POLS 205

American National Government

Elections Unit, Lecture 3:

Politics, Polling and Elections

I count!

Politics, Polling and Elections

This totally freaks me out!



Because I’m the mom and I said so, that’s why…

Political Socialization

Why do you vote like you do?

Family

“Hey Dad, what’s happening in the polls?”

Communication

How strongly parents communicate their views

Receptivity

How much children care about what their parents think

Education

The point of public education is to produce educated voters!

A higher level of education means you are more likely to be

Interested

Confident

Active

Religion

Traditional view:

Catholics and Jews are Democrats

Protestants are Republicans

More Accurately:

Degree of Religious Commitment (regular churchgoing)

Conservative, evangelical or fundamentalists

Either of these two factors tend to yield “socially conservative” voters

General Demographics

Generation (age)

Race

Income

Gender

Soccer Moms, Security Moms, NASCAR Dads, Joe the Plumber, the Walmart Mom, MAGA

Who do & who don’t:

**2000 presidential election:105 million people voted!**

**Unfortunately, that is only 51.2 percent of those who were eligible**

**Non-presidential years are even worse! 2002 had a 39.3 percent turnout**

**2004 had an almost 60% turnout! (120 million)**

**2006 mid-term elections: 136 m. registered; 96 m. voted**

**2008 Presidential: 132 million, about 62%. Woohoo!**

**2010 – Mid term – 42%**

**2012 – Down for a Presidential Year: 57.5%**

**2014 – 72 year low – 34%**

**2016 – Was back up! To 59.3%**

Why Not?

 

The charts we have been looking at come from polls

Polling houses (PEW, Gallup, Rasmussen, Quinnipiac, Reuters, PPP, etc.) ask a **sample** (a small group) of people a question, then use that sample to try to **predict** the same answer for the larger **universe.**

**They don’t ask everyone because it would take forever and be too expensive.**

But *how* they sample, question, and predict makes a world of difference!

I count!

Lies, dang lies, and statistics…

Unfortunately, pollsters and Jon Snow have a lot in common lately.

Or,
How many ways
things can go
wrong in polling:

Sampling Errors: Are you talking to the right people?

Do you just ask anyone about the coming election?

No, wait, they have to be registered voters, right?

DO ALL REGISTERED VOTERS VOTE?

You’re trying to predict the outcome of an election.

DO YOU CARE ABOUT PEOPLE WHO AREN’T GOING TO VOTE?

What would be different if you polled only likely voters?

What Does “Likely Voters” Mean?

Universe of Potential Voters: I’m 18, a citizen, and not a felon

* (VEP – Voting Eligible Population)

Registered Voters

* I’ve bothered to register

Likely Voters

* Yes, I will certainly vote in the next election
* (80% say this…)

Previous Voters

* I’ve voted in the last election

Active Voters

* I always vote

Wishy vs. Washy: Can they give you good answers?

“Undecided”

I Really Don’t Know

Not enough information to decide

Not generally politically engaged

That 20%+ that doesn’t know what they are

“Uncommitted”

I Could Easily Change My Mind

Waiting for the “October Surprise”

Unhappy with the choices

90% will not change

Timeliness and “Social Desirability” in Polling: Will they tell you the truth or what they think you want to hear?

 The Swiss Minaret Ban

Sunday's results stood in stark contrast to opinion polls, last taken **10 days ago**, that showed **37 percent supporting** the proposal. Experts said before the vote that they feared Swiss had pretended during the polling that they opposed the ban because they **didn't want to appear intolerant**.

The initiative was **approved 57.5** to 42.5 percent by some 2.67 million voters.

2014’s Swiss Immigration Vote:

Support for the initiative to “stop mass immigration,” which would impose an upper annual limit on newcomers, has been rising, according to the most recent poll by researcher gfs.bern, published on Jan. 29. **While rejection still looks likely, 43 percent of respondents said they’d vote yes, up from 37 percent in a survey published Jan. 10.** Fifty percent rejected the proposal, down 6 percentage points from the previous poll. http://www.bloomberg.com/news/2014-02-04/expats-in-crosshairs-as-swiss-vote-on-economy-defining-labor-cap.html

The vote in Switzerland, which is not a member of the European Union but has broad agreements with Brussels, was very close, with the measure **favored by just 50.3 percent of those who voted in the referendum**. It gives the government three years to come up with legislation imposing immigration quotas and to negotiate with Brussels on how to manage that legislation.

http://www.nytimes.com/2014/02/11/world/europe/swiss-immigration-vote-raises-alarm-across-europe.html

Dearie me, we kind of missed Brexit.

And a rather obvious one from our side of the pond

: 

The LA Times: November 9: “All fall, Hillary Clinton has maintained a lead over Donald Trump in a narrow band between 4 and 6 percentage points.”

* The final vote was 46.5% to 48.2%, but 306 to 232 Electoral College

Push Polls, Leading Questions and Half Questions: Are you asking good questions?

Push Polls:

Given the fact that Barack Obama…

Leading questions:

Are you for defending our right to…

Half Questions:

Are you an evangelical?

(Not followed up by how often do you: pray, go to church, evangelize, read your bible…)

Methodology Issues

When, Where and How to ask the questions.

(Phones, internet and exit polls all have their own challenges.)

(And we’re not even going to talk about statistical sampling modifications! Thank Goodness!)

What About Internet Polling?

Remember: Random and Reflective

Unusually motivated participants

Often part of a website with an established position

If so, this is called a self-selecting sample

It *can* give you a sense of how strongly some people feel about an issue.

**But** we are getting *better* at these, (ex: making them more random) while phone polling is getting *worse*! Internet polls were closer for Brexit!

Exit Polls

Questioning voters as they leave the polling place

Possible problems:

Sampling error

Sample bias

Respondent bias

“Good (ok, at least *better*) Polls”

Random, Representative Samples = Predictive Answers

Good Polling?

A “Good Poll”:

Random Sample

Representative Sample

Unbiased Questions

Unbiased Methodology

Timely

“Dewey Defeats Truman”: The poll was a week old!

Reagan’s November Surprise: Lots of Un-decideds!

Reflective of Reality

The real test of a poll is how *predictive* it was. Could you generalize from the poll’s respondents to the actual outcome?

What Makes a Good Sample?

Randomness

Everyone has an equal chance to be selected or represented.

Representativeness

Those selected are a reflective sample of the whole population.

Good Methodology is Still… ***IFFY!***

Margin of Error

The true answer falls within this range based on our poll

Example: A margin of error of plus or minus 4 means that the real answer is within 4 points on either side of our poll’s answer. That’s a total spread of 8 points!

(Standard distribution)

Confidence Level

We are 95% confident that our polled answer is correctly reflecting the overall universe

(1 in 20 times we are wrong!)

Flip a coin

Sample Size

Our sample is big enough to accurately reflect the universe we are trying to predict

N=number of respondents in the sample

A large N = a more reflective sample

Within the Margin of Error?



The final vote was Trump 46.5% to Clinton 48.2%, but 306 to 232 Electoral College

If the final ME was +/- 4, and the aggregated avg. prediction was Clinton 46.8 (50.8/42.8) and Trump 43.6 (47.6/39.6), then IT WAS WITHIN THE MARGIN OF ERROR!

Brexit was pretty close too

How Nerdly Are You?

http://www.realclearpolitics.com/epolls/latest\_polls/

If you want to know Presidential Approval Ratings, see how much people hate Congress, or consider the field of Presidential candidates for 2020, REAL CLEAR Politics is a great site.

So, what does all this mean?

The Bones Tell Me Nothing…

The polls *ARE* important, but be an informed consumer!

They mean something; they just don’t mean everything!

The Poll That Counts The Most

Election Day

Election Reforms

Progressive Reforms:

Direct Primaries - As Opposed To Delegates

Non-partisan Elections –

* 70 % Of Cities Use

At Large Elections

* As Opposed To Wards
* This Has Had Trouble With The Courts Over Race

Direct Democracy:

* Initiative/Referendum/Recall

Secret Ballot

* Bryant/ McKinley Race 1896

National Voter Registration Act of 1993 (The Motor Voter Act)

* Mail in applications
* Governmental agencies serving as registration points
* No removal for simply not voting
* Intent was to expand registration - est. 40 million
* Has yielded an increase in “independent” registration
* California challenged as unfunded mandate, not heard by Supremes

The Most Recent Reform: The Help America Vote Act of 2002

Each state must:

Have a uniform, centralized computerized statewide voter registration database to ensure accurate lists.

Provide provisional ballots to ensure no individual is turned away at the polls.

Provide voters an opportunity to check for and correct ballot errors in a private and independent manner.

Have a voting system that produces a hard copy of ballots for recounts and audits…

Provide at least one voting machine per precinct that is disability accessible.

Have ballots available in multiple languages as required by the Voting Rights Act.

Define what constitutes a legal vote for each type of voting machine used in the state.

Improve ballot access for military and overseas voters.

Other HAVA Provisions

1) Identification Requirements

States must set up new systems to verify voters’ identities:

When registering to vote, individuals must provide a driver’s license number or, if the voter does not have a driver’s license, the last 4 digits of the Social Security number. If an individual does not have either number, he or she will be assigned a unique identifier.

First-time voters who register by mail are required to provide identification when they cast their ballots.

2) States are obligated to maintain clean and accurate voter registration lists.

3) Voters who cast their ballots after the designated poll-closing time as a result of a court order will have their ballots segregated and counted separately.

Voting Troubles
(Packing And Cracking Part 2)

Fraud

Falsified registrations

Lack of a national database

Electronic and mail in registration

Illegally cast ballots

Falsified results

Ballot Box stuffing

New option: electronic devilry

=Bribery, Larceny

Intimidation

Challenged ballots

Provisional ballot

Required by HAVA

Challenged voters

Overly complex systems

Defacto literacy tests

Registration

Voting

Butterfly ballot of 2000 (from a Democratic supervisor)

Vandalism

=Harassment, Thuggery

Election Trends:

Vote by Mail

* Oregon, Washington and Colorado

E-voting

* YIKES!

Automatic registration

* 5 states have adopted automatic registration when you come into contact with the government, unless you opt out.

Early/Absentee Voting without excuse

* 35 states
* Estimated 40% voted early in 2012 and 2016
* (15% in 2000, 33% in 2008)
* Florida is estimated to be 80%!!!

Increased participation?

* We’ll see…

It really DOES matter…

…Every voter, as surely as your chief magistrate, under the same high sanction, though in a different sphere, exercises a public trust.
     Grover Cleveland, *Inaugural Address*

Pray like Solomon, ‘cause you *are* in charge!

 Mrs. K