

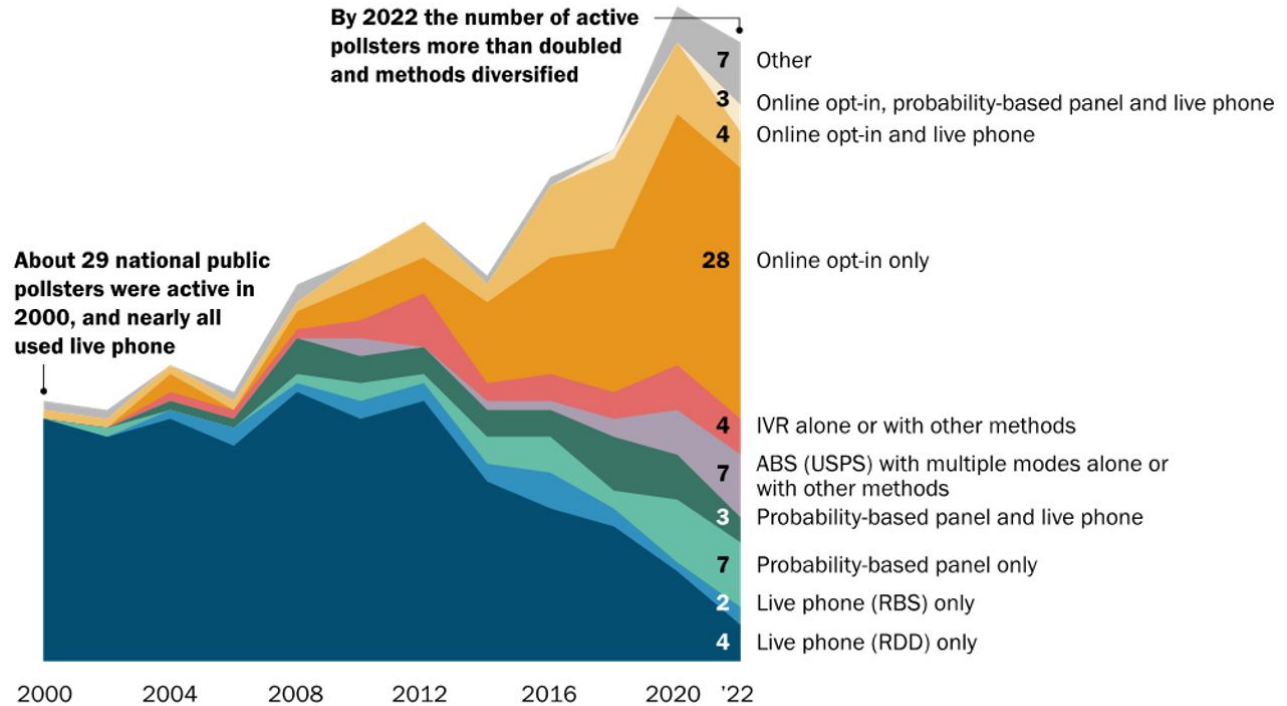
A Polling Primer

Courtney Kennedy

VP Methods and Innovation

Polling methods are very diverse today

Number of national public pollsters in the U.S. using method(s)



Most public pollsters are trying to understand the campaign and voters' mood – not forecast

The New York Times

Trump Leads in 5 Critical States as Voters Blast Biden, Times/Siena Poll Finds

Voters in battleground states said they trusted Donald J. Trump over President Biden on the economy, foreign policy and immigration, as Mr. Biden's multiracial base shows signs of fraying.

Share full article

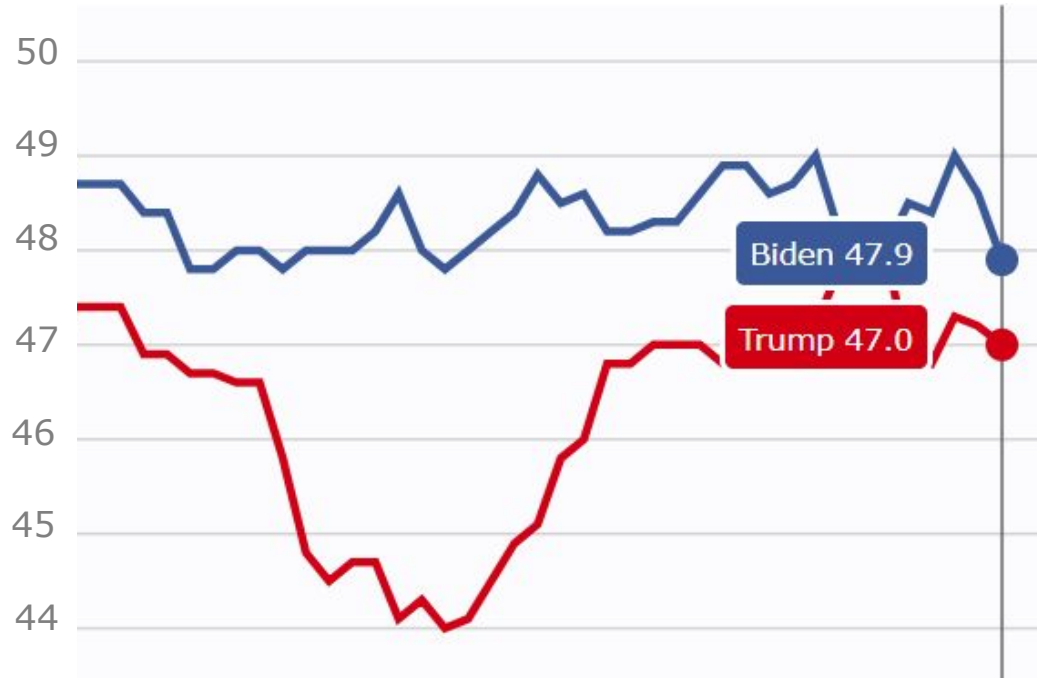


3.3K

“Discontent pulsates throughout the Times/Siena poll, with a majority of voters saying Mr. Biden’s policies have personally hurt them.”

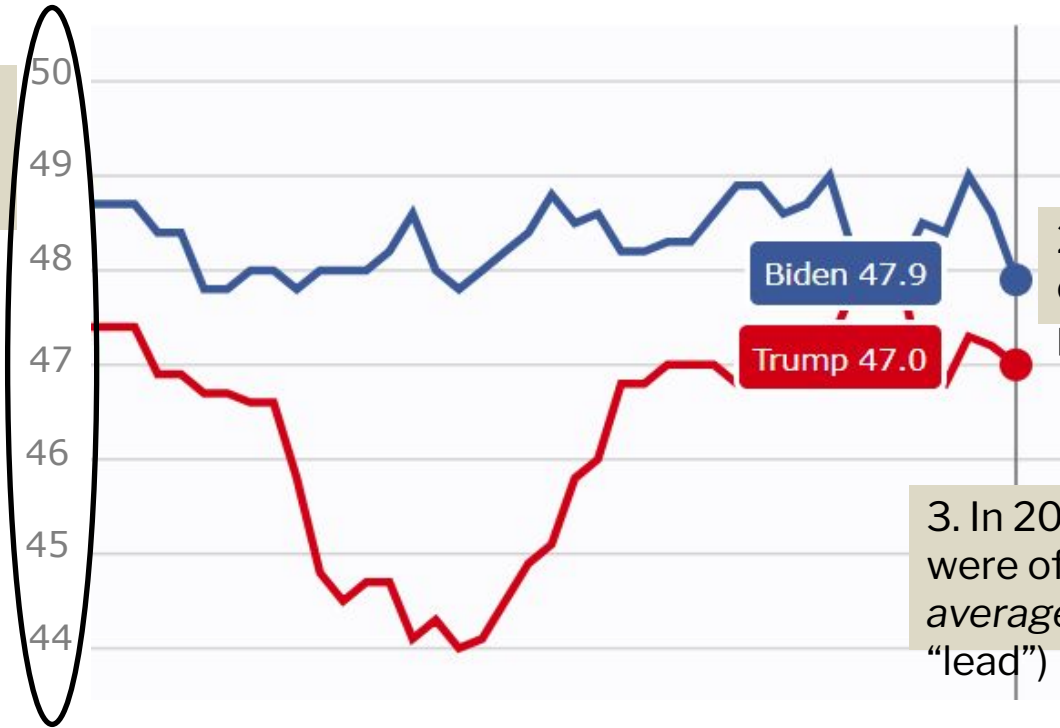
“The survey also reveals the extent to which the multiracial and multigenerational coalition that elected Mr. Biden is fraying.”

Ways polling data gets misinterpreted



Ways polling data gets misinterpreted

1. Small, insignificant changes are made to look important

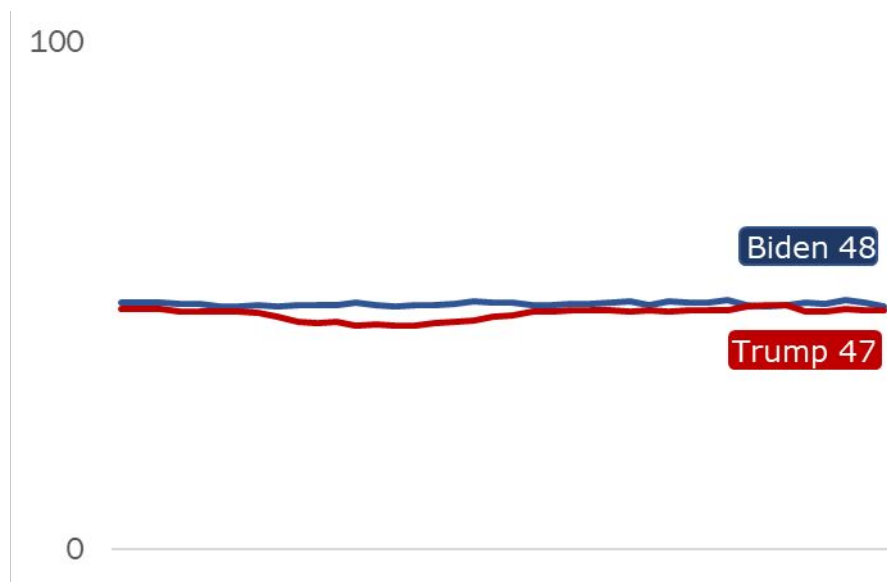


2. Decimals overstate the precision of polls

3. In 2020 state polls were off by 5 points on average. (more than this "lead")

Ways polling data gets misinterpreted

The same data shown in a less interesting but more accurate way



Don't be this reporter

New poll shows Jaime Harrison up by 2%

Saturday, October 17th 2020



FILE - In this June 21, 2019 file photo, Associate DNC Chairman Jaime Harrison speaks at Jim Clyburn's "World Famous Fish Fry" in Columbia, S.C. Harrison has posted a record fundraising haul in his

This poll was a selectively released from the Democratic candidate's campaign.

Lindsay Graham won by 10 points.

Don't be this reporter

BOOM! Kid Rock LEADS in Michigan Senate Race Poll

Published July 23, 2017 at 7:45pm
247 Comments



Rockstar Kid Rock set off a political firestorm after teasing his Twitter followers about a potential Senate run in Michigan.

News broke this weekend that Kid Rock is LEADING challenger, Dem Debbie Stabenow in a new poll 30% to 26% !

The pollster's website appeared just weeks earlier, and it's unclear if this poll was even real.

Debbie Stabenow beat John James (not Kid Rock) by 6 points.

Polls are less precise than people assume

TheUpshot

SURVEY SAYS?

When You Hear the Margin of Error Is Plus or Minus 3 Percent, Think 7 Instead

 Share full article    80

By David Rothschild and Sharad Goel

Oct. 5, 2016

As anyone who follows election polling can tell you, when you survey 1,000 people, the margin of error is plus or minus [three percentage points](#). This roughly means that 95 percent of the time, the survey estimate should be within three percentage points of the true answer.

If 54 percent of people support Hillary Clinton, the survey estimate might be as high as 57 percent or as low as 51 percent, but it is unlikely to be 49 percent. This truism of modern polling, heralded as one of the great success stories of statistics, is included in textbooks and taught in college classes, including our own.

Polls are less precise than people assume

Error from...	Error name	Reflected in MoE?
Excluding parts of the population	Noncoverage	No
Low response rates from certain groups	Nonresponse	No
People misunderstanding the question or misreporting their opinions	Measurement	No
Interviewing a sample rather than entire population	Sampling	Yes

Polls are less precise than people assume ... especially for subgroups

Group	Unweighted sample size	Plus or minus ...
Total sample	9,654	1.6 percentage points
White	6,602	1.8 percentage points
Black	737	5.3 percentage points
Hispanic	1,645	4.5 percentage points
Asian	278	8.2 percentage points

Polls need to be vetted – just like any other source

Signs of an unreliable poll

- Campaign poll (they're released selectively)
- Methods not disclosed (mode? sample source? weighting?)
- Polling organization has little to no track record
- Question wording has political bias

Signs of a reliable poll

- The sample source has face validity (e.g., RV records, U.S.P.S. file, RDD frame)
- Detailed methods reporting
- Neutral question wording

.....