

Confidence in the 2020-2021 Elections in Georgia

February 2021

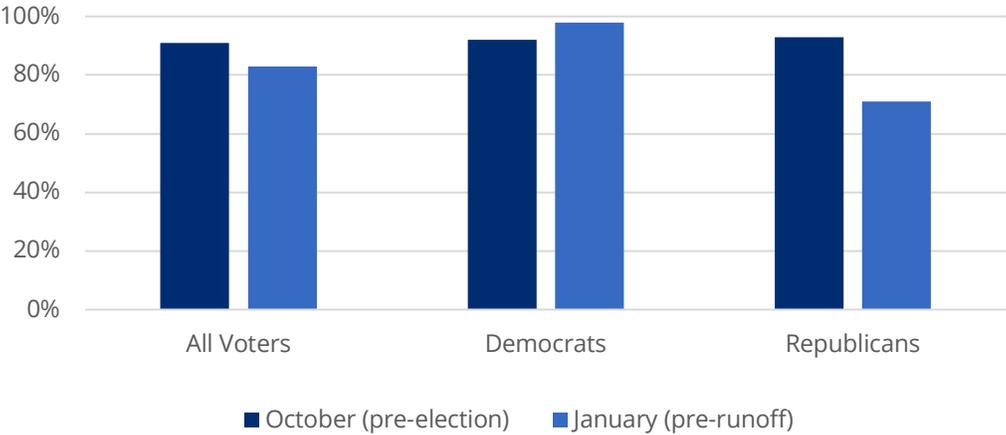


The Center for Election Innovation & Research recently surveyed Georgia voters to better understand their confidence in the state’s electoral system and processes. This polling took place in October during the general election early voting period, in November shortly after the general election, and in January just prior to the runoff election. Though voter confidence diminished somewhat post-November, the drop was less than we might have expected given the foreign and domestic disinformation campaigns designed to diminish voter confidence. That better-than-expected result signals cause for hope. This short report focuses on voters’ confidence in the accuracy of individual and statewide vote counts, both overall and by voting method.

Belief Ballots Counted as Intended

Our January survey showed that 83 percent of respondents were confident their individual votes would be counted as they intended. That was down slightly from our October pre-election surveys, which showed 91 percent of respondents were confident. The percentage of all respondents who were very confident remained steady at around 58-59 percent. It is heartening to see a relatively small reduction in overall confidence in the face of the unprecedented and false attacks on Georgia’s voting system in the immediate aftermath of the presidential election.¹

Percentage of Georgia Voters Confident their Individual Votes Were Counted as Intended



As expected, changes within partisan groups were more pronounced.² Before the general election, 93 percent of self-identified Republicans reported they were confident their votes would count as intended. Despite some drop off, a large majority of Republicans

¹ For examples of these unfounded claims, see: Hope Yen, Jeff Amy, and Michael Balsamo, “AP FACT CHECK: Trump’s Made-up Claims of Fake Georgia Votes,” AP NEWS, January 3, 2021, <https://apnews.com/article/ap-fact-check-donald-trump-georgia-elections-atlanta-c23d10e5299e14daee6109885f7dafa9>.

² For more about partisan divisions, see: Miles Parks, “The Next 2020 Election Fight? Convincing Trump’s Supporters That He Lost,” GPB, November 8, 2020, <https://www.gpb.org/news/live-updates-2020-election-results/2020/11/08/the-next-2020-election-fight-convincing-trumps>.

maintained their confidence. By January, 71 percent still believed their votes would be counted as intended. Self-identified Democrats' confidence was more stable, with a slight increase during the same period. Our October survey found 92 percent were confident their votes would count as intended, and in January, 98 percent were confident.

When asked in January whether votes in the November general election were counted as intended statewide, 63 percent of respondents stated they were confident in the vote count. However, a wide partisan gap is present on this particular issue. Ninety-nine percent of Democrats said they were confident votes were counted as intended statewide, compared to only 31 percent of Republicans. Indeed, 88 percent of Democrats reported they were very confident in the statewide general election count, while a majority of Republicans, 52 percent, stated they were "not confident at all." Despite the fact that the Georgia presidential race was counted three times overall—once entirely by hand statewide—it appears that the massive disinformation campaign directed by former President Trump saw some success in diminishing voter confidence, but only among Republicans.³

Confidence in Voting Methods

In-Person Voting

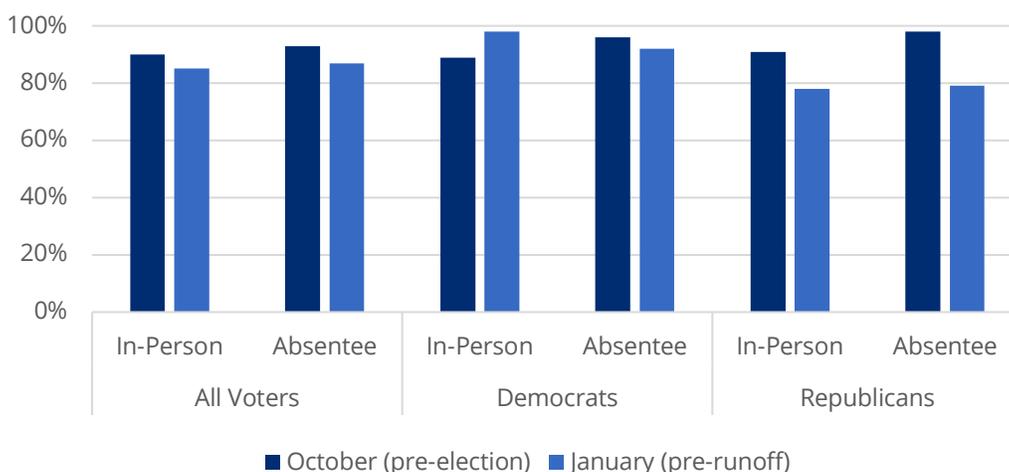
In 2020, Georgia introduced new ballot marking devices (BMDs) statewide. An overwhelming 97 percent of our November survey respondents who used the BMDs in the general election stated they had a positive experience. Ninety-eight percent of respondents reported the BMDs were easy to use. Levels of favorable interactions and ease of use were comparable across parties. Additionally, 90 percent of respondents reported they double-checked their printed ballot to confirm their choices were accurate before placing it in a vote tabulator, indicating a remarkably high level of ballot verification.

Despite voters' nearly universal approval of the BMDs following the general election, confidence in voting machines faded in January—but only among Republicans. Overall confidence in the BMDs was reduced to 68 percent, with just 45 percent of Republicans expressing confidence compared to 95 percent of Democrats.

Generally, though, confidence levels regarding in-person voting remained high and relatively steady. In our October survey, 90 percent of respondents who voted or planned to vote in person stated that ballots cast in person likely would be counted accurately. This only fell slightly to 85 percent in January. Any downward trend was due, again, to declines among Republicans. In October, 91 percent of Republicans who voted or planned to vote in person believed in-person ballots likely would be counted accurately compared to 78 percent in January. Their Democratic counterparts actually saw increased confidence, growing from 89 percent in October to 98 percent in January.

³ David Wickert, Patricia Murphy, and Mark Niese, "Georgia recount confirms Biden win, again, but Trump still battling," *The Atlanta Journal-Constitution*, December 7, 2020, <https://www.ajc.com/politics/election/georgia-recount-confirms-biden-win-again-but-trump-still-battling/OZGAOQCMKVFG7G43L5PSF3BNHM/>.

Percentage of Georgia Voters* Confident Votes Were Counted as Intended, by Vote Method



*Voters were only asked about their confidence in ballots cast using their chosen method of voting. For example, absentee voters were asked how confident they were that absentee ballots would be counted accurately.

Absentee voting

Voters’ confidence in absentee voting remained relatively steady despite rampant disinformation. In October, 93 percent of respondents who voted or planned to vote absentee in the upcoming election were confident absentee ballots would be counted accurately, with only a small decline to 87 percent in January. Democrats went from 96 percent to 92 percent being confident, while Republicans, the primary targets of false claims of voter fraud, declined a bit more, from 98 percent to 79 percent.⁴

Conclusion

The disinformation campaign to raise doubts about the integrity of Georgia’s elections was without modern precedent. There is no question that the falsehoods about the election had an impact on their intended audience—Republican voters in the state. However, our survey data suggests that while there has been a measurable decline in voter confidence among Republicans, that decline was not as large as one might expect. Republicans were still fairly confident overall, with over 70 percent believing their votes would be counted as cast. It’s likely that efforts of election officials and others throughout the state, using transparent processes and accurate and secure methods, as well as communicating those methods effectively, contributed substantially to bolstering voter confidence.

⁴ Note: Republicans who voted or planned to vote absentee were relatively small subsets of the January and October surveys.