
Public Opinion Polls and the 2012 Elections

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What is public opinion?

- **Types of publics**

- Mass public
- Attentive publics

- **Nature of opinions**

- How stable over time?
- How consistent across issues?
- How grounded in valid & reliable knowledge?

Three types of polls

1. Straw polls

- ❑ Key flaw: non-random samples
- ❑ Examples: *Literary Digest* polls, 1916-36

2. Push polls

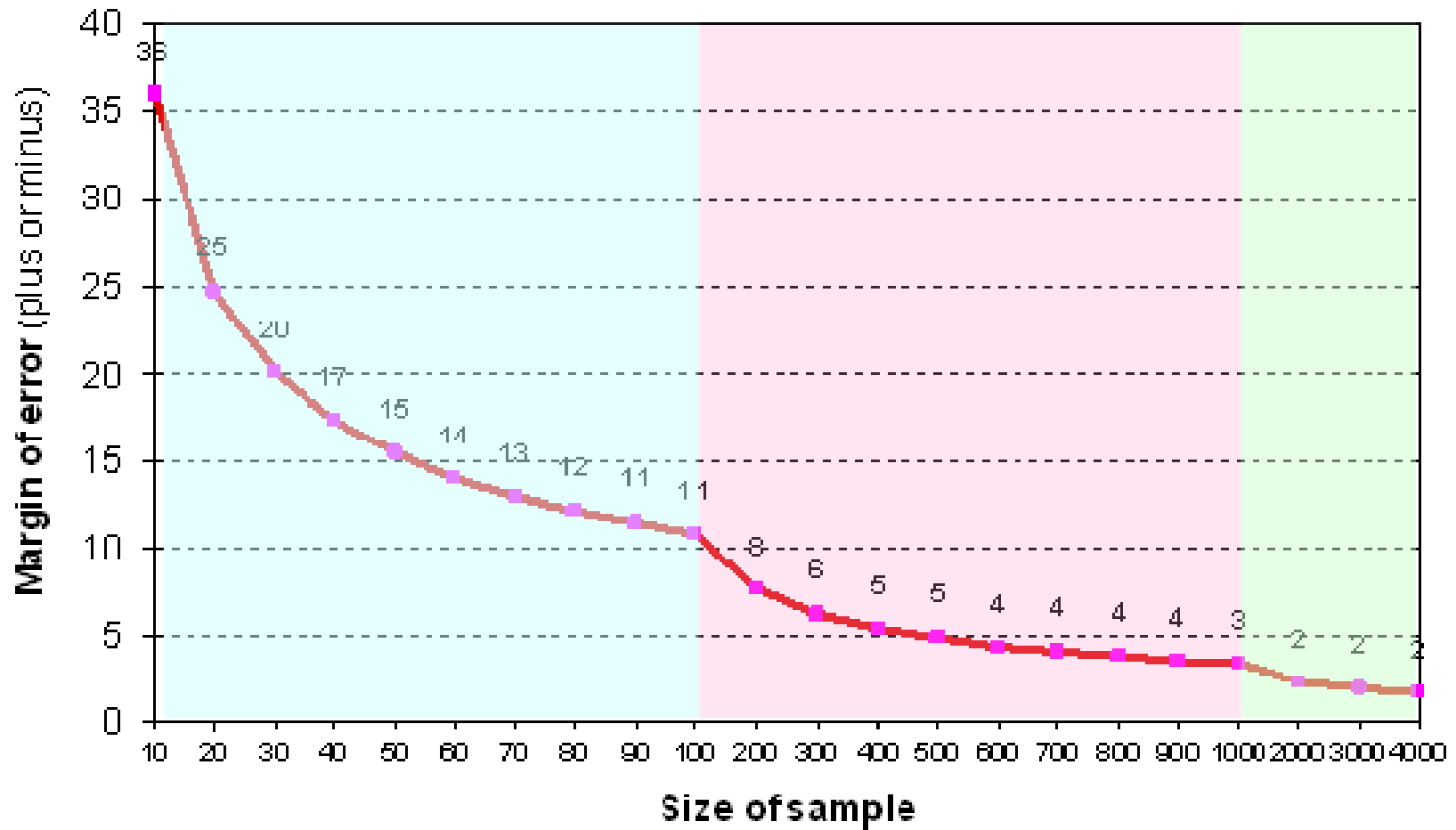
- ❑ Goal: change rather than measure opinions
- ❑ Method: intentionally biased question selection and/or wording

3. Scientific polls

Random-sampling error

- **Can be accurately estimated**
- **Varies by**
 - Type of random sample (simple v. multi-stage)
 - Population variability
 - Desired confidence level
 - Size of random sample

Sample Size and Sampling Error



<http://people-press.net/campaign.com/methodology/sampling/>

Two types of polling errors

1. **Sampling error**

- ❑ Convenience samples
- ❑ Random samples
- ❑ Target population (national v. swing states)

2. **Non-sampling error**

- ❑ Timing of poll
 - ❑ Interviewer training
 - ❑ Question order
 - ❑ Question wording
-

The role of public opinion in voting

■ Long-term factors

1. Demographic factors
 - Region
 - Gender
 - Age
 - Race/ethnicity
2. Group identifications
 - Party
 - Ideology

■ Short-term factors

1. Candidate evaluations
 - Competence
 - Honesty
2. Issue attitudes
 - Salience
 - Policy preference

**Instant
polling:**

**using clickers
in the
classroom**



Do you approve or disapprove of the way Barack Obama is handling his job as president?

- A. Approve**
- B. Disapprove**

President Barack Obama Job Approval

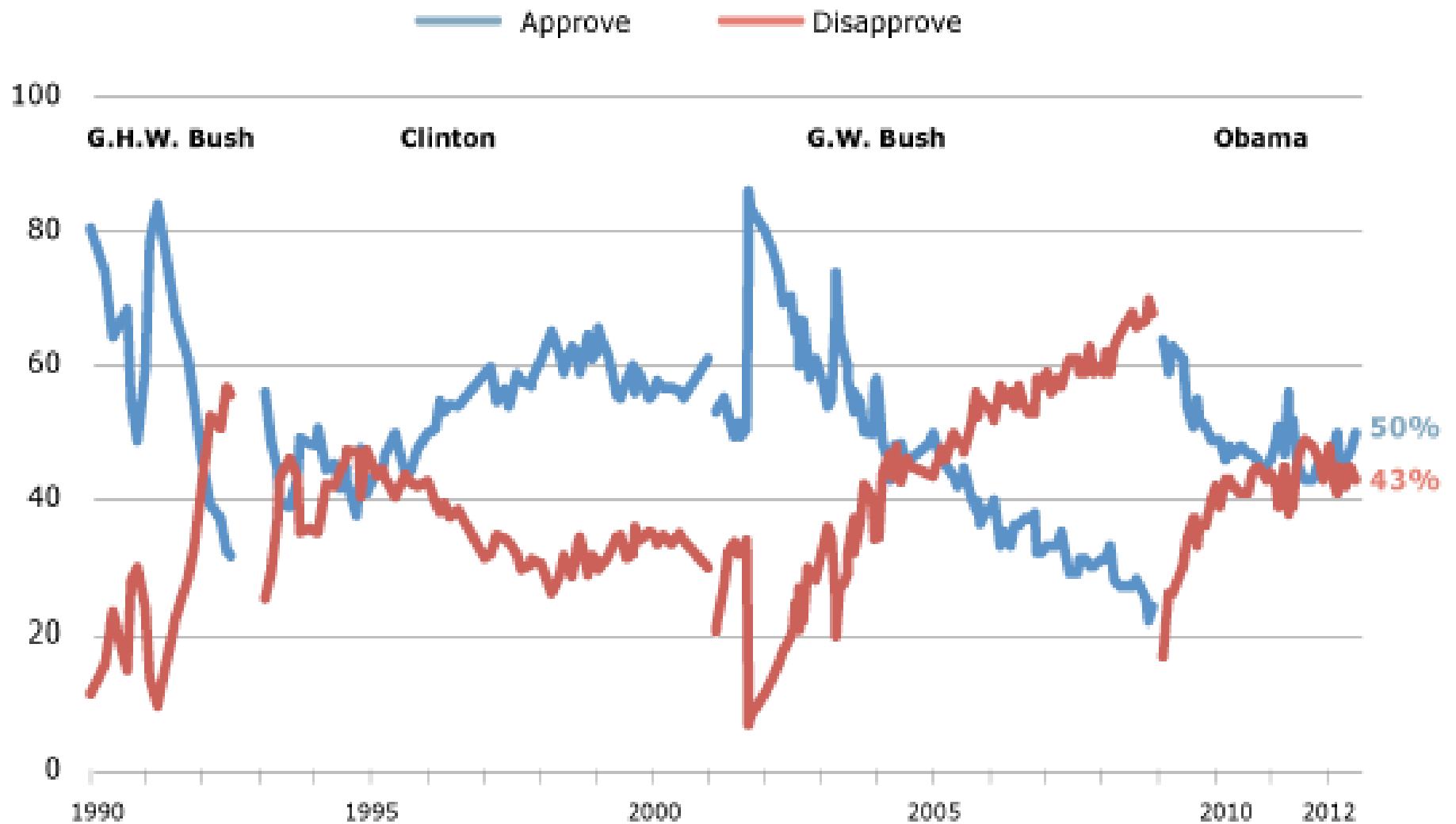
Three-day rolling averages for time periods ending Aug. 1-Sept. 25, 2012



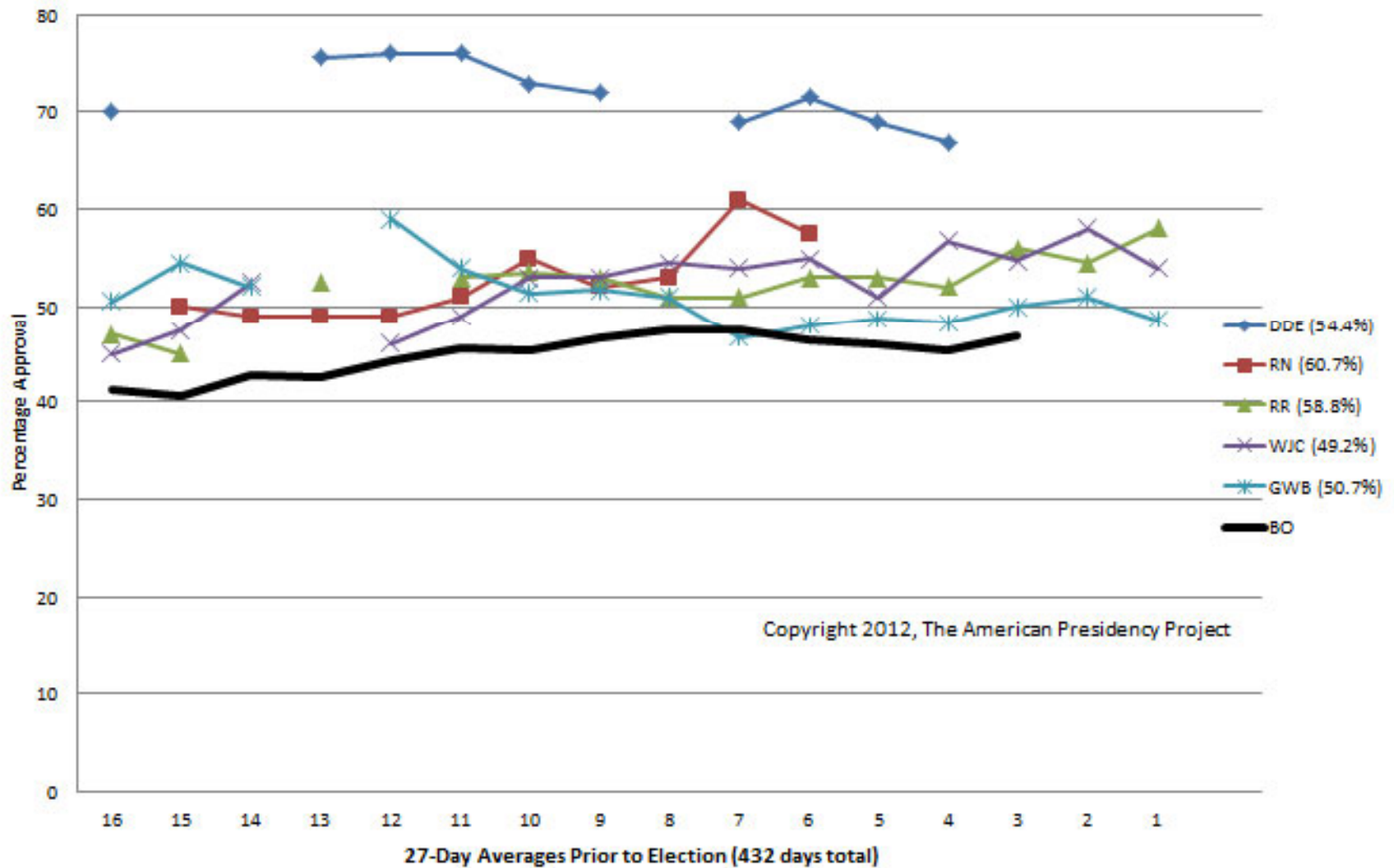
http://www.gallup.com/poll/157709/obama-approval-vote-support-reach-better.aspx?utm_source=google&utm_medium=rss&utm_campaign=syndication

Presidential Approval, 1990-2012

Pew Research Center for the People & the Press



Approval Trends, Five *Winning* Incumbent Presidents Plus Obama (Updated Sept 13, 2012)



If the election were held today, would you vote for --

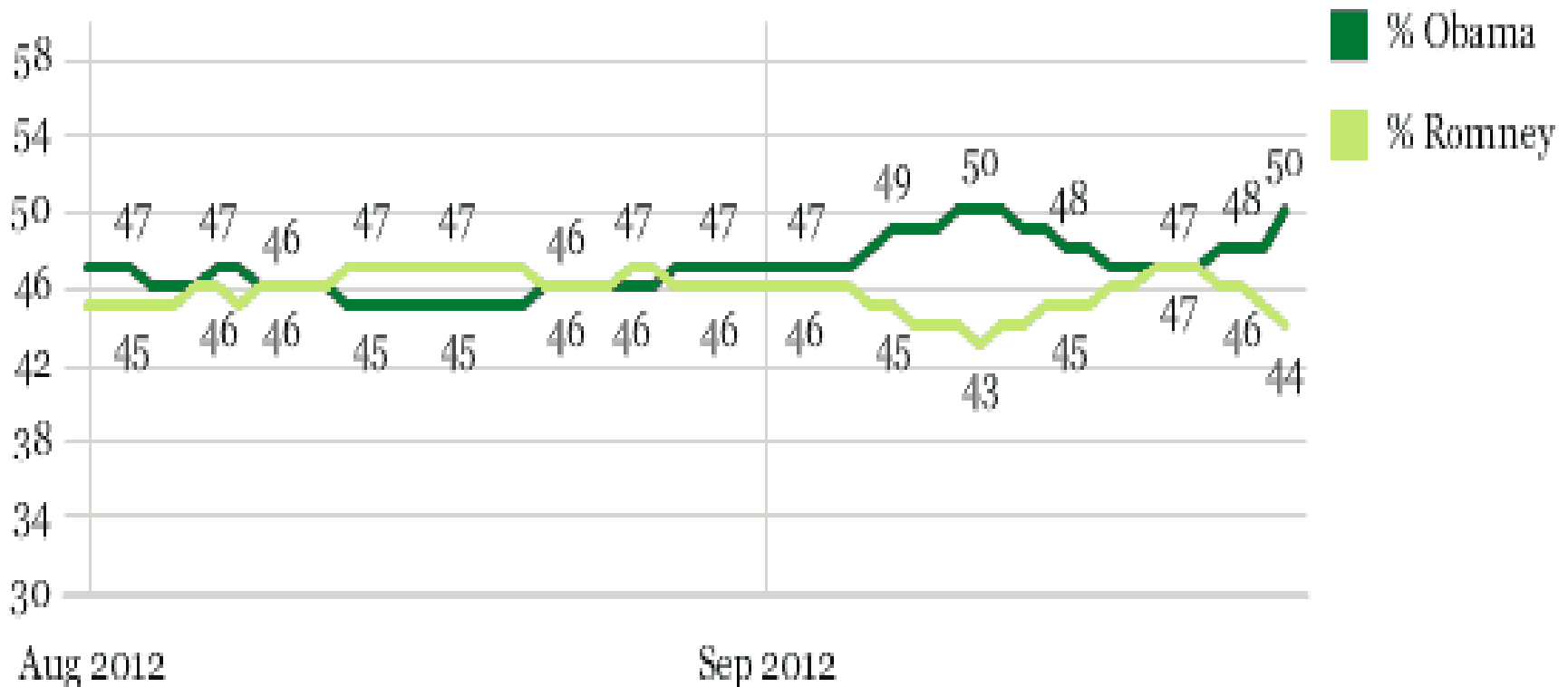
A. Barack Obama

B. Mitt Romney

C. Not sure

2012 Presidential Trial Heat, Based on Registered Voters

Seven-day rolling averages for time periods ending Aug. 1-Sept. 25, 2012



http://www.gallup.com/poll/157709/obama-approval-vote-support-reach-better.aspx?utm_source=google&utm_medium=rss&utm_campaign=syndication

Topics not covered

- Other issues & candidates
- Primary elections
- Tea-Party movement
- Election-campaign finance
- Communications media
- Impact of the Electoral College

Which presidential candidate won the popular vote but lost the electoral vote?

- A. Andrew Jackson (Dem. 1824)
- B. Samuel Tilden (Dem. 1876)
- C. Grover Cleveland (Dem. 1888)
- D. Al Gore, Jr. (Dem. 2000)
- E. All of the above
- F. None of the above

2012 Electoral College projections

- <http://cookpolitical.com/presidential/charts/scorecard>
- <http://electoral-vote.com/>
- <http://elections.huffingtonpost.com/2012/romney-vs-obama-electoral-map>
- http://www.realclearpolitics.com/epolls/2012/president/2012_elections_electoral_college_map.html
- <http://www.270towin.com/>
- <http://freedomslighthouse.net/2012-presidential-election-electoral-vote-map/>
- <http://www.foxnews.com/politics/elections/2012-presidential-race>
- <http://www.cnn.com/ELECTION/2012/ecalculator#?battleground>
- <http://election.princeton.edu/electoral-college-map/>
- <http://elections.nytimes.com/2012/electoral-map>
- <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-srv/special/politics/election-map-2012/president/>
- <http://www.pbs.org/newshour/vote2012/map/calc.html#states=lrGSpRqGBIvGnqBIKp>
- <http://www.centerforpolitics.org/crystalball/articles/category/2012-president/>

Links to other useful polling & elections websites

http://people.uncw.edu/lowery/pls302/Survey_Data_Web_Sites/index.htm