

# **Pre-election Polling Methods: Phone and Face-to-face Surveys in a Comparative Perspective**

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# Organization of the presentation

- **The role of polls in a democracy**
- **Brief history of media polling**
- **New polling methods and their use in the media**
- **Examples of pre-election polling issues and problems around the world**
- **Conclusions**

# The role of polls in a democracy

- **Measure public opinion so it can be represented in law and policy**
- **Assess public responses to the candidates' and parties' issue positions and platforms**
- **Measure and evaluate the dynamics of support during the campaign**
- **Estimate the outcome of the election**
- **Hold elected officials accountable for positions they took during the campaign**
- **Assess opinions on issues or policies that were *not* discussed during the campaign**
- **Inform citizens about what other citizens think**

# Why elections make good news

- **Elections are a central element of a democracy**
- **Occur on a schedule and can be planned and budgeted**
- **Are important and involve visible figures willing to be quoted**
- **Involve conflict with a resolution and declared winners and losers**
- **Have consequences for the control of government and the formulation of policy**

# **The role of pre-election polls in the industry**

**Public polling is used to develop visibility and credibility for a firm to support the commercial side of its business**

**The special form of validation in the election results**

**As a result, the image of the entire industry depends to a large extent on the quality of pre-election poll estimates**

# Did journalism invent polling?

- Harrisburg *Pennsylvanian* (1824) straw poll in the Andrew Jackson - John Quincy Adams race based upon 504 purchases/votes
- Periodic efforts into the 20th Century culminating in *The Literary Digest's* first national poll in 1916
- George Gallup and *The Washington Post* in 1936 predicted the *The Literary Digest* poll would be wrong and FDR would defeat Alf Landon

# Rosenstiel's Identification of 6 Major Trends Affecting the Use of Polls in Today's News

- 1. Changes in the industry (cutbacks, repackaging secondhand material, demands of the 24-hour news cycle)**
- 2. Proliferation of outlets offering news**
- 3. Reduction in regular reporting: presenting information rather than gathering it**
- 4. Growing reliance on daily tracking polls ("horse race" journalism)**
- 5. Growing audience skepticism and political polarization**
- 6. Inability of academics and pollsters to maintain standards and deepen journalists' understanding of public opinion research and how to use it in journalism**
- 7. The data aggregators and modelers**

# The Founding Fathers





# Face-to-face interviews and their logistics



# What happened in 1948?



# The shift to telephone interviewing



# Understanding the new polling environment

The image displays the web interface for managing surveys on surveys.groupquality.com. The main dashboard includes navigation tabs for Dashboard, Surveys, and Survey settings. A dropdown menu shows 'My new survey'. Below this, there are tabs for Details, Participants, Results, and Participant Results. A yellow callout box contains the text: 'When you're ready to open the survey click the button below to send your participants their survey invitations.' with buttons for 'Start this survey' and 'Preview invitations'. To the right, there are buttons for 'Preview survey', 'Edit survey', 'Edit redirects', and 'Delete'. A table titled 'Survey questions' lists questions by order and type. A second browser window in the foreground shows a survey titled 'Test customer Satisfaction' with a progress bar and a table of statements for rating.

	Strongly disagree	Inclined to disagree	Neither agree or disagree	Inclined to agree	Strongly agree
The operator was an effective listener	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The operator asked me the right questions	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The operator was friendly and understanding	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The information was provided in a way I could understand	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

The mobile device on the right shows a 'Customer Satisfaction Survey' with the question: 'Thinking about the experience you had with the helpdesk operator, please rate the following statements. Please select one answer for each question. The operator was an effective listener.' The response options are: Strongly disagree, Disagree, Neither agree or disagree, Agree (selected), and Strongly agree.

# Changing models of election outcome estimation in the United States

Increased emphasis on horse race coverage and the proliferation of polls at the state and national level has led to statistical modeling and the use of others' data

[www.RealClearPolitics.com](http://www.RealClearPolitics.com)

[www.MysteryPollster.com](http://www.MysteryPollster.com)

[www.Pollster.com](http://www.Pollster.com)     [www.huffingtonpost.com/news/pollster/](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/news/pollster/)

"Poblano" on [www.DailyKos.com](http://www.DailyKos.com)

[www.FiveThirtyEight.com](http://www.FiveThirtyEight.com)     [fivethirtyeight.blogs.nytimes.com](http://fivethirtyeight.blogs.nytimes.com)

[themonkeycage.org](http://themonkeycage.org)

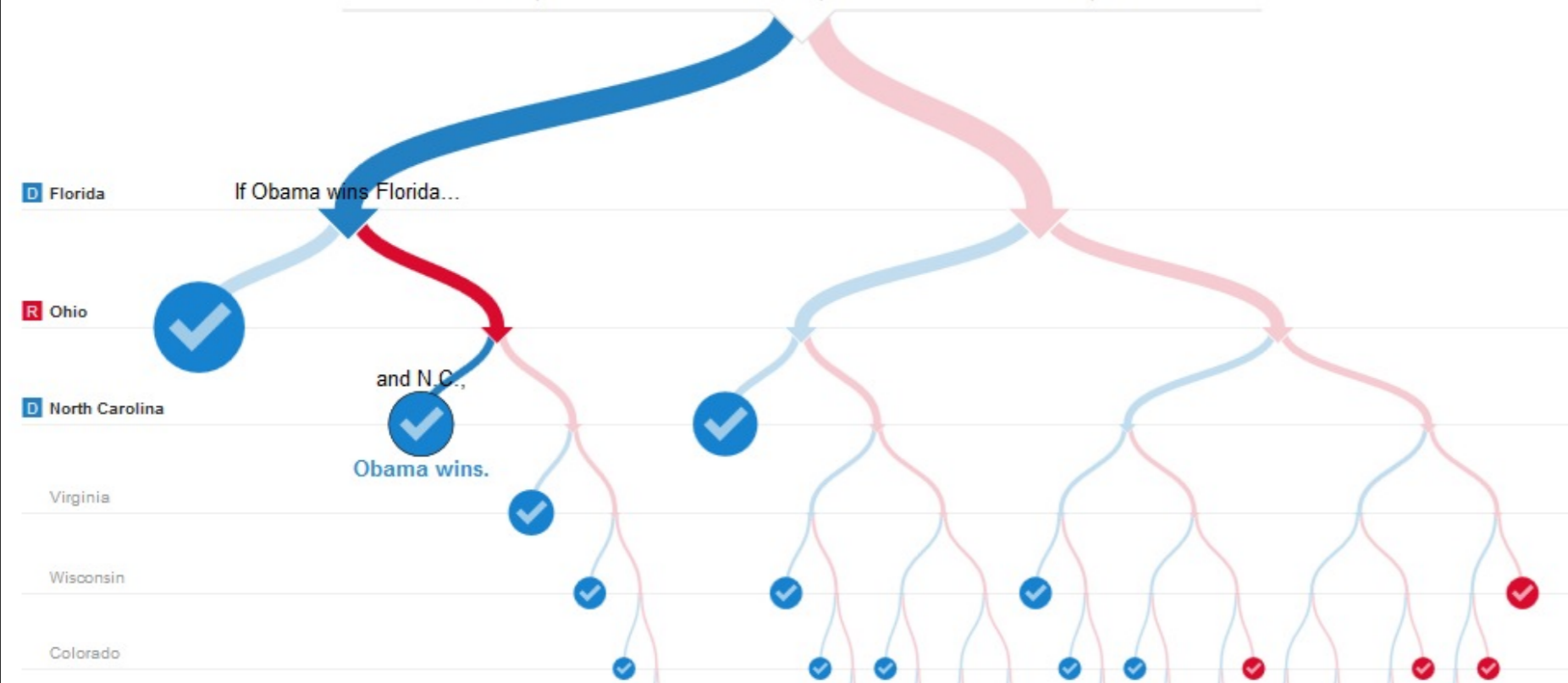
[election.princeton.edu](http://election.princeton.edu)

# 512 Paths to the White House

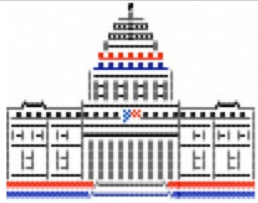
Select a winner in the most competitive states below to see all the paths to victory available for either candidate.

Fla.	Ohio	N.C.	Va.	Wis.	Colo.	Iowa	Nev.	N.H.
Dem Rep	Dem Rep	Dem Rep	Dem Rep	Dem Rep	Dem Rep	Dem Rep	Dem Rep	Dem Rep

Obama has 431 ways to win (84% of paths) | 5 ties (0.98% of paths) | Romney has 76 ways to win (15% of paths)



**A change in reporting style**



October 24, 2012, 4:42 PM

## Aide: Obama Still Has Easier Path to Victory

Article

Comments (12)

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By Laura Meckler

DAVENPORT, Iowa—Obama campaign officials they aren't fazed by improved polling numbers for **Mitt Romney**, saying they always expected a close race. Still, senior White House adviser **David Plouffe** made a point Wednesday to try to direct media attention to the battleground states and suggested ignoring national surveys.

"I assume in the closing days here, the attention will move more quickly to what is your pathway to the presidency. How are you acquiring 270 electoral votes?" he told reporters on a bus from a Davenport, Iowa, rally, the first of six battleground states Mr. Obama will visit over an intense two-day swing through six battleground states.

"We think we maintain a lot more plausible pathways to 270 than Gov. Romney, who we think has to essentially pull an inside straight in the Electoral College," he added.



## A change in reporting style

# What are the key concepts involved in pre-election polling?

- 1. Drawing a representative sample of citizens who are a) eligible to vote in the election *and* b) likely to vote in the election**
- 2. Ask a valid and reliable question about candidate or party preference that minimizes social desirability and a possible spiral of silence effect**
- 3. Ask questions that measure the attitudes and issue positions in the electorate that may affect likelihood of voting and candidate/party preference**



# **Where are we now? Where do we go next?**

**New data collection methods are changing the nature of campaign reporting**

**Citizens get more facts but a weaker understanding of the structural meaning and impact of elections**

**Campaigns lose their function and role as a way to hold incumbents accountable**

**Politics becomes a game, and citizens lose the meaning of the mandate that the winner receives to govern**

# How to understand and interpret polls for the public?

**Full disclosure of methods (transparency): WAPOR-ESOMAR standards**

**Key elements:**

**Who sponsored the survey?**

**Which firm did the work?**

**What was the sample design?**

**Full questionnaire (wording and order): Trial heat Q**

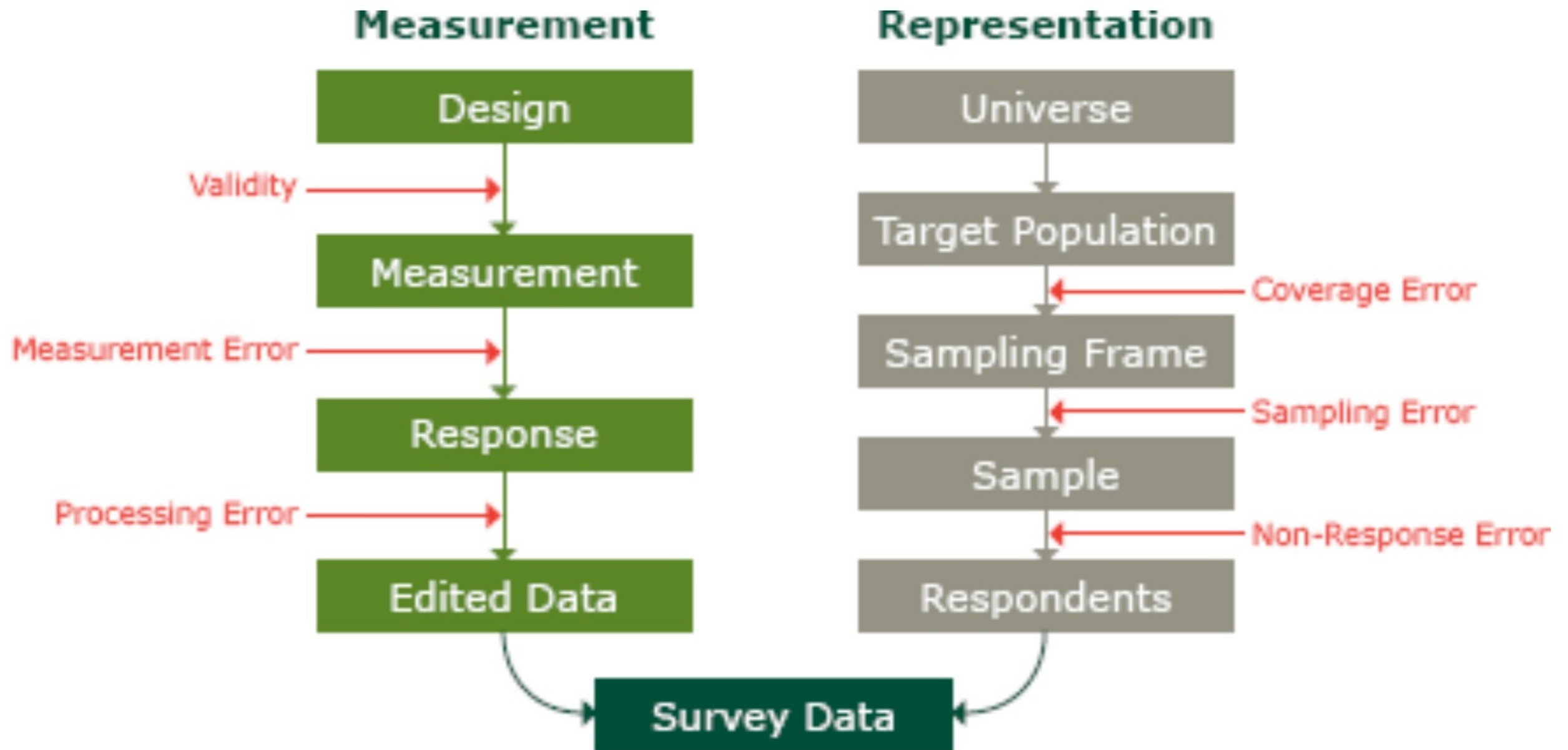
**Mode of administration**

**Field period**

**Was weighting used? In what manner?**

**Are results presented for subgroups? How defined?**

# The Total Survey Error Perspective



# How can TSE help us understand polling estimation problems

**In pre-election polling:**

- 1. The errors at the subnational-level remain larger than at the national level**
- 2. Sampling issues (representativeness) seem to loom larger than measurement issues, with the exception of identifying "likely voters"**

# How can TSE help us understand polling estimation problems

**Three examples of methodological issues:**

**Quebec, Canada (2008): IVR polls in English only**

**State of Mexico: In a post-election study, female interviewers reduced the estimation errors for the PAN and PRI, and closely supervised interviewers reduced errors for the PRI and PRD**

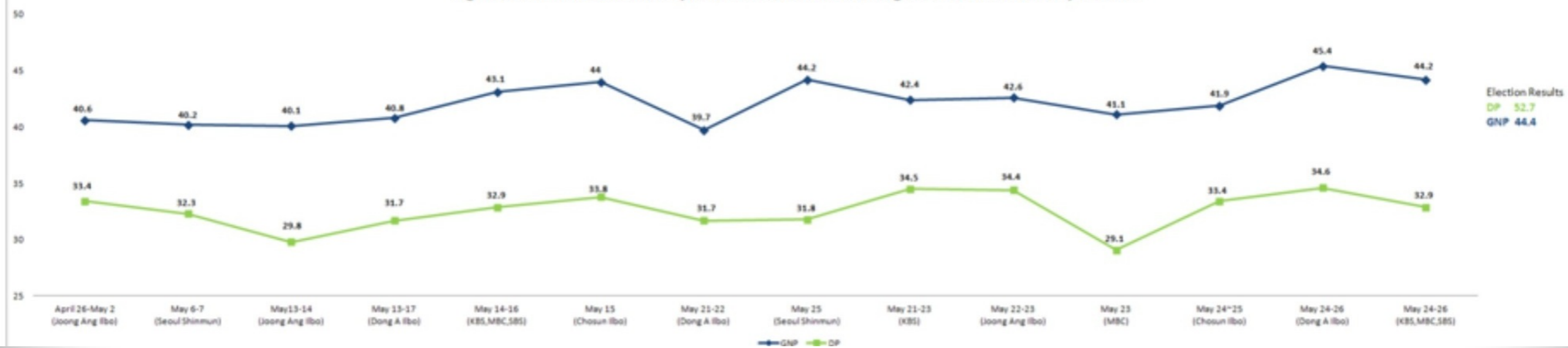
# How can TSE help us understand polling estimation problems in Korea

**The 2010 mayoral and provincial elections in Korea had significant estimation errors**

**Korean pollsters used samples based upon listed landline telephone numbers and quota selection of respondents**

# How can TSE help us understand polling estimation problems in Korea

Figure 2. The Time Series of Reported Poll Results Preceding the 2010 Incheon Mayor's Race



# How can TSE help us understand polling estimation problems in Korea

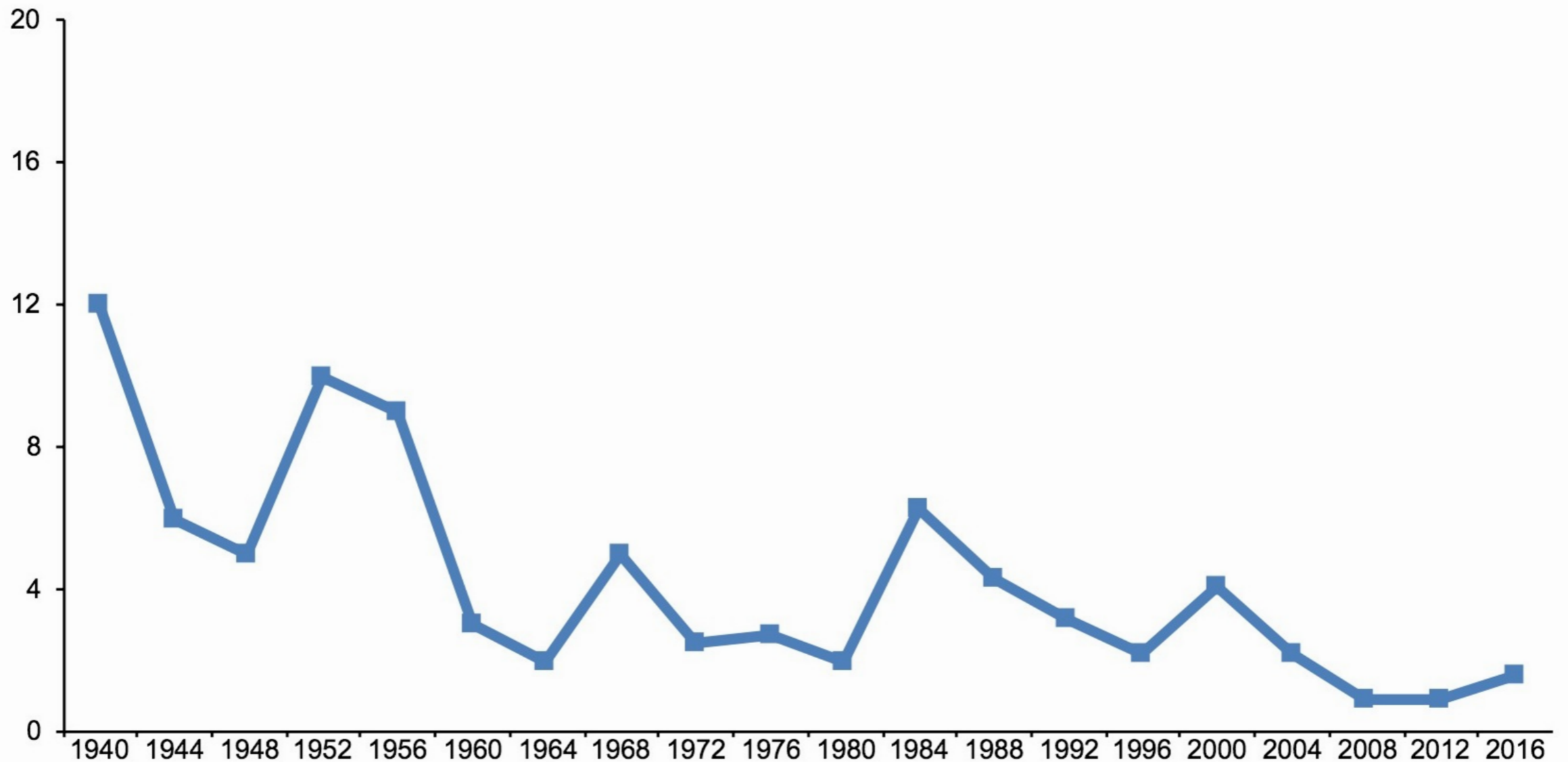
	Listed Landline	Landline RDD	Cell RDD	Dual RDD	2010 Census*	NEC**
Gender						
Male	41.1%	35.7%	56.8%	47.6%	48.9%	49.5%
Female	58.9%	64.3%	43.2%	52.4%	51.1%	50.5%
Total	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%
N	335	624	400	1024		



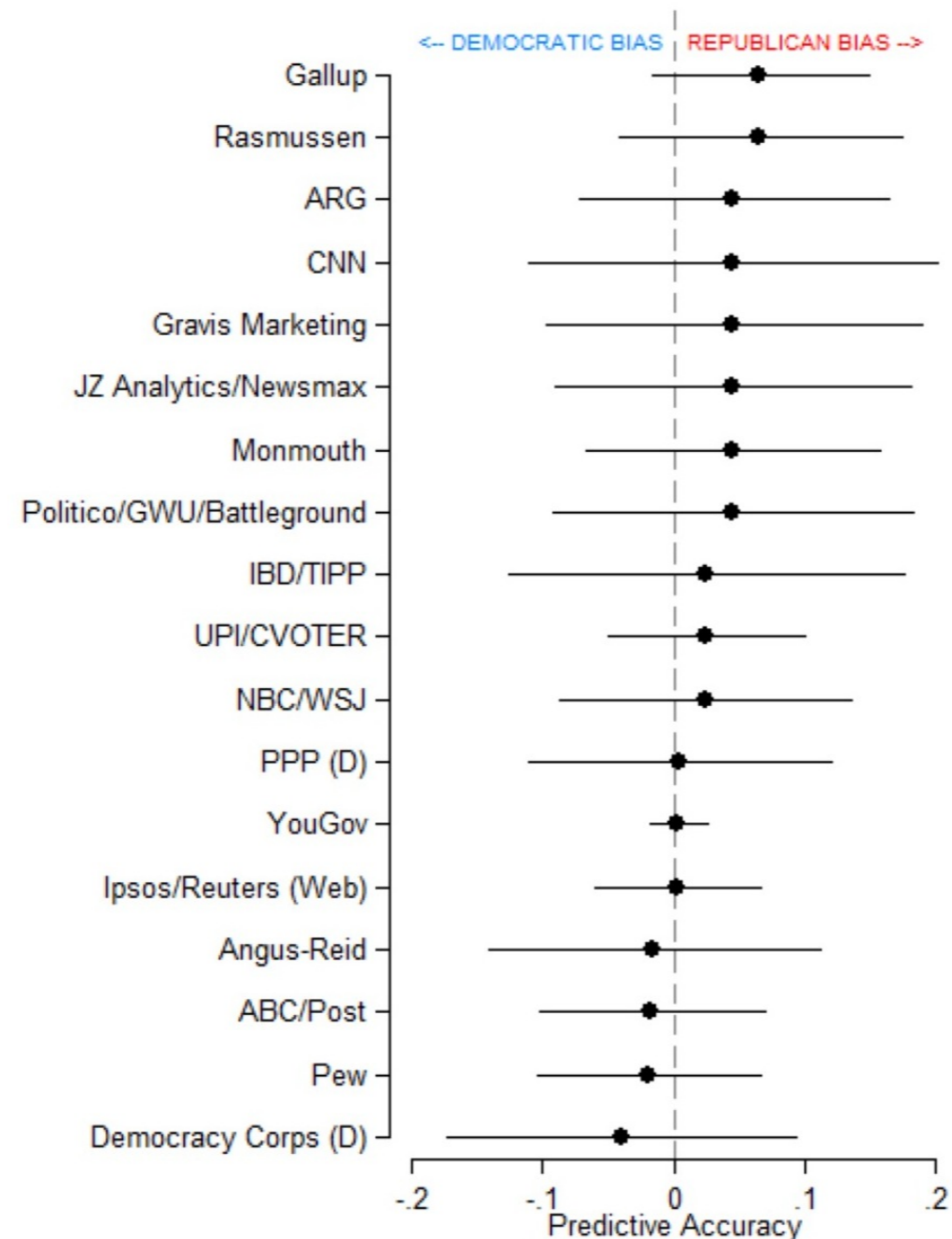
# How can TSE help us understand polling estimation problems in Korea

	Listed Landline	Landline RDD	Cell RDD	Dual RDD
Interest in Politics				
Very	6.3%	5.1%	6.7%	5.4%
Somewhat	13.8%	17.4%	20.8%	20.3%
Moderately	28.9%	35.5%	35.5%	33.8%
Not too	34.5%	29.7%	24.3%	27.1%
Not at all	16.5%	12.3%	12.7%	13.4%
Total	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%
N	335	624	400	1024

# Accuracy of the Pre-election Polls in U.S. Presidential Elections



# Accuracy of the Pre-election Polls in U.S. Presidential Elections

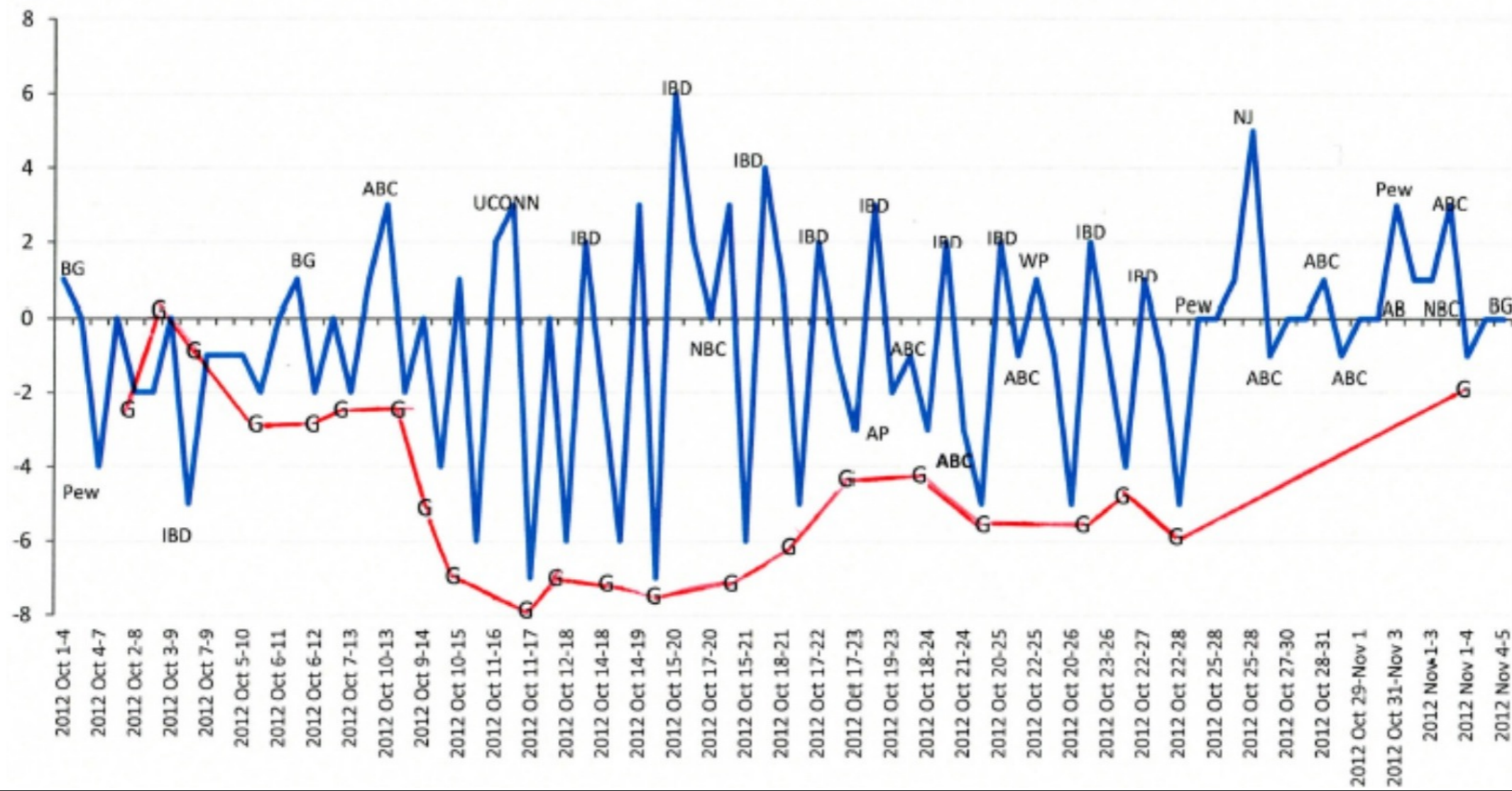


Predictive accuracy is equal the ratio of Romney share to Obama share in each poll divided by the ratio of actual Romney to Obama vote shares. That quantity is then logged. Horizontal lines are 95% confidence intervals. See Martin, Traugott, and Kennedy (2006). Graph by John Sides.

# Gallup Estimates in the 2012 U.S. Presidential Election

## Net Vote for Obama, Likely Voters

All LL/Cell Telephone Surveys in October-November 2012



# **Gallup Estimates in the 2012 U.S. Presidential Election**

**Potential causes of the problems:**

**Sampling:**

**Landline - cell phone mix**

**Proportion white-nonwhite**

**Representation of battleground states**

**Likely Voter models**

**How to address the problems: Experiments**

# Conclusions

**Pre-election polling involves the scientific study of public opinion and behavior**

**Issues arise periodically; information is required to address them**

**Transparency (disclosure) and adherence to best scientific practices are important**

**Sharing information as available technology and knowledge expand is the key**