to be active throughout her career. Another of her joys is being a moderator for the Gov Doc-L listserv, which she has done since 1989.

Throughout her career, Aimée has been a strong advocate for access to government information and is especially concerned about how the digital divide continues to impact users now that the FDLP is a mostly digital program. Thanks to Aimée's advocacy, NAU is in the process of becoming a virtual depository library, and she is looking forward to adding Depository Coordinator to her duties. Meanwhile, she loves to help her fellow librarians: "I don't know all the answers, but I usually know who to ask."

Gwen Sinclair (gsinclair@hawaii.edu), Chair,
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University of Hawai'i at Mānoa Library

Notes

1. John Andriot was best known for his *Guide to U.S. Government Publications*. Laurence Schmeckebier wrote numerous guides to government agencies and was the author of *Government Publications and Their Use*.

Protecting Privacy, Protecting Democracy: Government Surveillance in U.S. Libraries

Amy Enberg-Aravena

Introduction

In the first fifty days of President Trump's second term, Immigration Customs and Enforcement (ICE) made 32,809 arrests related to immigration enforcement, more than the entirety of the prior year under President Biden's administration.¹ 8 U.S.C. § 1357 gives ICE agents the power to "interrogate any alien or person believed to be an alien as to his right to be or to remain in the United States" without a warrant.² This increase in ICE activity is particularly relevant to librarians, as law enforcement may question patrons on library property or seek to access patron records. Government surveillance and law enforcement activity in libraries is not a new phenomenon; the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) Library Awareness Program and the USA PATRIOT Act are two examples of ways the U.S. government has operated in libraries or sought to make patron records available to law enforcement officers. Evaluating these instances—their history and their impact—can aid librarians and information professionals in understanding how to protect patron privacy in ever-changing political climates.

The Library Awareness Program

The Library Awareness Program was a Cold War initiative of the FBI that sought to surveil the circulation activity of patrons potentially associated with countries "hostile to the United States, such as the Soviet Union."³ *The KGB and the Library Target, 1962-Present*, an unclassified FBI study of "Soviet intelligence services (SIS) utilization of America's specialized scientific and technical libraries to further the objectives of the SIS collection effort," noted that the SIS recruited librarians and students to gain access to research databases, such as the National Technical Information Service (NTIS), which Soviet nationals were prohibited from accessing by President Carter's 1980 letter to the U.S. Secretary of Commerce, "Policy on Technology Transfer to the USSR."⁴ In response, the FBI sought to

develop librarians as sources to counter the KGB, notably in the greater New York area through the Library Awareness Program, according to redacted FBI documents provided to the U.S. House Committee on the Judiciary in 1988. This development included interviewing librarians and encouraging them to report suspicious activities by "Soviets who are members of professional organizations who have libraries and related access and/or those Soviets who would not have access but request access to otherwise restricted library privileges [*sic*]." The FBI itself labeled these activities as a "library awareness program," noting that the purpose was to "resolve any concerns expressed by librarians regarding the possible use of their resources by SIS officers."⁵

A challenge in evaluating the extent of the Library Awareness Program is that there is still not an official demarcation of when it began or which specific libraries agents targeted. When the National Security Archive made a Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) request for information concerning the Library Awareness Program in 1987, the FBI excluded documents for national security purposes, leading to *National SEC. Archive v. FBI*, 759 F. Supp. 872 (D.D.C. 1991). In this case, the court judged in favor of the FBI's exclusions of content under subsection (b)(2) of FOIA, "related solely to the internal personnel rules and practices of an agency," and in favor of the National Security Archive for content under (b)(5), "inter-agency or intra-agency memorandums or letters that would not be available by law to a party other than an agency in litigation with the agency..."; it also ordered that the FBI provide more information to justify its exclusion of materials under (b)(7), "records or information compiled for law enforcement purposes," with special focus on subsections (C) and (D), "could reasonably be expected to constitute an unwarranted invasion of personal privacy" and "could reasonably be expected to disclose the identity of a confidential source...and, in the case of a record or information compiled by criminal law enforcement

authority in the course of a criminal investigation or by an agency conducting a lawful national security intelligence investigation, information furnished by a confidential source.”⁶ Because Library Awareness Program materials are so inherently connected to the development of individuals as sources for intelligence purposes, it is difficult to gain information about the reach of its activities and which libraries it affected due to privacy issues.

Librarians had valid concerns about the constitutionality of the FBI’s surveillance of libraries, leading to a widespread condemnation of the program. The ALA Council passed a *Resolution in Opposition to FBI Library Awareness Program* in 1988 condemning the Library Awareness Program that states it “opposes any use of governmental prerogatives which leads to the intimidation of the individual or the citizenry from the exercise of free expression.” It further resolved that the ALA would “use all of the appropriate resources at its command to oppose the program and all similar attempts to intimidate the library community and/or to interfere with the privacy rights of library users by the FBI.”⁷ While these programs did not restrict expression directly or on face value, in practice a patron might self-censor and only browse materials deemed unsuspicious, which, as seen in the prohibition of Soviet nationals accessing the NTIS, may include technical or scientific information needed by students and professionals. The Supreme Court, in *Board of Education v. Pico*, 457 U.S. 853 (1982), held that “the right to receive ideas is a necessary predicate to the recipient’s meaningful exercise of his own rights of speech, press, and political freedom”; the restrictions of library activity by the Library Awareness Program infringe on this “right to receive ideas.”⁸ Unfortunately, as seen with the USA PATRIOT Act, government agencies continue to pursue surveillance operations in libraries, regardless of potential constitutional concerns.

USA PATRIOT Act

Following the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks, Congress passed H.R. 3162, Uniting and Strengthening America by Providing Appropriate Tools to Intercept and Obstruct Terrorism (USA PATRIOT ACT) Act of 2001, which gave intelligence agencies and law enforcement agencies expanded powers when it came to national security investigations.⁹ President George W. Bush, upon signing the Act into law, stated that the bill “gives law enforcement officials better tools to put an end to financial counterfeiting, smuggling, and money laundering,” allows criminal operations and intelligence operations to “share vital information so necessary to disrupt a terrorist attack before it occurs,” allows “surveillance of all communications used by terrorists, including e-mails, the Internet, and cell phones,” and makes warrants “valid across all districts and across all States.”¹⁰ There have been several updates to the original Act, including

H.R. 3199, which repealed the sunset date for the surveillance provisions of the USA PATRIOT Act, making them permanent, with the exceptions of sections 206 and 215, which were extended for four years.¹¹ The Department of Justice’s *Report from the Field: The USA PATRIOT Act at Work* notes that section 504 amended the Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Act of 1978 (FISA) to allow intelligence officials conducting FISA surveillance to consult with federal law enforcement, which aided in bringing down the “wall” between intelligence and law enforcement in the case of the “Lackawanna Six,” members of an al Qaeda cell.¹²

Sections 214 through 216 of the USA PATRIOT Act, with their expansion of telephone monitoring laws and records access, caused major privacy concerns in libraries that still exist in the present. With most libraries providing public internet terminals, section 216’s extension of the “pen register” and “trap and trace” provisions “to include routing and addressing information for all Internet traffic, including e-mail addresses, IP addresses, and URLs of Web pages” enables law enforcement officials to access patrons’ library computer records, and librarians are prohibited from disclosing the monitoring of information to patrons. Under section 214 and section 215, an FBI agent needs only to claim that the records may be related to a terrorism or intelligence investigation, without needing to demonstrate probable cause; according to Foerstel, “a ‘warrant’ issued by a secret FISA court is sufficient to require the immediate release of library records, and no court review or adversarial hearing is available to challenge the process.”¹³ Section 215 added provisions allowing the Director of the FBI or a designee to “make an application for an order requiring the production of any tangible things (including books, records, papers, documents, and other items) for an investigation to protect against international terrorism or clandestine intelligence activities, provided that such investigation of a United States person is not conducted solely upon the basis of activities protected by the first amendment to the Constitution.”¹⁴ This allowed law enforcement officers to access library records of patrons in relation to intelligence investigations, and as stated above, there was little recourse to question if a warrant was valid. As of March 15, 2020, section 215 has expired, though existing cases and potential offenses before the sunset date are grandfathered in, and sections 214 and 216 are still in effect.¹⁵

Following the passage of the USA PATRIOT Act, libraries found ways to circumvent policies that impacted patrons’ privacy, without outright disobeying the law. Skokie Public Library System in Illinois and Santa Cruz public libraries posted signs next to public computers, catalog terminals, the reference desk, and the circulation desk, informing patrons of the new laws and surreptitiously letting them know if law enforcement had asked to view patron records recently. Mark Corallo of the Justice

Department noted that libraries would not be breaking laws by destroying patron records in advance of any potential subpoenas, i.e., deleting computer terminal records at the end of each day or anonymizing patron circulation activity.¹⁶ Forty-eight states and the District of Columbia have enacted laws to protect patron privacy; one notable example is the Michigan Library Privacy Act, which states in section (2)(a) that a library employee shall not release a library record without the “written consent of the person liable for payment” unless “a court has ordered the release or disclosure after giving the affected library notice of the request and an opportunity to be heard on the request.”¹⁷

ICE Investigations

These two cases of government surveillance in libraries are relevant in conversations regarding initiatives by agencies like ICE, both in the lack of transparency surrounding them, such as with the extent of the FBI Library Awareness Program, and the continued provisions of the USA PATRIOT Act. One tactic used by immigration enforcement officers is exploiting confusing legal frameworks, for example, the distinction between administrative and judicial warrants and subpoenas. Because ICE is an agency of the Department of Homeland Security (DHS), which was established as an executive department by the Homeland Security Act of 2002, it does not have judicial power.¹⁸ Immigration enforcement agents have the authority to arrest individuals believed to be “an alien illegally in the United States” with an ICE-issued warrant of arrest under 8 C.F.R. pt. 287.8(c) and without a warrant of arrest if the individual is “likely to escape before a warrant can be obtained” under (c)(2)(ii); *search* warrants, however, must be issued by a judicial court and be signed by a state or federal judge, along with other requirements, to be valid and therefore require immediate compliance.¹⁹ Subpoenas, whether requiring testimony in court or the production of records, also have administrative and judicial distinctions. According to 8 C.F.R. pt. 287.4(d), if a witness refuses to testify or produce records designated in a subpoena issued by DHS, the issuing immigration judge or officer can request the U.S. District Attorney to seek a District Court order that would require the witness to comply.²⁰ It is this subsequent subpoena, issued by a judicial court and signed by a state or federal judge, that is a valid judicial subpoena and must be immediately complied with to avoid legal action.²¹

Conflating administrative and judicial warrants and subpoenas can lead to confusion and pressure to hurriedly consent to searches and records access without first consulting legal representation, posing a risk to library staff who may be served with ICE orders to release patron records. This was the case at Liberty High School Academy for Newcomers in New York City. In 2010, the school received a DHS subpoena signed by an ICE agent demanding

the release of student records protected under the Family and Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA), 20 U.S.C. § 1232(g).²² Though attorney Lauren Burke advised the school not to release the records, as the subpoena was administrative, rather than judicial, the New York City Department of Education required Liberty High to comply, due to the coercive language of the subpoena.²³ ICE’s use of immigration subpoenas is not new—the Liberty High instance happened under the Obama Administration—but it is particularly relevant with evolving immigration rules, i.e., the rescinding of the 2021 DHS memorandum *Guidelines for Enforcement Actions in or Near Protected Areas* with the 2025 *Enforcement Actions in or Near Protected Areas*.²⁴ Because of the stress that accompanies being served with a warrant or subpoena, along with the potential that any established legal frameworks could change, library administrations should be proactive in creating plans for responding to law enforcement and immigration officer presence.

ALA makes several suggestions for librarians and library staff dealing with law enforcement inquiries, including asking for officer identification and referring them to the library director or legal counsel for records requests, or, if the officer has no warrant, explaining that the library does not make information available to law enforcement agencies unless presented with a proper court order. The guidelines note, “Without a court order, neither the FBI nor local law enforcement has authority to compel cooperation with an investigation or require answers to questions, other than the name and address of the person speaking to the agent or officer.”²⁵ The strategies adopted by the library community in response to the Library Awareness Program and the USA PATRIOT Act, including understanding patrons’ constitutional rights and finding loopholes to inform patrons of new legislation that impacts their privacy, will be helpful in responding to the Trump administration’s increased immigration enforcement efforts.

Amy Enberg-Aravena (AmyEnbergAravena@gmail.com), Research and Instruction Librarian, Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University. This paper was written while a student of the Department of Library and Information Science, Graduate School of Information Sciences at the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign for IS594, Spring 2025, Government Information, Professor Dominique Hallett.

Notes

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- March 13, 2025, <https://www.dhs.gov/news/2025/03/13/ice-arrests-first-50-days-trump-administration>.
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Proactive Public Awareness: AMBER Alerts

Anna Rimanelli

Introduction

The first three hours in child abduction cases are crucial to the outcome and safe recovery of the victim. In 2006, the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP), within the Department of Justice (DOJ), released a report that stated shocking statistics. This report revealed that 76% of children reported missing were found deceased within the first three hours, and 88.5% of missing children were found deceased within the first twenty-four hours after first reported missing.¹ The America's Missing: Broadcast Emergency Response (AMBER) Alert System broadcasts emergency alerts to the public to aid in the search for actively abducted children. AMBER Alerts are especially critical within the first three hours of the abduction. Therefore, familiarizing the public with AMBER Alert programs, procedures, and resources will help the public recognize AMBER Alert crises and streamline recovery information during crucial steps in abduction cases.

Since the implementation of the AMBER Alert System, these harrowing statistics have been reversed. According to the 2023 AMBER Alert Report, 72% of children were recovered within the first three hours of an AMBER Alert being issued, and 96% of children were recovered within seventy-two hours.² As of December 2024, the AMBER Alert System has contributed to the recovery of over 1,200 children, and, in return, deserves public and government recognition that urges further development of AMBER Alert resources and programs.³

The AMBER Alert Program is crucial to the recovery of abducted children and has extensive outreach through local, state, and federal governments, which requires careful collaboration between all individuals involved in the case. Understanding the role of these agencies, third-party organizations, and the public is essential for emergency preparedness at the individual, community, and national levels. In many instances, people in the public are unaware of the many resources on AMBER Alerts until it applies directly to a tragic personal event, but it is important

to increase public awareness for everyone. Anyone could help identify a suspect or victim in the event of an AMBER Alert.

The goal of this paper is to increase awareness of the AMBER Alert System and its available resources, both for the public and for researchers. Increasing public awareness encourages proactive planning for child recovery and limits reactive responses, which tend to be less efficient for individuals, local communities, and government agencies. Furthermore, it is important to raise public awareness to further advocate for laws that encourage funding and programming that ultimately bring abducted children safely home.

Background and Overview

The AMBER Alert System was formed in Arlington, Texas, in 1996 and has grown to include AMBER Alert Plans in all states and U.S. territories.⁴ The assembly of the AMBER Alert System was in reaction to the abduction and homicide of a young girl, Amber Hagerman. After the recovery of the deceased 9-year-old, it became apparent that law enforcement may benefit from involving the public and media in searching for a child during an abduction case. Ideally, increasing the number of people involved in searching for the child would increase the chances of the child being safely recovered. Today, the Amber Hagerman case remains unsolved and serves as a tragic reminder of the importance of a proactive AMBER Alert System plan and its potential to recover abducted children.⁵

The AMBER Alert System acts as an early warning communication to alert the public about currently abducted children. It is important to note that AMBER Alerts are only enacted during the most serious child abduction cases.⁶ An AMBER Alert will be issued when law enforcement believes a child, under the age of eighteen, has been abducted and is in imminent danger of bodily harm or death. Additionally, an AMBER Alert can only be issued if there is identifiable information available about the victim and/or suspect.⁷ Otherwise, the public cannot be notified.

For example, alerts are frequently issued with vehicle information or photos of the victim or suspect. The public, with this identifiable information, can call 911 if they believe they have seen the vehicle, victim, or suspect. Additionally, anonymous tips can be given online through the Cyber Tipline, regulated by the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children (NCMEC).⁸

On a federal level, the DOJ runs and regulates AMBER Alert Plans all over the country, coordinating the agencies and resources used in the case of an AMBER Alert.⁹ AMBER Alerts are geographically split and issued at the local (single county), regional (multi-county), statewide, or multistate level.¹⁰ The larger the geographical area the abduction case covers, the more agencies and organizations are involved in the AMBER Alert, requiring additional coordination.

Federal Outreach

There are over 80 AMBER Alert plans throughout the United States, which necessitates collaboration and trusting relationships between agencies.¹¹ Once an AMBER Alert is filed, multiple federal government agencies begin an “all-hands-on-deck” approach to recover the abducted child. Multiple federal agencies begin their processes to aid the AMBER Alert System. For example, the FBI may deploy a Child Abduction Rapid Deployment (CARD) team available through the FBI’s Violent Crimes Against Children Program to aid in the recovery of a child. Other agencies, such as the Department of Homeland Security and U.S. Marshals Service, are kept updated with the case and remain available to help in the search if needed.¹² Additionally, the Department of Transportation (DOT) uses DOT highway signs to project alerts to local drivers.¹³ Each contributing agency has their own plan of action and responsibilities during an AMBER Alert. Integrating these plans generates the best recovery effort possible.

Another major resource deployed at the initiation of an AMBER Alert is the Secondary Distribution Program that is managed and carried out by the NCMEC under the direction of the DOJ. It is important to note that NCMEC does not determine if AMBER Alerts are issued, and all actions taken by NCMEC are by permission of local, state, or federal law enforcement.¹⁴ The NCMEC has a vast network of secondary alert distributions, including but not limited to national companies, such as Google, social media companies, the Federation for Internet Alerts, and the Out of Home Advertising Association. The NCMEC’s Secondary Distribution Program’s AMBER Alerts interrupt regular radio and television programming with alert information, along with lottery and digital billboards and wireless communications, such as text messages.¹⁵

The purpose of using this extensive network is to use all available public communication outlets to alert as many people in the community as possible. According to the 2023 AMBER Alert Report, 75% of abductions take place in or outside the victim’s residence or car, so suspects and victims are frequently “hiding in plain sight.”¹⁶ Additionally, over 50% of abductions are performed by a parent or family member and therefore it may be more difficult for a bystander to discern a potential threat.¹⁷ Having the public alerted may make it more difficult for the suspect to “blend in” to daily life. It is also common for a suspect to release a child once an AMBER Alert is issued due to fear of legal repercussions.¹⁸

The Federal Emergency Management Association (FEMA) also provides tools for issuing alerts, such as the Integrated Public Alert and Warning System (IPAWS), which issues a variety of emergency notifications like the Emergency Alert System (EAS) and the National Weather Service Emergency Alerts.¹⁹ The AMBER Alert System also partners with the Federal Communications Commission (FCC), which mandates standards for use of communication and technology and helps distribute Wireless Emergency Alerts.²⁰

Federal Resources

Federal resources on AMBER Alerts are widely available online but differ between agencies and organizations. Users should be aware they may need to navigate multiple sites to find all information they need. A good place to start is the DOJ Office of Justice Programs, which has a dedicated collection of federal AMBER Alert resources, including blogs, speeches, fact sheets, and press releases.²¹

The NCMEC plays a large role in the AMBER Alerts and also plays a larger role in the AMBER Alert System’s documentation and data management. The NCMEC and OJJDP partnered to create yearly AMBER Alert Reports, beginning in 2007. These annual reports are valuable to users looking for specific statistical information with analysis. For example, the AMBER Alert Reports contain information regarding demographics on children and abductors, recovery statistics, alert locations, incident duration, hoaxes, and more.²²

OJJDP also has numerous publications related to AMBER Alerts that are available on their website.²³ One of the best sources for up-to-date information is *The Amber Advocate*, a quarterly magazine that highlights news, success stories, current program development, recognized workers, news, and more. This resource is the best one-stop shop for up-to-date information about the AMBER Alert System. Issues from 2018 on are available via OJJDP; all issues (2006-current) are available in *The AMBER Advocate* magazine archive.²⁴

Finally, users may find the Prosecutorial Remedies and Other Tools to End the Exploitation of Children Today (PROTECT) Act useful. The PROTECT Act was signed into law on April 30, 2003, and comprehensively strengthened law enforcement's ability to prevent, investigate, prosecute, and punish violent crimes against children. The PROTECT Act also established the role of the National AMBER Alert Coordinator in the Department of Justice. The role of the National Coordinator is to issue minimum standards or guidelines for AMBER Alerts that states can adopt voluntarily.²⁵ The National AMBER Alert Coordinator is to aid local and state agencies in creating or advancing their AMBER Alert Plans. The public is encouraged to familiarize themselves with the PROTECT Act and learn how the National AMBER Alert Coordinator helps their own state and local governments' AMBER Alert Plans. For researchers, the PROTECT Act is worth reviewing both for its history and its continual funding for advancement of the AMBER Alert programs and policies.

State and Local Government Collaboration and Resources

The establishment of the National Coordinator helped in the production of AMBER Alert plans in all 50 states, the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico, and the U.S. Virgin Islands. Each state has different primary agencies that they collaborate with, depending on the networks available in their region. Additionally, each state AMBER Alert plan includes its own criteria for issuing alerts and their own state program contacts. For example, Alabama's State Contact for AMBER Alerts is the Alabama State Bureau of Investigations, while Iowa's State AMBER Alert contact is the Iowa State Patrol Communications. As a result, navigating through state or local government documents and resources on AMBER Alert information is not always straightforward. Helpful resources include a list of State AMBER Alert Contacts, as well as a list of Missing Child Clearinghouse websites, both maintained by the NCMEC.²⁶

State contacts can provide additional information about the AMBER Alert plan near you. For example, the Michigan AMBER Alert Plan is supported by the Michigan State Police, Michigan Department of Transportation, Michigan Lottery, Michigan Sheriff's Association, Michigan Association of Chiefs of Police, and the Michigan Association of Broadcasters.²⁷ State agencies depend on local law enforcement agencies to report AMBER Alerts and assist throughout the case until recovery. These agencies and organizations are crucial to the success of an AMBER Alert Plan. Depending on the county or city, there may be AMBER Alert information located on local government websites as well.

Ongoing Developments

In recent years, coordinating AMBER Alert plans in Tribal Lands became a topic of focus as more reports suggested the absence of recovery programs for American Indians in tribal communities, colloquially referred to as Indian country. In 2018, the Ashlynnne Mike AMBER Alert in Indian Country Act was passed, which amended the PROTECT Act to reauthorize the AMBER Alert grant program and modify the program to include the integration of tribal AMBER Alert Systems into state AMBER Alert Systems.²⁸ The goal of integration is to allocate resources that may be available in aiding the recovery of any child that travels in or out of tribal land. The OJJDP created the AMBER Alert in Indian Country (AIIC) Initiative with the goal of assisting Tribal communities develop programs to safely recover endangered, missing, or abducted children.²⁹ The AIIC works with tribal members to enhance response capacities and capabilities and increase public participation in protecting children through the update of technologies and policies.

AMBER Alert partners continue to collaborate and develop resources, programs, and plans that assist with the safe recovery of abducted children in and out of the United States. More than 30 countries in addition to the United States have begun Rapid Emergency Child Alert Systems like AMBER Alerts with the help of the International Centre for Missing and Exploited Children (ICMEC). The ICMEC also provides international information, including child abduction statistics, current cases, programs, and partners.³⁰

Conclusion

The AMBER Alert System has evolved since its origin in 1996 with advanced outreach and programming to assist in the recovery of an abducted child. Although government agencies, organizations, and the public are invested in the AMBER Alert System and rely on its resources, not all AMBER Alerts result in a safe recovery. To limit the occurrences of unrecovered children, the AMBER Alert System continues to look for avenues of improvement with partnering agencies and the public to maximize the benefits of collaboration. The public is also encouraged to review AMBER Alert emergency preparedness at home by familiarizing themselves with their local, state, and federal partners. The purpose of understanding the intertwining of these agencies and their resources is so users can swiftly locate relevant information, whether for research or an emergency. Furthermore, the alerts only work when individuals in agencies, media, and the public take them seriously and report suspicious activity or AMBER Alert identifiable information.

In conclusion, it is imperative to proactively promote public awareness of AMBER Alerts to aid in the recovery of children, advocate for further policy and funding, and encourage further collaboration, which has proven to successfully recover abducted children.

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Election Fraud & Reform: A Historical Perspective Using Government Documents

Rachel Schmalz

Introduction

Free and fair elections are the cornerstone of representative, democratic government. They allow citizens to hold their leaders accountable and express their political will. However, throughout U.S. history election fraud and interference have surfaced at various levels of government, undermining public trust and prompting reforms. This paper examines three election interference and fraud cases: the 1997 Miami Mayoral Election, the 2004 Washington Gubernatorial Election, and the 2000 U.S. Presidential Election. Each case represents a different level of government and illustrates how election-related challenges manifested and were resolved. This paper focuses on official government documents produced during and in the aftermath of each controversy. In doing so, the paper examines the details of these cases and reflects on how past experiences can inform current conversations about election security and reform.

Local Level: 1997 Miami Mayoral Election

The 1997 Miami mayoral election between incumbent Joe Carollo and former mayor Xavier Suarez¹ illustrates how local elections can be vulnerable to fraud. The general election for mayor took place on November 4, 1997; since neither candidate received a majority of votes, a runoff election was held a week later. On November 14, election results were certified, and Suarez won the race.² However, the election faced serious allegations of fraudulent absentee ballots and altered votes, with claims that these actions directly impacted the outcome. This case exemplifies how local government bodies can respond to electoral fraud and the steps necessary to restore public trust in local elections.

Following the announcement of the 1997 Miami mayoral election results, Carollo promptly challenged the outcome by filing a legal protest, initiating a judicial review of the election process. Under Chapter 102 of the 1997 Florida Statutes, candidates are granted the right to dispute election results. Carollo first submitted a claim under Section 102.166, which permits a candidate to protest if they believe the election returns are incorrect.³ Additionally,

he filed a separate case under Section 102.168, “Contest of Election,” which enables a circuit court to review the certification of election results.⁴ These two filings were eventually merged, and a bench trial was scheduled for March 3, 1998.

The trial court ultimately ruled in Carollo’s favor, ordering a new election due to the evidence of widespread misconduct. However, the ruling was quickly appealed to the Third District Court of Appeal of Florida. In its review, the appellate court found that the trial court’s conclusion was supported by substantial evidence. The judges noted a “pattern of fraudulent, intentional and criminal conduct” that severely undermined the purpose and integrity of absentee ballot laws.⁵ In reaching its decision, the court cited the Florida Supreme Court case *Bolden v. Potter*, which held that while protecting the will of voters is crucial, so too is preserving the legitimacy of the election process.⁶ The court emphasized that it could not ignore deliberate fraud intended to corrupt the outcome.

Although the appellate court agreed with the trial court’s findings regarding the fraud, it disagreed with the remedy. Instead of ordering a new election, the appellate court determined that the appropriate course of action was to discard all absentee ballots from the election. Its ruling stated:

We expressly hold that substantial competent evidence supported the trial court’s finding that extensive absentee voter fraud affected the outcome of the November 4, 1997, City of Miami Mayoral election. Further, our consideration of the relevant case law and strong public policy considerations leads us to the inescapable conclusion that the only appropriate remedy for this absentee voter fraud is the invalidation of all absentee ballots.⁷

The 1997 Miami mayoral election scandal also brought legislative reform in Florida. The State Congress enacted the 1998 Voter Fraud Act⁸ to strengthen the integrity of absentee voting and curb vote-brokering practices. The bill passed with a majority of support in the Congress and was signed into law

without the Governor's signature.⁹ The goal was to revise and edit chapters 98-129 in the Florida Statutes in response to the "alleged voter fraud and absentee ballot abuses in Miami."¹⁰ It is important to note that although the bill was passed, not all the provisions were enforced due to the federal preclearance requirements of the Voting Rights Act of 1965. After the 2000 Presidential election, more legislation was passed in Florida to protect absentee ballots and allowed for more of the 1998 Voter Fraud Act to be enforced. This case showcases the quick legislative response to local election fraud in Florida.

State Level: 2004 Washington Gubernatorial Election

The 2004 Washington gubernatorial election was among the most contentious in the state's history, with a razor-thin margin separating Democrat Christine Gregoire from Republican Dino Rossi. The election, which initially declared Rossi the winner, was immediately marred by allegations of irregularities in the vote-counting process. Specifically, the controversies centered on absentee ballots; thousands of ballots were rejected due to signature mismatches or missing postmarks, while others were contested over whether they were properly postmarked or received on time. In addition, there were claims that certain ballots had been incorrectly rejected or counted twice and that local election officials applied inconsistent standards when validating absentee ballots. The closeness of the race meant that every vote was critical, and when the initial count showed Rossi leading by just a few hundred votes, the stage was set for a prolonged legal and political battle.¹¹ Ultimately, the controversy surrounding the election underscored the need for greater transparency, consistency, and accountability in Washington's electoral process.

The election took place on November 2, 2004, although it took over two weeks to tally the votes. The initial count had Rossi winning by a 261 margin. This close of a margin triggered a mandatory recount according to Chapter 29A.64 of the Revised Code of Washington (RCW).¹² The recount was published at the end of November and showed an even closer margin, with Rossi winning by 34 votes. He was announced as the governor-elect. However, Gregoire decided to file for an additional manual recount at her own expense under Chapter 29A.64.011 of the RCW.¹³ One of the pertinent issues in the election was the different voting methods used because the Washington legislature passed a bill in 1993 allowing voters the option to request to vote by mail.¹⁴ In the 2004 election, it was estimated that 60% of voters voted by mail and 40% voted in person, making it challenging to recount the votes.¹⁵ A few weeks later, the manual recount was announced, and Gregoire won the election with 129 votes. While Gregoire was sworn into office on January 12,

2005, the controversy was far from over, as Rossi filed a lawsuit to nullify the election results.

Six months after election day, Chelan County Superior Court Judge John Bridges oversaw the trial between the petitioner, Rossi and company, and the respondents, King County and the Washington State Democratic Party. This lawsuit was politically polarized, with the Democratic and Republican parties blaming the system for failing to count the votes correctly. In the pre-court brief from the Washington State Democratic Committee, they claimed that the petitioners were attempting to "oust a sitting Governor from office" and no evidence to prove "illegal" votes in the election existed.¹⁶

In June 2005, Judge Bridges ruled that "the petitioners have not met either the clear and convincing burden or the preponderance of the evidence burden as to the element of causation," further citing RCW 29A.68.110, saying, "Fraud cannot now be claimed and that to the extent that it was claimed, neither the act of fraud nor the causation arising therefrom were proved by the higher burden of proof of clear, cogent and convincing."¹⁷ Judge Bridges also cites RCW 29A.68.110 as his limitations on delivering a ruling in favor of the petitioner. The code states:

No election may be set aside on account of illegal votes, unless it appears that an amount of illegal votes has been given to the person whose right is being contested, that, if taken from that person, would reduce the number of the person's legal votes below the number of votes given to some other person for the same office, after deducting therefrom the illegal votes that may be shown to have been given to the other person.¹⁸

After delivering the ruling, Rossi decided not to appeal the results because of "the political makeup of the Washington State Supreme Court, which makes it almost impossible to overturn this ruling."¹⁹ This decision ultimately ended one of the most divisive elections in Washington's history.

The 2004 Washington gubernatorial election revealed significant weaknesses in the state's election infrastructure and prompted a wave of electoral reforms. One of the most glaring issues was the lack of standardized ballot handling and reconciliation procedures across counties. In King County alone, officials discovered hundreds of ballots that had been mistakenly rejected.²⁰ The 2004 Election Report from King County acknowledged that mistakes were made during the election process and offered suggestions for reforms moving forward, including "clarification and uniformity of canvassing and ballot processing procedures" and "extending the time provided for certifying election results."²¹

In response, the Washington legislators implemented a series of reforms to improve transparency and consistency. The legislature

passed House Bill 1754, amending RCW 29A.48.010 to allow for county auditors to hold all elections by mail²²; Senate Bill 5499, which standardized election procedure²³; House Bill 2477 updating election laws and the powers of the Secretary of State to enforce the laws²⁴; and Senate Bill 6362, which clarified voter registration challenges.²⁵ These reforms helped restore public trust in Washington's elections and served as a model for other states seeking to strengthen the integrity of their electoral systems.

Federal Level: 2000 U.S. Presidential Election

The 2000 U.S. presidential election was one of the most controversial elections in U.S. history. The election between Republican George W. Bush and Democrat Al Gore was not won by popular vote but instead by the Electoral College. The race came down to the state of Florida, where a close margin triggered a mandatory recount and sparked weeks of legal battles. The Supreme Court ultimately decided in *Bush v. Gore* to end the recount in Florida and awarded Florida's electoral votes and the presidency to Bush. This election exposed significant weaknesses in voting technology and legal frameworks, setting the stage for national conversations about electoral reform and voter confidence.

The election took place on November 7, 2000. According to the Federal Election Commission report, Gore won the popular vote with 50,992,235, and Bush won the electoral vote by 271. However, with its 25 electoral votes, the state of Florida had 537 votes separating Bush and Gore.²⁶ The U.S. Commission on Civil Rights released a report that stated there was "widespread voter disenfranchisement" that created extraordinary circumstances in the Florida election.²⁷ The election results were immediately contested, with both sides filing lawsuits over the handling of ballots and the accuracy of vote counts in Florida.²⁸

Due to the close margins, Gore protested the election results under Florida state law and filed petitions to recount in several counties. Under Florida Statute 102.166(d), "The person who requested the recount shall choose three precincts to be recounted, and, if other precincts are recounted, the county canvassing board shall select the additional precincts," so Gore chose heavily Democrat favoring counties.²⁹ Gore also contested the election under Florida Statute 102.168(1).³⁰ From November to December, Bush and Gore filed several court cases to try to secure the election.³¹

The main argument sought in the court cases was whether Florida law allowed the judicial system to step in and allow extensions of recounts. In *Palm Beach County Canvassing Board v. Harris*, the Florida Supreme Court reversed the trial court decision and allowed for an extension so recounted votes could be included in the certification deadline.³² Bush followed by filing a challenge with the U.S. Supreme Court, citing that the

Florida Supreme Court had overstepped. In *Bush v. Palm Beach County Canvassing Board*, the Supreme Court said:

Specifically, we are unclear as to the extent to which the Florida Supreme Court saw the Florida Constitution as circumscribing the legislature's authority under Art. II, § 1, cl. 2. We are also unclear as to the consideration the Florida Supreme Court accorded to 3 U.S.C. § 5. The judgment of the Supreme Court of Florida is therefore vacated, and the case is remanded for further proceedings not inconsistent with this opinion.³³

Three days later, the Florida Supreme Court reversed another lower court decision in *Gore v. Harris*, which expanded the voting recount to all counties, allowing them additional time to count their votes.³⁴ The next day, the U.S. Supreme Court issued a stay pending further oral argument.³⁵ On December 12, 2000, the Supreme Court ruled that the lack of uniform standards in the recount violated the Equal Protection Clause and effectively ended the recount in Florida.³⁶ The Florida Supreme Court later ruled, "Accordingly, pursuant to the direction of the United States Supreme Court, we hold appellants can be afforded no relief" and reversed the order to allow recount extensions.³⁷ This presidential election and the judicial court decisions highlighted deep flaws in the U.S. electoral system.

In response to the crisis, Congress passed the Help America Vote Act (HAVA) in 2002, which sought to address some of the fundamental issues exposed during the 2000 election.³⁸ HAVA aimed to modernize voting systems, improve the accessibility of voting machines, and set minimum standards for election administration. Moreover, Governor Jeb Bush created a task force to improve Florida's voting system and prevent prolonged court cases from happening in the future.³⁹ The election also spurred discussions about the Electoral College system, with many advocating for reforms to ensure that the popular vote more directly determines the outcome of presidential elections.⁴⁰ In 2004, a House Joint Resolution was proposed to amend the Constitution to have the President and Vice President be voted in by popular vote; however, the resolution never made it out of committee.⁴¹ Overall, the 2000 election revealed significant flaws in the electoral process, and the lessons learned from it have influenced both state and federal reforms aimed at improving election security and ensuring that all votes are counted accurately.

Lesson Learned

The three cases analyzed in this paper reveal vulnerabilities within the American electoral system across local, state, and federal levels. In Miami, widespread absentee ballot fraud revealed how weak municipal oversight and lax verification protocols could be

exploited to manipulate election outcomes. In Washington State, the close margin between gubernatorial candidates Christine Gregoire and Dino Rossi revealed inconsistencies in ballot counting across counties, particularly in how absentee and provisional ballots were handled. The 2000 presidential election between George W. Bush and Al Gore at the federal level exposed the consequences of outdated voting machines and ambiguous recount statutes.

These earlier controversies continue to echo in today's debates over election integrity. Concerns about inconsistent standards for counting mail-in and absentee ballots have resurfaced in recent years, especially as many states expanded vote-by-mail during the COVID-19 pandemic. In Pennsylvania, courts ruled that voters whose mail ballots were rejected for minor technical issues should be allowed to cast provisional ballots.⁴² In Colorado, officials have investigated alleged attempts to intercept mail ballots.⁴³ These disputes reflect the same tensions over ballot rejection as the Washington case. They also echo the Miami mayoral election, where fraudulent ballots were initially counted without proper verification. Meanwhile, concerns about outdated or insecure voting machines, which were central to the *Bush v. Gore* dispute, persist. Experts warn that aging equipment and software vulnerabilities could threaten election security if jurisdictions fail to update or audit their systems.⁴⁴ These parallels show that the weaknesses exposed in past elections remain ongoing issues and continue to shape policy debates and public skepticism.

Ultimately, the case studies in this paper highlight that the integrity of elections relies on accurate vote counting, strong legal structures, bipartisan oversight, and public transparency in the electoral process. Safeguarding these principles is essential to the health of a democracy, especially as states today grapple with how to secure mail-in voting, regulate ballot collection practices, and modernize voting machines. By examining past instances of fraud and procedural failures, policymakers can identify weaknesses and enact meaningful reforms that address these contemporary challenges. Well-defined protocols and thorough documentation not only guide fair outcomes but also help sustain public confidence, which has become increasingly fragile in an era of misinformation and election denialism. The legal and legislative responses to past controversies offer lessons for strengthening trust in the democratic process today.

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Notes

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