

**A Summary of the Exit Poll We Conducted on November 4, 2008, at
Crofton Middle School, Crofton, Maryland**

I. Introduction

For our course, “Survey Management,” we were given the assignment of conducting an exit poll at a precinct of our choosing on Election Day 2008, working in teams of two. We approached the project from the perspective of managing a survey from beginning to end. Along the way we developed a schedule of project tasks and tracked task progress using a Gantt chart; developed, pre-tested, and cognitive-tested our questionnaire; conducted the poll; and tallied and analyzed results. In this report we document our exit polling process and offer some analysis of our results.

II. Selecting a precinct

In searching for a location for our exit polling, our primary concern was proximity to where we both live. Since Rachel lives in Washington, DC, and Sara lives in Howard County, MD, some place in Maryland south of Howard County seemed like a good fit. Looking at a map, Prince George’s County seemed to be a good mid-point between our two residences. However, after examining voter registration records and results of previous elections, we determined that most locations in Prince George’s county would be too homogeneous (Democratic). Maryland as a whole usually votes Democratic in Presidential elections, but several counties vote Republican. Anne Arundel is one such Republican County, and is located within a reasonable distance from both Rachel’s and Sara’s homes. In an attempt to choose a location with more registered Republicans, we chose Crofton, MD, in Anne Arundel County. Situated between Annapolis, home to the U.S. Naval Academy and the U.S. military base Fort Meade, we felt that Crofton might provide a military influence that could diversify our sample.

Once we decided on Crofton, we needed to determine which precinct to survey. We wanted a precinct with a large number of registered voters, and also one where the entire precinct voted at one location. Additionally, we wanted a location where only one precinct voted. We reviewed the voter registration and precinct information on the Anne Arundel County Board of Elections web page (<http://www.aacounty.org/Elections/index.cfm>). We identified the largest precinct accommodated entirely at one location: Precinct 16, voting at the Prince of Peace church annex. However, when we looked at the address on Google Maps, we determined that this location had multiple driveways and several building entrances and exits, and therefore might be difficult to manage on Election Day. The

next-largest precinct accommodated at one location was Precinct 17, voting at Crofton Middle School. We also viewed this location on Google Maps and determined this location to be a better fit: it had only one driveway from the main road and appeared to have just a few building entrance and exit points. The middle school had the added benefit of being located on a major road, easily accessible to both Rachel and Sara. We decided to use Crofton Middle School as our location and retain the Prince of Peace church annex as a back-up location to be used if for some reason we were not able to conduct our exit poll at our preferred location. Two days before Election Day, Sara visited Crofton Middle School to confirm that the location would be suitable for our exit poll. There appeared to be one main entrance to the building, with a secondary entrance on the side of the building toward the back, near the athletic fields. Sara assumed that the entrances were far enough apart from each other that voters would be unlikely to use both doors and instead use one or the other. We therefore decided to keep the middle school as our first choice location.

III. Designing the forms used in the exit poll

Developing the questionnaire

As a first step in designing our questionnaire, we found copies of exit poll questionnaires that had been used in the 2004 elections, as well as the 2008 primaries. We reviewed several versions of the Edison and Mitofsky National Election Poll questionnaire, as well as one from an exit poll conducted by the Los Angeles Times. The initial version of our questionnaire borrowed questions from these two sources.

We had several goals in mind while designing the questionnaire. We were interested in characterizing individuals who voted for the two main presidential candidates, and in learning which issues mattered most to the voters. We also wanted questions that were clear and easily understood. In addition to asking for whom they voted, we included questions about the respondents' age, sex, race/ethnicity, political persuasion (very conservative to very liberal), and whether they had ever served in the military. The question about military service was included specifically because Crofton is located near Annapolis, which is home to the U.S. Naval Academy. We thought we would have a number of respondents with military service, and we wanted to learn whether this was a factor in their choice for president. We also included a question that asked respondents to identify the one issue that mattered most to them in determining their choice for president; the question included a list of seven issues from which respondents were asked to choose one.

Because there was a lot of enthusiasm surrounding the 2008 election, we thought there may be a number of first-time voters, and so we included a question to collect this information. We also asked

about voters' financial situation today compared to four years ago. The nation's economy figured prominently in the news in the weeks leading up to the election, stock markets had declined considerably from 2007 to 2008, and we were interested in learning whether voters were personally experiencing any financial hardships. The comparison to four years ago was relevant, because it reflected the time that had elapsed since President Bush was last elected.

The structure of the questionnaire followed that used by Edison and Mitofsky. The first two questions were quick and easy—they asked about the respondents' sex and race. We then included a question asking who they selected for president. The remainder of the questionnaire followed what we felt was a logical order. We asked the question about respondents' financial situation last, since we thought it was the most sensitive question we asked. We wanted the questionnaire itself to appear like it would be quick and easy to complete, so we used a large font and asked only 10 questions. (See the appendices for copies of all versions of the questionnaire.)

We received feedback on the initial questionnaire in a practice run of the exit poll and in early cognitive testing. Our issues question, "Which ONE issue mattered most in deciding how you voted today?" frustrated some respondents because they felt it was too difficult to choose only one issue. One person was frustrated because the issue he felt was most important in determining his presidential selection did not appear in the list of seven issues. Based on this feedback, we modified the issues question before continuing with additional cognitive testing. We changed the question so that it asked, "On a scale of 1 to 5, where 1 is not important and 5 is very important, how important were each of these issues in determining your vote for president?" Following the question was a list of 6 issues; voters rated the importance of each of these issues on the 1 to 5 scale.

We cognitively tested the questionnaire by asking six individuals to complete it and provide us with feedback. All individuals who participated in the cognitive testing were handed a clipboard with the questionnaire, and were asked to complete it while standing. They were also asked to imagine that they had just cast their vote in the November 2008 election. The cognitive testing protocol was designed to learn more about how individuals reacted to the questionnaire's design and flow; how they interpreted the questions; and whether they felt any questions were frustrating, too personal, or lacking in clarity. We were also interested in receiving general feedback and recommendations from individuals who participated in the testing. An appendix to this report includes the cognitive testing protocol. Here, we highlight the results and talk about how we modified the questionnaire based on the feedback received.

In cognitive testing, we learned that individuals' first impressions of the questionnaire were positive. Initial impressions included thoughts like: "it's easy-to-read," "shouldn't take long to complete," and "it looks like a typical ballot, very straight-forward." This is the image we wanted to

convey when trying to convince voters to participate. On the issues question (G), we learned that “moral values” was not as straight-forward as we had thought. When we included it in the survey, we were thinking of issues like abortion or gay rights, ones in which individuals may feel there is a morally right or wrong side of the issue. Some of the participants in cognitive testing thought moral values referred to McCain leaving his first wife; others were not sure what was meant by moral values. Overall, we learned that the term “moral values” meant something different to each participant. Because of the confusion about how to interpret this issue, we chose to delete it from the questionnaire. While many participants thought we had covered the core issues important to the 2008 election, the following topics were suggested as additions: Supreme Court appointments, views on abortion, foreign policy, immigration, and taxes. Ultimately, space considerations did not allow us to add additional issues to the questionnaire. We also learned that, like some pre-test participants, cognitive testing participants had a difficult time choosing one issue as their most important. To accommodate this, we decided to change this question to allow respondents to rank each issue on a scale of one to five, with one being “not important” and five being “very important.”

Question J asked “Compared to four years ago, is your family’s financial situation: better today, worse today, or about the same?” In cognitive testing, we learned that participants interpreted “family” in different ways. One participant said she thought of her parents’ and siblings’ financial situations, as well as her own, even though they are spread apart on two continents and in several different states. Other participants thought of their partners or spouses—that is, the people sharing their household. Some participants further found it difficult to compare the current family situation that of four years ago because their family composition had changed during that time period. We decided to simplify this question by deleting the word family.

In the final version of the questionnaire, the responses to two questions were systematically randomized. In question C, about which presidential candidate the voter selected, one-half of the questionnaires had Barack Obama listed first and one-half had John McCain listed first. In question H, where voters were asked to characterize themselves on politically matters, one-half of the ballots began with “very liberal” and proceeded to “very conservative,” and the other one-half listed the options in reverse order. There was also a slight difference in the directions appearing in the box at the bottom of the questionnaire: one-half asked the voters to “put” the questionnaire in the box and one-half asked the voters to “place” it in the box. This difference was made to distinguish between surveys that Sara distributed and those that Rachel distributed, to use in our analysis of survey non-response.

Developing the observational instrument

The observational instrument was designed to be used at specific time intervals to collect descriptive information about the physical polling location and the surrounding area. We divided the form into five sections: general information, voter characteristics, voting characteristics, non-voter presence, and other observations. The first section contains two types of information: polling place specifics that would not change at each iteration (precinct name and location, number of building exits, and date), as well as variable general environmental observations (weather and traffic conditions). We felt that weather and traffic conditions were important to record because they could influence a voter's motivation to get to the polls, as well as the flow of traffic into the building. In the second section, we created fields for collecting our perceived voter race and age summary characteristics. We designed the third section to capture characteristics of the voting process, including length of lines, volume of voters, and any perceived problems with voting machines or voting eligibility. In the fourth section, we wanted to be able to record the presence of non-voters at the polling location. Finally, we wanted to have a section at the end to record any miscellaneous observations that wouldn't fit into any of the other sections of the instrument.

Developing the non-response instrument

The non-response instrument was used to collect information about every Nth person departing the exit polling site. This form was completed by the teammate who was not asking voters to participate in the survey. The information was collected in order to calculate survey response rates and to adjust the data, as necessary, for non-response. There were three main pieces of demographic information collected on the form: the individual's sex, race/ethnicity, and age. The age information was collected in three broad categories: 18 to 34, 35 to 64, and 65 and over. We chose these categories because we knew it would be challenging to guess someone's age—and we wanted to be able to do it as accurately as possible. Also, we were satisfied that we could adequately identify young, middle-aged, and older voters with these groups.

The form was also used to collect information about whether the person selected to participate completed an interview, refused, was missed by the interviewer, or was not eligible. Space was provided to indicate which teammate was asking voters to participate in the survey, and to keep a tally of how many individuals had left the polling site. The tally section was a tool to use in keeping track of every Nth respondent to depart the polling site; it was added to the form after the pre-test in Alexandria. Additionally, the form had a notes section, to record any relevant or interesting thoughts or interactions. (See the appendices for a copy of the non-response instrument.)

IV. Pre-testing the questionnaire

Background

We decided to pre-test the exit polling process to make sure we were comfortable with the entire polling process. Since Virginia allows early absentee voting and Maryland does not, we chose to pre-test our questionnaire outside the Alexandria courthouse on the morning of Saturday, October 18th. We thought that a late morning time slot would ensure a large number of early absentee voters. We chose a date three weeks before Election Day to ensure we had enough time to allow for edits and cognitive testing.

Process

We arrived at the courthouse at about 10:15 the morning of the pretest, hoping that voter traffic would be heavier at this time of day. We spoke to the poll workers, who gave us permission to conduct the pre-test and provided instruction about where to stand. We stood to one side of the exit path, on the sidewalk outside the building, and placed our box for completed surveys on top of a brick half-wall. The weather conditions were favorable for conducting the exit poll; it was sunny and brisk. After observing the flow of traffic into and out of the building, we chose $N=2$ as our interval. Voters entered and exited the building through the same door. We began the pre-test at about 10:30 am, with Rachel approaching voters asking them to complete the survey, and Sara recording the non-response information. At approximately 11:00, we reversed roles, and continued the polling process until about 11:30. During our hour at the courthouse, there were no campaigners or other exit pollsters present. At the end of the pre-test, we had fourteen completed questionnaires, four refusals, seven misses, and nine non-eligibles.

What we learned from the pre-test

Because voters often exited the building in groups of three or more, we found that an interval of $N=2$ would be too small for Election Day. We found that during the pre-test we missed many (presumed) eligible voters because they exited the building quickly while the pollster was busy with another voter. We decided that on Election Day we should choose an interval of at least $N=4$.

During the pre-test, we received feedback from respondents on three of our questions. For question E, "Which ONE issue mattered most in deciding how you voted today?," a few voters mentioned that it was difficult to choose only one issue. As a result, we revised this question to create a scale of 1 to 5 for each issue, asking the voter to rate each issue on that scale.

For question I, "Have you ever served in the U.S. military?," one respondent mentioned that many people living in the Alexandria area work as civilians for the Department of Defense and they could find

this question confusing. After considering this feedback, we decided to leave this question as-is because we didn't think this concern would be as much of an issue in Crofton.

For question J, "Compared to four years ago, is your family's financial situation:," with response options "better today," "worse today," and "about the same," one respondent asked "Who's financial situation is better?," referencing the recent economic crisis. We considered this feedback, and decided not to change the question because we felt that answers to this question could vary according to the age of the respondent.

Given the good physical set-up of our pre-test, we determined that we should be prepared for less than ideal conditions on Election Day. During the pre-test we were able to place our ballot box on a convenient brick ledge next to the sidewalk where we stood. Knowing that we would likely be standing in a parking lot at our polling location in Crofton, we planned to bring tray tables with us so we would not have to put the box on the ground.

When looking at the results of the pre-test and comparing them with our recorded observations on the non-response questionnaire, we noticed a few things that could be improved for Election Day. First, not all of our misses were due to a heavy volume of voters exiting the building. We missed a few people due to lack of assertion on our part; we felt that we could have made more of an effort to get the attention of voters we needed to approach. We planned to be more assertive on Election Day. We also noticed that Rachel guessed too high with regard to people's ages, perhaps in an attempt to check more than just the middle age category on the non-response sheet. We also noticed that, while both Rachel and Sara did well at guessing sex and race, the pre-test respondents were a relatively homogeneous group, and we would need to track these characteristics carefully on Election Day.

V. Exit poll

Background

We chose Crofton Middle School in Crofton, Maryland, as the precinct at which we would conduct our exit poll. We also chose a nearby precinct—Prince of Peace Presbyterian, in Crofton—as a backup location, in case our first choice did not work out. The day prior to Election Day, we checked the weather forecast; it called for rain, beginning around noon. We had planned to conduct the exit poll starting at 2 p.m. but we decided to start earlier, hoping that we could beat the rain. We met at Crofton Middle School at 10:30 a.m. on November 4, 2008. We arrived on time, but the rain did not; it already was raining lightly when we arrived.

We spoke with the precinct judge, who initially informed us that we would need to stand 100 feet from the school's entrance. Unfortunately, the 100 feet marker placed us in the middle of the parking lot

being used by voters. Upon further discussion, and after realizing that we were nonpartisan, we were instructed to stand just inside the school entrance. This position was ideal for conducting the exit poll. All voters entered and exited the school at the same location. In the process, they funneled past us via a hallway that was about eight feet wide.

We began to conduct the exit poll at 10:45 a.m. At this time, between 400 and 450 voters had already cast their ballots. The precinct judge reported that it had been a relatively busy morning compared to past elections at that precinct. We chose $N = 5$ as our selection interval. We felt that this interval was appropriate based on the flow of individuals departing the precinct. We conducted the exit poll until about 1:15 p.m. During this time, we rotated between recruiting participants for the survey and recording information about those selected to participate. We rotated approximately every 30 minutes; at each rotation, we filled out an observational form describing the general conditions at the polling site. Other than election officials, voters, Girl Scouts selling cookies, and us, no one else was present during the period we conducted the survey. Voters were mostly white. There were a number of elderly individuals and a number of moms with young children. The pace of voters was moderate, but slowed with time. The lines were short the entire time we were conducting the survey. Overall, the situation seemed normal throughout the period we were conducting the exit poll. It was raining off-and-on outside, but luckily we were indoors.

We had brought along three folding chairs on which to place our survey-return box and other materials, but we needed only one. We offered the extras to respondents. A few of the respondents were elderly and the chairs made it easier for them to participate. Most respondents chose to sit down. We were thrilled that we had brought chairs—we are confident that this boosted our response rate.

During the nearly three hours that we were at Crofton Middle School, we witnessed only one disturbance. Around noon, one middle-aged woman was standing nearby, talking loudly on her cell phone. She was upset because she was not on the voter registration list, even though she had voted in the precinct for more than thirty years. She was on the phone complaining to election officials for an extended period of time.

We departed the precinct around 1:30 p.m. At this time, we had collected forty surveys. When we checked with the precinct judge, we learned that 837 individuals had voted at this time. Overall, we had a positive experience conducting the exit poll at Crofton. One factor that perhaps worked in our favor was the friendliness of the precinct's judge. She had previously worked at the U.S. Census Bureau and was familiar with survey methods. Her particular interest and background in surveys may have been a factor in why she was willing to accommodate us.

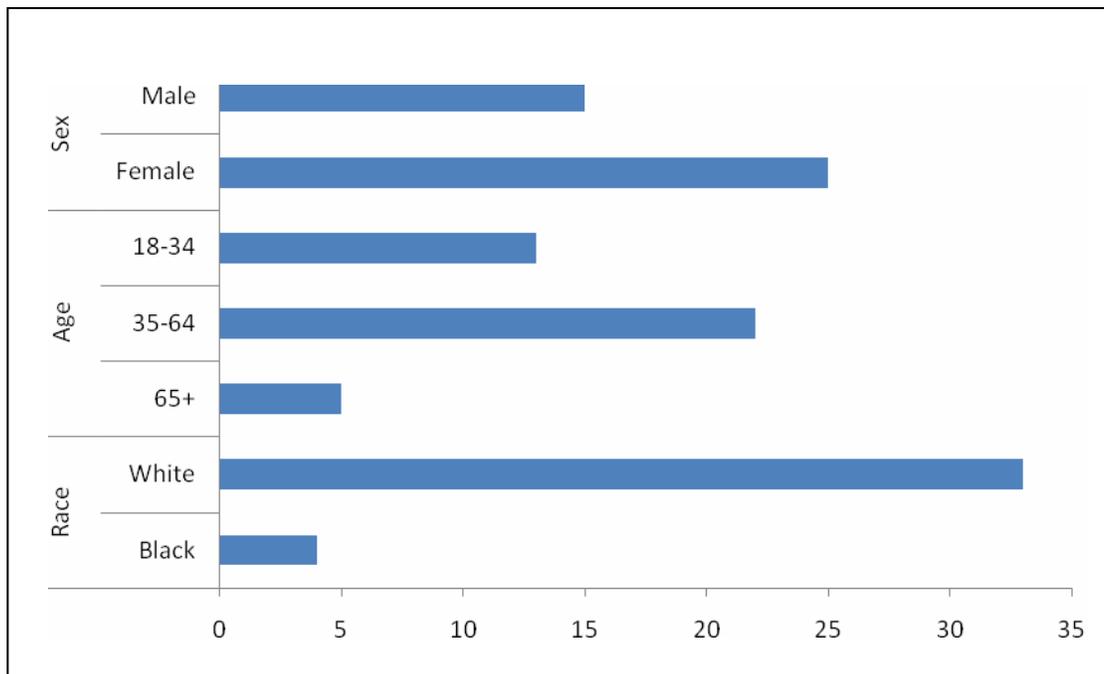
VI. Results and Analysis

When entering our data into electronic format, we used a double-coding procedure wherein we each entered the data individually on our own, and then we each checked our entries against the other's. This process helped us to be sure that our data entry was accurate. When performing our analysis, we chose not to weight our data. Since our sample size is so small, we didn't want to introduce more variance. Furthermore, we had no reason to believe our non-response was nonrandom. With this in mind, we proceeded to analyze our unweighted data.

Outcome codes

Thirty-nine voters completed the exit poll questionnaire and one voter partially completed the questionnaire. (The partially-completed questionnaire had item non-response for question C, about which candidate the voter chose, and question F, about whether the voter was persuaded more by the candidate's position on issues or by his leadership and personal qualities.) The majority of survey participants were female (62 percent), ages 35 to 64 (55 percent), and white (83 percent). These results coincide with our observations about voters.

Chart 1. Number of respondents by demographic characteristics



We calculated outcome rates using the standard definitions (2008) provided by the American Association for Public Opinion Research (<http://www.aapor.org/>). Two response rates were calculated: the first rate (response rate 1) does not include the partial response as a completed questionnaire, whereas

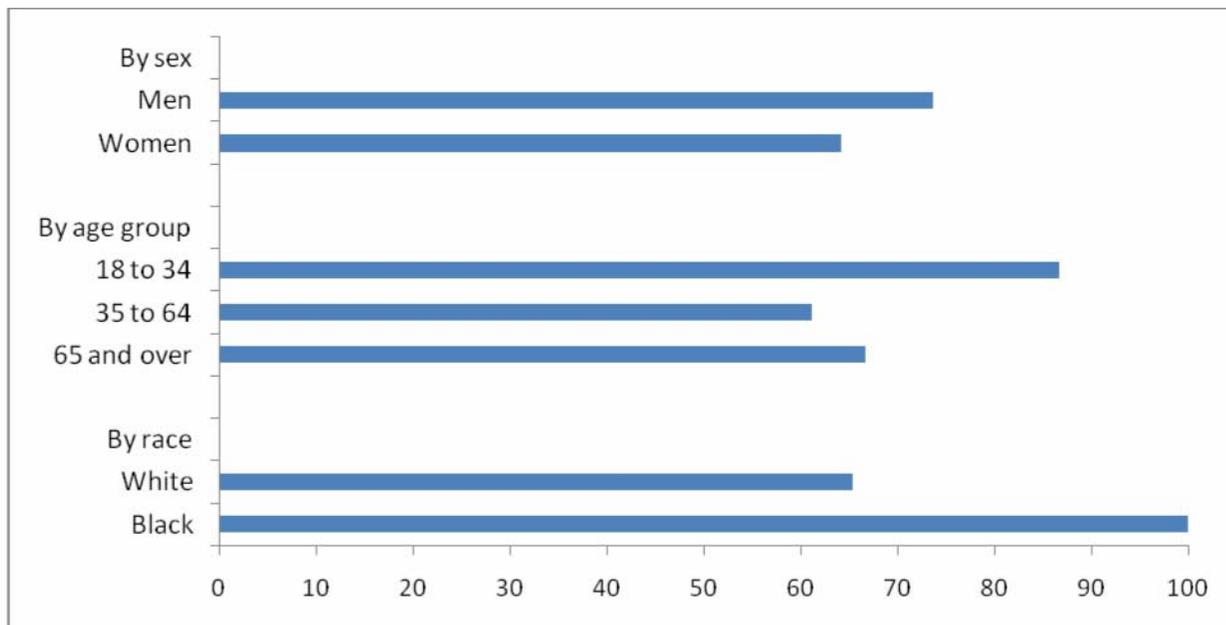
the second rate (response rate 2) does count the partial as a completed questionnaire. Response rate 1 was 67.2 percent and response rate 2 was 69.0 percent; we were pleased with these results, based on our understanding that exit polls often have low response rates. Two cooperation rates also were calculated; as with the response rates, the first rate does not include the partial as a completed questionnaire and the second rate does count it as a complete. Cooperation rate 1 was 68.4 percent and cooperation rate 2 was 70.2 percent. The contact rate was high (98.3 percent), perhaps because we were strategically located at the precinct's only exit. The hallway's width at the exit was only about 10 feet, so we were able to contact nearly all voters who were selected. One voter slipped by; she was conversing with friends and did not respond to our inquiry. The table shown below includes outcome rates for the survey.

Table 1. Outcome rates for the total sample

Rate	Percent
Miss rate	1.8
Response rate 1	67.2
Response rate 2	69.0
Cooperation rate 1	68.4
Cooperation rate 2	70.2
Refusal rate	29.3
Contact rate	98.3

Response rates (using rate 1) by demographic characteristics show that men were slightly more likely to respond to the survey than were women; voters in the youngest age group, those ages 18 to 34, were more likely to respond than were voters in the two older age groups; and black voters were more likely to participate than were white voters. For the statistics by race, however, it is important to consider that only four black voters were selected for the survey compared to 49 white voters who were in the sample. There were too few (or no) voters in the other race and ethnicity categories to analyze.

Chart 2. Response rates (1) by demographic characteristics (percents)



Overall, the response rate for Sara was 60.6 percent and for Rachel it was 76.0 percent. Most of Sara’s refusals occurred during the first 30-minute shift in which we were collecting data. This was a high volume period relative to those later in the day; it could be that voters who were exiting the poll during this initial shift had spent more time in lines, and thus felt more time-pressured, than those who voted later in the day. It also could be that these voters were surprised by our request and simply provided a gut-reaction, saying that they did not want to participate. Voters who arrived after we began conducting the survey would have had time to consider whether or not they would participate, and perhaps been more likely to do so, than voters who had not been aware that a survey was being conducted.

Sara and Rachel had similar response rates for men, but not for women. Women were more likely to respond to Rachel than to Sara. Based on the response rates, it appears that voters ages 35 to 64 also were more likely to respond to Rachel than to Sara; however, Rachel had some difficulty in guessing voters’ ages, and she over-estimated the number of voters in the 35 to 64 age group. Rachel guessed that 13 of the voters who had completed questionnaires were age 35 to 64, but only nine were actually in this age group. It is probable that Rachel classified too many refusals into this age group, too; if so, the response rate associated with Sara, for those ages 35 to 64, would be lower than its true value. Nearly all voters in the sample were white, so the response rates for whites are nearly identical to the overall totals. They show that white voters were less likely to cooperate with Sara than with Rachel.

Table 2. Response rates by interviewer

	Total number of people		Response rate 1	
	Sara	Rachel	Sara	Rachel
Total	20	20	60.6	76.0
By sex				
Men	8	7	72.7	75.0
Women	12	13	54.5	76.5
By age group				
18 to 34	6	7	75.0	100.0
35 to 64	13	11	56.5	73.3
65 and over	1	2	-	-
By race				
White	15	20	57.7	76.0
Black	4	0	100.0	-

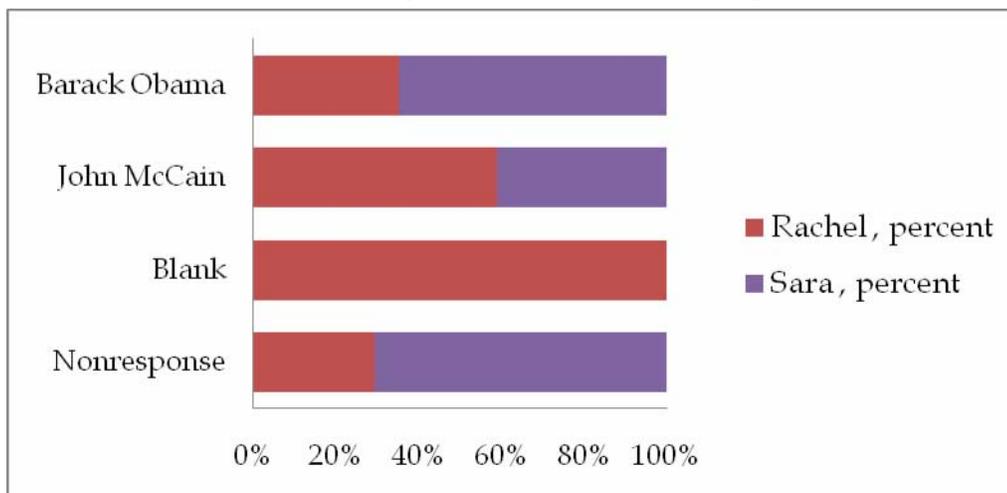
Rachel and Sara both did well at guessing voters' sex and race/ethnicity. They were less successful at guessing the correct age of voters. Rachel over-estimated the number of voters ages 35 to 64. Sara over-estimated the number of voters ages 18 to 34. Of all completed votes, about 65 percent of the Obama supporters and 40 percent of the McCain supporters were intercepted by Sara. We also completed a two-way t-test to determine there was any interviewer bias in the results, and determined that there was not (p-value .1479).

Table 3. Demographics for individuals selected for the survey

	Total	Sex		Age			Race/ethnicity				
		Male	Female	18 to 34	35 to 64	65 or over	White	Black	Hispanic/Latino	Asian	Other
Guesses, total											
Completes and partial	40	15	25	13	24	3	35	4	0	1	0
Refusals	17	4	13	2	13	1	15	0	0	0	0
Missed/Noncontacts	1	0	1	0	1	0	1	0	0	0	0
Guesses, interviewer = Sara											
Completes and partial	20	8	12	6	13	1	15	4	0	1	0
Refusals	12	3	9	2	9	0	10	0	0	0	0
Missed/Noncontacts	1	0	1	0	1	0	1	0	0	0	0
Guesses, interviewer = Rachel											
Completes and partial	20	7	13	7	11	2	20	0	0	0	0
Refusals	5	1	4	0	4	1	5	0	0	0	0
Missed/Noncontacts	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Actual demographics, based on responses											
Total	40	15	25	13	22	5	33	4	1.5	1	0.5
Interviewer = Sara	20	8	12	8	9	3	13.5	4	1.5	1	0
Interviewer = Rachel	20	7	13	5	13	2	19.5	0	0	0	0.5
Ratio: Guessed demographics to actual results											
Guesser = Rachel	-	1.0	1.0	0.8	1.4	0.3	1.1	1.0	0.0	1.0	-
Guesser = Sara	-	1.0	1.0	1.4	0.8	1.0	1.0	-	-	-	0.0

Note: There was some item non-response in the demographic information. If a respondent checked two boxes for race/ethnicity, then each category was allocated one-half point.

Chart 3. Percent of votes for presidential candidates, by interviewer



Comparing our exit poll results to official election results

In our exit poll, voters in Precinct 17 preferred John McCain as their presidential candidate. Fifty-six percent of our respondents voted for McCain, compared to forty-four percent for Obama. None of the participants in our exit poll voted for a third-party candidate. Precinct-level election results were not available at the time this report was written. Results for Anne Arundel County as a whole, however, were available, so we will compare our precinct results to the county-level results. John McCain won Anne Arundel County as a whole with approximately fifty percent of the vote. Barack Obama, who ended up winning the state of Maryland and the election as a whole, got approximately forty-eight percent of Anne Arundel County’s vote, while the remaining two percent of the vote went to third-party candidates.

Table 4. Comparing our results to official election results

Candidate	Precinct 17, Crofton Middle School (our results)	Anne Arundel County	Maryland	United States
John McCain	56%	50%	37%	46%
Barack Obama	44%	48%	62%	53%
Others	0%	2%	2%	1%

Note: election results official as of December 8, 2008

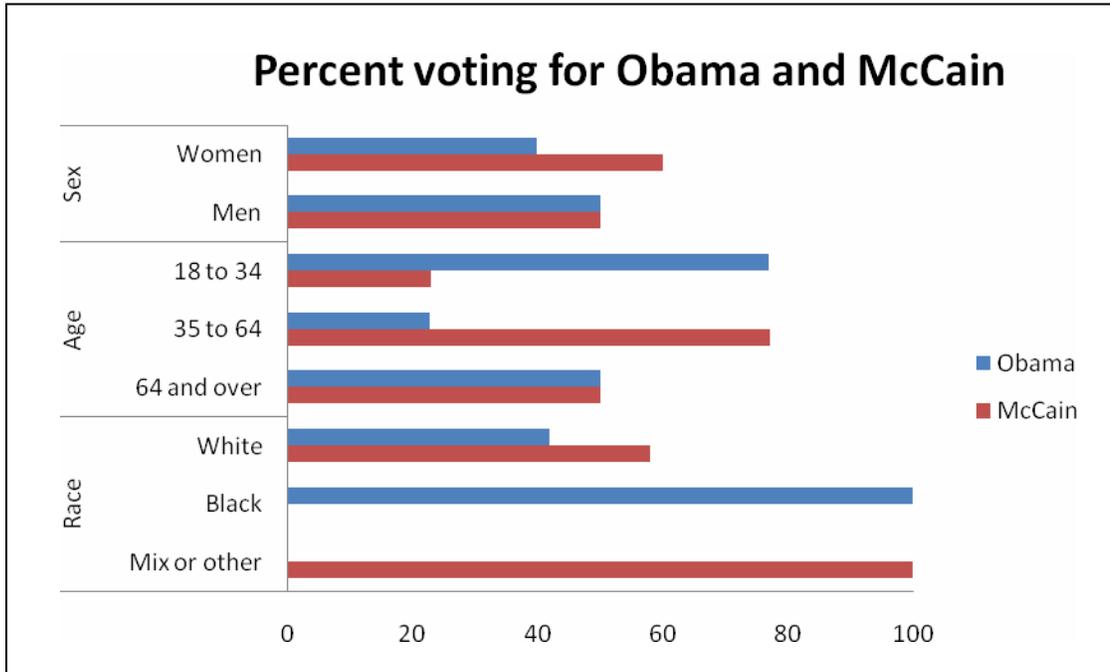
We completed a one-way t-test to compare our results to the official Anne Arundel County results, and discovered that there was no statistically significant difference (p-value .4304). We found that our proportion of McCain voters was too high when compared to the official Maryland results, as there is a significant statistical difference, at a ninety-five percent confidence level, between the two proportions (p-value .0277). Furthermore, there is no significant statistical difference between our results and those for the country as a whole (p-value .2493). We suspect that our results reflect a conservative precinct. However, since precinct-level results are not yet available, we cannot confirm this suspicion.

Exit poll results: Characteristics and concerns by candidate choice

Chart 4 shows voters’ characteristics by their choice for president. Of the characteristics shown (sex, age, and race/ethnicity), only age was significantly different (at a 95 percent confidence level) by candidate, with a p-value of 0.03. McCain voters tended to be older than Obama voters. As shown in the chart, there was no difference in the percent of people ages 65 and older who voted for Obama and

McCain. However, McCain voters were more likely to be ages 35 to 64 and less likely to be ages 18 to 34 than Obama supporters.

Chart 4. Demographics of voters for Obama and McCain



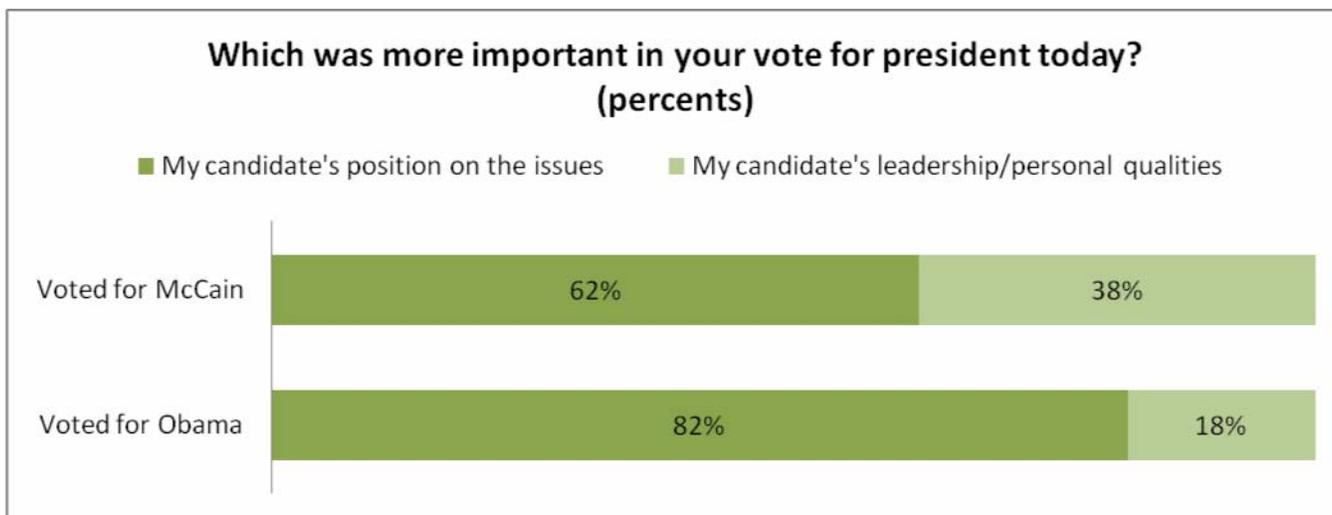
There was little variation in how respondents answered the issues question (E). On the continuum, where a one indicated the issue was “not important” and a five indicated that it was “very important” to the respondent, the average values for nearly all issues were four or higher. Terrorism was the only issue that was statistically significant at a 95 percent confidence level (p-value = 0.01). Voters who selected McCain were more likely to rate terrorism as an important concern than those who voted for Obama. McCain and Obama supporters gave approximately equal weight to concerns about health care, the economy, the war in Iraq, the environment, and energy policy.

Table 5. Average scores on the issues questions, where respondents used a scale from 1 to 5 to rate various issues; 1 is "not important" and 5 is "very important"

	Voted for Obama	Voted for McCain	Significant at a 95% confidence level?
Health care	4.3	4.2	No
Economy	4.5	4.5	No
War in Iraq	4.4	4.4	No
Terrorism	3.6	4.5	Yes
Environment	4.4	4.0	No
Energy policy	4.3	4.5	No

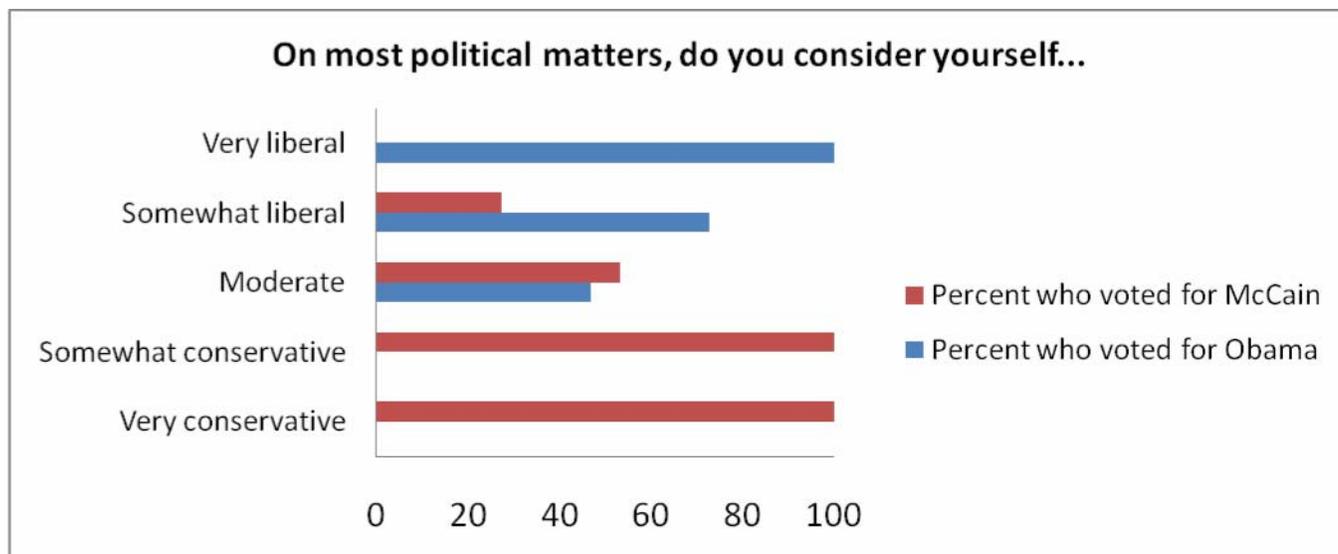
Voters for both candidates selected “my candidate’s position on the issues” over “my candidate’s leadership/personal qualities” as the more important reason in deciding for whom to vote. There was no statistically significant difference between McCain and Obama supporters on this question (p-value = 0.18).

Chart 5. Importance of issues versus a candidate’s qualities



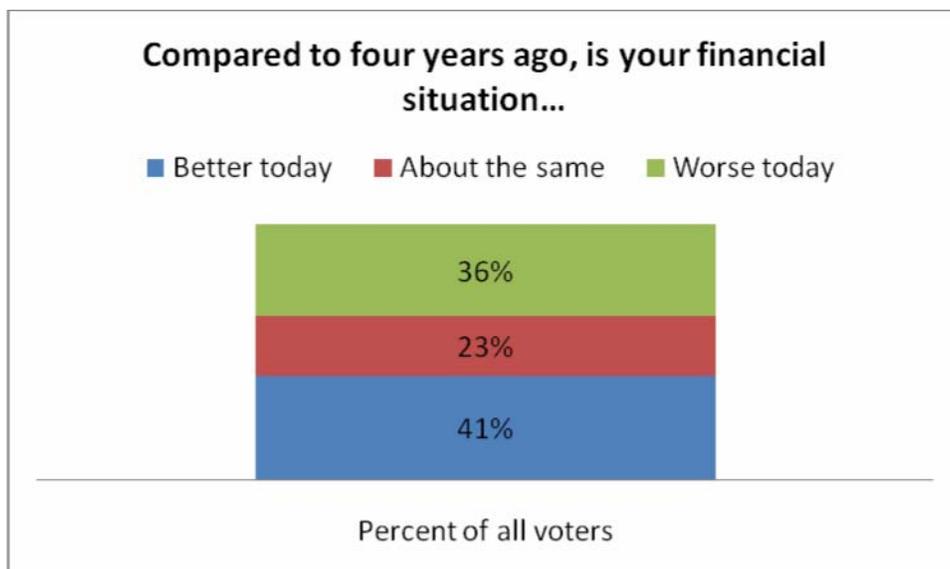
On political matters, McCain’s supporters were more conservative than Obama’s supporters (p-value = 0.00). McCain received the support of all eleven voters who indicated they were politically “very conservative” or “somewhat conservative,” while the two voters who indicated they were “very liberal” voted for Obama. McCain and Obama split the “moderate” vote and shared the “somewhat liberal” vote.

Chart 6. Political perspectives and candidate selected



The final question was about how respondents viewed their current financial situation to their situation four years ago. This was of particular interest because the economy was deteriorating at the time of the election, and it figured prominently in the daily news. There was no significant difference in how Obama and McCain supporters responded to this question (p-value = 0.30); because of this, chart 7 shows an overall summary of how voters responded to the question. Forty-one percent of voters said their financial situation was “better today” than it was four years ago, and a slightly smaller share (36 percent) said their financial situation was “worse today.” The remainder (23 percent) said their financial situation had not changed.

Chart 7. Financial situation today compared to four years ago



VII. Conclusions

In our exit poll, we were able to collect a good number of completed surveys and obtain a reasonably high response rate. Ironically, we believe the bad weather was the biggest factor in our successful data collection effort. Since we were allowed to stand indoors due to the rain, we were able to catch voters as they were about to exit the building, before they dispersed to their cars in the parking lot, which lead to an extremely low miss rate. Also, since the exit also served as the entrance to the building, voters were able to see us, as well as other voters completing the questionnaire, when they walked in, so they anticipated being approached by us when exiting. We also feel that bringing folding chairs with us helped our response rate.

In addition to our luck on Election Day, we believe that a thorough planning process helped our effort to be successful. We carefully chose the questions for our survey instrument so we could have a focused analysis. Also, we tested the questions for cognitive understanding and edited the questionnaire based on feedback from that testing, as well as our process pre-test, and feedback from classmates. All of this preparation helped us to understand the process as best we could, and perform the appropriate analyses.

Completing the exit polling assignment enhanced our understanding of survey management. We learned how to budget time and tasks effectively, and became familiar with many of the processes involved in setting up a study and seeing it through to completion. In addition to learning about the management of the survey, we also acted as data collectors in this project. This perspective is one that will further enhance our management skills professionally.

When examining our results, it is important to keep in mind that our data represent voters from just a two-hour window at our particular polling place. Also, our sample size is very small compared to those of professional polling organizations. Consequently, our results are limited and should not be used to interpret actual results from our precinct.