



Americans Trust Electronic Voting Systems More Than Other Technologies in 2012

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Contact: M. Glenn Newkirk glenn_newkirk@infosentry.com **Phone: 919.810.2514**

Americans' trust in voting technology has shifted in 2012 to favor electronic voting systems in the polling places over other available technology choices. This shift marks this highest level of trust in any of the voting technologies since InfoSENTRY® began tracking these attitudes soon after passage of the Help America Vote Act in 2002. These findings came from a nationwide opinion survey released today by InfoSENTRY® Services, Inc.

M. Glenn Newkirk, InfoSENTRY's President, commented, "Even with the billions of dollars spent in installing paper-based voting systems in polling places throughout the country, sometimes replacing recently installed electronic voting technology such as touchscreen systems, and even with the massive lobbying efforts by special interest groups against the computerized voting systems, the newer electronic voting technology has a positive trust rating of +54 over the +41 positive trust rating of paper-based technologies in the polling places."

The tracking survey in each year since 2004 asked respondents the following question:

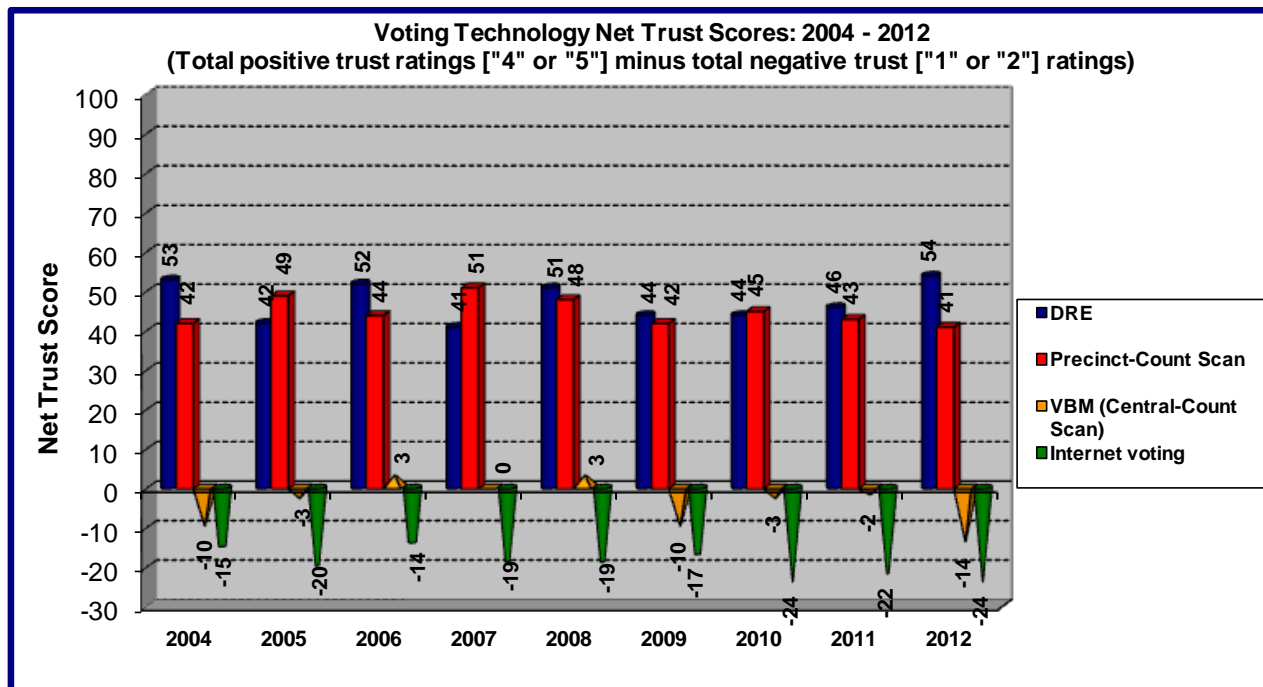
Now I am going to read to you some methods people use to vote in elections for public officials and ballot issues throughout the United States. As I read each one, please tell me on a scale of 1 to 5, where 1 means very low trust and 5 means very high trust, how much you trust each voting method to produce confidential and accurate election results. [READ AND RANDOMLY ROTATE STATEMENTS]

- (1.) Going to a polling place and making your choices directly on a computer screen and having the computer count the results
- (2.) Going to a polling place, marking your choices on a paper ballot, and having your ballot counted by a computer scanner
- (3.) Getting your ballot in the mail, marking your choices on the paper ballot, and mailing your ballot back to be counted by a computer scanner
- (4.) Using a computer at your home, office, or some other place of your choice to cast your ballot over the Internet"

The four voting methods above typically go by the respective names of (1) DRE (Direct Record Electronic), (2) precinct-count scan, (3) central-count scan or Vote by Mail (VBM), and (4) Vote by Internet (VBI) technologies.

Figure 1 contains the trend results of the responses from the past years of surveys.

Figure 1



Americans' trust in fully computerized voting systems in polling places, commonly referred to as DRE, "touchscreen," or "computer station" voting systems, is at the same statistical level in 2012 as it was in 2004. Those systems' "net trust" rating, which subtracts the negative scores from the positive scores, was at +53 in the January 2004 survey and is at +54 in InfoSENTRY's 2012 survey. The net trust rating among men in these computer station voting systems stayed statistically the same from +47 in 2004 to +44 in 2012, given the survey's sampling error. However, during the same 2004-2012 period, women's net trust ratings in these more fully computerized systems grew from +57 to +64, a statistically significant increase. There were few such shifts among other demographic groups. InfoSENTRY's 2012 opinion survey data shows no statistically significant differences in the positive net trust for electronic, computerized voting in the polling place among Democrats, Independents, or Republicans.

Newkirk noted that, "The real change in net trust in the more fully automated, computer station voting technology in the polling places came over the years among women. Just like some of the recent polling results showing women distancing themselves from men on attitudes toward candidates and issues, our poll shows that women have also moved more than men to trust the electronic, computer station voting systems in polling places."

Attitudes toward "precinct-count" ballot scanning systems have also seen fluctuations over the trend survey period, but ended at the same level of net positive trust in 2012 that they had in 2004. The net trust levels in these systems started at +42 in InfoSENTRY's January 2004 opinion survey and ended at a statistically equivalent level of +41 in the 2012 survey. In this year's survey, there are no statistically significant differences in net trust ratings of precinct-count paper scan systems between Democratic and Republican respondents or between men and women.

Newkirk summarized these results in this manner, "For the paper-based, precinct-count systems, Americans arrive at the 2012 elections with much the same net trust ratings as they had in 2004 across the sample as a whole and within major demographic subgroups. Trust in the widely used paper-based systems lags Americans' trust in the more fully electronic, non-paper-based computer systems in polling places. This phenomenon occurs as more and more states have taken out the fully electronic systems, under pressure from special interest groups, and replaced them with the in-precinct and, in some cases, central-count ballot scanning systems."

Trust in Vote-by-Mail (VBM) has not moved consistently into positive territory in InfoSENTRY's annual nationwide surveys. The net trust level for VBM technology started at -10 in InfoSENTRY's 2004 survey and moved to a -14 net trust rating in the 2012 opinion survey. Respondents in the 2012 survey who identified with the Democratic Party indicate a higher level of trust in VBM (net trust score of -8) than do Republicans (net trust of -13) or Independents (net trust of -34). The survey also revealed a statistically significant racial and ethnic trust gap for the VBM method. While the net trust scores for Vote By Mail in 2012 are -12 among Whites and -18 among Hispanics, the trust score is -25 among African-American survey respondents.

"Despite its widespread popularity and use in Oregon, Washington, and several other western states and even with its wide use for absentee voting throughout the country, most survey respondents have not expressed significant trust in the Vote By Mail method," Newkirk observed. "The overall negative trust score in 2012 and the consistent lack of public trust for Vote By Mail reflected across all of our annual surveys will make it difficult in the near term for this technology to gain a substantially wider foothold."

The survey also documented the continued net negative trust in Vote-by-Internet (VBI). InfoSENTRY's annual opinion research has measured VBI's net negative trust ratings of -24 in 2010, -22 in 2011, and, now, -24 in 2012. The 2012 survey shows net negative trust ratings for VBI across all demographic and political subgroups. The net trust in VBI is lowest in the Northeast (-31) and the Midwest (-30) regions. However, the net trust rating for VBI is only -19 in the South. Among the age groups, there was a near "barbell" curve with **(1)** the 35-64 year old groups near the overall -24 net trust level in the middle, **(2)** the 18-34 year olds at a -2 net trust rating on one end of the barbell, and **(3)** the 65+ age group at a -40 trust rating on the other end of the barbell. Women in the survey sample are more trusting than men of VBI, by a -16 net trust rating given to the technology by women to a -32 net trust rating given by men. Among the racial/ethnic categories in the survey, the net trust ratings for VBI vary widely: -27 for Whites, -16 for Blacks, and -8 for Hispanics.

Newkirk observed, "Most Americans just do not trust Internet-based voting technologies for public office elections, although they use it widely for other types of private group elections, such as in corporate shareholder votes, university elections, and association elections. It will be interesting to see if the organization, Americans Elect, which is planning to carry out a presidential nomination operation this year over the Internet, can convince Americans of the legitimacy of its nominee. If they can pull off their operation and involve enough Americans across all demographic and political groups in a successful national candidate selection process over the Internet, it is possible that Internet-based voting will receive a shot in the arm this year for its trust rating."

This news release presents the findings of telephone surveys conducted among national probability samples of 1026 adults in 2004, 1018 adults in 2005, 1004 adults in 2006, 1017 adults in 2007, 1018 adults in 2008, 1002 adults in 2009, 1024 adults in 2010, 1006 adults in 2011, and 1006 adults in 2012. All respondents were 18 years of age and older, living in private households in the continental United States. The margin of error is plus or minus three percentage ($\pm 3\%$) points. Interviewing for this Opinion Research Center CARAVAN® Survey occurred in the first calendar quarter of each year. Opinion Research Center is one of the best known and most established opinion research organizations in the United States.

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