

In every election, some voters make more choices than are permitted in a contest, which creates what are called overvotes. Those who record fewer choices than are permitted create what are called undervotes, or sometimes “blank” votes or ballots. When overvotes occur—such as voting for two candidates for President or the U.S. Senate where only one choice is allowed—the vote is not counted for that particular office. The Help America Vote Act (HAVA) mandates that voters be notified when they cast an overvote.

Generally, overvotes are the result of errors made by an individual voter, but they can also be due to poor ballot design. Undervotes may also be voter error but may be a choice made by the voter to designate fewer candidates than allowed. For example, a voter may decide not to vote for any of the candidates in a race, vote for fewer than the number of candidates allowed, or just record no vote for an office or on a referendum or initiative.

As 2006 was not a Presidential election year, there was no nationwide Federal office on the ballot in every State. The Election Assistance Commission (EAC) survey only sought data for the Federal offices of U.S. Senator and U.S. Representative and, therefore, does not have any information from Gubernatorial or other statewide contests. While the EAC survey attempted to capture the number of votes cast for all Federal candidates on the ballot in each jurisdiction, there were separate questions that asked the number of overvotes and undervotes.

The candidate votes, however, were not easily connected to the overvotes and undervotes in the system. In addition, the response rates provided by the States regarding the overvotes and undervotes questions were very low. Further, only six States provided data for U.S. Senate contests. Detailed data on overvotes and undervotes is provided for each state in tables 31a and 31b in appendix B.

When overvotes occur—such as voting for two candidates for President or the U.S. Senate where only one choice is allowed—the vote is not counted for that particular office. The Help America Vote Act (HAVA) mandates that voters be notified when they cast an overvote.

Table E
Overvotes and Undervotes in 2006

	U.S. Senate	U.S. House
Overvotes	140	15,021
Percentage of Ballots Cast	0.1%	0.0%
Undervotes	5,615	1,056,570
Percentage of Ballots Cast	0.1%	1.5%