

Lies, Damn Lies & Navigating The 2020 Presidential Campaign Trail

GOlympics

Great Moments in Political Numbers History

1. On the eve of the 1948 U.S. Presidential election, the Gallup Poll (which had correctly predicted the three prior Presidential elections) gave challenger Thomas Dewey a 5-percentage-point edge over President Truman.

This pre-election perception prompted the *Chicago Tribune* to prematurely call the election for the New York governor.



As it turned out, Gallup's "quota sampling" approach had a fatal flaw--what was Gallup's Achilles' heel?

- a) Within the demographic quotas (such as age, race, and gender) pollsters were allowed to choose whom they polled
- b) They failed to adequately reach less-wealthy voters
- c) Because it had correctly predicted the prior three elections, Gallup was overconfident in its methodology
- d) All of the above

Go Figure, further:

In what ways are current polls under-counting (or over-counting) certain segments of the population?

2. Michael Bloomberg spent over \$500 million in a three-month span before dropping out of the race on March 4th, the day after Super Tuesday. What proportion of his net worth is that?



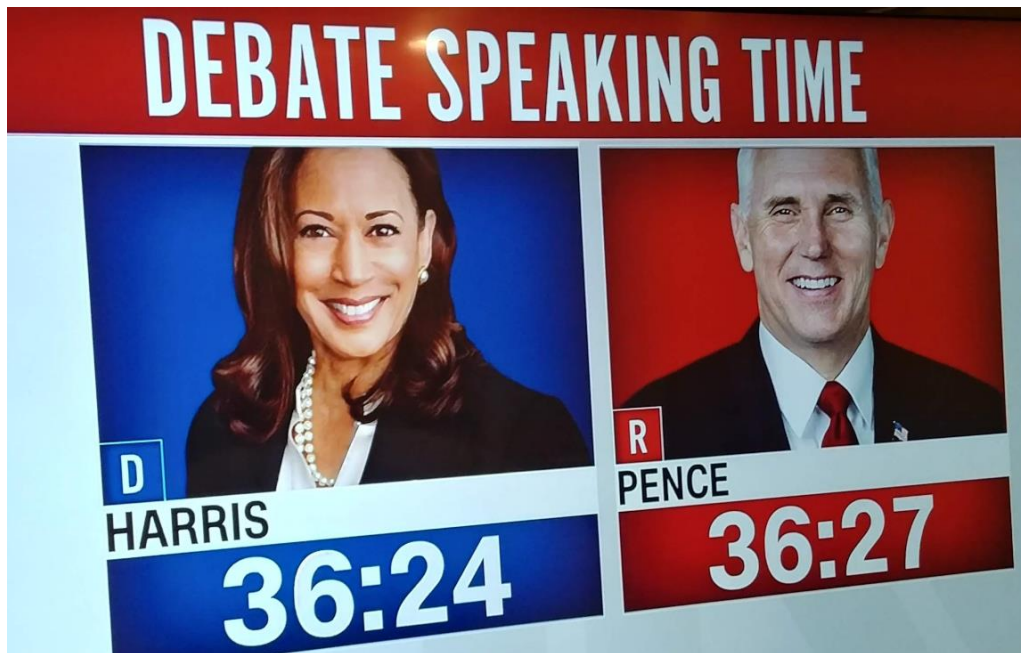
Image credit: Wealthy Gorilla

- a) 9%
- b) Less than 1%
- c) 2.7%

Go Figure, further: What does net worth mean? How does it compare to annual income?

Obvious Observations

3. During the October 7th Vice Presidential Debate, incumbent Mike Pence and challenger Kamala Harris had almost equal speaking time. Does this mean that the event was fair and balanced? *If so, why? If not, why not?*



4. Since Donald Trump became President, the *Washington Post* has tracked false and misleading claims that he has made.

The Washington Post

In coverage of prior administrations, the Post has tracked a number of previous presidents' per-day lying habits. How many other presidents' false and misleading claims have been tracked?

Go Figure, further:

Over the first 3 ½ years of his Presidential tenure, Trump had made over 20,000 false or misleading claims, or nearly 16 per day, according to the *Washington Post* (through July 9, 2020).

According to the Post's "Fact Checker" reporters in July, had the daily average of Trump's false or misleading claims risen or declined since the COVID-19 pandemic hit the United States four months earlier?

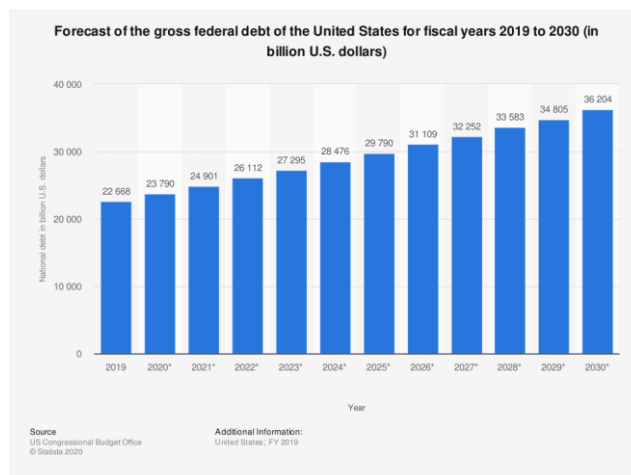
Lessons & More-ons

5. According to a 2012 study by [The Pew Charitable Trusts](#), at that time what was the estimated proportion of the voting-eligible population in the United States that was NOT registered to vote?

- a) 4% b) 14% c) 24%

6. As of October 10, 2020, the U.S. federal debt had soared over \$27 trillion. On a per capita basis, how much (approximately) is that overall figure (\$27,000,000,000,000)? The denominator is the U.S. population, which is about 330 million.

- a) \$82,000 b) \$180,000 c) \$8,100



Yes or No



7. During the October 7th Debate, Vice President Mike Pence stated that, according to the National Oceanic Administration, there are no more hurricanes now than a century ago. Is that true?

8. Getting 30% of the voter-eligible vote is usually more than enough to win a Presidential election. (*Yes or No?*)

9. In any story you encounter, “voter turnout” always means only one thing: the percentage of those who voted from among the number of registered voters. (*Yes or No?*)



Medians/Modes/Means

10. Of the three “m” averages, what do people usually mean when they say “average”? _____

11. RealClear Politics released these figures in Fall 2019:

Polling Data														
Poll	Date	Biden	Warren	Sanders	Buttigieg	Harris	Yang	O'Rourke	Booker	Castro	Gabbard	Klobuchar	Bennet	Steyer
RCP Average	9/19 - 9/29	27.2	23.0	17.8	5.4	4.6	3.6	2.2	1.4	1.4	1.0	1.0	0.8	0.6

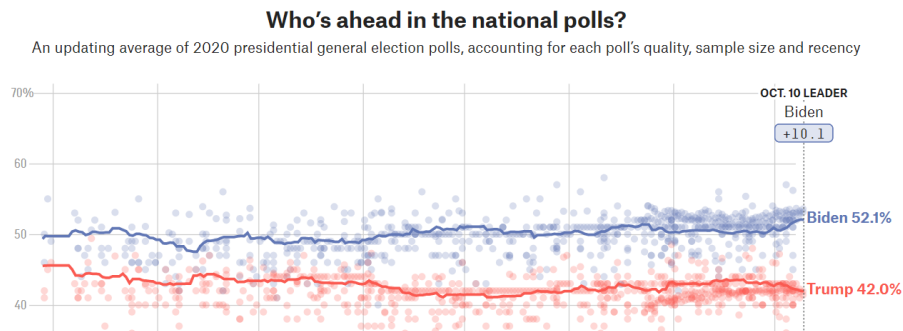
The average level of support for these 13 Democrats was:

- A. 6.9%
- B. 2.2%
- C. 1.0 / 1.4%
- D. All of the above

Which of those figures is the mean? The median? The mode?

Percentages

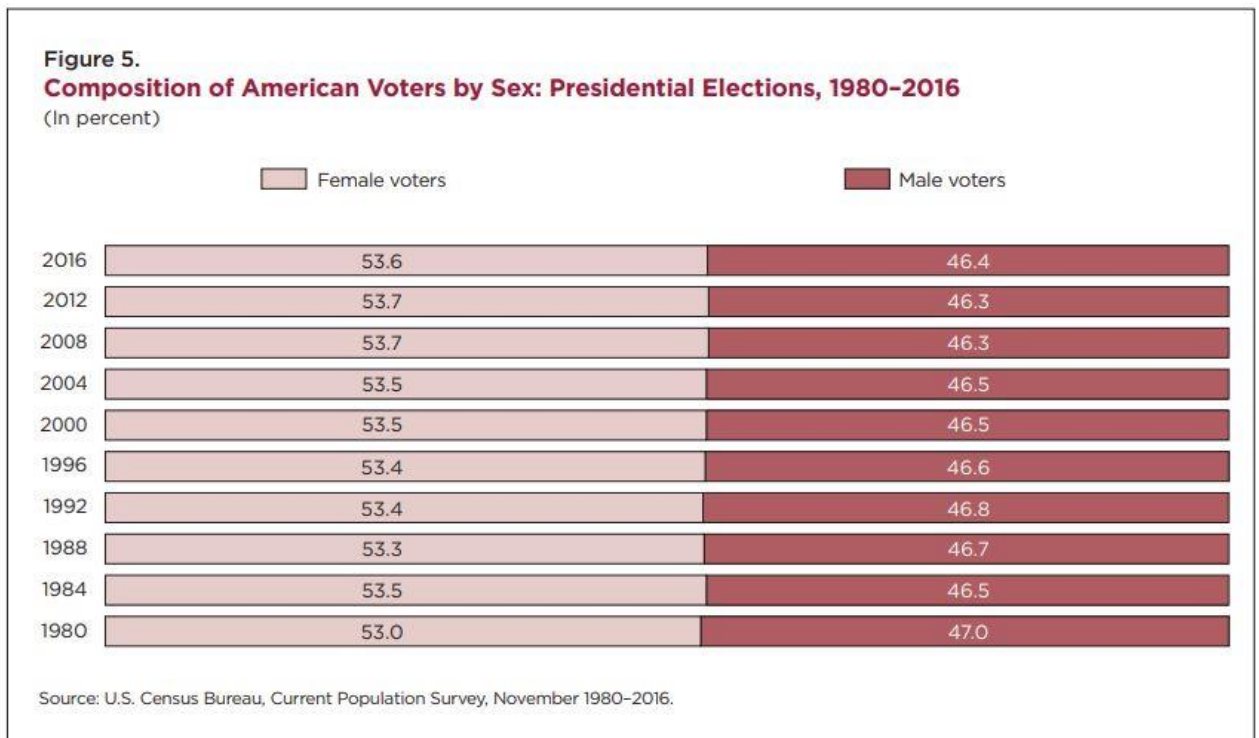
12. As of October 10th, Democratic Joe Biden had 52.1% support, while President Trump had 42.0%, according to the average of general election polls.



This means that Biden...

- A. Was ahead of Trump by 10.1 percentage points
- B. Had the support of 24 percent more voters than Trump did
- C. Both (A) & (B)

13. For the below graphic....



... the **percentage-point difference**, between female voters & male voters, was 7.2 in the 2016 election.

What percent more women than men voted in that election?

- A. $7.2 / 46.4 = 15.5\%$
- B. $7.2 / 53.6 = 13.4\%$

Infinite Intrigue

14. One thousand (1,000) times (x) one thousand (1,000) is one million (1,000,000). One million (1,000,000) times (x) one thousand (1,000) is one billion (1,000,000,000).

If one million seconds equals 11 ½ days—and it does—then approximately how long is one billion seconds?

- a) About 3 years
- b) Almost 32 years
- c) Nearly 100 years

Go Figure, further:

What is the ratio of one million to one billion? Of one to 1,000? Of 1,000 to one million? To help picture those figures, write them out, being sure to insert a comma in the proper spots (every three digits).

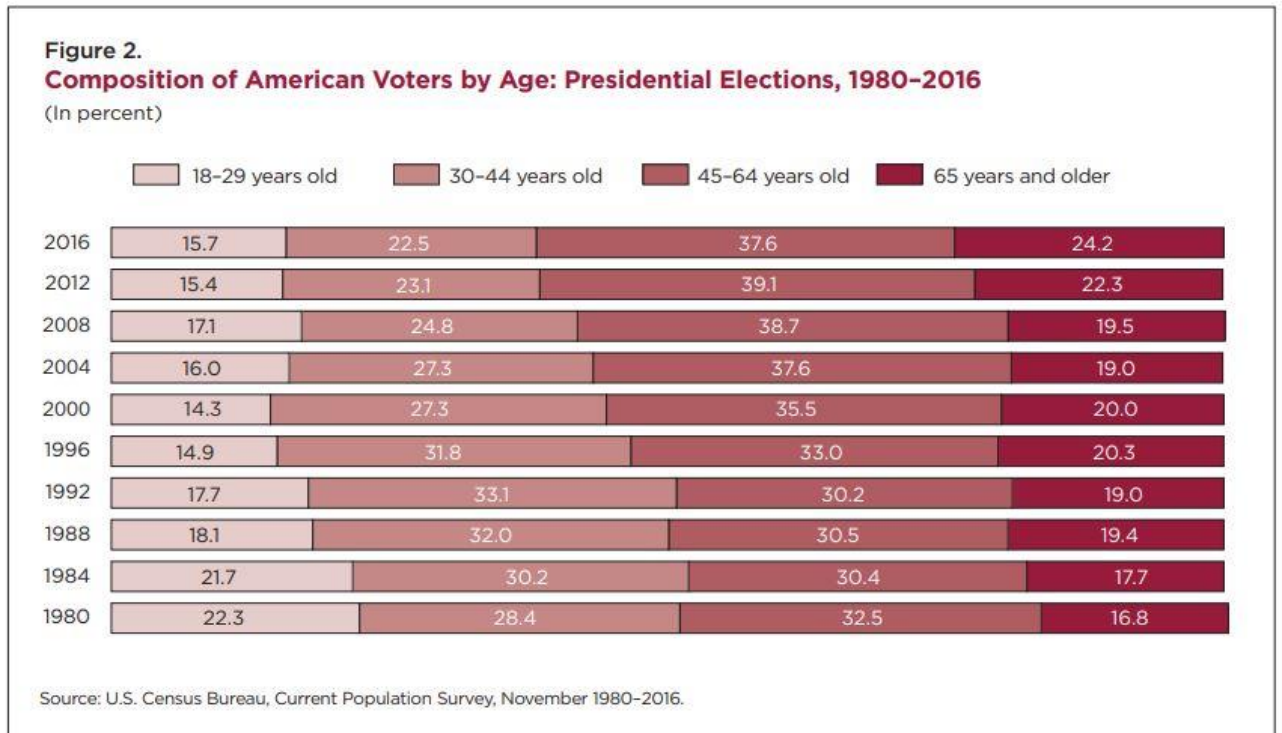
On October 10th, President Trump's approval rating was 43.3%. At the same point in their Presidential tenures (1,360 days), four Presidents over the past 75 years had lower approval ratings: Harry Truman, Lyndon Johnson, Jimmy Carter & George H.W. Bush.

15. At 32.6%, which President's approval level was the lowest from this group?

(Ironically, a quarter-century later, in a Gallup Poll, when Americans were asked if they approved of the job former presidents did in office, this President had the *highest* approval rating among all living Presidents at the time: 64%.)

Common Sense

16. Consider the below graph:



Which age group is the fastest-growing group of voters since 1980?

Which age group is the fastest-growing group of voters since 2012?

Which age group has the greatest **potential** to become the fastest growing in the years to come?

Which age group covers the briefest span of ages?

Which age group covers the longest span of ages?

17. Among those planning to vote on Election Day, on October 9th what was the percentage-point advantage that President Trump held over Joe Biden, according to the Pew Research Center?

- a) 8 points (51% to 43%)
- b) 19 points (57% to 38%)
- c) 32 points (63% to 31%)

Go Figure, further. among absentee or mail voters (an estimated 70 million people), Biden has a huge advantage, 69% to 27%.

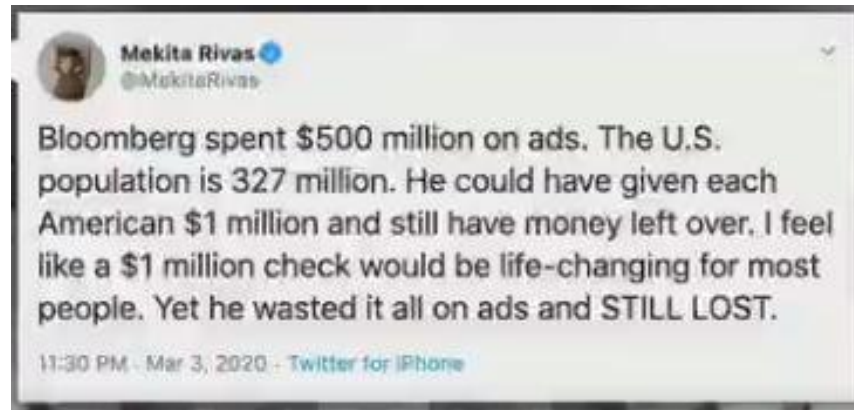
Stats & Such



18. In the 2000 U.S. Presidential election, how many “third party” candidates received more than 537 votes from Florida voters—the figure that was finally determined to separate the Bush-Cheney ticket from the Gore-Lieberman ticket?

- a) 3
- b) 5
- c) 8

19. Read the below Tweet...



To the closest dollar, how much could Bloomberg *actually* have given each American?

Go Figure, finale:

What is the cumulative credibility we should automatically assign to someone who uses ALL CAPS, exclamation points (!!!), fancy words, or any other attention-getting devices, like **BOLD FONT**, when they communicate?

- a) ***ZERO!***
- b) ***ZILCH!***
- c) ***ZIP!***
- d) ***All of the above!!!!***

Go Figure: Recommended Reading

How to Lie with Statistics, by Darrell Huff

Published in 1954, this book is a classic that humorously illustrates some of the ways that numbers can be used to manipulate and mislead people.

A Mathematician Reads the Newspaper

Innumeracy

Once Upon A Number: The Hidden Mathematical Logic of Stories

-All by John Allen Paulos

At times, Paulos tackles material that can be hard to grasp, even for math lovers, but he drops in a gem on a regular basis and employs a story-telling style that is most accessible.

A key point of *Once Upon A Number* that holds true in journalism: you can't get into a story very long before using numbers, and you can't use numbers for very long before a story emerges. Online: <https://math.temple.edu/~paulos/>

The Arithmetic of Life and Death, by George Shaffner

Some books hold a special appeal not only for their content, but their easy-to-read format. This is one of them. In 38 essays that build upon one another, Shaffner plays with numbers like a kid in a candy store. Consider some of essay names: The Probability That You Would Be You, The Value of Being Stupid, The Case For Smoking, Why There Are Meetings, and The Tailgater's Advantage.

Damned Lies and Statistics, by Joel Best

A professor of sociology and criminal justice at the University of Delaware, Best begins with a bang as he writes about "the worst social statistic ever." As the book promises, Best does a very good job of plainly "untangling numbers from the media, politicians, and activists." Find him at www.joelbest.net.

Since 2001, Matt Baron has shared "Go Figure: Making Numbers Count" as a training program for journalists throughout the United States, including [more than 15 newspaper associations](#).

In addition, his "Go Figure" columns have guided thousands of journalists & other professional communicators. More: www.GoFigureMakingNumbersCount.com