UNDECIDED VOTERS

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Sample surveys are burdened with several problems even when the sample that has been drawn is truly representative of the much larger population for which estimates will be made. Does the respondent understand the question? Is the respondent answering the question honestly? How to replace a person who refuses to participate in the survey? What to do when a person refuses to answer a specific question?

Further, is the enumerator reporting responses accurately? Is the enumerator actually answering the questions and turning in the data as if they were the answers provided by the respondent? Are the sampling errors correctly calculated?

Regarding the polls taken to determine voter preferences the media almost without exception does not report the number of respondents who answered "undecided."

This exclusionary practice can have an important impact on how the data are reported to the public and can mislead as to who is the front runner. Assume that 400 persons are included in the sample and they respond (in alphabetical order) as follows.

	Votes	Percent Distribution	
		excluded	included
	(1)	(2)	(3)
Bush	17	5.9	4.2
Carson	13	4.5	3.2
Cruz	79	27.2	19.8
Kasich	24	8.3	6.0
Rubio	68	23.4	17.0
Trump	89	30.7 -- #1	22.2
Undecided	110	------	27.5 -- #1

In this instance, the rank ordering changes in a most important manner. Excluding the undecideds (column 2) puts Trump first. Including them (column 3) puts the undecideds first. Indeed, including the undecideds indicates that fully 78 percent of the respondents intend to vote for someone other than Trump or have not made up their mind.

In any state where large numbers of voters make up their mind at the last minute and pollsters have excluded the undecideds in polls taken days and weeks earlier, the results misrepresent voter preferences and could have an effect on how the undecideds actually express their preferences in the voting booth.

Among all the candidates, the front runner has the greatest incentive to exclude the undecideds because it inflates his/her lead. For that reason the media ought to be required to include the undecided voters with every poll taken, and report that number especially when undecideds rank at or near the top in voter preferences.

No special effort is required to make this information available to the public. The data already are being collected. And the future of the country is at stake.

Paraphrasing what Mark Twain said about lies, damned lies, and statistics, there are polling data, damned polling data, and political strategists.

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