

Public Opinion Polls Assignment

Answer the following questions:

1. Why are polls conducted?
 - a. Polls are meant to draw conclusions about the population, typically their sentiment regarding a specific topic; they are not intended to draw conclusions about the sample.
2. What makes them reliable?
 - a. Reliable samples see polls respondents selected randomly. Questions are designed in a manner that does not encourage preselected answers to be given by respondents despite potential desire to see those results by some participating in the executing the poll. Questions must be phrased carefully to avoid assumptions.
3. How can respondents be interviewed? Is one way more reliable than the others?
 - a. Respondents may be interviewed by mail, phone, online surveys, pen and paper surveys, or in a scientific poll. Well-conducted scientific polls can be very informative, the results providing a reliable guide to the opinions of many people. Unscientific polls tell little other than what the sentiments of the respondents were.
4. How reliable are polls conducted on the internet?
 - a. Polls conducted over the internet are not as reliable as other scientific polling methods. Many Americans still do not have internet access or use the internet regularly outside of specific uses, and therefore go unrepresented in online polls. Online polls can also be manipulated with greater ease by outside forces than other scientific polling methods. Respondents are self-selected, and are therefore not necessarily going to be as random as a sample selected by a pollster.
5. What does it mean for a poll to have an error margin?
 - a. Error margin is the potential error that can result from the process of selecting the sample. By knowing this, a clearer picture of the upper and lower bounds of the results can be determined. Sampling error can be quantified, but other errors may occur in the polling process that are not quantifiable but should still be considered when analyzing results. In other words, over-emphasis on sampling error does not resolve all the potential issue with a poll.
6. What other factors can skew polls results?
 - a. Other potential sources of inaccuracies in polls besides sampling error include: question phrasing, question order, inadequate interviewer training and supervision, data processing errors, and operational problems. Professional operations are less likely to suffer from these issues than amateur or volunteer conducted polls.