



“Instead of calling in a specialist, couldn’t we just conduct an opinion poll among all the hospital’s doctors?”

### ESSENTIALS

Public opinion data can impact elections and policy debates is affected by such scientific polling types and methods as:

- Type of poll (opinion polls, benchmark or tracking polls, entrance and exit polls)
- Sampling techniques, identification of respondents, mass survey or focus group, sampling error
- Type and format of questions

1. What is the underlying idea of this cartoon? [Write your response like a claim statement]
2. Is there a difference between “expert” opinion and “public” opinion? In a democracy what is better?

### PROPERLY ASSESSING PUBLIC OPINION POLLS – USE THE FOLLOWING CAUTIONARY STEPS:

Below you will find the KEY cautionary steps to take when analyzing a public opinion poll.

1. **Identify the Subject of the Poll.**
2. **Identify the Source of the Poll.**
3. **Determine the Sampling Method.**
4. **Identify the Sample Size.**
5. **Consider the Margin of Error.**
6. **Examine the Wording of the Questions.**
7. **Examine the Answer Categories.**
8. **Evaluate the Results.**

Find three (3) polls online. Evaluate each by applying the cautionary steps above.

POLL #1

POLL #2

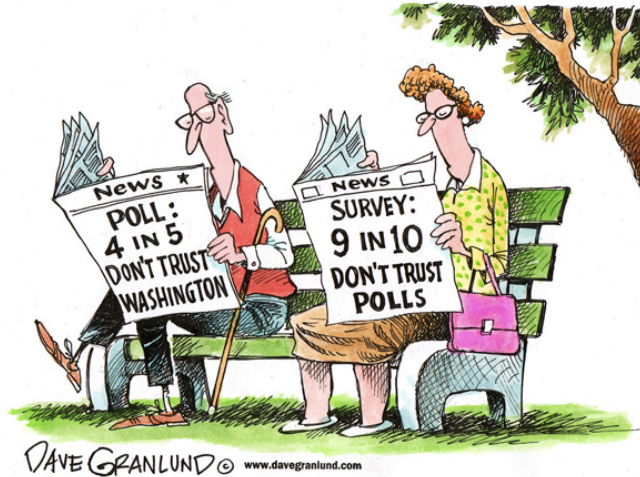
POLL #3

## Making Connections

Check out this link to an **interview** with a leading presidential pollster – **Joel Benenson**.

<https://youtu.be/-42oHXI5d4Q>

What are the biggest takeaways? What questions do you still have?



1. Is public opinion important to a healthy democracy? Explain.
2. Are public opinion polls important to a healthy democracy? Explain.

## CONCEPT APPLICATION

Donald Trump's victory in the 2016 U.S. presidential election, as well as the UK's decision to leave the European Union through "Brexit," rattled public confidence in polls. Since these two major world events occurred, we have been asked the same question when giving presentations, on social media, in interviews, and from our own friends and neighbors: "Can we still trust polls?"

Those who felt led astray by surveys conducted during the 2016 U.S. presidential election may be surprised to learn that national polling was generally quite accurate.

National pre-election polls in 2016 indicated that Hillary Clinton would win the national popular vote by a 3-point margin, and in fact she won by 2 points. The major problem was with state-level polls, many of which missed a late swing to Trump among undecided voters and did not correct for the fact that their responding samples contained proportionally too many college-educated voters (who were more likely to favor Clinton). A silver lining is that both of these problems can be overcome, to some extent, by more rigorous survey weighting and heightened attention to the possibility of late shifts in voter preferences.

It's also important to remember that election polls are just one kind of poll, and that they're not the best barometer for the accuracy of polling in general. Why not? Because an election poll has an extra hurdle to jump: It not only has to measure public opinion, it also has to predict which of the people interviewed are going to vote and how they will vote – a notoriously difficult task.

Pew Research Center. May 14, 2018.

- A. Referencing the scenario, describe why so many in our democracy mistrust polls?
- B. In the context of this scenario, explain how polling companies address the doubts discussed in part A.
- C. Explain how constitutional provisions speak to our concerns about polling.