

The Untold History of Disputed Elections in the United States: From Controversial Counts to Fraught Outcomes

The United States, often regarded as the beacon of democracy, has witnessed its fair share of controversial and disputed elections throughout its history. These pivotal moments have often left the nation in a state of uncertainty and chaos, challenging the very foundations of the democratic process. From the earliest days of the republic to modern times, let us delve into the intriguing history of disputed elections in the United States.

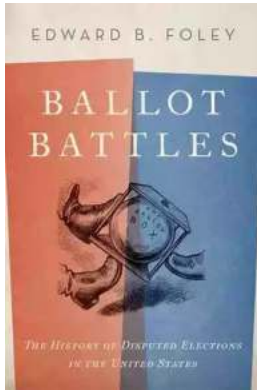
1. Tilden vs. Hayes: The Compromise of 1877

The year 1876 witnessed one of the most fiercely contested elections, pitting Democrat Samuel J. Tilden against Republican Rutherford B. Hayes. Tilden claimed to have won the popular vote, but the outcome was marred by allegations of widespread voter fraud, illegal voting practices, and voter suppression. As a result, several states sent conflicting sets of electoral votes to Congress, leading to an electoral stalemate.

The crisis reached its apex when a special commission was formed to settle the dispute. In the end, the commission, consisting of Supreme Court justices and members of Congress, awarded the contested electoral votes to Hayes. The compromise deal struck between Democrats and Republicans marked the end of Reconstruction, as well as the withdrawal of federal troops from the South.

Ballot Battles: The History of Disputed Elections in the United States

by Edward Foley (Illustrated Edition, Kindle Edition)



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Enhanced typesetting	: Enabled
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2. Bush vs. Gore: The Supreme Court Intervention

The contentious 2000 presidential election between George W. Bush and Al Gore is etched into the collective memory of every American. Florida, with its razor-thin margin, became the epicenter of the controversy. Allegations of flawed ballot designs, hanging chads, and incomplete recounts led to a protracted legal battle that eventually reached the United States Supreme Court.

In the landmark ruling of *Bush v. Gore*, the Supreme Court halted the recount of disputed ballots in Florida, effectively securing Bush's presidency. The decision was met with fervent criticism, as many felt that the Court had overstepped its bounds and interfered in the democratic process. This historic event sparked nationwide discussions on the adequacy and transparency of election procedures.

3. Hayes vs. Tilden: The End of Reconstruction

While the compromise of 1877 resolved the disputed presidential election between Tilden and Hayes, it also had significant implications for the Reconstruction Era. With Hayes assuming the presidency, federal troops were

withdrawn from the Southern states, effectively bringing an end to the federal government's efforts to protect and enforce civil rights for African Americans.

Historians argue that the resolution of the electoral dispute in favor of Hayes was contingent upon the Republicans' promise to end Reconstruction. This compromise deal dealt a severe blow to the progress made during this critical period in American history, and its consequences were felt for generations.

4. Johnson vs. Stearns: The Birth of Election Fraud

One of the earliest instances of election fraud in the United States can be traced back to the 1800s. The 1855 gubernatorial race between Henry S. Johnson and Fayette McMullen Stearns in California exemplifies the lengths to which some would go to secure political power.

In this fiercely contested election, Johnson, a Democrat, used fraudulent tactics to gain an advantage over his opponent. He manipulated voter registration rolls, engaged in ballot stuffing, and even tampered with the unofficial returns.

Ultimately, despite widespread allegations of fraud, Johnson was declared the winner, marking a dark chapter in American electoral history.

5. The Presidential Election of 1800: Peaceful Transition Amid Bitter Rivalry

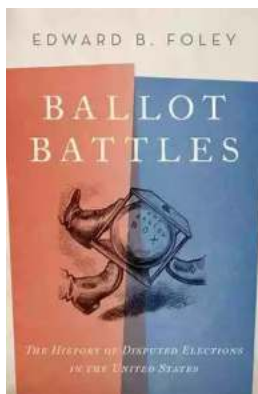
The presidential election of 1800 was not only a hotly contested race between Thomas Jefferson and incumbent President John Adams but also an intense battle of ideologies. The campaign was characterized by personal attacks, slanderous accusations, and bitter political rivalries. However, it was the peaceful transition of power that became the most defining aspect of this election.

When the Electoral College tie between Jefferson and his running mate Aaron Burr sent the decision to the House of Representatives, the nation held its breath.

Through numerous ballots, Jefferson finally emerged as the winner, marking the first transition of power from one political party to another in the young nation's history. This event solidified the precedent of peaceful transfer of power, a cornerstone of American democracy.

From the tumultuous compromise of 1877 to the Supreme Court intervention in 2000, disputed elections in the United States have shaped the course of the nation's history. These episodes have highlighted the flaws and strengths of the American electoral system, leading to vital discussions on democracy, transparency, and the sanctity of each vote.

As the United States continues to evolve and adapt its democratic processes, it is crucial to remember the lessons learned from these disputed elections. They serve as reminders of the importance of a fair and accessible electoral system, where every vote counts, and that the will of the people must prevail.



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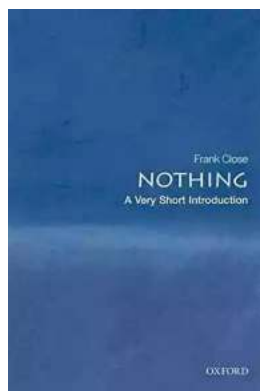
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The 2000 presidential race resulted in the highest-profile ballot battle in over a century. But it is far from the only American election determined by a handful of votes and marred by claims of fraud. Since the founding of the nation, violence frequently erupted as the votes were being counted, and more than a few elections produced manifestly unfair results. Despite America's claim to be the world's greatest democracy, its adherence to the basic tenets of democratic elections—the ability to count ballots accurately and fairly even when the stakes are high—has always been shaky. A rigged gubernatorial election in New York in 1792 nearly ended in calls for another revolution, and an 1899 gubernatorial race even resulted in an assassination. Though acts of violence have decreased in frequency over the past century, fairness and accuracy in ballot counting nonetheless remains a basic problem in American political life.

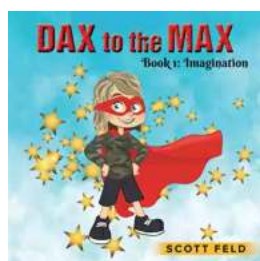
In *Ballot Battles*, Edward Foley presents a sweeping history of election controversies in the United States, tracing how their evolution generated legal precedents that ultimately transformed how we determine who wins and who loses. While weaving a narrative spanning over two centuries, Foley repeatedly returns to an originating event: because the Founding Fathers despised parties and never envisioned the emergence of a party system, they wrote a constitution that did not provide clear solutions for high-stakes and highly-contested elections in which two parties could pool resources against one another. Moreover, in the American political system that actually developed, politicians are beholden to the parties which they represent - and elected officials have typically had an outsized say in determining the outcomes of extremely close elections that involve recounts. This underlying structural problem, more than anything else, explains why intense ballot battles that leave one side feeling aggrieved will continue to occur for the foreseeable future.

American democracy has improved dramatically over the last two centuries. But the same cannot be said for the ways in which we determine who wins the very close races. From the founding until today, there has been little progress toward fixing the problem. Indeed, supporters of John Jay in 1792 and opponents of Lyndon Johnson in the 1948 Texas Senate race would find it easy to commiserate with Al Gore after the 2000 election. *Ballot Battles* is not only the first full chronicle of contested elections in the US. It also provides a powerful explanation of why the American election system has been-and remains-so ineffective at deciding the tightest races in a way that all sides will agree is fair.



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