

Name/Model: eSlate 3000

Vendor: Hart InterCivic, Inc.



Brief Description:

Hart InterCivic's eSlate is a multilingual voter-activated electronic voting system where the voter turns a Select Wheel and pushes a button to indicate his/her preference. The eSlate is connected via cable to the Judge's Booth Controller (JBC; image above) which provides vote activation and vote storage for up to twelve eSlates. A poll worker issues a four digit, randomly generated Access Code to the voter using the JBC. The voter enters the Access Code on the eSlate and votes using the select Wheel and Buttons. Once the ballot is cast, the votes are stored in redundant and physically separate areas of the eSlate System, including the eSlate, JBC and flash memory. The votes are transmitted via a cable to the JBC, and are stored on the JBC and on a flash memory card (Mobile Ballot Box or MBB) inside the JBC. Then the MBB is physically transported to election headquarters for tabulation.

Detailed Voting Process:

When the voter enters the precinct, poll workers first confirm that the voter is properly registered. Then, a poll worker using the Judge's Booth Controller (JBC) prints out a piece of paper with a four digit, randomly generated Access Code. This number does not tie to the voter's identity but ties to the voter's precinct so that the proper ballot style for each voter will appear on the eSlate after a voter enters his/her Access Code. A voter is NOT assigned to any specific voting terminal. A voter can proceed to any open eSlate booth.

The voter takes the piece of paper with the Access Code to any open eSlate booth and enters the number into the eSlate device using the Select Wheel and Enter button. This Access Code number permits the voter to vote once; the Access Code will not work a second time. The voter makes his or her selections using the buttons and Select Wheel on the bottom of the eSlate. The Select Wheel allows the voter to navigate through the ballot. When the voter is finished, he or she presses the red "Cast Ballot" button at the lower left-hand corner of the eSlate to cast his/her ballot. Access Codes cannot be reissued by the JBC.

It is possible for a voter to ask a pollworker if his/her Access Code has registered a ballot on the JBC. If the voter has completed the voting process and cast a ballot, the pollworker can print off a piece of paper similar to the Access Code that lists the voter's Access Code number and reads "Assigned and Cast." Again the Access Code is a randomly generated number and does not tie to the identity of the voter.

The ballot is then transmitted over the cable that connects the eSlate to the JBC on a closed, private network. This cable is a "serial" cable and carries both power and data. Up to twelve eSlates can be connected via this serial cable to the JBC. The JBC records and stores the ballot internally and on a flash memory card or Mobile Ballot Box (MBB). Additionally, each ballot is stored on the individual eSlate voting unit so that all ballots are stored redundantly in separate areas of the eSlate System. The MBB is a removable PCMCIA computer card that stores vote data as well as the ballot definitions, needed to open the polls for a given election. The PCMCIA card is a credit card-sized device containing flash memory that is sealed into a slot on the JBC.

Once the balloting is closed, the poll workers use the printer on the JBC to print summary results on to paper. Then the poll workers either remove the MBB and physically transport it with any printouts to a central tabulation facility or they can transport the JBC itself depending on local regulations and procedures.

Past Problems:

- March 2004: California. Hundreds of voters in Orange County were turned away when one eSlate machine broke down. It is not clear from reports if this was a JBC or eSlate.¹
- March 2004: California. Approximately 7,000 voters were presented with the wrong ballots due to problems with poll workers' understanding the eSlate system. In 21 precincts where the problem was most acute, more ballots were cast than there were registered voters. Tallies at an additional 55 polling places with turnouts more than double the county average of 37% suggest at least 5,500 voters had their ballots tabulated for the wrong precincts.²
- February 2004. Virginia. Voters had to cast paper ballots when the JBC unit at one precinct "fried," rendering all the eSlate machines unusable.³
- November 2003: Texas. Poll workers in Harris County, confused by the eSlate system's complexity, could not get the machines to work properly. Subsequent investigation revealed they had been assigning the wrong ballots to voters using the JBC.⁴

¹ "Voters Decide Record Bond Issue; Edwards Quits." NBC4TV, March 2, 2004.

² "7,000 Orange County Voters Were Given Bad Ballots." LOS ANGELES TIMES, March 8, 2004.

³ "Polling places report light turnout here," RICHMOND TIMES -DISPATCH, February 11, 2004.

⁴ "eSlate voting proves smooth, not flawless." HOUSTON CHRONICLE, Nov. 5, 2003.