

Changing Minds : Two tests of the Influence of Polls on Movement in Opinion During Electoral Campaigns

Presented
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Literature - synthesis

- ✦ Impact of polls not in all elections :
 - ✦ More likely when election is close and many polls, not too ambiguous (SIC)
 - ✦ More likely when more than 2 candidates or options.
- ✦ May vary during an electoral campaign (beginning vs end)
- ✦ Not on all people (more vs less sophisticated voters? Undecided or partisan?)
- ✦ Multiple hypotheses on the process by which polls influence voters (affective vs cognitive, normative vs informative)
- ✦ BUT few empirical validations.

Research question

✦ Do polls influence electors?

If so,

✦ How is this influence acting?

✦ Does this influence vary with specific characteristics of electoral campaigns?

✦ Does this influence vary during campaign?

✦ Does this influence vary according to type of voters (more or less sophisticated)?

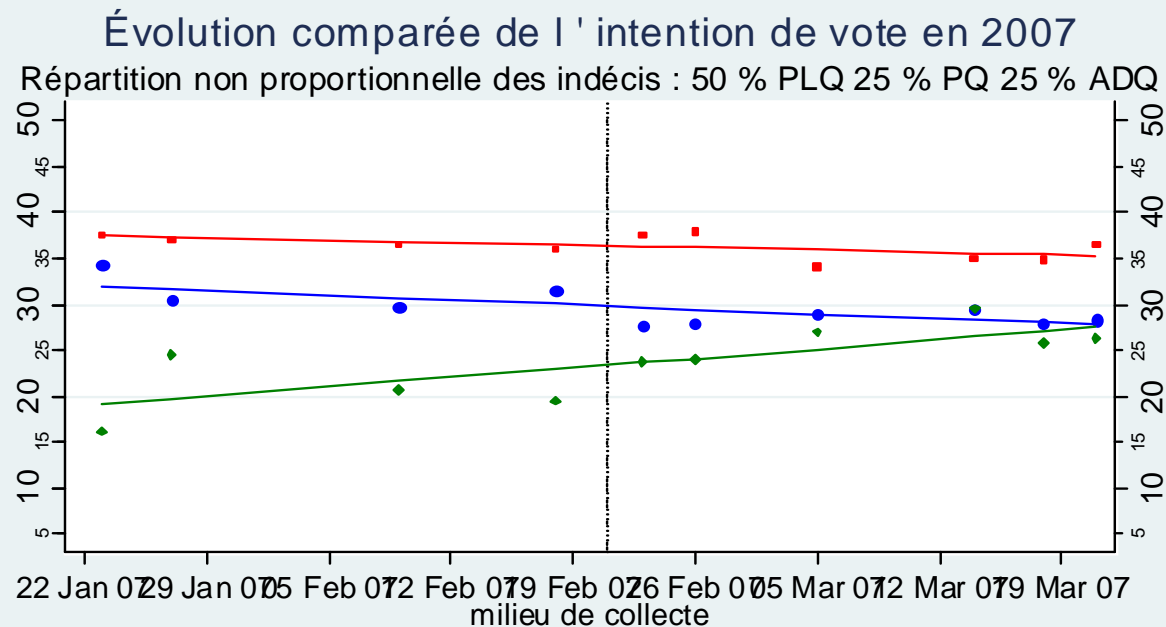
Two elections, two projects

Election 1

- ✦ March 2007, Quebec election
 - ✦ Three parties who will finally get an almost equal share of the vote on election day (33, 30, 28).
 - ✦ Slow but steady movement traced by polls during the campaign for 2nd and 3rd parties but not for the leading party.
 - ✦ Design :
 - ✦ 1st poll at beginning of campaign
 - ✦ 2nd poll at end of campaign
 - ✦ Post election poll among respondents to the pre-election polls a few days after the election.

Evolution of voting intentions, Quebec election 2007

Election 1



Note : not many polls, evolution of 2 parties only

Two elections, two projects

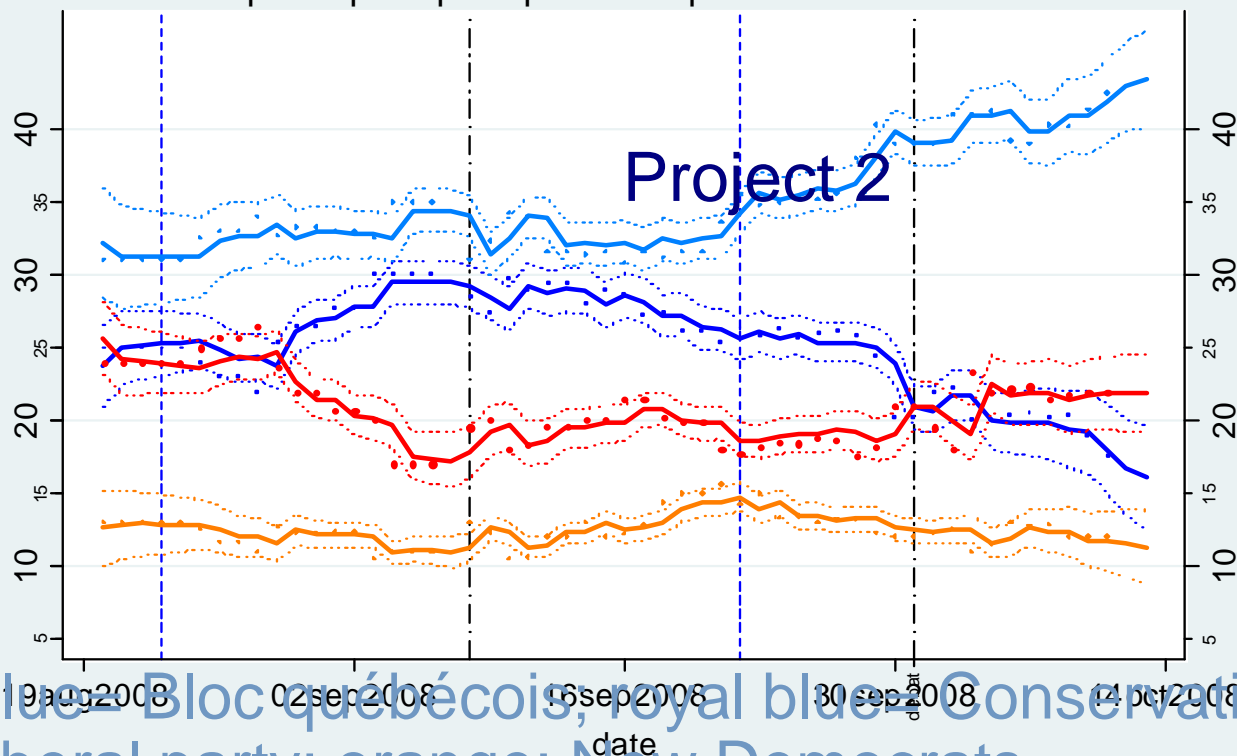
Election 2

- + Sept-oct 2008, Canadian election - in Quebec
- + Four main parties in Quebec.
- + Huge movement during the campaign:
 - + At beginning : Bloc and Conservatives almost equal at around 30%, Liberals at around 20% and NDP slightly over 10%. Liberals were going down and Conservatives going up.
 - + At the end, Bloc way ahead at more than 40%, Liberals and Conservatives at around 20% and NDP slightly over 10%.
- + Design :
 - + 1st poll at beginning of campaign
 - + 2nd poll at end of campaign among respondents to the 1st poll
 - + Post election poll among respondents to the pre-election polls a few days after the election.

Evolution of voting intentions - Election 2 - 2008

Canadian election in Quebec

Évolution comparée de l'intention de vote au Québec
quatre principaux partis - depuis le 20 août 2008



Pale blue= Bloc québécois; royal blue= Conservatives;
red=Liberal party; orange: New Democrats
Note: Lots of polls, all parties move.

Summary : Comparison between two elections

	Election 1 QC 2007	Election 2 - CDA 2008
type of election	provincial	federal
participation	71,2%	61,7%
parties at begin.	3 (1 higher)	4 (2 higher, 2 low>
parties at end	3 equal	1 high, 2 middle, 1 lo>
movement	some	substantial
no. polls	low, none middle camp>	high, daily

Measures

- ✦ Interest in campaign
- ✦ Read/heard about polls
- ✦ Perception of/ Confidence in polls
- ✦ Polls good for the voter?
- ✦ Change between intention (time 1/time 2) and vote cast (post-election poll).
- ✦ Influence of polls on change - self report

Comparison of 2 projects

Summary of measures

	Election1 - 1st poll	Election 1 - 2nd poll	Election 2 - T1	Election 2 - T2
Read/heard about polls	60%	68%	51%	
Who is leading?	52% Liberals (93>	34% Liberals (57%>	21% Bloc Qc (>	
Polls are ok?	61%	54%	n/a	
Rely on polls	59%	58%	n/a	
polls scientific	n/a	n/a	78%	
polls reliable	n/a	n/a	68%	
Polls good for voters	55%	55%	67%	
Polls influenced you?	29%	29%	29%	
made decision + diff.	9%	9%	7%	
made decision easier	20%	20%	22%	
change party	14%	10%	17%	5%
twds no vote	13%	10%	13%	13%
undec. twds vote	4%	5%	3%	4%
stable	41%	49%	38%	35%

Results for Election 1

	Change party	twds no vote	from undec. twds party
end of campaign	-	-	=
age	-	--	=
scol	-	--	-
region	=	+Mtl island	=
heard/read polls	-	--	=
rely on polls	=	=	-
polls influ. decision	+	+	--

- ✦ Those who read/heard about polls are less likely to have changed their mind or decided not to vote.
- ✦ But those who changed their mind or decided not to vote are more likely to say that polls influenced their decision.

Results for election 1 (continued)

According to beginning vs end, interested vs non interested.

- + Predictors are the same and act in the same manner if we look at each survey (beginning and end of campaign) separately except for “rely on polls” which becomes non significant.
- + Interested respondents (54% of sample) are more likely to be stable (71% vs 49%), less likely to be non voters (10% vs 22%).
- + Changers and non voters tend to declare that polls influenced their decision while it is not the case among not interested electors.
- + Among interested respondents, those who read polls are less likely to be non voters.

Results for Election 2

	Time 1 to time 3	Time 1 to time 3	Time 2 to time 3	Time 2 to time 3
	change party	twds no vote	change party	twds no vote
age	=	--	=	--
scol	=	--	=	--
region	=	=	=	=
heard/read polls	-	--	-	--
polls are reliable	=	=	=	=
polls influ. decision	=	=	=	=

- ✦ Those who read/heard about polls are less likely to have changed their mind or decided not to vote (same as election 1).
- ✦ But in this election, people who changed their mind or decided not to vote are not more likely to say that polls influenced their decision.

Results for election 2 (continued)

According to beginning vs end, interested vs non interested.

- + Predictors are the same and act in the same manner at time 1 and at time 2.
- + Interest in election asked only at time 2.
 - + As in election 1, interested respondents (68%) are more likely to be stable (62% vs 42%) and less likely to be non voters (9% vs 21%).
 - + Among interested electors, none of the variable related to attitudes towards polls is related to change while among non interested people, reading polls is a predictor of stability and vote.

Summary

- ✦ In both elections those who read polls are more likely to be stable voters.
- ✦ In election 1 where support for parties became very close at the end, changers report -- more than stable voters -- that polls are likely to have influenced their final choice.
- ✦ In election 2 where support for parties became quite differentiated at the end, changers do not report more than stable voters that polls are likely to have influenced their final choice.
- ✦ We did not find an influence of confidence in polls on change, all things being equal.
- ✦ The so-called undecided have a profile more similar to partisan non disclosers than to really undecided people.

Answers to research questions

- ✦ Do polls influence electors?
 - ✦ Interested people read polls.
 - ✦ People who read polls are **less** likely to change their mind.
 - ✦ Changers in election 1 say that polls influenced them but there is no influence of confidence in polls on change.
- ✦ People who acknowledge being influenced by polls are more sophisticated voters who may be influenced by a number of informations among which there are polls.

Answers to research questions

- ✦ Does this “influence” vary with specific characteristics of electoral campaigns?
- ✦ In election 1 where support for parties was less differentiated, people report that polls influenced them but not in election 2 where parties were further apart at the end.
- ✦ People may feel that they were influenced by polls in some specific situations:
 - ✦ When there is a close race at the end.
 - ✦ When they like two parties quite equally.

Answers to research questions

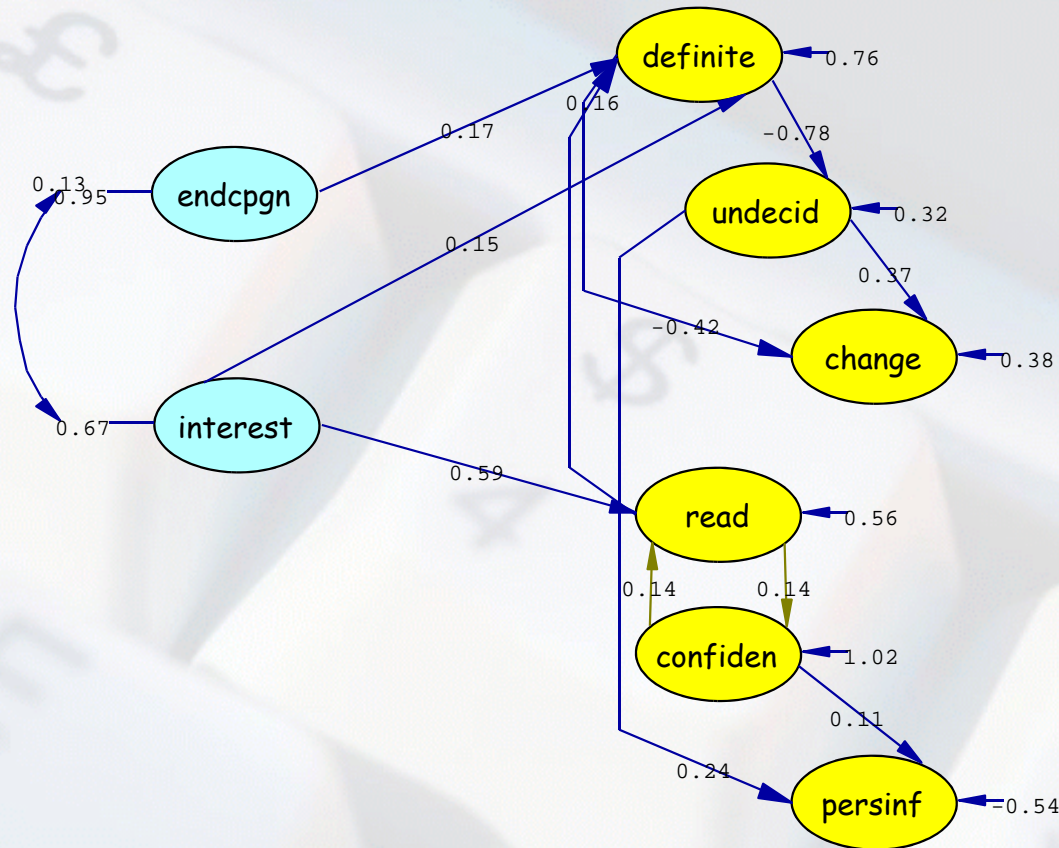
- ✦ Does this influence vary during campaign?
 - ✦ There is more change between beginning of campaign and vote than between end of campaign and vote.
- ✦ But predictors are similar.
- ✦ We may conclude that it is the situation that prevails when people vote that may impact on the influence of polls, not the situation during the campaign. (To be validated).

Answers to research questions.

- ✦ Does this “influence” vary according to type of voters (less vs more sophisticated)?
- ✦ In both elections, predictors tend to vary according to interest in the campaign.
 - ✦ Interested people tend to acknowledge an influence of polls on their decision (election1).
 - ✦ Reading polls has no influence on change (election 2) among interested people but it is related to voting behavior among not interested people.

A model of polls' influence

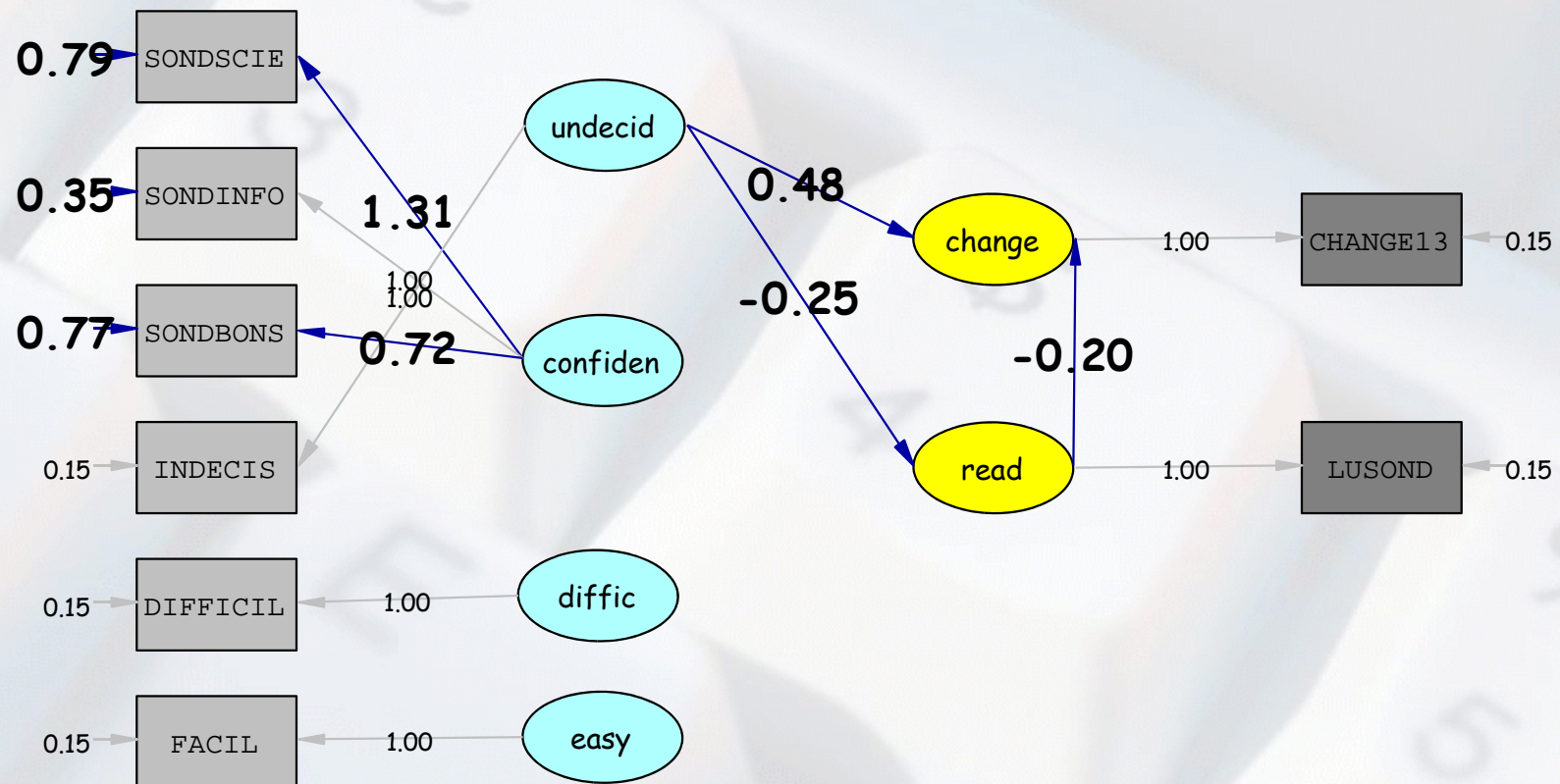
Election 1



Chi-Square=93.21, df=31, P-value=0.00000, RMSEA=0.043

A model of polls' influence

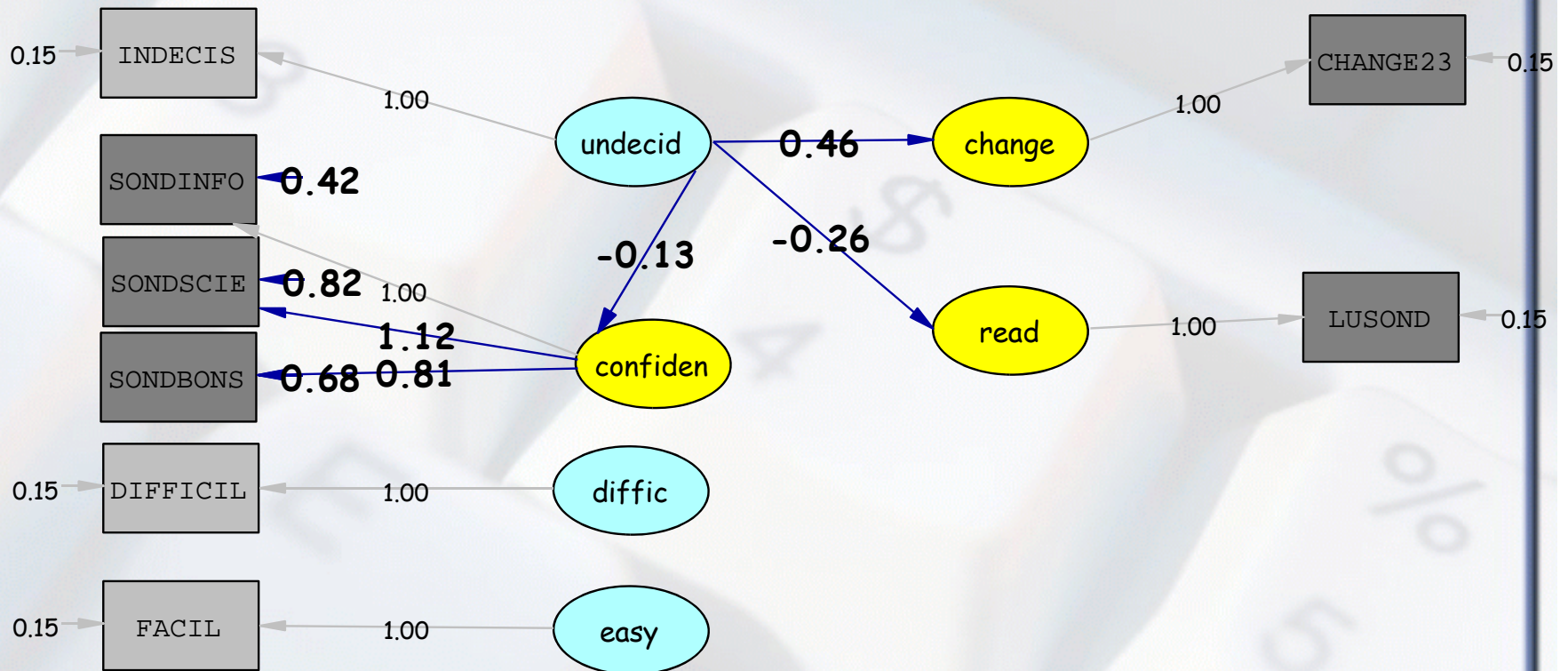
Election 2 - change from t1 to t3



Chi-Square=18.71, df=16, P-value=0.28399, RMSEA=0.018

A model of polls' influence

Election 2 - change from t2 to t3



Chi-Square=37.42, df=19, P-value=0.00703, RMSEA=0.050

Conclusion

- ✦ We tend to conclude that
 - ✦ There is not much influence of polls
 - ✦ Except perhaps in some very specific situations
- ✦ Perhaps because both elections took place in a parliamentary system where what happens in constituencies is not informed by polls.
- ✦ Polls are used mostly by sophisticated, interested electors.