

## **Big Julie's Blank Dice and the Texas Two-Step: Thoughts on March 4th and Computerized Elections**

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Last week, as I was watching what could be watched of the crucial March 4th Democratic primary elections and downloading for analysis such data as was made publicly available, a hilarious scene kept coming unbidden to mind. The scene is from *Guys and Dolls* and it takes place somewhere in the sewer system of New York, where Nathan Detroit's floating crap game has found a temporary and rather sarcastically colorful and well-lit home.

Big Julie, a scar-faced high-roller in from Chicago to "shoot crap," is down on his luck and out about 10 *Gs*. Nathan (Frank Sinatra) says it's time to go home, but Big Julie is not the kind of mug to go gentle into that good night without his 10 *Gs*, plus interest. So he challenges Nathan to roll him personally for the dough and Nathan (putting up cash to Big Julie's "marker" and, to narrow down his choices somewhat, at gunpoint) accepts.

Big Julie, to change his luck, is going to use his own dice. The trouble (for Nathan at least) is that the dice don't have any spots; they've worn off. But, not to worry, Big Julie remembers where they were.

The results ("Hah! Seven! I win. . . .Hah! Snake Eyes! You lose") are, shall we say, predictable—though Nathan does manage to win when Big Julie rolls him for \$1—and Nathan kisses off his last few grand with a resignation worthy of Gore, Kerry, a host of other candidates who would not appear on Karl Rove's A-list, and the Democratic Party as a whole.

The scene is hilarious, but Tuesday night was not. Nor was New Hampshire, nor 2006, nor 2004, nor 2002, nor any election in America since the vote counting went wholesale into the darkness of proprietary cyberspace and the spots were rubbed off the dice, leaving the equipment vendors, with their avowed partisan proclivities and their secret computer code and memory cards, to tell us who won ("Hah! Seven!") and who lost ("Hah! Snake Eyes!").

Before proceeding to analyze yet another evening of bizarre numerical happenings, I want to suggest that we look at some of the occurrences in our New Millennium elections as if they hailed not from our own beloved Beacon of Democracy but from Vladimir Putin's Russia—from a place, that is, where we have learned to discount the official story as the typical cover job of a pretend democracy. We will find—as we might in Russia, or Kenya, or Ukraine—a parade of numbers and patterns that don't add up, don't fit the official story. And all we have to assure us that our democracy and our nation are *not* being subverted are code and memory cards we are never permitted to see, providing us with very shiny and precise-looking vote totals that may or may not have any correspondence to the votes actually cast—in other words, a pair of Big Julie's blank dice.

The Democratic primaries held Tuesday shared with the New Hampshire primary the distinction of being do-or-die contests for candidate Clinton. It was effectively conceded by the Clinton campaign that losses back in New Hampshire in January and in Texas or Ohio last week would have spelled curtains for her candidacy. There were four primaries held on March 4th and, leaving aside the delegate-poor and noncompetitive contest in Vermont, there were New Hampshiresque—which is to say somewhere between suspicious and stunning—developments in each of them. Taking them in alphabetical order:

## Ohio

The numerical story in Ohio was the old familiar one of exit poll-vote count disparity. Without examining any specific incidents or allegations of foul play, we are confronted with an initial exit poll (EP), posted shortly after poll closing, showing a 3% Clinton margin (51.1% to 47.9%) and a final votecount (VC) showing a 10% Clinton margin (54.3% to 44.0%). This disparity is outside the EP's margin of error (MOE) even allowing for the "cluster effect." The VC is, moreover, a significant departure from a compendium of pre-election polls (PEP), showing Obama gaining ground and approaching equality (<http://www.usatoday.com/news/politics/election2008/poll-tracker.htm>).

Viewed in isolation, Ohio could be explained as a late Clinton surge that caught the pre-election pollsters on the hop. Primaries are indeed more fluid and volatile as elections go, and there is the crossover voting phenomenon to be considered. But Ohio takes its place among a *parade* of contests in important states in the 2008 nomination battle in which a substantial EP-VC disparity worked in Clinton's favor: New Hampshire obviously, but also Massachusetts, Illinois, New Jersey, Arkansas, Arizona, California, and now Ohio and, as we will see, Texas and Rhode Island. In contrast, we have observed no battleground states with an EP-VC disparity working in the other direction. As anyone who has spent any time in the countryside of Ohio (or NH, MA, IL, NJ, AR, AZ, CA, TX or RI for that matter) can tell you, when all the cows are facing in one direction, there's a reason for it (it's going to rain).

Given the directionality of the disparities, it is also worth noting that we have received no assurance that the first posted EP of the evening has not in fact already been partially adjusted toward conformity with the incoming VC, a process which continues in several steps throughout the evening until virtual full conformity with the final VC is achieved. Edison/Mitofsky, which performs and processes the EPs for the media consortium known as the National Election Pool (NEP), acknowledges that the adjustment process begins with "Quick Counts," which are available from selected precincts and early voting tabulations immediately upon poll closing. Especially in instances where the first EP posting is delayed by more than a few minutes after poll closing; there exists ample opportunity to begin the process of adjustment, which of course has the effect of minimizing the *observable* EP-VC disparity.

## Rhode Island

There's not a whole lot to say about Rhode Island other than if exit polls are this far off, why bother exit polling? And if vote counts are this far off, why bother voting?

The EP-VC disparity in RI was 14.1%; that is, the exit poll posted after poll closing had Clinton up 4.1% (51.6% to 47.5%) over Obama, and the official vote count had Clinton up 18.2% (58.8% to 40.6%). This is far outside the most generous calculation of the EP's MOE, and on a par with the similarly perplexing 15.5% disparity favoring Clinton in Massachusetts on Super Tuesday.

Now since EP-VC disparities of suspect, if not outright stunning, magnitude have become commonplace in the era of computerized vote tabulation, it is clear enough that *something* is not happening according to Hoyle. What that something is has been settled on by the mainstream media and all analysts under contract to such: since we dare not question the vote counts, the exit polls *must* be off again. . . and again . . . and again. In fact it is now *established* that the exit polls are *always off* (recently joined by the pre-election polls, especially in the wake of New Hampshire 2008) and no longer worthy of our attention, because they just keep on disagreeing with the vote counts—pretty much always in the same direction—and we dare not question the vote counts. . . .

And so the circular argument goes, by now repeated with enough reassuring smiles to take on the polished finish of fact. Except if they really cared to find the truth, the logic of the denialists would puncture, like an overinflated balloon, with one prick of a pin, and all would agree that without first investigating and verifying the vote counts—without, that is, putting the spots back on the dice—no one can conclude that all those polls are “off.”

## Texas

The striking phenomenon in Texas was the magnitude not of the EP-VC disparity (it was a relatively modest 4%, in the usual direction, but withheld from the public until more than an hour after poll closing, allowing ample opportunity for extensive adjustment toward conformity with the in-coming vote count) but of the early voting (EV) vs. at-precinct voting (APV) disparity, which was of staggering proportions that at first seemed to defy explanation.

The earliest returns posted on network websites showed a total of approximately 740,000 votes cast in the Democratic primary with 0% of *precincts* reporting. This then was the early/absentee vote tally, which in most states is pre-counted and available for release immediately upon poll closing. Obama's margin at that point was 436,034 to 303,276 for Clinton, or 59% to 41%. By the time the counting was done the next morning, Clinton had a 51% to 48% victory, a whopping 21% margin reversal.

What was even more stunning, however, was that Clinton had caught up to Obama before even a quarter of the precincts had reported: with 23% of the precincts reporting (and almost exactly as many APVs as EVs counted), the count stood at Obama 711,759, Clinton 711,183 (49%-49%), a dead heat. To catch up so quickly and produce those numbers, Clinton had to win the APV in that quarter of Texas precincts by 59% to 41%, an exact reversal of the EV Obama landslide. Judging by the county-level results posted, that APV Clinton landslide came predominantly from the rural areas of the state.

So what we saw until that point were essentially equal and opposite landslides, as if we were observing two not only separate but radically divergent electorates, one that chose to vote early and one that chose to go to the polls. Ordinarily explanations for a divergence of such magnitude, particularly in intra-party contests, would be found only in such time-specific phenomena as late-breaking gaffes, scandals, debate blowouts and the like. But there was no such occurrence. The early voting period in Texas extends from 17 days to 4 days prior to the election. During this period the average of 13 pre-election polls was Clinton 45.6%, Obama 46.7%. In the three days before the election, after the early voting period had ended, the average of eight polls was Clinton 46.8%, Obama 46.1%, a very modest change and certainly not the 21% mega-reversal displayed by the EV and APV vote counts.

Since ordinary political dynamics fail to explain the bizarre Texas numbers, we look to the extraordinary. There has been much made in the March 4th post-mortem period of the impact of crossover voting, specifically Republican voters exhorted by Rush Limbaugh and other lesser-known leaders, to hold their noses and vote in the Democratic primary for Clinton.

To digress just a bit from our analysis of the March 4 numbers, the Limbaugh appeal brings into the open the motive and strategy that go a long way to explaining virtually all of the bizarre disparities and anomalies that have beset at least the Democratic side of the 2008 primary season. It has for some time been quite apparent that the goal of Republican strategists, finally exposed in Limbaugh's rather desperate public exhortation, has been to make sure the Democratic nomination process is

as drawn out, bitter, procedural, and ugly as possible, culminating in a brutal battle involving superdelegates and credentialing, one that will turn off (to say the least) the public and leave festering wounds in the party itself.

If the goal had been simply to have Clinton win, that could have been easily achieved through crossover voting and/or rigging--remember that Obama won something like a dozen contests in a row, most of which could have been pushed far enough in Clinton's favor to give her a decisive delegate edge. This wasn't done. What was done instead was to revive Clinton's campaign (it appears by rigging) when she was on life-support in NH, keep her within striking distance on Super Tuesday, let Obama gain popularity and momentum, then revive Clinton again on March 4, just when the Democrats nationally were getting comfortable with Obama as their candidate (again see <http://www.usatoday.com/news/politics/election2008/poll-tracker.htm>).

Now it will get *really* ugly and whoever emerges as the nominee will have been undermined enough--so the story will go, anyway--to manage to 'lose' to McCain; i.e., either Clinton or Obama will have accumulated plenty of *plausible defeatability*. And the story of Democratic 'civil war' (as the MSM is already gleefully framing it) and disarray may even be good enough to 'explain' how they failed to capitalize on the enormous structural and dynamic advantages they hold on the Congressional side, setting the stage for currently unimaginable Republican *gains* in Congress in November.

Perhaps crossover voting accounts for both the magnitude of the Clinton victory in Ohio and the miraculous reversal of Obama's early voting margin in Texas. Or perhaps it was crossover voting *and* some computer voting (that is, voting *by* computers) for good measure. Is there any way to know? It does not take all that much imagination to see Clinton's successive resuscitations as Karl Rove's specialty of the house, his apotheosis as conscienceless strategist: to go into 'retirement' and apparent seclusion, give scholarly and apparently appealing speeches from above it all on the lecture circuit, and meanwhile find the exact alchemic strategy to turn a pile of rusty Republican political scrap metal into gold. But strategy is one thing and rigging something else entirely. Or is it?

Of course a "fit" is not tantamount to proof. But when you have a multi-year parade of numerical anomalies combined with unexpected outcomes that a brilliant and apparently conscienceless strategist would bring about if he could, must it not at least shake the blind faith that Americans, cued by their opinion leaders, continue to place in the honesty of their black-box electoral system?

Isn't it time to stop rolling for our nation's future with blank dice?