SURVEYS AND POLLING

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Surveys vs. Polls

Technically speaking:

▫ <u>Polls</u> are "quick & dirty" with few questions whereas <u>surveys</u> are usually longer and more comprehensive

▫ <u>Surveys</u> usually have broader application whereas <u>polls</u> are used in political settings

Practically speaking, the two terms are generally used interchangeably

"Poll on Polls" – Part 1

"As you may know, most national polls are typically based on a sample of 1,000 adults. Do you think a sample of this size accurately reflects the views of the nation's population or not?"

30% say yes, 68% say no

"Poll on Polls" – Part 2

"Some polling organizations make frequent predictions of election results. What is your general impression of how well they do: Do you think they are pretty nearly right most of the time, or do you think their record is not very good?"

54% answer mostly right,
41% answer not very good.

How are polls conducted?

Polls or surveys use sampling:

1. Ask a <u>small number</u> of people a set of questions
2. Use the sample to <u>represent a larger population</u>

… a *small number* of people

- We accept that we cannot talk to <u>everyone</u> in our population

- So we select a small number of people to poll – this is our sample

- And we accept that there will be some error in our result, called the
  Margin of sampling error (MOSE)

Margin of Sampling Error (MOSE)

MOSE measures how accurately the results reflect the "true" sentiment of the population

Most polls are based on the following:
- approx. 1,000 people
- a MOSE of + or – 3 percentage points
- 95% confidence level

This means that…

An Example…

… in a recent poll

41% approved of the way Barack Obama is handling the situation in Iraq
(USA Today/Gallup telephone poll, July 27-August 1, 2010)

The true value is somewhere between 38% and 44%, and this result would occur 95 out of 100 times

How are polls conducted? (Part 2)

Polls or surveys use sampling:

1. Ask a <u>small number</u> of people a set of questions (this is straightforward, based on math)

2. Use the sample to <u>represent a larger population</u> (this requires more work!)

…To represent a larger population

- Must have a <u>representative</u> sample that is <u>randomly selected</u>

- Where do we find a representative sample? At the mall? The baseball stadium? A college campus?
  - Home

- Randomization
  - Random Digit Dialing (RDD)
  - Within-household selection

What is the population of interest?

- All national adults

  ↓

  - Registered voters

    ↓

    - "Likely voters"

      ↓

      - Actual voters (exit polls)

Other sources of error – Part 1

- Coverage error – homeless, military overseas, cell phones
- Non-response bias (non-response bias)
- Response bias
  - Spiral of silence

Other sources of error – Part 2

- Measurement error
  - Question wording
  - Question order
  - Interviewer error
  - Question response options
  - Timing

Eschew Obfuscation!

Do you "agree" or "disagree" with the following:

On occasion, I am unable to express how interested in politics I am

Another example:

Did you vote in the 2004 and 2008 elections?

Question Order, or "Context Effect"

1. Do you feel that the economy is better than, worse than, or the same as it was last year?

2. What do you think is the most important issue facing the nation?

Balanced Questions and Response Categories

Consider these two questions:

a. Do you support gay marriage?
b. Do you support or oppose gay marriage?

Consider these response options:

▫ all of the time
▫ most of the time
▫ never

Timing is Everything

Influence of polls

- Bandwagon effect

- Underdog effect

- Boomerang effect

Questions???

Presentation will be posted at:

http://www.mpc.edu/institutionalresearch/Pages/default.aspx

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