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POLLS DURING THE PAST DECADE IN BIRACIAL ELECTION CONTESTS

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ABSTRACT

The narrow margin of victories of David Dinkins for mayor of New York City and L. Douglas Wilder for governor of Virginia brought to the forefront the difficulties involved with pre-election polling. In both cases these black Democratic candidates were viewed as clear front runners and were predicted to win by comfortable margins. The major consideration not factored into the pre-election polling results was that in each case one candidate was black and the other white.

The working hypothesis of this paper is that when a black Democratic candidate runs against a white Republican candidate in a mostly Democratic area, the undecided vote will break to the Republican. Undecided voters, who tend to be white and Democratic in these elections, are reluctant to say they will vote for either a Republican candidate or for a black candidate when surveyed prior to the election. In the end, these voters base their final decision on race of the candidate rather than the candidate's party.

This phenomenon will be illustrated using pre-election polling data for various political contests nationally and a detailed examination of survey data for New York and Chicago mayoral races.

POLLS DURING THE PAST DECADE IN BIRACIAL ELECTION CONTESTS

The polls' failure to anticipate the narrowness of David Dinkins's victory in last year's New York mayoral election was widely interpreted by the press as a big blow to the credibility of pre-election surveys. Republican Rudolph Giuliani's close finish, with 48% of the vote to Dinkins's 50% in a heavily Democratic city, seemed at variance with the solid Dinkins lead all the major media polls had been reporting.

In the weeks following the election, news stories about what went wrong with the polls in New York proliferated. In combination with questionable exit poll results on another biracial contest, the Wilder-Coleman gubernatorial election in Virginia, the performance of the New York mayoral polls led some to offer a deceptively simple explanation of what went wrong -- the pre-election poll results diverged from the actual election outcome because voters lied to the polltakers.

Having conducted six pre-election surveys for New York Newsday and another five surveys separately for FOX News, The Gallup Organization was as big a target for criticism as any other survey organization tracking candidate standing in the Dinkins-Giuliani race. Like most of our colleagues who poll for news organizations, we didn't buy the "lying" explanation. Yet it was clear that we had much explaining to do. While we were spared the ultimate embarrassment of miscalling the winner, our figures, like those of our competitors, gave the impression that Dinkins would be elected the city's first black mayor by a comfortable margin.

Same Methods Proved Successful in Measuring Primary Vote

Using methods refined over more than 50 years of election polling, Gallup's surveys showed Dinkins with a double-digit lead over Giuliani in seven consecutive telephone surveys conducted between August and the weekend before the November election. Today, despite the apparent inaccuracy of these results, we believe that the basic election poll methodology employed was

fundamentally sound. Only two months earlier, this same pre-election poll methodology had met the challenge of accurately measuring voter preferences in another biracial contest -- the primary election in which Dinkins wrested the Democratic nomination from incumbent Mayor Edward I. Koch.

In our view, any attempt to explain why the polls in the New York general election for mayor seemed to perform so poorly must explain why similar polls during the primary seemed so much closer to the mark. Both elections were essentially two-way races between a black candidate and a white candidate. In each case the black candidate was David Dinkins, whose personal style was non-confrontational and whose campaign sought to minimize, rather than to exploit racial tensions.

In terms of setting up expectations for election night, the biggest inconsistency between the polls in the primary and general election was their estimates of Dinkins's ability to win white votes. The polls before the primary seemed to underestimate his potential to draw white support. The exit polls¹ taken on primary day showed him receiving a higher proportion of the white vote than virtually any pre-election poll had indicated. But while Dinkins's vote-getting ability among whites exceeded expectations in the primary, it seemed to fall below expectations in the general election. Most exit polls showed his share of the white vote to be a few percentage points lower than what the pre-election polls had indicated, even if it was assumed that none of the undecided white vote would go to Dinkins.

Had we more carefully reviewed the polls' performance in previous biracial elections, we might have avoided the election night shock that occurred on November 7th. If the media pollsters and the sponsoring news

¹This paper does not deal with the controversies surrounding the accuracy of exit polls in biracial elections. With the exception of one exit poll in Virginia's Wilder - Coleman race, we found that the exit poll figures generally criticized for inaccuracy were early estimates based on partial samples. In our analysis, we used only final weighted exit poll results from the CBS Election and Survey Unit when comparing pre-election poll results with reported vote on election day.

organizations had interpreted the results of pre-election polls in the appropriate historical context of previous polling on biracial elections, the closeness of that election would have been better anticipated. The success of our methodology during the primary election should not have been cause to assume we could handle the general election in the same way. In fact, we would have been prepared to caution our clients that polls on biracial general elections are often more problematic than polls on biracial primaries.

The objective of this paper goes beyond an attempt to explain what happened last fall in New York. By summarizing the performance of media polls on biracial elections we hope to provide researchers involved in future surveys in such elections with a framework in which to interpret their results.

NYC Pre-Election Polls' Performance Follows the Historical Pattern

Our review of pre-election polling in big-city and statewide biracial elections leads us to the following conclusions about what happened in New York City last fall:

* The apparent overestimation of Dinkins's margin over Giuliani in the pre-election polls was anything but unique. It fits the pattern observed for polling on other biracial general elections. We find that when a black Democrat faces a white Republican, unless some effort is made to allocate the undecided vote in a particular way, the late pre-election poll results consistently overestimate the black candidate's strength relative to that of his white opponent. On average, the margin in the actual election results differs from the margin in the pre-election poll by 10 percentage points to the white candidate's favor.

* This overestimation of the black candidate's vote-getting ability seems to occur regardless of how racially divisive the candidates or the campaigns are perceived to be. Whether the black Democrat is a Harold Washington or a Tom Bradley, and whether the white candidate is a Frank Rizzo or a George Deukmejian, the same phenomenon is found to take place.

* Pre-election polls on biracial primary elections, such as the Dinkins-Koch race, do not show such a consistent pattern of mis-estimating the vote in a particular direction. When the candidates do not carry party labels, the poll results on biracial elections appear to come closer to reflecting the actual vote-getting ability of the two candidates. The findings can be handled in a more conventional fashion. They do not demand the special interpretation that pre-election poll results on biracial general elections seem to warrant.

* Biracial general elections seem more difficult to measure because they set up a conflict between race and party for a sizable segment of the voters. When a black Democrat faces a white Republican, the undecided vote in the late pre-election polls has the same characteristics as the voter subgroups in the exit polls whose reported vote differs most from pre-election poll estimates. Each is disproportionately white and non-Republican. This suggests that many white voters generally inclined to vote Democratic tell the pre-election pollsters they are undecided but end up voting their race rather than their party preference.

Polls' Performance in Biracial General Elections

Our conclusions about the problems associated with polling on biracial general elections such as the Dinkins-Giuliani contest are based on our analysis of polling data from nine big city and statewide biracial elections during the 1980s. These elections include the mayoral contests in Chicago, New York, and Philadelphia, along with gubernatorial races in California and Virginia. For each election, we compared the results of a late campaign pre-election survey with the actual election returns.

We limited our analysis to publicly released polls done for news organizations. For the Chicago and New York elections, we were able to use Gallup data. In each case, we selected the "final" poll, the one conducted closest to election day as the basis for analysis. Gallup, however, did not poll on the Philadelphia, California and Virginia elections. For these races, we selected the best media poll we could find that was conducted close to election day.

The following chart summarizes the pertinent information on the general elections and polls we analyzed. Except for the 1987 Chicago mayoral election and the 1983 Philadelphia mayoral election, these contests were essentially two-way races between a black Democrat and a white Republican. In the 1987 Chicago race, Harold Washington's main white opponent was Edward Vrdolyak, who ran as an Independent (Republican Donald Haider was a minor candidate). The 1983 Philadelphia race included a third candidate who received more than a small percentage of the vote. White Democrat John Leonard ran as an Independent and captured 8% of the total vote. Despite the differences, we felt the dynamics of these elections were similar enough to the others to include them in our analysis.

CHART 1

THE RACES
 Biracial General Elections

<u>Election</u>	<u>Black Democrat</u>	<u>White Republican</u>	<u>Election</u>	<u>Poll Dates</u>	<u>Sample Size/ Organization</u>
VA-Gov. - '89	Wilder	Coleman	Nov. 7	Oct. 31-Nov.1	1274 (RV's) Wash Post
NYC-Mayor - '89	Dinkins	Giuliani	Nov. 7	Nov. 3-5	2,258 (LV's) Gallup
Phila-Mayor - '87	Goode	Rizzo	Nov. 3	Oct. 28-29	N/A KYW-TV
Chi-Mayor - '87	Washington	Vrdolyak (I)	April 7	March 16-23	923 (LV's) Gallup
CA-Gov. - '86	Bradley	Deukmejian	Nov. 2	Oct. 27-30	701 (RV's) Field Inst.
Phila-Mayor - '83	Goode	Egan	Nov. 7	Oct. 21-26	N/A Phila. Daily News
Chi.-Mayor - '83	Washington	Epton	April 12	March 26-30	750 (LV's) Gallup
CA-Gov. - '82	Bradley	Deukmejian	Nov. 2	Oct. 29-31	942 (LV's) Field Inst.

LV's - Likely Voters
 RV's - Registered Voters

I - Independent

We compared the results of the pre-election polls with actual election outcomes in two ways. First, we looked at "the spread", i.e, how the black candidates lead (or deficit) in the poll compared with his the margin of victory (or defeat) in the actual election.² Second, we compared the black candidate's overall level of support in the poll -- before any allocation of undecided votes -- with his proportion of the total vote in the election.

As shown in the following chart, our analysis of the spread finds that the black Democrat did less well in the election than the final pre-election poll results implied in all nine cases studied. Further, in six of the eight contests studied the difference in the point spread of the poll and the election results falls into a very tight range of 8 to 12 points in favor of the white candidate. The exceptions to this rule are worth noting. One is the 1987 Chicago mayoral election in which one of Harold Washington's white opponents withdrew late in the campaign. The other is the only contest analyzed with a white incumbent --the 1986 California governor's race.

²Gallup does not generally evaluate pre-election survey accuracy on the basis of the point spread because of the increased sampling error associated with this statistical comparison. But experience has shown that journalists judge the polls' accuracy on the basis of how closely they come to estimating the winning candidate's margin of victory. The public does not remember that most late polls in New York showed Dinkins with roughly 50% of the vote (the proportion of the vote that he ended up winning) but that most polls had Dinkins ahead by 10 percentage points or more.

CHART 2

CHANGE IN SUPPORT
Biracial General Elections

<u>Election</u>	<u>Candidates</u> ³	<u>Final Poll</u>	<u>Actual Vote</u>	<u>Change</u>	<u>Cand. Lead Poll</u>	<u>Actual Margin</u>	<u>Change</u>
BLACK DEMOCRAT VS. WHITE NON-DEMOCRAT							
VA-Gov. -'89	Wilder (D) Coleman (R)	52 41	50.1 49.9	-2 +9	+9	0	-9
NYC-Mayor -'89	Dinkins (D) Giuliani (R)	51 37	50 48	-1 +11	+14	+2	-12
Phila.-Mayor -'87	Goode (D-I) Rizzo (R)	50 39	51 49	+1 +10	+11	+2	-9
Chi.-Mayor -'87	Washington (D-I) Other candidates	53 39	54 46	+1 +7	+14	+8	-6
CA-Gov. -'86	Bradley (D) Deukmejian (R-I)	37 56	37 61	0 +5	-19	-24	-5
Phila.-Mayor -'83	Goode (D) Egan (R)	50 20	55 37	+5 +17	+30	+18	-12
Chi.-Mayor -'83	Washington (D) Epton (R)	51 37	52 48	+2 +11	+14	+4	-10
CA-Gov. -'83	Bradley (D) Deukmejian (R)	49 42	48 49	-1 +7	+7	-1	-8

³Candidate Labels

D (Democrat)
R (Republican)

I (Incumbent)

Our second analysis provides additional evidence that pre-election polls on biracial general elections behave in a consistent manner. In all but one case, the 1983 Philadelphia mayoral contest, the black candidate's share of the actual vote did not significantly exceed his total support in the final poll -- at best being only one percentage point higher. Further, the one piece of anomalous data can be easily explained. The Philadelphia poll had 21% undecided -- roughly double the size of the undecided vote in the other polls. Had the percent undecided been lower, one might assume that Wilson Goode's support in the poll would have been at least a few percentage points higher, thus reducing the difference between the poll findings and the election results.

CHART 3

CHANGE IN SUPPORT
 Biracial General Elections

<u>Election</u>	<u>Black Cand. Support in Final Poll</u> %	<u>Black Cand. Share of Actual Vote</u> %	<u>Diff.</u>	<u>Size of Undec.</u>
VA-Gov. '89	52	50	-2	7
NYC-Mayor '89	51	50	-1	10
Phila.-Mayor '87	50	51	+1	11
Chi.-Mayor '87	53	54	+1	8
CA-Gov. '86	37	37	0	5
Phila.-Mayor '83	50	55	+5	21
Chi.-Mayor '83	51	52	+1	12
CA-Gov. '82	49	48	-1	9

The consistency with which these nine sets of pre-election poll results compare with actual election results is striking given some of the differences among the candidates involved and the nature of the campaigns. For example, while the 1983 Washington-Epton contest was seen as one of the most bitter and racially divisive elections in recent history, the Gallup final survey on that particular election performed no better or worse than did our final poll on last year's more gentlemanly Dinkins-Giuliani race in New York. Further, our poll results in the 1987 and 1983 elections diverged from actual election results by a similar margin, even though Harold Washington ran as an incumbent the second time.

Polls' Performance in Biracial Primaries

Biracial primary elections -- such the 1989 New York Democratic primary election between Koch and Dinkins -- don't seem to present the same measurement problems for pollsters that biracial general elections do. This conclusion is based on a review of pre-primary polls' performance in five different primaries, including the Koch-Dinkins contest. Gallup data was available for three of these primaries -- those in New York and Chicago.

Shown below are the races and polls we analyzed. We decided to limit our analysis to two-way races. This left us with fewer races to analyze, since primaries often include a multi-candidate field. Although we had only five sets of results to evaluate, we felt that it was necessary to limit ourselves to two-way races in order to make valid comparisons between polls in biracial general elections and those in biracial primaries.

CHART 4

THE RACES
 Biracial Primary Elections

<u>Election</u>	<u>Black</u>	<u>White</u>	<u>Election</u>	<u>Poll</u>	<u>Sample Size</u> <u>Organization</u>
NYC-Mayor -'89	Dinkins	Koch	Sept. 15	Sept. 4-7	760 (RV's) Gallup
Chi-Mayor -'89	Sawyer	Daley	Feb. 28	Feb. 10-14	1001 (RV's) Gallup
Chi-Mayor -'87	Washington	Byrne	Feb. 24	Feb. 3-9	826 (LV's) Gallup
Phila-Mayor -'87	Goode	Rendell	May 19	April 2-5	403 (LV's) KYW-TV
Phila-Mayor -'83	Goode	Rizzo	May 17	April 22-23	693 (RV's) Teichner Poll

RV's - Registered Voters
 LV's - Likely Voters

Analyzing the primary poll data first in terms of "the spread" -- the difference in the margins separating the two candidates in the poll and the actual election results -- we do not find the consistent overestimation of the black candidate's position that was seen for biracial general elections. Only in one case, the 1987 Philadelphia Democratic primary between Goode and Rendell, did the pre-primary poll results differ from the actual election outcome by the magnitude typical of pre-election polls in biracial general elections. Further, when evaluated on the basis of the point spread, Gallup's two surveys in biracial primary elections last year were as accurate as Gallup's final polls on the last two presidential elections.⁴

⁴When evaluated on the basis of the point spread, Gallup's estimates of the winning candidate's margin of victory in last year's New York and Chicago Democratic primaries differed by 2 percentage points and 0 percentage points, respectively, from actual results. The Gallup Poll's final survey estimates of the winner's margins in the presidential races differed from actual results by 4 percentage points (1988) and 0 percentage points (1984).

CHART 5

CHANGE IN SUPPORT
 Biracial Primary Election

<u>Election</u>	<u>Candidates</u> ⁵	<u>Final Poll</u>	<u>Actual Vote</u>	<u>Change</u>	<u>Cand. Lead Poll</u>	<u>Actual Margin</u>	<u>Change</u>
NYC-Mayor '89	Dinkins (B) Koch (W-I)	46 39	51 42	+5 +3	+7	+9	+2
Chi.-Mayor '89	Sawyer (B-I) Daley (W)	38 50	44 56	+6 +6	-12	-12	0
Chi.-Mayor '87	Washington (B-I) Byrne (W)	52 40	54 46	+2 +6	+12	+8	-4
Phila.-Mayor '87	Goode (B-I) Rendell (W)	54 31	57 43	+3 +12	+23	+14	-9
Phila.-Mayor '83	Goode (B) Rizzo (W)	42 30	53 46	+11 +16	+12	+7	-5

⁵Candidate Labels

B (Black)
 W (White)

I (Incumbent)

Final pre-primary results in biracial elections also do not seem to reflect a "ceiling" above which a black candidate's support will not further increase. In three of the five cases studied, the black candidate's share of the actual vote was at least 5 percentage points greater than his proportion of the vote in the final poll.

Why Polls on Biracial General Elections Appear Less Accurate

Our analysis suggests that candidate standing in biracial general elections has been more difficult to measure than candidate standing in biracial primaries because party labels, often helpful in predicting preferences in other types of elections, create a conflict between party and race that adds a systematic bias to the results. When we examined the demographic and political characteristics of the late undecided vote in these elections, we consistently found it to be disproportionately white and non-Republican. Further, when exit poll results are compared, voter subgroup by voter subgroup, with candidate preferences in pre-election polls, the biggest discrepancies are found among these same types of voters -- whites and those who call themselves Democrats or Independents.

Gallup pre-election poll data and CBS exit poll data for three biracial mayoral general elections shows how consistently these polls err in estimating how many white voters will end up supporting the Republican candidate. Last year in New York, Giuliani's share of the white vote in the CBS exit poll was 18 percentage points higher than the corresponding figure in Gallup's final survey. Similarly, white candidates opposing Harold Washington in Chicago's 1987 Chicago mayoral election scored 17 percentage points higher among white voters in the exit poll than they did in the pre-election poll. And in Chicago's 1983 mayoral, Bernard Epton's share of the white vote in the exit poll was 17 percentage points above his percentage in the pre-election poll.

While the presence of Republicans is one thing that sets general elections apart from Democratic primaries, this analysis makes it clear that they are not the source of the error. In all three elections, the Republican candidate's share of the Republican vote in the pre-election poll was not exceeded by his share of the vote in the exit poll.

CHART 6
1989 NYC General Election

<u>Dinkins</u>				
	<u>FOX/ Gallup Poll Nov. 3-5</u>	<u>NY Times/ CBS Exit Poll Nov. 7</u>	<u>Change</u>	<u>Other/ Undecided</u>
	<u>%</u>	<u>%</u>		
Total	51	50	-1	11
<u>Race Ethnicity</u>				
White	31	27	-4	14
Black	92	91	-1	5
Hispanic	63	65	+2	7
<u>Party</u>				
Republican	13	17	+4	7
Democrats	64	69	+5	12
Independent	34	34	--	10
<u>Democrat Primary</u>				
Dinkins	90	90	--	4
Koch	35	36	+1	16

<u>Giuliani</u>				
	<u>FOX/ Gallup Poll Nov. 3-5</u>	<u>NY Times/ CBS Exit Poll Nov. 7</u>	<u>Change</u>	<u>Other/ Undecided</u>
	<u>%</u>	<u>%</u>		
Total	36	48	+12	11
<u>Race/Ethnicity</u>				
White	53	71	+18	14
Black	2	7	+5	5
Hispanic	28	34	+6	7
<u>Party</u>				
Republican	76	81	+5	7
Democrats	23	30	+7	12
Independent	50	62	+12	10
<u>Democratic Primary Vote</u>				
Dinkins	5	9	+4	4
Koch	48	63	+15	16

CHART 7
1987 GENERAL ELECTION

-----Washington-----

	<u>Gallup Poll</u> <u>March 16 to 23</u> %	<u>CBS/WBBM</u> <u>Exit Poll</u> <u>April 7</u> %	<u>Change</u>	<u>Other/</u> <u>Undecided</u>
Total	50	53	+3	9
<u>Race</u>				
White	20	15	-5	11
Black	91	96	+5	6
Hispanic	53	55	+2	6
<u>Party ID</u>				
Republican	14	24	+10	8
Democrat	60	59	-1	10
Independent	34	38	+4	8
<u>Primary Vote</u>				
Washington	91	94	+3	3
Byrne	7	6	-1	6

-----Other Candidates-----

	<u>Gallup Poll</u> <u>March 16 to 23</u> %	<u>CBS/WBBM</u> <u>Exit Poll</u> <u>April 7</u> %	<u>Change</u>	<u>Other/</u> <u>Undecided</u>
Total	41	47	+6	9
<u>Race</u>				
White	69	86	+17	11
Black	3	3	-	6
Hispanic	41	43	+2	6
<u>Party ID</u>				
Republican	77	75	-2	8
Democrat	31	40	+9	10
Independent	58	62	+4	8
<u>Primary Vote</u>				
Washington	6	6	0	3
Byrne	87	93	+6	6

CHART 8
1983 GENERAL ELECTION

-----Washington-----

	<u>Gallup Poll</u> <u>March 26-30</u> %	<u>CBS</u> <u>Exit Poll</u> <u>April 12</u> %	<u>Change</u>	<u>Other/</u> <u>Undecided</u>
Total	51	52	+1	12
<u>Race</u>				
White	20	18	-2	16
Black	92	98	+6	7
<u>Party</u>				
Republican	10	19	+9	2
Democrat	63	63	-	11
Independent	40	43	+3	14
<u>Primary Vote</u>				
Byrne	31	20	-11	11
Daley	20	19	-1	13

-----Epton-----

	<u>Gallup Poll</u> <u>March 26-30</u> %	<u>CBS</u> <u>Exit Poll</u> <u>April 12</u> %	<u>Change</u>	<u>Other/</u> <u>Undecided</u>
Total	37	48	+11	12
<u>Race</u>				
White	64	81	+17	16
Black	1	1	-	7
<u>Party</u>				
Republican	88	79	-9	2
Democrat	26	36	+10	11
Independent	46	56	+10	14
<u>Primary Vote</u>				
Byrne	58	77	+19	11
Daley	67	80	+13	13

Our analysis generally supports Professor Lawrence Bobo's assertion that the polls' failures to estimate the closeness of these kinds of elections are explained by "a small but significant number of... 'racially ambivalent' Democrats and Independents."⁶ Bobo sees these voters as ascribing to racial equality in society, but holding serious reservations about blacks in leadership positions. Whether or not Bobo is right about why their response in the polls differs from their actual vote, he seems to have identified the right voters.

We see the difficulties of measuring the preferences of this group of voters in biracial general elections as resulting from the built-in conflict between party and race. White voters prone to support Democratic candidates are being asked to either support a Republican or a Democrat of a different race. When these voters tell an interviewer they are undecided, their response may reflect true indecision, or it may reflect a desire not to appear discriminatory given their general preference for Democratic candidates.

Gallup's experience polling in another type of biracial election suggests that measurement problems arising from race-party conflict are not limited to elections where white Democrats are asked to support a black. Last year in Chicago, white candidate Richard M. Daley, winner of the Democratic primary, faced black candidate Tim Evans in the general election for mayor. Evans, a Democrat, chose to bypass the Democratic primary to run as an Independent in the general election.

In that particular contest, the late undecided vote was disproportionately black. Poll results in the Daley-Evans race overestimated the white candidate's vote-getting ability. As show in the following table, what happened in this election parallels what occurred in the more typical biracial general election. Evans received 41% of the vote on election day, 10 percentage points greater than his share of the vote in the final Gallup pre-election poll. This time, black voters were the ones having to choose between party and race and they seem to have behaved much like their white counterparts.

⁶Professor Bobo's analysis of the problems associated with polling in biracial contests appeared in The Baltimore Sun (November 12, 1989).

CHART 9
CHANGE IN SUPPORT

<u>Election</u>	<u>Candidates</u>	<u>Final Poll</u>	<u>Actual Vote</u>	<u>Change</u>
WHITE DEMOCRAT VS. BLACK NON-DEMOCRAT				
Chi.-Mayor -'89	Daley (D)	53	56	+3
	Evans (I)	31	41	+10
BLACK DEMOCRAT VS. WHITE NON-DEMOCRAT				
VA-Gov. -'89	Wilder (D)	52	50.1	-2
	Coleman (R)	41	49.9	+9
NYC-Mayor -'89	Dinkins (D)	51	50	-1
	Giuliani (R)	37	48	+11
Phila.-Mayor -'87	Goode (D)	50	51	+1
	Rizzo (R)	39	49	+10
Chi.-Mayor -'87	Washington (D)	53	54	+1
	Other candidates	39	46	+7
CA-Gov. -'86	Bradley (D)	37	37	0
	Deukmejian (R)	56	61	+5
Phila.-Mayor -'83	Goode (D)	50	55	+5
	Egan (R)	20	37	+17
Chi.-Mayor -'83	Washington (D)	51	52	+2
	Epton (R)	37	48	+11
CA-Gov. -'83	Bradley (D)	49	48	-1
	Deukmejian (R)	42	49	+7

Recommendations for Reporting Results in Future Biracial Elections

The consistency with which pre-election polls seem to mis-estimate candidate standing in biracial general elections demands that researchers interpret them in a special manner. To report the results of polls in these elections in the same way as poll results in a presidential election or a local election between two white candidates is likely to give news media clients and their audiences the wrong impression about the closeness of the race.

When reporting poll results in biracial general elections, the racial composition of the undecided vote must be highlighted. If the racial composition of the undecided vote differs markedly from that of the total sample, the researcher must take into account how, as a consequence, the election outcome might differ from the poll results.

Many election poll practitioners choose not to speculate about how survey respondents who say they are undecided in a final pre-election poll are likely to vote. Gallup is one of the few organizations that goes on record in a presidential election with a final pre-election estimate that includes an allocation of the undecided vote. For biracial elections, allocation of the undecided vote in the final poll, and some effort to characterize the undecided vote in prior polls, seems essential given the record of polling in these contests. To release such poll results without characterizing the undecided vote risks an election night surprise, like the one that occurred in New York last November.

We propose allocating the undecided vote in biracial general elections strictly on the basis of race. We tested this method using pre-election poll data from the six biracial elections on which we were able to obtain breakdowns of the racial composition of the undecided vote. The following chart outlines the elections studied and the racial breakdowns of the total sample and the undecided vote in each pre-election poll.⁷

⁷All poll results included in this analysis are reported on a registered voter base since the racial composition of the likely voter base was not always available. As a result, poll results for some elections may differ from those cited previously.

CHART 10

PROPORTION OF UNDECIDED BY RACE OF RESPONDENT
 Biracial General Elections

	<u>Proportion of Sample</u> %	<u>Proportion of Total Undecided Vote</u>
NYC-Mayor -'89 (DINKINS VS. GIULIANI)		
Total White	57	71
Black	25	11
Hispanic	16	10
Chi.-Mayor -'87 (WASHINGTON VS. VRDOLYAK)		
White	53	66
Black	37	24
Hispanic	8	5
CA-Governor -'86 (BRADLEY VS. DEUKMEJIAN)		
White	81	65
Black	8	8
Chic.-Mayor -'83 (WASHINGTON VS. EPTON)		
White	54	73
Black	40	23
CA-Governor -'82 (BRADLEY VS. DEUKMEJIAN)		
White	82	80
Black	6	5
Chi.-Mayor '89 (DALEY VS. EVANS)		
White	51	38
Black	39	51
Hispanic	6	2

Having collected the data on racial composition, we then allocated the undecided vote in the poll by giving the black candidate all of the black vote and assigning all of the non-black vote to the white candidate. The following chart demonstrates the success of this allocation method in improving accuracy of the poll results. In all six cases, the poll's estimate of the winning candidate's percentage of the vote ranged from 1 to 3 percentage points of his share of the actual vote. Had we used this method in New York last November, our final figure would have cut Dinkins's margin in half, out of the double-digit range that suggested he would win by a comfortable margin.

CHART 11

ALLOCATING UNDECIDED BASED ON RACE
 Biracial General Elections

	<u>Final Poll</u>	<u>Undecided Allocated</u>	<u>Actual Vote</u>
NYC-Mayor -'89 (RV's)			
Dinkins	51	52	50
Giuliani	36	45	48
Other	2	2	2
Undecided	11	-	-
Chi.-Mayor -'87 (RV's)			
Washington	50	52	54
Other Candidates	41	48	46
Undecided	9	-	-
CA-Governor -'86 (RV's)			
Bradley	37	38	37
Deukmejian	56	60	61
Other	2	2	2
Undecided	5	-	-
Chi.-Mayor -'83 (RV's)			
Washington	51	54	52
Epton	37	46	48
Undecided	12	-	-
CA-Governor -'82 (RV's)			
Bradley	50	51	48
Deukmejian	40	48	49
Other	1	1	3
Undecided	9	-	-
Chi.-Mayor -'89 (RV's)			
DaIey (D)	51	56	56
Evans (I)	30	37	41
Vrdolyak (R)	6	6	4
Undecided	13	-	-

Because racial breakdowns were not available based on likely voters, the above numbers are based on registered voters.

In proposing this method for allocating the undecided vote in biracial general elections, we do not mean to imply that all of the error in the poll results from the undecided vote breaking overwhelming in one direction. In fact, it seems more likely that some "racially ambivalent" voters tell us in pre-election polls that they will vote for the Democrat but end up voting for the candidate of the same race on election day. But regardless of the precise nature of the shift, in practical terms, this method seems to work.

It should be pointed out, however, that there is a precedent to suggest that the undecided vote in pre-election polls can break heavily in one direction. When media pollster Nick Panagakis collected poll results for 155 elections that included an incumbent, he found that in 127 of those cases, or 82%, most or all of the undecided vote appeared to go for the challenger.⁸ Further, many of the exceptions to Panagakis's so-called incumbent rule might be explained by the challenger having shared some of the characteristics of incumbency. He found that many challengers who failed to win most of the undecided vote were current or recent officeholders themselves.

In sum, the closeness of the Dinkins-Giuliani race in New York should have been better anticipated by the election pollsters and the journalistic community. Previous polls in similar biracial contests had consistently overestimated the black candidate's vote-getting ability. Dinkins's more moderate style should not have caused us to expect a difference in the polls' performance -- the same phenomenon had happened in California when another more moderate black, Tom Bradley, ran for Governor. Nor should we have underestimated Giuliani's ability to attract votes because he was running as a Republican underdog in a heavily Democratic city -- Bernie Epton was a virtual unknown when he came close to defeating Harold Washington in Chicago.

⁸Nick Panagakis's analysis of the polls performance in incumbent races appeared in the February 27, 1989 issue of The Polling Report (Vol 5, No. 4).

Until experience proves otherwise, pre-election polls on biracial general elections should be interpreted in light of the racial composition of the undecided vote. A size of a candidate's lead in a poll must be qualified if the undecided vote is disproportionately of a different race than the leading candidate.