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US PRESIDENTIAL ELECTORAL CAMPAIGN:
The Role of Polling in Primary Elections

(Master's Thesis)

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Declaration:

Herewith I declare that I have written the Master's Thesis on my own and I have cited all sources.

Prague, *23 April 2016*   …………………

Student's Signature

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

ABSTRACT

The analysis presented in the following dissertation investigates the importance of considering the level of decisiveness in pre-electoral early polls, when it comes to primary electoral forecasting. In light of the current electoral campaign for the presidential nomination in the United States, an experiment was conducted at the North Carolina State University in order to test hypotheses related to the accuracy of pre-electoral surveys. The core of the analysis regarded one single poll conducted over a five days' period in November 2015. A specific question set was included in the survey questionnaire in order to improve the understanding of people's decision during the pre-electoral period. The results have clearly supported the idea that previsions based on early-polls are little predictive of the final outcomes, if done as average mainstream media outlets usually do. Moreover, the analysis offers important case studies regarding the specific matter of early primary polls, and gives an understandable view of how the process functions in the field of electoral forecasting.

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List of Abbreviations

A-CASI	Audio Computer Assisted Self Interviews
CAPI	Computer Assisted Personal Interviews
CATI	Computer Assisted Telephone Interviews
CAWI	Computer Assisted Web-Interviews
DEM	Democrats
E.T.	East Time
IVR	Interactive Voice Response
GOP	Grand Old Party
GOV	Governor
NCSU	North Carolina State University
PID	Party Identification
Q#	Question
REP	Republicans
SEN	Senator
US	United States
VP	Vice President

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Introduction

A little over a year ago, during April 2015, pollsters[1] saw Jeb Bush as the favorite in the run for the presidential nomination 2016 of the United States of America. A year later, Sen. Bush is not participating in the race anymore. On the other side, Sen. Ted Cruz from Texas was polling in single digit in the same period, yet nowadays he is among the last competing candidates, with Trump and Kasich, for the GOP nomination, having won several important states in the primary process. While Hillary Clinton was already identified (*correctly*) as the front-runner a year ago, Vermouth Sen. Bernie Sanders was polling at 5%, and no pollsters would have bet he could have been a real candidate for that long of a time, as he was in the previous months. The pre-electoral period is incredibly important for both candidates, who start to test the environment for their campaigns, and for the Media, which need to create stories and cover politics. Forecasting elections had become one of the most profitable fields ever, and pollsters in the past decades saw their momentum grow. **However, if the polling industry has been increasingly selling more and more, yet, the skepticism over opinion polls has boosted a lot, especially in light of consistent failures in predicting the elections' outcome.**

The idea of investigating the field of polling was born after identifying how often these numbers and percentages are reported by both Media outlets and running candidates. The attention over the grade of '*apparent*' appreciation towards politics and its usage is permanently high, even years before the actual elections, and forecasting electoral events starts the day after the previous cycle is over. For this reason, the need of

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[1] Agiesta, J. (2015, April 21). As campaigns launch, CNN/ORC poll finds GOP field stays tight. Retrieved April 15, 2016, from http://edition.cnn.com/2015/04/20/politics/2016-elections-republican-field-poll/

considering early polls' accuracy emerged, in order to have a clear idea of what is technically going on when media barrage the public with their stories about candidates' momentum, like Carson's surge at the beginning of November 2015[2], clearly overestimated. The importance of this kind of analysis is worldwide recognized, and many authors have been considering the relationship between polling accuracy and the democratic process as something worth attention, especially in the past few decades.

The primary goal of this dissertation is to highlight the role of early electoral polls during the pre-electoral and electoral period for the primaries, on the way to the nomination for president of the Unites States of America. The basic research query focuses on the **reasons why early-polls might be little predictive of what will be the outcome of certain elections**. Alongside to the main question, several sub-questions are touched by the discourse: whether early polls are worth attention or coverage and whether the employment of public opinion polls enhances the democratic process. In order to investigate the different interrogatives, the analysis followed a **three level schema, offering three different indicators.** Firstly, a study on electoral turnouts has been presented, in order to consider how strongly the American citizens feel the duty of voting in the general and primary elections. The second indicator used, regards the level of attention about political news and the ongoing discourse over the primary nomination process. At last, an empirical experiment was run, taking into consideration the level of decisiveness – third indicator - of the public when casting a preference in early-polls.

Different sources have been considered for the following analysis. One in particular resulted of profound help: the publication '*The opinion makers: An insider*

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[2] Cobb, M. D. (2015, November 9). Diagnosing the Carson surge. Retrieved April 21, 2016, from http://www.wral.com/diagnosing-the-carson-surge/15072742/

exposes the truth behind the polls[3]' by D.W. Moore, published in 2008. Moore's book cites an incredibly interesting series of studies regarding the art of polling, which introduces the reader to think critically about what he is hearing every day and discuss the sort of information that he is bombarded with by the general Media outlets. Another important source regarded the experiments[4] made by Gallup few years earlier, in relation to the importance of a scale in determining the strength of people's attitudes, while responding in early-polls about questions related to candidates' preferences. The hypothesis arose thanks to Gallup's study is that **early-polls are little predictive when forecasting elections because, on average, they do not take into consideration the little decisiveness of respondents**. Lastly, for a general, but deep understanding of the political atmosphere permeating the American environment, the book by Hershey, 'Party politics in America[5]' was taken into consideration, and was cited oftentimes.

The studies just mentioned were crucial for the understanding of the matter: even if polling accuracy has been under investigation for the past eighty years, and many experiments were based on different aspects of electoral forecasting, yet no real answers were given in order to solve the problems. This makes the topic always up to date and worth attention; moreover, the necessity of more experiments in the field represents the only way which scholars can walk in order to explain the hidden world of forecasting. What has just been said served as background for the whole research, which has been conducted to <u>test</u> how ***in*-accurate** early polls are in light of these findings, and the reasons behind this phenomenon. In order to test the hypotheses, an experiment similar

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[3] Moore, D. W. (2008). The opinion makers: An insider exposes the truth behind the polls. Boston: Beacon Press.

[4] Gallup, G., Jr., & Gallup, G. (2000). The Gallup poll: Public opinion 2000. Wilmington, DE: Scholarly Resources. Pp. 161 – 163.

[5] Hershey, M. R. (2015). Party politics in America (16th ed.). New York: Pearson Longman

to the one from Gallup has been performed: a poll was conducted by the organization 'The PackPoll', an independent scholar organization at the North Carolina State University, over a sample of more than one thousand students attending the university. The scope was to detect the level of <u>attention and decisiveness</u> of the respondents towards candidate's appreciation during the pre-electoral period preceding the primary contest (third indicator).

The dissertation presents the work of over a year of data collection and analytical studies on the topic of early-polling. Chapter one, with a highly focused review of the literature on previous studies, settles and analyzes the basis of the doctrine, offering a theoretical framework which considers the American political system, the definition of terms like public opinion and early polls, and the system of the primaries, base of the whole discourse. It is believed that a solid explanation of the background is necessary in order to understand the vast world backgrounding polling usage in American politics. The second chapter, on the other side, states the reasons why an experiment of this type could be helpful in order to test the hypotheses, and displays the methodology used to perform the poll. Sub-chapter 2.1 provides detailed information regarding the methodology utilized to perform the experiment and analyze the data, and furnishes all the instructions for possible reproduction. All the decisions made by the team while running these experiments were based on the review of previous literature and studies; however, being the social sciences' field subject to interpretation, some decisions could have been taken differently. Anyhow, the experiment claims to be scientific, and the methodology can be used for the proposal of the experiment in different environments. Appendix A, at the end of this document, presents a full report on the survey implemented, comprehensive of all the questions and the data tracked. The third chapter reports the experiment and its analysis. In a both quantitative and qualitative study of the data acquired through the

survey, the chapter presents a detailed investigation of the questions and percentages used to test the hypotheses, which were related to polling accuracy. The implementation of a question on respondents' decisiveness made possible to answer the research question that guided the whole study. The answer to all the questions are reported in the conclusions, which are open to interpretation. The data clearly showed a general trend towards polling, however, the final decision to believe or not in electoral polls is up to the single individual, considering that everything depends on how pollsters conduct their opinion surveys, and how analysts interpret the data.

1. Political and Theoretical Framework

1.1 The American political system

The United States of America has been and still is considered one of the most influential countries in the world. According to different authors, the importance of a country is given by its position in the geopolitical system, and the chief of the US is generally recognized among one of the most powerful men of the world[6] (Buzan, 2004). Due to this fact, the intensity of attention on how the American citizens elect their representatives has been matter of study since its birth, and scholars from all the world have spent decades trying to understand the whole picture of this complex political system. For this reason, it is necessary to make a step back and briefly analyze the political system and the election's instruments, in order to fully understand the importance of polling and the shape of public opinion, core of this study.

The United States of America were created in the form of federal constitutional republic. The head of the state is the **President** of the United States, which is the commander in chief and represents the executive branch. Among the different powers this figure is entitled of, the president also has the prerogative to either endorse or veto different types of legislation passed in the congress. The **Congress** represents the legislative body, composed of two equal chambers: *The House of Representative* (Lower chamber) and the *Senate* (Higher chamber). The juridical branch is represented by the **Supreme Court of Justice**, which deals with matters related to federal law and constitutional issues. The whole system is subject to the so-called principle of *check and*

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[6] Buzan, B. (2004). The United States and the great powers: World politics in the twenty-first century. Cambridge: Polity.

balances, which should prevent any of the three branches to extend its own powers and overcome the other branches[7].

Elections

The electoral process of the United States is rather mechanic and generally, to fully comprehend it, it requires some time. In a nutshell, the system works on defined period of time: the election terms of the different elected bodies are <u>fixed</u> and, unlike many of the European counterparts, they are not subject to other causalities (i.e. the vote of confidence). At the federal level, the elections are generally held in November of even-years: The President and the Vice-President (VP) of the US are elected nationwide every four years, and their mandate can be confirmed for another cycle, making the same person able to rule the country for a maximum of eight years consecutively. While the representatives of the House are elected for a two-year term in a single-seat constituency, the senators are elected for six years (two for each constituency/State) with a renewal of one-third of them every two years.

As clear from what just said, one of the most distinctive facts of the American political system is the climate of continuous electoral campaigning typical of the system just presented. The American citizens are called to vote for their representative at least once every two years for the federal level, plus all the state and regional elections that may occur in the same period (mayoral, district etc.). This creates a system in which the electoral body is overwhelmed by the number of elections it is called to express a preference for and causes a general apathy towards politics, which will be presented later. The number of election calls, and the resulting indifference which it creates, is the

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[7] Madison, J., Hamilton, A., Jay, J., & Kramnick, I. (1987). The federalist papers. Harmondsworth: Penguin.

starting point of the analysis presented in this dissertation, in order to understand whether the public opinion is formed consciously or not in the pre-electoral period and the impact that this might have on the whole process.

On the way to the nomination: The primaries

Alongside to the factual elections that were mentioned above, at both federal and national-level, another major component of the elections is the system of the **Primaries**. The United States is generally considered by political scientists[8] as a system in which parties are 'fluid' (not strong), citizens' partisanship is volatile and the voting expression is based on personalities, more on that later. The primaries elections are the major instrument that parties use in order to select their representatives that run for offices at most of the levels of the system. Before briefly explaining how the primaries work, it is important to underline once more the pressure of politics on the citizens. Not only they are called to cast a vote more than once every two years (at least), but also the system asks them to participate in the selection process of candidates that run for those elections. Simultaneously, the environment is fully contaminated by news and info regarding all those elections, creating a climate of electoral campaign on a 24/7 scale.

The institute of the primaries is something which has been created to select the nominees for different offices. Born in the early 1900, the first primary was held in Oregon in 1910, as the state was given a bill *'to extend the Direct Primary Nominating Elections law as to include presidential campaigns and nominations'*[9]. Even if the philosophy behind is the same, the application of this process is different when it comes to different elections. For the interest of the discourse, the analysis presented regards only

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[8] Zielinski, J., Slomczynski, K. M., & Shabad, G. (2005). Electoral Control in New Democracies: The Perverse Incentives of Fluid Party Systems. World Politics, (Vol. 57).

[9] Haynes, G., H. (1911). "People's Rule" in Oregon, 1910. Political Science Quarterly, 26(1), 32–62.

the presidential primary process for those who seek the presidency. Technically the procedure of selecting candidates starts between January and February of the election-year with the first states called to select their favorite candidate (Iowa and New Hampshire), however practically the campaign begins many months before the election-day, sometimes even years. In the case of the 2016 elections, the first personality (Hillary Clinton) running for the democratic party <u>appeared on the stages as a candidate more than a year before the elections</u>[10] while her first in time opponent (Sen. Ted Cruz) in the republican field made <u>his appearance more than 15 months before the elections</u>[11]. Even if the speculation on who was going to run was a solid part of media announcements before the first candidacies, the news coverage really started from that time on.

'*Primary elections are an American invention, just as Americans invented public opinion polls, drive-through restaurants, and other means of democratizing life.*'[12] (Hershey, 2015). The <u>direct primary</u> - often called simply primary or primary election - is an institution regulated by Party, federal and state laws[13] which allow the electorate of a certain party to choose the personalities that will run for the general elections seeking the oval office at the White House. Unlikely the general elections, in which every American citizen older than 18 years and with full voting right can cast his preference, the primary elections follow a different system. Firstly, it is important to say that the

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[10] Chozick, A. (2015, April 12). Hillary Clinton Announces 2016 Presidential Bid. The New York Times. Retrieved April 5, 2016, from http://www.nytimes.com/2015/04/13/us/politics/hillary-clinton-2016-presidential-campaign.html?_r=3

[11] Zezima, K. (March 23, 2015*)*. "Ted Cruz Announces He's Running for President"*.* The Washington Post. Retrieved March 28, 2016, from https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/post-politics/wp/2015/03/23/ted-cruz-announces-presidential-run/

[12] Hershey, M. R. (2015). Party politics in America (16th ed.). New York: Pearson Longman.

[13] For more information, see the Federal Election Commission at http://www.fec.gov/about.shtml and the Library of Congress of the United States at https://blogs.loc.gov/law/2016/02/state-primary-election-laws/

process that leads to the nomination for president of the US is not entirely decided through the primaries.

For the first 110 years, the American candidates seeking the highest office in the country were nominated by the relative parties (primarily through caucuses and later by means of party conventions). This system was consistently closed, and only the highest representatives of a certain party were allowed to have a say in the selecting process. The system changed alongside the society, and nowadays the nomination course includes both caucuses and primaries. This practice was never regulated in the constitution, and it is mainly a selection procedure that each party of the bipolar system presented through time. Of the fifty states composing the country, some states utilize **caucuses**, others instead call the people to vote in the primaries and few adopt a mixture of the two practices. The electoral events are not all held the very same day and follow a fixed schedule; between January/February and June the selection process determines the candidate that will run for president in November of the following year. If the primaries are overlooked by the state government of the state called to vote on a certain date, on the other side the caucuses are private events regulated by the different parties according to their will. The caucuses work differently for each party in every state but overall it is important to say that the voting procedure is similar to a primary but different for certain points of view. Firstly, caucuses are more time demanding: people are requested to meet in an agreed place at the same time and a discussion takes place. Representatives of each running candidate give speeches in order to change the mind of the people in the room. At the end of the event, each person attending the caucus is requested to cast a vote (Sometimes secret, sometimes by raising their hands) and the most voted candidate is declared the winner of the caucus. This generally takes place at the county level and the overall average of the various counties in a state gives the winner of the state.

The system of the primaries is radically different, and far more related to the basic research of this dissertation. On a certain date (generally on a different Tuesday along the whole nomination cycle) the population of a State is called to cast a vote for the preferred candidate among either the democratic or the republican party. Primaries types are multiples, according to the state and the party[14]. Eleven states provide <u>open primaries</u>, which allow any registered voter to express its vote in the election day, regardless of his or her political affiliation. Independents and members of one party can 'cross-over' and vote for any of the candidates in the list. On the other side, <u>closed primaries</u> (around a dozen states) consider eligible to vote only those who are registered as members of one of the two parties before the election day: independents are excluded from the system. The <u>hybrid system</u>, somewhere in between an open and closed primary, is the most used system. It varies from state to state, and from election cycle to election cycle. Sometimes unaffiliated are permitted, but it is the choice of the respective party.

Lastly, for understanding what will follow, mainly anyone older than 18 years and with full voting rights can participate as a candidate in the primary process. It is generally done filling a petition, and a certain amount of signatures and supporters has to be presented, depending on the specific state regulation or residency. The role of the party comes later, when it is time either to persuade a candidate to run or not to run, and the system of <u>endorsements</u>[15]. An endorsement represents a direct sign of appreciation and support to a candidate, and it generally comes from figures of the establishments as members of the congress, governors and party members. However, also public civil

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[14] NCSL. (2014, June 24). State Primary Election Types. National Conference of State Legislatures. Retrieved April 5, 2016, from http://www.ncsl.org/research/elections-and-campaigns/primary-types.aspx

[15] For a comprehensive understanding of the matter, see Hershey, M. R. (2015). Party politics in America (16th ed.) pp. 179-195. New York: Pearson Longman.

society is capable of endorsing candidates, and among the most powerful ones it is possible to find national media outlets and newspapers. The endorsements, together with polls, are among the most valuable and credible ways to measure the real power of a candidate in the pre-election period, when no other indicators are as successful as those are.

1.2 Polling and Survey Research

The previous sub-chapter presented briefly how the American political system works, focusing the attention on the premises that precedes the elections and the process which leads to the formation of new governments. The importance of a deep understanding of the subtended political dynamics in the analyzed country is clear when it comes to the study of the public opinion. The main question that arises in this sense is how polling interacts with what have been voiced above. As mentioned, polling is a solid presence through the course of any modern political campaign and according to some scholars is even able to shift and shape public opinion. However, firstly it is necessary to define the different terms.

Public Opinion and Misinformation

The first term worth attention has been mentioned already more than once in the introduction. Public opinion is the basic concept underlying the whole research of this dissertation. However, what is public opinion? The term was presented under different lights according to the different period in history. The interests on the opinion of the public were born with the philosophers of the 17th century as Hobbes and Lock, when the public sphere was called to decide 'together' over the importance of an accepted general government to rule. With the raising of survey methodology, H. Blumer in the fifties

raised the question on what polling was really measuring, considering that everyone talking about public opinion did not have a clear idea of what the essence of the concept was[16]. **Public opinion is essentially the collective opinion of many, on particular given issues**. **It is an aggregate information collection reflecting attitudes and behaviors of a certain society.** Mainly, public opinion is what the society (as a whole) thinks of something. Still, with the definition just presented, it is still hard to catch the inner substance of the concept. However, if considering the actual way to measure public opinion, the matter seems easier to understand: a marketing survey asking which candy's color seems more desirable produces red as a favorite choice for the 70% of the respondents among a certain group of people. The opinion of the public[17] (people interviewed) is that red is the most desirable color.

Whether or not public opinion exists as such, or is simply an aggregation of individual preferences hard to treat as one, is irrelevant for the purposes of this study. <u>Public opinion is thought to be measured, therefore it is a real component</u>. The creation of a state of mind in which opinions are measured and collected becomes in this sense a crucial part to understand, especially when, in the name of this collective opinion, personalities are presented (or not) to the vast public[18]. For this reason, from now on, public opinion will be considered as a pertinent and real thing, subject to measurability.

Since Public Opinion is considered as a real part of everyday political and media coverage life, the question which is important to address is: 'how do people form opinions'? The cognitive process of acquiring and processing information has been matter

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[16] See Blumer, H. (Oct. 1948). Public Opinion and Public Opinion Polling. American Sociological Review, Volume 13, Issue 5.

[17] It is the opinion of the whole group when it is done respecting the statistical properties of sampling.

[18] Fox News and Facebook for the GOP 2016 first debate appearance of the candidates stated that the candidates must have been in the first five spots on national polls (national public opinion).

of study for centuries and it is hard to think to unravel it in a short chapter. However, it is important to think about it in the sense that shaping the opinions of individuals results in shaping the whole public opinion. In an interesting article regarding misinformation[19], Nyhan and Reifler talk about how U.S. citizens and even journalists utilize the data they process, and how this affects the democratic process of casting conscious preferences and votes. One of the most astonishing statements they make is that Americans are not only **uninformed** about politics and policies, but (even worse) they are **misinformed**. Moreover, their findings and the doctrine are pessimistic on this point: it is far harder to change a wrong belief than it is to convince someone of something. The main takeaway is that people '*seek out information that is consistent with their pre-existing views and avoid information that contradicts their prior beliefs'* (Nyhan and Reifler, 2012*)*, phenomenon called selective exposure. This goes together with the idea that people hold opinions on things even without knowing anything about the thing itself: an easy step is to think what my party thinks. The experiments presented in the study regarded Pres. Obama, whether he was a Muslim or not and whether he was born in the U.S or not (See Figure 1 and 2, below). Despite of the fact that Obama is a Christian and it was born in the state of Hawaii, still a majority of republicans believed that he was neither of them, after false information's campaign was affecting his popularity. Eventually, the two scholars found that even when a false info is corrected, it is still affecting the opinion of people.

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[19]Nyhan, B., Reifler, J. (2012). Misinformation and Fact-Checking: Research Findings from Social Science. Media Policy Initiative. New America Foundation.

Figure 1: **Obama's Religion**

Percentage of GOP that believed Obama is...
...Christian   ...Muslim

Legend: 2009, 2010
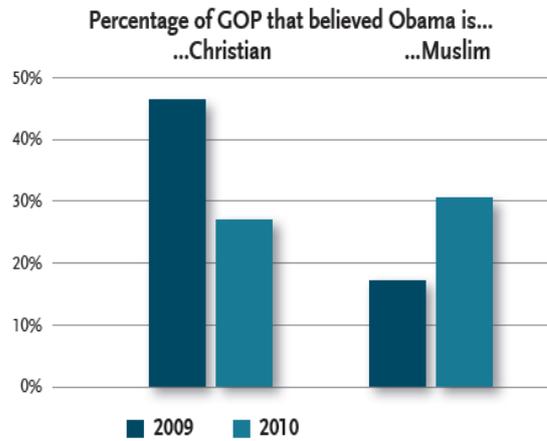
Source: Nyhan and Reifler, 2012

Figure 2: Obama's Citizenship and 9/11 Conspiracy

Percentage that believed...
- Obama not born in United States
- 9/11 conspiracy in federal government

DEMOCRATS   INDEPENDENTS   REPUBLICANS

(Scripps-Howard poll July 6–24, 2006; CNN poll July 16–21, 2010)
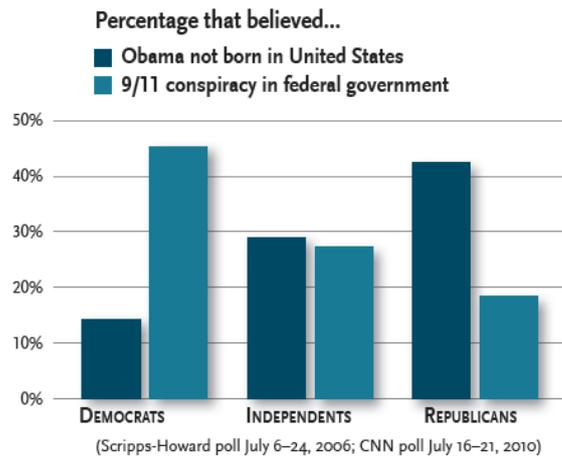
Source: Nyhan and Reifler, 2012

All that in order to consider, how can we rely on polls, especially in political polls, if people are misinformed, or not informed? Moreover, how can people cast preferences if they are not aware of whom they are voting for?

Polling: An Historical Overview

Generally speaking, modern polling and the measurement of public preferences are considered a young field of study. Even if the attention on what people thought has always been of interest for the ruling class, it was only with the 1940s that a real school of thought started to practice statistical measurement on social behaviors and opinions. Since then, the art of the survey has been exponentially growing, and different scholars[20] detect three well distinct frames on the timeline. From the end of the 19th century until nowadays, '*twelve hundred polling organizations conducted nearly thirty-seven thousand polls by making more than three billion phone calls*', reported Lepore in her study.

The first period, according to Groves, went from the 30s until the 60s of the 20th century. The first decade of the gap saw a flourishing increase of statistical studies in the United States, birthplace of the subject. At the beginning, surveys were mainly area-based, and clustering was the main technique utilized, and the interviews were conducted live with people in the street (in-person interviews) or through regular mail. The initial discussion in the field was based on whether to ask open or close questions and on the statistical basis of the findings, given the hard time in comparing the sample with the target population of a certain area. Regarding the response rate - number of people who are willing to answer compared to those contacted for a poll - (cornerstone of many of nowadays problems related to polling's credibility) those were the golden years[21]: every respondent was happy to interface this new democratic method and felt his opinion was deeply valuable. By the end of the period, with the improvement of telephone technology

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[20]For more information, See: Groves, R. M. (2011). '*Three Eras of Survey Research*'. Public Opinion Quarterly, Vol. 75, No. 5, 2011, pp. 861-871

[21]According to a study published on the New Yorker by Lepore, the response rate during the Great Depression period was around 90%.

and development of the practice, survey had become a real instrument to investigate what people's attitudes were towards many phenomena, and politics was one of them.

The second age of polling lasted until the 1990s, the so-called era of expansion. The main protagonists of this period were essentially the telephone and the good connections of landlines that were established. The creation of solid sampling frames (list of possible interviewees) was a natural consequence and the development of telephone interviews (CATI) reached its peak. Another important aspect is the usage of computers for the analysis of data, which before required time and implied human-mistakes. Now, with the implementation of machines in the data analysis, the velocity of the process increased a lot. Eventually, another major cause for the expansion of survey research was the fact that people started to realize the inner potentiality of the field. Not only private businessman, but also the federal government saw in polling the possibility of detecting public opinion, and set according to individuals' preferences the agenda to extend the consensus. This fact is intrinsically important for the following research, in relation to the idea that polling can radically change candidates' attitudes towards campaigns. However, especially during the last years of the period, polling was not perceived anymore as something new and worth absolute attention: this resulted in an inevitable decrease in the response rate, therefore a greater margin of error (statistical possibility of error in response detection).

The third and (*maybe*) last era of polling started with the big technological and social changes of the '90s. Response rate begun to decrease drastically, yet was not the only problem. The introduction of mobile telephone technology and the deterioration of landline coverage created important issues in the assessing of sample frames. The major controversy was - and still is - the possibility of contacting more times the same person

(overrepresentation), and never different type of individuals (underrepresentation), skewing in this sense the statistical basis of survey methodology. Also, the phenomenon of globalization and the introduction in the system of area mobility made indirectly complicated the area-based samples, with people moving in the country within a short period of time[22]. The rise of the internet, however, offered a new breeze in the field, creating the possibility of interviewing people either via e-mail or directly via web (CAWI). On the other side, the internet alone is a source of statistical information only if methodologically well done, and this is not the general path.

The curve detected may seem diminishing and the tone used pessimistic. The raise in the costs of data collection, the falling of response rate, the impossibility to avoid statistical mistakes, margin of errors, partial clusters: these are among the many problems that polling and the survey field have to face every day. However, researches on public opinion are still amid the most important aspects in elections, and shortly this relevance will be presented. The analysis of voting behavior, which will be presented in chapter 3.1, suggests that many Americans care little about politics in general, and even less when the elections are off-cycle and local. The following sections will review more carefully what early polls are, and why they could be misleading.

Polling and Survey Methods

'*Polling may never have been less reliable, or more influential, than it is now*'[23].As stated by J. Lepore from *The New Yorker*, the importance of polling as an instrument is worldwide recognized. Nowadays more than ever, polling is a prominent

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[22] Problem in creating lasting sample frames.
[23] Lepore, J. (2015, November 15). Politics and the New Machine: What the turn from polls to data science means for democracy. The New Yorker. Retrieved April 5, 2016, from http://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2015/11/16/politics-and-the-new-machine

part of our lives. However, what exactly a political opinion poll is, and how it works, is something shady and worth some attention. '***Public opinion polls are but a statistical snapshot of a certain moment in time***'[24] (Newport, F. et al.,2009). The definition given by Newport is the one I believe get the closest to what an opinion poll is. It is short, but provides profound information. However, some additional conceptualization results necessary: an opinion poll is based on the idea that public opinion, which has been discussed in a previous subchapter, can be measured and it is somewhat valuable for different markets. In order to have *absolute* data on what people think, it would be necessary to ask the same question to every citizen of a certain country. This form of survey takes the name of census, and it is extremely expensive and time consuming. Obviously, to have a concrete and reliable outcome based also on relatively small sources, it is impossible to survey the whole population of a country in a timely manner, especially in the case of the United States (more than 300 million inhabitants). Moreover, surveys and polls are an instrument used by politicians, media and marketing, which reduces it to a service based on profits. For this reason, pollsters have to be cost-efficient: the expenditure to provide the information to the client has to be lower than the earnings. As a result, election pollster samples an incredibly smaller percentage of the population of a country – generally in the scale of few thousand – with the statistical promise of representing the whole population. If, theoretically, few thousands participants are more than enough to drag general paths of the entire citizens, some issues arise, skewing to some extent the data[25].

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[24]Newport, F. et al. (2009). Winning the White House, 2008: The Gallup poll, public opinion, and the presidency. New York: Facts on File.
[25] For a full and comprehensive explanation, see Groves, R. M. (2004). Survey methodology. Hoboken, NJ: J. Wiley.

However, survey data are important for politicians under many perspectives: they help to make important decisions (as if it is useful to continue to run for office or it is better to retire etc.) and the timing of polls production and delivery is oftentimes short; generally, polls data have to be provided to the commissioner couple of days after the poll conduction in order to keep the info updated. Many things can change in a few hours when it comes to politics.

Summarizing, a political opinion poll is a survey based on statistical theory tempting to create a valid and respectful picture of societal attitudes towards political issues representing a whole society. The society taken into consideration can be of many types. The most common ones are based on areas: the whole population of a country (national poll); the population of a certain state (state poll) or cluster by cluster the area can be decreased. Another type of poll is based on societal clusters like group age, occupation, gender etc.: this will be the case for the student cluster of North Carolina State University, case study presented in the second part of this thesis. The ability of creating a representative picture of the target population (society taken into consideration) in a certain period of time is not easy. For this reason, many polls are considered bad, however it is possible to drag valid information too.

The information gathered through public opinion's measurements is oftentimes gold for the candidates, both at the state and federal level. The most basic information that a running candidate needs to achieve is how he is seen by the electorate. The second most important aspect is to understand what the opinions of the other candidates are, where they come from. Polling is able to provide tons of data, like the appreciation of candidates by gender, group ages, social status, work status and many others: all those cues are necessary for the campaign manager of a candidate in order to assess how

strongly it is necessary to focus on specific clusters of people. One self-explaining example is the interest of Bernie Sanders, Senator of Vermouth and running candidate for the nomination of 2016, to collect the votes of the black population in the southern states of the United States of America[26]. Important polls had shown how strongly that part of population was supporting his opponent, Hillary Clinton, and this gave great info into the hands of Sen. Sanders.

Another important aspect of opinion poll when it comes to primaries is how well recognizable is a certain candidate. This information allows nominee seekers to determine how much money and funds are necessary, to run efficiently their campaign. A solid concern is represented by issues-opinion. Oftentimes, public opinion's view on specific matters is what makes candidates win or lose the nomination. Due to this reason, candidates run polls in different constituencies and states and adjust their discourses and speeches according to what the public thinks of them. Again, in the states with larger amount of independents, candidates tend to mitigate their statements about issues, in order to get as much favorability as possible among the less partisan population spectrums; on the other side when it comes to partisan states (California for the democrats, for instance) speeches are partisan-driven and strong. Without the information provided by polls on public preferences, campaigning becomes a 'guessing game' without statistical forecasting possibilities; with information, a candidate can formulate camping plans (Stonecash, 2003). Poll results tell candidates where they stand: how well known they are (name recognition), which sectors of the society know them (cluster based), and what people think. Polls also tell candidates about the opinions or attitudes of the electorate,

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[26]Israel-Trummel, M., & Schachter, A. (2016, February 18). New poll shows that black voters really aren't 'Feeling the Bern'. The Washington Post - Monkey Cage. Retrieved April 5, 2016, from https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/monkey-cage/wp/2016/02/18/new-poll-shows-that-black-voters-really-arent-feeling-the-bern/

who holds those opinions, and how people with differing preferences are likely to vote. The challenge for a poll analyst is to interpret this information and tell a candidate how to deal with the electorate to win an election (Stonecash, 2003)[27].

Early-Polls

Polling creates one of the most profitable actions of news coverage for media, and even more when it comes to elections (Benoit, Stein, & Hansen,2005[28]; Stromback & Dimitrova,2006[29]; Stromback & Shehata,2007[30]). With the rising of 24/7 news channels in mainstream information services, analysis and polls became a way to fill out the spare time between other kind of news. It is important to keep in mind what has been mentioned above: especially in the United States, News Organizations are mainly private and their scope is to make profits. Unsurprisingly, this creates a climate in which electoral campaigns never end, and polling about possible candidates starts the day after one election is completed.

Several scholars described, in the past few decades, how early election polls can be misleading and misinterpreted. However, this does not necessarily mean that polling far from the elections is not important or that it fails to provide some information to those who know what to look for (Lang, K., & Lang, G. E. 1984[31]). The most common criticism is not against polling itself, but more often to media organizations conducting them and

[27] Stonecash, J. M. (2003). '*Political polling: Strategic information in campaigns*'. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield.
[28] Benoit, W. L., Stein, K. A., & Hansen, G. J. (2005). New York Times coverage of Presidential campaigns. Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly,82(2),356–376
[29] Strömbäck J., Dimitrova D. V. (2006). Political and media systems matter: A comparison of election news coverage in Sweden and the United States. Harvard International Journal of Press-Politics;11(4):131-147.
[30] Strömbäck J, Shehata A. (2007). Structural biases in British and Swedish election news coverage. Journalism Studies;8(5):798-812.
[31] Lang K, Lang GE. (1984). The impact of polls on public opinion. Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science 472(1): 129–142

their poor interpretations of their own polls. Politicians and candidates use and misuse polls to support their thesis, showing they have the support of the people, but always taking into consideration only one side of the issue[32]. This can affect the public in several different ways and often those are not even perceived by the public itself. For instance, just being interviewed has been found to arise naturally the interest in politics and encourage some respondents to inform themselves better and have a deeper understanding of the matter (Lang, K., & Lang, G. 1984)[33]. On the other side, another well-known phenomenon takes place in the process of research information. Once pushed by the environment to look for new thinking, people often tend to inform themselves on partisan sources and not to change mind, as reported in the paragraph on opinion formation. This effect creates a cycle that pushes the public into the loop of ideas' reinforcing, no matter if the assumptions on which those ideas are based are true or false.

Many Americans will choose a candidate when asked for whom they would vote for 'if the elections were held today' (Gallup, A. 2010). This question can be full of meaning and well predicting the results of the elections when asked closed to those elections. <u>On the other side, when this question is asked far from the election day, polling results offer little predictive value</u>. This can be due to several facts. One, is that people tend to form opinions on candidates close to the time in which they are called to express their vote. As the amount of information covered by the media increases as the election day nears, people learn more about the candidates. Another reason, supported by the data

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[32] Trump often uses his polls numbers to create an environment of confidence among his voters. When not leading, it is either people or polling's fault.
Earle, G. (2016, October 27). 'If I lose Iowa, I will never speak to you people again': Trump says. Retrieved April 14, 2016, from http://nypost.com/2015/10/27/ben-carson-surpasses-donald-trump-in-new-national-poll/
[33] Other influences can be detected in the 'bandwagon' effect, the idea that the single follow the mass, or could shape public opinion in discouraging to vote someone that has no chances to win, especially in majority voting system. (Lang, Lang, 1984). Lang K, Lang GE (1984) The impact of polls on public opinion. Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science 472(1): 129–142

collected and exposed in the successive part of this paper, could be that average Americans care little about politics in general (a little bit more than one out of two Americans vote at the general elections), and even less when it comes to primaries or lower competition's levels. Despite of all those issues, this does not mean that early polling is meaningless or worthless, but probably the way it is done – on average - does measure something different that individual's preferences on candidates.

The fact that the same question could be interpreted in different ways when asked according to the distance in time to the election arises an interesting but big problematic. When asked about preferences close to the elections, individuals use to give the option they had in mind either for a long time (shaped by party identification or external factors) or despite of how much they pondered the answer, the option they had been more exposed to. The idea is that the closer to the time of the vote, the harder it is that people change radically their minds. However, this assumption has to take into consideration that in general elections is harder to change political party's preference due to the big difference in ideology between the two counterparts, but in primaries this effect could be mitigated by the closeness among candidates. Nevertheless, the importance of polling itself is in fact the interpretation. The question is asked in the exact same way, with the exact same answer options, but the results of the polls, in correlation to the true outcome of the election, change according to time. For this reason, the analysis of the data cannot preclude the interpretation of external factors.

Said that, several studies have shown how early polls in primary elections can be incredibly distant from true election's outcomes. One of those studies, conducted by Nate

Silver and Harry Enten at FiveThirtyEight[34], shows clearly what it has been discussed in the past few pages. The analysis takes into consideration the general elections starting from 1948 until the last presidential of 2014 regarding the polling accuracy a year before the elections. What they found should not surprise: a year before the elections, polls are little predictive of the real outcome. On the other side, interestingly the absolute error's average is considerably high, as shown in Figure 3.[35]

Figure 3: Polling Accuracy a Year Before the Election

ELECTION	POLLING ACCURACY A YEAR BEFORE THE ELECTION		
	AVERAGE GOP POLL LEAD	GOP ELECTION MARGIN	ABSOLUTE ERROR
1964	-50.3	-22.6	27.7
1992	+21.0	-5.6	26.1
1980	-15.5	+9.7	25.2
2000	+11.9	-0.5	12.4
1984	+7.2	+18.2	11.0
1988	+18.0	+7.7	10.3
2008	-0.3	-7.3	6.9
1956	+22.0	+15.4	6.6
1944	-14.0	-7.5	6.5
2004	+8.7	+2.5	6.2
1996	-13.0	-8.5	4.5
1960	+3.0	-0.2	3.2
2012	-2.8	-3.9	1.0
1948	-3.8	-4.5	0.7
Average			10.6

Source: FiveThirtyEight

More than the 20% of the elections taken into consideration had a polling error of 25 points or more from the actual outcome, meaning that the attitudes measured were either non-attitudes or were not strongly held at that time. Many things could have happened in between to make people change their mind because politics in general and

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[34] Study conducted by Nate Silver, American statistician founder of the polling blog FiveThirtyEight in 2007 and reporter for ABC News. Enten, H. (2015, November 9). A Year Out, Ignore General Election Polls They have little relationship to the final outcome. Retrieved February 24, 2016, from http://fivethirtyeight.com/features/a-year-out-ignore-general-election-polls/

[35] Silver, N., Enten, H. (2015) http://fivethirtyeight.com/features/a-year-out-ignore-general-election-polls/

electoral consensus in particular move faster than anything else, and candidates gain and lose approval due to both external factors and their behavior. The average is around 10 percentage points, meaning that early polls in general elections have some sort of predictive value, but is subject to great error in special cases.

An interesting point was made by the Washington Post's reporter Philip Bump, who analyzed different horse-races and match-ups a year before the nomination's elections in the last three competitions, the one of 2004, 2008 and 2012[36]. The journalist observes, 'At any given moment in the four most recent contested nomination processes, the person who was leading didn't always turn out to be the nominee. Often didn't.'[37]. Clinton and Giuliani are one of the most interesting examples in this sense, leading respectively for 83 days by almost 20 points the democratic field (Clinton) and almost 50 days with the 10% more of preferences than the other GOP candidates when it comes to Rudy Giuliani.

Party identification is an important attitude that influences vote choices (Campbell et al. 1960[38]; Lewis-Beck et al. 2008[39]). When it comes to primaries, due to the lack of strong attachment to ideology, which plays a great role in generals, the relative error is even greater and preference's shifts from one candidate to another are considerably according to the time. For this reason, in order to sustain the assumption that early polls are little predictive, an empirical experiment took place among student at the North

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[36] Bump, P. (2015, August 19). Here's who was winning the presidential race four, eight and 12 years ago today. Retrieved January 20, 2016, from https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/the-fix/wp/2015/08/19/heres-who-was-winning-the-presidential-race-four-eight-and-12-years-ago-today/

[37] Data from Real Clear Politics' polling average in 2008 and 2012 and all polling data from Gallup's 2004 surveys. (http://www.realclearpolitics.com/)

[38] Campbell, A., Converse P. E., Miller E. W., and Stokes, D. E. 1960. The American voter. New York: John Wiley & Sons.

[39] Lewis-Beck, Michael S., Jacoby, W. G., Norpoth, H. and Weisberg, H. F. 2008. The American Voter Revisited. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press.

Carolina University regarding the primaries that will take place in 2016 for the nomination in both parties.

The experiment of the survey used as a guideline for testing of the hypotheses replicated an important founding of the literature. Several authors[40] discovered the importance of the intensity of beliefs in survey research, especially political polls (Gallup, 2009. Moore, 2008). Mainstream news organizations often care little about accuracy, as we said, their main scope is to create fascinating stories to attract the public and make profits. For this reason, due to cost-efficiency, media tend to ask as few questions as possible, without taking into consideration many important aspects that should always be taken into account.

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[40] Gallup, A., & Newport, F. (2010). The Gallup Poll: Public opinion 2009. Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Pub. Pp 103; 524-525 and Moore, D. W. (2008). The opinion makers: An insider exposes the truth behind the polls. Boston: Beacon Press. Pp 112-119.

2. Methodology and Expectations

In order to test the hypotheses mentioned in the introduction, a study on the North Carolina State University (NCSU) student population had been conducted in the fall 2015, more than four months before the first primary election and almost a year preceding the general election of November 2016. The study saw the administration of a political opinion poll on a sample of 4500 undergraduate students attending the University: among the different general questions[41] – as gender, age, social extraction, year in college – several other questions have been included to measure the different aspects of the matter described in the previous chapters.

Firstly, the students were asked questions regarding their knowledge about the current political situation in their country in the form of 'how closely have you been following…' to measure the attention towards political news and political interest, second indicator of the analysis. My expectation on this question - considering subchapter 4.1, regarding voter turnouts, and the assumption that average Americans care little about politics - was that a small percentage of the student population was paying attention to political news.

Secondly, students were asked the most common question of a political poll since the great depression: 'As of today, who would you vote for…'. This question was included in order to track students' preferences in regard of the up-coming primary elections. Alongside to the question regarding the primary, different possible matches up were presented for the general elections in order to test different hypotheses a year far

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[41] These are questions considered inevitable in order to drag information from the different social groups. Candidates use those question to decide which clusters (Youth, Female, Unemployed) are worth a special attention in order to have better results.

from the actual date. Only the most probable candidates were included in the study, in order not to stress too much the respondents, and deduce valuable information from them: for this reason, the two most liked candidates of the Democratic party were included (Sen. Clinton (D) and Sen. Sanders (D)) and 'only' Mr. Trump (R), Sen. Rubio (R), Mr. Carson (R) and J. Bush (R) were included in the analysis. The decision not to propose a match-up between the democratic candidates and Sen. Ted Cruz (R) (nowadays close to the front runner Donald Trump on the way to the nomination) was made by the team because the questions were already many, and at that time Cruz was not polling well among students. With the wisdom of hindsight, it would have been interesting to include the Texan republican candidate in the poll, in order to see how the attention shifted if he will be the running candidate for president 2016. My expectations in this sense saw Sanders outclassing Clinton in the democratic primary poll and winning in the general elections matches-up: this assumption was based on the fact that generally, students are more inclined to be democrats and the common trend in that period detected Sanders as the candidate of the youth. On the republican side, no real expectations were made, considering the solid number of candidates on the stage, and the difficulty that this implies for the polling industry.

Alongside to those political questions, way more important for the purpose of the analysis that will shortly be presented, an experiment was made in order to enumerate the consistency of students' conviction when answering who they would vote for. The experiments replicated a question proposed by Gallup in his polls and asked respondents how intense was the choice they just made. The question testing how strongly students made up their mind regarding the candidate – more than four months before the elections

– was expected to produce a huge number of negative responses[42], in order to be consistent with the idea that early polls are little predictive of the future race.

2.1 Poll Methodology

To extrapolate information for the testing of the assumptions above mentioned, a survey instrument was constructed, in the form of an opinion poll. This was possible thanks to the work of '*The PackPoll*'[43], an independent project of survey research at the North Carolina State University I worked with, during the year 2015. The survey in question was conducted over a five days' period between **November, 5th and November,10th 2015**, more than four months away from the first state primary competition[44] and pretty far away from the final candidates' nominations. The survey was implemented over the internet (CAWI) with the *Qualtrics* software. The sample frame was based on 4'500 units, selected randomly among the university undergraduate population of NCSU and the sample size saw 1'172 respondents, who accepting to take part in the poll: yet, only **1062** students fully answered the whole question-set (from the first to the last question). The sampling error was counted as +/-2.93% for completed interviews and questions asked to the full sample; this error might be higher for sub-groups and questions asked to portions of the full sample (like the match-ups, administered to only half of the sample). The response rate reached the 24% for completed interviews and a little more adding partial interviews (26%). Post-stratification sample

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[42] 'Negative responses' means little strong opinions over candidates' preferences.
[43] http://packpoll.com/ retrieved on April, 10th 2016
[44] First scheduled primary (subject to possible changes): New Hampshire, February 9th 2016 (Primary) and Iowa February 1st 2016 (Caucus). Andrews, W., Bennet, K., & Parlapiano, A. (2016, January 1). 2016 Delegate Count and Primary Results. Retrieved April 1, 2016, from http://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2016/us/elections/primary-calendar-and-results.html?_r=0 Updated April 22nd, 2016

weights were not applied because sample demographics closely approximated the known student parameters for age, year in school and gender[45].

The poll included several topics among which immigration, abortion, death penalty and many more. Copious queries were asked in the form of experiments, in order to test different assumptions, including different questions' wording, peculiar answer options and quotes' attributions[46]. For the purpose of this dissertation, only part of the questions asked will be analyzed. <u>The questions regarding the '*made up mind*' experiment were asked to the whole sample (N: 1062) according to party identification, as well as question related to news attention.</u> Those who claimed to be independent were asked if they were leaning towards either the Republican or the Democratic party: if so, they were included in the experiment as supporters of the relative party of preference in order to simplify the analysis. On the other side, questions concerning the possible match-ups in the 2016 presidential race were asked to half of the sample (N=531) on a random basis, in order not to charge the respondents with too many questions. However, the statistical properties were respected, therefore all the data can be considered reliable for the purpose of the study.

2.2 Data Analysis

As a matter of fact, media polls rarely ask respondents if they have really decided who they will support. The reason of that can be found in the fact that <u>each additional</u>

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[45] Full report available at: http://packpoll.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/11/Toplines-Fall-2015-Big-Poll.pdf

[46] A question regarding the possibility of building a wall on the borderline between Mexico and the United States of America has been attributed once to Donald Trump, once to 'some experts' and another time to unspecified people. The experiment has shown that according to the person who attributed the quote to, people's reaction to that changed, and also the public opinion on building a wall. For more info, see http://packpoll.com/state-students-opposed-to-building-a-border-wall/

question increases the cost of the poll administration and media outlets - profit driven –
do not spend money on 'uninteresting' data. One set of Gallup findings, though, when
they looked into this, found that a year before the elections at least one third of
respondents had not made up their mind about the candidates[47] they are going to support.
In the 'PackPoll' poll, the respondents were given the opportunity to select among three
choices, as shown in the Figure 4[48], and generally speaking (total amount of Republicans
and Democrats) **a considerable number of people did not have already decided
several months before the election's date (35%).**

Figure 4: Overall Decision Level
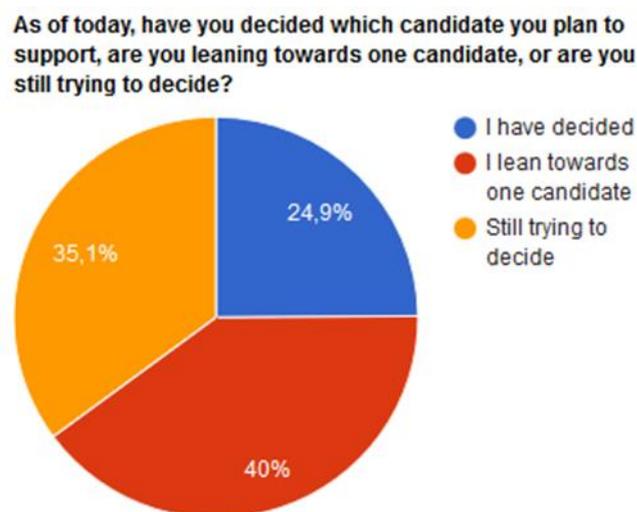
Source: The PackPoll

When it comes to people that have already made up their mind, the results are
unsurprisingly lower: less than one American out of four have a clear idea of who he/she
is going to vote in the primary elections. This raises the question; why do the Media give
so much attention to results that are clearly non-attitudes? The importance that this

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[47] This changes from election to election, depending on external issues that drive attention to
candidates (I.e. scandals, war etc.). Gallup, A. The Gallup Poll Public Opinion, 2009.
[48] The question asked was split by party identification. The numbers reported are a sum of the
republicans and the democrats that answer the relative question.

question has in terms of accuracy and precision a year before the elections is relevant; people do not form their opinion about candidates that far from the time in which they are called to vote. When forced to choose without a no-opinion option, respondents will usually pick something (Moore,2008). The interesting question is why do some candidates get more support when respondents are forced to pick, if they haven't really decided. Several can be the explanations that push people to choose someone even if they are not sure. They could be polite and give an answer to fill the survey. It could be that they are considering preferable one candidate among the others, but they do not feel as they are consistently leaning to that candidate. Or they maybe just want to be done with the questions, so they pick the first one among the list presented to them. Despite of the reasons, this fact is something that oftentimes happens and should be analyzed for fair information. The main takeaway from this experiment could be resumed in the phrase 'pay attention to what you read'. It has been demonstrated that news organizations often do care little about what we discussed so far, for this reason their findings could be partial, biased, misleading or simply the result of wrong interpretations.

Another aspect that has to be considered when talking about polling, especially in the above mentioned cases, is related to what methodologists call **'validity'**. It is considered one of the most important possible errors in survey design, as well as one of the hardest to identify. Validity is the extent to which the measure is related to the underlying construct[49] (Groves et al. 2004). In plain English, it is related to how much the survey itself is measuring and representing the concept that the survey outlet wants to express. In other words, validity is the level of **proximity** between the data collected and the concept that the survey wanted to measure. To give an example, if a pollster wants to

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[49] Groves, R. M. (2004). Survey methodology. Hoboken, NJ: J. Wiley

measure the favorite color of a certain sample, it is necessary to include a question which asks exactly what the favorite color is, among those proposed (or as an open-ended question[50]). If the pollster asks a partial or cuing question, the issue might be of a misleading tracking of preferences. When it comes to electoral polling, this problem happens a lot. Most surveys poll on a national basis, even for primaries. On the other side, <u>primary elections are important on a state level because people are called to cast a vote for the nominee on a state basis[51].</u> This issue is strongly interconnected with the fact that polls can affect the importance and attention focus that is given to different candidates.

When asking about candidate's preferences on a nationwide level, news organizations create percentages that are little representative of what the American citizens think in reality. The national trend towards one candidate can be misleading, considering that competitors have to pass and win most state elections based on either caucuses, or primaries in order to gain the presidential nomination[52]. This issue does not appear consistently in the poll conducted by the PackPoll because the sample utilized was almost entirely from the state of North Carolina, and the same sample will vote in the North Carolina's primary. However, when compared with specific polls based on a similar target population and with same underlying rules, the trend is pretty similar even in states far from North Carolina. For this reason, the results can be considered representative of the student population nationwide, even if topical of a central-southern state.

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[50] Questions who provide more options than a simple 'yes, no, no-opinion'. Generally, they are structured with a blank space where the respondents can write whatever they feel get closer to their view.

[51] Example of validity problem.

[52] The problems arise when media outlets utilize national trends to interpret state primary races and data.

In politics, polling is increasingly visible and influential. Media outlets use polls and surveys to decide how much coverage candidates deserve. Party officials use polls to decide which candidates have to leave primary's races. Donors look at the polls to help them decide whether it's worth purchasing a particular candidate or not, and electors use polls to change their mind and use thoughtful vote-power. This inflates drastically the importance of polling, even of early polls, because it can affect the decisions on the way down to the presidential nominations.

3. American Interest in Politics

3.1 Electoral Turnouts

One of the major problematics arising when it comes to survey's evaluation is the method used to judge the survey itself. Different scholars and experts can, according to their judgment calls, decide to see the matter under specific points of view, more or less generally recognized. In order to support the relevance of the experiment on decisiveness – represented by the question 'have you made up your mind…'- I considered, as mentioned, the **electoral turnouts**. An analysis of this type puts every aspect of what has been talked about into perspective, and has an extraordinary power of self-explanation. When it comes to analyses in social sciences, as always, everything can be matter of argumentation: however, I consider the voter turnouts a clear indicator of how much Americans care about politics, and a good starting point in order to evaluate early polls. For this reason, the electoral turnouts study has been taken as the first indicator in the analytical process.

The major aspect to take into consideration in this sense is to quantify the number of people who 'generally' cast a vote. For the purpose of this investigation, 'to cast a vote' has been considered as the process which requires (at least) to be present at the polling station on the election day[53]; it does not matter what the voters vote for. According to The United States Election Project[54], turnouts at the **general elections** vary between 35% and the 60% of the total voting population: to give an image, nowadays in the United States

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[53] It is important to remember the registration process, which presents differences between general and primaries, and also among primaries themselves.

[54] The United States Elections Project is an information source for the US electoral system. Run by Dr. M.P. McDonald, Associate professor of Political Science at the University of Florida, the project seek transparency and provide information about electoral statistics. (http://www.electproject.org/home)

a little more than 200'000 million citizens are entitled to vote (on an overall population of more than 300'000 million). A 35% to 60% turnout reflects into between 70'000 million and 120 million voters for the general elections, (less than one third of the whole population). Figure 5 reports the turnouts of the eligible population in general elections between the years 1949 and 2012. The time period is consistent with the analysis, considering the '50s the beginning of the new era of modern political campaigns. As shown, the highest peaks were not even reaching seven Americans out of ten, and the average is a little less than one out of two. The path does not present a progressive decrease in the voting attitudes of the American citizens, arising questions regarding why people are so inconsistent when it comes to voting. Many explanations could be mentioned to answer these questions (party identification, appeal of different candidates, social situation, registration process[55]), however it is irrelevant to the subject of this study. **The core information achieved thanks to these data is that on average, around one out of two Americans goes to vote for the general elections**.

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[55] Among the requirements for voting in the United States, many elections require a registration in the electoral list of the different constituencies. This is generally recognized among the causes of decreasing turnouts. For a better understanding of the matter, see https://www.usa.gov/register-to-vote

Figure 5: Turnouts of U.S. Voting Eligible Population '48/'12

Turnout of U.S. Voting Eligible Population, 1948-2012
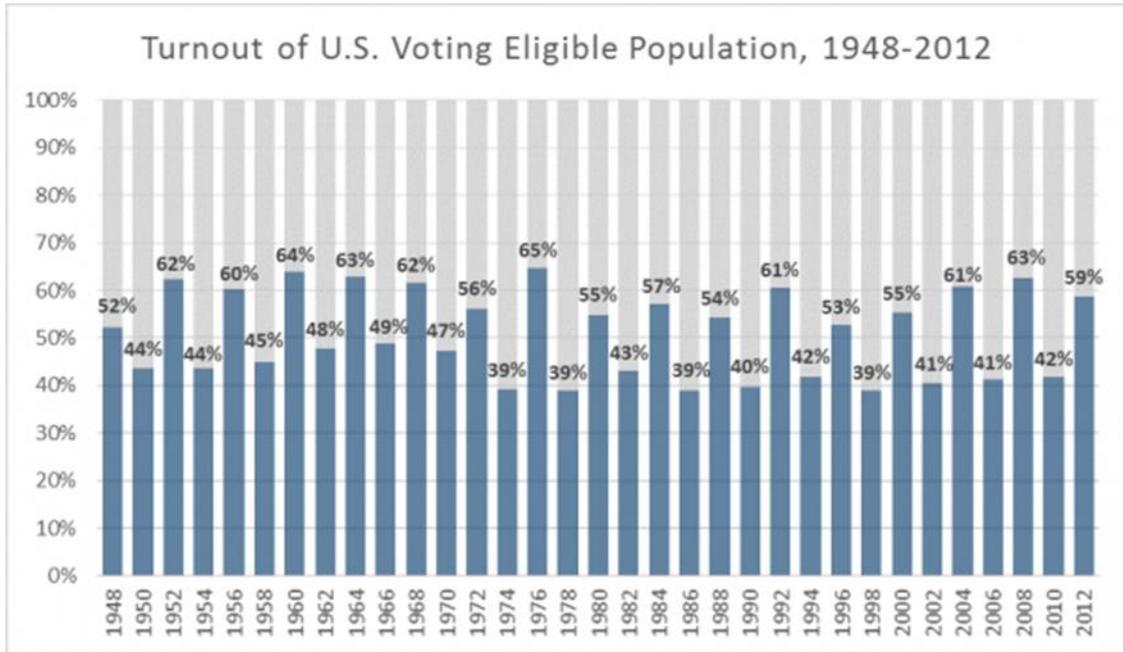
*Source: The United States Election Project*

On the other side, the situation changes if <u>primaries' turnouts</u> are under investigation. According to the Bipartisan Policy Center[56], turnouts for primary elections decline drastically if compared with the general elections' turnouts. As shown in Graph 1 and Figure 6, **the number of people that vote in primaries drops between half and one quarter of the same population.** The study was conducted taking into consideration the turnout trend, based on the highest statewide office for the primaries *overall* and the relative split by Party Identity is related to the specific case taken in exam[57]. The decision to consider just the past 12 years in the analysis is driven by the idea that U.S. society has changed a lot in the past 50 years[58], as well as the rules governing the electoral episodes, therefore to be compared to the 2016 primary the data has to be as similar as possible.

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[56] The Bipartisan Policy Center seek transparency and, regardless of party affiliation, try to make analysis and give an understanding of specific issues. (http://bipartisanpolicy.org/)
[57] The population taken into consideration is based on the voting-eligible population (VEP) and it is adjusted by population/year.
[58] For general information: Electoral turnouts in primary elections vary consistently among the different cycles. Firstly, Republicans has been found to be generally less responsive than their Dem. Counterparts.

Graph 1: Turnout General Elections vs. Primaries Split by Party
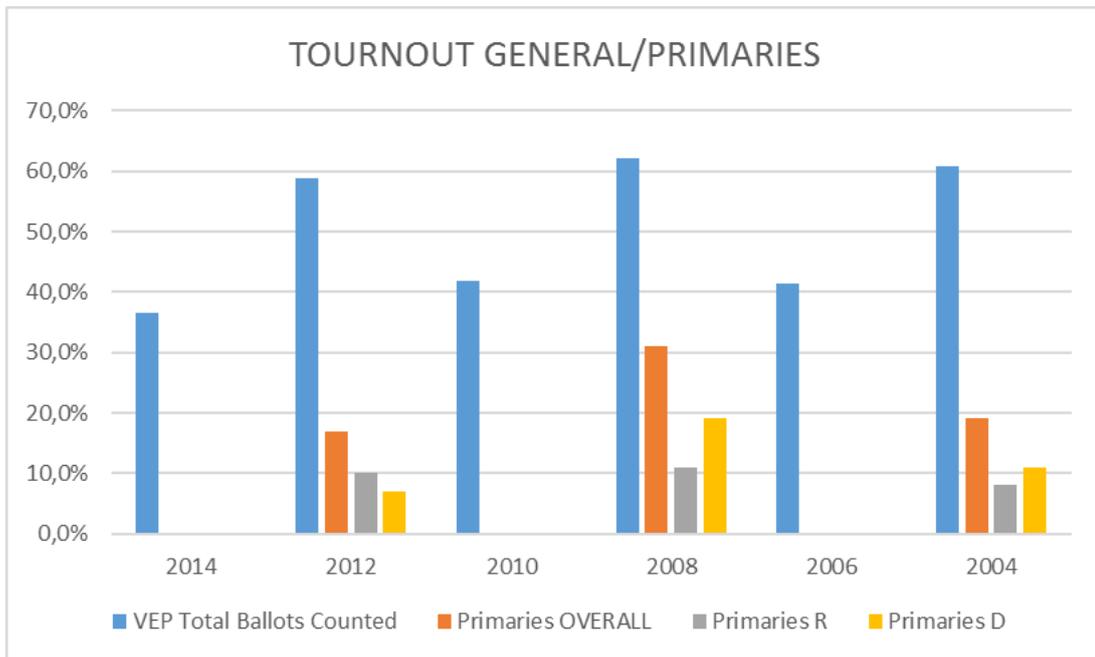
Data Source Graph: Bipartisan Policy Center

Figure 6: Turnout Trend
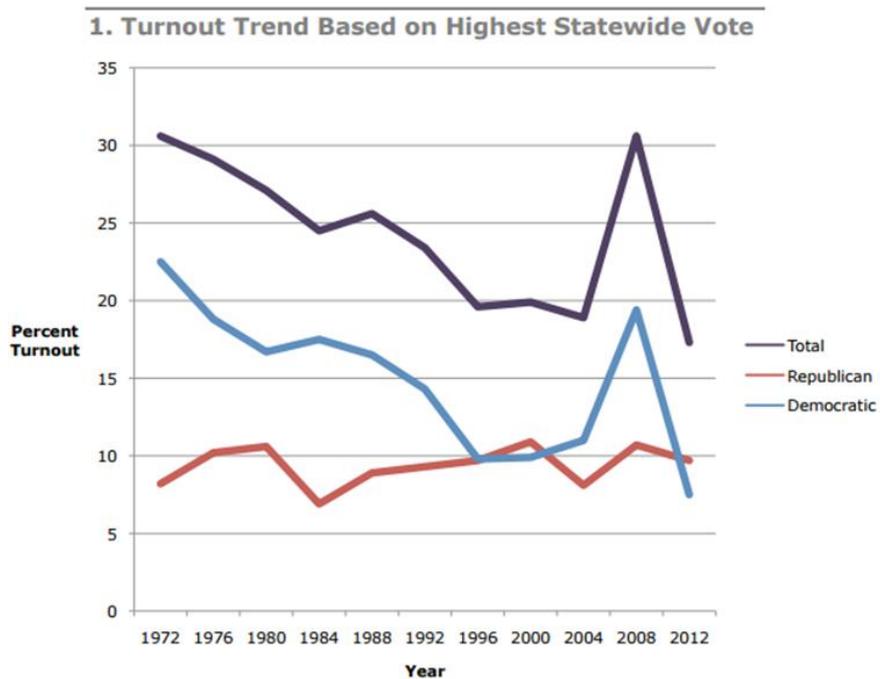
Source: FiveThirtyEight

Secondly, turnouts are generally lower when an outgoing president is running for the second mandate, being the president a deeply strong candidate (see Obama 2008). However, differences have been found in specific cases.

Regarding the actual primary elections, <u>as of today</u>[59] the turnouts have been pretty much as scholars have been expecting. Again, the United States Elections Project presented the '2016 Presidential Nomination Contest Turnout Rates', a collection of data analyzing the turnout for each of the caucus and primary of the 2016 nomination cycle. Even if the attention to this year's election is higher than the past for many reasons, the general apathy toward vote casting is still present: by total ballot (not split by party) the average of casted votes is around the 25%, or one US citizen out of four, with the New Hampshire[60] primary at the highest peak and the Hawaii caucus at the lowest[61].

These data are interesting because they suggest Americans have little interest in politics. Almost half of the citizens do not go to vote in the general elections[62]. Interestingly, people care even less about primaries, which is the dominant way ordinary people can influence which candidates run in the general elections. In the 10 years taken into consideration in the above-mentioned graph, both republicans and democrats went to vote for the primaries in number close to one out of ten[63]. My review of voting behavior suggests that many Americans care little about politics in general, and even less when the elections are primaries, off-cycle or local.

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[59]April, 9th 2016

[60] New Hampshire is the first official Primary in the calendar (the Iowa event takes the form of a Caucus); therefore, generally the attention is high, even if the state is relatively small. This might be among one of the reasons why the turnouts are generally interestingly high.

[61] Data retrieved on April,9th 2016 from http://www.electproject.org/2016P

[62] Average from 1948 until 2014. See Figure 5.

[63]Percentages based on the voting-eligible population for each primary combined (overall) and split by partisanship (R- Republican; D-Democrats). One out of ten means one person out of ten eligible to vote in those specific primaries.

3.2 News Attention

The most important finding from the study on voting behavior seems to support the hypothesis that American voters do not participate on a day-to-day basis in the selection process of their representatives (at both levels). To some extent, this can be translated to 'US citizens care little about politics', considering that the elections are the moment in which the average person can propose his own view. Alongside to this analysis, 'the Packpoll' poll proposed a question related to how closely respondents were paying attention to general and political news appearing in the period in all mainstream media, in order to have a better understanding of the sample it was working with, and supporting the analysis with more statistical information. The findings are consistent with the path that has just been presented.

Question number 31 (Q31) of the poll[64] asked: '*Have you happened to follow each of the following news stories very closely, fairly closely, not too closely, or not closely at all?*' and presented three pieces of news information appeared at least couple of times in every major media outlet in the weeks preceding the conduction of the poll (Nov. 2015). All three options concerned political attention, especially in relations with the parties' debates that were going on in the period[65]. The experiment was conducted utilizing the whole sample of 1062 full respondents, and the margin of error has been counted as plus or minus 3% of the actual value.

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[64] See Appendix A

[65] For a detailed overview of dates and indexes regarding the presidential debates, see:
GOP: http://www.uspresidentialelectionnews.com/2016-debate-schedule/2016-republican-primary-debate-schedule/
DEM: http://www.uspresidentialelectionnews.com/2016-debate-schedule/2016-democratic-primary-debate-schedule/

Regarding the data extrapolated from the question, the results are not particularly surprising. Graph 2 presents the rough data as collected through the administration of the poll, and the results are self-explaining. **When it comes to general news about candidates** – which should interest every citizen, despite of the political belief – **not even two Americans out of ten are paying close attention to the race** (several months before the elections). However, half of the sample claimed they are 'keeping an eye' on the overall situation, in order to form an opinion. On the other side, when asked if they have been following the past debate (either Republican, or Democratic or both), the 50% of people who claimed to pay 'fairly close' attention to candidate news in the previous question, drops to less than half (average of 25%), meaning that something is shady. The reasons to explain this fact has been mentioned in the theoretical framework: how people form opinion and what people think of how they form their opinion <u>do not necessarily</u> reflect the right way of the cognitive process. When saying they have been following candidate news, it could mean they have been listening to the same piece of news over and over, without even paying attention. This could induce respondents to think they have been following fairly closely news about politics, but in reality it is not what they have concretely done. Also, when asked a precise question as 'Have you been following news regarding the past presidential debate' people have less problem recalling the time period, and can give a more accurate answer because it relies on something real to them. This might a better way to estimate how closely respondents have been following political news, because it gives them the possibility of recalling specifically a certain event in time. When asking regarding general news, respondents do not recall properly when and how they became informed of something, therefore answers might suffer of validity issues.

Graph 2: News Attention

NEWS ATTENTION

Not closely at all	27,20%	
	30,30%	
	10,50%	
Not too closely	31,10%	
	36,30%	
	25,00%	
Fairly closely	26,70%	
	23,80%	
	47,80%	
Very closely	15,00%	
	9,60%	
	16,80%	

0,00% 10,00% 20,00% 30,00% 40,00% 50,00% 60,00%

■ The 1st Democratic Presidential Debate
■ The 3rd (Most recent) Republican Presidential Debate
■ News about candidate for the 2016 Presidential Elections
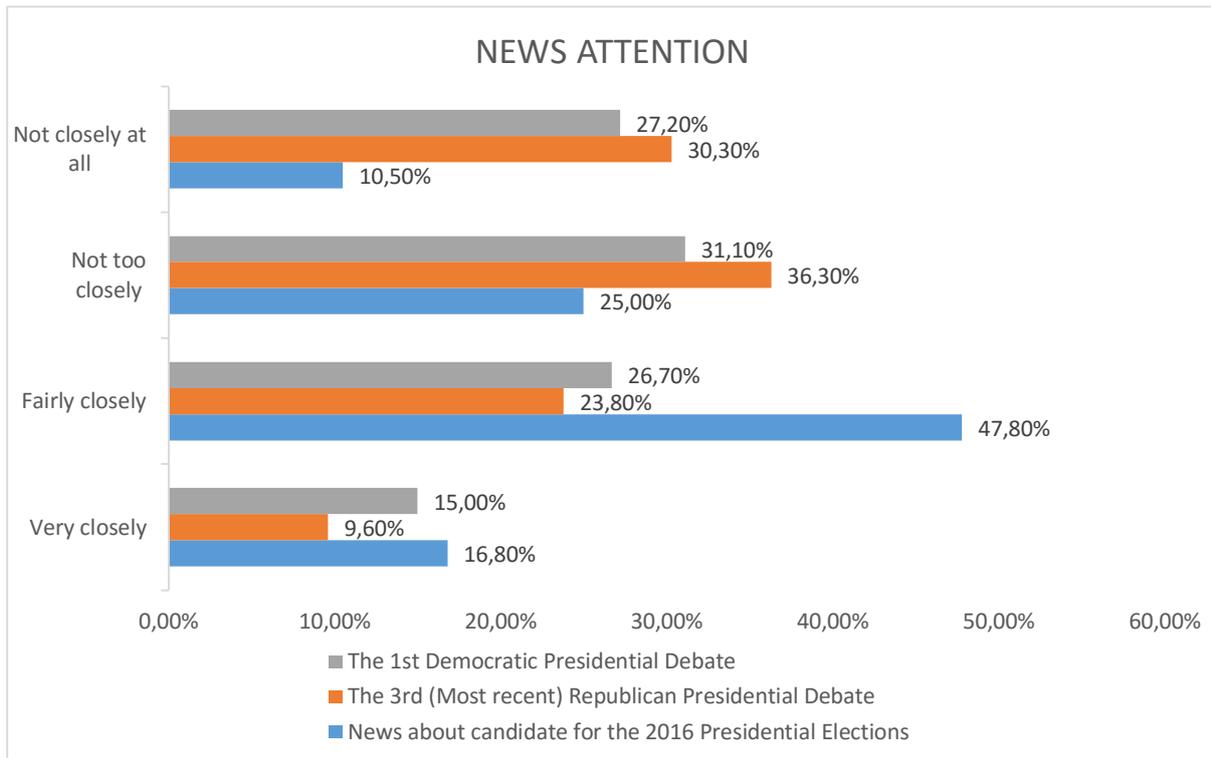
Data Source Graph: PackPoll Survey

To conclude, **the analysis on news attention, as well as the analysis on voter turnouts, reflects a general trend of apathy toward politics, especially many months before the actual voting day.** This preparatory work was necessary due to the idea that if people care little about what's happening around them, then the attitudes pollsters' tracks in early polls are little predictive of the outcomes.

3.3 Level of Decisiveness

Even though the general elections were about a year away, and the first primary and caucus months, at the time in which the poll was conducted at NCSU, polling about the two races was in full swing and yet a first priority for the whole country[66]. However,

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[66] Da Rold, A. (2015, November 18). '*Carson and Sanders, Lead the Pack*'. Retrieved March 2, 2016, from http://packpoll.com/carson-and-sanders-lead-the-pack/

the accuracy of polls, as mentioned before, is subject to different factors. In a study conducted by Harry Enten[67] from the FiverThirtyEight, which was already mentioned earlier in the analysis, the author gives a full explanation (worth few lines) on how misleading those polls can be. As mentioned before, the study proposed an absolute error – difference between the real outcome and the average of pollster outcomes – which was incredibly high for an election cycle (in the order of two numerical values). Despite of the little trust that this study creates on polling, the problem remains: should we trust early polls, and if so, to which extent? Both Silver and Enten report that many things could change over time, like the economic situation, military casualties and even equilibriums within the different branches of the political system. If the poll is not accurately done, the risk is to <u>misinform</u>, and as mentioned before, this creates even more problems than leaving people uninformed.

The experiment conducted in November wanted to test exactly this hypothesis: have voters already made up their mind regarding the primary elections to come, or not? The question seems to be trivial, but in reality holds an extraordinary power: <u>when looking into any mainstream poll conducted by news organizations (CNN, FOX, etc.), data are expressed in a form that makes you think everyone already has a clear idea on who he/she is going to vote for, even a year before the elections.</u> However, the findings of this investigation propose a totally different picture.

The question was split by party identification index (asked about the republican nomination to those who said they were either Republican or leaning toward the Republican party and to the Democrats vice-versa). When (half) the sample was proposed

[67] Enten, H. (2015, November 9). A Year Out, Ignore General Election Polls. Retrieved January 13, 2016, from http://fivethirtyeight.com/features/a-year-out-ignore-general-election-polls/

the question number 13 (Q13): '*Thinking about the candidates running for the* DEMOCRATIC/REPUBLICAN *nomination for president in 2016, as of today, have you decided which candidate you plan to support, are you leaning towards one candidate, or are you still trying to decide?*' the answers were logical and consistent with the theory. **Only one in three respondents said he had made up his mind regarding the candidates, overall[68].** When splitting by PID, while the 33% of the Dem. claimed they had a clear idea on who to vote for in several months, less than a 20% of Rep. said they were sure on that. The difference between the two political spheres can be assigned to the large number of candidates running at that time in the republican field, compared to the only three candidates in the democratic context. **Even more intriguing, a solid 40% in the Republicans and more than 30% among democrats said they were 'still trying to decide'**. Given the fact that the middle option was 'I lean toward one candidate', the 'still trying to decide' answer can be understood as they had no clue on whom to vote for.

The third option, the middle one 'I lean toward a candidate', has been matter of argumentation for weeks within the PackPoll team. As mentioned before, the experiment was inspired by Moore's book 'the Opinion Makers': however, in the original version, the scholar asked a 'yes/no' version in the form of '*as of today, have you made up your mind or have you made not* […]'. According to the PackPoll staff, this gave no option to the people to speak up their real attitudes towards the elections. Therefore, <u>we thought it would have been better to proceed with an open-mind, and we refused a simplistic black/white approach</u>. As expected, the majority of the student population chooses that option, reaching a solid 40%, as shown in Figure 7. The fact that a third middle way was introduced in the system, complicates a little the analysis of the data, due to the fact that

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[68] Meaning both Republicans and Democrats together.

it is not possible to treat the 'leaning' neither as a full decision, nor as a full in-decision. However, for the purposes of this dissertation, the outcome is interesting anyway: **less than one third of the students admit to have a clear idea on their chosen candidate many months before the elections.**

Figure 7: Overall Decision Level[69]
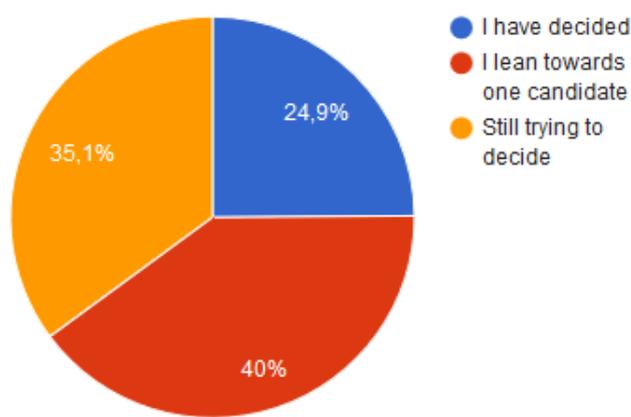
Data Source Graph: PackPoll Survey

Party identification

The data just reported are incredibly interesting when split by party identification, and bring with them a great amount of information. Media coverage of polls oftentimes presents a reality which is partial and little explanatory of the complex situation just presented. As an example, a poll by Quinnipiac University[70] administered and released to the great public a week before the poll we conducted at NCSU, reported the personal choices of Republican respondents, as if they were conscious, final and conclusive. Obviously, with thirteen candidates on the stage and many months to go before the first

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[69] The question asked was split by party identification. The numbers reported are a sum of the republicans and the democrats that answer the relative question.
[70] https://www.qu.edu/images/polling/us/us11042015_xsq33a.pdf

election day, this sounded incredibly wrong and misleading. As shown in Figure 8 below, only the 18% of our republican sample confirmed to have decided the candidate they would have voted for in the North Carolina Primary, expected for March 2016, 5 months later. Neither the democrats seemed to have a clear mind on that, even if the case was drastically different: only three candidates on the stage (two, if we consider that M. O'Malley was polling at less than 3% at that time), a clear frontrunner by endorsement - Hillary Clinton -, and a clear nationwide university student's trend toward Sen. Sanders. Yet, two out of three students did not have made their choice.

Figure 8: PID Decision Level

Decided on a Candidate?

Republican   Democrat

	Republican	Democrat
Decided	18	33
Leaning Toward	48	38
Still Deciding	36	30
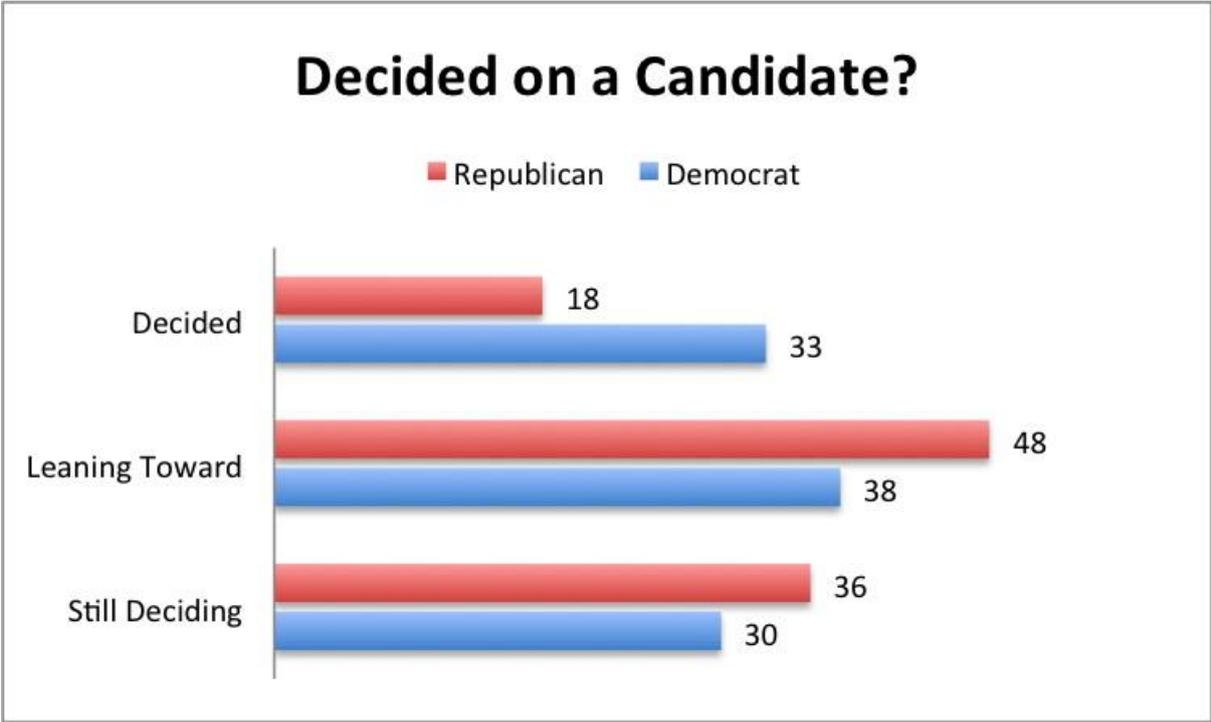
Data Source Graph: The PackPoll

One of the major critics proposed to media outlets has always been the level of precision on reporting the stories. As shown with the example from the Quinnipiac poll, a piece of news on the same page is damaging not only the image of certain candidates, but to some extent the whole democratic process. The degree of respondents' decision

affects drastically the way scholars and journalists can report on candidates' appreciation, despite of the poll timing or methodology. However, in times in which polling draws the main storyline in news coverage – due to the lack of other sources like electoral events – a certain degree of attention should be focused on 'good polling' and how to do so, in order to keep things right.

The example about Republicans, when it comes to decided/undecided, is remarkable. Putting together Republicans who are still trying to decide, and those who are leaning, a little more than 10% choose **Trump**. On the other side, the businessman saw his support increasing drastically among those who claimed they have made up their mind (21%). An opposite effect was registered for one of his adversaries, Sen. Marco Rubio, which saw a 20% of support among those still undecided, declining to 16% when asked to those who have already made a choice. Carson support was close to Trump's one, but the numbers were higher: 37% support among undecided, 46% of support among the decided ones. Those numbers are useful for a statistician because they give a sense of how much a certain candidate can grow, or how much a candidate can lose. A minor percentage among those who are decided is (for some points of view) preferable to a greater one coming from those who are undecided. This gives a greater room for improvement in the percentages for those candidates, like Trump, who apparently have already a solid base of commitment. It is harder for Trump to lose his 21% of decided, than for Carson to lose his 37% of undecided[71].

Speaking about the Democrats, in the NCSU poll of November Sanders was overwhelmingly preferred to Clinton, despite of the level of decisiveness of the students.

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[71] Assumption based on the logic that those undecided are more likely to change their choice in respect of those who claim to be decided.

However, the solid break was among those who were decided: 85% for Sanders against a 13% for Clinton. The determination of preferences' level can, however, help to understand things better: among those who said they were not decided, the gap between the two candidates was not so huge, implying a possibility for Clinton to cover the difference (Clinton 31%/Sanders 51%). Data would have been radically different, if not analyzed under this perspective and the outcomes could have produced wrong or partial information.

The experiment was created in order to compare the results of the PackPoll poll with the polling news which did not present these questions – forcing the respondents to pick a candidate. These polls always present an electorate that is fully conscious and decided, even if it is clear from the previous analysis that oftentimes this does not represent the reality. <u>Most voters, at that moment in time (and in general while early polls take place) are still trying to figure out who they will vote for.</u>

The main takeaway from this analysis regards the fact that not only two third of the sample did not make a choice yet, but also different candidates poll better or worse according to the level of decision of the respondents. In the case of Ben Carson, among the Republican in the sample who have made up their minds, he was supported by the 46% of them. However, less than one third of the whole republicans said they were decided, so his **'real'** support was not even close to one out of two republicans, but it was somewhere around a 10% of the sample. However, an inattentive analyst could have created a series of stories about Carson's appreciation close to the 50%, which would have been wrong. As we clearly see, the narrative media outlets choose radically changes the perception of reality. In this sense, it is an incredible priority to understand that early

polling can be very misleading and uninformative, if conducted, measured and reported careless.

Name Recognition

The previous paragraph has brought to light many interesting aspects of the art of polling. Firstly, it gives a sense of understanding on how a good poll should be conducted and interpreted, not only for academic purposes, but generally for a good comprehension of the matter itself. Secondly, it underlines what can (and is) done in the wrong manner, and again focuses the attention on a level of decisiveness which should always be present when talking about people's preferences. Last but not least, it gives a sense of how difficult it is to understand how deep respondents have thought about the question itself, if the poll tracks real attitudes and if respondents take seriously what they are doing. When analyzing a poll, one of the most difficult moments is to evaluate the questions and the sample that participated in the poll itself.

The real alarming result of the study just conducted, is the fact that most of the respondents, even after admitting to not have a clear idea on whom to vote for in the elections, even after assessing that they have no clue, still usually pick one candidate, if encouraged to do so by the survey. Studies have shown that when the option '*no opinion*' is present, some of the respondents fall in that category. However, in order to show at best the problematic of poll interpretation, the PackPoll decided not to present the no opinion option, and induced the respondents to answer the question about candidates' preferences – as mainstream polls do. The major question arising, is why respondents do so.

After studying these phenomena during the past year, I came to the conclusion that part of the data tracked by early polls might simply be <u>candidates' name recognition</u>.

Several pollsters, both private and public, at the beginning of the electoral cycle propose a series of polls in order to understand which personalities of a certain party are more or less known by the general public. Oftentimes this is done either by the party, or by the candidate itself, in order to understand the actual chances of victory in the long term and how to plan and run a successful electoral campaign. Even if the early polls, which have been matter of discussion in this dissertation, were not asking plainly about name recognition, the suspect that an un-informed respondent used to pick the most common name among the ones proposed is highly present. **Name recognition, however, brings a consistently different set of implications than an actual decision on who to vote for**. Jeb Bush at the early stages of the run was probably not only the most known candidate in the GOP field, but also was the undiscussed frontrunner, supported by all the establishment that already made a choice. Ten months later, the same candidate Jeb Bush dropped out the race because he was not able of winning any of the electoral competition in which he run, and was polling at less than 5% in every major poll. Bernie Sanders, on the contrary, was among those candidates with little or no name recognition, compared to the ex-secretary of state Hillary Clinton, but he is still competing for the nomination, as of today. This shows that name recognition is far from being candidate's approval: however, it is a matter of fact that it could be one among the many options that pushes respondents to choose one name even when not being decided.

Another, more simplistic, reason why respondents still answer, when asked, can be found in psychology. Sometimes respondents feel obliged to answer to all the questions by the environment[72] (survey), other times they are just paying little attention to what they are doing and they simply pick one proposed option. Sometimes they just

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[72] Especially when it comes to live interviews (A-CASI – CAPI – CATI).

want to be done, and pick the first option in the list – this is mainly why a good poll rotates all the answer options every time the question is asked, as it was done in the PackPoll poll. However, despite of the specific reasons why respondents still answer, this happens and poll's analysts have to take it into account. The worst part of this, is that an inattentive analyst reporting these – wrong - percentages is affecting the whole race! Polling has been found to have the capacity of shaping later polling, given the fact that undecided voters oftentimes rely on the perception of electoral support to make a choice on the primary. Unlike the general elections, when uninformed voters rely on the party identification in order to make a choice, the primary presents a variety (many times more than five) of candidates that are close to each other in terms of ideology. Unless a citizen is deeply interested in voting for one despite another, for an average partisan individual **any of the candidates of one party would be better of any of the candidates of the other**. This has been found to be one of the reasons why primary turnouts are so low compared to general turnouts. Anyhow, polling percentages in this sense help the undecided to make a choice, especially those who are uninformed or care little about the factual result.

The Frontrunner Fallacy

Strongly related to name recognition is what D. Greenberg, professor of history of Media Studies at Rutgers University, calls 'the front-runner fallacy[73]'. This theory has been one of the most interesting examples of how the misinterpretation of polling can be misleading. The study presents a historical overview of how well polling was doing before several election events in the history of the United States of America, and how the first in line in the early-polls ended at the general elections. The first example presented

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[73] Greenberg, D. (2015, December). The Front-Runner Fallacy. Retrieved January 19, 2016, from http://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2015/12/the-front-runner-fallacy/413173/

is the case of the 1975/1976 elections, when Dem. Jimmy Carter became president. Few months before the primary cycle started, in 1975, the favorites in the polls were Sen. Ted Kennedy at 23%, and Gov. of Alabama George Wallace at 19% of the shares. The 1976 outcome of the democratic primary saw an incredible victory of the future president, who won more than 20 states in the primary contest[74]. Another major example to support this thesis is the competition of 1991/1992. Bill Clinton, before the primary cycle, was polling in single digit in the earliest part of the race, and around the 15% in the second part. The Democratic voters have consistently preferred other candidates, which were not even running (See Figure 9). Eventually, Clinton managed to beat one by one all his competitors, and even became president in the fight for the White House.

Figure 9: 1992 Democratic Primary Race

1992 Democratic Primary Field
Average of Polls Conducted in January-June 1991

Candidate	Poll Average		Name Recognition (Estimate)	Recognition Adjusted Poll Average
Cuomo, Mario	20.7%	(3/3)	70%	29.6%
Gore, Al	9.7%	(3/3)	60%	16.1%
Bentsen, Lloyd	9.3%	(3/3)	80%	11.7%
Jackson, Jesse	8.7%	(2/3)	90%	9.6%
Gephardt, Dick	6.3%	(2/3)	70%	9.0%
McGovern, George	5.7%	(2/3)	70%	8.1%
Nunn, Sam	4.7%	(2/3)	50%	9.3%
Bradley, Bill	4.3%	(2/3)	50%	8.7%
Richards, Ann	3.0%	(1/3)	60%	5.0%
Wilder, Douglas	2.3%	(3/3)	40%	5.8%
Harkin, Tom	2.3%	(3/3)	30%	7.8%
Mitchell, George	2.3%	(2/3)	50%	4.7%
Clinton, Bill	**1.7%**	**(3/3)**	**30%**	**5.6%**
Rockefeller, Jay	1.7%	(1/3)	40%	4.2%
Kerrey, Bob	1.3%	(3/3)	30%	4.4%
Robb, Chuck	1.3%	(1/3)	30%	4.4%
Tsongas, Paul	1.0%	(2/3)	30%	3.3%
Solarz, Stephen	0.3%	(1/3)	30%	1.1%
McCurdy, Dave	0.0%	(1/3)	20%	0.0%

Source: New York Times[75]

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[74] Web Archive, Retrieved January 21, 2016 from
http://web.archive.org/web/20091026141022/http://geocities.com/Athens/Agora/8088/Dem1976.html

[75] Silver, N. (2011, April 4). A Brief History of Primary Polling, Part II. Retrieved February 12, 2016, from http://fivethirtyeight.blogs.nytimes.com/2011/04/04/a-brief-history-of-primary-polling-part-ii/?_r=0

The cases just presented are among the many examples[76] that take into consideration the possibility of non-accuracy of early polls in electoral primaries. The frontrunner fallacy sustains that oftentimes the top choice in an early poll, even if polling extraordinarily, is little likely to become the actual nominee once the voting cycle started. This is based on the idea - and the experiment of the PackPoll is a solid supporter - that many people would pick a name in a poll when asked to, even if they are not decided or have little intention to vote. It creates a system in which **the illusion of a frontrunner becomes real, and affects not only the candidate's expectations, but also the voting behavior of other people**. Of course, as Greenberg reports, sometimes early-polls get it right[77]. However, on the long run, early polls seem to be misleading and far from being predictive of the situation: Few times they capture a real public attitude towards elections, but often they get snapshots of a general name recognition proper of an apathetic and dis-interested electorate. It is to be kept in mind the fact that a year before the elections few voters are paying attention to political news, as reported in the experiment before regarding news attention. In a case like the 2016 GOP competition, which saw an incredibly high number of contenders in the race, it is perceived as meaningless by the majority of the people to inform themselves on each of the candidates, when most likely half of them won't even be in the ballot for the primary races. The dropping out phenomena are concretely present when the candidates' number is high because an electoral campaign is both time and money consuming: candidates with no chance of winning either the nomination or the possibility of a political ticket are more likely to end their campaign before the vote starts, in order to save money. Voters, on the other side, generally starts to pay attention (if any) few weeks before the election call, and oftentimes

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[76] Silver, N. (2011, March 31). A Brief History of Primary Polling, Part I. Retrieved February 13, 2016, from http://fivethirtyeight.blogs.nytimes.com/2011/03/31/a-brief-history-of-primary-polling-part-i/

[77] Both in 1979, Regan and in 1999, Al Gore lead both early polls and won the Nomination after.

do not dig deep because, as mentioned before, any of the candidates of a certain party is better than any of the counterparts.

Therefore, name recognition and frontrunner fallacy presents one plausible explanation on how, why and when early-polls are misleading. However, the important aspect worth attention in this sense is the fact that the fault is not of polling itself. If bad polls exist, it is due to the fact that bad pollsters exist. The general trend of blaming polling for not being able to forecast properly should be shifted toward media outlets criticism, because they are the reason why bad polling is made. As presented in the study, good polling can be done if the statistical properties and the theory of cognitive process are respected. However, this requires both a certain amount of time and money, united with the necessary ability in the field.

3.4 Polling Influence in the Political Process

The analysis, which has been presented in the previous pages, has shown how deeply polling is misinterpreted and misused in our everyday life. News organizations create polls in order to have stories about candidates, then they spread them out in the form of news and they make profit out of that. The public is subject, voluntarily or not, to the environment in which it lives in. Those stories affect how people form the opinions that are lately measured by the polling departments of the same news media organizations that spread the stories. Other stories are created about people's opinions - maybe true, maybe not, depending on how good the attitudes' analyses were - which affect, change or form new opinions. It forms a never-ending cycle. This cycle starts early in politics, sometimes even years before an election, and it is a ceaseless process of news formation and public opinion's measurement. The fact that polling is among one of the major

<u>sources of news media coverage should alarm many, keeping in mind what the investigation just highlighted.</u> How polling can affect politics, and its impact on the democratic process, however, has been matter of argumentation for years. Candidate's campaigns are influenced by polling in several ways, and candidates sometimes are not able to recover from the bad publicity resulted from it, as shown by Moore in his book 'The Opinion Makers'[78]. One of the most characterizing ways in which polling has shaped politics in the 2015/2016 cycle regarded the candidates' debates in the pre-electoral period. Several major media outlets, among which CNN, FOX and CNBC, hosted the different debates: occasions in which the candidates seeking the nomination had the opportunity to show to the general public their ideas and propositions. However, given the incredibly high number of contenders in the Republican field, the television organizations decided to divide the candidates into two groups, making two debates in order to give 'better' coverage to all of them. The debates were always held on the same day, one in the late afternoon and one around dinner time. In order to decide which candidate could attend which debate, TV broadcast decided to utilize polls: for example, Fox News, for the GOP debate preceding the Iowa caucus and the New Hampshire Primary on Jan. 28th 2016, declared to admit to the main stage those candidates who *'poll in either the top six nationally or the top five in Iowa or New Hampshire will be eligible for the prime-time debate, scheduled for 9 p.m. ET. The network will look at an average of the five most recent national, Iowa and New Hampshire polls when making its determination.'*[79] All those candidates who did not meet the requirements were generally (and also in the specific case) made part of an early-debate before the main one. **The**

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[78] Moore, D., W. (2008) 'The Opinion Makers: An Insider Exposes the Truth behind the Polls'. Boston: Beacon. Print.

[79] Allen, C. (2016, January 21). 'Fox News announces debate criteria: The undercard lives'. Retrieved April 19, 2016, from http://www.usatoday.com/story/news/politics/onpolitics/2016/01/21/fox-news-debate-criteria-iowa-undercard/79136650/

impact of polling is clear in this sense; it actually changes the opportunity of different candidates to increase their visibility[80]: as obvious the less a candidate is covered by media stories and debates, the harder it is to increase polling numbers and consensus.

Another important aspect to take into consideration is related to the fact that early polls are consistently used by media to assign a certain amount of coverage to different candidates. According to their poll's numbers, candidates have the chance to appear on national TV shows, Talk Shows and political programs. This is understandable from a point of view of the Media, the more a candidate is polling well, the more the probability is that the sharing will raise, but an important question arises: what about the democratic principle of equal possibilities? For all these reasons, polling and pollsters share a responsibility, when it comes to inform people. As of today, there is pretty much no formal distinction between good and bad pollsters, nor a code of conduct that media outlets should respect by law, in order to keep publishing their stories.

The most important question emerged in the analytical part regards how to treat early polls. Are early polls something irrelevant that media produce in order to fill blank spaces or increase their audience, as different authors said? Or maybe we can take something from those polls to understand patterns among society, as others sustain? After all that has been written, and the experiment conducted by the PackPoll used as a guideline, this question is still hard to answer. Undoubtedly the impact that early polls have on societies and electoral processes is incredibly tremendous. Candidates use polls to sustain their thesis, and show off that part of the population supports them. But what

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[80] The debates of less favorite candidates were less followed by the general public in respect to those who were polling better.

do those respondents believe in? A well-known phenomenon is the fact that year by year campaigns are less likely to be based on future projects and policies and more on sensationalism and interesting news[81]. Of course, this problem is created by both sides: Candidates talk less about policies for 'neutrality' in order to be appealing for a broader spectrum of voters and Media talk less about policies to avoid being called biased and politically incorrect. This remarks that respondents do not base their decision on policies. Again, what do those people believe in, while asked in early polls? Maybe they trust candidates' personalities, maybe they consciously vote for the one candidate that has most chances, or maybe they simply do not have an idea yet (as shown in the experiment) and they are simply forced to pick one among the others by the format of the survey, which does not present a no opinion option.

Alongside the candidate's usage of polls, another important aspect to take into consideration is the impact that polling has on Media outlets. As mentioned early in the dissertation, news organizations produce and consume statistical data to create stories. They consciously assign relative coverage to candidates that poll well and decide to talk less about others that have little impact. **But as shown in the literature above-mentioned and clearly represented by the experiment on 'made up mind' conducted by the PackPoll, people when given the option, are more likely to say they do not have a clear idea on candidates.** Considering this as the core finding of this paper, it is easily assumable the fact that Media hurt democracy when they give coverage according to misleading polling results for several reasons. First of all, most of the polls are based on a national level. <u>Nationwide polling is representative of the whole society, but individuals are called to vote in primaries and caucus on a state level, as mentioned briefly</u>

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[81] See Trump's 2016 campaign.

before. Basing coverage on national polls it is firstly misleading, and secondly, could in theory give broader media space to candidates that have relatively less consensus in certain states but have better results nationwide. The second and probably most important aspect is the fact that mainstream early polls (and the way they are treated by media outlets) are misleading and little representative of the real attitudes of the population. Moore, Gallup and several other authors; the experiment conducted: all those sources have proven that. On the other hand, the impact that early polls have on the system and the society is huge. When CNN, FOX or other national televisions decide to cover one candidate more than the other because of polling, they arbitrarily determine what the public will have the opportunity to get. One example of this is represented by the CNN decision of including only part of the candidates in the GOP debate on September 2015[82]. CNN respected a series of criteria to allow the presence of certain candidates on the stage. Those criteria could be reasonable and fair, as well as they could be totally partial and misleading. The polls taken into consideration for the CNN or Fox News stage appearance, only partially examined a 'have you made up your mind' experiment. Several did not include a no-opinion options, others had that but it was not asked out loud, and just a few were able to detect the undecided. A solid doubt appears because people, when forced to choose, went for the most known names in the list (Name recognition theory). This implies that the most known candidates receive more attention, and become more and more known. Eventually, it has to be kept in mind as well that only live and telephone interviews (CAPI, PAPI, CATI and mixed mode) are generally contemplated as criteria for media coverage (i.e. the CNN and Fox News debate mentioned above). On the other

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[82] Schaul, K. (2015, September 3). Choose who makes the GOP debate stage! Retrieved April 2, 2016, from https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/the-fix/wp/2015/09/03/choose-who-makes-the-gop-debate-stage

side, candidates as Trump poll better online and in self-administered surveys (CAWI, WEB, TEXT, IVR) and this could skew data and results[83].

3.5 Good Polling and Bad Polling

The analysis presented in this dissertation has been considerably critical in the way of approaching polling and the measurements of public opinion in general. Skepticism over the ability to forecast elections is something not only perceived by the general public, that more and more criticizes media for that, but also created a narrative in the news coverage. Different journalists and reporters, many examples were presented before, spend a consistent amount of time advocating against their colleagues who make polls: however, even if the study presented some structural problems in the way polling is done and reported, it is important to understand that it is not the art of polling to blame, but those who make polls.

As mentioned before, an opinion poll is a statistical snapshot of a situation in a certain period in time. Data do not lie: respondents answer to specific questions that the survey poses them, and the answers collected are not either correct or wrong, they are just valid. The fallacy is created by those who build, administer and analyze the data of an opinion poll: the first necessary important step is to ask the right questions. One example is the introduction of a question measuring intensity, as done in the PackPoll experiment regarding the 'made up mind': this incredibly helps in giving a full comprehensive understanding of the matter. Another important step regarding the questionnaire itself is the idea that answer options are critical: the decision to include a no-opinion option or

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[83] Of course this issue had no major impact on Trump in the specific case, but it could have had effects on minor candidates or past/future similar cases.

not, changes radically the information collected, and could have led to different results even in the experiment that has been presented. Secondly, it is important to collect the data in the correct way: as reported before, even the implementation method of a survey has a huge impact on the respondents. Some candidates like D. J. Trump, which is oftentimes labeled as racist, get more support in interviews which are deprived of the human factor, like Web-surveys. This happens because respondents are somehow ashamed in admitting they would like to vote for a candidate like Trump, but in reality the secrecy of the ballot allows them to vote without being judged. The selection of the method can, in the end, present real data but particular of a certain situation; for this reason, it is important for a pollster to know exactly what type of poll they are performing. Lastly, as intrinsically shown in the course of the whole dissertation, **the most important step is probably the analysis and the interpretation of the data**. Even if a survey would ask the best questions, and the method of implementation would consider all the facts just mentioned, if the data are interpreted in the wrong way, the stories will be wrong and misleading. In the first part of this analysis, it was reported an early-poll by Quinnipiac saying that the majority of Republicans were supporters of Trump. However, it should be clear by now that the information created by that piece of news is misleading, if we consider that a huge part of the respondents, if asked, would have said they were undecided. This is a perfect example of misinterpretation of the data, and obviously it supports the idea that polling can hurt democracy.

On the other side, I would like to spend a few lines explaining why, up to me, not everything is trash. Firstly, when it comes to predict an election, a lot of factors should be considered. It is a hard process which requires attention to many aspects: polls, endorsements, fund-raisings, the party support etc. Just to give a sense of how hard it is

to forecast elections, Journalist Phil Han from CNBC recently analyzed[84] the betting odds more than a year before the elections for the winner of the nomination for the White House. Betting odds represent the other face of forecasting, and obviously the agencies that accept the bets earn as much money as more precise they are in their previsions. On March, 2nd 2015 the odds for Donald Trump were around 100/1, meaning that betting 100$ on him winning the nomination would have made around 10'000 $ of profit. Nowadays, according to the study, the odds are around 10/11, making Trump the undiscussed favorite, and a profit of 'just' 90,91 dollars per every 100 betted. The incredibly high odds are certainly depending on the fact that the GOP field at that time saw a considerable amount of candidates competing for the nomination, making hard to predict who would have persisted in the race until the end. In fact, regarding the Democratic side, odds were much lower: Hillary Clinton, considered the front-runner since the beginning of the pre-electoral period, was edging on odds equal to 3/1, meaning a profit of 'simply' 300$ every 100$ betted; in April 2016 the profit is much lower (1/8) with a profit of 12,50$ every 100$[85]. Clearly betting has no statistical power in forecasting, nor a solid theoretical framework as polling, but I believe this gives a sense of how hardly it can be to predict successfully an election outcome, when it comes to US politics.

The second major step in evaluating polling is the fact that sometimes, **polling gets it right!** Nate Silver, who was already mentioned before, has spent the past decade reviving the good name of polling with his work. With the FiverThirtyEight team, he applied a statistical algorithm used for Baseball betting, to forecast elections: in 2008 his

[84] Han, P. (2016) 'Bet on a US President?' CNBC
http://video.cnbc.com/gallery/?video=3000511079&play=1
[85] Source: http://sports.williamhill.com/bet/en-gb

mathematical model called correctly 49 out of the 50 American States[86], missing only the state of Indiana by less than 1%. In 2012, his previsions were 100% correct, when he saw the real outcome in all the states of the United States, making a star out of himself and bringing back some interest in the art of polling. Of course, it is important to say that the idea behind the FiveThirtyEight project is to give the sense of a trend in elections, and not pointing at one winner for the sake of forecasting. However, apparently their work is doing pretty well, making forecasting something useful for both candidates and the general public. All this is possible thanks to polling, which remains the major components of Silver's model: he applied different wages to different polls, giving more importance to those who are well done and closer to the election date, and less to those polls by unreliable pollsters or done consistently early in the election-process. His model also takes into consideration endorsements, the establishment and the betting odds of the most important betting agencies, making it work, somehow.

[86] Taylor, C. (2012, November 07). 'Triumph of the Nerds: Nate Silver Wins in 50 States'. Retrieved April 22, 2016, from http://mashable.com/2012/11/07/nate-silver-wins/#DDLbgKf5Iaqg

Conclusion

The analysis presented in this dissertation highlights the role of early-polls in the pre-electoral and electoral period of the primaries on the way to the nomination for President of the United States of America. As well, it considered the importance of good polling against bad polling, and the effects that the narrative created by news media has on the whole nomination process. It also reflects indirectly on specific problematics that arise while doing proper forecast for the elections, which is nowadays among the major parts of news media coverage and importantly impacts the different campaigns. The goal of the whole investigation was to understand the causes of why early-poll can be drastically misleading. The research question, major guideline of the discourse, concentrated on the **reasons why early-polls might be little predictive of what will be the outcome of certain elections**. As demonstrated in the theoretical framework, the attention to the United States primary election is high not only on the American soil, but also worldwide, due to the effects that it has on the geopolitical equilibrium of the whole world. Also, as highlighted in the first chapter, polling is among the major components of this process, making the topic contemporary and incredibly important.

The main questions and hypotheses, arose in the course of the past year, while preparing the ground for this dissertation, were tested thanks to the usage of the three indicators. Among the different hypotheses, the idea that early-polls are little predictive when forecasting elections, due to their inconsideration of the little decisiveness of respondents served both as an axiom and conjecture for the proceeding of the investigation. After an in-depth overview of the importance of polling by itself, and the accuracy of pre-electoral polling in the system presented, the first decisive study regarded the investigation of electoral turnouts. The findings, presented in Chapter 3.1, clearly

show a general apathy towards election, especially when it comes to primaries - just between one and three Americans cast a vote out of ten who have the right -. This first level of analysis was useful in order to say that Americans care little about politics in general. Following up to this theory, another question arose, to understand how closely American citizens follow the pre-electoral period. In order to examine and unravel this query, 'The PackPoll' implemented a survey with a series of questions regarding the level of attention of the respondents. Overall, the results showed a trend of indifference towards candidates' campaigns, at least when the election dates are still far in time. Last but not least, the most important finding answered the research question. The experiment presented in the analytical part, replicated from a previous one from Gallup, has been the core of the whole investigation, and successfully proved the hypothesis stated in the introduction. Creating a scale of decisiveness allowed this dissertation to understand one of the major reasons why early-poll can be misleading and hurting the democratic process. The hypotheses regarded the idea that early polls are little predictive of the general outcome of nomination primaries due to the fact that **people are un-informed, un-interested and un-decided**. Yet, the same respondents have been proven to systematically give a preference when asked, even if they have not made up their mind yet. This has been demonstrated with the question about '*leaning*', asked to the students' sample at the North Carolina State University. This was possible thanks to 'the PackPoll', independent association of public opinion measurement of which I have been part of.

By virtue of the experiment, it was possible to give a sense to the hypotheses and questions with some numerical data, which are oftentimes better than words. The results clearly presented a system in which data are **misinterpreted and misleading**, but still utilized and spread out by many different pollsters. However, the even worse part, is the

fact that the misinterpretation of results has a huge impact on the decision making process of the people – shown by the many examples which were mentioned before -: greater coverage of candidates which poll well; possibility of participation in media debates, and increase in fundraising for those who have high percentages of appreciation. Even if it was slightly mentioned, the relationship between democracy and polling has not been part of the analysis itself, due to the fact that it withstands to other assumptions and hypothesis. However, it is important to consider that the study presented put this aspect into perspective: if it is true that polling affects that much the democratic process of representatives' selection, how does the misinterpretation of these polls change the '*apparent*' democracy of the United States?

What has not been presented in this dissertation, however, is the fact that polling – despite of all the problems that brings with it – is still one of the only scientific methods we can rely on, while making assumptions and previsions regarding elections' outcomes. Few examples of successful polling were reported, as for instance the Nate Silver's FiveThirtyEight project, but many more could be mentioned. The inner idea behind public opinion's measurement, since the beginning, was the assumption that a voice from the public could have made a better democracy out of the United States. This because having statistical information for little price about what the population of a nation thinks of specific issues could enhance the concept of direct democracy, close to the hearts of many. Several studies[87] have shown the importance that public opinion polls had in the policy formation of different governments in different countries, and sometimes the perception was close to the idea of having in hands a referendum. This is useful in order to say that public opinion is not something we should be scared of, by itself. What should

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[87] See Moore' study on the Iraqi war polling.

alarm, is the fact that misleading surveys and bad analysts are out there, making profit out of something ambiguous and inaccurate.

While the model presented has a relatively strong explanatory power in terms of scientific social science, it still does not fully explain why early polls are utilized in a consistently misleading way. What is clear, is the fact that a story based on the number of undecided people a year before the elections would not sell as much as saying that a specific candidate is polling in single or double digits. However, what pushes media to do so can be easily assumed (Profit). On the other side, what the experiments did show, are the reasons that push respondents to pick a candidate when asked, even without a clear mind. Many answers were given in this sense: front-runner fallacy, name recognition, politeness. However, it is hard to claim that one above the others is the real one, due to the fact that respondents are many and different. I would suggest, therefore, to look at the bigger picture: the solution is probably in a combination of reasons, those who were presented and probably many more which are still unexplored by the doctrine.

To conclude, the study above presented a systematic investigation of why mainstream early polls are misleading, when it comes to elections. The investigation presented can fall into the category of survey methodology research, given the fact that it was based on the presence of a question which allows to understand decisiveness. The main takeaway of this dissertation, however, would like to be the fact that polling is not imperfect by itself. It is important to keep in mind that data are not produced or formed, but the results are dragged out and collected from the general population. Pollsters do not create public opinion, but they measure attitudes that are already there. The crucial part is the collection and interpretation of data, which are oftentimes cheap and inaccurate. However, good polling is possible – even when it comes to early polls. When done

respecting the rules and analyzing all the different facets that this incredible field of study presents, united with the work ethic, polling has demonstrated to be effective and beneficial, and a real ammunition in the hands of democracy.

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List of Appendixes

Fall 2015 Pack Poll Toplines Report

N=1062 Completed, (1172 Partial)

Completed response rate= 24% (Partial = 26%)

Margin of sampling error for completed surveys and questions asked of the full sample = +/-2.93%

The following are the results for this semester's "Big Poll," which has been conducted bi-annually since Fall semester, 2010. This survey, like all prior PackPolls, was conducted on-line (Nov 5-10, 2015). Respondents were undergraduate students selected randomly, contacted via email. We invited 4,500 students to take the survey, and 1,062 completed it, generating a 24% response rate. The survey had a margin of sampling error of +/-2.93% for questions that all respondents were asked. The margin of sampling error for any question that was asked of just a sub-sample will be higher; the margin of sampling error will also be higher when analyzing the results by sub-groups, such as year in school.

Topics of this PackPoll include the 2016 Presidential election, immigration, abortion, the death penalty, education, and more. Many question were experimental, that is, we varied the wording to examine how changes to the question affected responses. Please go to packpoll.com to read the reports for each topic to learn more.

Q1 - Do you approve or disapprove of the way Barack Obama is handling his job as president?
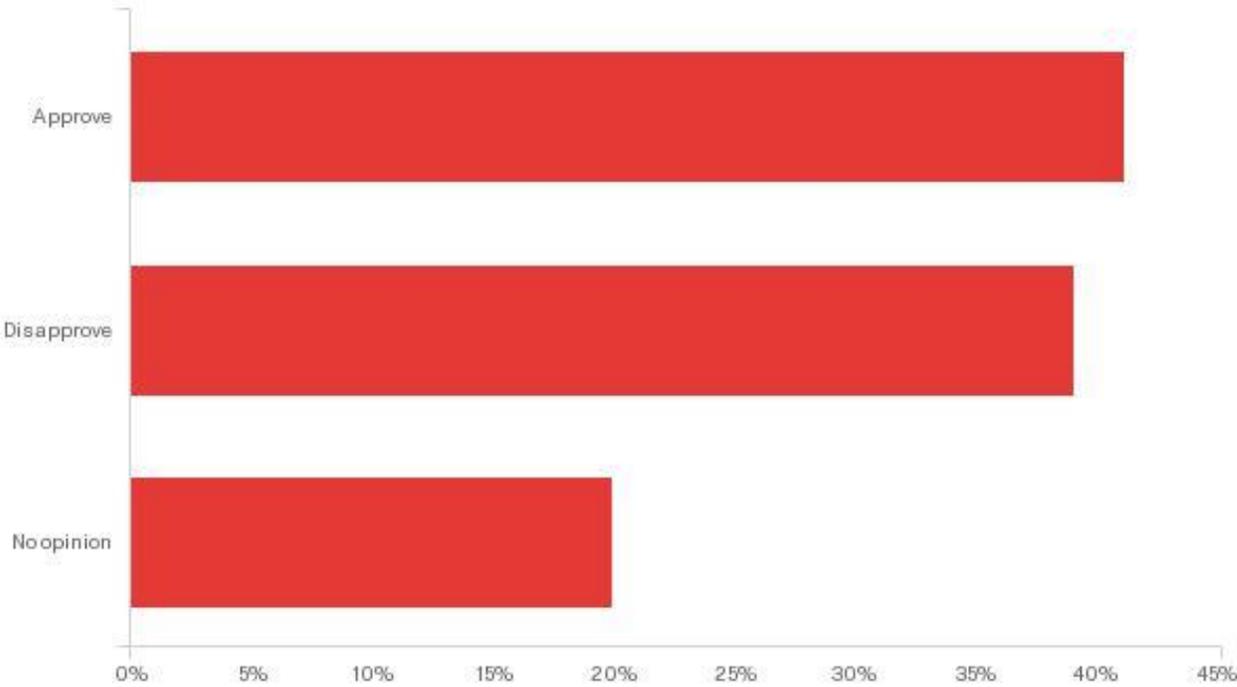
Answer	%	Count
Approve	**41%**	**482**
Disapprove	**39%**	**457**
No opinion	**20%**	**233**
Total	**100%**	**1172**

Q3 - Generally speaking, do you consider yourself as a Republican, a Democrat, or an independent?
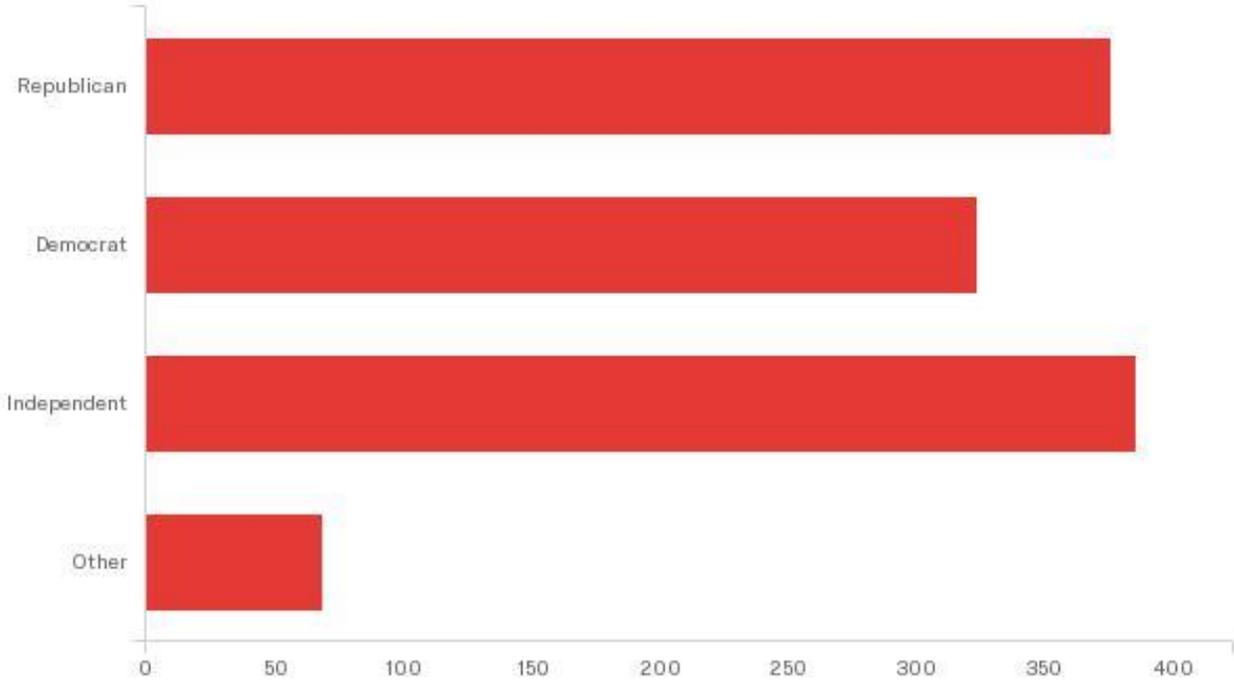
Answer	%	Count
Republican	**33%**	**375**
Democrat	**28%**	**323**
Independent	**33%**	**385**
Other	**6%**	**68**
Total	**100%**	**1151**

Q5 – (IF INDEPENDENT OR OTHER) As of today do you lean more towards the Republican Party or more towards the Democratic Party?
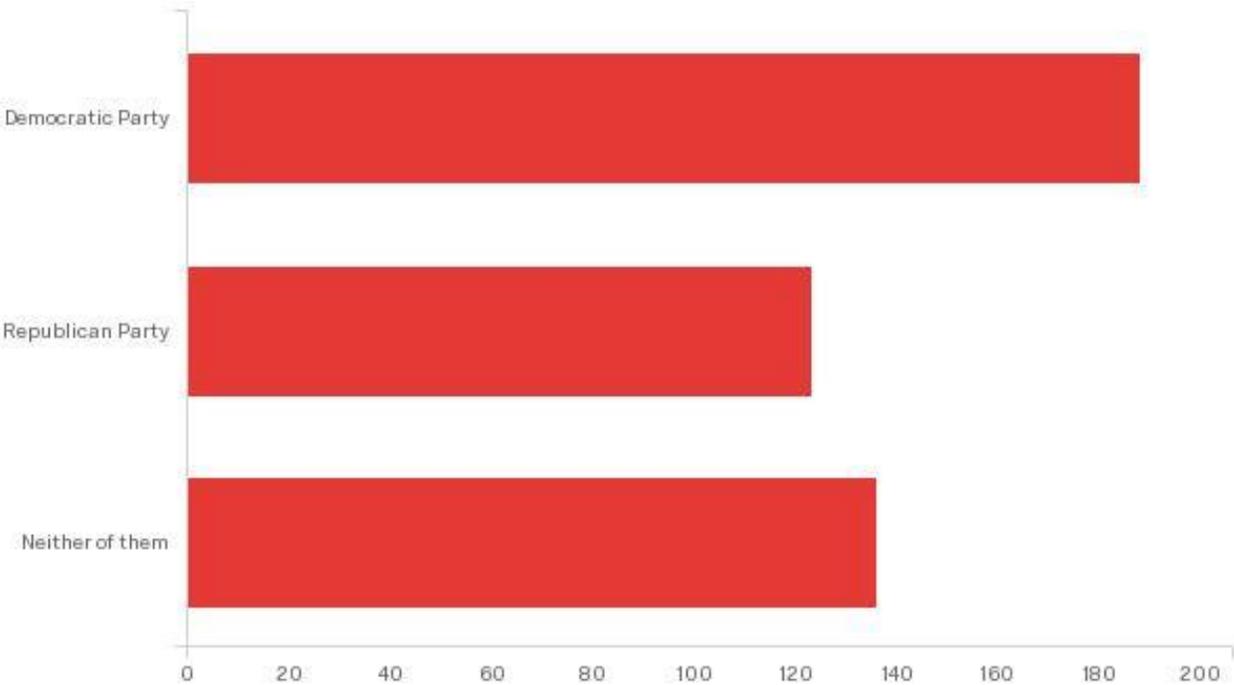
Answer	%	Count
Democratic Party	42%	188
Republican Party	28%	123
Neither of them	30%	136
Total	100%	447

Q6 – (ASKED OF REPUBLICANS ONLY) Thinking about the candidates running for the Republican nomination for president in 2016, as of today, have you decided which candidate you plan to support, are you leaning towards one candidate, or are you still trying to decide?
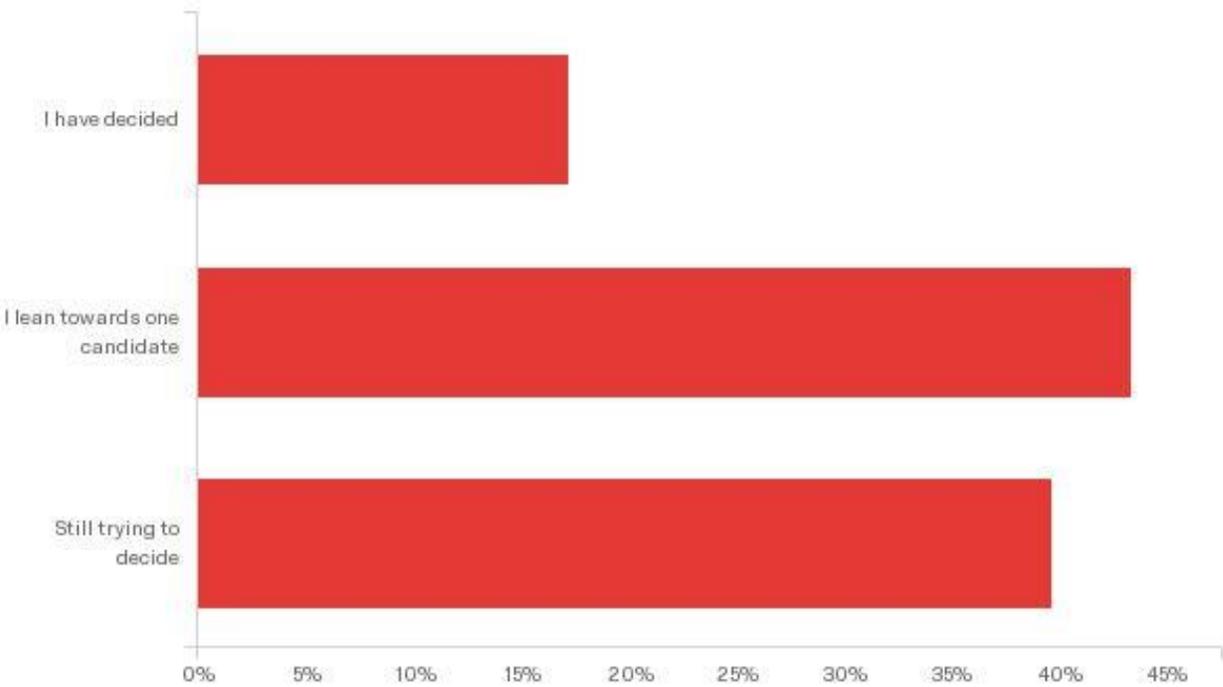
Answer	%	Count
I have decided	**17%**	**85**
I lean towards one candidate	**43%**	**214**
Still trying to decide	**40%**	**196**
Total	**100%**	**495**

Q14 – (REPUBLICANS ONLY) If the Republican presidential primary were held today, whom would you support for the nomination?
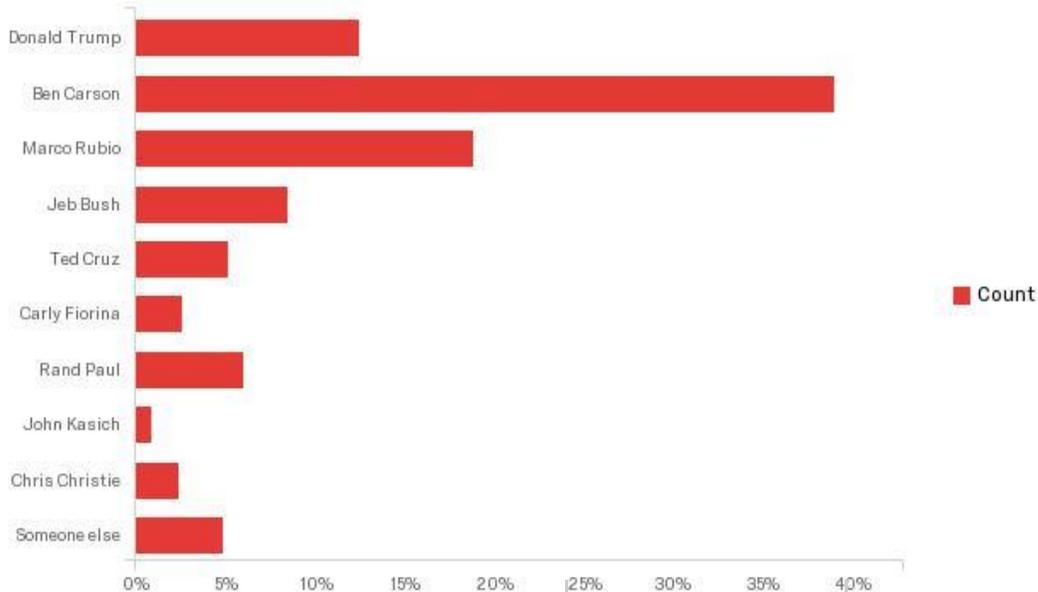
Answer	%	Count
Donald Trump	**12%**	**59**
Ben Carson	**39%**	**185**
Marco Rubio	**19%**	**89**
Jeb Bush	**8%**	**40**
Ted Cruz	**5%**	**24**
Carly Fiorina	**3%**	**12**
Rand Paul	**6%**	**28**
John Kasich	**1%**	**4**
Chris Christie	**2%**	**11**
Someone else	**5%**	**23**
Total	**100%**	**475**

Q13 – (ASKED OF DEMOCRATS ONLY) Thinking about the candidates running for the Democratic nomination for president in 2016, as of today, have you decided which candidate you plan to support, are you leaning towards one candidate, or are you still trying to decide?
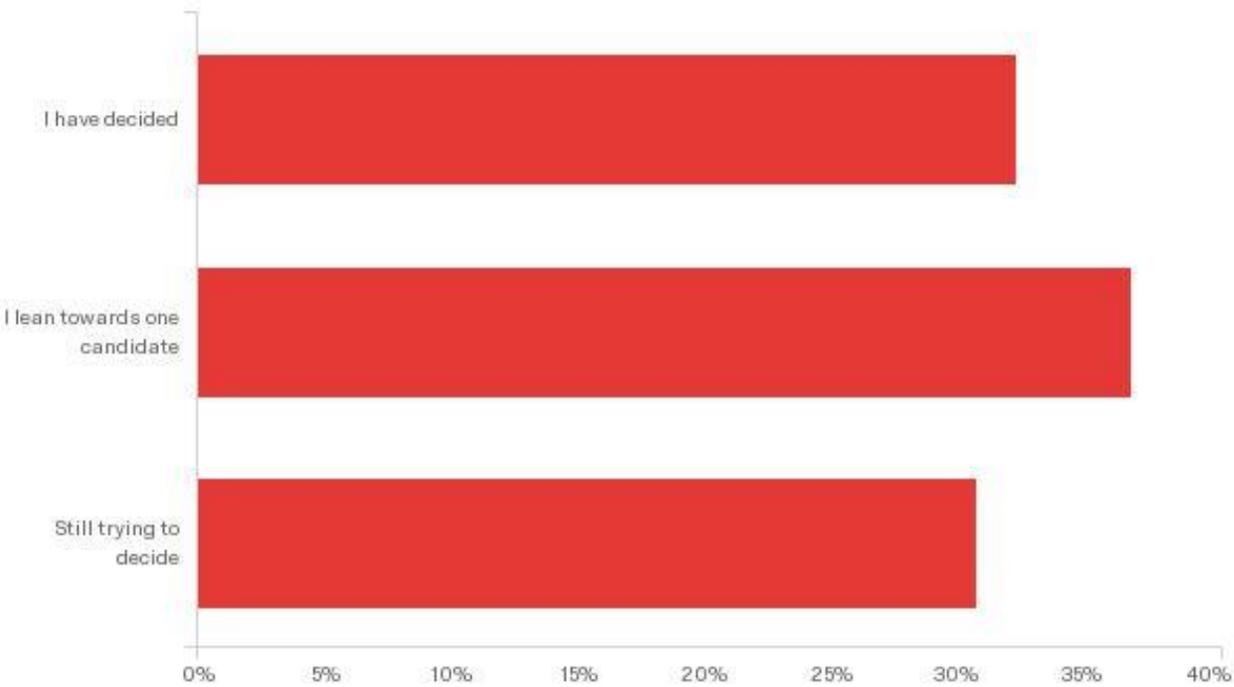
Answer	%	Count
I have decided	**32%**	**165**
I lean towards one candidate	**37%**	**188**
Still trying to decide	**31%**	**157**
Total	**100%**	**510**

Q15 – (DEMOCRATS ONLY) If the Democratic presidential primary were held today, whom would you support for the nomination?
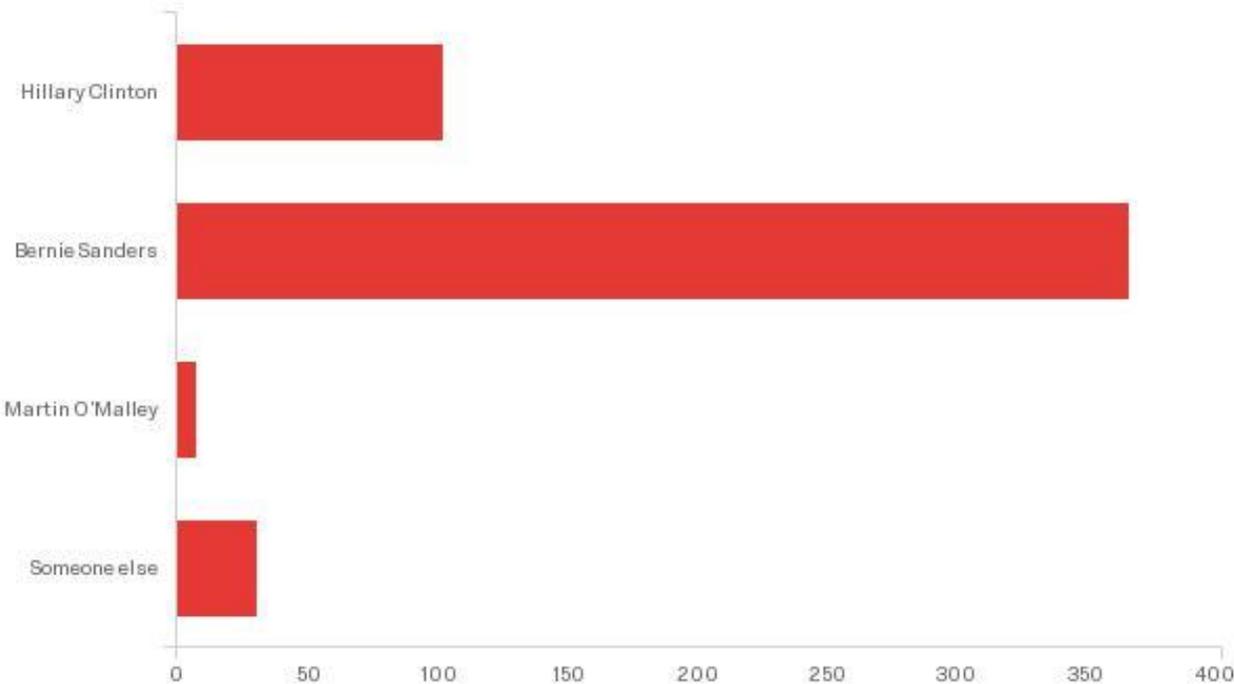
Answer	%	Count
Hillary Clinton	**20%**	**102**
Bernie Sanders	**72%**	**366**
Martin O'Malley	**1%**	**7**
Someone else	**6%**	**30**
Total	**100%**	**505**

Q41 – (HALF THE SAMPLE) And, if the election for president were held today, and Donald Trump were the Republican candidate and Hillary Clinton were the Democratic candidate, for whom would you vote?
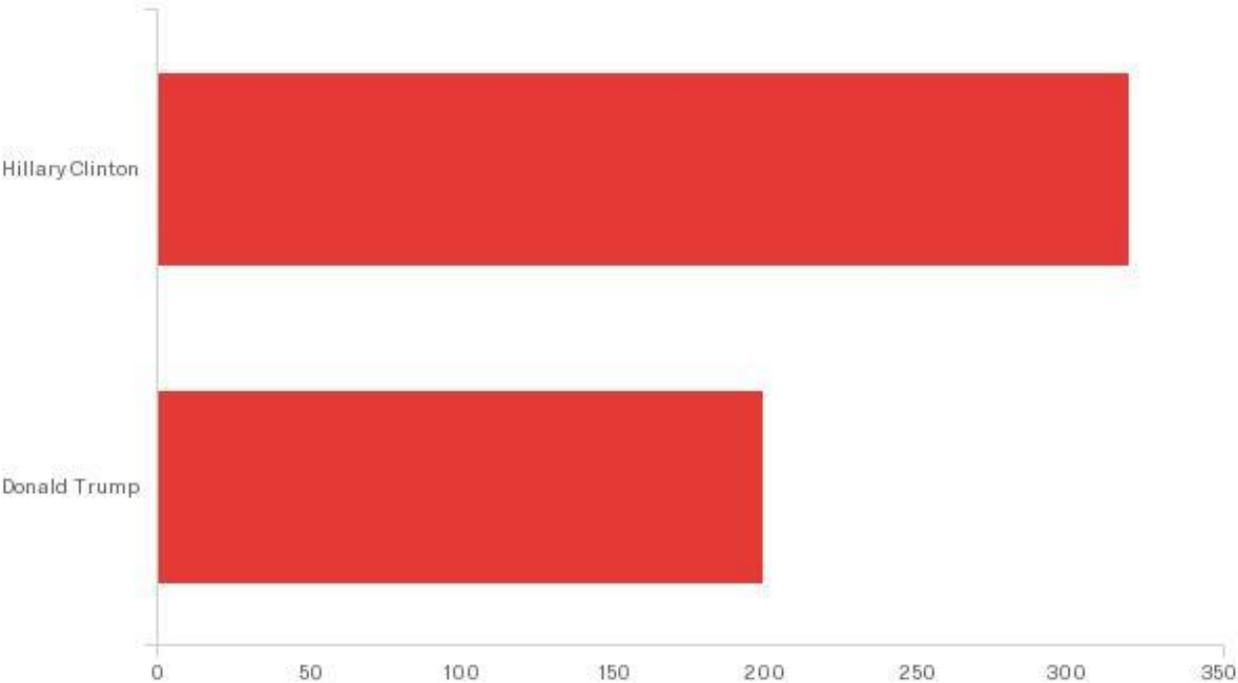
| Answer	%	Count
Hillary Clinton	**62%**	**320**
Donald Trump	**38%**	**199**
Total	**100%**	**519**

Q42 - (HALF THE SAMPLE) And, if the election for president were held today, and Marco Rubio were the Republican candidate and Hillary Clinton were the Democratic candidate, for whom would you vote?
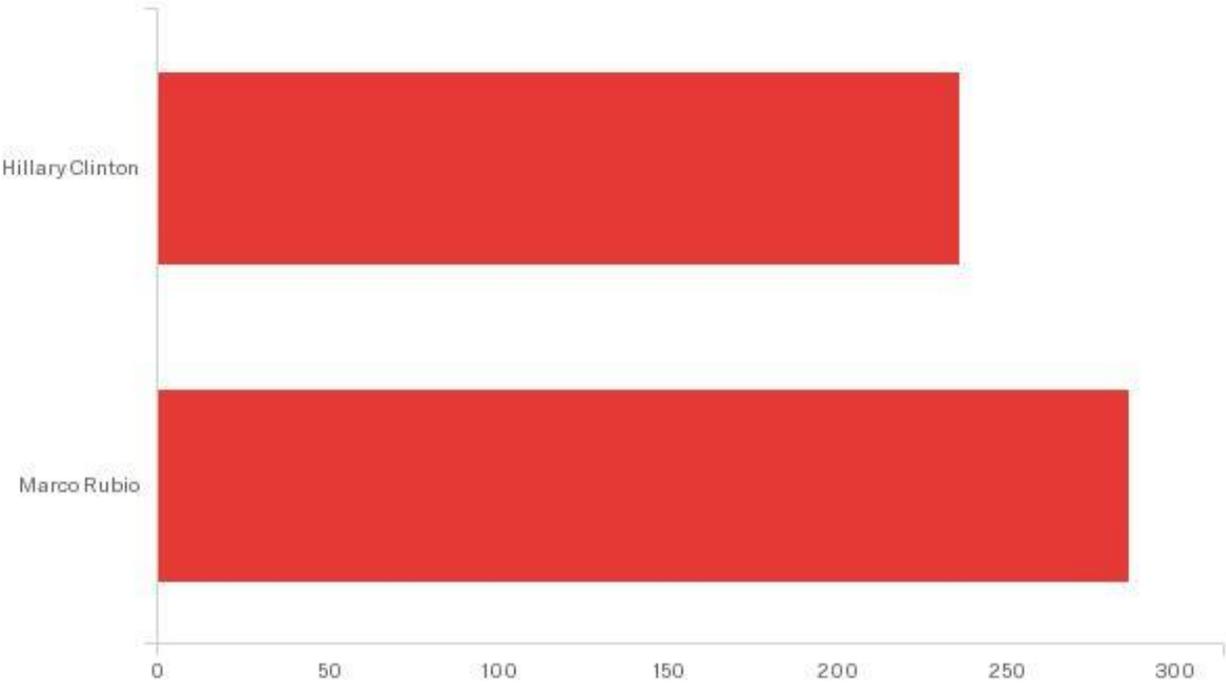
| Answer	%	Count
Hillary Clinton	**45%**	**236**
Marco Rubio	**55%**	**286**
Total	**100%**	**522**

Q43 - (HALF THE SAMPLE) And, if the election for president were held today, and Ben Carson were the Republican candidate and Hillary Clinton were the Democratic candidate, for whom would you vote?
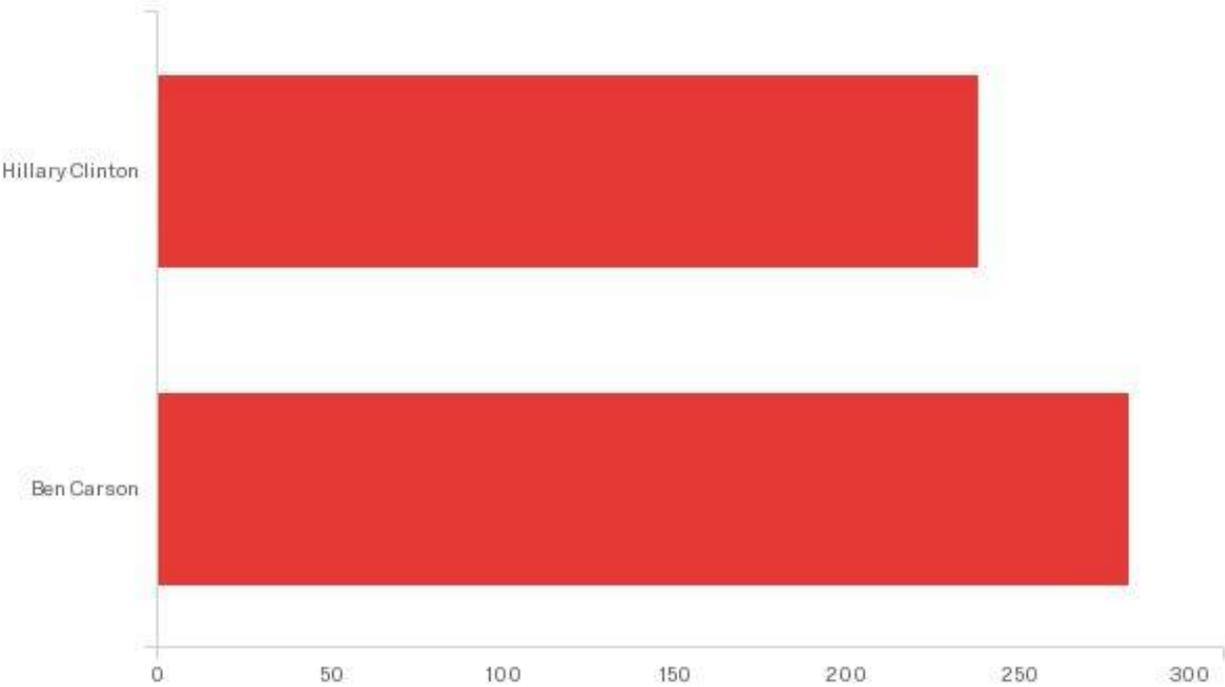

Answer	%	Count
Hillary Clinton	**46%**	**238**
Ben Carson	**54%**	**282**
Total	**100%**	**520**

Q44 - (HALF THE SAMPLE) And, if the election for president were held today, and Jeb Bush were the Republican candidate and Hillary Clinton were the Democratic candidate, for whom would you vote?
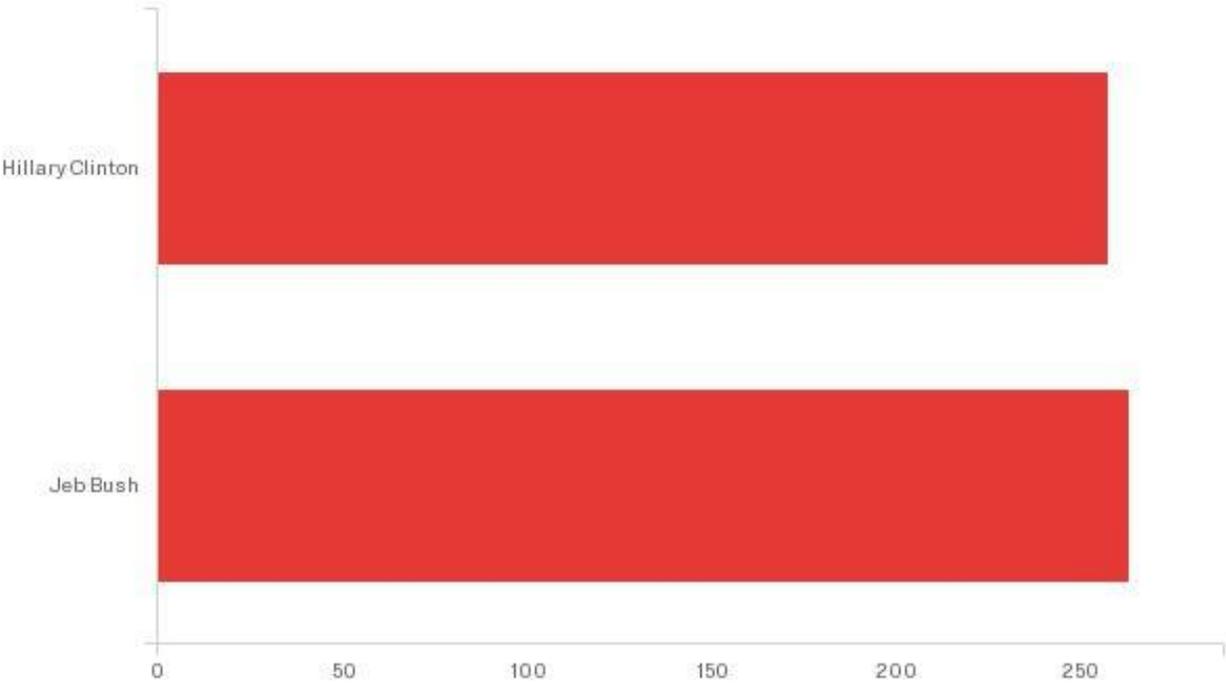
Answer	%	Count
Hillary Clinton	**49%**	**257**
Jeb Bush	**51%**	**263**
Total	**100%**	**520**

Q45 - (HALF THE SAMPLE) And, if the election for president were held today, and Donald Trump were the Republican candidate and Bernie Sanders were the Democratic candidate, for whom would you vote?
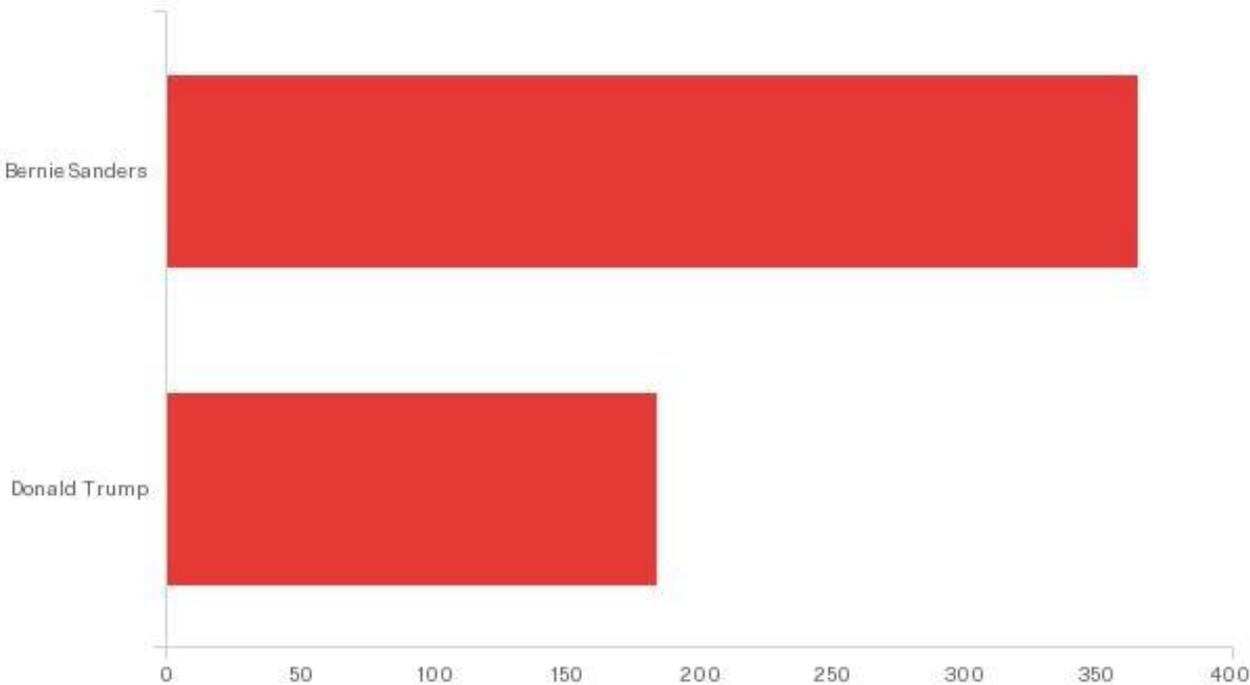

Answer	%	Count
Bernie Sanders	**66%**	**365**
Donald Trump	**34%**	**184**
Total	**100%**	**549**

Q47 - (HALF THE SAMPLE) And, if the election for president were held today, and Marco Rubio were the Republican candidate and Bernie Sanders were the Democratic candidate, for whom would you vote?
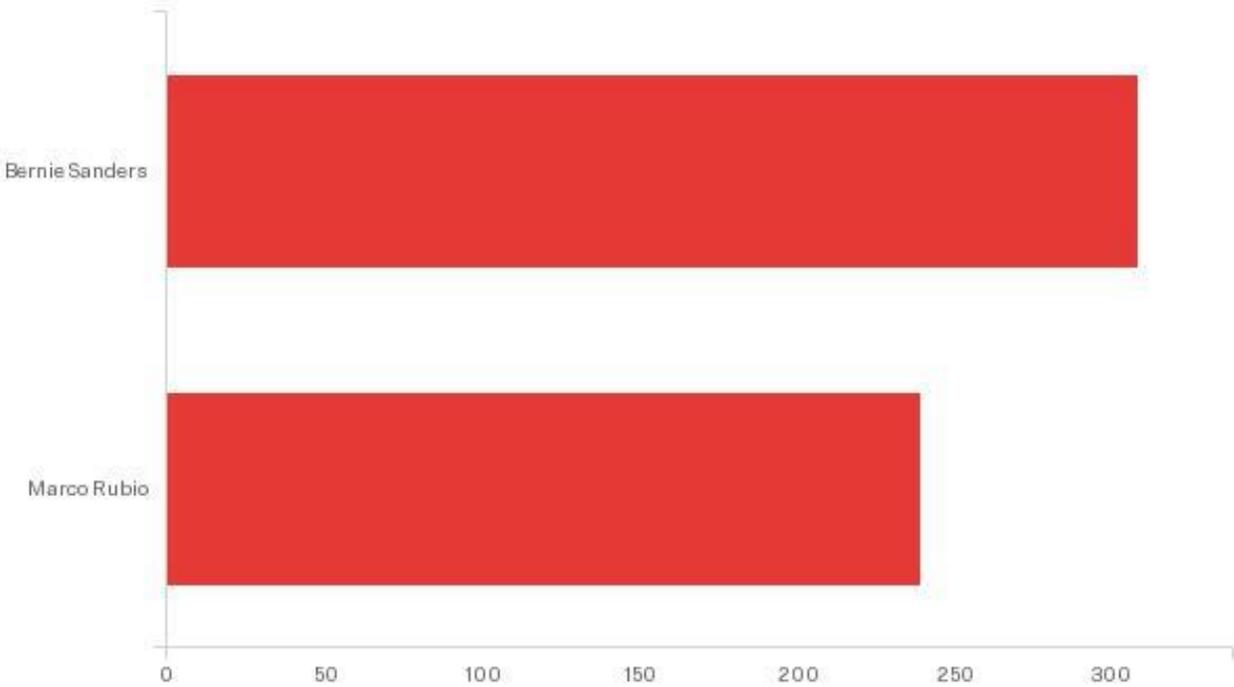
Answer	%	Count
Bernie Sanders	**56%**	**308**
Marco Rubio	**44%**	**239**
Total	**100%**	**547**

Q48 - (HALF THE SAMPLE) And, if the election for president were held today, and Ben Carson were the Republican candidate and Bernie Sanders were the Democratic candidate, for whom would you vote?
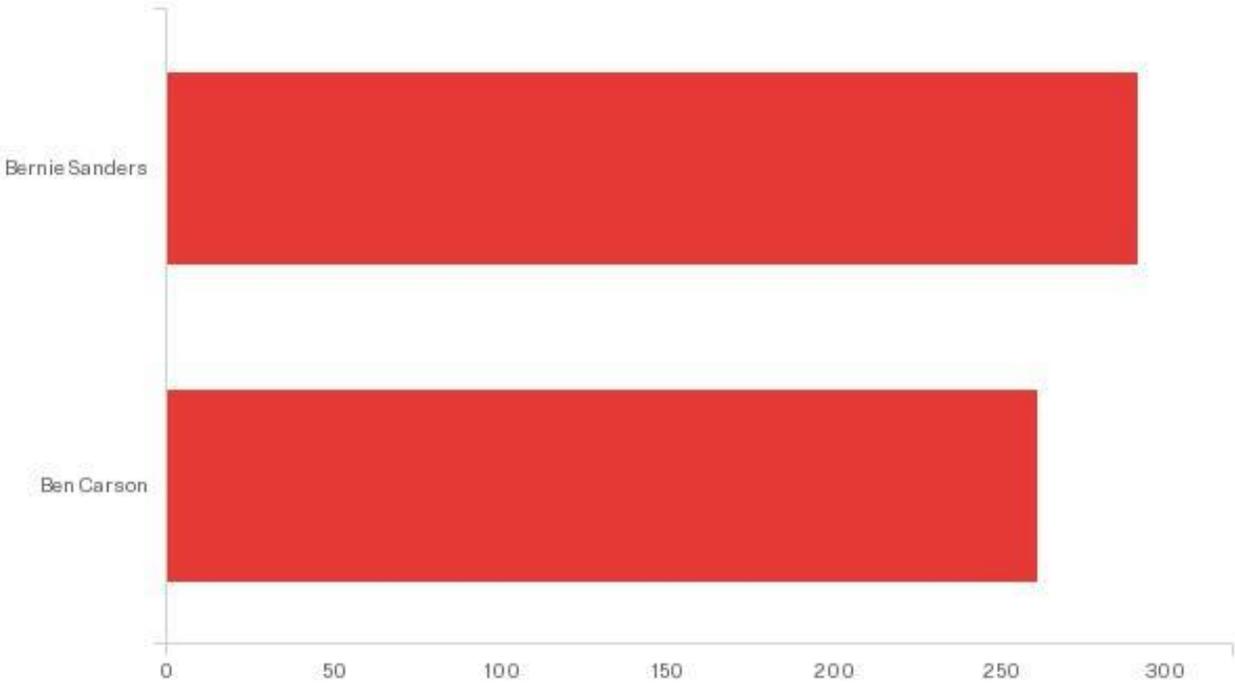
Answer	%	Count
Bernie Sanders	**53%**	**291**
Ben Carson	**47%**	**261**
Total	**100%**	**552**

Q49 - (HALF THE SAMPLE) And, if the election for president were held today, and Jeb Bush were the Republican candidate and Bernie Sanders were the Democratic candidate, for whom would you vote?
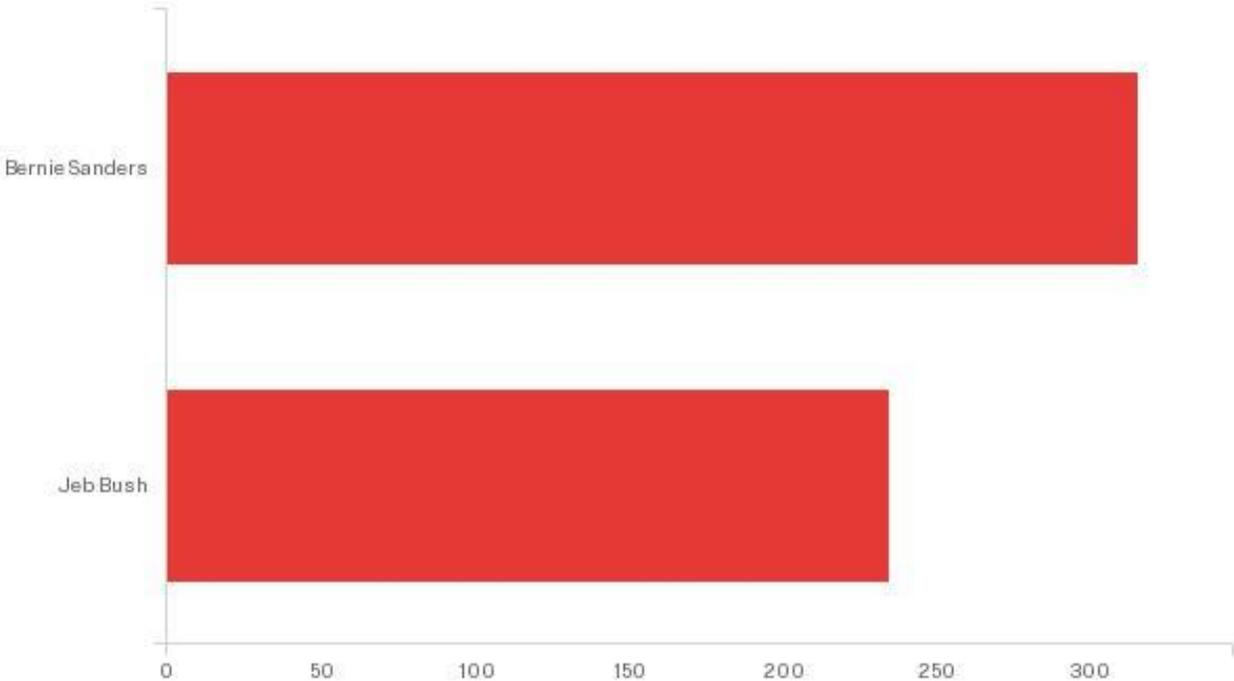
Answer	%	Count
Bernie Sanders	**57%**	**315**
Jeb Bush	**43%**	**234**
Total	**100%**	**549**

Q37 - All in all, do you think things in the United States are:
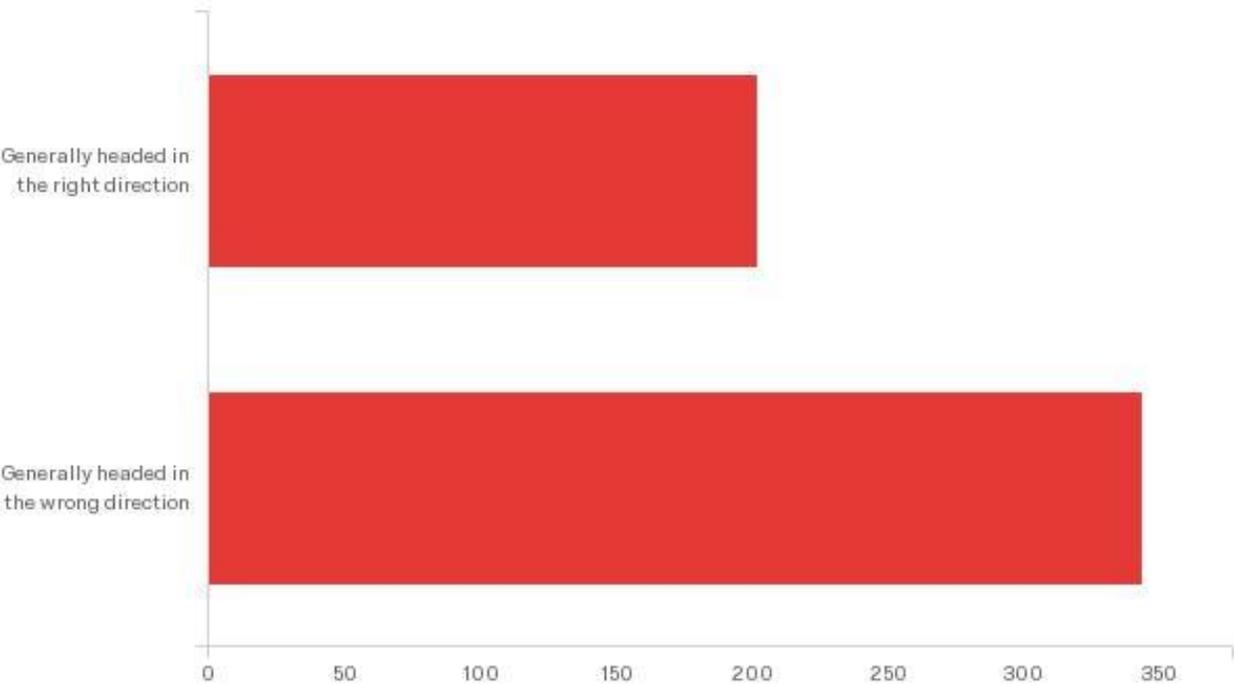
Answer	%	Count
Generally headed in the right direction	**37%**	**201**
Generally headed in the wrong direction	**63%**	**343**
Total	**100%**	**544**

Q38 - All in all, do you think things at NC State are:
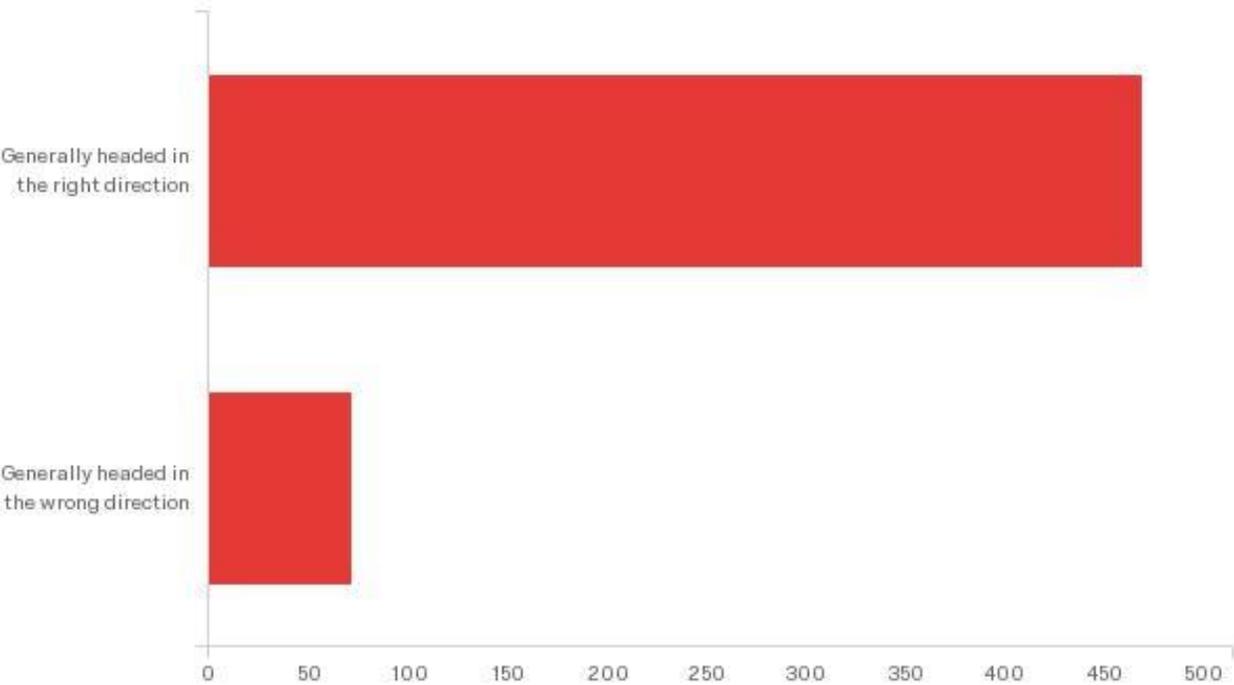
| Answer	%	Count
Generally headed in the right direction	**87%**	**468**
Generally headed in the wrong direction	**13%**	**71**
Total	**100%**	**539**

Q13 - (ONE-SIXTH OF THE SAMPLE) Some people say illegal immigration is increasing the level of serious crime in America. Do you believe we should build a wall on the border of Mexico to keep illegal immigrants from entering the U.S?
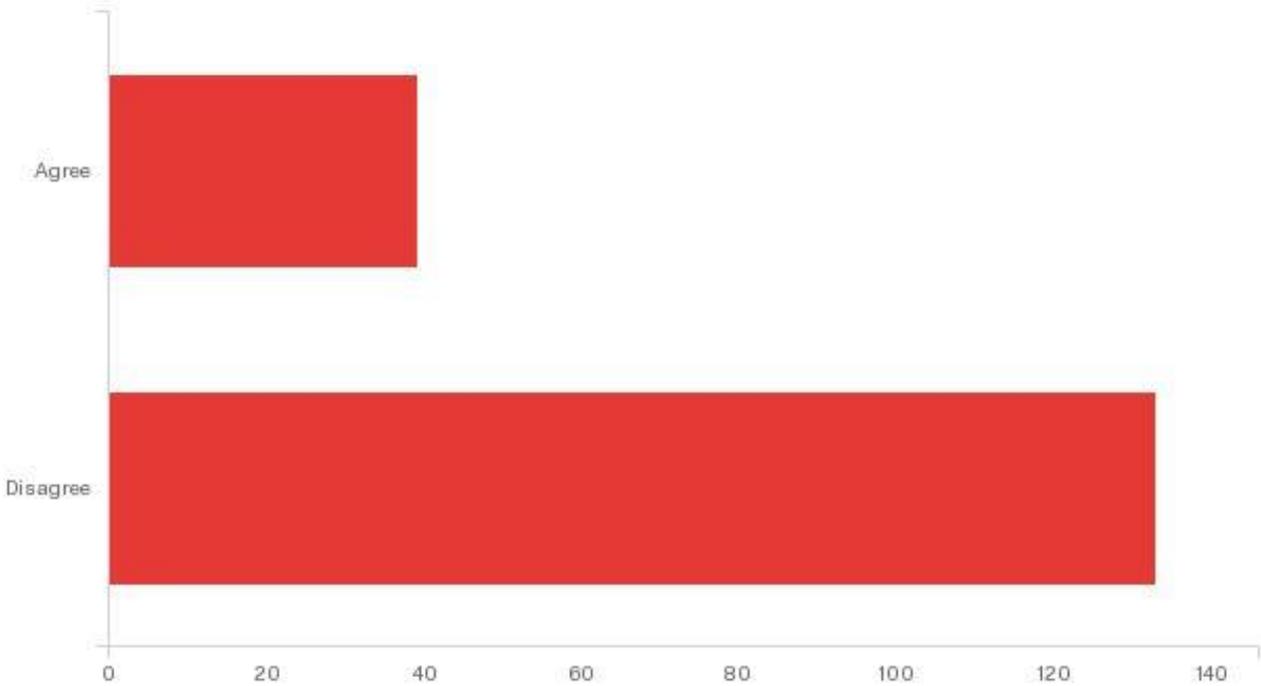
Answer	%	Count
Agree	**23%**	**39**
Disagree	**77%**	**133**
Total	**100%**	**172**

**Q19 - (ONE-SIXTH OF THE SAMPLE) Some people say illegal immigration is increasing the level of serious crime in America. Do you believe we should build a wall on the border of Mexico to keep illegal immigrants from entering the U.S?**
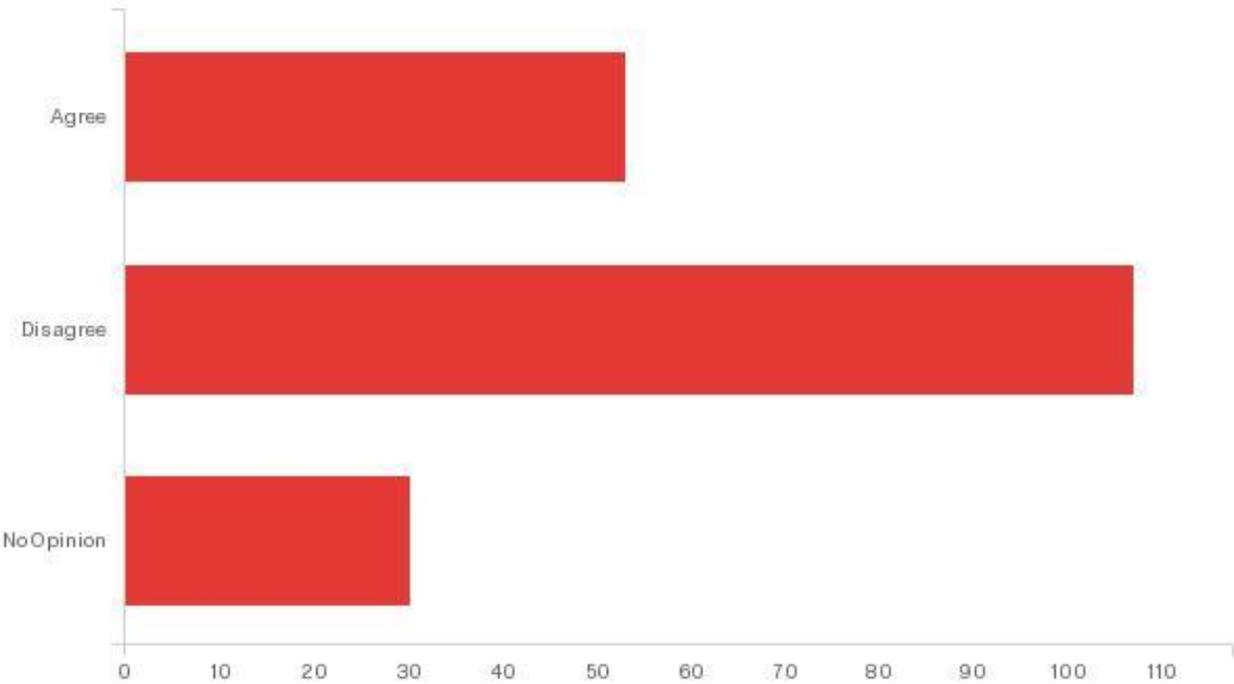
Answer	%	Count
Agree	28%	53
Disagree	56%	107
No Opinion	16%	30
Total	100%	190

Q17 - (ONE-SIXTH OF THE SAMPLE) Donald Trump has said illegal immigration is increasing the level of serious crime in America. Do you believe we should build a wall on the border of Mexico to keep illegal immigrants from entering the U.S?
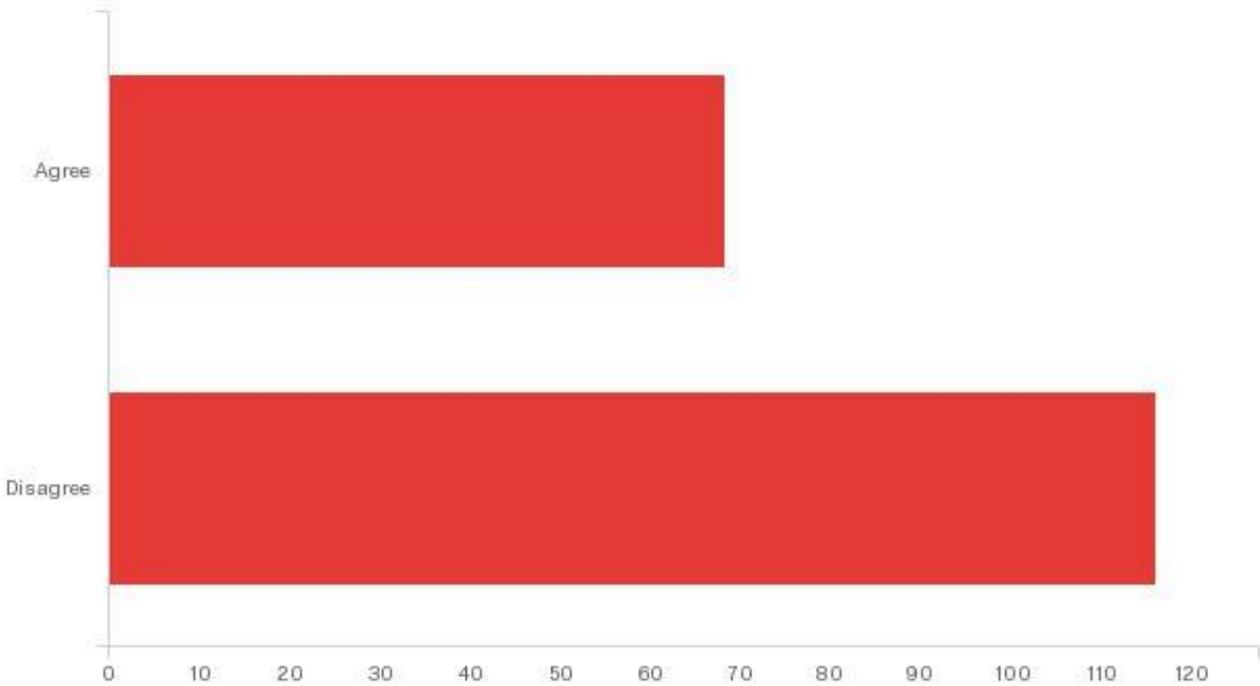

| Answer	%	Count
Agree	**37%**	**68**
Disagree	**63%**	**116**
Total	**100%**	**184**

Q20 - (ONE-SIXTH OF THE SAMPLE) Donald Trump has said illegal immigration is increasing the level of serious crime in America. Do you believe we should build a wall on the border of Mexico to keep illegal immigrants from entering the U.S?
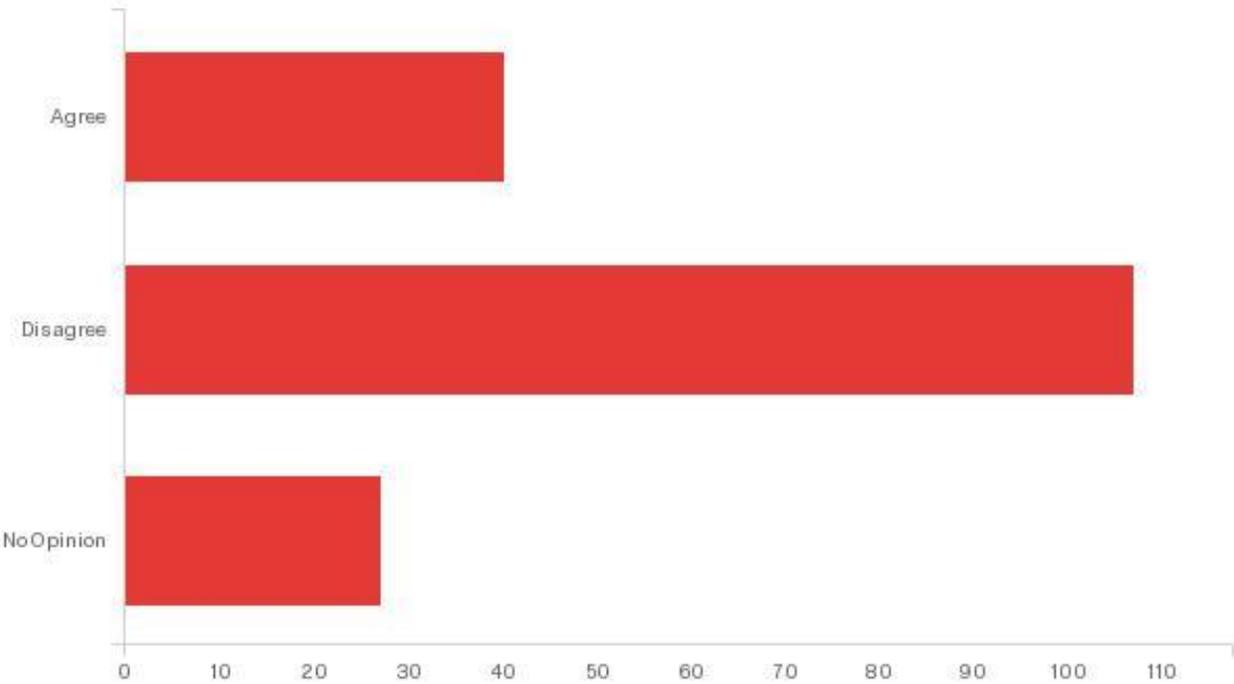
Answer	%	Count
Agree	**23%**	**40**
Disagree	**61%**	**107**
No Opinion	**16%**	**27**
Total	**100%**	**174**

Q30 - (ONE-SIXTH OF THE SAMPLE) Do you believe we should build a wall on the border of Mexico to keep illegal immigrants from entering the U.S?
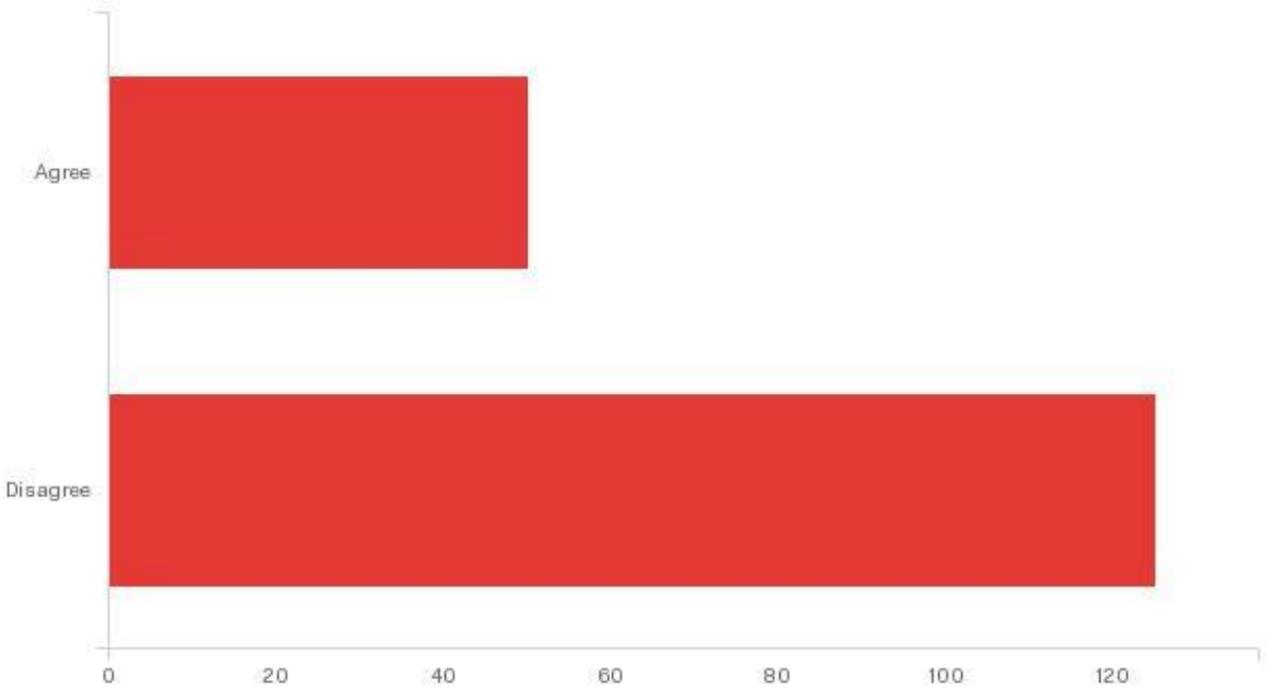
Answer	%	Count
Agree	**29%**	**50**
Disagree	**71%**	**125**
Total	**100%**	**175**

Q31 - (ONE-SIXTH OF THE SAMPLE) Do you believe we should build a wall on the border of Mexico to keep illegal immigrants from entering the U.S?
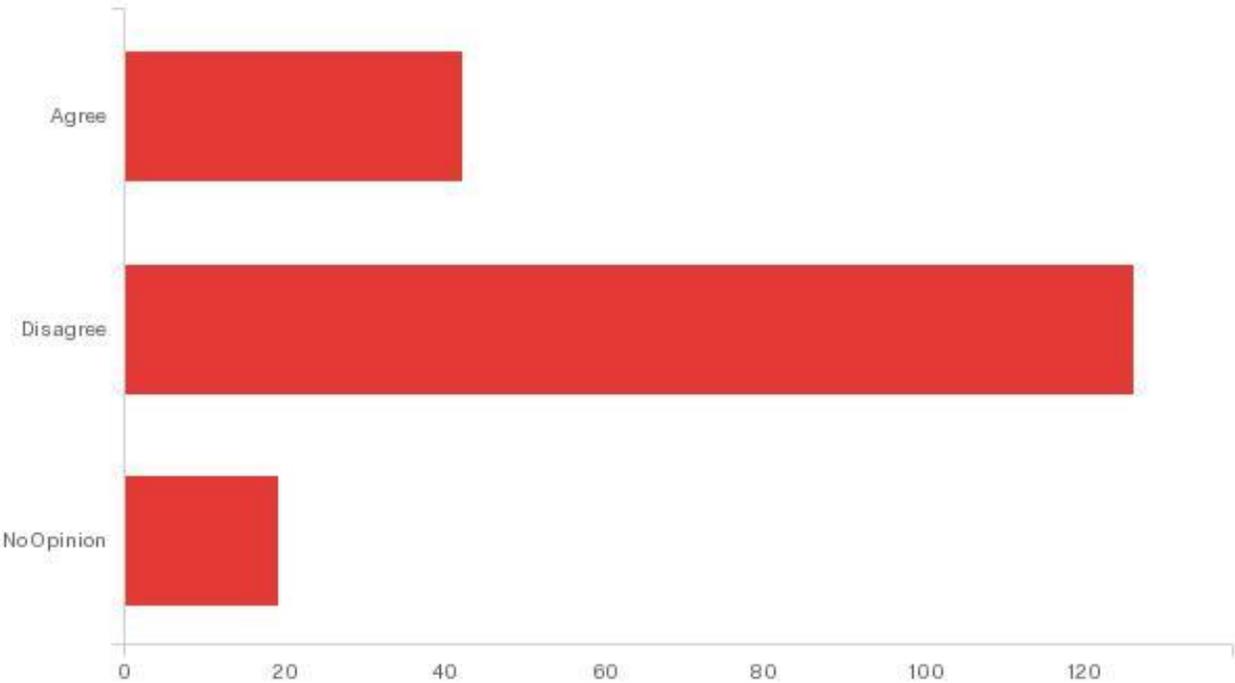
Answer	%	Count
Agree	**22%**	**42**
Disagree	**67%**	**126**
No Opinion	**10%**	**19**
Total	**100%**	**187**

Q19 - (ONE-THIRD OF THE SAMPLE) Do you think college education is a right?
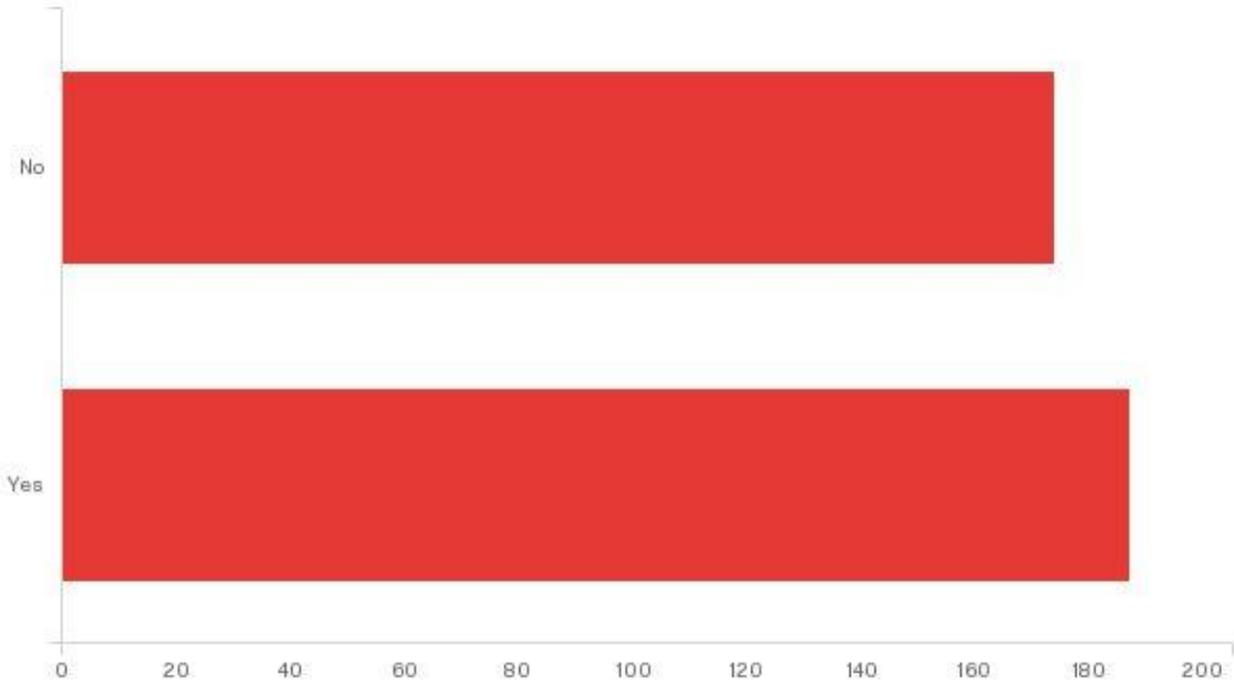
Answer	%	Count
No	**48%**	**174**
Yes	**52%**	**187**
Total	**100%**	**361**

Q20 - (ONE-THIRD OF THE SAMPLE) Do you think college education is a right or a privilege?
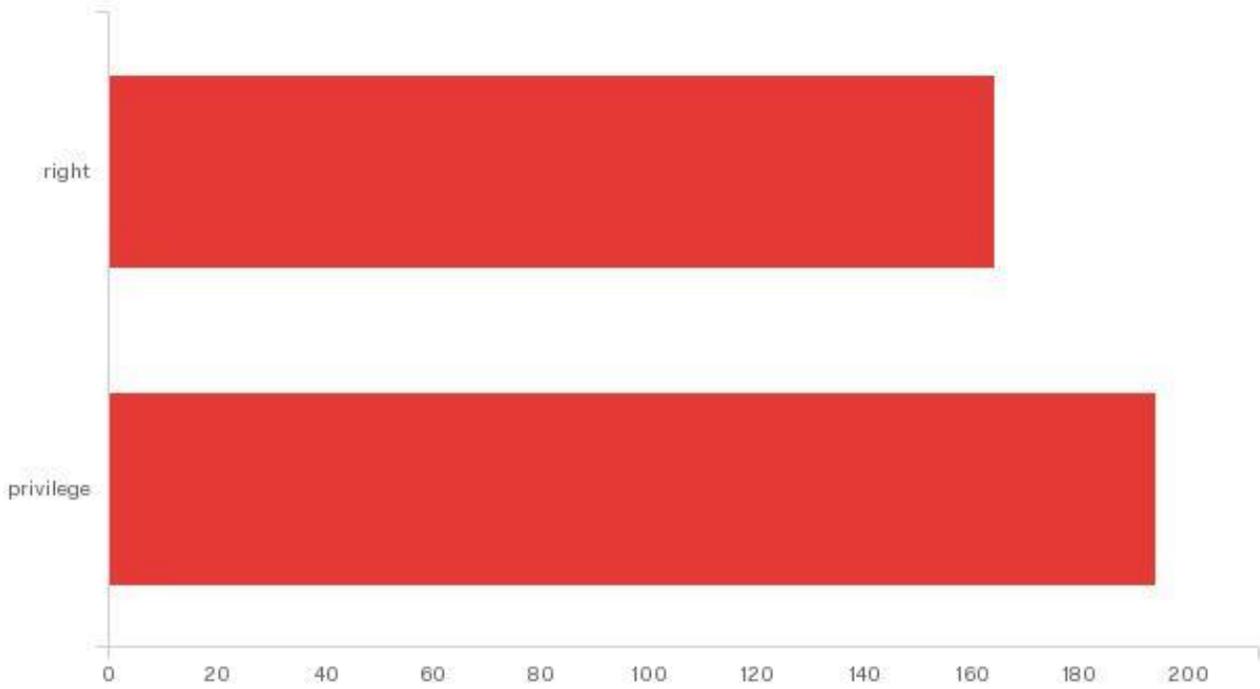
Answer	%	Count
right	**46%**	**164**
privilege	**54%**	**194**
Total	**100%**	**358**

Q21 - (ONE-THIRD OF THE SAMPLE) Do you think college education is a right, privilege, both, or neither?
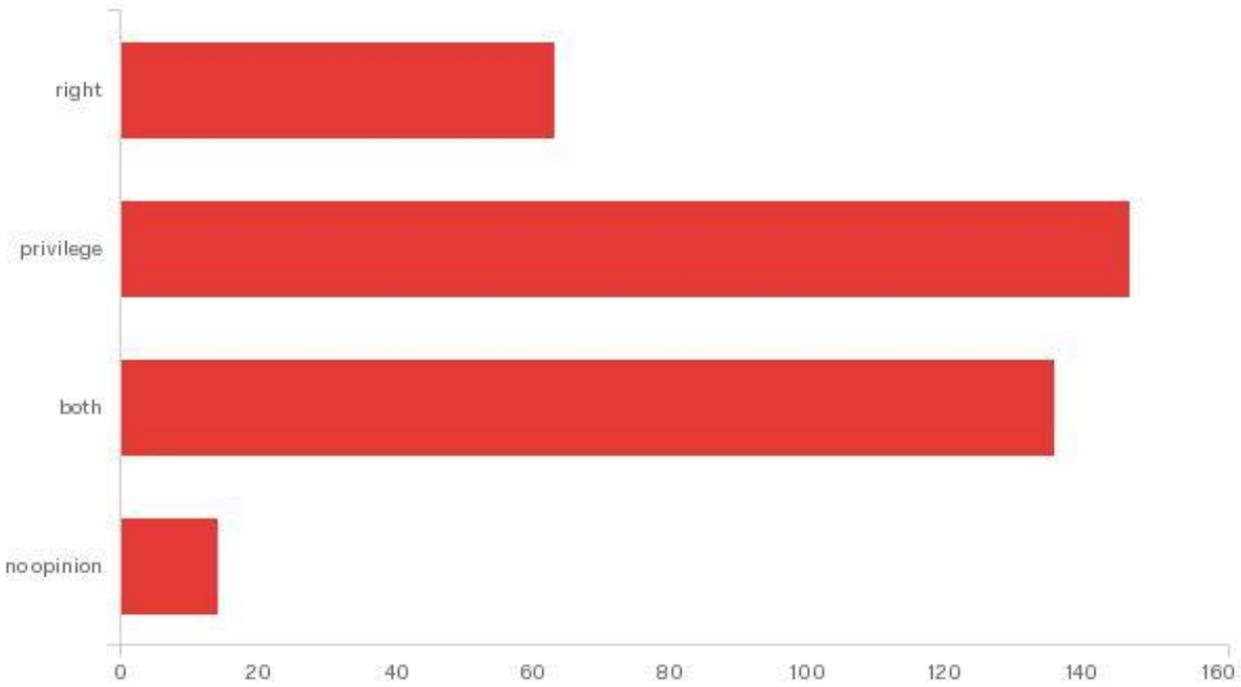
Answer	%	Count
right	**18%**	**63**
privilege	**41%**	**147**
both	**38%**	**136**
no opinion	**4%**	**14**
Total	**100%**	**360**

Q30 - What is the first word that comes to mind when you are asked, what is a sin? (A full list of every response is available upon request)

Q50 – (ONE-SIXTH OF SAMPLE) For persons convicted of murder, do you favor or oppose a sentence of the death penalty?
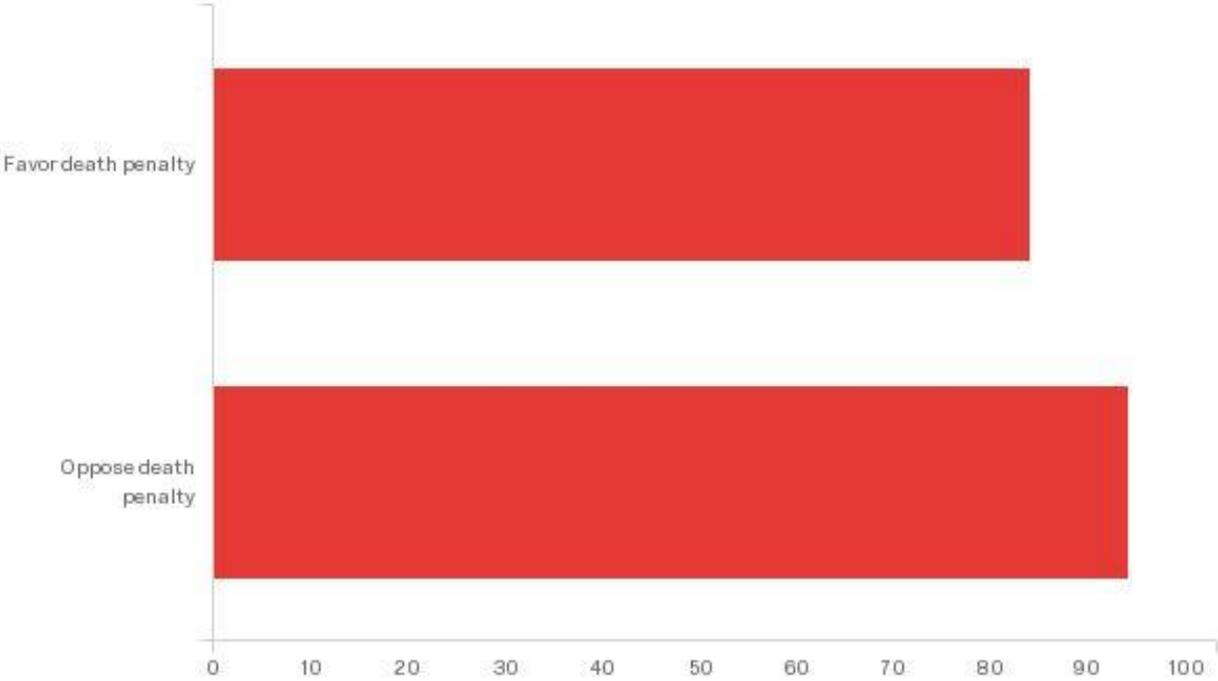
Answer	%	Count
Favor death penalty	**47%**	**84**
Oppose death penalty	**53%**	**94**
Total	**100%**	**178**

Q51 - (ONE-SIXTH OF SAMPLE) For persons convicted of murder, do you favor a sentence of the death penalty, or do you favor a sentence of life in prison without parole with a requirement that the inmate work and give any pay to the victim's family?
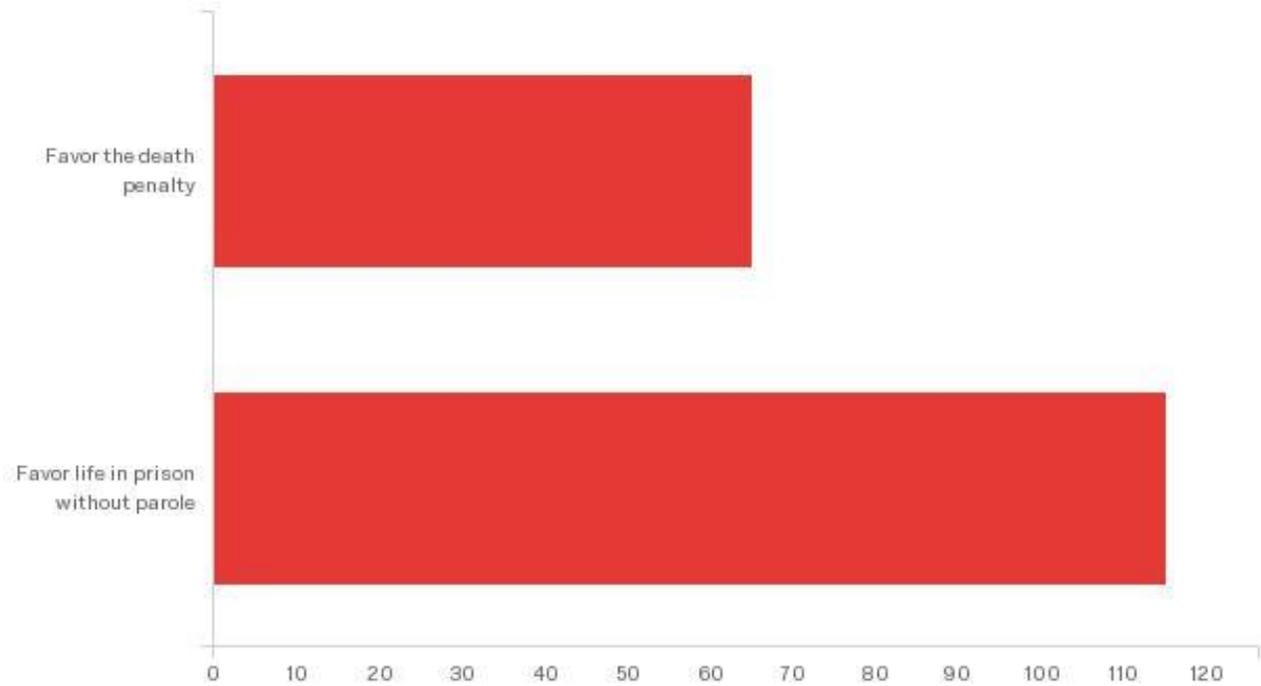
Answer	%	Count
Favor the death penalty	**36%**	**65**
Favor life in prison without parole	**64%**	**115**
Total	**100%**	**180**

Q54 – If you had a friend that was against the death penalty, would that friend feel comfortable talking about the issue with others who supported the death penalty?
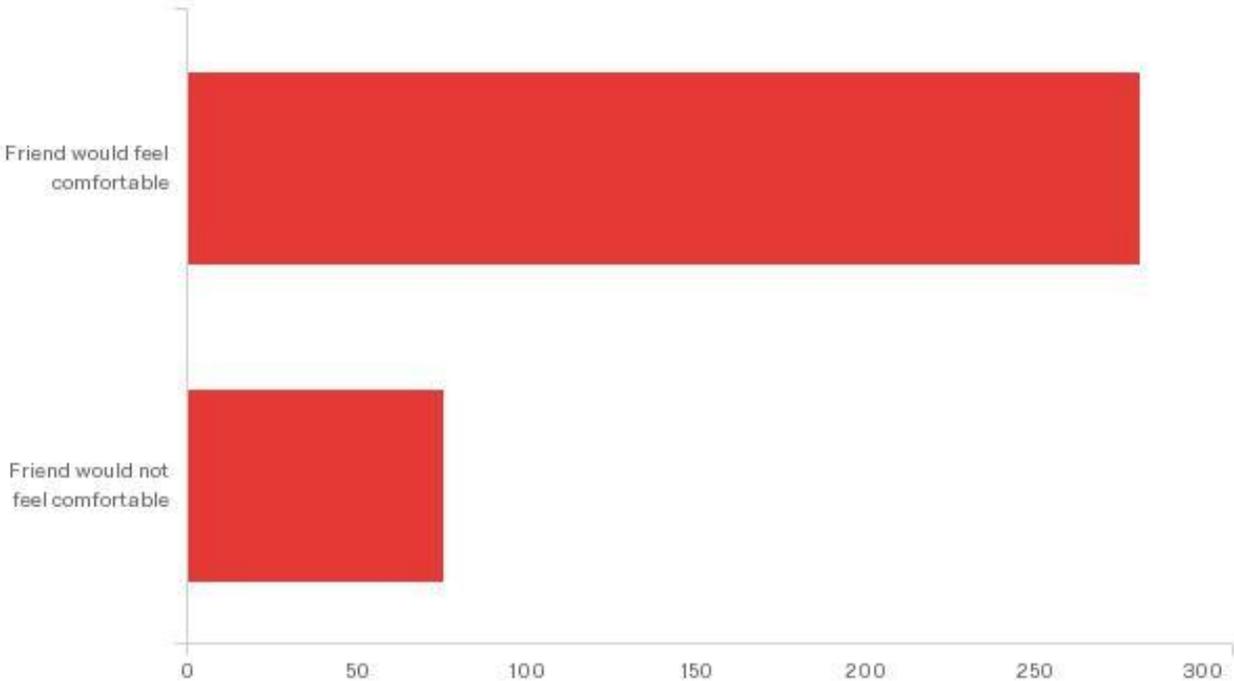
Answer	%	Count
Friend would feel comfortable	**79%**	**281**
Friend would not feel comfortable	**21%**	**75**
Total	**100%**	**356**

Q52 - (ONE-SIXTH OF SAMPLE) Support for the death penalty remains solid, a new poll shows. The results of a recent national poll taken show that 74% of Americans support the death penalty, with only 20% opposed and 6% undecided.
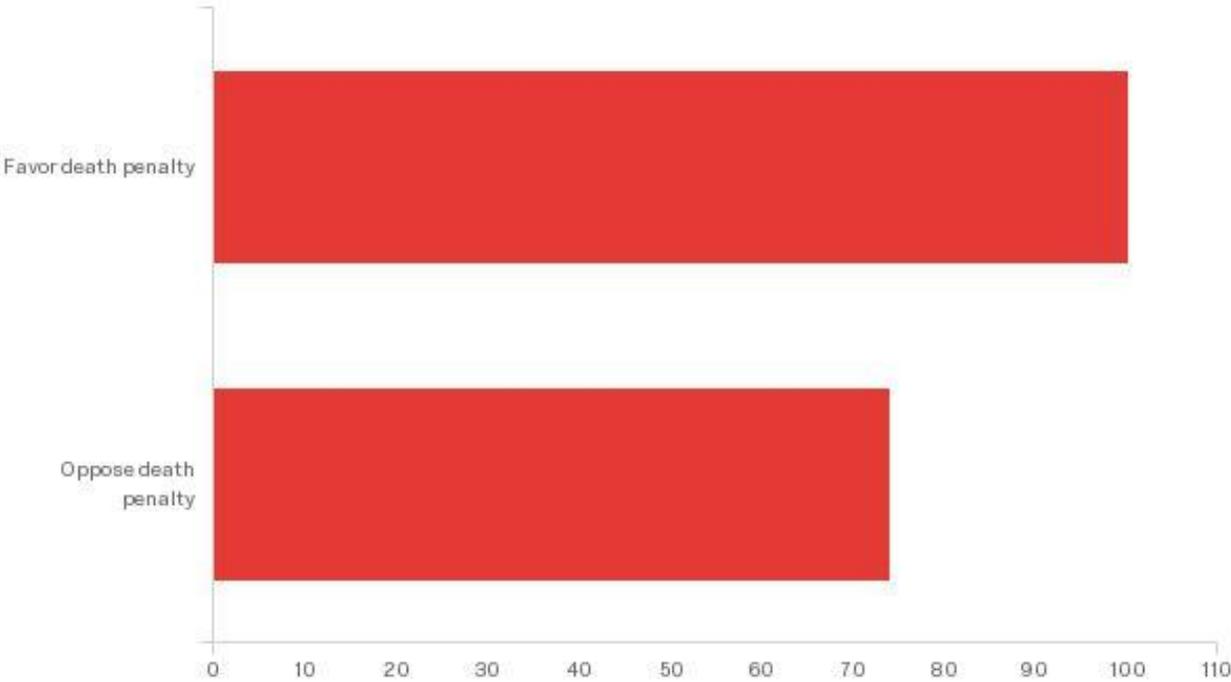

Answer	%	Count
Favor death penalty	**57%**	**100**
Oppose death penalty	**43%**	**74**
Total	**100%**	**174**

Q53 - (ONE-SIXTH OF SAMPLE) Support for the death penalty remains solid, a new poll shows. The results of a recent national poll taken show that 74% of Americans support the death penalty, with only 20% opposed and 6% undecided.
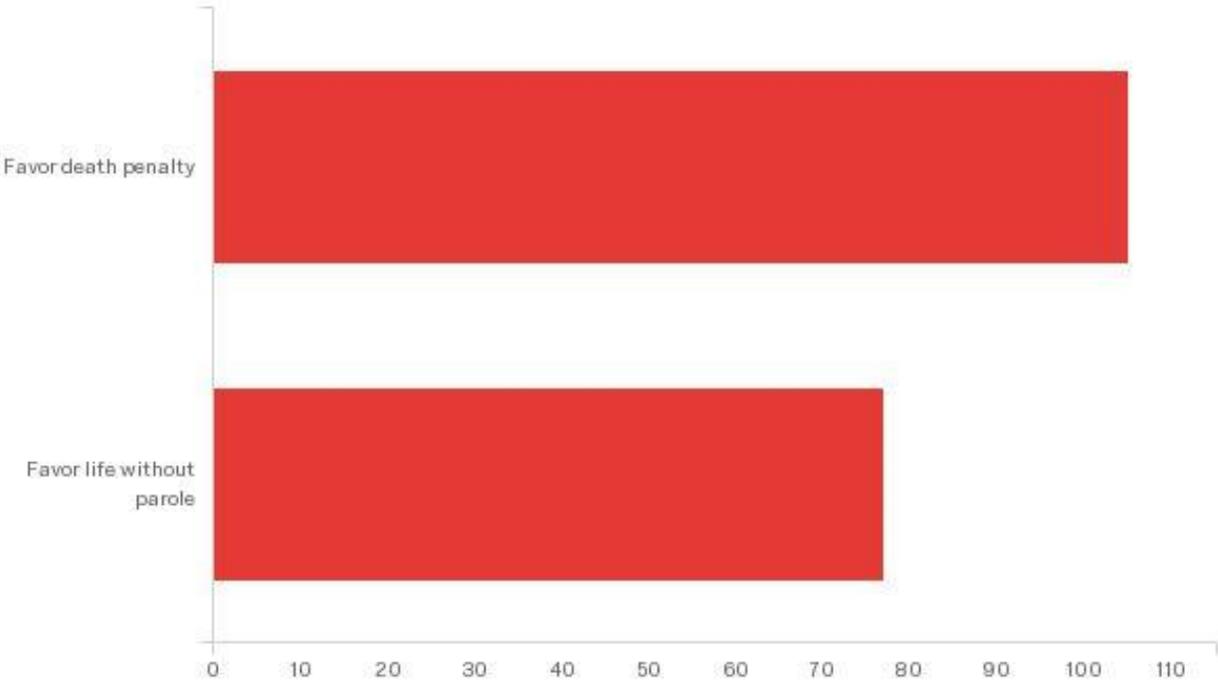
Answer	%	Count
Favor death penalty	**58%**	**105**
Favor life without parole	**42%**	**77**
Total	**100%**	**182**

Q55 - If you had a friend that was against the death penalty, would that friend feel comfortable talking about the issue with others who supported the death penalty?
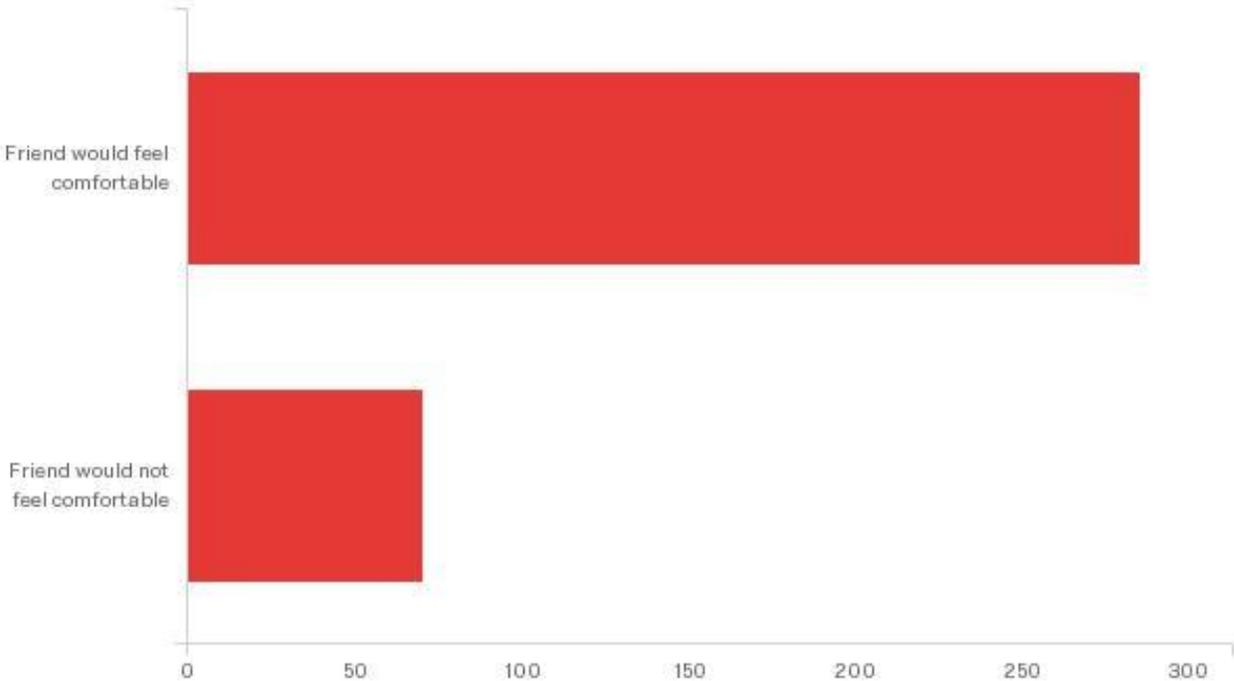

Answer	%	Count
Friend would feel comfortable	**80%**	**285**
Friend would not feel comfortable	**20%**	**70**
Total	**100%**	**355**

Q69 - (ONE-SIXTH OF SAMPLE) More people support alternatives to the death penalty, a new survey shows. The results of a national poll indicate that 48% of Americans think the sentence for a convicted murder should be life in prison without parole, with the inmate required to work a prison job and send any proceeds to the victim's relief fund.
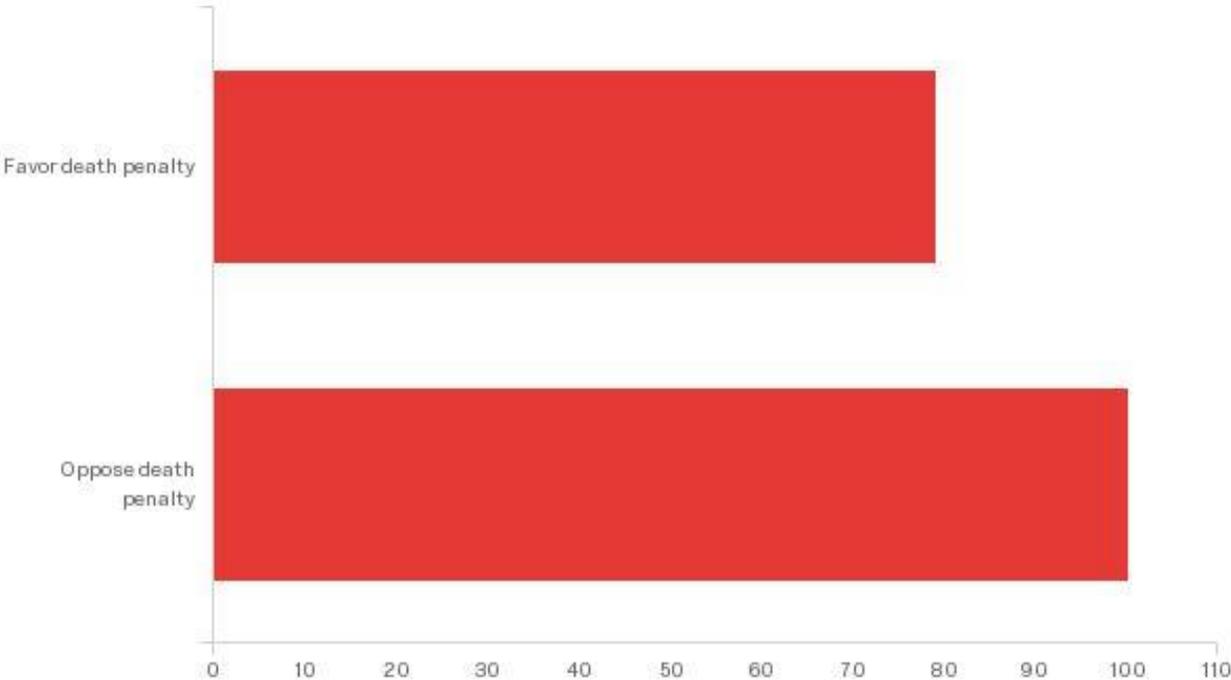

Answer	%	Count
Favor death penalty	**44%**	**79**
Oppose death penalty	**56%**	**100**
Total	**100%**	**179**

Q70 - (ONE-SIXTH OF SAMPLE) More people support alternatives to the death penalty, a new survey shows. The results of a national poll indicate that 48% of Americans think the sentence for a convicted murder should be life in prison without parole, with the inmate required to work a prison job and send any proceeds to the victim's relief fund.
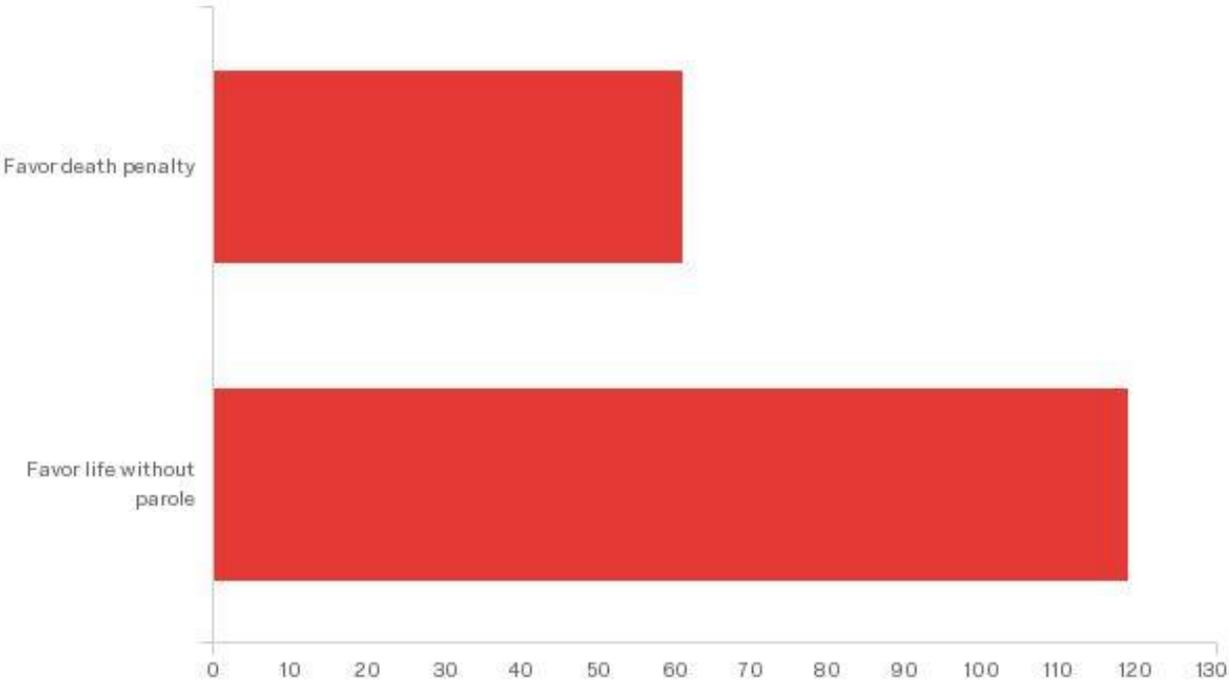

Answer	%	Count
Favor death penalty	**34%**	**61**
Favor life without parole	**66%**	**119**
Total	**100%**	**180**

Q71 - If you had a friend that was against the death penalty, would that friend feel comfortable talking about the issue with others who supported the death penalty?
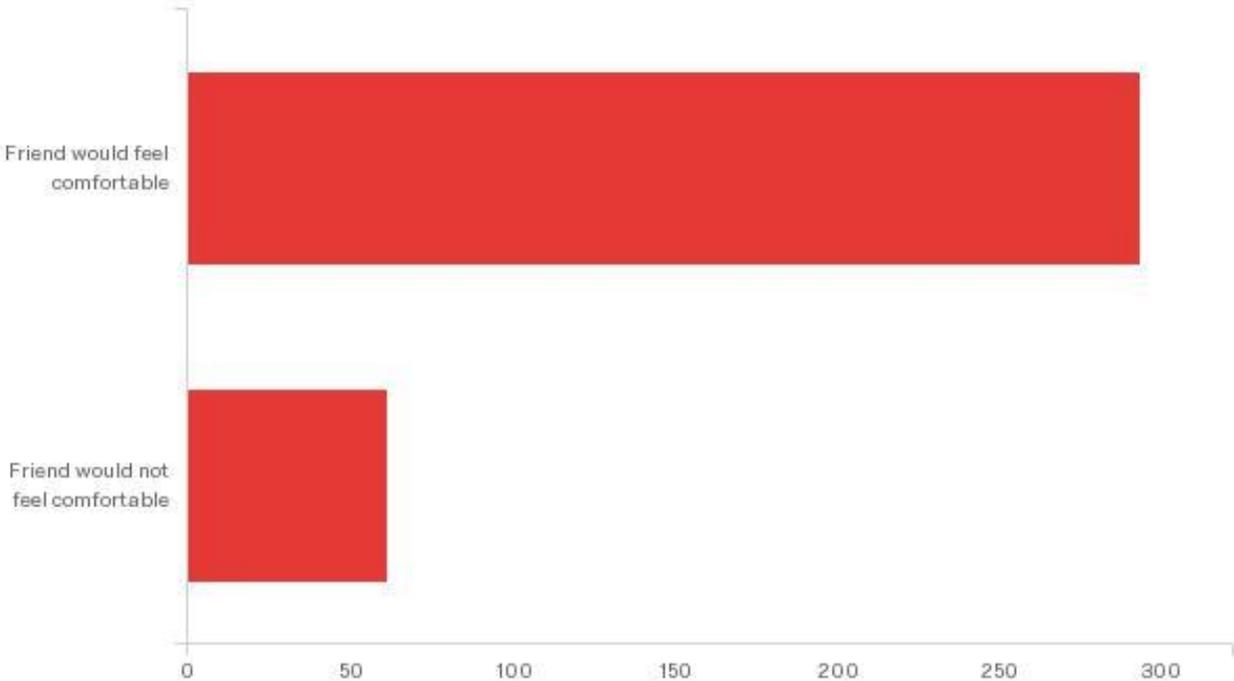
| Answer	%	Count
Friend would feel comfortable	**83%**	**293**
Friend would not feel comfortable	**17%**	**61**
Total	**100%**	**354**

Q31 - Have you happened to follow each of the following news stories very closely, fairly closely, not too closely, or not at all closely?
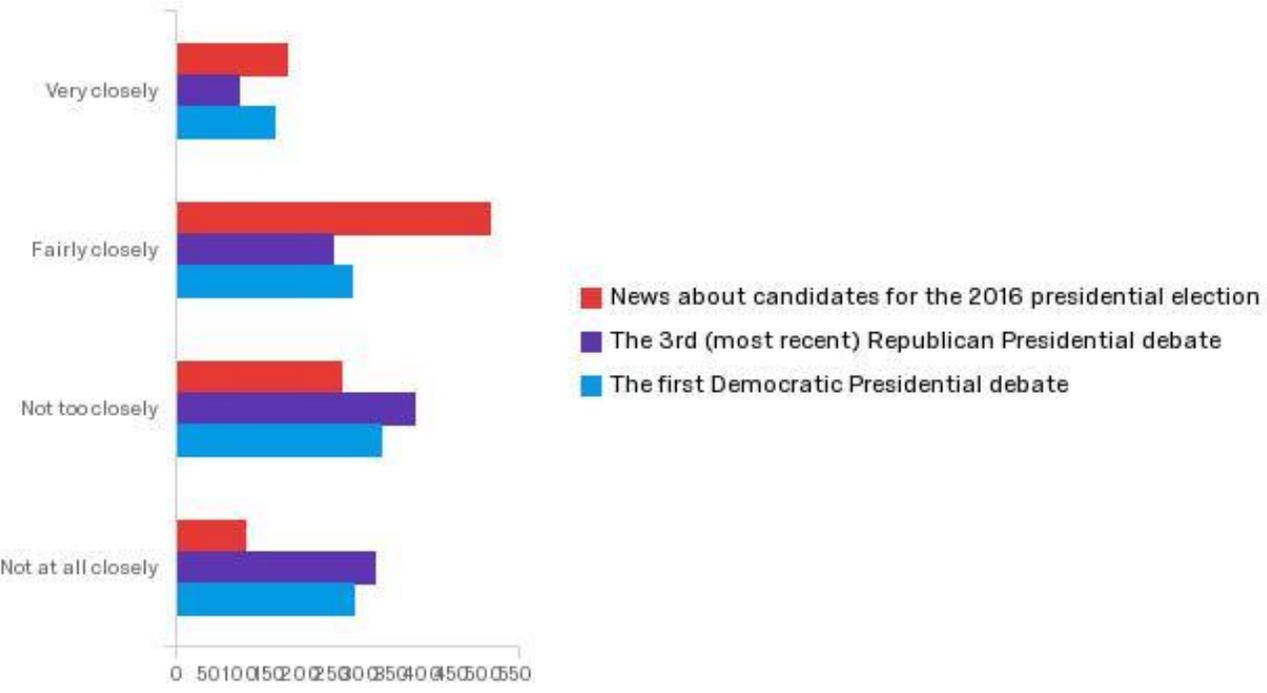
Question	Very closely	Fairly closely	Not too closely	Not at all closely	Total
News about candidates for the 2016 presidential election	178	509	268	111	1066
The 3rd (most recent) Republican Presidential debate	102	253	389	322	1066
The first Democratic Presidential debate	159	284	334	289	1066

Q39 - Would you say the Democratic Party:
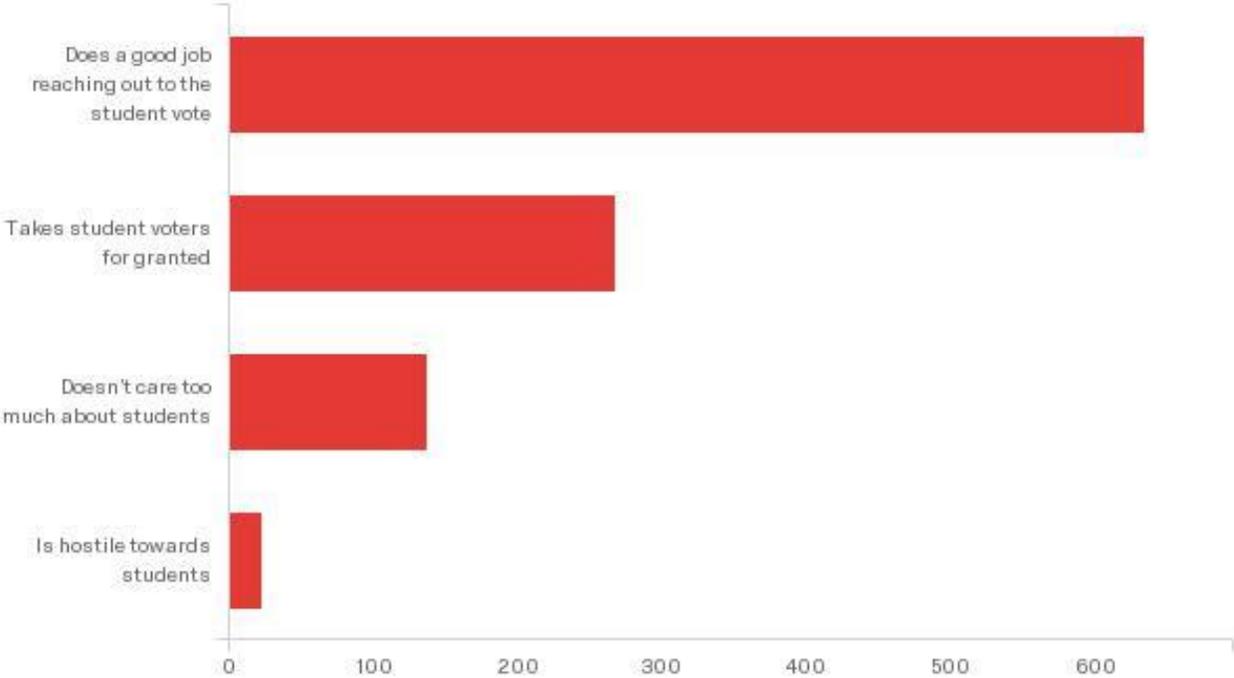
Answer	%	Count
Does a good job reaching out to the student vote	**60%**	**633**
Takes student voters for granted	**25%**	**266**
Doesn't care too much about students	**13%**	**136**
Is hostile towards students	**2%**	**21**
Total	**100%**	**1056**

Q40 - Would you say the Republican Party:
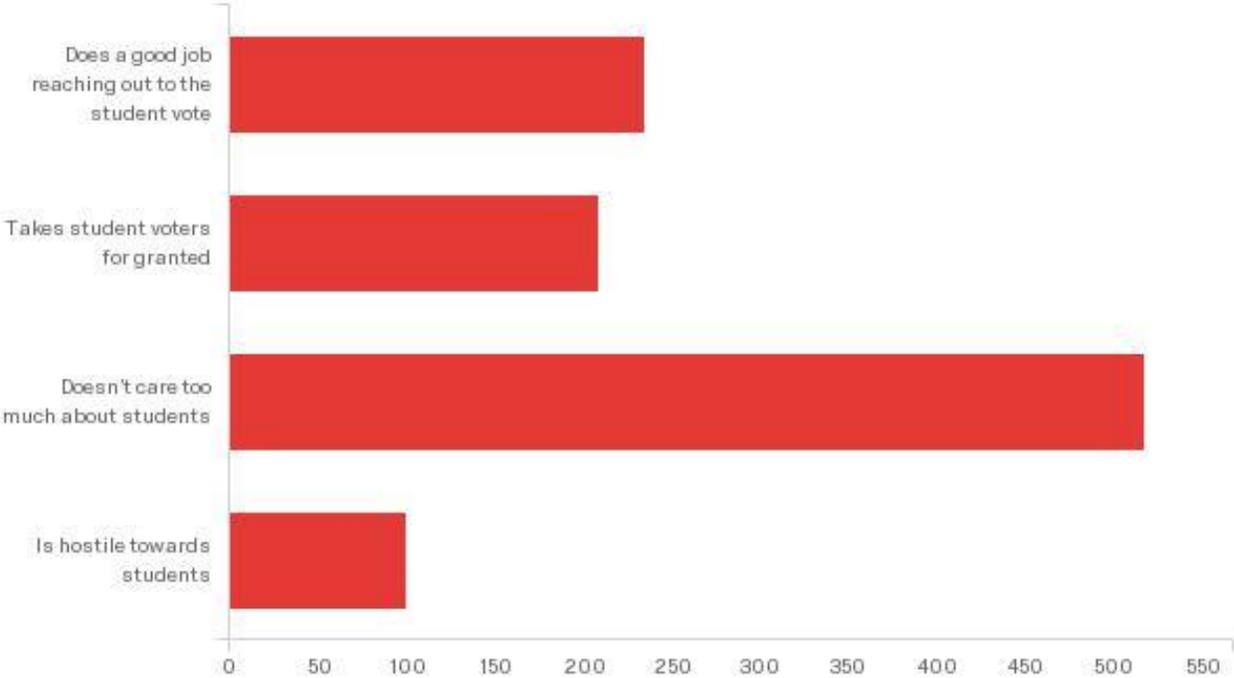
Answer	%	Count
Does a good job reaching out to the student vote	**22%**	**233**
Takes student voters for granted	**20%**	**208**
Doesn't care too much about students	**49%**	**516**
Is hostile towards students	**9%**	**99**
Total	**100%**	**1056**

Q23 – (HALF SAMPLE) Do you think abortion should be legal in all cases, legal in most cases, illegal in most cases or illegal in all cases?
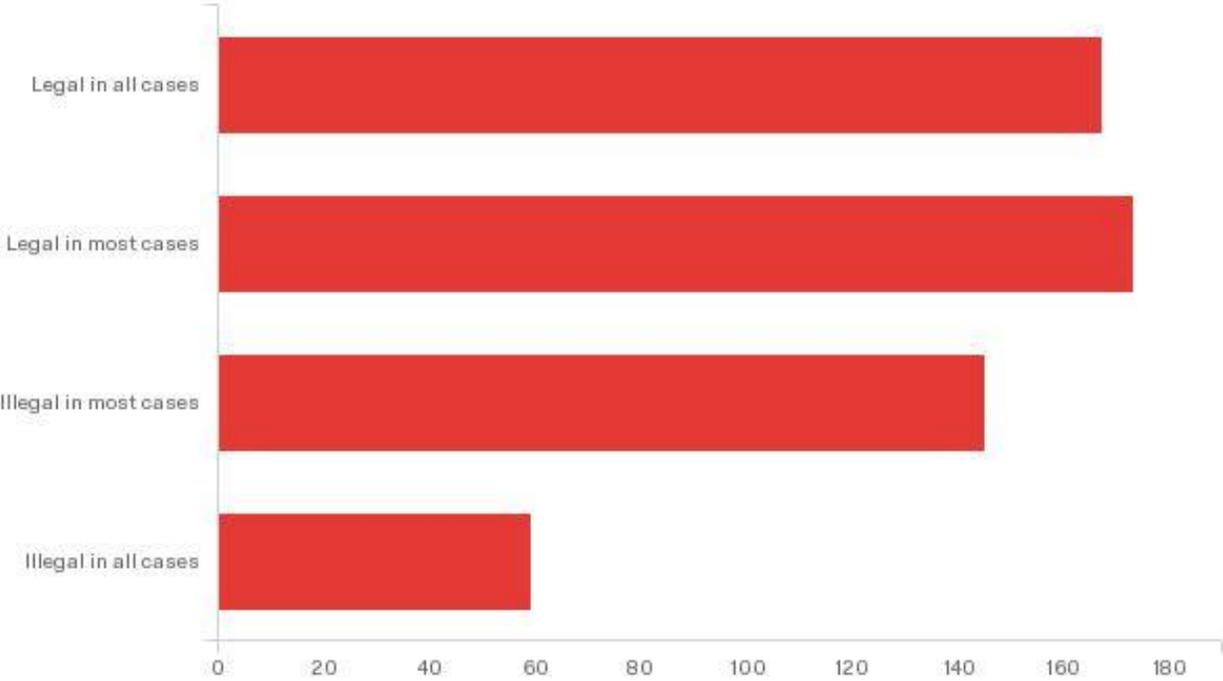

Answer	%	Count
Legal in all cases	**31%**	**167**
Legal in most cases	**32%**	**173**
Illegal in most cases	**27%**	**145**
Illegal in all cases	**11%**	**59**
Total	**100%**	**544**

Q24 – (HALF SAMPLE) Which of these comes closest to your view?
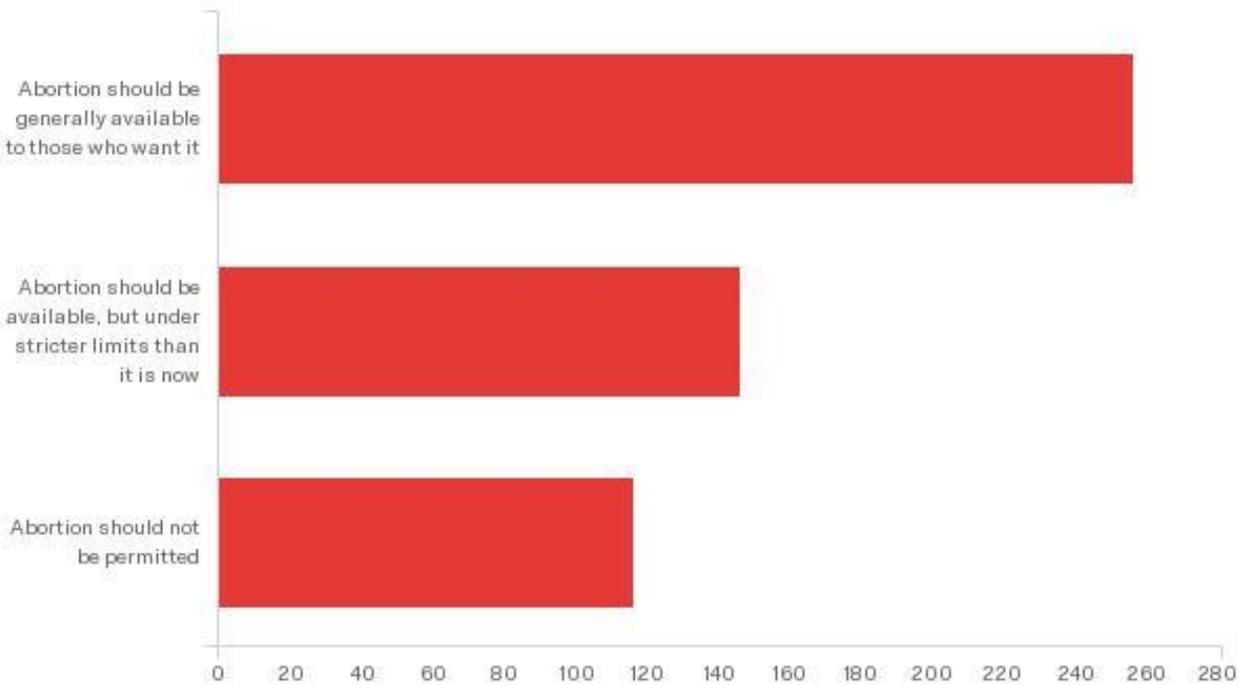

Answer	%	Count
Abortion should be generally available to those who want it	**49%**	**256**
Abortion should be available, but under stricter limits than it is now	**28%**	**146**
Abortion should not be permitted	**22%**	**116**
Total	**100%**	**518**

Q09 - These last set of questions help us understand how different groups think about social issues and government. First, what is your gender?
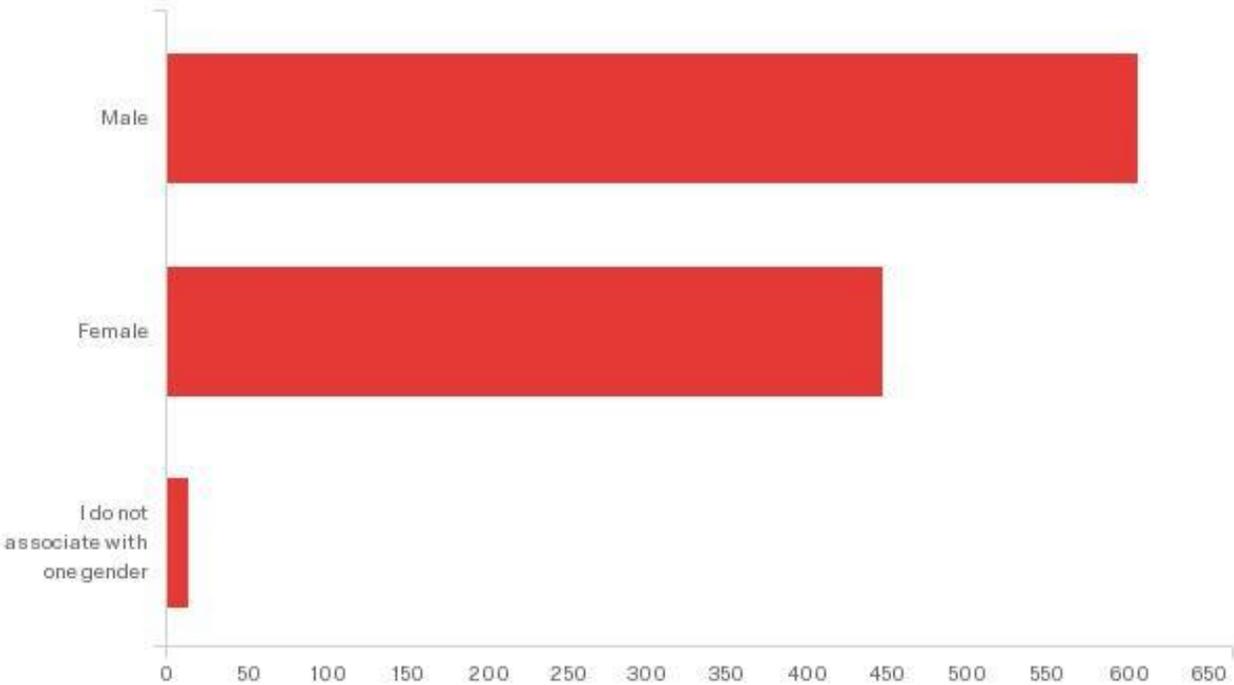

Answer	%	Count
Male	**57%**	**606**
Female	**42%**	**447**
I do not associate with one gender	**1%**	**12**
Total	**100%**	**1065**

Q13 - What is your age?
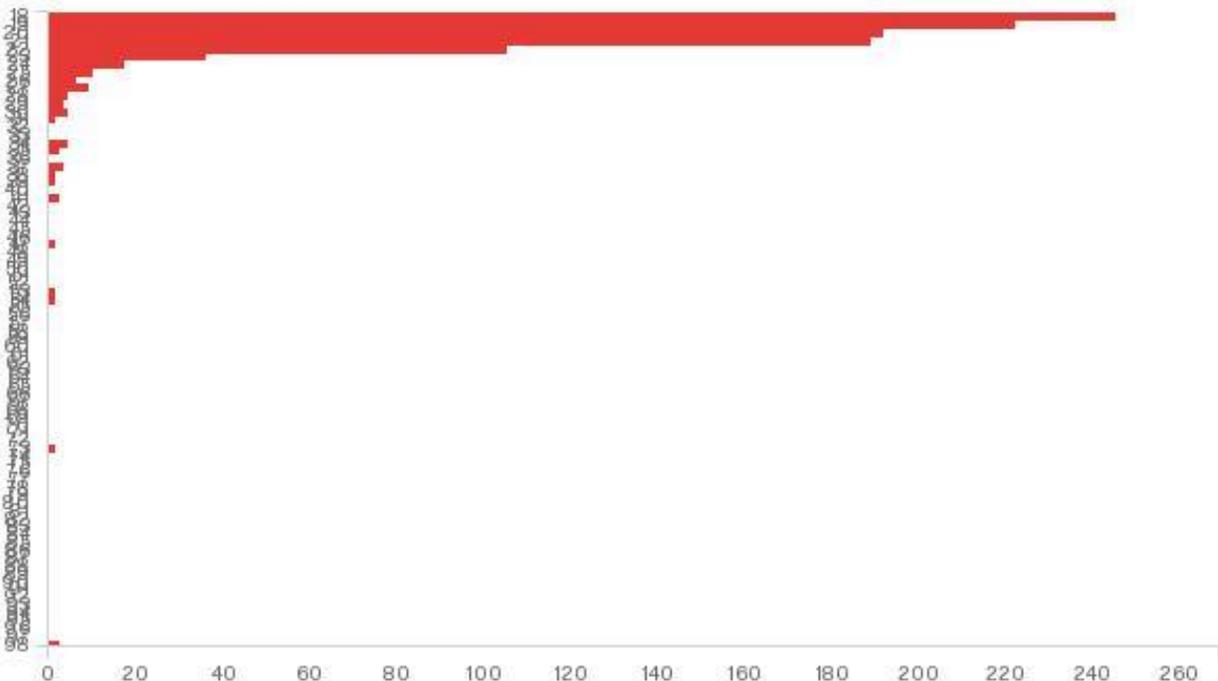
Q32 - What year in school are you considered?
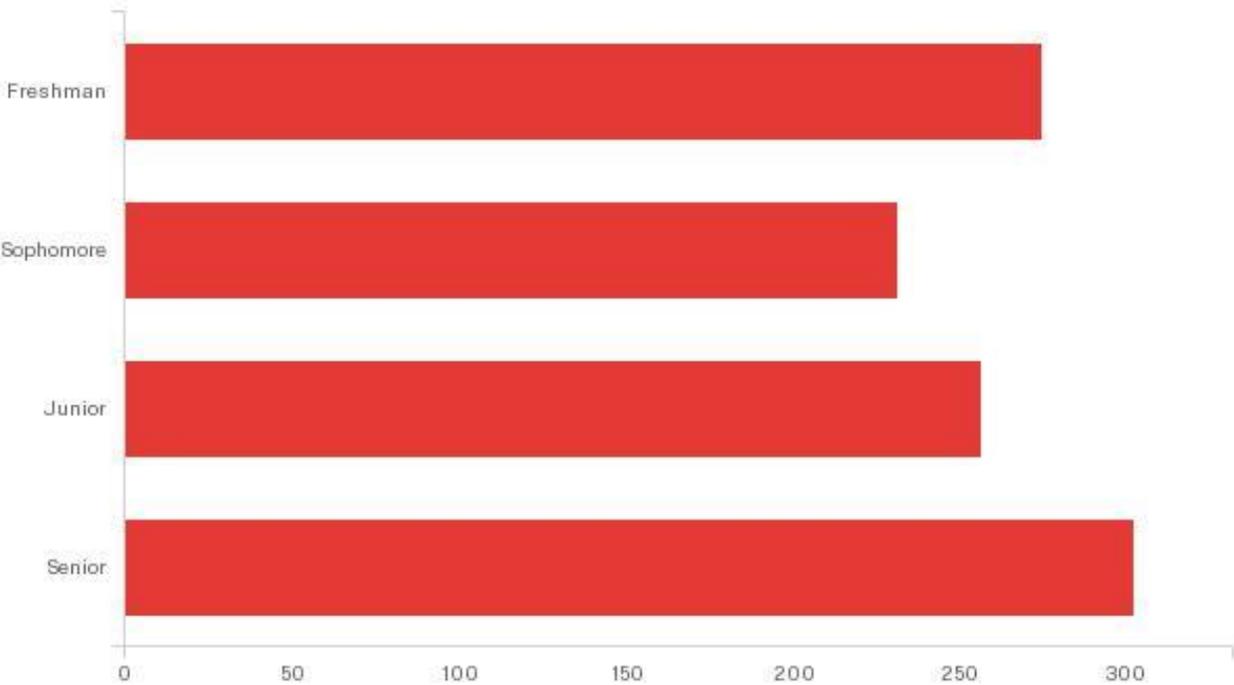
| Answer	%	Count
Freshman	**26%**	**274**
Sophomore	**22%**	**231**
Junior	**24%**	**256**
Senior	**28%**	**302**
Total	**100%**	**1063**

Q34 - When it comes to ECONOMIC issues in politics, do you think yourself as a liberal, a moderate, or a conservative?
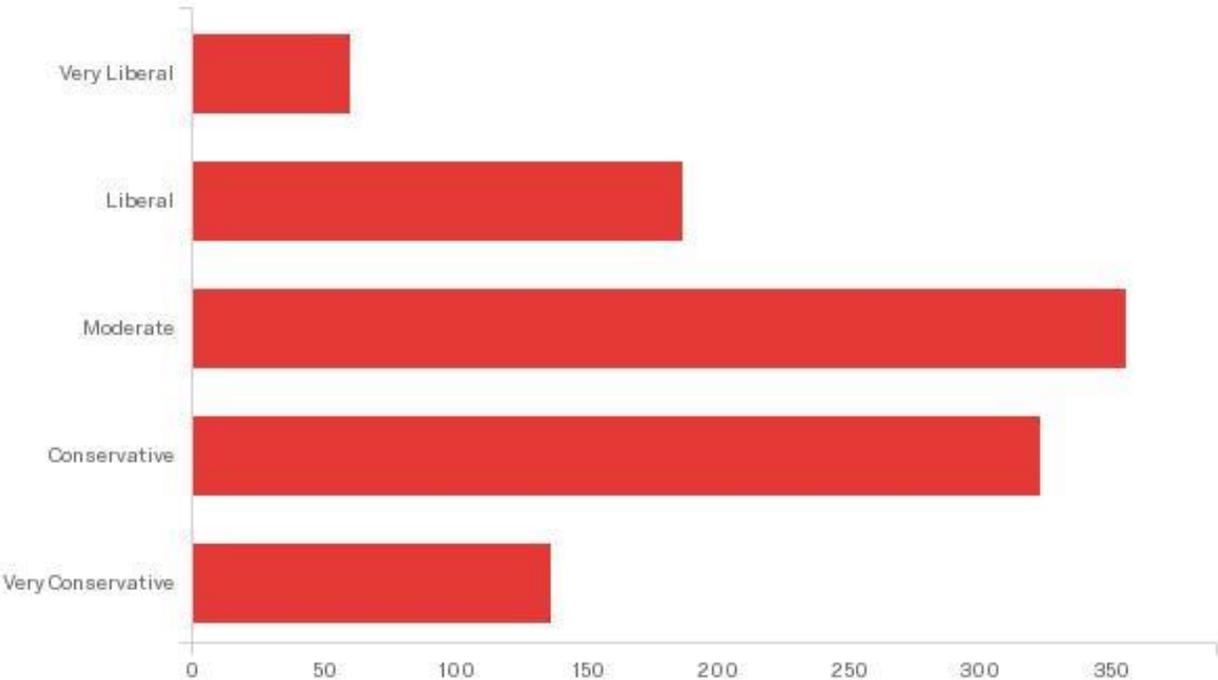
Answer	%	Count
Very Liberal	**6%**	**59**
Liberal	**18%**	**186**
Moderate	**34%**	**355**
Conservative	**30%**	**322**
Very Conservative	**13%**	**136**
Total	**100%**	**1058**

Q35 - When it comes to SOCIAL issues in politics, do you think yourself as a liberal, a moderate, or a conservative?
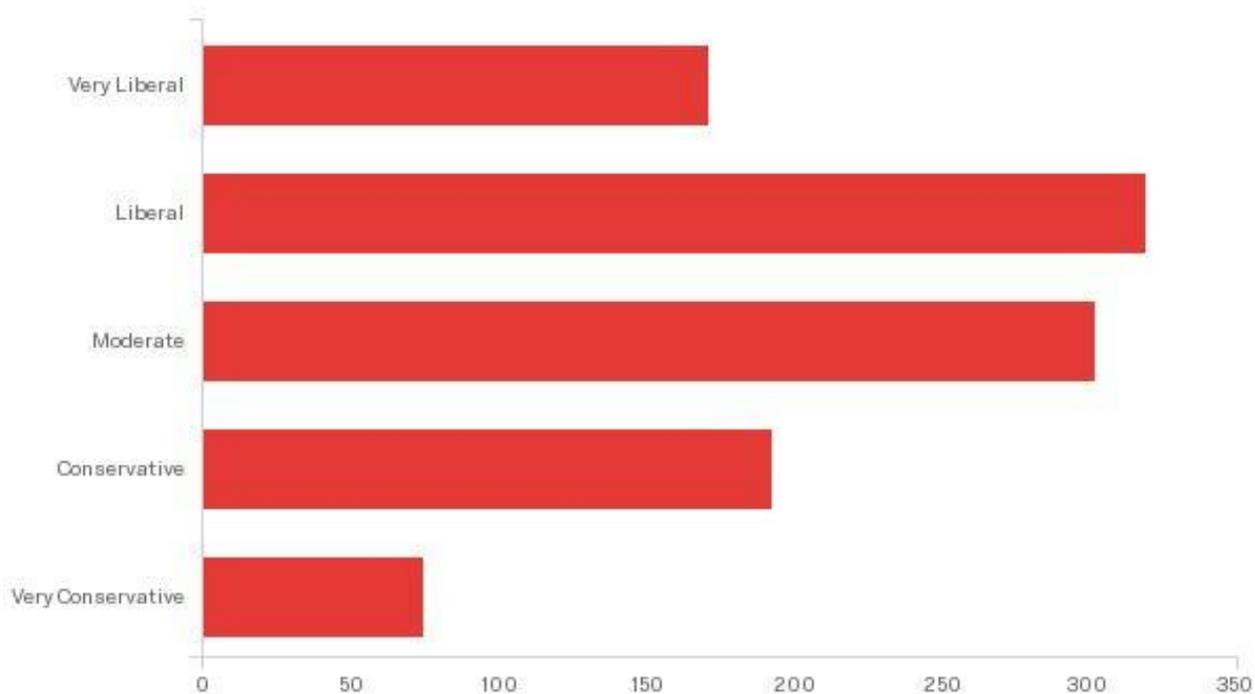
Answer	%	Count
Very Liberal	**16%**	**171**
Liberal	**30%**	**319**
Moderate	**29%**	**302**
Conservative	**18%**	**192**
Very Conservative	**7%**	**74**
Total	**100%**	**1058**