

Michael Matros

Gauging the Political Winds

Political polling has come to play a prominent role in elections. Many North Carolina candidates turn to national firms. In addition, 4 major in-state pollsters and another 10 Tar Heel companies are in the business. Meanwhile, various polling methods have evolved. Seven aspects of a poll demand the attention of journalists and voters—including the population surveyed, the wording of the questions, and the sample size.

by J. Barlow Herget

During the final weeks of the 1984 Democratic primary campaign for governor, the major polls showed former Charlotte Mayor H. Edward Knox in the lead. The (Charlotte) Observer Poll had Knox at 24 percent and his nearest rival, Att. Gen. Rufus L. Edmisten, at 21 percent. Knox's own poll, taken by DeVries and Associates April 27-May 2, had Knox with 27 percent and Edmisten at 26 percent.

Nevertheless, in the days just before the May 8 primary, "I was very calm and reflective," recalls Michael W. Carmichael, Edmisten's campaign director for most of 1983 and coordinator for media and polling at the end of the primary campaign.¹ "We were very confident because we

J. Barlow Herget is a Raleigh-based writer.

understood our strategy," he continues. "We maintain our exact polling data closely. Very few people know about it because the information can be misleading. We don't let the polling intrude [on other campaign activities.]"

When the election results came in, "our polls were on target, absolutely!" says Carmichael. But he won't release the results of the Edmisten polls, so no comparison can be made with the Observer and DeVries results—or with the outcome of the election. After the votes were counted, Edmisten had 31 percent and Knox 26 percent. Edmisten went on to win the June 5 runoff against Knox, who never overcame Edmisten's lead.

Why the difference in polls? The Observer Poll and the DeVries results missed the final Edmisten count by 5 to 10 percentage points. Did they have some methodological flaw that could account for such a large error? Did the in-house Edmisten poll come closer, as Carmichael implies?

Because of the large field in the first primary, there were a large number of undecided voters, say DeVries and Carmichael. "The undecideds went to Edmisten," says DeVries. "That's where the error came."²

John Koslick, director of The Observer Poll, claims another defense. "Our polls are not predictions of the ultimate outcome," says Koslick. "We are presenting the reality on the day the polls were taken."

What roles have polls come to play in politics? How advanced is the science of polling—the questions themselves, the margin of error, the process of selecting those to be interviewed? How do techniques vary among the pollsters? Can polls be relied upon to predict the results of elections?

"I look to see if a poll is consistent with my gut reaction," says V.B. "Hawk" Johnson, long active in Democratic Party politics. "If it's at a wide variance with what my gut tells me, I know there may be a problem with it."

David Flaherty, state Republican Party chairman, and many others echo Johnson's skepticism. "In 1982, every poll we had two weeks before the election showed us winning, and we got creamed," says Flaherty. "It can turn around in two days."

Polling Comes of Age

Today, party pros might be cautious about polling results. But at the same time, many consider pollsters and campaign consultants the wise men of American politics. Why such a contradiction? As early as the 1824 presidential campaign, a Delaware poll predicted Andrew Jackson would beat John Quincy Adams. Even though the poll picked the wrong man (Jackson won four years later), the polling business had a foothold.

Polling was mostly campaign folderol until the 1920s when *The Literary Digest*, a popular magazine of the era, began predicting election results. The magazine canvassed prospective readers, a technique far removed from today's random sampling and screening of respondents for such factors as "likely voters." In 1936, *The Literary Digest* canvassed 10 million prospective readers on the Franklin Roosevelt-Alf Landon race and predicted a Landon upset. The magazine never recovered from the Roosevelt landslide, but political polling, ironically, not only survived but became serious business.

In 1932, George Gallup helped his mother-in-law run for office in Iowa, and with others, including Elmo Roper, began bringing a methodology to public opinion research. In 1936, Gallup and other pollsters achieved widespread recognition by calling the Roosevelt election right when *The Literary Digest* was wrong, thus gaining respect for their "scientific" approach. Gallup overcame several notable errors—such as predicting Thomas Dewey would beat Harry Truman—to reach the pinnacle of success long before his death in 1984.

A brood of hotshot newcomers are breaking their political necks to take Gallup's place at the head of the pecking order. But there is a significant difference between Gallup and the new polling whiz kids on the American scene. Many of the best known upstarts now work directly for candidates,

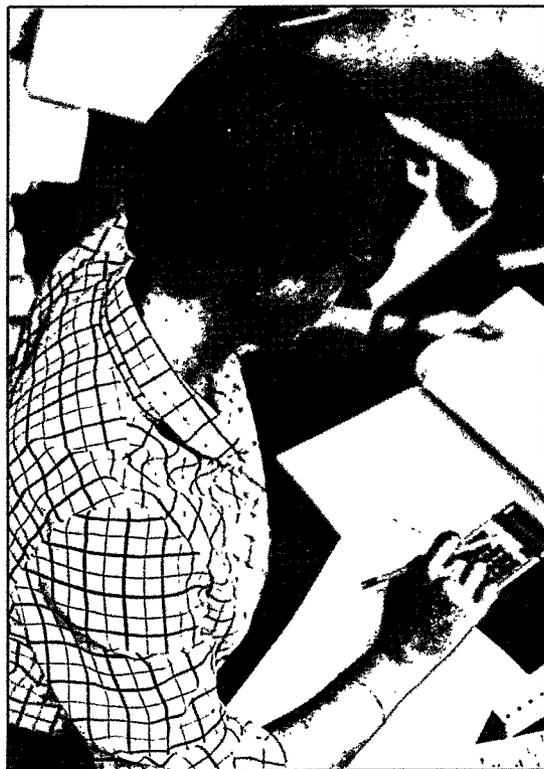


Photo courtesy of DeVries & Associates, Inc.

not only as pollsters but as consultants for overall campaign strategy. Some of the early pollsters worked directly for candidates (e.g., Roper for Jacob Javits, Lou Harris for John Kennedy), but not until recent years did so many pollsters become integral to the entire campaign operation.

"Pollsters pretty much work for one party or another," says Walter DeVries, who heads the only North Carolina-based company listed in the National Association of Political Consultants. "You want to be comfortable ideologically. Often you're giving advice, and your reputation goes with how the campaign goes."

The major national Republican pollsters, according to North Carolina Republican pollster Brad Hayes, are Richard Wirthlin of Santa Ana, Calif., Lance Tarrance of Houston, Arthur Finkelstein of Washington, D.C., and Robert Teeter of Detroit. Wirthlin moved his family to Washington

to secure the means to get elected," writes Blumenthal. "The parties were superseded by the consultants."

Pollsters are fixed in the landscape of North Carolina politics as well. In the current U.S. Senate campaign, James B. Hunt Jr. employs Peter Hart, while Jesse Helms uses Arthur Finkelstein. The top three finishers in the Democratic gubernatorial primary all had national agencies. Edmisten used Caddell and Joseph Napolitan of Washington, D.C.; Knox worked with DeVries (a national and "state" pollster); and D.M. "Lauch" Faircloth contracted with Hamilton and Associates of Chevy Chase, Md. In addition, state Sen. Robert B. Jordan III (D-Montgomery) hired Peter Hart's company in capturing the Democratic nomination for lieutenant governor.

Public opinion research, which includes but goes beyond polling on specific political races, is becoming a cottage industry in North Carolina. Compiling a complete list of pollsters is like trying to find all the dandelions in a yard. Some, like DeVries, work for particular candidates. Others, like The Observer Poll and The Carolina Poll, conducted at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill School of Journalism, have no affiliation to party or candidate. A fourth major pollster in the state, Long Marketing Inc., operates its state poll on a subscription basis, and is said to be associated with conservative candidates.

Besides the "big four," 10 other North Carolina companies, individuals, or agencies conduct political or opinion polls on a regular basis. Several of these, like the Carolina Poll, have ties to state universities: Steven J. Lerner (UNC-Chapel Hill), Yevonne Brannon (Center for Urban Affairs, N.C. State University), Roger Lowery (UNC-Wilmington), and Associate Dean Schley Lyons (UNC-Charlotte). Within state government, the N.C. Office of Budget and Management conducts a semi-annual survey on public issues, called the N.C. Citizen Survey. (See sidebar on page 6 for more on the 14 state groups and selected national agencies.)

Despite the recent growth of polling operations, the four largest and best established still set the tone for the quality of polling in North Carolina and the extent to which polls are taken as serious predictors of political races. Below are profiles of the "big four," in alphabetical order.

The Carolina Poll

In 1981, Phil Meyer brought his experience with the Knight-Ridder newspaper chain to the UNC-CH School of Journalism—and to the Carolina Poll. Robert L. Stevenson and Jane Brown, also faculty members at the School of Journalism, were operating the poll before Meyer came. Since

*Public opinion
research . . . is
becoming a
cottage industry
in North Carolina.*

because of the demands of the Reagan White House.

A threesome has emerged among the leading Democrats. Patrick Caddell rode the Jimmy Carter presidency to national prominence and recently has worked for Gary Hart, among others. Peter Hart polls for Walter Mondale. William Hamilton, whose company worked for John Glenn, also holds major national stature.

Some of these national pollsters call for a "continuing political campaign," as Patrick Caddell puts it, using polls to help officeholders overcome voter alienation and govern more effectively. In *The Permanent Campaign*, an analysis of the new breed of political consultants, Sidney Blumenthal links the increasing power of pollsters/consultants to the era of television and the decline of old-style political machines.³ "A candidate seeking office had to go to a place other than party headquarters

THE CAROLINA POLL

Meyer's arrival, he has worked with every poll, with either Stevenson or Brown.

Meyer began polling for newspapers in 1962 and later attended Harvard University as a Nieman Fellow in 1966-67 where he studied opinion research. He wrote a book called *Precision Journalism* in 1973 and today is happy to be back in Chapel Hill where he did graduate work.

The Carolina Poll, which conducts two polls a year, considers the public as its "client." Students and faculty decide the questions; Meyer, Stevenson, and Brown oversee the actual wording to reduce the chances of bias. They use student interviewers, who often lack the experience and professional objectivity needed in good survey work. The School of Journalism helps fund the poll, which means students usually conduct it as a part of course work or student jobs. Newspapers and associations also support the poll through donations to the School of Journalism.

Using students as the primary interviewers has its weaknesses, says Meyer. "We all suffer from the 'sample-of-one' problem. We tend to assume the rest of the world is like you and me, but it's not." Meyer and other pollsters interviewed for this article emphasized the importance of an interviewer being noncommittal in tone when sampling opinion.

The Carolina Poll normally takes 10 to 15 minutes per interview, short by many pollsters' standards. It also uses a distinctive screening process, surveying *those who will talk, whether they are registered voters or not*. "We're interested in various social indicators, not just how they will vote," says Meyer. "And we want to be consistent from year to year."

The interviewers, under Meyer's supervision, sift out the respondents and decide which ones to use in the final poll results, using criteria such as "registered voters" and "likely to vote." The Carolina Poll may interview as many as 600 to 1,200 but end up with a final sample of 400 or even fewer *who are likely to vote*.

In its February 1984 poll, "the scale of respondents most likely to vote was based on three questions," says Meyer: "if they were currently registered in the precinct in which they live; if they always vote; and if, on a scale of 1 to 10, they assign themselves the top rating on intention to vote in the May primary." After screening all respondents with these questions, the poll reported the results in two ways: "Support among all prospective voters in Democratic primary" and "Support among those most likely to vote."

Aware that such a sampling method has drawbacks, Meyer has sought advice from DeVries and from The Observer Poll. "We've made some enhancements," says Meyer. "I'm pretty happy with 400 respondents for a statewide poll if we minimize chance for errors on those," says Meyer. "We did pretty well on the (Democratic) primary with fewer than 300 voters."

Meyer justified this assessment in a May 14 memo to supporters of The Carolina Poll: "The outcome of the May 8 primary was remarkably close to the poll we took Feb. 17-March 1. . . . The average error among the six major candidates was 3.4 percent."⁴ But the poll results missed the Knox vote by *6 percentage points* (20 percent in the poll, 26 percent in the first primary) and was under the Edmisten tally by a whopping *11 percentage points* (20 percent in the poll, 31 percent in the vote).⁵

Walter DeVries and Associates

Walter DeVries, who holds a Ph.D. in psychology, came to North Carolina in 1971 after working for Michigan Governor George Romney and teaching at the Harvard Institute of Politics. In 1972, he gained statewide attention when he helped Hargrove "Skipper" Bowles upset then Lt. Gov. Pat Taylor for the Democratic gubernatorial nomination. For several years in the 1970s, DeVries based his work at Duke University, where he and journalist Jack Bass co-authored *The Transformation of Southern Politics*. DeVries, who has done polling for *The News and Observer* of Raleigh, currently works out of Wrightsville Beach and has clients from New Orleans to Alaska.

If you hire DeVries, you're not just paying to have someone poll for name recognition. DeVries will first want to know about you and why you're running for office. "I ask them what they want people to say about their administration once they've left office," says DeVries, referring to his initial sessions with prospective clients.

Next he will probably conduct a "baseline" poll. Many political analysts believe this is the most important part of a pollster's job. It tells a candidate the concerns of voters, the strengths and weaknesses of a candidate (e.g., name recognition), and those of his or her opponent. A baseline poll takes time and money, \$15,000 to \$30,000 in North Carolina. DeVries reviews the results of a baseline poll with a candidate and advises him or her on campaign

Continued on page 7

DeVries
ASSOCIATES, INC.

Pollsters Working in North Carolina

Name/Phone	Address	Major Clients (N.C. and Others)
Yevonne Brannon (919) 737-3211	Urban Affairs, NCSU P. O. Box 7401 Raleigh, N.C. 27695	N.C. Office of Budget and Management (N.C. Citizen's Survey, see below)
Pat Caddell (202) 223-6764	1750 Pennsylvania Ave. Suite 301 Washington, D.C. 20006	Att. Gen. Rufus Edmisten for Gov., Sen. Gary Hart for Pres., Gov. Mario Cuomo (N.Y.), Gov. Michael Dukakis (Mass.), Mayor Wilson Goode (Phil., Pa.), and Mayor Harold Washington (Chicago, Ill.)
Carolina Poll (Phil Meyer) (919) 962-4085	UNC Journalism School 109 Howell Hall Chapel Hill, N.C. 27514	N.C. Newspapers
DeVries and Assoc. (Walter DeVries) (919) 256-3976	Suite F, The Landing 530 Causeway Dr. Wrightsville Beach, N.C. 28480	Former Mayor Eddie Knox (Charlotte) for Gov., SEMTA (Detroit), Alaska Committee, Mayor Dutch Morial (New Orleans, La.)
Noel Dunivant (919) 821-5185	Suite 809 19 W. Hargett St. Raleigh, N.C. 27601	NA
FacFind Inc. (Pat Kyle) (704) 568-6820	7113 Lakeside Dr. Charlotte, N.C. 28215	Former Mayor Eddie Knox (Charlotte) for Gov., Cong. William Hefner, and N.C. Rep. James Black
Focus Group (Steve Lerner) (919) 929-7759	P.O. Box 3767 Chapel Hill, N.C. 27515	N.C. Sen. Robert Jordan for Lt. Gov., Susan Green for Congress, WBTV and WTVD
Gallup Poll (James Shriver) (609) 924-9600	53 Bank St. Princeton, N.J. 08540	News media, including a consortium of N.C. newspapers
Green, Smith and Crockett (704) 364-3855	3719 Latrobe Dr., Suite 830 Charlotte, N.C. 28211	NA
Brad Hayes Marketing Assoc. (704) 365-2832	P. O. Box 221488 Charlotte, N.C. 28222	Cong. James Martin for Gov.
Peter Hart Research Assoc. (202) 234-5570	1724 Connecticut Ave., N.W. Washington, D.C. 20009	Gov. James B. Hunt Jr. for Senate, N.C. Sen. Robert Jordan for Lt. Gov. and Walter Mondale for Pres.
William Hamilton & Staff (Harrison Hickman) (301) 656-2200	Suite 1345 5454 Wisconsin Ave. Chevy Chase, Md. 20815	Former Commerce Sec. Lauch Faircloth for Gov., Lt. Gov. Martha Layne Collins (Ky.) for Gov., Gov. Edwin Edwards (La.), House Speaker Tip O'Neill (Mass.), and Sen. John Glenn for Pres.
Long Marketing Inc. (Bill Long) (919) 292-4146	122 Keeling Road East Greensboro, N.C. 27410	NA
Roger Lowery (919) 395-3000	UNC-Wilmington College Rd. Wilmington, N.C. 28405	Wilmington <i>Star-News</i> , WWAY-TV
Schley Lyons (704) 364-4299	UNC-Charlotte, Highway 49 Charlotte, N.C. 28205	NA
N.C. Citizens Survey (Lynn Little) (919) 733-7061	N.C. Budget Office Administration Bldg. 116 W. Jones St. Raleigh, N.C. 27611	Public opinion (state funded)
The Observer Poll KPC/Research John Koslick (704) 379-6342	P. O. Box 32188 Charlotte, N.C. 28232	<i>Charlotte Observer</i> , <i>Miami Herald</i> , Knight-Ridder
Lillian Woo (919) 847-0113	1200 Hunting Ridge Raleigh, N.C. 27609	NA

strategy. If the baseline shows that voters above all want good public education, for example, and are willing to pay for it, then DeVries will encourage the candidate to make that one of the campaign themes.

DeVries, like most national pollsters working with a specific candidate, will conduct "tracking" polls as well to see if the campaign strategy is working. Pollsters use a tracking system to keep abreast of shifts in voter opinions in critical campaign periods such as after a TV debate or a media blitz, or near election day. DeVries' tracking method, a rotating system, works like this. In a sample of 600, 200 persons might be interviewed every day for some specified number of days; each day, the 200 responses gathered first are dropped from the results and the most recent added. Hence, the results, based on a constant sample of 600, are constantly being updated—or tracked.

Tracking polls generally cost about half the price of a baseline poll, and they keep a candidate up-to-date on shifts in the electorate. The public changes its mind quickly. Tracking polls help candidates, particularly in major contests like the gubernatorial or U.S. Senate races in North Carolina this year, make strategic adjustments as the campaign unfolds right up to election day.

DeVries screens respondents for voter registration, party affiliation, whether the person voted in the last comparable election, and the probability of voting in the election covered by the poll. "What's the use of asking people their opinion if they're not going to vote," says DeVries, "and then basing a prediction on non-voter responses?" He supplements his polling with research on "focus groups" (women, minorities, etc.), often video-taped, and helps shape basic campaign strategy, select campaign issues, and produce TV/media ads. He works for moderate and liberal Democrats and recommends that a candidate for an average statewide campaign allocate about \$100,000 for public opinion polling. His current clients are in North Carolina, Alaska, New Orleans, and Michigan.

KPC/Research, The Observer Poll

John Koslick, marketing and research director of KPC/Research, has run The Observer Poll since 1978. Koslick, who has a Masters in Business Administration with training in psychology and statistics, came from Dayton, Ohio, and began building up the computer program used in the KPC/Research opinion research. "We had antiquated software and part-time interviewers. We purchased [the computer program called] Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) and started converting our part-time employees to full-time," he says.



KPC/Research, a subsidiary of the Knight Publishing Company (hence "KPC"), bills itself as "Charlotte's most sophisticated research firm." It conducts The Observer Poll and other special polls for Knight newspapers and private companies. Located in the Observer building, KPC/Research provides research and marketing for the paper's advertising and editorial department. It also does work on a contract basis for private companies, for county government, and for other Knight-Ridder newspapers such as *The Miami Herald*.

"We did one job for a South Carolina candidate awhile back," said Koslick, "but the company decided that it was too much of a conflict since we might have to report on the race, too. So, we don't do any polling for candidates now."

KPC also has a policy of not publishing results of its polls a week before an election. "You have to be careful about timing," cautioned Koslick. "A candidate might release a poll right after a heavy media blitz." The polls can be manipulated by candidates who may try to translate a front-runner's spot into fundraising success. There are parallels in other fields, says Koslick. "If you look at those baseball teams who are in first place or in the running, you'll find that they usually have good attendance. Those who aren't near the top have poor attendance."

Koslick has given the poll respectability, says DeVries, who ranks it as the best in-state poll. Republican pollster Brad Hayes, also based in Charlotte, agrees that Koslick has brought the poll into high regard. But everyone does not share that judgment, particularly persons who work for losing candidates.

Rodney Maddox, the campaign manager for Tom Gilmore in the recent gubernatorial election, thinks The Observer Poll hurt Gilmore's chances to raise money and to attract voters undecided between Gilmore and Knox, the former Charlotte mayor. "Shortly before the election, The Observer Poll gave us three percent when even the other *candidates'* polls were showing us with six and seven percent," says Maddox. Gilmore finished

fourth with 8.6 percent of the vote, nearly 6 percent more than the results of the last Observer Poll. Koslick says the poll has a typical margin of error of 3.5 percent.

But most pollsters agree with DeVries and Hayes that The Observer Poll has a high scientific quality to its work. Dr. Patricia Kyle of Charlotte ranks the poll as one of the best in the state "because of the academic purity of their work." Kyle, a former political science professor, is president of FacFind Inc., a research and planning firm that does political polling and consultation.

For a statewide election, The Observer Poll uses a sample of 800 to 1,000 and claims a margin of error of 3.5 percent. It screens respondents for voter registration, party affiliation, and to some extent whether the person voted in the last comparable election. The main factor in deciding whether to work for a particular paper, says Koslick, "is whether they will be objective with the data."

KPC/Research works most often for *The Charlotte Observer*, *The Miami Herald*, the *Lexington (Ky.) Herald-Leader*, and the Knight-Ridder Washington bureau. The poll works in such a way that reporters can call back respondents for in-depth interviews.



Long Marketing North Carolina Poll

A Duke University alumnus who started his business in York, Pa., in 1945, Bill Long notes that his was one of two companies out of 50 national polls that predicted Truman would beat Dewey in 1948. He moved to North Carolina in 1961 and has operated his corporation's Long Marketing North Carolina Poll (LMNCP) since April 1970. He charges varying subscription rates for 12 monthly issues of his poll, currently from \$15 to \$132.

Of the "big four," Bill Long elicits the strongest comments from colleagues and bystanders and he returns in kind. "I couldn't ethically comment on other polls, and I don't give a damn about university pollsters," he said in a telephone interview. "We print our demographics at the top of page one of every LMNCP poll. What about the others?"

Long does not follow traditional polling methodology. Instead of using random sampling and telephone interviewers, like virtually all major polling operations, he uses a mail survey

to elicit the opinion of what he calls "decision-makers" in the state. He has copyrighted the term "Focused Sampling" for this method. "Via an eight-year test from 1970 through 1978, we found mail was the most productive and most reliable for North Carolina," says Long. "So since January 1979 we have used mail for our LMNCP poll; on other [polls] we use a combination."

The mailing system reaches into all 100 counties, says Long, and thus into all major and minor markets. For each monthly poll, Long uses 1,000 to 1,050 respondents, but he will not reveal the sample size nor the identity of individuals he uses for the mailed survey itself. "We developed it [the sample], and we're not going to tell anybody how it works," Long insists. "It's copyrighted."

He claims a zero margin of error, "because in a mail poll, [there is] no interviewer interjection—direct responses only," says Long. "All you have to do is tabulate it correctly." To defend the accuracy of his sample, he notes with pride that his poll forecast John East's upset of Robert Morgan in the 1980 U.S. Senate race. In the 1984 primaries, Long says his survey predicted correctly 13 out of 17 races for "major state offices."

In addition to working on a subscription basis, Long works for candidates and gets 50 percent down and 50 percent on delivery of the poll-results report. He said his prices "are competitive and the payment method eliminates the deadbeats."

While Long is said to be a maverick, he expresses concern for many of the same things that more traditional pollsters cite, such as adequate demographics, using registered voters, and location of people sampled. He also declares that if there are too many "undecided" returns, then the sample is worthless in predicting election outcomes.

"We wish to be properly classified as a public opinion research firm," Long wrote on his completed survey, which the N.C. Center for Public Policy Research sent to all major pollsters working in North Carolina. "We are not pollsters—it rhymes with hucksters."

Conclusion

V.O. Key, the political scientist who broke much new ground in political analysis, described the old-style electorate like this: "It judges retrospectively; it commands prospectively insofar as it expresses either approval or disapproval of that which has happened before."⁶

Political consultants who double as pollsters have changed that classic depiction of the elec-

torate, perhaps forever. Their surveys of public mood can shape the issues as much as they reflect them. "The new political operators have hastened the weakening of the old-style political machines by identifying discontent and appealing to it, in order to create swing voters who can provide the margin of victory," writes Sidney Blumenthal.⁷

The pollsters working in North Carolina have a major impact on elections—shaping campaign strategy, generating news for the press, affecting how campaign contributors perceive the frontrunners, and perhaps most importantly, helping to shape the mood of the electorate. "In using polling data prior to an election, newspaper publishers should be sensitive that they may be creating news rather than reporting news," says Rodney Maddox, the Gilmore campaign manager.

Despite the growing power of pollsters, political savants still subscribe to that time-worn phrase, "If you live by the polls, you die by the polls." Or in modern jargon, don't rely entirely on pollsters' computer printouts. "They're not a precision instrument like a thermometer," says Ferrel Guillory, associate editor of *The News and Observer* of Raleigh. "They can pick up trends and movements."

Raleigh attorney John T. Bode, campaign coordinator for state Sen. Robert B. Jordan III in his successful race for the Democratic nomination for lieutenant governor, put it this way. Polls "tend to confirm your gut feelings. They don't tell you a whole lot you don't already know." But Bode finds them critical to overall campaign strategy and very helpful at the outset in determining voter issues and where a candidate needs to spend his time.

Political analysts and campaign operators view polls as essential to their work. Yet many view them with caution, both for their power over the electorate and for their imprecision. "Pollster and client prejudice not uncommonly shape a poll's results even before the data is collected," writes Larry Sabato in *The Rise of Political Consultants*. "The wording of questions is unavoidably prejudiced, sometimes culturally, always attitudinally."⁸ (For more on the elements of a good scientific poll, see sidebar on page 12.)

Polls, continues Sabato, are "almost certain to be flawed in at least a couple of respects. The sooner this is accepted and understood by candidates, press, and public, the healthier and more realistic will be the perceptions of the polling consultant's role in the election campaign and beyond."

The possibilities for misusing polls, ironically, seem to be increasing even as the technology keeps improving. In North Carolina, as in the nation, polls have taken on a fundamental

new role in politics. "As political parties have weakened, polls have stepped in with new technology to replace the intelligence and feedback once provided by precinct captains," says Guillory.

In the end, polls are likely to be judged by their respective track records. The enlightened voter, meanwhile, will remember that a poll is only a snapshot in time of how the electorate is posed on a particular day. And a voter is advised to remember that tomorrow is another day. □

FOOTNOTES

¹Carmichael has now returned to his duties as special assistant to the Attorney General.

²Phil Meyer, who directs The Carolina Poll at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill School of Journalism (see article text for more on the poll), believes strongly that undecided voters should be taken out of the sampling base for a direct comparison with final election results. In a prepublication review of this article by the leading state pollsters and others, only Meyer raised this concern. The comparisons made in this article between poll results and final election outcomes do not take out the undecided voters.

At the recent American Association for Public Opinion Research conference, a roundtable discussion on this issue concluded that undecideds should be taken out for comparison with election results, says Meyer. Polls have tried to allocate for undecideds before the election, but it's difficult, he says. Nevertheless, in November, says Meyer, The Carolina Poll will allocate the undecideds to the various candidates, and thus its pre-election poll results will show no undecideds.

³Sidney Blumenthal, *The Permanent Campaign*, New York: Simon and Schuster, 1982, p. 18.

⁴In the May 8, 1984, Democratic primary for governor, the six major candidates finished like this: Rufus Edmisten (31 percent), Edward Knox (26 percent), D.M. "Lauch" Faircloth (16 percent), Thomas O. Gilmore (8.6 percent), James C. Green (8.5 percent), and John R. Ingram (7.8 percent). Other candidates received 2.2 percent of the vote.

⁵Meyer believes these figures are misleading for two reasons. First, this article uses the poll's results on "prospective voters" rather than "most likely to vote." The poll released both sets of figures but highlighted the "prospective voters" in its press release. Newspapers covered the "prospective voters" figures, with quoted comments from Meyer on these results. In retrospect, says Meyer, "we should've stressed the most-likely-to-vote results since they are more accurate."

Second, Meyer says the figures shown in the text include the undecided voters reported by The Carolina Poll rather than the "repercentaged" results with the undecideds out (see footnote number 2 for more on the "undecided" issue). Applying a "repercentage" system *after an election* works like this, says Meyer: Say the sample was 600 with Edmisten getting 25 percent (150) and undecideds getting 20 percent (120). To repercentage Edmisten's percent to compare with election results (where there are no undecideds), the sample size would be reduced by the number of undecideds (600 - 120 = 480); then Edmisten's "repercentage" would be calculated by dividing his number of "votes" in the poll (150) by the reduced sample size (480), which equals 31 percent, the same as the actual result of 31 percent.

⁶Cited in Blumenthal, p. 333.

⁷Blumenthal, p. 300.

⁸Larry J. Sabato, *The Rise of Political Consultants*, New York: Basic Books Inc., 1981, p. 104.