

SEMINAR ON *BRITISH POLLING, ELECTIONS AND DATA*

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Preamble

Hi. My name is Nick and I
used to be a pollster



It's conceivable some of you make
have seen this next slide before

2005 General Election

	NOP	Actual result
Labour 	36	36
 CONSERVATIVE	33	33
 LIBERAL DEMOCRATS	23	23

Does the arrival of a larger 4th party pose any challenges for opinion polling?

In theory no, but in practice it causes problems

IF

we had a perfect method of drawing a sample and getting an unbiased response

AND

IF

people could be relied on to tell us the truth

Then there would be no problem

But polls increasingly rely on weighting/adjustments – especially online polls – that become more like what Peter Kellner refers to as modelling

And then any change to the status quo risks the underlying assumptions of the model no longer being true

A timely example

(courtesy of the British Polling Council Rules)

Pollster	Fieldwork	Con	Lab	LD	UKIP	Oths.
		%	%	%	%	%
YouGov	5-6 September	34	38	9	12	7
Opinium	3-6 September	30	35	7	17	11
Populus	4-5 September	33	37	14	8	8
Populus	30 August-1 September	34	38	12	8	8
YouGov	30-31 August	31	41	9	13	6
Survation	30-Aug	29	37	11	17	6
Populus	23-26 August	33	37	13	10	7
YouGov	22-23 August	32	38	10	13	7
Opinium	20-23 August	29	36	8	18	9
Populus	21-22 August	30	38	12	12	8
Populus	16-18 August	32	38	12	11	7
YouGov	15-16 August	32	38	10	13	7
Populus	14-15 August	36	39	10	8	7
ComRes	14-15 August	28	37	8	19	8

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Why are Populus so different for UKIP?

There's a big clue here

		Gender			Age						Social Grade				Region					Employment Sector		Vote Intention				
		Total	Male	Female	18-24	25-34	35-44	45-54	55-64	65+	AB	C1	C2	DE	South East	Mid-lands	North Eng-land	Wales & South West	Scot-land	Public	Pri-vate	Con	Lab	LibDem	UKIP	
Unweighted base		2025	920	1105	255	334	382	399	331	324	592	584	340	509	594	492	494	294	151	276	863	442	540	147	244	
Weighted base		2025	992	1033	243	324	385	344	304	425	547	587	425	466	515	534	508	292	176	295	839	449	526	191	129	
Absolutely certain to vote	(10)	1019	559	460	59	100	192	173	195	300	342	273	204	200	228	284	251	153	103	143	393	321	335	85	89	
		50%	56%	45%	24%	31%	50%	50%	64%	71%	63%	46%	48%	43%	44%	53%	49%	52%	59%	49%	47%	72%	64%	44%	69%	
	(9)	268	146	122	45	49	51	34	39	51	76	93	46	53	88	58	57	44	21	41	116	68	88	39	22	
		13%	15%	12%	18%	15%	13%	10%	13%	12%	14%	16%	11%	11%	17%	11%	15%	12%	14%	14%	15%	17%	20%	17%		
	(8)	152	68	84	20	45	35	26	11	15	35	41	35	41	40	38	30	31	13	25	76	21	37	37	6	
		8%	7%	8%	8%	14%	9%	8%	4%	4%	6%	7%	8%	9%	8%	7%	6%	11%	7%	9%	9%	5%	7%	20%	4%	
	(7)	104	47	57	28	21	23	18	5	9	26	25	26	28	30	19	27	19	10	22	47	21	27	12	5	
		5%	5%	6%	12%	7%	6%	5%	2%	2%	5%	4%	6%	6%	6%	3%	5%	6%	5%	7%	6%	5%	5%	6%	4%	

	Voting Intention			
	Con	Lab	LibDem	UKIP
Weighted	442	540	147	244
Unweighted	449	526	191	129

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		5%	5%	6%	12%	7%	6%	5%	2%	2%	5%	4%	6%	6%	6%	3%	5%	6%	5%	7%	6%	5%	5%	6%	4%		

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Why do Populus weight UKIP down so much?

As polling has got more difficult, pollsters have had to use more complex weighting/adjustment:

- Certainty to vote
- Past vote
- “Shy Tories”
- Foreign holidays
- Newspaper readership
- Party ID

And Party ID is the culprit here

“We have done this by asking respondents which political party – if any – they generally identify with and comparing these answers to those on party identification given to the British Social Attitudes Survey in the year of the last General Election.”

The lesson to draw

Party ID is quite a good variable to use

- it is the main one used by US pollsters

But it is not very good for new parties

And it is even worse if you use an out of date source to weight to

- Last election should be used for past vote




- For Party ID you want the most up to date data

Will the translation of vote shares into seat numbers be more of a challenge

PROBABLY

What are the wider issues that will concern/
interest polling companies in the run up to
GE2015?

Polls had one of their best ever elections in 2005

	NOP	Actual result
Labour 	36	36
 CONSERVATIVE	33	33
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2010 was not a triumph for the polls

	Con	Lab	LibDem	Other	Average Error
Angus Reid	36	24	29	11	3.5
ComRes	37	28	28	7	2
Harris	35	29	27	10	1.75
ICM	36	28	26	10	1.5
Ipsos MORI	36	29	27	8	1.5
Opinium	35	27	26	12	2.5
Populus	37	28	27	8	1.5
TNS BMRB	33	27	29	11	3.5
YouGov	35	28	28	9	2
Average	36	28	27	10	2.2
Actual Result	37	30	24	9	

Though the long-term trend of over-estimating Labour was reversed

Surveys generally are getting more difficult

- Long-term decline in response rates
 - even on government surveys
- Increased disaffection with parties and process
- UKIP makes seat projection more difficult
 - pollsters will get blame for that
- Continuing risk of response bias
 - Differential response by supporters of different parties
- Low cost of entry
 - “rogue polls” damage reputation of all polls

Are there benefits/disbenefits for polling companies in the possible evolution of studies linking changes in demography to changes in voting patterns?

Demographic change

- Limit to what pollsters can do here
- Impact of ethnicity will be significant
 - Though not as significant in US
 - Our minority population is far smaller, and far more diverse
- Student vote might be important because of fees
- Demographic impact more likely to be seen at constituency level
 - Might lead to demand for more constituency polls
 - But cost is high as can't really be done online

What might those conducting polls like academics to concentrate on in relation to the furtherance of our collective understanding of changes in voting behaviour?

GOSH! IS THAT THE TIME?

AND AS WE ALL KNOW

IT'S ONLY THE EXIT POLL THAT
REALLY MATTERS