POLLING IN 2020

TO: INTERESTED PARTIES
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SUBJECT: POLLING IN 2020
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When you put in the hard work, you don't need to guess. In 2018, Ragnar Research reported the correct outcome of all races polled to within an average of 0.4% of actual Election Day results. We applied the best practices and put in the hard work necessary to tell our clients what was happening on the ground, how to act on it, and what could be done to impact voters not yet reached.

In scientific terms, this came down to three important, but not necessarily "sexy," practices:

- Proper representation of cell phone-only households,
- Weighting partisanship in every race based on previous Presidential Election results, and
- A rigorous, systematic, and fanatic devotion to the construction of proper stratification and sample frames.

Can I get your Number?

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention reports that, on average, 90% percent of Americans have a cell phone, 51% have a cell phone exclusively, and only about 7% have a landline in their household.[1] As a result, including cell phones in your survey sample has never been more important, because:

- Contacting someone on a cell phone increases the chance that they are who they say they are, and
- Cell phone interviews naturally fall in line with the partisan makeup of the state, where landlines tend to skew toward more stable and conservative groups.

Who you gonna call?

Typically, cell phones will be answered by the person you're calling while a landline may be answered by anyone in the household. Sure, you can ask for Julie, but Grandma may take the survey instead. It's important to ensure that you *are* contacting the person you are *intending to* contact. It is equally important that you are contacting enough of your targets that your data can tell you what reality is with a degree of certainty; otherwise, you can't make clear decisions.

Which is the entire point of the exercise in the first place, isn't it?

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[1] https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/data/nhis/earlyrelease/wireless201705.pdf

Match Rate Back to Voter File Utilizing Gender, Birthyear ±2 years, and State Voter ID.	Overall	Cell Phone	Landline
	70.7%	70.9%	70.3%

Landlines *Lean* Right, but Cell Phones Are *Right*.

The average American will know that the older the person, the more likely they are to have a landline phone. That same American would agree with the assumption that older people tend to be more conservative than younger people. But what that American may be surprised to realize is that landline interviews, regardless of the age of respondent, tend to be more conservative in their responses than cell phone interviews.

> *Question:* *If the election for [Governor/Senator] of [State] were held today, would you vote for [insert candidate name] the Republican…or… [insert candidate name] the Democratic? (Various polls conducted by Ragnar Research during the week leading up to the Midterm Elections)*

Combined Polling and Election Results from Regionally Disparate Interviews Across the U.S.	Cell Phone	Landline	Actual
	R+4	R+16	R+6

The President Has a Lot of *Weight* with the Public

Ragnar Research observed significant changes in ballot outcome on all races polled pre- and post-weighting to 2016 Presidential election results. In some cases, we saw a swing of up to 10 points. By utilizing Presidential margin weighting, Ragnar was able to dramatically improve the overall accuracy of our results.

Why does it matter? Two reasons:
- In states where voters don't register by party (40% of states), it helps us get a reliable read on partisanship, and
- In states that do have party registration, it helps to mitigate respondent tendency to overstate their likelihood of being party crossers (Republicans act like Republicans/Democrats act like Democrats).

Stratification and the Samples They Inform

Let's talk about strats, baby!

Perhaps the single most important, yet widely overlooked, aspect of public opinion research is ensuring that your results represent the universe you are trying to reach with as little statistical manipulation as possible. Before a questionnaire is written, and before a client is sure they want to field, the work starts on ensuring the people you contact are representative of the people going to vote. This work can be broken into two important and independent tasks: building stratifications and building the sample frame.

Stratification, in public opinion research, is the quotas sent to our call centers used to complete the research project. For Ragnar Research this means: gender, age, ethnicity, region (down to precinct level granularity), 2016 Presidential election results, education, and party where available.

Our goal is to tell the call center to have a clear target for each demographic group, ex: call *x* males, y females, *z* 18-29-year olds, etc. This starts with researching what happened in that geography in the past: how many people voted, what percentage of men and women voted, and so on, down the line for every single demographic stratification. This is where the fanaticism comes into play; data available in 2006 or 2010 is not easily attainable. To really understand a population, it takes contacting individual county election offices, local party offices, or third-party sources. It may also mean taking results from other races near it, pulling out the relevant data for the race in question, and applying the results.

Next, we ensure we know what that geography looks like at the present day. This comes from a few sources, but first and always foremost, the U.S. Census Bureau's most recent population data. Where the Census falls short, multiple other sources are pitted against each other, evaluated, and the data with the most integrity is used. Sometimes these are local county censuses, commercial data, or even the voter rolls themselves.

Lastly, once all this data has been compiled, the two sources are married in a way to indicate not only who is really in this area, but of those people, who is going to show up on Election Day. Even with all of that, the work is not done: we still have to make sure we can get those people on the phone.

Would you give a music producer a sample that isn't your best work?

Ragnar Research leverages registration-based sampling (RBS). What this means is that every individual contacted is on the Secretary of State's certified voter rolls for that given race. To take it a step further, Ragnar Research ensures that no voter list is more than one month old, and in the weeks leading up to the election, no more than two-weeks old, thus allowing for the most representative read possible. This allows us to make sure that anyone who can vote has a possibility of getting contacted, and anyone who is not eligible to vote (for one reason or another) does not get contacted.

To 2020 and Beyond!

Looking toward 2020, the takeaways are twofold: 1) being right isn't complicated but it is a lot of hard work, and 2) Ragnar does the hard work it takes to be right no matter the time, cost, or labor needed to make it happen. In 2020, we can expect tough races for Republicans up and down the ticket, but we can also expect to know that the feedback you're getting from Ragnar is what is actually happening on the ground. We hope this brief review will help our clients and others better understand how we achieve accurate and consistent results.