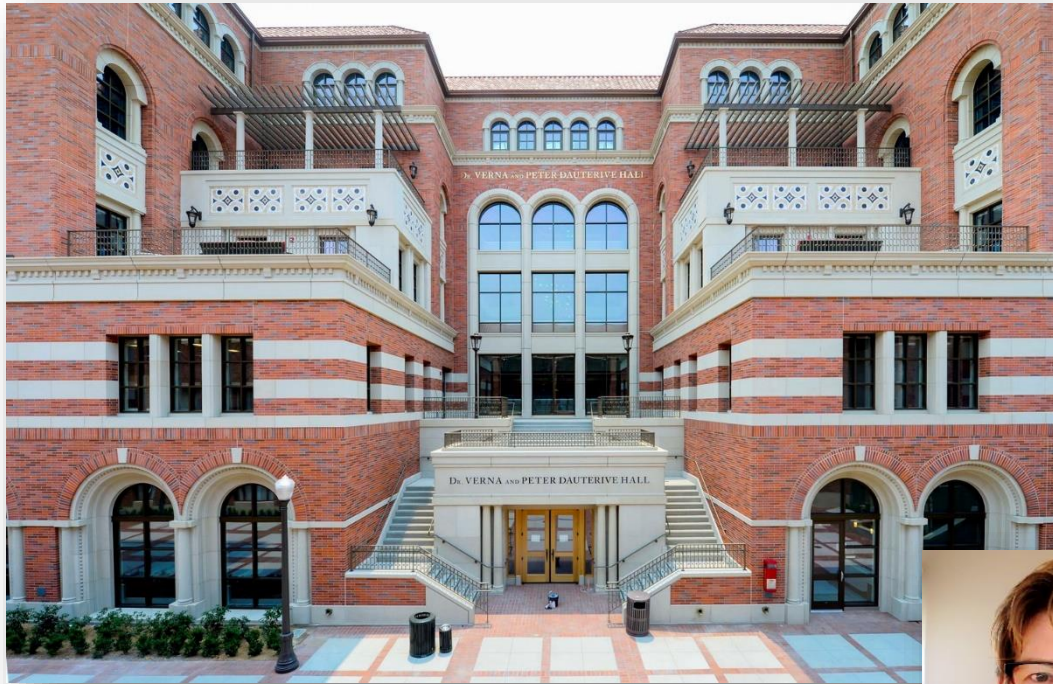


Experiences with U.S. National Election Polling in 2016 and 2020

***Using a Probability-based Internet Panel and
Experimental Outcomes Models***

Jill E. Darling, Survey Director

Understanding America Study
Center for Economic and Social Research
University of Southern California



USC Dornsife
*Center for Economic
 and Social Research*

USC Dornsife
Center for the Political Future



SANTA FE INSTITUTE



USC Price
 Sol Price School of Public Policy

MIT Massachusetts
 Institute of
 Technology

USC Schaeffer
 Leonard D. Schaeffer Center
 for Health Policy & Economics

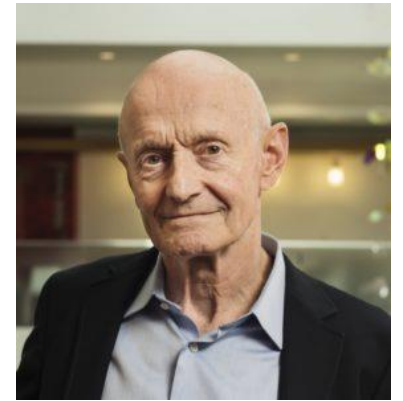
Data collection funded by NSF, and USC Dornsife

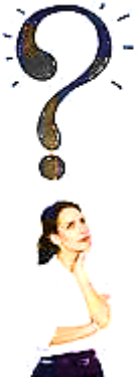
The Understanding America Study Methodology



Probability-based internet panel of 9000+ adults

- Founded 2014 at USC Center for Economic and Social Research
- Address-based sample for a representative sample of U.S.
- Internet-connected tablets provided as needed
- Multi-mode & multi-step English/Spanish recruitment
- 14% recruitment rate into the panel, 75%-80% survey RR
- Panel burden is low
 - 1 to 3 surveys a month in English or Spanish
 - Compensation is \$3 for every 5 minutes of survey time
 - Almost no one is in another survey panel
- Two-stage weights adjust for sample design, non-response





Measures



Probability of Own Vote

- What is the percent chance that you will vote in the presidential election?
- If you do vote in the election, what is the percent chance that you will vote for Donald Trump? For Joe Biden? And for someone else?



Probability of one's Social Circle Vote

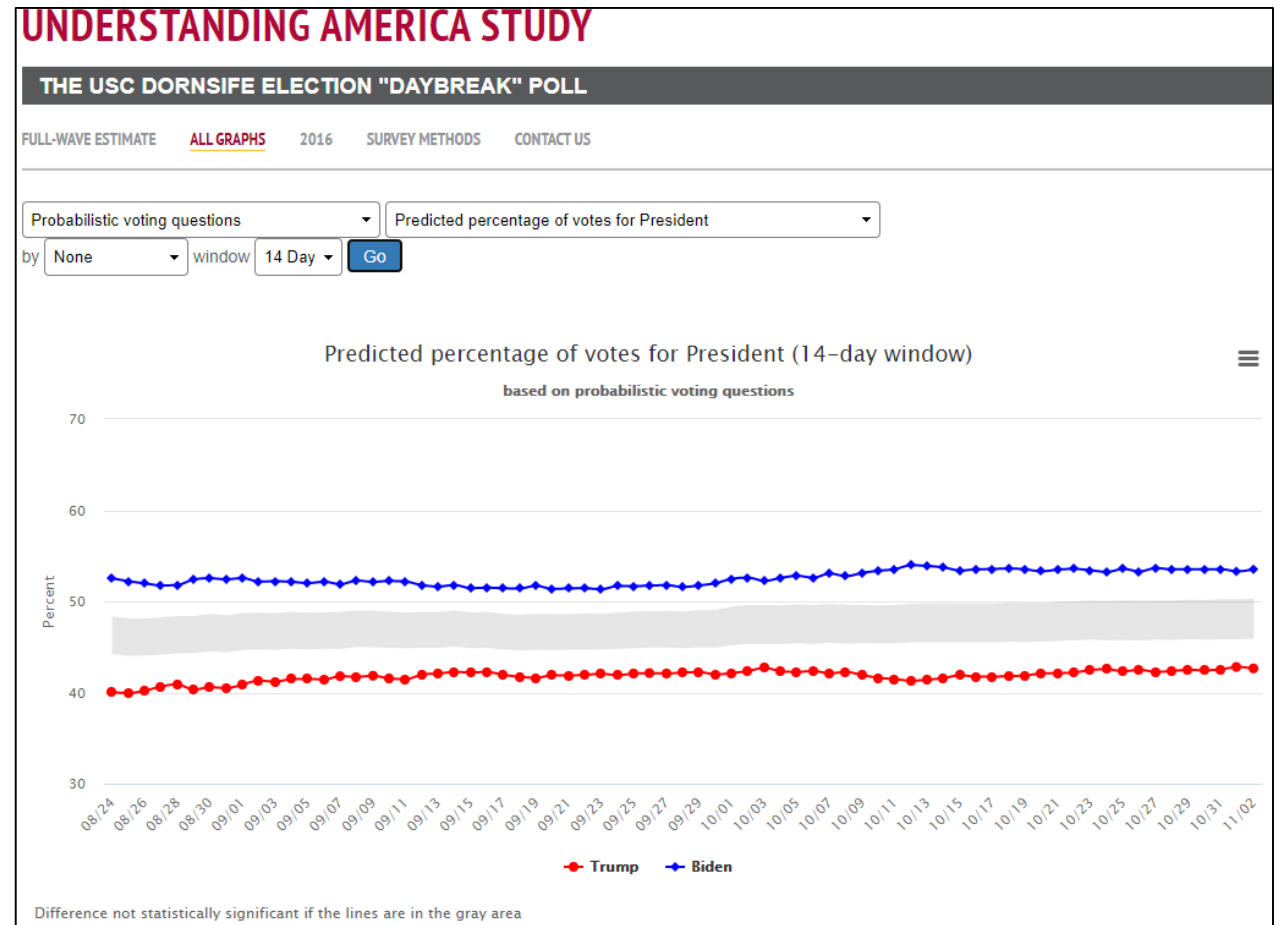
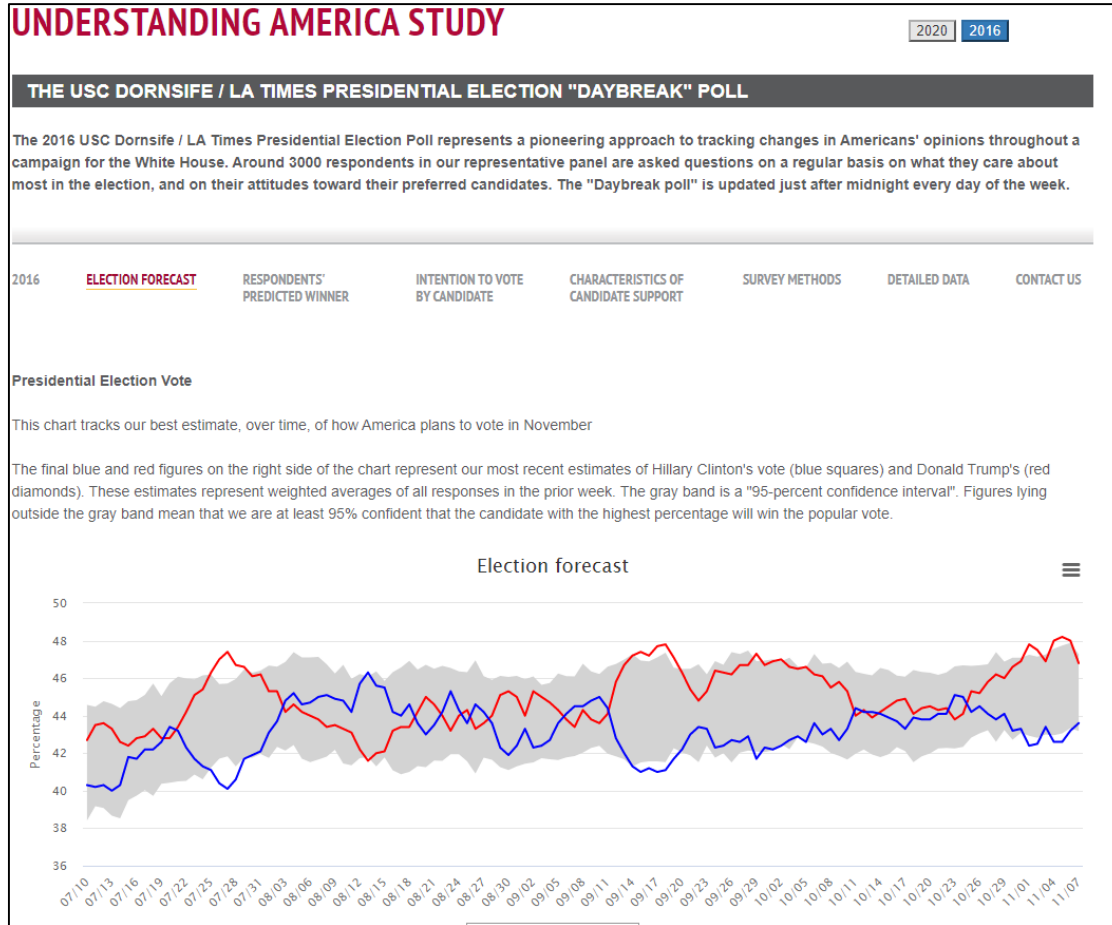
- What percentage of your social contacts that live in your state are likely to vote in the 2020 U.S. presidential election?
- Of all your social contacts who live in your state and are likely to vote in the 2020 U.S. presidential election, what percentage do you think will vote for Donald Trump? For Joe Biden? And for someone else?

Probability of the vote at State and National Level

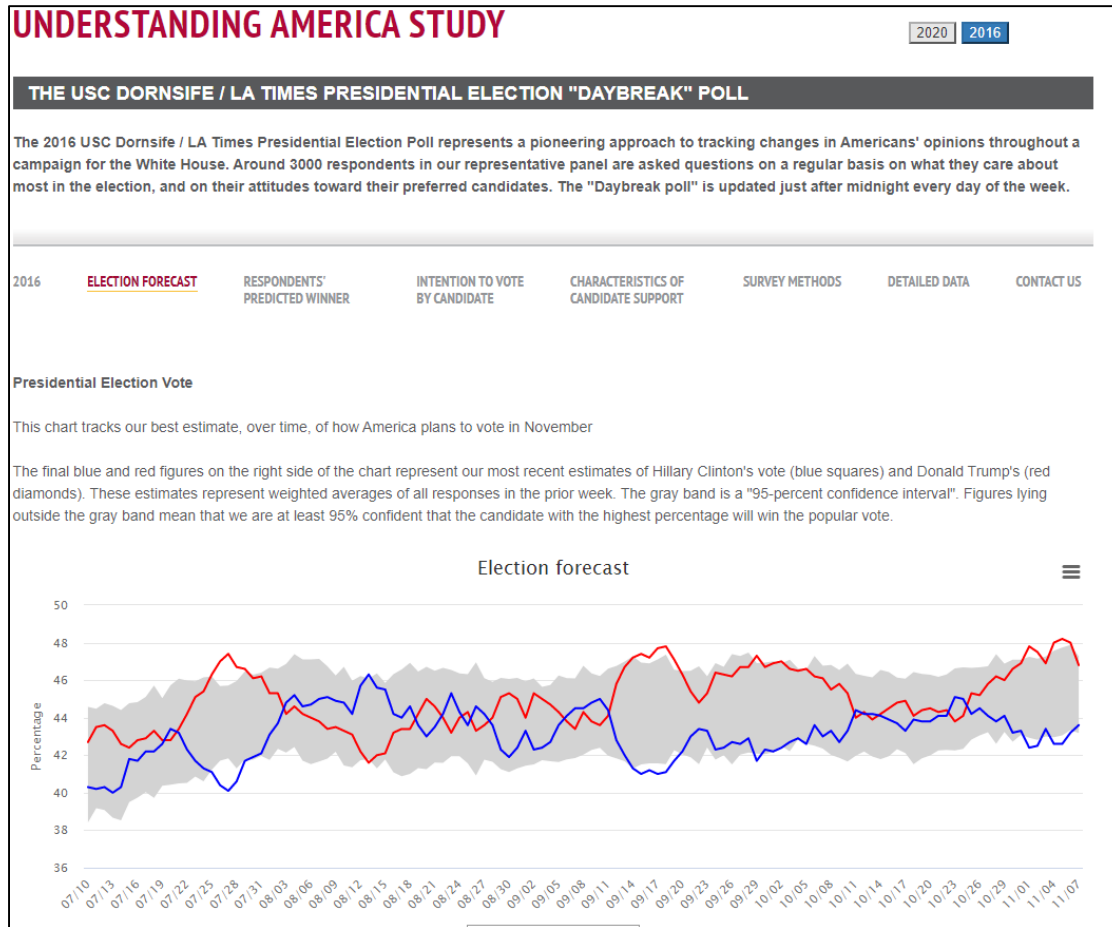
Of all people who live in the U.S. / your state and are likely to vote, what percentage do you think will vote for Donald Trump? For Joe Biden? And for someone else?

UAS Presidential Election Tracking Polls – 2016 and 2020

The Daybreak Poll



UAS Tracking Poll – 2016



4000+ participants assigned a day of the week
7-day waves, 18 waves starting in July
Graphs updated daily with rolling 7-day averages
Microdata available in real time

3 measures in the tracking + social circle in extra polls

1. Own probability of voting in the election
2. Own probability of voting for each candidate
3. Percent chance that each candidate would win



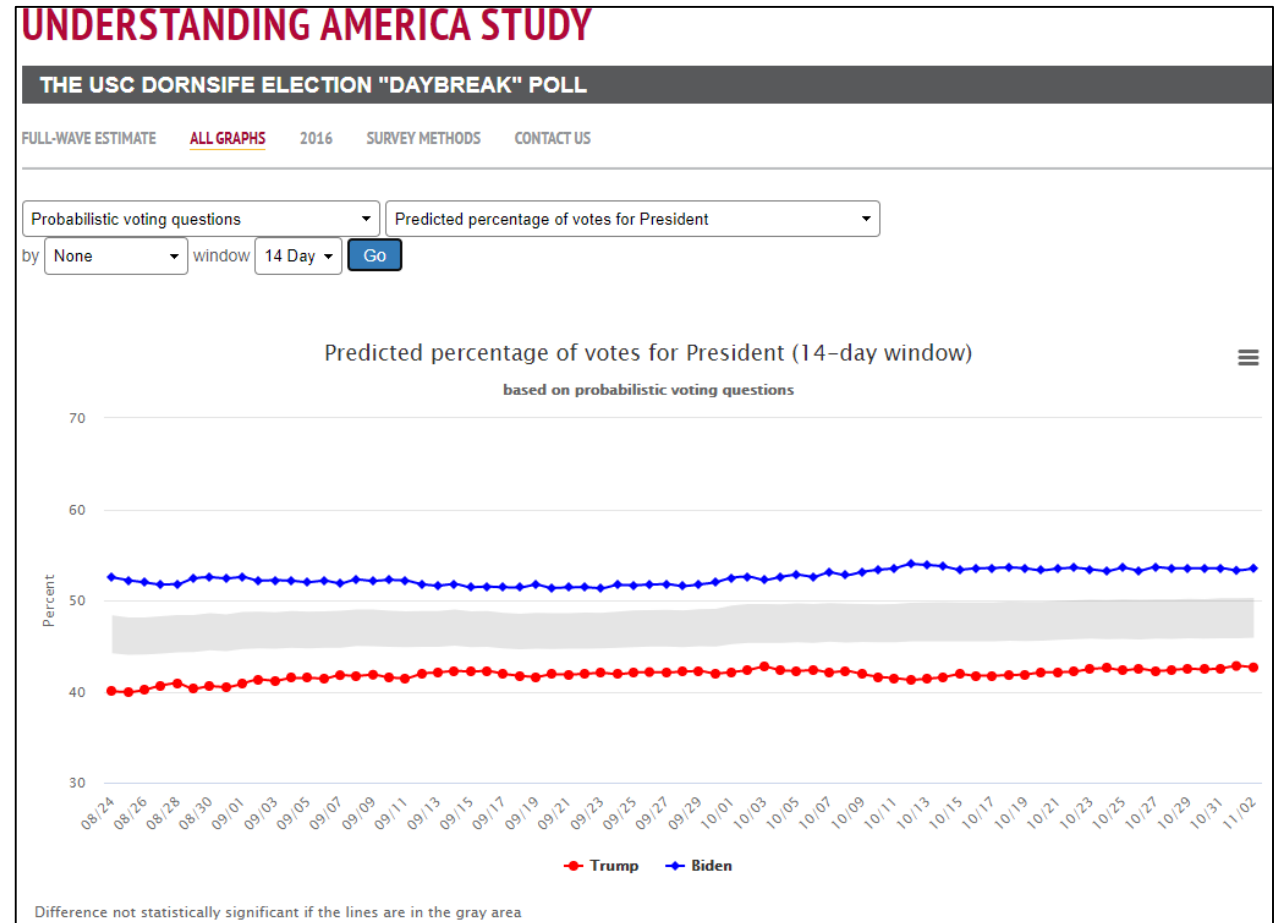
UAS Tracking Poll – 2020



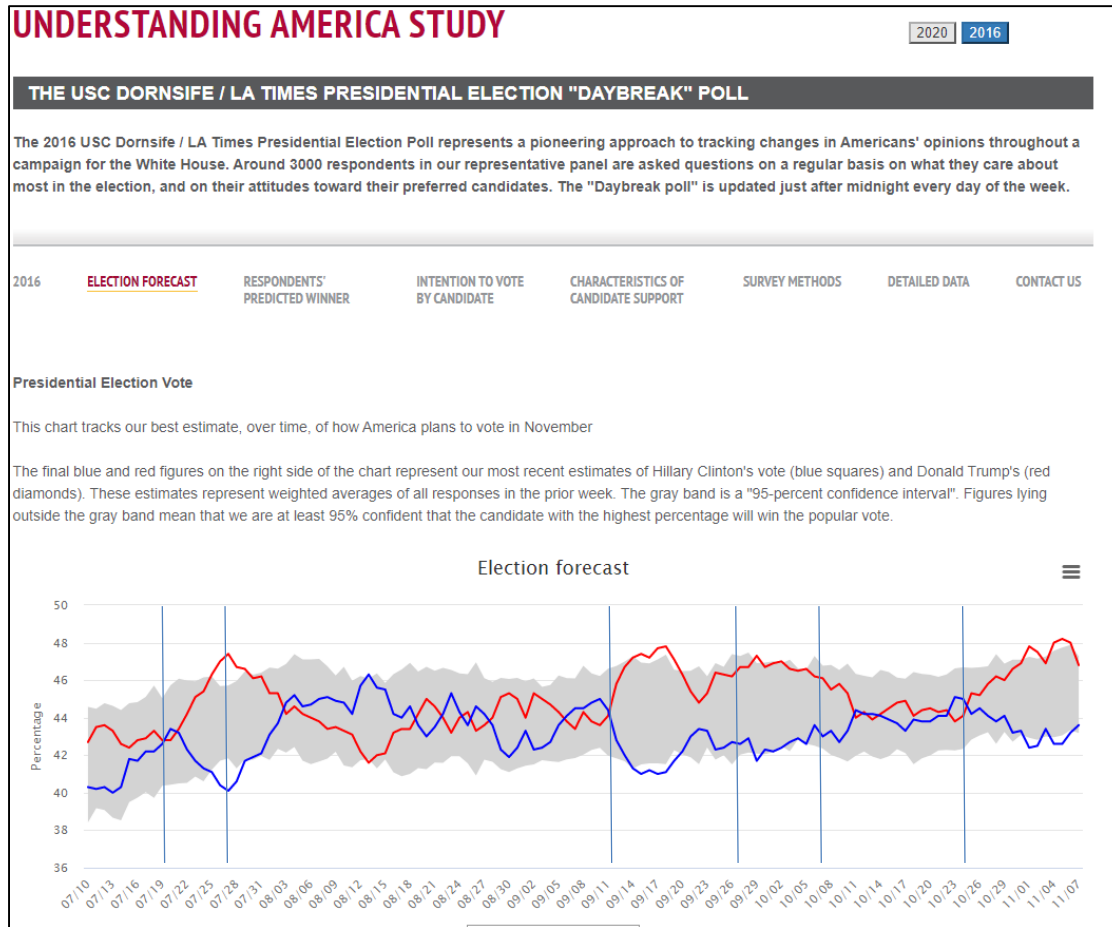
5500+ participants assigned a day of the week
14-day waves, 6 waves starting in August
Graphs updated daily with rolling 7-day (and then 14-day) averages

6 Measures in the tracking poll:

1. Own probability of voting in the election
2. Own probability of voting for each candidate
3. Prediction of National vote
4. Prediction of State vote
5. Probability of how Social Circle would vote
6. Categorical “if the election were held today”



UAS Tracking Poll – 2016 Events

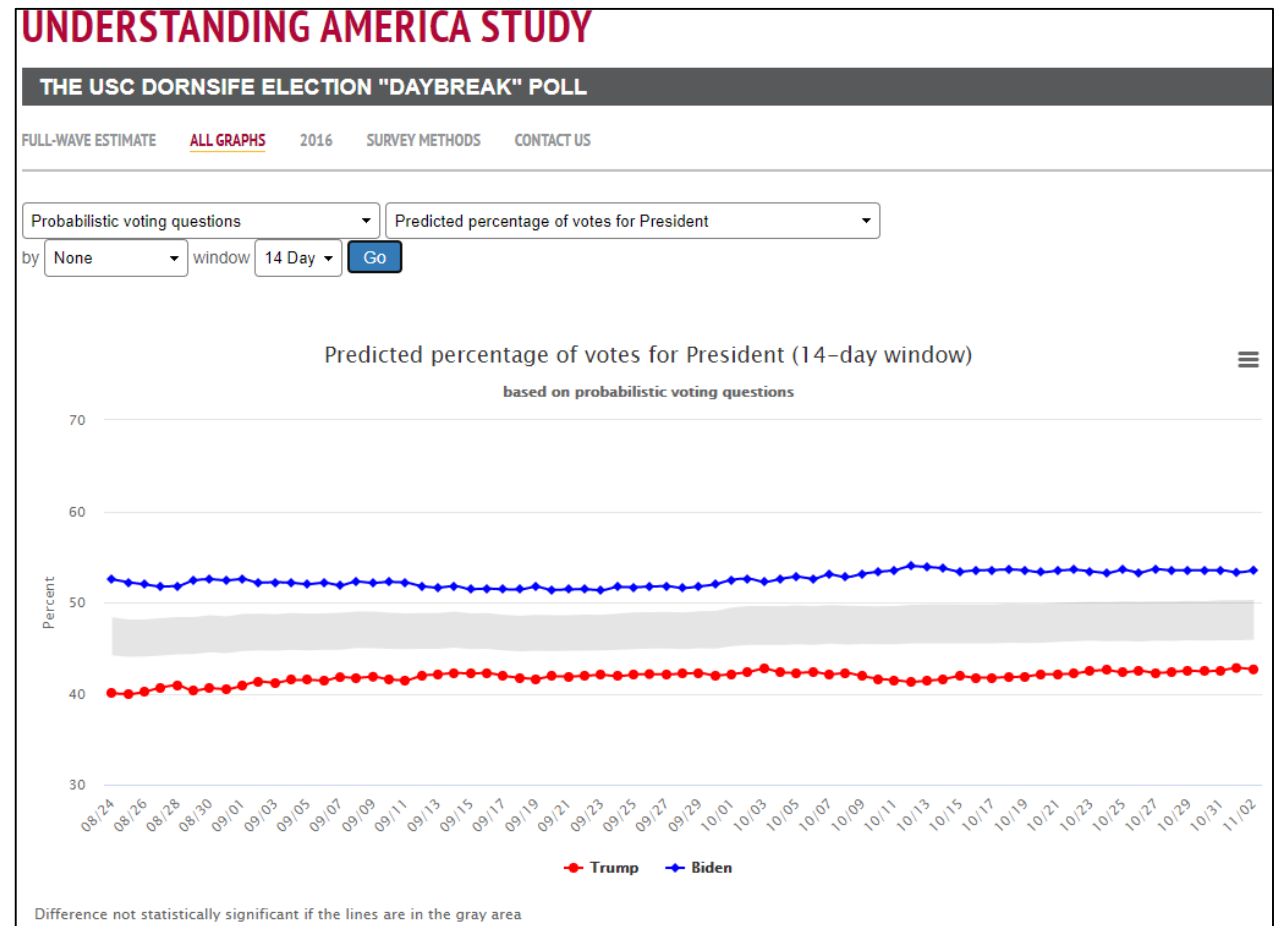


1. The DNC and RNC party conventions in July ended with Hillary Clinton as the first female nominee for president
2. Clinton called Trump and his supporters a "basket of deplorables"
3. Clinton stumbled due to illness at an event, after Trump saying she was weak
4. Donald Trump was seen on Access Hollywood video making lewd comments about grabbing women
5. The head of the FBI revealed they were investigating Clinton's use of a personal email server while she was Secretary of State

UAS Tracking Poll – 2020 Events



1. Party conventions were virtual for the first time in history. Democrats nominated the first African America/Asian female vice president in history
2. Police killed George Floyd in May; months of angry and sometimes violent protests across the country
3. Changes to the U.S. postal service created slowdowns in service, while voting by mail spiked
4. Donald Trump and others politicized the U.S. response to the pandemic, belittling people for wearing masks and calling for states to open up.
5. Donald Trump cast doubt on the reliability of voting by mail, and early vs. in person voting was politicized
6. Liberal U.S. Supreme court justice Ruth Bader Ginsberg died; the majority Republican Senate confirmed a conservative replacement, days before the presidential election.





Other challenges

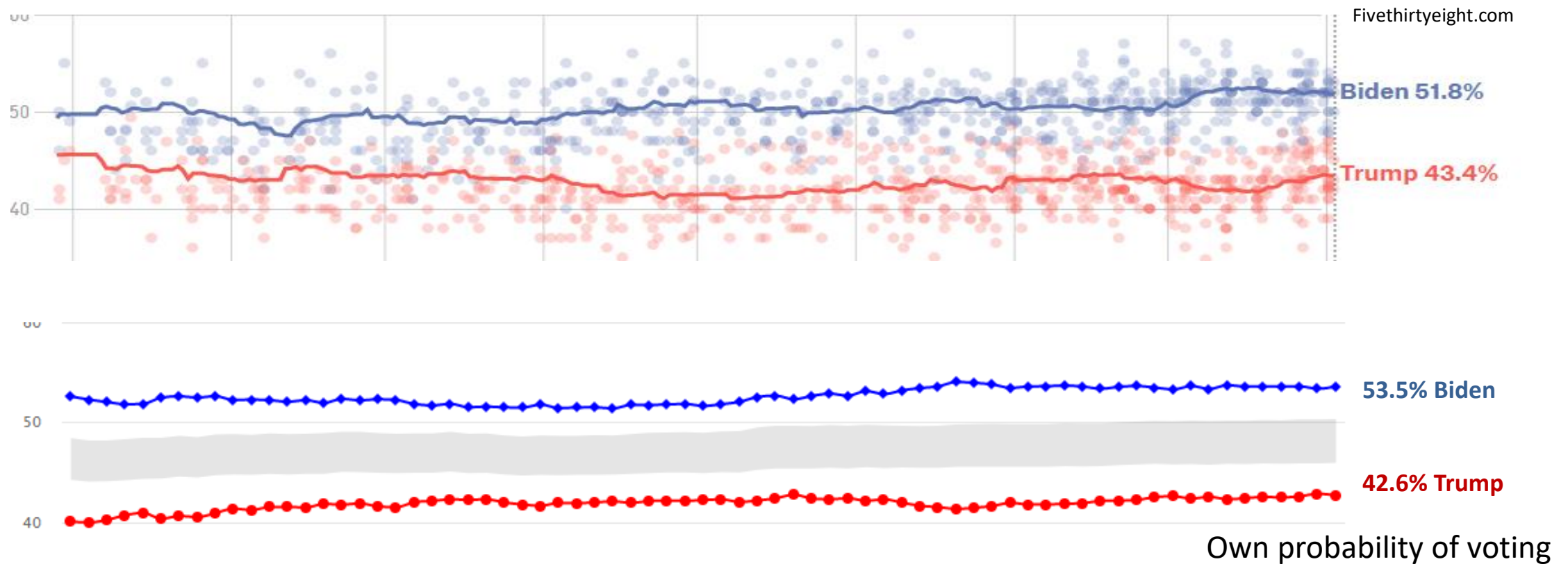
Election polling comes with the mixed blessing of nearly instant feedback on the accuracy of your approach, in a normal year

- We conduct a post-election poll immediate after the election gives us vital information about how panel members actually voted and to assess their reactions to the outcome
- We also compare our outcomes to the actual vote, and take stock of where things worked and where they did not

This year, the massive turnout, coupled with unprecedented levels of mail voting, slowed the vote count. Challenges by the Trump administration to try to overturn the vote counts in several states also contributed to delayed results.



In 2020, Biden led in our **own probability of voting** measure, often by double digits, ending at 11 points (factoring in the full wave it is 9 points). Average at FiveThirtyEight.com had similar Biden leads, ending with 8 points.





Post-Election Insights

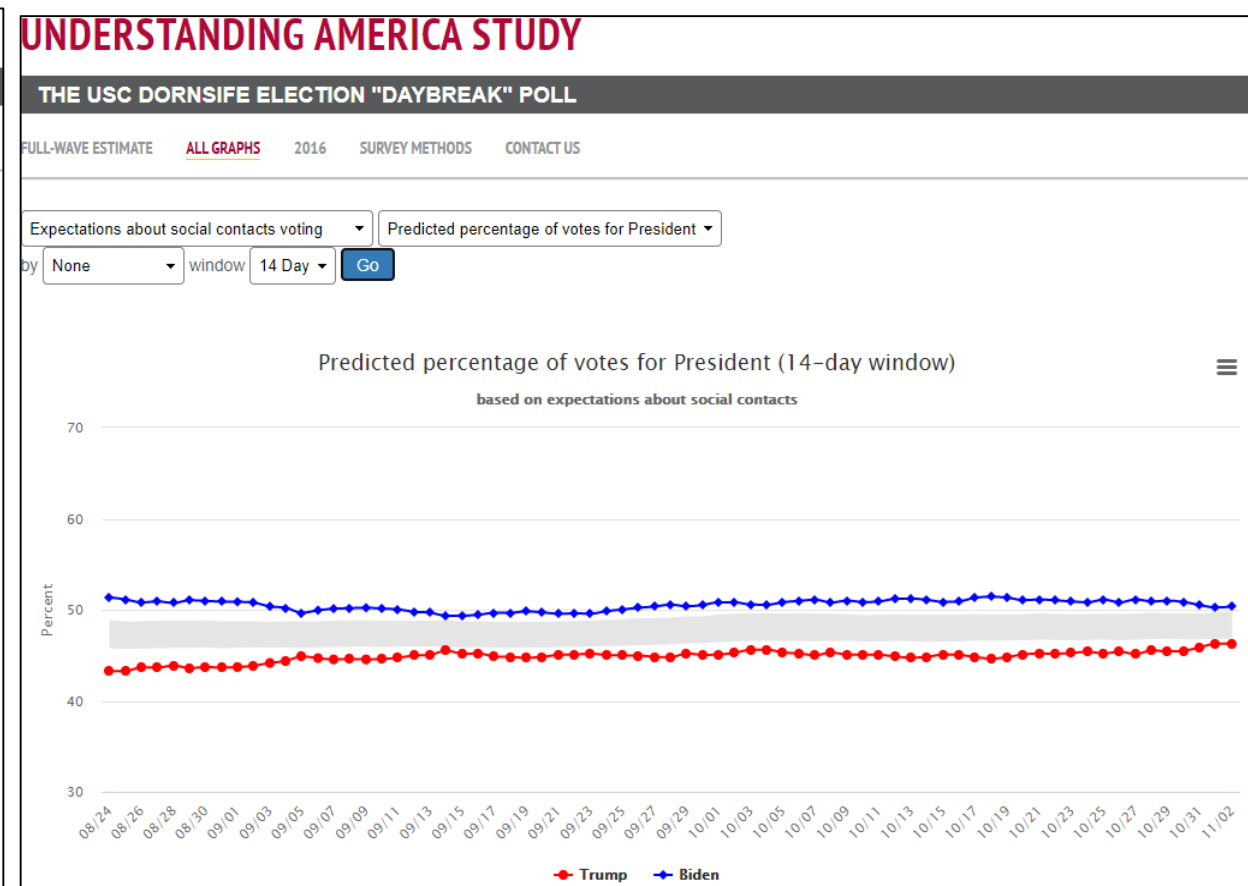
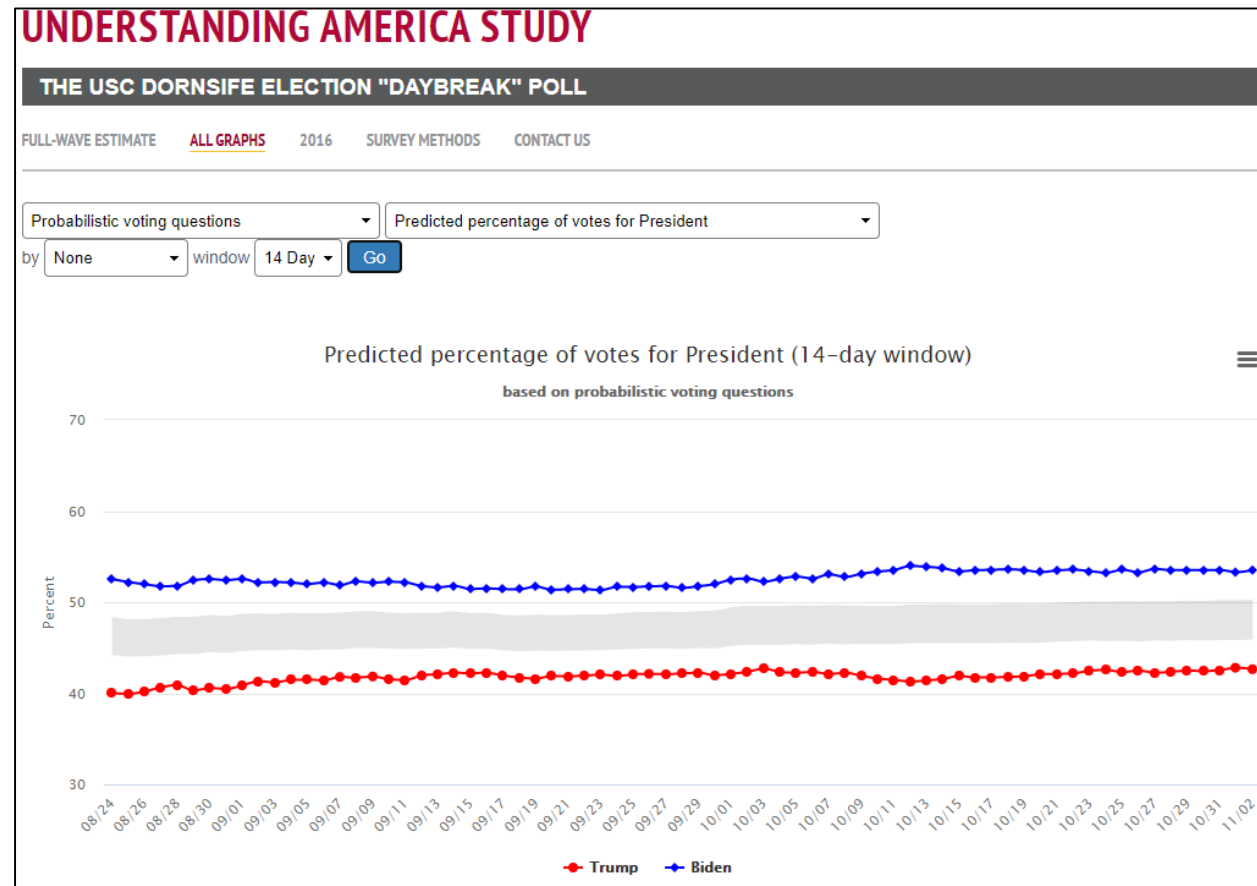
- Our Own-Probability questions did a great job of
 - predicting overall likelihood of voting (within-person) and actual vote for the candidates.
 - Predicting their likelihood of voting for Trump or Biden
 - So... we seem to be missing some voters
- We measured evidence of voter suppression but not to a level where it could have played a significant role in the outcome
- We are missing some of the late deciders, which would have brought Trump's percentage up in the own-vote, but not enough to get us to the outcome
 - Trump won among election-day deciders (10% of the electorate)
 - The candidates tied among people who made up their mind within the week before the election (19% of the electorate)

2020 UAS Model Comparison



Own Probability of voting for Trump/Biden
9 or 11 point Biden lead

Social Circle Probability of voting for Trump/Biden
4 point Biden lead – **Spot On**



Why do Social Circle methods work better?



- **It may help include people who are otherwise difficult to get to talk to us in a poll.** They may not want to answer polling questions, they may not trust universities or the media, or they just may be a hard to reach group.
 - Indirectly increases sample size of the poll
- **This is related to, but different than the hidden voters idea**, which is that some people may not tell us that they are voting for a very polarizing candidate. The team tested this using social circle methods: low incidence overall, but higher predictions of each of these behaviors for a person's social circle among Trump voters.
 - Embarrassment (~10%)
 - Fear of harassment (~10%)
 - Wanting to skew poll results (~ 5%)
- **It may help us include votes from people who decide who they will vote for on election day.** So far in our data, it looks like that is about 10% of voters. Many of these late deciding voters may well be influenced by the decisions made by their friends and family

Relevant Citations and Links



- Galesic, M., Bruine de Bruin, W., Dumas, M. *et al.* Asking about social circles improves election predictions. *Nat Hum Behav* **2**, 187–193 (2018).
<https://doi.org/10.1038/s41562-018-0302-y>
- Galesic, M., Bruine de Bruin “[Election polls are more accurate if they ask participants how others will vote](#)” The Conversation, November 18, 2021
- Darling, J., Gutsche, T. “[It is Finally Election Day](#)” Evidence Base, November 3, 2021



Thank you!

Jill Darling

JillDarl@usc.edu

Center for Economic and Social Research (cesr.usc.edu)

Panel methodology, survey data and documentation (UASdata.usc.edu)

Tracking poll graphs and methodology (elections.usc.edu)