

The performance of probability-based online panels in election polling: Lessons from 2020 and 2024

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Fivethirtyeight database of polls

Date ranges (180 days to election day):

- May 7 – November 3, 2020
- May 9 – November 5, 2024

National presidential horserace polls:

- Populations: Likely voters > Registered voters > Adults
- Prefer questions with more candidates (including 3rd parties)
- Prefer estimates with lower undecided

National presidential approval polls:

- Populations: Adults > Registered voters > Likely voters

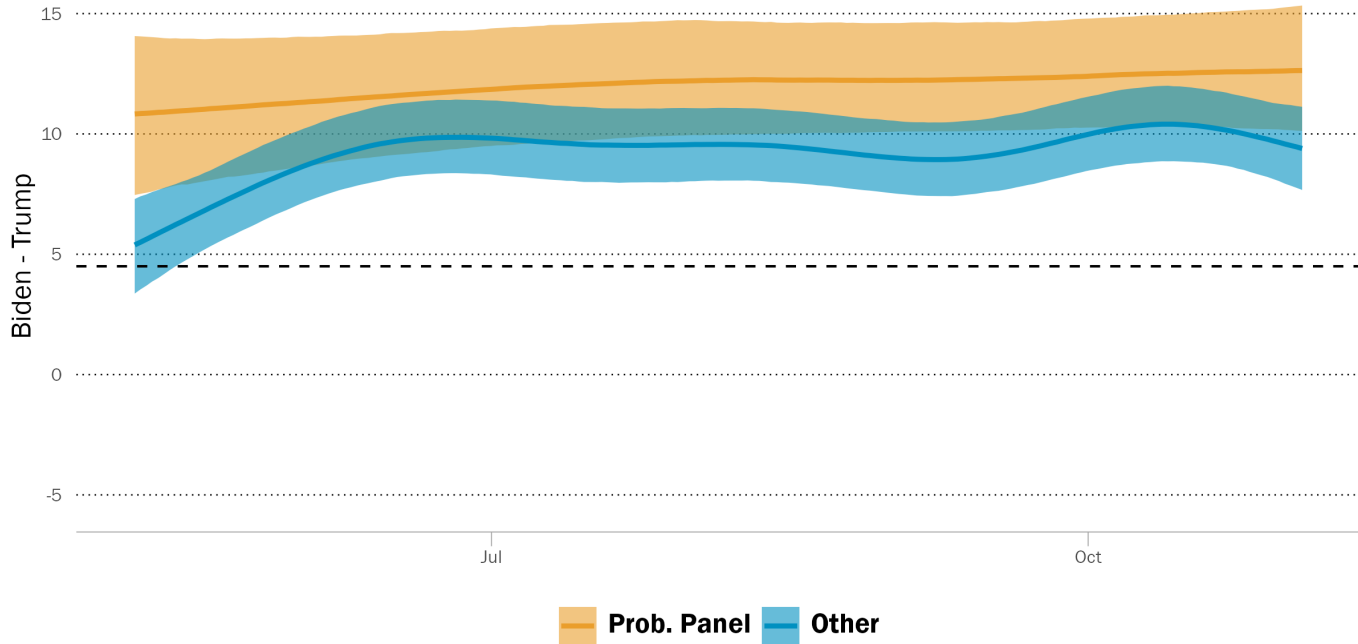
Modeling approach and data

Multilevel GAMs with smoothing factors by survey type and random effects for pollsters.

Cycle	Survey Type	Pollsters	Horseshoe Polls	Approval Polls
2020	Prob. Panels	8	55	44
	Other	85	484	896
2024	Prob. Panels	11	39	21
	Other	81	408	248

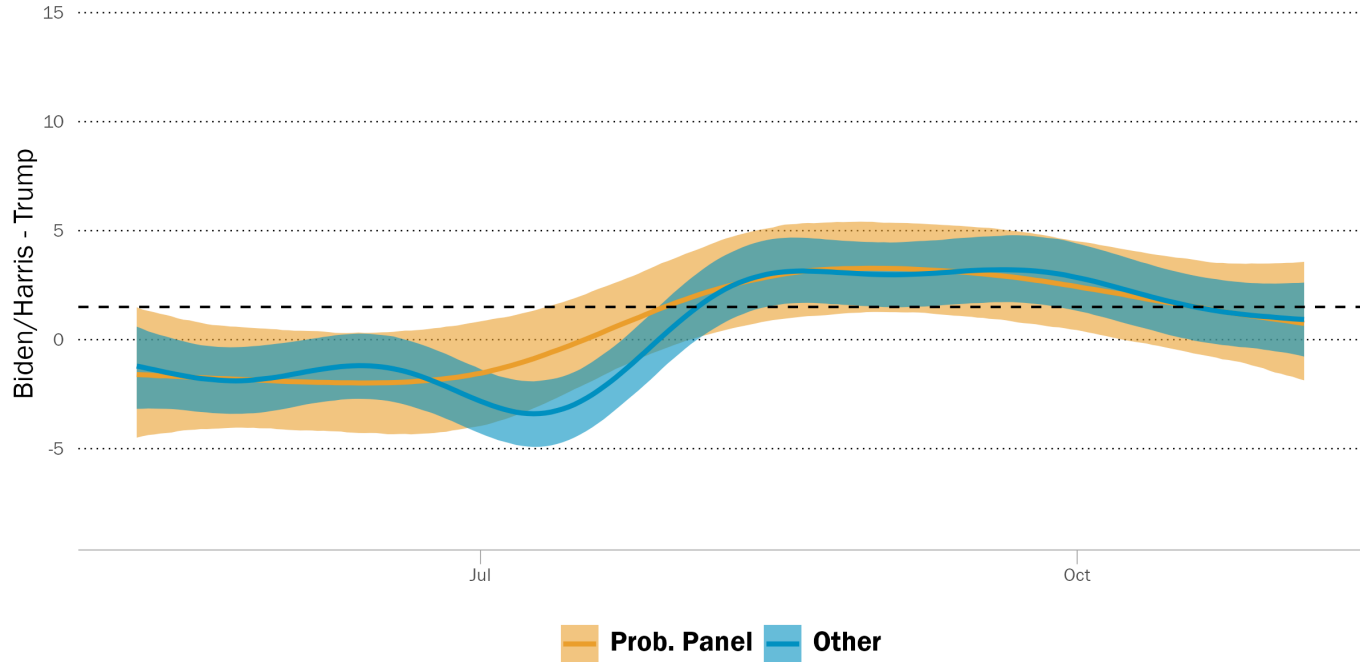
2020 Presidential Vote by Survey Type

Modeled presidential vote margin for the likely voter population



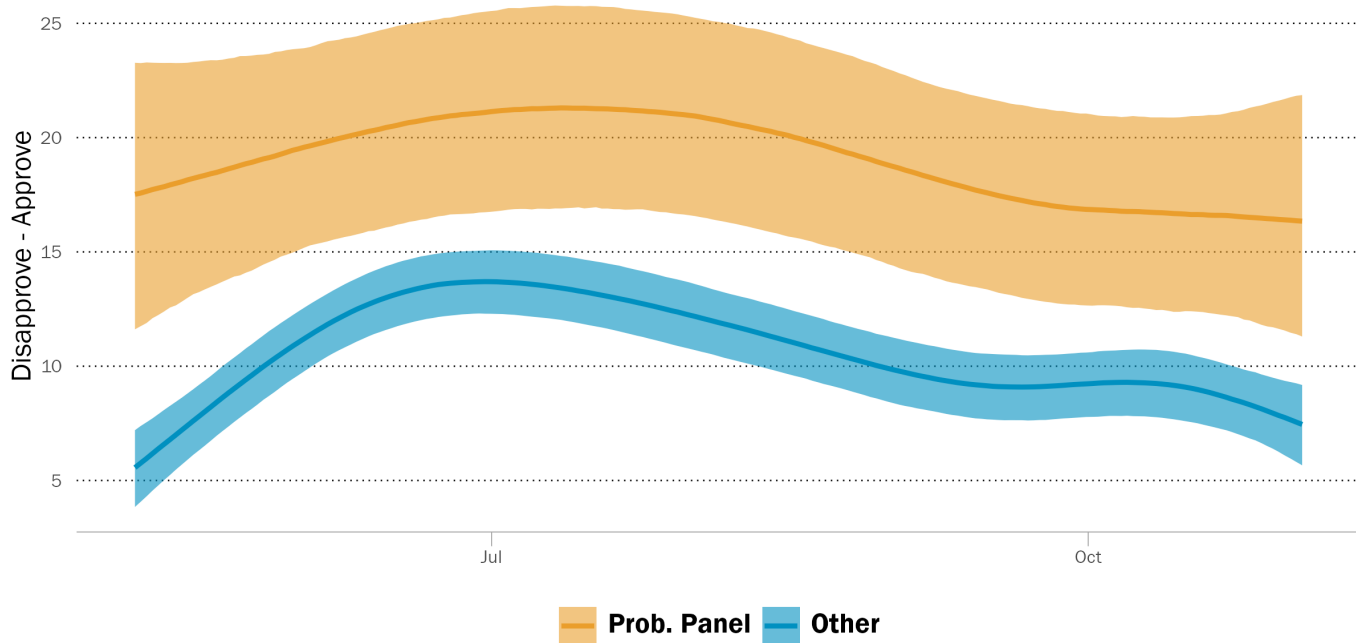
2024 Presidential Vote by Survey Type

Modeled presidential vote margin for the likely voter population



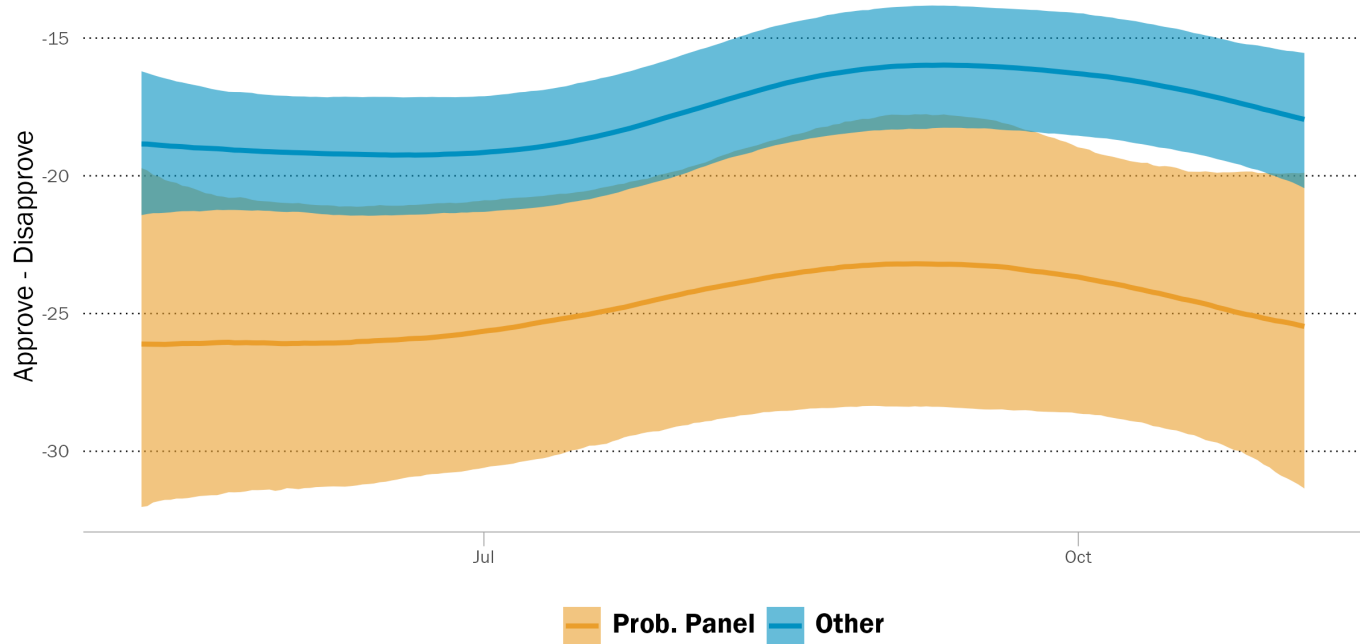
2020 Trump Disapproval - Approval

Modeled disapproval margin for the U.S. adult population



2024 Biden Approval - Disapproval

Modeled presidential approval margin for the U.S. adult population



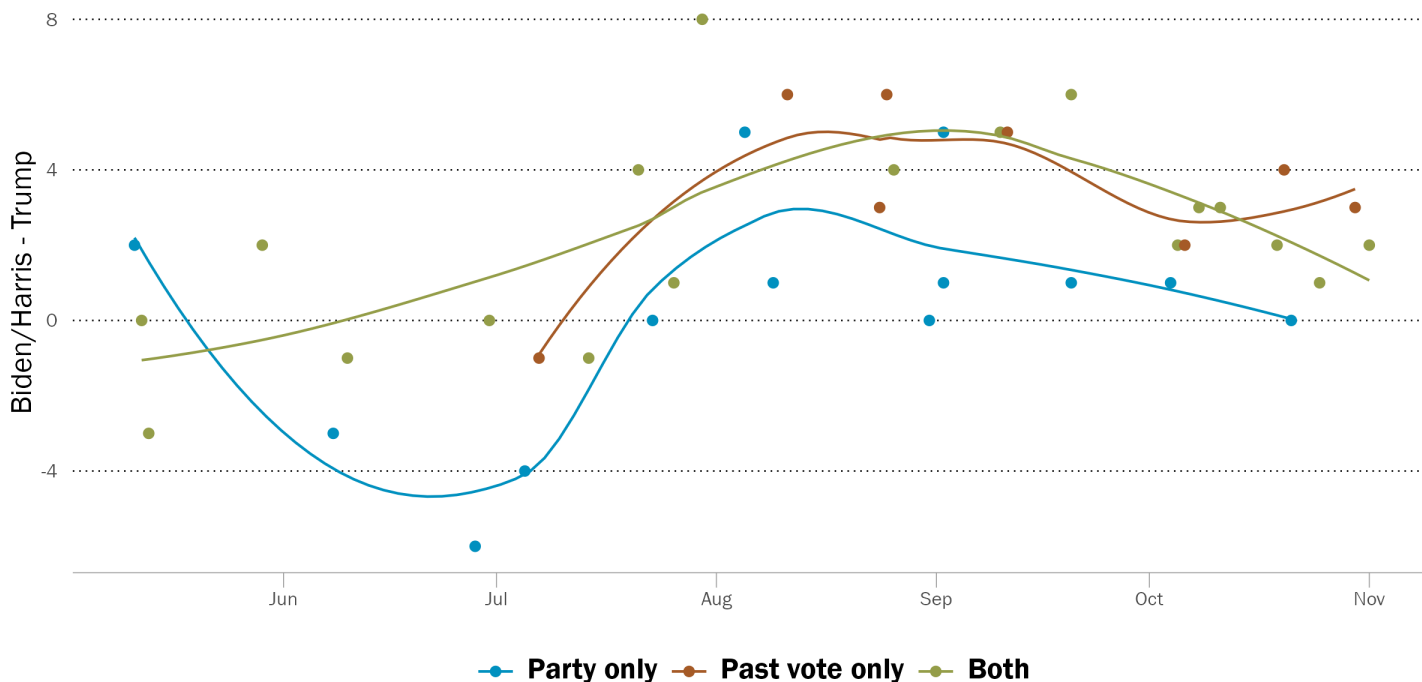
Is this shift due to partisan weighting adjustments?

This seems likely but the data is confounded

- The Understanding American Panel and AmeriSpeak did not measure the horserace in 2024.
- SSRS Opinion Panel did not exist in 2020
- In 2020, only the ATP weighted by party ID
- In 2024, all probability panels but AmeriSpeak weighted by either party ID, party registration, or 2020 vote preference.

Maybe we can see if these approaches perform better?

Few differences by adjustment type for prob. panels



Conclusions

- Clear reduction in Democratic bias for probability panels in 2024
- Establishing causality will require more/better data or a different modeling approach
- Much of the variability in original (not modeled) estimates is due to other design factors and house effects.

Thank you!

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