



## Americans Show No Crisis of Confidence in Widely Used Voting Systems' Security

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There is no widespread, growing crisis of public confidence in voting systems that some interest groups have proclaimed. A strong majority of Americans have confidence in the country's most widely used voting systems, including the computerized systems frequently attacked by critics of election administration. These findings came from five nationwide, annual opinion surveys completed in January 2008 and released recently by InfoSENTRY Services, an information technology consulting firm in Raleigh, North Carolina.

"We tracked public opinion towards voting systems used throughout the United States since January, 2004, just over a year after Congress passed the Help America Vote Act in late 2002," said M. Glenn Newkirk, InfoSENTRY's President. "In that first survey, 68% of American adults expressed either high or very high trust in the process of going to a polling place, making selections on a computer screen, and having the computer tabulate the election results. Only 15% of the survey's respondents expressed either low or very low trust in these computerized systems. By 2008, our survey indicated that 67% expressed positive trust levels and 16% expressed negative trust levels. Statistically, that is no change from 2004, falling comfortably within the surveys'  $\pm 3\%$  margin of error."

Newkirk noted that, after years of criticism of that computerized technology and simultaneous support for a technology by which voters mark choices on paper ballots in their polling precincts and feed them into computerized scanners, "A similar number of adults now trust the in-precinct computerized scanners as much as they trusted the more fully computerized systems in our initial survey. In 2004, 59% of American adults expressed either high or very high trust in the in-precinct paper ballot scanners, while only 17% expressed either low or very low trust in these systems. In our 2008 survey, the positive trust levels had increased to 64% and the negative trust levels remained stable at 16%."

Newkirk continued, "Contrary to the image from some election critics and media reports, the American public expresses at least as much confidence in the fully computerized systems in their precincts as they do in the in-precinct scanning of paper ballots. In 2008, the trust scores are statistically equivalent for these two methods of voting that are most widely used throughout the United States."

Data from the survey showed that a third voting technology, now used fully in Oregon and widely in Washington State, called Vote By Mail (VBM), registered a statistically significant increase in public trust from 2004 to 2008. Newkirk noted, "In 2004, 31% of American adults expressed either high or very high trust in VBM while 41% gave either low or very low trust responses. However, by the January, 2008, survey, the positive trust responses had increased to 38% and the negative trust responses had declined to 33%. These trust scores are somewhat lower than are the trust scores for the two more widely used voting systems. However, VBM has significantly higher scores in the West, where it is better known and more widely used. Also, trust for this type of voting is growing in other regions, particularly in the South."

The survey also showed that Americans' trust level in the security of Voting By Internet (VBI) for public elections remains low and has actually declined by a slight, but statistically significant, amount from 2004 through 2008. Newkirk reported that "In January, 2004, one in three (32%) of Americans expressed either high or very high trust in VBI security while almost half (47%) responded with either low or very low trust in VBI. By January, 2008, the positive trust level in Internet voting's security had fallen to 28% and the negative trust level remained at 47%. Unlike the stable or rising trends in the

other voting technologies, the trend in trust of the confidentiality and accuracy for VBI was a downward one”

InfoSENTRY’s survey also allowed a comparison of the level of confidence that Americans have in the accuracy of their local election counts with their confidence in the accuracy of data in major institutions’ information systems. Newkirk explained, “We asked the survey’s respondents to rate their confidence in the accuracy of data in information systems maintained by banks and financial institutions, hospitals and medical institutions, schools and universities, large corporations, the Federal government, state governments, and local governments. Americans’ confidence in their area’s election count accuracy was statistically even with their confidence in the security of information in banks and financial institutions. That level of confidence in security was well above the levels for all other institutions in the study.”

Newkirk pointed to several of the more interesting findings from his analysis of the survey’s data on subgroups in the American population.

- Blacks have turned decidedly negative against fully computerized voting systems in the precincts over the past five years.
- Hispanics’ trust in Voting By Internet (VBI)’s security trended up sharply over the five surveys and was more positive than Internets’ net trust ratings scored by either Whites or Blacks.
- Whites’ trust declined in only one voting technology: Voting By Internet.
- Men generally trust fully computerized voting technology less than do women.
- Trust in fully computerized voting is higher in the South than it is in other regions.
- The older age subgroups in America, those over 55 years old, and particularly those over 65 years old, displayed the greatest positive change in trust in all four systems in the surveys.
- Overall, Republicans and Republican-leaning-Independents trusted the most widely used voting technologies at significantly higher levels than did Democrats and Democratic-leaning-Independents.

Newkirk concluded that, “This survey shows that Americans’ trust in various voting systems’ security often varies by different demographic subgroups. However, these data also show clearly that claims by voting system critics that there is a growing crisis of confidence or mistrust in those systems are wrong. Most Americans trust the security of widely used voting systems, including the so-called ‘touchscreen’ computer systems, and they trust the confidentiality and accuracy of the voting systems used in their local areas.”

The 45-page white paper is available for download on InfoSENTRY’s website: [www.infosentry.com](http://www.infosentry.com) .

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Interviewing for all of InfoSENTRY’s surveys was carried out on the Opinion Research Center CARAVAN® Surveys in 2004 through 2008. Opinion Research Center is one of the best known and most established opinion research organizations in the United States.

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