

THE FIELD POLL

THE INDEPENDENT AND NON-PARTISAN SURVEY
OF PUBLIC OPINION ESTABLISHED IN 1947 AS
THE CALIFORNIA POLL BY MERVIN FIELD

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VOTER CONFIDENCE IN TOUCH SCREEN VOTING SYSTEMS NO DIFFERENT THAN ITS CONFIDENCE IN OTHER VOTE METHODS.

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By Mark DiCamillo and Mervin Field

The Field Poll in its most recent survey measured the overall confidence that likely voters in California have that their votes are being accurately counted in this state's elections. In addition, it asked voters which of three possible voting methods provided them with the greatest assurance that their votes would be accurately counted.

The results show that less than half (44%) have a great deal of confidence that their votes are being accurately counted, while an almost equally large group (41%) allows that they have some confidence. This compares to 14% who say they have only a little or no confidence in the accuracy of election counting. Republicans express a somewhat higher level of confidence in the accuracy of the voting counting systems used in California than Democrats or non-partisans.

Table 1
Confidence voters have that their votes are being
accurately counted in California elections
(among likely voters)

	Total	Democrats	Republicans	Non-partisans/ others*
Great deal of confidence	44%	41%	56%	32%
Some confidence	41	43	34	45
Only a little confidence	11	9	8	20
No confidence	3	5	2	2
No opinion	1	2	*	1

* Small sample size.

Confidence in touch screen voting systems no different than other methods

When voters are asked which of the state's three main voting systems currently in use provided them with the greatest confidence that their vote would be counted accurately, remarkably, each voting system was preferred by almost identical proportions. About one in three voters (32%) place their greatest confidence in voting by means of a paper ballot in which they are asked to select their preference by filling a circle or oval. Another 31% have the greatest confidence in votes cast using a punch card system, while a similar proportion (31%) have the most confidence in voting electronically using a touch screen machine.

However, there are differences in voter confidence of each voting system between those who have a great deal of confidence overall in the vote counting process and those who do not. Voters who express a high level of confidence in the accuracy of the vote counting process overall are more likely to have greater confidence in touch screen voting systems than other voters. Those who have less confidence in the accuracy of vote counting place more confidence in paper ballot and computer punch card voting systems.

Table 2
Voting method that provides voters with the greatest confidence that their vote will be accurately counted (among likely voters)

	<u>Total</u>	<u>Confidence in accuracy of vote counting</u>	
		<u>Great deal</u>	<u>Some/little/none</u>
Filling in circles on a paper ballot	32%	21%	39%
Punching holes into a computer card	31	30	32
Voting electronically onto a touch screen machine	31	43	21
No difference/no opinion	6	6	8

Background

The highly publicized and protracted recount of the Florida ballots in the 2000 presidential election raised doubts throughout the country as to whether existing vote counting procedures being practiced in the U.S. were accurate.

In reaction, Congress passed the Help America Vote Act, which allocated huge sums of money - \$250 million in California alone – to modernize voting procedures. In 2002 California voters also passed Proposition 41, a \$200 million bond measure to help counties convert to electronic touch screen voting systems.

Subsequently, election officials in many California counties embraced electronic voting systems and purchased the expensive equipment necessary to put them in place.

However, earlier this month, California's newly elected Secretary of State Debra Bowen ruled that the electronic machines used in many counties were not secure enough for future elections. Her action came after a task force of computer experts she had assembled reported that the electronic voting machines were vulnerable to "hacking."

Bowen's decision has caused a storm of protest from a number of local election officials, many of whom had committed considerable resources to the purchase of electronic voting systems in their counties. Nonetheless, state and county election officials are now in the process of making the necessary arrangements to comply with Bowen's decision in time for California's next statewide primary, to be held on February 5th.

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Information About The Survey

Sample Details

The findings in this report are based on a random sample survey of 402 likely voters in California. Interviewing was conducted by telephone in English and Spanish August 3-12, 2007. Up to eight attempts were made to reach and interview each randomly selected voter on different days and times of day during the interviewing period.

The sample was developed from telephone listings of individual voters selected at random from a statewide list of registered voters in California. When drawing samples from registration-based lists, *The Field Poll* stratifies the sample by region and age to insure that the poll includes adequate representations of voters across each major region of the state and across different age categories. Once a voter's name and telephone number has been selected, interviews are attempted only with the specified voter. Interviews can be conducted on either the voter's landline or cell phone, depending on the source of the telephone listing from the voter file. After the completion of interviewing, the results are weighted slightly to *Field Poll* estimates of the demographic and regional characteristics of the state's registered voter population.

Sampling error estimates applicable to any probability-based survey depend on sample size. According to statistical theory, 95% of the time results from findings based on the overall sample of likely voters are subject to a sampling error of +/- 5.0 percentage points. There are other possible sources of error in any survey other than sampling variability. Different results could occur because of differences in question wording, the sequencing of questions, the rigor with which sampling procedures are implemented, as well as other factors.

Questions Asked

When it comes to voting in California elections, how much confidence do you have that the votes are being counted accurately – a great deal of confidence, some confidence, only a little confidence or no confidence at all?

I am going to read three of the methods voters can use to indicate their ballot choices in California's state and local elections. They include (1) voting electronically onto a touch screen machine; (2) punching holes into a computer ballot card; and, (3) filling in small circles on a paper ballot. Which method do you feel provides you with the greatest confidence that your vote will be accurately counted?