

**Key Findings of GAO Report:
"Elections: Statistical Analysis of Factors That Affected Uncounted Votes
in the 2000 Presidential Election"**

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At the request of Rep. Henry A. Waxman, the General Accounting Office conducted an investigation into uncounted votes in the 2000 presidential election, examining the extent to which high rates of uncounted votes could be attributed to voting equipment and the demographic characteristics of voters.

As part of this investigation, GAO obtained county-level information on voting equipment, voter turnout, and presidential vote data in 43 states. This data was then matched with demographic data (population, racial composition, age, income, and education) from the U.S. Census Bureau.

The GAO investigation found that:

- Over 1.6 million ballots -- almost 2% of all ballots cast -- were not counted in the 2000 presidential elections.
- Minority voters had higher rates of uncounted ballots. According to GAO, "counties with higher percentages of minority residents tended to have higher percentages of uncounted presidential votes."
- The type of voting technology used by voters had a significant impact on the percentage of uncounted ballots. According to GAO, "the largest percentages of uncounted presidential votes tended to occur in counties that used punch card equipment." GAO found that counties that used optical scan technology that allowed voters to correct errors had undercount rates that were 1.1 percentage points lower than counties that used punch cards. This 1.1 percentage point difference in undercount rates -- from a 2.9% undercount rate in counties with punch-card equipment to a 1.8% undercount rate in counties with optical scan equipment with error correction -- corresponds to a nearly 40% reduction in the undercount. GAO found that approximately 300,000 out of the 800,000 uncounted votes in counties using punch cards could have been avoided if the counties had used optical scan equipment with error correction.
- Significant variance in undercount rates occurred among counties that had similar demographic characteristics and used similar voting technology. GAO found that factors that are specific to individual states accounted for significant differences in the percentage of uncounted ballots. These differences could include factors such as state standards for determining what is a valid

vote, statewide voter education efforts, and state laws on casting straight party ballots. According to GAO, "[d]ifferences across states were of considerable importance in determining the prevalence of uncounted presidential votes."

In July 2001, the Special Investigations Division of the minority staff of the Committee on Government Reform prepared a report for Rep. Waxman analyzing the impact of demographics and voting technology on the percentage of uncounted ballots in the 2000 presidential election. The GAO results confirmed the findings of this report. According to GAO, "while there were differences between our study and that of the Special Investigations Division . . . our results do indicate, like theirs, that regardless of voting equipment, percentages of uncounted presidential votes were higher in minority areas than in other areas."