



AMERICAN ASSOCIATION FOR
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Exit Polling 101: Basic Methods for Predicting Election Outcomes

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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 geographical 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 geopolitical 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

Exit Polling 101

Thank You!