

Polling station environments matter: Physical layout can impact the voting experience

November 10 2015

A presentation by human factors/ergonomics researchers at the HFES 2015 International Annual Meeting in Los Angeles in October explained how a voter's positive or negative experience with a particular voting system is influenced not only by perceptions of trust and aesthetics but also by the polling environment itself.

Rice University researchers Claudia Ziegler Acemyan and Philip Kortum studied the relationship between U.S. voters' expectations about voting system usability and the polling station environment because such systems and environments are so diverse and very little is understood about the impact of one on the other.

Configurations of voting booths at polling places such as libraries, schools, and offices vary drastically across the country, and there are no regulations defining space arrangements. As reported in their proceedings paper, "Does the Polling Station Environment Matter: The Relation Between Voting Machine Layouts Within Polling Stations and Anticipated System Usability," Acemyan and Kortum asked 35 participants to view photorealistic images of 12 [voting system](#) configurations in a polling station and to complete a survey to assess anticipated system usability.

Ratings were lowest when [voting machines](#) had neither dividers nor spacing between units and when the voting machines were placed so that

two rows faced each other in the center of the room. Anticipated usability was highest when the voting systems had dividers around the interface, there was space between units, and polling booths were arranged in the room such that voters did not face one another.

Lead researcher Acemyan stressed the relevance of this study, noting "If environmental features and system attributes deter people from voting, it might lead to disenfranchisement and altered election outcomes."

Provided by Human Factors and Ergonomics Society

Citation: Polling station environments matter: Physical layout can impact the voting experience (2015, November 10) retrieved 2 May 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2015-11-polling-station-environments-physical-layout.html>

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