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Smartmatic Ties to Hugo Chávez Warned About in 2006

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In 2006, [The Miami Herald warned](#) about Smartmatic's ties to Hugo Chávez:

“Software engineers with links to the Leftist, anti-American regime of HUGO CHÁVEZ are in charge of programming electronic VOTING machines that will soon power U.S. ELECTIONS.”

3 Miami Herald (Miami, Florida) • 29 Mar 2006, Wed • Page 158

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ELECTRONIC VOTING

Forget Dubai — worry about **Smartmatic** instead

BY RICHARD BRAND
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Software engineers with links to the leftist, anti-American regime of Hugo Chávez are in charge of programming electronic voting machines that will soon power U.S. elections.

The greater threat to our nation's security comes not from Dubai and its pro-Western government, but from Venezuela, where software engineers with links to the leftist, anti-American regime of Hugo Chávez are programming electronic voting machines that will soon power U.S. elections.

Congress spent two weeks overreacting to news that Dubai Ports World would operate several American ports, including Miami's, but a better target for their hysteria would be the acquisition by Smartmatic International of California-based Sequoia Voting Systems, whose machines serve millions of U.S. voters. That Smartmatic — which has been accused by Venezuela's opposition of helping Chávez rig elections in his favor — now controls a major U.S. e-voting firm should give pause to anybody who thinks that replacing our antiquated butterfly ballots and hanging chads will restore Americans' faith in our electoral process.

Consider the lack of confidence Venezuelans have in their voting system. Anti-Chávez groups have such little faith in Smartmatic's machines that they refuse to run candidates in elections anymore as reports surface of fraud and irregularities from Chávez's 2004 victory in a recall referendum. Yet somehow Smartmatic International and its Venezuelan owners were able to purchase Sequoia last year without the deal receiving any scrutiny from federal regulators — including the Treasury Department's Committee on Foreign Investments in the United States (CFIUS), which is tasked with determining whether foreign takeovers pose security risks.

CFIUS generally investigates such transactions only when the parties voluntarily submit themselves to review — which Smartmatic did not do. But it retains the authority to initiate an investigation when it suspects a takeover compromises national security.

Smartmatic has a brief but controversial history. The company was started in Caracas during the late 1990s by engineers Antonio Mugica and Alfredo Anzola. They worked out of downtown Caracas providing small-scale technology services to Latin American banks. Despite having no election experience, the tiny company rocketed from obscurity in 2004 after it was awarded a \$100 million contract by the Chávez-dominated National Electoral Council to replace Venezuela's electronic voting machines for the recall vote.

When the council announced the deal, it disingenuously described Smartmatic as a Florida company, though Smartmatic's main operations were in Caracas and the firm had incorporated only a small office in Boca Raton. It then emerged that Smartmatic's "partner" in the deal, Bizta Corp., also directed by Anzola and Mugica, was partly owned by the Venezuelan government through a series of intermediary shell corporations. Venezuela initially denied its investment but eventually sold its stake.

When the vote finally came, exit polls by New York's Penn Schoen & Berland Associates showed Chávez had been defeated 59 to 41 percent; however, when official tallies were announced, the numbers flipped to 58-42 in favor of Chávez. Venezuela's electoral council briefly posted machine-by-machine tallies on the Internet but removed them as mathematicians from MIT, Harvard and other universities began questioning suspicious patterns in the results.

Flush with cash from its Venezuelan adventures, Smartmatic International incorporated in Delaware last year and purchased Sequoia, announcing the deal as a merger between two U.S. companies.

Smartmatic says the recall vote was clean and that it is independent of the Chávez government. Responding to my inquiries, Smartmatic-Sequoia sent a written statement: "Sequoia's products consist only of voting devices and systems, all of which must be federally and state tested and certified prior to use in an election. As Sequoia's products do not have military, defense or national security applications, they do not fall within the parameters of the matters governed by CFIUS."

In fact, Smartmatic International is owned by a Netherlands corporation, which is in turn owned by a Curacao corporation, which is in turn held by a number of Curacao trusts controlled by proxy holders who represent unnamed investors, almost certainly among them Venezuelans Mugica and Anzola and possibly others.

Why Smartmatic has chosen yet again to abuse the corporate form apparently to conceal the nationality and identity of its true owners is a question that should worry anyone who votes using one of its machines. Congress panicked upon hearing that our ports would be run by an American ally, Dubai, but never asked whether America's actual enemies in Venezuela have been able to acquire influence in our electoral process.

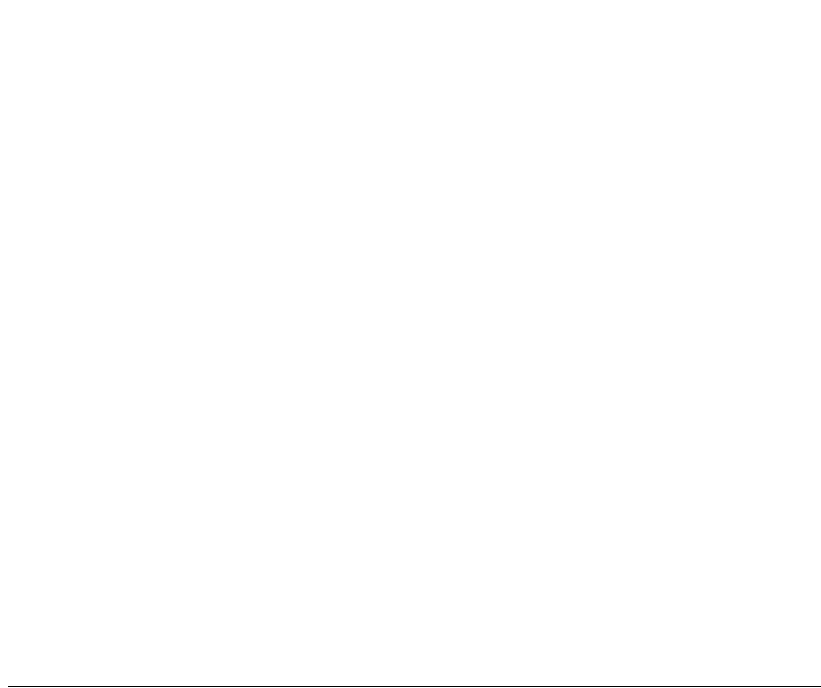
Richard Brand is a second-year law student at New York University and a former staff writer for The Miami Herald.

2006 CNN Segment Warned Over 'Venezuelan Controlled' Smartmatic



Fifteen years ago CNN reported that watchdog groups were questioning why U.S. voting machines would be under the control of citizens from another country.

WATCH:



When Chicago had problems with the machines, a dozen Venezuelan employees were there to “help” with the election.

Dobbs told Pilgrim: “Let’s call the White House! Lets find out the answer so everyone knows by Monday evening. This is ridiculous!.”

“We’re looking into it actively Lou,” said Ms. Pilgrim.

WATCH:





Smartmatic's Own About Us Page Confirms Ties to Venezuela

Smartmatic's [about us page from 2005](#):

Seven years ago we were the Research and Development Unit of Panagroup in Venezuela. Our main goal was to provide smart connectivity and information technologies to the automation and industrial control market.

– Smartmatic's [About Us Page](#)



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