Survey Research Department
Consumer Reports® National Research Center

Public Opinion toward Presidential Voting via the Internet

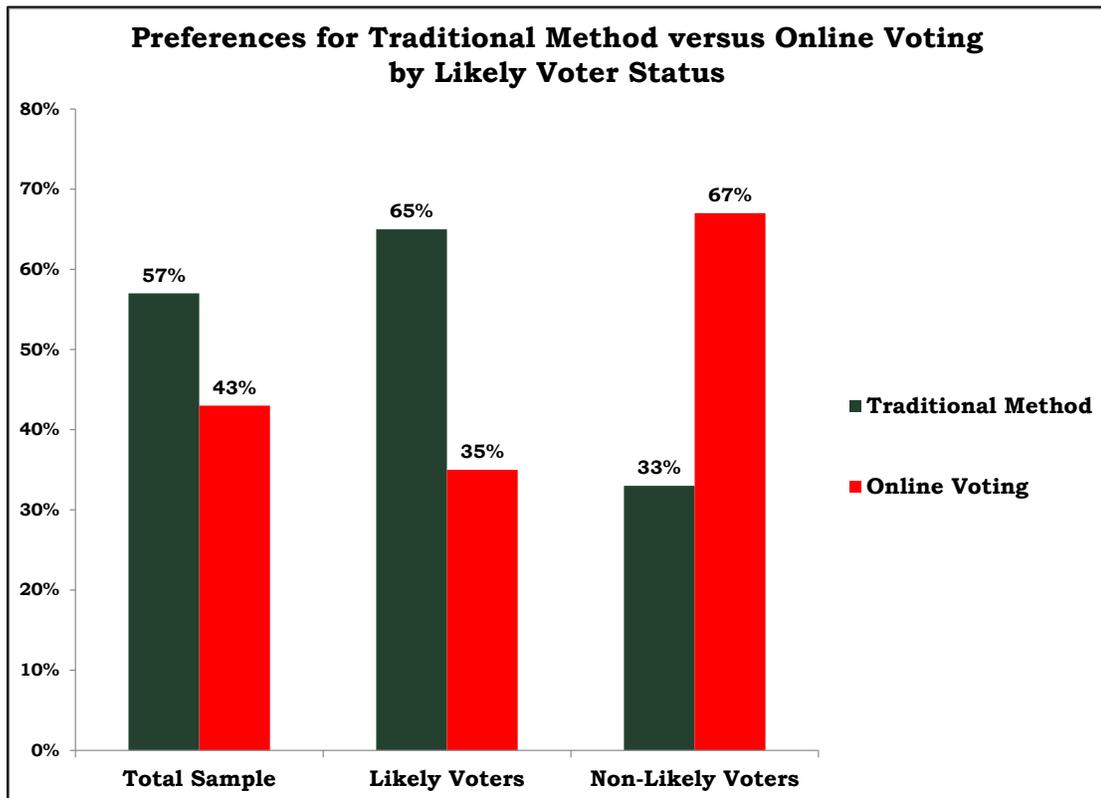# Nationally Representative Survey - March 2016

Highlights

- **In a nationally-representative survey of 3,649 U.S. citizens of voting age, 33% said they would be more likely to vote in the Presidential Election this November if they had the opportunity to do so using the Internet from wherever they chose.**

- **43% of all voting age citizens said they would prefer to vote via the Internet than by the traditional voting method used in their state.**

- **The majority of projected new likely voters motivated by Internet-voting are Independents and moderates.**
  - **More than one-fifth of them have no candidate preferences, but among those who do:**
    - **54% favor one of the two Democratic contenders, and**
    - **24% favor one of the three remaining Republican contenders.**

- **Even if all of the projected new voters actually voted, they would represent merely 7% of the total pool of likely voters and would have a very marginal impact on the outcome of November's Presidential Election.**

- **The likelihood that many of the projected new likely voters would actually vote is limited by the reality that only 25% of them are currently registered at their current addresses.**

Introduction

Consumer Reports designed a survey, which was fielded by Public Policy Polling (PPP) in late March 2016, to gauge Americans' interest in the prospect of voting in elections for public office, if they had the option of using the Internet in addition to their state's traditional voting method. The sample consisted of 3,649 U.S. citizens, representative of the total voting age population. Respondents were asked if they would be more likely to vote if given the opportunity to vote from anywhere they choose using the Internet. A second question asked if, given the choice, citizens would prefer voting via the Internet or by their state's traditional method.

On the latter question, more than two-fifths (43%) say they would prefer voting via the Internet, while 57% would prefer their state's traditional voting method.

Preferences for Traditional Method versus Online Voting by Likely Voter Status

	Traditional Method	Online Voting
Total Sample	57%	43%
Likely Voters	65%	35%
Non-Likely Voters	33%	67%

The graph above illustrates, however, that the majority of "likely voters" (i.e., U.S. adults currently registered to vote at their current address who say they're "very likely" to vote in the upcoming Presidential election) prefer traditional voting methods, whereas those who indicate less likelihood of voting are just as united in their preference for online voting.

Bearing in mind that respondents in surveys always overstate their likelihood of voting (http://www.gallup.com/poll/4636/how-define-likely-voters.aspx), we first established a baseline percentage of those who said they are "very likely" to vote in the Presidential election this coming November, which is 75%.

Projected Potential Effects of Internet-Voting

The impact of an Internet voting option is likely to motivate only those who are now only "somewhat likely" to vote and who indicate they would be "more likely" to vote if given the opportunity to do so via the Internet. This particular combination of factors accounts for 7% of the total voting-age population.

Whereas just 35% of the total sample said they would be more likely to vote if provided the chance to do so via the Internet, that percentage is much higher for the critical pool of "somewhat likely" voters – 60%. Given our assumptions and our findings, we would expect an increase in the percentage of "likely voters" from 75% of the electorate to 82% of the electorate.

Share of Likely Voters in Electortate: Baseline versus Internet-Motivated Expanded Electorate
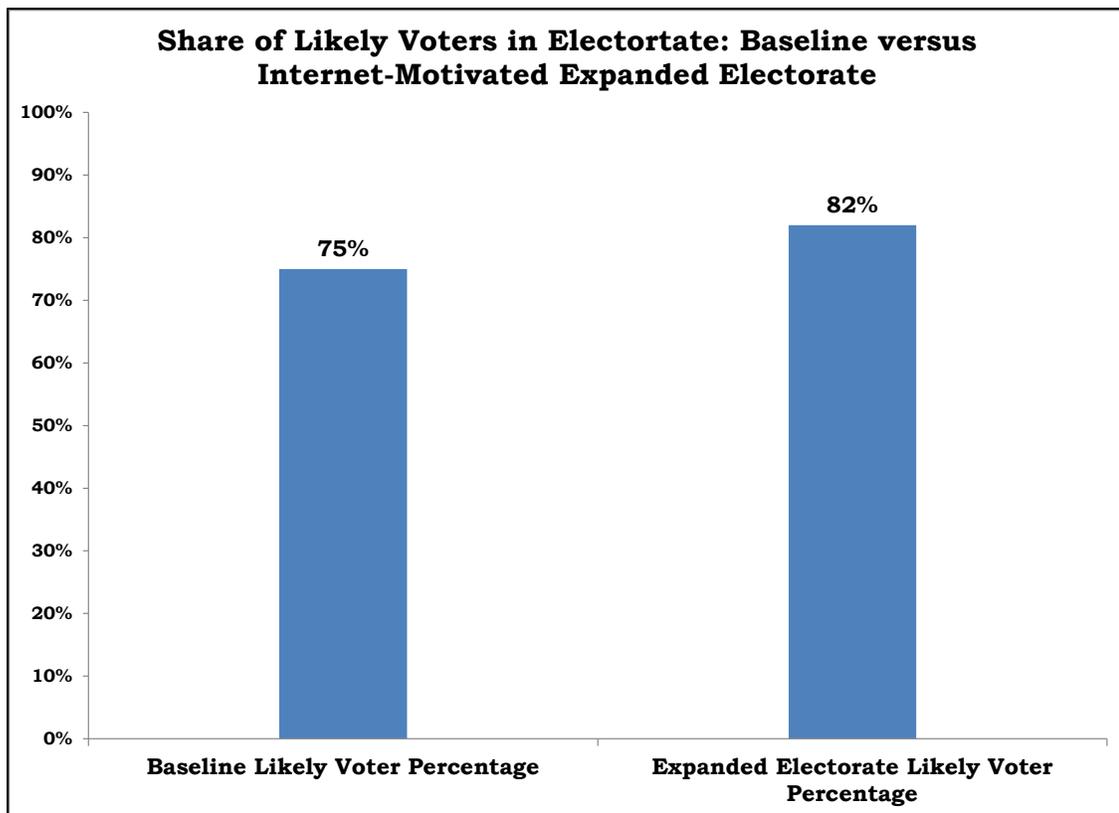
We estimate that Internet voting could expand the total share of "likely voters" by 7 percentage points. The caveat remains, however, that self-reports of likely voting exaggerate the percentage of the pool of eligible voters who actually cast a ballot on Election Day.
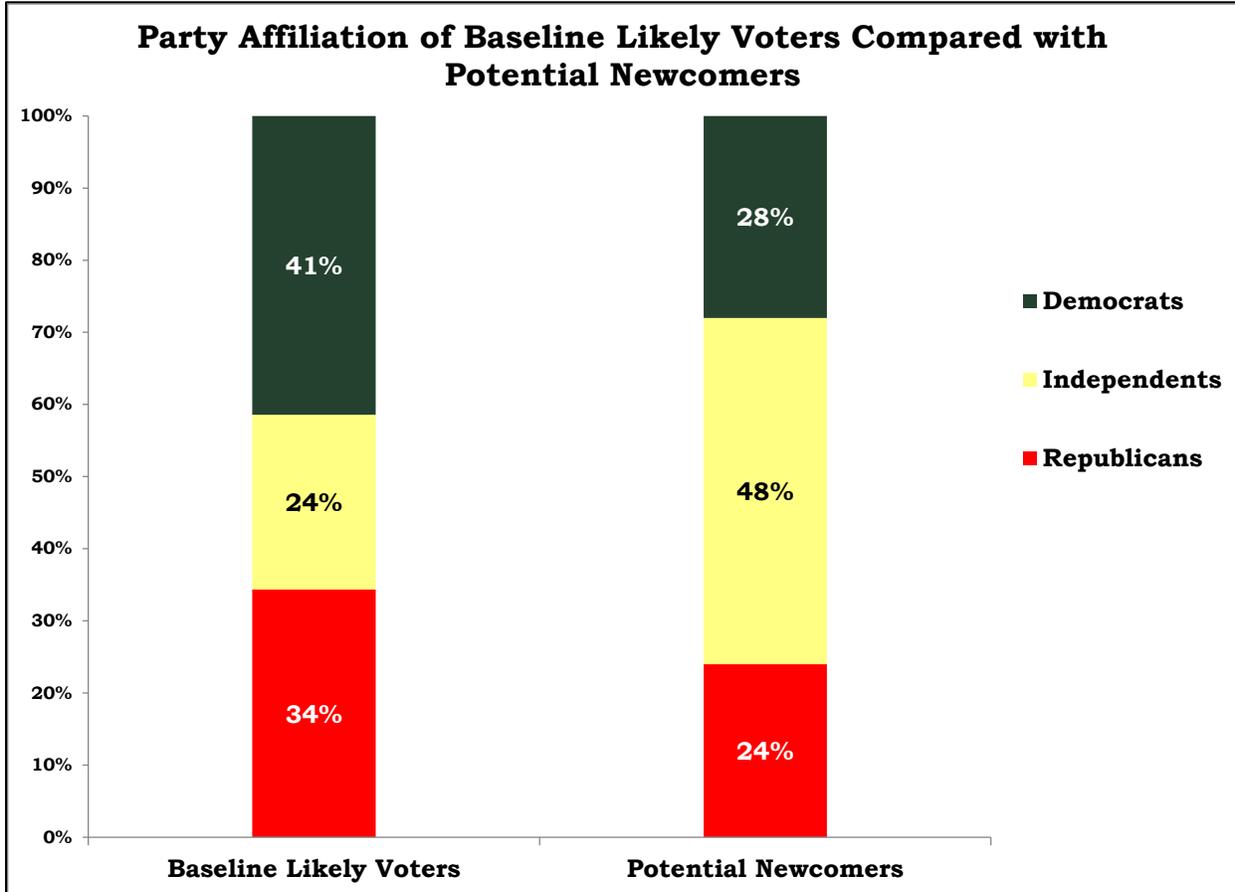
Beyond that, our findings indicate that only 25% of this "Internet-motivated segment" are currently registered at their current address. Given the registration prerequisite for voting, it is reasonable to surmise that many of these voters will not actually cast a ballot in November.

Trends toward easing voter registration have evolved, however, to the point where 31 states plus D.C. now allow online voter registration (and four others have passed legislation that would extend this courtesy by 2017 or 2018). Presumably, voters who prefer online voting would also find online voter registration a convenient device. In addition, 13 states and D.C. offer Election Day registration, also abetting voting prospects. These findings are drawn from the website of the National Conference of State Legislatures (www.ncsl.org).

Furthermore, the recently published analyses by David W. Nickerson of Temple University (http://www.journals.uchicago.edu/doi/full/10.1086/678391) suggest that voter registration drives do, at least marginally, enhance the pool of likely voters from the ranks of previously unregistered voters.
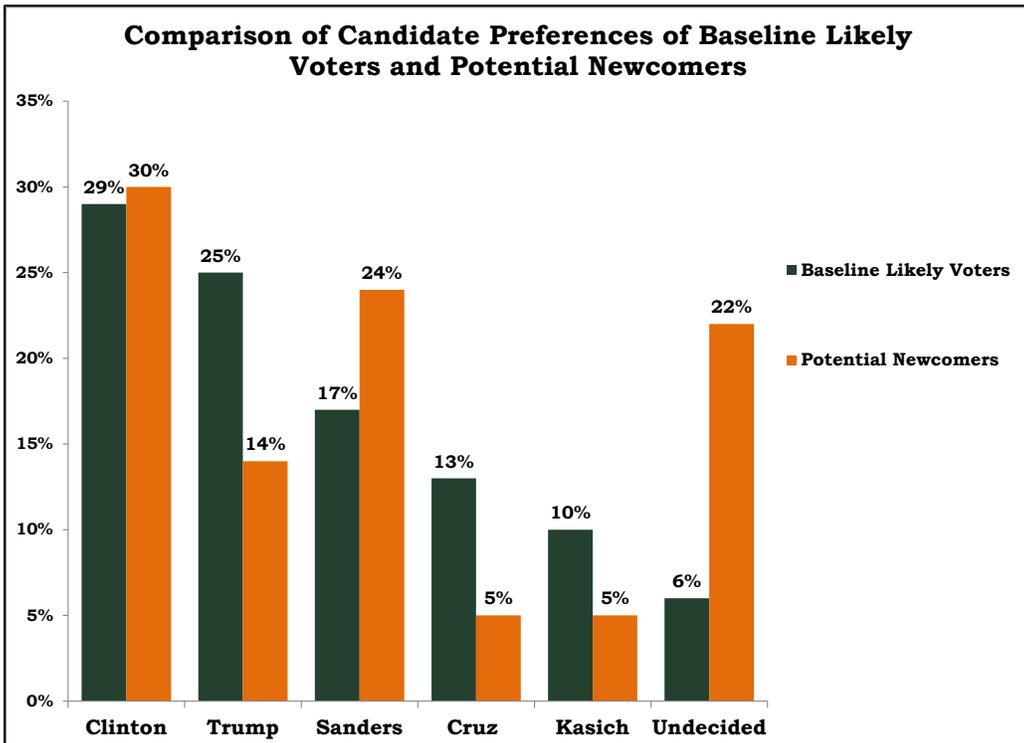
The Potential Voting Newcomers

   Taking these findings at face value, we explore the characteristics of those who may be *more motivated* to vote if an Internet voting option became available. As reflected in their low registration rate, these citizens are less engaged and far less partisan in their perspectives than the baseline pool of likely voters (i.e., currently registered voters who say they're very likely to vote in the upcoming Presidential Election).

Party Affiliation of Baseline Likely Voters Compared with Potential Newcomers

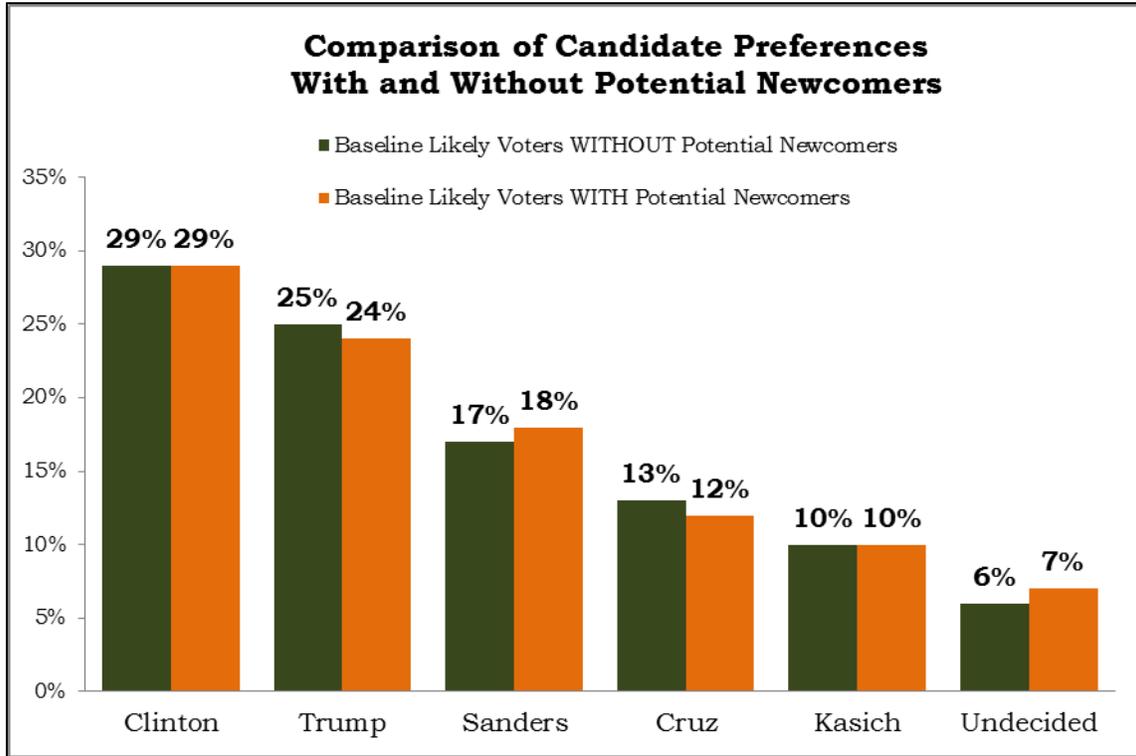|	Baseline Likely Voters	Potential Newcomers
Democrats	41%	28%
Independents	24%	48%
Republicans	34%	24%

   In fact, these potential newcomers to the electoral sphere are remarkably more Independent than current likely voters. On the other hand, these potential newcomers do have ideological perspectives that are more moderate and less conservative than baseline likely voters. (See chart on top of the following page.)

Ideological Leanings of Baseline Likely Voters Compared with Potential Newcomers

	Baseline Likely Voters	Potential Newcomers
Liberal	33%	32%
Moderate	30%	55%
Conservative	36%	13%
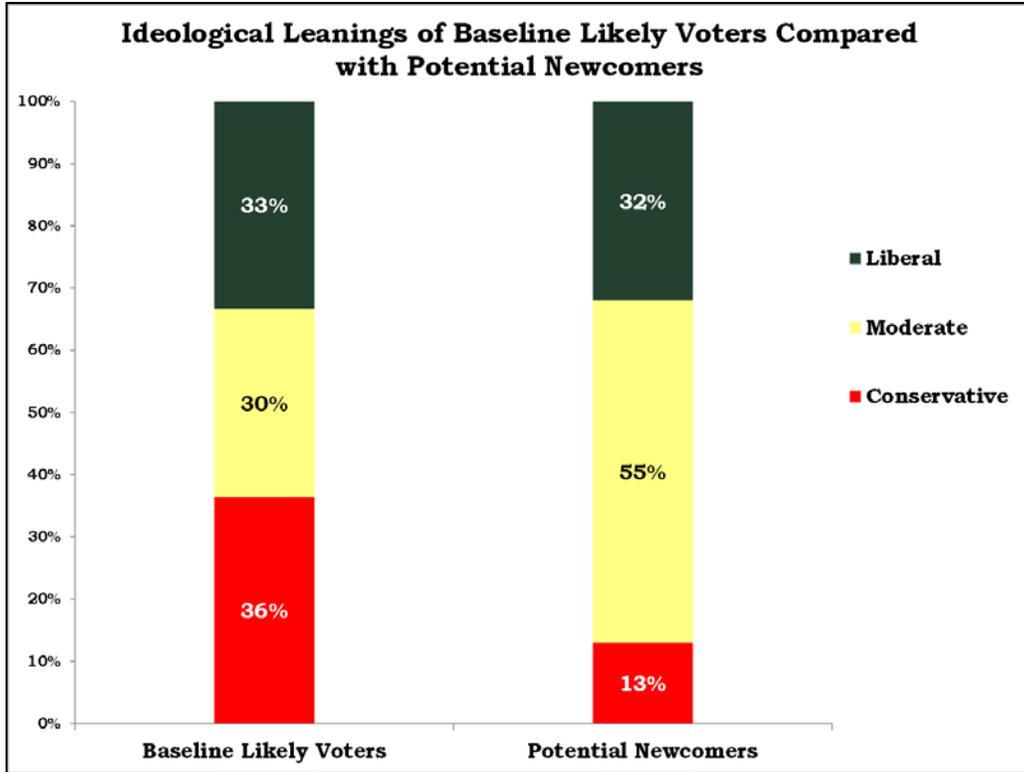
The candidate preferences of potential newcomers are characterized by much greater uncertainty and lower levels of support for each of the Republican contenders.

Comparison of Candidate Preferences of Baseline Likely Voters and Potential Newcomers

	Clinton	Trump	Sanders	Cruz	Kasich	Undecided
Baseline Likely Voters	29%	25%	17%	13%	10%	6%
Potential Newcomers	30%	14%	24%	5%	5%	22%

The net effect, however, on overall candidate preferences by an infusion of new Internet-motivated voters would be nominal. Data are graphed below.

Comparison of Candidate Preferences With and Without Potential Newcomers

- ■ Baseline Likely Voters WITHOUT Potential Newcomers
- ■ Baseline Likely Voters WITH Potential Newcomers

Candidate	WITHOUT	WITH
Clinton	29%	29%
Trump	25%	24%
Sanders	17%	18%
Cruz	13%	12%
Kasich	10%	10%
Undecided	6%	7%

Projected new online-voters are demographically distinct from current likely voters. As can be seen below, compared to current likely voters, they are more likely to be female, less likely to be White, younger, less educated, and have lower household incomes.

Demographic Comparisons between Baseline Likely Voters and Potential Newcomers

	Baseline Likely Voters	Potential Newcomers
Gender		
Female	49%	69%
Male	51%	31%
Ethnicity		
White	74%	57%
Hispanic	8%	22%
African-American	13%	12%
Other	5%	9%
Age		
18-29	12%	42%
30-44	22%	35%
45-64	41%	19%
65+	25%	4%
Education		
No College	21%	33%
Some College	36%	42%
College Graduate	43%	25%
Household Income		
Under $20,000	13%	26%
$20,000-$49,999	29%	47%
$50,000-$74,999	24%	14%
$75,000-$99,999	16%	7%
$100,000 or More	19%	6%

Internet Voting Sentiment

A person's opinions about the potential negatives associated with Internet voting are not strongly correlated to their opinions about some of the potential positives associated with Internet voting. Most people agree with both the potential positives and negatives of instituting Internet voting.
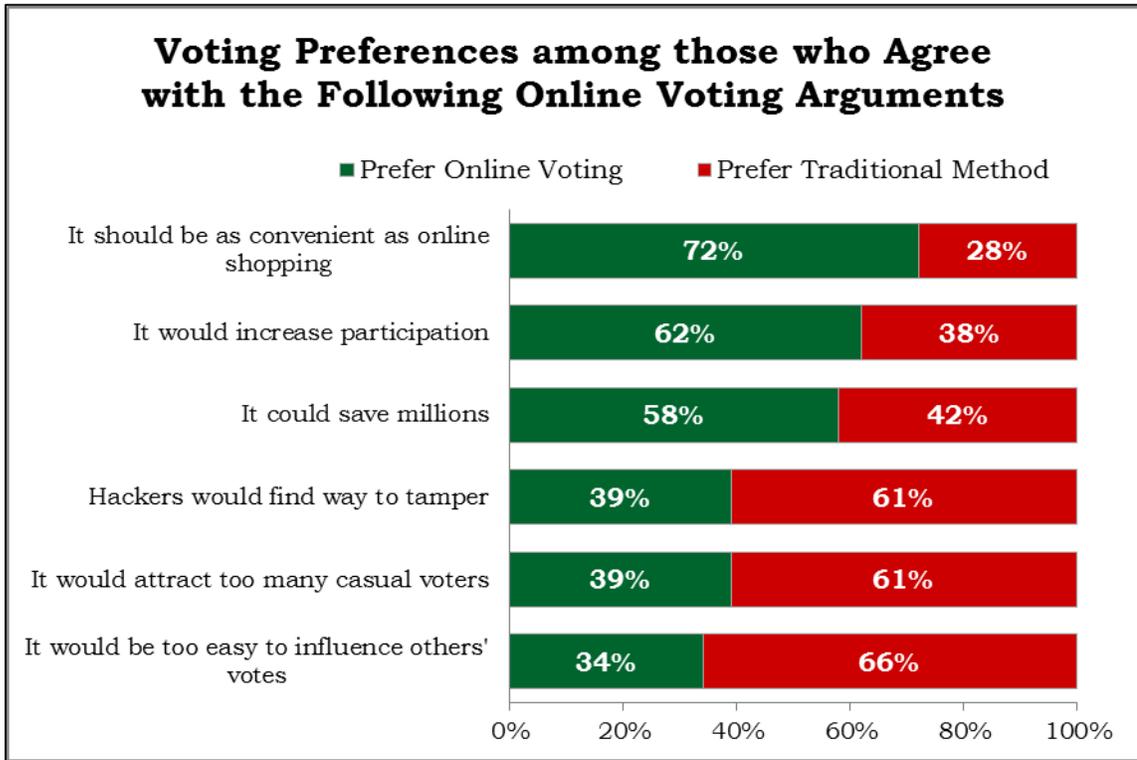
On the positive side:

- 68% agree that Internet voting would save millions of dollars in election day administration costs;
- 65% agree that Internet voting would increase citizen participation; and
- 54% agree that voting should be just as convenient as other transactions conducted via the Internet.

On the negative side:

- 84% agree that hackers would figure out how to tamper with votes;
- 65% agree that Internet voting would make it too easy for people to vote without putting much thought into it; and
- 61% agree that Internet voting would make it easier for a family member or friend to unfairly influence someone's vote.

Attitudes about Online Voting

Those who think that voting should be just as convenient as online shopping are more likely to prefer voting online than voting via their state's traditional method. Majorities of those who feel online voting would increase voter-participation and/or could save the country millions in election costs also prefer online voting, but to a lesser degree.
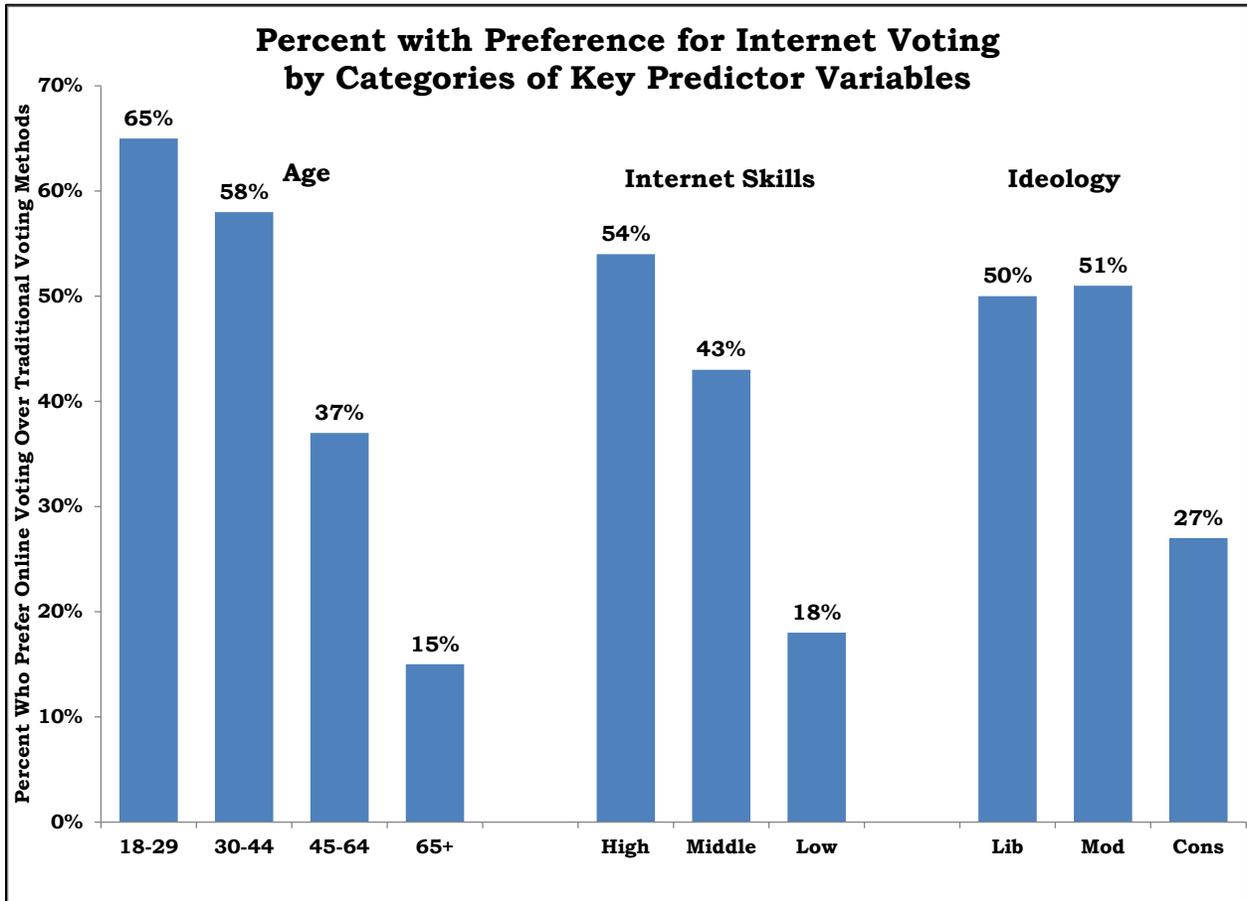

Voting Preferences among those who Agree with the Following Online Voting Arguments

- Prefer Online Voting
- Prefer Traditional Method

Argument	Prefer Online Voting	Prefer Traditional Method
It should be as convenient as online shopping	72%	28%
It would increase participation	62%	38%
It could save millions	58%	42%
Hackers would find way to tamper	39%	61%
It would attract too many casual voters	39%	61%
It would be too easy to influence others' votes	34%	66%

The "public good" arguments that would most likely be used to justify the availability of Internet voting (i.e., increasing voter participation and decreasing election administration costs) track less closely with preferences for online voting than the largely self-interested convenience argument. About two-fifths of those who accept the participation and cost arguments, respectively, prefer their state's traditional voting methods.

Furthermore, it is surprising to see that 39% of those who believe that hackers would be able to tamper with online votes would still prefer to vote online. In fact, the feeling that online voting would make it too easy for people to influence the votes of friends and relatives seems to be a slightly bigger deterrent to accepting online voting than is the concern over potential hacking.

The Demographics of Online Voting Preferences

A person's age is a better predictor of their preference to vote online than both level of internet skill and ideology. Younger respondents, those with self-reported advanced Internet skills, and liberals/moderates are most likely to embrace the Internet voting option. Two-thirds (65%) of the those under 30 years old prefer online voting, while only 15% of those 65 or older do so.

Percent with Preference for Internet Voting by Categories of Key Predictor Variables

(Vertical axis: Percent Who Prefer Online Voting Over Traditional Voting Methods)

Age
- 18-29: 65%
- 30-44: 58%
- 45-64: 37%
- 65+: 15%

Internet Skills
- High: 54%
- Middle: 43%
- Low: 18%

Ideology
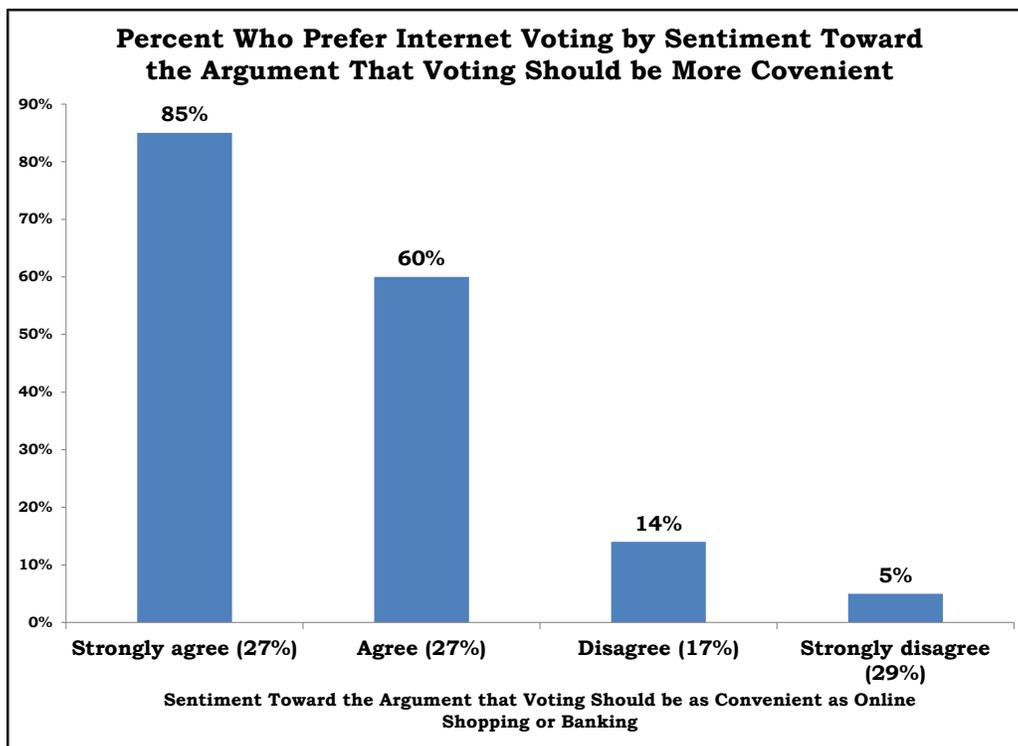- Lib: 50%
- Mod: 51%
- Cons: 27%

Internet-savviness is closely correlated with age: 53% of 18-29 year olds claim advanced Internet skills, compared to 13% of those 65 or older. Yet, even when we control for age, Internet skill level is a powerful predictor of a preference for online voting: 54% of citizens with advanced Internet skills express a preference for online voting, compared to merely 18% of those with beginner-level Internet-related skills.

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The Predictive Impact of the Convenience Argument

Attitudinally, as noted previously, the statement about Internet voting that best predicts preferences for the Internet voting option is the convenience argument.[1] Our finding is that when we simultaneously control for the influence of each of the six aforementioned statements, the convenience argument is *more than twice* as important in preferences for online voting than the second best predictor (increased participation) and the third best predictor (cost savings). For that reason, we focus on the convenience argument in greater detail here.

Those who strongly agree that voting should be as convenient as shopping or banking online are strongly inclined to prefer Internet voting, whereas those who strongly disagree with that argument are nearly unanimous in their preference for their state's traditional voting method.

Percent Who Prefer Internet Voting by Sentiment Toward the Argument That Voting Should be More Covenient

Sentiment	Percent
Strongly agree (27%)	85%
Agree (27%)	60%
Disagree (17%)	14%
Strongly disagree (29%)	5%

Sentiment Toward the Argument that Voting Should be as Convenient as Online Shopping or Banking

So who doesn't buy into the convenience argument, and why? From a demographic/political perspective, the main actors who are not persuaded are older respondents, conservatives, and the least Internet-savvy respondents – in that order.

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[1] This finding is based on a multivariate analysis, in which we considered the overlapping influences of six statements about the positive and negatives associated with Internet voting on the preference for online voting.

Opposition to online voting seems rooted in concerns about the integrity of votes cast in online elections. Consider that overall, among those who voted in the 2012 presidential election, 82% are at least "somewhat confident" that the vote they cast in that election was counted as intended. When those same voters are asked about their confidence that a presidential vote cast via the Internet would be counted as intended, just 50% said they are at least "somewhat confident." In the years to come, public officials may rely on this expression of public concern to justify resistance to the adoption of Internet voting.

There is a strong correlation between lack of confidence in an accurate recording of an Internet vote and disagreement with the convenience argument. Voters who lack confidence in the honest count of a vote cast via the Internet strongly disagree with the notion that voting via the Internet should be made as convenient as other online transactions.

Percent Agreeing with the Convenince Argument by Confidence That Votes Cast Via Internet Would Be Counted As Intended
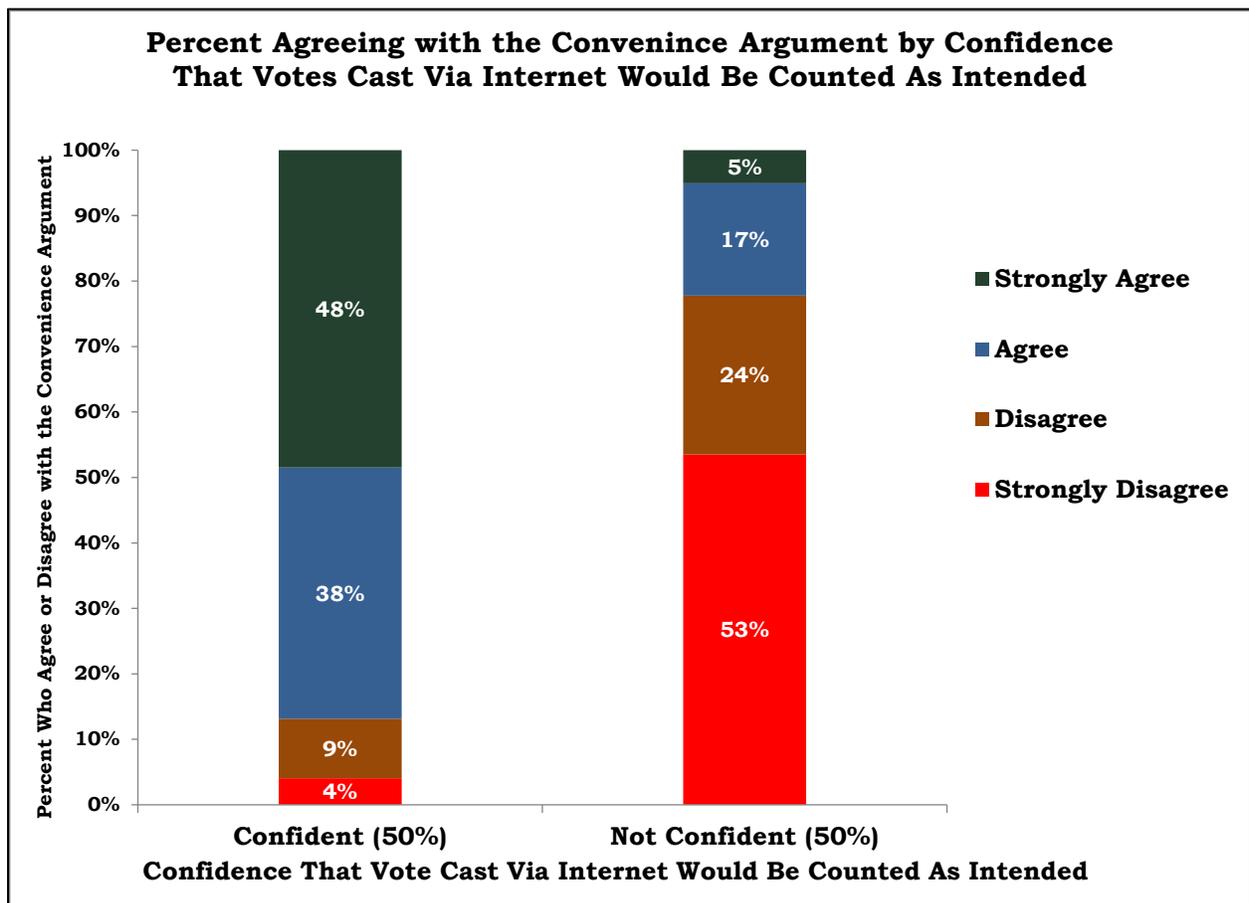
More than half (53%) of voters not confident about the accurate count of a vote cast via the Internet strongly *disagree* that online voting should be as convenient as other online transactions, whereas 48% of those confident that

their vote would be counted as intended strongly *agree* with the convenience argument.

Certainly, those with the greatest concerns about the integrity of Internet-based votes are disproportionately conservative in their general outlook: 43% of those with concerns are conservatives, whereas only 21% are liberals. Yet, within the ranks of each ideological category (liberals, moderates, and conservative, respectively), Americans who lack confidence that an Internet-based vote will be counted accurately are unpersuaded by the convenience argument. The majority of all voters of each ideological stripe reject the convenience argument if they express concern about potential fraud associated with Internet-cast votes.

Percent Agreeing with the Convenience Argument
by Confidence in Online Vote Integrity by Ideology
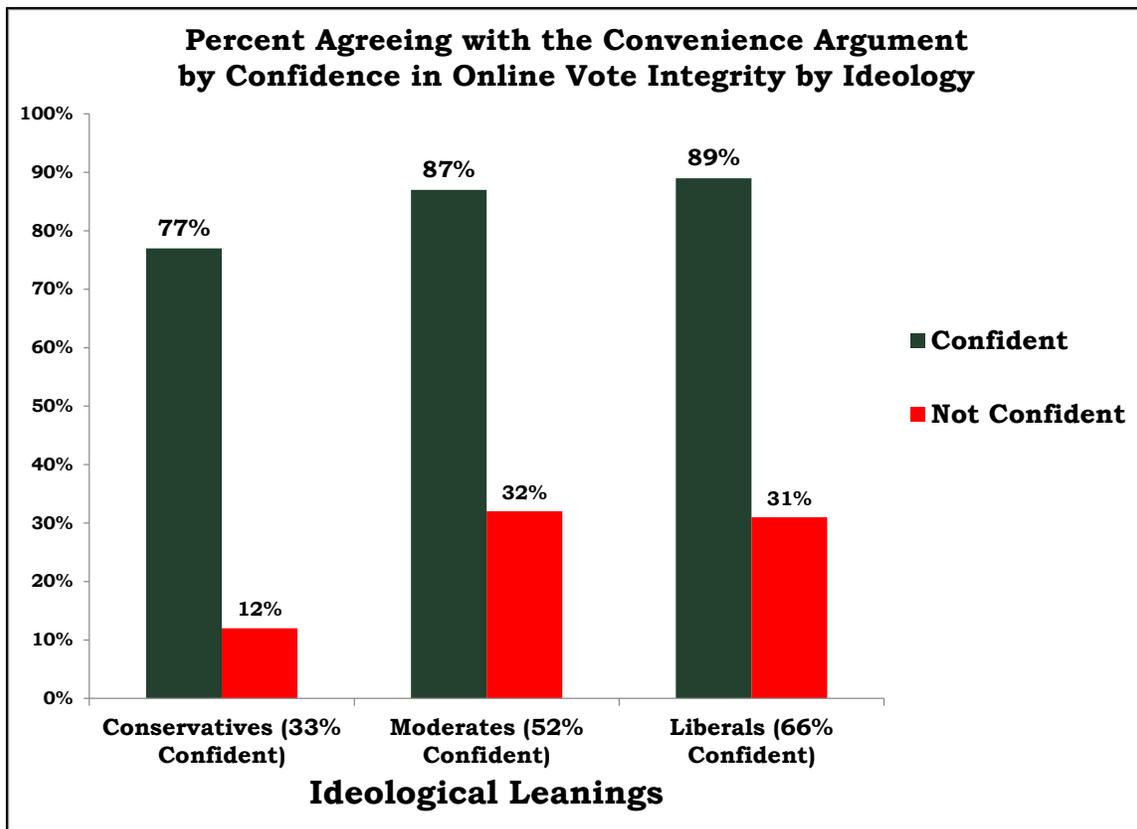
Methodological Approach

Public Policy Polling (PPP) fielded this survey from March 18th to March 27th, 2016. The survey was timed to reflect the preferences of the U.S. voting age population immediately following the March 15th primary elections. The sample consists of 3,649 U.S. citizens 18 years of age or older. A mixed-methods approach was used, whereby the majority of respondents (76%) were contacted via random-digit dialing, while harder to reach segments were contacted online (24%). The margin of error for this sample at the 95% confidence level is +/- 1.6 percentage points.