

# Improving Voting Accessibility for Injured Veterans

Georgia Institute of Technology

More than 50,000 men and women have been wounded in military service in Iraq and Afghanistan.

Many of these recently injured veterans are in rehabilitative centers where they face barriers that prevent them from voting independently, securely and privately.

Researchers at the Georgia Institute of Technology, along with the Information Technology and Innovation Foundation and the Operation BRAVO Foundation, are developing ways to provide a more accessible voting system for service members to use within treatment facilities.

“Veterans from Iraq and Afghanistan have different types of injuries than the general population with disabilities,” said Brad Fain, head of the Human Systems Engineering Branch at the Georgia Tech Research Institute. “The range of accommodations they need to participate in elections differs. We need to better understand the barriers faced by veterans with disabilities to make the electoral process more accessible.”

After two years of study and hundreds of interviews with recently wounded vets, Fain and the research team found veterans with disabilities are likely to experience difficulty with voting because of inaccessible polling places, complicated ballot design and voting technologies that are not compatible with their needs.

Traumatic brain injury, the “signature injury” of troops returning from Iraq and Afghanistan, can impact cognitive ability, independence, memory and attention span. Other common injuries among service members include mobility impairments or amputation of limbs, visual and hearing loss, sensation changes and post-traumatic stress disorder, all of which can affect voting activities.

Researchers recommend taking simple steps to improve voting access such as simplifying the ballot design and removing distractions during the voting process.

They also recommend implementing a portable, tablet-based voting system with numerous control options. Fain is developing a marking tool that would be able to read the ballot in a format the individual could understand, allow the person to mark the ballot and then export it to the voting commissioner in an acceptable manner.

While this innovative technology shows potential, the researchers point out that advancements in technology alone will not solve the problem of voting accessibility for wounded veterans.

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“A technology solution is not going to be useful unless we have the policy solutions, security issues and support services that allow people to vote privately, securely and independently,” Fain said.

Georgia Tech researchers will continue to study these issues in a larger study on voting among the general population with disabilities.

“It’s an honor to help solve this problem so all Americans with disabilities have the best opportunity possible to cast a private, secure and independent vote, especially veterans since those injuries were obtained in service to their country,” Fain said.

In 2010, the Information Technology and Innovation Foundation, in partnership with the Georgia Tech Research Institute and the Operation BRAVO Foundation, received a grant from the U.S. Election Assistance Commission for this project.

### Related Links

- [Georgia Tech Research Institute](#) [1]
- [Making Voting More Accessible for Veterans with Disabilities report](#) [2]

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### Links:

[1] <http://www.gtri.gatech.edu/careers/students>

[2] <http://www2.itif.org/2012-making-voting-accessible-vets-disabilities.pdf>