

# Self-reported influence of polls on voting intention and explanatory factors

## Influencia autoreportada de las encuestas en la intención de voto y factores explicativos

### *Influência auto-relatada das pesquisas nas intenções de voto e fatores explicativos*

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**ABSTRACT** | This paper analyzes the importance that citizens give to electoral polls in their vote intention, considering their intense propagandistic reach and news coverage in Mexico. The traditional factors of electoral behavior were contrasted as independent variables –partisan identification, candidates' proposals, the reference groups, and political sophistication– that predict the polls' influence. Given the few previous studies in the region, we conducted an exploratory exercise of a mixed and case nature, using an online analytical survey (n=209) and five focus groups in the same five municipalities (n=40 participants). The results showed that the polls are widely consulted, but little considered in formulating the vote, in absolute terms and in relation to other factors of electoral behavior, partly due to a distrust of them. However, it was confirmed that informed voters, i.e., with higher levels of political sophistication, of a higher socioeconomic level, and who pay more attention to the campaign, are the ones who show a greater poll influence. The research seeks to lay the foundations for further studies of this phenomenon, which is little addressed in the current literature on electoral behavior.

**KEYWORDS:** electoral surveys; political communication; electoral behavior; party identification; candidates' proposals; reference groups; political sophistication; Mexico.

#### HOW TO CITE

Bellia, L. & Echeverría, M. (2022). Influencia auto reportada de las encuestas en la intención de voto y factores explicativos. *Cuadernos.info*, (53), 117-137. <https://doi.org/10.7764/cdi.53.48517>

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**RESUMEN** | Esta investigación analiza la importancia que los ciudadanos le otorgan a las encuestas electorales en su intención de voto, considerando su intensa mediatización propagandística y noticiosa en México. Se contrastaron los factores tradicionales de comportamiento electoral como variables independientes –identificación partidista, las propuestas de los candidatos, los grupos de referencia y la sofisticación política– que predicen la influencia de las encuestas. Dado los escasos estudios precedentes en la región, se realizó un ejercicio exploratorio de naturaleza mixta y de caso, utilizando una encuesta analítica en línea (n=209) y cinco grupos focales en cinco municipios (n=40 participantes). Los resultados arrojaron que las encuestas son muy consultadas, pero poco consideradas para formular el voto, en términos absolutos y con relación a otros factores de comportamiento electoral, en parte por una desconfianza hacia ellas. No obstante, se confirmó que los votantes informados, es decir, con mayores niveles de sofisticación política, de nivel socioeconómico más alto y que prestan más atención a la campaña, son quienes manifiestan una mayor influencia de las encuestas. La investigación busca sentar las bases para estudios posteriores sobre este fenómeno, poco abordado en la literatura actual sobre comportamiento electoral.

**PALABRAS CLAVE:** encuestas electorales; comunicación política; comportamiento electoral; identificación partidista; propuestas de los candidatos; grupos de referencia; sofisticación política en México.

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**RESUMO** | Esta pesquisa analisa a importância que os cidadãos dão às pesquisas eleitorais na sua intenção de voto, considerando sua intensa cobertura propagandística e jornalística no México. Os fatores tradicionais do comportamento eleitoral foram contrastados como variáveis independentes –a identificação partidária, as propostas dos candidatos, os grupos de referência e a sofisticação política– que predizem a influência das pesquisas. Devido aos poucos estudos anteriores na região, foi realizado um exercício exploratório de natureza mista e de casos, utilizando uma pesquisa analítica online (n=209) e cinco grupos focais em cinco municípios (n=40 participantes). Os resultados mostraram que as pesquisas são amplamente consultadas, mas pouco consideradas para formular o voto, em termos absolutos e em relação a outros fatores do comportamento eleitoral, em parte devido a uma desconfiança em relação a elas. No entanto, confirmou-se que os eleitores informados, ou seja, com maiores níveis de sofisticação política, maior nível socioeconômico e que prestam mais atenção à campanha, são os que apresentam maior influência das pesquisas. A pesquisa busca estabelecer as bases para estudos futuros sobre esse fenômeno, pouco abordado na literatura atual sobre comportamento eleitoral.

**PALAVRAS-CHAVE:** pesquisas eleitorais; comunicação política; comportamento eleitoral; identificação partidária; propostas de candidatos; grupos de referência; sofisticação política no México.

## INTRODUCTION

Among the most visible narratives about elections, one of them is to narrate them as a sporting contest, in which, throughout the campaign and using polls as a barometer, there are leaders and laggards, winners and losers. Journalistic, propagandistic, but also popular, the literature talks about a horse race frame, because it reports who is ahead or behind in the election race and speculates about the scenarios and final results (Pedersen, 2012). Due to their saturation during campaigns, the influence of polls on voters' decisions is under discussion.

There has been a long-standing interest in unraveling the variables that influence voting behavior –such as a retrospective consideration of voting, partisan identification, or reference groups– (Downs, 1957; Lipset & Rokkan, 1992). Although it was acknowledged that the media played a certain cognitive role in voting intention, this was less significant than other variables. However, given the contemporary trends of political secularization and partisan misalignment, traditional and digital media content could gain renewed strength as predictors of voting (Romero & Parás, 2018).

In this regard, polls as vote determinants as a means of guiding the perception of the likely winner, and consequently biasing the electorate, have been studied on the basis of the bandwagon and underdog hypotheses (Roy et al., 2015; Van der Meer et al., 2016; Obermaier et al., 2015). In contrast, the place of polls as a self-perceived source of electoral influence versus other established sources has been less extensively researched. Although self-perception measures are often not consistent with actual behaviors, they are important for revealing the intersubjective dimension of the complex electoral decision, allowing to capture processes such as reflexivity and voters' internal and peer negotiation during campaigns.

In Mexico, the first studies of electoral behavior considered factors typical of the authoritarian system prior to the democratic transition, such as clientelism, despotism, or systemic identification, but they were relativized in the face of contemporary factors as democracy matured (Moreno Álvarez, 2003, 2009; Moreno Álvarez & Meixueiro Nájera, 2012; Moreno Álvarez, 2018). Surveys begin to be considered in the Mexican literature with greater preponderance from 2012 (Kuschick Ramos, 2012; Abundis Luna et al., 2014). Evidence on the self-perceived influence of surveys and the factors that explain it is scarce, beyond an exploratory study (Gálvez Muñoz, 2011). Only the experimental design of Cantú and Márquez (2021) seeks to know the influence of pre-election polls on voters; the results show that respondents identify themselves as undecided.

This research explores the influence of electoral polls, disseminated in digital and traditional media versus other sources of influence that have proven empirical

relevance in the electoral behavior of Mexicans, on the voting intention as reported by the electors themselves. The other sources of influence include candidates' proposals, political sophistication to correctly interpret polls (Moreno Álvarez, 2018), reference groups, understood as spheres of political socialization (Moreno Álvarez, 2009), and partisan identification, which in Mexico maintains currency in certain layers of the electorate (Moreno Álvarez, 2003). Although other recent factors –such as the theory of political cleavages of an ethnic nature during the 2018 federal elections (Márquez & Martínez-Hernández, 2022) or presidential approval in the 2021 elections, as a retrospective vote (Moreno Álvarez, 2022)– have shown relevance, according to Moreno Álvarez (2003a, 2009b & 2018c) the first set of factors would be the most relevant and, therefore, the one that will be considered here.

The research is conducted in three moments: 1) inquiry of the degree of citizens' exposure to polls, as a relevant focus of the campaign; 2) exploration of the self-reported influence of polls in contrast to the self-reported influence of the other factors mentioned, and 3) interaction of the degree of exposure to polls with the self-reported influence of polls, which concludes by increasing or decreasing their relevance. To achieve the above task, as a case study, we investigate the gubernatorial election of the state of Puebla in 2019.

### **ELECTORAL POLLS AND VOTING INTENTIONS**

As a scientific instrument used politically, polls are a method of knowledge and expression of the citizenry, giving them a voice in political affairs, as well as a tool in the attainment of power. Electoral surveys are those “conducted on issues related to the campaign or conducted during the main campaign period” (Traugott & Lavrakas, 2008, p. 11). Although a fair number of these are for internal and private use to plan or execute tactics for internal use in the campaign organization and in the parties, others become information to which the greatest possible publicity is given, both by these organizations, for persuasive purposes, and by other agents in the electoral arena, such as journalists (Sampedro, 2000).

This almost ubiquitous diffusion of polls has given rise to a research trend that determines their influence on the electorate's attitudes, since they could be a reference point for voters who follow the elections and the candidates' position. To study their effects, three conditions are deemed relevant: the attention they receive, the trust the voter places in them, and their influence (Asher, 2007; Gálvez Muñoz, 2011; Paletz et al., 1980). In other words, for polls to be successful in modifying voting intentions, voters must be exposed to them, give them some level of credibility, and some cognitive, attitudinal, or behavioral change related to the vote must be elicited.

Regarding the attention paid to polls, their presence is so prominent during campaigns that it is highly probable that citizens are exposed to at least one. Media polls not only monitor opinions on campaign issues, but they are campaign issues themselves (Paletz, 1980). Of course, both aspects happen in the Mexican context (Moreno Álvarez, 2018), fully immersed in an electoral media and digital logic of electoral behavior (Flores et al., 2017; Meyer et al., 2013). For example, De la Peña (2016) states that the number of polls published in the 2012 elections (320) was comparable to that of the U.S. context. Although Echeverría (2017) documents horse race coverage in national newspapers, its presence at the subnational level is not clear, where less sophistication in journalistic coverage and favorage arrangements coexist. In the subnational digital space, there is evidence of a biased circulation of polls during campaigns for propaganda purposes and by partisan affinity (Álvarez Monsiváis, 2018).

Regarding voter confidence in this instrument, Asher (2007) states that some pollsters are concerned about the “increase in skepticism, cynicism, lack of interest, and even hostility towards polls” (p. 21). In the Mexican context, De la Peña (2016) affirms that “they have distanced on many occasions from the accuracy required concerning the distance between the first two places, inverting the order in many cases” (p. 29). On the other hand, Moreno Álvarez (2018) assures that in Mexico “the opinion about polls is asymmetric: if they are successful nothing happens, but if not, they become a scandal” (p. 125). In those cases, specifically in local elections, different factions accuse a certain group of corruption, manipulation, and servitude, which can increase distrust towards polls and their impact (De la Rosa, 2017).

This skepticism towards polls in Mexico dates back to the end of the 1980s, when they first began to be published. Due to the authoritarian and single-party dominated context, they only served to know who would be in second place, since the winner was predictable (Belden, 1994).

Regarding the polls' influence on voters, the literature has recognized several effects. For example, emotional ones, linked to the excitement they produce (Stolwijk et al., 2016). There are also cognitive ones, which can work as an efficient heuristic shortcut for the voter, saving time and cognitive effort compared to analyzing issues or candidate profiles (Lau & Redlawsk, 2001). The majority of research has focused on the effects on voting intention and basically on the bandwagon and underdog hypotheses, corroborated and at the same time refuted by several studies (Roy et al., 2015; Van der Meer et al., 2016; Obermaier et al., 2015). According to Gálvez Muñoz (2011), the bandwagon effect “consists in the fact that the prediction by the polls of the triumph of a party leads many voters, especially the undecided, to vote for the party or candidate that, according to the

polls, appears as the probable winner” (p. 32). Whereas in the case of the underdog, “voters turn their backs on the party favored in the polls and support its most direct rival, out of sympathy, the one who, despite knowing he or she is the loser, is fighting bravely until the last moment” (p. 33). Both start from the assumption that “the electoral behavior of [...] people is a function of their expectations of electoral results” (Simon, 1954, p. 245).

For empirical research purposes, specifically in the Mexican context, the influence of polls rivals at least with three relevant variables of electoral behavior: reference groups, candidates’ proposals, and partisan identification. These are the most prominent in the electoral behavior models developed for Mexico (Moreno Álvarez, 2009, 2019). Along with political sophistication, these elements could modulate the understanding and relevance that voters give to polls.

Abreu (2020) states that the reference group theory “seeks to explain the behavior of the individual in terms of his or her attitude towards the values of a collective [...] and does so by linking, through the notion of reference, the attitude of an individual with his or her aspiration to become a member of/integrate this collective” (p. 63).

In turn, candidates’ proposals represent an important reference during electoral campaigns. It is the offer of promises to citizens, which consider problems, goals, and ways to achieve them (Nicolás Jiménez et al., 2014), and which hypothetically constitute the basis of their ability to obtain office.

Partisan identification is a long-term factor that is constituted during the individual’s socialization and affects his or her electoral behavior (Van der Eijk & Franklin, 2009). Consequently, “partisan identification or psychological adhesion tends to persist over time and explain diverse attitudes of the person and his or her individual political behavior” (Campbell et al., 1960, cited in Moreno Álvarez, 2009, p. 143).

Finally, political sophistication is the degree of knowledge and understanding of political issues. Luskin (1990) identifies five dimensions: 1) access to and interest in political information, 2) level of education, 3) constant exposure to political information, 4) cognitive level or intelligence, and 5) occupation. Regardless of their influence on the electoral decision, it has been empirically demonstrated that voters with greater political sophistication tend to be more influenced by polls (Meffert et al., 2011).

The previous theoretical review allows us to characterize polls as a source of influence or independent variable in the voting decision, which rivals other traditional sources (reference groups, proposals, partisan identification and

sophistication). On the other hand, it is possible to consider that the latter factors have an effect on the weight that voters give to polls when casting their vote, i.e., as independent variables in the subjective relevance they give to these instruments. Both aspects will be empirically studied in the following section.

## **METHODOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK**

We conducted an exploratory methodological design, since the aim is “to examine a topic or research problem that has been little studied, about which there are many doubts or which has not been addressed before” (Hernández Sampieri et al., 2014, p. 100). In the case of the Mexican context, there is little empirical literature. Consequently, we resorted to a mixed sequential explanatory design (Creswell, 2014), which collects quantitative data in the first phase, which are analyzed and subsequently used to construct a second, qualitative phase, which in this case was complementary.

For empirical research purposes, we deem it important to research the electoral influence of polls as a concomitant factor to the other strong factors, but also as a dependent variable with respect to them. This is addressed in the following questions:

*RQ1.* What is the degree to which voters are exposed to polls during electoral processes, and through which media are they likely to be exposed?

*RQ2.* What importance do voters give to electoral polls in their voting intentions as opposed to the factors of party identification, reference groups, and candidates' proposals?

*RQ3.* What is the effect of partisan identification, candidates' proposals, and reference groups on the self-reported influence of polls on voting intention?

Based on the theoretical and empirical evidence previously discussed, significant importance is assigned to political sophistication as a factor in the understanding and use of polls, which would make them more influential electorally, even than the other factors discussed. Thus, we expect that:

*H1.* The voter's political sophistication will have a greater effect than partisan identification, reference groups and proposals on the self-reported influence of electoral polls on voting intention.

*H2.* There will be significant differences between sophisticated and unsophisticated voters in terms of the self-reported importance of polls in the electoral decision.

## Quantitative phase

We conducted an online poll through social networks to learn about factors related to citizens' voting behavior during the 2019 extraordinary elections for governor of the state of Puebla, Mexico, taking it as a case study. This election was called eight months after the death of governor Martha Alonso, who had been in office for only ten days. The left-wing MORENA party (44%), the right-wing Partido Acción Nacional (PAN) (33%), and the center-left Partido Revolucionario Institucional (PRI) (18%) contested. In this scenario, numerous polls circulated in social networks as well as in traditional media, most of which gave the victory to the MORENA candidate.

Due to the exploratory nature of the research, we chose to use a non-representative sample of subjects and for convenience, given that these are subjects registered voluntarily in the social networks used and available at the call to respond. As for the analytical survey, rather than drawing inferences from representative samples to broad populations, the interest lies in seeking associations between variables and their behavioral patterns, determining their directionality, testing and generating hypotheses, among other purposes. As in experimental designs, the method privileges internal validity over external validity or the results' generalization.

Likewise, this reasoning allows the use of statistical operations, such as regressions or Student's t-tests, for two reasons. Although in principle these are intended to infer the sample of the population, on this occasion they are used to test hypotheses for guidance purposes. On the other hand, the tests do not include among their assumptions any type of sampling, which is why they are used in clinical studies with non-representative samples and for convenience (Hayashi et al., 2022).

While recruiting participants through social networks has the advantage of being able to access populations in different locations, contact people who are difficult to find, have automatic databases, and save time and money for researchers (Wright, 2005), sociodemographic representativeness might be affected, since it tends towards more educated, younger, and higher-income segments. On the other hand, user profiles are self-reported and could be induced by users in aspects such as social desirability and biased self-representation. However, empirical research has found significant similarity between Facebook profile data and real data, possibly because the former are preceded by face-to-face interactions that are difficult to fake (Kosinski et al., 2015). Likewise, it has been found that the statistical correlations between the interest variables of certain populations sampled by convenience in Facebook –despite being



biased– are very similar to those sampled probabilistically in face-to-face exercises (Brickman Bhutta, 2012), which could place the networks as suitable platforms for exploratory and analytical research, such as the one presented here, without disdaining their important limitations.

The poll was conducted in 2019 through the Google Forms platform and disseminated on the researchers' Facebook (May 29 to June 1) and Twitter (May 25 to June 1) social networks and the Tribuna Comunicación company, a leader in radio broadcasting in Puebla, with coverage throughout the state. The invitation to participate identified the research project, the university in charge (Benemérita Universidad Autónoma de Puebla), the purpose, and confidentiality: "to know the opinions of the citizens of the state of Puebla about the electoral process and the behavior of the candidates for governor. The results are confidential and only for academic purposes, so your identity and data provided will remain anonymous".

The poll's date of implementation corresponded to the eight days prior to the election (June 2, 2019), when voters are less uncertain about their voting intentions. It was delimited to be available to users in the state of Puebla and, by means of filter questions, who had a valid voter's credential and were of legal age ( $\geq 18$  years old). A total of 209 questionnaires were received with a 100% completion rate, i.e., all those who started the survey completed it.

Women accounted for 53.1% of the sample ( $n=111$ ) and men for 46.8% ( $n=98$ ). The ages of the sample ranged from 18 to 73 years ( $M=38.70$ ,  $SD=13.45$ ). In terms of educational level, the majority group had a bachelor's degree ( $n=119$ , 56.9%) or postgraduate degree ( $n=67$ , 32.05%). The remaining 11% did not answer.

Income between \$10,001.00 and \$30,001.00 ( $n=71$ ) was reported by 33.97%, while 25.83% had income of more than \$30,001.00 ( $n=54$ ), 22.4% between \$6,001.00 and \$10,001.00 ( $n=47$ ), 8.61% less than \$6,001 ( $n=18$ ), and 9.09% responded that they did not know their income ( $n=19$ ).

In the third question, we performed a hierarchical multiple regression model for each of the independent variables. As for the hypotheses, in the first a hierarchical multiple regression model was also used for each of the independent variables and in the second a Student's t-test was performed between two groups (sophisticated and unsophisticated) to test whether there are statistically significant differences between the two.

Regarding the measurements, and based on various works (Van der Meer et al., 2016; Meffert et al., 2011; Stolwijk et al., 2016; Obermaier et al., 2015; Paletz, et al., 1980; Traugott & Lavrakas, 2008; Moreno Álvarez, 2018) we used the following:

## Descriptive and independent variables

The study aimed to determine the media in which voters have seen polls during the election, as well as their degree of influence on their voting behavior. Likewise, we measured four independent variables that help shape the voter's vote: reference groups, candidates' proposals, partisan identification and political sophistication (Luskin, 1990; Muñiz Muriel, 2012; Moreno Álvarez, 2018, 2019; Abreu, 2012).

For the first, we asked the question: How much influence would the following social groups have on your voting decision? Where 1 is not at all and 5 is very much, creating an index that included the average self-reported influence of the three reference groups considered in the study (family, friends, and coworkers) ( $M=1.89$ ,  $SD=0.30$ ). The Cronbach's Alpha obtained (0.837) was acceptable for this index.

Regarding the candidates' proposals, we asked: How much do you consider the candidates' proposals at the time of voting (with a four-level scale as a response, in which 1 is a lot and 4 is not at all). To measure partisan identification, we asked: Generally, do you consider yourself 1) from PAN, 2) from PRI, 3) from MORENA, 4) a non-partisan. This was condensed into two categories, from 1 to 3 considered partisan (34%), while 4 was non-partisan (66%). For political sophistication, we asked questions regarding voter interest in the gubernatorial election campaign in the state of Puebla, where 0 is not at all and 10 is quite a lot ( $M= 7.77$ ,  $SD= 2.92$ ); approximate monthly household income, grouped as follows: less than 6,000; between 6,001 and 10,000; between 10,001 and 30,000; more than 30,001; don't know ( $N=2.86$ ,  $SD= 0.937$ ), and level of study, where the following options were found: don't have; preschool; elementary; middle school; high school; undergraduate; graduate ( $M=6.21$ ,  $SD=0.63$ ). From these three variables, we created a composite variable on political sophistication.

Dependent variable. Importance of electoral polls for the electoral decision. To measure it, respondents were asked: How important are published electoral polls for you when making your voting decision? The response was measured on a scale with the options 1) very important, 2) somewhat important, 3) not very important, and 4) not at all important ( $M=2.78$ ,  $SD=0.979$ ).

Control variables. The control variables in this study are sociodemographic, considering age, gender, income, and educational level.

Regarding the question wording, it is worth mentioning a precision. In media effects research there is a risk that effect variables are overestimated when self-reported, either by factors of social desirability or campaign climate (Bucy et al., 2013), as has been observed in the inflation of self-reported consumption of television debates (Prior, 2012) or of the vote by respondents (Vavreck, 2007). In this research we did not find such a theoretical problem in the case of poll influence,

an aspect corroborated in our empirical findings (*vid supra*). As an exploratory exercise, the self-reporting of survey effects is asked at the same time as the self-reporting of other factors (groups and proposals), in a reflexive approach consistent with the qualitative exercise.

### **Qualitative phase**

In the qualitative phase, we conducted five focus groups, each of them in a municipality in the state of Puebla, Mexico (Puebla capital, Atlixco, Teziutlán, Tecamachalco and San Martín Texmelucan). These municipalities were selected based on criteria such as population and those with greater demographic and economic prominence (Asuad, 2010). There were eight participants per focus group (Alvarez-Gayou, 2003), with four women and four men (N=40) each, recruited using the snowball technique. The topics were: attention to electoral polls, influence of electoral polls, trust in published electoral polls, and other factors of self-reported electoral influence. To conduct this work, we integrated a quota sample, in which “the researcher selects considering some phenomena or variables to be studied such as gender, race, religion, work areas” (López, 2004, p. 198).

In order to constitute the sample, we considered inclusion criteria such as that the subjects had voted in an election prior to the one studied (>22 years old), that they had participated in the previous state election and that they voted in the municipality chosen (see above). The exclusion criteria were that they did not know each other, that they did not hold political positions, and that they did not have a formal responsibility or militancy in any political party.

### **RESULTS**

Polls seem to be objects of frequent consumption by voters during elections. Ninety-seven percent said they learned about at least one of them through some communication medium. While 39% of the sample was exposed to them through only one medium, 30% did so through two and 16% through three. The main ways in which they learned about them were through social networks (73%), digital newspapers (43%), television (35%) radio (25%), and printed newspapers (19%).

Regarding the importance that voters give to polls in their voting decision as opposed to the traditional factors considered in the literature (question 2), respondents reported that the candidates' proposals (59%), followed by party loyalty (11%), and the opinions of their social circles or reference groups (6%) are important for their decision. The polls corresponded to 3% of the voters' responses. The direct question on whether the position of the candidates in the polls makes the respondent decide for whom to vote received 13% of affirmative answers. This

ranking was similar in the scale questions, with the influence of the proposals in the lead ( $M=1.7$ ,  $SD\ 0.8$ ), followed by the reference groups ( $M=1.6$ ,  $SD=.06$ ) and -far behind-, polls ( $M=2.8$ ,  $SD=1.8$ ).

As for question 3, on the effect of party identification, candidates' proposals, and reference groups on the self-reported influence of electoral polls on voting intention, it was found that party identification ( $\beta=0.120$ ,  $p>0.05$ ) and reference groups have no statistical significance ( $\beta=-0.121$ ,  $p>0.05$ ), but candidates' proposals have a high statistical significance ( $\beta=0.285$ ,  $p=0.05$ ). Concerning sociodemographic aspects, educational level has moderate statistical significance ( $\beta=0.168$ ,  $p<0.05$ ) in the self-reported influence of the polls (table 1). However, it should be noted that both the model that combines sociodemographic variables and the model that combines partisan identification, proposals, and reference groups do not have statistical significance in the self-reported influence of the polls.

The first hypothesis found that political sophistication decreases the self-reported influence of the polls, similar to the reference groups, although this variable was not significant ( $\beta=0.120$ ,  $p>0.05$ ) (Table 1).

Variable	Model 1			Model 2			Model 3		
	B	DE	$\beta$	B	DE	$\beta$	B	DE	$\beta$
Gender	0.320	0.134	0.169**	0.197	0.130	0.104	0.177	0.130	0.094
Age	0.009	0.005	0.119	0.007	0.005	0.102	0.009	0.005	0.129
Income	0.077	0.077	0.077	0.132	0.073	0.132	0.186	0.081	0.186**
Educational level	0.273	0.110	0.183**	0.252	0.104	0.168**	0.310	0.110	0.207**
Partisan identification				0.239	0.133	0.120	0.191	0.136	0.096
Candidates' proposals				0.750	0.178	0.285*	0.636	0.192	0.242**
Reference groups				-0.197	0.110	-0.121	-0.173	0.111	-0.106
Political sophistication							-0.118	0.076	-0.147
R2	0.103			0.218			0.228		
$\Delta R2$	0.084			0.187			0.194		

N=209.

Note: Relationships are statistically significant at \* $p<0.05$  and \*\* $p<0.01$ .

**Table 1. Explanatory factors of the importance of electoral polls on voting intentions**

Source: Own elaboration.

In this model, income and educational level exert a moderate influence on the importance attached to the surveys ( $\beta=0.186$ ,  $p<0.05$  and  $\beta=0.207$ ,  $p<0.05$ , respectively). However, the model as a whole has no significant effect on the dependent variable. Regarding the second hypothesis, it was found that there is a statistically significant difference ( $p=0.000$ ) between the very sophisticated ( $M=2.89$ ,  $SD=1.278$ ) and the unsophisticated ( $M=2.77$ ,  $SD=0.911$ ), although this, as noted, is minimal. Likewise, we identified a Cohen's D of  $-0.109$ , which indicates that the effect is small in both populations.

On the other hand, in the qualitative phase, we observed the following findings, organized around two blocks: on the one hand, those related to the polls (attention, reception, trust, and influence) and, on the other hand, the other factors linked to the voting decision in line with what was reported in the quantitative section.

1. Attention paid to electoral polls. The consumption of surveys is limited in several of the participants, but others use social networks, newspapers, and television –in that order– to learn about them. They also receive them on their mobile phones or are exposed to them through a secondary source, i.e., someone comments on them. Likewise, surveys are sometimes not seen out of their own conviction, and many times “it's not that I look for them, they put them in front of me [through social networks]” (male, 63 years old, retired). Consequently, they do not analyze or take them into account. Finally, polls are consumed with greater interest on election day and not during the campaign.

2. Reception and attitudes towards polls. For some participants the polls are important, since it is according to the polls that the situation is defined, giving them a perspective of how the race is developing and the candidates' positions. Some interviewees affirm that they are excited to see that the candidate of their preference is winning.

Moderator: If your preferred candidate is ahead in the polls, what is your reaction?

Woman: Obviously one gets excited, one feels emotion, satisfaction that hopefully there will be a change (woman, 51 years old, housewife).

Moderator: And the other way around, if you are losing?

Man: No, the polls are already manipulated (laughter) (man, 45 years old, employee).

3. Influence of electoral polls. The influence of polls is ambivalent. On the one hand, some participants affirmed that when they observe that the candidate of their preference is winning or losing, this does not influence whether they will

vote for him or her, since they consider that they will not have the power to change these positions when they cast their vote. One participant even commented that, if she sees that the candidate of her preference is in second place in the polls, she tries to persuade other citizens to vote for him. In this regard, it was interesting that some participants stated that they believe that polls influence others, but not them:

Moderator: Do you think the polls have an influence?

Woman: Well, maybe they do.

Moderator: Do they influence you?

Woman: No, no (female, 25 years old, student).

When asked the same question, we obtained this response: “Polls do have a lot of influence, not on me, but on most people, they do” (man, 66 years old, retired).

4. Confidence in published electoral polls. The participants emphasized the lack of confidence they have in the polls, since they consider them “rigged”, i.e., manipulated with figures at the convenience of the candidates to be published in the media.

As I interpret them, they are very laughable, because they [...] put them in such a way that they want to influence one’s decision. Let’s suppose that Dulce and I are the candidates, although she is leading [...], if the plan is not for her but for me to win, then they put it completely the other way around. Why? How is she going to win? No, this one has to win (man, 66 years old, retired).

5. Other factors of self-reported electoral influence. Some participants affirmed that when they cast their vote they do so for a political party, while others look at the candidates and their proposals, especially since political parties are highly discredited.

Regarding the influence of reference groups, some participants stated that they do value the opinions of some members of their social groups and that they influence their electoral decision, since these “know more than they do” (about politics), because they have higher levels of education or filial authority, and, therefore, they are a guide for voting. Others argued that, although their family is attached to some political-electoral idea, this does not influence them to make their decision and they do it out of conviction.

As for the candidates’ proposals, many participants assured that they were aware of them and that they were relevant at the time of casting their vote.

## CONCLUSION

This research focused on exploring, on the one hand, voters' exposure to electoral polls and, fundamentally, the self-reported influence of these on electoral voting intention in the face of certain influencing factors. Our quantitative and qualitative results corroborate that the voters' exposure to polls is extensive, but that they do not seem to be objects on which voters focus their attention or reflection in their electoral decision. Exposure seems to be rather inadvertent or passive –the survey reaches the voter, but the voter does not seek it–, judging by the little attention they mention paying to them, the delayed consultation they deserve –only at the end of the race–, and the fact that a large majority of users have been exposed to them through social networks (76%), most likely involuntarily, which could also be related to the low credibility of such information for the public.

As a result, it is possible that polls have a minimal effect on voting intentions and that their relevance interacts little with other decision variables. Both sets of evidence corroborate that, both absolutely and relatively –i.e., compared to other voting factors– published electoral polls are not considered by electors in their voting intentions, who attach more importance to candidates' proposals, partisan loyalty, and reference groups. As previous international and national studies have corroborated, these continue to be the decisive factors in the configuration of the vote (Moreno Álvarez, 2018; Gálvez, 2011). Other voters operate under a rational choice logic (Downs, 1957), in which, even if the candidates of their preference were losing in the polls, their vote would have no effect on that trend.

Overall, these variables suggest that as socioeconomic and educational levels increase, polls are more relevant in the voting decision, along with the self-reported relevance of campaign proposals. This evidence points to the fact that it is the informed voter –those who, in accordance with their better socioeconomic status and education, consume more information about the campaign– who gives more relevance to the polls (an aspect surely influenced by the bias of higher education of the respondents).

The findings of this study raise several questions that can be further investigated in relation to certain theoretical concepts. In the first place, we find that there is a lack of carryover effects due to the consideration of dominant opinions in their environment, both in favor of winning (bandwagon) and losing (underdog) candidates. It would be convenient to explore the processes that explain the absence of these effects in the Mexican context. On the other hand, it is verified that most of the exposure to polls is inadvertent –they are not consulted voluntarily but accidentally through journalistic or propagandistic sources–, so that it would be worthwhile to start with methodological designs that consider this situation

of exposure from the outset. Finally, given that the measurement procedure of this study is by self-reporting, it would be pertinent to investigate the role of third-person effects –attributions of effects on other people except oneself– in the impact of the surveys.

It is noteworthy that this study has limitations linked to the sample's low representativeness and its collection method. Likewise, it is important to highlight that the respondents have an undergraduate and graduate level of education, having not found lower levels of schooling. This certainly biases their electoral orientations in favor of campaign information –including polls– and particularizes the electoral behavior found in the study, which should not be generalized to other social groups. Consequently, it is recommended to continue this line of work with a larger sample and extending it to more states of the Republic and at an international level in democratic contexts.

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