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Time For New Voting Interfaces

By [Matt Carolan](#), [Interactive Week](#)

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I enjoy voting. For me, it is a ritual. I have always lived close to a polling place, so I could get up early and stroll to the polls on a crisp, autumn day and ponder the workings of democracy. This year, however, I also gave Internet voting a second thought. If not from home, than maybe from the polling place itself.

I like the atmosphere of the local school gymnasium, and the pleasure of seeing the good citizen volunteers manning the polling place. They clearly care about civic duty. Good for them.

But how often are they unwitting accomplices for the political parties, who sometimes have too much to lose to leave elections to the people? Some of the same political leaders are put in charge of the local boards of elections. That's scary.

Unfortunately, voting is not the clean institution described in the elementary school textbooks. Reports of vote fraud and other polling place irregularities are regular occurrences. And even subtler methods are employed to influence the vote.

Consider the voting machine itself. As I walked into the booth this year, I got that same claustrophobic feeling. It's dim inside and the levers cast shadows over the names of the candidates. In New York, third-party candidates abound. They are often assigned rows way below eye level, so you have to stoop to read their names. And they are given odd positioning, outside of the neat rows assigned to the major parties.

You also get the sense that everyone is waiting for you outside. Unless you are careful, you rush through the process.

Indeed, one feels an overwhelming sense of doubt under the current voting conditions about whether you've actually pulled the lever for the right person, or for the right vote on a bond act or other proposition.

It's time for a new voting interface.

I'm not sure about voting online from home - not because I give a hoot about the ritual aspect of a mandatory trip to the polls, to see the community come out. That's just my personal preference, and I don't think such aesthetic preferences should be mandated.

Rather, I'm worried about more fraud. But it is my hope that relatively secure methods will eventually be devised. The rest is up to an independent press and special government agencies to monitor.

But isn't it possible, in the meantime, to technologically improve the interface on the voting machine at the polling place? How about an illuminated screen and scrolling to make all the candidates equal? And a secure central server to record the votes, with multimirrored drives. And a dialup to the central network to upload the results.

Maybe there are states that are already implementing changes like these. If there are, let me know. Maybe I'll move there. In any case, in such an age of rapid change, it shouldn't be only once a year that we find ourselves questioning the voting booth experience.

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