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"At Your Service"

Voter Evaluations of Poll Worker Performance

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The experiences in Florida in 2000 and Ohio in 2004 demonstrate that the election process can fall short of voters' expectations. In the wake of reforms, such as the Help America Vote Act (HAVA) of 2002, scholars have attempted to identify ways in which the objective conditions in polling places shape citizens' experiences and overall confidence in the electoral system. Early studies reveal that poll workers play a major role in the way voters feel about their voting experience. Using exit poll data on the delivery of service at the polling locations, we study the determinants of reactions to poll workers. We find poll worker evaluations are responsive to wait times, feelings of privacy while voting, poll worker training, and special poll worker recruiting efforts, to name a few. When voters feel good about their interactions with poll workers, they feel better about their voting experience and more confident about the electoral system.

Keywords: *election reform; polling places; poll workers; voter confidence; voter satisfaction; election administration*

The act of voting is central to theories of democratic practice. It is the activity by which citizens choose their leaders and hold them accountable. Yet, the opportunity to cast a vote is not an act that occurs spontaneously or springs de novo from the citizens who serendipitously conclude it is time to have an election. The opportunity to cast a vote is the culmination of an extensive and complex set of administrative decisions. Long before voters go to the polls to make their collective will known, election officials review election law, revise procedures, test voting equipment, select polling locations, recruit poll workers, train those poll workers, and dispatch them across the

electoral jurisdiction to provide democracy's human infrastructure for early voting and on election day. Ideally, democracy's human infrastructure merely serves as a conduit of the collective will, facilitating—without prejudice—the expression of voters' preferences. In reality, the decisions that shape our electoral infrastructure can have profound effects on who expresses preferences in elections. For example, literacy tests and poll taxes effectively barred Black voters from exercising their franchise for decades in the South (Key, 1949). Easing registration laws increases overall turnout and narrows the turnout differences between the better and less educated (Rosenstone & Hansen, 1993; Wolfinger & Rosenstone, 1980).

More recently, the federal government and state governments have invested massive amounts of money overhauling voting machines and transitioning from mechanical to electronic voting. The Help America Vote Act of 2002 (HAVA) was a response to problems encountered in the 2000 presidential election, when the difference between the parties' vote shares in several jurisdictions were smaller than the counting error associated with the voting technology. In other words, counting error in these jurisdictions produced different winners in recounts. Pundits, politicians, and scholars alike expressed concern that the problems encountered in 2000 would erode public confidence in the electoral process. Previous research has shown that confidence is an important determinant of citizens' willingness to participate in elections (e.g., efficacy effects in Rosenstone & Hansen, 1993). Studies of the effects of the HAVA and other efforts to restore public confidence in elections are only now becoming available. Atkeson and Saunders (2007); Hall, Monson, and Patterson (2005, 2007); and Magleby, Monson, and

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Patterson (2007) each documented positive reactions to the new technology, but they also found that poll workers play an important role in shaping voters' overall satisfaction with their voting experience and confidence that their vote will be counted accurately. Citizens who rated their poll workers more highly expressed significantly more confidence that their votes would be counted accurately and felt better about their overall voting experience than those who responded less positively to their poll workers.

The act of voting is a governmental encounter, similar in some ways to citizens' interactions during an airport-security screening or at a social security, unemployment, or department of motor vehicles office. Although these government services may offer a reasonable benchmark for customer satisfaction in voting, previous research highlights both a lack of uniformity in the studies and unevenness in comparing various governmental services. A metaanalysis of surveys measuring satisfaction across several services in more than 200 jurisdictions found that fire, library, and trash-collection services enjoyed much greater citizen approval than street repair and zoning. Still, on average, respondents rated all government services on the positive end of the satisfaction spectrum (Miller & Miller, 1991). Likewise, Goodsell (1994) found that most citizens were satisfied in their dealings with bureaucracy. Nelson (1979) noted that very positive ratings for social security services and positive ratings in general for most public services are not surprising because most clients receive immediate benefits as a result of such encounters.

Voting, however, varies from most models of citizen–government encounters in a few important ways. First, and perhaps most notably, the benefits of voting are not immediate. Rational-choice models predict that individuals will only go to the polls when the benefits of doing so outweigh the costs. Although citizens choose to interact with most service offices to secure government benefits, the lack of candidate options and the low likelihood of an individual vote making a difference depress motivation to vote (Hibbing & Theiss-Morse, 2002). Though this lack of immediate benefits may cause a decrease in customer satisfaction, the voluntary nature of voting as a service encounter may lead some or most individuals, up to a point, to overlook some of the inconveniences and imperfections with the encounter. Second, one of the key determinants of client satisfaction, the number of choices, is absent from voting (Kahn, Katz, & Gutek, 1976). Poll workers do not present an array of options to voters but simply check voters' registration and allow them to cast a ballot.

Noting that interactions with government also resemble a retail shopping experience, we plumb research on consumer evaluations of shopping

experiences for insights. Research on the quality of retail shopping experiences examines the kind of encounters individuals have with retail help and the extent to which these encounters affect the shopper's assessment of the shopping experience. For example, Price and Arnould (1995) found that qualities such as feeling mutual understanding with the service provider, getting extra attention from the service provider, feeling authenticity from the service provider, viewing the service provider as competent, and seeing the service provider meet minimum requirements of civility are significant in customers' experiencing positive emotions in service encounters.

Unlike a retail experience, little is actually known about the quality of the service provided to the voter, and how it differs from one location to the next (Hall et al., 2005). To be sure, poll workers are not there simply to provide a service. Poll workers are street-level bureaucrats, not just retail workers (2005). Research demonstrates that street-level bureaucrats affect decision making and policymaking in public organizations (Lipsky, 1980; Prottas, 1979), they affect policy implementation (Keiser, Mueser, & Choi, 2004; Maynard-Moody, Musheno, & Palumbo, 1990), and they use their discretion and autonomy in applying rules (Brehm & Gates, 1997; Scott, 1997). Decisions made by street-level bureaucrats, embodied by the poll workers, represent the policy that voters receive, just as a salesperson represents the service of a particular provider. Poll workers configure the polling place, determine where and how voter information is displayed, and assess whether a voter is eligible to vote and, if not, whether the voter is given a provisional ballot or told to go to a different precinct. Poll workers are also in a position to treat voters differently in how they interact with them. For example, a poll worker may give better instructions on how to vote to some voters than to others. Poll workers can be courteous and helpful or surly and aloof. Consequently, poll worker behavior should matter for the quality of service rendered at a polling location in much the same way that a salesperson's helpfulness enhances a shopping experience.

Because confidence is an important determinant of electoral participation and because the brief relationships forged on election day between poll workers and citizens meaningfully affect voters' confidence, we examine the interaction between the voter and the poll worker in what follows. We analyze a unique exit poll conducted during the November 2006 elections in two Ohio Counties (Summit and Franklin) to investigate the circumstances under which a voter will express high levels of satisfaction with the poll worker. Drawing parallels between the literature on commercial service encounters and the role of poll workers providing services to the voting public, we assess the human component of the voting experience. In doing so, we identify

several basic aspects of the voting service encounter, such as reducing the time it takes to vote and providing clear voting instructions that lead to better poll worker ratings and subsequently to higher voter confidence.

Voting as a Type of Service Encounter

On election day, most voters find their polling location and cast a vote.[1] These voters share an experience of finding the polling location, encountering the physical space of that location, and interacting with the poll workers staffing the location. We have already noted that voters who report receiving better service from poll workers will feel better about their voting experience and more confident in the electoral system. Unfortunately, political scientists and boards of elections alike know very little about what distinguishes a good encounter with a poll worker from a bad one. In contrast, commercial vendors have devoted enormous attention to studying the determinants of positive service encounters. In fact, the experience of making a purchase and then being asked to participate in a survey about the service rendered is ubiquitous. Vendors believe service is important because it is linked to sales and repeat sales. We believe understanding service at polling places is important because it is linked to voters' senses of efficacy and confidence in the electoral system and subsequent participation.

Not surprisingly, given the ubiquity of customer service surveys, there is an enormous literature on the factors, such as the consumer interaction with service personnel, that can affect the quality of a service encounter. A service encounter typically focuses on the relationship between the provider and the consumer in a particular kind of situation in which both participants have particular roles to play (Suprenant & Solomon, 1987). Because voting is a civic act, citizens may bring to the polls different expectations than they do to a more mundane service encounter. Still, the voter–poll worker relationship is in many respects comparable to the person-to-person interaction of a commercial service encounter.

The research on service encounters generally groups the factors that affect service evaluations into four broad categories: physical conditions, human interaction, circumstances at the time of service, and the consumer's preexisting expectations. Physical conditions consist of such characteristics as in-store marketing, layout, design, lighting, music, and even smell of the store (Baker & Cameron, 1996; Baker, Grewal, & Parasuraman, 1994; Bitner, 1990, 1992; Hu & Jasper, 2006; Ward, Davies, & Kooijman, 2003; Yalch & Spangenberg, 1990). All of these conditions affect consumers' perceptions and evaluations

of the quality of service they received (Donovan, Rossiter, Marcoolyn, & Nesdale, 1994; Gilboa & Rafaeli, 2003; Russell & Pratt, 1980).

Human conditions center on the type and quality of contact that occurs between the consumer and the service provider. Such characteristics as the knowledge, courtesy, and appearance of the service provider can affect the satisfaction the consumer expresses with the service encounter and the subsequent behavior of the consumer toward the business (Shao, Baker, & Wagner, 2004). Demographic characteristics of the service provider, such as gender, can also produce differential effects in consumer response to service (Mattila, Grandey, & Fisk, 2003). Because human interactions seem to matter in the service encounter, research also focuses on how to train the service providers and how much discretion to give them in their interactions with the customer (Berry, Zeitbaml, & Parasuraman, 1990; Bowen & Lawler, 1992).

The circumstances at the time of service include nonphysical environmental factors. For example, service evaluations vary with crowding and wait times (Bateson & Hui, 1987; Taylor, 1994). Some of these experiences can be controlled through better planning and management but some simply have to do with the particular time at which the consumer arrives. Experiences in the store can also affect the attitudes of the consumer. A poor experience will have predictably bad effects. It is not just the occurrence of an incident but when it occurs. Bad experiences earlier in the service encounter will produce different effects than those experienced later in the encounter (Dalakas, 2006).

Finally, research on consumer reactions to service also seeks to understand how the expectations and dispositions consumers bring with them to the business establishment affect their evaluation of the service encounter. For example, individuals possess different feelings about technology and its trustworthiness. The feelings and attitudes they have toward technology shape their reaction to self-service technology and their likelihood of using it in the future (Elliott & Hall, 2005; Parasuraman, 2000).

The early research indicates that the service encounter is an important dimension of the voting experience. The physical conditions at polling locations, the human interactions with poll workers, and the circumstantial conditions all vary dramatically across the thousands of electoral jurisdictions in the United States (Amy, 2000; Fife & Miller, 2003; Kimball, Kropf, & Battles, 2006). Previous research has shown that service at the polling location, especially the interaction between voters and poll workers, affects the confidence a voter expresses in the fairness of the election and also confidence about whether the ballot is counted accurately (Atkeson & Saunders, 2007; Hall et al., 2005, 2007; Magleby et al., 2007).

Understanding the relationship between the experiences voters have and the impact these experiences have on poll worker performance evaluations will lead to a more complete understanding of how voters assess the overall quality of the voting experience. To develop this explanation, we draw on our review of consumer research to model the citizens' evaluations of poll workers as a service encounter. In terms of human interactions, we predict that when voters receive competent and credible service they will evaluate the service more highly (Parasuraman, Zeithmal, & Berry, 2005). In addition, we expect that when citizens feel better about the physical conditions in which they vote, when the circumstances in which they cast their ballot are better, when they have more experience with the type of technology they use to vote, they will evaluate their poll worker's service more favorably. We recognize that the extent to which poll workers are responsible for such elements of the voting experience as time spent voting, confusing instructions, or privacy in voting are difficult to disentangle from other factors, but identifying problematic aspects of voters' encounters with poll workers is important regardless of whether the poll worker caused the problem. We now turn to a description of the data and the models.

Data and Methods

The exit poll format is ideal for capturing citizens' reactions while the voting experience is still fresh in their minds. Toward that end, we conducted exit polls in Summit and Franklin Counties (Ohio) in November 2006. Ohio was of interest to the project for several reasons. First, Ohio is an important battleground state in U.S. presidential elections and paid significant attention to election administration and the voting experience during the 2004 election. Second, like many other states, Ohio made a statewide transition in voting machines during the primary elections preceding the November 2006 elections to comply with HAVA. Summit and Franklin were selected because they are typical of counties in Ohio; they have large and diverse populations, use different types of voting equipment,[2] and use different training methods. Our findings may not be exactly representative of what one might find with a more diverse set of election jurisdictions, but the diversity of the two Ohio Counties examined here are sufficient to be suggestive. In fact, if additional jurisdictions were part of the study, the added variation in poll worker quality would likely strengthen the relationships we uncover in this study.

Our samples are of voters as they left approximately 50 polling locations, in each county, throughout the day on election day.[3] A representative sample

of polling locations in each county was selected using stratification and probability proportionate to size (PPS) sampling.[4] Polling locations were stratified by past voting patterns and then randomly sampled using PPS sampling based on the number of registered voters at each polling location. Students from several Ohio universities were stationed at the polling locations, and they were trained to apply a sampling interval to select every nth voter depending on the number of interviews needed at each location. Hence, probability sampling was used both to identify polling places and to identify individuals at the polling places. In Franklin County, of the 2,080 voters sampled, 1,113 completed questionnaires for a response rate of 54%. In Summit County, of the 2,757 voters sampled, 1,301 completed questionnaires for a response rate of 47%.

The data are also weighted to account for the sampling design and the final election outcome. In general, sampling weight is the inverse of the probability of inclusion in the sample using final election turnout to calculate the weights.[5] Because we are not interested in estimating election results but in making inferences about those who voted, an additional weight was created to make the data more representative of the election results. The final weight applied to the data is a combination of the weight based on the sampling design and the weight that accounts for the election results.[6] Additional details about the sample design and weighting procedures are available from the authors on request.

Our dependent variables consist of five survey questions designed to capture citizens' evaluations of poll workers.[7] The survey items are presented in Figure 1A and 1B. Because the overall evaluations (see Figure 1A) were predicted by different variables than the other four evaluation items (knowledge, helpfulness, respectfulness, and ability to operate the voting machines), we model overall evaluations separately. However, the predictors of each of the other four items were very similar to an additive index. Hence, we combine the four items shown in Figure 1B by simply summing to create a four-item index. We subtract one from each item prior to summing so that each item ranges from 0, indicating strong disagreement (SD), to 4, indicating strong agreement (SA), and the additive scale ranges from 0 to 16.[8]

Each of these variables, the overall evaluation and the four-item index, is modeled separately to allow different predictors to emerge for different dimensions of the service evaluations. We also modeled each county separately to allow for comparisons across counties with different voting machines. As described above, our variables can be classified into four categories: physical conditions of the polling location, human interaction with poll workers, circumstances at the polling location, and demographic controls that aid in

Figure 1
Survey Questions About Poll Workers

A. Overall Evaluation

[P] Please rate the job performance of the poll workers at your precinct today:

- ❑ 1. Excellent
- ❑ 2. Good
- ❑ 3. Fair
- ❑ 4. Poor

B. Knowledge, Helpfulness, Respectfulness, and Ability to Operate Voting Machines

[Q] Do you agree or disagree with the following statements regarding the poll workers at your precinct?
Please circle one number per line.

	Strongly Disagree				Strongly Agree
a. The poll workers knew what they were doing	1	2	3	4	5
b. The poll workers were helpful	1	2	3	4	5
c. The poll workers treated me with respect	1	2	3	4	5
d. The poll workers knew how to operate the voting machines	1	2	3	4	5

controlling for the prior expectations that voters bring with them to the polling location. The demographic controls include the following: sex (1 = *male*), race (1 = *Black*), party identification (leaners, identifiers, and strong identifiers of each party are coded 1, 2, and 3, respectively, with independents coded as 0), age in years, education, income, and marital status (1 = *married*). Certain voters may have had experiences in the past or have interpreted election-related news through the lens of their own experience in ways that could affect their evaluation of the current experience. Given the closeness of the 2004 presidential election in Ohio and news reports in the aftermath about race and the voting experience, this may be particularly true of race and party identification. Similarly, knowing a poll worker (1 = *yes*) and the frequency of Internet use (0 = *no access* to 4 = *once or more per day*) may also be used to set expectations for the voting experience. Knowing the poll worker may affect expectations about how one should be treated by the poll workers, and frequent Internet use may set expectations about the trustworthiness of technology.

Indicators of the voting experience related to circumstantial conditions at the polling place on election day include the following: time it took to vote (in minutes), whether the voter reported problems with the ballot (1 = *yes*), whether the voter had problems with the ballot counter (Summit only, 1 = *yes*) or viewed the printed paper receipt (Franklin only, 1 = *yes*), whether the voter thought the machine was confusing (0 = *SD* to 4 = *SA*), and whether the voter felt they voted in privacy (0 = *SD* to 4 = *SA*).

Indicators of the voting experience related to human interaction between the voter and poll worker include whether the voter's identification (ID) was not checked (1 = *yes*), whether the voter's ID was rejected (1 = *rejected*), and whether the voter asked for help (1 = *yes*). Finally, in the individual-level model we have only one indicator related to the physical conditions of the polling location and that is an indicator of whether the voter had trouble finding the polling place (1 = *yes*).[9]

Results

Table 1 presents the various models. Columns two and four contain the results for the overall evaluation of poll workers, and columns three and five contain the results from the four-item index of statements about the poll workers (see Figure 1) for the two counties. Beginning with our controls for voters' experiences and expectations, most of the demographic controls are not statistically significant predictors of the job ratings or other judgments about poll workers. Effects for gender and race emerge in several models, but the effects are not consistent across counties or between the overall evaluation and the four-item index. There are no significant effects for party identification, education, income, or marital status. Frequency of Internet use, possibly related to the voting experience because it may lead to expectations about the voting equipment and what poll workers should know about technology, is also not a significant predictor of poll worker evaluations.

Age appears to be a positive predictor of evaluation of poll workers in three of the four models, with older voters significantly more positive in their evaluations. Experientially, older voters have been through the voting process repeatedly over the years and likely require less and expect less of their poll workers. They may also respond more positively because poll workers are likely to be older individuals. From surveys of poll workers in both counties, we know that 59% of poll workers in Franklin County were age 55 or older, and 79% of poll workers in Summit County were age 55 or older. Knowing a poll worker also produces significant effects in three of the four models.

Table 1
Individual-Level Predictors of Poll Workers' Job-Performance Ratings

	Summit County		Franklin County	
	Overall Evaluation	Four-Item Index	Overall Evaluation	Four-Item Index
Voters' expectations				
Male	–0.04	–0.28***	.10	–.14*
	(.08)	(.08)	(.10)	(.08)
Black	–0.01	–0.13	–.29***	–.07
	(.15)	(.13)	(.11)	(.11)
Republican	–0.02	0.02	–.003	.07
	(.04)	(.04)	(.050)	(.05)
Democrat	–0.04	–0.05	–.03	.02
	(.04)	(.04)	(.05)	(.04)
Education	–0.04	–0.06	–.05	–.02
	(.04)	(.04)	(.05)	(.04)
Income	–0.005	–0.001	–.001	.03
	(.025)	(.026)	(.029)	(.02)
Married	0.10	0.09	.12	.11
	(.09)	(.09)	(.10)	(.09)
Internet usage	–0.02	0.02	.06	.004
	(.04)	(.04)	(.04)	(.042)
Age	0.011***	0.006**	.009**	.001
	(.003)	(.003)	(.004)	(.003)
Know a poll worker	0.19*	0.18*	.24	.25*
	(.11)	(.11)	(.16)	(.14)
Circumstances				
Problem using ballot	–0.15	–0.08	.02	–.20
	(.24)	(.30)	(.21)	(.17)
Counter (Summit) or receipt (Franklin)	–0.03	0.03	.13	–.05
	(.27)	(.21)	(.09)	(.08)
Voting time in minutes	–0.015***	–0.007***	–.015***	–.009**
	(.003)	(.003)	(.004)	(.004)
Instructions confusing	–0.19***	–0.20***	–.16***	–.14***
	(.05)	(.04)	(.04)	(.05)
Voted in privacy	0.07**	0.18***	.11***	.15***
	(.03)	(.03)	(.03)	(.03)
Human interaction				
ID not checked	–0.56***	–0.21	–.08	–.15
	(.18)	(.16)	(.21)	(.20)
ID rejected	–1.25*	–1.61*	–.74**	–.46*
	(.65)	(.93)	(.35)	(.28)
Asked for help	0.18**	0.03	.33***	.16
	(.09)	(.08)	(.12)	(.12)
Physical conditions				
Trouble finding polls	–0.09	–.02	–.63***	–.48***
	(.16)	(.17)	(.19)	(.18)
N	1,288	1,142	1,097	1,009

Note: Weight = final weight; robust standard errors in parentheses. Ordered probit estimator, cutpoints omitted.
*$p < .10$. **$p < .05$. ***$p < .01$.

Knowing one's poll worker leads to consistently more positive overall evaluations and higher four-item index scores in both counties (though one of the four is not significant). It is also worth noting that less than 10% of voters personally knew their poll worker in Franklin County, whereas about 18% reported knowing their poll worker in Summit County.

In Table 1, several of the variables related to the circumstances at the time of service are important predictors of the evaluations voters have of poll workers. Voting time in minutes is a significant predictor of poll worker evaluations in all four models. Not surprisingly, longer voting times produce a more negative evaluation of the poll workers. In Table 2, we present the substantive effects for the statistically significant ordered probit coefficients. Summarizing the effects of ordered probit variables concisely is difficult because the change in predicted probability associated with a change in an independent variable is different for each category of the dependent variable. For example, in Summit County, for the overall evaluation model, setting all the variables to mean values and varying minutes by 1 *SD* (14 min) increases the probability of a poor evaluation by .005, increases the probability of a fair evaluation by .02, increases the probability of a good evaluation by .05, and decreases the probability of an excellent evaluation by .08. Presenting all of these for each variable for each model would consume too much space. Rather, we present the average of the absolute change in probability across all the categories of the dependent variable (see Long & Freese, 2006). Thus, in Table 2, for the Summit County overall evaluation model, varying wait time by 1 *SD* is associated with an average effect of –.04 (we added signs based on the coefficients in Table 1). Because the average effect generally represents the change in probability associated with midrange values of the dependent variable, one can interpret positive effects as indicating greater likelihood of giving a midrange positive evaluation and negative effects as indicating greater likelihood of giving a midrange negative evaluation.

The average effects of wait time on overall evaluations are robust but modest. A standard deviation increase in wait time is associated with a 4% and 3% greater chance of a moderately negative evaluation in Summit and Franklin Counties, respectively. However, if wait times were more variable, the effect of wait time could be very substantial. The effects in 2006 are tempered by the fact that the average voting time in Summit County in 2006 was about 22 min with a standard deviation of just 14 and the average voting time in Franklin County was 16 min with a standard deviation of just 11. Finally, the differences between the average effects for the overall models compared to the four-item index models are driven primarily by the greater number of

Table 2
Average Change in Predicted Probability Associated With a Change in the Independent Variable

	Summit County		Franklin County	
	Overall Evaluation	Four-Item Index	Overall Evaluation	Four-Item Index
Voters' expectations				
Male				
Δ 0/1	–0.01	–0.01	0.01	–0.01
Black				
Δ 0/1	–0.02	–0.01	–0.05	–0.003
Age				
Δ ± 1 *SD*	0.03	0.004	0.02	0.001
Know a poll worker				
Δ 0/1	0.03	0.01	0.04	0.01
Circumstances				
Voting time in minutes				
Δ ± 1 *SD*	–0.04	–0.005	–0.03	–0.004
Instructions confusing				
Δ Min./Max.	–0.16	–0.04	–0.12	–0.03
Voted in Privacy				
Δ Min./Max.	0.05	0.03	0.09	0.03
Human interaction				
ID not checked				
Δ 0/1	–0.11	–0.01	–0.01	–0.01
ID rejected				
Δ 0/1	–0.20	–0.05	–0.12	–0.02
Asked for help				
Δ 0/1	0.03	0.002	0.05	0.01
Physical conditions				
Trouble finding polls				
Δ 0/1	–0.02	–0.001	–0.12	–0.02

Note: Rows from Table 1 with one or more significant variables only. To summarize effects across the categories of each dependent variable, the cells represent the average, absolute change (by definition, the average change would sum to zero) in predicted probability across the categories of the dependent variable. The signs were added to represent the direction of each effect. The change in each independent variable is marked under the variable name in the first column. Changes in predicted probability for each variable with all others set to their mean computed using SPOST for STATA. In general, the average change in probability reported corresponds with the changes in probability associated with midrange categories of each dependent variable (see Long & Freese, 2006).

categories associated with the four-item index. Changed probability must be spread out over 16 categories instead of 4; therefore, individual categories are associated with less change in probability (and smaller average and absolute change).

Voters who thought the instructions for using the equipment were confusing gave lower poll worker evaluations in all four models. Although voters may have been reacting to written instructions that poll workers had little or nothing to do with, we note that written instructions were minimal and we suspect that this variable captures the oral instructions given by workers after each voter checked in. Likewise, privacy can also be linked to evaluations of poll workers. Voters are likely to respond negatively to voting machines placed too close together or in easy view of bystanders (sometimes because of short power cords or rooms with limited power outlets or poor lighting). However, although we have classified the privacy variable as a circumstance, it too may be related to human interaction. Anecdotally, we have observed that in some situations, poll workers can be too helpful in their efforts to help voters navigate new voting equipment, where they hover so close to touch screen voting screens that they can easily see vote choices or aid voters as they insert their optical scan ballots into precinct-level vote counters in a way that violates an individual voter's sense of privacy while voting. Finally, looking at the average effects in Table 2, we note that the first differences on these five-point scales—especially the difference between strongly disagreeing and strongly agreeing that the instructions for voting were confusing—are associated with big average changes in probability. Strongly agreeing that one voted in privacy is associated with about 5% and 9% greater chance of a moderately positive overall evaluation in Summit County and Franklin County, respectively. Strongly agreeing that the instructions were confusing is associated with about 16% and 12% greater chance of a moderately negative overall evaluation in Summit County and Franklin County, respectively.

Other variables capturing circumstances did little to predict poll worker evaluations in either county. Neither problems using the touch screen voting system (Franklin) nor problems with the optical scan ballot (Summit) were significantly related to poll worker evaluations. Likewise, problems with the precinct ballot counter (Summit) and voters neglecting the printed paper record (Franklin) had no statistical significance. Although acknowledging that it is difficult to disentangle the effect of poll workers on elements of the voting experience that do not always involve direct contact with poll workers, voters appear to distinguish between factors poll workers can more plausibly affect, such as instructions and privacy, but they do not blame poll

workers for factors that poll workers are less likely to directly affect, such as problems with the machines or with ballot counters.

The variables more clearly related to direct interaction with poll workers produce some of the most striking results in the models. Exit poll respondents were asked, "Were you asked to present any identification before voting?" Three response options were given to allow voters to specify whether they were asked to present identification and whether the identification was accepted or rejected. This variable is interesting both because of the ongoing controversy throughout the United States about voter identification laws and their effects on turnout and as the fact that Ohio implemented a new voter ID requirement that went into effect for the first time in the November 2006 election. Not checking ID produced a negative and statistically significant coefficient in the overall evaluation of Summit County poll workers and negative but insignificant effects in the other three models. Somewhat surprisingly, those who were not asked for their ID evaluated poll workers worse than those who were asked. The consumer literature would likely attribute the higher evaluations among those whose ID was checked to time interacting with the poll worker. All else equal, more significant interactions with service personnel lead to higher evaluations. However, under the new law, the vast majority of voters reported being asked to present ID (about 97% in both counties). Less surprisingly, having one's ID checked and rejected (compared to the baseline of being asked to present ID and it being accepted) produces a negative effect in all four models. In the overall evaluation models, having ID checked and rejected is associated with a 20% and 12% greater chance of a moderately negative evaluation in Summit County and Franklin County, respectively. In the four-item index models, ID rejection is associated with a 5% and 2% greater chance of a moderately negative evaluation in Summit County and Franklin County, respectively (again, the smaller effects reflect the larger number of categories). Admittedly, only a small proportion of voters reported having their ID rejected, but we are confident that the experience was very negative and that voters whose IDs were rejected blamed the poll workers.

Another source of human interaction occurred when voters asked poll workers for help. Here the effect is not statistically significant in either of the four-item index models, but the effect on overall evaluations is positive and robust. This is interesting as one might expect that voters who needed to ask for help might be having a difficult time voting and might blame the poll workers. However, as was the case with having one's ID checked and accepted, it appears that simply interacting with the poll worker inspires more positive reactions to the poll worker.[10]

Finally, the only exit poll question related to physical conditions at the polling place asks voters whether they had trouble finding the polling place. In all four models, this variable has the expected sign (negative), but it was statistically significant in only the Franklin County models. In an attempt to investigate other possible sources of physical conditions affecting poll worker evaluations, we also estimated some other types of models that mix the exit poll with other data sources. Our methodology also included two other data-collection efforts, in addition to the exit polls, designed to provide a more complete picture of election administration and the voting experience. These included surveys of poll workers in both counties and structured observation of the polling locations.[11] We estimated aggregate (polling–place level) models of evaluations of the poll workers by regressing the mean (weighted) overall evaluation for each polling place from the exit poll on the mean poll worker survey items and the mean structured observation items. These bivariate regressions capture the polling–place level determinants of poll worker evaluations. Unlike the individual-level results, the aggregate-level determinants of the four items presented in Figure 1B are quite different empirically. Hence, we estimated models of each item separately by county.

Aggregate-Level Results

Given the number of models estimated, for brevity, we summarize the results here; however, tables detailing the statistical results are available in an online appendix.[12] In broad strokes, these analyses uncover interesting information about the associations between (a) voters' evaluations of poll workers and the physical conditions at the polling places, (b) voters' evaluations of poll workers and poll workers' attitudes and self-evaluations of the training they received, and (c) voters' evaluations of poll workers and the way poll workers were recruited. First, the structured-observation study and the survey of poll workers were both designed to investigate possible relationships between the physical conditions at the polling places and the evaluations of poll workers. From that standpoint, relatively few of our objective measures of physical conditions significantly affect poll worker evaluations (the full-structured observation and poll worker survey instruments contained dozens of items about the physical conditions that were not significant in the bivariate regressions). Nevertheless, greater physical space between the voting stations had a positive relationship with the aggregate judgment of whether voters thought the poll workers knew what they were doing and were helpful. Displaying information on how to vote had a positive effect on poll workers' overall evaluations as did having space to wait indoors (out of the weather)

instead of outdoors on election day.[13] But there is little else to point here. It is notable that voters' assessments of the voting experience are not related to others sources of variability in the physical conditions, such as the type of building (e.g., church, community center, apartment complex, etc.), whether the space was well lit, the adequacy of the space and the parking, and many other physical attributes of the polling places.

In addition to questions about physical conditions, the survey of poll workers also contained information about the poll workers themselves. Poll workers' attitudes and their judgments about the adequacy of their training also emerged as statistically significant predictors of poll worker evaluations. For example, polling places where poll workers felt better about their training received better evaluations, on average. Likewise, in polling places where poll workers were more confident about the ID requirements, voters judged them as more respectful. Polling places where the poll workers reported problems in working together received lower evaluations. Lastly, in terms of attitudes, in polling places where poll workers were less confident that votes were recorded accurately, they received worse evaluations. It is as if, consciously or unconsciously, poll workers communicate their attitudes and their sense of adequacy and preparation to voters as they interact with them on election day.

Finally, turning to the way poll workers were recruited, in Franklin County polling places, where more poll workers had been recruited in the new Champions of Democracy program, evaluations were higher on several dimensions. In 2006, Franklin County began a large-scale effort to recruit new poll workers through partnerships with corporations, unions, county agencies, and public schools. In particular, a large number of younger student poll workers were recruited by teachers to work at the polls specifically because of their assumed comfort level with technology. There is some evidence here that the efforts to recruit these new poll workers were noticed by voters. The basis for this assertion is that polling places with more workers who report having been recruited by a teacher or at work received significantly higher aggregate poll worker ratings. In terms of decision making by boards of elections, our results reinforce the importance of investing in human capital—voters appear to have responded positively to the innovative recruitment program in Franklin County.

Discussion and Conclusion

The voting experience for those casting ballots is in many ways comparable to service encounters more generally. However, understanding how

voters rate the service they received at the polling place is not the same thing as understanding who votes or why people vote as they do. In most cases, factors we know to be important predictors of turnout and voting behavior, such as education and income, are not significantly related to how those who vote evaluate their interactions with poll workers. For example, one of the most important variables for predicting who votes is education (e.g., Wolfinger & Rosenstone, 1980). However, among those who voted in 2006 and participated in our exit polls, education made no difference in how they evaluated poll worker performance. Therefore, to understand how voters evaluate the quality of the voting experience, we suggest moving beyond standard predictors of who does or does not vote.

Age, unlike education, does matter both in predicting turnout and evaluating the performance of poll workers. Older voters were more positive in their assessments. Older voters vote in greater proportions and should, therefore, have more voting experience. Previous voting experience should condition how the voter evaluates the current experience. Older voters may also be more likely to know their poll workers, but this is probably not the only factor because so few of the Ohio voters in our exit polls reported knowing their poll workers.

As the literature on commercial service encounters would predict, the circumstances at the polling place, such as the amount of time spent waiting to be served, crowding, or a lack of privacy, were important predictors of poll worker performance. The voting time in minutes is a uniformly significant predictor of negative voter evaluations of poll workers in our models. However, several other variables that would be related to the circumstances of the polling place were not consistently significant.

The literature on consumer activity also points us toward the possible impact of physical conditions at the polling place as something that might influence evaluations of the poll workers. Factors like the layout, design, lighting, smell, and background music could positively or negatively influence the views of consumers. Unlike consumer service encounters, voters seem to be willing to tolerate—or at least not blame poll workers for—a wide range of physical conditions at the polling places. Poll workers at churches, schools, community centers, and clubs were all evaluated similarly despite vast differences in the adequacy of the respective facilities. Only when frustrated by waiting to vote, having difficulty finding the polling place, or facing a lack of privacy while voting did voters penalize their poll workers.

Human interaction has also been found to be an important predictor of how consumers evaluate service providers at restaurants, banks, or hotels. The type and quality of contact between the consumer and service provider

is important when interactions involve other people. The variables in our study that had to do with human interaction produced some of our most striking results. Voters who interacted with their poll worker whether in the context of a request for help or while producing identification—provided it was accepted—responded more positively than those who did not interact with a poll worker in these ways. However, interactions can turn negative. If the voter's ID was rejected, we found negative effects in both counties and with our different configurations of dependent variables.

The literature on commercial human interaction also finds that the quality of training of employees is important to how consumers assess the services they receive. The surveys we conducted of poll workers in the Ohio counties and voting places found that poll workers who positively evaluated their training received more positive assessments. Better trained poll workers are more confident and have higher job satisfaction (Hall et al., 2007). Voters perceive this confidence, and they evaluate the poll workers more favorably.

Finally, the literature on how the public views service providers in a sector that relies on technology found that factors that predicted a positive experience included the extent to which the public trusted the technology. This study provides an analysis of the impact of a large-scale technological change in voting. Despite widespread fears the public might not like the new machines, voters overwhelmingly preferred the new machines to the previous method of voting. The surprising finding is that their confidence in the new voting technology appears to derive in part from their assessment of poll workers. If voters evaluated poll workers' performance favorably, they had more confidence in their vote being counted accurately as well as the fairness of the election (Atkeson & Saunders, 2007; Hall et al., 2005, 2007; Magleby et al., 2007).

Noting the previous scholarship indicating that poll workers play a major role shaping voters' confidence in the electoral process, we sought to understand the factors that affect how a voter evaluates poll workers with the hope that it would eventually provide a more complete explanation of what determines confidence in the voting process. Drawing parallels between the voting experience and service encounters, we have made progress toward understanding the intermediary factors that shape overall confidence in an election and a voting process. We also theorized that voting shares some similarities with a service encounter. Most Americans have some understanding of what constitutes a good or bad service encounter. Research on business and consumer behavior has identified several different dimensions of the service encounter and their overall effect on consumer behavior and confidence.

Voting is an encounter with multiple layers of government. Although the voter usually interacts only with a local poll worker, the web of regulations extends all the way back to the national government and can include all layers of government in between. In most electoral jurisdictions, local, county, and state officials have some input into the structure and organization of the voting experience. With so much riding on the structure and organization of elections, we think it prudent to consider the importance of the human infrastructure in running elections and the effect of this infrastructure on the voter.

Notes

1. We say most voters because some voters cast their ballot by mail or absentee ballot (Fortier, 2006).

2. Summit County uses an ES&S Model 100 precinct count optical scan system and Franklin County uses an ES&S iVotronic DRE touch screen voting machine.

3. Due to poll workers refusing (contrary to Ohio law) to allow students to conduct the exit poll in one polling place in Summit County, we only have 49 locations there.

4. The sampling design is modeled after the sampling done from 1982 through 2006 for the Utah Colleges Exit Poll (Grimshaw, Christensen, Magleby, & Patterson, 2004).

5. Once the actual turnout for all precincts was available, a summary was made so that the actual turnout for all strata was calculated and then this number becomes the numerator of the weight variable. The denominator is the actual number of polling places sampled in the strata by the number of completes at the polling place. This weight by turnout is then normalized by multiplying the ratio of the number of completes to the actual turnout. This accounts for the auxiliary and factual information of actual turnout on election day.

6. Our data have a democratic bias, so we used an iterative rim weighting or raking process to calculate a weight based on the U.S. Senate results, multiplied it by the sampling weight described above to create a temporary weight used to adjust the data, and then computed a weight based on the gubernatorial results. The process is repeated iteratively until the exit poll results for both races closely approximate the actual election results.

7. Paul Herrnson of the University of Maryland and Steven Hertzberg (then with the Election Science Institute) generously shared questionnaires from their research with us while we were in the early stages of questionnaire design (see Herrnson et al., 2008).

8. The alpha scale reliability coefficients are .96 for Franklin County and .95 for Summit County.

9. To use as many surveys with valid responses as possible, we use multiple imputation to replace missing values on the independent variables for all cases not missing on the dependent variables. The imputations were performed using STATA's ice command and the parameter estimates and standard errors were computed using the micombine command (Royston, 2004). The STATA routine uses multiple imputation by chained equations to create multiple-imputed datasets. We imputed three datasets in which each predictor was modeled according to its distribution (e.g., male was modeled using logit) as a function of all of the other predictors. The micombine command pools estimates for the three imputed datasets by averaging coefficient estimates and computing standard errors that take into account both within-imputation variation

and across-imputation variation. The number of missing observations on the independent variables is relatively small, most well under 5% of the sample.

10. Because nearly everyone who reported asking for help also reported that they received the help they needed, we did not control for not receiving help.

11. Prior to election day, graduate students and law students were trained as structured observers. They visited each polling location in the exit poll sample and completed a questionnaire that assessed the physical conditions inside and outside of each polling location. In addition to the structured-observation study, we also surveyed poll workers in each county by sampling all of the poll workers assigned to work at exit poll locations. The poll worker survey includes a full array of items regarding recruitment, training, election day experiences, job satisfaction, and a variety of attitudes.

12. The online appendix is available at http://csed.byu.edu/Assets/AtYourService_Appendix.pdf.

13. Summit County had significant rainfall on election day in 2006, so there is some basis for this relationship.

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