

Voter Satisfaction and the Need for Help: Results from a Field Study

Richard G. Niemi

Department of Political Science
University of Rochester

University of Maryland	Paul Herrnson
	Ben Bederson
Georgetown University	Michael Hanmer
University of Michigan	Michael Traugott
	Frederick Conrad

Study Design

- Expert review (10 experts)
- Lab Study (42 participants)
- Focus now □ • **Field Study (1,540 participants in 3 states)**
 - Voter satisfaction and need for help
- Natural experiment

Research design: field tests

- Six voting systems (as noted)
- Field tests with 1540 individuals
 - In/near Baltimore/DC, Rochester, Ann Arbor
 - Shopping malls, senior citizen complexes, community centers, university locations
 - Wide variations in age, computer experience, voting history; some focus on inexperienced and older individuals.

Experimental procedures

- Participants voted on each machine—in random order.
- Participants
 - Voted for some specific candidates.
 - Voted “freely” for some specific offices.
 - Voted, then changed their vote.
 - Wrote in a candidate.

Experimental procedures (cont.)

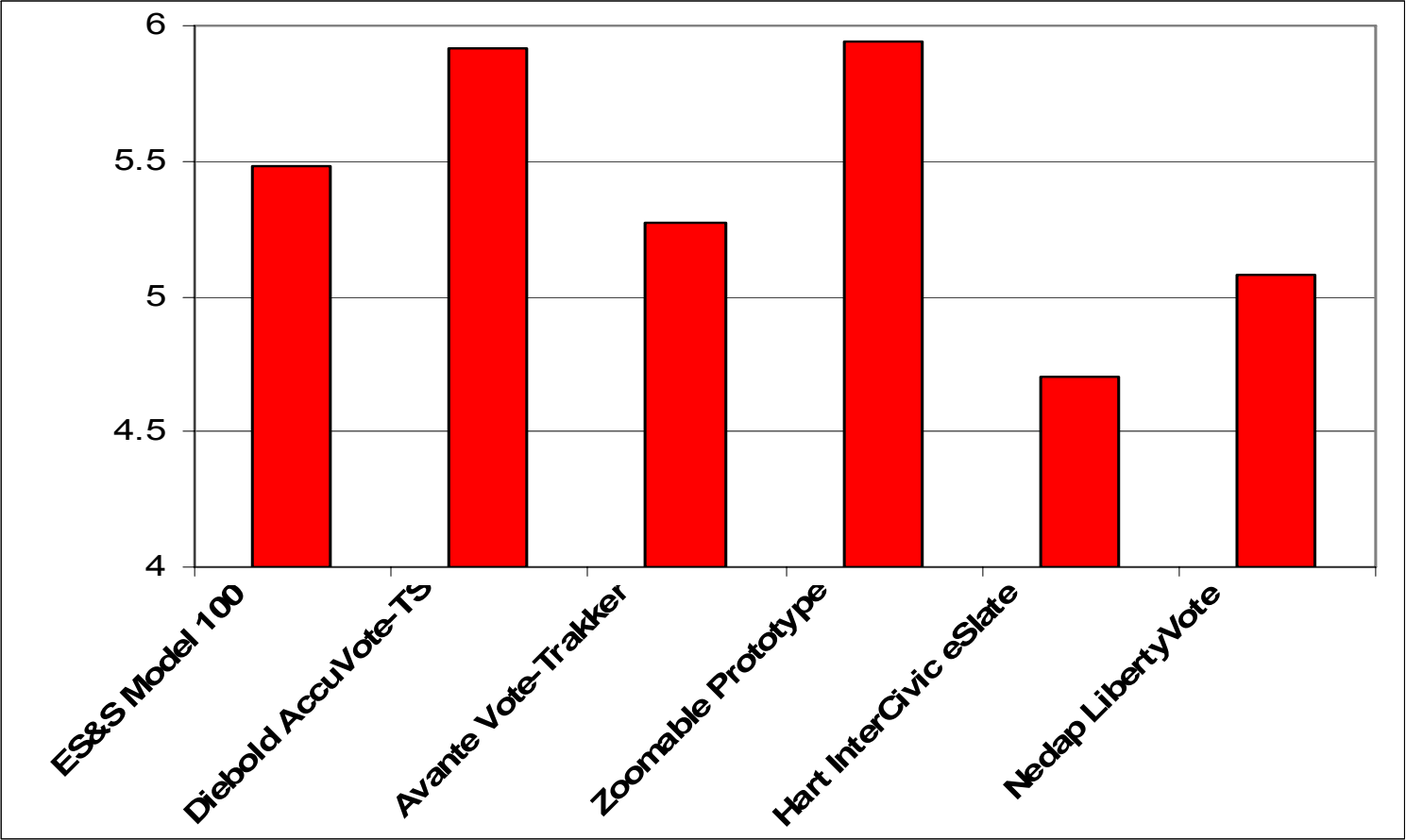
- Participants
 - Completed a questionnaire after voting on each machine.
 - Completed a background questionnaire at the end.
- Ballot was realistic
 - Partisan and nonpartisan offices.
 - Uncontested races.
 - Voting for multiple candidates.
 - Ballot questions.

Findings

- All systems were rated relatively favorably.
- But,
 - Some viewed more/less favorably.
 - Some usability criteria viewed more/less favorably.

Overall Voter Satisfaction

Average Satisfaction with each Voting System



Positive/negative overall

- Positive: voters were confident their votes would be recorded accurately.
 - All three touch screen systems were highly rated on this characteristic.
- Negative: it was hard for voters to change votes or simply correct mistakes
 - Need to de-select before re-selecting was confusing.

Paper ballot/optical scan

- Might expect it to be the standard by which all others are judged.
- But not rated so well on confidence.
- Dissatisfaction when changing vote
- Criticized for lack of meaningful feedback.

Touch screens

- All three rated highly on confidence.
- Diebold and Zoomable rated most highly.
- Mixed results on the matter of a paper trail.
- Avante rated lower, perhaps due to automatic advance and its reviewing mechanism.

Wheels and buttons

- Found it difficult for navigating across ballot.
- Changing votes, write-ins especially cumbersome.



To finish voting,
press
CAST BALLOT



until you see the
waving American flag.



Voter Instructions

1. Enter Access Code
Access Code: 2248

- Turn the **SELECT** wheel to highlight the first number of your Access Code.
- Press **ENTER**.
- Repeat for all numbers.

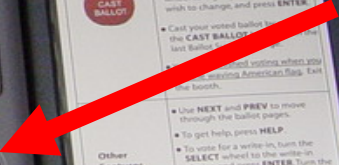
2. Make Choices

- Turn the **SELECT** wheel to highlight your choice.
- Press **ENTER**.
- The box to the left of the choice changes to 00.
- To change your choice, turn the **SELECT** wheel to your new choice and press **ENTER**.

3. Cast Ballot

- Read the Ballot Summary Page.
- To change a choice from the Ballot Summary Page, turn the **SELECT** wheel to highlight the line you wish to change, and press **ENTER**.
- Cast your voted ballot to the **CAST BALLOT** button.
- Cast your ballot when you see the waving American flag. Exit the booth.
- Use **NEXT** and **PREV** to move through the ballot pages.
- To get help, press **HELP**.
- To vote for a write-in, turn the **SELECT** wheel to the write-in choice and press **ENTER**. Turn the **SELECT** wheel and press **ENTER** to spell out the name of the candidate you wish to write in. Turn the **SELECT** wheel to highlight **ACCEPT** and press **ENTER**.

Other Features



Full screen

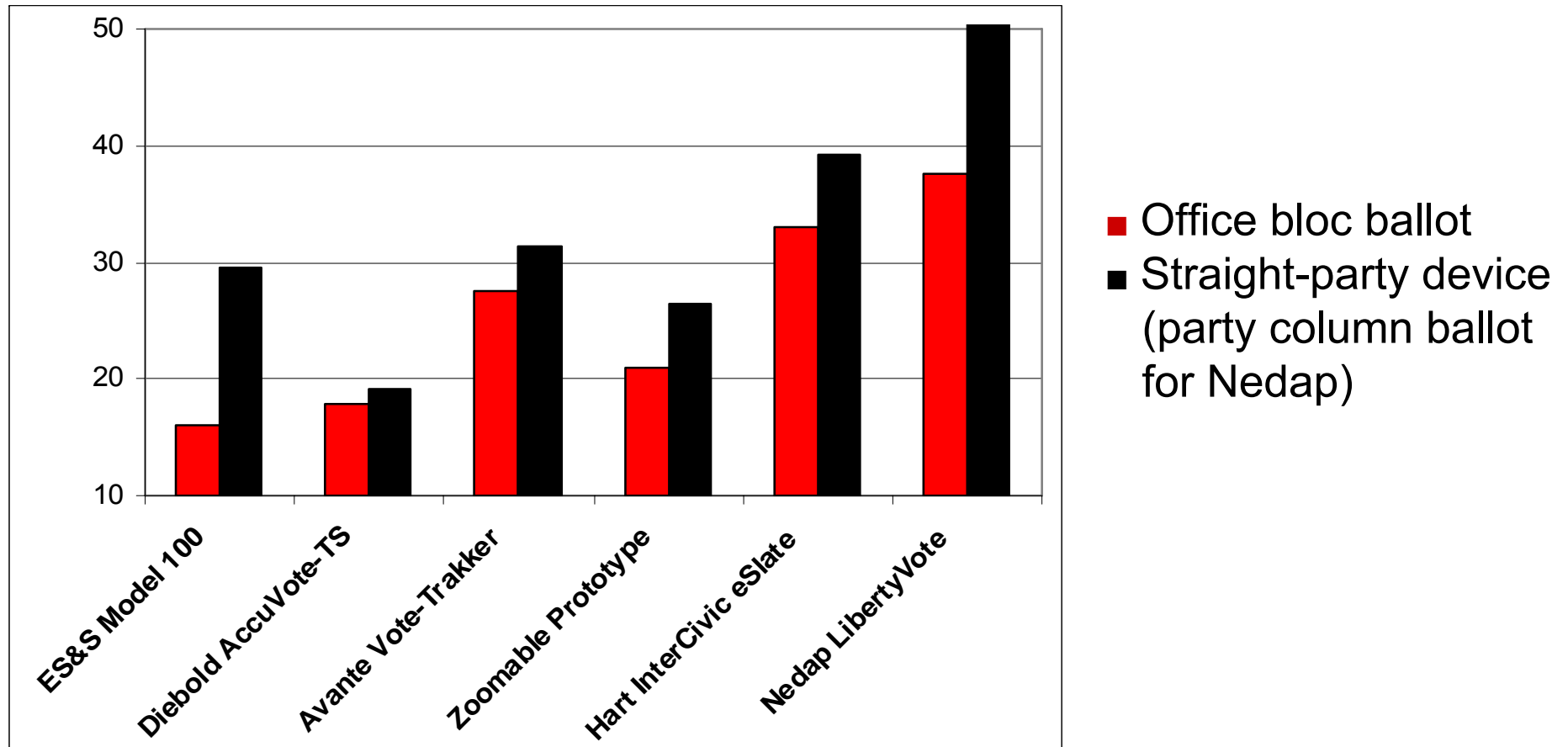
- Membrane buttons judged hard to use
- Write-in keyboard and screen were small
- Casting the vote was difficult (button problem again).
- Presence of full screen overshadowed by other problems.

Digital divide?

- Multivariate analysis
 - Few variables consistently influence voter satisfaction.
 - Only modest evidence of digital divide.
 - Frequent computer users preferred touch screens.
 - Elderly disliked mechanical and zoomable interfaces.

Need for help

Did you feel the need to get help when using the machine? % Yes



Need for help: digital divide

- Multivariate analysis
 - More evidence of digital divide.
 - Computer experience (all but Avante), education (all but Hart and Nedap), age (all), native language (Diebold & Avante), sex (all but ES&S).

Conclusions

- Positive
 - All voting systems performed reasonably well.
- Negative
 - Some features were annoying, perplexing, disconcerting.
 - Varying levels of confidence that votes would be accurately reported.
 - Voters often felt they needed help.

Conclusions (cont.)

- Especially interesting
 - Voters had more confidence in paperless touch screens to accurately record their vote than other systems, including the paper ballot.
- Least anticipated
 - The considerable difference in ease, etc. between office-bloc and straight-party ballot.

For more information

www.capc.umd.edu/

An Assessment of Voting Technology and Ballot Design



Voting Technology

The Not-So-Simple
Act of Casting
a Ballot



Paul S. Herrnson, Richard G. Niemi,
Michael J. Hanmer, Benjamin B. Bederson,
Frederick C. Conrad, and Michael W. Traugott

**National Science
Foundation grant #0306698
Carnegie Corporation grant
#D05008**