AP VoteCast Methodology: 2021 Virginia Methods Statement

AP VoteCast is a survey of the American electorate conducted by the AP-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research for The Associated Press and Fox News. In the 2021 Virginia election for the Governor, AP VoteCast combines interviews with a random sample of registered voters drawn from state voter files with self-identified registered voters selected using nonprobability approaches.

Interviews are conducted in English and Spanish. Respondents may receive a small monetary incentive for completing the survey. Participants selected as part of the random sample can be contacted by phone, text, and mail and can take the survey by phone or online. Participants selected as part of the nonprobability sample complete the survey online.

The survey is expected to complete about 3,000 interviews with registered voters between October 27 and November 2, 2021, concluding as polls close on Election Day. The margin of sampling error is expected to be about plus or minus 2.5 percentage points for voters and 4.5 percentage points for nonvoters. As with all surveys, AP VoteCast is subject to multiple sources of error, including from sampling, question wording and order, and nonresponse.

Sampling Details

Probability-Based Registered Voter Sample

NORC obtains its sample of registered voters from Catalist LLC's registered voter database. This database includes demographic information, as well as addresses and phone numbers for registered voters, allowing potential respondents to be contacted via mail and telephone. The sample is stratified by state, partisanship, and a modeled likelihood to respond to the mailing based on factors such as age, race, gender, voting history, and census block group education. In addition, NORC attempts to match sampled records to a registered voter database maintained by L2, which provides additional phone numbers and demographic information.

Prior to dialing, all probability sample records are mailed an invitation to complete the survey either online using a unique PIN or via telephone by calling a toll-free number. Those sample records with a cell phone number are also sent a text message with a link to complete the survey online. Telephone interviews are conducted with the adult that answers the phone following confirmation of registered voter status in the state.

Nonprobability Sample

Nonprobability participants include panelists from Dynata or Lucid, including members of its third-party panels. Digital fingerprint software and panel-level ID validation is used to prevent respondents from completing the AP VoteCast survey multiple times.

Weighting Details

AP VoteCast employs a four-step weighting approach that combines the probability sample with the nonprobability sample and refines estimates at a subregional level within each state.

First, weights are constructed separately for the probability sample and the nonprobability sample. These weights are adjusted to registered voter population totals to correct for demographic imbalances

in age, gender, education, race/ethnicity, and county political grouping of the responding sample compared to the population of registered voters.

In 2021, the adjustment targets are derived from a combination of data from the U.S. Census Bureau's November 2020 Current Population Survey Voting and Registration Supplement, Catalist's voter file and the Census Bureau's 2019 American Community Survey. Prior to adjusting to population totals, the probability-based registered voter list sample weights are adjusted for differential non-response related to factors such as availability of phone numbers, age, race and partisanship.

Second, all respondents receive a calibration weight. The calibration weight is designed to ensure the nonprobability sample is similar to the probability sample in regard to variables that are predictive of vote choice, such as partisanship or direction of the country, which cannot be fully captured through the prior demographic adjustments. The calibration benchmarks are based on state level estimates from regression models using the probability cases.

Third, all respondents are weighted to improve estimates for substate geographic regions. This weight combines the weighted probability and nonprobability samples, and then uses a small area model to improve the estimate within subregions of a state.

Fourth, the survey results are weighted to the actual vote count following the completion of the election. This weighting is done in 21 subregions within Virginia.