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Notes on the Center for Politics 2005 Post-Gubernatorial Election Survey¹
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Generally speaking there are three broad categories of election polls: pre-election polls, exit polls, and post-election surveys. Each presents its own distinct set of challenges: Pre-election polls must grapple with the simple fact that, in advance, we don't know which respondents will actually turn out to vote on Election Day; accordingly, sometimes-heroic efforts must be made to identify a sample of "likely" voters. Exit polls, by contrast, are by definition comprised of voters, interviewed as they are leaving their polling place. Exit polls, however, do not allow us to learn anything about a group of citizens that political scientists, journalists, and others have a decided interest in: non-voters. Nationally, exit polls almost always get the election outcome "right" because they are weighted to final election results.

Post-election surveys are essential for understanding the nature of the vote choice, the configuration of winning and losing coalitions, and especially for understanding the nature of non-voting. Such surveys are hampered by two vexing tendencies: First, because voting is highly socially desirable, many people report having cast a ballot when in fact they did not. In presidential elections, it is common for surveys to estimate voter turnout at levels far higher than what official statistics indicate. A second tendency is for respondents – whether or not they have voted – to misreport for whom they voted. People are simply more likely to report (and possibly to remember) having voted for the winner.

These two biases – over-reporting of turnout and over-reporting of voting for the winning candidate – affect all post-election surveys. Importantly, however, they do not undermine our ability to learn from such surveys. Relationships between demographic and other variables, on the one hand, and vote choice on the other can still be estimated with data from post-election surveys. Even if the mean results are higher than "actual" levels, the relationship between the explanatory variables and the vote outcome still holds.

Of course, we don't need a survey to tell us who won the election: We have the election results for that. But especially in the absence of exit polls, the single best way to learn about an election is to conduct a careful, scientific post-election survey with a representative sample of citizens.

A separate challenge in reporting data from post-election surveys is what to do with people who say they voted, but are unwilling or unable to report for whom they cast their ballot. One common practice is to simply treat these respondents as "missing data," that is, to delete them

¹ Prof. Paul Freedman and the staff at the University of Virginia Center for Politics would like to thank Paul Goldman for his questions and for the opportunity to provide additional clarification on the results of the 2005 Post-Gubernatorial Election Survey.

from the analysis. An alternative is to allocate these individuals to the candidates in some proportion. In the tables that follow, we show the breakdown of the vote for all respondents, for white respondents, and for male respondents. As one can see, if all those who said they voted but did not say for *whom* had actually been Kilgore voters, the election outcome would have been the same but Kilgore would have tied Kaine among white voters and won among men. Exercises such as this can be an instructive way to learn more from survey data.

**Vote Analysis Addendum
January 23, 2006**

Unlike election results, which are what they are (usually), survey data are ultimately estimates and necessarily subject to error and uncertainty. The challenge for survey researchers is to minimize (not eliminate) such uncertainty. The challenge for post-election research in particular (as opposed to other kinds of surveys) is that the “truth” one is trying to make inferences about is more readily apparent.

Differences between survey findings and electoral reality, therefore, can be attributed to some combination of the following factors: a) over-reporting of turnout in general and the vote for the winning candidate in particular; b) under-representation of particular groups (such as African Americans) in the survey sample; c) the allocation of respondents who report having voted but who refuse to say for whom they voted; d) sampling error. Each of these issues is likely to confront all post-election surveys; the last one is particularly relevant when it comes to sub-group analysis. When one is looking at smaller groups (whether gender groups, partisan groups, or particular racial or ethnic groups), the margin of sampling error is necessarily greater than it is for the sample as a whole.

All Respondents

Q6: Raw Vote Choice

Kaine	52.84
Kilgore	37.13
Potts	1.87
Other	0.48
Don't know	0.62
Refused	7.06

n = 825

Vote Choice – DK/Ref. Deleted

Kaine	57.24
Kilgore	40.22
Potts	2.02
Other	0.52
Don't know	--
Refused	--

n = 759

Vote Choice – DK/Ref. to Kilgore

Kaine	52.84
Kilgore	44.81
Potts	1.87
Other	0.48
Don't know	--
Refused	--

n = 825

White Respondents

Q6: Raw Vote Choice

Kaine	48.91
Kilgore	41.79
Potts	2.27
Other	0.43
Don't know	0.32
Refused	6.28

n = 682

Vote Choice – DK/Ref. Deleted

Kaine	52.36
Kilgore	44.74
Potts	2.43
Other	0.46
Don't know	--
Refused	--

n = 635

Vote Choice – DK/Ref. to Kilgore

Kaine	48.91
Kilgore	48.39
Potts	2.27
Other	0.43
Don't know	--
Refused	--

n = 682

Male Respondents

Q6: Raw Vote Choice

Kaine	48.28
Kilgore	43.68
Potts	1.65
Other	0.00
Don't know	0.23
Refused	6.16

n = 338

Vote Choice – DK/Ref. Deleted

Kaine	51.58
Kilgore	46.66
Potts	1.76
Other	0.00
Don't know	--
Refused	--

n = 317

Vote Choice – DK/Ref. to Kilgore

Kaine	48.28
Kilgore	50.07
Potts	1.65
Other	0.00
Don't know	--
Refused	--

n = 338