

Pittsburgh demands for vote recount raise data security doubts



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Controversy surrounding the US presidential election refuses to quieten down – and now data experts are calling for a vote recount in three key states.

States using electronic voting systems – Pennsylvania, Michigan and Wisconsin – have all come under scrutiny after Donald Trump won all three, despite having trailed his rival Hillary Clinton in opinion polls prior to the vote.

Demand has been particularly strong in Pittsburgh and the rest of Pennsylvania where electronic voting machines were used by 96% of the electorate. The fact that these machines do not produce a physical paper trail, has made it much more difficult to detect immediately if there was any electronic interference.

A strange request – from Michigan

As you would expect, calls for recounts in Wisconsin, Pennsylvania and Michigan are being led by Democrat supporters. But their voices have been joined by an unexpected source – the University of Michigan Centre for Computer Security and Society (CCSS).

In an article posted on the social blogging site Medium, the CCSS director J. Alex Halderman suggested that Hillary

Clinton should request a recount – but not with a view to overturning the election result. Instead Halderman wants to put an end to speculation that voting machines were tampered with.

"The only way to know whether a cyberattack changed the result is to closely examine the available physical evidence - paper ballots and voting equipment in critical states like Wisconsin, Michigan and Pennsylvania," he wrote.

From his article it would seem that Halderman is finally trying to end the controversy surrounding the election. He is keen to point out that there is no evidence of cyberattack or voting irregularities. The exercise would simply prove (a) no fraud has taken place, and (b) the safeguards used to protect the system were sufficient.

Time is running out in Pittsburgh, Detroit and Milwaukee

The deadline for requesting a recount is rapidly approaching, leaving the Clinton team just a few days to lodge an appeal. Whether a recount would change the result remains to be seen – but from a technical point of view, it would be interesting to see if (and how) the electronic voting systems used in Pennsylvania were hacked.