Exit Polling 101: Basic Methods for Predicting Election Outcomes

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65th Annual WAPOR Conference
Hong Kong, China

15 June 2012
Exit Polling 101

- Current Methods Used in the USA for Predicting Election Outcomes on Election Day
  - Early Voter Surveying
  - Setting the Election Day Priors
  - Election Day Sampling
  - Election Day Data Collection
  - Election Day Data Processing
  - Gathering Auxiliary Election Day Data
  - Election Day Analyses
Early Voter Surveying

- **Pre-Election Telephone Polling**
  - Dual Frame Landline and Mobile RDD frames
  - Possible Use of Registration-Based Frames
  - Screening for Voters who already have voted early
  - Screening for Voters who will Vote Early, but have yet to do so
  - Gathering Data from All Respondents, even those who are not early Voters
  - Using all this information in the Election Day computer models
Setting the Election Day Priors

Gathering Information about the Likely Outcome of Each Election Race or Issue being Studied

- Aggregating pre-election polling results (and other types of forecasts) from as many credible sources as available
- Past election outcomes within relevant geo-political areas
- Expert knowledge of the voting public, politics, and elections
- Using all of the above to set the “Priors,” i.e., priming the Election Day computer models
Election Day Sampling

- Probability Sampling for Precincts and Voters
  - Multistage sample of Voting Precincts within each geo-political area being surveyed
  - Random systematic sample of voters within each sampled precinct
    - Data collection *from* initially designated sample that cooperates
    - Data collection *about* initially designated sample that refuses to cooperate
Election Day Data Collection

- Interviewer Selection
- Interviewer Training
- Pilot testing Questionnaires, both content and form/layout
- Preparing and distributing all materials
- Guarding the confidentiality of the data collection process and all gathered data
- Capturing key data from interviewers throughout Election Day to use in predicting election outcomes and understanding the “mandate” of the election
Gathering Auxiliary Election Day Data

- Incoming “real” vote at the precinct level
- Incoming real vote across the entire geo-political area being measured
Election Day Data Processing

- The need for reliable and secure systems to take data coming from interviewers and getting them into the systems used for the analyses that will be carried out that day/night
- Stringent measures to guard against unauthorized early dissemination (in any form) of the incoming data or anything about those data
Election Day Analyses

- Early forecasting based on data from priors, early voter surveys, and data from exit polling early on Election Day
- Using extremely conservative decision rules for calling an election outcome before any real vote is in
- Estimate of within-precinct bias comparing real vote with exit poll data
- Continual updating the predicted outcome with real vote for races too close to call at the time voting ends
- Always being extremely conservative in drawing and disseminating predictions
Thank You!