

Using Polling Data

Goal: Public opinion polls help us identify target audiences for our campaign. Without researching public opinion, funds can be wasted on the wrong audience or by using an ineffective message.

The Role of Polls in Politics

Polling provides insight into how different demographic groups may view an issue or candidate. They can also be used to test the efficacy of a message or campaign strategy on a **sample** (selected group) of real voters. There are three main uses for polling results:

- 1) To understand how people view a politician or policy.**
- 2) To test how messages align with targeted voters.**
- 3) To get a feel for the current political environment.** Polling can highlight the issues that voters care about.

Who gets polled?

Scientifically conducted polls randomly select which voters to interview. This is often done by using a random dialing system to reach registered voters on their landline or cellular phone. This allows pollsters to analyze the results and then extrapolate their findings to the entire population of voters. However, the percentage of people who answer their phones is much lower now than ever before, often leading to a limited sample.

Targeted Polling

Targeted or tracking polls are used to understand how certain demographic groups will likely respond to campaign messaging or to specific policy positions.

Polling Limitations

Margin of Error: Only a small sample of the population is being polled, so there is a **margin of error** percentage in any poll. For example, a poll may show that 60% of those polled held a favorable view with a +/-5% margin of error. This means that 55-65% of the population could actually hold this view.

Confirmation Bias: When created by a campaign or political group, polls often serve to confirm that groups' view. Questions may be asked in a way that influences the responses to be favorable to that group/individual.

Polling Technologies: With the advent of cellular phones, a shift away from landlines, and methods for screening incoming calls, some polling firms report response rates as low as 3-5%. Low response rates make it challenging to get a **representative sample** and leads to higher margins of error and bias in the polls.

Alternative Public Opinion Metrics

Polling is expensive. Many politicians also attempt to use online metrics and data to understand public opinion. Metrics such as signatures to online petitions, Google search data, and clickstream data from a campaign website can be used to assess the effectiveness of a campaign or message with different demographic groups. These methods, however, have even higher levels of error than polling.

How to Use Polling Data

At PurpleState, we use polling to identify target groups of likely voters and to locate where they may reside in the state.

1) Closely read the polling question. Then identify the overall favorable/unfavorable or support/oppose trends and the percentage of undecided (Don't Know).

2) Identify the demographics of undecided voters using the **cross tabs** in the **polling report**. These may be indicated by a response such as "don't know." Undecided groups are generally the key target audience for a **persuasion** campaign.

3) Then, identify which groups have the highest levels of support and opposition on the issue. This information is also important in a campaign focused on **mobilization**.

4) You can identify the location of these groups using the **PurpleState Map Tool**.

Polling Report: State Taxpayer Incentives for Corporations

Polling Question: The state is providing up to 3 billion dollars of taxpayer money to Foxconn as an incentive to locate the plant in Wisconsin and potentially provide 13,000 jobs for residents. Do you think the state giving 3 billion dollars of taxpayer money to Foxconn provides more benefit to the state?

Overall

Will provide more benefit to state	State is paying more than plant is worth	Don't Know	Refuse
30%	47%	22%	1%

Crosstab Results

Politics	Will provide more benefit to state	State is paying more than plant is worth	Don't Know	Refuse
Republican	57%	20%	22%	0
Independent	34%	47%	18%	1%
Democrat	15%	69%	15%	0
Other	13%	53%	34%	0