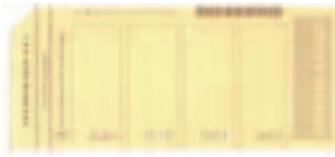# on the Ground:

Voting Observations during the U.S. Presidential Election

How Do I Know When I'm Done?

Two persons in separate precincts abandoned their machines without "closing out." In one case, the workers yelled after, and ran to catch, the voter before she left. She closed out and left the precinct with a chagrined look on her face. In the other case, workers did not observe the problem before the voter left. After discovering the abandoned station, two of them sat over the machine for about three minutes to close it out. The ballot instructions posted in each precinct indicate that the voter must press a selection at the top of the last screen that states "End All Voting." It appears that these voters had missed that instruction.

Reported by Josephine Scott in Westland, Michigan,
November 2, 2004
UniLect Patriot Voting System

Polling Place Layout: "I did the best I could."

The precinct captain told me that he had received three hours training. When I asked if he had any training in the layout of the polling place, he said, "No. This is a new room; I did the best I could." When I asked him how he accommodated wheelchair voters, he said that he had only one person in this precinct in a wheelchair, and when this person came in, he would lower one of the voting booths; but he didn't want to give up one of his booths until that point.

Reported by Carol Barnum in Fulton County, Georgia,
November 2, 2004
Diebold Election System

Room Layouts can be Confusing When the Room is Full

The layout of the gym was very confusing, with various lines snaking along the bleachers in an oval pattern. There were no signs indicating where the line started or what it was for. One poll worker was stationed outside the gym, motioning people to go in. I did not see the table I was expecting, with the registration forms to fill out. When I asked in the line where the forms were, someone handed me a pad of the forms, which I then passed along to the person behind me.

Reported by Carol Barnum in Fulton County, Georgia,
November 2, 2004
Diebold Election System

Even People with Mild Disabilities Might Need Assistance

There were two elderly people who needed assistance and were escorted from station to station. A third person looked like he should have received assistance (but did not get any). He had a portable stool that he sat on while he waited on a long line, picking it up and moving it as the line moved forward.

When he reached the table where a number of other lines were formed to confirm registration by name, he was escorted to the *end* of the line for the P-Z list of names (where he had to wait again, dragging his stool along as the line inched forward). After he was through the process to get a ballot, he had to stand to vote (all of the voting machines were at the same height so he did not appear to have any other option).

Reported by Carol Barnum in Fulton County, Georgia,
November 2, 2004
Diebold Election System

Instructions can Hurt More Than They Help

This next observation echoes the situation in Palm Beach County, Florida, in 2000: voters were instructed to "Vote Every Page"—instructions that were wrong in a butterfly ballot and probably encouraged people to invalidate their ballots through overvoting.

The Diebold machine has some confusing instructions, which you would probably be better off not reading. For example, there were three different arrows pointing in three different directions to show you how to insert your SmartCard:

1 At the top of the screen (as far from the action as possible) was the instruction, "Insert card to start." An arrow pointed up (in the upper left of the screen) to this instruction.

2 At the bottom of the screen in the lower right, an arrow pointed to the right with the instruction "Please insert your card."

3 The hardware to accept the card was below the machine on the flat surface of the booth and there was an arrow pointing up on the top of the hardware to show which way to insert the card.

Reported by Carol Barnum in Fulton County, Georgia,
November 2, 2004
Diebold Election System

Status Messages can be Confusing

At the lower right of the screen, in a task bar at the bottom, was the word "charging" and a number count—a fairly small number: ninety-one. Both made me slightly anxious, as (1) I wasn't sure if "charging" meant that the machine was not yet ready to record my vote (I thought of the metaphor of my cell phone charging for use), and (2) I didn't understand why so few votes had been counted on this machine, as I had seen far more people in line and there were only eleven voting machines. I later learned that the machines have to be re-certified every hour and the number of votes confirmed and then reset.

Reported by Carol Barnum in Fulton County, Georgia,
November 2, 2004
Diebold Election System

Where is my Vote Actually Stored?

Several similar comments from people in the software industry indicated that they believed that their votes were stored in the SmartCards they used to initiate the voting process.

There was a stack of the voting cards on the card table at the exit. I saw a poll worker take the stack back over to the registration table. I asked the Diebold certification employee what they did with the cards and he told me they reprogrammed them for reuse. He told me that there were about twenty cards at the precinct. It was at that point that it really struck me that there was no back-up for my vote.
Reported by Carol Barnum in Fulton County, Georgia,
November 2, 2004
Diebold Election System

Voting is Social... and People Can Find Ways to Outwit the System

The fundamentally social nature of voting was clearly evident: neighbors greeted each other, couples voted together, and voters and poll workers engaged observers in curious but friendly conversation. One grandmother volunteered that she was waiting there in case the line got long, so that her daughter, who was going to arrive from work shortly, wouldn't have to wait. When the daughter arrived, there was no line, but it was clear that they had seen this type of long wait in the past.
Reported by Josephine Scott in Westland, Michigan,
November 2, 2004
UniLect Patriot Voting System

False Transparency of Information

At the end of the day, a copy of the printout tape from each machine was posted outside the door. This is a new state law, so that anyone can inspect the results of each precinct. At this polling place, the printouts were taped in a wad across the door. Although there were four precincts, the printouts were posted in two groups, with no differentiation between two of the pairs.
Reported by Whitney Quesenbery in Palm Beach County, Florida, August 31, 2004 (Primary)
Sequoia AVC Edge Voting System

Warning: Elderly Poll Worker at Work

As I registered, the poll worker could not find the letter for my last name (Q). He was looking in S-T, and I was about to say something when the worker sitting next to him noticed the problem. She got him to the right page and confirmed my identity. Then she

said, "Brain not working yet this morning?" to him in a friendly, but not excusing, way. As a voter, it was a bit disconcerting to see an elderly poll worker (he was one of the oldest-seeming in the room) struggling not only to hear, but with the alphabet.
Reported by Whitney Quesenbery in High Bridge, NJ,
November 2, 2004
Sequoia AVC Advantage Voting System

In Small Communities, Small Adaptations are Made Easily

An elderly couple in the line turned out to be a mother and son. She went into the voting booth first. There was a brief exchange I did not hear with the poll worker at the machine, but it was obvious that she was having a problem. One of the poll workers at the table said, "It's OK. She has macular degeneration. He can go in to help her." The poll worker taking care of the machine then held the curtain back to let the son go into help his mother.
Reported by Whitney Quesenbery in High Bridge, NJ,
November 2, 2004
Sequoia AVC Advantage Voting System

More Ways to Provide Help

The voter had signed in and gone into the booth to vote, with the poll worker in charge of the machine standing right outside. The voter shook the curtain and asked a question (too quietly to be heard from where I was standing). The poll worker loudly gave her instructions through the curtain, telling her to look at the top or side of the machine. I think she was talking loudly so we could all hear that she was not trying to influ-

ence the vote. Two other people waiting in line also listened carefully to the instructions.
Reported by Whitney Quesenbery in Hamilton, NJ, November 2, 2004
Sequoia AVC Advantage Voting System

Problems Reading

This incident was pulled from the phone-in reports to the Election Incident Reporting System (EIRS), which collected over 37,000 incidents from the 2004 primary and presidential elections. EIRS was created by a consortium that included: Verified Voting, Electronic Frontier Foundation, Computer Professionals for Social Responsibility, and other voter advocacy groups.

A voter requested assistance of friend. The poll worker refused—told friend that paperwork necessary was too complicated. They told her that a Spanish-speaking poll worker would help. Voter voted with her assistance, but she did not speak Spanish. He thinks he voted for Kerry but can't read and isn't sure.
EIRS—Reported from Palm Beach County, Florida

Authoritative Poll Workers Can Calm Potential Incidents

A town council meeting room was crowded with two precincts and many people coming and going, including people using walkers and with baby strollers. A woman was having a problem because she was not listed in the registration book. The poll workers looked her up in some other reference and found someone else listed at her address. They told her she would have to vote provisionally and vaguely waved her to the back of the room. She crossed the

In Palm Beach County, each precinct is required to post the vote counts from that polling place. They do this by taping a copy of the tapes from the voting machines onto the door.

room and tried to explain the problem to a woman sitting at the table, but she could not remember the word "provisional." She seemed near tears and wanted to vote. Finally, the captain came over and took her to a private table. There she sat her down and quietly explained the procedure. He put a three-sided cardboard enclosure around her, "For privacy, so no one can see your ballot," and showed her how to sign and seal the affidavit. As she listened, she became visibly calmer, simply because someone seemed to be in charge.
Reported by Whitney Quesenbery in Lawrence Township, NJ, November 2, 2004
Sequoia AVC Advantage Voting System

"Who did I vote for?"

"I pushed his name [Kerry], but a green checkmark appeared before President Bush's name," she said. She erased the vote by touching the checkmark at Bush's name. That's how a voter can alter a touch-screen ballot. She again tried to vote for Kerry, but the screen again said she had voted for Bush. The third time, the screen agreed that her vote should go to Kerry.
Report from http://uspolitics.about.com/library/bl_2000_election_results.htm

Inconsistency Doesn't Help

During training at the polling station on the new touchscreen systems, my wife and I were both told by a poll worker (on separate occasions) that if we voted a straight party line, a party-line vote for president would *not* be registered, so we would have to enter that vote directly. Here's what happened:
Step 1: We both voted a straight party line and found that a vote for president consistent with our party-line vote *was* displayed on the touchscreen (in other words, green checkmark displayed).
Step 2: Since the poll worker had explicitly told us to enter the presidential vote directly, we both pressed the touchscreen by our choice for president. This undid our previously displayed vote for president (in other words, green checkmark no longer displayed).
Step 3: We both recognized immediately that this action was a mistake and so we entered our vote for president a third time.
Step 4: Then we completed the rest of the voting procedure and submitted our votes.

My concern it that some people may leave off step three and thus not vote for president. I asked an official, and he said that not all of the machines in South Carolina are programmed that same way. This lack of standardization makes it harder for poll workers to administer the correct training and harder for voters to learn the correct procedure over time.

Reported by Leo Gugerty in Anderson County, South Carolina
ES&S iVotronic Touchscreen Voting System
Submitted to UPA Voting Problem Reports

Lost Votes

The following is a description of one of the few confirmed cases of votes being actually lost during an election. It has now been confirmed by both the county and vendor.

In North Carolina, 4,438 votes cast in early voting were lost, and have been declared un-recoverable. The county election officials thought that they had set the machines to be able to store up to 10,500 votes, but the limit was actually set to 3,005. Testing after the election confirmed that, although there was an

Top: A voting booth, with layers of instructions pasted on all sides. Bottom: Screen capture of UniLect web site from December 28, 2004. Source: http://www.unilect.com

intermittent warning light that appeared with the message "Voter Log Full," there was no other warning that votes were not being cast.

Unfortunately, the machine continued to allow people to vote and continued to give voters the message that "Your vote has been cast." The machine vendor, UniLect, has acknowledged the problem and said that the computer software had not been upgraded in that North Carolina county. Their Web site, however (as of January 6, 2005), continued to boast that their system "Never had a significant hardware or software election problem," and has "Never lost even a single vote."

On December 29, 2004, the North Carolina Board of Elections ordered a new

statewide election for agriculture commissioner because the margin of victory was only 2,287—less than the number of lost votes.
Cartaret County, North Carolina
Early Voting, October 2004
UniLect Patriot Voting System

Proof Your Ballot

A group in Travis County, Texas reported that some voters had inadvertently changed their ballot from a straight party vote to a vote for one candidate through an ambiguous interaction with their Hart Intercivic machine: "After pressing ENTER after marking straight Democrat, some voters inadvertently turn the SELECT wheel one click through the ballot while meaning to go to the final PROOF page. If you hit enter at that point, your cursor is over the first candidate on the ballot: Bush/Cheney." The report suggested that all voters carefully read their summary page to "proof their ballot" and be sure that their intended candidates are listed.
Reported by Paul Sherman
Source: Austin for Change (partisan advocacy group) e-letter
Travis County, Texas,
2004 election early voting
Hart-Intercivic eSlate

Audio Ballots are Hard to Use if There is Too Much Background Noise

This location had approximately fifty machines within the polling place. The noise level was so high it would have been impossible to use voice system to interact with the equipment. For wheelchair voters, voting equipment was placed in the lap of the individual. Unfortunately, this kind of accommodation eliminated the privacy of their voting. One voter shared his frustration with the lack of independence and how his wife had to read the choices and select the buttons for him.
Reported by J. R. Harding, Access Board, from Miami-Dade County,
November 2, 2004
ES&S iVotronic Touchscreen Voting System

How Do I Know When I'm Done? Part Two

Although the eSlate presents a big message saying that you are done and can leave, people had a bewildered look when they turned away from the polls. I ran this by the chief judge who agreed that people are used to something tangible happening when they are done voting. At this polling place, they are given stickers as they left, and I think the stickers partially fulfill this need.

Reported by NIST/EAC TGDC staff in Alexandria, VA, on November 2, 2004
Hart InterCivic/eSlate U**X**