Well, another U.S. presidential election has passed, and this time it seems U.S. government agencies and voters improved on the quality of the voting system. Around 62 percent of registered voters cast ballots and had their votes counted. This is an increase since the disputed 2000 election and the 2004 presidential election. If knowing the will of the people is the purpose of an election, then this is one step in the right direction. Higher turnout equates to higher certainty or at least probability of capturing the will of the governed. Another process improvement has been the shift away from punch card ballots and toward others such as optical scan technology. One quality issue related to voting technology was the potential for failure and lack of hardcopy record with some electronic voting methods. Some problems with these machines were identified, but not enough to affect the outcome of an election. This should be improved as soon as possible.

For me, one of the most troubling quality issues from this election was a continuation of the partisanship affecting or potentially affecting voter turnout. On the left, partisans were concerned with the potential for attempts at suppressing voter turnout. Any suppression of voters who are legally entitled to vote is a serious quality problem and the cost of poor quality is the lost votes and/or fair count of the public will. On the right, partisans were concerned with voters who were not legally entitled to vote but still cast ballots or even voted multiple times. The cost of poor quality in this case is an over counting of votes. Both sides presented examples of why and how the other side was damaging the system.

What makes the partisanship of these issues troubling to me is that both are quality problems and should concern every voter. I don’t want to see any person who is not legally eligible to vote to change the outcome of an election. At the same time, I want every eligible voter to vote and have his or her vote counted accurately. Any effort to artificially increase or decrease vote counts is tampering with the system and must be eliminated. And the work to remove these problems should be entirely non-partisan.

Enjoy this issue of the Government Division newsletter, and as always, letters to the editor are encouraged.