



# VIEWS ON THE AMERICAN ELECTION PROCESS AND PERCEPTIONS OF VOTER FRAUD

Many Americans have reservations about the integrity of the voting system in this country. Recent computer hacks at major federal agencies, large corporations, and the Democratic National Committee have generated discussion about possible attempts to interfere with the 2016 election results.<sup>1</sup>

In the latest poll conducted by The Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research, most Americans think there is at least some fraud in elections, and 8 in 10 approve of laws that require voters to show photo identification, legislation with a stated aim of preventing such voter fraud. Those who say election fraud takes place are particularly likely to favor such laws.

Along with these misgivings, only about 4 in 10 Americans have a high degree of confidence that the votes in the 2016 presidential election will be counted correctly. However, most people think new technology introduced in the wake of the controversial 2000 presidential election has made vote counts more accurate.

The nationwide poll of 1,022 adults was part of the AmeriSpeak® Omnibus, a monthly multi-client survey using NORC at the University of Chicago's probability-based panel. Interviews were conducted between September 15 and 18, 2016, online and using landlines and cell phones.



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## Three Things You Should Know

About the AP-NORC Poll

Among all American adults:

- 1) Thirty-five percent say there is a great deal of election fraud in the United States, 39 percent say there is some election fraud, and only 24 percent say there is hardly any.
- 2) Forty-one percent are very concerned and 35 percent are somewhat concerned about how susceptible the country's election system is to hacking. Just 23 percent express little concern.
- 3) Only 4 in 10 have a lot of confidence that the vote counts will be accurate this year. Three in 10 are moderately confident, and another 3 in 10 have little or no confidence in this year's vote counts.

<sup>1</sup> [http://www.nytimes.com/2016/08/14/opinion/campaign-stops/the-election-wont-be-rigged-but-it-could-be-hacked.html?\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2016/08/14/opinion/campaign-stops/the-election-wont-be-rigged-but-it-could-be-hacked.html?_r=0); <http://time.com/4500216/election-voting-machines-hackers-security>

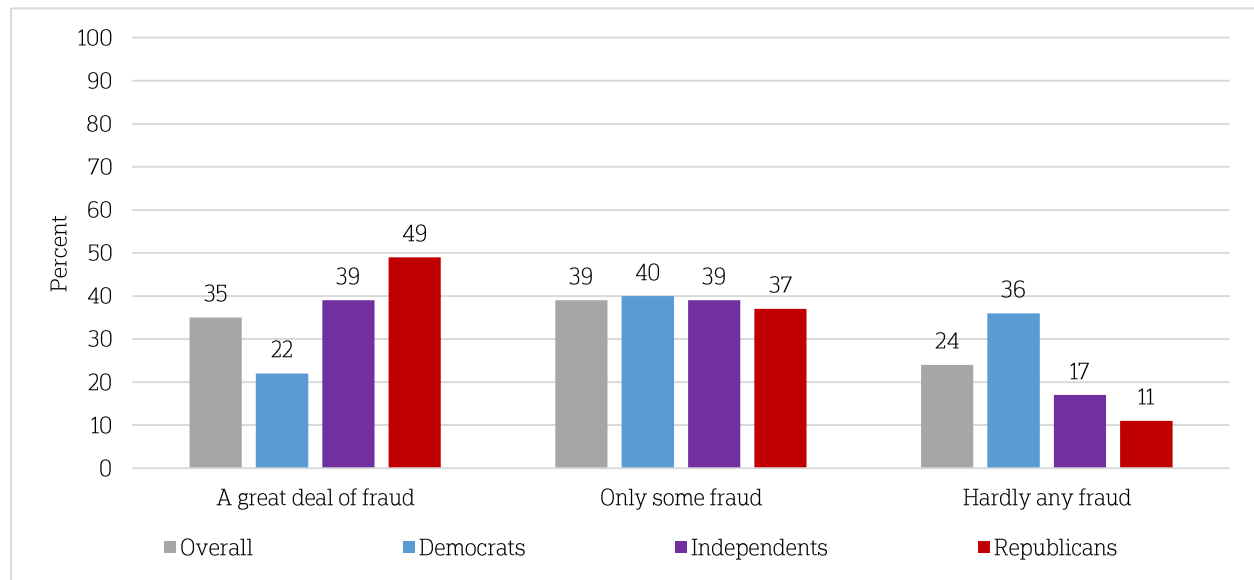
Some of the poll's key findings are:

- There has been little evidence of systematic voter fraud, yet a third of the public thinks there is a great deal of voter fraud in U.S. elections, and about 4 in 10 say there is some fraud. Only a quarter think there is hardly any fraud.
- In recent years, legislation requiring voters to provide valid photo identification in order to cast a ballot has been enacted in several states. Many of these laws have been struck down by the courts. However, 8 in 10 Americans approve of voter identification laws, with more than 6 in 10 saying they strongly support such measures. Those who say there is a great deal of election fraud are especially supportive of voter identification laws, with 77 percent strongly in favor.
- Although the Department of Homeland Security reports no credible cyberthreat to the 2016 election results, the public has widespread concerns about the vulnerability of the country's voting system to hackers. Forty-one percent of Americans are quite concerned about the security of the election, and 35 percent are somewhat concerned. Only 23 percent express little concern.
- In addition to questions about the integrity of the nation's election system, only 39 percent have a great deal or quite a bit of confidence that votes will be counted correctly. Twenty-nine percent are moderately confident, and 31 percent have little or no confidence that the vote counts for president will be accurate this year.
- In addition to uncertainty about the validity of the electoral process, the public has little confidence in the country's democratic institutions in general. A poll conducted by The AP-NORC Center in May found even fewer Americans with a great deal of confidence in the political process or in any of the three branches of government.
- Since the 2000 presidential election, extensive changes have been made in how Americans vote. Nearly 6 in 10 think new technology introduced in recent years has made vote counting more precise. Only 15 percent say new technology has hurt the accuracy of vote counting, and about 3 in 10 think it has not made any difference.
- Most states allow eligible voters to cast a ballot before Election Day, either during the early voting period or with an absentee ballot. Sixty percent of the public approve of giving voters a chance to cast their ballots before Election Day.
- Few Americans say the two-party system works fairly well, while about 4 in 10 say the two-party system is seriously broken. Another 4 in 10 say the two-party system has real problems but, with improvements, can still work.

## MOST AMERICANS THINK THERE IS AT LEAST SOME ELECTION FRAUD, BUT ARE CONFIDENT VOTES WILL BE COUNTED ACCURATELY.

Although there has been little evidence of voter fraud,<sup>2</sup> 35 percent of the public thinks there is a great deal of fraud, like voting by people who are not eligible and people casting multiple ballots, in U.S. elections. Thirty-nine percent say there is some voter fraud, and only 24 percent think there is hardly any fraud. Republicans and independents are more inclined than Democrats to say there is a great deal of election fraud in the United States.

### Democrats are least likely to say there is a great deal of fraud in American elections.



**Question: How much voter fraud do you think there is in American elections, that is, people voting who are not eligible or people casting multiple ballots?**

Although the Department of Homeland Security reports no specific threat to the cybersecurity of the 2016 election results,<sup>3</sup> the public has widespread concerns about the vulnerability of the country's voting system to hackers. Forty-one percent are extremely or very concerned about the security of the election, and 35 percent are somewhat concerned. Only 23 percent are not very or not at all concerned. More Republicans (52 percent) than either Democrats (35 percent) or independents (33 percent) are very or extremely concerned.

Those who are concerned about the election's susceptibility to being hacked are more likely to say there are high levels of voter fraud, with 56 percent of those who are very concerned or more about hacking saying they think there is a great deal of fraud compared to just 26 percent of those who say they are only somewhat concerned and 12 percent of those who say they are not very or not at all concerned.

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.nytimes.com/2007/04/12/washington/12fraud.html?ex=1334289600&en=7ca7e26e09dfa4d8&ei=5124&partner=permalink&exprod=permalink>; <http://www.brennancenter.org/issues/voter-fraud>

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.nass.org/news-releases-and-statements/release-nass-statement-cyber-security-election-readiness>; <https://www.dhs.gov/news/2016/08/15/readout-secretary-johnson-call-state-election-officials-cybersecurity>

Elections are an essential aspect of democracy, and belief in their accuracy is fundamental to people's trust in the legitimacy of the government. Only 4 in 10 Americans have a great deal or quite a bit of confidence that votes will be accurately counted. Three in 10 have a moderate amount of confidence, and another 3 in 10 have only a little or no confidence at all. Just 16 percent have a great deal of confidence that votes will be counted accurately this year.

Party differences emerge, with nearly half of Democrats but just a third of Republicans and a quarter of independents expressing a lot of confidence.

Confidence in the accuracy of vote counting is correlated with perceived levels of fraud and the system's vulnerability to hacking. More than three-quarters of those who say there is hardly any fraud have quite a bit of confidence in the accuracy of the vote count compared to just 12 percent of those who say there is a great deal of fraud. And, those who have little or no concern about hacking are more confident in the vote count than those who are very concerned (56 percent vs. 30 percent).

**Confidence in the accuracy of the 2016 presidential election vote count relates to how much fraud people think there is in American elections.**



**Question: How much confidence do you have that the votes in the 2016 presidential election will be counted accurately?**

However, the public's confidence in all aspects of government is low. In The AP-NORC Center poll taken in May, only 24 percent had a great deal of confidence in the Supreme Court. Confidence in the other two branches of government was even more dismal: 15 percent were very confident in the executive branch, and only 4 percent had a great deal of confidence in Congress. Only 10 percent has faith in the overall political system of the United States.<sup>4</sup>

The Gallup Poll has been asking the public about confidence in the country's key institutions for more than 40 years. Americans have been losing faith in many institutions over the years, with banking, organized religion, the news media, and Congress taking the biggest hits over the last 10 years.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>4</sup> [http://www.apnorc.org/PDFs/Voting/APNORC\\_Elections\\_Toplevel.pdf](http://www.apnorc.org/PDFs/Voting/APNORC_Elections_Toplevel.pdf)

<sup>5</sup> <http://www.gallup.com/poll/192581/americans-confidence-institutions-stays-low.aspx> <http://www.gallup.com/poll/1597/Confidence-Institutions.aspx?version=print>

In the aftermath of the controversial 2000 presidential election, Congress passed the Help America Vote Act (HAVA)<sup>6</sup> in 2002, to reform the nation's voting process. Widespread improvements, including the implementation of new technology, have changed how Americans vote and how votes are counted. Today, a majority (57 percent) say this technology has made vote counting more accurate. Only 15 percent say new technology has hurt the accuracy of vote counting, and nearly 3 in 10 think it has not made any difference. Democrats are the most likely to say this has improved the accuracy of vote counting (65 percent), followed by Republicans (54 percent), with independents the least likely to say so (41 percent).

## **MAJORITIES SUPPORT BOTH EARLY VOTING AND VOTER ID LAWS.**

Most states have a method for eligible voters to cast a ballot before Election Day, either during the early voting period or by requesting an absentee ballot. All states will mail an absentee ballot when requested. In 37 states and Washington, DC, any qualified voter may cast a ballot in person during a designated period prior to Election Day. Three of those states mail ballots to all voters. There are 13 states where early voting is not available and an excuse is required for an absentee ballot.<sup>7</sup>

Most Americans (60 percent) approve of giving voters a chance to cast their ballots before Election Day. Just 13 percent oppose early voting, while 26 percent neither favor nor oppose it. Democrats are particularly likely to favor it. Studies of early voting indicate that it tends to improve turnout among minorities and young voters, who are more likely to support Democratic candidates.<sup>8</sup>

Another potential change to election laws is a requirement for all voters to provide valid photo identification at their voting place in order to cast a ballot. In recent years, however, such laws have been struck down by the courts in several states, including North Carolina,<sup>9</sup> Texas,<sup>10</sup> and Wisconsin.<sup>11</sup>

Despite these legal challenges, even more Americans favor this policy than early voting. Eight in 10 approve of such voter identification laws, just 11 percent oppose them, and 9 percent neither favor nor oppose. While most Americans, regardless of party identification, favor these measures, Republicans overwhelmingly support them. Analysis of voter identification laws suggests they can suppress turnout of voters who often vote Democratic, particularly minorities and younger Americans.<sup>12</sup>

The rationale for voter identification laws is generally to hinder election fraud. Those who think there is some or a great deal of fraud in elections are more supportive of them than those who say there is hardly any fraud (85 percent vs. 59 percent).

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<sup>6</sup> [http://www.eac.gov/about\\_the\\_eac/help\\_america\\_vote\\_act.aspx](http://www.eac.gov/about_the_eac/help_america_vote_act.aspx)

<sup>7</sup> <http://www.ncsl.org/research/elections-and-campaigns/absentee-and-early-voting.aspx>

<sup>8</sup> <http://www.scholarsstrategynetwork.org/brief/when-florida-rolled-back-early-voting-minorities-were-especially-affected>

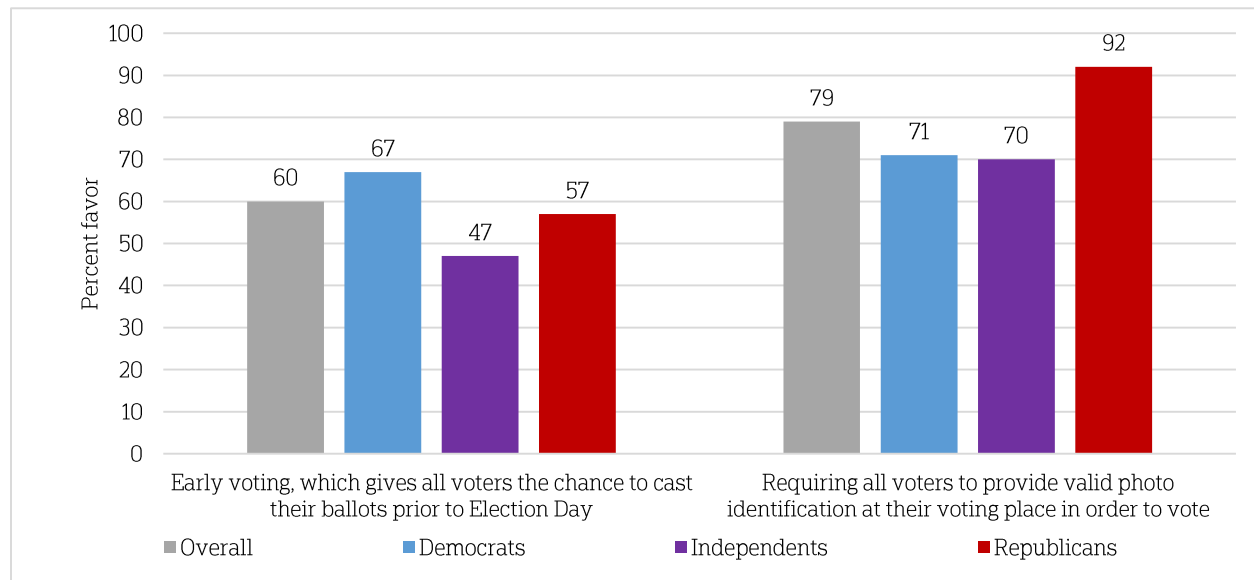
<sup>9</sup> <http://www.nytimes.com/2016/09/01/us/politics/north-carolina-supreme-court-voting-rights-act.html>

<sup>10</sup> <http://www.nytimes.com/2016/07/21/us/federal-court-rules-texas-id-law-violates-voting-rights-act.html>

<sup>11</sup> <http://www.nytimes.com/2014/10/10/us/politics/supreme-court-blocks-wisconsin-voter-id-law.html>

<sup>12</sup> <http://www.gao.gov/assets/670/665966.pdf>

## Democrats are most in favor of allowing early voting, while Republicans are most in favor of a photo ID requirement for voting.



**Question: Do you favor, neither favor nor oppose, or oppose each of the following election-law policies?**

In the United States, nearly all elected officials belong to one of two major parties. But, few Americans say the two-party system is working. Just 1 in 10 say the two-party system is working even fairly well, while about 4 in 10 say the two-party system is seriously broken. About 4 in 10 take the middle road, saying the two-party system has real problems, but can still work with some improvements. Despite this apparent dissatisfaction, few third-party candidates gain much traction in elections. Gary Johnson, the Libertarian candidate this year, is only getting an average of 7 percent in the polls.<sup>13</sup>

## ABOUT THE STUDY

### Survey Methodology

This survey was conducted by The Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research and with funding from NORC at the University of Chicago. Data were collected using AmeriSpeak Omnibus®, a monthly multi-client survey using NORC's probability-based panel designed to be representative of the U.S. household population. The survey was part of a larger study that included questions about other topics not included in this report. During the initial recruitment phase of the panel, randomly selected U.S. households were sampled with a known, non-zero probability of selection from the NORC National Sample Frame and then contacted by U.S. mail, email, telephone, and field interviewers (face-to-face).

<sup>13</sup> [http://www.realclearpolitics.com/epolls/2016/president/us/general\\_election\\_trump\\_vs\\_clinton\\_vs\\_johnson\\_vs\\_stein-5952.html](http://www.realclearpolitics.com/epolls/2016/president/us/general_election_trump_vs_clinton_vs_johnson_vs_stein-5952.html)

Interviews for this survey were conducted between September 15 and 18, 2016, with adults age 18 and over representing the 50 states and the District of Columbia. Panel members were randomly drawn from AmeriSpeak, and 1,022 completed the survey—821 via the web and 201 via telephone. The final stage completion rate is 29.6 percent, the weighted household panel response rate is 26.2 percent, and the weighted household panel retention rate is 95.0 percent, for a cumulative response rate of 7.4 percent. The overall margin of sampling error is +/- 3.7 percentage points at the 95 percent confidence level, including the design effect. The margin of sampling error may be higher for subgroups.

Once the sample has been selected and fielded, and all the study data have been collected and made final, a poststratification process is used to adjust for any survey nonresponse as well as any non-coverage or under- and oversampling resulting from the study specific sample design. Poststratification variables included age, gender, census division, race/ethnicity, and household phone status. The weighted data, which reflect the U.S. population of adults age 18 and over, were used for all analyses.

All differences reported between subgroups of the U.S. population are at the 95 percent level of statistical significance, meaning that there is only a 5 percent (or lower) probability that the observed differences could be attributed to chance variation in sampling.

A comprehensive listing of the questions, complete with tabulations of top-level results for each question, is available on The AP-NORC Center website: [www.apnorc.org](http://www.apnorc.org).

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