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surveys have provided fodder for breathless election night predictions so dear to the anchormen's heart.

But something went wrong in the Bush vs. Gore bout.

After a decade of competence, VNS failed famously that election night, supplying faulty numbers to the five major networks and AP.

Its erroneous calls — especially when it declared Al Gore the winner in Florida before changing its call to George W. Bush and then to "too close to call" — rattled voter confidence and put press credibility in question.

The failure also changed the face of election night coverage. Chastened networks vowed accuracy, rather than being "first" with pivotal but possibly flawed results.

But during midterm elections in November, a newly overhauled computer system also failed, causing VNS to disband in January, with promises that new alternatives were "forthcoming."

Four months later, the new alternatives include a larger role for AP on election night. Previously, the news service provided an independent vote count to back up the old VNS tabulations, and provided results in thousands of state and local election races that VNS did not cover.

In the next election, the onus will be on AP to supply broadcasters as well.

"The TV networks require information faster and with more frequency than anyone else," said AP spokesman Jack Stokes. "This service is designed to accommodate the breadth and depth of the information which has to be delivered."

The scope of it is "awesome," said Mr. Stokes, adding that a computerized system will deliver the goods in "real time."

Meanwhile, exit polls will be taken by Mitofsky International — directed by Mr. Mitofsky — and Edison Media, where he is director of media research.

"This looks like AP will be doing what it did before, but they've dressed it up a little," said Andrew Kohut, director of the Pew Research Center for the People and the Press. "It looks like they'll be dealing in information only. I don't see any indications they

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