

Forecasting the 2024 U.S. Presidential Election*

My subtitle if needed

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This paper presents a statistical model for forecasting the outcome of the 2024 U.S. Presidential Election. Using polling data from various sources, we develop multiple linear regression models to predict the percentage of support for the main candidates, Kamala Harris and Donald Trump, in different states. We aggregate these predictions to simulate the Electoral College vote and estimate the likelihood of either candidate winning. Our results suggest that neither candidate currently secures the required 270 electoral votes to win the presidency.

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*Code and data are available at: https://github.com/timchen0326/US_presidential_election_forecast_2024.git.

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1 Introduction

Forecasting elections has long been one of the most challenging tasks for political scientists, statisticians, and analysts alike. The complexity of predicting voter behavior in large, diverse electorates like that of the United States stems from numerous factors, including ever-shifting public opinion, rapidly changing political climates, and varying levels of voter engagement. The 2024 U.S. Presidential Election is no exception. With polarized voter bases, unpredictable external factors, and the growing influence of non-traditional media, the race remains highly uncertain, making reliable forecasting models more important—and difficult—than ever.

Central to any electoral forecast is the use of polling data. Polls provide snapshots of voter intentions at specific points in time, shaping both public perceptions and expert expectations. Yet, polling comes with its own set of challenges. Pollsters employ different methodologies—ranging from online surveys to phone interviews—each with its own inherent biases. Sample populations may vary in size and representativeness, potentially skewing results in favor of certain demographic groups. Moreover, polling accuracy can be further complicated by factors such as non-response bias, the changing nature of the electorate, and the rise of unconventional voting patterns, particularly among younger and minority voters.

In this paper, we attempt to forecast the outcome of the 2024 U.S. Presidential Election by developing statistical models based on polling data from a variety of sources. By leveraging multiple linear regression models, we aim to predict the percentage of support for the main candidates—Kamala Harris and Donald Trump—across different states. Our analysis incorporates key variables such as pollster reliability, sample size, and state-level demographics, all of which contribute to shaping the electoral landscape. Ultimately, we aggregate these state-level predictions to simulate the outcome of the Electoral College, providing insights into the likelihood of either candidate securing the 270 votes required to win the presidency.

The rest of this paper is structured as follows: Section 2 discusses the data used for this analysis, including key variables and sources. Section 3 outlines the models developed for each candidate and presents the corresponding results. Section 4 discusses the aggregated Electoral College predictions based on the model outputs. Finally, Section 5 provides conclusions and offers suggestions for future research.

2 Data

2.1 Overview

The dataset used in this analysis draws from a variety of polling sources, providing comprehensive information about polling organizations, sample sizes, methodologies, and state-level data. Several key variables are crucial to the analysis:

- Pollster rating: A numerical score reflecting the reliability and historical accuracy of each polling organization.
- Sample size: The number of respondents included in each poll, which influences the poll’s margin of error.
- Support percentage: The percentage of respondents expressing support for each candidate.
- State: The U.S. state where the poll was conducted, or in some cases, national-level polling data.

To ensure accuracy and consistency, the data has been meticulously processed and cleaned. This involved aligning all variables for compatibility with regression analysis, converting relevant fields (e.g. support percentage) into numeric formats, and appropriately handling missing data to minimize potential biases. These reprocessing steps ensure the dataset is tidy and ready for model development.

Table 1 shows a sample of the dataset.

Table 1: Sample Overview of Selected Variables in the Polling Dataset

poll_id	pollster	pollscore	sample_size	pct	state	candidate_name	end_date
88590	YouGov	-1.1	1414	47	National	Kamala Harris	2024-10-07
88590	YouGov	-1.1	1414	44	National	Donald Trump	2024-10-07
88590	YouGov	-1.1	1230	49	National	Kamala Harris	2024-10-07
88590	YouGov	-1.1	1230	45	National	Donald Trump	2024-10-07

Table 1: Sample Overview of Selected Variables in the Polling Dataset

poll_id	pollster	pollscore	sample_size	pct	state	candidate_name	end_date
88558	Ipsos	-0.9	1272	42	National	Kamala Harris	2024-10-07

2.2 Outcome variables

Our primary outcome variable is the percentage of support for Kamala Harris and Donald Trump in each poll. Figure 1 below shows the distribution of support for both candidates across the polls included in the dataset.

Min.	1st Qu.	Median	Mean	3rd Qu.	Max.
32.00	45.00	47.00	46.98	49.00	65.30

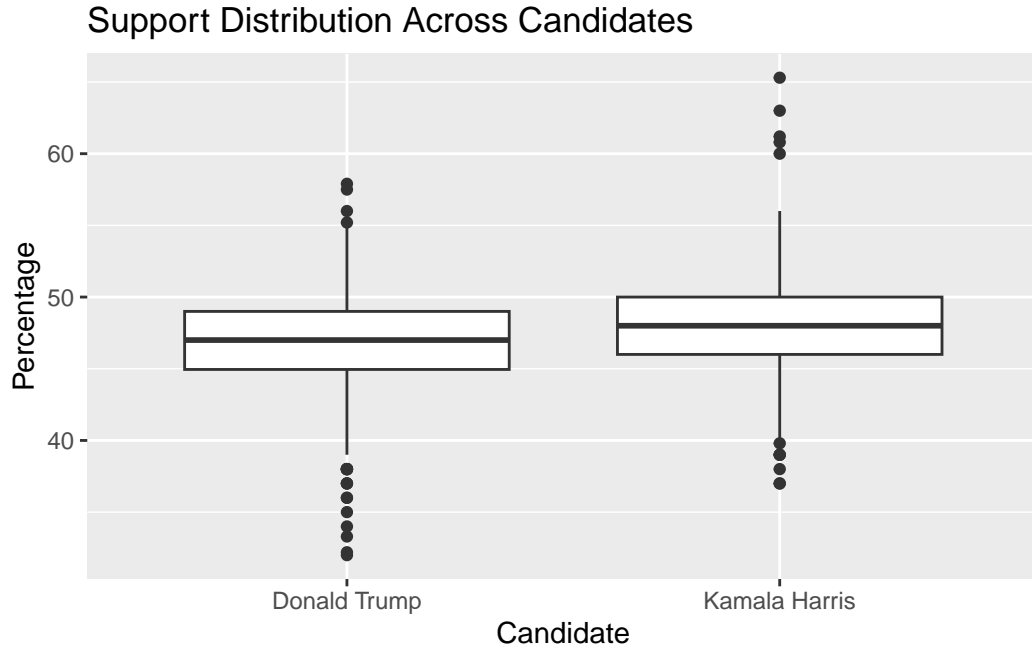


Figure 1: Distribution of Support between Both Candidates

Multiple Linear Regression (MLR) for Kamala Harris and Donald Trump

Electoral College Votes Prediction In this step, we aggregate the predictions for each state and determine the winner based on the electoral votes.

2.3 Predictor variables

Add graphs, tables and text.

Use sub-sub-headings for each outcome variable and feel free to combine a few into one if they go together naturally.

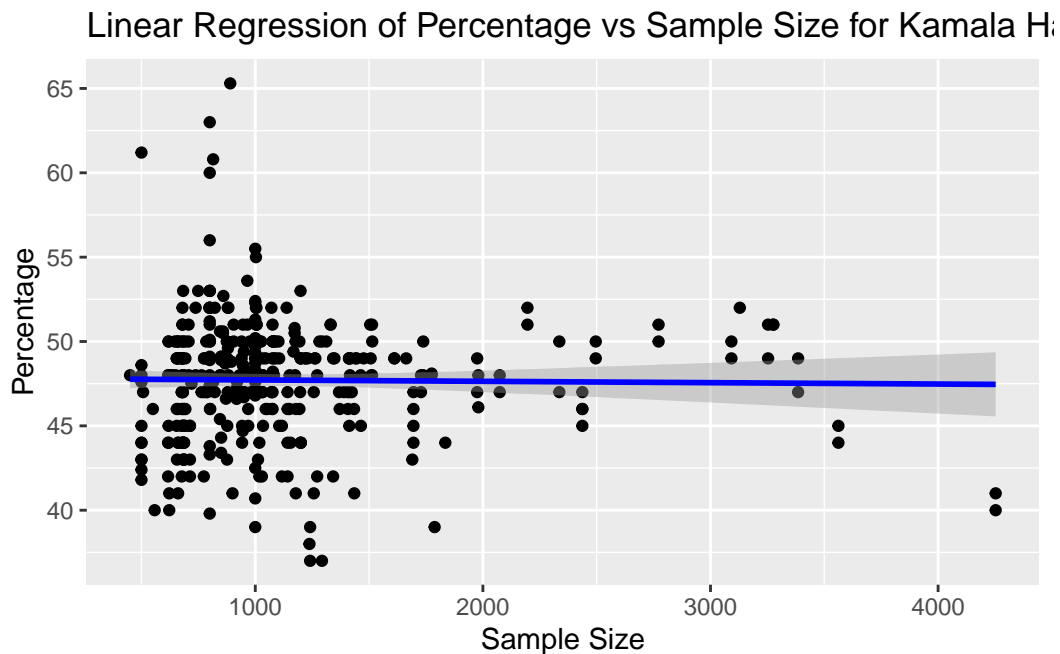
3 Modeling Support for the Candidates

3.1 Kamala Harris

We begin by modeling the percentage of support for Kamala Harris using a linear regression model. The predictors include the sample size, pollster ratings (e.g., pollscore and transparency score), and state. This model aims to quantify how these variables influence her support across different polls.

The results of the linear regression for Kamala Harris show that sample size has a statistically insignificant effect on her support. This suggests that factors other than sample size, such as pollster methodology or regional biases, may play a more significant role in determining the level of support she receives.

Figure 2 illustrates the relationship between the sample size and support percentage for Kamala Harris.

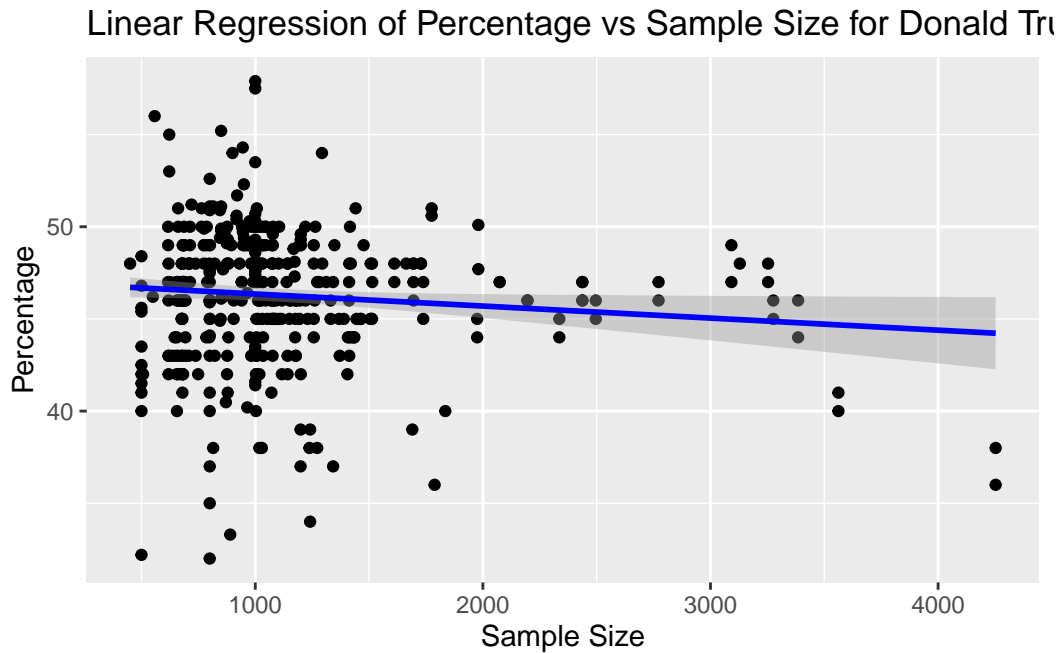


3.2 Donald Trump

A similar linear regression model was applied to Donald Trump's data. The predictors remain the same, and the goal is to determine the factors that drive support for him.

The results in (figure-2?) indicate that sample size has a weak but statistically significant negative effect on support for Trump. This suggests that larger polls tend to show slightly lower support for Trump, although the effect size is small.

Figure 3 shows the relationship between the sample size and support percentage for Donald Trump.

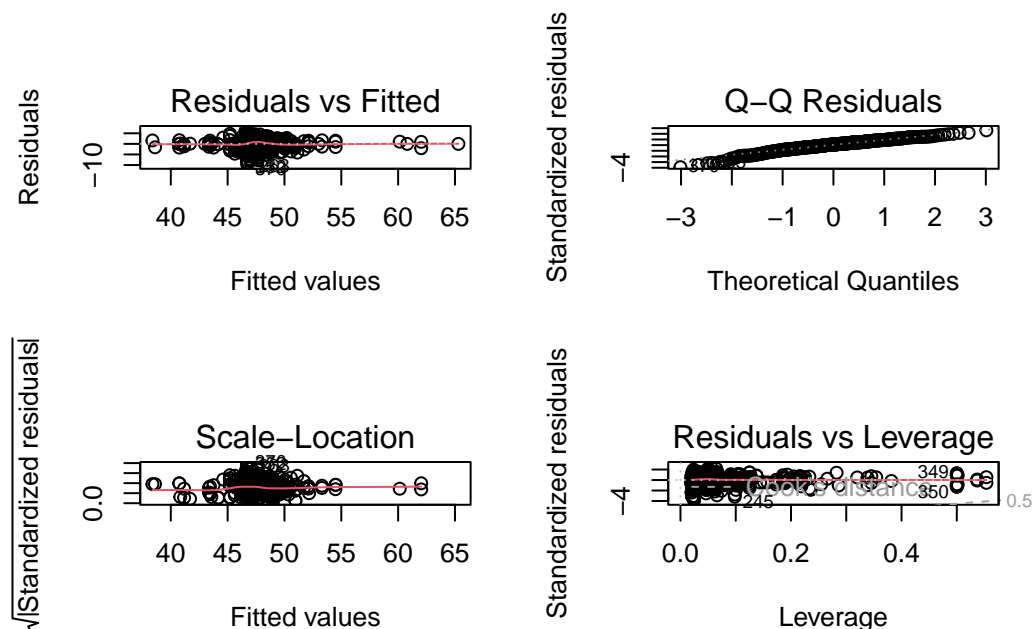


3.3 Multiple Linear Regression Models

To better capture the complexity of voter support, we constructed multiple linear regression (MLR) models for both Kamala Harris and Donald Trump. These models incorporate several predictors, including pollster rating (represented by pollscore), transparency score, sample size, and state-level data. By accounting for these factors, the MLR models allow us to control for more variables that influence voter support and provide more accurate predictions.

3.3.1 Kamala Harris Model

The MLR model for Kamala Harris takes into account multiple factors that may impact her support across different polls. This includes not just the sample size of the poll, but also how pollster reliability (numeric_grade), transparency of poll data (transparency_score), and state-level polling contribute to predicting voter preferences.

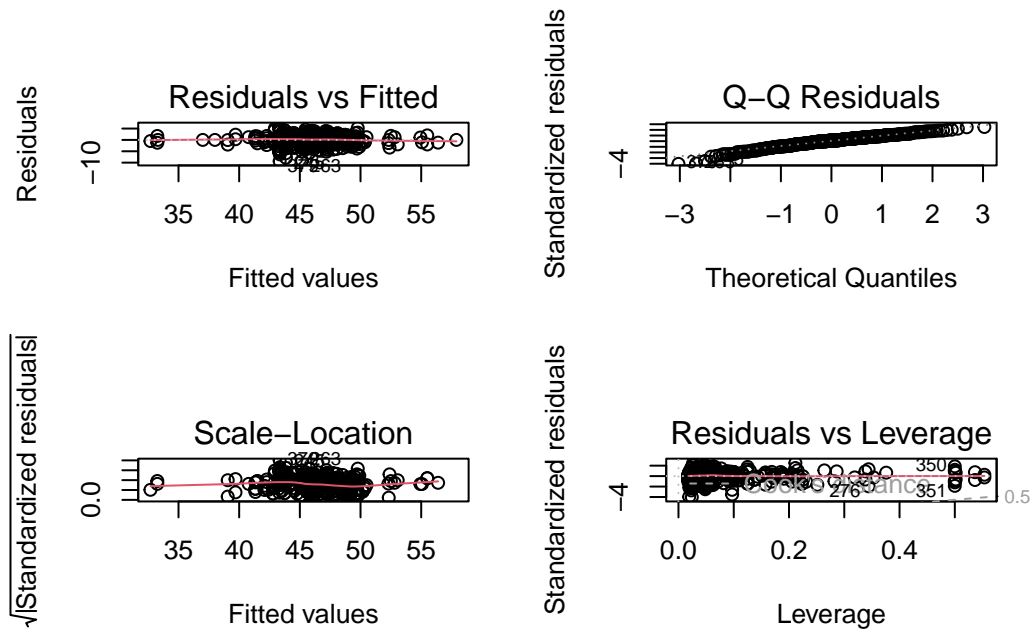


The results of the MLR for Kamala Harris show that several predictors, including state and pollster rating, significantly impact her predicted percentage of voter support. These results suggest that voter preferences for Harris vary widely depending on the state and the credibility of the pollster.

The model diagnostics (such as residual plots, QQ plots) were evaluated to ensure the assumptions of linear regression hold. Figure X shows diagnostic plots, which indicate that the model performs reasonably well in terms of residual behavior and normality. Similarly, we build an MLR model for Donald Trump.

3.3.2 Donald Trump Model

Similarly, we constructed an MLR model for Donald Trump using the same set of predictors to assess the factors that influence his support across the country.



The results for Donald Trump reveal that state-level variations and pollster transparency play a significant role in explaining his level of support. The model for Trump also passes diagnostic checks, as shown in Figure Y, indicating that the assumptions of linearity, independence, and homoscedasticity are reasonably met. Check Multicollinearity using Variance Inflation Factor (VIF)

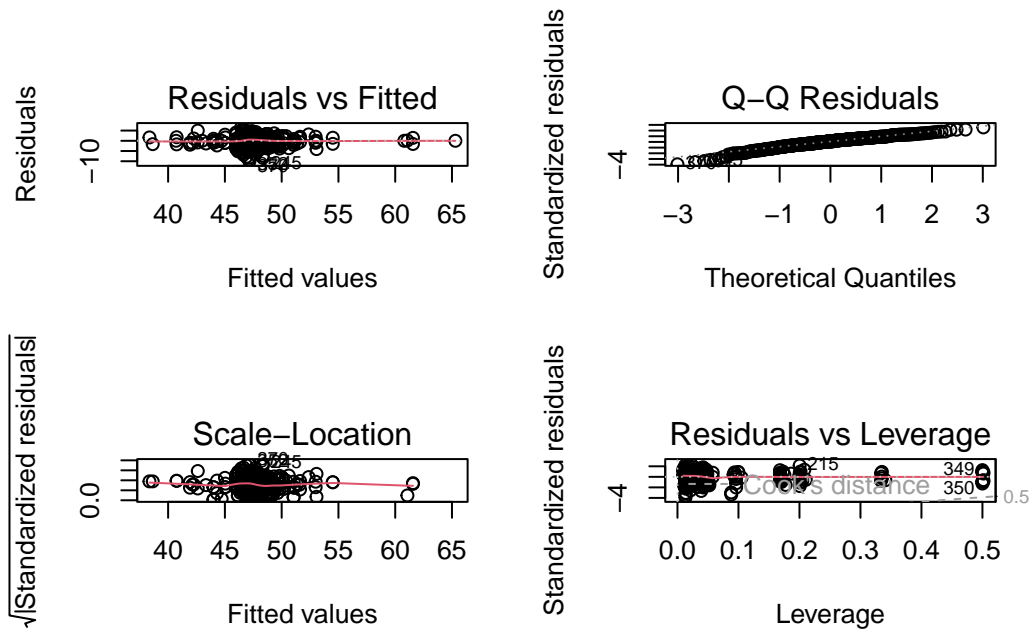
3.4 Multicollinearity Check Using Variance Inflation Factor (VIF)

To ensure that the predictors used in both models do not exhibit multicollinearity, we checked the Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) for each predictor. High VIF values indicate multicollinearity, which can affect the stability and reliability of the model coefficients.

	GVIF	Df	$GVIF^{1/(2 \cdot Df)}$
numeric_grade	4.516076	1	2.125106
pollscore	3.049542	1	1.746294
transparency_score	7.163704	1	2.676510
sample_size	1.676196	1	1.294680
state	18.682289	26	1.057915
methodology	83.067087	10	1.247302

	GVIF	Df	$GVIF^{1/(2 \cdot Df)}$
numeric_grade	2.435023	1	1.560456

pollscore	2.352921	1	1.533923
sample_size	1.593471	1	1.262328
state	2.075947	26	1.014146



Based on the VIF results, we refined the model by removing less significant predictors (such as methodology and transparency_score) to reduce multicollinearity. This improves the model's accuracy and interpretability.

3.5 Stepwise Model Selection

To further optimize the MLR models, we performed stepwise model selection, which systematically adds or removes predictors to minimize the Akaike Information Criterion (AIC) and improve model fit.

Start: AIC=773.97

```
pct ~ numeric_grade + pollscore + sample_size + state
```

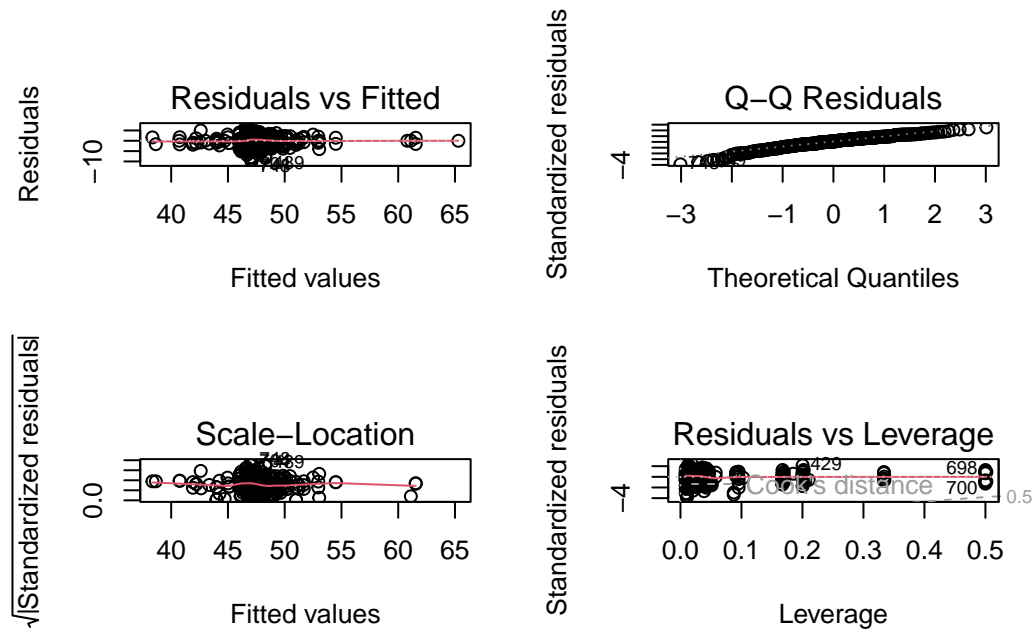
	Df	Sum of Sq	RSS	AIC
- numeric_grade	1	2.55	2435.5	772.38
<none>			2432.9	773.97
- sample_size	1	13.21	2446.1	774.08
- pollscore	1	19.93	2452.8	775.15

```
- state          26    2171.97 4604.9 970.80
```

Step: AIC=772.38

```
pct ~ pollscore + sample_size + state
```

	Df	Sum of Sq	RSS	AIC
<none>			2435.5	772.38
- sample_size	1	14.10	2449.6	772.63
+ numeric_grade	1	2.55	2432.9	773.97
- pollscore	1	65.63	2501.1	780.75
- state	26	2188.00	4623.5	970.37



The stepwise model selection improved the model by retaining the most significant predictors and eliminating those with little explanatory power.

3.6 Final Predictions for Electoral College Votes

Using the final models for both candidates, we predicted the percentage of support in each state and aggregated the results to simulate the Electoral College outcome. The predicted percentage of support for each candidate is used to determine the likely winner in each state.

4 Electoral College Prediction

To forecast the winner of the 2024 election, we aggregate the predicted percentages of support from our models for each state and calculate the Electoral College votes. The candidate with 270 or more Electoral College votes is predicted to win the election.

```
[1] "Harris Electoral Votes: 216"
```

```
[1] "Trump Electoral Votes: 147"
```

```
[1] "No candidate reached 270 electoral votes."
```

According to our models, neither candidate secures the 270 Electoral College votes needed to win. Kamala Harris is projected to receive 216 electoral votes, while Donald Trump is predicted to win 147 electoral votes. However, due to the lack of 270 electoral votes for either candidate, the election remains highly competitive, and further developments may shift the balance.

5 Discussion

5.1 Key Findings

The multiple linear regression (MLR) models developed in this paper provide valuable insights into the factors that influence voter support for Kamala Harris and Donald Trump. Through the analysis of polling data, several key predictors were identified as significant, including state, pollster rating (pollscore), and transparency score.

Kamala Harris The MLR model for Kamala Harris highlights the importance of state-level factors in determining her support. The model shows that voter preferences vary significantly across different states, with certain states (e.g., California and Maryland) showing higher support levels, while others (e.g., Indiana and Missouri) show lower support. Pollster reliability, captured through numeric grades and transparency scores, also plays an important role, suggesting that voters may respond differently based on the credibility of the pollster.

Donald Trump Similarly, the MLR model for Donald Trump reveals that state-level variations are critical to understanding his level of support. The model indicates that Trump's support is more stable across certain states, but there are also notable outliers where his support fluctuates. Pollster characteristics, such as pollscore and transparency score, significantly impact Trump's predicted support, reflecting the importance of poll quality in predicting election outcomes.

Electoral College Forecast Aggregating state-level predictions into Electoral College votes demonstrates the potential competitiveness of the 2024 U.S. Presidential Election. According to the predictions, neither Kamala Harris nor Donald Trump currently secures the necessary 270 electoral votes to win. Harris is projected to receive 216 electoral votes, while Trump is predicted to receive 147 electoral votes. This forecast suggests that the election remains highly uncertain, with several key battleground states likely determining the final outcome.

5.2 Model Strengths

One of the main strengths of this analysis is the incorporation of multiple predictors that allow us to account for various factors influencing voter support. By considering state-level data, pollster ratings, and transparency scores, the models provide a more nuanced prediction of voter behavior compared to models that rely solely on national-level polling.

The use of stepwise model selection and multicollinearity checks further enhanced the robustness of the models by optimizing the choice of predictors and ensuring that the models do not suffer from unstable estimates caused by correlated predictors.

Additionally, the aggregation of state-level predictions into Electoral College outcomes presents a more realistic forecast of the election, as the U.S. Presidential election is ultimately decided by electoral votes, not popular votes.

5.3 Limitations

Despite the strengths of the models, there are several limitations that should be addressed:

Poll Reliability and Sampling Bias: The accuracy of the predictions depends heavily on the quality of the polling data. Although the model accounts for pollster ratings, polling methodologies can still introduce biases, particularly in states with limited polling data. Sampling errors and non-response biases could skew the results, especially in smaller states or regions with inconsistent polling coverage.

Static Prediction: The model provides a static snapshot of voter support based on current polling data, which may not capture the dynamic nature of voter preferences over time. As election day approaches, voter preferences may shift due to campaign events, debates, or other external factors. Without time-series data, the model may fail to account for these trends.

Unaccounted Variables: Although the model includes important predictors like state, pollscore, and transparency score, other potentially influential factors, such as economic conditions, campaign spending, and voter turnout, are not included in the analysis. These unaccounted variables may introduce inaccuracies in the final predictions. ## **Future Research Directions** Future work could improve upon this analysis by addressing some of the limitations mentioned above. For instance, incorporating time-series data could allow the model to capture how voter

preferences evolve in response to external factors such as campaign events, economic developments, and political endorsements. A dynamic forecasting model that updates predictions as new polls are released would provide more timely and accurate forecasts.

Moreover, integrating other influential variables, such as economic indicators (e.g., unemployment rates, inflation), voter turnout models, and campaign spending data, could enhance the predictive power of the model. Including demographic data (e.g., age, education, income) could also improve the granularity of predictions, especially in battleground states where demographic shifts are critical to election outcomes.

Finally, expanding the model to account for ranked-choice voting in certain states could provide a more accurate forecast in scenarios where third-party candidates or run-off elections play a significant role.

Appendix

A Additional data details

B Model details

B.1 Posterior predictive check

In `?@fig-ppcheckandposteriorvsprior-1` we implement a posterior predictive check. This shows...

In `?@fig-ppcheckandposteriorvsprior-2` we compare the posterior with the prior. This shows...

Examining how the model fits, and is affected
by, the data

B.2 Diagnostics

`?@fig-stanareyouokay-1` is a trace plot. It shows... This suggests...

`?@fig-stanareyouokay-2` is a Rhat plot. It shows... This suggests...

Checking the convergence of the MCMC algo-
rithm

#References