

Voter Confidence in Georgia's Touchscreen Voting System: an examination of the impact of race and party on public confidence in Georgia's newly established system for casting and counting votes

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Presented at the Eighth Annual State Politics and Policy Conference 2008
Temple University, May 30-31, 2008

In our representative democracy, voting is as close to a sacred act as any in the secular world. The 2000 Presidential Election brought to the fore a multitude of problems with the way Americans cast and count their votes. Since that time, Congress has passed the Help America Vote Act (HAVA, 2002), and many counties and states have revamped their own procedures for casting and counting ballots. In Georgia, the Secretary of State's office took a bold stride prior to the passage of HAVA and made the determination that (1) Georgians would move to a system of electronic voting, abandoning all various forms of paper ballots, and (2) all counties throughout the state would use the same system, thereby eliminating the discrepancies in systems used by wealthier and poorer counties.

This paper attempts to answer the question: what impact have those changes to the elections system had on the public's confidence in the system? To answer this, the paper first will provide an overview of some of the problems with Georgia's system of voting prior to the implementation of the fully electronic system and assess the degree to which the new system reduced or eliminated those problems. Next, using data from the Peach State Poll—a statewide public opinion poll focused on public policy issues—the paper examines public attitudes about new system, focusing on the roles that race and partisanship play in shaping those attitudes. The author asserts that even if the newly implemented system accurately counted every vote with unparalleled precision, our system relies on public confidence, without which, accuracy and precision are meaningless.

Catalyst of Election 2000

In a statement submitted to the U.S. Senate Committee on Commerce, Science and Transportation, then Georgia Secretary of State Cathy Cox stated, “Mr. Chairman, comparing ourselves to Florida and the problems that occurred there in the design of ballots and the counting and recounting of votes, I can only come to one conclusion: There, but for the grace of God, go I.” While the general outcome of the election in Georgia was not in doubt—George W. Bush took __ percent of the overall vote—the undervote in Georgia was even higher than that found in Florida.

Undervote is defined as the number of ballots cast that do not register a vote for president. The assumption underlying concern about undervotes is that the presidential race is the ballot item least likely to be skipped by voters. After all, voter turnout increases dramatically in presidential elections over that of off-year or, even more so, local elections. The national average undervote in Election 2000 was 1.9 percent of ballots. In Florida, the undervote was 2.9 percent, and in Georgia the undervote was 3.7 percent—nearly double the national average.

In her statement, Secretary Cox went on to say,

Like Florida, we had wide variations in undervote rates from county to county. Some counties showed very low undervote totals – one half of one percent or below. Others showed high – very disturbingly high – undervote rates of 15 percent. When more than one in ten ballots register no choice in the most important race, it doesn’t take an election expert to know that something is seriously wrong with the system.

As the Secretary pointed out, the undervote was not randomly distributed throughout the state. Counties with large percentages of African Americans and with high levels of poverty were more likely to be associated with a high undervote than were other counties. Randolph County, Georgia—whose population is 60 percent African American and whose poverty rate is nearly 24 percent—had an undervote of 15 percent in the 2000 election. Of the other five counties with an undervote above 9 percent, four have poverty rates about 20 percent and three are more than 40 percent African American.

Three of the state’s five wealthiest counties—Cobb, Fayette, and Gwinnett—had undervotes below 1 percent. Cherokee—the third wealthiest county in terms of median household income—had an undervote rate of 2.1 percent, and Forsyth—the second wealthiest county—had an undervote rate of 3.6 percent. In fact, only one of the ten wealthiest counties in the state, Columbia, had an undervote rate (4.2 percent) above the state’s average, and that was only marginally above it.

Thus, not only were the undervotes for the state as a whole higher than the Secretary of State could abide, the undervote was more pronounced in counties that held large percentages of households below the federal poverty line. To put it another way, the

median county household income is negatively correlated with the rate of undervotes in counties (Kendall's Tau-b = -0.304, $p < .001$). It is a weak correlation, but a correlation nonetheless.

Sinclair and Alvarez (2004) demonstrated that women and minorities are more likely to have their ballots voided by undervotes and overvotes in a study that controlled for the type of method of election. Yet, other analyses have shown that the method of voting also plays a role in the rate of undervotes. Alvarez et al (2001) note that “manually counted paper ballots have the lowest average incidence of spoiled, uncounted, and unmarked ballots, followed closely by lever machines and optically scanned ballots. Punchcard methods and systems using direct recording electronic devices (DREs) had significantly higher average rates of spoiled, uncounted, and unmarked ballots than any of the other systems.” Hood and Bullock (2002) find that methods in Georgia in 2000 produced significant differences in undervote rates, and these differences tended to result in more undervotes in counties with poorer and minority voters. Consequently, minorities in Georgia—who were more likely to live in counties with methods producing higher than average undervotes—were systematically more likely to have their choice for president voided.

Reducing the Undervote

In order to level the playing field and reduce the overall level of undervotes, the Georgia Secretary of State proposed that the state adopt a uniform, fully electronic system for casting and counting votes. Every county in the state would be using the same touchscreen machines; the contract for supplying the machines and software went to Diebold, a nationally known company that also sells automatic banking machines. The new system was implemented statewide in time for the 2002 general election.

Because the new system was implemented in advance of the national Help American Vote Act of 2002, and no federal standards for election equipment had been mandated, the Georgia Secretary of State Cathy Cox chose a system without a paper trail, preferring to rely on electronic technology. Apart from the fact that no standards existed, Secretary Cox argued that a paper system was no more secure than a purely electronic system.

As far as reducing undervotes, the new system was a huge success. Comparing the 2000 Presidential Election to the 2004 Presidential Election, the rate of undervotes in Georgia fell from 3.5 percent to 0.4 percent. Additionally, the dramatic differences among counties also were reduced in dramatic fashion—from a low of 0.1 (Forsythe County) percent to only as high as 2 percent (Taliaferro County). Randolph County had seen its rate of undervotes fall from 15 percent to 1.2 percent, and the undervote rate in Bacon County fell from 10.5 percent to 0.9 percent.

Despite the reduction of undervotes, the relationship between undervotes and median household income grew stronger. The 2004 undervote rate is negatively correlated with median household income (Kendall's Tau-b = -0.604, $p < .001$) more strongly than the relationship between income and the 2000 undervote. In other words, as both the magnitude and the variance in undervote rates were reduced, the relevance of income became more pronounced.¹ Nevertheless, the story was that the vote count was now more accurate.

Not surprisingly, with the new system of elections came an increase in the public's confidence that its votes were being accurately counted. In general, the public had a high level of confidence in the new fully-electronic, touchscreen machines.

¹ It is possible that the various systems for casting ballots across counties, while increasing undervoting as a whole, actually ameliorated the impact on the traditionally undercounted voters. By eliminating variations in the means for casting and counting ballots, those who have traditionally been undercounted, were even less undercounted, but the undercount rate grew relative to wealthier counties.

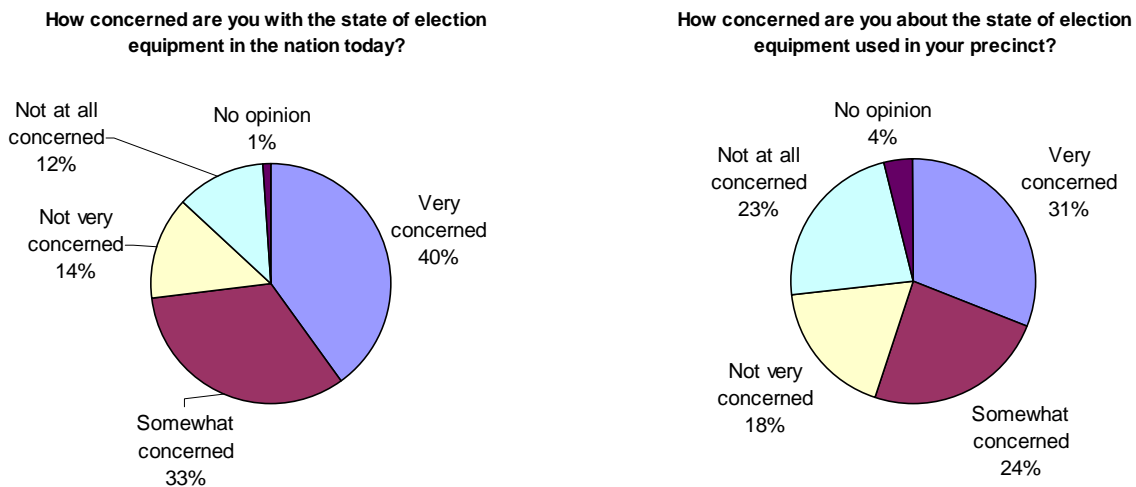
Public Confidence in the Reformed System of Elections

SEPTEMBER 2001

In September 2001, prior to the statewide establishment of the touchscreen voting machines, the Peach State Poll asked Georgians a few questions to assess their feelings about 2000 elections problems. This poll ran just after the September 11th terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon, and the public was in the “rally ‘round the flag” mode. Public confidence in governmental institutions was at an all-time high, and presidential approval was sky high. However, despite the record levels of public approval for George W. Bush in September 2001, there remained a lingering unease among many Georgians over the process of the 2000 Presidential Election and the problems associated with recording and counting votes.

Forty percent of Georgia residents said that they are very concerned about the state of the election equipment being used in the nation today, and an additional 33 percent said that they are somewhat concerned. Georgians express less concern about the equipment in their precinct—the very equipment that was being replaced—but still more than half of the public said that they were either very concerned (31 percent) or somewhat concerned (24 percent) about the equipment used in their precinct.

Figure 1: Concern for voting equipment nationally and locally



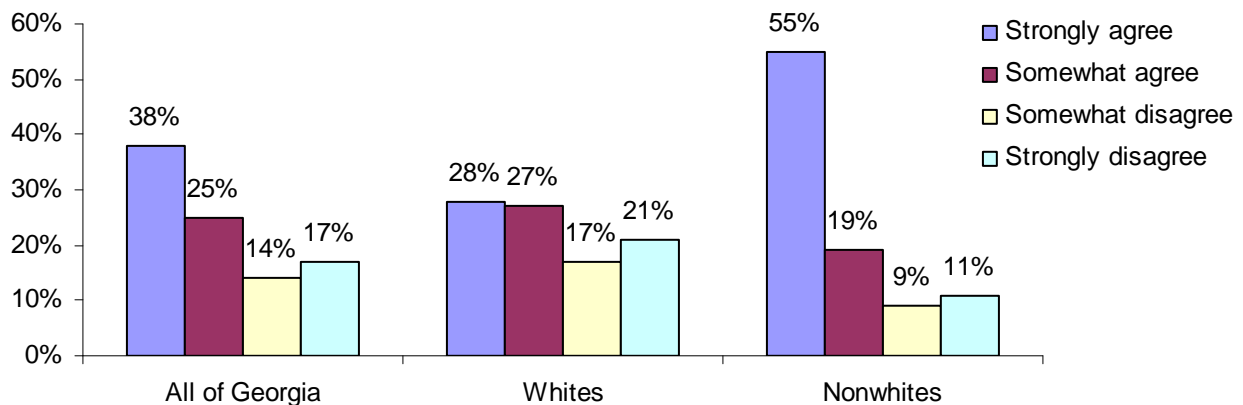
Those Georgians who claimed to be the most interested in news related to elections and voting were more concerned about the equipment used to record and count votes in their own precinct and in the nation than were those that who expressed little interest. Not surprisingly, likely voters were more apt to express high concern over the state of election equipment than were unlikely voters.² Seventy-eight percent of likely voters said that they were very concerned (47 percent) to

². A likely voter in this context is defined as someone (1) who professes to have voted in the previous election and (2) who asserts that he or she will vote in the coming election. Any respondent who does not meet both of these criteria is not considered to be a likely voter.

somewhat concerned (31 percent) about the state of election equipment in the nation, as opposed to only 64 percent of those unlikely to vote (29 percent were very concerned and 35 percent were somewhat concerned).

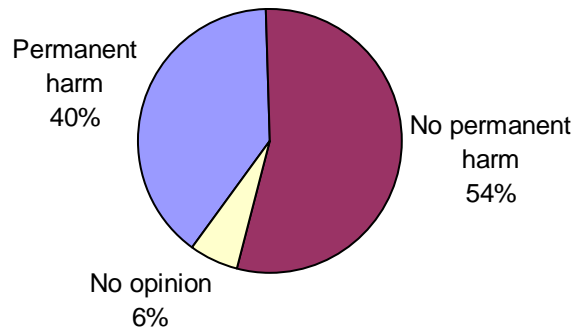
A majority of Georgia residents (63 percent) agreed that the problems experienced in Election 2000 had led to a decline in the public's faith in democracy. In addition to the depth of this conviction is an intensity that is rare; more Georgians were likely to feel strongly rather than moderately about this issue. This response is especially true among nonwhites, where a clear majority (55 percent) strongly agreed that the public's faith in democracy had been hurt. Seventy-four percent of Democrats, as opposed to 56 percent of Republicans, agreed that the problems associated with Election 2000 led to a decline in the public's faith in democracy—nearly half (48 percent) strongly agreeing with this sentiment.

Do you agree or disagree that the problems with counting votes in the last election have led to a decline in the public's faith in American democracy?



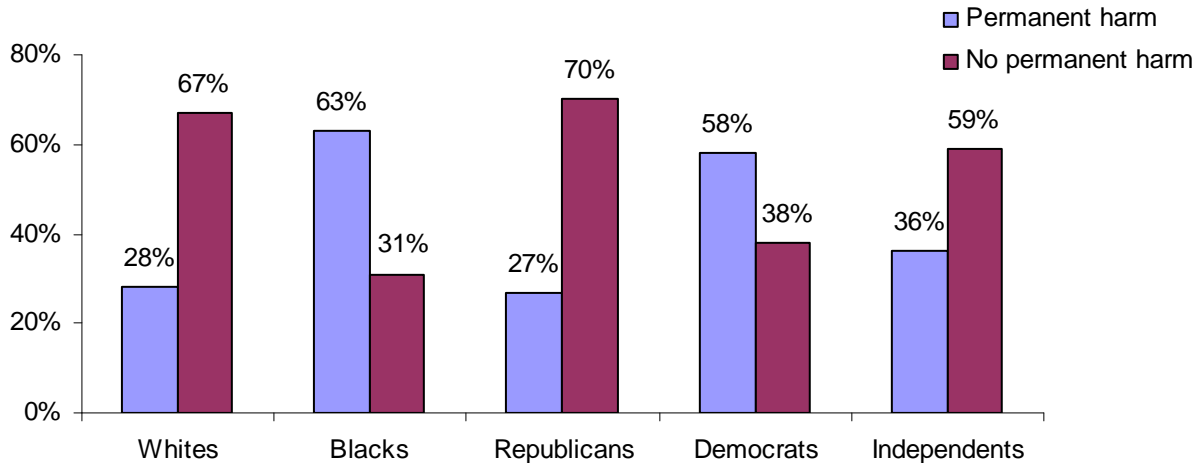
In December 2000—while the fracas over Florida's electoral votes was still unresolved—the Gallup Poll asked a national sample of respondents whether or not they believe that the problems surrounding the 2000 Presidential Election did permanent harm to the United States. At that time, 39 percent of the respondents said that permanent harm was done. Given the amount of time between the Gallup Poll and the September 2001 Peach State Poll, the strong wording of the question, and the impact of the 9/11 attacks, it would have been reasonable to expect that fewer people would see permanent damage from Election 2000. After all, the nation went on without any major civil unrest, and the President's approval ratings were sky high. Yet, despite this, 40 percent of Georgians said that they believed that the Election 2000 process did permanent harm to the nation—a percentage nearly identical to that found by the Gallup Poll 10 months earlier. This result is indicative of the deep-seated concerns among Georgians over the process by which Americans cast their ballots.

Which comes closer to your view: a) there has been permanent harm done to the United States as a result of the 2000 Presidential Election process, or b) there has been no permanent harm done?



Not surprisingly, not all Georgians felt equally that the 2000 Presidential Election process caused permanent harm. African Americans in Georgia were, and still are, far more likely to have a long-lasting and negative opinion about Election 2000 than were other Georgians, and Democrats are more likely to feel negatively than are Republicans or Independents. This negativity, however, should not be attributed to the outcome but rather to the process of the 2000 Presidential Election. Otherwise, we would expect to have found lower approval ratings for the president in national polls and a reduced level of confidence in governmental institutions, particularly the Supreme Court. However, the September 2001 Peach State Poll found that 48 percent of respondents had either "a great deal" or "quite a lot" of confidence in the U.S. Supreme Court. Less than one in five respondents expressed "very little" or no confidence in the nation's highest court (17 percent).

Which comes closest to your view: (a) there has been permanent harm done to the United States as a result of the 2000 Presidential Election process, or (b) there has been no permanent harm done?

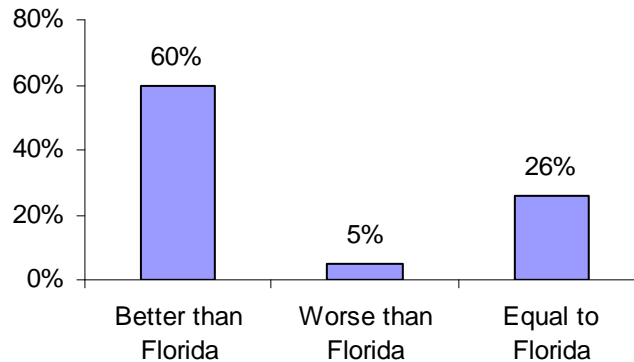


In response to their concern over the election process, a majority of Georgians (69 percent) in September 2001 supported increasing state spending for modernizing election equipment, although it is important to note that most were not in favor of raising taxes for that purpose. Fifty percent of the public disapproved of a hypothetical tax increase to fix the problems associated with Election 2000; 38 percent of the public said that they strongly disapproved. On the other hand, those classified as likely voters were also more willing to accept a tax increase, provided the extra state revenue is applied directly to fixing the problems with the election equipment. Fifty percent of likely voters say they strongly approve (28 percent) or somewhat approve (22 percent) of a slight increase in taxes to fix problems associated with last November's elections.

When asked which level of government should bear the greatest responsibility for fixing the problems concerning recording and counting votes in American elections, a plurality of Georgians (33 percent) looked to their state government, although just slightly fewer (29 percent) believe that the federal government bears primary responsibility.

As noted above, Georgians were more concerned with the national system for casting and counting votes than with their own precinct's system, despite the fact that the undercount in Georgia far surpassed the national average and was also well above that found in Florida in 2000. Despite this, Georgia residents believed that the system for recording and counting votes in their state was more accurate than that of Florida. Even a majority of those respondents who said that they were highly interested in election and voting news were convinced that Georgia fared better than Florida in terms of accurately counting the votes of the last election.

From what you've read and heard, do you think the system for recording and counting votes in Georgia is better than, worse than, or equal to that of Florida in terms of accuracy?

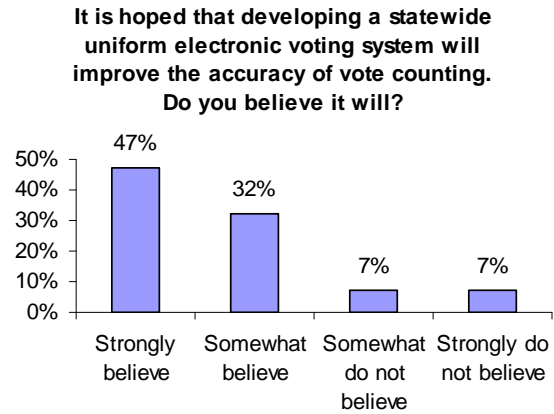
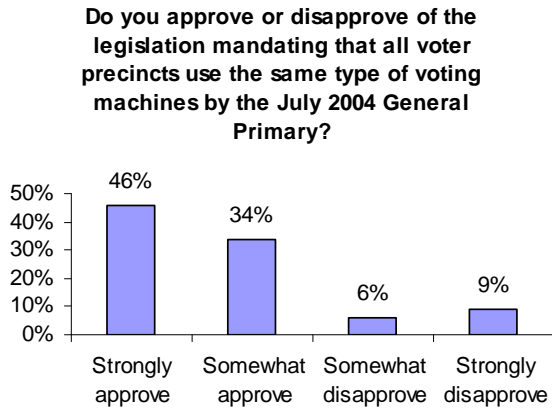


Those who said they planned to vote in the 2001 local elections that November were also quite confident that their votes would be counted accurately. In fact, those who planned to vote in the November 2001 election were somewhat more confident that their votes would be accurately counted in the upcoming election than they were that their vote in November 2000 had been counted accurately.

Perhaps feeding the public's faith that future votes would be accurately counted was their belief that state officials were actively working to improve Georgia's system for casting and counting ballots (64 percent). Additionally, four of every five Georgians said that they approved of the legislation, proposed by Secretary of State Cathy Cox and passed by the Georgia legislature in March 2001, that mandated that all voter precincts use the same type of voting machines by the July 2004 General Primary.³ Those most familiar with the legislation were even more likely to support it strongly. Most importantly, 79 percent of Georgians believed, in September 2001, that the legislation would improve the accuracy of vote counting.

The system proposed by the Secretary of State was fully operational by the 2002 general election.

³ The exact text of the question read as follows: "The Georgia State Legislature passed a law in March 2001 that mandates that all voter precincts will be using the same type of voting machines by the July 2004 General Primary. The state will purchase new machines, and the individual counties will be responsible for providing technical support. Do you approve or disapprove of this legislation?" In fact, the system of new machines was installed and functioning for the 2002 November General Election.



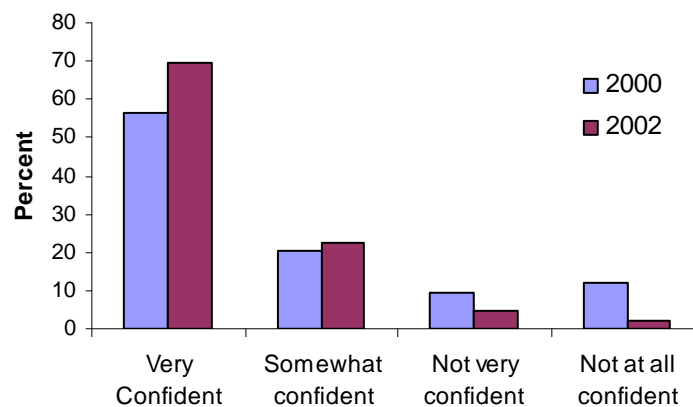
2002 Gubernatorial Election

In 2002, Georgia voters turned out a sitting governor and U.S. Senator in a surprise turn of events. Sonny Perdue, who once served in the state legislature as a Democrat, beat incumbent Governor Roy Barnes to become the first Republican Governor of Georgia since reconstruction. Polls had predicted Governor Barnes to win re-election fairly easily. Polls were not as conclusive on the likely fate of Democratic Senator Max Cleland, who was challenged by Republican Saxby Chambliss. Cathy Cox, who was running for re-election to the post of Secretary of State glided to an easy victory largely on her success in changing Georgia’s election system. This election was the first to fully implement the new touchscreen machines in every precinct throughout the state.

In December 2002, one month after the election, the Peach State Poll asked those who voted how confident they were that their votes were accurately counted. Seventy percent of voters said that they were very confident, and another 23 percent said that they were somewhat confident that their votes were accurately counted. In addition, 97 percent said of voters that they experienced no difficulties with the new voting machines.

The new touchscreen machines were roundly praised following the election, and voter confidence in the system’s accuracy increased over levels found following Election 2000.

How confident are you that your vote was accurately counted?



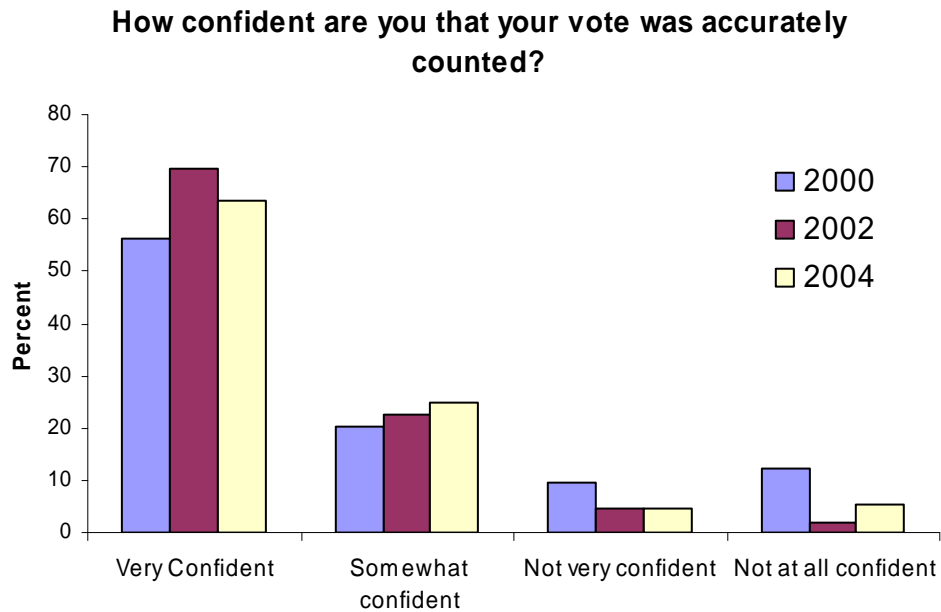
Ninety-one percent of Republicans that voted in November 2002 said that they were very confident that their vote was accurately counted; by contrast, 50 percent of Democrats said that they were very confident and 31 percent said that they were somewhat confident that their vote was accurately counted. The large and statistically significant difference in confidence in the counting of votes between Democrats and Republicans reflects the former party's frustration with the outcomes in both elections. In addition, only 40 percent of African American voters said that they were very confident that their vote was accurately counted.

Despite the differences found in party and race, the overall mood was positive in favor of the new election system in Georgia. A majority of Georgians (58 percent) in December 2002 said that they were either completely confident (31 percent) or mostly confident (27 percent) that the new voting machines would prevent the sort of problems that befell Florida in 2000. Only 10 percent said that they were either not very confident (6 percent) or not at all confident (4 percent) that the problems that Florida faced would be avoided in Georgia because of the new equipment.

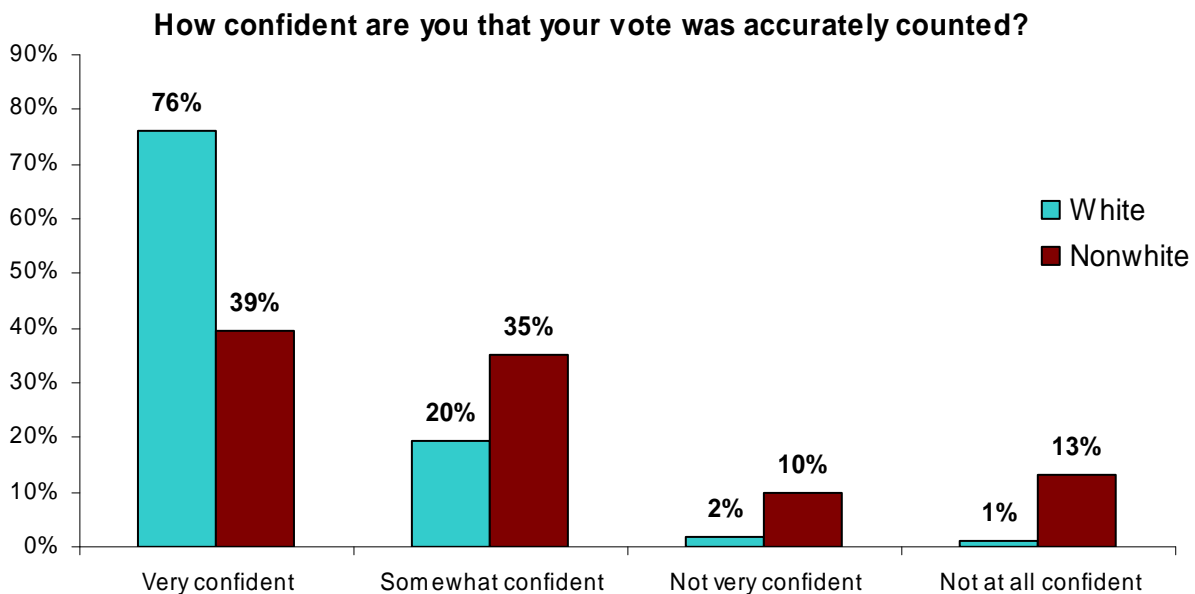
There was less confidence, however, that the rest of the nation was immune to the problems found in Election 2000. Only 47 percent of Georgians in 2002 said that they were either completely confident (22 percent) or mostly confident (25 percent) that the nation has solved the problems that Florida exposed in 2000.

2004 Election:

The general election of 2004 was the first presidential election in Georgia with the fully electronic system of casting and counting votes. The confidence among voters that their votes were accurately counted dropped slightly from 2002, the inaugural year of the touchscreen machines, but still remained well above levels found following Election 2000. One potential explanation for the drop in confidence may be the higher turnout due to the fact that 2004 was a presidential election year. In addition, the new system and the manufacturer of the new machines, Diebold, had been in the news a good deal, casting doubts among many Democratic voters.



Still, despite the high levels of confidence, there remained a significant gap between the views of whites and African Americans (and nonwhites generally) in Georgia. About three out of four white voters expressed a high level of confidence that their votes were accurately counted, while much less than half of nonwhite voters (39 percent) expressed a similarly high level of confidence. Additionally, almost one in four non-whites said that they were either not very confident (10 percent) or not at all confident (13 percent) that their votes were accurately counted.



Seventy percent of Georgians said that they were aware that the new touchscreen voting machines were implemented statewide, and 74 percent said that they had voted on the new machines by the 2004 election. In the wake of the 2004 Presidential Election, Georgians generally expressed a great deal of confidence in the touchscreen machines; a substantial majority of Georgians (59 percent) said that the new machines contributed to more accurate elections in the state.

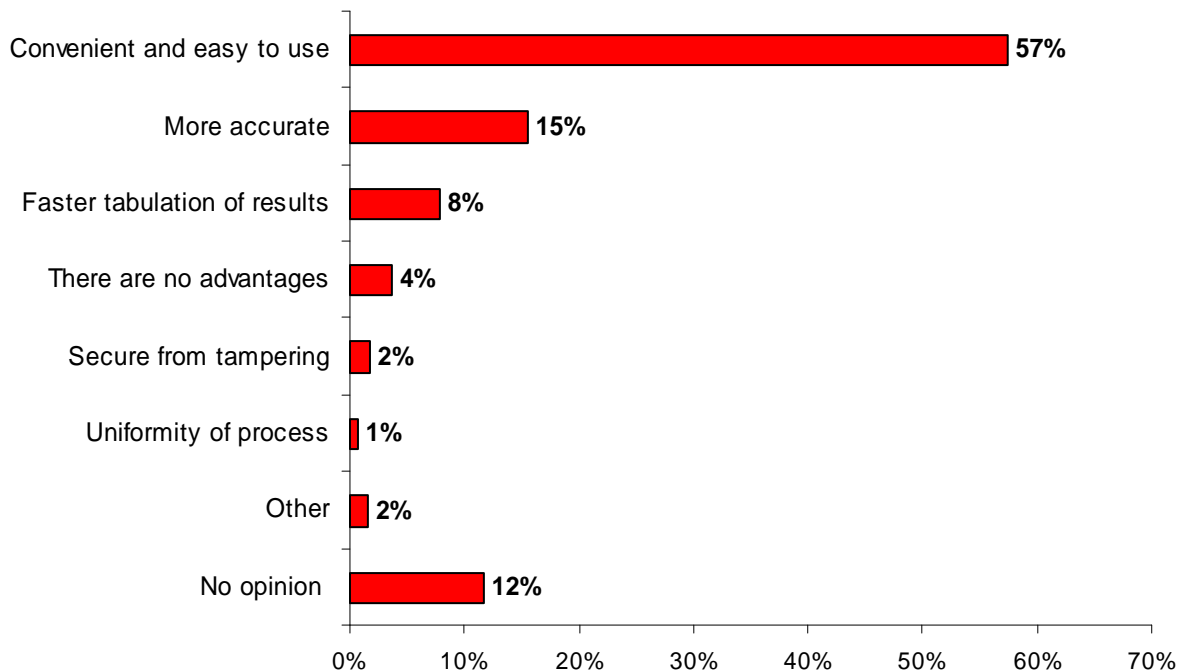
Racial disparities of opinion were still apparent following the 2004 election, and these differences even extended into opinions about the new voting equipment. Nonwhites were less likely to share the high opinion of the new voting equipment than were whites—although a plurality of nonwhites (48 percent) said that the touchscreen machines made for more accurate elections in Georgia. About one in three nonwhites (33 percent) said that the touchscreen machines make no difference in the accuracy of elections. It is important to note that nonwhites express about the same level of comfort with technology as do whites, so the differences in attitudes about the touchscreen machines does not likely reflect a discrepancy in comfort with the technology. Rather, it is likely that the lower level of support for the new machines is based on a deeper suspicion of the electoral system generally held by nonwhites as compared with whites.

Still, only 6 percent of the public overall (and 11 percent of nonwhites) said that the new machines contribute to less accurate elections following the November 2004 election. Clearly, the majority are enamored of the new fully electronic voting system. Republicans, whites, college educated, and those between the ages of 45 and 55 are the most likely to say that the new machines have made elections more accurate than in the past.

In openended questions, Georgians were asked to cite the greatest advantages and the greatest weaknesses associated with the new statewide touchscreen voting system. The public believed that the greatest advantage of the new electronic voting system was that the machines are

convenient and easy to use (57 percent), more accurate than previous means of voting (15 percent), and faster in tabulating the responses (8 percent). Interestingly, reducing errors seemed second in importance to convenience and speed in the public mind. In other words, while the impetus of implementing the new system was concern for accuracy of the count, the public's concern for this matter was secondary to making it easier—quicker and more convenient—to vote. The uniformity of the process—which leveled the undercount variance across counties—was cited by only a handful of respondents (1 percent).

Greatest Advantages of Fully Electronic Voting Machines



The greatest disadvantages of the new machines, as far as Georgians were concerned in wake of the 2004 election, were the potential for fraud (12 percent), the fact that programmers can make mistakes and the power grid can go down (11 percent), the fact that some people are intimidated by the new technology (11 percent), and the absence of a paper record for auditing the votes (9 percent). In addition to the 9 percent who cited others' reticence about technology, 4 percent cite the potential that others find the new machines difficult to use. Less than 1 percent of the respondents actually said they had any difficulty using the machines; instead, these respondents are concerned that others might find the machines difficult. One example is the respondent who said, "I think the new machines are not good because I saw a lot of people leaving without voting. They weren't able to get the help they needed."

Twenty-nine percent of Georgians believe that there are no disadvantages with the fully electronic voting machines. By contrast, only 4 percent believe that there are no advantages with the new system. Clearly, the number of Georgians enamored of the new system was far greater than the number disenchanted with it.

Disadvantages of Electronic Voting Machines



The February 2005 Peach State Poll posed a number of possible reforms that could make voting more convenient or less stressful for Georgian voters. Of the reform options offered in the poll, the most popular was extending the hours of advanced voting to accommodate those who work long hours (supported by 88 percent); adding weekends to advanced voting was the second most popular reform option (supported by 77 percent). Unfortunately, the question wording chosen for extending the hours of voting introduced a possible source of bias. It is likely that including the reference to people who work long hours led to overrepresentation of support for extending voting hours. Consequently, we cannot be sure if the high level of support is for (a) extending the hours of advanced voting, (b) for making voting more convenient for working people, or (c) for the combination of making voting more convenient for working people by extending the hours.

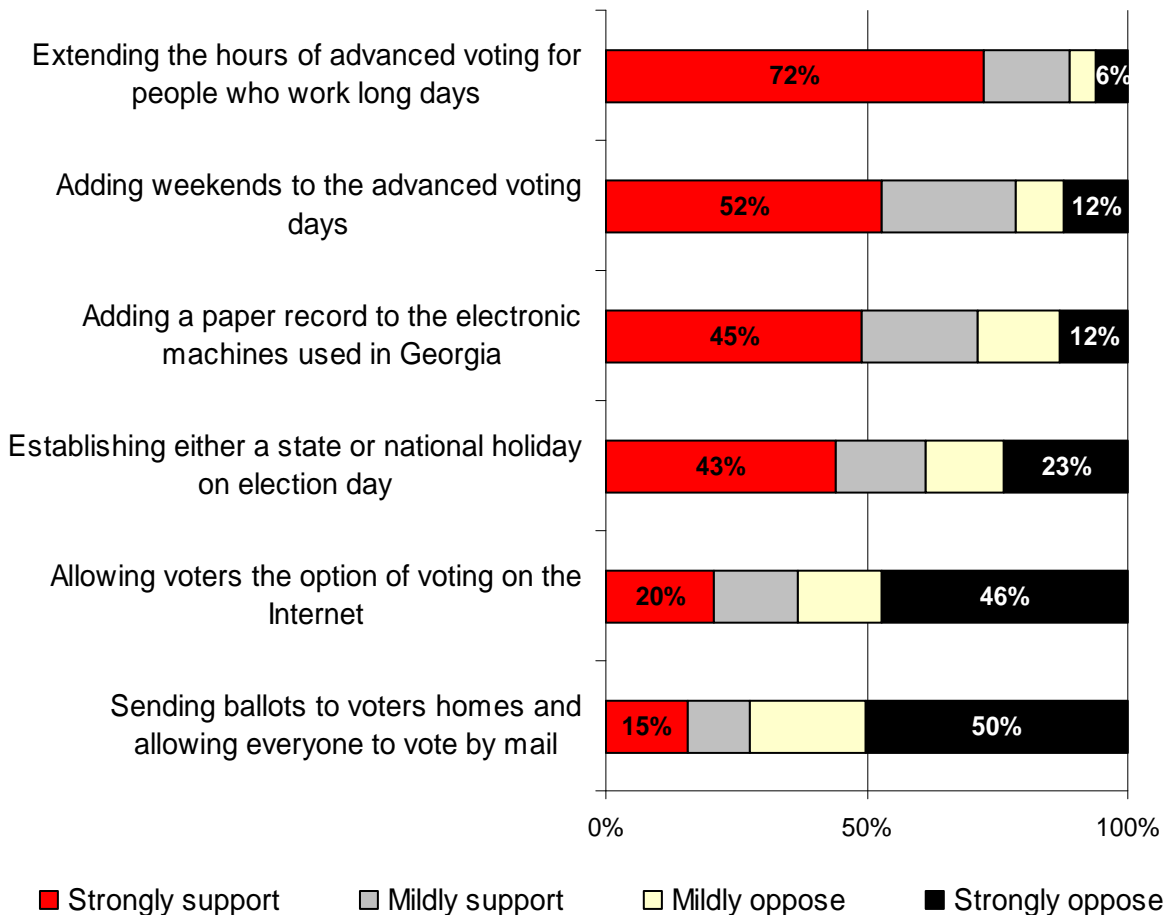
Two proposals that were opposed by majorities of Georgians were allowing all citizens the option of voting by mail (opposed by 71 percent) and opening up voting via the Internet (opposed by 62 percent). There was no significant difference in the level of support for allowing Internet voting between those who express high levels of comfort with technology and those who say they are uncomfortable with technology; in other words, those who feel comfortable using new technology are no more likely to support allowing the public to vote over the Internet.

One's professed comfort with technology is also unrelated to one's support for having a paper record of the electronic votes. While those who are less comfortable with technology were

slightly more supportive of requiring a paper record, the difference did not meet the threshold for statistical significance. However, nonwhites were significantly more likely to support adding a paper record than were whites ($t = 4.021, p < .001$). In addition, Democrats are far more likely than Republicans to support the paper record, even when controlling for race. In other words, white Democrats are significantly more likely than white Republicans to support this option ($t = 4.806, p < .001$). While there exists a significant correlation between a lack of confidence that one’s vote was counted accurately and one’s support for adding a paper tabulation of votes, the relationship is not particularly strong (Cramer’s $V = .197$).⁴

The support for having a paper record of the vote was the only option offered that received any significant mention in the open-ended questions that preceded these questions; 9 percent of the respondents referenced the lack of a paper trail or the total reliance on an electronic tabulation as the greatest problem with the fully electronic system.

Support and Opposition for Reform Options



⁴ It is important to remember that those who did not vote were still asked about their support for a paper trail, although their responses are not included in the correlation coefficient. All missing values, including those who respond with a “no opinion” to either question, are dropped from the calculation.

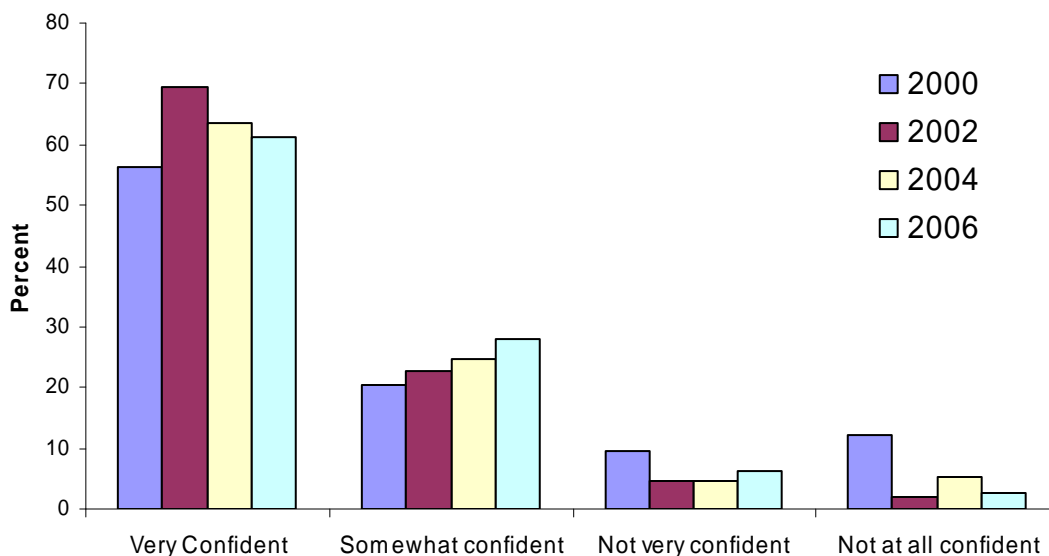
2006 Election:

After the 2006 general election, the Peach State Poll again asked Georgians about the fully electronic system for voting. In November 2006, the state’s incumbent Republican governor was reelected by wide margin, the state elected a Republican to the post of Lieutenant Governor for the first time since Reconstruction, the office of Secretary of State went from Democratic to Republican hands, and the Republicans increased their majorities in the State legislature. While the Democratic Party performed very well nationally, in Georgia it lost ground with the exception of picking up two Congressional seats in very competitive House districts.

It is important to note that with the 2006 elections, the responsibility for elections in Georgia switched to a Republican Secretary of State. And the prospect of recounts were very high in two of the Congressional races. A recount, involving the new system—which lacked any paper trail—amounted to simply running the totals from the computers multiple times. If a disparity arose in different tallies, it would have been impossible to know which of the tallies was accurate or more accurate as the case may be.

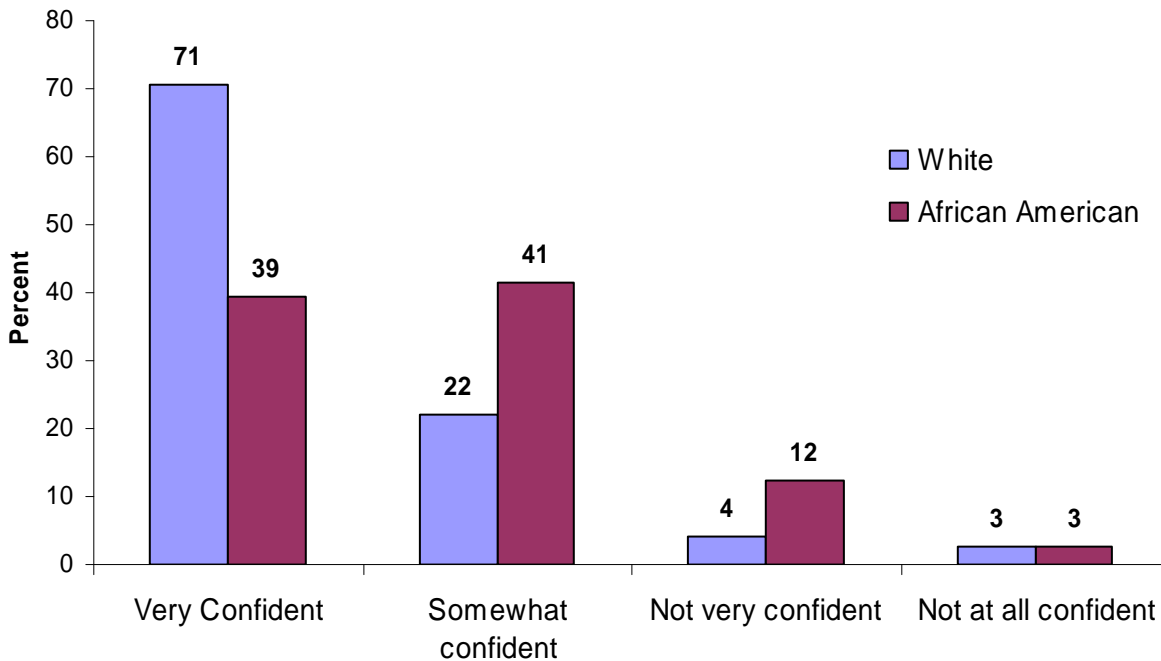
Still, confidence in the touchscreen machines remained high. In fact, levels of confidence did not vary much from the previous election in 2004. How and when one voted in the 2006 election was significantly related to one’s level of confidence. Those who voted absentee ballots had the lowest level of extreme confidence (47 percent). This was the only group not using the new electronic system; in fact, absentee ballots are hand counted of necessity. Those who voted in advance—taking advantage of advanced voting on the touchscreen machines—had a lower level of extreme confidence (56 percent) than those who voted on Election Day (64 percent) but a higher level of confidence than those who voted absentee.

How confident are you that your vote was accurately counted?



While the public generally expressed a high level of confidence that their votes were accurately counted (61 percent, very confident; 28 percent, somewhat confident), the Peach State Poll still found a wide disparity between the confidence level of whites and nonwhites, particularly African-American voters whose confidence was lowest among all race and ethnic groups.

How confident are you that your vote was accurately counted?



As in 2004, the majority of the public (52 percent) following the 2006 election said that the single greatest advantage of the new machines over the old system of casting votes is that the new machines are fast and easy to use; only 10 percent cited greater accuracy in counting votes as the greatest advantage, despite the fact that the perceived need for the new machines was based on a sense that the earlier system lacked accuracy.

Of Georgians who claim to have voted in the 2006 general elections (63 percent of the entire sample), 80 percent say that they voted on election day, while only 13 percent say that they voted prior to election day, known as advance voting. The remaining 6 percent say that they used absentee ballots.⁵ Figures from the Secretary of State’s office show that only 9 percent of voters in the 2006 general election actually voted in advance and 8 percent voted by absentee ballot—numbers lower than the Peach State Poll data suggest but not outside what might be expected considering the standard error due to sampling. Nevertheless, the data allow us to compare the

⁵ These figures add to just below 100 percent as a result of rounding.

experiences of advance and absentee voters with those voters who cast ballots in their precincts on Election Day.

Thirty-eight percent of voters, assuming that they voted either by advance voting or at their precinct on Election Day, said that they had no wait in line for voting. For those who did have to wait in line, the average length of time was 21 minutes.⁶ Voting on Election Day or by advance voting made no difference in the overall length of wait or whether voters had to wait at all. White voters were slightly more likely than nonwhites to report not having to wait in line at all to vote (40 percent compared with 34 percent), and white voters who did wait reported waiting significantly less time than nonwhite voters (16 and 29 minutes, respectively) ($t = 4.366$, $p < .0001$).

⁶ If we factor in zero minutes for those who say that they did not wait in line at all, then the average time in line for all voters is 13 minutes.

Conclusions

In sum, the Georgia public's confidence in the statewide system for casting and counting votes has remained high since the Secretary of State's office implemented the touchscreen voting machines. While the public favors the idea of establishing a paper trail, the lack of a paper trail has not led to a lack of confidence in the system—although it is possible that adding a paper trail would further increase the level of confidence.

Despite the fact that the Georgia Secretary of State established the touchscreen voting system out of concern for the accuracy of counting votes, the broad appeal of the fully-electronic system is speed and convenience. Concern that the new system could be manipulated, or concern that a recount would be wholly unrevealing, were not on the public's mind as the Peach State Poll queried Georgians about the system for casting and counting votes.

What cannot be overlooked, however, as one considers the confidence in Georgia elections is the fact that African-Americans, particularly, and nonwhites more generally, are less confident in the system than are whites. Given the history in Georgia of disenfranchisement of blacks, the discrepancy in levels of confidence suggests a real hurdle that the Georgia Secretary of State needs to jump; it is not enough to actually improve the accuracy of counting votes—if in fact the new system does improve the accuracy in addition to reducing the undervote—but it is also necessary that the public believe that the system is fair. And if one major minority group within the public believes that the system is not fair, the credibility of the entire system is undermined.

American democracy, based on John Locke's notion of government by consent of the governed, demands public acceptance in the fairness of the system. Legitimacy of American government stems from the belief that those in office came to their position through a fair process, based on one man, one vote, and the notion that no group is unfairly excluded from the political process. The thirteenth and fourteenth amendments to the Constitution, the women's suffrage movement, and the civil rights movement all eventually came to be supported by nearly all Americans because they leveled the political playing field and appealed the notion of fairness. Concerns among African-American voters following the Election 2000 debacle cannot be dismissed among concerns for updating the antiquated and problematic means by which most Americans have casted their ballots.

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