SENATE DISTRICT 66 DFL NEWSLETTER

February 2021

Polls can be used and abused as predictive tools

by Prof. David A. Schultz, Hamline University

The 2020 presidential election is finally over. Among the enduring stories of the election cycle was that the pollsters again got it wrong. Specifically, in the closing week or so of the election Real Clear Politics documented polls from the Economist, Quinnipiac, NBC/ Wall Street Journal, Survey USA, CNN, and Fox which predicted the national popular vote to have Joe Biden winning over Donald Trump by 10, 11, 10, 8, 12, and 8 points respectively. In reality, Biden's final national popular vote lead over Trump was 4.4 percent. These errors are on top of claims that in 2016 pollsters and prediction machines such as FiveThirtyEight were wrong in not seeing that Trump would win. Up to Election Day, FiveThirtyEight gave Clinton a 72 percent chance of winning.

There may be a crisis in polling, but much of it has to do with a failure to understand survey research, the employment of bad polls, and the misuse and interpretation of them.

Remember first that polls or surveys are not meant to be predictive tools. They are snapshots in time regarding what a statistical sample of people think about an issue. This is one of the most fundamental errors that analysts, the media, and the predictive machines make. When a survey is done it is predicated upon the answers individuals give at the time they are surveyed. They do not tell us what they are going to think in two weeks, they do not tell us what people who are undecided are going to believe, and they do not tell us how many individuals are actually included in the entire population of those who hold similar opinions or may actually vote. All of these matters are predictive issues which polls cannot do.

Many in the media also simply do not understand statistics. When a poll says that it has a confidence level of .05 or 95 percent that does not mean it is 95 percent certain that this poll is an accurate prediction of what the final results will be on election day. Many seem to think that. The confidence level refers to the fact that a pollster believes that a poll has a 95 percent chance of being an accurate random sample of the population being surveyed at that time. Again, this is not a prediction for the future, but a statement about the current poll, and it also recognizes that there is a 5 percent or one-in-twenty chance the poll does not accurately represent the population it wants to survey. This suggests that even a good pollster can get it wrong. Thus, some

Upcoming events

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Roseville DFL Central Committee Meeting

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Do Good Roseville
Community Conversations
on Race: White Supremacy

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The Census, Redistricting, and Reform

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polls are not valid when done, and many are consistently not reliable over time and should simply be discounted or ignored.

Polls also vary in terms of what is called their margin of error. The margin of error reflects the size and composition of the sample done. Surveys might report margins of error of plus or minus two, three, four, or more points. The smaller the margin of error generally the better. A poll saying Biden is leading Trump by seven percentage points, plus or minus a margin or error of three points, means the lead could be four or 10 points. In tight elections, especially at the state level where presidents are selected due to the electoral college, leads of one or two points with margins of error of three points are still technically correct even if the predicted winner loses.

Traditionally surveys used confidence intervals to assess these margins or error but increasingly some are using what are called Bayesian Credibility Levels. They are not the same thing.

Credibility Levels are used in nonrandom samples and assess the probability that a sample reflects a pollster's predetermined sample composition. The use of nonrandom samples and Bayesian Credibility Levels opens up new sources of bias and inaccuracy in polls. This might include misestimating some voters, such as non-college-educated males whose turnout was greater than these surveys assumed in the last two presidential election cycles. Phrased another way, confidence levels assess the probability that a sample is representative of the real population. Credibility level assesses the probability the survey sample matches a pollster's predetermined belief of what it should look like. The American Association for Public Opinion Research has cautioned against this increasingly popular survey methodology, perhaps for good reasons.

Remember also that national polls for presidential elections are effectively meaningless. We do not elect presidents with a national popular vote but with the electoral college that makes it 50 separate state contests. In the critical swing states of 2020 such as Georgia, Michigan, Pennsylvania, and Wisconsin, polls there predicted close races and once all the votes came in—not just those on election day and reported that night—polls in those states were accurate and the final results came within the accepted margin of error. Everyone seems to have forgotten this.

There are also other problems with polls that predict voting. One needs to think about the questions asked, assumptions about who will show up to vote, how many are undecided, and when and if they will make up their minds. Finally, yes in a world where no one picks up their phone anymore it is hard to do samples, but if one is willing to spend the time and money and increase sample sizes, one can still get accurate polls. The issue is willingness to commit the effort to doing it right.

Given the above and recognizing that polls are not predictive tools, we can see the fundamental flaws with tools such as FiveThirtyEight. They take a collection of all polls—good and bad—average them, and then makes a statistical prediction of what is likely to happen in an election. Phrased otherwise, they take instruments not meant for prediction and which already have statistical assumptions in them which might not be accurate, and then use them to make statistical predictions for a future event. All this is highly questionable. Then analysts still ignore the fact that a prediction machine that says it is 70 percent likely something will happen means, even by its own estimate, a 30 percent chance of being wrong. Error compounds error, statistical assumptions multiply upon themselves, and a failure to understand statistics yields the belief that the polls simply have it wrong.

Polling is an exercise based on probability and chance. It is not a perfect predictive tool that can foresee the future in a clairvoyant way. If viewed in this light we find the crisis in polling and predictive machines is less about traditional polling and more about their misuse and abuse.

We are up to the challenge
by Rep. Athena Hollins (66B)

In 2020, we used the phrase "unprecedented times" quite a bit, and it looks like that phrase is going to hold over (at least for a little while) into 2021. On January 6, our nation's capitol building was breached for the first time in more than 200 years, not by soldiers of a foreign nation, but by a riotous mob of American citizens who had been deceived and manipulated by the President of the United States into believing that a free and fair election had been stolen.

While these times are challenging, I know we are up to the challenge.

It has been very heartening to work with my new DFL colleagues in the Minnesota Legislature. Whether it is insurgents who reject reality or a global pandemic, we all stand united. My colleagues and I are going to fight for our values this session—to protect our environment, increase the accessibility and affordability of health care, stand up for working families, and begin to tackle our housing crisis.

There are exciting things happening at the legislature. I'm thrilled to be a part of the newly formed Committee on the Prevention of Homelessness. This committee reflects our desperate need and ability to address the current unsheltered crisis, while simultaneously looking to prevent future housing crises. We know that without stable housing, other positive aspects of life such as good-paying jobs, academic achievement, and overall wellbeing are difficult, if not impossible, to obtain. Working with nonprofits, grassroots activists, and other segments of government, we are focused on policy that allows every Minnesotan to have a place they call home.

I'm also proud to be the only freshman DFL member assigned to the Energy and Climate Committee. As many of you know, climate change and climate justice are primary concerns of mine at the legislature. I'm committed to fighting for a Just Transition, where our friends and neighbors can flourish in a green economy. I also been have focusing my attention on renewable-energy storage legislation that will help the market break free from the oil industry.

Finally, something truly remarkable is happening at the Capitol, a shift in perspective that has the potential to revolutionize our policy making: the concept of racial equity. Representatives Rena Moran and Ruth Richardson cochaired the House Select Committee on Racial Justice and wrote a very thoughtful and thorough report on the topic. With that report as the backdrop, Speaker of the House Melissa Hortman has asked every committee to intensely consider the racial-equity implications of each bill that passes through the Minnesota House of Representatives. This type of crucial reflection around equity, to my knowledge, has never been done; I'm eager to see the results of our collective effort.

Even at the national level, where things feel very tumultuous, there are still sometimes points of light that manage to cut through. Like many of you, I was also sleeplessly doomscrolling through news on January 6. One of the stories that I saw was about Eugene Goodman, a member of the United States Capitol Police. As an officer of color, he stood his post, alone, in the hallways of our nation's capitol and used his own body to lure the mob away from our senators and future vice president, so that they could make it to the safe room. It was an important reminder to me that we all have our individual parts to play in bending the arc of history towards justice. It makes it easier to know that I have your support in the fight for our values.

We responded quickly in 2020 and have a busy 2021
by Commissioner Trista MatasCastillo
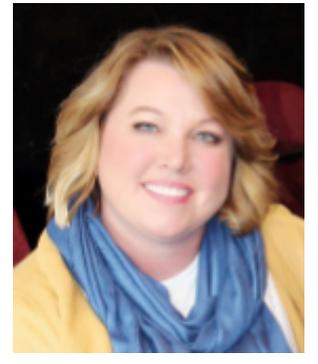
As we move past this unprecedented year, I wanted to look back at some of the moments and accomplishments we have made together and look forward into the challenges and opportunities we will face in 2021.

I am proud at Ramsey County that we pivoted extremely quickly when the pandemic struck in March to meet the needs of our residents and businesses in a changed world. We reallocated funds, reassigned staff from across the organization, and built new departments overnight that are now helping to put tens of millions of dollars into our community through work responding to food insecurity, skyrocketing homelessness, struggling businesses, and many other needs.

I particularly appreciate the fast work of our Workforce Solutions and Community and Economic Development (CED) departments to disburse money quickly to people, businesses, and nonprofits in need. Their quick work has helped a lot of Ramsey County institutions stave off bankruptcy this year.

I am also extremely grateful for the work Ramsey County staff members have done to address racial disparities in our programs and to center the voices of BIPOC individuals in our planning. This work has always been a central priority for us, but has taken on particular importance in the aftermath of the killing of George Floyd and the subsequent civil unrest. Our Transforming Systems Together (TST) initiative will help us rethink how the county delivers services and invests in community. TST is intended to change the way the county makes decisions about priorities, approaches, budgets, and program design by having community members at the table as an equal voice.

Much of my time has been consumed responding to the exploding housing crisis. Once Bethesda and our other new shelter sites are online, Ramsey County will go from providing a few dozen shelter beds for people experiencing homelessness to nearly 700 beds across the county. We also quickly reshuffled our capital priorities to invest $8.9 million in creating and preserving affordable housing, including new affordable housing for seniors at the Ford Site and providing money to keep Wilder Square affordable for generations to come.

In transportation, we have continued our work to transform our streets to be safer and more equitable. This year saw permanent four-to-three-lane conversions on Larpenteur Avenue, Maryland Avenue east of Interstate 35E, and on Energy Park Drive. We are working to bring this treatment to more local corridors, including Dale Street and other parts of Maryland Avenue. We have also enthusiastically supported the ongoing Rice Street Visioning Study, which will center safety, business success, and neighborhood vitality in the design of Rice when it is rebuilt starting in 2022.

Finally, I have been all-in pushing for Rice-Robert Arterial Bus Rapid Transit to be included in Metro Transit's plans for later this decade. Rice-Robert would connect some of Ramsey County's most transit-dependent neighborhoods to our regional transportation system and bring fast, reliable service from Little Canada to the southern end of West Saint Paul.

I am so proud that I could work with all of you these last few years to make our community a more equitable, sustainable, and just place, but our work has just begun. I am counting on your help in the years ahead to truly make a city and a county where everyone can thrive.

In the spirit of the season, I wish you all good health and prosperity in this coming year of rebuilding. This has been a challenging year for all of us, but I know that the success of our communities means, first and foremost, the success of individuals and families throughout the county.

Biden's environmental actions and appointments
by Gwen Willems

Good news for the environment

Inauguration Day was uplifting, a time of great optimism. Not only were an intelligent, planful, and empathetic president and vice president sworn in, but President Biden also started signing executive orders to undo the immense damage done by the former president.

In his first few days in office, he signed a flurry of executive orders with more coming on the fast track. President Biden

- had the United States rejoin the Paris climate agreement, the largest international ..... effort to curb global warming,

- stopped the United States' withdrawal from the World Health Organization, with Dr. Anthony Fauci becoming the head of the U.S. delegation,

- revoked a key cross-border presidential permit needed to finish the controversial Keystone XL pipeline,

- placed a temporary moratorium on oil and gas activity in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge,

- ordered the federal government to buy a vast fleet of zero-emissions vehicles,

- made climate change, for the first time, a core part of all foreign policy and national security decisions,

- directed agencies to review and reverse more than 100 Trump actions on the environment,

- halted construction of the border wall by terminating the national emergency declaration used to fund it,

- established a National Climate Task Force,

- paused new oil and natural gas leases on public lands or in offshore waters "to the extent consistent with applicable law," and

- set the goal of achieving a carbon pollution-free electricity sector by 2035.

President Biden signing executive orders.
Photo by the Associated Press.

We have high expectations for President Biden, during both his first 100 days and long-term. The environment is just one major area he promised to tackle. As he said in his inaugural speech, the people gave this administration the mandate to battle to control the virus, build prosperity, secure your family's health care, achieve racial justice and root out systemic racism, and save the climate.

Those of us who supported candidate Biden and had conservation issues on our minds remember when we urged moderators to include environmental questions in the debates. We also remember the many times he said on the campaign trail that on the first day he was in office he would do this, that, and so many things. How much can the president do and how soon? Some changes are being made quickly by executive order, but others will move more slowly through public processes and Congressional debate. He does have the important advantage of a Democratic majority in the House and a divided Senate to pass legislation long-term that will revise anti-environment regulatory changes made by the previous administration.

Damage to undo

There is a lot of work to do, so many harmful actions of the former president to undo. President Biden has a long and gruesome list of Trump's environmental losses to repair, too many for me to include here. The former president opened national land to drilling and logging, sold some of it off, and lowered pollution standards. President Biden can reinstate lands removed from Bears Ears and Grand Staircase-Escalante national monuments. Action is needed on detrimental changes made to regulations that implement the National Environmental Policy Act, Endangered Species Act, Clean Air Act, Clean Water Act, Migratory Bird Treaty Act, and many others. Just to avoid construction delays of the border wall with Mexico, 41 laws that protect public lands and endangered wildlife were waived by the last administration. They all need to be reinstated and enforced.

Another example is the Great American Outdoors Act, which was signed into law in August 2020. The law provides $1.9 billion annually to Interior agencies and the U.S. Forest Service for deferred maintenance projects, such as critical bridge repairs and campground improvements. To enact it, the Biden Administration will have to include funding for deferred maintenance projects in its budget request to Congress in February 2021. The Great American Outdoors Act also provides funding for land acquisition, but the Trump Administration hampered implementation with an executive order in November to set criteria that would at least slow any acquisitions.

Appointees

Before taking office, President Biden was able to take significant actions. He chose individuals with knowledge and experience in environmental issues to be his advisers and Cabinet officials. Here are details on some of his most important appointees, most of whom do need Congressional confirmation.

John Kerry – Special Presidential Envoy for Climate
The position: Senior adviser to the president on climate-related policy and decisions, elevated to be part of the National Security Council.
The nominee: John Kerry was a secretary of state to Obama and was an architect of the Paris climate accord. A former chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, Kerry was also a U.S. senator from Massachusetts for 28 years.

Gina McCarthy – National Climate Adviser
The position: Runs the new White House Office of Domestic Climate Policy. Assists the president in coordinating his climate agenda.
The nominee: Gina McCarthy led the Environmental Protection Agency during President Barack Obama's second term. She has since been CEO of the Natural Resources Defense Council. Earlier in her career, McCarthy was an environmental regulator in Connecticut.

Tom Vilsack – Secretary of Agriculture
The position: Advises on food production and agricultural issues and oversees food assistance programs.
The nominee: Tom Vilsack, a former Iowa governor, was secretary of agriculture during both terms of the Obama administration. Since then, he has been CEO of the U.S. Dairy Export Council.

Jennifer Granholm – Secretary of Energy
The position: Advises on energy policy. Oversees the nuclear weapons stockpile.
The nominee: Jennifer Granholm was the governor of Michigan from 2003 to 2011, and worked with the state's auto industry during the financial crisis, with a focus on clean energy development. Earlier, she served one term as the state's attorney general.

Pete Buttigieg – Secretary of Transportation

The position: Advises on transportation policy. Oversees regulators for aviation, highways, railways, pipeline, and others.

The nominee: Pete Buttigieg was the mayor of South Bend, Indiana, from 2012 to 2020. He ran in the 2020 Democratic primaries and endorsed Biden after withdrawing in March. Buttigieg was an intelligence officer in the U.S. Navy Reserve and was deployed to Afghanistan in 2014. Buttigieg would be the first openly LGBTQ person in U.S. history to have a permanent Cabinet role.

Deb Haaland – Secretary of the Interior

The position: Oversees public and federal lands and their natural resources, the Bureau of Indian Affairs, the National Park Service, and the Fish and Wildlife Service.

The nominee: Rep. Deb Haaland of New Mexico, who was elected to the House of Representatives in 2019, will give up her Congressional seat and role as chair of the House Subcommittee on National Parks, Forests and Public Lands. She is one of the first two Native American women to serve in Congress, and if confirmed, she will be the first Native American person in a Cabinet role.

Michael Regan – Administrator, Environmental Protection Agency

The position: Advises on climate and environmental issues and enforces environmental laws.

The nominee: Michael Regan heads North Carolina's Department of Environmental Quality, focusing on coal ash and perfluoroalkyl substances, or PFAS, cleanups. He earlier worked for the Environmental Protection Agency during the Clinton and George W. Bush administrations, focusing on air quality initiatives.

President Biden's first days have given us reason to be hopeful and confident that the new administration will make every effort it can to improve our climate and environment. As he said from the White House on January 27, 2021, "We've already waited too long to deal with this climate crisis. We can't wait any longer. We see it with our own eyes. We feel it. We know it in our own bones. And it's time to act."

Thanks to National Public Radio for information about President Biden's appointees.
Gwen is cochair of the Capitol Region Watershed District Community Advisory Committee.

SD66 DFL leadership report
by SD66 DFL Chair Ryan Lee

A lot of us were looking forward to turning the page on 2020, but so far 2021 has offered many of the same challenges. When this article was written, Trump had just been impeached for the second time, and the vaccine rollout has been woefully slow. By the time you read this, we hope that February is looking brighter. In the SD66 DFL, we are looking to use 2021 as a year to get us in position for the 2022 caucuses and to crystallize our mission as a party unit to help with outreach and to support volunteers like you.

To that end, we've created a short survey to get a better sense from folks as to what drew them to the SD66 DFL party unit and what they'd like to see in the coming years. If you have five or ten minutes to spare, we would appreciate it if you could fill out the SD66 DFL Involvement Survey at https://forms.gle/qk2d4pu8c6QVuqJT9. The answers will be collected into a report to be reviewed by the Outreach Subcommittee as well as the Central and Executive committees.

In January, we had a preliminary meeting of the Caucus Subcommittee where we discussed ways to improve our preparation for the 2022 caucuses and how we can make the caucuses run more smoothly for participants. So far, we've hit upon the importance of having a main convener and an assistant convener for each precinct. You can save the date for the 2022 caucuses: Unless the chairs of the two largest major parties jointly notify the Secretary of State of a different date by March 1, 2021, the precinct caucuses will take place on February 1, 2022.

Finally, we also convened a subcommittee to look at the different types of programming we can put on as a senate district, as well as ways we can partner with or piggyback off of events that are of interest to our community. If you have some ideas for programming you would like to see happen, such as keynote speakers we should invite to come give a talk or documentaries we should screen, please use the contact form on our website (http://sd66-dfl.org/contact) to let us know your thoughts!

If you'd like to help out on the Outreach, Caucus, or Forum subcommittees, they meet on the first Monday of every odd month. The next such meetings will be on Monday, March 1. You can check our calendar (http://sd66-dfl.org/calendar) for all scheduled meetings. All of our meetings and programming will be held online via Zoom until further notice. Depending on how vaccine rollout goes in our state, we might look at an outdoor, socially distanced gathering in late summer or early fall, as we know how important in-person events are to everyone in our district.

Keep calm and mask on!

How we voted locally

From the editor, Gwen Willems

Local election turnout was excellent. This chart gives a handy overview of the numbers and percentages of registered voters who voted in pertinent cities in the 2020 election. SD66 DFL includes all of Falcon Heights and Lauderdale and parts of Roseville and Saint Paul.

Information is from the Ramsey County Election Turnout website,
2020 General Election Turnout | Data | Ramsey County

	Total Voting	Total Registered	Percent Voting
Falcon Heights	3,074	3,426	89.7
Lauderdale	1,389	1,584	87.7
Roseville	22,963	25,925	88.6
Saint Paul	52,614	189,523	80.5

CALENDAR

SD66 DFL is continuing to hold its meetings remotely until further notice. Zoom links and instructions will be posted at sd66-dfl.org prior to the meeting dates. See https://zoom.us/

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Visit our website at http://sd66-dfl.org/ for calendar updates.

Elected officials

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Rep. Alice Hausman
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Rep. Athena Hollins
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