

BREAKING NEWS CONSUMER'S HANDBOOK

ELECTION POLLS EDITION

1. Wait. Shrug off polls until just before primaries, or until after the conventions for the general election.
2. Ignore *national* primary polls — they measure nothing. (But state polls matter.)
3. Ignore hypothetical match-ups in primary season — they also measure nothing.
4. Look for polls of likely voters, not just registered voters.
5. Look for polls that use live interviewers; they're more accurate.
6. Be wary of Internet polls; they're less tested.
7. Know the polling firm — some are waaay better than others.
8. Margin of error and sample size matter less than *who's* in the sample.
9. Beware polls tagged “bombshells” or “stunners.” Outliers are usually wrong.
10. Instead, look at averages or trends in polling.
11. Asking people about their votes “*if the election were tomorrow*” is designed to heighten drama by reducing “undecided” responses.
12. Consider the motives of the media reporting on the polls. They want headlines.