

Voter Confidence in the 2020 Presidential Election: Nationwide Survey Results

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1 Executive Summary

The Monitoring the Election project at Caltech conducted a national survey of 5,051 registered voters immediately after the November 2020 presidential election. One of the important topics in our survey was voter confidence. In this report, we provide an initial and high-level overview of preliminary results from our national survey.

Key findings include:

- There was a very high degree of confidence among registered voters nationally that their own vote was counted as they intended (for those who voted). We also find that there is less confidence among registered voters that votes were counted as intended in their county, their state, or nationally. Ninety percent of registered voters who cast a ballot were confident it was counted as intended; 81% of registered voters were confident that votes were counted as intended in their county, 78% in their state, and 58% in across the nation.
- There are substantial confidence gaps between Democratic and Republican voters, especially with respect to confidence at the national level, and similar confidence gaps between Biden and Trump voters.
- The survey reveals that younger and less educated voters were generally less confident at each level.
- White and Black registered voters were more confident that their own ballots were counted as intended relative to Hispanic/Latino voters (91% and 90%, compared to 85%). However, Black registered voters were more likely to be confident that votes were counted as intended at the national level (70%) than were Hispanic/Latino registered voters (67%) or White registered voters (54%).

2 Voter Confidence

2.1 Survey Details

We conducted a post-election survey, interviewing 5,051 registered voters across the United States. Our survey focused primarily on their voting experiences in the 2020 November presidential election. Details about the survey methodology are in the final section of this brief.

Here we focus on four key questions that were included in our survey. The first question was asked to registered voters who said they cast a ballot in the election; the remaining three were asked of all registered voters:

- How confident are you that your vote in the General Election was counted as you intended? (Asked of those who voted in the 2020 November election).
- Think about vote counting throughout your county, and not just your own personal situation. How confident are you that votes in your county were counted as voters intended?
- Now, think about how vote counting throughout [the voter’s state]. How confident are you that votes in [the voter’s state] were counted as voters intended?
- Finally, think about vote counting throughout the country. How confident are you that votes nationwide were counted as voters intended?

Again, the final three questions were asked of all registered voters in the sample. For all of these voter confidence questions, respondents could indicate that they were very confident, somewhat confident, not too confident, not at all confident, or say that they didn’t know. The results presented here are weighted, using the procedure discussed at the end of this brief.

2.2 Voter Confidence in the 2020 Presidential Election

Table 1: Voter Confidence

	Own Vote	County	State	National
Very confident	65	49	44	28
Somewhat confident	25	32	34	30
Not too confident	5	9	11	18
Not at all confident	3	7	8	21
I don’t know	2	3	3	3

The primary results are provided in summary form in Figure 1, with detailed toplines in Table 1. Overall, 90% of the voters in our post-election survey reported that they were confident that their vote was counted as they intended (this includes both those who said they were very and somewhat confident); only 8% lacked confidence that their vote

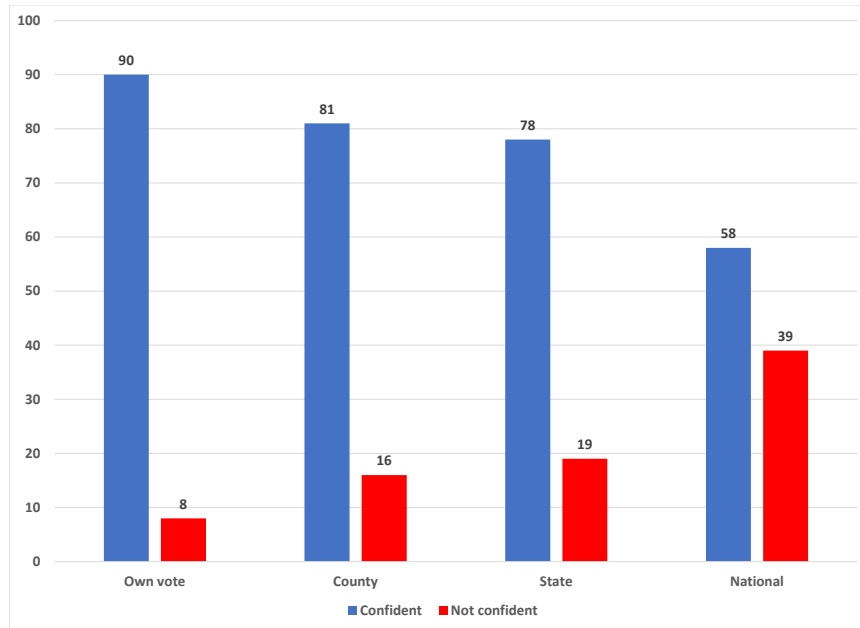


Figure 1: Voter Confidence in the 2020 Presidential Election

was counted as they intended. Given all of the widespread conversation in the media and online about potential problems with the administration of the presidential election that occurred before, during, and after November 3, 2020, finding such a high rate of overall confidence is significant.

However, as we look at voter confidence at other levels — their county, their state, and then nationally — we see a different picture. At each successive level, voter confidence that votes were counted as intended drops (and correspondingly, the percentage of registered voters who lack confidence that the votes were counted as intended increases). Eighty-one percent of the registered voters who completed our survey said they were confident that votes were counted as intended in their county; 78% were confident that votes were counted as intended in their state; only 58% were confident that votes were counted as intended nationally.

This last result is striking. Fifty-eight percent of the registered voters in our survey, just over a majority, said that they were confident that votes were counted as intended nationally, and 39% said they were not confident. As shown in Table 1, of those who lacked confidence, 18% said they were not too confident, and one-fifth of the sample who answered this question (21%) said they were not at all confident.

2.3 Voter Confidence by Partisanship and Presidential Vote

One of the most substantial patterns seen in the voter confidence data from this election is the drastic differences in confidence by party identification and presidential vote. These are provided in Table 2.

Table 2: Voter Confidence: Party and Presidential Vote

<i>Own Vote</i>	Dem.	Ind.	Rep.	Biden	Trump
Very confident	80	61	51	80	50
Somewhat confident	16	27	34	17	34
Not too confident	2	6	7	1	8
Not at all confident	1	3	6	1	5
I don't know	1	2	2	1	2
<i>County</i>	Dem.	Ind.	Rep.	Biden	Trump
Very confident	66	44	36	68	35
Somewhat confident	28	33	36	27	36
Not too confident	3	10	13	2	13
Not at all confident	1	9	12	1	14
I don't know	1	5	3	2	2
<i>State</i>	Dem.	Ind.	Rep.	Biden	Trump
Very confident	61	41	29	64	27
Somewhat confident	30	33	38	29	37
Not too confident	5	13	16	4	18
Not at all confident	1	9	13	1	15
I don't know	2	5	4	2	4
<i>Nation</i>	Dem.	Ind.	Rep.	Biden	Trump
Very confident	45	24	11	48	9
Somewhat confident	39	31	20	39	19
Not too confident	11	19	25	9	26
Not at all confident	3	21	41	2	44
I don't know	2	5	3	2	2

Starting with party identification, 96% of Democratic voters said that they were confident that their own vote was counted as they intended, 85% of Republican voters said the same. Among independents, 88% were confident that their vote was counted as they intended. Again, as we move to the confidence of registered voters that votes were counted as intended at the county, state, and national levels, we see confidence decrease progressively, and that these decreases are most pronounced among Republican registered voters. When we look at the result for confidence at the national level, note that 84% of Democrats are confident, but only 31% of Republicans are confident. Fifty-five percent of registered independents are confident that the votes were counted as intended at the national level. Furthermore, it is worth noting that 66% of Republican registered voters said they were not confident that votes were counted as intended at the national

level.

We see similar partisan breakdowns when we look at those who reported voting for Biden or Trump. Again, at the level of their confidence that their own vote was counted as intended, virtually all of the Biden voters in our sample said they were confident (97%, which is a striking number). Eighty-four percent of Trump voters said they were confident that their own vote was counted as intended.

But like what we see for Republican identifiers, Trump voters are much less confident that votes were counted as intended in their county (71%), in their state (64%), and across the nation (28%). Seventy percent of Trump voters were not confident that votes were counted as intended at the national level.

These strong gaps in confidence, especially at the national level, between Republicans and Democrats, and between Trump and Biden supporters, will require additional research.

2.4 Voter Confidence by Selected Demographics

We provide additional breakdowns of these four measures of voter confidence by self-reported race and ethnicity (Table 3), age (Table 4), and educational attainment (Table 5). Important results from those analyses are:

- Regarding race and ethnicity, Hispanic/Latino voters were less confident than Black or White voters that their votes were counted as intended; at the national level, though, White registered voters were less confident than were Black or Hispanic/Latino registered voters.
- Younger voters (18 to 29) were less confident that their votes were counted as intended; older voters (over 65) had confidence that their own vote was counted as intended (92%), but were the least confident at the national level (52%).
- Voters with high levels of educational attainment (post-graduates, in particular) were confident that their votes were counted as intended; registered voters with high levels of educational attainment were also confident that votes at their county, state, and national levels were counted as intended. Conversely, those with a high school degree or less, or with some college, were generally less confident at every level of election administration.

Table 3: Voter Confidence: Race and Ethnicity

<i>Own Vote</i>	White	Black	Hispanic	Other
Very confident	66	69	56	56
Somewhat confident	25	21	29	35
Not too confident	5	5	8	4
Not at all confident	3	2	3	5
I don't know	2	3	4	0
<i>County</i>	White	Black	Hispanic	Other
Very confident	51	49	44	40
Somewhat confident	31	32	34	43
Not too confident	8	9	10	6
Not at all confident	7	3	8	9
I don't know	3	7	4	2
<i>State</i>	White	Black	Hispanic	Other
Very confident	44	47	44	39
Somewhat confident	33	33	36	40
Not too confident	11	11	12	11
Not at all confident	8	4	6	9
I don't know	3	6	3	2
<i>Nation</i>	White	Black	Hispanic	Other
Very confident	26	35	30	24
Somewhat confident	28	35	37	40
Not too confident	19	18	14	14
Not at all confident	24	7	16	18
I don't know	3	4	3	3

Table 4: Voter Confidence: Age

<i>Own Vote</i>	18-29	30-44	45-64	65+
Very confident	55	64	65	70
Somewhat confident	30	27	24	22
Not too confident	7	5	4	4
Not at all confident	4	3	4	2
I don't know	4	1	2	1
<i>County</i>	18-29	30-44	45-64	65+
Very confident	38	49	50	55
Somewhat confident	37	31	30	32
Not too confident	12	11	7	7
Not at all confident	8	6	8	5
I don't know	5	3	4	1
<i>State</i>	18-29	30-44	45-64	65+
Very confident	35	47	46	45
Somewhat confident	42	33	30	33
Not too confident	11	11	12	11
Not at all confident	8	6	9	7
I don't know	4	3	4	3
<i>Nation</i>	18-29	30-44	45-64	65+
Very confident	22	31	30	25
Somewhat confident	35	34	28	27
Not too confident	24	15	17	19
Not at all confident	15	18	23	25
I don't know	4	3	3	4

Table 5: Voter Confidence: Education

<i>Own Vote</i>	HS or Less	Some College	College Grad	Postgrad
Very confident	59	63	69	75
Somewhat confident	29	25	24	20
Not too confident	6	6	4	3
Not at all confident	4	4	3	1
I don't know	3	2	1	1
<i>County</i>	HS or Less	Some College	College Grad	Postgrad
Very confident	41	49	55	61
Somewhat confident	36	32	31	25
Not too confident	10	9	7	6
Not at all confident	9	7	5	6
I don't know	4	3	3	3
<i>State</i>	HS or Less	Some College	College Grad	Postgrad
Very confident	37	45	48	53
Somewhat confident	36	32	34	30
Not too confident	13	12	9	8
Not at all confident	9	8	6	4
I don't know	5	3	3	4
<i>Nation</i>	HS or Less	Some College	College Grad	Postgrad
Very confident	26	24	29	38
Somewhat confident	28	30	32	33
Not too confident	19	20	18	13
Not at all confident	24	23	19	13
I don't know	4	3	2	3

3 Survey Methodology

The survey questionnaire was developed by our research group at Caltech, based on similar surveys of voter experiences that we have conducted since 2006. The survey methodology was reviewed by the California Institute of Technology's Institutional Review Board. This survey was fielded online by YouGov from November 4-10, 2020, using respondents from their opt-in panel and an external partner. The survey's population is U.S. registered voters. The sample contains responses from 5,051 subjects and is weighted based on gender, age, race, education, U.S. Census region, state of residence, and 2020 presidential vote or non-vote. These weights range from 0.1 to 5.973, with a mean of one and a standard deviation of 1. The survey margin of error, adjusted for weighting, is $\pm 2\%$. We will continue to release reports from this survey in the coming days and weeks.

About the Monitoring the Election Project

The Monitoring the Election project was founded in 2018, with financial support from the John Randolph Haynes and Dora Haynes Foundation. The initial phase of the project in 2018 was a pilot study that implemented various election auditing, forensic, and monitoring methodologies, focusing on Orange County (CA). The project expanded scope in 2020, covering Southern California (with a focus on Orange and Los Angeles Counties), as well as providing forensic analysis statewide. Details about the project can be found at <https://monitoringtheelection.us>.