AAPOR
AMERICAN ASSOCIATION FOR PUBLIC OPINION RESEARCH

Measuring Sub-Group Preferences

Sub-Groups: Size Matters

Soccer Moms, NASCAR Dads, Evangelical Christians, the Internet Married – we know that political strategists like to group voters into categories in order to target their candidate's message. But election polls are limited in uncovering the vote intention or opinions of these microgroups because of their small size.

Journalists need to take into account that when subgroup results are reported, the sampling error margin for those figures is larger than the sampling error for results based on the sample as a whole. (see graph on this page) Journalists should identify the number of respondents in the subgroup, even for larger groups such as Democrats or men or Hispanics or senior citizens. The following table shows the number of respondents in various subgroups from a statewide poll of a battleground state in the Midwest.

Group	Number Interviewed	Sampling Error ±	Full Range of Sampling Error
Statewide Adults	1000	3	6
Women	520	4	8
Men	480	4	8
White	872	3	6
African American	120	9	18
Hispanic	60	13	26
Asian	30	18	36
Protestant	560	4	8
Evangelical Protestant	240	6	12
Jewish	20	22	44
Catholic	270	6	12
Other	90	10	20
No Religion	100	10	20
Republican	400	5	10
Democrat	360	5	10
Independent	240	6	12

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Sample sizes below 100 will have a large margin of sampling error – plus or minus 10 percentage points for a sample size of 100 and increasing as the sample size declines. Journalists should avoid reporting on groups this small unless there is a compelling reason to do so, and the only after consulting with an independent polling expert.

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