

Math 110

Poll Watching Election Assignment

October 31, 2008

Since there is an hour exam next week, there will be no formal textbook assignment. However, for Wednesday, I would like you to complete a brief election assignment. This will use what we know about polling and 95% confidence intervals.

The New York Times lists six states, Florida, Indiana, Missouri, Nevada, North Carolina and Ohio as “toss-up” states as of October 27, 2008. These states represent 89 electoral votes. It lists eight states, Colorado, Iowa, Minnesota, New Hampshire, New Mexico, Pennsylvania, Virginia, and Washington as leaning Democrat. These states represent 90 electoral votes. It also lists Georgia, West Virginia, and Montana, representing 23 electoral votes as leaning. The remaining states are solidly on one side or the other. (See <http://elections.nytimes.com/2008/president/whos-ahead/key-states/map.html>)

Information about polling in each state can be found on the National Polls or Battleground States page of Real Clear Politics (www.realclearpolitics.com). For each state there is a page tracking several polls. It shows individual polls and a graph tracking the poll averages since June. It also shows the sample size and margin of error for each poll.

The Assignment

1. Sign up for your home state and one toss-up or leaning state.
2. For your two states:
 - Record the names of three polls.
 - For the RCP average and each of the polls: record the most recent date, sample size (only for polls), margin of error, percentage for Obama-Biden, and the percentage for McCain-Pailin.
 - Briefly describe the trends in the RCP Poll Averages for each ticket from the graph on the state’s RCP page.
3. Watch/listen to the election results on Tuesday night and
 - Record the results for your two states.
 - For each poll note whether the election result was within the 68% confidence interval for each poll, the 95% confidence interval for the poll, or neither. (The 95% confidence interval should be one “MoE” (Margin of Error) and the 68% confidence interval should be half the MoE.)
 - Write up your data and observations in a word document for display in class on Wednesday. Your write up should be brief, hopefully less than a page, and show data clearly. You can do most of this before election night.
 - e-mail your page(s) to me by noon on Wednesday for display in class and a discussion of the accuracy of the polls.