



Chapter 3

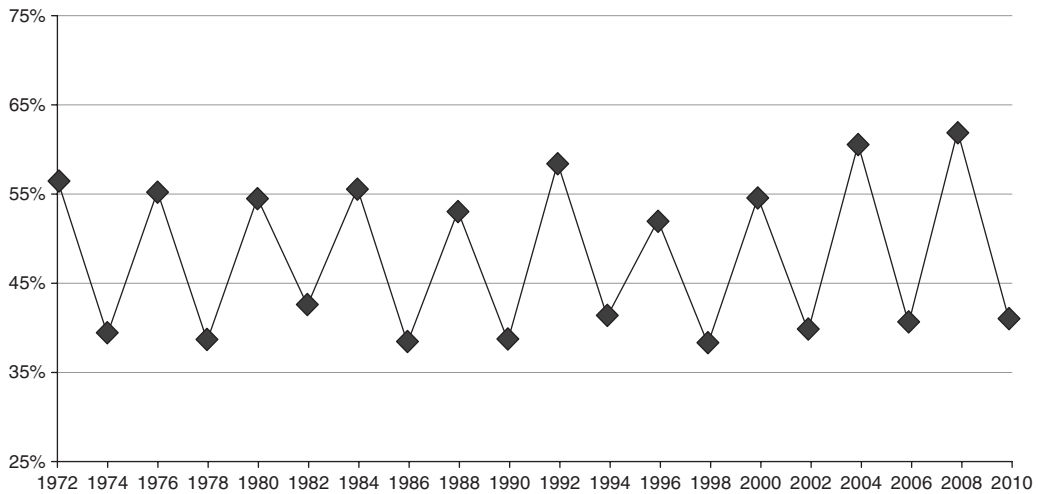
Composition of the Exit Polls

Who votes is a key question to understanding electoral politics in the United States. Answering that question allows us to assess the relative importance of different types of voters, identifying the key groups necessary to build a winning coalition. It enables us to make sense of campaign strategies, dissecting the targets of message marketing, travel schedules, and even the issue positions of competing candidates. It also facilitates our understanding of policymaking, by identifying the types of voter groups that public officials may be responding to when crafting government initiatives.

Election laws in the United States allow all citizens eighteen years of age or older to cast ballots so long as they have met state registration requirements. States, though, can exercise considerable discretion in establishing voting rights provided they are consistent with the federal Constitution, which prohibits suffrage from being denied to individuals on the basis of religion, race, sex, or affluence. Through the years, states have imposed a variety of restrictions limiting the franchise. States' voter qualifications vary on the basis of individuals' immigration status, felony convictions, duration of residency, and mental competence, as well as their registration deadlines and identification requirements.

Figure 3.1 shows the turnout rate for the voting-eligible population from 1972 to 2010 (see Table 3.1 at the end of the chapter for the exact percentages). Turnout seesaws between presidential and midterm elections.¹ In presidential elections, citizens “surge” to the polls in higher numbers than in other political races. In the past ten presidential elections, on average, 56 percent of the voting-eligible population cast ballots. Turnout in presidential elections has expanded of late, increasing 10 points in the past four election cycles.

By comparison, midterm elections witness a “decline” in participation. In the past ten midterm elections, only 40 percent of eligible voters, on average, turned out to the polls, which was 16 percentage points less than those who cast ballots in presidential elections over this period.

Figure 3.1 Turnout Rate of the Voting-Eligible Population, 1972–2010

Source: Michael McDonald, "United States Elections Project," http://elections.gmu.edu/voter_turnout.htm.

Similar to presidential elections, though, the number of citizens voting has had an upward trend. From 1998 to 2010, the turnout rate of eligible residents has increased steadily by a total of 3 percentage points.

The most recent U.S. elections saw some of the highest turnout rates in decades. In the 2008 presidential election, 62 percent of eligible voters cast ballots, resulting in the highest turnout rate since exit polling began in 1972. In the 2010 midterm election, 41 percent of the voting-eligible population cast ballots. This turnout nearly matched the three-decade-long highs of 41 percent in 1994 and 42 percent in 1982.

In this chapter, we consider the composition of voters in national elections over time by examining questions in the exit polls.² We document the proportion of respondents to every question in the national exit polls administered at least five times from 1972 to 2010, including one of the last two exit polls administered in 2008 or 2010. For each question, we first describe how the distribution of respondents offering each response category varies over time, using graphs to facilitate our discussion. Then, we detail the results of the most recent election in which the question was asked, either 2008 or 2010, and explain how this varies, if at all, from the historical pattern. After we analyze each group separately, we conclude the chapter by coming full circle and exploring similarities and differences in the overall composition of respondents in the exit polls conducted in midterm and presidential election years.

Readers can use this information to estimate the distribution of these groups in the active electorate over time. If the response options to a question are mutually exclusive, then we can secure an estimate of the proportion of voters in each category by dividing the number of respondents who chose each response option by the total number of respondents who answered the question and then applying a margin of sampling error (see the section in

Chapter 2 entitled “Reading Chapter 3: Composition of the Exit Polls” for a lengthier discussion of this procedure). Take for example, the exit poll question inquiring whether a respondent’s gender is male or female. Say that 10,000 respondents answered the question in the 2010 exit poll, 52 percent of whom indicated they were female. We can apply this information to Table 2.2 to determine the margin of sampling error for the estimate, which in this case is 1 percent. If we wish to project the proportion of voters in the active electorate who are female, we simply add and subtract the sampling error from the exit poll estimate. Thus, we can be 95 percent confident that between 51 and 53 percent of the active electorate was female in the 2010 election.

Physical Traits

Physical traits play a prominent role in the practice of politics. Individuals with common physical traits are often socialized about politics in similar ways. From sharing the same neighborhoods, schools, and places of worship to encountering the same stereotypes and life experiences, those with similar physical traits frequently adopt common expectations and beliefs about government. This commonality can breed distinctive politics for members of such groups, capable of fostering shared policy preferences, political interests, and partisan orientations.³

National exit pollsters have been tapping physical traits since the inception of exit polling. From 1972 through 2010, pollsters repeatedly inquired about respondents’ race, gender, age, and sexual orientation. These questions have resulted in some of the longest running time series in the data collection.

Race

Race perhaps has been the most difficult physical trait for exit pollsters to assess. It is not a biological category, but rather a sociopolitical construct intended to understand how people are viewed and/or view themselves in a particular cultural context. There has been little consensus on how to measure race, in part, because the concept is often confounded with ethnic background in both the academic community and in the general public. These debates have troubled exit pollsters, as well.

Initially, interviewers recorded the race of voters as white, black, or Hispanic. Beginning in 1982, it was included as a standard question on the exit polls, with the same three response options offered through 1988. In the 1990 election, Asian was introduced as a fourth category from which voters could select. In 2004, additional categories were added to the race question—American Indian, Native Alaskan, and Native Hawaiian—to more closely resemble the categories then used by the U.S. Census Bureau. We exclude American Indian, Native Alaskan, and Hawaiian Native from our analysis, though, because their numbers are all well below 1 percent for the years they were included.

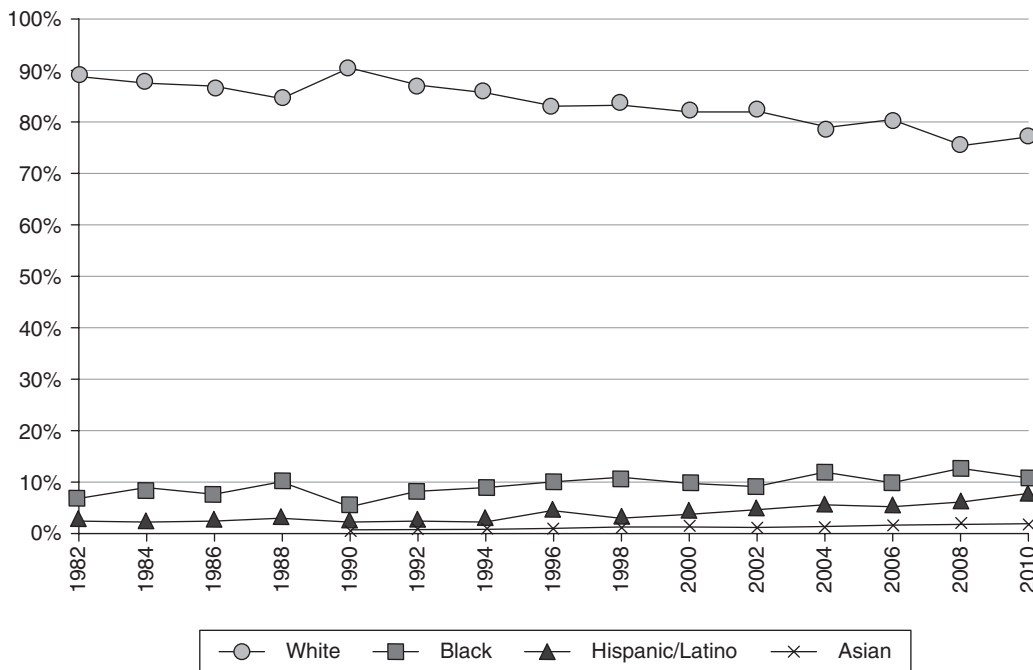
The Hispanic category has proved particularly problematic for exit pollsters. Following the lead of the U.S. Census Bureau, they have shifted their interpretation of Hispanic from a race to an ethnicity, in part, because people of Hispanic origin often classified themselves as one of the other

racial categories, as well. In 1998, a new permanent item was introduced that asked all respondents regardless of race whether they were of Hispanic descent. However, the national exit polls maintained *Hispanic* as a category in the race question to permit longitudinal comparisons. Our analysis relies on responses to the race question only, even after Hispanic ethnicity is introduced as a separate question, thereby enabling a direct comparison over time.

Figure 3.2 illustrates the distribution of the four most commonly asked categories in the exit polls—white, black, Hispanic/Latino, and Asian—from 1982 through 2010. It shows that the racial composition of respondents has changed gradually over the past three decades. The proportion of white voters in the exit polls has declined fairly steadily since 1990, falling 12 points from the 1990 election to the 2010 election. Conversely, the other racial groupings have inched up over this time frame. The largest change has occurred among Hispanics, whose share of exit poll respondents has quadrupled from 2 to 8 percent in the past twenty years.

The 2010 election witnessed one of the most racially diverse exit polls to date (see Table 3.2 at the end of the chapter). Whites still made up an overwhelming proportion of respondents, but their 78 percent share was smaller than in any midterm election since 1982. African Americans comprised 11 percent of respondents, Hispanics 8 percent, and Asians 2 percent.

Figure 3.2 Composition of the Exit Polls by Race, 1982–2010



Source: National exit polls. See the section in Chapter 2 entitled “Creating a Cumulative National Data Set: Selecting Exit Polls” (pp. 28–29).

Note: When using these results to make inferences about the active electorate, the standard errors should be calculated using Table 2.2 (p. 36), which is explained in the adjacent section of Chapter 2, “Analyzing Exit Poll Questions: Estimating Sampling Error” (pp. 34–36). For a guide on how to understand the tables and figures of this chapter, see the section in Chapter 2 entitled “Presenting and Discussing the Exit Poll Data: Reading Chapter 3” (pp. 37–39).

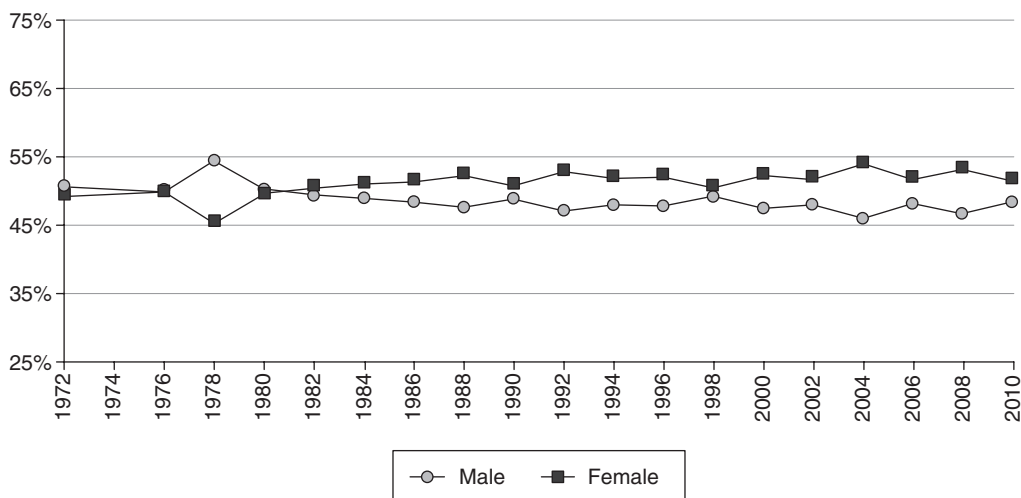
Gender

Exit pollsters have taken stock of voters’ gender since the first national exit poll was administered in 1972. From 1972 to 1980, exit pollsters did not ask respondents directly whether they were male or female, but had interviewers record it as respondents departed the voting booth. Beginning in 1982, it was added as a separate question and has been included on every exit poll administered since.

Figure 3.3 shows the gender split in the exit polls over time. The gender composition of respondents has shifted decisively over the past several decades. Historically, male voters comprised a larger share of respondents than their female counterparts, much as they did in the general population. In the 1940s, the female share of the population surpassed men as female-leaning birth rates eventually trumped male-leaning immigration rates. However, it was not until the 1982 midterm election that the political landscape shifted and women finally surpassed men in their share of the exit polls. Women have maintained this advantage over men ever since.

Since 1982, the gender gap in the exit polls has taken two different trajectories depending on the type of election. In midterm election years, the gender gap in respondents has remained remarkably stable, failing to exceed 4 points in the past eight midterm elections. In fact, women have averaged only a 2-point advantage in the midterm exit polls, virtually identical to their advantage in the general population over that time span. By contrast, in presidential election years, the gender gap in exit poll respondents has widened gradually over time. Over the past seven presidential exit polls, the difference between female and male respondents expanded 5 points, from 2 points in the 1984 election to 7 points in the 2008 election.

Figure 3.3 Composition of the Exit Polls by Gender, 1972–2010



Source: National exit polls. See the section in Chapter 2 entitled “Creating a Cumulative National Data Set: Selecting Exit Polls” (pp. 28–29).

Note: When using these results to make inferences about the active electorate, the standard errors should be calculated using Table 2.2 (p. 36), which is explained in the adjacent section of Chapter 2, “Analyzing Exit Poll Questions: Estimating Sampling Error” (pp. 34–36). For a guide on how to understand the tables and figures of this chapter, see the section in Chapter 2 entitled “Presenting and Discussing the Exit Poll Data: Reading Chapter 3” (pp. 37–39).

Chapter 3

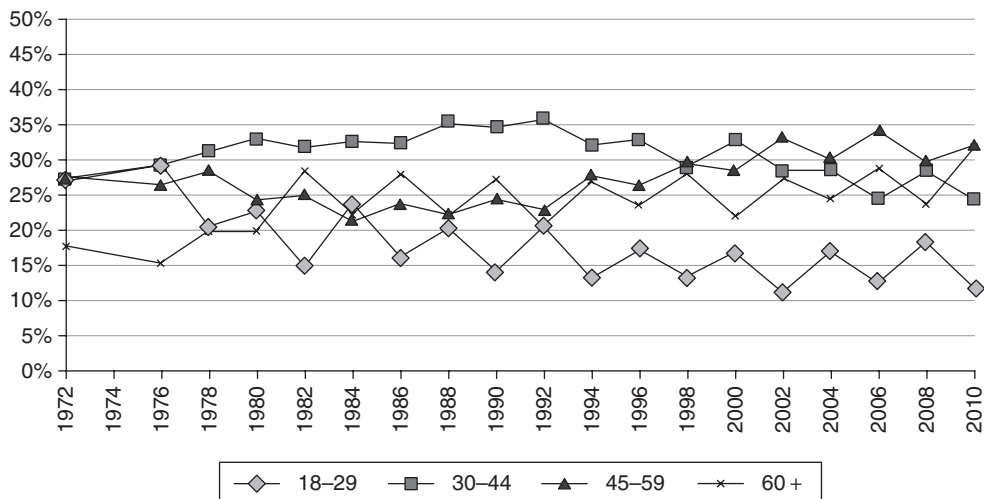
In the 2010 midterm election, the gender gap among exit poll respondents was 4 points (see Table 3.3 at the end of the chapter). Men comprised 48 percent of respondents, whereas women comprised 52 percent. This gap was virtually identical in size to those that appeared in the two previous midterm exit polls.

Age

Age is one of the longest running questions administered to voters. Nonetheless, exit pollsters have changed the response options on numerous occasions, most recently in the 2000 election. Because respondents are asked to place themselves in an age range, rather than provide their exact age or year of birth, pollsters have struggled with both the number of age ranges to provide and their respective endpoints. Since 1972, they have offered as few as four categories to as many as nine categories, with ranges as narrow as four years to as wide as “60 or over.” Currently, voters are asked to which of the following nine age groups they belong: “18–24,” “25–29,” “30–39,” “40–44,” “45–49,” “50–59,” “60–64,” “65–74,” and “75 or over.” To permit longitudinal comparisons, we recoded the categories offered into four groupings: 18–29, 30–44, 45–59, and 60 or over.

Figure 3.4 shows the age distribution of respondents in each election from 1972 through 2010. The age composition of the exit polls has shifted repeatedly over the past four decades, with no obvious pattern to most of the changes. A closer look, though, reveals three noteworthy developments underlying the age dynamics of exit poll respondents.

Figure 3.4 Composition of the Exit Polls by Age, 1972–2010



Source: National exit polls. See the section in Chapter 2 entitled “Creating a Cumulative National Data Set: Selecting Exit Polls” (pp. 28–29).

Note: When using these results to make inferences about the active electorate, the standard errors should be calculated using Table 2.2 (p. 36), which is explained in the adjacent section of Chapter 2, “Analyzing Exit Poll Questions: Estimating Sampling Error” (pp. 34–36). For a guide on how to understand the tables and figures of this chapter, see the section in Chapter 2 entitled “Presenting and Discussing the Exit Poll Data: Reading Chapter 3” (pp. 37–39).

First, the 18–29 age group comprised the greatest proportion of respondents in the exit polls administered immediately after the passage of the Twenty-sixth Amendment, which extended the right to vote to 18- to 21-year-olds. In 1972 and 1976, the 18–29 age group made up, respectively, 28 and 29 percent of respondents. In the elections occurring since, their share has decreased substantially, bottoming out in 2002, when they comprised only 11 percent of exit poll respondents.

Second, many of the changes in the age composition of the exit polls coincide with the maturation of the baby boom generation—the disproportionately sized cohort born between 1946 and 1964. As this cohort has passed from one age group to the next, a surge has typically occurred in the proportion of respondents in the subsequent age group. In fact, the age group containing the baby boomers typically comprises the largest share of respondents in the exit poll. As the baby boomers comprised much of the 18–29 age group in the 1970s and early 1980s, this group saw some of its largest exit poll shares of the past forty years. When baby boomers shifted into early middle age in the late 1980s and early 1990s, the 30–44 age group became the largest group of respondents. During the late 1990s and much of the 2000s, as the baby boom generation transitioned into late middle age, the 45–59 age group exerted the biggest voice in the exit polls. In 2010, the earliest baby boomers began reaching their sixties, corresponding with an increase in the proportion of respondents in the 60 or over age group.

Finally, differences in the age composition of the exit polls can be found in presidential and midterm election years. As the electoral context changes, the mix of younger and older respondents shifts, as well. In presidential election years, younger respondents increase their share at the expense of older voters. In midterm election years, the process reverses itself and the proportion of younger respondents in the exit polls shrinks and the proportion of older respondents grows. Since 1976, the proportion of 18- to 29-year-olds in the exit polls has dropped roughly 6.5 percentage points on average in midterm election years, whereas the proportion of respondents aged 60 or over has grown by roughly 6 percentage points, on average, in midterm election years.

The 2010 midterm election saw the convergence of these trends, leading to one of the oldest exit polls in four decades (see Table 3.4 at the end of the chapter). Respondents aged 45 years or older made up a whopping 64 percent of total exit poll participants, split evenly between voters in the 45–59 and 60 or over age groups. This dwarfed the amount of younger respondents. Respondents under age 30 made up only 12 percent of the exit poll, whereas those in the 30–44 age group made up 24 percent of the exit poll.

Sexual Orientation

The national exit polls began querying about sexual orientation in the 1990s. The wording of the question changed twice before settling into its current format. Initially, pollsters inquired whether respondents were either gay or lesbian, originally in an all-that-apply and later in a yes-no format. Since 1996, voters have been administered a yes-no question asking whether they are gay, lesbian, or bisexual.

Figure 3.5 shows the ratio of gay, lesbian, or bisexual respondents to those who are not, from 1996 through 2010. The proportion of respondents identifying themselves as gay, lesbian,

Figure 3.5 Composition of the Exit Polls by Sexual Orientation, 1996–2010



Source: National exit polls. See the section in Chapter 2 entitled “Creating a Cumulative National Data Set: Selecting Exit Polls” (pp. 28–29).

Note: When using these results to make inferences about the active electorate, the standard errors should be calculated using Table 2.2 (p. 36), which is explained in the adjacent section of Chapter 2, “Analyzing Exit Poll Questions: Estimating Sampling Error” (pp. 34–36). For a guide on how to understand the tables and figures of this chapter, see the section in Chapter 2 entitled “Presenting and Discussing the Exit Poll Data: Reading Chapter 3” (pp. 37–39).

or bisexual has fluctuated between 3 and 5 percent, averaging 4 percent of the total over this time period. Despite gay marriage being a hotly contested political issue in recent years, there has been no discernable change in the proportion of respondents identifying as gay, lesbian, or bisexual either over time or across election types.

In 2010, gays, lesbians, and bisexuals comprised 3 percent of exit poll respondents (see Table 3.5 at the end of the chapter). This rate is virtually unchanged from the 2008 presidential election, when 4 percent of respondents were gay, lesbian, or bisexual.

Geographic Location

The geographic location of voters is another important factor in American politics. Geographic locales draw together a distinct blend of social groups, natural resources, and institutional arrangements, which, in turn, spawns a unique political culture.⁴ Political culture influences which types of individuals become active in politics, what they want and expect out of government, and perceptions about which types of candidates and policies they think are capable of achieving them.⁵

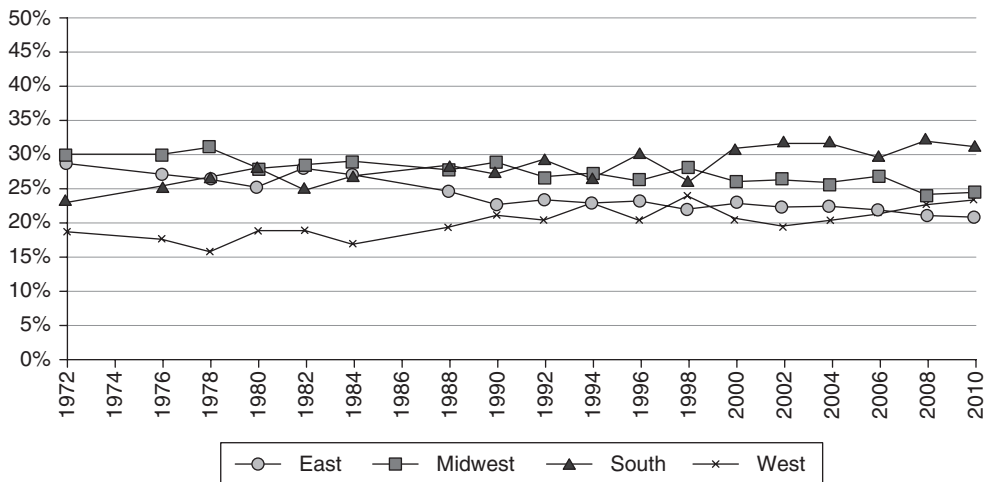
To tap elements of geographically based political cultures, national exit pollsters have assessed two geographic characteristics repeatedly over time: regional location and population density. Regional location identifies the section of the country in which respondents’ electoral precincts are found, whereas population density indicates the number of people living in communities containing respondents’ electoral precincts. The relative distribution of both measures in the exit polls has evolved over time, changing considerably over the past several decades.

Regional Location of Voter's Precinct

Exit pollsters classify each respondent's electoral precinct according to one of the four primary regions used by the U.S. Census Bureau. Respondents heading to the polls in Connecticut, Delaware, Maine, Maryland, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New York, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, Vermont, Washington, DC, or West Virginia are assigned to the eastern region. Midwestern respondents are defined as those casting a ballot in Illinois, Indiana, Kansas, Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, Nebraska, North Dakota, Ohio, South Dakota, or Wisconsin. Southern respondents are found in Alabama, Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Mississippi, North Carolina, Oklahoma, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, or Virginia. Finally, western respondents participate in Alaska, Arizona, California, Colorado, Hawaii, Idaho, Montana, Nevada, New Mexico, Oregon, Utah, Washington, or Wyoming.

Figure 3.6 shows the distribution of these groupings in the exit polls over time. Over the past four decades, there have been major shifts in the regional bases of respondents. Southern and western respondents have increased their shares of the exit polls substantially, at the expense of eastern and midwestern respondents. The proportion of southern respondents increased by 8 percentage points since 1972, gradually becoming the largest region represented in the exit polls. The prominence of western respondents also grew as they moved from being the weakest voice in the exit polls to nearly the second strongest. By contrast, the proportion of eastern respondents in the exit polls decreased by more than 7 percentage points over the past four decades, whereas midwestern respondents' share dropped 5 percentage points.

Figure 3.6 Composition of the Exit Polls by Region, 1972–2010



Source: National exit polls. See the section in Chapter 2 entitled “Creating a Cumulative National Data Set: Selecting Exit Polls” (pp. 28–29).

Note: When using these results to make inferences about the active electorate, the standard errors should be calculated using Table 2.2 (p. 36), which is explained in the adjacent section of Chapter 2, “Analyzing Exit Poll Questions: Estimating Sampling Error” (pp. 34–36). For a guide on how to understand the tables and figures of this chapter, see the section in Chapter 2 entitled “Presenting and Discussing the Exit Poll Data: Reading Chapter 3” (pp. 37–39).

Chapter 3

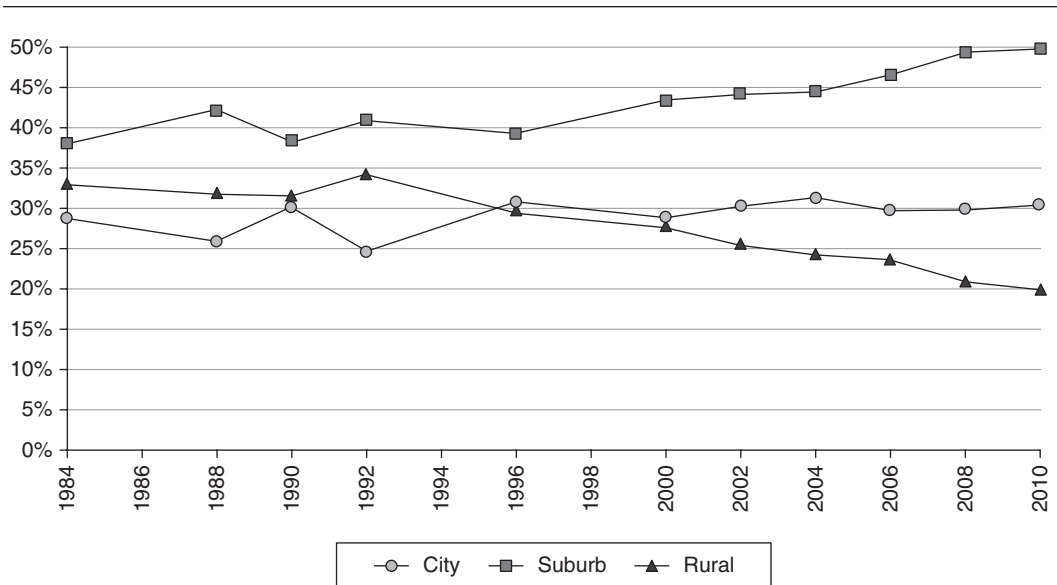
These changes in the regional composition of the exit polls persisted in the 2010 election (see Table 3.6 at the end of the chapter). The South held the most respondents overall, with the region making up 31 percent of the exit poll. Conversely, the East held the smallest share of any region, consisting of only 21 percent of all respondents. Midwestern and western respondents fell in between, comprising 25 percent and 23 percent of the exit poll, respectively.

Population Density of Voter's Precinct

Since 1984, national exit pollsters have also coded the population density of each respondent's election precinct as urban, suburban, or rural. Urban precincts are located in a central city with a total population of 50,000 or more. Suburban precincts are found in lower-density, autonomous municipalities with easy access to a central city. Rural precincts are found outside metropolitan areas, in communities with populations less than 50,000.

Figure 3.7 shows how the population density of respondents' precincts has varied over time. From 1984 to 1996, suburbanites comprised roughly two-fifths of the exit polls, whereas the proportions of rural and urban respondents each fluctuated at around a third of the exit polls. In the past decade or so, suburbanites have increased their share steadily, comprising nearly one out of two exit poll respondents by 2010. These gains have come primarily at the expense of rural respondents, whose share of the exit polls has dropped by a third over the same period and who now make up only one in five respondents. Meanwhile, the percentage of urban respondents has held steady at around 30 percent of the exit polls, changing little since the start of the series.

Figure 3.7 Composition of the Exit Polls by Population Density of Precinct, 1984–2010



Source: National exit polls. See the section in Chapter 2 entitled "Creating a Cumulative National Data Set: Selecting Exit Polls" (pp. 28–29).

Note: When using these results to make inferences about the active electorate, the standard errors should be calculated using Table 2.2 (p. 36), which is explained in the adjacent section of Chapter 2, "Analyzing Exit Poll Questions: Estimating Sampling Error" (pp. 34–36). For a guide on how to understand the tables and figures of this chapter, see the section in Chapter 2 entitled "Presenting and Discussing the Exit Poll Data: Reading Chapter 3" (pp. 37–39).

In 2010, the exit poll showed that the population density of respondents' precincts held steady, changing little from 2008. Suburbanites once again dominated the exit poll, comprising nearly half of all respondents (see Table 3.7 at the end of the chapter). Conversely, rural respondents made up only 21 percent of respondents. Meanwhile, urban respondents constituted 31 percent of the exit poll.

Religious Characteristics

Religion can be a potent force in politics. Religious institutions instill core values and shape a range of beliefs about society. They foster perceptions of right and wrong. They cultivate attitudes toward out groups, promoting tolerance and benevolence in some cases and narrow-mindedness and dogmatism in others. They even advance particular behaviors such as sexual mores or dietary practices. Together these teachings can inform interpretations of politics and ideas about public policies.⁶

National exit pollsters have routinely assessed three different religious characteristics of voters over time. They have asked respondents their religious affiliation, religious attendance, and identification with evangelicalism. Unfortunately, each question has been plagued with measurement issues, limiting the number of response options and time points that can be compared.

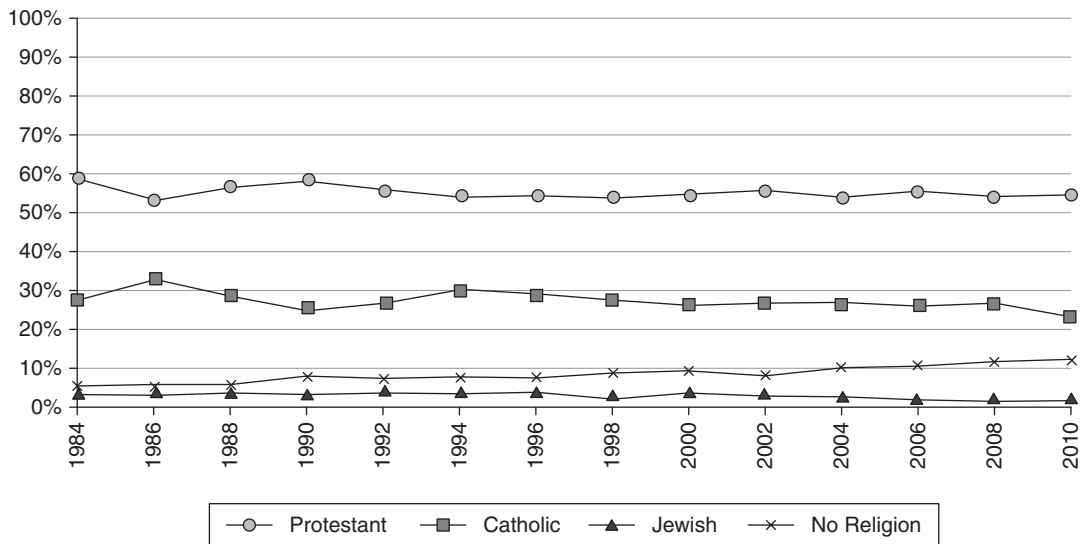
Religious Affiliation

Exit pollsters gauge religious affiliation by querying respondents about whether they identify with one of the main religious traditions found in the United States. The traditions have varied somewhat over time, including affiliations such as Baptist, Muslim, and Mormon at certain points. Pollsters have most frequently asked whether respondents identify themselves as Protestant, Catholic, or Jewish, or whether they do not identify with an organized religion.

Figure 3.8 shows the distribution of these four groups in the exit polls since 1984. The proportion of religious seculars has grown substantially, more than doubling in size in the past quarter-century from roughly one in twenty respondents in the mid-1980s to nearly one in eight respondents by the end of the 2000s. This shift has come at the expense of Judeo-Christian affiliations. The proportion of Christians has fallen roughly 9 percentage points over this period, from 87 percent of the exit poll in 1984 to 78 percent of the exit poll in 2008, with Protestants and Catholics contributing similarly to the decline depending on the election year. Meanwhile, the share of Jews in the exit poll has also declined over the past quarter-century, falling from roughly 4 percent of respondents in the last half of the 1980s to roughly 2 percent of respondents by the end of the 2000s.

The 2010 exit poll had among the smallest shares of religiously affiliated respondents since pollsters first solicited this characteristic in the mid-1980s (see Table 3.8 at the end of the chapter). Seculars comprised 12 percent of respondents in the 2010 election, up 4 percentage points in just the past two midterms. Most of this increase appears to have come at the expense of Catholics, who comprised their smallest share, at 23 percent, of the exit poll since the item first appeared in 1984. Meanwhile, Protestant and Jewish respondents held steady, comprising 55 percent and 2 percent of the exit poll, respectively.

Figure 3.8 Composition of the Exit Polls by Religious Affiliation, 1984–2010



Source: National exit polls. See the section in Chapter 2 entitled “Creating a Cumulative National Data Set: Selecting Exit Polls” (pp. 28–29).

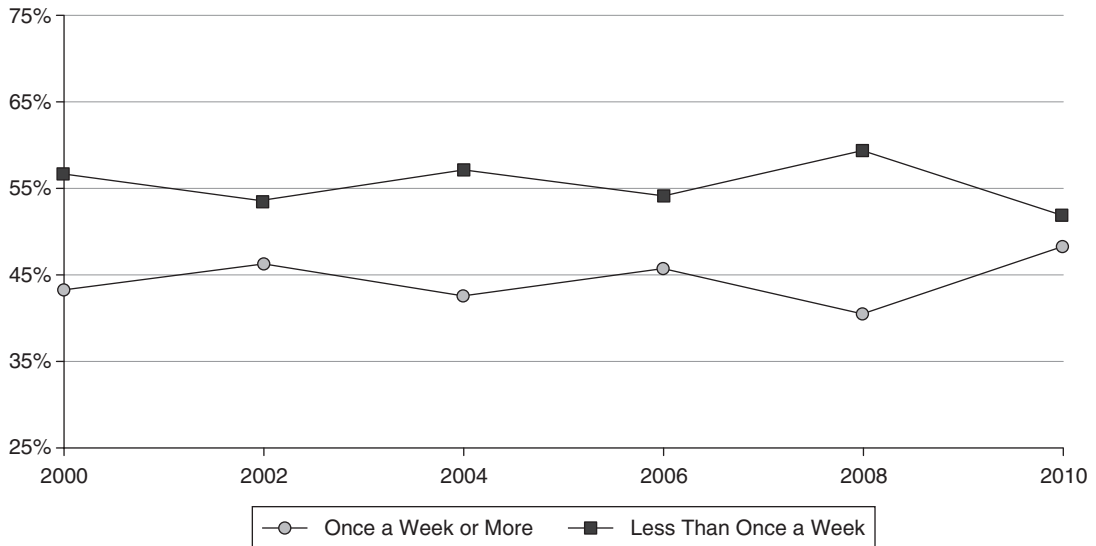
Note: When using these results to make inferences about the active electorate, the standard errors should be calculated using Table 2.2 (p. 36), which is explained in the adjacent section of Chapter 2, “Analyzing Exit Poll Questions: Estimating Sampling Error” (pp. 34–36). For a guide on how to understand the tables and figures of this chapter, see the section in Chapter 2 entitled “Presenting and Discussing the Exit Poll Data: Reading Chapter 3” (pp. 37–39).

Religious Attendance

Identifying with a religion does not necessarily mean that voters practice the religion. Therefore, exit pollsters introduced an item tapping how often respondents attend religious services. The wording of the religious attendance question has changed somewhat over time as pollsters have varied both the number and content of the response options administered to exit poll respondents. The question has included as little as one category, such as when respondents were asked if they attended religious services at least once a week, to as many as five categories, such as when respondents were asked whether they attended religious services more than once a week, once a week, a few times a month, a few times a year, or never. To allow for longitudinal comparisons, we recoded comparable questions into two categories differentiating between respondents who attended religious services at least once a week from those who did not attend religious services at least once a week.

Figure 3.9 shows the relative proportion of weekly attendees and non-weekly attendees in the exit polls administered from 2000 through 2010. Over the past decade, a majority of respondents in each election have not attended services at least once a week, comprising 55 percent of the exit polls, on average. Conversely, 45 percent of respondents, on average, have attended religious services at least once a week.

Despite the brevity of the series, the evidence suggests that respondents in midterm election years are more religious than respondents in presidential election years. The three midterm elections this past decade saw upticks in the share of the exit polls comprised of more highly religious

Figure 3.9 Composition of the Exit Polls by Religious Attendance, 2000–2010

Source: National exit polls. See the section in Chapter 2 entitled “Creating a Cumulative National Data Set: Selecting Exit Polls” (pp. 28–29).

Note: When using these results to make inferences about the active electorate, the standard errors should be calculated using Table 2.2 (p. 36), which is explained in the adjacent section of Chapter 2, “Analyzing Exit Poll Questions: Estimating Sampling Error” (pp. 34–36). For a guide on how to understand the tables and figures of this chapter, see the section in Chapter 2 entitled “Presenting and Discussing the Exit Poll Data: Reading Chapter 3” (pp. 37–39).

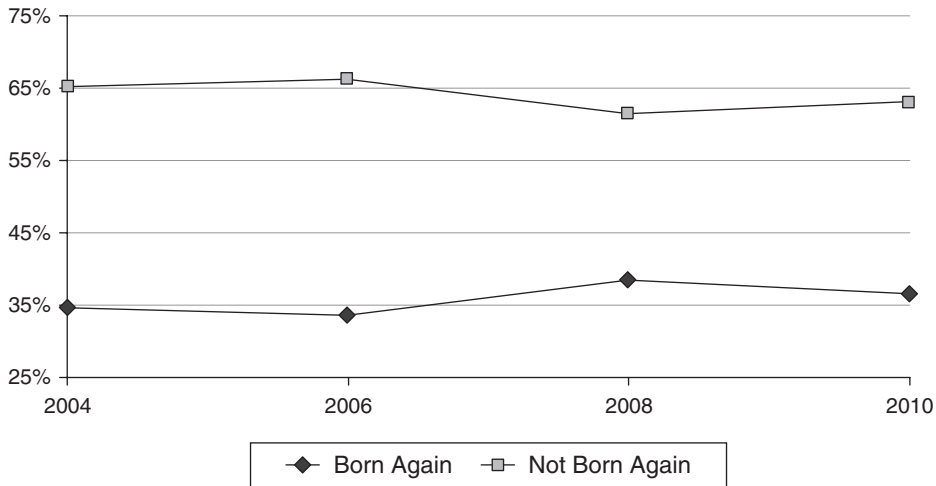
voters. The share of respondents attending church weekly rose 4 percentage points from 2000 to 2002, 3 points from 2004 to 2006, and 7 points from 2008 to 2010. After both 2002 and 2006, the subsequent presidential election saw a decline in the proportion of respondents who were highly religious.

The 2010 election saw the proportion of low-frequency religious attendees fall to its lowest level in the past six elections (see Table 3.9 at the end of the chapter). Fifty-two percent of exit poll respondents reported attending church less than weekly, down 3 points from their decade-long average. By contrast, the proportion of frequent attendees rose to its highest level in the 2000s, reaching 48 percent of the exit poll in 2010.

Evangelical

After the emergence of evangelical Christian-oriented political organizations in the late 1970s, such as Jerry Falwell’s Moral Majority and James Dobson’s Focus on the Family, exit pollsters began attempting to capture an affinity for the beliefs underlying such groups. Unfortunately, they have had difficulty settling on question wording for such an amorphous idea. From 1982 to 1994, exit pollsters asked respondents whether they were “born-again Christians” or “evangelical Christians.” Sensitive that they might be overstating the numbers in the movement, pollsters began asking voters whether they considered themselves part of the “Religious Right” in 1996. When this descriptor fell out of fashion with newer evangelical political organizations,

Figure 3.10 Composition of the Exit Polls by Evangelical, 2004–2010



Source: National exit polls. See the section in Chapter 2 entitled “Creating a Cumulative National Data Set: Selecting Exit Polls” (pp. 28–29).

Note: When using these results to make inferences about the active electorate, the standard errors should be calculated using Table 2.2 (p. 36), which is explained in the adjacent section of Chapter 2, “Analyzing Exit Poll Questions: Estimating Sampling Error” (pp. 34–36). For a guide on how to understand the tables and figures of this chapter, see the section in Chapter 2 entitled “Presenting and Discussing the Exit Poll Data: Reading Chapter 3” (pp. 37–39).

national exit pollsters reverted back to their initial wordings in 2004 and began assessing whether respondents considered themselves “born-again or evangelical Christians.” However, the formatting of this most recent version of the question is not comparable with the earlier version.

Figure 3.10 shows the proportion of self-identified evangelicals in the exit polls administered since 2004. On average, evangelicals have comprised 36 percent of respondents in the past four elections. Their share in any given election has remained remarkably stable, fluctuating within a 4-point range.

Despite well-publicized differences in the religious orientations of the incumbent presidents—George W. Bush identified as an evangelical Christian, whereas Barack Obama did not—the proportion of evangelicals in the exit poll changed little from 2006 to 2010 (see Table 3.10 at the end of the chapter). Evangelical Christians made up 37 percent of respondents in the 2010 election. This rate was similar to the 34 percent of evangelicals who completed the midterm exit poll administered four years earlier.

Lifestyle Characteristics

Another category of questions that pollsters include frequently on national exit polls are those that tap lifestyle choices, such as occupational, consumptive, and recreational decisions. These lifestyle characteristics influence the types of people with which individuals associate and interact. They form the bases of many organizational memberships, from involvement in civic groups to

participation in sports leagues. Such social reinforcements of lifestyle choices serve to unify preferences, particularly on issues stemming from these choices.⁷

Political scientists have found that lifestyle decisions are often related to political orientations and behaviors.⁸ Laws and regulations frequently aim to constrain lifestyle choices, from licensing requirements to age restrictions. Disagreements on these constraints have prompted numerous electoral debates in recent campaigns over topics such as drug use policy, gun control issues, and environmental practices.

From their inception, national exit polls have included a variety of lifestyle characteristics, from personal vices, such as cigarette smoking and cocaine usage, to mass media practices, such as Internet usage and talk radio listening. Unfortunately, many of these items were included only once or twice, preventing any analysis of their relationship with electoral preferences and behaviors over time. Over the past several decades, five lifestyle characteristics have appeared on five or more exit polls including either the 2008 or 2010 exit poll: education, employment status, marital status, child in the household, or union member in the household.

Education

Exit pollsters have surveyed respondents' education in a similar format since the 1986 election. They have measured education as progress toward or completion of particular levels of schooling rather than the number of years of school attendance or knowledge acquired. The five comparable response options administered over time ask whether respondents did not complete high school, completed high school, attended some college, completed a college degree, or undertook graduate study.

During the past quarter-century, exit poll respondents have become increasingly more educated (see Figure 3.11). From 1986 to 2010, the proportion of college-educated respondents grew 20 percentage points, from less than a third in 1986 to more than half in 2010. Conversely, respondents with only a high school diploma or less saw their voice in the exit polls diminish considerably relative to their college-educated counterparts. The proportion of respondents with just a high school education fell 14 percentage points since 1986, whereas the proportion of respondents with less than a high school education dropped 5 points.

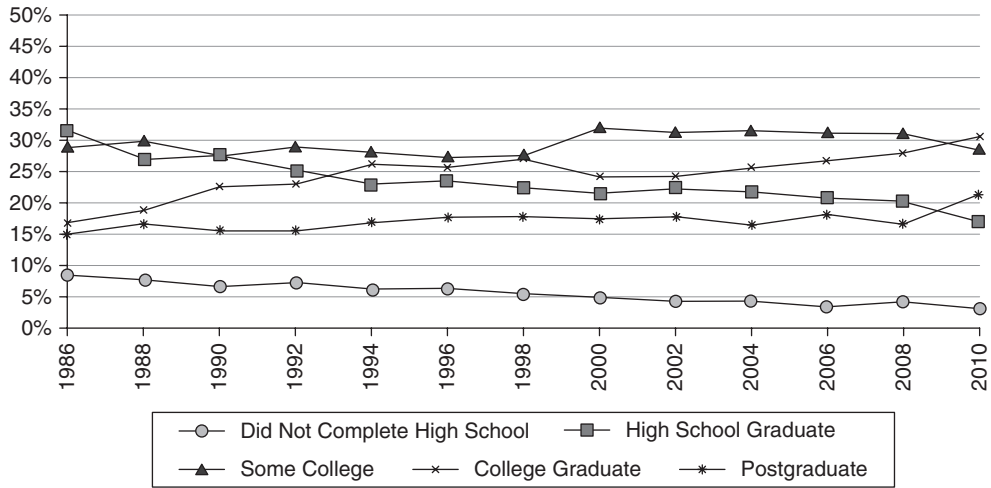
By 2010, the exit poll respondents were the most educated they had ever been (see Table 3.11 at the end of the chapter). Ninety-seven percent of respondents had received a high school diploma. Fifty-one percent of respondents had earned a college degree, including 21 percent who had some postgraduate education.

Employment Status

Exit pollsters have long been interested in the relationship between employment status and vote choice. Since 1996, they have asked respondents whether or not they were employed full time at the time they cast their ballots. Readers should be mindful that those not employed full time may not necessarily be without a job or looking for work, but instead may be employed part time, retired, in school, or acting as a homemaker.

Figure 3.12 shows the share of exit poll respondents employed full time and less than full time over the past two decades. In every election since 1996, respondents employed full time have

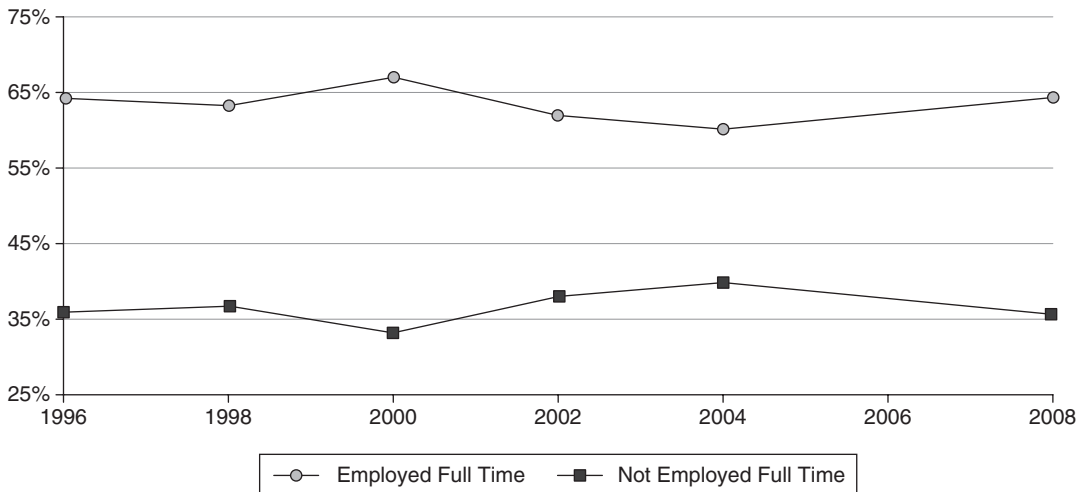
Figure 3.11 Composition of the Exit Polls by Education, 1986–2010



Source: National exit polls. See the section in Chapter 2 entitled “Creating a Cumulative National Data Set: Selecting Exit Polls” (pp. 28–29).

Note: When using these results to make inferences about the active electorate, the standard errors should be calculated using Table 2.2 (p. 36), which is explained in the adjacent section of Chapter 2, “Analyzing Exit Poll Questions: Estimating Sampling Error” (pp. 34–36). For a guide on how to understand the tables and figures of this chapter, see the section in Chapter 2 entitled “Presenting and Discussing the Exit Poll Data: Reading Chapter 3” (pp. 37–39).

Figure 3.12 Composition of the Exit Polls by Employment Status, 1996–2008



Source: National exit polls. See the section in Chapter 2 entitled “Creating a Cumulative National Data Set: Selecting Exit Polls” (pp. 28–29).

Note: When using these results to make inferences about the active electorate, the standard errors should be calculated using Table 2.2 (p. 36), which is explained in the adjacent section of Chapter 2, “Analyzing Exit Poll Questions: Estimating Sampling Error” (pp. 34–36). For a guide on how to understand the tables and figures of this chapter, see the section in Chapter 2 entitled “Presenting and Discussing the Exit Poll Data: Reading Chapter 3” (pp. 37–39).

made up a far larger share of the exit poll than voters not employed full time, comprising 63 percent of the exit poll on average and holding at least a 20-point advantage over their counterparts in every election. Their numbers have remained relatively flat over time, fluctuating between 60 and 67 percent and never moving more than 5 points in a single election.

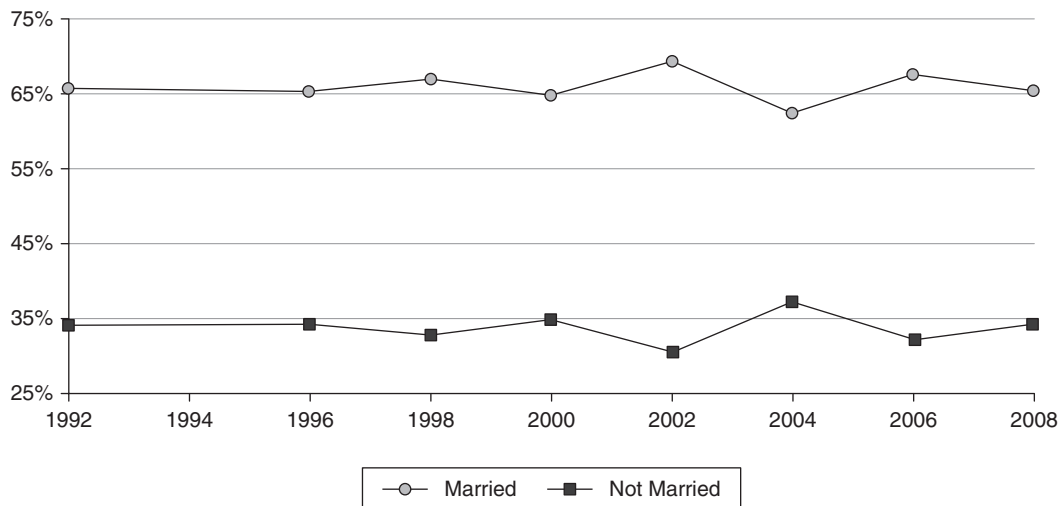
Exit poll respondents were not asked their employment status in the 2010 election. In the 2008 exit poll, a large majority of respondents were once again employed full time (see Table 3.12 at the end of the chapter). Sixty-four percent of exit poll respondents reported that they worked full time, whereas only 36 percent indicated that they worked less than full time.

Marital Status

Exit pollsters have solicited the marital status of voters in a similar format since 1992. The question asks respondents whether or not they are currently married. It disregards whether respondents have been married in the past or are legally separated in the present.

The composition of married and unmarried respondents in the exit polls can be seen in Figure 3.13. Over the past quarter-century, married respondents have typically comprised a far larger share of the national exit polls than unmarried voters. Married respondents have held a nearly two-to-one advantage over unmarried respondents since 1992. Sixty-six percent of exit poll respondents have been married, fluctuating between 63 and 70 percent over time.

Figure 3.13 Composition of the Exit Polls by Marital Status, 1992–2008



Source: National exit polls. See the section in Chapter 2 entitled “Creating a Cumulative National Data Set: Selecting Exit Polls” (pp. 28–29).

Note: When using these results to make inferences about the active electorate, the standard errors should be calculated using Table 2.2 (p. 36), which is explained in the adjacent section of Chapter 2, “Analyzing Exit Poll Questions: Estimating Sampling Error” (pp. 34–36). For a guide on how to understand the tables and figures of this chapter, see the section in Chapter 2 entitled “Presenting and Discussing the Exit Poll Data: Reading Chapter 3” (pp. 37–39).

Chapter 3

In recent election cycles, married respondents have comprised a somewhat greater share of the exit polls in midterm elections than in presidential elections. In the past three midterms, the proportion of married respondents has increased, with married respondents' share of the exit poll growing 4 points, on average, in the subsequent midterm election before shrinking again in the next presidential election year.

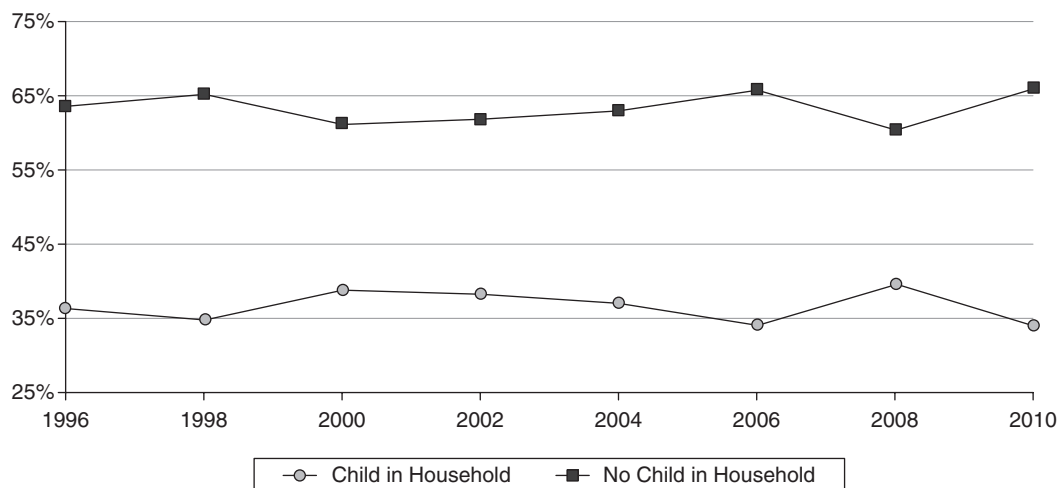
The marital status question did not appear on the exit poll in the 2010 election. In 2008, married respondents comprised 66 percent of the exit poll, down 2 points from the previous midterm election (see Table 3.13 at the end of the chapter). Unmarried respondents made up the remaining third of the survey.

Child in the Household

Children's issues have played a prominent role in national politics in recent years, from debates over funding for day care centers to educational testing programs. Since 1996, the national exit polls have queried voters in a yes-or-no format on whether they have children under age eighteen living in the household. On average, 37 percent of respondents reported children living at their home over this time span (see Figure 3.14). The proportion of respondents with a child in their household has ranged between 34 and 40 percent with no discernable pattern to the fluctuations.

In the 2010 election, 34 percent of exit poll respondents had children under the age of eighteen living in their household (see Table 3.14 at the end of the chapter). This proportion was down 6 percentage points from 2008 but was identical to the proportion of respondents with children in the household in the previous midterm exit poll.

Figure 3.14 Composition of the Exit Polls by Child in Household, 1996–2010



Source: National exit polls. See the section in Chapter 2 entitled "Creating a Cumulative National Data Set: Selecting Exit Polls" (pp. 28–29).

Note: When using these results to make inferences about the active electorate, the standard errors should be calculated using Table 2.2 (p. 36), which is explained in the adjacent section of Chapter 2, "Analyzing Exit Poll Questions: Estimating Sampling Error" (pp. 34–36). For a guide on how to understand the tables and figures of this chapter, see the section in Chapter 2 entitled "Presenting and Discussing the Exit Poll Data: Reading Chapter 3" (pp. 37–39).

Union Household

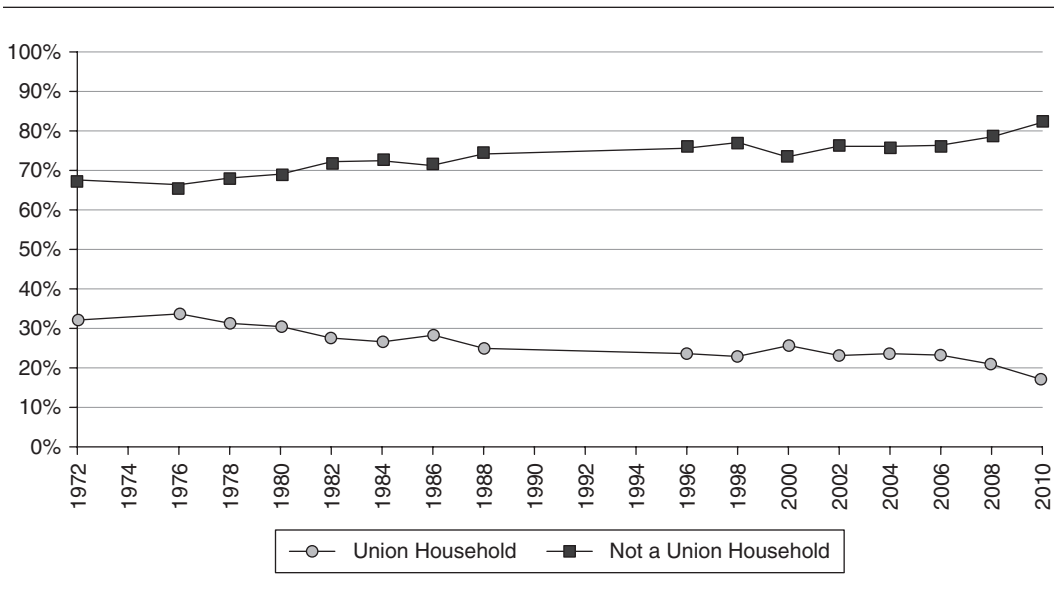
Unions have long had a strong presence in American politics. They promote positions on many campaign issues and direct members toward particular candidates. They also play a vital role in mobilizing voters by organizing registration drives, supplying logistical information, and even providing transportation to the polls.

Exit pollsters have recognized these efforts, assessing union membership in one format or another since the first national exit poll in 1972. The specific wording of the question has varied somewhat over the years. Sometimes pollsters have asked voters whether anyone in the household belongs to a union. On other occasions, pollsters have asked voters to specify whether they were union members or whether some other person in their household fit this description. To ensure the longest series possible, we recoded all versions into a single measure indicating whether or not a union member lived in the respondent’s household.

Figure 3.15 shows the proportion of exit poll respondents from union households over the past four decades. Generally speaking, the share of respondents with union connections has been declining over time. The proportion of respondents from union households fell from one-third in the 1970s to less than one-fifth by 2010.

In 2010, only 18 percent of exit poll respondents had a union member in their household (see Table 3.15 at the end of the chapter). This showing was the lowest share of union households represented in the survey since national exit polling began in 1972. Not only was it down 17 points from its high point of the series in the 1976 election, but it was down 9 points in just the past decade alone.

Figure 3.15 Composition of the Exit Polls by Union Household, 1972–2010



Source: National exit polls. See the section in Chapter 2 entitled “Creating a Cumulative National Data Set: Selecting Exit Polls” (pp. 28–29).

Note: When using these results to make inferences about the active electorate, the standard errors should be calculated using Table 2.2 (p. 36), which is explained in the adjacent section of Chapter 2, “Analyzing Exit Poll Questions: Estimating Sampling Error” (pp. 34–36). For a guide on how to understand the tables and figures of this chapter, see the section in Chapter 2 entitled “Presenting and Discussing the Exit Poll Data: Reading Chapter 3” (pp. 37–39).

Political Orientations

The national exit polls routinely solicit information about respondents' political orientations, which are general attitudes about institutions, policy directions, and the general welfare of the country. Rather than specific preferences about a particular policy or event, they are typically conceptualized as comprehensive assessments based on an accumulation of judgments.

Scholars believe political orientations are immediate antecedents of political decisions. They shape individuals' positions on social, economic, and political issues, predisposing them to support particular candidates or policies. Through the years, numerous studies have shown a close correspondence between political orientations and vote choice.⁹

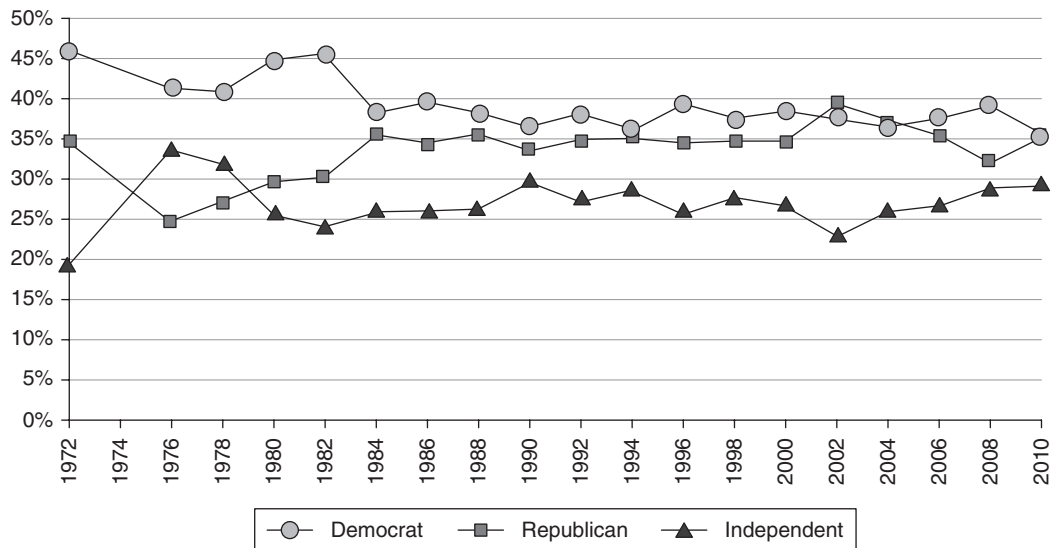
Exit pollsters have assessed a variety of different political orientations over the past four decades. The most commonly asked questions assess party and ideological self-identification, presidential and congressional approval, forecasts about the direction of the country in the immediate future and a generation from now, perceptions about government activism, voting behavior in the prior presidential election, and newness to voting. The exit polls show considerable variation in responses, both within and between items.

Party Identification

Exit pollsters have inquired about respondents' partisan predispositions since 1972. The question asks respondents whether they usually think of themselves as a Democrat, a Republican, or an independent. In most but not all years, they were also given an option to indicate whether they identified with another unnamed political party. Since there has not been a predominant third political party over the past four decades, we have combined the options for independent and something else to create a category designed to indicate respondents who did not identify with (or were independent from) the two major political parties.

Figure 3.16 illustrates the composition of major-party identifiers in the exit polls conducted from 1972 through 2010. Major-party identifiers—whether Democrats or Republicans—have consistently outnumbered independents by roughly a three-to-one margin. With the exception of an increase in independents immediately following the Watergate scandal, the proportion of independents in each exit poll remained remarkably steady through the 1980s and 1990s. Since 2002, though, the proportion of independents has begun to inch up, gaining 6 percentage points over the past four exit polls.

Among major-party identifiers, Democratic respondents have outnumbered Republican respondents in the exit polls for much of the past four decades. Between 1972 and 2000, Democrats had a 7-point size advantage over Republicans, comprising 40 percent of the exit poll, on average, compared to 33 percent for Republicans. In the 2002 exit poll, the share of self-identified Republicans surpassed the share of self-identified Democrats for the first time in thirty years, topping them 40 percent to 38 percent. In the elections occurring since, the proportion of exit poll respondents identifying with each of the major parties has been roughly equal, with the exception of the 2008 exit poll, when Democratic respondents held a 7-point advantage.

Figure 3.16 Composition of the Exit Polls by Party Identification, 1972–2010

Source: National exit polls. See the section in Chapter 2 entitled “Creating a Cumulative National Data Set: Selecting Exit Polls” (pp. 28–29).

Note: When using these results to make inferences about the active electorate, the standard errors should be calculated using Table 2.2 (p. 36), which is explained in the adjacent section of Chapter 2, “Analyzing Exit Poll Questions: Estimating Sampling Error” (pp. 34–36). For a guide on how to understand the tables and figures of this chapter, see the section in Chapter 2 entitled “Presenting and Discussing the Exit Poll Data: Reading Chapter 3” (pp. 37–39).

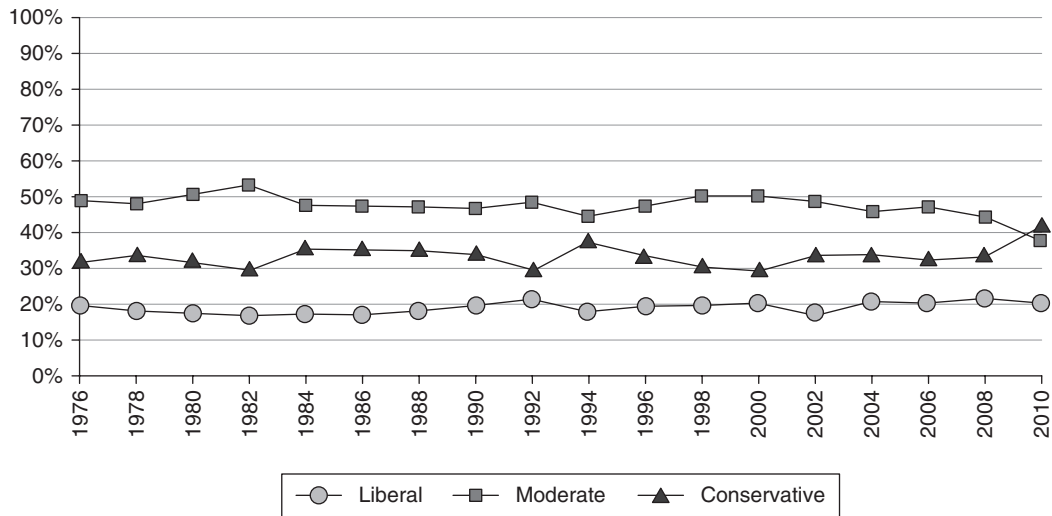
In 2010, Democrats and Republicans appeared in the exit poll in equal numbers. Self-identified Democrats and Republicans each comprised 35 percent of respondents (see Table 3.16 at the end of the chapter). Meanwhile, independents made up 30 percent of exit poll respondents, among their largest shares in the past thirty years.

Ideological Identification

Exit pollsters have gauged the ideological orientation of respondents’ political views since 1976. They have relied exclusively on an item that requests respondents to locate themselves on a unidimensional, liberal-conservative scale. The question asks whether on most political matters respondents consider themselves to be liberal, conservative, or moderate.

Figure 3.17 shows the distribution of ideological self-identification in the exit polls during the past three decades. Generally speaking, the ideological orientation of exit poll respondents has remained relatively stable. From 1976 to 2008, roughly a fifth of respondents identified themselves as liberal, a third identified as conservative, and nearly half identified as moderate. The movement that has occurred in the ideological composition of the exit polls appears to have resulted primarily from fluctuations in the proportion of moderate and conservative identifiers. Upward shifts in the proportion of moderates have typically been mirrored by downward shifts in the proportion of conservatives, and vice versa. Meanwhile, the proportion of liberals has remained essentially the same over the past two-and-a-half decades.

Figure 3.17 Composition of the Exit Polls by Ideological Identification, 1976–2010



Source: National exit polls. See the section in Chapter 2 entitled “Creating a Cumulative National Data Set: Selecting Exit Polls” (pp. 28–29).

Note: When using these results to make inferences about the active electorate, the standard errors should be calculated using Table 2.2 (p. 36), which is explained in the adjacent section of Chapter 2, “Analyzing Exit Poll Questions: Estimating Sampling Error” (pp. 34–36). For a guide on how to understand the tables and figures of this chapter, see the section in Chapter 2 entitled “Presenting and Discussing the Exit Poll Data: Reading Chapter 3” (pp. 37–39).

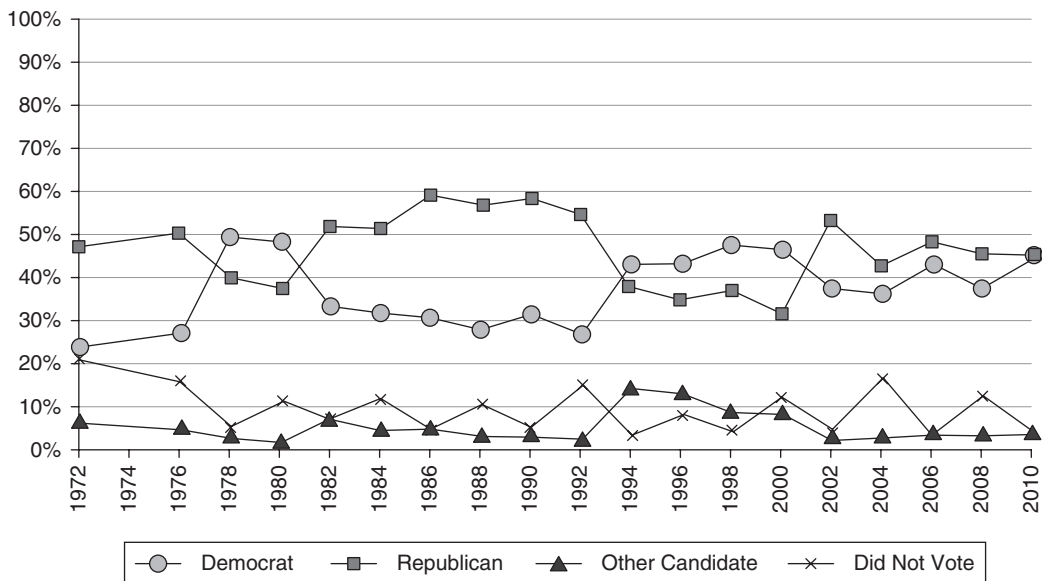
The 2010 exit poll was the most ideologically polarized in at least three decades. Sixty-two percent of respondents indicated an ideological orientation, the first time the number has topped 60 percent since the introduction of the question on the 1976 exit poll (see Table 3.17 at the end of the chapter). Most of this change was due to an increase in the proportion of conservatives, which moved up 7 points from 2008 to 41 percent, and a decrease in the proportion of moderates, which fell 5 points to 39 percent. The 2010 exit poll had the highest share of conservatives and the lowest share of moderates in any election in the series. Meanwhile, the proportion of liberal identifiers remained essentially flat, registering at 20 percent of respondents.

Last Presidential Vote

To explore the consistency in the electorate’s voting behavior, national exit pollsters have queried respondents repeatedly about their presidential vote in the previous election. Since 1972, respondents have been asked in every national exit poll if they voted for the named Democratic nominee (for example, Bill Clinton), the named Republican nominee (for example, Bob Dole), someone else, or if they did not vote in the previous presidential election. We recoded named responses into two categories: Democratic presidential candidates and Republican presidential candidates. Because named third-party candidates were not offered to respondents, we did not recode the response options indicating that respondents had chosen some other candidate or did not vote in the previous presidential election.

Figure 3.18 shows the previous presidential vote for exit poll respondents from 1972 through 2010. At first glance, the distribution of responses appears inexplicable, with the series showing

Figure 3.18 Composition of the Exit Polls by Presidential Vote in Last Election, 1972–2010



Source: National exit polls. See the section in Chapter 2 entitled “Creating a Cumulative National Data Set: Selecting Exit Polls” (pp. 28–29).

Note: When using these results to make inferences about the active electorate, the standard errors should be calculated using Table 2.2 (p. 36), which is explained in the adjacent section of Chapter 2, “Analyzing Exit Poll Questions: Estimating Sampling Error” (pp. 34–36). For a guide on how to understand the tables and figures of this chapter, see the section in Chapter 2 entitled “Presenting and Discussing the Exit Poll Data: Reading Chapter 3” (pp. 37–39).

considerable volatility over time. On closer examination, though, several noteworthy patterns stand out.

First, in nearly every exit poll, a greater proportion of respondents supported the winner rather than the loser in the previous presidential election, regardless of the popularity of the sitting president. From 1972 through 2010, 50 percent of exit poll respondents on average recall voting for the winning presidential candidate in the previous election, whereas 35 percent of respondents recall voting for the losing candidate. The proportion of exit poll respondents who supported the winning presidential candidate in the previous election differed from the actual share of the electorate who had voted for the previous winner by 3 points on average, exceeding the winner’s share in five exit polls, falling short in nine exit polls, and matching it in five exit polls. By contrast, the proportion of exit poll respondents who supported the losing presidential candidate in the previous election differed from the actual share by 9 points on average, falling short in every exit poll, save one, during the past four decades.

Second, respondents in the subsequent midterm exit poll (two years later) report a previous presidential vote that more closely matches the actual vote than is the case for respondents in the next presidential exit poll (four years later). In the first midterm exit poll conducted after a presidential election, the correlation between the percentage of respondents who voted for the winning candidate in the previous presidential election and the actual vote received by that candidates was .70, whereas the correlation between the percentage of respondents who

Chapter 3

chose the losing candidate and the actual vote received by that candidate was .74. By the time of the next presidential election, two years after the midterm, the correlation between respondents who voted for the previous winning presidential candidate and the actual vote that candidate received was .38, whereas the correlation between respondents who had voted for the losing candidate and the actual vote the losing candidate received was .21.

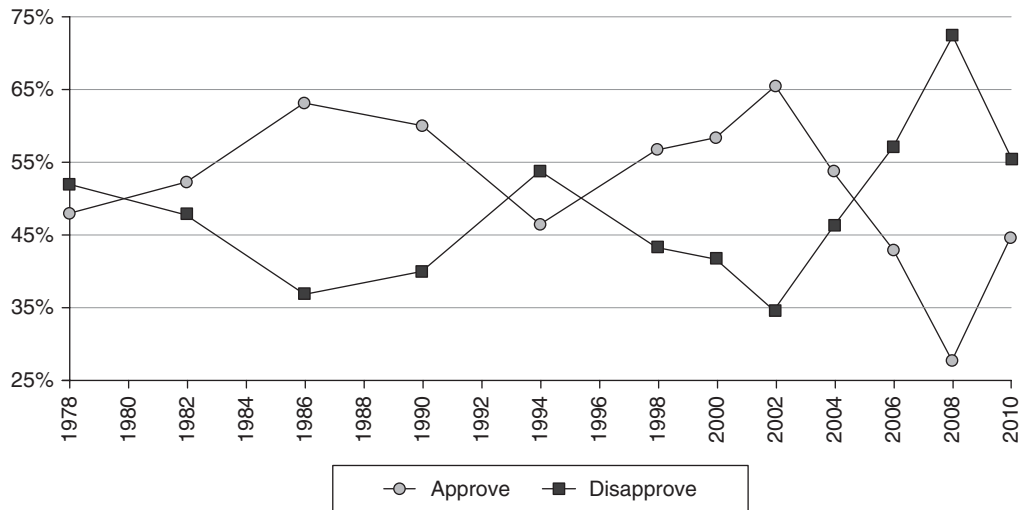
Finally, the proportion of respondents who indicated that they had not voted in the previous presidential election was higher in exit polls administered in presidential election years than in exit polls administered in midterm election years. In presidential exit polls, 14 percent of respondents, on average, did not vote in the previous presidential election. That percentage reached as high as 22 percent in the 1972 election, immediately after the Twenty-sixth Amendment gave eighteen- to twenty-one-year-olds the right to vote, and as low as 9 percent in the 1996 election. In midterm exit polls, only 5 percent of respondents, on average, had not voted in the presidential election occurring two years earlier, with the proportion fluctuating in a very small range between 4 and 7 percent.

In the 2010 exit poll, the distribution of respondents' prior presidential votes deviated as much from the aforementioned patterns as at any time in the past (see Table 3.18 at the end of the chapter). For the first time, the proportion of exit poll respondents who chose the winner, Obama, in the previous presidential election did not exceed the proportion of respondents who chose the loser, McCain; each group comprised 46 percent of the exit poll. Finally, the 5 percent of respondents who did not vote in the 2008 election nearly matched the smallest shares of nonvoters found in any of the preceding exit polls.

Presidential Approval

Exit pollsters have long been interested in the relationship between judgments of presidential performance and vote choice, particularly congressional vote choice. They have included a question tapping presidential approval on surveys administered in midterm election years since 1978. In 2000, they began including the question on exit polls administered in presidential election years, as well. The wording of the question is based on the measure of presidential approval developed by the Gallup Poll and used by the organization since the 1940s. It asks whether respondents approve or disapprove of the way the officeholder is handling his job as president. Beginning in 2002, the response options were expanded to include the intensity of judgment, changing from approve/disapprove to strongly or somewhat approve/disapprove.

Figure 3.19 illustrates exit poll respondents' presidential approval ratings from 1978 through 2010. Judgments of individual presidents appear to move according to their own trajectory, showing few commonalities at similar junctures in their administrations. Jimmy Carter had a weak evaluation in the exit poll conducted at his midterm, securing approval from only 48 percent of respondents. Ronald Reagan received approval from 52 percent of exit poll respondents at his first midterm, and his approval rating only strengthened by his second midterm, when 63 percent of respondents approved of his performance—a greater share in his sixth year than either of his two-term successors received. George H. W. Bush secured 60 percent approval from exit poll respondents during his only midterm election. Bill Clinton's approval rating rose considerably

Figure 3.19 Composition of the Exit Polls by Presidential Approval, 1978–2010

Source: National exit polls. See the section in Chapter 2 entitled “Creating a Cumulative National Data Set: Selecting Exit Polls” (pp. 28–29).

Note: When using these results to make inferences about the active electorate, the standard errors should be calculated using Table 2.2 (p. 36), which is explained in the adjacent section of Chapter 2, “Analyzing Exit Poll Questions: Estimating Sampling Error” (pp. 34–36). For a guide on how to understand the tables and figures of this chapter, see the section in Chapter 2 entitled “Presenting and Discussing the Exit Poll Data: Reading Chapter 3” (pp. 37–39).

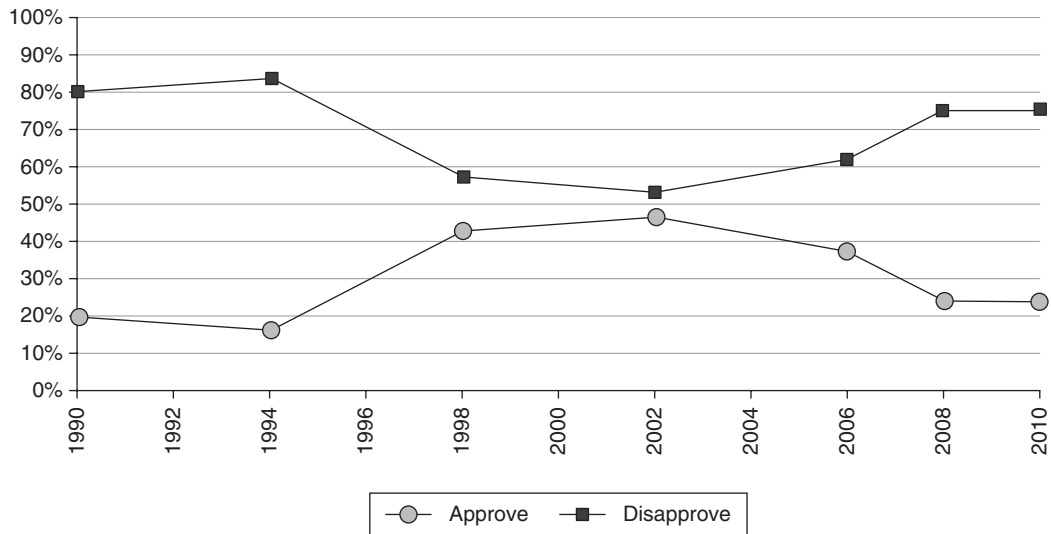
from his first midterm to his second midterm, jumping from 46 percent to 57 percent, where it remained essentially unchanged at the end of his second term in 2000. George W. Bush’s approval rating declined steadily in every exit poll conducted while he was in office, falling from 66 percent at his first midterm in 2002 to 54 percent at his reelection in 2004 to 43 percent at his second midterm in 2006 to 28 percent near the end of his second term in 2008.

Barack Obama fared quite badly among exit poll respondents at his first midterm (see Table 3.19 at the end of the chapter). More than half (56 percent) of them disapproved of his performance as president. Only 45 percent of exit poll respondents approved of President Obama, among the lowest midterm approval ratings given to any president in an exit poll administered in the past thirty years.

Congressional Approval

Since 1990, exit pollsters have asked voters to evaluate the overall performance of Congress in each midterm election. The question used was the same as that used to measure presidential approval. It queried respondents about whether they approve or disapprove of the way Congress is handling its job.

In stark contrast to presidential approval, a majority of exit poll respondents have given Congress negative evaluations in every election in which the question has been asked (see Figure 3.20). In the last seven midterm elections, 70 percent of exit poll respondents, on average, disapproved of the way Congress had been handling its job. Only three in ten respondents approved of its performance.

Figure 3.20 Composition of the Exit Polls by Congressional Approval, 1990–2010

Source: National exit polls. See the section in Chapter 2 entitled “Creating a Cumulative National Data Set: Selecting Exit Polls” (pp. 28–29).

Note: When using these results to make inferences about the active electorate, the standard errors should be calculated using Table 2.2 (p. 36), which is explained in the adjacent section of Chapter 2, “Analyzing Exit Poll Questions: Estimating Sampling Error” (pp. 34–36). For a guide on how to understand the tables and figures of this chapter, see the section in Chapter 2 entitled “Presenting and Discussing the Exit Poll Data: Reading Chapter 3” (pp. 37–39).

Despite this negative tilt, congressional approval ratings are hardly static, exhibiting considerable variability over time. In the 1990 and 1994 midterm exit polls, respondents’ disapproval of Congress topped 80 percent. Respondents’ stance on Congress improved considerably over the next decade, as disapproval dropped to 57 percent in the 1998 exit poll and 53 percent in the 2002 exit poll. By 2006, congressional disapproval was again on the rise, reaching 76 percent in the 2008 exit poll.

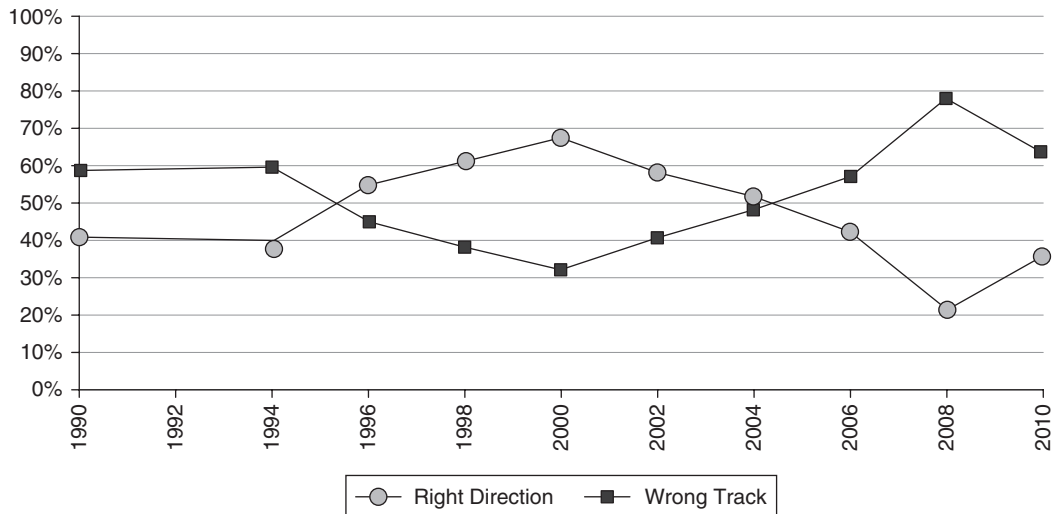
The 2010 exit poll saw little change in congressional approval, despite a new president from the same political party, capable of working with the majority (see Table 3.20 at the end of the chapter). Three-quarters of the exit poll respondents disapproved of the way Congress was handling its job. A paltry 25 percent of respondents approved of Congress’s performance.

Perceived Direction of the Country

Whereas presidential and congressional approval ratings are retrospective evaluations of two institutions critical to shaping the country’s state of affairs, national pollsters have also considered respondents’ perceptions about the country’s future prospects. Specifically, they have asked respondents whether the country is headed in the right direction or off on the wrong track. The item has appeared on every exit poll administered since 1990, save 1992.

Judgments about the future direction of the country have changed considerably over the past two decades (see Figure 3.21). In 1990 and 1994, only about 40 percent of respondents believed that the country was moving in the right direction. Over the next six years, the proportion of the

Figure 3.21 Composition of the Exit Polls by Perceived Direction of the Country, 1990–2010



Source: National exit polls. See the section in Chapter 2 entitled “Creating a Cumulative National Data Set: Selecting Exit Polls” (pp. 28–29).

Note: When using these results to make inferences about the active electorate, the standard errors should be calculated using Table 2.2 (p. 36), which is explained in the adjacent section of Chapter 2, “Analyzing Exit Poll Questions: Estimating Sampling Error” (pp. 34–36). For a guide on how to understand the tables and figures of this chapter, see the section in Chapter 2 entitled “Presenting and Discussing the Exit Poll Data: Reading Chapter 3” (pp. 37–39).

respondents that thought the country was continuing to improve grew by 28 percentage points. By 2000, 68 percent of respondents believed that the country was moving in the right direction.

From 2000 through 2008, though, the tide reversed course, taking the optimism of exit poll respondents away with it. Over the course of the decade, respondents grew increasingly pessimistic about the future of the country. In each of the four elections after 2000, the proportion of respondents believing the country was going off the rails grew by at least 7 percentage points. By 2008, a whopping 79 percent of exit poll respondents thought the country was off on the wrong track, a 47-point increase in only eight years.

The 2010 election found exit poll respondents still quite pessimistic about the country, although decidedly less so than they were in 2008 (see Table 3.21 at the end of the chapter). Optimism increased 14 points since Obama was elected, almost completely mirroring the decline of two years earlier. Nonetheless, an overwhelming 64 percent of respondents thought the country was off on the wrong track, whereas only 36 percent thought the country was moving in the right direction.

Expected Life for the Next Generation

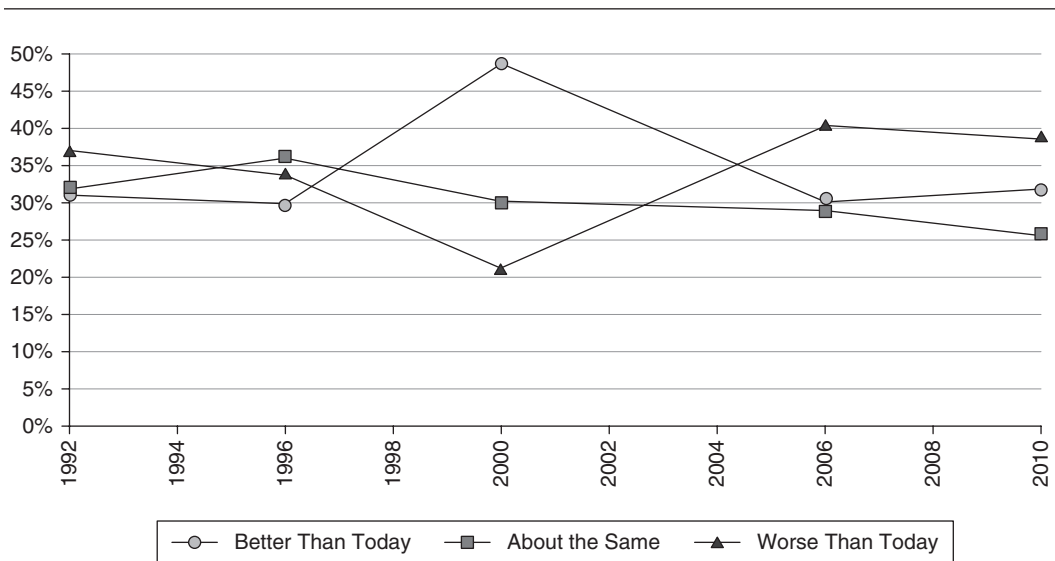
In recent years, national exit pollsters have extended the outlook about the direction of the country to explore whether the time frame varies respondents’ perceptions. Since 1992, the exit polls have asked respondents periodically whether they “expect life for the next generation of Americans to be better than life today, worse than life today, or about the same.” The question has been

included on half of the past ten exit polls, appearing on three exit polls administered in presidential election years (1992, 1996, 2000) and on two in midterm election years (2006 and 2010).

The response distribution for exit poll respondents can be seen in Figure 3.22. The primary effect of changing the time frame has been to reduce the differences in the proportion of optimists and pessimists about the future. Whereas the difference in the share of respondents believing the country was going in the right direction as opposed to off on the wrong track averaged 23 percentage points and exceeded 15 percentage points on eight of its ten administrations, the difference in the share of respondents believing life for the next generation would be better than today as opposed to worse averaged only 11 points and exceeded 15 points on only one of its five administrations.

The distribution patterns over time, though, are still comparable to those found in the question assessing whether the country is going in the right direction or is off on the wrong track. During the 1990s, pessimists outnumbered optimists for both questions. In 1992, 37 percent of respondents thought the next generation would have it worse than today, compared to 31 percent who thought it would be better. In 1996, the results were quite similar; 34 percent indicated that life would be worse for the next generation, compared to 30 percent who thought it would be better. Assessments flipped completely by 2000, just as they they had on the right direction–wrong track question. In the 2000 exit poll, 49 percent of respondents thought the next generation would have it better, whereas only 21 percent thought it would be worse, a change of more than a dozen points in the size of each group. The distribution reversed itself again in the second half of the

Figure 3.22 Composition of the Exit Polls by Expected Life for the Next Generation, 1992–2010



Source: National exit polls. See the section in Chapter 2 entitled “Creating a Cumulative National Data Set: Selecting Exit Polls” (pp. 28–29).

Note: When using these results to make inferences about the active electorate, the standard errors should be calculated using Table 2.2 (p. 36), which is explained in the adjacent section of Chapter 2, “Analyzing Exit Poll Questions: Estimating Sampling Error” (pp. 34–36). For a guide on how to understand the tables and figures of this chapter, see the section in Chapter 2 entitled “Presenting and Discussing the Exit Poll Data: Reading Chapter 3” (pp. 37–39).

2000s, as it did for responses to the right direction–wrong track question, as well. In the 2006 exit poll, 41 percent of respondents thought life for the next generation would be worse than today, whereas 31 percent of respondents thought it would be better than today, swings of about 19 points, respectively, from six years earlier.

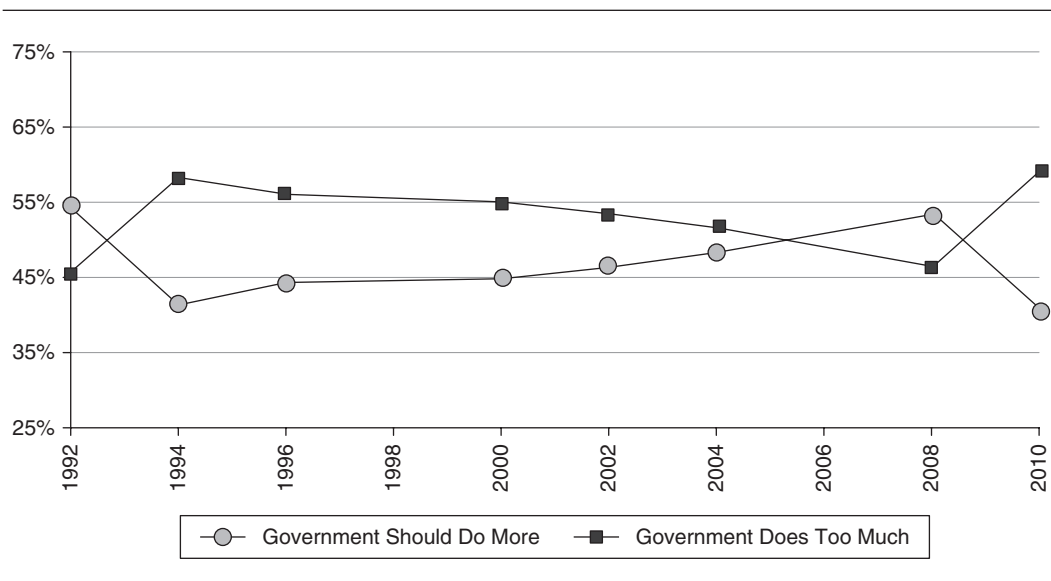
In the 2010 exit polls, forecasts about the future varied little from 2006 (see Table 3.22 at the end of the chapter). A plurality of exit poll respondents (40 percent) felt that life for the next generation would be worse than today. Conversely, 33 percent of respondents believed life would be better in the years to come. The remaining 27 percent of exit poll respondents thought life would be about the same for the next generation.

Position on Government Activism

The role of government has been a key issue in campaigns for decades, often dividing the parties and their respective candidates. Generally speaking, the Democratic Party promotes government intervention in the marketplace to offset the inequalities and negative externalities generated by it, whereas the Republican Party prefers limited government that does not interfere with the workings of the market, believing the private sector is more effective at helping the less fortunate. Since 1992, exit pollsters have asked respondents whether they think the government should do more to solve problems or is doing too many things better left to businesses and individuals.

A small majority of exit poll respondents typically believes that the government is too active, with 53 percent of respondents, on average, indicating that government does too many

Figure 3.23 Composition of the Exit Polls by Position on Government Activism, 1992–2010



Source: National exit polls. See the section in Chapter 2 entitled “Creating a Cumulative National Data Set: Selecting Exit Polls” (pp. 28–29).

Note: When using these results to make inferences about the active electorate, the standard errors should be calculated using Table 2.2 (p. 36), which is explained in the adjacent section of Chapter 2, “Analyzing Exit Poll Questions: Estimating Sampling Error” (pp. 34–36). For a guide on how to understand the tables and figures of this chapter, see the section in Chapter 2 entitled “Presenting and Discussing the Exit Poll Data: Reading Chapter 3” (pp. 37–39).

Chapter 3

things better left to the private sector (see Figure 3.23). Only twice in the past ten exit polls, both occurring after many years of Republican control of the White House, have a majority of respondents thought the government should do more. In 1992, after twelve years of Ronald Reagan and George H. W. Bush, 55 percent of respondents thought the government should be more active. Again, in 2008, after eight years of George W. Bush, 54 percent of respondents thought the government should do more to solve problems.

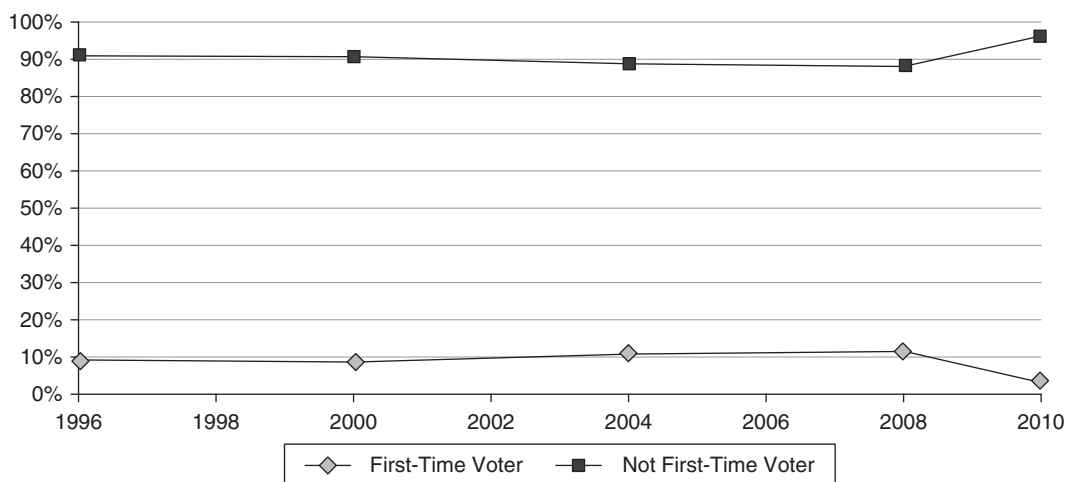
The 2010 elections witnessed a dramatic shift in exit poll respondents' perceptions of government activism (see Table 3.23 at the end of the chapter). In the first election since Obama took office, 60 percent of respondents thought the government was doing too much, up 13 points from the 2008 exit poll. This was the highest share of respondents with this opinion since the 1994 exit poll, which was the last time the Democrats lost double-digit seats in the House of Representatives.

First-Time Voter

In recent years, national exit pollsters have assessed the proportion of new voters in the active electorate. The most commonly used question in the national exit polls asks whether the current election is the first election in which respondents have ever voted. Until recently, though, it has been administered only in exit polls conducted in presidential election years, not in midterm election years.

Figure 3.24 displays the proportion of respondents voting for the first time in exit polls conducted from 1996 through 2010. For the past four exit polls in presidential election years, one out of ten respondents, on average, were casting their first ballot. The share of new respondents

Figure 3.24 Composition of the Exit Polls by First-Time Voter, 1996–2010



Source: National exit polls. See the section in Chapter 2 entitled “Creating a Cumulative National Data Set: Selecting Exit Polls” (pp. 28–29).

Note: When using these results to make inferences about the active electorate, the standard errors should be calculated using Table 2.2 (p. 36), which is explained in the adjacent section of Chapter 2, “Analyzing Exit Poll Questions: Estimating Sampling Error” (pp. 34–36). For a guide on how to understand the tables and figures of this chapter, see the section in Chapter 2 entitled “Presenting and Discussing the Exit Poll Data: Reading Chapter 3” (pp. 37–39).

in the presidential exit polls has changed remarkably little over time, fluctuating between 9 and 12 percent, regardless of which candidates were running or what get-out-the-vote strategies were used.

The 2010 exit poll was the first occasion in which pollsters considered whether respondents were participating in a midterm contest for the first time (see Table 3.24 at the end of the chapter). Only 3 percent of exit poll respondents were first-time voters, down from 8 percent in the 2008 exit poll. Without any other midterm elections to consider, conclusions cannot be drawn, but the results are consistent with research that suggests midterms are typically low-stimulus elections, where reduced media coverage, less issue salience, and lower-profile candidates suppress participation from potential voters on the peripheries of politics.¹⁰

Economic Considerations

The last group of items included regularly on national exit polls covers economic considerations. Economic traits have long been tied to voters' electoral decisions.¹¹ They influence citizens' choices to participate by easing some of the costs of voting, such as fees to document eligibility, travel expenses to and from the polls, and lost wages from missing work. They shape individuals' judgments about public policy, particularly initiatives with salient financial elements such as tax rates, public welfare programs, and more recently health care reform. And, they influence voters' candidate preferences.

National exit pollsters have assessed five economic considerations repeatedly over time. Household income is the only item tapping actual individual economic circumstances. The remaining questions—household financial situation compared to two and four years earlier, and judgments about current and future national economic conditions—are based on subjective judgments of financial conditions and as a result tend to show more volatility over time.

Household Income

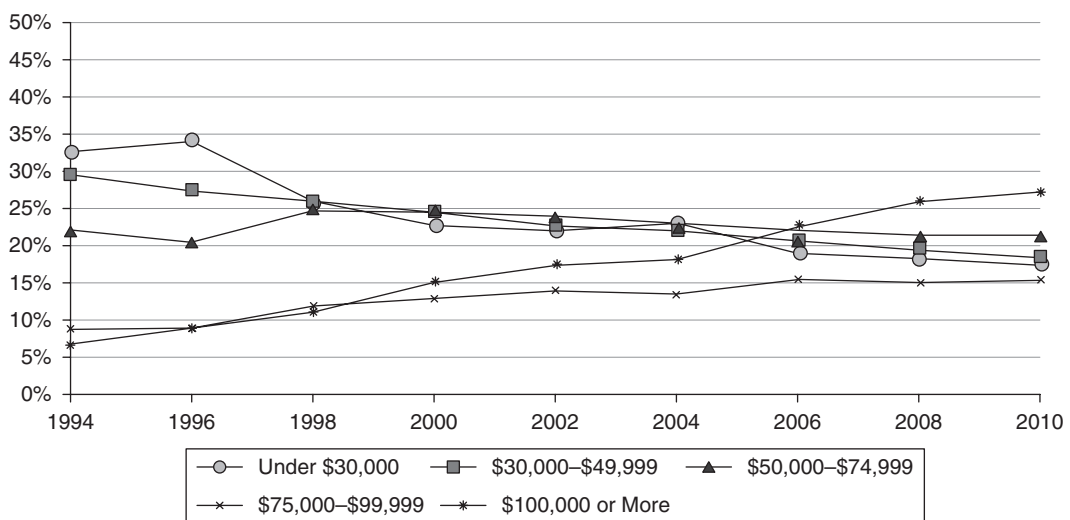
Exit pollsters have solicited respondents' household incomes since 1976. Rather than asking respondents to recall the precise income of their households, which they may not know or may refuse to provide, respondents are asked to identify a monetary range within which their household income falls. The number of income ranges offered has varied over time between four and eight. Moreover, the value of each range's endpoints has changed periodically, often in response to inflation in the median income of the population over time. In 1976, the ranges offered to respondents were (1) under \$8,000, (2) \$8,000–\$12,000, (3) \$12,001–\$20,000, and (4) over \$20,000. By 2010, the ranges presented were (1) under \$15,000, (2) \$15,000–\$29,999, (3) \$30,000–\$49,999, (4) \$50,000–\$74,999, (5) \$75,000–\$99,999, (6) \$100,000–\$149,999, (7) \$150,000–\$199,999, and (8) \$200,000 or more.

These discrepancies make it exceedingly difficult to create uniform ranges that permit comparisons over time. Adjusting the income categories for inflation by converting the nominal dollar values to constant dollar values produces income ranges with little overlap. For example, the \$8,000 endpoint of the bottom category in 1976 would be worth roughly \$41,000 in 2010,

placing it in the middle of the third-highest category for that year. Even recoding the categories into a simple trichotomy that equates one of the ranges with the median household income and then collapses the remaining ones into two categories representing household incomes above and below the median income does not make comparisons any easier because in too many years the median income falls right at the margin of a given range. Instead, we opt to leave the income ranges alone and simply report the distributions for those years in which the ranges remain consistent. Although this avoids the problem of comparing two ranges with different income widths, it ignores price inflation over time. Thus, the exact same income in 2000 can buy less goods and services in 2010.

Figure 3.25 shows the distribution of incomes in the exit polls administered from 1994 through 2010. Exit poll respondents possess increasingly higher incomes over time, as respondents from higher income brackets repeatedly replace those in lower income brackets. This is entirely consistent with changes in the income distribution of the population, where the median household income in the United States was \$32,264 in 1994 and has grown to \$49,777 in 2010. In the 1994 exit poll, 62 percent of respondents came from households earning less than \$50,000, compared to 38 percent who came from households earning \$50,000 or more. Within sixteen years, these numbers had flipped entirely. In the 2010 exit poll, 63 percent of respondents came from households earning \$50,000 or more, compared to only 37 percent who came from households earning less than \$50,000.

Figure 3.25 Composition of the Exit Polls by Household Income, 1994–2010



Source: National exit polls. See the section in Chapter 2 entitled “Creating a Cumulative National Data Set: Selecting Exit Polls” (pp. 28–29).

Note: When using these results to make inferences about the active electorate, the standard errors should be calculated using Table 2.2 (p. 36), which is explained in the adjacent section of Chapter 2, “Analyzing Exit Poll Questions: Estimating Sampling Error” (pp. 34–36). For a guide on how to understand the tables and figures of this chapter, see the section in Chapter 2 entitled “Presenting and Discussing the Exit Poll Data: Reading Chapter 3” (pp. 37–39).

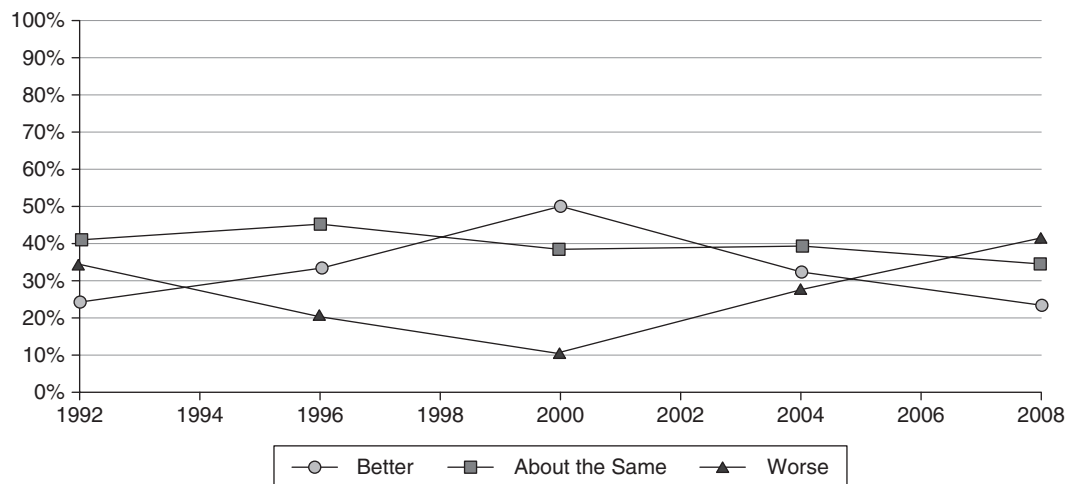
The 2010 exit poll has the highest nominal household incomes to date (see Table 3.25 at the end of the chapter). Respondents from households earning over \$100,000 comprised 27 percent of exit poll respondents, whereas respondents from households earning \$50,000–\$74,999 and \$75,000–\$100,000 made up 21 percent and 15 percent of exit poll respondents, respectively. Only 37 percent of exit poll respondents came from households earning the median household income or less. Respondents from households earning \$30,000–\$49,999 comprised 19 percent of the exit poll, and voters from households earning less than \$30,000 comprised 18 percent of the exit poll.

Four-Year Household Financial Situation

Household income does not always give a clear picture of fiscal health, particularly if a voter’s income is changing over time. To capture evolving economic circumstances, exit pollsters have queried respondents about their relative financial situation in every presidential year since 1992. Specifically, respondents have been asked whether their household finances have gotten better, gotten worse, or stayed about the same over the previous four years (which is when the last presidential election occurred).

Figure 3.26 shows respondents’ perceptions of their four-year household situation in presidential election years occurring from 1992 to 2008. Relative fiscal judgments track with changes in the unemployment rate. As unemployment increased, the ratio of positive to negative financial

Figure 3.26 Composition of the Exit Polls by Four-Year Household Financial Situation, 1992–2008



Source: National exit polls. See the section in Chapter 2 entitled “Creating a Cumulative National Data Set: Selecting Exit Polls” (pp. 28–29).

Note: When using these results to make inferences about the active electorate, the standard errors should be calculated using Table 2.2 (p. 36), which is explained in the adjacent section of Chapter 2, “Analyzing Exit Poll Questions: Estimating Sampling Error” (pp. 34–36). For a guide on how to understand the tables and figures of this chapter, see the section in Chapter 2 entitled “Presenting and Discussing the Exit Poll Data: Reading Chapter 3” (pp. 37–39).

Chapter 3

perceptions decreased, whereas when unemployment dropped, the ratio of positive to negative financial perceptions rose. Meanwhile, the proportion of respondents indicating that their financial situation had stayed about the same remained relatively unchanged, fluctuating between 34 and 46 percent over this period.

From 1992 through 2000, the unemployment rate dropped 3.5 points, according to the U.S. Labor Department, moving from 7.4 in November 1992 to 5.4 in November 1996 to 3.9 in November 2000. During this period, the ratio of positive to negative evaluations more than doubled. In 1992, 24 percent of exit poll respondents indicated that their household financial situation had gotten better, whereas 34 percent indicated that it had gotten worse. By 2000, 51 percent of respondents indicated their household finances were improving, whereas 11 percent indicated they were getting worse.

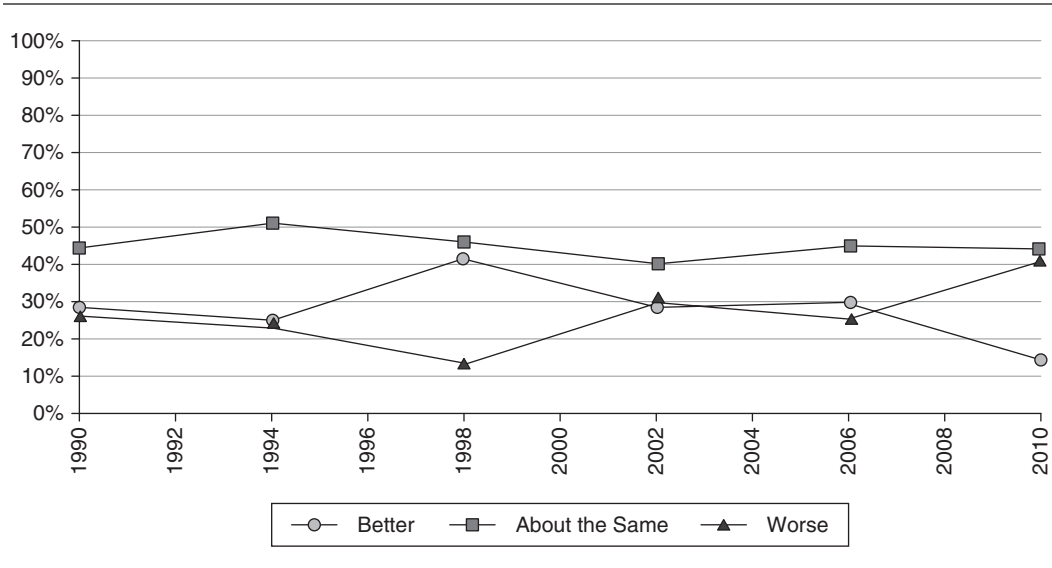
In the past two presidential election cycles, the story flipped completely. The unemployment rate jumped 1.5 points to 5.4 percent in November 2004 and another 1.4 points to 6.8 in November 2008. Meanwhile, the share of exit poll respondents indicating their household finances had gotten better in the past four years dropped 19 points in 2004 and another 8 points in 2008. Conversely, the proportion of respondents who thought that their finances had gotten worse rose 17 points in 2004 and 14 points in 2008.

In the 2008 exit poll, respondents judged the performance of their household finances over the previous four years quite harshly (see Table 3.26 at the end of the chapter). Forty-two percent of respondents indicated that their household financial situation had gotten worse since the 2004 presidential election, which was the most negative that exit poll respondents had been since the question was introduced in 1992. Only 24 percent of respondents said their household finances had gotten better, matching the 1992 election results as the lowest proportion of exit poll respondents to articulate optimism about their finances in the previous four years. The remaining 34 percent of respondents in the 2008 exit poll reported that their household financial situation had remained about the same.

Two-Year Household Financial Situation

During midterm election years since 1990, to identify a relationship between personal financial situation and congressional vote choice without the confounding role of presidential contests, pollsters have asked exit poll respondents about the performance of their finances in the past two years. The question is identical to that used to gauge perceptions of household finances during the previous four years, save for the change in perspective. Respondents are asked whether their family's financial situation is better today, worse today, or about the same compared to two years earlier.

Similar to the four-year measure, perceptions of household finances over the past two years track with the unemployment rate (see Figure 3.27). Midterm elections yield more negative judgments when the unemployment rate is increasing than when the unemployment rate is declining. From November 1992 to 1994, the unemployment rate dropped 1.8 points to 5.6 percent; from November 1996 to November 1998, it dropped 1 point to 4.4 percent. In the corresponding elections, the share of exit poll respondents indicating that their household finances had gotten worse dropped 3 points and 10 points, respectively.

Figure 3.27 Composition of the Exit Polls by Two-Year Household Financial Situation, 1990–2010

Source: National exit polls. See the section in Chapter 2 entitled “Creating a Cumulative National Data Set: Selecting Exit Polls” (pp. 28–29).

Note: When using these results to make inferences about the active electorate, the standard errors should be calculated using Table 2.2 (p. 36), which is explained in the adjacent section of Chapter 2, “Analyzing Exit Poll Questions: Estimating Sampling Error” (pp. 34–36). For a guide on how to understand the tables and figures of this chapter, see the section in Chapter 2 entitled “Presenting and Discussing the Exit Poll Data: Reading Chapter 3” (pp. 37–39).

During the 2000s, the two-year financial perceptions of exit poll respondents seesawed up and down, consistent with the dynamics of the unemployment rate. In the 2001–2002 election cycle, the unemployment rate increased 2 points to 5.9 percent, and the proportion of respondents indicating that their finances had worsened grew 17 points and the proportion of respondents indicating that their finances had improved shrunk 12 points. In the 2005–2006 election cycle, the share of those thinking their household situation had improved increased 1 point and the share of those thinking it worsened dropped 6 points, reflecting the roughly 1-point decrease in the unemployment rate. In the 2009–2010 election cycle, the unemployment rate shot up 3 points to 9.8 percent. Similarly, the proportion of exit poll respondents indicating their finances had worsened increased 17 points and the proportion indicating their finances had improved fell 15 points.

The 2010 exit poll saw the harshest judgments of household finances in twenty years (see Table 3.27 at the end of the chapter). Forty-two percent of respondents reported that their household finances had gotten worse, compared to only 15 percent of respondents who reported they had gotten better over the previous two years. Forty-three percent of respondents said that their household finances had remained about the same since the last election.

Judgments of Current National Economic Conditions

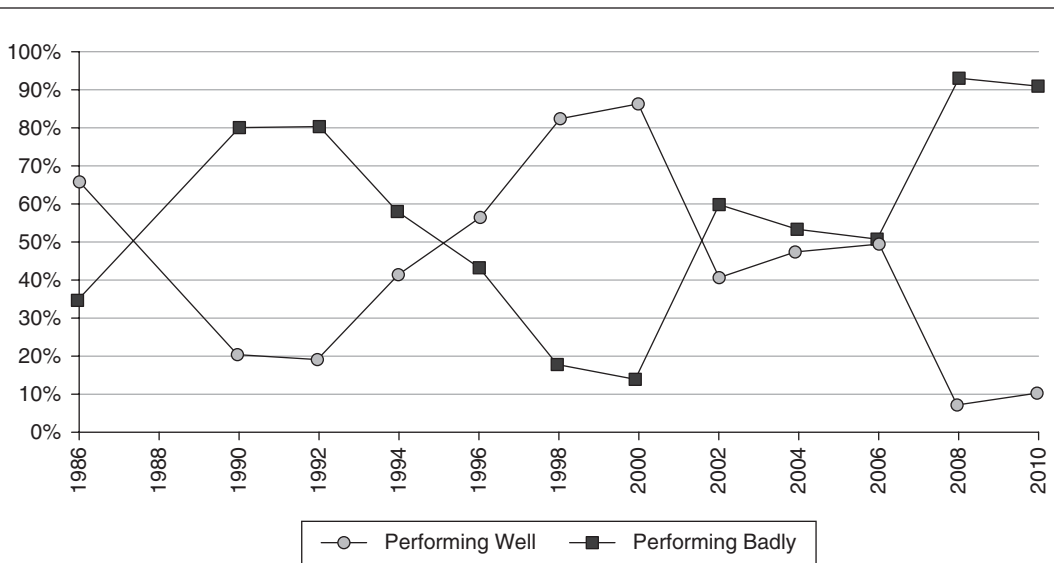
Exit pollsters have also been interested in the relationship between voters’ perceptions of the broader economy and their voting decisions. Since 1986, they have solicited judgments of current national economic conditions. Exit poll respondents have been asked whether they think national

economic conditions are excellent, good, not so good, or poor. Since the extreme categories attract only a trivial proportion of responses in some years, we have combined “excellent” and “good” as well as “not so good” and “poor” into a pair of categories—performing well and performing badly—to simplify interpretation.

Figure 3.28 shows the distribution of national economic evaluations in the exit polls conducted from 1986 through 2010. Similar to perceptions of household finances, evaluations of the overall economy track with the unemployment rate. As unemployment rises, economic evaluations grow more negative, whereas when unemployment drops, economic evaluations grow more positive. From 1992 to 2000, the October unemployment rate fell each election year, from 7.3 percent to 3.9 percent. At the same time, exit poll respondents became increasingly positive about the economy, with the proportion of respondents judging the economy to be performing well growing from 19 percent to 86 percent. Conversely, the unemployment rate grew during much of the 2000s, reaching 9.8 percent in October 2010. Meanwhile, negative judgments soared. By 2008, more than nine out of ten respondents—nearly the entire exit poll—thought the economy was performing badly.

Judgments of national economic conditions remained overwhelming negative during the 2010 elections (see Table 3.28 at the end of the chapter). A massive 91 percent of exit poll respondents indicated the economy was performing badly. Only 10 percent of respondents thought the economy was performing well.

Figure 3.28 Composition of the Exit Polls by Judgments of Current National Economic Conditions, 1986–2010



Source: National exit polls. See the section in Chapter 2 entitled “Creating a Cumulative National Data Set: Selecting Exit Polls” (pp. 28–29).

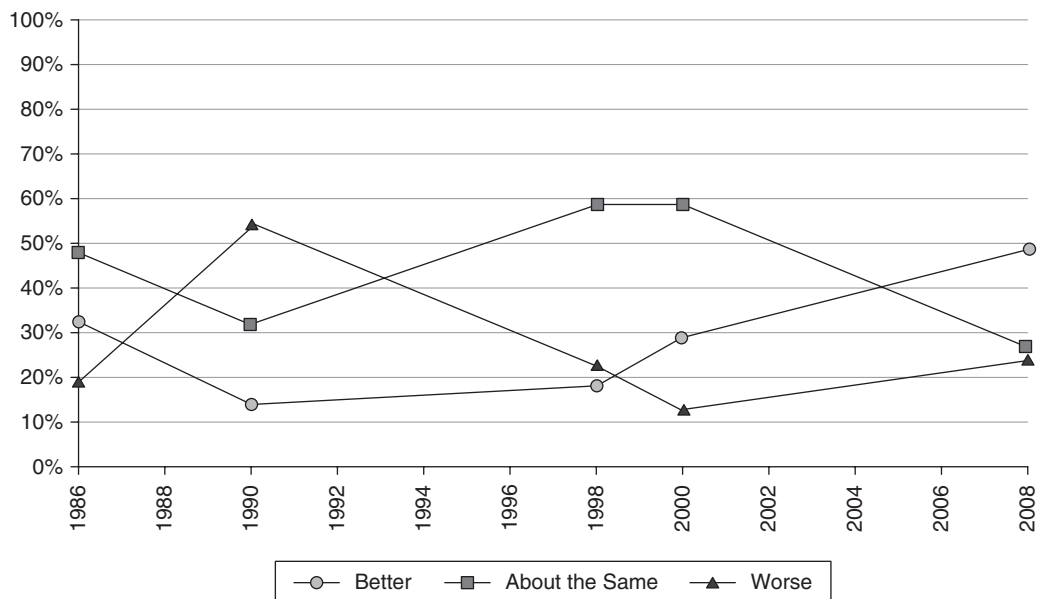
Note: When using these results to make inferences about the active electorate, the standard errors should be calculated using Table 2.2 (p. 36), which is explained in the adjacent section of Chapter 2, “Analyzing Exit Poll Questions: Estimating Sampling Error” (pp. 34–36). For a guide on how to understand the tables and figures of this chapter, see the section in Chapter 2 entitled “Presenting and Discussing the Exit Poll Data: Reading Chapter 3” (pp. 37–39).

Judgments of Future National Economic Conditions

Some scholars contend that voters' evaluations of future economic conditions are at least as important to understanding electoral behavior as their judgments of past or present economic conditions.¹² Since 1986, exit pollsters have occasionally included a question tapping respondents' economic forecasts. Specifically, they have asked voters whether they believe the economy will get better, get worse, or stay about the same over the next year.

Figure 3.29 shows exit poll respondents' judgments of future economic conditions in polls conducted from 1986 through 2008. Like perceptions of current economic conditions, their economic forecasts are related to the national unemployment rate. In 1986, 48 percent of respondents thought the economy would remain about the same over next year, consistent with the behavior of the unemployment rate over the preceding year, during which it remained flat, at around 7 percent. In 1990, the majority of respondents thought the economy would likely get worse over the next year, as it had over the previous twelve months, when the unemployment rate increased from 5.3 percent to 5.9 percent. The 1998 and 2000 elections again saw sizable majorities of exit poll respondents speculating that the economy would stay about the same in the next year, as the unemployment rate had in the prior year to each survey, hovering around 4.5 percent throughout 1998 and 4.0 percent throughout 2000.

Figure 3.29 Composition of the Exit Polls by Judgments of Future National Economic Conditions, 1986–2008



Source: National exit polls. See the section in Chapter 2 entitled “Creating a Cumulative National Data Set: Selecting Exit Polls” (pp. 28–29).

Note: When using these results to make inferences about the active electorate, the standard errors should be calculated using Table 2.2 (p. 36), which is explained in the adjacent section of Chapter 2, “Analyzing Exit Poll Questions: Estimating Sampling Error” (pp. 34–36). For a guide on how to understand the tables and figures of this chapter, see the section in Chapter 2 entitled “Presenting and Discussing the Exit Poll Data: Reading Chapter 3” (pp. 37–39).

Chapter 3

In the 2008 exit poll, respondents diverged from prior behaviors, voicing considerable optimism about future economic conditions in the face of an economic downturn (see Table 3.29 at the end of the chapter). Despite an unemployment rate that had been rising steadily over much of the year, nearly half of the respondents (49 percent) judged the economy would get better over the course of the next year. Only 24 percent of exit poll respondents indicated that the economy would get worse. The remaining 27 percent of respondents thought the economy would stay about the same.

Comparing the Presidential and Midterm Exit Polls

We conclude this chapter by aggregating all these disparate groups and considering the differences between the exit polls conducted in the presidential and midterm election years. Recall that the turnout rates in midterm and presidential elections are quite distinct (see Figure 3.1 and Table 3.1), differing by 16 percentage points on average. The question remains whether national exit polls are comprised of similar proportions of each group in both presidential and midterm election years or whether the relative distribution of groups varies by election type. Answers to this question are critical to understanding the campaign strategies of the candidates, vote shares, and even policy outcomes.

To assess the relative size of each group participating in the midterm and presidential exit polls over time, we recalculate the average longitudinal share (the figures appearing in the bottom row of each table) of each group analyzed in this chapter by election type. For midterm election years, we average the proportion of responses to each question appearing in the 1978, 1982, 1986, 1990, 1994, 1998, 2002, 2006, and 2010 exit polls. For presidential election years, we use data only from the 1972, 1976, 1980, 1984, 1988, 1992, 1996, 2000, 2004, and 2008 exit polls. Since variability is both extensive and, at times, unpredictable, we omit missing years from the calculation rather than interpolate values for the unavailable data.

The Presidential Exit Polls

Table 3.30 (at the end of the chapter) reports the average size of each group in the national exit polls conducted in presidential election years from 1972 through 2008. It is rank ordered by magnitude. Topping the chart are the largest groups of respondents in the presidential exit polls, whereas groups at the bottom comprise the smallest share of respondents in the exit polls.

The ten largest groups in the national exit polls each make up at least 58 percent of respondents. Half of the groups are defined by the absence of a politically germane characteristic rather than the presence of one, such as respondents who are *not* gay, not first-time voters, not evangelicals, not living in households with union members, or not living in households with children. The largest groups in the presidential exit polls possessing a noteworthy trait are respondents who are white, are married, work full time, attend religious services less than once a week, or disapprove of Congress.

By comparison, the ten smallest groups in the presidential exit polls each comprise no more than 10 percent of respondents. They are primarily characterized by race—such as black, Hispanic/Latino, Asian, and those of a race other than white, black, Hispanic/Latino, or

Asian—and religious affiliation—such as Jews, those who identify with a religion other than Protestant, Catholic, or Jewish, and those who do not identify with any religion. The remaining groups in the bottom ten are comprised of respondents who are gay, have not completed high school, have voted for a non-major-party candidate in the last presidential election, and are casting ballots for the first time.

Table 3.31 (at the end of the chapter) reports the relative distribution of these groups in the 2008 national exit poll. Comparing groups' shares with their historical averages reveals that the composition of the 2008 presidential exit poll changed only modestly for this historic election. Only a tenth of the seventy-five groups considered in this chapter grew or shrank by more than 10 percentage points from their long-term means; roughly a fifth of the groups changed by more than 5 points.

The groups that changed by more than 10 points from their historical averages were all characterized by their financial judgments or evaluations of the incumbent administration. Respondents who believed current economic conditions were performing badly exceeded their longitudinal average by 36 points, comprising 93 percent of voters in 2008, compared to their average of 57 percent, whereas those who thought that current economic conditions were performing well fell short of their average by 36 points. Respondents who thought the country was off on the wrong track and those who disapproved of the president made up, respectively, 28 points and 20 points more of the exit poll than their long-term average predicted, whereas voters who thought the country was going in the right direction and those who approved of the president comprised, respectively, 27 points and 19 points less than was expected. Finally, respondents who thought future economic conditions would be about the same fell short of their average by 16 points, whereas those whose household finances had gotten worse over the past four years exceeded their average by 15 points.

The Midterm Exit Polls

The relative distribution of groups in the midterm exit polls is quite comparable to that of the presidential exit polls (see Table 3.32 at the end of the chapter). Nine of the ten largest groups of midterm exit poll respondents are among the ten largest groups of presidential exit poll respondents. Similarly, nine of the ten smallest groups in the midterm exit polls are among the ten smallest groups in the midterm electorate. Moreover, the size of the groups in both electorates is very much alike. The correlation between each group's average share in the midterm exit polls and the presidential exit polls is .95. None of the sixty-five groups for which we have overlapping longitudinal data in both exit polls had an average share in the midterm exit polls that differed by more than 7 percentage points from its average share in the presidential exit polls. In only 14 percent of the groups was their mean composition in the midterm exit poll more than 3 points greater or lesser than it was in the presidential exit poll.

Of the groups that differed the most in their relative sizes between the midterm and presidential electorates, most could be characterized by one of two traits. First, they appear to be differentiated by age. Young respondents (those in the 18–29 age group) had a midterm share 7 points smaller than their presidential share, whereas older respondents (those aged 60 or over)

Chapter 3

had a 6-point-smaller share in the presidential exit polls than in the midterm exit polls. Similarly, respondents who had not voted in the previous presidential election had a 9-point-smaller share in the midterm exit polls than in the presidential exit polls. Second, they differ by religiosity. Respondents who attended religious services less than once a week had a 5-point-smaller share in the midterm exit polls, and respondents who attended religious services more than once a week had a 5-point-greater share of the midterm exit polls.

The other groups that varied significantly between exit polls were characterized largely by their satisfaction with the incumbent government. Respondents who approved of the incumbent president comprised 6 points more of the midterm exit polls than the presidential exit polls, whereas voters who disapproved of the president comprised 6 points less. Similarly, respondents who thought government does too much comprised 6 points more of the midterm exit polls than the presidential exit polls, and those who thought it does not do enough, therefore, comprised 6 points less. Finally, respondents who voted for a Democrat in the last presidential election comprised 5 points less of the midterm exit polls than the presidential exit polls.

The similarities between the midterm and presidential exit polls extended to the most recent election, in which the 2010 exit poll looked a lot like the 2008 exit poll (see Table 3.33 at the end of the chapter). The size of the groups in the 2010 electorate correlated at .97 with the size of the groups in the 2008 electorate. Only six of the sixty-five groups measured in both elections differed by more than 10 percentage points in their relative size, and all were tied to the presidential transition from Bush to Obama. The proportion of respondents who approved of the president was 17 points higher in the 2010 exit poll than in the 2008 exit poll, whereas the proportion of respondents who disapproved of the president was 17 points lower in 2010 than in 2008. Similarly, the share of respondents in the 2010 exit poll who thought the country was moving in the right direction was 14 points higher than the share of respondents in the 2008 exit poll (and 15 points lower for those who saw it as off on the wrong track). Finally, the proportion of respondents who thought the government was doing too much was 14 points higher in the 2010 exit poll than in the 2008 exit poll, and the proportion of those who thought it should do more was 14 points lower in 2010 than in 2008.

From a historical perspective, the 2010 exit poll deviated from the typical midterm exit poll primarily on economic grounds. Only six groups in the 2010 exit poll differed by more than 10 points from their average share in a midterm electorate, and all the differences were tied to changing economic circumstances. The proportion of respondents who thought current economic conditions were performing badly comprised 35 points more of the 2010 exit poll than their long-term average would predict, and the proportion of respondents who thought current economic conditions were performing well comprised 35 points less of the 2010 exit poll. The share of respondents in the 2010 exit poll whose finances worsened in the previous two years was 15 points higher than their average share, and for those whose finances got better, the share of respondents in 2010 was 14 points lower than the average share. Finally, the share of respondents in the 2010 exit poll who thought the country was off on the wrong track was 11 points higher than their average share, and for those who saw it as moving in the right direction, the share of respondents in 2010 was 11 points lower than the average.

Notes

¹ Angus Campbell, Philip Converse, Warren E. Miller, and Donald Stokes, *The American Voter* (New York: Wiley, 1960).

² All percentages presented in the text have been rounded to the nearest whole number. Any calculations necessary to compute them are also based on rounded whole numbers.

³ James G. Gimpel and Jason E. Schuknecht, *Cultivating Democracy: Civic Environments and Political Socialization in America* (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press, 2003).

⁴ Daniel Elazar, *American Federalism: A View from the South* (New York: Crowell, 1966).

⁵ James G. Gimpel and Jason E. Schuknecht, *Cultivating Democracy: Civic Environments and Political Socialization in America* (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press, 2003); Robert S. Erikson, John P. McIver, and Gerald C. Wright, "State Political Culture and Public Opinion," *American Political Science Review* 81 (1987): 797–813.

⁶ David Leege and Lyman A. Kellstedt, *Rediscovering the Religious Factor in American Politics* (New York: M. E. Sharpe, 1993).

⁷ Robert D. Putnam, *Bowling Alone* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2001).

⁸ Laura W. Arnold and Herbert Weisberg, "Parenthood, Family Values, and the 1992 Presidential Election," *American Politics Quarterly* 24 (1996): 194–220; Herbert Weisberg, "The Demographics of a New Voting Gap: Marital Differences in American Voting," *Public Opinion Quarterly* 51 (1987): 335–343.

⁹ Campbell, Converse, Miller, and Stokes, *The American Voter*.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Gregory B. Markus, "The Impact of Personal and National Economic Conditions on Presidential Voting, 1956–1988," *American Journal of Political Science* 36 (1992): 829–834; Morris P. Fiorina, "Economic Retrospective Voting in American National Elections: A Micro-Analysis," *American Journal of Political Science* 22 (1978): 426–443.

¹² Brad Lockerbie, "Prospective Voting in Presidential Elections, 1956–1988," *American Politics Research* 20 (1992): 308–325.

Table 3.1 Turnout Rate of the Voting-Eligible Population, 1972–2010

Year	Turnout Rate
2010	41%
2008	62%
2006	40%
2004	60%
2002	40%
2000	54%
1998	38%
1996	52%
1994	41%
1992	58%
1990	38%
1988	53%
1986	38%
1984	55%
1982	42%
1980	54%
1978	38%
1976	55%
1974	39%
1972	56%
Average	48%

Source: Michael McDonald, "United States Elections Project," http://elections.gmu.edu/voter_turnout.htm.

Table 3.2 Composition of the Exit Polls by Race, 1982–2010

Year	White	Black	Hispanic/Latino	Asian	Other Race	Number of Respondents
2010	77.6%	10.8%	7.8%	1.9%	1.9%	17,871
2008	75.7%	13.0%	6.4%	2.1%	2.8%	17,608
2006	80.6%	10.2%	5.6%	1.7%	1.9%	13,560
2004	79.0%	11.9%	5.6%	1.6%	1.8%	13,513
2002	82.4%	9.5%	4.9%	1.2%	2.1%	17,474
2000	82.2%	10.2%	4.1%	1.8%	1.6%	13,035
1998	83.4%	10.8%	2.9%	1.4%	1.4%	11,259
1996	83.0%	10.1%	4.5%	1.1%	1.3%	16,406
1994	86.0%	9.1%	2.7%	1.2%	0.9%	11,205
1992	87.4%	8.1%	2.3%	1.0%	1.2%	15,360
1990	90.5%	5.3%	2.4%	1.0%	0.8%	19,733
1988	85.1%	10.2%	3.2%		1.6%	11,585
1986	87.0%	7.7%	2.7%		2.5%	8,964
1984	87.7%	8.8%	2.4%		1.1%	9,126
1982	89.1%	7.1%	2.7%		1.1%	7,830
Average	83.8%	9.5%	4.0%	1.5%	1.6%	

Question Wording for Race (Coded: White = 1; Black = 2; Hispanic/Latino = 3; Asian = 4; Other Race = 5):

1982–1984 and 1988: “Are you . . . White (1); Black (2); Hispanic (3); Other (5)”

1986: “Are you . . . White (1); Black (2); Hispanic or Latino (3); Other (5)”

1990 and 1996: “Are you . . . White (1); Black (2); Hispanic or Latino (3); Asian (4); Other (5)”

1992–1994 and 1998–2002: “Are you . . . White (1); Black (2); Hispanic/Latino (3); Asian (4); Other (5)”

2004–2010: “Are you . . . White (1); Black (2); Hispanic/Latino (3); Asian (4); Other (5); American Indian (5); Native Alaskan (5)”

Source: National exit polls. See the section in Chapter 2 entitled “Creating a Cumulative National Data Set: Selecting Exit Polls” (pp. 28–29).

Note: When using these results to make inferences about the active electorate, the standard errors should be calculated using Table 2.2 (p. 36), which is explained in the adjacent section of Chapter 2, “Analyzing Exit Poll Questions: Estimating Sampling Error” (pp. 34–36). For a guide on how to understand the tables and figures of this chapter, see the section in Chapter 2 entitled “Presenting and Discussing the Exit Poll Data: Reading Chapter 3” (pp. 37–39).

Table 3.3 Composition of the Exit Polls by Gender, 1972–2010

Year	Male	Female	Number of Respondents
2010	48.2%	51.8%	18,092
2008	46.7%	53.3%	17,937
2006	48.2%	51.8%	13,782
2004	46.0%	54.0%	13,659
2002	48.1%	51.9%	17,682
2000	47.6%	52.4%	13,059
1998	49.5%	50.5%	11,254
1996	47.9%	52.1%	16,416
1994	48.1%	51.9%	11,179
1992	47.2%	52.8%	14,898
1990	49.1%	50.9%	19,519
1988	47.6%	52.4%	11,621
1986	48.5%	51.5%	8,968
1984	49.0%	51.0%	9,149
1982	49.5%	50.5%	7,807
1980	50.3%	49.7%	15,192
1978	54.6%	45.4%	8,794
1976	50.0%	50.0%	15,204
1972	50.7%	49.3%	17,546
Average	48.8%	51.2%	

Question Wording for Gender (Coded: Male = 1; Female = 2):

1972–1980: “Interviewer recorded sex of respondent . . . Male (1); Female (2)”

1982–2010: “Are you . . . Male (2); Female (2)”

Source: National exit polls. See the section in Chapter 2 entitled “Creating a Cumulative National Data Set: Selecting Exit Polls” (pp. 28–29).

Note: When using these results to make inferences about the active electorate, the standard errors should be calculated using Table 2.2 (p. 36), which is explained in the adjacent section of Chapter 2, “Analyzing Exit Poll Questions: Estimating Sampling Error” (pp. 34–36). For a guide on how to understand the tables and figures of this chapter, see the section in Chapter 2 entitled “Presenting and Discussing the Exit Poll Data: Reading Chapter 3” (pp. 37–39).

Table 3.4 Composition of the Exit Polls by Age, 1972–2010

Year	18–29	30–44	45–59	60+	Number of Respondents
2010	12.0%	24.3%	32.1%	31.7%	18,035
2008	18.3%	28.5%	29.7%	23.5%	17,874
2006	12.5%	24.4%	34.2%	28.9%	13,753
2004	16.9%	28.6%	30.0%	24.5%	13,639
2002	11.1%	28.3%	33.1%	27.5%	17,689
2000	16.8%	32.9%	28.4%	22.0%	13,142
1998	13.4%	28.9%	29.6%	28.1%	11,312
1996	17.1%	32.9%	26.3%	23.7%	16,495
1994	13.1%	32.2%	27.7%	27.0%	11,219
1992	20.7%	35.8%	22.9%	20.6%	15,256
1990	14.0%	34.6%	24.4%	26.9%	19,788
1988	20.3%	35.3%	22.3%	22.1%	11,536
1986	16.0%	32.3%	23.8%	27.8%	8,945
1984	23.8%	32.6%	21.4%	22.2%	9,080
1982	14.9%	31.8%	25.0%	28.2%	7,826
1980	22.9%	33.0%	24.3%	19.8%	13,918
1978	20.4%	31.3%	28.5%	19.8%	8,104
1976	29.4%	29.2%	26.3%	15.2%	12,685
1972	27.5%	27.1%	27.8%	17.6%	16,510
Average	18.0%	30.7%	27.2%	24.1%	

Question Wording for Age (Coded: 18–29 = 1; 30–44 = 2; 45–59 = 3; 60+ = 4):

1972 and 1984–1986: “To which age group do you belong? . . . 18–24 (1); 25–29 (1); 30–44 (2); 45–59 (3); 60 or over (4)”

1976 and 1980: “To which age group do you belong? . . . 18–21 (1); 22–29 (1); 30–44 (2); 45–59 (3); 60 or over (4)”

1978, 1982, and 1988: “To which age group do you belong? . . . 18–29 (1); 30–44 (2); 45–59 (3); 60 or over (4)”

1990: “To which age group do you belong? . . . 18–29 (1); 30–39 (2); 40–44 (2); 45–49 (3); 50–59 (3); 60 or over (4)”

1992–1998: “To which age group do you belong? . . . 18–24 (1); 25–29 (1); 30–39 (2); 40–44 (2); 45–49 (3); 50–59 (3); 60–64 (4); 65 or over (4)”

2000–2010: “To which age group do you belong? . . . 18–24 (1); 25–29 (1); 30–39 (2); 40–44 (2); 45–49 (3); 50–59 (3); 60–64 (4); 65–74 (4); 75 or over (4)”

Source: National exit polls. See the section in Chapter 2 entitled “Creating a Cumulative National Data Set: Selecting Exit Polls” (pp. 28–29).

Note: When using these results to make inferences about the active electorate, the standard errors should be calculated using Table 2.2 (p. 36), which is explained in the adjacent section of Chapter 2, “Analyzing Exit Poll Questions: Estimating Sampling Error” (pp. 34–36). For a guide on how to understand the tables and figures of this chapter, see the section in Chapter 2 entitled “Presenting and Discussing the Exit Poll Data: Reading Chapter 3” (pp. 37–39).

Table 3.5 Composition of the Exit Polls by Sexual Orientation, 1996–2010

Year	Gay or Bisexual	Not Gay or Bisexual	Number of Respondents
2010	3.1%	96.9%	3,848
2008	3.5%	96.5%	4,098
2006	3.1%	96.9%	6,063
2004	3.6%	96.4%	6,392
2002			
2000	3.8%	96.2%	6,082
1998	4.2%	95.8%	5,192
1996	5.0%	95.0%	3,733
Average	3.8%	96.2%	

Question Wording for Sexual Orientation (Coded: Gay or Bisexual = 1; Not Gay or Bisexual = 2):

1996–2010: “Are you gay, lesbian, or bisexual? . . . Yes (1); No (2)”

Source: National exit polls. See the section in Chapter 2 entitled “Creating a Cumulative National Data Set: Selecting Exit Polls” (pp. 28–29).

Note: When using these results to make inferences about the active electorate, the standard errors should be calculated using Table 2.2 (p. 36), which is explained in the adjacent section of Chapter 2, “Analyzing Exit Poll Questions: Estimating Sampling Error” (pp. 34–36). For a guide on how to understand the tables and figures of this chapter, see the section in Chapter 2 entitled “Presenting and Discussing the Exit Poll Data: Reading Chapter 3” (pp. 37–39).

Table 3.6 Composition of the Exit Polls by Region, 1972–2010

Year	East	Midwest	South	West	Number of Respondents
2010	20.8%	24.9%	31.1%	23.2%	18,132
2008	21.1%	24.0%	32.3%	22.7%	18,018
2006	22.0%	27.0%	29.5%	21.5%	13,866
2004	22.4%	25.5%	31.6%	20.4%	13,719
2002	22.4%	26.5%	31.7%	19.5%	17,872
2000	22.8%	25.8%	30.8%	20.5%	13,225
1998	22.0%	28.0%	26.0%	24.0%	11,387
1996	23.2%	26.2%	30.2%	20.4%	16,637
1994	23.0%	27.0%	27.0%	23.0%	11,308
1992	23.5%	26.7%	29.4%	20.4%	15,490
1990	22.7%	28.6%	27.5%	21.2%	19,888
1988	24.7%	27.6%	28.4%	19.3%	11,645
1986					
1984	27.0%	29.0%	27.0%	16.9%	9,174
1982	27.8%	28.2%	25.2%	18.9%	7,855
1980	25.1%	28.1%	28.1%	18.7%	15,201
1978	26.5%	31.1%	26.7%	15.8%	8,808
1976	27.1%	29.8%	25.4%	17.6%	15,300
1972	28.5%	29.7%	23.0%	18.7%	17,595
Average	24.0%	27.4%	28.4%	20.2%	

Classification for Region:

East: Connecticut; Delaware; Maine; Maryland; Massachusetts; New Hampshire; New Jersey; New York; Pennsylvania; Rhode Island; Vermont; Washington, DC; West Virginia

Midwest: Illinois; Indiana; Iowa; Kansas; Michigan; Minnesota; Missouri; Nebraska; North Dakota; Ohio; South Dakota; Wisconsin

South: Alabama; Arkansas; Florida; Georgia; Kentucky; Louisiana; Mississippi; North Carolina; Oklahoma; South Carolina; Tennessee; Texas; Virginia

West: Alaska; Arizona; California; Colorado; Hawaii; Idaho; Montana; Nevada; New Mexico; Oregon; Utah; Washington; Wyoming

Source: National exit polls. See the section in Chapter 2 entitled “Creating a Cumulative National Data Set: Selecting Exit Polls” (pp. 28–29).

Note: When using these results to make inferences about the active electorate, the standard errors should be calculated using Table 2.2 (p. 36), which is explained in the adjacent section of Chapter 2, “Analyzing Exit Poll Questions: Estimating Sampling Error” (pp. 34–36). For a guide on how to understand the tables and figures of this chapter, see the section in Chapter 2 entitled “Presenting and Discussing the Exit Poll Data: Reading Chapter 3” (pp. 37–39).

Table 3.7 Composition of the Exit Polls by Population Density of Precinct, 1984–2010

Year	City	Suburb	Rural	Number of Respondents
2010	30.7%	48.8%	20.5%	18,132
2008	29.9%	49.4%	20.7%	18,018
2006	29.8%	46.6%	23.5%	13,866
2004	31.4%	44.6%	24.0%	13,711
2002	30.4%	44.3%	25.3%	17,766
2000	28.8%	43.4%	27.8%	13,022
1998				
1996	30.9%	39.2%	29.9%	16,637
1994				
1992	24.7%	41.0%	34.3%	15,490
1990	30.2%	38.4%	31.4%	19,888
1988	26.0%	42.3%	31.8%	11,539
1986				
1984	28.8%	38.2%	33.0%	9,174
Average	29.2%	43.3%	27.5%	

Classification for Population Density:

City: Precinct residing within Census metropolitan statistical area (MSA) containing greater than 50,000 residents

Suburb: Precinct residing within Census MSA in close proximity to large urban area

Rural: Precinct residing within Census MSA with less than 50,000 residents not in close proximity to large urban area

Source: National exit polls. See the section in Chapter 2 entitled “Creating a Cumulative National Data Set: Selecting Exit Polls” (pp. 28–29).

Note: When using these results to make inferences about the active electorate, the standard errors should be calculated using Table 2.2 (p. 36), which is explained in the adjacent section of Chapter 2, “Analyzing Exit Poll Questions: Estimating Sampling Error” (pp. 34–36). For a guide on how to understand the tables and figures of this chapter, see the section in Chapter 2 entitled “Presenting and Discussing the Exit Poll Data: Reading Chapter 3” (pp. 37–39).

Table 3.8 Composition of the Exit Polls by Religious Affiliation, 1984–2010

Year	Protestant	Catholic	Jewish	No Religious Affiliation	Other Religion	Number of Respondents
2010	54.6%	23.1%	2.2%	12.3%	7.8%	3,934
2008	54.1%	26.4%	2.1%	11.7%	5.7%	4,145
2006	55.3%	26.0%	2.1%	10.7%	5.9%	6,445
2004	54.1%	26.7%	2.6%	10.0%	6.7%	9,826
2002	55.9%	26.6%	3.1%	8.2%	6.2%	8,124
2000	54.7%	26.0%	3.5%	9.3%	6.5%	9,251
1998	53.9%	27.7%	2.6%	8.4%	7.4%	5,404
1996	54.4%	28.9%	3.4%	7.5%	5.8%	7,753
1994	54.4%	29.6%	3.6%	7.6%	4.9%	5,364
1992	55.8%	26.9%	3.9%	7.0%	6.5%	7,853
1990	58.3%	25.0%	3.2%	7.8%	5.7%	8,887
1988	56.8%	28.3%	4.2%	5.3%	5.4%	11,004
1986	53.5%	32.9%	3.9%	4.8%	4.8%	8,563
1984	58.9%	27.6%	3.5%	5.0%	5.0%	8,642
Average	55.3%	27.3%	3.1%	8.3%	6.0%	

Question Wording for Religious Affiliation (Coded: Protestant = 1; Catholic = 2; Jewish = 3; No Religious Affiliation = 4; Other Religion = 5):

1984–1988: “Your religion . . . Protestant (1); Catholic (2); Other Christian (1); Jewish (3); Something else (5); None (4)”

1990: “Your religious preference today? . . . Protestant (1); Catholic (2); Other Christian (1); Jewish (3); Something else (5); None (4)”

1992–2000: “Are you . . . Protestant (1); Catholic (2); Other Christian (1); Jewish (3); Something else (5); None (4)”

2002: “Are you . . . Protestant (1); Catholic (2); Other Christian (1); Jewish (3); Muslim (5); Something else (5); None (4)”

2004–2010: “Are you . . . Protestant (1); Catholic (2); Mormon/LDS (5); Other Christian (1); Jewish (3); Muslim (5); Something else (5); None (4)”

Source: National exit polls. See the section in Chapter 2 entitled “Creating a Cumulative National Data Set: Selecting Exit Polls” (pp. 28–29).

Note: When using these results to make inferences about the active electorate, the standard errors should be calculated using Table 2.2 (p. 36), which is explained in the adjacent section of Chapter 2, “Analyzing Exit Poll Questions: Estimating Sampling Error” (pp. 34–36). For a guide on how to understand the tables and figures of this chapter, see the section in Chapter 2 entitled “Presenting and Discussing the Exit Poll Data: Reading Chapter 3” (pp. 37–39).

Table 3.9 Composition of the Exit Polls by Religious Attendance, 2000–2010

Year	Once a Week or More	Less Than Once a Week	Number of Respondents
2010	48.1%	51.9%	3,957
2008	40.5%	59.5%	4,151
2006	45.7%	54.3%	6,455
2004	42.7%	57.3%	9,853
2002	46.4%	53.6%	8,117
2000	43.3%	56.7%	6,213
Average	44.5%	55.5%	

Question Wording for Religious Attendance (Coded: Once a Week or More = 1; Less Than Once a Week = 2):

2000–2008: “How often do you attend religious services? . . . More than once a week (1); Once a week (1); A few times a month (2); A few times a year (2); Never (2)”

2010: “Do you attend religious services once a week or more? . . . Yes (1); No (2)”

Source: National exit polls. See the section in Chapter 2 entitled “Creating a Cumulative National Data Set: Selecting Exit Polls” (pp. 28–29).

Note: When using these results to make inferences about the active electorate, the standard errors should be calculated using Table 2.2 (p. 36), which is explained in the adjacent section of Chapter 2, “Analyzing Exit Poll Questions: Estimating Sampling Error” (pp. 34–36). For a guide on how to understand the tables and figures of this chapter, see the section in Chapter 2 entitled “Presenting and Discussing the Exit Poll Data: Reading Chapter 3” (pp. 37–39).

Table 3.10 Composition of the Exit Polls by Evangelical, 2004–2010

Year	Born Again	Not Born Again	Number of Respondents
2010	36.5%	63.5%	3,859
2008	38.5%	61.5%	12,992
2006	33.6%	66.4%	6,321
2004	34.7%	65.3%	9,659
Average	35.8%	64.2%	

Question Wording for Evangelical (Coded: Born Again = 1; Not Born Again = 2):

2004–2010: “Would you describe yourself as a born again or evangelical Christian? ... Yes (1); No (2)”

Source: National exit polls. See the section in Chapter 2 entitled “Creating a Cumulative National Data Set: Selecting Exit Polls” (pp. 28–29).

Note: When using these results to make inferences about the active electorate, the standard errors should be calculated using Table 2.2 (p. 36), which is explained in the adjacent section of Chapter 2, “Analyzing Exit Poll Questions: Estimating Sampling Error” (pp. 34–36). For a guide on how to understand the tables and figures of this chapter, see the section in Chapter 2 entitled “Presenting and Discussing the Exit Poll Data: Reading Chapter 3” (pp. 37–39).

Table 3.11 Composition of the Exit Polls by Education, 1986–2010

Year	Did Not Complete High School	High School Graduate	Some College	College Graduate	Postgraduate	Number of Respondents
2010	3.1%	17.2%	28.2%	30.4%	21.1%	17,269
2008	4.1%	20.4%	31.1%	27.8%	16.6%	17,748
2006	3.2%	20.7%	31.1%	26.8%	18.2%	6,345
2004	4.2%	21.9%	31.7%	25.6%	16.5%	9,986
2002	4.2%	22.4%	31.3%	24.3%	17.8%	8,211
2000	4.8%	21.4%	32.0%	24.2%	17.5%	9,360
1998	5.3%	22.5%	27.6%	27.0%	17.6%	5,394
1996	6.3%	23.6%	27.1%	25.6%	17.4%	8,162
1994	6.1%	22.8%	28.1%	26.2%	16.8%	5,317
1992	7.1%	25.3%	29.0%	23.0%	15.6%	8,145
1990	6.6%	27.6%	27.8%	22.5%	15.5%	10,005
1988	7.6%	27.0%	30.1%	18.8%	16.5%	10,955
1986	8.4%	31.4%	29.0%	16.7%	14.5%	8,490
Average	5.5%	23.4%	29.5%	24.5%	17.1%	

Question Wording for Education (Coded: Did Not Complete High School = 1; High School Graduate = 2; Some College = 3; College Graduate = 4; Postgraduate = 5):

1986–1988: “What was the last grade in school you completed? . . . Did not graduate from high school (1); High school graduate (2); Some college but not four years (3); College graduate (4); Postgraduate study (5)”

1990–1998: “What was the last grade of school you completed? . . . Did not complete high school (1); High school graduate (2); Some college, but no degree (3); College graduate (4); Postgraduate study (5)”

2000–2010: “What was the last grade of school you completed? . . . Did not complete high school (1); High school graduate (2); Some college or associate degree (3); College graduate (4); Postgraduate study (5)”

Source: National exit polls. See the section in Chapter 2 entitled “Creating a Cumulative National Data Set: Selecting Exit Polls” (pp. 28–29).

Note: When using these results to make inferences about the active electorate, the standard errors should be calculated using Table 2.2 (p. 36), which is explained in the adjacent section of Chapter 2, “Analyzing Exit Poll Questions: Estimating Sampling Error” (pp. 34–36). For a guide on how to understand the tables and figures of this chapter, see the section in Chapter 2 entitled “Presenting and Discussing the Exit Poll Data: Reading Chapter 3” (pp. 37–39).

Table 3.12 Composition of the Exit Polls by Employment Status, 1996–2008

Year	Employed Full Time	Not Employed Full Time	Number of Respondents
2008	64.4%	35.6%	4,196
2006			
2004	60.2%	39.8%	3,260
2002	61.9%	38.1%	8,876
2000	66.8%	33.2%	9,760
1998	63.2%	36.8%	5,401
1996	64.2%	35.8%	11,560
Average	63.4%	36.6%	

Question Wording for Employment Status (Coded: Employed Full Time = 1; Not Employed Full Time = 2):

1996 and 2000–2008: “Do you work full time for pay? . . . Yes (1); No (2)”

1998: “Do you work for full time pay? . . . Yes (1); No (2)”

Source: National exit polls. See the section in Chapter 2 entitled “Creating a Cumulative National Data Set: Selecting Exit Polls” (pp. 28–29).

Note: When using these results to make inferences about the active electorate, the standard errors should be calculated using Table 2.2 (p. 36), which is explained in the adjacent section of Chapter 2, “Analyzing Exit Poll Questions: Estimating Sampling Error” (pp. 34–36). For a guide on how to understand the tables and figures of this chapter, see the section in Chapter 2 entitled “Presenting and Discussing the Exit Poll Data: Reading Chapter 3” (pp. 37–39).

Table 3.13 Composition of the Exit Polls by Marital Status, 1992–2008

Year	Married	Not Married	Number of Respondents
2008	65.9%	34.1%	4,344
2006	68.0%	32.0%	6,460
2004	62.7%	37.3%	13,270
2002	69.8%	30.2%	8,253
2000	65.2%	34.8%	9,357
1998	67.2%	32.8%	5,696
1996	65.7%	34.3%	11,470
1994			
1992	66.1%	33.9%	7,948
Average	66.3%	33.7%	

Question Wording for Marital Status (Coded: Married = 1; Not Married = 2):

1992: “Are you . . . Married (1); Single, never married (2); Widowed (2); Divorced/Separated (2)”

1996–2008: “Are you currently married? . . . Yes (1); No (2)”

Source: National exit polls. See the section in Chapter 2 entitled “Creating a Cumulative National Data Set: Selecting Exit Polls” (pp. 28–29).

Note: When using these results to make inferences about the active electorate, the standard errors should be calculated using Table 2.2 (p. 36), which is explained in the adjacent section of Chapter 2, “Analyzing Exit Poll Questions: Estimating Sampling Error” (pp. 34–36). For a guide on how to understand the tables and figures of this chapter, see the section in Chapter 2 entitled “Presenting and Discussing the Exit Poll Data: Reading Chapter 3” (pp. 37–39).

Table 3.14 Composition of the Exit Polls by Child in Household, 1996–2010

Year	Child in Household	No Child in Household	Number of Respondents
2010	34.0%	66.0%	4,124
2008	39.7%	60.3%	4,348
2006	34.2%	65.8%	12,879
2004	37.0%	63.0%	10,035
2002	38.2%	61.8%	8,255
2000	38.7%	61.3%	9,401
1998	34.8%	65.2%	5,705
1996	36.4%	63.6%	11,617
Average	36.6%	63.4%	

Question Wording for Child in Household (Coded: Child in Household = 1; No Child in Household = 2):

1996: “Do you have a child under 18 living at home? . . . Yes (1); No (2)”

1998–2010: “Do you have any children under 18 living in your household? . . . Yes (1); No (2)”

Source: National exit polls. See the section in Chapter 2 entitled “Creating a Cumulative National Data Set: Selecting Exit Polls” (pp. 28–29).

Note: When using these results to make inferences about the active electorate, the standard errors should be calculated using Table 2.2 (p. 36), which is explained in the adjacent section of Chapter 2, “Analyzing Exit Poll Questions: Estimating Sampling Error” (pp. 34–36). For a guide on how to understand the tables and figures of this chapter, see the section in Chapter 2 entitled “Presenting and Discussing the Exit Poll Data: Reading Chapter 3” (pp. 37–39).

Table 3.15 Composition of the Exit Polls by Union Household, 1972–2010

Year	Union Household	Not a Union Household	Number of Respondents
2010	17.5%	82.5%	3,967
2008	21.1%	78.9%	4,170
2006	23.2%	76.8%	6,763
2004	23.8%	76.2%	9,990
2002	23.2%	76.8%	8,194
2000	26.2%	73.8%	9,725
1998	22.7%	77.3%	5,651
1996	23.6%	76.4%	7,731
1994			
1992			
1990			
1988	25.5%	74.5%	10,899
1986	28.3%	71.7%	8,570
1984	26.8%	73.2%	8,665
1982	27.5%	72.5%	7,269
1980	30.7%	69.3%	13,574
1978	31.5%	68.5%	8,009
1976	33.7%	66.3%	12,344
1972	32.3%	67.7%	16,123
Average	26.1%	73.9%	

Question Wording for Union Household (Coded: Union Household = 1; Not a Union Household = 2):

1972–1980: “Are you or is anyone living in your household a union member? . . . Yes (1); No (2)”

1982: “Are you or is anyone living in your household a member of a labor union? . . . Yes (1); No (2)”

1984: “Are you or is any person in your household a member of a labor union? . . . Yes, I do (1); Yes, other family member (1); No (2)”

1986–1988: “Are you or is any person living in your household a member of a labor union? . . . Yes, I do (1); Yes, other family member (1); No (2)”

1996: “Do you or someone in your household belong to a labor union? . . . Yes (1); No (2)”

1998: “Do you or does someone else in your household belong to a labor union? . . . Yes (1); No (2)”

2000–2008: “Do you or does someone in your household belong to a labor union? . . . Yes, I do (1); Yes, someone else does (1); Yes, I do and someone else does (1); No one does (2)”

2010: “Does someone in your household belong to a labor union? . . . Yes (1); No (2)”

Source: National exit polls. See the section in Chapter 2 entitled “Creating a Cumulative National Data Set: Selecting Exit Polls” (pp. 28–29).

Note: When using these results to make inferences about the active electorate, the standard errors should be calculated using Table 2.2 (p. 36), which is explained in the adjacent section of Chapter 2, “Analyzing Exit Poll Questions: Estimating Sampling Error” (pp. 34–36). For a guide on how to understand the tables and figures of this chapter, see the section in Chapter 2 entitled “Presenting and Discussing the Exit Poll Data: Reading Chapter 3” (pp. 37–39).

Table 3.16 Composition of the Exit Polls by Party Identification, 1972–2010

Year	Democrat	Republican	Independent	Number of Respondents
2010	35.3%	35.0%	29.7%	17,302
2008	39.1%	32.1%	28.8%	17,774
2006	37.7%	35.5%	26.8%	12,850
2004	36.5%	37.1%	26.3%	13,121
2002	37.6%	39.5%	22.9%	16,064
2000	38.6%	34.7%	26.7%	12,432
1998	37.3%	35.0%	27.7%	10,723
1996	39.4%	34.7%	25.9%	15,422
1994	36.0%	35.4%	28.7%	10,575
1992	37.9%	34.7%	27.4%	14,622
1990	36.6%	33.6%	29.8%	19,010
1988	38.1%	35.5%	26.4%	10,936
1986	39.7%	34.3%	26.0%	8,550
1984	38.3%	35.5%	26.1%	9,148
1982	45.6%	30.3%	24.2%	7,695
1980	44.8%	29.6%	25.6%	14,718
1978	40.8%	27.1%	32.1%	7,982
1976	41.4%	24.9%	33.7%	12,556
1972	45.9%	34.8%	19.3%	16,395
Average	39.3%	33.6%	27.1%	

Question Wording for Party Identification (Coded: Democrat = 1; Republican = 2; Independent = 3):

1972: “Do you usually think of yourself as a . . . Democrat (1); Republican (2); Independent (3); Other (3)”

1976–1988: “Do you usually think of yourself as a . . . Democrat (1); Republican (2); Independent (3)”

1990–2010: “No matter how you voted today, do you usually think of yourself as a . . . Democrat (1); Republican (2); Independent (3); Something else (3)”

Source: National exit polls. See the section in Chapter 2 entitled “Creating a Cumulative National Data Set: Selecting Exit Polls” (pp. 28–29).

Note: When using these results to make inferences about the active electorate, the standard errors should be calculated using Table 2.2 (p. 36), which is explained in the adjacent section of Chapter 2, “Analyzing Exit Poll Questions: Estimating Sampling Error” (pp. 34–36). For a guide on how to understand the tables and figures of this chapter, see the section in Chapter 2 entitled “Presenting and Discussing the Exit Poll Data: Reading Chapter 3” (pp. 37–39).

Table 3.17 Composition of the Exit Polls by Ideological Identification, 1976–2010

Year	Liberal	Moderate	Conservative	Number of Respondents
2010	20.2%	38.6%	41.3%	16,981
2008	21.7%	44.3%	34.0%	16,903
2006	20.4%	47.4%	32.2%	12,667
2004	21.0%	45.5%	33.5%	12,939
2002	17.3%	48.8%	34.0%	15,853
2000	20.4%	50.2%	29.4%	12,250
1998	19.3%	50.2%	30.5%	10,572
1996	19.6%	47.2%	33.2%	15,205
1994	17.9%	45.0%	37.1%	5,276
1992	21.3%	48.9%	29.8%	7,749
1990	19.4%	46.4%	34.2%	9,898
1988	18.3%	47.1%	34.7%	10,815
1986	17.1%	48.1%	34.8%	8,447
1984	17.0%	47.2%	35.8%	8,467
1982	16.8%	53.2%	30.0%	7,613
1980	17.5%	50.6%	32.0%	14,095
1978	18.0%	48.3%	33.7%	7,835
1976	19.7%	48.7%	31.7%	11,860
Average	19.1%	47.5%	33.4%	

Question Wording for Ideological Identification (Coded: Liberal = 1; Moderate = 2; Conservative = 3):

1976–2010: “On most political matters, do you consider yourself . . . Liberal (1); Moderate (2); Conservative (3)”

Source: National exit polls. See the section in Chapter 2 entitled “Creating a Cumulative National Data Set: Selecting Exit Polls” (pp. 28–29).

Note: When using these results to make inferences about the active electorate, the standard errors should be calculated using Table 2.2 (p. 36), which is explained in the adjacent section of Chapter 2, “Analyzing Exit Poll Questions: Estimating Sampling Error” (pp. 34–36). For a guide on how to understand the tables and figures of this chapter, see the section in Chapter 2 entitled “Presenting and Discussing the Exit Poll Data: Reading Chapter 3” (pp. 37–39).

Table 3.18 Composition of the Exit Polls by Presidential Vote in Last Election, 1972–2010

Year	Democrat	Republican	Other Candidate	Did Not Vote	Number of Respondents
2010	45.8%	46.0%	3.7%	4.5%	8,936
2008	37.6%	45.9%	3.7%	12.8%	4,178
2006	43.2%	48.9%	4.1%	3.8%	6,361
2004	36.7%	43.0%	3.5%	16.8%	3,182
2002	37.9%	53.8%	3.8%	4.5%	7,886
2000	46.4%	31.8%	9.1%	12.7%	6,252
1998	48.3%	37.4%	9.5%	4.8%	5,434
1996	43.4%	34.8%	13.3%	8.5%	15,400
1994	43.2%	38.1%	14.9%	3.8%	10,572
1992	27.2%	54.8%	2.5%	15.4%	14,947
1990	31.7%	58.7%	3.9%	5.7%	10,033
1988	28.2%	57.1%	3.8%	10.9%	10,990
1986	31.0%	59.2%	4.9%	4.8%	8,615
1984	31.9%	51.1%	5.0%	12.0%	8,653
1982	33.6%	51.6%	7.4%	7.4%	7,596
1980	48.8%	37.2%	2.3%	11.6%	13,814
1978	49.9%	40.6%	3.9%	5.6%	7,962
1976	27.6%	50.2%	5.6%	16.6%	12,061
1972	23.9%	47.6%	7.0%	21.5%	16,111
Average	37.7%	46.7%	5.9%	9.7%	

Question Wording for Presidential Vote in Last Election (Coded: Democrat = 1; Republican = 2; Other Candidate = 3; Did Not Vote = 4):

1972: “In 1968, for whom did you vote? . . . Nixon (2); Humphrey (1); Wallace (3); Other (3); Didn’t vote (4)”

1976: “In 1972, for whom did you vote? . . . Nixon (2); McGovern (1); Someone else (3); Did not vote (4)”

1978: “In 1976, for whom did you vote? . . . Carter (1); Ford (2); Someone else (3); Did not vote (4)”

1980: “In 1976, for whom did you vote? . . . Jimmy Carter (1); Gerald Ford (2); Someone else (3); Did not vote (4)”

1982: “How did you vote in the 1980 election for president? . . . Carter (1); Reagan (2); Anderson (3); Someone else (3); Did not vote for president in [Year] (4)”

1984: “Who did you vote for in the 1980 presidential election? . . . Carter (1); Reagan (2); Anderson (3); Didn’t vote (4)”

1986: “Who did you vote for in the 1984 presidential election? . . . Reagan (2); Mondale (1); Someone else (3); Didn’t vote for president (4)”

1988: “Who did you vote for in the 1984 presidential election? . . . Reagan (2); Mondale (1); Someone else (3); Didn’t vote (4)”

1990: “Who did you vote for in the 1988 presidential election? . . . George Bush (2); Michael Dukakis (1); Someone else (3); Didn’t happen to vote in [Year] (4)”

1992: “Who did you vote for in the 1988 presidential election? . . . George Bush (Rep) (2); Michael Dukakis (Dem) (1); Someone else (3); Did not vote in [Year] (4)”

1994: “Who did you vote for in the 1992 presidential election? . . . George Bush (Rep) (2); Bill Clinton (Dem) (1); Ross Perot (Ind) (3); Someone else (3); Did not vote in [Year] (4)”

1996: “Who did you vote for in the 1992 presidential election? . . . George Bush (Rep) (2); Bill Clinton (Dem) (1); Ross Perot (Ind) (3); Someone else (3); Did not vote for President (4)”

1998: “Who did you vote for in the 1996 presidential election? . . . Bill Clinton (Dem) (1); Bob Dole (Rep) (2); Ross Perot (Ref) (3); Someone else (3); Did not vote for president in [Year] (4)”

2000: “In the 1996 election for president, did you vote for . . . Bill Clinton (Dem) (1); Bob Dole (Rep) (2); Ross Perot (Ref) (3); Someone else (3); Did not vote (4)”

2002: “In the 2000 election for president, did you vote for . . . Al Gore (Dem) (1); George W. Bush (Rep) (2); Ralph Nader (Gre) (3); Someone else (3); Did not vote (4)”

2004: “Did you vote in the 2000 presidential election? . . . Yes, for Al Gore (1); Yes, for George W. Bush (2); Yes, for another candidate (3); No, I did not vote (4)”

2006–2008: “In the 2004 election for president, did you vote for . . . George W. Bush (Rep) (2); John Kerry (Dem) (1); Someone else (3); Did not vote (4)”

2010: “In the 2008 election for president, did you vote for . . . Obama (D) (1); McCain (2); Other (3); Didn’t vote (4)”

Source: National exit polls. See the section in Chapter 2 entitled “Creating a Cumulative National Data Set: Selecting Exit Polls” (pp. 28–29).

Note: When using these results to make inferences about the active electorate, the standard errors should be calculated using Table 2.2 (p. 36), which is explained in the adjacent section of Chapter 2, “Analyzing Exit Poll Questions: Estimating Sampling Error” (pp. 34–36). For a guide on how to understand the tables and figures of this chapter, see the section in Chapter 2 entitled “Presenting and Discussing the Exit Poll Data: Reading Chapter 3” (pp. 37–39).

Table 3.19 Composition of the Exit Polls by Presidential Approval, 1978–2010

Year	Approve	Disapprove	Number of Respondents
2010	44.5%	55.5%	4,422
2008	27.5%	72.5%	4,282
2006	42.9%	57.1%	6,943
2004	53.7%	46.3%	6,913
2002	65.6%	34.4%	8,738
2000	58.4%	41.6%	6,177
1998	56.8%	43.2%	11,112
1996			
1994	46.3%	53.7%	10,299
1992			
1990	60.1%	39.9%	18,491
1988			
1986	63.2%	36.8%	8,319
1984			
1982	52.3%	47.7%	7,159
1980			
1978	48.0%	52.0%	7,576
Average	51.6%	48.4%	

Question Wording for Presidential Approval (Coded: Approve = 1; Disapprove = 2):

1978: “On most political matters, do you approve or disapprove of the way [President] is handling his job as president? . . . Approve (1); Disapprove (2)”

1982–2002: “Do you approve or disapprove of the way [President] is handling his job as president? . . . Approve (1); Disapprove (2)”

2004–2010: “Do you approve or disapprove of the way [President] is handling his job as president? . . . Strongly approve (1); Somewhat approve (1); Somewhat disapprove (2); Strongly disapprove (2)”

Source: National exit polls. See the section in Chapter 2 entitled “Creating a Cumulative National Data Set: Selecting Exit Polls” (pp. 28–29).

Note: When using these results to make inferences about the active electorate, the standard errors should be calculated using Table 2.2 (p. 36), which is explained in the adjacent section of Chapter 2, “Analyzing Exit Poll Questions: Estimating Sampling Error” (pp. 34–36). For a guide on how to understand the tables and figures of this chapter, see the section in Chapter 2 entitled “Presenting and Discussing the Exit Poll Data: Reading Chapter 3” (pp. 37–39).

Table 3.20 Composition of the Exit Polls by Congressional Approval, 1990–2010

Year	Approve	Disapprove	Number of Respondents
2010	24.2%	75.8%	4,392
2008	24.5%	75.5%	4,488
2006	37.6%	62.4%	6,457
2004			
2002	46.9%	53.1%	7,953
2000			
1998	42.6%	57.4%	5,482
1996			
1994	16.6%	83.4%	5,220
1992			
1990	19.7%	80.3%	9,825
Average	30.3%	69.7%	

Question Wording for Congressional Approval (Coded: Approve = 1; Disapprove = 2):

1990–2002: “Do you approve or disapprove of the way Congress is handling its job? . . . Approve (1); Disapprove (2)”

2006–2010: “Do you approve or disapprove of the way Congress is handling its job? . . . Strongly approve (1); Somewhat approve (1); Somewhat disapprove (2); Strongly disapprove (2)”

Source: National exit polls. See the section in Chapter 2 entitled “Creating a Cumulative National Data Set: Selecting Exit Polls” (pp. 28–29).

Note: When using these results to make inferences about the active electorate, the standard errors should be calculated using Table 2.2 (p. 36), which is explained in the adjacent section of Chapter 2, “Analyzing Exit Poll Questions: Estimating Sampling Error” (pp. 34–36). For a guide on how to understand the tables and figures of this chapter, see the section in Chapter 2 entitled “Presenting and Discussing the Exit Poll Data: Reading Chapter 3” (pp. 37–39).

Table 3.21 Composition of the Exit Polls by Perceived Direction of the Country, 1990–2010

Year	Right Direction	Wrong Track	Number of Respondents
2010	35.8%	64.2%	4,330
2008	21.5%	78.5%	4,087
2006	42.4%	57.6%	6,215
2004	51.5%	48.5%	3,295
2002	58.9%	41.1%	8,556
2000	67.8%	32.2%	6,099
1998	61.6%	38.4%	5,386
1996	54.9%	45.1%	3,799
1994	40.3%	59.7%	5,400
1992			
1990	40.9%	59.1%	9,823
Average	47.6%	52.4%	

Question Wording for Perceived Direction of the Country (Coded: Right Direction = 1; Wrong Track = 2):

1990–2010: “Do you think things in this country today are: . . . Generally going in the right direction (1); Seriously off on the wrong track (2)”

Source: National exit polls. See the section in Chapter 2 entitled “Creating a Cumulative National Data Set: Selecting Exit Polls” (pp. 28–29).

Note: When using these results to make inferences about the active electorate, the standard errors should be calculated using Table 2.2 (p. 36), which is explained in the adjacent section of Chapter 2, “Analyzing Exit Poll Questions: Estimating Sampling Error” (pp. 34–36). For a guide on how to understand the tables and figures of this chapter, see the section in Chapter 2 entitled “Presenting and Discussing the Exit Poll Data: Reading Chapter 3” (pp. 37–39).

Table 3.22 Composition of the Exit Polls by Expected Life for the Next Generation, 1992–2010

Year	Better Than Today	About the Same	Worse Than Today	Number of Respondents
2010	32.9%	27.0%	40.1%	4,036
2008				
2006	30.5%	29.0%	40.6%	6,329
2004				
2002				
2000	48.8%	30.0%	21.2%	3,187
1998				
1996	29.9%	36.2%	34.0%	3,912
1994				
1992	31.1%	31.8%	37.1%	2,832
Average	34.6%	30.8%	34.6%	

Question Wording for Expected Life for the Next Generation (Coded: Better Than Today = 1; About the Same = 2; Worse Than Today = 3):

1992–2010: “Do you expect life for the next generation of Americans to be . . . Better than life today (1); Worse than life today (3); About the same (2)”

Source: National exit polls. See the section in Chapter 2 entitled “Creating a Cumulative National Data Set: Selecting Exit Polls” (pp. 28–29).

Note: When using these results to make inferences about the active electorate, the standard errors should be calculated using Table 2.2 (p. 36), which is explained in the adjacent section of Chapter 2, “Analyzing Exit Poll Questions: Estimating Sampling Error” (pp. 34–36). For a guide on how to understand the tables and figures of this chapter, see the section in Chapter 2 entitled “Presenting and Discussing the Exit Poll Data: Reading Chapter 3” (pp. 37–39).

Table 3.23 Composition of the Exit Polls by Position on Government Activism, 1992–2010

Year	Government Should Do More	Government Does Too Much	Number of Respondents
2010	40.5%	59.5%	4,256
2008	53.6%	46.4%	4,367
2006			
2004	48.2%	51.8%	3,142
2002	46.6%	53.4%	7,777
2000	44.8%	55.2%	6,767
1998			
1996	44.0%	56.0%	3,890
1994	41.5%	58.5%	5,294
1992	54.6%	45.4%	2,735
Average	46.7%	53.3%	

Question Wording for Position on Government Activism (Coded: Government Should Do More = 1; Government Does Too Much = 2):

1992–1994: “Which comes closest to your view . . . Government should do more to solve national problems (1); Government is doing too many things better left to businesses and individuals (2)”

1996–2008: “Which comes closest to your view . . . Government should do more to solve problems (1); Government is doing too many things better left to businesses and individuals (2)”

2010: “Which is closer to your view . . . Government should do more to solve problems (1); Government is doing too many things better left to businesses and individuals (2)”

Source: National exit polls. See the section in Chapter 2 entitled “Creating a Cumulative National Data Set: Selecting Exit Polls” (pp. 28–29).

Note: When using these results to make inferences about the active electorate, the standard errors should be calculated using Table 2.2 (p. 36), which is explained in the adjacent section of Chapter 2, “Analyzing Exit Poll Questions: Estimating Sampling Error” (pp. 34–36). For a guide on how to understand the tables and figures of this chapter, see the section in Chapter 2 entitled “Presenting and Discussing the Exit Poll Data: Reading Chapter 3” (pp. 37–39).

Table 3.24 Composition of the Exit Polls by First-Time Voter, 1996–2010

Year	First-Time Voter	Not First-Time Voter	Number of Respondents
2010	3.4%	96.6%	4,680
2008	11.5%	88.5%	8,586
2006			
2004	11.1%	88.9%	6,704
2002			
2000	9.1%	90.9%	9,797
1998			
1996	9.3%	90.7%	7,719
Average	8.9%	91.1%	

Question Wording for First-Time Voter (Coded: First-Time Voter = 1; Not First-Time Voter = 2):

1996–2004 and 2010: “Is this the first time you have ever voted? . . . Yes (1); No (2)”

2008: “Is this the first year you have ever voted? . . . Yes (1); No (2)”

Source: National exit polls. See the section in Chapter 2 entitled “Creating a Cumulative National Data Set: Selecting Exit Polls” (pp. 28–29).

Note: When using these results to make inferences about the active electorate, the standard errors should be calculated using Table 2.2 (p. 36), which is explained in the adjacent section of Chapter 2, “Analyzing Exit Poll Questions: Estimating Sampling Error” (pp. 34–36). For a guide on how to understand the tables and figures of this chapter, see the section in Chapter 2 entitled “Presenting and Discussing the Exit Poll Data: Reading Chapter 3” (pp. 37–39).

Table 3.25 Composition of the Exit Polls by Household Income, 1994–2010

Year	Under \$30,000	\$30,000–\$49,999	\$50,000–\$74,999	\$75,000–\$99,999	\$100,000 or More	Number of Respondents
2010	17.7%	18.7%	21.1%	15.4%	27.2%	12,159
2008	18.2%	19.4%	21.3%	15.0%	26.1%	16,129
2006	19.1%	20.6%	22.2%	15.5%	22.5%	11,946
2004	23.1%	22.1%	23.0%	13.7%	18.2%	12,321
2002	22.0%	22.5%	23.8%	14.0%	17.6%	15,188
2000	22.7%	24.5%	24.8%	12.9%	15.1%	11,860
1998	26.0%	25.9%	24.9%	11.9%	11.4%	9,979
1996	34.1%	27.4%	20.6%	8.9%	9.0%	14,724
1994	32.7%	29.6%	22.0%	8.8%	6.9%	10,046
Average	24.0%	23.4%	22.6%	12.9%	17.1%	

Question Wording for Household Income (Coded: Under \$30,000 = 1; \$30,000–\$49,999 = 2; \$50,000–\$74,999 = 3; \$75,000–\$99,999 = 4; \$100,000 or More = 5):

1994–2002: “[Previous Year] Total family income . . . Under \$15,000 (1); \$15,000–\$29,999 (1); \$30,000–\$49,999 (2); \$50,000–\$74,999 (3); \$75,000–\$99,999 (4); \$100,000 or more (5)”

2004–2010: “[Previous Year] Total family income . . . Under \$15,000 (1); \$15,000–\$29,999 (1); \$30,000–\$49,999 (2); \$50,000–\$74,999 (3); \$75,000–\$99,999 (4); \$100,000–\$149,999 (5); \$150,000–\$199,999 (5); \$200,000 or more (5)”

Source: National exit polls. See the section in Chapter 2 entitled “Creating a Cumulative National Data Set: Selecting Exit Polls” (pp. 28–29).

Note: When using these results to make inferences about the active electorate, the standard errors should be calculated using Table 2.2 (p. 36), which is explained in the adjacent section of Chapter 2, “Analyzing Exit Poll Questions: Estimating Sampling Error” (pp. 34–36). For a guide on how to understand the tables and figures of this chapter, see the section in Chapter 2 entitled “Presenting and Discussing the Exit Poll Data: Reading Chapter 3” (pp. 37–39).

Table 3.26 Composition of the Exit Polls by Four-Year Household Financial Situation, 1992–2008

Year	Better	About the Same	Worse	Number of Respondents
2008	23.7%	34.4%	42.0%	4,563
2006				
2004	32.3%	39.6%	28.1%	6,731
2002				
2000	50.6%	38.8%	10.6%	6,300
1998				
1996	33.6%	45.6%	20.9%	15,418
1994				
1992	24.4%	41.3%	34.3%	7,897
Average	32.9%	39.9%	27.2%	

Question Wording for Four-Year Household Financial Situation (Coded: Better = 1; About the Same = 2; Worse = 3):

1992–2004: “Compared to four years ago, is your family’s financial situation . . . Better today (1); Worse today (3); About the same (2)”

2008: “Compared to four years ago, is your family’s financial situation . . . Better (1); Worse (3); About the same (2)”

Source: National exit polls. See the section in Chapter 2 entitled “Creating a Cumulative National Data Set: Selecting Exit Polls” (pp. 28–29).

Note: When using these results to make inferences about the active electorate, the standard errors should be calculated using Table 2.2 (p. 36), which is explained in the adjacent section of Chapter 2, “Analyzing Exit Poll Questions: Estimating Sampling Error” (pp. 34–36). For a guide on how to understand the tables and figures of this chapter, see the section in Chapter 2 entitled “Presenting and Discussing the Exit Poll Data: Reading Chapter 3” (pp. 37–39).

Table 3.27 Composition of the Exit Polls by Two-Year Household Financial Situation, 1990–2010

Year	Better	About the Same	Worse	Number of Respondents
2010	14.8%	43.3%	41.9%	4,513
2008				
2006	29.8%	44.8%	25.4%	6,947
2004				
2002	28.8%	40.6%	30.6%	8,231
2000				
1998	41.2%	45.4%	13.5%	10,762
1996				
1994	24.9%	51.1%	24.0%	5,410
1992				
1990	28.6%	44.9%	26.5%	10,038
Average	28.0%	45.0%	27.0%	

Question Wording for Two-Year Household Financial Situation (Coded: Better = 1; About the Same = 2; Worse = 3):

1990–2010: “Compared to two years ago, is your family’s financial situation . . . Better today (1); Worse today (3); About the same (2)”

Source: National exit polls. See the section in Chapter 2 entitled “Creating a Cumulative National Data Set: Selecting Exit Polls” (pp. 28–29).

Note: When using these results to make inferences about the active electorate, the standard errors should be calculated using Table 2.2 (p. 36), which is explained in the adjacent section of Chapter 2, “Analyzing Exit Poll Questions: Estimating Sampling Error” (pp. 34–36). For a guide on how to understand the tables and figures of this chapter, see the section in Chapter 2 entitled “Presenting and Discussing the Exit Poll Data: Reading Chapter 3” (pp. 37–39).

Table 3.28 Composition of the Exit Polls by Judgments of Current National Economic Conditions, 1986–2010

Year	Performing Well	Performing Badly	Number of Respondents
2010	9.5%	90.5%	4,509
2008	6.6%	93.4%	8,611
2006	49.1%	50.9%	6,917
2004	47.6%	52.4%	3,386
2002	40.2%	59.8%	8,948
2000	86.4%	13.6%	6,283
1998	82.8%	17.2%	5,580
1996	56.2%	43.8%	8,263
1994	41.1%	58.9%	5,442
1992	19.1%	80.9%	8,190
1990	20.2%	79.8%	9,957
1988			
1986	66.1%	33.9%	8,465
Average	43.7%	56.3%	

Question Wording for Judgments of Current National Economic Conditions (Coded: Performing Well = 1; Performing Badly = 2):

1986: “These days, is the condition of the nation’s economy . . . Very good (1); Fairly good (1); Fairly bad (2); Very bad (2)”

1990: “These days, do you think the condition of the nation’s economy is . . . Excellent (1); Good (1); Not so good (2); Poor (2)”

1992–2010: “Do you think the condition of the nation’s economy is . . . Excellent (1); Good (1); Not so good (2); Poor (2)”

Source: National exit polls. See the section in Chapter 2 entitled “Creating a Cumulative National Data Set: Selecting Exit Polls” (pp. 28–29).

Note: When using these results to make inferences about the active electorate, the standard errors should be calculated using Table 2.2 (p. 36), which is explained in the adjacent section of Chapter 2, “Analyzing Exit Poll Questions: Estimating Sampling Error” (pp. 34–36). For a guide on how to understand the tables and figures of this chapter, see the section in Chapter 2 entitled “Presenting and Discussing the Exit Poll Data: Reading Chapter 3” (pp. 37–39).

Table 3.29 Composition of the Exit Polls by Judgments of Future National Economic Conditions, 1986–2008

Year	Better	About the Same	Worse	Number of Respondents
2008	49.0%	26.7%	24.3%	4,224
2006				
2004				
2002				
2000	28.7%	58.9%	12.4%	6,137
1998	18.2%	58.7%	23.1%	5,541
1996				
1994				
1992				
1990	14.0%	31.7%	54.3%	10,365
1988				
1986	32.5%	48.3%	19.2%	8,571
Average	28.5%	44.8%	26.7%	

Question Wording for Judgments of Future National Economic Conditions (Coded: Better = 1; About the Same = 2; Worse = 3):

1986: “A year from now, will the U.S. economy be . . . Better than today (1); Worse than today (3); About the same as today (2)”

1990–2008: “During the next year, do you think the nation’s economy will . . . Get better (1); Get worse (3); Stay about the same (2)”

Source: National exit polls. See the section in Chapter 2 entitled “Creating a Cumulative National Data Set: Selecting Exit Polls” (pp. 28–29).

Note: When using these results to make inferences about the active electorate, the standard errors should be calculated using Table 2.2 (p. 36), which is explained in the adjacent section of Chapter 2, “Analyzing Exit Poll Questions: Estimating Sampling Error” (pp. 34–36). For a guide on how to understand the tables and figures of this chapter, see the section in Chapter 2 entitled “Presenting and Discussing the Exit Poll Data: Reading Chapter 3” (pp. 37–39).

Table 3.30 Average Size of Groups Responding to Presidential Exit Polls, 1972–2008

Group	Mean Share
Not gay or bisexual	96%
Not first-time voter	90%
White	83%
Disapprove of Congress	76%
Not a union household	73%
Married	65%
Employed full time	64%
Not born again	63%
No child in household	62%
Attend religious services less than once a week	58%
Think current national economic conditions are performing badly	57%
Protestant	56%
Disapprove of the president	53%
Female	52%
Think government does too much	51%
Think country is off on the wrong track	51%
Think country is moving in the right direction	49%
Think government should do more	49%
Male	48%
Moderate	48%
Approve of the president	47%
Voted for Republican candidate in last presidential election	45%
Think future national economic conditions will be about the same	43%
Suburban precinct	43%
Think current national economic conditions are performing well	43%
Attend religious services at least once a week	42%
Household finances have stayed the same in last 4 years	40%
Democrat	40%
Think life will be worse for the next generation (last asked 2000)	40%
Think future national economic conditions will be better	39%
Child in household	38%
Born again	37%
Not employed full time	36%
Not married	35%
Voted for Democratic candidate in last presidential election	35%
Republican	33%
Conservative	33%
Household finances have gotten better in last 4 years	33%
30–44 age group	32%
Think life will be better for the next generation (last asked in 2000)	31%
Some college education	30%
City precinct	29%
Southerner	29%
Rural precinct	29%
Think life will be about the same for the next generation (last asked in 2000)	27%
Independent	27%
Midwesterner	27%
Household finances have gotten worse in the last 4 years	27%
Catholic	27%
Union household	27%

Table 3.30 (Continued)

Group	Mean Share
45–59 age group	26%
Easterner	25%
Approve of Congress	25%
College graduate	24%
Household earns less than \$30,000 annually	24%
High school graduate	23%
Household earns \$50,000–\$74,999 annually	23%
Household earns \$30,000–\$49,999 annually	23%
18–29 age group	21%
60+ age group	21%
Westerner	20%
Liberal	20%
Think future national economic conditions will be worse	18%
Postgraduate	17%
Household earns \$100,000 or more annually	17%
Did not vote in last presidential election	14%
Household earns \$75,000–\$99,999 annually	13%
Black	10%
First-time voter	10%
No religious affiliation	8%
Religion other than Protestant, Catholic, or Jewish	6%
Did not complete high school	6%
Voted for non-major-party candidate in last presidential election	6%
Hispanic/Latino	4%
Gay or bisexual	4%
Jewish	3%
Race other than white, black, Hispanic/Latino, or Asian	2%
Asian	2%

Source: National exit polls. See the section in Chapter 2 entitled “Creating a Cumulative National Data Set: Selecting Exit Polls” (pp. 28–29).

Note: When using these results to make inferences about the active electorate, the standard errors should be calculated using Table 2.2 (p. 36), which is explained in the adjacent section of Chapter 2, “Analyzing Exit Poll Questions: Estimating Sampling Error” (pp. 34–36). For a guide on how to understand the tables and figures of this chapter, see the section in Chapter 2 entitled “Presenting and Discussing the Exit Poll Data: Reading Chapter 3” (pp. 37–39).

Table 3.31 Composition of the 2008 Presidential Exit Poll

Group	2008 Share
Not gay or bisexual	97%
Think current national economic conditions are performing badly	93%
Not first-time voter	89%
Not a union household	79%
Think country is off on the wrong track	79%
White	76%
Disapprove of Congress	76%
Disapprove of the president	73%
Married	66%
Not born again	62%
No child in household	60%
Employed full time	64%
Attend religious services less than once a week	60%
Protestant	54%
Think government should do more	54%
Female	53%
Suburban precinct	49%
Think future national economic conditions will be better	49%
Male	47%
Think government does too much	46%
Voted for Republican candidate in last presidential election	46%
Moderate	44%
Household finances have gotten worse in the last 4 years	42%
Attend religious services at least once a week	41%
Child in household	40%
Democrat	39%
Born again	39%
Voted for Democratic candidate in last presidential election	38%
Not employed full time	36%
Conservative	34%
Household finances have stayed the same in last 4 years	34%
Not married	34%
Southerner	32%
Republican	32%
Some college education	31%
City precinct	30%
45–59 age group	30%
30–44 age group	29%
Independent	29%
College graduate	28%
Approve of the president	28%
Think future national economic conditions will be about the same	27%
Household earns \$100,000 or more annually	27%
Catholic	26%
Approve of Congress	25%
Household finances have gotten better in last 4 years	24%
Midwesterner	24%
60+ age group	24%
Think future national economic conditions will be worse	24%
Westerner	23%

Table 3.31 (Continued)

Group	2008 Share
Think country is moving in the right direction	22%
Liberal	22%
Union household	21%
Rural precinct	21%
Household earns \$50,000–\$74,999 annually	21%
Easterner	21%
High school graduate	20%
Household earns \$30,000–\$49,999 annually	19%
Household earns less than \$30,000 annually	18%
18–29 age group	18%
Postgraduate	17%
Household earns \$75,000–\$99,999 annually	15%
Did not vote in last presidential election	13%
Black	13%
No religious affiliation	12%
First-time voter	12%
Think current national economic conditions are performing well	7%
Hispanic/Latino	6%
Religion other than Protestant, Catholic, or Jewish	6%
Voted for non-major-party candidate in last presidential election	4%
Did not complete high school	4%
Gay or bisexual	4%
Race other than white, black, Hispanic/Latino, or Asian	3%
Jewish	2%
Asian	2%

Source: National exit polls. See the section in Chapter 2 entitled “Creating a Cumulative National Data Set: Selecting Exit Polls” (pp. 28–29).

Note: When using these results to make inferences about the active electorate, the standard errors should be calculated using Table 2.2 (p. 36), which is explained in the adjacent section of Chapter 2, “Analyzing Exit Poll Questions: Estimating Sampling Error” (pp. 34–36). For a guide on how to understand the tables and figures of this chapter, see the section in Chapter 2 entitled “Presenting and Discussing the Exit Poll Data: Reading Chapter 3” (pp. 37–39).

Table 3.32 Average Size of Groups Responding to Midterm Exit Polls, 1978–2010

Group	Mean Share
Not first-time voter (asked only in 2010)	97%
Not gay or bisexual	97%
White	85%
Not a union household	75%
Disapprove of Congress	69%
Married (last asked in 2006)	68%
Not born again	65%
No child in household	65%
Employed full time (last asked in 2002)	63%
Think government does too much	57%
Think current national economic conditions are performing badly	56%
Protestant	55%
Think country is off on the wrong track	53%
Attend religious services less than once a week	53%
Approve of the president	53%
Female	51%
Male	49%
Voted for Republican candidate in last presidential election	48%
Disapprove of the president	47%
Attend religious services at least once a week	47%
Moderate	47%
Think country is moving in the right direction	47%
Think future national economic conditions will be about the same (last asked in 1998)	46%
Suburban precinct	45%
Household finances stayed the same in last 2 years	45%
Think current national economic conditions are performing well	44%
Think government should do more	43%
Voted for Democratic candidate in last presidential election	40%
Think life will be worse for the next generation	40%
Democrat	39%
Not employed full time (last asked in 2002)	38%
Child in household	35%
Born again	35%
Conservative	34%
Republican	34%
Think future national economic conditions will be worse (last asked in 1998)	32%
Not married (last asked in 2006)	32%
Approve of Congress	31%
Think life will be better for the next generation	31%
City precinct	30%
30–44 age group	30%
Some college education	29%
Household finances have gotten better in last 2 years	29%
45–59 age group	29%
Southerner	28%
Independent	28%
Midwesterner	28%
Think life will be the same for the next generation	27%

Table 3.32 (Continued)

Group	Mean Share
60+ age group	27%
Household finances have gotten worse in the last 2 years	27%
Catholic	27%
College graduate	25%
Union household	25%
Rural precinct	25%
Household earns less than \$30,000 annually	24%
High school graduate	24%
Household earns \$50,000–\$74,999 annually	23%
Easterner	23%
Household earns \$30,000–\$49,999 annually	23%
Westerner	21%
Think future national economic conditions will be better (last asked in 1998)	21%
Liberal	19%
Postgraduate	17%
Household earns \$100,000 or more annually	17%
18–29 age group	14%
Household earns \$75,000–\$99,999 annually	13%
No religious affiliation	9%
Black	9%
Religion other than Protestant, Catholic, or Jewish	6%
Voted for non-major-party candidate in last presidential election	6%
Did not complete high school	5%
Did not vote in last presidential election	5%
Hispanic/Latino	4%
Gay or bisexual	4%
First-time voter (asked only in 2010)	3%
Jewish	3%
Race other than white, black, Hispanic/Latino, or Asian	2%
Asian	1%

Source: National exit polls. See the section in Chapter 2 entitled “Creating a Cumulative National Data Set: Selecting Exit Polls” (pp. 28–29).

Note: When using these results to make inferences about the active electorate, the standard errors should be calculated using Table 2.2 (p. 36), which is explained in the adjacent section of Chapter 2, “Analyzing Exit Poll Questions: Estimating Sampling Error” (pp. 34–36). For a guide on how to understand the tables and figures of this chapter, see the section in Chapter 2 entitled “Presenting and Discussing the Exit Poll Data: Reading Chapter 3” (pp. 37–39).

Table 3.33 Composition of the 2010 Midterm Exit Poll

Group	2010 Share
Not first-time voter	97%
Not gay or bisexual	97%
Think current national economic conditions are performing badly	91%
Not a union household	83%
White	78%
Disapprove of Congress	76%
No child in household	66%
Think country is off on the wrong track	64%
Not born again	64%
Think government does too much	60%
Disapprove of the president	56%
Protestant	55%
Attend religious services less than once a week	52%
Female	52%
Suburban precinct	49%
Attend religious services at least once a week	48%
Male	48%
Voted for Democratic candidate in last presidential election	46%
Voted for Republican candidate in last presidential election	46%
Approve of the president	45%
Household finances stayed the same in last 2 years	43%
Household finances have gotten worse in the last 2 years	42%
Conservative	41%
Think government should do more	41%
Think life will be worse for the next generation	40%
Moderate	39%
Born again	37%
Think country is moving in the right direction	36%
Democrat	35%
Republican	35%
Child in household	34%
Think life will be better for the next generation	33%
45–59 age group	32%
60+ age group	32%
City precinct	31%
Southerner	31%
College graduate	30%
Independent	30%
Some college education	28%
Household earns \$100,000 or more annually	27%
Think life will be about the same for the next generation	27%
Midwesterner	25%
Approve of Congress	24%
30–44 age group	24%
Catholic	23%
Westerner	23%
Easterner	21%
Postgraduate	21%
Household earns \$50,000–\$74,999 annually	21%

Table 3.33 (Continued)

Group	2010 Share
Rural precinct	21%
Liberal	20%
Household earns \$30,000–\$49,999 annually	19%
Household earns less than \$30,000 annually	18%
Union household	18%
High school graduate	17%
Household finances have gotten better in last 2 years	15%
Household earns \$75,000–\$99,999 annually	15%
No religious affiliation	12%
18–29 age group	12%
Black	11%
Think current national economic conditions are performing well	10%
Hispanic/Latino	8%
Religion other than Protestant, Catholic, or Jewish	8%
Did not vote in last presidential election	5%
Voted for non-major-party candidate in last presidential election	4%
Gay or bisexual	3%
Did not complete high school	3%
First-time voter	3%
Jewish	2%
Race other than white, black, Hispanic/Latino, or Asian	2%
Asian	2%

Source: National exit polls. See the section in Chapter 2 entitled “Creating a Cumulative National Data Set: Selecting Exit Polls” (pp. 28–29).

Note: When using these results to make inferences about the active electorate, the standard errors should be calculated using Table 2.2 (p. 36), which is explained in the adjacent section of Chapter 2, “Analyzing Exit Poll Questions: Estimating Sampling Error” (pp. 34–36). For a guide on how to understand the tables and figures of this chapter, see the section in Chapter 2 entitled “Presenting and Discussing the Exit Poll Data: Reading Chapter 3” (pp. 37–39).

