

## Citizens Shape Polls - How can Polling Shape Citizens?

Most democratic government systems claim to be “airtight” and continuously operating on the public’s best interest. But that does not mean “public interest” is immune to abuse from external powers. I believe democracy can be exploited through *polling* and *poll result awareness*. Specifically, through the way pollsters and media poll and report polls, and how it can lead to severe misrepresentation. Recent reports show that roughly ⅓ of voters are “in the dark” when it comes to voting<sup>1</sup>, telling us considerable amounts of opinions are unset. Poll knowledge is one of the primary influences of molding future voter beliefs and behaviors. Political officials and the media are aware of this population trend, as they both “feel they need polling for *tactical* reasons”<sup>2</sup>. Media outlets hold pre-existing political leanings<sup>3</sup>, allowing them to deploy persuasion techniques to target audiences<sup>4</sup> or intentionally frame results to promote self beliefs<sup>5</sup>. Disregarding skewed media, we still see reputable pollsters indirectly instilling “bad conformity” amongst voters<sup>6</sup>. Conformity commonly arises following *national* poll results, from the threat of citizen’s experiencing “social disapproval”<sup>7</sup>. The fear of breaking newfound societal norms perceived from poll results causes citizen’s to assume they are voting the “right” way<sup>8</sup>.

I believe this vulnerability can be extinguished by implementing government mandated regularization policies to oversee the polling process within all relevant entities. A government official should act as a media correspondent to monitor poll processes, and directly present reports to citizens to ensure result accuracy. These officials should monitor national results specifically to avoid “bad conformity”. Enforcing pollsters and campaigns to provide detailed policy/candidate information will further education in unsure voters. The government should always represent the people’s thoughts, not outside firms. Without solutions, citizen-government relations suffer, and political power is placed in the wrong hands. Whether on the national or local level, poll knowledges is what hinders democracies’ ability to operate appropriately.

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<sup>1</sup><https://www.reuters.com/article/us-usa-election-name/whats-in-a-name-one-third-of-u-s-voters-dont-know-candidates-reuters-ipsos-poll-idUSKCN1MD1QC>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.usnews.com/opinion/articles/2016-11-22/polls-are-bad-for-democracy>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.allsides.com/media-bias/media-bias-chart>

<sup>4</sup> Cohn, Alain. 2019. “Media and Persuasion.” SI 334. University of Michigan, Ann Arbor.

<sup>5</sup> Cohn, Alain. 2019. “Media and Persuasion.”

<sup>6</sup> Cohn, Alain. 2019. “Conformity.” SI 334. University of Michigan, Ann Arbor.

<sup>7</sup> Cohn, Alain. 2019. “Conformity.”

<sup>8</sup> Cohn, Alain. 2019. “Conformity”