

For audio, select

**Join Audio Conference by Computer**

or

Call: 1-470-869-2200 (U.S. toll)  
Meeting ID: 148 667 3542

Having Trouble?

Email Ben at [bgoodrich@coffa.org](mailto:bgoodrich@coffa.org)

# Welcome to



The webinar will begin momentarily.  
Your line has been muted.

# COSSA HEADLINES

A monthly look at what's new and noteworthy in social science policy

October 8, 2020

☐ This Month's HEADLINES

☐ This Month's DEEP DIVE:  
**Polling with Dr. Aimee Vella Ripley**

☐ This Month's HOMEWORK:  
Actions you can take this month



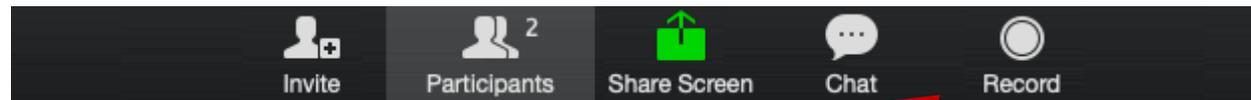
Wendy Naus  
Executive Director  
COSSA



Aimee Vella Ripley  
Research Director  
The Harris Poll

# Questions

Use the chat box to ask a question.



More opportunities for Q&A at the end.



# This Month's Headlines



## CONGRESS

- Congress Averts Government Shutdown, CR through December 11; COVID Relief Timeline Unclear
  - More: <https://www.cossa.org/policy/>

## EXECUTIVE BRANCH

- White House Directs Federal Agencies to Defund Race-Related Trainings for Federal Employees, Contractors, and Grantees
  - More: <https://www.whitehouse.gov/presidential-actions/executive-order-combating-race-sex-stereotyping/>
- Census Deadline Still in Flux
  - More: <https://www.cossa.org/2020/09/29/with-days-left-census-deadline-still-in-flux/>
- ICE Proposes Major New Restrictions to International Student Visas
  - More: <https://www.federalregister.gov/documents/2020/09/25/2020-20845/establishing-a-fixed-time-period-of-admission-and-an-extension-of-stay-procedure-for-nonimmigrant>
- NSF Seeking Comments on STEM Education Strategic Plan
  - More: <https://www.federalregister.gov/documents/2020/09/04/2020-19681/notice-of-request-for-information-on-stem-education>



## EXECUTIVE BRANCH (cont.)

- CIA Establishes First-Ever Federal Laboratory
  - More: <https://www.cia.gov/offices-of-cia/science-technology/cia-labs.html>

## COMMUNITY

- National Academies' Leaders Raise Concern about Politicization of Science
  - More: <https://www.nationalacademies.org/news/2020/09/nas-and-nam-presidents-alarmed-by-political-interference-in-science-amid-pandemic>
- National Academies Holds Webinar on Earning Trust in the Age of Pandemic
  - More: <https://www.nationalacademies.org/event/09-16-2020/earning-trust-in-the-age-of-the-pandemic>

## COSSA

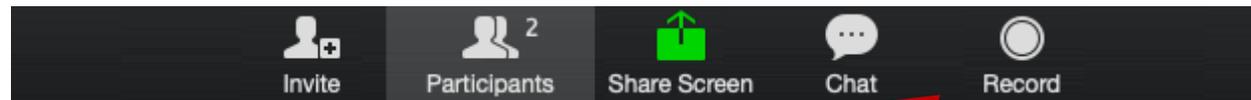
- COSSA to Co-Host Symposium on “Responding to COVID-19: Emerging Insights from SBS Sciences” – TOMORROW!
  - More: <https://www.nationalacademies.org/event/10-09-2020/responding-to-covid-19-emerging-insights-from-social-behavioral-and-economic-sciences>
- “Why Social Science?” Focuses on Misinformation and Online Extremism
  - More: [www.whysocialscience.com](http://www.whysocialscience.com)



WASHINGTON UPDATE  
Subscribe for more news: [www.cossa.org/washington-update](http://www.cossa.org/washington-update)

# Questions

Use the chat box to ask a question.



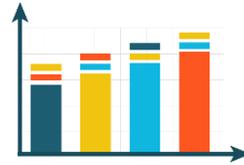
More opportunities for Q&A at the end.



Deep Dive

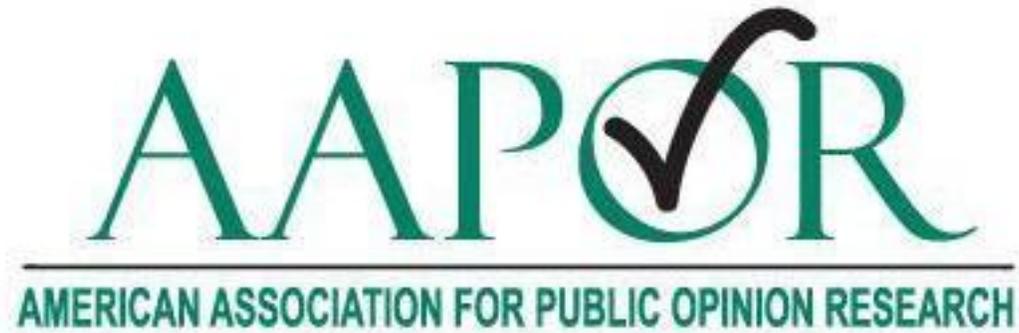


## Presidential Election Polling



Today's Guest:  
**Aimee Vella Ripley**  
Research Director  
The Harris Poll





# Reporting on Polls

---

# Webinar Purpose

For journalists and others who seek to understand the basics of how to report on polling and to provide some background on the history of accuracy of polls.



Chicago Daily Tribune Home

# DEWEY DEFEATS TRUMAN

*G.O.P. Sweep Indicated in State; Boyle Leads in City*

REPUBLICAN TICKETS AHEAD IN 1948 VOTE  
TODAY'S ELECTIONS  
RECORD CITY VOTE SEEN IN LATE TALLIES  
BALLETING IN ELECTORAL  
PATS BOYLE LEADS IN CITY

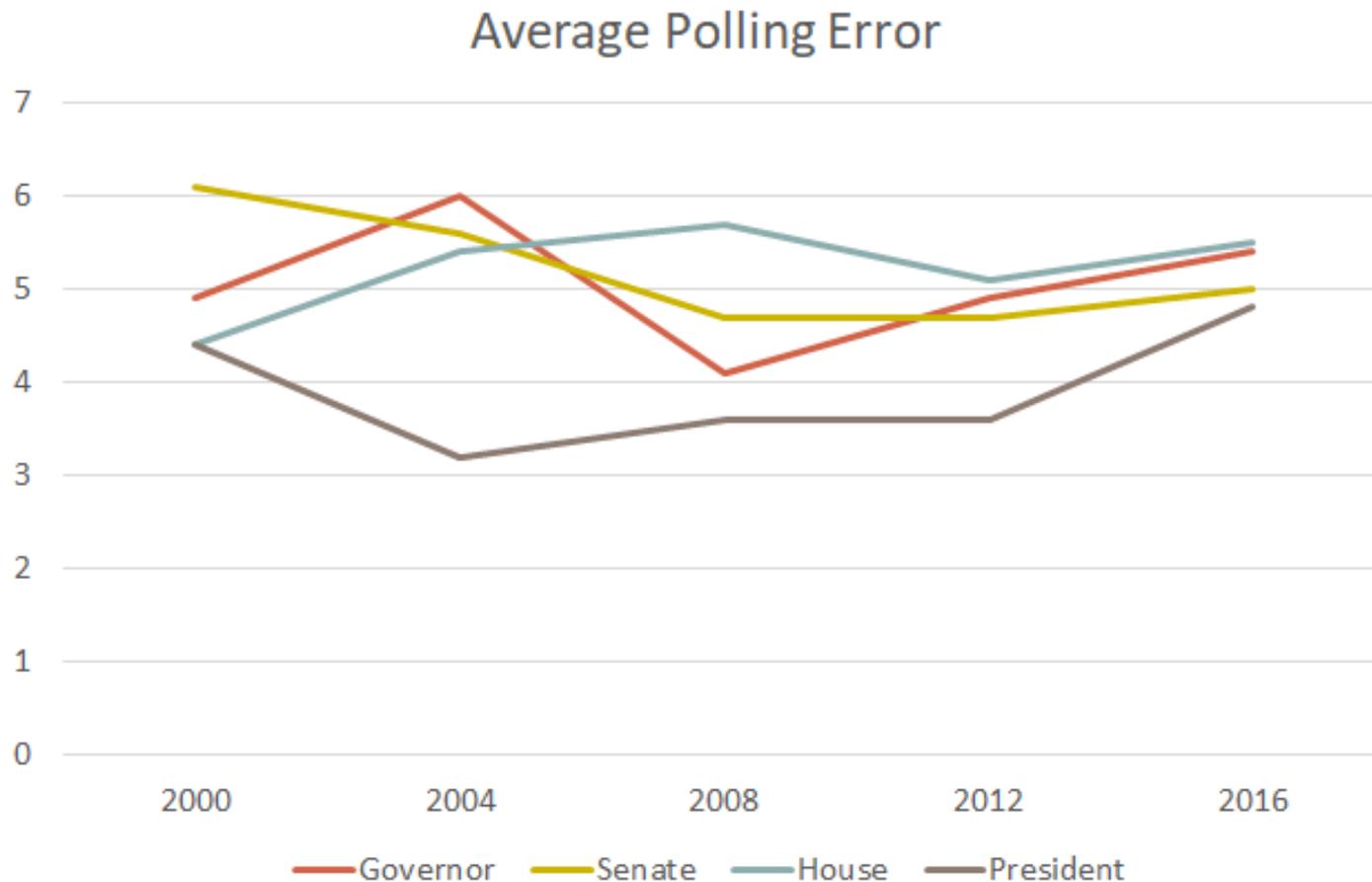
Reporting on Polls: 1948

---

# Have Polls Gotten Less Accurate?

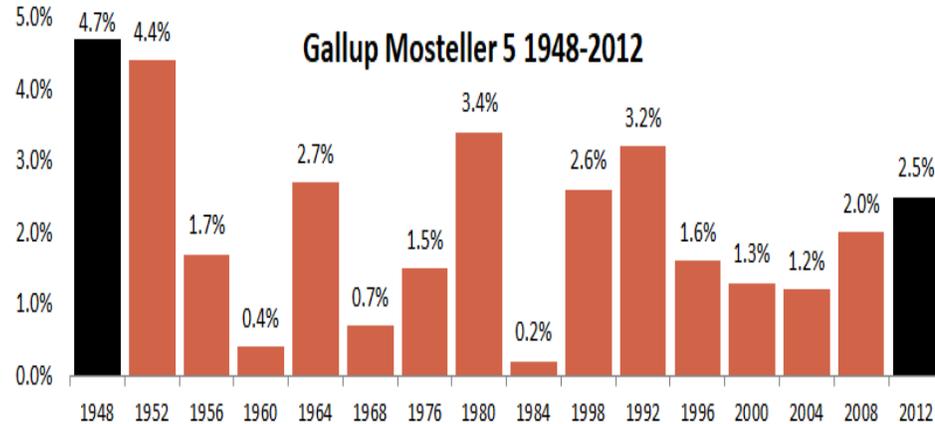
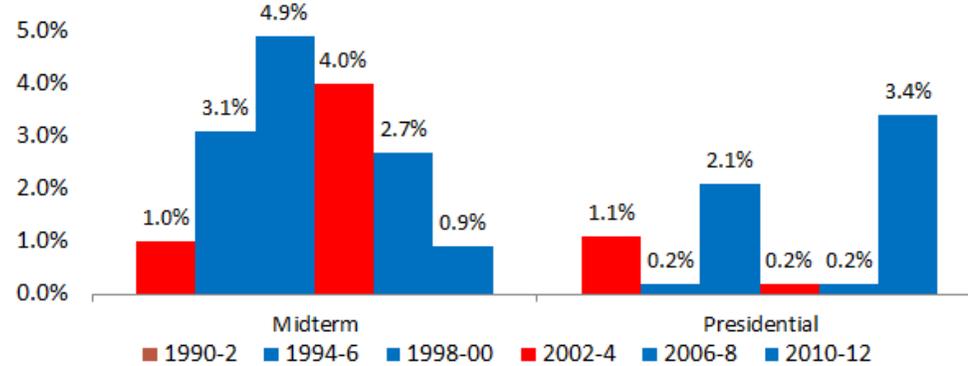
---

Weighted-average error of polls in final 21 days before the election, among polls in FiveThirtyEight's Pollster Ratings database



# The Status Quo of Polling Historically: Accuracy

## FiveThirtyEight Polling Error Summary 1990-2012



## Partisan Bias In Senate Polls

Average statistical bias in polls conducted in final 21 days of campaign, 1990-2014



# Can we still trust polls?

(note: the below was NOT a polling result. It was a model built on polling and other data to predict the electoral outcome!



**CLINTON**  
**98.0%**

**TRUMP**  
**1.7%**



Photos: Getty

# A Quick Summary of 2016 Polling



An Evaluation of 2016 Election Polls in the U.S.

Ad Hoc Committee on 2016 Election Polling

National polls were generally correct and accurate by historical standards

State-level polls showed a competitive, uncertain contest, but clearly underestimated Trump's support in the Upper Midwest

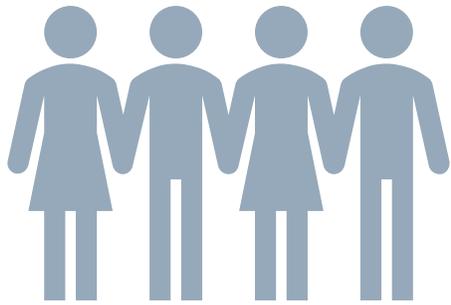
Why:

- Real change in vote preference during the final week or so of the campaign
- Adjusting for over-representation of college graduates was critical, but many polls did not do it
- Undecided voters swung disproportionately for Trump

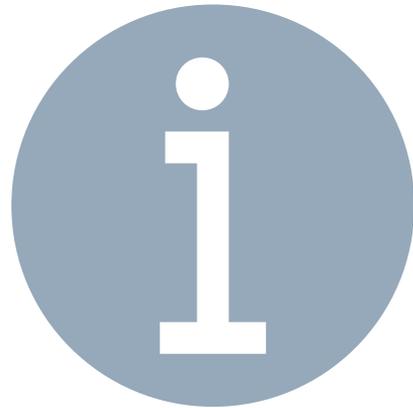
# Before You Report on Polls, Do You Know...?

---

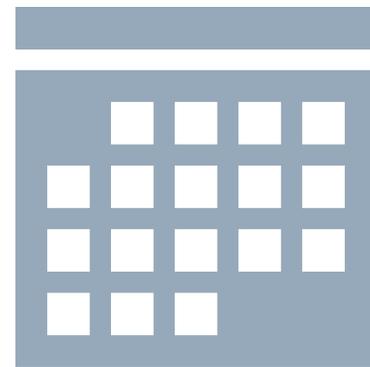
Who



What



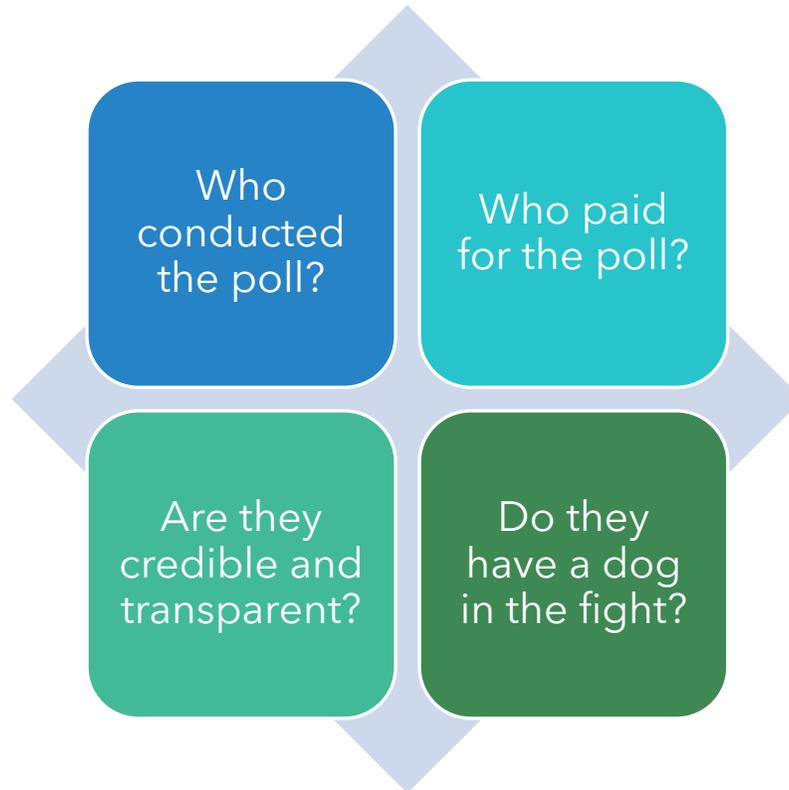
When



How



# Who

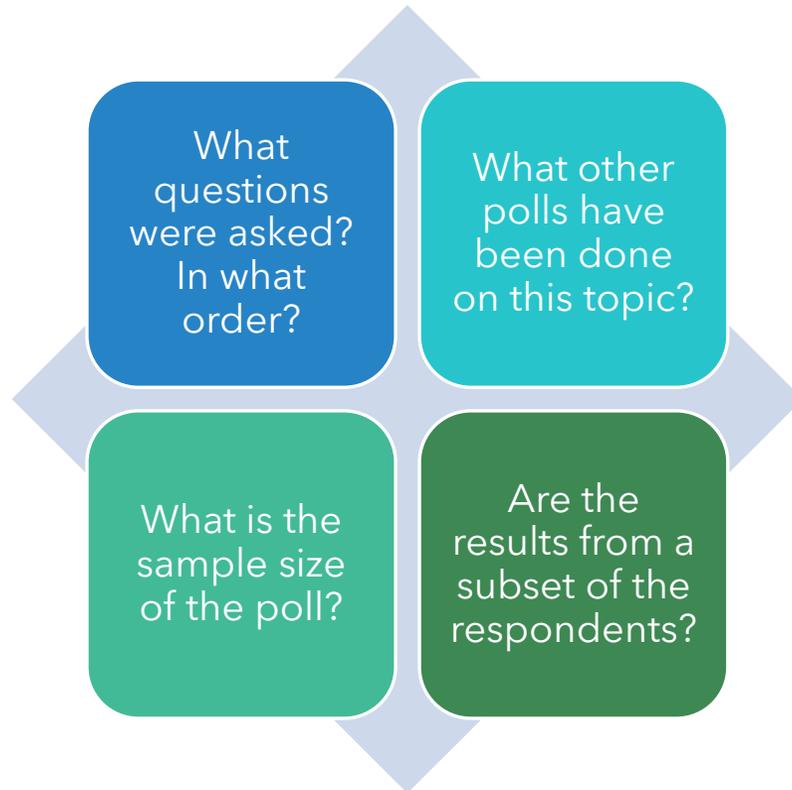


Examples of poll sponsors:

- Media organizations
- Advocacy groups
- Political campaigns

# What

---

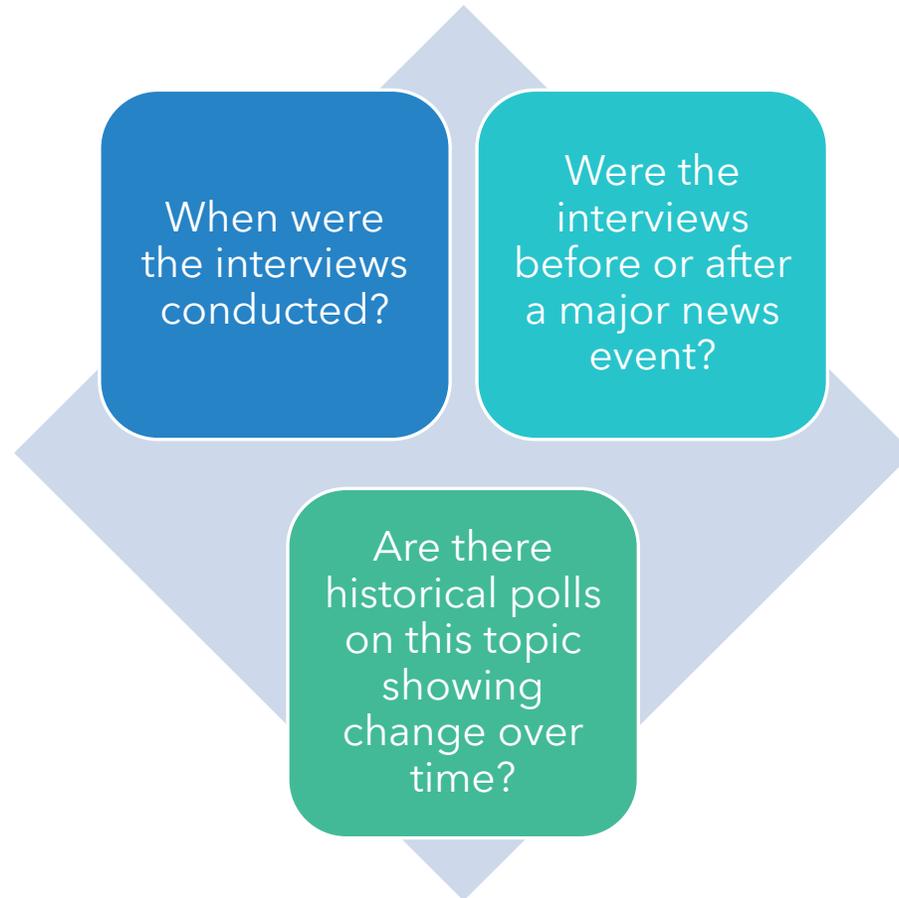
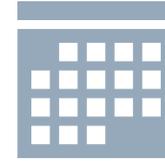


What is the margin of sampling error?\*

*\* More to come on this later...*

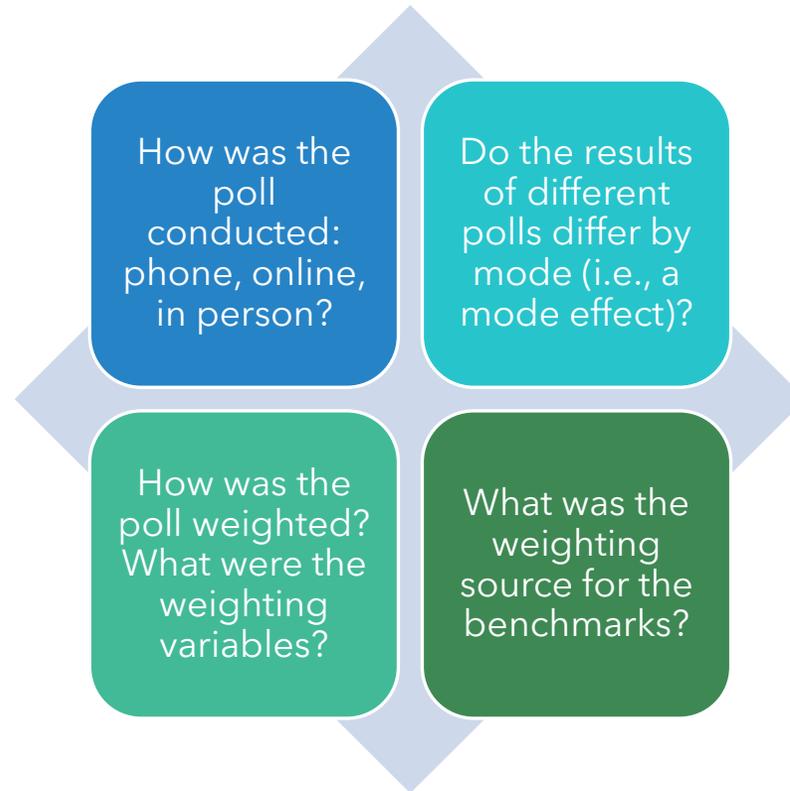
# When

---



# How

---



# Tracking Polls:

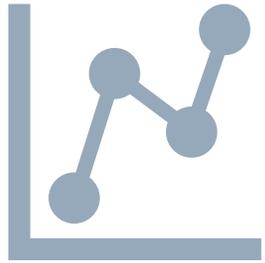
Who, What, When,  
How

## **Questions to ask about tracking polls (e.g., approval ratings)**

- Are you comparing the same poll over time?
- Is the methodology (e.g., question wording) the same?
- A change of only a few points could be noise and not a significant change

# The Fundamentals of Reporting on Polls

---



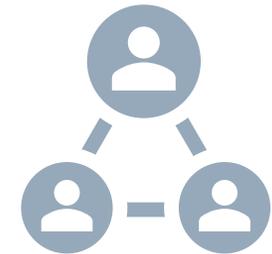
Understanding margin of error



Explaining leads in pre-election polls



Writing clear polling headlines



Additional resources

# Understanding Margin of Error

## Error Margin

The range that the answer likely falls between if we had talked to everyone and not just a sample of people

## 95% Confidence Level

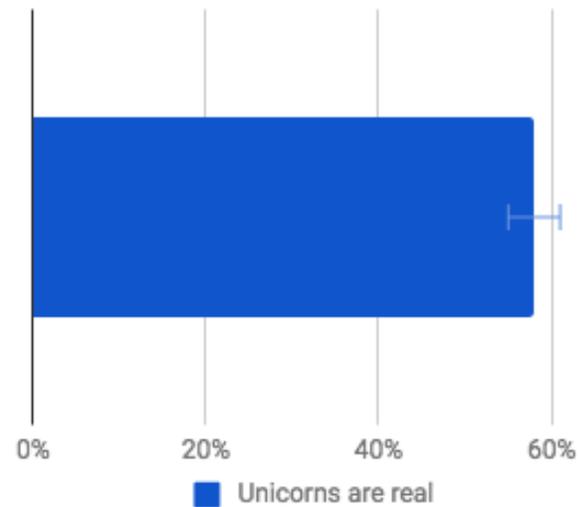
95 times out of 100, we expect an answer to fall within that margin (but 5 times out of 100, it won't)

# Understanding Margin of Error

---

A poll says 58% of Americans think unicorns are real, within an error margin of +/-3 percentage points.

We can be 95% confident the percent of the public that says unicorns are real is somewhere between 55% - 61%.

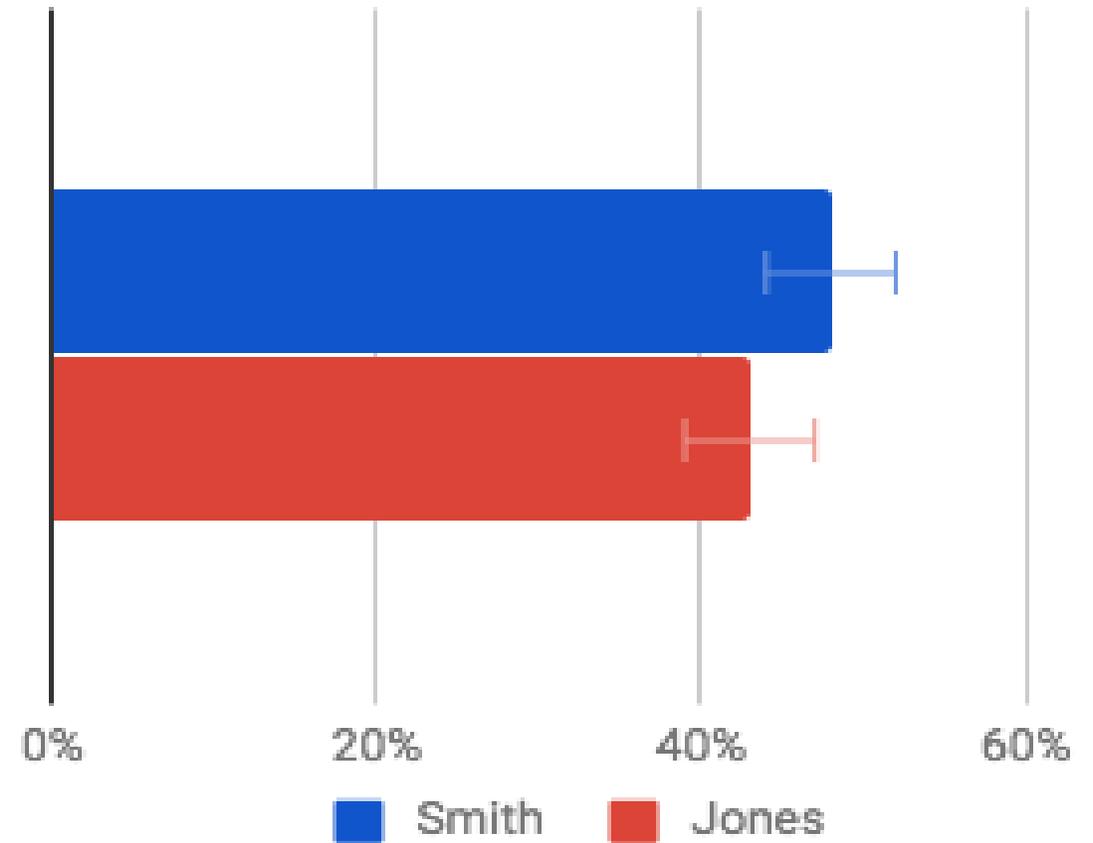


# Explaining Leads in Pre-Election Polls

Pre-election "horserace" polls:  
Who is in the lead?

If a poll with these results has an error margin of  $\pm 4$  points, who is in the lead?

- Smith - 48%
- Jones - 43%
- Neither



# Explaining Leads in Pre-Election Polls

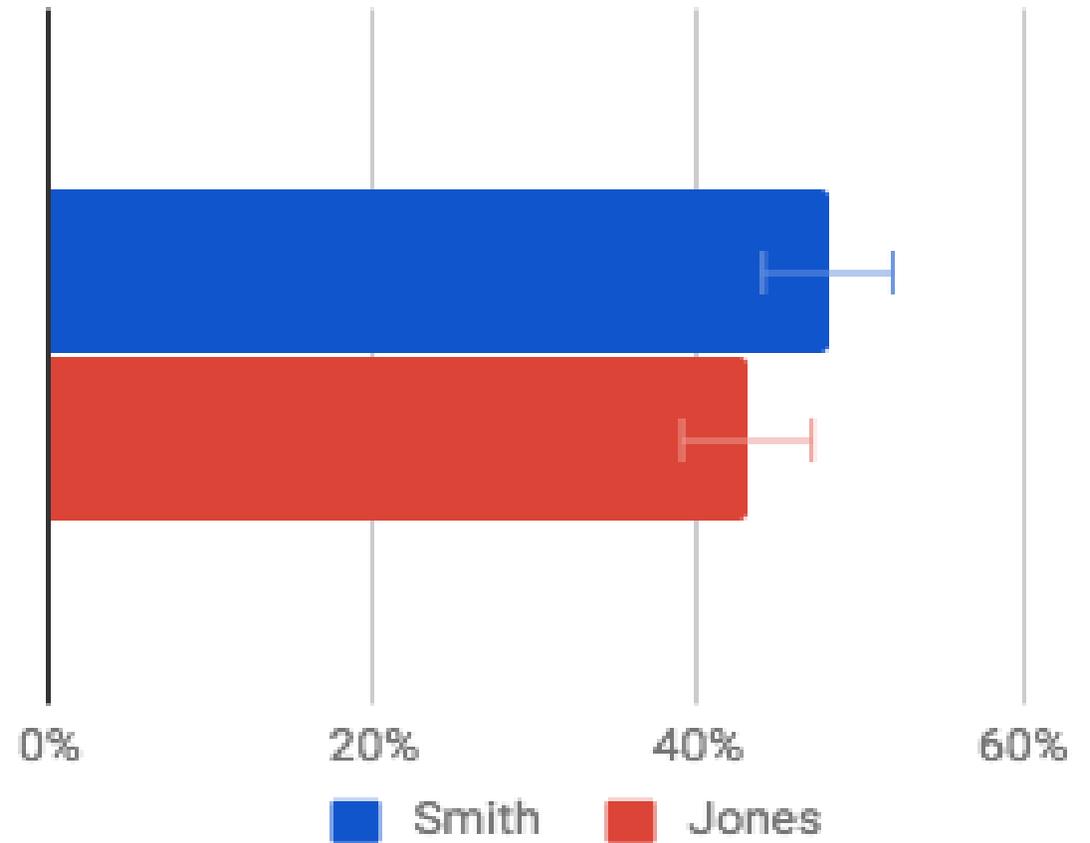
---

ANSWER: NEITHER!

The margins of error overlap, so there is no clear leader.

With an error margin of  $\pm 4$ , there is a 95% chance that:

- Smith's support is between 44% - 52%
- Jones' support is between 39% - 47%



# Writing Clear Polling Headlines

---

## **RULES OF THUMB**

A candidate's advantage should be between 1.5x-2x the margin of error to be 95% certain that candidate actually has a lead

Headline terminology:

- Slight, apparent lead, or edge: Lead of 1x-2x the error margin
- Lead or clear lead: Lead of  $> 2x$  the error margin (AP Style Guidelines)

# Writing Clear Polling Headlines

---

What headline can you use if Washington has a 3.5 point lead over Adams and the error margin is 3 points?

**WASHINGTON HAS SLIGHT EDGE OVER ADAMS**

**WASHINGTON LEADS ADAMS**

**WASHINGTON IS WINNING**

**WASHINGTON IS BEATING ADAMS**

**POLL SAYS WASHINGTON WILL WIN**

# Writing Clear Polling Headlines

---

“Slight edge” best describes a 3.5 point lead with a +/- 3 point error margin. Polls reflect a snapshot in time; they are not a prediction of the future.

**WASHINGTON HAS SLIGHT EDGE OVER ADAMS**

- American democracy requires we know what the public thinks.
- Public opinion polls are the standard method of knowing what the public thinks, and for good reason: Done well, they are nonpartisan, unbiased, and accurate.
- “Horse race” polling is but one corner of the polling landscape, but ironically is both the most visible corner, and the one that is least about “public opinion,” meaning what people think about issues and events.
- It is therefore incumbent upon survey researchers to continue to strive toward accuracy, and of journalists to uphold scientific polls as generally accurate and important to democracy.

## Keeping Polling in Perspective

# Additional Resources

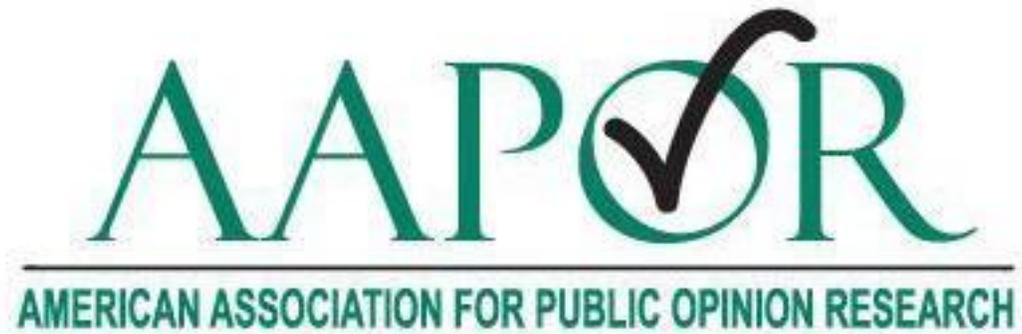
---

## Online resources:

- [AAPOR: 2016 Report of the Polls](#)
- [AAPOR: Journalist cheat sheet](#)
- [AAPOR: Margin of Error](#)
- [AAPOR: Transparency Initiative](#)
- [Associated Press: Style guide for reporting on polls](#)
- [Poynter: Online course on polling](#)

## Videos:

- [Washington Post: How polls work](#)
- [Pew Research Center: Methods 101](#)



Thank You

---

# Discussion



Let's hear from you!

If using computer microphone: **raise your hand!**

**Step 1: select "participants"**

**Step 2: select "raise hand"**

**(may be in sidebar)**

**Step 3: after you're unmuted, ask your question!**

If using telephone audio: **put your question in the chat box!**



# Homework Assignment



- Make your plan to vote  
<https://www.vote.org/>

- Tell the Senate to extend the 2020 Census deadlines  
[https://app.govpredict.com/portal/grassroots/campaigns/n1dert3x/take action](https://app.govpredict.com/portal/grassroots/campaigns/n1dert3x/take_action)

- Share examples of social science research related to timely policy issues with COSSA  
<https://www.cossa.org/share-your-story>



# CSSA HEADLINES



A monthly look at what's new and noteworthy in social science policy

## Next Month:

- NOVEMBER'S HEADLINES
- DEEP DIVE TBD

MARK YOUR  
CALENDAR!

NOVEMBER 12, 2020

## Recordings of Past Headlines Available @

[www.cossa.org/resources/headlines](http://www.cossa.org/resources/headlines)



### THIS YEAR'S DEEP DIVE TOPICS:

- September 2020: Tracking School Reopening Plans
- August 2020: The Psychology of COVID-19
- July 2020: The Societal Experts Action Network (SEAN)
- June 2020: A Conversation on Police Violence
- May 2020: A Conversation with an Epidemiologist
- April 2020: Communication Strategies in an Emerging Public Health Crisis
- March 2020: White House Office of Science and Technology Policy Updates
- Feb 2020: The Trump Administration's FY 2021 Budget Request
- Jan 2020: 2019 Policy Wrap-Up and a Look Ahead



Find this useful?

- Tune in** each month – 2<sup>nd</sup> Thursday
- Tell your colleagues to **sign up for COSSA Member Messages and Alerts—MEMBERS ONLY** (*email Julia at [jmilton@cossa.org](mailto:jmilton@cossa.org)*)
- Encourage other organizations and universities to **Join COSSA** (*email Wendy at [wnaus@cossa.org](mailto:wnaus@cossa.org)*)
- Send us your ideas** for DEEP DIVES (*email Ben at [bgoodrich@cossa.org](mailto:bgoodrich@cossa.org)*)



CONSORTIUM *of* SOCIAL SCIENCE ASSOCIATIONS

Wendy Naus

Executive Director

Email: [wnaus@coffa.org](mailto:wnaus@coffa.org)

Visit Us:

[www.coffa.org](http://www.coffa.org)

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



@COSSADC ★ #WhySocialScience



@SocialScienceAssociations



[www.linkedin.com/company/coffadc](http://www.linkedin.com/company/coffadc)