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SOME EFFECTS OF QUESTION WORDING AND QUESTION
ADMINISTRATION ON THE PREDICTION OF VOTING BEHAVIOUR

A thesis presented in partial fulfilment
of the requirements
for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy
in Marketing
at Massey University

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1996

ABSTRACT

The comparatively short history of polling has seen numerous instances of predictions which failed to match the final election outcome. Of the many possible explanations put forward to explain the divergencies that have occurred, the potential for error introduced by the undecided group has come under increasing scrutiny.

A series of surveys conducted prior to the 1993 New Zealand General Election examined the effects of three question wording or question administration variables: contextual questions; an increase in the level of confidentiality, and a probability scale, on the proportion of undecided respondents and on the accuracy of the estimates obtained. In addition, the research examined the effects of various weighting procedures. The surveys also used a probability scale to estimate respondents' likelihood of voting.

The findings suggest that, although contextual questions, the use of a secret ballot and the use of a probability scale will reduce or eliminate the undecided group, this reduction is not synonymous with an increase in the accuracy of the estimates obtained. Although proportional allocation of undecided respondents resulted in more accurate voting intention estimates than the treatments examined, some weighting factors appeared to improve the accuracy obtained by proportional allocation alone.

While replication research is required, the probability scale provided accurate estimates of turnout.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I owe a debt to Professor Philip Gendall that is larger than I care to imagine (though I am confident he has reckoned it up). Phil always had the time to listen to me discuss problems I was attempting to address; his helpful comments gave me much to reflect on, and his meticulous research skills taught me a great deal about survey research. Phil's anarchic sense of humour provided light relief in the bleaker moments of this study and taught me that life is not as serious as I sometimes imagine it to be.

My supervisor, Tony Lewis, provided me with thoughtful and constructive feedback and gave me a great deal of support and encouragement. My co-supervisor, Hugh Morton, also responded promptly to my queries and I am grateful for his expertise.

Much as I sometimes begrudged it, Don Esslemont's advice often provided me with a clearer perspective on my work. Often irascible, always provocative, Don gave his advice willingly, and his comments invariably helped me produce better work than I would otherwise have done. Bradburn & Sudman suggested a particularly sound method of pre-testing a questionnaire involved asking a group of disinterested colleagues to comment on it. They warned that this was often a humbling process and it would be remiss of me not to acknowledge the role Don and Phil played in teaching me humility.

Robert Neale read much of this thesis; his perceptive and lovingly ironic comments revitalised both my writing and my sense of humour.

The Massey University Research Fund (MURF) awarded me several generous grants which helped to fund the cost of this study; in addition, the Women's Research Award I received from MURF enabled me to devote more time to my research. Richard Long, Editor of *The Dominion*, and John Harvey, Editor of the *Manawatu Evening Standard*, also helped to fund this research by subscribing to the survey results.

As well as academic acknowledgements, I need also to thank my family for their unflinching support throughout my research. My mother has always encouraged me to strive to achieve the goals I believe are worthwhile and, as she has on so many other occasions, she offered me help whenever I was beset by the crises that seemed to occur at regular intervals during this project.

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Finally, I want to plagiarise one of the finest crafters of writing I know, Robert Neale, so I can thank the most important people, Anna and Phil, who made this, as they make everything, worthwhile.

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