



Questionnaires

POL 20050 – Second Year
Analysing Politics : Lecture 10

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17 February 2010



Outline

1. Main modes of data collection.

2. Question design.

3. Questionnaire design.

4. Bias.

5. Review.

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Main modes of data collection

1. Face-to-face structured interviews.
2. Telephone interviews.
3. Self-completion/mail back.
4. Internet/E-mail.

Main Modes of data collection

1. Face-to-face structured interviews

– *Examples:*

- *Major components of National Election Studies.*
- *Exit polls: sample of actual voters only (e.g.: RTÉ/ Lansdowne Exit Poll 2009).*
- *Ipsos Mrbi opinion polls for The Irish Times.*

– *Advantages*

– *Disadvantages*

Main Modes of data collection

2. Telephone interviews

– *Examples*

- *Telemarketing (particularly in the United States).*
- *Flash Eurobarometer Polls.*
- *Red C opinion polls for the Sunday Business Post.*

– *Advantages*

– *Disadvantages*

Main Modes of data collection

3. Self-completion/mail back

– *Examples:*

- *CSO National Employment Survey.*
- *Some portions of national election studies – Irish National Election Study 2002 had a self-completion element.*

– *Advantages*

– *Disadvantages*

Main Modes of data collection

4. Internet/E-mail

– *Examples:*

- *YouGov*
- *Eurostudent*

– *Advantages*

– *Disadvantages*

– *YouGov.*

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Why is it important to think carefully about survey questions?

'Yes Prime Minister' 1986



General considerations

1. Always bear in mind your R.Q.
2. Make sure the survey questions are capturing what you want to measure.
3. Short questions (unless long necessary).
4. Common language.
5. Common concepts.

Avoid



Leading questions.

Leading questions



- ‘You were in *Copperface Jack’s* last Wednesday night, weren't you?’
- ‘You don’t smoke, do you?’
- ‘Would you vote for David Cameron, a man who has been known to break his campaign promises?’

Avoid



Leading questions.



Negatives.

Negative questions



- Do you agree or disagree with the following statement:
‘Marijuana should not be legalised’ De Vaus (2002: 98)
- Tell me your level of agreement with the following statement: *‘You should not use the best online survey software available.’*
- Do you agree or disagree with the following statement:
‘Teachers should not be required to supervise students during recesses.’

Avoid



Leading questions.



Double negatives.



Vague wording and ambiguous concepts.

Vagueness/ambiguity



- "Does your boss engage you in interactive dialogue?"
- 'Can you tell me how often you go to the cinema?'
- Concepts – e.g.: 'Family' – what is 'family'?

Avoid



Leading questions.



Negatives.



Vague wording and ambiguous concepts.



Dangling alternatives.

Dangling alternatives



- ‘Would you say that it is frequently, sometimes, rarely or never that...?’
- Mention the question first, the alternatives later.

(Converse & Presser, 1986: 15; De Vaus 2002: 97)

Avoid



Leading questions.



Negatives.



Vague wording and undefined concepts.



Dangling alternatives.



Asking two questions in one.

Asking two questions in one



- ‘Do you think smoking should be prohibited in pubs and restaurants?’
- ‘Do you think women and children should be given the first available flu shots?’

(Converse & Presser 1986: 13)

Avoid



Leading questions.



Negatives.



Vague wording and undefined concepts.



Dangling alternatives.



Asking two questions in one.



Not having mutually exclusive categories

Not having mutually exclusive categories



What age are you?

~~18-24~~

~~24-29~~

30-39

40-49

What age are you?

18-24

25-29

30-39

40-49



Avoid



Leading questions.



Double negatives.



Vague wording and ambiguous concepts.



Dangling alternatives.



Asking two questions in one.



Not having mutually exclusive categories



Technical terms: e.g.: ICTU, BNP, GOP.



Long questions (debatable)

Question structure

- **Open Question**

- *‘What was the main reason you did not vote in the last general election?’ (INES, 2002 QB22)*

- **Closed Question**

- *‘How good or bad a job do you think the Fianna Fail/ Progressive Democrat government did over the past five years in terms of the economy? Did they do a:*

Very Good Job /Good Job/Bad Job /Very Bad Job/Don’t know’

(INES, 2002 QA2)

Question structure

- **Open Question**

- Respondent can answer in their own terms.
- Can lead to new interpretations/unanticipated answers.
- Useful for exploring new research avenues.

- **Closed Question**

- Easy to fill in and code.
- More precisely related to concept of interest.
- Reduces possibility of variability in recording of answers.

Open and Closed Questions

Q: *'Name two of the most important national or world events or changes during the past 50 years?'*

OPEN

- 14.1% WW II
- 10.1% Vietnam War
- 6.9% Space Race
- 4.6% JFK Assassination
- 53.7% Other responses
- 10.6% Don't Know

CLOSED

- **29.9% Computer invented**
- 22.9% WW II
- 15.8% Space Race
- 14.1% Vietnam War
- 5.4% other
- 0.3% Don't Know

Closed questions: answer categories

- Mutually exclusive categories.
- Exhaustive set of categories.
- Don't know/no response/refusal option.
- Scales:
 - Even or odd?
 - Do we include a middle point?
 - If we create the scale after data has been collected, multiple measures to measure the same thing.

Some Scales

- Likert Scale:

- Q: *'To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statement: The European Union helps to protect us from the negative effects of globalisation'* (Eurobarometer 69.2, 2008)

1. Strongly Agree	2. Agree	3. Neither Agree nor Disagree	4. Disagree	5. Strongly Disagree
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- Thermometer scale:

- Q: *'I'd now like to ask you how you feel about Fianna Fáil using what we call the "feeling thermometer". It works like this: If you have a favourable feeling Fianna Fáil you should place the party somewhere between 50 and 100 degrees; If you have an unfavourable feeling you should place the party somewhere between 0 and 50 degrees; and If you don't feel particularly warm or cold, then you should place the party at 50 degrees. Where would you place Fianna Fáil?'* (INES, QC1, 2002)

Creating scales: Knowledge

Eurobarometer 69.2 - Ireland (2008):

R asked three true or false questions about the EU. R gets a score of 1 if they answer correctly and 0 if they answer incorrectly/Don't Know.

- *The EU currently consists of fifteen Member States. (FALSE)*
- *Switzerland is a member of the European Union. (FALSE)*
- *Every six months, a different Member State becomes the President of the Council of the European Union. (TRUE)*
- R1 answers: FALSE/FALSE/TRUE
- R2 answers: TRUE/TRUE/DON'T KNOW
- Summing together the answers of each R, knowledge scale can be created.



Note of caution:

- Scale has to be justifiable.
- Measures must correlate.

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Questionnaire Design

1. Question ordering: **order should be followed.**
 - Go from general to particular.
 - Go from easy to difficult.
 - Go from factual to abstract.
 - Start with closed format questions.
 - Do not start with demographic and personal questions.
 - Potentially objective questions should be at the end.
2. Attractive layout.
3. Clear instructions to respondent and interviewer.

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Bias

- **When a sample statistic gives systematically the wrong estimate of the population parameter.**
- When the probability of inclusion in the sample varies across subjects, we have the risk of bias.

Sources of bias in questionnaires

1. Non-response bias

Non-response bias

- Refusal by sampled individuals to cooperate.
- If the decision to cooperate or not is correlated with any of the variables of interest, the result is bias.

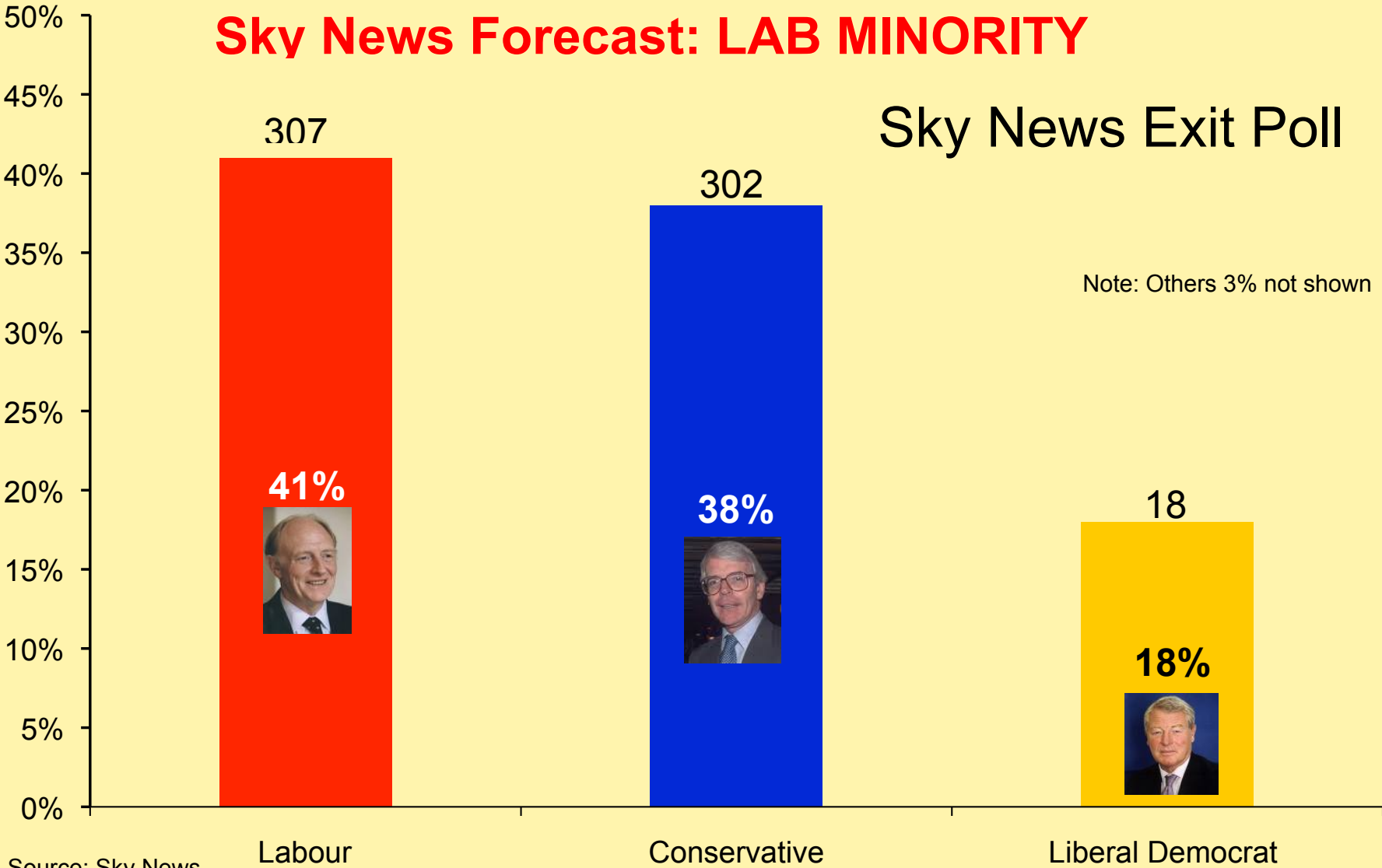
Example I: British General Election 1992



Sky News Forecast: LAB MINORITY

Sky News Exit Poll

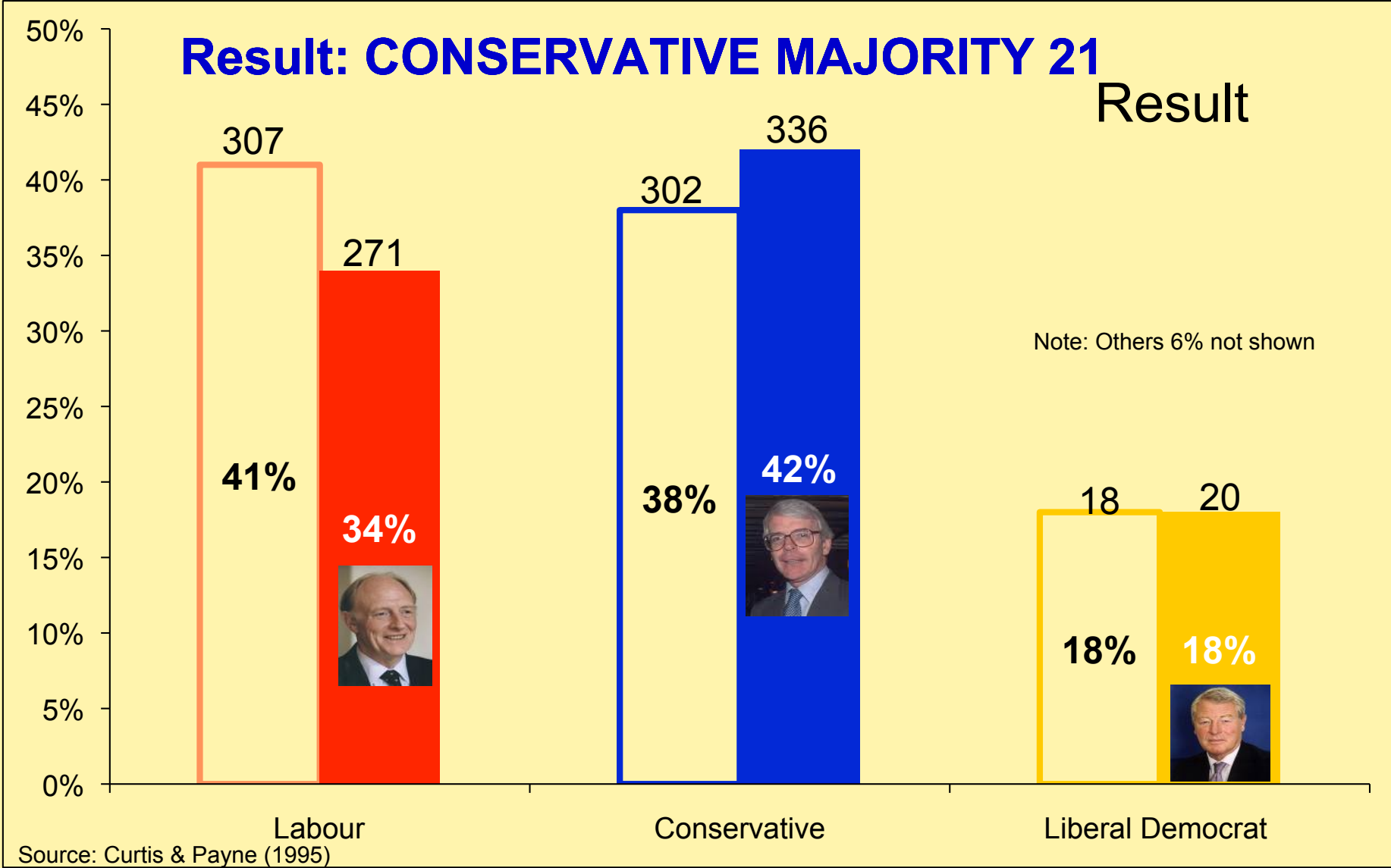
Note: Others 3% not shown



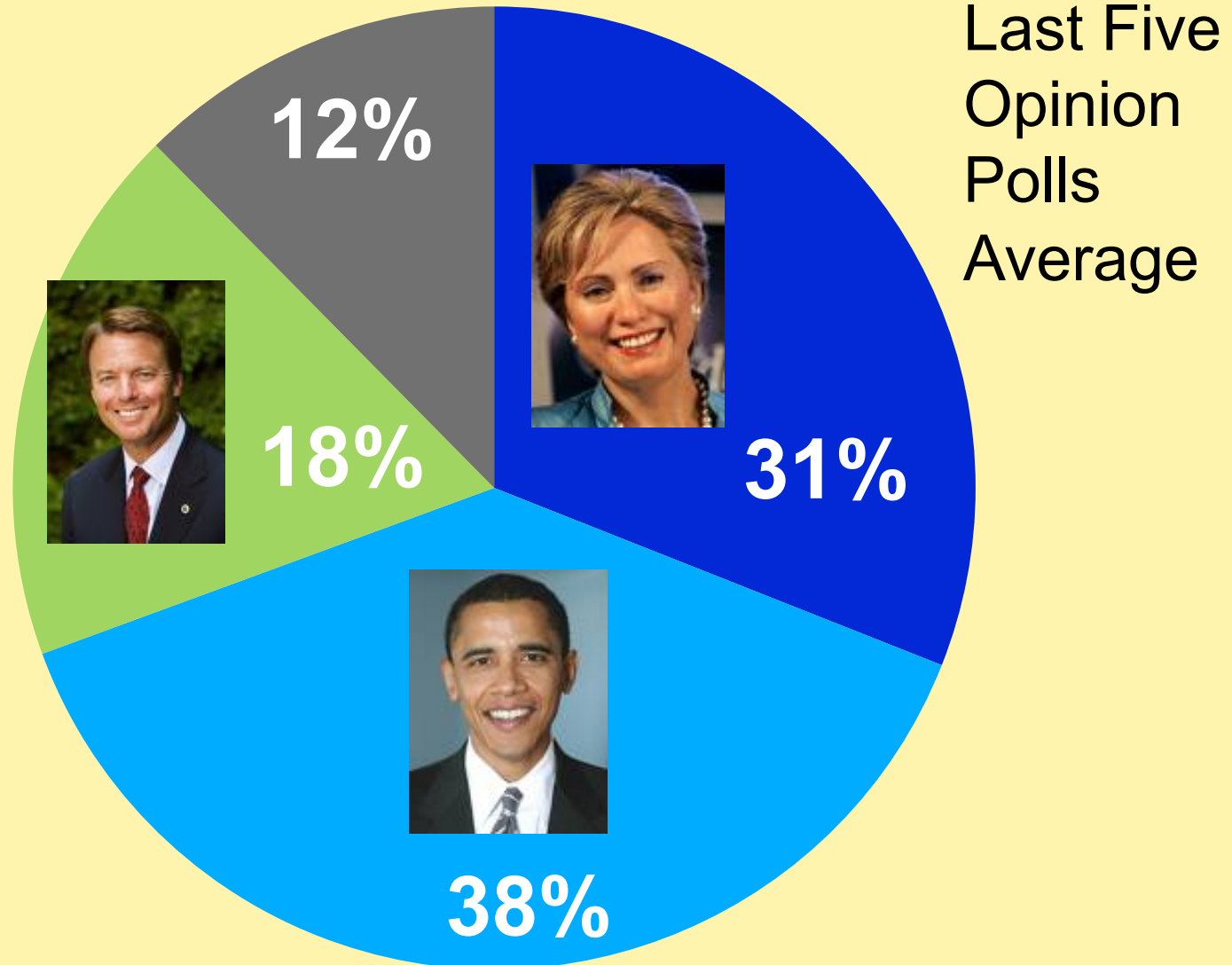
Source: Sky News



Example I: British General Election 1992



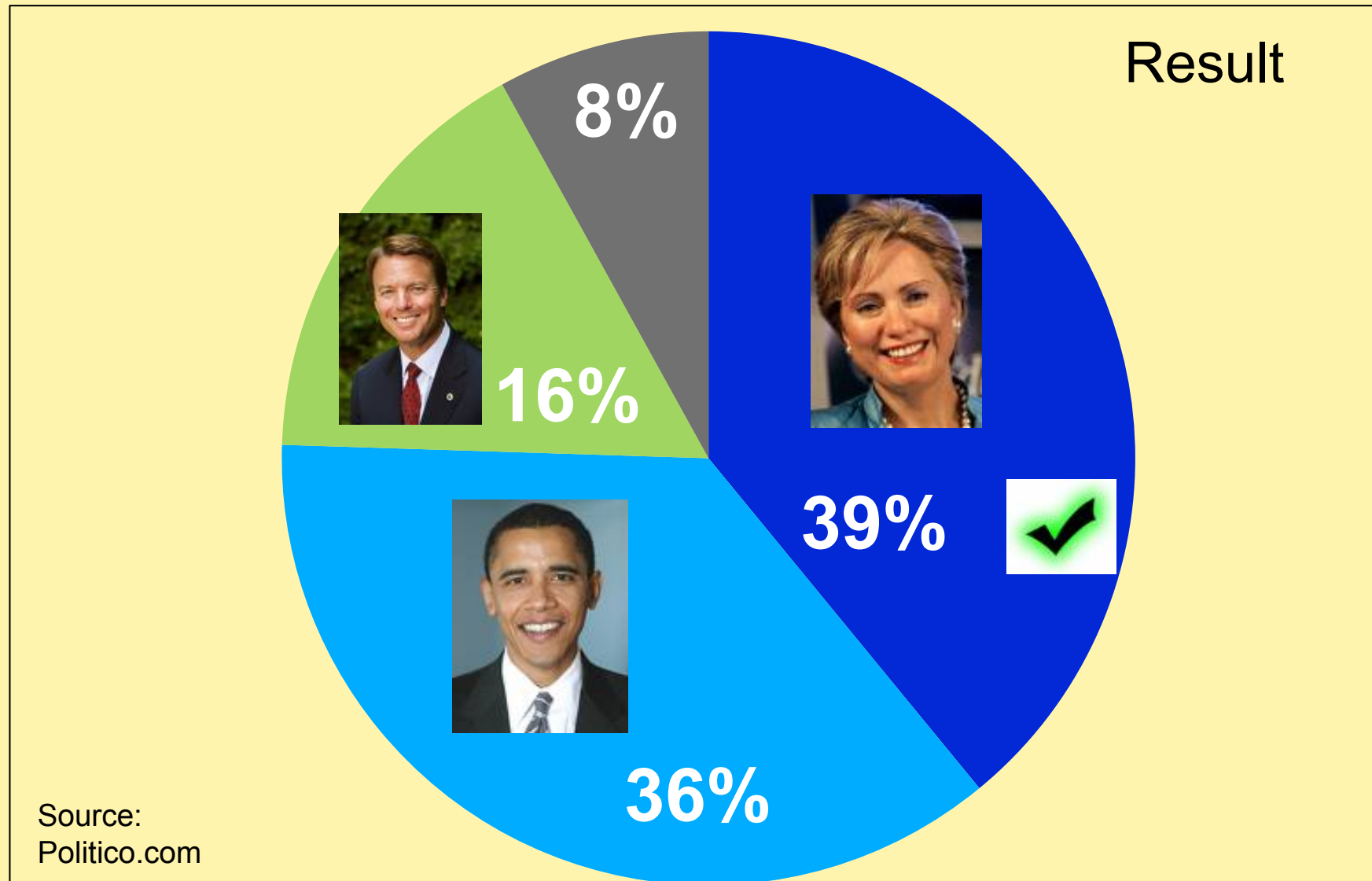
Example II: New Hampshire Democratic Primary 2008



Source:
Pollster.com



Example II: New Hampshire Democratic Primary 2008



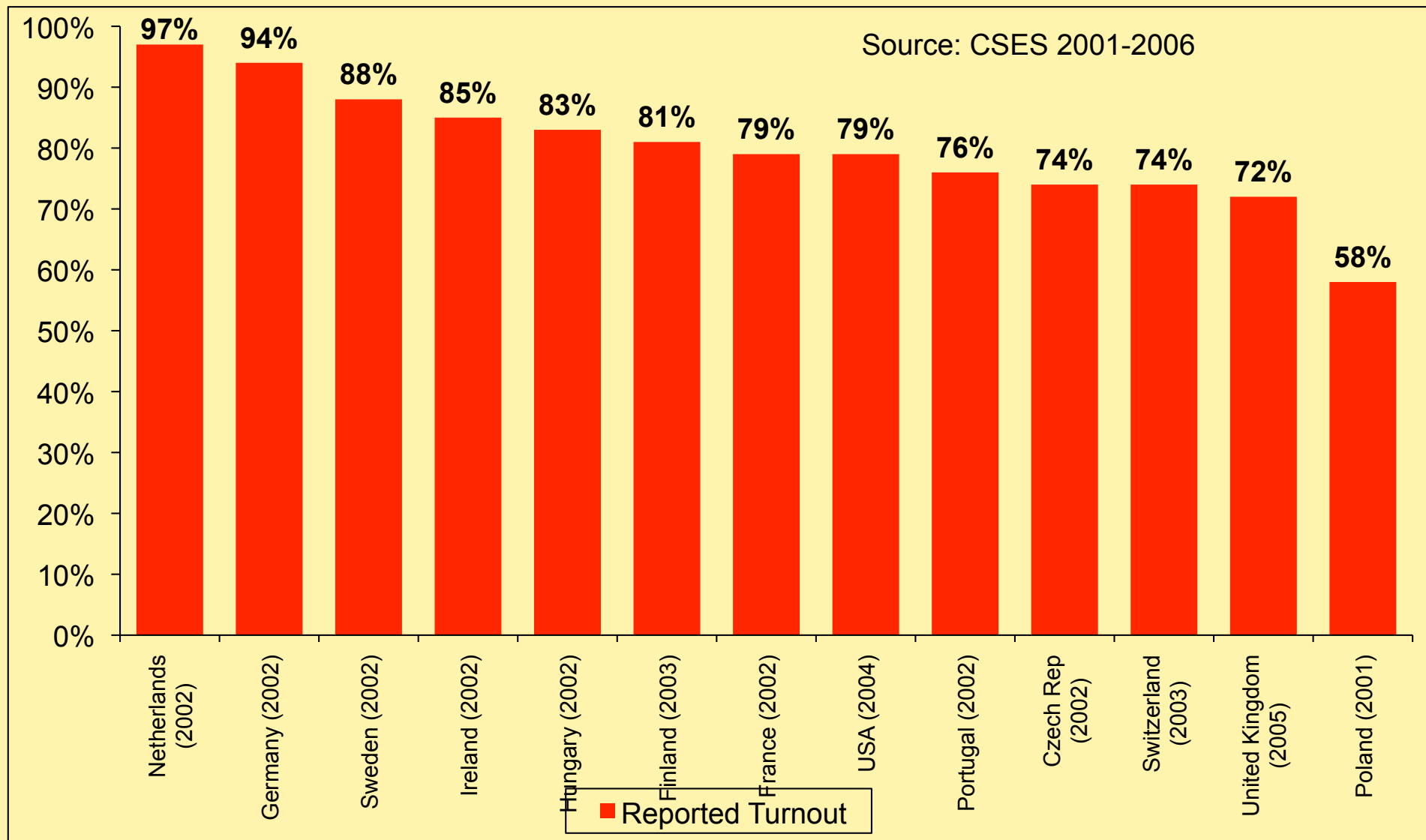
Sources of bias in questionnaires

1. Non-response bias

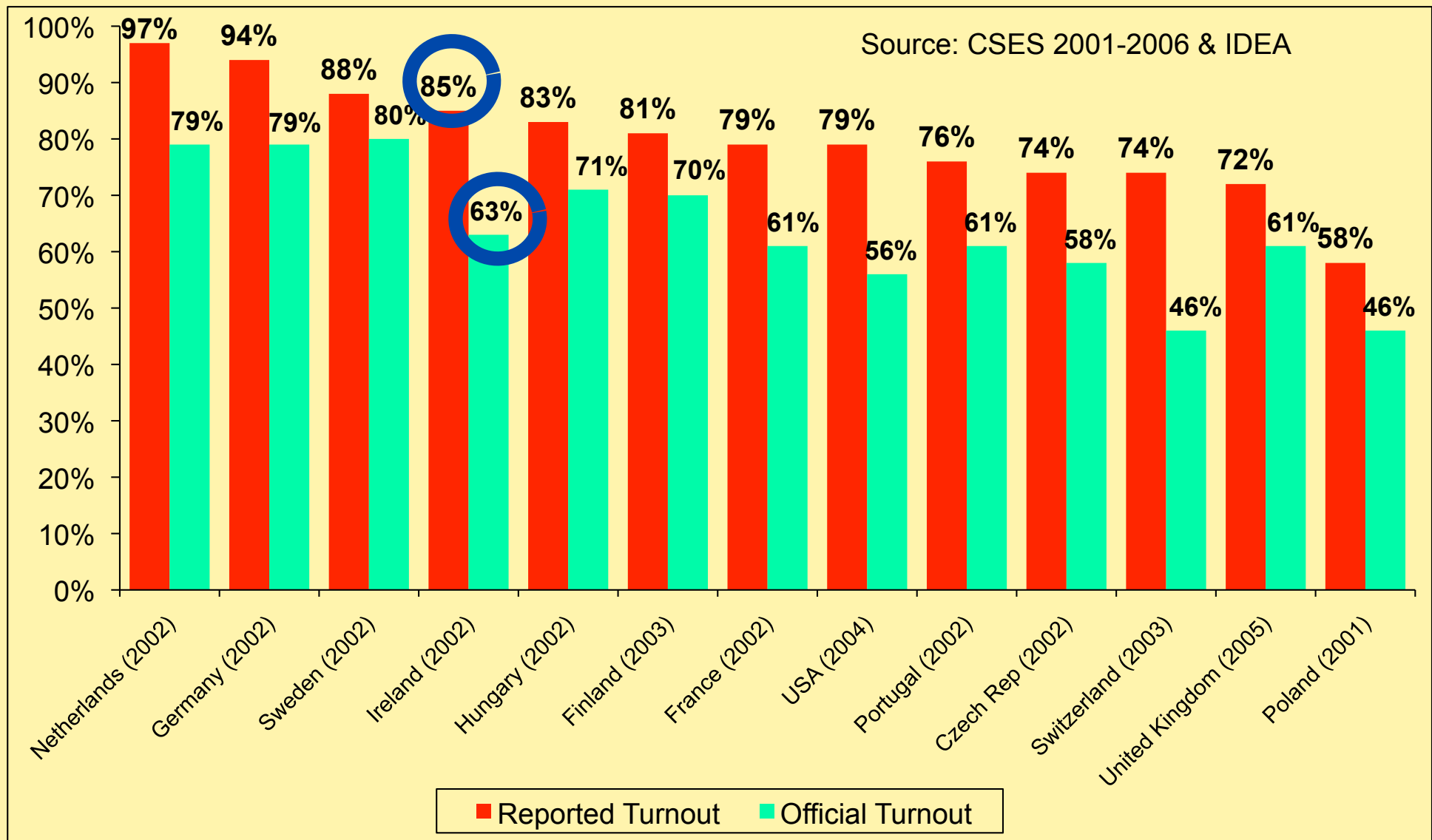
2. Misreporting by respondents

- Social Desirability Bias
- Recall Bias

Social Desirability/Recall Bias: The case of electoral turnout



Social Desirability/Recall Bias: The case of electoral turnout



Sources of bias

1. Non-response bias.
2. Misreporting by respondents:
 - Recall Bias.
 - Social Desirability Bias.
3. Characteristics of interviewer.
4. Question-ordering effects.

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Lecture Review

- Several modes of data collection: all have advantages and disadvantages.
- **Question wording and format MATTERS!**
- Question ordering MATTERS!
- Layout of questionnaire MATTERS!
- **Beware of and AVOID bias!**
 - Non-response
 - Social Desirability
 - Recall



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