

# Campaign Camp

## Polling and Targeting

Pia Nargundkar



# WHAT IS POLITICAL POLLING?

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# Polling is much more than the horse race questions you see in the media

Pollsters are an integral part of a campaign's consulting team

- Most candidates bring an impressive background, history of accomplishments, and ambitious policy agenda to the table. But even high information voters can absorb only a limited amount of information.
- It is the pollster's job to identify what exactly about a candidate and his or her vision resonates with voters and help distill it into the most effective burst of information possible.
- Pollsters also identify which demographic blocs are most important for the campaign to communicate with (in order to either persuade or motivate to turnout).

# Other uses for polling

- Before a candidate announces that he or she is going to run, they may hire a pollster to see if they have a viable path to victory.
- Campaigns can release positive poll numbers in order to convince donors that the race is close/winnable and their money is needed.
- Polling is also used by groups not affiliated with an individual campaign. A national organization, for example, may want to poll in multiple districts to see where their money is most needed.

BEFORE YOU POLL

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# Questions to consider

- Are you working on a campaign where polling is likely to happen? Polling is usually utilized on bigger tier campaigns: statewide, presidential, etc. State legislative races can benefit from polling done through a caucus, while races like city council, etc. rarely poll.
- What's the budget?
  - ✧ Polling should be no more than 10% of a typical campaign's total operating budget (can be higher for small campaigns)

Sample Size	Length	Estimated Cost
N=300	10-12 mins.	\$15-\$17k
N=500	15-18 mins.	\$28-\$33k
N=800-1,000 + oversamples	18-20 mins.	\$50-\$75k

- When will you have the money to poll?
  - ✧ Does it make sense to spend your money on a poll?
  - ✧ Will a poll be making your communications more efficient, or robbing resources from them?

# When should I poll?

- When will you have the information you need in order to poll?
- When does your campaign expect to start communicating?
  - ✦ What is the timeline for a photo / video shoot, and how much lead time do your other consultants need before communicating?
  - ✦ How many times will you have an opportunity to tweak your messaging?



# What should I know before I poll?

Who are the candidates in your race?

When will the races above you on the ballot be set?

What are the stories you might want to tell about your candidate?

What are the stories you might want to tell about your opponent?

What's the lay of the land in this district?



# Typical polling package

- Qualitative research (only utilized on biggest races)
  - Four focus groups = \$40k
- Quantitative research
  - Baseline poll (n=400 @ 18 minutes) = \$30k
  - Tracker poll (n=400 @ 7 minutes) = \$12k

# POLLING METHODOLOGY

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# Types of polls

## Benchmark Poll (18-20 minutes)

- After candidates are established, but before major communication
- Assesses political environment, candidate support measures, vote scenarios, issue testing, message testing

## Trend Poll (12-18 minutes)

- Measures impact of early media to make adjustments to current message
- Gives a read on political environment and movement in candidate support measures and vote scenarios

## Tracking Poll (5-10 minutes)

- Timed to coincide with paid media; measure its effect
- Gives a read on political environment and movement in candidate support measures and vote scenarios

# What makes a good poll?

## Robust sample design

- The right people are being called
- The people who respond are representative of the electorate

## Fair questionnaire design

- Question language and order don't bias responses
- Balanced messaging

## Appropriate fielding window

- In the field for at least 3 days
- Did not dial during major events or holidays where regular people are unlikely to pick up the phone

# Unearthing a bad poll

Who's in the sample?

A poll of adults will give you different results than a poll of registered voters, which will give you different results from a poll of likely voters.

What do the demographics look like?

We know presidential year electorates are younger and more diverse than midterm electorates.

How was the poll conducted?

Live telephone interviewers yield more accurate results than polls conducted through IVR (aka robocalls). Cell phone dialing is a must, as is bilingual dialing among an electorate with a high Hispanic population.

Is there another way to interpret the data?

Sometimes a change in numbers from poll to poll is due to something other than a true shift in public opinion, such as a change in any of the above, or unfair question wording.

# Cell phone and Spanish-language dialing

- The most recent data indicates 51% of American households do not own a landline phone
- Those only reachable by cell are disproportionately:
  - Under Age 35
  - Hispanic
  - Lower income
  - Renters
  - Urban
  - Democratic



- Spanish is the primary language spoken at home by more than 37 million Americans.
- Spanish-speakers vote significantly differently from English-speakers.
- It is becoming increasingly important to offer the option of Spanish-language interviews among heavily-Hispanic electorates. 65% are wireless only.

# ANALYZING THE RESULTS

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# Pollsters will analyze and interpret the data for you!

You will get three kinds of documents from your pollster:

Topline results show answers for everyone

Crosstabs show results for subgroups

Analysis provides the pollster's conclusions about the data



# What does it all mean?

1. Things to look for:
  - Who are the persuadable voters at the outset?
  - Who moves during a poll, and why?
  - What messages are most persuasive to those voters (positive and negative)?
  - How do we tie that all together into a coherent theme?
    - Sometimes, some of your best testing messages may not get used because they don't make thematic sense
  - Tracking polls: what has changed? Did the voters who moved in our baseline poll move in reality?
2. Use context when analyzing data
  - How does your race compare to similar races around the country?
  - How does it compare other polling in the state/district?
3. Do not over-interpret your data
  - Margin of error = all of your data is at least a little wrong.
  - Polls must be evaluated in the context of a campaign: just because someone changes their mind with 20 minutes on the phone doesn't mean they'll do so after seeing a TV ad.

# After polling, you can expect...

- A realistic assessment of your race and your path to victory.
- A clear path forward, with a defined messaging and targeting strategy: you should know what to say and to whom to say it.
- An engaged polling team that will serve as guardians of this strategy moving forward.

# WHAT TO DO IF YOU CAN'T POLL

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# How can I work with my pollster to get the most out of limited resources?

- 1. Make sure your pollster understands what your resources are
- 2. Think about how you're going to be communicating
- 3. Decide whether you need more interviews or a longer poll
- 4. Make sure you go into each poll with a clear plan for that poll, and an understanding of how it fits into a total plan

# Can't afford polling?

- Look at past election results to identify possible strongholds and persuadable areas
- Look at national public polling on salient issues
  - [www.pollingreport.com](http://www.pollingreport.com)
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- Be aware of other campaigns
  - Presidential candidates and significant statewide campaigns have tested their language and know the best way to appeal to voters
  - Major organizations (PPFA, Emily's List, HRC) know how to best talk about their issues in a way that does not tune out swing voters



QUESTIONS?

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PIA NARGUNDKAR  
pia@lillianslist.org