

Re-examining Voter Confidence as a Metric for Election Performance

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Abstract

Voter confidence — or the voter’s perception that his or her ballot will be counted accurately — has been proposed as one of a few key metrics by which we can evaluate the performance of the American election system. In this paper, we subject this item to critical scrutiny, testing the hypothesis that voter confidence is less a function of experiences with elections and election administration, and more an expression of the respondent’s affective orientation toward the political system (trust and confidence in government) and their evaluations of current political debates. We test our hypothesis using the 2008 Cooperative Congressional Election Study. We find that while voter confidence *is* strongly influenced by a respondents affective orientations and policy opinions, the individual’s experiences with election mechanics, poll workers, and the individual’s confidence in election administrators still play the largest role in influencing a voter’s confidence that her ballot is counted as she intends.

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Introduction

In the wake of the major electoral controversies of 2000 and 2004, ‘voter confidence’ has emerged as a topic of interest to election scholars, administrators, and the reform community. Indeed, the ‘voter confidence’ has entered the political lexicon and is altering the debate over election reform in this country. Indeed, the title of a report after the 2004 election, “Building Confidence in U.S. Elections” makes no bones about its underlying motive: “Polls indicate that many Americans lack confidence in the electoral system. ... Building confidence in U.S. elections is central to our nation’s democracy.” (Commission on Federal Election Reform 2005). A Lexis-Nexis search in the past five years of major U.S. newspapers turned up 722 uses of the phrase ‘voter confidence,’ 611 mentions of ‘voter confidence’ with ‘elections,’ and 33 mentions of ‘voter confidence’ with either ‘election reform’ or ‘election administration.’ Writing in 2006, Ray Martinez, then Vice Chairman of the Federal Election Assistance Commission, wrote that voter confidence had substantially eroded in our elections system. Martinez referred to survey data on voter trust and confidence as substantial evidence that major election reforms were needed:

A Wall Street Journal-NBC News poll, for example, taken shortly after the 2004 presidential election, showed that more than 25% of those surveyed worried that the vote count in the 2004 presidential race was unfair. More recently, the American Bar Association [...] released a nationally commissioned poll showing that some 20% of Americans surveyed has lingering doubts that their vote was accurately counted in the 2004 presidential election. (Martinez 2006)

He went on to argue for a four point program of reform: election audits, conflict of interest provisions for statewide election administrators, political neutrality requirements for vendors, and disclosure requirements as a condition of voting system certification. These changes, he asserted, would restore voter confidence in the system. At the state level, Ohio Secretary of State Jennifer Brunner wrote, in April 2008, that voter confidence would be boosted by post-election audits (Brunner 2008). And in Congress, the “Voter Confidence and Increased Accessibility Act of 2007” (H.R.811), sponsored by Rep. Rush Holt (D-NJ), implicitly assumed that by moving to a system of paper ballots with voter-verified paper records, ‘voter confidence’ in the elections system would increase. Robert Pastor, head of the Center for Democracy and Elections Management at American University argues that photo identification at the polling place in Mexico has translated both into high levels of confidence, and into such “pride in their voter ID that they use it for all forms of identification” (2004, 588).

Academics have not been immune to the attraction of voter confidence as a suitable metric by which we can evaluate the performance of American elections. For instance, Hall writes “more recently, scholars have begun to study the attitudes of voters in regards to their election experience [...] these data have provided a baseline for understanding the factors that affect the confidence of voters, especially race and party affiliation.” He further argues that it is possible to link voter confidence to specific features of the voter experience such as voter-poll worker interactions or

whether the voter is asked to show identification at the polls (2008, 8-9). Stewart (2009) describes voter confidence as a “summary judgment of the voting experience.” Alvarez, Hall, and Llewellyn (2008), providing perhaps the most specific definition of the concept, “define trust in the electoral process as the confidence that the voters have that their ballot is counted as intended” (2008, 755). Indeed, their definition reflects the survey item most commonly used to measure confidence:

“How confident are you that your vote was [or will be] counted as intended in [the election]?”

1. Very confident
2. Fairly [somewhat] confident
3. Not too confident
4. Not at all confident

This item appeared in the 2006 Cooperative Congressional Election Study (CCES), as well as a Pew-funded study of the Performance of the American Election system in 2008 (Alvarez, et al. 2009). However, like the question of confidence itself, the item has only a recent history: most analyses of the voter confidence item has emerged in the past five years—and rely on a relatively limited set of data. There appears to be tacit agreement among most voting reform and election administration scholars as to the meaning of the term, but this understanding is not universal.¹

The primary issue that we focus on in this paper, then, is trying to establish a richer conception of ‘voter confidence’. What kind of survey item is under examination? Is it valid to consider this some sort of summary measure of the performance of American elections? What other correlates are there to the measure? Part of the problem in this young literature is that scholars have yet to undertake a critical examination of these questions.

Scholars have so far tended to treat voter confidence as a discrete attitude — possibly causing, but unlikely to be affected by, confidence in government more generally. Alvarez, et al. (2008) explicitly argue that there are no *a priori* reasons to expect that trust in the electoral process is the same as generalized trust in government. (That is, voters who distrust government or think all politicians are crooks may still trust that their ballots are being cast accurately.) As they point out in their article, most previous work on voter trust has focused on specific features of voting experience and technology, such as the mode of balloting (precinct place versus absentee) or the machinery in place (touchscreen voting systems (DREs), DREs with voter verified paper audit trails, or optical scan systems).² Atkeson and Saunders posit a relationship between governmental trust and electoral confidence: “trust at this [electoral] level builds confidence in other government institutions [...] and

¹ A literature search turned up at least one author who, writing about election reform in Canada, used the term ‘voter confidence’ to refer to the broad concept of confidence and trust in government (Henderson 2006).

² See, for example, Stein et al. 2008; Atkeson and Saunders 2007.

attachment to the political system” (2007, 656), but implicitly consider this relationship as essentially unidirectional. While they worry that attitudes conditioned by the electoral process may affect citizens’ views about democracy as a whole, they do not consider the possibility for a mediating opposing influence.

Indeed, we do not really know what the *implications* of high or low levels of confidence are. The general assumption seems to be that any expression of concern about election administration must be perilous (i.e., Atkeson and Saunders 2007), but as the many studies of trust in government have shown, Americans are traditionally skeptical of politics and of political actors. While some have argued that the decline in trust in government since the 1970s is a crisis (Hetherington 2005), we have argued elsewhere that these levels are not symptomatic of anything other than a resurgence of historical American skepticism, if not outright hostility, to organized governmental action (Gronke and Hicks 2009). Similarly, while Martinez (2006) cited a 20% figure of respondents who were “not at all” or “not very confident” that their vote would be counted as a cause of concern, we have no context within which to interpret these numbers.

Even the most commonly used dependent variable is somewhat problematic: it contains an implicit assumption that the confidence that one’s own vote will be counted as intended translates directly to confidence in the electoral system as a whole.³ It may be, however, that there is a disconnect between this individual vote confidence, and a broader confidence in the efficacy of the system—or at least that the two might be affected by slightly different factors. Even if confidence in the individual vote is conditioned by direct experience with the system, a voter could still hold the American democratic process and structure in high regard. Inference about the general level of confidence in the electoral process — and concomitant predictions of doom for democratic accountability in its absence — may therefore be incomplete.

So, we see a need to reexamine this concept. The aim of this paper is to re-conceptualize voter confidence as part of a bundle of attitudes about government and institutions, that generally falls under the rubric of trust in government and confidence in institutions. If our conception of this ‘bundle’ is accurate, then correlating voter confidence solely with features of election administration — technology, accuracy of the count, election day experiences — provides an incomplete picture. Voter confidence may be more strongly tied to generalized trust in government, trust in others, and sense of the system as a whole, than to these factors.

Primarily, then, our paper seeks to extend the scholarship in this area by arguing that there exists a relationship between confidence in the electoral system and a broader confidence in government and institutions, and that it is not *unidirectional*, but *bi-directional*. We hypothesize, in contrast to previous work, that there *is* reason to believe that citizens who express greater trust in government and confidence in the leaders of societal institutions are likely to be more confident in the voting

³ Though see Hall, Monson, and Patterson (2008), who use survey questions about both confidence in the individual vote *and* ‘fairness of election outcome’.

system. To this end, we develop a model to test the individual voter confidence metric against a more extensive set of attitudinal measures of trust and confidence, alongside more traditional measures of election day experience and demographic characteristics.

Methods

Our data are drawn from a large national survey, the Cooperative Congressional Election Study (CCES).⁴ The CCES consists of a core set of survey items that are asked of all 30,000 plus respondents, and a number of smaller team modules, each administered to a sample of approximately 1,000. The analysis that follows relies primarily on a module designed by the Make Voting Work team at the Pew Center on the States, while some items were also included in a second module designed in cooperation with the AEI/Brookings Election Reform Project.⁵

The survey included the most commonly used voter confidence item, as well as a battery of other election administration indicators (e.g. mode of balloting, confidence in the poll worker, type of election technology). In order to test the possibility that voter confidence is a product of generalized trust in government or in other citizens, we added two sets of indicators. First, we queried respondents about their confidence in leaders of social and political institutions—a survey battery adapted from the General Social Survey, with one new item, confidence in election administrators.⁶ Following Cook and Gronke (2005), we added the conventional trust in government item as well as what they deem “active trust” in government.⁷ We also included a set of items designed to reflect the respondent’s trust in others, or ‘social trust,’ following Brehm and Rahn (1997).

We also wanted to see if voter confidence was reflective of the respondent’s evaluations of the current political and economic conditions. Thus, we take advantage of measures that were part of the CCES core—the respondent’s approval of President Bush’s performance in office, their retrospective and prospective economic evaluations, their approval or disapproval of the Iraq war, and finally a more generic “state of the times” measure.

⁴ Insert appropriate citation and sampling information for the CCES here, available from the CCES website.

⁵ Our thanks go out to the directors of the AEI/Brookings Election Reform Project, Thomas Mann, Norman Ornstein, and John Fortier, with special thanks going out to Molly Reynolds and Timothy Ryan who worked closely with us in designing the paired module.

⁶ The items were presented as a grid, with the prompt reading “You are going to read a list of social and political institutions. With regards to the leaders of these institutions, would you say you have a great deal of confidence, some confidence, not very much confidence, or not at all confident in these leaders.” Additional analyses of these items can be found in Gronke and Hicks 2009.

⁷ Cook and Gronke (2005) argue that the conventional trust in government measure is unbalanced and biased towards distrustful responses. Instead, they propose an ten-point “active trust/distrust” measure.

Finally, we include a set of other political and demographic indicators, including partisanship, ideological leanings, interest in politics, consumption of political news, gender, race, education, age, and income.

For the purposes of the univariate and bivariate analyses and for all graphical displays, we have weighted the data according to the guidelines provided by the CCES. As noted above, the CCES is an internet-based sample, and the survey organization calculates weights intended to bring the survey demographics in line with the Current Population Survey in terms of education, age, race, gender, and income. In multivariate analyses, we have included these indicators in all estimates rather than calculating survey weighted models. We have compared the weighted and non-weighted results and the differences are minimal.⁸ We have estimated both ordinary least squares regressions and ordered probit on the voter confidence item, a four point measure. We report ordered probits below.

Univariate and Bivariate

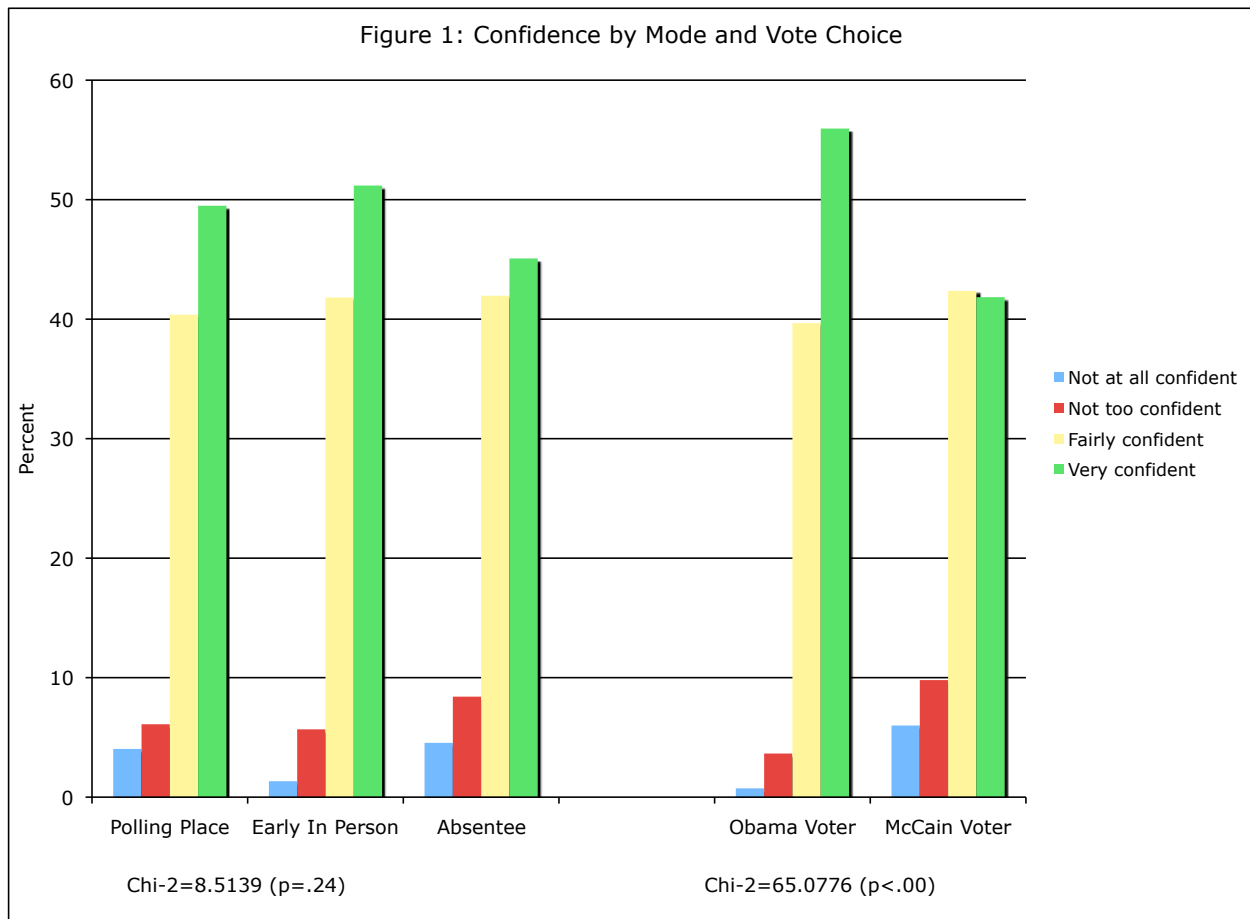
Our first goal in this research was to replicate and extend previous studies of voter confidence. Was voter confidence higher or lower in the 2008 election? Did it follow the same patterns as observed by previous scholars?

We were initially struck by how *confident* respondents were that their ballots would be counted. As shown below, 82% of those intending to vote were either very or fairly confident that their ballots would be counted—this rose to over 90% of those who reported having voted in the post-election survey. Interestingly, confidence levels were significantly lower among those pre-election respondents who were uncertain as to whether they would cast a ballot or not. Either causal ordering seems reasonable: lower confidence in the election system lowers the probability of voting, or a lower probability of voting on other grounds (e.g. disinterest, lack of knowledge, lower efficacy) is associated with lower levels of voting experiences and consequently a higher level of distrust in the machinery of democracy. Alvarez, Hall, and Llewellyn (2008) also find this pattern.

The levels of confidence mirror those found in another study conducted in 2008. The 2008 Survey of the Performance of American Elections found that between 86% to 100% of state samples — and 94% nationally — were “somewhat” or a “very” confident that their ballots would be counted as they intended (Alvarez et al., 2009). Previous studies at local levels have found similarly high levels of confidence. Stein et al. (2008) reports that 66% of respondents in Jefferson County, TX, “strongly agreed” that their ballots would be counted as intended in the 2006 election, while 84% of respondents in two counties in New Mexico and Colorado said they were “very” or “somewhat” confident (Atkeson and Saunders 2007). Thus, even in the face of withering criticism of the elections systems by many election advocates, citizens still express robust confidence in the ability of the system to accurately count their votes. (Unfortunately, we have no comparable measures from immediately after the 200 elections.)

⁸ For survey-weighted analyses, we have relied on the survey data feature in Stata 10.

Though confidence is generally very high, we are able to extract some distinct group effects. A key finding of past studies (Alvarez, Hall, and Llewellyn 2008) has been that differences in voter confidence exist across voting modes. The theory is that absentee voters—who lose control of their ballot earlier in the process, and have a less direct connection to the electoral system—will express lower confidence in their vote intent being accurately recorded. Indeed, this is not an unreasonable expectation, given that absentee by mail ballots are, in fact, more likely to be challenged and less likely to be accurately counted (Alvarez, Hall, and Sinclair 2008). We do not find this in our 2008 dataset, as shown in the left-hand panel of *figure 1*. On the other hand, we do find support for Hall’s (2008) argument that those on the losing side tend to be less confident in the electoral system. In the aggregate, as shown below right, Obama voters express significantly more confidence in the counting of their votes.



Just as with voter confidence, we found high levels of agreement with a series of items that were designed to probe the contours of public attitudes about American elections. In fact, responses were so uniform on the first set of items as to constitute a set of valence issues—issues or ideas that are uniformly liked (or disliked) in the population. First, we asked respondents to score the importance to them of a particular phrase, from 1 (least important) to 5 (most important). Second, we asked

them to choose between a pair of phrases, set up to be roughly dichotomous. *Table 1* presents these results.

Table 1: Respondent Attitudes About the Election System			
Survey prompt: how important?	Mean score (5 = "Very important")	Survey prompt: pairs of phrases	Mean score (5 = "Very important")
"We should make elections better"	4.51	"Voting should be easy even if insecure / Voting should be secure even if not easy"	3.77
"We need to make elections more secure"	4.57	"It is my responsibility to register / It is government's responsibility to make sure I am registered"	1.48
"We need to better protect against voting fraud"	4.53	"I am worried about voting fraud / I am not worried"	2.55
"We need to make sure everyone has a chance to vote"	4.46	"I like to go to the precinct place / I don't like to go"	2.36
"We should make voting more convenient"	3.92	"Voting is a right / Voting is a privilege"	2.74
Survey respondents were presented with a "slider" and endpoints labelled roughly as shown. Full question wording is available from the authors.			

The left side of *table 1* shows the high support given to the valence phrases. Respondents strongly endorsed vague statements about “making elections better,” “making elections more secure,” and “making sure everyone has a chance to vote.” When asked to choose between two phrases—rather than simply endorsing one—the results became rather more mixed. Respondents were, for example, quite polarized over the “voting is a privilege”/“voting is a right” question. Indeed, the results suggest that Americans are not *entirely* positive. Responses to questions about voting security and fraud indicate a level of concern about electoral malfeasance. Strikingly, when asked to choose between “It is important to make voting as easy as possible even if there are some security risks” and “it is important to make voting secure even if it not easy,” 60% of respondents chose 4/5. Indeed, one of the take-away points from these data is that Americans seem willing to tolerate a little inconvenience in exchange for assurances of security.

Previous studies (Alvarez, Hall, and Llewellyn 2008) have found several demographic variables to be strongly associated with variation in voter confidence. (Others, however, have found statistically insignificant effects (Atkeson and Saunders 2008).) One of these is race; in particular,

African-American respondents have reported notably lower rates of confidence that their ballot was correctly counted. We find no such effects in this national sample.

Table 2: Voter Confidence by Race				
	Not at all confident	Not too confident	Fairly confident	Very confident
White	3.8%	6.8%	40.7%	48.7%
Black	2.0%	4.3%	35.0%	58.8%
Hispanic	2.0%	3.5%	43.9%	50.6%
Other	6.7%	9.1%	53.2%	30.7%
chi-square (9) = 19.3772, p = 0.08; n = 1404				

In summary, the descriptive results from our 2008 study highlight a few important findings. First, voter confidence, as measured by an item querying whether the respondent’s ballot will be counted as intended, is very high. Depending on the mode of balloting, between 45-51% of voters are “very confident” and nearly 40% are “somewhat confident.” Second, we found similarly high levels of agreement with a series of descriptive adjectives about the American election system (whether it should be convenient, secure, and accessible). When respondents are asked to make a judgment, however, between ostensibly conflicting goals, we find more variation in the public’s attitudes about American election management. Finally, we were unable to replicate the racial differences in voter confidence reported by Alvarez, Hall, and Llewellyn (2008).

In the next section, we test these same hypotheses in a multivariate context.

Multivariate Results

Analytically, we proceed in this section by starting with a simple demographic model, replicating the approach followed by Alvarez, Hall, and Llewellyn (2008) and Atkeson and Saunders (2008). We then sequentially add groups of variables that correspond to each of our primary questions described in our introductory section. In essence, if our primary approach is correct, then the influence of election-specific measures, such as experiences with the poll worker or voting technology will be less important than general orientations toward society, government, and politics. If, on the other hand, voter confidence really does reflect a citizen’s election experience, then the influence of election-specific variables should be maintained even when other attitudinal controls are added.

We start with a simple demographic model, reported in column 1 of *table 3*. Here, we regress a set of demographic indicators (race, income, education, gender, age, and political interest). As noted in our introductory section, these are also the variables that are used to create the sample weights for the CCES. The results here are modest at best. Similar to Atkeson and Saunders (2007), and

contrary to Alvarez and colleagues (2008), we did not find that non-White respondents (African American, Latinos, and other racial categories) express lower levels of confidence. The only demographic measures that provides any explanatory leverage on the voter confidence measure is, in fact, the voter's income level. This variable remains statistically significant and positive across three of our five specifications.

In the second model, we add a battery of measure of trust and confidence, specifically, the active trust/distrust measure proposed by Cook and Gronke (2005), confidence in the institutions of order (following Gronke and Cook), and an index of interpersonal trust measures.⁹ As expected, there is a strong and positive relationship between a voter's overall trust in government and institutions of order, and confidence that one's vote will be counted as intended. We do not find, however, any relationship between interpersonal trust and voter confidence. The pattern of results is not particularly surprising, but is at least heartening, since it confirms one of the primary ideas motivating this paper: voter confidence, if not the same thing as confidence in other social and political institutions, at least is strongly related to it. Those who trust government, in short, trust governmental actors to administer elections (although, as Alvarez and Hall (2005) found in the 2004 election, and we also found in 2008, citizens strongly endorse the notion of non-partisan election administration; see also Gerken 2009). It would be very worrisome if any other result obtained.

In the third model, we add a single measure—confidence in election administrators. This is an item that we developed for this survey. We used the same wording for this item as the GSS has used to measure confidence in other social and political institutions for more than three decades. While other surveys have asked about poll workers or election machinery, this is the first time to our knowledge that election administrators themselves have been the focus of a generalized confidence item.¹⁰ Not surprisingly, we find a strong positive relationship between expressed confidence in election officials and voter confidence. Election officials may be also happy to hear that respondents expressed generally high levels of confidence in their performance--the overall level of confidence is just below the Supreme Court and the scientific community, two institutions that have historically been the most esteemed in American society (Gronke and Hicks 2009).

The next analysis is our first test of our "state of the times" theory. We posited above that voter confidence may be less related to specific experiences at the polling place and instead may simply reflect the voter's general mood, emotional state, or attitudes about politics. In this model, we add a battery of indicators, including: vote choice in 2008, approval of the performance of President Bush and the Congress, a series of issue items (a retrospective evaluation of the national economy, prospective evaluations of business conditions and personal income, and the respondent's opinion about the financial bailout measure) and a overall summary "state of the times" measure.

⁹ An index formed from dichotomous response categories to three questions that probe people's levels of social and personal trust. Questions are a subset of those traditionally used on the NES and GSS.

¹⁰ Other studies, including our own, have asked about the partisanship of election officials.

As found previously by Hall (2008), we find a negative relationship between a vote for the loser and the respondent's level of confidence in the accuracy of the count (though the result fails to meet conventional statistical significance levels). Those who approve of Bush are significantly *less* likely to be confident that their ballot was counted accurately, although this may be simply capturing the “sore loser” results posited by Hall. The rest of our issue battery provided very little explanatory leverage, other than the respondent's opinion about the government bailout. Those who supported the bailout express lower levels of confidence. Overall, there is limited evidence that unconfident voters would be those same voters who were unhappy about the state of their family finances, political leadership in the country, or controversial political issues. We do find, as previous work has shown, that those who vote for the loser are less confident that the election system is working properly. We also find that those who supported the sitting president (a small minority in this sample as in every other survey taken at this time) were also less confident. Other measures were in the direction we expected—more optimism about the future of the economy is positively related to one's confidence in the election system—but all measures failed to meet conventional statistical significance levels.

In our final model, we add in what might be deemed the conventional wisdom about voter confidence—that voter's respond primarily to the election day experience (Alvarez et al. 2008; Classen, Magleby, Monson, and Patterson 2008). In this model, we add to the previous regressors the voter's self expressed concern about voting fraud, an index of items that capture the nature of their interaction with their poll worker (either early in person or at the precinct place), and an index of their overall experience with the election.

Here we find a series of powerful relationships, indicating that voter confidence is, after all, a rational response to the citizen's voting experience. For instance, we find that those who are worried about voting fraud are significantly more likely to distrust the integrity of ballot counting. While this is an attitudinal measure, it is *prima facie* much more directly related to election administration, in contrast, for example, to one's attitudes about the performance of Bush in office. Similarly, respondents who reported a positive poll worker experience or overall election experience were far more likely to be confident that their ballots were counted accurately.

The relative impact of these variables is substantial, although — shown in *table 4* — the impact of the election administration variables dominates the generalized confidence and issue measures.¹¹ For example, a respondent who voted for John McCain was 10% less likely to express a “great deal” of confidence that their ballot was counted as intended, compared to a Obama voter (all other variables were kept at their mean value for this calculation). Respondents who were most approving of Bush's performance were 16% less likely to express confidence, compared to those who were least approving, again *ceteris paribus*. Those most trusting in government overall were 20% more

¹¹ Estimates produced using *CLARIFY*, authored by Michael Tomz, Jason Wittenberg and Gary King. For more, see <<http://gking.harvard.edu/clarify>>.

sanguine about ballot counting accuracy than the most distrustful.

Compare the size of these effects to measures that are arguably more directly related to the elections process. For example, moving a respondent from the least confident to the most confident in election officials is also associated with a 20% gain in our dependent variable. More substantial, though, are the

Table 4: Probability Changes		
Variable Change	Change in Probability “Very Confident”	Standard Error
Vote for McCain	-10%	0.08
Least to Most Approving of Bush’s Performance	-16%	0.10
Least to Most Confident in Election Officials	20%	0.02
Least to Most Trusting of Government	20%	0.10
Most Negative to Most Positive Election Experience	33%	0.13
Most Negative to Most Positive Poll Worker	63%	0.10

impacts estimated from direct election experiences. Respondents who were most positive about their election experience were a whopping 33% more likely to be confident their ballots would be counted as they intended, compared to those who were most negative. Those who were most approving of their poll workers were 63% more likely to trust the accuracy of ballot counts. It seems that if we want American voters to be more confident that their votes are counted as intended, we need to improve the quality of poll workers and the election experience, and worry less about the national zeitgeist.

Conclusion

We started this paper by questioning the validity of what is becoming a commonly used metric to evaluate the performance of American elections—a voter’s perception that his ballot will or will not be counted accurately. The motivation for the survey is obvious: after the 2000 contest, and continuing in 2004, the press, bloggers, and advocacy groups highlighted widespread problems with voting machines and voting technology. Furthermore, there have been increasing calls for a “democracy index” which would help us monitor election performance (Gerken 2009; Pew Center on the States 2008). Any democracy index, however, is only as good as its components. Is voter confidence an appropriate measure of the quality of election administration? That was the primary goal of this paper—to subject this measure to critical scrutiny.

Given the coverage since 2000, it is perhaps surprising to discover that by 2008 — after an election that was moderately well-run overall (though see Gerken 2009b for a contrary view) — voter confidence is quite high, with nearly 90% expressing confidence that their ballot will be counted properly. On the other hand, we still are not sure what the item is measuring—confidence

in the system by which ballots are counted, confidence in the probability that the voter's own ballot will be counted, or faith in the system of American elections and American democracy writ large? After all, as we have shown in other contexts (Gronke and Hicks 2009; Cook and Gronke 2005), moderately high levels of skepticism about elected officials is part and parcel of American democracy, and can quite easily co-exist with strong levels of faith in the system as a whole. As Easton put it so effectively more than three decades ago, "system support" (support for a political system as a whole) is quite distinct from "regime support" (support for a particular political leader), party, or regime (Easton 1975). We wonder whether the same distinction applies to voter confidence—whether a low level of confidence in a particular balloting system really says anything at all about the voter's support for the overall system of casting and tallying votes.

Overall, we found mixed support for our claims, however. The voter confidence measure does seem to operate in what we might deem a reasoned or rational fashion. Voters who place more confidence in government and in election officials, as we predicted, have more faith in the system by which ballots are counted. We did find weak support for the notion that voter confidence is labile and responsive to the "state of the times." Voters' political choices (vote for president, approval of the outgoing administration) affected their evaluations of the integrity of the ballot, even though there is arguably little relationship between the two.

Finally, and most importantly to those who advocate the use of this item, voter confidence is most strongly related to actual evaluative and experiential aspects of the election system. Voters who are concerned about fraud are, not surprisingly, also concerned about ballot integrity. Similarly, those who had a positive election day experience, both overall and in their poll worker interaction, express higher levels of confidence. These patterns are reasonable and speak to the validity of this item.

There are missing elements in this paper and in our research design that have only become apparent to us in hindsight. First, we did not ask the overall voting experience to those who did not vote absentee, losing a substantial proportion of voters in many states. This was an oversight that needs to be corrected in future work. Also, because absentee balloters do not have a "polling place" experience, any poll worker items do not apply to these respondents. In future work, we need to examine voter confidence among absentee voters separately. Second, we did not ask a general evaluative question about the fairness of the election *overall* (distinct from an item about the individual ballot). This item, we believe, may allow us to discriminate between individual level experiences and broader evaluations, analogous to the long-established "pocketbook" and "sociotropic" categories of economic evaluations. Finally, we believe we can push the envelope somewhat on the notion of a "sore loser" by examining not only those respondents who voted for the losing presidential candidate, but also who may have chosen a losing Senatorial, gubernatorial, or House candidate. The CCES is uniquely designed to allow us to make these fine-grained distinctions, but we have not done so yet.

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Table 3: Explanatory Models for Voter Confidence

Model Number:		1	2	3	4	5					
Demographics	Race (white)	-0.049	0.114	-0.018	0.130	-0.044	0.131	0.008	0.140	-0.160	0.167
	Income	0.027	0.016	0.025	0.017	0.027	0.017	0.032	0.018	0.052	0.022
	Education	0.003	0.035	-0.003	0.039	-0.011	0.039	-0.040	0.042	-0.027	0.049
	Gender (female)	-0.054	0.094	-0.073	0.105	-0.063	0.105	-0.085	0.112	-0.105	0.133
	Age	-0.001	0.004	-0.004	0.004	-0.004	0.004	0.000	0.004	0.000	0.005
	Political Interest	-0.115	0.190	-0.066	0.224	-0.092	0.225	-0.163	0.235	-0.191	0.271
Trust	Active Trust in Government			0.490	0.114	0.453	0.115	0.456	0.126	0.272	0.148
Confidence	Confidence, Social Institutions			0.511	0.334	0.327	0.340	0.355	0.370	-0.139	0.386
	Confidence, Institutions of Order			0.503	0.278	0.448	0.280	0.297	0.300		
	IP Index			-0.089	0.142	-0.035	0.144	-0.017	0.152	0.096	0.177
	Election Officials					0.549	0.189	0.618	0.199	0.539	0.245
State of the Times	McCain vote							-0.296	0.179	-0.253	0.212
	Approval of Pres							-0.444	0.232	-0.427	0.270
	Approval of Cong							-0.235	0.226	-0.318	0.280
	State of Nation							-0.053	0.190	0.116	0.223
	Economic Recovery							0.052	0.180	0.050	0.207
	Business ?							0.069	0.157	0.229	0.186
	Income ?							0.163	0.191	0.191	0.230
Bailout							-0.074	0.038	-0.063	0.045	
Election Administration	Fraud Concern									-0.169	0.096
	PW Index									1.973	0.461
	Election Day exper.									0.877	0.370
Ancillary Parameters	Cut 1	-2.030	0.283	-1.980	0.399	-1.879	0.402	-2.278	0.471	-0.829	0.663
	Cut 2	-1.376	0.269	-1.244	0.383	-1.141	0.387	-1.442	0.449	0.285	0.634
	Cut 3	-0.162	0.264	-0.004	0.380	0.116	0.384	-0.129	0.446	1.785	0.640

p < .05: ***Bold & Italics***

p < .10: **Bold**

Notes: Data are from the 2008 Cooperative Congressional Election Study. Cell entries are ordered probit coefficients. All variables have been coded to the 0-1 range unless specified in the text.