

Kelly Grimsley

28 November 2022

Political Conflict within the US Midterm Election

As the midterms ended over the last few weeks, the topic of polling errors and inaccuracies in predicting winners in certain elections has been at the forefront of the media. The way in which the public digests polls leading up to an election can have either an undetectable or major influence on how people vote, which is why it is so important that polls are conducted with high accuracy and with minimal margins of error. The credibility of political polling in the year of political partisanship is now highly contested. In the 2022 midterm elections, the gaps in the margins of errors and the inability to account for youth voters have led to the question of improving how polls are conducted before an election. Our lectures and readings over the last 14 weeks in American Politics offer an explanation as to why these inaccuracies occurred.

Midterm elections occur in the off years of presidential elections. The last midterm election that occurred was in 2018, and the differences in voting have shifted in favor of both parties in certain counties, partially due to redistricting that occurred following the 2020 census. The importance of midterm elections is that they can change the dynamic of congress; that is, the House of Representatives and the Senate seats are voted on during these elections. As we've seen from the voting results, the House of Representatives has shifted from a democratic majority to a republican, which will inevitably result in a drastic shift in the legislation that is to be voted on over the next two years. However, excluding the Georgia Senate runoff election results, the democrats have managed to maintain their narrow lead in the Senate, which means the tensions in the Senate will remain stagnate as there is not a large enough margin to end the filibuster. It is

known that partisanship is at its peak in 2022 political discourse, especially surrounding elections and that both the democratic and republican parties were pouring as much funding as possible into the midterm elections supporting candidates of their party. With, it came as a shock to both parties that neither performed as positively as the polls were entailing once the election took place. The margins of error, which is the percentage at which polls are predicted to be inaccurate, were widely off base. As we gained knowledge of the margin of error from class discussion, we learned that those consuming polls must understand that the accuracy of a poll is determined by such a margin and ignoring such a statistic can be detrimental to the consumer, and if the margin itself is inaccurate, then the whole poll should not be considered when predicting the election. An example of an inaccurate election poll would be how the results such as the Pennsylvania Senate race being won by John Fetterman over Trump-supported candidate Mehmet Oz. Polling suggested that Oz would be up from anywhere between 2 to 6 points depending on the poller. Marist College conducted a poll with 1,152 pollsters which concluded that Oz would be up by 6 points among registered voters. With a margin of error of only 3.8 points, this poll conducted only 8 days before the election was far off from what the people of Pennsylvania voted for, and with the knowledge I gained from reading about how polls should properly be conducted, I can safely say that this poll should be deemed largely inaccurate.

Like the Pennsylvania Senate seat, the Senate seat in Arizona which was a predicted win by republicans was called for democratic candidate Mark Kelly over republican Blake Masters. While some pollsters such as Trafalgar and Data for Progress suggested that Masters would win by a slight margin, most other pollsters assumed Kelly would win by a narrow lead if any with a 2.9% margin of error, which presumably was not the case. Kelly took the seat in Arizona with 51% of the votes compared to Masters' 46% of the votes. This inability to account for

democratic voters' turnout in polling can be a result of either not accounting for the younger generation of voters, which was a mistake pollsters made throughout the nation, or it could be a result of toss-up voters who may have voted republican in previous elections who shifted to a democratic vote. This course provided me with the information that oftentimes polls can lead to such inaccurate margins because of their lack of representation of the entire population with their sampling, which was the case in Arizona's Senate race.

While these inaccurate polls were mostly at the fault of partisan-led pollsters, their influence in the media and who turned out to vote was largely influential. It can be argued that the predictions based on both the 2018 midterm elections and the 2020 presidential elections had resulted in the inability to account for the younger generation of voters, as previously stated. In diving into how voters vote in our class readings, I was given the ability to understand why such a lack of representation in youth voters mattered in this election. In previous midterm elections, the youth voter turnout remained consistently around 20%. Because many pollsters banked on the fact that the youth wouldn't cast a ballot, their lack of representation in the polls failed them. In this election, 27% of voters from 18-24 years old turned in a ballot, which is the second highest turnout in this age category ever recorded. This demographic has an increased frequency of engaging in the political process by participating in protests, keeping up with the news and current events, and discussing politics with their peers. This political efficacy among the younger demographic has led to an increase in issue-based voting in 2022 with issues such as abortion, gun control, student loan forgiveness, and environmental policies on the ballot. With policies so likely to affect their lives, it's not uncommon that the youth would turn to vote for representatives who share a similar stance on these issues as they do, which was a major topic of discussion with my peers throughout a large portion of this semester. Breaking down how and

why voters will act the way they do is a result of what resources they have available to them with the concept of the paradox of voting explains why the turnout was so high within this demographic, which is why the pollsters are receiving such criticism for the lack of youth representation. The youth has high political efficacy and are very aware of the political climate, and a lot to lose if their vote isn't counted. With this, the media and the public are left to question why pollsters didn't take the initiative to gather data on this growing group of voters when such large portions of the group are more likely to participate politically and who are most likely to be impacted by the policies to be voted on once the election concludes.

The problem with polling is not the inaccuracies, because those who are knowledgeable in the political realm know that there is always going to be room for error when conducting polls. From what this course's readings have taught me, gaining an accurate depiction of how the public is going to vote merely by sampling a fraction of the population is nearly impossible, and most educated voters know that. The harm of the inaccuracies is to those who are less educated on how they work. Many polls may reflect bias based on who is conducting them, and many may just have a poor sample size that doesn't truly represent most voters in a population. These flaws in polling can lead to the media manipulating how their audience perceives election results, which as we read in class with the examples following the 2020 presidential election, can have very negative consequences for the security of our democracy. If polls are transparent about their biases, and if they accurately account for the majority of the demographic of voters, this will ensure that the integrity of our democracy will be protected and that there won't be a skewed perception within the public of how an election should result.

Right and Left React to Midterm Results, New York Times

<https://www.nytimes.com/2018/11/08/us/politics/midterms-right-left.html?searchResultPosition=2>)

How Different Groups Voted According to Exit Polls and AP Vote-Cast, Washington Post

<https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/2022/11/08/exit-polls-2022-elections/>)

Final Election Update: The Forecast Is More Or Less Back Where It Started, Five Thirty-Eight

<https://fivethirtyeight.com/features/final-2022-election-forecast/>)

Young Voters Issue Agenda Poll, Alliance for Youth Action

<https://allianceforyouthaction.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/24/2020/07/HIT-Alliance-Issue-Survey-Deck-CR.pdf>)