



ST. NORBERT COLLEGE
Strategic
Research
Institute

How to Be a Good Consumer of Polls

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7 Things To Look for in Polls

1. Push Polling
2. Population Under Study
3. How the Sample is Drawn
4. Sample Size and Reading Error Rates
5. The “not sures,” “undecideds,” and “independents”
6. Intensity of Feeling and Level of Knowledge
7. Question Wording

1. Push-Polling

- Disguised form of negative campaigning/
telemarketing
- “message testing” is ok
- Violation of AAPOR Code of Professional
Ethics

How to determine if You're Being Push-Polled

- Only asks about a single candidate (sometimes a single issue)
- Wording bias (usually strongly negative and leading)
- The org doing the “poll” is not named or is a phony organization
 - they are usually evasive in answering questions about this
- There are also restrictions on the use of cell phones – federal law

What to do:

- Get as much info as possible
- Name and Location of the organization
 - Calling
 - Sponsoring
- Take notes on specific questions asked
- Ask about sample size
- Ask how the data will be used
- Report it: File a formal complaint w/ the AAPOR
- www.aapor.org/reportinviolations

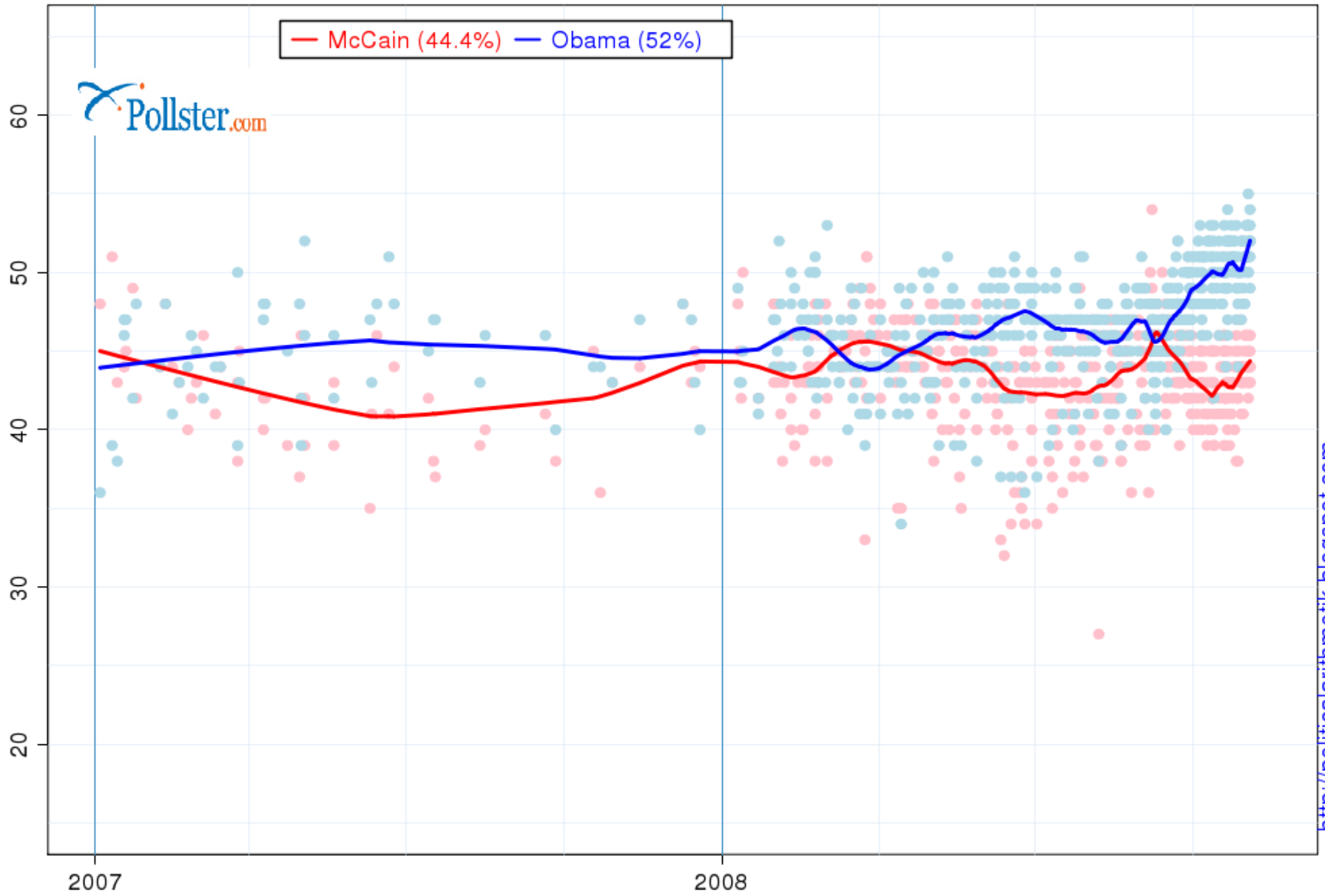
2. Population Under Study

- Residents of US, WI etc
- Registered Voters
- “Likely” Voters
- Specialized Population Based on Purpose of Study

3. Sampling

- Phone, Email, Mail, Web, Call-in etc.
- Source the Sample is drawn from
 - Voter Registration lists
 - All active residential phone numbers
- What does Random Sampling REALLY mean?
- # Call-backs – attempts to reach the random number drawn
- Gender, age, cellphones and structural bias of samples → look at lots of polls

National: McCain vs. Obama
Latest Poll: 11/03/2008



— McCain (44.4%) — Obama (52%)

Info on Our Survey

- **Survey Information:**
- **Random Selection, Landline and Cellphone Survey**
- **Number of Adult Wisconsin Resident Respondents: 400**
- **Interview Period: 10/13/09 – 10/22/09**
- **Margin of Error: +/- 5% at the 95% confidence level.**

4. Sample Size and Error Rates

- Monte Carlo Simulations
- 95% Confidence Levels
 - Generalizing to the Population
- Error Margins and Each Statistic
 - EXAMPLE: Sample with +/- 5% Error
 - Romney = 45%
 - Obama = 51%
 - Other = 4%
 - Is Obama Ahead?
 - No, statistically you cannot generalize a difference between Romney and Obama in the general population because each statistic has a +/- 5% margin
 - Romney = (40% - 50%)
 - Obama = (46% - 56%)

5. Not Sures and Independents

- Vote Choice “Undecideds”
 - If Obama is 10 points ahead of Romney, but 16% are undecided...?
- “Independents”
- “Fence-sitting” options for answers
- Rounding
- “Not Sure, Don’t Know, Refused”
 - (next slide example)

I am going to ask you about a number of public figures. Please tell me for each one whether you have heard of this person or not.

IF RESPONDENT HAS HEARD OF ASK: Would you say you have a generally Favorable or Unfavorable Impression of _____ (CANDIDATE NAME) (ROTATE NAMES)

IF YES ASK: -----> IMPRESSION QUESTION

	Favorable	Neutral	Unfavorable	Not heard of	Unsure	Refused
a. Barbara Lawton	22%	12%	18%	43%	6%	0%
b. Mark Neumann	20%	13%	11%	50%	6%	<1%
c. Tommy Thompson	57%	7%	29%	5%	2%	0%
d. Scott Walker	26%	8%	10%	51%	5%	0%
e. Kathleen Falk	23%	14%	15%	40%	8%	<1%
f. Mark Todd	4%	7%	3%	81%	5%	0%
g. Tom Barrett	29%	10%	9%	48%	4%	0%
h. Tim Michels	6%	6%	4%	80%	4%	<1%

	Not heard of	Unsure	Refused
a. Barbara Lawton	43%	6%	0%
b. Mark Neumann	50%	6%	<1%
c. Tommy Thompson	5%	2%	0%
d. Scott Walker	51%	5%	0%
e. Kathleen Falk	40%	8%	<1%
f. Mark Todd	81%	5%	0%
g. Tom Barrett	48%	4%	0%
h. Tim Michels	80%	4%	<1%

	Favorable	Neutral	Unfavorable
Barbara Lawton	42%	23%	35%
Mark Neumann	46%	29%	25%
Tommy Thompson	61%	8%	31%
Scott Walker	59%	18%	23%
Kathleen Falk	44%	27%	29%
Mark Todd	30%	46%	24%
Tom Barrett	61%	20%	19%
Tim Michels	37%	37%	27%

6. Knowledge and Intensity

- Knowledge of Subject Matter
- Fickleness
- Intensity of Feeling
- Semantics that vary from one person to another – *you know like totally awesome!*

7. Question Wording

- Order of Questions – Priming
- Answer Selections
- Ideological Bias – Leading
- Social Response Bias
- Double-barreled
- Validity – what is the question actually measuring and does it measure the same thing for everybody?
- Pilot Testing!! Looking for “...but....”

Wording Example

“Only a marriage between one man and one woman shall be valid or recognized as a marriage in this state and that a legal status identical or substantially similar to that of marriage for unmarried individuals shall not be valid or recognized in this state”

Group Work:

- In a telephone survey, how would you ask about the above policy?
- What wording issues would you consider?
- What priming issues would you consider?

The Wisconsin State Legislature is considering passing an amendment to the state Constitution which states that “only a marriage between one man and one woman shall be valid or recognized as a marriage in this state.” Do you favor or oppose this amendment?

	Spring 2004	Spring 2006
Favor	66%	61%
Oppose	27%	34%
Not Sure	6%	6%
Refused	1%	<1%

Civil Unions grant certain basic legal rights to unmarried couples such as hospital visitation, inheritance, insurance coverage etc. Do you favor or oppose these types of civil unions?

	Spring 2006
Favor	59%
Oppose	30%
Not Sure	10%
Refused	1%

Civil Unions and Gay Marriage

	Same Sex Civil Unions Support	Definition of Marriage = 1 man, 1 woman	Same Sex Civil Unions Support D-R	Definition of Marriage D-R
Sp 2014	77%	52%	25	44
Sp 2012	75%	56%	34	59
Sp 2009	60%		34	

Polarization

- Much Higher for Elected Officials than Issues
- Much Higher for General Issue Question than more Specific Questions

Health Care

Polarization – Difference Between Democrats and Republicans

- **General Support for Affordable Care Act**

	Sp 10	Fall 12	Fall 13
General ACA Support	71	76	70

- **Specific Questions**

	Fall 09	Fall 13
Universal Coverage	31	38
Pre-existing Conditions	30	15
Public Option	53	41



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Thank You!

Spring '14 Issue Comparisons

Increase Minimum Wage \$10.10	56
Increase Voting Restrictions	47
Keep Gay Marriage Ban	44
Increase Minimum Wage Above \$7.25	42
Voter Fraud is a Serious Problem	42
Legalize Marijuana	26
Civil Union Rights	25

Collective Bargaining – Spring 2011

Teacher Favorability	36
Public Employees Favorability	47
Public Employee Unions	65
Allow Collective Bargaining - Wages	49
Allow Collective Bargaining - Benefits	67

Gun Control – Spring 2013

Polarization – Difference Between Democrats and Republicans

Limit Size of Ammunition Clips	30
Increase Spending on Mental Health	25
Ban Assault Weapons	22
Armed Guards in Schools	18
Background Checks	11
Regulate TV Violence	7

Spring '05 – “Life Issues”

- Democrat – Republican – Absolute Value
- Gov't More Active on Moral Issues 18
- Is Morally Acceptable:

Death Penalty	27
Stem Cell Research	27
Abortion	22
Gov't More Active on Moral Issues	18
Physician Assisted Suicide	10
Medical Testing on Animals	10
Cloning Animals	2
Cloning People	0

Abortion Circumstances

Polarization – Difference Between Democrats and Republicans

Woman's Life Endangered	8
Woman's Physical Health Endangered	20
Pregnancy Caused by Rape/Incest	25
Evidence Baby is Physically Impaired	18
Evidence Baby is Mentally Impaired	21
Woman/Family Cannot Afford to Raise Baby	19

Additional Issues from Sp '05

Polarization – Difference Between Democrats and Republicans

Terry Schaivo Remove Feeding Tube	15
Support Death Penalty Pre-meditated murder	24
Younger Workers Invest Some Social Security in Private Investments	48

Spring '13 Governor's Budget

Streamline Mine Permitting	48
Decrease Income Taxes	38
Increase School Vouchers	28
Increase Mental Health Spending	22