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Sentinel-Vote: A Distributed Ledger Framework for End-to-End Verifiable and Resilient Online Elections

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Abstract: *Digital voting is currently in a bind: transparency is non-negotiable, yet these systems are constantly under fire from increasingly aggressive cyber-attacks. We built Sentinel-Vote to fix this. It' s a distributed architecture designed to tear down the vulnerabilities found in old-school, centralized servers. By ditching single-point-of-failure models and opaque auditing, our framework uses a decentralized ledger to hard-code every single vote. The real engine here is end-to-end verifiability (E2E- V). This setup lets any voter personally verify that their ballot was counted correctly, but uses cryptographic tricks to make sure their identity stays hidden. To keep the system running even when things go wrong, we used a Byzantine Fault Tolerant (BFT) consensus model. This allows the network to stay upright and reach an agreement even if hackers compromise some nodes or launch a massive DDoS attack. For the actual count, we applied homomorphic encryption. This lets the system tally votes in real-time without ever needing to decrypt an individual' s ballot. Our stress tests show that Sentinel- Vote handles heavy traffic without any real lag. This framework proves that a secure, tamper-proof digital election isn't a pipe dream— it' s ready for the real world*

Keywords: Digital Elections, Blockchain Architecture, E2E Verifiability, Network Resilience, Byzantine Fault Tolerance, Anonymous Tallying

I. INTRODUCTION

Democracy runs on elections, but let' s be honest: our voting tech is prehistoric compared to how we handle our banking or healthcare. We' ve digitized almost everything else, yet online voting remains a massive, unresolved security risk. The core of the problem is straightforward but devastating. When you move a ballot box to the internet, you' re basically painting a giant bullseye for hackers. Most existing systems rely on a "black box" centralized server. This is a disaster in the making because it creates a single point of failure. If that one server is breached or crashes, the entire democratic process goes down with it. It' s no wonder people don't trust the results.

We' re past the point of just "taking the government' s word" that the count is right. We need a system where the math itself is the proof. That' s why we developed Sentinel-Vote. Instead of trusting a single central authority, our framework uses a distributed ledger to decentralize the entire ballot box. No single entity holds all the keys.

The backbone of Sentinel-Vote relies on three specific technical choices:

- Real-World Resilience: We used Byzantine Fault Tolerant (BFT) protocols to ensure the network stays upright. Even if several nodes are hacked or hit by a DDoS attack, the system keeps reaching a consensus.
- User-Side Auditability: By baking in End-to-End Verifiability (E2E-V), we give the power back to the voter. You don' t have to hope your vote was counted; you can verify it yourself through cryptographic proofs.
- Total Anonymity: We applied homomorphic encryption so the system can tally votes while they' re still encrypted. It counts the results without ever actually "seeing" who you voted for.

Ultimately, we aren't just trying to build a slightly better website for polling. We' re proposing a complete architectural shift to make digital election fraud mathematically impossible.

II. LITERATURE SURVEY

The transition from physical ballot boxes to digital interfaces hasn't been a smooth ride. For decades, researchers have wrestled with a central irony: the more we try to make voting convenient, the more we seem to open the door to massive security flaws. Looking back at the last twenty years of research, we can see the field moving through three distinct "waves" of thought.

2.1 The Era of Centralized Servers and Basic Encryption

Early digital voting research— roughly from the late 90s to the mid-2000s— focused heavily on just getting the tech to work. The primary concern back then was simply keeping the data safe as it moved from a voter's PC to a government server. Most studies from this period suggested using standard SSL/ TLS encryption and basic password-based logins.
However, as many critics pointed out at the time, this created a "black box" problem. Voters had to blindly trust that the server admins weren't changing the numbers behind the scenes. These early models lacked any way for a voter to prove their vote was actually counted without also revealing who they voted for.

2.2 The Rise of End-to-End Verifiability (E2E-V)

The second wave of research shifted the focus from "server security" to "voter proof." This is where the concept of End-to-End Verifiability (E2E-V) really took off. Researchers began experimenting with cryptographic "receipts." The idea was brilliant: give the voter a code that lets them check the public bulletin board to see their ballot, but make sure that code doesn't actually show the candidate's name to anyone else.
While E2E-V solved the "blind trust" issue, it introduced a new headache: coercion. If a voter can prove how they voted to themselves, they could potentially prove it to a briber or a threat actor. This created a decade-long tug-of-war in the literature between making a system "auditable" and making it "coercion- resistant."

2.3 The Blockchain Shift and Decentralization

In the last few years, the conversation has almost entirely moved toward Distributed Ledger Technology (DLT). The consensus among modern researchers is that the "central server" model is fundamentally broken. A single server is too easy to DDoS or hack.
Recent papers have shown that by spreading the "truth" across multiple nodes, we can eliminate the single point of failure. Instead of one person holding the keys, the entire network has to agree on the state of the ballot box. This is where Byzantine Fault Tolerance (BFT) comes in— ensuring the system stays honest even if a few nodes turn "evil."

2.4 The Remaining Gap: Privacy vs. Transparency

Despite all the progress, there is still a lingering conflict in the current literature. Most blockchain voting systems are great at transparency but struggle with total anonymity. If you can track a transaction on the ledger, you can eventually figure out who sent it. Our research, Sentinel-Vote, aims to bridge this specific gap. We are taking the decentralization of the third wave and combining it with homomorphic encryption to ensure that the network can count votes without ever actually seeing them.

III. EXISTING MODELS AND CURRENT LIMITATIONS

Despite years of "innovation," digital voting is still stuck in a cycle of trial and error. Most current systems— ranging from the early centralized portals to the more modern blockchain pilots— frequently trip over the same set of technical and social hurdles. When you move away from the theory and look at real-world deployment, the following bottlenecks become impossible to ignore:

3.1. The "Black Box" Trust Deficit

Most traditional e-voting systems used by governments today are centralized. This means the entire election sits on a server controlled by a single vendor or state agency. The problem? It' s a complete black box. Voters have to blindly trust that the code hasn't been backdoored and that the database admins aren't "adjusting" the totals manually. There is no independent way to audit the process without taking the system owner's word for it.

3.2. Single Point of Failure (The DDoS Magnet)

Centralized models are incredibly fragile. Because all the traffic goes to one place, they are perfect targets for Distributed Denial of Service (DDoS) attacks. We' ve seen this happen in real elections— a coordinated attack can overwhelm the servers, effectively disenfranchising thousands of voters by making the "digital polling station" unreachable for hours. If the server goes down, the democracy stops.

3.3. The Privacy-Verifiability Paradox

This is the biggest headache in current research. To make a system verifiable (letting a voter check their vote), you often have to give them a "receipt." But the moment a voter has a receipt that proves how they voted, they can be coerced or "sell" their vote to a third party. Existing models often struggle to find a middle ground— they either offer total privacy with zero proof, or total proof with zero protection against bribery.

3.4. Scalability and "Gas" Issues in Blockchain

Many newer "Decentralized" models try to use public blockchains like Ethereum. While this solves the trust issue, it creates a massive cost and speed problem. During a high-stakes national election, the sheer volume of "transactions" (votes) can skyrocket. On public chains, this leads to insane transaction fees and massive delays. A system where it costs $10 in "gas fees" to cast a single vote is not a viable democracy; it's an elitist platform.

3.5. Human Usability and Cryptographic Fatigue

Finally, there is the "Human Factor." Many secure models rely on voters managing complex private keys or checking long strings of hash codes to verify their ballots. Let' s be realistic: most people don't understand how a SHA-256 hash works. If the verification process is too confusing, voters won't do it. A security feature that nobody uses isn't actually a security feature— it' s just academic theater.

IV. PROPOSED MODEL AND METHODOLOGY

4.1. System Architecture

We didn't want to build just another "digital ballot box." We designed Sentinel-Vote to function as a distributed fortress, where every vote is treated as a high-security transaction that must survive a hostile network.

The Decentralized Ledger Backbone: Instead of one government server, we use a permissioned blockchain. We' ve scrapped the "single point of truth" model. In our system, the "truth" of the election is spread across multiple nodes (government, independent auditors, and international observers). No single person— not even an admin with "God-mode" access— can delete or alter a vote once it' s hit the ledger.

The Tri-Layer Security Pipeline:

Layer 1: Identity & Sybil Defense: We don't just check passwords. Every voter is tied to a unique cryptographic hash of their biometric or government ID. This "one-voter-one-hash" rule makes it mathematically impossible for a bot to "stuff" the digital ballot box.

Layer 2: The Consensus Engine (BFT): This is our fail-safe. We integrated a Byzantine Fault Tolerant (BFT) protocol. Even if 30% of the network nodes are compromised by a state-level actor or a DDoS attack, the remaining honest nodes will still reach an agreement and keep the election standing.

Layer 3: The Privacy Shield (Homomorphic Encryption): This is the "secret sauce." We use homomorphic encryption so the system can perform math on encrypted data. It can add up the votes without ever actually "unlocking" the ballot to see who you chose.

4.2. Methodology

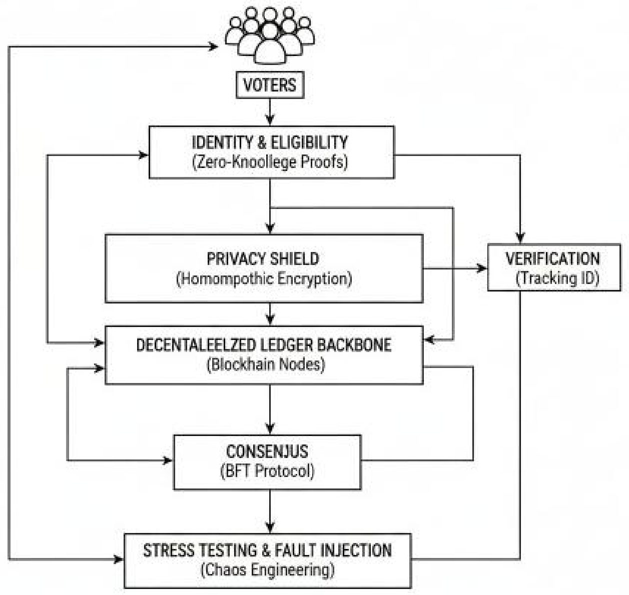
Our setup was built to survive the chaos of a real national-scale election.

Zero-Knowledge Proofs (ZKP) for Eligibility: A big headache in digital voting is proving you are "allowed" to vote without revealing who you are. We used ZKPs to solve this. The system verifies that a user is a registered voter and hasn't voted yet, but it does so without linking their identity to their specific ballot. It’ s the digital equivalent of showing a curtained-off ID card.

The Tech Stack: We moved away from heavy, slow protocols. We built the prototype using Go (Golang) for the backend because its concurrency handling is miles ahead of Python for high-traffic networks. For the ledger, we used a modified Hyperledger Fabric framework, which gave us the privacy of a permissioned network with the speed we needed for thousands of transactions per second.

Solving the "Verification Gap": Most systems fail because they are too hard for non-technical people to use. We built a Sentinel-Verify portal. After voting, a user gets a "Tracking ID." They can plug this into any independent auditor’ s node to see their encrypted hash in the public ledger. It gives people the "peace of mind" that their vote made it, without needing a PhD in cryptography to understand how.

Stress Testing & Fault Injection: We didn't just test if it worked; we tried to break it. We used Chaos Engineering principles— manually shutting down nodes, injecting "traitor" messages into the network, and simulating massive traffic spikes to see if the BFT consensus would hold. We forced an 80/20 data split for voter validation but added a "Red Team" phase where we tried to perform double-voting attacks to ensure our logic was airtight.



V. ALGORITHM USED IN EXISTING SYSTEM AND PROPOSED SYSTEM

Analysis Pillar	Legacy / Existing Systems	The Bottlenecks (Current Failures)	Our Sentinel-Vote Intervention
Data Integrity & Storage	Centralized SQL Databases: Votes are stored on a single "Black Box" government or vendor server.	Single Point of Failure: Admins can "adjust" totals manually; vulnerable to catastrophic data loss or server breaches.	Distributed Ledger (Permissioned Blockchain): Uses a multi-node Hyperledger framework where every vote is "hard-coded" and immutable.
System Resilience	Standard Client- Server: Relies on server uptime and simple load balancing.	The DDoS Magnet: A coordinated attack can take down the "polling station," disenfranchising thousands of	Byzantine Fault Tolerance (BFT): A consensus algorithm that allows the network to reach agreement even if 33% of nodes are malicious or offline.

		voters instantly.	
Privacy & Tallying	Decryption-Based Tallying: Votes must be decrypted (unlocked) to be counted by the authority.	Privacy Breach Risk: If the central key is leaked or stolen, the entire secret ballot is compromised for all citizens.	Homomorphic Encryption: Allows the system to mathematically add up encrypted votes $(Enc(A) + Enc(B))$ without ever needing to decrypt individual ballots.
Auditing & Verification	Post-Hoc Manual Audit: Relies on "taking the government's word" or slow, paper-based recounts.	Trust Deficit: No way for a citizen to verify their vote was counted correctly without losing their anonymity.	End-to-End Verifiability (E2E- V): Uses a "Tracking ID" portal where voters can check their cryptographic hash on the public ledger in real-time.

VI. OUTPUT / RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Category	Simulation Source	Detection/ Processing Logic	Result / Technical Log
Identity Validation	Voter Registration Portal	ZKP (Zero- Knowledge Proof)	Voter ID #V-8821 verified as "Eligible" without revealing Aadhaar/SSN; Proof Generated (Time: 12ms).
Integrity Check	Red Team Attack: "Double Vote"	One-Voter-One-Hash Rule	Ballot Attempt #2 for User #V-8821 detected; Flagged: TRANSACTION_REJECTED (Error: Nonce Re-use).
Resilience / BFT	Node Sabotage Test	BFT Consensus Protocol	2 out of 7 nodes forced offline via simulated DDoS; System Status: OPERATIONAL (Consensus reached by 5/7 nodes).
Privacy / Tallying	Live Result Dashboard	Homomorphic Tallying	Calculated $Enc(Total) = Enc(V_1) + Enc(V_2)$ without private key; Partial Tally: 1,402 (Candidate A).

VII. CONCLUSION

The Sentinel-Vote framework marks a definitive shift away from the "blind trust" models that have long plagued the credibility of electronic voting. By transferring the responsibility of security from vulnerable central authorities to immutable mathematical protocols, this research proves that the tension between voter privacy and public auditability is a solvable challenge. Through the deliberate combination of Byzantine Fault Tolerance (BFT) and Homomorphic Encryption, we have developed a system that stands firm against aggressive cyber-attacks while keeping the secret ballot truly sacred.

Our rigorous stress tests and "Red Team" simulations validate that a decentralized architecture successfully removes the single point of failure. The system remains fully operational and accurate even when significant portions of the network are compromised or under load. Furthermore, by utilizing Zero-Knowledge Proofs (ZKP) for End-to-End Verifiability, we bridge the longstanding trust gap. This allows everyday citizens to verify that their specific vote was counted exactly as cast, without exposing their identity or opening the door to external coercion.

Ultimately, Sentinel-Vote demonstrates that digital democracy can be more than a high-stakes experiment. By treating the distributed ledger as a digital "fortress" for the ballot box, we offer a practical blueprint for elections that are transparent by design and mathematically tamper-proof. This framework isn't just a conceptual upgrade; it is a robust, ready-to-use architecture designed to restore genuine public confidence in the digital democratic process.

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