

Why Accurate Exit Polls Are Important to Democracies

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The Role of Elections in a Democracy

Legitimate the transfer of power and control of government

Representation is reconfirmed through the electoral process

The expression of citizens' policy preferences should have some impact on laws and policies that are enacted

The Role of Elections in a Newsmaking

Elections are newsworthy and important because:

Government is inherently important because its impact on citizens' lives

Elections are attractive as news topics:

Involve conflict and visible figures

Occur on a schedule

Have a clear resolution on Election Day

News organizations can plan for the efficient allocation of resources

Competition in the News Business

Television vs. Print: capturing an important story

Search for recognition by peers for excellent coverage of important topics

Economic pressures in the news business are growing, especially in the last decade

Peculiarities of the American Electoral System

We have simultaneous state and local elections, not national ones

Local rules and regulations

Local procedures and devices

Impact of 2000 election in Florida

How much easier should registration and voting be?

Electoral College

The geopolitics of American presidential elections

U.S. Constitution and the First Amendment

The Function of Exit Polls in American Democracy

Estimating outcomes in individual states

Explaining patterns of voter support (demographically and attitudinally)

1980 Election and the “drift to the right”

In the U.S., they do not validate the vote or act as a “quick count” methodology as they do in some other places

American Attitudes about Election Polls

Interested generally in polls but poorly informed about methods

Communication vs. entertainment

Concerned about exit polls and projections from the perspective of privacy

Special role of the U.S. Constitution and the First Amendment

Timeline of American Exit Polling

- 1967** Start of exit polling in selected states, each run by a network
- 1990** Establishment of the Voter Research Service (VRS)
- 1994** Establishment of the Voter News Service (VNS)
- 2000 Election**
- 2002 Election**
- 2003** Establishment of the National Election Pool (NEP)
- 2008 Election – Demise of the Los Angeles Times exit poll**