



The Associated Press-NORC
Center for Public Affairs Research

CONCERNS ABOUT THE VULNERABILITY OF THE ELECTION SYSTEM AHEAD OF THE 2018 MIDTERMS

Many Americans lack confidence in the security and accuracy of the country's voting system heading into the 2018 midterm elections. The public's overall concern about the vulnerability of the election system to hackers has changed little since 2016, but there have been dramatic shifts in the relative opinions of Democrats and Republicans.

The new UChicago Harris/AP-NORC Poll finds Democrats have grown increasingly concerned about election security in the last two years, while Republicans have grown more confident.

Most believe state, local, and federal election officials, as well as intelligence and national security agencies, should take responsibility for addressing the security of elections. Fewer, but still a majority, say Congress and the president should have a great deal or quite a bit of responsibility.

When it comes to how people vote, the public has the most confidence when there is a voting machine with a paper record, which is the most popular voting method in the country and was used by about 61 percent of jurisdictions in 2016.¹

In contrast, fewer Americans are confident that votes are accurately counted with newer election methods such as online voting or elections conducted only with mail-in ballots.



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Three Things You Should Know

About the UChicago Harris/AP-NORC Poll Among American Adults:

- 1) Seventy-six percent are at least somewhat concerned the final vote count is vulnerable to hackers, including 44 percent who are very concerned.
- 2) Republicans are more likely than Democrats to have confidence in the accuracy of vote counts in the upcoming midterms (54 percent vs. 36 percent), which is a reversal of attitudes from 2016 when 49 percent of Democrats, but just 32 percent of Republicans, had a lot of confidence in the vote counts.
- 3) Only 28 percent favor the use of online voting in their states, and only 19 percent favor the exclusive use of mail-in ballots.

¹ U.S. Election Assistance Commission, *EA VS Deep Dive: Election Technology*, Silver Spring, MD: EAC, 2018.
<https://www.eac.gov/documents/2018/05/01/eavs-deep-dive-election-technology/>

The nationwide poll was conducted by the University of Chicago Harris School of Public Policy and The Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research from September 13 to 16, 2018, using AmeriSpeak®, the probability-based panel of NORC at the University of Chicago. Online and telephone interviews using landlines and cell phones were conducted with 1,059 adults. The margin of sampling error is +/- 4.3 percentage points.

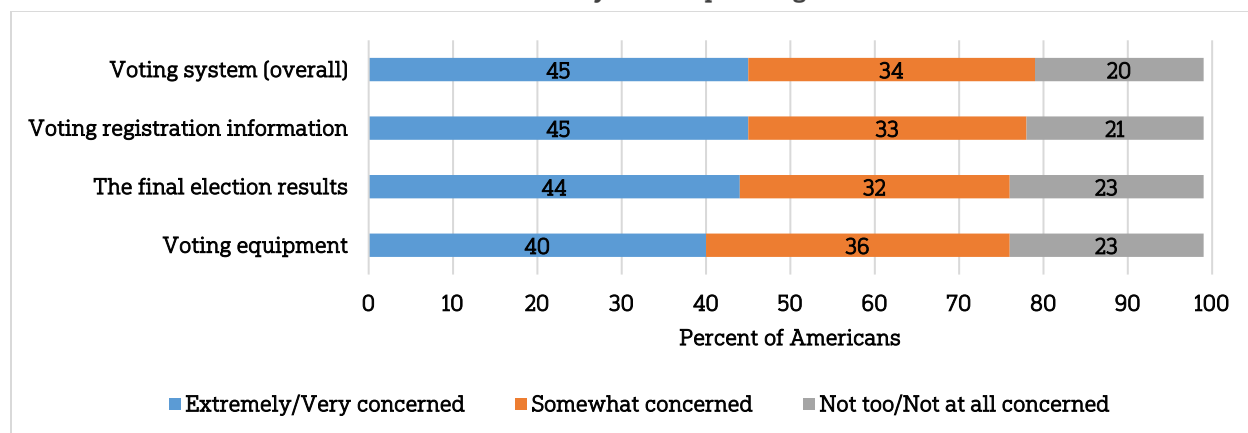
Other key findings from the poll include:

- More than 40 percent are very concerned about the potential hacking of each of the following: voting registration information, voting equipment, and final election results.
- There has been little change in the portion of the public that has a great deal of confidence in the accuracy of vote counts compared to 2016 (40 percent vs. 39 percent).
- Republicans are less likely to be very concerned about hackers impacting U.S. election systems than are Democrats (39 percent vs. 58 percent), whereas in 2016 Republicans were more likely than Democrats to be very concerned (52 percent vs. 35 percent).
- Seventy-nine percent of people say intelligence and national security agencies should have a great deal of responsibility for election security, while only 51 percent say the same about the president and 64 percent say the same about Congress.
- Eighty-eight percent have at least some confidence in the accuracy of vote counts with electronic machines that provide paper receipts, and 83 percent have confidence in paper ballots scanned into a machine, while only 66 percent have such confidence in electronic voting machines that do not provide paper receipts.

A MAJORITY LACK CONFIDENCE THAT VOTES IN THE 2018 MIDTERM ELECTIONS WILL BE COUNTED ACCURATELY.

The public has concerns about the accuracy of the upcoming midterm elections and the vulnerability of voting systems to hackers. Only 40 percent have quite a bit or a great deal of confidence votes will be counted accurately, while 37 percent have a moderate amount of confidence and 22 percent have only a little or none at all.

A vast majority are at least somewhat concerned the country's voting system might be vulnerable to hackers, including 45 percent who are very concerned. Only 20 percent are not too concerned. When asked about specific aspects of election security, the public expresses similarly high levels of concerns about hacking of voting registration information, voting equipment, and final election results.

Most Americans have concerns about the security of the upcoming midterm elections.

Questions: How concerned are you that the country's voting system might be vulnerable to hackers? / How concerned are you that each of the following might be vulnerable to hackers?

Source: UChicago Harris/AP-NORC Poll conducted September 13-16, 2018, with 1,059 adults age 18 and older nationwide.

WHEN IT COMES TO THE SECURITY OF AMERICAN VOTING SYSTEMS, THE VIEWS OF DEMOCRATS AND REPUBLICANS HAVE SHIFTED SIGNIFICANTLY OVER THE LAST TWO YEARS.

In the wake of several high-profile investigations into the security of the 2016 election,² the public's overall attitudes toward election security are comparable to two years ago. However, there have been large changes in the opinions of Democrats and Republicans since 2016.

The public's overall concern about the voting system being vulnerable to hackers this fall is similar to concern expressed leading up to the 2016 presidential election, with 45 percent being very concerned in 2018 compared to 41 percent being very concerned in 2016. Likewise, there has also been little change in those who have a lot of confidence in the accuracy of vote counting compared to two years ago (40 percent vs. 39 percent).

The nexus of that concern has shifted significantly. Republicans are now more likely to have confidence in the accuracy of vote counts in the upcoming midterms than Democrats or independents (54 percent vs. 36 percent and 30 percent). This is a major shift from 2016 when 49 percent of Democrats, but just 32 percent of Republicans and 24 percent of independents, expressed a lot of confidence in the vote counts.³

Likewise there has been a shift amongst partisans when it comes to concerns about hackers. Democrats are more likely to be very concerned about vulnerabilities to hackers than are Republicans and independents, a reversal from 2016.⁴

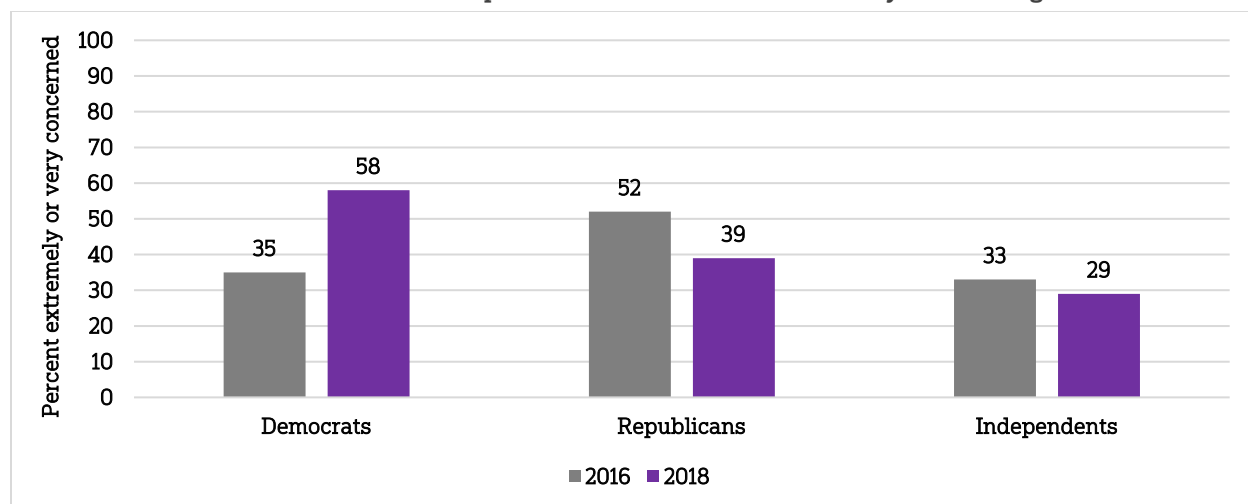
² Eric Tucker, "12 Russians Indicted for Meddling in 2016 U.S. Election," *AP News*, July 14, 2018.

<https://www.apnews.com/1ddb174446a34785becd670275fedcbf/12-Russians-indicted-for-meddling-in-2016-US-election>

³ AP-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research, *Views on the American Election Process and Perceptions of Voter Fraud*, Chicago, IL: AP-NORC, 2016. <http://www.apnorc.org/projects/Pages/HTML%20Reports/views-on-the-american-election-process-and-perceptions-of-voter-fraud-issue-brief.aspx>

⁴ AP-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research, *Views on the American Election Process and Perceptions of Voter Fraud*, Chicago, IL: AP-NORC, 2016. <http://www.apnorc.org/projects/Pages/HTML%20Reports/views-on-the-american-election-process-and-perceptions-of-voter-fraud-issue-brief.aspx>

The attitudes of both Democrats and Republicans toward election security have changed since 2016.



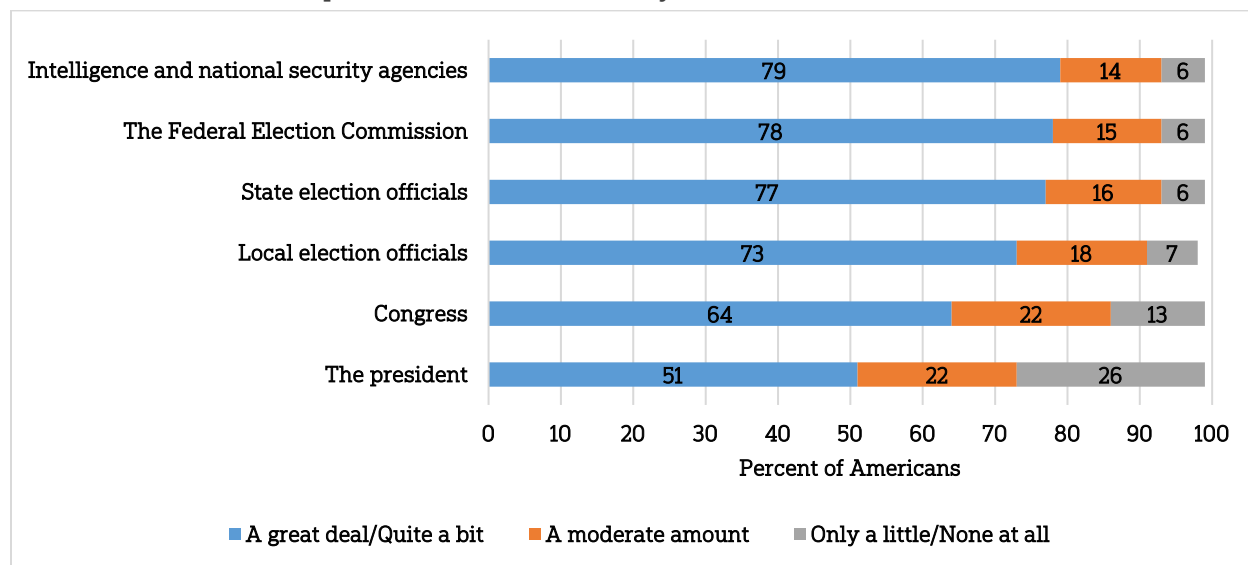
Question: How concerned are you that the country's voting system might be vulnerable to hackers?

Sources: UChicago Harris/AP-NORC Poll conducted September 13-16, 2018, with 1,059 adults age 18 and older nationwide. AP-NORC Poll conducted September 15-18, 2016, with 1,022 adults age 18 and older nationwide.

MOST AMERICANS BELIEVE THE RESPONSIBILITY FOR ELECTION SECURITY RESTS WITH FEDERAL SECURITY AGENCIES, AS WELL AS LOCAL, STATE, AND FEDERAL ELECTION OFFICIALS.

When it comes to who is responsible for addressing election system vulnerabilities, Americans point the finger at a number of different officials—but are least likely to say the president or Congress.

Most adults think intelligence and national security agencies along with the Federal Election Commission should be responsible for election security.



Question: How much responsibility should each of the following have in addressing the security of elections?

Source: UChicago Harris/AP-NORC Poll conducted September 13-16, 2018, with 1,059 adults age 18 and older nationwide.

There are partisan differences, as Democrats are more likely to say that Congress should have responsibility for election security than are Republicans (72 percent vs. 59 percent). Likewise, Democrats are more likely than Republicans to report that intelligence agencies, state election officials,

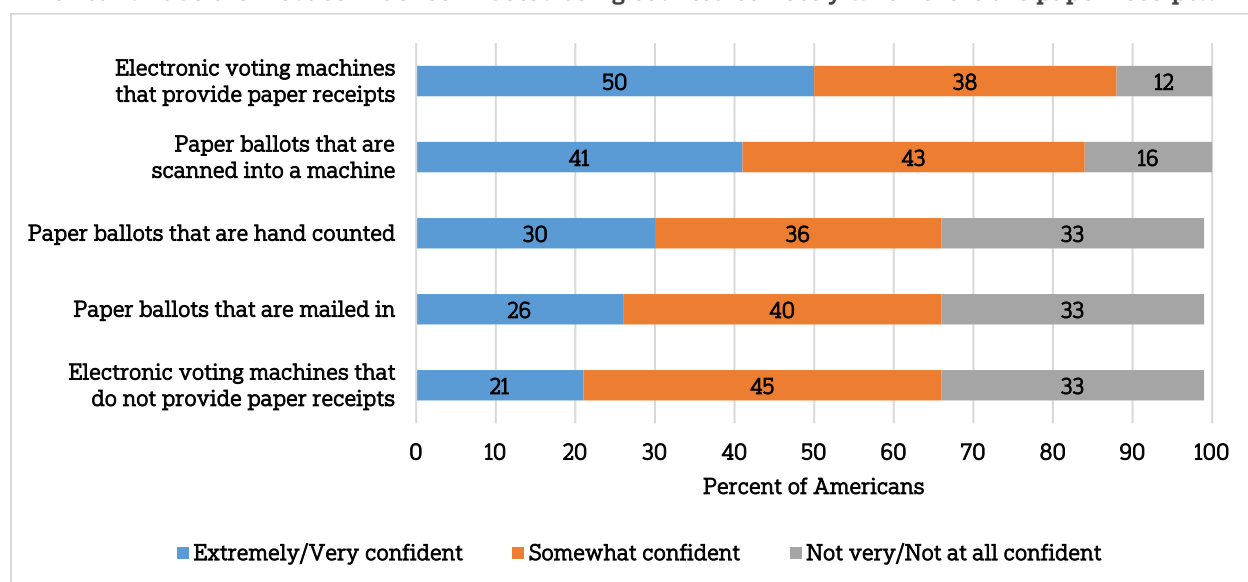
and local election officials should have a great deal of responsibility. However, there is no significant difference between Democrats' and Republicans' beliefs about whether the president should have responsibility.

THE PUBLIC IS APPREHENSIVE ABOUT VOTING TECHNOLOGIES THAT DON'T LEAVE A PAPER TRAIL.

The Election Day experience varies significantly from place to place as state and local election authorities determine how people vote. Some states have moved entirely to mail-in ballots, others use electronic machines, while others are still hand-counting paper ballots. With a spotlight on the potential for hacking election systems, public confidence is greatest for voting methods that use technology, but maintain some type of paper trail.

Most adults have at least some confidence in electronic voting machines that provide paper receipts and paper ballots scanned into machines. The public is much less confident in electronic voting machines that do not provide receipts and paper ballots counted by hand.

Americans have the most confidence in votes being counted correctly when there are paper receipts.



Question: How confident are you that votes cast using each of the following methods would be counted accurately?

Source: UChicago Harris/AP-NORC Poll conducted September 13-16, 2018, with 1,059 adults age 18 and older nationwide.

In 2016, about 61 percent of jurisdictions across the country used optical scan machines that scan paper ballots or paper records, whereas only about 22 percent of jurisdictions used electronic voting machines without a paper receipt.⁵ For the 2018 midterm elections, there are five states that are expected to rely entirely on electronic machines without paper receipts (Delaware, Georgia, Louisiana, New Jersey, and South Carolina), and at least eight other states expected to use voting machines without paper receipts in some, but not all, counties.⁶

Asked if the voting technology would impact their chances of voting, people are more likely to say they would probably vote if there is only an electronic voting machine that provides paper receipts (75

AP-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research, *Views on the American Election Process and Perceptions of Voter Fraud*, Chicago, IL: AP-NORC, 2016. [ptions-of-voter-fraud-issue-brief.aspx](http://www.apnorc.org/projects/Pages/HTML%20Reports/views-on-the-american-election-process-and-perceptions-of-voter-fraud-issue-brief.aspx) <http://www.apnorc.org/projects/Pages/HTML%20Reports/views-on-the-american-election-process-and-perceptions-of-voter-fraud-issue-brief.aspx>
[ates-vote-paper-ballots-experts-change/story?id=57835958](https://abcnews.go.com/Politics/states-vote-paper-ballots-experts-change/story?id=57835958) <https://abcnews.go.com/Politics/states-vote-paper-ballots-experts-change/story?id=57835958>

percent) or only paper ballots that are scanned into a machine (71 percent) than if the only option is paper ballots that are hand counted (64 percent) or only paper ballots that are mailed in (61 percent).

MANY ARE LEERY OF NEWER METHODS OF VOTING SUCH AS ONLINE VOTING AND ELECTIONS USING ONLY MAIL-IN BALLOTS.

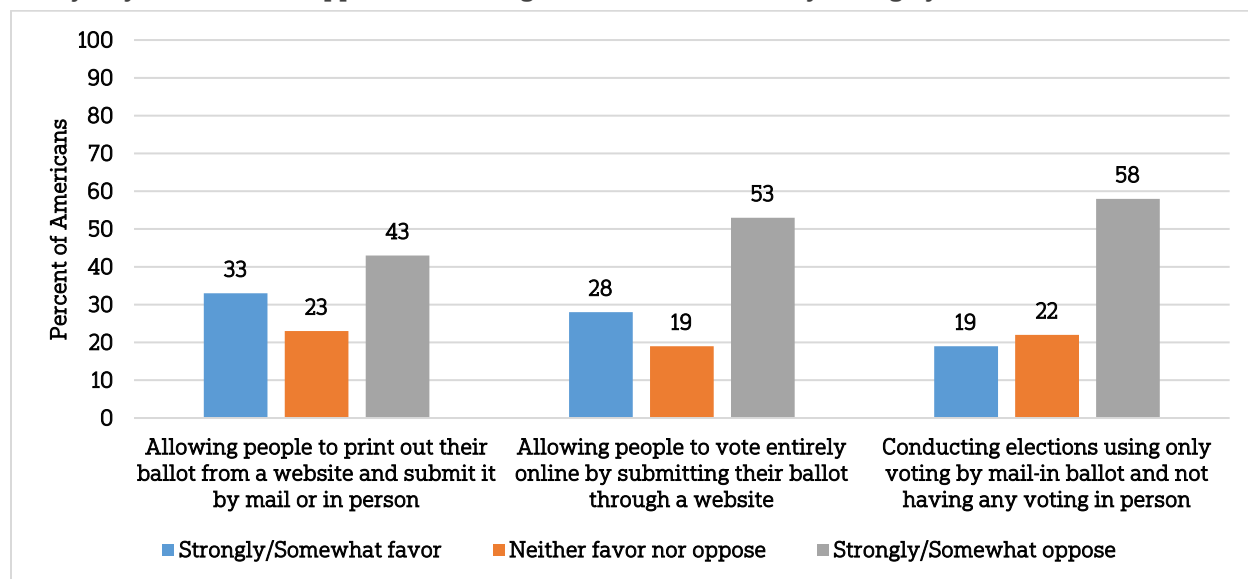
While some states are testing newer methods for conducting elections, there is not yet strong public support for either online voting or elections with only mail-in ballots.

For example, a pilot program in West Virginia will allow certain eligible voters to use their mobile device to cast their votes in the 2018 election.⁷ However, only 19 percent are very confident in votes cast online, and nearly twice as many people oppose allowing people to vote entirely online as favor it (53 percent vs. 28 percent).

Adults age 18-29 are more supportive of online voting than older adults, but still less than half of such young adults favor online voting (43 percent).

There are a growing number of states using mail-in ballots, and Colorado, Oregon, and Washington all conduct their elections using only mail-in ballot voting. Yet, there is not strong public support nationwide for conducting elections this way. Fifty-eight percent of adults oppose conducting elections with only mail-in ballots, and only 19 percent favor it.

A majority of Americans oppose conducting elections online or only voting by mail-in ballot.



Question: [Do/Would] you favor, oppose, or neither favor nor oppose your state doing each of the following?

Source: UChicago Harris/AP-NORC Poll conducted September 13-16, 2018, with 1,059 adults age 18 and older nationwide.

⁷ "Pilot Program of Overseas Voting App to Spread across State," *AP News*, September 21, 2018.

<https://apnews.com/4be6fdacce914033bcf1e24bd0d2464d>

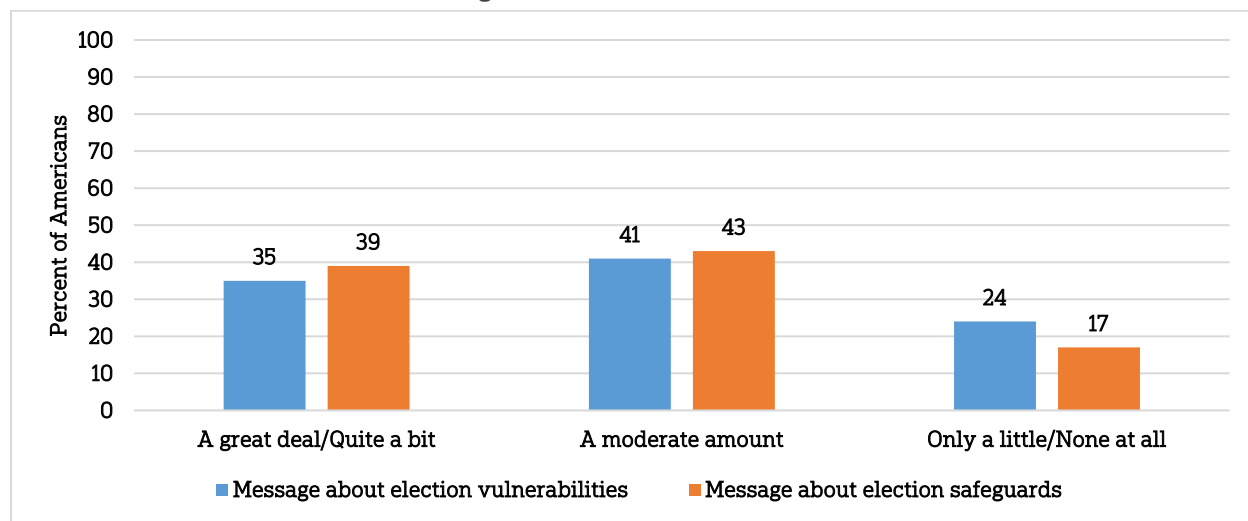
CONFIDENCE IN VOTE COUNTING CHANGES LITTLE WHEN PEOPLE ARE PRESENTED WITH SMALL AMOUNTS OF ADDITIONAL INFORMATION ABOUT POTENTIAL ELECTION SAFEGUARDS AND VULNERABILITIES.

Public confidence in the accuracy of vote counting appears relatively resistant to large changes due solely to short messages about election security, but there might be the potential for some small shifts in attitudes.

This study featured a survey experiment in which respondents were randomly assigned one of two different messages about a meeting earlier in 2018 of hackers and cyber-security officials to identify vulnerabilities in the country's electoral system.⁸ Half of respondents received a message about hackers compromising voting machines to alter voting tallies during the meeting. The other half of respondents received a message about how the goal of the meeting was to find problems before others do to prevent hackers from compromising U.S. elections.

While these two messages are not associated with large differences in people's confidence in how accurately elections will be counted, there are some modest shifts. For example, 24 percent of those who were told hackers compromised the machines say they have only a little confidence or none at all, compared with 17 percent who were told the goal of the meeting was to prevent hackers.

Confidence in how accurately votes will be counted is not strongly related to messages about either election vulnerabilities or election safeguards.



Question: How much confidence do you have that the votes in the 2018 midterm election will be counted accurately? Earlier this year, hackers and cyber-security officials gathered to identify vulnerabilities in the country's electoral system. [According to the news reports, hackers were able to compromise voting machines to alter vote tallies/Their goal is to find problems before others do to try to prevent hackers from compromising U.S. elections]. Given that, how much confidence do you have that the votes in the 2018 midterm election will be counted accurately?

Source: UChicago Harris/AP-NORC Poll conducted September 13-16, 2018, with 1,059 adults age 18 and older nationwide.

Additional analysis and research is needed to determine the full potential of messaging to impact people's attitudes toward election security. On one hand, the partisan nature of people's attitudes toward election security may limit the potential for messages to change opinions. However, this survey experiment tested only short messages that offer a small amount of information, and longer messages could have greater impact for some respondents.

⁸ Sue Halpern, "Election-Hacking Lessons from the 2018 DEF CON Hackers Conference," *The New Yorker*, August 23, 2018. <https://www.newyorker.com/news/dispatch/election-hacking-lessons-from-the-2018-def-con-hackers-conference>

STUDY METHODOLOGY

This survey was conducted by the University of Chicago Harris School of Public Policy and The Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research with funding from NORC at the University of Chicago. Staff from Harris Public Policy and The AP-NORC Center collaborated on all aspects of the study.

Data were collected using the 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). The panel provides sample coverage of approximately 97 percent of the U.S. household population. Those excluded from the sample include people with P.O. Box only addresses, some addresses not listed in the USPS Delivery Sequence File, and some newly constructed dwellings.

Interviews for this survey were conducted between September 13 and 16, 2018, with adults age 18 and over representing the 50 states and the District of Columbia. Panel members were randomly drawn from AmeriSpeak, and 1,059 completed the survey—842 via the web and 217 via telephone. Interviews were conducted in English. The final stage completion rate is 25.5 percent, the weighted household panel response rate is 28.6 percent, and the weighted household panel retention rate is 86.0 percent, for a cumulative response rate of 6.3 percent. The overall margin of sampling error is +/- 4.3 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 noncoverage or under- and oversampling resulting from the study specific sample design.

Poststratification variables included age, gender, census division, race/ethnicity, and education. Weighting variables were obtained from the 2018 Current Population Survey. The weighted data reflect the U.S. population of adults age 18 and over.

A topline with full question wordings is available at www.apnorc.org. For more information, email info@apnorc.org.

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- NORC at the University of Chicago is one of the oldest and most respected, independent research institutions in the world.

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