

Gaslit Nation Transcript  
02 September 2020  
"How To Hack an Election: The Jennifer Cohn Interview"

Hillary Clinton:

I really do think that Vice President Biden is very well positioned—and now with Kamala Harris on the ticket—to win the overwhelming vote and even the electoral college. But I also fear and worry about all of the shenanigans that we are seeing from the Trump campaign and their allies, trying to mess with the post office, increasing their efforts to suppress votes, and then a much more aggressive disinformation campaign that is underway.

Hillary Clinton:

So if we had a totally free open election, I believe that Joe and Kamala would be our next president and vice president, but I think we're going to have to work like crazy between now and November to make sure that everybody who wants to vote does vote, and every vote is counted. And that's going to be the challenge for, not only, the Democratic Party and the ticket, but frankly, the public and the press, so that we have an election that accurately reflects the will of the people.

Hillary Clinton:

This is the kind of regime that Donald Trump supports and this is the kind of leadership from an autocrat like Putin that he aspires to. And to circle back to Nicole's question, every American should ask him or herself, do you want a country where your president admires someone who kills, literally kills, his opposition? And we have heard nothing.

Hillary Clinton:

We have heard nothing from Pompeo, we've heard nothing from the White House and it is a demonstration of the moral bankruptcy, but also the clear and present danger that the Trump administration poses to our freedoms, to our values. And I am really concerned that more people in our country are not understanding what has happened elsewhere in the world that Trump seems to admire and what would stop him from going even further than he has if given the chance.

Sarah Kendzior:

I'm Sarah Kendzior, the author of the bestselling books, *The View from Flyover Country* and *Hiding in Plain Sight*.

Andrea Chalupa:

I'm Andrea Chalupa, a journalist and filmmaker, and the writer and producer of the journalistic thriller, *Mr. Jones*.

Sarah Kendzior:

And this is Gaslit Nation, a podcast covering corruption in the Trump administration and rising autocracy around the world.

Andrea Chalupa:

Welcome to a very special episode of Gaslit Nation. Today, Sarah and I are interviewing Jenny Cohn, an election security advocate, and writer. Welcome to Gaslit Nation Jenny, where you belong given your topic.

Jenny Cohn:

Hi, thank you very much for having me.

Andrea Chalupa:

So election security is a very important topic. Sarah and I actually met pretty much—or our friendship was forged in the fires of Audit the Vote, which we helped launch right after Donald Trump's surprise victory, the 2016 election. And we learned so much about election security and how deeply vulnerable our election systems were for so long.

Andrea Chalupa:

And we made so much noise about that issue, which of course led to the recounts, which of course were an entirely different story, going down that road. But what it really exposed was just the public, the lack of understanding about how our election systems work, reluctance in the media to really go after this issue in a substantial way, public officials, the same thing. Could you walk us through, what do we know now, finally, about what happened in 2016 in terms of election hacking?

Jenny Cohn:

So, thank you. Yes, it was even more than the public not understanding though; they were affirmatively misled in some cases. We had Jim Comey testifying that voting machines never—supposedly—never connect to the internet. And thus, supposedly, it would have been all but impossible for internet hackers to have changed the outcome of the election. And that was just false on two premises, and I will get into what we specifically do know that happened, but this is sort of central to it.

Jenny Cohn:

It was false in that what independent and highly respected election security experts explain is that even if the actual voting machines themselves don't connect to the internet, they all have to receive programming before every single election from centralized county computers that themselves either connect to the internet or can connect to the internet and often do, or that receive updates and programming from internet-connected systems.

Jenny Cohn:

So you're really just one or two steps away from the internet, even if the equipment the voters actually interact with does not itself connect. But even more important than that, or more direct than that, at least two swing states had precinct ballot scanners from a company called Election Systems and Software (ES&S) and those precinct ballot scanners in Wisconsin and Florida, and perhaps elsewhere in the 2016 election contained cellular modems that connected them and the receiving end county central tabulators to the internet.

Jenny Cohn:

We were affirmatively misled and it's no wonder that the public is so confused about what's happening because you have to follow it incredibly carefully to sort of weed through the morass of misinformation that has been spread even by people in positions of trust.

Sarah Kendzior:

Yeah. Speaking of those people, that is one of the most frustrating things about that is that few spoke out before the election, when they had the chance, and those who did speak out were ignored or vilified. And one of the definitive moments for me was when Harry Reid wrote his now-infamous letter to James Comey in 2016, stating that not only was the Kremlin planning to interfere in the election but that they had the ability to falsify vote tallies to actually change the results of the election.

Sarah Kendzior:

He wrote to Comey twice. Comey ignored this letter, the media ignored this letter. What do you think of Harry Reid's attempt and what do you make of the general reluctance of federal officials to tell the truth about election hacking and how widespread this threat was?

Jenny Cohn:

So my understanding or my thoughts about what might be going through their minds keeps shifting over time. I think Harry Reid was a hero in trying to warn the public. The way it was massaged—his letter—falsified election results. There was a concerted effort to allay the public's concerns and tell them that no, no, no falsified results could have just meant a reference to the voter registration systems and deleting people's names—which is a bad thing in and of itself—and that that would result in a false outcome.

Jenny Cohn:

There was definitely a concerted effort to convince the public that Russia was not in a position to alter vote tallies when in fact, the book Rigged by David Shimer, which I read recently, he had reached out to me and pointed out we have a lot of interests in common, and I read it and I was stunned to see that four former senior members of the Obama administration told him that Russia was very much in a position to alter vote tallies in the 2016 election.

Jenny Cohn:

And that this was the talk of the town, and this was the red line. And this is what Obama meant when he got in Putin's face and said, "Don't screw with the vote." They weren't talking about the voter registration systems, although that was a concern too. The thing they were the most worried about was the actual vote tallies and there was a deliberate effort to not tell the public. I don't think it was with malevolent intent certainly by the Obama administration but I feel like there's sort of two schools of thought going on.

Jenny Cohn:

There's the school of thought which Harry Reid appeared to adopt, which is the one that I think, which is that these elections belong to the public and the public has a right to know and officials have an obligation to tell them if there's a direct threat to their elections. That's transparency and transparency is the only way to prevent fraud, especially if you end up with someone like Trump in power later on.

Jenny Cohn:

Now we have this precedent where you don't tell the public under Obama, and now we have Trump in charge. It gets more and more dangerous with time. Then I think there was probably what Obama was thinking, which is he didn't want to undermine trust in an untrustworthy election system. So it was putting the public's trust ahead of actually having trustworthy elections, but to be somewhat fair to him, I mean, it does appear he tried to handle it behind the scenes.

Jenny Cohn:

He tried to handle it through the DHS and maybe through, I don't know if he directly worked with white hat hackers, with Anonymous, but apparently, they were trying to help as well. And at least communicating with some members of the Department of Homeland security, according to Andrea's sister, who would be in a position-

Andrea Chalupa:

Andrea, sorry. [laughs]

Jenny Cohn:

I'm sorry, oh my gosh.

Andrea Chalupa:

We're pretentious here at Gaslit Nation.

Sarah Kendzior:

Jeni. Sorry. [laughs]

Jenny Cohn:

Call me Jeni. Thank you. Call me Jeni. [laugh] So in any event, yes, I think that there are people who are concerned about elections but try to handle it all behind the scenes, and they're the ones who've kind of gotten us into this really bad position. And then there are those who are much more into transparency and I think that that clearly is really more the way we need to go given everything that does not really work very well.

Andrea Chalupa:

Yeah. I totally agree and I'm just curious regarding these four Obama administration officials who were quoted in Shimer's book, why were they willing to talk to him for his book but not tell the American public before the book came out? And, you know, this isn't a knock on Shimer because I don't know the circumstances, but why didn't he tell the public that these guys had told him earlier? Because it just seems like time is of the essence. The more time the Trump administration has to consolidate their autocracy and rig our elections, the worst off we are. So it seemed like the full story being told early is to the advantage of democracy itself, and why did they not come forward earlier?

Jenny Cohn:

You know, I don't know. I actually was going to interview Shimer and then his Ph.D. exam changed the schedule and so it hasn't happened. I hope maybe you guys will interview him at some point. I would

sort of like to know that, too. I imagine though, if he had just come forward without having his name already sort of as a recognized authority in this area, it might've been dismissed.

Jenny Cohn:

And I don't know why. I believe, having read his book, at least the tenor of it was that there was an affirmative decision made not to tell the public about the vote tallies part of it.

Sarah Kendzior:

Wow.

Jenny Cohn:

What I found really interesting, somewhat reading between the lines though, is that the book gave me a fuller understanding of why that mantra "we see no evidence that vote tallies were changed" was circulating. As a lawyer—I'm sure as many non-lawyers noticed—those words really stuck out.

Jenny Cohn:

You know, it depends on the meaning of is. It stuck out to me way back when. It seemed very stilted because a lack of evidence isn't an evidence of absence, as they say. So they still could have been changed and not have seen evidence of it. I thought it was a reference to a lack of signals intelligence, like eavesdropping on—they didn't hear any Russians talking about changing vote tallies when they eavesdropped on them. But after reading his book, what I think it is, is that the DHS did monitor to an extent, and I don't know to what extent, but they did monitor state election systems even on election day. So they could say as to those, they did not see any, I guess, internet traffic or any successful breaches on election day.

Jenny Cohn:

But there are two things very misleading about saying... It gave them sort of a CYA, we saw no evidence. And maybe they even persuaded themselves it didn't happen because, psychologically, it would be very difficult to admit to oneself that a breach might've happened on your watch. And then you didn't warn the public in advance, or even after.

Jenny Cohn:

They didn't really monitor for the most part county election systems. I mean, there was just with a few very limited exceptions. And so the truth is if you wanted to alter an election outcome, you would not do it for the most part at the state level, because that would be detected very easily; if you gave a state total, but you didn't affect the county totals, which are reported separately now in the United States. Someone can just add up the counties and easily see that the state total was bogus.

Jenny Cohn:

So what you'd want to do is alter the county election systems, and municipal in some places, which is really where most of the election activity occurs. And they were not in a position to know whether there were any attempted intrusions on election day because they were not given permission. And you know, it's not entirely clear that they asked all of the counties. They might have. There's a whole lot of them. I believe like 33,000 if you do counties, and some states run their elections through municipalities.

[begin advertisement]

Sarah Kendzior:

This episode of Gaslit Nation is sponsored by Best Fiends. A puzzle game you can play at home on your phone. Best Fiends challenges your brain with fun puzzle levels but it's a casual game so it doesn't stress you out which is a good thing right now. With Best Fiends, you can collect cute characters, solve puzzles, and compete against your friends and family. Best Fiends updates the game monthly with new levels and events so it never gets old.

Sarah Kendzior:

My kids love it and they've already passed level 100. Parents this is a great way for kids to relax with friends while practicing social distancing. Best Fiends is fun for users of any age. Engage your brain with fun puzzles and collect tons of cute characters. Trust me with over 100 million downloads. This five star rated mobile puzzle game is a must-play. Download Best Fiends free on the Apple app store or Google Play. That's friends without "R": Best Fiends.

[end advertisement]

Andrea Chalupa:

So that's the vulnerabilities. Our election system is a hodgepodge and DHS, the Department of Homeland Security, doesn't have access to the massive full hodgepodge.

Jenny Cohn:

Well, right, unless they're given express permission, and the book made really clear, there was an interview, a quote from Jeh Johnson—and I'm probably mispronouncing that as well, Jeh Johnson, anyway—where he said they don't have independent surveillance activity. And so what became the “we saw no evidence” morphs over time into, “they did not change vote tallies”, which promotes the sort of magical thinking about our election system and intelligence community that their eyes are everywhere and that if something happened they would magically know it and we would know it and everything.

Jenny Cohn:

And therefore the fact that they didn't tell us anything went wrong means it didn't happen. And it's just very dangerous, especially now that we have Trump in power. If Obama didn't tell us, you can be pretty sure the Trump administration's not going to tell us if there are breaches.

Andrea Chalupa:

And the Kremlin changed the election results in Ukraine in 2014, the presidential election results in Ukraine.

Jenny Cohn:

Yep.

Andrea Chalupa:

And Ukraine, being used to Kremlin aggression for many generations, was able to catch this quickly, catch it and change it. Yeah, they could do it to Ukraine, a country which leads the world in IT (Ukraine is I think like the fifth-best market for IT talent in the world). If Ukraine can catch this, right? And if this was done to Ukraine, then the excuse for the U.S. was that we were just sitting ducks in 2016.

Jenny Cohn:

I think that yes, we were sitting ducks and the truth is we don't know if vote tallies were changed or not in 2016. We can suspect one way or the other, but we don't know. And it is misinformation for members of the Trump administration and of the former Obama administration, as far as I can tell, to run around telling people that they weren't.

Jenny Cohn:

Most of the Obama administration doesn't say it that definitively, but Susan Rice apparently was on Stephen Colbert saying definitively that vote tallies weren't changed and there appears to be no factual basis for that statement. The department of Homeland security has admitted it did not do a forensic analysis and as you know, the recount—which thank you for promoting that, you were ahead of me, in seeing the need for that—but it was really a sham because experts say the only way to know if electronic tallies have been changed is to conduct a robust manual audit or full manual recount of a reliable paper trail.

Jenny Cohn:

In many of these places, they didn't have paper at all, much less a reliable paper trail, which would be hand-marked paper ballots. And even when they had them in Wisconsin, the court told the counties they could decide and most of the large counties decided not to do it manually, and machine recount is not really a recount at all.

Andrea Chalupa:

Right. Well, we demanded a vote audit, which as you pointed out is very different from a recount and had to settle for a recount, and recounts themselves are war. I was talking to organizers on the ground in Wisconsin who were there during the recount who were describing to me how Trump brought in his goon squad of lawyers to hover over the recount, intimidate people and so forth. So recounts are our war and they're absolutely not adequate to do proper forensics on election hacking.

Jenny Cohn:

I mean, I think in some ways it hasn't gotten enough attention that Trump blocked the recount. It's not so different than what happened in 2000 where the GOP blocked a recount. I mean, the big difference here is that we didn't have the Democratic Party behind the recount. Whether that would have made a difference we'll never know.

Jenny Cohn:

I think the psychology of it is certainly different when you have the Democratic Party itself actually supporting the recount, it might've helped. I do think that the Democratic Party backed itself into a corner in 2016. They sort of were fooled by Trump who affirmatively, you know, he does that projection thing where he claimed it would be rigged so that the Democrats would push back harder and overstate the security of our election system, which would have made them look like hypocrites if they had then themselves gone to go seek a recount.

Jenny Cohn:

And I am very concerned that I'm seeing the same thing happening now, which is not to say that I... I mean, I don't know, maybe Biden will be declared victorious on the electronic count. I certainly hope so, but if he's not, we cannot have a repeat of history where the Democratic Party has made it such that they will look like hypocrites if they're the ones who need to challenge another suspicious electronic outcome. We cannot have that.

Jenny Cohn:

And so their messaging has to be a little bit subtle on this. And I just am seeing sort of all the same people who are always considered the adults in the room—who've presided over this system that landed us in this terrible place—focusing exclusively on the possibility that the electronic outcome will favor Biden and Trump will try to undermine it and not even considering the reverse possibility, which is that what if the vote tallies are changed—I don't want to say again—but what if they are changed in 2020 to favor Trump?

Jenny Cohn:

They're not even putting that scenario out there and it's framing you really need to at least have it out there so it gives you credibility if later on you need to be the one filing an election challenge. They're not framing it at all. They're only framing the... well of course the electronic part is going to be legitimate and it'll favor Biden because he's so far ahead. And therefore it's just going to be Trump who's going to be trying to challenge it, and that would be inappropriate. I don't know, we just need to be a little more subtle in our messaging. Democrats.

Andrea Chalupa:

Why do you think they're still so reluctant? Because before you were saying that you think Obama basically put the image of trustworthiness ahead of actual trust. And our institutions were badly hurt back then, but they were not nearly at the state we are now where Trump has bulldozed and gutted our actual institutions and is trying to annihilate the very idea of facts and truth and trust and transparency.

Andrea Chalupa:

You know, we're at a point where people are acknowledging a lot of the things that they were reluctant to acknowledge in 2016, like his dictatorial aspirations. Why will they still not go there? When we need to know, when we as citizens are about to head to these polls and vote, why are they still so reluctant today to touch this topic, given that now they have a lot more proof and evidence, to kind of broach the territory?

Jenny Cohn:

Well, it's difficult to tell the public, "we didn't tell you before and by the way, maybe they really were changed". I think that is a very difficult thing to say. I don't understand why former members of the Obama administration have not made election security a priority. Even if they didn't want to admit that it's conceivable that vote tallies were changed in 2016, why they haven't then at least joined the cause against things like wireless modems and precinct ballot scanners and remote access software, which I believe was—at the time in 2016—I believe there was remote access software in ES&S and Diebold Election Systems and perhaps Dominion county central tabulators. I don't understand that at all.

Jenny Cohn:

Maybe they were threatened. I honestly don't know. I think there's a groupthink to it, but I do want to say, I do think Obama, it wasn't just that he wanted people to trust an untrustworthy system. He thought maybe he'd get lucky and could take care of it through the DHS and through these white hat hackers. And maybe he didn't understand the system well enough.

Jenny Cohn:

I mean, he's a busy guy and unless he studied it independently to realize that monitoring the state election systems is not sufficient, that you have to cover the county election systems. And I mean, it could be, for example, in 2004, which was considered one of the most suspicious election outcomes of probably all time, maybe even more so than 2016—

Andrea Chalupa:

How so?

Jenny Cohn:

Well, you had a Republican secretary of state in the state of Ohio named Ken Blackwell, who was also like an honorary chair of the Bush campaign, and he entered into a contract with two Republican—they were known as the Republican, well, one of them was known as the Republican IT Guru. And they routed Ohio's results through a backup server on election night at about 11:14 PM to a company called SmarTech in Chattanooga, Tennessee.

Jenny Cohn:

And these are objectively verifiable facts. It was reported, the facts themselves were reported in publications like McClatchy. And so when the main server went down for no explained reason; there was no indication of too much traffic. That was the ostensible reason for building this backup server. So Ohio's results were routed to SmarTech, which was owned by a big Republican operative.

Jenny Cohn:

And when it went back up, it flipped. Kerry was ahead before the server went down and then he lost when it went back up and it stayed there. There was even a lawsuit over it and then one of those two—the guy that built the backup server—died in a private plane crash before the election. So that was John Kerry who lost and he has since said that he himself suspected electronic vote tally manipulation during that election, but that he figured it would end up at the United States Supreme court again, and have the same result as in 2000.

Jenny Cohn:

And so they didn't pursue it. Of course, this left the public in the dark that this was a possibility and for the next decade and a half, people who were trying to figure out what happened with that election were largely vilified as conspiracy theorists and he didn't chime in to help them at all. He only in the last several years finally started saying rather quietly that he suspected vote tally manipulation all along. And so he was the secretary of state of Obama in 2016.

Jenny Cohn:

And you know, I mean do think, I have heard—and this is all just hearsay so take it with a grain of salt—but I heard that he warned Obama and that they took efforts in 2012 to thwart hacking. And of course, that was anonymous hackers took credit for de-rigging or changing passwords and preventing electronic manipulation in that election and the same group, according to Alexandra-

Andrea Chalupa:

My sister, yeah.

Jenny Cohn:

That same group of hackers did work in 2016 to try to see what was going on, but they hadn't infiltrated a ground game in the same way that they had in 2012, so something still could have happened despite their efforts. So, I mean, I think he tried. He didn't just leave it to chance. I do think Obama tried, he just didn't want the public in on what was happening.

Jenny Cohn:

And I think that was a mistake in retrospect, but had it worked I guess maybe it would seem different. Maybe it did work. Maybe it did work. I should say that. I really do mean it when I say we don't know. I have my suspicions about 2016, but I do not claim to have proof that vote tallies were changed in 2016. I think it's enough to say that we don't know and that's unacceptable.

Andrea Chalupa:

Exactly right. Yeah, so my sister Alexandra Chalupa, who was a DNC contractor who used the power of Google.com to piece together public record information about infamous Paul Manafort, torturers lobbyists, and all these other connections to show that the Tremlin—the Kremlin, [laughs] the Tremlin. The word terror, because it was a terrorist attack by the Tremlin.

Andrea Chalupa:

So, my sister pieced together, all this information publicly available of course, that the Kremlin was helping steal this election in 2016 over Donald Trump, and that Paul Manafort was a smoking gun given his long history of being Putin's operative in Ukraine. And he was just reusing that same playbook in the U.S. So she pieced all this together and tried to warn both Republicans and Democrats and at 3:00 AM on election night when her worst fears came true, she wrote a memo and put it on Facebook and it went viral and that helped launch #AuditTheVote.

Andrea Chalupa:

And you've been referring to it in this conversation. And it's really chilling because there was this article in Salon, I think, about what you're talking about in Ohio, in the John Kerry election, where Bush won reelection. And there was a lot of nefarious stuff going on in Ohio, not just this election hacking story, but also deliberately engineered long lines.

Andrea Chalupa:

The GOP, of course, depends on stealing elections, but what was really interesting about the Salon story that came out about Ohio and the election hacking and the anonymous hackers that hung out in the system to try to protect the election, I think it referred to Karl Rove having a meltdown on live TV on Fox News.

Jenny Cohn:

Oh, that's 2012, yes.

Andrea Chalupa:

Yeah, 2012, 2012, when the election was called for Obama, when Ohio was called for Obama. And I remember watching this and just seeing the look of shock on Karl Rove's face. It was like something had gone wrong, like Bushes brain... Karl Rove being as dirty as the Trump Crime Family, Karl Rove is a danger to our country and our democracy, and he was the one that led the way for Trump's corruption with his own corruption to get the Bush Crime Family in the White House. But it was really interesting, that infamous Karl Rove meltdown on live Fox TV, that it was almost like his scheme didn't work. And he was shocked that it didn't work.

Jenny Cohn:

Yes, it was an iconic moment. And I remember watching it with great enjoyment as well. That actually launched I think—well, Megyn Kelly was already a thing, but it made her more of a thing, more of a sensation because she's the one who said, "You know, it kind of looks like Obama won." And he kept saying, "No, no, no, it's going to change."

Jenny Cohn:

It was, I believe, around the same time when everything changed for Bush in 2004. So this is 2012. And he kept saying, "No, no, no, Ohio is going to change." And then it didn't. And she just got up from her desk and walked back and talked to all the Fox News analysts and they said, "Yeah, we're done. There's nothing else to change. We're done. We're done here, Obama won."

Jenny Cohn:

And I have always hesitated to talk about Anonymous' claim to have stopped a hack in 2012, because it sounds so far fetched and it may to some of your listeners still, and I'm not pretending to know that they did or didn't, but what really, the reason why I started bringing it up again is I finally looked back at Alexandra's Facebook post again.

Jenny Cohn:

And I hadn't put together that it was the same, supposedly, the same group of Anonymous—there are subgroups, I guess, in Anonymous—that it was supposedly the same group in 2012 that claimed to have stopped something in 2012, that worked with the DHS, or at least was there in 2016. And when I put those two together, because Alexandra is not part of the regular election integrity community that meets annually and discusses 2012 and did an Anonymous do it, or didn't it do it?

Jenny Cohn:

It's sort of coming from this entirely separate avenue. It added a little more weight to something that I maybe had given as much weight to the possibility before. I just, I wish Anonymous didn't wear the mask and do the music and all of that. It makes it seem just really silly.

Andrea Chalupa:

It's a loose collection so I think any sort of group can be, I don't know. I mean, Anonymous is a complicated topic for a variety of reasons, but just to clarify what I was saying earlier. So, 2012 is Romney versus Obama, and that's when Karl Rove had his meltdown on Fox News live, where he kept claiming that "no, it's going to turn around" and then it didn't and he stormed off the set.

Andrea Chalupa:

What followed was an article in Salon or some site like that saying that Anonymous hackers claimed credit for protecting Ohio from Karl Rove's election hacking. And prior to that, in 2004, John Kerry failed to pursue any type of legal action toward credible claims that the election systems had been hacked in Ohio at a time when Kerry was actually up in the vote and suddenly the server collecting the votes went down and when it came back up, Bush was leading and Kerry just dropped that, but—and you've heard—privately warned Obama.

Andrea Chalupa:

All of this is to say that the Democrats are complicit and negligent in having a full-throated, office-wide, grassroots supported movement for election hacking, for election security. It's just like voter ID. It's just like gerrymandering. It's just like the giant bag of tricks, the dark arts the GOP uses to steal elections. Election hacking is central to all that and it's so odd to me that the Democratic Party that prides itself on being innovative—Obama was the first social media president and the first social media White House and all of it—it's just so infuriating that they can't wrap their heads around election security as being central to all of their vote protection work.

Jenny Cohn:

Well, yeah, what Stephen Spoonamore—he's a security expert who was a witness in that 2004 case—what he says is that for example, Max Cleland, who unexpectedly lost his race when Georgia became the first state in the country to use paperless, which is to say unrecountable, unauditible touchscreen voting machines in 2002, he very much unexpectedly lost his race to a Confederate flag defender. And apparently, Spoonamore, people that he knows spoke with people who know him, and he didn't want to be the person who told Americans their votes don't count.

Jenny Cohn:

There's just a lot of pressure and I think Democrats, they want there to be trust in institutions and maybe they just felt like they had it under control, that it was just like a minor nuisance when Obama won twice. But the truth is if hackers actually helped him succeed the second time—and by the way, in 2008, if Karl Rove really was involved in orchestrating these things, and there's not enough transparency for anyone to really prove this, but if he was, I mean, he was a defendant in an active lawsuit in 2008, as was the guy that built the backup server who, according to Spoonamore was feeling extremely guilty and considering saying something at the trial, in that case, had he lived long enough to make it to the trial.

Jenny Cohn:

And this all does sound very conspiratorial, unfortunately, but those are the facts. Those are what we know. We don't know the ultimate whether—I guess—whether it's true that there was an orchestrated theft, but I think people think of hacking as a little more exotic than it is. And that makes it maybe more scary. And in some ways... I interviewed Don Siegelman, who might make a really great guest for you. He

has a new book out. He was a Democratic governor of Alabama, which also, actually, they actually had paper ballots in 2002 for his race.

Jenny Cohn:

And what happened was he was one of the most popular politicians of all time in Alabama. He had been governor, lieutenant governor, secretary of state, and AG, and he was running for reelection and the polls all suggested he would win and he was running against a guy whose campaign manager was close with Karl Rove. And Karl Rove was very much all over Alabama at that time, by the way, I believe this was before he moved on to Texas. And, on election night, Siegelman was declared victorious and they would post the results outside the courthouse. And after everyone was told to go home and go to sleep, another set of results was posted outside the courthouse.

Jenny Cohn:

And it removed 6,000 votes from his total in this one county, a very Republican county. It didn't change the outcome of the county but it changed the outcome of the overall race, so that his opponent won and then Karl Rove's client also happened to be the Alabama AG. And they seized the paper ballots before there could be a recount and certified the results. And I think it's... Oh and then of course the part that got the most attention really was the fact that then Siegelman's opponent's manager's wife was a U.S. attorney and they sort of redefined and expanded the definition of bribery to include situations where you don't get any personal benefit. And then they also threatened witnesses to pretend there was sort of this quid pro quo when there really wasn't.

Jenny Cohn:

And they locked him up for five years and an incredible amount of prosecutors around the country from both parties but I almost want to say more Republicans saw that as an extreme abuse of power and an injustice. And a whistleblower, who was a Republican, came forward, I believe, about him being locked up and was very suspicious about the result and said that she once heard Karl Rove say that you could rig an election as long as final polls were within three percentage points.

Jenny Cohn:

That election, in some ways it makes it more scary, but in some ways it makes it less scary. It doesn't have to be these masked crusaders or international cohorts. It can just be these sleazy political operatives shifting some votes here and there, and we need to be more on our toes about machines that don't allow recounts. And then even when we get the paper ballots, the GOP doesn't let us get recounts. So they screw us both ways and we need to really be attuned to these patterns so that we can thwart it in 2020 and beyond.

Andrea Chalupa:

Right. There's a great documentary on what you just described of the Don Siegelman case. It's called Atticus Versus The Architect: The Political Assassination of Don Siegelman. And you can watch that now on Amazon. And in fact, while listening to you, I feel like a really good headline for this interview should be, "Karl Rove Walked, so Manafort Could Run: The Jenny Cohn Interview".

Jenny Cohn:

Could be. Yeah. Yeah. I just... You guys talk a lot about lack of accountability and the same is really true with Karl Rove. So apparently Eric Holder is the one who—I mean, this is what I believe—Don told me

when I interviewed him that Eric Holder was the one—and I think it's in the Atticus versus Architect—who decided not to prosecute Karl Rove for defying a congressional subpoena.

Andrea Chalupa:

Oh, dear God.

Jenny Cohn:

So it was kind of all lumped together. There were several things going on with Karl Rove, but one was, I believe, 20 million missing emails from the Bush administration, which Democrats never made an issue of that and then Hillary became the missing email lady later on.

Sarah Kendzior:

It's such a frustrating situation because it feels like the Democrats are digging their own grave by not prosecuting these prior administrations or even just investigating their crimes. But they're throwing the rest of us in that grave with them. They're digging the grave of democracy. That's one of the things that I just don't understand is that there is no future for them or for this country unless you actually have a transparent process of oversight, accountability, prosecution for those who've been deemed guilty. Do you see any of that as possible moving forward when we have the current administration, which overtly flaunts its disregard for the rule of law?

Jenny Cohn:

Well, I don't know, but it is true that the hindsight is 2020. I think Obama was very much trying to unite the country and so he didn't want to go into the crimes of the Bush administration. And Eric Holder was maybe just a really bad choice to be part of the administration because I believe he was with a law firm that previously represented Karl Rove. That would have to be fact-checked, I could be wrong, but there was some bizarre connection there. The whole voter fraud myth started, really, with Karl Rove. That was what the firing of U.S. attorneys under the Bush administration was about—the political firings—was that some of these U.S. attorneys didn't want to perpetrate this myth and so the idea was that they were firing them for political and improper purposes. And there was an investigation where they were supposed to get the Bush administration emails.

Jenny Cohn:

And the Bush administration was using a private email server hosted by—SmarTech!—the company that received the 2004 Ohio results. And they claimed that they couldn't find them. It was something like 20 million emails, I believe that's the number. And they just couldn't find them. But the Obama administration later found them and Crew had actually done a public records request for them but Holder reached some kind of agreement just to give them a teeny tiny handful, like a random batch. And the rest never saw the light of day. But then Russia—these things, if you don't have accountability, they have a way of coming back to haunt you because Russia hacked SmarTech in 2015, which had all the Bush administration emails—including Karl Rove's private emails—and it had received those 2004 election results. And so I don't know what exactly Russia got a hold of when it hacked SmarTech.

Jenny Cohn:

There was lots of stuff SmarTech had. But the potential for kompromat is immense. And there are a lot of people who were sort of disdainful...I don't know that Rove was exactly Never Trump, but he was disdainful and now he kind of works for him. You just have to wonder, whatever they got from SmarTech

was never released, which implies it can be used as leverage. Going forward, I still have hope because actually hearing that there are white hat hackers consistently on the cas gives me some hope that-

Andrea Chalupa:

Well, we don't know that though. We don't know that.

Jenny Cohn:

We don't.

Andrea Chalupa:

I mean, that's the thing is sort of like this... That's why Batman exists as a story because human nature wants to believe that there's someone somewhere looking out for us and doing good and having all the resources, like a Bat Cave and a Batmobile to do it. So we don't know though.

Jenny Cohn:

They were there but whether they can do anything is another question. So in 2004—so I just went back the other day and reread it more. And you know, if you're able to infiltrate a ground game, that's very... I interviewed Jonathan Simon, who's the author of the book Code Red who spoke with the guy, he says, a guy who claimed—and again, it could be people yanking our chain—but he spoke with a guy who claimed to know the guy who infiltrated the 2004 operation. And apparently, yeah, he actually got in on the ground and that's very different than what typically would be able to occur.

Jenny Cohn:

Especially if now we're talking about a foreign nation having joined our little party here in the United States with elections. We don't know how many people are inside our systems. There could be lots of people having a party and shifting votes this way, no, we're going to shift them that way, no, we're going to shift them this way. So, I don't know, I have hope because you know... well, certainly no one would ever accuse me of being an optimist, but I'm just not in the predictions business.

Jenny Cohn:

I don't know why. You guys are better at that. Most people who make predictions are wrong the majority of the time and I don't want to be one of those people. And I hope that overwhelming turnout could make a difference. And I did a really detailed article with tips on maximizing our chances for having our votes be counted, no matter how you choose to vote, whether it's vote by mail or vote in person or touch screen.

Andrea Chalupa:

We'll link to those tips in our show notes for this interview because it's a must-read guide on how individuals have to take the power back in their own hands to be vigilant and take measures necessary to secure their vote. It's on us. And so I want to ask you, what has been done since 2016 to secure our elections? Has there been any improvement that you've seen?

Jenny Cohn:

Yeah, I mean, apparently Albert sensors have been attached to some machines which would not thwart attacks, but rather let you know that there was at least an attempted infiltration, maybe it even lets you

know if there was an actual breach. The problem is, I think most state systems got them, but I don't know if that's just their voter registration systems or if that extends to their election management systems, which again, election management systems are like the centralized treasure chest if you're a hacker for the voting part of the operation because they provide the programming for all of the voting machines in a county or state. And then they also include the central tabulators that aggregate the precinct totals.

Jenny Cohn:

So I don't know if those Albert sensors are there and even if they are, we are now at the mercy of whoever is in charge of somebody telling us and they're making these things classified and you know, they're having nondisclosure agreements in Florida about what they've done or not done to secure elections and about whatever breaches occurred in 2016. You asked me at the very beginning what we know about 2016 and I'm sorry, I kind of diverted, but I mean we know that—I actually made a quick list ≠ that they targeted all 50 States, that they breached two to three election service providers. The only name we have is VR Systems, which was an electronic poll book and voter registration system company and still is around. They breached voter registration systems in Florida, Illinois, and Arizona.

Jenny Cohn:

We know that the FBI can't say if voter data was changed or not, but the media is massaging this and it's becoming "no voter data was changed, no vote tallies were changed". We know that they were at least—from Shimer's book—that they were in a position to alter vote tallies. I would think if that was untrue, the Obama administration would have issued a statement about his book being false and they haven't done that. We know that no one knows if vote tallies were changed. We know that they did not monitor most of the county election systems. We know there was no, well, as far as we know, there was no forensic analysis. The DHS said it hadn't conducted one and did not intend to conduct one. We know there was no meaningful hand recount. And so that is pretty much what we know.

Sarah Kendzior:

Well and Reality Winner's contribution as well, right? The leaked NSA document showing that Russia accessed voter registration rolls. Yeah, I mean the fact that that document has just been hanging out there in cyberspace while Reality Winner is behind bars. I mean that to me seems like an enormous story and it is just untouchable. Very few people, very few mainstream reporters or outlets will even discuss the fact that she's in there, even while Flynn and Manafort and Cohen and the rest are all going free. Can you comment on her case and what that means?

Jenny Cohn:

I'm a huge supporter of releasing Reality Winner. I mean, I think it's pretty clear she violated the law, but you know there should be some proportionality because she's sort of like a conscientious, what is the term? Is it—

Andrea Chalupa:

Conscientious objector.

Jenny Cohn:

Yeah. I mean she did it for the greater good. The larger crime was the attack on our election system and the coverup of the attack on our election system. So I did a thread that I'm going to make into a medium

article. I've talked about doing it for years, but I really went through the timeline and there was very much a cover up—at least in the court of public opinion—by the Trump administration saying that there had been media reports of Russia attacking our election infrastructure, but he called it “fake news”.

Jenny Cohn:

So leaking the actual physical NSA report was really the only thing—that type of thing, the actual internal report was the only thing—that could debunk Trump's fake news claims. I mean the media had reported something had happened, but it wasn't enough to break through that fake news allegation and she broke through that and I think she's a hero for doing that. I don't think we would know what little we do know, but for her. But I also want to say, when I read that document really carefully that she released, it did not say it was just voter registration systems.

Jenny Cohn:

It talked about websites and networks, and I noticed it at the time. And I think I have a tweet somewhere saying, why is everyone saying that this is *just* voter registration? And after reading Shimer's book, there was a line in there I'll have to find the quote, that they purposely kept it vague. They didn't want people to know that might extend to the actual vote tallies. I actually think things are a lot worse in some ways, by the way, as we head into 2020. In one specific way. There's a pattern that has me very concerned.

Jenny Cohn:

We do know that domestic actors and corrupt insiders can obviously wreak havoc on elections and may or may not have done so in the past. But if we really do have Russia having joined the party, foreign nations having joined the party, they use the internet in particular as a weapon and that's how they apparently attacked Ukraine's election system in 2014 and actually changed the reported results. And one thing that has occurred to me is that since 2016, we have actually significantly expanded our internet connectivity of precinct systems since the 2016 election. And that has me hopping up and down worried. And in the two specific ways that we have done this is these new cellular modems in precinct ballot scanners because now Michigan has them as well.

Jenny Cohn:

They didn't have them in 2016. Now they have them and God knows what other states might have them. It is not the majority of the country by any means, but we now have Florida, Michigan, and Wisconsin. The good news is I've been talking to people who—I'm trying to organize some action on getting them removed, like on the ground protests and that sort of thing in those three states. In one of them, I talked to a woman who says there absolutely is still time to remove the modems. It would not be a difficult thing to do. But I'm very, very worried about it. And then the other thing is, these electronic poll books. It's like a new fad. They've been around for years, but they weren't popular.

Jenny Cohn:

Jurisdictions typically used paper poll books at the polling place. Now suddenly, partly because of the move to early voting in which there's electronic check-in computers, you can't update in real-time whether someone has already voted or not during early voting with paper poll books, it's just not logically feasible. But on election day, they're now using them as well, where there are these electronic ones and it's unnecessary and oftentimes they are connecting them to wifi or Bluetooth, which is incredibly hackable.

Jenny Cohn:

And they're using them now not just as part of the voter registration checking system, but to activate the new touch screen voting machines and that is just weird. And they're making them effectively part of the voting system. So they are using them to encode the cards that start the voting machines. And we don't know what is going into that encoding. And at the most simplistic level, if you had rolling blackouts—á la Belarus—if you had rolling blackouts during our election in targeted areas, you wouldn't be able to activate those voting machines, so even if you had back up paper poll books, if you didn't have backup hand-marked paper ballots, people would not be able to vote. And that is worse. That is a worse situation than we were in previously.

Jenny Cohn:

And not enough people have woken up to it or are talking about it. And there is time for some action on this, but only if it kind of goes viral. So it's in my tips sheet. That's a start, is identifying it and those two things, wireless modems and these—on election day we can't do anything about it, during early voting they're necessary, but on election day, I don't think we should be using these electronic poll books at all. And if we do use them, we need backup paper everything, and I can guarantee you, there are many places that are going to go bare like the Titanic without the backup paper or anything.

Jenny Cohn:

Because that's exactly what happened in Los Angeles County, a liberal county. They were dumb enough to do it on election day. They have a setup that actually makes it impossible to have backup paper poll books. These Vote Anywhere centers are bad, bad, bad for election day. And Georgia didn't have backups either and it was chaos in both places.

Andrea Chalupa:

Wow. Who's getting rich off of machines? Any members of Congress? Are they getting lobbying money and other things?

Jenny Cohn:

They're not good getting rich off of it. A lot of them do get donations. The biggest chunk that I've seen is ES&S donating \$30,000 since 2013 to the Republican State Leadership Committee but that's not a huge number. I think what happens is family members may make donations and such, and we don't really know what happens under the table, but a lot of this is done under the table. So for example, in Philadelphia, ES&S did make contributions through its lobbyists to the decision-makers who, against the advice of experts and voting rights advocates, bought these new touchscreen machines rather than hand-marked paper ballots.

Jenny Cohn:

And the city comptroller conducted an investigation and she discovered that there had been undisclosed donations made to the two decision-makers, one Democrat in Philadelphia and one Republican. And it would have been grounds to terminate the contract, but of course, they didn't terminate it and so that's the crappy system they have, and it had all kinds of problems. Touchscreen systems, I just don't recommend them. When you often hear about touchscreens flipping your vote, that's because it's a touch screen; they have calibration problems. And miscalibration, the vendor of these systems in

Pennsylvania, their rep, I saw a video where he's assuring everyone before the election before they bought them, "Scout's honor, miscalibration is not an issue anymore."

Jenny Cohn:

Well, guess what? It was something like a third of the machines were miscalibrated. I don't know that it was deliberate. I doubt it because it's a pretty visible problem. Why would you do something visibly when you can do it invisibly? But maybe you would, I don't know. But miscalibration can be either deliberate or unintentional. I think typically it's unintentional, but Kim Zetter wrote an article long ago—she's a really great cybersecurity journalist—which said that it can be done deliberately.

Jenny Cohn:

So anyway, that's in my tip sheet too, which is to request a hand-marked paper ballot. And if you use a touchscreen, there certainly are strategies to minimize the risks of it, the main one being to bring a completed sample ballot with you to the polls and use it as a cheat sheet to compare against the paper printout from those touchscreens, which is the only thing that could be used in a manual auditor recount. You want to make sure that it accurately reflects what you intended and that note down-ballot races, in particular, have been deleted or changed.

Jenny Cohn:

Because studies show that 93% of those changes would go unnoticed by voters, which is an invitation for both fraud and error. And you want to have an accurate audit or recount if you get one and so it's really a no brainer to bring your completed sample ballot. That was the conclusion of this study, by the way, is that everyone should have a completed slate of voters or sample ballot, that's the only thing that brings up the ability to accurately verify these printouts is having a cheat sheet with you, but no one's really messaging it except for me. So now I am, so now you can.

Andrea Chalupa:

This shouldn't be on you to fix this massive problem. There should be some central command system supported by both leading parties and all secretaries of state to say this isn't acceptable, we should not be having a national debate of whether our vote tally was hacked in 2016. There should be zero debate, so let's tie up all these loose ends and have a paper trail, hand-marked paper ballots, and let's have full confidence in the security of our elections. It should just be a central command doing this. It shouldn't be on grassroots activists and independent journalists.

Jenny Cohn:

Among the most zealous advocates, no one can agree on what to emphasize, which is partly why I just started doing it on my own on Twitter, because I couldn't take it anymore. Certain things seemed obvious to me and all the arguing and bickering and stuff that often occurs in the groups, I couldn't take it. There is a serious misinformation problem. Some people with blue check marks are of that mentality that you put trust in elections ahead of trustworthy elections and that transparency is dangerous and they should try to handle it behind the scenes.

Jenny Cohn:

And some of them I believe are well meaning. They just want to try to handle it as best they can behind closed doors and not inform the public. And I'm just adamantly in the other camp. The problem is, so, there's one guy who works with a lot of election officials. He's on the Michigan Secretary of State's—he's

a Democrat—he's on her committee, but he testified voting machines never connect to the internet. And he was working with election officials in Wisconsin. So either—he holds himself out as an expert—either he didn't know himself, which is scary that these cellular modems connect to the internet or he was lying.

Jenny Cohn:

I think maybe he didn't know he was telling a falsehood, but he spread it far and wide. And he advises ProPublica, which is a very respected publication. So their election division uses him as an advisor and he is very much of the “putting the trust ahead of trustworthiness”, and he is very much “let us handle it behind closed doors”. And he sees it, I believe, I can't read his mind, but he appears to see it as his job to make election officials look good, even if they screw up.

Jenny Cohn:

And certainly, there are many well-meaning election officials and we don't want them all quitting. We don't want that, but there are also mistakes being made and I think we're seeing from Reality Winner to some of Kim Zetter's reporting, by the way, on these modems, nothing changes. Sometimes for the public, the light of day is the only thing that makes people change their ways. So for example, she reported that these receiving end systems in Wisconsin, the receiving end systems to these wireless modems, the county central tabulators that received the transmissions, they had been left online for months or years in some cases. And she told election officials in Wisconsin and they did nothing.

Jenny Cohn:

They left them there until she said, or somebody told them that and they did nothing until she said she was going to write it up in an article and then they took them offline. So I think we really are at the point where we need the transparency, but we have so many actors out there that have the opposite philosophy and they start to convince themselves. And then they convinced maybe the people they didn't mean to convince of falsehoods.

Andrea Chalupa:

Yeah and what's this "expert"'s name that advises ProPublica? What's his name? The guy in Michigan?

Jenny Cohn:

David Becker. He knows he said that voting machines never connect to the internet and at this point, he has to know that that's false.

Andrea Chalupa:

Right.

Jenny Cohn:

And there was never a retraction. And he still, for some reason, Electionland has decided to still use him and that was sort of the central false talking point after the 2016 election. It's not like a minor little subtlety.

Andrea Chalupa:

No, of course not.

Jenny Cohn:

So I don't think I'm being too particular, but there was another blue check mark who's quite popular, sort of an adult in the room, who actually blocked me when I asked him in a direct message why he was continuing to put on a reporter who had spread disinformation after the 2016 election and he called me a zealot and blocked me for it. You know, I thought it was a fair question because it's the same people who led everyone to think that it just wasn't even on the table that vote tallies might've been changed.

Jenny Cohn:

Those same people are going to all of these paid forums. You know, there's a whole industry around supposed election integrity. Really large well-funded groups, they have all these seminars and people attend them and they have these blue checks and the same people who misled deliberately or otherwise unknowingly, but they're still the ones who—maybe slightly less—but they're still the ones to whom the mainstream media goes and they hold these events and some of their coverage is still up and I'm seeing this rewriting of the 2016 election, more and more people saying, "Well, at least we know that vote tallies weren't changed there." And we need an accurate historical record if nothing else.

Jenny Cohn:

I hope we win this election in November. If we don't though, we need an accurate historical record so someone someday can try to figure out what was our downfall and try to move past and try to fix things.

Sarah Kendzior:

Yeah, exactly. I mean—

Jenny Cohn:

Or where it went wrong.

Sarah Kendzior:

We've said so many times on this show that an informed public is a powerful public and what's remarkable about this situation is the diversity of groups that seem to be trying to take away this power from the public, the power of information, of transparency. You obviously see it from the Trump camp and the GOP who are trying to protect their own interests and their own theft and misdeeds. But we also saw it with The Intercept and Glenn Greenwald when Reality Winner sent in that document to them and they released it in a way that she could be identified and arrested.

Sarah Kendzior:

And we also see it from Obama administration officials and members of the Democratic National Committee who would be defined more as centrists or centrist liberal. We see it sometimes from leftists who are very adamant that Hillary Clinton lost this election on her own lack of merit and there can't possibly be any other explanation, there can't be Russian interference, there can't be election tampering. So many people are committed to this narrative for their own reasons that they just don't even want to look at the evidence in front of them.

Sarah Kendzior:

And that, I think, is one of the most damaging things about where we as a country, because facts supersede your political position, and it is alarming when people who hold such different political positions can unite in defiance of the facts and in defiance of investigation and in defiance of the people's own right to know what their government is doing. And to know whether they do have a voice in that government, whether we really do have representative government. I mean, what bigger question is there? It's so offensive to me that people don't even want to try to answer it. So I'm grateful that you've persisted because I know the abuse that you get and others get, it comes from all sides. And it's annoying as hell.

Jenny Cohn:

Yes, thank you. There are some on the Left who, there's one very popular account who's all sunshine and roses publicly, very popular. She's an author, I bought her books. And she told me I'm doing the devil's work.

Sarah Kendzior:

Oh, I know who this is. She said I was doing the devil's work too. She also said I'm a Russian agent, so yeah, it's not exactly sunshine and roses. I'm Satan, I'm a Russian agent...

Jenny Cohn:

To be fair, there is a great fear that this type of thing will reduce turnout, but I don't think it's been substantiated by studies and if it has been, I actually would be very curious to see them and whether giving solutions and empowering voters, as I try to do, with things that they can do to mitigate a lot of these risks, whether that changes the calculus. But I mean, I always do try to give "here's what you can do". I mean, there is a real, I think, legitimate concern about not wanting to reduce turnout. I just don't know that the evidence is there, that it would. And in fact, Sue Halpern, who's a great journalist at the New Yorker, published this piece where she cited a Harris Poll, and it's just a poll, it's just one poll, but it showed that at least before the 2018 midterm voters said they were more likely to vote because they were concerned about hacking.

Sarah Kendzior:

Yeah. I think we saw that in 2018. The mass turnout in 2018 I think was based on two things. One was a desire for accountability and for the nightmare to end, but also great concern that the Republicans were going to toy with the results of this election. And I think they were listening to people who said overwhelming turnout is one of the key mechanisms of retaining your own power. And we've always been very adamant: vote, vote in overwhelming numbers, check your voter registration information before you go.

Sarah Kendzior:

All of these safety tips, but people like to put this narrative out there. I've been accused over and over like "Sarah said don't bother to vote because there's corruption. I'm like, no! You vote *because* there's corruption. You vote to try to get people in who will annihilate the corruption and you vote because it's your right and people fought hard for that right. But yeah, there's a propaganda operation. I mean, there are multiple propaganda operations and then I think just other things going on, people don't want to admit that this is possible. They also don't want to deal, I think, with the repercussions of, well, wait, what if our Congress was not legitimately elected?

Sarah Kendzior:

What does that mean for core appointments? What does that mean for other, political appointments and policies that were voted on by what would be illegitimate actors? I mean, it's just a whole can of worms. No one wants to open it. I understand that on principle, but we're at the point where we're lurching right into full blown fascism. This is the time. We've got nothing to lose. We need total honesty, I think, to remain a flow. And no agency and no individual has jurisdiction over the truth. The truth is the truth, and the truth needs to be told.

Jenny Cohn:

And I think there is this irony that a lot of journalists are trained and correctly so that they don't want to report on speculative claims. So they consider the suggestion that outcomes might not be legitimate speculative. And I actually sort of—I don't agree with it really—but I can sort of see what they're saying, but what they miss is that the official results that they are reporting are also completely speculative—

Sarah Kendzior:

Mmhmm.

Jenny Cohn:

because they haven't been verified because we don't allow that in our country and that is the story. And I think there has been headway, but the story is that we don't have a system that allows us to verify these outcomes and that's the subtle middle ground that they're missing. They think it has to be one or the other, and they are reporting on unverified claims of who won the election. That is also unverified. It's not just that the cheating is unverified, the whole thing is.

Andrea Chalupa:

One final question. What policies need to be enacted, state by state, nationwide to fully secure our elections?

Jenny Cohn:

For November?

Andrea Chalupa:

I don't have faith that... I mean, we can push as much as we can for November, but I would just say long term so we can formulate some sort of plan.

Jenny Cohn:

A lot of them are the same, actually. I mean the one thing we can't get before November, which is so important is a requirement of robust manual audits with a transparent chain of custody between election night and the audit. It's an absolute must and it has to be required and we still don't have it. But we also need a meaningful paper trail to conduct those audits and for most voters, hand-marked paper ballots, or voters with disabilities, it's okay to use a touch screen, but the touch screens just have too many risks associated with them to use as a primary system at the polling place.

Jenny Cohn:

We need to not have those modems and the internet connectivity with our precinct equipment. We need to not have remote access software. We need backup paper-everything. So backup paper poll books. If you're going to use electronic poll books, I would say not to use them at all on election day, because even with the backups people often aren't trained to use backups so there's still mass chaos and disenfranchisement, even when they technically could have used the emergency protocols, they don't know to do it.

Jenny Cohn:

Those are sort of the main provisions. I think we need a provision, some sort of a Right To Know law about breaches, and it gets tricky because you don't want to derail an investigation but I think now we have a system where everything got classified and people assume there must be some big investigation that's going to uncover and get to the bottom of things. And if they ever do get to the bottom of things, we don't get to know.

Jenny Cohn:

So it's a tricky piece of legislation to write when it comes to telling the public about breaches, but there has to be some kind of protocol requiring that transparency. I mean I think it's just really crucial. And in the meantime, there are things that increase transparency. So, at protectourvotes.com, which is the group that I'm in and it's our website, we are doing a photographing of precinct results to compare to reported totals. And if you look at what in Belarus, the voters there are living in a dictatorship and they understand that results have a way of changing between the precincts and what's reported later and they're doing photographs themselves.

Jenny Cohn:

Unfortunately, ballot selfies are illegal at the precincts in most U.S. jurisdictions, because of concerns about votes selling and undue influence, but the totals themselves come out of the machines and we can't say for sure whether those totals themselves are accurate, but we can at least make sure they don't change on routes to the county and state. And so not all jurisdictions post—they're called poll tapes—their precinct results outside on election night. And I think that should be a requirement that they all do that.

Jenny Cohn:

So that would be a really good start. The PAVE Act and The SAFE Act written by Ron Wyden were a very good start toward meaningful election security legislation. And I think it would need to be expanded a bit to include electronic poll books, something for that, because that is just a new threat that is going to catch a lot of people flat-footed, I think, in November.

Sarah Kendzior:

All right, well thank you and as we said, we're going to put a link to your article full of advice and tips, and information for voters on our Patreon page. Is there anything else that you want to promote while you have the Gaslit Nation floor?

Jenny Cohn:

Well, my Twitter handle @Jennycohn1, J-E-N-N-Y-C-O-H-N-1. And Protect Our Votes also has a good library that I put together of good sources. You know, many of the articles, most of them I'd say that I have found, are very accurate in their reporting and maybe the things that really have changed the way that I thought about elections and changed the landscape in a meaningful way. So I think our library is really excellent and includes all of my own articles and it includes a section of recommended other sources and I'll keep expanding it. I don't want people to be offended if I didn't include their book or article there. I tried to get most of them and I keep updating it.

Sarah Kendzior:

All right. Well, thank you so much for coming on. I think this is going to be a useful and important episode for our listeners.

Andrea Chalupa:

You are always welcome back on Gaslit Nation. Thank you so much for coming on and keep fighting the good fight we need you.

Michelle Obama:

Folks who know they cannot win fair and square at the ballot box are doing everything they can to stop us from voting. They're closing down polling places in minority neighborhoods. They're purging voter rolls. They're sending people out to intimidate voters and they're lying about the security of our ballots. These tactics are not new, but this is not the time to withhold our votes in protest or play games with candidates who have no chance of winning. We have got to vote like we did in 2008 and 2012.

Michelle Obama:

We've got to vote early, in person if we can. We've got to request our mail-in ballots right now, tonight, and send them back immediately and follow up to make sure they're received and then make sure our friends and families do the same. We have got to grab our comfortable shoes, put on our masks, pack a brown bag dinner, and maybe breakfast too, because we've got to be willing to stand in line all night if we have to.

Andrea Chalupa:

Our discussion continues and you can get access to that by signing up on our Patreon at the Truth Teller level or higher.

Sarah Kendzior:

We want you to encourage you to donate to your local food bank, which is experiencing a spike in demand. We also encourage you to donate to Direct Relief at [directrelief.org](http://directrelief.org), which is supplying much needed protective gear to first responders working on the front lines in the U.S., China, and other hard-hit parts of the world.

Andrea Chalupa:

We encourage you to donate to the International Rescue Committee, a humanitarian relief organization, helping refugees from Syria, donate at [rescue.org](http://rescue.org). And if you want to help critically endangered orangutans already under pressure from the Palm oil industry, donate to the orangutan project at [theorangutanproject.org](http://theorangutanproject.org). Gaslit Nation is produced by Sarah Kendzior and Andrea Chalupa. If you like

what we do, leave us a review on iTunes; it helps us reach more listeners. And check out our Patreon; it keeps us going. And also subscribe to our new YouTube channel.

Sarah Kendzior:

Our production managers are Nicholas Torres and Karlyn Daigle. Our episodes are edited by Nicholas Torres and our Patreon exclusive content is edited by Karlyn Daigle.

Andrea Chalupa:

Original music in Gaslit Nation is produced by David Whitehead, Martin Visenberg, Nick Farr, Demian Arriaga, and Karlyn Daigle.

Sarah Kendzior:

Our logo design was donated to us by Hamish Smyth of the New York firm order. Thank you so much, Hamish.

Andrea Chalupa:

Gaslit Nation would like to thank our supporters at the Producer level on Patreon...