

The Perpetuated Myth That the Polls Are Wrong



Donald Trump is not a popular president. To some people that matters. To some people it doesn't. Either way, it's the reality of the situation. As of today, the president's approval rating, according to the *Real Clear Politics* average of national polls, is at only 42%.

If you're a fervent Trump supporter, it's a safe bet that your reflexive response to that last sentence will be something like: *Are those the same polls that showed that Hillary Clinton was going to win the election?*

After all, just about every time a commentator references President Trump's approval ratings, that's the kind of snarky retort they're typically greeted with by the Trump faithful, whether it be through social media, website comment-sections, or in person (I'm speaking from personal experience on that last one).

I understood such a visceral response back in November, right

after Trump won the presidency. Swing-states that were supposed to go to Clinton went to Trump, and many analysts (sometimes dubbed “the elites”) were left dumbfounded over what happened. The default sentiment was that the much-cited poll numbers (nearly all of which suggested a Clinton victory) had been dead wrong.

Only, as it turned out, they *weren't* wrong. They actually ended up being pretty accurate.

Back in January, when the final vote tallies were released, we learned that Clinton had won the popular vote by about three million votes, which equates to 2.1 points. The average of national polls (which measure the popular vote), taken just prior to the election, showed Clinton with a 3.1 point lead. That's only a one-point difference between the polling estimate and the actual numbers, making the national polling results from 2016 even more accurate than in the 2012 election.

The problem was with a handful of *state* polls (which are notoriously less reliable). Local polling in Wisconsin (which none of the national pollsters participated in), for example, had Clinton with a 6.5 lead right before the election. As we all know, Trump ended up winning the state.

The national polls reflect general public sentiment in this country. They don't necessarily reflect the nuances of the electoral college. And though the national popular-vote isn't how the presidency is ultimately decided, it has historically been a good indicator of the electorate's attitude.

Of course, I'm not the first person to point out this distinction (not by a long shot). But being that it's been nearly five months since the election, and a large number of people are *still* denying the validity of national polling based on the election results (including President Trump at times), I think it's worth repeating.

After all, accurate data is a good thing. Is it not?

As Americans, we've understandably lost faith in many of our country's institutions, but national polling firms shouldn't be among them. They've turned out (for the most part) to be pretty darned good at what they do. They're not "out of touch" with people's sentiments, as is often suggested. They're actually very much reflective of the sentiments of Americans, as they proved in November of 2016.

So, when people thumb their noses at the notion that our president's job-performance ratings are legitimate, it's safe to say that those people are either in denial or blissfully ignorant on the matter.

And when they respond to those unflattering ratings by asking, "Are those the same polls that showed that Hillary Clinton was going to win the election?" the correct answer to that question is: "No. They are the same polls that accurately predicted the election results."

It's perfectly valid to argue that Trump isn't getting a fair shake, and that the mainstream media's overwhelming negative coverage of his presidency is contributing to his poor approval rating. But denying the premise that our president is viewed unfavorably by most of the country is both unfounded and foolish.

Thirty years ago, Sean's father mysteriously abandoned his family in the Colorado mountains. He was never seen again. **This October, the truth comes home.**

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