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POLLS, THE MEDIA,

AND THE

1997 CANADIAN FEDERAL ELECTION

By

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A Thesis

Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies

in Partial Fulfilment of the Requirements

for the Degree

Doctor of Philosophy

McMaster University

Canada

POLLS, THE MEDIA,

AND THE

1997 CANADIAN FEDERAL ELECTION

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY (1998)　　　　　　　　　　　McMaster University
(Sociology)　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　Hamilton, Ontario

TITLE:　　　　Polls, the Media and the 1997 Canadian Federal Election.

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SUPERVISOR:　　　Professor John Fox

NUMBER OF PAGES: xiv, 297

ABSTRACT

I examined coverage of the 1997 Canadian federal election by 14 media organizations (including three television networks and 11 regionally important newspapers), analysing the relative importance of major election issues, and evaluating the reporting of the technical details of pre-election polls. The media played a passive role in covering the election, seldom evaluating party platforms, and emphasizing only those issues that the leaders of the major political parties introduced into the campaign. National unity dominated media coverage despite public opinion polls initially showing that voters had little interest in the issue. Only the NDP stressed health care and job creation — issues that the electorate considered most important — but the NDP was afforded less coverage than the other major parties, and coverage of these issues suffered as a result.

Election coverage was also characterised by an emphasis on pre-election polls, where recently released poll results set the tone of coverage for other election stories. An analysis of the methods of 17 Canadian polling firms showed that there was much similarity in their survey practices. All firms used some form of probability sampling, and none used substandard methods, lending legitimacy to the media's reporting of pre-election polls. The emphasis on polling results was accompanied by poor technical reporting, however.

Finally, I examined published polling data for the five month period prior to the

election to chart the dynamics of the campaign. I found that two events — the election call and the televised leaders' debates— apparently affected trends in voting intentions. During the course of the campaign, the Liberals and Bloc Québécois experienced a decline in support, while the Reform Party and PC Party enjoyed increases in support. PC support seems to have been buoyed by the popularity of its leader, Jean Charest, following his performance in the English-language leaders' debate.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am honoured to acknowledge the outstanding guidance of my supervisor, John Fox. I am fortunate to have studied under a scholar with such expertise and dedication. John taught me the skills necessary to be a competent researcher. Just as important, I spent three years as John's teaching assistant, and learned more about teaching than I had in all the years before. As well as providing valuable suggestions for my thesis, John was exceptionally quick in reading it, enabling me to finish quickly. I could not have asked for a better supervisor.

I am also grateful to the other members of my committee — Margaret Denton and Barbara Carroll — for their advice and comments, and for how quickly they read my final draft despite having short notice.

I must also thank my family, especially my parents. Although I'm sure that they don't fully understand what I do, they are clearly proud of my accomplishments, and help me persevere through even the toughest of times.

I thank my wife, Jill, for her patience and love. Jill was understanding of my needs as a PhD student, even when my work limited my spare time. She was also helpful with my work, spending tiresome hours reading parts of my thesis and providing valuable comments.

Finally, I dedicate this work to the memories of my grandmother, Kamma Andersen, and my brother Greg, both of whom passed away in 1997. I'm sure that most

Ph.D. students will agree that completing a dissertation is an isolating experience, but I was always rejuvenated after I visited with either of these kind people.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION AND OUTLINE

Canadian elections are undoubtedly mass media events. Most voters pass judgments on political leaders and their policies on the basis of what they see or hear in the media. Most will agree that even if media effects are minimal, the accurate representation of election issues is essential to the integrity of a democratic state. For voters to get a true understanding of an election campaign, media organizations must give a balanced representation of the issues and political parties, rather than favouring reports that tend to help improve one party's public image.

It is obvious that media reports of substantive campaign issues present voters with information with which to evaluate political parties and candidates. How much the media influences voting intentions is directly related to the extent of bias in its reports. Polls are unlike all other campaign issues, in that they add no new knowledge regarding political parties' platforms and the abilities of their leaders. It is therefore more difficult to understand how and why polls affect voting intentions. Nonetheless, research has shown the possibility of bandwagon and underdog effects.

Over the last few decades the number of published pre-election polls during Canadian election campaigns has risen dramatically. Furthermore, research on media coverage of recent Canadian election campaigns has shown that the media placed

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noticeable emphasis on poll results. If polls influence public perceptions, their accuracy and how they are represented in the media are important issues.

Results from poorly conducted polls can mislead voters about the state of public opinion. The public can also be mislead by properly conducted polls if the media do not report their results completely and clearly. These issues are especially contentious considering that polling firms are often affiliated with either a media organization or political party; in Canada this is the case with more than half of the major polling firms (Emery, 1994:2).

1.1 *Polls and the 1997 Canadian Federal Election*

This dissertation has four objectives: (1) it examines media reports of campaign issues during the 1997 Canadian federal election to determine the role of pre-election polls; (2) it evaluates reports of polls, looking specifically at how well the media presents the technical details of polls; (3) it compares the survey practices of 17 firms that conduct polls of voting intentions in Canada; and (4) it uses published polling data to study changes in voting intentions in the five month period leading up to the 1997 Canadian federal election. Associated with each of these goals are a number of research questions and hypotheses.

First, I hypothesize that media coverage of the election was characterized by "horse-race" journalism, where the emphasis was on popularity contests — and their effects on politicians — among parties and leaders, rather than on providing extensive analysis of party platforms and the substantive issues of the campaign. I also expect to find differences in reporting — i.e., differences in the frequency and manner in which

political parties and campaign issues were reported, and the coverage of certain events during the campaign — related to the political orientations of the media organizations.

Second, I expect to find that the technical details of polls were poorly reported. I hypothesize that inaccuracies and biases in the reporting of polls were related to the political orientations of the media that publish them.

Third, I explore the survey practices of Canadian polling firms. I look for variations in survey practices among firms, and attempt to determine which practices are associated with more accurate polling results. I study the differences in survey practices between firms that conduct polls for strategic purposes only, and firms that release their poll results to the public. Differences between Quebec pollsters and pollsters from the rest of the country are also investigated.

Finally, I hypothesize that events during the campaign affected public opinion. Analysing published polls of voting intentions, I test for the impact of two events: (1) the official start of the election campaign; and (2) the first two televised leaders' debates (combined since they were only one day apart). Both these events received significant media attention. Unfortunately the effects of other events could not be assessed because only small numbers of polls were conducted between them.

1.2 *Methodological and Substantive Contributions*

This dissertation contributes to sociological inquiry from both methodological and substantive viewpoints. To my knowledge, this study is the first to combine a systematic examination of polling practices used for pre-election polls during a Canadian election campaign with an analysis of how these polls were presented by different media

organizations. This is especially important considering the relative centrality of polls in

Canadian media coverage of elections (Wagenberg et al., 1988).

In my examination of media reports, the use of binary logit models and the large

number of reports analysed, allowed me to control for many characteristics of the media.

This study is unique in its examination of the partial effects of medium, ownership,

region and language on media coverage of the election. In a large and diverse country

like Canada, all of these factors must be considered to account adequately for differences

in media coverage.

Finally, my meta-analysis of published polling data is a significant advancement

over previous research on the dynamics of Canadian election campaigns. The use of

binomial logit models enabled me to formally test if events during the 1997 Canadian

federal election campaign affected public opinion.

1.3 *Chapter Outline*

Chapter two provides a review of relevant literature, laying the theoretical

foundations for this study. It starts with an overview of the history of modern election

polling; continues with a general explanation of the sources of error in surveys and polls;

and ends with a review of the literature on media coverage of elections in general, and

polls in particular.

Chapter three describes the various data and methods employed for the study.

Chapter four analyses media reports of the 1997 Canadian federal election

campaign, assessing the relative importance of the major election issues.

Chapter five examines the contents of media reports of polls, providing an

evaluation of the reporting of technical details.

Chapter six explores the survey methods of 17 Canadian polling organizations, and assesses the accuracy of their polls.

Utilizing data from published polls conducted prior to the 1997 Canadian federal election, chapter seven explores the dynamics of the campaign and the immediate pre-campaign period.

Finally, chapter eight provides an overview and discussion of the study's major findings.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter provides a review of relevant literature. It starts by examining the

history of modern election polling in the context of changes in methodology. The

chapter continues with a discussion about the possible sources of error in surveys and

polls. Errors due to sampling are briefly discussed, but the main focus is nonsampling

errors. Next, the chapter provides a discussion of the mass media's relationship to

competitive elections in liberal democracies, and more specifically, to pre-election

polling. The chapter concludes with a review of literature related to pre-election polling

in Canada.

2.1 The Evolution of Modern Polling

The roots of survey research can be traced to censuses and administrative records

of ancient times (Bradburn and Sudman, 1988; Modell, 1988; Converse, 1987; Marsh,

1982; Zeisel, 1973). Pre-election polls, however, are relatively recent phenomena that

have developed with the growth of democracy. The first pre-election polls used

relatively crude methods, and were far more likely to err than polls today. With this in

mind, this section is concerned with the evolution of modern polling in the context of

methodological improvements (e.g., how errors in election forecasting led to the

continuing quest for improved methodology).

2.1.1 *The Early Years*

Until the early part of the nineteenth-century, pre-election polls were

meaningless because elections were open to only a small portion of the population. The

1824 US presidential election was the first to be decided largely by popular vote.

Concomitantly, it was also the first time that partisan organizations felt it necessary to

test the popularity of their candidates[1]. As a result, the era of pre-election polling was

spawned with a series of straw polls[2] sponsored by newspapers and political parties

(Smith, 1990). The first known straw poll was conducted by the *Harrisburg*

Pennsylvanian during the 1824 US federal election campaign on July 24, 1824 (Hoy,

1989:12).

The intent of these early pollsters was to shape public opinion by encouraging

new supporters for their candidate, and discouraging other candidates and their

supporters. Parties published their poll results in newspapers only when the poll

showed their candidate in the lead. Similarly, although newspapers didn't usually

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[1]Presidential interest in polling also started during the early 1800's when the White House started to use straw polls and canvassing to determine the public's mood. Until 1960, however, presidential polling was carried out in an ad hoc manner according to the personal tastes of each administration. Modern US presidential polling has its roots in Kennedy's 1960 presidential campaign (Jacobs and Shapiro, 1995).

[2]Straw polls ask members of certain groups (e.g., subscribers to magazines or newspapers) about their opinions. Most of the early polls consisted of coupons in magazines or newspapers which asked readers to check off for whom they were planning to vote and return the coupon through the mail (Bradburn and Sudman, 1988:33). In other words, no attempt is made to ensure that a representative sample is used.

conduct or sponsor the polls, they showed bias by publishing only poll results that favoured candidates that they endorsed (Smith, 1990:30).

From 1824 until 1936, straw polls enjoyed high credibility among both politicians and the public in the United States, and were used extensively to predict election outcomes. Nearing the end of this period, *The Literary Digest* magazine became the most popular of pollsters due to its record of successfully predicting every election outcome from 1920 to 1932. The 1932 *Literary Digest* poll was especially accurate; Roosevelt's victory was predicted within one percentage point (Squire, 1988:126). The poll's prediction of the number of states and votes that Roosevelt would win was also uncanny — it was predicted he would win 41 states with 474 electoral votes; he actually won 42 states with 474 electoral votes (Moore, 1992:42). The poll's results were very impressive, even by today's standards. Soon, however, the limitations of straw votes became evident, and today they are never used by reputable polling firms.[3]

In 1936, *The Literary Digest* distributed 10 million straw vote ballots to a sample drawn from automobile registration lists and telephone books. Although an impressive 2.3 million people returned the ballots, this represented only a 25 percent response rate. The poll predicted that the Republican candidate, Alf Landon, would receive 55 percent of the vote while the Democrat candidate Franklin D. Roosevelt would get 41 percent. On election day, however, 61 percent voted for Roosevelt and only 37 percent voted for Landon.

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[3]Even though they are widely recognized to provide "virtually worthless results", many magazine publications still conduct straw polls today to "keep in touch" with their readers (Gawiser and Witt, 1994:17).

Recent research has shown that the *Literary Digest* poll was critically flawed due to its initial sample bias—which included a high proportion of middle class and rich, a low response rate and a nonresponse bias (see Squire, 1988 for a systematic study of the poll's shortcomings). Still, *The Literary Digest* did not use new techniques for its 1936 poll compared to those for its previous polls which were successful. All its polls were biased towards those who could afford magazine subscriptions. This bias was not problematic before 1936, however, because until this time, the electorate had not voted along class lines. Upset with Roosevelt's New Deal, many middle and upper-middle class voters moved their support to the Republican party. Since the poll under-represented the less wealthy (who were more likely to vote for Roosevelt), it gave results which showed a Republican victory (Moore, 1992:53). The disastrous result of this poll brought an end to the credibility of both straw polls and *The Literary Digest* as a polling organization.

2.1.2 *The Beginning of Scientific Sampling*

Just before the infamous 1936 *Literary Digest* poll, George Gallup, Archibald Crossley and Elmo Roper all started conducting polls using more scientific sampling techniques (Squire, 1988:126). Learning from their experiences in market research, these pollsters used quota sampling — which required interviewers to contact a set number of respondents in each economic category — and an array of other practical techniques, including "a short, standardized interview schedule with fixed questions that could be administered by people with little or no training" (Converse, 1984:26, see also, Moore, 1992:54-56). All of these pollsters correctly predicted the 1936 election, and hence the

switch to the new methodology gained momentum, and the field of public opinion grew significantly (Gawiser and Witt, 1994:19).

Spurred on by a tremendous growth in public opinion polling, the first scholarly journal of public opinion, *Public Opinion Quarterly*, was established in 1937. This development encouraged further research into improving polling methodology. Finally, by 1941, Gallup's organization and his more scientific methods had gained enough public recognition to expand into Canada (Hoy, 1989:10-13).[4] This marked the first time that national polling was conducted in Canada (Emery, 1994).

Much to the dismay of Prime Minister Mackenzie King and his Liberal government, the first issue that Gallup planned to tackle was public attitudes toward conscription. This was an especially contentious issue between French-speaking and English-speaking Canadians: Quebec politicians felt that World War II was a British war in which Canadians should not participate; English Canadian politicians, however, were in general agreement that Canadians were obligated to help the Allied forces. Although the government was interested in public opinion regarding conscription, it didn't want the results of the poll to be published for fear they would cause too much tension.

The King government was able to convince Gallup to conduct a confidential survey in order to predict the outcome of a plebiscite on conscription (Emery, 1994:2). King's efforts to stop Gallup from publishing polling results, and instead to give the government the information confidentially, marked the first time that a Canadian government used polling as a tool to determine policy.

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[4]In Canada, The Gallup Organization was originally known formally as the Canadian Institute of Public Opinion (CIPO).

It wasn't for another four years, in 1945, that Gallup conducted and published the first pre-election poll in Canada.[5] The poll was very successful: it predicted a Liberal win with 39 percent of the popular vote, an impressive result considering that the Liberals received only two percentage points more on election day (Hoy, 1989:17).

Despite the improved methodology that Gallup and others were using by this time, there were still many failures of polls to predict election outcomes correctly. The first major disaster came with the 1948 US presidential election. In spite of all major polls calling the election with the Republican candidate Thomas Dewey as the clear victor[6], Harry Truman was elected with a 49.5 percent to 45.1 percent margin over Dewey. The Chicago Daily Tribune was so confident in the poll predictions that it jumped the gun and published the next morning's paper with the headline: "DEWEY DEFEATS TRUMAN" (Moore, 1992:70).

Ironically, the size of the error for the Gallup poll predicting a Dewey victory in 1948 (5.3 percent) was smaller than Gallup's error in predicting Roosevelt's victory in 1936 (7 percent) — the poll which made him famous and gave legitimacy to his techniques (Moore, 1992:71). Academics were quick to attack pollsters for their continued use of quota sampling considering new developments in scientific sampling were available. Nonetheless, much of the error was surely due to the timing of the polls

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[5]Canadian political parties did not begin polling extensively until nearly two decades later. The first pre-election polls to assist in an election campaign were done by the Quebec Liberal Party for the 1960 Quebec provincial election (Emery, 1994:2).

[6]Gallup had Dewey winning by a margin of 49.5 percent of the vote compared to 44.5 percent for Truman; Crossley had it 49.9 percent to 44.8 percent for Dewey; and Roper predicted Dewey over Truman by a margin of 52.2 percent to 37.1 percent (Hoy, 1989:18).

— all were conducted no closer than ten days before the election. With so much time between the poll and the actual vote, many events could have taken place which would have influenced a change in opinion.

Even after pollsters learned from this latter problem, and started to conduct polls closer to the election dates, they would still make prediction errors. A glaring example of an inaccurate Canadian poll was the last Gallup poll prior to the 1957 federal election. The poll had the Liberals ahead by 14 points, indicating that a Liberal majority would result. When the election was finished, however, the Progressive Conservatives under John Diefenbaker had won a minority government (Hoy, 1989:18-19). Due to failures like this, quota sampling came under growing criticism, and eventually fell by the wayside as new developments in probability sampling arose (Converse, 1984:26).

2.1.3 *The Past Few Decades*

With better probability samples, polls have become far more accurate. Still, even some recent polls have been far off the mark. There have been a few notable failures over the last three decades: polls during the 1970 British general election predicted the re-election of Harold Wilson and the Labour Party, but Edward Heath and the Conservatives won an upset victory; polls showed the outcome of the 1980 US presidential election too close to predict, but the Republican candidate, Ronald Reagan, won by a wide margin over incumbent President Jimmy Carter; according to most polls the Labour Party was far ahead of the Conservatives heading into the 1992 British general election, but the Conservatives were elected (Emery, 1994:6; Worcester, 1995; Jowell et al., 1993).

In Canada, inaccurate polls have been relatively rare. In only two of the 12

federal elections between 1945 and 1974 did Gallup polls fail to get within two

percentage points of the Liberal and Conservative parties' share of the vote (LeDuc,

1975:217). In the last few decades, however, there have been some notable errors. In

1972 all of the major polls predicted Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau and the Liberal party

would win a majority government, but instead they only secured a minority

government. The opposite happened in 1974 when none of the polls predicted that

Trudeau would win a majority government but he succeeded (Wheeler, 1976:22).

More recently, research by Fox et al. (1996) shows that polls during the Quebec

referendum on sovereignty in October 1995 were off the mark. Although most media

reports indicated the referendum was too close to predict, a logit model regressing vote

on date for 22 polls gives a 95-percent confidence interval for voters intending to vote

'Yes' as between 51.8 percent and 54.7 percent.[7] Nonetheless, when they went to the

polling booths, a small majority of voters (50.5 percent) selected the 'No' option.

Even if we dismiss the cases where the wrong victor is predicted as

extraordinary, errors in forecasting from polls are still higher than would be expected

from sampling error alone. Research by Crespi (1988) and Buchanan (1986) shows that

the average margin of forecasting error is at least twice as high as what would be

expected on the basis of sampling theory. Buchanan's (1986:227) examination of pre-

election polls in several countries, including Canada, showed that margin of error

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[7]It must be noted that each poll has a substantial margin of error (most had about
1,000 respondents), and a large number of undecided respondents. The more precise
prediction was obtained by combining data from 23 polls, taking into account the date of
the poll.

estimates usually "seriously understate the empirical range of error." Likewise, using an analysis of 227 mid-term congressional polls in the USA., Erikson and Sigelman (1995) found that the polls had errors that clustered around 4-6 percentage points.

Though modern polls are usually quite accurate, the small but significant number of incorrect polls has led increasing numbers to distrust their results. For example, Roper (1986) conducted two US national surveys on public attitudes toward polls, and found that although 75 percent of respondents said "polls worked for the public's interest," scepticism towards polls was rising. Surprisingly, pollsters fared well regarding public perception of their honesty — 76 percent felt that pollsters were at least "usually honest." Only slightly more than half (56 percent) of the respondents, however, felt that poll results are at least "usually accurate." Roper concludes that pollsters will have to better monitor and regulate their practices if polls are going to retain credibility.

Not all researchers, however, agree that the public trust in polls is dwindling. Kohut (1986) compares the results of two US surveys about opinion polls — a pioneering survey conducted by Hadley Cantril in 1944, and a 1985 Gallup survey modelled after it. He argues that while public opinion regarding polls is divided, it is generally positive. Concerning the issue of the accuracy of pre-election polls to predict election outcomes, a large majority (68 percent) of those questioned in 1985 felt that polls are "right most of the time" (Kohut, 1986:7). Interestingly, this showed a substantial increase over the 57 percent who answered similarly in the 1944 survey. Kohut (1986:8; see also Schleifer, 1986) concludes that there is "no evidence of a crisis in confidence" with respect to public opinion of the accuracy of polls.

A recent article in *The Economist* read, "Opinion polling is about as serious as

weather forecasting or economic forecasting, pastimes that provide useful employment to the few and harmless entertainment to the many" (The Economist, 1996). Statements like this suggest that polls are incapable of measuring public opinion accurately. Most problems, however, are likely due to methodological deficiencies which can be prevented by careful consideration of the possible sources of error in surveys and polls.

2.2 *Sources of Error in Surveys and Polls*

Errors associated with polls and surveys can be divided into two main categories: sampling errors, and nonsampling errors. This section briefly describes errors due to sampling. More importantly, however, it provides a detailed analysis of nonsampling errors — i.e., errors due to poorly constructed questionnaires, bias in the interview process, and problems with respondents — which can often have a strong impact on the results of polls. It ends with a discussion of problems that are specific to pre-election polls.

2.2.1 *Errors Due to Sampling*

An ideal sample provides a perfect representation of the population. This ideal is impossible to achieve with a large population since we can never know all of its characteristics (Singleton et al., 1988:136-137). No method can completely ensure the absence of sampling error, but the use of probability samples gives at least a good chance of obtaining a close approximation to the population.

Although there are many types of probability samples (simple random samples, independent random samples, stratified random samples, etc.), they all have in common

the random selection of respondents at some stage of sample selection. All individuals in the population have a known chance of being selected. Although probability samples usually closely represent the population, there is still the chance that they do not, and even surveys employing probability samples are subject to sampling error.

After determining which population will be studied, researchers must decide how to sample it. This is done by constructing a sampling frame (Singleton et al., 1988). Sampling frames can be lists of the population, or as is often done with pre-election polls, can be determined by random-digit dialing. In an ideal situation the population and sampling frame will be identical, but this is seldom the case. For example, the use of a telephone directory list excludes all those who have unlisted telephone numbers, who have recently moved to the area, and who do not own a telephone. Though a better technique, even random-digit-dialing excludes people from the sample because it contacts only those who have telephones and answer them.

When discrepancies between the sampling frame and the population arise, a sample is subject to coverage error (Groves, 1989). Coverage error is problematic because part of the population has been systematically excluded. Consequently, if there is coverage error, survey statistics may be biased (Groves, 1989:13). Coverage error is seldom a problem with polls because of the reliance of most polling firms on random-digit dialing (see Voss et al., 1995). Since most people own telephones, only a very small proportion of the population is excluded. Still, it is possible that polls using random-digit dialling can be susceptible to bias. For example, by contacting only those with telephones, the poorest people — who might have different attitudes regarding candidates and parties in an election than other groups — are systematically excluded

from the sample. Still, most researchers agree that in countries like Canada, where only a very small minority do not have telephones, bias from random-digit dialing is relatively small (Brick et al., 1995).

2.2.2 *Questionnaire Problems*

Interpreting public opinion can be a difficult task. According to Warner (1939:377), "Public opinion consists of people's reactions to definitely-worded statements and questions under interview conditions." As a result, there are many potential problems with questionnaire design. Research shows that the wording of a question, the ordering and constraints of its response choices, and its placement, can all alter the distribution of responses to the question (Turner and Martin, 1984; Converse and Presser, 1981). These issues are especially problematic with Canadian national surveys, since they must be drafted in both French and English, and it is difficult to ensure identical meanings for the two languages (Emery, 1994:6; see Blais and Gidengil, 1993, for a systematic study of the problem of measurement equivalence between French and English surveys).

It is obvious that questions must have face validity (i.e., the wording of the question must appear to measure what we are studying). If the goal is to determine for whom respondents intend to vote in the next election, the question should be asked directly. For example, it cannot be assumed that simply because a respondent "approves" of one leader more than another that he or she will vote for that leader's party. There are many factors that may affect one's voting behaviour — party leader approval is only one. It is best to be direct, and simply ask respondents whom they

intend to vote for.

Face validity, however, does not ensure that we are measuring the right thing. Evidence suggests that even nonsubstantive wording changes to a question (substituting words with ones of similar meaning, or simply changing the order of words in sentences) can give divergent results. For example, using split ballot data, researchers in the 1940's found that respondents were considerably more willing 'not to allow' speeches against democracy than they were to 'forbid' such speeches (Turner and Martin, 1984:131).

Using question-wording experiments dealing with partisanship in the US, Abramson and Ostrom (1994) had similar findings. In this case, two similar — but not identical — party identification questions were administered to respondents at four different times over a seven month period. The first question was developed by the Survey Research Center (SRC) at the University of Michigan. It reads as follows: "Generally speaking, do you usually think of yourself as a Republican, a Democrat, an Independent, or what?" The second question is commonly employed by the Gallup organization. The question reads as follows: "In politics, as of today, do you consider yourself a Republican, a Democrat, or an independent?"

A comparison of the responses to the questions above indicated that they measured two different phenomena. The SRC question was found to be a far better indicator of party identification than the Gallup question. Despite the similarity of the two questions, responses to the Gallup question "were more related to short-term evaluations and electoral preferences than were responses to the SRC measure" (Abramson and Ostrom, 1994:43).

Payne (1951:196) argued that when one candidate is much better known than another, polling results can be problematic if the question wording is not informative enough. He gives the following example:

> *If the election for Governor were being held today, which*
> *candidate would you vote for—Morey Pute or Bob Scure?* If Pute
> has been in office for twenty years, while Scure has never been in
> the limelight before, the results of this question at the start of the
> campaign may indicate an overwhelming victory for Pute. It may
> be advisable to identify Scure in the question at least as well as
> he will be identified on the actual ballot.
> *Which candidate will you vote for—Mr. Pute, the Democrat, or*
> *Mr. Scure, the Republican?* This attempt at balancing the loading
> through bringing party affiliation into account is much more
> likely to approximate the actual returns than is the first version.

Question constraints can also affect response distributions (Converse and Presser, 1986; Turner and Martin 1984). Sometimes open and closed questions appearing to ask the same thing will yield different results. It seems logical to suggest that open questions can widen the number of responses. A widespread criticism of closed questions is that they limit the number of responses by forcing people to choose among alternatives that do not necessarily reflect their opinion. On the other hand, Presser and Converse (1986:33-34) argue that by providing response alternatives, closed questions can be more specific because they better ensure that respondents have a common frame of reference. Also, by providing many categories from which to choose, respondents might respond with an answer that they may not have thought of otherwise.

In a related problem, including a "don't know" (DK) response alternative can give a different response distribution than if it is omitted, since many respondents who have no opinion will select the DK option (Turner and Martin, 1984:134). A deeper discussion of DK responses is given later in this chapter, in the context of respondent

error.

Experimental research by Schuman and Presser (1981:86) supports the argument

that well designed closed questions can be effective in determining attitudes. The

following two questions were used in the study:

(1)   "People look for different things in a job. What would you most prefer in a job?"

(2)   "People look for different things in a job. Which one of the following five things would you most prefer in a job—work that pays well; work that gives a feeling of accomplishment; work where there is not too much supervision and you make most decisions yourself; work that is pleasant and where the other people are nice to work with; or work that is steady with little chance of being laid off?

Answers to the first question (the open-ended question) were not specific enough in

order to be able to fully understand attitudes towards work. For example, many

respondents argued that "pay" was the most important aspect of a job. Nonetheless, it

could not be distinguished if they meant "steady pay" or "high pay" since it was not

specified. Responses to the second question showed that there appears to be a difference

between the two types of pay that did not show up it the first question. Schuman and

Presser (1981:86) concluded that by providing well designed question response

alternatives, it is possible to more accurately measure differences in opinion than by

asking respondents to answer in their own words.

When using closed-ended questions, the order of response choices can be very

important. Changing the order in which responses to a question are read or displayed to

respondents can influence their selection. Using a split-ballot experiment, Payne (1951)

found that complicated questions with only two response categories often have a

"recency effect" — that is, respondents are more likely to choose whichever of the two

alternatives is listed last.

More recently, Schuman and Presser (1981) replicated Payne's study and had similar findings. Using the exact wording of two questions regarding the oil industry which showed response-order effects in Payne's study, and administering both of them on two different occasions, Schuman and Presser found that a response was chosen more often when it was read last than first. For example, in one experiment performed at two different times, subjects were split into two groups, and each group was administered one of the following two versions of the same question:

(1)   "Some people say that we will still have plenty of oil 25 years from now. Others say at the rate we are using our oil, it will be used up in about 15 years. Which of these ideas would you guess is most nearly right?"

(2)   "Some people say that at the rate we are using our oil, it will be used up in about 15 years. Others say we will still have plenty of oil 25 years from now. Which of these ideas would you guess is most nearly right?"

Both times the experiment was performed there was found to be a recency effect. In the first experiment, 63.5 percent answered that there would be plenty of oil in 25 years to the first question, but 77.3 percent answered the same to the second question. The result for the second experiment were similar: 60.7 percent answered "plenty" to the first question, and 68.8 percent answered "plenty" to the second question. The differences in responses to the questions in both experiments were statistically significant. Schuman and Presser (1981) also performed 12 original question wording experiments to test response-order effects. Eight of these experiments showed no effect, but four had statistically significant results. Though they offer no concrete rationale for why some questions showed a recency effect and others did not, Schuman and Presser (1981:72) state that "we can only note that effects did not occur with very brief dichotomous

items."

Similarly, Wanke et al. (1995) found that comparative questions (which are often used in pre-election polls) can have a strong impact on results. Common logic suggests that it doesn't make a difference if respondents are asked to compare Liberals to Conservatives or vice versa, but experimental analysis of the cognitive process underlying comparative judgments suggests that the "direction of comparison influences the judgment by determining, in part, which information is used for the judgment" (Wanke et al., 1995:348). One experiment by Wanke et al. (1995) randomly assigned 30 students to two different groups, each of which was administered one of the following two questions regarding their high school teachers:

(1) "Thinking of your teachers in high school, would you say that the female teachers were more empathetic with regard to academic and personal problems than the male teachers, or were they less empathetic?"

(2) "Thinking of your teachers in high school, would you say that the male teachers were more empathetic with regard to academic and personal problems than the female teachers, or were they less empathetic?"

The results showed that for the first question, where female teachers are mentioned before male teachers, 41 percent of respondents felt females were more empathetic and only 12 percent answered that male teachers were more empathetic. For the group where male teachers were answered first, however, far more respondents answered that male teachers were more empathetic than female teachers — 55 percent said males were more empathetic versus only 9 percent who responded that females were more empathetic. In light of these findings, Wanke, et al. (1995) argue that questions should be worded so that the comparison follows the direction that people are likely to choose spontaneously in daily life. Unfortunately, little is known about how people choose spontaneously.

Experimental studies have also found that question placement can affect a question's response distribution. Claiming to use similar surveys, two studies on public confidence in the leaders of US national institutions had "large and persistent discrepancies" (Turner, 1984:186). A systematic evaluation of the surveys found that the two organizations placed different types of questions leading up to the confidence questions. An experimental manipulation of the survey context was done by placing negatively related questions before a confidence question in some questionnaires, and after it in others. It was concluded that confidence levels were lower when the negative questions were placed first than when they were placed last, a primacy effect.

2.2.3 *Bias Due to the Interviewing Process*

Even when identical questionnaires are used, results often differ between surveys. Much of the discrepancy can be attributed to the interviewing process. Research suggests that both the individual characteristics of the interviewers and interviewing styles of organizations contribute to a survey's results.

Turner and Martin (1984:149-154) examined the results of the *Stouffer Survey* on civil liberties in 1954, which was carried out in tandem by two different survey organizations. Despite the fact that both organizations drew full probability samples, used identical questionnaires, and interviewers were given identical instructions to follow, there were small but statistically significant differences in the results obtained by the two survey houses. It was argued that the two survey organizations trained their interviewers differently which resulted in interviewers overriding specific question instructions. This was especially evident in how "don't know" (DK) responses were

handled. One of the survey houses trained interviewers to probe DK's, while the other instructed its interviewers to accept the answer without any further questioning.

Though it appears to be less common than originally thought, there is evidence that the mode in which the survey is administered (e.g., telephone versus face to face interviewing) systematically affects responses (Turner and Martin, 1984:137; see also DeLeeuw and Van der Zouwen, 1988). Roll and Cantril (1980) suggest that respondents are more likely to give honest answers over the telephone than face to face, especially regarding negative opinions. They argue that it is easier for people to give negative responses to unseen strangers than to a person sitting directly in front of them. For example, in 1971 a telephone poll found that the percentage who approved of Nixon as president was 11 percent points lower than the findings of a poll conducted at the same time using face to face interviews (Roll and Cantril, 1980:102).

With respect to face to face interviews — where the interviewer and interview location may be foreign to the respondents — responses may differ according to the social context in which the survey takes place. Turner and Martin (1984:257) state: "The social context can constrain or facilitate the expression of attitudes and opinions, and therefore the feelings expressed in different social situations are not necessarily consistent." There is some evidence that the physical characteristics of the interviewer influence respondents for some questions. While there has been little research regarding other characteristics, experimental manipulation has repeatedly showed that the race of the interviewer influences answers to race-related questions (Turner and Martin, 1984:136).

A problem common to both the interviewing process and the questionnaire is

conceptual ambiguity. Researchers and respondents may have different interpretations of concepts (Turner and Martin, 1984:235). For example, lay understandings of unemployment are probably different from the definition used by the Canadian government. The Canadian government includes only those who are out of work but still actively seeking employment in official unemployment statistics. This definition does not take into account those who have given up on job searches and have withdrawn from the labour force, those who have returned to school because of the lack of work, or the under-employed (i.e., those who are able only to get part-time work when they aspire to work full-time). Any of those omitted above could be considered as unemployed by some respondents. Therefore, if the goal is to determine public opinion on unemployment we would have to make sure that we specify an exact definition, or respondents would have various interpretations. Turner and Martin (1984:235) argue that "if the concepts used in survey questions are not understood in the same way by the survey researcher and the respondent, then responses to the questions are likely to be 'misinterpreted by the researcher'."

2.2.4 *Problems with Respondent Error*

Some recent research has focused on survey design from a cognitive science perspective (see an edited book by Tanur, 1992). For example, Clark and Schober (1992) argue that respondents proceed as they would in ordinary conversation, and in doing so, look for the question's intent. As a result, these authors argue that researchers should see surveys as a type of discourse, "as a specialized arena of language," if they hope to get the desired message across to respondents (Clark and Schober, 1992:43).

Determining personal opinions, however, can be problematic even when questions are completely understood by the respondents. Psychological studies have found that people do not necessarily have "privileged knowledge of their own attitudes, motives, or the causes of their behaviour" (Turner and Martin, 1984:298). Moreover, evidence suggests that when asked repeatedly to the same individuals, introspective questions often have high variability (Turner and Martin, 1984:105). In a review of 31 attitude change experiments, Nisbett and Wilson (1977) concluded that for the majority of the studies, verbal reports did not indicate attitudinal change despite behavioural indicators showing an obvious change. In other words, people do not usually report on cognitive processes (i.e., the processes mediating the effects of a stimulus on a response) on the basis of accurate introspection (Nisbett and Wilson, 1977:231). Just because respondents' attitudes show they are likely to support one candidate or party, it does not necessarily mean that they will actually vote in the same manner.

A common type of respondent error is the expression of an opinion when lacking knowledge of the subject. In his study of US national election panel data for 1956, 1958, and 1960, Converse (1964, 1974) found that responses to attitudinal questions fluctuated significantly over time (see also, Pierce and Rose, 1974). He suggested that these fluctuations were not simply changes in opinion due to temporal influences, but reflected non-attitudes. According to Converse, respondents give meaningless responses to questions when they hold no attitude in order to hide their ignorance, or to please the interviewer by supplying a response. He states, "where any single dimension is concerned, very substantial portions of the public simply do not belong on the dimension at all. They should be set aside as not forming any part of that particular

issue public" (Converse, 1964:245).

Research also suggests that a significant amount of respondent error is nonaccidental. According to Lewis and Schneider (1982), the proportion of people who lie in surveys could be as high as 15 percent. As a result, even ensuring that response categories are exhaustive, or adding a "don't know" (DK) response, will not eliminate all respondent error (Schuman and Presser, 1981:147-60). Even when they truly have no opinion on an issue, many people are reluctant to respond DK because it implies ignorance of the subject matter. Smith (1984:223) gives the example of a Gallup US survey in 1978, which found that although 96 percent had an opinion on the importance of a balanced budget, more than 25 percent did not know if the budget was balanced, and eight percent wrongly thought that it was. He concluded that people who were unknowledgeable on the subject were more likely to give what they perceived to be the socially expected (or respected) answer than a DK response — in this case, attempting to indicate that they were knowledgeable about the importance of a balanced budget.

Gilljam and Granberg (1993:355) agree that apparently meaningful answers can often be misleading if respondents truly don't have an opinion on the issue. Using Swedish survey data, however, they demonstrate that DK responses can also be problematic if they hide "relatively inaccessible attitudes rather than non attitudes." They argue that many people who appear to have no opinion on first questions often take a position on follow up questions. Unfortunately, as these authors acknowledge, there is no easy solution to the problem of DK responses. A more detailed examination of how pollsters deal with undecided voters will be given later in this chapter.

2.2.5 *Common Problems with Pre-election Polls*

Researchers have developed many models to help understand and limit the

impact of nonsampling errors in surveys (Groves, 1989; Biemer et al., 1991; Lessler and

Kalsbeek, 1992). According to Lessler and Kalsbeek (1992:6) methods such as "response

rates, item completion rates, edit failure rates, consistency checks, resurveying, and

recoding" should be incorporated into early versions of the questionnaire to ensure

minimal errors. These methods, however, are costly and require extensive time which is

not usually available to pollsters. The goal of a pre-election poll is to determine and

publicize who is leading the campaign at the current time; it matters little who led the

campaign in the past. Since polls are usually conducted under severe time constraints,

the common errors associated with surveys are more likely to occur with pre-election

polls.

Using polls to forecast elections is susceptible to an array of other problems.

First, pre-election polls are merely snapshots of public opinion at a specific point in time;

their results do not take into account changes in public opinion that occur due to events

preceding the election but falling after the poll was completed (Rosenstone, 1983:27).

Second, close elections are extremely difficult to call simply because of the potential error

in polls due to sampling. Third, in a multi-party parliamentary system like Canada's, it

can be difficult to predict the number of electoral seats each party will win based on the

overall popular vote (Emery, 1994:6; see also Kavanagh, 1981:201). Fourth, in countries

where there are sharp regional differences (as in Canada), polls have to be used

cautiously since, "regional climates of opinion are frequently at variance with national

patterns" (LeDuc, 1975:210). Despite these problems, there has been a relative dearth of

serious research on the accuracy and impact of pre-election polls.

Some attempts have been made to determine the methodology of polling firms. For example, Voss et al. (1995) examined the process by which survey data were generated by the major polling organizations in the United States. They found that large polling firms generally used three steps to conduct a poll: a) random-digit dialing, b) telephone interviewing, and c) data adjustment (e.g., post-stratification techniques such as weighting, that allow pollsters to adjust their findings so that they take into account demographic differences between their samples and the population). All of these steps enable polls to be conducted as quickly as possible.

The most extensive research on the accuracy of polls in forecasting elections was conducted by Crespi (1988), who systematically studied polling organizations in the United States. According to Crespi, the main sources of errors in polling have changed very little since the 1940's. Contrary to popular thought at the time, Crespi found that sample size does not significantly predict poll error rates. Instead, Crespi (1988:170; see also Fenwick et al., 1982; Traugott, 1987; Traugott and Tucker, 1984) argues that the four major sources of error are:

- Poor sample designs.

- Problems with potential nonvoters.

- Difficulties with undecided voters.

- Late changes in public opinion that come after the poll's completion.

Lau's (1994) analysis of polls during the 1992 presidential election in the US supports Crespi's (1988) finding that sample size has no significant effect on poll

accuracy.[8] Lau argues that the number of days the poll is in the field, and the times at which the poll is conducted, are far more important contributors to its accuracy. He states, "A 1-day poll conducted during the week resulted in over a full percentage point more error in estimating support for a candidate than would be expected from a 5-day poll with interviewing conducted on the weekends and during the week" (Lau, 1994:19). Lewis-Beck and Rice (1992) concur that the time at which interviews are conducted can seriously bias a poll's results.

Despite improvements over the years, methods of sample selection are often still problematic. Though most pre-election polls do use probability samples, some do not (Crespi, 1988). Even well intended efforts to use scientific sampling are typically flawed causing biased results (Traugott, 1987). The urgency for results from pre-election polls leads to quick, and often careless, sampling. A particularly common problem is bias due to a high nonresponse rate caused by the poor handling of callbacks (i.e., attempts to call back those selected for the sample who could not be reached initially).

Each polling firm has a different policy regarding callbacks (Voss et al., 1995). Some will call only twice in the same day, while others will call several times, at different times, for several days. Some polls take as many as four days and make six or seven callbacks if necessary. On the other hand, though some polls following a debate or other significant event utilize pre-contact methods, most are conducted with little consideration to ensuring those originally selected for the sample are reached (Voss et

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[8] Lau (1994) examined 56 "trial heat" polls conducted during the last month of the 1992 US presidential election campaign. The polls varied in sample size from 575 to 2,086. No other information was given regarding the distribution of sample sizes.

al., 1995; see also Crespi, 1988:43). A related issue is the problem of how to handle those who refuse to participate in the survey. Voss et al. (1995:110) found that most polling firms will remove the telephone number of those who are uncooperative from their lists after only one call.

There is some evidence that respondents reached on the first telephone call differ in voting behaviour from other respondents. Through post-election interviews, Bolstein (1991) compares the likelihood to vote among respondents and various types of nonrespondents in a 1988 pre-election poll taken one week before the 1988 US presidential election. Although the sample size (n=608) was too small to draw statistically significant results, there was a tendency for nonrespondents (i.e., those who could not be reached after three callbacks) to favour the Republican candidate, George Bush (68.3 percent), more strongly than those who participated in the poll (54.1 percent). Bolstein (1991:649) argues that those who are hard to reach for interviews "are more likely to be conservative," since there is probably a relatively high proportion of single people and working couples without children.

The greater the effort to reach the selected sample, the less chance there is of having biased results (Jowell et al., 1993). Unfortunately, methods to deal with nonparticipation are at best ad hoc, and as Lin and Schaeffer (1995) have shown, they are not very successful. Methods to weight the data require a large number of small decisions which are based neither on theory nor on data but "may greatly affect the resulting estimates of nonparticipation bias" (Lin and Schaeffer, 1995:253). For example, there is intuitive appeal to weight the nonresponse the same as those who were difficult to contact. This method is based on the argument that people who are difficult to contact

differ from those who are interviewed easily, and are like those who are never contacted. Evidence suggests, however, that such methods fail to capture the true extent of nonparticipation error.

Another challenging problem facing pre-election polls is how to determine likely voters (Traugott and Tucker, 1984). For purposes of predicting who is leading an election, the opinions of those who will not vote are irrelevant. Many people might be willing to tell interviewers which party or candidate they favour, but this does not mean that they will make the effort to vote on election day. In their study of post-election self-reported voting versus actual voting behaviour, Abelson et al. (1992) showed that the proportion of people who claimed to have voted was much higher than the proportion who actually voted. They argued that vote over-reporting is primarily a "social-desirability artifact," (i.e., people report having voted because voting is considered a civic duty). The same rationale could cause pollsters to obtain higher numbers of likely voters than what will actually occur if they rely on respondents' self reported intentions. Others, however, argue that poll-based election forecasts are not usually significantly different if based on the whole sample, or just on likely voters (Crespi, 1988; Lau, 1994).

How to allocate undecided voters is another difficult question pollsters must address (Fenwick et al., 1982; Jowell et al., 1993). Some polls will simply exclude from the results all those who answer "don't know" to the voting intention question. Most polls, however, attempt to limit the number of undecided by asking follow up questions to those who originally replied "don't know." The goal is to "squeeze" out a voting intention. This latter method appears to be more effective than simply excluding the "don't knows" after only one question. Still, even with the follow up questions, there can

be a large number of undecided respondents. Usually the persistent "don't knows" are

excluded from the analysis as if their influence has no effect on the results. This practice

can have serious repercussions for election predictions if the undecided are

homogeneous in attitude for one reason or another.

For example, Fox et al.'s (1996) research showed that despite polls showing a

probable "Yes" victory in the 1995 Quebec sovereignty referendum, the "No" side

squeaked out a slim victory. Part of the polls' inaccuracy probably stems from the

unusually large percentage of undecided voters who were able to make up their minds

when they went to the ballot box. A "Yes" victory would clearly have brought

uncertainty to the economy of Quebec, and it was speculated that this fact may have

played an instrumental role in the majority of the undecided opting for the status quo.

Another recent example of where a majority of initially undecided respondents

apparently voted similarly was the 1992 British general election. Through a comparison

of pre-election poll results conducted during the 1992 British general election with a

more reliable panel survey, Jowell et al. (1993) found that undecided voters during the

campaign were slightly more likely to vote for the Conservative party. An even stronger

pattern emerged for those who refused to give an interview — it appears a substantial

majority of these also voted for the Conservatives.

Outside of methodological flaws, there are often problems with how polling

firms represent their polls to the media. Frizzell's (1989) analysis of polls during the

1988 Canadian federal election supports this conclusion. First, there were commonly

problems dealing with margins of errors when samples were broken down by region.

For example, one poll conducted by Gallup used a sample of 1041 respondents and yet

divided the poll results into five regions: the Atlantic region, Quebec, Ontario, the

Prairies and BC. Despite this division, which makes the margins of error for each region

very high, the margin of error reported was only for the nation as a whole. The same

complaint is made about a poll conducted by the *Globe and Mail*, which used a sample

of 1275 and broke the poll down by province. Frizzell (1989:96) states, "They estimated

their Saskatchewan error margin at 13.5 percent. In an overall sample of this size a

representative number of voters in that province would be 51 so that even by

interviewing slightly more respondents than required, the numbers for a provincial

breakdown were ludicrous." Frizzell (1989:101) argues that attempts by the polling

industry to impose self-discipline have not been successful, and that stronger self-

regulation is needed if standards of polling methodology are ever to improve.

A cynical view of polls is that they are intended to mislead the public. Most polls

are commissioned or conducted by organizations that have an interest in their outcome

(e.g., they have a vested interest in one party or leader winning the election). According

to some writers, dishonest practices are used to ensure that the interests of the polling

firm or its client are met. Wheeler (1976:115) presents a list of ways that polling data can

be rigged:

- Using fake data;

- Intentionally biased samples;

- Using loaded questions;

- Allocating undecided voters in ways that suit the needs of the poll's sponsor;

- Throwing out respondents on the grounds that they are nonvoters;

- Manipulating the sequence and context within which questions are asked.

Wheeler (1979:116) admits that most polling data must be adjusted so that its demographics more accurately represent the population (the sample must be weighted, etc.), but he argues that the thin line between proper adjustments and rigging the data is one of intent. Candidates can also influence a poll's results without the pollster's knowledge. If candidates know one area will be polled more extensively than others (e.g., they were able to obtain the sampling points for the next poll), they could do "high-powered" campaigning in that area with the hope of influencing public opinion.

2.3 *The Media, Elections, and Polling*

In Western democracies, elections are essentially mass media campaigns. The media give politicians the chance to communicate with millions of voters several times a day. Except for the few individuals who are highly politicized, these communications are the only means through which voters develop their opinions of political candidates and parties. Like political parties, which constrain electoral choices, the media stand between the voter and their representatives (Black, 1982:166; Taras, 1990). A candidate's message is interpreted, shaped and criticized by the reporters who work for media organizations. According to Siegel (1983:14-15; see also Black, 1982), the media has immense power stemming from five major functions:

- They are the providers of basic political information;

- They are the major link between the public and government;

- They are selective in the news that they report and hence help set the political agenda;

- Their editorials can influence voters to adopt certain ideological perspectives;

- They have a direct influence on politicians because of their potential capability to influence public opinion.

It is intuitive that the media's "agenda-setting" function can influence an election campaign (see Soderlund et al., 1984). The media determine what issues are perceived as important by deciding which stories to cover, where the stories are placed, and how much space or time is devoted to them. Just as important, the media decide which issues to ignore. In his classic definition of agenda setting, Cohen (1963:13) states that the "media may not be successful in telling people what to think, but it is stunningly successful in telling its readers what to think about." Not surprisingly, Patterson (1980) found that during the 1976 US Presidential campaign, the issues that the public found important were the same issues emphasized in the media (see also McCombs and Shaw, 1972). Similarly, voter perceptions of who was winning the campaign corresponded to media representations (this was especially true for the print media). Of course, these results are subject to interpretation — we cannot be sure that there was a causal relationship — but, considering the media's powers, it seems likely that media reports both reflect public opinion, and influence it.

2.3.1 *Media Reporting of Polls*

Media reporting of public opinion polls was popular as far back as the early nineteenth century, but it began to take its present shape in 1935 "with the syndication of Gallup and Fortune polls" (Atkins and Gaudino, 1990:473). Published pre-election polls

are now so prevalent that few could deny their importance to the media's agenda setting function. In his analysis of the importance of polls to media coverage of news issues, Kovach (1980:567) states: "The polling tool has been so completely factored into our decision making process, especially in political reporting, that I have difficulty remembering how we worked before we had this tool. How did we report the issues?"

Not only are the results of polls treated as newsworthy events, but their reporting can influence the reporting of other news issues. For example, it is common knowledge that, during election campaigns, the candidates and parties that are shown to be low in the polls receive far less attention than those with a high proportion of public support (Atkins and Gaudino, 1990:478: Patterson, 1980). Even more significant, however, is the widespread trend in Western democracies towards the "horse-race" journalism approach to election coverage. Most recent academic research in this area has pertained to the USA (see Broh, 1980; Wheeler, 1990; Holley, 1991; Atkins and Gaudino, 1990), but researchers have also commented on horse-race journalism in Canada (e.g., Wagenberg et al., 1988; Fletcher, 1988; Johnston et al., 1991; and Frizzell, 1989), Great Britain (Jowell et al., 1993; Worcester, 1995) and Israel (Weimann, 1990).

Horse-race journalism refers to the media's over-emphasis on the results of pre-election polls. Instead of focussing on candidates' qualifications, platforms, or issue positions, polls have encouraged reporters to stress candidates' popularity, momentum, and sizes in leads (Atkins and Gaudino, 1990). Regarding his analysis of media reports of polls during the 1988 US presidential election, Holley (1991:215) states the following:

> The media focus far too much attention on who is leading in the
> campaign and who is trailing, the so-called horse race aspects of the
> election. The media make news by conducting their own polls. Political

polls have become increasingly more powerful components of the election process, and they interfere with that process.

Weimann (1990) states that the media commonly practices horse-race journalism regardless of the methodological deficiencies of the polls.

In the early days of polling, media organizations purchased the publishing rights of polls in order to have exclusive coverage of a story. Most polls were not commissioned or conducted by media organizations. Over the last 20 years, however, media organizations have significantly increased the number of polls that they conduct or commission, and the number of published polls in general has increased dramatically (Traugott, 1992:125). By the mid-1980's, at least 500 newspapers regularly conducted polls in the US (Ismach, 1990). Moreover, most major television networks also conduct polls. According to Von Hoffman (1980), by conducting or commissioning polls itself, the media essentially "creates" news events. He argues that this gives media organizations "the power to make every day election day" (VonHoffman, 1980:573).

How the media report the technical details of polls is also of concern. Without knowledge of the technical details of a poll, it is impossible to give any significant meaning to its results. A poll report could state that 43 percent will vote for the Liberal candidate in the next election, but without knowing the characteristics of the sample, and the exact question asked in the poll, readers cannot fairly assess this result. Perhaps the sample was small and drawn for convenience by simply asking people who walked by a downtown street corner. If this is the case, the poll tells nothing about the country as a whole, and knowing 43 percent of those polled plan to vote for the Liberals means absolutely nothing. If the technical details are not given, readers do not have the chance

to make this assessment. The potential danger with this lies in the possibility that many readers will accept the results of poorly conducted polls without criticism.

Despite the potential to mislead readers, there is little or no legislation in most countries on poll reporting. Still, many organizations — such as the Canadian Daily Newspaper Publishers' Association (CDNPA) in Canada, and the American Association for Public Opinion Research (AAPOR), the Council of American Survey Research Organizations (CASRO), and the National Council on Public Polls (NCPP) in the US—have provided standards for reporting public opinion polls for many decades (Hollander, 1971; DeMaio et al., 1990; Miller and Hurd, 1982). For example, the AAPOR Standards of disclosure for reporting polls in newspapers require an article to include the following elements:

- Sample size;

- Sponsor of the poll or survey;

- Wording of the questions used;

- Sampling error;

- Definition of the population being studied;

- Interview methodology (e.g., telephone, mail, face to face);

- Time of interviewing (e.g., weekends, weekday evenings etc.);

- Explanation of the sample.

The CASRO standards state that all survey findings should include, at minimum, the name of the sponsor of the survey, a brief description of its purpose, the sample design, dates the survey was in the field, the exact wording of the questions, and "any other information that a layperson would need to make a reasonable assessment of the

reported findings" (DeMaio et al., 1990:512). The CDNPA standards are similar except that they also require that refusal rates be stated (Frizzell, 1989:98). The NCPP, an organization that represents the interests of major pollsters, has similar standards, but adds that percentages on which conclusions are based should be included.

Industry guidelines were provided only after it was recognized that reports of polls were generally poor. It became apparent that technical information about polls had to be given if they were to be reported responsibly (Hollander, 1971:529). Nonetheless, even with these guidelines, most researchers would agree that the technical details of polls are generally poorly reported.

Although it is considered unacceptable not to report margins of error due to sampling variation, reports of surveys seldom take into account potential nonsampling errors (Turner and Martin, 1984:107-109). As Roper (1990) argues, the emphasis on sampling error implies an unwarranted degree of accuracy. For example, a report might state: "This finding is within 3 percentage points of what the entire American public thinks on this subject," when in fact a differently worded question might yield entirely different results (Roper, 1990:489). The omission of the exact question wording is one of the most serious problem with reports of poll results (Tipton, 1992:141). Just as problematic, however, polls are often misinterpreted by the media.

Miller and Hurd's (1982) study of poll reports in three US newspapers — the Chicago Tribune, the Los Angeles Times, and the Atlanta Constitution — found that methodological details are seldom given. Numerous studies concur (see also Weiman, 1990; Miller, 1991). Wilhoit and Weaver (1990) provide the following list of problems commonly found in the reports of polls:

- Often reports generalize beyond the population being sampled;

- Seldom is enough information given about how the sample was drawn and how the margin of error was calculated;

- Insignificant differences are often over emphasized;

- The conclusions of reports are often based on only a small part of the poll rather than the whole poll.

Ultimately, these problems can result in poor interpretations of polling results.

A more controversial argument is that polls are often deliberately misrepresented by the media. Emery argues that polls can be deliberately misused and misinterpreted "if the technical information accompanying them is too sketchy to permit assessment of the validity of the results" (1994:16; see also Cantril, 1991). Wheeler (1976) argues that polls are often deliberately misrepresented because media organizations want snappy headlines to attract readers. He states: "A pollster who submits a survey which says that 30 percent are for candidate A, 20 percent for B, and the remaining 50 percent undecided may well be presenting the most accurate picture of public opinion, but he will not be in the newspaper business long" (Wheeler, 1976:130). Hoy (1989) presents good anecdotal evidence of media attempts to influence Canadian elections by reporting polls dishonestly (e.g., by overstating the lead of one candidate over the other).

There have been efforts towards educating people about how to read polls, but not in mainstream publications that the average citizen is likely to read (see Gallup, 1972, Cantril, 1982; Cantril, 1991; Crespi, 1989). Instead, the general public relies on what the media tell them. As was shown earlier, the limited research in this area indicates that the media do not provide the public with enough information to make complete sense of polling results. There have been some attempts to educate journalist about interpreting

and reporting polls correctly (for example, see Wilhoit and Weaver, 1990; Gawiser and Witt, 1994), but it appears that they do not heed this advice, and as a result the public is often misled by media reports of polls.

2.3.2 *Assessing the Influence of Published Pre-election Polls*

The media's power does not go unnoticed by politicians, who seem to understand that "an effective media strategy," which ensures quick and positive media coverage, is necessary for electoral success (Frizzell and Westell, 1989:75). It is obvious that politicians pay close attention to pre-election polls (MacKuen and Turner, 1984). Interest in the issues that the electorate finds important has led to the development of private polling by political parties (Hoy, 1989; Emery, 1994; Smith, 1990; Jacobs and Shapiro, 1995). From a more radical perspective, it is argued that politicians and government officials control the media (see Herman and Chomsky, 1988). According to this argument, public opinion is manipulated so that it approves of government actions.

Assessing the influence of media coverage of elections on the electorate, however, is not as clear. Although we can determine how a campaign is covered, this does not tell us how the coverage affected the public (Berkman and Kitch, 1986:136). Research by Patterson and McClure (1976:53) found that two out of three Americans who recently watched evening television news programmes could not recall even one story accurately. Nevertheless, just because many people have difficulty recalling news stories does not mean that the media has little impact on voters. This is especially true when it comes to the media's representations of public opinion. Experimental research suggests that people often submit to group opinion, especially when confronted with issues that are

supported by an overwhelming majority (Lang and Lang, 1990:360).

Testing the political and social impact of published polling results is a difficult task, and there are few systematic studies in the area (Turner and Martin, 1984:52). The wide range of possible effects — e.g., changes in political interest, changes in the knowledge about candidates or issues, and changes in support for candidates — complicates the assessment of the impact of pre-election polls. Making things even more complicated is that many of the effects of polls are likely indirect, making it difficult to measure them. There are also questions of exactly whom the media affects — the general public, only political elites, or both (Traugott, 1992:125). Nonetheless, there are some findings worthy of discussion.

Some argue that polls have no significant effect on voting behaviour and public attitudes towards election campaigns (e.g., Roshwalb and Resnicoff, 1971; Fleitas, 1971). Most research, however, contradicts these claims. Even anecdotal evidence is quite convincing that polls substantially affect public perceptions, and it is difficult to imagine that polls have no impact on the public at all (Martin, 1987; Wheeler, 1976). At the very least, polls can influence public opinion simply by raising attention to the issues that they ask questions about (Berkman and Kitch, 1986:152). Furthermore, even if they have minimal influence on voting behaviour, polls undoubtedly influence political campaigns (Frizzell, 1989:101). As former US House Majority Leader Tip O'Neill once stated: "A terrifically lopsided poll can kill a campaign by killing off the contributions" (Wheeler, 1976:115).

A continuing debate centres around the question of whether published pre-election polls infringe on the democratic process by affecting voting behaviour.

According to Kavanagh (1981:211) if we believe that polls influence voting behaviour, then we must assume that voters understand how other voters will react to poll findings on election day. This is difficult to assess, but it is conceivable that some people make their voting choice after considering the probable choices of others. As a result, there has been concern over the possibility of bandwagon and underdog effects since the early days of pre-election polling (Traugott, 1992:136; see also Herbst, 1993:89-111 for a good discussion of concern from the US Congress).

A bandwagon occurs when one party or candidate is perceived to be gaining in popularity due to the influence of published polls already showing a lead. In contrast, underdog effects refer to the phenomenon of when candidates or parties are showed to be behind in polls, and preferences change in their favour. As Fleitas (1971:434) argues, "what both the bandwagon and underdog phenomena have in common is the ability to persuade voters to respond to candidates on the basis of very little information." Considering the media's emphasis on horse-race journalism, these phenomena are at least plausible.

Not surprisingly, pollsters deny bandwagon and underdog effects. As early as 1940, Gallup argued that although leading candidates remained in the lead as US elections came closer, their portion of public support actually decreased (Traugott, 1992:137). More recently, Lorne Bozinoff, vice-president of Gallup Canada, stated "A thermometer does not create the weather, and a poll does not create public opinion" (Bozinoff et al., 1991). In spite of these claims, studies of post-election response have shown bandwagon effects on reported votes (i.e., people who falsely claim to have voted for the election winner). Presumably these little lies "reflect the mild euphoria that sets

in as a heated campaign ends and partisan hatchets are temporarily buried" (Lang and

Lang, 1990:360). There are theoretical grounds to believe that a similar mass

phenomenon may occur during a campaign, indicating that pre-election bandwagon

effects could also exist. On a related issue, some researchers cite a rise in a winning

candidate's popularity immediately following the election as evidence of bandwagon

effects (Mueller, 1970).

Determining if bandwagon and underdog effects are caused by published polls is

an extremely difficult task. As Traugott (1992:137) states: "The problem is to understand

a citizen's initial attitude or behavioural predisposition, to know that he or she was

exposed to news content containing polling information, and then to ascertain whether a

change in attitudes or behavior has taken place because of that exposure." Even if this

problem could easily be overcome, analysing bandwagon and underdog effects is

complicated because they can presumably occur simultaneously, in effect cancelling each

other out in the aggregate.

Some British political scientists look simply to late trends in polls as indications

of bandwagon and underdog effects. For example, Hodder-Williams (1970:47) argues

that possible evidence of bandwagon effects is shown when a party wins power with far

more votes than polls leading up to the election indicated they would. This was the case

during the Orpington by-election of 1962, when polls predicted that the Liberals would

receive four percent more votes than the Conservatives; on election day they won by 18

percentage points. On the other hand, according to Kavanagh (1981:212), the four British

general elections between 1966 and 1974 show the possibility of underdog effects.

During all four elections, the party that was ahead in the last pre-election poll did worse

than was expected.

Despite these examples, statistical support for bandwagon and underdog effects is meagre. A few studies, however, have provided modest experimental evidence (e.g., Nadeau et al., 1993; Ansolabehere and Iyengar, 1994; McAllister and Studlar, 1991). A good example is research by Lavrakas et al. (1991), which used panel data to examine attitudes of registered voters before and after the 1988 US presidential election. They found apparently simultaneous bandwagon and underdog effects. The differences between expected vote preference and actual vote showed that one-fifth of those who were predicted to vote for Bush actually voted for Dukakis (indicating a possible underdog effect), while one-tenth of the predicted supporters of Dukakis actually voted for Bush (suggesting the possibility of a bandwagon effect). As logic would suggest, "it was voters who made up their minds late in the actual 1988 campaign who were most likely to demonstrate either effect" (Lavrakas et al., 1991:180).

Other experimental research also shows the possibility of underdog effects (e.g., Marsh, 1984; Navazio, 1977). One such experiment is Ceci and Kain's (1982) study of voting intentions of college students during the 1980 US presidential election. Students were divided into three different groups and told that a recent poll of college-educated people showed Carter [or Reagan] with a substantial lead over Reagan [or Carter]. The students were then asked to state their vote preference. Each group of students was later given information about a new poll. Two of the three groups were given information that showed one or the other candidate in the lead, as well as other campaign information. The control group was supplied the latter information about the campaign, but nothing about who was leading. Again the students were asked to state their vote

preference. A comparison of the two question responses showed significant shifts in candidate support — most prevalent was the decline in support for the candidate depicted as leading in the campaign. Still, this was not convincing evidence of underdog effects since declining support for the leading candidate was not accompanied by increased support for the trailer. Instead, most of the shift seemed to occur among the undecided.

If polls do not change voting intentions, there is some evidence to suggest that they can influence voter turnout. Research by Jackson (1983; see also Sudman, 1986) shows that election night reporting, specifically of exit polls, can affect whether people vote if the reports change perceptions about the closeness of the race. Using data from the 1980 Presidential Election Study it was found that, for those who had not voted yet, hearing an election projection on the night of the election decreased the likelihood of voting. Jackson concluded that respondents' decisions to vote were based, in part, on the perception of the value of their vote — i.e., if voting was seen as able to make a difference in the outcome, then people were more likely to vote. According to this argument, voting is like other human behaviours, with both costs and benefits (Sudman, 1986). If the costs of voting (e.g., the time taken up to actually vote) are too high relative to the benefits (e.g., voting to support a favoured candidate or party when it appears they will lose anyway), then many voters will choose not to vote.

2.3.3 *The Media, Polls and Canadian Elections*

The effect of the mass media on Canadian voting has been relatively neglected in social science research (Gidengil, 1992). Nonetheless, a number of studies have

addressed the general issue of polling and media coverage during Canadian election

campaigns (see an edited volume by Fletcher, 1991; also, Lachapelle, 1991; Frizzell, 1989;

Wagenberg et al., 1988; Johnston et al., 1992; Soderlund, 1984). There are five major

points to report here. First, election reporting has gradually increased over the years.

Second, the number of polls reported in the Canadian media has risen drastically over

the past two decades. Third, polls have become one of the most important issues

covered during election campaigns. Fourth, poll results seem to affect how other issues

in an election campaign are covered; mostly because of the emphasis on "horse-race"

journalism. With respect to these first four points, some have argued that polls have

become so much a part of Canadian elections that they have gained too much influence

over the electorate (Wagenberg et al., 1988; Lachapelle, 1991:11). Last, but not least, the

technical reporting of polls is generally not very good (e.g., the public is often not given

enough information to make sense of the polls), and their results are often

misinterpreted by reporters. With special emphasis on the handling of polls, the

following discussion provides a review of relevant literature on election reporting in

Canada during the past three decades.

Fletcher (1981) analysed election reporting in nine newspapers, and the CBC,

CTV and SRC television news programmes, for both the 1974 and 1979 Canadian federal

campaigns. Among his observations was that election campaign coverage was on the

increase in the broadcast media. Only the SRC did not increase its election coverage

from 1974 to 1979; he argues this was probably due only to the fact that their coverage

was already exhausting available resources. In contrast, newspaper election coverage

remained relatively stable from 1974 to 1979.

Fletcher (1981:292) also noticed an increasing "trend in Canada toward more judgmental journalism." This conclusion was based on discussions with veteran reporters who claimed that they were becoming more interpretive and critical of the objectives of campaigns. According to Fletcher, the television networks and some major newspapers encouraged their journalists to be more judgmental than they had in previous campaigns. There were two outcomes to this new approach. On the negative side, important issues were often shuffled aside. As Fletcher (1981:292) writes, "Reports came to resemble sports writing or theatre reviews." On the positive side, there was a tremendous increase in issue-oriented reports by the national media. For example, CBC English television established a team, backed by researchers, to prepare special issue reports for the news. In total, the CBC national news devoted more than an hour of air time during the election to the coverage of campaign issues (about 14 percent of its campaign coverage). CTV, however, provided much poorer coverage—only about 45 minutes of its campaign coverage was devoted to issues.[9] In general, newspapers provided better coverage of issues than television stations.

During the 1979 Canadian federal election campaign there were eight national published polls. Fletcher (1981) argues that although polls accounted for only about five percent of media reports during the campaign, they had a strong influence on how reporters covered other election issues. He states, "The poll results no doubt both reflected and reinforced media perceptions" (Fletcher, 1981:299). While the polls were

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[9] Unfortunately, the percentage of the CTV's election campaign coverage devoted to issues is not given, nor is the total amount of time devoted to the campaign as a whole.

generally of "reasonable technical standard", secondary reports of them in the media were often misleading (Fletcher, 1981:297). The media seldom provided adequate technical information about the polls. For example, sampling techniques, sample size, and question wording were rarely discussed. The most common flaw was the exaggeration of differences between polls. The major consequence of this was that it created "the impression that various polls were in contradiction when in fact they were in broad agreement" (Fletcher, 1981:296). A close analysis of the polls suggests that there were only minor shifts in voting intention during the campaign.

During the 1970's and 80's, W.C. Soderlund, W.I. Romanow, E.D. Briggs and R.H. Wagenberg, all from the University of Windsor, conducted many studies on media coverage of Canadian elections (Wagenberg et al., 1988; Soderlund et al., 1984). They found that election coverage was relatively homogenous among media organizations (see also Siegel, 1983:246). All media showed marked increases in the number of reports on pre-election polls. Media attention towards polls grew progressively to the point that, by the 1984 election campaign, polls received more attention than any other campaign issue (Wagenberg et al., 1988; Soderlund, 1984:133-134; see also Fletcher, 1988:170). In the two previous federal elections (1979 and 1980), polling had ranked no higher than fourth in coverage from any one medium, and party leadership was the single most important focus of the media.

Wagenberg et al. (1988) argued that the increase in polling reports marks a growing tendency towards a horse-race style of political reporting (i.e., reports concentrated more on who appeared to be leading the campaign than on substantive issues). As a result, they argue that voting decisions may be influenced less by

substantive matters than whether a party is deemed likely to win or lose the election. Since the Conservative party was ahead in the polls during the whole 1984 Canadian federal election, a very high proportion of news items contained a positive impression of the Conservative party and a negative one of the Liberal party. According to Wagenberg et al. (1988:122) the mere reporting of that fact raised the possibility of a 'bandwagon' effect. They concluded that highly publicized and frequent reports of polls are influential with respect to voting behaviour, and "media emphasis on them during the 1984 campaign was a significant factor in the election outcome" (Wagenberg et al., 1988:128).

Fletcher (1988) agrees that the media had a notable effect on the outcome of the 1984 Canadian federal election. An analysis of the polls showed that more than half of voters made their voting decision during the course of the campaign — this was a significant increase over previous campaigns. The major newspapers devoted between 6 and 10 percent of their space to election coverage. Also, CBC television's evening news programme, "The National," devoted 390 minutes to election coverage — an increase of nearly 10 percent over the previous election. Again, as in the 1979 election, reporters tried to interpret the campaign. One study of CBC's television coverage of the 1984 campaign reported that only 12 percent of the time was directed at reporting what the leaders actually said, while the other 88 percent was taken up by reporters' commentaries (Fletcher, 1988:168; see also, Comber and Mayne, 1986:92). The pattern towards more commentary was even more prevalent in the press.

Both the 1980 and 1984 Canadian federal elections again saw an increase in the number of published national pre-election polls — in 1980 there were 10, and in 1984

there were 12. Fletcher (1981) argues that even more than in previous elections, the poll results set the tone for coverage of the election. In 1980, polls were reported in 16 percent of election stories on network television news, and by 1984 they were featured in 20 percent. (Fletcher, 1988:170). By 1984, radio and newspapers provided more coverage of polls than any other campaign issue. Radio and newspapers devoted 26 and 17 percent of election coverage respectively to poll related stories. The proportion of stories related to polls occupying the lead item on television and the front page in newspapers was also very high (33 percent for television, and 25 percent for newspapers).

The emphasis on pre-election polls had three major consequences for the 1984 federal election campaign (Fletcher, 1988). First, like Wagenberg et al. (1988), Fletcher argues that the campaign was treated more as a "horse-race" than an election campaign. Reporting of serious issues suffered greatly because of the overwhelming emphasis on discussing who was winning the campaign. Second, the Liberal party continually showed poorly in the polls, and this was reinforced by the media, which in turn put the Liberal party on the defensive. Third, the nature of media coverage of the campaign in general was influenced by poll results. Once it was determined that the Progressive Conservative party would probably win the election (as was indicated in poll results), campaign coverage became little more than a discussion of the possible magnitude of victory, and the consequences of a Progressive Conservative majority.

Pre-election polls were even more pervasive during the 1988 Canadian federal election campaign. The number of published national polls was 24—double the number of the 1984 election (Frizzell, 1989:95). According to Johnston et al. (1992), polls again received more attention than any other campaign issue, and they had no shortage of

interpretation from the media. Johnston at al. argue that the CBC's evening national news programme "The National" was committed to poll coverage, and despite only conducting two polls itself, provided the most comprehensive coverage of all polls. On the other hand, the two major Toronto newspapers, the *Globe and Mail* and the *Toronto Star* each provided spotty coverage that concentrated mostly on the polls that were conducted by their respective polling firm affiliates. Johnston et al. (1992:123) state: "On the day that the affiliate firm reported, only that firm would get front-page coverage. Other days, other polls might make the front page, but never with the detail that the affiliated poll received." Johnston et al., (1991:123) also commented that horse-race journalism was frequent, but not a daily event.

In his analysis of the 1988 Canadian federal election, Frizzell (1989) found that pre-election polls were generally both flawed methodologically and poorly interpreted by the polling organizations that conducted them. Lachapelle (1991) examined how polling results during the 1988 Canadian federal election campaign were represented in the press. His analysis showed that "despite the existence of standards of practice and codes of ethics, certain elements are missing from published results" (Lachapelle, 1991:108).

Johnston et al. (1991:332) argue elsewhere that pre-election polls during the 1988 election campaign drove voter expectations. They argue that the polls seemed to produce a small bandwagon that did not have a significant effect on the election. At no point in time was the Progressive Conservative party's share of public support significantly influenced by prior published polls. On the other hand, the New Democratic Party's (NDP) share of popular support appears to have responded to at

least one poll. There is also weak evidence to suggest that polls influenced public support for the Liberals. Nonetheless, the effects of polls on the Liberal party was difficult to assess since its support fluctuated throughout the campaign.

On average, newspapers devoted approximately five percent of their coverage of the 1988 election to stories that had polls as the main topic (Frizzell, 1989:98). Though this was extensive coverage, there was still plenty of room to cover the other issues of the campaign. Most importantly, however, no newspaper article during the 1988 election complied with all the guidelines established by the Canadian Daily Newspaper Publishers' Association on basic information that should be included when reporting a poll. At least one of the recommended elements — the reporting of sample size, sponsorship, refusal rates and method of sample selection — was excluded from every report. This problem was most serious when polls were mentioned as secondary aspects in a story (e.g., usually editorials and columns). Stories in the *Globe and Mail* generally came closer to achieving these guidelines than others.

Television news was far more concerned with polls (at least proportionately to other election stories) than the print media. CBC television mentioned polls in 20 percent of its election stories, and nine percent of the election stories had polls as the main topic (Frizzell, 1989:99). CTV led the television media in terms of the amount of coverage given to polls. It mentioned polls in 21 percent of its election stories, with 15 percent of its election stories having polls as the main topic. Moreover, Frizzell (1989:97) argues, it was a "sad fact" that most media reporting of polls concentrated only on who was winning and losing, and not on the how the public saw the issues. The only television media organization that provided substantial issue coverage was CBC's

television news. There was much similarity in the manner in which newspapers and television news reported polling results during the 1988 campaign. Despite proportionately more coverage of polls compared to newspapers, television was just as inadequate in its explanation of the technical details of the polls.

Using National Election Study data, Mendelsohn (1994) examined the effect of the media on vote intentions during the 1988 Canadian federal election. It was found that the pattern of exposure to the media influenced opinions about the campaign — those who had high media exposure led others in terms of opinion. It is argued that gradual increases in support for one candidate cannot necessarily be considered as evidence of momentum, but rather, in many cases, probably indicate the fact that those with less media exposure take longer to hear of campaign issues. Mendelsohn (1994:95) concludes that, although the media served to reinforce most voters opinions and voting intentions, a large enough minority of voters were persuaded by media messages that it is possible they can determine election outcomes.

2.4 *Chapter Summary*

This chapter started with an examination of the evolution of modern pre-election polling in the context of changes in methodology. The first polls (known as straw polls) were conducted with convenience samples usually taken from newspaper or magazine subscription lists. While at first this method of sample selection appeared to work well, it didn't take long before it was clear that straw polls could not adequately measure public opinion. The drastically wrong prediction of the 1936 US presidential election by a *Literary Digest* poll ended the credibility of straw polls. On the other hand, the correct

prediction by pollsters using quota sampling started a movement to this new method of sample selection. Eventually problems with quota sampling were evident, and probability samples became the standard for pre-election polls. Even today, however, not all pollsters employ probability sampling techniques.

I then discussed the various types of nonsampling errors that can cause problems for polling accuracy. Questionnaire problems, problems due to the interviewing process, and respondent error can produce bias in survey results. The time constraints associated with pre-election polls increase the likelihood of these problems occurring. When used to predict election outcomes, polls are also susceptible to other problems. In this regard, the most difficult questions facing pollsters are how to determine likely voters, and how to allocate undecided voters. Furthermore, since they are only snapshots of public opinion at a certain time, it is difficult to extrapolate the results of polls to election day. Research in this area indicates that most polls are not conducted well.

Finally, I discussed the literature related to media reports of pre-election polls in Western democracies. I concluded with a look at the media coverage of Canadian elections (specifically of pre-election polls) over the past two decades. It was found that the number of published polls has been steadily increasing since the 1970's, to the point where today they are one of the most important election issues covered. Though there are few systematic studies in the area, most research shows that quality of reporting of polls is poor. Seldom is enough technical information given for the public to be able to make any real sense of polling results.

CHAPTER 3

DATA AND METHODS

As explained in chapter one, this dissertation has four goals: (1) it examines media reports of the 1997 Canadian federal election, determining the relative importance that each media organization placed on each campaign issue; (2) it ascertains how poll results were represented; (3) it compares the survey methods of 17 organizations that conduct polls of voting intentions in Canada; and (4) it uses data from published pre-election polls to study changes in voting intentions before the 1997 Canadian federal election.

The four goals of the dissertation required that data be assembled from many sources, and each goal relied on different methods. As a result, this chapter is divided into four sections, each focussing on the data and methods used to accomplish one of the dissertation's goals.

3.1 Media Reports of the 1997 Canadian Federal Election Campaign

3.1.1 Source of Data: Newspapers and Television News Programmes

The assessment of media coverage of the 1997 Canadian federal election, and the role poll reports played in that coverage, was restricted to a 37 day period, starting with the day the election writ was issued, and ending with media reports on election day that

occurred before the polls closed (April 27, 1997 — June 2, 1997). Only newspaper and

television news coverage were analysed[1], neglecting radio broadcasts due to their

relative unimportance,[2] and the internet because, although it is an increasingly important

source of information, it is still only a major source of news for a minority of the

population. Media reports of the election were examined both quantitatively and

qualitatively.

To evaluate television coverage, I examined all reports of the election on the late

evening national news programmes of all three Canadian networks with a nationwide

presence:

- *The National* on the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (CBC), regularly
  scheduled weeknights at 10:00pm.[3]

- *CTV Evening News* on the CTV Television Network (CTV), scheduled
  weeknights and weekends at 11:00pm.[4]

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[1] According to most research, television is "the most important sector of the
Canadian mass media in shaping public opinion" (Siegel, 1983:32). Television is the most
effective medium because it utilizes moving pictures and sound, and it is able to transmit
its message quickly. Still, the role of printed media should not be underestimated.
Though evidence shows that newspapers and television news reach the same audience,
the press is the most important source of in-depth news (Siegel, 1983:33).

[2] The relative unimportance of radio was reflected in the National Election
Survey of 1984, which found that only four percent of Canadian voters received their
news from radio alone, compared with 42 percent and 14 percent from television and
newspapers. Only 21 percent received their news from a combination of radio and
another medium (MacDermid, 1991:55). A 1987 survey found similar results: 47 percent
of Canadians were informed about the news from television, 31 percent from
newspapers, and 15 percent from radio (Adams and Levitin, 1988).

[3] Due to the CBC's and Radio-Canada's commitment to cover the NHL's Stanley
Cup Play-offs during the month of May, the *National* and *Le Téléjournal* did not always
appear at the regularly scheduled times.

[4] I am missing reports for CTV's Evening News on May 2, 1997 due to a video-
taping error.

• *Le Téléjournal* on Radio-Canada (SRC), regularly scheduled weeknights and weekends at 10:00pm.

These programs were chosen because of their large national audiences and prestige.

CBC and Radio-Canada are publicly owned broadcasters, while CTV is a network

composed of privately owned stations and affiliates. Furthermore, Radio-Canada's *Le*

Téléjournal ensured a strong French language presence.

I also analysed all news reports, columns and editorials (excluding letters to the

editor) dealing with the election in 11 major newspapers. Each of the four major regions

of Canada — the Atlantic Provinces, Quebec, Ontario and the West — was represented

by at least one major newspaper from its largest city, and by the newspaper with the

largest circulation in the region. Newspapers in both official languages — French and

English — were examined. The newspapers analysed were:

•Atlantic Provinces: *Halifax Chronicle-Herald*, Halifax.

•Quebec: *Le Devoir*, Montreal (French language); *The Gazette*, Montreal
            (English language); *La Presse*, Montreal (French language).

•Ontario: *The Globe and Mail*, Toronto; *The Toronto Star*; *Toronto Sun*;
            Ottawa Citizen.

•Western Provinces: *Calgary Herald*; *Vancouver Sun*;
                    Winnipeg Free Press.

Table 3.1 provides information about the ownership and circulation of each newspaper

analysed in the study.

The total number of election reports analysed was 4430 (3926 newspaper articles,

and 504 television news reports).

Table 3.1
Descriptive information about the 11 Newspapers analysed.

Newspaper	Owner	Format	Publication Frequency	Average Daily Publication
Calgary Herald	Southam	Broadsheet	Mon-Sun	122 736
Montreal Gazette	Southam	Broadsheet	Mon-Sun	156 589
Globe & Mail	Thomson	Broadsheet	Mon-Sat	313 682
Halifax Chronicle-Herald	Independent	Broadsheet	Mon-Sat	99 615
Montréal Le Devoir	Independent	Broadsheet	Mon-Sat	31 962
Montréal La Presse	Power Corp.	Broadsheet	Mon-Sun	196 621
Ottawa Citizen	Southam	Broadsheet	Mon-Sun	148 256
Toronto Star	Torstar	Broadsheet	Mon-Sun	514 755
Toronto Sun	Sun Media	Tabloid	Mon-Sun	253 094
Vancouver Sun	Southam	Broadsheet	Mon-Sat	204 429
Winnipeg Free Press	Thomson	Broadsheet	Mon-Sun	146 408

Source of data: Compiled from information obtained from the *Canadian Newspaper Association* <http://www.cna-acj.ca>, June 27, 1997.

3.1.2 *Assessing Media coverage*

This part of the dissertation attempts to: (1) determine the relative importance the media placed on the major campaign issues and parties, paying attention to the role of polls (i.e., to determine the extent of horse-race journalism); and (2) discover whether the coverage of issues changed over time. I was interested in overall media coverage, but also in differences between television and newspapers, and among different media organizations. Through a content analysis, reports were analysed both quantitatively and qualitatively.

First, I attempted to determine the political agenda of each media organization.

Here I adapted parts of the methods from previous studies on the agenda-setting function of the media, and how election campaigns are reported (Wagenberg et al., 1988; Soderlund et al., 1984; Halford et al., 1983; Weimann, 1990).

Agenda setting was explored by examining: (1) the editorial stance of each media organization determined simply from their self-endorsements of parties, leaders, or issues; (2) the relative frequency with which each of the major issues was the main focus of reports; (3) the frequency with which the major campaign issues were reported; and (4) the form of coverage of issues. A qualitative analysis of the media was also used to determine which campaign events were deemed as potentially influential to the campaign (i.e., events that possibly could have affected voting intentions).

For the quantitative analysis of the media, all newspaper articles and television reports were coded according to the presence or absence of the 12 most discussed campaign issues. If it was obvious that one issue was the main focus of an article, this information was also recorded. I also determined if one political party received more attention than others in each report, recording the name of the party.

A preliminary list of issues was adapted from previous research on media coverage of Canadian elections (see Wagenberg et al., 1988; Johnston et al., 1991). Since each campaign has its own peculiarities, however, the list was revised after exploring the issues discussed in the first two weeks of the campaign. The final list of issues included:

(1)   *Results of pre-election polls.* If pre-election polls were present, I compiled more information such as:

    i.   Number of polls discussed.

    ii.   Whether or not the article compared polls over time.

iii. Whether or not the article compared polls conducted at the same time.

iv. If statistical tests of comparisons between two or more polls were mentioned.

v. Whether or not comparisons were displayed in graphs or tables.

vi. Whether or not the article claimed one party was leading the campaign, and if so, which party was claimed to be leading.

vii. Did the article predict one party was going to win the election?

viii. Were there direct warnings of the possible risks of using polls to determine party support, and predict election outcomes?

(2) *Government spending or deficit reduction.*

(3) *Law and order issues.* This included articles mentioning gun control, prisoners' rights and/or victims' rights, decriminalizing euthanasia or marijuana.

(4) *Televised leaders' debates* (either French or English).

(5) *Increased spending for education and/or research.*

(6) *Leadership.* This referred specifically to discussions regarding the abilities of party leaders.

(7) *Health care spending.*

(8) *National unity.*

(9) *Tax reform.* This referred to whether increases or decreases in income taxes were discussed.

(10) *The timing of the election call.* This related either to criticism of the timing

of the election call on the grounds that the Liberal party lacked the

necessary mandate, or that the election should not have been called until

the Manitoba flood disaster was under control.

(11)   *Unemployment and/or job creation.*

(12)   *Poverty.* This referred to mention of the need for increased government

spending on policies directed at decreasing either poverty in general, or

child poverty specifically.

Finally, I recorded the author (or reporter), the length of the report (for television

news this was measured in minutes, for newspapers it was measured in the length of the

columns), its placement relative to other reports, the date, and the type of report (i.e.,

newspaper article, newspaper column, newspaper editorial or television news

programme). Appendix A contains the complete code book of the variables and

categories used in the analysis of media reports of the election.

Contingency tables and chi-square tests were used to determine differences in the

coverage of issues. Using two-way tables I explored the differences in the coverage of

each issue: (1) between newspapers and television news programmes; (2) among the 11

newspapers; (3) between newspapers grouped according to their ownership; and (4)

among the three television news programmes. The dependent variables for all the

contingency tables were the campaign issues listed in section 3.2.2.

Next, I was interested in determining the likelihood of issues being covered at

different points in time during the campaign. To accomplish this, I employed a series of

binary logit models, using time as the primary explanatory variable in eight separate

models, each model using the presence or absence of a different issue as the response

variable. For this analysis, I concentrated only on the eight most mentioned issues: (1) leadership, (2) national unity, (3) polls, (4) unemployment, (5) budget, (6) taxes, (7) health care, and (8) the televised leaders' debates. Other issues were not examined because of their relative unimportance; none was mentioned in more than 10 percent of reports.

Date was operationalized as a continuous variable when possible (i.e., when the relationship between date and the response variable was linear on the logit scale). In other cases date was operationalized as a set of dummy variables. Events during the campaign were modelled using dummy variables and added as explanatory variables to some of the logit models in order to determine if they affected media coverage of the issue in question.

The qualitative analysis of the media determined that only two issues were likely to be directly affected by events during the campaign: national unity and the televised leaders' debates.

Five events were operationalized as dummy variables to test their effects on coverage of national unity: (1) May 3, 1997 — The Liberals started to receive criticism from other parties for their nearly disastrous efforts during the 1995 Quebec Referendum; (2) May 8, 1997 — Jacques Parizeau's book release caused a stir because of the statement that he planned to unilaterally declare independence if the Yes side won the referendum; (3) May 13, 1997 — The English-language leaders' debate, which had a heated discussion about unity; (4) May 19, 1997 — The French-language leaders' debate on unity; and (5) May 26, 1997 — Jean Chrétien stated that 50 percent plus one is not enough support in a referendum to allow Quebec to separate from Canada.

Events that possibly affected coverage of the televised leaders' debates were obvious: the debates themselves. Three periods were examined: (1) the pre-debates; (2) the mid-debate period (i.e., the period between the English-language debate and the French-language unity debate); and (3) the post-debate period. Two dummy variables were used to operationalize these dates, with the pre-debate period being the baseline category.

The use of logit models allowed me to examine television news programmes and newspapers simultaneously, controlling for medium. Moreover, including television reports and newspaper articles together made it possible to add a new category to the ownership variable — "public" — which included CBC's *The National* and Radio-Canada's *Le Téléjournal*. Binary logit models also allowed me to improve on the bivariate analyses by controlling for five independent variables: date, region, medium, language and ownership. Analyses of deviance were performed to test the significance of the effects of the explanatory variables.

3.2 *Evaluating Media Reports of Polls*

Starting from the same data as above, reports containing mention of pre-election polls were further coded according to how the technical details of the polls were reported. For this analysis, each poll — not each story or article — was treated as an individual case (in other words, it was possible for there to be details of more than one poll in a single newspaper article or television story). The variables and categories used to analyse the technical reporting of the polls are listed below:

(1)   *Type of poll*. I analysed the reporting of four types of polls: (1) Voting

intention polls (i.e., national and provincial party preference polls); (2)

popularity polls (i.e., Leader preference polls); (3) riding or area polls (i.e.,

polls that discussed voting intentions for a small subsection of the

population), and (4) issue polls (i.e., polls regarding opinions of campaign

issues).

(2) *Firm that conducted the poll.* Here I entered the name of the firm that

conducted the poll. If the firm was not mentioned I entered "none."

(3) *Sample size.* The sample size was recorded as stated in the article; "0"

was entered if none was given.

(4) *Percentage of support for the Liberal Party or candidate.* For this and the

next seven variables I entered the percentage as given in the article to one

decimal place, with the decimal point (e.g., 43.5); if the percentage was not

reported, then I recorded 0.0.

(5) *Percentage of support for the Reform Party or candidate.*

(6) *Percentage of support for the Bloc Québécois or candidate.*

(7) *Percentage of support for the Progressive Conservative Party or

candidate.*

(8) *Percentage of support for the New Democratic Party or candidate.*

(9) *Percentage of support for other parties or candidates.*

(10) *Percentage of respondents who were undecided.*

(11) *Percentage who refused to answer the survey question.*

(12) *Global non-response rate.* I recorded the non-response rate as a

percentage to one decimal place (e.g., 39.3) if it was reported; if the

response rate was reported, I subtracted it from 100; if the global non-response rate was not reported, I recorded 0.0.

(13)   *Margin of error.* I entered the half-width of the confidence interval stated in the article, in percent to one decimal place (e.g., if the report was that the poll results were "accurate to plus or minus 3 percent, 19 times in 20" I entered 3.0).

(14)   *Dates the survey was in the field.* I entered the starting and ending date of the survey; for dates not identified I entered 0.

(15)   *Was there mention of the date that the poll was first published?* This variable applied to secondary reports of polls that had been previously published.

(16)   *Was the exact wording of the question used in the poll discussed?*

(17)   *Was there a meaningful discussion of the undecided vote (i.e., did the discussion go beyond a mere mention of the percentage undecided?).*

(18)   *Was there specific discussion of poll results for Quebec voters?* I also determined the extent to which the Quebec results were mentioned (i.e., were the results discussed in detail, or were they simply referred to with sparse details).

(19)   *Was there specific discussion of poll results for one or more provinces or regions other than Quebec?*

(20)   *Was there a breakdown by gender?* I also determined the extent to which differences in results between genders were mentioned (i.e., were the results discussed in detail, or were they simply referred to with sparse

details).

(21)   *Was there a breakdown by any socio-economic characteristics (including any of the following: class, race, age, education, income)?*

In total, detailed information about poll results were given on 1452 occasions. The type of polls can be further broken down to include: 1231 party preference polls; 142 leader preference polls, 65 riding polls, and 14 polls dealing with public opinion of campaign issues.

Reports of pre-election polls were examined both qualitatively and quantitatively. First, I used contingency tables and chi-square statistics to assess differences in the contents of reports dealing with polls in an attempt to determine the extent to which they were relied on as a new issue. Next, I used contingency tables and chi-square statistics to examine difference in reporting of the various technical details of polls. I also performed a more qualitative analysis by looking at the manner in which polls were reported, attempting to determine if there were systematic patterns (e.g., were polls only poorly reported if it helped make the poll more favourable to the party endorsed by the media organization?).

3.3 *Canadian Polling Methods*

3.3.1 *Questionnaire Data*

Data were gathered from polling firms for two purposes: (1) to describe differences in survey practices among firms, and (2) to explore how differences in survey practices were associated with polling accuracy. These data were collected through a formal questionnaire, and less formal interviews.

I contacted all firms that published national or Quebec polls of voting intentions during the six month period prior to the 1997 Canadian federal election. I also gathered information on the methods used by the pollsters of each of the official parties, which employed polling data for strategic purposes only. Eighteen firms were contacted: 12 of these regularly publish their polls; six of these work for an official party, and do not usually publicly release their polling results (when this is the case, the party is noted in parentheses:

- *ABM Research* (Reform Party pollster, no polls were published)

- *Angus Reid Group Inc.*

- *Canadian Facts*

- *Compas Research*

- *Comquest Research Inc.* (NDP Party pollster, no polls were published)

- *Créatec Plus* (Official pollster of the No side during 1995 Quebec Sovereignty Referendum)

- *CROP Inc.*

- *Ekos Research Associates Inc.*

- *Environics Research Group Ltd.*

- *The Gallup Organization*

- *Le Groupe Léger and Léger Inc.*

- *Pollara* (Liberal Party pollster)

- *Service de Sondage sur l'Opinion de Quebec,* also known as *Lepage* (BQ/PQ pollster, and official pollster of the Yes side during the 1995 Quebec Sovereignty Referendum)

- *SOM Inc.*

- *Sondagem*

- *Strategic Counsel Inc.*

- *Western Opinion Research* (PC Party)

- *Zogby Group International*

For a list of these firms' addresses see Appendix B.

For all but one of the firms — Service de Sondage sur l'Opinion de Quebec — the main source of revenue of the organization comes from providing marketing and management information to businesses. Service de Sondage sur l'Opinion de Quebec, the official pollster of the Parti Québécois and the Bloc Québécois, however, concentrates on political polling. Zogby International, which conducted polls during the 1997 Canadian federal election for Reuters, is based in Utica, New York, making it the only firm not based in Canada.

A six page questionnaire was sent to all 18 firms. For the most part, firms gladly participated in the study, and anxiously await its results, seeing it as an opportunity to compare their survey practices with others in their industry. Some firms were initially reluctant, however, and many callbacks were needed to achieve a high response rate of completed questionnaires. In the end, only one firm — Strategic Counsel — refused to complete the questionnaire[5].

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[5] I tried several avenues to gain Strategic Counsel's cooperation. The questionnaire was sent to Strategic Counsel president Allan Gregg's office on three different occasions, but no response was ever given. After many phone calls to Strategic Counsel's office, I was told that the firm was too busy to participate in the study. The final attempt to gain cooperation was made October 1, 1997, when a letter and the third questionnaire were sent to Gregg's office. I did not receive a reply.

The questionnaire was an adaptation of one used by Crespi (1988) in his research of polling accuracy in the US. The specific elements examined are:

•Sample design.

•Methods for dealing with potential nonvoters.

•Methods of allocating undecided voters.

•Interview method.

•Times at which the interviews were carried out.

•Callback procedures.

•Interview length.

•Placement of the voting intention question relative to other issue/attitude questions.

•Length of time polls were in the field.

•Information on organization structure (e.g., type of interviewing staff and size of the organization).

A copy of the complete questionnaire can be found in Appendix C.

To supplement the questionnaire data, attempts were also made to conduct face-to-face or telephone interviews with the personnel of each firm most familiar with the firm's methods. For firms in Ontario and Quebec I sought face-to-face interviews at the site of the firm's office, but due to financial constraints only telephone interviews were conducted with firms located outside Ontario and Quebec.

The interviews consisted of relatively informal discussions about the organization of the firms. In many cases when face-to-face interviews were conducted I was given a tour of the organization's polling facilities (e.g., interviewing rooms,

computer software, etc.). In most cases, interviews were secured. Three firms (Strategic Counsel, Compas and Ekos), however, refused an interview.

3.3.2 *Exploring Polling Methods*

The first objective for this section was to survey and compare the various methods of the 18 firms studied. I grouped firms according to similarities in goals, and compared their methods using contingency tables and Fisher's exact tests[6]. Of interest were differences in polling methods and organizational goals between firms that conducted strategic polls (i.e., those performed by party pollsters), and firms that conducted published polls. I also compared firms that conducted polls only in Quebec with firms that surveyed samples from the whole Canadian population.

Polls conducted during the last two weeks of the 1997 Canadian federal election campaign (starting May 15, 1997) were used to explore how differences in survey practices were related to polling accuracy. May 15th was chosen as the starting date for the analysis for several reasons. First, since polls are only snapshots of public opinion at a specific point in time, it makes no sense to measure their accuracy according to election results that did not take place soon after. Second, May 15th occurs long enough after the most significant event of the campaign, the English leaders' debate on May 12, for polls to capture any resulting changes in public opinion. Third, events occurring after the debate probably had comparatively small effects on voting intentions.

Polling error can be defined simply as the difference in percentage points of

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[6] Fisher's exact tests were used because of the small number of firms.

voting intentions and election results. I encountered two complications, however, when formulating an overall measure of the polling error: (1) I had to determine how to allocate the undecided voters; and (2) I had to determine how to construct a measure of accuracy for an election where there were more than two significant parties.

The first complication was relatively easy to solve. I had two choices: I could either calculate the polling results without the undecided, or I could allocate the undecided evenly among all parties. I chose the former, which effectively implies that undecided respondents either do note vote, or will split along the same party lines as decided voters. The latter would artificially inflate the percentage of support for those parties that are less popular on the national scale (e.g., the NDP and the Bloc Québécois).

The second complication was slightly more difficult to resolve. For elections with two alternatives, the method for calculating polling error is clear: it is simply the absolute value of the percentage the winning party or candidate received in the election subtracted from what the party or candidate received in the poll (Crespi, 1988:22). The first variable I created, which I call *poll error score*, adapted this method to the Canadian multi-party political system. For each poll, I summed the absolute differences between the percentage who voted for each major party in the election, and the percentage who intended to vote for them according to each poll. The following example illustrates this procedure:

Final Election Results:		Poll Result:	Absolute Difference:
Liberal Party:	39%	41%	2
PC Party:	20%	19%	1
Reform:	18%	20%	2
NDP:	11%	9%	2
BQ:	11%	10%	1
Other:	1%	1%	0

Poll error score (Total of absolute differences) = *8* percentage points

Using the above example, poll error is simply interpreted: the poll was wrong in its overall prediction by eight percentage points.

Since there were more than two parties gaining a substantial proportion of the vote, and therefore none had close to half the vote, I decided to create a second variable — the *adjusted poll error* —which involved weighting the difference in proportions for each party by the square root of P(1-P), where P is the proportion supporting the party in the election. The rationale for this approach is that the standard error of the poll proportion is proportional to the square root of P(1-P). The sum of weighted differences was highly correlated with the original poll error score (r=.943). Unlike the poll error score, however, the adjusted poll error does not have a simple interpretation. Since the two variables are highly correlated, I opted to use the simpler poll error score.

The time constraint on poll date made the number of useable polls very small, effectively limiting the number of employable methods. The total number of polls analysed was only 14, including seven national polls and seven polls of Quebec voters. Moreover, since there were fewer parties with a significant percentage of the vote in Quebec than the rest of Canada, I could not analyse polls from the two groups at the same time. Such small numbers prohibited a multivariate analysis of the sources of error and accuracy of the polls, so I could only do bivariate analyses. For polls grouped

according to certain survey practices which could only be operationalized as categorical variables, I compared differences in distributions using Mann-Whitney U-tests. I examined scatterplots with least-square lines to assess the relationships between quantitative explanatory variables and polling error score.

Explanatory variables were determined from the questionnaire data, and from the technical details of the polls published in the media. Only variables showing variability were used in the analysis, making many of the questionnaire variables unusable. Four of the explanatory variables are quantitative:

- *Time.* The number of days the poll was conducted before the election, measured from the midpoint of the poll.
- *Sample size.* I took the log of the square root of the sample size.
- *Number of days the poll was in the field.*
- *Number of calls made to respondents who initially refused to participate.*

The remaining five explanatory variables are categorical:

- *Use of demographic quotas.*
- *Household selection technique.* Random-digit dialling versus methods using telephone directories.
- *Respondent selection.* Systematic or random selection versus "first available voting age adult" method.
- *Weighting/adjustment of the sample.*
- *Use of "leaner" question to allocate undecided.*
- *Position of party preference question.* Before attitude/issue questions versus after these questions.

3.4 *The Dynamics of the 1997 Canadian federal election campaign*

3.4.1 *Data: Published pre-election polls*

Data were collected for all published scientific[7] poll results of voting intentions

for both the nation as a whole, and for Quebec voters only, conducted and published

between January 1, 1997 and May 30, 1997.[8] Although other polls were reported (such as

internet polls, call-in polls, and mail-in ballot polls), I focussed only on scientific polls

because I wanted credible indicators of public opinion. For each poll, information was

compiled on:

- •Percentages of respondents expressing a voting intention for each official party.

- •Dates the poll was conducted.

- •Date of the poll's first public release.

- •Sample size.

- •Margin of error.

- •Percentage of undecided respondents.

Preliminary data were collected from newspaper accounts and press releases, but when

information was missing for a poll — as was often the case — I contacted the firm that

conducted the poll and requested the information.

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[7]By "scientific" I mean polls that used some form of probability sampling.

[8]Although the election campaign did not officially start until April 27, 1997, polls from the four months preceding the campaign were necessary to better determine overall trends in voting intentions, and more importantly, to determine if the early election call affected voting intentions. No polls were published between May 31, 1997 and the election day (June 2, 1997) due to a legal ban on published polls in the 72 hour period before the election (see *Canada Elections Act, section 322.1*). The midpoint of the days a poll was in the field was used to determine the date of the poll.

I successfully obtained complete data for all published national polling results from January 1, 1997 through May 30, 1997. I was unable to obtain complete data for regional or provincial results, however, because press reports seldom gave these details, and most firms either did not keep regional details on file, or they were unwilling to search their files for the information. Only data for polls of Quebec voters could be analysed for trends, but they too were not complete, missing information for many polls on the important category of undecided voters. Despite this shortcoming, I was able to use the Quebec polling data to explore changes in support over time for the three major parties in Quebec: The Liberal Party, The Progressive Conservative Party and the Bloc Québécois.

Table 3.2 lists the 28 national polls of voting intentions used for the study. These polls were conducted by nine different firms. Table 3.3 gives similar information for the 27 Quebec polls of voting intentions. Only 13 of the polls are unique to Quebec. These 13 polls were conducted by four firms that usually conduct polls only in Quebec. The remaining 14 Quebec polls were part of national polls listed in Table 3.3.

Table 3.2

National Results of 28 Published Pre-election Polls, January-May, 1997.*

Firm	Source	Survey Dates	Published Date	Percent Liberal	Percent PC	Percent Reform	Percent NDP	Percent BQ	Percent Undecided**	Sample Size	Margin of Error
Environics	Globe & Mail	Dec. 18 - Jan. 15	Jan. 22	47	14	11	13	13	26	2000	2.2
Canadian Facts	Globe & Mail	Jan. 6 - Jan. 11	Jan. 17	46	18	13	11	9	33	1025	3.0
Gallup	Press Release	Jan. 16 - Jan. 21	Jan. 28	53	18	10	9	9	33	1000	3.1
Angus Reid	Southam News	Jan. 21 - Jan. 27	Jan. 30	45	19	11	10	11	9	1519	2.5
Gallup	Press Release	Feb. 13 - Feb. 18	Feb. 25	51	15	11	9	13	33	1008	3.1
Angus Reid	Southam News	Feb. 19 - Feb. 24	Feb. 27	46	17	12	11	12	13	1961	2.5
Gallup	Press Release	Mar. 10 - Mar. 16	Mar. 25	52	18	9	9	10	33	1002	3.1
Environics	Globe & Mail	Mar. 11 - Mar. 21	Apr. 10	47	16	12	12	12	27	1961	2.2
Angus Reid	Southam News	Mar. 26 - Mar. 31	Apr. 3	41	18	17	12	11	14	1500	2.5
Ekos Research	Globe & Mail	Mar. 18 - Apr. 9	Apr. 20	53	15	13	8	10	21	1535	2.6
Gallup	Press Release	Apr. 10 - Apr. 16	Apr. 25	55	15	10	9	11	35	1006	3.1
Angus Reid	Southam News	Apr. 16 - Apr. 22	Apr. 26	42	18	16	13	11	19	1513	2.5
Crop/Environics	CBC	Apr. 17 - Apr. 22	Apr. 28	44	20	15	11	8	15	2541	2.0
Compas	Financial Post	Apr. 15 - Apr. 25	Apr. 30	47	18	13	10	11	23	2600	1.9
Zogby	Reuters	May 1 - May 4	May 5	48	16	15	10	8	25	1005	3.2
Angus Reid	CTV/Southam	May 5 - May 8	May 10	42	19	18	11	9	8	3208	2.25
Gallup	Press Release	May 7 - May 12	May 16	46	19	14	9	11	29	1004	3.1
Strategic Counsel***	Toronto Star	May 10 - May 11	May 16	40	21	18	11	10	23	600	---
Strategic Counsel***	Toronto Star	May 12 - May 14	May 16	39	25	15	10	10	23	600	---
Environics	Globe & Mail	May 13 - May 15	May 17	40	25	18	9	7	12	1912	2.3
Zogby	Reuters	May 14 - May 16	May 17	45	20	16	10	8	30	1009	3.2
Zogby	Reuters	May 22 - May 24	May 25	44	20	17	10	7	31	1005	3.2
Ekos Research	Globe & Mail	May 22 - May 25	May 26	38	21	18	11	10	28	3008	1.8
Angus Reid	CTV/Southam	May 22 - May 27	May 29	36	24	19	11	10	9	3220	2.25
Zogby	Reuters	May 24 - May 26	May 27	42	21	19	11	6	29	1014	3.2
Strategic Counsel	Toronto Star	May 25 - May 27	May 29	41	19	18	11	10	23	1200	2.9
Gallup	Press Release	May 25 - May 28	May 29	41	22	16	11	9	27	1507	2.5
Environics	Globe & Mail	May 25 - May 28	May 30	39	20	19	11	9	14	1852	2.2

*Percentages of intending to vote for each party are for the sample after undecided voters have been omitted. The table omits percentages intending to vote for small parties since in total they seldom were more than one percent.

**Percent Undecided includes "don't know" responses and refusals.

***Part of the May 16 Strategic Counsel poll which gave results for the two days before the debates and the three days following them.

Table 3.3

*Results of 27 Published Pre-election Polls of Quebec voters, January-May, 1997.***

Firm	Source	Survey Dates	Published Date	Percent Liberal	Percent PC	Percent BQ	Percent Other	Percent Undecided**	Sample Size
Gallup	Press Release	Jan. 16 - Jan. 21	Jan. 28	44	14	39	6	-	268
***Som Inc.	Le Soleil	Jan. 17- Jan. 22	Jan. 23	36	9	49	7	19	1126
Gallup	Press Release	Feb. 13 - Feb. 18	Feb. 25	34	9	54	3	-	270
Angus Reid	Southam News	Feb. 19 - Feb. 24	Feb. 27	40	8	46	6	-	336
***Léger & Léger	Globe & Mail	Feb. 20 - Feb. 23	Feb. 25	28	23	48	1	18	1004
Gallup	Press Release	Mar. 10 - Mar. 16	Mar. 25	47	10	44	2	-	268
Angus Reid	Southam News	Mar. 26 - Mar. 31	Apr. 3	36	14	44	6	-	334
***Sondagem	Le Devoir	Apr. 2 - Apr. 13	Apr. 15	37	15	44	4	20	1000
Gallup	Press Release	Apr. 10 - Apr. 16	Apr. 25	47	7	44	2	-	268
Angus Reid	Southam News	Apr. 16 - Apr. 22	Apr. 26	36	9	49	6	-	340
***Léger & Léger	Globe & Mail	Apr. 16 - Apr. 22	Apr. 25	37	15	43	5	15	1000
Crop/Environics	CBC	Apr. 17 - Apr. 22	Apr. 28	37	25	35	1	16	918
***Som Inc.	La Presse	Apr. 18 - Apr. 23	Apr. 25	34	20	40	6	18	1001
***Som Inc.	La Presse	May 2 - May 7	May 8	40	13	39	8	20	968
Angus Reid	CTV/Southam	May 5 - May 8	May 10	38	20	36	6	-	796
***Léger & Léger	Globe & Mail	May 6 - May 9	May 10	39	20	37	4	20	1008
***Crop Inc.	La Presse	May 6 - May 10	May 13	37	20	38	5	17	1014
Gallup	Press Release	May 7 - May 12	May 16	38	15	43	4	-	270
***Som Inc.	Le Soleil	May 9 - May 12	May 13	36	19	37	8	22	1002
***Léger & Léger	Globe & Mail	May 14 - May 16	May 17	33	30	35	2	14	1004
***Som Inc.	La Presse	May 16 - May 21	May 23	33	31	31	5	25	1002
Ekos Research	Press Release	May 22 - May 25	May 26	30	26	40	5	-	970
Angus Reid	CTV/Southam	May 22 - May 27	May 29	29	31	38	2	5	810
***Som Inc.	La Presse	May 23 - May 27	May 29	33	28	28	5	19	1002
Strategic Counsel	Toronto Star	May 25 - May 27	May 29	37	23	37	3	27	608
Gallup	Press Release	May 25 - May 28	May 29	37	29	33	1	-	409
***Léger & Léger	Globe & Mail	May 26 - May 28	May 30	35	26	33	6	10	1005

*Percentages intending to vote for each party are for the sample after undecided voters have been omitted.

**Percent Undecided, includes "don't know" responses and refusals. "-" indicates that data were not available for the undecided.

***Indicates polls that only examined Quebec voters (i.e., they were not part of national polls).

3.4.2 *Assessing Changes in Public Opinion*

Twelve binomial logit models[9] (two for each of the major parties: Liberals,

Progressive Conservative, Reform, NDP, and Bloc Québécois; and two for the undecided

vote, which included non-responses and refusals)[10] were used to determine if events

during the campaign influenced changes in voting intentions of national voters. Six

more binomial models were used to test changes in voting intentions of Quebec voters

(two models for each of the three major parties in Quebec: Liberals, Progressive

Conservatives, and Bloc Québécois).[11]

For each model, the count of people intending to vote for the party in question

was the response variable, and date was the primary explanatory variable. The

relationship between the two variables was usually treated as linear, but when

necessary, second-order models were used (i.e., date was operationalized as a quadratic

function). A series of dummy variables representing the firms that conducted the polls

were also included as explanatory variables in all the logit models, enabling me to

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[9] Rather than treating each observation individually as in binary logit models, binomial logit models group observations according to specific distinct combinations of the independent variables, in this instance, by polls. In other words, "the binomial logit model is based on the frequency counts of 'successes' and 'failures' for each combination of independent-variable values" (Fox, 1997:484).

[10] Since other parties aside from the official parties seldom registered more than one percent of voting intentions, they were included in the undecided category to simplify the analyses.

[11] The values for the undecided vote for Quebec polls were unreliable, making it pointless to analyse them — 11 polls were missing this information. Attempts to retrieve it from the firms that conducted the polls were unsuccessful.

control for firm effects.

Significant campaign events were included as explanatory variables in the form of dummy variables. The small number of polls allowed me test the effects of only two events: (1) The start of the official election campaign — April 27, 1997; and (2) The last day of the first two televised leaders' debates — May 13, 1997. The two debates were measured together because their separate impact cannot be determined since they were only one day apart.

Testing for these two events was logical since both were given significant media attention. The timing of the election call led to significant attacks, both from other parties and from the media, directed at the Liberal Party. Also, the non-governing parties probably received far more media exposure during the official election campaign than before it. Both of these factors could have influenced voting intentions. Similarly, the debates could have affected vote intentions because they gave voters the opportunity to see leaders answering questions under pressure. Common media interpretations had the PC leader Jean Charest coming out ahead in the debates. It was also argued that this helped his cause in the polls.

3.5 *Chapter Summary*

This chapter focussed on the empirical framework of the study. The three main sources of data were identified —media reports of the 1997 Canadian federal election, published polls of voting intentions conducted prior to the election, and methodological data obtained from polling firms. The measurement of the variables for the study was

also discussed. Finally, the statistical procedures undertaken were explained.

CHAPTER 4

MEDIA COVERAGE OF THE

1997 CANADIAN FEDERAL ELECTION

This chapter examines media coverage of the 1997 Canadian federal election. The first section briefly describes the amount of coverage given to the election in general, and determines the political orientations of the media organizations studied. Using bivariate analyses, the next section explores the relative coverage of each election issue, attempting to determine the role of polls in media reports. In the third section I use logit models to determine changes in reporting through the course of the campaign, testing if events during the campaign influenced the coverage of issues. The last section summarizes the general tone of election coverage.

4.1 Overall Election Coverage

The election was a newsworthy event for all media organizations analysed. No event received more attention during the course of the election campaign than the election, both in terms of the amount of coverage, and the placement of the stories. Only one issue — the Manitoba flood, which was one of the greatest natural disasters in Canadian history — provided any significant competition. The flood subsided by the second week of the campaign, however, and election stories dominated overwhelmingly thereafter.

Most newspapers typically ran at least one election story on the front page each

day; as the campaign progressed, front page coverage increased. There were two

exceptions. The Winnipeg area was hit hard by the Manitoba flood, so the election

initially received limited attention in the *Winnipeg Free Press*, rarely making the front

page in the first couple of weeks. The *Toronto Sun* provided even less front page

coverage — its tabloid format is characterized by sensational headlines and a large

photograph on the front page; presumably election stories were generally not exciting

enough to warrant this type of coverage.

The pattern was similar for television news broadcasts. As with newspapers, the

election received more attention than any other news issue. The Manitoba floods

received more consistent early coverage on all three television news programmes than it

did in print, however, pushing the election aside for a little longer. Still, by the start of

the second week of the campaign, the election was the top story, and had no serious

competition.

Though the election was covered extensively by all media organizations

analysed, there was variation in the amount of coverage. As Table 4.1 shows, the

amount of overall election coverage (measured by the column area in square centimetres

of stories devoted to the election) was related to the size and ownership of the

newspapers. The small independently owned *Halifax Chronicle-Herald* and *Le Devoir*

had the least amount of coverage. The *Toronto Sun*, the only tabloid newspaper in the

study, also had comparatively less coverage than the large broadsheets. On the other

hand, the four largest newspapers in the study — the *Toronto Star*, Montreal's *La Presse*

and *The Gazette*, and the *Globe and Mail* — provided the most extensive coverage.

Table 4.1
Total coverage of the 1997 Canadian federal election for newspapers.

Newspaper	Language	Ownership	Total Coverage*
Toronto Star	English	Torstar	103 750
Montreal La Presse	French	Power Corp.	103 659
Montreal Gazette	English	Southam	94 240
Globe & Mail (Toronto)	English	Thomson	81 244
Vancouver Sun	English	Southam	79 769
Ottawa Citizen	English	Southam	79 400
Calgary Herald	English	Southam	75 412
Winnipeg Free Press	English	Thomson	69 698
Toronto Sun**	English	Sun Media	48 311
Halifax Chronicle-Herald	English	Independent	40 018
Le Devoir (Montreal)	French	Independent	39 281

*Total election coverage was measured by the total area of each newspaper (in square centimetres) devoted to election stories during the course of the campaign. Although I measured the column lengths for each report, I originally neglected to measure the column widths. As a result, widths were estimated later from a sample of articles from each newspaper (i.e., the articles for two days in each newspapers were measured and averaged. This measure gives an accurate representation of the relative coverage of the election since the type sizes in all newspapers were approximately the same.

**The Toronto Sun is the only tabloid newspaper in the study; all others are broadsheets.

There was less variation in the amount of election coverage by television news programmes. As Table 4.2 reveals, the privately owned *CTV's Evening News* devoted more time to the election than the two publicly owned National news programmes (CBC's *The National* and Radio-Canada's *Le Téléjournal*). *CTV's Evening News* was the primary source of election news on the CTV network, however, while the CBC and Radio-Canada had daily half-hour programmes devoted entirely to election coverage that aired after the regular evening news programmes. In other words, in terms of complete network programming, both the CBC and Radio-Canada provided more in-depth election coverage than CTV. For purposes of this dissertation, however, I analyse

only the regular evening national news programs of the three networks because they are

the main sources of television news regarding the election for most voters.

Table 4.2
Total coverage of the 1997 Canadian federal election for Television News
Programmes.

News Programme	Language	Ownership	Total Coverage*
CTV Evening News	English	Private	316.31
Le Téléjournal (Radio-Canada)	French	Public	308.88
The National (CBC)	English	Public	260.44

*Total Election coverage measured by the cumulative length of all election stories (in minutes) during the course of the campaign.

There were qualitative differences between newspapers and television

programmes in the manner of reporting. Television tended to focus only on the daily

events of the leaders of the major parties, seldom going into much detail about political

platforms. Newspapers were also pre-occupied with the daily events of the leaders, but

they provided more detailed — yet still limited —discussions of the party platforms.

Television is obviously limited in the amount of news programming compared with

newspapers, limiting the amount of time available to analyse party platforms.

There were also qualitative differences in reporting among newspapers. The

large newspapers relied mostly on reports from their own staff reporters, while the

smaller papers tended to rely extensively on news services, specifically the Canadian

Press. As expected, the larger newspapers also had generally far more columns and

editorials that dealt with the election than the smaller newspapers. Four newspapers

require further mention.

First, the *Toronto Sun*'s tabloid format typically provided far more opinion articles than the other newspapers. Even the *Sun's* news reports were more opinionated, and often less serious in tone, than those of the other newspapers.

Second, Montreal's *Le Devoir* was also more opinionated than most newspapers, yet more serious than the *Toronto Sun*. Although its election coverage was limited, *Le Devoir* contained proportionately more in-depth articles than other newspapers, obviously gearing itself towards more sophisticated voters who wanted to understand the issues.

Third, as noted earlier, the *Halifax Chronicle-Herald* had the least amount of coverage of the election. Its limited size (it was the smallest of the newspapers in the study) also left little space for commentary outside of basic news reports, and the *Chronicle-Herald* provided far less of it than any other newspapers.

Finally, Montreal's *The Gazette* is part of the Southam newspaper chain, but is a special case. While it often prints news reports and columns from Southam's staff reporters, it relies far more on reporters who work solely for the *Gazette* (e.g., many articles dealing with the election commonly found in other Southam newspapers were not printed in the *Gazette*). The other Southam newspapers were very similar in content, and relied extensively on Southam reporters.

4.1.1 *Political Orientations of Media Organizations*

Qualitative differences among media organizations were also reflected in the tone of coverage of certain issues, and focus on the major parties. Differences were more pronounced for newspapers than television news programmes. In most cases political

orientations were confirmed late in the campaign in editorial endorsements of specific

parties and candidates. Table 4.3 displays the editorial endorsements of the newspapers

in the study, organizing newspapers by ownership and region.

Table 4.3
Newspaper Editorial endorsements of Political Parties.

Newspaper	Region	Ownership	Editorial Endorsement
Southam Newspapers			
Montreal Gazette	Quebec	Southam	Liberal Party
Ottawa Citizen	Ontario	Southam	Liberal Party
Calgary Herald	West	Southam	None*
Vancouver Sun	West	Southam	Liberal Party
Thomson Newspapers			
Globe & Mail	Ontario	Thomson	PC Party
Winnipeg Free Press	West	Thomson	Liberal Party
Independents and Others			
Halifax Chronicle-Herald	East	Independent	None
La Presse	Quebec	Power Corp.	Liberal Party
Le Devoir	Quebec	Independent	Bloc Québécois
Toronto Star	Ontario	Torstar	Liberal Party
Toronto Sun	Ontario	Sun Media	PC Party, Jean Charest in particular

*Although the Calgary Herald did not endorse a specific party or candidates in their editorials, regular columns typically favoured the Reform Party.

The most obvious finding in Table 4.3 is the majority support for the Liberal

Party. Liberal support among newspapers was not strong early in the campaign, but no

party had a strong enough campaign to sway editorial support away from the Liberals.

Though most newspapers officially endorsed the Liberals, they did not do so

without reservations. Support for the Liberals came not because they ran a strong

campaign — in fact most thought that they didn't — but because they performed well at

reducing the deficit during their first mandate. Most were generally critical of the Liberals, but since they considered the deficit an important issue, they argued that it was better to go with the Liberals than with an unproven party.

It is interesting that the Liberals had less support in Ontario, where two of the four newspapers supported the PC Party. Despite weak popularity in the west, the Liberal Party was endorsed by two of three western newspapers in the study. Two of the Quebec newspapers supported the Liberal Party, but the third one, *Le Devoir*, supported the Bloc Québécois.

Southam and Thomson newspapers were obviously not completely constrained by ownership to endorse specific parties. The *Calgary Herald* did not officially endorse any party or candidate despite the fact that the other Southam newspapers endorsed the Liberal Party. There was also a difference between the Thomson newspapers — the *Globe and Mail* endorsed the PC Party, but the *Winnipeg Free Press* favoured the Liberal Party.

Political orientations did not only show up in editorial endorsements in the dying days of the campaign; they were prevalent in the amount of reporting given to each of the major parties. There was variation in the proportion of reports that focussed on each party. Differences were found among television news programmes, among newspapers, and between television and newspapers.

Table 4.4 displays the percentage of television and newspaper reports that focussed on each major party. Since small parties were seldom the focus of news reports (less than one percent in total), articles that focussed on them were grouped together with articles that focussed on more than one party.

For both television news programmes and newspapers the popularity of parties and the amount of coverage given to them are related. The incumbent Liberal Party received by far the most attention in both media, and the NDP received the least.

Two differences between television and newspapers are noticeable: (1) television appears to have provided more balanced coverage of the parties; (2) newspapers were more likely to have reports that focussed on more than one party or smaller parties. The first difference is probably a reflection of all three television news programmes having national audiences, while each of the newspapers basically serves only one region of the country. With national audiences, television would probably be more likely to try to interest citizens from all regions, and to cater to their political preferences.

Table 4.4
Percentage of Reports Focussing on each of the Major
Political Parties by Medium.

Political Party as the Main Focus:	Medium	
	Newspapers	Television
Liberal Party	20.4	19.2
Progressive Conservative Party	10.7	15.1
Reform Party	11.9	13.5
New Democratic Party	7.1	10.7
Bloc Québécois	9.1	13.7
Other or No party is the main focus	40.9	27.8
Number of Reports	3926	504

Chi-square= 45.756, df=5, p<0.0001

As Table 4.5 shows, there was little variation among television programmes in the proportion of reports focussing on each of the major parties. *Le Téléjournal* provided

proportionately more coverage of the Bloc Québécois, and *CTV's Evening News* seems

to have provided the most balanced reporting, with less coverage of the Liberals, and

greater coverage of the NDP. The differences, however, are not statistically significant.

Table 4.5
Percentage of Reports Focussing on each of the Major Political Parties by Television Programme.

Political Party as the Main Focus:	News Programme		
	Le Téléjournal (SRC)	The National (CBC)	CTV's Evening News
Liberal Party	21.5	20.5	16.8
Progressive Conservative Party	16.6	13.4	15.0
Reform Party	12.3	15.7	13.1
New Democratic Party	9.8	9.4	12.1
Bloc Québécois	17.2	11.0	12.6
Other or No party is the main focus	22.7	29.9	30.4
Total Number of Reports	163	127	214

Chi-square= 7.595, df=10, p=0.668.

Table 4.6 displays the percentage of reports in each newspaper that focussed on

each of the major political parties. There are statistically significant differences among

the papers, and in many cases, these differences reflect the political orientations of the

newspapers.

Table 4.6
Percentage of Reports Focussing on each of the Major Political Parties by Newspaper.

Political Party as the Main Focus:	Southam Newspapers					Thomson Newspapers			Independents and others				
	The Gazette	Ottawa Citizen	Cal. Herald	Van. Sun	All Southam Papers	Globe & Mail	Winn. Free Press	Both Thomson Papers	Halifax Chr-Herald	Montreal La Presse	Montreal Le Devoir	Toronto Star	Toronto Sun
Liberal Party	18.6	18.2	15.5	17.5	17.5	21.1	29.8	25.1	20.6	18.9	23.1	17.0	28.3
PC Party	8.8	10.3	9.6	4.8	8.3	10.0	9.1	9.5	8.5	14.2	16.7	11.6	13.8
Reform Party	11.0	10.6	14.1	12.4	12.1	11.2	13.7	12.4	7.0	7.8	8.5	12.7	23.0
NDP	5.6	5.8	5.6	6.5	5.9	5.7	9.4	7.4	12.6	6.3	5.1	9.8	7.4
Bloc Québécois	13.0	5.5	3.7	3.4	6.7	10.7	2.0	6.7	3.5	16.5	31.2	6.3	1.8
Other or no party	42.9	49.7	51.4	55.5	49.6	41.3	36.0	38.8	47.7	36.2	15.4	42.6	25.8
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100
Number of Reports	408	292	354	355	1409	402	342	744	199	599	234	458	283

Five Chi-square tests of independence were performed:

(1) Among all newspapers: Chi-square=475,628, df=50, $p < 0.0001$.

(2) Among ownership groups (Southam, Thomson or Other): Chi-square=111.457, df=10, $p < 0.0001$.

(3) Between Southam newspapers: Chi-square=53.083, df=15, $p < 0.0001$.

(4) Between Thomson newspapers: Chi-square=31.889, df=5, $p < 0.0001$.

(5) Between Independents and Other newspapers: Chi-square=256.850, df=20, $p < 0.0001$

The *Toronto Sun* was especially forthright in its support for a right-wing agenda. A conservative paper, *The Toronto Sun* had trouble choosing between the Reform Party and the PC Party, and was clear about its concern over the split in the right (i.e., the split among conservative voters between Reform and the PC). *The Toronto Sun's* early support for the Reform Party was obvious in its much higher coverage of that party than any other news organization. Moreover, only the *Calgary Herald* provided as positive coverage of the Reform Party as the *Sun.* It wasn't until the last week of the campaign — after Reform's negative campaign against Quebec politicians — that the *Toronto Sun* endorsed Jean Charest and the PC Party.

The *Globe and Mail* is traditionally a conservative newspaper that supports the PC Party and "fiscal responsibility." The 1997 election was no exception. Support for the PC party showed up in extensive coverage of the leaders' debates, including pre-occupation with PC leader Jean Charest's performance in the debates. By most accounts, Charest won the debates. *The Globe and Mail* also had very little to say about the NDP. Unlike the *Toronto Sun*, however, the *Globe and Mail* was clearly anti-Reform.

Though the *Calgary Herald* did not officially endorse any party, daily columns showed support for the Reform party. Columns and editorials frequently discussed the importance of balancing the budget and reducing taxes. National unity was also given significant coverage by the *Herald*, which encouraged voters to support the Reform Party's version of how to solve the problem. A column late in the campaign stated that the Reform party is "about building solid foundations for Canada's political system and rebuilding the foundations of the country itself" (Stockland, 1997:J5). The *Herald's* editorial on the morning of the election stated:

We have our points of view, but they are — as stated in the past on this page — independent of partisan political party allegiances. Our readers are more than capable of exercising their own unfailing good judgment in choosing their representatives and thus guiding the course of Canadian democracy in a manner which will best serve the needs of their constituencies and their nation. Today is voting day. You know what to do (Calgary Herald, 1997: A6).

The *Halifax Chronicle-Herald* was far less critical than other newspapers of the NDP, and provided proportionately more coverage of the party as well. The NDP's platform was displayed as the most likely to help the desperate unemployment problems of Eastern Canada. *The Chronicle-Herald's* emphasis on the NDP was also influenced by the fact that NDP leader Alexa McDonough was running in Halifax, where she is a resident and was a well respected politician long before she became leader of the federal NDP.

The two French-language newspapers — *La Presse* and *Le Devoir* — provided the most coverage of the PC Party, reflecting (and possibly influencing) the rise of Jean Charest's popularity among French-speaking Quebecers. Along with the other Quebec newspaper, *The Gazette*, they also provided the most coverage of the Bloc Québécois. Only *Le Devoir*, however, portrayed the Bloc Québécois in a positive light. *Le Devoir* was also unique in its unrelenting criticism of the Liberals and Jean Chrétien.

The PC Party's lack of popularity in British Columbia was reflected in the *Vancouver Sun's* limited focus on the party. *The Vancouver Sun, The Calgary Herald,* and *The Winnipeg Free Press,* all representing the western provinces, also showed a lack of interest in the Bloc Québécois. Only the *Halifax-Chronicle-Herald* showed as low a level of interest in the Bloc Québécois.

The *Toronto Star* is widely known as a Liberal newspaper, and it endorsed the

Liberal Party; it is therefore surprising that *The Star* had proportionately fewer articles than all other newspapers, except *the Calgary Herald*, that focussed on the Liberals. Still, the tone of coverage of the Liberal Party in *The Star* was generally more favourable than in any other newspaper, and *The Star* was extremely critical of the *Reform Party*.

4.2 *The Relative Coverage of Campaign Issues*

I now turn to the relative coverage of campaign issues. Three measures were used: (1) the percentage of reports containing mention of each issue; (2) the percentage of reports with each issue as the main focus; and (3) the percentage of overall reporting (measured in minutes for television, and in square centimetres for newspapers) used for reports that had each issue as the main focus. There were only small differences among these three measures, and in later analyses I utilize only the first measure, since it has been used often by other researchers.

4.2.1 *Differences between Television News and Newspapers*

Table 4.7 displays the percentage of reports containing mention of each major election issue by medium. The rankings of issues are identical for newspapers and television news programmes. Polls played a prominent role in election reporting, placing third among all election issues in terms of the number of times they were mentioned — only leadership and national unity were given more mention.

Table 4.7
Percentage of Reports Mentioning Major Issues by Type of Report

Issue	News-paper Columns	News-paper Editorials	Newspaper News Reports	Television Reports	*p*-value*
Leadership	45.1	36.9	33.3	43.3	<0.0001
National Unity	36.8	39.0	31.2	37.9	<0.0001
Pre-election Polls	29.5	14.9	20.5	19.8	<0.0001
Unemployment	13.5	20.7	20.2	19.2	0.001
Budget or Deficit	16.5	25.4	13.4	12.3	<0.0001
Tax Reform	16.9	23.7	13.4	11.9	<0.0001
Health Care	11.2	12.5	13.1	11.5	0.477
Televised Leaders' Debates	9.5	12.5	7.5	11.1	0.002
Law & Order	6.5	6.4	8.4	5.8	0.084
Timing of the Election Call	7.1	10.5	5.0	5.2	0.001
Education and/or Research	3.5	5.1	6.2	3.6	0.007
Total Number of Reports	661	295	2970	504	

p-value for a chi-square test of independence.

Many issues that were important in past election campaigns were virtually ignored during the 1997 campaign: child care, women's issues, poverty, native issues, and the environment received only token mention in both media. (Less than one percent of news reports for both television and newspapers addressed each of these issues). It is interesting to note that all of these issues were championed by the NDP and received little attention from other major parties.

Most campaigns have their own idiosyncratic issues. There was one of these issues in the 1997 campaign — the timing of the election call. The Liberal government's decision to call an election with well over a year remaining in their mandate, and with many Manitobans temporarily homeless because of the flood, was met with much criticism early in the campaign.

There were some statistically significant differences between newspapers and television programmes: leadership issues and the leaders' debates were mentioned in proportionately more television reports than newspaper reports; education and research were mentioned proportionately more often in newspaper reports than on television. The abilities and actions of party leaders in general, and more specifically with respect to the televised debates, are topics that fit more naturally with television news than newspapers because of the quick impact of sound and video bites. On the other hand, adequate discussions of funding for education or research require more extensive time, and are more difficult to make quick mention of in television reports where the amount of election coverage is limited compared to newspapers.

Table 4.8 displays the percentages of reports with major issues as the main focus by medium. The three issues that received most attention were again national unity, leadership, and pre-election polls. There are, however, some obvious differences in the ranking of the issues compared with Table 4.7. In terms of the main focus of articles, national unity received more attention than any other issue. Two issues — the budget or deficit, and tax reform — received significant mention in both newspaper articles and television reports, but were seldom the focus of the report.

Table 4.8

Percentage of Reports with Major Issues as Focus by Medium.

	Medium		*p*-value*
Issue	Newspapers	Television	
National Unity	12.8	14.1	0.440
Leadership	11.1	11.3	0.877
Pre-election Polls	6.6	6.9	0.751
Televised Leaders' Debates	4.9	7.3	0.018
Law & Order	3.0	3.6	0.488
Unemployment	2.4	6.3	<0.001
Health Care	2.7	3.4	0.407
Timing of the Election Call	2.1	2.4	0.697
Tax Reform	1.5	2.0	0.440
Budget or Deficit	1.4	2.0	0.331
Education and/or Research	0.6	0.2	0.244
No Issue emphasized more than others	15.3	9.1	0.000
Other election stories	35.5	31.3	0.069
Total Number of Reports	3926	504	

*p-value for a chi-square test of independence.

There are a few differences in the focus of reports between newspapers and television news programmes that are worth discussing. The most interesting finding was the much larger proportion of television news stories that focussed on the unemployment issue. Television news stories were also more likely to focus on the leaders' debates. Newspaper reports, on the other hand, had proportionately more reports that focused on more than one issue. The latter finding is expected because of the limited time that television has to deliver the complete news for the day compared with that of newspapers.

Table 4.9 displays the proportion of overall election coverage (in terms of space) devoted to each issue. The findings of this table are similar to those from Table 4.8. One

observation is worth noting: televisions news' greater emphasis on the debates

compared to newspapers is even more noticeable when measured by the length of the

reports rather than simply by the number of articles. With this measure, the debates

become the second most covered issue on television (occupying 12 percent of the total

time spent on election reports), while for newspapers the debates remain in fourth

position, with only five percent of total newspaper coverage.

Table 4.9
Percentage of Total Election Reporting with Major Issues as Main Focus by Medium

Issue	Medium	
	Newspapers*	Television**
National Unity	12.66	14.93
Leadership	10.88	10.52
Pre-election Polls	6.82	6.05
Televised Leaders' Debates	5.06	11.94
Law & Order	2.59	2.64
Unemployment and/or Job Creation	2.17	5.12
Health Care	2.60	2.82
Timing of the Election Call	2.10	2.24
Tax Reform	1.48	3.78
Budget or Deficit	1.31	1.67
Education and/or Research	0.51	0.23
No Issue emphasized more than others	19.28	10.04
Other election stories	32.34	28.02
Total Amount of Election Coverage	814 782	885.63

*Total election coverage was measured by the cumulative total area of the newspapers (in square centimetres) devoted to election stories during the course of the campaign.
**Total election coverage for television news programmes measured by the cumulative length of time (in minutes) spent on the election during the course of the campaign.

4.2.2 _Differences among Newspapers_

Although the general pattern of the mention of issues was similar (i.e., the rankings of the mention of issues were very close), there were statistically significant differences among newspapers with respect to the proportion of articles in which all the major issues were mentioned (see Table 4.10).

Four newspapers stand out because of their limited coverage of poll results: _Le Devoir, The Halifax Chronicle-Herald,_ the _Toronto Sun,_ and the _Winnipeg Free Press._ A few newspapers stand out for other reasons.

Le Devoir's political leanings showed up in significant mention of many issues related to the cause of Quebec sovereignty. For example, _Le Devoir_ was obviously critical of the leadership of all federal politicians, mentioning the leadership issue in more than half of its articles, which was significantly more than any other newspaper. _Le Devoir_ also mentioned the budget issue proportionately more than other newspapers, clearly critical of the federal government's handling of provincial transfer payments. Coverage of national unity, however, more clearly reflected _Le Devoir's_ position than any other issue. While _Le Devoir_ mentioned constitutional issues relating to national unity in more than half of its articles, no other newspaper mentioned the issue in more than 40 percent of its articles. On the other hand, _Le Devoir_ had far less emphasis on polls than any other newspaper in the study — reports of polls ranked only 8th out of the 11 major campaign issues. When all newspapers are considered together mentions of polls ranked third.

Montreal's _La Presse_ stood out for its comparative lack of mention of several issues. First, articles in _La Presse_ were far less likely to mention the unemployment issue

than any other newspaper, including the other Montreal newspapers (*Le Devoir* and *The Gazette*). Also, contrary to *Le Devoir*, *La Presse* virtually ignored the budget. (Here again, *La Presse* provided proportionately less mention than all other newspapers). *La Presse* also provided proportionately less mention of tax reform and health care than all other newspapers.

Though still one of the less important issues, law and order was mentioned significantly more by the *Halifax Chronicle-Herald*, the *Calgary Herald*, and the *Winnipeg Free Press* than by other newspapers. Law and order was dominated by opposition to the Liberal government's proposed new gun law (Bill C-68) which promised to bring in more stringent gun registration regulations. The strongest opposition to Bill C-68 came from citizens living in rural locations. All three of these newspapers are in cities which have large rural populations close by.

The *Winnipeg Free Press* also provided significantly more mention of the timing of the election call than any other newspaper. This was expected since the Liberal government called the election when many Manitobans were homeless due to the flood.

The *Halifax Chronicle-Herald* placed more emphasis on unemployment and education than all other newspapers. This is not surprising considering the high unemployment rates in the Eastern provinces. Since the *Halifax Chronicle-Herald* is the only newspaper in the study from the Eastern provinces, I cannot confidently conclude that there are regional differences.

Table 4.10

Percentage of Reports Mentioning Major Issues by Newspaper.

Issue	Southam Newspapers						Thomson Newspapers				Independents and others					p-value***
	The Gazette	Ottawa Citizen	Cal. Herald	Van. Sun	All Southam Papers	p-value*	Globe & Mail	Winn. Free Press	Both Thomson Papers	p-value**	Halifax Chr-Herald	Montreal La Presse	Montreal Le Devoir	Toronto Star	Toronto Sun	
Leadership	38.2	40.8	32.2	23.4	33.5	<.001	38.8	25.4	32.7	<.001	27.1	38.4	50.4	33.0	45.2	.003
National Unity	37.7	33.9	34.2	27.0	33.4	.018	35.1	22.5	29.3	<.001	27.1	29.2	53.8	32.1	33.2	.088
Polls	22.8	31.5	24.9	30.1	27.0	.026	24.9	16.1	20.8	.003	15.1	21.4	8.5	19.4	15.9	<.001
Unemployment	15.4	18.8	17.2	15.8	16.7	.634	18.2	24.6	21.1	.033	31.2	11.0	26.1	29.0	12.4	.014
Budget	11.3	16.1	15.8	14.9	14.3	.205	15.2	15.5	15.3	.903	16.1	8.2	26.9	19.9	11.0	.796
Tax Reform	11.3	15.1	18.4	14.1	14.5	.051	15.7	18.7	17.1	.272	17.6	6.0	22.2	19.7	12.0	.124
Health Care	11.0	14.7	16.1	11.5	13.2	.126	12.7	18.1	15.2	.039	15.6	5.5	11.1	19.7	7.8	.028
Leaders' Debates	5.4	7.9	5.9	7.6	6.6	.462	14.2	6.1	10.5	<.001	7.0	8.3	10.3	8.3	9.2	.006
Law & Order	6.1	9.2	10.5	9.9	8.8	.145	8.2	11.1	9.5	.179	12.6	3.0	6.0	7.9	8.1	.012
Election Timing	5.4	7.5	7.1	4.8	6.1	.385	7.2	12.0	9.4	.026	6.0	2.3	4.7	4.1	4.9	<.001
Education	5.9	7.5	5.1	3.9	5.5	.242	4.7	8.2	6.3	.053	10.1	3.2	6.4	8.3	2.1	.706
Total Number of Reports	408	292	354	355	1409		402	342	744		199	599	234	458	283	

*p-values for chi-square tests of independence between Southam newspapers.

**p-values for chi-square tests of independence between Thomson newspapers.

***p-values for chi-square tests of independence among ownership (Southam, Thomson, and Other).

Chi-square tests of independence were also calculated to explore the differences among all newspapers when treated individually. In these cases, all the p-values were <0.0001.

There was no significant difference in the proportion of articles mentioning national unity among the three ownership groups — Southam, Thomson, and Other. All three groups placed a high level of importance on the issue, as seen by it receiving the second most mention of all issues, placing a close second to leadership. Less important issues, such as the budget, tax reform, and education also received essentially the same amount of coverage from all three ownerships groups.

Newspapers from the two major chains reported significantly more about the health care and law and order issues, but less about the abilities of the leaders of the major parties, than newspapers in the "other" category. The chains differed with respect to coverage of the debates: Southam newspapers mentioned the debates significantly less than the Thomson newspapers, and the other newspapers were in the middle of the two chains.

The Southam newspapers mentioned the problems of unemployment proportionately much less than Thomson and other newspapers, but made significantly more mention of pre-election polls. A major reason for the difference in poll reports was Brad Evenson's "301" column, which ran in all Southam newspapers except *The Gazette*, mentioning poll results nearly every day. No other newspaper had a similar column. (More detailed analyses of the differences in poll reports will be given in Chapter 5).

Thomson newspapers tended to criticize the Liberal government's decision to call an early election more than Southam and other newspapers, but this result requires further explanation. There are two Thomson newspapers in the study: *The Globe & Mail* and *The Winnipeg Free Press*. The unusually high proportion of mention of the timing

of the election was probably not related to ownership, but instead due to the location of the *Winnipeg Free Press*. As mentioned earlier, the *Winnipeg Free Press* was most critical of the timing of the election because of the Manitoba flood. On the other hand, as Table 4.10 showed, the *Globe & Mail* did not mention the timing of the election call to any greater extent than other newspapers.

There appear to be differences in reporting among regions. For example, the Ontario and Quebec presses were far more concerned with the national unity and leadership issues than those in the East and West. The East (represented only by *The Halifax Chronicle-Herald*), was more likely to mention unemployment, law and order, and education than any of the other regions. On the other hand, regions from the rest of Canada reported on pre-election polls significantly more often relative to other issues than the *Halifax Chronicle-Herald*.

There were only small differences between French-language and English-language newspapers in terms of the rankings of issues measured by the amount of coverage given to them. National unity and leadership received more coverage compared to other issues in most newspapers, but the difference was greatest for the French-language press. Moreover, *Le Devoir* was far more likely to discuss leadership and national unity than any other newspaper. These findings are expected considering the importance of Quebec separation to most French-speaking Quebecers, many of whom blame federal political leaders for the failure to reach an agreement to bring Quebec into the Canadian constitution.

The reporting of other issues in the French-language press suffered because of its concentration on national unity and leadership. Only the debates received similar

mention in the presses of both languages; all other issues were mentioned significantly less in the two French newspapers. The Quebec press's pre-occupation with constitutional problems and the national unity issue was so overwhelming that other issues, such as tax reform, health care, law and order, and the timing of the election call, received comparatively less proportional coverage than in newspapers from other regions. Considering the large number of Quebec polls that are typically conducted in Quebec (As well as 28 national polls, there were 13 additional polls of Quebec voters in the six months preceding the election), it is surprising that French-language newspapers made proportionately less mention of polls than English-language newspapers.

4.2.3 *Differences among Television News Programmes*

I now turn to an examination of the difference in the reporting of issues among television news programmes. I explore the differences in the proportion of stories that mentioned each issue. I also examine differences in the proportions of reports that contained each issue as the major focus.

As Table 4.11 shows, the proportion of reports in which each issue was mentioned are similar among television news programmes. There were some statistically significant differences, however. First, CBC's *The National* discussed issues surrounding the leaders of the major parties in proportionately more reports than other news programmes. Second, *CTV's Evening News* made less mention of the budget issue than the other two programmes. Third, there were differences among all three programs with respect to the proportion of articles in which the law and order issue was discussed: the French language *Le Téléjournal* paid the least amount of attention, while *CTV's*

Evening News paid the most attention.

Table 4.11

Percentage of Reports Mentioning Major Issues by Television Programme.

Issue	News Programme			P-value*
	Le Téléjournal (SRC)	The National (CBC)	CTV's Evening News	
Leadership	42.9	55.1	36.4	0.003
National Unity	38.7	37.8	37.4	0.969
Pre-election Polls	13.5	18.9	25.2	0.017
Unemployment	19.6	20.5	18.2	0.868
Budget or Deficit	15.3	16.5	7.5	0.017
Tax Reform	9.2	14.2	12.6	0.394
Health Care	10.4	17.3	8.9	0.054
Televised Leaders' Debates	7.4	11.0	14.0	0.125
Law & Order	2.5	5.5	8.4	0.048
Timing of the Election Call	4.3	5.5	5.6	0.831
Education and/or Research	3.7	3.1	3.7	0.957
Total Number of Reports	163	127	214	

*p-value for a chi-square test of independence.

Table 4.12 displays the percentage of reports for which each major issue was the focus for the three television news programmes. A comparison of Tables 4.12 and 4.11 shows that the order in which the relative frequency of issue are mentioned is only slightly different from the order of issues according to the proportion of articles that they were the main focus. Leadership, for example, placed first in terms of mention, but second to national unity in terms of main focus.

Most issues were given a similar proportion of focus by the three programmes; there were only two statistically significant differences. First, reports by *CTV's Evening News* were more likely than the other programmes to focus on more than one issue.

Second, and most meaningful, *Le Téléjournal* aired significantly more stories that

focussed on health care. *Le Téléjournal*'s greater focus on health care has more to do

with Ontario politics than it does the federal election. During the campaign it was

announced that the Ontario government's cost-reducing measures meant that the only

French-language hospital in Ottawa would be closed. This announcement caused a stir

among Ontario's French-speaking population, and as the nation's French-language

national news programme, *Le Téléjournal* picked up on the issue, scrutinizing the

federal parties' health care platforms. The Ottawa hospital issue was not important to

English-speaking Canadians, and received less mention in the media accordingly.

Table 4.12
Percentage of Reports with Major Issues as Main Focus by Television Programme.

Issue	News Programme			*p*-value*
	Le Téléjournal (SRC)	The National (CBC)	CTV's Evening News	
Leadership	14.1	11.8	8.9	0.277
National Unity	17.2	13.4	12.1	0.368
Pre-election Polls	6.7	3.9	8.9	0.220
Unemployment	8.6	4.7	5.6	0.344
Budget or Deficit	3.1	3.1	0.5	0.111
Tax Reform	1.2	3.9	1.4	0.188
Health Care	7.4	2.4	0.9	0.002
Televised Leaders' Debates	4.9	8.7	8.4	0.349
Law & Order	1.8	4.7	4.2	0.340
Timing of the Election Call	2.5	3.1	1.9	0.753
No Issue emphasized more than others	6.7	5.5	13.1	0.028
Other election stories	25.2	34.6	34.1	0.116
Total Number of Reports	163	127	214	

p-values for a chi-square test of independence for each issue.
The overall Chi-square for the table = 41.898 with 22 d.f., *p*-value=.006.

4.3 *Changes in Reporting of Issues over Time*

This section has two purposes: (1) it examines changes in reporting over time; and (2) it provides a multivariate analysis of the issues covered during the election. Only the eight most mentioned issues are examined. As shown in Chapter Four the eight most mentioned election issues, in descending order were: (1) leadership, (2) national unity, (3) polls, (4) unemployment, (5) budget, (6) taxes, (7) health care, and (8) the debates. Other issues were mentioned in less than 10 per cent of reports.

Figure 4.1 is a time series graph showing the relative daily coverage of the four most reported issues during the campaign: leadership, national unity, polls and unemployment. Only these four issues are shown in order to make the graph easier to interpret.

The line representing coverage of national unity stands out for its sudden jump at May 9. This date corresponds to the release of former Parti Québecois leader Jacques Parizeau's book which stated that he planned to declare independence unilaterally after the 1995 Quebec Referendum had the Yes side won. After this event, the national unity issue dominated the rest of the campaign.

Reporting of the unemployment issue fluctuated daily, but declined only slightly through the course of the campaign. Coverage of leadership, also declined — though more noticeably — as the campaign progressed, falling from the most covered issue at the beginning to second place at the end of the campaign.

Figure 4.1 allows us to visualize the importance of polls throughout the campaign. When polls were first released they were important news stories. Three distinct high spots can be noticed in the line for poll reports: at the start of the campaign,

at May 18, and at May 29-30. The first date corresponds to the start of the campaign and the release of CBC's CROP/Environics poll. The huge jump on May 18 follows the release of six separate polls between May 16-17. May 29-30 corresponds to the release of seven individual polls from May 27-30. On the last two days mentioned here, polls were covered more than any other story. Immediately following May 30 poll reporting drops off drastically, reflecting the legal ban on published polls during the last 72 hours of the campaign.
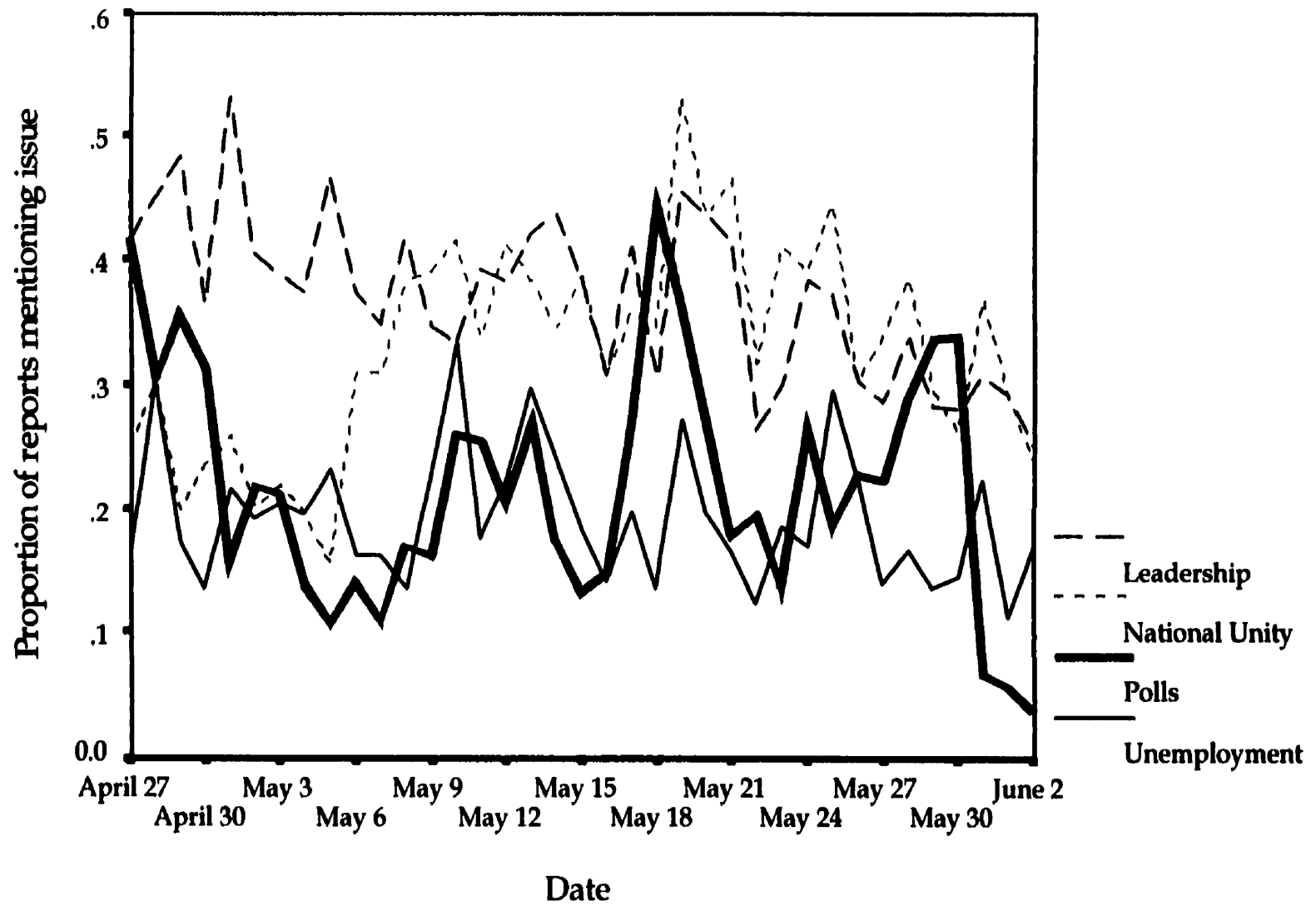
Figure 4.1

Line Graph of the proportion of media reports that mentioned the four most covered issues over the course of the campaign.

The reporting of the eight most mentioned issues was analysed using binary logit models. I analysed television news programmes and newspapers simultaneously, controlling for medium. Including television and newspapers together made it possible to add a new category to the ownership variable — "public" — which included CBC's *The National* and Radio-Canada's *Le Téléjournal.* Binary logit models enabled me to improve on the bivariate analyses by controlling for five independent variables: date, region, medium, language and ownership. Including date in the models also allowed me to test for differences in the reporting of each issue over time.

In this section, each of the eight issues are examined separately through a set of binary logit models and an analysis of deviance. In each case, Model 0 is a null model that fits a constant only. In most cases date is treated as a quantitative variable, but in certain cases the relationship between reports of the issue and date could not be fit with either a linear or quadratic trend, so date was grouped according to categorical variables representing periods separated by important events.

4.3.1 *Leadership*

A graph showing a lowess smooth of the relationship between the mention of leadership and date showed a negative linear relationship, so date was treated as a quantitative variable (see Figure 4.2). The deviances and degrees of freedom for the binary logit models fit for leadership are shown in Table 4.13.
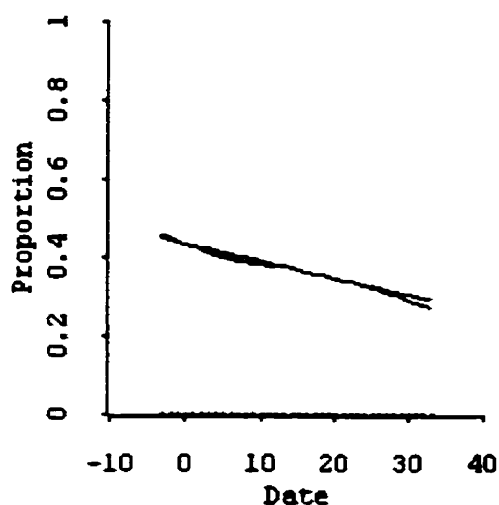
Figure 4.2
Lowess smooth and logit line fit to the
data for the probability of mention of
leadership according to date. Date is
coded so that May 1=1.

Table 4.13
Deviances and degrees of freedom for binary logit models with media
reports of Leadership as the dependent variable.

	Model	Deviance	d.f.
0	Constant only	5811.02	4429
1	Date (linear)	5771.19	4428
2	Date, News Source	5658.62	4415
3	Date, Medium, Region, Language, Ownership	5693.45	4420
4	Date, Medium, Region, Ownership	5694.77	4421
5	Date, Medium, Region, Language	5699.37	4423
6	Date, Region, Language, Ownership	5693.92	4421
7	Date, Medium, Language, Ownership	5739.92	4423

Table 4.14 provides Likelihood-ratio tests for the significance of each independent variable. Two interesting results can be seen. First, there was a statistically significant negative relationship on the logit scale between date and reporting of leadership. Second, controlling for date, there were statistically significant differences among news sources in the amount of reporting of the leadership issue. Of the variables analysed, the only variable that could account for any of the difference is region. Still, there was much variation among news sources that isn't accounted for by the model.

Table 4.14
Analysis of Deviance table for effects on Reports of
Leadership, based on logit models (see Table 4.13)

Models	Source	G^2	d.f.	p
0 - 1	Date (linear)	39.83	1	<<0.0001
1 - 2	News Source	112.57	13	<<0.0001
5 - 3	Ownership	5.92	3	0.1156
6 - 3	Medium	0.47	1	0.493
7 - 3	Region	46.47	3	<<0.0001
4 - 3	Language	1.32	1	0.2506

G^2 is the likelihood-ratio chi-square test statistic

Table 4.15 displays the coefficients for the final model which contained only the significant explanatory variables. The odds of reports about leadership declined by 12 percent each week. By the end of the campaign, the odds of leadership being reported were only half what they were at the beginning of the campaign. The odds of reporting on leadership were greater in Ontario and Quebec than in the east and west.

Table 4.15

Coefficients for a logit model of Reports of Leadership.

Coefficient	B	SE(B)	exp(B)
Constant	-0.6706	0.1674	——
Date (linear)	-0.0187	0.0029	0.98
REGION (baseline category is "East")			
Ontario	0.5466	0.1673	1.73
Quebec	0.6045	0.1691	1.83
West	-0.0244	0.1746	0.98
Deviance 5702.746			
df 4425			

4.3.2 National Unity

A lowess smooth of the data showed that the relationship between national unity

and date was irregularly non-linear (see Figure 4.3). As a result, date was treated as a set

of dummy regressors. Initially, each day of the campaign was included in the analysis,

with the first day of the campaign treated as the baseline category. This analysis

determined that there were statistically significant differences in coverage of the national

unity issue at different points in time. I contrasted this first model with a model

containing date coded as a set of dummy variables representing potentially significant

events.
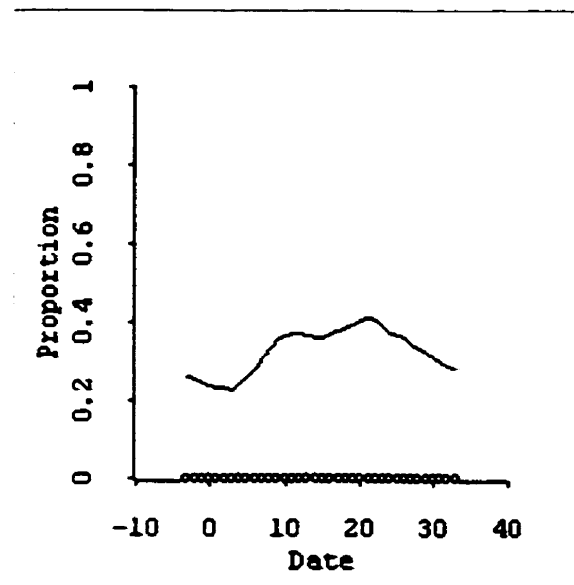
Figure 4.3
Lowess smooth fit to the data for the probability of mention of national unity according to date.

My qualitative analysis of the media's election coverage determined five dates to model:

- May 3,   The Liberal's performance in the 1995 Quebec Referendum, and its unity plan for the future, began to receive criticism from the other major parties (especially by Reform's Preston Manning), bringing national unity into the election as a major issue for the first time;

- May 8,   The day after Jacques Parizeau's book was released which stated that he planned to unilaterally declare Quebec independence if the Yes side had won the Referendum;

- May 13,   The day following the English-language leaders' debate, which had a heated discussion about national unity, including the much

applauded statement by Charest : "If there is one commitment I

will make to my children, it is that I'm going to pass on to them

the country I received from my parents" (Winsor, 1997:A1);

•May 19,   The day after the French-language leaders' debate on national

unity;

•May 26,   The day following Chrétien's television interview on the RDI

network (French-language Newsworld) where he stated that 50

percent plus one is not enough support in a referendum to allow

Quebec to separate.

Table 4.16
Deviances and degrees of freedom for binary logit models with media
reports of National Unity as the dependent variable.

	Model	Deviance	d.f.
0	Constant only	5637.20	4429
1	Date (Categorical)	5516.47	4393
	Significant Events		
2	Criticism, Parizeau, Debate1, Debate2, Chrétien	5560.41	4424
3	Criticism, Parizeau, Debate1, Debate2	5580.78	4425
4	Criticism, Parizeau, Debate1, Chrétien	5566.57	4425
5	Criticism, Parizeau, Debate2, Chrétien	5562.06	4425
6	Criticism, Debate1, Debate2, Chrétien	5584.86	4425
7	Parizeau, Debate1, Debate2, Chrétien	5560.44	4425
8	Date, News Source	5422.58	4380
9	Date, Medium, Region, Language, Ownership	5474.94	4385
10	Date, Medium, Region, Ownership	5475.39	4386
11	Date, Medium, Region, Language	5481.40	4388
12	Date, Region, Language, Ownership	5476.58	4386
13	Date, Medium, Language, Ownership	5496.93	4388

Table 4.17 is an analysis of deviance table for the logit models examining reports

of national unity. As the first panel indicates, there were statistically significant

differences in reporting of this issue through the course of the campaign. Three of the

events had a statistically significant effect on the amount of attention national unity

received —(1) the release of Parizeau's book, (2) the French-language leader's unity

debate, and (3) Chrétien's 50+1 statement.

Table 4.17
Analysis of Deviance table for effects on Reports of National Unity, based on logit models (see Table 4.16)

Models	Source	G^2	d.f.	p
0 - 1	Date (Categorical)	60.73	36	0.0061
	Significant Events			
2 -	Criticism, Parizeau, Debate1, Debate2,	43.94	31	0.0617
1 7 - 2	Chrétien	0.03	1	0.8625
6 - 2	Criticism of Liberal's Unity Plan	24.45	1	<<0.0001
5 - 2	Parizeau's UDI Statement	1.65	1	0.1989
4 - 2	English Leaders' Debate	6.16	1	0.0131
3 - 2	French Unity Debate	20.37	1	<<0.0001
	Chrétien's 50+1 Statement			
1 - 8	News Source	93.89	13	<<0.0001
10 - 9	Language	0.45	1	0.5023
11 - 9	Ownership	6.46	3	0.0913
12 - 9	Medium	1.64	1	0.2003
13 - 9	Region	21.99	3	<<0.0001

G^2 is the likelihood-ratio chi-square test statistic

Table 4.18 displays the coefficients for the final model fit for the national unity

response variable. After the release of Parizeau's book, the odds of mentioning national

unity were nearly twice as great. In the period following the French-language unity

debate, reporting of national unity slowed down, but it was not until after Chrétien's

50+1 statement that media reports of national unity fell off drastically to levels much

lower than at the start of the campaign (odds ratio=.65). Contrary to common

interpretations of the campaign, Preston Manning's initial discussions of the national

unity problem had no significant effect on its coverage, nor did the English-language

debate. Still, this does not mean that Manning's persistence in continually bringing up

the issue didn't contribute to its prominence.

Table 4.18
Coefficients for a logit model of Reports of National Unity.

Coefficient	B	SE(B)	exp(B)
Constant	-1.4331	0.1725	
SIGNIFICANT EVENTS (baseline is "Before Parizeau's UDI")			
Parizeau's UDI Statement	0.6074	0.0911	1.80
French-language Unity Debate	0.1957	0.0908	1.22
Chrétien's 50+1 Statement	-0.4365	0.0931	0.65
REGION (baseline category is "East")			
Ontario	0.3376	0.1686	1.40
Quebec	0.4820	0.1703	1.62
West	0.0234	0.1752	1.02
Deviance	5531.718		
df	4423		

4.3.3 Pre-Election Polls

Polls received relatively consistent coverage throughout the campaign compared

to other issues. Still, a lowess smooth fit to the data shows the relationship between date

and proportion of articles that mentioned polls to be clearly irregular, with some

distinctly obvious high and low points (see Figure 4.4). Due to the irregular pattern, date

was modelled as a categorical variable.
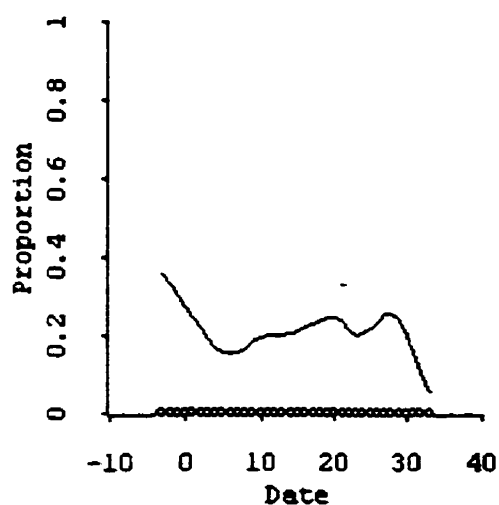
Figure 4.4
Lowess smooth of the data for the
probability of mention of polls according
to date.

Using a set of dummy regressors that represented all days of the campaign, the

first model showed that there were statistically significant differences in the daily

coverage of polls.

The nature of this issue — i.e., the fact that it is not a substantive campaign issue

— meant that, aside from the release of new polls, events during the campaign were

likely to have little effect on coverage. As shown earlier in Figure 4.1, mentions of polls

seemed to be more frequent in periods briefly after the release of many new polls. Five

dates were modelled as dummy variables:

•April 27-28 (Start),   The start of the campaign;

•May 3-10 (Low),   The period of least polling activity during the campaign, with only two polls being released in the week;

• May 16-20 (High1),   The first period of polling following the first two leaders' debates, seven polls were released;

• May 26-30 (High2),   The last period of polling before the legal ban, eight polls were published;

• May 31 - June 2 (End), The legal ban on published poll results.

Table 4.19 displays the logit models fit to the media reports of polls.

Table 4.19
Deviances and degrees of freedom for binary logit models with media reports of Poll as the dependent variable.

Model	Deviance	d.f.
0 Constant only	4597.53	4429
1 Date (categorical)	4384.34	4393
2 Date (linear)	4596.42	4428
Periods corresponding to intensity of polling		
3 Start, Low, High1, High2, End	4475.19	4424
4 Low, High1, High2, End	4482.64	4425
5 Start, High1, High2, End	4484.38	4425
6 Start, Low, High2, End	4481.18	4425
7 Start, Low, High1, End	4491.23	4425
8 Start, Low, High1, High2	4534.01	4425
9 Date, News Source	4280.04	4380
10 Date, Medium, Region, Language, Ownership	4312.23	4385
11 Date, Medium, Region, Ownership	4317.53	4386
12 Date, Medium, Region, Language	4357.31	4388
13 Date, Region, Language, Ownership	4316.08	4386
14 Date, Medium, Language, Ownership	4326.98	4388

As Table 4.20 shows, a test for a linear trend was not statistically significant. It

can also be seen that the variables representing polling periods were statistically

significant, but failed to capture a substantial proportion of the variation in the reporting

of polls. The variation in reporting over time that was not accounted for was haphazard,

and showed no apparent pattern. All other independent variables had a statistically

significant effect on the mention of polls.

Table 4.20
Analysis of Deviance table for effects on Reports of Polls, based
on logit models (see Table 4.19)

Models	Source	G^2	d.f.	p
0 - 1	Date (categorical)	213.19	36	<<0.0001
0 - 2	Date (linear)	1.11	1	0.292
Polling Intensity Dates				
3 - 1	Start, Low, High1, High2, End	90.85	5	<<0.0001
4 - 3	Start	7.45	1	0.00634
5 - 3	Low	9.19	1	0.00243
6 - 3	High1	5.99	1	0.0144
7 - 3	High2	16.05	1	<<0.0001
8 - 3	End	58.83	1	<<0.0001
1 - 9	News Source	91.46	13	<<0.0001
12 - 10	Ownership	39.83	3	<<0.0001
13 - 10	Medium	4.58	1	0.032
14 - 10	Region	14.72	3	0.0021
11 - 10	Language	5.5	1	0.019

G^2 is the likelihood-ratio chi-square test statistic

Table 4.21 displays the coefficients and their log odds ratios for a logit model

regressing mention of polls on all explanatory variables in the model, including the five

polling periods. Holding all other variables constant, television reports were 1.44 times

more likely to mention polls than newspaper articles; Ontario reports were more likely

to report on polls than those from other regions; the French-language media were more

likely than English; and Southam newspapers were far more likely to report on polls

than media organizations of any other ownership. These differences, however, do not

completely account for the differences among sources.

Table 4.21
Coefficients for a logit model of Reports of Polls.

Coefficient	B	SE(B)	exp(B)
Constant	-1.8172	0.2062	——
POLLING PERIODS			
Start (April 27-28)	0.5435	0.1887	1.72
Low (May 3-10)	-0.3401	0.1096	0.71
High1 (May 16-20)	0.2934	0.1161	1.34
High2 (May 26-30)	0.3966	0.0986	1.49
End (May 31- June 2)	-1.5669	0.2388	0.21
OWNERSHIP (baseline category is "Other")			
Public	-0.5899	0.2371	0.55
Southam	0.8354	0.1424	2.31
Thomson	0.2767	0.1387	1.31
MEDIUM (baseline category is "Newspapers")			
Television	0.3661	0.1846	1.44
REGION (baseline category is "East")			
Ontario	0.3404	0.2205	1.41
Quebec	-0.1895	0.2736	0.83
West	-0.0204	0.2506	0.98
LANGUAGE (baseline category is "English")			
French	0.4565	0.2033	1.58
Deviance	4405.481		
df	4416		

4.3.4 *Unemployment*

Unemployment was the fourth most mentioned issue during the campaign. As

Figure 4.5 indicates, however, there was a negative linear relationship between

unemployment and date. As a result, date was modelled as a continuous variable.

Figure 4.5
Lowess smooth and logit line fit to the
data for the probability of mention of
unemployment according to date.

Table 4.22 shows the logit models used to test the partial relationships of the

explanatory variables, as well as to test the significance of a linear trend in date.

Table 4.22
Deviances and degrees of freedom for binary logit models with media reports of Unemployment as the dependent variable.

	Model	Deviance	d.f.
0	Constant only	4320.38	4429
1	Date (linear)	4313.23	4448
2	Date, News Source	4210.34	4415
3	Date, Medium, Region, Language, Ownership	4274.52	4420
4	Date, Medium, Region, Ownership	4277.29	4421
5	Date, Medium, Region, Language	4282.14	4423
6	Date, Region, Language, Ownership	4276.10	4421
7	Date, Medium, Language, Ownership	4283.21	4423

As Table 4.23 indicates, there was a statistically significant relationship between date and mention of unemployment. Ownership and region also had statistically significant effects on the amount of mention given to the unemployment, but these effects were small relative to source effects.

Table 4.23
Analysis of Deviance table for effects on Reports of Unemployment, based on logit models (see Table 4.22)

Models	Source	G^2	d.f.	p
0 - 1	Date (linear)	7.15	1	0.0075
1 - 2	News Source	102.89	13	<<0.0001
5 - 3	Ownership	9.62	3	0.0221
6 - 3	Medium	1.58	1	0.2095
7 - 3	Region	8.69	3	0.0337
4 - 3	Language	2.769	1	0.961

G^2 is the likelihood-ratio chi-square test statistic

Table 4.23 gives the coefficients for the final model fit for unemployment. A

calculation of the odds-ratio for different dates shows that the odds of mention of

unemployment decreased by seven percent per week, and were 31 percent lower at the

end of the campaign compared to the beginning. Furthermore, only two explanatory

variables — ownership and region — accounted for differences among news sources in

reporting unemployment when the other variables are held constant. Representing the

East, the *Halifax Chronicle-Herald* was more likely to discuss unemployment compared

to media representing other regions. Also, Southam newspapers were less likely than

others to mention unemployment.

Table 4.24
Coefficients for a logit model of Reports of
Unemployment.

Coefficient	B	SE(B)	exp(B)
Constant	-0.6177	0.1653	—
Date (linear)	-0.0102	0.0036	0.99
OWNERSHIP (baseline category is "Other")			
Public	0.0959	0.1596	1.10
Southam	-0.2083	0.1116	0.81
Thomson	0.0189	0.1233	1.02
REGION (baseline category is "East")			
Ontario	-0.5651	0.1700	0.57
Quebec	-0.8467	0.1743	0.43
West	-0.5294	0.1998	0.59
Deviance	4278.296		
df	4422		

4.3.5 *The Budget*

A lowess smooth of the data showed a curvilinear relationship between date and mention of the Budget, which a quadratic function appeared to fit well (see Figure 4.6).
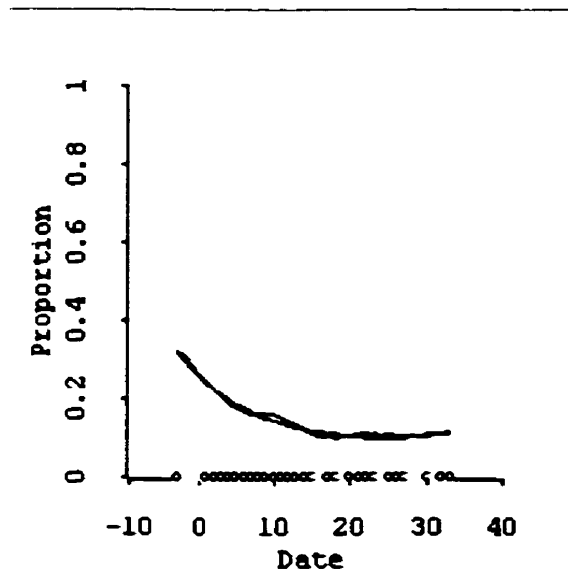
Figure 4.6
Lowess smooth and logit line fit to the data for the probability of mention of the budget according to date.

Table 4.25 displays the deviance and degrees of freedom for the logit models used to assess the relationships between the explanatory variables and mention of the Budget.

Table 4.25

Deviances and degrees of freedom for binary logit models with media reports of the Budget as the dependent variable.

	Model	Deviance	d.f.
0	Constant only	3673.33	4429
1	Date (quadratic)	3576.92	4447
2	Date, News Source	3499.29	4414
3	Date, Medium, Region, Language, Ownership	3556.60	4419
4	Date, Medium, Region, Ownership	3557.13	4420
5	Date, Medium, Region, Language	3566.23	4422
6	Date, Region, Language, Ownership	2569.31	4420
7	Date, Medium, Language, Ownership	3561.60	4422

As Table 4.26 shows, when modelled as a quadratic function, date had a highly

statistically significant effect on the coverage of the Budget issue. Moreover, when all

factors are controlled for, the partial relationships for ownership and medium are

significant.

Table 4.26

Analysis of Deviance table for effects on Reports of the Budget, based on logit models (see Table 4.25)

Models	Source	G^2	d.f.	p
0 - 1	Date (quadratic)	96.41	2	<0.0001
1 - 2	News Source	77.63	13	<0.0001
5 - 3	Ownership	9.629	3	0.022
6 - 3	Medium	12.71	1	0.00036
7 - 3	Region	5.001	3	0.1717
4 - 3	Language	0.527	1	0.4678

G^2 is the likelihood-ratio chi-square test statistic

Table 4.27 displays the coefficients from the final logit model fit to analyse

reporting of the budget. The odds of the budget being mentioned were 1.7 times higher

at the beginning of the campaign than they were during the start of the second week of

the campaign. By the end of the third week, the budget was nearly three times less likely

to be mentioned, and it remained at approximately this level until the end of the

campaign.

Holding ownership constant, the odds of television news programmes

mentioning the budget were half as high as for newspapers. Even when controlling for

medium, the odds of publicly owned media organizations (CBC and Radio-Canada)

reporting on the budget were more than twice as high as the odds for other

organizations.

Table 4.27
Coefficients for a logit model of Reports of the
Budget.

Coefficient	B	SE(B)	exp(B)
Constant	-1.0019	0.0960	——
DATE (quadratic)			
Date	-0.09185	0.0960	0.91
Date^2	0.00191	0.0136	1.00
MEDIUM (baseline category is "Newspapers")			
Television	-0.8125	0.2707	0.44
OWNERSHIP (baseline category is "Other")			
Public	0.8185	0.3088	2.27
Southam	-0.0807	0.1023	0.92
Thomson	0.0666	0.1232	1.06
Deviance	4303.359		
df	4423		

4.3.6 Tax Reform

As Figure 4.7 shows, the relationship between date and mention of tax reform

was fairly linear, and date was treated as a quantitative variable accordingly.
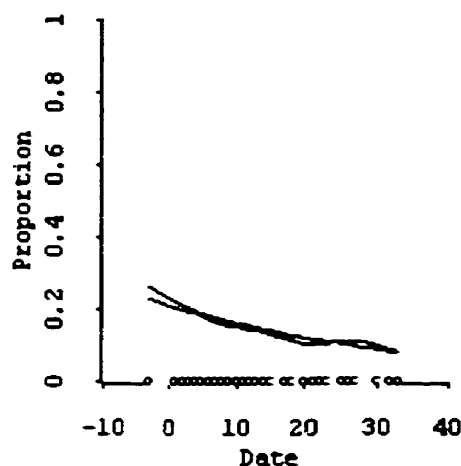
Figure 4.7
Lowess smooth and logit line fit to the
data for the probability of mention of
tax reform according to date.

Table 4.28 shows the logit models used to examine the effects of the independent

variables on mention of tax reform.

Table 4.28
*Deviances and degrees of freedom for binary logit models with media
reports of Tax Reform as the dependent variable.*

	Model	Deviance	d.f.
0	Constant only	3655.57	4429
1	Date (linear)	3591.48	4448
2	Date, News Source	3505.09	4415
3	Date, Medium, Region, Language, Ownership	3558.71	4420
4	Date, Medium, Region, Ownership	3559.51	4421
5	Date, Medium, Region, Language	3560.56	4423
6	Date, Region, Language, Ownership	3560.97	4421
7	Date, Medium, Language, Ownership	3565.43	4423

As Table 4.29 shows, mention of tax reform had a statistically significant linear relationship with date. Though there were once again significant differences among news sources, they were not accounted for by any of the other explanatory variables.

Table 4.29
Analysis of Deviance table for effects on Reports of Tax
Reform, based on logit models (see Table 4.28)

Models	Source	G^2	d.f.	p
0 - 1	Date (linear)	64.091	1	<<0.0001
1 - 2	News Source	86.397	13	<<0.0001
5 - 3	Ownership	1.848	3	0.6045
6 - 3	Medium	2.257	1	0.133
7 - 3	Region	6.722	3	0.0813
4 - 3	Language	0.799	1	0.3713

G^2 is the likelihood-ratio chi-square test statistic

As the campaign progressed, tax reform was less likely to be discussed. Each week the odds of tax reform being mentioned were 22 percent less than the week before. By the end of the campaign, the odds of mentions of tax reforms were 72 percent less than at the beginning of the campaign (see Table 4.30 for the coefficients of the model).

Table 4.30
Coefficients for a logit model of Reports of Tax Reform.

Coefficient	B	SE(B)	exp(B)
Constant	-0.9977	0.1494	----
DATE (linear)	-0.0339	0.4941	0.97
Deviance	3591.483		
df	4428		

4.3.7 Health Care

After examining a graph of a lowess smooth of the data, I determined that there was a curvilinear relationship between mention of health care and date (see Figure 4.8). As a result, a quadratic trend for date was included in the logit models.
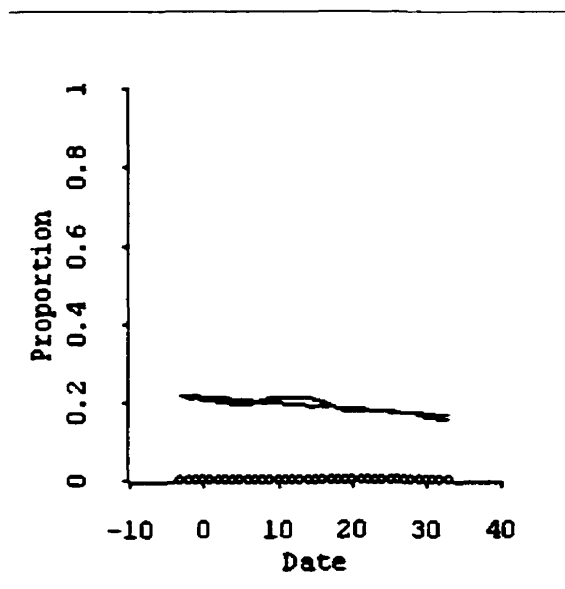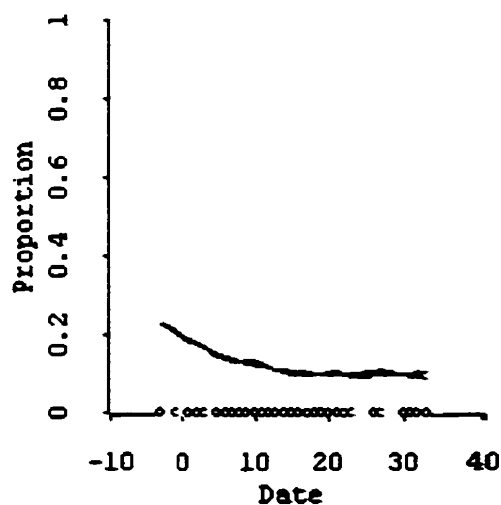

Figure 4.8
Lowess smooth and logit line fit to the data for the probability of mention of health care according to date.

Table 4.31 displays the logit models fit to the data to assess the coverage of health care.

Table 4.31
Deviances and degrees of freedom for binary logit models with media reports of Health Care as the dependent variable.

	Model	Deviance	d.f.
0	Constant only	3358.56	4429
1	Date (quadratic)	3314.12	4447
2	Date, News Source	3230.29	4414
3	Date, Medium, Region, Language, Ownership	3265.99	4419
4	Date, Medium, Region, Ownership	3272.06	4420
5	Date, Medium, Region, Language	3275.77	4422
6	Date, Region, Language, Ownership	3271.82	4420
7	Date, Medium, Language, Ownership	3270.40	4422

As Table 4.3 shows, date had a statistically significant effect on the coverage of health care. Holding all other explanatory variables constant, there were also statistically significant relationships with ownership, medium, and language.

Table 4.32
Analysis of Deviance table for effects on Reports of Health Care, based on logit models (see Table 4.31)

Models	Source	G^2	d.f.	p
0 - 1	Date (quadratic)	44.436	2	<<0.0001
1 - 2	News Source	83.835	13	<<0.0001
5 - 3	Ownership	9.776	3	0.0206
6 - 3	Medium	5.821	1	<<0.0001
7 - 3	Region	4.409	3	0.2206
4 - 3	Language	6.065	1	0.0138

G^2 is the likelihood-ratio chi-square test statistic

Table 4.33 displays the coefficients for the final model fit for the health care issue.

A calculation of the odds-ratios for different periods in time found that after one week,

the odds of reports of health care was 37 percent less than at the start of the campaign.

By the end of the second week the odds ratio compared to the start of the campaign had

decreased by 61 percent; by the end of the third week it was 76 percent less; and by the

end of the campaign, the odds of health care being mentioned were 92 percent less than

they were at the start of the campaign.

Table 4.33
Coefficients for a logit model of Reports of Health
Care.

Coefficient	B	SE(B)	exp(B)
Constant	-1.1855	0.1174	——
DATE (quadratic trend)			
Date	-0.0681	0.0145	0.93
Date^2	0.0014	0.0005	1.00
OWNERSHIP (baseline category is "Other")			
Public	0.8424	0.3047	2.32
Southam	-0.1687	0.1193	0.98
Thomson	0.0447	0.1362	1.05
MEDIUM (baseline category is "Newspapers")			
Television	-0.6092	0.2575	0.54
LANGUAGE (baseline category is "English")			
French	-0.8146	0.4763	0.44
Deviance	3270.403		
df	4422		

Probably the most interesting finding is that, controlling for all other explanatory

variables, the odds of health care being mentioned by the public media (*The National*

and *Le Téléjournal*) were more than twice as high than they were by other ownership

groups. The odds of television mentioning health care were only half as high as they

were for newspapers, and for the French-language media the odds were less than half as

for the English-language media.

4.3.8 *Leaders' Debates*

For the models used to assess the reporting of the debates, date was

operationalized as a categorical variable because coverage followed an irregularly non-

linear trend (see Figure 4.9). Date was divided into three categories:

- •April 27-May 12,   Before the debates;

- •May 13 - May 18,   The period between the first debate and the last debate;

- •May 19 - June 2,   The post-debates period.

These three periods were modelled using two dummy variables, and were used in

models both with, and without, a linear trend component included.
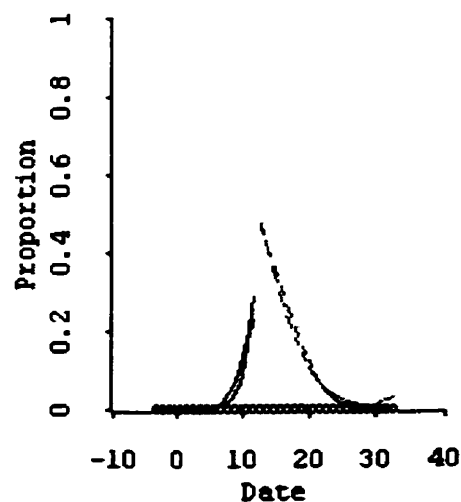
Figure 4.9
Lowess smooth and logit line fit to the
data for the probability of mention of
the debates according to date.

Table 4.34 displays the deviances and degrees of freedom for the logit models fit

to analyse reports of the debates.

Table 4.34
**Deviances and degrees of freedom for binary logit models with media
reports of the Leaders' Debates as the dependent variable.**

Model		Deviance	d.f.
0	Constant only	2588.24	4429
1	Date (linear)	2587.10	4428
2	Date (categorical)	1768.97	4393
	Debate Dates (including linear trends)		
3	Date (linear), Debate1, Debate2, Date x Debate1, Date x Debate2	1828.34	4424
4	Date, Debate2, Date x Debate2	1832.12	4426
5	Date, Debate1, Date x Debate1	1993.09	4426
	Debate Dates (no linear trend)		
6	First Debate, French Unity Debate	2083.72	4427
7	First Debate	2501.59	4428
8	French Unity Debate	2457.87	4428
9	Date (categorical), News Source	1722.53	4380
10	Date, Medium, Region, Language, Ownership	1732.94	4385
11	Date, Medium, Region, Ownership	1743.25	4386
12	Date, Medium, Region, Language	1742.54	4388
13	Date, Region, Language, Ownership	1739.92	4386
14	Date, Medium, Language, Ownership	1755.12	4388

Table 4.35 displays the likelihood-ratio tests for the logit models for reports of the

debates. As expected, the linear trend in date was not statistically significant on its own,

but when a dummy variable for the English debate is included in the model, date

becomes significant. In fact, although there is still some haphazard fluctuations in the

reporting of the debates from day to day that are not accounted for, far more variation in

the data is accounted for if the linear component is included rather than excluded.

Moreover, when all partial relationships are examined, all explanatory variables are

statistically significant.

Table 4.35
Analysis of Deviance table for effects on Reports of the Debates, based on
logit models (see Table 4.34)

Models	Source	G^2	d.f.	p
0 - 1	Date (linear)	1.14	1	0.2856
0 - 2	Date (categorical)	819.27	26	<<0.0001
Debate Dates (linear trends)				
3 - 2	First Debate, French Unity Debate, Date x First Debate, Date x French Unity Debate	59.37	31	0.0016
4 - 3	First Debate, Date x First Debate	165.56	2	<<0.0001
5 - 3	French Unity Debate, Date x French Unity Debate	3.78	2	0.1511
Debate Dates (excluding linear trends)				
6 - 2	First Debate, French Unity Debate	314.75	34	<<0.0001
7 - 6	First Debate	417.87	1	<<0.0001
8 - 6	French Unity Debate	374.15	1	<<0.0001
2 - 9	News Source	46.44	13	<<0.0001
12 - 10	Ownership	9.6	3	0.0223
13 - 10	Medium	6.98	1	0.0082
14 - 10	Region	22.18	3	<<0.0001
11 - 10	Language	10.31	1	0.0013

G^2 is the likelihood-ratio chi-square test statistic

Table 4.36 shows the coefficients and odds-ratios from the final logit model for

reporting of the debates. Before the first debate, the debates received limited but

increasing mention. As expected, after the English-language debate reports of the debate

increased dramatically. Media interest in the debates dwindled quickly, however, and

by the end of the campaign they were rarely mentioned. Simply put, the debates seem

to have had no lasting impact of the media's coverage of the election, possibly a

reflection of the lack of extensive discussions on substantive issues that characterised the

debates.

Table 4.36
Coefficients for a logit model of Reports of the Debates.

Coefficient	B	SE(B)	exp(B)
Constant	-9.7589	0.9771	——
DATE			
Date (linear)	0.7228	0.0736	2.06
First Debate	13.2504	0.9766	568 297
Date x First Debate	-1.0104	0.0019	0.36
OWNERSHIP (baseline category is "Other")			
Public	-0.5828	0.3452	0.59
Southam	0.6050	0.2399	1.83
Thomson	0.5099	0.2072	1.67
MEDIUM (baseline category is "Newspapers")			
Television	0.6926	0.2716	2.00
REGION (baseline category is "East")			
Ontario	0.1463	0.3404	1.16
Quebec	-0.7902	0.4603	0.45
West	-0.8241	0.3980	0.44
LANGUAGE (baseline category is "English")			
French	1.1554	0.3620	3.18
Deviance	5328.887		
df	4430		

The odds of television news reports mentioning the debate were twice as high as

for newspaper articles. Surprisingly, the odds of the French-language media mentioning

the debates were twice as high as the odds for the English-language. Most important, however, is the difference among regions. Controlling for language, Quebec and the West gave significantly less mention to the debates than Ontario and the East. Since in the West Manning received significant attention and Charest was virtually ignored, the lack of mention of the debate probably reflects the non-impact of Manning's performance. On the other hand, Ontario and the East's greater attention on the debates could reflect the better performance of Charest, who was treated favourably in both regions throughout the campaign.

4.4 *The General Tone of Reporting*

Despite differences in political orientations and the extent to which many issues were reported, there were remarkable similarities in the way the election was covered. In general, the media played a passive role, reporting mostly on events that were presented to them by party leaders, and seldomly setting the agenda. In other words, there was an astonishing lack of critical analyses.

It was appalling how little scrutiny party platforms received. The media concentrated almost solely on the daily actions of leaders, volunteering information about platforms only when the leaders themselves brought it forward. The only time platforms received any serious attention was when they were first released. Early in the campaign each party released a small booklet that outlined its social and economic plans should it be elected. After the initial scrutiny, however, party platforms received little attention, not to mention criticism.

Polls played a significant role in the campaign from the outset. When Chrétien

called the election only three and a half years into his mandate and without any significant issues to bring to the electorate, the media argued that the election was called only because the Liberals were enjoying high popularity in the polls, and the opposition parties posed little threat to a second consecutive Liberal majority. From start to finish, the election was presented as a race for the opposition. It was even suggested that voters might vote strategically for the PC Party or Reform Party in order to prevent the Bloc Québécois from regaining status as the official opposition party.

It was obvious that the media understood which issues were most important to the electorate. Public opinion polls were published in all media that showed public concern rested foremost with the high level of unemployment and with cuts to health care. For example, Claude Picher's column in *La Presse* stated, "The most important issue to the electorate is the economy and unemployment, not constitutional disputes. All the polls agree on this point" (Picher, 1997:B4, my translation).

The campaign started with the media showing an apparent interest in discussing the unemployment and health care issues. The first major election story came two days in, when the Liberals announced that they planned to restore some funding to health care. The day after that, the Reform Party obtained a copy of the Liberal's platform, which gave more details of the health care plans, and released it publicly. The only real period of sustained media criticism of a party's platform followed. The next week Chrétien was held captive at the opening of the Hibernia oil field by a group of unemployed Newfoundland fisheries workers, encouraging media criticism of the Liberal government's job creation record.

After the first two weeks of the campaign, however, like other substantive issues,

unemployment and health care received only token mention. It is ironic that despite using polls to explain how voters felt about parties and issues, the media elected to de-emphasize the issues, and gave overwhelming coverage to leadership, pre-election polls, and only one substantive issue —national unity.

National unity was seldom discussed early in the campaign, but it was clear that the media were waiting for the opportunity to raise it. Despite only token mention of the issue from Reform leader Preston Manning, two days into the campaign, *The Globe and Mail* stated, "Unity issue ready to erupt in election"(Howard, 1997:A8). With the release of Jacques Parizeau's book — which contained the revelation that he planned to declare independence unilaterally had the Yes side won the referendum — national unity became the most significant issue in the campaign. Afterwards, Manning continually pushed the issue to the top of the media's agenda.

The continual emphasis on national unity was mostly an indication of Manning and the Reform Party's persistence, frequently calling press conferences to discuss the national unity problem and criticize the other leaders for their purported lack of ability to handle another referendum. Of course, the Bloc Québécois was also obsessed with national unity, arguing constantly that federal politicians had failed Quebecers. The PC Party also joined the discussion early in the campaign, with Charest arguing he was the best candidate to lead Canada in case of another referendum in Quebec. The Liberals and NDP tried to avoid the unity discussions altogether, and the media's emphasis (or better said, the Reform Party's emphasis) on the issue seemed inadvertently to hurt both parties.

The Liberals were portrayed as lacking credibility because of the near

referendum loss and Chrétien's smugness that a No victory would be easy. Although

they tried to avoid it initially, the Liberals eventually took a hard line on national unity

in what appeared to be an attempt to win votes in the west. Near the end of the

campaign Chrétien's 50+1 statement led to him being portrayed in a more positive light

with respect to national unity, especially in newspapers in the west.

Of course, the pro-sovereignist *Le Devoir* was an exception to this trend. Its

headline on the day following Chrétien's 50+1 comment read, "A real attack on Quebec"

(Cauchon and Cayoutte, 1997:A1, my translation). The article continued with a long

quotation from Bloc Québécois leader Gilles Duceppe, in which, using many recent

international referendums as examples, he argued that democracies are based on

majority rule, and majority requires only one more than 50 percent of popular support.

Ultimately, *Le Devoir* represented Chrétien's statements as oppressive, and yet another

reason why Francophone Quebecers should vote for the Bloc Québécois.

Unlike the other parties, the NDP stayed out of the unity debate almost entirely,

electing to stress jobs and health care. Their reluctance to engage the media's favourite

issue seemed to hurt coverage of the NDP. Not only were stories about the NDP

generally less frequent, but they were usually not very favourable. The NDP was

discussed as being unable to have any impact on the national unity issue, both because

of its lack of support in Quebec, and its unwillingness to debate the issue. Still, the NDP

seemed to fare better in the east because of its emphasis on other issues, where *The

Halifax Chronicle-Herald* gave the party more favourable coverage than other

newspapers did. Perhaps not coincidently, the NDP won more seats in Nova Scotia in

1997 than it had in any previous election.

Coverage of leadership qualities declined slightly through the course of the campaign. Still, it was clear that as the campaign progressed the general consensus of the media regarding PC leader Jean Charest was that he was performing better than all other leaders. Despite seldom saying anything substantive, Charest was applauded for running a "good" campaign. The media's fixation with Charest showed up in the almost unanimous selection of him as the winner of the English language leaders' debate. Charest was able to woo the media with his tirade directed at Bloc Québécois leader Gilles Duceppe's announcement that Quebec was a separate nation. Charest's obviously scripted statement, "I want to give my children the country my parents gave me," was the biggest news of the day following the debate.

Unfortunately for the electorate, however, the debates were so poor that they did not provide any new information on the platforms of the parties. The media deserves blame for not addressing this issue afterwards, and for instead trying to tap into feelings of pride by praising Charest's statement. I do not question Charest's feelings for Canada, but it is unlikely that they are essentially different from those of other leaders who want to be Prime Minister. The media, nonetheless, saw Charest as the only leader passionate and charismatic enough to contribute to national unity.

The media's pre-occupation with leadership and national unity also showed up in unfair criticisms of Bloc Québécois leader Gilles Duceppe. Duceppe was ridiculed for his bus getting lost in rural Quebec, and for wearing a hairnet during a tour of a cheese factory. The ridicule turned to questions regarding his leadership abilities.

Prompted by Reform leader Preston Manning, the media also reported that Chrétien was getting "old and tired." While these were Manning's words, they certainly

were not deserving of front page coverage. This article title in the Globe and Mail was typical of all media: "Campaign entering a nastier phase. Manning denies playing age card but suggests Chrétien too tired out, Charest too old-thinking to lead" (Campbell and Sallot, 1997:A8). It was not news that Chrétien was the oldest of the leaders, nor was it any indication of his abilities. Still, the media reported the story as if it were important that voters hear it.

4.5 *Conclusion*

In this chapter I argued that the media played a passive role in covering the election. For the most part, the daily agenda of newspapers and television news programmes was determined by the leaders of the political parties. In other words, the media simply reported what the leaders wanted them to report. This meant that critical analysis of party platforms on issues important to voters suffered. Instead, the media elected to concentrate on national unity, an issue that was seldom raised before Jacques Parizeau's book release, and which was pushed to the top of the agenda almost daily by Reform leader Preston Manning. The only party that showed interest in the issues that most Canadians found important was the NDP. Unfortunately, the NDP was a voice little heard — the NDP received less coverage than any other major party.

The overwhelming coverage of the national unity issue during the middle of the campaign seems to have limited coverage of other issues. Aside from polls and the debates, all other issues received less mention as the campaign went on. Coverage of the issues most important to voters — unemployment and health care — received only token mention near the end of the campaign.

There were substantial changes in the reporting of election issues through the course of the campaign. Of the major issues, only polls received fairly consistent coverage throughout the campaign. That it was the third most mentioned issue reinforces the importance of polls to the media's coverage of the election.

Televised leaders' debates are typically recognized as important events by the media. This campaign was no exception, and the period between the first and last debates was marked by intense coverage. The post-debates period, however, had significantly less mention of the debates than the pre-debate period. This finding suggests that the performance of the leaders in the debates had little lasting impact on the media.

More importantly, I found that coverage of the national unity issue was clearly influenced by events during the campaign. Unlike common interpretations of the campaign, however, Manning's introduction of the issue appears to have little effect on coverage. Instead, it was the release of Jacques Parizeau's book that brought national unity to the forefront of all media coverage of the election. There was a slight decline in attention to national unity following the French-language unity debate, but it wasn't until Chrétien stated that 50 percent plus one was not enough for a country to be divided that the media's pre-occupation with unity subsided. It was almost as if Chrétien's comments put the media at ease.

Of the other explanatory variables, region affected media coverage of more issues than any other factor. Only the budget, tax reform and health care did not receive significantly different coverage among regions. More importantly, the two most covered issues — leadership and national unity — were far more likely to be covered in Ontario

and Quebec than in the other regions. Since these two issues were strongly related, this finding substantiates claims that the West is less concerned than other regions with constitutional problems related to Quebec.

CHAPTER 5

MEDIA REPORTS OF POLLS

As discussed in Chapter Four, polls played an important role in media coverage of the 1997 federal election, placing third among election stories in terms of the number of times that they were mentioned. Fifteen national polls (two of which were conducted just before that start of the campaign), and eight separate polls of Quebec voters, were published during the course of the 37-day election campaign. A total of 847 newspaper articles made reference to at least one of these polls, for a total of 1803 poll mentions. The number of television reports that mentioned polls was 100, with individual poll results being mentioned on 132 occasions. Poll reports were prominent throughout the campaign, but during periods when polls were recently released they received more attention than any other election issue.

This chapter has two purposes: (1) to present a detailed examination of the content of reports that mention polls, with the goal of determining how poll results were used; and (2) to evaluate the amount of technical information that was supplied.

5.1 The Importance of Polls to Media Coverage of the Election

5.1.1 General Reporting of Polls

Poll results were commonly front-page news on the day that they were

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published. The news organization that commissioned polls (e.g., *The Globe and Mail, La Presse,* Southam newspapers, CBC, CTV) always featured the results of their own polls as lead stories. Those organizations that did not commission polls provided less extensive coverage of polls in general, and seldom had a poll report as the lead story, but polls still played an integral part in their coverage of the election.

Most of the reports mentioning polls did not have poll results as their primary focus. Still, I found that recent poll results often set the tone for coverage of the election campaign; this was true for all news organizations analysed. The election campaign was presented as a "horse-race" giving significant attention to who was in the lead at the expense of substantive issues, and poll results were used to substantiate claims that a party was leading or gaining momentum. The horse race element is evident in the emphasis on national polling results rather than regional or riding results.

Because of the nature of our parliamentary system, and the regional fragmentation that usually takes place in Canadian elections, national poll results do not translate simply into the number of seats each party will get in the election. Most problematic was the emphasis on the Bloc Québécois's level of national support, when it did not field candidates outside of Quebec. Nonetheless, national poll results were seldom interpreted in a manner that would allow readers to understand these problems.

A few articles discussed the difficulties of using national poll results to project seats, but these were never clear, as illustrated in the following example from the *Toronto Star* regarding a Quebec poll: "A SOM-La Presse poll released last week indicates the Liberals are still a long way from winning a majority of Quebec's seats. The poll found that they had the support of 39 per cent of those interviewed, putting them in

a tie with the Bloc Québécois" (Contenta, 1997:A12).

The media were forthright about the stress they placed on poll results, on several occasions discussing the importance of polls to democracy. This was most evident regarding the legal ban on published polls in the 72 hours before the election, which received much attention in both media, but especially in newspapers. Southam and Thomson newspapers were part of a court challenge to the law — attempting to declare it unconstitutional — that reached the courts midway through the campaign. The law was upheld, causing a stir reflected in editorials and columns in all the newspapers.

It was argued that polls were an important part of democracy because they allow voters to understand the electorate before they make their own decisions (in other words, they make it easier for people to vote strategically). An article in *The Gazette* discussed the written submissions that the Southam and Thomson chains placed before the courts. The chains contended that "voters will suffer irreparable harm...Voters will have been robbed of information relevant to casting their ballots, their rights to free speech and an informed vote without recourse or remedy" (Bindman, 1997:A13).

All newspapers had something to say about the ban. In his "301" column in Southam newspapers, Brad Evenson wrote, "BIG BROTHER: Election polls have been banned from publication" (Evenson, 1997:A4). An editorial in the *Winnipeg Free Press* stated, "This self-defeating solution to a non-problem has no place in our laws. The new Parliament should remove it before the next election" (Cole, 1997:A10). An editorial in the *Calgary Herald* stated, "We protest. Government ban on polls muzzles our right to free speech" (*Calgary Herald*, 1997:J4).

Small violations of the poll ban were abundantly evident. Though there were few

discussions of complete details, some polling information was released. For example, an article on May 31 in the *Ottawa Citizen* stated, "Polls show the NDP has only one per cent support in Quebec" (Naumetz, 1997:A5). It was also common for predictions to be made based on public opinion polls, but without any numbers provided to substantiate the claim. Some newspapers disclosed the websites of companies that planned to publish poll results illegally during the ban (see Riga, 1997:A13; Canadian Press, 1997a:C4).

The aura of truth that polls seem to enjoy in media reports was also evident in the extensive use of pollsters as "experts" on the election. Comments from pollsters were added to newspaper articles or television reports to lend legitimacy to a reporter's claims. This phenomenon was common to all media organizations.

Southam newspapers and *CTV's Evening News* typically relied on pollsters from Angus Reid (the firm that they commissioned to conduct polls) to comment on the dynamics of the campaign. For example, an article in the *Vancouver Sun* addressing the Liberals' chance to win seats in B.C. quoted Angus Reid as saying, "What they face is the constant reality here, and that is an extremely volatile electorate" (Rinehart, 1997:A3). Darrel Bricker, of Angus Reid, argued in Southam newspapers that the Liberals' decision to put money back into health care was motivated by growing concern about health care among Canadians, and by the threat of the NDP in the eastern provinces. He stated, "Atlantic Canadian voters don't get dissatisfied and go right....They get dissatisfied and go left" (Lindgren, 1997:A5).

The two French-language newspapers relied mostly on Quebec pollsters as experts, reflecting their stronger interest in public opinion in their own province rather

than in the nation as a whole. While Jean-Marc Léger (of Léger & Léger), Gilles Therrien (SOM), and Claude Gauthier (CROP) were relied on by both papers, each newspaper put more emphasis on the pollster who conducted polls for it: *La Presse* relied on SOM's Gilles Therrien and *Le Devoir* relied on Sondagem's Jean Noisseux.

Though a Southam newspaper, *The Gazette* was obvioulsy more influenced by its location, relying far more than the other Southam newspapers on Quebec pollsters for commentary. For example, sociologist and pollster, Pierre Drouilly and pollster Jean-Marc Léger were both used to add legitimacy to the argument that the electorate (both in Quebec and the nation as a whole) was bored with the election campaign because of the lack of a burning issue (Scott, 1997:A17).

Allan Gregg from Strategic Counsel was called on often by *the Toronto Star* (for which Strategic Counsel conducted its polls) and also by the CBC. *The Globe and Mail* usually relied on Donna Dasko of Environics and Jean-Marc Léger of Léger and Léger, both of whom conducted polls for *The Globe.*

Perhaps the biggest misuse of pollsters as experts came in the *Toronto Sun,* which seldom provided the names of their experts. One article discussed the number of seats that each party could potentially get, using an unidentifed pollster to back up its claims. To dispute the claims that the Liberals would lose many seats, the article stated, "However, a polling expert dismissed all this as wishful thinking and forecasted as many as 99 Grit seats this election. 'The media have turned this into a horse race in Ontario and it simply doesn't exist,' the analyst said" (Benzie, 1997:2).

I do not dispute the pollsters' expertise with regards to their polls. Competent pollsters should be able to interpret their findings since they know the technical details

of their polls better than others. It is sensible that pollsters are considered experts in this context, but too often they did not sufficiently explain the basis on which conclusions were drawn. Even more problematic, pollsters were far too often relied on to provide election commentary that transcended poll results.

The frequency with which pollsters were used as experts on election issues not related to their polls is alarming. For example, the *Ottawa Citizen* had Conrad Winn of COMPAS analyse a Reform party television commercial that suggested it was time to vote for a leader from outside of Quebec. Winn is also a political scientist at Carleton University, and is perhaps qualified to address the question in that capacity, but the article added "Mr. Winn is also the president of the polling firm COMPAS" as if to lend weight to his comments (Cobb, 1997:A3).

Similarly, the *Halifax Chronicle-Herald* relied on Angus Reid pollster Darrell Bricker to evaluate the leaders' performance in the English-language debate. Bricker evaluated Charest's performance as follows: "If this were figure skating, he won on artistic impression...At the end of the day the question comes down to, so what? He may have won the contest but it may have no impact on the campaign" (Canadian Press, 1997b:A11). There was no mention of any polls, past or present.

Another example occurred on the *CTV's Evening News*, when Chrétien was met with criticism for his hesitancy to participate in a third leaders' debate. The CTV interviewed Michael Simard of Léger and Léger, who stated that Chrétien was reluctant because "he knows its slippery ground and he doesn't want to slip, and he prefers that Jean Charest breaks his neck on the question" (CTV, May 13, 1997). Simard probably has a good understanding of public opinion from his experience in polling, but that does not

make him qualified to analyse Chrétien's actions.

The media also interpreted the actions of leaders as if they were reactions to poll results, without any support from pollsters. A typical example in the *Globe and Mail* stated, "Buoyed by his performance in the televised leaders' debate, yet conscious that his party continues to lag behind in the polls, Progressive Conservative Leader Jean Charest shifted the focus of his campaign yesterday to the issue of leadership" (McIlroy, 1997:A10). Another report stated, "Mr. Chrétien's aggressive remarks suggest he is determined to try to limit or reverse any gains registered during the past week by two of his main rivals in the June 2 election" (Feschuk and Cox, 1997:A4).

A similar example from the *Toronto Star* discussed Manning's so-called 'hot-button' strategy of criticising leaders from Quebec. The article interpreted the actions as a reaction to Reform's lack of movement in the polls, stating, "The hot-button strategy was necessary because polls showed Manning's main message of a balanced budget, smaller government in Ottawa and a future tax break wasn't sizzling, even among hard-core Reformers" (Walker, 1997:A10).

It was clear from media reports that politicians saw the poll results as factors that could change the course of the election. Early in the campaign when the Liberals apparently had an unsurmountable lead, Manning stated on CTV's Evening News, "The Liberal vote is as soft as putty. There's all kinds of room for it to move around" (CTV, May 10, 1997). Late in the campaign a headline in the *Toronto Star* stated, "Manning claims he's encouraged by poll results. Believes Liberal vote continuing to soften" (Thompson, 1997:A16). In the same article, NDP leader Alexa McDonough argued that poll results were missing the significant gains that she felt her party was making across

the country. McDonough argued, "I'd have whiplash if I tried to follow the bounces back and forth and all the polls said something different" (Thompson, 1997:A16). With just two days of campaigning left, McDonough stated in the *Winnipeg Free Press*, "We're absolutely confident we're going to go well beyond what the polls say" (Kuxhaus, 1997:A5). In fact, the NDP fared no better than poll results predicted that they would.

Bloc leader Gilles Duceppe made little reference to polls throughout the campaign, but nearing the end, when polls showed favourable results, Duceppe was clearly pleased. After the release of an Ekos poll showing the Bloc well in the lead in Quebec, an article in the *Ottawa Citizen* cited Duceppe as saying, "I'm not going to comment on polls, but what we feel on the ground is really that our troops are ready, that people are enthusiastic, and we must work hard" (Clark, 1997:A5).

The PC Party was so worried about a Zogby poll released on May 5 that showed them far behind the Liberals that they released a press statement condemning the poll: "According to the majority of poles [sic] the party has steadily gained ground within the last few months...The means and procedures used to verify the accuracy of this pole [sic] remain questionable" (Canadian Press, 1997c:A17) .

When polls began to show his party gaining momentum, however, Charest discussed them as if they were matters of fact and important news sources. Days after the release of a few polls that showed he was possibly making gains (though these gains were within the margin of error) Charest stated, "This campaign has just changed for a simple reason...In the last few days, Canadians have had an opportunity to compare — to compare leaders, to compare plans and in the next few days, next few weeks, to compare teams" (Travers, 1997:A14).

Charest's momentum was a topic that received substantial attention, clearly influencing the actions of other leaders. After a SOM poll published on May 23 showed that the PC Party was gaining support in Quebec, CTV's Rosemary Thompson stated, "Pollsters are now comparing the Jean Charest momentum in Quebec to that of Lucien Bouchard's in 1995 when he stepped in and nearly won the referendum campaign. They say it's a trend that can only be stopped if Charest makes a major mistake next week" (Rosemary Thompson, CTV, May 23, 1997). Strategic Counsel's Allan Gregg argued on *CTV's Evening News*, "If Charest can find a galvanizing issue you could see tremendous change in the next week" (CTV, May 17, 1997).

Aside from the "horse-race," poll reports also provided insights into the election campaign that otherwise may not have been available, in the form of questions on which issues the electorate found most important. As stated in Chapter Four, according to public opinion polls, the most important issues were unemployment and health care. These questions were seldom given the same attention as the voting intention questions, but they were frequently referred to in passing.

An Ekos poll conducted early in the campaign suggested that jobs would be the key election issue. First quoted in the *Calgary Herald*, the poll found that "75 per cent said the possibility of Canada suffering 'a very serious and permanent shortage of jobs' is somewhat likely" (Adams, 1997:A2). An Angus Reid poll of 3208 Canadians conducted between May 5 and 8 showed that jobs and health care were considered the most important issue by far more respondents than national unity — 55 percent said jobs was the most important issue; 29 percent selected health care; only 18 percent selected national unity (Bryde, 1997:A15). Similarly, a poll by the Strategic Counsel released on

May 16 showed that 40 percent of respondents named job creation as the most important

issue (McCarthy, 1997:F6). The pattern had changed very little by the end of the

campaign. For example, a poll of Manitoba voters released on May 29 showed

unemployment as a far greater concern than national unity (Samyn, 1997:A9).

Polls about issues were reported relatively infrequently, and as the emphasis on

national unity and the horse-race indicates, their results were not taken seriously by the

media or by political parties. This point was echoed by Arthur Gillman, a pollster in

Winnipeg, who argued, "The June 2 election will return the Liberals to office not because

they won the election, but because all other parties lost it...The other parties are losing

this election because they are ignoring huge stocks of artillery that the voters of Canada

are offering them" (Shaw, 1997:A4).

An alarming inclination of media accounts of polls was to treat their results as

straightforward matters of fact. Potential problems with polling methodology were

seldom discussed. In fact, no television stories, and only 26 newspaper articles (just over

half of one percent) gave direct warnings to readers about interpreting poll results. All

newspapers faired equally poorly, rarely reporting the potential problems of polls in

news reports for which poll results were the main focus. There were some exceptions,

but these were usually confined to editorials or columns that were not even reporting the

most recent poll results.

Even indirect warnings that a poll only measures public opinion at a certain point

in time (and that many factors could produce a change in public opinion before the

election), were issued infrequently, and when they were mentioned, there was little

elaboration. This treatment of polls as matters of fact corresponded to poor reporting of

the technical details of the polls.

5.1.2 *Differences between Newspapers and Television*

Table 5.1 describes some of the elements of media reports containing mentions of

polls. To examine the extent to which articles emphasize poll results I looked for the

presence of the following information:

- poll results were the main focus of the article;

- results of more than one poll were mentioned;

- poll results were compared over time;

- poll results from similar times, but different firms were compared;

- graphs or tables were used to display the results of polls;

- a leader was declared;

- a winner was predicted;

- commentary that transcended the results of the polls (i.e., discussions of
  the campaign that were unrelated to polls).

In both media only about one-third of poll reports took place within articles for which

polls were the main focus. In these cases, the details of polls were usually given

significant attention. In the other 70 percent of cases, polls were typically mentioned

only in passing.

Table 5.1
Characteristics of News Stories that mention Poll Results by Medium, in percent.

| Percent Reporting | Medium | | *p-*value* |
	Newspapers	Television	
Polls are Main Focus of the Article	28.6	31.0	0.612
More than One Poll discussed	19.2	8.0	0.006
Comparison of Polls over Time	15.7	3.0	0.001
Comparison of Polls by Different Firms	6.1	6.0	0.956
Graphs or Tables used to Display Results	14.4	23.0	0.024
Declaration of a leader in the election	37.0	36.0	0.852
Prediction of Election Winner	7.9	6.0	0.498
Commentary	89.1	89.0	0.967
Total Number of Reports	847	100	

*p-value for a chi-square test of independence.

There were some significant differences between the two media. Newspaper articles were more than twice as likely to discuss more than one poll, and five times as likely to compare polls over time. Simply put, more so than television news programmes, newspapers relied on poll results to trace the dynamics of the campaign, showing how certain events could have been responsible for changing public opinion. On the other hand, television stories made greater use of tables to display the results of polls. Considering how quickly poll results are mentioned orally, tables are necessary for television broadcasts if voters are to comprehend their results. Aside from these differences, there was much similarity between the two media with respect to poll related material for reports containing poll mentions.

5.1.3 Differences among Newspapers

Table 5.2 describes the elements of newspaper articles that discussed poll results

for the 11 newspapers in the study. With the exception of *The Gazette*, Southam-owned

newspapers had an exceptional reliance on polls as news stories. This is evidenced by

the large number of articles devoted to polls, the frequency with which more than one

poll was discussed, and the extensive use of graphs and tables to display trends in public

opinion through the course of the campaign. A daily column in the Southam

newspapers called "301", by Brad Evenson, regularly relied on polls. (Evenson's column

did not appear in *The Gazette*). The *Toronto Star*, on the other hand, was most likely to

discuss polls within articles that focussed on other issues or events.

Table 5.2
Characteristics of Articles that mention Poll Results by Newspaper, in percent.

| Percentage of Reports containing certain characteristics: | Newspaper | | | | | | | | | | | *p* value[*] |
| | Southam Newspapers | | | | Thomson Newspapers | | Independents and others | | | | | |
	Montreal Gazette	Ottawa Citizen	Calgary Herald	Van. Sun	Globe & Mail	Winnipeg Free Press	Halifax Chr-Herald	Montreal La Presse	Montreal Le Devoir	Toronto Star	Toronto Sun	
Polls are Main Focus of the Article	25.8	27.2	23.9	28.0	25.0	45.5	20.0	42.2	20.0	15.7	31.1	0.001
More than One Poll is discussed	9.7	34.8	31.8	37.4	16.0	10.9	6.7	15.6	10.0	4.5	8.9	<0.001
Comparison of Polls over Time	6.5	31.5	29.5	29.9	10.0	7.3	6.7	11.7	10.0	5.6	4.4	<0.001
Comparison of Polls by Different Firms	5.4	4.3	3.4	6.5	9.0	7.3	3.3	11.7	5.0	1.1	4.4	0.140
Graphs or Tables used to Display Results	1.1	23.9	30.7	24.3	7.0	14.5	3.3	18.8	5.0	5.6	0.0	<0.001
Declaration of a Leader in the Election	28.0	43.5	43.2	51.4	24.0	23.6	43.3	32.0	55.0	34.8	46.7	<0.001
Prediction of Election Winner	7.5	7.6	4.5	5.6	9.0	10.9	3.3	3.9	15.0	10.1	22.2	0.019
Commentary that Transcends Poll Results	91.4	94.6	94.3	93.5	81.0	96.4	86.7	71.9	95.0	95.5	97.8	<0.001
Total Number of Articles	93	92	88	107	100	55	30	28	20	75	45	

[*]*p*-value for a chi-square test of independence.

The *Winnipeg Free Press* had a higher proportion of poll mentions in articles for which they were the main focus than any other newspaper. Much of this was due to the fact that there were substantially more local and provincial polls conducted in Winnipeg during the campaign than elsewhere. These polls asked questions about vote preference, but focussed mostly on the issues of the campaign, the most important of which was the Liberal's decision to call the election when Manitoba was in the midst of the flood.

There seemed to be a connection, though weak, between the way poll results were interpreted and the political orientations of the media organizations. National poll results always showed a Liberal lead, and this was usually reflected in the titles of the news articles focussing on polls. Those newspapers that showed support for the Reform Party, however, were more likely to emphasize changes in public opinion for that party. This was evident in the *Calgary Herald* and the *Toronto Sun*, but more so in the latter. *Le Devoir*, the pro-sovereignist Quebec paper that supported the Bloc Québécois, was most interested in discussing poll results as they pertained to that party. There was one glaring exception — despite supporting the PC Party, *The Globe and Mail* provided a balanced outlook on poll results regardless of the PC Party's standing.

Most appalling was the way in which the *Toronto Sun* relied on nonscientific polls as if they provided insight into the dynamics of the campaign. It was obvious that these polls were relied on more because they supported the parties that *The Sun* they endorsed than because they were newsworthy events. Most significant was the *Sun's* internet poll at its website, for which the results were reported every week, always showing the Reform Party leading. There would be no mention that the respondents for the poll were not representative of the population; the closest articles ever got to

explaining the limitations of the internet poll was the following statement: "The poll, albeit unscientific, has shown a steady growth in Reform support, especially in Ontario" (Toronto Sun, 1997:13).

On one occasion the Halifax Chronicle-Herald also reported a nonscientific poll — one which used a sample of 310 high school students of voting age chosen from school cafeterias — as if it was newsworthy. There was some discussion about the limitations in the representativeness of the sample, but only because the sample was picked in a cafeteria. There was no mention that a sample of students does not represent the population as a whole. In fact, it was stated that the poll had a margin of error of about "plus or minus four percent" (Armstrong, 1997:D3).

5.1.4 *Differences among Television News Programmes*

I now turn to differences in the reporting of polls among television news programmes. Surprising is the number of news stories that mentioned polls in *CTV's Evening News* broadcasts compared with the other new programmes (see Table 5.3). This can be attributed, in part, to CTV's emphasis on polls done by Angus Reid, which it commissioned.

The French-language *Le Téléjournal* relied on polls to explain the dynamics of the campaign more than the two English-language news programmes. For example, to show trends in public opinion over time, *Le Téléjournal* used graphs or tables in 40.9 percent of stories that made reference to poll results, but *CTV's Evening News* and *The National* used graphs in only 22.2 percent and 8.3 percent of stories. *Le Téléjournal* was also far more likely to discuss more than one poll at a time, and to compare poll results

from different firms.

Table 5.3
Characteristics of Television Stories that mention Poll Results, by Television News Programme.

Percent Reporting	Programme			p-value*
	Le Téléjournal (SRC)	The National (CBC)	CTV's Evening News	
Polls are Main Focus of the Report	40.9	20.8	31.5	0.337
More than One Poll discussed	22.7	4.2	3.7	0.016
Comparison of Polls over Time	4.5	0.0	3.7	0.602
Comparison of Polls by Different Firms	18.2	4.2	1.9	0.023
Graphs or Tables used to Display Results	40.9	8.3	22.2	0.031
Declaration of a leader in the election	40.9	33.3	35.2	0.852
Prediction of Election Winner	9.1	0.0	7.4	0.251
Commentary	90.9	91.7	87.0	0.791
Total Number of Reports	22	24	54	

*p-value for a chi-square test of independence.

5.2 Reporting Technical Details

5.2.1 General Patterns in the Media

Table 5.4 shows the percentages of poll mentions for which various kinds of technical information were supplied. Reports of polls in both media are characterized by an alarming absence of basic information. This was true both when polls were the main focus of an article or simply mentioned. The latter can perhaps be excused since polls that were only referred to in passing were given more detailed treatments in previous days' reports, or other reports on the same day. When polls are the main focus, however, technical information should be supplied. Nonetheless, sample size, the exact wording of the question used in the survey, the percentage of respondents who were undecided,

and the percentage of respondents who refused to participate in the survey, were seldom

mentioned (none of these elements was mentioned for more than 16 percent of polls

reported in either medium).

Table 5.4

Technical Reporting of Polls by Type of Report, in percent.

Percentage of mentions of polls for which the following technical information was provided:	Poll Results are the Main Focus of the Report					All Reports that Mention Poll Results				
	News-paper Columns	News-paper Editorials	Newspaper News Reports	Tele-vision Reports	p-value*	News-paper Columns	News-paper Editorials	Newspaper News Reports	Tele-vision Reports	p-value*
Sample Size	7.0	0.0	32.7	20.3	<0.001	4.9	0.0	22.4	10.6	<0.001
Polling Firm	91.0	33.3	94.6	95.7	<0.001	81.7	12.8	71.5	51.5	<0.001
Percent Undecided	2.0	0.0	13.9	5.8	<0.001	1.6	0.0	10.0	3.0	<0.001
Percent Refused	0.0	0.0	1.0	0.0	0.428	0.0	0.0	0.6	0.0	0.176
Margin of Error	4.5	0.0	25.2	36.2	<0.001	3.0	0.0	17.0	19.7	<0.001
Survey Dates	14.5	0.0	64.4	53.6	<0.001	8.8	2.6	42.7	28.0	<0.001
Poll Release Date	87.5	33.3	91.6	95.7	0.001	77.4	12.8	66.2	50.8	<0.001
Question Asked	0.5	0.0	20.7	5.8	<0.001	0.2	0.0	12.7	3.8	<0.001
At least one detail	93.0	33.3	97.1	95.7	<0.001	83.0	15.4	73.9	51.5	<0.001
Total Number of Polls Mentioned	200	3	691	69		628	39	1136	132	

*p-value for a chi-square test of independence.

The only technical detail that was adequately reported was the polling firm. Still, there was rarely mention of who commissioned the poll; when the sponsor of the poll was mentioned, it was usually only in passing. Greater effort was made only when the poll was commissioned by the reporting newspaper itself. There were exceptions, however.

Without knowing the exact question asked in a survey, it is difficult to evaluate its results. Nonetheless, it was a rarity for the question to be mentioned in the reports. The absence of information about the question leads to unsubstantiated claims that readers cannot dispute on the basis of the report alone.

The margin of error was infrequently presented by all media organizations. In most cases, even when the margin of error was reported, there was seldom discussion of its significance or meaning and it was sometimes disregarded altogether. For example, when the margin of error was taken into consideration, individual poll results often showed Reform and PC in a tie, but reports nevertheless commonly declared that one party was leading.

Discussions of the meaning of the margin of error were seldom seen, but they were more likely in newspaper columns than elsewhere, and even these were not complete. The following example from Andrew Coyne's column in the *Calgary Herald* typifies the best of the discussions: "A Vancouver Sun poll put Reform's lead at 37-35. It's well within the margin of error, of course, but clearly all is not so quiet on the western front" (Coyne, 1997:A17).

Similarly, polls that showed changes in popular support that were well within the margin of error were often interpreted as showing evidence for an increase in

popularity for one party, and in no instance was a distinction made between the sampling variability of an individual poll and for changes between polls. Moreover, in combining information from several polls, there was no attempt to assess the statistical variability of the combined data.

Since large percentages of undecided voters and high nonresponse rates can bias a poll's results, it is important that these items be reported. Descriptions of the percentage undecided were usually ambiguous — in most cases the undecided, those who refused to answer, and those who said that they would not vote were treated as a homogeneous group. The grouping together of the undecided, refused, and nonvoters was common to all media organizations. No report made reference to the global nonresponse rate, and only seven reports (0.4 percent), all of which were newspaper articles, distinguished refusals to respond from the undecided.

Technical details were better reported as the campaign came close to the end, perhaps an indication that the media was covering itself in the event that polls they commissioned were off the mark. Survey dates, the question asked, and the firm that conducted the poll were far more likely to be mentioned than early in the campaign.

5.2.2 *Difference in Technical Reporting according to Media*

Technical reporting was typically better done in newspapers than on television. The most striking difference between the two media is the relative infrequency with which television stories mention polls without giving even one piece of technical information. In other words, television news was more likely to refer to polls only in passing compared to newspapers. Newspapers also fared better in terms of reporting the

firm that conducted the poll, the question asked, and the initial date that the poll was publicly released. Surprisingly, however, the margin of error was reported more often on television. It can also be seen that newspaper editorials did a poorer job than news articles, both when polls were the main focus of a story and when they were only mentioned.

There were also differences between the different types of newspaper articles. News reports did a far better job of reporting the technical details than both editorials and columns. Columns fared comparatively better when polls were not the main focus of the article, but when polls were the main focus, news reports fared far better. Editorials usually provided only scant details, but because of the nature of editorials — i.e., they provide more elaborate discussions of news stories that are typically discussed elsewhere — they can be excused for their lack of technical reporting.

5.2.3 *Differences among Newspapers*

Tables 5.5 and 5.6 show the percentage of news articles reporting technical information for each of the eleven newspapers. Table 5.5 displays the results for all poll mentions, regardless of the focus of the article. Table 5.6 shows the technical information given for polls mentioned in articles for which poll results were the main focus. In both cases poll results were poorly reported, but they were far better reported when polls were the main focus of the article.

Table 5.5

Technical Reporting of Polls for all mentions of Polls, regardless of the focus of the article by Newspaper, in percent.

Percentage of mentions of polls for which the following technical information was provided:	Newspaper													p-value*
	Southam Newspapers					Thomson Newspapers			Independents and others					
	Montreal Gazette	Ottawa Citizen	Calgary Herald	Van. Sun	All Southam Papers	Globe & Mail	Winnipeg Free Press	Both Thomson Papers	Halifax Chr-Herald	Montreal La Presse	Montreal Le Devoir	Toronto Star	Toronto Sun	
Sample Size	18.9	10.4	9.6	15.7	13.1	11.5	32.4	16.1	36.4	24.9	13.2	13.8	9.4	0.001
Polling Firm	56.8	83.5	84.6	83.6	80.0	76.2	60.6	72.8	47.7	74.7	73.9	56.3	43.4	<0.001
Percent Undecided	8.3	3.8	5.0	3.4	4.6	15.5	5.6	13.3	25.0	7.5	7.9	1.8	3.8	<0.001
Percent Refused	0.0	0.0	2.1	0.0	0.5	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.8	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.402
Margin of Error	12.9	7.3	10.0	15.4	11.4	11.5	12.7	11.8	34.1	15.8	13.2	4.8	1.9	0.823
Survey Dates	23.5	24.2	20.0	20.5	21.8	40.5	26.8	37.5	34.1	55.7	8.4	29.3	11.3	<0.001
Poll Release Date	48.5	82.7	80.4	77.8	75.7	72.2	39.4	65.0	43.2	71.5	73.7	54.5	26.4	<0.001
Question Asked	12.1	5.8	6.7	2.7	5.9	11.9	7.0	10.8	0.0	21.7	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.003
At least one detail	57.6	86.2	85.4	85.0	81.5	76.2	62.0	73.1	52.3	75.5	81.6	63.5	47.2	<0.001
Total Number of Polls Mentioned	132	260	240	293	925	252	71	323	44	253	38	167	53	

*p-value for a chi-square test of independence among ownership (Southam, Thomson, and Other).. Chi-square tests of independence were also calculated to explore the differences among all newspapers when treated individually. In these cases, all the p-values were <0.001 except for "Percent Refused" which has no significant differences.

Table 5.6

Technical Reporting of Polls for mentions of Polls in articles that Poll Results were the main focus by Newspaper, in percent.

Percentage of mentions of polls for which the following technical information was provided:	Newspaper													*p-value*
	Southam Newspapers					**Thomson Newspapers**			**Independents and others**					
	Montreal Gazette	Ottawa Citizen	Calgary Herald	Van. Sun	All Southam Papers	Globe & Mail	Winn. Free Press	Both Thomson Papers	Halifax Chr-Herald	Montreal La Presse	Montreal Le Devoir	Toronto Star	Toronto Sun	
Sample Size	55.8	16.5	19.1	32.7	25.5	16.1	52.4	23.3	50.0	36.1	13.0	26.3	20.0	0.117
Polling Firm	90.9	94.0	98.9	87.3	92.7	98.2	92.9	97.1	75.0	98.8	87.0	86.3	75.0	0.057
Percent Undecided	17.3	7.5	11.2	5.5	9.1	22.6	9.5	20.0	25.0	10.1	0.0	2.5	10.0	<0.001
Percent Refused	0.0	0.0	5.6	0.0	1.3	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	1.2	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.219
Margin of Error	30.8	11.3	22.5	36.4	23.7	15.5	21.4	16.7	37.5	23.7	21.7	10.0	5.0	0.94
Survey Dates	46.2	39.1	44.9	43.6	42.7	60.7	45.2	57.6	37.5	78.7	8.7	58.8	20.0	<0.001
Poll Release Date	88.5	94.0	95.5	82.7	90.4	98.2	61.9	91.0	87.5	97.6	87.0	91.3	30.0	0.967
Question Asked	28.8	11.3	18.0	7.3	14.1	17.9	11.9	16.7	18.0	32.5	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.311
At least one detail	90.0	98.5	87.9	87.3	94.3	98.2	95.2	97.6	87.5	99.4	95.7	98.8	75.0	0.750
Total Number of Polls mentioned	52	133	89	110	384	168	42	210	8	169	23	80	20	

*p-value for a chi-square test of independence among ownership (Southam, Thomson, and Other).. Chi-square tests of independence were also calculated to explore the differences among all newspapers when treated individually. In these cases, all the p-values were <0.001.

As discussed earlier, four newspapers stand out for the limited mention of polls in general: *Le Devoir*, *The Halifax Chronicle-Herald*, *The Toronto Sun*, and *The Winnipeg Free Press*. With the exception of *The Winnipeg Free Press*, these papers also provided the poorest coverage of technical information. *The Toronto Sun* performed poorly in its reporting of polling firms, sample size and margin of error. *Le Devoir* seldom provided the dates of the survey, ranking last among newspapers for both articles with polls as the main focus and articles with other issues as their focus. *The Halifax Chronicle-Herald* was the least likely to give any details of polls at all (it stated some technical details for only 52.3 percent of all polls it mentioned, and for only 87.5 percent of polls mentioned in articles when they were the main focus), and while it did the best job of reporting the percent undecided and sample size, it did a very poor job of reporting the polling firm.

All other newspapers provided significant mention of polls, but no newspaper regularly reported all the information needed to understand polling results fully. Even when they were mentioned, technical details were seldom given proper attention; they were treated as unimportant statistical jargon, rather than as information needed to understand a poll's results.

Of the newspapers that provided broad mention of polls, *The Globe and Mail* and *La Presse* provided the best overall coverage of technical details — both provided the percent undecided, sample size and survey dates far more regularly than other newspapers. Of the newspapers that commissioned polls, *La Presse* did by far the best job of reporting details of their own polls, providing a section entitled, "Méthodologie" each day that a new poll was released. The section was authored by the pollster, and

contained most of the necessary technical information needed to understand the poll's results. *The Globe and Mail* and *La Presse* also had the most extensive coverage of polls.

Unfortunately, Southam's emphasis on polls as a news story is overshadowed by its poor technical reporting. Although poll reports in Southam newspapers were provided with at least one technical detail more often than those in newspapers of other ownerships, seldom was more than the polling firm's name and the initial publication date of the poll stated (for these two factors, Southam newspapers placed first). Southam newspapers provided the worst reporting of sample size, percent undecided, survey dates and the question asked.

Much of the reason for the lack of technical details for poll reports in Southam newspapers is attributable to many of their poll reports being shown in graphs only. For example, Brad Evenson's "301"column presented a graph almost every day of the campaign, adding new polls as they were released. Mention of technical details outside of what could be seen on the line graph (i.e., the publication date, firm, and percent for each party) was seldom given, except for on the first day that the poll was published. Evenson merely provided a footnote that stated, "Poll formats and questions may vary." Notwithstanding this caution, however, to interpret the trends properly, readers need to know differences in question wording, and other details such as the percentage of undecided. Ironically, Southam called the "301" column its "reality check on the polls, the promises and the political spin" (Vancouver Sun, 1997:A1).

Still, with the exception of *The Gazette*, the Southam-owned newspapers — the *Calgary Herald, Ottawa Citizen,* and *Vancouver Sun* — provided at least one piece of technical detail for poll (typically the firm's name and poll release date) more often than

most newspapers when polls were not the main focus of the article. Only *Le Devoir* provided at least some technical detail for proportionately more polls, but seldom were complete details given and relatively few polls were mentioned.

For the most part there was very little difference between French-language and English-language newspapers in terms of the technical reporting of polls within articles. In fact, there were greater differences among French-language newspapers. As stated earlier, *Le Devoir* had little emphasis on polls, but *La Presse* used them extensively. These two papers were at the opposite ends of the spectrum. *La Presse* outperformed *Le Devoir* in every category of technical reporting.

5.2.4 *Differences among Television News Programmes*

Table 5.7 displays information on the technical reporting of polls for the three television news programmes. It is apparent that there were significant differences among the three programmes.

Table 5.7
Technical Reporting of Polls, by Television News Programme.

Percentage of mentions of polls for which polls the following technical information was provided:	Poll Results were the Main Focus of the Story				All Stories that Mentioned Poll Results			
	Le Télé-journal (SRC)	The National (CBC)	CTV's Evening News	*p*-value*	Le Télé-journal (SRC)	The National (CBC)	CTV's Evening News	*p*-value*
Sample Size	8.8	50.0	25.9	0.022	6.8	16.7	10.9	0.449
Polling Firm	97.1	75.0	100.0	0.008	77.3	25.0	43.8	<0.001
Percent Undecided	2.9	0.0	11.1	0.302	2.3	0.0	4.7	0.488
Percent Refused	0.0	0.0	0.0	——	0.0	0.0	0.0	——
Margin of Error	44.1	37.5	25.9	0.339	36.4	12.5	10.9	0.003
Survey Dates	76.5	65.2	22.2	<0.001	59.1	20.8	9.4	<0.001
Poll Release Date	97.1	75.0	100.0	0.008	77.3	25.0	42.2	0.001
Question Asked	0.0	0.0	14.8	0.037	2.3	0.0	6.3	0.319
At least one detail	97.1	75.0	100.0	0.008	77.3	25.0	43.8	<0.001
Total Number of Polls Mentioned	34	8	27		44	24	64	

*p-value for a chi-square test of independence.

The National provided the worst technical reporting of polls, both when polls were the main focus of the story, and when they were not. Even when polls were the main focus of a story, only 75 percent of poll mentions on *The National* reported at least one technical element; nearly all of poll mentions in stories with polls as the main focus in the other two programmes were accompanied with at least one technical detail. *The National* was also far more likely than other programmes to simply refer to polls in passing in stories of other focus, giving at least one detail for only 25 percent of the polls it mentioned.

Le Téléjournal fared best when polls were mentioned in stories when they were not the main focus. As Table 5.7 shows, *Le Téléjournal* provided the polling firm, margin of error, survey dates and poll release date far more often than either of the other two programmes. When polls were the main focus of the story, *The National* performed

somewhat better, but still lagged behind the *CTV's Evening News* and *Le Téléjournal*, both of which did equally well.

The absence of the percent refused was problematic for all programmes. The question asked was never reported on *The National*, and seldom reported on *Le Téléjournal*. *CTV's Evening News* did a better job, but even when polls were the main focus of the story, it only reported the question asked on 14.8 percent of occasions.

5.3 *Conclusion*

This chapter started by examining the importance of polls to overall media coverage of the election. I found that polls were an integral part of election coverage for all media organizations examined, setting the general tone of coverage. The media practised "horse-race" journalism, relying on poll result to discuss popularity contests among party leaders and parties. Actions of leaders were usually interpreted as reactions to the position of their party in the polls.

Polls were so integral to overall coverage of the election that the Southam and Thomson newspaper chains tried to get the courts to overturn a law banning published poll results in the last 72 hours before the election. When they lost the ruling, all newspapers were clearly outraged.

Poll results often provided insight into the campaign regarding the public's perception of issues. The media chose to de-emphasize this part of the polls, and concentrated more on the race among candidates.

Too often polls were treated as matters of fact. The overwhelming credibility afforded polls was reflected in the media's reliance on pollsters as experts on the

campaign. Relying on pollsters to discuss poll results is sensible, but relying on pollsters to give commentary transcending poll results is irresponsible if they are treated as expert opinions. Too often this was the case.

Unfortunately the emphasis on polls as matters of fact did not coincide with good treatments of the technical details of the polls. I found that even when polls were the main focus of reports there was not enough attention to the technical details. Only the polling firm and poll release date received any consistent mention. The question asked and the percent undecided were seldom reported.

All media organizations performed poorly, but typically television news programmes performed worse than newspapers. There were also significant differences among newspapers, and among television news programmes.

A few news organizations deserve special attention. The *Globe and Mail* and *La Presse* generally provided adequate discussions of most technical details, especially when newly released polls were commissioned by them. *Le Devoir*, and *The Toronto Sun* provided comparatively poor coverage of the technical details of polls both when they were the main focus of an article and when they were mentioned within articles focussing on other election issues.

CHAPTER 6

SURVEY PRACTICES OF

CANADIAN POLLING FIRMS

This chapter begins with a discussion of the survey practices used by 17

Canadian polling firms. I compare the methods of Quebec pollsters with those of

national pollsters, and the methods of strategic pollsters with those of public pollsters.

Finally, using data from polls conducted during the last two weeks of the 1997 Canadian

federal election, I explore the relationships of certain survey practices with polling

accuracy. Because of the small number of cases, statistical analysis is limited to bivariate

relationships.

6.1 Pre-Election Survey Methodology

Since most of the data for this analysis were obtained on the condition of

anonymity, the identities of the firms are usually concealed. Direct references to specific

pollsters are made only when the information was either already public, or I was told by

respondents that I could mention their names. I do not, therefore, list the methods of

each organization separately. Instead, I compare the methods of the organizations

grouped according to two variables: (1) the type of pollster (i.e., firms that publicly

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release their poll results either to a specific media organization, or in the form of a press release, referred to as "Public Pollsters", or firms that conduct polls to serve the strategic interests of political parties, referred to as "Strategic Pollsters"); and (2) the location of the population polled (i.e., National polls versus Quebec polls).

Published polls can be divided into two types: *omnibus polls* and *custom polls*. *Omnibus polls* are regularly conducted polls (e.g., once a month) that contain questions commissioned by subscribing clients. Questions of voting intentions are included by pollsters as a means of gaining publicity from the published results. *Custom polls* are conducted specially to collect information about specific topics like voting intentions and other political issues surrounding the election. These polls are usually commissioned by clients for private reasons, but on occasion they are carried out independently by a pollster.

All of the 17 firms conduct scientific polls (i.e., they use some form of probability sampling at some stage of sample selection, and use industry accepted survey research practices). Eleven firms are public pollsters; six firms are strategic pollsters. Moreover, 11 of the firms studied conduct National polls, and six firms are based in Quebec and usually conduct polls of Quebec voters only.

6.1.1 *Organizational Structure*

Although the size of the firms varies greatly — from one person operations to large firms with over 100 researchers — all but one of the firms relies on professional researchers with graduate degrees (either in one of the social sciences, or in statistics) to design their studies. *Lepage,* the Bloc Québécois and Parti Québécois pollster, is a

special case in that it relies only on political consultants (i.e., political strategists who are not trained in survey research) to determine survey questions. Another strategic pollster, which requested confidentiality, relies on both professional researchers on staff and political consultants.

Pollsters talked openly about the close relationships among Canadian polling firms. Firms based in Ontario, for example, commonly collaborate with Quebec firms. The reason for this is practical: It is much easier for a predominantly English-speaking firm to contract a French-speaking firm to conduct the odd poll in Quebec than it is to set up a Quebec operation, complete with French-speaking interviewers. Some firms have closer connections: Montreal-based *CROP* is owned by Toronto-based *Environics*, and often does the Quebec portion of *Environics's* national polls; based in Quebec City, *SOM* carries out all the interviewing for Toronto-based *Gallup's* national polls.

There are strong connections among Quebec firms. Surprisingly — considering that most pollsters requested anonymity — the exchange of methodological information among firms is not uncommon; this was especially true regarding public opinion polls during the 1995 Quebec Sovereignty Referendum. Gregoire Gollin of *Créatec Plus*, for example, has worked with many of the firms in this study on several occasions. Gollin's contribution to other firms is also noted by several firms using sample selection software that he co-designed — *Sampler Canada*.

Interviewing practices among the firms are very similar. All firms use only telephone interviews for polls completed close to elections, and for all firms the interviews are conducted from supervised central locations (versus from the interviewers' homes). Only one firm uses face-to-face interviews at all, and this is only

for the occasional poll conducted before the official election campaign. Time constraints

and high costs were identified as the main reasons for not using personal interviews.

Two pollsters also discussed the benefits of better sampling from random-digit-dialling

as another good reason to use telephone interviews instead of personal interviews.

There is some variation in the type of interviewing staff. *Lepage* is unique

because it relies on volunteers for its interviewing staff, while all others use paid

interviewers. *Lepage's* special relationship with the Parti Québécois and Bloc Québécois

(it does no polling other than for the PQ and BQ) gives it the benefit of the Quebec

separatist movement's vast volunteer organization. All other firms used some type of

paid interviewing staff. Of these, 13 (76.5 percent) train and supervise their own

interviewing staff, one firm (5.9 percent) employs a full-service research firm, and two

firms (11.8 percent) employ an outside interviewing firm. There is no relationship

between type of firm or location of firm and type of interviewing staff.

All firms reported that obtaining accurate poll results is important, and all

claimed to use superior research designs. No firm claimed that accuracy was "not at all

important," but there is variation in the level of importance that firms place on polling

accuracy. Though not statistically significant, there is an association between the type of

polls that are conducted and the importance the firm places on accuracy. As Table 6.1

shows, strategic pollsters (83.3 percent) are more likely to evaluate a poll's success by its

prediction accuracy than public pollsters (54.5 percent).

Table 6.1
Poll Type and the Importance of Accuracy.

"Is a highly accurate prediction of elections an important criterion when evaluating the success of your pre-election polls?"			
	Poll Type		All Polls
	Public	Strategic	
Extremely important	54.5% (6)	83.3% (5)	64.9% (11)
Important	45.5% (5)	0	29.4% (5)
Not too important	0	16.7% (1)	5.9% (1)
Not at all important	0	0	0
Total Number of Firms	100% (11)	100% (6)	100% (17)

p-value for Fisher's Exact Test = 0.333.

A quick glance at Table 6.1 could lead one to be surprised that one firm in the Strategic category considered the accuracy of polls to predict an election as "not too important." Fortunately, Andre Turcotte, the president of *ABM Research* (the firm that responded this way to the questionnaire) did not request confidentiality. The Reform Party's pollster during the 1997 Canadian federal election, Turcotte argued that he is most interested in determining how the electorate feels about key issues, rather than how they will vote. While he considers it important to have a sense of party preferences, he argues that in determining campaign strategy it is more important to understand public opinion on key issues. In other words, despite a seeming lack of interest in predicting election outcomes, a high quality research design is still important.

Informal discussions with public pollsters showed strong disagreement regarding the extent to which a firm should be evaluated on the success of its pre-election polls. It became apparent that all pollsters want accurate polls, but many

claimed that there are many factors outside of their control that affect poll accuracy (such as late changes in public opinion, or sampling error). On the other hand, one pollster was adamant that assessing a pre-election poll's prediction accuracy is the best way to evaluate the caliber of a survey research firm.

Some public pollsters claimed that the more accurate their poll is the more positive the publicity that they receive, and positive publicity brings more clients. It is not uncommon for a firm to use slightly different methods for polls just days before an election than they do for polls earlier in the campaign. Others make sure that more detailed information is released to the press for polls conducted near the election than is usual practice for polls earlier in the campaign.

In general, polling methodology is quite simple, and is seldom changed. Only three firms have made any changes in practices over the past two years, and only one firm had performed any statistical testing to ensure their methods were working well. One pollster claimed that the field is so well established that the best methods have long since been determined, implying that no changes in methods were necessary. Others stated that changes are only considered when errors in prediction close to elections happen frequently — something they claimed seldom occurs.

Despite the close relationships among firms, most firms claim that they don't compare the results of their polls to those of other firms. A couple said this was important — claiming that their polls usually perform better — but they never perform any statistical tests of comparisons. In fact, one pollster acknowledged that one of his polls was quite different from those done by other firms at similar dates, but without providing any evidence, confidently claimed all the rest were wrong.

In the interviews, Quebec pollsters claimed that Quebec voters are well informed, and pay closer attention to poll results than voters in the rest of Canada. During the past five years, more elections have been held in Quebec than in any other Canadian province. With two referenda (the Charlottetown Accord Referendum in 1992, and the 1995 Quebec Sovereignty Referendum), and three major elections (two federal elections and one provincial), Quebec voters have been volatile, increasing the interest for pollsters. For these reasons, Quebec pollsters argue that they must pay closer attention to ensuring accurate results than pollsters from outside of Quebec. The questionnaire data, however, indicate no difference between Quebec and National pollsters with respect to how they perceive the importance of polling accuracy (see Table 6.2). Approximately two-thirds of both groups consider an accurate prediction of the election an extremely important criterion to evaluate their polls.

Table 6.2
Location of Firm and the Importance of Accuracy.

"Is a highly accurate prediction of elections an important criterion when evaluating the success of your pre-election polls?"		
	Location of Firm		All Polls
	Quebec	Rest of Canada	All Polls
Extremely important	66.7% (4)	63.6% (7)	64.9% (11)
Important	33.3% (2)	27.3% (3)	29.4% (5)
Not too important	0	9.1% (1)	5.9% (1)
Not at all important	0	0	0
Total Number of Firms	100% (6)	100% (11)	100% (17)

p-value for Fisher's Exact Test is 1.000.

6.1.2 *Characteristics of Interviews*

Table 6.3 compares the hours of interviewing between firms in Quebec and firms based in the rest of Canada. There is very little variation among firms, and none of the relationships is statistically significant. Not surprisingly, none of the firms interviews only during the daytime on weekdays — doing so would severely bias the sample to the minority of adults who do not work during the day. Compared to Quebec firms, however, proportionately more national firms interview only during the evening on weekdays.

Table 6.3
Location of Firm and Interviewing Hours.

Interviewing Hours	Location of Firm		All Polls	p^*
	Quebec	Rest of Canada		
Saturdays	83.3% (5)	90.9% (10)	88.2% (15)	1.000
Sundays	100% (6)	81.8% (9)	88.2% (15)	0.515
Weekdays, evenings only	16.7% (1)	54.4% (6)	41.2% (7)	0.304
Weekdays, daytime only	0	0	0	1.000
Weekdays, daytime and evenings	83.3% (5)	45.5% (5)	41.2% (7)	0.304
Total Number of Firms	100% (6)	100% (11)	100% (17)	

* p-value for Fisher's Exact Test.

Lepage is the only firm in Quebec that does not conduct interviews during the daytime on weekdays. This is explained partly by it being the only strategic pollster based in Quebec. Though the relationship is not statistically significant, strategic pollsters are less likely than public pollsters to interview during the day on weekdays

(see Table 6.4). A strategic pollster suggested that those who are at home during the day are less likely to vote than those who are not. (He provided no evidence for this claim, however). Since the goal of a strategic poll is to understand the opinions of potential voters, he felt that it is not sensible to interview during the day.

Table 6.4
Type of Poll and Interviewing Hours.

Interviewing Hours	Type of Poll		All Polls	p^*
	Published	Strategic		
Saturdays	90.9% (10)	83.3% (5)	88.2% (15)	1.000
Sundays	81.8% (9)	100% (6)	88.2% (15)	0.515
Weekdays, evenings only	27.3% (3)	66.7% (4)	41.2% (7)	0.162
Weekdays, daytime only	0	0	0	1.000
Weekdays, daytime and evenings	72.7% (8)	33.3% (2)	58.8% (10)	0.162
Total Number of Firms	100% (11)	100% (6)	100% (17)	

* p-value for Fisher's Exact Test.

The typical interview used by the firms in the study is about 10 minutes. As it turns out, however, appropriate interview length is a topic about which pollsters have fundamentally different opinions. One strategic pollster argued that long interviews are needed in order to truly tap public opinion about election issues, which in turn gives a better understanding of potential voting behaviour. Similarly, another pollster argued that well thought-out responses are best obtained if the voting intention question comes after many "warm-up" questions which are used to build a sense of trust between respondent and interviewer. On the other hand, some pollsters argued that if interviews are too long, there is the risk that many respondents will end the interview before the

important questions have been asked.

The debate over interview length is most obvious among strategic pollsters, for which the variability in interview length is much larger than for public pollsters (see Figure 6.1). Though the distributions among the two groups differ from each other in shape, the average interview lengths are similar. Unfortunately, the distributions and small number of cases do not allow for a comparison of means. The median length of interviews for both groups, however, was essentially the same (10.0 minutes for public pollsters; 10.25 minutes for strategic pollsters). Moreover, a Mann-Whitney U-test for the difference between the two groups is not statistically significant (p-value=0.879).

There is very little difference between Quebec pollsters and National pollsters in terms of interview lengths. As Figure 6.2 shows, when the two obvious outliers are ignored, the variability in interview length between the two groups is very similar. (The Quebec group has an usually low case that negatively skews its distribution; the National group has an unusually high case that positively skews its distribution). A comparison of the medians reinforces the conclusion that the interview lengths of the two groups are similar — the median interview length for Quebec pollsters is 9.5 minutes; for National pollsters it is 10 minutes. The Mann-Whitney U-test for difference between the two groups is not statistically significant (p=0.448).
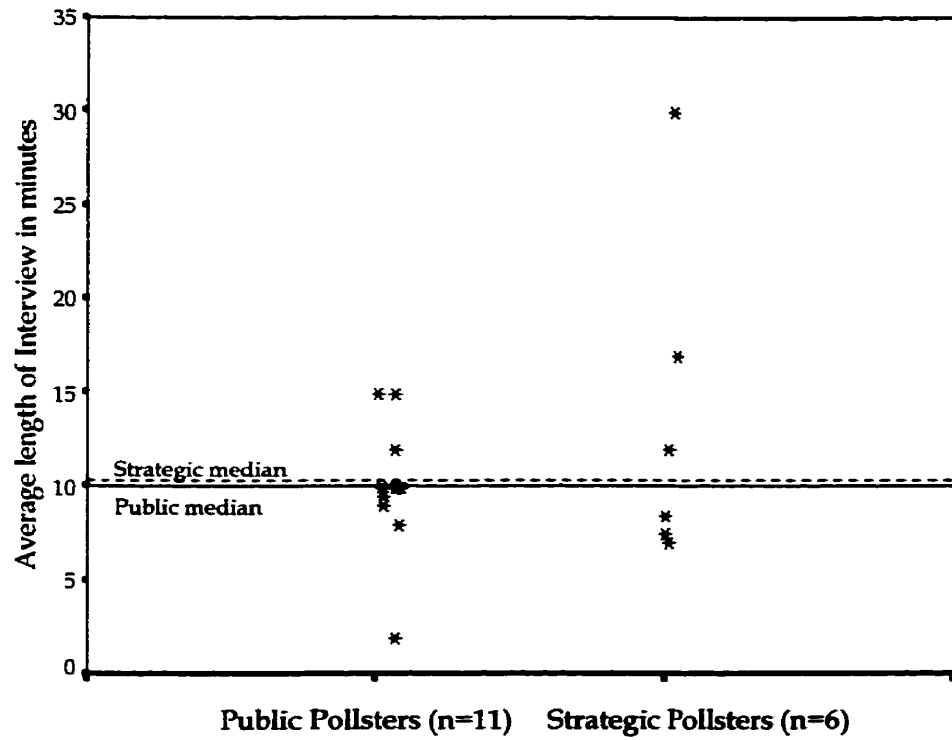
Figure 6.1
Dotplots of Interview length by Type of Pollster.
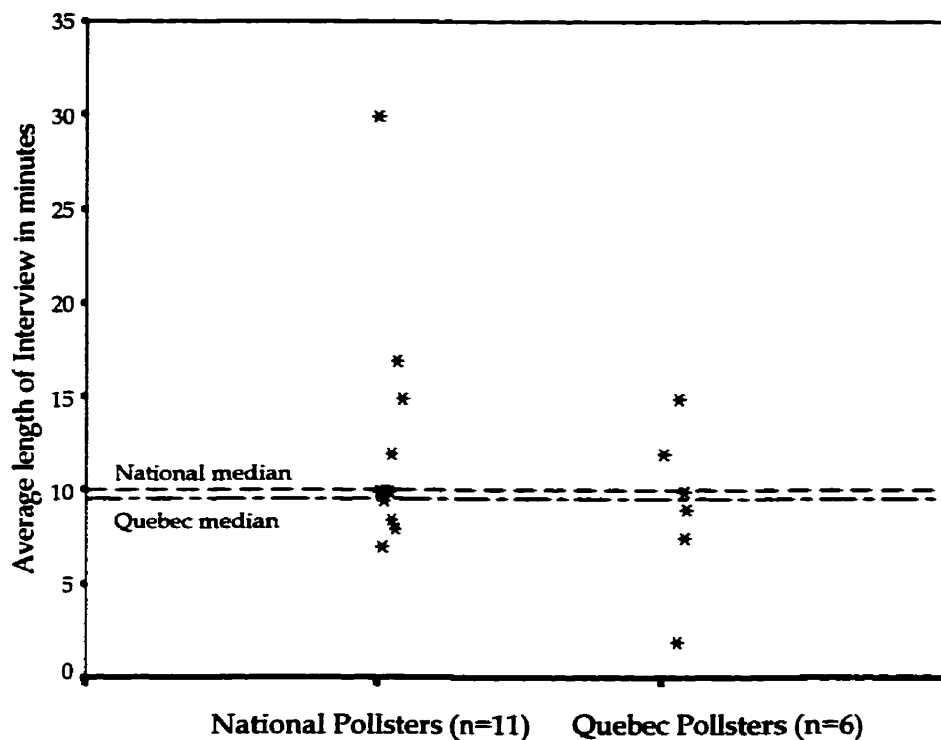
Figure 6.2
Dotplots of Interview length by Polling Location.

6.1.3 Sample Selection

As stated earlier, all firms use some form of probability sampling at some stage of

sample selection. There are other near universals in the sample selection procedure: 94.1

percent (16) firms do not use a clustered sample design, and 94.1 percent (16) do use

stratified samples. There are, however, greater differences in sample size, the use of

quotas, and other methods for selecting respondents (both for selecting households, and

for selecting respondents from within households).

A basic sampling difference between strategic polling and public polling became

apparent in the interviews. While public pollsters usually conduct polls over a few days using one large sample, strategic pollsters generally use rolling samples, polling as frequently as every day of the election campaign. Only one strategic pollster did not use a rolling sample during the 1997 Canadian federal election campaign.

Rolling sampling implies that the survey is administered to independent samples on a frequent basis (usually every day). The sample rolls along in time, combining the present day of interviewing with the previous few days. Strategic pollsters claim that the rolling poll method allows them to better evaluate trends in public opinion than taking large samples a few days apart.

Since most strategic pollsters use daily rolling samples, sample sizes are necessarily smaller than they are for public pollsters. (Time and financial constraints make it difficult to have large samples). Strategic pollsters typically use daily samples of between 300 and 600, and have a median sample size of 568. On the other hand, the median sample size for public pollsters is 1000, and none of the firms in this group use samples of less than 800. The Mann-Whitney U-test for difference between the two groups was not significant ($p=0.051$). Still, considering that public pollsters usually poll over three or four days, their daily sample sizes are similar to those for strategic pollsters. Furthermore, aside from one public pollster that uses atypically large samples, the distributions between the two groups are quite similar (see Figure 6.3).

The median sample size for both Quebec pollsters and National pollsters is 1000 (p-value=0.918 for a Mann-Whitney U-test for difference between the two groups). As Figure 6.4 shows, however, there is far greater variability among National pollsters than Quebec pollsters. Motivated by a desire to have large regional samples, there are a few National pollsters that employ much larger samples than other firms. For example, during election campaigns, *Ekos* and *Angus Reid* often use sample sizes of more than 2000 for national polls, typically polling close to 1000 Quebec residents. (Most National pollsters use much smaller samples of Quebec voters — typically around 300-400 respondents).
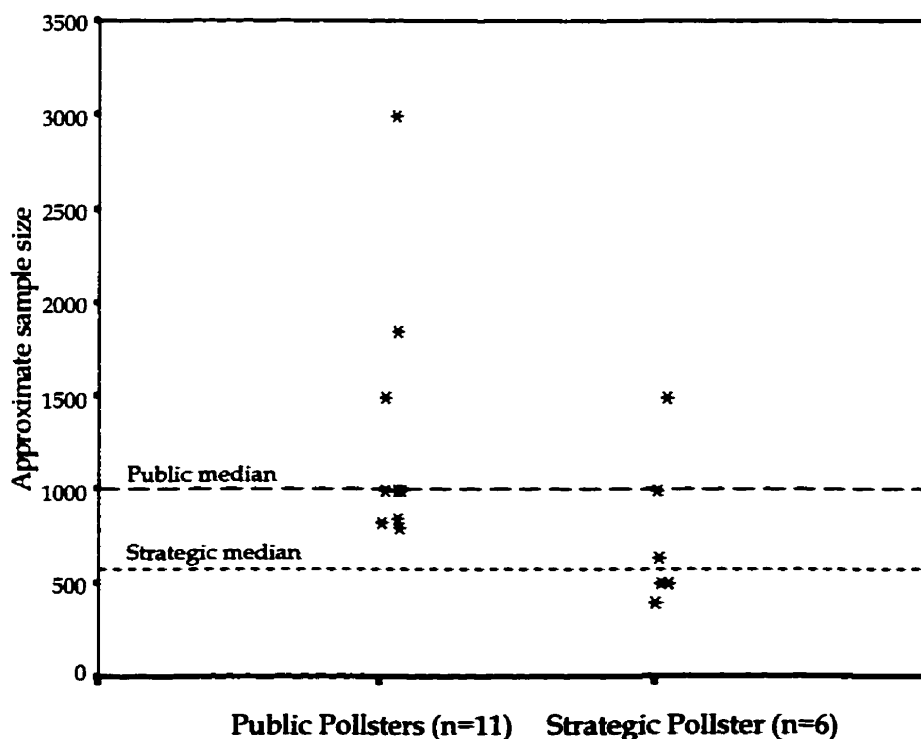
Figure 6.3
Dotplots of Sample Size by Type of Pollster.
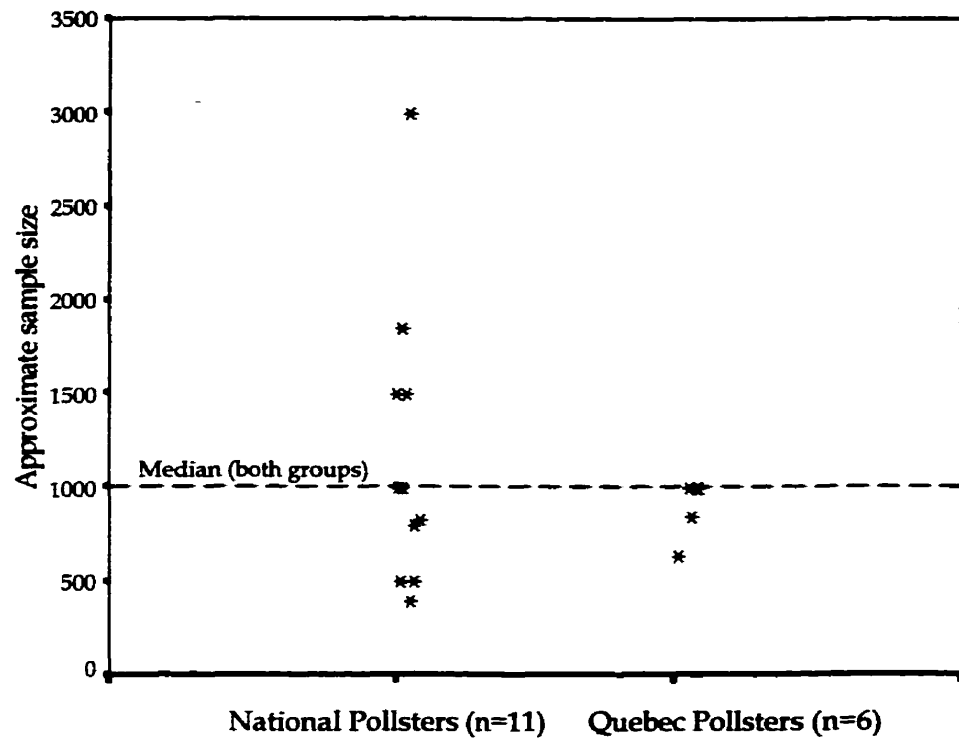
Figure 6.4
Dotplots of Sample Size by Location of Polling.

Using demographic quotas is common practice: 64.7 percent (11) of the firms

studied use at least one demographic quota in sample selection. Region and sex are the

two most commonly used quotas, while income and education quotas are never used.

As Table 6.5 shows, there is little difference in the use of demographic quotas between

strategic pollsters and public pollsters.

Table 6.5
Poll Type and Demographic Quotas.

Demographic Quota	Type of Poll		All Polls	p^*
	Strategic	Public		
Community Size	0	9.1% (1)	5.9% (1)	1.000
Sex	66.7% (4)	27.3% (3)	41.2% (7)	0.162
Age	16.7% (1)	18.2% (2)	17.6% (3)	1.000
Race	0	0	0	1.000
Language	16.7% (1)	0	5.9% (1)	0.353
Income	0	0	0	1.000
Education	0	0	0	1.000
Region	33.3% (2)	54.5% (6)	41.2% (7)	1.000
At least one Quotas	83.3% (5)	54.5% (6)	64.7% (11)	0.333

* p-value for Fisher's Exact Test.

There are, however, substantial differences between Quebec pollsters and National pollsters with respect to the use of demographic quotas. As Table 6.6 shows, only 33.3 percent (2) of Quebec pollsters use any demographic quotas, while 81.8 percent (9) of National pollsters use at least one. The most profound difference between Quebec and National pollsters with respect to quotas (and the only one that is statistically significant) is the use of sex quotas. None of the Quebec pollsters use a sex quota, but 63.6 percent (7) of the National pollsters do.

Considering the difference in Quebec public opinion often associated with language, it seems somewhat surprising that only one Quebec pollster uses a language quota. The same can be said for the absence of regional quotas in Quebec polls — again, only one pollster uses this quota. As the next section shows, however, most Quebec pollsters opt to post-weight the sample according to language and region instead of

using quotas.

Table 6.6
Polling Location and Demographic Quotas.

| Demographic Quota | Polling Location | | All Polls | p^* |
	Quebec	National		
Community Size	0	9.1% (1)	5.9% (1)	1.000
Sex	0	63.6% (7)	41.2% (7)	0.035
Age	0	27.3% (3)	17.6% (3)	0.515
Race	0	0	0	1.000
Language	16.7% (1)	0	5.9% (1)	0.353
Income	0	0	0	1.000
Education	0	0	0	1.000
Region	16.7% (1)	54.5% (6)	41.2% (7)	0.304
At least one Quota	33.3% (2)	81.8% (9)	64.7% (11)	0.109

* p-value for Fisher's Exact Test.

Most firms rely on some form of computer generated telephone numbers for selecting households to include in the sample. The most common approach, employed by 41.2 percent (7), is the use of a software program that randomly picks numbers from a listing of all residential phone numbers in Canada. As discussed earlier, this program, called *Sampler Canada*, was designed by Gregoire Gollin of *Créatec Plus*. Pollsters who rely on this method claim that it is less expensive and more up-to-date than telephone directories distributed by the telephone companies. Random-digit-dialling is used by only 29.4 percent (5) of firms (all of which are large, well established firms), and the remaining 29.4 percent (5) of firms generate numbers from telephone directories. There is no relationship between method of household selection and poll type or polling location.

Nine of 17 firms (52.1 percent) do not use probability sampling methods to select the respondents to be interviewed from contacted households. Only two of these firms use any type of controlled method — both select respondents with the "youngest man/youngest woman in the household" method, often referred to as the Trohdal-Carter method. The other six firms simply ask for the first available voting age adult. Of the 47.1 percent (8) of firms that use some form of probability sampling in the selection of respondents, seven use the "next birthday" technique, and one randomly selects a respondent from a listing of members of the household. The "next birthday" technique assumes that birthdays are randomly distributed across the population, and simply asks for the person in the household whose birthday is next (Lavarkas, 1993:111).

Though neither is statistically significant, poll type and polling location both seem to be related to method of respondent selection. Proportionately more National pollsters (54.5 percent, n=6) use probability methods than Quebec pollsters (33.3 percent, n=2). Likewise, proportionately more public pollsters (54.4 percent, n=6) use probability methods than strategic pollsters (33.3 percent, n=2). The p-value for a Fisher's Exact Test of independence is .402 in both cases.

Since all firms consider an accurate prediction of election results an important criterion when evaluating their polls, I expected that firms would be most interested in the opinions and party preferences of likely voters. Only 11.8 percent (2) of the firms studied, however, try to limit respondents to likely voters. (Demographic questions are still asked of all respondents reached). In both cases, likely voters are identified by a question asking respondents to state their intention to vote. The population studied by the other 88.2 percent (15) firms is all eligible voters (i.e., Canadian citizens who are 18

years of age or older).

There is no significant relationship between polling location and the population

interviewed. In fact, 90.9 percent (10) of National pollsters study eligible voters, using

no criteria to limit the sample other than the age and citizenship of the voters. Though

not statistically significant, type of poll and the population interviewed are related. As

Table 6.7 shows, none of the public pollsters takes the extra effort to include only likely

voters, but 33.3 percent (2) of the strategic pollsters do.

Table 6.7
Type of Poll and Population Interviewed.

Population Interviewed	Type of Poll		All Polls
	Strategic	Public	
All eligible voters	66.7% (4)	100% (11)	88.2% (15)
Likely voters for voting intention question, and all eligible voters for demographic questions	33.3% (2)	0	11.8% (2)
Total Number of Firms	100% (6)	100% (11)	100% (17)

p-value for Fisher's Exact Test is 0.110.

The survey also determined the effort pollsters make to reach the respondents

selected for their samples. All of the firms in the study conduct call-backs when the

selected respondent is not home. Only one firm does not conduct at least three call-back

attempts before the selected respondent is replaced with another; it makes only two

callback attempts. A spokesperson for the latter firm (a strategic pollster) claimed that

the benefits with respect to the representativeness of the sample when making more than

two callback attempts do not out-weigh the added time costs.

There is more variability in the number of attempts made to reach respondents who initially refused to be interviewed. Forty-one percent (7) of firms make no follow-up attempts to reach selected respondents who refused to be interviewed, 52.9 percent (9) of firms make a second attempt, and only 5.9 percent (1) make a third attempt. Typically, Quebec pollsters expend greater effort to interview refusals than National pollsters, and the relationship is statistically significant (see Table 6.8). As Table 6.8 shows, all Quebec pollsters make at least one follow-up call to respondents who initially refuse to participate in the poll, while 63.6 percent (7) of National pollsters do not make any follow-up calls.

Table 6.8
Polling Location and Call Attempts to Refusals.

Number of Call Attempts to Refusals	Polling Location		
	Quebec	National	All Polls
One	0	63.6% (7)	41.2% (7)
Two	83.3% (5)	36.4% (4)	52.9% (9)
Three	16.7% (1)	0	5.9% (1)
Total Number of Firms	100% (6)	100% (11)	100% (17)

p-value for Fisher's Exact Test = 0.035.

There is also a relationship (though not statistically significant) between poll type and the number of calls made to initial refusals. Because they use rolling samples, strategic pollsters make fewer attempts to reach respondents who initially refuse to

participate than pollsters who publish their poll results (see Table 6.9).

Table 6.9
Type of Poll and Call Attempts to Refusals.

Number of Call Attempts to Refusals	Type of Poll		
	Strategic	Public	All Polls
One	66.7% (4)	27.3% (3)	41.2% (7)
Two	33.3% (2)	63.6% (7)	52.9% (9)
Three	0	9.1% (1)	5.9% (1)
Total Number of Firms	100% (6)	100% (11)	100% (17)

p-value for Fisher's Exact Test = 0.162.

6.1.4 Sample Weighting

As can be seen in Table 6.10, with the exception of one firm, some type of sample weighting is commonly used if it is necessary: 64.7 percent (11) weight their samples as standard procedure; 29.4 percent (5) weight their samples only when there appears to be a sample divergence from certain population demographic characteristics. Though the relationship is not statistically significant, proportionately more Quebec pollsters weight their samples as standard procedure compared to National pollsters. As Table 6.11 shows, proportionately more public pollsters weight their samples as standard procedure than strategic pollsters.

Table 6.10
Polling Location and Sample Weighting.

Do you weight the sample?	Polling Location		All Polls
	Quebec	National	
Yes, as standard procedure	83.3% (5)	54.5% (6)	64.7% (11)
Yes, if necessary	16.7% (1)	36.4% (4)	29.4%(5)
No	0	9.1% (1)	5.9% (1)
Total Number of Firms	100% (6)	100% (11)	100% (17)

p-value for Fisher's Exact Test = 0.333.

Table 6.11
Poll Type and Sample Weighting.

Do you weight the sample?	Polling Type		All Polls
	Strategic	Public	
Yes, as standard procedure	50.0% (3)	72.7% (8)	64.7% (11)
Yes, if necessary	33.3% (2)	27.3% (3)	29.4%(5)
No	16.7% (1)	0	5.9% (1)
Total Number of Firms	100% (6)	100% (11)	100% (17)

p-value for Fisher's Exact Test = 0.600.

The second last column in Table 6.12 displays the percentages of pollsters who weight their samples by various factors. By far the most commonly used sample weighting factors are sex and age (76.5 percent and 58.8 percent of the firms weight their

polls by sex and age). On the other end of the spectrum, no firms weight their samples by race, education or income.

As discussed earlier, Quebec is a special case compared to the rest of Canada because of historical differences in public opinion between Francophones and Anglophones. Rather than ensure that samples represent these populations through quotas, most Quebec pollsters opt to post-weight them when needed. As Table 6.12 shows, there is a statistically significant difference between the proportion of Quebec pollsters who weight their samples and the proportion of National pollsters who weight their samples according to language: 66.7 percent of Quebec pollsters; only 9.1 percent (1) of National pollsters. None of the other weighting variables have a statistically significant relationship with poll location. Weighting by size of household, however, is a far more common practice used by Quebec pollsters (50.0 percent) than by National pollsters (18.2 percent).

Table 6.12
Polling Location and Weighting Factors.

| Weighting Factors | Polling Location | | All Polls | p^* |
	Quebec	National		
Employment Status	0	9.1% (1)	5.9% (1)	1.000
Number of phone lines	0	9.1% (1)	5.9% (1)	1.000
Sex	66.7% (4)	81.8% (9)	76.5% (13)	0.584
Age	66.7% (4)	54.5% (6)	58.8% (10)	1.000
Language	66.7% (4)	9.1% (1)	29.4% (5)	0.028
Political Party identification	16.7% (1)	9.1% (1)	11.8% (2)	1.000
Size of household	50.0% (3)	18.2% (2)	29.4% (5)	0.280
Region/Province	50.0% (3)	63.6% (7)	58.8% (10)	0.644
Total Number of Firms	100% (6)	100% (11)	100% (17)	

* p-value for Fisher's Exact Test.

Although none of the relationships are statistically significant, for all possibilities except political party identification, a larger proportion of public pollsters than National pollsters use weighting procedures (see Table 6.13). The two most striking differences are sex and age. Just half of strategic pollsters (3) weight their samples by sex, while 90.9 percent (11 of 12) of public pollsters use this procedure. The proportion of strategic pollsters who weight by age is 33.3 percent (2); this is substantially smaller than the 72.7 percent (8) of public pollsters who weight by age.

Table 6.13
Poll Type and Weighting Factors.

Weighting Factors	Poll Type		All Polls	p^*
	Strategic	Public		
Employment Status	0	9.1% (1)	5.9% (1)	1.000
Number of phone lines	0	9.1% (1)	5.9% (1)	1.000
Sex	50.0% (3)	90.9% (10)	76.5% (13)	0.099
Age	33.3% (2)	72.7% (8)	58.8% (10)	0.162
Language	16.7% (1)	36.4% (4)	29.4% (5)	0.600
Political Party identification	16.7% (1)	9.1% (1)	11.8% (2)	1.000
Size of household	16.7% (1)	36.4% (4)	29.4% (5)	0.600
Region/Province	50.0% (3)	63.6% (7)	58.8% (10)	0.644
Total Number of Firms	100% (6)	100% (11)	100% (17)	

* p-value for Fisher's Exact Test.

6.1.5 *Measuring Voting Intentions*

Research has shown that question wording can have a significant effect on responses to voting intention questions. Unfortunately, I could only obtain limited information on the wording of voting intention. Still, some information about the type of questions used is worth discussing.

First, similar to Crespi's analysis of US polling firms (1988), the goal of all pollsters studied is to determine current voting preferences, not voting intentions at election time. In other words, they ask respondents to state which party they would vote for if the election were held on the day of the interview, not for whom they expect to vote on election day.

Second, there is little variability in the format of the possible responses to the

voting intention questions. The most common method, used by 94.1 percent (16), is for interviewers to read a list of possible party choices, and ask respondents to choose their preferred party. Only one firm currently uses an open-ended question, and even it is considering changing to the closed-end format. A spokesperson for this firm, who requested anonymity, stated that they were in the process of determining which method is more accurate close to elections. The firm has noticed that, compared to polls conducted by other firms at similar times, their polls conducted early in election campaigns overstate the support for the party in power. As the election comes closer, however, their poll results are usually similar to those of other firms.

As discussed earlier, obtaining accurate polls is important to all pollsters. For some survey questions undecided responses pose few problems, but they can be very problematic for voting intention questions if "don't know" responses mask hidden intentions. There are two approaches to handling this problem: (1) the undecided can simply be ignored, implying that they either don't vote, or that they vote proportionately the same as those who expressed a vote preference; or (2) attempts can be made to reduce the number of undecided by allocating their vote preferences according to other factors.

Most pollsters try to allocate as much of the undecided responses as possible. Factors such as opinions on issues and candidates, or "leaning" questions are often used by US pollsters to determine how undecided voters might by leaning (Crespi, 1988:115). Sixteen of the 17 firms use at least one method to allocate and reduce the number of undecided. All of these firms use a leaning question (representing 94 percent of the firms in the study) — 76.5 percent (14) use only a leaning question; 11.8 percent (2) use a

leaning question in conjunction with some form of party identification question (i.e., they ask which party the respondent thinks is doing the best job, etc.); 5.9 percent (1) use both questions about candidate ratings and opinions on issues, as well as leaning questions. Those firms that use other methods of allocating the undecided along with the leaning question usually report two sets of poll results: one after only the leaning question, and the other after all methods of allocation have been factored in.

A spokesperson for the firm that does not attempt to reduce the number of undecided provided a rationale for this approach. He argued that it makes little sense — especially early in an election campaign — to "invent" voting intentions. It was his opinion that those who do not volunteer a voting intention are likely to change their minds in the course of the campaign. Ultimately, the pollster argued that his job was only to determine "stated" public opinion; he leaves it to the media and political analysts to interpret the results, including how the undecided might vote.

There is strong disagreement among pollsters about the best position for the voting intention question relative to other political questions. There is no statistically significant relationship, however, between polling location and the position of the voting intention question, or between type of pollster and the position of the voting intention question. Most pollsters (58.8 percent, n=10) place voting preference questions before questions eliciting attitudes towards political issues, some of them claiming that this ensures that respondents are not predisposed to any other issues that might temporarily sway their opinion.

On the other hand, 29.4 percent (5) pollsters place the voting intention question after other attitude questions. Adherents to this practice argue that it is superior because

it decreases the non-response rate for two reasons: (1) warm-up questions prevent respondents from feeling the voting intention question is too personal to answer; (2) many respondents who are not yet well informed about the issues of the election (perhaps because it is early in the campaign) are given the chance to ponder the issues, and better make up their mind as to which party they prefer.

Two firms (11.8 percent), both of which conduct national polls (one a strategic pollster, the other a public pollster), often place voting intention questions as "bookends" (i.e., they have two questions, one before attitude/issue questions, and the other after them). In both cases, the second question is used to asses vote intentions, except for respondents who have ended the survey before the second question, in which case the first question is used.

6.2 *Survey Methods and Polling Error*

This section uses the results from all published polls conducted during the last two weeks of the 1997 Canadian federal election campaign to explore the relationships between various survey practices and polling accuracy. Unfortunately, the number of polls studied is very small — only seven National polls and seven Quebec polls — so it is difficult to draw conclusions from the analyses. The limited number of polls did not allow for examining relationships simultaneously, nor for controlling for time, possibly a lurking variable in some of the relationships.

As discussed in Chapter 3, the *poll error score* is calculated as the sum of the absolute differences between the percentage recorded for each party for the voting intention questions of a poll, and the percentage who actually voted for the party on

election day. Figure 6.5 shows the distributions of poll error scores for National and

Quebec polls.
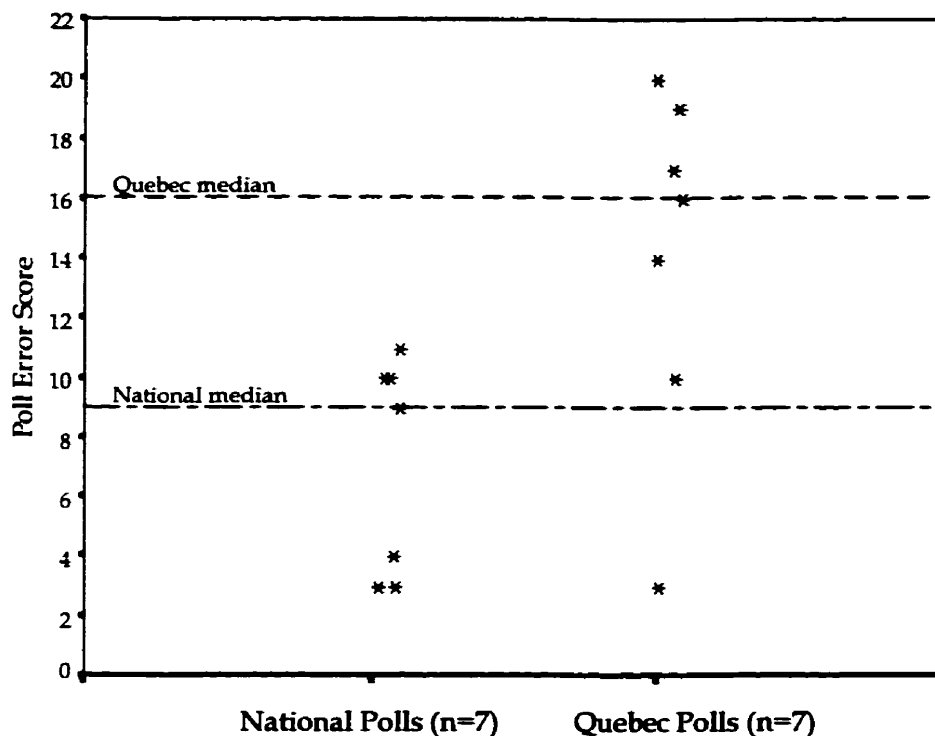
Figure 6.5
Dotplots of Poll Error Scores for published Quebec polls and National
polls conducted during the last two weeks of the 1997 Canadian federal
election.

Figure 6.5 shows two patterns: (1) National polls tend to have lower poll error

scores than Quebec polls; (2) there is more dispersion among Quebec polls than National

polls. The first observation is difficult to interpret due to the difference in the way poll

error scores were calculated for the two groups. (As stated in Chapter 3, there are fewer

parties in Quebec that obtain a significant proportion of the vote than there are nationally, affecting the calculation of poll error scores). Still, there is a statistically significant difference between the two groups (a Mann-Whitney U-test for the difference between the two groups has a p-value of 0.033). It is possible that Quebec pollsters are more likely to have larger errors than National pollsters, but these results are not conclusive because of the differences in the calculation of poll error scores between the two groups.

Two more differences in the distributions can be noticed. First, the distribution for National polls is more condensed than the distribution for Quebec polls. Secondly, the National group is composed of two groups of points (for which the small number of cases did not allow an explanation), while the Quebec polls distribution is characterized by only one group.

I will use graphical analyses (scatterplots with regression lines) to explore the relationships between four quantitative variables — date of the midpoint of the poll, sample size, number of days the poll was in the field, and the number of call attempts made to respondents who initially refuse to participate in the poll —and poll error score. The differences in poll error score calculations for Quebec and National polls does not allow the two groups to be analysed together, and hence the effect of each variable on poll error score is treated separately for the two groups.

As expected, there is a positive relationship between the date of the polls (measured from the midpoint of the poll) and poll error scores, — as the election date came closer, polls were more likely to be accurate. As can be seen in Figure 6.6, there is a weak linear relationship for Quebec polls. (The statistically nonsignificant correlation

between poll error score and days away from the election is 0.38). The relationship for

National polls is much weaker, and almost non-existent (see Figure 6.7). The

discrepancy between the two groups could be due to the fact that the National polls

were all conducted within a much shorter period (five days) than the Quebec polls (10

days).
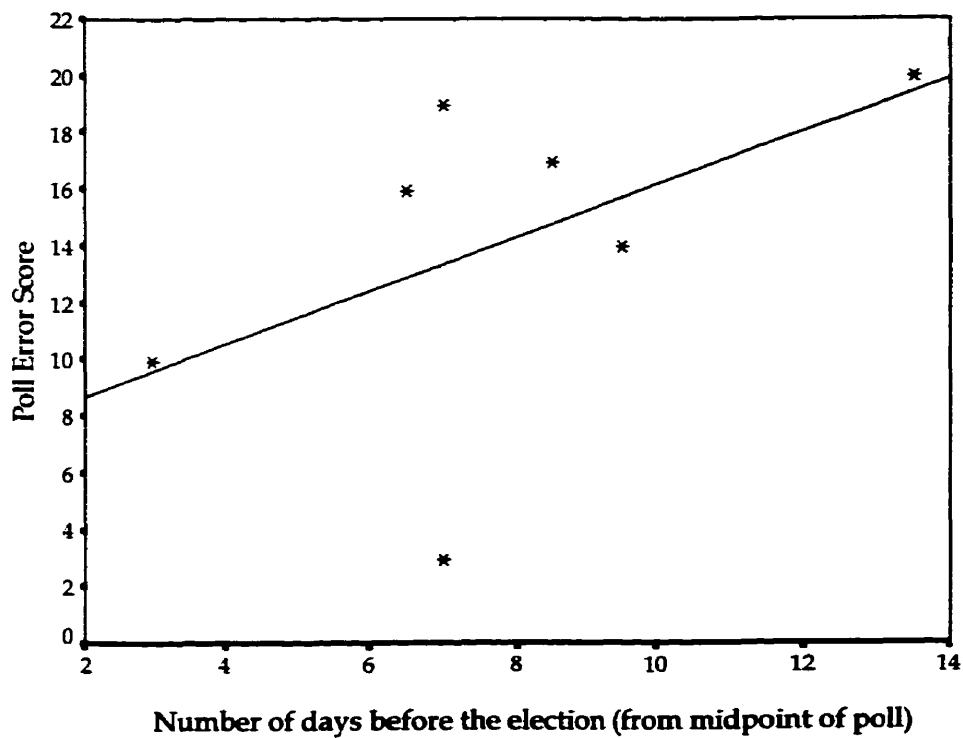
Figure 6.6
Scatterplot of Poll Date and Poll Error Scores for Quebec Polls.
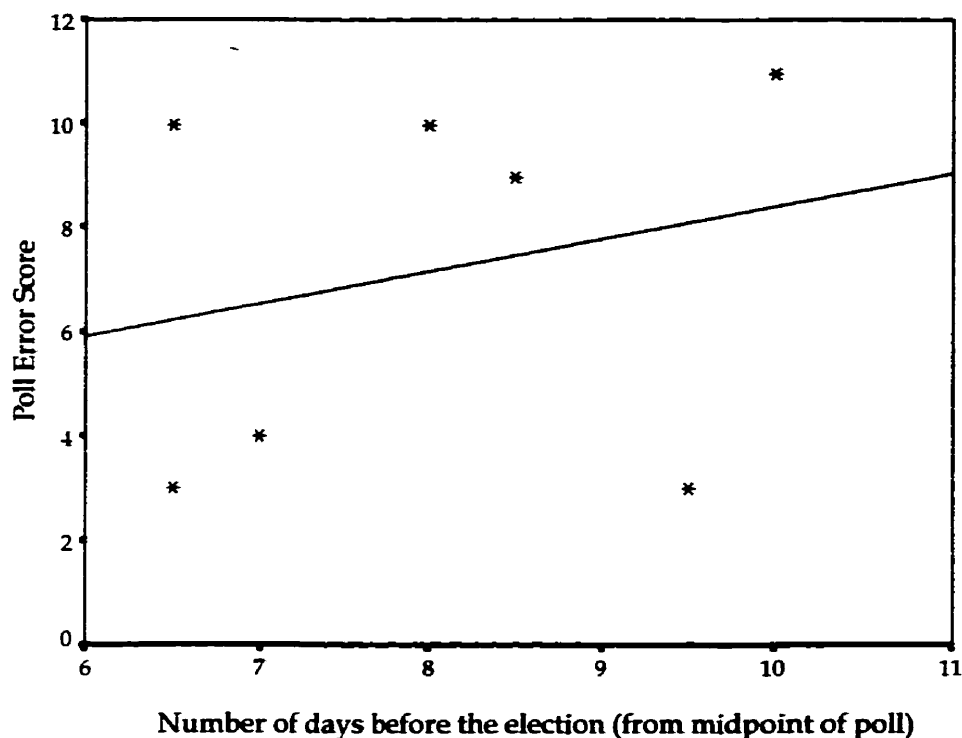
Figure 6.7
Scatterplot of Poll Date and Poll Error Scores for National Polls.

According to sampling theory, holding all other factors constant, larger sample

sizes should lead to lower poll error scores, regardless of the populations. In this study,

however, the direction of the relationship between sample size and poll error scores is

different for Quebec polls than it is for National polls. The relationship for National

polls was negative as expected (see Figure 6.8). On the other hand, Quebec polls tended

to be less accurate with larger samples (see Figures 6.9). Both relationships are weak,

however, and the results for Quebec polls should be interpreted cautiously.
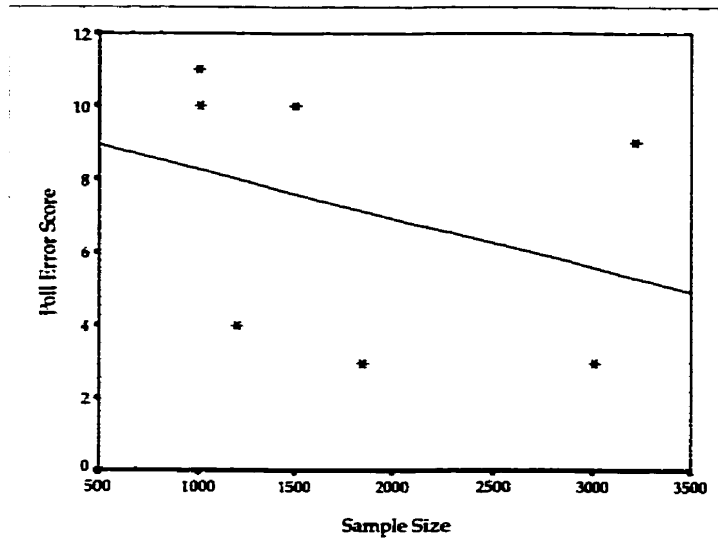
Figure 6.8
Scatterplot of Sample Size and Poll Error Score for
National Polls.
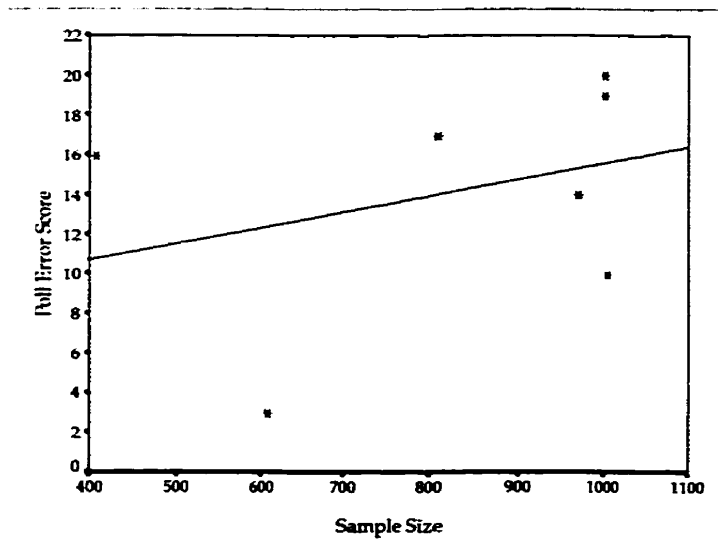
Figure 6.9
Scatterplot of Sample Size and Poll Error Score for
Quebec Polls.

The weak relationships between sample size and poll error scores are probably due to the fact that most polls in the study used reasonably large sample sizes. All national polls, for example, had samples that were larger than 1000. Quebec polls had slightly smaller sample sizes, but except for two cases — which were both part of national polls — they still employed samples of more than 800. Furthermore, the Quebec poll with the lowest poll error score used the second smallest sample size, pulling the regression line in the negative direction. When this case is excluded the relationship between sample size and poll error score for Quebec polls is almost non-existent. Unfortunately, the poll was conducted by Strategic Counsel, a firm about which I have little information, so I could not determine what might be responsible for its low poll error score.

Since public opinion can change from day to day, it is intuitive that the longer a poll is in the field (i.e., the number of interviewing days), the higher its error score is likely to be. This relationship held true for Quebec polls (see Figure 6.10). The correlation between the two variables is extremely high (0.767) and statistically significant (p-value=0.026). There is less variability in the number of days polls were in the field for National polls; this along with the small number of cases, makes it difficult to determine if there is a relationship between the number of days in the field and poll error score for that group (see Figure 6.11).
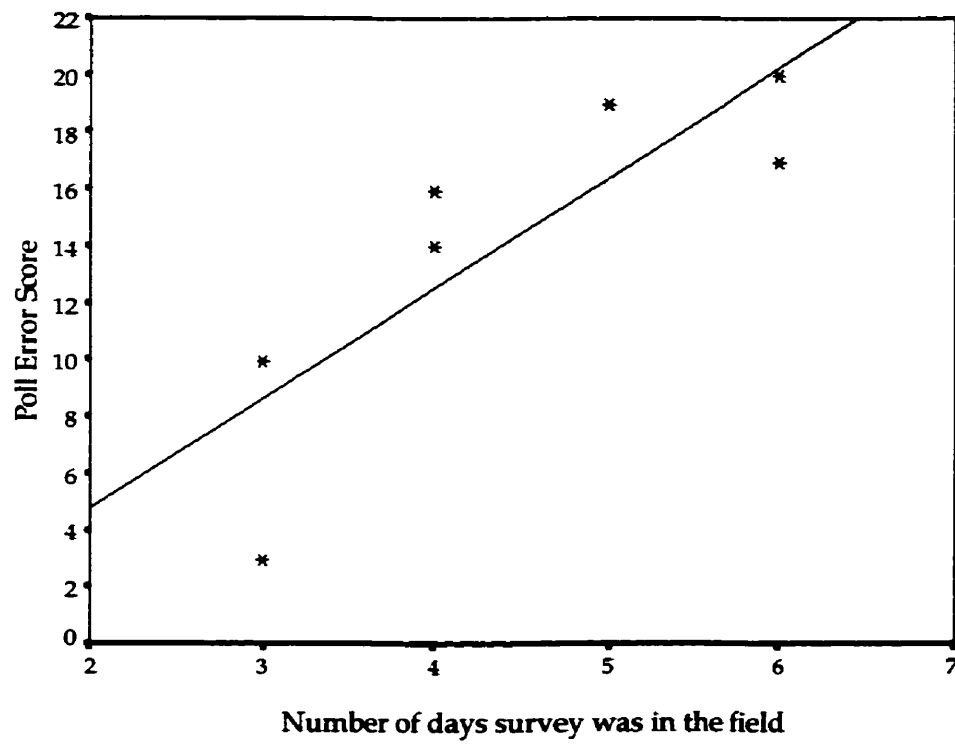
Figure 6.10
Scatterplot of Number of Days Poll was in the Field and Poll Error Score
for Quebec Polls.
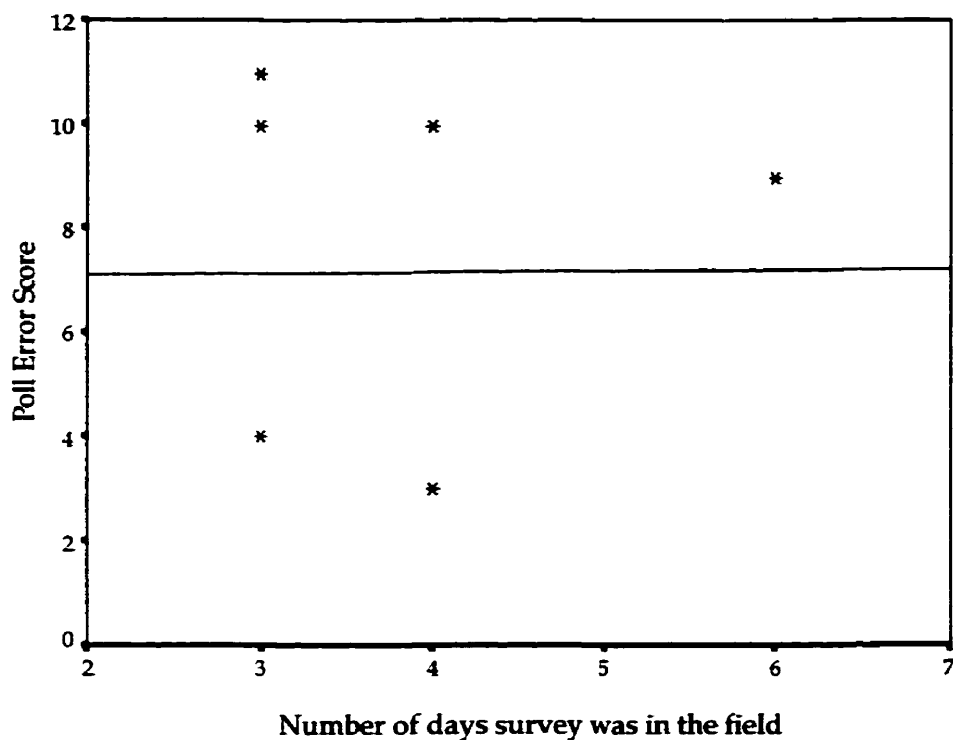
Figure 6.11
Scatterplot of Number of Days Poll was in the Field and Poll Error Score
for National Polls.

As discussed earlier in the chapter, there is little variability among pollsters in the

study with respect to the number of callback attempts made to selected respondents

when they are not home on the first phone call. There is some variation, however, in the

number of calls made to respondents who initially refuse to participate in the study

(ranging from one to three call attempts). The relationship between the number of calls

made to initial refusals and poll error score is in the expected direction: as Figures 6.12

and 6.13 illustrate, there is a weak negative relationship for both National polls and

Quebec polls. As with the other relationships discussed above, however, with a larger

number of cases the relationships may have been more clear.
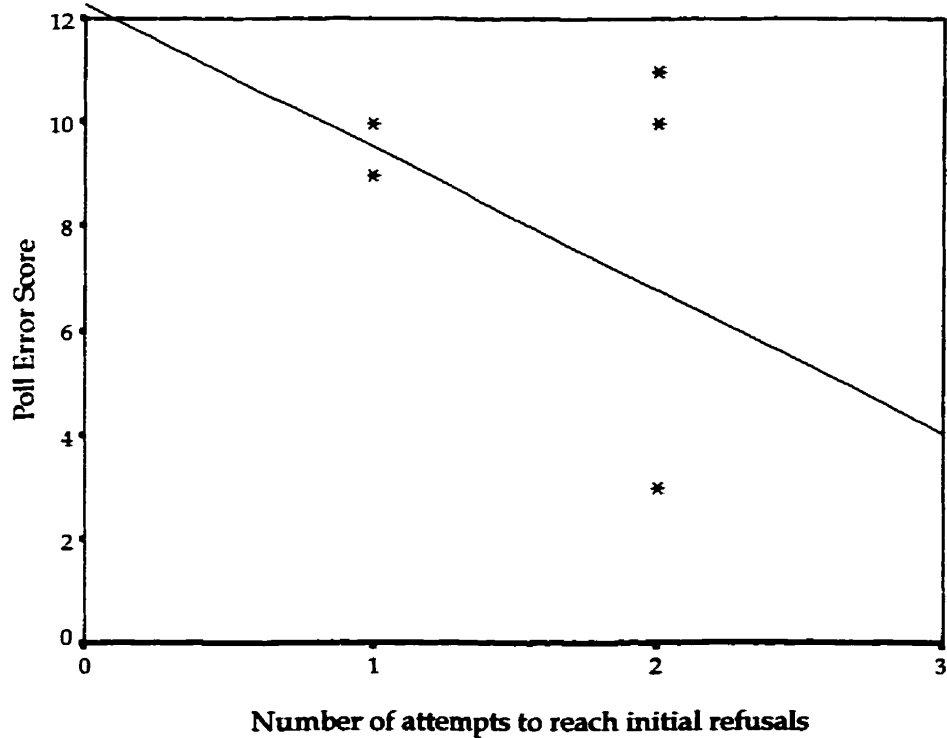
Figure 6.12
Scatterplot of Call Attempts Made to Respondents who initially Refuse to
participate in the Poll and Poll Error Score for National Polls.
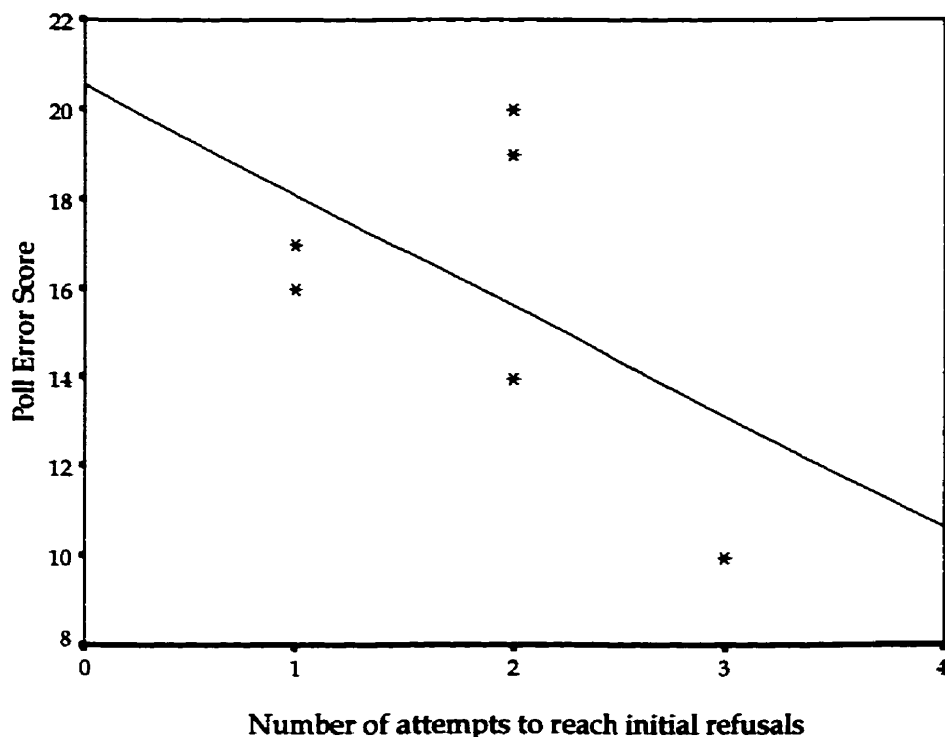
Figure 6.13
Scatterplot of Call Attempts made to Respondents who initially Refuse to participate in the Poll and Poll Error Score for Quebec Polls.

Table 6.14 displays the results of Mann-Whitney U-tests for differences in poll

error scores between various survey practices that could only be operationalized in the

form of categorical variables. Though conclusions can only be made tentatively, the use

of demographic quotas, random selection of respondents from households, the use of

"leaning" questions, and placing voting intention questions after other political

issue/attitude questions, are all related to lower poll error scores. (Only the relationship

between poll error score and random selection of respondents from households is not

statistically significant). Surprisingly, random-digit-dialling is related to higher poll

error scores than the less sophisticated technique of sampling from telephone directories

(including computer software programs that select numbers from telephone directories).

Polls that used demographic quotas in the sample selection process were substantially more accurate than those that did not, both for Quebec polls and National polls. Only the results for National polls were statistically significant, however.

For both Quebec polls and National polls, random-digit-dialling is associated with higher poll error scores than methods that select phone numbers from telephone directories (only the relationship for Quebec polls is statistically significant, however). Considering the superior theoretical properties of random-digit-dialling, this finding is surprising.

For Quebec polls there was no difference in poll error scores whether respondents were selected randomly from households, or if they were selected using the first available adult. On the other hand, although not statistically significant, National polls tended to be more accurate when they randomly selected respondents from the household.

Table 6.14
Mann-Whitney U-tests for Difference of Poll Error Scores for various Explanatory variables.

Explanatory Variable	Polling Location	Method Used (n)	Mean Rank	Sum of Ranks	Mann-Whitney U-test	*p*-value
Use of Demographic Quotas	Quebec	Quotas (3)	2.33	7.00	1.000	0.127
		No (3)	4.67	14.00		
	National	Quotas (3)	2.00	6.00	0.000	0.043
		No (3)	5.00	15.00		
Household Selection Method (Random-Digit-Dialling vs. Other)	Quebec	RDD (3)	5.00	15.00	0.000	0.050
		Other (3)	2.00	6.00		
	National	RDD (4)	4.50	18.00	4.000	0.471
		Other (3)	3.33	10.00		
Random selection of Respondents from Household	Quebec	Random (3)	4.00	12.00	6.000	1.000
		No (4)	4.00	16.00		
	National	Random (4)	3.13	12.50	2.500	0.208
		No (3)	5.17	15.50		
Use of "Leaning" question to reduce and allocate the number of undecided respondents	Quebec	Leaning (4)	2.50	2.50	0.000	0.133
		No (2)	5.50	5.50		
	National	All national polls used a "leaning" question				
Position of Voting intention question relative to other attitude/opinion questions	Quebec	Before (5)	3.80	19.00	1.000	0.667
		After (1)	2.00	2.00		
	National	Before (4)	5.50	22.00	0.000	0.031
		After (3)	2.00	6.00		

Two factors regarding voting intention questions appear to be related to polling accuracy. First, though not statistically significant, there is a strong relationship between

the use of a "leaning" question to reduce the number of undecided, and poll error score. Quebec polls that used leaning questions generally had lower poll error scores than the polls that did not use "leaning" questions. These findings should be interpreted cautiously, however, since only one firm did not use a "leaning" question, and only two of this firm's polls were included in the analysis. It is possible that other house effects played a role in the error score difference.

Second, placing the voting intention question before other political attitude/issue questions is associated with substantially higher poll error scores. Although the relationship for Quebec polls is not statistically significant, the relationship among National firms is highly statistically significant. The Quebec results are not reliable since only one poll had the voting intention question last relative to other attitude/opinion questions.

6.3 *Chapter Summary*

This chapter presented the results of an analysis of pre-election polling practices in Canada. I found that, for the most part, there is little variability in survey practices. All firms use telephone interviews and some form of probability sampling. There is also little variation in sample size. The only major difference in sampling is between public pollsters and strategic pollsters — most of the latter use rolling samples through the course of the campaign, often sampling every day, while no public pollsters use rolling samples.

There are also statistically significant differences between Quebec and National pollsters with respect to the use of demographic quotas and sample weighting. Most

National pollsters use at least one demographic quota, most commonly sex quotas, but Quebec pollsters seldom use any demographic quotas, and none uses sex quotas. Post-weighting samples by at least one factor is a practice typically used by both Quebec and National pollsters, but only Quebec pollsters commonly weight their samples according to language.

There are fundamental disagreements among pollsters pertaining to the proper placement of voting intention questions and the proper length of interviews. Some argue that the voting intention question should be among the first questions asked in the survey; others argue it should be placed near the end. Similarly, many pollsters feel that a long interview is the only way to obtain rich data on the public opinion of issues, while others argue that if the interview is too long there is the risk of boring respondents, causing them to end the interview before important questions have been reached. Both of these factors can influence response distributions to voting intention questions.

Finally, the chapter discussed the relationships of certain survey practices to polling error. Due to the limited number of cases, this analysis is weak, and most relationships are statistically insignificant. Some tentative conclusions were made, however. Most importantly, I found that the number of days a poll is in the field, the use of demographic quotas, placing voting intention questions after other political questions, and the use of leaning questions to reduce and allocate undecided voters all had a statistically significant association with more accurate polls. As anticipated, the number of callbacks made to initial refusals, and the closeness that a poll was conducted to the election, were also positively related to poll accuracy.

CHAPTER 7

THE DYNAMICS OF

THE 1997 CANADIAN FEDERAL ELECTION

This chapter uses published polling data to chart the dynamics of the 1997

Canadian federal election. I employ data from all polls of voting intentions published in

the six month period prior to the election for both national voters and Quebec voters,

performing a meta-analysis to test media interpretations of the campaign. A series of

binomial logit models are used to analyse trends in the proportions of respondents

intending to vote for the major parties. Each of these models examines voting intentions

for "decided" voters only — defined as those intending to vote for one of the five parties.

For national polls I also analysed the proportion of undecided voters.

The chapter is divided into two sections. First, I look for trends in voting

intentions in Canada as a whole. Next, I look for trends in voting intentions of Quebec

voters. The limited number of polls — 28 national polls and 27 Quebec polls — and their

timing allowed me to test the effects of only two major events: (1) the election call, and

(2) the first two televised leaders' debates[1]. As shown in Chapter Four, both of these

events received intense media attention.

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[1]The English-language debate and first French-language debate could not be
tested separately since they were only a day apart.

7.1 *Model of Logit of Party Support*

Figure 7.1 displays how the models were fit to the data when the relationships

between date and party support were linear.

Logit of Party Support
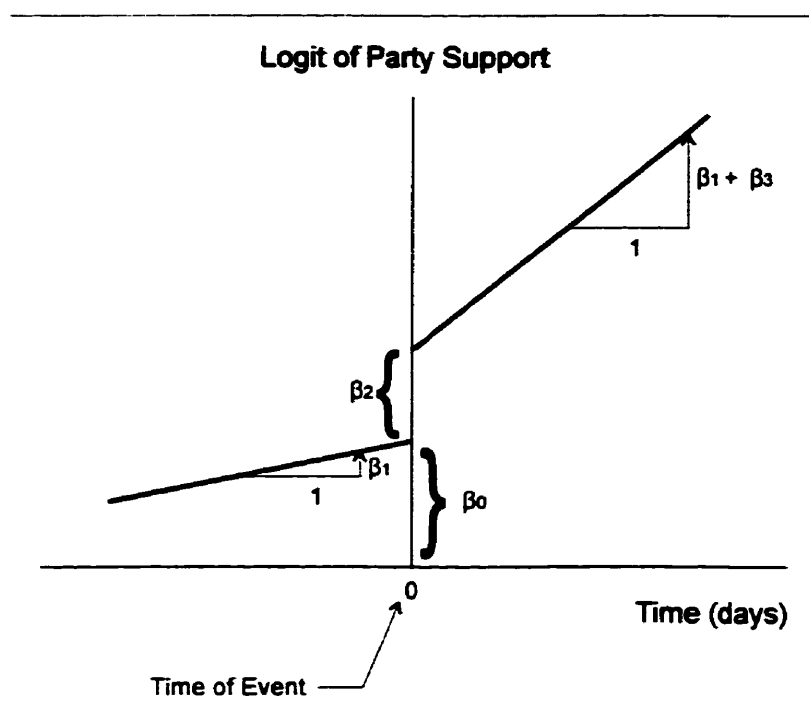
Figure 7.1
Diagram showing the construction of the models of logit of
party support.

The full linear logit model is as follows:

$$logit = \beta_0 + \beta_1 \bullet Time + \beta_2 * Event + \beta_3 \bullet Time \bullet Event$$

where time is the date measured in days, and event is the date of the election call or

debate (depending on which event is being tested). The beta coefficients are: β_0, the

immediate pre-event level (i.e., the logit of the proportion supporting the party); β_2, the

change in levels at the time of the event; β_1, the pre-event slope; and β_3, the change in slope. As the diagram shows, time is set to "0" at the point of the event. There are two resulting models:

$$\text{logit} = \beta_0 + \beta_1 * \text{Time}$$

which measures the effects of time on party support before the event, and

$$\text{logit} = (\beta_0 + \beta_2) + (\beta_1 + \beta_3) \bullet \text{Time}$$

which measures the effects of time on party support after the event.

In some cases the model of logit support fit better when date was modelled with a quadratic trend. In these cases, the full model has the following equation:

$$\text{logit} = \beta_0 + \beta_1 * \text{Time} + \beta_2 * \text{Time}^2 + \beta_3 * \text{Event} + \beta_4 * \text{Time} * \text{Event} + \beta_5 * \text{Time}^2 * \text{Event}$$

The model before the event is:

$$\text{logit} = \beta_0 + \beta_1 * \text{Time} + \beta_2 \bullet \text{Time}^2$$

and the model after the event is:

$$\text{logit} = (\beta_0 + \beta_3) + (\beta_1 + \beta_4) * \text{Time} + (\beta_2 + \beta_5) * \text{Time}^2$$

The interpretation of the beta coefficients for the quadratic model is slightly different than in the linear model: β_3 is the difference in the intercepts (i.e., change in level at the time of the event -- and β_0 is the immediate pre-event level); β_4 is the change in the linear component; and β_5 is the change in the quadratic component.

Models were originally fit with only date and event explanatory variables (and their interaction). Despite significant coefficients, all these models fit poorly, suggesting the possibility of significant differences among polls conducted by different firms. Firm effects were added to the models in the form of dummy variables, and Wald tests

showed them to be highly statistically significant in most models. The firm effects

dummy regressors were included in all models reported in this chapter.

The logit model analyses for each party are accompanied by scatterplots with

lowess smooths and logit lines fit to the data. Separate graphs are used to show the

effects of the election call and the debates. The firms that conducted the polls are labelled

on each graph by the following three character codes:

CAN:	Canadian Facts
COM:	COMPAS
CRO:	CROP
C_E:	CROP/Environics
EKO:	Ekos Research
ENV:	Environics
GAL:	Gallup
L&L:	Léger & Léger
REI:	Angus Reid
SON:	Sondagem
SOM:	SOM Inc.
STR:	Strategic Counsel
ZOG:	Zogby International

The date variable in each graph represents the number of days after December 31, 1997

(January 1=1).

7.2 *National Voting Intentions*

All published polling data analysed in this section were displayed in Table 3.2. A

series of models was fit for each of the five major parties — Liberals, PC, Reform, NDP,

and Bloc Québécois. I also fit a series of logit models for undecided voters.

Models exploring the effects of the election utilized 28 polls, with 14 of these

conducted before the campaign. Since there were significant numbers of polls on both

sides of the election call, its effect was easily determined. Unfortunately, there were only 14 polls during the campaign[2] — only four before the debates — making tests for the effects of the debates less reliable. Nonetheless, in some cases these models still yielded significant results.

7.2.1 *Trends in National Support for the Liberal Party*

Figure 7.2 plots the proportion of decided voters intending to vote for the Liberal Party against the completion date of the polls. A lowess smooth of the data showed a possible curvilinear relationship between date and support for the Liberal Party. In the pre-campaign period, support for the Liberal Party was relatively constant, with only a slight decline just before the election call. During the campaign, Liberal support declined rapidly. Support did not decline immediately following the election call, however, indicating that voters initially were not angry enough with the early election call to switch support. In fact, immediately following the election call, Liberal support increased for a brief period.

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[2] Two factors contributed to the relatively small number of polls compared to previous elections: (1) only 37 days in length, the 1997 Canadian election was shorter than previous election campaigns; and (2) right from the start of the campaign, the Liberals were perceived to have a large lead.

Figure 7.2
Proportion intending to vote Liberal among
decided voters in 28 national pre-election polls.
Date is number of days after Dec. 31 (January 1=1).
The symbol "x" represents polls conducted after
the election call; "•" represents polls before the
election call.

Figure 7.3 is a scatterplot examining the effects of the debates on support for the

Liberal Party. The decline in Liberal support through the campaign is again evident.

The small number of polls before the debate makes the effects of the debate difficult to

determine, but they appear to be minimal. This finding mirrors media accounts of the

debate which said Chrétien neither helped nor hurt his fortunes with his performance in

the debate.

Figure 7.3
Proportion intending to vote Liberal among
decided voters in 14 national pre-election polls
conducted during the official election campaign.
Date is number of days after Dec. 31 (April 30=120).
The lines on the plot are from a logit model fit to
the data. "x" represents polls after the debates; "•"
represents polls before the debates.

Table 7.1 displays the coefficients for the models used to explore changes in

Liberal support. Estimated asymptotic standard errors are given in parentheses below

each coefficient; coefficients that are more than twice their standard errors give Wald

tests that are statistically significant at the 0.05 level.

The logit models fit to the data confirmed the preliminary observations of the

scatterplots. Model 1 shows that time did not have a statistically significant effect on

Liberal support before the election call, but the coefficient for the election call is positive and statistically significant. On the other hand, the interactions between time and the election call, and between the quadratic term in time and the election call, produced a strong negative trend that was statistically significant. In other words, the election call seems to have given the Liberals a short lived boost in public support. Many voters were apparently not impressed by the Liberal's campaign, however, and changed voting intentions accordingly.

As shown in Model 3 of Table 7.1, the effects of the debates are not only statistically insignificant, but all other coefficients except firm effects are insignificant as well. Model 4, which excludes the debate dummy regressor, but included its interaction with time, shows that after the debates the Liberal support declined less rapidly, almost levelling out. The difference in fit between Model 4 and Model 5 is not statistically significant, indicating that Model 4 adequately captures the trend in the data.

Table 7.1

Coefficients for Logit Models testing the effects of events on national voting intentions for the Liberal Party.

Explanatory variables	Event tested				
	Election Call		Debates		
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5
constant	-.2314*** (.0465)	-.2122*** (.0439)	-.4019*** (.1141)	-.4147*** (.0621)	-.3580*** (.0517)
Time	-.0036 (.0023)	-.00087 (.00055)	-.0334 (.0222)	-.0359** (.0118)	-.0207*** (.0053)
Event	.4353* (.1731)	-.0074 (.0592)	-.0158 (.1195)	—	—
Interaction between Event and Time	-.0556** (.0192	-.0112*** (.0021)	.0298 (.0223)	.03198* (.0147)	—
Time^2	-.000022 (.000017)	—	—	—	.0010* (.0005)
Interaction between Event and Time^2	.0012* (.00048)	—	—	—	—
Firm Effects	(Baseline category is "CROP")		(Baseline category is "Ekos")		
Canadian Facts	-.0013 (.1050)	.0133 (.1049)	—	—	—
Gallup	.2232 (.6890)	.2675 (.0605)	.1515 (.0710)	.1550 (.0657)	.1249 (.0674)
COMPAS	.1073 (.0627)	.0161 (.0627)	—	—	—
Ekos Research	.1389 (.0701)	.1617 (.0623)	—	—	—
Environics	.0523 (.0676)	.0742 (.0619)	.0453 (.0591)	.0444 (.0587)	.0158 (.0577)
Angus Reid	-.0669 (.0639)	-.0218 (.0556)	-.0906 (.0561)	-.0904 (.0561)	-.0975 (.0572)
Strategic Counsel	.0771 (.0806)	.1011 (.0744)	.0454 (.0681)	.0473 (.0665)	.0160 (.0662)
Zogby International	.2552 (.0753)	.2848 (.0687)	.2051 (.0612)	.2037 (.0603)	.1971 (.0606)
Wald Test for Firm Effects					
Wald Statistic	103.66***	101.08***	46.27***	46.26	45.04***
Degrees of freedom	8	8	5	5	5
Summary Statistics					
Deviance	28.71	36.30	5.51	5.54	6.00
Degrees of freedom	14	16	5	6	6
Number of polls	28	28	14	14	14

Notes: Numbers in parenthesis are standard errors. Time^2 is a quadratic term in time.
*p < .05   **p < .01   ***p < .001

7.2.2 *Trends in National Support for the PC Party*

Figure 7.4 is a scatterplot of the relationship between date and the proportion of

voters supporting the PC Party. Before the election call, support for the PC Party was

relatively constant. Immediately after the call, PC support appears to drop slightly, and

then rise drastically, only to fall back somewhat in the middle of the campaign. In other

words, the lowess smooth indicated that a quadratic date trend should be added to the

logit model.
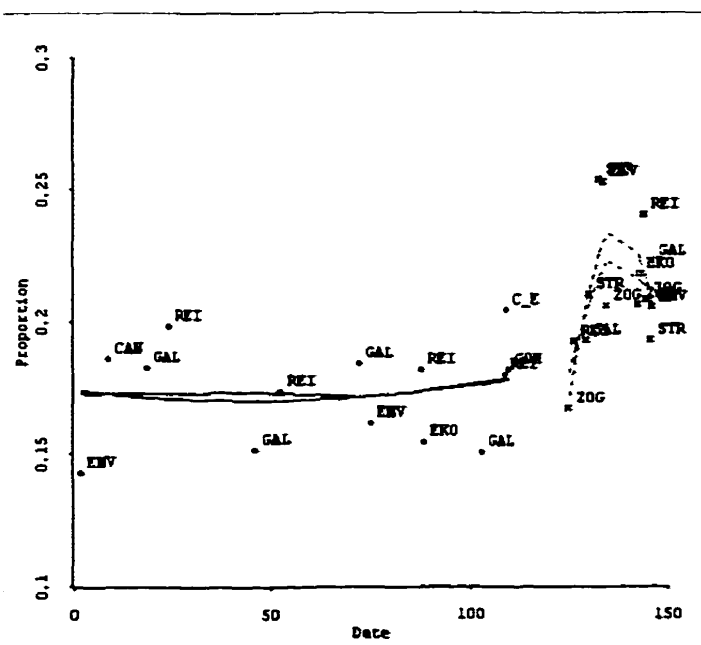
Figure 7.4
Proportion intending to vote PC among decided
voters in 28 national pre-election polls.

The media commonly reported that the turning point in the campaign for the PC

Party was the English-language leaders debate. As discussed in Chapter Four, PC leader

Jean Charest was widely recognized to have won the debate by a wide margin. From

Figure 7.5 it seems that Charest's performance did indeed help the popularity of his

party. Although there were only four polls conducted during the campaign before the

debates — making it difficult to accurately determine a trend — on average, polls

showed lower support for the PC Party before the debate than the polls immediately

following the debate.

Figure 7.5
Proportion intending to vote PC among decided
voters in 14 national pre-election polls conducted
during the election campaign.

Table 7.2 displays the coefficients for the logit models fit to the data. As shown in the column for Model 1, the coefficient for time showed no relationship between date and support for the PC Party before the election call. The election call, however, had a statistically significant negative effect. The interaction terms of both date and the election call, and the quadratic date term and the election call, were also statistically significant, supporting the analysis of the scatterplot, which showed a curvilinear tend after the election call.

Although aside from the intercept none of the coefficients in Model 2 is statistically significant, this does not mean that the debate had no affect on PC support. It is possible that the effects were not captured adequately because of the limited number of polls immediately before the debate. This argument makes more sense when Model 4 is considered, for which there is a statistically significant curvilinear trend corresponding to the immediate increase in PC support after the debate and a decline afterwards. Model 3, which excluded the debate dummy regressor, fit even better, yielding statistically significant coefficients for the time and the interaction of time and debate. This model also showed that support for the PC Party rose until the debates, but declined afterwards.

Table 7.2

Coefficients for Logit Models testing the effects of events on national voting intentions for the PC Party.

Explanatory variables	Event tested			
	Election Call	Debates		
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
constant	-1.3828*** (.0579)	-1.3534*** (.1407)	-1.1323*** (.0737)	-1.2971*** (.0612)
Time	-.0031 (.0030)	.0377 (.0279)	.0818*** (.0145)	.0381*** (.0065)
Event	-.9179*** (.2180)	.2703 (.1462)	—	—
Interaction between Event and Time	.1475*** (.0237)	-.0549 (.0281)	-.0947*** (.0180)	—
Time^2	-.000027 (.000024)	—	—	-.0032*** (.00061)
Interaction between Event and Time^2	-.0034*** (.00059)	—	—	—
Firm Effects	(Baseline category is "CROP")	(Baseline category is "Ekos")		
Canadian Facts	-.1168 (.1361)	—	—	—
Gallup	-.2917 (.0882)	.0483 (.0849)	-.0111 (.0799)	.0824 (.0811)
COMPAS	-.1422 (.0794)	—	—	—
Ekos Research	-.3875 (.0897)	—	—	—
Environics	-.3179 (.0863)	.0071 (.0699)	.0231 (.0692)	.1081 (.0679)
Angus Reid	-.2045 (.0816)	.1262 (.0660)	.1237 (.0660)	.1494 (.0673)
Strategic Counsel	-.3456 (.1006)	-.0878 (.0737)	-.0574 (.0794)	.0370 (.0789)
Zogby International	-.4245 (.0956)	-.0878 (.0281)	-.0648 (.0726)	-.0425 (.0729)
Wald Test for Firm Effects				
Wald Statistic	36.71***	14.43*	13.66	13.53*
Degrees of freedom	8	5	5	5
Summary Statistics				
Deviance	23.44	6.39	9.87	10.07
Degrees of freedom	14	5	6	6
Number of polls	28	14	14	14

Notes: Numbers in parenthesis are standard errors. Time^2 is a quadratic term in time.
*p < .05   **p < .01   ***p < .001

7.2.3 _Trends in national support for the Reform Party_

Figure 7.6 is a scatterplot of date and support for the Reform Party from January

1, 1997 until the election on June 2, 1997. Lowess smooths of the data indicate the

possibility of positive curvilinear trends both before and after the start of the election.

Initially the quadratic trend and its interaction with the election call were included in the

logit model. According to Wald tests the quadratic date term and its interaction with

time were statistically insignificant (see Table 7.3). As a result, both were left out of the

final model, and the relationship was treated as linear.

Figure 7.6
Proportion intending to vote Reform among
decided voters in 28 national pre-election polls.

Figure 7.7 displays the support for the Reform Party during the course of the

official election campaign. Again the problem of too few polls before the debates makes

it difficult to determine if the debate had a significant effect, and because of the high

variability in the data, it is obvious that the logit model does not fit well. Only firm

effects were statistically significant. The coefficients for date and the debate were not

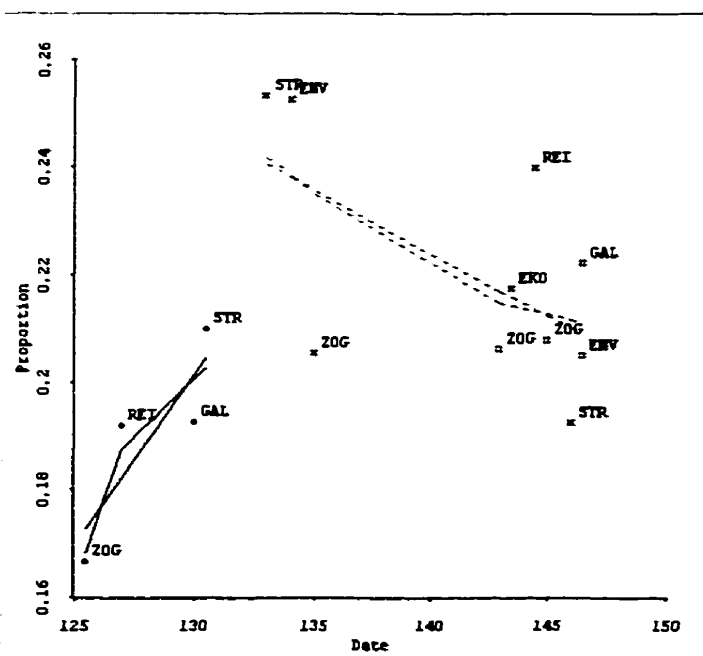statistically significant, nor was the interaction between the two variables.
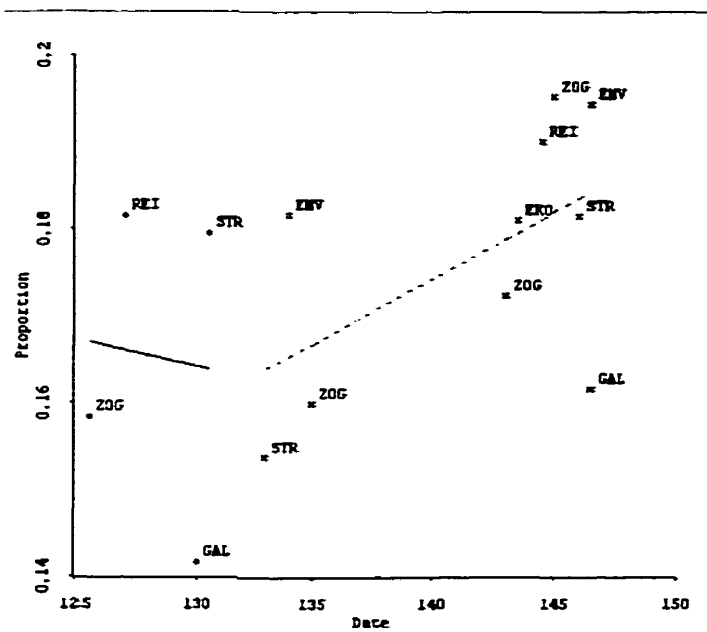
Figure 7.7
Proportion intending to vote Reform among
decided voters in 14 national pre-election polls
conducted during the election campaign.

Table 7.3 displays the coefficients for the logit models fit to the data for support for the Reform Party. For Model 1, the coefficient for time is positive and statistically significant, corresponding to the strong increase in Reform popularity during the five month period before the election. The trend was unaffected by the election call, however, as shown by the nonsignificant coefficient. This does not mean that the election campaign did not affect support for the Reform Party, since it is possible that support would have tapered off or levelled out had the election not been called. Considering the relentless campaign that the Reform Party delivered, I suspect that the positive trend would not have continued if the election was not called since the party would not have received nearly as much media exposure as it did.

As Model 4 shows, the event coefficient for the debate is not statistically significant, indicating that the debate had little effect on support for the Reform Party. On the other hand, when the debate dummy regressor is excluded from the analysis, time has a positive and statistically significant relationship with support for the party (see Model 5 in Table 7.3).

Table 7.3

Coefficients for Logit Models testing the effects of events on national voting intentions for the Reform Party.

Explanatory variables	Event tested				
	Election Call			Debates	
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5
constant	-1.6625*** (.0648)	-1.6855*** (.0607)	-1.6735*** (.0604)	-1.5066*** (.1515)	-1.5780*** (.0643)
Time	.0067* (.0033)	.0034*** (.00083)	.0050*** (.0004)	.0155 (.0296)	.0060* (.0027)
Event	.1418 (.2278)	.0889 (.0804)	—	-.1315 (.1584)	—
Interaction between Event and Time	-.0148 (.0251)	.0030 (.0028)	—	-.0043 (.0297)	—
Time^2	.000027 (.000027)	—	—	—	—
Interaction between Event and Time^2	.00034 (.00063)	—	—	—	—
Firm Effects	(Baseline category is "CROP")			(Baseline category is "Ekos")	
Canadian Facts	.1974 (.1541)	.1827 (.1538)	.3436 (.1355)	—	—
Gallup	-.2389 (.0978)	-.2834 (.0869)	-.1920 (.0759)	-.2055 (.0936)	-.1759 (.0869)
COMPAS	-.1822 (.0899)	-.1808 (.0898)	-.1816 (.0898)	—	—
Ekos Research	-.0314 (.0978)	-.0820 (.0869)	.0076 (.0767)	—	—
Environics	.0051 (.0947)	-.0383 (.0862)	.0707 (.0701)	.0819 (.0742)	.0652 (.0727)
Angus Reid	.0580 (.0888)	.0162 (.0778)	.1034 (.0655)	.0636 (.0706)	.0778 (.0687)
Strategic Counsel	-.0549 (.1094)	-.1020 (.1008)	.0067 (.0870)	-.0284 (.0873)	-.0208 (.0844)
Zogby International	-.0624 (.1033)	-.1086 (.0943)	-.0025 (.0792)	-.0211 (.0786)	-.0281 (.0772)
Wald Test for Firm Effects					
Wald Statistic	41.27***	42.17***	50.77***	13.98*	14.19*
Degrees of freedom	8	8	8	5	5
Summary Statistics					
Deviance	19.28	20.832	25.64	2.79	5.05
Degrees of freedom	14	16	18	5	7
Number of polls	28	28	28	14	14

Notes: Numbers in parenthesis are standard errors. Time^2 is a quadratic term in time.
*p < .05   **p < .01   ***p < .001

7.2.4 Trends in National Support for the NDP

The lowess smooths in Figure 7.8 indicate the possibility of different quadratic trends in time for support of the NDP before and after the election call. The data have much variability, however, suggesting that these relationships are very weak. The logit model fit to the data confirms this thought — only the curvilinear trend before the election is statistically significant (see Table 7.4). The NDP experienced a brief drop in support following the election call, but the campaign had little effect on support. I suspect that committed NDP supporters never wavered from the party, but few converts were made.
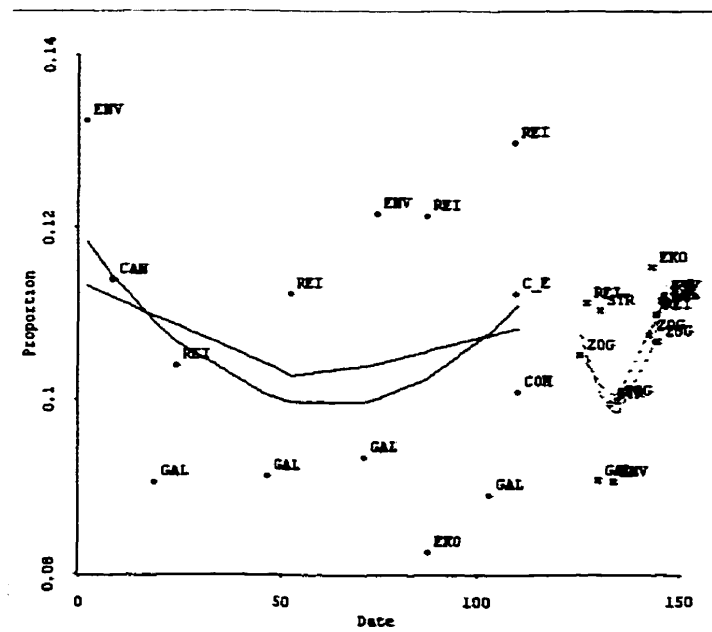
Figure 7.8
Proportion intending to vote NDP among decided voters in 28 national pre-election polls.

Figure 7.9 shows the scatterplot for support of the NDP during the course of the

official election campaign. There appears to be some evidence of an increase in support

after the debates, but again the fact that there were only four polls before the debate

makes it difficult to ascertain the trend. As the coefficients for Model 4 suggest, the

debate had no significant effect on support for the NDP (see Table 7.4).

Figure 7.9
Proportion intending to vote NDP among decided
voters in 14 national pre-election polls conducted
during the election campaign.

Table 7.4

Coefficients for Logit Models testing the effects of events on national voting intentions for the NDP.

Explanatory variables	Event tested				
	Election Call			Debates	
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5
constant	-2.0177*** (.0732)	-2.0153*** (.0732)	-2.0307*** (.0703)	-2.1408*** (.1837)	-2.0870*** (.0780)
Time	.0069 (.0036)	.0073* (.0035)	.0051* (.0020)	-.0197 (.0359)	.0043 (.0033)
Event	.1855 (.2755)	-.2660* (.1127)	-.2531* (.1121)	-.0704 (.1948)	—
Interaction between Event and Time	-.0584 (.0307)	-.0042 (.0056)	——	.0348 (.0361)	—
Time^2	.000058* (.000028)	.000062* (.000028)	.000045** (.000017)	—	—
Interaction between Event and Time^2	.0014 (.00077)	—	——	—	——

Firm Effects	(Baseline category is "CROP")			(Baseline category is "Ekos")	
Canadian Facts	.0278 (.1659)	.0268 (.1659)	.0043 (.1633)	—	—
Gallup	-.0820 (.1094)	-.0726 (.1091)	-.1090 (.0981)	-.1259 (.1118)	-.1115 (.1038)
COMPAS	-.1234 (.1014)	-.1236 (.1015)	-.1226 (.1015)	—	—
Ekos Research	.0178 (.1109)	.0032 (.1106)	-.0346 (.0988)	——	——
Environics	.0994 (.1059)	.0916 (.1058)	.0596 (.0971)	-.1007 (.0919)	-.1343 (.0902)
Angus Reid	.1125 (.0996)	.1233 (.0993)	.0916 (.0902)	-.0529 (.0861)	-.0149 (.0836)
Strategic Counsel	.0830 (.1265)	.0732 (.1263)	.0393 (.1183)	-.0347 (.1057)	-.0519 (.1024)
Zogby International	.0528 (.1189)	.0473 (.1188)	.0161 (.1116)	-.0873 (.0961)	-.0797 (.0940)

Wald Test for Firm Effects					
Wald Statistic	15.83*	16.41*	16.04*	2.32	4.10
Degrees of freedom	8	8	8	5	5

Summary Statistics					
Deviance	23.21	26.42	26.99	1.55	5.20
Degrees of freedom	14	15	16	5	7
Number of polls	28	28	28	14	14

Notes: Numbers in parenthesis are standard errors. Time^2 is a quadratic term in time.
*$p < .05$ **$p < .01$ ***$p < .001$

7.2.5 *Trends in National Support for the Bloc Québécois*

Figure 7.10 displays the trend in support for the Bloc Québécois in the five month

period prior to the election. Despite lowess smooths of the data following a quadratic

trend, there appears to be very little relationship. When controlling for polling firm

effects, a logit model fit to the data showed that time had no significant effect, both when

the quadratic term, and its interaction with date, were added to the model, and when

they were omitted (see Table 7.5). As Model 3 shows, however, when the event dummy

regressor for the election call is excluded, the time coefficient is negative and significant.
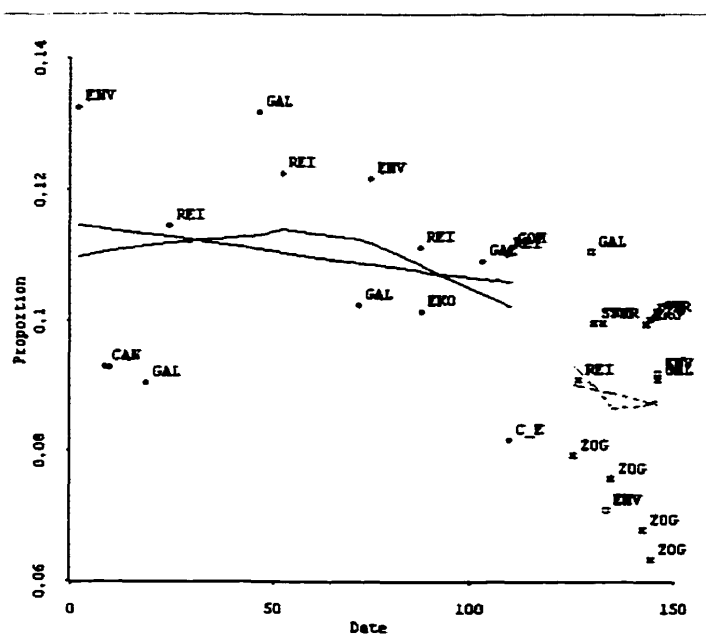
Figure 7.10
Proportion intending to vote Bloc Québécois among
decided voters in 28 national pre-election polls.

Figure 7.11 shows national support for the Bloc Québécois during the official

election campaign. Again, no relationship with date is noticeable, and this is confirmed

by the statistically insignificant coefficients for Model 1 and Model 2 (see Table 7.5). The

campaign as a whole, including the debates, had no apparent effect on the Bloc

Québécois' support. These findings should be interpreted cautiously, however, since the

Bloc is a Quebec only party. A better analysis of support for the Bloc will be done later

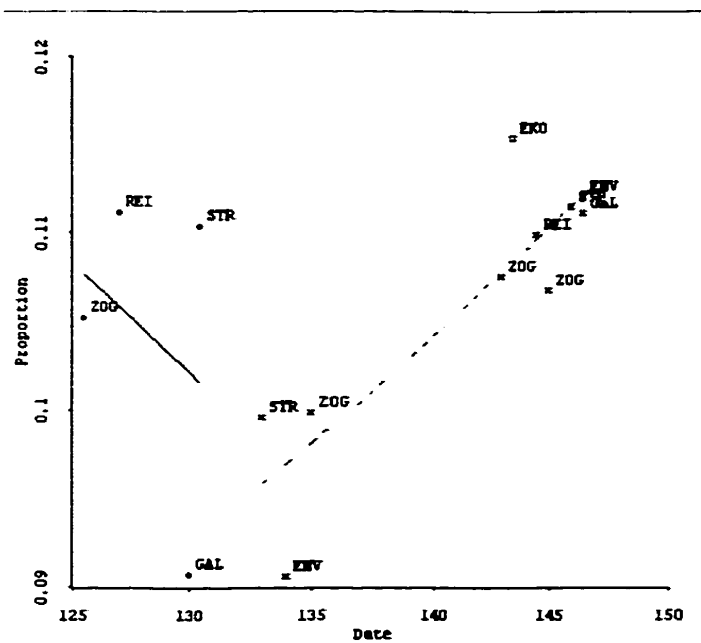when Quebec polls are examined.
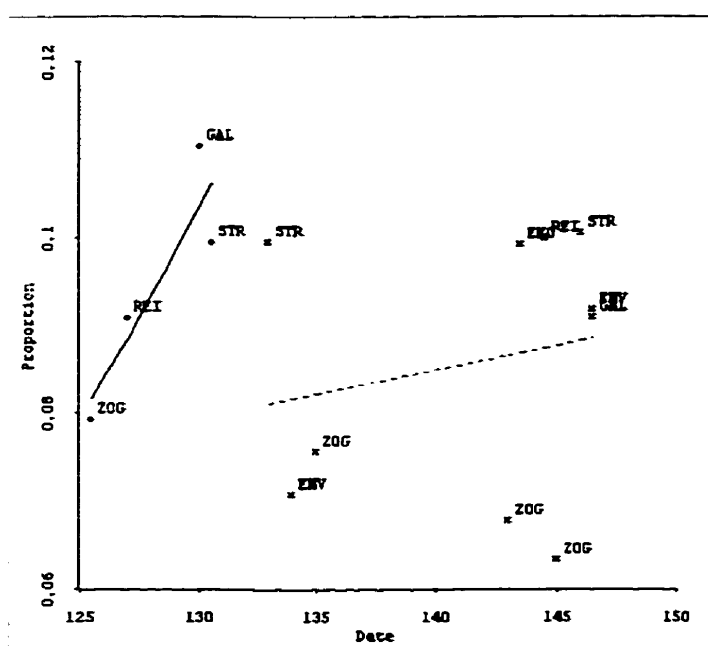
Figure 7.11
Proportion intending to vote Bloc Québécois among
decided voters in 14 national pre-election polls
conducted during the election campaign.

Table 7.5

Coefficients for Logit Models testing the effects of events on national voting intentions for the Bloc Québécois.

Explanatory variables	Election Call			Debates		
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5	Model 6
constant	-2.4304*** (.0832)	-2.4308*** (.0796)	-2.4384*** (.0794)	-2.0892*** (.1896)	-2.1525*** (.1043)	-2.2319*** (.0835)
Time	-.0015 (.0036)	-.0015 (.00086)	-.0026*** (.00045)	.0257 (.0382)	.0107 (.0076)	.0023 (.0036)
Event	.0939 (.3025)	-.2043* (.0992)	—	-.2352 (.2021)	-.1767 (.1395)	—
Interaction between Event and Time	-.0327 (.0338)	—	—	-.0153 (.0385)	—	—
Time^2	2.58E-7 (.000028)	—	—	—	—	—
Interaction between Event and Time^2	.00092 (.00085)	—	—	—	—	—
Firm Effects	**(Baseline category is "CROP")**			**(Baseline category is "Ekos")**		
Canadian Facts	-.0126 (.1791)	-.0142 (.1778)	-.1182 (.1616)	—	—	—
Gallup	.2828 (.1166)	.2847 (.1040)	.2208 (.0938)	-.0517 (.1171)	-.0392 (.1127)	.00068 (.1082)
COMPAS	.3400 (.1068)	.3400 (.1068)	.3405 (.1068)	—	—	—
Ekos Research	.3176 (.1184)	.3046 (.1070)	.2558 (.0983)	—	—	—
Environics	.2855 (.1143)	.2774 (.1062)	.1983 (.0905)	-.1900 (.0999)	-.1887 (.0998)	-.2158 (.0978)
Angus Reid	.3238 (.1087)	.3273 (.0962)	.2536 (.0852)	-.0418 (.0924)	-.0477 (.0913)	-.0250 (.0895)
Strategic Counsel	.3976 (.1353)	.3870 (.1261)	.2978 (.1118)	.0019 (.1116)	.0132 (.1078)	.0196 (.1077)
Zogby International	.0313 (.1326)	.0245 (.1233)	-.0738 (.1085)	-.3263 (.1075)	-.3343 (.1058)	-.3430 (.1056)
Wald Test for Firm Effects						
Wald Statistic	31.98***	34.45***	35.50***	14.76*	16.25**	22.761***
Degrees of freedom	8	8	8	5	5	5
Summary Statistics						
Deviance	27.99	29.18	33.50	7.57	7.73	9.35
Degrees of freedom	14	16	18	5	6	7
Number of polls	28	28	28	14	14	14

Notes: Numbers in parenthesis are standard errors. Time^2 is a quadratic term in time.
$^*p < .05$ $^{**}p < .01$ $^{***}p < .001$

7.2.6 *National Trends in Undecided Voters*

Figure 7.12 is a scatterplot of the proportion of respondents who were undecided in the 28 national polls conducted between January 1, 1997 and the June 2 election. A curious trend emerges. The proportion of undecided voters appears to have gradually decreased leading up the official election campaign, and then, opposite to what would be expected, increased again once the campaign was under way.
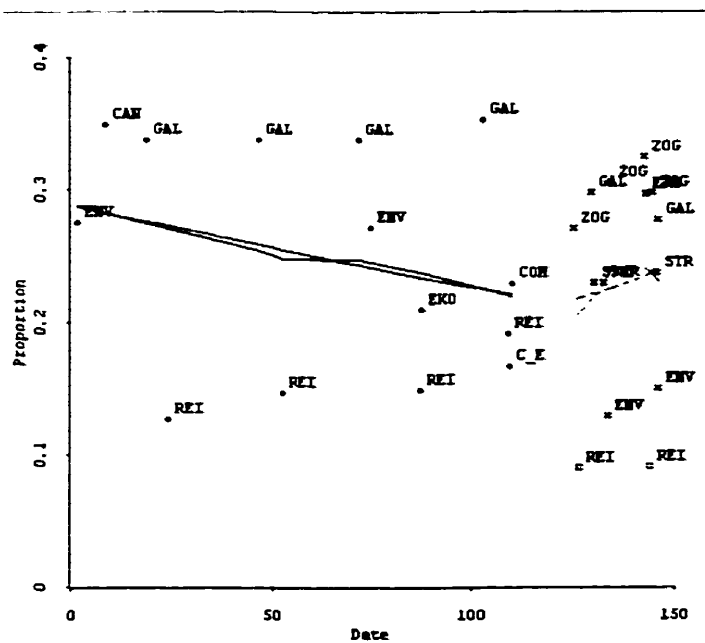
Figure 7.12
Proportion of undecided in 28 national pre-election polls.

Figure 7.13 shows that even the leaders debates provided little help for the undecided. Once again, however, the small number of polls makes it difficult to assess trends. Still, it appears that the campaign had little effect on undecided voters.
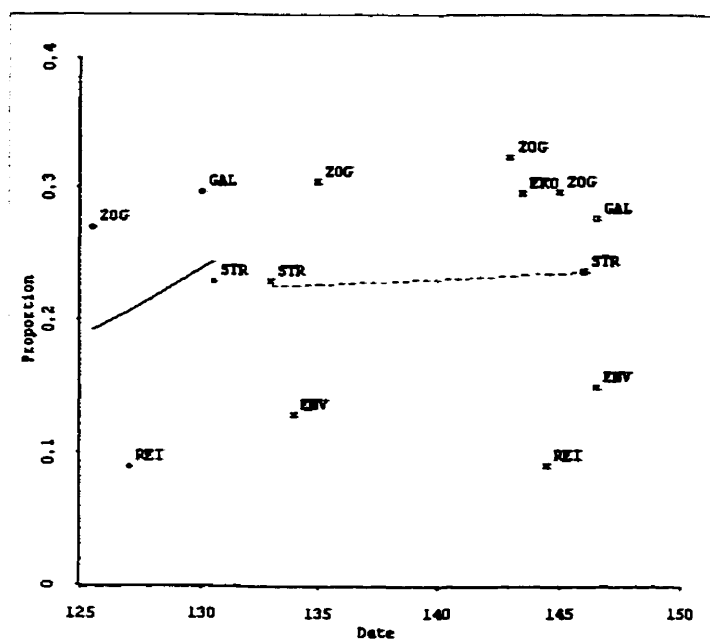
Figure 7.13
Proportion of undecided in 14 national pre-election
polls conducted during the election campaign.

Table 7.6 shows the models fit to the data for the undecided voters. The

coefficients for Model 1 show that the linear trend in the proportion of undecided voters

before the official election campaign was not statistically significant, but the election call

had a statistically significant negative effect on the undecided. Strangely, as the

campaign got into gear there was a gradual — but statistically significant — increase in

the proportion of undecided respondents.

As Model 2 indicates, the debate had no statistically significant effect on the

undecided, supporting what is shown in the scatterplots. There was a slight — yet

statistically significant — increase in the proportion of undecided respondents through

the course of the campaign.

Table 7.6

Coefficients for Logit Models testing the effects of events on the proportion of undecided voters.

Explanatory variables	Event tested	
	Election Call	Debates
	Model 1	Model 2
constant	-1.6143*** (.0534)	-.7150*** (.1091)
Time	-.00084 (.00058)	.0463* (.0220)
Event	-.5279*** (.0700)	-.2114 (.1209)
Interaction between Event and Time	.0091*** (.0025)	-.0408 (.0220)
Firm Effects	(Baseline category is "CROP")	(Baseline category is "Ekos")
Canadian Facts	.9010 (.1027)	——
Gallup	.9535 (.0669)	-.0857 (.0660)
COMPAS	.4001 (.0707)	——
Ekos Research	.7966 (.0695)	——
Environics	.3922 (.0712)	-.9469 (.0637)
Angus Reid	-.2188 (.0665)	-1.4189 (.0637)
Strategic Counsel	.7738 (.0825)	-.3364 (.0656)
Zogby International	1.1259 (.0755)	.0615 (.0562)
Wald Test for Firm Effects		
Wald Statistic	1436.4***	982.57***
Degrees of freedom	8	5
Summary Statistics		
Deviance	247.23	5.90
Degrees of freedom	16	5
Number of polls	28	14

Notes: Numbers in parenthesis are standard errors. Time^2 is a quadratic term in time.
*$p < .05$ **$p < .01$ ***$p < .001$

7.3 *Voting Intentions of Quebec Voters*

In this section I analyse trends in voting intentions for the three major parties in Quebec — Liberal Party, PC Party and the Bloc Québécois. The data used for this analysis were polls of Quebec voters published from January 1, 1997 until the June 2 election. The results of these polls are listed in Table 3.3.

Only the three major parties are analysed because other parties seldom had the support of more than one percent of decided voters, making an analysis of changes in voting intentions for these parties pointless. On the other hand, considering that they typically consisted of around close to 20 percent of the respondents in the polls, an analysis of the undecided vote may have been interesting. Unfortunately, however, only 11 of the polls reported information on the undecided, making trends difficult to ascertain.

As with the analysis of national polls, I examine trends in the campaign and test for the effects of the election call and the debates. I am able to provide a somewhat more informative analysis of the effects of the debate than I could for the national data because there were six Quebec polls conducted before the debate (as opposed to only four national polls).

7.3.1 *Trends in Quebec support for the Liberal Party*

Figure 7.14 is a scatterplot of the Quebec polling data showing Liberal support from January 1, 1997 until the June 2 election. The period before the election appears to

be characterized by a flat relationship between date and support for the Liberals, but

after the election call the relationship is curvilinear, with support dropping until the

middle of the campaign, and then coming back up. As a result, a quadratic term for

date, and an interaction of the quadratic date term and the election call were included in

the logit model.
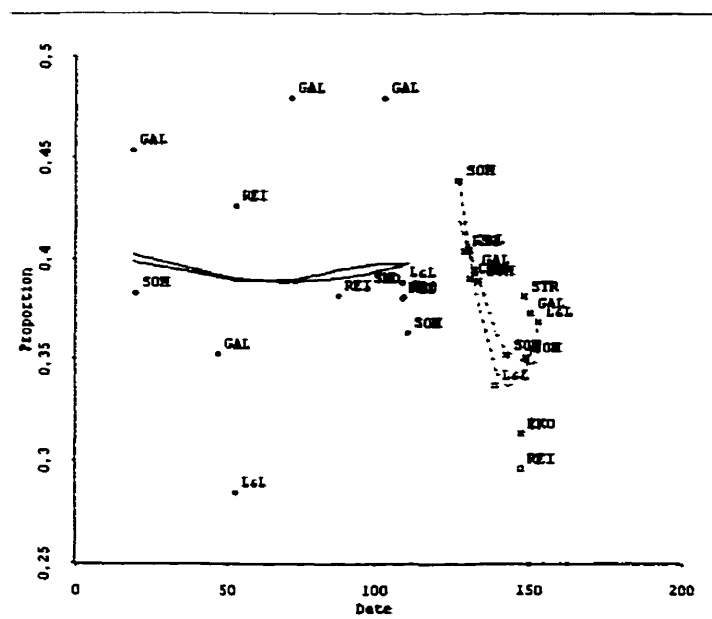
Figure 7.14
Proportion intending to vote Liberal among
decided voters in 27 Quebec pre-election polls. Date
is number of days after Dec. 31 (January 1=1).

Figure 7.15 sheds a little more light on the significant increase in the Liberals

support in the middle of the campaign. Support for the Liberals decline both before and

after the debates, though the drop was less steep afterwards. The debates appear to

have had very little effect on support for the Liberals in Quebec.

Figure 7.15
Proportion intending to vote Liberal among
decided voters in 14 Quebec pre-election polls
conducted during the election campaign.

Table 7.7 displays the coefficients for the various logit models fit to the data. As

the estimates for Model 1 indicate, there was a slight — yet statistically significant —

positive linear relationship in the trend before the election. Immediately following the

election, support for the Liberals increased dramatically, as indicated by the highly

statistically significant positive coefficient for the event variable. The effect of the call

does not seem to have lasted long, however. The statistically significant curvilinear

relationship during the official campaign was statistically significant, suggesting that

support fell dramatically until around the middle of the campaign, when the decline

continued, but at a lesser pace.

Although none of the coefficients in Model 2 are significant, they are in the

expected direction. Furthermore, the highly statistically significant curvilinear trend

indicated in Model 3 follows a similar pattern to that of Model 2. In other words,

Liberal support in Quebec declined after the debates, though at a less rapid pace than

before them. More discussion of this follows later in the context of the analysis of the

support for the other two parties.

Table 7.7

Coefficients for Logit Models testing the effects of events on Quebec voting intentions for the Liberal Party.

	Event tested		
	Election Call	Debates	
Explanatory variables	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
constant	-.4277*** (.0666)	-.8827* (.3489)	-.4902*** (.0729)
Time	.0080* (.0036)	-.5177 (.4072)	-.0412*** (.0076)
Event	.9294*** (.2142)	.5089 (.5083)	——
Interaction between Event and Time	-.0996*** (.0207)	.4769 (.4117)	——
$Time^2$	.000069 (.000036)	-.0823 (.0663)	.0017*** (.00044)
Interaction between Event and $Time^2$	.0016*** (.00044)	.0840 (.0661)	——
Firm Effects (Baseline category is "CROP")			
Ekos Research	-.0676 (.1053)	-.2048 (.2220)	-.0722 (.1181)
Gallup	.2651 (.0777)	-.0120 (.2138)	.1175 (.1129)
Léger & Léger	-.0183 (.0656)	-.0958 (.1830)	.0370 (.0881)
Angus Reid	.0181 (.0705)	-.2861 (.2453)	-.0814 (.0933)
Sondagem	.0903 (.0966)	——	——
SOM Inc.	.0513 (.0637)	-.0280 (.2059)	.0786 (.0842)
Strategic Counsel	.2281 (.1201)	.0897 (.2285)	.2231 (.1315)
Wald Test for Firm Effects			
Wald Statistic	29.08***	13.27*	12.28
Degrees of freedom	7	6	6
Summary Statistics			
Deviance	47.70	.359	2.82
Degrees of freedom	14	2	5
Number of polls	27	14	14

Notes: Numbers in parenthesis are standard errors. $Time^2$ is a quadratic term in time.
*p < .05   **p < .01   ***p < .001

7.3.2 *Trends in Quebec Support for the PC Party*

Figure 7.16 indicates that support for the PC Party was fairly constant before the

start of the official election. Immediately following the election call, however, support

for the PC Party dropped substantially for a brief period. During the campaign, PC

support appears to have been characterized by a curvilinear trend that shows a dramatic

increase until near the end of the campaign when if falls back slightly. The statistically

significant increase in the popularity of the PC Party that followed after the start of the

campaign can undoubtedly be attributed to what the media called the strength of their

campaign, and the poor campaign of the Liberals and Bloc Québécois.

Figure 7.16
Proportion intending to vote PC among decided
voters in 27 Quebec pre-election polls.

Figure 7.17 suggests that support for the PC Party rose throughout the campaign.

Unlike its effect on national voters, Charest's performance in the debate did not

immediately increase the popularity of his party, as indicted by the statistically

insignificant coefficient for debate (see Table 7.8). As Model 2 in Table 7.8 demonstrates,

although immediately following the debate PC support did not increase, the increase in

PC support in the weeks afterwards was statistically significant. Still, when the main

effects of the debate are left out, the model does not fit as well as Model 4, which
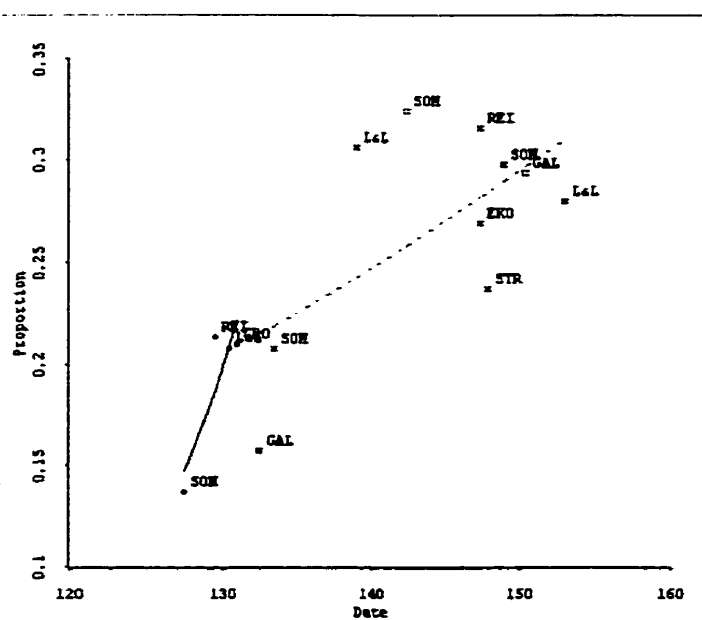
contained the quadratic trend in time.

Figure 7.17
Proportion intending to vote PC among decided
voters in 14 Quebec pre-election polls conducted
during the election campaign.

Table 7.8

Coefficients for Logit Models testing the effects of events on Quebec voting intentions for the PC Party.

Explanatory variables	Event tested			
	Election Call	Debates		
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
constant	-1.3129*** (.0809)	-1.539*** (.1014)	-1.1764*** (.0909)	-1.2380*** (.0873)
Time	-.0064 (.0048)	.1710** (.0524)	.1486*** (.0269)	.0834*** (.0089)
Event	-1.7606*** (.2541)	-.0883 (.1763)	—	—
Interaction between Event and Time	.1918*** (.0237)	-.1535** (.0520)	-.0132*** (.0296)	—
Time^2	-.00011* (.000050)	—	—	-.0032*** (.00050)
Interaction between Event and Time^2	-.0032*** (.00050)	—	—	—
Firm Effects (Baseline category is "CROP")				
Ekos Research	-.5388 (.1152)	-.0267 (.1640)	-.0751 (.1327)	-.2770 (.1331)
Gallup	-.6097 (.0976)	-.1156 (.1683)	-.1678 (.1322)	-.2058 (.1325)
Léger & Léger	-.1988 (.0762)	.1021 (.1309)	.0627 (.1049)	-.0061 (.1039)
Angus Reid	-.3786 (.0839)	.2304 (.1406)	.1880 (.1124)	.0344 (.1098)
Sondagem	-.4572 (.1241)	—	—	—
SOM Inc.	-.3308 (.0757)	.1031 (.1550)	.0448 (.1022)	-.1150 (.1018)
Strategic Counsel	-.0701 (.1378)	-.2058 (.1805)	-.2536 (.1533)	-.4383 (.1531)
Wald Test for Firm Effects				
Wald Statistic	67.60***	19.10**	19.09**	22.51***
Degrees of freedom	7	6	6	6
Summary Statistics				
Deviance	118.36	32.59	32.84	10.65
Degrees of freedom	14	4	5	5
Number of polls	27	14	14	14

Notes: Numbers in parenthesis are standard errors. Time^2 is a quadratic term in time.
*p < .05   **p < .01   ***p < .001

7.3.3 *Trends in Quebec Support for the Bloc Québécois*

Although Figure 7.18 suggests the possibility of a curvilinear relationship

between date and support for the Bloc Québécois both before and after the election call,

they proved to be statistically insignificant when included in a logit model fit to the data

(see Table 7.9). As a result, the final model treated the relationship as linear, giving

statistically significant results. There were statistically significant negative relationships

both before and after the election call, but the election call had no immediate effect.
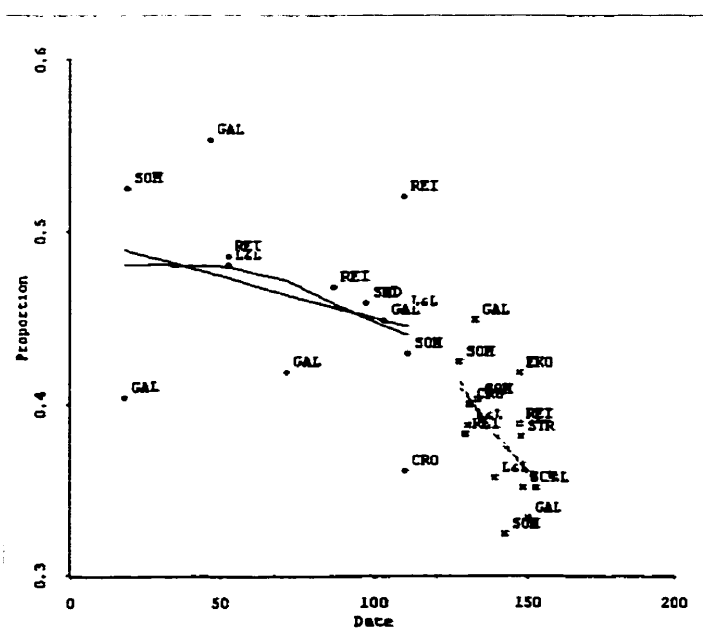
Figure 7.18
Proportion intending to vote Bloc Québécois among
decided voters in 27 Quebec pre-election polls.

Figure 7.19 shows the trend of voting intentions for the Bloc Québécois during

the official election campaign. The data are divided into two periods: pre-debate and

post-debate. The distinct curvilinear relationships in both periods were confirmed in a

logit model fit to the data, which determined that the quadratic date term, and its

interaction with the time of the debates, were both statistically significant.
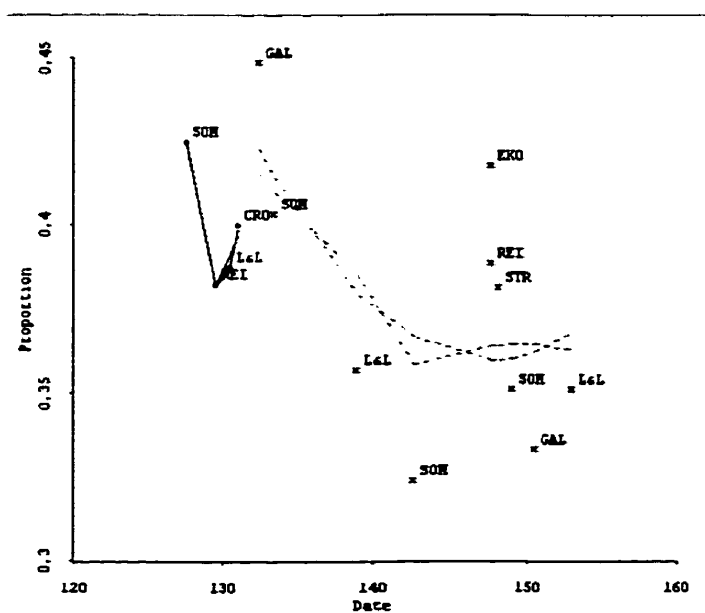

Figure 7.19
Proportion intending to vote Bloc Québécois among
decided voters in 14 Quebec pre-election polls
conducted during the election campaign.

Table 7.9

Coefficients for Logit Models testing the effects of events on Quebec voting intentions for the Bloc Québécois.

Explanatory variables	Election Call Model 1	Election Call Model 2	Debates Model 3	Debates Model 4
constant	-.4414*** (.0660)	-.4283*** (.05912)	.3541 (.3432)	-.4160*** (.0722)
Time	-.0045 (.0035)	-.0030*** (.00076)	.9216* (.4002)	-.0105*** (.0027)
Event	.3471 (.2127)	.0358 (.0729)	-.8349 (.5016)	—
Interaction between Event and Time	-.0378 (.0205)	-.0089*** (.0028)	.1621* (.0651)	—
$Time^2$	-.000016 (.000035)	—	.1621* (.0651)	—
Interaction between Event and $Time^2$	.00068 (.00044)	—	-.1598* (.0649)	—
Firm Effects (Baseline category is "CROP")				
Ekos Research	.4379 (.1017)	.4242 (.1007)	.5791 (.2193)	.2461 (.1141)
Gallup	.1218 (.0778)	.1294 (.0765)	.2295 (.2131)	.0391 (.1128)
Léger & Léger	.1435 (.0654)	.1507 (.0641)	.2059 (.1822)	-.0443 (.0877)
Angus Reid	.2228 (.0701)	.2300 (.0684)	.4580 (.2400)	.0213 (.0925)
Sondagem	.1918 (.0950)	.2025 (.0918)	—	—
SOM Inc.	.1592 (.0638)	.1539 (.0637)	.2068 (.2048)	-.0280 (.0839)
Strategic Counsel	.2882 (.1201)	.2796 (.1196)	.4243 (.2276)	.1008 (.1311)
Wald Test for Firm Effects				
Wald Statistic	23.27**	23.00**	22.09**	12.27
Degrees of freedom	7	7	6	6
Summary Statistics				
Deviance	51.12	53.63	2.24	16.25
Degrees of freedom	14	16	2	6
Number of polls	27	27	14	14

Notes: Numbers in parenthesis are standard errors. $Time^2$ is a quadratic term in time.
$*p < .05$ $**p < .01$ $***p < .001$

It is interesting to note that the analysis of support for the Bloc Québécois yielded different results when national data were used compared with Quebec data. In the national analysis, I could only determine that the Bloc Québécois's support declined from January to June. There was no indication of a decline during the official campaign. The Quebec analysis was more informative, finding statistically significant curvilinear relationships in time both before the debates and after them.

7.4 *Conclusion*

This chapter demonstrated how published pre-election polls can be used to analyse the dynamics of an election campaign. Once firm effects are controlled, logit models can be used to determine trends in voting intentions during a campaign, and to test the effects of important events. Controlling for firm effects substantially improved the fit of most models that I analysed. Still, few of the models fit well, suggesting differences among polls not captured by firm effects and simple trends.

I investigated the dynamics of the 1997 Canadian federal election for both national voters, and Quebec voters. It is obvious that the election campaign had an effect on the electorate, both in the nation as a whole and in Quebec. A number of conclusions are worth highlighting.

Although the election call had a substantial immediate effect on national support for only one party — The PC Party, for which support decreased dramatically — the campaign saw increasing support for the PC and Reform parties, but declining support

for the Liberals. I also found support for media interpretations of the influence of the debates — the debate seemed to increase the popularity of the PC Party. The effects of the debate on PC support were short-lived, however, and by the end of the campaign support was only slightly higher than before the debates. No other part party experienced substantial changes in support immediately following the debates, but support for the Liberals and Bloc Québécois gradually declined afterwards, and support for the Reform Party gradually increased.

National results for the NDP and the Bloc Québécois showed little movement in support for either party, both before and after the election call. The model for the NDP probably well represented the dynamics of the campaign in the nation as a whole, but would miss the few areas of the country where the NDP was stronger and showed momentum (e.g., Atlantic Canada). More importantly, national models for the Bloc are misleading since the Bloc runs candidates in Quebec only.

The campaign did not appear to have helped undecided voters make up their minds. In fact, when controlling for firm effects, the proportion of undecided voters increased as the campaign went on. There was a slight decrease after the debates, but it was not statistically significant. I suspect the increasing level of indecision reflects the media's poor coverage of the issues of the campaign. As discussed in Chapter Four, party platforms received very little scrutiny.

It must be remembered that national polls do not explain the full dynamics of a Canadian campaign because of our parliamentary system and regional cleavages. This becomes clear when the dynamics of the campaign in Quebec are compared with the

dynamics of campaign in the rest of the country. Although the Bloc Québécois's support was characterized by a steep decline in Quebec, the analysis of national polls showed a lesser decline. Moreover, the NDP made significant gains in the maritimes, where it won more seats than ever before, but this was not indicated in the national polls. Nonetheless, this chapter showed that pre-election polls can be an effective tool to chart the dynamics of a campaign.

The Quebec analysis showed that although the election call had no immediate effect on support for the Bloc Québécois, through the course of the campaign its support declined. After an initial surge in popularity immediately following the election call, the Liberal Party also experienced a significant decline in support. The benefactor of the loss in support for the Liberals and Bloc Québécois was the PC Party. After an initial drop in support at the very start of the campaign, the PC Party's support increased substantially during the course of the campaign.

Arguably neither the Liberals nor the Bloc Québécois ran stellar campaigns, contributing to their declines in support. For example, the poor performances of Gilles Duceppe in the debates were reflected in a significant decline in Quebec support thereafter. I suspect, however, that the decline in support for the Liberals and Bloc Québécois can be partly attributed to increased exposure for the other parties.

As the governing party, the Liberals were in the news daily before the election. Similarly, before the election the Bloc Québécois enjoyed a high profile in Quebec with extensive media coverage both because of its political orientation and its domination of Quebec seats in parliament. It is a foregone conclusion that no other parties were as well

known. With the start of the election campaign, the PC Party and the Reform Party experienced increased media exposure, resulting in higher profiles and greater recognition. Voters who knew little about them before were given the chance to better assess them, perhaps increasing their popularity.

In conclusion, although the Liberals regained a second consecutive majority government, they lost a significant amount of support during the course of the election campaign. Both the Reform Party and the PC Party benefitted from the Liberal decline. The PC Party also enjoyed increases in popularity due to the apparent increase in leader Jean Charest's popularity after the debates, and the Bloc Québécois's drop in Quebec. Only the level of support for the NDP seemed to be unaffected by the campaign.

CHAPTER 8

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

This thesis examined national and Quebec polls conducted in the months

preceding the 1997 Canadian federal. I set out to analyse four related topics: (1) the

media's coverage of the 1997 Canadian federal election, with emphasis on the relative

importance of the major issues and the importance of pre-election polls; (2) the quality of

media reports of the technical details of polls; (3) the survey practices of Canadian

polling firms; and (4) changes in voting intentions of Canadians during the five month

period prior to election day.

This chapter provides a synthesis of the results, explaining the importance of the

study. My conclusions raise a number of issues concerning further research in the area.

I discuss these issues, and make reference to the limitations of the study. The last section

of the chapter provides some concluding remarks.

8.1 *Media Coverage of the Election, and the Role of Polls*

During the 1997 Canadian federal election, national unity was the only policy

issue that received significant media attention. This was true even though it was an

issue about which voters were initially little concerned. Through the entire campaign,

voters were most interested in unemployment and health care, but these issues were

given significantly less attention than national unity. The lack of attention to substantive campaign issues corresponds to the media's reluctance to scrutinize party platforms. The media failed to give voters a good understanding of the issues of the campaign, and provided them with little on which to base their votes except evaluations of superficial characteristics of the leaders.

After the election, critics of the media's coverage of the campaign argued that it was hijacked by Preston Manning and the Reform Party because the issues they pushed often appeared at the top of the media's agenda. Most obvious was the media's emphasis on national unity, which was also Reform's number one issue. It was clear that the media was looking for the right opportunity to make national unity a bigger issue than it was initially. It wasn't anything that Manning did, however, that brought unity to the forefront. Manning's lack of popularity at the start of the campaign seemed to be reflected in the fact that the media gave little attention to his early criticisms of the Liberal Party's performance during the 1995 Quebec Referendum. Perhaps the media felt that Manning's actions alone could not elicit the required passion for national unity to become a major issue. It was the release of Jacques Parizeau's book that provided the needed impetus. Still, national unity remained in the headlines because of Manning's persistence.

For the most part, the media provided little critical analysis of party platforms independent of what was said by party leaders. As a result, many issues were virtually ignored during the campaign. This does not mean that the media were uninterested in campaign issues — quite the contrary. It was obvious that not all party leaders received equal attention, and hence not all issues received equal attention. I suspect that this

discrimination was not coincidental. Most obvious was the media's neglect of the NDP, and the issues that it discussed. For the most part the NDP avoided the national unity issue while all other parties emphasized it. Instead, to a far greater extent than any other party, the NDP tried to push the issues that were most important to voters, such as unemployment and health care. It seldom succeeded in getting the media's attention.

It was clear that the media did not perceive the NDP as a legitimate choice to govern the country, and their policies, accordingly, were not deemed important. More importantly, I suspect that the media was disinterested in the NDP because its platform did not sit well with the political orientations of the owners of the media organizations. For example, during the election campaign, NDP leader Alexa McDonough targeted millionaire newspaper publisher Conrad Black for his high income, arguing that it is wrong that government policies allow corporations to deduct the salaries of executives as business expenses. McDonough argued, "A reporter earning the top salary at a Conrad Black newspaper could work an entire career — literally a lifetime — without earning what Mr. Black pays himself in one year" (McCarthy, 1997B:A10). To promote such policies would be against the self-interest of newspaper owners.

The media's attention to pre-election polls, and the manner in which the polls were reported, were indicative of the media's passive role. Studies of the past few Canadian elections have shown that the media relied extensively on pre-election polls (Wagenberg et al., 1988; Johnston et al., 1992). The 1997 election was no exception. Poll results were given consistent coverage throughout the campaign, ranking third among the most mentioned issues. Leadership and national unity were the only issues to receive more attention. Furthermore, a systematic examination of the content of reports

referring to polls made it obvious that they were considered newsworthy events.

A reliance on polls begs the question of how well these polls were conducted. If substandard methods were used, reporting their results as newsworthy events would be irresponsible. US studies have shown the survey practices of pollsters to be highly variable (Voss et al., 1995), with many pollsters employing nonscientific procedures (Crespi, 1988). Surprisingly, my investigation of 17 major Canadian polling firms detected very little variability among their methods. Most important, all the firms employ probability sampling procedures. The most significant differences pertain to the position of the party preference question and the length of the interviews.

I found that Canadian pollsters generally use methods that are widely accepted to be accurate measures of public opinion. The accuracy of polls conducted late in the 1997 Canadian election provides some evidence for this point. Although differences in methods seemed to be minimal, they showed up in significant firm effects on the level of support for each party through the course of the campaign.

The findings that Canadian pollsters claim to use well respected scientific methods, and their results appear to be quite accurate, lends legitimacy to reporting poll results in news stories. Still, poll results are fallible, even if just due to sampling error. Moreover, my use of published poll results to examine the dynamics of the 1997 Canadian federal election showed substantial, and statistically significant, variation that was related to firm effects. Unfortunately the media seldom discussed the potential problems with poll results, and rarely offered extensive information regarding the technical details of polls.

Research in the US has shown media accounts of the technical details of polls to

be seriously deficient (Miller and Hurd, 1982; Miller, 1991; Wilhoit and Weaver, 1990).

Aside from Lachapelle's (1991) brief analysis of the technical reporting of polls in his

study of polls during the 1988 federal election, Canadian studies on poll reporting have

been merely anecdotal. This study provided the first extensive systematic examination

of poll reports in Canada. Not surprisingly, I found the technical reporting of polls

during the 1997 Canadian federal election to be generally deficient.

Although the overall quality of poll reports varied among news organizations,

most reports neglected to mention information important to the interpretation of the

polls. Information such as the sample size, margin of error, question asked, and the

percentage of undecided respondents was seldom reported. Interpretation of polls was

also typically poor, and reports commonly made claims that were not substantiated by

the polls' results.

Part of the problem associated with the reporting of polls may have been

unintentional — reporters may lack the required knowledge about the technical details

to produce insightful reports. In many cases it was obvious that reporters' reliance on

polls was not accompanied by sound understanding of statistical procedures. A

practical need to keep stories short also probably played a large role in poor poll

reporting.

One can take an even more critical approach and argue that the technical details

of polls were left out or de-emphasised in order to support the political orientations of

the media organization (see for example, Wheeler, 1976). I saw little evidence for this,

however, and it certainly was not the norm. This is not to say that bias was absent, only

that it was infrequent and sporadic, rather than pervasive. Of all the media

organizations only one seemed to be guilty of biased reporting of polls on a regular basis — *The Toronto Sun.* *The Toronto Sun* was so bad, that it even discussed nonscientific polls as if they were meaningful, obviously pleased that they showed the Reform Party in the lead.

Despite the deficiencies of poll reports, poll results set the tone for coverage of the election in general. Media accounts of the election were often characterized by "horse-race" journalism, where the contest among leaders or parties was emphasized more than substantive issues. The emphasis on leadership — the most mentioned issue during the campaign — is more evidence of this point, especially since discussions of leadership typically characterized the election campaign as a popularity contest. Poll results complemented this type of coverage.

If polls influence voting, my findings are disturbing. In his analysis of polls and the media in Canadian elections, Lachapelle (1991) argued that better reporting of the technical details is needed in order to give voters a better understanding of poll results. I agree with this assessment. Moreover, even if poll results are news, they do not deserve more attention than substantive election issues. It is the substantive issues that will affect voters after the election, not poll results. The media seemed oblivious to this point.

Studies of US elections have shown the media to have a significant impact on voter preference (Fan, 1996). Similarly, Mendelsohn's (1994) study of the 1988 Canadian election found that the media had a significant effect on public opinion during the campaign. If this argument is accepted, my findings suggest that the media's coverage of the 1997 election campaign could have detrimentally affected some political parties, and helped others.

Strategic voting, for example, is usually based on evaluations of media reports of public opinion polls. As a result, it is possible that poorly reported polls could erroneously influence election outcomes. While it is unlikely that the media had much influence on the eventual winner of the election (the Liberals had a large lead before the election, and were able to hold on for the win), they may have contributed to the Reform Party's ousting of the Bloc Québécois as the official opposition.

Because of the large lead the Liberals held in the polls, and the strength of the Bloc Québécois in Quebec, voters outside of Quebec were confronted with an unusual reason to vote strategically — the desire to stop the sovereignist Bloc Québécois from regaining official opposition status. In fact, many media organizations encouraged this action. Polls showed that only two parties — the PC Party and the Reform Party — posed realistic challenges to the Bloc Québécois. Since Reform and PC are similar in many ways, for many voters the choice between the two parties may have been decided on which they perceived most likely to win the most seats. Unfortunately, using national poll results to vote strategically is not effective because differences in popular support on a national scale do not necessarily translate into similar differences in the number of seats parties get in parliament. Seldom did the media explain this well.

On a less serious note, even if voting was not affected, media reports of poll results were likely to confuse uninformed voters, and unlikely to provide them with accurate insight into changes of public opinion during the campaign.

There is little doubt that events during the campaign had a significant impact on voting intentions. Shortly following the election call, the Liberals and Bloc Québécois experienced a drop in support, while the PC and Reform parties gained popularity. It is

likely that these changes in party support partly reflect the relative media coverage given to each party before and after the start of the official election campaign. The Liberal's status as the governing party gave them greater exposure than other parties in the nation as a whole. The Bloc Québécois's status as official opposition, and its dominance in Quebec, gave it similar status in that province. As a result, both parties were far better known than others. With the start of the official election campaign, however, the Reform Party and PC Party were given greater media exposure. Since neither the Liberals or the Bloc Québécois staged brilliant campaigns, Reform and PC were able to turn increased media exposure into greater support.

The Bloc Québécois was also undoubtedly weaker in the 1997 federal election than in 1994 because of the absence of a charismatic leader. In 1994 Lucien Bouchard enjoyed immense popularity, while in the 1997 election Gilles Duceppe's popularity floundered, and declined with every miscue that he made. The media's continual discussions of this issue probably hurt the Bloc Québécois even more. Similarly, the media's attack on the Jean Chrétien and the Liberal Party for their performance during the 1995 Quebec referendum (seemingly brought on in response to statements from leaders of the other parties) probably contributed to the decline in Liberal support.

The first two televised debates also seemed to affect voting intentions. Probably largely due to the media's constant praise of Jean Charest's performance in the English-language debate, the PC Party experienced a dramatic rise in the polls shortly thereafter. That the debates were marked by a lack of policy discussions, and simply contained a lot of ranting and raving, was reflected in their short-lived impact, both in the media and on public opinion. The PC Party fell back to just slightly above pre-debate levels of support

by the end of the campaign. I doubt that it is only coincidental that as the campaign entered its final week the debates were rarely mentioned in the media.

The findings of this dissertation also imply that the media's deficient reporting of issues and party platforms may have had an effect on the electorate. The lack of coverage of the NDP and the negative coverage of the Bloc Québécois were mirrored by declining support in the polls. As the incumbent party, the Liberals received more scrutiny than other parties, and also experienced a decline in support throughout the campaign. On the other hand, the positive coverage afforded the PC Party and Jean Charest coincided with increased support for the party. Moreover, Preston Manning's increased media exposure was accompanied by a rise in the Reform Party's public opinion ratings. Limitations of the data analysis, however, mean that I can only speculate about the media's effects. Nonetheless, these conclusions suggest that this topic deserves further attention.

8.2 *Limitations of the Study*

There were a few limitations related to the data. Some of these were oversights in data collection, but others were out of my control. All of the limitations of this study suggest steps that could be taken in the area in future research.

First, in the quantitative analysis of media reports I explored only the number of reports with each political party as their main focus. This on its own is not problematic. It would have been helpful, however, if I had also collected data on the proportion of articles in which each party was mentioned, regardless of whether or not it was the main focus. A comparison of the two variables would have been interesting.

Second, my analysis of the technical reporting of polls could have been improved with better data. Previous research in the area looked at all reports of polls for which the technical details were reported, leading to unfair criticism regarding the lack of technical details. I improved on this by looking both at reports for which polls were not the main focus, as well as those for which they were. I could have made yet another improvement by also looking at the combined daily reports for each media organization. In this way I could have avoided unfair criticism of a media organization for its failure to report technical details when they were already reported in another story in the same day's news. Unfortunately my data were not collected in a manner which would allow me to do this.

Third, my analysis of the dynamics of the campaign was limited by the relatively small number of published pre-election polls. Nonetheless, I was still able to test the effects of the two most important events, and produced some interesting results. Furthermore, I chose to rely only on published polls because of the emphasis on media coverage elsewhere in the dissertation.

Fourth, it would be interesting to formally test the relationship between the media's coverage of campaign issues and public opinion on the issues. For example, did public opinion on the national unity issue change as the media emphasized it more? To answer questions like this I would require extensive survey data to which I did not have access. Data from the Canadian Election Study would work well, but it was not yet available.

Finally, although I controlled for firm effects in my analysis of trends in voting intentions, I did not determine what accounted for the differences among firms. Since I

have data on polling practices, this would not be a difficult task, but space limitations preclude the inclusion of the analysis in this dissertation.

8.3 *Concluding Remarks*

Above all else, this dissertation reaffirmed that pre-election polls are an important element of Canadian elections. This was seen in the amount of attention that polls receive in the media, and in the close attention that pollsters pay to their methods. I showed, however, that the reliance on polls as news stories is not accompanied by good technical reporting.

I also determined that the media played a very passive role in the 1997 Canadian federal election, reporting little more than what the leaders of the major parties said. The media's coverage of issues at certain points in time, however, seemed to be affected by events during the campaign. Nevertheless, most issues received less coverage as the campaign progressed. Most problematic was the lack of analysis of party platforms.

My analysis of the survey practices of firms that conduct polls in Canada showed that there are remarkable similarities among the firms. All firms use probability sampling procedures at some stage of sampling, and none use substandard practices of any kind. This result lends legitimacy to the media's reporting of polls as newsworthy events, and to the use of polls as measures of the dynamics of an election campaign.

Finally, I showed how pre-election polls could be used to chart the dynamics of an election campaign. I found that voting intentions during the 1997 Canadian federal election were influenced by two major events: the start of the official campaign, and the first two debates. The PC Party and Reform Party enjoyed increased popularity during

the course of the campaign, while the popularity of the Liberal Party and the Bloc Québécois dropped significantly. The popularity of the PC Party also increased substantially after the leaders debates, apparently due to Jean Charest's performance. Patterns in voting intentions also seemed to follow changes in the amount of coverage the media gave to certain issues.

APPENDIX A

ARTICLE CODE BOOK

Variables are on the left side of the page; categories and coding are to the right.

General questions:

(1) News Source

Newspapers:
- CHR Halifax Chronicle-Herald (Independent)
- DEV Montreal Le Devoir (Independent)
- FRE Winnipeg Free Press (Thompson)
- GAZ Montreal Gazette (Southam)
- GLO Toronto Globe and Mail (Thompson)
- HER Calgary Herald (Southam)
- OTT Ottawa Citizen (Southam)
- PRE Montreal La Presse (Powercorp)
- STR Toronto Star (Independent-Torstar Corp.)
- SUN Toronto Sun (Sun Media Corp.)
- VAN Vancouver Sun (Southam)

Television News Programmes:
- CBC The National
- SRC Radio-Canada Téléjournal
- CTV CTV Evening News

(2) Date of Report

(3) Placement of the Report

For newspapers I coded up to 2 page numbers as they appeared in the newspaper (e.g, A1 A6); zeros were coded for the second page if the entire article is on one page only.

For television, I coded each report according to the chronological order that it occurred in the programme relative to others (e.g., a lead story was coded 1).

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(4) Length		For newspapers I measured the length of each article in inches, to the nearest inch; if an article was spread over several newspaper columns, I added the lengths of the columns.

For television programmes I recorded the time of each story in minutes (to the nearest 1/4 minute, rounding up).

(5) Author

I entered the author's or reporter's name, or the name of the wire service; If no author was given I entered ANONYMOUS.

(6) Type of Report

N	Newspaper news article
C	Newspaper column
E	Newspaper editorial
T	Television news programme
O	Other (articles written by prominent writers, politicians [candidates], academics, or other experts with a special article)

(7) Main Focus of the Article

P	*Poll Results*
B	*Budget, debt, deficit or related issue*
C	*Crime, law & order* (including gun control, abortion issues etc.)
D	*Televised debate between leaders*
E	*Education &/or research*
ENV	*Environmental Issues*
L	*Leadership* (Specific mention of the quality of leadership from one or more of the party leaders; NOT simply a mention of what they did in the day).
M	*Medicare* (including pharmacare etc.)
POV	*Poverty* (including child poverty)
Q	*Quebec* (only as it refers to national unity)
T	*Tax reform*
TIM	*Timing of the election call* (criticism of the Liberals for calling the election too early, or for not waiting until the Manitoba flood was cleared)
U	*Unemployment &/or job creation*
O	*Other campaign issue*
N	*No issue was emphasized more than others*

(8-20) Issues mentioned in the article:

> Variables 8 - 20 correspond to those listed above. For all of these variables I entered " Y" if any mention is made to the issue at all (e.g., even if it is said only in passing that "polls show support for the Bloc is dwindling" etc., I would have enter "Y" implying that poll results were mentioned). I entered "N" if there was no mention of the issue.

(8) Polls Results

(9) Budget or Deficit

(10) Crime   (Law & Order Issues)

(11) Televised debate between party leaders

(12) Education

(13) Leadership

(14) Medicare (including Pharmacare)

(15) Quebec Issue (National Unity issues)

(16) Tax reform

(17) Unemployment

(18) Environment

(19) Timing of the election

(20) Poverty

(21) Party that was emphasized.

> When a report obviously focused on only one party, I recorded the party that was the focus of the article.

> LIB   Liberal Party
> REF   Reform Party
> BLO   Bloc Quebecois
> NDP   New Democratic Party
> PC   Progressive Conservative Party
> O   Other
> NONE No party was emphasized more than others

(22-26) General characterization of each official party.

> For variables 22-26, I made an overall judgement about how the leaders, comments, policy, etc. each party were portrayed (i.e., were they discussed with neutral, negative or positive language). Possible responses were:
>
> P   Positive
> N   Negative
> X   No obvious characterization

(22) General characterization of the *Liberal Party*

(23) General characterization of the *Reform Party*

(24) General characterization of the *Bloc Quebecois*

(25) General characterization of the *NDP*

(26) General characterization of the *PC Party*

(27) Number of Polls Discussed in the report

> N   None discussed
> R   One or more poll referred to, but no technical details were given (e.g., polls show a liberal lead etc.)
> ONE   One poll with detail
> M   More than one is discussed in some detail.

(28) Time comparison between poll results

> Y   If the article compared the results of two or more polls conducted at different times
> N   No time comparison was made

(29) Other comparison (i.e., a comparison of poll results conducted at the same time).

> Y   If the article compared the results of two or more polls conducted at the same time by different firms
> N   No comparisons

(30) Did the report discuss any statistical tests of the comparison?

> Y   If the article made a comparison between or among polls taking account of the sampling error of the comparison (e.g., by a significance test confidence interval for the difference)make a note of how sampling error taken into account
> N   If comparisons were not accompanied by an indication of their sampling variation
> X   If the article did not make comparisons among polls

(31) Were poll results displayed in graphs or tables?
>   Y   Yes
>   N   No
>   X   Polls were not reported in the article

(32) Did the report make a prediction of who would win the election?
>   Y   Yes
>   N   No

(33) Did the report identify one party as leading?
>   This variable applied to all poll results (i.e., national, regional, provincial or riding). If a party was identified as being in the lead I entered the party's name.

(34) Were direct warnings of the possible flaws associated poll results given?
>   Y   Yes
>   N   No

(35) Did the report give commentary outside of the poll results?
>   This variable was relevant only to articles that discussed poll results.
>   Y   Yes
>   N   No

APPENDIX B

ADDRESSES AND TELEPHONE NUMBERS OF MAJOR CANADIAN POLLING FIRMS

ABM Research
666 Haillsdale Ave., East
Toronto, ON
M4S 1V3
(415) 487-8200

Angus Reid Group Inc.
1 Nicholas St, Suite 1400
Ottawa, ON
K1N 7B7
(613) 241-5802

Canadian Facts
1075 Bay Street, 3rd Floor
Toronto, ON
M5S 2X1
(416) 924-5751

Compas Research
350 Sparks, Suite 702
Ottawa, ON
K1R 7S8
(613) 237-4493

Comquest Research Inc.
1500 Don Mills Road,
Toronto, ON
M3B 3K4
(416) 445-8881

Créatec Plus
206 Avenue Des Pins E
Montreal, PQ
H2W 1P1
(514) 844-1127

CROP Inc.
500 Place D'Armes, Suite 1935
Montreal, PQ
H2Y 2W2
(514) 849-8086

Ekos Research Associates Inc.
74 Valperche St.
Hull, Quebec
J87 2A6
(819) 770-2423

Environics Research Group Ltd.
33 Bloor St. East, Suite 900
Toronto, ON
M4W 3H1
(416) 920-9010

The Gallup Organization
180 Bloor St. West
Toronto, ON
M5S 2V6
(416) 961-2811

Le Groupe Léger and Léger Inc.
60 St. Jacques,
Montreal, PQ
H2Y 1L5
(514) 982-2464

Lepage (Service de Sondage sur l'Opinion de Quebec)
Contact Michel Lepage at the office of
the Premier of Quebec.
Premier's office: (514) 873-3411

Pollara (formerly INSIGHT Canada)
101 Yorkville, Suite 301
Toronto, ON
M5R 1C1
(416) 921-0090

SOM INC.
1180 Drummond,
Montreal, PQ
H3G 2S1
(514) 878-9825

Sondagem
3575 St. Laurent
Montreal, PQ
H2X 2T7
(514) 845-2750

Strategic Counsel Inc.
21 St. Clair St. East, Suite 1100
Toronto, ON
M4T 1L9
(416) 975-4465 Ext.22

Western Opinion Research
213 Note Dame 806
Winnipeg, MB
R3B 1N3
(204) 989-8999

Zogby Group International, Inc.
506 Bleecker Street,
Utica, New York 13501 USA
(315) 798-8822 Tel.
(315) 798-9399 Fax.

APPENDIX C

SURVEY OF STANDARD METHODOLOGY
EMPLOYED IN PRE-ELECTION POLLS

Please have this questionnaire completed by the person most
familiar with the methods used to conduct your pre-election polls
for the 1997 Federal election — yourself, staff member, consultant,
or individual in an outside survey organization, as appropriate.

CONFIDENTIALITY: If you wish, you may request that your replies to this
questionnaire are to be confidential. If you request confidentiality, then we guarantee
that the information you provide will not be identified with your organization, and that
results of this study will be reported in a manner that will make it impossible for anyone
to identify the particular methods of your polling organization. To maintain control over
the data, however, it is necessary for us to number the questionnaires.

PRIVILEGED INFORMATION: If you feel that a particular question asks you to divulge
what you consider to be a trade secret, please skip that question — but, please do answer
the other questions.

INFORMED CONSENT: University regulations require that participants in studies such
as this one sign an informed consent form. Please read the enclosed consent form and
sign it if you decide to participate in this study.

Thank you for your cooperation.
INSTRUCTIONS

Please describe the standard methods *now* used to conduct your pre-election polls.

> If your methods differ when conducting *final* pre-election polls as
> compared with earlier polls, please describe the *final pre-election
> poll methodology only*.

If any of your methods have changed in recent years, we would appreciate it if you
would describe these changes in the space provided only the last page.

> Please check only one response per question, except where otherwise noted.
> This questionnaire is adapted from *Pre-Election Polling* by Irving Crespi, New
> York: Russell Sage Foundation, 1988.

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A. INTERVIEWING METHOD

☐1 Personal in-home

☐2 Telephone: from central location

☐3 Telephone: from interviewer's home

☐4 Sidewalk, mall intercept

☐5 Mail

B. INTERVIEWING HOURS:

Check as many as apply:

☐1 Weekday: daytime and evening

☐2 Weekday: daytime only

☐3 Weekday: evening only

☐4 Saturday

☐5 Sunday

C. ASSIGNED DEMOGRAPHIC QUOTAS:

Check as many as are assigned:

☐1 None

☐2 Sex

☐3 Age

☐4 Race/ethnicity

☐5 Language

☐6 Employed/not employed

☐7 Income

☐8 Education

☐9 Other: Please describe_____

D. POPULATION INTERVIEWED

☐1 All voting age adults for entire questionnaire

☐2 Enumerated voters for entire questionnaire, plus unenumerated for
   demographics only

☐3 Enumerated voters only. Screen out unenumerated

☐4 Likely voters for entire questionnaire, plus unlikely voters for demographic
   questions

☐5 Likely voters only. Screen out unlikely voters

☐6 Other: Please describe_____

E. RESPONDENT SELECTED TO BE INTERVIEWED

☐1 Available voting age adult

☐2 Youngest man/youngest woman at home

☐3 "Next birthday" selection procedure

☐4 Random selection from listing of household members

☐5 Other: Please describe_____

F. NOT-AT-HOME

1. If no one is at home, or the selected respondent is not at home, do you?

☐1 Substitute

☐2 Weight by times-at-home

☐3 Conduct call-backs

☐4 None of above

2. How many callbacks are made to selected respondents who are not home before they are left out of the sample?

☐1 None

☐2 One or two

☐3 Three or more

G. REFUSALS

When a respondent refuses to be interviewed, how many attempts are made to interview the same person at another time?

☐1 None

☐2 One

☐3 More than one

H. WEIGHTING/ADJUSTING THE SAMPLE

1. Do you weight the sample?

☐1 Yes, as standard procedure

☐2 Yes, if necessary

☐3 No

2. IF YES: What sample weights are used? (Check as many as apply.)

☐1 Sex

☐2 Age

☐3 Race/ethnicity

☐4 Language

☐5 Education

☐6 Income

☐7 Political party identification

☐8 Size of household

☐9 Other: Please describe_____

3. Do you use any ratio or regression procedures to adjust the sample for divergences from known characteristics?

    ☐1 Yes: for what characteristics?_____

    ☐2 No

I. THE UNDECIDED VOTE

1. Do you seek to reduce or allocate the "Undecided" vote?

    ☐1 Yes

    ☐2 No

2. IF YES: How? (Check as many as apply.)

    ☐1 Follow-up "leaner" questions

    ☐2 Use opinions on issues

    ☐3 Use ratings of candidates

    ☐4 Party identification of undecided

    ☐5 Other: Please describe_____

J. TURNOUT

1. Do you report party standings for: (Check all that you report)

    ☐1 All voting-age adults

    ☐2 Enumerated voters

    ☐3 "Likely voters"

    ☐4 "High/moderate/low-turnout voters"

2. Which one of the following best describes how you identify "likely voters"?

    ☐1 Ask one question about likelihood of voting in addition to enumeration and include as likely voters those who indicate they are certain to vote.

    ☐2 Ask a series of "screening" questions and include as likely voters only those who successfully pass all screens.

    ☐3 Develop a "turnout score" based on a series of questions related to likelihood of voting, and include as likely voters all those who score above a "cutting point."

    ☐4 Assign a probability of voting weight to each person in the sample using characteristics related to likelihood of voting.

    ☐5 Other: Please describe_____

    ☐6 Do not identify "likely voters."

3. What characteristics do you use to identify "likely voters"? (Check all that apply)

    ☐1 Reported enumeration

    ☐2 Stated intention to vote

    ☐3 Commitment to party

    ☐4 Interest in election

    ☐5 Information on the election

    ☐6 Reported past voting

    ☐7 Demographic characteristics

    ☐8 Other: Please describe_____

4. Do you use past turnout rates to sample or to weight geographic areas, such as regions or sections of a province?

    ☐1 Yes, to *sample* areas

    ☐2 Yes, to *weight* areas

    ☐3 Yes, *both* to sample and to weight

    ☐4 No, neither

K. HOUSEHOLD SELECTION: TELEPHONE INTERVIEWS

How are telephone numbers selected?

    ☐1 Sample enumeration list and get telephone numbers of those who are selected

    ☐2 Select sample of numbers to call from telephone directory

    ☐3 Select sample of numbers from telephone directory and generate numbers to call from them

    ☐4 Computer-generated random numbers

    ☐5 Other: Please describe_____

    ☐6 Don't conduct telephone interviews

L. HOUSEHOLD SELECTION: PERSONAL INTERVIEWS

How are interviewing areas selected?

    ☐1 From Census statistics

    ☐2 "Starting addresses" from telephone directory

    ☐3 From enumeration lists

    ☐4 Other: Please describe_____

    ☐5 Don't conduct personal interviews

M. OTHER SAMPLE DESIGN FEATURES

1. What is the approximate sample size (after screening out unlikely voters) on which party standings are based?

_____

2. Do you use a clustered or unclustered sampling design?
   - ☐1 Clustered
   - ☐2 Unclustered

3. Do you use a stratified or unstratified sampling design?
   - ☐1 Stratified
   - ☐2 Unstratified

N. POSITION OF PARTY PREFERENCE QUESTIONS
- ☐1 Before attitude/issue questions
- ☐2 After attitude/issue questions
- ☐3 Do not ask attitude/issue questions

O. LENGTH OF INTERVIEW
1. What is the average length of interview, in minutes?

_____

2. Are questions asked that are not related to the election?
   - ☐1 Yes
   - ☐2 No

3. Were your election polls during the 1997 federal election included in omnibus polls, or were they custom polls?
   - ☐1 Custom
   - ☐2 Omnibus

ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE

1. Who *designs* and *analyses* your pre-election polls?
   - ☐1 Staff members
   - ☐2 Professional researchers who are on staff
   - ☐3 An outside consultant or consultants
   - ☐4 Both staff researchers and consultants
   - ☐5 An outside survey research firm
   - ☐6 Other: Please describe_____

2. What type of interviewing staff is used for your pre-election polls?

 □1 Paid interviewers who are trained and supervised by a member of the firm's staff

 □2 Other regular staff personnel

 □3 An outside full-service survey research firm

 □4 An outside interviewing service

 □5 Other: Please describe_____

3. Is a highly accurate prediction of elections an important criterion when evaluating the success of your pre-election polls?

  □1 An extremely important criterion

  □2 An important criterion

  □3 Not too important a criterion

  □4 Not at all important

Please use this space to describe recent changes in your methods and the date of change; attach additional pages, if necessary:

THANK YOU VERY MUCH FOR YOUR ASSISTANCE

RETURN TO: Dr. John Fox
     Department of Sociology
     McMaster University
     1280 Main Street West
     Hamilton, Ontario
     L8S 4M4

REFERENCES

Abelson, R.P., E.F. Loftus and A.G. Greenwald. (1992). "Attempts to Improve the
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