

STAT 021 S22 HW 8

Isabelle Courtney

TOTAL POINTS

10 / 10

QUESTION 1

1 Description 3 / 3

✓ + **3 pts** Correct

QUESTION 2

2 Identify possible mistakes 3 / 3

✓ + **3 pts** Complete

+ **0 pts** Incomplete

QUESTION 3

3 Connection to ASA guidelines 4 / 4

✓ + **4 pts** Correct

Stat 21 HW 8: Bad Statistics

In 2016, the Marist Institute for Public Opinion, in coordination with the Knights of Columbus, a private Catholic organization, conducted a poll of American's opinions on abortion. They used this poll to draw several conclusions that seem to indicate an overwhelming support for pro-life policies, such as a support of significant restrictions on the situations where women are allowed to get abortions, opposition to taxpayer funding of abortion, and others. However, this study has a number of issues, both in the interpretation of the poll results, and in the poll design itself.

One major conclusion of the study was that almost 75% of Americans support significant restrictions on abortion, including the majority of pro-choice people, is very misleading. It depends on their definition of significant restrictions, which includes supporting abortion only during the first three months of pregnancy. 33% of the respondents who identified as pro-choice supported this policy. When this is combined with those respondents who support abortion during the first six months or at any point during pregnancy, this accounts for 79% of pro-choice respondents. Only 20% of respondents who identified as pro-choice supported stricter policies, which is far from a majority.

The statistic that 74% of Americans want the Supreme Court to restrict abortion comes from the percent of Americans who already identified as supporting restrictions in general. It also combines respondents in favor of a range of degrees of strictness, from limited to the first three months, to never being permitted in any circumstances. So, the huge bar graph which states "Yes, rule to allow" above the 74% statistic is extremely misleading. Additionally, these results are not in line with most other studies about opinion on abortion. Even in the study, they state that the proportion of Americans who support an abortion ban after 20 weeks has increased by 53% from earlier in the same year. This statistic alone should have caused the researchers to consider the presence bias in their study.

Finally, the most significant issue in this study is in the process of data collection. In the methodology section, the authors state that they used two methods to find respondents: random landline telephone numbers, and random mobile numbers. But for the landline numbers, the household member was automatically designated as the youngest male. Some defenses of this study explain that they did half male, and half female for the landline numbers. But this is not explained in the methodology statements of any of the publications about this poll. If they did make a mistake in their explanation, this is still a major issue because it indicates that the authors were not transparent about their methods, or at the very least, were not careful in their reporting of the poll results. It ultimately calls into question the legitimacy of all the results that they presented.

The authors of this poll violated principles A, B, C, and D of the ASA's ethical guidelines. The methodology did not produce valid results, since it ignored a key part of the population (women). For principle B, they included very little information about the data source. Their methodology section simply leads to more questions that are not answered anywhere. For principle C, it is important to keep in mind that this study was funded by the Knights of Columbus, a private Catholic organization. The academic department that they worked with at

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Marist College clearly sacrificed scientific integrity in favor of the interests of their donors. Most importantly, these researchers did not take responsibility for those directly affected by these analyses. According to their own methodology, women, who are directly affected by abortion policies, were not even included in a significant part of their poll. They used this data to draw conclusions about American public opinion of abortion, and several news articles cite this study as evidence for support of pro-life policy.

Sources

The official presentation of study results:

<https://www.kofc.org/un/en/resources/communications/american-support-abortion-restriction.pdf>

First found this study on:

https://www.reddit.com/r/badstats/comments/5pwx20/apparently_over_80_of_americans_are_mostly_male/

3 Connection to ASA guidelines 4 / 4

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