

THE HIGH COST OF VOTING

THE voter explosion hits with a double whammy. On top of the people explosion, we have a rocket surge in the percentage who read, argue—and vote.

Back in 1920, less than half (44 percent) of U.S. adults went to the polls. By the election year 2000, nine Presidential terms from now, about 83 out of every 100 eligibles will exercise their franchise. The way things are going, more than 168 million Americans will want to vote. Southern Negroes have added their voices to the ever-broader demand for say-so in public affairs. Democracy deepens.

But there's a hitch: the rising cost of our archaic system for polling and counting. In an average county, the cost runs about \$2 per vote, per election. This price already exerts a subtle but serious pressure against greater citizen participation. Unless the high cost of voting is cut, this nation can't make good on its dream of universal suffrage.

To insure an honest count of paper ballots, officials have to hire production lines of election workers, often keep them going for long hours. So they turn to supposedly "modern" voting machines. Things get worse. One machine,

which should serve about 400 citizens, costs upward of \$1,600 and has to be carted around like an outsize refrigerator. Budget-tight officials never provide enough to handle the crowds. You wait for hours in long lines or—research proves—give up your rights in disgust.

What to do? University of California political scientist Joseph Harris, 68, found an answer. He invented a simple gadget that lets the ordinary voter punch his decisions directly into an IBM card. When polls close, precinct judges just hustle the punched ballots to a computer. Most big counties now own or can rent a computer smart enough to tally long ballots with absolute accuracy.

The Harris Votomatic, as Joe Harris calls his punch-card device, is so cheap that each county can provide as many as the people need. No more long lines. No waits.

Such convenience befits the rising dignity of political action, Harris believes. "A generation ago, politics was looked down on. It was left to people with their hands out. The approved view used to be: 'I'm nonpartisan.' This is no longer true. It's now respectable to be active in politics."

Punch-card ballot slashes expenses. More can vote.

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“Why didn’t we think of this for Uncle Harry?”

Selecting Christmas presents is a lot of fun most of the time, but every once in awhile you run into a special problem. In the case of the Graham family it was rich Uncle Harry, a proverbial case of “the man who had everything.”

Fortunately, the Grahams are regular LOOK subscribers, and Mrs. Graham found the answer while reading their current issue — a gift subscription to LOOK Magazine.

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VOTING continued



The League of Women Voters, crusaders for an informed and active electorate, taught De Kalb County, Ga., citizens how to punch ballots.

“It’s as simple as stirring coffee with a spoon.”

Booming Atlanta, and its satellite county, De Kalb, had wallowed for years in political lethargy. Georgia’s corrupt “county-unit system” made urban votes almost worthless. With reapportionment and civil-rights ferment, registration shot up about 60 percent in four years.

How could the voters find room at the polls? De Kalb dolefully planned to buy \$122,000 worth of extra voting machines—but instead went whole hog for the cheaper punch-card ballot. Atlanta made a token test.

Older officials feared that people would not take to the new way. But a community education project paid off. The experiment, spreading to other U.S. counties, argues for punch-vote reform. “It’s as simple,” drawled a lady official, “as stirring your coffee with a spoon.”

Atlanta barber Sam Sheats, worker for the All Citizens Voter Registration Committee, demonstrated a sample Votomatic to 300 regular customers.

