

Things to keep in mind about polls

Size of sample: Can the responses of 500 people accurately reflect the mood of a much larger group? Generally, the larger the number of respondents, the more accurate the poll.

Random selection: Random selection is generally considered the only reliable way of polling people.

Questions and wording: Pollsters can draw the responses they wish to get by asking leading questions. Questions should be worded carefully so as not to reflect any bias the questioner may have.

When the poll was taken: Opinions change, especially as an election nears; recently taken polls are preferred over older ones.

How it was conducted: Was it conducted by telephone, or on a

street corner? Generally, telephone polls are to be preferred over, say, a poll of those leaving a political rally or civic organization.

What is 'sampling error'?: Sampling error is the amount of deviation in findings that could normally be expected to occur with that number of respondents. Thus, a poll with a sampling error of 5 percent showing candidate A with 32 percent and candidate B with 35 percent does *not* show one candidate 'leading' another. Significant leads must be at least twice the size of the sampling error.

Who paid for the poll?: Was the poll an independent one, or was it paid for and released by a specific campaign? The former should be preferred.