2024 General Election Forcasting Model

POLSCI 239 - Assignment Four

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Methodology

The data for this model is borrowed from ABC's 538 general election state polling dataset. (Full citation in README)

```r
polling_data <- read_csv("data/president_polls.csv", show_col_types = FALSE)
glimpse(polling_data)
```

```
Rows: 15,971
Columns: 52
$ poll_id                   <dbl> 88806, 88806, 88836, 88836, 88817, 88817, 88~
$ pollster_id               <dbl> 770, 770, 1895, 1895, 1741, 1741, 770, 770, ~
$ pollster                  <chr> "TIPP", "TIPP", "Quantus Insights", "Quantus~
$ sponsor_ids               <dbl> NA, NA, 2184, 2184, NA, NA, NA, NA, NA, NA, ~
$ sponsors                  <chr> NA, NA, "TrendingPolitics", "TrendingPolitic~
$ display_name              <chr> "TIPP Insights", "TIPP Insights", "Quantus I~
$ pollster_rating_id        <dbl> 144, 144, 859, 859, 721, 721, 144, 144, 338,~
$ pollster_rating_name      <chr> "TIPP Insights", "TIPP Insights", "Quantus I~
$ numeric_grade             <dbl> 1.8, 1.8, NA, NA, NA, NA, 1.8, 1.8, 0.7, 0.7~
$ pollscore                 <dbl> -0.4, -0.4, NA, NA, NA, NA, -0.4, -0.4, 0.6,~
$ methodology               <chr> "Online Panel", "Online Panel", "Online Pane~
$ transparency_score        <dbl> 3.0, 3.0, 5.5, 5.5, 8.0, 8.0, 3.0, 3.0, 4.0,~
$ state                     <chr> NA, NA, "Pennsylvania", "Pennsylvania", "Flo~
$ start_date                <chr> "10/18/24", "10/18/24", "10/17/24", "10/17/2~
$ end_date                  <chr> "10/20/24", "10/20/24", "10/20/24", "10/20/2~
$ sponsor_candidate_id      <dbl> NA, NA, NA, NA, NA, NA, NA, NA, NA, NA, NA, ~
$ sponsor_candidate         <chr> NA, NA, NA, NA, NA, NA, NA, NA, NA, NA, NA, ~
$ sponsor_candidate_party   <chr> NA, NA, NA, NA, NA, NA, NA, NA, NA, NA, NA, ~
$ endorsed_candidate_id     <lgl> NA, NA, NA, NA, NA, NA, NA, NA, NA, NA, NA, ~
$ endorsed_candidate_name   <lgl> NA, NA, NA, NA, NA, NA, NA, NA, NA, NA, NA, ~
```

```
$ endorsed_candidate_party  <lgl> NA, NA, NA, NA, NA, NA, NA, NA, NA, NA, NA, ~
$ question_id               <dbl> 213459, 213459, 213538, 213538, 213472, 2134~
$ sample_size               <dbl> 1244, 1244, 840, 840, 400, 400, 1254, 1254, ~
$ population                <chr> "lv", "lv", "lv", "lv", "lv", "lv", "lv", "l~
$ subpopulation             <lgl> NA, NA, NA, NA, NA, NA, NA, NA, NA, NA, NA, ~
$ population_full           <chr> "lv", "lv", "lv", "lv", "lv", "lv", "lv", "l~
$ tracking                  <lgl> TRUE, TRUE, NA, NA, NA, NA, TRUE, TRUE, NA, ~
$ created_at                <chr> "10/21/24 08:43", "10/21/24 08:43", "10/21/2~
$ notes                     <chr> NA, NA, NA, NA, NA, NA, NA, NA, NA, NA, NA, ~
$ url                       <chr> "https://tippinsights.com/tipp-tracking-poll~
$ url_article               <chr> "https://tippinsights.com/tipp-tracking-poll~
$ url_topline               <chr> NA, NA, "https://docs.google.com/document/d/~
$ url_crosstab              <chr> NA, NA, NA, NA, NA, NA, NA, NA, NA, NA, NA, ~
$ source                    <dbl> NA, NA, NA, NA, NA, NA, NA, NA, NA, NA, NA, ~
$ internal                  <lgl> NA, NA, FALSE, FALSE, FALSE, FALSE, NA, NA, ~
$ partisan                  <chr> NA, NA, "REP", "REP", NA, NA, NA, NA, "REP",~
$ race_id                   <dbl> 8914, 8914, 8872, 8872, 8778, 8778, 8914, 89~
$ cycle                     <dbl> 2024, 2024, 2024, 2024, 2024, 2024, 2024, 20~
$ office_type               <chr> "U.S. President", "U.S. President", "U.S. Pr~
$ seat_number               <dbl> 0, 0, 0, 0, 0, 0, 0, 0, 0, 0, 0, 0, 0, 0, 0,~
$ seat_name                 <lgl> NA, NA, NA, NA, NA, NA, NA, NA, NA, NA, NA, ~
$ election_date             <chr> "11/5/24", "11/5/24", "11/5/24", "11/5/24", ~
$ stage                     <chr> "general", "general", "general", "general", ~
$ nationwide_batch          <lgl> FALSE, FALSE, FALSE, FALSE, FALSE, FALSE, FA~
$ ranked_choice_reallocated <lgl> FALSE, FALSE, FALSE, FALSE, FALSE, FALSE, FA~
$ ranked_choice_round       <dbl> NA, NA, NA, NA, NA, NA, NA, NA, NA, NA, NA, ~
$ hypothetical              <lgl> FALSE, FALSE, FALSE, FALSE, FALSE, FALSE, FA~
$ party                     <chr> "DEM", "REP", "DEM", "REP", "DEM", "REP", "D~
$ answer                    <chr> "Harris", "Trump", "Harris", "Trump", "Harri~
$ candidate_id              <dbl> 16661, 16651, 16661, 16651, 16661, 16651, 16~
$ candidate_name            <chr> "Kamala Harris", "Donald Trump", "Kamala Har~
$ pct                       <dbl> 47.0, 48.0, 48.2, 50.3, 45.4, 54.6, 47.0, 49~
```

Data Cleaning

The model will only calculate win percentages for toss up states.

```r
toss_up_states <- c("Michigan", "Nevada",
      "Arizona", "New Mexico",
      "Wisconsin", "Pennsylvania",
      "North Carolina", "Georgia")

polling_data <- polling_data |>
  select(
    poll_id,
    state,
    end_date,
    sample_size,
    candidate_name,
    pct
  ) |>
  filter(candidate_name == "Kamala Harris" & state %in% toss_up_states) |>
  mutate(end_date = as.Date(end_date, format = "%m/%d/%y")) |>
  arrange(end_date) |>
  drop_na(sample_size)

glimpse(polling_data)
```

```
Rows: 847
Columns: 6
$ poll_id        <dbl> 84542, 84542, 84543, 84543, 84544, 84544, 84545, 84545,~
$ state          <chr> "Arizona", "Arizona", "Georgia", "Georgia", "Michigan",~
$ end_date       <date> 2023-11-03, 2023-11-03, 2023-11-03, 2023-11-03, 2023-1~
$ sample_size    <dbl> 603, 603, 629, 629, 616, 616, 611, 611, 600, 600, 603, ~
$ candidate_name <chr> "Kamala Harris", "Kamala Harris", "Kamala Harris", "Kam~
$ pct            <dbl> 43.0, 43.0, 44.0, 44.0, 45.0, 48.0, 42.0, 42.0, 44.0, 4~
```

Summary Statistics

```r
options(pillar.sigfig = 7)

polling_data |>
  group_by(state) |>
  summarise(
    poll_count = n(),
    raw_harris_approval = mean(pct),
    ealiest_poll = min(end_date),
    most_recent_poll = max(end_date)
  )
```

```
# A tibble: 8 x 5
  state          poll_count raw_harris_approval ealiest_poll most_recent_poll
  <chr>               <int>               <dbl> <date>       <date>
1 Arizona               111            46.50595 2023-11-03   2024-10-18
2 Georgia               119            46.41235 2023-11-03   2024-10-18
3 Michigan              124            47.50210 2023-11-03   2024-10-18
4 Nevada                 80            46.96812 2023-11-03   2024-10-18
5 New Mexico             10            48.96    2024-08-03   2024-10-18
6 North Carolina        111            47.18766 2024-02-16   2024-10-18
7 Pennsylvania          166            47.52759 2023-11-03   2024-10-20
8 Wisconsin             126            48.46984 2023-11-03   2024-10-18
```

Weighting Data by Sample Size

Each poll was weighted using a function based on its sample size. Specifically, I take the square root of the median sample size for each state and then multipled the Harris approval percentage for each poll by the square root of the poll's sample size divided by that states' square-rooted median sample size. This methodology was adopted from 538's weighting guidelines and then adjusted to fit the specifications of the dataset. A new "adjusted_pct" variable was applied to each poll in the dataset.

```
square_root_median_sample_size_by_state <- polling_data |>
  group_by(state) |>
  summarize(
    square_root_median_sample_size = sqrt(median(sample_size, na.rm = TRUE))
  )
as_tibble(square_root_median_sample_size_by_state)
```

```
# A tibble: 8 x 2
  state          square_root_median_sample_size
  <chr>                                   <dbl>
1 Arizona                              27.85678
2 Georgia                              28.26659
3 Michigan                             26.22975
4 Nevada                               26.01922
5 New Mexico                           22.94559
6 North Carolina                       28.28427
7 Pennsylvania                         28.33725
8 Wisconsin                            26.45751
```

```
polling_data <- polling_data |>
  mutate(adjusted_pct = case_when(
    state == "Arizona" ~ sqrt(sample_size)/27.85678*pct,
    state == "Georgia" ~ sqrt(sample_size)/28.26659*pct,
    state == "Michigan" ~ sqrt(sample_size)/26.22975*pct,
    state == "Nevada" ~ sqrt(sample_size)/26.01922*pct,
    state == "New Mexico" ~ sqrt(sample_size)/22.94559*pct,
    state == "North Carolina" ~ sqrt(sample_size)/28.28427*pct,
    state == "Pennsylvania" ~ sqrt(sample_size)/28.33725*pct,
    state == "Wisconsin" ~ sqrt(sample_size)/26.45751*pct
    )
  )

glimpse(polling_data)
```

```
Rows: 847
Columns: 7
$ poll_id        <dbl> 84542, 84542, 84543, 84543, 84544, 84544, 84545, 84545,~
$ state          <chr> "Arizona", "Arizona", "Georgia", "Georgia", "Michigan",~
$ end_date       <date> 2023-11-03, 2023-11-03, 2023-11-03, 2023-11-03, 2023-1~
$ sample_size    <dbl> 603, 603, 629, 629, 616, 616, 611, 611, 600, 600, 603, ~
$ candidate_name <chr> "Kamala Harris", "Kamala Harris", "Kamala Harris", "Kam~
$ pct            <dbl> 43.0, 43.0, 44.0, 44.0, 45.0, 48.0, 42.0, 42.0, 44.0, 4~
$ adjusted_pct   <dbl> 37.90497, 37.90497, 39.03953, 39.03953, 42.58030, 45.41~
```

Exponentially Weighted Moving Average

In an EWMA calculation, recent data points are assigned more weight than older points. This makes the average more responsive to recent changes in the data. The lambda variable controls how much weight is assigned to more recent data points. I assign a lambda value of 0.95 in order to assign greater importance to more recent polls. The smoothed average provides the a value for Harris' approval rating that is then used as the Dem win percentage in my forcast. More documentation on the EWMA can be found here (https://www.investopedia.com/articles/07/ewma.asp).

```
options(pillar.sigfig = 7)

calculate_ewma <- function(data, raw_average, lambda) {

  ewma <- numeric(length(data[[raw_average]]))
  ewma[1] <- data[[raw_average]][1]

  for (i in 2:length(data[[raw_average]])) {
    ewma[i] <- lambda * data[[raw_average]][i] + (1 - lambda) * ewma[i - 1]
  }
  return(ewma[length(ewma)])
}
polling_data |>
  group_by(state) |>
  summarise(
    ewma_adjusted_pct = calculate_ewma(cur_data(), "adjusted_pct", 0.95)
  )
```

```
Warning: There was 1 warning in `summarise()`.
i In argument: `ewma_adjusted_pct = calculate_ewma(cur_data(), "adjusted_pct",
  0.95)`.
i In group 1: `state = "Arizona"`.
Caused by warning:
! `cur_data()` was deprecated in dplyr 1.1.0.
i Please use `pick()` instead.
```

```
# A tibble: 8 x 2
  state          ewma_adjusted_pct
  <chr>                      <dbl>
1 Arizona                 44.59247
2 Georgia                 52.24131
3 Michigan                56.43388
```

```
4 Nevada                  41.80885
5 New Mexico              68.36112
6 North Carolina          47.53028
7 Pennsylvania            49.37062
8 Wisconsin               44.52851
```

Additional Considerations and Data Limitations

This dataset introduces several inconsistencies to the model which will be addressed here. First, the inconsistent number of polls conducted within each state creates uncertainty in the accuracy of the data. Second, the variability of polling sources opens the data to potential bias. FiveThirtyEight uses extensive guidelines when choosing polls to include within their data in order to account for bias; however, this is mostly a subjective science and isn't statistically grounded in my model. Information on 538's polling policy can be found here (https://fivethirtyeight.com/features/polls-policy-and-faqs/). Third, this model uses a ruidmentary modeling algorithm that adjusts based on sample size and time decay. Other weights such as pollster rating and margin of error are common strategies, but are not considered in this model.

Weighting and averaging data admits a certain level of subjectivity into the data as the methods by which the data is adjusted are largely statistically insignificant. The weighting and averaging methods I chose were subjective choices influenced by common practice but are not scientifically grounded as the best practice.