

**American Confidence in  
Electronic Voting and Ballot Counting:  
A Pre-Election Update<sup>1</sup>**

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**Executive Summary**

This study examines the confidence that voters have that their ballot was counted accurately in 2004 and the attitudes of the American public toward electronic voting. As many states and localities move to new—and often electronic—voting systems, understanding public confidence and public attitudes is critical for policy makers. This study includes several key findings:

1. There has been a decline in confidence among voters from 2005 to 2006 that their vote in 2004 was counted accurately. Part of this decline is likely the result of a prospective concern that their vote in 2006 may not be counted accurately.
2. African Americans are currently less confident than whites that their votes were counted accurately.
3. Roughly one-third of respondents did not have an opinion about the potential benefits or liabilities of electronic voting systems. This may represent uncertainty about electronic voting machines, a lack of familiarity with them, or ambivalence about their use.
4. The public views electronic voting as making voting easier for people with disabilities and making it more accurate to vote.
5. The public also thinks that electronic voting machines are prone to unintentional failures and agreed that they increase the potential for fraud.

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## Introduction

As America enters its fourth consecutive highly contentious election season, debates about election reform continue to swirl around the nation. The media is full of stories about possible problems in the election. This is also the first election conducted where the Help America Vote Act, the federal legislation passed to address the problems of the 2000 election, will be fully in effect in most states. There will be new voting technology in several states, new voter registration systems in most states, and new election procedures across the country.

We have been examining public confidence in voting technologies—especially electronic voting—since the fall preceding the 2004 presidential election. Since then, we have conducted three other surveys that gauge public confidence in electronic voting technologies and in ballot counting across the country. This report presents the results of our most recent study on this topic. The results of the study conducted before the 2004 election can be found online at <http://vote.caltech.edu/media/documents/fall04survey.pdf>.

## Confidence in Ballot Counting

In the closing days of the 2006 midterm elections, we asked a nationally representative sample of American adults about confidence in the voting process. Interviews were conducted from October 26 – October 31, 2006 among a nationally representative sample of 1084 adults, age 18 and older including 156 Non-Hispanic African Americans. Specifically, we asked a national sample of American adults the following question:

How confident are you that your ballot in the November of 2004 presidential contest between George Bush and John Kerry was counted as you intended? Would you say that you are very confident, somewhat confident, not too confident, or not at all confident?

We report the confidence rates of adult registered voters who are likely to vote, where we define likely to vote as either voting prior to the survey via early or absentee ballot or reporting a greater than 50% chance of voting during the 2006 election.<sup>2</sup> Among registered voters who are likely to vote, 75% responded that they were confident their votes were counted as intended during the 2004 election (55% were “very confident” and 20% were “somewhat confident”) and 22% responded as possessing a lack of confidence (12% were “not too confident” and 10% were “not at all confident”).<sup>3</sup>

Although nearly three out of four voters are confident that their vote during the 2004 election was counted correctly, some may find it disturbing that nearly one in five respondents

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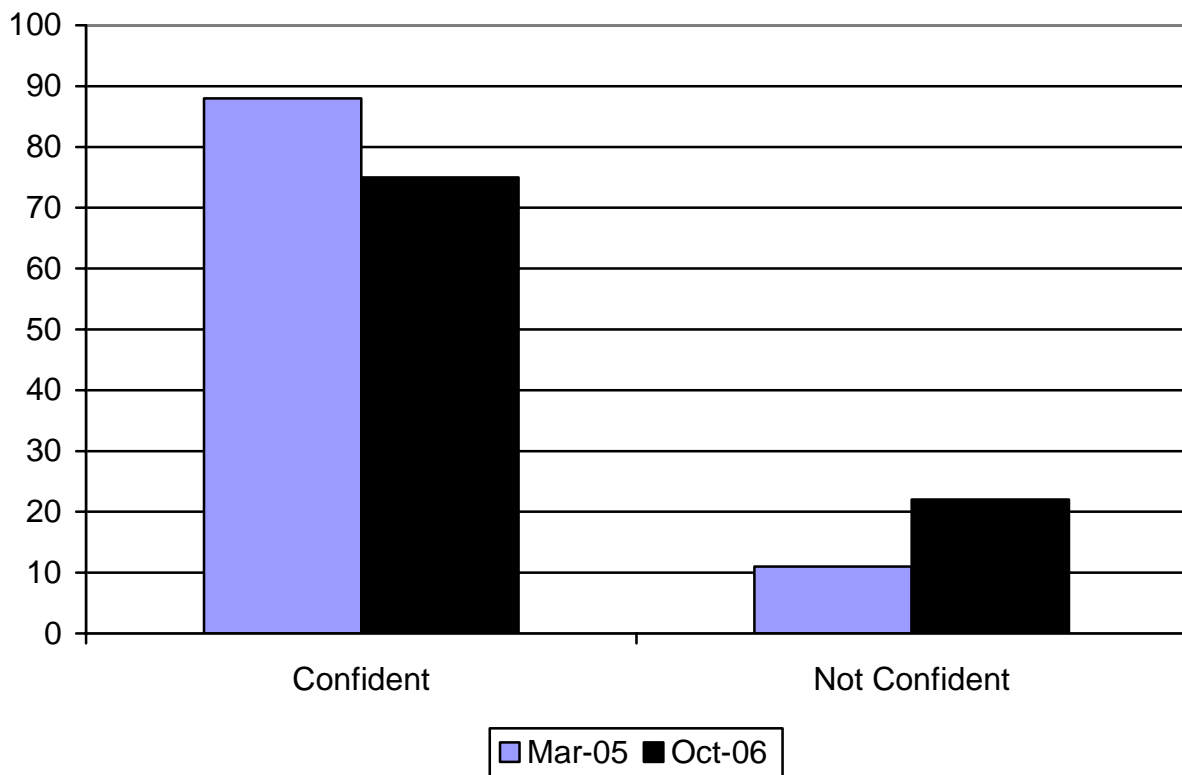
<sup>2</sup> We report the results of likely voters in order to promote comparability with the March 2005 survey; the March 2005 survey reported the confidence rates of individuals who identified themselves as having voted in the 2004 presidential election. The results for the entire October 2006 sample of registered voters is similar to those of the subsample consisting of the registered likely voters. If we were to report the results over the entire October 2006 registered voter sample, then we would actually report a lower rate of confidence (73% of registered voters stated net confidence in this survey).

<sup>3</sup> In addition, 4% of the registered voters had no opinion. Furthermore, 62 individuals report not having voted in the 2004 election and 12 individuals refused to answer the question; both of these groups were dropped from the analysis.

expressed a lack of confidence that their ballot was counted as intended in the 2004 presidential election.

There is also evidence that the overall level of confidence in the outcome of the 2004 presidential election has dropped since that election. In early March 2005, we conducted a very similar survey, and then asked those who recalled voting in the 2004 presidential election “How confident are you that your ballot for president in the 2004 election was counted as you intended?”<sup>4</sup> At that point in time, 88% of voters responded as being confident (66% were “very confident” and 22% “somewhat confident”) and 11% stated a lack of confidence (6% “not too confident” and 5% “not at all confident”). It may be that voter confidence about the 2004 election is not changing; instead voters may be less confident in the 2006 election as compared to the 2004 election and project this lack of confidence retroactively to the 2004 election. We think that this is likely the case and the data may reflect evidence that voters are becoming less confident in the electoral process overall.

### Change in Overall Confidence 2005 to 2006



<sup>4</sup> The March 2005 survey was conducted using an identical methodology to the October 2006 survey. Between March 9 and 15, 2005, ICR interviewed 2032 adults as part of their EXCEL national telephone omnibus survey, and asked those respondent many of the same questions we utilized in the October 2006 survey.

Although the question we used in March 2005 was worded slightly differently than the one used in our October 2006 survey, it is intriguing to us that the overall confidence in the 2004 presidential election has declined by such a large degree since the spring of 2005.<sup>5</sup>

### Confidence in the 2004 Election

	Not Confident	Confident	Don't know
<b>Total Respondents</b>	21.9	75.1	3.0
<b>Survey by race</b>			
African American	44.1	54.9	1.0
White	17.7	79.4	2.9
<b>Confidence by gender</b>			
Male	21.6	76.4	2.0
Female	22.1	74.0	3.9
<b>Party Identification</b>			
Democrat	31.0	64.6	4.4
Republican	8.7	89.8	1.5
Independent	22.0	75.2	2.8

### Racial Gap in Confidence

The October 2006 survey data has two important “confidence gaps” in the baseline data, both of which existed in previous surveys. First, there is a confidence gap between whites and African Americans, a “race-confidence gap”. In order to better understand this gap, when we set up our methodology for this survey, we over-sampled African American respondents in this survey so that we can better understand the attitudes of African American registered voters. In the October 2006 survey, we found that 79% of white registered voters expressed confidence and 18% stated a net lack of confidence. For African American registered voters, only 55% expressed confidence and 44% expressed a net lack of confidence (the remainder expressed no opinion). Clearly, there is a difference between white and African American registered voters in their opinions over the confidence in their ballots for the 2004 presidential election being counted correctly, which may presage a similar racial gap in confidence in the looming 2006 midterm elections.

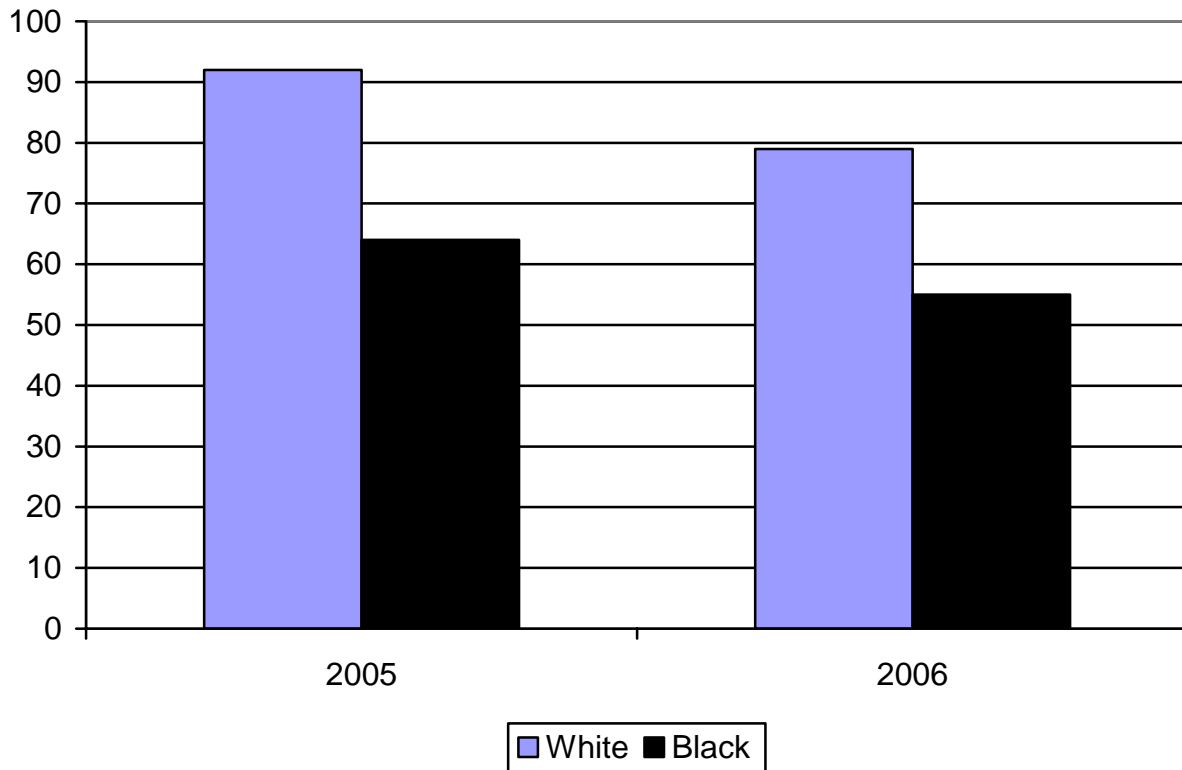
The racial gap also existed in our March 2005 survey. Then, 92% of white voters expressed confidence, but only 64% of African American voters expressed confidence. Certainly, this provides evidence that African American voters are less confident overall;

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<sup>5</sup> Our rationale for the change in the question wording is twofold: (1) we believe that immediately after the 2004 election voters treated the term 2004 presidential election as being synonymous with Bush versus Kerry and as time passes this association weakens and (2) given the discussion in the media regarding the 2008 presidential election we wish to be as clear as possible regarding the particular election over which we framed the question.

although our data indicates that the decline in confidence from March 2005 to October 2006 for white and African American voters are comparable in magnitude (white confidence has fallen by 13 points, African American confidence by 9 points).

### Confidence and Race

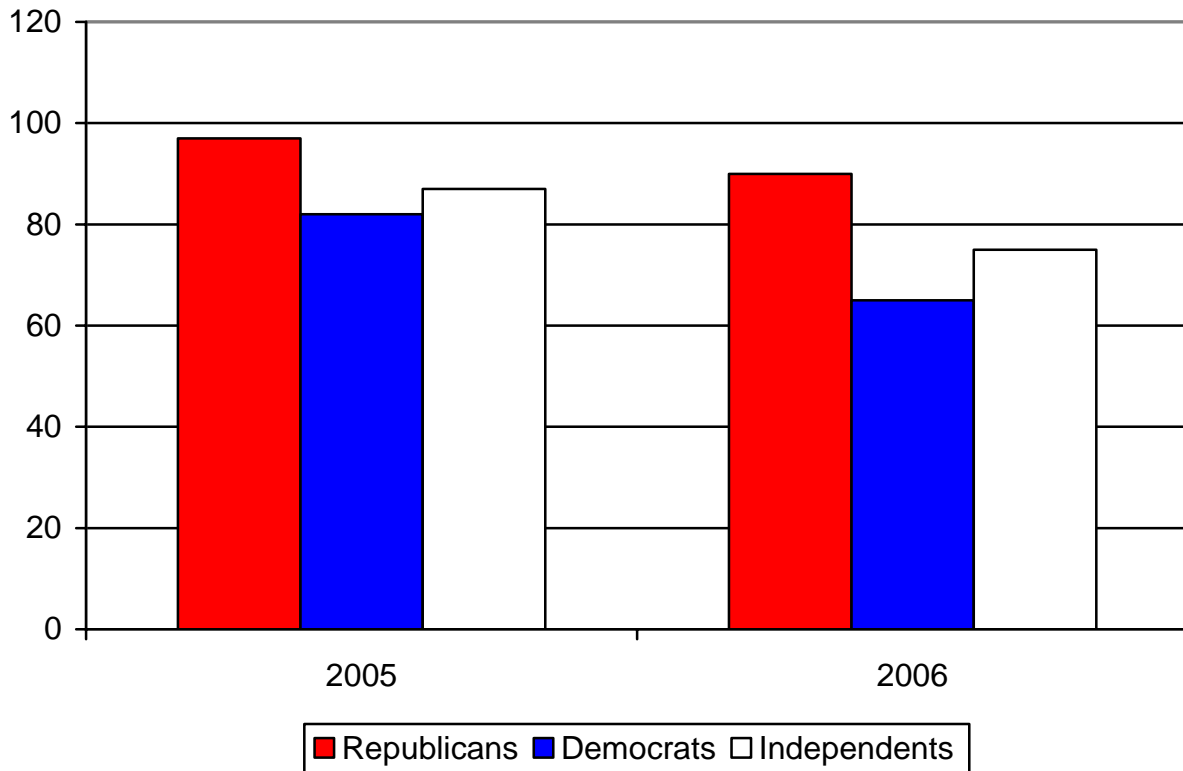


### Partisan Gap in Confidence

There is also a “partisan-confidence gap” among Democrats, Republicans, and Independents regarding whether their votes were counted accurately in 2004. In the October 2006 survey, 90% of self-identified Republican registered voters expressed confidence compared to 65% of self-identified Democrats and 75% of self-identified Independents. There are marked differences among Republicans, Democrats, and Independents in confidence in the 2004 election.

When we compare the results of this survey with our March 2005 survey, where a similar question was posed to those respondents who stated that they had voted in 2004, we find that virtually all self-identified Republicans (97%) were confident, but only 86% of self-identified Democrats and 87% of self-identified Independents were confident. Of course, there appears to have been a decline in Republican confidence, but quite dramatic declines in the confidence of Democrats and Independents.

## Confidence and Partisanship



### Attitudes Regarding Electronic Voting

Since 2004, we have been asking the American public about their attitudes regarding various facets of electronic voting.<sup>6</sup> Specifically, we have asked the following question (slightly modified for each election by the date included in the question):

You may have heard discussion about the use of electronic “touchscreen or “direct recording electronic” voting machines that will be used in the November 2006 elections. I am going to read you some statements about electronic voting and want to know whether you agree or disagree with each statement or if you have no opinion. Some people say that electronic voting systems are:

- More accurate
- Increase the potential for fraud
- Prone to unintentional failures
- Make voting easier for people with disabilities.

These four items track the four major arguments made by both sides of the debate on electronic voting. The critics argue that electronic voting increases the potential for fraud and for

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<sup>6</sup> In this section we examine the attitudes of the complete sample of all adult respondents in our October 2006 survey.

unintentional errors. The supporters argue that the system is more accurate and more accessible, especially for people with disabilities. The order in which these four items were asked was rotated to ensure that the survey results were not biased. Below we provide the weighted results for each of these survey questions, as well as the cross-tabulations of these questions by race, gender, and partisanship. We note that the responses to these questions have remained remarkably stable since we conducted our first survey asking these four questions in 2004.

## E-Voting Fraud

We first consider whether public attitudes regarding electronic voting increases the potential for fraud. Here, we see that just over 38% agree with this statement. There are not differences here in agreement rates by race, but men appear more likely to agree that electronic voting increases the potential for fraud compared to women and Democrats are much more likely to agree than are Republicans. In fact, Republicans tend to disagree with this statement at a greater rate than their ideological counterparts. Independent voters are concerned about electronic voting's potential for fraud but also show very high rates of ambivalence, as expressed by the large number of independent voters who have no opinion.

### Electronic Voting Increases the Potential for Fraud

	Agree	Disagree	No Opinion
<b>Total Respondents</b>	38.3	25.3	36.4
<b>Survey by race</b>			
African American	37.5	18.3	44.2
White	34.6	27.8	37.6
<b>Confidence by gender</b>			
Male	42.1	26.2	31.7
Female	34.8	24.5	40.7
<b>Party Identification</b>			
Democrat	45.9	21.4	32.7
Republican	32.1	40.4	27.5
Independent	39.0	20.9	40.1

## E-Voting Accuracy

We then turn to the question regarding whether or not electronic voting is more accurate. We do see a plurality of voters agree with this statement. However, there is a very large racial gap associated with this question; African American respondents are much more likely to have no opinion about this question whereas white respondents are more likely to agree. As was the case previously, Democrats are more skeptical than Republicans about the accuracy of electronic voting. Further, more Democrats agree than disagree that electronic voting is more accurate a majority of Republicans agree with this statement as well.

### Electronic Voting Systems Are More Accurate

	Agree	Disagree	No Opinion
<b>Total Respondents</b>	41.2	23.9	34.9
<b>Survey by race</b>			
African American	28.0	23.2	48.8
White	44.8	20.8	34.4
<b>Confidence by gender</b>			
Male	42.4	25.5	32.1
Female	40.0	22.5	37.5
<b>Party Identification</b>			
Democrat	40.7	26.9	32.4
Republican	55.2	15.5	29.3
Independent	36.3	28.1	35.6

### E-Voting and Individuals with Disabilities

The one area where there is a very high level of agreement is that electronic voting benefits individuals with disabilities to cast a ballot. All racial groups, all political parties, and both men and women think that electronic voting makes voting easier for those with disabilities.

#### Electronic Voting Makes Voting Easier For Those With Disabilities

	Agree	Disagree	No Opinion
<b>Total Respondents</b>	56.2	14.2	29.6
<b>Survey by race</b>			
African American	56.0	11.6	32.4
White	58.0	12.6	29.4
<b>Confidence by gender</b>			
Male	54.6	15.3	30.2
Female	57.7	13.1	29.2
<b>Party Identification</b>			
Democrat	57.1	17.2	25.7
Republican	64.4	9.2	26.4
Independent	57.0	12.4	30.6

## E-Voting and Unintentional Failures

Finally, we see that just over 40 percent of respondents think that electronic voting systems are prone to unintentional failures. Given the media coverage of this type of problem, this finding is expected. Two interesting differences in the data are the level of no opinion among African American respondents and the gap between Democrats and Republicans regarding whether electronic voting is prone to failures.

### Electronic Voting Systems Are Prone To Unintentional Failures

	Agree	Disagree	No Opinion
<b>Total Respondents</b>	41.6	21.0	37.4
<b>Survey by race</b>			
African American	29.2	19.9	50.9
White	40.9	23.1	36.0
<b>Confidence by gender</b>			
Male	40.1	23.8	36.1
Female	42.9	18.4	38.7
<b>Party Identification</b>			
Democrat	48.6	17.5	33.9
Republican	35.6	30.2	34.2
Independent	42.4	20.3	37.3

## Conclusions

In the final days preceding the 2006 election, we see that a large majority of voters are confident that their votes will be counted accurately. However, there remains a sizable and growing segment of the population that may have concerns regarding whether their votes will be counted accurately. Given the likelihood of a close election outcome, this confidence gap is likely to remain in some form through the next presidential election cycle. Even if there are no problems in this election with voting technologies and the counting of ballots, voters may transform disbelief that the candidate they supported lost into doubt regarding the integrity of the voting system. Such a “sore loser” effect will likely persist through 2008.

## Methodology

This study was conducted via telephone by ICR, an independent research company. Interviews were conducted from October 26 – October 31, 2006 among a nationally representative sample of 1084 adults, age 18 and older including 156 Non-Hispanic African Americans. The study was part of the ICR EXCEL omnibus telephone survey. This survey’s methodology consists of interviews with approximately 1000 respondents, conducted twice a week. ICR undertakes a random-digit dialing approach to sampling telephone households, and within each sample household a single adult respondent is selected based on the adult with the most recent birthday. The ICR EXCEL survey data is then weighted to produce a nationally

representative sample of the adult population; we use these population weights in all of the univariate and cross-tabulated analyses reported in this paper. Given the sample size of the ICR EXCEL survey we use, a typical survey proportion (50%-50% split) will have a 95% confidence level of approximately plus or minus 3 percentage points. More information about ICR can be obtained by visiting [www.icrsurvey.com](http://www.icrsurvey.com).