

THE ACCURACY OF THE NATIONAL PREELECTION POLLS IN THE 2004 PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION

MICHAEL W. TRAUOGOTT

Abstract The 2004 presidential election campaign provided a venue for a wide variety of polling, and it was not without its controversies. In the end, the final estimates of the preelection polls, the bread and butter of the polling industry, were very good at suggesting it would be a close race, with Bush the likely winner. In historical perspective, the overall performance was above average for the period since 1956. Issues raised in the media leading up to the end of the campaign and the final estimates, however, created some controversy, especially about the likely voter methodology used by different organizations. There were also some anomalies at the end of the campaign as some firms and collaborators ended up producing different estimates of the outcome depending on likely voter definitions or the mode of data collection.

The 2004 presidential election in the United States produced a relatively easy popular vote victory for incumbent president George W. Bush, as he converted a 500,000 vote loss in 2000 to a 3.5 million margin over Senator John Kerry. In the final count of the popular vote division, Bush received 50.7 percent of the popular vote, while Kerry received 48.3 percent (McDonald 2004). His 2.4 percentage point victory was the closest for an incumbent president, just ahead of Woodrow Wilson's 3.1 percentage point victory in 1916. While the overall electoral map looked very similar to the one in 2000, with two states converting from Democratic to Republican (Iowa and New Mexico) and one from Republican to Democratic (New Hampshire), the electoral vote outcome produced a more substantial Bush victory. He won by 286 to 252, as redistricting after the 2000 U.S. Census produced a shift of seven net electoral votes in his direction from the states that he won in 2000 simply as a result of faster-than-average population growth there due to migration and immigration.

MICHAEL W. TRAUOGOTT is a professor of communication studies and senior research scientist at the Institute for Social Research at the University of Michigan. The author would like to acknowledge the helpful comments of anonymous reviewers on an earlier draft. Address correspondence to the author; e-mail: mtrau@umich.edu.

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Under these conditions, the preelection pollsters in 2004 had an unusually good year historically in estimating the winner of the election. The majority of the polls estimated that Bush would win, and their estimates of his performance and his margin over Kerry were among the best recorded in the contemporary period. There were some anomalies at the end of the campaign as some firms and collaborators ended up producing different estimates of the outcome, depending on definitions of the likely electorate and the mode of data collection. The exit polls were not without controversy, but this was a function of leaked earlier results rather than early or incorrect projections on election night (Traugott, Highton, and Brady 2005).

The Performance of the Preelection Polls

It is difficult to characterize the number of polls produced in the United States during the general election period, usually considered to be between Labor Day and Election Day (September 6 through November 2, 2004). The number of polls produced by the major polling firms employing standard telephone or Web-based methodologies was about the same as that in 2000.¹ But the number of tracking polls was substantially reduced, while the number of measurements in “battleground states” increased. As expected (Traugott 2001), there were more estimates of the electoral vote totals for the candidates because of this emphasis on state-level results.

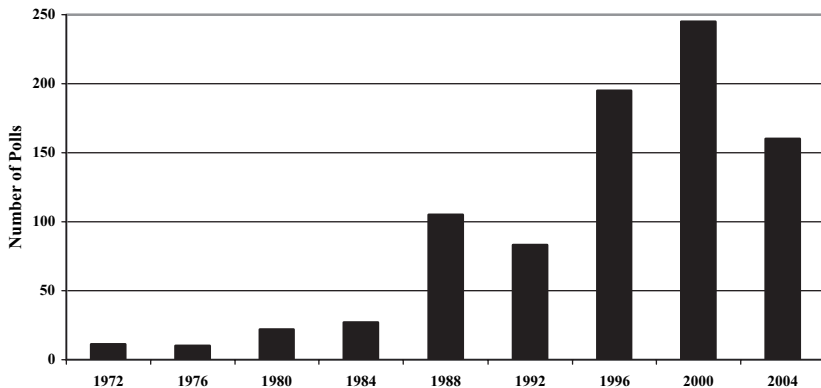
The preelection polling in the 2004 campaign was not without controversies, including extensive news coverage of different methodological issues, especially the omission of cell phones in standard samples and the differences in methods for estimating “likely voters.” The Gallup Organization came under direct attack from the MoveOn.org political action committee, which placed a full-page ad in the *New York Times* on Tuesday, September 28, accusing it, among other things, of “refusing to fix a longstanding problem with their likely voter methodology.”² Overall, the pollsters fared somewhat better in the Pew Research Center’s 2004 postelection poll measurement of popular perceptions of their performance during the campaign in comparison to their performance in 2000; 45 percent of the respondents gave them a grade of A or B in this election, compared to 33 percent who did so the last time.³

The number of preelection polls in the 2004 campaign remained approximately the same as that in 2000, but the mix of polls was different, as news organizations and polling firms planned for a close election and altered their

1. This analysis does not include computerized polls that employ computerized voices and do not allow for respondent selection. This means that poll results from Rasmussen and SurveyUSA are excluded from this report.

2. A copy of the ad may be found at www.MoveOn.org/content/pdfs/Final-Gallup-Ad.pdf. The next day, *USA Today*, a major Gallup client, affirmed its belief in the Gallup results in an article that included a reference to the ad (Memmott 2004).

3. A full copy of the Pew report is available at <http://people-press.org/reports/pdf/233.pdf>.



Sources: Roper Center iPOLL, PollingReport.com, NationalJournal.com

Figure 1. Frequencies of publicly released trial heat polls conducted between Labor Day and Election Day.

mix of study designs. Estimating the number of polls conducted in any given year is difficult when taking into account the range of sources in which results can be published, the kinds of samples employed (national, state, or local), and other coding issues. Kennedy and Traugott (2004) have developed a relatively standardized approach to producing such an estimate that relies upon a search of the Roper Center's iPOLL database for occurrences of the standard "trial heat" question that asks: "If the election were held today. . ."⁴ Data are presented in figure 1 that show the distribution of the results of such a search in the presidential election years from 1972 to 2004, covering the period from Labor Day to Election Day.

The explosion in polls started in the 1980s, and the shift from 1984 (27 questions retrieved) to 2000 (245 questions retrieved) is about 900 percent. Most of this was due to the increase in daily tracking polls, as in the 2000 campaign three firms (Gallup, Voter.com, and Zogby) each released results from more than 35 national tracking polls. But in the 2004 campaign, Gallup and Zogby produced tracking polls in the range of about once a week while devoting more effort to producing estimates of support in a select set of "battleground states."⁵

4. The Roper Center at the University of Connecticut is the repository of record for commercial polling data in the United States, and its iPOLL database is available by membership and through Lexis-Nexis. Neither questions nor survey data from Rasmussen and SurveyUSA are available from the Roper Center. These firms are not included in this analysis because they interview by computer over the telephone without a human interface, and specific respondent selection cannot be assured.

5. For example, the Gallup Organization produced eight tracking poll estimates in 2004 (September 5, 15, and 26 and October 3, 10, 16, 24, and 31).

Data are presented in table 1 for 19 different preelection estimates of the outcome of the 2004 presidential election. Overall, it was a very good showing for the preelection polls. For the last three weeks of the campaign, they suggested that the race would be close. On Election Day, the Bush margin over Kerry in the popular vote was 2.4 percentage points, although rounded to whole percentage points as poll results are typically reported, it might look like three percentage points.⁶ Eighteen of the poll estimates were within the range of plus or minus 4.0 percentage points (13 showing Bush ahead, two with ties, and five showing Kerry ahead). The final *Newsweek* poll showed Bush ahead by six percentage points, the largest margin in any of the preelection polls evaluated.

The listing is also unusual in a number of regards. Two organizations (ABC News and the *Washington Post*) shared the same data collection, but they produced different estimates of the outcome based upon the application of separate “likely voter” classifications. Two other firms that collaborate on the Battleground Poll conducted for George Washington University used two different (aided and unaided) trial heat questions; there are three entries for them, one for each of the participating firms (the Tarrance Group, a Republican firm, and Lake, Snell, Perry, a Democratic firm) and a composite.⁷ And while the Gallup Organization produced a final estimate for its clients CNN and *USA Today* on October 31, it also produced its own revised estimate of a tied outcome on November 1. One last unusual pair of estimates came from Harris Interactive, which produced one estimate from its online poll showing Kerry in the lead by 50 percent to 47 percent and another estimate from a telephone poll showing Bush in the lead by 49 percent to 48 percent; both are included in the analysis. The Harris Interactive online estimate was released on Election Day, as was the Zogby estimate, late in the day as voting was under way; these estimates undoubtedly reflect late interviewing using Web-based surveys.

There are two historical measures of the accuracy of preelection polls and a new method that has been proposed because it has advantages over both of them. Two of the measures were proposed by Mosteller et al. (1949), and they have generally been used in one form or another since the 1948 election. The most commonly used measures have been Mosteller Measure 3, the average

6. This is based on final vote counts as reported by McDonald (2005) and Leip (2005).

7. The final survey questionnaire, available at www.tarrance.com/files/9936QF11-01.pdf, shows that Q1 on the survey was “If the election for President were held today, and you had to make a choice, for which candidate would you probably vote? (DO NOT READ NAMES, JUST RECORD)” (the unaided version), while Q7 and its introduction was

Still thinking about the election for U.S. President that will be held on November 2nd—

Q7. If the election for U.S. President were held today and you had to make a choice, for whom would you vote. . . .

(ROTATE NAMES)

George W. Bush, the Republican,

OR John Kerry, the Democrat? [the aided version]

Table 1. Final Preelection Poll Estimates of the Outcome of the 2004 Presidential Election

Firm	Field Period	Bush	Kerry	Nader	Other	Bush Lead	Predictive Accuracy (A)	Mosteller Measure 3	Mosteller Measure 5
Election Result		50.7	48.3	0.3	0.7	2.4			
Harris (Online)	10/29–11/1	47	50	1	2	-3.0	-0.110	2.70	5.40
Battleground: Lake	10/31–11/1	48.6	50.7			-2.1	-0.091	2.25	4.50
Fox News	10/30–31	46	48	1	5	-2.0	-0.091	2.50	4.40
Marist College	11/1	49	50	0	1	-1.0	-0.070	1.70	3.40
Democracy Corps	10/29–31	47	48	1	3	-1.0	-0.070	2.00	3.40
Gallup	10/31–11/1	49	49	1	1	0.0	-0.048	1.20	2.40
American Research Group	10/28–30	48	48	1	3	0.0	-0.048	1.50	2.40
Zogby ^a	11/2	49.4	49.1	1	0.5	0.3	-0.042	1.05	2.10
Harris (Telephone)	10/29–11/1	49	48	2	1	1.0	-0.028	1.00	1.40
NBC News/Wall Street Journal	10/29–31	48	47	1	4	1.0	-0.027	2.00	1.40
ABC News	10/28–31	49	48	1	3	1.0	-0.028	1.00	1.40
Washington Post	10/28–31	49	48	1	3	1.0	-0.028	1.00	1.40
CBS News/N.Y. Times	10/29–11/1	49	47	1	3	2.0	-0.007	1.50	0.40
CNN/USA Today/Gallup	10/29–31	49	47		4	2.0	-0.007	1.50	0.40
Pew Research Center	10/27–30	51	48	1		3.0	0.012	0.30	0.60
TIPP ^b	10/30–11/1	48.6	45.3	0.9	5.2	3.3	0.022	0.45	0.90

Table 1. (Continued)

Firm	Field Period	Bush	Kerry	Nader	Other	Bush Lead	Predictive Accuracy (A)	Mosteller Measure 3	Mosteller Measure 5
Battleground: Tarrance George Washington University	10/31–11/1	51.2	47.8	0.5	0.5	3.4	0.020	0.50	1.00
Battleground <i>Newsweek</i> Average	10/31–11/1 10/27–29	50 50	46 44	1 1	4 5	4.0 6.0	0.035 0.079 -0.026	1.50 2.50 1.66	1.60 3.60 2.14

NOTE.—This table preserves the use of decimal places by some polling firms in their final estimates, even though this level of precision is unwarranted given the sample sizes employed in these polls. Changing these estimates to whole numbers would affect the values of the three measures of poll accuracy used in this table and, in some cases, the relative ranking of the polls on that basis. All polls listed were conducted by telephone unless noted otherwise. The “Other” category includes other minor party candidates (usually volunteered), *don’t know*, and *undecided* responses. Predictive accuracy, *A*, is a measure developed by Martin, Traugott, and Kennedy (2005, pp. 350–53), and it is described in full there. The formula for computing *A* is $A_{ijk} = \log [(r_{ijk}/d_{ijk})/(R_jk/D_{jk})]$. Mosteller Measure 3 is computed as the (Absolute Value of $[50.7 - \text{Poll's Bush Estimate}] + \text{Absolute Value of } [48.3 - \text{Poll's Kerry Estimate}]/2$). Mosteller Measure 5 is computed as (Absolute Value of $[2.4 - (\text{Poll's Bush Estimate} - \text{Poll's Kerry Estimate})]$).

^a Zogby produced a final election poll for Reuters based upon interviewing conducted October 29–31 where the Bush proportion was 48 percent and the Kerry proportion was 47 percent. That estimate was revised on the afternoon of Election Day and is the last one included in this analysis.

^b TechnoMetrica Institute of Policy and Politics (TIPP) produced two estimates from the same survey, one with the undecided vote allocated and one without the allocation. The latter is the estimate used here because none of the other polls used an allocation.

absolute difference between the poll estimate for each of the leading candidates in the final estimate, and Measure 5, the absolute value of the difference between the margin separating the two leading candidates in the poll and the difference in their margins in the actual vote (Mitofsky 1998; Traugott 2001). While the size of the vote for minor parties has been a source of discussion in calculating these measures in recent presidential elections since 1992, this was not an issue in 2004, as Ralph Nader received approximately 0.3 percent.

Martin, Traugott, and Kennedy (2005) have proposed a new measure of predictive accuracy (A) based upon the natural logarithm of the odds ratio of the outcome in a poll and the outcome of the election.⁸ This measure has several advantages, including allowing comparisons of accuracy across elections and polling firms, and it produces a signed statistic rather than an absolute value, so it incorporates an indication of the direction in which the preelection estimate differs from the outcome. A positive sign indicates a pro-Republican bias, while a negative sign indicates a pro-Democratic bias. They also discuss another recurring issue—the method for dealing with unallocated “undecided” preferences in a preelection poll. Their calculation essentially builds in an assumption of proportional allocation in accord with the measured preferences. But their measure of A could accommodate other explicit methods for dealing with alternative allocation schemes as well.

The values of the three measures for each poll are presented in table 1, and they are summarized historically in table 2 for Mosteller Measures 3 and 5. Based upon the relative precision of the estimates in relation to the election outcome, there are low values for both the Mosteller measures. The average value for Mosteller Measure 3 across the 19 estimates is 1.66, while the average value for Mosteller Measure 5 is 2.14. As the summary in table 2 shows, the 2004 election would be considered tied for the fifth most accurate in the 13 held since 1956 on the basis of Mosteller Measure 3, and it would be third based on Mosteller Measure 5. One reason for the difference in comparable results is that there was a significant third party candidate in 1968, George Wallace, who actually won electoral votes, while there was no such candidate in 1976, when only the margin was calculated between Gerald Ford and Jimmy Carter according to Mosteller Measure 5.

There is no equivalent lengthy time series of the values of A , but Martin, Traugott, and Kennedy (2005) have computed the average value of the statistic for three historically important elections for pollsters—1948, 1996, and 2000. The average value of A for 1996 is -0.0838 , suggesting a slight Democratic bias in the polls that overestimated Clinton’s margin over Dole. For 2000, the average value of A is $+0.0630$, suggesting an overestimate of support for Bush; he was the leader in 14 of the 19 preelection polls, although Gore won the popular vote. For the 2004 election, the average value of A is -0.024 ,

8. A full description of the derivation and formula for A can be found in Martin, Traugott, and Kennedy 2005, pp. 350–53.

Table 2. Average Errors in Presidential Polls, 1948–2004

Year	# of Polls	# of Candidates	Mosteller Method 3		Mosteller Method 5	
			Average Error (%)	Rank	Average Error (%)	Rank
2004	19	2	1.7	5	2.1	3
2000	19	3	1.7	5	3.5	8
1996	9	3	1.7	5	3.6	10
1992	6	3	2.2	10	2.7	6
1988	5	2	1.5	3	2.8	7
1984	6	2	2.4	11	4.4	11
1980	4	3	3.0	13	6.1	13
1976	3	3	1.5	3	2.0	2
1972	3	2	2.0	9	2.6	5
1968	2	3	1.3	2	2.5	4
1964	2	2	2.7	12	5.3	12
1960	1	2	1.0		1.9	1
1956	1	2	1.8	8	3.5	8
Yearly Average						
1956–2004			1.9		3.3	
1948	3	3	4.9	14	12.9	14

NOTE.—This table lists significant third party candidates who were often mentioned by name in the “trial heat” questions employed by public polls. They include George Wallace (1968), Eugene McCarthy (1976), John Anderson (1980), H. Ross Perot (1992 and 1996), and Ralph Nader (2000).

suggesting a small underestimate of Bush’s margin. The 2004 value of *A* is the smallest of the three elections, indicating the most accurate estimation, as is true of the values of Mosteller Measures 3 and 5. Again 13 of the polls showed Bush ahead, but there was a slight Democratic bias in the estimates, as 14 of the 19 showed a Kerry lead, indicated a tie, or underestimated Bush’s actual margin (i.e., the value of *A* was negative).

The Estimation of Likely Voters

The estimation of likely voters became such a topic of discussion and reporting during the campaign that the American Association for Public Opinion Research decided to produce an additional information resource for journalists and others who were interested in the topic, as well as other issues related to the methodology of preelection polls.⁹ Not only did discussions of likely voter

9. The essay, entitled “Sources of Variation in Published Election Polling: A Primer,” was authored by Cliff Zukin and can be found at www.aapor.org/pdfs/varsources.pdf.

methodology appear in regular news channels and on the Web sites of news organizations and pollsters, the discussion of likely voter estimation emerged in a number of online newsgroups as well as in a series of Web logs that appeared in growing numbers during the 2004 campaign.¹⁰ The topics discussed range from details of the methodology to conspiracy theories of the reasons for employing particular methods. These theories were most publicly visible in the full-page ad that the MoveOn.org PAC took out in the *New York Times* on September 28 that attacked the Gallup Organization and George Gallup III personally.

What seems fairly clear is that some polling organizations are producing substantial “house effects” with regularity, although the reasons for this are unclear.¹¹ This suggests that additional information about the details of their methods needs to be made public in order for analysts to develop an understanding of why that is.¹² One cogent explanation for the seeming Republican leanings in the recent Gallup polls can be found in the work of Erikson, Panagopoulos, and Wlezien (2004), who suggest that moving to a “likely voter” model too early in the campaign can produce unstable estimates of the size and composition of the likely electorate as a function of short-term news events. They claim that a “likely electorate” that approximates voters who will cast ballots can only be estimated with confidence near the end of the campaign as Election Day draws near.

There was more information available about preelection polling methods in 2004, although it was often located in fugitive places on the Web.¹³ One suggestion found there is that polls that use a “likely voter” model like Gallup’s, which employs a series of questions to construct an index and then uses a cut-off to eliminate candidate preference data from “unlikely voters,” seem to produce more Republican samples. On the other hand, polls that employ weighting by party identification, a practice generally frowned upon in the profession, produce more Democratic samples. The difference, of course, is

10. See, for example, <http://abcnews.go.com/images/pdf/responserates.pdf>, <http://abcnews.go.com/Politics/PollVault/story?id=43943>, www.cbsnews.com/stories/2004/09/28/opinion/polls/main646125.shtml, and <http://gallup.com/poll/content/default.aspx?ci=12052>. See also Huffington (2004), and Taylor (2004) for examples of this kind of discussion before the election. An excellent summary of the issues raised during the campaign posted after the election can be found at www.mysterypollster.com/main/2004/11/lessons_likely_.html.

11. For a review of “house effects” and the difficulties they can produce, see Borelli, Lockerbie, and Niemi 1987; Erikson and Wlezien 1999; Lau 1994; MacKuen et al. 1992; Schuman and Presser 1979; and Smith 1978.

12. While the focus of this discussion is on the tracking poll estimates, graphical presentations of public polling data available from the Web site of Steven Ruggles (www.hist.umn.edu/~ruggles/2004.htm) suggest that in measures of presidential approval, for example, Gallup produced systematically higher levels of approval for George W. Bush across his first term, while Zogby produced systematically lower levels.

13. See, for example, “A Consumer’s Guide to the Polls” produced by *Slate* at its Web site (www.slate.com/Default.aspx?id=2108778& [Saletan, Kenner, and Thomas 2004]), as well as a lengthy series about likely voter methodology prepared by Mark Blumenthal at his Web site, www.mysterypollster.com/main/2004/09/how_do_pollster_1.html.

that partisanship remains an important predictor of candidate preference, and the cutoff polls generally produced larger Bush leads over Kerry than the polls weighted by party identification. This is an important issue that requires additional research, although this cannot be the full explanation for why some polls are producing higher and lower levels of approval for George Bush's job performance.

The Postdebate Polls

The Commission on Presidential Debates again organized debates between the presidential and vice presidential candidates, and one year before Election Day it proposed a relatively compressed schedule of four debates within a two-week period.¹⁴ In recent campaigns, news organizations used a variety of measurement techniques to assess the candidates' performance during the debates. In addition to snap polls, many employed their Web sites as a way for anyone to register an opinion about who "won" the debates. In the 2000 campaign, there were differences in these assessments after the first debate; for example, polls employing probability samples suggested that Al Gore had performed better, while the Web sites available to self-selected volunteer respondents suggested that Bush had done better because of e-mails from the Republican National Committee that suggested which Web sites loyal partisans could use to register their views (Traugott 2001).¹⁵

After each of the debates in the 2004 campaign, the major polling operations assessing the performance of the presidential and vice presidential candidates employed slightly different methods and approaches to their task. As the data presented in table 3 show, there were four organizations that consistently assessed the debate performance of the presidential candidates. Each of them employed a panel approach to measurement by recontacting previous survey respondents who watched the debates. Their assessments were consistent across these approaches in suggesting that John Kerry bested George Bush in the first debate, a key factor that brought Kerry back into the race at a critical juncture when it seemed that Bush might be opening an insurmountable lead of 14 percentage points in the *CNN/USA Today*/Gallup poll.

14. There was the usual posturing by candidates and their negotiating teams about the dates and the protocol for the organization of the debates. In the end, the negotiating teams agreed to the proposed schedule, but they produced a 32-page document of terms and conditions for the debates themselves. In an unusual move, they asked the journalists and news organizations to sign off on the agreement, but these key actors refused. A full recounting of the schedule and agreement can be found at www.debates.org.

15. In 2004, the Democratic National Committee also circulated such e-mails in advance of each debate (see www.freerepublic.com/focus/f-news/1244005/posts); this time the self-selected Web polls also showed Kerry the debate winner. In the Phoenix market, there was also an experiment on Valley Cox Digital Cable whereby subscribers could register their assessments, and those viewers of the first debate also indicated that Kerry had done better (<http://phoenix.bizjournals.com/phoenix/stories/2004/10/11/daily46.html>).

Table 3. The Results of Four Post–Presidential Debate Polls in 2004

Poll	Outcome/ Winner	% of Respondents Who Picked This Outcome		
		First Debate (September 30)	Second Debate (October 8)	Third Debate (October 13)
ABC ^a	Kerry	45	44	44
	Bush	36	41	41
	Tied	17	13	17
CBS ^b	Kerry	43	50	39
	Bush	28	32	25
	Tied	29	13	36
Gallup/CNN/ <i>USA Today</i> ^c	Kerry	53	47	53
	Bush	37	45	39
	Tied	10	8	8
Democracy Corps ^d	Kerry	45	45	41
	Bush	32	37	36
	Neither, Tied	23	18	24

^a Registered voters who watched; sample sizes were 531, 515, and 566, respectively. The exact question wording was: “Who, in your opinion, won the debate?” Interviews were taken the night of the debate.

^b For the first and third debates, debate watchers who were “undecided” or said they could switch (Knowledge Networks); sample sizes of 200 for each. Interviews were taken the night of the debate. For the second debate, registered voters sampled on the telephone one to three days after the debate (October 9–11). After the first and third debates, the question wording was: “Who won the debate?” After the second debate, the question wording was: “Who won the second presidential debate?”

^c Registered voters who watched; sample sizes of 515, 613, and 511, respectively. Interviews were taken the night of the debate. The exact question wording after each debate was: “Regardless of which candidate you happen to support, who do you think did the better job in the debate: John Kerry or George W. Bush?”

^d Likely voters who watched (Knowledge Networks); sample sizes of 1,318, 1,155, and 1,030, respectively. Interviews were taken the night of the debate. The exact question wording after each debate was: “Thinking about tonight’s debate between George Bush and John Kerry, who would you say won the debate?”

ABC News interviewed samples of registered voters on the phone who watched the debate, and it assessed Kerry the winner by a 45 percent to 36 percent margin. CBS News obtained data through Knowledge Networks on the Web from “undecided” voters who watched the debate, and it assessed Kerry the winner by a 43 percent to 28 percent margin. Gallup recontacted registered voters who watched the debate, and it assessed Kerry the winner by a 53 percent to 37 percent margin. And Democracy Corps, a PAC organized by Stanley Greenberg and James Carville, also employed Knowledge Networks to survey likely voters who watched the debate; and it assessed Kerry the winner by a 45 percent to 32 percent margin.

The summary also suggests that CBS's "uncommitted" voters generally evaluated Kerry more favorably than the samples of registered or likely voters. The Kerry margins over Bush were generally greatest in the first debate among registered and likely voters and were significantly reduced in the assessments after the second debate. It is interesting to note that, as previous research has shown (Steeper 1980), polls conducted several days after the debates—and after subsequent media coverage of them—showed larger majorities believing that Kerry had won each. This was undoubtedly due to the media coverage of each of them and the media consensus that developed about each candidate's performance.¹⁶

Conclusions

The 2004 presidential election campaign provided a venue for a wide variety of polling, and it was not without its controversies. In the end, the final estimates of the preelection polls, the bread and butter of the polling industry, were very good at suggesting it would be a close race, with Bush the likely winner. In historical perspective, the overall performance was above average for the period since 1956. Issues raised in the media leading up to the end of the campaign and the final estimates, however, created some controversy, especially about the likely voter methodology used by different organizations.

The American electoral system is entering a period of dynamic technological change with the passage of the Help America Vote Act of 2002. As the voting procedures and devices change and more opportunities to vote early arise, preelection and exit pollsters will face new challenges for the standard telephone surveys of voters at home and face-to-face interviews with voters leaving the polls. More public disclosure of methods and their consequences will be required to maintain public confidence in the profession, as well as in the basic foundation of the American electoral system and its transparency to the public.

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16. For example, a poll of registered voters five days after the first debate indicated that 60 percent thought Kerry had won, against just 23 percent who thought Bush had, compared to the 15-point advantage in the polls cited above among viewers on the night of the first debate (www.cbsnews.com/stories/2004/10/04/opinion/polls/main647342.shtml).

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