



For Immediate Release  
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## **Fact Sheet: The Different Types of Voting Systems**

**Background:** As part of the Help America Vote Act (HAVA) of 2002, states received federal grant funding to implement new voting equipment that adheres to these minimum voting standards:

- Notifies voters if they overvote, and gives them the opportunity to correct their ballots
- Produces a permanent paper record with a manual audit capability
- Provides disability access equal to the level of access, privacy and independence available to other voters

The law also mandates that states provide "at least one DRE or other voting system equipped for individuals with disabilities at each polling place." While many states utilize DRE technology to meet this requirement, many others use ballot marking devices or vote-by-phone systems for this purpose (see below). One state, Oregon, offers an alternative format ballot for individuals with disabilities that can be read and marked by voters using their home computer.

According to Electionline.org, the most widely-used technology in the 2008 presidential election will be optical scan technology (56 percent of voters), followed by direct-recording electronic devices (31 percent of voters), lever machines (6 percent), hand-counted paper ballots (.52 percent) and punch card equipment (.14 percent).

**Optical Scan System:** Optical scan machines scan and tabulate the selections made on a paper ballot. Voters make their selection using a pen to fill in an oval or connect two lines. Jurisdictions in 49 states and the District of Columbia use optical scan technology in some capacity. Seven of these states use optical scan only to process absentee or mail ballots.

**Direct Recording Electronic Voting Machine (DRE):** DREs, often referred to as "touch-screen machines," display the ballot electronically and prompt the voter to make selections using a touch-screen or a dial. The machine then records the votes on a memory card. Thirty states currently use DRE machines in some capacity. Eighteen of these states have jurisdictions using DREs with a voter-verified paper audit trail (VVPAT), while 17 states have jurisdictions that use DRE without a VVPAT. Additionally, seventeen states with jurisdictions using DRE machines as their primary voting system provide paper ballots in the event of equipment failure.

**Punch Cards and Lever Machines:** Lever machines are mechanical systems that tabulate votes after the voter pulls a lever. With a punch card system, a voter punches a hole in the ballot card opposite their choice and places the ballot in a ballot box or tabulating device. One of the goals of the Help America Vote Act (HAVA) was to eliminate the use of punch cards and lever machines. One state has jurisdictions that use lever machines, and one state has jurisdictions that use punch card machines.

**Vote-by-Phone System:** Five states (Connecticut, Maine, Oklahoma, New Hampshire and Vermont) offer vote-by-phone systems to permit voters with disabilities, the elderly and others to vote privately and independently at polling places. These systems allow voters to use a telephone keypad and audio prompts to mark a paper ballot, which is then printed out in an election office to be counted with the rest of the ballots on Election Day.

**Ballot Marking Devices:** As with the DRE machines, ballot markers display the ballot electronically and prompt the voter to make their selection on a touch-screen. These devices, however, do not record votes – they mark the voters' choices on an optical scan paper ballot, which is then tabulated by a separate optical scan machine. Twenty-nine states have jurisdictions using ballot marking devices.

**SOURCE:** September 2008 NASS Report, "Engaging the Energized Electorate: NASS Survey on State Preparations for the 2008 Presidential Election." Online: [www.nass.org](http://www.nass.org).

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