

Political Science 146: Mass Media and Public Opinion

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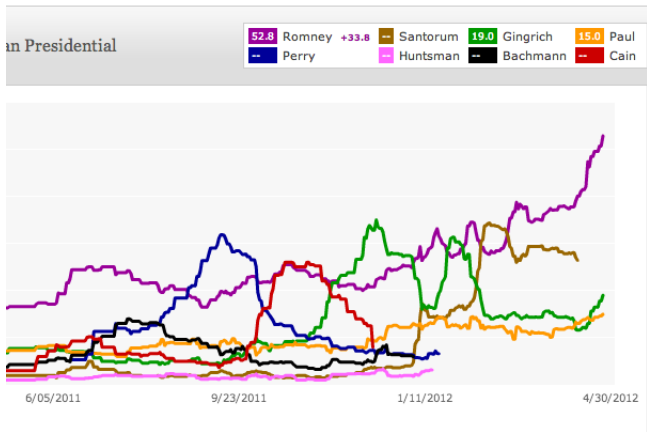
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Polls and the Horse Race: GOP Primary (2012)



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 - Three important bits of info collected: Candidate/opponent's name recognition; trial heat/electoral strength of candidate vis-à-vis their opponent; incumbent's job performance
- Downside: Timing, the earlier the poll is done, the less likely anyone will know the candidate – especially a challenger. Boosting name recognition is the biggest problem for the challenger.

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- Thus, trial heats taken far in advance of an election measure name recognition more than anything else.

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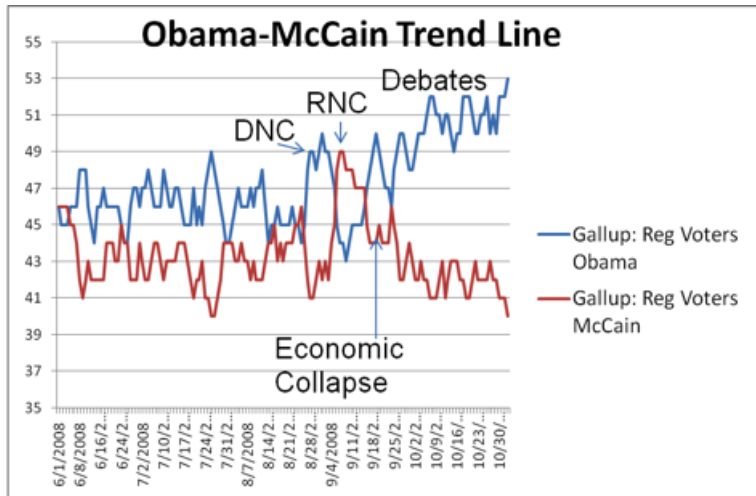
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- Allows pollsters/researchers to study daily changes and electoral dynamics

Gallup Tracking Poll (2008)



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- But, panel surveys provide better information than do cross-sectional surveys.

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- Fishkin (1992, 1996) argues that this is a more normatively pleasing way to view how the public thinks or can think.
- This type of poll is very expensive, however, because it requires bringing together a representative sample and providing fair and balanced materials about the issues at hand.

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- Exit polls are generally accurate, but as states move to vote-by-mail (OR, WA) and as the electorate diversifies, exit polls may become less reliable.
- Disadvantages: May deter people in western states from

Gore Florida Winner, 2000



Types of Polls: Push Polls

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- Different from political polls that may have pro/attack information in them
- Legitimate polls use samples representative of all voters. “Push polls” use telephone banks to canvass large numbers of voters. Legitimate polls may seek out weaknesses of candidates and attempt to ascertain impact on voters of knowledge of these weaknesses, as well as issues and other facets of a political campaign. “Push polls” attack selected candidates, and research is not intent.

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- Fundraising: If a candidate can show they are ahead/close, then people are more likely to donate to their campaign
- Candidates may attack a public poll when it shows them performing poorly. “The only poll that counts is the poll taken on Election Day” (sure fire way to know that a candidate is likely to drop out or will get wiped)

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- The poll's likely voter model