

LIGHTSPEED

Are opinion polls always wrong?

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VP Innovation

Lightspeed Research

Are polls always wrong?

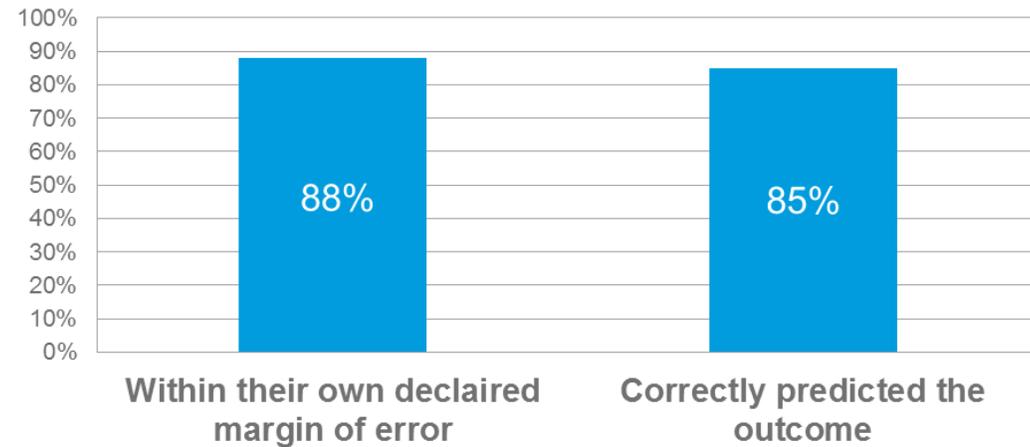
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Kantar research published by ESOMAR

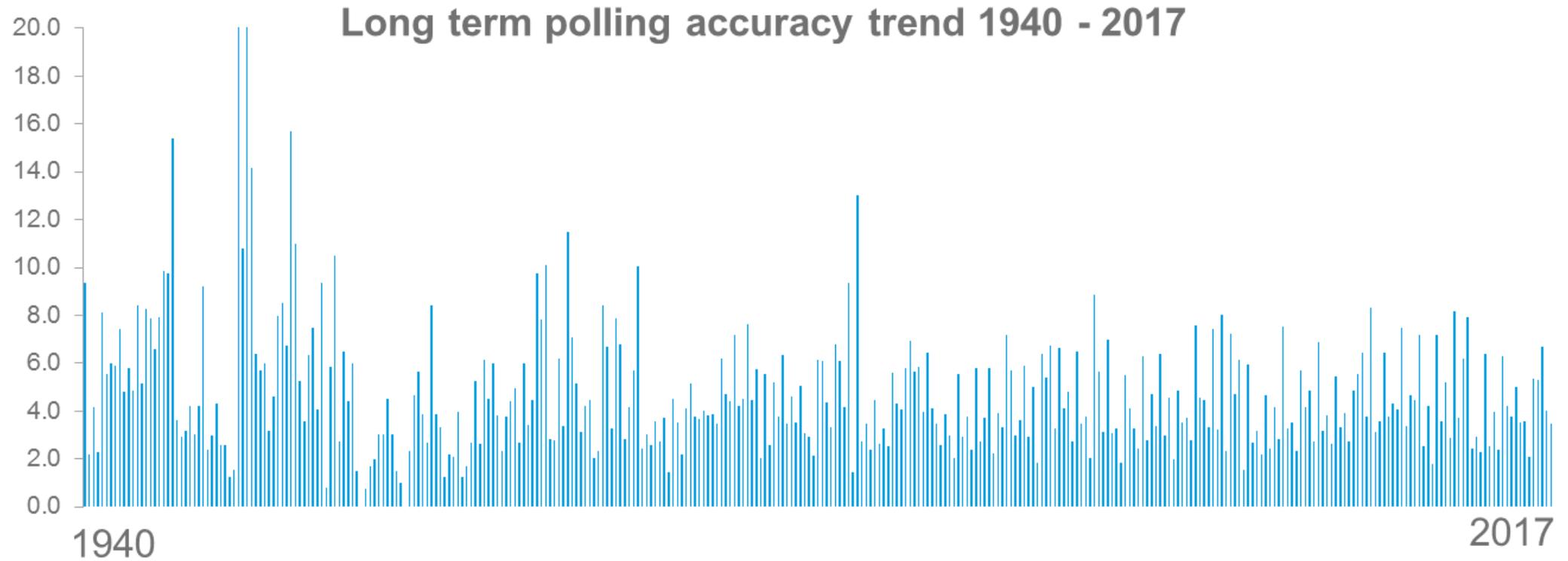
- Analysed 30,040 polls from 479 voting events across 40 countries spanning 1940 - 2017
- Spoke to 30+ polling experts in 15 different countries

85% of polls correctly predict the outcome

The accuracy of polls conducted within seven days before an election



No obvious decline in the accuracy of polling either



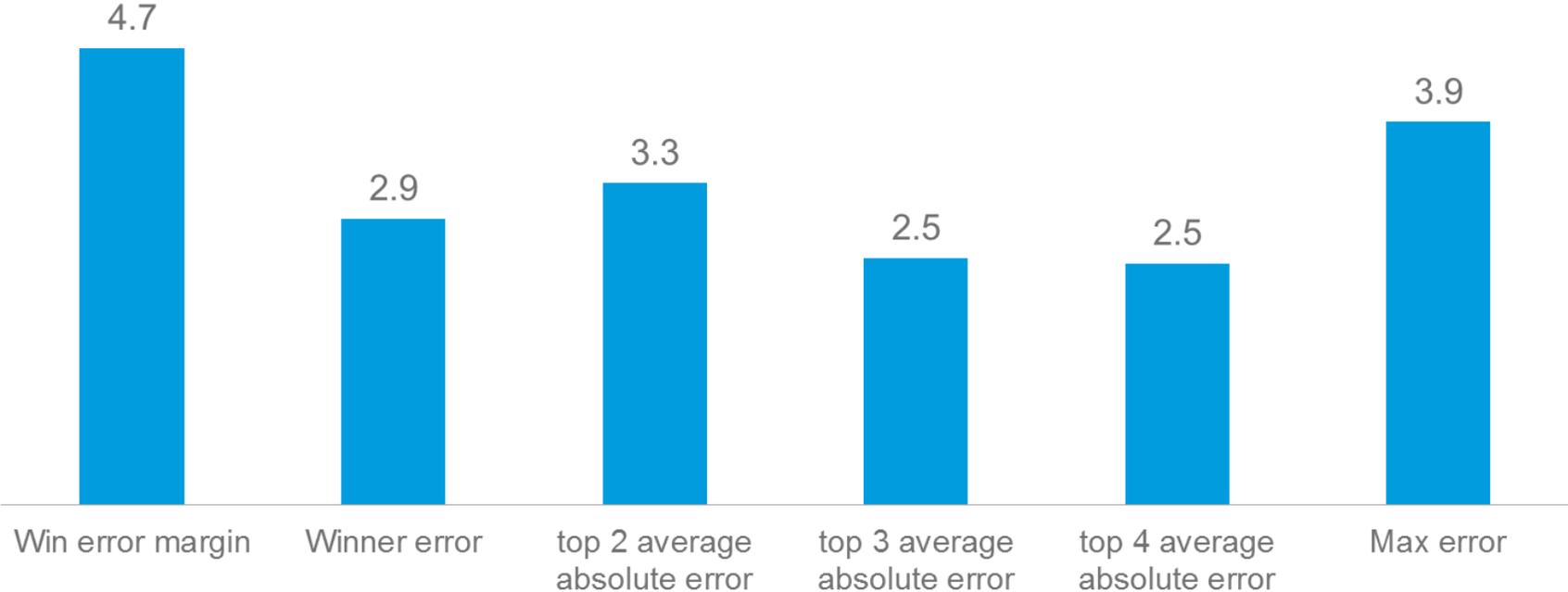
Are they all comparable?

Comparing is difficult

Lots of Different ways of measuring election “errors”...

1. **Win Error:** The error in measuring the share of vote of the winning party or candidate e.g. if the polls estimated the winner would get 55% of the vote and the end result was 57% the win error would be 2%
2. **Win Margin Error:** The size of the gap between the first and second place parties in the vote compared to the poll.
3. **Average Absolute Error:** the average size of error (be it positive or negative) of the top parties' or candidates' votes. This could be the top two, three or four parties or all parties gaining over a certain share of vote.
4. **Average Absolute Marginal Error:** The absolute size of margin error between each of the main parties or candidates which is then averaged.
5. **Max Error:** The largest single measured error of any party or candidate
6. **Outcome Error:** Simply whether or not the poll predicted the outcome

And they all give different results!



Different countries tend to use different methods to critically evaluate polling results

- US Presidential election → Winner error
- European Multi party elections → Average Absolute Errors

ESOMAR have publish comparison tables to enable different scales of errors to be compared

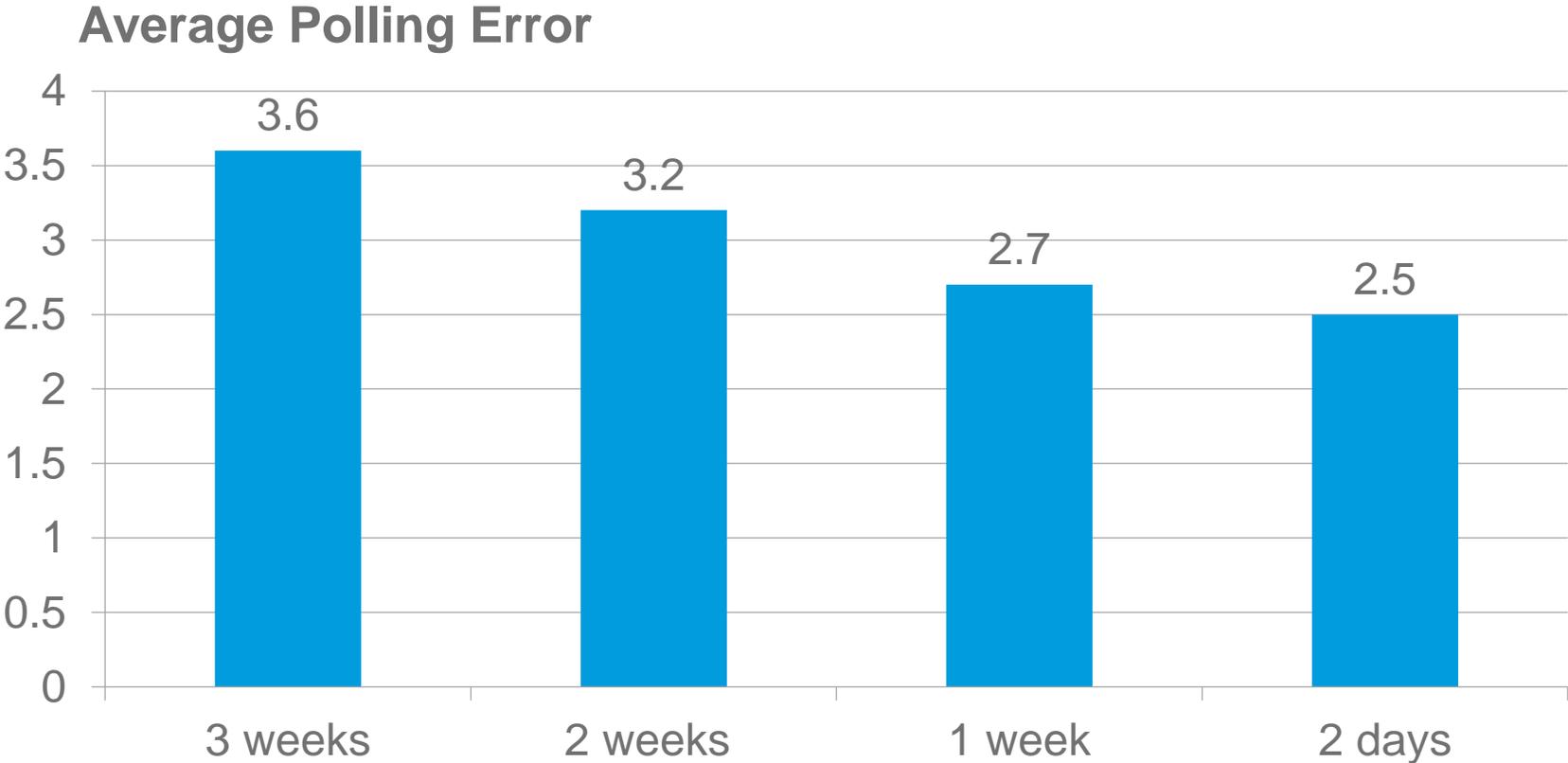
	Percentile	Winner error	Win error margin	top 4 average absolute error	Max error	Mid campaign top 4 error
Smallest error  Largest error	0-5%	0.1	0.2	0.4	0.6	0.5
	5-10%	0.3	0.6	0.8	1.2	0.9
	10-15%	0.5	1.0	1.0	1.6	1.1
	15-20%	0.8	1.3	1.2	1.9	1.4
	20-25%	1.0	1.7	1.5	2.3	1.6
	25-30%	1.3	2.1	1.7	2.6	1.8
	30-35%	1.5	2.5	1.9	3.0	2.0
	35-40%	1.8	2.9	2.1	3.3	2.3
	40-45%	2.1	3.5	2.3	3.7	2.5
	45-50%	2.4	4.0	2.5	4.0	2.8
	50-55%	2.7	4.6	2.8	4.4	3.1
	55-60%	3.2	5.2	3.1	4.9	3.4
	60-65%	3.6	5.9	3.4	5.3	3.6
	65-70%	4.1	6.7	3.7	5.8	3.9
	70-75%	4.7	7.6	4.0	6.3	4.2
	75-80%	5.3	8.7	4.3	6.9	4.5
	80-85%	6.1	10.0	4.8	7.8	5.0
	85-90%	7.1	11.8	5.5	8.9	5.7
	90-95%	8.6	14.7	6.5	11.0	6.8
	95-100%	14.5	23.2	9.8	16.4	10.0

We recommend for comparison purposes the Absolute Error of the top 4 parties

Are all polls around the world equally reliable?

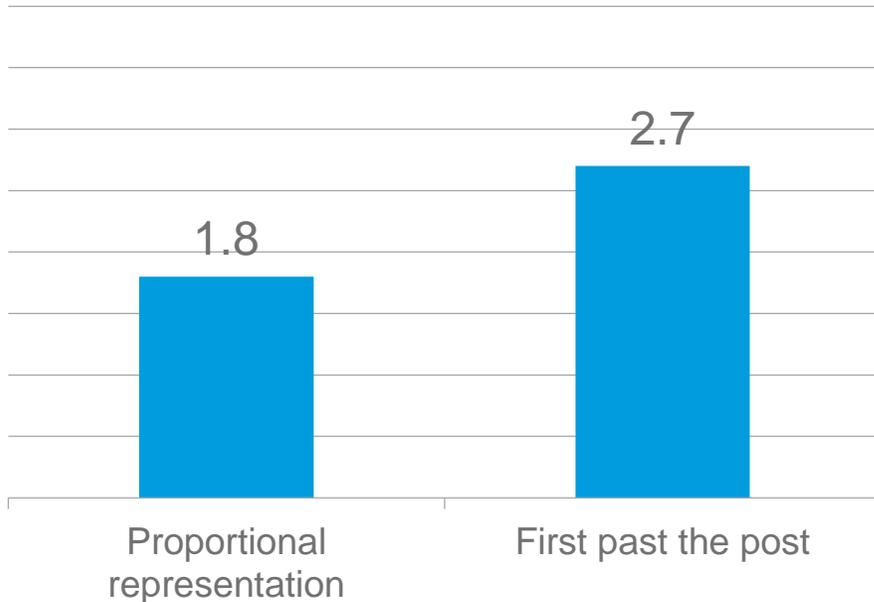
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The closer polls are conducted to the election the more accurate they will be



The accuracy of polling varies dramatically by the type of election

PR v First past the post



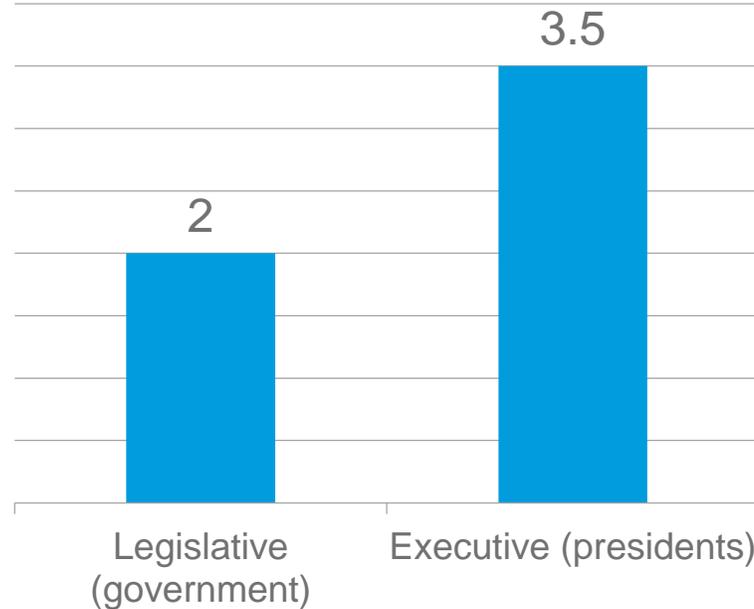
Proportional representation

First past the post



Less of a need for tactical voting in PR elections

Party v people



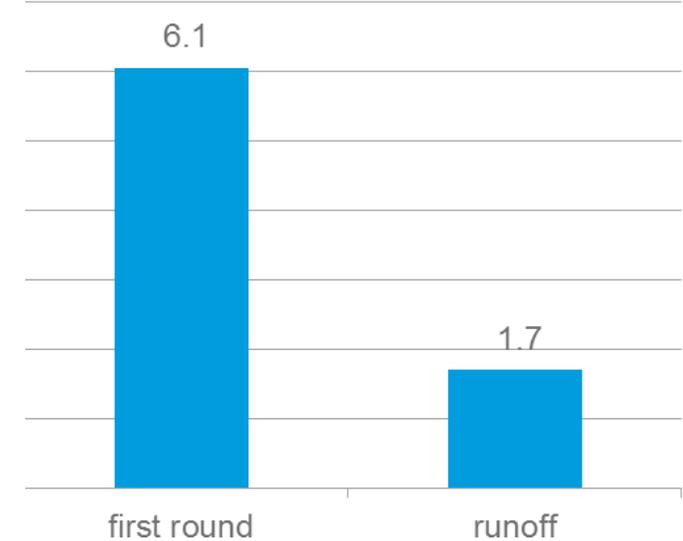
Legislative (government)

Executive (presidents)



More historical data on parties for pollsters to work with

Round of vote



first round

runoff



A lot of last minute tactical voting

What are some of the common causes of polling errors?

1. Shy voter issues
2. Sampling difficulties
3. The difficulty of predicting if people will vote or not
4. Weighting errors
5. Differences in the number of undecided voters
6. Last minute tactical voting decisions

SHY VOTER ISSUES



Types of shy voter:

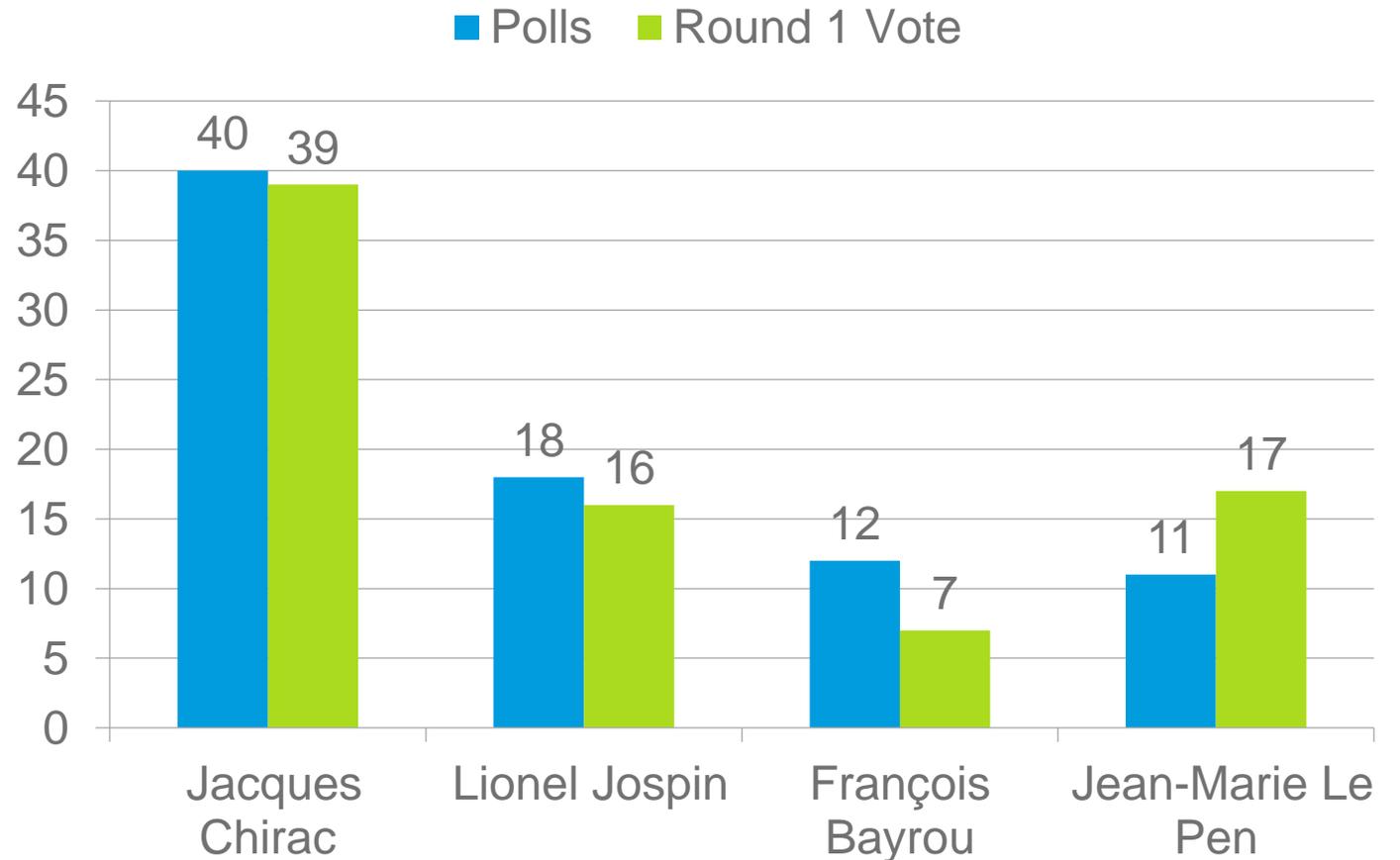
1. Those reluctant to participate in polls
2. Participants that are reluctant to say what they think
3. Participants who say what they think people want to hear
4. Participants who say what they want to hear themselves

Shy voting

- Tends to impact on the voting data for extreme left and right parties - their numbers can be under represented in polls.
- As these are normally fringe parties shy voting issue are generally benign

Shy voting can have a dramatic impact in some elections

2002 French Presidential primary election where the pollsters spotted the rise of the Jean-Marie Le Pen's Front National



...and probably more famously the 2016 US election



~7% swing
In last 2 weeks

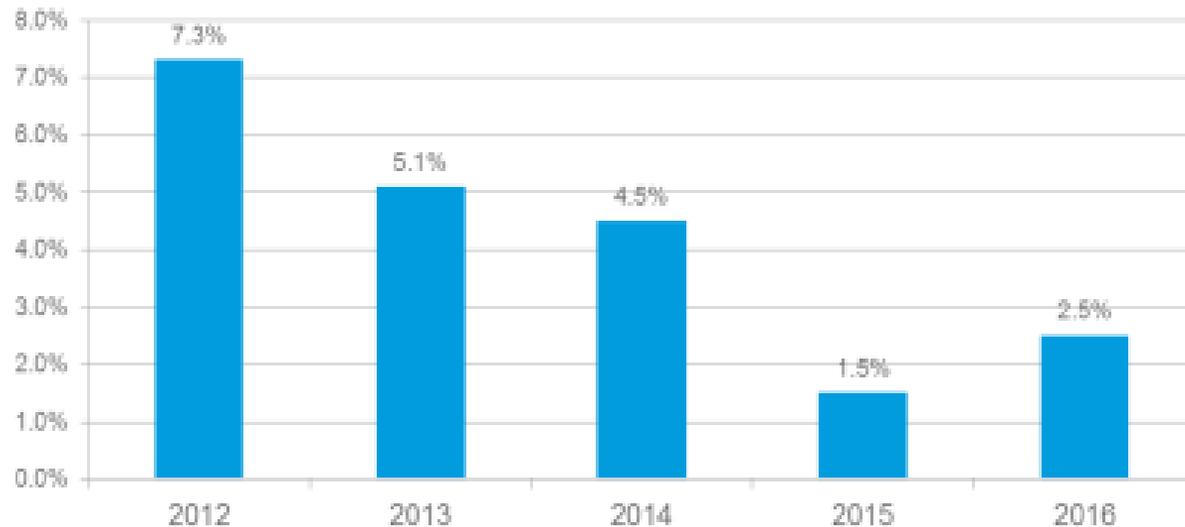


Shy Republicans avoided taking part in polls during “pussygate” -5%

The impact of this was that many mid-election polls presented a false picture of how big Hilary Clinton’s lead actually was.

Pollsters have developed a range of quite sophisticated techniques to account for shy voting

French Pollsters have been Tracking shy voters elections since 2012



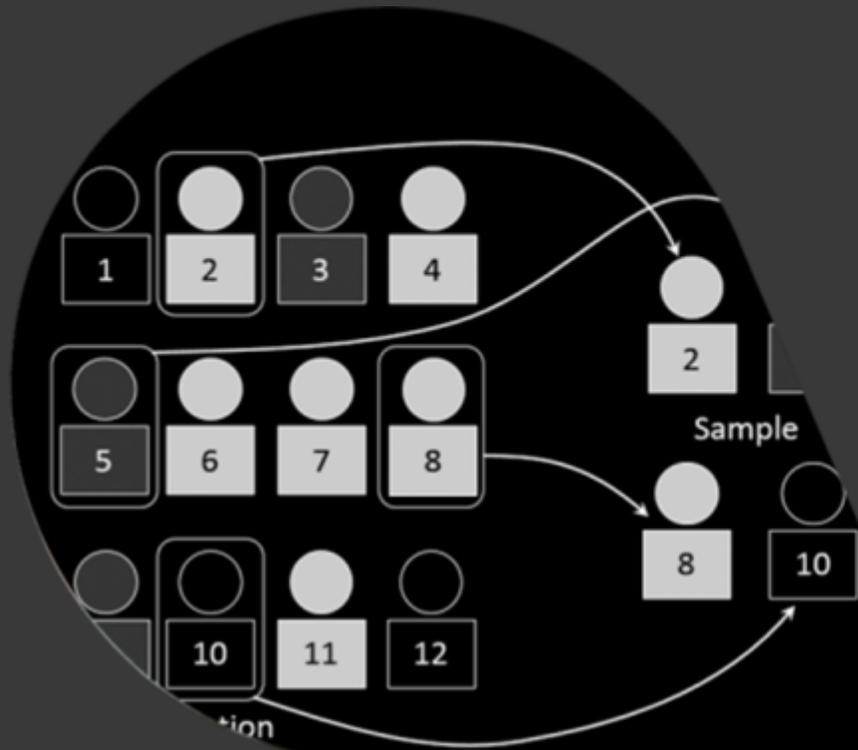
French method = who did you vote for in the last election and comparing to actual voter numbers for each party

Adopting the polish solution



“are you happy to express your political opinions amongst your friends and family?”

Urszula Krassowska, Kantar Public, Poland



SAMPLING *i*SSUES

The difficulties in reaching the voting population

Challenges with different sampling methods

Face to face

- The most reliable but also most costly & time consuming
- Hard to reach some of the more active members of society who are not in when interviewers calls
- Subject to human interview biases

CATI

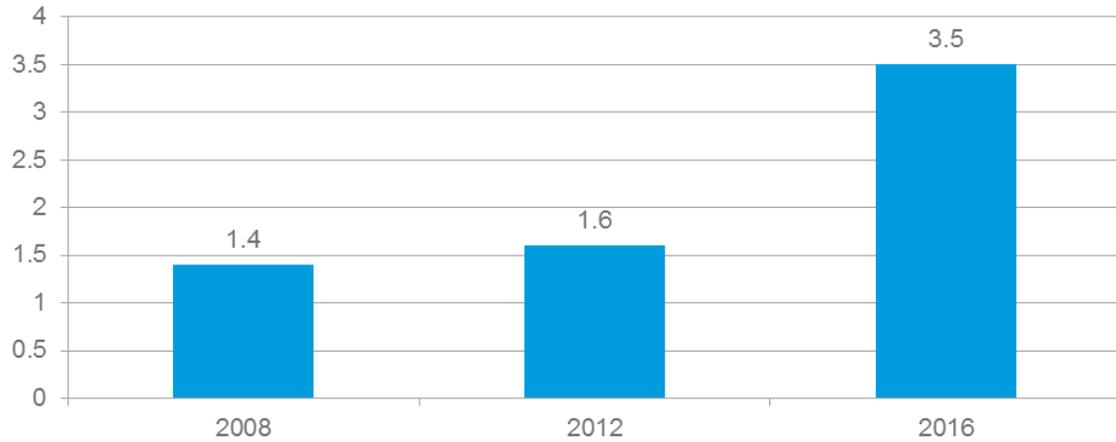
- Suffering from declining response rate <10% which introducing Non-response biases
- Human interviewer bias effects
- Growth of mobile phones making geo-demographic targeting difficult

Online

- Difficulty in reaching older demographic groups in some countries
- Self selecting: Those participating can be more politically engaged
- Not all panels are designed for political polling. Online panels need to be regionally balanced for political use and many commercial research panels are not.
- More honest answer, less over claim
- Faster and becoming more reliable than phone polling

The growing challenge of phone polling, driving a shift to online

US Average State level polling error

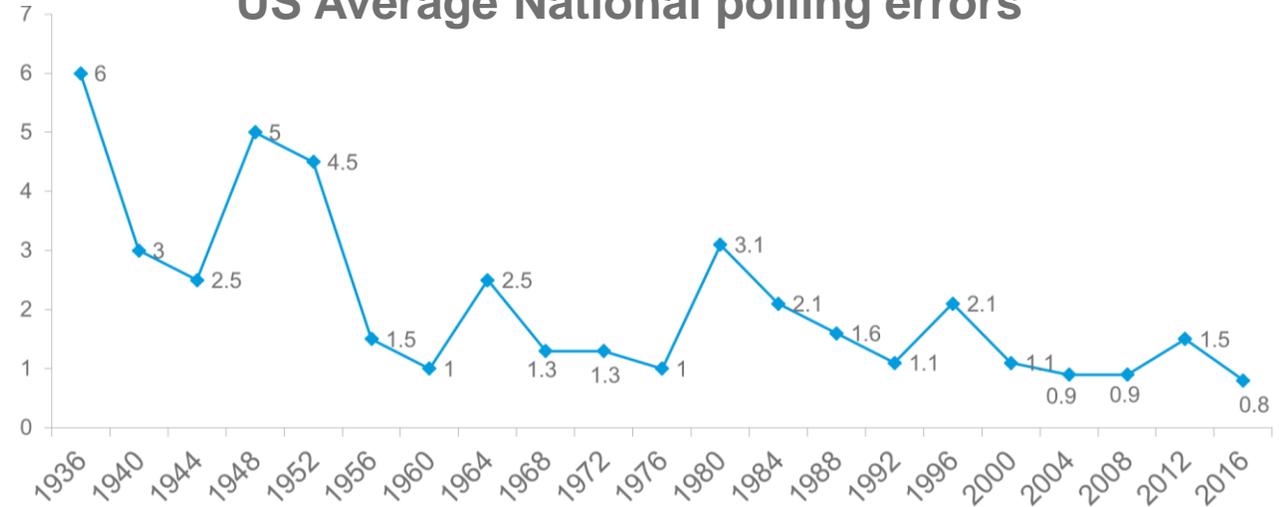


Phone polling

Phone polling

Phone polling

US Average National polling errors



Face to face



Phone



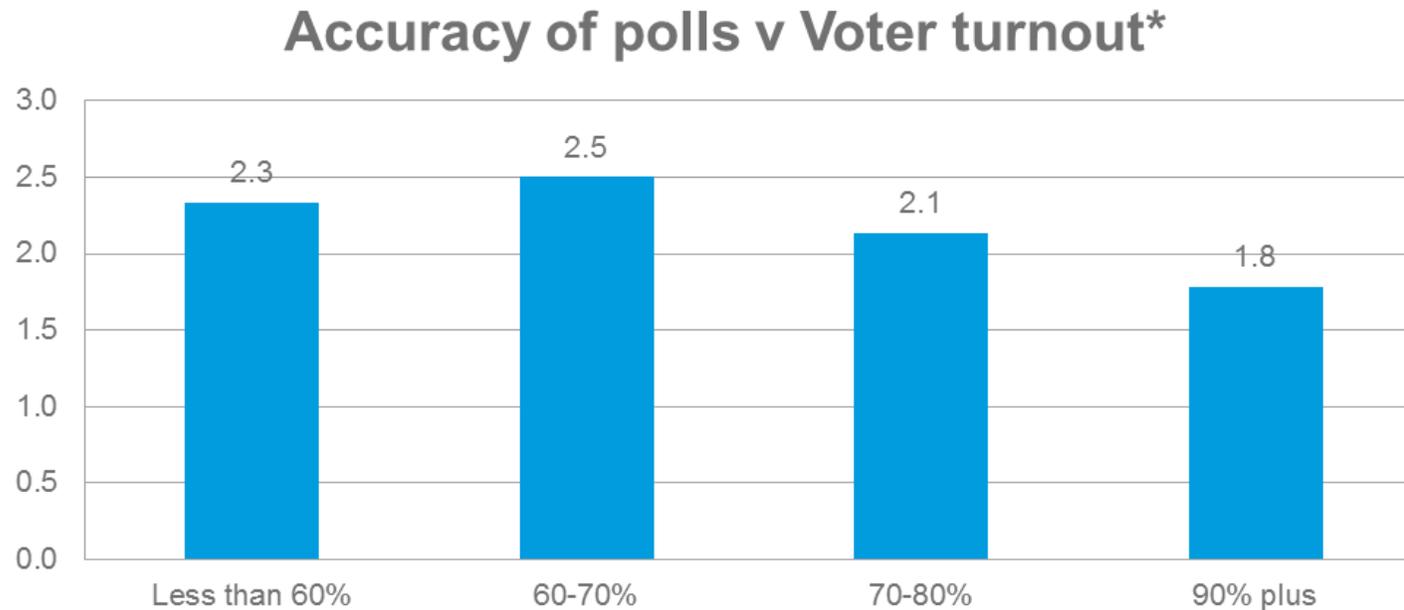
Online



WILL THEY VOTE

Working out if people will actually vote is as much of a challenge as working out who they will vote for

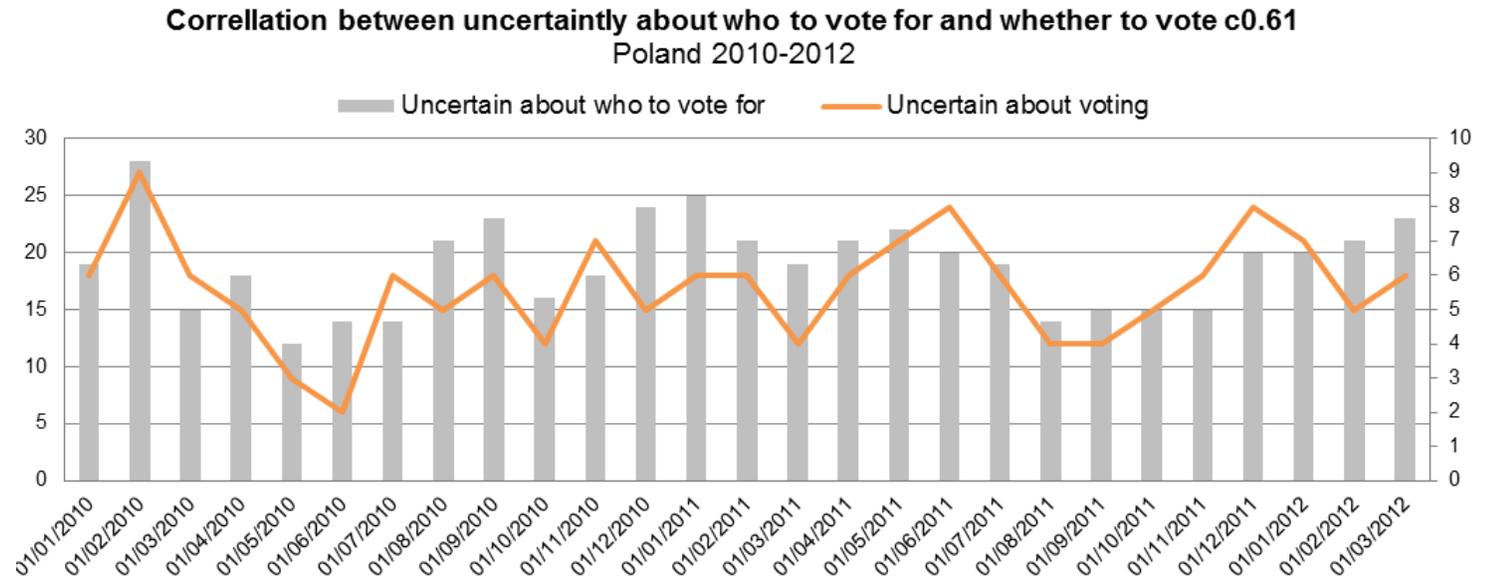
The overall accuracy of polls is linked to how many people vote in an election



Polling is harder in elections with lower voter turnout

Predicting if someone will vote is much harder than measuring who they will vote for.

- Unless compulsory, the number of voters can vary dramatically from one election to the next
- Propensity to vote varies age group, by demographic and by party
- It is linked to whether or not you know who to vote for and how passionate you are about voting for a particular party or candidate





WEIGHTING iSSUES

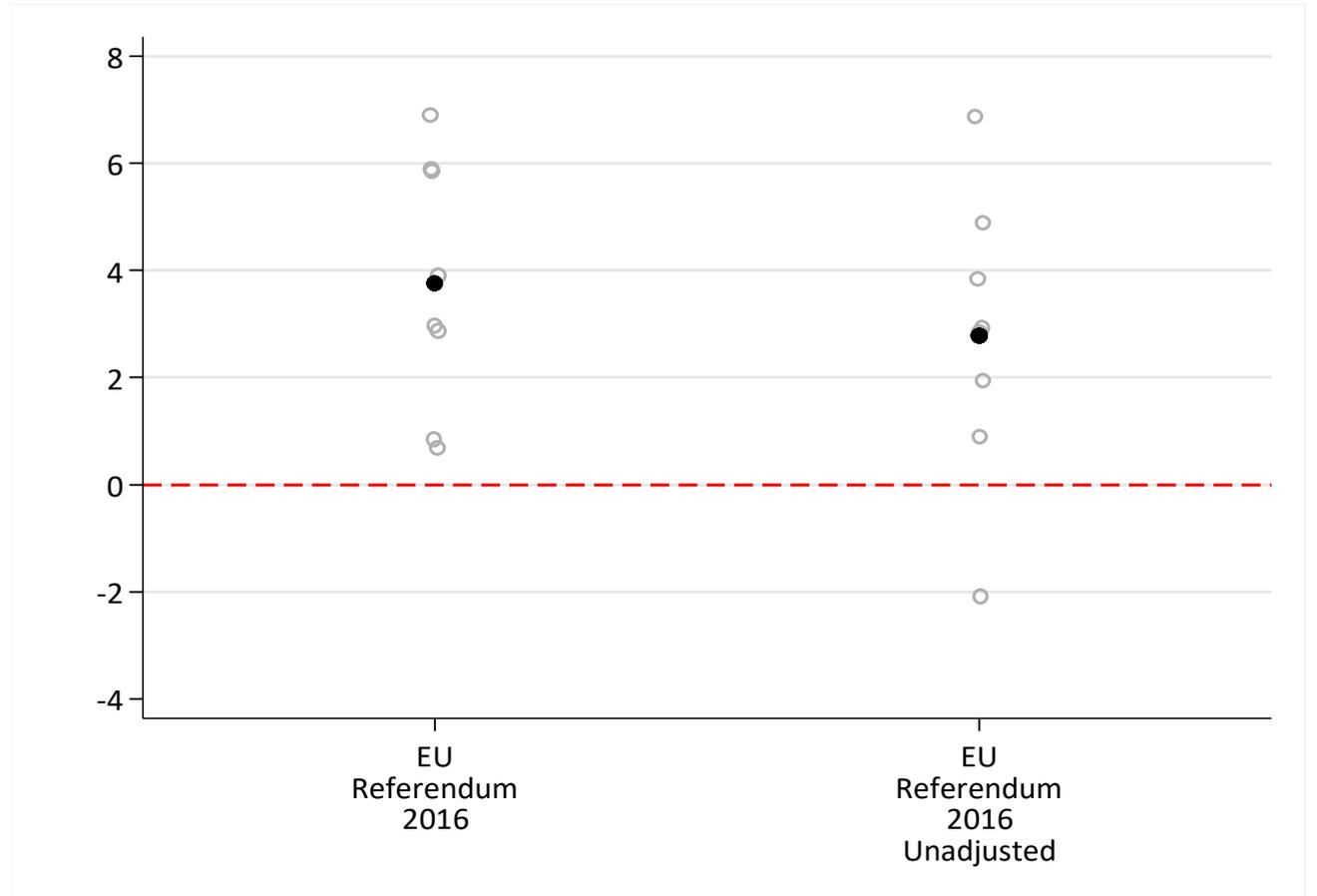
Weighting issues

- Reliant on robust voter population statistics which are not always available in some countries
- A dark art: Methods of weighting are often guarded secrets so a lack of transparency can be an issue
- Requires a skilled statisticians to do effectively
- Requires a very level headiness - all too easy to make tweaks to align your data with the crowd

Confirmation bias of pollsters



The tinkering pollster



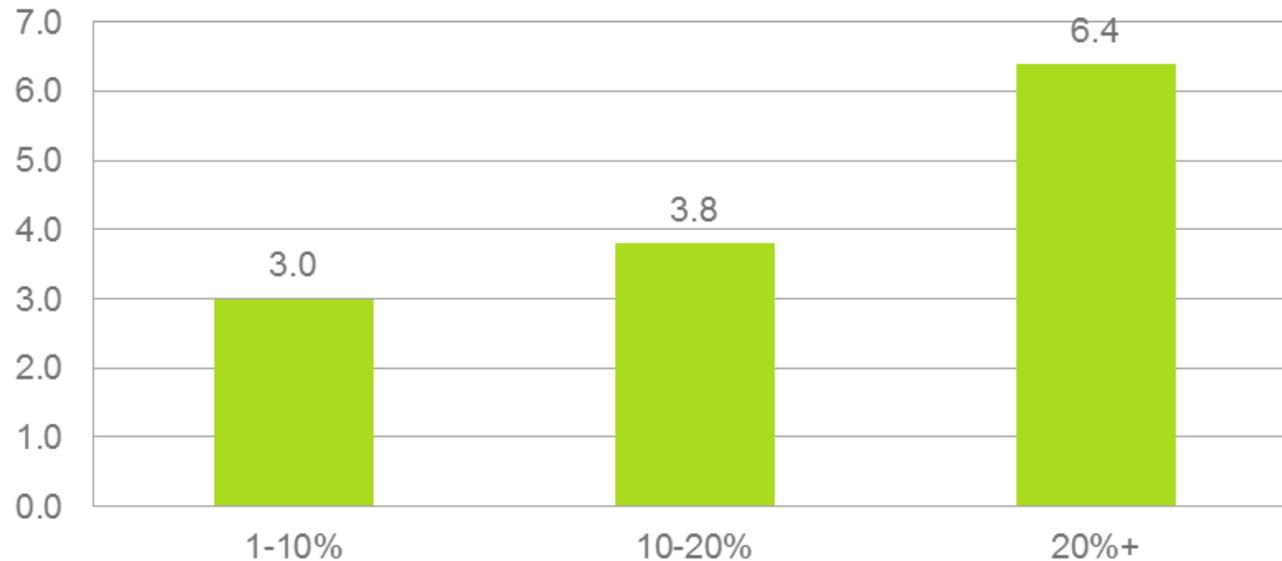


THE UNDECIDED

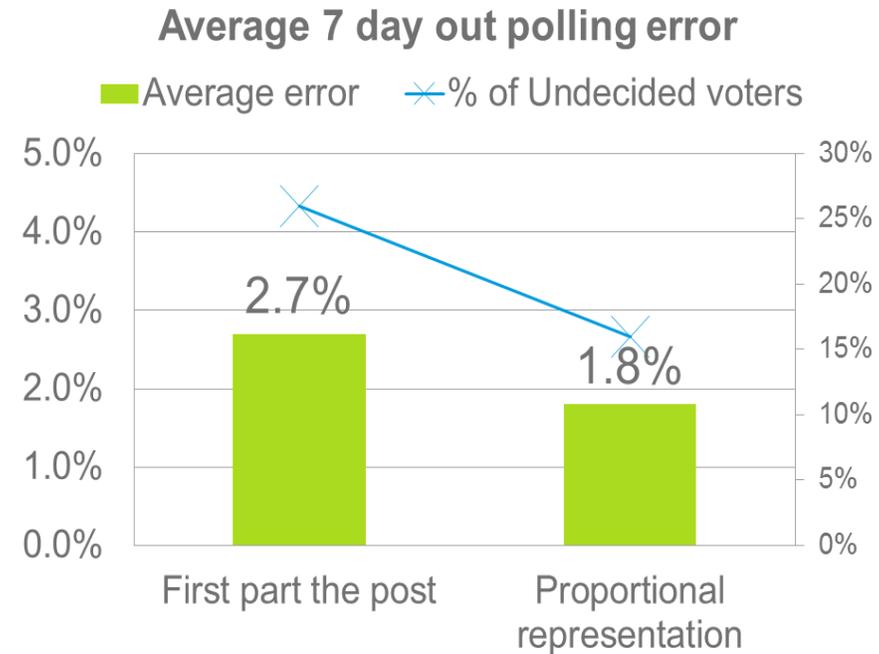
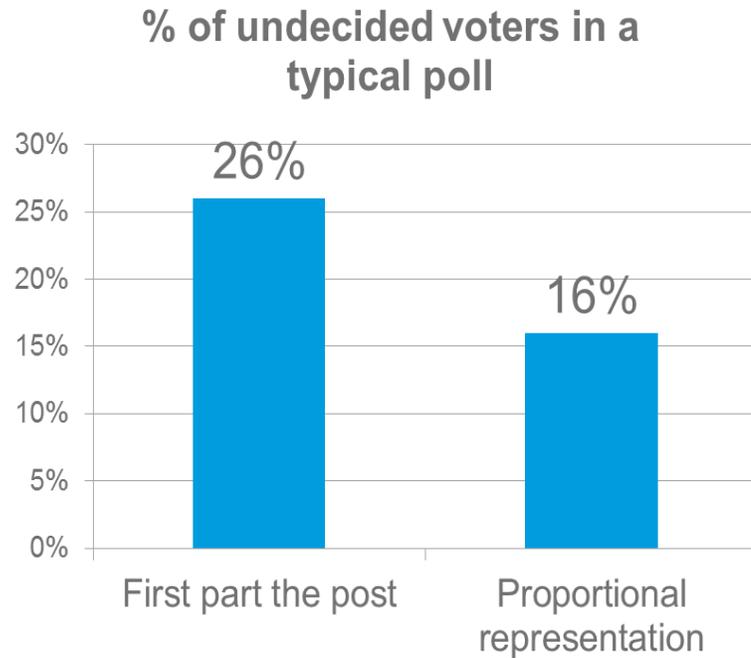
The trouble voters have in making up their minds

Election with higher numbers of undecided voters are likely to have larger polling errors

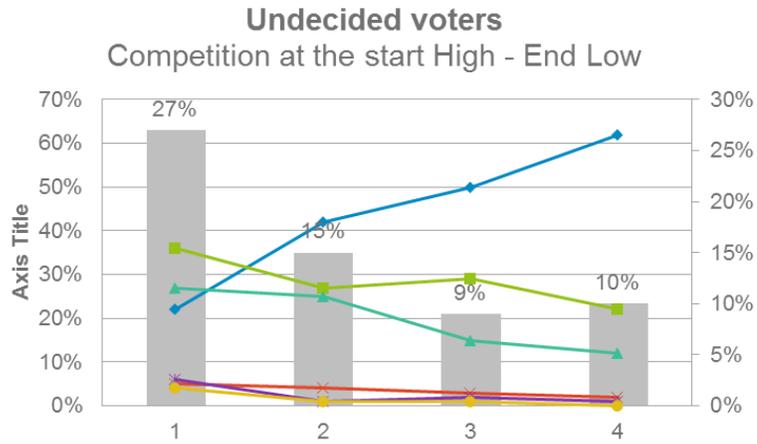
7 day out accuracy of polls based on the % of undecided voters



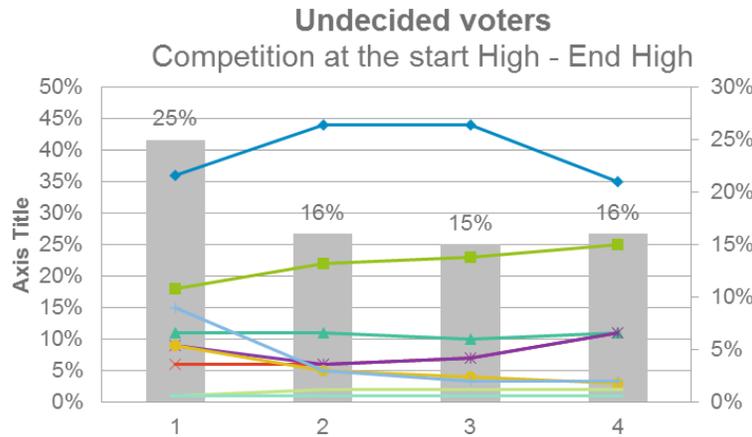
Different types of elections have different numbers of undecided voters



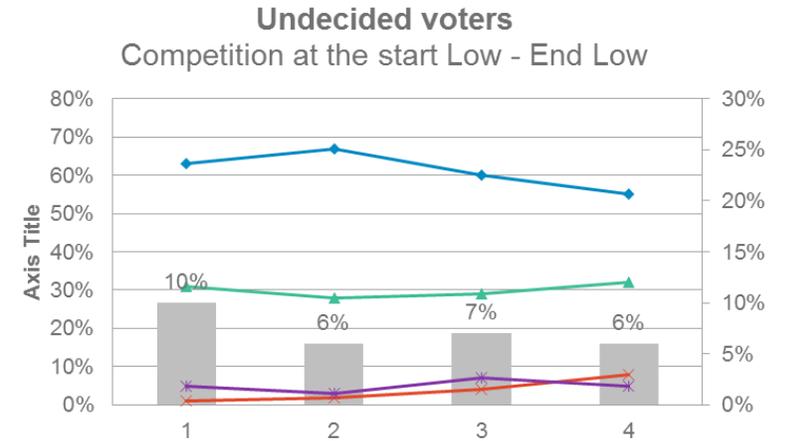
Levels of undecided is linked to the difficulty in making a decision...



Polling error = 2%



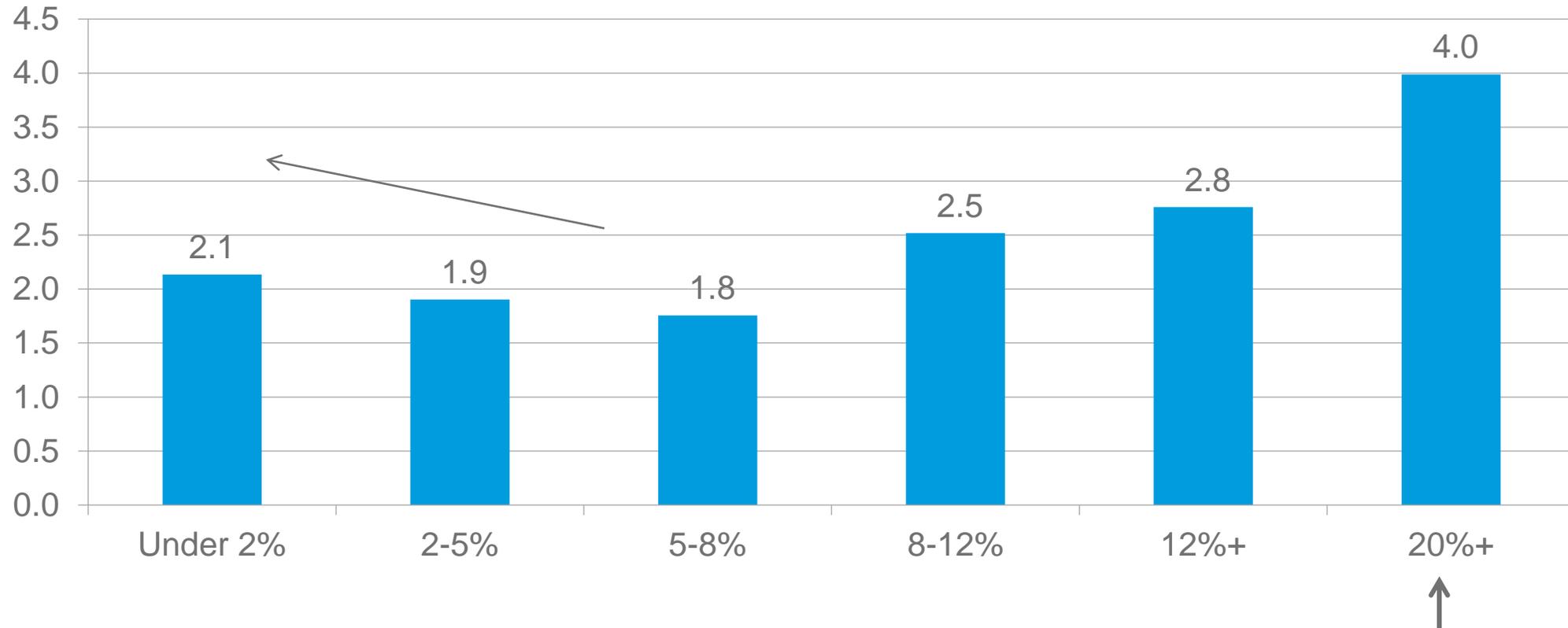
Polling error = 4%



Polling error = 1%

This means that tight elections where there are more undecided voters can have slightly higher errors than less tight elections

Error based on margin of victory



...and at the other end of the extreme where the vote is a foregone conclusion more people feel they have the luxury to either not bothering voting or casting a “protest” vote.



TACTiCAL VOTING

Both decided & undecided can change their mind & make last minute strategic voting decisions

Many voters don't make up their minds until the very last minute

Data from exit polling in Germany

German election		When did you made your decision?		
		on election day or in last days	last weeks	longer before & vote always the same
General Election 98	N=20.596	25%	12%	53%
General Election 02	N=20.482	18%	17%	61%
General Election 05	N=16.187	29%	20%	49%
General Election 09	N=15.086	33%	19%	46%
General Election 13	N=16.463	32%	20%	47%

Source: infratest dimap Exit polls

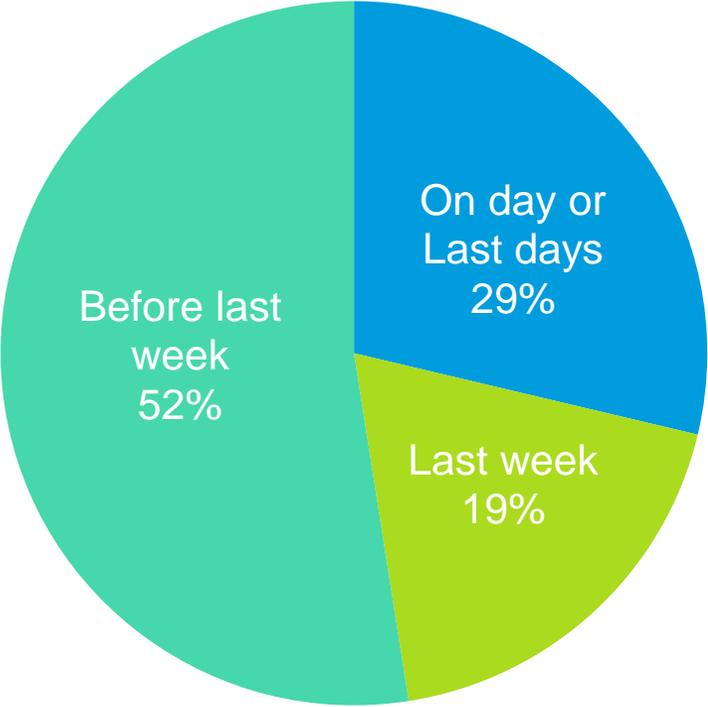
Data from 2016 US election

75% changed their mind more than once
 44% had not completely made up their mind 2 day before election

Data from 2017 UK election

20% made up mind on the day of the election itself

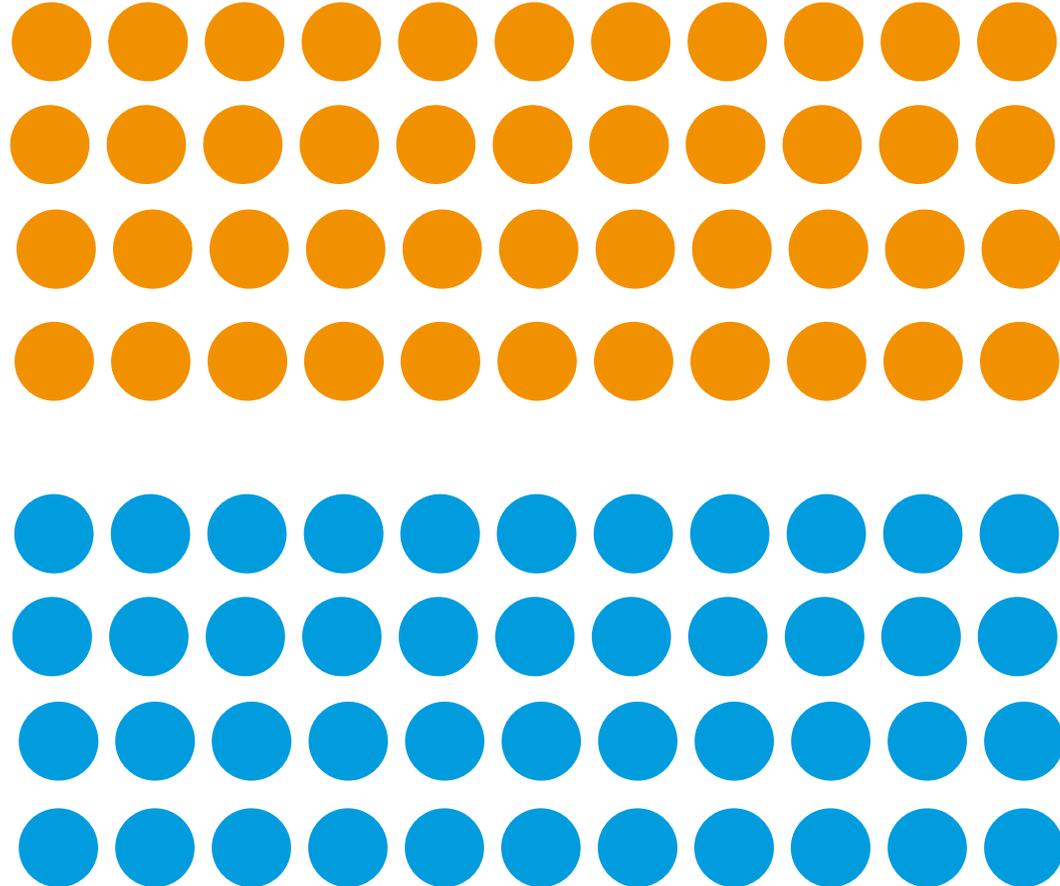
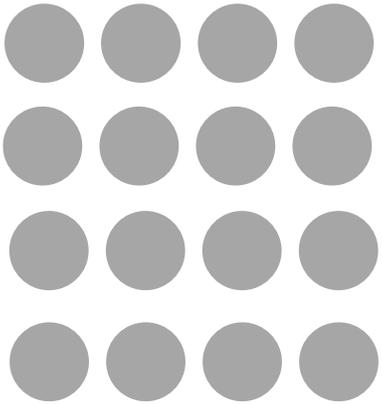
When did you make your decision?



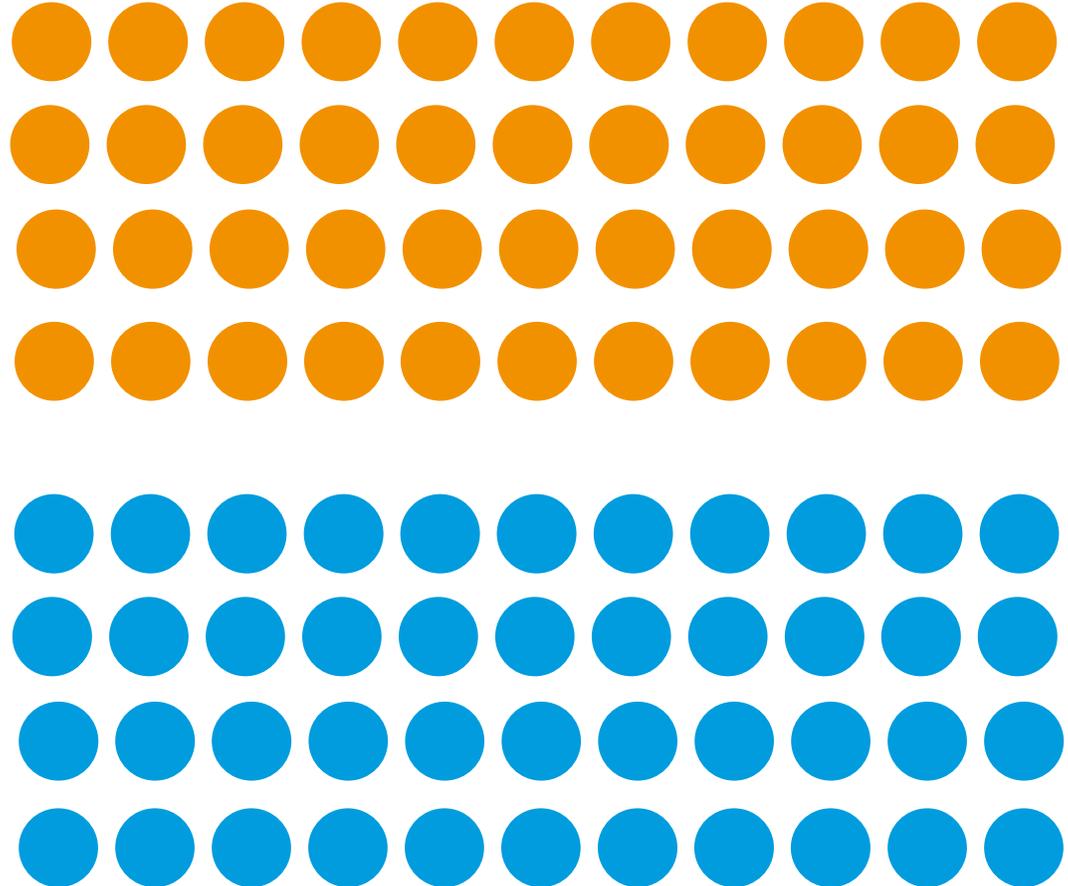
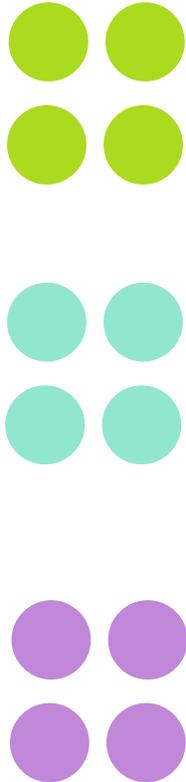
Polling information is used by voters to help people to decide

The polling embargo point, when they see what the final polls are saying is often when people finally decide who to vote for

Last minute undecided voters decisions don't tend to fall out evenly...

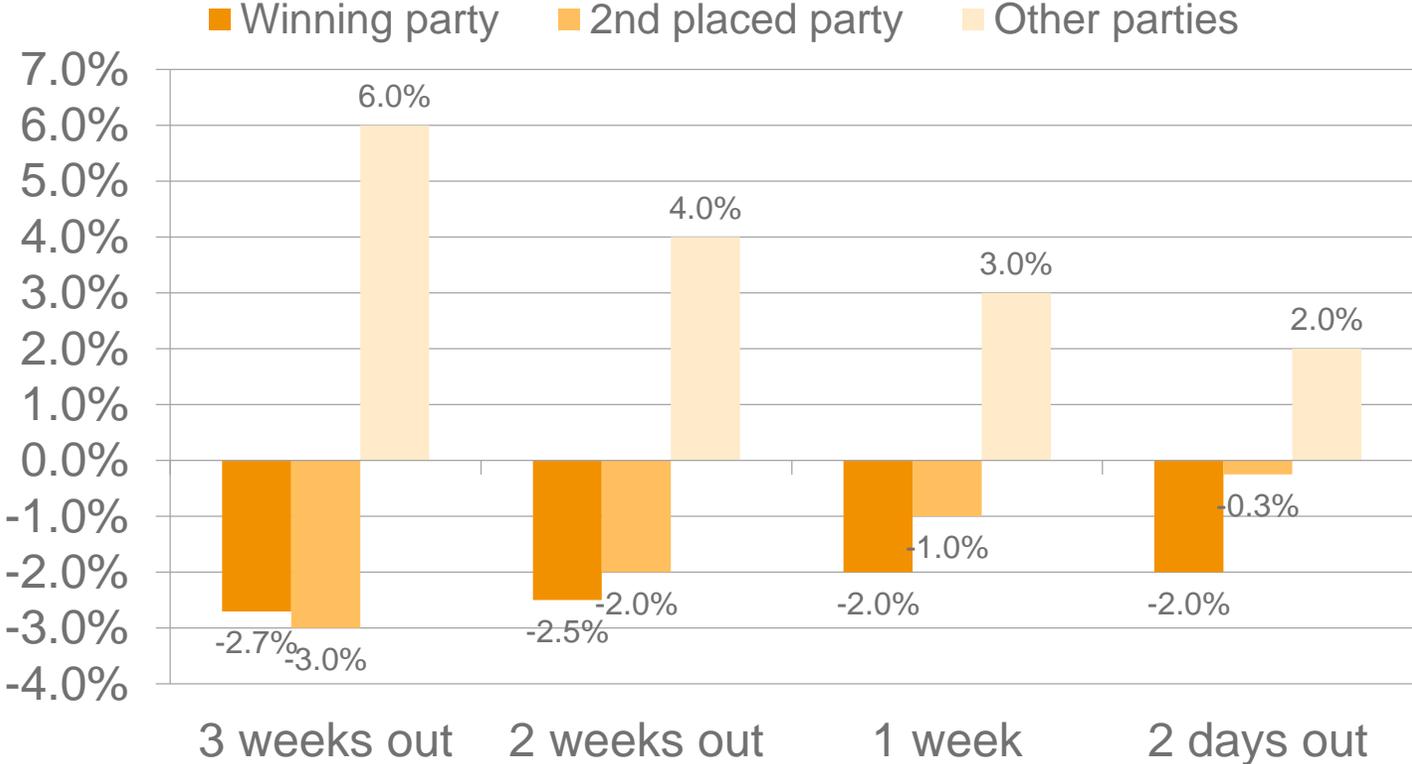


In tight races people who were planning on voting for a smaller party can jump ship at the last minute to one of the leading parties as well...



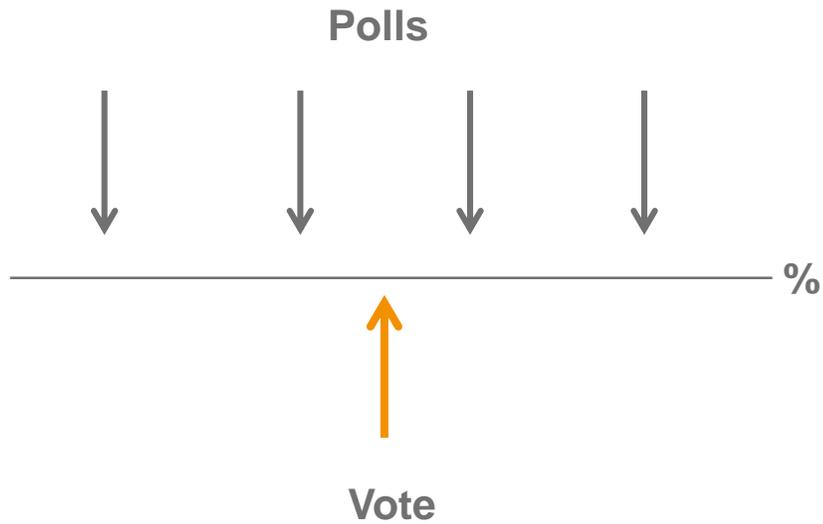
As a result there tend to be what are referred to as “directional errors”

The average size of direction errors...

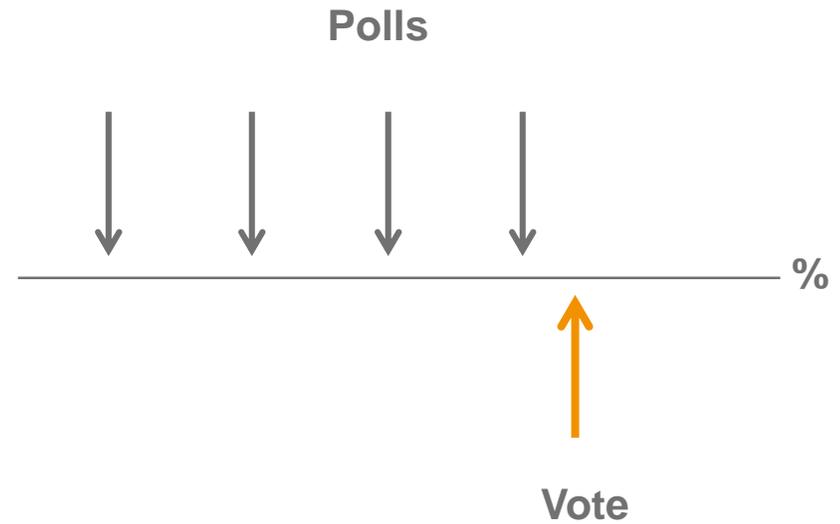


Directional errors are when all the poll errors are out in the same direction

zero directional error



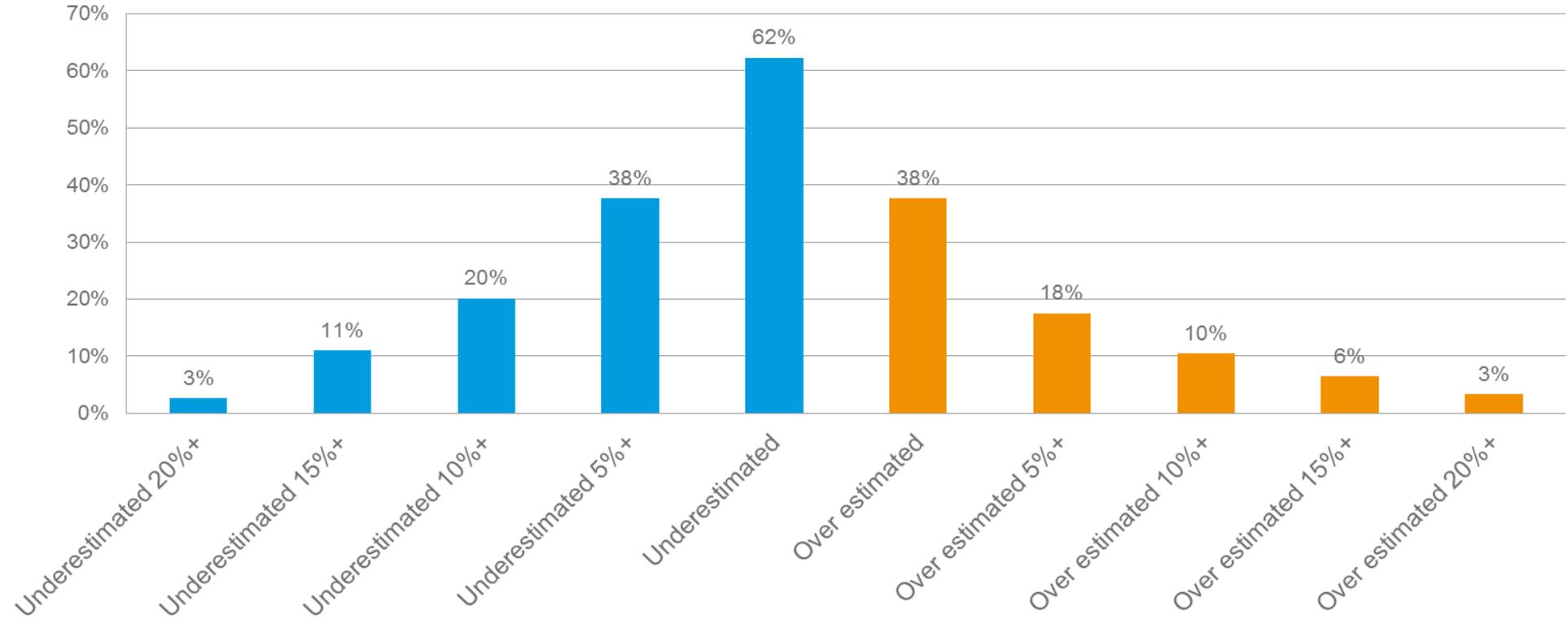
Directional error



Please don't leap to blame directional “errors” on bad polling.

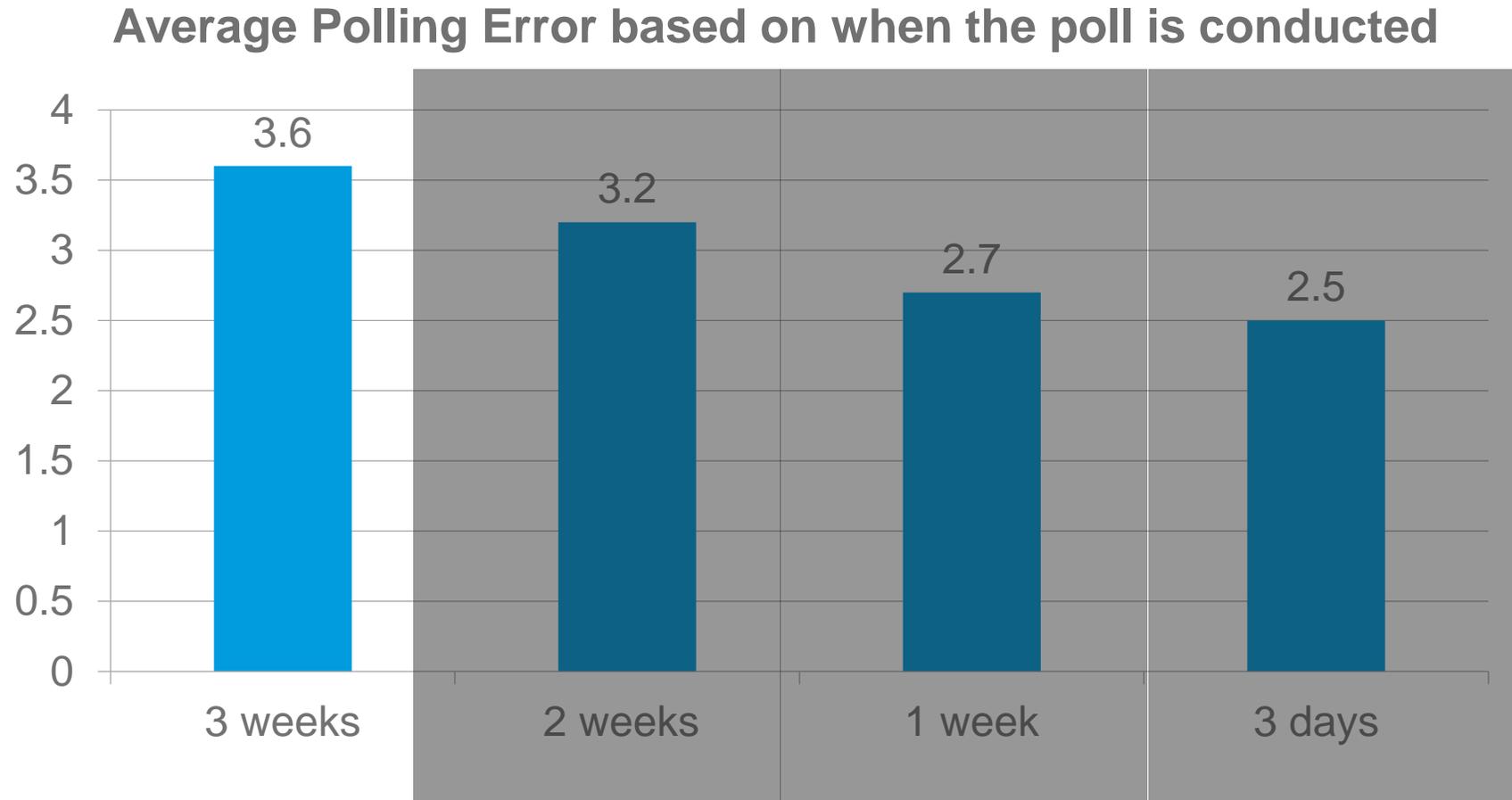
Directional errors exist in nearly all elections

7 day out polling error of leading party or candidate



In fact referring to them as errors is not very helpful. They are better described as “directional movements of opinion” between the when the average point in time when the polls were conducted and the voting event.

Considering that people do make decisions based on what the polls are saying it begs the question ...What is the value of a polling embargo periods?



If it leads to people making decisions based of miss-information

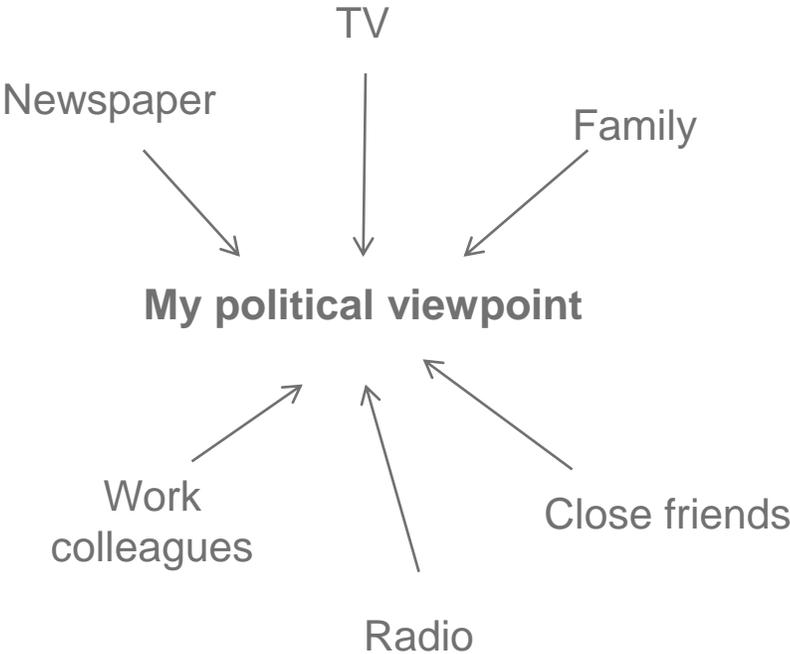
Summary

1. **85%** of polls correctly predict the outcome of elections
2. The accuracy of **polls do vary by type of election**
3. The **closer to the election the more accurate** polls become
4. **Sampling, weighting and methodological errors** can contribute to polling errors and **herding effects** can exacerbate this
5. Poll accuracy linked to the number of **undecided voters** this varies by election
6. **Voters wait till the last minute to decide**, often after the last polls have been conducted
7. **Polling results are used by voters to help make decisions** and as a result polling results tend to have directional “error”
8. These are not necessarily “errors” but **last minute movements in opinion** and demonstrate the value of polling to the democratic decision making process.

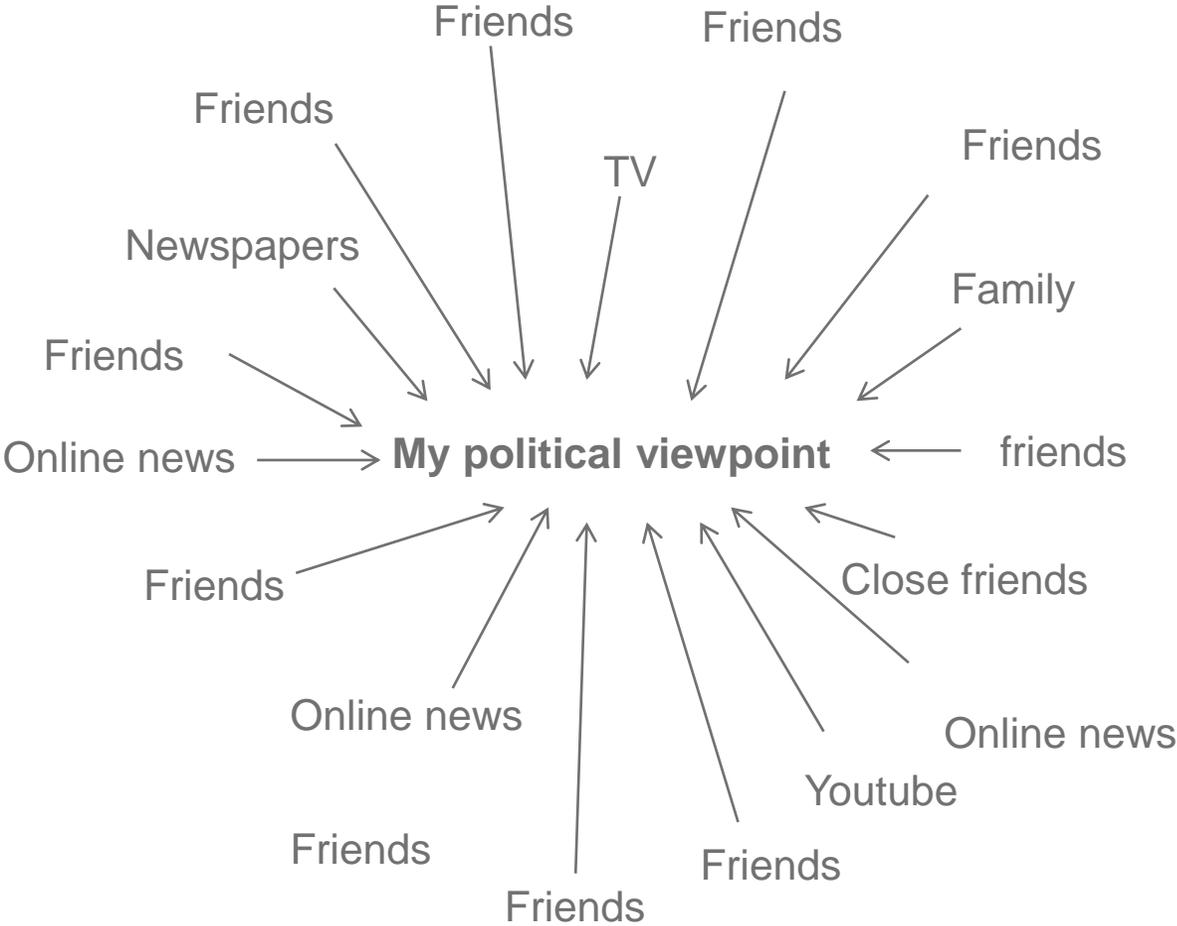
Into the future considering Wider issues

- Changes in the political landscape and how we are forming our political opinions
- Funding model for Polling – Good polling costs money

How we form political opinions is changing: Faster news cycles, more diverse influences from social media and alternative news sources



Stable



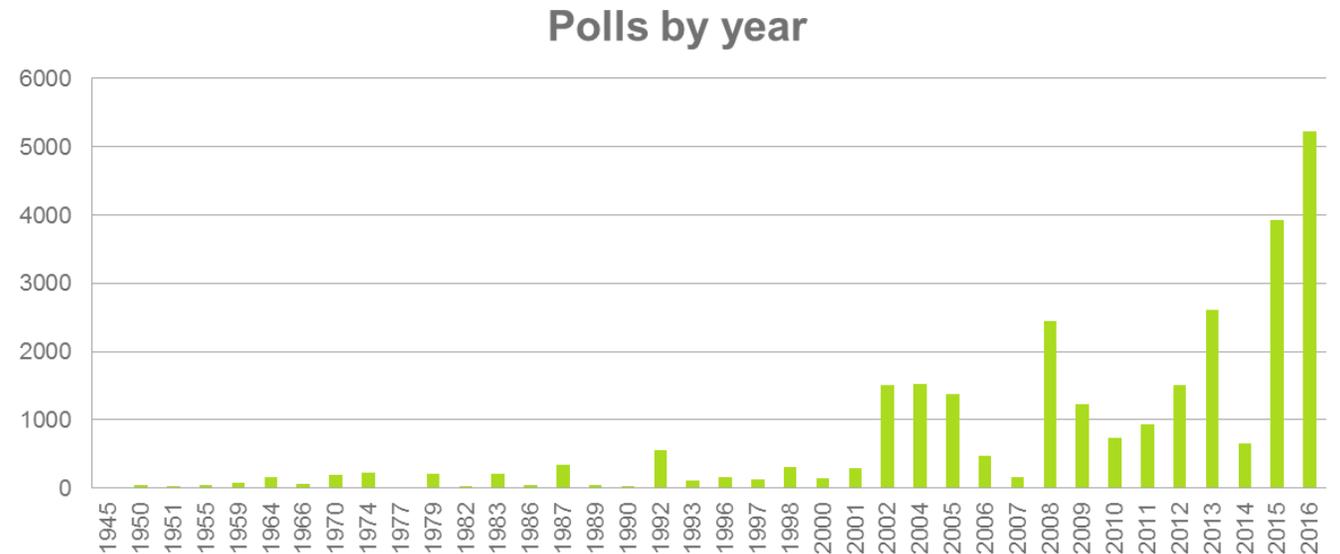
Dynamic



Marcia Cavallari, Ibopeinteligencia, Brazil, on how dynamic public opinion has become *“Back in the 1980’s, we would undertake on a three-week journey to cross the Amazon to conduct opinion polling. Very little would change over this period. It’s very different today. We conduct mayoral election polls on a Saturday for elections on a Sunday. The results can be completely transformed by a news story distributed on social media late on Saturday night.”*

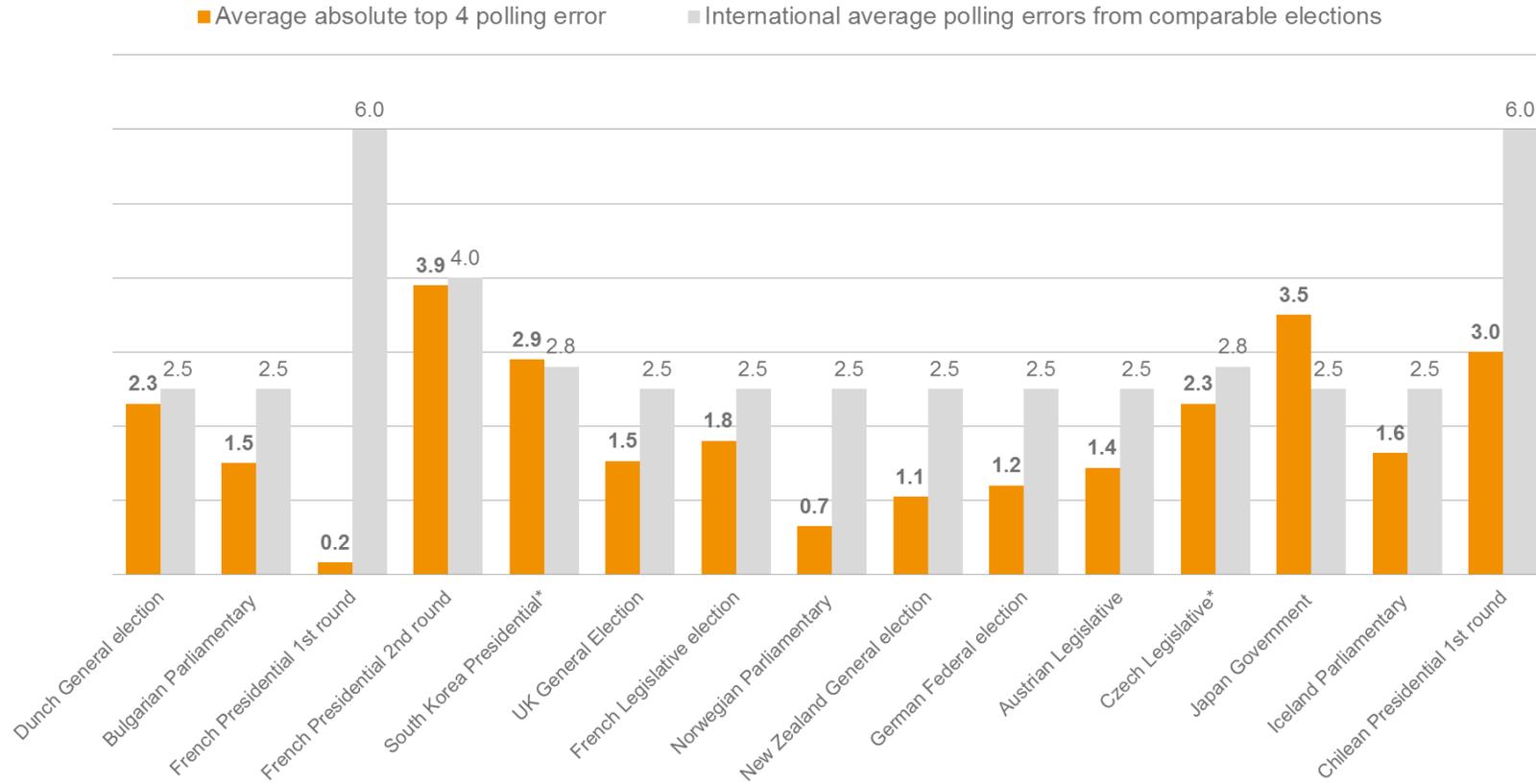
The funding model is changing: A confusion of polls

- Quality polling costs money - once was funded by the primary TV and Newspaper channels
- Today there are ever more people who want to do polling but there is less money to fund individual polls
- All too easy to do a quick unrepresentative online poll



International Pollsters are leaning from their past mistakes: IN 2017 14 out of 15 elections pollsters outperformed international performance norms

2017 Election Average Polling Errors



* For the South Korea and Czech election there is no polling data undertaken the 7 days before the election so figures are based on 2 week out poll averages